

**A SOCIO-ECONOMIC HISTORY OF NORTH SHÄWA,
ETHIOPIA (1880s-1935).**

by

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Glossary

Abba - father, owner of, the horse-name of prominent figures, or a form of title for ordinary priests

Abéto - a medieval title which came to be increasingly appropriated by Shäwan rulers after the 16th century

Abun - ‘bishop’, the highest ecclesiastical title of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church; *Abuna*, used as a proper noun, as *Abuna* Pawulos etc

Afä negus - ‘mouth of the king’, the supreme judge under the king

Agafari - superintendent of banquets

Aläqa - head of a church, a learned priest, title often bestowed on scholars versed in church education, (yämärét *Aläqa*- elder son or head of siblings in the share of *rist* land)

Amba - a steep flat-topped hill, often serving as a natural fortress or royal prison

Aqegni abbat- founding father of a settlement or of *rist* land ownership

Ato - a title equivalent to ‘Mr’

Awuraja - an administrative unit below the province

Azazh - ‘commander’, chief of the imperial court

Bäjeroned - royal treasurer

Balabbat- originally hereditary owner of *rist* land; since the 19th century, used to denote the hereditary chief of southern people

Balambaras - ‘head of an *amba*’, a low level administrative title

Birr - the standard Ethiopian currency unit

Chiqa-shum- a last level village administrator in a parish, representative of peasants in government hierarchy

Datara- cleric, with attributes of learning, astrology and intrigue

Däjazmach- ‘commander of the gate’, a politico military title below *ras*

Däjach. (A contracted form of *däjazmach*)

Echagé - the highest Ethiopian ecclesiastic until the appointment of Ethiopian bishops (*abun*); abbot of the monastery of Däbra Libanos in Northern Shewa

Endarasé- ‘in my place’ or local representative of a higher authority

Enjara - leavened thin pancake-like bread, the stable diet in much of highland Ethiopia

Etegé - title reserved for queens and queen mothers

Fitawurari - ‘commander of the vanguard’, a title below *däjazmach*

Gäbaz - the secular overlord of a church

Gäbbar- tribute/tax- paying peasant

Gada - an age-graded socio-political system of the Oromo

Gasha - a unit of measurement, equivalent to 40 hectares

Geber- agrarian tribute, invariably paid in kind; tax

Gibbi - court yard, generally used in connection with royal and princely place compounds

Grazmach - ‘commander of the left’, a politico-military title above *balambaras*

Guluma - private land as a gift from a father/some one

Gult - non-hereditary right to collect tribute, bestowed members of the nobility and clergy by the king

Kélla - toll-post

Lij - ‘child’, honorific title generally reserved for sons of the royal family and of the upper nobility

Mäkwänen - nobility whose rank is earned by service, (singular form *Mäkonnen*)

Mälekäigna - the commander of the army during the conquest of the southern region who inhabited a vast land

Mar’ed azmach- Shawan title, higher than *abéto* and lower than *negus*

Mäsfent - hereditary nobility, (singular form *Mäsfen*)

Naftagna - from *näft*, ‘rifle’, name given to Emperor Menlek’s warriors of northern origin, who later settled in the south

Näggadras - ‘head of merchants’, originally leader of a merchant caravan, later chief governor official in charge of the collection customs

Negus- king

Negusa nägäst- ‘king of kings’, the official title of Ethiopian emperors

Qägnazmach- ‘commander of the right’, a politico- military title above *grazmach*

Qälad- ‘rope’, a unit of land measurement, the system of land measurement, measured land

Qés- priest

Ras- ‘head’, the highest traditional politico-military title under *negus*

Rist (Atsmä-rist) - a lineage system of land ownership, giving usufruct rights to the claimant

Ristä gult- hereditary *gult*

Säfar- encampment, settlement, quarters

Shälaqa- local representative of a higher authority, entrusted with the collection of tribute; in

recent times, equivalent to the army rank of major

Shefta - bandit, rebel

Thaler - silver coin bearing the head of Maria Theresa

Tsahafe te'ezaz - head of the royal scribes, keepers of the royal seal; title of the ministry of pen
after 1907

Ujuba - burial places for the non-Christian early Oromo of Shäwa

Wäqét - a unit of measurement of the weight of gold

Wäyizaro - a title equivalent to 'Mrs'

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Finally, I am grateful to all of my informants who spent much of their time with me during the field work and librarians in the Institute of Ethiopian Studies and Ethiopian National Archives.

Declaration

I declare that **A SOCIO-ECONOMIC HISTORY OF NORTH SHÄWA, ETHIOPIA (1880s-1935)** is my own work. All the sources that have been used throughout the study are properly quoted and acknowledged by means of footnotes.

Date _____

Dechasa Abebe

Summary

This thesis attempts to address how and why North Shäwa deteriorated from a political heartland to a region of impoverished peasants by the beginning of the 20th century. One of the factors that determine the selection of the place for a seat of the government for a region or country and sustainability of its system is its resource potential. In this case, arable and grazing land with other related land resources were decisive. They were some of the major factors contributing to both the origin and development of the kingdom. However, by the beginning of the 20th century, the region was abandoned by the court and by a significant proportion of its population. This was mainly because of the impoverishment of the region. The growth of the number of consumers (town dwellers) and the supplies needed by the kingdom exceeded the carrying capacity of North Shäwa. The economic productivity of the region could not correspond to the development of its needs. Thus, this thesis accords due emphasis to the factors that contributed to the impoverishment of North Shäwa and the consequences that followed. Throughout the thesis, North Shäwan peasants are the main subject of discussion. Political, social, cultural and geographical factors that impacted on the peasants' economy and that retarded its development are discussed in the study. It also attempts to unearth the measures taken by the court and peoples of North Shäwa to withstand or escape from the prevailing socio-economic problems. Finally a comparison is made with other regions of the country to describe the political and socio-economic status of North Shäwans that continue to live in the region. This discussion covers the period from the 1880s up to the Italian occupation of Ethiopia in 1935.

Key terms: *North Shäwa, Political Heartland, Impoverishment, Peasant, Land Tenure, Multiple Instabilities, Socio-cultural systems, Semi-mobile Royal Residences, Population Migration, Marginalization.*

Chapter One

1. Introduction

1.1. Geographical Setting

Since social and economic interactions and activities are practiced in specific geographical settings, the preliminary geographical information about the area of study is very important for the reason that geography can be considered as the major factor for the productivity, types of crops, animal husbandry and related social life¹. Ethiopia is a large landlocked country located in the Horn of Africa. It is one of the most ancient countries in the continent. It was one of the three African countries (along with Liberia and South Africa) which were independent on the eve of the First World War because of its decisive victory against Italy at the battle of Adwa in March 1896. North Shäwa, the focus of this study, is located in the heartland of the country. It is a region where the embryo of the “Empire state” of Ethiopia was conceived by the efforts of early Shäwan Chiefs who were the ancestors of Emperor Menilek, the veteran of the battle of Adwa.

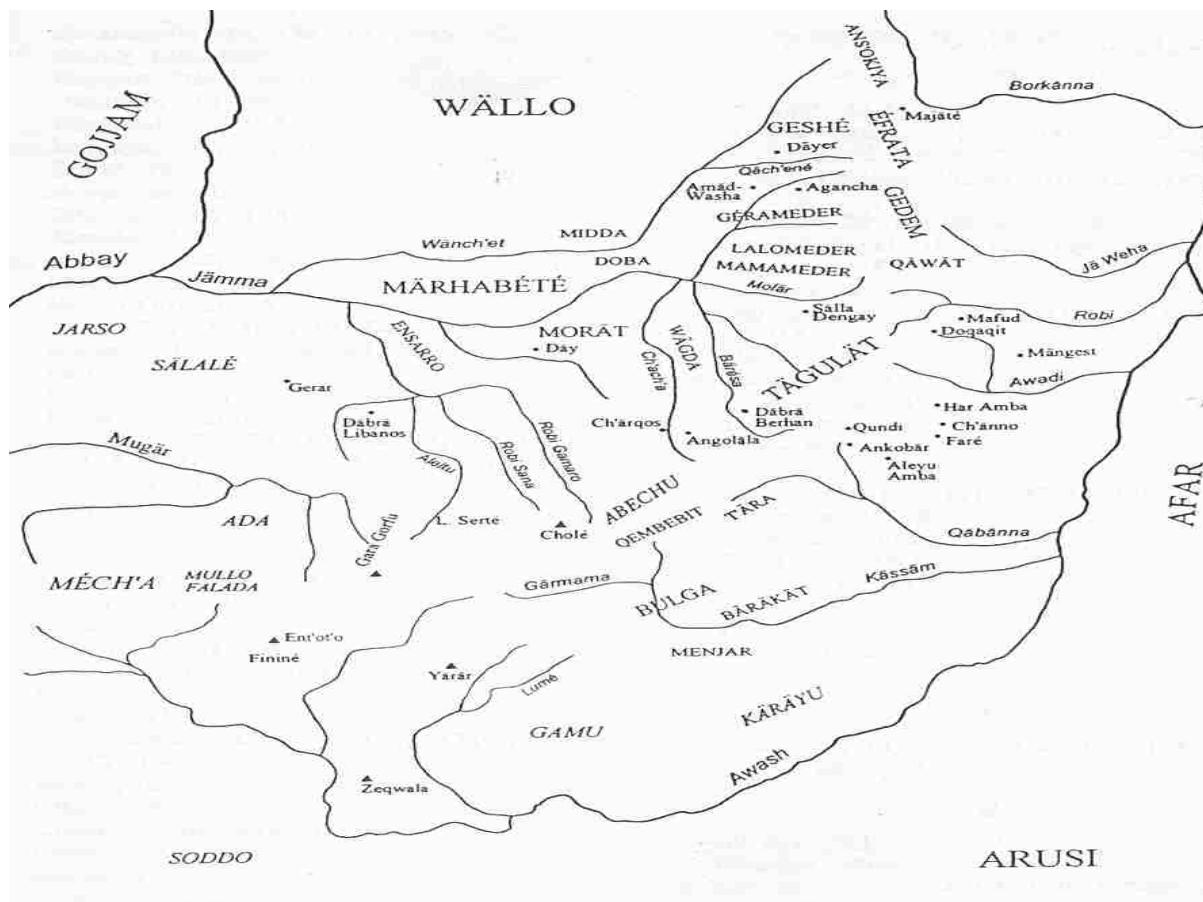
Historically, there were three geographical features that became part of the Shäwan kingdom, the current region of North Shäwa. The first of these was the Amhara inhabited chiefdoms that were considered as “refugee camps” by the Shäwan Amhara. They are characterized by a rugged geographical setting, which contained excellent natural fortresses for defense but these were not suitable for agriculture, particularly since they could not accommodate a large population. These Chiefdoms which were at war with the Oromo up to the 19th century, were Antsokiya, Efrata, Gedem, Mänz Mamma, Mänz Lalo, Geshé, Doba, Mehuy, Korra (Märhabété), Tägulät, Morät, Wägda, Däbib in the north and Bulga and Tära in the north east.² This history is narrated in the tradition as:

¹ José Ortega y Gasset in Susan J. Ferguson, *Mapping the Social Landscape* (Boston, 2002), p.1.

²*Ibid.*

አፋፃፃ የንለ ሌጅ
 መግ የዘን ሌጅ
 ደብብ የዘን ሌጅ
 ማርሃበቴ የወልዕ ሌጅ
 ገሽ የአውሳብ ሌጅ
 ሙራት የተኩ ሌጅ
 ገደም የለታ ሌጅ
 ይህን ጠኩ አዋጅ
 አጥንት ምን የደርጋል ካላለበት እንደ፡፡³

Afkera the son of Golee,
 Wägda the son of Zogo,
 Däbib the son of Tsegga,
 Märhabété the son of Weldu
 Geshé the son of Awsabé,
 Morät the son of Tsedu,
 Gedem the son of Läta
 You recite as such,
 But, what is the value of bone if it has no flesh?



Map (sketch) 1. Shäwa in the middle of the 19th century; Adopted from S. Ege, *Class, State and Power in Africa: A case study in the kingdom of Shäwa (Ethiopia) about 1840* (Harrassowitz, 1996).

³Informant (9): Asfaw Woldä Giyorgis (at Enäwari on 16/7/2002 and 16/9/2007); **hereafter, the number in the bracket next to the word informant/s is to indicate the serial number of the informants available at the back of this thesis on page 297.**

The second part was the land of Kärräyyu Oromo (commonly known as Ifat), the eastern part that faces the Awash Valley.⁴ The third was the land of Tuläma Oromo, commonly called Shäwa Méda, located between the Awash bordering the territory of Mächa Oromo to the west of Ankobär and the Abay in the South to Mofärwuha to the north of Ankobär as far as Wäläqa.⁵ Based on temperature and elevation, North Shäwa consists of three climatic regions. These are the highlands (*Däga*), the plateau (*Woyna Däga*) and lowland plains (*Kola*). The highest mountain peaks of Shäwa are Abuyé Méda (4005m), Mägäzäz (3878m) and Qundi (3730m).⁶ These peaks are the watershed which divides the Abay (Blue Nile) and the Awash River basins.⁷

Roughly, the area of study covers the land between the Jäma and Käsäm rivers, which are fed by different tributaries. Jäma and Käsäm are tributaries of the Abay (Blue Nile) and Awash respectively. Numerous tributaries falling down from the higher grounds of over 3000 metres to below 900 metres feed the Jäma River. The main westward flowing tributaries of this River are the Robi, Chacha, Barressa, Dalecha, Dembaro, Guna-gunit, Mofärwuha, Adabay and Wänchit Rivers. Jäma is mainly difficult to access although its valleys comprise gently sloping land. It is estimated that the altitude at the Jäma river-crossing is about 1,300 metres, and 2,000 metres at the top of the gorge. The major eastward flowing rivers, which are tributaries of the Awash, from south to north, are Käsäm, Käbänna, Ayrarra, Awadi, Robit, Jäwuha, Attaye (Nazero) and Jarra.

These rivers are used for different purposes such as irrigation, home and animal water consumption. Particularly, they are important for small-scale irrigation, for the purpose of basic livelihood and barter for cereals on the nearby plateau. They are also barriers to communication. Throughout their history, the peoples of the region had free communications only from the month of October to the beginning of June. In the remaining three to four months these rivers and their tributaries, including minor streams, overflowing their banks, form several rapids and falls that are very difficult to cross. Hence the common greeting among the community of northern Shäwa when its members meet after *Mäsqäl* (the middle of *Mäskeräm*, the last week of September) is “*Baga nagaan batan!*” in Afan Oromo and “እንዳን ይህኑ ክረማኑ!” in Amharic, [welcome to] happy sunny season.

⁴ Bairu Tafla (ed and trans), *Asmä Gyorgis and His Works: History of the Galla and the Kingdom of Shäwa* (Stuttgart, 1987).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *North Shäwa Agricultural Office, Annual reports of, 2007, 2008 and 2009.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

The lands between these rivers were not plains; they were uneven and full of ups and downs. This feature made the construction of infrastructure such as roads, bridges and railways and even the use of boats on the rivers very difficult and expensive. The valleys (gorges) of these rivers were also home to bandits and opponents of governments throughout the history of the region.⁸

The region receives adequate rainfall during the main rainy season, *Keremet* (summer), June to September and the *Bäleg* season, the shorter rainy season, March to April. The mean annual rainfall amount in the region is 901.31 mm. Production during the shorter rainy season is very important in the *Däga* zones of northern Shäwa where frost prevails during the summer season. Unfortunately, the *Bäleg* season is unreliable since rain is characterized by delay or absence. In some years, it falls only for a few weeks and the crops cannot be harvested; in other years it falls for several months, which results in crop failure. According to peasant-informants, production of *Bäleg* is usually risky and rain is unreliable.

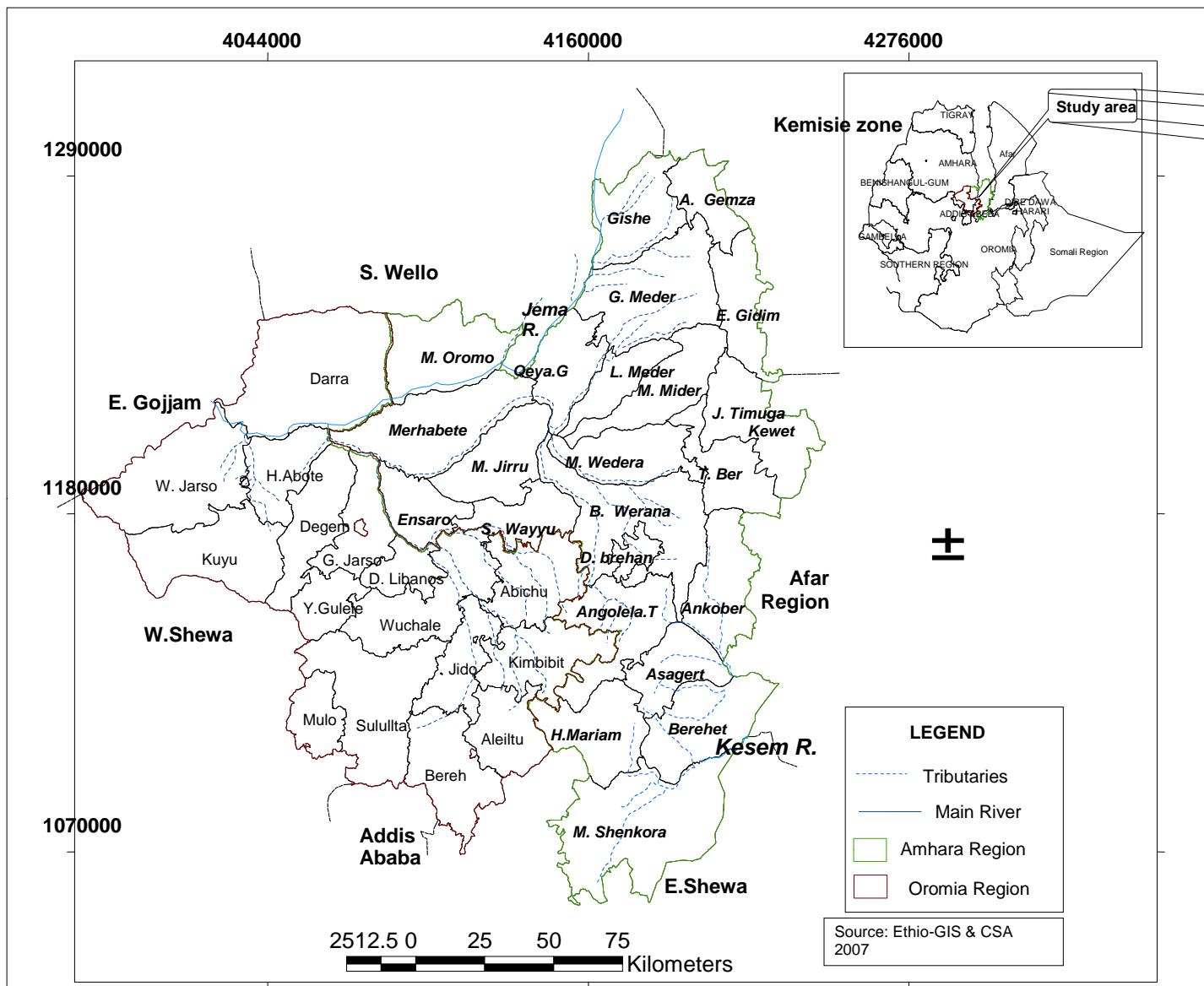
The ridge of the Rift Valley facing the Awash River is cloudy and moist during most of the year. The whole area is saturated with water during the rainy season but suffers from a serious lack of water in the dry season. Thus, shortages of foods, sometimes severe famines, are some of the challenging experiences of the peasants in the region. Desertification, shortage of rain and failure of the annual crops have occurred frequently, causing starvation and death for numerous inhabitants⁹. This study concerns the background history of these prevailing socio-economic problems.

Generally, Geshé and Antsokiya districts are the northern extreme, having Wänchit, the tributary of the Jäma River, as the boundary separating them from southern Wällo. Käsäm and Hagärä Mariam districts are the southern extreme, with the Gärmama River, a tributary of Käsäm River, as the boundary with Minjar and Bärähät districts which fall under northern Shäwa for present day administrative purposes but have a different ecology and historical experience in comparison to proper historical North Shäwa. Qwäät, Tarma Bär and Ankobär districts are the eastern extreme of the study area that is bounded by the Afar Regional State. Bäräh-Aläletu and Sululta-Mulo districts, north east of Addis Ababa, are the western extreme of the study area. These districts became parts of Shäwa in the mid 19th century as parts of Sälalé Awuraja.¹⁰

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰Svein Ege, *North Shäwa 1: 100,000: Topographic and Administrative Map of North Shäwa Zone, Amhara Region, Ethiopia* (Trondheim, 2005).



Map 2. The current political map of North Shäwa

1.2 Methodology

One of the most difficult activities in historical research is how to unearth the hidden or obscured sources and deal with the available ones. The problem is more serious in the case of issues dealing with rural peoples (both Oromo and Amhara peasants) who did not have the habit of recording the date of events¹¹. This was a difficulty common to most of the topics in the study about the peasantry in African history¹².

¹¹Frequently dates are associated with the days commemorated for angels, saints and the like.

¹² CB Hilliard, *Intellectual Traditions of Pre-colonial Africa* (McGraw-Hill College, 1998).

Further problems included the geographical features of the place of study, part of highland Ethiopia, together with the academic calendar and working seasons of the farmers. Field research during the summer was challenging because the ups and downs became wet and difficult for movement. Several rivers and their large numbers of tributaries throughout the region were also difficult to cross. Thus, for academics like the present researcher who spend most of their time in universities, the most convenient time for field research would have been the summer. Unfortunately, the Shäwan plateau was not conducive during this season. On the other hand, during the autumn and spring, starting from the end of September to the end of January, as well as from the beginning of April to the middle of July, the farmers of the region were very busy in performing agricultural activities. The researcher was considered as a person who had no burning issue but who was wandering in the villages collecting trivial news (ለማረጋገጫ) ¹³. Moreover, dealing with oral evidence was also another challenge¹⁴. The informants were hesitant about most of the activities and “unusual questions” of the researcher. Thus, convincing them was one of the more demanding assignments in this study. The remoteness of the period under study was also another problem in dealing with oral informants. The informants were obliged to give second hand information or traditions of which they were not eye witnesses, which might have resulted in distortion of facts.

In general, the following were some of the challenges that the researcher faced during the research work, and the ways in which he tried to overcome them. The first problem, particularly with some foreign sources, was language. The researcher has no good knowledge of other European languages besides English; so it was very difficult to consult travellers’ accounts which were written in French, Italian and German. The aid of some colleagues in the Institute of Foreign Languages at Addis Ababa University in consulting French and Italian sources was significant. A few sources, originally German¹⁵ but translated into English and Amharic in certain cases, were referred to. The second challenge was encountered with Ge’ez, which was the

¹³ Informants (1,2, 6,7...): The priests whom the researcher met at the monastery of Zéna Marqos in Morät; *Ato Abäbä Robälé* of Wobäri and most of the peasants in the birthplace of the researcher laughed at him while he was interviewing them, on 29/7/2002, 21/11/2007, and on several subsequent occasions, beginning from 7/9/2010 respectively.

¹⁴ Ethiopian Orthodox Church, *Seratä Qedasé* (Addis Ababa, 1994); Ethiopian Orthodox Church, *Mareha Tsädeq: Bahelü Haymanot* (Addis Ababa, 1991).

¹⁵ Eike Haberland, *Galla-Sud Athiopiens* (Stuttgart, 1963); V. Sitiz, *Studien zur kulturgeographie zentralathiopiens* (Bonn, 1974).

language of the church and in which many church books were written. For this one, the researcher was forced to consult only the Amharic versions in most cases. Moreover, some Amharic words and concepts in the sources are out of use today and dealing with them was time consuming and demanding. The early Ethiopian writers described many land issues where a term, concept or traditional title had multiple dimensions or interpretations simply as a word used in day to day communications¹⁶. Some of the units of measurement they listed are not in use today. In addition, these were even very heterogeneous or varied from locality to locality. They were not uniform in size and or amount, for units such as *qunna*, *ladan*, *gurzign*, *enqib*, *dawulla*, *gundo*, *wäqét*, *korja*, *gerewina*, etc.,¹⁷ which are mentioned in many of the sources. It was a difficult task to understand and transform them into the present day units. For the purpose of the study the researcher adopted some of the translations or modern equivalents of the concepts from *Käsatä Berhan* by Täsäma and Gäbräwäld, classic books of traditional authors on Ethiopia.¹⁸

Land issues are also sensitive these days and some oral informants were reluctant to tell the secrets behind shares or divisions in the case of inheritance because of the cheating and suspicion which prevailed in the past. The dating of oral sources was also very complex because they narrate oral tradition without any reference to specific time. Oral histories were also narrated in relation to other incidents, some of which were indeed very difficult to trace or date. Their attempt to associate incidents with major historical occurrences in the region was well observed by Täfära who wrote that, in the region “the battle of Sägälé of 1916 and the *Hidar Beshita* (the influenza epidemic of 1918) had affected everyone in the area and important happenings are dated in relation to these two events.”¹⁹

It was also challenging to differentiate place names and rivers. There were numerous names within a single parish or peasants’ association. For instance, the northern parts of the study area are very fragmented with every land feature being given its own name, having a prefix or suffix such as *bär* (pass), *amba* (flat topped villages) etc.²⁰ In fact, the southern part of the region is relatively plain land with a prefix before *agär* (country) or *Méda* (field or plain land)²¹.

¹⁶ Mahetämä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekrü Nügär* (Addis Ababa, 1970).

¹⁷ “Yägäbäya wulo” in *Berhanena Sälam*, weekly newspaper published from 1917 E.C to 1935.

¹⁸ Gäbrä Wäld Engeda Wärq, *Yä Ityopya märétna yägeber sem* (Addis Ababa, 1956); Täsäma Habtä Mikaél, *Käsatä Berhan*....

¹⁹ Täfära Dägufé, *The Centenary of Ethiopian Minutes* (Addis Ababa, 2006), p. 22.

²⁰ Svein Ege, *North Shäwa 1:100,000: Topographic and Administrative Map of North Shäwa Zone, Amhara Region Ethiopia* (Trondheim, 2005).

Analyzing and giving meaningful explanations for all these fragmented names was an onerous activity.

Another serious challenge was the continual change in place names. For instance, the names of peasants' associations or parishes in Lalo-Mama Mänz have been entirely changed to current names like *del bätiegel*, *del chora*, *genbot haya* etc.²² Identifying the previous names (by which they were mentioned in the sources) of these peasants' associations was a very difficult task by itself. The names of the rivers of the study area are also changed several times across the route, beginning from their upper courses to their lower courses. Qächiné/Wayat/ Wänchit, Jaldésa/Zinjärwuha/ Bärséna, etc. change their names two or three times before they enter into Jäma, Käsäm or Awash.²³

Consequently, it was very confusing to indicate a place as being north, south or east and west of these streams, or to use them as a boundary to indicate the geographical extent of a locality. It was also difficult to neglect them since this resulted in misunderstanding of the socio-economic or cultural history of the region. Because they were entities of unity or separation, in other words they aggravated regionalism, የወንዘት አይነት ሥነዱ አይ... (*We are from the same river, the same country*). Some of the plateaus which are separated by the valleys of these rivers were quite inaccessible or have steep sides with some *ambas* which were used as places of detention of political prisoners and were also utilized as storehouses of Shäwan chiefs particularly during difficult periods²⁴. One of such *ambas*, as mentioned by informants, is Kolash in the heart of the *qolla* region which was used as a place of incarceration²⁵.

The documents (archives) that deal with the period before 1935 suffered from mass destruction because of the Italian occupation of the country (1935-1941), particularly because of the fact that the area under study was the home of patriotic resistance throughout the period of the occupation. Many archives, church manuscripts and the like were destroyed. After liberation, many writers tried to reconstruct the period of resistance. Immense numbers of

²¹*Ibid.*

²²*Ibid.*, p.15,-17, 22-22.

²³ Svein Ege, *North Shäwa 1:100,000: Topographic and Administrative Map of North Shäwa Zone*.

²⁴ Gäbrä Sillassé; Donald Levine, *Wax and Gold: Tradition and innovation in Ethiopian culture* (Chicago, 1965).

²⁵ Informants (3): *Balambaras* Gamfur and others at Aläm Kätäma on 6/8/2002 and 17/9/2008.

historical novels and memoirs of individuals who played roles in the resistance were written and published. The period before the war seemed to be forgotten. The novels, biographies, autobiographies were written from the supporters' points of view during the resistance or for the purposes of liberation. The events were exaggerated because of the attempts to create exaggerated images for individuals who played minimal roles in the resistance. Similar responses were written to these artificial images. The issues before the time of the invasion and resistance were given less attention in the literature produced after the war. The litigation over the possession of land was an exceptional issue from the pre-war period which was given space in the post-war record when individuals were forced to cite evidence from the incidents before the occupation, when matters were in a "normal order".²⁶

On the other hand some of the oral informants hide their family background when being interviewed. Those who have in particular inhabited the eastern and north eastern part of Shäwa, facing the Amhara inhabited districts, considered it as an insult to be called Oromo. Many of the informants in Wayyu and Jirru reflected this attitude during field work²⁷. However, their genealogy vividly depicted that they had been Oromo prior to three or four generations back. The same tendency was observed as regards the issue of religion for they claimed that they had been Christians starting from time immemorial, "ከጥኑ ጥምር አርከተያን ካበርን...", but when they were asked to locate the churches where the tombs of their grand- or great grandparents were found, they usually pointed to the graves near their localities. They called each one "ujuba" (grave), which was typical of an Oromo traditional burial centre. In fact, it is believed to be a corrupted form of Arab term *hujub*²⁸. A similar problem with the literate oral informants in towns such as Däbrä Berhan and Enäwari, Aläm Kätäma, Mehal Méda and the like was that they confused what they saw, read and heard from others with their own knowledge. Their power of memorizing events was also weak in comparison to non-literate oral informants.

²⁶ Taddässä Zäwälde, *Qärin Gärämäw* (Addis Ababa, 1970).

²⁷ Informants (4): at Bollo, Jirru on 29/6/2009 and 30/6/2009.

²⁸ Informants (4,5): Eshäté Nágéssø; Täfära Ayfokeru and others (at Nefas Amba, Jihur on 29/6/2009); Dächasa Abäbä, "The Peopling of Morät and Märhabét C. 1700-1889", MA Thesis in History (Addis Ababa University, 2003); Most probably, the term adopted from Tgri-worjis who were living among the Oromo of Shewa speaking Afan-Oromo forgot their language after they were cut from their ancestors (Saho family) in the eastern low land of the country.

A further type of challenge was dealing with sources which were a combination of historical and geographical ones that derived from the present patterns of settlements, dates of church foundations, names and types of agricultural tools, species of crops, methods of cultivation, names of different farmlands, non-functional trade routes and types of plants (e.g., large trees) in the compounds of monasteries. Coming up with meaningful narration from such sources was sometimes confusing and contradictory to the existing literature²⁹.

1.3 Sources

The sources that were consulted for this study were characterized by the marginalization of peasants. The detailed parts of them were about the kings, queens, lords and military generals whose stories were recorded by their chroniclers. Peasants who did not have their own chroniclers were not treated as the main actors in the socio-economic history of the region. Hence African people say, “Until the lion has his or her own story teller, the hunter will always have the best part of the story”³⁰.

The sources used for the purpose of this thesis are classified into ten categories, depending on their common characteristics. The classification is not a standard category; it is made to simplify the discussion on the nature of the sources.

The first of such groups can be categorized as “source books” which were contributed mainly by amateur Ethiopian historians. There are also books under the same category compiled and published by professionals so as to make archives and official letters accessible to young scholars for further study. These books were very useful for this thesis not only because of their interpretation or analysis, but also because of the original letters, decrees, and proclamations etc., which form part of their annexures.

The books are the best filing method to keep the letters, decrees and proclamations, which are not easily available, saved from being spoiled or other disaster³¹. These three, *Acta Etiopica*, *Ate Menilek bähagär wist yätetsatsafuachew däbdabéwoch, yäwäläga tarikäwi sänädoch* and *yätinte mastawäsha bä atsé Menilek zämänä mengest* are letters and receipts compiled entirely in Amharic. The first and the second are collections of letters dispatched to Europe and Wällägga as well as from Wällägga to the central government, and receipts for the annual and other related

²⁹ Léncha Gabé Giorgis, Magel Mariam, Chengi Abbo, Chengi Mariam... are some of them.

³⁰ Benin, “African Proverb of the Month”, April, 2006; it is told among different African communities with little modification.

³¹ Mahetämä Sillassé, *Zekerä Nägär*.

payments by the regional governors of Wällägga. Over two hundred letters and ninety receipts were consulted for the purpose of this study to identify some of the economic reasons for the marginalization of Shäwa at the end of the 19th century. *Acta Eteopica* is a collection of Amharic and Ge'ez letters which were translated into English by two scholars, Merid and Sven Rubénson. The book is a compilation of letters from Menilek to European rulers and individuals; and letters from agents of the well known Catholic missionary Antoine die a'Abbadie spending a number of years in Ethiopia. About 44 of them were found to be worth researching for this study³². On the other hand, the book entitled as *Zekerä Nägär*, which is considered as a “gold mine” for modern Ethiopian history students, contains almost all government decrees and proclamations as well as letters beginning from about 1900 to 1935. *Zekerä Nägär* is encyclopedic in the issues and number of annexures it incorporated. The author recorded a great deal about the economy of the country, although many of his records are not interpreted by him³³. Another source book which was very important to this study is *Atsé Menilek bähagär wist yätätsatsafuachew däbdabéwoch*. Even if the archives have not been accessible to researchers till now, Pawulos Gnogno, who was a well known journalist during the *därg* regime (1974-1991), obtained permission to refer to the archives from the higher officials, including the prime minister of the time, to prepare a journal/ book for the centenary of Addis Ababa. Along with discharging this duty, he copied down thousands of Menilek's international and local letters written during the first decade of the 20th century. Unfortunately, he encountered resistance from the higher officials of the time in publishing these and making them available to readers. The letters were published by June 2011 in two volumes, the first consisting of international letters, and the second of local letters, being available to readers two decades after his death. The second volume is of considerable relevance to this topic. Of about 2242 local letters mentioned above, 180 were directly or indirectly used for this study. They were essential to strengthen the series of arguments from chapter four to chapters ten of the study³⁴.

Yäbétäkeresetian Märäjawoch is also a very important source concerning the land issue, from the beginning to the end of the period that is covered by this study. In the long history of this country from 1270-1974, at least one-third of the country's cultivable land was occupied by

³² Sven Rubenson and Merid Wäldä Arägay , *Acta Eteopica*, Vol.III (Addis Ababa, 2000).

³³ Mahetämä Sillassé, *Zekerä Nägär*.

³⁴ Paulos Gnogno, *Até Menilek Bähagär wuset yätätsatsafuachew däbedabéwoch* (Addis Ababa, 2011).

the church. The existence of so many churches in the region of study and the occupation of much cultivable land of the region by the church had its own results for the agricultural productivity of the region. For such an issue this book, which was compiled by one of the deacons of the church, is one of the crucial sources to study about church land and the cultural influence of the church on the productivity of the land³⁵. The works of Gäbrä Wäld are also very important for the chapter on tenure system and taxation system³⁶.

The second category of sources comprises books written by amateurs, who wrote using local languages, acknowledging different materials as their sources or quoting or appending letters and speeches or sayings, either from the chronicles or *Tarikä Nägäst* (history of kings)³⁷ as well as *Kebrä Nägäst* (glory of kings)³⁸ and even sometimes the Bible³⁹. Writers belonging to this group include Täklä Tsadiq, Heruy, Asmä-Giyorgis and Paulos. Heruy and Täklä Tsadiq were the authors of several books. However, since they were high officials in the government bureaucracy during the reign of Emperor Hailä Sillassé they may not have been free from bias in writing the political history of the country. A good measure in this regard is that they omitted different issues of popular economic discontent. Heruy wrote on different issues besides history. His only comprehensive history book⁴⁰ (manuscript up to 2007) emphasizes the genesis of the Shäwan kingdom. In this book he discussed the economic activities of the occupied territories, the land tenure system, the type of farming, and the fertility of the land to a certain extent⁴¹. Täklä Tsadiq wrote almost entirely on Ethiopian history, starting from very ancient times to the first half of the twentieth century. Particularly, his last three books on the period of Emperor Tewodros, Yohannes IV and Menilek II contain a relatively detailed history of modern Ethiopia and as such are of paramount relevance to this study. Even though his major emphasis was on the political history of the country, the economic history was also discussed, albeit in a very shallow manner⁴². Although, as indicated, most of these authors were high officials in the central

³⁵ Daniél Kebrät, *Yäbétäkerestian Märäjawoch* (Addis Ababa, 2007).

³⁶ Gäbrä Wäld, *Yä Itiyopiya yämärét seritna yegeber sem.*

³⁷ Heruy Wäldä Sillassé, *YäItiopia Tarik: Känägäst Saba iskä Dagemawi Menilek* (Addis Ababa, 2007).

³⁸ Täklä Tsadiq Mäkuria, *Atsé Tewodros ina yä Itiyopiya Andenät* (Addis Ababa, 1989); *Atsé Menilek ina yä Itiyopiya Andenät* (Addis Ababa, 1991); *Yä Itiyopiya Tarik kä Atsé Lebnä Dengle Iskä Atsé Tewodros* (Addis Ababa, 1973); *Atsé Yohannis na yä Itiyopiya Andenät* (Addis Ababa, 1974).

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Heruy.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Täklä Tsadiq, 1989, 1990, 1991.

governments and regions, their attitudes towards Ethiopian history were dissimilar as they stemmed from somewhat different backgrounds. For instance, Asmä Giorgis and Märsé Hazän were relatively different from the rest because they tried to describe incidents objectively. And their books are not also totally secondary sources since they incorporated their eyewitness accounts⁴³. Märsé wrote mainly on his own experiences, which is why he entitled his books *kayehutena Käsämahut* (from what I see and hear) and *Tizita: Selärasé* (Memory about me). Both of them are basic sources for this study, for they touch several economic issues directly or indirectly. In spite of their differences, all of these authors were from the region. They were at least familiar with issues that took place during their lifetimes and had considerable information about the existing oral traditions. One basic limitation of Asmä Giorgis' book is that he criticized the clergy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church “unnecessarily”⁴⁴, even though his family was from the same institution; later he became a Catholic Christian⁴⁵. Most of these authors wrote an official history of the country, and their purpose was to legitimize the Shäwan dynasty. In writing local history there was a slight difference among them. Since Asmä Giorgis was from Haramba, Heruy from Märehabété, Mahetämä Sillasé and Täklä Tsadiq from Bulga and Märsé Hazän from Morät, consciously or unconsciously they gave emphasis to their respective villages or districts. All of these localities are within the area of study. For the purpose of the present study all of them are very important.

The third category of sources useful for this study encompasses biographies and memoirs of individuals. Since they had no intention to write about the history of the country or a region but rather to narrate their own experiences and roles in the political and economic spheres, they did not give priority to agricultural practice. However, since the society of the region in which they grew up was agrarian, they could not escape from mentioning their experiences⁴⁶. Some of these for instance, Täklä Hawariat's autobiography, which covers the first three decades of the twentieth century, were therefore very important sources for this study. He studied in Europe, and in particular his second field of study in France was agriculture; furthermore, he was from the region of study, specifically Seyadäber in northern Shäwa. He mentioned many issues about

⁴³Bairu Tafla (ed), *Asmä-Giyorgis and his work*; Märsé Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, *Yähayagnaw Kefeläzämän mäbacha* (Addis Ababa, 2008).

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵Bairu Tafla, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*.

⁴⁶Täklä Hawariat Täklä Mariam. *Autobiography: Yä Hiyyoté Tarik* (Addis Ababa, 2006).

the economy of Shäwa along with his experiences in Russia during his first study⁴⁷. Märsé's *tezita*, Ethiopia on the Eve of 20th century and Täfära's Centenary of Ethiopia are lively in narrating their own eyewitness accounts. Märsé was also one of the main contributors to and chief editor of the then well known newspaper *Berhanena Sälam*, and he retained, as well as clarified more fully, what he wrote to the newspaper⁴⁸ because of the censorship of certain criticisms as well as unwanted truth. He described such events in his own personal records. Täfära's discussions of how his ancestors came from Mänz and Ifat to Ankobär, the reasons behind the movement and how the scarcity of resources aggravated the intra-community conflicts and migrations are important. He mentioned how his parents divorced because of economic reasons, even to the extent that his mother, aunts, uncle and he himself had their homes in Addis Ababa. Poverty forced his father to seek employment as the servant of a more senior priest and supplement his income by weaving cotton. Just to mention two more very crucial memories, *Aläqa Lämma*'s memory also assists one to understand the gradual north-south migration of the clergy, notwithstanding his personal bias⁴⁹. The second is that of *Ras Imru Hailä Sillassé*, the family, and personal, friend of the Emperor Hailä Sillassé during his earlier years, who worked as a distinguished official during his life time. His memoir which was published recently is essential to understand the *gäbbar* system in the country and the factors impelling people to migrate to Harar from the impoverished parts of the country, including Shäwa. His parents were also from Shäwa, as he mentioned in a concluding remark about his family background, “በባታዎች በኋታዎች ወተን የትወልድ አገል ሽዋ በማስላዎ አማራ ከፍል ነው፡፡”⁵⁰. “Both on my father's and mother's sides, my birth [origin] is from Shäwa [particularly] from [the] Amhara part of the region”.

Chronicles form the fourth category of sources. They are contributions left behind intentionally so as to enable the coming generation to be aware of the achievements and challenges of the previous times. The other aspects of their life experiences, which might even be more important to later generations, were omitted intentionally⁵¹. What is considered noteworthy is that contributed by any member of the society who possessed power, whatever it might be,

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Märsé Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, *Tizitayé: Selärasé Yämasawsäww: 1891-1923.E.C* (Addis Ababa, 2010).

⁴⁹ Mängestu Lämma, *Mätsehafä tezeta zä Aläqa Lämma wäldä tarik* (Addis Ababa, 1967).

⁵⁰ *Leul ras Imeru, Kayähutina kämasawsäw* (Addis Ababa, 2009).

⁵¹ Kwame Nantambu, *Role of History and Culture in the Liberation Struggle* (U.S.A, 2009).

political power in this case⁵². The chronicles which have been consulted for the purpose of this study are those of Emperor Menilek II (1889-1913), *Lij* Iyyasu (1913-1916) and Empress Zäwditu (1916-1930). One of the best-known chronicles is that of Emperor Menilek II. Gäbrä Sillassé, who was the chronicler, tried to justify all the activities of Shäwan chiefs, kings and later emperors of Ethiopia in each and every statement. His subject of discussion was the territorial expansion which was the dominant activity of Shäwan rulers in the 19th century. Along with this, he mentioned the number of looted cattle, crops, extent of farm lands, amount of tribute that they collected from the occupied territory, the nature of consumption, festivals etc. Consequently, this is one of the most important sources for the first two chapters of this study⁵³. All of them were written in Amharic, which posed no language barrier to the researcher unlike the earlier chronicles in Ethiopia that were written in Ge'ez, a language which is unfamiliar to many of the young scholars⁵⁴. Other related chronicles which are important for the background part of this study are: the royal chronicle of Abyssinia, 1769- 1840⁵⁵, the chronicle of Tsärsä Dingle⁵⁶, the chronicle of Emperor Tewodros by *Aläqa Zänäb*⁵⁷, and the chronicle of Gojjam,⁵⁸ which was published recently entitled as *Yä Itiyopiya Tarik* (history of Ethiopia) by *Aläqa Täkelä Yäsus*⁵⁹.

Archives comprised a further category of sources which were used for this study. Two types of archival materials (historical and geographical) were consulted in constructing some chapters of this study. For the first type there are certain letters and documents available in the library of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies in Addis Ababa University. These are letters from the central government (Addis Ababa) to different regional governors and from regions to the centre. For instance, letters from Harar, letters from Gondär or to Gondär and letters to and from Ankobär and other destinations were consulted for the purpose of this study⁶⁰. Other very important archives were *Ras* Kassa Hailu's documents in general which were available in the

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Gäbrä Sillassé Wäldä Arägay (*Tsähafä Tezaz*), *Tarikä Zämän Zä Dagmawi Menilek Nigusa Nägäst Zä Itiyopiya* (Addis Ababa, 1967).

⁵⁴ Bahru Zäwdé, *Society, State, and History: Selected Essays* (Addis Ababa, 2008), p.20.

⁵⁵ Weld-Blundell, Herbert Joseph, *The Royal Chronicles of Abyssinia 1769-1840* (London, 1922).

⁵⁶ Alämu Hailé (ed and trans), *Yä Atsé Särtädengel Zäna mäwael: Ge'ez na Amarigna* (Addis Ababa, 2007).

⁵⁷ Zänäb, *The Chronicle of King Theodor (Yäteodros Tarik)* (Princeton, 1902).

⁵⁸ Täkelä Yäsus, *Yä Itiyopiya tarik* (Addis Ababa, 2010).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ IES MS.No.1103, Zäwditu Letter book, 1911 EC; IES MS. No. 1207, Téferi's Harar office, 1920 EC.

IES manuscript and archives section entitled “የራስ ከና የንግድ አስተዳደር”⁶¹ and “ከራስ ከና በተመጣሚ ይተካና ስነ ይች”⁶². Both of these were collections of decrees and letters of *Ras Kassa* to different governors and individuals and from others to him. Besides the IES archival centre there are also archives in the Ethiopian national archives and library agency. Most of these were collections of post 1935 material. Individuals such as *Belata Märsé Hazän*, *Däjazmach Käbädä Täsäma*, Dr/ *Däjazmach Zäwdie Gäbrä Sillassé*, *Aläqa Taye Gäbrä Mariam* donated their personal collections of archives during their lifetime, or sometimes these were donated by their families after their death. Archives contained letters, records of personal witnesses and the like relating to pre-1935 incidents. Recently the bulk of the archives which had been housed in the Ministry of the Interior were given to the agency. Still, these archives also deal with the post 1935 period although some of them did mention the situations before the war (1935-1941). A further limitation of these newly opened archives was that they had not yet been catalogued properly.

The second category of archives, geographical, were available in the northern Shäwa Administrative Zone agricultural office. The annual reports from different districts in the zone and the zone’s annual reports were very important for geographical information such as location, relief, climate, economic activities etc⁶³. Archives that were available at the Woldä Mäsqäl’s archival centre (a branch of IES) were mainly the contributions during the 1940s and 1950s on land litigation, but used the pre-Italian Ethiopian system as their evidence. Archives from north Shäwa which were contributed to this centre were numerous. However, most of them comprised various applications for land to be transferred from state ownership from the south, since there were no lands for the applicants in North Shäwa. These were individuals who claimed that they or their families had contributed to the liberation of the country from Italian occupation. Various series of correspondence by the British Foreign Office to and from Ethiopia which were preserved in microfilm in the Institute of Ethiopian Studies also contributed to this study⁶⁴. Moreover, periodicals, newspapers, particularly *Berhanena Sälam* contained pages dealing with different issues of agriculture in many ways. News and articles contributed by a few enlightened individuals of the early 20th century were enormously helpful. Letters and declarations, which

⁶¹ Märsé Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, “Yä Ras Kassa Astädadär Dämb,” Document No. 256.

⁶² IES MS. No. “ከራስ ከና በተመጣሚ ይተካና ስነ ይች”

⁶³ North Shäwa Zone Agricultural Office Annual Report.

⁶⁴ Public Record Office, London (Great Britain Foreign Office), IES, Microfilm section.

were published in these newspapers, are also crucial primary sources. Ethiopian newspapers of almost all types are preserved in the IES. Two foreign periodicals about Ethiopia in the late 19th and early 20th century which were compiled and published by Pankhurst were also used in filling the gaps in the last chapters of this study⁶⁵.

Oral sources provide the most crucial evidence for this study. African and Africanist historians have debated the value and reliability of oral evidence for the reconstruction of the history of African peoples⁶⁶. Their weaknesses as a source of historical reconstruction have been argued as being no worse than those of other sources of history, including written records⁶⁷. Jan Vansina and his students asserted that the oral tradition can be a viable source for writing African history⁶⁸. Accordingly, oral traditions that deal with land issues, the livelihoods of different families and institutions have been used for this study. For instance, there were traditions regarding how a member of a given community became a farmer, craftsman, merchant and the like and also regarding how a certain institution became the owner of a particular property. Those oral traditions were available in different forms such as simply narrated stories, songs, prose, and so forth⁶⁹.

Oral histories were also the most important sources that were collected from individuals who participated in the events or knew eyewitnesses to them. Even though it is claimed that the country was literate for centuries, this was confined to the clergy. So, as is the case in many sub-Saharan African countries, peoples share their experiences by oral narration⁷⁰. Particularly the land issue was a very sensitive one for many of the communities and they were knowledgeable to tell their experiences and pass on knowledge about their lands to their children. Recounting the genealogy of one's family can be taken as one of the basic results of this attitude, in which the concept of confiscation or being forced to transfer land to conquerors (*awäräsu*) is told or

⁶⁵ R. Pankhurst, “Two Early Periodical Publications: ‘Djibouti’ and ‘le Semeur d’ Ethiopie’, as Sources for Late 19th and Early 20th Century Ethiopian History” in *Annales d’ Ethiopie*, 2003, vol.XIX, pp. 231-256.

⁶⁶ Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Nairobi,1985), pp.37-41.

⁶⁷ UNESCO, *General History of Africa*. Vol. I.

⁶⁸ Jan Vansina. *Oral Tradition....*, pp. 37-41.

⁶⁹ Bahru Zäwde, “A Century of Ethiopian Historiography” in *Society State and History: Selected Essays* (Addis Ababa, 2008), pp. 15-44.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

narrated⁷¹. Their knowledge about how an individual became *Yä märét Aläqa* (the family leader on land issues)⁷² and their rights and responsibilities as well as how that position could be abused were expressed in a lively fashion. Oral sources were also very important in dealing with the issues of migration and instability. It is very common to hear the narration of elders about who left the village for the first time with his family, the cattle he had, who crossed that river, who climbed that mountain, who established the present settlement, who inhabited the area that was full of jungle, how agriculture was practiced or was begun, how they survived the scarcity of seed, “collecting seeds from the dung of the migrants’ ox⁷³”, how the differences in professions came into existence among the communities of the same ancestors were some of the stories the elders of the study area love to narrate.⁷⁴ They also explained, clearly, the types of foods they consumed during hard periods, and the challenges they faced after the wars or conflicts, since no government support or rehabilitation service existed. Eating *amaqito*, *mujja*, *akerema*, and sometimes prohibited foods, cannibalism and the like were common stories amongst the elders of the study area⁷⁵.

The abundance of place names within the area of study, including very tiny spots in a locality, churches, roads and suchlike was an important clue in studying the economic history of the area. Particularly, these names can be used for this study where they have the suffix and prefix after a term. Place names were characterized with the suffix *amba*⁷⁶ in the rugged topography of the region and *agär*⁷⁷ in some of the plains. *Bär*⁷⁸, *Méda*⁷⁹, *gädäl*⁸⁰, *mider*⁸¹ are also frequently suffixed to other terms. Many places are furthermore called after the resources or materials

⁷¹ Informants (6,7,8): Tullu Tufa, Taka Kamsi and other informants at Sakela, a village in Wayyu on 7/9/2010.

⁷² Informant (8): Abäbä Dämisé and others in the same village on several occasions, beginning from 11/9/2006.

⁷³ Informant (9): Asfaw Wäldä Giyorgis.

⁷⁴ Informants (10, 11,12): Gété Arado, Askälä Bushé, Mitiké Esho and others at Sakela on 7/9/2009.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Svein Ege, *North Shäwa 1: 100,000: Topographic and Administrative Map of North Shäwa Zone, Amhara Region, Ethiopia* (Trondheim, 2005), pp. 8-45.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

available there⁸². Still other localities were named after the service(s) they provided⁸³. All these names were very important for this study. Yet another equally very important suffix of place names was *bado*⁸⁴ (abandoned land) to indicate its previous owners. The term *bärät*⁸⁵ is also frequently available throughout Shäwa, as an indication of animal rearing. *Färäs täfer* and *berie agär*⁸⁶ are also other important terms. Many of the place names are Amharic and Afan Oromo, which are also an indication of 19th century and later names. Church foundation dates and some of the books used for religious services are used to indicate the direction and phase of agricultural transformations. The books help to understand some of the religious services the church was rendering to the community.

Manuscripts of biographies of known personalities during the period under study, from different villages or localities of northern Shäwa, such as *Däjach Abawuqaw*⁸⁷, *Ras Gobana Dachi*⁸⁸, Major General Abäbä Dametäw⁸⁹, *Ras Täsäma Nadäw*⁹⁰, and others, served as the main sources of information about the socio-cultural system, land tenure and taxation, population movement and the like.

The European travellers' accounts have been used largely for some of the chapters of this study⁹¹. Here awareness of the travellers' background and character may help to interpret their accounts. Because their understanding of Shäwa was similar and they recorded a homogenous picture, the materials are not valuable in counterchecking each other in most cases, for they seem a duplication of each other⁹². Therefore some of the information they record about Shäwa is not a result of eyewitness accounts. However, having all the limitations that they do, the travellers' accounts are nonetheless rich sources to study the agricultural history of Shäwa. They were keen

⁸² Dagnachäw Wärku, *Adäferes* (Addis Ababa, 1970), p.5.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Svein Ege, *North Shäwa*, pp.8-45.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Sirak Fiqadä Sillassé, "Yä Däjazmach Abba wuqaw Yäheyiwot tarik", Manuscript (IES, 400, 1939), p. 12.

⁸⁸ Nägädä...Yä Gobana Dachi Sänädoch, a manuscript in the institute of Ethiopian Studies, no catalog number

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ W.C. Harris, *The High Land of Aethiopia* Vol. I, II, III (London, 1844); Isenberg and Krapf, *Journal of C.W. Isenberg of J.L. Krapf: Detailing their Proceeding in the Kingdom of Shoa and Journey in Other Parts of Abyssinia in the Years 1839, 1840, 1841 and 1842* (London, 1843).

⁹² *Ibid.*

observers and gave due emphasis to the resources available in the region such as agricultural products, cattle, sheep and goats, their own day to day food items, festivals, conflicts and damage to cultivated fields during those conflicts, extravagant consumption at the Shäwan court, the amount of firewood consumed, the amount of *täj* (mead) drunk, the numbers of cows and oxen slaughtered daily or during different festivals, types of articles for domestic purposes which were the direct products of natural resources from the region, how the houses and compounds were constructed, as well as the detailed description of construction materials and how those construction materials were collected⁹³. The nature of tax collection, kinds of taxes, trade activities, local markets, the types of items available at those local markets, rates of exchange, the activities of craftsmen and women, types of articles they produced, ways of dressing, the raw materials from which those clothes were made and so forth, were discussed in detail and are emphasized by all of them. Of course, their knowledge was largely confined to Ankobär and its vicinity, and to Shäwa Méda. Thus, their discussions of agriculture, taxes and animal husbandry were based on what was practiced in Shäwa Méda⁹⁴. The Geographical Society of Italy, which was chaired by Antinori, had its base at Let Marefia⁹⁵ (a temporary station) near Ankobär (the Shäwan capital, before Entoto was accorded this role). Its archives also described in detail the same issue. Its members studied most of the *fauna* and *flora* along with the geographic setting of Shäwa. The letters of Antinori from Let Marefia to the Italian Geographical Society from 1887 to 1890, as well as those of his successors until the eve of the battle of Adwa in 1895, are especially important⁹⁶.

Atlases of both geographical and historical maps were also important sources. In particular, the maps compiled and published by Svein Ege⁹⁷ and that which was prepared and published by Amhara regional state⁹⁸ are valuable sources for understanding the relief, as well as the types of climatic zones, of the region. The map prepared by the Amhara regional state is also useful for identifying different parishes or peasants' associations in each district of the zone. One interesting item from the map is the location of numerous churches throughout the area of study.

⁹³*Ibid.*

⁹⁴*Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Orazio Antinori, "Lettra del M.O. Antinori a S.Eil comm. Correnti Presidente dellSocieta," *Bollettino dell Societa Geographica Italiana*, Vol. 16 (1979), pp. 374-403.

⁹⁶ Täfära Dägufé, *Minutes of an Ethiopian Century* (Addis Ababa, 2006),

⁹⁷ Svein Ege, *North Shäwa*, pp.8-45.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*

Theses and dissertations of students from Addis Ababa University on different localities have been consulted for different purposes in this study. For instance, MA theses on Ilu-ababora, Arsi, Mänz Gera and Balé were consulted. Those dealing with the southern provinces gave due emphasis to the conquest and to how the traditional rules of the south were uprooted so that the populace lost some of their hereditary rights⁹⁹. However, they overlooked issues such as how the pressure on land in the north drove people to the south or how the south accommodated this pressure from the north. Their writers were preoccupied with the discussion of political issues and had insufficient space for other aspects. The thesis written on Gera Meder was very important to understand the public perceptions, rules and procedures of inheriting *rist* lands.¹⁰⁰

The final category of sources particularly used for the purpose of conceptualizing and understanding the theoretical aspects that are relevant to the topic comprises books and journals written by professionals. The works of different scholars, mainly from the fields of History, Geography, Sociology, Anthropology, Philosophy, Political Science and Economics, have been consulted. To mention but a few of them, several books and articles of Richard Pankhurst, a historian, have been referred to for his detailed description of incidents pertaining to Shäwan pre-Addis Ababa towns and way of life in the 19th century¹⁰¹. The second authority is Harold Marcus who wrote the political biography of Emperor Menilek. His book has been consulted for information on some of the incidents during the transformation of pressure on resources in northern Shäwa to the south during the early years of Menilek's southward expansion. The third source is John Markakis who wrote on land politics in the country in general. However, Shäwan issues were given special emphasis on his discussion of the relation between Shäwan settlers and the natives in the south¹⁰². A fourth exemplary book was that of Berhanu Abbebe. Regardless of

⁹⁹ Berhanu Täsfayé, "A Historical Study of Land and Agriculture in Grea Mider, Mänz to 1974", MA Thesis (AAU, 1996); Katabo Abdiyo, "A Historical Survey of the Arsi-Oromo ca. 1910-1947", MA Thesis in History (AAU, 1999), pp. 25, 26; Yasin Muhammad, "A Historical Study of the Land Tenure System in Highland Ilu-ababora , c.1889-1974", MA thesis in History (Addis Ababa University, 1990), pp.61-62; Kätäma Mäsqäla, "The Evolution of Land-ownership and Tenancy in Highland Balé: A Case Study of Goba, Sinana and Dodola to 1974", MA Thesis in History (Addis Ababa University, 2001), p.33.

¹⁰⁰ Berhanu, p. 32.

¹⁰¹ R. Pankhurst, "The History of Shäwan towns from the Rise of Menilek to the Foundation of Addis Ababa" in *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Nices, 1977).

¹⁰² Harold G. Marcus, "Motives, Methods and Some Results of the Unification of Ethiopia During the Reign of Menilek II." *Proceedings of the Third International Conference of Ethiopia Studies* (Addis

the language barrier, the book of Berhanu Abbebe on land issue in Shäwa from the time of Menilek to that of the constitution of 1931 is very crucial for two chapters, three and four, of this study. His discussion on the three domains, state, church and peasant, tenure was enlightening¹⁰³.

A further group of professionals consists of geographers. Their works are used to understand geographical issues which are very important as regards historical happenings and human beings' effect on their environment¹⁰⁴.

Another group of related professionals comprises sociologists and anthropologists. Even if their works lack the temporal aspect, they are very important to understand the social dimension of peasant history. In this regard Levine's *Wax and Gold* and *Greater Ethiopia*, which were published in 1965 and 1974 respectively, were exemplary. In the first book, his accounts of Shäwa deal primarily with the relative legacy of Gondär and Mänz to the present-day Ethiopia. In order to assess the legacy of Mänz, he sketched the outline of the history of Shäwa. But the most important issues for this study stemmed from his discussion of peasants' daily consumption, clothing, house structure, different holydays, festivals and traditional church education. The value of Darkwah's study lies in his interpretation of institutions, notably the administrative organizations that were important to understand in the economic aspect of the history of Shäwa¹⁰⁵. Ege and McCann's studies of Ethiopia are other valuable contributions. Eige's study is intensive; his understanding of Shäwa in the 1840s can be seen from the maps, charts and figures constructed in his book published in 1996. His work is more sociological in nature than historical. Unfortunately, the glaring limitation of his study is that it is confined to the social history of the 1830s and 1840s kingdom of Shäwa¹⁰⁶. It seems that he restricted himself to these two decades because of the availability of written sources about Shäwa from European travellers. McCann deals with a longer period of time so his study is free from

Ababa, 1969); *The Life and Times of Menilek II 1844-1913* (Oxford, 1975); John Markakis, *Ethiopia: Anatomy of a Traditional Polity* (Addis Ababa, 1974).

¹⁰³ Berhanou Abbebe, *Evolution de la Propriete Fonciere au Choa (Ethiopie): Du regne de Menelik a la Constituion de 1931* (Paris, 1971).

¹⁰⁴ L. Berry, J. Olson, and D. Campbell, *Assessing the Extent, Cost and Impact of Land Degradation at the National Level: Overview: Findings and Lessons Learned* (Addis Ababa, 2003), pp. 24-40.

¹⁰⁵ D. Levine, *Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopia Culture* (Chicago, 1965); *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multi-ethnic Society* (Chicago, 1974); R. H. K. Darkwah, *Shäwa Menilek and the Ethiopian Empire: 1813 – 1889* (London, 1987).

¹⁰⁶ Svein Ege, *North Shäwa*, pp.8-45.

deficiency of time depth; however he took only Ankobär as one site, a single vicinity from the region. Thus, it cannot be representative of the socio-economic history of Northern Shäwa¹⁰⁷.

There are also several articles which were consulted for the purpose of this study. For instance Bairu Tafla¹⁰⁸ contributed several articles to the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, mainly concerning the political biographies of a number of Shäwan notables in the court of Emperor Menilek. His narration about their earlier years and how they became well known individuals from humble backgrounds, mainly from agrarian and priestly families, helps to provide information about the agriculture and land tenure systems. Last, but not least, are the works of Mässay Käbädä, a philosopher. His books and articles are helpful in grasping the socio-cultural set up of Ethiopian peoples¹⁰⁹. Despite his north-centric approach in most of his analysis of Ethiopian issues, his works encouragingly enabled the researcher in attempting to read sources critically.

1.4 Structure

The period of study (1880s-1935) was a landmark in the history of the region. Menilek shifted his political centre from Northern Shäwa to Entoto (Dildila), central Shäwa in 1886 and then to the present site of Addis Ababa in 1887. Therefore, the decade of the 1880s was very important in the socio-economic history of northern Shäwa. The year 1935 was also another significant historical landmark: during it, the Italian occupation of the country took place.

The study has been organized into twelve chapters that have been arranged by taking thematic approaches into consideration.

The first chapter of the study constitutes an introduction, dealing with the nature of the research and the general geographical setting of the study area. The second chapter deals with a review of related literature.

¹⁰⁷ James McCann, *People of the Plough: An Agricultural History of Ethiopia, 1800-1990* (Madison, 1995).

¹⁰⁸ Bairu Tafla, “Three Portraits: Ato Asmä Giyorgis, Ras Gobana Dachi and Sahafe Tezaz Gäbära Sillase,” *Jounal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol.5 (Addis Ababa 1967), pp. 133-150; “Two Ethiopian Biographies,” *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol.6 (Addis Ababa, 1968) ; “Four Ethiopian Biographies: Däjazmach Gärmammé, Däjazmach Gäbrä Egziabher Moroda, Däjazmach Balcha and Kantiba Gabru Dästa,” *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol.7 (Addis Ababa, 1969), pp. 1-31.

¹⁰⁹ Mässay Käbädä, *Survival and Modernization, Ethiopia's Enigmatic Present: A Philosophical Discourse* (Red Sea Press, 1999); *Meaning and Development* (Atlanta, 1994).

The third chapter discusses the historical background to how agricultural settlements were founded and the region transformed from a common property resource to individual farmlands because of different interrelated factors. The chapter is an attempt to describe how the settlements were established consecutively, as well as the ensuing dynamics that emerged, owing to the factors which will be discussed in later chapters.

The fourth chapter assesses the land tenure system and other related property rights or access rules to land and land related resources. The tenure system was one of the factors that shaped the socio-economic system in the region. Consequently, the chapter attempts to explain the nature of this system and how it affected the socio-economic relations in the region.

The fifth chapter discusses the process of tribute and tax collections, which were levied both in kind and through labour services. The chapter examines how these taxes and tributes discouraged the payers from hard work and future hopes of improvement.

Chapter six contains a discussion about different types of instabilities; mainly concerning how the political unrest and its outcome had resulted in the impoverishment of peasants. All types of conflicts influenced agricultural activities in one way or the other. Hence, the chapter attempts to describe the conflicts that were prevalent during the period under study in north Shäwa and analyze their impacts on the life of the agrarian community as well as on the agricultural activities overall.

Chapter seven offers an analysis of “natural challenges” which profoundly hampered the productivity of agriculture and shaped the social and economic system of peasants in the region. These were challenges that the latter considered as natural or beyond human responsibility and were sometimes taken as incidents that could not be solved by human effort. In this chapter different types of challenges, which were “acts of God” in the minds of peasants, will be discussed.

Socio-cultural settings contribute to the development of a given economic activity, if they are worldly and progress oriented. But the social and cultural settings of north Shäwa during the period under discussion were not conducive to this. Thus, chapter eight considers socio-cultural systems that were obstacles to productivity.

Pre-industrial towns were, in terms of agriculture, dependent on nearby lands, for there were no modern means of transporting food supplies from faraway places. This excessive dependence on such resources resulted in their gradual depletion and made the towns short-lived.

Therefore, chapter nine deals with the effects of agriculture dependent north Shäwan towns on the land and land related resources of the region, in the last quarter of the 19th century and the first three decades of the 20th century.

A region or locality is continuously inhabited by peoples for only as long as its resources can support them sustainably. If this is no longer the case, the able members of the community will begin to leave that region in search of a better life. Chapter ten concerns outmigration of these members to different regions of southern Ethiopia. Pushing factors in north Shäwa and pulling factors in the regions south of north Shäwa are the focus of this chapter.

The eleventh chapter investigates why and how north Shäwa became the land of people marginalized from the political and economic issues of the country in the 20th century.

Finally, the thesis contains concluding remarks, attempts to explain why northern Shäwa became one of the forgotten regions of the country.

Chapter Two

Review of Related Literature

2. Impoverishment: Causes and Consequences

Studying the history of impoverishment and poverty is demanding because of two main reasons. The first is to establish a working definition of the concept. An exact historical and conceptual definition of impoverishment and poverty is almost impossible. They have many facets and many societies have their own varying accepted forms of knowledge about them. In other words, for different societies, there are different indicators of impoverishment and poverty. The second reason is that a discussion of the history of this issue is affected by the meagreness and quality of the historical sources. They are small in number, fragmented and left behind by writers who were not members of the community(ies) being studied. Such accounts are frequently deceptive. For instance, the European travellers tend to discuss the matter away from the local context. On the other hand, local sources, including oral traditions, have their own prejudices about impoverished members of their society¹¹⁰. They are often marred by ethnic and social stereotypes and the social conditions existing at the time of their recording. They also pay much more attention to the history of the better-off members of the society.

For the purpose of this study, impoverishment should be understood as a process that leads to the condition of poverty. Therefore, poverty is treated as a consequence of the process identified as impoverishment. In fact, many of the available literature sources mainly deal with poverty, rather than the process leading to it. Impoverishment is a dynamic that through time leads to the condition identified as poverty. The people who lead that type of life are identified as poor. However, poverty might not be unfamiliar to the better-off members of the society such as its officials, even including the emperor. The cliché declaration, “ለን አንቀጽ የዕለታዊ ባለቤት”¹¹¹..., “in order that the poor would not be affected...” is one aspect of an acknowledgement of the issue by the ruling members of society in Ethiopia. However, they might not be aware of or understand the process of the impoverishment of peasants. Here, it appears logical to identify clearly the peasants whose livelihood is discussed throughout this study. The above mentioned Webster

¹¹⁰ Mahetämä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekrä Nägär* (Addis Ababa, 1970); W.C. Harris, *The HighLand of Aethiopia* Vol. I, II, III (London, 1844); Isenberg and Krapf, *Journal of C.W. Isenberg of J.L. Krapf: Detailing their Proceeding in the Kingdom of Shoa and Journey in Other Parts of Abyssinia in the Years 1839, 1840, 1841 and 1842* (London, 1843).

¹¹¹ Mahetämä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekrä Nägär*; Gäbrä Sillassé Wäldä Arägay (*Tsähafä Tezaz*), *Tarikä Zämän Zä Dagmawi Menilek Nigusa Nägäst Zä Ityopiya* (Addis Ababa, 1967).

dictionary defined a peasant as a person who owns or rents a small piece of land on which he /she grows food and keeps animals in order to feed his/her family. Peasants were typically made up the majority of the agricultural labour force in a pre-industrial society. Though it is used prejudicially, once a market economy has become well established, the term is frequently employed to describe the traditional rural population in countries where smallholders farm much of the land. It is these members of the society who could describe in much detail the process leading to poverty, even within the life span of one generation. However, it seems that the other members took it for granted that poverty is the natural fate of the peasantry¹¹². Hence the literature on Ethiopian history totally eschews discussing the process of impoverishment as its subject. Even within the same framework, poverty is more frequently mentioned in the literature in comparison to impoverishment. In the historical context of the country, poverty is a relative condition. It is socially defined and dependent on social context. Hence, we rarely have a clear point of reference or standardized indicators of poverty for the period under discussion¹¹³.

According to the Webster dictionary, “impoverishment is a process of reducing to poverty or making poor in quality, productiveness, fertility by depleting or draining of something essential, etc.; or exhausting the strength or richness of a country or a society”. In addition, “poverty is a state or condition in which a person or community lacks the financial resources and essentials to enjoy a minimum standard of life and well-being that is considered acceptable in society”. It is a condition where people's basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter are not being met¹¹⁴. It is understood that poverty is generally of two types: the first is absolute poverty, which is synonymous with destitution and occurs when people cannot obtain adequate resources to support a minimum level of physical health. This term means more or less the same thing everywhere. The second type is relative poverty that occurs when people do not enjoy a certain minimum level of living standards as determined by the society. It varies from region to region and from time to time. In terms of the available evidence, relative poverty can be seen everywhere¹¹⁵.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Philippa Bevan, *Poverty in Ethiopia: A Background Paper: Prepared for the Overseas Development Administration* (United Kingdom, March 1997), pp, 7-8.

¹¹⁴ Merriam-Webster Online: *Dictionary* and *Thesaurus*, www.merriam-webster.com.

¹¹⁵ M. Katherine McCaston and etal, *A Conceptual Overview of Underlying Causes of Poverty* (Cairo, 2005).

In the scanty discussions about the livelihood of peasants in Ethiopian history, impoverishment and its causes are hardly examined either intentionally or unknowingly. The state of poverty has been discussed more fully than the process leading to it. The writers who recorded the history were not confident enough to mention the political factors particularly. Even, in their view, what is there in impoverishment and poverty to discuss when so many issues are there to be described under the patronage of influential individuals? What can be said about depressing conditions? ¹¹⁶

The four individuals who are pillars in conceptualizing impoverishment for the purposes of this study are Gétnät Bäkälä, Berhanu Abägaz, James McCann and Gäbrä Hiwot Baikädagn. Unfortunately, their perceptions on the causes of impoverishment are one sided. Gétnät Bäkälä¹¹⁷, for instance, explains that the impoverishment of the region of north Shäwan peasants occurred because of the specialization in economic activities, i.e., marginalization of animal rearing and taking, land ploughing, as the major economic activity. Likewise, Berhanu Abägaz¹¹⁸ analyzes the situation by arguing that peasant impoverishment was due to the production relationship, i.e. the relation between producers and tax collectors; James McCann considerably associates the rural impoverishment in Wollo with the dramatic change on the processes tax and tribute collection after the centralization of political power by Emperor Menilek and Emperor Hailä Silassé and Gäbrä Hiwot Baikädagn states that the impoverishment of the Ethiopian people was caused by political instability¹¹⁹. However, in the actual historical experiences, there were multi faceted variables that impoverished peoples of a nation or a region¹²⁰.

¹¹⁶ Heruy Wäldä Sillassé, *Yä Itiopia Tarik: Kä negäst Saba iskä Dägämawi Menilek* (Addis Ababa, 2007); Mängestu Lämma, *Mätsehafä tezeta zä Aläqa Lämma wäldä tarik* (Addis Ababa, 1967); Heruy Wäldä Sillassé, *Yä Itiopia Tarik: Kä negäst Saba iskä Dägämawi Menilek* (Addis Ababa, 2007).

¹¹⁷ Gétnät Bäkälä, “Contingent Variables and Discerning Farmers: Marginalizing Cattle in Ethiopia’s Historically Crop-livestock Integrated Agriculture (1840-1941)” in *North African Studies* Vol. IX. No. II. (Michigan, 2007).

¹¹⁸ Berhanu Abägaz, “Poverty Trap in a Tributary Mode of Production: The Peasant Economy of Ethiopia” in *Working Paper*. No.6. (College of William and Mary, 2004).

¹¹⁹ Gäbrä Hiwot Baikädagn, *Mänegesetena Yähezeb Astädadär* (Addis Ababa, 1924); *Atsé Minelekina Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 2002); James McCann, *From poverty to famine in north east Ethiopia: a rural history, 1900-1935* (Philadelphia, 1987).

¹²⁰ Philippa Bevan, *Poverty in Ethiopia: Background Paper* (UK March, 1997), p. 4.

2.1. Causes of Impoverishment

The available literature on the issue shows that the basic causes of impoverishment resulted from a combination of political, social, economic, and environmental factors; while the immediate causes include disease, famine, conflict, natural disasters, etc¹²¹. Presently, significant quantities of works dealing with the present status of impoverishment and causes of poverty have been published. However, from the historical perspective, the issue is overlooked. In particular, the political causes seem to be intentionally missed, or attributed to one or two factors. Therefore, the available pieces of evidence about impoverishment in the history of the country rarely consider the complicated causes behind the deprived socio-economic existence of peasants. In some cases, the issue is politicized unnecessarily and the causes are attributed only to the political settings¹²².

As mentioned above, causes for the impoverishment of Ethiopian peasants have been accorded due emphasis in the works of Gäbrä Hiwot, who concluded strongly that human factors are decisive in determining the fate of a given society by rejecting geographical or environmental factors. He generalizes his explanation as, “የሁዝቦች ፊጥረ ህዝቦችን ሁሉ ተከከል እድርነት ተርሱ ለፍደራል ለልማት የሚያስፈልጋቸውን ነገር ሁሉ ከመለጥ ቅዱድር ለልማት የሆነ በቻቸው ለጥቃቸዋል፡፡ ለለሁ ማኅቸውም ሁዝብ በላማም በጠናቀም በገዛ እና ነው፡፡¹²³”, roughly meaning, “the creator of all peoples endowed them with everything [potential and resources] needed for life and development; so, any people could be developed or under developed because of their own reasons.” Although he claims that human factors (political, social or economic) are decisive for the development or impoverishment of a nation at the beginning, in his discussion he confines himself only to explaining how political factors impoverished the peasants. Moreover, as regards the political factors, he gave the lion’s share to the political conflicts¹²⁴. Foreign travellers and scholars have also not discussed the impoverishment of the peasantry; even if they mentioned this as an incident, they do not seem to

¹²¹ M. Katherine McCaston, p.10.

¹²²Afawärq Gäbärä Yäsus. *Dagmaw Menilek Negusä Nägäst Zä Ityophiya*. Rome, 1961; Gäbrä Hiwot Baikädagn, *Mänegesetena Yähezeb Astädadär*. Addis Ababa. 1924; Atsé Minelekina Ethiopia. Addis Ababa. 2002.

¹²³Gäbrä Hiwot Baikädagn , *Mänegesetena Yähezeb Astädadär* (Addis Ababa, 1925), p.11.

¹²⁴Ibid.

have worried about the process or the factors behind it; or most of the factors they singled out have been used either to indict the political settings or blame the peasants as lazy or idle¹²⁵.

Later on, the foundation of Addis Ababa University and the opening of the Department of History as well as the Institute of Ethiopian Studies resulted in the production of a large amount of literature on Ethiopian history that deals with different aspects both at the national and local levels. In this case, the authors are Ethiopian and expatriate professors as well as students who produced various theses for their Bachelors, Masters and PhD degrees. Unfortunately, they rarely wrote on the process of impoverishment of a given locality because of the interwoven factors mentioned above. Some of them picked one of those several factors as their subject of study. Mainly, they focused on the issue of land tenure and the taxation system¹²⁶. James McCann stands out as an exception, including a chapter in his book, *People of the Plough: An Agricultural History of Ethiopia, 1800-1990*, about the deterioration of Ankobär from a royal residence to barren lands. Still his discussion lacks an explanation of how a series of factors led to the impoverishment of the district and eventually resulted in its abandonment by the then rulers of Shäwa. In his other book, *From poverty to famine in north Ethiopia: A rural history, 1900-1935*, he explained the cause of impoverishment of the peasantry in Wollo. In his discussion he gave due emphasis to one factor that led to impoverishment, the mode of tax and tribute collections, over looking other equally important factors¹²⁷.

In the literature that deals with the poverty of Ethiopian peasants, Mäsfen Woldä Mariam has published a great deal on the famines persistently recurring in the history of the country. The major characteristic of his arguments throughout his books and articles is the critique of the

¹²⁵W.C. Harris, *The High Land of Aethiopia* Vol. I, II, III (London, 1844); Isenberg and Krapf, *Journal of C.W. Isenberg of J.L. Krapf: Detailing their Proceeding in the Kingdom of Shoa and Journey in Other Parts of Abyssinia in the Years 1839, 1840, 1841 and 1842* (London, 1843).

¹²⁶Bahru Zäwde, *Society, State, and History: Selected Essays* (Addis Ababa, 2008), p.20; Berhanu Täsfayé, “A Historical Study of Land and Agriculture in Gera Mider, Mänz to 1974” MA Thesis (AAU, 1996); Katabo Abdiyo, “A Historical Survey of the Arsi-Oromo ca. 1910- 1947” MA. Thesis in History (AAU, 1999), pp. 25, 26; Yasin Muhammad, “A Historical Study of the Land Tenure System in Highland Ilu- ababora, c.1889-1974”, MA thesis in History (Addis Ababa University, 1990), pp.61-62; Kätäma Mäsqäla, “The Evolution of Land-ownership and Tenancy in High land Balé: A Case Study of Goba, Sinana and Dodola to 1974”, MA Thesis in History (Addis Ababa University, 2001), p.33.

¹²⁷James McCann, *People of the Plough: An Agricultural History of Ethiopia, 1800-1990* (Madison, 1995); James McCann, *From poverty to famine in north east Ethiopia: a rural history, 1900-1935* (Philadelphia, 1987).

political setting of the country, as with Gäbrä Hiwot half a century before. Knowingly or unknowingly he has overlooked all other causes or factors that played their role in the process of impoverishment and ultimately aggravated the final stage of the process. Geographically, his emphasis was on the northern and eastern extremes of the country. It seems that he assumed north Shäwa was in a better position¹²⁸. Mahetämä Sillassé's comprehensive book, *Zekrä Nägär*, was also an attempt at national image building and at justification of the prevailing socio-economic and political systems as normal. Most of the chapters, in the book, concern political issues, there being only a few chapters on social and economic issues. Although all of these were significant factors contributing to the impoverishment of the peoples in the region, he wrote about those issues as historical experiences stemming from different aspects, arguing that the nation should be proud of the experiences¹²⁹.

Furthermore, his discussion of Bulga in another book with this title entirely concerns the historical experiences of the impoverished people but he did not utter even a word about the poverty of the people in the proper sense of the term. He merely narrates the “excellent experiences” of the people and how they were instrumental in the process of nation building in the history of Ethiopia, both in the spiritual and secular aspects, over centuries¹³⁰.

Of the works of local authors who focused on north Shäwa, exemplary volumes were the biographies of Märsé and Täklä Hawariat. Even if both of them originated from deprived clergy families, they either could not understand what impoverishment is, or intended to write only the most favourable part of their background¹³¹. However, their narration describes the reduced life conditions of their families, while their own outmigration itself occurred because of the impoverishment of their respective regions or families that forced them to look for better opportunities¹³².

Gäbrä Sillassé, the chronicler of Emperor Menilek, himself discusses the *kifu qän* (evil days) that were experienced by the end of the 19th century, not as the outcome of a long process caused

¹²⁸ Mäsfen Woldä Mariam, *An Introductory Geography of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 1972); *Suffering under God's Environment: A Vertical study of the Predicament of Peasants in North-central Ethiopia* (Switzerland, 1991).

¹²⁹ Mahetämä Sillassé, Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekrä Nägär* (Addis Ababa, 1970).

¹³⁰ Mahetämä Sillassé, *Zekrä nägär; Yä Itiyopia bahel tinat: Bulga* (Addis Ababa, 1968).

¹³¹ Märsé Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, *Tizitayé: Selärasé Yämasawsäww: 1891-1923.E.C* (Addis Ababa, 2010); *Yähayagnaw keflezämän mäbacha* (Addis Ababa, 2008); Täklä Hawariat Täklä Mariam. *Autobiography: Yä Hiyoté Tarik* (Addis Ababa, 2006).

¹³² *Ibid.*

by several factors but for the purpose of emphasizing the good deeds of the king¹³³. He also regards these incidents as acts of God “ክእነዥ አጥቢ ስምምነት ታሸሬ..”, “a punishment ordered by God...”¹³⁴. However, in the actual context of the time, the nation in general and the region in particular were subjected to such living conditions because of the process of impoverishment that had reached its apex by that time. But the literature attributed this to an immediate cause (the extermination of plough oxen). Actually, the more deep rooted causes were emanating from the political, economic, socio-cultural, and environmental settings¹³⁵.

2.1.1. Access to Resources and Property Rights

A substantial number of books, articles in journals and theses that deal with access to resources and property rights have been produced by various scholars from different disciplines, mainly from history. One of them is the work of R. Pankhurst entitled *Economic History of Ethiopia: 1800 - 1935*. It is a survey of the economic activities of the country before the period of Italian occupation. His description is overwhelmingly dominated by agricultural and related activities; in fact, it is the economic history of an agrarian society. In terms of sources, the author relied heavily on materials produced by foreigners. It seems that impoverishment is not his interest. In his description, he has not discussed the changes and dynamics in the socio-economic history of the country in general and the northern half in particular during the period covered by his study. He hardly mentions the impoverishment of the peasants resulting from the nature of access to resources and property rights. A cause-effect analysis is seldom seen in his discussion of the economic situation during the period of his study. But one can clearly understand, from his description, the existing economic situation of the peasants in the northern half of the country. His discussions also lack a consideration of the causes behind their situation. His examination of the tenure system, taxation and agricultural tools and trade activities as well as crafting could have been discussed from the point of peasant life. However, as is common in most of the works of the earlier Ethiopian scholars, his descriptions revolve around the privileged members of the society. He could have told us how the existing economic system with

¹³³Gäbrä Sillassé Wäldä Arägay (*Tsähafä Tezaz*), *Tarikä Zämän Zä Dagemawi Menilek Nigusa Nägäst Zä Ityopiya* (Addis Ababa, 1967).

¹³⁴Ibid.

¹³⁵M. Katherine McCaston, pp. 9-11.

the other related variables disfavored the peasantry and eventually obliged them to lead an impoverished life¹³⁶.

Another scholar who wrote about the issue of access to resources and property rights is Berhanou Abbebe. He directly investigated the land tenure system in Shäwa during the late 19th and early 20th century. Regardless of his clear and analytical discussion about access to resources and property rights with their overall political implications during the period of his study, he offers few discussions of the peasants' conditions and their impoverishment because of the existing legal situation. His discussion focuses more closely on the political value of land ownership in Shäwa during the time of his study. His analysis is of the land issue as it concerned the ruling class: the peasants are not his subject of discussion; their way of life and the reasons for it do not interest him. Evidently, he did not want to deal with their state of poverty and the interwoven causes behind their process of impoverishment¹³⁷. His major sources are the traditional Ethiopian writers such as Gäbrä Wäld Engeda Wärq, Täsäma Habtä Mikael (Käsatä Berähan), and Mahetämä Sillassé. However, he attempted to use the French systems as his model, comparing and contrasting his subject of study from the administrative and legal point of view with that of the French¹³⁸. In fact, from his discussions one can see the burden of the responsibilities the peasants had to discharge and the taxes they had to pay in kind, which partly led them to a life of poverty or destitution¹³⁹.

Gäbrä Wäld Engeda Wärq has also contributed a book that can be considered as a mainstay regarding the land issues in Ethiopian history. As the author himself mentioned in his introduction, his purpose was to instruct the young graduates who would work in the bureaucracy about the nature of the land tenure and taxation system in different regions of the country. It seems that he considered the existing land administration as well established. Therefore, he intended to enable the government and the peasantry to work in harmony, which is why he wrote his book about the system, so that it would be implemented properly by the coming generation¹⁴⁰.

¹³⁶ R. Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia: 1800 – 1935* (Addis Ababa, 1968).

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Berhanou Abbebe, *Evolution de la Propriete Fonciere au Choa (Ethiopie): Du regne de Menelik a la Constituion de 1931* (Paris, 1971).

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Gäbrä Wäld Engeda Wärq, *Yä Ityopya märetäna yegeber sem* (Addis Ababa, 1956).

Clearly, the impoverishment of the peasantry was not the concern of the author. His discussion is overloaded with names and definitions of traditional land tenure systems and techniques, tools and measurements rather than with a discussion of peasants' conditions. Cause-effects analyses are rarely seen throughout, at least, his discussion of the Shäwan land tenure system¹⁴¹. In any case, the taxes and tributes that he described as being expected from the peasants were forcing them into destitution; although these are not the only factor they can be taken as one of the major factors¹⁴².

Berhanu Abägaz can be considered as one of the few scholars who wrote directly on the impoverishment of peasants during the previous period, mainly in the *rist* owning regions of the country. He regarded the land tenure and administration system as the factor that pitched the peasants into the “poverty trap”. The relations between the land owners and collectors of taxes and tributes (owners of *gult* rights) led to the crippling of the peasants' agricultural productivity. His explanation on the issue is excellent and convincing as far as the available sources and the actual situations on the ground during the period under study are concerned. However, there are several factors that he has not mentioned but which were equally responsible for bringing about the impoverishment of the peasants. Berhanu did not describe the other complicated factors besides the economic relationship between *rist* owners and *gultägnas*¹⁴³.

Another outstanding historical work on the Amhara districts of north Shäwa is the MA thesis of Berhanu Täsfayé, which deals with the land and agriculture in Mänz Géra Meder. His extensive description of the process of accessing *rist* land is impressive. Even though his thesis is entitled “A Historical Study of Land and Agriculture in Géra Meder, Mänz to 1974”, he gives attention to the *rist* land inheriting systems, most probably because of the availability of oral sources/traditions on the issue. However, other socio-cultural issues are not included in his study, except for the discussions of agricultural tools that are used in ploughing and the intra-community/kin relations because of the nature of the land tenure system¹⁴⁴. The socio-cultural system, mainly the role of religion and peasant mentality in the district, has been overlooked.

¹⁴¹Ibid.

¹⁴²Ibid.

¹⁴³Berhanu Abägaz, “Poverty Trap in a Tributary Mode of Production....”

¹⁴⁴Berhanu Täsfayé, “A Historical Study of Land and Agriculture in Grea Mider, Mänz to 1974”, MA Thesis (AAU, 1996).

Besides these issues, he should have discussed the other interwoven factors that undermined the agricultural productivity of the district and forced the peasants to live such a substandard life style even by the beginning of the 18th century¹⁴⁵. This condition of life in turn pushed them into conflict with the nearby Oromo, in order to establish more agricultural settlements as ways out of the poverty in Mänz. Therefore, the population outmigration because of the scarcity of arable and grazing lands should have been discussed by Berhanu to make the agricultural history of the district complete and comprehensive¹⁴⁶. In fact, one factor that is well understood from his discussion is that he does not consider the productivity of agricultural activity to be low.

The descriptions by Zäläläm and Williams of the management of common property resources in the Mänz *guasa* area comprise one of the best contributions regarding the access to resources in the region. Their examination of how the common property resources are managed in this resource scarce district of the region is largely impressive. Mänz is known for its scarcity of land and its impoverished peasants. But in the midst of this scarcity the peculiar system of using resources is excellently described by the authors. However, they do not tell us why the inhabitants of the district were forced to use such a system, in the midst of according the focus of attention to ploughing their lands. Moreover, the discussion of how the climate/weather conditions indirectly shaped the methods of accessing resources shows that geography still significantly determines the economic activity of the region in general and that of the district in particular. Unfortunately, this concept is omitted by the authors. They also do not indicate the role of the environment in determining the livelihood of the peasants¹⁴⁷. The locality under discussion could not be settled and ploughed because of its cold temperatures; the only option to exploit the resources there was to design an appropriate type of resource management and consumption.

2.1.2. Conflicts and War

Conflicts and war contribute significantly to the impoverishment of a given nation or community. In the history of Ethiopia, a number of authors point out that the former resulted in the extreme suffering of peasants from looting, diseases and famine. In many of their works, we

¹⁴⁵ Mängestu Lämma, *Mätsehafü tezeta za Aläqa Lämma wäldä tarik* (Addis Ababa, 1967).

¹⁴⁶ Berhanu Täsfayé.

¹⁴⁷ Zäläläm Täfära and Leader-Williams, *The Resilient Nature of Common Property Resource Management System: A Case Study from the Guasa Area of Mänz* (Michigan, 2004).

cannot see clearly how wars impoverished peasants gradually. Of course, the current literature on poverty in the present society gives appropriate emphasis to wars and conflicts as major causes of impoverishment. Much historical literature on Ethiopia lacks discussion of changes and dynamics related to the issue, merely describing the situation of the incident during the time of its occurrence. Some of the Ethiopian scholars attributed the poverty of Ethiopian society by the end of the 19th and the beginning of 20th century, to the conflicts or wars and the rampant pillaging of the army. Two of them stand out, for their discussion and conclusion that Ethiopia was poor simply because of wars created intentionally by individuals who did not want to toil but aspired to live on the labour of others. One of the two authors, Gäbrä Hiwot, wrote about the status of Ethiopian poverty from a feeling of heartfelt disappointment during the period under discussion¹⁴⁸. He linked the prevailing political system, mainly the outnumbered soldiers and their behaviour, to his assumption that they were the ardent enemies of the peasantry owing to all the poverty which resulted¹⁴⁹. He tends to ignore, or did not know, the other factors which equally contributed to the impoverishment of the nation. All his strong and quotable statements about the issue are conflict related, or at least politically affiliated, as if all the other factors had nothing to do with the impoverished peasant life¹⁵⁰.

The same is true of Afäwärq; he accused the regional lords and rulers of the country of causing the extreme poverty of the peasantry. Leaving Menilek aside, because of his own personal reasons, he criticized the administrative system, mainly for the way in which the army, during wars and conflicts and owing to its billeting system, brought great suffering to the peasants. He declared the peasants had no reason to toil if everything they earned was taken over or spoiled by the army. Afäwärq pointed out that the peasants had no rights over their property during such times of conflict, let alone over their wives and daughters who were subjected to forceful sexual abuse¹⁵¹. Therefore, he concluded, upon the coming of Menilek to political power all these evils were abolished, although in fact they continued in one way or the other. As with most of his contemporary authors, his analysis was attributed only to the political conflicts and

¹⁴⁸ Gäbrä Hiwot Baikädagn, *Mänegesetena Yähezeb Astädadär* (Addis Ababa, 1925).

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Afäwärq.

the rampant activities of the army¹⁵². He had no intention of discussing other reasons for the impoverishment of peasants.

A further author, who gave fitting attention in his discussion about Shäwa to conflicts as the sole cause of the suffering of peasants, is Asmé. He reproached the Ethiopian Orthodox church for causing the conflicts that resulted in bloodshed and restless peasant life. The existence of non Christian and non Amhara peoples was extremely miserable because of the instruction by the clergy to snatch the property (lands) of the non Christian community, mainly the Oromo. His emphasis falls on the bloodshed and the antagonistic relations between the Oromo and the government of the country. He underlined how the Oromo developed a deep hatred against the government because of this ill advice by the clergy¹⁵³.

Even if he does not directly discuss the impoverishment of the peasants because of these conflicts, he overemphasized the role of the conflicts in disturbing the life of the people. Ultimately, the conflicts hindered the peasants from thinking about the future or devising a long term plan. His explanation describes the prevailing socio-economic systems for us, though we cannot see the reasons for such a life style, except his perception that the church, particularly the patriarch who was from Egypt, intentionally created such chaos among the peoples and government¹⁵⁴.

2.1.3. Physical Environment and Related Challenges

The physical environment could facilitate the efforts of a given society for the betterment of their livelihood or could offer challenges or hindrances to those efforts. The challenging aspects are accorded little emphasis in most of the studies dealing with economic history, specifically agricultural history. Many writers even rarely mention this issue in their works dealing with the socio-economic history of the country in general and regions in particular. What is common in most of the literature (including the media) is the availability of bountiful resources and the beauty of the country¹⁵⁵. Therefore, they appear to assume that the poverty of the country is the result of the lack of skilled manpower. The other factors, such as the unreliability of rainfall,

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Bairu Tafla (ed), *Asmä-Giyorgis and his Work: History of the Galla and the Kingdom of Shäwa* (Stuttgart, 1987).

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Taddässä Zäwälde, *Qärin gärämäw* (Addis Ababa, 1970); Mahetämä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekrä Nägär* (Addis Ababa, 1970).

crop failure, pests and insects, seasonal fluctuation of the volume of rivers and streams, soil erosion since highland areas are sources of rivers, the fact that these areas are not appropriate for irrigation, and the like have been accorded minimal emphasis. In particular, the problem of low soil fertility and a poor harvest from each plot of land is rarely discussed in historical accounts. However, in the history of the nation, the soil or land impoverishment led to the deterioration of agricultural productivity and contributed to frequent shifts of the locality of the political capital because of the decrease in the capacity of land to accommodate a large number of people on a certain area of it¹⁵⁶.

The available literature on the natural environment of north Shäwa lacks the historical background or time depth to perceive the dynamics or gradual changes of the environmental setting.

The description by Täklä Hawariat, in his *Autobiography*, of the ecology of north Shäwa is only useful for a few districts of the region. His emphasis is placed on the scarcity of land for peasants to plough, including that available to his parents¹⁵⁷. We obtain no information from his entire discussion about other challenges to agricultural productivity. He could have explained different environmental issues in this regard. Even after his return from Europe several years later, he perceived that the environment was not as it had been before he left. He considered that the difference he observed was because of his age. What he remembered as large trees and dense vegetation covering an area such as a forest appeared to be less dense or bare by the time he returned, especially in comparison with the areas he had seen in different parts of the country and abroad. The trees and gardens he recalled from his childhood had been cut down or some of them had ceased bearing fruit¹⁵⁸. In fact, he omitted any discussion about the region after this visit. The impoverishment of the peasants as well as of their lands was not his topic. Even if he mentioned that the amount of food which his parents produced from the same plot of land could not feed them any longer, he could not or did not want to reason why this became the case. What he understood clearly was the increase in the size of his family. Besides, he should have mentioned the gradual depletion of the soil's fertility because of over cultivation. He does not

¹⁵⁶ Akalu Wäldä-Micael, "Some Thought on the Process of Urbanization in pre-20th Century Ethiopia" in *Ethiopian Geographical Journal*. Vol.14.No. 2. (Addis Ababa, 1967).

¹⁵⁷ Täklä Hawariat Täklä Mariam, *Autobiography: Yä Hiyoté Tarik* (Addis Ababa, 2004).

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

associate the overall description of the ecology with the agricultural activity, productivity and peasant poverty¹⁵⁹.

The *Introduction to Ethiopian Geography* by Mäsfen Woldä Mariam is a solid source in this respect. Its wide coverage and detailed description of the Ethiopian landscape are valuable. His analysis on the influence of the landscape on the mindsets of different villages of the peasants and members of the elite is clear. He accorded suitable emphasis to the hindrance posed by the geographical landscape to the national unity of the peoples of the country. Regardless of his knowledge about the geography of the country, though, he did not discuss the role of the geographical setting or ecological reasons for the poverty of the peasants or minimal productivity of farmlands¹⁶⁰.

Mersie's discussion on natural challenges to the work of peasants is also one sided. He asserts that they faced these challenges but could have overcome them to lead a normal life. He claimed that, regardless of the challenges, which he explained as ordained by God, the peasants were leading a normal life. The issue of poverty is not clearly mentioned, or he has no intention to discuss issues from that point of view. Even his comparison of the difficulties posed by the pests and insects to the biblical verse that says man [sic] must "eat by the sweat of [his] brow" and the unreliability of weather conditions for the growing of wheat in Jirru did not motivate him to discuss the poor productivity and destitute life of peasants¹⁶¹.

The only author, as far as the available sources are concerned, who deals with issues of environmental challenges to agricultural productivity is Mahetämä Sillassé. He discusses how pests and insects could have been controlled to improve land productivity. He observes that it would have been through this means that the national income of the government of Ethiopia could have been increased. Peasant poverty was not his worry; those peoples from his district were intelligent enough to find a way out of the problem, he claims. Hence, he concluded that they had options to lead their life properly¹⁶².

Gétnät Bäkälä who wrote an outstanding article entitled "Contingent Variables and Discerning Farmers: Marginalizing Cattle in Ethiopia's Historically Crop-livestock Integrated

¹⁵⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰Mäsfen Woldä-Mariam, *An Introductory Geography of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 1972).

¹⁶¹Märsé Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, *Tizitayé: Selärasé Yämasawsew: 1891-1923.E.C* (Addis Ababa, 2010).

¹⁶²Mahetätmä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Tibebe grehat* (Addis Ababa, 1952); *Be'ele grehat* (Addis Ababa, 1967).

Agriculture (1840-1941)” also examines the disparity between crop production and cattle rearing in the peasant economy. His analysis demonstrates that the cattle disease which led to the period termed *kifu qän* was an incident that brought about a dramatic shift in the peasants’ agricultural methods from pastoral or mixed farming to an agricultural practice dominated by land ploughing. He gives us a very good explanation on the historical background of this shift in the country in general and the region in particular. He also explains the outcome of this tendency for the food habits of the region¹⁶³.

Even though Gétnät did not describe this boldly, the change came about not only because of the cattle disease that exterminated plough oxen, as he assumed, but also because of the increase of demand in feeding the large number of population who could not only be fed by animal products. Cereals were in general the best options. They could be ready for consumption within three to four months and could relatively speaking feed a large number of people in comparison with products obtained from the animals grazing on the same area of land. Even then, the crop needs the plot for only three to four months while the animals need it the year round.

Consequently, the government as well as the peasants had good reason for the time being to maintain the status quo. But gradually this led to the diminishing of the fertility of their lands, affecting their livelihood as well as components of their daily diet; which became free of animal products. In fact, this was a dramatic loss for peasants who were entirely doing manual labour that required much energy. They also began to lack animal manure in their soil because of the availability of only a small number of animals, and for that matter the available manure itself began to be used as fuel for cooking. Generally, although Gétnät is astute enough to inform us about the impoverishment of peasants he does not enable us to grasp the intertwined causes and consequences of the issue¹⁶⁴.

2.1.4. Socio-Cultural Systems

In Ethiopian history, literature dealing with social history in general, and economically related social issues in particular, is scarce. The works of two scholars are unique in the literature of Ethiopian history on the topic, at least as far as this study is concerned. The first of such books is that of Pankhurst entitled *A Social History of Ethiopia*. It is a survey of social issues in Ethiopia

¹⁶³ Gétnät Bäkälä, “Contingent Variables and Discerning Farmers: Marginalizing Cattle in Ethiopia’s Historically Crop-livestock Integrated Agriculture (1840-1941)” in *North African Studies* Vol. IX. No. II. (Michigan, 2007).

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

to the 19th century. One of its basic features is over dependence on foreign sources that describe Ethiopian society as backward. The book also lacks analysis of the situations that forced the people of the northern half of the country to lead an impoverished life. In his description, the analysis of causes and effects or the existence of different variables that forced the peasants to lead such a lifestyle is not taken into consideration. Moreover, it is also limited in period of study and geographical coverage, not addressing those covered in this thesis. His description of Ethiopian society relates more to the northern half¹⁶⁵.

The second book on the social history of Ethiopia to contain a careful and intensive analysis is that of Täshälä Tebäbu, entitled, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia: 1896-1974*. Although, the author is from the political science stream, the book is the first of its kind in the analysis of the causes and effects giving rise to the emerging society in modern Ethiopian social history. In his discussion much emphasis has been accorded to the socio-economic relations between two major ethnic groups or two cultural settings, the Amhara-Tgrie or northern Christian and the southern with their traditional beliefs and practices. In fact, the discussion about their relationship is over encumbered with the Oromo-Amhara relations, frequently antagonistic. An explanation is also given for Amhara's internal conflicts¹⁶⁶.

Still, that antagonistic relation between or within the ethnic groups is not categorized as the lifestyle of the impoverished peasants. Most of his discussion evaluates the existing socio-cultural systems. As a result, his study does not focus on the lifestyle of the peasants from their impoverished socio-economic point of view. He regards the peasants as classless in the existing socio-economic and political settings of the country. According to his analysis, the existing socio-economic and political setting of the country during that time contained three significant classes: the nobility, the clergy and the army. Therefore his analysis is overwhelmingly dominated by the issues faced by these three. He does not tell us how the lifestyle of these classes wrought its own negative effect on the life of the *balagär*, the peasantry.

The solid volume by Sylvia Pankhurst, entitled *Ethiopia: A Cultural History*, is a significant contribution to the socio-cultural system of the nation. Pankhurst demonstrates her knowledge as both an historian and an anthropologist throughout the chapters in this book. In this extensive historical and cultural survey, she writes with great detail and clarity. Her knowledge of the

¹⁶⁵ R. Pankhurst, *A Social History of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 1990).

¹⁶⁶ Täshälä Tebäbu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia: 1896-1974*.

culture of the country as regards the aspects of the language, literature, music, education, arts, crafts and religions is vividly expressed. However, although her book is called a cultural history, one can hardly find even a single paragraph about the peasantry throughout this book of about 747 pages which consists of 43 chapters. She devotes significant attention to the professions said to be despised such as minstrels (musicians), crafts such as iron and gold forging as well as pottery and weaving. Of all activities and practices, land ploughing or peasant life did not attract the attention of the author in her cultural studies. Surprisingly, she adopted a drawing by a school boy which depicts a peasant ploughing land. Nevertheless, she did not caption the picture, indicating what it represented, although she did caption the other pictures throughout her book. This one is simply referred to as a drawing by a schoolboy. The boy depicted what he observed, the actual culture which prevailed in his surroundings, but the author did not say anything about it¹⁶⁷.

2.2. Consequences of Impoverishment

Concerning the historical literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, north Shäwa was characterized by marginalization. Other newly incorporated and better resourced regions with their newly appointed officials attracted all the attentions. Discussions about this region, particularly about the peasants, were minimal because of the absence of sources. The authors of the royal documents were busy recording social and economic issues in the capital and the southern regions of the country. They usually followed in the footsteps of the ruling group, the royalty and the nobility, who by this time were absent from north Shäwa. The region is only mentioned when these groups came to the region or passed through it to cross to the region north of the Abay. The visits of Emperor Menilek, Lij Iyyasu, Emperor Hailä Sillassé and their officials, *rases* and *däjazmaches* to Wällo and Gojam brought north Shäwa into the state record as a by-product of their discussion about the individuals mentioned above. Therefore, we do not have ample documentation that explains the livelihood of the impoverished peasants of the region¹⁶⁸. However, the consequences of impoverishment were manifested in the form of a relatively substandard life style, conflicts over resources but with different pretexts, population migrations, and inefficient administration systems¹⁶⁹.

¹⁶⁷Sylvia Pankhurst, *Ethiopia: A Cultural History* (London, 1955).

¹⁶⁸Hailä Sillassé (Emperor), *Hiwoténa YäItiyopiya Irmija*.Vol.1. (Addis Ababa, 1973).

¹⁶⁹ Philippa Bevan, Poverty in Ethiopia...,pp. 8-10.

2.2.1. Poor Livelihood (Substandard Lifestyle)

The livelihood of the peasants from the socio-economic perspective is mostly the subject of study of anthropologists. The peasants of this region during the period being researched were rarely the subject of study for scholars from other disciplines. Many of the latter placed their focus on the southern regions of the country, most probably thinking that the societies in north Shäwa were “cultured enough” and were exposed to modern ways of life. The exceptions are Ege who studied the early period of Shäwan society during the reign of King Sahelä Sillassé; Feré Hiowt who studied a pocket area inhabited by Muslim migrants from Wällo who recently domesticated the hostile locality of Ifat; and Donald Levine who studied the lifestyle of Mänz in the second half of the 20th century¹⁷⁰.

Although he wrote an outstanding comprehensive historical volume that deals with the first four decades of the 19th century Shäwa, Ege’s period of study falls far outside the scope of this discussion. Feré Hiowt’s work is also specific and the period he studied is very recent. Donald Levine is one of the most celebrated scholars in the field. He investigated the Amhara community of Ethiopia, Mänz. His description of the Mänz culture concerns their myth of settlement and identity, and how the Mänz ruling chiefs evolved. The lifestyle that he discussed was that of the better off group. We cannot see the life of the impoverished peasants of Mänz in his discussion, which was real on the ground. His discussion of the consumption of mutton with *inäjra* or barley is only the perception of the author. The peasantry could not lead that way of life in reality. The misery of the peasants in the area, for instance, inadequate food along with the problem of clothing in this extremely cold area of the region, has not been given attention in his extensive study¹⁷¹.

James McCann is also an exceptional historian in this respect. He advances the argument that the fate of Ankobär declined sharply in the 1880s, when the Shäwan state shifted its capital southward to Addis Ababa. According to his conclusion, the loss of the royal court resulted in the declining of agricultural activity in the region. He points out that what had been a surplus-producing agricultural system based on intensive practices became a region of vulnerability. Hence, he attempted to discuss the livelihood of peasants in the vicinity of Ankobär by placing

¹⁷⁰D. Levine, *Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture* (Chicago, 1965); S. Ege, *Class, State and Power in Africa: A Case Study in the Kingdom of Shäwa (Ethiopia) about 1840* (Harrassowitz, 1996); Feré Hiowt Täsfayé, “Food Security and Peasants’ Survival Strategy: A study of A village in Northern Shewa, Ethiopia”, PhD Thesis (University of Toronto, 1998).

¹⁷¹ D. Levine, *Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture* (Chicago, 1965).

emphasis on the agricultural techniques. In his later works about peasants, he confined his discussion to Wällo. Therefore, the first limitation of his work is its geographical extent: only the Ankobär area of the region and southern Wällo are addressed in his studies. The period 1800-1990 in one of his books that does contain a chapter for Ankobär provides little relevant detail. Other social and political aspects of the peasants' lifestyle were also not given attention in this particular study¹⁷².

Amongst the local authors, Täfära raised the issue of north Shäwa, when he wishes to describe his experience and that of his parents and relatives in the region. Even if he did not use the word, the poverty of his parents and relatives is evident from his explanations. In those sections in which he discusses the region he attempts to perceive matters from cause-effect points of view. His analyses are sound, except for their limitations in time and geography. Concerning the aspects of the life of the impoverished peasants he displayed solid knowledge only of their political and to some extent their social life¹⁷³.

2.2.2. Conflicts over Resources

The prevalence of conflicts in a given region impoverished the people of that region. But impoverishment also aggravated conflict; or the latter could also be the consequence of impoverishment, in areas where peoples compete for meagre resources. The most exemplary work concerning conflicts over resources because of scarcity or poverty is that of Täshalä Tebäbu, mainly on the *rist* owning regions of the country. He provides a detailed explanation of how intra-community conflicts shaped the mentality of the Amhara. However he could have explained more fully how the gradual decreasing of the size of *rist* land for kin or families aggravated the conflicts he has explained in detail. In fact, as far as cause-effects analysis is concerned, Täshalä's is the best¹⁷⁴.

Another scholar who contributed significantly in this aspect is Ahemäd Hassän. His discussion concentrates on conflicts over resources that manifested in the form of ethnic conflicts because of scarcity of arable and grazing lands. After a time the conflict became one of lifestyle and frequently occurred among the Amhara, Oromo, and Afar, as his studies indicate. But his studies were confined only to the north eastern corner of the region, facing the Awash River. He

¹⁷² James McCann, *People of the Plough: An Agricultural History of Ethiopia, 1800-1990* (Madison, 1995).

¹⁷³ Täfära Degufé, *Minutes of an Ethiopian Century* (Addis Ababa, 2006).

¹⁷⁴ Täshalä Tebäbu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia*.

does not describe to us the lifestyle of the poor peasants whom we can see in the *Minutes of an Ethiopian Century* of Täfära Degufé¹⁷⁵.

2.2.3. Population Outmigration

The history of population movement in Ethiopia in the late 19th century and onwards is characterized by population migration from northern regions to the southern regions of the country. The issue has been treated by three groups of scholars; the first comprises the advocates of the “re-unification” of Ethiopia who considered this north-south population movement as part of incorporating the lost regions. Most of the professors from Addis Ababa University, largely the Department of History and the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, and amateur historians from the central part of the country, mainly Shäwa, addressed the issue as such by overlooking the situation on the ground concerning the peasants¹⁷⁶.

The second group includes nationalist scholars (“ethno-nationalist” historians) from the southern regions of the country, mostly the Oromo nationalist historians. They addressed the same issue, as “the colonial occupation by the Abyssinians”¹⁷⁷. Those who belong to the third group are the students of Addis Ababa University who tend to adopt a middle position. While writing their theses for their BA, MA or PhD, it seems that they are looking into the history of their respective localities from the first group’s point of view. In particular, they attempt to see the issues through the lenses of their supervisors until they are awarded the degree. Once they

¹⁷⁵ Ahmed Hassen Omer, “A Historical Survey of Ethnic Relations in Yefat and Temmuga, North-East Shawa (1889-1974)”, M.A. thesis, History Department (Addis Ababa University, 1994); “State and Ethnic Relations in North Eastern Shewa, 1912-1935” In *Ethiopia in browser Perspective: Papers of the XIIIth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* Vol.I. (Kyoto, 1997), pp. 138-150; “Emperor Menelik’s Attempts towards Political Integration: Case Study from North-Eastern Shoa (Ethiopia), 1889-1906” In *annales d’ ethiopie*. Vol.18. (Université de Province, 2002), pp. 231-233; Täfära Degufé, *Minutes of an Ethiopian Century* (Addis Ababa, 2006), pp.1-11, 21-30.

¹⁷⁶ Bahru Zewde, “Economic Origins of the Absolutist State in Ethiopia (1916-1935)” in *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, XVII (Addis Ababa, 1984); *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1974* (Addis Ababa, 1991); *Society, State, and History: Selected Essays* (Addis Ababa, 2008); Imiru Hailä Silassé, *Kayähutina Kämastawsäw* (Addis Ababa, 2009); Täklä Hawariat Täklä Mariam, *Autobiography: Yä Hiyoté Tarik* (Addis Ababa, 2006); Täklä Tsadiq Mäkuria, *Atsé Tewodros ina yä Itiyopiya Andenät* (Addis Ababa, 1989); *Atsé Menilek ina yä Itiyopiya Andenät* (Addis Ababa, 1991); *Yä Itiyopiya Tarik kä Atsé Lebnä Dangle Iskä Atsé Tewodros* (Addis Ababa, 1973); *Atsé Yohannis na yä Itiyopiya Andenät* (Addis Ababa, 1974).

¹⁷⁷ Assafa Jalata, *Oromia and Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethno-National Conflict, 1868-1992* (London, 1993); Assafa Kuru. “The Conquest and Environmental Degradation of Oromia” in *The Journal of Oromo Studies*. Vol. II. No.I. (New York, 1995); “Fate of Conquered Peoples and Marginal Lands under Imperial Rule: The Case of Awash River Basin” in *the Journal of Oromo Studies*. Vol. IV. No.I. (New York, 1997); Gädä Mälba, *Oromia: Yätädäbäqäw Yägef Tarik* (Addis Ababa, 1994).

attain it, they usually join the camp of the second group; addressing this north-south population pressure on their respective locality from the colonial point of view, which is assumed to be an imposition of the political and economic interests of the north on the south. Almost all of the articles contributed to the *Journal of Oromo Studies* are the works of this second generation of historians¹⁷⁸.

Therefore, all the three groups seem to have extremely politicized the issue, without leaving room for discussion about the north south migration of impoverished peasants, particularly how they were accommodated, the real push and pull factors beyond the political intention of the state. They totally overlooked the migration of the ordinary citizens because of the pulling factors in the south and pushing factors in the north, mainly economic interest that determined their decision either to leave or remain in north Shäwa¹⁷⁹.

Hector Blackhurst is in a better position to see this issue from a different perspective. He studied the community of Tuläma Oromo in Arsi and Balé. His discussion mostly concerns the migration of Tuläma from north Shäwa to Arsi and Balé; and their ways of survival among the other Oromo with their different religion. His explanation carefully deals with both the pushing factors arising from north Shäwa, such as a scarcity of cultivable land and maladministration; and pulling factors, for example the availability of resources, mainly land for grazing and ploughing; peaceful accommodation of the Oromo of the region and the relative proximity of Sälalé to Arsi and then to Balé. Particularly, using Arsi as a temporary place to stay and thereafter moving further south to Balé made the movement relatively easy and smooth. Unfortunately, his study did not deal much with north Shäwa; for instance, in the aspects of time depth and geography he concentrated on what was going on in Arsi and Balé. He did not discuss ordinary peasants from the Amhara ethnic group. He also gives much attention to Sälalé from

¹⁷⁸ Berhanu Täsfayé, “A Historical Study of Land and Agriculture in Grea Mider, Mänz to 1974”, MA Thesis (AAU, 1996); Katabo Abdiyo, “A Historical Survey of the Arsi-Oromo ca. 1910-1947”, MA Thesis in History (AAU, 1999), pp. 25, 26; Yasin Muhammad, “A Historical Study of the Land Tenure System in Highland Ilu-ababora , c.1889-1974”, MA thesis in History (Addis Ababa University, 1990), pp.61-62; Kätäma Mäsqäla, “The Evolution of Land Ownership and Tenancy in Highland Balé: A Case Study of Goba, Sinana and Dodola to 1974”, MA Thesis in History (Addis Ababa University, 2001), p.33. Benti Getahun, “An Overview of Some Factors Limiting the Migration of the Oromo to Addis Ababa” in *The Journal of Oromo Studies*. Vol. 8. (New York, 2001); “A Nation without a City [a Blind Person without a Cane]: The Oromo Struggle for Addis Ababa” in *North East African Studies*. Vol.9. No. 3.(Michigan, 2002); Holcomb, Bonnie and Sisai Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of Dependent Colonial State in North East Africa*(New Jersey, 1990).

¹⁷⁹Ibid.

North Shäwa, the region he assumed was the only source of the Tuläma who had their destination in Arsi and Balé¹⁸⁰.

2.2.4. Maladministration by the Agents of Absentee lords

One aspect of impoverishment is manifested in the political administration of a nation or region. Absence of, in the modern sense of the term, good governance, contributed to the impoverishment of the governed people. Moreover, under conditions of poverty, this absence of good governance became worse. Therefore, the life of impoverished peasants was subjected to an evil administration system, treated in this study as maladministration¹⁸¹. Maladministration in the region, largely in certain districts which were the domains of absentee lords, was the concern of a number of articles in the newspaper *Berhanena sälam* during the first three decades of the 20th century.

The issue was openly debated because of the presence of the forum during the early reign of Täfäri-Hailä Sillassé. At this point, the intention of this young ruler, first as regent then as emperor, was to weaken the power of the regional lords. Criticisms of them, for all of the evils which prevailed among the impoverished peasants of the region, were boldly published on the aforementioned newspaper. Hence, the contributors of those articles used the forum to express their feelings about the evil deeds committed towards the peasants by the *meselänés* or *indärasé* of the absentee lords who were living in Addis Ababa or the southern region¹⁸². Unfortunately, their descriptions were overshadowed by the political issues, primarily maladministration by the local lords or their agents. They did not discuss the other aspects of the peasant life¹⁸³.

On this issue, Tsägayé is one of the few individuals who have undertaken their historical studies on peasant conditions from the grass roots level, although he devotes only one chapter to the subject in his study. It is clear that he incorporated the issue as a chapter in his MA thesis entitled “The Oromo of Sälälé” because of the availability of comprehensive documents of *ras* Kassa that deal with numerous duties of peasants imposed on them by the agents. Probably, he came upon a document compiled by Märsé as *yäras kassa yägäbbar astüdadär* by accident and

¹⁸⁰ Blackhurst, Hector, "Continuity and Change in Shoa Galla Gada System" In Baxter, P.T.W. and W. Almagor (eds), *Age Generation and Time: Some Features of East African Age Organization* (London, 1978).

¹⁸¹ Philippa.

¹⁸² Asebé Hayilu, “Silä Hezeb Gudat” *Berehanena Sälam Hamelé* 14,21,1919 E.C; Däräsa Amänté, “Selägizew gänzäb chigger” in *Berähanena Sälam*, Yekatit, 3, 1924. E.C; Amalaji Mahetäm Sillassé, “Däsi Yämiyasägne weré” in *Berähanena Sälam* on *Megabit* 27, 1920 E.C.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

incorporated it into his chapter on the land tenure system. However, he did not describe the causes and consequences of such a way of life. Most of his discussions deal with the political history of Sälalé beginning from the end of the 19th century to the coming of the Italians. Therefore, he only raised the issue of peasant life en route to discussing the administration of Sälalé under *ras* Kassa¹⁸⁴.

¹⁸⁴Tsägayé Zäläkä, “The Oromo of Salaalee: A History (c.1848-1936)” MA Thesis in History (Addis Ababa University, 2002).

Chapter Three

3. Historical Background

An in-depth analysis of gradual change in the socio-economic condition of North Shäwa stemming from certain major factors should be preceded by a discussion about the history of the ecological setting and settlements of agricultural communities which took place mainly after the beginning of the 18th century¹⁸⁵. These settlements were accompanied by the transformation of common property resources into privately owned and cultivated farmlands. Of the three traditional categories of geographical, cultural, economic and social settings of North Shäwa mentioned in the preceding chapter, Ifat and Shäwa Méda, which were virgin and fertile, attracted peoples for new settlements from the Amhara inhabited districts, mostly from Mänz at this early stage¹⁸⁶. The reasons that the lands in Ifat and Shäwa Méda were virgin stemmed from a number of socio-cultural, historical and natural factors that will be discussed below.

3.1. Survey of Environmental History of North Shäwa (16th -19th century)

The rivalry over resources between the Christian kingdom and Muslim sultanates (13th-16th centuries) was followed by further rivalry between the Oromo population and the Christian kingdom over land resources. These conflicts resulted in a series of battles and raids¹⁸⁷ and forced the state (the Christian kingdom) to establish its centre of political power to the region north of the Abay in the 17th century. Thus, North Shäwa was no longer the centre of such power for the next three hundred years. The region became a peripheral territory to which the opponents of the existing rulers were exiled. Sometimes, the rulers also dispatched their armies to carry out raids rather than for the purposes of formal tax or tribute collection. It was a region loosely considered as subordinate to the state, which employed an appointee entitled “*tsähafä lam*”, “writer/recorder of cows”. This title indicated that cattle were collected as tax, at least from some localities of the region. The chroniclers of Särsä-Dengil, and his successors, reported

¹⁸⁵Mängestu Lämma, *Mätsehafä teZeta za Alaqa Lämma wäldä tarik* (Addis Ababa, 1967), p.110.

¹⁸⁶Bairu Tafla (ed and trans), *Asmä Gyorgis and His Works: History of the Galla and the Kingdom of Sawa* (Stuttgart, 1987), p.503; Gäbrä Sillasse Wäldä Arägäy (*Tsähafä Tezaz*), *Tarikä Zämän Zä Daymawi Menilek Nigusä Nägäst Zä Ityophiya* (Addis Ababa, 1959 E.C.).

¹⁸⁷Bairu Tafla, *Asmä Gyorgis and His Works...*, pp. 503-521.

that the items raided or collected from North Shäwa at this time were predominantly cattle and pack animals¹⁸⁸.

While narrating the different battles and conflicts in the region north of the Jäma River after the capital was transferred to the region north of the Abay River, the chroniclers mentioned the damage inflicted on ripening crops on the farmlands, the burnt agricultural fields or crops and stores of crops in villages. They also described the number of cattle raided or how different communities retreated with their cattle, in their records of the region south of the Jäma river¹⁸⁹.

Having discussed these background incidents, some crucial evidence can be considered as regards to the environmental rejuvenation of North Shäwa from the end of the 16th to the beginning of the 18th centuries. The first of such points is that there was no dense population settlement that could have posed a danger to the environment. The second is that there was no intensive farming. The Oromo of this time were known for their animal husbandry and the insignificant area of land that they ploughed. The farming activity among them was very limited in extent; only the hill or mountain sides near villages were used for producing cereals, mainly barley and wheat. The rest of the vast fields were left to the herds¹⁹⁰. The third and related point is that large numbers of armies or court subordinates had their bases in the region north of Jäma River. The fourth one concerns the socio-cultural and the economic system of the Oromo who settled in the region during these centuries. They practiced the habit of “environmentally friendly” interaction which contributed greatly to the rejuvenation of the land resources¹⁹¹. Their close relations with aspects of nature such as land, animals and plants can be understood from these practices and their praise to “Mother Earth”, such as in:

<i>Dachee yaadachee</i>	<i>Mother earth</i>
<i>Jrrikee midhaani</i>	<i>On your there is food</i>
<i>Jalikee bishaanii</i>	<i>Under you there is water</i>
<i>Horeet sirra yaafnee</i>	<i>We rear and graze on you</i>
<i>Qonnee sirra gnanee</i>	<i>We eat farming on you</i>
<i>Yojiru qalaba teegna</i>	<i>you are generous, feed us when living</i>

¹⁸⁸ Alämu Hailé (ed and trans), *Yä Atsé Särtsedengel Zéna mäwael: Ge'ez na Amarigna* (Addis Ababa, 2007), pp. 7, 22, 30.

¹⁸⁹ Alämu Hailé, p. 127.

¹⁹⁰ Isenberg and Krapf, *Journal of C.W. Isenberg of J.L. Krapf: Detailing their Proceeding in the Kingdom of Shoa and Journey in Other Parts of Abyssinia in the Years 1839, 1840, 1841 and 1842* (London, 1843).

¹⁹¹ Assefa Kuru, “The Conquest and Environmental Degradation of Oromia” in *The Journal of Oromo Studies* Vol. II, No.I (New York, 1995), p. 31.

*Yooduunee ufata teegna
Jiran ba'a keetii
Du'an gara keeti....¹⁹²*

*You clothe us when dead
The quick and living are your burden
The dead is back into your motherly womb.*

Related to the fourth reason, the Oromo religious perception and practice concerning nature was another crucial factor fostering environmental protection and preservation. Their belief in the sacred character of nature was playing a very important role for the protection of nature in its “original” form. This gave rise to the concept of sacred groves, trees, rivers and mountains¹⁹³.

Sacred groves (*hujuba*) among the Oromo used to serve as places for rituals of initiation and sacrifice¹⁹⁴. There were a number of such spaces across villages throughout Shäwa Mmäda which were well protected, before they were abandoned owing to the influence of Christianity that confined burial places to church compounds¹⁹⁵.

Moreover as a sixth factor, but related to political decisions, the Oromo devised rules and regulations on how to protect and conserve nature in the *gada* system¹⁹⁶. This was a complex institution which played a central role in the socio-political system of the Oromo people. Decisions concerning the socio-economic issues of the community were made by the *gada* council under the leadership of *Abba-bokku*¹⁹⁷. The assembly as a whole was charged with the responsibility of resolving major economic questions, and crises between groups of descendants, clans, or camps. The majority of crises had to do with the misuse of land resources such as pastures for grazing livestock and conflict over use of water resources, but occasionally they were of a domestic nature¹⁹⁸. Beyond the resolution of conflict, the assembly also shouldered the obligation to contribute to the economic well-being of the community.

¹⁹² Assäfa Kuru, p.31; Gämächu Mägärsa, “The Oromo World-view” in *The Journal of Oromo Studies* Vol.XII, No. I (New York, 2005), p. 75-77; Marlo I Aguilar, “The ‘God’ of the Oromo: A Religious Paradigm in the Work of Lambert Bartels” in *The Journal of Oromo Studies* Vol. XII, No.I (New York, 2005), p.59, 60.

¹⁹³ Michael J. Sheridan, “The Environmental and Social History of African Groves: A Tanzanian Case Study” in *African Studies Review*, Vol. 52. No.I (2009), p. 73.

¹⁹⁴ Tsägayé Zäläkä, “The Oromo of Salaalee: A History (c. 1840-1936)”, M.A Thesis in History, Addis Ababa University, 2002.

¹⁹⁵ Daniél Keberät, *Yäbetä Krstiyän Märäjäwoch* (Addis Ababa, 2007), p. 181; Abarra Zäläkä, "Fiche; Foundation, Growth and Development up to 1941", B. A. Thesis, History, Addis Ababa University, 1986. p. 9.

¹⁹⁶ Mohammäd Hassän, *The Oromo of Ethiopia, A History 1570-1860* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 53; Assäfa Kuru, “Fate of Conquered Peoples and Marginal Lands under Imperial Rule: The Case of Awash River Basin” in *The Journal of Oromo Studies* Vol. IV, No. I, p. 186.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Assäfa kuru, “Fate of Conquered Peoples...” p. 8.

For example, the assembly would mobilize workers to help maintain cattle watering points that were essential for a pastoral life¹⁹⁹.

Finally, late marriage²⁰⁰ in the *gada* system contributed to the presence of the smaller number of households among the Oromo, in comparison to the nearby Amhara who had a larger number of households in proportion to a similar size of population because of early marriage, which led individuals to found households. Thus, the Amhara military had large families²⁰¹ (wife and children) who were dependent on the environment and the peasants. However, the *Luba* armies of the Oromo had no families of their own because of the fact that they only began families after performing the ritual of circumcision at the age of forty. Hence the *gada* system contributed to late marriages.

Therefore, the fertility of land in Shäwa Méda was remarked on by 19th century observers owing to the factors discussed above, though it had been populated for almost three hundred years. This issue was underlined by Krampf during his visit to Shäwa Méda as far as Entoto in the early 1840s²⁰². Even if he did not understand the reasons for the sustainable fertility and beauty of the land, he commented: “Generally speaking, the further we go to the south, the country becomes more beautiful. It is an immense loss that this fine country is in the hands of these people [Oromo]. They have everything in abundance, and their climate is like that of Italy. It is so healthy that sickness is unknown.”²⁰³ Certainly, the fertility and beauty of the region was not the result of the “laziness” of these people, as Krampf assumed²⁰⁴; rather it stemmed from their indigenous socio-cultural, economic and political practices that were environmentally friendly. Therefore, as a result of the above mentioned factors, North Shäwa by the beginning of 18th century boasted attractive ecological features that could accommodate numerous agricultural settlers who were successful, without encountering significant challenges.

North Shäwa, mainly the Oromo inhabited area, was endowed with different types of promising resources at the opening of the 18th century. Grazing and farming lands, forests, raw materials for local crafting, domestic flocks and wild animals, streams and rivers, suitable

¹⁹⁹Bairu Tafla, *Asmä Gyorgis and His Works...*, p.502 .

²⁰⁰ Mohammäd Hassän ; Svein Ege, *Class, State and Power in Africa: A Case Study of the Kingdom of Shäwa (Ethiopia) about 1840* (Weishaden, 1996), pp.35-40.

²⁰¹ Mahetämä Sillassé WäldäMäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär* (Addis Ababa, 1962 E.C.), pp. 238-240.

²⁰²Isenberg and Krapf, p. 201.

²⁰³*Ibid.*

²⁰⁴*Ibid.*

climatic conditions with moderate temperature and rainfall were the available resources. Some existing indigenous ancient forests in selected pocket areas or church compounds constitute standing evidence that North Shäwa was covered by a diversity of woods in the past²⁰⁵, affording an indication that the ecology was suitable for growing different types of plants. They also furnish evidence for the presence of such types of trees/woods in most parts of Shäwa before they were cleared because of the expansion of agricultural settlements and the extravagant consumption of wood products for construction and fuel²⁰⁶. Some of the preserved wood types that indicated the vast wood coverage of the region on the *Däga (high land)* and *wäyna däga (middle high land)* in the past include juniper and *podocarpus*²⁰⁷.

In the partly *qola (low land)* parts of the region, mostly in Ifat and other districts in the Awash basin, the following types of wood were widely available before the expansion of agricultural activities: *wäyira (Olea europaea)*, *wanza (Cordia abyssinica)*, *warka, shola (Ficus sp)*, *abalo, derir, gerar, embus, agam, qäga, tiläm, kulqual (Opuntia vulgaris)*, *qinchib (pterolobium ställatum)*, *shänbäqo, shinät (Myrica salicifolia)*, *akaya, kitkita*, and the like²⁰⁸. In these forests and areas thickly covered with vegetation there were numerous wild animals, including different species of monkeys, hyena, leopard, fox, porcupine, antelope, partridge, guineafowl, and rabbit²⁰⁹.

Evidence indicates even the presence of large animals such as elephant, lion, and buffalo. This can be deduced from place names like *kara'arba* (elephant's route), *zihon atint* (elephant's bone), *gosh wuha* (buffalo's water), *Goshe baddo* (abandoned by buffalo), etcetera. Similarly, the same types of animals and plants were present in Kaset, a locality between the Chacha and Baressa rivers, which are tributaries of Jäma, in Tägulät district²¹⁰. Täklä Hawariat provides a clear explanation of this locality's geography and ecology in his description of his experiences here, which was the birthplace of his parents. He listed a number of plants which were growing in Tägulät; almost the same as those in Mahetämä Sillassé's description of vegetation in Bulga. The same wild animals were mentioned by both of them, such as monkey, leopard, hyena,

²⁰⁵ Mahetämä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Yä Itiyopiya bahel tinat: Bulga* (Addis Ababa, 1973), p. 8.

²⁰⁶ Bairu Tafla, *Asmä Gyorgis and His Works...*, pp. 503, 513, 517.

²⁰⁷ Mahetätm Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Yä Itiyopiya bahel tinat: Bulga*, p. 8.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9

²¹⁰ Täklä Hawariat Täklä Mariam, *Autobiography: Yä Hiyoté Tarik* (Addis Ababa, 2006), pp. 9-10.

antelope and the like²¹¹. The recently published autobiography of Märsé also contains similar descriptions of the ecology of Morät, Emboacho-Mägdälawit Mariam, one of the Amhara inhabited districts of North Shäwa²¹².

Relatively fertile soils in the plateau and river valleys also encouraged the production of varieties of crops. Probably this was the reason why, after a time, ploughing land became the major economic activity for almost all the inhabitants of the region in place of animal husbandry²¹³. Täklä Hawariat tells us in his autobiography that wheat, barley, *téf* and different types of leguminous crops were grown on the plateau of his birthplace, Sayadäber. Similarly, Morät and Jirru were known for fairly fertile lands in the region; the former from the Amhara inhabited districts and the later from Shäwa Méda.

Cattle, pack animals and sheep were also predominantly reared as the inhabitants had been practicing mixed farming in many parts of the region by the 19th century before the period of the *kifu qän* (evil days), 1888-1892, which resulted in a reduction of the number of cattle reared in the region. By comparing annual livestock sales in different markets of Ethiopia, Alamanni estimated that in the 1890's (immediately before the rinderpest) 17,500 oxen, 120,000 cows, 20,000 goats and 9000 sheep were sold at the market of Aliyu Amba alone²¹⁴. Moreover, the abundance of Shäwan resources can be observed from Gäbrä Sillassé's descriptions of the marriage ceremony of Zäwditu Menilek to Ariya Sillasé Yohannes and the inauguration of St. Mary's Church at Entoto²¹⁵. Generally, the plateau portion of the region accommodated a number of animals because of its suitable climate and the availability of grazing land.

Before the area became barren, most of the peasants possessed bees, used for producing honey. They hung a number of beehives in their compounds to do so, even in the 20th century²¹⁶. Honey was one of their major products in many localities of North Shäwa. It was predominantly used by the peasants to defray their taxes. Thus, even if honey was one of their most important products, it was rarely consumed by them. It was used mostly by the nobility and royalty for making the favourite local drink called *täj* (mead). Amazingly, in many localities peasants were

²¹¹*Ibid.*

²¹²Märsé Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, *Tizitayé: Selärasé Yämasawsäw: 1891-1923 E.C.* (Addis Ababa, 2010), pp.15-20.

²¹³ Mahetämä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Yä Itiyopiya bahel tinat: Bulga.* pp.11-12.

²¹⁴ R. Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia: 1800 – 1935* (Addis Ababa, 1968), p.210.

²¹⁵ Gäbrä Sillassé Wäldä Arägay, pp. 111-113,125-129.

²¹⁶ Mahetätm Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Yä Itiyopiya bahel tinat: Bulga*, p.15; Märsé Hazän, *Tizitayé*, p.

not allowed to brew this drink²¹⁷ because they were supposed to use it for paying tax. Of course, they were fattening goats and sheep for similar purposes, but they were either not allowed, or could not afford, to slaughter those animals for themselves²¹⁸.

Mahetämä Sillassé, Täklä Hawariat, and Märsé all confirmed that the Shäwan peasants, particularly those in the Amhara inhabited districts where farmlands were scarce, used to supplement their livelihood through crafting; by means of forging iron and silver, pottery, tannery, weaving, and other related professions. In the Amhara inhabited districts, facing Sayadäber, such as Morät and Motalämy, the people produced different types of items. To mention some of them: pottery, skin and hide products, woven cotton clothes, carpet and umbrellas made of long grasses and varieties of vegetables and fruits²¹⁹.

All the raw materials that were used to produce the items mentioned above were available throughout the region in different districts, although with much variation in amount or size. There were cotton lands on either side of the river banks of Jäma, Käsäm and their tributaries. Weaving of wool was common among the highland peasants owing to the presence of sheep and the prevalence of the cool climate in the highlands. They survived this climate by producing blankets. Often, those woolen clothes were used in place of cotton ones since no cotton was grown in those high regions.

Making and repairing iron and metal objects was also a very important occupation in the Amhara inhabited districts. Iron ore was found in several parts of the country. Smelting was widely practiced by blacksmiths who operated one or more self-made sheepskin bellows over a charcoal fire²²⁰. Shäwan rulers such as Sahelä Sillassé (1813-1847) and his predecessors had some local crafting centers under their own supervision. Harris, who saw iron workers at Gureye, in the valley of the Chacha river, mentioned that this industry was one of the largest such establishments in his day²²¹. There were also different localities where the skill of identifying soil containing iron was practiced. For instance, the informants at the monastery of *balejje* (craftsmen) near Aläm Kätäma in the Märhabété district said that their ancestors possessed the knowledge of purifying iron from an ore. Märsé also reports that there was even an area by the

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.23.

²¹⁹ Täklä Hawariat Täklä Mariam, p.7.

²²⁰ W.C. Harris, *The High Land of Aethiopia* Vol. II (London, 1844).

²²¹ Pankhurst, *Economic History*, p. 239.

name የዕለት አራር (soil of iron) in the middle of Morät at a locality called Enjarra Mariam. The presence of raw material, iron, and the skill of extracting it from the ore made iron working one of the major economic activities in the region. In addition the availability of charcoal contributed significantly to this practice. In some cases, both the iron and charcoal were collected as tributes in kind from the peasants. This raw iron was called *tägära* in Amharic. It was used by craftsmen employed by Shäwan rulers to forge different types of iron tools. Iron smelting needs a huge amount of energy that could be generated by burning an enormous amount of charcoal. Before it became bare, the region had forest cover to supply these quantities²²².

There was also a raw material for producing gunpowder along the layers of river valleys²²³. Attempts were made to produce bullets in the locality by Ethiopian craftsmen during the time of Sahelä Sillasé in the first half of the 19th century. Most probably that was why Menilek also attempted to establish a bullet factory at Bulga in the region after being advised by Alfred Ilg (his foreign adviser)²²⁴.

Another related craft carried out in the area was tanning. As was mentioned above the region was endowed with a significant number of cattle on its plateau that certainly made possible the availability of large amounts of hides and skins²²⁵.

Clay soil was predominant in different localities of the region, which was why pottery was much practiced by the wives of blacksmiths, weavers, and tanners. Since other types of containers were not commonly in use, the role of potters was very important in the history of the region before the introduction of plastic and metal containers in general.

The plateau region of North Shäwa was suitable for rearing pack animals. The importance of these animals, mainly horses and mules, in the history of Ethiopia, particularly when kings maintained mobile or semi-mobile capitals and during persistent conflicts, was very pronounced. Consequently, where the areas occupied by courts were suitable for rearing horses and mules, the pasture lands were entirely preserved for these pack animals. North Shäwa was one of these regions where such animals were reared in abundance. It was the major source of horses and mules for the cavalry of the later chiefs and kings of Shäwa. The major examples are the cavalry

²²²Märsé Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, *Tizitayé*, p.83; Gäbrä Wäld Engida Wärq, *Yü Itophiya Märét na Geber Sem* (Addis Ababa, 1948 E.C.), p.28.

²²³*Ibid.*

²²⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 25-31.

²²⁵C. Johnston, *Travels in Southern Abyssinia through the Country of Adal to the Kingdom of Shoa* Vol. II (London, 1844), p. 69.

of King Sahelä Sillassé during his frequent campaigns against Tuläma and that of king Menilek during his campaign to Wällo and the South, particularly during the initial stage of the territorial expansion. Horses constituted a sizeable proportion of the large amounts of tributes collected in kind from different localities of the region²²⁶.

There was also no serious shortage of water throughout the region, on the plateau as well as in the valleys. Available sources do not indicate any scarcity of water for the consumption of the inhabitants' animals, domestic purposes and small-scale irrigation at the garden level. Mähetemä Sillassé, Täklä Hawariat, and Märsé repeatedly mentioned the abundance of springs and streams in their respective localities during all seasons. The same holds true for the plateau in the region. Since the plateau is a watershed between the Jäma and Käsäm rivers, many of their tributaries had their sources on this plateau²²⁷.

Even if they were barriers to communication during the rainy season, the availability of large numbers of rivers and their tributaries offered an important guarantee of a reliable water supply, for domestic consumption and animals as well as small-scale irrigation²²⁸. Fishing on a minor scale was practiced on the two (Jäma and Käsäm) rivers.

3.3 Agricultural settlements of the Amhara community since the 19th century

The forceful movement of Shäwan Chiefs from the Amhara inhabited districts to Ifat resulted in the displacement of Kärräyyu Oromo. After their displacement, Ayené was founded by Nägasi and his community as a new settlement. All these lands, from Qobo and Mängest in the current Qäwot district to the river Awadi in the south near Tarma Bär in the current district of Mafud, were well cleared and cultivated around 1700²²⁹.

Asmé is precise in his explanation of the situation as "... [ኩስ]ከረም መንጋዙን የሚሰማቸውን መቆጣሪ ለወገኖች የከናወል ይመጣ" ²³⁰: "...he [Nägasi] began to distribute the pasture, on which the Kärräyyu let their cattle, to his relatives". The successor and son of Nägasi, Säbesté, founded his settlement at Doqaqit near the town of Däbrä Sina²³¹. The tradition confirms that he did not inherit even a single plot of land from his father.

²²⁶ Harold Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menilek*.

²²⁷ Mäsfen Wäldä Mariam, *An Introductory Geography of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 1972).

²²⁸ Mahetätmä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Yä Itiyopiya bahel tinat: Bulga*, p.8.

²²⁹ Bairu Tafla, *Asmä Gyorgis and His Works...*, p.508.

²³⁰ *Ibid*, p.502.

²³¹ *Ibid*; Heruy Wäldä Silassé, p.77.

Consequently, he drove the Kärräyyu further to the south and occupied other lands for the purpose of farming. A significant part of the population of Kärräyyu Oromo was driven out of Ifat by Säbesté in the first two decades of the 18th century²³². The third Shäwan chief, Abiyé, founded another settlement at Haramba in the district of Ankobär. All the land in the area beyond his father's territory was cultivated as far as Ayirrara River in the district of Ankobär²³³.

As more lands were occupied the initial settlements, for instance at Gäfgäf, were left to the clergy. Abiyé's victory over his rivals from different localities of the region and over the forces which were sent from Gondär to Ayené during the reign of Iyyasu Bakafa (1730-1755) constituted an important impetus for the expansion of agricultural settlements²³⁴. The series of campaigns brought a number of captives to Abiyé. His humane treatment of the captives, who were skilled in iron working, promoted the migration of more skilled men from the north to Shäwa. They helped him to clear the forest of Ifat. Asmé writes that "...እንደን ስ የንግንለው የለም
መጥበያ የሚር መጥበያ ሆነ ስ የኝነትና ይን በዘመና መጥበያ አቀናው፡ መሆኑን መንፈል
ይመር" ²³⁵; "...Nobody served him like them, they made axes and sickles for him, and he cleared the forest of Ifat by these tools. They made ploughshares and wägäl for him; he ploughed the land using them". After the death of Abiyé, his son and successor Amähayäs continued the same practice of expanding farmlands and settlements. He founded new settlements at Selele'ulan, Asetit and finally at Ankobär. In particular, the settlement of Ankobär was founded on forest land²³⁶ and Amähayäs inhabited the area. Thus, he was identified by the people as:

አል አምሮስ አረዳ የቀቀ
መቻ ወርሃ ይመር አየተንፃቀቀ²³⁷

Amehayes is becoming older and older
He began crawling on earth
But to mean he began occupying [our] land

The districts of Bulga, Tära and Menjar began to be ploughed by the men of this Chief. The next expansion, which was effected by Wäsän Sägäd, brought the settlement as far as Shäwa Méda. The area where the town of Däbrä Berähan is located is said to have been constructed by Wäsän Sägäd, assuming that the area is the site of the medieval town of Emperor Zäryaqob²³⁸.

²³² Svein Ege, p.39.

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ Bairu Tafla, *Asmä Gyorgis and His Works...*, p.509; Svein Ege, p.42.

²³⁵ *Ibid*,p.512.

²³⁶ *Ibid*,p.513.

²³⁷ Informant (76): Ato Solomon at Ankobär on 25/6/2008.

²³⁸ Taddässä Tamrat, p.97.

As a result, the pasture lands of Shäwa Méda were fully cultivated after the foundation of Angoläla as the last boundary of Shäwan farms which were ploughed by uprooting the Tuläma²³⁹. Generally, the settlements were accompanied by the foundation of administrative towns and churches that opened up new opportunities for peoples with different skills. Farmers, craftsmen, soldiers, clergies, and merchants began to migrate to the region.

The farmers came to cultivate the newly usurped land from the Oromo. Craftsmen were attracted to the region, observing the new market opportunities and the patronage given to them by Shäwan Chiefs²⁴⁰. There was also a strong effort by the new Chiefs and kings to establish churches in every village and locality they appropriated from the Oromo. In addition, some of the Oromo became Christians which also resulted in the influx of large numbers of priests, from Amhara inhabited districts such as Märhabété, Morät, Tägulät, Bulga, Wägda, and Mänz or from regions north of Shäwa such as Tigrai, Gondär, and Gojjam, to the region to serve in the churches²⁴¹.

The foundation of churches was followed by the allotment of large proportions of the neighbouring lands to them²⁴². Merchants also began to engage in long distance and local trading in Shäwa because of the availability of new markets or consumers and the existence of relative peace²⁴³. Large numbers of needy people also migrated to the region because of the presence of courts/ palaces as well as churches²⁴⁴. In these two institutions (churches and courts) particularly, there were frequent feasts and ceremonies at least two or three times a week that provided leftovers to the indigent²⁴⁵. Many, men from the region north of Shäwa migrated to the region, being prompted by the news about its prosperity, heard from the people who had arrived in the region before them, beginning in the 18th century. In addition, the number of soldiers who migrated to Shäwa was very significant after the escape of Menilek from Mäqdäla in 1865. They were also prompted by the news about its prosperity from those who came to Shäwa with

²³⁹Bairu Tafla, *Asmä Gyorgis and His Works...*, p.518-521.

²⁴⁰Isenburg and Krapf, pp. 74, 88,89, 138-40,142; William Cornwallis Harris, p. 371; Charles Johnson.II, pp. 330-32.

²⁴¹Mängestu Lämma, *Mätsehafä tetzeta zä Aläqa Lämma*, pp.102,112,114,115,123,124.

²⁴²*Ibid*, p. 103.

²⁴³Svein Ege, p. 47.

²⁴⁴Isenburg and Krapf, p. 171.

²⁴⁵Mängestu Lämma, pp.104-105.

Menilek during his escape from Mäqdäla. They were known in the Shäwan court as Gondärés (people from Gondär)²⁴⁶.

The settlements of the Amhara community were not founded on vacant lands. Rather, they were established either by displacing or by subduing the Oromo. Perhaps the fundamental question to be posed here is; why did the Oromo who had been powerful for the last two centuries (16th-18th) become powerless in the face of the Amhara while the latter were successful in the expansion of their agricultural settlements? The reasons lie in the socio-cultural, economic and political experiences of both groups during the period preceding the genesis of Shäwa as a kingdom.

The first reason comprised the special “skills” and “knowledge” which enabled the Amhara to dominate the Oromo. The former claim that: “.....በእውቅታኝና በንልበታኝና የቀኑ ወ. መረት...” ; “...the land we inhabited [utilized] using our knowledge and skills”²⁴⁷.

Thus, what were these “skills” and “knowledge” or accumulated experiences that allowed the Amhara to be successful? The Amhara inhabited the river gorges for a long period, and these were not conducive to many economic purposes. Working in the area was laborious and required the inhabitants to overcome major hardships from generation to generation. Thus, they inevitably aspired to gain relief from such hardships, which also strengthened every aspect of their life, physically, psychologically and mentally, to discover a way out from these privations. On the other hand, the Oromo had been living for centuries on a vast area of land that enabled them to own large numbers of herds and lead a relatively easy life²⁴⁸.

So, concerning their need for more land the Amhara became skillful and energetic over time while the Oromo became complacent and passive. The other possible aspect of contrast would be military or battle experience. The Oromo were on the way to losing the military training, graded by age, provided in the *gada* system. This system became confined only to religious issues, by losing its other roles that led to the rise of chieftaincy among the Oromo in place of egalitarian political and military leadership²⁴⁹. While dealing with the issue of Sälalé, concerning the Oromo-Amhara interactions in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries and the process of incorporation of Sälalé into the Shäwan kingdom, Tsägayé frequently mentioned the “notables”

²⁴⁶Afäwärq Gäbrä Yäsus, *Dagmaw Menilek Negusä Nägäst Zä Ityophiya* (Rome, 1901), pp. 31,57.

²⁴⁷Bairu Tafla, *Asmä Gyorgis and His Works...*, p. 502.

²⁴⁸*Ibid*, pp.516-517.

²⁴⁹Tsägayé Zäläkä, p.124.

or Oromo local Chiefs rather than the previous *gada* leaders²⁵⁰. This is vividly indicative of the waning of the authority of *gada* leaders during this period. To the advantage of the Amharas, there was bitter rivalry among the Oromo Chiefs. Therefore, the Shäwan Amhara of this time were confronted not with the Oromo who were organized traditionally or the *Luba* military force under the command of *abbadula*. Rather, they encountered the Oromo led by Chiefs who had a weak hold in specific geographical areas and were supported by relatively permanent armies; not *Luba* soldiers graded by age. The same also holds true for the Oromo chieftaincy of the northern part of Shäwa Méda. Significant examples were Gobana among the Abichu, Bokisa among the Wayyu and Atero among the Jirru Tuläma Oromo sub-groups²⁵¹.

On the other hand, the Amhara communities were still practicing their traditional fighting or military exercises along the river beds of Jäma and its tributaries. It was almost the continual practice among the Amhara community to gain masculine social status, such as prestige among the community, and military training by participating in every type of possible confrontation:²⁵² “የር መን ስላት...”, “In case, he is told that there is a campaign...”, a trained or skilled peasant army could accomplish the mission. This was one of the qualities that the Oromo of Shäwa were lacking by this time. Another related practice was hunting, one of the favourite practices among the Amhara not only for economic reasons but also for social status. They aggressively killed big animals by using different skills, which obviously caused them to become experienced fighters²⁵³. On the contrary the Oromo had due respect for every creature including wild animals. They did not kill animals except in rare cases. Hence, they were becoming more passive and less experienced as soldiers. Furthermore, the geography that the Amhara inhabited created the opportunity of becoming an abode for rebels or fighters in shaping their mentality as fighters or in developing warlike values (ደንናትና) ²⁵⁴. Most probably, it was such experience, considered as especial “skill” and “knowledge, that enabled the Amhara to evict the Oromo from

²⁵⁰Ibid.

²⁵¹Dächasa Abäbä, “The Peopling of Morät and Märhabété C. 1700-1889”, MA Thesis in History (Addis Ababa University, 2003), p.43-45.

²⁵²Ibid, p.48 .

²⁵³Mahetämä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Balän Inewäqebät* (Addis Ababa, 1965), p.56.

²⁵⁴Informant (14): Awäqä Gobana (at Enäwari on 6/8/2002 and 25/9/2008).

their lands, on which the former eventually settled. All these factors contributed to the military success of the Shäwan Amhara against their immediate neighbours²⁵⁵.

The myth of “Displacement” that existed among Shäwan Amhara for a long period was also instrumental in generating social and political movements at that time. The Amhara communities of the Amhara districts claimed that they had settled on the plateau before the war of Ahmad Gragn displaced them and that the Oromo had followed in his footsteps to settle on the land. This claim gave the Amhara a sort of psychological strength to continue their attempt to “resettle” on the plateau. The popular motto was that, “they took our land during the time of our weakness. But now we are strong enough to take it back”. The claim was made mostly by two influential groups of the community. The first consisted of the elites²⁵⁶, the authorities of the time. Writers like the chronicler of Emperor Menilek II also advanced justifications for the myth²⁵⁷. For instance, they generated explanations from ethnic perspectives as to how the Amhara were fit for farming and fighting as well as administration, but that the Oromo knew only pasturing and raiding. To justify this *Aläqa Tayé* wrote: “አምኔ ሲ ማለት አራሻ ማለት ነው”²⁵⁸. “Amhara means farmer”. They also tried to convince their followers by claiming that the Tuläma on Shäwa Méda were foreigners and the Amhara were the indigenous people of the country. This is clearly evidenced by the following saying: “...አማርኛ ከኢትዮጵያ አለምና ለቃድ የመግኘት ነው እንደአንድላለም እንደ ማለት ከዚያ ህዝብ የመግኘት ቅንቃ አይደለም:”²⁵⁹. “Amharic is a language came from our fathers [ancestors], the Ethiopians, not like [Afan Oromo] that came from outside”.

The justification goes to the extent of considering the Oromo as a zealous enemy who settled on the Amhara lands previously inhabited by their ancestors. Märsé, who is considered as an enlightened church scholar as well as an amateur historian of the early 20th century, recorded the myth that existed among the Amhara community of Morät district: “የአንድሮ ተወለደች ቅድሞ በግራኝ ገዢ እለም በአይቀም ወረዳ ማኅንያት ከደሩ ይጋል እና እና በአየተኩ አካባቢ የሰራተኞት ወደ በዘመዣ በገደል ከሱም ይገኘል፡፡ ለማስረጃም የሰዋቸ

²⁵⁵Heruy; Mahetämä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Balän Inewäqebät*

²⁵⁶Gäbrä Sillassé, p. 46.

²⁵⁷Mahetämä Sillassé, *Zekerä Nägär*, pp. 112-113.

²⁵⁸Tayé, p.49.

²⁵⁹*Ibid*, p.50; the same conclusion was also written in *Käsatä Berähan* (1956:462) which considered the Oromo as alien to the country: “...የጋለ ቅንቃ አይቀም ከመግኘት አገር ወደ አትምና ተስፋ ለመግኘት እና... በስራተኞት ህዝብ የመግኘት... ህድ ቅንቃ...”

የምግባ ማብራሪና መኩታ ከፍል የ ከ-ብርሃናዎም ወጪ ሁኔታ በዋናው ወሰን ተለይቶ ይታወል፡፡”²⁶⁰; roughly this says, “The peoples of the parish were displaced from the nearby highlands of Jirru first due to the war of Ahmed Gragn and later as a result of the invasion of the Oromo. As evidence, the cave and their cooking utensils as well as a room for their animals are visible.”

The second influential group which attempted to convince every member of the community about the “truth” of this claim was the clergy. The priests were very active in preaching to convince the public about the presence of a number of churches throughout Shäwa Méda before the 16th century²⁶¹.

The scarcity of land became a serious problem in the Amhara inhabited districts as time passed. *Aläqa Lämma* mentioned his evidence: “.... የን ገብ የሽዋ ለው የርስት ነገር ተናው የን ለው የን ለው መሬት አልተያዘ እልቀናሙ መንዝማ እንዳው የድን አገር ነው፡ ሽዋን አገር የደረሰ ይኩል የን ለው መሬት አይደለም?”²⁶²; “...during that time the issue of *rist* (land) was problematic. This land of the Oromo was not occupied. Mainly, Mänz was the country of the poor. Shäwa became prosperous country after the land of the Oromo was occupied.”

The personal biography of Täklä Hawariat on how his parents came from Kaset to Seyadeber is another important example. He narrated this as follows: “አባቱ በተወለደበት አገር በባታቸው መቁደሰ (በከሰት ማቃሳል) ሌሎች ተስፋ ተስፋ ነበር፡፡ አባታቸው ከመሬ ወይም ከታቸው ከይቶት የጠቃቃ የደረሰቸውን ስራት (ትናንሽ ቁርጥሮች መሬቶች) አያረሰ ወጪም በርታቸውን በደሳየም ተወለደቸ በከሰት ሌሎች መሬት አየጠበ ተናው መሬት አልቀረም፡”²⁶³; “Even if, my father was living in the land of his father and serving at the church (Kasete Michael), by ploughing the *rist* he inherited from his father and mother (fragmented lands), he could not alleviate the scarcity of land because of the multitudes of the children”.

Märsé mentioned in his autobiography that “በሽላቅ ወሰን ለእርሻ የሚከታተሉ መሬት በመሬ ነው የንኑ ተወለደቸ ይርኩል፡ ይርኩልውን ተከናወለው የርስተዋል...”²⁶⁴; “In the valley, the land for farming is small; so, the inhabitants cultivated by sharing only this available land.” He also adds, “በቁ የእርሻ መሬት ሌሎች አብዛኛው ወደፊት ወደፊት ተስፋ እየተሰማ በየርስት ይርኩልው ወይም በትንካሬት እያረሰ

²⁶⁰Märsé, *Tizietayé*, p. 16. Kidanä Wäld Kiflie, identified the Oromo as the zealous enemy of the Amhara, “ጋብርና መሬት ይመኩ እኩረና ጋብርና በግኝ ተከናወል”, p. 317.

²⁶¹Ethiopian Orthodox Church, *Mareha Tsigeq: Bahelä Haymanot* (Addis Ababa, 1991), pp.76-80.

²⁶²Mängestu Lämma, p. 110.

²⁶³Täklä Hawariat, p.9.

²⁶⁴Märsé, *Tizietayé*, p.16.

የአማካች ቁለጥቻዎን በደንብም ይሰበሰባል፡”²⁶⁵ “Because of the scarcity of land, many of them descended to the more lowland of Bedebej and Shima to cultivate and produce for their annual consumption.”

All the above quotations depict the extent to which the myth of displacement and the scarcity of land among the Amhara inhabited districts had a deeply rooted background in the socio-economic history of the region. This in turn motivated them to climb the hill and settle on the plateau. In other words, the difficulties in their locality energized them in fighting to climb to the plateau.

Another factor that contributed to the growth of Amhara settlements on the plateau was peaceful interaction. This was manifested in their marriages. Marriage contracts were arranged with the Oromo families who possessed lands. The Chiefs were role models in this aspect. Beginning from the northern corner of Shäwa Méda, the family of Argano Wadajo, the first Christian Chief among the Jirru Oromo, made a marriage alliance with the family of Sahelä Sillasse²⁶⁶. Gobana also played a crucial role in arranging such types of marriage alliances. He gave his daughters to the Tuläma chiefs among the Galan and Wayyu Oromo. His biographer stated that:

የአንተ ለቃቃው የወይዘሮ በርቃ ብል የደቃቃች ተከለንየርሃን አበት አቶ አርጋም ይሸ የዋወ ብለ
በርቃ የነበረ አዋሳ አዋሳ ባዘቀም ወያ ደንብ... ሆነተኛ አመቃቃው የወይዘሮ አማካች ብሔ ነገወ፡፡
ነገወ የሆነ የሆነ ብሔርቃ አቶ የሆነ ብሔርቃ አቶ የሆነ ብሔርቃ አቶ የሆነ ብሔርቃ አቶ የሆነ ብሔርቃ
በሆነ አቶ የሆነ ብሔርቃ፡፡²⁶⁷

The husband of his elder daughter *weyizero* Birké was the father of *Däjach* Täklä Giyorgis, *Ato* Argano Jiree, who was the chief of Wayyu, the neighbour of Butta Bokkisa whose land was Wayyu Dannabba....the husband of the second daughter Immamma was Birru Nagwo, Nagwo Garri the chief of Mutte Galan, who was baptized when he was a child by Menilek; the whole of Abichu and Galan respected his words and were loyal to him.

Afänegus Arägay Bacharé was another son-in-law of Gobana. Arägay, the father of *Ras* Abäbä Arägay, originated from the Oromo of Wayyu. Gobana also bought off most of the families of the Tuläma Chiefs through persuasion and rewards. Specifically, the younger sons of the family were very important for they lost many advantages because of the law of primogeniture in Oromo tradition. For this reason they were invited, in such words as “ና ባባት አንጻ አንጻ”

²⁶⁵*Ibid*, p.20.

²⁶⁶Dächasa, p.123.

²⁶⁷*Ibid*.

እረዳለሁ፡ ለምን ቁጥሩ ተብለሁ ትጠቃለሁ፣ ልጅሁም በረዳለሁን እድልምን? ”; “Come! I will appoint you as a chief [elder] on the land of your father, why do you become junior? Your son is going to be a slave?”²⁶⁸ In one way or the other the previous hostile relationships were, over time, replaced by peaceful interaction, at least at the individual family level.

Because of its extremely fragmented geographical set up, agricultural activities were extremely laborious in the Amhara inhabited districts. Using animal labour for these purposes was very difficult and sometimes even impossible. Rather than using ploughs drawn by oxen, digging by hoe was common, while instead of using pack animals many agricultural products were transported by human beings. Existence in the northern part of northern Shäwa was so demanding during this period that, when opportunities presented themselves, most inhabitants aspired to live on the fertile nearby plateau.

The other factor that made life in the Amhara inhabited districts very difficult was the presence of pests that did damage to the farms of the peasants, who were therefore occupied with guarding against these pests from the day of sowing to the day of harvesting, for almost twenty-four hours every day, besides being involved in other agricultural activities. Otherwise, the farms or crops of the peasants would have been threatened by complete destruction; hence, the proverb “ዘንጋጀ የዋለቻት...”, “spoiled by a gang of monkeys...”. And sometimes the peasants might contract seasonal diseases such as malaria, which were common in the lower terraces, while guarding their farms from these animals²⁶⁹. The same experience was observed by Märsé in Morät, by the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries²⁷⁰.

Generally, the factors listed above contributed to the success of the agricultural settlements of the Amhara community, on the land inhabited by the Oromo for almost three centuries, by the former displacing or subduing the latter. Unfortunately, the process was followed by the gradual impoverishment of the region. Therefore, the following chapters of this study address a number of historical and natural factors that gradually led to the over exploitation of resources which eventually resulted in diminished agricultural productivity of the farms. Consequently, this contributed to the gradual decline of North Shäwa’s capacity to accommodate numerous people.

²⁶⁸Ibid.

²⁶⁹Mahetämä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Yä Itiyopiya bahel tinat: Bulga*, p.13.

²⁷⁰Märsé, *Tizitayé*.

This was followed by outmigration of a large number of its inhabitants to the newly conquered regions of southern Ethiopia and the newly founded capital town, Addis Ababa.

Chapter Four

4. Land Tenure System

4.1 Background (1865-1880)

Property rights are important factors in determining socio-economic interactions such as the productivity of the land; effectiveness agriculture and distribution produce in agrarian societies²⁷¹. Rights to land and their implementation shape the security of any tenure system. It varies substantially across time, communities and individuals. In some countries, it is often governed by traditional common property systems. In this system land is controlled by the village or the clan, which allocates rights of use to individual members. In other countries, farmland is mostly privately owned, while forests, pastures and wastelands are common or state property²⁷².

Land rights are major determinants of productivity, income, investment and effectiveness in agriculture, and are a significant feature of the political economy, distribution and welfare of rural populations. In many societies, land also has a number of important social, cultural and religious implications. In land-scarce societies, it is a major asset and a substantial proportion of household wealth is held in land. Its distribution is strongly correlated with income. In land-abundant societies, land has little commercial value and consequently does not form an important component of household wealth. In land-abundant areas, various kinds of livestock are major assets which perform many of the same functions as land does in the land-scarce communities²⁷³.

Property rights to land are a combination of different claims, such as use rights and transfer rights. For instance, traditional land tenure in different localities of Ethiopia comprised the right to cultivate the plot, to keep the full crop output, to donate the plot and sometimes to sell it within the community. However, sales to outsiders might be forbidden, or subject to approval by local authorities. Land may also be subject to seasonal variations in ownership status. In several parts of the region under study, land was farmed individually, while after harvest all land becomes part of the village's common property and pasture²⁷⁴

²⁷¹Täshälä Tebäbu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia: 1896-1974* (London, 1996).

²⁷²Rasmus Heltberg, "Property Rights and Natural Resource Management in Developing Countries" in *Journal of Economic Surveys* Vol.XVI, NO. II (Oxford, 2002), p. 199.

²⁷³*Ibid.*

²⁷⁴Täshälä Tebäbu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia: 1896-1974* (London, 1996).

The researcher has discussed the fact that the transformation to farmlands throughout Oromo inhabited Ifat and Shäwa Méda had taken place almost by the last quarter of the 19th century. After the transformation, the right of access to these lands was one of the important factors that determined the socio-economic interactions among different communities and the relationship between the rulers and the public, besides its influence on the productivity of the farmlands. The idea of establishing means of access to land for cultivating or using products emerged, along with the agricultural settlements by the beginning of 18th century. Initially, two categories of tenure systems were created; one being termed *rist* and the other *gasha*²⁷⁵. At least at this early stage two types of land tenure were therefore in existence; one, *rist*, applied to the Amhara inhabited districts and the other, *gasha*, from the tool used to occupy the land of Oromo²⁷⁶, to the Oromo inhabited regions of Ifat and Shäwa Méda.

In Mänz and other Amhara inhabited districts access to agricultural land was granted only through parental descent as *rist*. An indispensable rule of *rist* tenure was the inalienable right of all descendants to a piece of land that could be traced back to the founding father (*aqni*) through either side of the family. Equally important in *rist* arrangements in north Shäwa was the link that existed between *rist* and cultivated land: only land owned and cultivated by the claimants fell under the category of *rist*, personally cultivable land. Forests, pasture, and bodies of water which fell outside were considered as communal property²⁷⁷.

It appears that the Amhara who were settled by Shäwan Chiefs after displacing the Oromo used the *gasha* lands in return for the provision of different services to the chiefs, such as *genedäbäl*, *sämon*, *ganägäb* etc. The settlers only had the right to use or cultivate this part of north Shäwa as long as they discharged the responsibilities expected from them by the chiefs, to the end of the 19th century. In fact, some of them occupied extensive areas and became powerful even at the expense of the chief or king.

It is believed that the land tenure system of the region began to be structured more clearly beginning from the time of Menilek's arrival in Shäwa in 1865. Therefore, it was during his early Shäwan rule that the land tenure system in North Shäwa was well established. Accordingly, the land in the region was divided among three claimants for different purposes. Hence, it was

²⁷⁵ Bairu Tafla (ed and trans), *Asmäi Gyorgis and His Works: History of the Galla and the Kingdom of Sawa* (Stuttgart, 1987), p.503.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.528.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

classified traditionally, in the domain of Christian rulers as “ሰሳ አረጋግጣ ስሳለሁንጋግጣ ሰሳ ለቀጽና” ; “one third for the tiller, one third for the crown and one third for the prayer²⁷⁸”. However, new regulations were proclaimed for the *gasha märet* (*gasha* land) in Shäwa Méda and Ifat on *Tir* 23, 1883 (January, 30, 1891). On that day Menilek made a proclamation that changed the whole of Shäwa Méda and Ifat from *gasha* to *rist* land²⁷⁹.

However, the land tenure system in North Shäwa was not as simple as that of the general rule mentioned above. It is a very confusing and complex system which greatly varied from locality to locality, even having the same name but varying in execution. Having the presence of these local variations in mind, the following is an attempt to discuss the general land tenure system in North Shäwa during the period under study.

4.2. Public Land or “Land of the First Settlers”²⁸⁰

Although it is very difficult to identify when and how the peopling of the region took place, the inhabitants of each locality developed their own myths of settlement by which they claimed that they were the first settlers. Therefore, each locality of the earlier Amhara Chiefdoms told their own stories about their settlement. They asserted that they had inherited the land from their ancestors or *aqgni abbat*. Though it is difficult to come by documented sources, their oral tradition about the settlement is essential in shaping one’s understanding of the land tenure system in the socio-economic history of the region. Three sample districts: Mänz, Märhabéte and Morät are selected to explain how the myth of settlement shaped their inhabitants’ identity and served as a device to claim that the area was their “homeland”, inherited from their ancestors.

i) Morät - The myth of settlement in Morät, a district between Jäma and Bärsena rivers, states that the “first settlers” of the *Qolla* region were the descendants of medieval King Dawit’s (1430-1433) third son called Hezbenagn (Endriyas), whose town was situated on the hill of Däy in Morät. *Gädelä Zéna Marqos* associates the chiefs of Morät with Hezbenagn and his descendants. The *Gädel* frequently mentions the relationship between the king, by the name Endriyas, and the monk Zéna Marqos²⁸¹.

²⁷⁸Gäbrä Wäld Engda Wärq, *Yä Ityopya märétna Yägeber sem* (Addis Ababa, 1956), pp. 5-7; see also; Täfsa Gäbrä Sillassé (ed), *Gädelä Täkelä Haymanot* (Addis Ababa, 1992), pp.76-77.

²⁷⁹Gäbrä Sillassé, *Tarikä Zämänä zä Dagmawi Menilek* (Addis Ababa, 1967), p. 179; Berähanou Abbebe, pp.33-39.

²⁸⁰*Ibid*, p.11.

²⁸¹Laekä Mariam Wäldä Yäesus, *Gädelä Abuna Zéna Marqos* (Addis Ababa, 2007), pp. 166,183.

Taddäsä Tamrat was interested by this story, told for generations in Morät. He posed an inquiry that led him to the conclusion, “There is a kernel of historical truth in the tradition”. To reach this finding he relates the inhospitable geographical features of Morät and Märhabéte districts with the despotic political behaviour of king Zärayaqob (1434-1468). Accordingly, the inhabitants of Morät associated their first settlement in the area with the descendants of Hezebnagn in their stories. The founder of the settlement was said to be a certain Chief who was assumed to be the remote ancestor of Hezebnagn, called by the name Mäzämer, along with one hunter, Amdé, and a craftsman named Yemera. Mäzämer used the skills of the craftsman in winning over his opponents²⁸².

The present informants told the story as follows: previously Mäzämer had lived in the neighbouring districts of Wägda and Weger, to the east of Morät. Yemera’s family had also been residing in the same area for some generations and they were well known for their technical skills. Knowing this, Mäzämer invited Yemera to a political alliance supported by political marriage. The contract entailed the possession of half of the land of Morät after the conquest, and Mäzämer’s offering his own daughter for Yemera’s son. Yemera accepted the offer of a marriage alliance and immediately started preparations to occupy the Morät district. He planned to frighten the previous inhabitants of the district into either peaceful submission or a disorderly retreat to neighbouring districts. Then he manufactured many little iron bells and captured a similar number of strange birds, tied the bells on their feet and let them fly in the skies over Morät. The local peoples were alarmed by the strange ringing and by the croaking cries of the birds. This allowed Mäzämer to mount an attack on the inhabitants. Many of them fled across the Jäma River to the neighbouring districts. The rest submitted to the invading forces of Mäzämer. The mission of settlement was performed not only by these two, but also with the help of a third ally, Amdé, a well known hunter, who hunted by using his clever dog. Therefore, Morät was settled by the triple alliance of Mäzämer, Yemera and Amdé. Hence the informants said

²⁸²Taddäsä Tamrat, "Always Some Kernel of Historical Truth: Atsé Hezbanan (1430-1433) Resurrected in a Morät Folk Story." In Fukuii, K. and others (eds). *Ethiopia in a Broader Perspective: Papers of the XIIIth International Conference of Ethiopia Studies*. Vol. I (Kyoto,1997), p. 301.

ማዕራም በጋዢዎች
የምሬ በመቻዎች
አምድ በወጫዎች :²⁸³

Mäzämer by his shield
Yemera by his hammer
Amdé by his dog.

These three pioneers inhabited Morät and made it the *rist* of their descendants. In fact, the tradition accords the status of descendant of Hezebnagn of Däy only to Mäzämer. The same attitude of the people is mentioned in the autobiography of Märsé Hazen as: “በዘመን አንድ የሚከናወች ተረካም እበበ ከጋዢ እንወለዎላን እያለ የሚቻቻ ጥንት ከርስተያን ፍቃዎች :”²⁸⁴; “The people who were living in Morät were early Christians and proud of being born from Tidu of Morät and Tsäga of Däbibi”.

ii, Mänz - The myth of settlement in Mänz, a huge district between Qächiné and Mofär wuha rivers, is associated with the end of the war of Ahmed Gragn in the 16th century. It relates two important historical issues: the first being the destruction or threat that took place because of the war, with the second being how “the resettlement” was carried out after the end of the war. The story was well recorded by Donald Levine several decades ago. It says the region was settled by three founding fathers: Mamama, Lalo, and Géra who were sent by one of the emperors to settle and govern that region. The emperor offered each of them as much land as he could travel in a single day. They began their journey from the Addabay River, a western boundary of present day Mänz, and galloped as fast as they could on the plateau of Mänz. Each attempted to cover as much distance as he could. The result of their long day’s journey was the present division of Mänz into Mama Meder, Lalo Meder and Géra Meder²⁸⁵. It is said that, of the three brothers, Gera was able to cover the longest distance and claimed the largest territory in comparison to his brothers. The same story confirms that Géra’s horse was the strongest, which is why Géra Meder is the largest of the three²⁸⁶.

Another version of this tradition states that these founding fathers were sent by Emperor Gälwdwos (1541-1559), while other versions declare that they were sent from Gondär. In one way or the other the myth underlined that Géra was the most powerful of the three, as the story

²⁸³ Informants (9, 19): Asfaw Wäldä Guyorgis, Haylä Mäsqäl Täkka at Enäwari on 2/2/2008.

²⁸⁴ Informants (9, 17, and 18): Asfaw Wäldä Guyorgis, Gälätaw Gäbrä Wäld and Mekasha Aläme; Märsé Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, “sele Zendiro azmera ke agär wusiti Yemetalin wrie” in *Berähanena Sälam* (weekly newspaper). Vol.I, No.I (Addis Ababa, January, 1, 1925).

²⁸⁵ Donald Levine, *Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture* (Chicago, 1965), p. 31.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

of his horse indicated. He controlled most of the land of Mänz, including Afqara, a mountain fortress. He set aside a large stretch of grassland to be used by local people for grazing and providing grasses for roofs²⁸⁷. The grassland is not used as farmland and villages for settlements because of its cool temperature, as will be discussed in considering the tenure of common property resources. Thus, the later *rist* owners of Mänz asserted that they were the descendants of these three founding fathers.

iii, Märhabété - a district between Wänchit and Jäma rivers, also had its myth of settlement, mainly associated with migration from Gondär. The preserved myth is narrated among the inhabitants of Märhabété with several modifications but almost similar conclusions. Probably, the story tells of an incident that had taken place by the end of the 18th century. This is because Gondär has been mentioned time and again in the narration and the chief, by the name Wäldu, was the contemporary of Asfawäson of the late 18th century at Ankobär.

According to one of the informants, the “founding father” of Märhabété was Bézanä Wäld. He said Bézanä Wäld appealed to the king at the time for the position of administrator of Märhabété, knowing that the king would appoint an excellent fighter as administrator over some of his domains. Fortunately, he deserved the position since he met this criterion and was given the appointment. After this he built his town on Korra Mountain and began to administer Märhabété²⁸⁸.

After the death of Bézanä Wäld, his son Bawla succeeded to the position. At the same time a man called Wäldu came from Gondär. He was a cousin of Bawla. When he asked for a place to settle he was given Weyin Amba by Bawla so that Wäldu would not come to Korra. Bawla did this because of a prophecy which foretold that if the latter were to come to Korra he would be the Chief “Negus” of Märhabété in the place of Bawula. But as the story explains, Wäldu gained the position by ousting his rival, Bawla, in the absence of the latter. Bawla kept a mistress, down in the Jäma basin, and visited her frequently. Obtaining this information, Wäldu sent a spy to the town of Korra, who would smoke something as a signal if Bawla was in his court at mid day, and burn a torch at midnight if he was not there (ከለ ለቀን ወጪ አጠቃ ከለለ በለለት ቅዱ አጠቃ). The spy did accordingly so that Wäldu knew that Bawla was elsewhere. Wäldu then marched to the top of Korra and declared that from that time onwards he had overthrown Bawla. He ordered his

²⁸⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸⁸Dächasa, pp.40-43.

army to guard all passes to the *amba* of Korra and became the ruler of Märhabété. Hence, the latter generations of *rist* holders claim that they are the descendants of these fathers; Bézanä Wäld being the first settler and Wäldu the law giver (፩፻፭፻ የበኩና ሪልድ ቅና የወልድ ወልድ).

4.2.1. Common Property Resources

One of the modalities of accessing the public land or “land of the first settlers” was to make use of it as common property and resources. This refers to resources under communal ownership where access rules are defined with respect to membership of the community²⁹⁰. It comprises collectively owned and used resources such as irrigation systems, wells, forests, pasture grounds, wastelands etc. In such cases, property rights are in the hands of the tribe, the village, the clan or the ancestors²⁹¹. Common property systems that once efficiently functioned throughout the Oromo of Shäwa Méda and Kärräyyu have been undermined gradually since the settlement of the area by the Amhara chiefs and their followers²⁹². Land constituted the collective property of all the community among the Oromo²⁹³. Any part of the community’s land was generally inhabited by those clans and their associates who had access to the rivers and streams within it, since water was also an essential resource for both the farmers and pastoralists. Forests were a very limited resource for the Oromo of north Shäwa. Pockets of hills and mountains or places of religious rituals were covered with forests or woods. For instance, *Gada* rules prohibited forest destruction; the cutting down of certain Trees was outlawed²⁹⁴.

North Shäwa was once richly endowed with rules governing common property resources amongst its diversified localities²⁹⁵. However, gradually, the significant common properties in the area of study were reduced to only those of water, pasture and forest. One good example of the methods of accessing common property resources in the region is the practice related to

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.* Informants (20,21): Mulugeta Wäldä Tsadiq and Yeläma Astaraqi at Aläm Kätäma on 17/9/2008.

²⁹⁰ Isenberg and Krapf, *Journal of C.W. Isenberg of J.L. Krapf: Detailing their Proceeding in the Kingdom of Shoa and Journey in Other Parts of Abyssinia in the Years 1839, 1840, 1841 and 1842* (London, 1843).

²⁹¹Informants (23, 24): Mulugeta Nagawo and Tullu Dandana at Romé and Usmani on 2/9/2010 and 23/9/2010.

²⁹² Märsé Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, "Yä Ras Kassa Astädadär Danb", MSS. No., 1792 (IES).

²⁹³ Jabéssa Ejäta, *Yä Oromo Behér Tarik* (Addis Ababa, 1992).

²⁹⁴ Y. Admassé, *Twenty Years to Nowhere: Property Rights, Land Management and Conservation in Ethiopia* (Lawrenceville, USA, 2000), p.97.

²⁹⁵ Z.T. Ashenafi and N. Leader-Williams, "Indigenous Common Property Resource Management in the Central Highlands of Ethiopia", *Human Ecology* (2005), pp. 539 – 563.

pastureland (*guassa*) in Mänz Gera Mider. In Mänz, the community claimed that their founding fathers (*Aqgni Abat*), Asbo and Gera, initiated the indigenous means of wisely using the pasture of the *Guassa* area in the 17th century. According to the tradition, they took note of an open piece of land in the eastern part of Mänz and demarcated it as their pastureland. Then they sub-divided it into two parcels, one for each father²⁹⁶. These two founders set the area aside for the primary purpose of livestock grazing and use of the *guassa* (*Festuca*) grass for other purposes. Those who belonged to this kinship group through either parent could lay claim to a share of the land for possible use. To employ the resources in the locality efficiently, the members of the land holding group developed an indigenous means of doing so. The system was known as *Qero*. It worked by choosing a headman (*Abba Qera* or *Afero*) who was responsible for protecting and regulating the use of each area. The parcels had one elected *Abba Qera* (*Afero*) for each. The user communities of the *guassa* were further subdivided at village level²⁹⁷.



Fig. 1 Guassa: one of the Wurich regions where common property resource utilization is practiced.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Zäläläm Täfära and N. Leader-Williams, *The Resilient Nature of Common Property Resource Management Systems: A Case Study from the Guasa Area of Mänz*, p.6.

The system provided for the protection of the *guassa* area from any type of use by the community for three to five consecutive years. The duration of the protection largely depended upon the growth of the grass and the demands made by the community. When the grass was ready for harvest, the date of the opening was announced to the rightful user community, either at church ceremonies, in the marketplaces, at burial ceremonies or at other public gatherings. The site would be opened to community members during the dry season, commonly in the month of February. Then every member harvests the grass and the livestock begins to graze what is left over. The community should make ready to leave the site by the first week of *Hamlé*; in particular, it is closed by 12 July (*Hamlé Abo*). This is because of the fact that the heavy summer rain becomes even heavier²⁹⁸.

It is understood that environmental reasons forced the inhabitants to arrange such traditional rules. More especially, the area is very cold (*wurch*), and neither trees nor crop cultivation yield the expected results. Hence, there was no permanent human settlement in the area. However, the *guassa* area played an important role in the economies and survival strategies of the communities living adjacent to it throughout their history of settlement.

4.2. 2 “Private” Farmlands (Rist) 1891-1935

The term *rist* is frequently found with the prefix *Atsm* in most of the sources used for study. *Atsm* signifies skeleton or bone. Accordingly, *Atsmü-rist* refers to land demonstrating some association with one’s ancestors. Among the Christian community, it meant the land inherited from ancestors. Similarly, among the Oromo with their traditional beliefs, it was the land where ancestors were buried. It is the nature of the transfer of land from father to sons or daughters that provides emphasis in dictionary definitions of the term *rist* by Täsäma Habtä Mikael. In the same vein, *Fiteha nägäst* also gives emphasis to the possible means of inheriting *rist*²⁹⁹. Täshälä Tebäbu furnishes a further explanation of the tenure as it was both an ancestral descent claim and effective possession of land; the ancestral descent claims were much larger than the size of the

²⁹⁸Ibid; Informants (98, 99): *Ato Lämma Nägash and Ato Siyamiregn Lämma* at Tsehay Sina/Mänz on 19/9/2009.

²⁹⁹Gäbrä Wäld Engda Wärq, *Yä Ityopya märétna Yä gebre sem*, p.11; Täsäma Habtä Mikael, *Käsatä Berähan Täsäma: Yä amarigna mäzegäbä qalat* (Addis Ababa, 1959), p. 220; Täfsa Gäbrä Sillasé (ed.), *Fiteha Nägäst*, (Addis Ababa, 2000), pp. 326-345.

effective possessions³⁰⁰. But in north Shäwa, the lands claimed to be effective possessions were much larger by the middle of the 19th century.

In terms of the definitions of the sources mentioned above, both the Amhara and the Oromo inhabitants of the region could claim *rist* land. The myths of settlement among the Amhara and the graves or *ujuba* of the Oromo community throughout Shäwa Méda correspond mainly with the definition by Gäbrä Wäld. In fact, the Oromo were not able to enforce this right to their *rist* of Shäwa Méda and Ifat after their displacement or subjugation, beginning from about 1700 AD³⁰¹.

The increasing role of identity politics among the Amhara has reinforced the role of territoriality as a source of identity, that of the *rist* owner. In this aspect, their control of most of the region as their “homeland”, with strong roots in the doctrine of “primacy of the first settler” through reconstructing their myth of displacement, was very important. For this reason they considered the highland plateau as the land from which they had been “displaced” during the 16th century “turbulence³⁰². In any case, after the settlement of an area was said to have been accomplished, there was a rule about access to that newly founded farmland as *rist* for a member of the community.

The claim to *rist* possession was based on belonging to a line of descent from the initial father who happened to be the first to occupy the land as mentioned above. He was termed the *aqegni abbat* (founding father). The *rist* land was transmitted along both parents’ line of descent. As mentioned, there was a relatively well established regulation of the rights and duties of the community who had access to the land. One of them was the process of inheriting *rist* land. The discussion of this process becomes more meaningful if one understands the different modalities of application among different owners of the land in the region. The lands which were owned as *rist* were sub-divided among the members of the community according to their different social,

³⁰⁰Täshälä Tebäbu, p. 73.

³⁰¹Ed. Semone, "The Amhara Military Expeditions against the Shäwa Galla (1800-1850): A Reappraisal." In *Proceedings of the First United States Conference on Ethiopian Studies* (Michigan State University, 1975), pp.6,139; V. Stitz, "The Amhara Resettlement of Northern Shäwa During the Eighteenth and the Nineteenth Centuries", *Rural African* No.11 (Michigan State University, 1970), pp. 1,6.

³⁰²Odd Eirik Arnesen, "The Becoming of Place: A Tuläma Oromo Region in North Shoa," J. Hultin and Triulizi (eds), *Being and Becoming Oromo, Historical and Anthropological Enquires* (Uppsala, 1996), pp. 213-214.

economic and political status; and the responsibilities they were required to discharge for the government. Broadly, there were three different kinds of members of the community recognized as *rist* owners: *gäbbars*, *genedäbäls* and *melmels*. One important point to be underlined here is that the members under the second (*genedäbäl*) and third (*melmel*) categories could only be owners of lands granted by the state during their terms of service.

The members of the first group were known as *gäbbars*, tax payers as regards the *rist* land they owned or inherited from their ancestors. The major means of accessing *rist* for the *gäbbars* was indeed by inheritance. *Fiteha Nägäst* described the issue as follows. The first step for the process was that of appointing an *Aläqa* (master). For instance, if an individual had nine children, one of them would be appointed as *Aläqa*. This was done by dividing the *rist* of the individual into ten equal parts. Then each child would take its own share by casting lots, and the *Aläqa* was entitled to add the tenth part³⁰³.

The additional share of the *aläqa* was known as *yä aläqa meqdemiya* (master's extra). The extra share of the *aläqa* was not always determined by lot. In many cases children who would become *aläqa* were given title to specific plots, *guluma* (private), while their parents were still alive. The extra share of the *aläqa* was free from taxation. In addition to the additional share of the land, the *aläqa* would expect to receive, usually, two *qunna* of flour at Easter as *yätsom qolo* from his siblings³⁰⁴.

An individual who would assume the position of *aläqa* upon the division of *rist* belonging to an *aqni abbat* (founding father) was known as *yägend aläqa* (initial master). Each sibling would then assign an *aläqa* of his or her own, upon dividing their share of the land among their heirs.

This secondary group of *aläqa* would be known as *yäwägäb aläqa* (Middle master). Still another group of *aläqas* were those of the fourth and subsequent generations, exercising authority over a vast body of land owners who were collectively known as *minezer* (sub-superintendent)³⁰⁵.

The *aläqa* (master) was accorded advantages since he acted or worked as the master of the siblings. Most cases of *ilqina* were accompanied by benefits, for which reason there were large

³⁰³Täfsa Gäbrä Sillasé (ed.), *Fitehanägäst* (Addis Ababa, 2000), pp. 326-345; Täväma Habtä Mikaél, *Käsatä Berähan Täväma: Yä amarigna müzegäbä qalat* (Addis Ababa, 1959), p. 86.

³⁰⁴*Ibid.*

³⁰⁵Berehanu Täsfayé, pp.38-39; Berahanu Abbebe, 121; Täväma Habtä Mikaél, p.105.

numbers of court cases involving disputes over the office itself. He collected government taxes from them, carried out the actual division of land and performed other important duties. He had important administrative and social roles to play. The *ilqina* essentially derived from a position of seniority among siblings or heirs to a common ancestor. The responsibility of the *äläqa* ranged from distribution of land to collection of taxes from the *minzer* landholders. It was also the *äläqa* who arranged for and presided over the election of *chiqashum*. The *äläqa* was not necessarily a senior brother in a set of siblings. It was quite possible, and indeed a frequent occurrence, for a younger child to be chosen for the position of *äläqa*; this is why *Käsatä Berähan* says, “ወያም አባቱ የለቀው” ; “or whoever the father appointed”³⁰⁶. In those cases where the ancestor passed away without their properties being shared equally among their children the siblings would themselves pick one. An *äläqa* picked out by his siblings would not be entitled to an additional share of land upon division. An important characteristic of *ilqina* in this case is that it would be a rotating office. Siblings or heirs would take turns to discharge the responsibilities attached to their estate³⁰⁷.

The *gäbbars* of most of the Amhara districts such as Mänz, Märhabété, Morät, Bulga and Tägulät applied such a system for generations, up to the revolution of 1974 in the country³⁰⁸. Märsé furnishes a detailed account about the means of accessing *rist* land in his birth place Morät. His experience of *rist* tenure in a locality called Enjara Mariam in Morät after the battle of Sägälé in 1916 was identical with Brehanu Täsfayé’s experience in Mänz, as mentioned above³⁰⁹.

The second group of members of the community who owned *rist* land were termed *genedäbäl* (peasant army)³¹⁰. They were the peasants serving the government in the court for a fixed period of time or providing special types of service during military campaigns³¹¹. They carried out many activities to do with tents. For this reason they were called after a pole (*gend* in the Amharic language) used to stretch tents, as *genedäbäl* (“wood eaters”). They inherited *rist* land from their ancestors but did not pay all the taxes levied on the *gäbbars* who possessed lands like them. They were expected to pay only a few of these (according to the agreement they

³⁰⁶ Täsäma Habtä Mikaél, p. 86, 1330

³⁰⁷ Berehanu Täsfayé, p. 42.

³⁰⁸ Gäbrä Wäld Engeda Wärq, pp. 9-39.

³⁰⁹ Märsé Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, *TeziTayé*, p. 38.

³¹⁰ Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, pp.110-116.

³¹¹ Käsatä Berehan, p.85.

concluded with the government or their respective master). The rest of the tax was defrayed by the service they provided to the court³¹². This does not mean that all *gemedäbäls* were owners of *rist* land inherited from their ancestors. There were *gemedäbäls* who were donated land by the king. In this case, each specific piece of land was linked to the performance of particular duties. Such land could be inherited only as a result of the goodwill of the king, but this usually occurred when the heir assumed the responsibilities discharged by the former holder.

Most of the *gemedäbäls* of the late 19th and early 20th century of the country itself were recruited from the region in either of the two mentioned modalities. This was probably because of the proximity of the region to the newly founded capital and the affiliation the peoples of the area had with the rulers of the time, since they came from the same region³¹³.

Although the *gemedäbäls* were considered as a “peasant army”, the service they had to provide for the government was much more diversified. They were given the same name only because of the tent and its pole which they carried in service of the government. The *gemedäbäls* who provided different services to the government for the *rist* land they inherited from their ancestors were roughly identified as a fighter (*zämach*), mule man (*beqilo qälabi*), quarry man (*dingay fälach*), firewood man (*enchet fälach*), gardener (*ateklet täkay*), cannon and machinegun loader (*medfina metereyes chagn*), post man (*posta chagn*), tent pitcher (*dinkuan täkay*), prison guard (*wehni zäbägna*) and the like³¹⁴.

The third categories of *rist* land owners were known as *melmel* because of their exemption from other routine taxes. A *melemel* is a tree free of bulky branches; these taxpayers were likewise free from many of the taxes³¹⁵. Some of these provided the following items: different kinds of woven cotton cloths or togas and woven cotton, *barnose* or *zitet* (woollen local overcoat or blanket), saddle, leather (*qurbet*), *indod* (soap plant), clay plate for making *injära*, pieces of iron (*tägära*), charcoal, hoe and axe, stick (*zabia*), sickle, bit (*liguam*), stirrup (*irkab*), rein (*zab*), ploughshare, incense, pepper, chicken and pheasant, *kosso*, spear, gunpowder, tent peg, wand for burning and the like³¹⁶. *Azmari* (royal minstrels) were also placed in the same category if they

³¹²Gäbrä Wäld, pp.21-23.

³¹³*Ibid*, pp.111-113.

³¹⁴Gäbrä Wäld Engeda Wärq, pp. 22-23.

³¹⁵The name was given to them because of the fact that they were considered as peoples exempted from the routine taxes which were paid by other peasants.

³¹⁶Gäbrä Wäld, pp.25-31.

had their own *rist*³¹⁷. All these items expected to be provided by the third group of *rist* owners were not purchased for royal consumption or by the homes of different local officials. It seems that they were not abundantly available on the market. On top of this, a cash economy had not been introduced in the Shäwan economic system during the period under study. Hence the chiefs of Shäwa during the early period and the later kings introduced such a system of obtaining provisions from the subjects.

Besides offering ways of accessing and inheriting territory, another related feature of *rist* land was that it was neither totally communal nor completely private landed property. It was not communal property in that it was fragmented into individual possessions by those who inherited it from their kin. Nor was it private property in that it could not be bought or sold. It was barred from circulation as a commodity, so that it stayed in the possession of the same kin group³¹⁸.

The following were some of the available proportions of *rist* lands, out of the total number of *gasha* or number of taxed lands in about 60 districts within the area of study.

Name of the district	Total amount of lands in <i>gasha</i>	Lands of <i>Gäbbars</i> plus share of the <i>alqa</i>	<i>Genedäbäls</i> Lands	<i>Melemel</i> lands
Ankobär	8859	3678.5 +13	657	55
Mänz	3858	2051 +121	-	-
Gnä'a	378. 25	188	28.5	-
Sälalé	3891.25	996.25	295	42.5
Siyadäber	56.5	19	7	-
Sululta	257	142	13	3
Doba	18	? +8	-	-
Jamma	1034	144	37	-
Jirru	2760	847+145	638	108
Gädära	515	299	128	26
Gur	71	53	2	-
Geshé	1999	917.5 +53	15	-
Mida	544	290.25 +55	-	-
Gidim	2084	913 +132	267	-
Tära	505	73	110	151
Tatésa	454	314	97	-
Choba & Kärräyyu	202	107	16	56
Färäs Tifir	505	187	238	60
Islam Amba (Baso)	844	344	267	2

³¹⁷Ibid.

³¹⁸Ibid.

Ensaro	2144	280	356	-
Kitim wäira	1041	437	350	
wärämo	152	137	-	-
Warana	522	230 + 8	218	-
Wäsil	289	170	12	103
Wägeda	484	252	112	-
Wayyu	788	460 +6	117	-
Ifat	4861	1570	1950	-
Efrata	5757.5	1648 +515	-	-
Dibbi Ye Salam agar	338	333	5	-
Dinki Ye welasema agar	80	80	-	-
Qinbibit	888	349	439	9
Bäräkät	1065	542	251	108
Bulga (7 dug)	3019	1286	1012	66
Bita & Bilow	364	- +364	-	-
Tägulät (all)	3128	1462	600	220
Tegora	349	15	24	-
Ahiya fej	281	170	17	-
Aläletu	407	235	106	-
Amälesa	749	91	65	-
Asagirt	977	398	399	-
Abdülla	304	98	91	-
Haramba	1192	404	384	-
Lamwasha	652.5	189.5 +90	7	-
Mäsaqo	836	298	321	-
Märhabété	7167	690.5 +22	611	-
Mafud	27	27	-	-
Minjar	3571	1628	1036	6
Morät	1104	307 + 40	25	4
Säladingay	1645	752	276	-
Soten	338	252	8	38
Shänkora	1388	413.5	334	20
Qäwäät	391	212	84	-
Qäyya	190	15 +38	-	27
Chäreqos	339.25	44	33	33
Chatu	36	14	1.5	-
Fursi	588	588	-	-
Gurené	294.5	48	27	-
Gida	656.25	263	50	-
Gimbichu	521	112	31.5	-
Wobäri	659.5	115	19.5	-
Gullallé	541.5	119	68	-
Därra	2023	767	305	-
Dännäba	274.75	102.25	32	-
Abichu	408.75	114.25	41.5	-

Table.1 *Rist* lands under the ownership of peasants (*gäbbars*, *genedäbäls* and *melemel*)

Although, as indicated, the general rule governing the land tenure system in the country was understood as the land within the Christian king's domain being divided into three, of which each third was owned by state, church and the public, the districts in the region were characterized by containing a large proportion of public or *rist* land. The other two claimants were given *gult* rights on the lands owned by the public as *rist* lands. As can be observed from the above table, the majority of the land in the region was under the ownership of peasants who were *gäbbars*, *genedäbäles* or *melmeles*. In some localities the lands in the hands of peasants in the form of *rist* varied from 75% to 90% of the total recorded lands of a locality or district. The table indicates that in more than 30 of the 60 listed districts, the majority of the lands were possessed by *gäbbars*. These are either the districts inhabited by the Amhara or conquered early by them. Only less than half of the districts recorded significantly sized lands were either in the hands of the state or of the church. These are the conquered regions or districts confiscated from the Oromo. Districts such as Sälalé, Seyadäber, Jirru, Tära, Färäs Tifir, Ketem Wäira, Qinbibit, Amälesa, Abdälla and Shänkora can be mentioned as examples. On the other hand, Ankobär, Gnä'a, Jirru, Gidem, Färäs Tifir, Islam Amba (Baso), Ensaro, Kitem Wäira, Warana, Ifat, Qinbibit, Bulga, Tägulät, Aläletu, Asagirt, Haramba, Masaqo, Minjar, Säladingay, Shänkora and Qäwät reported significant quantities of land categorized as being possessed by *gendäbäls*. Most of these districts are located north of the Awash River, and probably the *gendäbäls* were *rist* owners because of the declaration of Menilek on *Tir* 23, 1883 (January 30, 1891). Therefore, large numbers of peasant armies in the region were *rist* owners. Only a few districts contained large amounts of land for *melmels*: Jirru, Tära, Wäsil, Bäräkät and Tägulät. The rest had either no *melmel* lands or lands very small in size assigned for this purpose.

Unfortunately, the individual territories of peasants were very small or fragmented because of the presence of large numbers of claimants. Though one *gasha* or one taxed land would be recorded under the name of an individual, most of the time the *aläqa*, and all his brothers and sisters (*minzirs*), possessed their shares of that land. Thus, the actual amount of farmland in the hands of one peasant was extremely small. In turn, the total farmlands in the region were not in the hands of economically powerful members of the community. The peasants who possessed these farmlands, which were fragmented, had neither the economic potential nor the initiative to improve productivity. The group, who were given *gult* rights on the same farmlands could not

control, supervise or subsidize the process of production. They were only accorded the rights to collect fixed amounts of taxes in kind from what the *rist* land owners' produced³¹⁹.

4.3. “State Lands” (1880-1935)

State lands were those formally under state ownership, for which the state ideally would enforce access rules. These lands were mostly state owned, at least in principle, while the cultivation rights were delegated to individuals or collectives under different preconditions³²⁰. The lands under this category in the region stemmed from diversified sources. Primarily, they had been occupied through different mechanisms such as being confiscated from rebels or peasantry guilty of serious crime. Although *rist* lands were inherited, this principle was held as subordinate to the king's theoretical supremacy over all land. Thus, in the case of treason or grave misconduct the owner would usually forfeit the land and his heirs would be deprived of their rights. Many of the *hudad* and *tisägna* lands (land leased for tenants) in Morät and Märhabété as well as Jirru were the result of this measure. One example was the case of Abbawuqaw Birru whose families were supporters of Mängäsha Séifu and lost their land to the government for this reason³²¹. Another source was that of lands captured in war, *yägasha märét*, in many localities of Shäwa Méda. The so called “vacant” or “unoccupied lands were also occupied and considered as state land; finally there were lands belonging either to the crown or to the sovereign personality, given or bequeathed to him by former owners (*yawäräsu*)³²². It was these that were granted to individuals or collectives under different preconditions. Most of the time, the ownership of these granted lands was vested in the state, and the individuals or collectives had only the right to use them. In fact, at the initial stage of the settlement, these land grants or allocations could take two forms, based either on permanent and inheritable tenure known as *rist* with virtually no obligations attached, or on temporary tenure which carried with it a variety of obligations³²³.

³¹⁹Berehanu Abägaz, “Poverty Trap in a Tributary Mode of Production: the Peasant Economy of Ethiopia”, *Working Paper Number 6* (College of William and Mary: Department of Economics, 2004), pp.1-22.

³²⁰Rasmus, pp. 194-95.

³²¹Sirak Fiqadä Sillassé, “Yä Däjazmach Abba Wuqaw yä heyiwot tarik”, Manuscript (IES, 400, 1931 E.C.), p. 12.

³²²Gäbrä Sillasé, p. 99.

³²³R. Pankhurst, *Economic History*, p. 128.

The amount of *rist* which could be allocated by any king was limited. The practice was confined to previously unallocated lands, newly conquered lands and land which reverted to the crown for different reasons³²⁴. The subject of discussion under this sub-topic is, however, the temporary tenure. Grants in this case were made in return for specific services rendered by administrative officials, usually members of the nobility³²⁵.

The following section discusses some of the state lands which were granted to individual administrative officials or collectives, or reserved for different routine functions of the palace of the king. The first is *yäbalabbat siso* (*balabbat*'s one-third) or *yä mälekägna siso* (*mälekägna*'s one-third). A *balabbat* is someone “who has a father”; probably one that could bequeath him a significant position, mainly the leadership of one's own community. These were often clan leaders or “representatives” of conquered peoples such as the Tuläma of Shäwa Méda. *Mälekägna* was the commander of the army during the conquest of a certain area or a powerful person who inhabited a massive territory of “vacant land”, “በት ኢትዮጵያ ለተለቃቸው ስራ እንደሸጋል”, as his possession³²⁶.

When the *qälad* system was introduced in Shäwa to transfer some of the lands occupied during the conquest to state ownership by the beginning of 1880, both the *balabbats* and *mälekägnas* were entitled to one-third (*siso*) of the land of their clan and the territory they occupied respectively. The members of the first group were entitled to reclaim the land from which they had been totally evicted during the conquest. The state declaration of 1897 E.C, of course, stated the purpose of the *balabbat siso* as “መፋትን የተነኝ ቅለና የወረዳ ባለቤት ህዝር ለፋይ ተነኝ ቅለው እንዲያቀርር...”; “In order that the sons of evicted Galla *balabbats* should not be left without land”. This was implemented, for instance, in the districts of Gidda and Gna'a of North Shäwa in 1920, 1921, and 1923 E.C.³²⁷

The *mälekägnas* were also entitled to possess one third of the land they occupied during the conquest. The detailed description by Gäbrä Wäld considered both the *balabat* and *mälekägna* as one and the same³²⁸. Nonetheless, his explanation focuses more on the *balabbats*. For him, an individual could become a *balabbat* in two ways. One was through taking one-third of the

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär* (Addis Ababa, 1972), p.109; Gäbrä Wäld, p.13.

³²⁶ Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, p.109.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

³²⁸ Gäbrä Wäld, p.13.

conquered land under his leadership. The second was through loyalty: when a local Chief or clan leader peacefully submitted in an area that had been conquered, he was given one-third, considered as the representative of his clan, and the land was named as *yäbalabat mirt*³²⁹. The former *balabat*, having some lands for his own use, could then give away the land to the tillers who would pay taxes in the form of honey or any other kind as the landlord deemed appropriate. If he did not wish to give the land away to the tillers, he could till the land himself or he could lease it to landless tillers. Lands which were granted to local *balabbats* in Shäwa after 1903 were officially termed *siso*. The *balabat* had, in principle, the right to choose a third of the land under his control, though, according to Mahetämä Sillasé, the proportion actually varied from a third to a sixth³³⁰.

Gäbrä Wäld pointed out that the *mälekäigna* lands were also territories dealt with similarly to the *balabat* lands. Since *mälekäignas* were commanders of the army which conquered new lands, they were given their privileges because of their merits. They were of two ranks. The second in rank was *mälekäigna* of the countryside (rural areas), *yägätär mälekäigna*³³¹. *Yägätär mälekäigna* was given only enough lands to till for himself. He also shouldered the responsibility to supervise or administer the locality, particularly as regards facilitating the timely payment of taxes to the government. This *mälekäigna* did not possess the right to use the taxes collected from the people in the locality. However, the other *mälekäignas* had more land granted to tillers and they could collect taxes for their own use³³². Generally, in the areas where the land was not distributed by *qälad*, a *mälekäigna* was a government employee or a soldier who was given *gult rights*. But the *mälekäignas* in Shäwa Méda occupied very considerable territories, taken from the Oromo. This is why they were ordered by the king to give back a certain portion of that land under the pretext that “the sons of evicted Galla *balabbats* should not be left without land”³³³.

Many of the Amhara inhabited localities of north Shäwa did not contain lands for *siso* or *balabat* as is evident from the table below, except for a few plateaus with extensive, fertile

³²⁹ Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, p.107; Gäbrä Wäld, p.13 .

³³⁰ *Ibid*; Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, p.108.

³³¹ Gäbrä Wäld, p. 14.

³³² *Ibid*.

³³³ Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, p.109.

farming and pasture lands³³⁴, because of territorial expansion and forcible occupation of the Oromo inhabited plateau land. Consequently *färäs tifer*, a region that was occupied by using cavalry, had available a large proportion for *siso* of the *balabbat*³³⁵. The majority of such lands in north Shäwa were located in the outskirts of the region and became parts of it during the reign of King Sahelä Sillasé (1813-1847), by forceful incorporation. Hence, the *balabats* who were appointed as governors or leaders during the incorporation had the *siso* as the rule of the time³³⁶.

The second category of land identified as belonging to the state was known by the name *dästa* land: “land of happiness”: where a tent of the king or Chiefs, called *dästa*, was erected when they were on a regional or local visit³³⁷. According to Gäbrä Wäld, a small red tent was pitched in front of the king’s palace as a signal that the king was ready to set out for a journey to do battle or for any other official visit³³⁸. Therefore, a similar tent that was erected as a sign of the visit of the king or lord to a site was termed *dästa* and the land was given the same name. The sites which were selected for this purpose were characterized by green grass, plenty of streams, and being suitable for refreshment. Hence the lands allocated to the people who took care of this tent were called *dästa* land³³⁹. Mahetämä Sillasé illustrated the point that there were several such lands in Shäwa Méda but there was no territory reserved for such a purpose in the land scarce districts of north Shäwa³⁴⁰. It seems that the king or other state functionaries frequently visited the region or crossed the region on their way to the Northern provinces of the country.

The third type of state land which was directly used by the court or state officials was *hudad*. These areas were lands co-operatively cultivated by a group of peasants who provided labour service to the state as tribute. Conventionally, there were two types³⁴¹ of *hudad* lands: the major one was the palace’s land, worked by tenants of the state, while a second type was that of individual landlords who possessed vast lands and who gave a part of these to landless tenants, ordering them to work for the owners two to three days per week on the remaining land, likewise

³³⁴The tables are found in sources that were preserved from Italian destruction during their occupation. The author obtained them from the Ministry of the Interior before the Italian occupation of the country in 1935; he claims that they are original.

³³⁵Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, p.142.

³³⁶*Ibid*, pp. 133- 137.

³³⁷Käsatä Berähan, p. 85.

³³⁸Gäbrä Wäld, p.23.

³³⁹*Ibid*.

³⁴⁰Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, p. 110.

³⁴¹*Ibid*, p. 117; Gäbrä Wäld, p.16.

termed *hudad*. The subject of discussion here concerns *hudads* belonging to the palace. The people, for instance those near government land (*hudad*), cultivated, harvested and worked on it³⁴².

The king, governors, *balabats* and government messengers possessed *hudad* lands which were selected from good lands in fertile areas. They were found in localities where the land had already been measured. The government agent or *mislenne* would supervise the land being cultivated, sown and harvested by the peasants until the grain had been stored in the granary of the palace³⁴³.

Hudad lands were worked by tenants under the supervision of *miselanes*³⁴⁴. In Shäwa Méda the land identified as state *hudad* was available only in Dännäba; the table indicates the list of tenure systems in some localities of the area of north Shäwa as preserved by Mahetämä Sillasé. This was most probably because of the fact that some of the Tuläma in the Dännäba area were supporters of Menilek's opponents and were evicted from the lands, which became state *hudad*. Thereafter, these *balabbats* were confiscated and the land became state land, to be cultivated by state tenants (*tisägnas*)³⁴⁵.

The kings donated parts of the state lands to serve as a pension for individuals or soldiers who had completed their terms of service. These were termed *Wuha sinqu*, which literally means one whose provision is water. These lands were given to governors who used to give banquets but could not do so when their term was terminated. Since the area they were granted was small compared to what they used to administer, it was referred to as *Wuha sink'u*, as if they have "no food to serve"³⁴⁶. The other type of state land which served the same purpose was *mätoria* land. It was given probably to officials in their retirement³⁴⁷. The *wuhasingu* was not an old age pension but a pension after a certain length of service; the owner was still expected to serve the government in time of emergency or war. There were two types of *mätoria* land: in the first case a *rist* owner who had no strong heir or whose son could not support his father during old age, bequeathed his *rist* to the government or to a wealthy man. The bequest was given so that the individual could give feasts during his old age. Because such a procedure could create financial

³⁴²*Ibid.*

³⁴³Käsatä Berehan, p. 86.

³⁴⁴Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerü Nägär*, p.117; Gäbrä Wäld, p.16.

³⁴⁵Sirak Fiqadä Sillasé, p. 12.

³⁴⁶Gäbrä Wäld, p.15.

³⁴⁷*Ibid*, pp.31-32.

difficulty, the support or the financial aid that could be expected from the inheritor was limited by government declaration³⁴⁸. The second type was a kind of life pension for soldiers and civilians who had served the government. After they died, the land was given to others on the same basis³⁴⁹.

The state also reserved lands that served for the direct provisioning of the royal kitchen. These lands were termed *ganägäb* (for what to drink) or *madbét* (for what to eat). The former was a word derived from *gan*, a big jar made of clay, and was used to make local drinks, while *madbét* stemmed from the house where food was prepared; it came especially from *madbét* (a kitchen where *injära* is baked). Therefore, these lands were, at least literally, granted for the purpose of brewing drinks and preparing food for royal consumption and related purposes³⁵⁰. The court traditionally owned extensive lands which supplied produce of all kinds to the palace. Those which provided grain, pepper, and other provisions were called *madbét* or *ganägäb*³⁵¹.

Such lands were located usually within easy reach of one or other of the royal palaces. The territories under this category were either *hudads* or *gäbbars* or both. The main objective was to provide supplies to the royal kitchen for a month. Before the region was abandoned by the government there were large numbers of lands for this purpose in north Shäwa. All the capital towns of Shäwa before Addis Ababa were located not only in areas strategically important for defence but also in lands known to be fertile, to feed large numbers of dwellers³⁵².

Even if their contributions were considered as insignificant by Täkalign Wäldä Mariam in his PhD dissertation, there were a number of localities in north Shäwa assigned for this purpose after the foundation of Addis Ababa. Probably because of the proximity of northern Shäwa to Addis Ababa there are lists of several localities as *ganägäb* countries, according to both Gäbrä Wäld and Mahetämä Sillasé. For instance, of the sixteen lists of *ganägäb* localities of Shäwa in Gäbrä Wäld seven of them were in northern Shäwa³⁵³. The cultivation of these lands was often under the direction of specially appointed officials. These consisted of an *azsaj* or supervisor, who was

³⁴⁸*Ibid*, p.32.

³⁴⁹*Ibid*.

³⁵⁰Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, p.117.

³⁵¹Käsatä Berehan, pp. 85-86.

³⁵²James McCann, *People of the Plough: An Agricultural History of Ethiopia, 1800-1990* (Madison, 1995); Täkalign Wäldä Mariam. "A City and its Hinterlands: The Political Economy of Land Tenure, Agriculture and Food Supply for Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 1887-1974." (Ph.D. Dissertation, Boston University, 1995).

³⁵³Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, p.117; Gäbrä Wäld, pp.15-16.

assisted by *meselenés*, or representatives, which resided in the area. The land would often be divided into twelve parts, each controlled by a *meselené* who had to present himself at the palace once a year and remain there for a month, bringing with him sufficient provision for the palace for that period.

During the remaining eleven months he was charged to ensure that the *gäbbars* or tenants cultivated the land³⁵⁴. All the places that were assigned to pay taxes to be used as food for all, from the princes to the soldiers, are known as *ganägäb*. Consequently, the districts that were assigned to provide the food are divided into 12 groups. Bigger districts furnished food for one month each, but for smaller districts, two or three were grouped together to provide food for one month. The *meselené* ground the grain (that had been paid as tax) and, in the month he was assigned, presented it to the government with the firewood used for preparing the food. Incidentally, each locality or lord or governor or their vassals performed their activities following the same pattern and similarly had their own *ganägäb* or *madbét*. The *gäbbar astadader* (peasant administration) of *ras* Kasa of Sälalé was the best example³⁵⁵.

Related to the provisions for the royal kitchen, state land was assigned for the farming of animal products, as royal pasture. Such lands were identified as *wärägänu*. *Wärägänu* was intended both for royal use and for those who feeded and provided state herds³⁵⁶. There were also two divisions which fell under this category: the butchery and the dairy. These lands generally offered plenty of water and good pasture for the raising of government cattle and sheep to provide meat and butter for the *geber* or banquets. Some farmlands within the *wärägänu* were used by the peasants of the neighborhood who were responsible for these services and were often exempted from payments of taxes, but were required to transport the cattle in time of war. These peasants were sometimes known as *abba lam* or father of cows³⁵⁷. These men were granted land to cultivate, but not on their own account. In most cases they could neither sell nor bequeath it, but could not be dispossessed during their life time. They paid tithes and some also supplied honey to the chief of the *wärägänu*. In certain regions, the *abba lam* could also become owners of properties, but were still obliged to take their turn in guarding government herds. All lands reserved for this purpose were situated outside the regions of study in the 20th century, except for

³⁵⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵⁵R.Pankhurst, *Economic History*, p. 148.

³⁵⁶Mahetämä Sillasé, *Zekerä Nägär*, p. 118.

³⁵⁷Käsatä Berähan, p. 86.

a few districts such as Tära and Jidda. Both districts were known for their healthy pasture and cattle rearing besides their proximity to the capital. Most probably this was the reason why a significant amount of land was reserved for *wärägänu*³⁵⁸.

Before the introduction of a modern transportation system into the country in general and the area of study in particular, pack animals were significantly needed in the day-to-day activities of a sate or a region. Kings or chiefs reserved pasturelands for grazing these animals, reared for state functions. Those reserved in this way were identified by the name *baldaras*: a person who took care of the government horses and mules and prepared the saddles³⁵⁹. There were subdivisions under this category such as *mokari* (coach), *leguami* (one who makes ready for riding), and *agach* (feeder or shepherd). This land was usually well watered, and its grass was cut and stacked by the local *gäbbars*, or tenants³⁶⁰. Several districts in the region were selected by the state for rearing horses and mules, used as cavalry and for other transportation purposes. Some which were located in north Shäwa were Ankobär, Yäka, Chafa, Intoto, Tora Mäsk, Bakelo, Addis Ababa, Ataklt, Sululta, Däbrä Berähan, Islam amba, Masét, Géja, Gida, and Haro Gida³⁶¹. But after the introduction of modern transport, the railway and motor vehicles, the importance of these animals declined almost entirely. Hence there were no lands for such purposes in the records preserved by Mahetämä Sillasé.

State lands were also assigned to state functionaries during a short term of office. The lands for such a purpose were regarded as granted for daily bread (*madäriya*, a place where one spent a night). There were several names and modalities for this tenure. Commonly, it was an area held by state servants or soldiers in lieu of maintenance³⁶². Täsäma in his book, *Käsatä Berähan*, defined *madäriya* or *Gasha* land as that given to soldiers or servants as long as they were serving the state. It could be transferred from one user to the other in a case where the previous one had committed a certain fault or crime; for this reason the land was named as one of “planting” and “uprooting”, equivalent to one of “hiring” and “firing”. It was also a land for temporary use, only for basic need, depending on the status of both the donor and the receiver. However, there are also complexities and basic differences in the duration of the tenure although Berähanu Abebe

³⁵⁸ Mahetämä Sillasé, *Zekerä Nägär*, pp. 117-118.

³⁵⁹ Märsé Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, "Yä Ras Kassa Astädadär Danb".

³⁶⁰ Käsatä Berehan, p. 86.

³⁶¹ R. Pankhurst, *Economic History*, p. 148.

³⁶² *Ibid.*

categorized them all as *madäriya*. Some of them could be inherited / transferred from father to son, but others could not. Lands such as *yäshäläqa märét* (land for the *shaläqa*), *yäsäqäla märét* (land of suspension), *yäsälatin märét* (land for government troops), *yäzäb märét* (land for guards), and *yämätkäya-mänqäya märét* are categorized as falling under the *madäriya* tenure³⁶³.

The dictionary definition for each is as follows³⁶⁴: *Yäshäläqa märét*, given to a local governor so that he could use it with his servants; if he is demoted all his servants are also displaced from the land. *Yäsäqäla märét* was a land that became *rim* and was transferred from father to son. *Yäsälatin märét* was a property of the state, reserved as *rist*, to be used for state functions such as being granted to troops. *Yäzäb märét* was given to guards who were expected to discharge this responsibility for a fixed number of dates every month. The size varies according to the status and service of the functionary; for an individual it ranges from one to three *gashas*. In some localities, there were officials ranging from *yähamsa aläqa* to *shamble* who were given from ten to thirty *gashas*. Holders paid only a tithe, but were liable to mobilization and could be called up in time of peace to relieve the guard. If deserving, and at their own request, they could sometimes obtain permanent ownership of a part of the land. In fact, the region of study was dominated by hereditary *gäbbar*, *genedäbäl* as well as *sämon* lands; not every locality contained such sizeable properties for this purpose³⁶⁵.

The state lands were also leased to peasants who possessed no land of their own. Since they could not serve in the other government activities they provided corvee labour in return for the land they ploughed or settled on. They did not hold any property rights but lived on the land given to them by the landowners, the state in this case³⁶⁶. These peasants were known as *tisägnas* (tenants). Land holders would lease property to *tisägnas*, in effect small farmers, for a term which might be fixed or indefinite. In the later case, the proprietor could order the farmer to quit at a month's service. If the holder of *madärya* land was succeeded by a different person, his successor could expel the *tisägna* or retain them, usually in return for a small payment of silver

³⁶³Täsäma Habtä Mikaél, *Käsatä Berähan* (Addis Ababa, 2002), p. 85, Berhanu Abbebe, pp. 52-56.

³⁶⁴*Ibid.*

³⁶⁵Mahetämä Sillasé, *Zekerä Nägär*, pp.133- 142; Gäbrä Wäld, p. 34.

³⁶⁶Käsatä Berähan

from each one. There were large numbers of *tisägnas* in some Amhara inhabited Shäwan localities, such as Lamwasha, Märhabété, Mänz, Morät, Ensaro and others³⁶⁷.

The Oromo communities which inhabited localities such as Wayyu and Jirru did not initially constitute part of the Shäwan kingdom; however, they were incorporated during the early 19th century into it. Incidentally they could not have provided a base for the opponents of Menilek because of their geographical setting, proximate to the Amhara inhabited lowlands, and were not subjected to confiscation of their property. Consequently their properties did not contain large numbers of *tisägnas*, unlike their neighbours. However, significant numbers of *genedäbäles*, for instance 838 *gasha* in Jiruu and 460 *gasha* of *gäbbars* land, were found in Wayyu³⁶⁸. Although only the third and the fourth kinds were often clearly identifiable in the area of study, there were about four kinds of *tisägnas* according to Gäbrä Wäld³⁶⁹.

The first was the tenant who bought a part of the land owned by a *mälekägna* and paid the latter with honey, salt or manual labour as tax, but was entitled to sell or exchange the land he had bought. The second one purchased land from a *maderia mälekägna*, paid him a tax and could not be dispossessed by him. However, if a new *mälekägna* arrived the *tisägna* was required to enter a new agreement with the new *mälekägna* and was obliged to pay for the land all over again³⁷⁰. The third type was the tenant who rented land from a *mälekägna* or any other *rist* owner, and contributed half the seed to be sown. At harvest time the *tisägna* and the *mälekägna* shared the harvest equally. But the cultivation of the land, the weeding and all the rest of the necessary work had been performed by the *tisägna*. This was done in localities where weeding was not difficult. In farms where it was, the *tisägna* did the weeding by himself, performed the work, from sowing to harvesting, provided all the seeds required and gave only one third of the harvest to the *rist* owner, while two thirds remained with him. Such a *tisägna* could be removed from lands owned by *mälekägnas* at any moment, but if the *tisägna* had not gathered crops, he was allowed to stay until he had harvested them.

³⁶⁷Sirak Fiqadä Sillassé, p.12; Mahetämä Sillasé, *Zekerä Nägär*, p.139.

³⁶⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 141,142.

³⁶⁹Gäbrä Wäld, pp. 35-36.

³⁷⁰*Ibid.*

A final category that can be considered as the fourth kind of *tisägna* consisted of *irbo arash* (one-fourth). These were tenants who cultivated and harvested with their own oxen and labour and gave a quarter of the harvest to the landowner, owning three-quarters³⁷¹.

It seems that there exists a sort of confusion in differentiating between *gäbbar* and *tisägna* in several cases, for instance, in the works of Mahetämä Sillasé. In his collections there were lands differently registered as *gäbbar* and *tisägna* lands, but in some cases they are treated interchangeably. Conventionally *gäbbars* were *rist* owners and *tisägnas* were not. For this reason many of the Amhara inhabited localities of the region had the lion's share of hereditary *gäbbar* lands. Most probably they were not exposed to the displacement of peasants from their inherited lands and the region was sufficiently well populated that the lords and the government did not have any pretext to take the land away from the peasants. Even though it was known as the earlier tenure system of Shäwa there was no need of measuring and appointing *balabats* for them. It was also the heartland of the empire and paid every tax directly to the court by means of *meselenes*³⁷².

In comparison to the unmeasured land of the Amhara inhabited areas, measured areas contained small amounts of land that were left for *gäbbars*, most probably because a significant quantity was taken over by *balabats*, newly constructed churches were regarded as *sämon*, and the remaining areas were occupied by the state as *yämängist mätikäya* and *shaläqa mätikäya*, after the incorporation declared by King Menilek when many of the lands of the Oromo of Shäwa Méda were confiscated by the state³⁷³. It was in association with this act that many of the Oromo were forcibly uprooted from their hereditary lands. In fact, the process forced the king himself to make a declaration in 1905 that ordered the *mälekägnas* to return a certain amount of land to the Oromo from the large areas the former had usurped. For instance, one who had taken more than four *gasha* as *siso* was ordered to give back one *gasha*, while a *mälekägna* who took three *gasha* was ordered to give back half *gasha* and the like³⁷⁴. There were also possibilities for *tisägnas* to obtain *rim* from their immediate masters or the state. *Rim* (*guläma*)³⁷⁵ was given to one's own servant; a *mälekägna* or any master could make land available to his servants as a

³⁷¹*Ibid*, p. 36.

³⁷²Mahetämä Sillasé, *Zekerä Nägär*, pp.110, 118,119.

³⁷³*Ibid*, p.113.

³⁷⁴*Ibid*, p.114.

³⁷⁵*Guläma* is frequently used by the peasants but the term in the literature is *rim*.

wage, as long as they provided the required service. The land owners took back the land which they had given to their servants when the latter left them and gave it to others in their stead. The servant harvested all the produce of the land for his personal use; the lord had no share from it³⁷⁶. Hence it is sung:

አይሁዳም አንዳር ለሁዳም፣ *It never happens, but if it were*
ከመግሬ መራት ይቅላል ጥልማት³⁷⁷ *Better to own privately [than share fruits with other]!*

³⁷⁶Käsatä Berähan, p. 215.

³⁷⁷Kidanä Wäld Kiflie, *Mtsähafä sewasewo wege'ez mäzegäbä qalat* (Addis Ababa, 1956), p.317; Informants (25, 3, 22): Dametäw Gäbrä Mariyam, Gamfur Gäbrä Mariyam and Letyibelu Cherinet of Aläm Kätäma.

Name of the district	Total amount of lands in <i>gasha</i>	Lands for <i>balabbats</i> , <i>Mälekägnas</i> or <i>shaläqa</i> in <i>gasha</i>	<i>Dästa</i> lands	<i>Wärägänu</i>
Ankobär	8859	102	-	-
Mänz	3858	-	-	-
Gnä'a	378. 25	134.5	14.5	-
Sälalé	3891.2	1510.25	23	-
Siyadäber	56.5	26	2.5	-
SuluLäta	257	61.5	1	-
Doba	18	-	-	-
Jamma	1034	-	-	-
Jirru	2760	-	-	-
Gädära	515	68	-	-
Gur	71	-	-	-
Geshé	1999	-	-	-
Mida	544	-	-	-
Gidim	2084	-	-	-
Tära	505	69	-	38
Tatésa	454	-	-	-
Choba & Kärräyyu	202	13	-	-
Feres Tifir	505	89	-	-
Islam amba (Baso)	844	14	-	-
Ensaro	2144	-	-	-
Kitim wäira	1041	-	-	-
wärämo	152	-	-	-
Warana	522	11	-	-
Wäsil	289	-	-	-
Wägeda	484	-	-	-
Wayyu	788	-	-	-
Ifat	4861	-	-	-
Efrata	5757.5	-	-	-
Dibbi Ye Sälam agar	338	-	-	-
Dinki Ye welasema agar	80	-	-	-
Qinbibit	888	-	-	-
Bäräkät	1065	-	-	-
Bulga (7 dug)	3019	1	-	-
Bita & Bilow	364	-	-	-
Tägulät (all)	3128	49	-	-
Tegora	349	-	-	-
Ahiya fej	281	-	-	-

Aläletu	407	-	-	-
Amälesa	749	-	-	-
Asagirt	977	53	-	-
Abdella	304	-	-	-
Haramba	1192	123	-	-
Lamwasha	652.5	-	-	-
Mäsaqo	836	92	-	-
Märhabéte	7167	12	-	-
Mafud	27	-	-	-
Minjar	3571	266	-	-
Morät	1104	-	-	-
Säladingay	1645	7	-	-
Soten	338	-	-	-
Shänkora	1388	362	-	-
Qäwät	391	32	-	-
Qäyya	190	-	-	-
Chäreqos	339.25	161	7	-
Chatu	36	7	1.5	-
Fursi	588	-	-	-
Gurené	294.5	88	5	-
Gida	656.25	221.75	21.5	8
Gimbichu	521	330	16.5	-
Wäbäri	659.5	197.5	6	-
Yaya	541.5	346.5	-	-
Gullallé				
Därra	2023	709	-	-
Dännäba	274.75	92	9.5	-
Abichu	408.75	152.5	5.5	-

Table.2. Proportion of “state lands” for officials and royal kitchen

The above table indicates that a small number of districts recorded significant sizes of *mälekägna* or *balabbat* lands: Ankobär, Gnä'a, Sälalé, Haramba, Minjar, Shänkora, Gida, Gimbichu, Wäbäri, Därra, Dännäba and Abichu contained a remarkable proportion of such lands because of their history; they were districts conquered from the Oromo containing immense areas which were occupied by the *mälekägnas*, or given back to the *balabbats* who were considered as clans representative of the Oromo.

Dästa lands were located in the districts on the route from north Shäwa to different directions. For instance, districts on the journey to the north and later to Addis Ababa had lands for these purposes: Gnä'a, Sälalé, Dännäba, Seyadäber and Gurané were on the route from north Shäwa to the north via Gojjam. Districts such as Abichu, Gida, Gimbichu, Wäbäri and Sululta were on the way from north Shäwa to Addis Ababa before 1935. The table also indicates the minor *wäräganu* lands in the area of study by the first decades of the 20th century. Tära and Gidda were

known for their relatively extensive pasturelands in comparison to the other districts in the region. *Baldäras* lands began to lose their importance after the introduction of modern means of transport for the lords and men of the palace. The remaining tenure systems had persisted under different modalities.

The basic characteristic of land tenure under “state ownership” was its uncertainty as regards long term tenure. Hence, it provided few incentives for undertaking land improvements. This insecurity was aggravated because of some peculiar features of Ethiopian society. The first was that there was an open opportunity, relatively speaking, for an individual to move from the bottom of the political, economic and social ladder, even to the extent of becoming a monarch. In fact, the opposite could also occur: one might go from the apex to the bottom of the ladder³⁷⁸. No legal or moral sanction or embargo was placed by any institution on individuals who were successful in achieving the highest rank. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which was the strongest institution, rather gave its blessing under the pretext of maintaining, “he would not be here without the will of God”. So, any position was open to every person with the necessary skill and power³⁷⁹.

Secondly, such “easy” upward and downward mobility ended in the success of individuals or groups and their followers, but could result in a change in the position of the group as a whole if new officials and nobles were appointed. Thus, achieving a position by birth was relative because a situation could arise in which that position might be lost. The same was the case in the possession and losing of the land and land related privileges which were particularly considered as possessions of the state³⁸⁰.

Thirdly, this system meant that every position was still temporary; individuals would not consider their defeat as final. They began to plan for their next opportunity because they clearly understood that the existing system was a “warriors’ meritocracy”³⁸¹. Many of the followers of Menilek and his predecessors gained their positions not because of their birth, but rather because of their achievements in war, though the status of their parents taught them some preliminary skills that made the way easy for them.

³⁷⁸ Mäsay Käbädä, *Survival and Modernization, Ethiopia’s Enigmatic Present: A Philosophical Discourse* (Red Sea Press, 1999), pp. 167-170.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁰ Mäsay Käbädä, *Survival*, pp. 159-166.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*

However, peoples from the same social class or with similar backgrounds to the previous group would be left either in serious poverty or as an ordinary priest or peasant. Particularly the areas in the category of “state land” were exposed to the fate of undergoing a change in ownership, whether for the long or short term. Such situations were very prevalent during the early phase of Menilek’s reign and his predecessors in north Shäwa³⁸². Before Menilek became the king of Shäwa in 1865, every land in the region was considered as the “personal property of the ruler”. Such a ruler as Sahelä Sillassé, without giving any explanation, could dispossess the present holder and confer his wealth upon another, or retain it for his own use.

4.4 Sämon (Church) lands (1880-1935)

Most of the north was inhabited by the Christian community and hence there were numerous churches that served it. The church, as the dominant institution in the country in general and in the region in particular, possessed one-third of the land at least in theory. However, the possessions of the church amounted to much less than one-third of the total lands in the region. There were some districts where there were no such holdings while in others it claimed up to a tenth of the land. Thus, the church’s most important possession was that of the *gult* right, as held by the officials in most districts of the region. Therefore the *gult* right might even amount to more than one third in some districts of the region. The lands actually possessed were donated to the church by the state or individuals in different forms. They were redistributed among the clergy either as *ristä-gult* or *rist*. However, they were collectively termed *sämon* land; named after the continual service of the priests for a week³⁸³. These church possessions were broadly divided into two: lands which served as *ristä-gult* and those comprising the church’s *rist*. The former were the personal *rist* of the *gäbbars*; however, tax was paid not to the state but to the church. Land grants to churches and monasteries were often permanent; after the grant the areas could not be regarded as state land any longer, but rather as church lands. As mentioned, secular grants were normally revocable at the king’s pleasure or were valid only during an official’s period of appointment³⁸⁴.

³⁸²Gäbrä Sillase, p. 126; Heruy, p.62.

³⁸³Gäbrä Wäld, pp. 24-25.

³⁸⁴R. Pankhurst, *Economic History*, p. 135.

Church lands were distributed or donated to the members of the clergy according to their status and services. The *azazsh* (abbot) of a monastery, entitled *mämeher*, was *balägult*, and had the right to collect and use taxes from church *gäbbars*. The *azazsh* of a *däber*, entitled *aläiga*, was also *Balägult* and exercised the same rights. The rest of the servants of the church at different levels were given *rist* land, unlike the heads of monasteries and *däbers* who were vested with *gult* rights. The following list mentions such servants: the heads of rural churches, *märigéta* (had one or two *gashas*), priests and deacons, *sämonägna* (varying from five to seven depending on the status of the church), those who gave praise, *awädash* in Ge'ez (no limitation on their number, which was anything from one hundred to three hundred for monasteries and *däbers*, and from five to ten for rural churches), servants at night, *sä'atat quami* (priests and deacons), bell ringers, *däway*, grinder, *aqabit* (a woman who ground grain for the sacred bread in the church), wood splitter, *qärafi*, and cleaner, *antafi*³⁸⁵.

Name of the district	Total amount of lands in <i>gasha</i>	The amount of church lands in <i>gasha</i>
Ankobär	8859	878
Mänz	3858	239
Gnä'a	378. 25	46
Sälalé	3891.25	1047
Siyadäber	56.5	6
SuluLäta	257	33.5
Doba	18	10
Jamma	1034	20
Jirru	2760	45
Gädära	515	-
Gur	71	16
Geshé	1999	61
Mida	544	17
Gidim	2084	140
Tära	505	64
Tatésa	454	18
Choba & Kärräyyu	202	10
Feres Tifir	505	23
Islam amba (Baso)	844	90
Ensaro	2144	132
Kitim wäira	1041	244
wärämo	152	15
Warana	522	53

³⁸⁵ Gäbrä Wäld, pp. 24-25.

Wäsil (Bulga)	289	4
Wägeda	484	-
Wayyu	788	13
Ifat	4861	829
Efrata	5757.5	282
Dibbi Ye Sälam agar	338	-
Dinki Ye welasema agar	80	-
Qinbibit	888	-
Bäräkät	1065	-
Bulga (7 dug)	3019	654
Bita & Bilow	364	-
Tägulät (all)	3128	197
Tegora	349	6
Ahiya fej	281	29
Aläletu	407	60
Amälesa	749	43
Asagirt	977	127
Abdülla	304	54
Haramba	1192	259
Lamwasha (Morät)	652.5	66
Mäsaqo	836	125
Märhabéte & kolash	7167	192
Mafud	27	-
Minjar	3571	635
Morät	1104	89
Säladingay	1645	265
Soten (Bulga)	338	40
Shänkora	1388	258.5
Qäwät	391	33
Qäyya	190	110
Chäreqos	339.25	68
Chatu	36	6
Fursi	588	-
Gurené	294.5	16.25
Gida	656.25	85
Gimbichu	521	45.5
Wobäri	659.5	15
Gullallé(Selale)	541.5	83.75
Därra	2023	242
Dännäba	274.75	42
Abichu	408.75	38.5

Table.3 The land proportion in the actual possession of the church

As the table above indicates, only three districts (regions), Sälalé, Doba, and Qäyya, fall under the official description that one-third of the lands in the domain of a Christian king belongs

to the church. But, just as in the case of the state, the churches in the region were *gult* owners because most of the lands were in the possession of *rist* owners. Unfortunately, only the heads of some monasteries and *Däbers* had the right of owning *gult*. The other servants of the church, ranging from the other heads to the ordinary servants, were *rist* owners of that very small proportion of church lands. Surprisingly, Muslim dominated districts contained comparatively large sized church lands; districts such as Ifat and Qäwät are examples.

Chapter Five

5. Land Taxes and Tributes (1880-1935)

The early history of the kingdom of Shäwa was characterized by an absence of formal tax collection and tribute extraction mechanisms. It seems that only the *balabbats* or influential village leaders brought “gifts” to the court of chiefs, while in turn the chiefs also sent or took “gifts” to the court of the country at Gondär. Most probably these village leaders or locally influential figures had collected “gifts” from the peasants in their domain³⁸⁶. However, by the 18th century Shäwan chiefs were already beginning to collect formal taxes and tributes from peasants who were mainly landowners. The absence of currency, gold or other related precious metals forced these chiefs to collect taxes and tributes in kind³⁸⁷.

In the modern history of the region, there were two major methods of collecting tax and tribute from the peasants. The first was predatory, which was common in Shäwa before Menilek became king. It was an appropriation based on the use of force. In this case the demands of collectors were disorganized and arbitrary; there was cyclic destruction of properties by the collectors. Consequently, there was a prevailing conflict between the appropriators and producers. The most obvious example of this practice was the Shäwan court and its army at Ankobär, and its exactions from peasants in the kingdom, mainly the Oromo of Shäwa Méda³⁸⁸.

The second method was the customary appropriation which was common in Shäwa, mostly after the 1880s. Here there was a recognized “legitimacy” in the extraction of taxes and tributes from the producers. The church was one of the appropriators in this respect, from its *gults*. The church’s domain (*gult*) was not subjected to forcible appropriation by the court or its army. Unlike the first type, the customary appropriation was relatively peaceful. In fact, both were practiced in Shäwa even after the coming to power of Menilek. The customary method was employed during a time of relative peace while the predatory means was implemented during wars and conflicts³⁸⁹.

The concern of this chapter is the customary or “legally recognized” method of tax and tribute collections. The forcible method will be discussed in the next chapter which deals with

³⁸⁶Gäda Mälba, *Oromiya: Yätädäbäqäw Yägef tarik* (Addis Ababa, 1994), p. 120.

³⁸⁷Gäbrä Wäld Engeda Wärq, *Yä Itiyyopiya mrietina Yä gebere sem* (Addis Ababa, 1956), p. 10.

³⁸⁸Täshalä Tebäbu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia: 1896-1974* (Lawrenceville, 1995), pp. 71-72.

³⁸⁹Bairu Tafla (ed and trans), *Asmä Gyorgis and His Works: History of the Galla and the Kingdom of Sawa* (Stuttgart, 1987), p. 528.

political instabilities. To implement this “legally recognized” exaction of taxes and tributes from land owners in Shäwa, there was a need to identify the fertility of land and its area. Along with this, it is assumed that Menilek also aspired to weaken the power of local warlords or *mälekägnas* who occupied vast lands because of their leading position during the campaign to occupy the Oromo lands in the region.

5.1. Land Inventory and Measurement (1879-1880)

After the failure of his ambition to become emperor of the country and his attempt to expand the territory of Shäwa to the north and to control Wällo, Menilek was forced to accept the dictated agreement of Liché in 1878 (by which he was forced to abandon or postpone his interest in being emperor). As a result, he diverted his attention from the north to the south to strengthen his position, at least in north Shäwa for the time being. This was followed by the restructuring of the Shäwan state itself, mainly as a means of strengthening his power against the local *mälekägnas*. He took calculated measures as regards *gasha märét*, which made the *mälekägnas* powerful because they occupied vast areas. One of the measures implemented the concept of the *balabbat's siso* (one third for the Oromo clan leaders). It seems that the measure was intended to balance the power between the Oromo clan chiefs who had been totally evicted in most cases and the *mälekägnas* who possessed vast *gasha* lands. It entitled the former to one-third of the land they had lost to the conqueror; and the latter to another third of the land they had occupied by means of conquest as has been discussed in the previous chapter³⁹⁰.

The first phase of the process was to make an inventory of all lands in Shäwa in 1879³⁹¹. The inventory was followed by measurement of land in Shäwa in 1879-1880³⁹². The policy of land measurement and redistribution was first tested in a small area west of the Chacha River, before it became the rule across Shäwa in the 1880s. In fact, in their general form, neither tribute and taxation nor land measurement and distribution were a totally new exercise in Shäwa. Yet Menilek's practice was different in that it marked the shift from *gasha märét*, where *mälekägna* had the upper hand, to *qälad*, where the state became the responsible body as regards access to land³⁹³. The unit employed in this measurement was the *gasha*, which in practice varied

³⁹⁰R. Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia: 1800-1935* (Addis Ababa, 1968), p. 152.

³⁹¹Gäbrä Sillasé Wäledä Arägay, *Tarikä Zämäna zä Daghmawi Menilek* (Addis Ababa, 1967).

³⁹²*Ibid.*

³⁹³R. Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia*, pp. 152-153.

considerably, but may be taken as the equivalent of 1200 meters by 800 meters³⁹⁴. The measurement was carried out with the aid of a special rope, 133 cubits in length, which in many areas was referred to as *qälad* and gave its name to land measured in this way. The length of the cubit was fixed by the arm of a very tall man called Baymot, which was taken as the standard. The measurement was therefore called the “cubit of Baymot”. Approximately, it was about 66 and half centimeters³⁹⁵.

Thus, the measurement of land by the *qälad* system was carried out after a thorough investigation of the fertility of the land. Mahetämä Sillasé wrote that the lands were graded according to their fertility as follows: First grade was assigned to land which was well cultivated, *läm*, productive or fertile. Land classified as first rate was seven *qälads* in width and eleven *qälads* in length, or equivalent to 467.25m by 734.25m. The second grade was land of fair fertility, *läm täf*, semi-fertile. This was nine *qälads* wide and twelve *qälads* long, or 509.25m by 781m. The third grade was called *täf* (infertile or bad land). It could also be further divided into two grades. The first category could be made fertile with proper care or by putting it to different uses. It was ten *qälads* wide and fifteen *qälads* long, or 667.50m by 1701.75m. The second category comprised completely bad or infertile land, *täf*. This was twelve *qälads* wide and twenty *qälads* long, or 801m by 1355m³⁹⁶. A similar classification of the size of *gasha* land, depending on its grade, was undertaken by Berehanu Abbebe in a slightly different way. He did so in two phases, first climate based and then depending on fertility and configuration. Under the former, he devised three categories, *däga*, *wayna däga* and *qolla*, while under the latter he included two within each climatic category. Therefore he ended up with six classifications in his summary, as indicated below.

³⁹⁴ Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär* (Addis Ababa, 1972), pp. 106-107; Gäbrä Wäld Engeda Wärq, *Yä Itophiya Märetña Geber Sem* (Addis Ababa, 1956), p. 9.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 105.

³⁹⁶ Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, pp. 106-107; Gäbrä Wäld, pp. 9-10; Berehanu Abbebe, p. 99.

Type of land	Climate (location)	Configuration	Fertility rate	Approximate size in <i>qälad</i>	Approximate size in hectares
1 <i>gasha</i>	<i>Däga</i>	Normal	Fertile	15x9	60,15
		Plain	Semi-fertile	20x9	70,20
1 <i>gasha</i>	<i>Wayna-</i> <i>Däga</i>	Normal	Fertile	12x8	46,98
		Irregular (uneven terrain)	Semi-fertile	15x9	60,15
1 <i>gasha</i>	<i>Qolla</i>	Normal	Fertile	11x7	34,30
		Irregular (uneven terrain)	Semi-fertile	12x8	46,98

Table 4 Size of one *gasha* land depending on land grade

Source; Berehanu Abebe, p. 99.

The responsibility to measure the land was given to the office of *tsähafä tezaz*, Gäbrä Sillasé. In areas where the land had been measured once, the individual land owner's fields lay adjacent to one another. But in regions where the measurement of land by the *qälad* had been done twice or thrice, the individual's plots of land were not contiguous. It is assumed that this was because the initial measurements were found to be incorrect and extra plots were given to others. Similarly individuals who owned lands which were less than the standard size received another plot from a different site. Mähetämä Sillasé adds that the measurements during the period under study were not very exact, because of the variations in the length of the rope, the level of the land, or because of the fact that the sides of the plot were not always at right-angles. Irregularities in the shape of a plot often caused difficulty in exactly calculating its area. Moreover, the work of the surveyors was not always reliable. In the hope of obtaining better results the rope was replaced by a chain, but this expedient effected little change, principally because the ground was not level and it was not known how to calculate exactly the area of irregularly shaped land. Subsequent examination revealed numerous errors. The actual surfaces were always larger than the official figures indicated³⁹⁷. The excess land was then confiscated by the government and re-allocated to landless people. Thus, land owners found that their separate plots of land in different sites now belonged to others³⁹⁸.

In regions where the land had not been measured by the *qälad* system, one piece of land liable to tax “እንደ የግብር መፋት”³⁹⁹ was found in one large stretch. In other places, however,

³⁹⁷ Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, pp. 106-107.

³⁹⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 105-106.

land belonging to one owner was found in scattered fragments here and there because others had arrived and occupied parts of it, while the pioneer had settled in one place but cultivated areas in different spots. This was uncommon in Amhara inhabited districts, for there was no such unbalanced possession of lands. The land was sub-divided among *rist* owners in the traditional rule of *rist* inheritance.

The practice in Menilek's time was that if a piece of land had not been measured the person who claimed to be the owner was required to address a request to the king, that his right to the property should be recognized. Depending on the request, a commission was then appointed to make an inquiry and identify the total area of the land, the distribution of the plots it comprised, and the degree of their fertility. The land would then be classified into one or more of the above categories⁴⁰⁰.

The order of inventory and measurement was followed by Menilek's first levy of state taxes on Shäwan cultivators, against the backdrop of the existing practice that reserved great power to the *mälekäigna*. As mentioned above, the size of a traditional unit, for instance *gasha*, varies depending on the nature of the fertility of the land. Fertility and size for a *gasha* are inversely proportional. In the areas where lands had not been measured tax was levied according to the number of lands possessed: “አንድ ማጥፊት መረጃ”, one taxed land⁴⁰¹.

In the region being studied, many of the lands were not measured although some newly incorporated localities during the reign of Sahelä Sillasé in the middle of the 19th century were measured and termed *qälad* or *gasha* land. The rest were called *yärist agär* or *yätinet sirit*, “earlier tenure”⁴⁰², because these were not considered as vacant land or the land from which the Oromo had been chased or uprooted and occupied by *mälekägnas*. But the latter type of territory was measured because there was the assumption that the *mälekägnas* had forcefully occupied too much land by uprooting the Oromo; hence the king ordered the *mälekägnas* to give back or distribute the *siso* (one third) to Oromo *balabbats*⁴⁰³.

The distribution was effected according to the parameters discussed in chapter three of this study under the subtopic of *balabat* lands. In Shäwa nearly eighty districts were listed as *rist*

⁴⁰⁰R.Pankhurst, *Economic History*, p. 153; Pawulos Gnogno, *Até Menilek Bähagär wuset yätätsatsafuachew däbdabéwoch* (Addis Ababa, 2011), pp. 128, 130.

⁴⁰¹Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerü Nägär*, pp. 133-142.

⁴⁰²*Ibid*, pp. 143-151.

⁴⁰³*Ibid*, pp. 108-109.

agar for taxation purposes. Each district contained numerous registered lands. But few districts were categorized as *qälad* land; they were below twenty in number. Even if the actual sizes of these localities were greater than *yärist agär*, the numbers of lands mentioned were small, because of the presence of numerous dividing geographical barriers in the case of *yärist agär*⁴⁰⁴.

Although Menilek's *qälad* measurement and distribution was started during 1879 in Shäwa, it had spread well beyond that region in the decade after the 1896 Battle of Adwa⁴⁰⁵. After the measurement had been completed, the selling of "extra land" by the government was common. If the state was willing to sell a portion of *qälad* land to individual farmers (often at a cheaper price than the *gäbbar* would have paid to *mälekägna* earlier, both in kind and in service), it also required them to cultivate the land and pay *asrat* to the government on an annual basis. For the farmers, therefore, cultivating the land became the best way to keep other claimants away, including the state, which might subject the piece of land to another round of measurement and distribution. In terms of the standards of the government, *läm/täf* referred to the state of a given piece of land, according to the degree to which it was cultivated, for the purpose of legitimizing ownership, as well as for defining the tax category of the farmer. On the ground, because *läm/täf* determined resource entitlement rights, farmers seized upon it to defend and maximize their land holdings within the *qälad* system⁴⁰⁶.

5.2 Taxes and Tributes (1880-1932)

Taxes and tributes seem to be synonyms in the available pieces of evidence for the history of the region. Frequently, both of them had been mentioned as *geber* in the local literature. The term *geber* takes several meanings in different contexts. In one way or the other it seems that tributes preceded taxes in the history of the region. Conventionally, it is understood that both were parts of governmental systems in Shäwa during the period under study. But the transition from tribute to tax was gradual and both were functioning simultaneously for a long period in the history of the Shäwan kingdom, as mentioned above. Tribute was wealth, often in kind, that an individual or group gave to another as a sign of respect, submission or allegiance. Tax was a

⁴⁰⁴*Ibid*, pp.143-151.

⁴⁰⁵Pankhurst, *Economic History*, p.153.

⁴⁰⁶Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, pp. 120-121.

financial charge or other levy upon taxpayers by a state or the functional equivalent of a state, such that failure to pay was punishable by law⁴⁰⁷.

Generally speaking, the government exacted about five types of taxes and tributes from individuals, groups or institutions who had access to land. These were *feré geber* (main tax), *asrat* (tithe) mostly of two types, one for the state and the other for the church, labour services, military services, hospitality, religious services (praying for peace, security, prosperity, plenty, a long and comfortable life for the king and his vassals and armies as well as other related services). However, the amount and the variety of tax expected from each were immensely different from one another. There were institutions and individuals exempted from one form but expected to pay or provide one or two others. Of all the groups and individuals as well as institutions, *gäbbars* were expected to remit the lion's share of the taxes in Shäwa. The taxes were at least nominally measured in traditional units which, as indicated, were not exact and paved the way for abuses⁴⁰⁸. Some of these units which were used in north Shäwa during the period under discussion are listed below.

Traditional units	their equivalents
One <i>qunna</i>	Fifteen kilograms
One <i>dawula</i>	Twenty <i>qunnas</i>
One <i>ladan</i>	Four to five <i>qunnas</i>
One <i>gurzgn</i>	Two to three <i>qunnas</i>
One <i>enqib</i>	Half <i>dawula</i> or ten to thirteen <i>qunnas</i>
One <i>madiga</i>	Ten <i>qunnas</i>
One <i>chan</i>	One hundred fifty <i>qunnas</i> or five <i>qunnas</i> times thirty
One <i>nitir</i>	Twelve <i>Birr</i> or three hundred grams
One <i>weqiet/seqel</i>	Twenty eight grams
One <i>feresula</i>	Seventeen kilograms (but varying from twelve to twenty)
One <i>korja</i>	Twenty hides or twenty <i>taqas</i> for clothes
One <i>taqa</i>	Twenty seven meters

⁴⁰⁷ Pankhurst, *Economic History*, p.153.

⁴⁰⁸ Täsäma Habtä Mikaél, *Käsatä Berähan: Yä amarigna mäzgäbä qalat* (Addis Ababa, 1951), p. 85. The name *gäbbar* denotes taxpayers. However, from the theoretical point of view everybody was a taxpayer, from the ordinary peasant to the king himself, as Mässay Käbädä concludes. Most probably the people were regarded as such for they paid immense amounts of taxes.

One <i>tanika</i>	Twenty liters
One <i>gundo</i>	Nineteen kilograms (but varying from ten to nineteen in some cases)

Table 5 Traditional units of measurement in Ethiopia

5.2.1. Taxes from Rist owners

As noted above, peasants who owned *rist* land in the region of study were divided into three traditional categories depending on the nature of the taxes and tributes they paid. These self explanatory categories were *gäbbars*, *genedäbäls* and *melemels*.

Gäbbar refers to a taxpayer or a peasant who possessed land, for which tax was paid. The root of the term “*geber*”⁴⁰⁹ was a payment in different forms to the upper officials. There were many kinds of *gebers*, which were defrayed by a *gäbbar*. *Gäbbars* had inherited their *rist* lands from their parents or relatives⁴¹⁰. Conventionally, by the end of the 19th century a *gäbbar* who possessed one *gasha* of land or one taxable land “አንድ የግብር መሸጥ”, in districts in north Shäwa where land had not been measured, was obliged to pay numerous kinds of tax and provided routine labour services to the government or government appointee. The following paragraphs describe some of the taxes paid in kind and in labour services.

The first was one *gundo* of honey⁴¹¹. In fact, its size varied from locality to locality depending on the fertility of the land and types of items available in that locality. Thus, a *gundo* ranged from 10 to 19 kilograms throughout north Shäwa. However, the conventional size was 19 kilograms. A further payment in kind was three *dawulla* of grain or cereals, or two in some localities⁴¹². In a case where there was no agreement between the taxpayers and owner of the land or tax collector to pay or collect in kind, it was paid or provided in the form of labour. In such a case the *gäbbar* had to work for the state or the local lord (his master) on one third of the working days and on two thirds of them for himself. Alternatively, the *gäbbar* could take a fixed

⁴⁰⁹Ethiopian Orthodox Church, *Mätsafä Sewasewo* (Addis Ababa, 1994), p.12.

⁴¹⁰Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, p. 110.; Gäbrä Wäld, pp.17-18.

⁴¹¹*Ibid*; *gundo* was a special container made of clay that, as noted, contained about 19 kilograms. Even if it is difficult to be completely certain, *gundo* seems an Afan Oromo term and had its origin from afan Oromo, to mean the equivalent of Amharic *säfēd*.

⁴¹²*dawulla* denotes an amount / measurement in different containers. One *dawulla* amounts to 20 *quenna* or two *enqib*. Both *quenna* and *enqib* were containers made of local grass families. One *quenna* amounts to thirteen or more kilograms while ten *quenna* are approximately two *enqeb*. One *dawulla* amounted to about 92 kilograms for leguminous crops and about 78 kilograms for the other cereals. All these calculations are adopted from Gäbrä Wäld, p. 13.

amount of land (*hudad*) and work on it for the tax owner by his own schedule, from the beginning to the end of every season⁴¹³. The palace, governors, landlords and *mälekägnas* possessed *hudad* land, which was harvested by the combined labour of all the *gäbbars* who lived nearby.

The third type of payment in kind was *asrat* (*tithe*), paid both to the state and the church. It took the form of provisioning the army or, as a substitute, quartering soldiers in the home of the peasants. *Asrat* or tithe was one-tenth of their produce and included transporting it to the store⁴¹⁴. Besides this, the peasants were obliged to grind five *qunna* (about 75 kg) of grain per month. Since there was no modern watermill or other machine to grind, the court or other junior officials had to feed their large numbers of residents not only by the labour of their servants who ground the produce at the court or residence but also by ordering peasants to discharge the same responsibility and transport it to the appropriate destination. In fact, the crop was already there (collected through tax, *asrat*, *hudad*) in the hands of the peasants or in a nearby store for grinding.

Another payment in kind was providing firewood for the court, tied by a rope and amounting to the circumference of a two-meter circle. This was because officials had no other source for fuel and the peasants were obliged to meet these needs⁴¹⁵. Since Christianity was the state religion and the area of study was inhabited by a Christian community, the church as an important institution expected some provisions from the peasants, besides its possession of one-third of the land throughout the country; such as *asrat* (*tithe*), two *qunna* of wheat which were termed *mägäbäria*, four *qunna* of any type of grain for the food of the female servant(s) of the church, termed *aqabit*, a fixed amount of money for the clothes of the same servant, and one load or *shäkim* of firewood for the service of the church⁴¹⁶.

Difficulties caused by natural barriers of communication were partially solved by the traditional system of compulsory hospitality, which included free transportation of baggage for officials moving from one place to another, as well as for guests of state and travellers in general. The mountainous nature of the land, the numerous rivers and river beds which swelled into

⁴¹³ Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, p. 117.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.109; Gäbrä Wäld, pp. 16-17; Pawulos Gnogno, *Yü Atsé Menilek ..*, pp.74, 75, 77.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.18.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid*.

torrents in the rainy season, the more or less complete absence of roads, bridges and wheeled traffic were some of the factors that compelled the peasants to be hospitable, whether by force or legal means. Transporting provisions, using their animals during wars or campaigns, and feeding at least one pack animal that would serve as transport for the duration of a campaign constituted other forms of labour service expected from *gäbbars*. They were expected also to construct the houses and fences of the local lord or the court, churches as well as storehouses for the produce that was collected from the locality, as well as to guard those stores and prisoners in the locality for certain periods, taking turns⁴¹⁷. They also shouldered the obligation of providing food and other provisions to officials who visited their locality. The provisions comprised one pot of local beer, ten *injära* (local bread), and one or two *qunna* of grain or grass for the pack animals of the officials. These provisions were known as *mätin*. A further obligation of the peasant, to be discharged towards those officials, was to transport their baggage to the borders of his territory. The system was termed *elf*⁴¹⁸.

Generally, before the introduction of modern means of transport, when the emperor, king, royalty, or other officials moved from one province to the other or within a province they maintained stations at intervals of about 20 kilometers, at a fixed place which was reserved for such purpose by the name *dästa*, as indicated earlier. The local governor ordered peasants to furnish provisions for these guests even if the latter had brought provisions for themselves. The supplies ranged from cows and or oxen to firewood and fodder for the animals, as *mätin*. Sometimes the local governor was instructed directly by the emperor and served the travelling ruler and his followers. For instance, Emperor Menilek gave such an order to one of his local governors by the name *gerazmach* Dilnesaw on Yekatit 20, 1898 E.C as “ለመንግሥት መተንተግበ
የምኑ ደንብ የሚገኘ አምስት ዓመት ጥና ለአሳላቸ መንገሻ ይሰጣው፡⁴¹⁹” ; “to prepare for our provision which will be served at Dännäba on our route, give five *dawula* of *Gesho* to the servant Mäshäsha”. Where the travellers had baggage that could not be loaded on an animal’s back the peasants were expected to carry and transfer it to the next territory, as *elef*. Both duties were ended with a declaration from the government on Tikemet 23, E.C. 1925 (November 2, 1932).

⁴¹⁷ Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, Zekerä Nägär, p. 110; Gäbrä Wäld, pp. 17-21.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 18-19; Pawulos Gnogno, *Yä Atsé Menilek Däbdabéwoch*, pp. 72-73, 164.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 19.

Different types of payments in cash were expected from a *gäbbar*, for instance on the appointment of his master to a better position or on the birth of a male child. The former payment that amounts to one *Birr* was known as *mäshuamia* while the latter, also one *Birr*, was termed *yäädäsdäs*. Moreover the *gäbbars* were required to provide their master with different special dishes in cases where they held personal feasts for a wedding, the baptism of their children and other related occasions. One pot or *gänbo* of local beer (*tälla* or *täj*) was supplied and a tax called the slaughter tax (one organ of the animal that was slaughtered for the feast) was levied. *yätsom qolo*, fasting grain, amounting to one *qunna* of flour, was also paid at the end of a fasting month or season. If a peasant hung a honey bees' hive in his compound or in the nearby forest he was obliged to pay one kilo per hive. When a *lébashay* (thief searcher) came to his locality he had to pay two *birr*⁴²⁰.

Like the grain tithe, there was also a tithe on cattle. As noted, providing labour also comprised another type of tribute paid by the peasants of the region during the period under study. The following were well known provisions⁴²¹:

- ¹ Cultivation of state land and carrying of produce to government stores
- ² Cutting of grasses on government lands and providing twelve armfuls a year, one for each month, in case insufficient grass was forthcoming.
- ³ Erection of houses and fences for provincial governors.
- ⁴ Looking after one or two mules for these governors.
- ⁵ Bringing of flour and firewood to the palace three or four times a year, an obligation imposed only on peasants living not too far from the court.
- ⁶ Transportation of tithes to state granaries and repairing and guarding the granaries.
- ⁷ Transportation of baggage in times of war and other travels for officials.
- ⁸ Acting as prison guards.
- ⁹ Building and repairing of churches, and
- ¹⁰ Guarding telephone and post offices, this began only during the reign of Menilek.

⁴²⁰*Ibid*, p.17-19; Pawulos Gnogno, *Yä Atsé Menilek Däbdabéwoch*, pp. 80, 81.

⁴²¹The large numbers of suppliers of firewood should be related to deforestation or soil degradation, as will be discussed in the seventh chapter. Of all these duties, *mätin*, *elef*, *meshuamia* and *Yäädäsdäs* were cancelled during the last period of the reign of Empress Zäwditu, most probably in 1920's.

The above description was not identical throughout the region. It varied from district to district; from locality to locality. For instance, a *gäbbar* in one of the districts in north Shäwa, Qinbibit, by the beginning of the 20th century was expected to pay the following taxes and tributes⁴²².

1. Grinding and transporting five *qunna* of grain every month to Addis Ababa.
2. Ploughing a *siso* (one-third of the working days in a week for the *guletägna*)
3. Paying one *qunna* of grain as *yäsom qolo*
4. Paying five hens and or cocks every year
5. Transporting five *qunna* of grain during campaigns

The second group of *rist* owners who were expected to pay taxes and tributes consisted of *genedäbäls*. The only type of payment in kind from this group of people was *asrat*. However, there were numerous tributes they were required to contribute by rendering services of which the following were some: Military service, taking care of government mules and horses, transportation of food supplies, transportation of government tents during expeditions, guarding the tent store and repairing and cleaning tents, a service carried out by relatively privileged persons who also sometimes served as prison guards, transportation of cannon and machine guns, conveying government correspondence, cutting firewood for the royal palace, planting trees and other plants in the palace compound, doing service in the quarries to provide stone for the palace and other buildings, the workers however being given a small salary, and guarding prisons. Persons looking after the sovereign's tent, transporting cannon or machine guns and carrying government correspondence were usually given a mule and entitled to a reduction of about nine *dawulas* of grain from their tithe⁴²³.

Holders of *madäriya* land were exempted from tax other than the tithe⁴²⁴. These numerous tributes were provided even after crossing a long distance to reach the palace, mainly after the foundation of Addis Ababa as a new capital. North Shäwa was heavily subject to these duties because of its relative proximity to the capital, unlike other regions of the country. This can be understood from Märsé's experience in Morät and Jirru during the early 20th century. He

⁴²²Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, pp.110-111; Gäbrä Wäld, pp. 21-22; Pawulos, p. 219.

⁴²³*Ibid.*

⁴²⁴Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, p.114.

narrates the issue as, “.... የወጪ ደንብ ለወር ተሸ የመሆኑ ነፋሽኑ ነበሩ፡፡ ... ከዚያ በፊላማ ለደንጋጌ ቅጥቅዣ ወዘዣ እኩል እበባ ከመሆኑ የፋይ ለወጥ የወጥ በየመንገዶች ተንኋገና ቅጥረቻን ለበዚ የለ፡፡”⁴²⁵; “... two of them were arms bearers who came for monthly guard... after that many individuals who came to Addis Ababa for road construction joined our group and swollen our number.” Some of the *gemedäbäles* had slightly different obligations. These were the inhabitants of *wärägänu* land who looked after government cattle, cut the grass, milked the cattle and processed milk into butter; the same was true for the *baladaras*⁴²⁶.

Payment of taxes in the form of craft works was expected from peasants categorized as *melman* who, as indicated, owned land in compensation for their good services to the government. *Melemel* paid all the dues only by means of one type of item. Included under this category was a tax called *shämma geber* (toga’s tax), paid in cotton clothes. Ten different kinds of such clothes were made by weavers and presented as tax. Most of the weavers were members of Muslim communities in the lowland. For instance, during the reign of Sahelä Sillasé of Shäwa in the 1830s and 1840s the Muslim communities there, mainly the Argobba, were known for their provision of cotton cloth to the court⁴²⁷. Other than cotton clothes, clothes made of sheep wool (*barnos* or *zetaät*), were also offered as tax. There were different qualities of woollen clothes for different purposes and different ranks of people. Taxes paid in crafts included *koricha* (saddle), *qurbät* (hides), *mitad* (large clay oven used to bake *injära*), *tagara* (a long cylindrical iron used for making sickles, hoes, axes, ploughs), charcoal, ink used for writing secular and spiritual books for the royal palace, *doma materäbia* (hoe and axe), (sickle), *leguam* (bits used to fit into the mouths of horses and mules), *erkab* (stirrup), *maräsha* (plough share), *tor* (spears), and *barud* (gunpowder). All these taxes were borne by weavers, blacksmiths, potters, and tanners⁴²⁸.

Taxes in pepper, ginger cloves and many other kinds of spices were remitted to the central administration for use in the imperial kitchen. Taxes as regards wood products were paid in *indod* (a plant used as soap) and *zabia* (wooden handles). *Kosso* tree was paid as tax; it was used as a cure for tapeworm that enters the digestive system from eating raw meat. An incense called

⁴²⁵Märsé, *Tezetayé*, p. 33.

⁴²⁶Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, pp.117-118.

⁴²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

⁴²⁸*Ibid.*

bergud constituted a tax “so as to make the smell of food in the dining room of the royal palace disappear”. *Kasma*, a wooden peg used to erect tents, and *chibo* (torch) were also paid as tax⁴²⁹.

5.2.2 Taxes from the Siso of the Balabbats/Mälekägnas⁴³⁰

Holders of *siso* or *balabats* land were also liable to a land tax, payable in cattle or goats, as well as both a tithe and military services. The tax was based on the amount or size of land (not on the number of the pieces of land) which was decided by the government. In some places, a person supplied one ox and 19 kilos of butter (called one *gundo*) for 20 *gashas* of land. Where the land was between 10 and 20 *gashas*, the tax would be only an ox (but not the butter), or a fattened sheep or goat and *asrat* (a tenth of their product). Some *balabats* or *mälekägnas* were given permission to defray all in the form of services. In addition, the tillers of their lands were obliged to go to war with them and serve as their soldiers, in the regiment called the horse guard or cavalry. Commonly, they received arms from the ruler and served in this capacity⁴³¹.

A further related group consisted of holders of a land called *dästa*. The taxes and services expected from them, according to Mähetämä Sillasé, were the following:

1. The first payment was one mule. The animal was supposed to remain on the taxpayer’s land and had to be used on government business. If the mule died and the fact could be proved, the government replaced it.
2. As a reduced tithe, the land holder was authorized to retain nine quintals a year for the upkeep of the mule and his service. In times of campaigns the mule had to be used for the transport of army supplies⁴³².
3. Retired or provisioned officials or *mälekägnas* (*wuha sinqu*) were expected to pay only in the form of joining with government forces during times of war⁴³³.

5.2.3. Services from holders of *Sämon*⁴³⁴ land

The conventional historical knowledge about the role of the church in the political economy of the country in general and that of the region in particular underlined the fact that the church was exempted from any form of taxes. On the other hand, it theoretically possessed a

⁴²⁹*Ibid*, pp. 28-31.

⁴³⁰Gäbrä Wäld, pp. 13-15.

⁴³¹*Ibid*.

⁴³²Mähetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerü Nägär*, p.110.

⁴³³Gäbrä Wäld, p. 15.

⁴³⁴It is said that *sämon* or church land was exempted from any type of tax. Almost all literature confirmed this argument.

share of one-third of the lands or *gult* rights of the country. If no tax was collected from the church, what were the tributes or services expected from it in return? Several were expected, besides teaching believers about spiritual issues such as salvation and the do's and don'ts for this purpose. Additional services included, such as the frequent prayers for agricultural productivity both by the priests and ordinary Christians who were attending the Mass or other liturgical ceremonies of the church:

በመጀበት በታ አግዥእብዕር አናመን የዘንዥ በንድ ስለዘኝበት እንማቁያለን፡፡
For the rains, we implore, that God may send rain on the place that needs it.

የወንበኝ ወቃ ሙላን በለን አግዥእብዕር እና ሆኖ ለሰላከቻዎች እኩ መሰኞዎች
ይመን በንድ ስለ መንበኝ ወቃ እንማቁያለን፡፡

For the waters of the rivers, we implore, that God fill them unto their due measure and bounds.

አዘጋጅ ለመክር ለሁን አግዥእብዕር ለጥቃር ቅዱምን ይሰጣት በንድ ስለጥቃር ቅዱ
እንማቁያለን፡፡⁴³⁵

For the fruits of the earth, we beseech, that God grant to the earth her fruit for sowing and for harvest.

የአየርን መል የጥቃርንም ቅዱ እኩበህ ባርከቻዎች የለጥቅትም መብቻዎች፡፡

For the air, we beseech, that God bless the air (weather conditions) and the fruits of the land.

እብቱ በኋንና መከናዣ እኩበ በያመክ ህሉ የሚ ችግር የጥቃርናወቻችን እኩበ ባርከቻዎች እብዕት መቻዎች፡⁴³⁶

Oh, God please remember the seeds and the harvest in every year, bless them, and

Multiply them.

Prayers for prosperity, plentiful supplies of every resource and reliable climatic conditions were also another function of the church. In fact, the prayers were those of an agricultural community in which cultivation of land was predominantly practiced. A number of them concerned rain and the most favourable level of rivers. Most probably this originated in the assumption that flooding resulted in disaster.

Politically the church was the dominant institution to control people without using any physical force. The thoughts of hell and paradise were the most important instruments to strike terror in the minds of the people. The church preached that the people should be loyal to the existing ruler. It also supported the perpetuation of the *status quo*. In times of war, the clergy joined their regional nobles, carrying the *tabots* of their parish, praying for victory over the enemy, just like the ancient Israelites⁴³⁷. They were not fighters but prayers, calling upon God's help to ensure victory for their respective notables. If victory was achieved, praise was accorded to the heavenly Lord; if not, it was due to the sin of the people. Earlier chronicles and books

⁴³⁵Ethiopian Orthodox Church, *Seratä qedasé* (Addis Ababa, 1994), Ch.3, No. 95-97, p. 28; Marcos Daoud(trans.), *The Liturgy of the Ethiopian Church* (Kingston, 2006), p.26.

⁴³⁶*Ibid*, Ch.3.

⁴³⁷Gäbrä Sillassie.

written by church scholars contained pages upon pages of such interpretations⁴³⁸. The church was not making efforts only in this regard to ensure the victory of each noble or convince the people about the *status quo*, but also even more during the eight consecutive days' prayers / masses in their respective churches throughout the Christian region, even the country. Under this category, a number of issues were raised during the celebration of such masses or liturgies. These were peace, security and strength to defeat enemies for the king or respective nobles. One of them was recited as

ለንተማችን ለበተሙ ማስቃ ለሰራዎችም ለመኑንንችም ለመኑናንችም ለአምን ስጠወ፡፡⁴³⁹

For the Emperor, the rulers and those in authority, we implore that God may grant them of His peace!

የሚችው መንና የሚችው መን መለቁን ሆነ ፍጥነ ሁኔታ በታች አድርጉ ቁጥጥር
አስተሳለች አርብን ማን በአዎት በሰላም ለከብርት በተከርስተያን በለሁ በከብር
መስቀል፡፡⁴⁴⁰

May you [sic] God crush under his feet in the dust all the visible and the invisible enemies of the King for the sake of church for which he made all the necessary things!
ንተማችንንም አስበው በመወቂ ወይም በለመወቂ ከስራው ከዚመት ማስረዳም ሆነ ፍጥነ የሚስለውን
መተቋንከአግድ በታች አድርጉ ቁጥጥር አስተሳለች፡፡⁴⁴¹

May you [God] bless our king; release him from all of his sins committed knowingly or unknowingly, Place his enemies below his feet!

In fact, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church mass was dominated by prayers for land cultivation or gardening and irrigation⁴⁴². The issue was raised simply when they preached what God had done to the Israelis. Prayer in relation to other economic activities was not common except for the safety of traders in rare cases:

ለንግድ ወደ መንገድ የሂያዎችንና እንግዳ የሆነትን አበቃችንና መንደዋችንና አስብ በህይወቻ
በሰላም ወደመሸረቶችው መቻለችው፡፡⁴⁴³

For them that travel, God should guide them with a merciful right hand and let them enter their home in safety and peace.

5.3. Local Administrators and Systems of Taxations

The structure of taxation was based on a complex hierarchy that reached from the king's palace down to village officials (*chiqashum*). The three most important local officials in

⁴³⁸Ibid; Marcos Daoud(trans.), *The Liturgy of the Ethiopian Church* (Kingiston, 2006), p.25.

⁴³⁹Ethiopian Orthodox Church, *Seratä qedasé*, Ch.4, No. 10, p. 50.

⁴⁴⁰Ibid, Ch.4, No. 20, p. 50.

⁴⁴¹Ibid, Ch.1, No.83, p. 65.

⁴⁴²Ibid, pp. 95-97.

⁴⁴³Ibid, Ch.3, No.196, p. 42; Marcos Daoud (trans.), *The Liturgy of the Ethiopian Church* (Kingiston, 2006), p.25.

descending order of rank were; *meselené* (together with the *dug*), *mälekägna*, and *chiqashum*⁴⁴⁴. The first of these officials was the *meselené* (viceroy) who performed the tasks of supervising the collection of taxes and of punishing “law breakers”⁴⁴⁵. He employed an assistant called a *dug*⁴⁴⁶, who was appointed by the *meselené* himself and was not officially recognized by the government. The *dug* was given land. The *meselené* was appointed either directly by the emperor or by provincial governors. The next local administrator in the hierarchy was *mälekägna*, immediately under the *meselené*. There were two kinds of *mälekägnas*, as was pointed out in the previous chapter of this study. One was either a soldier serving in the national force or a *shaläqa*⁴⁴⁷. The other was the head of many landowners whose kinsmen called him *mälekägna*. Or he could also be regarded as their *äläqa*. His task was to enforce the orders of the *meselené* and supervise tax collection, or to ensure that peasants paid their tax in time⁴⁴⁸.

In the process of tax collection in kind, not all the peasants might be expected to appear and pay in person. Just as the *mälekägna* was considered to be the representative of other land owners, the different peasant families had their own *äläqa* to pay tax for the land they possessed. He would be responsible for all tax payments. In return for this service he would receive a little more of the common inheritance than the others. The property which was allotted among heirs could not be sold without the permission of the *äläqa*. If one of the members could not pay his share of the tax, he had to surrender his land to the *äläqa*. If the *äläqa* himself could not pay, the property would pass to the state. This was locally understood as “ጥንካር በለቅ ለእለቅ አለቅ በለቅ ለእለቅ...”⁴⁴⁹ among the Amhara *rist* owners. If a father died before appointing the *äläqa* for his *rist*, the eldest child automatically became the *äläqa*. However, because the *äläqa* received the tax due from the rest of the family sharing the *rist* and paid it to the government in his name only, in the long run he attained a position in which he could dispossess the others of their *rist*. This system was abolished in the time of Emperor Hailä Sillasé I. Thereafter the individual tax payers were registered in government books and paid their own dues⁴⁵⁰.

⁴⁴⁴ Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Yä Itiyopiya bahel Tinat: Bulega* (Addis Ababa, 1967), pp. 14-15.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁷ Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Yä Itiyopiya bahel Tinat: Bulega*, pp. 1516.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁹ Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, p. 119.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

The lowest official in the hierarchy was the *chikashum*⁴⁵¹. He was appointed from the *gäbbars* of one *mälekägna* for the service of one year. His position was below that of the *mälekägna* while the district *dug* (local official) acted as an immediate authority over the peasants. His duty was to disseminate the commands from the above authority to the peasantry. He was also responsible for collecting taxes and forwarding them to the office concerned. Moreover, he ordered the peasantry to provide provisions whenever district or other officials or authorities visited his locality. In turn he enjoyed the privilege of being invited to feasts and festivals, holidays including such occasions prepared even by or for the church⁴⁵². Another local official which is rarely mentioned in most of the available sources is *yägäbbar aläqa*⁴⁵³. As far as the available sources are concerned, only Berehanu Abbebe has mentioned this officially in his study of the land tenure in Shäwa. He was responsible for overseeing the *gäbbars* while they were working on the *hudad* of the government. The official supervisor for the Muslim inhabited region of north Shäwa, particularly among the Argobba ethnic group, was termed the *Wolasma*⁴⁵⁴.

All these local officials were unpopular. They were considered as aliens who had come to the region to aggravate the suffering of the poor peasants. Although their region or district was fertile, beautiful, and grew sufficient crops to feed them, these officials made them unproductive and caused them to lead a substandard life⁴⁵⁵.

⁴⁵¹ Sven Ege, *Class, State and Power in Africa*, p.43; Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Yä Itiyopiya bahel Tinat*, p.15.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*

⁴⁵³ Berehanu Abebe, p. 121.

⁴⁵⁴ Sven Ege, *Class, State and Power in Africa*, p.45.

⁴⁵⁵ Informants (36, 37): Käbädä Täsäma, Täfära Ygelätu, Hailu Dämisé (at Sakela/ Wayyu on 8/9/20010); *Berehanena Sälam* (25/7/1929G.C; Probably this was why the peasants of the Amhara districts in the region chant:

አንጻችን ወጥ ለጥ መጥ አነስተ አረመ አየበዣ መዣዣ አየዣረሰን፡፡ የምር ካርር መስከ ተረጋግ መዝተ፡፡ አንድ ፕሮራ ቅድቅና ስምም ማረጋገጫ፡፡	Our good country, our good land is generous But for these weeds and pests (new comers/appointed officials). The vista, the meadow, the spring and hills but the multiplicity of the officials!
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The officials made use of different mechanisms to enforce tax and tribute collections. Universally, it seems that these officials had the right to own oxen, sheep, goats, butter, and honey taken from the subjects. They could demand contributions from their subjects on many occasions: such as when they were ready for a campaign, returned from a campaign, lost a horse during campaigns, married a wife, their property had been consumed by fire, they had lost all belongings in battle. The same tax payers were also expected to serve a funeral banquet incase an official passed away etc⁴⁵⁶.

European travellers frequently mentioned that, “The tribe in the Awash area, paid Sahelä Sillasé each year one oxen for every hundred head of cattle in their herds. The problem was, however, that the monarch was ever sending requisitions for further livestock.⁴⁵⁷” Taxation in fact played a major role in the peasant’s life; the prosperity or impoverishment of a village depended almost entirely upon the rapacity or moderation of its immediate chief.

The peasants also suffered from the obligation to provide hospitality to travellers of all kinds. It was customary for officials, state visitors from any province, whether friendly or hostile, and any one travelling under a chief’s protection to be given free lodging for them and their servants. Such travellers were not supposed to find their own provisions, and it was also a general custom, when a lodger killed a cow, sheep, or goat, to give the skin to the owner of the house, with a piece of meat, and offer him meals though this depended upon the goodwill of the lodger. Many travellers, however, expected to be fed without giving any compensation in return⁴⁵⁸. The worst offenders were travelling chiefs, who had ruined the inhabitants by burning the doors of their houses, tables, cattle-pens, and so forth for firewood as well as by slaughtering their sheep and drinking their beer. Thereafter relations between the peasants and travelling soldiers were unfriendly. The peasants tried to save themselves from this forceful appropriation by digging large underground pits, known in Amharic as *gwudgwads*, which were closed inside with cow-dung and mud⁴⁵⁹.

⁴⁵⁶Isenberg and Krapf, *Journal of C.W. Isenberg of J.L. Krapf: Detailing their Proceeding in the Kingdom of Shoa and Journey in Other Parts of Abyssinia in the Years 1839, 1840, 1841 and 1842* (London, 1843).

⁴⁵⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁸Täklä Tsadiq Mäkuria, *Asé Menilek na Yä Itiyopiya andinet* (Addis Ababa, 1991).

⁴⁵⁹R. Pankhurst, *Social History of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 1990), p. 140.

Geber was understood as two-way traffic; it was collected and “redistributed” to payers in the form of consumable foodstuffs, clothes or other related items⁴⁶⁰. Every item was collected from the people within the domain of the government of Shäwa and the interaction with the community outside the domain was very limited. One cannot see the items, which were not produced or available outside the domain, except for weapons and a few royal garments. In fact, the case of the clothes was simply an indication that royalty wore rare clothes. Otherwise all what they consume were from within the country⁴⁶¹. The peasants during the period under study had to pay huge numbers of dues, and were subject, as in the past, to frequent and arbitrary devastation by the soldiers. The peasants were thus the victims of bad government, military oppression, and the constant devastations of war and were obliged to bear, directly or indirectly, the whole burden of taxation⁴⁶². The system of taxation constituted a continual source of harassment and anxiety. In many cases, the peasants never knew when their properties were safe, or when they might be obliged to repair to the residence of their chief on holidays, some presenting bread, butter, honey, and corn, and others a goat, sheep, or cows, to remain in favour and to prevent him from sending his soldiers to live upon their premises⁴⁶³.

Taxes on the peasants were normally paid at *Mäsqäl*, the feast of the Cross, according to Pankhurst who depends entirely on foreign sources, particularly in discussing the history of the Shäwan economy in the middle of the 19th century. The people of Shäwa Méda (Tuläma Oromo) were forced to pay tax in kind, particularly in cattle, as long as they were willing to pay. Otherwise, the armies of the Shäwan kingdom undertook the usual campaign to raid the cattle of Tuläma three times a year for the feasts of three holidays. Asmé commented that “የሽዋ አዎ. ወደ ተለማ እንደ ወደ ወለ መዘመቻ እያወደም”⁴⁶⁴; “The army of Shäwa wanted to undertake campaign to Tuläma not to Wällo.” The first of these was *Mäsqäl* (the feast of the cross) immediately after the end of the rainy season, when the cattle of Shäwa had become fat. The rest were the Christmas and the Easter holidays. However, after the rules and regulation of taxes and tributes were well established during the reign of Menilek, taxes were paid at least in principle once a year except for the regular labour services and other occasional payments. The really

⁴⁶⁰Gäbrä Wäld, p. 8.

⁴⁶¹Pankhurst, *Social History of Ethiopia*. p. 140.

⁴⁶²Gäbrä Wäld, p.17; Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, pp.110-111.

⁴⁶³R. Pankhurst, *Social History*, pp.139-140.

⁴⁶⁴Bairu Tafla (ed and trans), *Asmä Gyorgis and His Works...* p.528.

backbreaking period of tax collection and significant losses for the region of Shäwa was the time from 1878-1889, when Menilek the king of Shäwa paid limitless amounts to Emperor Yohannis IV. According to Gäbrä Wäld and Mahetämä Sillasé, all the tax collectors throughout Shäwa collected tax during the harvest or immediately after the harvesting season; from the beginning of December to the end of March⁴⁶⁵.

The peasants' duty of providing the army with all the necessary provisions was later substituted by a payment called the *asrat* (tithe). The initial phase almost, for the purposes of this study, running from 1865 for the next 28 years was the billeting of armies in the homes of peasants. In fact, prior to the period of Menilek and his early period of rule all *Balärists* (landowners) had harvested the produce of their land for their own benefit. However, thereafter the armies, who had no property of their own to grow food, were quartered with the peasants. Most of the fighting among warlords or to incorporate new territories was conducted during the dry season, starting from the month of October to the beginning of June. During the rainy season from June to the beginning of October the army was billeted in the houses of peasants, particularly in the newly incorporated region or in their own localities. The latter were forced to feed the soldiers according to their economic capacity⁴⁶⁶.

The year 1865 can be taken as a turning point in the history of the region, as mentioned above: when Menilek returned to Shäwa from exile with a large number of army regiments known as *Gondäré* who were quartered in the home of peasants to 1892 as mentioned above⁴⁶⁷.

Thus *Asrat*, a tithe (one-tenth), which, as mentioned, was originally paid to the church came to be part of the payment to the government after *Tikimit 3* 1885 E.C. (October, 1892) as a substitute for the billeting⁴⁶⁸. The payment of a tithe to the central government in Shäwa on a national scale was commenced in 1901. In fact, it was exercised at local level during the reign of Sahelä Sillasé. This was done by quartering soldiers in a single camp (*Kätäma*), removing them from the homes of peasants. Then the king ordered that they would be provided with food by the peasants⁴⁶⁹, according to the latter's capacity to pay. Nevertheless, another problem emerged.

⁴⁶⁵ Gäbrä Wäld, p. 38

⁴⁶⁶ Mängestu Lämma, *Mätsafä Tizita Zä Aläqa Lämma Hailu* (Addis Ababa, 1975), pp 59,76.

⁸² Gäbrä Sillasé.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁸ Gäbrä Wäld, pp. 16-17.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

The wives of the soldiers forced the peasants to provide more than the fixed amount by using different mechanisms⁴⁷⁰.

Because of this issue a second mechanism was devised: collecting *asrat* after the *chiqashum* (local official) and an elected elder from the peasantry had estimated the amount the peasant produced. Granaries were erected in the quarters of each *mälekägna* so that peasants could pay at nearby areas. The army collected its share from there. During this time of estimation the peasant would be expected to invite and prepare a feast for these people but frequently the latter did not arrive on time. This increased the suffering of the peasants and in many cases the *chiqashums* and the clerks, collaborating with the former, began to abuse the amount of the *asrat*. Consequently the government adopted a third measure, i.e., the peasants were allowed to pay the *asrat* after an oath⁴⁷¹.

The fourth phase was for the peasant to pay only the amount of *asrat* that he agreed to, after taking an oath: “ከብት አበረቱ እኔል አበሩ የጥሩ-በኩ”; “May God deprive me of the cattle in my corral and grain in my home,” declared in 1904 E.C. on *Hamlé* 30 (August 6, 1912)⁴⁷². This also created another difficulty, at least for the government, because the amount that was collected during this time continually diminished, in comparison to the previous ones. To solve this issue the government made a declaration that enabled the soldiers to collect the *asrat* by themselves from the peasants on *Tekemet* 6, 1914 E.C. (October, 10, 1921)⁴⁷³.

There were certain rules concerning the rights and duties of both parties; for instance, the soldiers could not live or have a home on the land of the peasants; every 100 soldiers should construct their camps (*kätäma*) on state land. Still, the peasants and the army had no agreement while sharing on several times. A soldier was permitted to enter the peasants’ land only three times a year: when the crop was ready for harvest, when it was transported to the threshing floor and when the crop was threshed. During these times the soldier could not order a peasant to bring him (food, drink, fodder, firewood etc)⁴⁷⁴. The next improvement in collecting *asrat* was that the government fixed the amount of *asrat*, which was paid in terms of a certain size of land: on fertile land 10 *dawula* per *gasha*, on partially fertile land 5 *dawla* per *gasha* and on non-fertile

⁴⁷⁰*Ibid.*

⁴⁷¹Gäbrä Wäld, pp. 16-17.

⁴⁷²Märsé Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, *Yähayagnaw kefeläzämän wazema* (Addis Ababa,2007), p.93.

⁴⁷³Gäbrä Wäld, pp.16-17.

⁴⁷⁴Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, p.125

land 2 *dawula* per *gasha*⁴⁷⁵. But this regulation also encountered difficulties because the land that had been assumed to be fertile became infertile after a few years and vice versa. Thus, the government was forced to take a further measure: the *chiqashum* and elders estimated the amount of produce before the crops were ground. This system functioned up to the Italian period, 1935/36. In fact, the government declared that the estimated amount from a single *gasha* should not exceed ten *dawla*⁴⁷⁶.

However, a series of significant declarations was issued to minimize the backbreaking duties expected from peasants in the last decade of the 19th century. In January 1891, Menilek issued an edict establishing hereditary ownership between Wayat and Awash (Shäwa). The decree declared that all *gasha* land known as *gasha märét* (shield land), the holders of which were supposed to furnish a man armed with a shield, should henceforward be considered as *rist*, hereditary property, regulated according to customs then existing in Mänz⁴⁷⁷. It was also specified that convicted criminals were liable to the confiscation of their goods but no longer of their land. The decree, the chronicler states, proclaimed that a person found guilty of a grave crime was liable to the seizure of his land. The same punishment was also applied to relatives of an escaped criminal up to the third generation⁴⁷⁸. A decade later, in 1903-04, the emperor gave orders for the restoration of rights to land which had been confiscated during the previous period of fighting from Shäwa Oromo⁴⁷⁹. The rules established at this time, according to Mahetämä Sillasé, were as follows: if a *mälekägna* (Amhara army leader) had owned five *gashas*, or somewhat more than four, the *balabbat* (the clan chief of the Oromo) was to be given a *gasha*; if the *mälekägna* had owned three *gashas*, the *balabbat* would receive half of a *gasha*; if the *mälekägna* had owned two and half *gashas*, the *balabbat* would receive half of a *gasha*, and so on in proportion, until one-fourth of a *gasha*⁴⁸⁰.

The security of *rist* was further strengthened towards the end of Menilek's reign by the first set of decisions taken by the cabinet which he had appointed in October, 1907. The ministers ruled that persons found guilty of grave crimes for which their lands previously could have been forfeited should henceforward be liable to the seizure of their cattle and corporal punishment, but

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁶ Gäbrä Wäld, pp.16-17.

⁴⁷⁷ *Berähanena Sälam*, Hidar, 20, 1921 E.C. (29/11/1928).

⁴⁷⁸ *Berähanena Sälam*, 1st of Meskerem 1927 E.C. (11/9/1934).

⁴⁷⁹ *Berähanena Sälam*, 1st of Genebot 1927 E.C. (8/6/1935).

⁴⁸⁰ *Berähanena Sälam*, 15th of Tekemet 1921 E.C. (25/10/1928).

could not be dispossessed of their land. An exception, however, was made in the case of escaped murderers and persons found guilty of plotting against the government. The ministers further proclaimed that all land inherited from one's father or mother or purchased with money was to be considered as *rist*⁴⁸¹.

The decree also laid down that lands belonging to a person who died without children should pass to the deceased's father or mother, and not to the local Chief, or *cheqashum*, who had hitherto taken them over as the representative of the government. In the absence of parents such lands had to pass to the deceased's brother or sister or to his nearest relatives as far as the fourth degree. Only in the absence of such relatives should the *cheqashum* take over the land⁴⁸². Even after all these measures, the discontentment of taxpayers was not ended, and harsh treatment of peasants by officials was common. The personal experience of *Lij* Iyyasu while visiting Mänz, the district in the area of study, bore strong testimony to this fact. He met a peasant digging land using a hoe; the young monarch wanted to know why he did so instead of ploughing. The response of the peasant according to the author was to the point: “እኔ ነታው በራ
የምንበበት ተየት አገኘለሁኝ ለዚህ ለጋመኝ አዲሱ አንዳ ማቋምም መልከኝ አጥር አጠር፡ ከዚያ ቅርጫ፡ አስራት
አዎች መጥን አምባ አያላ ከእነር ለያገርኝኝ ነው”⁴⁸³; “My master, how can I earn money to buy oxen, let alone that, for this hoe dependent life of mine, the *chiqashum*, frequently ordered me to fence, to dig, to pay tithe, *mätin* and I am on the verge of leaving my village?”. The monarch encountered the same response from a widow in Mänz who survived by selling bread although she owned *rist* land. She could not bear the bulk of *rist* taxations; and claimed that, “ርስተኩ አለኝ
ግብር ለንቀሳኝኝ ነው”⁴⁸⁴; “I have *rist*, but I am going to lose it because of the taxes”.

In the same way, the successors of Emperor Menilek also made several major reforms concerning tributes expected from the peasants. At least five major reforms were implemented at the country level which had direct significance for the region under study. According to Mahetämä Sillasé Sillasé, there was a series of decisions by the government to improve land administration and taxation systems beginning from 1921 EC. (1928/29). Since the regional governors levied different types of extra taxes beyond what was initially imposed by the

⁴⁸¹Gäbrä Waled, p. 15.

⁴⁸²R. Pankhurst, *Economic History*, p. 305; Täsefa Gäbrä Sillasé (trans), *Fiteha Nägäst*, Article 18. No. 689-690 (Addis Ababa, 2000).

⁴⁸³Märsé Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, *Yähayagnaw*, pp, 121-122; Pawulos Gnogno, p. 87, 88.

⁴⁸⁴*Ibid*, p. 121.

government on the peasants, both payments in kind and *corvee* labour were very difficult for the latter to meet. Thus the government made the following reforms to the taxation and administration systems, as well as that of tenure to some extent: land measurement, abolition of *corvee* labour, correcting the methods of payment, collecting tithes in kind and abolition of cancelling *rist*. The first decree, which was made on 6th of *Mäskäräm* 1921 E.C. (September 16, 1928), in its nine articles dealt entirely with the administration and taxation of extra land (*teref märét*) from the *balabbats* after it had been measured. The first two articles of the decree defined how to distribute the *terfe märét* and the rightful person to take the land. If the extra land was well ploughed by the owner it would be left to him as long as he paid appropriate taxes. If the extra land was left infertile by the owner it was to be subdivided and distributed among four individuals from different sections of the society. One-quarter would be allotted to the previous owner, the second quarter would be given to the tenants on the land or nearby the main land, the third quarter would be given to the *balabbats* who had lost their land and rights in different ways such as inheriting/granting to the government (*yawäräsu*) while the final, fourth, quarter would be allocated to individuals who were petitioning for land (*yämänegeset däjtägni*). If all these individuals were not available the land was to be left to the owner under preconditions such as promising to make the land fruitful within a brief period of time⁴⁸⁵.

The extra land in the hands of other sections of the society such as peasants and *gemedäbäl* would be allotted to them with proper taxation accordingly. Lands in the hands of the church as extra would be redistributed to the parishes with very small plots. In the middle of all these transfers or redistributions the government collected significant amounts of payments. For instance, if the productive land was left to the previous owner the government collected eighty Ethiopian *Birr*, but if it was distributed among different groups, the government would collect ten Ethiopian *Birr* from each individual. If the land was considered as infertile the new owner would be exempted from a certain percentage of taxation until the time when the land would become fruitful⁴⁸⁶.

The second decree which was issued on 20th of *Hidar* 1921 E. C. (November 29, 1928) was an attempt to abolish *corvee* labour with only a few exceptions. All types of it, such as loading materials, cultivating the lands of the lord, fencing, *mätin*, *elif* and so forth were

⁴⁸⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁶Taddässä Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270-1527* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 102-103.

officially banned. Construction of churches and fencing them were to be undertaken on non-farming or non-harvesting months of the year. According to these decrees peasants were ordered to perform the activity during two months, from the beginning of February to the beginning of April⁴⁸⁷.

A third related decree was proclaimed on the first of *Mäskäräm* 1927 E.C. (September, 1934) to correct the sizes of lands in neighbourhoods (so as to solve boundary disputes). If these sizes became above or below a normal size of *gasha*, it was assumed that the owner of a larger piece was shifting the boundary so that his neighbour's land decreased in area; therefore he would be ordered to give the extra amount to his neighbour. If that was not the case and only less was available he would receive the missing size from another site, or pay taxes according to the size of his land⁴⁸⁸. The fourth decree which was issued on the first of *Genebot* 1927 EC (May, 1935) was intended to alter the defraying of taxation, from being in kind to cash, and a fixed amount of money was levied per *gasha* of land. Accordingly a *gäbbar* was to pay thirty Ethiopian *Birr* per *gasha* of land, except for an *asrat*⁴⁸⁹. Another decree was issued even earlier on the 15th of *Tekemet* 1921 E.C. (October, 24, 1928) to abolish the confiscation of one's *rist* because of committing crime. It was declared that the *rist* should be given to the rightful successor⁴⁹⁰.

5.4. Gult Rights and its Impacts on Agricultural Productivity

Besides the collections of formal taxes and tributes by the government for itself, there was a system by which the government transferred the right to collect and use land taxes and tributes instead of land grants or salary payments to its officials or servants⁴⁹¹. This was known as the *gult* system. Literarily, *gult* means something immobile (most probably because it did not affect the owner or the individual who had access to the land; rather it was a system of changing the tax collector)⁴⁹². In short, *gult* was a tax and tribute appropriation right granted by the government to various servants in the power hierarchy, such as local rulers, members of the royal family, the

⁴⁸⁷Täshälä Tebäbu, p. 78-79.

⁴⁸⁸Käsatä Berehan, p.84.

⁴⁸⁹Gäbrä Wäled, p. 15.

⁴⁹⁰Ibid.

⁴⁹¹Berehanu Abägaz, "Poverty Trap in a Tributary Mode of Production: the Peasant Economy of Ethiopia", *Working Paper Number 6* (College of William and Mary: Department of Economics, 2004), pp.1-22.

⁴⁹²Ibid, p.10.

nobility, or priesthood as well as the religious establishment⁴⁹³. It was the government's right to create and transfer the *gult* right at will from one official to the other. Pankhurst wrote: "the emperor could create *gult* in any part of the country merely by transferring his taxation rights to a third party; no confiscation was involved, nor was there necessarily any change in the property relations of the area"⁴⁹⁴.

Gult grants were of two kinds: to the officials, and to the clergy or religious institutions. *Gult* grants for the officials could last for life or they could be evicted by the king or emperor at any time and be given away to others. However, those given to the latter were given permanently in the form of *ristä-gult*⁴⁹⁵. *Gult* rights often lapsed on the death of their holder. In some cases there was a possibility of inheriting such rights. Apart from the church, the term *reste-gult* was applied to such rights⁴⁹⁶. The transfers, however, required formal consent from the emperor or king. Mahetämä Sillasé states that the heir had to present a mule or horse, and a piece of cloth or pot of honey, to the king on such occasion⁴⁹⁷.

The above taxation and tribute appropriation system reduced the productivity of agriculture by retarding the potential of hard work among the peasants to improve their own lives. Berehanu Abägaz conceptualized the process as "Political accumulation versus peasant surplus pre-emption"⁴⁹⁸. In the *gult* system, the state and the *gult* holders enforced a sociopolitical system of "surplus" extraction and redistribution in the form of *geber*. The system influenced the productive base of the peasant economy to become preoccupied more with distribution (appropriation of taxes and tributes followed by a lavish banquet) than with production or accumulation. In the previous system *rist* owners had retained full control over the process of production. On the contrary, while the *gult* holders possessed rights over the outputs of the said process, they had no say or rights to contribute inputs (whatever their form) to this process. These income rights (*gult* right) over lands that were held by local and regional lords (*Mälekägnas*) and mandated by the state hindered the emergence of large, and innovative, landlord estates⁴⁹⁹.

⁴⁹³R. Pankhurst, *Social History*, p.110.

⁴⁹⁴Berehanu, p. 9.

⁴⁹⁵R. Pankhurst, *Economic History*, p. 162.

⁴⁹⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁷Gäbrä Sillasé.

⁴⁹⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁹*Ibid*; Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, pp.108-19

Generally, the *gult* system lacked a monopoly over access to land by *gult* holder *mälekägnas*, since the upper class (*gultägnas*) did not organize or supervise the production process. Thus, one could argue that autonomous peasants who had monotonously gone on producing for centuries had no reason to work for more productivity, if everything they produced was appropriated by the *gultägnas*, or “parasitic rent seekers” as Berehanu identified them.

Afawärq also explains the peasants’ experiences of his time as: “በወጥ የበቃለዎች ተፈጻሚ ስራ የሰራተኞች ከዚህ ለበለተኞች መመራሪያ ተሸጋ የጋዥ የርሃና በራ አለመጥበቻዎች በለ የጥናዎች ልረሰና በቅለው ተመሳሳይ ለተረጋገጧ ተሸጋ ተጠበቃ ስሳር ለቅናር ወለው ይከተማ አርፈለሁ ስል በበቃ የየለቅ መቻር ከዚህ በለበቃ ሆኖ ለበይንበትታትና የወን የደክመዋል በከንታቸው”⁵⁰⁰; “Why should the peasant toil if the fruits of his labour go to feed the soldier, if the cattle he had tended with so much care end up fattening the gult holder, if the horse and the mule that he had kept to trade for a cow and a plough ox are groomed for the governor, and if on retiring after a hard day’s work, he finds a domineering soldier lording it in his own houses?”

In fact, the peasants lacked not only the initiative to produce more but also capital for better inputs and innovations. On top of this, if a *gult* was too extensive for the holder to work effectively it became the *rists* of numerous peasants who shared it into extremely fragmented private farm lands. In particular, when the nature of the fertility of the land of their ancestor varied, the share would be more fragmented. Every claimant was entitled to receive a share from each grade of fertile land. Informants, peasants who had been *rist* owners before 1974, mentioned that their *rists* were as large as the “forehead of an ox” “የበራ የምባር የምኅል” in size. Asebé of Ankobär also described this share as “a worn out pair of shoes” “የመሬጥ እናዪ” while discussing the poverty rate of north Shäwan peasants in the first decade of the 20th century⁵⁰¹. The nature of the sharing of land contributed to the diminished agricultural productivity of peasants, consuming their energy, time and family labour by moving from one plot to the other or dispersing family members to each plot, particularly in districts where farms were subjected to marauding animals such as monkeys and apes.

Therefore, while on the one hand the lands were in the hands of peasants who were locked into those multi faceted hindrances, on the other hand the *gultägnas* who did possess the interest

⁵⁰⁰Afawärq, p.12.

⁵⁰¹Informants (36, 30): Täfera Yeglätu, Hailu Dämisé, and others; *Berähanena Sälam Meskrem*, 6, 1921.E.C

and opportunity to accumulate a surplus exercised no control over the land. Peasants with such living standards experienced no strong national feelings and could not be patriotic in whatever aspect concerning their country. This tendency amongst peasants, particularly in a country where the majority of its population consisted of them, resulted in the retardation of its economic development. Consequently Gäbrä Hiwot expressed his worry in the beginning of the 20th century as follows:

የመላዕወን የሚሰጠው ያገኘ ይሆናል የተወለደበትን አገር የሚያስቀት የክንያት ያጠናና ያገኘ
መግለጫ በበረታ ወይም በጠቃ ባድር የለመዋዬ ስለዘመዬ መግለጫ የሚቀምባቸት የገኘ ማስተ
በተቀጥቸ ሰዎች እና ለጠበብ አይደለም፡ ያገኘን ማስተበበ ለተዘጋጀ ለተዘጋጀ እንደል
አንድ፡ የሂጻቻዎች አድርጋኖ የሰራተኞዎ ይሆናል እና አድርጋ በይኑቱ እንበለ መጠን የሚረቻበት
አገር መግለጫ ከተቀት እናና እንደረረረ ያስርቻል፡ የእተዋናያንም ሆኖች በንመስከት እንዘዘ
የለ ጥሩት እንዲያደርጋል የሰራተኞ፡⁵⁰²

The poor who [is] deprived of the basic necessities of food and clothing has no reason to love his country; he does not care whether his state prospers or perishes. Thus, the state stands to lose if national wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few, and to gain if it is distributed equitably. Where there is exaggerated disparity between the life standards of the rich and the poor, it means the state is on the verge of its disaster. The situation in Ethiopia gives cause for such concern.

⁵⁰²Gäbrä Hiwot; *Mänegesetena* , p.119.

Chapter Six

6. Multiple Instabilities

Ethiopia is considered as a country which has suffered profoundly from conflicts in general. These conflicts stemmed from various backgrounds: religion, regionalism, ethnicity and the like. Their consequences were devastating and constituted major factors in causing the country's poverty and backwardness⁵⁰³. An early Ethiopian critical historian and political economist, Gäbrä Hiwot Baikädagn, in the early 20th century conceptualized this interlink and outlined the far reaching impacts of these conflicts for the growth and development of the country in his classic work, *Mängestina Yähizib Astädadär* (*State and Public Administration in Ethiopia*). He mentioned two major causes of conflict: *greed* (opportunity, such as finance or natural resources, for setting up rebel organizations) and *grievance* (such as pronounced inequality, lack of political rights, or ethnic or religious repression in the society). For him nothing exceeds the influence of conflicts and wars in hindering economic progress. Even natural disasters and negative trade balances cannot be compared with conflict in this regard. He underlined his view that wars, which were declared by persons who did not want to toil by themselves and aspired to feed on the toil of others, were the major obstacles to agricultural development in Ethiopia. According to him, the process also diverted human labour from farming to banditry⁵⁰⁴. There are several ways in which civil war damages economies. It gradually reduces the accumulation of indigenous factors (resources, accumulated skills and knowledge), negatively impacting on the growth rate and development of a nation. Moreover, the longer the duration of a war the more likely it would seriously affect a nation and its people and reduce them to impoverished status⁵⁰⁵. North Shäwa experienced a number of wars and conflicts that resulted in multiple instabilities throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. These were manifested in the form of political, religious or ethnic instabilities, which brought various hardships to the helpless peasants.

⁵⁰³Bairu Tafla, (ed and trans), *Asmä Gyorgis and His Works: History of the Galla and the Kingdom of Shäwa* (Stuttgart, 1987).

⁵⁰⁴Gäbrä Hiwot Baikädagn, *Yä Nägadras Gäbrä Hiwot Baikädagn serawoch: Näbar Mert Mätsehaf hetmät* (Addis Ababa, 2010), pp. 54-55.

⁵⁰⁵Alämayhu Gäda, "Does Conflict Explain Ethiopia's Backwardness? Yes! And Significantly", in *IEA* (Helsinki, 2004), p. 4.

6.1. Political Instabilities

North Shäwa became a battlefield on a great many occasions because of conflicts among rival chiefs for political positions. The death of King Hailä Mäläkot in 1855 resulted in endless battles one after the other, up to 1889. Local traditional authors accorded emphasis particularly to the initial phase of these conflicts. Their explanation of these Shäwan political conflicts is analogous with that of the political situation of medieval Europe by Thomas Hobbes in his book *Leviathan* in 1651; he explained Europe's political conflict as "the war of each against all". This could well clarify the situation in Shäwa during the second half of the 19th century, where the absence of strong government brought about political unrest⁵⁰⁶. The endless conflicts led to a dramatic rise in the number of soldiers for at least two reasons; employment opportunities for many people, as soldiers, while becoming one was the only means to escape the suffering inflicted on the peasants during this time of unrest.

6.1.1 Menilek and his Rivals (1865-1889)

Menilek's escape from Mäqdäla and his assuming the kingship of Shäwa also were unable to stop the conflicts. He had to settle his first rivalry with Bäzabih, the second viceroy of Emperor Tewaodros, at the battle of Gadilo in 1865. Although the confrontation was concluded by the victory of Menilek, Bäzabih continued to represent a headache to Menilek for the next few years. The other strong opponents of Menilek who had transformed Shäwa into a land of turmoil were his two uncles, namely Hailä Mikaél and Séifu, *Woizero* Bafäna (his own wife), and Mäshäsha Séifu (his cousin). The Amhara inhabited lowlands were places of self exile for most of these opponents and other rebels. Märhabété was frequently used for this purpose. In fact, the people of the area were also persuaded to rebel if they were subjected to unnecessary taxation or tribute or administered by an appointee not related to them. They rebelled, for instance at localities such as Afkara, Kolash, Enäwari, Mitak and others in the 1870s. All of these uprisings were, however, crushed by force⁵⁰⁷.

Emperor Yohannis IV also undertook one important campaign to Shäwa, although it was concluded without actual fighting by the Liché agreement in 1878. However, the period before this agreement was reached was a hard one for the peasants of Northern Shäwa. The chronicler of Menilek mentioned that "The armies of Emperor Yohannis were destroying the country, invading

⁵⁰⁶ Bairu Tafla (ed and trans), *Asmä Gyorgis and His Works: History of the Galla and the Kingdom of Shäwa* (Stuttgart, 1987); Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Paris, 1651).

⁵⁰⁷ Heruy, pp. 100-109.

the left and right, plundering cattle. While spending the night at Wädära, they burnt the town of *Woizero Atmoch*, Säladingay⁵⁰⁸.” During the same period the cavalry of the emperor tried to overrun Shäwa Méda, which resulted in many casualties. Even after the emperor prohibited his army from plundering the property of the people, the “starved northern armies” were not willing to stop doing so. Disappointed by the notoriety of his army, the emperor began to punish them by amputating their limbs. Some of his men advised the emperor to tolerate the actions of the army as “ወቃሮር ጥቃከዥን አንቀጽ ጥቃትን አያሳብያው” ; “soldiers think not about death but only about their captives [plunder]”⁵⁰⁹.

The army of Emperor Yohannes spent weeks on Shäwa Méda while crossing to Däbrä Libanos, the western extreme of the region. The emperor and his army passed through Mänz, Wädära, Dinbaro Méda, Dodotie, Abichu, Jijiga, and Sälalé to Däbrä Libanos, plundering Shäwan peasants on their route. It was the duty of the peasants to feed this huge imperial army during these weeks⁵¹⁰.

Before he moved to Intoto, Menilek spent almost the next two decades wandering throughout Shäwa, though his nominal capital was at Liché. As a result, the king and his army repeatedly crossed his domain, the Shäwan territory. The capital town, Liché, was founded in September 1865, but he was based at Ankobär in July 1867, and at Liché and sometimes in Wällo, throughout 1868 and 1869. He spent most of 1871 in another garrison town, Enäwari, occasionally in Wäräilu (Wällo), and stayed frequently in Wällo throughout 1872. He arrived at Liché in June 1873, returned to Wällo in 1874, reappeared in Wällo in 1875 but returned to Liché in December 1875⁵¹¹. Therefore, there was no “free season” that exempted the peasants from feeding the mobile court’s residents. These, mainly the military, requested food items that were not abundantly available. For instance, butter, meat, and honey were the favourite foods among these residents. The same travel pattern was frequently followed in Shäwa by Menilek after the Liché Agreement in 1878. Particularly, the year 1878 was characterized by repeated crossing and re-crossing of Shäwa, by both the army of Emperor Yohannes and that of Menilek. After the Liché agreement, the northward thrust of Menilek came to an end, at least for the time being, but the campaigns against rebels or peoples on the southern fringe of northern Shäwa continued. The hardship which the peasants faced during

⁵⁰⁸Ibid, pp.115-116.

⁵⁰⁹Ibid,p.117.

⁵¹⁰Gäbrä Sillassé.

⁵¹¹Seven Rubenson and Märid Wäledä Arägay, *Acta Eteopica*.

those campaigns was the subject of discussion amongst many local authors. While some of them suggested political reasons, others emphasized the ethnic manifestations⁵¹².

6.1.2. From Relative Internal Peace to Sägälé (1889-1916)

The aspects of internal unrest were, relatively speaking, solved after the death of Emperor Yohannes IV in 1889 at the battle of Mätämma. In fact, the death of the emperor also resulted in turmoil in Shäwa for a brief period of time, according to Täklä Hawariat⁵¹³. Another critical battle was fought with the Italians in 1896 at Adwa in the northern province of the country, Tigray. Even though the battle was not waged on Shäwan soil, the soldiers who were recruited from Shäwa and other newly incorporated southern provinces were large in number. They spent about two weeks on the Shäwan soil, consuming the property of peasants on their way to Adwa. The month they spent in Shäwa was also October, the eve of the harvesting season. “My campaign is in *Tikmit* (October), all the people of Shäwa, make yourself available at Wäräilu till the middle of *Tikmit*” was the command of the emperor⁵¹⁴. After the victory, the region once more experienced the burden of provisioning the army on its way back to the capital and the southern region⁵¹⁵.

The short reign of *Lij* Iyyasu (1913-1916) was also characterized by the mobility of the army, which accompanied the young crown prince from region to region. He commenced this movement with his followers before the death of the emperor. He invited both the old officials of the emperor and his new favourites at Säladingay to the feast served by the nearby peasants at the home of the *abun* in April 1912⁵¹⁶.

The unpredictable movements of the crown prince created an additional burden for the life of those peasants who were on his and his followers' route. This politically motivated behavior of *lij* Iyyasu also resulted in hardship. *Aläqa* Gäbrä 'Egziabher commented on the situation as follows:

ጥንት ለዚህም ለዚህ አበቶ እያስ ለወቻዎች ለንቅሁን እስተዳደር ወደ ዘመኝ ትኩ ስለሁ በለው እያስታወቁም
ና በር፡፡ ለጥቃት በለማረቻች መግለጫ ንግረው አበቶ በጠና ላይ ለረሰኑ ለይ ለመጠጥር ወቻዎች
መማቻች እንዲታወቁ በየራሱ ላይ እያዘለለ መጥቶ መማቻች ይቀጥለ፡፡ ንብረቱ የንግድ የንግድ

⁵¹²Afawärq Gäbrä Yäesus, *Dagmaw Menilek Negusä Nägäst Zä Ityophiya* (Rome, 1901), p. 45.

⁵¹³Täklä Hawariat Täklä Mmariam, *Autobiography: Yä Hiyyoté Tarik* (Addis Ababa, 2006), p. 1.

⁵¹⁴Afawärq, p. 89; Heruy, p. 236.

⁵¹⁵Ibid, p. 109.

⁵¹⁶Gäbrä Egziabher, p.34.

በየደረሰበት አንድ አንድ ገብቻና ባለቤቶች ለፈረሰዎች ገዢ ለወቻዎች አንድሸ ለስጋ ፍጋዎች አዘጋጅቶ
ይሰጥ ነበር፡፡⁵¹⁷

Any time Abeto Iyyasu did not order his army to prepare their provisions when he planned for a campaign. He informed only a few of his followers who were special officials and mounted his horse Tena. At that moment his selected followers carried their guns and mounted their horses to follow him. Nevertheless, in all countries [regions] of his destination, the local governors and peasants provided hay for their horses, *enjera* (bread) and cows to sloughter for the army.

This kind of movement from region to region increased the burden on the peasants; even the local governors just mentioned extracted what they gave to the prince from the same peasants who were on their way to supply all provisions. As we can deduce from his chronicles, most of the time Iyyasu and his followers were living in Wällo. Geographically north Shäwa was a bridge between the capital and Wällo. Therefore, the peasants of north Shäwa were responsible for providing all the requisitioned supplies and services while the prince crossed the region repeatedly. In fact, the three consecutive rulers of Ethiopia from 1889 to 1935 had a special relationship with Wällo and crossed north Shäwa to the region now and again with their numerous followers. The overthrowing of *Lij* Iyyasu by Shäwan nobility resulted in a conflict between Shäwa and Wällo, which fought a series of battles in 1916. Three of these (Tora Mäsk, Ankobär and Sägälé) were waged in the region and it was forced to host about 250, 000 soldiers with their servants and pack animals. In particular, *Nigus* Mikaél of Wällo ordered his army to loot in the following words: "...እንቃ ለእንቃ ደርሞኑ ለደረሰ አትበብ:: ስንቃኑ እኔ ከኔ:: አየበበኑ አየበበኑ አየዘረኑ እና...⁵¹⁸ "... do not worry to prepare your provisions.... I am your provisions, eat and drink by looting what you come across on your route!" This brought about massive destruction of the property of Shäwan peasants, which was carried out immediately after these forces entered Shäwan territory from Wällo. It was described by one of the Shäwan authors as follows, "...ወለዎ መር በመንገዱ ላይ እንደ መሬ መሬት ሆኖ ለሰሰበትና በመንገድ ላይ የተናወን ህላ ይዘርና ይመር:: የባለንድን በፈና መሬት መሬድና መሬለት በተና መሬወል....ይመረ::"⁵¹⁹ "the army of Wällo over flooded the district of Mänz and began to plunder all what they got on their way. They slaughtered the oxen and sheep of the peasants, burnt their houses..."

A further attribute of the battles which was the cause of great loss to the peasants was that they were fought in the middle of October, the season when every crop on the farms was

⁵¹⁷*Ibid*, p.41.

⁵¹⁸Gäbrä Egziabher Eliyas, p. 72; Pawulos Gnogno, *Yä Até Menilek Däbdabéwoch*, pp. 63,72.

⁵¹⁹Märsé, *Yä hayagnaw*, pp. 162,165,166,167.

ripening and was easily subjected to destruction either by the army's direct consumption or being set on fire as enemy property or by the soldiers letting their animals graze on or spoil it. The month of October was also the time when cattle and sheep were fatter because of the availability of grazing grass, at least during the rainy season.

Consequently, the wars inflicted major damage on the property of Shäwan peasants, which forced the new government of *ras* Täfäri, the future Hailä Sillasé, to declare: "... በዚህ በዚወወ
መኖት ማኅያት ዘመኑ ወታደር በበታሱ ገዢ ገዢ-በሱን የበዚወወ አገማወን የጠናበዱ ሆኖ ለለጻዣ በየኑ⁵²⁰
አያስታወቁህ ባጥበኑ እንደተቀበል እድርገናልና ገዢበ ተበዚወ አገማወው መቻ በፈቅድ ተረጋል በለህ አትከና..."; "... all the peasants, whose properties looted, whose farms destroyed by the army because of today's war, announce [this] to *ligaba* Beyne and we made you to take the compensation. So that, do not feel sorry by feeling that my property is looted, my farms are spoiled and my oxen are slaughtered...".

The same battles were remembered by Täfära Degufé as one of the most miserable life experiences of his family at Ankobär. He recorded one in his memoir thus:

The battle of Sägälé, at which thousands perished in a fratricidal conflict that shook Wällo and Shäwa to the core, affected countless families. Aunt Gete remembers Sägälé as a sad occasion when many lads from peasant families of our village were conscripted to follow their Chiefs to a conflict between feuding lords that they did not comprehend⁵²¹.

6. 2. Religious Conflicts

The legacy of the 17th century religious controversies between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Portuguese Jesuit missionaries was continued throughout the 18th and the 19th centuries in Ethiopia. In Shäwa, these reached a climax and affected many people after the Council of BoruMéda in 1878. Beginning in May 1878, the attempts of Emperor Yohannes to homogenize the religion of the country by banning all other religions and even various sects of Christianity, except the "two birth" sect to which he belonged, affected the peace and security of the region that was already in a state of turmoil because of the protests made by the opponents of Menilek. The measure was forceful; but was carried out under the pretext of doing away with all

⁵²⁰Gäbrä Egziabher, p.78.

⁵²¹*Ibid*; Täfära Degufé, p. 26; Aläqa Gäbrä Egziabher, p. 78.

other wrong practices⁵²². The measure affected north Shäwa primarily because the centre of the dominant rival sect, “three births”, was the monastery of Däbrä-Libanos in the heartland of Northern Shäwa⁵²³. Secondly, the majority of the inhabitants of Shäwa Méda consisted of the Oromo (Tuläma). They were banned from practicing their *gada* system and were subjected to forced circumcision and baptism before the actual *gada* age (*butta* age)⁵²⁴. Another related important reason was that significant numbers of Muslims were living in the eastern portion of northern Shäwa facing the Awash River. Peoples who were not willing to be converted from one religion to the other faced difficulties. More than anything, this measure would result in social unrest which in turn would affect agricultural productivity and peasant existence. Migration and displacement from one locality to the other, coupled with attacks or looting by soldiers who were using the situation as a pretext, constituted other notable manifestations of the unrest. Many Muslims migrated to areas such as Qabbéna in Guragé, Jimma Abba Jifar, and Harargehé⁵²⁵.

Generally, this religious measure taken against the believers of different sects created a degree of hostility between the king and the clergy, as well as the people where they had been banned from practicing the religion of their ancestors. The coronation ceremony of Menilek as the king of Shäwa, after he displayed his loyalty to Yohannes IV, at the Däbrä Berähan Sillasé Church and the feast at Liché one day later in October 1878 offered some examples of how peoples were forced to adapt the “two birth” sect of Orthodox Tewahido Christianity. Most of the unrest was created for the simple reason that the peasants could not clearly understand the differences between each sect. Let alone the ordinary peasants, the nobility and the royalty also did not fully understand what these were.⁵²⁶

The Tuläma were also ordered to be forcibly baptized. The unrest was aggravated when the clergy were not prepared to baptize them before checking whether the males had been circumcised or not. If not, they were forced into circumcision before the correct age according to the *gada* system (the *butta* ceremony)⁵²⁷. Asmé concluded his discussion about the religious and political feuds that frequently affected this region with a strong personal bias: “የ 400 ዘመን መርሃት ችልቱ ሁሉ የሰው ደም ተቀለቁለ ነረፈበት በብዴ አይነት ህዝቦና በብዴ አይነት ፈይምምት የእትዮጵያ ችልቱ ሁሉ በደም አስፈላጊ መቻት የሚርጋም”

⁵²²Bairu Tafla (ed and trans), *Asmä Gyorgis and His Works*.

523 *Ibid.*

524 *Ibid.*

⁵²⁵ Bahru Zäwdé, *The History of Modern Ethiopia: 1855-1991* (Addis Ababa, 2006).

⁵²⁶ Heruy, p. 121.

⁵²⁷ Bairu Tafla (ed and trans), *Asmä Gyorgis and His Works*, pp. 48-50.

ጥጥ የበቀለ የአትጥቃቻ ይም ነው ለአትጥቃቻ የሚሸጠት አዋጅቶ የሚከርን ጥጥ ለባሽቶ ፍቃዣ ይጋብ ከሚሰለ
አለቆናትም ጥብ አንቀጽዬች፡፡⁵²⁸ ; “The war of about 400 years over flooded Ethiopian rivers with
blood of the peoples from different religions and ethnic groups. This blood fertilized the Egyptian
soil on which they grow cotton. The patriarchs [of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church] were wearers of
this cotton and did not stop the war in order that the cotton would not dry.”

6. 3. Inter and Intra Community Conflicts

The prevalence of weak government, the geography of the region and the *rist* system were causes of further forms of conflicts; termed *inter* and *intra* community conflicts for the purpose of this study. In particular, these were aggravated because of a series of land litigations, long term disputes and a weak legal system.

The irregular landscape, mountains or hills and valleys resulted in the genesis of communities with their own identity and behaviour who considered themselves as foreigners with respect to the adjacent *amba* or geographical features. In most highland Ethiopian regions, each hamlet, each hill and each small valley has a name of its own. For casual visitors the places seem too small and too close to each other to deserve separate names of their own. But for the inhabitants they are separate “countries” and the usual phrase “my country” simply denotes “my village” with its specific psycho-social behaviour. Each individual had a special affiliation to his locality or “country”. These communities had common boundaries, mainly rivers or minor streams. These were lines of conflict or confrontation between communities on either side. On many occasions they became areas of showdowns or battles where the able male adult members of each community demonstrated their heroism. Different war songs were composed by the people to initiate such members into combat. There were also a number of common ተላላ (chants or war songs) among the Amhara community on both sides of the Adabay River.

ወይ አነስ አይመጥ ወይ አቶ አንቀጽር
መዝዣ ማም አደረጋ ለሁለት ላይ አንጻ፡፡⁵²⁹

*Neither we cross to them beyond, nor do they
The river unmuddied passed the night idle,
Oh, we two cowards!*

ወርሱበመባለሽን ወርሱበመ
አንቀምትከተለሽ ስምምነቶችን የሆን አንቀጋዣዎ፡፡⁵³⁰

*Tell him, your husband coward, tell him
To bend down, and you too, to observe the scene!*

⁵²⁸Ibid.

⁵²⁹Dechasa, p.6.

⁵³⁰Ibid, p. 8.

The practice was continued into the 20th century, as some of the eye-witness accounts in Jirru and Märhabété attest⁵³¹.

Besides geographical differences, ethnic ones were used as a cover for conflicts over control of resources such as grazing lands or farms. The most common ethnic groups in the region were the Oromo, Amhara and Afar who were the major rivals for these. The eastern zone of the region had been a battleground among these ethnic groups for a long period of time. Though they eventually left the area, the Argobbas were also an ethnic group who engaged in, and were victims of, the conflict. Several historical accounts confirm that the earliest settlers in the northeastern zone of north Shäwa were the Argobba community. According to Ahmed, the Argobba were Muslims historically known to have been engaged both in agriculture and trading (economic) activities. The traditional feature of the Argobba settlement in the transition zone was most probably associated with the significance of the area as an important trade route from the central highlands to the Middle East, which made it particularly suitable for them since the Argobba were long distance traders. Before the settlement of Oromo, the Amhara Christian and Argobba Muslim populations used to inhabit several highland and lowland areas of the northeastern extreme of the region. The Oromo settlements were mostly founded on the rich farmland and forest land that extend from the central highland to the arid zone. The Oromo pressure resulted in large scale displacement of the Amhara and the Argobba⁵³².

These two groups started to settle in the area by the beginning of the 18th century because of the revival of powerful local Amhara Chiefs and their strong alliance with the Argobba leader (*Wallasma*) against the Oromo, as discussed in the second chapter of this study. The Amhara began to establish their agricultural settlements in the lowland areas, which had earlier been used entirely by the Oromo for their pastoral way of life. In relative terms the Afar are the latest communities to move into these areas, probably also since the late 18th century. According to some historical accounts, by late 1890s various clans of the Afar seem to have extended their settlements further westwards, to the Oromo inhabited areas⁵³³. This expansion was associated with the great famine of 1888-1892 and ecological factors, which forced them to move to the neighbouring Oromo inhabited areas of Ifat. The history of environmental stress and conflict involving the four communities had its most obvious manifestation in the periods of the great

⁵³¹ Zäwudé Gäbrä Hiwot, *Yähiwot wutawuräd* (Addis Ababa, 2003), p. 8.

⁵³² Ahmed Hassen, pp. 76-77.

⁵³³ Pawulos Gnogno, *Yä Até Menilek däbdabéwoch*, p. 94.

famine (1888-1892). Competition and conflict in those periods might not comprise searching for lands but people might kill each other for wild trees and fruits.

Two decades later various political situations started to shape the inter-ethnic conflicts in the area. Power struggles between Shäwa and Wällo (Hailä Sillassé and *Lej Iysssu*) in 1916 and their attempts to divide the people, so as to gain their support, resulted in ethnically based divisions and conflicts. Iyassu attempted to strengthen his power by seeking the support of the Oromo and Afar, who were followers of Islam⁵³⁴. On the other hand Hailä Sillassé relied on the local Christian Amhara population. As a result the area became a centre of turmoil and recurrent conflicts. The power struggle ended with the victory of his supporters; however, the misery of the local population did not cease. Hailä Sillassé's supporters aggravated conflicts by adopting some harsh measures such as the confiscation of land and levying heavy taxation on the Afar and the Oromo. These measures led to a new wave of conflicts between Amhara (who were largely farmers) and Afar Oromo (mostly herders). Ahmed Hassen furnishes a detailed explanation of the conflicts that had prevailed for long. According to him, these resulted from Afar, Oromo and state conflicts in which local Oromo and Afar took out their grievances towards the state by killing their Amhara neighbours. For instance, in 1924 a group of 30 Amhara were rounded up and massacred by a group of Oromo assailants. Around the year 1925 frequent ecological crises occurred in the vast area of Afar lowlands. As a result the Afar nomads moved large numbers of herds of livestock into the Oromo occupied areas of Ifat. This caused a chain of critical reactions, with the Oromo responding to the pressure from Afar by pushing hard on the Amhara settlements in the areas. A series of conflicts mainly between the Oromo and the Afar took place in the years 1925, 1927, 1929 and 1931. Historical accounts tell that it was in these times that people started to realize that the roots of such conflicts lay in the differences in production styles and the environmental stress associated with them. In those periods the Amhara were typically farmers; the Oromo transhumant herders and the Afar almost entirely nomadic pastoralists. Probably the most affected of these were the Oromo transhumant herders whose limit of expansion was dictated by the scarcity of land and competition from both sides. This factor may

⁵³⁴Informants (62, 80): Abébé Zärga, Hailu Dämisé (at Sakela/ Wayyu on 8/9/2010).

partially explain the gradual withdrawal of the Oromo from most parts of that zone and the contacts of Amhara with the Afar and their persistent conflicts⁵³⁵.

The other common type of conflict in the region was taking place among members of the same community, even among kin. Such conflicts were very common among the Amhara community of the region. Land issues / disputes over boundaries or inheritance of *rist* lands resulted in killings and the disruption of the peace of a locality. Mostly, male members of the families that were clashing went in for ተፋጥነት (banditry) by leaving their farms to female members of their families. The process could cause a significant loss of agricultural productivity, since most of the area was dominated by plough agriculture which needed male labour to be productive. Usually, according to the tradition of the Amhara inhabited localities of the region, the harvested crops, or crops which were ripened and ready for harvesting, were set on fire by enemies. Homes and all other properties of the peasants might be set on fire at night; in such cases nothing would be left behind, including their cattle and other flocks, because nobody could save them from destruction. Frequently, after modern guns were made available to peasants, an enemy might shoot from a distance those who were attempting to save the property from the fire.

Thus the able man would commit banditry, usually by expressing his emotions as follows:

በራይ አረሱ ይገኘ ተንበሱ፣	<i>They killed my ox; I said I am no more</i>
መረጃም ቅመኝ ይገኘ ተንበሱ፣	<i>They took my land; I said I am no more</i>
ማረጃም ወላደቻቸ ይገኘ ተንበሱ፣	<i>They took my wife; I said I am no more</i>
አቶ ይም አይጥቅም ስወ ከልተኞች፡ :	<i>No man stains his hand (with blood) unless one sees it all enough!</i>

The family history of Täfära Degufé will serve as an example for explaining the above story. His story begins with the family background regarding how they had travelled from the Mänz area to Ankobär and describes what they faced there. As narrated in his life experience, "...He [grandfather] was away from a complicated land dispute that had resulted in his killing of his adversary in Mänz. And so he had run away to avoid revenge killing and blood feud...."; moreover, he adds what his family faced after their settlement in Ankobär, as follows:

The dreadful conflagration that destroyed the house and cattle reducing them to ashes is well remembered by the descendants. The cattle were barricaded for the night near

⁵³⁵ Ahmed Hassen, pp. 76-77.

⁵³⁶ Informants (28, 27): Agmas Chäré, Alagaw Wädaj. See also similar incidents in Pawulos Gnogno, *Yä Até Menilek Däbdabéwoch*, p.34, 62, 152.

the house and my mother and aunts witnessed helplessly their dying in the flames. They have never forgotten the turmoil and noise as the cattle exploded trapped in the fire⁵³⁷.

Most of the acts of revenge by the Amhara community of the area were committed against each other: the damage they caused to standing or harvested crops remind one of the Biblical tale of Samson's foxes. The practice was common not only among the Amhara community but was also spread gradually among the Oromo community of the area because of the interaction between the two peoples over a long period of time. For this reason the following song, similar in tone to the Amharic in note 46 above, was composed.

*Maasaan Darroo lafa hinbaatu,
talbaa facaafata taati;
Tokko horee tokko hin nyaatu,
walgaggalaafata taati*⁵³⁸. *Darroo's farm won't remain a fallow, never!
flux (oil-seed) will be sown at least.
One breeds and toils in vain, for someone to eat and live on?
Never ever! That will mark our end, at most!*

In most cases, the community placed no confidence in the government for the maintenance of peace and security; instead their confidence was largely founded on the power of their relatives and weapons at their disposal. This is why they expressed their feelings in such a way.

Moreover, most of the discontent that resulted in endless conflicts within the community or the families was created during the time of inheritance after the death of a father or family leader. In certain rare cases, the lands of members who died childless or heirless or who defaulted on taxes could pass on to the *Aläqa* who might favour some of the members with additional pieces of land or punish others by refusing to grant a full share. He could also strike secret deals with powerful or influential individuals and pass on the share of the deceased or of an impoverished member of descendants group to them. There were a number of legal instruments that would provide the *Aläqa* with pretexts to carry out such actions. For instance, the claimant was a member of a group who had

⁵³⁷Täfara Degufé, *Minutes of an Ethiopian Century* (Addis Ababa, 2006), pp. 22-23;

⁵³⁸ Informants (8,6): Abäbä Dämsé, Tullu Tufa (at Sakela on 7/9/2010).

⁵³⁹ Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Balen Enwokebet*, p.40.

not pressed a claim previously, the previous owner had defaulted on taxes, and / or that the deceased member did not have heirs⁵⁴⁰.

A household's assets in land depended not only on the size of its original endowments through direct inheritance, but also on its capacity to add to them through a successful exploitation of possibilities created by the system. Inheritance could mean bloodline inheritance or a takeover. In this context, the term was used as much in its second sense as in its first sense, although the conventional rules of *rist* ownership would have permitted only the first sense, that is inheritance through the rules of *ambilinal* descent. The use of the term *wurs* to indicate takeover of land by people not actually related to the previous owner is made clear when it is employed in contrast to the term *tiwulid* (blood relationship)⁵⁴¹.

It is difficult to trace the origins of the *wurs* system in the region of study. It appears to have had a longer history than the sources available to us indicate. It was particularly widespread during and immediately after the great famine (1888-1892). There were such large numbers of people who were desperate for food and support that they readily handed over their share to those who were able to take them in. In many cases, the people who handed over their lands to the rich were themselves unable to break their dependency in subsequent years and remained in their service. Even in those cases where the *balarist* died without actually handing over their lands to the rich, the latter claimed that they had done so. A whole series of court cases, according to tradition, which ensued from this situation would subsequently led to the famine which forced many peasants to lose their land⁵⁴².

The practice of alienating land to outsiders does not appear to have been a phenomenon of the late 19th and early 20th century. It appears to have been a practice as longstanding as the *rist* system itself. More recent records show that people who had handed over their lands by way of *wurs* to non relatives were usually childless people or people who felt that they had been abandoned by their children or relatives. Such people would search for someone who would make use of their lands but also take care of them. In some cases *balarist* who owned plots of land too few to support themselves would ask a more well resourced person to take the land and provide for them too. In such cases, the person who acquired the land, called the *warash*, would agree to support the *awurash* as the person who had handed over his land for life.

⁵⁴⁰Berhanu, p .42.

⁵⁴¹Märsé, p. 38.

⁵⁴²*Ibid.*

The other very important source of *wurs* was the widespread lack of security that derived from the struggle over land among siblings, relatives or people with unequal endowments of wealth and social resources. Individuals who felt marginalized or threatened by rivals or powerful enemies would want to protect themselves or to go on the offensive through enlisting the support of another powerful person by giving up part of all their lands in return⁵⁴³. The longevity and seriousness of the practice of *wurs* is further indicated by the development of mechanisms and instruments to limit it in what is called *gädäb*. Relatives, kinsmen and members of the same ancestral group entered into agreements to prevent the alienation of land outside of their ranks, and prescribed penalties for violations. When the announcement of the transfer of land from one person to another was made, a *dabalo* (the skin of a sheep) would be posted on a pole, like a flag, by the *chikashum* (local authority)⁵⁴⁴.

Thus, conflicts because of land litigation were one of the most important reasons for intra-community conflicts that resulted in poor productivity. In concrete terms, the tenure system, particularly the *rist* system, meant a system of landholding open to endless interpretations and reinterpretations of rights, the chief manifestation of that essence being litigation. This would affect agricultural productivity for several reasons, the first being the length of time that opponents spent on litigation, which diverted manpower from agricultural activities and led to an absence of confidence about the possession of the land. In particular, the planting of perennial crops needed an extended period of such confidence. The second reason might be the venues and locations of the courts themselves in relation to the residences and occupations of the contestants. Peasants would lack skills in litigation and would be obliged to pay for both the lawyer and most probably for the judge, even for cases that ended in failure. The third reason would stem from the relative resources that the various sides in the case would be able to expend to win it. Many of the peasants sold whatever they had, yet lost both their land and their property to the lawyer; to the extent of giving their sons and daughters as servants to those who would lend them money or offer legal services⁵⁴⁵. Fourthly, sustaining extended litigation in court and winning it was a source of prestige that would overshadow the economic importance of the land. Starting from that day the individual might begin

⁵⁴³Berhanu, p. 51.

⁵⁴⁴Gäbrä Wäld, p.31.

⁵⁴⁵Informants (3, 14): Gamfur Gäbrä Mariyam and Awäqä Gobana.

to boast, or consider himself as ከንር አዋጅ: የእባባሪ ስው (a statesman, a public figure) instead of working hard on his land or managing his rural property⁵⁴⁶.

6.4. Predatory System as Consequence of Instabilities

The wars and conflicts that took place in north Shäwa throughout the period of study involved very large armies which, as indicated, were often composed of 50 000 to 100 000 men with numerous camp followers. Most of the changes caused by the conflicts and wars were not for the better but rather for the worse. Even if assumptions and practical experiences suggested that wars or conflicts resulted in more scientific innovations, such as inventing different types of weapons and increasing the productivity of farms or industries to finance the war and to feed large numbers of soldiers, the real situation on the ground in Ethiopia in general and in the region of study in particular was different. The wars and conflicts, perpetuated for centuries, resulted in diminished agricultural productivity. This was primarily because of the cultural background which affected attitudes to the deeds of the military profession. These were considered in the country, as well as in the region, as acts of bravery, regardless of other related ethical issues. Their relationship with other members of their society, mainly with the peasantry, was the worst of all. Gäbrä Hiwot strongly associates the poverty of the country with the acts of the military,

writing: “የማህበው የገዢኝን ስው በወታደር ስም ይጠናል በደባብ ይጠናል ስራ ልትና ስከበሰበስ ይጠናል፡ ማክረናው በአገልግሎት እኩል ይመጣል፡፡ አካመው ባለቸው ንብረት ሁሉ ስራት፣ ወታደር ማት በባላንና ላይ ክፍት እንደይመጣ የሚጠበቅ ማት ነው፡፡ የገዢኝን ዓይነ የባላንና ይመና በለን በንተረገመው ላክ ነው፡”⁵⁴⁷ This could be translated as: “many of the peoples of our country call themselves soldiers, but they spend their time loitering in the streets, living like parasites on the produce of the peasantry. Among the civilized societies, a soldier is someone who protects the peasant and the *gäbbar*. In our country however, we are nearer to the truth if we define the soldier as ardent enemy of the peasant”.

Another author commented that the armies seem to have considered the peasants as objects created by them, “በፍጥነው የሰራተኞቸው ይመጣል....”⁵⁴⁸. They think only of the material needs supplied by the peasants regardless of the consequences. The introduction of firearms and their distribution among these arrogant soldiers gave them greater power to harass the peasants; as one of the same authors

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid; Pawulos Gnogno, *Yä Atsé Menilek Däbedabéwoch*, pp.220, 251.

⁵⁴⁷ Gäbrä Hiwot, “Menilekna Itiyopiya” Manuscript in Kennedy Library of Addis Ababa University.

⁵⁴⁸ Afäwärq, p.3.

expresses: “ን መ ካ ጥ ቅር ወተት መለያ...”⁵⁴⁹; meaning “Bring white *nug* (extremely black oily seed) and black milk”, two impossible provisions.

Secondly, the traditional Ethiopian church education did not deal with issues associated with military training or a code of conduct⁵⁵⁰. Although the church influenced many aspects of feudal life, there was no effective means by which it could influence the army or its leaders to stop or to avert war. Instead, the Ethiopian church tended to regard the victorious groups or individuals as the “elect of God”⁵⁵¹. Thus most armies lacked such codes or rules that would cause them to be disciplined, at least in their relations with the peasants in general. They carried out acts spontaneously to gain credit in the eyes of their masters, as mentioned below:

እረሰም ጽጋዥ አገ አሰሳ ቅረቤር፤ *Ride the horse to sweat*
ነፍጋም ተከተል ቁጥር አሰሳስ፤ *Pull the trigger too deftly*
የጥንም መመሪዎች ልማቅ ይሰንጻ፤ *Shoot the arrow, tear the Zenith*
አዲስ ሊገቡ አንተ ከመርቃቸ፡፡ : than to stick your head in your breast [when you present on royal feast].

The third possible factor was that the soldiers were unpaid, which meant that they were allowed to loot whatever they required from the regions through which they passed, irrespective of whether the inhabitants were loyalists or rebels. Therefore, the effects of frequent fighting were accelerated because of acts by these myriads of soldiers that caused damage to the property of peasants. In fact, the system offered its own advantages for the chiefs or kings at the expense of the latter. As intimated, feeding or providing many of the provisions to the army was not the responsibility of the king or the chief but rather that of the peasants. The former were not concerned about producing more crops from limited farmlands⁵⁵³.

If there was nothing to plunder or the resources had become depleted, the solution was to abandon the region or extend the size of their domain/territory to incorporate other, better resourced areas. This was a common measure adopted to feed large armies. The best examples in this case are the wars of Sahelä Sillassé in the first half of the 19th century, against the Tuläma of Shäwa Méda. The process of expansion actually resulted in extensive destruction, as recorded in the writings of European travellers. Harris described that,

⁵⁴⁹*Ibid*

⁵⁵⁰R. Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia: 1800-1935* (Addis Ababa, 1968), p.550.

⁵⁵¹Mässay Käbädä.

⁵⁵²Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldämäsqal, *Zekerä Nägär*, p.247.

⁵⁵³ R. Pankhurst, “Fire-Arms in Ethiopian History...” p. 149.

Flourishing fields of wheat, barley and beans, the produce of the toil of a rebellious tribe, were ravaged and overrun by the locust hordes, and in the course of half an hour the soil being stripped of every acre of cultivation, there commenced a general scramble for the rafters and ribs of houses, of which the skeletons were presently consigned to the flames... The bright spear-blades glittered through the cloud of stifling dust that marked the course of myriads over ploughed land. Green fields and smiling meadows quickly lost their bloom under the tramp of the seed; for no cultivation was now spared, and ruin and desolation were the order of the day... far and wide the country was laid waste, and every vestige of human habitation destroyed under the torch, the flames racing among the riper barley with the speed of galloping horse⁵⁵⁴.

The same observer goes on to describe the soldiers as follows:

Trampling underfoot the fields of ripening corn, in parts half reaped, and sweeping before them the vast herds of cattle which grazed untended in every direction. In the extreme distance their destructive progress was... marked by the red flames that burst forth in turn from the thatched roofs of each invaded villages⁵⁵⁵.

When the expedition was over, Harris surveyed the entire countryside:

Over this vast expanse not a living inhabitant was now to be seen. In every direction the bloodstained ground was strewed with the slaughtered foe, around whose disfigured corpses groups of surfeited vultures flapped their foul wings, and screamed the death note. The ashes of deserted villages smoke over the scorched and blackened plain. Ripe crops, which the morning before had gladdened the heart of the cultivator – now no more – were levelled to ground. Flocks of sheep, untended by the shepherd, strayed over the lone meadow; and the bands of howling dogs wondered up and down in fruitless quest of their lost masters. A single day had reduced to wilderness the rich and flourishing vale of Gär mama, including the dark forests of Finfiné, which for years had slept in peace; and their late numerous and unsuspecting population had in a few hours been swept off from the face of the earth⁵⁵⁶.

The army then began to return, “Flames and plunder again marking the track of these locusts. The looting was considerable.” Harris writes that “for miles and miles the road was lined with dusty and way worn warriors laden with spoils: flocks and herds, donkeys, mules and horses, honeycombs, poultry, household utensils and farming gear, with captive women children mingled with me at arms.” Such campaigns often culminated in the capture of immense booty⁵⁵⁷. One French traveller records that on one occasion the Shäwan army carried off 87,000 head of cattle⁵⁵⁸. Another British traveller wrote an account that mentioned the seizure of 12,000 head, while Harris tells of one

⁵⁵⁴Harris, Vol. II, pp.180-182.

⁵⁵⁵*Ibid*, p. 190.

⁵⁵⁶*Ibid*, pp. 199-200

⁵⁵⁷*Ibid*, p.200.

⁵⁵⁸R. Pankhurst, “The Ethiopian Army of Former Times”, p.146.

operation in which 43, 000 cattle were taken and another in which the Shäwan king claimed to have seized 37,042⁵⁵⁹.

The problem of the destructive nature of the undisciplined soldiers was also severe during the time of Menilek's coronation as emperor, as with previous periods in Ethiopian history. To worsen the matter, the land was impoverished and the peasants could therefore scarcely feed themselves let alone the soldiers. Large bands of unpaid but virtually professional soldiers who had left their lands during the previous period of fighting were, however, in existence, for they had little by little increased and multiplied till they had become out of proportion to the wants of a peaceful country. Unfortunately, there was a need for further men who would have to be mobilized to fight against the enemy. So, as is mentioned frequently, armies were usually predators living off their lords so as to raid enemies for booty. The lords could retain large numbers of armies, for they did not provide them with many of their needs, as mentioned. Many observers agreed that Menilek's conquest of the region south of Shäwa had the aim, among others, of feeding his expanding army. "Feeding" in this case means more than simply supplying with life necessities. More importantly, the conquest gave Menilek those resources which his predecessors and contemporaries so critically lacked⁵⁶⁰.

There were also moves to create war for the purpose of raiding; even if the king might not wish to spend much of his time in battle, his armies might desire to. That traditional assumption, "እርዳታ ማረጋገጫ ቅዱስ ቅዱስ" (bring us war, if there is no war there is no booty) seems the result of this mentality⁵⁶¹. The continuous wars or conflicts resulted in frequent abandoning of one's village and farms. No property or wealth was inherited by children from their parents. It is natural that land would become impoverished from generation to generation. Let alone other property, in such a state of war the son had no opportunity to inherit the village of his father. Even the latter might shift his residence several times within his life span. The same process would be continued during the life span of the next generation⁵⁶². In particular, houses or families which were isolated from the clustered villages were victims not only of soldiers but also bandits or robbers who used the turmoil

⁵⁵⁹Harris. Vol. II, pp. 216, 255; Vol.III, pp. 253, 368.

⁵⁶⁰S. Pausewang, "Land, Market and Rural Society in Ethiopia: 1840-1976" in *Fifth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Chicago, 1977), p. 703.

⁵⁶¹Täklä Tsadiq Mäkuria, *Yägragn Ahmäd Wärära* (Addis Ababa, 1966 E.C), pp.161-166.

⁵⁶²Informants (8,30,32): Abäbä Dämisé, Hailu Dämisé, Nädhi Zärga.

as an opportunity⁵⁶³. In such cases, peasants were forced to construct their homes near the villages of their kin, even those with whom there was acrimony over the ancestral inheritance⁵⁶⁴.

Broadly speaking, the history of north Shäwa during the period under discussion is an account not only of the victories and defeats with which the chronicle is mostly concerned, but also of the economic and social consequences of these wars and conflicts for peasants, the bloodshed, the ravaging of fertile lands, the butchering of flocks of cattle, the destruction of towns and villages, and the interruption of internal and external trade. The frequent destruction of property resulted in famines which led in turn to outbreaks of epidemics and a significant reduction of population in the areas most affected. Fighting in and around towns often had an almost permanent effect in decimating their population and preventing urban development. Fear of depredations by soldiers created an atmosphere of insecurity and militated against improvements in agriculture, animal husbandry and housing, as any sign of prosperity merely increased the risk of looting⁵⁶⁵.

A further type of conflict which had a negative outcome for the life of peasants was that of *shifenet* (banditry). It was the only method to achieve the highest position or rank which could not be achieved by means of peace. The area being studied was hospitable to such individuals because of a number of its inaccessible localities. Since these *shifetas* depended either on traders or peasants, it may even be assumed that the coming of modern transportation and construction of bridges on some of these rivers did not please some such individuals:

አዲስ አበባ የፋይ ማከበድ; *They did burn Adabay and its forest*
አዲስ አበባ አዲስ ማከበድ; *They did burn Jäma and its forest*
ከዚሁ ወንደም የማስላወድ⁵⁶⁶: : *Of more significance than a brother indolent.*

Under such circumstances, the people were victims of two opposite forces; on the one hand the *shifeta* forced them to provide him and his followers with all their necessities while on the other the government also attempted to collect tributes. The peasants might be punished for being supporters

⁵⁶³Informants (31,33, 34): Mägäretu Dämisé, Fäläkach Dämisé, Jifaré Dadhi. Mägäretu Dämisé explained how her grandfather Gämäda had left his land and village at Abichu in Gamo Däyi parish, a few kilometers from the town of Mändia, for Wayuu-Dännäba where her father Dämisé had his home. The land Gämäda left behind was given to the church; it became *gäbüz* land.

⁵⁶⁴Informant Mägäretu Dämisé offered a further explanation as to how her father Dämisé repeated the life style of his father and lost the land his father Gämäda purchased for him. The land was termed *Täratand* (one-fourth). The village there which was founded by Gämäda and his son was lost by Dämisé and he was forced to build a hut close to his remote relatives because of the recurrent plundering of his property by soldiers on the eve of the Italian invasion.

⁵⁶⁵R. Pankhurst, "The Ethiopian Army of Former Times", p. 143.

⁵⁶⁶Informants (25,3): Dametäw Gäbrä Mariyam, Gamfur Gäbrä Mariyam; this is also reproduced in a fictional narrative about patriotic resistance 1936-1941 in the area entitled "Adabay".

of *shifta* or their villages or farms might become battlegrounds or their cattle were looted by either of the two. Generally, the cruelty of the soldiers was not less than that of *shifta*; hence one of the European travellers, Parkyns, as quoted in Pankhurst remarks: “The troops in Abyssinia are for the most part collected from among the worst of the people, who prefer idleness in peace and plundering their neighbors in war to the more honest but less exciting occupation of agriculture.”⁵⁶⁷.

An additional important reason was the fact that the absence of modern transportation resulted in the army travelling on foot, which exposed the peasants to the activities of the army⁵⁶⁸. The armies were dependent on the peasants not only for their personal provisions but also let their pack animals graze on their farms. Even during times of peace the effect of any passing army was that villages on the line of travel and in its neighbourhood were automatically raided and left in a most miserable condition. The troops’ inclination to loot was referred to by an Ethiopian Chief, who, talking to a British officer in 1900, declared, “you know our soldiers are bad men and when we come to a large village, they just fire a few shots, on which the natives run away, and all their grain is then brought in to my camp.”⁵⁶⁹. Menilek was fully aware of the issue, and attempted to take action against certain “unjust” deeds of soldiers⁵⁷⁰. The first of these measures was taken in October, 1892. Accordingly he issued a proclamation forbidding the soldiers from quartering themselves on private persons and ordering the peasants to contribute a special tax for the upkeep of the army⁵⁷¹. In fact, the effect of this decree was very insignificant, as discussed in other chapters of this study.

A further related result of the turmoil which resulted in poor agricultural productivity was, as indicated, the absence of secure possession of lands. One’s land, including *rist* particularly, could easily be confiscated by powerful individuals and given to their other supporters⁵⁷².

Famine comprised another glaring result of wars and conflicts which undermined productivity. Each war was followed by famine because there was no time or opportunity to cultivate land.

It is frequently mentioned throughout this study that powerful princes and nobles ruled regions or localities and quarrelled with each other to achieve supremacy. The majority of the population,

⁵⁶⁷R. Pankhurst, “Ethiopian Army of Former Times”, p. 119.

⁵⁶⁸R. A. Caulk, “Armies as Predators: Soldiers and Peasants in Ethiopia c. 1850-1935” in *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* Vol.XI. No. III (Addis Ababa, 1978), p. 457.

⁵⁶⁹R. Pankhurst, “Ethiopian Army of Former Times”, p.159.

⁵⁷⁰Imru Haylä Sillassé, *Kayähutena kämastawsäw* (Addis Ababa, 2009), p.139; Täklä Hawariat Täklä Mariam, p.13.

⁵⁷¹Gäbrä Sillassé.

⁵⁷²Sirak Fiqdä Sillassie, “Yädäjazmach Abba wuqaw yäheyiwot tarik”, Manuscript (IES, 400, 1931 E.C.),p. 12.

made up of peasants (farmers and herders), lived a difficult life, hardly better than that of indentured servants. They were at the mercy of the will and whims of the nobility and their soldiers. While the nobles fought amongst themselves and the priests engaged in over-refined theological disputes, the social order was sustained by the peasantry, practically the only productive class in society. Through the combination of a long-established plough agriculture and animal husbandry, the peasants supported the whole social edifice. However, the peasants were at the mercy of warring nobles and their soldiers who went on raids to fill their coffers. As mentioned, the most severe famine which brought many hardships and claimed the life of many peasants was what was referred to as the “Great Famine” in Ethiopian history, from 1888 to 1892. Although certain interrelated factors such as the failure of the rains and the hot weather that scorched many hectares of crops affected peasant life, the fundamental reason for its crippling was the perpetuation of conflicts⁵⁷³.

The concentration of considerable numbers of soldiers in the north also contributed to the lessening of the available food supply. As mentioned above, a large number of soldiers were repeatedly crossing the Shäwan region. The overburdened peasants were forced to feed the soldiers from the limited supplies they had left after the failed crop season. The loss of cattle, especially oxen that were used for ploughing, brought agricultural activity to a halt, paralyzing and devastating the national economy by depleting capital (oxen and seed). The large number of cattle carcasses on the land created a fertile ground for unhygienic conditions and infectious diseases. Smallpox, typhus, cholera and influenza epidemics decimated the population⁵⁷⁴.

These diseases are all groups of infectious diseases caused by microorganisms and frequently associated with war and famine. The malnourished and overworked bodies of the peasants were unable to combat the combination of hunger and disease. According to Dägäfu, it is estimated that one third of the population perished from these causes. The unusually great numbers of animal carcasses and human bodies brought vultures and wild animals out of the forest. The weak were obliged to fight hunger, illness, hyenas, lions, and leopards and found themselves at the losing end.

The drought that crippled the peasants also affected the nobility. The price of food rose considerably and rapidly, rendering food unattainable. The few that possessed the means to purchase it found themselves unable to obtain as much as they wanted. Emperor Menilek II ordered that those who were hoarding crops should bring these to the market or lose all when he sent his soldiers. This

⁵⁷³ *Berähanena Sälam*, “Awaj”, October 24, 1928

⁵⁷⁴ R. Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia*, p.623.

mandate resulted in stabilizing the price of food. He opened his palace stores and started to feed masses of his hungry people. Unlike any emperor before and after him, he laboured in the fields among his people to encourage the use of hoes, and tilled the dry soil⁵⁷⁵. Following his example, the nobility participated in manual labour with the able bodied peasants and averted a complete decimation of the population.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Chapter Seven

7. “Natural⁵⁷⁶” Challenges to Peasants’ Productivity

The poverty of north Shäwan peasants became an unfortunate situation despite potential prosperity. As discussed in the second chapter of this study, the region was initially attractive and theoretically fertile and productive. However, famines due to crop failure, invasion of locusts, attacks on crops by pests, the recurrent absence or death of oxen used for ploughing, depredations on peasants’ property by troops and or destruction resulting from wars, were the actual, frequent historical experiences of Shäwan peasants⁵⁷⁷. The facilities of the state were too rudimentary to provide assistance to the famine-stricken except in the vicinity of the palace and provincial centres, where such relief was made available in a very traditional manner. Even these activities were considered not as acts of rehabilitation or the usual responsibilities of the state in such hard times but as acts of almsgiving carried out simply because of the kindness of the emperor, his officials and other nobles⁵⁷⁸. Besides the devastations mentioned above, the absence of a market economy and transport facilities led to a scenario where no region aspired to produce surpluses. The problems of communication in such a mountainous region were likewise very severe⁵⁷⁹.

In the context of Ethiopian culture, food crises, food insecurities, famines or droughts or other related difficulties are not the result of human activities, nor do they have anything to do with society or any political and socio-economic systems⁵⁸⁰. All of them are “Punishments of God” resulting from sin, and it is only a “Merciful God” that averts the hardship⁵⁸¹.

⁵⁷⁶The term “natural” is used here from the peasants’ point of view.

⁵⁷⁷Märsé Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, *Tizitayé: selärasé Yämastawsew: 1891-1923* (Addis Ababa, 2010), p.20. The challenge is emphasized also in *Gedel Täklä Haymanot* and has been narrated as follows: “...ዳቃመዣር-ርቃም ጥቂት ጥቂት የአርባ ስራ ይመሩ፣ በመሰጠ አገር ከፌ የአለት የመብት አዲሸናቸው፣ ነውን ስንከርት ይቻቻ ተከለ፡፡ሽከኩ መግ ይንፃር ይርት ለለቻቃም አትከልት የሚያጠሩ ሁሉ አስተኛነትው፡፡ ይበረ አስቦ ገና የሚረበኩ ነበቸና፡፡”; “the disciples began minor agricultural activities for their daily food; they began to plant cabbage, onion, potato and sow beans in between. But they encountered problems caused by by wild animals like apes, monkeys, and others since Däbrä Asabo was still a desert...”, p.205.

⁵⁷⁸Gäbrä Sillasé Wäldä Arägay, *Tarikä Zämänä Zä Daghmawi Menilik Negusa Nägäst ZäItiyopia* (Addis Ababa, 1967).

⁵⁷⁹R. Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia: 1800-1935* (Addis Ababa, 1968), p. 216.

⁵⁸⁰Gäbrä Hiwot Baikädagn, *Mengistena Yähezeb Astädadär* (Addis Ababa, 1925).

⁵⁸¹Gäbrä Sillasé, Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär* (Addis Ababa, 1972), p.502.

These calamities are simply the price of sin and the victims accept it as such. Another point is that, since both government and people perceive such challenges as a special act of God, nobody is held responsible for these. Quite disturbingly, for the government this perception of famine, droughts and other food related crises served as a convenient and successful means of disclaiming its responsibility and obligation to avert the situation⁵⁸². The same perception caused the people to accept suffering and death with peace and self-control in order that “the worst will not come” “የበኩ አቶምኑ! ”

7.1. Monkeys, Locusts and other Pests

In the region, many types of pests posed challenges to the peasants during their agricultural activities, throughout the year or cycle of production. Some of them attacked the crops newly sown in the soil, others consumed the seedlings and still others damaged the ripened crops. To worsen the matter, there were also organisms, besides these insects, which brought different diseases to the crop and affected productivity. Knowing all these challenges, the peasants concluded their daily ploughing and sowing of seeds by pleas such as: “ከዥና አእኑ አብቃና” in Amharic or “Hambaaf simbraa wajjin walini gayi nusori” in Afan Oromo, simply meaning, “[God may You] Let us live and eat the fruit with the birds and peoples!”⁵⁸³

These pleas indicate that no matter the extent to which the peasants toiled and made various efforts for increasing productivity, according to their perceptions, they could not fully prevent their farms from pests. Another related well known saying is also more expressive of the peasants’ life in Shäwa. Regardless of their endeavours, they could not eat the first ripened fruit of the crop. It would be subjected either to pests or related challenges, hence: “ቀድሚ የፋይና ማኅላ ወይ አዥና አልፋም ለወንታና”⁵⁸⁴; “The sorghum that ripened first is either for birds or for sling!” The birds consume the peasants’ sorghum when it ripens. Therefore, the latter have to guard their farms by using slings. Hence, the sorghum that ripens might be crushed by a stone thrown from the sling.

Harvesting and storing the products safely by themselves constituted only some of the challenges, since different types of insects and pests were also other difficulties for which there was no total solution. The farmers’ attempts could only decrease the risks to some extent. For this reason Mahetämä Sillassé, who had graduated in Agriculture from one of the European

⁵⁸²Ibid.

⁵⁸³Informants (14, 9): Awäqä Gobana, Asfaw Wäldä Guyorgis and others.

⁵⁸⁴Ibid.

institutions before the Italo-Ethiopian war (1935-1941), took up the problem seriously and tried to educate those who were concerned about or interested in agriculture while he was working in the Ministry of Agriculture during the post liberation period. His initial attempts took the form of writing books on agriculture, which were the first of their type. All of his experiences in this case stemmed from the situation of the pre-war period. Supplementing these by his modern education, he took most of his examples from Shäwa, mainly Bulga, his birthplace. The first text, “ጥበብ ከረቻት”, “Agricultural Skills”⁵⁸⁵, was written immediately after the restoration of the government and published almost a decade later, while the second “በዕለ ከረቻት”, “Wealth from Agriculture”⁵⁸⁶, was similarly published after another decade. But, as noted, all his discussions were based on the pre-war period.

The other writers, particularly those who contributed articles to the newspaper *Berähanena Sälam*, accorded due emphasis to the problem of locust invasion except in rare cases. For instance, one contributor wrote on how to protect plants from moths in his item titled “Enemies of Crops”⁵⁸⁷. In fact, the locust was one of the peasants’ most deadly enemies, and a major factor that depressed their standard of living. Foreigners who visited Shäwa in the middle and the second half of the 19th century recorded that the first sign of the locusts’ approach was a noise resembling the buzz of many swarms of bees rapidly growing in intensity, and resembling heavy cloud at some distance. It could entirely hide the sky and neighbouring mountains from view. As the insects approached, the peasants were terrified and every eye was filled with weeping⁵⁸⁸. Krapf reported from Shäwa in 1840 that fields were covered by an immense swarm of locusts, so they could see neither the sun nor the mountain around. In the following year Harris observed clouds of insects in the region around Awash⁵⁸⁹.

Several outbreaks of locust and caterpillars invaded the region in unusually high numbers during the 20th century. The insects devastated anything they landed on; nothing was left of the crop. The heavily populated farmlands of the region frequently suffered from these invasions. For instance, at the end of the 19th century, the effects were worsened because the weather had

⁵⁸⁵ Mahetämä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Tebäbü Gerahit* (Addis Ababa, 1952), p. 18.

⁵⁸⁶ Mahetämä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Be'elä Gerahit* (Addis Ababa, 1967), pp. 1-22.

⁵⁸⁷ “Selä ehili tälat” in *Berehanena Sälam* weekly newspaper, *Nähasé*, 2,1921 E.C. (August, 1929)

⁵⁸⁸ R. Pankhurst, *Social History of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 1990), p.146.

⁵⁸⁹ C.W Isenberg and J.L. Krapf, p. 196; W.C. Harris, *The High Land of Aethiopia* Vol. I (London, 1844), p. 308.

become unusually hot. Thus, an immense influx of locusts and caterpillars seems to have occurred at about the beginning of 1889 and at the end of September 1907⁵⁹⁰.

The 1910s, 1920s and 1930s E. C. (the first three decades of the 20th century) saw many pages of *Berähanena Sälam* devoted to the discussion of a series of locust invasions in the country. The districts or localities frequently mentioned in the articles as well as in the news were Sälalé (most likely including Märhabété), Menjar, Shänkora and Ankobär, which are located in the area of study. Even if they were not in a position to consume it, the peasants of these districts were producers of the Ethiopian staple food crop *téf*, at least at local level⁵⁹¹. The destruction of this crop by the locust invasion was a significant loss not only for its producers but also for the nobility who consumed the best quality *téf*, about which Shäwan peasants sang as follows: “የጥቅናት ከጥቅ ሙኅ የጥቅናት የጥቅ”; “the *téf* from Minjar which serves as lunch for the nobilities”. There is also a tradition among Shäwa peasants which holds that a poor peasant who had been accustomed to consuming *injära* (bread) made of other crops was given a chance to be served *injära* made of *téf* while he was sitting nearby a gate of his hut and said: “ergaa durii warri gofttolii dhadhan gaadatti signatuu ani hara'a dobbidhan karrarratti siargadhee...⁵⁹³”; “previously you were eaten by masters with best sup [butter] but today I am eating you with dobbi [food made of wild plant].”

One of the contributors to the newspaper mentioned above had discussed his concern and the tentative technique to lessen the danger or do away with it before the locusts were able to fly and damage all the property of the peasants (አዲስ የኢትዮጵያ ከንቀጽ). He explained how the entire economy or life of the people could be affected because of such an invasion, which resulted in damage to crops, woods and animal pasture. Even the milk of cows that grazed grass contaminated by the locust could not be consumed. For this reason the contributor mentioned expressed his experience as:

⁵⁹⁰R. Pankhurst, *Social History of Ethiopia*, pp.146, 147; Pawulos Gnogno, *Yä Até Menilek Däbdabéwoch*, pp.36, 37.

⁵⁹¹“Yä anebäta adäga bä Itiyopiya” in *Berähanena Sälam*, October 29, 1931.

⁵⁹²Informants (100,101): Taddässä Täsäma; Gétachaw Negusé and others (at Sakela on 19/9/2010).

⁵⁹³Informants (10, 11): Gété Arädo, Askalä Bushé (at Sakela on 7/9/2009).

ይህ ከኩ አዎስ ለሰውና ለእንሰሳ የሚሆን ቅድመ እና የዚህ የበላይ እንዲሆን ወደ
ታኩ ጥቃት እንዳደርሱ ተመክቸ፡፡ የእትጥቃዎች ሁዝብ ሆኖ በማቻቻዎች በከል ያለው ጥቃቻቸን
የተያዙ ወይም የተሰራ ነው ከዚህ እንዲ ጥቃቻቸን በልኩከል የቅረው ሆኖ ይለፍከለል ስኩ እንዲ
ሰላሆነ የኩዎች ሰር የሂሳታቸን መጠረት ይገባል፡፡ ከመቻት የጥናገኘዎን አሁንም የቃጥ የሚሆን
ለከብያቸቸን የሚሆን ሰር ለበት የሚሆን እንዲሁ ለእንበት ምግባር የሆነ የሚሆን ሰላም ጥቃቻቸን
ተያዙ መጥሩት ነው፡፡⁵⁹⁴

If this evil pest consumed all the foods of men and animals, it resulted in a big damage. You! The people of Ethiopia don't you see that all of our advantages are interwoven? If one of them is damaged all the rest will be in danger because for all the base is one, that is economy. If the crops we produce from our land for food, grasses for cattle, woods to construct our home are consumed by the locust, all of our advantages are damaged at once.

Other pests, monkeys, mammals and birds, also seized their share of farm produce, especially before the introduction of modern defensive tools widely used to hunt them or scare them off. The introduction of fire-arms resulted in at least the depletion in numbers of big game, not mainly because of the peasants hunting them, but rather because of the hunting activities of the soldiers and members of the nobility who possessed guns. In many areas, where farms were located far from villages, crops were frequently devastated by birds as well as by such animals as wild birds, antelopes, porcupines, monkeys, rats and mice⁵⁹⁵. Pearce, discussing this phenomenon, makes the following comments without understanding the difficulties of peasants in being alert and confident enough to perform every agricultural activity. He asserted that one third of their crop was wasted through neglect and laziness; since birds were numbered in millions all over the country, and yet no one attempted to destroy them⁵⁹⁶. However, this situation might well not have been the result of laziness; contrary to his comments, the children of peasants in the northern part of north Shäwa spent most of their time keeping these animals from the farms. Not only in the remote past: this duty of youngsters is still one of the critical issues in schooling them even at present⁵⁹⁷.

The inhabitants were indeed often engaged in regular conflict with pests; when the crops were ripening high platforms would be erected in the fields so as to keep an eye on the fields; fires would also sometimes be lit, and men and boys would stay up at night with slings: “በለለት

⁵⁹⁴Bäkälä Tachblé, “Yä anebäta adäga” in *Berähanena Sälam*, September 17, 1931.

⁵⁹⁵Mahetämä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Be'ele Gerahit*, p. 69.

⁵⁹⁶As quoted in Pankhurst, *Social History of Ethiopia*, p. 147.

⁵⁹⁷Informants: Awäqä Gobana, Asfaw Wäldä Giyorgis and others.

ቅራቱን ስርቶ አንቃልኩን አጥቶ ወንቃቄን ከርባም መጠናንም ለቁጥ ለመንጠናና ይርት አሳማዎን ህይናዚ ሲል የኝጋል”⁵⁹⁸; “He [a peasant] constructed a platform, prepared a sling, collected pieces of gravel, and tossed [these] against pigs and porcupine to keep them from his farm, spending [a] sleepless night” ran one of the most valuable observations of the enlightened Ethiopian individuals of the time, who described the labours and difficulties of peasants in *Berähanena Sälam*. Therefore, the peasants suffered grievously from the depredations of various pests, including monkeys and birds. Incursions by the former were particularly serious at the beginning of the rains when fields farthest from the villages were frequently damaged by these animals, which were very numerous near the mountains. They were at times extremely brazen, and on different occasions a crowd of them drove the peasantry from their fields. The beasts were only repulsed when reinforcements arrived from a nearby village, and even then, seeing that these had no guns, the animals retired, but slowly. The larger portion of Shäwa Méda alone was exempted from these intruders.

7.2. Land Degradations and Uncertain Weather

Land degradation is defined by scholars from the disciplines of geography, development studies, environmental studies and other related fields as a temporary or permanent decline in the productive capacity of land. Such degradation is a potential problem for environmental management, and has significantly contributed to the low yields of crops and livestock⁵⁹⁹. This type of degradation, either natural or induced by humans, has been a continuous process. There were major natural, political and socio-economic factors responsible for the degradation of land resources, including soil. These multiple interacting forces could be triggered by various processes. However, the most fundamental one was population growth which resulted in increased human interventions; for instance in the form of clearing woodlands and forests, unsustainable arable farming techniques, the use of dung for fuel, the use of crop residues for fuel, construction material and animal fodder, overstocking of grazing lands and so on⁶⁰⁰.

⁵⁹⁸“Itiyopiya? Itiyopiyas däg näbäräch, näbäräch bicham ayidäl, maläfiya bähonäch” in *Berähanena Sälam, Genebot*, 8, 1921 E.C (May, 1929).

⁵⁹⁹Bezuayähu Täfära et al, “Nature and Causes of Land Degradation in the Oromiya Region: A Review” in *Socio- economic and Policy Research Working Paper 36* (Addis Ababa: IIRI, 2002), p.5.

⁶⁰⁰L.Berry, J. Olson, and D. Campbell, *Assessing the Extent, Cost and Impact of Land Degradation at the National Level: Findings and Lessons Learned from Seven Pilot Case Studies* (Global Mechanism and the World Bank, 2003), p. 13.

The following are some of the widespread factors that contributed in this respect. In fact, they were also the result of the transformation of the larger part of Shäwa to farmlands and the intensive cultivation of the Amhara dominated localities. The primary factor, according to environmentalists, was the modification in land use and pressure on land resources due to a variety of factors such as altered fallow periods, adoption of new techniques, altered grazing patterns, and cultivation on marginal lands. As farming land expanded, changes took place in cropping patterns and the crop livestock mix. Most parts of north Shäwan lands which had been accommodating people for a relatively long period of time in terms of a pastoral or semi-pastoral way of life, could not do so after they were altered entirely into farmland and ploughed without fallow periods being implemented. Comparatively, this way of farming resulted in more serious soil erosion than in the pastoral or semi-pastoral economy. Soil erosion was followed by expanding or incorporating more lands into farmland. As the region was exposed to foreign items or accessed through long distance trade routes, economic changes took place in several localities.

The third and very common factor causing land degradation was population growth and migration. The movement of the Amhara community from the *qolla* districts to Shäwa Méda in the 19th century was one of the manifestations of this process. The dramatic growth in the number and size of towns resulted in increasing demands for rural resources, such as food and wood fuel. This was not followed by the parallel emergence of a productive rural economy, which in turn led to serious pressure on land resources throughout the 19th century. As was discussed in the second chapter of this study, the second half of the 19th century was characterized by persistent shifts in the localities of towns or settlements or the foundation of new ones, which resulted in excessive use of land resources. New governmental and institutional frameworks also emerged, including changes in land tenure structures, mainly in many parts of Shäwa Méda, ranging from the 18th century to the first decade of the 20th century when the tenure system was modified several times, as noted earlier. This also subjected the land resources to devastation or misuse because of tenure uncertainty.

The problem of unpredictable weather was recurrent in the history of the region and the country in general. The region was dominated by rainfall dependent agriculture, which was more exposed to weather related failures than agriculture that was irrigation dependent. In north Shäwa there were about three different farming zones, for which three types of agricultural seasons were

needed. In fact recently, the differences were lessened because of the gradual scarcity of rain in the month of April and May. The first zone comprised the *qolla* districts which produced different but related kinds of maize, sorghum and *téf* and had their sowing season in April and May. The second was the *weina Däga* or the transitional zone, where the sowing season ran from the middle of June to August. The third zone consisted of the highland or *Däga* districts where farming took place during the *Bäleg* season, beginning from March. Those in *Däga* and *weina Däga* shared some practices and farmers performed similar agricultural activities in both seasons. As mentioned above, all of them suffered climatic uncertainty. For instance, the *qolla* districts frequently faced the late arrival or absence of enough rain during the sowing months in April and May. The second group of districts encountered excessive rain which resulted in failure and flooding of farms in the months of August and July, as well as excessive cold in the month of October. Moreover, leguminous crops were attacked frequently by different types of worms. The third category of districts suffered problems such as the absence or late falling of enough rain at the beginning of the sowing season, and the arrival of heavy summer rain before harvesting. This resulted in the spoiling of crops by rain which forced the farmers to protect them from the moisture, and to wait for two months before trashing and consuming some of the leguminous crops little by little in the summer season, when the scarcity of food was serious among peasants of north Shäwa⁶⁰¹. Therefore, owing to all these challenges the Shäwan peasants could not be certain about the results of their toil on their farms.

Generally, crop failure because of different weather related reasons was frequent in the agricultural history of the country in general and the region in particular. It was apparently because of this reason that the government of Ethiopia was forced to issue the following statement, both as psychological support and a solution for the future in the second decade of the 20th century:

“በለፈው ከመን ስብሰ መታጥት ስናዘን ይችላል በንድርም ብዚው እንዳማናው ለመሆን የማቅሰን ህናልና እናን
ስለዳርቁም ወደ እንዲሸበር እኩን፣ መስጥም እየወጣሁ እኩል ነወ….”⁶⁰²; “While we are mourning because of last year’s crop failure, this year also seems the same, now pray so that the drought may end and sow seeds by using irrigation…”.

⁶⁰¹Pawulos Gnogno, *Yä Até Menilek Däbdabéwoch*, p. 270; Informants: Awäqä Gobana, Asfaw Wäldä Giyorgis and others.

⁶⁰²The Government of Ethiopia, “Awaj” in *Berähanena Sälam, Mägabit 8*, 1920 E.C (March, 19280); Pawulos, p.142.

Deforestation caused very serious damage to the region of Shäwa during these two centuries and its effects began to be felt clearly by the Shäwan court itself during the last decades of the 19th century. It was one of the major factors that forced the court to leave north Shäwa and move to the more afforested land of the central Shäwan hills/mountains⁶⁰³. It is clear that as the population increased, woodland would be converted to cultivation, and the use of dung for fuel would become more significant. This hindered the natural cycle of adding nutrients from the animals to their environment; in turn affecting the fertility of the soil. Crop residues began to be used for fuel, animal fodder and construction materials, particularly at the upper elevations of the highlands. Thus smaller quantities of residues from the soil entered into the natural cycle. Moreover, the cool temperatures of the highland hindered fast decay or decomposition of the few materials left over, according to the experiences of foreign observers and agricultural experts⁶⁰⁴.

Deforestation which led to land degradation took place in North Shäwa from the 18th century because of the settlement of Amhara communities in Ifat and Shäwa Méda. Thereafter it was accelerated owing to the following inter-related reasons, one being that the trees of the region were slow growing; when cut down, it took many years for them to be replaced. On top of this, the inhabitants of the region consumed large quantities of both firewood and timber, and felled the trees without replanting for the future. Their method of using wood was also uneconomical or unwise; doors and other wooden materials were crudely made of massive flat timbers in the absence of a saw. Building a single hut/ home would consume an immense amount of wood. There was also a need for the construction of several houses even for a single household during its existence because of such reasons as the lack of durability of the structures, the frequent wars and conflicts that forced the families to leave their villages and obliged them to settle again, fire damage caused accidentally or intentionally when their enemies torched their houses and the like⁶⁰⁵.

Iron working and other related activities were practiced widely in north Shäwa, also beginning from the time of the settlement of Amhara communities in the larger part of the region. The energy used for all these local industries was obtained from charcoal. Thus, charcoal burning was another important economic activity in the region which also led to heavy wood consumption. European travellers who were in the region in 1840s gave accounts of the process

⁶⁰³ *Ibid*, p.234.

⁶⁰⁴ Berry, J. Olson, and D. Campbell, pp.13-14.

⁶⁰⁵ Informants (32,30): Nädhí Zärga, Hailu Dämisé and others.

of iron working and the excessive charcoal which smiths were using for melting iron. One of them reported that in the 1870s the great forest of Shäwa had been completely destroyed for this purpose, 1000 kilos of wood being burnt to produce 10 kilos of charcoal⁶⁰⁶.

Finally, as indicated in the second chapter of this study, transformation of territory to farmlands was effected through clearing bush and woodlands. Indeed, the greatest destruction seems to have taken place due to burning as a means of clearing bush and woods to expand farms. As a result, by the end of the 19th century, the government of Ethiopia, which had had its seat of power in central Shäwa a decade previously, faced a great scarcity of wood and was obliged to move its capital to the better resourced areas of Addis Aläm. However, the introduction of the fast growing eucalyptus tree in 1894/95 seems to have solved the problem⁶⁰⁷.

The above practices resulted in the deforestation of north Shäwa, at least by the last quarter of the 19th century. The Ankobär area became a timberless plain, destitute of trees and even bushes. The Shäwa Méda, says Johnston, was poorly wooded. The French scientific missions report indicated that around Angoläla, trees were rare and one might see none, and that between Angoläla and Finfiné the country was completely devoid of trees. Wylde, describing an expedition in northern Shäwa at the turn of the century, wrote that “on five occasions only did we procure fire wood... and then only in such small quantities that as soon as the dinner was cooked the fire had to be carried on with semi-dried animal droppings”⁶⁰⁸. The situation at Menilek’s capital Entoto (Dildila) was no less serious. The site of the future capital Addis Ababa, then known as Finfiné, was however, moderately well forested in the first part of the 19th century. The French scientific mission found the hills covered with junipers and olive trees. A generation later the missionaries observed that in 1868 trees were still more plentiful there than elsewhere in Central Shäwa (present day site of Addis Ababa). The usual deforestation, however, soon occurred. And twenty years later in 1886 it was reported that a few huge trunks of junipers and olives could be seen at Finfiné. After the establishment of Addis Ababa the whole area was exhausted due to the demand for timber and firewood, which in turn resulted in an acute shortage of wood⁶⁰⁹.

⁶⁰⁶ R. Pankhurst, *Economic History*, pp.243-244.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*; the quotation is adopted from Pankhurst not from the original.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

Besides deforestation, as already mentioned, another factor contributing to land infertility was that most arable areas in the highlands were covered with cereal crops, with wheat and barley on the higher ground and *téf*, sorghum and maize at the lower elevations. According to environmentalists, all these crops leave bare areas of soil during some or all of the growing season, exposing soil to erosion. Very minor portions of the cultivated land in the region were covered with perennial crops such as oilseeds, fruit trees and cotton. Moreover, pulses also covered a very small percentage of the cultivated land in the region⁶¹⁰. The annual crops were planted mainly after the rain began, allowing early rain to directly affect the soil, contributing to high erosion levels. Additionally, as the population grew marginal lands were cultivated. In particular, the escarpments facing the lowlands or on the sides of cliffs began to be cultivated only for a year or two but were then left barren, or exposed the underlying rock without any soil to grow any plants. A further result of population growth was the reduction in fallow periods: in some areas nearly from seven to five per annum, even to three or a shorter rotation⁶¹¹.

A further related problem with respect to soil degradation was overgrazing of pasturelands, which altered grassland from comprising high cover perennial species to low cover annual species, and from more palatable to less palatable species. Expansion of farmlands had not only led to forest or bush clearing and burning, but also restricted the area for grazing. Due to the shortage of grazing lands, croplands are usually used for uncontrolled grazing immediately after crop harvesting. Livestock roaming, feeding on weeds and grass, also created stresses on agricultural lands⁶¹². Both croplands and pastures were vulnerable to erosion but croplands all the more so, because the soil was repeatedly tilled and left without a protective cover of vegetation. The lands which had previously been used only for pasture began to be cultivated; the livestock were limited to the remaining land, which resulted in over-grazing. Specifically when Shäwa Méda was “resettled” by the peoples from the nearby *qolla* districts, many areas were transformed from pasture to arable land without a reduction in the number of animals. On the contrary, the number of livestock was expected to be increased, for the purposes of both farming as well as milking and meat consumption. Thus, the Shäwan Méda began to host more animals than its natural capacity could hold. However, this was not true of every locality in the

⁶¹⁰Berry, J. Olson, and D. Campbell, p. 9.

⁶¹¹Informants (8,6,7,35): Abäbä Dämisé, Tullu Tufa, Täka Kämssi, Nägash Asfaw and others.

⁶¹²Bezuayähu Täfära et al, p. 27.

area of study. Erosion was the most serious problem in areas on the escarpments and to some extent on the high plateau, for there was no renewal of soil nutrients. In the lowlands or in the river valleys, there were localities that were the recipients of alluvial soil which was removed by erosion from the highland during rainy seasons⁶¹³.

Historical data on rainfall is not available since meteorological records were not kept until the 20th century, except for the fragmentary information of Harris in 1841/42 and the Italian geographical society in 1879⁶¹⁴. One of the characteristics of Ethiopian rainfall is that it exhibits high variability in time and space. Workneh reported that at least six series of famines and drought took place in Ethiopia, ranging from 1888 to 1934. However, except for the first that occurred from 1888-1892 clearly recorded evidence is not available. He traced the existence of the incidents depending on the level of Lake Rudolf and the Blue Nile, which were recorded by the British. The supposition was that any decrease in these levels meant a lack of rainfall in the country. However, the amounts of rainfall to the north east of Addis Ababa, part of north Shäwa, which were recorded over a long period, from 1898-1936 in this case, furnish no indication of rain failure⁶¹⁵.

It therefore seems that the frequent crop failures or famines were not the result of the total absence of rain. Rather, they occurred because of irregular rainfall and other social and environmental factors that are discussed throughout this study. Most probably, the rainfall contributed to the opposite: land or soil degradation because of its heavy nature and the mechanisms of cultivation on the plateau of Shäwa⁶¹⁶. This record, which was collected from north east of Addis Ababa, the southern extreme of the study area, with its mean annual rain being above 1000 mm (944-1730mm), shows an uneven distribution of rainfall: four months heavy rain (June, July, August, September) and three months relatively little rain (March, April, May)⁶¹⁷.

⁶¹³North Shäwa Agriculture Office.

⁶¹⁴Harris Vol. II, p. 134; J. McCann, *People of the Plough: An Agricultural History of Ethiopia, 1800-1990* (Madison, 1995), p.109.

⁶¹⁵Declan Conway et al, "Over One Century of Rainfall and Temperature Observations in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia" in *International Journal of Climatology* (United Kingdom, 2004), p.84.

⁶¹⁶*Ibid.*

⁶¹⁷Mhadi Osman et al, "A Preliminary Assessment of Characteristics and Long Term Variability of Rainfall in Ethiopia: Basis for Sustainable Land Use and Resource Management" in *Conference on International Agricultural Research for Development* (Witzenhausen, 2002), p.2.

Märsé also provides information on the situation of rainfall in Shäwa Méda and Addis Ababa at the end of the 19th century. His record describes the prevalence of torrential rain thus: “በነሐሴ 19 ቀን 1898 ዓ.ም ቅድሚ ከኢትዮጵን በተደረገ ተልቅ የመሬት መቃጥጥጥ ሆነ፡፡ በዘመኑ ቅን
መበረቅና ካነድንድ የተቀለቀለበት ይኖና አናም ስዘንም ወለ፡፡ በዘመኋው በደና አናም መከከል ይደለና
የመሬት መቃጥጥጥ ስለተደረገን ህዝቦ መካት መጠበና በለው ተደናገበ፡”⁶¹⁸. “On Nähasé 19, 1898 E.C.
[August, 1897] Saturday at midday there was an earthquake associated with torrential rain and lightning. The people feared that by saying it is the curse from God.” Similarly he recorded the prevalence of rain even in the winter season three years later as follows: “በዘመኋው መራት
(1901ዓ.ም) የበለግ አናብ ይዘንም ስለነበር ለለተ ክፍና መበረቅ ስበርቅ እናደ፡፡ የመበረቅም እናተ
አንድ ተልቅ የከለ ሁኔታ አቋጥልት ዓይነ ያቀበለውን ተመሳከተን”⁶¹⁹; “During these months (of 1901 E.C/
1909) there was spring rain associated with heavy lightning throughout the night. It burnt one big tree of *koso* that we have seen with our eyes”. Therefore, many poor farming seasons were followed by famine, which was caused not by lack of rain but by failure of crops aggravated by an absence of reserves in stores or granaries. The latter resulted from heavy taxation and arbitrary plunder by the soldiers⁶²⁰. To strengthen this argument, crops of the famine seasons which were mentioned in the historical sources would not grow in a season when rain failed. All of the foods of such seasons that are listed by informants are available at the end of the rainy season. However, in the 1880’s, the long rain and the short rain both failed, triggering a serious drought. The hot dry weather scorched the crop before it was ready for the harvest. As a result of these two factors, the Great Famine of 1888 to 1892 occurred. The year 1888-89 seems to have been excessively hot and dry and, therefore, unsuitable for agriculture⁶²¹. Dry weather seems to have been prevalent throughout the country. A subsequent British report confirmed the failure of the rain in Shäwa. Though the original harvest failure was caused by the absence of rain, it soon

⁶¹⁸Märsé, *Tezita*, p. 57.

⁶¹⁹*Ibid*, p. 68.

⁶²⁰Informants (10, 33, 31): Gété Arädo, Fäläqäch Dämisé, Mägäretu Dämisé; they listed a number of foods eaten during hard times which were not otherwise common. From their explanations it can be assumed that food shortages were frequent in the second half of any year, particularly on Shäwa Méda. People consumed seeds of plants such as *amaqito*, *akerema*, *mech*, and *sinqo*, a wild cabbage which is common after the first rain in May or the beginning of June. The shared understanding among the informants was that the health issues of the region throughout their experience were the direct results of the scarcity of food. They claimed that an individual who fell ill from *Genbot* onwards rarely recovered from his illness. Fäläqäch said: “all our families/ relatives who fell ill in *Kerämet* died”.

⁶²¹R.Pankhurst, *Economic History*, p. 216.

gave way to an even more serious dislocation of agriculture, for pests killed off almost all the oxen, making ploughing impossible. Subsequently, the drought crippled the peasants, while the price of food rose considerably and rapidly resulted in food scarcity⁶²².

7.3. Famines and Health problems

The health and diet of a given community or individual is crucial to its productivity. The health of North Shäwan peasants during the period being investigated was poor and affected their socio-economic activities in many aspects. Many types of diseases were prevalent in the region because of numerous interwoven reasons. Some included the absence of an adequate diet, the prevalence of wars and conflicts as well as the mobility and daily contact of the army with the peasants and the absence of modern medication for such diseases, on the one hand. On the other hand, the people of the region were extremely vulnerable to crop failures caused by drought, storms, or different types of plant diseases which led to serious famines that caused an immense number of deaths directly through starvation and indirectly through undernourishment, which caused people to be more vulnerable to diseases.

To start with the series of famines, one of them took place in north Shäwa in 1829, and was due to failure in the grain crop, followed by a cattle epidemic in which large numbers of livestock perished. It is reported that the people were reduced to the greatest extremities in obtaining food and clothing. Numerous victims suffered from hunger alone, and to keep themselves alive they began to act violently, which disturbed the social fabric⁶²³. The next famine of which there is evidence took place in 1835, followed by high rates of mortality throughout the region⁶²⁴.

As far as historical sources are concerned, a very serious famine took place in 1888-1892. It began with an outbreak of cattle disease which started in the north and advanced south, to north Shäwa. *Aläqa Lämma Hailu*, who was in bed for some three days during the early part of January 1889, reported that he found all the cattle were dead when he got up after his recovery. Setting out after four months for Addis Ababa, he travelled in the month of *Genbot* (May-June 1889) by way of Däbrä Libanos and Däbrä Berähan, passing through land from which livestock had almost completely disappeared. In Sälalé, in north Shäwa, he saw one black calf, and in the mountains above Däbrä Libanos six old oxen standing alone, with no other cattle; finally on

⁶²²*Ibid.*

⁶²³C. Johnston, p. 216.

⁶²⁴Bairu Tafla (ed and trans), *Asmä Gyorgis and His Works*.

reaching Däbrä Berähan, he discovered that a few cattle had survived here and there in the areas of highest elevation. At Laga-gindi, for example, he saw five or six cattle, but in the *qolla*, or low lands the extermination was complete⁶²⁵.

Other observers tell a similar story. As quoted in Pankhurst, Wurtuz, a French physician, confirms that in the year 1889 almost all the country's livestock perished, whole herds falling down dead where they stood. Wurtuz says that at Bulga, for example, all the cattle died within eight days, and cites the case of one of Menilek's herds, several thousand beasts in number, not a single one of which survived⁶²⁶. The severity of the situation was colourfully expressed by Menilek chronicler, Gäbrä Sillasé, who recorded it in Biblical tones, as “በኢትዮጵያ ከመን ከእግዚአብሔር መዓት ቤት ለምና በራ እየታመሙ ያልቻ ይመር፡፡ … በራ ካለቻ እህል እይታኝም እህል ከመኑ ስው እይቆምም፡ ይህ መዓት በእንሰሳት ቤታ እይቆርም…”⁶²⁷; “A curse sent from God fell on Ethiopia and led to the destruction of the cattle and oxen in the country. If oxen perished there would not be crops and in turn in the absence of crops human beings could not survive since the curse did not stop at killing animals...”.

The cause of the famine, as discussed by different writers and informants, was the extermination of oxen which, as mentioned, resulted in the inability to plough lands in an area which was known for its plough agriculture⁶²⁸. The above mentioned *Aläqa Lämma* observed that the chief cause of the famine was the death of the cattle. People could not plough, and therefore left their land fallow. Many farmers were too demoralized to attempt to cultivate the land with hoes instead of ploughs and therefore spent their time being idle. He narrated the conditions in Shäwa to his son, Mängestu who recorded the testimony. He declared that “My mouth cannot speak of the hardships of hundreds and thousands of others, it is beyond words”⁶²⁹. The magnitude of the famine was equally expressed by foreign and Ethiopian observers who were eyewitnesses. Animals of all kinds, living and dead, were eaten at this time. Gäbrä Sillasé indicates that many people had no alternative but to eat horses, mules and donkeys, the consumption of which at any other time would have been entirely unthinkable. Self enslavement was also common. The destitute, not surprisingly, also resorted to violence, and murders were

⁶²⁵Mängestu Lämma, p. 106.

⁶²⁶R. Pankhurst, *Economic History*, p. 218.

⁶²⁷Gäbrä Sillasé, p. 153.

⁶²⁸Afawärq Gäbrä Yäsu.

⁶²⁹Mängestu Lämma, p.142 .

committed for a piece of bread. Cannibalism, a practice entirely alien to Ethiopian culture, also occasionally occurred in several areas. Cannibalism, particularly of children by their mothers, is confirmed by tradition and the memories of some individuals⁶³⁰. *Aläiga* Lämma asserts that cannibalism occurred even at Felwuha in the vicinity of the capital. According to Gäbrä Sillassé, cannibalism also took place in Shäwa and Wällo. At Ensaro in Shäwa, he wrote that a woman had eaten seven children⁶³¹.

Such serious famines were often accompanied by deterioration of health and sometimes by serious epidemics for various reasons; a starving or semi starving population was easily vulnerable to disease⁶³², victims of famine were sometimes left unburied with their corpses becoming a source of infection⁶³³ and hungry persons travelling through the country in search of food acted as carriers of diseases⁶³⁴. Gäbrä Sillassé discussed all these reasons clearly in his explanation of *kefu qän*. His description of the mobility of peoples during such a time is colourful. He asserts that peoples moved to the capital from all corners of the country, but this may be the exaggeration which was usual with him. However, most of these peoples were from northern Shäwa, for the following reasons. The primary one was the proximity of the region to the capital, Entoto. People were not able to travel over long distances during those evil days. Many of them died enroute to the possible destinations⁶³⁵. Secondly, in relative terms, as indicated this was one of the regions where the army and the court were frequently on the move, yet the peasants had no reserves for such demands. Thirdly, the presence of large numbers of Shäwans in the capital who could welcome their kin from the countryside may have encouraged migration to Addis Ababa⁶³⁶. After all, the king and the majority of his followers, the residents of the capital, had their origin in North Shäwa. Keeping this in their minds, the victims were actively moving to the capital and some of them might even have obtained the expected support, nick-naming the emperor “እግዣዎች የዘላክ” ; “mother Menilek”⁶³⁷.

⁶³⁰Gäbrä Sillassé, p.175.

⁶³¹Mängestu Lämma, p.143.

⁶³²Gäbrä Sillassé, p.176.

⁶³³*Ibid.*

⁶³⁴*Ibid.*

⁶³⁵Informants (9, 14, 26): Asfaw Wäldä Guyorgis, Awäqä Gobana, Shifäraw Endalä.

⁶³⁶Gäbrä Sillassé, p.176.

⁶³⁷Informants (36, 37): Täfära Yegelätu, Käbädä Täsäma, and others.

Those who could not migrate from north Shäwa adopted different measures, as in the discussion of Ahemed Hassen who interviewed some elders in the north eastern corner of the region two decades ago. When the famine seriously struck almost all parts of the region and began to kill its inhabitants, they were said to have been forced to wander around the countryside in search of wild fruits and various grass species. They tried to survive by collecting wild fruits from the fig tree (*ficus sycomorus*) or *shola*, the plum fruits or *enkoy*, and the local weeds called *antara* and *amedmado*. In fact, their hunger is also said to have obliged them to feed on the boiled bark and roots of various trees for survival. At the height of the famine almost indiscriminate uses of all kind of plants for food was common, according to these informants, who said that only the bitter and thorny plants were not consumed⁶³⁸. It was reported that the people also fed on the roasted meat and skin of their dead animals. This caused diarrhea which was furthermore accompanied by other epidemic diseases that claimed the lives of thousands of people in most parts of the region. The only means of survival that the local people could identify at the time was turning to nature and the natural resources of their districts, thus devouring wild fruits, leaves, grasses and the like all around the region. As time went by, however, all these resources were soon exhausted; and it became necessary for the people to wander around more remote, uninhabited areas where they themselves became easy prey to wild animals such as lions and hyenas, which were also famished. There are traditions which indicate that in some areas, the peasants used non-traditional means of agricultural production such as donkeys, horses, mules, the hoe and the pick-axe for cultivating the land⁶³⁹. Amidst these catastrophes the king laboured in the fields among his people to encourage the use of hoes and tilled the dry soil. Following his example, the nobility participated in manual labour with the able bodied peasants⁶⁴⁰.

It was reported by the elders that, with some sense of pride, the people of the region of north Shäwa did their best to survive the difficult years without migrating to remote areas. Menilek himself is said to have personally visited the area in late 1890 or early 1891 and was apparently

⁶³⁸ Ahmäd Hassän, “Emperor Menilek’s Attempts towards Political Integration: Case Study From North-Eastern Shoa (Ethiopia), 1889-1906”, in *Annales d’ Ethiopie*. Vol. 18 (Universite de Province, 2002), pp. 231-233; the poems were narrated similarly or with little modifications during the famine of 1984/85 in the region as Fekadä Azäzä recorded in his “unheard voices”. All of the poems indicated, not the absence of rain, but rather the absence of drought animals. All the plants and animals mentioned in them would not have been present if there had been no rain.

⁶³⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid.

impressed by the initiatives of the local people. Although the king admired their efforts, he realized with sadness that all the crops they used needed a relatively long period of time to be harvested. Thus, the people of the region had a tradition which recorded that the emperor advised them not to waste their time and effort on such crops. Instead he distributed *gommän zär* (rapeseed) and *adenguarie* or *dängällo* (running bean or sword bean) to some of these people because they would be ready for consumption within a short period of time. All the peasants who received these crops are said to have cultivated them right away and saved themselves from hunger⁶⁴¹.

A number of serious epidemics that took place in north Shäwa in the 19th and 20th centuries were largely attributed to famines from which mortality rates soared. For instance, cholera and smallpox wrought great terror, social disintegration and economic collapse throughout the history of the country in general and that of the region in particular. The region was persistently affected by such diseases, as far as historical sources are concerned. One of these was the cholera outbreak of 1830-31 after the 1829 famine in Shäwa. A second serious outbreak took place during the crisis of the *Kefu qän* (1888-1892). The period of *Kefu qän* was also infamous because of the outbreaks of typhus and major smallpox epidemics. Thus, the decline in health for various reasons in turn diminished the productivity of peasants⁶⁴².

One of the most serious killers was smallpox. Major epidemics occurred during the 19th century, in 1839, 1854, 1878, 1886 and 1889-90, i.e. on average one every generation according to the conclusion reached by Pankhurst, who had excellent exposure to foreign sources⁶⁴³. Outbreaks of diseases in the late 1830s or early 1840s are indicated in the writings of several foreign travellers, namely Krapf, Harris, Rochet d'Hericourt, the French Scientific Mission of 1839-1843, and the British Consul for the Somali coast in 1845⁶⁴⁴.

In the 1870s, when north Shäwa was well known for its mobile court, large numbers of people became victims of the epidemics. One such was manifested at Liché and was described vividly by foreigners who frequently visited the court of Menilek in that decade.

⁶⁴¹Ibid.

⁶⁴²R. Pankhurst, *Economic History*, pp. 623-624.

⁶⁴³Ibid.

⁶⁴⁴Ibid, p. 624.

The Italian traveller Cecchi mentioned the outbreak in 1878, as it was particularly serious at the town of Liché, which housed a population of 15, 000; some 20 or 30 people were dying every day. Paul Soleillet, a French traveller of the 1880s stated that at least a quarter of the north Shäwan population bore smallpox marks. A further wave of smallpox seems to have occurred during the Great Famine of 1888-1891. Emperor Menelik's Swiss adviser, Alfred Ilg, estimated that Menilek's army returning from Tigre at the beginning of 1890 lost fifteen per cent of its members as a result of smallpox, as well as of dysentery, typhus and bronchitis⁶⁴⁵. One can only imagine the number of peasants infected by these diseases who perished on their way to Addis Ababa. The most frequent act that could be considered as an obstacle to economic activities, which was related to the disease, was self exile, the practice of separating oneself from the community or discontinuing any travel or interactions. On the outbreak of an epidemic the people often retreated with their cattle to the mountains, placing all their security in fleeing from the contaminated region. More socially desirable perhaps were the attempts to prevent the spread of infection by prohibiting or controlling the movement of persons. This could create a major crisis for all economic activities, but in particular affected trading activity because of the limits placed on the movement of people from one locality to the other.

Krapf records that when smallpox broke out at the Shäwan capital of Ankobär, King Sahelä Sillassé (1813-1847) retired to the nearby village of Mähal wänz where no one was admitted, merchants and travellers being forbidden from entering the realm⁶⁴⁶. Half a century later the French physician, Dr. Wurtz, reported in 1897 that many children of the capital, Addis Ababa, had been sent out of town to avoid the epidemic. His laboratory assistant, Fenski, records that at Addisghe, a small village in North Shäwa, a woman of noble family left her home and camped with her maids near a stream. She posted guards nearby with instructions to allow no one passes who would not wash his body and clothes⁶⁴⁷.

Another method of dealing with a smallpox epidemic that brought about economic hardship as well as a crisis of social relations was the practice of eliminating the victims. When infection was identified in a given household, the neighbours, knowing it would spread to the whole area if unchecked, would surround the house in the night and set fire to it. They then forced the patients back into the burning dwelling at spearpoint, even though they were their

⁶⁴⁵C.W Isenberg and J.L. Krapf; Harris, Vol.II.

⁶⁴⁶R. Pankhurst, *Economic History*, p.632.

⁶⁴⁷Ibid.

neighbours or relatives. Wurtz states that on the first appearance of the disease some of the Oromos would at once set fire to the villages affected and burn the patients in their homes even though the victims might be their closest and dearest relatives. Horrible as it might appear, he adds, they considered this practice a very wise mode of solving the problem. They justified it, he says, because an infinite number of their brethren would thus be saved by the sacrifice of a few⁶⁴⁸.

As intimated, another horrible epidemic in the history of the country and the region was cholera. In spite of the fact that differences of date exist in the accounts of travellers, they nonetheless agree on the magnitude of the epidemic. Kirk, a British surgeon attached to the diplomatic mission led by Cornwallis Harris, believed that there were in fact two outbreaks. The first one took place in 1834, which led to “great mortality” in Shäwa. The more elevated regions of Shäwa remained nearly free from the disease, a few isolated cases only appearing at Ankobär and Angoläla, the twin capitals of Shäwa, in the first half of the 19th century. The second outbreak occurred in the following year, 1835, when a drought resulted in a famine followed by an epidemic characterized by severe pain in the abdomen and frequent haemorrhage; the victim usually died in eight to ten days. The population of Ankobär was half depopulated according to the British travellers in Shäwa. Johnston, a British ship's surgeon, apparently describing this second outbreak, agrees that it was particularly serious, as it occurred after two successive crop failures had reduced the population to “the greatest extremity” with the result that at Ankobär nearly two thirds of the poverty-stricken inhabitants perished of cholera which, he records, was locally known as “አጥረጥ”; *agwert*. The intensity of the epidemic owed much to the capital's poor sanitary conditions⁶⁴⁹. Harris observed that the disease, as might have been anticipated, spread with fearful speed in the whole of the town so that one half of the whole population were swept away⁶⁵⁰.

The next major epidemic occurred a generation later in the 1850s and again apparently formed part of an international outbreak. A contemporary Ethiopian chronicler, *Dabtära Zänäb*, one of the chroniclers of Emperor Tewodros, states that God sent down a major epidemic and that many people died all over the country. The disease took the form of diarrhoea and vomiting,

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.635.

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

⁶⁵⁰ C. Johnston, p. 216.

killing them irrespective of whether they were standing, sitting or sleeping. Death came so suddenly that the disease was called *näftägna fängel* (epidemic of the army) apparently because it struck down its victims as swiftly as did the *näftägna*, or rifleman, though in Shäwa the term *agwert* continued to be used⁶⁵¹. Another chronicler of the period, *Aläqa Wäldä Maryam*, likewise refers to the epidemic as *näftägna* and adds that it broke out among the emperor's troops, many of whom succumbed to this "truly terrible" disease which killed large numbers of people between dawn and dusk on a single day⁶⁵². The series of outbreaks, though once again international in scope, owed much to local circumstances, pest and other circumstances having led from 1889 to 1892 to a great famine of unprecedented proportions, which caused the debilitated population to fall easy victim to infections of all kinds.

The chronicle of Gäbärä Sillase indicates that among those infected were a number of persons then engaged in conveying cattle from the Ogaden to the famine-stricken areas of the interior. Troops sent to guard them also contracted the disease and many of them died, their commander *Azasz Wäldä Tsadeq* himself falling ill. Anxious to avoid further spreading of the disease, this officer ordered that the animals should be kept in Adal (lowland east of Ankobär) and that the roads should be guarded to prevent the disease advancing to Ankobär where Emperor Menilek was then encamped⁶⁵³. *Azasz Wäldä Tsadeq* then withdrew to the lowland region of Dibbi, south of Ankobär, where he had a tent erected in the forest and lived there in isolation, declaring: "If I die what matters, so long as Menilek is master!" The chronicler declares that God heard these words and permitted the brave chief to recover, though those who survived after having once caught the disease were few in number. He adds that "many" people died at Ankobär, one of the first victims being Wäldä Gabriél, a priest renowned for his chanting. The epidemic came to an end at Ankobär only after Menilek left the city and made his way south to Entoto, which he reached on 20 September 1892. Vanderheym confirms that the population of Ankobär was "annihilated"⁶⁵⁴.

Addis Ababa, which Menilek had established as his capital only a few years earlier, also suffered. A British traveller, Pease, wrote that the disease resulted in "great ravages" there,

⁶⁵¹Harris, V.II, p.123.

⁶⁵²Zänäb, p.69.

⁶⁵³Gäbrä Sillasse.

⁶⁵⁴R. Pankhurst, *Economic History*, p. 635.

but later “died out completely”. Cholera at this time was known, according to De Coppet, as *Yä nefas bäshita*, or “disease of the wind”, as it was popularly thought to have been spread by the wind, which mainly blew from the north east, that is to say from the coast, where it first appeared, to many parts of the land⁶⁵⁵.

Famine was not the only cause of many of the serious epidemics in the history of Shäwa. Conflict and war were usually followed by severe diseases that killed a large number of people, even sometimes more than the war itself. For instance, both campaigns of Tewodros to Shäwa were followed by epidemics that claimed the lives of many people. Gäbrä Sillassé explains this from the Shäwan perspective as follows: “during that period a disease called *fängil*, followed the emperor and killed the armies as well as civilians in the country.”⁶⁵⁶ The army of Shäwa encountered a similar epidemic disease during their second campaign to defeat Séifu Sahelä Sillasé. The chronicler declared that “during this time, starting from Shäwa to Bägemider, along their route, about 1700 were identified that they died”⁶⁵⁷.

Venereal diseases constituted another type of disease which hindered the peasants from achieving full productivity. In the 1880s, north Shäwa was the area worst infected by these diseases, mainly syphilis. This was due to the location of the capital in the province; in addition, all in the vicinity were affected by the outbreak for there were trade centres and army camps. These members of the society did not take their women with them and procured others temporarily from the area, either willingly or forcefully. In fact, the army was known for its abuse of peasants in many ways, apart from those mentioned earlier, such as using their wives to satisfy temporary sexual needs. A peasant would be given back not only his wife but also the venereal disease she contracted from the soldier⁶⁵⁸. Hence the common complaints of the peasants, as reflected in the following poem:

በኩረት አገር ማያደርግ

ከተማ አገር ማያደርግ

በደንብ አገር ማያደርግ

ለዚህ ደርሃንት

መስቀል አገር ማያደርግ

Just not to flee my home

And to rear and bear children

And to breed cattle

I married my very wife off to the official

Said she is my sister

⁶⁵⁵*Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁷Gäbrä Sillassé, p. 51.

⁶⁵⁸*Ibid*, pp.53-54.

⁶⁵⁹Afawärq.

Eye diseases were also very common among peasants during the period under discussion in the area of study. They were unable to spend much of their time on their farms. Eye diseases, including trachoma and conjunctivitis, as well as the effects of smallpox and venereal diseases, were fairly widespread. Even if their spread and prevalence varied from region to region in the country, European travellers of the 19th century reported many cases in Shäwa. One of them, Merab, asserted that in the dry season as many as a quarter of his clients had conjunctivitis due to dust, insufficient cleanliness, the habit of frequent hand shaking, the presence of large numbers of flies, the smoky rooms in their window-less homes, the bright cloudless sun, and the frequent wind which strained the eyes⁶⁶⁰.

Another common disease was leprosy. It likewise had an adverse effect for none of the peasants could participate in production activities. The other people, and they themselves, considered begging or depending on the rest of the community as natural. The European travellers reported that they had observed few lepers in Shäwa. However, they had exposure only to Shäwa Méda and the area of the court which the beggars in the vicinity visited, and did not see the numerous victims in different villages of the region. Therefore as mentioned in the other topic of the same study, Menilek's uncle *ras* Darge had on one occasion been followed by a crowd of 300 lepers⁶⁶¹.

A further health challenge which peasants in North Shäwa faced during the period under study in this aspect was the *Yähidar beshita* (disease of November) which manifested itself in November, 1918. It is said to have been imported through the railway and disseminated throughout the country. North Shäwa was negatively affected by this epidemic, again because of its proximity to the capital. According to Gäbrä Egzabher Eliays, the epidemic caused the death of so many people that the bodies could not be buried⁶⁶². Thus the disease affected the agricultural practices of the region for two reasons, the first being that it occurred during the harvesting season of north Shäwa and the peasants could not harvest their crops. The second extremely harmful aspect of the epidemic was that it was most serious not for the elderly and

⁶⁶⁰Merab, pp. 92-93.

⁶⁶¹Bairu Tafla, "Some Aspects of Land Tenure and Taxation in Salale under Ras Darge, 1871-1900." *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, XII, II (Addis Ababa, 1974), p.32.

⁶⁶²Gäbrä 'Egziabher Elias, p. 99.

children, but rather for adults (በእርተካና በመቻርድ በነድምኑ) who were the more active participants in agricultural activities⁶⁶³. It is reported that the epidemic was “praised” in the following terms;

የንዑስ በሽታ ገዢ ነው አባሪ፣ *The November disease was a chasing killer*
ለህንጻ ገዢ ስምላለ አከበሪ፣ *Making mercy for infants and respecting elders*
ከተልማች ገዢ ተዋጋ መዝከር⁶⁶⁴፡፡ *But fighting strongly with adults.*

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Chapter Eight

8. Socio-Cultural Systems

After the transformation of the majority of north Shäwa to farmlands had taken place, it was not only the tenure, taxation, the political instability or stability of the region and other natural factors that determined the agricultural productivity and sustainability, but also the long established socio-cultural systems. One culture aided, while the other hindered, the economic progress of a given society. It seems that the majority of the established socio-cultural practices in northern Shäwa correspond to the second category⁶⁶⁵.

8.1. Agricultural Tools and Practices

Agricultural tools and practices had rarely been modified for centuries throughout the central plateau of Shäwa in general and northern Shäwa in particular. Farmers in the central highlands made use of a small light plough drawn by two oxen. The tools might vary depending on the seasons of the region and types of soil. During the rainy season the Shäwan peasant preferred to use lighter tools than in the dry or semi-dry ones. It seems that up to the beginning of the 19th century all tools were made of wood, according to James Bruce who visited Ethiopia in the late 18th century. It is very difficult to believe his account, since other European travelers in north Shäwa in the 19th century (1830s and 1840s) confirmed that they had seen an iron ploughshare⁶⁶⁶. The principal tool on which agriculture in north Shäwa has depended for centuries is the plough pulled by animals: oxen in most cases, horses in some. It consists of eight basic parts: the beam (*mofär*), ploughshare (*maräsha*), stilt (*eref*), yoke (*qänbär*), sheath (*wägäl*), leather strap (*mängächa*), pairs of wooden wings (*deger*), and string consisting of hide used to bind the beam and the yoke (*meran*). The beam is made of a piece of strong wood, on which at the centre of one end of the broader side, a hole is bored; two flat wooden wings are placed on either side, while between them an iron ploughshare is fitted, the share and supports being bound to the long and not very straight shaft with raw hide at an angle of about twenty degrees⁶⁶⁷.

⁶⁶⁵Mässay Käbädä, *Meaning and Development* (Atlanta, 1994), p. 16.

⁶⁶⁶W.C. Harris, *The Highland of Aethiopia*, Vol. II and III (London, 1844); C. Johnston, *Travels in Southern Abyssinia through the Country of Adal to the Kingdom of Shoa* (London, 1844), p.86; James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* (London, 1789).

⁶⁶⁷Tänker Bongär, *Yäzäréyitu Itiyopiya Idegätina limate käyét wädét* (Addis Ababa, 2010), p.31.

The yoke which is also joined to one end of the shaft by raw hide, consists of a straight piece of heavy wood about five feet long bored with four holes; through them pass four long pegs (*manägo*) which are fixed to the animal's collar of bent wood or plaited tendons. The plough is operated by a man who holds it with one hand, while with the other he wields a short handled whip (*jeraf*) with a long lash made of twisted gut. The plough is pulled by two oxen or horses, or one of each. Sometimes the horses need to be led by one person who guides them in the right direction. Fields on the sides of mountains which are too steep to plough are dug using a hoe⁶⁶⁸.

One of the most important factors encouraging the expansion or intensification of farming was the knowledge of iron smelting. The introduction of agricultural tools made of iron required this skill⁶⁶⁹. The craftsmen of north Shäwa were familiar with extracting iron from ore and even used to pay tax in iron, termed *tägära*. Gäbrä Wäld refers to this as follows: “*tägära* means a circular shape of iron which is made by local craftsmen. Since they have the knowledge of making iron, they pay tax in *tägära* to the court and it is made into different articles like *mäteräbia/mesar/tägära, doma, leguam* and *maräsha*”⁶⁷⁰. There were several sites where iron smelting was carried out in northern Shäwa. Angoläla and Ankobär, the twin capitals of Shäwa, Angoläla Mähäl-wänz near Ankobär and the village of Gureyon near the Chacha River were the known centres of iron working⁶⁷¹.

Iron tools encouraged the spread of farming throughout the world in the history of humankind. This metal provided the community with spears and arrows for hunting, axes for cutting timber and clearing agricultural land, and hoes and ploughshares for cultivating the land. Inhabitants in the region being studied had experience in using an axe with an angular handle to clear forests and make different agricultural or home service tools. There was also a large axe with a straight handle used for cutting and splitting heavy woods, but this was rarely available in the home of every peasant. The use of the saw was not recorded in the available sources⁶⁷². There were also two types of sickles: one with very tiny teeth, the other lacking teeth but with a sharpened edge like a knife. In fact, both of them were in the shape of a semi-circle and had a short handle made of wood.

⁶⁶⁸Informants (35,8): Nägash Asfaw, Abäbä Dämisé and most of the peasants I encountered during my field research clearly described to me the function of each part.

⁶⁶⁹Shillington, *A History of Africa*, p. 42.

⁶⁷⁰Gäbrä Wäld Engda Wärq, *Yä Ityopya märétna Yägeber sem* (Addis Ababa, 1956), p.28.

⁶⁷¹Harris.

⁶⁷²*Ibid.*

The other agricultural implements made of iron included parts of the ploughshare. One was the iron tip, which cut the soil, while the other was a sort of ring or chain, which joined together the wooden flat ears with the iron tip. There were two types; the first consisted of two linked chains, one holding the above mentioned materials together, with the other joined to a heavy long wooden plough with a kind of rope made of animal skin, which they called *märgät*. The second type consisted of one circle and straightly enlarged having a semi-circle at the other end to tie a rope on as mentioned above. After some time the first one was not commonly used⁶⁷³. These tools were rarely modified during the last two centuries. They were almost identical to those described by European travellers from the end of the 18th century onwards. In one way or the other iron was therefore a very important material in the intensification of farming in northern Shäwa because it is a much harder metal and can be sharpened to a finer edge or forged into every shape.

It was the strong support (patronage) of Shäwan chiefs which resulted in the intensive use of these tools for clearing and ploughing the greater part of northern Shäwa. The communities who possessed a good knowledge of iron and expertise in purifying iron from ore and forging it into different tools were invited and welcomed to Gondär which, as mentioned, had been the centre of political power after Shäwa ceased to become the seat of government in the 16th century. This technological input was not the result of the effort of individual peasants; rather it stemmed from the authorities' (in the form of the chiefs') endeavour to expand farmlands and feed their peasant army and Amhara communities. From this episode of the 18th century to the second half of the 20th century, the agricultural practice of the region did not see any significant technological inputs. Even the mechanization of agriculture that began to appear in the country in the second half of the 20th century did not occur in the region because of the *gult* system, as discussed in chapter four of this study. Its drawback is that the smelting of iron ore needs large quantities of hardwood charcoal. The available wood was used for this purpose and for construction of buildings and firewood for centuries, but, in fact, trees were very scarce on the plateau portion of the province except on mountain slopes and on the way down to the valleys.

⁶⁷³Informants (9, 38): Asfaw Wäldä Guyorgis, Täshomä Gäbrä Mikael and others; particularly the craftsmen (blacksmiths) elaborated on why these tools were modified after a time.

The inhabitants of the area obtained wood for construction from the nearby mentioned sites until the introduction of the eucalyptus tree from Australia at the end of the 19th century⁶⁷⁴. For this reason they were using animal dung or waste for fuel rather than for fertilizer. Using dung to maintain the fertility of the land was common along the terraces on both sides of the valley⁶⁷⁵.

There were two important techniques of renewing soil fertility on the flat plateau of Shäwa Méda before the introduction of some recent techniques and modern fertilizers. Where soil burning was practiced and the land was not suitable for leguminous crops because of its cold temperature in autumn (particularly in areas situated near streams), during long years (seven to ten), allowing land to lie fallow was practiced. This was implemented mostly after continuous cultivation of the land for three or four years. The fallow land was used for animal grazing. When it was ploughed after this period, the soil would be burnt; barley would be sown in the first year and a certain kind of *téf* in the second⁶⁷⁶. Burning was widely practiced by the peasantry for a number of reasons: to clear land for cultivation, to curtail the growth of bushes, and to destroy rats, mice, moles and insect pests, as well as to fertilize the soil⁶⁷⁷. The peasants of the other plateau, which was suitable for leguminous crops, were using crop rotation; so that the land which was exhausted would revive its fertility after it was sown with different crops. Cultivation of *téf* and leguminous crops would be alternated for several years. During the period under study, there was no habit of using fertilizer that was made of manure, because the animal dung was used for fuel⁶⁷⁸.

In the river valley and some bushy areas of the plateau, where land had to be cleared for cultivation, the peasants would begin the activity by cutting down the trees and bushes. Then the remaining vegetation would be set on fire. Following this, the ground would be ploughed over two or three times and thus made ready for sowing seeds. The downhill lands (soils) on the bank of rivers were renewed naturally by the soil eroded every year from the highlands. Here irrigation, though not universal, was practiced on a small scale. Small channels would be dug

⁶⁷⁴ Märsé Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, *Yähayagnaw kefeläzmän mäbacha* (Addis Ababa, 2006), p. 32.

⁶⁷⁵ S. Ege, *Class, State and Power in Africa: A Case Study in the Kingdom of Shäwa (Ethiopia) about 1840* (Harrassowitz, 1996), p.35.

⁶⁷⁶ Informants: Almost all the older farmers of Shäwa Méda know why it is performed in that way. For instance, Bäkälä Dadhi, Shifäraw Mulu, Mäkonen Gäbré, the respected farmers and elders among the community of Chancho *kebelé*, narrated the process confidently and were even proud of carrying it out.

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

from the higher parts of a stream to conduct water across a nearby plain, which would be branched into small ditches to form small compartments. Irrigation of this kind was used in some areas for the cultivation of cotton, vegetables and sugarcane in the Jäma and Käsäm valleys⁶⁷⁹. After sowing, weeding would follow. This was one of the most tiresome activities. To eradicate the weeds the soil would usually be turned over, after which the peasants would pick out the weeds carefully by uprooting them. If there were insufficient men for this work, women and children would gather, forming a line along the field, and would clear all the weeds from the corn⁶⁸⁰.

The harvesting that was done after the crop was ripe would be carried out with small wooden-handled iron sickles with or without tiny teeth by both men and women. While harvesting barley and wheat, they would tie the stalks together in sheaves. Most crops would be harvested towards the end of December. The following table, which contains data collected on the eve of the Italian occupation, is helpful to illustrate the cropping calendar of north Shäwa during the period under inquiry⁶⁸¹. It is similar to the current one except for minor differences in the approximate date of sowing, as is reported by experts from the Agricultural Office in north Shäwa.

Crop	Sowing	Harvesting
Wheat	End of June	December
Beans	June	December
Linseed	End of June	December
Maize	March and June	June and December
Barley	June	Middle of November
Peas	June	December
Chick peas	End of September	February
Sorghum	April and December	January
<i>Téf</i>	End of June	December

Table.6 Crop sowing and harvesting cycle/calendar in north Shäwa

After harvesting, the peasants would take the crop home and beat it with small sticks or it would be trodden by oxen, mules and horses. Winnowing would be carried out by throwing the grain in

⁶⁷⁹Dächasa, p. 35.

⁶⁸⁰C.W. Isenberg, and J.L. Krapf, *Journal of C.W. Isenberg and J.L. Krapf: Detailing Their Proceeding in the Kingdom of Shoa and Journey in Other Parts of Abyssinia in the Years 1839, 1840, 1841 and 1842* (London, 1843).

⁶⁸¹North Shäwa Agriculture office.

small quantities into the air by using a tool with three prongs and a long handle, i.e. a pitchfork (*mänsh*) and finally employing a similar tool but with a wide flat end that looks like a spade (*layida*), the husk thus being blown away by the wind⁶⁸².

The peasants were also skilful in storing their crops, even if they were still not safe enough from attacks by pests and plunderers. Crops which moths would not attack, such as *téf*, wheat, lentil, chickpea, and peas, were stored in containers such as *debgnit* (small grain containers) made of mud or bamboo which were placed in the house, or in granaries still made of the same materials but big enough to contain more, which were put in a compound. Other crops, which might easily be attacked by moths (families of sorghum, beans), were stored in a hole dug in the ground, which is called a *gudguad* (underground granary). This container was more secure in comparison to those on the ground, because strangers such as ordinary robbers and soldiers could not identify them easily⁶⁸³. The peasants also devoted much time to animal husbandry, including the milking of cows and rearing of cattle, which was a task generally given to boys. The recorded evidence on the significance of the history of cattle rearing in Shäwa is rich. From the early 16th century Portuguese traveller Manuel Almeida, to the late 18th century Scottish James Bruce and the early 19th century British agronomist Douglass Graham, as well as to Graham's fellow countryman Augustus Wylde, who visited Ethiopia late in the same century, the host of European travellers who lived in or visited Shäwa, observed a range of agrarian communities that cultivated crops and raised cattle⁶⁸⁴.

Richard Pankhurst summarized the accounts of these travellers one after the other to reconstruct the history of Ethiopia's 19th and early 20th century livestock farming and agriculture in detail. According to his discussion, even if there began to appear disparities between the two in course of time because of the expansion of arable lands at the expense of grazing lands, animal husbandry, mainly the mixed variety, was one of the main economic activities in north Shäwa. Graham's report suggests that, unlike mid to late 20th century highland farmers, whose interests

⁶⁸²Informants (8, 35): Abäbä Dämisé, Nägash Asfaw and others.

⁶⁸³Mahetäm Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Yä Itiyopia bahel tinat: Bulga* (Addis Ababa, 1967), p. 12.

⁶⁸⁴Manoel de Almeida, *Some Records of Ethiopia 1593–1646*, trans. and ed. C. F. Buckingham and G. W. B. Huntingford (London, 1954), p.47–48; James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Sources of the Nile in the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772, and 1773*, Vol. 3 (Edinburgh, 1790), cited in Richard Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia, 1800–1935* (Addis Ababa, 1968), p. 213.; Augustus Wylde, *Modern Abyssinia* (London, 1901), p. 269.

in raising, or ability to raise, livestock had come to focus on draught animals, those in mid 19th century north Shäwa raised cattle as a source of food and capital. From his testimony and that of others, it appears that crop and livestock production coexisted side by side in mid nineteenth century north Shäwa. This was due to the availability of pasture that supported a large livestock population in many parts of north Shäwa⁶⁸⁵. Another British traveller, C. W. Harris, reported that good cultivated land and vast pasture were available on which sizable numbers of livestock were reared by north Shäwan farmers during their travels in the region in 1840's⁶⁸⁶. It seems that the cattle disease which broke out towards the end of 1880s resulted in the death of large numbers of them. This led to a substantial increase in prices, as an indicator of the end of the time when they had been abundant⁶⁸⁷. Consequently, in the decades that followed, the balance between crop and livestock production changed dramatically in favour of the former. The process seems to have started around the early 1890s—coinciding with the outbreak of the pest plague. Subsequently it was accelerated after the turn of the century, primarily with the aim of allocating more space for crop production. This was beneficial for the farmers and nobility, though more for politico-economic than for environmental reasons⁶⁸⁸.

8.2. Migration as way out of the Socio-economic Problems

Migration was a way of life in the history of African peoples in general. If the existing socio-economic problems could not be solved through the day to day “normal” ways of doing things, leaving the locality and searching for what was needed under the sun (*garaa waqa jalatti*) was the common practice⁶⁸⁹. As discussed in the previous chapters, many of the responsibilities expected from the peasants forced them to lead a busy and monotonous but non-productive life. Asebé Hailu of Ankobär memorably expressed this existence in *Berähanena Sälam* during 1919 E.C. as:

የህዝብ ጥያቄ ቅዱር አንቀጽ እና አንቀጽ ከዚያን ወጪ ስምን ባለስራለንም ነበር፡፡ እና ሆኖ የአትሞች መከራኝ ይገኘ በስተምሳራቸ አንቀጽ ደቀኑ ተተልተ በልጻና ጥሩት መከከል አገር

⁶⁸⁵James McCann, *People of the Plough: An Agricultural History of Ethiopia, 1800–1990* (Madison, 1995), p. 116–17.

⁶⁸⁶C. W. Harris, Vol. 1, p.129; Charles Johnston, vol. 2, p. 158–59.

⁶⁸⁷Richard Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia*, p. 210.

⁶⁸⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁸⁹Basil Davidson, *Africa In History* (New York, 2001); Informants (8, 35): Abäbä Dämisé, Nägash Asfaw and others.

የተበለ ህል የመጀመሪያ አለች የሚሆል በንዳቸት ወቅት መሬት ከሰነቱ የሰራ ቁጥጥ አንዳንድ ለመስከና
ወይም ለሽያጭ ክሙት አስቀመጥ ይሰራል፡፡ የጀትራማንም እና ደሳሁ...⁶⁹⁰

If we write even a tiny portion of the loss and problem of the people, it led [one] to conclude that there is no need to be created as human being. Look, in the eastern part of Ethiopia in Ankobär Ifat, Tägulät, Morät, there were unfortunate poor peoples who toiled on one *gasha* land as small as the sole of a shoes. Of the three working days they worked for the lord or *Shaläqa* throughout the year and the labour services are also the same...

The peasants had no time to innovate or improve their methods of doing things. The political instability and the general absence of peace and security resulted in social and psychological unrest; in turn this caused them to think only about their daily bread instead of designing long term plans to solve the existing problems. Labour services and other related responsibilities also meant that they lived in areas which brought with them deep rooted problems. When matters went totally out of their control, their common solution was to migrate to other areas⁶⁹¹.

There were a series of social and cultural factors that encouraged migration as a way out from these multi-faceted problems. The first of these was the tenure system; both the *rist* system and that of tenancy encouraged migration. For instance, the *rist* system enabled the peasants to develop the confidence to leave since if they did not succeed they could return home and claim their share of the land of the community, into which they had been born, using their rights as a descendant. This made them mobile and allowed them to leave a place of growing population pressure, as well as of growing tribute extraction. In fact, there was also a possibility for the peasant to return to his/her rights as long as he/she justified his natural membership of the community. This was why Märsé had claimed his right in Morät (he called it Jirru), “በዚህ ጊዜ በረት
አራር የሚለውን ድርሻ ርዕስን አሳይኝና ከእርሻው ላይ የተገኘውን የሚሆ ድርሻ አንድ ቁርበት መሬት ጥሩ አስቀኑ
ተመሳሳይሁ”⁶⁹²; “at that time they showed me my share from the *rist* called *Yäberät afär* and I collected my share from the produces and took it to my home.” This was a decade after he and his father had left their village. Apparently, his father returned and began to live there after almost two decades. Täklä Hawariat also had a similar experience; he declared that he left his share behind to his mother⁶⁹³.

⁶⁹⁰ Asebé Hayilu, “Silä hezeb gudat” *Berehanena Sälam* Hamle 14,21,1919 E.C (July, 1927).

⁶⁹¹ Informants: Shifäraw Zäläkä, Jifaré Abbu and others.

⁶⁹² Märsé, *Tezeta*, pp. 38, 83.

⁶⁹³ Täklä Hawariat, p. 7.

The same opportunity was available to a tenant. He could leave others' land in search of another option since nothing would attract or tie him to a certain locality. He had no land or any other property. He was ready to migrate as long as he had somewhere to go. Thus, a minimal amount of choice persuaded him to consider migration as a way out of the hardship under the banner of “አልፎ ለለ አልፎ ይተናል...”; “if one moves or migrates he can earn thousands...”⁶⁹⁴.

Although, as tenants, the opportunity of gaining back their land was rare, the sense of migration “*garaan waqa jalli baaladha*”, “the land under the sky is broad”⁶⁹⁵ among the Oromo of Shäwa was also a common motto for moving away from the problem. In most instances, by loading his meagre property on a single donkey and expressing his dreams, one who was forced to flee his home could lament the loss and praise his pack animal in such words as,

<i>Goddini yaa bulla,</i>	<i>There you go, my Bulla,</i>
<i>Bulla gama gufura</i>	<i>My tolerant Bulla with a curly mane</i>
<i>Takkan deegga unkura</i>	<i>Let me chase misery</i>
<i>Deegga yafarrissa</i>	<i>Misery of ill fortune</i>
<i>mukattan sifanissa</i>	<i>To hang it on a hook</i>
<i>muka balla hinqabneeti</i>	<i>To a tree with no branches</i>
<i>Akka daatee hingaleti</i>	<i>So that it is trembled and finished</i>

According to the song the peasant is leaving his village with his donkey, Bulla, to do away with poverty for once and for all in order that it would not return to his home⁶⁹⁶.

<i>Goddini yabulla wajjuman biyya banee</i>	<i>There you go, my Bulla</i>
<i>qlaneti milmo tanee</i>	<i>My loyal companion</i>
<i>Alagani nuwallalee firri</i>	<i>We grew skinny as we may</i>
<i>dhiggani nubekee.</i>	<i>As thin as a needle to hitchhike through misery</i>
	<i>My Bulla, those friends alone could identify</i>
	<i>Our identity, while foes fail to!</i>

⁶⁹⁴Informants (30): Hailu Dämisé and others; *Ato* Hailu's brothers and relatives in Adda'a districts lost their villages many years previously because of their difficulties with the *balabats* and related economic issues; he narrated that specific experience and believed that anyone who migrated could earn more if he worked hard.

⁶⁹⁵Informants (39): Gorfu Asäfa; he speaks of the experience of his own father and repeats the phrase used by his father, that the land under the sun is wide and an individual could go somewhere else if he could not live in the original locality for various reasons. The statement “*Garaan waqaa jalli balladha*” was uttered by *Ato* Asäfa, the father of Goruf and the tenant of Käbädä Täsäma, during his quarrel with the *balabat* Käbädä Täsäma.

⁶⁹⁶Informants (8): Abäbä Dämisé; he related the experience of his paternal grandfather who was a part time trader. His grandfather Gamada Nagwo led his life not in his original village but in the “country” of his brother in law, very far from his original village, according to his personal story told to his grandson Abäbä.

He voices the challenges they might face during the course of the migration, which might even include becoming as thin as a needle, to the extent that nobody would be able to identify them except their relatives⁶⁹⁷.

The second important factor that encouraged migration was the traditional belief that explains the “bilateral agreement between the gods or spirits of the land of departure and destination” (“*adaara walirra qabddi*”)⁶⁹⁸. According to this belief, if an individual leaves his village because of serious problems, the gods of his village of departure send a message to those of his destination in order that they will assist him in all of his efforts and enable him to be successful. But if he leaves because of laziness or arrogance the gods in the land of origin inform their counterparts in his destination of this motive, in order that the latter do not aid him. Having this as a belief, the migrants would leave their villages with confidence.

The third factor was the economic status of the migrant. Nothing could draw him back, for he did not have properties that might be damaged in his absence. Social cohesion or the extended family would support his offspring as much as they could. Even his wife could marry another husband by either leaving the children with relatives of her former husband or taking them with her⁶⁹⁹.

8.3. Religion and “Peasant Mentality”

In the economic history of the modern world, the majority of the available literature emphasizes that all religions, at least the principal ones, were considered as hindrances or barriers to economic improvement. The religious beliefs and practices which were common in the area of study fit into this category⁷⁰⁰. Moreover, North Shäwa was the home of two well known religious fathers (saints) of Shäwa during the 13th century, *Abuna Täklä Haymanot* and *Abuna Zéna Marqos*. Many village or localities of Northern Shäwa are regarded as a place where these two fathers “did miracles” and brought the inhabitants of the area from their previous practices to Christianity. For instance, *Gädelä Zéna Mmarqos* begins its text with very attractive sentences directly addressing the peoples of the region “... ወንደልን በማትማር ለሀገና ለሰላም ዓገማለ

⁶⁹⁷*Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁸Informants (40, 41, 42): Mängesté Lämma, Bälachäw Umé, and Bäkälä Ayyu; they are relatives. They claim that they had a Muslim background and that their ancestors left their original village because of economic difficulties and the despotic treatment of the *balabat*; this was why the god/ spirit of the land or soil helped them to be successful in Romé and Sakela, after their ancestors left the Däbib area.

⁶⁹⁹Märsé, *Tezeta*, pp.132, 125.

⁷⁰⁰*Ibid.*

መሆኑ የሆነ የተመሳሳይ የአባታችሁ የዘመርቃቻን ተከምረዋችን እንደገዢታለንና የጥቃትና የሽዋ አመራቸዋች ስያች ስመ፣”⁷⁰¹ ; “Listen! Peoples of Morät and all districts of Shäwa, we are going to tell you the miracles of your father Zéna Marqos, who was preaching [the] Gospel, governed for law and peace and became the second teacher”. Moreover, the district of Mänz was also associated similarly with Saint Rafael, perceived as a locality where “he performed his miracles” for Shäwan chiefs and peoples. Therefore, it was very difficult for other religious concepts or Christian sects in the region to gain a foothold. Consequently, the official doctrine, that of the Ethiopian Orthodox church, seems never to have been modified for centuries. This church advocated the following beliefs and practices that are assumed to be hindrances to economic progress. The first was satisfaction with the *status quo*, as everything takes place by the will of God. In other words, the peasants think that whatever happens to them is because of God’s will (የንግድ ፊዜድ ነው) . This belief was used by the church and the state for their own purposes. The role of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as a source of political power and legitimacy was deeply rooted in the Amhara communities of the region. Shäwan chiefs usually relied upon religious and traditional endorsements of their right to rule after their actual position had been assured by force. Subsequently, they acquired the public image of being charismatic leaders, the “elect of God”, as well as the upholders of the culture and the sacred traditions of the society. They ensured the support of the church by rewarding it with certain rights and privileges, including land grants. In return, the church made the rulers mysterious, elevating them to the status of powerful enigmatic beings sent from Heaven by the Almighty God (“elect of God”). During religious services, they were praised as, “the Beholder of the Mystique Power, the Elect of God...”, and suchlike terms. In fact, they had to deal very carefully with the church for it was a most important source of religious and cultural legitimacy to maintain their power⁷⁰².

The second important belief was that of considering this world as temporal or a place of preparation for the eternal world. Religious leaders were active in preaching that it was a relief to know about the next life. The peasants were convinced that “death is not the end, but a new beginning; that the Lord brings each person to life again in His eternal kingdom, where He awakens the body of the spirit so that believers can continue life there”. So, the whole purpose of

⁷⁰¹Täfsa Gäbrä Sillassé (ed), *Gädelä Täklü Haymanot* (Addis Ababa, 1992); La’ekä Mariyam Wäldä Yäesus (ed and trans), *Gädelä Zéna Marqos* (Addis Ababa, 2007), pp. 26-145, 211-273 .

⁷⁰²Täfsa Gäbrä Sillassé (ed), *Sereate Qidaé*, pp. 279, 289.

the human being's life here on earth, according to religious teaching, was to prepare for the life which lasts forever. This was apparently attractive, particularly for the peasants who were suffering from different hardships, such as hunger, disease and maladministration. Thus, the majority of them had nothing pleasant in this world. Furthermore, concepts of Christianity helped the preachers to justify the poverty of the peasants or to hinder them from saving, if indeed they had anything to save. Statements quoted from the Bible, like "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for your selves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"⁷⁰³ were familiar. It was believed that, as noted, eternal life was far more substantial than earthly life and that it was much more important to prepare for that life.

The third crucial practice concerned the work ethics of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. There were numerous holy days. According to its doctrine, no Christian farmer was allowed to till the land or to carry out any other productive economic activity during those days. Hence, agricultural production was restricted by numerous church holidays, as well as by excessive fasting. Particularly, the sacred text called the "ትእም ማቋያም", "miracles of Saint Mary", was read frequently after each Mass. Many of the "miracles" were sources of terror for the peasants in case they did not act appropriately or forgot to celebrate the holy days; those of Saint Mary were numerous. One such command was mentioned in the given scriptures as follows: "እነ ሊሆንም በዓለት እንደ አዴል ሰንበት አድርጋው የከበታቸው፡፡ ከጠማት አሰሳ ዓመት አሰሳ ከአለም ደረሰ ባንም ስራ አይሰራባቸው፡፡" ; "they should mark all these holidays like they do on Sunday; they should not work from year to year and forever, should not do any kind of activity." After the order the "experiences" of peoples of different localities who did not celebrate those days would be read for the Christian (peasant) community from the same scripture, like "እግዥ በማል አገር የደረሰቸው ይከውም ተእም በአገራቸው ቅድም የልተደረገ ነው፡፡ በዳግማት የልተደረገ በአማራቸኝን በዓል ጉንበት ሽቦ ቅን የአንበሳ ስምም አከላቸቸው አከበረው ነበር፡፡ አከለቸቸቻ ጥን የአማራቸኝንን በዓል ምርመራ፡፡ በዘመኑም ስዓት ደኋዳ ጉመድመግኘት ሆነ፡፡ በዘመኑም ሆነ፡፡ ነፃሰ ተነስ መልማት ሆነ ...፡፡"⁷⁰⁴ ; "In a country called Damot the miracle She did, never happened before in Ethiopia. In Damot the peoples did what never done before, on the date of holiday of St. Mary on 24th of Ginbot half of the peoples of Enselale

⁷⁰³"The Gospel of Matthew" in *the Bible*, King James Version, 6:19-21; R. Pankhurst, *Economic History*, p. 223.

⁷⁰⁴Ethiopian Orthodox Church, *Tä 'amerä Mariam* (Addis Ababa, 1996), pp. 10, 88.

celebrate the holiday of st. Mary. But half of them did not. On that spot [day] serious earth quake happened, Heavy snow rain fall, stormy wind blow and the day became darkened...”.

According to the European travellers in Shäwa, early in the 19th century religious festivals prevented work some 180 days in every 12 months, while the numerous fasting days weakened the people’s ability to work during the permitted part of the year, with the result that “the male half of the Christian population lived most of its time in complete inactivity”. Saturday was equally celebrated with Sunday; even water could not be drawn or wood hewn, from Friday evening to Monday morning in the majority of the Amhara inhabited districts of the region. The travellers observed that there were perhaps 220 holidays a year, and that in some communities between March 9 and April 7 there had been no less than 21 holy days, and one day of *corvee*, so that there were only eight days of normal work.

The number of non-working days increased in the 20th century, most probably because of the persistent disasters, famines and locust invasions. Frequently, such calamities were attributed to sins committed by the peasants, who consequently could not develop confidence in their efforts to save themselves from hunger. Even hard working was discouraged as “ጥጥጥ በቅድመ በዘመኑ በቅድ አይሰጥም ቁጥና” ; “whatever they toil [plough by ninety pairs of oxen] peasants could not be safe from hunger”⁷⁰⁵. Even if the monthly and annual holy days varied from locality to locality, weekly ones were common for most Christian inhabited localities. The former were extended or shortened depending on the number of churches and the special significance of the saint to that locality. There were large numbers of holy days throughout a month besides the eight Sabbaths [two per a week] in Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. Traditionally, it is said that there were about 44 commemoration days for which *tabots* (altars) were consecrated and churches constructed throughout the region. Of these days many were holy, depending on the presence of churches by the name of a specific saint. For instance, in Shäwa Méda, particularly in the Jirru area, the 7th, 12th, 13th, 16th, 19th, 21st, 23rd, 24th, 27th and 29th including every Saturday and Sunday of the month were holidays on which no agricultural practice could be performed. In addition, the 5th, 6th, 14th, 15th and 28th were holy days in different localities⁷⁰⁶.

⁷⁰⁵*Ibid*, p. 224; *Gädelä Zéna Mmarqos*, p. 268.

⁷⁰⁶Mahetäm Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Ye Itiyopia bahel tinat: Bulga*, p 10; Kidanä Wäld Kiflie, *Mtsähafü sewasewo wäge’ez mäzegäbä qalat* (Addis Ababa, 1992), p. 218.

On top of these, as already indicated the fragmented landscape of the region resulted in numerous villages or *ambas*, making communication difficult. Each *amba* tended to possess its own church. So, a given district might have a large number of churches and holy days depending on the landscape of the district. According to Mahetämä Sillassé, the Bulga district alone contained about 125 churches before 1935⁷⁰⁷. Other districts also reported a large number of churches: for instance, Korra, a district in Märhabété, had about 114 churches by 1900, while Ensaro, a very pocket-sized district, contained 51 churches by 1900⁷⁰⁸. If the peasants violated the regulations concerning holy days the priests took other measures, apart from preaching⁷⁰⁹. The state also enforced the commemoration of those days officially. One of such decrees issued at the end of July 1928 reads as follows; in fact Menilek had also made a similar declaration on *Yekatit*, 28, 1899 E.C.

በሰንበትና በግብት በተከለከለው በእል ቅን ስራ እንዳይሰራ ተብሎ ከዚህ ቁደም በዘመኑ እዋና
ተናገሩ ተከለከለ የጽል፡፡ እኩን ጥን በተከበረው በእል ቅን ይፈቀም እለተሰንበትና በመፈረር
ግብትም እዋናም ጥናሁ ስራ እየሰራሁ በዚህ ምክንያት በየጊዜው መቻልፍቱ እልታንሰ እለን፡፡ እኩንም
ሰንበትና ከዚህ ቁደም የተከለከለው በእል እከበር፡፡ በተከለከለውም በእል ቅን ስራ እተናሸ፡፡
በዚህ በግብትና በእዋና በተከለከለው በእል ቅን ስራው የተገኘ ስወ ይቀ኏፡፡⁷¹⁰

You were forbidden by declaration not to work on Sabbaths and sanctioned holidays for long. But now you disobey the declaration and began to work on sanctioned holidays, consequently calamities never cool down. Now respect the Sabbath and the sanctioned holidays, do not work on those days. One who is found working on those sanctioned holidays will be punished.

A further, related, obstacle to the agricultural productivity of the Shäwan peasants was their dependency on their “Father confessors” (priests) spiritual advice for every facet of life. The former invariably felt that God was watching through the eyes of the latter. Unfortunately, the clergy did not encourage the spirit and aspiration to be creative, hard working, and productive. The presence of large numbers of priests resulted in a passive “religious mentality” being inculcated in the people for whom this world was temporary, as well as considering their status as being ordained by God. Particularly the priests, who formed almost half of the members of society, were active in solidifying this attitude in the minds of the people. Therefore, they were

⁷⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁸ Wakéné Fréw, "The Family of Ras Darge and the Church in Salale 1870-1941". (B.A.Thesis, Haile Sillaase I University, 1973), p. 28.

⁷⁰⁹ Fesäha Yihun, *Täskarena bä’al Yeqir* (Addis Ababa, 2003), pp. 12-15.

⁷¹⁰ The Government of Ethiopia, “Awaj” in *Berähanena Sälam on Hamelé*, 16, 1920 E.C. (July, 1928); Paulos Gnogno, *Yä Atsé Menilek Däbdabéwoch*, p. 129.

obstacles to innovations instead of being agents of development, an attitude further contributing to less productive agriculture.

More than any region or province south of the Abay (Blue Nile river), north Shäwa was inhabited by extremely conservative people. One example in this regard was that when Emperor Menilek despatched Egyptian teachers to some provinces in 1908 it was only northern Shäwa that refused to admit these teachers, fearing that they would bring about a change of attitude or religious conversion in their children⁷¹¹. Another similar example was their resistance to the construction of the first road, which was run from Addis Ababa to Jihur (the northern extreme of Shäwa Méda), passing through Sälalé, Saydeber and then passed through Jirru Méda in 1930. Their opposition was under the pretext that land touched by vehicles would not grow any crops and that this might result in hunger and famine⁷¹². The project was abandoned during the Italian period, most probably because of the construction of another road linking Addis Ababa to Shäwa Méda via Däbrä Berähan.

Extravagant consumption of food resources or the holding of frequent feasts in the palaces and residences of the nobility was another dimension of the problem of productivity. The feast (*Geber*) was not productive, though it was assumed to be a two-way affair in which the collected taxes were to be fed to the masses in the form of an extravagant feast. The churches were also one of the most common places for feasts during the frequent holidays in the region or the country. The description by Menilek's chronicler of one single feast states:

“ በዚህ ስምን ለይሆን የተመዘገበው ለሰውም ለወጥም ለግብርም የታረድዎ. ከዚት ስንጋዣ. ይሰበ ስህፈ በቆጠር ፌስሮች ሆነ ” ; meaning, “In this week the number of cattle which were killed was 5095”⁷¹³. This was on one single occasion: the inauguration of the newly constructed church of St. Mary at Entoto, at the beginning of the 1880s.

⁷¹¹ Märsé Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, *Yähayagnaw kefeläzämän mäbacha* (Addis Ababa, 2007), p. 49; the common contents which were taken by the “father confessors” as lessons were the life and teachings of *Abuna Täklä Haymanot* and *Abuna Zéna Marqos* in the Amhara districts of north Shäwa. Peasants were encouraged to commemorate different dates related to the life of these religious fathers, and they were told about what were done for peoples who performed such prayers and celebrated such feasts. The life and deeds of both fathers were narrated in their *gädel*. These passages were read or told to the ordinary peasants during those days of commemoration.

⁷¹² *Ibid*, p. 395.

⁷¹³ Gäbrä Sillassé, p. 137; Pawulos Gnogno, *Yä Atsé Menilek Däbdabéwoch*, pp. 385, 387.



Fig. 4 Ruin of a feast hall at Ankobär where huge amounts of agricultural products were consumed (source, North Shäwa culture and tourism office)

Finally, church education in the region had little relevance or contribution to agricultural productivity. Unlike the Ethiopian church, some religious orders of European monasteries improved life in several respects. One of them was agricultural productivity. Monastery farms often experimented with new agricultural techniques. Some orders were famous for their herb gardens and medical knowledge. However, in the region being researched, church education offered nothing in this regard. In medieval Europe monasteries were centres of agricultural research and contributed greatly to productivity, whereas in Ethiopia monasteries were hotbeds of theological controversies, and neglected issues related to the material world. If they had showed such an interest, north Shäwa could have been one of the hubs of agricultural research for there were a large number of monasteries that could have served as centres for such research. To worsen the matter, they were dependent on the peasants' labour although they had been donated vast tracts of lands either as *rist* or *gult* rights. Everything in the situation was suitable for such research / study, except for the lack of interest on the part of the monks and nuns and the ecclesiastical institutions in general. For instance, monasteries had a variety of plants and animals within their compounds or domains, which were well protected in that no one, had the confidence or courage to touch the property⁷¹⁴. They held vast lands, even in different ecological

⁷¹⁴ Aseb   Hailu, "Sel  hezeb gudat" in *Ber  hanena S  lam*, on *Hamel  * 14, 1919 E.C (July, 1927); *A recent publication on the history of Ethiopian Orthodox church by the church itself* "የኢ.ት.የኢ.ዳ. አርቶግኩስ ተዋህድ በተክርስቲያን ክልተ ክርስቲያን እስከ 2000ዓ.ም" claims that agriculture was one component of church education. It also indicates the possibility of reducing the number of holy days, depending on the legislation of the synod of the church and its procedure of amendment. According to the same publication,

settings. Most of their lands were not necessarily located in the vicinity of the monasteries; rather they were located in distant places or localities that could have afforded the opportunity to farm a variety of species. The peaceful atmosphere in those areas would have made its own contribution. No political dispute or social disorder which unfolded in the region affected the peaceful situation of monasteries except in a few cases such as the 16th century “Muslim-Christian conflicts”. Lacking in the curriculum of church education was content dealing with agriculture. There was a trend to study medicine but it would have been equally important and possible to study agriculture using all the available options. Unfortunately, the church did not play a vital role in the realm of agricultural production⁷¹⁵.

8.4. Social Environment that Favored Warrior-hood

Ethiopians fundamentally constituted a warrior society, according to foreign observers and the feelings of some of the groups of the society. In particular, the culture of the Amhara placed great value on achievement in battles and the booty to be gained through them. Apparently that was why Berkeley described Ethiopian society as a warrior society: his statement was translated by Dagnachäw Wäldä Sillasé as “የኢትዮጵያ ህዝብ ስዕምላት ወታደር ነው ወታደር ማት ይግኙ፣ ተዋሮ ማት ነው በለው የምናል፡፡”⁷¹⁶; “The Ethiopians believe that a man is a soldier, and a soldier is a fighter and a hero”. In fact, this mentality had developed not only among the Amhara communities in the region but had also begun to emerge among the Oromo of Shäwa, particularly since the second half of the 19th, when they became the main component of Menilek’s army. These military values influenced the political, economic, and social organization of the peoples of the region where well known personalities bore military titles, such as *ras*, *däjazmach*, *qägnazmach*, *grazmach*, *balambaras* and others, from top to bottom of the hierarchy. Additionally, military symbolism and themes occur frequently in the arts and folklore of the period⁷¹⁷. Generally, becoming a warrior had been the surest path to social advancement and economic reward in the country. Kings and nobles traditionally awarded land,

even the Roman Catholic Church did not have agriculture as part of its curriculum, though it contributed to the development of many universities and colleges in which numerous agricultural studies were carried out.

⁷¹⁵Richard Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia*, p. 669.

⁷¹⁶Dagnäwu Wäldä Sillasé (trans. and ed. George F. H. Berkeley), *Yä Adwa Zämäichana Yä Asé Menilek anesas* (Addis Ababa, 1982), p. 10.

⁷¹⁷Mahetäm Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Ché Bäläw* (Addis Ababa, 1973), p.58; Collections of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies in Addis Ababa University.

titles, and political appointments to those who proved their loyalty, competence, and courage on the battlefields. In particular, upward mobility was not the result of one's own achievement in agricultural production or profitable commerce; rather it was because of achievements in battles⁷¹⁸.

ጥጥ ለብ ዳኑ ለብ ደና አጥና ደላል፣
ጋኝው ክበረታ የታው መቻ ኦም ደላል፡፡⁷¹⁹

*The loyal servant,
fool as he may grumble for imploring on knees
But his master never ignores him if he turns
different![become a hero]*

As a result, warriors traditionally gave allegiance to that commander who could assure the fruits of victory to his followers. Hence their allegiance was not to the state or to government authority. This attitude was reinforced by the society's naming of their lords or officials as either a member of the cavalry or leader of it, while everybody wanted to be named after his warhorse. In the works of Mahetätm Sillassé, the traditions of the cavalry were accorded considerable emphasis. In his book entitled ቅ! ብለው! “Gallop your horse”, he discussed the significance of this tradition, which was not the respect or status accorded to ordinary individuals. The peasants were not accustomed to be called after their horses (using the prefix- *abba*); for that matter they possessed no warhorses. If they had a horse, it was used either for ordinary transportation or for agricultural purposes. The peasants were called after their firstborn son, or after their daughter in the absence of sons⁷²⁰. Shäwa Méda was very important for the culture of horse breeding and riding that pre-occupied the lands and minds of Shäwan nobility and royalty, which in turn undermined the life of the peasants. The former were preoccupied with war rather than with peace, which made them “idle”. Therefore, as far as was possible they did their best to “create” reasons for battle and demonstrate their courage and skill in fighting. This was why an excellent cavalry soldier or horseman was praised as:⁷²¹

እርጥ ዓማ ማሸው ቅጥርጥ፣
አባር ገዢ ከቅማና ስር፡፡

*A Man with bay horse, plaited on its tail,
chases his enemy to death,
Clad himself in the cloud.*

⁷¹⁸ Mäsay Käbädä, *Survival and Modernization, Ethiopia's Enigmatic Present: A Philosophical Discourse* (Red Sea Press, 1999), pp. 167-170.

⁷¹⁹ Mahetämmä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Balen Enwoqebet*, p. 40; this affords an important indication of the attitude that fighting is the only way to arrive at the top of the social, even the economic, ladder.

⁷²⁰ Mahetämmä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Balen Enwoqebet*, pp. 42-43.

⁷²¹ *Ibid.*

Another social activity that could be considered as a profession as equally respected as fighting was hunting. Indeed, this was an extension of fighting that also turned out to be an actual training environment for warriors⁷²². The practice of, as well as the social attitude to, hunting did not contribute to the betterment of agriculture; rather it worsened the latter in many respects. The first was that the society appreciated hunting more than farming⁷²³; secondly the practice did not enable peasants to improve their own skills in farming; and thirdly it resulted in depletion of resources.

The other educative mediums for the young people of the time comprised the home, the village community, and the courts of the notables, kings or emperors. To complete their education, young men laboured as apprentices under the guidance of a family head, or village leaders of their choice. All of these knew little about agriculture; rather, they emphasized bravery, loyalty, patriotism, leadership qualities, bodily fitness, and skill in the use of weapons⁷²⁴. Ideals of military and leadership education were given priority among the community. The family strove to shape the young man as a brave fighter, *jägna*, who could protect the community and eventually aspire to be a leader⁷²⁵. Hence, he would be appreciated as:

አንድ አኅፏ የወጪቸው እና አንድ አኅፏ የተጠቃቸው፡⁷²⁶ *Not only his mother who bore him
Proud of but his Mother-in-law, for his heroic deeds.*

To earn full respect and prestige at court an individual should be a brave fighter rather than a skilful farmer or cultivator. A brave man could not be a peasant or farmer, the occupation of persons who had no opportunity to become a soldier or an official. An individual should be an excellent fighter in order that he would not be ashamed of his social status; he is told to:

እረዳቸው ገልበዥ አገ አስከንቃቸው፣ የወጪቸው ተከተዥ ቅጂው አስከተበር፣ የጥንቃው ወርሃዥ ስጋዥ ይሰንጋቸው፣ አቅራቢ አንድ አኅፏ የተጠቃቸው፡⁷²⁷ *Ride the horse to sweat
Pull the trigger to deft
Shoot the arrow, tear the zenith
Than to stick your head in your breast on the feast.*

⁷²² Mahetämä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Balen Enwoqebet*, p. 42.

⁷²³ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁴ Hailä Gäbrél, *Adwa*, p. 239.

⁷²⁵ M. Perham, *The Ethiopian Government* (London, 1948), pp. 160,164.

⁷²⁶ Mahetämä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, p.447.

⁷²⁷ *Ibid*, p.40.

The productive members of the society, the farmers, craftsmen and traders, were not appreciated by the rest of it. All of them were regarded as those without other options to escape from their backbreaking jobs. A popular song among the Amhara community is an expressive indication of this attitude:

ትኩረት ጥኩረት ስልጻዣ የዕድል ስልጻዣ
ወንድም አይተዳለ፣ የዕድል ስልጻዣ
አባትና አይተዳለ፣ የዕድል ስልጻዣ
አጋዣ ስልጻዣ አንድ የዕድል
ወንድ አንድ አይተዳለ፡፡⁷²⁸ የዕድል ስልጻዣ

Of heroes but you sing!

Where is your brother's deed?

Where is your father's deed?

Let them farm,

keep your belly full.

The society did not appreciate cultivators at all. The only exception was the peasant's own metaphoric dialogue with and appreciation of his animals: oxen and donkeys, not horses. Regretfully, the horse was largely the animal of brave fighters and was appreciated equally. Consequently, farming during the period under discussion was the livelihood of peoples without any options and skills. Even the cultivators were not considered as skilled members of society, unlike for example the craftsmen who were equally needed, but treated differently because of the assumption that they possessed special power to harm others. Yet in reality the former were professionals who were contributing to the economy of the region⁷²⁹.

Altering one's profession from peasant to warrior was also another way out. This offered two parallel advantages: one was economic, because a warrior was in a better position during a period of fighting: he could plunder the peasants, and because of his services to the regional lord or the main court, particularly in the process of territorial expansion, he would be granted an extensive land or *gult* right. The second advantage was status (prestige). According to the tradition of the area, warriors were given much respect. Therefore, both of these could be achieved; but not by hard working as farmers. Täfsa Gäbrä Sillassé, a migrant from North Shäwa, Bulga who was living in Addis Ababa, commented on the issue as follows in 1928.

⁷²⁸Informants (14,43): Awäqä Gobana, Täsfayé Bägashaw; Popular songs.

⁷²⁹Dächasa, "The Peopling of Morät and Märehabété: c. 1700-1889" (MA thesis Addis Ababa University, 2003), p. 10.

ወቃድርች ህዝ አባትኩ በርካታ
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መወቃች ይወችሁ ከመከራተች
ነፃ ስወጣችሁ ንተ ክተች፡፡

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*All, you the soldiers please! Work hard
Be a farmer, produce more crops
Instead of wandering around carrying a gun
Harvest and fill your granary.*

*If a merchant does not farm
Crops would be expensive instead of money
Peoples are in a state of fear and distress
For you do not fix the plough and yoke to farm.*

*One who refuse to plough the land, soften
his hands
He would be in a state of stress now and
again*

*And will die a steady death of hunger.
A lazy person has no fruits
He would be in critical poverty.
One who refuse to work become hungry
One who hates farming has no fruits
Why don't you listen while I'm telling you?
It is the farmer who becomes wealthy
When our Lord (God) give a job to Adam
Say to him, Eat by the sweat of your brow.*

*I have great threat
If I don't eat bread (injära), I will die of
hunger
But if I work hard I will be a wealthy man.
One who afraid of cold and refuse to farm
One who migrate by hanging his hoe/ tools
He will be judged and ashamed of his deeds.
All! You the migrant, back to your village
Fix plough and yoke to farm the land
What you will eat, if you don't, work!*

⁷³⁰Täfsa Gäbrä Sillassé, “Mäjämäreya selä Itiyopiya ihel mäwädädha tduro Zämän Shämäta manäs” in *Berehanena Sälam on Mäskäräm*, 17, 1921 E.C. (September, 1928).

8.5 The Destructive Methods of Using Resources

A given environment is considered as a combination of different species of fauna and flora. The measures for the conservation and sustainable use of these fauna and flora vary from culture to culture and even within a culture. There is the important role of sociological, ethical, and religious and ethno-biological values in human activities that either accords proper concern to nature / the environment or exploits these unwisely. The main forces driving the environmental transformation of a region are human population growth, together with increasing resource consumption and socio cultural change. Strictly speaking, no part of the region was truly uninfluenced when it was exposed to the activities of peoples with different cultures. The culture of the region under study was significantly modified by human actions because of the fact that undisturbed or virgin forest began to be considered as property of little value in comparison to farmlands. Conventionally, the major activities which affect the natural condition of an environment, specifically in the area of study, are the following: agriculture and over harvesting of resources, habitat destruction, degradation, overuse of resources resulting in depletion of soil fertility and supply of water⁷³¹.

Accordingly, exploiting the resources “effectively” was the main motto of Amhara settlers and of kings when they settled peoples in the newly conquered areas of Ifat and Shäwa Méda. As has been mentioned in the second chapter of this study, the newly settled Amhara community considered themselves as knowledgeable and skillful in exploiting the resources. This was applied aggressively when many Amhara had settled in Ifat and Shäwa Méda⁷³². The traditional resource management techniques which had been usual, for instance in Mänz, were not employed in this case, most probably because the common property mentality seems to have come to an end. Besides, considering the resources which were previously in the hands of the Tuläm as enemy property could be another cause of using it in destructive ways⁷³³.

There was a dramatic change affecting the nature of interaction between the society and the geographical environment, owing to the transfer of most parts of Shäwa from the hands of the Oromo to those of the Amhara by the 19th century. This was apparently because the former conducted a relatively benign interaction with their environment as was discussed in the third

⁷³¹IRLI, Amhara.

⁷³²Bairu, *Asmä Gyorgis and his Works*.

⁷³³*Ibid*; Pawulos, p.385.

chapter of this study. However, the Amhara had no such cultural and religious social settings, which shaped their relation with the geographical environment in a different manner. Therefore, the nineteenth century can be taken as a turning point for many areas of Shäwa, mainly Ifat and Shäwa Méda in this regard. The newly settled dominant community interacted aggressively with their new environment, cutting down large trees, burning bushes and clearing vegetation or forests to expand their fields. All these activities were considered as an indication of hard work and industriousness. On the other hand the previously benign interaction of the Oromo began to be perceived as laziness or lack of knowledge and skills. Industriousness and hard working or clearing land of “useless” vegetation was promoted by the government. Even the famous 19th century Ethiopian intellectual, Gäbrä Hiwot Baykädagn, himself could not understand this healthy interaction of the Oromo with their environment and commented, “እና ሂሸም ወለች የእውቅት ደረጃዎች አቶ የለ ህቶ የእርሻን ሥራ አልለመቻም ካበርና አገሩ ተመልዌ ለግረግና ይን ሆነ”⁷³⁴; “These Gallas [Oromo] whose knowledge was inferior [to ours] did not learn how to cultivate, and so the land turns to be swampy and jungle”. In areas which were the home of many wild animals hunting was also undertaken aggressively not only for economic purposes but also for its social value mainly after the introduction of modern firearms, as discussed in the previous sub-topic of this chapter⁷³⁵.

⁷³⁴ Gäbrä Hiwot Baikädagn, *Mängesetena Yähezeb Astädadär* (Addis Ababa, 1914), p. 38.

⁷³⁵ Mahetämä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Balen Enwoqebet*, pp. 38-43.

Chapter Nine

9. Shäwan Towns in the Neighbourhood of Farmlands

9.1 Semi-Mobile Royal Residences (1865-1881)

In comparison to the mobile capitals or courts during the medieval period of Ethiopia⁷³⁶, the chiefdom, and later the kingdom, of Shäwa maintained relatively semi-mobile or permanent capitals in the 19th century. This caused the rulers to give thought to farmlands and granaries⁷³⁷. Menilek and his predecessors were actively working to obtain reliable farmlands for the court. Thus, the court operated its own farms and granaries in the neighbourhood of the capital towns⁷³⁸. The food supply was one of the essential conditions and requirements that gave rise to the foundation of these towns in north Shäwa during the 19th and 20th centuries. The availability of water was also another essential requirement. Hence most of the early towns were established close to rivers or water sources⁷³⁹. The locality would also have been able to offer good possibilities of defence naturally, which would be further consolidated by building walls or fortress. Significant examples here were Feqré Gemeb and Enäwari, where man made defences were constructed⁷⁴⁰.

Most Shäwan towns were centres of government. Thus, they were oriented towards military activities. If any trade was practiced, it was to serve the large armies of the rulers. The latter were mainly concerned with the needs of the army and the state. The surrounding rural dwellers, chiefly peasants, were there to serve the rulers and the army by supplying provisions to these towns. The town dwellers were enjoying these apparently at the expense of the rural poor. On the whole fertile farmlands and favourable climatic condition were the most important factors contributing to the emergence and growth of these towns. Particularly, they made productive agricultural activities possible in feeding the townsfolk⁷⁴¹.

⁷³⁶Gäbrä Sillassé Wäldä Arägay, *Tarikä Zämänä Zä Dagemawi Menilik Negusä Nägäst Zä Itiyopia* (Addis Ababa, 1967), p. 194.

⁷³⁷Täklä Tsadiq Mäkuria, *Atsé Tewodros ina yä Itiyopiya Andenät* (Addis Ababa, 1989), p. 63.

⁷³⁸R. Pankhurst, “The History of Shäwan Towns from the Rise of Menilek to the Foundation of Addis Ababa” in *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Nice, 1977), p. 222.

⁷³⁹*Ibid.*

⁷⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 225.

⁷⁴¹George W. Grantham and Sarget Marie-Noelle, “Espaces privilégiés: Productive agraire et zones d’approvisionnement des villes dans l’Europe préindustrielle” in *Annales, Histoire, Sciences Sociales*. Vol. 52, No.3 (1997), pp. 709-711.

Along with the factors mentioned above, communication lines were also determining the future fortunes of the towns, especially where population growth was continuing⁷⁴². This is because all those that were established in North Shäwa, from the beginning of the 18th century to the end of the 19th century, were “pre-industrial towns”, characterized by a large proportion of agricultural communities and the frequent disappearance of these or abandonment of the towns. After a gap of few years or decades new groups of farmers would set up new villages. From a long term perspective, there seemed to have been an increase in the number of agricultural settlements⁷⁴³.

High transportation costs resulted in low population density and small size urban settlements during the pre-industrial period. Such towns were characterized by encirclement by a series of specialized agrarian rings so as to minimize transportation costs. Products that could easily be spoiled, like milk and vegetables, were available in the villages close to the towns, while supplies that did not spoil easily, like wood and grain, would come from relatively distant areas. In such towns, according to the available literature, the proportion of the town population did not exceed 35% (of the population engaged in non-agricultural economic activity) owing to this reason⁷⁴⁴. This maximum limit was due to the limited supplies of food available from the neighbouring countryside. This was true for towns where maritime transportation was not possible, whereas towns with maritime routes imported a lot of grain through these.

The Shäwan towns were “self-sufficient” in their provisions of food from the nearby farmlands in the region. This situation would increase the opportunity to feed the population of the centre. To supplement the supplies from the farmlands, they were also fed by the food transported by pack animals within the radius of a two day trip. Economic historians estimate the radius necessary for a town to be sustained in terms of the size and the productivity of the surrounding agricultural activities⁷⁴⁵.

Accordingly, a town of 1,500 inhabitants needed a “belt” with a radius of between 6.2 and 2.8 km, while towns with 10 000 inhabitants needed the radius to be between 16.1 and 7.1 km. If a town housed 50,000 inhabitants, it was between 36.8 and 15.9 km. According to these scholars, beyond 50 km the transportation costs by land would have become too high. For instance, a city

⁷⁴²*Ibid*, p. 707.

⁷⁴³R. Pankhurst, “The History of Shäwan Towns...”, pp. 222-229.

⁷⁴⁴Grantham and Sarget, p. 724.

⁷⁴⁵*Ibid*, p. 709.

of 100,000 inhabitants needed a belt producing at least 8 hectolitres crops per hectare. At 200,000 the minimum productivity was around 12 and at 500,000 around 20 hectolitres crops per hectare⁷⁴⁶. Beyond 500,000 people, the city could not rely only on the produce of the surrounding countryside and required other inputs or solutions⁷⁴⁷.

It is assumed that the producers could carry the grain themselves, over up to 30-50 km in two days; this defines the limit of the intensive direct exchange between city and countryside as transportation costs would remain low. Transport by land could compete with maritime transport up to 50 km away from the centre. Establishing a new commercial linkage was difficult, expensive and likely to fail as it required a series of good harvests, trust and investment. As a result, trade routes carrying large amounts of grain were rare. Therefore, as most of the cities with fewer than 200,000 inhabitants could rely on their neighbouring countryside, there would be little demand for an extensive grain trade. Similarly, all of the Shäwan towns that preceded Addis Ababa possessed the characteristics of pre-industrial or agriculture dependent towns. All of them were small, being *Kätämas* (fortified settlements) that developed inside military garrisons. They were supplied with agricultural products by *gäbbars*, peasants who sold crops or other supplies⁷⁴⁸.

Within the twenty years following his escape from Mäqdäla in 1865, Menilek founded or rebuilt towns that can be categorized into four groups: the first, about seven in number, were newly built capitals and military garrisons. The second group was founded as a series of stations for foreign settlements while the third group consisted of markets. Fourthly, previous towns which had been destroyed during the civil wars among Shäwan political rivals, as well as campaigns by Tewodros and Yohannes against Shäwa, needed to be rebuilt by Menilek at the end of the 1870s. Liché, Feqré Gemeb, Enäwari, Tamo, Wärailu, Entoto (Wächacha) and Dildila (Entoto) belong to the first category. Angoläla Mähäl Wänz, Let Maräfiya, and Shotelit were foreign stations. Aliyu Amba, Abdul Räsul and Rogé were well known market towns of Shäwa

⁷⁴⁶Holger Th.Graf, “Leicestershire Small Towns and Pre-Industrial Urbanization” (MA thesis, University of Leicester, 1987), pp.100-102; (8 hectolitres per hectare, where one hectolitre = 100 litres or 112.5 kilograms).

⁷⁴⁷*Ibid*, p. 105.

⁷⁴⁸*Ibid*, p. 108.

until 1917. Ankobär, Däbrä Berähan and Säladingay had been Shäwan towns during its golden era in the middle of the 19th century and were rebuilt⁷⁴⁹.

Because of the above mentioned characteristics of pre-industrial towns, Shäwan rulers were forced to alter capitals one after the other. Those of the 18th and 19th centuries who preceded Menilek founded a capital that served only during a single reign or the life span of one ruler. Successors would be forced to shift their capitals to other, better resourced, sites since the towns of their predecessors would have run out of resources. However, in the second half of the 19th century, the Shäwan ruler, Menilek, was frequently shifting his royal residences from one site to the other during his reign, in fact, along with the attempt to rebuild the capitals of his grandfather Sahelä Sillassé. Therefore, from 1865 to 1886 he built several of such towns, while Addis Ababa was his final destination⁷⁵⁰.

The first destination of Menilek after he escaped from Tewodros' mountain fortress at Maqdala at the end of June 1865 was Ankobär, the capital of his grandfather, Sahelä Sillasé. He arrived by the end of August (on *Nahase* 24) after defeating Bäzabeh, Tewodros' governor of the province, at Gadilo, and passed through two important historical sites: Haramba, one of the few capitals of his ancestors which had survived the destruction resulting from the recent fighting, and Mähäl Wänz, which was used as a place of refuge mainly during the period when epidemic diseases posed a threat⁷⁵¹, finally arriving at Ankobär. Staying there throughout the month of September (*Mäskäräm*), he then continued his journey, and visited Qundi, Angoläla and Däbrä Berähan, almost all of which had been largely destroyed during the fighting with Tewodros⁷⁵².

Ankobär is located on the top of a mountain at 2400 metres on the steep escarpment of the north eastern Shäwan highlands. To the east, it faces the lowland that descends down to the market town of Aliu Amba at 1800 metres. To the south-east, it faces the Denki river valley at 1500 metres elevation. To the west, it faces the highland plateau of Shäwa (2300-2500 metres) which extends south west to Däberä Berähan and Angoläla. The town of Ankobär, founded initially as a border settlement in the late 18th century, served as a base for Sahelä Sillasé's control over the eastern lowlands inhabited by Argobba Muslims and Oromo pastoralists⁷⁵³. Its

⁷⁴⁹ Mahetämä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqal, *Zekrä Nägär* (Addis Ababa, 1972), p. 348.

⁷⁵⁰ Gäbrä Sillassé, p.138; R. Pankhurst, "The History of Shäwan Towns...", p. 234.

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵² Gäbrä Sillassé, p. 58; R. Pankhurst, "The History of Shäwan Towns...", p. 234.

⁷⁵³ James McCann, *People of the Plough*, p. 110.

location was very important not only for its own strategy of defence but also for controlling all sides of the kingdom. Besides these strategic advantages, there were also economic reasons that enabled Ankobär to survive for several decades. Different types of provisions, mainly agricultural products and fire woods as well as other related resources, were obtainable on the outskirts of the town or settlement, and nearby areas within a radius of about 50 to 60 km⁷⁵⁴. The limited number of town dwellers were fed by the farms and pastures located within this radius under different tenure, taxation and tribute systems.

The pasturelands on the plateau of Shäwa north of Angolola were providing milk and milk products as well as meat. These products were supplied not only by tribute and taxpayers in kind but also by the land directly owned by the court or king under the form of tenure termed *Wärägänu*⁷⁵⁵. Frequently, lands south of Angolola were also used as sources of these products, mainly through raids that were carried out three times a year⁷⁵⁶. Concerning food crops, it was the vicinity of the town that was used as the chief source. The vegetables were mostly provided from the nearby lowland, with about a six hour walk to climb the steep escarpment to Ankobär. Onions, garlic and red pepper were favourite vegetables and spices in Shäwa⁷⁵⁷. Peasants in the nearby Denki river banks were the chief suppliers of these foods.

Many of the cereals of the sorghum family and *téf* as well as wheat were also harvested from the lowland region that encircles the town in the shape of a crescent in the east. There were many varieties of sorghum, the principal ones of which were, *Zängada* with red spreading spikes and *wogari* with yellow, compact pendent thorns. According to Harris, four varieties of *téf* were found, two brown and two white. The latter was preferred; while the finest, *magna téf*, was grown “only up on the king’s fields”, and could never be purchased by his subjects⁷⁵⁸. Shäwans grew 24 varieties of indigenous wheat. The most significant were: *yabun ehel* (Abun’s grain), *yäbäré mängaga* (ox’s molar teeth), and *yägosh gembar* (buffalo’s forehead).

⁷⁵⁴C.W. Isenberg and J.L. Krapf. *Journal of C.W. Isenberg and J.L. Krapf: Detailing Their Proceeding in the Kingdom of Shoa and Journey in Other Parts of Abyssinia in the Years 1839, 1840, 1841 and 1842* (London, 1843), p. 179.

⁷⁵⁵Bairu Tafla (ed and trans), *Asmä Gyorgis and His Works: History of the Galla and the Kingdom of Sawa* (Stuttgart, 1987), p. 522 ; Svien Ege, *Class, State and Power in Africa: A Case of the Kingdom of Shäwa (Ethiopia) about 1840* (Wiesbaden, 1996), p. 45.

⁷⁵⁶*Ibid*; C.W. Isenberg, and J.L. Krapf, p. 180.

⁷⁵⁷Harris, W.C. *The Highland of Ethiopia*, Vol. II (London, 1844), pp. 402-404.

⁷⁵⁸*Ibid*.

Wheat was frequently eaten unground, in a mixture of parched grain, called *kollo* (roasted cereals), the common provision, which was carried by the Amhara warriors to the battle fields⁷⁵⁹.

The barley families were harvested from the cool high altitude regions of Shäwa that still encircled Ankobär in the form of a crescent from the south west. Sixteen kinds of barley were raised on the hill tops and on the high plateau of Shäwa, where neither the sorghum nor wheat could survive. Its greatest consumption was in brewing, but mules and horses were also fed on barley, while the finer types were eaten⁷⁶⁰. In fact, they were a staple food for the Shäwan peasants who inhabited the cool plateau.

Beans were also cultivated throughout the Shäwan highlands. They were eaten both fresh and green during the season, or, when dry, made into soups. Lentils (*meser*), chickpeas (*shembra*), peas (*atär*) and beans (*baqéla*) were grown in Shäwa. Generally, Harris underlines this in his observation of Shäwa during the 1840s:

Hence the astonishing number of distinguishable kinds of grain cultivated in a small compass of ground under certain established appellation, and brought in to use for very different purposes. Within a circumference of five miles around Ankobär are found, of sorghum, 28 varieties; of wheat, 24; of barley, 16; of rye, 2; of *téf*, 4; of oats, 2; of maize, 2.⁷⁶¹.

The western Amhara inhabited localities were not in a position to provide such important food resources because of distance from the court and the scarcity of farmlands. Instead they provided the court with different articles, the products of their crafts. For instance, Mänz was known for its wool products, and Morät and Märhabété for other products of iron working and tanning. Weaving cotton was the specialization of the Argobba. There were also important markets in the town itself and nearby vicinities, at distances of one or two days' walk from the capital where different products were exchanged and the towns' inhabitants could purchase all the necessary provisions⁷⁶².

In spite of the establishment of alternative towns such as Liché, Menilek did not abandon Ankobär for good. He visited it frequently. He also tried to reconstruct and spend some of his leisure time, mainly summer (the rainy season) and some days of scarcity of food at Ankobär.

⁷⁵⁹*Ibid*, p. 404.

⁷⁶⁰Isenberg, C.W. and J.L. Krapf, p. 181.

⁷⁶¹Harris, Vol.2, p. 403.

⁷⁶²Pankhrust, "The History of Shäwan Towns...", p. 222; Pawulos, pp. 61, 143, 189.



Fig. 5 Ankobär's nearby low land immediately after the rainy season (source, North Shäwa Culture and Tourism Office)

He visited the town on several occasions in the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s⁷⁶³. His attempt at reconstructing the town was appreciated by the chronicler of Menilek as the first of its kind. The previous palace, which was small, was enlarged and made more beautiful. The new *elfin* (reception house) was said to have surpassed all previous such buildings in beauty and novelty, as Gäbära Sillassé puts it, in accordance with the scriptural statement that the “glory of the latter house shall be greater than of the former”⁷⁶⁴. However, Ankobär by the end of 19th century was no more than an “insignificant” market, and therefore remained commercially dependent on Aleyu Amba. Most of the goods sold in its market were of local origin like butter, honey and wax, sugar cane, bananas, lemons, salt, cattle, mules, donkeys and horses, skins, earthenware

⁷⁶³Gäbära Sillassé, p. 193.

⁷⁶⁴*Ibid*, p. 194.

articles, umbrellas, knives, spears and shields. A few articles were brought from a distance: tobacco from Gurage and coffee from the land of Ittu Oromo⁷⁶⁵.

Another Shäwan town which was rebuilt by Menilek was Däberä Berähan, also at the end of the 1870s. At the end of 1879 European observers reported that the town had been recently reconstructed, partly by the construction of several sand huts in the palace compound. The construction of the Sillassé church was carried out by transporting wood for it from Mugaré Zala and was completed in 1881. By the late 1870s, Däberä Berähan had reached its earlier status. The rebuilding of Ankobär and Däbrä Berähan was followed by the foundation of Entoto and other towns in the 1870's and 1880s⁷⁶⁶.

Säladengay, formerly the residence of Sahlä Sillassé's mother, also continued to be used in the second half of the 19th century when Menilek's mother Ejegayähu lived there. The reason for the reconstruction of Säladengay, according to the informants, was that of the suitable highland weather conditions. It was the intersection of roads to Mänz and the northern regions of the country as well as the birthplace of his grandfather Sahelä Sillassé. The site was also called "the town of queen mothers" for it was the home of Sahelä Sillasé's mother Wäyzäro Zänäb Wärq, Menilek's mother Wäyzäro Ejegayehu and that of Wäyzäro Bafana. These queen mothers possessed vast fertile farms to feed hundreds of their servants. The town was also the residence of *Abuna* Matewos who was the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox church during the reign of Menilek II. The well known monastery of Markos in Säladingay was also established by *Abuna* Matewos in 1875 E.C. The construction of the church took seven years. It was accomplished through a process of extravagant consumption of wood resources; observers commented that: "እንዲ: የተኞዢ 30 ስዎ. ከጋራ 30 ስዎ. ከቀና ሆኖ እንዲቀምጣር በተጋድመ እንዲጠና ላይ ታስቦ እየተነተተ ካዣ: :⁷⁶⁷", "each log was transported[pulled] to the site by 60 men, 30 on the left and 30 on the right sides after tying it on a yoke".

The land nearby the monastery was considered as the *rist* of the *Abun*; the first administrator (ገብር) of the monastery was the Egyptian *Blatta* Pawlos, who was the brother of *Abuna* Matewos. There was about 350 *gashas* of land around Säladingay which comprised the land of the *Abun* (የእኩስ ማግራፍ) and around 133 servants with the title of priest. He also

⁷⁶⁵*Ibid.*

⁷⁶⁶Daniel Keberät, *Yäbété Krstiyán Märäjäwoch* (Addis Ababa, 2007), p. 180.

⁷⁶⁷*Ibid*, p.181.

employed a large number of servants and other consumers to which vast tracts of lands were allotted, and the finest quality of wheat was even named after the *abun* as *yabun ehel*⁷⁶⁸.

Angoläla, one of the twin capitals of Sahelä Sillassé, was repeatedly destroyed entirely by the Oromo rebels since it was founded as a gateway to the frontier of the kingdom. By the time Menilek was attempting to reconstruct the Shäwan towns, Angoläla was not accorded a chance to be rebuilt, because of its total destruction and lack of both economic and strategic importance in the period under investigation. Hence, though it was visited by Menilek in September 1868, and again in March 1869, it remained a ruin⁷⁶⁹.



Fig. 6. The mouth of a 19th century tunnel linking the royal palace with the nearby Church of Kidanä Mehrät, which is part of a secret underground tunnel for *Negus* Sahelä Sillassé (1813-1847), in order for him to move about unobserved by the public for security reasons.

Even if he attempted to rebuild Shäwan towns, Menilek was forced to establish a new town or settlement most probably because of two interrelated reasons. The first was the destruction of Shäwan towns, which were founded before his time during the political turmoil in Shäwa (1855-

⁷⁶⁸Harris, Vol. 2, p. 403.

⁷⁶⁹R. Pankhurst, "The History of Shäwan Towns...", p. 222.

1865), and second, the tradition of establishing new towns in the better resourced or unexploited regions. In fact, Menilek was not in a position to extend his Shäwan territory at this time⁷⁷⁰.

One such new settlement was Liché, five kilometers to the north east of Däberä Berähan which was selected in the autumn of 1865. Various authors claim that Menilek founded it for the usual strategic reasons since the site was protected in the west by the deep gorge of the Chacha River, which made the area virtually inaccessible from that direction, and it had the usual features of a military camp. In fact, it would not have been surprising if he had selected the site at this early stage of his reign when the peace of Shäwa was unstable. However in addition, in comparison to Däberä Berähan, Liché boasted a suitable market site to feed all the peoples of the settlement. The settlement operated a considerable market which lay to the east of the town, and was of greater importance than that of Däbrä Berähan. Liché market, which had its own customs chief, was visited by Amhara, Oromo, Adaré, Argobba and Guragé traders, as well as by peasants within a radius of sixty kilometers. Any distance beyond this was difficult to cross. Goods on sale at the market of Däberä Berähan included grain, cattle, mules and horses, cloth, cotton thread of many colours, buttons, mirrors and other objects from Europe; skins, hides and leatherwear; harnesses, shields, spears and knives; objects of iron, brass and silver, and basketware, myrrh, incense, coriander, ginger, butter, tobacco, and limes. All of them were products from the area. Items from faraway lands were not obtainable except for “items from Europe”⁷⁷¹. It can be assumed that the absence of fertile farmlands in the vicinity nonetheless forced the king to abandon the town within a short period of time.

Even if he did so, the volatile situation in Shäwa still did not allow him to give thought to any farmlands at this stage; rather, it forced him to accord more attention to establishing a strategic location to defend his authority⁷⁷². Consequently, he gave strong preference to finding another natural fortress. One of the first of such places to be used was Feqré Gemb (wall of friendship). Menilek fortified this inaccessible mountain five kilometers east of mount Qundi⁷⁷³. He did this, according to Pankhurst, because he thought that he might have to take refuge there, in case Tewodros or his possible successor invaded Shäwa. Unfortunately, Feqré Gemb was remote from the centre of the kingdom of Shäwa, and offered no protection to the central and

⁷⁷⁰ Bairu Tafla (ed and trans), *Asmä Gyorgis and His Works* , p. 525.

⁷⁷¹ R. Pankhurst, *Economic History*, p. 383.

⁷⁷² Bairu Tafla (ed and trans). *Asmä Gyorgis and His Works*, p. 549; Gäbrä Sillassé, p. 78.

⁷⁷³ *Ibid.*

southern portions of the kingdom. Most probably Menilek thought that from the fortress he could defend Ankobär, and keep in communication with the coast, but, because of its distance from the fertile regions of the country, he was unable to withstand a prolonged siege. Subsequently in 1870 he left Feqre Gemb, suspended the fortification work and restored the land to its previous owners⁷⁷⁴.

The third, fortified settlement of Menilek after Liché and Feqré Gemb in the second half of the 19th century was Enäwari. It was founded around 1870 as a natural fortress. It is located to the western extreme of Jirru at 68 kilometers distance from the north-west of Däberä Berähan. In comparison to Liché and Feqré Gemb, Enäwari offered at least two advantages at this stage. The first was its location in the centre of the kingdom that enabled the king to control both the Christian Amhara to the south and the Oromo to the north-east. Secondly the area contained rich pastures capable of feeding numerous warhorses, cattle and other livestock. In fact, after a few years the nearby plateau of Jirru began to be cultivated intensively and became a well known producer of different grains⁷⁷⁵. By the end of the century, it had become a significant supplier of wheat. Märsé, who was from Jirru, described the agriculture of the district as follows:

ይኑ በማል አገር እና ብንደና ጥቅር ስንደ ብቻ ተልሱ ተልሱ አገርና ስንደረሱ ዓይ ይበቃልበታል ጥቅር
ማቻም አልፎ አልፎ ጥቅት ያ ጥቅት ይተናል፡፡ እገር ዓይ ይኑ የኑ የኑ አገሮች ስንደ እው፡፡ ...
የገኘም መሬት ወል ስለሆነ በማወ ይኑ ከእርሻ በቀር አዲስ መሬት በበዝ አይተኝም፡፡ ... በደኑ
ዘጋጀ የለትም የቆለ አገርቻ መሬት ከንጂዕ ማኑ እግ ስለጥ ማኑ ስለጥ ማኑ ስለጥ ማኑ ስለጥ የበቃለለ፡፡⁷⁷⁶

In a country called Jirru, white wheat and black wheat, beans, linseed, peas, chickpeas and guaya, also sometimes black *téf* are grown. However, the major product of Jirru is wheat. The land of the country is scarce and no land is uncultivated. The low lands adjacent to Jirru also grow white sorghum and red sorghum, *téf*, *nug*, sesame and sunflower, banana and lemon.

Enäwari, located on the junction between Morät and Jirru, was encircled by relatively productive localities, besides its strategic importance for defence. Southwestern, western and northwestern lowlands supplied crops such as all families of sorghum, *téf*, and oil seeds as well as vegetables. The plateau of Jirru was important for growing all of the leguminous crops and wheat. Nevertheless, in the middle of all this, the peasants were leading an impoverished life for

⁷⁷⁴R. Pankhurst, *Economic History*, p. 695.

⁷⁷⁵Märsé Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, *Tizeta*, p. 165.

⁷⁷⁶Märsé Hazän, “Selä Zändero azmära kagär wuset yämäatalen wäré” in *Berähanena Sälam on Tahesas* 23, 1917 E.C. (January, 1925).

they could not consume many of the best crops that were grown in Jirru⁷⁷⁷. Most probably this was the reason why they expressed their feeling and experiences in these terms:

ጀር ስንደ ብወቂ ብንደ ብርሃና
አስፈላጊውን አልፋል እንደ ሰነ፡ ⁷⁷⁸ *Wheat is plenty in Jirru
But I am vowed to eat guaya (?) alone!
And to walk jerkily ahead, to reach my destination.*

Although wheat was abundantly produced in Jirru the poor peasants were forced to consume *guaya*, a very harmful crop which contained a chemical that affected the tendons of a person's legs. In most cases, it was used to fatten oxen and sheep. This does not mean that the farmers did not produce wheat, but wheat would be paid as taxes, and would not be available to the peasants. As a result, they regularly consumed (የቆረዥ) this harmful crop. The extensive plateau also offered excellent pasture both for the cattle and for pack animals. The cattle slaughtered during the inauguration of the fortress at Enäwari came from this plateau. The brewing of local drinks was also very important on every occasion. All the resources were brought from the nearby lowlands. Items such as *gésho*, honey, were frequently transported from this vicinity⁷⁷⁹.

To make the natural fortress of the site more secure, the only access was fenced with a huge stone wall and a ditch. After the work of the fortification was completed, in late 1871, the king arranged a “splendid feast” for which a large number of cattle were slaughtered, and vast quantities of beer and mead were brewed. Menilek expressed the view that he was very pleased with the fort, and declared that it was important not only for his own safety, but also for the defence of the entire kingdom. Because of the productivity of Jirru and its vicinity, Enäwari also became one of Menilek’s principal treasures. Arnoux, who visited it in 1873, stated that the reserves were accumulated in storehouses. According to European observers, there were rooms full of provisions, among them over 50,000 kilos of honey and enormous stocks of wheat, barley, *téf*, and other cereals, sufficient to feed a large army for over a year⁷⁸⁰. In fact, the area was still serving the same purpose in the first decades of the 20th century. Märsé mentioned the presence

777 *Ibid.*

⁷⁷⁸ Informants (14,46,47,48,49): Awäqä Gobana, Dagné Täklu, Asamen Täfära, Esheté Zäläläw, Shemäles Hailu; all of them are farmers in Jirru. None of them could tell me when this couplet was recited but volunteered the information that it was uttered when their fathers had no surplus to consume because their best crop had been taxed.

⁷⁷⁹ Märsé Hazän. *Tezetaq*, "Seläzändro..."

780 *Ibid.*

of government stores in the area then: "...ለም የሽ ለይ ካልወ የመግስት ትተር አራት የወል ገናና አራት ደወል በርበራ ሲለታዘዘልኝ ማንጻ ክእርኝ ማሳተር ክእሱን ደግኝ ተቀብዬ በሁኔታ ወሰጥ ወደ ደኝ ወረዳህ: " ⁷⁸¹ ; "from the government granary at Lam Washa [cave of cows] four *dawula gésho* and four *dawula*; pepper were ordered for me, I received the warrant [from the hands of the] minister of agriculture *azazh* Dägifie and went to Jirru during the fasting of Easter". Many writers claim that the reason for abandoning Liché and Feqré Gemb and proceeding to Enäwari was owing to the strategic importance of the latter. However, this seems an underestimation of the productivity of the region in supporting a large army or other inhabitants in comparison to Liché and Feqré Gemb which were market dependent, so that food items were brought from distant areas and sold in the markets of Liché and Bollo warké⁷⁸².

North Shäwa also possessed significant local and coastal markets to exchange food supplies and to serve as terminals for long distance trade routes during the 19th and in the beginning of the 20th century. These markets served to barter different products such as handcraft, crops and animals from various ecological settings. The items which were sold were various agricultural products of Shäwa. Bollo warké, northeast of Däberä Berähan, continued to engage in much trade and served as Shäwa's largest market for mules, besides horses, skins and saddles because it was located on the plateau where plenty of pasture was available. Items such as mules, horses, skins and saddles were closely associated with this area. Towards the coast, Aliyu Amba through which some of the agricultural products were exported was also very important. Because of its commercial links with the coast, Menilek appointed Abu Beker, the ruler of Zeila (seaport on the Indian Ocean), to the governorship of Aleyu Amba⁷⁸³.

Besides these towns three other places, Mähal Wänz, Let Marafiya and Shotelit, emerged and developed in this period as the result of Menilek's foreign contacts. They made no significant contribution to the expansion of farmland nor did they influence the development of agriculture. All of them had different, non agricultural objectives. For instance, Mähal Wänz, north-east of Ankobär and site of an earlier settlement, was selected for a gunpowder mill. Let Marafiya, which lay three kilometers south-west of Feqré-gemb, was conceived, like Gafat near Däbrä Tabor, as a settlement for foreigners. It was originally donated to Massaia for a mission station, but he was very impressed by its abundance of wildlife, and proposed that it be

⁷⁸¹ Märsé, *Tezeta*, p. 151.

⁷⁸² Pankhrust, "The History of Shäwan Towns...", p. 224.

⁷⁸³ *Ibid.*

transferred to the Italian Geographical Society's mission for zoological research, which arrived in 1877. The leader of the mission, Ignazio Antinori, died there in 1881. Shotelit, half an hour's walk to the east of Let Marafiya, was the residence of the Italian envoy Count Antonelli, the first foreign diplomat to arrive in Shäwa in Menilek's day⁷⁸⁴.

Generally, these pre-Addis Ababa Shäwan towns were characterized by the following important features: They were centres for paying *asrat* as provision for the army when the soldiers were prohibited from raiding the villages of peasants⁷⁸⁵. They were not large cities. In fact, as intimated, these were not viable until agriculture became industrialized and transport was modernized. In Shäwa, the period was characterized by poor transportation services. Food had to be conveyed with animal and human power to the towns. Since it could not be transported very far and very fast, this kept the towns very small. They were inhabited mainly by the ruling elite and their servants, labourers, craftsmen, and professionals who served them. They survived by taxing farmers⁷⁸⁶ Therefore, the land tenure and taxation system in the region during this period was set to overcome this critical problem. All the payments were in kind. Particularly, those peasants, termed *melman* and *baldaras*, paid taxes on items that were scarce because of the absence of industrialization. Certain forms of defraying taxation such as transporting crops to the capital as well as grinding them, or providing firewood as one form of taxation and tribute were the direct result of this⁷⁸⁷. Another result was that pack animals were very expensive, in comparison to oxen and cows, in Shäwan markets. One can observe the difference from the following table recording the prices of items in the Arada market of Addis Ababa in 1891 E.C. (1898/1899). These are also observed from travellers' accounts in the middle of the 19th century as well as news and articles published in the *Berähanena Sälam* newspaper throughout the 1910s and 1920s in a special column, “*Yägäbäya wulo*” (price news). The contributors to the newspaper were also demanding the construction of roads in order to transport crops from faraway lands, so as to minimize the prices of crops and to supply enough crops to the urban

⁷⁸⁴R. Pankhurst, “A visit to the Craftsmen's Gadam, or Monastery of Manteq, near Ankobär, Shäwa” in *Africa* Lii, 4, 1998, pp. 587-596.

⁷⁸⁵Mahetäm Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, p. 333.

⁷⁸⁶Grantham and Sarget, p. 718.

⁷⁸⁷Gäbrä Wäld Engida Wärq, *Yä Itophiya Märétna Geber Sem* (Addis Ababa, 1956), p. 25.

centres. They were concerned since the crops were very expensive not because of any scarcity in the country but owing to the absence of modern transportation.

No	Items	Price in Birr
1	Fattened Sheep (male)	2- 4
2	Ordinary sheep	1
3	Ox	10-20
4	A cow which presently gives milk	20-30
5	Horse	10-50
6	Ordinary mule	20-30
7	Trained mule	50-150

The food crops were only provided by farmers in the nearby towns in terms of what the pack animals could carry⁷⁸⁸.

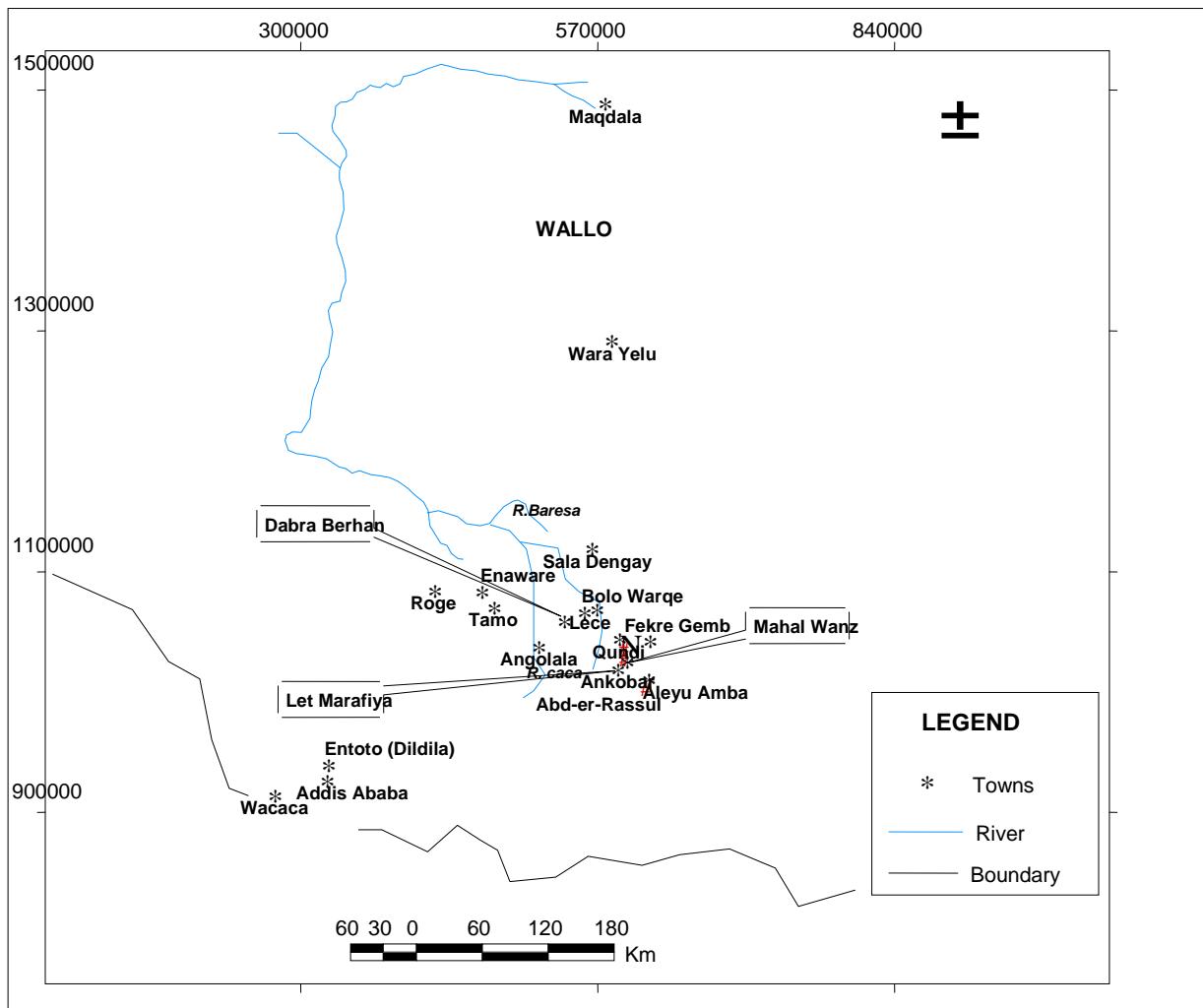
Slaughtered animals	Price in Birr	Pack animals	Price in Birr
Fattened ox	40	Well trained castrated horse	65
Ploughing ox	35	Mare	20-28
Fattened ox of Arsi	55-80	Pack horse	27
Breeding cow	35	Second class mule	150
Sterile fattened cow	32	First class mule	180
Breeding sheep (female)	3	Baggage mule	70
Sterile fattened sheep	5	Female donkey	17
Castrated fattened sheep	13	Male donkey	27
Breeding goat (female)	4		
Sterile fattened goat (female)	7		
Castrated fattened goat	10		

Table. 8 Adapted from *Brehanena Sälam* “Yä Addis Ababa gäbeya’ on 30 Genbot 1920 E.C.

The price of pack animals was dramatically decreased after the introduction of vehicles and construction of all-weather roads. One ox could be exchanged for two/three horses. A further interesting issue in this regard is that the newspaper stopped listing the price of the pack animals

⁷⁸⁸“ Yä babur Teqem” in *Berähanena Sälam* on Nähasé 17, 1920 E.C. (August, 1928); “ Yämängäd teqem” in *Berähanena Sälam* on Tahesas 24, 1922 E.C. (January, 1930); Pawulos, pp. 47, 76, 110, 151,174,262.

in the second half of the 1920s E.C.; most probably because of the tendency to use modern transportation (Lorry) for different food items and automobiles for human beings⁷⁸⁹.



Map. 3. Pre-Addis Ababa towns of Shäwa; Adapted from: R. Pankhurst, "The History of Shäwan Towns from the Rise of Menilek to the Foundation of Addis Ababa" in *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Nice, 1977), p. 222.

⁷⁸⁹“Yä färäsoch heyiwot mämäläs” in *Berähanena Sälam* on Teqemet 16, 1926 E.C. (October, 1933).

9.2. Depletion of Resources and Transfer of the Capital to Central Shäwa (1881-1886)

The region witnessed large-scale agricultural settlement in the 18th and 19th centuries. The pattern of these in the area shows that agriculturalists were concentrating on better quality lands. The relatively densely populated settlements would help powerful chiefs to keep a larger population under their control and consolidate their power. Such settlements would need to define their frontiers clearly and their leaders might wage wars to take captives for labour and military services. As a result, a large number of people possessed potential power by aiding the chiefs in expanding their territory. This was clearly understood, for instance by the biographer of Gärmamé who discussed the potential importance of the Oromo people and their territory:

የጋለ አኖ የሚውቃ አጋራ አለን አይደለም እና ጥቂቶች ነገ ስንት ባለቤት አያመን በፊማለው ሌሎንጋጌዎች ተቋንቋለሁ ማዘተኝኝም ለማስኑት የሚፈሰበው ወደ ምለበት ነው፡ የመን ሆኖ በደሰታ አንቀሳሽ ይሰ አንቀሰው... አንደ አን አሳቦ በአኅቱ አማካ በአባቱ ወለ ነው፡ ንብር ይህንበለው ተናገሩ፡፡⁷⁹⁰

an usher who cannot speak *Galla* language is not valuable, we are minority, how many *Galla balabbats* can be consulted by translator, I was in difficulty while discussing with them and also we plan to extend our territory to the *Galla* land. In order that, everybody would be happy and met without problem.... According to me, Gobana who is an Amhara by his mother and *Galla* by his father is an appropriate person.

Towns in the early days of Shäwa emerged in the context of population shifts and warfare. Warriors and priests were the dominant figures in this period. The genealogical history of Shäwan chiefs and kings, along with their foundation of new settlements one after the other, resulted in these shifts and persistent wars and the raiding of cattle and other resources. Since those capital towns in Shäwa in the 1800s were semi-mobile, this hindered the further development of infrastructure, evolution of local technologies, education and related activities. The topography of each capital town, i.e., either on hill tops or edges of the escarpment toward river gorges, hindered expansion, further settlement, construction of large buildings, establishment of extensive market areas, schools and the like. Moreover, fire was one of the serious problems that plagued every Shäwan town. Consequently, huge amounts of wealth were repeatedly destroyed by fire⁷⁹¹.

⁷⁹⁰ Hailé Zäläqä, “Yädäjazmach Gärmamé Yä Hiwot Tarik” (1945; a manuscript in IES. No. 2478), p. 25.

⁷⁹¹ R. Pankhurst, “The History of Shäwan Towns...”, pp. 222-229.

The following factors accounted for the persistent changes in these capital towns. The first was military security, but this is over emphasized by many of the scholars who have studied the history of urbanization in Ethiopia⁷⁹². Of course, it was one of the more significant reasons, particularly when the domain of the king expanded. There would be a need to defend the recently occupied regions, which could be achieved by moving one's seat of government from a distance to the heart of the domain. The transferring of Menilek's court from Fiqiré Gemb to Enäwari can be mentioned as one example, as well as his move from northern Shäwa to the Entoto area, to a certain extent⁷⁹³.

Secondly, the availability of trade routes or known market centres was important in attracting kings or rulers to establish their capital in the area. In the case of Shäwa the markets seem to have been more important than the route. Ankobär was the capital of the kingdom for a long period, even before the time of Menilek, not only because of its strategic location for defensive purposes but also because of its proximity to well known markets such as Aliyu amba. There were also routes leading to the markets which were under the control of the kingdom⁷⁹⁴.

The third reason, which is overlooked in the works of many scholars studying the history of urbanization, is culture. Shäwan rulers traditionally shifted their seats of government largely because of the following cultural reasons. Primarily, they aspired to constructing their own palace by leaving behind that of their predecessor. Just as a young married man would prefer to establish a new family in a new home, every Shäwan ruler wanted to be more popular than his predecessor by building a magnificent palace or court, or to have his own pages in the political genealogy of the kingdom⁷⁹⁵. Secondly, their advisors (shamans or hermits) played a major role in influencing the kings to establish their capital here or there by telling them various prophetic stories: "If you build your capital here, your reign will be as long as far as thousands of years, if

⁷⁹² Akalou Wälde-Michael, "Urban Development in Ethiopia: 1889-1925" in *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* Vol. VII. No. I (Addis Ababa, 1973), p. 7.

⁷⁹³ Gäbrä Sillassé, p.70.

⁷⁹⁴ R. Pankhurst, "The History of Shäwan Towns...", p. 229.

⁷⁹⁵ See the genealogical history of Shäwan chiefs and kings from c.1700 to 1889, for how they moved their capital / seat of government from one locality to the other or for their own explanation of how they inhabited or colonized the untouched or forest land for their own purposes; Gäbrä Sillassé, pp. 70, 96,138; Täklä Tsadiq Mäkuria, *Yä Ityophiya Tarik Kä Atsé Lebnä Dengel Eskä Atsé Tewodros* (Addis Ababa,1973), pp. 352-364.

not, you face such and such challenges.”⁷⁹⁶ Thirdly, when towns were destroyed because of disasters such as fire there was the tendency to abandon rather than rebuild them. Fire frequently destroyed many of the Shäwan towns, while severe transmitted diseases claimed the lives of the majority of their inhabitants. In such cases, the survivors, particularly the rulers, lacked the confidence to continue there⁷⁹⁷.

The fourth reason which is very important as a theme for this study is the lack of resources. A frequently overemphasized reason is the shortage of firewood. There are several cases in which this is mentioned as the absolute reason for forcing the rulers to shift their capital⁷⁹⁸. But there were also other factors related to resources. One was the fact that it cost little to build houses. As a result, rulers did not hesitate to abandon a settlement or their previous seat or the seat of their predecessor for minor reasons, since houses were constructed from cheap materials; living in them for a long period might necessitate repeated renovation. Thus, there was not much difference between rebuilding old palaces and building new ones. In fact, as intimated, many of them were abandoned owing to various wars and the lack of resources such as firewood⁷⁹⁹. According to Manoel de Alämeida, as quoted in Akalu: “The Habessines wonder to hear of so many great cities among us, for they do not believe the country can afford timber and food sufficient for so many houses”⁸⁰⁰. One can understand the extent to which urbanization, which was environment dependent, was disastrous to the ecology. This conclusion was reached by several foreigners, as the rulers would shift their capitals elsewhere when there was no more wood in the area. Another fundamental economic reason was the scarcity of arable and pasture lands. All Shäwan towns were established in the middle of, or nearby, such lands since one could not transport grain from remote places. Consequently, when the locality which hosted them was overexploited and could no longer support all their population, the situation forced the rulers to move their seat to another well resourced area. Causes and effects were discussed earlier.

Therefore, as indicated previously the capital town of Shäwa shifted from the north part of the kingdom to the then southern extreme. For instance, Gäbrä Sillassé described how Menilek moved to the mountain of Wächacha where he laid the foundation for a new town in 1878. He

⁷⁹⁶Bairu Tafla (ed and trans), *Asmä Gyorgis and His Works: History of the Galla and the Kingdom of Shäwa* (Stuttgart, 1987).

⁷⁹⁷R. Pankhurst, *Economic History*, pp. 684-696.

⁷⁹⁸Akalou Wälde-Michael, p. 8.

⁷⁹⁹*Ibid.*

⁸⁰⁰*Ibid.*

claimed that a copy of the *Kebrä Nägäst*, “Glory of Kings”, discovered by a monk on an island in Lake Zeway had foretold that Archangel Raguel had communicated to Emperor Dawit II, i.e. Lebna Dengel, that his descendant by the name Menilek would build a town at Entoto and erect churches in honour of Maryam, Raguel and Urael. The chronicler claims that since the location of Lebnä Denegl’s capital could not be ascertained, the town was established in a “favourable place” near Wächacha and was called Entoto⁸⁰¹.

At about 1887 Menilek decided to transfer his settlement of Entoto to a new and strategically better site to the north-east, on the mountain then known by the Oromo name Dildila. The reasons for this move are open to debate among authors of urban history in Ethiopia. Some claim that the king chose the new location because the previous kings had lived there, but others argue that the shift was motivated by political or military considerations, since Wächacha was possibly exposed to attacks from the Oromo. Gäbrä Sillassé, who adopts the former view, argues that Menilek, while traveling to Sululta, apparently in 1881, learnt that the “ruins of Dawit’s city of Entoto” had been discovered, and therefore decided to make this the site of his capital⁸⁰². Menilek duly visited the site and the construction of the town began partly with the aid of a master carpenter and a group of carpenters who came from Gondär, as Gäbrä Sillassé records, and were assigned to build the palace⁸⁰³. Apart from this historical background, the selection of Dilidila (Entoto) as a settlement for the capital town stemmed from other reasons⁸⁰⁴. Significantly, it was selected because it was a fortress. Unfortunately, because of its mountainous nature and high altitude, it suffered from extremely cold weather. Thus, it was soon abandoned in favour of Finfiné (Addis Ababa) to the south. Entoto was inconvenient not only because of inclement weather but also because of the difficulty in accessing transport facilities and the absence of drinking water. Therefore the king began to look for other options. Finally Entoto was abandoned and the last capital of the kingdom of Shäwa, and then of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, was established⁸⁰⁵.

This city was saved from the fates of other capital towns and became the permanent capital of the kingdom and later the capital of the country for several reasons. Primarily, its

⁸⁰¹Gäbrä Sillassé, p.97.

⁸⁰²*Ibid.*

⁸⁰³*Ibid.*

⁸⁰⁴R. Pankhurst, “The History of Shäwan Towns...”, p. 234.

⁸⁰⁵*Ibid*; Gäbrä Sillassé, p. 138; Mängestu Lämma, p. 105.

surroundings as far as Mount Ziquala were very fertile, which attracted the monarchy to situate its capital in the area, apart from security reasons. The land could support large numbers of people, as was mentioned by the European diplomats in the last decades of the 19th century. As quoted in McCann, in 1887 Leopold Traversi, who was the political assistant at the station of Let Marefiya, exclaimed: “what a splendid panorama! An expansive plain spreads itself at the foot of the mountain (Ziquala), the plain slowly undulates, divided like a chess board by so many verdant bounded by so many cultivations of barley, wheat, and *téf*.... What fertility!”⁸⁰⁶. The Ada'a district was one of the most fertile regions and supplied the palace with plenty of provisions. During the reign of Emperor Menilek the district received the new status of *madbét* (royal kitchen), an area whose land tenure and tributary obligations focused on providing food directly to the palace⁸⁰⁷. The role which had been played by Shäwan farms near Ankobär, Enäwari and other Shäwan capitals was replaced by Ada'a. From the economic point of view, just as northern Shäwa had been transformed into intensive farms in the 19th century, now by the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century Ada'a was transformed from mixed or pasture lands to intensive arable farms, so as to provide the royal kitchen with all the crops needed, mainly *téf* for which Ada'a is still known today. The *téf* is considered as of the first quality and is expensive on the national market.

A further possible reason was that the previous Shäwan capitals were constructed from cheap materials. But Addis Ababa was built using relatively expensive materials and more investment was made. Features like a piped water supply, the infrastructure, particularly roads, as well as newly constructed palaces and churches made the ruler hesitant to leave all these behind and move to another site as usual. Foreign advisors also tried to convince or remind him of the advantage of a permanent capital and solutions for the aforementioned problems. In addition to this, there was the promise of another source of fuel as a substitute for firewood. According to some foreigners such as De Castro, the discovery of coal in northern Shäwa in the district of Däbrä Libanos and the introduction of the eucalyptus tree also encouraged the king to remain in Addis Ababa⁸⁰⁸.

⁸⁰⁶ Abba Antonio Alberto, p. 142.

⁸⁰⁷ McCann, *People of the Plough: An Agricultural History of Ethiopia, 1800-1990* (Madison, 1995), p. 200.

⁸⁰⁸ Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia*, p. 707.

Innovations like a modern transportation system which could bring provisions from areas as far away as Harar, Wälläga and other provinces, as well as a modern communication system which could help to solve administrative and other related problems from a distance, exercised their own influence on the king's staying in the new capital. The completion of the railway in 1917 solved the transport issue. The country's victory over Italy, at Adwa in 1896, brought peace and stability to the region, along with recognition and prestige for Menilek and his Ethiopian army. It seems that after they finished their war duties, the nobility settled in Addis Ababa, and gave rise to the foundation of different *säfär*s (quarters) which became destinations for peoples with various skills and positions⁸⁰⁹.

Foreigners from Europe, Arabia, and India, played a direct role in investing in and in turn discouraging a relocation of the capital. Traders, including merchants and craftsmen, settled in the area, creating job opportunities for a large number of migrants who arrived mainly from north Shäwa because of its proximity to Addis Ababa, the chronic land problem, and their knowledge of incidents around the court. Many commanders or officials who stemmed from the region attracted immense numbers of their relatives since they were granted significant amounts of land to settle in Addis Ababa, and their followers who were mostly from the same localities settled here. Thus, the establishment of this promising settlement in the southern extreme of the kingdom and in the heartland of the country brought about a massive migration of peoples from north Shäwa to Addis Ababa⁸¹⁰.

9.3. Following the Footsteps of the Capital: North Shäwans became the Majority of Addis Ababa's Residents (1886-1935)

The relocation of the capital to the south, from north Shäwa to Dildila (Entoto) and then to Addis Ababa resulted in the movement of numerous people from the former region to the latter. The new site attracted peoples with different skills. The nobility, craftsmen, clergy and the soldiers travelled to central Shäwa, to the newly founded urban settlement, with their own respective visions. The notables were granted large areas on the hills surrounding the palace for the purpose of settlement. All of them arrived with their numerous servants and armies, and there were also absentee landlords and elites from different localities of North Shäwa who settled in

⁸⁰⁹Bahru Zwde, *The History of Modern Ethiopia: 1855-1991* (Addis Ababa, 2000).

⁸¹⁰*Ibid*; Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia*, p. 707.

the capital⁸¹¹. Other newcomers or migrants were the traders who began to use Addis Ababa as another destination between north Shäwa and Central Shäwa. Still, a large enough market was available in Addis Ababa in comparison to north Shäwa, which remained the home only of ordinary and poor peasants. Large numbers of peasant soldiers from different localities of north Shäwa arrived to serve as *kibur Zäbägna* (royal guards)⁸¹².

As noted, large numbers of craftsmen came to the site because of the increasing demand for their skills. They were given quarters surrounding the palace and ordered to manufacture different articles for use in the palace, according to the observations of foreigners such as Vardria in 1890 and Dr. Mareb at the beginning of the 20th century. Because of extensive settlement in the new capital the demand for these communities increased; particularly when the capital was transferred from Entoto to Finfiné (Addis Ababa), they were given their first quarters at a site now called the Italian Quarter or *Seratägna säfär* near the church of St. John. However, when the size of the town expanded gradually, the site was not suitable for their way of life and they left it for another quarter called *Zäbägna säfär*, after which they moved to their famous settlement at Qachanie. For instance, there were about fifty households or families living nearby the palace in 1909. After a few years they numbered approximately one hundred households or families⁸¹³. Relatively speaking, it was suitable for the craftsmen at least initially because of the proximity of a large market. However, after a time the introduction of manufactured articles from abroad undermined the sale of their own items⁸¹⁴. Craftsmen who were also partly farmers from localities such as Morät, Märhabété, Ensaro and Ankobär settled at Kächäné⁸¹⁵. The settlements or monasteries of crafts in these districts were abandoned and inhabited almost entirely by the elders, because most of the able bodied craftsmen had migrated to obtain work in Addis Ababa by the beginning of the 20th century⁸¹⁶.

⁸¹¹ Mahetämä Sillasé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Ché bäläw* (Addis Ababa, 1973); Fantahun Engäda, *Tarikäwi Mäzigäbäsäbe: kätinti äske zaré* (Addis Ababa, 2008), pp. 5-17; this Ethiopian biographical dictionary mentioned the birthplace or origin of the families of the notables in Addis Ababa by the beginning of the 20th century; surprisingly, most of the individuals listed under this category had their origin in different localities of north Shäwa.

⁸¹² Märsé, *Tezeta*, pp. 33, 120, 183.

⁸¹³ Mäsfín Assäfa, *Aliyah Bét* (Addis Ababa, 2009), pp. 114-137.

⁸¹⁴ Gäbrä Hiwot Baikädagn, *Mängistna Yähezeb Astädadär*, p. 32.

⁸¹⁵ Mäsfín Assäfa, pp. 123-137.

⁸¹⁶ R. Pankhrust, "A Visit to the Craftsmen's Gadam, or Monastery of Manteq, near Ankobär, Shäwa" in *Africa Lii*, 4, 1998, pp. 587-596.

Carpenters, masons and peoples with similar skills either migrated or were summoned to the new settlement to participate in the construction which was carried out on a large scale in Addis Ababa. They came from localities such as Bulga and Tägulät which were very close⁸¹⁷.

Priests also migrated in large numbers from the various *qolla* villages of the region to the capital to serve in newly founded churches. The clergy, particularly the younger generation with better church education, arrived in Addis Ababa from the area, either to serve in the newly established churches or as civil servants in the court of Menilek. Consequently, many of the *tsähafä tezazat* (royal chroniclers) stemmed from this region. The foundation of numerous churches was the primary reason for many priests and deacons as well as highly educated church scholars to come to Addis Ababa⁸¹⁸.

Owing to the above mentioned factors there was at first a gradual decrease in the population of northern Shäwan towns (the previous capitals). When their population declined dramatically, that of the newly founded capital increased rapidly. Estimates by contemporary travellers suggest that Addis Ababa's population was large, subject to considerable fluctuation, but on the whole was expanding rapidly. In the opening years of the 20th century the permanent population was estimated by Collat at 40,000 or 50,000, by Marcel Chon around 45,000 and by Skinner close to 50,000, while in the following decade Merab put it at 65,000 and Montandon at 70,000. Merab, who was an established resident, saw signs of subsequent expansion and expressed the view that with the expected arrival of the railway the population would reach 100,000 by 1914, especially if the floating populations were included, and that within a few years after the construction of the line there would be 100,000 permanent and 50,000 temporary residents. He believed that the resident population in 1910 was made up of the following⁸¹⁹.

Ethnic group/ place of origin	Population
Oromo	20000
Gumuz, Benishangul, etc	15000
Shäwan	15000

⁸¹⁷ Mahetämä Sillassé, *Yü Itiyopiya bahel Tinat: Bulga* (Addis Ababa, 1967), p. 12, 20; Gäbrä Sillassé, pp.123-126.

⁸¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸¹⁹ Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia*, p. 710

Walayta	5000
Amhara	3000
Gurage	2000
Tigre	1000
Gojame	1000
Other (Somali, Dankil, Kaffa, etc)	3000
Total	65000

Table 9 Adapted from Economic History of Ethiopia p. 709

The Oromo were more or less from the Shäwa plateau surrounding Addis Ababa (from localities near to the capital). Therefore, a large portion of them arrived from the area of study. According to the above estimation more than half of the population of the city by the first decade of the 20th century stemmed from northern Shäwa⁸²⁰. The following were the possible factors that significantly increased opportunities for the large number of Shäwan migrants in the newly established capital.

As is common to all types of mobility of people or migration, geographical proximity is one of the most significant factors. In the case of North Shäwa this contributed mainly to developing the confidence amongst ordinary Shäwans to leave their village. Many of them had relatives in the towns that were closer to the court and this might have made matters easier for them upon their arrival in the capital. Even in the absence of relatives it was straightforward for Shäwans to migrate to Addis Ababa. If the worst occurred they could return home with less expense. Most probably that was why their number in Addis Ababa accounts for nearly 50% of the population, as can be observed from the above table⁸²¹.

Secondly, the existing socio-political system helped them to fit into the new settlement. The Shäwan Amharas and already Amharized (assimilated) Oromo of Shäwa could easily blend into the social and political situation of the town. This certainly made them feel at home. The state's tendency to nationalize Amhara values (Shäwan ones) created a conducive environment

⁸²⁰Ibid.

⁸²¹Bänti Gétahun, “An Overview of Some Factors Limiting the Migration of the Oromo to Addis Ababa” in *The Journal of Oromo Studies*. Vol. 8, p.164.

in Addis Ababa (as in many other urban centres in the south) which facilitated the continuous migration of Amhara (Shäwans) to the city⁸²². In Addis Ababa, as just noted the urban environment was economically, socially, culturally and psychologically designed to accommodate the north Shäwans in several ways. Government measures, such as making Amharic the official language, assisted them in becoming accommodated in the military, the civil service and even as ordinary migrants in Addis Ababa. Further related measures were those of building churches that also caused the settlers to feel at home and establishing schools where they could educate their children⁸²³.

The third major reason stemmed from the economic difficulties or shortage of resources at home, in comparison to the opportunities in the town⁸²⁴. Fourthly, members of the government system came mainly from northern Shäwa because of the previous location of the capital. Many of the politically and militarily active residents during this early phase of the foundation of Addis Ababa were from the region. It was these peoples who migrated to the capital and in certain cases even uprooted the Oromo of the area, so as to accommodate this large number of dignitaries. Land distribution for all types of state servants was carried out by the government: soldiers, civil servants and priests were given town properties for different purposes⁸²⁵.

Contrary to this movement, most of the previous Shäwan towns lost much of their population, for their dwellers followed the footsteps of the court and moved to the south. One of them was Ankobär, the capital in the first half of the 19th century, whose population was consistently fluctuating depending on whether the king was or was not in residence. It is estimated that in 1830's, the town had a population of 5000 to 10,000 and 15,000 inhabitants in 1840s. Menilek's abandonment of the town led to a major decline in population, with the result that in the 1880's there were only 6,000 inhabitants. By the end of the 19th century, it had become merely a large village with a population of about 2,000⁸²⁶. Aliyu Amba, the main commercial centre of Shäwa in the first half of the 19th century, had a population of about 2,000-4,000 inhabitants, but by the beginning of the 20th century the place had lost almost all its importance⁸²⁷

⁸²²Ibid, p.158.

⁸²³Ibid, p. 159.

⁸²⁴Mahetämä Sillassé, *Yä Itiyopiya bahel Tinat: Bulga*, p.11.

⁸²⁵Benti, p. 159.

⁸²⁶R. Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia*, p.695.

⁸²⁷Ibid.

Chapter Ten

10. Population Outmigration (1881-1935)

10.1 Causes of the Migration

For various reasons few destinations of Shäwan migrants are accorded emphasis in discussions of population migration from north Shäwa to the southern regions of the country, beginning from the end of the 19th century. The first is the geographical proximity and the presence of minimal barriers between north Shäwa and these destinations⁸²⁸. The second is the method of occupation: regions occupied by force were subjected to different measures that resulted in displacement, mass massacres, and raids for slaves that led to the deployment of a large number of Shäwans as soldiers for maintaining the security of these regions and of “vacant land” that could accommodate numerous Shäwan migrants⁸²⁹. Moreover, as noted, the majority of the army of Menilek and their leaders before 1889 came from Shäwa, which facilitated the mass movement of Shäwans to the south after the actual incorporation of the regions⁸³⁰.

Population migrations had already been taking place in the history of humankind since time immemorial. The history of early river valley civilizations regarded the migration of their population as their beginning. Most of them narrated that they had moved from a certain locality to the site where their civilizations flourished. Biblical narratives are also noted for such stories. The histories of the majority of Ethiopian peoples were also dominated by the story of population movement, for varying reasons. As intimated, there were “push” factors and “pull” factors in the place of origin and in the place of destination, respectively⁸³¹.

Once a migration occurred, people left behind might migrate to join those who had departed earlier. Some individuals, however, might have been less inclined to migrate due to strong attachments to home, family, relatives and community. Those who chose not to migrate might have pursued various options in an attempt to stay: for example, improving their livelihoods by seeking additional land in the nearby localities, intensifying agricultural

⁸²⁸ Gäbrä Hiwot Baikädagn, *Mängistena Yähezeb Astädadär* (Addis Ababa, 1925), p. 70.

⁸²⁹ John Markakis, *Ethiopia: Anatomy of a Traditional Polity* (Addis Ababa, 1974), pp. 118-140.

⁸³⁰ Horold Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menilek II 1844-1913* (Oxford, 1975).

⁸³¹ Michael J. Greenwood, “Human Migration: Theory, Models, and Empirical Studies” in *Journal of Regional Science*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (1985), pp. 521-544.

production on existing land, seeking non-farming work, or engaging in temporary or seasonal migration before deciding to move for the long term⁸³².

The following sections discuss pushing factors in North Shäwa and pulling factors in the southern and south-eastern regions of the country in the last decades of the 19th and early 20th centuries. In fact, the latter factors were given more emphasis than pushing ones in the few existing historical and anthropological studies, most probably because of lack of sources. The sources dealing with the period under discussion seemed to follow in the footsteps of political power or the court, so that descriptions of incidents which took place in south, not in north, Shäwa are prevalent in the existing literature⁸³³. In addition, anthropological studies in this area have no interest in a deep rooted background. However, the region they were writing about was not incorporated without sacrifice or challenge. Therefore, the Shäwans would not have been prepared to make such sacrifices without strong pushing factors. Such factors that contributed to the mass-migration of peoples from north Shäwa to the south are now considered.

10.2. Declining Opportunities in North Shäwa as Pushing Factors

10.2.1. Deterioration of Land Resources since the late 19th century

Many of the push factors in this case comprised the declining opportunities in Shäwa for farmers, soldiers, the clergy, officials and craftsmen. Situations of surplus labour or skills arising from scarcity of cultivable land, inequitable distribution of resources, low agricultural productivity, population pressure on the limited resources, and the almost exclusive concentration of the rural economy on agriculture frequently led to an increase in outmigration. Generally, it seemed that poverty, continuous fragmentation of *rist* land, environmental degradation, famine, starvation, and lack of cash crops such as coffee created some of the factors that drove the Shäwans to the south⁸³⁴. One of the critical issues in the economic and environmental history of Shäwa was a lack of wood and wood products⁸³⁵ owing to the deforestation process that resulted from heavy dependence on natural forests for different

⁸³²*Ibid.*

⁸³³Richard Seltzer (trans.), *Ethiopia through Russian Eyes* (Saint Petersburg, 1993), pp. 10-13.

⁸³⁴Bänti Gétahun, “An Overview of Some Factors Limiting the Migration of the Oromo to Addis Ababa” in *The Journal of Oromo Studies*, Vol. 8, p. 164; Täklä Hawariat Täklä Mariam, *Autobiography: Yä Hiyyoté Tarik* (Addis Ababa, 2006), pp. xi,41.

⁸³⁵Richard Pankhurst, “Economic and Social Innovation during the Last Years of Emperor Menilek’s Life and the Short Reign of Lej Iyyasu” in *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol.1 (Trondheim, 2009), pp. 137-150.

purposes. In areas where deforestation took place; there would be no firewood for mass consumption by the peoples and the court, or charcoal for the iron working which was very common in various parts of the region and Shäwan courts.

There were several factors accelerating deforestation, such as construction dependent on forest products: towns, churches and peasant villages were constructed of wood. In particular, the continuous shifting of the capitals and various fires added pressure on the forests, as did an increase in the peasant population. As intimated, they would renew or construct their home several times within their life span⁸³⁶. The other purpose for which wood was used was fuel; both the court and peasants depended directly on it. There was no other source of energy and light apart from wood and animal dung. Even candles were not common in the homes of better off groups, and not at all in the homes of peasants. The activity of iron smelting needed much charcoal, manufactured from the wood products of the area⁸³⁷. Expansion of agricultural lands also caused damage to woodlands. Farmlands were expanded by clearing the latter; there was also the problem of short fallow periods. The cool climate of the highlands of Shäwa meant that the farmlands took a long time to recover their fertility⁸³⁸. Over-grazing might also occur for two interrelated reasons, the first being that population growth resulted in a need for more animals. The second was that a need emerged for more farmlands at the expense of more pasturelands. When the carrying capacity of the farmland decreased, the peasants extended their farms on the pasture. This process in turn resulted in overgrazing since a limited size of pasture would have to carry a large number of animals. Thus, forest lands would be converted to either farmlands or open pasture; hence Mähetemä Sillassé identified Bulga in his ethnographic study as “በአጋጥና የጊዜ አገልግሎት ከመቆረጥ የወጪ እንደገኝ የጥና ተከለዋ ይመስክርል::”⁸³⁹; “There are few saved juniper trees as evidences that indicate Bulga was covered by forest during former times.”

Soil erosion and land degradation was another ecological problem in north Shäwa. The process of deforestation and the landscape in the region accelerated land degradation through erosion. The region contained the sources of several rivers and streams that added to the problem; it is within the watershed of the Abay and Awash drainage system. Small streams became large

⁸³⁶ Täklä Hawariat Täklä Mariam, p.187; Täshalä Tebäbu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia: 1896-1974* (Lawrenceville, 1995), pp. 73-80.

⁸³⁷ R. Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia: 1800-1935* (Addis Ababa, 1968).

⁸³⁸ Bezuayähu Täfära, Gätzahägn Ayälä et al, *Nature and Causes of Land Degradation in the Oromiya Region: A Review; Socio-economic and Policy Research Working Paper 36* (Addis Ababa, 2002).

⁸³⁹ Mahetämä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Yä Itiyopia bahel tinat: Bulga* (Addis Ababa, 1967), p. 8.

gorges and rivers after a time⁸⁴⁰. The majority of them did not deposit floods or soil within the area of study because of its location in the upper course of the rivers, and owing to their rocky sides. These rivers were active in eroding land. The cultivation of these eroded lands had poor return for the peasants. Therefore, the absence of adequate harvests from their lands caused some of the able peasants to consider leaving their village⁸⁴¹. By the beginning of the 20th century, North Shäwa had already suffered from the pressures that have been listed above. In the localities where ecological degradation was critical, scarcity of arable land in combination with population growth had led to an excess populace on the smaller landholdings. The decreased productivity of the land has been mentioned by Mähetemä Sillassé in his intensive explanation concerning Bulga as follows, “የብልጋ ስው አይነት የንግድ በንግድ እርምጃ ስለሆነ በዘመኑ ስራ ስው በጣም የታወቁ ነው:: ነገር የጠናቸው አቀማመጥ ስለማይረዳው እና ከፍ ከፍ ለለወ ይከመው በቁ ገበያ አያገኘበትም::”⁸⁴²; “Since the major source of income for the people of Bulga is farming, their name is well known by this. However, since the geography of the land is not supportive, they could not earn sufficient income from their laborious effort.”

The common manifestations of ecological decline include drought, declining size of landholdings or landlessness, as well as a persistent decrease in food grain and livestock production and the associated recurrence of famine. Such stressful conditions prompted adaptation mechanisms and survival strategies, including migration to other areas and diversification of occupational activities. In the height of the great famine (1888-1892), all the emperor could do was to encourage his subjects to flee to relatively less affected areas to save their lives. Those Shäwans who had the energy to flee to the Oromo countries of the south did so to survive the curse⁸⁴³. The emperor strongly encouraged these flights both by urging individuals to leave and by organizing and launching his subjects as invading armies under his famous generals. The armies were of course expected to bring more territory under their control in addition to making it easier for the hungry to appropriate urgently needed resources through such activities as cattle raiding.

⁸⁴⁰Mäsfín Wäldä Mariam, *An Introductory Geography of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 1972).

⁸⁴¹Mahetämä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Yä Itiyopia bahel tinat: Bulga*, p. 11.

⁸⁴²*Ibid.*

⁸⁴³Täkalign Wäldä Mariam, "A City and its Hinterlands: The Political Economy of Land Tenure, Agriculture and Food Supply for Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 1887-1974." Ph.D. Dissertation (Boston University, 1995).

The height of the great famine in Shäwa, which resulted from ecological deterioration, was characterized by critical socio-economic problems. According to the oral informants who were interviewed by Ahemäd Hassän two decades ago, the peoples of north Shäwa took different measures to survive⁸⁴⁴. One of them was migration. The outmigration continued and even increased after the Italian period because of the building of infrastructure such as roads (which permitted easier movement), the success of previous migrants and the aggravation of the difficulties at home.

10.2.2. The Maladministration in the early 20th century

The abandonment of the region by the court and able individuals indicates that there was no prominent figure that could bring the troubles of impoverished peasants to the emperor or that there was no opportunity to voice their discontent even if they were living in the birthplace of the emperor and his officials, who considered the people of the area as their relatives⁸⁴⁵. They were living in extreme poverty, even greater than those who were undergoing socio-cultural oppression in the south. The explanation by Asebe of Ankobär about the peasant life of North Shäwa in early 20th century in the weekly newspaper *Berähanena Sälam* is exemplary in indicating the prevalence of maladministration. It was one of the reasons that forced the peasants to migrate, even sometimes blindly without clear information about their destinations. One of his observations read, “የመልከኛው የፋን ስላልተከራለለት እንደ ለብ ተስርቃ ተስኩር ይህን የመከራና የቃጌር መፍላቃዎች ነፃና የወጪ ተታ ለፋን አገል አበበ ጥሩ ተልና የፋታዎች የፋጌር እያለች እንደ ማዣታ ለፋን ለማስረዳ ከእንደ አገል እንደ አገል ስትኩር ስትኩርታታ...”⁸⁴⁶; “since the backlog tax of the *mälekägna* was not paid for her, she ran away hiding herself as a thief by leaving her hut which was the source of problems, poverty and hardships behind, to live as grinder or spinner to bring up her orphan child...”.

Thus, maladministration by the agents of absentee officials or lords, after the area was abandoned by the court, constituted another common pushing factor. The officials and some lords were accustomed to having their home in the capital and to employing agents on their lands or *gults*⁸⁴⁷. These agents were major parasites, worse than the nobility themselves. The maladministration was multi-faceted and broke the back of peasants in extreme fashion, as mentioned in the life of a certain peasant widow in this poem that was written by Asebé.

⁸⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁸⁴⁵Täklä Hawariat, p.41.

⁸⁴⁶Asebé Hayilu, “Silä hezeb gudat” *Berehanena Sälam* Hamle 14,21,1919 E.C (July, 1927).

⁸⁴⁷*Ibid.*

ይ:: በጥቃት ይግ ነው በረቶች ፍቃታ
 ከመከራ በቀር አየተኝ ይስታ
 ማዣር ወረዳኝ ማዣትኩስ ከፍጠኝ
 ከጥር ሰር ቅናቃው የቃማ መልካኝ::
 አጥቃ መናገሩ ለማርሃ ከዚ::
 የሸን መጠየቁ ለከናወሁ ከዚ::
 መቀቃ ከጥርሃ የለው እስ ከበር⁸⁴⁸::

Nearly to mean, it is good that the poor die in the expense of their masters since, they could not get happiness, rather they suffer from hardships. The masters killed the poor [peasants] without invasion or shooting. They simply killed the peasants who came to pay taxes on their gate [near the fence of the master]. [So]Should I pay the declared tax? Should I pay the ordered backlog? Why don't you ask him who lies [dies] near your fence?

All these disgraceful activities by lords or their agents were imposed on very poor peasants who owned tiny plots of land (*የመመሻማቸው አላቸ በጥቃቱል*) . On top of all this poverty, the free labour which was exacted from peasants throughout the year, including transportation of provisions to the capital, was one of the factors that aggravated their suffering. Therefore, they had neither the time nor the heart to produce a surplus nor to devise storage for disasters such as the failure of the harvest. In times of hunger and extreme poverty the peasants had very few options, except to die in their villages (*ጊዜ መግኘት አስተሳደቸው ይረስ*) when there was no aid either from the government or the church. The following explanation discloses the real life and economic status of the peasants in some districts of Amhara inhabited North Shäwa.

አንሁ የአትጥቅኝ መከራኝ ይ:: በስተምሰራቅ አንከበር ይፋትኝ ተተለት በፈርኝ ጥረት በጥቅለ መከከል
 አገር የተባለ ሁሉ የመመሻማቸው አላቸ በጥቃቱል ባንዲት የቅር ማድር ከስራቱ ሥራ ሰነ አንድን ለመልካኝ
 ወይም ለስለቃ ከመት አስተመት ይስራል የቅር ማዣትኩስ ከፍጠኝ ሥራ ማለት ከማዘት በዚል
 በተቀር ነው ይግባኝ የቅር ቅናቃው ፍቃታው ከሚባለቱ ከሱለቶች ለራዎች አንድን ለመረዳ ምስልኝ አንድን
 ለቅር ይስራል የዚህም የቅር ንግ ባንዲ መግኘት አገር ተወርች ተስር የተቀመጠ ገዢ መግኘት
 አስተሳደቸው ይረስ::⁸⁴⁹

Here is the unfortunate poor of Ethiopia in the east [in] Ankobär, Ifat, Tägulät, Bulga and Morät, in general in the entire central part of the country; he works on a land of one *gasha* equal to the worn-out [Sole] of a shoe. Of the working days [of the week] he works one day for the *mälekägna* or *shaläqa* throughout the year including other labour services except on holidays. On the other two days assigned for him, he works one day for the district *meseläné*, one day for the *dug*. His own, the hut of this poor person, is tied-up at certain corner with misery till the time come to let it free, death.

⁸⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

In a few cases, there were individuals or groups who decided to leave blindly instead of perishing. These actions caused those who were left behind to dream of migrating, to gain relief from the poverty and maladministration which persisted in the area. Unfortunately, this did not mean that all the migrants were successful. Sometimes, they faced even more challenges caused by the absence of relatives in their destination. The new generation of the 1920s, who contributed articles about peasant poverty in North Shäwa, emphasized the maladministration by omitting the other contributing factors. But the experience of a woman who faced more challenges in her destination could be taken as typical of the seriousness of the problems there, too. She laments as follows:

ልጅ አሳይበት አበት ሪሌላውን፡
አጥቃቻሁ ቅበቅበ አስተኞሁ ካና፡፡
አበትና ሌጅ የሂሳት በግዢር፡
በየሰመራቻው ነው የመልከታው ጥበኛ፡
መቅረት ካልተውረሰ ይሻል መቀበር፡፡
ይህ ደንብ ደንብ ገዢ የመለከት፡፡
ከየት አገር ለዚህ የፈለቀበ፡፡
ገለጻታምም በረን ማተልሽ በለውን፡፡
ገለጻይ ሌጅን ምስጻለሁው አበርሱ፡፡
ወደዚው ሌጅ ባጥ ካልን ተጠረኞ፡፡
የምሃይልበት መለው ቅበ መፍቻቸ፡፡
ገዢ ስወጥ አይደለ ነው እነ መስለቸ፡፡⁸⁵⁰

To bring up my fatherless child, I have got the farm, who would give me the seed?
Both the father and his son went out [died] in counsel [together] since they were tired of [suffering from] the tax of mälekägna.
If it is obligatory, it is better to go to grave [die] for all the poor who are called gäbbar.
Where is their [gäbbar] country of origin?
Before I take care of him, they told me that my husband died, before I bring him up, the meseläné [agent] chased me away with my child.

Immediately my child died, and I could not bury him since I could not get shroud. I do not know where to go. Alas! I was told that gäbbar is not human being!

⁸⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Maladministration also drove the Oromo of northern Shäwa to the more sparsely populated regions, for instance Arsi and Balé, because the historical incidents mentioned above attracted migrants from Shäwa. In particular the Oromo of northern Shäwa migrated to this region in large numbers owing to not only the scarcity of resources but also the maladministration of the local governors of Shäwa. The Oromo of Sälalé were typical examples in this regard. Their migration to Arsi and Balé has been repeatedly described in their songs. They had not only the advantage of relative geographical proximity but also of easy communication, using the same language even if they followed different religions. The Oromo of Shäwa were predominantly members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church⁸⁵¹.

The time of *Ras* Kasa Hailu (the first quarter of the 20th century) is well remembered among the Oromo of Sälalé as one of hardship and atrocities committed against them. The peasants of Sälalé took two measures to oppose this. The first was open resistance or rebellion⁸⁵² while the second and much more frequent measure was outmigration. Their destinations were those regions where the system was relatively less severe and / or where demand for land was not as high as that of north Shäwa. Although the Tuläma Oromo had settled extensively in the south, above all in Arsi, Balé, Harar, Sidamo, Kaffa and so on in the post Italian period, informants claim that their settlement had already begun before the Italian period⁸⁵³. It is indicated that land hunger (as a result of its being seized by Shäwan Amhara) and maladministration were the most decisive push factors for the massive immigration of the Tuläma Oromo to many parts of the south, mainly to Arsi and Balé. In addition to dispossession of their lands, informants revealed that as tenants the Tuläma were ill-treated⁸⁵⁴ by their lords, and as a result they sang the following song when they were ready to migrate:

<i>Yaa abba lafaa sii ka'e kunoo sii ka'e,</i>	<i>You the landlord, I leave for you, here it is</i>
<i>Yoo jaldeessi cisii sita'e</i>	<i>If the monkeys become tenants for you</i>
<i>Yoo sardiidoon irboo sii hiree,</i>	<i>If the foxes share a quarter for you</i>
<i>Yoo muujaan midhaan sii ta, ee.</i> ⁸⁵⁵	<i>If the mujja [grass family] renders grains for you.</i>

⁸⁵¹ Hector Black Hurst, “Ethnicity in Southern Ethiopia: The General and the Particular” in *Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (Edinburgh, 1980), pp. 55-65.

⁸⁵² Tsägäyé Zäläkä, “The Oromo of Salaalee: A History (c1840-1936)”, MA. Thesis in History (AAU, 2002), p. 107.

⁸⁵³ Informants (56, 30): Jifré Tullu, Hailu Dämisé and others with relatives from these regions.

⁸⁵⁴ Informants (39, 23): Gorfu Asäfa, Mulugéta Nägäwo.

⁸⁵⁵ Informants (50,51,52): several in Wäbäri and Mukaturi area asserted this, such as Täsfayé Waké, Hailu Bädhané, and Nugusé Abära. The song has also been cited by Tsägäyé, p. 108.

Both Arsi and Balé were the major destinations of Tuläma migrants during the next, continuous phases of migrations after the conquest of the regions. Many of the Sälalé and other Shäwan Oromo who migrated to Arsi explained that they went there to escape the hardship imposed on them by the Shäwan governors. The forced eviction of many Shäwans by Ras Kassa from Sälalé was very common⁸⁵⁶. In fact, the migration of Tulam Oromo to southern Ethiopia was also prompted by news of fertility and plenitude of land in Arsi and Balé, heard from their relatives who had arrived earlier or served in the army of Shäwa during their campaign to the region⁸⁵⁷.

The normal unit of migration was the household or a small group of genetically-linked households⁸⁵⁸. There was no large scale population movement, while the territory the migrants entered had already been settled by Arsi Oromo and two-thirds had already been taken by the state. Therefore, to survive, the migrants were ready to establish economic relations with the Arsi because the latter were the land owners (of the remaining one-third) in the area⁸⁵⁹.

10.2.3. “Saturation” of Employment Opportunities (1889-1935)

People possessing certain skills, mainly masons and carpenters, were nearly jobless in Shäwa during this period, owing to several factors. The first probable reason was that construction projects which needed skilled manpower were relatively scarce. Chiefs and lords who were able to construct buildings by employing or paying for such skilled persons had left the region either for the capital town or the south because of new appointments. The same was true as regards churches⁸⁶⁰. The region was saturated with them and there were no parishes that could afford to construct and run extra churches. In some cases even the previously constructed churches were not in a position to conduct services regularly because of the scarcity of supplies. Consequently the king himself was forced to issue this decree: “...በእርስ የን ተጠሪዎች እንቃላም ተብቃ ደረሰኑልን የለ እንደሆነ ከሚቀረቡት ቤተክርስቲያን ደረሰኑ”⁸⁶¹; “... if they [peasants] claim that they cannot [afford], the parishes [tabot] should be blended to the nearby able church”. Thus, those who were skillful in constructing such churches became unemployed. Not only masons and carpenters in some cases, but painters and calligraphers were also not able to survive because

⁸⁵⁶Ibid.

⁸⁵⁷Informants (53, 54): Jifaré Täkka, Dinké Esho.

⁸⁵⁸Blackhurst, p.139.

⁸⁵⁹*Berehanena Sälam*, “Märimero tämäramero”, 16.9.1926 G.C.

⁸⁶⁰Daniél Kebrät, *Yäbétäkerestian Märäjawoch* (Addis Ababa, 2007), p. 3.

⁸⁶¹Mähetemä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, p. 548; *Ibid*, p. 19; Pawulos, p. 34.

there were no patrons or lords or households to pay them. Even before this time when the region of Shäwa Méda was not occupied many Shäwan clerks migrated to the region north of them where patrons could be found. This was most probably the reason why two of Emperor Tewodros' chroniclers came from north Shäwa⁸⁶².

On the other hand, there were no positions for newly graduated priests although there were highly qualified self employed teachers of church education in several localities⁸⁶³. New positions were rare for most of the ordinary priests in north Shäwa in this period. Consequently, they were busy convincing the governors of the newly occupied region to establish churches so that they could accompany the *tabots* there⁸⁶⁴. They convinced these appointees to construct churches even in areas where the numbers in the Christian community were insignificant; the process would nonetheless create a job opportunity for them. For instance, until very recent times, in one of the southern regions priests were travelling from Shäwa for every service of the church: "... ከንግስት አውራቃቸ እስከ ቁጥማዊ ፍይለስላሴ አመን ከህናት ከሽዋ እያመጠ ስእታት ቁጥቃ፡ማግህለት ቁጥቃ፡ ቁጥቃ ለየበታዥ ተመድቦወልት የገለግለ ነበር..."⁸⁶⁵; "...beginning from the time of empress Zäwditu to emperor Hailä Sillassé, priests were sent from Shäwa and assigned separately for the church services like *se'atat*, *mahelet* and *qedash*." There were cases in which some of the churches in these crowded districts of north Shäwa were closed as has been mentioned above, and the *tabots* were taken to the nearby churches or to the south⁸⁶⁶. Another common job opportunity for Shäwan priests was to be employed as clerks for the governors of the southern regions⁸⁶⁷.

The third job opportunity that might have supported these migrants was to be employed as language teachers in the newly opened modern schools. However, the absence of sites to construct such schools also drove them from the region to the areas where these opportunities were available⁸⁶⁸. The main reason for the massive migration of priests to southern Ethiopia was not religious, but rather economic. One of the factors that justify this impression was the

⁸⁶²Enno Littmann (ed.), *The Chronicle of King Theodore of Abyssinia* (Berlin, 1902); E. Guilmoto (ed.), *Chronique de Theodoros II Rio des Rois d' Ethiopie (1853-1868)* (Paris, 1897).

⁸⁶³Daniél, p. 614.

⁸⁶⁴*Ibid.*

⁸⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 336.

⁸⁶⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 6, 204, 241.

⁸⁶⁷Mängestu Lämma, *Mätsehafü tezeta zä Aläqa Lämma wäldä tarik* (Addis Ababa, 1967).

⁸⁶⁸Märsé Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, *Tezeta: Selärasé Yämastawsäw* (1891-1923 E.C.) (Addis Ababa, 2002 E.C), p. 196.

background of the migrants. Most of them were less educated and economically poor or those who would not achieve better social and economic status. Therefore, they travelled to the south where competition was less and opportunities greater as well as where resources (land) were plentiful and fertile⁸⁶⁹.

The same was true for the peasant army. North Shäwa was already peaceful. Unlike the early 19th century, there were no significant local chiefs who were at war with each other for any reason, which in turn would have created job opportunities for peasants in the army. At the same time, it was also expensive to employ numerous soldiers or servants for the sake of social status because of diminished resources. As a result, the employees began to migrate to areas where chiefs or the nobility could feed them well. If they were not treated well they would search for better employers⁸⁷⁰. After the death of some notables in Shäwa who lacked strong successors, their armies were disbanded and their members looked for other lords, who by this time were in the south. For instance, the army of *Ras* Gobana followed *Däjach* Balcha. They decided to do so since they had no opportunity of employment in Shäwa and the capital. Therefore, many of *Däjach* Balcha's military were recruited in 1888-1889 from *Ras* Gobana's army, which was disbanded at his death, and were already accustomed to and toughened by the southern campaigns as well as being proud of their tradition of conquest. This was one of the incidents that increased the presence of large numbers of Shäwans since the majority of Gobana's army was recruited from Shäwa⁸⁷¹. Another example was the case of the army of Shäwan nobility called Amänä Shäwa who joined *ras* Mäkonnen in Harar after the death of the former⁸⁷².

10.3. Developments in the South after the Conquest as Pulling Factors

There were several incidents during the conquest which displaced the inhabitants from their villages and properties. In the process the casualty rate was extremely high, and the conquests were also accompanied by looting of grain, livestock, and slave raiding, leading to outbreaks of famine and disease, thereby depopulating the conquered regions. The death of numerous peoples throughout the battles was also one of the outcomes. The ruthless nature of

⁸⁶⁹ Charles Mc Clellan, "Reaction to Ethiopian Expansionism: The Case of Darasa, 1895-1935", Ph. D. Dissertation (Michigan State University, 1978).

⁸⁷⁰ Mahetämä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, p.245.

⁸⁷¹ Charles Mc Clellan.

⁸⁷² Täklä Hawariat, p. 187.

Shäwan warfare resulted in the devastation of the native population. For example, during the conquest of the Walayita Kingdom in 1894, nearly 120,000 people were massacred, and thousands more were taken into slavery, while 36,000 head of cattle were looted⁸⁷³.

In the campaign to conquer the Kaffa kingdom in 1897 (whose population had been estimated as 1.5 million in 1850 by French missionary, Father Massaja) the population was reduced to 200,000 by the 1930s. According to Menelik's own official chronicler, after nine months of fierce resistance, Kaffa disappeared from the face of the earth as a society and civilization. Kaffa's Emperor was finally captured and whatever remained of Kaffa submitted. According to a French missionary, De Salviac, the Oromo population, estimated at about 10 million in 1870, had been reduced to five million by 1900⁸⁷⁴. A further related means used to displace the native inhabitants in southern Ethiopia was to terrorize them to leave their villages⁸⁷⁵. Eventually, the government policy that advocated acculturation of the south encouraged the Shäwans to feel at home there⁸⁷⁶.

Generally speaking, the method of incorporation, either by force or peaceful submission, made a difference in opening the way to receiving fewer or more people. In the case of force, there was the possibility of accommodating large numbers of people from Shäwa since the local peoples had been alienated from their land, because of their strong resistance as mentioned above. Such forceful occupations broadened opportunities for Shäwan migrants/settlers. The majority of the previous inhabitants had either been displaced by the wars of conquest or became, as they mentioned, “frightened sheep” without sufficient strength to resist the day to day influence of the new arrivals⁸⁷⁷. The regions of the south, such as Sidamo, Arsi, Harar and Balé which are used as examples for this case, were incorporated by force. This was partly the reason why many people from north Shäwa had relatives in these regions⁸⁷⁸.

After the conquest, there were three important developments that contributed as attractional factors in the south: the foundation of garrison towns, the construction of numerous Ethiopian

⁸⁷³Gäbrä Sillassé Wäldä Arägay, p. 363.

⁸⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 461.

⁸⁷⁵Dima Noggo Sarbo, “*Contested Legitimacy: Coercion and the State in Ethiopia*”, Doctoral Dissertations (University of Tennessee, 2009), p. 112.

⁸⁷⁶*Ibid.*

⁸⁷⁷Pawulos, p. 40, 42.

⁸⁷⁸*Informants*: Wudé Dägäfa, Dinké Esho, Hailu Dämisé and others.

Orthodox churches and the opening of several regions to Shäwan peasant migrants who were searching for land. These are now discussed.

10.3.1 The Foundation of Garrison Towns (1887-1910)

The foundation of garrison towns in the southern regions of Ethiopia was linked to Menelik's conquests in the late nineteenth century. The settlers in the garrisons consisted of both the army and various state functionaries. These first settlers shaped and reshaped the growth of the garrisons that attracted numerous migrants from north Shäwa. They became permanent drawcards for the continuous migration of peoples from the north, mainly from north Shäwa. In fact, the majority of the settlers were members of the army. Numerous Shäwan armies settled in those towns and began to act as "indigenous" inhabitants or "hosts", considering all others (natives) as "outsiders."⁸⁷⁹ The treatment the armies received from their commanders and top officials also seemed to encourage further migrants from Shäwa, as a Russian observer clearly described, "To get the loyalty of their army, each army general served an extravagant banquet when the army is free from fighting. Every day many tens of fatten oxen which were looted from the enemy were slaughtered; mead was poured [drunk] like water."⁸⁸⁰

The inhabitants of these towns were settlers who were actively supported by the state, in turn accompanied by the imposition of Amhara political will, culture, and social values on other ethnic groups. The numerical predominance and the politico-cultural hegemony of the Amhara in these towns assisted them to adopt their own way of life in the heart of the land owned by previous inhabitants⁸⁸¹. Two of the major cultural agents of Amhara domination of other people's social and cultural life were their language (Amharic) and religion (Orthodox Christianity). Under the circumstances, natives who could not speak the Amharic language were unwilling to live in a town where they were often laughed at simply for speaking in their own language. The Shäwan settlers imposed Orthodox Christianity to enlarge their socio-cultural frontier and used it as an instrument for upward mobility⁸⁸².

⁸⁷⁹Bänti Gétahun, "A Nation without a City [a Blind Person without a Cane]: The Oromo Struggle for Addis Ababa" in *Northeast African Studies*, Volume 9, Number 3 (Michigan, 2002), pp. 115-131.

⁸⁸⁰Ambachäw Käbädä (tran.), *kä Atsé Menilek särawit gar* (Addis Ababa, 2009), p. 45.

⁸⁸¹*Ibid.*

⁸⁸²Bänti; According to him the Oromo among the Amhara in Shäwan towns are more comfortable in speaking their language in the numerically superior Amharic speakers than among the southern communities in which they were the majority in which they were considered as inferior or laughed at. The Amhara and Amharized Oromo settlers in the southern region of the country were too much arrogant in comparison to the Amhara inhabitants in North Shäwa.

The method involved displacing the previous people from the areas where the towns were founded, both physically and culturally. Such measures, which were implemented throughout the garrisons of southern Ethiopia, drew numerous peoples from Shäwa to these towns⁸⁸³. According to Akalu, about thirty-seven garrison towns were founded in the south through this process from 1887-1910. Some of these included Asälla, Wälico, Hosa'ana, Soddo, Dilla, Yirgaläm, Agäräsäläm, and Goré, Bakoo, Gobba and the like⁸⁸⁴. But for the purpose of this study only the experiences of four different provinces (Sidamo, Arsi, Harar, and Ilu-ababora) are taken into consideration⁸⁸⁵.

The intensive case study by McClellan provides one with a clear picture of the Shäwan settlers in Sidamo. According to him, after the incorporation, there were two separate military units in Sidamo, the *bét lej*, and the army recruited by the governor during his career and loyal to him⁸⁸⁶. The second group is important in this case since the majority of them came from the already pacified Shäwan region and its neighbours. An instance of the second group was the *barud bét*, a unit organized by Balcha for Menilek during his time as *bäjerond* (keeper of royal treasure); many of these soldiers were recruited in 1888-1889 from Ras Gobana's army, disbanded at his death. This was one of the factors that strengthened the presence of a large number of Shäwans since the majority of Gobana's armies were recruited from Shäwa⁸⁸⁷. In Sidamo *barud bét* soldiers settled in several garrison towns such as Bule, Shisha, Guguma, Garbicho, Aläta, Arbéguna, Wujigra, Luku and Illilcha. Ideally each of these garrisons was settled by 300 troops under one commander⁸⁸⁸. In 1900 Balcha founded his own administrative headquarters at Abéra. There he quartered about 2000 soldiers under fourteen *shambäls* (*command posts*). Some soldiers were sent with *endärasé* (representatives) to guard and administer locations distant from the capital in at least ten different garrisons: such as Amaro, Agärä Mariam, Urga, Harorésa, Shabadino, Kavenna, Wonago, Watadara (Kavado) and Degé

⁸⁸³ Ambachäw Käbädä, pp. 45-47.

⁸⁸⁴ Akalou Wäldä Michaél, "Urban Development in Ethiopia: 1889-1925" in *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* Vol. VII. No. I (Addis Ababa, 1973), pp. 1-7.

⁸⁸⁵ This occurred for two reasons: first, their proximity to Shäwa, and second, the relative availability of sources; these are regions that informants frequently allude to.

⁸⁸⁶ C.M. McClellan, *State Transformation and National Integration: Gedeo and the Ethiopian Empire, 1895-1935* (East Lansing, 1988), pp. 40-41.

⁸⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

near Kebrä Mängest⁸⁸⁹. Therefore, these settlements resulted in significant population transfer from north Shäwa to a single region, Sidamo, as can be observed from the above figure.

Unlike Sidamo, the case in Arsi was not described clearly, like the number of settler soldiers at each garrison. However, Kätäbo and Bezuwärk mentioned the issue, according more emphasis to the negative outcomes the process created for the Oromo of Arsi. The area around Asälla was occupied by Shäwan forces in 1882. Many northern soldiers and their families dwelt in garrisons. Asälla, Ticho, Munesa could be cited, among many others⁸⁹⁰. These settlers were dependent principally on local farming for their livelihood. Other military families settled in a few, dispersed peripheral areas. The settlers lived mostly in the highland areas where the land was fertile and the climate was conducive, while the Arsi Oromo were largely displaced into the lowlands⁸⁹¹. Land was offered to government servants according to their rank and position. Besides other officials, the soldiers were given many of the parcels of land in Huruta and Seré. Ordinary soldiers were given between two and three *gashsas* of land, and received between four and five close to Asälla⁸⁹².

The third instance of a Shäwan destination was the town of Harar and its vicinities. The eagerness of Shäwans to occupy the land of Harar even preceded the battle of Chälänqo (1887). When a certain regiment of Shäwans led by *Däjach* Wäldä Gäbriél camped in Chärcär, they claimed that the land was very fertile but its peoples were very harsh⁸⁹³. The battle of Chälänqo and the actual incorporation of Harar, however, resulted in the settlement of a large number of soldiers from Shäwa. The town of Harar itself became a garrison of Shäwan soldiers. Each gate was given different names and additional gates were constructed⁸⁹⁴. The strong resistance of the Muslim community, from different ethnic groups, caused the size of the military force to be increased. Initially *Ras* Mäkonen was left in Harar with an army comprising three different regiments: *Näfetägna*, *Wärwari* and *Gondäre*⁸⁹⁵. Marcus also mentioned that "The king stayed in the Harar area for about one month pacifying the region around the city, where order had broken

⁸⁸⁹*Ibid.*

⁸⁹⁰Kätäbo Abdiyo, "A Historical Survey of the Arsi Oromo ca. 1910- 1947", MA. Thesis in History (AAU, 1999), pp. 25, 26.

⁸⁹¹*Ibid.*

⁸⁹²Markakis, p. 131.

⁸⁹³Bälätä, p. 13.

⁸⁹⁴Dämisé Workagägnäw, *Yämeseraq Bärägna* (Addis Ababa, 1961), pp. 21-24.

⁸⁹⁵*Ibid.*

down. He commissioned his first cousin – *Balambaras* Mäkonnen – to be military governor of Harar, with the rank of *däjazmatch* [commander of the gate]. Makonnen was allowed a garrison of 3,000 men. Ali Abu Barka was appointed civil administrator.⁸⁹⁶ The town of Harar itself hosted a large number of soldiers not only as defenders from possible attack but also as gatekeepers, to guard the five gates of Harar. Many of these people stemmed from Shäwa, the birthplace of *ras* Mekonnen himself. They established their quarters in the town as *näfetägnoch säfär* [the quarter of riflemen], having lands outside the town. Garrison towns were also founded throughout the province, and accommodated soldiers with their servants and families. The soldiers in and outside the garrison towns brought their wives from their birthplaces or at least from Shäwa since, as indicated, the earlier peoples of the area were Muslims. Garamulata, Gursum, Jarso, Seqré, Giri, Gara-chitu, and Chärechär were some of the garrisons surrounded by their farms⁸⁹⁷. The intention to use Harar as farmland was also evident even in the court of *Ras* Mäkonene; for instance, his wife Yäshemäbét brought, from Shäwa,⁸⁹⁸ some crops which were said to be unfamiliar in Harar. Hence, it can be asserted that Harar was the endpoint of soldiers and priests who had obtained information about the region. Their migration to Harar was not easy for ordinary peasants because of the presence of the harsh desert and hostile communities in the middle. It took them a journey of almost a month on foot⁸⁹⁹. Even after and before the opening of the railway, those with relatives in Harar made the region their destination. Täklä Hawariat mentioned a number of individuals as relatives in Harar; priests, *näfetägnas* and clerks at each level. Thus Harar was the home of *näfetägnas*, and relatively speaking it was an area where a well organized army was stationed⁹⁰⁰. On the eve of the battle of Adwa, Harar had about 1500 - 2000 of such armies according to Täklä Hawariat, though Märigéta Bälätä wrote that the army mobilized for the campaign of Adwa from Harar was immense. However, the author of *Yämeseraq bärägna* mentioned that the armies of Harar who campaigned to Adwa numbered about 50 000⁹⁰¹. The above figure also indicated that there was a considerable degree of population transfer from Shäwa to Harar, at least from 1887-1896.

⁸⁹⁶Marcus, *Life and Times of Emperor Menilek*.

⁸⁹⁷Täklä Hawariat.

⁸⁹⁸Dämisé Workagägnäw, pp. 21-24.

⁸⁹⁹*Ibid.*

⁹⁰⁰Täklä Hawariat, p. 186.

⁹⁰¹*Ibid.*

The fourth examples comprise garrisons in Ilu-ababora that accommodated large numbers of Shäwans. As Kätäbo and Bezuwärk did in the case of Arsi, Yasin also emphasized the harsh treatment of the Oromo of Ilu-ababora by the settler soldiers (*näfetägnas*). It is difficult to deduce statistical information about the approximate number of Shäwan settlers in the garrisons in Ilu-ababora. His discussion is preoccupied with what the Shäwans had gained and the Oromo lost after their defeat⁹⁰². According to his discussion, *Ras* Täsäma made Goré the seat of his administration⁹⁰³. Therefore, one can imagine the presence of large numbers of Shäwans sharing the place of origin of the appointee or the governor because he would have recruited the majority of his followers and army from there. In fact, Yasin himself mentioned the new arrivals now and again as Shäwnas. Since *Ras* Täsäma came from Adisgé, in the heart of Amhara north Shäwa, most of his soldiers would have stemmed from the area⁹⁰⁴. It is said that titles such as *mesläné*, *abägaz*, *qoro* and *chiqashum* were used in the hierarchical administrative order, from the top to the bottom under each Shäwan *gäzshi* or governor⁹⁰⁵. In some cases, however, even these relatively minor positions were actually given to members of the Shäwan settlers.

Initially, the Shäwan officials and soldiers who settled in highland Ilu-ababora (in several garrisons) were assigned a number of peasant households depending on the rank and positions of the *näfetägna*. However this method of produce exaction was replaced by land measurement and distribution during the governorship of *Däjazmach* Nadäw. In the process of measurement, land was classified into various categories: the major ones were *yämänegeset märét*, *yäsämon märét*, and *yäbalabat siso*⁹⁰⁶. *Yämänegeset märét* or government land was registered exclusively as government property. It was from this category that land grants were made to soldiers who were in the service of the state in the area⁹⁰⁷.

10.3. 2. The Foundation of Ethiopian Orthodox Churches (1886-1935)

The church, as an auxiliary expansionist institution in Ethiopia in the late 19th and early 20th century, was blamed by many scholars for being one of the most significant resource grabbers. In particular, authors from southern Ethiopia wrote that the church was active not in

⁹⁰²Yasin Mohammäd, “A Historical Study of the Land Tenure System in Highland Ilu-ababora, c.1889-1974”, MA thesis in History (Addis Ababa University, 1990), pp. 61-62.

⁹⁰³*Ibid.*

⁹⁰⁴Mahetämä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Ché bäläw* (Addis Ababa, 1973), p.70.

⁹⁰⁵Yasin, p. 60.

⁹⁰⁶*Ibid.*

⁹⁰⁷*Ibid.*

spreading Christianity but rather in scrambling for the lands of the people. According to these groups of scholars, even if numerous churches were founded in the regions, these did not result in the Christianization of the majority of their inhabitants. Christianity was almost exclusively the religion of the governors and their followers as well as of new migrants into the region⁹⁰⁸. Asmä Gyorgis was one of those who blamed the clergy as forerunners in convincing the king to accomplish the seizure of land;

እሁን በዳግማዊ ምኬልከ አመን ጋላ ሁሉ ተገኘ በአማራ ሆኖ ስርዓት ዘዴ ካህናቱ ባን አንድ ጋላ አስተምረመ. እነጠመቁም ይልቅነ ተፈተኝመ. ቅም የበለጠ ቅም በልቦ አነጋዥበት መልቱን በቀላድ መተዳደሪት፣ አንድ ቅለድ የቁስ አንድ ቅለድ የአመዳኝ አያዲ በዘመኑ ስብከት ዓገልግሎት አስመኑ፣ ለመንግስት ያስቦ መሰላመ. ለንግድ አንድ ቅለድ፣ ለወታደር አንድ ቅለድ.... አንዳሁ ተከፍልው ጋላውን አንድ ባረም አድርጋው ይዘተታል::⁹⁰⁹;

... Now, in the time of Menilek II, all the Galla have been subdued and have adopted the custom of the Amhara. But the priests have neither taught nor baptized a single Galla. In fact, they have diffused more grievances in the heart of the Galla than ever. They expropriated their land by the *qälad* system: a *qälad* for the priest hood, a *qälad* for the deaconship, a *qälad* for the awadash.

In many cases, the peoples of the incorporated regions were ordered to provide materials and free labour services. For instance, in Ilu-ababora, the peasants were forced to build churches⁹¹⁰. Most probably, that was why the church as an institution was considered by many of the people of the south as an entity that had come to snatch their land rather than as an institution with special knowledge⁹¹¹. Several negative rumours were circulating against the “Christianized” *balabbats* of these incorporated regions. Therefore evangelization was a peripheral activity, although mass baptism or being ordered to convert to Christianity was common⁹¹². The people were forced to celebrate many of the holidays and pay numerous taxes to the church without acquiring any knowledge about this religion⁹¹³. The foundation of churches was followed by the allotment of large tracts of lands. On Menilek’s orders, many tracts of land in each district were reserved for the church, based on the rule that one-third of the land of the incorporated regions should be given to the church. *Sämon* rights over such land were granted to

⁹⁰⁸ Bairu Tafla, *Asmä Gyorgis and His Works...*, p. 556.

⁹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹¹⁰ Yasin, p. 63.

⁹¹¹ Bänti, p. 15.

⁹¹² Markakis, pp. 130-136.

⁹¹³ Markakis, p. 131.

ordinary priests, while church officials received grants of *ristä-gult* in the same manner as the nobility⁹¹⁴.

The same practice was also implemented in Arsi after the incorporation. The open space around the site of a church, reserved for burials, usually amounted to one *gasha*. The clergy (*gäbäz*, priest and deacons) who served in that particular church were offered three, one and a half *gashas* respectively⁹¹⁵.

Harar was also one of the regions where a number of churches were erected and lands donated to them. In fact, it is said that *ras* Mekonnen built about twenty churches in Harar province alone, which was predominantly inhabited by Muslim communities, during his period of rule. And as was mentioned above, all of them were donated extensive properties. The clergy were also similarly donated land⁹¹⁶.

A further instance of church construction and donation of land that attracted a number of priests was carried out in Balé. The earliest churches that were erected in the region were said to have acquired about one *gasha* each as *rist*. In addition to this, about three *gäbbars* were provided for the support of every clergyman in the churches. Through time, however, large quantities of land and a number of *gäbbars* were set aside for the church. According to Kätäma, there were many varieties of these church lands, such as, *yäqés märét*, *yädäbtära märét*, *yädiacon märét*, *yägäbäz märét* and others, which were commonly known as *sämon*. On the eve of the Italian occupation there were about 26 churches in highland Balé, which collected tribute on about 330 *gashas* of land. Of these 26, six were located in the *meseläné* of Gobba, possessing 146 *gashas* of land, and five in Dodola, possessing 97 *gashas* of land⁹¹⁷. Almost all of these churches' priests came from the region of North Shäwa because of the historical reasons discussed above. Those who served in the numerous churches in Harar stemmed from Shäwa or were priests who had spent a long time in Shäwa, such as *Aläqa Lämma Hailu* of Gondär⁹¹⁸. The churches in Ilu-ababora obtained their priests from Shäwa, who followed the footsteps of *Ras Nadäw* and his son *Ras Täsäma* from there⁹¹⁹. The same was true of Arsi and Balé where the

⁹¹⁴Yasin, p. 61.

⁹¹⁵Ibid, p. 62.

⁹¹⁶Dämisé Workagägnäw, p.2 2.

⁹¹⁷Kätäma Mäsqäla, "The Evolution of Land-ownership and Tenancy in Highland Balé: A Case Study of Gobba, Sinana and Dodola to 1974", MA Thesis in History (Addis Ababa University, 2001), p. 33.

⁹¹⁸Mängestu Lämma.

⁹¹⁹Markakis, p. 111, 131.

priests followed *Ras Dargé* and his successor from this region⁹²⁰. If we calculate an average number of 5-10 priests per church for daily or weekly masses and a number of high ranking clergy including *däbtäras*, not to mention deacons and others, we may deduce that an immense number of Shäwan clergymen were employed in those churches. Besides employment in the churches, other job opportunities were available for literate members of society, even if these were very minor in scale. Thus, they were quick to exploit this new opportunity⁹²¹.

10.3.3. The Opening up of the South for Shäwan Peasants (c.1895-1935)

Shäwan peasant migrants made some regions of the south, such as Arsi, Balé and Sidamo, their major endpoint because of the geographical proximity of these to north Shäwa. Other southern regions were not easy to reach for Shäwan peasants and other migrants because of their distance from Shäwa⁹²². As noted, they were also separated from it by hostile deserts or large river valleys which were difficult for ordinary migrants to cross. Therefore, as indicated, the nearer regions were attracting migrants not only because of easy travel but also less risk; they could return if they encountered difficulties in accommodation or the like⁹²³. Migration to Arsi took them approximately 12 to 14 days on foot, and to Balé five or six days more. This calculation depends on the official journeys undertaken by caravan traders⁹²⁴. In the same situation, the journey took them about 13 days to arrive at Sidamo territory⁹²⁵. Most probably, some of them might have used the dry weather vehicle transport as did a number of the soldiers, priests and town-dwellers that travelled to Harar by railway. For instance, it was only 84 kilometers from Adama to Asälla and 256 kilometers from Asälla to Gobba⁹²⁶.

A further feature of these regions to which Shäwan peasant migrants headed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was the time of their incorporation: either before Menilek became emperor of Ethiopia or immediately after, at least before the battle of Adwa (1896). At this period most of Menilek's soldiers were Shäwans, as mentioned already. This situation paved the

⁹²⁰ Mahetämä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Ché Bäläw*, p.36.

⁹²¹ V. Stitz, "Distribution and Foundation of Churches in Ethiopia" in *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* Vol. 13 No. 1. (Addis Ababa, 1975), pp. 12-13.

⁹²² Mähetämä Sillassé, *Zekerä Nägär*, pp. 428-430.

⁹²³ *Informant*: Jifaré Tultu, – who migrated from Shäwa Dännäba to Arsi, then to Balé and returned after staying there for thirty years to live with his relatives when the change of government took place in 1991.

⁹²⁴ Mahetämä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Zekerä Nägär*, pp. 426-427.

⁹²⁵ *Bälätä kenfä Gäbriél, Yäliuel Ras Mäkonnen Tarik* (Addis Ababa, 1989 E.C.), pp. 48-49.

⁹²⁶ Kätäma, p.43.

way for Shäwans to seize the new opportunities before the other northerners arrived in these regions⁹²⁷.

For reasons discussed, the rural areas of the newly incorporated regions of the southern, south eastern and south western were known destinations of Shäwan peasants⁹²⁸. Harar and Ilu-ababora might have been difficult for mass migrants to reach, as intimated, because of the terrain. The Awash and Gibie valleys were the main obstacles to journey to Harar and Ilu-ababora respectively. Not only Ilu-ababora but also Jimma were not settled by large numbers from Shäwa, most probably not only because of the topography but also because of the peaceful surrender that did not leave much space for migrants⁹²⁹. In fact, migrant labourers did work on coffee plantations to a certain extent, mainly after 1941. But to Arsi and Balé, farmers from Shäwa migrated in large numbers by following their cattle and families on foot⁹³⁰. Migration to Harar was later encouraged for the able bodied since they were needed for the construction of the railways. For instance, Shäwan songs about Arsi and Balé are associated with cattle along with the usual love affairs, but their songs about Harar are associated with the railway, about Jimma with coffee and about Sidamo with *bärebäré* (red pepper)⁹³¹.

To make this general description more vivid, it is useful to describe the experiences of some of these regions to which Shäwan peasant migrants travelled. After the conquest by the force of Menilek, confiscation of land and tenancy took place. There were two forms of confiscation: “absolute”, under different pretexts, and two-thirds, as was customary. Both types of confiscated lands were granted to aristocrats, officials, soldiers and clergy. Of the officials, for

⁹²⁷Dimma Noggo, 131.

⁹²⁸Täklä Hawariat, 354.

⁹²⁹Informant: Täklä Arägay, who migrated from Dembaro Mariam in Tägulät to Arsi, and thereafter to Jimma (Géra); he has been a weaver and part-time guard in Jimma town since the 1991 change of government. His younger brother is still living in Géra. Both of them claimed that their father was given extensive property in Géra and that they were the sons of *näftägan* but had migrated from their home area because of the scarcity of land. Even in the middle of all this, in times of crisis they supplemented their livelihood by other crafts which were not common among the families of which they claimed they were members. (I conversed a great deal with him when I was teaching in Jimma University since we were living in the same compound from 25/9/2004-19/11/2005.)

⁹³⁰Tsägayé Zäläkä, “The Oromo of Salaalee: A History (c. 1840-1936)”, M.A thesis in History (Addis Ababa University, 2002), p. 103.

⁹³¹Informants (7,6): Täkka Kämssi, Tullu, Tufa and others.

instance, *Ras* Birru sold large amounts of land to the able individuals⁹³². Similarly, the soldiers and others sold many of the lands that they were granted. Apparently, the clergymen would prefer fertile land on which tenants lived in order to be able to collect tribute or to sell it at an attractive price. This was the process that was followed until the Italian occupation⁹³³.

It was these lands that accommodated Shäwans in various ways. Numbers of able Shäwan peasants purchased these in the area, either individually or in groups. As indicated, many came from an area where land was considered as golden property for which everybody strove. It was said that an individual should die for his *rist* land, rather than surrender it to anyone. Therefore, when those holding such attitudes migrated to the south and had the opportunity to buy land, they made it productive, owing to their tradition of working hard in land scarce areas of northern Shäwa. Most probably, it was these groups that were identified by Gäda Mälba as “ከአማራ ሆነ የአመራኝነት ወደ ይበባ የነገሩ ገበዥች በከተማዥች የተለለቁ ሰላምች ያልማች አገልግሎቶች በለበቶች በንጠር ደግሞ የሰኔ ሁኔታዎች... በለበቶች ለመሆኑ ተለዋል::”⁹³⁴; “Peasants who migrated to the south with their bare feet from the country of the Amhara became the owners of big villas, apartments and trade institutions in towns... the owners of vast estates of land in rural areas.”

The *qälad* system (of land measurement, previously described) which was introduced in 1918 in Arsi contributed to accommodating a growing number of Shäwans in the region. In the first place, the measurement resulted in the creation of private property and the distribution of these units among soldiers, civil servants and the clergy. Secondly, this private property was intended to facilitate administration and a more profitable collection of taxes. Hence, the sale of land at very cheap prices also encouraged massive movements of groups of people from Shäwa to the south. In Balé the number of northern settlers at this early stage increased not because of the direct government policy that encouraged migration and settlement, but rather because of the indirectly favourable situation that would attract the northerners, besides the sparse population: one aspect of this was that the state permitted the transfer of inherited lands either by sale or by gift to, though with the consent of relatives or heirs. Those Shäwans who had acquired lands in

⁹³²Bezu Wärq Zäwdé, “The Problem of Tenancy and Tenancy Bills”, MA Thesis in History (Addis Ababa University, 1992), pp. 33-34.

⁹³³*Ibid.*

⁹³⁴Gäda Mälba, *Oromiya: Yätädäbäqäw Yägef tarik* (Addis Ababa, 1994); Pawulos, pp. 618,619.

one way or another held these as private property. The process encouraged the immigration of more peasants who would be able to purchase land, hearing about it from the early arrivals⁹³⁵.

There were also some cases of sales of land in highland Balé. Certain local land owners sold their lands to the settlers but, by way of overcoming opposition by members of their lineage, pretended that the land had been “leased” out to the buyers as tenants⁹³⁶. A very small amount of rent would be levied nominally. For instance, according to the personal eye witness account of Kätäma, an individual by the name of Tägägn Ayälä told him his family’s experience. His father Ayälä Abägaz had bought land from a certain Kalisu Däwano for ten Birr. The purchaser was however required to pay a rent of one Birr a year. Thus, he was theoretically a tenant of Kalisu. *Ato* Tägägn says that the land belonged to his father but that the tenancy clause was added for protection against the complaints of the *gossa* (clan) of Kalisu who would not agree to transfer of their land to an outsider. Outsiders, who possessed no land, or *gäbbars* who did not have enough, are also said to have entered into tenancy arrangements involving payments of fixed rent. The rent depended on the size and cultivability of the land. For instance, a man by the name of Musie Dästa was a *chisäga* of Nuro Qacho in Gobba. Musie used to pay an annual rent of five Birr on about one *gasha* of land according to Kätäma⁹³⁷. A second means of accommodating Shäwans in the south was for them to enter into contracts other than purchase, both as regards the confiscated land and the land left for the community in the hands of the representatives (*balabbats*), to settle as tenants or in terms of other agreements with those individuals who had been granted lands or had bought them with their own money. One of the contracts for newcomers to gain access to land was through agreements with the *balabats*, sometimes for payments of merely nominal fees. The *balabats* would help the claimant locate “unsettled” land and the latter would apply to the governor to grant him ownership of the land as private property⁹³⁸.

The third mechanism that enabled Shäwans to settle in the region was the crop sharing system. The early Tuläma migrants who did not have any work in the garrisons proceeded to the rural areas to look for land and became sharecroppers with the *balabbats*, the system that the majority of immigrants followed. Three types of sharecropping agreement were customary, the

⁹³⁵Markakis, p. 137.

⁹³⁶Informant (54); Dinké Esho – she was a migrant from Shäwa to Jimma (Limu Säka), who married and gave birth to a daughter who was about fifty years old by the time the interview was held.

⁹³⁷Kätäma, p. 39.

⁹³⁸Blackhurst, in Baxter, *Being and Becoming Oromo*, p. 139.

landlord taking progressively a quarter, a third or a half of the crop⁹³⁹. Fourthly, it was also a destination for very poor peasants who had no alternative in Shäwa. They migrated to the region as servants of different masters, including the soldiers. Common examples of these groups were the Tuläma Oromo from Shäwa Méda and Sälalé. Their first choices in their bid to acquire land were the Arsi landholders (*balabbats*). In this, they were followed by the majority of Tuläma immigrants. One simple mechanism was that they could establish themselves by becoming the labourer of an Arsi landlord, living with him as a family member⁹⁴⁰. Another favourite destination of Shäwan peasant migrants was Sidamo. Cc Machile indicated that the period after the battle of Sägälé in 1916 was particularly important in terms of increased settlement, most probably because of the devastation caused to the peasants' economy in Shäwa⁹⁴¹. Hudson reported that there were thousands upon thousands of these followers and that for miles the road was so blocked that progress was difficult⁹⁴².

A number of people seem to have migrated to the south looking for relatives. Such movement was traditional, and in the north a poor peasant might migrate in search of a wealthier relative who could employ him or rent him land. As mentioned above, the greatest number of migrants originated from the lower economic strata of northern society; rarely did the highest ranking aristocracy move there. For them Addis Ababa was the favourite destination during the period under discussion. It was not only the poor peasants and discontented lords who had the confidence to leave their villages in the south, but also poor and less educated priests. Those with less education and from poorly endowed churches were the most likely candidates. Even in exchange for substantial rewards in land and labour, higher church officials were reluctant to abandon what they had achieved in the north. North Shäwa was the region with the most suitable candidates since there was no wealthy church to persuade the educated clergy to stay behind.

A further very important attractional factor for the settlers to proceed to the south was the success of the early arrivals. Even if experiences varied, according to Cc Machile, in general relatively little was needed to satisfy expectations. Occasionally some northerners worked for the local *balabbats*, who were often illiterate, despite a conviction that these local *balabbats* were

⁹³⁹*Ibid.*

⁹⁴⁰Kätäma, pp.40, 45.

⁹⁴¹Cc Machile, pp. 40-41.

⁹⁴²Hudson, p.120.

socially inferior to them⁹⁴³. This was true particularly for Shäwan peasants who had migrated to the region with no alternative but with the hope that tomorrow might bring a better opportunity. To examine the range of opportunities open to settlers, Cc Machile attempted to trace the origin of the migrants in Sidamo. He concludes that farming was the chief opportunity for many of the Shäwan migrants, besides the large percentage of them who ended up as officers and soldiers. In fact, these peasants often proved to be the hardest workers in the area to which they had gone and became wealthy, provided that the cultural as well as the ideological support of the state was afforded them⁹⁴⁴.

⁹⁴³ Cc Machile, pp.40-41.

⁹⁴⁴ Bänti, pp. 1-10.

Chapter Eleven

11. Region of the Marginalized People

The main focus of this chapter is to examine the fate of the peasants of north Shäwa after the “active” members of the society in the region left in one way or another, either for the newly established capital or for the newly incorporated regions of the south⁹⁴⁵. Therefore, the life of the peasantry who had no way out of poverty because of their lack of skills and relatives⁹⁴⁶ who might assist them will be analyzed from the local point of view. These peasants continue to live in the region, as they record in this song:

<i>Biyya taa'uuf zägituu hammatee</i>	<i>To live in my village the agent is wicked</i>
<i>Lagga Gibee busaatu hamatee</i>	<i>To cross the Gibé River malaria is hostile</i>
<i>Biyya kafaa karaatu fagaatee</i>	<i>To go to Kafa it is too far</i>
<i>Kan Iyyeessaa rakkinuma taatee</i> ⁹⁴⁷ .	<i>For the poor it is too problematic.</i>

As can be observed, one issue concerns the maladministration that the peasants were facing in their villages under the agent (*zägi*), in other words the *meseläné* [representative] of absentee nobles, *Ras Kassa* and his relatives in this case. His agents are described as evil. The second and third lines of the poem depict the barriers that hindered peasants from leaving their villages. Finally, they conclude that they had no hope of an escape from such multi-faceted problems.

This issue of marginalization of the people of the region is not an argument without any point of reference; there are factors to be compared between North Shäwa and the other regions of the country. Therefore, this comparison is emphasized. According to contemporary social theories, marginalization can be viewed from different perspectives. It is political, if the inhabitants of a certain locality do not participate significantly in the political system of the nation. It is economic, if they do not have a moderate share in or contribution to the national economy. Social services also furnish major indicators as to whether an area or a locality is privileged or neglected or treated reasonably. Thus, one of the means of exposing

⁹⁴⁵ Macfarlane, “The Meaning of the Comparative Method” (India, 2004), p. 100.

⁹⁴⁶ Informants (58, 59): Käfälägn Taddässä, Fesäha Gétaw and other peasants in Geshé Rabél district of North Shäwa, who claim that እና የኞች አገት ጥወቃቻ ለሆነ
አዎች ላይ ማስረዥ አዎች ላይ ጥወቃቻ;

Nothing is there in my home to hinder me from migration
[Become a bandit]

But my children who tied me back like a rope.

⁹⁴⁷ Tsägayé Zäläkä, “The Oromo of Salaalee: A History (c. 1840-1936)”, M.A thesis in History (Addis Ababa University, 2002), p. 103.

marginalization is that of identifying absences. It is said that the comparative method helps us to reveal these absences⁹⁴⁸.

In this study, some indicators are taken into consideration to investigate the marginalization of the people of Northern Shäwa in contrast to other regions of the country during the period under study. Why these indicators did not exist in northern Shäwa although they were common in some regions of the country is another related issue to be addressed. Shäwa appears to have been marginalized in comparison to Harar, Sidamo, Wälläga, Ilu-ababora, Arsi and Balé, even in comparison to the regions north of the Abay. This argument is advanced by taking into consideration the peasants' quality of life, state services provided to them or the attention they received from the government. Services such as attempts at modernization (schools, health services, transportation, appointment of powerful and experienced officials are visible points of reference for the comparison⁹⁴⁹. It seems strange to refer to the sidelining of north Shäwa in the midst of the assumption that the reigns of both Emperor Menilek (1889-1913) and Hailä Sillassé (1930-1974) were dominated by people who were considered as Shäwans⁹⁵⁰. However, the following facts are contradictory to this conventional wisdom.

11.1. Peasant Life

As explained in the third chapter of this study, significant areas of North Shäwan lands were transformed into farmlands, from the beginning of the 18th century. In fact, the region was characterized by mixed farming to the end of the 19th century. However, by the last decade of that century, animal husbandry began to lose favour, which led to a dramatic decline, owing to the 1889–92 epidemics that exterminated large numbers of animals⁹⁵¹.

Furthermore, the Shäwan peasants were not able to recover from the destruction, famine and loss of their animals. Probably, they were not capable and confident enough to have possessed a reasonable number of animals. This was partly because of a new development that accorded emphasis to ploughing at the expense of animal husbandry. In this process the state took the

⁹⁴⁸Macfarlane, p. 100.

⁹⁴⁹ This condition of peasant life in North Shäwa on the eve of the Italian occupation is also mentioned explicitly by Dawit Wäldä Giyorgis in his book entitled *Eskädar* (Addis Ababa, 2009).

⁹⁵⁰Mahetäma Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Ché Bäläw* (Addis Ababa, 1973), p. 59; Gerry Salole, “Who Are the Showans?” in *Horn of Africa* 2(3), 1979, pp. 20-29.

⁹⁵¹Gétnät Bäkälä, “Contingent Variables and Discerning Farmers: Marginalizing Cattle in Ethiopia’s Historically Crop-livestock Integrated Agriculture (1840-1941)” in *North East African Studies* Vol. IX, NO.II (Michigan, 2007), pp. 83-100.

leading role. Animal husbandry was given little attention, except as regards plough oxen because they were essential to cereal crop production⁹⁵².

Mähetemä Sillassé also attempted to explain this gradual change in Bulga, at the birthplace of his family: “የብልጋ ሆነበት ማቃቃ ገደለን ያልፎ ማብብ በመሆኑ በእሁኑ ገበያ ወደረኝ በረቃቃ የወተት ለማቃቃ በመባት ይይዛል፡፡ ወተር አንድሸጂው ማቃቃ ለይከናወል በብልጋ … በዚ የቀንድ ከብዚት የሚረበ ነበሩ ይገባል፡፡”⁹⁵³; “Since the land is very narrow and features cliffs; the people of Bulga have only plough oxen and few cows for milk these days. Previously, before the land was fragmented, it is said that there were people who had large numbers of herds.” Accordingly, in the agricultural history of the region, studies and government documents focus on the area of land, mainly arable land, as a measure of prosperity and poverty or of the productivity of agriculture. In fact, this could be one variable to distinguish the level of poverty and prosperity. But in the ploughing areas, peasants (from the local point of view) used another extra variable to measure the status of economic difference or poverty among them. This was the possession of oxen, even more practical for reliable farming than owning large parcels of land⁹⁵⁴.

Therefore, poverty in North Shäwa also stemmed from the absence of oxen, the most expensive property of peasants there. Oxen were widely considered as the most important domestic animals in the region. They outnumbered cows, or comprised nearly the same proportion, in most parts of north Shäwa. They were costly, as the expression “የብራ ወጪ ነው…” ; “price of an ox”⁹⁵⁵ suggests. It simply means very expensive. In north Shäwa, if a peasant lost his ox because of an accident, the community would wish him to acquire another ox soon, while the responsibility of replacing the ox was also borne by all the members of the community after sharing the meat⁹⁵⁶.

⁹⁵²Ibid; Pankhurst, "The Great Ethiopian Famine of 1888-1892: A New Assessment", *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, Vol. XX1, No. 2 (Addis Ababa, 1966), pp. 10-15.

Gétnät Bäkälä, “Contingent Variables and Discerning Farmers: Marginalizing Cattle in Ethiopia’s Historically Crop-livestock Integrated Agriculture (1840-1941)” in *North East African Studies* Vol. IX, NO.II (Michigan, 2007), pp. 83-100.

⁹⁵³Mahetämä Sillassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, *Yä Itiyopia bahel tinat: Bulga* (Addis Ababa, 1973), p.12.

⁹⁵⁴Täñker Bongär, *Yäzäréyitu Itiyopiya Idegätina limate käyét wädét* (Addis Ababa, 2010), pp. 53-56.

⁹⁵⁵Informants (101, 85): Gétachäw Negusé, Täsfayé Damtäw, Negusé Dämisé and others.

⁹⁵⁶*Ibid.*

Peasants who possessed oxen could cultivate their own plots and feed their families. Even those who owned oxen but not land could acquire it through different forms of contracts: *mägazo* (*irbbo*, *siso* and *irta*), the landowner taking progressively a quarter, a third or a half of the crop respectively. A further type of contract was *wälädaged*, in which a landowner would give an area of land to the landless, in exchange for a certain amount of money. At the end of a specified period, the landowner was supposed to return the sum and reclaim the land. If he could not raise the money, the tenant would remain in possession until the landlord could do so⁹⁵⁷. In some localities, ploughing itself was performed by horses or a combination of a horse and an ox or even entirely by hoe (*gən̩s*)⁹⁵⁸.

Therefore, both farmlands and distribution of oxen are very important factors in understanding the economic status of peasants in the area. The following song, used to praise oxen, depicted their importance:

⁹⁵⁷ Informants (8, 60, and 61): Abäbä Dämisé, Täsäma Täkku, Hailé Täkku.

⁹⁵⁸ Informants (62, 42): Abébé Zärga, Aduna Täkka, Bäkälä Ayyu.

ՄՊ ՈՒՅ ՈՒ ՄՊ ՈՒՅ ՈՒ
ՔՈՅՆ ՀԳԴՅ
ՔԴ ՈՒ ԴՀԴՅ
ՈՒԽԹ ՀՄԲ ՀԾՇԴ ՊՃՃՅ :
ՈՒՅ ՔԹԵՅ :
ՈՈՅ Ն ՃՅ :
ՈՒՅ ՔՄ ՈՄՅ :
ՄՊՀՊ ՀԵՅ :

ՄՊ ԱՃԻ ԱՃ ՄՊ ԱՃԻ ԱՃ
ԱՃ ԿՅԴ ԱԲՅԻ
ԱՃՔՅ ՔՃԵՔՅԻ
ԴԱԴ ՔՅԲՅԻ :

ՍՊՈԾՔԻ ՈԾՔ ՍՊՈԾՔԻ ՈԾՔ
ՔՌՃՅ ՀԳԴԻ
ՔՇՅ ՀԳԴԻ
ՀԹԱԴԻ ԻՌԵԴԻ
ՀՄՐԴԻ ՇՄՌԻ
ՇՄՐԴԻ ՌՎԵԴԻ
ՇՎԵԴԻ ՇՎԵԴԻ :

አንድ በፌዴራል ለማኑ ወላል የተመለከት
አንድ በፌዴራል ለማኑ ወላል የተመለከት
አንድ በፌዴራል ለማኑ ወላል የተመለከት
አንድ በፌዴራል ለማኑ ወላል የተመለከት

እግዢሁ ወይ ነኝ እግዢሁ ወይ በራ?
ልቀበር ክንፈድ?
ልቀምናይምናድ?

ԱՇ ԻՆ ՀՅԴԻՆ ՉԵ ԻՆ ՀՅԴԻՆ
ՅԴԻԹԹԻԿԱԾԻ ՊԼԻ
ՓՈՒԹԹԻԿԸՐԵՒՄՆ : 959

*Oh my oxen, oh my oxen
Where can I see your mother?
To carry her on my back as an infant
Those who love oxen
Could travel on mule back
Those who do not love oxen
Could not have prestige*

*Oh my oxen, oh my oxen
I will build comfortable shelter
Store fodder for you*

*Oh my oxen, oh my oxen
[Please!] Serve the mother of my oxen by
Tying her at home during [a sunny and dry]
time
Giving her soup to drink
Laying toga for her to sleep on
Curtailing her from evil eyes*

*The privileged say one ox is not functional
But I am happy if I get her for a day
If one does not have an old ox in his home
Even the neighbours do not greet him*

*Please! My oxen, Please! My oxen make me
To be buried in my country
To stand/live in my territory*

*Oh my oxen without you
Even the king cannot enthrone
The priest cannot serve the mass.*

⁹⁵⁹Informants (63): Mäkkonen Tullu and others.

In the above song, entitled *bäriyyé eshu...ru...ru....*, the term “*Eshu ... ru... ru...*” is used in local languages by mothers to calm an agitated baby. North Shäwan peasants similarly uttered it to express their affection to their oxen, specifically during the threshing of crops so that the oxen would work amicably together. The peasant would utter the same praise for the mothers of oxen (cows) in their absence. Cows were in short supply among the north Shäwan peasants, particularly among the Amhara, because of the scarcity of grazing lands or fodder. Even with cows the peasants were not able to bring up extra herds/ calves and team them with oxen. Rather, they bought teamed oxen. Hence the phrase, “the mother of my oxen”. When north Shäwan Amhara peasants became better-off, they preferred mules rather than cows; in fact the geographical setting itself forced them to use mules rather than horses. Peasants who owned no oxen were considered as impoverished and lacked social prestige among the community, apart from their economic status.

As mentioned in chapter eight of this study, north Shäwan peasants consider migration as a way of escape from the prevailing socio-economic problems. To them their life depended on ploughing land, the source of food for everyone. Since farming was impossible in the absence of oxen, the peasant praised his oxen, saying that the royalty and the clergy could not function in their absence. As intimated, the majority of the peasants owned neither cows nor pack animals (horses, donkeys and mules) because of lack of pasture. All forms of transport, including journey to and from the market, were heavily dependent on human labour. Carrying goods on one’s head for males and one’s back for females became more common than animal transportation as there was a scarcity of animals⁹⁶⁰.

This tendency had multi dimensional effects on the land and economy of the region. In many parts of the region the population was becoming poor and any alternative source of energy was so expensive that people could not afford it. This hindered them from using livestock dung as organic fertilizer. Instead, they used and even sometimes sold the dried dung as a source of fuel. In addition to all these difficulties, the major source of food for the animals consisted of the leavings of the crop, because of the inadequate grazing lands. Hence, this lack of enough pasture

⁹⁶⁰Informants (64, 65, 66, 67): Täsfayé Zäwdé, Mäkonnen Bäyänä, Täsfayé Mängesté, Kabité Damté and others.

and absence of numerous cattle resulted in a shortage of dung which could have been used as fertilizer in Shäwa⁹⁶¹. In turn all these factors contributed to the aggravation of soil infertility⁹⁶².

There was also no crop residues left on the farms because they were used for animal food, house construction or for fuel. The little remaining could not be turned into compost easily within a short period of time to renew the land⁹⁶³. Furthermore, the majority of the land of the region is located in the upper course or the sources of rivers where erosion was serious and very few lands were renewed annually by the soil brought by erosion from the upper course⁹⁶⁴. Productivity decreased and to feed the same number of people, there was a need for large size land; consequently much pastureland became farmlands⁹⁶⁵. Non-cultivable or infertile land as well as pasturelands began to be cultivated and contributed further to the poverty of soil fertility. Mixed farming gave way to arable farming. Re-migration to the abandoned lowland or settlement on malaria infested lands on the banks of the Jäma were some of the measures taken by the peasants⁹⁶⁶.

Therefore, even if, outwardly, matters seemed to be unchanged for the peasants of north Shäwa, in fact, their personal lifestyle and social situation altered gradually because of the sidelining of animal husbandry, scarcity of land, less productivity per plot of land and the relative population explosion after the outmigration of the able bodied group⁹⁶⁷. The following represented some of the manifestations of these changes. The first comprised the alterations in the dietary behaviour and daily work of these peasants. Consuming “wild” and “famine” foods or giving up more costly food and other habits began to be their way of life⁹⁶⁸. Usually, there were two main periods of maximum consumption of these “wild” and “famine” plants: the first occurred while farmers were waiting for the upcoming crop harvest, and the second when they ran out of food stocks from the previous harvest, and faced a food shortage. But over a period people tried, whenever possible, to add famine foods to local staple foods or to mix the former

⁹⁶¹ J. McCann, *People of the Plough: An Agricultural History of Ethiopia, 1800-1990* (Madison, 1995).

⁹⁶² Bezuayähu Täfära et al, “Nature and Causes of Land Degradation in the Oromiya Region: A Review” in *Socioeconomic and Policy Research Working Paper 36* (Addis Ababa: IIIRI, 2002), p. 5.

⁹⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶⁴ Mäsfen Wäldä Mariam, *Suffering Under God’s Environment: A Vertical Study of the Predicament of Peasants in North-Central Ethiopia* (Geneva, 1991).

⁹⁶⁵ Gétnät Bäkälä.

⁹⁶⁶ Märsä Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, *Tezitayé: selärsé Yämasawä: 1891-1923* (Addis Ababa, 2002 E.C).

⁹⁶⁷ Informants (6, 8, 7): Tullu Tufa, Abäbä Dämisé, Täka Kämsi and others.

⁹⁶⁸ Mäsfen Wäldä Mariam, p. 91.

with other foodstuffs to mask the often offensive nature of the food and to reduce any characteristic and unpleasant side effects. A common example was *guaya*, which, as noted, had the effect of shrinking tendons. Many peasants were affected by this crop during the time of famine and very deprived people were regular victims. Wild cabbage or *sinko* was also a common food of the pre-harvest period; hence the popular saying: “ጥወን ነወጣ ከፍትከትከር የወን!”; “Barley, don’t be proud of life that endures the hunger season because of cabbage!”⁹⁶⁹

The farmers began to minimize the rearing of cows to the extent of claiming that: *Bidenatu ganda naman dhaqa malee annan gandan naman hindhaqu*.⁹⁷⁰; literally “It is the bread that led you for begging rather than the milk”. Thus, many of them chose to sell their cows to purchase oxen for farming. Milk and meat were becoming expensive foods, consumed rarely among the said peasants. The Oromo peasants who used to consume barley with milk and butter no longer did so. The absence of these items even forced the Oromo to adopt the practice of the Amhara in some rituals; substituting oily seeds in place of butter and milk⁹⁷¹. Similarly, the peasants were not even able to consume meat, which was one of the most expensive foods, eaten only during three times a year during the most significant holidays of the Orthodox, i.e. Christmas, Easter and New Year or *Mäsqäl*. Even then they did not slaughter animals privately for they could not afford to do so, but in a group, *qircha*⁹⁷².

Moreover, they led a life of poverty to the extent of associating some of their favourite foods with extravagant consumption. For instance, the following saying was common, to express that it is more economic to consume *muq* (soup) rather than *gäñfo* (porridge) during a time of hunger, mainly during the rainy season or the period before the next harvest, since the latter needs more flour and butter, milk or oily seed. Frequently, they joked that “መቅ የጥቅ ለበቻ አዎችን የጋድ የጥኑ ለቻ ለቻ”⁹⁷³; one who boils *muq* [soup] is wise; one who cooks porridge is extravagant”.

The environmental degradation and the loss of a once rich and unique biodiversity even led to the absence of varieties of “wild” foods which had been used as supplements by peasants. The reasons for the lack of honey have been noted. It became unavailable or unaffordable food item

⁹⁶⁹ Mahetämä Sillassé, ... *Bulga*, p.28.

⁹⁷⁰ Informants (63, 69): Mäkonen Tultu, Adäré Bädhashé, and Hailé Bädashé.

⁹⁷¹ Informants (10): Gété Arädo, Asfaw Mäshäsha.

⁹⁷² Mahetämä Sillassé, *Bulga*, p. 29.

⁹⁷³ Informant: Etétu Mängäsha.

among the peasants of Shäwa. As a result, even the government was forced to alter a tax levy in the form of honey to cash, issuing the following declaration:

“... የሚትኩ ጥብር ልቶ፣ ልቶ አይነት ሆኖ ገንዘብኩን ይዘህ የገብር ማቸ ለመግዛት ስትጋልን በዋጋው በዚት ወይም በመጀመሪያ መቻርጻሁን አሰቦን.... መቻቻዎችም የሚ... ጥብር በአመት ስለሳብር በቻ አንድነትኩ ጥብር አደጋኞልሆነ፡”⁹⁷⁴; “... Since the tax of your land is different, you wander to buy honey for tax, you face problems either because of its price or absence at all; we consider this... and decide for you to pay only thirty *birr* per year for any types of tax in honey.....”.

Regarding trees and shrubs, indigenous species which have flowers for bees have largely been replaced by fast growing exotic plants, notably eucalyptus. As indicated, this tree, which was introduced to Ethiopia at the end of the 19th century, became important for farmers as a cash crop, for construction and as a source of energy, but it could not provide them with a wide variety of different products, fruits and flowers as indigenous species did⁹⁷⁵. Therefore, the peasants were unable to supplement their foods by collecting “wild” foods from those plants or harvesting honey. The declining biodiversity, and their dependence on a narrow range of crops or wild plants for food production, increased the vulnerability of peasants to a food shortage. In addition to this, farmers uprooted and destroyed such plants during normal cropping seasons.

Despite Ethiopia’s long history of cyclical famines, civil war and ethnic feuding during which many people repeatedly endured hardship and deprivation and were forced to collect and consume wild plants to survive, they developed negative social attitudes towards doing so⁹⁷⁶. In addition to all these factors, religion also curtailed peasants’ fulfilling their needs by using wild plants and animals. Religion, particularly that of the Orthodox Church, represented a major constraint to the use and consumption of wild plants and animals. For the believers, this practice did not conform to their system of traditional and religious beliefs⁹⁷⁷. Consequently, the range of food available to people during times of stress was limited, even though the consumption of wild plants was a necessary part of the strategies adopted by people merely to survive in a harsh and

⁹⁷⁴The Government of Ethiopia, በዚ መሬት የተወሰነ ቁርጥ ጥብር ስለማስከራል በማንበት 1 ቀን 1927 ዓ.ም የተነገረ አዋጅ;

⁹⁷⁵Yves Guinand and Dächasa Lämessa, “Wild Food Plants in Ethiopia: Reflections on the Role of Wild Foods and Famine Foods at a Time of Drought”, in Richard Pankhurst, “Economic and Social Innovation During the last Years of Emperor Menilek’s Life and the Short Reign of Lij Iyyasu” in *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Trondheim 2009), pp. 141-142.

⁹⁷⁶*Ibid.*

⁹⁷⁷Informants: most of these here were priests such as *Mämré* Girma Fäläkä, Admasu Bäkälä, Abära Tsäga.

unforgiving environment. The same was true of hunting. Hunting for supplementing their daily food and for occasional food almost ceased because of deforestation and a reduction of the number of animals for hunting⁹⁷⁸. There was even an intervention by the government owing to the seriousness of the problem. For instance, the following proclamation was made after 1931: “የእዳን ፍቃድ የለለዎ ስዎ. በቻርጻዎ ለመባለ የእር እወልዎችን ለመደል ይቻል...”⁹⁷⁹; “One who has no license for hunting can also hunt animals for food during times of hunger [problem]...”

From the point of view of social conditions, certain changes took place. For instance, *geber* (a banquet) was no longer commonly served to the peasants, for many of the lords migrated to either the capital or the south. A lord who left the region took with him the resources he was entitled to collect. And some of the districts were assigned as *madbét* or *ganägäb* lands because of their proximity rather than their fertility or productivity. Hence, both the absentee lords and royal kitchens were removing the resources from the region. Previously they might have extracted similar amounts, but these would have been within the community, with many resources being spent on social gatherings and on gifts, necessary to ensure the loyalty of the peasants⁹⁸⁰. Such regions or localities were sometimes considered as offering a secure existence because everything positive was attributed to the gods or spirits that were responsible for fertility or reliable rainfall. Hence the common saying: “*Adi gurachat ittii qalaama!*”⁹⁸¹; “different types [ranges from white to black] animals are killed...” since sacrifices of animals were common among the Tuläma of Shäwa Méda. However, these practices came to an end because of the impoverishment of the region and the withdrawal of those who could afford to carry them out. Moreover, the peasants shouldered the responsibility of delivering their share of tax in kind to the town. One important reason that made Shäwa unusual was its proximity to the capital, which encouraged nobles to order peasants to bring their share to it. In fact, other related

⁹⁷⁸ Informant (23): Mulugeta Nägäwo and others.

⁹⁷⁹ Mähetemä Sillassé, *Zekerä Nügär*.

⁹⁸⁰ Siegfried Pausewang, *Peasants, Land and Society: A Social History of Land Reform in Ethiopia* (München, 1983) p.704.

⁹⁸¹ Informants and also Täshalä Tebäbu: *Adi gurachat ittiqalama*, the custom of the state-sponsored banquet, falls into the category of redistribution of consumables. It is the least complicated arrangement of the social relations of the *geber* system. From the imperial court of the *negusa nägäst* down to the *chiqa shum*, the banquet was the means by which members of the tribute-appropriating class displayed their prodigious wealth in the form of lavish generosity.

responsibilities were required such as the construction of fences, roads and even houses⁹⁸². Here the notion of extraction only of a surplus is contradicted by the reality of northern Ethiopian peasant life in general and that of Shäwan in particular. What they paid was not a surplus but was forcefully snatched. Hence the saying (“ዶግ ይበላው እንደ ይከናለው እያጣም”⁹⁸³ “the poor [peasants] had no what to eat but had what to pay” was prevalent among the tax collectors and the nobility. This notion of surplus extraction, according to Karl Marx, referred to what was left behind after sufficient had been consumed to sustain life. But here the majority of the peasants were undernourished and diseased⁹⁸⁴.

Since they were unable to put any pressure on the government, the latter made no effort in time of adversity to help them. Relatively speaking, town dwellers could exert pressure on the authorities to devise solutions such as purchasing food items from abroad. For this reason one of the Ethiopian enlightened individuals of the time mentioned his grievance in the weekly newspaper *Berähanena Sälam* as follows: “...ኩራኑ ጥና በዚና በአሁስ ስንደ ለላለ አገር መተረኞ ቅረቶ በቀድሞ በመኑ በአገልቻን የጠዋኑ የዘንድር መቻድኝ ስዕም የነበረውን መቻላና ዘንጀና ከህንደና አገር በብር ምን እያስመጥኑ ለጊዜ መቻጋር እደጋገናው፡፡”⁹⁸⁵; “... it is a tragedy. Previously, we had ample food (maize and sorghum) to eat and which even satisfied wild animals (monkeys and apes). But now we faced scarcity which forced us to purchase food items from abroad (India) to overcome our needs.” Therefore, the absence of a surplus caused the tax collectors or produce extractors to acquire whatever they could during harvesting or immediately after it. This was most probably why the North Shäwan *Madbét* districts were ordered to provide their share of grain during February and March immediately after the harvesting season. The same was true of the collection of formal taxes. Minimum quantities of provisions were brought to the capital not only because of the distance but also because they were scarce⁹⁸⁶. The districts in the area of study which provided supplies (grain and firewood) for this purpose were Dännäba, Ankobär, Ifat, Tägulät and Gna'a. The schedule apparently took into account the nature and quality of supplies from each district as well as the distance peasants had to travel to reach the capital. For instance,

⁹⁸²Asebé Hailu, “Selä hezeb gudat” *Berehanena Sälam*, Hamelé 14,21,1919 E.C.

⁹⁸³Tänker Bongär, R. A. Caulk, “Armies as Predators: Soldiers and Peasants in Ethiopia c. 1850-1935” in *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* Vol. XI. No. III (Addis Ababa, 1978).

⁹⁸⁴Asebé Hailu, “Selä hezeb gudat” *Berehanena Sälam*, Hamelé 14,21,1919 E.C;the eye witness account of Aria Sillassé about the life of peasants in Mänz.

⁹⁸⁵*Ibid.*

⁹⁸⁶Täkalegn Wäldä Mariam, p. 158.

the districts closer to the capital were scheduled to supply the palace during the rainy seasons when travel from the more remote districts would be difficult⁹⁸⁷. The *meseläné*, an agent stationed in each of the *madbét* districts, coordinated the preparation and transportation of the supplies to Addis Ababa and presented himself at the palace to supervise the deliveries. The table below indicates that a large number of peasants were included in the list of the *madbét* districts located at some distance from the capital. This was partly because many of those districts, such as Tägulät, Ankobär, Ifat and many others in the predominantly northern part of Shäwa, housed, proportionally, a larger population than the districts immediately surrounding the capital, and the peasants from the distant districts carried somewhat smaller quantities due to the distance they had to travel as well as the small size of their land. They owned several plots far from each other because of the geographical setting or the fragmentation of lands. Thus, considerably larger numbers of people came to Addis Ababa from the remote districts to provide the same, or a smaller, amount of supplies as was delivered by the peasantry closer to the capital⁹⁸⁸.

Generally, this also applied to the supply of firewood. Actually, the same people who conveyed flour to the capital also carried bundles of firewood. The proportion between the distance and the volume was also the same. However, the supply of firewood was a much more burdensome task for the peasantry than that of grain⁹⁸⁹. Many of the *madbét* districts produced little firewood and as a result many *gäbbars* were obliged to travel even further distances to fetch or purchase the supplies. This was a particularly heavy burden for the peasants who had to do so in addition to their obligation to the *mälekägna*; unlike the cereals which they produced or which were given to them from local stores, they were forced to fetch or purchase the firewood by themselves. There is some evidence that in some of the districts where it was unavailable, baked and dried cattle dung was substituted for wood at a rate of two donkey loads of dung for each bundle of wood⁹⁹⁰. For instance, Dännäba and Gna'a are part of Shäwa Méda, consisting of relatively wide plains and sparsely populated, so that they could not afford to provide a month's supply of this resource independently. These two districts were facing the major challenge of providing firewood because of the absence of trees or forests, which is most probably why all the

⁹⁸⁷*Ibid.*

⁹⁸⁸ Aria Sillassé Wäräta, “Mänzen Mägobgnät”, a manuscript in the National Library of Ethiopia, EMML, 18 (Addis Ababa, 1936), no pages.

⁹⁸⁹Mähetemä Sillassé, *Zekerä Nägär*, p. 62.

⁹⁹⁰Täkalegn Wäldä Mariam, p. 158.

districts in North Shäwa were allowed to supply only one bundle. The peasants of Ifat and Ankobär were numerous in comparison to Shäwa Méda, each *amba* or village housed numerous peasants and there were peasant households on each plot of land⁹⁹¹.

Month	Name of the district	Types of tax paid by <i>gäbbar</i>			Tax paid by <i>tisägna</i>			Total		
		No of <i>gäbbars</i>	Crop		No of <i>tisägna</i>	Crop in <i>quna</i>	Fire-wood	Crop		
			<i>dawla</i>	<i>quna</i>				<i>dawla</i>	<i>quna</i>	Fire wood
September	Genet	900	1		2			900		1800
October	Macha	1770		10	2	133	5	1	568	5 2273
November	Guda	222	1		2	83	10	1	263	10 527
November	Dämbi	240	1		2	16	10	1	248	
November	Dännäba	84	1		2	141	10	1	154	10 309
November	Qaliti	60	1		2	11	5	1	62	15 131
December	Bächo	1392		10	2	56	5	1	710	
January	Menjar	612								
February	Ankobär	1555		5	1	728	4	1	534	7 2283
March	Ifat	1500		5	1	741	3	1	486	5 2141
April	Tägulät ina Mäsaqo	838		5	1	1457	5	1	573	15 3295
May	Metta	372	1		2				372	
May	Geja	372	1		2				272	
June	Chorie	296	1		2	210	10	1	401	
July	Gnä'a	330	1		2				330	
July	Addis Ababa zuria	273	1		2				273	
August	Ada'a	827		10	2	133	5	1	446	15 1787
	Total	1943							6595	
										8 200147

Table. 10 The annual distribution of districts or localities to provide monthly supplies to the palace feast (Gana-gab countries) NB. The highlighted districts are located in the region under study. Source, Zekerä Nägär, p. 26

All these practices not only drew heavily from the produce of the already impoverished land but also diverted the peasants from their regular daily activities. According to the

⁹⁹¹ Asmä Giyorgis.

explanation by Asebé the peasants complained because, “እና አገር ሆኖ የማሽለ ዘር ስለሆነ ክልደረሰከም መሳሪሱ ነው...”⁹⁹²; “....the season in our village is the time of sawing sorghum, if I can not arrive by now it is obvious that I will migrate...”. This constitutes one of the common examples of how the system diverted the peasants from their daily work.

The extent of exactions from the region by absentee nobles is evident from the decree which was issued by *Ras Kassa* in the early 1920s E.C.: “...ይህንኑ ለወርሏ ለአማካት ታክክ የተደመዱን ነገር የማሽለዎን ገንደበል የማሽለዎን ገንደበል፣ በማሽበት አሁሱ የማሽለዎን በማሽበት አሁሮች የኩቻዎ አሁሮች በወር በስራ በስራ የለፈንት አካል አበባ አንጻር መቻበት ይረዳ ያስተባለ...”⁹⁹³; “...all these which are calculated and added, for a month and year, that are assigned to be loaded by *gäbbars*, will be loaded by *gäbbars*, that of *genedäbäl*, by *genedäbäl* and that of the *madbét*, by the donkeys of the *madbét* and should be brought to Entoto every month under the responsibility of the *azazsh* of Fiché.” Therefore, taxes were exacted both by the absentee nobles and the royal kitchens or *Itege madbétés*. Here, Bulga is not in the list of districts that provided supplies for royal kitchens, but it was one of the *Iteges madbét* (kitchens of queen mothers): “...ከተላለ በታላ አስተ አንቀጽ 1928 ዓ.ም ይረዳ የአቻዎች መቻ በት ሆኖ ይከራል...”⁹⁹⁴; “... after that it served as kitchens of queen mothers till 1928 E.C.” In other words, most of its products were removed from the locality. The district was assigned for this purpose most probably because many of its farms were engaged in producing vegetables and fruits as well as several types of spices⁹⁹⁵.

To worsen the matter, the introduction of varied foreign items into the markets and daily life of the nobles resulted in the tendency to spend money on imported luxury items, to consume them along with locally produced goods⁹⁹⁶. This way of life widened the gap between the lifestyles of the peasants and of the nobles. The latter became more prosperous, and began to acquire more for themselves at the expense of the peasants; they levied many more taxes and tributes. By the first quarter of the 20th century, there were new patterns of consumption that drew the new administrative elites into a growing alliance with the international trade interests and their local agents. The governors were removed from any alliance with the interests of the peasants. Their increasing need for money caused the wealthy to discover ever new ways to tap

⁹⁹²Asebé

⁹⁹³Märsé Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, "Yä Ras Kassa Astädadär Dänb", MSS. No. 1792 (IES).

⁹⁹⁴Mähetemä Sillassé, *Bulga*, p. 14.

⁹⁹⁵*Ibid.*

⁹⁹⁶Däräsa Amänté, "Selägizew gänzäb chigger" in *Berähanena Sälam, Yekatit*, 3, 1924. E.C.

the wealth of their villages. Corrupt practices of pressing peasants for bribes, collecting fees for administrative services, gradually spread and increased the dependency and insecurity of the peasants⁹⁹⁷.

This maladministration and declining in farm income forced many peasants to compensate by participation in non-farming activities. Thus, because of poverty or lack of resources the men began either to change or to diversify their profession and even started to practice the “despised” ones such as trading and crafting. Weaving was common among the majority of Amhara peasants in north Shäwa⁹⁹⁸. Many of these activities (e.g. traditional crafts) were part-time activities and a source of additional income. They included handicrafts, the spinning of cotton or wool, cloth weaving, pottery, leather tanning, artisan activities, iron working, masonry, wood work/ carpentry, and house construction. Wool spinning and weaving were very important in the cool highlands in north Shäwa, even after the Italian period, up until the establishment of a wool factory at Däbärä Berähan. This was asserted by Mähetämä Sillassé while narrating the life style of peasants in the district of Bulga: “የበላጊ ስዕስ በስራዎች ለማማሪት መቻቻ ስለማያበቻዎች በልዋ ልቶ ተማሪዎች እኩዎች ለተለለ:: የበላጊ ስራ:: የሽከላ ስራ:: እናጠኔ ተ:: ቁጥ መቻቻ:: የሽማ ስራ:: የወርቻና የበላጊ ባንዲ የከናወናለ::”⁹⁹⁹; “Since their land is not enough to produce widely, the people of Bulga supplemented their income by different crafting. Iron working, pottery, carpentry, tannery, weaving, jewellery are performed by the people of the district.”

These practices were common among most of the Amhara inhabited *qolla* and nearby districts because of their historical background. However, the Tuläma of Shäwa Méda had no such opportunities to make a non-farming income. They were not familiar with crafting. An opportunity for some of the Oromo during this period was, nonetheless, trading. Tulämas who had connections with the Worji families were participating in caravan trade activities¹⁰⁰⁰. Consequently, commercial activities used to be an important source of income for them. There were several peasants, part-time traders, who brought various consumer items such as salt, pepper, spices, coffee and clothes from outside the area and sold them to the local markets, according to informants. The long distance trade involved places such as Sidamo in the case of coffee and Maräqo in the case of pepper, as well as Jimma for coffee. Pack animals such as

⁹⁹⁷*Ibid.*

⁹⁹⁸Mähetämä Sillassé, Bulga, p. 12.

⁹⁹⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰⁰Informants (10,24,75): Gété Arädo, Tullu Dandana, Tiko Maru.

mules and horses (*agases*) played an important role in transporting these goods¹⁰⁰¹. Traders conducted their business despite many challenges and claimed that whatever they earned was by means of overcoming difficulties. For this reason they sang:

Bona awara kaasan malee
Gana dhoqree dhitan malee
Magalan odaan malee
Dimituun odaan malee
Attamin deega Baléessuu?
Akkanti seetee sarageenii [bawunddii horuni]
Balée bu'aanitii bala gnataniti
Wällo cee'anitii wallallamaniti
Shagari bu'aniti shagaramaniti

Roughly to mean;

Without: Covered by dust during dry season
Covered by mud during rainy season
Ignore chatting with chocolate colored women. Ignore chatting with beautiful women.
How one can do away with poverty?
It is not easy to earn money or accumulate wealth
It is after travelling to Balé, facing hunger and consuming the leaf of wild plant
It is after travelling to Shagar and falling in to trouble
It is after crossing to Wällo facing challenges and
losing one's natural colour to the extent that one cannot identify you.

Their songs were also cursing poverty as a zealous enemy, to encourage those who were merchants, in the following words:

<i>Deegni hamadha</i>	<i>Poverty! The evil</i>
<i>Deega maggana korma</i>	<i>The evil of evils</i>
<i>Chinacha nama jallissaa</i>	<i>It bends ribs</i>
<i>Dugda nama kuutaa</i>	<i>It breaks backbone</i>
<i>Mofaa namati uwisaa</i>	<i>It forces to wear rugs</i>
<i>Gowaa nama godhaa</i>	<i>It makes one foolish</i>
<i>Dheera gababssaa</i>	<i>It shortens the taller</i>
<i>Gababa Baléessaa</i>	<i>It perishes the shorter</i>
<i>Hatii nama dessee jalattu</i>	<i>[Even] Mother does not like the impoverished.</i>
<i>Abban umee lelissu</i>	<i>Father does not call the name of the impoverished.</i>

¹⁰⁰¹Mulatu Dämäkä, “Rural Non-Farm Activities in Impoverished Agricultural Communities: The Case of North Shäwa”, in *De-agrarization and Rural Employment Network*, Working Paper, Vol. 25 (Leiden, 1997).

The life of the poor peasant was also depicted by such songs as:

<i>Yaa nitii nana deegdicha</i>	<i>The wife of the impoverished</i>
<i>Yamii malee dhaqtee</i>	<i>She goes to feast without invitation</i>
<i>Astaii malee tesee</i>	<i>Sits without [being] given seat</i>
<i>Gaggessa malee galtee</i>	<i>Back home without treatment</i>
<i>Galtee dhirsaan walitoltee¹⁰⁰²</i>	<i>[And then] clashes with her husband.</i>

The peasants who did not or could not supplement their income by non-agricultural rural employment were indigent. They might ask for loans or engage in one or other form of begging from those who did have other employment in rural areas. Therefore, the song was both an indication of the wish for a better life, the inefficiency of agriculture and the hardship these peoples faced, even if they were in a better position in comparison to other peasants.

The above explanations may seem unpersuasive in places and times where and when varieties of agricultural products, both plants and animals, were available in the market, even sold at cheap prices. Moreover, while it might be assumed that outmigration might have relieved the region of overexploitation of land resources, these assumptions are not in line with the realities on the ground, owing to certain historical facts. Concerning the first aspect, the majority (almost all) of the peasants sold their produce, not because it was surplus to their daily consumption, but rather because they were forced to do so, to pay for different types of taxes and social obligations, or to buy articles and clothes for their families. Therefore, most of the “quality products” (distress surplus) that were common in the markets were sold to discharge these responsibilities or were obligatory sales¹⁰⁰³. None of the best quality products were consumed by the peasants, such as *téf* and wheat or animals and their products, such as eggs, sheep and goats. Therefore, the peasants were forced to sell their animals and grains cheaply to the advantaged members of the society, as Täsäma Eshété observed on the eve of the Italian occupation of the country¹⁰⁰⁴. In fact, North Shäwa was not able to provide important items to the national market at Addis Ababa. The only items it could supply were sheep and skins¹⁰⁰⁵.

¹⁰⁰²Informants (10): Gété Arädo. All the songs are collected from her, when she narrated the experience of her father-in-law, Gämäda Nägäwo, who was a merchant in the long distance trade. He told her the hardships he had experienced in crossing the Gibé River and how his animals had been taken by the water [drowned] while he himself was sick. Similar songs were collected by Ennerico Cireulli from informants in south west Ethiopia, in the Mächa dialect even if his informants were originally Tuläma (Cireulli pp. 145-146).

¹⁰⁰³Tänker Bongär; Pawulos, pp. 88, 99.290.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Täsäma Eshété, *Sämina wärq* (Addis Ababa, 1963), p.89.

¹⁰⁰⁵Government of Ethiopia, *Aemiro* weekly newspaper on *Yekatit* 11, 1925 E. C. (February, 1932).

At this juncture the region was convenient only for sheep and goat husbandry since these animals do not need extensive grazing land or much fodder in comparison to others. It was less expensive for peasants to slaughter a sheep or a goat individually at the family level, at least during significant Christian holidays. Since they did not kill oxen or cows, except on very few occasions such as Christmas in a group (*qircha*) or for wedding ceremonies or *teskars* (commemorations), the hides of these animals from north Shäwa were not available in the national market. These hides were not supplied to the market since they were locally needed badly for two important purposes: for *téfer* (ropes) and for *qurbät* or *jändi* to sleep on. Even the skins of fatted sheep and all types of goats were also required for preparing a container or bag called *silicha*. There were no items that could be substituted for these¹⁰⁰⁶.

As regards the second assumption, outmigration would not have improved the life of the peasants who remained behind, for the following reasons. As mentioned above, one was that the migrants did not lose their land or most of their privileges, yet the cultivators were still expected to provide all the expected supplies to the homes of absentee landowners. However, sometimes the situation had been better previously in certain situations. For instance, the collected property or resources might have been consumed there by the peasants themselves in some cases. The new system drained the resources out of the area for the reasons mentioned¹⁰⁰⁷.

In addition, it took more time for the peasants to discharge their responsibilities since they were obliged to travel to the place where their lords were living, mainly in Addis Ababa, rather than in North Shäwa¹⁰⁰⁸. Thirdly, the relative peace and security, as well as the lack of day to day contact with the soldiers who transmitted venereal diseases, which either killed or made sterile a large number of people, resulted in a relative population explosion. Before this time the discrepancy between natural resources and population growth had been evened out, mainly by these wars and frequent famines¹⁰⁰⁹.

These general explanations simply cover the life of the peasants of the region at the macro level. However, at the micro level of the village and family, their lifestyle might vary, depending, for instance, on the nature of the fertility of the farm land, the size of the family and their property, the proximity of the village to markets and the like. Therefore, according to some

¹⁰⁰⁶Informants: the tanner community in Morät at a village called Wuger Mariam.

¹⁰⁰⁷Märsé Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, "Yä Ras Kassa Astädadär Dänb", MSS. No., 1792 (IES).

¹⁰⁰⁸Irili Oromiya, Amhara.

¹⁰⁰⁹Tänker Bongär.

scholars the poor peasants in Shäwa could be classified into two types. The first were mobile labourers or servants. From the Marxist perspective this was the direct result of industrialization or agricultural mechanization, where the peasants were displaced from their plots. However, in North Shäwa this was not the case. Rather, the cause was the population explosion along with the scarcity and diminished productivity of farmland¹⁰¹⁰. The second category consisted of absolutely poor peasants: most probably the majority of the peasantry of north Shäwa. They owned none of the necessary elements for successful agriculture such as a pair of oxen, or good sized farmlands. Consequently, they were obliged to work partly for other, better off, peasants to obtain their daily bread and clothing¹⁰¹¹. To conclude, this was why one observer described the position of Shäwa and the lifestyle of its peasants in the early 20th century as follows.

<p>ሁስት መያዥ የሚልጥለች፡ ለሁሸምኩር እኩ መቻለች፡ ጥንት የኩንያቻዎች ስወስኩ እኩ በአተማራቅ በከል እንከበር መቻለች፡ እኩን ለመረዳት ይገኘ መያዥ፡ የጥልበት ንኩ ተስጥቶች፡ በአጋ ተጠላት ጥሩት ይፈት መሆኑች፡ ስጠቅ መትር እልቅ ቅመሳለሁ ባጥንች፡ ወደ ይከራ መግቢያ ለማቅረት እስች፡ እስተኞች የጥና ለሁ ለተራች፡ ኩኩ ተስጥቶች በጥናዎርስ ሽቦች፡ ትብ መሆኑ ስዋ የመከራሪ እኩ፡ እንደሆነ መቻለች፡ እበት ስወስኩ እኩ ለቻለቅ ስላለ መቻለች፡ ለቻለቅ ስላለ መቻለች፡¹⁰¹²</p>	<p><i>I had toiled for more than two hundred years I would not be deficient in witness for this The kings I enthrone in early times Abiyé Säbesté In the eastern direction on Ankobär and Majtie [my witnesses]</i> <i>Now for the future, my wish is The freedom of labour for all my people [In] Bulga, Tegulat, Morät, Ifat and Märhabété I had left as a skeleton after losing all my flesh [while]</i> <i>I did extend to the west for territory [colony] Don't you know all these efforts of mine? I need freedom of labour on my land Tibie, Central Shäwa, the mother land I [am] proud of If I do not get responses for all my cries from lords, I will take it to God!</i></p>
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¹⁰¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁰¹¹*Ibid.*

¹⁰¹² Asebé.

During this time, the absentee lords and officials were moving their immediate families and relatives to the capital to consume the resources acquired from the south. Shäwans in the proximity of the court looked at the south as a new opportunity. For instance, as mentioned in his autobiography, Täklä Hawariat Täklä Mariam brought many of his relatives from Tägulät and Wägda to enable them to survive the economic difficulties in their birthplace. On every occasion when *Ras* Mäkonnen visited the emperor, his return was accompanied by a large number of new followers or migrants from his place of birth in northern Shäwa¹⁰¹³.

11.2. Royal Appointees in North Shäwa

By the end of the 19th century the region had become a place of internship for newly entitled officials. When Shäwan officials in the system were promoted from one traditional politico-military rank to another, they were appointed to the southern regions instead of North Shäwa as a favour by the Emperor. Influential figures were rarely appointed as governors of the region. The political biographies of two important personalities in the history of Ethiopia can be cited to support this fact. These were *Ras* Dargé Sahelä Sillassé (uncle of Emperor Menilek II) and Täfäri Mekonnen (later Emperor Hailä Sillasé I). *Ras* Dargé was appointed as governor of Bulga before he was appointed as the governor of Sälalé, a relatively better resourced region than Bulga¹⁰¹⁴.

High ranking officials from privileged families were not satisfied with an appointment in any one of the districts in north Shäwa. The case of Täfäri Mokennen after the death of his father is one example. He and his supporters were dissatisfied by his appointment to Sälalé instead of inheriting the position of his father, the governor of Harar¹⁰¹⁵, because of his appointment to this small and relatively poorer region. Even the addition of another district called Baso in Tägulät did not placate him¹⁰¹⁶. On the contrary, according to the evidence of the late 19th and early 20th century, the regions throughout the country outside North Shäwa were governed by prominent figures in the political economy of the country¹⁰¹⁷.

The same pieces of evidence confirmed that there were regions governed by a *ras*, the highest politico-military rank, next to the king in the history of the country. All the regions which were occupied in the late 19th century and considered as well resourced, were governed by

¹⁰¹³Täklä Hawariat Täklä Mariam, *Autobiography: Yä Hiyoté Tarik* (Addis Ababa, 2006).

¹⁰¹⁴Mähetämä Sillassé, *Bulga*, p. 14.

¹⁰¹⁵Hailä Sillassé I. *Hiywäténa YäItyophiya Irmja*. Vol. I. (Addis Ababa, 1973), p. 12

¹⁰¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁰¹⁷Mähetämä Sillassé, *Zekerä Nägär*, pp. 636-637.

officials holding this title. Sälalé and Geshé were the exceptional districts within the area of study that were governed by such officials together with Arsi and Balé or with Därra and Märhabété in the case of the former and with Ifat, Qäwät and Wäräilu in the case of the latter¹⁰¹⁸. Even the appointed officials were not living in the region permanently. They governed their respective districts through agents or *meselené*. As mentioned, the system aggravated the life of impoverished peasants since most of their resources went to the residence of the appointed official. One example of absentee administrators was that of *Ras* Kassa of Sälalé who spent most of his time in Addis Ababa and Lasta. The extent of this issue can be seen easily from the decree which was proclaimed by *Ras* Kasa in the early 1920s E.C. *Däjach* Täfäri Mäkonnen also followed the same practice during his appointment in the districts of North Shäwa; he never went there to govern¹⁰¹⁹, though he travelled to the actual regions during his appointment in Sidamo and Harar. A number of officials acted similarly. Particularly, the heads of the armies during the early period of territorial expansion remained in the southern regions as governors, leaving their home base, North Shäwa. Moreover, with the coming to power of Emperor Hailä Sillassé (*de facto* in 1916 and *de jure* in 1930), the process of the sidelining of the north became more apparent. Though religious, cultural and linguistic ties between the state and the people in the north remained an important base of the state, the emergence of a rich settler and increasingly urbanized ruling elite with minimal or no social ties to the rural north exacerbated the disconnection between the state and the northern population. The settler elite, as the economically and politically dominant class, experienced an antagonistic relationship with the southern peasantry at the same time it had lost its ties with its traditional home base in the north. Emperor Hailä Sillassé was thus the first ruler of the Ethiopian state to have been born and raised outside the traditional northern base of the state. It is interesting to note here that the succession struggle of the early 20th century also assumed a regional character. In the struggle with the anointed successor of Menelik, *Lij* Iyyasu, the major support for Hailä Sillassé's case stemmed from members of the southern settler elite such as *Ras* Imiru Hailä Sillassé and Täklä Hawariat Täklä Mariam¹⁰²⁰.

Therefore, the most important figures in the country by the 1920s were second and third generation northern Shäwa. Almost none of them were born in the region; they had a special

¹⁰¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁰¹⁹Hailä Sillassé, *Hiywäténa Yäityophiya Irmja*, Vol. I, p. 12.

¹⁰²⁰Täklä Hawariat Täklä Mariam, *Auto biography*, pp. 281-287 ; Pawulos, pp. 292, 391, 488, 495.

affiliation to the southern region where they had been born. They originated from areas where their parents had settled in one form or another. This generation did not encounter the hardship that their parents had faced. The regions where they grew up were solidly resourced and already pacified, particularly after the decisive victory of Adwa. Even traditional church schools were actively established in the region south of northern Shäwa where churches and other related institutions such as health centres, transport facilities etcetera were built¹⁰²¹. To enjoy these material possessions, the elite were also supported by three inter-related ideologies: the unity of Ethiopia, Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, and Amharic as the national language. Those who belonged to the elite and strove for the sustainability of the system were given priority and were more easily eligible for many government positions, having their modern education as the major criterion.

As a result, there were no significant reasons for prioritizing the region, so that northern Shäwa was left with its deprived peasants and poorly constructed, numerous churches. After it was abandoned, the major effort made by the government in North Shäwa was to reconstruct its old churches dispersed throughout the districts of the region. Emperor Menilek was active in rebuilding several. Churches such as Däbrä Libanos, Däbrä Berähan Sillassé, Morät Zéna Markos, Dembaro Mariam, Itisa Täklä Haymanot and Ankobär Mädihani Aläm were reconstructed by his orders, with their materials being provided by him¹⁰²².

The other major cause of the sidelining of north Shäwa related to its geographical features that hindered unity and consideration as one region. Consequently, junior officials were appointed not for the region in general but for each district or locality with its peculiar political and economic or related importance to the country. Incidentally, even more than the positions mentioned, the most significant appointment in North Shäwa during this time was that of prison commander at different *ambas* throughout the region, mainly at Ankobär which served as a place of forced exile. The absence of economic attractions and the presence of several inaccessible *ambas* along with their geographical proximity to Addis Ababa made the region a suitable place of detention for political prisoners¹⁰²³.

¹⁰²¹ Mahetämä Sillasésilsie, *Zekerä Nägär*, p. 661.

¹⁰²² Pawulos Gnogno, *Yä Atsé Menilek Däbdabéwoch*, pp. 630-639.

¹⁰²³ R. Pankhurst, “The History of Shäwan Towns from the Rise of Menilek to the Foundation of Addis Ababa” in *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Nice, 1977), pp. 236-237.

Several prominent figures, including the young prince *Lij* Iyyasu (1913-1916), were detained in the region. It was a place of incarceration for two important groups; the first comprised the strongest opponents of the monarchs, from the royal family itself, or the possible threats to the existing system from places north of Shäwa and Shäwa itself. The second consisted of the southern Chiefs who were prisoners of war as a result of their resistance to the territorial expansion of Menilek from the 1880s-1900¹⁰²⁴. Personalities such as Tona of Wolayta, Serecho of Kaffa, *Ras* Walé Betul of Yäju, *Ras* Hailu Täklä Haymanot of Gojjam, *Ras* Mängäsha Yohannes of Tigray, *Däjach* Tayé Gulelat of Shäwa and *Däjach* Abbawuqaw Birru were detained in Ankobär during the late 19th and early 20th centuries¹⁰²⁵.

Besides Ankobär, Afqara in Mänz was also a locality for political detention in the region. Individuals such as *Ras* Bäzabeh in 1897 E.C. and *Ras* Gugesha Walé before 1908 E.C. were detained there. In fact, the region was also serving as a storehouse for arms and treasures because of the geographical reasons that have been discussed above¹⁰²⁶.

Because of the absence of prominent officials or royal appointees in the region by the beginning of the 20th century, it was sidelined by few mentions in the historical sources of the period under study. The official documents and chronicles had the activities of kings and their prominent military generals as their subject of discussion. Thus, north Shäwa was rarely mentioned, partly because of the absence of such personalities. In the majority of the literature on Ethiopia, it has been treated as part of, or the extension of, the capital¹⁰²⁷.

11.3 Attempts at “Modernization”

Beginning from the late 19th century, Ethiopian history was dominated by different attempts at modernization. The military aspect was prioritized in many of these during the initial phases. After a time, several other aspects of modernization were introduced. Emperor Menilek and his successors played significant roles in their attempts to introduce the Western system¹⁰²⁸. Throughout the process the West was adopted as the role model, except for a brief decade when Japan was taken as a model. For the purpose of this discussion basic aspects of modernization

¹⁰²⁴North Shäwa Tourism Office.

¹⁰²⁵Informant: Solomon, A tour guide at Ankobär.

¹⁰²⁶Märsé Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, *Yähayagnaw kefeläzämän mäbacha* (Addis Ababa, 2006); Pawulos, pp. 462, 617, 618.

¹⁰²⁷Bahru Zäwdé, p. 154.

¹⁰²⁸Bezu-Wärq Zäwdé, “The problem of Tenancy and Tenancy Bills”, MA Thesis in History (Addis Ababa University, 1992), pp. 33-34.

which the monarch tried to provide for “his people”, such as modern education (modern schools), health services (clinics and hospitals) and transport (railways and roads), have been taken into consideration for contrast.

Emperor Menilek used opportunities, owing to relative peace and stability particularly after the victory at Adwa, to introduce several European techniques and institutions. Regional lords and appointees followed his lead. Throughout these attempts, North Shäwa was generally overlooked even if it had been the birthplace of the emperor and his immediate vassals.

The main tendency during this time was not to focus on one’s own village or locality but to open up all possible opportunities to exploit the resourced areas of the country. Hence the first modern transportation systems were established not to join northern regions, specifically north Shäwa, to the capital, but rather to link the southern and eastern regions to this city¹⁰²⁹.

The first vehicle road was constructed to join Addis Ababa to Addis Aläm while the first railway was constructed to connect the capital with an outlet to the sea via the eastern south eastern region. Out of about 6326 kilometers of dry weather roads throughout the country by 1920, only one line[roads] passed through the western margin of the region under study: from Addis Ababa to Fiché, the capital of Sälalé, with a branch from it at Dubär to end at Jihur. It was abandoned after the Italian period. Sälalé was accorded attention because it was less impoverished and also governed by the distinguished royal families who were descendants of *Ras Dargé*. Even if it was claimed that the southern provinces were marginalized, the majority of them were connected to the capital at least by dry weather roads before the Italian occupation of the country in 1935-36. Even all the Northern provinces boasted such types of roads within the region north of the Abay (Blue Nile), although they were not able to cross the gorge, before the Italian period, it was only Italian expertise that enabled it to be crossed. During this time the eastern extreme as far as Ogaden and the southern tip as far as Borana as well as Wälläga could be reached from the capital by vehicle. Obviously, this was partly because of the resources available and the impetus created by the presence of royal appointees in these regions, in comparison to the Northern regions, and partly because of the topography of the land¹⁰³⁰.

The first modern military academy was founded in the region south of the capital at Holata although, as noted, many of the members of the traditional army of the emperor stemmed

¹⁰²⁹Mähetemä Sillassé, *Zekerä Nägär*.

¹⁰³⁰Ibid.

from North Shäwa¹⁰³¹. The second was also established in Harar. Surprisingly, no modern primary school had been opened in northern Shäwa by the government before the Italian occupation of Ethiopia¹⁰³². Almost all other southern and eastern regions and all northern regions boasted at least one primary school before the Italian period. Therefore, it is possible to say North Shäwa was almost abandoned when the locality near thousand-kilometer distance from the capital had their first primary school before 1936. As intimated, all the areas mentioned above were prioritized because of the appointment of influential figures, such as *Ras* Nadäw, *Däjazmach* Birru, and *Däjazmach* Dästa. The same message was underlined by Täfäri Mäkonnen in his speech during the inauguration ceremony of the school named after him, in 1920 E.C. ¹⁰³³

Those regions with influential appointees because of their resources benefited from exposure to such new attempts, which are why the aristocrats and military generals of the second half of the 20th century Ethiopia stemmed from the southern regions, mainly from Addis Ababa, Harar, Goré, Asälla, Gobba, and Sidamo. The other regions because of their scarce resources were left to the peasants and junior governors. Northern Shäwa was one of them. For instance, the second group of Egyptian teachers were assigned to teach at Ankobär; however there was no influential official to convince the public to support them. For this reason the emperor was forced to write a letter to his appointee *wohni azazsh* Wäldä Tsadiq: “...የፋይንቸንም አስተማዣች ካርድ የአከብኝን አየሁት፡፡ የነጋድ ማተሚር ለሁንፈችን ጥቅም ነው፡፡ አሁንም በቀዳም አስተማዣ በላን ሰደናቸው ይግባኝ የሚሸር ስው ተጠለ በዚህ ምክንያት ወይዘሁ ተመሳሳይ ማት ማስከም አይደለምና በወረዳ በወረዳ በፍቃዣቸው ትምህርት መሸር የሚፈጥኝን ልጅ እያቀረብከለቸው እነዚህ እንደያስተዋኑ ይህን፡፡¹⁰³⁴”; “...I have seen the issue of the foreign teachers you have sent me; their teaching is for the advantage of our country. Still, last time we send teachers so that they teach; now it is not good to bring them back because of the absence of students. Provide the kids who want to learn from each district and make them to teach there.” Gondär, Adwa, Gojjam, Mäqälé, Harargé, Jijiga, Drédawa, Dässé, Jimma, Goré, Näqämet, Arjo and Ambo were some of the localities exposed to modern education before 1936, following the declaration of the regent: “መኋንቱ ሆኖ በየግዢታቸው የንብረና የወሁዳት ትምህርት በት

¹⁰³¹*Ibid.*

¹⁰³²*Ibid.*

¹⁰³³Amalaji MahetämSillassé, “Däse Yämiyasägne weré” in *Berähanena Sälam* on *Mägabit* 27, 1920 E.C.

¹⁰³⁴Märsé Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, *Yähagnaw Kefeläzämän Mäbacha* (Addis Ababa, 2006); Pawulos, *Däbedabéwoch*, p. 530.

አስተ. ¹⁰³⁵; “All the officials should open schools for reading and writing.” North Shäwa was not even offered the opportunity of being given missionary schools which were common throughout the non-Christian regions of the country. The only exception was the Catholic missionary school at Karabagamo (Mändida) in the heartland of Tuläma ¹⁰³⁶.

A modern health service constituted another important indication of attention to, or neglect of, a given locality. Northern Shäwa did not even contain a single clinic before the Italian period. The other regions, mainly the capital and Harar as well as regions that were assumed to be peripheral in the minds of many scholars had already been recipients of their first hospitals and clinics. In the midst of all this the peasants of the region were suffering from severe poverty. An eye witness account from Mänz Lalo Meder in the 1930s mentioned that the birthplace of Zänäbä Wärq (the mother of Shäwan ruler, Sahelä Sillassé) had been well known during earlier times but that after the transfer of the capital to Addis Ababa it had almost been forgotten. The peasants of the area conveyed their feelings to the visitor, according to his report, as follows: አትናገኘው ወይ መንገት በሽያጭና አመትም ማር የደረገን::¹⁰³⁷; “Mänz, why don’t you tell [us] your disease that makes you as thin as a grass?”

11.4 Contribution to National Economy

In comparison to northern Shäwa, the southern regions were very important in their contribution to the national economy during the late 19th and early 20th century. They supplied an extensive quantity of different resources when northern Shäwa’s contribution was almost nil, except for the properties of *ganägäb*, which provided different food items for the royal kitchen that could not cover even a quarter of the annual distribution ¹⁰³⁸. On the contrary, immense amounts of items were collected from the south. Almost all of the trade items which were exported from the country by the end of 19th and beginning of 20th century arrived from the regions south of Shäwa. Only minor quantities of hides and skins originated from Shäwa. For instance gold was brought from Wälläga and from the basin of the Tumat River. Civet musk was obtained in the humid forested western regions, from the *teregn* (civet cat). It was a very expensive item that cost almost 17 times more than the same weight of silver in international markets. Ivory of very good quality was obtained from the forested regions of the south and

¹⁰³⁵Feré Känafer, pp. 24, 26.

¹⁰³⁶Taddässä Zäwälde.

¹⁰³⁷Araya Sillassé.

¹⁰³⁸Täkalegn; Mahetämä Sillassé, *Bulga*, pp. 14-15.

south-west of the country. It was sold for the most part from the court of the emperor. Sometimes the emperor defrayed his debts to suppliers with tusks. The fourth significant trade item was coffee. Both wild and cultivated coffee was obtained from southern regions of the country. For instance, wild coffee was harvested from Kaffa, Mocha, and the other southern regions, and cultivated coffee from Harar and Chärcär. Of the remaining articles exported from the country the following can be mentioned. One of them was wax, which is also of very good quality but was exported in small quantities. Skins and hides were also exported in very large quantities. A great deal of incense was exported from the lowland regions of the country, as was Gum Arabic. Although agricultural produce was the primary product of Shäwa, there was not surplus available for export. Therefore, items for foreign currency originated entirely from the south¹⁰³⁹.

The bulk of the taxes which were collected in kind and sent to the court of the emperor came mostly from the regions outside of Shäwa. For instance, the governor of Näqämté paid 1000 *wäqét* of gold and 100 *färäsula* of ivory annually. From 1898-1904, the areas of Benishangul and Wälläga paid gold that was valued at about 1,800,000 Maria Theresa, i.e. about 44723 ounce; while in 1885 Jimma Aba Jifar paid 30 tusks of ivory, 30 *yäteregn qänd*, 30 mules, 60 horses, 100 jars (*gan*) of honey, 100 quintals of coffee, and 20 skins of lion, tiger, an enormous amount of wealth in comparison to what could be earned from north Shäwa¹⁰⁴⁰. Incidentally, a letter from Menilek to Abba Jifar, by which he requested a loan from the latter, is an indication of the extent of the southern provinces' contribution to the national economy¹⁰⁴¹. A number of letters and receipts between the capital and Wälläga indicated that the southern regions were the key contributors to the national economy of Ethiopia by the beginning of the 20th century. Besides annual taxes of one thousand *wäqét* of gold, a number of taxes were collected in kind to feed the imperial regiment known as Gondoré in Wälläga¹⁰⁴².

Thus, from the national perspective agricultural products from North Shäwa became peripheral. The local industry, which had been very important in the history of Shäwa, became insignificant for various reasons, such as the absence of large-scale markets. Most consumers, mainly those who needed to be close to the court, migrated to Addis Ababa. The introduction of articles produced in foreign countries also overshadowed these locally produced commodities.

¹⁰³⁹ *Aemiro* weekly newspaper

¹⁰⁴⁰ Täsäma Ta'a, *Yäwälläga Tarikäwi Sänädoch*.

¹⁰⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴² *Ibid*; Pawulos, p. 33, 46,64,82,91, 110.

From the regional perspective also, a large number of the consumers left the region and migrated to Addis Ababa. They founded one important residential neighbourhood of craftsmen, who originated from different areas of north Shäwa at Kächäné in Addis Ababa¹⁰⁴³.

Trade also declined owing to several interrelated reasons such as the depletion or absence of resources that were trade items from the region, the diversion of the direction of trade routes, and the absence of any market itself¹⁰⁴⁴. In particular, the opening of the Ethio-Djibouti railway diverted the routes through northern Shäwa to the east. Hunting also almost ceased because of deforestation and depletion of animals. Moreover, animal products which were used as trade items for local or international markets in northern Shäwa were not available because of the same reason¹⁰⁴⁵.

¹⁰⁴³Mäfin Assäfa, *Aliyah Bét*(Addis Ababa, 2009),pp. 114- 137.

¹⁰⁴⁴Pankhrust , *Economic History*.

¹⁰⁴⁵*Ibid*; Pawulos, p. 179, 285.

General Concluding Remarks

As this study has demonstrated, the majority of North Shäwan districts were transformed from a region of common property resources to farmlands and became the political heartland of the country from the early 18th century to the middle of the 19th century. The process brought about a tendency to depend more greatly on ploughing land than animal husbandry in order to feed the swelling numbers of royal residents in the region. Along with this shift, only minor efforts were made to create suitable conditions that contributed to the sustainable growth of the farmers' livelihood. The economic capacity of north Shäwa gradually deteriorated. Thus, the accommodation of large numbers of population, mainly town dwellers, gradually became impossible. The accompanying impoverishment was due to several interrelated factors. Some of these were the land tenure system, heavy taxes and tributes, the prevalence of wars and conflicts, the persistence of "natural" calamities and unenviable socio-cultural systems. Therefore, the recurrent hunger and famine in northern Shäwa, mainly in the districts neighbouring Wällo in 1970s and 1980s, had a deep rooted background in this gradual deterioration of the peasant economy and absence of produce, for the reasons noted.

The tenure systems influenced the productivity of the farms and the entire socio-economic systems in several ways. Primarily, the major portion of the lands in the region was owned by the peasants but in an extremely fragmented manner. These peasants had neither the will nor the capacity to increase productivity because of the predatory styles of taxation. The multi-faceted process of inheriting these fragmented lands also contributed to the prevalence of intra-community conflicts. These were not only linear and or downward, from parents to children. There was also a means to make them horizontal or upward from offspring to parents. These methods paved the way for the relatives to consider each other as potential rivals and also contributed to the free migration of peasants because they were in a position to reclaim their lands, even after generations in the case of a *rist* owner. The mode of tenancy in Ethiopia in general and in North Shäwa in particular also allowed opportunities for the tenants to move from one master to the other or from one region to the other, unlike the serfdom of Medieval Europe. The so called "state land" was also influenced by temporary tenure that changed hands frequently, depending on the loyalty of the official and stability of the system. Furthermore, the land governed by all the tenure systems in the region had more social value than economic value.

Along with the tenure system, the taxes and tributes exerted their own significant influence on the productivity of agriculture and socio-economic relations. The *gult* owner or tax collector mostly levied an immense number of taxes and tributes on the peasants/ *rist* owners. Since the *gult* owners only exercised rights over the produce, not over the process or the land, there was no room for them to add inputs to increase productivity. Hence, they collected the products simply from what was produced by using different mechanisms. On top of this, the position was most of the time short term, for various reasons. Therefore, the *gult* owners wanted to earn as much as they could during this term of service or loyalty, hence the proverb “አኅም የልበላ ስናር ይቀመጥል!” ; “An appointee who did not eat will regret after his/her dismissal/demotion”. Such officials had no interest in long term improvement of products.

The presence of numerous “natural” challenges also brought about significant negative outcomes for the socio-economic situation, specifically the productivity of agriculture. The prevalence of different pests, diseases, hunger and famines crippled the potential of the farms of north Shäwan peasants.

The socio-cultural system of the region was also a hindrance to hard working and greater productivity. The presence of a large number of non-working days and the emphasis on Christian thinking, some of which was misinterpreted as promoting idleness, had their own negative impact on agricultural productivity. The peasant life was heavily influenced by father confessor [the clergy] who encouraged idleness rather than the Biblical principle which encouraged hard working and discouraged a luxurious life and unnecessary wastage of earned wealth. The major articles of the *fiteha nägäst* (law of kings) about *asrat* (tithe), *mitsiwat* (alms), *bäkurat* (giving first born animals or harvested crops to the church) and *silet* (vow) discouraged accumulation of wealth for this world and also promoted the feasts of *qurban* (communion), *täskar* (commemoration of a dead person) and *mahebär* (monthly gathering in honour of a saint): the maxim “...የጠቃሚ የሚገኘ ስማም ይልብ እኩል እኩል!” means to “accumulate wealth for the eternal world”.

Generally, the impoverishment of north Shäwan peasants was a corollary of many factors mentioned in the previous chapters of this study. But, if properly managed, these factors could have contributed in several ways towards the improvement of the livelihood of the society. These conditions prevailed in one form or another up to the Italian invasion of 1935 and the region’s dramatic shift to being one of the centres of “patriotic” resistance in Ethiopia.

These factors, the researcher argues, can be considered as “lost opportunities”. The following are some of the issues that could have been addressed as such because of their failure to better the livelihood of Shäwan peasants.

Monopoly of Access

Conventionally, it is understood that the ruling class enforced a socio-political system of “tributes appropriation” and redistribution in the form of *geber* (banquet or feast) in the *rist* land tenure system regions of the country during the period under study. Peasants generally retained control over the production process. The lords or *gult* holders had the right to control only the distribution of the products. Both the land and other tools of production including the plough oxen were the personal property of the peasants. They also exercised full rights over deciding the type of crops they produced, techniques of farming their plots and the type of agricultural inputs used. Generally, they possessed full control over the entire process of production. The *gult* holder was accorded rights only over the output of this process. The ultimate rights were held by the state through the agency of local and regional administrators. This system made it unlikely for large, and possibly innovative, landlords’ estates to emerge since they did not possess the right of ownership over the land cultivated by the peasants. Simply, the lords or local administrators lacked a monopoly over access to land. Since they did not organize or supervise the production process, it was impossible to convince the peasants to be more productive since they might consider they had no reason to toil any harder for the benefit of the *Balägult* or parasitic class. In short, the lands were in the hands of peasants who were forced to pay the bulk of taxes and tributes. On the other hand, the *gult* holder (*Balägult*) who had the interest and opportunity to accumulate a surplus exercised no control over the land. Moreover, the peasants who enjoyed access to land ownership through *rist* rights did not have the capacity to improve productivity. They did not possess the economic power or the capital to increase their inputs. While the *gult* owners had the interest and economic power to do so, they had access only to what the peasants produced rather than to the means of production. Unlike Marx’s economic theory, the means of production was not in the hands of the powerful ones. Consequently, no commercialization and mechanization of agriculture took place in this part of the country. However, when the southern regions were occupied and the *gult* owners in the north became land owners in these regions, such commercialization and mechanization began to appear.

Conflicts and Wars

Most of the dynamics that operated in the region because of the conflicts and wars were not for the better but rather for the worse. Even if assumptions and practical experiences appear to demonstrate that wars or conflicts sometimes resulted in more scientific innovations, such as inventing different types of weapons and increasing the productivity of farms or industries to finance the war and to feed large numbers of soldiers, the real situation on the ground in Ethiopia in general and in the region of study in particular was different. The wars in north Shäwa were not declared to solve short term problems or conflicts; rather they seem to have been a way of life; individuals were born in wars, grew up in them and died during them. Commonly, such conflicts and wars diverted a large amount of the labour force from production to the battlefields. Hence, there would be two options to feed this large number of soldiers; the first was to increase the burden on the peasants while the second was to increase productivity by using different mechanisms such as innovations. Europe in some of its great wars tried to address the food shortage by the latter means. But in Ethiopia the first one was commonly applied, even to the extent of snatching whatever was available from the hands of the deprived peasants.

The Primacy of Ploughing over Animal Husbandry

As discussed previously, the presence of plenty but irregular rains in the region rather contributed to crop failures. However, it would have been helpful if animal husbandry or mixed farming could have offered support in the case of crop failures. Hence the Shäwan peasants argued that “*bar tokko kan kotan bar took kan horan yatan*”; *one eats from what he ploughed for one year and from what he reared for another year [year of crop failure]*”. In particular, the cool plateau of north Shäwa was favourable for animal husbandry because of its relatively animal disease free environment. The first recorded significant cattle disease only occurred at the end of the 19th century owing to its introduction by the Italians. Hence, it was possible to breed productive and numerous animals. Sheep rearing would have been the most effective in the plateau of North Shäwa since they did not need large areas of grazing lands in comparison to other animals and were ready for consumption within a short time, in comparison to cattle. Some peasants compared them with crop cultivation in this regard, claiming that “*ከእና አኅሩ ጥናቸው ብልግ ፍቸው :*” ; “in case it rains all these [sheep] are important”, referring to the uncertain rain during the *Bäleg* season and in the absence of cultivable land then. Sheep were also important for the warm clothes which were used in the cool climate of the Shäwan plateau, especially in Mänz and Tägulät. Almost every peasant, particularly in the districts of Mänz, was expert in

weaving their wool. However no efforts were made to improve the productivity of sheep farming in the north Shäwan highlands. It even appears that the rearing of sheep was marginalized by chiefs or rulers in altering the use of grazing lands to farmlands. Most of the literature consulted contained minimal descriptions of sheep in the area. The chronicles themselves rarely mentioned them, except for indicating the collection of tax from products of sheep wool. Although there was the possibility of improving and expanding sheep rearing and wool weaving, nothing was contributed by the chiefs, unlike their efforts to expand ploughing lands. The foundation of the Däbrä Berähan wool factory in the middle of the 20th century, with the intention of using this wool as raw material, failed under the pretext of the poor quality of the wool. Sheep would have been the main source of food for the majority of the peoples in the area. In fact, as indicated, they were the only source of meat for the peasants on at least three occasions within a year, but from the viewpoint of the government were not considered as a major source of food for the royal kitchen. Weaving their wool could have been encouraged and would have served numerous people as a means of living. Unfortunately, it began to be replaced by imported and locally manufactured goods, and the latter used foreign raw materials to manufacture blankets.

“Open Society” and Possibility of Transformation

On the basis of the findings of the present study, the following can be taken as one of the factors that could have led to the upgrading of the peasants’ life. The presence of an “open society” narrowed the economic differences and limited the formation of rigid social strata in it. This contributed to continuing the system without a sudden or spontaneous eruption of protest or revolution, but by gradual reformation. Any radical alteration of socio-economic and political systems was not common in the history of the region because of the elasticity of these systems. There was room to accommodate new developments by adapting to the existing system. Politically, the tenure system determined the nature of the interaction between the people and the government. The only resource that the government distributed among its employees was land. Military service was entirely dependent on land grants. Owners of at least the “one-third”, “state land”, were in favour of the existing political regime. An individual who lost land for different reasons, such as confiscation or persuaded inheritance (*wures*) could survive by becoming a tenant (*tisägna*). There was also a possibility of appointment as *gäbbars* or donation of land to landless peasants by the government. Therefore, such kinds of

arrangements could have fostered or maintained a smooth relationship between the government and its subjects.

As noted earlier, the government granted land to those who were appreciated or favoured by the monarch and his immediate officials. The system was also a means of punishing criminals by uprooting them from their land and allocating it to others. The early period of Menilek in Shäwa was, for example, characterized by displacing individuals who were his opponents as well as their followers and granting the same lands to new, loyal chiefs or followers in the area. Similar relationships or interactions also prevailed between landlords and their tenants. The tenancy system was a sort of contract, so that the relationship would continue only if both parties honored it. In fact, as noted, tenancy in Shäwa was relatively different from serfdom. The tenant was free to leave the land of his lord as long as he had somewhere to go with his family.

Economically, the system directly or indirectly enhanced economic interaction and did away with “self sufficiency” in the peasants’ livelihood because of the presence of people without lands to cultivate. It forced them to engage in a “despised” economic activity. Landless persons became merchants and craftsmen involved in activities such as iron working, weaving, tanning, pottery and the like. These peoples did not possess land, for the different historical reasons discussed earlier. Therefore, to obtain their daily food they needed to exchange their products with those members of society who engaged in land cultivation. In fact, the latter did not necessarily mean land possession, since there were people who had no land but also possessed no skills apart from cultivation in the landlord-tenancy system. Thus, these economic interactions would have been developed into specialization of production among the Shäwan community.

Socially, the system sometimes shaped the marriage agreements between different families or ethnic groups of the area. Those who resided in the river gorges or in the Amhara inhabited lands, for instance, would “ascend the cliff” (increase their status) by forging marriage relationships with partners from the plateau for economic purposes (to acquire land). The system in turn facilitated population interaction and a shift in identity from one to another. Partly this was the reason why northern Shäwa had developed a sort of syncretistic identity, neither pure Amhara nor Oromo, neither completely Christians nor followers of Oromo religion. Rather, the life style of most inhabitants of the area was a mixture of the two. Land was also the source of

social prestige and history: “Peoples without land had no history”. Only peoples who possessed land could recount their genealogy and try to trace who had owned that land first, and how it was transferred to others, if any. As intimated, among the peoples of the area during the period under discussion, land imparted more social value than economic. Owing to these inter-connected political, economic and socio-cultural systems, it would have been possible for the state and the inhabitants of the region to transform the socio-economic system for the better.

Peace Making Role of the Church

The traditional Ethiopian church education was more ecclesiastical in character and should ideally have assisted individuals to develop humanitarian behaviour. For instance, the code of chivalry in medieval Europe combined Christian values and the virtues of being a warrior, who was expected to be brave, generous and loyal. He was supposed to respect and protect women and to defend his family’s honour. Chivalry also dictated rules of warfare. It promoted ideals of behaviour for the warrior that reduced brutality. The Orthodox Church also influenced many aspects of feudal life, like the Amhara community of north Shäwa during the period under study. But it did not challenge armed force by using its authority in different aspects in Ethiopia. If it had done so to reduce the existing warfare or instability, it could have contributed to the stability of the area. The medieval European church tried to enforce periods of peace known as the “peace of God”, which were nonexistent in Ethiopian Orthodox churches. The Catholic Church also demanded that warring groups should avoid harming non combatants and clergy, so that those who travelled and those who remained at home might enjoy the security and peace which were essential for economic development. However, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was inclined to regard the “elect of God” as those who were victorious on the battlefield. Therefore, there was no room for the church to consolidate and impose a code of conduct on the army.

In general, the church as a dominant institution in the history of the region could have played roles in improving peasant life, as noted. Unfortunately, none of these opportunities were used for the mentioned purpose.

North Shäwa and the Ethiopian Ruling Elites

In the migration history of the region, only the able ones moved to the resourceful regions and invite their relatives to join them. Nothing was brought from the region of their destination for those who remained behind. Almost all the prominent figures of the government that was in the process of building the empire state of Ethiopia stemmed from north Shäwa. They could have contributed greatly to the economic development of the region, for instance by investing what

they earned in building different aspects of infrastructure. None of them had such sentiments. Instead, they favoured the newly incorporated regions by building such features of infrastructure as roads and railways to facilitate transportation to and from these well-resourced areas. Attention was accorded from the resource extraction point of view rather than from that of development. They abandoned north Shäwa as of no economic value. Members of the ruling class had given their attention to the region south of Addis Ababa or the remote north either because of other special resources or to gain access to the sea. A number of schools were constructed in the other provinces of the country in the pre-Italian period but none in the region under study. The elite used another method to benefit their relatives, bringing them either to Addis Ababa or the southern region. However, they did not create a favourable situation for the betterment of the lives of peoples left behind in the region except for allowing them to migrate to the above mentioned areas. These first generation migrants cleared the path for their children to attain good positions for they were given not only the chance to have a church education but also a modern education. This was the case for not only those who were in Addis Ababa but also those in different garrison towns in the southern regions of the country, because the church was the only educational institution during the initial stages of their settlement and the learners were obviously the children of the Christian community who could speak Amharic. After a time the modern schools which were founded in those towns were enjoyed by the children of the same community. For this reason dignitaries in the political economy of this country who stemmed from the south came from these garrison towns such as Gore, Yirgaläm, Gobba, Asälla, and predominantly Harar. These dignitaries simply migrated to these resourced areas, consumed what they could, and did not make any attempt to provide for or develop their, or their parents', birthplace. There were no patrons who could sponsor different facilities such as schools, for the region was inhabited by underprivileged peasants. Individuals from the better off families who had relatives in Addis Ababa were forced to move there to access a modern education. Hence, those who did possess economic and political capacities were not in north Shäwa during the first half of the 20th century; rather they were in Harar, Gore, Sidamo and most probably Wälläga and Jimma.

To sum up, as far as this study is concerned, North Shäwa became the region of impoverished and marginalized peasants by the beginning of 20th century because of interwoven factors acted for several centuries. The factors that would have contributed for the socio-economic betterment

of the people of the region resulted in the opposite situation because of the local contexts that have been already discussed in this study from chapter four to chapter ten. In these local contexts, factors such as methods of access to recourses, taxes and tributes, conflicts and wars, geographical (“natural”) challenges, socio-cultural systems, location and nature of capital towns and population outmigrations were leading to the impoverishment of the region. Therefore, the region was left with its indigent peasants and numerous poorly constructed churches. Even then, the government was occupied in reconstructing these churches rather than schools or other infrastructure. The situation was followed by the marginalization of the region by the government even if the government of Ethiopia in the early 20th century was nicknamed as a “Shäwan Government”.

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3. Periodicals

3.1. *Berähanena Sälam* (Weekly newspaper)

- Berehanena Sälam*. 26/4/1920. E.C (5/1/1928).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 28/6/1920. E. C (7/3/1928).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 20/7/1920. E. C (29/3/1928).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 27/7/1920. E. C (5/4/1928).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 4/8/1920. E. C (12/4/1928).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 16/7/1920. E. C (25/3/1928).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 30/10/1920. E. C (7/7/1928).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 17/12/1920. E. C (23/8/1928).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 17/1/1921. E. C (27/9/1928).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 15/2/1921. E. C (25/10/1928).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 20/4/1921. E. C (29/12/1928).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 1/10/1921.E.C (8/6/1929).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 8/10/1921.E.C (15/6/1929).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 2/12/1921. E. C (8/8/1929).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 23/12/1921. E. C (29/8/1929).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 16/1/1922. E. C (26/9/1929).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 5/3/1922.E.C (14/11/1929).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 24/4/1922. E. C (2/1/1930).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 22/5/1922. E. C (30/1/1930).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 9/8/1922. E. C (17/4/1930).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 28/10/1922. E. C (5/7/1930).
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- Berehanena Sälam*. 18/2/1924. E. C (29/10/1931).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 6/8/1924. E. C (14/4/1932).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 25/5/1925. E. C (2/2/1933).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 16/2/1926. E. C (26/10/1933).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 26/4/1926. E. C (4/1/1934).
- Berehanena Sälam*. 3/5/1924. E. C (12/1/1932).
- ii. A’emiro* (weekly newspaper)
- A’emiro*. 11/6/1925. E. C. (18/2/1933).

4. List of Informants (Oral Evidences)

No	Title	Name of informants	age	Date of interview in E.C.	Place of interview	Remark
1	<i>Märigéta</i>	Sebähat Bayu	73	11/03/2000 (21/11/2007)	Morät/Z/ Marqos	He is a traditional church school teacher of <i>aquaquam</i> [<i>church music</i>] at the monastery of Zéna Marqos in Morät. He explained why several priests left north Shäwa and migrated to urban centres or outside the region
2	<i>Ato</i>	Abäbä Robälé	93	22/11/1994 (29/7/2002)	Wobäri	The researcher interviewed this informant during his research for his MA degree in Wobäri but he was too old at that time for his memories to be useful and is now deceased.
3	<i>Ba/s</i>	Gamfur G/Mariam	85	30/11/1994 (6/8/2002)	Aläm Kätäma	The researcher interviewed him for his MA; however the information not used during that period was found to be valuable and is used for this study.
4	<i>Ato</i>	Eshété Nägesso	64	23/10/2001 (30/6/2009)	Bollo/Jirru	-----
5	<i>Ato</i>	Täfära Ayifokiru	83	22/10/2001 (29/6/2009)	N/Amba / Jihur	-----
6	<i>Ato</i>	Tullu Tufa	76	Several times beginning from 2/13/2002 (7/9/2010)	Sakela/ Wayyu	Tullu Tufa and several informants from Sakela and Romé originated from Tuläma Oromo and <i>tisägnas</i> before 1974. They provided useful information on how their grand and great grandparents became tenants under different pretexts.
7	<i>Ato</i>	Täkka Kämsi	79	Several times from 2/13/2002 ((7/9/2010)	Sakela	-----
8	<i>Ato</i>	Abäbä Dämisé	69	Several times from 1/01/1999 11/9/2006)	Sakela	He narrated the experience of his paternal grandfather Gämäda Nägwo who was a part time trader. His grandfather led his life not in his original village but at the “country” of his brother-in-law “very far” from his original village in Abichu.
9	<i>Ato</i>	Asfaw W/giyorgis	92	9/11/94 and 5/01/2000 (16/7/2002 and 16/9/2007)	Enäwari	A weaver in the town of Enäwari. He is a very knowledgeable person on the relations between the Oromo and the Amhara during the “earlier times”. Mainly when conflicts took place over resources between the two, as he assumed and as he was told by his parents, there was an absence of confidence on the part of the Amhara regarding their relationship with the Oromo; the former said “የ ማቅረብ ቅድድ የጋለ ወቅድ የለወም!” ; meaning “a sickle cannot cut [clothes] just like the Galla cannot be a friend”
10	<i>W/ro</i>	Gété Arädo	85	2/13/2001 (7/9/2009)	Sakela	She was from a family who engaged in caravan trade activity and likes describing the availability of every item in the home of her parents, but began to live in poverty after her marriage to a <i>rist</i> owner who lost it because of

						land litigation and left it to a lawyer in place of his fee.
11	W/ro	Askalä Bushé	78	2/13/2001 (7/9/2009)	Sakela	-----
12	W/ro	Mitiké Esho	65	Several times from 3/03/2000 to the 24/10/2002 (13/11/2007 to 1/7/2010)	Sakela	-----
13	Memih er	Bézakulu	40	25/12/2002 (31/8/2010)	Däbrä Berähan	He works as an administrator of Sillassé (Trinity Church) in the town of Däbrä Berähan
14	Ato	Awäqä Gobana	83	10/11/94 and 15/01/2001 (17/7/2002 & 25/9/2008)	Enäwari	Pensioner lawyer in Enäwari; he was a key informant and gave detailed information on the land tenure and taxation system in Jirru. He worked as <i>rapor tsehafi</i> [clerk] during my first interview but later terminated this because of problems with his sight.
15	Ato	Bäkälä Dadhi	79	23/05/2000 (1/2/2008)	Dännäb a	-----
16	Ato	Shifäraw Mulu	85	23/05/2000 (1/2/2008)	/Dännäb a	-----
17	Ato	Gälätaw Gäbrä Wäld	72	25/05/2000 (3/2/2008)	Wuger/ Morät	Both Gelätaw and Mekasha are leather workers (<i>faqis</i>) Morät at a village called Wuger mariam.
18	Ato	Mäkasha Almé	80	25/05/2000 (3/2/2008)	Wuger/ Morät	-----
19	A/q a	Hailä Mäsqäl Täkka	74	24/05/2000 (2/2/2008)	Enäwari	-----
20	Qes	Mulugéta Wäldä Tsadiq	85	26/05/2000 (4/2/2008)	Enäwari	-----
21	Ato	Yilma Astäraqi	77	26/05/2000 (4/2/2008)	Enäwari	-----
22	Ato	Lätibälu Chrinet	71	7/01/2001 (17/9/2008)	Aläm Kätäma	-----
23	Ato	Mulugéta Nägäwo	85	4/13/94 & 27/12/2002 (9/9/2002 & 2/9/2010)	Romé / Wayyu	-----
24	Ato	Tullu Dandana	79	13/01/2003 (23/9/2010)	Rogé/ Usmani	Tullu and other informants from Rogé/ Usmani claimed that their fathers were long distance traders and had a Wärji background. They said that their parents narrated the challenges they faced during their way from Shäwa to Sidamo, Balé, Gibé, Dildila (Shägär) and sometimes from Wällo and back to Shäwa by saying “ <i>Akanati setee saraganii..</i> ” Meaning not to be as simple as to cross to these lands and earn wealth.
25	Ato	Dametäw G/Mariam	70	7/01/2001 (17/9/2008)	Aläm Kätäma	He coherently narrated the local tradition in Märhabété on the genesis of <i>rist</i> tenure in the area.
26	Ato	Shifäraw	83	21/12/94 and	Asco/	He queried how one could recount his/her genealogy if no

		Endale		15/04/2002 (27/8/2002 & 24/12.2009)	Addis Ababa	land had been inherited from the forefathers or the first settlers, as they claim.
27	Ato	Alagaw Wädaj	73	8/01/2001 (18/9/2008)	Aläm Kätäma	-----
28	Ato	Agmas Chré	60	8/01/2002 (18/9/2009)	Däl-qäy amba/ Geshé rabel	-----
29	Ato	Moges Chré	63	8/01/2002 (18/9/2009)	Däl-qäy amba/ G/rabel	-----
30	Ato	Hailu Dämisé	80	3/13/2002 (8/9/20010)	Sakela	Ato Hailu's brothers and relatives in Adda'a districts who had lost their villages a long time previously because of their difficulties with the <i>balabats</i> and related economic problems; he described that specific experience and believed that a person who migrated could earn more if he worked hard.
31	W/r o	Mägäretu Dämisé	58	8/6/2001 and 25/10/2002 (15/2/2009& 2/7/2010)	Gamo däy/ Mändid a	She explained how her grandfather Gemedä left his land a village at Abichu in Gamo Deyi parish a few kilometers fr the town of MENDIA for Wayuu- Denneba where her fat Dämisé had his home. The land Gemedä left behind w given to the church, it became <i>gäbäz</i> land. Mägäretu provid a further explanation of how her father Dämisé repeated life style of his father and lost the land his father Gemedä purchased for him, most probably during the <i>qälad</i> system land was called as <i>Täratand</i> (one-fourth). Dämisé was for to build a hut nearby his remote relatives because of recurrent plundering of his property by soldiers on the eve the Italian invasion.
32	Ato	Nädhi Zärgaw	82	3/13/2002 (8/9/2010)	Sakela	-----
33	W/r o	Fäläqäch Dämisé	78	23/05/2001 (31/1/2009)	Abäy/ Wobäri	-----
34	Ato	Jifaré Dadhi	65	25/10/2002 (2/7/2010)	Gamo- Däy	-----
35	Ato	Nägash Asfaw	60	01/13/2002 (6/9/2010)	Sakela	-----
36	Ato	Täfära Yeglätu	87	01/13/2002 (6/9/2010)	Goro/ Sakela	He was a <i>balabat</i> before the 1974 proclamation of land being assigned to the tiller.
37	Ato	Käbädä Tässäma	88	01/13/2002 (6/9/2010)	Goro/ Sakela	He was a <i>balabat</i> before 1974 proclamation of land being assigned to the tiller.
38	Ato	Täshomä G/mikael	78	3/02/2003 (13/10/2010)	Abäya/ Dännäb a	Originally from Tägulät and now living in Abaya/ Dännäba in the middle of an entirely Afan Oromo speakers' village as the only <i>Sidama</i> .
39	Ato	Gorfu Asäfa	59	02/01/2002 (12/9/2009)	Sakela	He told to the researcher the experience of his own father and mentioned the phrase his father used, “ <i>garan waqa jailil balladha</i> ”; that is, “the land under the sun” is wide and an individual can go somewhere if he cannot live

						here because of different reason". The statement " <i>Garan waqa jalli balladha</i> " was uttered by Ato Asäfa, the father of Goruf and the tenant of Käbädä Täsäma (who is still an informant for this study), during his quarrel with the <i>balabat</i> Käbädä Täsäma.
40	Ato	Mägesté Lämma	74	17/10/2000 (24/6/2008)	Romé / Wayyu	-----
41	Ato	Bälachäw Umé	80	2/13/2001 (7/9/2009)	Sakela	Mengesté Lämma, Bälachäw Umé, and Bäkälä Ayyu; they are relatives and had common ancestors. They claim that they had a Muslim background and their forebears left their original village because of economic difficulties and the despotic treatment of the <i>balabat</i> , which was why the god/ spirit of the land or soil helped them to be successful in their life in Romé, and Sakela after their ancestors left the Däbeb area.
42	Ato	Bäkälä Ayyu	76	2/13/2001 (7/9/2009)	Sakela	-----
43	Ato	Täsfayé Begashaw	68	27/05/2000 (5/2/2008)	Enäwari	-----
44	Ato	Wärku Bedhané	70	3/02/2003 (13/10/2010)	Dännäbä	-----
45	Ato	Tullu Yadaté	79	3/02/2003 (13/10/2010)	Dännäbä	-----
46	Ato	Dagné Teklu	74	28/05/2000 (6/2/2008)	Jihur	Originally, the grandfathers or great grandfathers of Dagnie and other informants from Jihur were from Morät and they inhabited Jirru where land was available in the hands of the Tuläma Oromo. They became <i>rist</i> owners at the expense of the Oromo.
47	Ato	Asamin Täfera	80	28/05/2000 (6/2/2008)	Jihur	-----
48	Ato	Eshété Zäläläw	82	29/05/2000 (7/2/2008)	Jihur	-----
49	Ato	Shimelis Hayilu	78	29/05/2000 (7/2/2008)	Jihur	-----
50	Ato	Täsfayé Waqé	50	23/05/2001 (31/1/2009)	Abäyi/ Wobäri	-----
51	Ato	Hailu Bädhane	63	24/05/2001 (1/2/2009)	Rogé/ Usmani	-----
52	Ato	Negusé Abära	58	24/05/2001 (1/2/2009)	Rogé/ Usmani	-----
53	Ato	Jefaré Takka	70	1/13/2001 (6/9/2009)	Goro/ Sakela	-----
54	W/r o	Denké Esho	72	1/13/2001 (6/9/2009)	Sakela	She is a migrant from Shäwa to Jimma (Limu Seka) who married and gave birth to a daughter who was about fifty years old by the time of the interviews, and often visited her mother who was living in Shäwa after returning there after the death of her husband, the father of her daughter, and began to live with her first husband in Dännäba.

55	W/r o	Wudé Dägäfa	75	1/13/2001 (6/9/2009)	Sakela	-----
56	Ato	Jifaré Tullu	84	2/13/2001 (7/9/2009)	Sakela	He is a migrant from Shäwa Dännäba to Arsi, then moved to Balé and returned after living there for thirty years to live with his relatives when the change of government took place in 1991.
57	Ato	Täklä'arägay Wäldäsämaia t	79	Many times beginning from 15/1/1997- 10/03/1998 (25/9/2004- 19/11/2005)	Jimma	A migrant from Dembaro Mariyam in Tägulät, first to Arsi, then to Jimma (Gerra) and at the time of the interviews was a weaver and part-time guard in Jimma town after the 1991 change of government. His younger brother is still living in Gerra. Both of them claimed that their father was given extensive lands in Gerra and that they are the sons of <i>näftägan</i> but that they had migrated from their home area because of the scarcity of land. Even in the middle of all this, in times of crisis they supplemented their livelihood by other crafts which were not common among the families of which they claimed that they were members. (I spoke with him a great deal when I was teaching in Jimma University since we were living in the same compound.)
58	<i>Qes</i>	Käfälägn Taddässä	62	9/01/2002 (19/9/2009)	Yäsha/ G/rabel	-----
59	Ato	Fesäha Getaw	58	9/01/2002 (19/9/2009)	Yäsha/ G/rabel	-----
60	Ato	Tässäma Täkku	79	25/10/2002 (2/7/2010)	Dännäb a	-----
61	Ato	Hailé Täkku	70	25/10/2002 (2/7/2010)	Dännäb a	-----
62	Ato	Abébé Zärgaw	78	26/10/2002 (3/7/2010)	Chafé/ sakela	-----
63	Ato	Mäkonnen Tullu	60	27/10/2002 (4/7/2010)	Sakela	-----
64	Ato	Täsfayé Zäwdé	58	28/10/2002 (5/7/2010)	Goro/ Sakela	-----
65	Ato	Mäkonnän Bäyänä	77	28/10/2002 (5/7/2010)	Goro/ Sakela	-----
66	Ato	Täsfäé Mängisé	67	28/10/2002 (5/7/2010)	Goro/ Sakela	-----
67	Ato	Käbité Damté	63	29/10/2002 (6/7/2010)	Goro/ Sakela	-----
68	Ato	Adré Bädhahsé	89	30/10/2002 (7/7/2010)	Abaya	-----
69	Ato	Hailé Bädhahsé	80	29/10/2002 (5/7/2010)	Goro/ Sakela	-----
70	Ato	Asfaw Mäshäsha	78	18/10/2000 (25/6/2008)	Romé / Wayyu	-----

71	W/r o	Etetu Mängäsha	58	28/12/2002 (3/9/2010)	Lämi	-----
72	Qes	Girma Fäläkä	57	5/01/2003 (15/9/2010)	Sakela	-----
73	Qes	Admasu Bäkälä	55	5/01/2003 (15/9/2010)	Sakela	-----
74	Qes	Abära Tsägaw	59	5/01/2003 (15/9/2010)	Sakela	-----
75	Ato	Tiqo Maru	80	18/10/2000 (25/6/2008)	Romé	-----
76	Ato	Solomon...	39	18/10/2000 (25/6/2008)	Ankobär	He works in the culture and tourism office of Ankobär as an expert. He narrated many of the oral traditions of the area with clarifying examples. Frequently, he mixes what he read from books with oral tradition or the stories of the area throughout the discussion.
77	Ato	Mägärsa Chäru	78	6/01/2003 (16/9/2010)	Chafé/ sakela	-----
78	Ato	Nägash Dämisé	68	6/01/2003 (16/9/2010)	Chafé/ sakela	-----
79	Ato	Mäkonnen Zärgaw	76	7/01/2003 (17/9/2010)	Chafé/ Sakela	-----
80	Ato	Nigusé Dubalä	80	7/01/2003 (17/9/2010)	Chafé/ Sakela	-----
81	Ato	Agushé Gebré	83	8/01/2003 (18/9/2010)	Chafé/ Sakela	-----
82	Ato	Täsäma Aredo	78	8/01/2003 (18/9/2010)	Chafé/ Sakela	-----
83	W/r o	Wädré Negusie	68	9/01/2003 (19/9/2010)	Chafé/ Sakela	-----
84	Ato	Shifäraw Arädo	72	9/01/2003 (19/9/2010)	Chafé/ Sakela	-----
85	Ato	Täsfayé Damitaw	69	9/01/2003 (19/9/2010)	Chafé/ Sakela	-----
86	Ato	Mulatu Arädo	75	25/12/2002 (31/8/2010)	Däbrä Berähan	Initially he was a tenant but after the establishment of the Däbrä Berähan wool factory, he was employed as a labourer and became a machine operator until he retired in 1992. He had a continuous relationship with his relatives in the countryside.
87	W/r o	Ejigé Shäwa	90	9/01/2003 (19/9/2010)	Goro/ Sakela	She is a daughter of a <i>balabat</i> by the name of Shäwa Mallé, and had the same grandfather as Käbädä Täsäma Malle who was also an informant in this study. Both Käbädä and Ejige explained clearly how their great

						grandfather became a <i>balabat</i> and that they could inherit several <i>gashas</i> of land.
88	Ato	Alämu Dingdé	68	12/01/2003 (22/9/2010)	Wabé / Wayyu	Alämu and other peasants who were interviewed at Wabé/Wayyu contributed a detailed group discussion and hot debate on the land tenure system and type of taxation in the area. All of them were tenants as they reported, except Bäkälä Teka who had several tenants himself.
89	Ato	Bäkälä Täkka	74	12/01/2003 (22/9/2010)	Wabé/ Wayyu	-----
90	Ato	Negusu Gezaw	50	12/01/2003 (22/9/2010)	Wabé/ Wayyu	-----
91	Ato	Däribé Gäbrä kidan	53	12/01/2003 (22/9/2010)	Wabé/ Wayyu	-----
92	Ato	Täfera Yosef	58	13/01/2003 (23/9/2010)	Wabé/ Wayyu	-----
93	Ato	Asrat Asfaw	56	13/01/2003 (23/9/2010)	Romé	-----
94	Ato	Eshétu Urgé	59	14/01/2003 (24/9/2010)	Romé	-----
95	Ato	Tumsa Jimilu	78	14/01/2003 (24/9/2010)	Romé	-----
96	W/ro	Dämmé Abbu	58	Several times beginning from Tikimet1999 (October, 2006)	Sakela	She furnished a very detailed description about how her grandfather Beshahwured became Waqjiré because of his arbitrary migration from Morät to Shäwa Méda during hard times: he first travelled to the market of Enäwariand, then moved to a locality called Abaya where he was adopted by an Oromo father Abba Lubbu and began to be Waqjirie Abba Lubbu.
96	Ato	Alämu Garädäw	73	15/01/2003 (25/9/2010)	Romé	-----
97	Ato	Dinagdé Darsé	84	25/05/2001 (2/2/2009)	Mukaturri	He explained how he had migrated to Arsi like other landless Tuläma peasants and lived there for a long period of time. He came back to Shäwa in 1974; because of the temporal unrest in Arsi he felt lonely. Consequently by invitation of his relatives in Shäwa and the allocation of land to the tiller he acquired a plot of land and lived in the area.
98	Ato	Lämma Nägash	78	19/9/2009.	Tsähay Sina/Mänz
99	Ato	Siyamiregn Lämma	52	19/9/2009.	Tsähay Sina/Mänz
100	Ato	Taddässä Täsäma	51	19/9/2010	Sakela
101	Ato	Gétachäw Negusé	47	19/9/2010	Sakela

