

The Lost Town of Yebaba: Royal Residence and Regional Capital (ca. 1612- ca.1800)

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Abstract

Yibaba served as the capital of a region to the south of Lake Tana called Mecha province, and, as a royal residence of Gondarine emperors since the early 17th century, provided the same function as the town of Aringo in Begemdir. Yibaba also played a significant role in the Gondarine politics and the power struggles of the early decades of the Zemene Mesafint (the era of warlords). Although the town was an important political center for centuries, there is no as such focused and significant historical study that has been made on Yibaba. Therefore, this paper provides a short historical account of the lost town of Yibaba, including the office of Yibaba Azazh, the province of Mecha and the political developments and relations of the town with the kings in Gondar. To this end, a range of sources is used including oral, published and unpublished sources.

Keywords: Ethiopia, Yibaba, urban, history, Gondarine period

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1. Introduction

Urban history is a relatively recent theme of historical study in Ethiopia. Thus, scholarly studies made so far on the history of Ethiopian urban centers are general works which mainly focus on the history of bigger urban centers that have still continue to exist. However, there is no significant urban historical study on ancient and medieval Ethiopian towns, especially those with secondary importance and at present are desolate villages. A case in point is the town of Yebaba (West Gojjam), which is the topic of this study. Students of the present generation have little or no knowledge about the lost town of Yibaba, which had been an important political and economic center more particularly during the Gondarine period and the *Zemene Mesafint* (17th-19th centuries). This study, therefore, sheds new light on the origin, development, decline and ultimate degeneration of Yibaba. The study will also fill some gaps in the existing literature. It is presumed to provide an important clue for archeologists, anthropologists and historians who want to do further research on the town.

Methodologically, this paper involves a range of data collected from published and unpublished secondary and primary materials as well as oral evidences. Traveler accounts, royal chronicles and the *Tarike Negast* deserve particular mention. The information drawn from authentic and credible sources were arranged, interpreted and analyzed so as to reconstruct the history of the lost town of Yibaba.

2. The Rise and Development of Yibaba

Physically, Yibaba Kidane Mihret is located in a rural district called Kotti Maryam which is about five kilometers east of Debre Mewi in the district of Yilmana Densa (West Gojjam Administrative Zone). It lies between $11^{\circ} 21' 54.4''\text{N}$ and $037^{\circ} 27' 03.4''\text{E}$ with an altitude of 2355 meters above sea level.¹ The ruins of a Gondarine period small palace are still visible on the site of Yibaba. The town is also called Yibaba Kidane Mihret because of the presence of the church of Kidane Mihret in it.²



Figure 1: Yebaba (Source: Berry, “Yebaba” In: *Encyclopedia Aethiopica*, Vol. 4: 38)

The area around Yibaba was the mainstay of the Christian state of Ethiopia particularly since the reign of Susenyos.³ The economic importance of the region to the state could be gauged from the construction of the small palace at Yibaba and the establishment of the first Catholic missionary

¹Chalachew Simeneh, “Ruined Palaces of Emperor Susenyos (1607-1632) and Fasiledes (r.1632-1667)” (BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, Department of Archaeology and Heritage Management, 2013), p. 2.

²Ibid.

³Hubtamu Mengstie, *Lord, Zēga and Peasant: Study of Property and Agrarian Relations in Rural Eastern Gojjam* (Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies, 2004), pp. 29-30.

center in Gojjam at Kolllella, about 50 kilometers east of Yibaba around 1612,⁴ where the Jesuits opened a branch missionary center at Sarka, (now Gimb Giyorgis) to the south of Yibaba.⁵ Regarding Sarka the 19th century British envoy to the court of *Ras* Ali II (r. 1831-53), Walter Plowden mentions:

...we rested for an hour or two, and then proceeded to the camp, placed on a commanding eminence two miles farther, where are the remains of an extensive castle built by the Portuguese for Emperor Susenyos, within the ruined walls of which we found the hut of the *Fitawrari* surrounded by those of his suit.⁶

The 18th century Scottish traveler, James Bruce, also noted that the region around Yibaba, which had royal possessions and houses, was one of the very fertile agricultural lands in Ethiopia. A section of his description reads:

The county round Ibaba [Yibaba] is the most pleasant and fertile not of Maitsha [Mecha] only, but of all Abyssinia [Ethiopia], especially that part of Colala [Kolllella] between Ibaba [Yibaba] and Gojam [Enebsie in Gojjam], where the principal Ozoros [*Weyzeros*] have houses and possessions, called Goult [*gult*] or fiefs, which they have received from their respective ancestors when kings...⁷

In addition to Bruce's description, tradition and other existing sources confirm that most of Kolllella and eastern part of Genj (surrounding Yibaba) were the *gult* lands (fiefs) of *Weyzero* Seble Wengel Fasil. She had houses made of stone and mortar at Gimb Kidane Mihret in the locality of Fasiladas in Kolllella along the Motta-Bahir Dar road, and at Safitemegn in Ganj. According to the tradition and local sources, the seven *gasha* lands of the northeast of Adet town was the *gult* of *Weyzero* Addi⁸ Gebre Amlak (*Wagshum*), who is believed to have been one of the wives of Emperor Fasiladas and mother of *Weyzero* Seble Wengel.⁹ One of the localities

⁴Balthazar Tellez, *The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia, Book II*, (The Society of Jesus: First Translated in to English, London, 1710), p. 189.

⁵Girma Beshah and Merid Wolde Aregay, *The Question of Union of the Churches in the Luso-Ethiopian Relation, 1500-1632* (Lisbon: Junta de Investigacoes do Ultramar and Centro de Estudos Historico Ultramarinos, 1964), p.80.

⁶Walter Plowden *Travels in Abyssinia and the Galla Country* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1868), pp. 251-252.

⁷James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Sources of the Nile in the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772 and 1773, Six Vols.* (Dublin: Printed by William Porter for P.Wogan, L. White, et al, 1790), Vol., 4, p. 473.

⁸Informants: (*Kese Gebez*) Demilew Ayele; (*Afemer*) Ashagre Chekol. Note that one *gasha* land is about forty hectares of land.

⁹Aman Belay (*Meri Ras*), *Yetentwa Itiyopia Tinsa'e Tarik: Ke Metsehafe Suba'e Yetewesede*, Second edition (Addis Ababa: Nebadan Publication Plc., 2009 E.C.), p. 334.

in her fief is still today called *Zufan*. The possession of *Weyzero* Addi, which was also collectively called *Wagda Serse Dingil*, was commonly identified as *Ye Weyzero Ager or Ye Zufan Ager*.¹⁰ All her *gult* lands were free from state taxes, dues, services, tributes and other exactions.¹¹ The chronicler of Emperor Susenyos, Tekle-Sellasé, remarked that the governor of Gojjam, *Ras Se'ele Kerstos*, firmly requested to take hold of these lands, although his request was rejected by the emperor.¹²

Still, however, there is conflicting of information regarding the *gult* of *Weyzero* Addi. Some informants argue that her fiefs were taken over by the powerful *Rasbitwedded* Welde Giyorgis, who was the founding father of Adet, apparently in the 1650s during the reign of Fasiladas. This, however, needs further study as the literature is scant.¹³

Similarly, regarding her family genealogy, sources indicate that *Weyzero* Seble Wengel was married first to *Dejazmach* Wellie of Damot, and bigoted Anestie, who was killed in the September 1707 rebellion against Emperor Tekle Haimanot I (r. 1706-1707).¹⁴ Later, when Wellie became a rebel, she was married to *Dejazmach* Tamie of Keraniyo and changed her name to Inqopa Tsion.¹⁵

Regarding naming and description of the localities in Yibaba and the nearby Gimb Giyorgis, we have different sources. Chalachew, for example, describes how the seventeenth century emperors and Jesuit missionaries established their residences at Yibaba. He puts it as follows:

In the vicinity of the palace, there are village names that have connection with Emperor Fasiledes such as “*Jangeber*” (a place of people who pay tribute for the emperor), “*Shanko*” (a place for the emperors horse), “*Shewa*”(a place where nobilities who came from Shewa were kept), “*Atse Mewagna*” (Part of a river where the emperor was

¹⁰Informants: (*Grazmach*) Ayalew Desta; (*Ato*) Zeleke Alelign.; Fantahun Birhane, “Gojjam: 1800-1855” (BA Thesis, Haile Selassie I University, Department of History, 1973), p. 25.

¹¹Fantahun, p. 25.

¹²Tekle Selasie (*Azazh Tinno*), *The Chronicle of Susenyos (Amharic)*, Trans. & ed., Alemu Hailé (Addis Ababa: Sirak Publishing Enterprise, 2005 E.C.), p. 213.

¹³The same informants referred under number eight above state that her fiefs were taken over by the powerful *Rasbitwedded* Welde Giyorgis, who was the founding father of Adet, apparently in the 1650s during the reign of Fasiladas.

¹⁴Bruce, Vol. 2, p. 531; Aman, p. 334.

¹⁵Aman, p. 334.

assumed to swim there), “*Gibir Meda*” (a place of communities where ‘*Gibir*’(tax) was provided), [*kudad*, royal estate], etc.¹⁶



Figure 2. Palace of Emperor Susinyos in ruins at Yebaba (Source: Chalachew, p.5)

Place names in and around Yibaba Kidane Mihret also show the coming and settlement of people and soldiers. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a number of Oromo troops were made to settle at Yibaba, for example, Gutta, Neftegna (musketeers), Feres Wegga (those who fought the Nubians or Funj), Mecha, Yilmana, Densa, Kotti, Turi Cheba [Teruchabba], Washo Ber (the gate of Washo), etc.¹⁷ The first six place names signify the settlement of groups of people most likely of Oromo origin since the early seventeenth century. The last three place names refer to the one time principal regional or local rulers who bore the traditional title of *Dejazmach* and played their own part in the politics of Gondar.¹⁸

¹⁶Chalachew, p. 4.

¹⁷Informant: (*Liqe Heruyan*) Belay Mekonnen. *Agafari Turi* was the leader of a Tulama *Chifra* (squadron) during Iyasu II, see, Ignazio Guidi, *Annales Regum Iyasu II et Iyo`as*. Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium Scriptores Aethiopici, Versio, Series Altera, vol. 6, (Paris, 1912), p. 61. I have also personally known the places and some stories about them. There are other localities by the name Feres Wegga Giyorgis, to my knowledge, one around Bure in Gojjam and another near Gondar.

¹⁸Among others, Bruce, Vol. 3, pp. 40-41, 51.; Vol. 4, pp. 72, 451, 461, 471-72.; Bairu Tafla, *Asma Giyorgis and His Work: History of the Galla and the Kingdom of Shawa* (Stuttgart: Steiner-verlag Wiesbaden Gambh, 1987), p. 878.

After the birth of Yibaba as an administrative center, there were a combination of intertwined factors in the growth and consolidation of Yibaba as one of the major regional towns of the Gondarine kingdom. Among other things, these include location in a fertile region, availability of relatively abundant water, royal residence (palace), administrative functions, military regiments, religious institutions, economic importance and having a big market. In this regard, we have a number of sources that could substantiate the status and role of Yibaba as a royal residence during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Dessie Keleb, who wrote about the annotations to the translation of the *Tarike Negest* (History of Kings), mentions the town of Yibaba as being one of the most significant places with its own title which reads, “*Zemene Aringo /Gondar we Yibaba*, (literally, the period of Aringo/Gondar and Yibaba).¹⁹ In the *Encyclopedia Aethiopica*, another scholar, Berry mentions that Yibaba, located at 11°21' 50 N, 37°27' 00 E provided various functions for Gondarine emperors between the mid-seventeenth and the mid-eighteenth centuries. The functions include military encampment, place of assembly, dry season residence and starting point of military campaigns. The author also mentions that Yibaba was one of the important towns (*medina* or *ketema*) of the Gondarine kingdom particularly during the reigns of Emperors Yohannes I (r. 1667-82) and Iyasu I (r. 1682-1706).²⁰ Such sources mention that Yebaba was first mentioned in the royal chronicle of Emperor Yohannes I, in relation to his journey of 1669-70 as an important Lent season residence and starting point of military expedition against the Agew.²¹

True, before the rise of Yibaba as a regional center, some governors of Gojjam used Sarka to the southwest of Yibaba as their seat of power. Situated in the Agew inhabited plain land, Sarka was the seat of power of both *Ras* Atnatiwos and *Ras* Se'le Kiristos during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, respectively.²² With the coming to power of Emperor Susenyos, Sarka got additional importance as it became a residence of Jesuit missionaries.²³ Around 1612, shortly after the establishment of Gorgora, Susenyos founded the town of Yibaba as his royal

¹⁹Dessie Keleb, *Tarike Negest* (Addis Ababa: The Ethiopian Orthodox Church Mahebere Kedusan, 2007 E.C.), pp. 264-337.

²⁰LaVerle B. Berry, “Yebaba”, *Encyclopedia Aethiopica*, Vol. 4, pp. 38-39.

²¹Among others, see, G. W. Huntingford, *The Historical Geography of Ethiopia: From the First Century AD to 1704* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 187, 189.

²²Huntingford, p. 152.

²³Girma and Merid, p. 80.

residence.²⁴ Then after the town served as an important stopping place of Gondarine emperors, on the one hand, and the capital of the whole region south and south west of Lake Tana comprising the regions of Damot, Agew Midir and Gojjam, on the other.²⁵ In connection to this, Crummey states that “throughout the seventeenth century...the [Gondarine] court spent one third of the year at Aringo in Begemdir and another third at Yibaba in Gojjam”.²⁶ Particularly, Yohannes I (r.1667-1682) and Iyasu I (r.1682-1706) stayed longer in it and started several of their itineraries from the town of Yibaba.²⁷

In terms of religion, Yibaba was also an important place where theological disputations took place during the reigns of Emperors Susenyos (1620-21), Yohannes I (1671), Iyasu I (May 1699) and Tekle Haimanot I (r. 1706 -1708).²⁸ During Susenyos’s reign the clerical debates took place between the followers of the Orthodox and Catholic faiths, but in the latter periods it was between the followers of *Kibat* (Uncion) and *Tewahido* (Union) doctrines. On 21 October, 1621²⁹, more than 600 monks, nuns³⁰ and lay Christians from Gonj, Washera, Kolllella and Iwofat were massacred fighting against the hardened veterans of *Ras Se’ele Kiristos* at Yibaba.³¹ Berry states that in 1674 *Kibat* monks attempted to assassinate Yohannes I in connection with religious observance.³² Verena Böll also mentions that Iyasu I ordered all the inhabitants of Yibaba to supply food for the participants of the synod held in May 1699.³³

²⁴Tellez, p. 189. ; Bruce, Vol. 4, pp. 472-473.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Donald Crummey, “Towns in Ethiopia: the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries” in History Miscellanea 1(Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, November 1980), p. 13. In footnote one: Donald Crummey, “Some Precursors of Addis Ababa: Towns in Christian Ethiopia in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *Proceedings of the Symposium on the Centenary of Addis Ababa, November 24-25, 1986*, eds. Ahmed Zekaria, Bahru Zewde and Taddese Beyene, pp. 9-31, Addis Ababa, 1987, the author states that the article cited here was first presented to the Annual Conference of the African Studies Association in Philadelphia, November 1980.

²⁷Among others see, Huntingford, pp. 187, 201.; Yuri M. Kobishchanov, “The Gofol Complex in the Gondarine Empire,” *Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Bahru Zawde, R. Pankhurst, Taddese Beyene, eds. Vol. I (Addis Ababa, Addis Ababa University, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1994), pp. 124 – 128.

²⁸Dessie, p. 265.; Berry, p. 38.; Girma and Merid, pp. 86-87.

²⁹Girma and Merid, p. 87.

³⁰Lobo, J. 1789. *A Voyage to Abyssinia* (Elliot and Kay, London and C. Elliot, Edinburgh, 1789), p. 121.

³¹Informant: (*Liqe Heruyan*) Belay Mekonnen. See also, Girma and Merid, pp. 86-87.

³²Berry, p. 38.

³³Verena Böll, “Aṣe Iyasu I (1682-1706) and the Synod of Yəbaba” In: *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, ed. by Svein Ege, Harald Aspen, Birhanu Tefera and Shiferaw Bekele, Trondheim, (2009: 65-73), p. 70. [Online].

In a parallel development, it was at Yibaba that some friendly Basso Gudru Oromos made peace with Iyasu in September 1702. With the mediation of *Dejazmach* Anorewos, governor of Gojjam, the Oromo of Gudru ceremonially joined Iyasu at his camp, Yibaba.³⁴ Later, in 1704 when he was at Yibaba, Iyasu was also greeted by many Teletas, Haros and Libans who pleaded his treatment with mercy.³⁵ On the other hand, Iyasu planned the 1704 war of revenge against the Gudru Oromo south of the Abay River at Yibaba. He carefully consulted with *Dejazmach* Tullu of Damot, the governor of Gojjam, Tigi and several friendly Oromo groups, including Basso and Liban and Kalegenda and Yahabeta of Gojjam.³⁶

Gradually, because of the increasing settlement of various Oromo clans during the seventeenth century, a new geographical and administrative unit called “Mecha Proper” emerged in the northern parts of the regions of Damot and Agew Meder; and to the south and southwest of Lake Tana. Mecha proper took shape apparently during the early eighteenth century. Bruce mentions that Mecha proper extended from the Abay River in the west to Abeya River in the east and from Lake Tana in the north to Jemma River in the south and to Agew Midir in the southwest.³⁷ The nineteenth century British envoy to the court of *Ras* Ali II (r.1831-1853), Walter Plowden, also agrees with Bruce’s description about the geographical extents of “Mecha province”.³⁸ Oral tradition also recognizes the region “*ke Abeya Eseke Belaya*” (from Abeya to Belaya), extending from Abeya River north of Motta town in Enensie to Belaya west of Achefer, as one *Ager or awraja* (territory or district). This covers more or less the present-day districts of Gonj- Kollella, Yilmana Densa, Mecha, Bahir Dar Zuriya and Achefer.³⁹

Mecha proper was ruled by *nighty nine shumes [clan heads]* who were accountable to the *Ras bitwedded* of the emperor at Gondar, “to whom it pays [paid] two thousand ounces of gold” each year. Bruce estimated that by 1768 about 4000 out of the total 15, 000 Oromo men of Mecha were horsemen.⁴⁰ Likewise, Plowden remarks that the people of Mecha had warrior character

³⁴Ignazio Guidi, *Annales Iyohannis I, Iyasu I Et Bakaffa*. Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium Scriptores Aethiopici, Tomus 7, Reimpression Anastatique, (Louvain-Heverle, 1961), p. 219.

³⁵Ibid, p. 235.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Bruce, Vol. 4, pp. 471-472.

³⁸Plowden, pp. 251-252.

³⁹I personally know the same popular parlance.

⁴⁰Bruce, Vol. 4, p. 472.

and the office of *Yibaba Azazh* was a bone of contention among its nineteenth century local rulers. He further remarks that the Amharic language of the people of Mecha had much resemblance with the language of the Oromo south of the Abbay River. A section of Mecha Oromo clans who settled in the province of Mecha had interacted and integrated with the already existing Christian and Amharic-speaking population.⁴¹

Yibaba also served as the capital of Mecha proper. The town had presumably a large population, and according to Bruce, it was “one of the largest in Abyssinia [Ethiopia], little inferior to Gondar in size or riches...”⁴² Having relatively large sized residents is also an indication of the commercial centrality of the political capital and hence the existence of flourishing commerce and trade in the area. Geographically, situated above the Alata Bridge, Yibaba was at the crossroads of the north-south and east-west long distance trade routes. Especially, the former was very important because it linked the resourceful pre-Oromo kingdoms of Enarya and Bizamo, south of the Abay River, with their northern counterpart, that is, the Gondarine kingdom.⁴³ It had a daily market.⁴⁴ Bruce described Yibaba as “a large market-town, where there is a royal residence...”⁴⁵

In addition, the place names of Ali Mesk (the field of Ali) and Ali wenz (Ali River), to the northwest and east of Yibaba respectively, were indications of settlement of Muslims in the area who were probably merchants.⁴⁶ Bruce mentions that Muslim merchants from the north took several types of trade items to the territories south of the Abay like beads, large needle, kohl, myrrh, and cloths. In return, they brought to the north items like slaves, civet, wax, hides, and great quantity of ginger.⁴⁷ At the same time, the route from the Lake Tana area to east Gojjam, which was taken by itinerant emperors as well as merchants, crossed Yibaba. The places commonly mentioned in the journeys of Gondarine emperors are those along the route from

⁴¹Plowden, pp. 251-252.

⁴²Bruce, Vol. 4, pp. 472-473.

⁴³Bruce, Vol.4, pp. 30-31.

⁴⁴Bruce, Vol. 4, p. 473.

⁴⁵Bruce, Vol. 2, p. 570.

⁴⁶Informant: (*Ato*) Yerom Alemu.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

Gondar → Alata Bridge → Tamir → Yibaba → Tul River → Weneba → Yezat River. There was also another route which passed through Yiwodi west of Lake Tana and entered Yibaba.⁴⁸

Founded as a secondary royal residence near Dibre Mewi with a small castle of Taka or *Arogie Gimb* (Old Building) which was built by Emperor Susenyos around 1612, Yibaba was the seat of an official called *Yibaba Azazh* (governor of Yibaba). The *Yibaba Azazh* was a trusted official accountable to the *Rasbitwedded* of the Gondarine emperor, “whose employment is worth 600 ounces of gold”.⁴⁹

Moreover, it was from the town of Yibaba that several pretenders or usurpers attempted to take political power from the Emperors at Gondar by using particularly Oromo troops from Mecha, Damot and Gojjam led by one or another renegade *Weregna* (Oromo military leader). To begin with, in anger at the brutal murder of Emperor Iyasu I in 1706, his loyal supporters from Mecha, Agew Midir, Gojjam and Damot crowned a certain *Kibat* monk and pretender to the throne, Berbila Weregna, with the crown name of Emperor Amde Tsiyon, at Yibaba in September 1707. However, after three weeks Amde Tsion was slain at the battle of Kebero Meda near Yibaba by imperial troops commanded by *Ras* Darmen, Emperor Tekle Haimanot's (r.1706-1708) maternal uncle and new governor of Gojjam proper. This battle caused heavy casualties on both sides. Among others, many prominent leaders of the *Kibat* (Uktion) faith from Gojjam were slain.⁵⁰ The soldiers of Darmen also killed *Azazh* Chuhay, an Agew chief, and thousands of his fighters.⁵¹ However, according to Bruce, the greatest loss on the side of the rebel army fell upon “the common men of Ilmana Densa” (now Yilmana Densa).⁵² Unrest continued. A relative of Amde Tsion, Welde Abib, became a rebel in Mecha and Damot areas. In June 1708, the opportune time which the Agew nobles were waiting for to avenge the death of Iyasu came, when Emperor Tekle Haimanot marched to Damot to attack *Dejazmach* Welde Abib, and partly

⁴⁸Huntingford, pp. 169, 190, 194, 204.

⁴⁹Tekele Tsadik Mekuriya, *Ye Itiyopiya Tarik Ke Atse Libne Dingil Iske Atse Tiwodros, Second Edition* (Addis Ababa: Berhan Ena Selam Printing Press, 1961 E. C.), p. 124.

⁴⁹Bruce, Vol. 4, p. 473.

⁵⁰Bruce, Vol. 2, pp. 530-531.; Tekle Tsadik, pp. 213-214. For the name Berbila Weregna see Tekle Iyesus Wakijra, “Ye Gojjam Tarik, Chapter 20” (MS, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, No. 254), pp. 135-136.

⁵¹Tekle Iyesus, pp. 135-136.

⁵²Bruce, Vol. 2, p. 530. ; Dessie, p. 296. For *Azazh* Chuhay, see Tekle Iyesus, “Ye Gojjam Tarik, Chapter 20”, pp. 135-136.

for a hunting game.⁵³ Subsequently, when he reached the border area between Damot and Agew Midir to hunt a buffalo, the Agew conspirators murdered him at Azena Mika'el in Agew Midir.⁵⁴

Likewise, in late 1710 *Dejazmach* Tigi assembled many Basso, Liban and Kalegenda Oromo fighters and rebelled in Gojjam against the next Emperor, Tiwoflos (r. 1708-1710). He proclaimed a certain pretender at Yibaba. His forces ruthlessly killed most of the inhabitants of the town. However, Tiwoflos's *chewa* troops defeated Tigi in March 1711. Tigi's Oromo troops took shelter in a sanctuary church near Yibaba. The church was set on fire with a *neft* (gun) under the order of the emperor and the Oromo fighters inside the church, whose number was estimated to be 500, apparently perished. Tigi was also killed by peasants at Weramit near Lake Tana and yet the pretender escaped forever. After the incident, Tiwoflos rebuilt the church and renamed it Debre Mewi (Mountain of Victory).⁵⁵ According to Bruce, however, the church had originally been built and named so by Iyasu I following his victory over the Oromo in the plain of Mecha.⁵⁶

3. Power, Rivalry and *Azazhoch* (Local Governors)

As indicated above, initially, the *Yibaba Azazh* (governor of Yibaba) had a much expanded political influence over the whole regions south of Lake Tana. Gradually, it declined and was limited to the surrounding districts, particularly Yilmana Densa, to the south of Yibaba. Bruce claims that the office was generally given to the principal persons of the province of Mecha so as to secure their allegiance as there was a very considerable territory that depended upon this office.⁵⁷ During the eighteenth century many took the office of *Yibaba Azazh*. Their stay, however, was short. During the reign of Bekafa (r.1721-1730) the office was *Azazh* Biniyam Anstanyos, who was the leader of the Oromo cavalry of Ilmana Densa.⁵⁸ After the death of Bekafa in 1730, the post was given first to a certain Kura Giyorgis,⁵⁹ and a year later to *Dejazmach* Mammo, who held it together with the governorship of Yilmana Densa, Gutta,

⁵³Bruce, Vol. 2., p.531.; Tekle Tsadik, pp. 214-215.

⁵⁴Bruce, Vol. 2, p. 531.; Tekle Tsadik, pp. 214-215.

⁵⁵Dessie, pp. 300-301. ; Bruce, Vol. 2, pp. 536-537.

⁵⁶Bruce, Vol. 2, 536.

⁵⁷Bruce, Vol. 4, p. 473.

⁵⁸Dessie, p. 315.; Tekle Tsadik, p. 242.

⁵⁹Ignazio Guidi, *Annales Regum Iyasu II et Iyo'as*. Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium Scriptorum Aethiopici, Versio, Series Altera, vol. 6, (Paris, 1912), p. 34.

Wember and Agew Midir.⁶⁰ In the third year of Iyasu II's (r. 1730-55) reign *Fitawrari* Tense Mammo (Tensay) held the post until he was publicly hanged in Gondar in 1733 in charge of leading the rebellion against the royal family to put a pretender named Hezkeyas on the throne.⁶¹ In return to his astute role in the suppression of the rebellion in Gondar in January 1733, an Oromo courtier of Bekafa and his son Iyasu II (r.1730-1755), Weregna Washo, was given the post of Yibaba *Azazh* including the territories of Ilmana and Densa, Damot and Agew Midir.⁶² In 1755 and 1757 *Balambaras* Duri,⁶³ and *Kentiba* Nitsa Kiristos were given the post, respectively.⁶⁴ In 1760, *Azazh* Terbinos was replaced by *Ras* Wedaje as the *Yibaba Azazh*.⁶⁵ Two years later, the post was given to a cousin of Empress Mintwab, *Fitawrari* (later, *Dejazmach*) Awsabiyos, together with the territories of Ganj and Yiwodi, until 1762.⁶⁶ The next governor of Yibaba was *Dejazmach* Eshete Merqoriwos, another cousin of Empress Mintwab, who was also the governor of Damot. He continued in power until his death in March 1764 at a battle with the Jawwi of Damot backed by *Ras* Fasil Weregna.⁶⁷ After a month, the post was given to *Fitawrari* Yehabene Wold, who was one of the followers of *Ras* Fasil.⁶⁸

The value of Yibaba town as a regional capital and as a place where renegade individuals could proclaim themselves as emperors continued for some decades during the *Zemene Mesafint* or Era of Warlords (1769-1855). This was probably because some of the warlords of Mecha province such as *Ras* Kinfu Adam Sendi and his maternal brother *Dejazmach* Hailu Adera actively participated in the political struggles of the period until the early 1780s.⁶⁹

⁶⁰Guidi, *Annales Regum Iyasu II et Iyo`as*, p. 47.

⁶¹Bruce, Vol. 2, pp. 624-625.; Tekle Tsadik, pp. 257-260.

⁶²Bruce, Vol. 2. P. 624.; Vol. 3, pp. 219-20.

⁶³Guidi, *Annales Regum Iyasu II et Iyo`as*, p. 174.

⁶⁴Guidi, *Annales Regum Iyasu II et Iyo`as*, p. 184.

⁶⁵Guidi, *Annales Regum Iyasu II et Iyo`as*, p. 193.

⁶⁶Guidi, *Annales Regum Iyasu II et Iyo`a*, p. 197.

⁶⁷Guidi, *Annales Regum Iyasu II et Iyo`as*, pp. 228-229; Bruce, Vol. 3, pp. 269-270.

⁶⁸Guidi, *Annales Regum Iyasu II et Iyo`as*, p. 230.

⁶⁹Informant: (*Kesä Gebez*) Demilew Ayele.; Nigatu Seyfu, "Tezemedo Sebe'e Ze Ityo'piya" (MS, Personal Collection of *ato* Worku Nigatu, Bahr Dar, n. d) first part), pp. 28, 95. *Ras* Kinfu Adam was also an Agew descendant of Iyasu I: Amete Sillasie Iyasu I →Eliyas Gora (*Dejazmach*) who married Mintwab Chuhay→Tirngo→Kinfu Adam and Adera Hailu. Amete Selassie herself was born of a woman of Ginde Beret. See Nigatu Seyfu.

On the other hand, the short royal chronicles of *Dejazmach* Hailu Eshetie state that the town of Yibaba and its Arogi Ginb (old palace) were still functioning as a place of assembly for warring lords of the period. Blundell's English translation reads:

... [The month of] Yakātit [1770] began on a Tuesday. The Negus [Tekle Haimanot II, r. 1769-77] and *Ras* [Mikā'el Sihul]...moved from Abolla and joined at Yebāba, halting at the Old Castle (Arogē Gemb). The Liqa Maquās Wand Bawasan caused to be brought to the King of Kings and the Chief of the Kings, Takla Hāymānot, a liberal dinner and supper, that is to say, Matsen (various foods); this was of incalculable amount, for there was every kind of food of various flavours in abundance. The wine was the wine of Kānā, so sumptuous was the ordering of his house...⁷⁰

However, *Ras* Mika'el *Sihul* of Gondar, who was one of the leading figures in the struggle for power, was defeated by a coalition of regional lords at the Battle of Sarbakusa in 1772, and driven back into Tigray. Similarly, in 1775 a coalition of other warlords also killed another prominent participant of the political struggles of the *Zemene Mesafint*, namely, *Ras* Fasil Weregna of Mecha and Damot. Hereafter, the way was open for *Ras* Kinfu Adam and *Dejazmach* Haiu Adera to dominate Gojjam, Damot and Agew Midir as well as the politics at Gondar for about a decade. Accordingly, in June 1778 Emperor Solomon II (r. 1777- 1779) made Hailu Adera governor of Gojjam, and Kinfu that of Damot and Agew Midir.⁷¹ However, this political arrangement seemed to have aroused the anger of *Dejazmach* (later *Ras*) Hailu Yosedek (r.1770-1794) of Gojjam proper because his realm was taken by force. This soon led to the battle of Sabisa Ber between the half-brothers on the one side and Haylu Yosedek on the other in which the former emerged victorious.⁷²

On the other hand, on July 19, 1779, partly pressurized by the people of Mecha and Damot, the powerful Kinfu Adam and Hailu Adera dethroned Emperor Solomon II and proclaimed Tekle Giyorgis (first reign, 1779-84), nicknamed *Fisame Mengist*, Emperor at Yibaba.⁷³ In this case, Blundell's translation of the chronicle reads:

⁷⁰ Blundell, pp. 211-12. In the footnote Blundell describes that **maten** was Amharic for bread, meat, butter and other things presented to persons of distinction. Kana, the marriage feast of Cana. In the Synaxarium this Commemoration was held on 13th Ter=21st January.

⁷¹ Blundell, p. 330; Negatu, p. 67; Informant: (*Kése Gebez*) Demilew Ayele.

⁷² Blundell, p. 332.

⁷³ Blundell, pp. 231, 234.

In the month of Hamlē [1779] God roused the people of Mechā and Dāmōt, so much that they said if Takla Giyorgis did not reign they would not submit, nor give tribute to King Salomon. When Kenfu saw the excitement of the people, he gave the kingdom to our King Takla Giyorgis in the country of Yebāba on the 12th of the month of Hamlē...The Negus built a church in Yebāba [1780], under the invocation of the Holy Apostles, and he made great devotions of penitence, for that the Lord had made him enter the city of his fathers and his regalia (royal property).⁷⁴

The chronicler further states that Tekle-Giyorgis stayed at Yibaba for six months before he finally travelled to Gondar on 6 January, 1780 accompanied by Kinfu. As his long time sympathizers and fellow countrymen, the coronation of Tekle-Giyorgis was a source of mass jubilation among the people of Mecha and Damot.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the friendship between Tekle-Giyorgis and Kenfu did not last long. After some eight months elapsed (September 1780), Emperor Tekle Giyorgis learned that Kinfu intended to enthrone Solomon once again. The strained relations between the two eventually led to the rebellion that Kinfu Adam and a certain Gedlu had organized in Jan'amora in 1780.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, the then ruler of Begemdir, *Djazmach* Mebaras Beketu, who had already attached himself with the emperor through marriage, defeated the half-brothers at the battle of Maryam Wuha in Begemdir in May 1781, and handed them over to the emperor.⁷⁷ The chronicler mentions that a messenger to the emperor had declared that "... and all the rebel officers of the people of Mecha, Damot and Jawwi had been killed or captured."⁷⁸ However, the brothers managed to escape from prison in October 1781,⁷⁹ but they were recaptured around Dangila in June 1782 by their adversaries in Damot and Mecha such as *Dejazmach* Adigeh⁸⁰ and *Fitawrari* Ikoniyan,⁸¹ respectively. Then, Emperor Tekle Giyorgis took them into captivity for some three years and eventually punished them through eye blinding.⁸² On the other hand, following the suppression of the rebellion of Kinfu, the emperor placed Damot under a certain *Dejazmach* Aklog and reinstated Hailu Yosedek over Gojjam with the title of *Ras*.⁸³

⁷⁴Blondell, p. 231 - 32.

⁷⁵Blundell, p. 231-241

⁷⁶Blundell, pp. 235-236, 240-241, 243-249.

⁷⁷Blundell, p. 254.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Blondell, p.256.

⁸⁰Blundell, p. 266.

⁸¹Blondell, p. 257.

⁸²Blundell, p. 268; Nigatu, p. 67; Informants: (*Afemir*) Ashagirie Chekol.

⁸³Blundell, p.429

The preceding developments marked the end of the role of the lords of Mecha in the political struggles of the *Zemene Mesafint*. Consequently, during the late eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries, the province of Mecha, including the post of *Yibaba Azazh*, came under the alternative domination of the lords of Gojjam and Damot, and suffered from the fighting and political struggles among the lords of Begemdir, Damot and Gojjam.⁸⁴ Furthermore, during the same period, there were constant rivalries and conflicts among the local chiefs of Mecha over the office of *Yibaba Azazh*.⁸⁵

Starting with the early years of the 1780s, *Ras Hailu I* of Gojjam began giving continued military assistance to Emperor Tekle Giyorgis I against another powerful warlord of the period, *Ras Ali I* (Ali Gwangul) of the Yejju region (r.1784-1789).⁸⁶ The Emperor reciprocated this military assistance by recognizing Hailu as the governor of Gojjam and Agew Midir.⁸⁷ In 1780 Emperor Tekle Giyorgis built another church at Yibaba.⁸⁸ The next Emperor, Hizkiyas (r. July 1789-January 1794), made *Ras Hailu I* the governor of the whole of Gojjam encompassed by the Abay River together with the post of *Yibaba Azazh*.⁸⁹

However, *Ras Haylu I* died in 1794 and Gojjam was repartitioned into its former administrative units. Power struggle soon started among the main lords of Gojjam and Damot. Each seemed to aspire to rule all the regions of Gojjam, Damot and Agew Midir as a single political entity. For instance, Goshu Zewdie of Damot (r. 1823-1852) in his undated letter to Pope Gregory XVI, introduced himself as: “the *Dejazmach* of Gojjam, of Damot, and of Mecha [including Yibaba], and ...of the [Oromo] lands south of the Abbay River...”⁹⁰ In such a way the province of Mecha, including the post of *Yibaba Azazh*, had come under the rule and influence of Damot lords during the first half of the nineteenth century.⁹¹

⁸⁴Tekle Tsadik, *Ye Itiyopiya Tarik*, p. 320.; Plowden, p. 261.

⁸⁵Plowden, pp. 251-52.

⁸⁶Fantahun, pp. 1-4.

⁸⁷Fantahun, p. 4.

⁸⁸Blundell, p. 232.

⁸⁹Blundell, p. 232; pp. 396-397, 429-430.

⁹⁰Fantahun, p. 29.

⁹¹Genet Ayele (Trans.), *Be Itiyopiya Kefetagna Teraroch Koyitayie (Amharic), Douze Ans d`Sejour dans le Haute Ethiopie (Abyssinia)*, Volume 1, Paris, 1868 by Arnauld M. d`Abbadie (Addis Ababa: Grafic Printers, Hidar 2009 E.C.), pp.133, 303.

On the other hand, Walter Plowden, who was at Feres Wegga in Mecha, close to Yibaba, during the time of *Ras Ali*'s 1844 campaign to Gojjam to fight against *Dejazmach* Goshu and his son, Birru, describes that the traditional office of *Yibaba Azazh* was occupied by local rival family members. They were *Fitawrari* Gebre Iyesus and *Dejazmach* Asenie Dires, who were the then *Azazhoch* (governors) of the districts of Yilmana Densa and Mecha-Gutta, respectively. Plowden further states that *Azazh* Gebre Iyesus was backed by Birru Goshu of Gojjam, and Asenie by that of *Ras Ali II* of Begemdir.⁹² Informants confirm the description of Plowden about the rivalry between Gebre Iyesus and Asenie over the post of *Yibaba Azazh* by the poems which run:

እናንተ ዴንሠኞች ክረምት አትዉደዱ፤

ያሰኔ ይመጣል ማቱ ነገድጓዱ።⁹³

You the Densas you should not like the coming of rainy season,
the [month of] June will come to you with thunder storms. [Compares Asenie to a
thunder].

እናንተ ሜ ጩ ጃች ዳጉሳ ያላችሁ፤

ገብሬ ድሀ አደግ ነዉ ጤ ፍም አይላችሁ።⁹⁴

You the Mechegnas with the crop of finger millet, Gebre [Gebre Iyesus] is so
poor that he would not give you *teff*. [Gebire is contemptuous to the Mechegnas].

Both of the above couplets explain that the local rulers of both districts were so powerful that their followers were proud of them, and through these couplets they were boasting about the invincible position of their respective rulers. Nevertheless, at the same time, the verses explain that local rivalries and conflicts had their own negative impact on the population of the declining town of Yibaba, and the traditional office of *Yibaba Azazh*.

4. The Fading Away of Yibaba: Ca. 1850s- 1880s

⁹²Plowden, pp. 253-254, 275. Plowden also stated that Gebre Iyesus and his troops assisted Birru in ravaging Debre Tabor on 7 February 1842.

⁹³Informant: (*Ato*) Zeleke Alelign.

⁹⁴Ibid.

The available sources show that Yibaba as an urban center seemed to have steadily declined since the middle of the *Zemene Mesafint*, particularly since about 1800 and later degenerated into a rural village probably around the late nineteenth century. However, the exact time when the town of Yibaba ceased to be an important political and trading center is not clearly known. Nevertheless, from the scholarly study of Donald Crummey, we can understand that during the early decades of the nineteenth century Yibaba had a population of less than 2000.⁹⁵

The first strong attack on the urban development of Yibaba occurred in March 1710, when *Dejazmach* Tigi is said to have massacred “all its inhabitants”,⁹⁶ and according to the *Tarique Negest*, “many of its inhabitants”⁹⁷, “without distinction of age and sex” were killed.⁹⁸ Then, its regional economic value must have been severely affected at the end of the eighteenth century, when *Ras* Hailu the Great of Gojjam, the then Yibaba *Azazh*, transferred the regional market center of Yibaba into Adet Medhane Alem by founding the famous Hailu Gebeya (Haylu Market) there.⁹⁹

The rulers of Damot, who gained political prominence over the whole region south of Lake Tana in the nineteenth century, also seemed to have not given due attention to the town of Yibaba most likely because they ruled the region from their political centers first at Bure and then at Dembecha towns.¹⁰⁰ At the same time, local power rivalries and conflicts mentioned above obviously had their own negative impact on the urban functions and political roles of the historical town of Yibaba. Those who assumed the post of *Yibaba Azazh* by overcoming their rivals did not use Yibaba as their seat of power. Instead, they ruled the region from their own respective district centers of administration.¹⁰¹

Likewise, unlike their Gondarine period counterparts, the second half of the 19th century Ethiopian empire builders such as Tiwodros II (r. 1855-68), Yohannes IV (r. 1872-89) and

⁹⁵Crummey, “Some Precursors of Addis Ababa,” pp. 18-19, 26.

⁹⁶Bairu, pp. 420-21.

⁹⁷Dessie, p. 300.

⁹⁸Bruce, vol. 2, p. 536.

⁹⁹Yilmana Densa District Culture and Tourism Office, “Profile of Yilmana Densa Wereda” (Adet, *Senie* 2005 E.C.), p. 3.; Abdussamad Hajj Ahmad, “Trade and Politics in Gojjam, 1882-1935” (MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, Department of History, 1980), p. 29.

¹⁰⁰Informant: (*Ato*) Yilma Bayih.

¹⁰¹Informant: (*Liqe Heruyan*) Belay Mekonnen.

Minilik II (r. 1889- 1913) did not use Yibaba as their political center and place of temporary stay. Other centers also emerged and used. In 1869, for example, as Rassam reported, the town of Zegie, situated along the southern shore of Lake Tana, was used as the capital of Mecha,¹⁰² to which the emperor even had a plan to transfer his capital. However, Zegie was sacked by Tiwodros because of the issue related with tribute collection.¹⁰³ The chronicler *Aleqa Zeneb* states that Yibaba was one of the places that was suggested by one of the priests to serve as the emperor's quarter in 1856 when the emperor complained to a gathering of clergymen that he was lost without any means of reserve to support his army as the church had control over a good portion of the taxable land. The priests counseled that the emperor can return to former practices of moving the imperial center from place to place:

... አንዱ ካህን መለሰ፡ አለም። አራት ወር በጎንደር ተቀምጦል አርማጭሆን፤ ጸገዴን፤ ወለቃይትን፤ ስሜንን፤ ትግሬን ይብሎ አላቸደ። አራት ወር በአሪነጎ ተቀምጦል በጌምድርን፤ ላስታን፤ የጁን፤ ወረሂመኑን፤ ወሎን፤ ሸዋን ይብሉ። አራት ወር ይባባ ላይ ተቀምጦል ሜጫን፤ አገዉን ዳሞትን፤ ጎጃምን ይብሉ፤ እንደ ጥንት።...¹⁰⁴

One of the priests replied [to the complaint of the emperor] that he could stay in Gondar for four months and consume provisions of Armachiho, Tsegedie, Welkayt, and Tigrie; then establish yourself at Aringo for four months and devour provisions of Begemdir, Lasta, Yeju, Werre Himenu, Wollo and Shewa; and then for four months make your residence at Yibaba, and eat up provisions of Mecha, Agew Midir, Damot and Gojjam as was in the past.

Aleka Zeneb claimed that, after some hesitation, Emperor Tiwodros accepted the advice of the clergies of Gondar to use regional centers as his temporary seats of power.

Other centers were also used as a place of stay during the continuous campaign of Emperor Tiwodros. In April 1856, on his way back to Gondar from his campaign against Shewa, the emperor took a rest at Debre Mewi and kept on his journey without visiting Yibaba.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰²H. Rassam, *Narrative of the British Mission to Theodore* (1869), p. 1.

¹⁰³Rassam, pp. 118-19.

¹⁰⁴Zen'eb (*Aleka*), *Ye Tiwodros Tarik*, Enno Littman, Publisher, (Princeton: Princeton University, 1902), pp. 28-29.

¹⁰⁵Zen'eb, p. 26.

Later on, however, Emperor Tiwodros seemed to have used the town of Yibaba as a temporary place of stationing for his repeated campaigns against Mecha. For instance, the address of one of the letters of Emperor Tiwodros II written to Queen Victoria of Great Britain on October 31, 1862 (*Tekemet* 20, 1855 EC) is the town of Yibaba in Gojjam.¹⁰⁶ The chronicler confirms that Emperor Tiwodros II repeatedly ravaged Mecha and looted its cattle.¹⁰⁷ The emperor imprisoned its rulers such as *Dejazmach* Asenie Dires, Golem Wolde Mika'el and Maru Selemon and eventually publicly amputated their limbs and then hanged them at Geregera in Begemdir in May 1858.¹⁰⁸ Informants also state that, stationing himself at Yibaba, the emperor sent his troops who burnt and plundered the monastery of Adet Medhane Alem¹⁰⁹ around 1864.¹¹⁰

The chronicler Gebre Silassie also mentions that on his way back to Shewa from his campaign against Begemdir, in April 1877, *negus* Minylik was given warm receptions by the clergy and inhabitants of Debre Mewi and Adet, and then he proceeded to Shewa via Motta; that is, without staying at Yibaba.¹¹¹

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, it appears that Yibaba was still a town, where Empress Taitu Bitul's mother *Weyzero* Yewubdar Kebetie (d. March 1905) and her husband *Aleqa* Engida resided. The latter, who was the stepfather of the Empress, was one of the wealthy family heads of the locality. However, there was a rivalry between the inhabitants of Debre Mewi and Yibaba which led to the demolition of a newly established church at Yibaba by *Aleqa* Engida. After an appeal to her, Empress Taitu is said to have given the order of the demolition of the dome of same church.¹¹² Gebre Silassie also indicates that Empress Taitu's mother was living at the locality of Debre Mewi by early June 1888, when *nigus* Menilek and *nigus* Tekle

¹⁰⁶Tekle Tsadik Mekuriya, *Ats Tiwodros Ina Ye Itiopiya Andinet* (Addis Ababa: Kuraz Publishing Agency, 1981 E. C.), p. 301.

¹⁰⁷Zen'eb, p.27.

¹⁰⁸Zen'eb, pp. 33-34.

¹⁰⁹Informants: (*Afemir*) Ashagrie Chekol.

¹¹⁰Tekle Tsadik Mekuriya, *Atse Tiwodros Ina Ye Itiopiya Andinet* (Addis Ababa: Kuraz Publishing Agency, 1981 E. C.), p. 246.

¹¹¹Gebre Selassie Welde Aregay, (*Tarik Zemen Ze Dagmawi Minylik Niguse Negesit Ze Itiopiya*) (Addis Ababa: Berhan Ena Salam Printing Press, 1959 E.C.), p. 74.

¹¹²Belay Makonnen (*Liqe Hiruyan*), *Itegie Taytu Be Debre Mewi* (Addis Ababa: Tana Publishing Enterprise, 2003 E.C), pp. 28, 44-47.

Haimanot are said to have conspired against Emperor Yohannes IV (r. 1872-89) near the river called Tul, to the east of Debre Mewi.¹¹³

All the developments mentioned above must have led to the termination of Yibaba as an urban center probably by the 1880s. Today, it is a rural village in the locality of Kotti Maryam. Only the ruined enclosure walls averaging one to two meters in height and some parts of the foundation of its seventeenth century palace are still visible amidst privately owned farm lands.¹¹⁴

5. Conclusion

During the Gondarine period, Yibaba was perhaps one of the most important urban centers of the kingdom. It served as regional capital and royal residence since about the early decades of the seventeenth century. This also reveals two other things such as the economic importance of the fertile region surrounding Yibaba and the efforts of Gondarine period monarchs to control regional political tendencies in the regions south of Lake Tana by temporarily seating at Yibaba. Like other traditional Ethiopian urban centers, the town of Yibaba flourished partly because it was a regional capital. Nevertheless, as the political system waned due to the *Zemene Mesafint* (Era of Warlords), the town also began to fade away and eventually degenerated into a rural village centering on the church of Yibaba Kidane Mihret. Hence, it is a lost town.

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¹¹³Gebre Silassie, p. 150.

¹¹⁴Berry, p. 39.

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