

Discovering Eritrea's Past

Select Documents from the Works of the Pioneers

by
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and
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To Elaine B. Tafta who picked up the torch



“A few years ago we described the customs and law of the Bogos. At that time we already suspected that they could hardly be proprieties of this people alone, and after a meticulous study we are now convinced that what we have attributed to the Bogos is applicable to all these peoples.”

(W. Munzinger, 1864, p. 73)

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This book contains a few documents which may show how the historiography of Eritrea began more than a hundred and fifty years ago. The selected five documents are taken from the works of the pioneers, Werner Munzinger and Leo Reinisch. The exact source of each one is given in a footnote at the beginning of the respective document. They have been translated with great care by a highly qualified person who worked throughout her life as a court interpreter, secondary school teacher and department head. Three letters written by the leaders of the Anseba inhabitants at a critical time of their troubles are also included. They needed protection of their people and sought it in vain from near and distant lands.

The reader may wonder why the book is so restricted to a particular region although numerous studies have been conducted in other parts of Eritrea as well. I have also considered this problem at the time of planning the project and briefly explained the reason in the introduction. To make the answer short, the reasons are obvious: firstly, not all the studies were done at the same time; in fact some took place a century later. Hence, they could only be mentioned on the side in the introduction or briefly in footnotes. Secondly, research work is always influenced by shortage of time as other commitments of the researchers cannot be totally ignored. Thirdly, one should also not forget that a vast undertaking requires a great deal of financial strength for the translation, editing and publication. Frau E. Schmidt has done the translation and proofreading for the love of the country and its people. I only hope that other individuals or groups will in the near future follow the example and enrich our knowledge of the history of Eritrea. A better hope may also be that the long awaited book on the medieval history of Eritrea will soon appear in print and may possibly satisfy the wish of the hankering reader.

The question of transliteration had to be dropped for technical and financial reasons. It is also in no way helpful to the ordinary reader. Instead, the spelling of names and technical and foreign terms of the authors in the original are retained in the translation. Unfortunately Munzinger was not consistent in his spelling. But they are not in any way a hindrance to the reader. We have provided a short list of names together with brief descriptions or identification hints in appendix 2 in so far as we could find informants or written sources.

The present work could not have been realized without the generous help of several institutions and persons who cannot all be listed here. Reasons of economy preclude the naming of them all. We are very grateful to every one of them. But a few have to be mentioned as their assistance was indispensable. We are grateful to

the Research and Documentation Centre (RDC) in Asmara for availing us some unpublished documents. The State and University Library and the library of the Asian-African Institute in Hamburg have greatly helped us by availing books and journals allowing longer borrowing time and granting special permission in cases of restricted works. Miss Sümeyye Dogan did not only fetch and return on our behalf library books and journals but also xeroxed articles and drew genealogical tables. We are grateful to Daniel B. Tafla for scanning on our behalf the pictures from various sources. We are also thankful to Frau Annette Schacht and Frau Christin Becker of DVBS in Hamburg for frequently availing us one of their assistants to help us in sorting out various publications, etc. Among many others who assisted us as advisors, informants and mediators are Ato Tesfankel (Tesfa-Mika'el) Kidane and Abba Merhawi Habtay of Keren, Ato Andetsyon Girmai of Kassel, Memhir Adhana Mengiste-Ab, Ato Meswatti Gebrehiwot and Ato Gebre-Michael Stephanos of Asmara, W/o Dehab Abraha, and Ato Tekhle Abraha of Göttingen, Professor Dr. Michael Zach of Vienna, Professor Dr. Irma Taddia of Bologna as well as Herr Manfred Fabisch and Professor Dr. Volker Matthies of Hamburg. Last but not least the assistance of my life partner Hildegard was always available in spite of her heavy professional and familial commitments.

Bairu Tafla
Hamburg, 27 January 2016

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

An explanation is called for to the reader who is accustomed to the currently accepted transliteration of East African languages into European script.

We had to deal with texts edited between 1859 and 1889 in which East African terms, proper names and place names appeared in seemingly careless and in places rather odd spelling as, e.g. Takue for Tawqe, Ubie for Wube; Habt Seluss for Habte-Sellus (Habte-Sellassie). We were given a choice between Barca here and Barka there, between Tigré and Tigre, Anseba, Ansaba and Ainsaba, Shum, Sim or Gim, Ad or Az, Massua or Massaua. We found up to three variants of the same word within one paragraph, as e.g. the Ad Ali Bákhit figuring as Ad Ali Bakit, Bachit, and Bachir; and such a puzzling distortion as “Gümmegan” for Dimbezan.

Bearing in mind that a translator's task is not to embellish or to emend but to render as true a replica as possible of the original in the new language, and since with a very few exceptions the names and terms are recognizable, we decided to leave all that as we found it, giving the correct spelling in the pertaining annotations. It is one way to illustrate the difficulties of those pioneers, of catching and reproducing by means of the Latin alphabet unknown sounds for which it has no characters. It is also a reminder of the situation of an author living in Keren in the 1850s whose book is to be published in Switzerland, without our modern ways of communication. He sent the manuscript by messenger to his editors who knew nothing about those languages and had to decipher his handwriting.

Probably the blame for the majority of irregularities in the Bogos text rests with them. When the essays about the Tawqe and the Marya were about to appear Munzinger was in Europe and very likely saw the proofs; these texts contain notably fewer discrepancies .

As to Ziegler's remark about Munzinger's problem of finding himself out of touch with the German language after several years in East Africa, this translator has found only very few instances of the presumed inadequacy, e.g. “souteniert” (see fn. 39), “indentisch” (see fn. 41), or “die Verwandtschaft der Bogos beginnen” (to begin the relationship of the Bogos, see p. 99). Rather, she has been fascinated by these writings of a highly gifted author who was not only able to relate law and circumstance with precision but whose style conveys his wholehearted commitment to his chosen subject.

Eva Schmidt
Hamburg, 27 January 2016

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- A.M. = Amete Mihret (Year of Mercy) which refers to the Ge'ez calendar, 7/8 years behind the Gregorian one.
- Bottaro, 2003 = Luigi Bottaro, *Gli Italiani in Eritrea – Esploratori, Missionari, Medici e Artisti*. Asmara.
- Ed. / Eds.: Editor / Editors.
- Ency.Afr., 1977 = *The Encyclopaedia Africana: Dictionary of African Biography*. In 20 volumes. Volume one, Ethiopia-Ghana. New York, Reference Publications Inc.
- Haberland, 1986 = Eike Haberland, *Three Hundred Years of Ethiopian-German Academic Collaboration*. Wiesbaden, Franz Steiner Verlag.
- Langknecht, 1995 = Ludwig Langknecht, *Eritrea – Ein Reiseführer*. Heidelberg, Max Kasperek Verlag.
- N.P. = No Place (of publication)
- Pankhurst&Ingrams, 1988 = richard pankhurst & leila ingrams, *Ethiopia Engraved – an illustrated catalogue of engravings by foreign travellers from 1681 to 1900*. London and New York, Kegan Paul International.
- RN: – Reinisch's Note(s)
- TN: – Translator's Note(s)
- ZN: – Ziegler's Note(s)

INTRODUCTION

THE BEGINNING OF ERITREAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

“The roads to human power and to human knowledge lie close together and are nearly the same; nevertheless, on account of the pernicious and inveterate habit of dwelling on abstractions, it is safer to begin and raise the sciences from those foundations which have relations to practice, and let the active part be as the seal which prints and determines the contemplative counterpart.”¹

Oral tradition is the oldest source of historical writing and is in a way the concern of the present monograph. The writing of history began around 2500 years ago. Herodotus of Halikarnassos (Asia Minor), who lived in the fifth century B.C. and is often referred to as the father of historical writing, travelled as far as the Black Sea, Babylon and upper Egypt not only to see the geographical settings of the various countries and to observe the cultural achievements of the inhabitants, but also to listen to the narratives of their priests and elders. Even those who doubt the distances he claimed to have covered admit that he gathered his historical material from traders, soldiers and travellers who themselves saw various societies and and/or heard about their past events, and with their information combined with his sagacious analysis he produced his nine books.

The famous Arab writers who produced important works between the ninth and fifteenth centuries A.D. (among whom are al-Yaqubi, Ibn Hawqal, al-Mas’udi, Ibn Battuta and others) also gathered their material from their own observation and the narration of numerous people. For example, Ibn Battuta (1304–68) toured throughout north Africa, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Arabia, a part of the Eritrean and Sudanese coasts, Persia, India, as far as China as well as parts of Europe and west Africa before he settled in his home country, Morocco, to write his books after thirty years’ travels.² His works are still useful sources of history, although in the meantime other sources – archeology, linguistics and archival documents – are given priority in the reconstruction of history. In the meantime oral tradition has also

¹ F. Bacon, *Novum Organum*, cited in Carr, 1939, p. vii.

² For further details of his travels, see Defremery and Sanguenetti (Eds.), 1962.

been rehabilitated and has acquired scientific methodology through hard studies of brilliant scholars of the twentieth century.³

Oral tradition is not only a historical source. It is the philosophy of social life which includes within itself the rules and regulations of the society's order and security. Only through tradition could the numerous communities of Eritrea or any other country for that matter survive throughout the centuries. 'Oral' signifies merely the transmission of the system by word of mouth. 'Tradition' is the essence of the system. It is not easy to imagine how a society could continue to exist without tradition. There would be no marriage, no obligation, no agreement, no peace, to say the least. The countries that have developed central institutions such as parliament and government regulate the important elements to insure the order and security of their societies. But one must not forget that those institutions are also gradual developments of tradition. Many of the industrial countries today collect and archive their oral traditions in order to facilitate the research about their societies' past.

Prior to the birth of Eritrean historiography in the second half of the nineteenth century, the region which was known by various names, including Eritrea, before it was officially proclaimed 'Eritrea' by Italian colonialists was not terra incognita; Protestant and Catholic Missionaries, explorers and adventurers heading for the central and southern parts of Ethiopia and the Sudan traversed it at least since the sixteenth century.⁴ The two traditional trade routes connecting the Ottoman-controlled port of Massawa and the central highlands of Ethiopia which ran across the southeastern part of Eritrea were also the routes which the travellers of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century followed before the Obock and Zeila routes were regarded as safe. But these travellers scarcely bequeathed us any information on the cultural, linguistic or social life of the inhabitants of Eritrea. They were of the opinion that the Christian highland was an extension of Tigray and the rest was the country of the Moors who, in the thinking of the time, did not deserve any study. Two indefatigable researchers – a Swiss and an Austrian – successfully worked against that theory and showed the academic world what there was indeed worth writing about in that region of Africa. Their determination opened the path which was to be followed by a number of researchers who produced books and articles on various aspects of Eritrean oral tradition.⁵

³ Among the famous ones are Jan Vansina, Christophe Wondji, Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch and Jean-Pierre Chrétien. For further names of their colleagues and some of their works, see Jewsiewicki and Newbury (Eds.), 1986.

⁴ Cf Pankhurst, 1965: pp. 1–104; Zach, 1985: pp. 53–167; Matthies, 2003: pp. 1–80.

⁵ Actually three Europeans had visited 'Bogos' and the neighbouring areas immediately before the arrival of Munzinger, and two of them wrote general descriptions of the region and their inhabitants. But they did not go into the details of the society's traditions. Cf Sapeto, 1857: pp. 187–233, and --, 1861: pp. 299–308; Plowden, 1868: pp. 18–23 and *passim*.

PART ONE

THE ANSEBA VALLEY, HOME OF MANY PEOPLES
 GEOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF HALHAL AND MAREA⁴³

by

Werner Munzinger

Physiognomy of the Anseba mountains – Geographic Profile of Halhal and Marea – The torrent nature of the river – Origin and meaning of the word “Anseba” – Tributaries of the Anseba – Natural divisions of the river course – Comparison of the Anseba to the Barka – The streams of Marea – The unknown end of the Anseba – Further comparison with the Barka – The political impact of the river.

Every range of high mountains will appear to the seafarer or desert wanderer from afar as one continuous chain without gap or gate, only rarely will sharp peaks give some variety to the almost level contour line. In this way he will obtain a general impression but only a half-truth. For, when compelled by his curiosity he moves nearer to the mountains, his illusion will fade with his every step. The conformity falls away; valley and mountain appear as littered about in a jumble, it is impossible to discover any sort of a coherent plan of nature. That is the impression, the visible reality; and yet he will miss the truth if he allows the exception to mislead him into forgetting the rule. What use would the bulging mass of mountains and rivers be to him if there were not some system discernible that reveals to him the ingenious,

⁴³ This article (part 1 of 2) by Werner Munzinger originally appeared in print in the scientific journal: *Zeitschrift für Allgemeine Erdkunde – Neue Folge*. Vol. 12, Berlin, 1862. pp. 162–173. This title was preceded in the original by the following note: “Extract from Werner Munzinger’s Diary beginning 13th July 1861 with the departure from Mocullu (Om Kullu), finishing 15th October 1861 in Keren. Transmitted by Dr. H. Barth (with a map, table III)”. It was published in two parts, but we have excluded part II which describes the inhabitants of the Anseba valley in a very similar way as the account given in Munzinger’s *Ostafrikanische Studien* published in 1864 from which we borrowed the texts of parts three and four of the present compilation. Dr. Heinrich Barth (1821–1865) was a famous German explorer of Africa and parts of western Asia. How he came across Munzinger’s ‘diary’ is unknown. There is also no hint that the ‘diary’ was ever published or preserved in ms. form.

poetic, almost humanly intelligible course of nature? So we, too, can illustrate our geographic observations only by, in the first place, defining their position within the whole system. We are all the more compelled to proceed in this way as only a bas-relief, and no map, can reliably reproduce a country.

In order to understand the formation of the Marea mountains we must have recourse to its principle which is the high plateau of Hamasen. As massif⁴⁴ (stock), as its basis, the plateau of Zasega presents itself as the only instance, eastward extending to the declivity toward Samhar, westward toward the kolla of Démbela without valleys interrupting its level— which gives it the character of a true high plateau. Moreover, Zasega has to be regarded as the highest elevation of northern Abyssinia since it soon drops on all sides; toward the south, a few hours beyond Zasega, the high plateau is intersected and divided by the Mareb, and almost abruptly this very fast river, swiftly gaining strength, hollows out a weirdly deep valley whereby the plateau is cut into two arms, on the east side the high plateau of Aggela and Saher, on the west side the peninsula Sarak. Without meaning to proceed further in this direction we have yet sketched the analogy because of this branching off of the basis, seeing that in the north the same phenomenon presents itself – but effected much more slowly, more consistently, and more regulated. The part of the Mareb is here played by the Anseba that descends to the lowlands in regular gentle stages, thereby dividing the northern extension of the high plateau by its wide valley into two mountain ranges that, at an almost continuous height, form a considerable extension of the daga. So, for a basis of our survey we have the massif continuing northward in two almost parallel arms, and the Anseba that, springing from the stock, shapes a deep valley for itself which divides the two arms of the stock from one another.

We are used to accepting as the source of a river the place where it wells up as natural spring water; but this applies only to water that flows constantly and unceasingly. Where the river is only a bed for rain water (torrens) we have to regard as its source the arm with the longest course from the interior of the high plateau, and by no means the streams of rain water from the mountains; where there are several competing streams, preference must be given to the one that conforms to the lower course in the most natural way, without a noticeable change of direction. In the light of these principles, Mai goila of Zasega must be regarded as the source of the Anseba; for the Anseba cannot be regarded as a river but only as a torrens, as it carries running water only for three months of the rainy season. As to its length,

⁴⁴ TN: According to The Shorter Oxford Dictionary (third edition repr. 1950), in 1885 “A large mountain mass ..., a compact portion of a range” – which is the precise definition of Munzinger’s understanding of his term “Gebirgsstock”, i.e. a trunk with limbs. To him these rivers and mountains are no insensitive matter, but animated parts of creation, alive and each with a distinctive character.

PART TWO

ON THE CUSTOMS AND THE LAW OF THE BOGOS

by

Werner Munzinger

With a map of the northern borderlands of Abyssinia
and a preface by J. M. Ziegler

PREFACE

To the northeast⁴⁹ of the often mentioned ascent from Massua⁵⁰ on the Red Sea to Halai, the first station of Abyssinia, lies a small mountain region in whose place but a few years ago there was just a white spot on all maps, until the same was visited by Europeans and made known to wider circles. The first to come were the Lazarist missionaries, Messrs Stella⁵¹ and Sapeto⁵² who in 1852 traversed the territories of the Habab, the Menza, and the Bogos. After them came the British consul in Massua, Mr. Plowden, to those regions in January 1854. Soon after, in May 1854,

⁴⁹ Obviously a mistake for 'northwest'.

⁵⁰ Also written 'Massawa'.

⁵¹ Giovanni Stella, an Italian Lazarist missionary, who worked with Mgr. Massaia in Gondar and Tigray in the early 1840s and later with Biancheri in Bogos. In 1851–52 he accompanied Sapeto in an exploratory travel to Samhar, Mensa'e, Bogos and Habab, but it is unknown if he ever published anything. In the mid-1860s, he left the mission, married a Blean and undertook an agricultural concession at Tchitel to the south of Keren. Cf Puglisi, 1952: p. 276; Bottaro, 2003: pp. 18–30.

⁵² Giuseppe Sapeto (1811–95) was an Italian Lazarist missionary who arrived in Northeast Africa in 1838 and worked in Tigray until his return to Europe in 1843 for reasons of health. In 1851–52, he explored, jointly with Stella, Samhar, Mensa'e, Bogos and Habab about which he published a book. See appendix IV below. He subsequently held academic positions in various institutions of higher learning in Paris, Genoa and other cities and published other works of linguistic, historical and geographical interest. But he is remembered in Northeast African historiography more for the purchase of Asab Bay on behalf of the Rubatino Maritime company, which became the beginning of the colonization of Eritrea, than for his missionary and academic activities.

Herr Werner Munzinger travelled across the land of the Menza to Mogarech and after a brief stay returned via Betschuk to Massua.

Subsequent journeys afforded him a closer acquaintance with the stretches between 15–17° northern latitude and 35–37° eastern longitude (v. the attached map) so that he could design the first map thereof in which, however, the region of the Bogos, his residence so far, has a better claim to local exactness than the surrounding districts.⁵³ Soon after meeting the land and its people he felt attracted to both, and in a *Mittheilung*⁵⁴ expressed himself as follows:

“All those who have visited this people and wandered across their beautiful valleys, carry the same impression of a land of promise back to the sands of Massua. The climate is Italian, the soil excellent, and all the riches of the colonies could be transplanted there. The inhabitants are noble and hospitable, Christians by memory and intuition, and my worthy friend, Mr. Johann Stella, their missionary, cannot fail to endow them with the teachings of Christian civilization.”⁵⁵

It is understandable that this feeling which Munzinger has preserved for “his Bogos” to the present day, has also equipped him with the genuine sympathy and perseverance to report on them and their institutions. Considering such praise, one can only wonder that this “blessed land”, so closely bordering on the main thoroughfare between the Red Sea and Abyssinia, could yet remain unknown until very recently.

By way of four stages, or terraces, one climbs – as Munzinger instructs⁵⁶ us – from there to Tigre where on the topmost, Zasega, capital of Hamasen, and beyond, the well-known first Abyssinian station, Halai, is reached. There, i.e. to the south, lies the province which has always served as a buffer against the thrusts from Abyssinia, and probably also saved the Bogos and their neighbours from that side. That was the case until very recently, but as Munzinger (p. 22) tells us himself, the Empire of Habesch⁵⁷, revived under Emperor Theodoros⁵⁸, appears to be expanding its influence across wider marches. That august man is aiming for a port on the Red

⁵³ In the 1860s, he was able to explore most of the other districts and the results were published in various journals; cf Appendix II below) and in his book – *Ostafrikanische Studien. Mit einer Karte von Nord-Abyssinien und den Ländern am Mereb, Barka und Anseba*; 2nd repr. (Basel 1883).

⁵⁴ ZN: *Zeitschrift für Allgemeine Erdkunde*, Berlin, September number, 1857, p. 204.

⁵⁵ This quotation is probably taken from Munzinger’s article of 1857: cf Munzinger, 1857: pp. 204 f.

⁵⁶ ZN: *Nouvelles Annales des Voyages, rédigées par Mr. V. A. Malte-Brun*, September 1858, p. 260.

⁵⁷ Arabic form for Abyssinia.

⁵⁸ ZN: On the same, see Von Heuglin, *Reise in Abyssinien 1852, 1853*, p. 40. Dr. Krapf, letter of 20th February 1855, *Zeitschrift für allgemeine Erdkunde*, Berlin, IV. , p. 352, or his *Reisen in Ostafrika*, II. , p. 353.

PART THREE

HISTORY & TRADITION OF BET-TAKUE¹²⁷

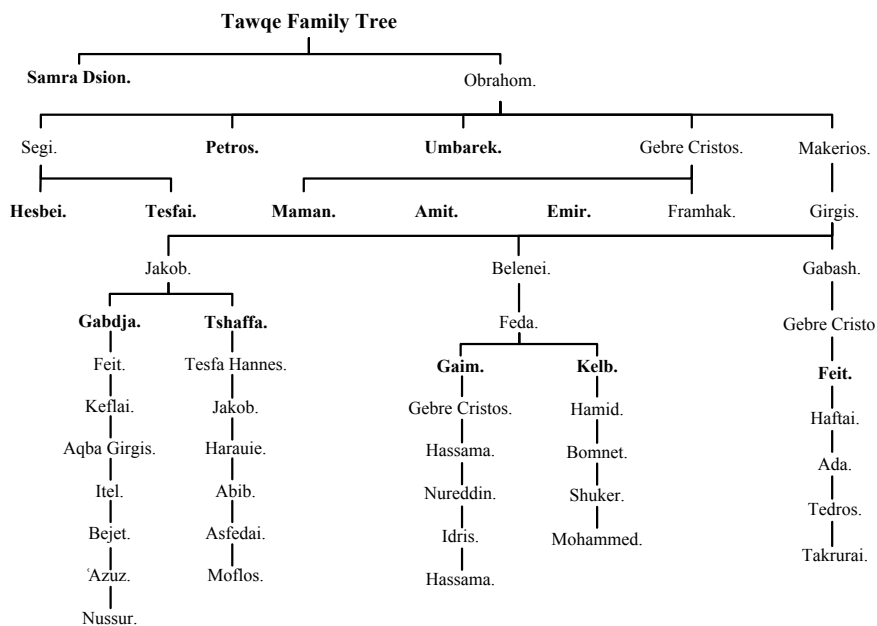
By

Werner Munzinger

Origin of the Bet-Tawqe – Their practice of burying the dead – Frequent attacks from distant rulers and close neighbours – Villages and their inhabitants – Customary laws and penalties – The language spoken in the region.

Seeing that the Halhal plain is regarded as the ancestral seat of the Bet-Takue, we feel it to be expedient to insert some remarks on this people. As the Bet-Takue, quite like the Bogos, enjoy an aristocratic tribal constitution, we have to provide the family tree of the ruling families as lineal pride has preserved it in memory, in a footnote.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ The text of this section which was originally entitled “Über die Beit Takue” is taken from Werner Munzinger’s book, *Ostafrikanische Studien*, Schaffhausen, 1864, repr. Basel, 1883, pp. 195–209.
¹²⁸



Of course, we are mentioning only the most important lines. Thus we find thirteen generations down to the progenitor of this people that bears his name; Belen [Blean] is another, inaccurate, term for the Takue, based on their language. There is no doubt whatever that the Takue are descended from the Gümegan [Dimbezan] in Hamasen; even now they are acknowledged by the latter as their relations, and in Ad Teklesan [Ad-Tekelezan] there are plots of land pointed out as their property which is left fallow owing to their owners' absence. So, the Takue are a branch of the large family of Beit Atoshim [Bet-Ateshim] that rules and, for the greater part, also inhabits, the Hamasen. Tradition names as the first immigrant from Abyssinia Samra Dsion [Semere-Tsyon], son of Takue. He is said to have come (about 300 years ago) together with his relations Bidel and Zer'u, down the slope of Af-Gula via Schütel [Shitel] to the foot of Debre Salé [Däbrä-Sale] where they jointly founded a village in Hümmeret Goila; there is even talk about a church of theirs that is said to have stood near Af Sabr (close to Adartá [Aderde]). It is not known why they were not satisfied with their first settlement; they decided to look for a better location and sent scouts to the adjacent plateau. One of them discovered Debre Salé, another Halhal, the third Ere. Each praised his find, and because none was ready to give in, they went their separate ways: Bidel took possession of Debre Salé where there are still traces of their villages and churches to be found; Zer'u made for Ere where his descendants have been dispossessed by the Marea [Marya]; Samra Dsion came to Halhal. Whereas we are planning to deal with his two companions later, let us now follow up his fate and his clan's.

Samra Dsion's descendants have wasted away and died out; their village of Mai Auálid [May-Awalid] no longer exists, their church has fallen to ruins. The present Takue are almost all descended from Obraham's sons, the most outstanding of whom were Gebre Cristos and Makerios [Meqaryos], the other branches have joined them and are living with them. There had, however, also Tigrés, or villains, come as immigrants; with Samra Dsion there came the Drauen; Obraham on the other hand is said to have arrived with seven men by the names of Dsarui, Dengenei, Legenei, Sakrenei, Hamasenei, Garai, Kasenei, whose descendants are split into as many clans in accordance with their names which, however, seem to be indicative rather of their places of origin than proper names, as is clearly apparent in the case of Kasenei (man from Kasen, a village in Karneshim) and Hamasenei.

As concerns the Barea, they have to be acknowledged as the original inhabitants of the country; also the place names are an indication of this, e.g. Aretta. As mentioned above, at the time of immigration there were only scant remnants of them left; the larger part of that people is supposed to have emigrated before that time to their present residences. The land around the Anseba was at that time shared by Beit Mushe and, in the upper part, the Qagin. The Gengerén owned Bab Gengerén and Aretta; they are still there; we shall deal with them later. It is difficult to decide

PART FOUR

HISTORY AND TRADITION OF BET-MAREA¹²⁹

By

Werner Munzinger

Origin of the Marya – The different localities of the Marya – The Red and Black Marya – Conversion of the Marya to Islam – Tax estimates of the Marya – Agriculture and cattle rearing – Manner of installing leaders – Comparison of Marya law with that of Bogos – The master and the Tigre – Relations of the Marya among themselves and with their neighbours.

Since to the aristocratic peoples that we have so far met around the river basin of the Anseba the ideas of community and family are coincidental, so that every family including its protégés occupies its own settlement and the population is numbered not by heads but by immediate and extended families, we have never scorned to report their family trees, as they are the only way to convey a clear conception of the close links within the clan; and with the Marea we shall proceed in the same way. There is no doubt that such a petrification of the system where the only factor that determines the importance of the individual is derived from his or her being a member within the family circle, where every child is conscious of its clan and genealogy, can develop only where the people have next to no contact with traffic and trade.

Genealogies, though, rarely extend beyond fifteen generations, for the simple reason that their political import dwindles the farther they reach back, since blood kin in its strict meaning does not include more than seven degrees; the family links beyond this limit still create a feeling of solidarity but without any political or legal consequence. A people's history that dates back at best 350 years would indeed be badly off. So, into its place steps tradition which, if used with care, is not altogether futile; for we shall soon find out if it conforms with the traditions of neighbouring or

¹²⁹ The text of this section which was originally headed "Reise in's Land der Marea" [= "Expedition to the country of the Marea"] is taken from Werner Munzinger's book, *Ostafrikanische Studien*, Schaffhausen, 1864, repr. Basel, 1883, pp. 222–249.

related peoples. The ultimate resort would, of course, be language; but that will allow decisive conclusions only in the case of larger peoples and not of small clans that derive their origin from only one man or very few persons. Whereas a whole people will not readily abandon its language, a small clan, when squeezed in between large foreign-speaking peoples, may very well do so; and so will, all the easier, do their progenitors who, immigrated as a small troop, settle among the original inhabitants of the country and only by and by multiply to become an independent people.

That is why we find the Takue speaking Belen, in spite of their Ethiopian origin, because their ancestors, when they were still only a few, were dependent on a Belen-speaking people for support; for the very same reason they are at present about to exchange that language for Tigré, because they are surrounded by Tigré-speaking peoples. In the Barka itself, the fact that Tigré and To-bedauié have co-existed for a long time now, indicates two distinctly heterogeneous peoples; but not even from this linguistic division may we infer with certainty that it corresponds with their ethnic origins. Rather, accident must have played a part in giving priority to To-bedauié in one place, to Chassie in another; else, it would be inexplicable why the ruling tribe, the Nebtab, should be speaking mostly To-bedauié in the Barka but Chassie in Söhel. However, the more a people grows, the more reluctantly will it change its language.

To determine a people's origins by their law and customs is even more difficult; for in the most important respects the Bogos, Takue, Mensa, Habab, and the inhabitants of the Samhar, are in complete accordance although from the historian's point of view they are not related. But since we know for a fact that all these tribes immigrated not so long ago in very small numbers from very different regions, replacing or subduing the original inhabitants, the obvious inference is that the original population was somehow homogeneous with common laws and customs; that these newcomers conformed to the majority and that only after they had attained superiority they adapted this adopted law to their aristocratic notions. That they accomplished this, in spite of their different origins, rather uniformly, can be easily explained from their position as a single foreign family confronting a majority of natives, which demands a firm aristocratic solidarity.

Naturally all these peoples tell their history in a way to suggest that they were the original aristocracy from time immemorial. But that does not square with their own genealogical tradition which traces their origins to only a few immigrants. Because it is evident that a few strangers arriving in an inhabited country cannot straight away seize the reigns of power. For a long time they will have to be content with sufferance, until they have multiplied sufficiently to come forward in their own right. That is why the origins of these peoples are clothed in obscurity; humble beginnings are not sufficiently impressive to deserve being remembered.

PART FIVE

ORIGIN AND SETTLEMENT OF BET-TARQE¹⁴⁵

HISTORICAL TRADITIONS OF THE BOGOS

By

Leo Reinisch

Origin of the Bogos – Immigration of the Katim, and the case of the Rom – The immigration of the Barea and their replacement by the Blean – The Dschaula and Kalkalti in Hamasen and Mansa – Immigration of Gabre-Tarqe into the Bogosland – Conflicts among the various groups of Gabre-Tarqe’s descendants and with their neighbours.

1.

The four¹⁴⁶ brothers Lammaschelli, Bigatay, Soquina and Belaqa, came down¹⁴⁷ from Abyssinia¹⁴⁸ and settled on the Ansaba. Belaqa occupied for himself Baqil-sabiniuch, Lammaschelli, Bigatay and Soquina however established themselves in

¹⁴⁵ This text, originally entitled „Geschichtliche Ueberlieferungen [sic.] der Bogos“, is taken from Leo Reinisch, *Die Bilin-Sprache I-III. I: Texte der Bilin-Sprache*. Leipzig, 1883, pp. 1–66.

¹⁴⁶ As in Munzinger’s work two more brothers are omitted: Debru who like Gebru settled in Adirba or Idirba, a mountainous and relatively distant area from the settlements of his brothers, and Satif who according to all legends left no issue behind. The descendants of Debru had moved sometime earlier to the highlands before the coming of the researchers, only to return home in 1879. The informants of the researchers probably did not tell them about the absentees. Later writers – e.g. Pollera, Ghebre-Yesus, Mika’el and Birhane-Mesqel – however, mention them in their works. Two years after the appearance of his book in print Munzinger visited Adirba along with the German expeditionary team of 1861–62.

¹⁴⁷ In a footnote to the Blean text, Reinisch remarks that ‘gam’ = ‘descend’ means actually ‘descend from a mountain’. Here especially it denotes the immigration from the heights of Hamasen, hence the translation “came down from”.

¹⁴⁸ This name, which generally was used as alternative to ‘Ethiopia’ in foreign literature, refers in this context and in several travel accounts to Seraye and Hamasen where the Blean had lived before they settled for good in the middle part of the Ansaba valley.

the Gundabertina, whence the three removed to the Gusch. There they had enough to eat, for they held sway over the river frontages on either side of the Ansaba.

Then, the whole tribe of the Katim came to settle in Harkokya, and when they were established there they once said to Lammaschelli: "Our land is too small, do give us some more!"

"No, no, this is my property," Lammaschelli told them, whereupon the Katim scattered and disappeared; some moved to Halhal, others to the Marea, part of them are still living among us.

Lammaschelli, Bigatay and Soquina later moved to Amer, the Belaqa however stayed in Baqil-sabiniuch.

Then Lammaschelli returned to Gusch and built his houses of stone there. In that way, the land above Amer became Lammaschelli's land; below Lammaschelli's estates Bigatay ruled in Amer, and Baqil-sabiniuch became the property of Belaqa, their brother.

Lammaschelli settled on the Ansaba; from Ansaba as far as Tschindiq he owns the following places: Daronqua, Awal, Assagito, also on the border of Salaba: Maaldi and Baluwa up to Megasses: so, those are his grounds.

Then Lammaschelli's three brothers Bigatay, Soquina and Belaqa said to him: "We will divide the land among us!" "Oh yes, let us divide then," said Lammaschelli. "Oh yes, that is just and fair," the four brothers said to one another.

To divide the land they measured it, and then Lammaschelli was told: "As the eldest, choose your share!"

Then Lammaschelli replied: "By virtue of my primogeniture I take for myself: on the Ansaba the grounds of Gurda-alabo, Kuarikoch, Gellu, Tschindiq, Diragum, Gusch and the Gundabertina as far as Baqil-sabiniuch."

"Agreed; the youngest brother is Belaqa, take him with you and give him some of your estates; I however shall give to Soquina the fields above Amer," said Bigatay to Lammaschelli.

"Agreed, that's right," they said to one another, and Bigatay moved with Soquina to Amer; Belaqa however and Lammaschelli settled on the Ansaba.

Then Lammaschelli and Belaqa fell out, and when they were about to apportion Belaqa slew his brother's son and fled to the great king.

Of Belaqa's family one part stayed behind and said to Lammaschelli: "Make me your brother; whatever you say I shall do."

"Agreed!" said Lammaschelli; "take the Gundabertina above Baqil-sabiniuch, and below, Diragum and Saleguat shall be your property." "Bless me, then," Belaqa said and received the blessing, and subsequently built his residence at Dschartam.

Then Lammaschelli said to Belaqa: "You should bring your brother back, there is no danger for him."