

Local Response to Italian Occupation in Yilmana Dénsa District (West Gojjam) and the Battles of Yizora and Yidibi (1937)*

Geremew Eskezia*

Abstract

During the Italian Occupation Period (1936-41), Yilmana Dénsa district was one of the most renowned centers of patriotic resistance in Gojjam. Italian authorities successively made Yilmana Dénsa a center of Vice Resident (1936-37), Resident (1937-38) and Commissionership (1939-41) mainly with the purpose of controlling the patriotic movement there. Nevertheless, they were confined only at Adét town and Däbrä Mäwi due to the intensification of patriotic resistance in the district and its surroundings. Among others, in 1937 the patriots of Yilmana Dénsa district defeated fascist Italian forces at the battles of Yizora and Yidibi. Afterwards, the patriots' resistance in the district continued right up to the independence of the country in 1941.

Key words: *fascist atrocities, patriotic resistance, banda (collaborator), askaris (colonial soldiers), Resident*

* This research paper is a modified version of a sub- section of my unpublished MA thesis entitled Geremew Eskezia, "A History of Yilmana Dénsa District (1901 – 1974)" (MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, Department of History, 2015).

* Ph. D Candidate, Bahr Dar University, Department of History; Email geremeweskezia@gmail.com

Introduction

Studies on the history of Ethiopian resistance to Italy's occupation mainly focus at the national level. In fact, few studies have also been made on the anti-fascist Italian occupation and the resistance movement at the provincial and district levels. However, although the patriots of Yelmana Dénša played a significant role in the resistance and final liberation of the country, it has not been thoroughly studied so far. Studying the resistance movement at the local level is presumably important to assess the roles played by ordinary patriots and their community members in the resistance movement. It will also fill some gaps in the existing literature. Therefore, the main objective of this research paper is to investigate the anti-fascist patriotic resistance in Yilmana Dénša district (West Gojjam).

- What caused the patriots of Yelmana Densa district to resist fascist forces?
- What were their strengths and weaknesses?
- How successful were they in achieving their goals?
- What was their contribution for the final liberation of the country and the restoration of Ethiopia's national pride?

The paper will answer these major questions through analyzing a range of sources including secondary materials, archival, oral and published and unpublished primary sources. The paper emphasises the main causes that gave rise to the resistance in Yelmana Dénša and some of the major battle grounds. Italy had developed the ambition to colonize Ethiopia since the 1870s. However, the Ethiopian army led by Emperor Menilek II (r. 1889 – 1913) scored a resounding victory over the Italian colonial army at the battle of Adwa on March 1, 1896. With its defeat at Adwa Italy was forced to renounce its desire to colonize Ethiopia at least for the time being.¹

Nevertheless, the seizure of power by the Fascist party in 1922 in Rome revitalized Italy's longtime dream to take over Ethiopia.² Accordingly, starting from October 3, 1935 fascist Italian forces invaded Ethiopia from the north as well as the south. As it was the case in the past, the inexperienced and ill equipped Ethiopian armies under their traditional leaders tried their best to repulse the highly armed, more numerous and modern fascist Italian armies in both directions since October 1935. However, Italian military superiority and use of mustard gas led to the total destruction of Ethiopian armies and complete victory of the enemy in all war fronts.³ Hence, at the beginning of May 1936, fascist forces completed the invasion and declared that Ethiopia was a component part of the newly formed *Africa Orientale Italiana* (Italian East African Empire). The Italians occupied the country until 1941. However, they were mainly confined in and around urban centers because of the intensification of the patriotic resistance in the country.⁴

Like other Ethiopians, the inexperienced and ill equipped troops from Yelmana Dénša district fought the enemy on the Shiré front led by the contemporary district governor, *Däjjazmač*

¹Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, Revised Second Edition*, (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press. 2002), Pp. 74 – 77; Sven Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* (Addis Ababa: Kuraz Publishing Agency, 1976), pp. 399 – 404.

²Bahru, p. 151.

³Ibid, pp. 153 – 159.

⁴Bahru Zewde, pp. 151, 153, 176. ; Anthony Mockler, *Haile Sellasie's War: The Italian- Ethiopian War, 1935-1941*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 148.

Sibhatu Yigzaw (r. 1932 -36) who was under *Däjjazmač* (later, *Ras*) Mängäša Jämbaré (a sub-commander of *Ras* Imiru).⁵ On the war front, like the troops from other parts of the country, large number of *gultä gäzis* (local governors) of Yilmana Dénša and their followers lost their lives, and victory was almost entirely on side of fascist troops. In April 1936 the survivors reached Yilmana Dénša.⁶

Italian invaders came to Yelmana Dénša from the direction of Bahr Dar. In this regard, sources indicate that on May 3, 1936 Italian forces seized control of Bahr Dar and made it a center of administration for the surrounding region including Yilmana Dénša.⁷ By the middle of May, 1936 an Italian column led by a prominent local *banda* (collaborators) named *Qäññazmač* Bälay Mäšäša (the hereditary ruler of Qollälla) crossed Adét and proceeded to Moṭa to ultimately reach Däbrä Marqos . On the way, Italian troops ordered the local people to surrender their arms peacefully⁸. They also tried to persuade the local people that under Italian rule there would be no form of taxation and their main target was Emperor Haylä Sillase.⁹

However, those who had been to the war front from Yilmana Dénša like *Däjjazmač* Sibhatu Yigzaw, *Qäññazmač* Diräs Šifäraw and several of their followers retreated in to mount Adama, a part of Amädamit Mountain range. On their part, Italian authorities favoured lower ranked local chiefs like the *čhiqa šum* (local headmen) from the beginning and summoned them to Bahr Dar. Hence, the local people of Yelmana Dénša partly agitated by the *čhiqa šums* and partly due to the promised tax waiver by Italian forces started to isolate their own higher ranked local chiefs. Because of this, several high local chiefs like *Däjjazmač* Sibhatu of Yilmana Dénša and others from Méčha and Ačäfär districts were forced to surrender to the Italians at Bahr Dar.¹⁰

Anti-Fascist Italian Patriotic Resistance in Yilmana Dénša District: Major Causes

Informants indicate that some Italian forces were present in Adét town since July 1936. Initially, the Italians reinstated *Däjjazmač* Sibhatu as the *misläné* (governor) of Yilmana Dénša and ordered him to maintain law and order, to disarm the local people and to hand over the arms collected from the people to Italian authorities at Bahr Dar. The Italians also ordered

⁵ Imiru Haylä Sellasé (*Leul Ras*), *Kayähut Ina Kā Imastawsāw* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2001 E.C.), pp. 265 – 266; Bälay Mäkönnän, *Itégé Taytu Bā Däbrä Mäwi* (Addis Ababa: Tana Publishing Enterprise, 2003 E.C), p. 63. *Ras* Imiru was the governor of Gojjam province (r. 1932 – 36). In addition, the transliteration system of the Department of History of Bahr Dar University is used for Amharic terms throughout this paper.

⁶Life History of *Däjjazmač* Diräs Šifäraw (Obituary, Amharic, n.d.), p. 2; Informants: Admasu Gugsu, Addam Käbbädä and Täwabä Ayčäh.

⁷Seltene, “A History of Resistance in Gojjam (Ethiopia): 1936-1941” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Addis Ababa University, Department of History, 1999”), p. 47; Informants: Yärom Alämu and Admasu Gugsu.

⁸Informant:Admasu Gugsu.; Haddis Kassa (*Aläqa*), *Geše Abbay-Gojjam-Finotä Sälam: Yäjäbdu Ena Yä Limat Mägeläčha* (Bahr Dar: *Qidus Giyorgis* Publisher, *Tahsas* 2004 E.C.), p. 7.;Seltene, p. 92.

⁹National Archive and Library Agency (here after N. A. L. A), *Blatta Märse'ë Hazän Wäldä Qirqos's* Collection, “Silä Italia Ina Silä Gojjam Arbäññinät Hunéta” (Manuscript, n.d.), Folder Number ሙ . ቃ . ሙ . ቁ . 63.1, File Number 38.15. ; Informant: Addam Käbbädä.

¹⁰Informants: Taddäsä Indaläw, Addam Käbbädä and Haylu Mitiku. ; Seltene, pp. 88-89 and 107. See also Alberto Sbacchi, *Ethiopia Under Mussolini: Fascism and the Colonial Experience*. London: Zed Books Ltd, 1989, p. 146.

Sibhatu to collect taxes from the people of Yilmana Dénša using *chiqa šums*.¹¹ As a result, for about a year, since the occupation, considerable sections of the local people of Yilmana Dénša were forced to pay a tax of five Italian *faranca* (Italian Lire) per household for owning an ox, ten *faranca* for owning a pair of oxen and so on. In addition, they were required to pay taxes in the form of grain, which Italian authorities then sold out.¹² However, like those in other parts of the country, the people of Yilmana Dénša started to resent the collection of taxes because it was against the promises the Italians had initially made.¹³

Meanwhile, in August 1936 Italian authorities accused *Däjjazmač* Sibhatu and other ex-officials of *Ras* Imiru of planning to attack the Italian garrisons at Bahr Dar and Dangila. Hence, Sibhatu was summoned to Bahr Dar together with his relatives and followers on August 5, 1936. Informants state that Sebhatu went in to Bahr Dar by refusing to accept the advice of a local council composed of his followers not to go there. Then, on September 12, 1936 Sibhatu, his son *Lij* Bāzabih, his nephew and secretary, and *Qāññazmač* Yigzaw Kassa, were hanged at a public square at Bahr Dar on charge of disturbing public security. Disarmed, their followers returned home in tears.¹⁴ In the meantime, the Italians appointed prominent local *bandas* namely *Fitawrari* Tifé Kassa as the *mislāné* (governor) of Yilmana Dénša and *Qāññazmač* Nigatu Sāyfu as his secretary. Like Sibhatu before him, Tifé seated at Qwayt (in Anbāsīt), five kilometers south of Adét town, and started to disarm the local people and collect taxes from them. However, this triggered the indignation of the relatives and loyal men of *Däjjazmač* Sibhatu, who managed to mobilize the local people of Yilmana Dénša and kill Tifé in an open battle, as will be elaborated below.¹⁵

Moreover, the Italian policy of disarmament and the atrocities they perpetrated were the other causes for the start of the anti-fascist patriotic struggle in Yelmana Densa.¹⁶ In this regard, the Italian historian, Alberto Sbacchi, states that the lack of colonial experience and ill temperedness of lower Italian officers who served as governing officials like Captain Salvatore E. Corvo at Adét and the atrocities they committed contributed a lot for the setting in motion the patriotic resistance and the consequent failure of Italian colonialism in Ethiopia.¹⁷ For instance, the main reasons for the outbreak of patriotic resistance in Yilmana Dénša were the Italian policy of disarmament and the murder of *Däjjazmač* Sibhatu Yigzaw and his relatives at Bahr Dar.¹⁸ The following two verses recited at the funerary ceremony clearly indicate the public grief on the hanging of *Däjjazmač* Sebhatu and his relatives at Bahr Dar by the same Captain Corvo.

እነሱ አላወቁ ወይ ሰዉ አልጠየቁ፤
ሶስቱም ወንድሞቻቸው ባንድ ላይ አለቁ።¹⁹

¹¹Informants: Addam Käbbädä; Taddäsä Indalāw and Čäré Agāññ.

¹²Informants: Čäré Agāññ and Addam Käbbädä

¹³N. A. L. A., Folder Number ሙ. ኃ. ወ. ቁ. 63.1, File Number 38.15. ; Informants: Mulu Wārqnāh, Yārom Alāmu and Haylu Mitiku.

¹⁴N. A. L. A., Folder Number ሙ. ኃ. ወ. ቁ. 63.1, File Number 38.15. ; Informants: Taddäsä Indalāw, Addam Käbbädä and Haylu Mitiku.; Informants: Taddäsä Endalāw, Addam Käbbädä and Haylu Meteku.; Seltene, p. 113; Informants claim that it was the “work” of *Fitawrari* Tifé and *Qāññach* Nigatu Sayfu.

¹⁵ N. A. L. A., Folder Number ሙ. ኃ. ወ. ቁ. 63.1, File Number 38.15. ; Addis, p. 7. ; Informants: Mulu Wārqnāh, Taddäsä Indalāw and Haylu Mitiku.

¹⁶Informants: Taddäsä Endalāw and Mulu Wārqnāh. ; see also Seltene, pp. 139, 148.

¹⁷Sbacchi, pp. 80 – 81, and 196.

¹⁸Sbacchi, p. 196.

¹⁹The poem was versified by the sister of *Däjjazmač* Sebhatu. Source: Bālay, p. 63.

They did neither know themselves nor ask others about what would happen, and hence, my three brothers died [hanged] all together.

ስጋ አማረኝ አለች የጌታየ ሚስት፤
ባህር ዳር አትሄድም ከታረደበት፡፡²⁰

The wife of my ex-lord has desired to eat meat, let her go to Bahr Dar where the slaughtering [of *Däjjazmač* Sebhātu] took place.

Furthermore, at one point the Italian Resident at Adét (since August 1937), Captain Corvo, ruthlessly murdered over thirty local chiefs even after they surrendered their arms and fed his soldiers. Noting this, the people of Yilmana Dénša refused to surrender their arms and joined the patriots for they could not escape murder even by doing so. Italian military operations to subdue patriots also aggravated the resistance.²¹ Italian authorities could not establish effective rule as *Banda* troops were repeatedly beaten in the areas of Yizora, Méçha, Säkäla and Qwarit by newly emerging patriots and *shiftas*.²² This was the main reason for the coming of the above mentioned bold headed neurotic Italian officer, Captain Corvo, in to Adét in August 1937 with the primary objective of subduing popular resistances in these areas.²³

Further, lack of consistency in the Italian colonial policies encouraged the patriotic resistance in Yilmana Dénša district. Before a policy was fully implemented, Italian authorities usually introduced a new and contradictory one.²⁴ For instance, as mentioned above, initially, Italian authorities generously promised the lifting of taxes, but soon taxes were re imposed, which caused the resentment of the local people in the district. Because of this many peasants joined the rank of the patriots.²⁵

In addition, Italian authorities' favour to the Muslims and the aerial attacks on the churches of Yilmana Dénša led local people to believe that the Italians came to Dénša to replace Christianity by Islam. The main justification for such areial attacks forwarded by Italian forces was that churches were serving as shelters for patriots of the district. The total number of burnt and partially demolished churches in the district by Italian aerial bombardment during the occupation period is estimated to be sixty.²⁶ For instance, the monastery of Adét Mädhane Alām was completely burnt to the ground, while that of Däbrä Mäwi Mariam was partially demolished in 1937, and their religious administrators namely *Qésä Gäbäz* Kassa Wasé and *Liqäräd* Bogalä Gétahun, respectively, became martyrs. This further motivated the local people including the clergy to join the patriots. The likes of *Abba* Yayäh of Adét and

²⁰Informant: Addam Käbbädä.

²¹Sbacchi, p. 196; Informants: Taddäsä Indaläw, Mulu Wärqnäḥ and Täwabä Ayčäh.

²²Seltene, p. 106.

²³Informant: Yärom Alämu and Admasé Inyäw. Corvo was the Resident (later Commissioner) of the Italian administration in Yilmana Dénša until February 1941. Initially, he was a Resident at Bahr Dar where he ruthlessly killed large number of ex officials of *Ras* Imiru, including *Däjjazmač* Sibhatu of Yilmana Dénša, see Alberto Sbacchi, p. 196.

²⁴N. A. L. A., Folder Number መ. ቃ. ወ. ቂ. 63.1, File Number 38.15. ; Tädla Zä Yohannes. *Yä Ethiopia Tarik: Italia Bā Ethiopia*. Addis Ababa: Mankusa Publishing Enterprise, PLC, 2004 E.C, pp. 238- 239, 399.; Sbacchi, p. 147.

²⁵Informants: Čäré Agäññ, and Täwabä Ayčäh. ; N. A. L. A., *Ibid*; Seltene, pp. 50-51.

²⁶The Life History of *Däjjazmač* Diräs,” p. 3; Informants: Taddäsä Indaläw, Yärom Alämu and Wärqinäḥ Gétahun. ; Sbacchi, pp. 163 – 164. See also Tädla, p. 233.

Liqārād Arya Sibhat of Däbrä Māwi in Dénša can be mentioned among the clergy who soon became renowned patriots.²⁷

Moreover, Italian military operations to disarm the people and suppress rebellions led to the rise of open rebellions and the emergence of new patriotic leaders. Ayaléw Wändim, Alämayähu Kābädä (of Yizora) and Gärämāw Wändawik were from among the new patriot leaders who rejected the Italian order for submission and surrender of arms.²⁸ For instance, *Lij* Gärämāw Wändawik of Lijj Ambära started his career as a patriot leader in the middle of May 1936 by inflicting the first casualties on an Italian column led by *Däjjazmač* Gässässä Bälāw at a place called Gomt in Qwarit district. Because of his unprecedented heroism, the people of Qwarit and Inzägidim took no time to dignify *Lijj* Geremew by the name *Däjjazmač* Matābé. The Adama – Amādamit massifs between Dénša and Qwarit- Sākāla areas became the main base for patriots and *shiftas* (bandits).²⁹ In this way, the people of Yilmana Dénša joined hands with the people of other adjacent districts in their persistent resistance against Italian colonial occupation right up to 1941.³⁰

To the knowledge of the researcher, the first known popular reaction against Italian rule in Dénša took place on September 23, 1936. As mentioned above, on the same day the relatives and loyal followers of Sibhatu mobilized the people of Yelmana Dénša and killed the Italian appointee, *Fitawrari* Tirfé Kassa, at a place called Insät Midir in the locality of Anbäsit. They also captured Tirfé's secretary, *Qāññazmač* Nigatu Säyfu and the latter's son, Hunāññaw.³¹ The rest of Tirfé's *banda* troops were dispersed. The victors distributed among themselves the arms captured from Tirfé and his *banda* forces, and the arms confiscated from the local people by him.³² Participants in this battle who latter became notable patriots in Yelmana Dénša include *Asalafi* Tābo, *Qāññazmač* Alāmu Tägāññä, Damté Šebäši, Dillé Ešäté, Kassa Ešäté, Adära Ešäté, Lanäh Haylu, Kassa Bāzzabih and Daññaw Mäkonän. Adära Ešäté lost his life in the engagement.³³ Seltene argues that the battle of Insät Midir was the first popular reaction against fascist Italian rule in Gojjam.³⁴

Likewise, in January 1937 the people of Gänj- Agitta areas, north of Yelmana Densa, rose in arms against the Italian policy of disarmament and the appointment of *Fitawrari* Gässässä

²⁷Informants: Yärom Alāmu, Tāwabä Ayčäh, Haylu Mitiku. ; Bälay, p. 65.

²⁸Sbacchi, p. 196. ; Seltene, p. 106.

²⁹*Ibid*; Addis, pp. 7 and 10.

³⁰Dawit Ayalew, "A History of Méçha Wārāda of Bahr Dar: 1935-1991" (MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, Department of History, 2010), p. 34.

³¹N. A. L. A., Folder Number መ. ታ. ወ. ቂ. 63.1, File Number 38.15. ; Informants: Taddäsä Indalāw, Mulu Wārqnäh, Tāwabä Ayčäh, and Admasé Inyāw. Informants state that Nigatu was released, but he soon secretly travelled to Bahr Dar and joined the Italian camp.

³²Seltene, pp. 51, 108. ; Addis, p. 7.

³³Informants: Yärom Alāmu, Taddäsä Indalāw, Mulu Wārqnäh and Haylu Mitiku. ; Däbrä Marqos University Archive and Research Center (here after D. M. U. A. R. C.), A Letter from Bahr Dar *Awrajja Gizat* Office to Gojjam *Täqlay Gizat* Office, Date, *Tahsas* 21, 1963 E.C Folder No., 0083, File No., መ. ጠ. 6.

³⁴Seltene, pp. 51, 108.

Wādan over them. They killed Gāssāssā, captured arms from his *banda* troops and then descended in to the low lands in arms opposition to Italian colonial rule.³⁵

The Battles of Yizora and Yidibi (1937)

As mentioned above, in August 1937 the Italian resident in Bahr Dar prepared military operations to Yilmana Dénša, Qwarit-Sākāla and Méčha areas with the aim of subduing the patriots and disarm the local peoples.³⁶ Accordingly, on August 25 Captain Corvo from Bahr Dar and Colonel Striano from the Alata garrison (above Tis Abay) led their forces to the ridge of Yizora, on the Méčha side of Adama Mountain in Dénša. Their *banda* forces burnt many villages on their way to Yizora.³⁷

Agitated by the call to arms made by *Qāññazmač* Alāmu Tägāññā, *Agafari* Gādāfaw Alāmayāhu, and *Lijis* Alāmayāhu Kābbādā, Kābbādā Dinqé and Bitāwa Dällällä (all from Yizora) using the phrase “እርዳ ለማተብ” /fight for the cause of your religion/, the people of Dénša, Yilmana, Qwarit, Sākāla, Ṭaliya - Lijj Ambāra and Méčha joined hands to resist the enemy. They were led by formidable patriot leaders such as *Qāññazmač* Dirās Šifāraw of Dénša, *Lij* Gārāmāw Wāndawek of Lijj Ambāra, Alāmayāhu Kābbādā of Yizora, Bākālā Lāmmu of Méčha and many others.³⁸ In this regard, citing Italian archival sources, Seltene states that these patriot leaders were able to gather an estimated number of 2,700 fighters.³⁹ Then, the battle of Yizora was fought for three days from Wednesday August 25 to Friday August 27, 1937. The patriots scored a decisive victory largely thanks to their numerical superiority and knowledge of the terrain. The commander, Colonel Striano and his sub lieutenants namely Lazzari and Isola lost their lives at the battle field. Moreover, about eighty *askaris* and *bandas* were killed and many others were wounded. . The patriots also captured a lot of arms like *minišer*, *albin* and machine guns and a mule loaded with ammunition. In fact, the patriots also suffered many deaths and wounds. Among the dead was one of the noted patriots of Yilmana Dénša, *Lij* Alāmayāhu Kābbādā.⁴⁰

Corvo and his surviving troops stayed the night of August 27, 1937 at a place called Daval Gābrā`él along Adama mountain and at dawn entered the Adét garrison for protection. The patriots of Dénša, Yilmana, Sākāla, Méčha, Gānj, Yiwodi and Qwarit took turns in besieging the enemy (the 27th Battalion) at Adét.⁴¹ Many noted patriots denied the enemy at Adét access to the waters of Šina and Šiggāz Rivers. These include *Fitawraris* Bayabil Adigāh, Sinišaw Alāmu, Zāgāyā Birlé, Nāgaš Tāšomā; *Qāññazmač*es Dirās Šifāraw, Bāyānā Kinfu, Miskir Yimam and Tariku Šibāši and *Grazmač* Ṭirunāh Alāmé. There were also *Lijis* Admasu Dāsta, Anlāy Haylé, Gārāmāw Wāndawek, Admasu Gugsu, Agāw Indalāw and many others.⁴² The siege lasted from August 28 to December 1, 1937. Surrounded by *fannos* (literally, heroes), as

³⁵*Ibid*; N. A. L. A., Folder Number ሙ. ኃ. ወ. ቁ. 63.1, File Number 38.15. ; Addis, p. 8.

³⁶N. A. L. A., Folder Number ሙ. ኃ. ወ. ቁ. 63.1, File Number 38.15. See also Addis, p. 8.

³⁷Seltene, p. 126; Sbacchi, p. 196.

³⁸Informants: Admasu Gugsu, Tāwabā Ayčāh and Limānih Balāw. See also Seltene, *Ibid*; Sbacchi, p. 196.

³⁹*Ibid*.

⁴⁰*Ibid*; Amhara Regional State Planning Office, “Silā Mirab Gojjam Astādadār Akababi Tarik Andanid Nāṭiboč” (MFN, 1299, *Tahsas* 1982 E.C., Bahr Dar), pp. 21-22. ; N. A. L. A., Folder Number ሙ. ኃ. ወ. ቁ. 63.1, File Number 38.15. ; Informants: Mulu Wārqnāh, Taddāsā Indalāw and Limānih Balāw. See also Tādla, p. 233.

⁴¹Informants: Mulu Wārqnāh, Taddāsā Indalāw, Limānih Balāw and Admasu Gugsu. ; Seltene, p. 126.

⁴²Informants: All my informants. ; N. A. L. A., Folder Number ሙ. ኃ. ወ. ቁ. 63.1, File Number 38.15. ; The Life History of *Dājjazmač* Dirās Šifāraw, pp. 2- 3. ; The Life History of *Dājjazmač* Anlāy Haylé (Obituary, Amharic, Bahr Dar Printing Press, 1990 E.C.), p. No page.

patriots were often described, the fascist forces at Adét were obliged to airlift food, water and other necessities.⁴³ In fact, informants also unanimously state that during one of the shift turns, one of the famed patriots, *Lij Gärāmāw Wändawik* and nine others lost their lives at the battle of *Mugāḥa Bahr* along *Šina* River due to an Italian aerial bombardment on October 30, 1937.⁴⁴

On Saturday September 4, 1937, a number of patriot leaders held a meeting in Dénša by which they decided to incite the peoples of their respective districts to rise in to rebellion. Some of them were *Däjjazmač* Adal Täsämma and *Qäññazmač* Diräs Šifärāw of Dénša, *Grazmač* Bäkälä Lämmu of Méḥa, *Fitawrari* Bayabil Adigäh of Lijj Ambära, and *Qäññazmač* Alämayāhu Wasé of Agāw Midir. They also elected *Däjjazmač* Mängäša Jämbäré as their commander in chief.⁴⁵ At the same time, the patriots of Dénša, Yilmana, Lijj Ambära, Gänj, Yiwodi, Zägé and Midrä Bäd elected *Qäññazmač* Diräs (also named *Abb Šäññāw* which literally means the Repulser) as their war commander under *Däjjazmač* Mängäša. On the other hand, as indicated above, taking this as a pretext Italian authorities burned the monastery of Adét Mädhane Alām from the air on the same day.⁴⁶

The *arbäñña aläqas* (sub district commanders) who were elected to lead patriots below Diräs also include Bäkälä Kassa of Dénša, Miskir Yimam and Zägäyā Birilé of Yiwodi and Mitiku Zäru of Lijj Ambära. In addition, there were Bāzabih Adigäh of Zägé, Ambaw Gäbrä Mädhin of Midrä Bäd, Tädla Yimär of Gänj and Admasu Gugsu of Yilmana and Bāyānā Kinfu of Qollälla. Below these sub district commanders there were *gobāz aläqas* (zone commanders) who were the leaders of ordinary patriots called *tāwagi* (young fighters). These patriot leaders were determined not only to continue the siege at Adét but also to engage in many other battles till the independence of the country.⁴⁷

The second viceroy of Mussolini for the Italian East African Empire, Rodolfo Graziani, himself admitted the disastrous defeat of Italian, *askaris* and *banda* troops at the battle of Yizora at the hands of patriots, as discussed above. This forced him to send a huge reinforcement of two columns consisting of 5,500 troops (35 Battalions) from Däbrä Tabor and Gondar in November 1937.⁴⁸

The column from Däbrä Tabor, commanded by Colonel Di Lawrentis, arrived first at the bridge of Alata. However, the patriots of Gänj, Dénša, Damot and Moṭa organized by *Däjjazmač* Mängäša Jämbäré and led by *Qäññazmač* Mäkönnän (the chief of Gänj) besieged Di Laurentis at the bridge. In the meantime, the other Italian column arrived from Gondar

⁴³Informants: Taddäsä Indalāw, Haylu Mitiku and Mulu Wärqnäh.

⁴⁴Informants: Admasu Gugsu and Taddäsä Indalāw. ; N. A. L. A, Folder Number ሙ. ኃ. ወ. ቂ. 63.1, File Number 38.15. ; Addis, p. 10. ; The Life History of *Qäzmač* Dästa Yimam, p. no page. See also Seltene, p. 127. The date on which *Lij Gärāmāw* was killed was *Tiqemt* 19, 1930 E. C. *Aläqa* Addis recommends that a school or a road should have been designated in his name and a statue should also be erected for him, see Addis, p. 10. Dästa Mogäs also lamentingly told to me that he and other officials of Adét town during the *Därg* regime had the intention to designate the bridge at *Šina* River as: “*Gärāmāw* Bridge”.

⁴⁵Seltene, p. 164. ; Sbacchi, p. 198; Tädla, p. 233.

⁴⁶The Life History of *Däjjazmač* Diräs, p. 3. ; Informant: most of my informants. The monastery of Adét Mädhane Alām was burnt on *Nähasé* 29, 1929 E. C.

⁴⁷Amhara Region Planning Office, pp. 21- 23. ; Addis, p. 5.

⁴⁸N. A. L. A, Folder Number ሙ. ኃ. ወ. ቂ. 63.1, File Number 38.15. ; Seltene, pp. 133- 134.

under the leadership of Colonel Barbaccini and started fighting accompanied by heavy air bombardment to break the siege that began on November 26, 1937. On November 30, 1937, he lifted the siege by breaking the encirclements of the patriots.⁴⁹ Barbaccini brought the two Italian columns under his command and on the next day lifted the siege of the 27th Battalion at Adét by patriots that began on August 28, 1937.⁵⁰

It appears that the major intention of Colonel Barbaccini was to avenge the disastrous defeat of the Italians at Yizora in August 1937 and subdue the patriotic movement in the Dénša-Sakala-Mécha area. Hence, the combined forces of Barbaccini and the 27th Battalion at Adét moved to the hill of Yizora and reached Yidibi (above Yizora) escorted by local *banda* leaders like *Qāññazmač* Nigatu Säyfu and Dämillāw Čäkkol and accompanied by heavy Italian air bombardment from the Bahr Dar air base.⁵¹ *Däjjazmač* Mängäša led the patriots of Dénša, Moṭa, Damot, Mécha, Säkāla and other areas and ordered an offensive on December 1, 1937. The patriots had the advantages of numerical superiority, mastery of the terrain and above all, a heightened morale brought about by their earlier victory at Yizora. As a result, they scored another decisive victory over the troops of Colonel Barbaccini after fighting for three days and nights from Saturday December 1 to Monday December 3, 1937. Many fascist soldiers were killed and many others were wounded. On the very first day of the engagement, Mängäša captured three Italian officers; among which was Captain Vincenzo Berjtoja. Although there are variations among sources, an estimated number of 500 *askaris* and *banda* were also killed and 30 machine guns, 1000 *albin* and *minišer* hand guns were captured.⁵² The remaining fascist army started to retreat from Yidibi to Yizora (to the north).

However, the patriots intercepted the retreating enemy troops and annihilated them.⁵³ The survivors pulled back to the west led by a *banda* leader named *Qāññazmač* Nigatu Säyfu and camped at a place called Mankit along the border with Mécha district.⁵⁴ In this regard, citing Italian archival sources, Seltene states that "...the Duke of Aosta relates that Barbaccini with his 250 wounded troops was forced to remain under siege in the hill of Mankit..."⁵⁵ The siege of Barbaccini was lifted later on by 60 Battalions of operational military force from Gondar commanded by General Galloni after fighting with the patriots from January 19-22, 1938.⁵⁶

⁴⁹Seltene, *Ibid.*

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹*Ibid*; Taddäsä Gäbrä Mädhin to Emperor Haylä Sillāsē about the Patriotic Struggle in Gojjam (Manuscript, n. d), N.A.L.A., Folder Number መ. ታ. ወ. ቂ. 63.1, File Number, 47.07; The Life History of *Däjjazmač* Diräs," p. 3; Informants: Taddäsä Indalāw and Mulu Wärqnäh.

⁵²N. A. L. A, Folder Number መ. ታ. ወ. ቂ. 63.1, File Number 38.15.; Informants: Mulu Wärqnäh and Taddäsä Indalāw. In the Life History of *Däjjazmač* Diräs on page 3 it is also mentioned that 3 enemy soldiers, 95 *albin* machine guns, 1 mortar and more than 3000 *albin* and *minyshir* hand guns were captured at the battle of Yidibi. But, the Life History of *ato* Andwalām Birhanu explains that the patriots captured 88 machine guns, one *Awsa* special machine gun, one mortar and innumerable hand guns at the battle of Yidibi. Seltene also mentions that Captain Vincenzo Berjtoja stayed with Mängäša until March 1941, and Colonel Carrano was among the wounded who escaped capture at Yidibi, see Seltene, pp. 133- 134.

⁵³Informants: Mulu Wärqnäh and Taddäsä Indalāw. ; The Life History of *Qāññazmač* Dästa Yimam, p. no page Seltene, p. 135; and Dawit, p. 24.

⁵⁴*Ibid.* The Italians had promoted Nigatu to the rank of *Fitawrari*, but the people of Dénša refused to call him by his new title until his death.

⁵⁵Seltene, p. 136.

⁵⁶N.A.L.A, Folder Number መ. ታ. ወ. ቂ. 63.1, File Number, 47.07; Seltene, "A History of Resistance in Gojjam," p. 141; Tädla, 235. Following this, Galloni moved to the south to lift the sieges of the Dangila and Injibara garrisons.

Therefore, mainly because of the intensification of the resistance there and their humiliating defeat at Yizora and Yidibi in 1938, Italian authorities were forced to give up the Residence at Adét in Yilmana Dénša and established a new Residence at Däbrä Mäwi under Major Tinetti Amato with in the Commissionership of Agäw Midir.⁵⁷

One of the major challenges for the patriots was the activities of the *bandas* (collaborators). Here, *bandas* supplied the enemy with information about the movement of the patriots and tried to become economically beneficiaries through supplying the enemy with the necessary food items.⁵⁸ However, they were severely punished whenever the patriots captured them. The *banda* had also to bear the mockery of patriots and their fellow citizens:

እነልበ ጥፋ፣
 ያገለግላሉ እየተገረፉ፣
 ጣሊያንም ታዝቦ ስሙን አለዉ ባንዳ፣
 እንዳህያ ጭኖ ፊት ፊት እየነዳ፣
 ያዉም አሸክሞ አስራ ሁለት ኮዳ።⁵⁹

A loose translation of the couplet reads:

*the absent minded who are whipped to serve the enemy; and henceforth, the
 Italians named them banda, and shouldered them twelve water bottles and
 drove them like donkey.*

With regard to the patriots, from mid- March to the end of May 1938 the new fascist governor of Amhara, General Ottavio Mezzetti, ordered several of his lieutenants to conduct military operations in the lowland territories of Däbrä Mäwi, Yelmana Dénša, Aläfa, Yesmala Giyorgis and Tis Esat Fall areas.⁶⁰ As a result, fascist rule was temporarily restored in Dénša and other adjacent areas. In 1939 the Italians made Adét a center of Commissionership with the urgent task of controlling the movements of the patriots.

However, according to Sbacchi, soon the local people in these areas joined the patriots.⁶¹ For instance, already in April 1938 an Italian column from Moṭa coming through Daga Damot was beaten by the patriots of Dénša led by *Fitawrari* Deräs at Buha Dängiya and the survivors were forced to enter the Adét garrison for protection.⁶² Enemy convoys travelling between Bahr Dar and Mota were ambushed by patriots several times. Moreover, the resistance continued in Yelmana Densa right up to 1941. The patriots of the district also took part in the wars at Färäs Wägga and Samsi in Méṭṭa, and in Qwarit districts during the course of 1938 and 1941. Subsequently, Italy's defeat in the Second World War and consequent international

⁵⁷N. A. L. A, Folder Number ሙ. ኃ. ወ. ቁ. 63.1, File Number, 47.07; Tädla, 235. ; Seltene, p. 152.

⁵⁸Seltene, pp. many pages; Geremew, p. 36; Informants: Addam Käbbädä, Bayäh Fälläqä, Fäṭänä Aynaläm and Čäre Agäññ.

⁵⁹Informants: Zälläqä Allälleññ and Addam Käbbädä.

⁶⁰Seltene, "A History of Resistance in Gojjam," p. 152.

⁶¹Sbacchi, p 196.

⁶²The Life History of *Qäññazmač* Dästa", p. no page; A Letter from Taddäsä Gäbrä Mädhén to Emperor Haylä Sellasé about the Patriotic Struggle in Gojjam", N. A. L. A., Folder Number ሙ. ኃ. ወ. ቁ. 63.1, File Number, 47.07.; *Blatta* Märse`é Hazän Wäldä Qirqos's Collection, "Bä Amest Amätu Yä Italian Wärrä Wäqet Yä Tägädälu Arbäññöç: Yä Däjjazmač Mängäša Tarik" (Manuscript, 1932 E.C.), Folder Number ሙ. ኃ. ወ. ቁ. 63.1, File Number 47.14.

support helped the patriots of the country at large to finally drive out fascist forces after five years of occupation. Accordingly, on February 23, 1941 the Italian officer at Bahr Dar, Colonel Torelli, ordered the withdrawal of the Adét, Däbrä Mäwi, Aläfa, Yesmala and Zägé garrisons to Bahr Dar. This marked the end of the five years Italian occupation of Yelmana Dénsa district.⁶³

Conclusion

As the discussions made in this paper reveal, it was fascist Italian authorities themselves that ignited the patriotic resistance movement in Yilmana Dénsa district. Once it started, the patriotic resistance in the district gradually intensified, and remained largely beyond the control of fascist forces throughout the Occupation Period (1936 – 41). The battles of Yizora and Yidibi (both of them fought in 1937) and the disastrous defeat of fascist troops there determining factors in the continuation of the resistance movement in the district. In general, the patriots of Yilmana Dénsa played their own part in the anti-fascist Italian patriotic resistance and the final liberation of the country in 1941.

⁶³ Informants: Admsé Enyāw and Haylu Meteku; Geremew, p. 36; Seltene, p. 350; Tädla, p. 441. The Italians withdrew from Adét and Däbrä Mäwi on *Yäkatit* 16, 1933 E.C.

Bibliography

I. Unpublished Sources

A. Archival Sources

Däbrä Marqos University Archive and Research Center (D.M.U.A.R.C.), A Letter from Bahr Dar *Awrajja Gezat* Office to Gojjam *Ṭäqalay Gezat* Office, Date *Tahsas* 21, 1963 E.C., Folder No., 0083, File No., መ. ጠ. 6.

National Archive and Library Agency (N.A.L.A), *Blatta* Marse'e Hazan Wäldä Qirqos's Collection. "Bä Amest Amäto Yä Italian Wārära Wäqet Yä Tägadälu Arbäññoč: Yä Däjjazmač Mängäša Tarik" (Manuscript, 1032), Folder Number መ. ቃ. ወ. ቂ. 63.1, File Number 47.14.

_____. "Selä Italia Ena Selä Gojjam Arbäññenät Hunéta" (Manuscript, n.d.), Folder Number መ. ቃ. ወ. ቂ. 63.1, File Number 38.15.

_____. A Letter from Tadäsä Gäbrä Mädhén to Emperor Haylä Sellasé about the Patriotic Struggle in Gojjam (Manuscript, n.d), Folder Number መ. ቃ. ወ. ቂ. 63.1, File Number, 47.07.

B. Study Report

Amhara Region Planning Office. "Silä Mirab Gojjam Astädadär Akababi Tarik Andand Näṭiboč" (MFN, 1299, Bahr Dar, *Tahsas* 1982 E.C.).

C. Theses and Dissertations

Dawit Ayalew. "A History of Méçha Wāräda of Bahr Dar (1935-1991). MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, Department of History, 2010.

Geremew Eskezia. "A History of Yelmana Dénša District: 1901 -1974". MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, Department of History, 2015.

Seltene Seyoum. "A History of Resistance in Gojjam (Ethiopia): 1936-1941". Ph.D. Dissertation, Addis Ababa University, 1999.

II. Published Sources

A. Obituaries Collected from Individuals

Ato Addam Käbbädä. The Life History of of Däjjazmač Deräs Šefäraw (Obituary, Amharic, Adét, n.d).

Ato Fäṭänä Enyāw. The Life History of Däjjazmač Anläy Haylé (Obituary, Amharic, Adét).

Ato Mesganaw Tayä. The Life History of Qäññazmač Dästa Yimam (Obituary, Amharic, Adét, 1978).

Ato Šägaw Andwalām. The Life History of Ato Andwalām Birhanu (Obituary, Amharic, Adét, Hidar 29, 2007 E.C.).

A. Books

Bahru Zewde. *A History of Modern Ethiopia, Revised Second Edition*. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2002.

Bälay Mäkönnän. *Etégé Ṭaytu Bä Däbrä Mäwi*. Addis Ababa: Ṭana Publishing Enterprise,

2003 E.C

Imiru Haylä Sillasé (*Leul Ras*). *Kayähut Ina Kä Imastawsäw*. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2001 E.C.

Haddis Kassa (*Aläqa*), *Geše Abbay-Gojjam-Finotä Sälam: Yäjäbdu Ina Yä Limat Mägeläçha*. Bahr Dar: Qidus Giyorgis Publisher, *Tahsas* 2004 E.C.

Mockler, Anthony. *Haile Sellasie's War: The Italian- Ethiopian War, 1935-1941*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.

Sbachi, Alberto. *Ethiopia Under Mussolini: Fascism and the Colonial Experience*. London: Zed Books, 1989.

Tädla Zä Yohannes. *Yä Ethiopia Tarik: Italia Bä Ethiopia*. Addis Ababa: Mankusa Publishing Enterprise, PLC, 2004 E.C.

List of Informants

No	Name and title of Informant	Age*	Interview		Remarks
			Date	Place	
1	Addam Käbbädä (<i>Ato</i>)	85	21.9.1999& 26.3.2000	Erbereb (Adét)	A native of Adét. He knew a great deal about Yelmana Dénša since the time of <i>Ras</i> Haylu.
2	Admasé Inyāw (<i>Šambäl</i>)	84	15. 5. 2007	Adét 02	He is a native of Adét. He was a collaborator and later on a <i>Näçh Läbaš</i> .
3	Admasu Gugsä (<i>Fitawrari</i>)	80	30.3.2000	Bahr Dar	He was a patriot leader and had immense knowledge on the occupation period. He became a sub district and district governor in Yilmana Dénša after 1941.
4	Dästa Mogäs (<i>Ato</i>)	52	4.9.1999	Adét 01	He was a school director and then Mayor of Adét town before 1991. He had a fair knowledge on the history of the district.
5	Haylu Mitiku (<i>Ato</i>)	88	18.6.2015	Adét 02	A patriot who served the previous two regimes in various capacities. He has a detailed knowledge on the occupation period.
6	Limāneh Balāw (<i>Ato</i>)	80	8.12. 2014	Adet	A son of a patriot from Gošäya. He is an interesting informant concerning the occupation period.
7	Mulu Wärqenäh (<i>Agafari</i>)	82	25.8.1999	Adét 02	A patriot who came from Méçha and settled at Erbereg in Adét as a guard of <i>Däjjazmač</i> Deräs since 1942.
8	Taddäsä Indalāw (<i>Ato</i>)	88	26.8.1999	Buha Dāngiya (Adama)	He was patriot. He had much knowledge on the Italian occupation period.
9	Tāwabä Ayçäh (<i>Ato</i>)	80	26.5.2015	Adét 02	He has a detailed knowledge on resistance movement.
10	Yärom Alāmu (<i>Ato</i>)	87	17.8.1999	Adét 02	He was a native of Adét who joined the Italian camp and had immense knowledge about them.

*At the time of the interview.