

The Careers of Empress Mentewab (c.1706-73) and the Amhara, Oromo, and Tigre Mix in the Power Elites of Gondär.

Wagaw Bogale (PhD)*

Abstract

Empress Mentewab was one of the most influential female political figures that the country saw in its long history. Her beauty which is eulogized by some writers of the time latter helped her to control power especially during the time of Emperor IYASU II. Her political grip, as we shall see, was not, however, a result of sheer beauty. She was, rather, a person who could put beauty and understanding together to control the reins of government for about half a century. Her political skill was revealed, among others, in the political marriages that she arranged with the most influential lords of the time who ruled the major political units of the country; viz, Tigray, Lasta and Begemder, and Gojjam.

Key words: Quaragnoch, Yejju Oromos.

*Assistant professor of History, Jigjiga University

Introduction

By a habit of thought deeply entrenched, women in Ethiopia have been relegated to the sphere of domestic tasks and private life and men alone have been considered equal to the task of shouldering the burden of public affairs. In military, political and civilian life, therefore, women continued to be sub-ordinate to men and have been assigned to less valued auxiliary roles.¹ Nevertheless, in its long history, Ethiopia saw a handful of prominent women figures whom even the most biased historian or writer could not ignore. They were not, therefore, only wives and mothers but were diplomats, military strategists, politicians, and administrators. Leaving the queen of Sheba to the famous Solomonic legend, queen Illiné (consort of Zär'a Ya-qob), Empress Säblä Wongél (wife of Emperor Lebnä Dengil), Empress Mentewab (Bäkäffa's wife), and Empress Taitu (wife of Menilek II), played varied roles of importance in the country's social, economic, and political history.²

Queen Illiné, a Hadya, for example was, among others, a born diplomat of the 16th century, who realized the danger hanging over the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia, and was responsible for cultivating contact with the Portuguese government,³ a task which reached a fair success with the defeat, in 1543, of Imam Ahmed Bin Ibrahim Al-Ghazi by a combined force of Ethiopia and Portugal. This was the major achievement from a project designed by Illiné in the face of serious opposition from the incumbent king, Lebnä Bengil. But the human tragedy caused by the introduction of Catholicism into Ethiopia, which *per se* was the outcome of Illiné's diplomatic effort, left behind one of the most traumatic experiences meted out to the Ethiopian people after the Christian-Muslim conflict was over.

After the death of Lebnä Dengil, Säblä Wongél distinguished herself as the defender of the Christian kingdom from the assault of Imam Ahmäd Bin Ibrahim al-Ghazi or Gragn, as he was known by the Christian tradition. She managed to receive the 400 Portuguese soldiers that came to Ethiopia in 1541 while the reigning king, Gälawdewos was in the south.⁴ Had it not been for the military valor and skill of Säblä Wongél, victory over Gragn would have been far from reality. Since then, a century lapsed for Ethiopia to see another prominent woman who exercised real power for nearly half a century. This was the famous Empress Mentewab, wife of Emperor Bäkäffa. In a country where patriarchy had been deeply rooted, the advent of Mentewab could be regarded as an important landmark in the country's social and political history. Her physical appearance takes central importance in her latter success, as she used her beauty to attain power. A woman from Qwara, Mentewab indeed combined beauty and political skill which enabled her to exercise real power, a circumstance that had broken the long established norm of male supremacy in the country's entire affairs. In effect, the reins of government were at the disposal of Mentewab during the reigns of Iyasu II (r.1730-1755) and Iyo'as (r. 1755-1769).⁵ It was not until the last quarter of the 19th century that another woman of power came into the political landscape who was actively involved in the administrative and military life of the country. This was Empress Taitu, consort of Menilek II in 1883, who was responsible for the foundation of the city of Addis Ababa and who was the strategist and the heroine at the battle of Adwa.⁶

These were the most readily recognizable women figures that left behind an important contribution in Ethiopia's diplomatic, military and political history. In this study an attempt will be made to analyze the careers of Empress Mentewab, the major issues being her genealogy, her beauty, and the political marriages which she arranged. Most writers argue that she had Portuguese blood,⁷ an issue that needs to be carefully examined. And beauty gave her the opportunity to be the consort of Bäkäffa which, after nearly a decade, put the reins of government in her hands. But Mentewab was not simply a naive beautiful woman; rather, she

combined beauty with wisdom and understanding and made political capital out of the situation by concluding one of the most effective and profitable, at least one which was profitable enough for her dreams to come true, marriage arrangements ever made in the history of Ethiopia.⁸

Genealogy of Empress Mentewab

It is well documented that Itegé (Empress) Mentewab was born c. 1706 to *Däjjazmač* Mänbär and *Woizero* (Lady) Enkoyé of Qwara.⁹ However, the genealogy of Mentewab is a subject that needs to be examined in more detail, as she is said to have been, on her mother's side, descended from a Portuguese soldier who came to help liberate Ethiopia from the invasion of Ahmäd Gragñ.¹⁰ The intent of the author of this paper regarding this intriguing question is not, however, to show the family tree of the Empress Mentewab, so that the question of her Portuguese ancestry would get a satisfactory answer. This article rather attempts to examine and analyze the major hypothesis orbiting her genealogy and suggests an objective interpretation on the basis of these assumptions. The major historical developments that could help us examine and analyze this issue will accordingly be discussed below.

The legend of the Prester John of the Indies first appeared to European Christian states in the first half of the 12th century.¹¹ From then on the search for this strong Christian Priest king ruling over a vast and wealthy territory was high in the agenda of Europe. But it was not until the early years of the 14th century that the kingdom of the mysterious Prester John was first associated with Ethiopia.¹² Following the 15th century discoveries and explorations, the Portuguese rounded Africa, passed the Cape of Good Hope, and reached Goa in India. Their main objective was to control the lucrative Asian trade with Europe which was active in the Indian Ocean, the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea regions. So, in order to overturn Ottoman preeminence in these areas, they hoped to use Ethiopia as a potential ally.¹³ In the meantime the conflict between the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia and the Sulṭānate of Adal became acute. At this crucial time, queen Mother Illiné, wife of Emperor Zär'a Ya-qob, came up with the idea of cultivating relations with the Portuguese government. Though her idea was rejected by the incumbent monarch, Lebnä Dengil, her delegation reached Portugal in 1514. In 1520, the Portuguese government sent a delegation to Ethiopia under the leadership of F. Alvarez. This delegation, that received inadvertent welcome from Lebnä Dengil, re-embarked six years later, in 1526.¹⁴ But relations between Ethiopia and Portugal continued on and off. In between, the Christian army under Lebnä Dengil was routed by the force of Imam Ahmed Bin Ibrahim al-Ghazi (better known in the Christian tradition as Grañ or the left handed) at the battle of Šimbra Kuré in 1529.¹⁵ It was after this shattering debacle that the fugitive king, Lebnä Dengil, realized that the idea of Illiné was correct.¹⁶ Now Lebnä Dengil needed the Portuguese more than they needed him. He implored the Portuguese government for military assistance. In 1541, 400 Portuguese musketeers landed at Massawa. But a year before their arrival, Lebnä Dengil had died and was succeeded by his son Gälawdewos (r. 1540-1559). In 1543, Grañ was defeated and was shot dead at the battle of Woina Däga, near Lake Ṭana, while the remaining Adalite soldiers retreated to Harär.¹⁷ For the Christian kings of Ethiopia, this was a great favor from the Portuguese government. But, the Portuguese government had a hidden idea of making Ethiopia a catholic nation. To this effect catholic priests entered Ethiopia from the first half of the 16th century. Of all the catholic priests who entered in Ethiopia, Paez was the most successful. He converted Emperor Susānewos, after which the king officially declared Ethiopia a catholic nation in 1622. This pronouncement, however, led to strong opposition and bloodshed.¹⁸ Realizing the weight of the assault he had incurred on his own people Susānewos abdicated his power in favor of his son, Fasilädäs, in 1632,

(r.1632-1668). After this arrangement, Fasilädäs restored the status quo and ordered the catholic priests to immediately leave Ethiopia.

The important point in the above account is the situation of the remaining Portuguese soldiers who stayed in Ethiopia and the nature of the religious persecution. Before the religious persecution, and during the reign of Susänewos, the Portuguese were given two important centers-Gorgora and Fremona, the former around Lake Ṭana and the latter in Tigray, near Adwa.¹⁹ According to some writers their composition was not homogenous. There were priests, soldiers and artisans that apparently enjoyed magnanimous land grants from Emperor Gälawdewos and reported to have started life which resembled that of the Ethiopians.²⁰ Besides, the soldiers and the artisans presumably came to Ethiopia alone, i.e., without their wives. So, if they were settled in Ethiopia and began to lead life that resembles that of the Ethiopians, the assumption that they were intermarried with the Abyssinians seems plausible. Besides, some writers have argued that the persecution was exclusively applied to the catholic priests.²¹ If we take the battle of Woina Däga (1543) and the birth of Mentewab (c.1706) as points of references, we have more than a century during which time intermarriage between the Ethiopians and the Portuguese settlers could have taken place, a circumstance that somehow affected the demographic history of the Lake Ṭana area and Adwa in Tigray, the two important centers of Portuguese settlement. Having this in mind, let us see what the sources say regarding the genealogy of Itegé Mentewab.

Several writers have associated the genealogy of Itegé Mentewab to Emperor Minas (1559-1563). Emperor Minas had a child by the name of Fiṣṣor who died in battle in 1538 without coming to the throne. His daughter, whose name is not indicated in the literature, was given in marriage to Robel, a noble from Tigray, who was active during the reign of Emperor Säršä Dengil (r.1563-'97), whose mother is said to have had a Portuguese ancestry.²² And they maintained that Mentewab had Portuguese blood by virtue of her ancestor through the mother of Robel. This, however, seems difficult to accept. But given the long period of intermarriage between the two people and the proximity of Gorgora and Fremona to Qwara, the birth place of Mentewab, and Adwa, if Robel's mother was from the Fremona area, respectively, the assumption that Mentewab had Portuguese blood seems genuine.

The other assumption which provides some hope in our effort to provide a balanced argument regarding the genealogy of Itegé Mentewab is associated with religious debate, which was one important feature of the medieval history of Ethiopia. In 1450, Emperor Zär'a Ya-qob called a church council at Däbrä Miṭmaq, in Šäwa, and resolved the controversy over the question of the Sabbath, which was, among others, at the center of the reform movements of the Ewostaṭians and the Stephenites.²³ But in the years that followed the council of Däbrä Miṭmaq, division occurred within the Orthodox clergy, this time over the nature of Jesus Christ. To add insult to injury, Emperor Susäneyos declared Ethiopia a Catholic country in 1622. Though the status quo was restored in 1632, the debate over the nature of Christ continued up until the church council of Boru Méda, in Wällo, held in 1878, a council in which the *Täwahido* doctrine was proclaimed as the official doctrine of the Ethiopian state by Emperor Yohannis IV (r. 1872-'89).²⁴

During the Gondärine period, the controversy over the nature of Christ divided the clergy into three- Followers of *Qibat* (Son by Unction), *Yä Šäga Lij* (son by Grace), and *Täwahido* (Union). Not all Gondärine kings were followers of one of the above factions. Some were followers of *Qibat* and others were followers of *Täwahido*.²⁵ Following the death of Emperor Bäkäffa (r.1721- '30), a follower of the *Täwahido* doctrine and husband of Itegé Mentewab, a rebellion broke out in Gondär.²⁶ The major cause of the rebellion was Mentewab's policy of

rule by a coterie of relatives. The nobility from other families in other parts of the country, therefore, accused Mentewab of elitism. During this time the Patriarch and the Eçägé joined the anti Mentewab group. The reason for this, according to many writers, was her religious position. Unlike her husband, Bäkaffa, Mentewab was a follower of the *Qibat* doctrine which in some matters resembles Catholicism. Both *Qibat* and Catholicism agree on the two natures of Christ and rejected the teaching of the *Tāwahido* doctrine which believes in the unity of Christ's humanity and divinity.²⁷ Besides, in the second half of the 18th century some argue that, three Franciscan catholic priests came to Gondär and that they received a warm welcome from Iyasu II and his mother and regent, Itegé Mentewab.²⁸ So, those who rose against Mentewab, including the Patriarch and the Eçägé, claimed that Mentewab was a catholic in her heart because her ancestors were Portuguese who were responsible for the bloodbath a century before. They, therefore, implicitly accused her of harboring the catholic priests.²⁹ But against this charge, Mentewab is known to have built several famous churches and indeed gave generous land grants and endowments to many churches and monasteries. One of these monasteries that received land grants and endowments from Empress Mentewab is Qoraṭa Wälättä Peṭros in Lake Ṭana.³⁰ Wälättä Peṭros was one of the 17th century female saints who built many monastic communities and one who vehemently opposed the catholic religion from gaining ground in Ethiopia.³¹ Had Mentewab been a catholic in her heart she would not have established such a strong attachment to this monastery which was built after Wälättä Peṭros, a nun who greatly opposed the catholic faith.

The accounts of Bruce, the Scottish traveler of the 18th century, are very useful in this connection. He, an eye-witness who met Mentewab in her old age, and her daughters, and one who had strong attachment to this family, tells us that Mentewab was whiter in complexion than most Portuguese and was proud of her Portuguese ancestry.³² Moreover, the Zägé people who live in Zägé peninsula, whose complexion is whiter than the surrounding Amhara community, also claimed Portuguese ancestry.³³ Apart from saying this, however, both Bruce and the Zägé people give no detailed account on this intriguing question. Similarly, some other writers tell us that there were people as far east as Däbrä Tabor whose complexion was whiter than the complexion of the larger community.³⁴ But all these accounts are crude to take them at face value. Nevertheless we can at least suggest some points pertaining to the issue in question.

No doubt there were Portuguese settlers in Ethiopia, mostly soldiers after the war with Grañ was over; and artisans whose craftsmanship was in high demand by the monarchs of Ethiopia. As the sources indicate, most of them were living in Fremona and Gorgora and around the royal court. Given the political instability of the period and the nature of their profession, they might not have been in a position to bring their wives with them, or might not have wives before they came to Ethiopia, but as some writers note, married Ethiopian ladies.³⁵ Probably, the complexion of Itegé Mentewab was, as Bruce asserted, whiter than most Portuguese. From the accounts stated above, we can say that Mentewab might have had a Portuguese ancestry, a story which is, however, not pretty certain, and needs to be studied further.

Mentewab Stepped in to Power with Her Beauty

It can be claimed that beauty and charm, i.e., external appearance of human beings usually affect our inter-personal relationships. The human mind is created in such a way that it defines natural events, to take the two extremes, as beautiful and ugly. Obviously the beautiful ones, as defined by the human mind, are the seat of our passion and affection.

What happened to Emperor Bäkaffa was no exception. Bäkaffa was, according to many writers, the last ruler of the Gondärine period before the country was plunged into the *Zämänaä Mäsafint* (era of the princes, 1769-1855).³⁶ The first wife of Emperor Bäkaffa was Awaldä Nägäst who unfortunately died, for reasons we do not know clearly, on the day of her wedding.³⁷ Few years after this tragic incident that numbed the king very much, there came an opportunity that first pained and later consoled Bäkaffa from all his misfortunes. In those days emperors journeyed into the remotest part of their domains either for hunting or for visiting their provinces. The tradition says that in one of his journeys in the wilderness of Sännar, he fell ill with malaria. A noble man from Qwara took him to his house and entrusted to one of his daughters who treated Bäkaffa well.³⁸ This was the later Itegé (Empress) Mentewab. According to the tradition it was under such an agonizing situation that Bäkaffa made up his mind to marry her. This beauty that melted the heart of Bäkaffa while he was suffering from the ailments of malaria, was inherited from her mother, *Woizäro* (Lady) Enkoyé who, according to Crummy, was the pride of all the people of Qwara.³⁹ And as we have mentioned in the preceding part of this article, most writers including Bruce, associated her complexion with her Portuguese ancestors.

The beauty of Mentewab, which was the real stepping stone to her later rise into power and success in the county's social and political life, was eulogized by several writers, the common denominator being "How Beautiful She Is!"⁴⁰ Yes! The name Mentewab conveys the expression of beauty, but it does not exactly mean 'how beautiful she is' as most writers have put it. The correct meaning of the name Mentewab is, however, that "nature has bestowed all the beauty and there is no other way to beautify her."⁴¹ In this connection it would be advisable to look into the words which writers have used to express her beauty.

The Scottish traveler Bruce who met Mentewab during her old age and her daughters expresses her beauty as in the following; "...was exceedingly beautiful, gentle, mild, and affable, of great understanding and prudence beyond her age, the darling not only of her own family but of the entire neighborhood.... the handsomest woman of her time."⁴² Bruce, an eye-witness, must have, however, heard the qualities that he describes of her above from other people as he met her some five years before she passed away in 1773.⁴³ By the time Bruce met her, Mentewab was about 67/68 years of age. Beauty is glorious and perilous; glorious when one is in his/her youth and perilous in old age. So, Mentewab must have shed her beauty off by the time Bruce met her. But he might have read some beauty she would possibly have preserved during her youth in what was left behind her bowed and twisted appearance. In addition, Bruce might have seen some striking similarity between Mentewab and her daughters whom he admired even more than Mentewab herself. One of her daughters, Aster, the eldest daughter, is described by Bruce as "the handsomest woman in Abyssinia."⁴⁴ She was his favorite while he was in Abyssinia and their attachment was somehow exaggerated. Whether there was something beyond this is not the interest of the writer of this article. But she was always at the tip of his eulogizing tongue and he had her photographed.

One thing that we notice in the family of Mentewab is that they used their own social strategy to gain influence in the social and political life of the country. As we shall see in the next part in more detail, it was this beauty that they inherited from Mentewab that enabled her daughters (Aster, Alṭash, and Wälättä Israel) to gain glory in the eyes of their husbands.

Another important point that Bruce made is his depiction of Mentewab as a woman of great understanding and prudence. Though Mentewab was chosen as Bäkaffa's wife for her beauty, as her career after the death of Bäkaffa tells us, it was not simply by sheer beauty that she had

ruled, as regent, the kingdom for half a century. She was rather a person who could put beauty and understanding together to control the reins of government for such a long period of time.

The alluring power of Mentewab's beauty also captured the attention of writers after Bruce as they mostly repeated what he had said of her beauty and added their own. One hundred and fifteen years after Bruce, Budge asserts that the Emperor Bäkaffa married Mentewab straightway when she arrived to his court.⁴⁵ In fact *Woizäro Yolyana*, her grandmother played a major role in adorning Mentewab before she left her house in Qwara and went to the court of Bäkaffa.⁴⁶ Budge added that it was only Mentewab whom the king admitted to his bed. But the most vivid and, indeed exaggerated, description of her beauty is the one we read from the writings of Pankhurst. In his "The royal Chronicles..." in which he translated the accounts of the chronicles of Iyasu II and Empress Mentewab, we read the following:

...her eyes as [bright] as the stars, and as delightful as a grape, and her face was as bright as oil (her face shone like precious stone), her hair was like flax, and her stature was that of a palm tree, she was called Mentewab, from whose lips there flowed milk whether she was silent or spoke, whose eyes were those of dove, whose bosom was like that of bees, slim, and full of sweetness; obedient and wise, **for whom all men felt love in their hearts**...when she reached the court he was pleased for she was completely beautiful, and said "You have no faults at all!"⁴⁷ (Emphasis added).

Those such as Chessman, Ullendorff, Salt, Täklä Şadiq Mäkuria, and recently Henze and others spared few lines regarding the beauty of Mentewab in a more or less similar manner to Bruce's account. Chessman for example referred Bäkaffa as a romantic figure who has encountered the beautiful Mentewab in the house of her parents in Qwara while he was ill with malaria.⁴⁸ Henze on his part portrays Mentewab, besides her beauty, as Bäkaffa's most valuable contribution to his capital and to his country.⁴⁹ Ullendorff repeated what Bruce said word by word.⁵⁰ A somehow different but similar version of a description of her beauty is the one given by H. Salt. He makes Mentewab "small, and elegant" and one whose features were "regular and having fine teeth, and cool-black hair," and concluded his account by saying; "...she might in any way, have been esteemed handsome."⁵¹

The account of Täklä Şadiq Mäkuria is interesting in that it is supported by a wonderful couplet sang both by the people and the clergy. Two months after Iyasu II was proclaimed Emperor, in December 1755, Mentewab was made Empress and regent to Iyasu II. During her coronation, therefore, the people of Gondär expressed their joy by composing the following poem;

አሁን ዎጃች ጄምበር ተሸሽጋ ነበር	Now the sun rises, which was in hid till now.
አሁን ዎጃች ጨቃ የምትለን ፍርድ ይብቃ	Now the moon is up, which gives us justice.
ደስ ይበልህ ዘመድ ከነገሶች በዘውድ	Rejoice relative, if she reigned by crown.
ደስ ይበልህ ባለጌ ከነገሶች ይቴጌ	Rejoice peasant, if crowned Itege (Empress).
ደስ ይበልህ ጉንደር ቀድሞ ከፍቶህ ነበር	Rejoice Gondar, for you were sad before.

The clergy on its part glorified her beauty in Ge'ez by saying;

መንክር ግርማ መንክር ግርማ	So impressive is her grace; so impressive is her grace
ወልደ ልኡል ጸላላ መንክር ግርማ	One whose protection is in Wälda Le'ul, so impressive is her
	grace!

Wäldä Le'ul was the brother and right hand of Empress Mentewab whom she trusted most.⁵²

Put it succinctly, it was such a beauty and charm that easily moved and overcame the heart of Bäkaffa while he was still under the agony of the fever from malaria. Had it been only for the treatment that Bäkaffa received from Mentewab, she and her family would have been given generous gifts from the king. But, what matters most was indeed her beauty. For Bäkaffa, this was a mere pleasure objectified or symbolized by Mentewab. But for Mentewab, it was a God sent opportunity to elevate herself into the political pavilion. As we shall see below, she used her beauty and charm to influence the court to strengthen her power and secure appointments for her close relatives, making them assume key political posts in the royal court and in the provinces. As noted earlier, Mentewab was not only a naive beautiful consort of Bäkaffa. That is why we see beauty and bravery in a happy blend in the personality of Mentewab. That is why we say Mentewab stepped in her beauty which enabled her to reach power and to have registered herself in history as the most outstanding woman in the social and political life of Ethiopia. For Helen Pankhurst, the advent of Mentewab was the “Most striking social and political development of the 18th century Gondärine Ethiopia.”⁵³

Political Marriages Arranged by Empress Mentewab

Emperor Bäkaffa died in 1730 and was succeeded by his son by Mentewab, Iyasu II, also known as Qwaräñña Iyasu, so named after the place of his origin, Qwara, a place located north west of Lake Ṭana. During his minority (he was only seven years old when he came to power) real power was exercised by Mentewab. As stated earlier, she was one of the few strong, manipulative, and skillful female political and social figures that Ethiopia saw in its 3,000 year long history. During the reign of Iyasu II (r.1730-'55), and his son and successor, Emperor Iyo'as (r.1755-'69), the influence of Mentewab was strongly felt in the court of Gondar.⁵⁴ In the preceding part of this article, we have seen how beauty gave Mentewab the avenue to political ascent. Her entire success was not, however, merely attributed to her beauty. Indeed, as many writers have confirmed, she was beautiful, and politically skillful, a combination that is rarely found.

Mentewab's political skill began to be demonstrated soon after the death of her husband, Emperor Bäkaffa. Mindful of what would happen following the death of a reigning monarch; she managed to keep the death of Bäkaffa profoundly secret. Due to the polygamous character of the Ethiopian monarchs in general they had many children from their wives including from the queen and from their concubines. On the death of the incumbent king, therefore, though the tradition favored the first born of the king by the queen mother to succeed his father, every one born from the deceased monarch sought to assume the throne. Mentewab realized this fact very well and her son, Iyasu II, was then only seven years old. The important question here is that, why did Mentewab keep the death of Bäkaffa scrupulously secret? We do not know for how long she managed to keep it secret, but Mentewab had one great assignment to accomplish first. So, before his death was made known to all, she made one important political arrangement that indeed gave her the power and confidence to stay in the political game for a period of half a century. Though the task was started in the last days of Emperor Bäkaffa, after his death, Mentewab swiftly began to summon her close relatives, most of whom from Qwara, into Gondar and gave them key posts. Men like Wäldä Le'ul, Ešäté, Géta, Awsabiyos, Niqolawos, and Arkälédes were some of her relatives who played significant administrative and military roles Mentewab included in her blue ribbon list. These were people who formed the political group called Qwaräññoč, so named for most of them were fetched from Qwara, their birth place including that of Mentewab. Of all these and others not mentioned here who shared her fortunes and misfortunes, Wäldä Le'ul, her brother, was the

most influential whom Mentewab trusted most as her right hand and confidant. On his arrival at Gondar he was made *Ras* and then *Ras Bitwädäd* (in 1733) (equivalent to the position of the prime minister today), and remained in that position until his death, in March 1767.⁵⁵ That was why, on the date of her coronation, the clergy chanted and danced by saying;

መን ከ ር ግ ር ማ መን ከ ር ግ ር ማ	So impressive is her grace; so impressive is her grace
ወልደ ልኡል ጸላላ መን ከ ር ግ ር ማ	One whose protection is in Wälda Le'ul; so impressive is her grace!

After his death Géta, her nephew, was made *Ras Bitwädäd* on September 1767. When he died in 1768, *Ras* Michael Schul, who at that time married Princess Aster, daughter of Mentewab, assumed the position of *Ras Bitwädäd* (January, 1768). Thus, in one way or another, this important post remained in the house of Empress Mentewab until the end of the Gondärine period, 1769. Others were made governors in the various provinces of the kingdom.⁵⁶

It was after this decisive political arrangement that Mentewab made the death of Bäkäffa public. Nevertheless, news of the death of Bäkäffa, as Mentewab foresaw, led to rebellion that raged for two weeks to sway the throne of Iyasu II and Mentewab. She was not, therefore, a false prophet in this. In the ensuing war, the town of Gondär experienced one of the deadliest confrontations that claimed the lives of many people. Had it not been for this political arrangement which the calculative Mentewab first made, victory over the rebels would have been impossible.⁵⁷

Another strategy through which Mentewab maintained power and influence for such a long period of time was by concluding political marriages with the notable houses found in the most important political units of the kingdom. Before moving into the details of this subject, it is apposite to answer the question, why did rulers conclude political marriages? Political marriage was made at least for four reasons – to neutralize potential threats; to legitimize positions; to secure the loyalty of strong men and to ensure the lines of continuity; to maintain peace and order, and to widen areas of influence.⁵⁸

In the history of Ethiopia, political marriage as an essential instrument of achieving the above objectives predated the times of Mentewab and continued right up to the 20th century. Emperor Zär'a Ya-qob, (r. 1434-'68) for example, married Illiné in 1445, a Hadya Princess who played a significant role in the administrative, and diplomatic history of the Christian kingdom even after the death of her husband. According to Taddesse Tamrat Illiné was “politically formidable, and accomplished in everything.”⁵⁹ It is well documented that Hadya was one of the strong medieval kingdoms in southern Ethiopia whose independence culminated when it was conquered by Amdä Şeyon in 1316/17. In addition to queen Illiné, the period of Zär'a Ya-qob was remarkable in that it involved prominent female figures who had exerted great influence both in the center and in the provinces. According to R. Pankhurst, Zär'a Ya-qob's daughters, Mädhin Zämäda and Birhan Zämäda were active in the center while nine other women were appointed in Tigray, Angot, Bägémdär, Amhara, Damot, Gedom, Grañ, and Ifat as governors.⁶⁰ Marriage alliance as a mechanism of consolidating power was also evident in the medieval southern kingdoms of Enarya, and Walita. There were instances of political marriages between the rulers of Enarya, a medieval Gibé Oromo state, and royal women of Käffa, and Walita rulers married royal women of Arusi, Jimma, Hadya, and Kullo.⁶¹

During the *Zämänä Masifent*, 1769-1855, the Wära Seh Mäsfinate, a Yajju Oromo ruling family, also employed political marriage as an important instrument for defending power.

During this time, the ruling families of Lasta, Tigray, Simén, Bägémdär, and Gojjam were tied to one another in marriage. Regarding this issue Shiferaw Bekele, a specialist on the history of the Wära Seh Mäsfinate, said; “There was no ruling house not related to the Wära Seh rulers of Yäju.” According to Shiferaw, the ruling houses of the major political units in Ethiopia during the period of the *Zāmānā Masifent*- Bägémdär, Gojjam, Wällo, Tigray, Simen, and Lasta- were interrelated either by blood or marriage.⁶²

After the end of the era of the princes, *Ras* Ali II and his mother Itegé Mänän, member of the Mamädoč family of Wära Himäno and Wällo, gave their daughter, Princess Täwabäč Ali, to Kasa Hailu of Qwara, the later Emperor Tewodros II (r. 1855-1868), so as to ensure the allegiance of the powerful Kasa.⁶³ During the reign of four successive kings of Ethiopia who came to the throne after Tewodros II - Emperors Täklä Giyorgis, Yohannis IV, Menilek II, and Hailä Sellassie I, political marriage continued to be seen as an essential tool for ensuring loyalty. In those days, the ruling families of Gondär, Šäwa, Wällo, Gojjam, and Tigray concluded political marriages to achieve either of the objectives stated earlier.⁶⁴ But the one made by Empress Mentewab was unique in that, as we shall see below, the tradition started in earnest during her time; it was effective, done timely, and changed the ethnic composition of the so-called Solomonic ruling family.⁶⁵

After the death of Emperor Bäkaffa, Mentewab begot three daughters from *Grazmač* Iyasu, the one whom the people of Gondär called *Melmel* Iyasu (Iyasu the Kept). This was neither Iyasu I / the Great/ nor Iyasu II, but was the nephew of Emperor Bäkaffa. That was why the people scoffed him by saying *Melmel* Iyasu. Aster was the eldest. Next came Alṭaş and the youngest was Wälättä Israel.⁶⁶ Though the people expressed their resentment that way, for Mentewab, their coming was more a blessing than a curse. While her marriage to Emperor Bäkaffa was the result of a sudden encounter, the marriages that Mentewab had arranged were all calculated. The outstanding Empress made a political capital out of her social ability to further tighten the screws of political influence.

During the time of Iyasu II, Itegé Mentewab was *de facto* ruler of Ethiopia. But following the death of Iyasu II, she faced the first serious opposition from Wabit, a Yäjjū Oromo and wife of Emperor Iyasu II, who at that time was a widow. Emperor Iyo’as (r. 1755-’69), on his part showed favor for his mother, Wabit, and began to push his grandmother, Mentewab, into the sidelines of the political game. Some said that Iyo’as told Mentewab that the turn was for him and for his mother.⁶⁷ It was at this crucial moment, therefore, that Mentewab arranged, in haste, one of the most dynamic and phenomenal political marriages ever concluded in the history of Ethiopia.

Though *Däjjazmač* Michael Schul rebelled against Iyasu II and his co-ruler and Regent Empress Mentewab around 1747, the latter managed to suppress it soon and Michael Schul showed heart-felt fidelity to them. Subsequently he earned fame and favor for himself by paying tribute on time and by giving lavish gifts to Iyasu II and Empress Mentewab and even to other influential members of the royal court at Gondar.⁶⁸

For the brilliant Mentewab, this was not enough to secure *Däjjazmač* Michael Schul’s loyalty, who by that time was the strongest of all the regional lords found in the country. Thus, she made a quick decision. She proposed a marriage alliance with Michael Schul which the latter pleasantly accepted. And on September 2, 1755, Alṭaş, her second daughter by *Grazmač* Iyasu, was given to Wäldä Hawaryat, son of Michael Schul, as his wife with a lavish dowry.⁶⁹ By doing so, Empress Mentewab won the loyalty and support of the strong Michael Schul, a circumstance that apparently led to the apprehension of Emperor Iyo’as and his mother,

Wabit. So, relations between the two families were further cemented and the influence of Mentewab continued to be unchallenged for the time.

Nevertheless, if what some writers have said is to be believed, the marriage between Alṭaš and Wäldä Hawaryat demolished one crucial aspect of the long existing marriage culture of the peoples of northern Ethiopia.⁷⁰ According to the marriage culture of the Amhara and Tigrean peoples, it has been strongly forbidden to conclude marriages between families who were related up to seven generations. The reason for this is that, people said, if we pour six cups of water into a cup of milk of the same size, it would not totally eliminate its color. But if we add one more cup of water, it would totally eliminate the color of the milk. So does the blood of the two that agree to be united in marriage.

In the part of this paper that deals with the genealogy of Mentewab, we have noted that she claimed descent from Robel, a noble man from Tigray, whose mother is said to have been of Portuguese ancestry. And some sources tell us that Michael Schul who later became strong during the final years of the Gondärine period, was fifth in lineal descent from this Robel.⁷¹ So did Mentewab's genealogy. Thus Alṭaš and Wäldä Hawaryat were united in marriage probably after six generations from Robel. Currently, marriage after six generation is becoming a norm and is becoming tolerable, if not, acceptable. Regarding this we heard the elderly people saying; ስምዖን ሲያረጅ በጋብቻ ይታደሳል literally means when blood relation advances in years, it would be repaired by marriage.⁷² The same thing happened to the families of Mentewab and Michael Schul. But, given the conservative nature of the marriage culture of the time, had it not been either for political reason or ignorance, they would not have concluded the marriage between the two families. Be that as it may, this union further increased the influence and confidence of Empress Mentewab in the politics of Gondär. This was, indeed, her main objective.

The second instrument with which the Empress Mentewab bolstered her sway was princess Aster, her eldest daughter by *Grazmač* Iyasu. Aster was given to three strong lords at different times. In 1755, she was given to *Däjjazmač* Näčo, a powerful man, and one-time governor of the province of Bägémder. After his death, she married *Däjjazmač* Yä Maryam Bariaw, who, according to Bruce, was the strongest of all the military leaders of the time, and governor of Lasta and Bägémder from 1764-'68. On January 6, 1769, he died at the battle of Čačaho, an area located between the present day north Wällo and south Gondär Zones. On his death she married the then *Ras Bitwädäd*, Michael Schul, who after strangling Mentewab's grandson, Emperor Iyo'as, on May 14, 1769, became the king maker until 1771.⁷³ These men whom Aster married at different times played crucial roles in maintaining peace and order in the kingdom. Mentewab would not possibly secure the loyalty of Tigray, Lasta, and Bägémder without having concluded such political marriages with the families of such influential regional lords.

Princess Wälättä Israel was the third of her political dowry with which she further strengthened her influence. Empress Mentewab knew that the province of Gojjam was the granary of her kingdom. Therefore, around 1755, Wälättä Israel, was given in marriage to *Däjjazmač* Yosädéq, another powerful man and governor of the rich province of Gojjam. In addition to its political purpose, the marriage between Wälättä Israel and *Däjjazmač* Yosädéq had far reaching repercussions. First, it gave birth to the later *Ras* Hailu I, which in turn gave birth to the local ruling family of Gojjam. From *Ras* Hailu I to Adal Täsäma, later Nigus (king) Täklä Haymanot, this ruling family saw strong and weak men who played significant roles in the administrative and military history of the country.⁷⁴ The important thing was, however, the coming of Gojjam under the direct control of Empress Mentewab through

Wälättä Israel. These were the major effective political marriages arranged by Empress Mentewab which helped her dominate the affairs of the government during the reigns of Iyasu II and Iyo'as. One thing that we need not forget is that it was not only the desire and skill of Mentewab that made these marriage arrangements successful, but, as we repeatedly noted, also the beauty that her daughters inherited from Mentewab that incited the lust of their would be husbands who took them as wives at first sight, as was the case with Emperor Bäkaffa.

Nevertheless, not all marriages arranged by Empress Mentewab were helpful in making her dreams come true. It happened that the first wife of Emperor Iyasu II was an Amhara Princess. Her name is not mentioned in the literature, but had developed a black jealousy towards the growing power of Empress Mentewab.⁷⁵ On learning that she sought to remove her by virtue of being the consort of Emperor Iyasu II, and before things got worse, Mentewab immediately nipped the marriage between them in the bud. She ordered Iyasu II to divorce her and take Wabit, an Oromo who was later baptized as Bersabeh, as his wife.⁷⁶ However, Wabit herself was not a foolish consort of Iyasu II. Because of Iyasu's love and respect for his mother, Empress Mentewab, Wabit kept silent looking and praying for opportunities to challenge Mentewab's influence.⁷⁷ Presumably, Mentewab was not aware of the danger planted within the backyard of her own house. But as Judea was waiting for the appropriate time to hand over Christ Jesus to the Romans,⁷⁸ Wabit was digging the grave of Empress Mentewab.

During the Gondärine period (1632-1769), court intrigues and poisoning were common among the ruling families. When *Grazmač* Iyasu died, people rumored that he was pushed into the valley by Iyasu II, who is believed to have had hidden resentment of his relation with his mother, Empress Mentewab, the wife of his father, Emperor Bäkaffa. When Iyasu II suddenly passed away in 1755, people rumored that he was poisoned by the sister of *Grazmač* Iyasu.⁷⁹ Be that as it may, the death of Iyasu II in 1755 was seen, by Wabit, as a God sent opportunity to remove Mentewab from the political game. She sought to dominate the government by being Queen Mother to her son, Emperor Iyo'as (r.1755-'69) as Mentewab had done during the reign of her son, Iyasu II, supported by her close relatives. Emperor Iyo'as, on his part, is said to have shown sympathy to the plans of his mother, Wabit, at the expense of his grandmother, Empress Mentewab, who by that time was older than Wabit. Iyo'as is said to have scoffed at his grandmother owing to her old age and told her that her time was ended and that she should leave the stage for his mother, Wabit.⁸⁰ This sparked off a long period of rivalry between the followers of Mentewab, collectively known as the Qwaraññoč, and Wabit, the Touläma Yäjjau Oromos.

Like what Mentewab had done after the death of her husband, Emperor Bäkaffa, Wabit began to summon her brothers and close relatives into the court and began to give key posts both in the center and in the provinces. Worst of all, Oromiffa became the lingua franca of the royal court at Gondar which for the Qwaraññoč and the Christian Amharas became a bitter pill to swallow and was considered a shame and a humiliation.⁸¹ As a result, the last part of the Gondärine period saw one of the deadliest conflicts and civil wars between the two sides before the country finally plunged into the era of the princes which *per se* resulted in unprecedented destruction of material and human life.

It is, therefore, in this context that we say the union between Iyasu II and Wabit, later baptized as Bersabeh, was a miscalculation and a major mistake done by Empress Mentewab that deterred her from achieving her objective. First, her power began to be challenged and secondly it brought the Oromos into the court of Gondär which the people considered to be a shame and a humiliation. Besides, it set the stage for serious conflicts and deadly civil wars

that greatly disrupted the peace and order of the country. Moreover, the rivalry between the Qwaraññoč and the Yäjju Oromos paved the way for the period of the *Zāmānaä Masifent* that greatly damaged the country.

Nevertheless, the union between Iyasu II and Wabit had one important outcome. Though Mentewab was totally unaware of the long-term repercussion of the union, and even if it was considered to be a shame and a humiliation by the Christian Amhara community, it greatly changed the social composition of the power elites of Gondär. For the first time in the history of Ethiopia the Cushitic Oromos were integrated into the ruling family of the so-called Solomonic dynasty, the real engineer of it, be it knowingly or unknowingly, being the shrewd Empress Mentewab.⁸²

Besides her beauty on which she stepped to power; and her political skills with which she exercised much influence in the workings of the government, the social concern that Mentewab had given also helped her win the acceptance of the people and the clergy. As was the tradition with her predecessors, she had built her own palace and several churches and monasteries after her names. Empress Mentewab was also known for the magnanimous land grants and endowments she made to a number of churches found in Gojjam, Gondär Tigray, and the environs of Lake Ṭana.

The most impressive of all the churches built under the auspices of Empress Mentewab is the church of Däbrä Ṣhay Quisquam found in Gondar. Its construction began in 1733 and was completed in 1743. This church is marked by stately grandeur and lavishness and received, together with Narga Sellasie, the most generous land grants and endowments ever made in Ethiopia by Empress Mentewab, and where her corpus is deposited. Narga Sellasie, which is found in one of the islets of Lake Ṭana, is another important Christian center constructed under the patronage of Empress Mentewab.⁸³ These actions of the Empress also enhanced her power and prestige. Despite her *Qibat* position, which for the followers of the *Tāwahido* doctrine was tantamount to Catholicism, Empress Mentewab demonstrated herself as the champion of Christianity by building several churches and monasteries. Laconically put, the success of Empress Mentewab was the result of her beauty, blood relations, personal intelligence, political marriages, and concern for society.

Conclusion

Ethiopia is one of the few places in the world wherein ancient culture and civilization thrived. In its long history, however, women have long been pushed into the sidelines of the country's entire affair. But things were not totally desperate in this regard. Though the challenges facing patriarchy have been /are/ minimal, there were few prominent female figures that played important roles in the diplomatic, administrative, and social history of the country. One of these influential female figures who dominated the social and political developments of the last fifty years of the Gondärine period (1632-1769) was Empress Mentewab.

In this paper an attempt has been made to examine the genealogy and the success of Empress Mentewab. The genealogy of Empress Mentewab is interesting in that it gives her a Portuguese ancestry. In an effort to analyze this intriguing issue, I have found two things to be very useful. One is that, if we take 1543 and c. 1706, battle of Woina Dägä and the birth of Mentewab respectively, as points of reference, there were one hundred and sixty and more years of intermarriage between the remnants of the Portuguese soldiers and artisans about whom we have no information about their Portuguese wives and the Abyssinians. Therefore, Mentewab might have been a byproduct of this intermarriage. Besides, Gorgora near Lake Ṭana and Fremona near Adwa and Axum were the two important centers of Portuguese

settlement. Gorgora is not far from Qwara, Mentewab's birth place. And Robel, whose mother was believed to have been a Portuguese, was from Tigray, probably from Adwa within which town was found Fremona, from whom writers have derived Mentewab's genealogy. If the above account is to be believed, she had also a Tigre blood line through Robel's father.

The second interesting story which helps us analyze Mentewab's genealogy was her complexion, which according to Bruce, as we have noted in the discussion above, was whiter than most Portuguese. From this, even if we may not be pretty certain, we can say that Empress Mentewab might have had Portuguese blood.

As noted in the preceding parts of this article, the success of Mentewab was a function of four things. The first one is what nature bestowed upon her, i.e., her beauty. This seems unusual for we do not find beauty and success always to be a happy blend. When it comes to Mentewab, however, it was the real avenue, as indicated earlier, that took her into success. This beauty that many writers have eulogized much moved the affection of Emperor Bäkaffa and melted his heart, thus enabling her to be the consort of one of the strongest kings of the Gondarine period. Nevertheless, Mentewab was very much aware of the fact that mere beauty means nothing if not matched with personal skills which were, indeed, found in good harmony in her personality. Three things have clearly shown us her bravery as one having the necessary political skills and understanding which helped her manipulate political developments. So as to prevent the usual havoc that mostly broke out following the death of a reigning monarch, she managed to keep the death of her husband, Bäkaffa, a secret. In the mean time she summoned her close relatives from Qwara and gave them important posts so that revolts could possibly be quickly suppressed. This was not sufficient to further tighten the screws of political control. As a result she concluded effective political marriage alliances with the houses of the most influential lords of Bägemder, Gojjam, Wällo (Yäjjju Oromo) and Tigre. These political marriages, except the one concluded with the Yäjjju Oromos, further bolstered the influence of Mentewab. Though the marriage between Iyasu II, her son, and Wabit, an Oromo, did not initially deter Mentewab from achieving her objective, after the death of Iyasu II, it resulted in a long period of rivalry and war between the Qwaräññoč and the Yäjjju Oromos that claimed the lives of many people. One important outcome of this marriage was, however, that for the first time in the history of Ethiopia the Oromos were integrated into the families of the country's power elites. The third factor that sustained the influence of Empress Mentewab for such a long period of time was her concern for the society whom she governed. As was the tradition before her, Mentewab won the acceptance of the clergy and the people by not building palaces after her name, but by constructing churches that received generous gifts and land grants as *guilts* from her. Worth mentioning are Däbrä Şehay Quisquam in Gondar and Narga Sellassie in Lake Ṭana.

To sum up, there were four things at the root of Mentewab's success – Beauty, blood relations, political marriages and concern for society.

Notes

¹Male superiority or patriarchy has been (still is) the social norm not only in Ethiopia but also in Tropical Africa. This is eloquently described in Dennis Paulme (ed.), *Women of Tropical Africa* (U S A: University of California Press, 1963), see the prefix.

²Queen Illiné for example was politically active during the reigns of Emperors Zär'a Ya-qob (r. 1434-68), Bā'edā Mariam (r. 1468-78), Eskindir (r. 1478-94), and Na'od (1494-1508): Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270-1527* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), PP. 288-89. "Emperor Gälawdewos ruled from 1540 to 1559. During his immaturity, his mother, Säblä Wongél assisted him as regent in the administration of the kingdom;" Täklä Şadiq Mäkuria, *A History of Ethiopia from Aşé Lebnä Dengil to Aşé Tewodros II* (Addis Ababa, 2000 E.C.), Amharic Version, P. 59. "Iyasu reigned for 24 years and the actual work of government was carried out by his mother, the Empress...Mentewab;" Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), P. 121. "The two women at Menilek's side, ...and Empress Taitu, were powerful personalities who shared a sense of purpose in politics;" Heran Sereke-Brhan, "Like Adding Water to Milk": Marriage and Politics in Nineteenth Century Ethiopia," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol., 38, No. 1 (2005), P.68.

³"In 1512, Matthew was sent to Portugal by his step-grandmother, the regent during his minority, Eläni (Helena);" F. Alvarez, *The Prester John of the Indies: A True Relation of the lands of the Prester John, Being the narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Ethiopia in 1520*, ed. C.F.Beckingham and G.W.B.Huntingford, Vol., I (Cambridge University Press, 1958), P. 4.

⁴Paul B., Henze, *Layers of Time: A History of Ethiopia* (London: Hurst and Company, 2000), P.88. See also Täklä Şadiq Mäkuria,..., P. 59.

⁵"Iyasu accepted the fact that his mother was the real ruler of the country and said "make my mother reign, crown her with my crown because without her my reign cannot go on," Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), P. 123.

⁶Regarding the marriage between Taitu and Menilek, see Heran above, P. 70. "The move from Entotto to Addis Ababa was effected by Empress Taitu;" Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2002), P. 68. Regarding Taitu's heroism see Täklä Şadiq Mäkuria, *Aşé Menilek and the Unity of Ethiopia*, Amharic Version (Addis Ababa: Kuraz Publishing Agency, 1983), P. 285.

⁷See for example J. Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile in the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772, and 1773*, Vol., II (London: Edinburgh, 1813), P. 661.

⁸Regarding the marriage between Altaş and Wäldä Hawaryat see Richard Pankhurst, "An 18th Century Dynastic Marriage Contract Between Empress Mentewab and Ras Mika'el Sehul of Tigray," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol., XLII, Part 3 (University of London, 1979), PP. 48-53. Also in Pankhurst, *The Royal Chronicles...*, PP.133-134.see also Bruce, PP. 658-59, 661, 669, and 699. The marriage between Aster and Mika'el Sehul is documented in Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians: an Introduction to Country and People* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), P. 82.

⁹Encyclopedia Aethiopica, Vol., I, (Harrasowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 2003), P. 534. See also Stanislaw Chojnacki, "Mentewab, c. 1706-1773 Orthodox Ethiopia" *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* (New York, 1997), P. 1.

¹⁰Bruce, *Travels...*, 661. See also Henze, *Layers of Time...*, P. 104, Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians...*, P. 81.

¹¹Sergew Hable Sellassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270* (Addis Ababa, United Printers, 1972), PP. 239-292.

¹²F. Alvarez, *The Prester John of the Indies: A True Relation of the lands of the Prester John, Being the narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Ethiopia in 1520*, ed. C.F. Beckingham and G.W.B. Huntingford, Vol., I (Cambridge University Press, 1958), P. 1.

¹³*Ibid.*, PP. 1-5.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, P.4. See also Henze, *Layers of Time...*, P. 86.

¹⁵Täklä Şadiq Mäkuria, *A History of Ethiopia from Aşé Lebnä Dengil to Aşé Tewodros II* (Addis Ababa, 2000 E.C.), Amharic Version, PP. 46-47.

¹⁶Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians...*, P. 74. See also Henze, *Layers of Time...*, P. 86.

¹⁷Täklä Şadiq Mäkuria, ..., P.63.

¹⁸“Had the successors of Paiz confined themselves to work on his lines, there seems to be no doubt that the whole nation would have embraced the Roman faith”, Henze, *Layers of Time...*, PP. 95-98.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, P. 96.

²⁰Tellez, *The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia*, Vol., II, (London, 1710), P. 131.

²¹R.E. Chessman, *Lake Tana and the Blue Nile: An Abyssinian Quest* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1936), P. 191.

²²Bruce, *Travels...*, 661. See also Castanhoso, *The Portuguese Expedition to Abyssinia in 1541-43*, a translation by R.S. Whiteway (Germany: Lessing-Druckerei-Wiesbaden, 1967), P. 4, Sir E. A. Wallis Budge, Kt., *A History of Ethiopia: Nubia and Abyssinia*, Vol., 2 (London, 1928), PP. 443-447.

²³Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270-1527* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), PP. 230-31.

²⁴Täklä Şadiq Mäkuria, *Aşé Yohannis and the Unity of Ethiopia*, Amharic Version (Addis Ababa: Kuraz Publishing Agency, 1982), PP. 197-199. See also Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2002), P. 48.

²⁵“Qibat was now firmly entrenched, and as we will see, it enjoyed strong support from Mentewab....the Qwarāññoc were not, however, all in all Qibat,” Donald Crummy, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia: from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Ethiopia: Addis Ababa University Press, 2000), P. 104. See also “Gondar Sights: The City and its Surroundings” *Ethiopian Cultural Heritage Project North Gondar Culture and Tourism Bureau*, P.20, says; “Fasil favored Tāwahido, Yohannis Şadiqu inclined to Qibat, Bākaffa was Tāwahido while his wife the Empress Mentewab was Qibat.”

²⁶Bruce, *Travels...*, Vol., II, PP.616-20. See also Täklä Şadiq Mäkuria, *A History of Ethiopia from Aşé Lebnä Dengil to Aşé Tewodros II* (Addis Ababa, 2000 E.C.), Amharic Version, PP. 256-60.

²⁷Informant, Märi Geta Fantahun Alebachew. See also La Verle Berry, “Coalition Politics and the Royal Office in Mid 18th Century Gondar,” *Proceedings of the X International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol., X (1994), P.223 says; “As the Kwara party under Mentewab was favorably positioned to control the succession and to rebuild Qibat power.....” Also in Bruce, *Travels...*, Vol., II, P.661 says; “...that she had a warm attachment to the Catholic religion in her heart.” See also Donald Crummy, *Land and Society...*, P. 104, and Täklä Şadiq Mäkuria, *A History of Ethiopia from Aşé Lebnä Dengil to Aşé Tewodros II* (Addis Ababa, 2000 E.C.), Amharic Version, PP. 258-59.

²⁸Henry Salt, *A Voyage to Abyssinia and Travels into the Interior of the Country* (Frank Cass and CO. LTD, 1967), P. 483.

²⁹Henze, *Layers of Time...*, P. 105.

³⁰Donald Crummy, *Land and Society...*, P. 105. It says; “As we have seen, Wälättä Petros, the saint to whom the monastery was dedicated, had been active as an anti-catholic during the

reign of Suseneyos. Mentewab cultivated an association with this other heroic woman,” i.e., by granting *gult*.

³¹Getu Ambaye, “A short History of the Monastery of Wälättä Petros (1901-1974), B.A. thesis in History (Addis Ababa University, 1999), PP. 15, 16, 24.

³²Bruce, *Travels...*, Vol., II, P. 661. See also Budge, Kt., *A History of Ethiopia: Nubia and Abyssinia*, Vol., 2 (London, 1928), P. 448.

³³Informant, *Ato Tazebew Tamesgen* who himself is a Zägéan and an old friend of mine whose complexion is as white as the *Färänjés* (whites).

³⁴R.E. Chessman, *Lake Tana and the Blue Nile: An Abyssinian Quest* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1936), P. 191. He says; “I have noticed that the faces of some women in Däbrä Tabor bear a resemblance to Portuguese features....”

³⁵J. Spencer Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia* (London, Frank Cass and Company Ltd., 1965), P. 98 says; “After the defeat of Grañ, the remnants of the Portuguese had settled down and intermarried with Abyssinians and their numbers had been augmented by Jesuit priests sent to convert Abyssinia to Catholicism.”

³⁶Henze, *Layers of Time...*, P. 104. He says; “The country needed respite and finally Bäkäffasaved the country from drifting into anarchy...” Also in Bruce, *Travels...*, Vol., II, P. 596, Bäkäffa as one whom the Oromos referred him as the inexorable, and tells us as the name itself was given by the Oromos.

³⁷Budge, Kt., *A History of Ethiopia: Nubia and Abyssinia*, Vol., 2 (London, 1928), P. 443. See also in Donald Crummy, *Land and Society...*, P. 99.

³⁸Bruce, *Travels...*, Vol., II, PP. 598-99. Budge, Kt., *A History of Ethiopia: ...*, PP. 445-447. Also in “Gondar Sights: The City and its Surroundings” *Ethiopian Cultural Heritage Project North Gondar Culture and Tourism Bureau*, P.13, R.E. Chessman, *Lake Tana and the Blue Nile: An Abyssinian Quest* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1936), P. 384, Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians...*, P. 81.

³⁹Donald Crummy, *Land and Society...*, P. 95.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, P. 94. Also in Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians...*, P. 81, Bruce, *Travels...*, Vol., II, PP. 598-99.

⁴¹This is my own suggestion for such names are common in my birth place, Gondar, and is relatively the correct meaning.

⁴²Bruce, *Travels...*, Vol., II, PP. 598-99.

⁴³Täklä Şadiq Mäkuria, *Aşé Tewodros and the Unity of Ethiopia*, Amharic Version (Addis Ababa: Kuraz Publishing Agency, 1981), P. 42. Stanislaw Chojnacki, “Mentewab, c. 1706-1773 Orthodox Ethiopia” *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* (New York, 1997), P. 1.

⁴⁴Bruce, *Travels...*, Vol., II, P. 661.

⁴⁵Budge, Kt., *A History of Ethiopia: ...*, PP. 445-447.

⁴⁶Donald Crummy, *Land and Society...*, P. 95.

⁴⁷Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), P. 122.

⁴⁸Chessman, *Lake Tana and the Blue Nile: An Abyssinian Quest* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1936), P. 384.

⁴⁹Henze, *Layers of Time...*, P. 104.

⁵⁰Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians...*, P. 81.

⁵¹Henry Salt, *A Voyage to Abyssinia and Travels into the Interior of the Country* (Frank Cass and CO. LTD, 1967), P. 332.

⁵²Täklä Şadiq Mäkuria, *Aşé Tewodros and the Unity of Ethiopia*, Amharic Version (Addis Ababa: Kuraz Publishing Agency, 1981), P. 36.

⁵³Helen Pankhurst, “Women the Peasantry, and the State in Ethiopia: A Study from Menz”, PhD thesis (University of Edinburgh, 1990), P. 155.

⁵⁴Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), P. 121.

⁵⁵Donald Crummy, *Land and Society...*, PP. 95-98. Bruce, *Travels...*, Vol., II, P. 610. See also in Michel Perret, "Les Partis, A. La Cour, de Gondar, en 1769," *Proceedings of the 18th Int. Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Addis Ababa, 1988/89), P. 130.

⁵⁶Bruce, *Travels...*, Vol., II, PP. 607-611.

⁵⁷Täklä Şadiq Mäkuria, *Aşé Tewodros and the Unity of Ethiopia*, Amharic Version (Addis Ababa: Kuraz Publishing Agency, 1981), PP. 36-38. Bruce, *Travels...*, Vol., II, P. 607.

⁵⁸Heran Sereke-Brhan, "Building Bridges, Drying Bad Blood: Elite Marriages, Politics and Ethnicity in 19th and 20th Centuries Imperial Ethiopia" *Proceedings of the XV Int. Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Hamburge, 2003), P. 266.

⁵⁹Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270-1527* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), PP. 288-289.

⁶⁰Richard Pankhurst, "The Role of Women in Ethiopian Economic, Social and Cultural Life," *Proceedings of the first Int. Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (1990), PP. 345-346.

⁶¹Jacques Bureau, "The Tigre Chronicle of Wollaita; A Pattern of Kingship," *Proceedings of the first National Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Addis Ababa, April 11-12, 1990), PP. 51, 52, and 59. Also in Heran Sereke-Brhan, "Building Bridges, Drying Bad Blood: ..." *Proceedings of the XV Int. Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Hamburg, 2003), P. 268.

⁶²Shiferaw Bekele, "Reflections on the Power Elite of the Wära She Mäsfenate, 1786-1853," *Annales D'Ethiopie*, Vol., XV (1990), PP. 162-63

⁶³Bahru, A Histoty of Modern Ethiopia...., P. 28 says; "Kasa's growing prominence in Qwara attracted the attention of the Yajju lords. In a desire to tame him, they restored to diplomacy. Qwara, which Kasa had already come to control by dint of military force, was formally given to him, and the daughter of Ras Ali, Tawabach, was also given to him in marriage."

⁶⁴Heran Sereke-Brhan, "Like Adding Water to Milk": Marriage and Politics in Nineteenth Century Ethiopia," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol.,38, No. 1 (2005), P.59.

⁶⁵Bruce, *Travels...*, Vol., II, PP. 658-59.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, P. 661. Donald Crummy, *Land and Society...*, P. 96.

⁶⁷Täklä Şadiq Mäkuria, *A History of Ethiopia from Aşé Lebnä Dengil to Aşé Tewodros II* (Addis Ababa, 2000 E.C.), Amharic Version, PP. 271-74. Bruce, *Travels...*, Vol., II, P.665.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, P. 651-656.

⁶⁹Pankhurst, "An 18th Century Dynastic Marriage Contract Between Empress Mentewab and Ras Mika'el Sehul of Tigray," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol., XLII, Part 3 (University of London, 1979), PP. 48-53.

⁷⁰Castanhoso, *The Portuguese Expedition to Abyssinia in 1541-43*, a translation by R.S. Whiteway (Germany: Lessing-Druckerei-Wiesbaden, 1967), P. 4.

⁷¹*Ibid.*

⁷²I and my wife, for example, are from Gondär and I am six in lineal descent from my wife and she is five from me. But when I told to my grandfather that I decided to marry her, he counted the genealogy and said, I understood he was not that much happy, the elderly said "ዝምድና ሲያረጅ በጋብቻ ይታደሳል" literally means when blood relation advanced in years, it would be repaired by marriage, and blessed me as a sign of his will.

⁷³Bruce, *Travels...*, Vol., II, PP. 683-706.

⁷⁴Donald Crummy, *Land and Society...*, P. 99. See the chart showing the genealogy of Mentewab. See also Täklä Şadiq Mäkuria, *Aşé Tewodros and the Unity of Ethiopia*, Amharic Version (Addis Ababa: Kuraz Publishing Agency, 1981), P. 38.

⁷⁵Bruce, *Travels...*, Vol., II, PP. 658-59.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*

⁷⁷Täklä Şadiq Mäkuria, *A History of Ethiopia from Aşé Lebnä Dengil to Aşé Tewodros II* (Addis Ababa, 2000 E.C.), Amharic Version, PP. 271-74.

⁷⁸The Book of Luke Chapter 22: Nos. 1-6, in the New King James Bible (Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1980).

⁷⁹Täklä Şadiq Mäkuria, *A History of Ethiopia from Aşé Lebnä Dengil to Aşé Tewodros II* (Addis Ababa, 2000 E.C.), Amharic Version, PP. 269-70.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, PP. 271-74.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, P. 272. See also Bruce, *Travels...*, Vol., II, PP. 665-69.

⁸²Bruce, *Travels...*, Vol., II, PP. 658-59.

⁸³Donald Crummy, *Land and Society...*, PP. 105-106.

Bibliography

I. Travel Accounts

- Alvarez, F. *The Prester John of the Indies: A True Relation of the lands of the Prester John, Being the narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Ethiopia in 1520*. Edited by C.F.Beckingham and G.W.B. Huntingford, Vol., I, Cambridge University Press, 1958.
- Bruce, J. *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile in the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772, and 1773*, Vol., II, London: Edinburgh, 1813.
- Budge, Sir E. A. Wallis. *A History of Ethiopia: Nubia and Abyssinia*. Vol., 2, London, 1928.
- Chessman, R.E. *Lake Tana and the Blue Nile: An Abyssinian Quest*. London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1936.
- Salt, Henry. *A Voyage to Abyssinia and Travels into the Interior of the Country*. Frank Cass and CO. LTD, 1967.
- Tellez. *The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia*. Vol., II, London, 1710.

II. Secondary Sources

- Bahru Zewde. *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991*. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2002.
- Berry, La Verle. "Coalition Politics and the Royal Office in Mid 18th Century Gondar," *Proceedings of the X International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol., X, 1994.
- Bureau, Jacques. "The Tigre Chronicle of Wollaita; A Pattern of Kingship," *Proceedings of the first National Conference of Ethiopian Studies*. Addis Ababa, April 11-12, 1990.
- Castanhoso. *The Portuguese Expedition to Abyssinia in 1541-43*. A translation by R.S. Whiteway, Germany: Lessing-Druckerei-Wiesbaden, 1967.
- Chojnacki, Stanislaw. "Mentewab, c. 1706-1773 Orthodox Ethiopia." *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*. New York, 1997.
- Crummy, Donald. *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia: from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century*. Ethiopia: Addis Ababa University Press, 2000.
- Encyclopedia Aethiopica, Vol., I, Harrasowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 2003.

- Ethiopian Cultural Heritage Project; North Gondar Culture and Tourism Bureau. Gondar Sights: The City and its Surroundings (the year of publication is not indicated).
- Getu Ambaye, "A short History of the Monastery of Wälättä Petros (1901-1974), B.A. thesis in History, Addis Ababa University, 1999.
- Helen, Pankhurst. "Women the Peasantry, and the State in Ethiopia: A Study from Menz", PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1990.
- Henze, Paul B. *Layers of Time: A History of Ethiopia*. London: Hurst and Company, 2000.
- Heran Sereke-Brhan. "Building Bridges, Drying Bad Blood: Elite Marriages, Politics and Ethnicity in 19th and 20th Centuries Imperial Ethiopia." *Proceedings of the XV International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*. Hamburg, 2003.
- _____. "Like Adding Water to Milk": Marriage and Politics in Nineteenth Century Ethiopia." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, V., 38, No. 1, 2005.
- Holly Bible. The Book of Luke Chapter 22: Nos. 1-6, in the New King James Bible. Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1980.
- Pankhurst, R. "An 18th Ceury Dynastic Marriage Contract Between Empress Mentewab and Ras Mika'el Sehul of Tigray," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol., XLII, Part 3, University of London, 1979.
- _____. *The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles*. London: Oxford University Press, 1967.
- _____. "The Role of Women in Ethiopian Economic, Social and Cultural Life," *Proceedings of the first International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*. Addis Ababa, April 11-12, 1990.
- Paulme, Dennis (ed.). *Women of Tropical Africa*. U S A: University of California Press, 1963.
- Perret, Michel. "Les Partis, A. La Cour, de Gondar, en 1769," *Proceedings of the 8th Int. Conference of Ethiopian Studies*. Addis Ababa, 1988/89.
- Sergew Hable Sellassie. *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270*. Addis Ababa: United Printers, 1972.
- Shiferaw Bekele, "Reflections on the Power Elite of the Wära She Mäsfenate, 1786-1853," *Annales D'Ethiopie*, Vol., XV, 1990.
- Tadesse Tamrat. *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270-1527*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972.

Trimingham, J. S. *Islam in Ethiopia*. London, Frank Cass and Company Ltd., 1965.

Täklä Şadiq Mäkuria. *A History of Ethiopia from Aşé Lebnä Dengil to Aşé Tewodros II*.

(Amharic Version) Addis Ababa, 2000 E.C.

_____. Mäkuria. *Aşé Menilek and the Unity of Ethiopia*. Amharic Version. Addis Ababa: Kuraz Publishing Agency, 1983.

_____. *Aşé Tewodros and the Unity of Ethiopia*. Amharic Version, Addis Ababa: Kuraz Publishing Agency, 1981.

_____. *Aşé Yohannis and the Unity of Ethiopia*. Amharic Version, Addis Ababa: Kuraz Publishing Agency, 1982.

Ullendorff. *The Ethiopians: an Introduction to Country and People*. London: Oxford University Press, 1960.

III. Informants

Ato Asres Nigussie. I and my wife, for example, are from Gondär and I am six in lineal descent from my wife and she is five from me. But when I told to my grandfather, *Ato Asres Nigussie*, that I decided to marry her, he counted the genealogy and said, I understood he was not that much happy, the elderly said “ዝጥድኛ ሲያረጅ በጋብቻ ይታደሳል” literally means when blood relation advances in years, it would be repaired by marriage, and blessed me as a sign of his will.

Ato Tazebew Temesgen. *Ato Tazebew Tamesgen* who himself is a Zägéan and an old friend of mine whose complexion is as white as the *Färänjés* (whites), once told me as there is a tradition that claims the Zägé peoples were descended from the Portuguese.

Märi Geta Fantahun Alebachew. Fantahun is one of my colleagues in Jigjiga University who has received Church education and is well versed in Ge'ez. Now he is an instructor in the department of Economics.