

Research article

A Historical Study on the Properties of the Royal Family in Begémdir and Semén Teklay Gizat (Province): 1941-1974

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Abstract: *The former Begémdir and Semén Teklay Gizat (province) was a key source of wealth for the royal family between 1941 and 1974. Despite its significance, studies on royal properties remain scarce. This research examines the conditions and significance of these properties during that period. Both primary and secondary sources were utilized, with archival materials from the former North Gondar Zone administration office proving particularly valuable. Data were carefully selected, cross-checked, described, and interpreted. The findings indicate that the royal family, and high-ranking government and military officials connected to them through marriage, leveraged their positions to amass wealth through land, housing, and the expanding commercial activities in Gondar. To manage the properties acquired from the Teklay Gizat, they relied on local agents, representatives, and overseers. The analysis highlights the strategies employed by the royal*

family and their agents in managing these assets and discusses the broader implications of such practices for understanding the interplay between property, power, and local development during the late imperial era of Ethiopia.

Keywords: Royal properties, Overseers, Land, Housing, Property management

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1. Introduction

This paper examines the management of rural *rist* and *gult* lands, urban housing, and other wealth sources held by the Ethiopian Imperial family and high-ranking officials connected through marriage during the post-liberation period in Begémdir and Semén Teklay Gizat (province). To administer these extensive properties, the government established an office known as *Béte Rist*, or *Nibret Mastedaderiya Tsihfet Bét* (Property Administration Office), which was responsible for their oversight and control.¹ Tekalign defines *Béte Rist* offices as

¹See the seals of the *Béte Rest* Offices in the archived letters in the former north Gondar Administrative Office, for example, one can observe the seals of Prince Mekonnen, the Emperor and Princess Tenagnewerq.

"administrative bodies set up by the landed aristocracy for the management of their estates."² These offices had legal centres and *wekils* (appointed representatives) in various parts of northern and southern Ethiopia, particularly in provincial capitals like Gondar.³

These local representatives were responsible for overseeing the activities of *tebakis* (local overseers), collecting *giber* (taxes) and rents, and facilitating the sale of produce. Their duties also encompassed reporting on the status and number of livestock, managing financial transactions such as profits and losses, procuring farming equipment and oxen, disbursing salaries, and ensuring the transfer of cash or foodstuffs to the central *Béte Rist* office in Addis Ababa.⁴ In return for their services, *Béte Rist* workers were usually given two *gashas* (80 hectares) of land as *rist* and *maderya*, respectively, by the government.⁵

1.1. Statement of the problem

Despite the former Begémdir and Semén *Teklay Gizat* (province) being a vital source of wealth for the Ethiopian royal family between 1941 and 1974, there is a striking absence of focused academic research on royal properties during this period. While broader studies on Ethiopian land tenure and imperial wealth provide substantial historical context, the specific mechanisms by which the royal family, and the high-ranking government and military officials connected to them through marriage, acquired, managed, and exploited these assets remain largely unexplored.

This research addresses this gap by examining how these properties were systematically used to amass wealth through land, housing, and commercial ventures in Begémdir and Semén *Teklay Gizat*. By critically analysing primary sources, particularly archival materials from the former North Gondar Zone administration office, and supplementing them with secondary literature, this study aims to shed light on property management tactics during the late imperial era of Ethiopia and explore their broader implications for understanding the interplay between property, power, and local development.

1.2. Research questions

²Tekalign Woldee 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 Graduate School, Boston, 1995), p.xi.

³There are a number of files both at Wolde Meskel Tariku Research Center, institute of Ethiopian Studies(henceforth, WMTRC-IES) in Addis Ababa and the Gondar archives concerning the opening of centers of *wekils* of *Béte Rist* offices at Dessé, Gondar, Asmara, Assella, Goré, Harar, etc.

⁴Tekalign, p. 324.

⁵A Letter from Begémdir and Semén *Kifle Hager* Land Administration Office to the Provincial Administrative Office Dated to *Tahisas* 25, 1967 E.C., [January 3, 1975], Folder No ፳49, File No, ል17/2-7/46.

This study seeks to answer the following key research questions:

- What were the main types of royal properties in Begémdir and Semén *Teklay Gizat* between 1941 and 1974?
- How did the royal family and their associates acquire, manage, and expand their wealth in the region?
- What role did local agents and overseers play in administering these properties?
- What were the economic and social effects of royal property ownership on local development in Gondar?
- How did property ownership reflect broader power dynamics in late imperial Ethiopia?

2. Research Methods and Materials

2.1. Description of the study Area

The study area of this research covers the former Gondar province, which was known as Begémdir and Semén *Teklay Gizat* during the Imperial regime (1941–74). Prior to 1935, Begémdir and Semén were two separate *Awrajjas*, each accountable to the central Ethiopian state. Begémdir was governed by *Ras* Gugsä Wellé (until 1910), *Negus* Welde Giyorgis (r. 1910–18), *Ras* Gugsä Wellé (r. 1918–30), and *Ras* Kassa Haylu (r. 1930–35).⁶ Semén, on the other hand, was governed by *Dajjazzmach* Ayaléw Berru from 1917 until the arrival of the Italians in 1936.⁷

In the immediate aftermath of liberation from Italian occupation, the restored government of Emperor Haile Selassie merged Begémdir and Semén to form one of the fourteen *Teklay Gizats* (provinces), with its capital in Gondar.⁸ At that time, the newly formed province was composed of seven *Awrajjas* (sub-provinces): Gondar Zuriya, Debre Tabor, Wegera, Gayint, Chilga, Semén, and Libo.⁹

2.2. Historical background

The economic importance of the Begémdir and Semén regions to the Ethiopian state was immense during the 20th century. The fertile plains of Dembiya, Fogera, and Wegera not only served as a vital economic base for local communities but also provided essential

⁶Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, Second Revised Edition (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2000), pp. 120, 135-137, 145.

⁷Bairu Tafla and Tsegaye Tegenu, “Ayyaléw Berru,” *Encyclopedia Aethiopica*, Volume 1 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003), p. 413.

⁸LaVerle Berry, “Bägemder,” *Encyclopedia Aethiopica*, Volume 1 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003), p. 440.

⁹“*Ye Begémdir and Semén Teklay Gizat Huletegnä Ye Ediget Ena Ye Lemat Seminar*” (A Report, *Hedar* 15 to 21, 1964 E.C., Gondar).; Berry, p. 440.

support to regional governments, the Church, and the central state.¹⁰ In addition, control over the Metema Kella was a major factor in the long-standing conflict between *Ras* Gugsä Wellé of Begémdir and the central government, culminating in the Battle of Anchim on Monday, March 30, 1930.¹¹

During the Italian occupation, Wegera was specifically designated by Fascist authorities as a White Italian agricultural settlement known as *Ente Romagna d’Etiopia* (literally, ‘the village of Romans in Ethiopia’) in December 1937.¹² The Italians also established farming villages along the Qeha River and in Azezo, constructing numerous buildings for various purposes.¹³ Additionally, they designated Gondar as the capital of the *Governo Della Amara* (Amhara Governorate) and undertook extensive construction projects there.¹⁴

The Italians constructed a large number of buildings in Gondar to serve as offices, residences, commercial centres, hotels, restaurants, military storage facilities, and more, primarily concentrated around today’s Piazza, Auto Parco, Chechela, Bulleko [Bellico], Arada, and Azezo.¹⁵ In addition, private Italians built numerous smaller houses throughout the town.¹⁶ According to available records, a total of 352 Italian buildings still exist in Gondar.¹⁷

2.3. Research methods and materials

This study employs a qualitative methodology, with a focus on historical analysis, to examine the conditions and significance of royal properties in the former Begémdir and Semén *Teklay Gizat* between 1941 and 1974. The research is principally grounded in primary data, particularly archival materials. Extensive archival research was conducted, with a special emphasis on documents from the former North Gondar Zone administration office. These archives provide invaluable insights into land ownership records, property transactions,

¹⁰Margery Perham, *The Government of Ethiopia* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd. , 1947), pp. 282-283; see also, Gebre Weld Engeda Werk, *Ye Iteyopiya Ye Meret Ena Ye Geber Sim* (Addis Ababa: Tensa’e Zaguba’e Printing Press, 1948 E.C), pp. 57-60.

¹¹Bahru, pp. 136-137. This battle is also called the Battle of Quana or Debre Zebit (Kebede Tesemma, *Ye Tarik Mastawesha*, Second Edition, Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, Ltd., 2007 E.C., p. 93).

¹²Alberto Sbacchi, *Legacy of Bitterness, Ethiopia and Fascist Italy, 1935-1941* (Lawrence Ville: The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1997), p.115.

¹³David Rifkind, “Gondar Architecture and Urbanism for Italy’s Fascist Empire” *JSAH* 70:04_05 (December 2011):492- 511, Article__ Rifkind. Pdf (accessed from http://www.davidrifkind.org/fiu/research_files/JSAH7004_05_Article_Rifkind.pdf, date of access 16/11/2024).

¹⁴ Bahru, p. 162.

¹⁵Tomohiro Shitara, “Present Condition of Historical Italian Buildings in Gondar,” *NES*_no.10 (2006): 15-22Shitara. Pdf (accessed from [http://www.janestudies.org/drupal_jp/sites/default/files/NES_no10\(2006\)Shitara.pdf](http://www.janestudies.org/drupal_jp/sites/default/files/NES_no10(2006)Shitara.pdf), date of access, 16/11/2024), p. 17.

¹⁶Solomon Addis, Solomon Addis, *A History of the City of Gondar* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2006), p. 119.

¹⁷Shitara, pp. 15, 19.

administrative correspondence, and legal documents related to royal estates and other properties during the specified period.

In addition, a thorough review of existing literature was undertaken, focusing on Ethiopia's land tenure systems, the economic activities of the royal family, and the historical context of the Begémdir and Semén regions. This included consulting historical analyses, land tenure studies, and research on the socio-economic dynamics of the province during the mid-20th century. Relevant information was meticulously gathered from both primary and secondary sources. This process involved identifying documents and literature that shed light on the acquisition and management of royal properties in the region under investigation. The data collected from these various sources were systematically selected, cross-checked and interpreted.

Through interpretive historical analysis, this research offers a comprehensive examination of the schemes employed by the royal family and their agents in managing their assets in the province. It also explores the broader implications of these practices for understanding the interplay between property, power, and local development during Ethiopia's late imperial era.

3. Acquisition and Management of Royal Property

3.1. *Reste- gult* lands of the Royal Family

Members of the royal family were among the largest landholders of *rist* and *gult* land in the post-liberation period in Ethiopia.¹⁸ The best lands in the country were primarily granted to imperial family members and high-ranking officials closely tied to them by marriage. By acquiring vast estates, especially in the south, royal family members became part of the upper echelons of Ethiopia's landed aristocracy during this time.¹⁹ Thus, Empress Menen Asfaw, along with her children and grandchildren, owned *rist* and *gult* lands in the districts of Begémdir and Semén *Teklay Gizat*.²⁰ They were partly pre-1935 period hereditary holdings and partly granted by the post-liberation period restored government, i.e. by the Emperor.

¹⁸Donald Crummey, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2000), p. 241.

¹⁹Tekalign, p. 324; Manfred Metz, "Land Tenure in Modern Ethiopia," *Encyclopedia Aethiopica, Volume 3*, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007), p.499.

²⁰A Letter from the Begémdir and Semén *Kefle Hager* Administrative Office to Semén *Awrajja* Administrative Office, date *Yekatit* 28, 1967 E.C.[March 7, 1975], Folder No ጥ/49; File No, ል17/2-11/46; A Letter from Libo *Awrajja* Administrative Office to Begémdir and Semén *Kefle Hager* Administrative Office, dated to *Megabit* 8, 1967 E.C. [March 17,1975] Folder No ጥ/49, File No, ል17/2-7/46.

These lands served as primary income sources for the *Béte Rist* offices, which were responsible for managing the imperial family's estates.²¹

After the country's liberation from fascist Italian occupation, the restored Imperial government of Ethiopia introduced a series of land and economic reforms. For instance, the first land grant decree introduced on July 24, 1942, provided land grants to former patriots, exiles, and widows of those who had lost their husbands or fathers during the resistance.²² As a result, throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the government distributed plots of land to each patriot and exile, collectively referred to as *bale-wuletawoch* (literally, who helped the nation through patriotism).²³ For example, archival sources indicate that large portions of *maderya* (literally, subsistence) lands were granted in the Begémdir and Semén *Teklay Gizat* districts to patriots, exiles, state officials, and government favourites during the post-liberation period.²⁴

Archival sources also provide crucial evidence regarding the landed property of the imperial family. Notably, Princess Tenagnewerk held four *debir ager* (parishes) and sixteen *gotses* (localities) in Bellesa *Woreda* (Libo *Awrajja*) alone, as part of her *rist* and *gult* lands. The names of these localities were: Michiwa Mariyam, Azondola Mariyam, Zerayzeho Mariyam, Meha Giyorgis, and the *gotses* of Bira, Quncha, Qebena, Gil, Dehurho, Lafcho, Finchirwa, Bilatégé, Debtera, Gakiw, Aqumeshi, Wember, Abarwa, Sansiba, Arongé, and Zengirho.²⁵

Similarly, the *rist* and *gult* lands of Empress Menen Asfaw in Debre Tabor *Awrajja* (Begémdir), inherited from Empresses Taytu and Zewditu, were passed to her daughter, Princess Tenagnewerk, during the post-liberation period. These lands included Dat Giyorgis and Mehalgé Giyorgis (Esté district), Tenta Qirqos (Dera district), and Kizana Mika'él (Farta district). The *wakil* for these *rist* and *gult* lands of the Princess was Ato Gobé Tebeje.²⁶ For

²¹ A Letter from Begémdir and Semén *Teklay Gizat* Administrative Office to the Ministry of Interior, dated to *Tir* 5, 1940 E.C. [January 14, 1948], WMTRC-IES, Folder No. 2231, File No. 2089; see also Metz, p.499.

²² Tekalign, p. 239.

²³ See the various documents in one of the Gondar archives, Folder No. የጎከ19, “*Betelat Gizé Tesertew Lebalewletawechna Begizéwinet Yeteseፉ Bétoch Zirzir*,” File No.3457/58.

²⁴ This kind of information can be found in several folders within the Gondar archives, for instance, those concerning Gayint, Fogera, Dembiya, and others, in addition to the main folder used to write this paper, Folder No ፳/49.

²⁵ A Letter from Libo *Awraja* Administrative Office to Begémdir and Semén *Kefle Hager* Administrative Office, date *Megabit* 8, 1967 E.C. [March 17, 1975], Folder No ፳/49, File No, ል17/2-7/46.

²⁶ A Letter from Begémdir and Semén *Teklay Gizat* Administrative Office to the Ministry of Interior, date *Tir* 5, 1940 E.C. [January 14, 1948], WMTRC-IES, Folder No. 2231, File No. 2089.

example, from the Kizana Mika'él parish alone, she received Ethiopian \$97.75 annually.²⁷ In addition, archival evidence indicates that five *debir agers* from Tselemt district in Semén *awrajja*, namely Sebra Maryam, Ademihret Amanu'él, Abina Tekle Haymanot, Tarnasheha Giyorgis, and Fanya Giyorgis, were *rist* and *gult* lands of Princess Welete Isra'el Seyoum.²⁸

Finally, it should be noted that Emperor Haile Selassie granted *rist* and *gult* lands to members of the Imperial family, as well as other officials and high-ranking military officers, as a form of compensation for their services in collecting taxes, administering justice, and maintaining peace and order within their respective jurisdictions. In the absence of the *rist* and *gult* owning royal family member, a *wakil* (representative) was tasked with these duties.²⁹ The *gulte gezh* or their representative was expected to collect various taxes, such as *asrat* (tithe), *giber* (tax), both in kind and cash, along with other type of taxes like *amisho* (one-fifth), *chew giber* (bar-salt tax), and the like, and send the proceeds to the government after retaining their own share.³⁰

3.2. Urban and sub-urban royal property

3.2.1. Acquisition of Italian properties

In the aftermath of the liberation, patriot leaders and exiles hastily occupied Italian houses, hotels, shops, and other establishments in Gondar town.³¹ These properties were both officially and popularly called *Ye telat nibret* (literally, "enemy property").³² Meanwhile, the Ethiopian state assumed control of the larger buildings for use as government offices.³³ In addition, the Emperor allocated a number of these prominent properties to members of the royal family, incorporating them into their *Béte Rist*, as well as to other relatives and favoured individuals.

The Emperor's appointment of his own relatives and favourites as Governor Generals of the *Teklay Gizat* played a significant role in transferring Italian buildings and installations to the royal family and in establishing *wakil* centres of *Béte Rist* offices in Gondar town. For

²⁷A Letter from *Qegnasmach* Alebachew Wendyirad, Administrator of Debre Tabor *Awrajja*, to Gondar Kifle Hager Administrative Office, dated to *Megabit* 3, 1967 E.C. [March 12, 1975], Folder No ጥ/49, File No, ል17/2-7/46.

²⁸A Letter from the Begémdir and Semén *Kifle Hager* Administrative Office to Semén *Awrajja* Administrative Office, date *Yekatit* 28, 1967 E.C. [March 7, 1975], Folder No ጥ/49, File No, ል17/2-11/46.

²⁹Perham, pp.282-83, 287.

³⁰A Letter from *Libo Awrajja* Administrative Office to Begémdir and Semén *Kifle Hager* Administrative Office, date *Megabit* 8, 1967 E.C. [March 17, 1975], Folder No ጥ/49, File No, ል17/2-7/46.

³¹*Ibid*, p. 15; Solomon, p. 119;

³²Many archival sources at the Gondar archive refer to the Italian buildings by that name; for example, there is Folder No. ፆ፻፲፱, titled "*Betelat Gizé Tesertew Lebale Wletaweche na Begizéwinet Yetesetu Bétoch Zerzir.*"

³³Solomon, pp. 119-120.

instance, the person who had taken part in the liberation campaign and stayed in Gondar as the first Governor General was Crown Prince Asfaw Wossen Haile Selassie (1942–1943).³⁴ He and his successor, *Ras* Imiru Haile Selassie (1944–January 1946), re-established the Emperor’s rule in the *Teklay Gizat*, took control of the Italian-built houses in Gondar, granted *maderya* lands to patriots and state officials, and laid the groundwork for the establishment of *wakil* centres of *Béte Rist* offices there.³⁵

On the other hand, most of the smaller Italian buildings, particularly those constructed by private Italians, were taken over by patriots as their personal property.³⁶ In fact, there were patriot leaders who were also granted larger buildings in recognition of their leading roles during the resistance. Among them were *Dejjazmach* Kassa Meshesha (governor of Gondar *Zuriya awrajja*), *Ras* Wubneh Tesemma (*Ras* Amoraw), and *Dejjazmach* Adane Mekonnen (governor of *Wegera Awrajja*), who were given, respectively, today’s Fogera Hotel (originally built as a villa by an Italian), the building of Banco di Roma (near the post office), and the former Italian municipal building.³⁷

Finally, the process of claiming Italian-built houses in Gondar continued well into the 1950s and 1960s. *Awrajja* (sub-province), *Woreda* (district), and *Miktil-woreda* (sub-district) governors, some from as far as *Gayint Awrajja*, requested government permission to take ownership of various Italian-built houses for use as “ጽሕፈት” (literally, accommodation of stay) whenever they stayed in Gondar. In many cases, this was carried out by dispossessing the earlier occupants of these properties.³⁸

3.2.2. Administration and management of Bete Rist Offices in Gondar

Archival sources copied from WMTRC explain that the earliest known date for the opening of *Béte Rist* offices at the central level is 1934 E.C. (1942). Soon after, the system expanded into other parts of the country.³⁹ Archival sources from Gondar also indicate that *wakil*

³⁴Gerima Tafere, *Gondere Begashaw*. Addis Ababa: Tesfa Gebre Sellasé Printing Enterprise, 1949 E.C. pp. 244-246; Hanna Rubinkowska “Asfa Wäsän Haylä Sellasé”, *Encyclopedia Aethiopiaca*, Vol. 1, p. 367.

³⁵Ibid; Richard Pankhurst, “Emmeru Haylä Sellase”, *Encyclopedia Aethiopiaca*, Vol. 2, ed., Siegbert Uhlig (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005), p. 278.

³⁶Ibid, p. 119.

³⁷*Gon Goma-Nordic African Institute*, http://nai.uu.se/library/resources/thematic_resources/local_history_of_ethiopia/g/ORTGON05.pdf, (date of access, 16/11/2024).

³⁸A letter written from Honored Lieutenant Colonel Tamerat Yigezu, the Begémider and Semén Governor General, to Ministry of Pen, dated *Tikimt* 3, 1958 EC [October 13, 1965], Folder No. የጎከ19, “*Betelat Gizé Tesertew Lebala wletawechna Begizéwinet Yetesetu Bétoch Zirzir*,” File No. 3457/58; see also Solomon, p. 225.

³⁹A Letter from Haile Selassie I’s *Béte Rist* Office to the Ministry of Interior, dated to *Miyaziya* 2, 1934 E.C, [April 10, 1942], WMTRC-IES, Folder No. ቀ.ሐ.ሥ ቤተ ርስትና ቦጎ አድራሻ ት, File No. 2088. There are other folders and files in the same institute which confirm this fact.

centres of *Béte Rist* offices were opened in the town around 1943/44. However, the process of property acquisition by the royal family, along with the distribution of *maderya* and *rist/gult* lands by the government, had already been underway since late 1941.⁴⁰ For instance, in a letter dated *Tir* 21, 1967 E.C. [January 29, 1975], addressed to *Derg* officials in Gondar, *Grazmach* Hailu Abebaw, the *wakil* of the *Béte Rist* office of Princess Tenagnework, claimed that he and some of his subordinate workers had served in the *Béte Rist* for “over thirty years.” This suggests that the office made its first appearance sometime before 1937 E.C. (1944), i.e. soon after the opening of *Béte Rist* offices in the central areas of the country.⁴¹

The first and most profitable *Béte Rist* to open its *wakil* center in Gondar around that time was Princess Tenagnework’s *Béte Rist*. It managed her landholdings, residential properties, and business enterprises. The *wakil* of this office was *Grazmach* Hailu Abebaw, who was responsible for overseeing all activities related to the princess’s *Béte Rist* in the *Teklay Gizat*.⁴² With the arrival of *Bitweded* Andargachew Messay as Governor General of the *Teklay Gizat* (r. 1946–1952), accompanied by his wife, Princess Tenagnework, in January 1946, the *Béte Rist* appears to have received even greater attention. It also seems evident that Princess Tenagnework took advantage of the powerful positions held by her husband and his successors to gather wealth through her *Béte Rist* in the *Teklay Gizat*, as was the case in other parts of the country.⁴³

Bitweded Andargachew himself was one of the three founding members, *Commandataire* (manager) and a shareholder of *Société Anonyme Naviga Tana* (Naviga Tana Company), established in Gondar in late 1941.⁴⁴ In any case, *Bitweded* Andargachew and Princess Tenagnework resided in Gondar until 1952, when he was appointed the Emperor’s representative in Eritrea.⁴⁵

⁴⁰A Letter from the Ministry of Land Administration to the Begémdir and Semén *Kifle Hager* Land Administration Office, dated to *Miyaziya* 3, 1967 E.C.[April 11, 1975], Folder No ጥ/49, File No, ል17/2-9/46.

⁴¹A letter from *Grazmach* Haylu Abebaw to Begémdir and Semén *Kifle Hager* Administrative office dated to *Tir* 21, 1967 E.C [January 29, 1975], Folder No ጥ/49, File No, ል17/2-7/46.

⁴²Solomon, p. 119. Several letters used in this paper confirm the grant of the building to the Princess by the Emperor.

⁴³Solomon, p. 111; see also, A Letter from Begémdir and Semén *Kifle Hager* Administrative Office to the Ministry of Finance, date *Tahisas* 4, 1967 E.C. [December 13, 1974], Folder No ጥ/49, File No, ል17/2-7/46.

⁴⁴Solomon, p. 99. The other two founding members of the maritime transport were *Bitweded* Andargachew Messay and a local merchant *Ato* Kibret Astateké.

⁴⁵Hanna Rubinkowska, “Tänaññäwäraq Haylä Sellasé,” *Encyclopedia Aethiopica, Volume 4*, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), p. 858.

Below is an account of several prominent buildings and business establishments acquired by the imperial family and individuals closely connected to them.

Princess Tenagnework

The Emperor granted Princess Tenagnework a block of eight-room Italian buildings located in Piazza, stretching from the present-day one-storey Ethiopia Hotel to the south and west.⁴⁶ She incorporated these buildings into her *Béte Rist*, which was overseen by her long time *wakil* in Gondar, *Grazmach* Hailu Abebaw. He was responsible for managing all activities related to the princess's *Béte Rist* in the *Teklay Gizat*.⁴⁷ Some of the rooms were rented to foreign companies, such as A. Besse, as well as to Ethiopian and Yemeni Arab small retail traders.⁴⁸ Others were used for her own business ventures, including the sale of fruits, vegetables, milk, dairy products, and other goods.⁴⁹

The Emperor also granted the vast tracts of Italian garden land in the Abba Samu'él area, located between Chechela and Azezo on the southern outskirts of Gondar, along with all enemy property and installations there, to Princess Tenagnework as her personal *rist*.⁵⁰ With the help of her husband, she transformed Abba Samu'él into a branch centre for fruit and vegetable cultivation and animal rearing.⁵¹ The centre diverted the waters of a stream called Shinta, located about 2,500 meters north of Abba Samu'él, through a long ditch.⁵²

The Abba Samu'él horticultural and animal rearing centre became a crucial supplier of fruits, vegetables, milk, and dairy products for the people of Gondar and the surrounding region, including areas between Addi Arkay and Bahr Dar.⁵³ To run its operations, the centre used a Datsun pickup truck and a Sheriat Volkswagen car, with license plate numbers ፲፯ 357 and ፲፯ 303, respectively.⁵⁴

Additionally, Solomon states that based on a lease agreement between *Grazmach* Hailu Abebaw and an agro-industrial company called INCODE Abattoir, signed on *Megabit* 6,

⁴⁶Solomon, p. 119. Several letters used in this paper confirm the ownership of the building by the Princess.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Solomon, p. 111.

⁴⁹Informant: Aderaw Gebre Mika'él.

⁵⁰Solomon, p. 119.

⁵¹Informant: Aderaw

⁵²A Letter from *Grazmach* Hailu Abebaw to Gondar Provincial Administrative Office, date *Megabit* 22, 1967 E.C. [March 31, 1975], Folder No ፳/49, File No, ፳17/2-7/46.

⁵³Ibid, p.215.

⁵⁴A Letter from *Grazmach* Hailu Abebaw to *Ato* Feleke Habte Mika'el, Head of the Gondar Branch of the Ministry of National Resource Development Office, date *Hamle* 19, 1967 E.C. [July 26, 1975], Folder No ፳/49, File No, ፳17/2-7/46.

1953 E.C. [March 15, 1961], 328,000 square meters of Abba Samu'él land was leased to the company for an initial payment of Ethiopian \$10,000.⁵⁵ The centre became functional in 1965, and by 1969, INCODE employed approximately 300 workers in Gondar.⁵⁶

Prince Mekonnen Haile Selassie

Still in Piazza, to the east, opposite the Italian buildings owned by Princess Tenagnewerk, all the eight-room shops and the present-day Quara Hotel, standing behind them, were given to Prince Mekonnen Haile Selassie by the Emperor.⁵⁷ Sources indicate that Prince Mekonnen was an imaginative businessman.⁵⁸ These buildings, which once housed the Italian Grand Bar, were renamed Le'ul Mekonnen Hotel and Bar after the liberation and were managed by the *Bétä Rist* office of Prince Mekonnen through *wekils* (representatives).⁵⁹ Each of the shops was highly sought after by business entities like *Naviga Tana* and other retailers, and was rented out for Ethiopian \$40.00 birr per month.⁶⁰



Figure 1. Some of the Italian buildings in Piazza in Gondar that were taken over by the royal family. **Source:** David Rifkind, "Gondar Architecture and Urbanism for Italy's Fascist Empire" JSAH (December 2011): 492- 511, p. 508.

However, according to archival sources, Le'ul Mekonnen Hotel and Bar (now Quara Hotel) remained closed for an extended period due to the lack of renters. It was at the beginning of 1961 E.C. (late 1968) that the inheritors of Prince Mekonnen's *Bétä Rist* (since Prince Mekonnen had passed away on May 13, 1957, due to a car accident) renovated the hotel and

⁵⁵Solomon, pp. 217, 219. The company had different other agro industrial areas of interest including grain winnowing, flour mills, oil mills, leather and wool processing and sheep breeding, see Solomon, p. 237.

⁵⁶Gon Goma-Nordic African Institute, http://nai.uu.se/library/resources/thematic_resources/local_history_of_ethiopia/g/ORTGON05.pdf, (date of access, 16/11/2024).

⁵⁷Solomon, p. 119.

⁵⁸Hanna Rubinkowska, "Mäkwännē Haylä Sellasé", *Encyclopedia Aethiopica, Volume 3*, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007), p. 685.

⁵⁹A Letter from Ato Kidanē Asegahegn, Renter and *ṭebaki* of *Leul* Mekonnen Hotel to Begémdēr and Semén Kiflē Hager Provisional Military Government, date *Yekatit* 11, 1967 E.C. [February 18, 1975], Folder No ጥ/49, File No, ል17/2-7/46.

⁶⁰A Letter from Ato Seyfe Selassie Liben, Manager of *Leul* Mekonnen *Béte Rist* to all the Renters of *Leul* Mekonnen *Béte Rist* Shops in Gondar, date *Tiqimit* 18, 1961 E.C. [October 28, 1968].

rented it to two Ethiopian merchants for Ethiopian \$1,000 per month. The renters, who had initially signed a six-year contract starting from *Ṭir* 1, 1961 E.C. [January 9, 1969] with the *Béte Rist* office, whose general manager at that time was *Ato Seyfe Selasie Liben*, were *Ato Kidanie Asegahegn* and *Fitawrari Tesfaye Asnake*. Later, the contract was extended to thirteen years, running until *Ṭir* 30, 1974 E.C. [February 7, 1982], through a new agreement signed on *Tahisas* 1, 1964 E.C. [December 11, 1971].⁶¹

Ato Kidanie was also appointed as the *ṭebaki* of the *Béte Rist*, responsible for collecting and handing over the rents for the shops and hotel to the *wakil* (representative) of the *Béte Rist* in Gondar, *Ato Sahilie Ayo*, who was, by then, the *Vice Shum* of municipality of Gondar. The latter had been officially assigned this responsibility by a letter dated *Hidar* 21, 1957 E.C. [November 30, 1964], sent to him by the then manager of the main *Béte Rist* office in Addis Ababa, *Fitawrari Workeneh Wolde Amanu'él*.⁶²

One of the major weaknesses of almost all the possessors of Italian buildings in Gondar, including government bodies and royal families during the post-liberation period, was their reluctance to repair and beautify the properties, even during imperial visits to Gondar and despite persistent orders from the municipality office. Sources indicate that, in many cases, the owners of such "enemy properties" were forced to sign lease agreements with individuals to repair, beautify, and use the buildings for a set number of years. A good example of this is the two-story house in a place called Daregenda in Chewa Sefer, which had been given to *Ras Kassa Haylu* by the Emperor. In 1968, the house was renovated by a man named *Ato Tsehay Gessesse*, who was allowed to use it freely for the next six years. A similar situation applied to Prince Mekonnen's hotel.

One of the points of agreement between Prince Mekonnen's *Béte Rest* office and *Ato Kidanie* and *Fitawrari Tesfaye*, therefore, further illustrates the reluctance of the *Béte Rist* offices to renovate the houses. The agreement states:

⁶¹Ibid; *Ye Leul Mekonnen Haile Selasie Nibiret Astedader Tsihfet Bét Ye Bét Ena Ye Bota Kiray Wul*, date *Tahsas* 1, 1964 E.C [December 11, 1971]; A Letter from *Ato Kidané Asegahegn*, Renter and *tebaki* of *Leul Mekonnen Hotel* to *Begémdar* and *Semén Kifle Hager* Provisional Military Government, date *Yekatit* 11, 1967 E.C. [February 18, 1975], Folder No ጠ/49, File No, ል17/2-7/46.

⁶²A Letter from *Fitawrari Werkinch Wolde Amanu'él*, manager of the *Béte Rist* office of Prince Mekonnen in Addis Ababa to *Ato Sahilie Ayo*, Chief of Gondar Municipality, dated to *Hidar* 21, 1957 E.C. [November 30, 1964], Folder No ጠ/49, File No, ል17/2-7/46.

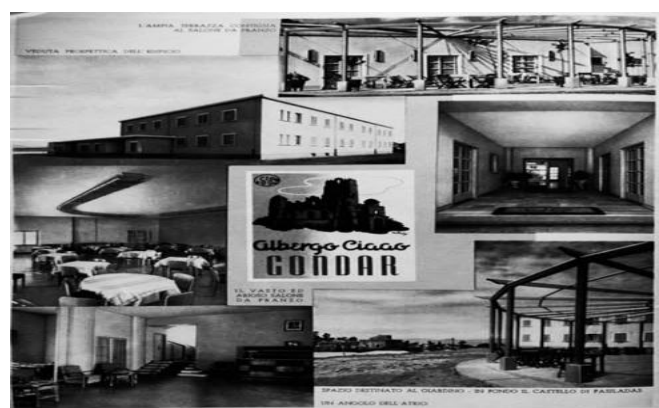
የወሉ ዘመን ሲያልቅ ተከራይ በራሳቸው ኪሳራ የሰሩት ቢኖር ግጭት ሳይጠይቁ አፍርሰው ማሳደድ ይችላሉ፡ ነገር ግን የአከራይ ወገን ከተስማማ ግጭቱን ከፍሎ ሊያስቀር ይችላል።⁶³

At the end of the term, the renter may take away all materials used for any additional construction or installations made by him without charge. However, if the house owner agrees, he may retain the materials by paying compensation to the renter.

Additionally, in 1974, *Ato* Kidanie wrote to the *Derg* officials, stating that for several years following the withdrawal of the Italians, the hotel had no renters. He explained that, in the name of Prince Mekonnen, he had cleared all the debris, carried out the necessary renovations, and transformed the property from almost nothing into a successful establishment.⁶⁴

Empress Menen Asfaw

The former one-storey, “whites-only,” thirty-seven-room Italian hotel called *Albergo C.I.A.A.O.* (*Compagna Immobiliare Alberghi Africa Orientale*) was initially owned by the government. It is a large, two-storey rectangular building situated on a hill to the southeast of the Fasil Gebi (the palace compound of Fasiladas).⁶⁵ Later, due to its reluctance and a shortage of funds to renovate the building, the government sold the establishment to Empress Menen in August 1952. Archival sources indicate that the government was not in a position to renovate the hotel and therefore sold it to Empress Menen, with the money transferred from her “Special Treasury” to the central government treasury. However, they do not provide sufficient information regarding the exact cost of the sale.



⁶³*Ye Leul Mekonnen Haile Selassie Nibiret Astedader Tsihfet Bét Ye Bét Ena Ye Bota Kiray Wul*,” date *Tahisas* 1, 1964 E.C. [December 11, 1971], Folder No ጥ/49, File No, ል17/2-7/46.

⁶⁴A Letter from *Ato* Kidanie Asegahegn to Major Bereta Gemoraw, Vice Administrator of Begémdir and Semén *Kifle Hager*, date *Miyazia* 27, 1968 E.C. [May 5, 1976], Folder No ጥ/49, File No, ል17/3/46.

⁶⁵A Letter from the Imperial Ethiopian Government to Begémdir and Semén *Teklay Gizat* Director’s Office dated to *Nehase* 15, 1944 E.C [August 21, 1952], Folder No ጥ/49, File No, ል17/2-7/46. For the status of the hotel during the Italian period see, Solomon, p. 35.

Figure 2. The exterior and interior parts of the *Albergo CIAAWO* with 37 rooms in Gondar during the Occupation. **Source:** David Rifkind, “Gondar Architecture and Urbanism for Italy’s Fascist Empire” *JSAH* (December 2011):492- 511, p. 501.

The Empress’s representative in Gondar, *Ato* Mekuriya Molla, was assigned to carry out all matters related to the transaction.⁶⁶ Regarding this, the Imperial Government’s letter No. 108/44, dated *Nehasé* 15, 1944 E.C. [August 21, 1952], addressed to the Director of the *Teklay Gizat*’s office, Colonel Tamirat Zegeye, states:

...ጎንደር የሚኖሩ የቻዎ ሆቴል የነበረው ወደፊት በቅርብ ጊዜ ለሚሰና ለሚቋቋም የሚገቡ ሰዎች ስላሉ ይህንኑ ሆቴል እንደነበረ አድርጎ ለሚቋቋም ከኛም ወገን ገንዘብ ጭጭ አስፈላጊ ስለሆነና ማግስትም ለዚሁ ጉዳይ ገንዘብ ለሚጠጡ ስላልፈቀደ ግርማት እቴጌ [ማን] ማለትም ፈቃዳቸው ሆኖ እንዲገዙና የሚሰፈልገውን ገንዘብ ከልዩ ግጭት ቤታቸው አዝዘው እንዲያሰሩት ተፈቅዷል...⁶⁷

... Experts will come to Gondar in the near future to restore the ex-*C.I.A.A.O.* hotel. The work needs government funding, but the government does not want to spend such an amount of money for its renovation. Hence, *Etégé* [Menen] has been granted permission to buy the hotel and restore it by ordering the required amount of money from her Special Treasury.

The hotel was later renamed Hotel *Etégé Menen* and began operating sometime after 1955. The primary intention was to provide accommodation for the growing number of tourists visiting Gondar and its surrounding tourist attractions, thereby generating greater profits for the *Béte Rist* of the Empress.⁶⁸

By the standards of the period under discussion, it was considered a large-capacity hotel, equipped with tennis courts and a swimming pool, although the latter was rarely functional.⁶⁹ However, the process of revitalizing the hotel took more than three years. This can be understood from an urgent letter sent by the *Enderasé* office of the Emperor in Eritrea to the Director of the Begémder and Semén *Teklay Gezat* office, dated *Tir* 24, 1947 E.C. [February 1, 1955], which states:

...ጎንደር በግርማት እቴጌ [ማን] ስም የተገዛው አክስ አልቢርጎ ቻዎ የተባለው ሆቴል ቤት ለቱሪስቶች እንዲዘጋጅ በታሰበው ማረት የሚደሱ ስራ ስለተጀመረ አስቀድሞ በቤቱ ላይ የነበሩትን የሚከተሉትን በር ማዘጋጀት የሚጠበቅ ቤቱንም እቃ ለባ እንዳይወስደው በማለት

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷A Letter from the Imperial Ethiopian Government to Begémder and Semén *Teklay Gizat* Director’s Office dated to *Nehase* 15, 1944 E.C [August 21, 1952], Folder No ጠ/49, File No, ል17/2-7/46.

⁶⁸A letter from the *enderasé* office of the Emperor in Eritrea to Col. Tamirat Zegeye, Director of Begémder and Semén *Teklay Gizat* Administrative Office, dated to *Tir* 24, 1947 E. C [February 1955], Folder No ጠ/49, File No, ል17/2-7/46. The same sources show that the money from the rent was directly transferred to the “Special Treasury” of Empress Menen through the Gondar Branch of Commercial Bank of Ethiopia.

⁶⁹*Gon Goma - Nordic African Institute*, http://nai.uu.se/library/resources/thematic_resources/local_history_of_ethiopia/g/ORTGON05.pdf, (date of access, 16/11/2024).

ወልቀዉ በማግስት ንብረት እጅ ስለሚኙ እነዚህን እቃዎችና ሌሎች እቃና መሳሪያዎች ቢኖሩ በጠቅላላዉ ማኛዉም ጀኦሜሪ አፖላኒ በፍጥነት ለመረከብ እንዲችሉ አስፈላጊዉ ትእዛዝ እንዲሰጥልን፡፡⁷⁰

...In Gondar, the restoration of the hotel purchased by *Etégé* [Menen], formerly known as *Albergo C.I.A.A.O.*, intended for use by tourists, is proceeding according to plan. Therefore, we request permission for our workers to collect all the materials belonging to the hotel, including doors and windows, which had been stored by the government in secure locations to protect them from theft.

It appears that following the death of Empress Menen Asfaw in 1962, ownership of the *Etégé* Menen Hotel was transferred to the *Béte Rest* office of Crown Prince Asfawesen Haile Selassie. The renter of the hotel from around the mid-1950s until 1973 was an Italian merchant, *Commandatori* Buschi, who was also one of the three founding members of the *Naviga Tana Company*.⁷¹

At the time of its nationalization by the *Derg* in 1974, the hotel was rented by *Ato* Mammo Habte Yohannes.⁷² A letter from the Gondar Branch Office of the National Resources Development Corporation dated *Megabit* 29, 1967 E.C. [April 7, 1975], states: "የቀድሞው ንጉሥ ልጅ የአስፋውስን ኃይለ ሥላሴ ንብረት ሆኖ የእቴጌ ሆቴል ተብሎ ይጠራ የነበረው..." ("The property of the son of the ex-emperor, Asfawesen Haile Selassie, which was known as *Etégé* Hotel..."). This confirms that the legal inheritor of the hotel from Empress Menen was Crown Prince Asfawesen.⁷³

Mesafints and officials

Among the *Mesafints*, *Leul Ras* Kassa Hailu, a relative of the Emperor, received a two-storey building in a place called Daregenda, in Chewa Sefer, close to the Imperial Hotel. The house had the capacity to accommodate six family heads, who collectively paid a total monthly rent of Ethiopian \$150.00 birr. The owner of the house, who had inherited it from *Ras* Kassa following his death in 1956, was *Ras* Kassa's grandson, *Fitawrari* Messay Wendwesen.

⁷⁰A letter from the *enderasé* office of the Emperor in Eritrea to Colonel Tamirat Zegeye, Director of Begémdar and Semén *Teklay Gizat* Administrative Office, dated to *Tir* 24, 1947 E. C [February 1, 1955], Folder No ጠ/49, File No, ል17/2-7/46.

⁷¹Solomon, p. 99.

⁷²A letter from Feleke Habte Mika'él, Head of the Gondar Branch office of the National Resources Development Corporation, to the *Kifle Hager* Administrative Office, date *Tir* 19, 1967 E.C.[January 27, 1975], Folder No ጠ/49, File No, ል17/2-7/46.

⁷³A letter from Feleke Habte Mika'él, Head of the Gondar Branch office of the National Resources Development Corporation, to the *Kifle Hager* Administrative Office, date *Megabit* 29, 1967 E.C [April 7, 1975], Folder No ጠ/49, File No, ል17/2-7/46.

As mentioned above, in 1961 E.C. (1968), the house was renovated by a man from Gondar, *Ato Tsehay Gessese*, under a contractual agreement that allowed him to use the house rent-free for six years. This arrangement was made because there was a planned visit to Gondar by the Emperor, and *Fitawrari Messay* did not have the funds necessary to quickly renovate the house.⁷⁴ By the time of the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution, the *wakil* and legal inheritor of the house were *Memeré Azezew Yenéneh*⁷⁵ and *Weyzero Tisemiyalash Kassa*, the daughter of *Ras Asrate Kassa*.⁷⁶

Weyzero Tisemiyalash (*Tisemé*) also received another large, one-storey building at *Chewa Sefer* from the Emperor. Its *wakil* was *Ato Menbere Beyene*. The only son of *Ras Kassa* who survived the massacre by the Italians, *Leul Ras Asrate Kassa*, also received two other large houses in the *Piazza* area, adjoining those given to *Princess Tenagnework*. These houses were rented to *A. Besse Company* to be used as stores.

In addition, *Princess Yeshashwerk Yilma* owned a house in *Piazza* with an underground level, a ground floor, and an upper storey. It was rented to *A. Besse Company*, whose manager was *Ato Teke'é*, under a contractual agreement of Ethiopian \$250.00 per month. Furthermore, *Leul Ras Siyoum Mengesha* (the husband of *Princess Aida Desta Damtew*) was granted one of the Italian buildings located to the west of the *Fogera Hotel*.⁷⁷

Ras Asrate Kassa (close relative of the Emperor and *Enderasie* /Governor General, 1942-1944, 1952-1956)⁷⁸ was also one of the owners of the bus transport enterprise called *Gosh Gondar*, which provided public transportation services between the capital and Gondar. As mentioned earlier, he was also one of the shareholders of *Naviga Tana Company* before it was taken over by the Imperial government.⁷⁹

Further, the royal family and officials associated with them through marriage also owned urban land and houses in other towns within the *Teklay Gizat*, particularly in *Metema*,

⁷⁴A Letter Containing the Statements of *Memiré Azezew Yenéneh* spoken to the *Kifle Hager Derg* Sub-Committee, date *Tikimt* 1, 1967 E.C.[October 11, 1974], Folder No ጥ/49, File No, ል17/2-11/46.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

⁷⁶A Letter from Gondar Municipality office to Colonel *Fikrie Abebe*, *Begémdir* and *Simén Kifle Hager* Police Commander, date *Ginbot* 19, 1967 E.C.[May 27, 1975], Folder No ጥ/49, File No, ል17/2-11/46.

⁷⁷A Letter from *Begémdir* and *Simén Kifle Hager Derg* Committee to Colonel *Getachew Negash*, the *Kifle Hager Yelewit Hawarya* (Apostle of Change) Team Leader, date *Yekatit* 18, 1967 E.C.[February 25, 1975], Folder No ጥ/49, File No, ል17/2-11/46.

⁷⁸*Shiferaw Bekele*, "Asratä Kassa," *Encyclopedia Aethiopica, Volume 1*, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003), p. 384; *Gon Goma - Nordic African Institute*, http://nai.uu.se/library/resources/thematic_resources/local_history_of_ethiopia/g/ORTGON05.pdf

⁷⁹*Solomon*, p. 108.

Humera and Abderafi, where they also established large mechanized farming estates.⁸⁰ For instance, Lt. Colonel Tamirat Yigezu, who served as Governor of the *Teklay Gizat* from 1965 to 1973, owned 2,890 square meters of urban land in Humera town, registered in the names of his two daughters – Monikh (2,400 square meters) and Negesti (400 square meters).⁸¹ In addition, in Yohannes town (Metema), *Ras Mengesha Siyoum* and Princess Aida Desta each owned 1,920 square meters of urban land.⁸²

Furthermore, according to archival evidence, *Dajjazmach Amha Abera (Enderasie, February 1961-62)*⁸³ received approximately ten *gasha* of land from the government at Mariyam Wuha in the Metema town area. The land was so extensive that it was nationalized during the 1974 Revolution, and a portion of it alone was allotted to over 315 individual town dwellers.⁸⁴

Finally, *Dejjazmach Keflie Dadi (Enderasie, 1958-1960)*⁸⁵ owned 1,505 square meters of urban land in Humera.⁸⁶ Major General Nega Tegegn (*Enderasie, 1973-1974*) also owned a villa at Arib Gebeya in Dera *woreda*,⁸⁷ as well as a joint farming estate, together with nine others, consisting of 50 *gasha* (2000 hectare) of land at Mahibere Selassie Monastery in Chilga *awrajjja*.⁸⁸

4. Conclusion

In the post-liberation period (1941–1974), Begémdir and Simén *Teklay Gizat* came under increased political and economic control by the imperial government, spearheaded by Emperor Haile Selassie and the royal family. While the Emperor himself did not directly acquire *rist/gult* lands or urban properties in the region, he facilitated the concentration of

⁸⁰Metz, p.499.

⁸¹*Ibid.* Lt. Colonel Tamirat Yigezu was the husband of Martha Imiru, who was the daughter of a close relative of the Emperor, *Ras Imiru Haile Selassie*, from whom he had ten children (Thomas P. Ofcansky, “Tä’a mmerat Yegäzu”, *Encyclopedia Aethiopica, Volume 4*, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010, p. 798)).

⁸²A Letter from the Committee of Investigation of the Property of Ex Officials to Begémdir and Simén *Kifle Hager* Administrative Office, date *Ginbot* 30, 1967 E.C.[June 7, 1975], Folder No ጥ/49, File No, ል17/2-11/46.

⁸³*Gon Goma - Nordic African Institute*, http://nai.uu.se/library/resources/thematic_resources/local_history_of_ethiopia/g/ORTGON05.pdf

⁸⁴A Letter from the Committee of Investigation of the Property of Ex Officials to Begémdir and Simén *Kifle Hager* Administrative Office, date *Ginbot* 30, 1967 E.C.[June 7, 1975], Folder No ጥ/49, File No, ል17/2-11/46.

⁸⁵Andargie Mesfin, *Arbegna Enna Banda Be Ennat Guada*, Second Edition (Addis Ababa: 2009 E.C.), p. 161.

⁸⁶A Letter from the Committee of Investigation of the Property of Ex Officials to Begémdir and Simén *Kifle Hager* Administrative Office, date *Ginbot* 30, 1967 E.C., Folder No ጥ/49, File No, ል17/2-11/46.

⁸⁷A Letter from Debre Tabor *Awrajjja* Administration Office to the *Kifle Hager* Administrative Office, date *Nehasie* 16, 1967 E.C. [August 25, 1975], Folder No ጥ/49, File No, ል17/2-7/46. Major General Nega Tegegn was the husband of the granddaughter of the Emperor, Princess Hirut Desta Damtew (Fentahun Tiruneh, “Nägga Tägäññ”, *Encyclopedia Aethiopica, Volume 3* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007), p. 1112).

⁸⁸A Letter from the Begémdir and Simén *Kifle Hager* Military Sub Committee to Colonel Getachew Negash, the *Kifle Hager* Head of *Yelewut Hawarya* (Apostles of Change), date *Yekatit* 18, 1967 E.C.[February 25, 1975], Folder No ጥ/49, File No, ል17/2-11/46.

land and wealth in the hands of his family members, loyal officials, and imperial favourites. Through generous grants of *rist*, *gult* and *maderya* (subsistence) lands, as well as the redistribution of Italian-owned urban properties, the powerful elite were entrenched at the expense of the local peasantry and urban dwellers.

This process of land concentration and economic domination was reinforced by political centralization. The appointment of *Enderasie* (Governor Generals) with direct ties to the imperial family ensured the extension of the central government's administrative and judicial control deep into the region. Furthermore, symbolic hegemony was established through the naming of public spaces and institutions after the Emperor and his relatives, embedding imperial influence into the cultural landscape of Gondar.

These developments had far-reaching consequences. They exacerbated land scarcity, fragmented peasant holdings, and undermined local autonomy, leading to growing socio-economic disparities. The researcher argues that if Italian-owned buildings and business establishments had been managed by the Gondar municipality, they could have provided a significant source of municipal revenue, aiding the town's post-liberation reconstruction and development. However, the monopolization of resources by the imperial elite deepened local public dissatisfaction. This discontent ultimately made Gondar one of the focal points of political activism during the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution, culminating in the nationalization of royal and elite properties and the dismantling of the imperial order in the province.

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Informant

No	Name and title of Informant	Age by the time of the interview	Interview		Remarks
			Date	Place	
1	Adera Gebre Mikael	78	26/12/2017	North Gondar Zone Administrative office	He was born in Addis Zemen area. From 1950 to 1988 E.C., he worked in the Begemidir and Semien Teklay Gizat records office. He has extensive knowledge and experience with the archival sources there.