

A POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY OF RAS ALULA

1875 - 1897

by

Haggai Erlich

A Thesis submitted for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at the University of London

School of Oriental and African Studies

June 1973



ProQuest Number: 10672713

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 10672713

Published by ProQuest LLC (2017). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code  
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

ABSTRACT

Rās Alulā played a significant role in the political history of northern Ethiopia during the period between the Egyptian invasion of 1875 and the Italian defeat at Adwā in 1896. This son of a peasant managed to avoid the *local* social scale by becoming the best general of the Tigrean Emperor Yohannes. As such, he helped his master to consolidate Tigrean hegemony in Ethiopia and was appointed as the governor of the problematic frontier province of the future Eritrea. External threats to this province made him a key figure in Ethiopia's relations with its African neighbours and with European powers.

Alulā's power, based on his imperial rank and provincial function, was at its height during the period of 1884-1887. His activities during those years culminated in military victories (at Kūfīt against the Mahdists and at Dogali against the Italians) but resulted in the collapse of his dual basis of power: Eritrea and the Tigrean emperor.

Back in Tēgre after the death of Yohannes in 1889, Alulā's only way to avoid returning to the lower rungs of the feudal ladder was to preserve the Tigrean hegemony. Thus, as the counsellor of Yohannes's heir, Rās Mangashā, Alulā became throughout the period of 1889-1893 the most persistent fighter for a Tēgre independent of the Shoan Emperor Menilek II. His policy, however, based on uniting the Tigrean élite under Mangashā and attracting the Italians in Eritrea to join hands against the emperor was unsuccessful. The Tigrean nobles never forgot his humble origin and the Italians could not forgive him for Dogali.

Thus, in 1894, Alulā fully recognised Menilek's hegemony just to return to the position of a 'King's man'. As such he fought in the battle of Adwā and met his death a year later.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It gives me especial pleasure to thank all those who have assisted me in the preparation of this study. My research was encouraged and supported by the Faculty of Humanities and the Department of Middle Eastern and African History of Tel-Aviv University, by the Central Research Fund of London University, and by the British Council.

My deepest gratitude goes to my supervisor, Professor R. Gray, for his encouragement and guidance. Professor E. Ullendorff and Professor G. Goldenberg offered me invaluable advice and tuition. My teachers, colleagues and friends in Tel Aviv University, Professor S. Shamir, Professor U. Dann, Dr. H. Shaked, Mr. S. Raz, Mr. I. Grinfeld and others were more than helpful in offering their aid; my debt of gratitude to them is heavy. The Institute of Ethiopian Studies was a pleasant as well as a most useful place, thanks to Professor and Mrs. R. Pankhurst. Professor S. Rubenson and Professor P.M.Holt were kind enough to give me important Sudanese and Egyptian documents. Dadjāzmāch Dr. Zawde Gabra Sellāsse's advice shed light on many difficult problems and Mr. R. Cowley <sup>so helpfully</sup> translated for me the Ge'ez MS. of Alulā's history. Dr. R. Caulk was most encouraging and helpful in generously giving me Ethiopian documents and guiding me through the French archives.

Last, but not least, my deepest gratitude goes to my wife Hanna who had shared the burden and delight of this work with me.

ABBREVIATIONS

AA Rub.Col.	'Abidīn Archives (Cairo). Egyptian documents available in Rubenson's Collection, IES.
A.S.MAI	Archivio Storico del <del>s</del> oppresso Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Rome.
BM	British Museum.
BN	Bibliothèque Nationale.
Dadj.	Dadjāzmāch.
D.I.	Diarii Informazioni in A.S.MAI.
DN	<u>The Daily News</u>
Fit.	Fitāwrāri.
FO	Foreign Office.
H.S.I.U.	Haile Sellassie I University, Addis Ababa.
IES	Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa.
Int.	Interview with.
JES	<u>Journal of Ethiopian Studies.</u>
LV	<u>Libro Verde.</u>
MAE	Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Rome.
MAE(F)	Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris.
M.d.G.	Ministero della Guerra.
MG	<u>The Manchester Guardian</u>
NA	<u>Nuova Antologia.</u>
RMI	<u>Rivista Militare Italiana.</u>
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies, London University.
W.	Wayzaro.
WO	War Office

Note on Transliteration

I tried to be consistent about transliterating Ethiopian names, titles etc. from their Amharic form. I used ā for the fourth order and e for the sixth.<sup>1</sup>

Thus:

ደጃዝማች ድረሰ ሥላሴ። = Dadjāzmāch Hāyla Sellāsse.

Arabic names appearing in the text are rendered phonetically, only the 'ayn and hamza have been specifically designated.

Thus:

بنو عامر = Banū 'Amir.      نائب = Nā'ib.

The spelling of names familiar to English readers is sometimes given in the form commonly accepted by English publications: Massawa, Addis Ababa.

In quotations from Italian sources I have left the Italian form. Thus:

Mangashā = Mangascia.

---

<sup>1</sup>A different system was used by R. Cowley, who translated the Ge'ez Ms. of Mannawe.

CONTENTS

	page
Abstract .. .. .	1
Acknowledgements .. .. .	3
Abbreviations .. .. .	4
A. Alulā "Wadi Qubi" .. .. .	7
B. 1872-1876: Shālaqā Alulā .. .. .	12
C. 1877-1879: The king's man: "Rās Alulā who is a Turk Bāshā" .. .. .	23
D. 1880-1882: "Rival of Shoa. Ruler of Massawa" .. .. .	45
E. 1883: The eve of a second Egyptian-Ethiopian war .. .. .	61
F. 1884: Treaty with Britain .. .. .	69
G. 1884: Disillusionment .. .. .	82
H. 1885: "The year in which the Dervishes were cut down" .. .. .	95
I. Asmarā .. .. .	139
J. 1885-1886: The Italians in Massawa: From a European neighbour to a local rival .. .. .	155
K. 1886-1887: Dogali .. .. .	171
L. 1887: The end of Alulā's government in the Marab Mellash .. .. .	191
M. 1888-1889: The end of the Tigrean emperor .. .. .	219
N. 1889-1890: Alulā's failure to preserve Tigrean hegemony .. .. .	241
O. 1890-1892: Alulā's failure to create a Tigrean- Eritrean front against Menilek .. .. .	277
P. 1892-1894: "Wadi Qubi" challenges the son of Yohannes .. .. .	307
Q. 1894-1897: A king's man again: An acceptance of Shoan hegemony .. .. .	320
Conclusion .. .. .	350
Genealogy of Alulā and the Tigrean élite .. .. .	357
Glossary .. .. .	358
Bibliography .. .. .	361
Indexed maps .. .. .	371



A. ALULĀ WADI QUBI

When Rās Alulā died on 19th February 1897 he was famous enough to be lamented by a contemporary British historian in the following words:

"The greatest leader that Abyssinia has produced since the death of the Emperor Theodore in 1868, was undoubtedly Ras Alula; a chief whose honourable and fearless character often stood out in bold relief against the background of intrigue that fills every picture of Abyssinian political life."<sup>1</sup>

Yet only a few old people in the small village of Mannawe, some fifteen miles south of Abbi-Addi the capital of Tamben district in Tēgre, could remember his father's name: \*engdā Qubi, a humble farmer.<sup>2</sup> Qubi, Alulā's grandfather, was probably more famous than his son and the child, born in the 1840s<sup>3</sup> in the village of Zuqī, two miles west of Mannawe, was nicknamed "Wadi Qubi", the son of Qubi.

Ato \*engdā Qubi and his wife, Wayzaro Garada (the daughter of Nagid, a local notable from the neighbouring village of Bagā) were simple bālāgars, farmers.<sup>4</sup> Information based on an interview with Alulā<sup>5</sup> according to which he "was born a soldier because

---

<sup>1</sup>G.F.Berkeley, The Campaign of Adowa and the Rise of Menelik, London, 1902; New Edition, London 1935, p.13.

<sup>2</sup>A collective interview in Mannawe, February 1972. Interview with Fitāwrārī Bayana Abrehā, a descendant of Alulā; Aksum, February 1972.

<sup>3</sup>Many sources are contradictory as to Alulā's date of birth. Hill's suggestion of 1847 seems the more likely. R.Hill, A Biographical Dictionary of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Oxford 1951 (second Ed., London 1967).

<sup>4</sup>This fact is agreed by all the written and oral sources, with the exception of G.Puglisi, Chi e? dell' Eritrea, Asmara 1952, p.14. Puglisi suggested that "Abba Gubbi" was a Dajjāzmāch.

<sup>5</sup>L.Mercatelli, "Nel Paese di Ras Alula", Corriere di Napoli, 15.6.1891. Based on interviews conducted with Alulā in March and May 1891. On Mercatelli, see below, p.283

his father was a soldier and also his grandfather" need not be regarded as contradictory. The self-armed peasantry constituted the main source of military manpower in that period in Tēgre. The farmers were recruited by the Nagārit war-drums to follow their local masters in the almost ceaseless warfare of their country.

Young Alulā, given the baptismal name of Gabra Mikā'el, was the fourth child of 'engdā, a brother to Kaffa, Tasammā, and Gabra Māryam and to his two younger sisters, Dēngu and Kāssā.<sup>1</sup>

The people of Mannawe remember but few details about the childhood of the future leader. He was brought from the neighbouring Zuqī to be educated in their church by the Mamher Walda Giyorgis and, being an aggressive and dominating child, he soon became the leader of the children. A huge rock on the top of the opposite mountain, they say, was his favourite playground, climbing on which he would make the others follow him. There on the summit he would give bread to those who managed to join him and, sitting there for hours looking at the mountainous scenery of Tamben, the young leader would tell them many fantastic stories.

One day - goes a story well known throughout Tēgre - a group of people were going to a wedding ceremony carrying baskets full of 'enjarā. On their way they met the children of Mannawe led by the young Alulā. 'Where are you going?' demanded the little leader and the people mockingly replied: 'To the castle

---

<sup>1</sup>Interviews with Alulā's descendants. W. Yashāshwānq, Abbi Addi, Feb. 1972. Fit. Bayana Abreha of Aksum. According to Puglisi, p.14, he had also another sister named Tamarsa.

of Rās Alulā Wādi Qubi.' Thereafter his friends and the people of Mannawe nicknamed him Rās Alulā.<sup>1</sup> It was a good example of humour based on the absurd.

The question of social mobility throughout modern Ethiopian history is still in need of further intensive research. The career of Rās Alulā was by no means the only example in which a son of a peasant, entirely destitute of wealth, hereditary rights or family prestige, reached the upper rung of the social ladder.<sup>2</sup> Yet, in his period in northern Ethiopia, against the background of the dominant Tigrean aristocracy, the rise of Alulā to such a position was unique and was by itself most significant in relation to many important developments in the history of Ethiopia during his career.

Alulā's story has all the ingredients of a personal drama, which in its vicissitudes reflects some of the major issues in his period. The revival of Tigrean hegemony over Ethiopia, the military victories which guaranteed the survival of Ethiopia's independence, the loss of Eritrea to a foreign power, the decline of the Tigrean power, the rise of Menilek and the great national victory in Adwā were all milestones in his life. Simultaneously, the story of this son of a peasant, his successes and failures, his ambitions and weaknesses, his achievements and mistakes, was an important factor in those developments.

---

<sup>1</sup>Interview with Dr. Abbā Gabra Iyāsus Haylu, Addis Ababā, Jan. 1972. Also his article "Selarās Alulā" in Yazāreyatu 'Ityopyā, Hedār 6th 1955 E.C. Tesfai Seyoum, Ras Alulā Abba Nega, B.A. thesis, HSIU 1970, p.2.

<sup>2</sup>Bairu Tafla, "Three distinguished Ethiopian military leaders". A paper presented at the Social Science Conference, Nairobi 1969.

The young Alulā "Wadi Qubi" started his colourful career at the bottom of the Tigrean feudal ladder. He managed to climb up a few relatively accessible rungs and could well have finished his career as a local administrator, had not the Tēgre become the centre of the Ethiopian Empire. With the coming to power of his patron, Yohannes IV as a Tigrean emperor, the young Alulā managed to cross from the local, *agrarian* ladder and started climbing up the imperial one. He distinguished himself as a warrior and since he had no hereditary rights or an agrarian basis of power in Tēgre he was more easily trusted by the emperor. Alulā's excellent military services in fighting external enemies and establishing the Tigrean internal supremacy established him in the position of the king's man. This was his main source of power (and eventually lack of power) up to the death of Emperor Yohannes. The political events of northern Ethiopia enabled the king's man to construct also an independent basis of power. The government which he was given over the problematic border provinces of the Marab Mellāsh (the future Eritrea) gave him the economic source and social position which he lacked in Tēgre. The border problems which he had to face in this province also made him a key figure in Ethiopia's relations with its African neighbours and European powers.

At the height of his career Alulā's power was based on his imperial rank, his position in the court, and as governor of a strategically important province.

His character and activities were undoubtedly important factors, not only in the building of that power, but also in its collapse: the loss of the Marab Mellāsh (Eritrea) to a foreign

power and the end of the Tigrean emperor.

Yet, this energetic person without any visible basis of power managed to continue to play a most significant role in his country's history.

B. 1872-1876 SHĀLAQA ALULĀ1868-1872: Lower rungs of the local ladder

In 1868 when Rās Ar'āyā Demṣu was released from Emperor Tewodros's prison, young Alulā, whose father's land probably belonged to Ar'āyā, became Ar'āyā's Ashkar, i.e., one of his followers.<sup>1</sup>

Rās Ar'āyā was a true representative of the Tigrean ruling class: a descendant of a former governor of the province and the head of a *family with* hereditary rights (Rəst) *ownership* over the/of vast territories in various parts of Təgre. As his Ashkar, Alulā was probably a kind of personal servant or a tax collector in his master's domains. Here in the Rās's house he probably met for the first time two of the main personalities in his future career, Ar'āyā's son Dabbab and his youngest daughter \*əmlasu.

The young 'Wadi Qubi' did not stay long in Ar'āyā's house and was soon transferred by his master to his successful nephew, Dadjāzmāch Kāssā, to whom he became an \*elfəgn kalkāy, a chamberlain and door keeper. After a few years he was promoted by Kāssā to the rank of Agāfari, the organiser of meals in the court and became the head of Kāssā's personal guard.<sup>2</sup> On 11th July 1871 the ambitious Kāssā defeated the Emperor Takla Giyorgis in the

<sup>1</sup>"Epistolario Africano", Italiani in Africa, Rome 1887, pp. 247-250. A. Bonacucina, Due Anni in Massawa, Fabriano 1887, p.40; The Daily News, 10.2.87; F. Fasolo, L'Abissinia e le Colonie Italiane, Caserta 1887, pp. 204-205.

<sup>2</sup>Fasolo, op.cit.; Interview Fīṭāwrāri Alame Tafari, Maqalle, Feb. 1972. According to Puglisi, p.14, Alulā was also a Naggādrās, i.e. chief or trader of the customs and organiser of caravans.

battle of the 'Assam River near Adwā. Oral tradition<sup>1</sup> attributes the imprisonment of Takla Giyorgis to Alulā, who was then given the first imperial rank of Shālaqā, a commander of a thousand troops.

In that stage of his early career, around 1872, Alulā married his first wife, W. Bitwatā Gabra Masqal, a daughter of a farmer from Tamben. During the seven years they lived together he had from her three daughters, Damaqach, Dinqnash and Şahaywarada.<sup>2</sup>

A Ge'ez Ms asserts that following the coronation ceremony in which Kāssā became Emperor Yohannes IV, 21st January 1872, the trusted "Shālaqā Alula became a ligābā",<sup>3</sup> i.e., official introducer and master of ceremonies at the court, as well as in charge of his personal domain.<sup>4</sup> This administrative rank, however, though superior to his military one of Shālaqā, was only once, to my knowledge, ever mentioned again.<sup>5</sup>

Alulā's activities during the period 1872-1875 are not known but he probably followed Yohannes IV who had to fight continuously at home for the consolidation of his power.<sup>6</sup> The young

---

<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Tesfai Seyoun, Ras Alula Abba Nega: A Biography, B.A. thesis, H.S.I.U. 1970, p.4. Also: A. Bartincki, Historia Etiopii, Wroclaw, 1971, p.261.

<sup>2</sup>W. Yashāshwārq, Fit. Bayana.

<sup>3</sup>A Ge'ez Ms. in the Church of Dabra Berhān Sellāsse, Adwā. This Ms. explains that Yohannes promoted and rewarded only those of whom he was certain. The relevant paragraph is "Seyumāna beta mangest". This was sent to me by the local teacher, Gigar Bazabeh.

<sup>4</sup>Interview, Dr. Dadjāzmāch Zawde Gabra Sellāsse, Addis Ababa, March 1972.

<sup>5</sup>Fasolo, op.cit.

<sup>6</sup>For Yohannes' history, see: Zewde Gabre-Sellasie, The process of Re-Unification of the Ethiopian Empire 1868-1889, unpublished D.Phil. Thesis, Oxford 1971.

Shālaqā and Ligābā was still overshadowed by the men of reputation and position in his master's court.

1875-1876: Egyptian threat and the emergence of Alulā<sup>^</sup>  
as an imperial general

Taking advantage of the internal difficulties of Yohannes the Egyptians had captured the country of Bogos in July 1872, occupied Matammā (Al-Qallābāt) in May 1873, and, encouraged by the Swiss adventurer Munzinger<sup>1</sup> and the energetic governor of Massawa, 'Arāqīl Bey, they planned in July 1875 a further invasion deep into Ethiopia.<sup>2</sup>

Bearing in mind the details and results of the successful campaign of Napier in 1868, the Egyptians hoped that their military campaign would be assisted by the Ethiopian domestic situation. Apparently the Egyptians did not aim at making a total conquest of the Ethiopian empire. Their territorial interest lay in the countries north of the Marab river, the Red Sea coast, and regions neighbouring their Sudanese colony, where they could hope to gain the allegiance of the Muslim population. A Tigrean emperor over Ethiopia with his capital quite near the Marab river (and especially a devoted Christian like Emperor Yohannes IV) was potentially an obstacle to the African empire of Khedive Ismā'īl, who would prefer to see the centre of Ethiopian power shifted to

---

<sup>1</sup>See R.Hill, A Biographical Dictionary.

<sup>2</sup>For the Egyptian invasion and the battle of Gundat, see G.Douin: Histoire du Règne du Khedive Isma'īl, Rome 1933-1941, III, 3<sup>o</sup>, fasc. A., pp. 583-4, 586 and fasc. B., pp.713, 715, 717, 718, 720, 722, 732, 735, 752, 894, 804, 812, 921.



the far south. Thus, the Egyptian campaigns of late 1875 and early 1876 were probably aimed at the fall of Emperor Yohannes IV.

During his preparations to meet the Egyptian invading column, the emperor must have felt the despair of a deserted man. Not even one of the important leaders of Ethiopia joined him to face the threat.<sup>1</sup>

When the Nagārit war-drums were beaten on 2nd November 1875 Shālāqā Alulā, in charge of the one thousand men strong advance guard, Alulā's brother Bāshā Gabra Māryam, and Dadjāzmāch Hagos,<sup>2</sup> were among the few leaders to accompany the emperor.<sup>3</sup>

Having beaten the ruler of the Hamāsen, Dadjāzmāch Gabru, the Egyptians managed to gain the cooperation of local leaders<sup>4</sup> and awaited the Ethiopian army in Addi Qualla and Gundat.

In order to try and regain the vital cooperation of the people of Hamāsen one of their hereditary leaders, Lēdj Walda Mikā'el Solomon, was mobilised by the emperor. As far back as 1869 this prince from Hamāsen had been justifiably suspected as

---

<sup>1</sup>Douin, op.cit., p.770. For details, see: Aṣme Giyorgis, Yagāllā tārik, IES Ms. 138, p.81, and Alaḳā Lamlām, Ya'ase Takla Giyorgisnā ya'ase Yohannes tārik, Ms. Ethiopiens No. 259 (Collection Mondon Vidaillet, No. 72), Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris. (A copy is kept with Dr. R. Caulk, H S.I.U.), f20 bis.

<sup>2</sup>For Hagos, later Ras Hagos, see below, p.227

<sup>3</sup>Douin, op.cit.

<sup>4</sup>C. Conti Rossini, Italia ed Etiopia, Rome 1935, p.110; Zewde, pp. 101, 102; J.A.Kolmodin, Traditions de Tsazzega et Hazzega, Rome 1912-1916, No. 238.

conspiring against the future emperor and encouraging foreign powers to invade the country.<sup>1</sup> He was imprisoned in the same year, to be released in 1871 and stay<sup>ed</sup> in the emperor's court. Giving Yohannes his word to mobilise his people against the invaders, Walda Mikā'el was made a Dadjāzmāch and accompanied the marching army.<sup>2</sup>

On 14th November Shālaqā Alulā crossed the Marab river leading the advance guard and immediately engaged the advanced Egyptian posts in Gundat. The main Ethiopian army under the emperor crossed the Marab on the night of 15-16th November. At the same time Shālaqā Alulā disengaged his forces from the Egyptians at Gundat and, outflanking from the west<sup>3</sup> those advancing from Addi Kualā, he appeared in their rear blocking their way of retreat. On the morning of 16th November 1875 the Egyptians found themselves surrounded in the steep valley, and the battle soon turned out to be a massacre from which only a few of their 3,000 men managed to escape.<sup>4</sup> Two thousand two hundred rifles and sixteen cannons were captured by the Ethiopians, who lost some 550 dead and 400 wounded, one of them being Alulā's brother Bāshā Tasammā, whose wound remained unhealed for a long period.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> A.B. Wylde '85-'87 in the Soudan, London 1888 Vol I pp. 324-326.

<sup>2</sup> Kolmodin, No. 238; R. Perini, Di Qua dal Mareb, Firenze 1905, p.36; A. Wylde, '83-'87 in the Soudan, London 1888, Vol. I, p.326; W.M.Dye, Moslem Egypt and Christian Abyssinia, N.Y. 1880, p.285.

<sup>3</sup> Takla Šadeq Makuriya, Yaityopyā tārīk, Addis Ababa 1960 E.C., p.48.

<sup>4</sup> Douin, op.cit.; Ilyās al-Ayūbī, Ta'rīkh miṣr fī 'ahd al-khidīw Ismā'il bāshā, Cairo 1923, pp. 78-85; Luca dei Sabelli, Storia d'Abissinia, Rome 1936, vol. III, p.247.

<sup>5</sup> A. Salimbeni, "Diario d'un pioniere africano", Nuova Antologia, 1936, p.149.

Dadjāzmāch Walda Mikā'el had a substantial share in the victory and, *pursuing* the retreating Egyptians, he managed to capture some seven hundred rifles.<sup>1</sup> Yet this newly restored governor of Ḥamāsen was not sufficiently trusted to be allowed to keep these arms for himself. On the emperor's orders he had to give them to Shālaqā Alulā who, with the army back in Adwā by 25th November, was appointed by Yohannes over a new force equipped with all the captured Remingtons.<sup>2</sup> Hence, the young Alulā emerged as the commander of the king's fusiliers, an important and high imperial function. This was also the starting point of his rivalry with Walda Mikā'el.

In early December 1875 a fifteen thousand strong Egyptian punitive mission landed in Massawa and, invading the Marab Mellash, soon met with an unexpected diplomatic success. Disappointed and insulted by the emperor's preference for the unknown Shālaqā, Dadjāzmāch Walda Mikā'el appeared in their camp dressed as a Muslim and offered his services. He was accompanied by his son Masfen and son-in-law Balāmbārās Kēfle Iyāsus, and promised the Egyptians to mobilise over two thousand well armed men to reinforce their column. Walda Mikā'el was warmly received and was given the Egyptian military rank of Fariq and thus promoted himself to Rās.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Alaqā Lamlam, f. 21; Kalmodin, No. 239.

<sup>2</sup>BM. Add. Mss. 51294, Gordon to his sister, 28.3.77; FO 407/11, Wylde's memo, 11.11.79; FO 78/3083, Gordon's notes 17.8.79; Douin, *op.cit.*, p.842.

<sup>3</sup>Kolmodin, No. 239; Muḥammad Rif'at Bek, Jabr al-kasr fī al-khilās min al-asr, Cairo 1314 H, pp. 14-15; Ayūbī, pp. 102-109; BM. Add. Mss. 51294, Gordon to Augusta, 15.3.77.

Rās Walda Mikā'el's reception by the Egyptians attracted additional leaders from the territories to the north of the Marab river to join the advancing camp.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the Egyptians could march down to the Marab river without a single shot and their confident army occupied Khaya Khur and Gurā' where two strong zaribas were constructed.

Oral tradition and some written sources strongly suggest that Shālaqā Alulā, leading the Ethiopian advance guard, outmanoeuvred the Egyptians in the battle of Gurā' (7-9th March 1876) which resulted in a decisive Egyptian defeat. "The Abyssinian advance guard," Gordon was told later, "defeated the Egyptian army at Gura. The king's main force never came into action."<sup>2</sup>

The tactical move attributed to the Shālaqā by oral tradition was to penetrate between the two Egyptian zaribas on 7th March and, by pretending to start a panic retreat, he tempted Rātib pasha to come out of his fortified post.<sup>3</sup> Only 1,900 troops out of the 5,200 who left the Zariba managed to return from the massacre which followed.<sup>4</sup>

"He [Yohannes] did all this with only one Tigrean" wrote an Ethiopian chronicler of the emperor, "no one from those over

<sup>1</sup>See Amharic Mss., Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, collection Mondon Vidaillet, Ethiop. 291, Mondon 104, p.22. A document kept by Dr. R. Caulk, H.S.I.U. Perini, op.cit., pp. 36, 37.

<sup>2</sup>BM. Add. Mss. 51304, Gordon's "Notes taken from king's interpreter", 23.9.79.

<sup>3</sup>Fit. Bayana Abrahā. Yet, as described by Dye, op.cit., the American advisors forced the Egyptians to march out in order to catch the Ethiopian army between two fires as it was thought to be marching through the valley in search of water.

<sup>4</sup>FO 78/2631, Vivian to Derby, 23.1.77.

whom he ruled helped him."<sup>1</sup>

The Ethiopian army experienced however its share of bloodshed. The next day when a direct assault on the Gurā' Zariba was launched, the Ethiopian inability to face an entrenched and artillery-equipped force was proved with costly losses. "The Dad-jāzmāches, the Afa Negus, the Turk Bāshā perished, let alone the soldiers. Abuna Antanewus was injured by lead shot... became sick and died."<sup>2</sup> Alulā himself - the Italian Savoiroux heard him say eleven years later - was saved from being shot by a sudden move of his horse.<sup>3</sup> Among the 1,800 dead Ethiopians<sup>4</sup> Shālaqā Alulā found the body of his elder brother Bāshā Gabra Māryam whom he later buried at Mannawe and whose only daughter he adopted.<sup>5</sup>

Despite these losses, the victory at the battle of Gurā' was without doubt a most important event in modern Ethiopian history.<sup>6</sup> For Yohannes personally it was not only a vital step towards preserving his Tigrean hegemony over Ethiopia but also brought personal security. Alulā, henceforward called "The lion of Gura",<sup>7</sup> had proved to be his main support.

---

<sup>1</sup>Lamlam, op.cit.

<sup>2</sup>ibid.

<sup>3</sup>E. Perino, Vita e gesta di Ras Alula, Rome, 1897, p.103.

<sup>4</sup>B.M. Add. Mss., 51294, Gordon to Augusta, 15.3.77.

<sup>5</sup>Conti Rossini, Italia ed Etiopia, p.77. Int. people of Mannawe.

<sup>6</sup>For descriptions of the battle of Gurā' see also: Zewde, pp. 159-168, Ayūbī, pp. 87-117; Hesselstine and Wolf, The Blue and the Gray on the Nile, Chicago 1961, pp. 194-211.

<sup>7</sup>Bonacucina, op.cit., p.43. See also: P. Matteucci, In Abissinia, Milano 1880, p.230.

"In the fourth year of the reign of Yohannes, King of Kings", wrote the unknown contemporary biographer of Alulā,<sup>1</sup> "Muslims came and arrived in the land of *Ḥamaṣēn*, and when Ras Alula heard the news of their coming, the grace of the holy spirit aroused him and messianic power emboldened him. He took up his spear, and girded his sword, and fought with them. This man Alula returned with much spoil and prizes of war, and did homage to the king. He cried out and said, 'I am your servant, the son of your maidservant.' The king said to him, 'My son, live for me for a long time' because he saw that the grace of the holy spirit rested on him. He said to his officers, 'Do you not see that favour follows this man, who showed promise from his childhood?' And he Yohannes said to him Alula, 'I give you this land which flows with milk and honey'."

October '76: Governor of Hamāsen

The victory over the invading Egyptians, effective as it was in preventing the fall of Yohannes, was not followed by adequate military measures to regain the country of Bogos which remained in Egyptian hands. Diplomatic negotiations concerning the question of the Egyptian prisoners of the war failed to solve the frontier problems. Indeed, the Egyptian delegation received by Alulā near the Marab and accompanied by him to Adwā<sup>2</sup> was soon expelled from the country. Beaten twice the Egyptians wanted Walda Mikā'el to regain control of the Hamāsen in order to make it a buffer zone to protect Bogos and Massawa and eventually serve as a springboard for future initiatives. Yohannes, aware of his enemies' move, reacted by appointing Dadjāzmāch Haylu Habal over that country. Dadjāzmāch Haylu and Walda

---

<sup>1</sup>A Ge'ez manuscript of 95 pages by an unknown author kept in the church of Mannawe. The priests there were kind enough to let me photocopy it in Maqalle, February 1972. A few additional pages were found later in Abbi Addi. It was then translated by Mr. Roger Cowley of Maqalle. (Mannawe Ms.)

<sup>2</sup>Douin, op.cit., p.1035.

Mikā'el were old rivals. They headed the two strongest and wealthiest families<sup>1</sup> in Hamāsen. The headquarters of the family of Haylu was in the village of Sa'zegā and that of Walda Mikā'el in Hazagā. These two families and centres shared between themselves the hereditary rulership of Hamāsen for many generations.<sup>2</sup>

Dadjāzmāch Haylu assumed his command in June, 1876 and marched in mid-July to Hamāsen, only to be ambushed there by the newly armed and supplied Rās Walda Mikā'el. In the battle of Wokidba, 17th July 1876, Haylu was killed; his supporters, those few who survived the massacre, fled to Tēgre and their headquarters was set on fire.<sup>3</sup> Rās Walda Mikā'el rebuilt the power of Hazagā, recalled his elder son Dadjāzmāch Masfen from Cairo,<sup>4</sup> and prepared himself for a long period of independence.

When Yohannes heard the news from Hamāsen, he expelled the Egyptian envoys swearing he would never again negotiate with them.<sup>5</sup> Then in September he ordered Shālaqā Alulā and Rās Bariāwu, the governor of Adwā, to march to Hamāsen through Akalla Guzāy. On 3rd October 1876 Rās Walda Mikā'el fled to Bogos<sup>6</sup> and the emperor entered Hamāsen to join his generals. Before returning to Tēgre on 9th October 1876 Yohannes appointed Alulā as

---

<sup>1</sup>For family ownership of land in Eritrea see S.F.Nadel, "Land Tenure on the Eritrean plateau", *Africa*, vol. XVI, 1946, pp. 1-21, 99-109. See also below, p.141

<sup>2</sup>See S.H.Longrigg, *A Short History of Eritrea*, Oxford 1945, p.101.

<sup>3</sup>Kolmodin, Nos. 243-250.

<sup>4</sup>Kolmodin, No. 251.

<sup>5</sup>FO 78/3003, Gordon's notes on the Sudan 17.8.79.

<sup>6</sup>FO 78/2634, Gordon to Vivian; Wylde's report, 23.4.77.

ruler over Hamāsen and Sarāya and promoted him to the rank of  
Rās.<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \*

Unlike in <sup>Some</sup> other parts of his empire, Yohannēs was unlucky  
 in his search for a loyal local vassal in the Marab Mellāsh.  
 Following the Egyptian invasion these provinces beyond the Marab  
 became so important from the geo-political point of view that  
 the busy emperor had to deprive himself of an able commander,  
 absolutely loyal to him, and nominate him over these provinces.  
 For Alulā, an unknown Shālaqā just twelve months earlier, the  
 new rank and the new office would become a source of increasing  
 power.

---

<sup>1</sup>Douin, op.cit., p.1085.



C. 1877-1879: THE KING'S MAN: "RĀS ALULĀ  
WHO IS A TURK BĀSHA"

First meeting with the border problems

Suddenly the experienced brigadier had become an inexperienced governor of a most problematic province.

With their strong tradition of self government uninterrupted for centuries the people of Hamāsen could not easily accept the appointment over them of an outsider from the Təgre, a highlander "Dog'o".<sup>1</sup> Thus, Alulā's nomination resulted in further support being given to Rās Walda Mikā'el and many left Hamāsen to join his camp in Ḥalḥal, Bogos.<sup>2</sup>

Supported and armed as he was, Walda Mikā'el, sheltered by the Egyptian fort of Bogos, started raiding continuously and intensively into Hamāsen with the aim of undermining Alulā, the new Tigrean governor. His most effective raid took place on 25th February 1877 when five villages of the Mansā' tribe were pillaged and burnt, their inhabitants fleeing to Rās Alulā's headquarters of Addi Taklay.<sup>3</sup>

But the Rās, though having under his command "more than 10000 Remingtons"<sup>4</sup> and already having the reputation of "a young,

<sup>1</sup>See below, Section I.

<sup>2</sup>See an example in: Ishaq Yosef; Hade eritrawi, Asmara 1961 E.C., Chapter 5. (A book in Tigrinya summarised for me by a Tigrean student.)

<sup>3</sup>BM. Add. .Mss. 51294, Gordon to Augusta 8.3.77 and 15.3.77.

<sup>4</sup>MAE (F), Massawa 4, Carbonnel to MAE, 5.3.77. Comparing with Walda Mikā'el's 2,000 followers in the Bogos (see FO 407/11, Gordon's account 15.9.79). The Egyptians 700 men in Sanhit and 2,000 in Massawa (FO 78/2631, Vivian to Derby 23.1.77.)

warlike man who only likes fighting"<sup>1</sup> did not dare to cross to the Bogos and *Þorsøe* the rebel. Probably he was held back by the memory of the third day of the battle of Gurā when the fortified Egyptians caused so many casualties to his forces. In the present situation with Walda Mikā'el protected by the strong, well-armed Egyptian fort of Sanhīt, Alulā preferred to react indirectly.

Around the village of Aylet Rās Walda Mikā'el had gathered 4,000 head of cattle kept by some of his followers and protected by Egyptian troops. On 1st February 1877, while Alulā cut the Bogos-Aylet road, his devoted lieutenant Belāttā Gabru "Abbā Chaqun", leading 1,500 men, raided Aylet, pillaged the neighbouring villages and captured the cattle. Returning to Addi Taklay, Gabru brought with him some twenty Egyptian prisoners and the American geologist Mitchell who had been engaged by the Egyptians in making a survey there.<sup>2</sup>

The capture of Mitchell may well have been planned deliberately as the Ethiopians were undoubtedly aware of his presence there. Yohannes who had ordered Alulā to raid Aylet<sup>3</sup> was again in a delicate domestic situation and he could not afford to have his best general with so many troops on the border while a hostage such as the American could restrain the Egyptians.

Subsequent negotiations between Rās Alulā and the Egyptian

---

<sup>1</sup>Carbonnel to MAE, 5.3.77.

<sup>2</sup>MAE(F) *Massauah* 4, Carbonnel to MAE, 11.2.77, FO 78/2631, Cherif to Vivian 9.3.77, Vivian to Derby 6.2.77.

<sup>3</sup>FO 78/2632, Wylde's Report, 23.4.77.

governor of Massawa, 'Uthmān pasha, did not result in the release of the American. Alulā demanded Ethiopian hostages held by Rās Walda Mikā'el and responding to 'Uthmān's complaint about the raid on Aylet he stated: "Ethiopia goes up to the sea; Egypt begins there."<sup>1</sup> To emphasize this and as a reprisal for the raid on the Mansā', Alulā again marched on Aylet in early March.<sup>2</sup>

### Europeans

The American geologist stayed in Alulā's camp for a period of twenty days before being transferred to the emperor in Adwā. In Mitchell's long and detailed report Alulā is reflected as an admirer of the Europeans, their technical achievements and character.<sup>3</sup> The fact that Alulā let Mitchell eat during the Ethiopian fast, and that (two years later) he let Gordon smoke (in spite of the ban issued by the emperor which was strictly followed by Alulā) may indicate that he then regarded the Europeans as a privileged race, whom one has to honour and trust.

"Meanwhile" wrote Mitchell, describing his meeting with the naive and curious young Rās,<sup>4</sup> "a large number of the pieces of my chemical apparatus had been collected. Alluli summoned me, one day, to an audience. I went to his quarters. He was seated upon his carpet, near a brazier of coals. Spread out before him, was perhaps two-thirds of what had been the contents of my blowpipe apparatus case, but, to a large extent, in a condition bordering on ruin.

---

<sup>1</sup>MÆ(F), Massauah 4, Carbonnel to MÆ, 5.3.77.

<sup>2</sup>FO 78/2632, Carbonnel to French Agent in Cairo 21.3.77.

<sup>3</sup>L.H.Mitchell, Report on the Seizure by the Abyssinians of the Geological and Mineralogical Reconnaissance expedition, Cairo 1878, pp. 25, 40, 41, 42, 54, 55, 56, 58.

<sup>4</sup>ibid., pp. 54, 55.

One by one, he asked me the purposes and uses of the articles. I gave him the necessary explanations, in so far as it was possible, with the assistance of an interpreter who spoke very bad Arabic. I suppose the chief was satisfied with my lecture. I had no fear, however, that he would ever succeed myself in the use of the apparatus for purposes of chemical manipulation! Other things [sic] equal, he could never do that. He had already practised upon my watch for nearly two weeks, and it was still with the greatest difficulty that he could succeed in winding it properly."

Alulā's first direct encounter with a representative of western technology must have left a strong impression on him. As a man who for the next two decades was to become one of the main figures in the context of Ethiopia's relations with foreign powers, this starting point was undoubtedly significant. His admiration of European technical superiority resulted in his constant future interest in keeping open the trade route to the Red Sea and in importing as many modern fire-arms as possible.<sup>1</sup> And what was no less important, it may have been the source of his future naive interest in having a European ally as a neighbour, instead of a Muslim one.

A few days after Mitchell had been taken to Yohannes in Adwā, Alulā received a letter from Col. Gordon, the newly appointed Governor-General of the Sudan, Darfur and Eqvator. Gordon was sent by the Khedive Ismā'īl to try and solve the conflict with Ethiopia without damaging Egyptian past territorial gains.<sup>2</sup> Advancing from Massawa to Sanhīt in early March 1877, Gordon contacted Walda Mikā'el and was not slow to understand his destructive role in the Egyptian Ethiopian border relations. Reaching

---

<sup>1</sup>For his economic interest, see below, Section I.

<sup>2</sup>FO 78/2632, Vivian to Derby 7.4.77.

Bogos, Gordon drafted a letter to Alulā and sent it to him with Ḥasan Bāshā, the Egyptian commander of the fort of Sanhīt.

Gordon offered Alulā "the Emperor's greatest general" six points to be agreed by themselves as a basis for a solution and to be discussed later and ratified between Yohannes and Ismā'īl. Those points were: a. An armistice. b. Preservation of the present frontier. c. Free Ethiopian trade with Massawa. d. The emperor to be allowed to import annually and free of duty 50 boxes of gunpowder and 10 muskets. e. The khedive to sanction an appointment of an Abun. f. Walda Mikā'el to be kept away from the Ethiopian frontier.<sup>1</sup>

Alulā's first reply to Gordon was to ask his permission to enter Bogos country in order to arrest Walda Mikā'el. He promised to take special care that his soldiers would cause no damage to the country before leaving it.

Receiving Gordon's refusal, Alulā - according to Wylde<sup>2</sup> - showed an interest in Gordon's points, but explained that he was not authorised to deal with the question and would go to Adwā to raise the matter with Yohannes. Hasan Bāshā, the Egyptian envoy, reported to Wylde that upon reading Gordon's conditions for settlement Alulā said they were "just and fair".

In fact these points were not just and not fair. They included the recognition of the Egyptian's recent conquest of extensive Ethiopian areas in exchange for fifty boxes of ammunition a year

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 78/2632, Gordon to Vivian 28.3.77, 2.4.77; Vivian to Derby, 7.4.77.

<sup>2</sup>FO 78/2632, Wylde's Report 23.4.77. See also A.B.Wylde, '83 to '87, vol. I, pp. 332, 333.

and an Abun. Indeed, in a letter sent on 18th June 1877 Yohannes strongly protested to Gordon reminding him that the Ethiopian frontier was well known.<sup>1</sup> Alulā also knew exactly his master's conception of the Ethiopian frontier. He had seen Yohannes expelling the Egyptian envoys from Adwā for suggesting less than his aspirations and swearing never to negotiate with them again. Alulā's response to Gordon and what seems to be his readiness to sacrifice so much to reach an agreement through him was probably based on his interest, as governor of Hamāsen, in reopening Massawa trade<sup>2</sup> and restraining Walda Mikā'el. Yet it seems that Alulā's response was also based on the mistaken belief that the English colonel was a potential western neighbour and ally.

#### Tigrean hegemony challenged

Around 18th March 1877 Rās Alulā left Hamāsen and hastily made his way to Adwā.<sup>3</sup> But it was not the new diplomatic development which caused him to abandon his province. He had been recalled by Yohannes who must have been worried about Menilek's advance northwards. The king of Shoa, an energetic claimant to the title of "King of Kings", penetrated as far as to camp at Dabra Tābor<sup>4</sup> supposedly aiming to reach the old capital of Gondar.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Yohannes to Gordon, 18.6.77 in G.B.Hill, Colonel Gordon in Central Africa 1874-1879, London 1881, p.291.

<sup>2</sup>For Alulā's interest in that trade, see below, . . . **Section I.**

<sup>3</sup>Mitchell, op.cit., p.97.

<sup>4</sup>Guebré Sellassie, Chronique du règne de Mènèlik II, Paris 1930-32, Ch. XXIV,

<sup>5</sup>IO R/20, A.A.Vivian to Derby 29.3.77.

According to Gordon's report Yohannēs had also to face an almost open rebellion from his most influential uncle, Rās Ar'āyā Demṣu in Akalla Guzāy.<sup>1</sup>

For years afterwards Rās Alulā was to be described as the constant champion of Tigrean hegemony over Ethiopia (and the more so after the death of Yohannēs and Menilek's accession in 1889). This was more extraordinary than it sounds when one remembers that he was only the son of a common farmer and that the notables sometimes cooperated with the emperor's enemies.

The key to his behaviour may, however, be found by analysing the relations between Alulā and the emperor. Suspecting the powerful Tigrean nobility, many of whom proved to be his open or secret enemies, Yohannēs needed an able man as a soldier and adviser and occasionally ( being a kind of lonely, melancholic and depressed King Lear) as a friend<sup>2</sup> whom he could trust at least as not being ambitious for his throne.<sup>3</sup> Alulā was probably one of several young men of humble origins who served as such under the emperor,<sup>4</sup> but he was lucky or strong enough to create more chances for

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 78/2632, Gordon to Vivian 28.3.77. In Vivian to FO 16.4.77. (No. 98).

<sup>2</sup>For Alulā as a friend of Yohannēs and the best comparative sketches of their characters, see: W. Winstanley, A Visit to Abyssinia, London 1881, vol. II, pp. 224, 225, 230, 235.

<sup>3</sup>FO 78/3806, Egerton to Salisbury 26.7.85. Quotes Mason Bey, the Egyptian-employed American governor of Massawa: "The Negus has more confidence in him than in any of his chiefs, for the reason that he is of low birth and has no pretensions of himself with the royal family."

<sup>4</sup>According to oral tradition Yohannēs visited Rās Alulā in Hamāsen in 1884. Alulā ordered his young lieutenant Belāttā Gabru to leave his court, because he suspected that if the emperor saw him he might take him to his court. See Kolmodin, No. 271.

himself in order to remain not merely a Bālamwāl<sup>1</sup> or "favourite".

For Alulā on the other hand, Yohannes was the one to whom he owed absolutely everything. He knew very well that without the emperor he would not have made more than two steps in the long way upwards, and he admired his master in a way that astonished many European visitors. For Alulā, Tigrean hegemony was not only animated in the personality of Yohannes but was, while he lived, undoubtedly identical with him.

On 22nd March 1877 Rās Alulā entered Adwā<sup>2</sup> leading the imperial force of ten thousand soldiers which was then under his command.

March 1877: Rās Alulā who is a Turk Bāshā

According to the unknown contemporary biographer of Alulā it was at this time that the emperor was looking for a new title for Alulā, a title which would emphasize Alulā's superior position at Court.

"With what name shall I magnify him," the author described Yohannes' thoughts,<sup>3</sup> "and with what name shall I honour him for this man Alulā is faithful, after my own heart, and he does all my wishes, and he does not hold back from doing my commands .... he Yohannes called his father and his counsellor, the great chief of the priests Eçägē Tewoflos... whose sea of knowledge is not depleted ..."

"The king and the Eçägē met a second time,<sup>4</sup> in private, not in public, and it was said: 'Behold, we have found an honourable name and a high rank which is fitting

---

<sup>1</sup>Heruy Walda Səllässe, Yaheywat t̄arik, Addis Ababā 1914 E.C., p.47.

<sup>2</sup>Mitchell, p.103.

<sup>3</sup>Ms. Mannawe.

<sup>4</sup>Eçage Tewoflos was known as a great supporter of the Tigrean hegemony in Ethiopia (see below, p. 310 ). The fact that he supported the nomination of Alulā indicates that Tewoflos, as also proved later, was serving the interests of a strong united Təgre rather than those of the Tigrean feudal chiefs who undoubtedly opposed the nomination of Alulā.



for the elect and blessed Ras Alula', and saying this they named him Terkwe Basa, saying 'There is nothing which is greater than this name, and there is nothing which is better than this rank' and they closed the matter with this counsel."

The title of a Turk Bāshā was connected in Ethiopia with the introduction of firearms. In previous centuries it was given to the functionary in charge of the imperial stores of firearms and ammunition and commander of the fusiliers. It seems however that during the "Era of the Judges" the title lost its importance and remained rather an honorific one. Yohannes' former Turk Bāshā, mentioned by Lamlam as killed in the battle of Gurā<sup>1</sup> was apparently a man of secondary importance. The revival of the title as an addition to Alulā's rank of Rās was significant. In the future Alulā did his best to emphasise it as a sign of his superiority over other Rases. From now on he would always sign his letter, "Rās Alulā who is a Turk Bāshā".

"He [Yohannes] adorned him [Alulā] with all adornments ... He did nothing like this for the other officers.

When Yohannes, King of Kings, had completed the ceremony of appointment for the Ras, he said to him: '... Let your authority be under me. Do all that you wish, and there will not be found one of the princes or officers who will be honoured more than you. And for me, there is nothing with which I could make you greater, except only the throne of my kingdom.'"

#### March 1878: Submission of Menilek

In early April 1877 Turk Bāshā Rās Alulā, leading the advance guard of the emperor's army, crossed the Takazze river heading for Godjām. There, threatened by Menilek, the local ruler Rās Adāl was besieged on an Ambā waiting for the emperor to relieve him. Yohannes, however, marched not only to save Rās Adāl

---

<sup>1</sup>See above, p. 19.

from Menilek but actually to fight for his very crown, as the king of Shoa, still referring to himself as "King of Kings" was openly challenging him. Menilek was said to be accused at Court as mobilising religious differences between Shoa and Təgre, that "he has brought a new foreign Bishop ... [and was] corresponding with foreign powers and importing arms."<sup>1</sup>

Reaching Godjām in the early rainy season Yohannes found that Menilek had already retreated to Shoa.<sup>2</sup> With Alulā in his camp he subsequently marched to Wallo to unite with the forces of the local leader Muḥammad 'Alī. There he detached Alulā, in command of the whole Tigrean army, and ordered him to camp during the rainy season near the Shoan border.<sup>3</sup> Establishing his court in Dabra Tābor,<sup>4</sup> Yohannes then tried to reach a peaceful solution with Menilek through the services of the clergy.

Only in February 1878 did Yohannes finally decide to invade the southern province:

"When the king and rulers of the country of Shoa," wrote Alulā's biographer,<sup>5</sup> "and all creatures from man to the animals, heard this news, they trembled and were afraid, and melted like wax, all those who were living there. The land trembled, and the whole of the country of Shoa was troubled because of the majesty of the coming of Yohannes, king of kings, and because of the strength of the power of Ras Alula, chief of the princes, for they greatly feared Ras Alula ... Ras Alula did in that land great deeds which ... cannot all be written or told. If all the deeds which were done in the land of Shoa were written down singly, the matter would be too much for us. And it would seem false to the hearers."

---

<sup>1</sup>Aṣme, p.83. See also Zewde, pp. 203-208, FO 78/3633, Vivian to FO, No. 220, 17.7.77.

<sup>2</sup>For Menilek's moves, Feb.-June 1877, see Guèbrè Sellassie, op.cit., chs. XXIV, XXV.

<sup>3</sup>L. Gentile, L'apostolo dei Galla, Torino 1916, p.345.

<sup>4</sup>Lamlam, f.23.

<sup>5</sup>Ms. Mannawe.

Menilek had to <sup>ask</sup> for peace. On 26th March 1878 at Boru Medā in a traditional ceremony the beaten Menilek submitted to the emperor of Ethiopia. He approached the throne carrying a stone on his neck and as he lay before Yohannes - it was suggested by some Italian writers - the emperor ordered Alulā to remove the stone as a gesture of reconciliation.<sup>1</sup>

Walda Mikā'el retakes Hamāsen

While a great political triumph was being obtained in the south, the situation in the north deteriorated. Alulā's hasty departure from Hamāsen in March 1877 had been interpreted there as a victory for Walda Mikā'el. In April 1877 Ṣa'zagā was taken by a representative of Walda Mikā'el and the latter, encouraged by the Egyptians, was reportedly preparing to march into Tēgre.<sup>2</sup> There in Adwā the emperor had left the local governor, Rās Bāriāwu Gabra-Ṣadeq, in charge of the affairs of the northern frontier.<sup>3</sup> In May 1878 Rās Bāriāwu crossed the Marab to be ambushed by Walda Mikā'el and to meet his death on 20th May 1878 near Bet Meca.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Pietro Valle: "Abissinia schizzo storico", RMI, June 1887, pp. 495-508. In 1887 the Italian prisoner of Alulā, Savoiroux, told a journalist he had heard Alulā saying to his soldiers after the battle of Dogali: "... This Menelik off whose neck I myself removed the big stone with which he presented himself to ask pardon for his rebellion." Perino, p.103.

<sup>2</sup>Kolmodin, No. 255; FO 407/11, Gordon's memo 15.9.79; BM Add. Mss. 51294, Gordon to Augusta, 11.12.77.

<sup>3</sup>Mitchell, pp. 70, 103.

<sup>4</sup>MAE(F), Massauah 4, Carbonnel to MAE, 25.5.78; Kolmodin, No. 259; B. Hill, pp. 313, 314.

June-July 1878: Alulā sent to the North

On hearing the news of the death of his devoted Rās Bāriyāwu, Emperor Yohannes could not leave his affairs in the south and hasten northwards. He had to confer with Menilek and Rās Adāl and Muḥammad 'Alī of Wallo (soon to be baptised Rās Mikā'el) over acute religious and political problems. According to the unknown author of the Mannawe history of Alulā, the Rās appealed to his master to send him back to his last province.

"When Yohannes, king of kings had returned from the land of Shoa and was in the land of Wello, messengers came and told him the news of the death of the great Ras Bar'u, prince of the land of Tigre . . . And again the faithful man Ras Alula said to Yohannes, "To me the strength of the power and the glory of the authority of this man Walda Mikā'el seem like a reed stem which waves before the face of the wind,' . . . Yohannes . . . having heard this matter from Ras Alula, was silent for a long time while he thought in his heart, and he said: 'If this Ras Alula is separated from me and goes to where that man . . . Walda Mikā'el is, . . . who will uphold for me the house of my kingdom, for there is no one who can order the house of my kingdom like him? But if he stays with me, who can fight this Walda Mikā'el, for there is not to be found a man faithful like him Alula, who does my will? . . . And he Yohannes said to Ras Alula . . . 'Go to the place you mentioned to me yourself, and let it be according to your words'."<sup>1</sup>

"Governor of Tegre"

Thus as a fully empowered representative of the emperor, Alulā marched back to the north. As his province beyond the Marab was still occupied by Walda Mikā'el, Alulā was given the government of Adwā succeeding the late Bāriyāwu. This was probably a temporary arrangement to enable the Rās to mobilize Bāriyāwu's troops and it was cancelled after Alulā had regained the Marab Mellash. Yet, many European visitors for years to come regarded

---

<sup>1</sup>Mannawe Ms.

Alulā as the governor of Tēgre.<sup>1</sup> In fact Alulā was never a governor of that province as it is known today, but only and temporarily of Adwā and the surroundings, the area then usually called Tēgre.<sup>2</sup>

According to his biographer, Alulā was enthusiastically received in Āksūm and Adwā by the inhabitants who were worried about a possible invasion by Walda Mikā'el.<sup>3</sup> Yet for the Tigrean aristocracy the rise of the king's Bālamwāl, the young<sup>4</sup> son of an unknown farmer from a tiny village, was an unpleasant surprise. Bāriyāwu's son, Dadjāzmāch Gabra Madhān, who thought he would inherit his father's domain, was openly hostile to Alulā whom he nicknamed Arastay, farmer.<sup>5</sup>

It was at this stage in his career that Alulā divorced his wife Bitwatā, the daughter of a farmer from Tamben and the mother of his three daughters. He sent her back to her village and married, apparently following the instructions of Yohannes, the nineteen year old Wayzārit 'emlasu (whose baptismal name was Wallata Takla Hāymānot), daughter of Rās Ar'āyā Demṣu the most prominent Tigrean chief and Yohannes's uncle. According to later

---

<sup>1</sup>See, among many, Fasolo, p.206; G. Bianchi, Alla terra dei Galla, Milano 1884, p.50; A.S.MAI 36/3-23, Ferrari and Nerazzini to MAE 14.9.85.

<sup>2</sup>Int. Dadjāzmāch Zawde.

<sup>3</sup>Ms. Mannawe.

<sup>4</sup>Though over thirty years old Alulā looked then much younger, Winstanley, vol. II, pp. 191, 192.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 3/7-47 Memo. on Bāhtā Hagos, 1.1.95.

evidence Rās Alulā was deeply in love with this young and noble new wife, though she was always sick<sup>1</sup> and bore him no children. His own humble origin was never forgotten however by the leading families. Marriage brought no great social power, nor did it secure allies amongst the notables. Alulā's new brother-in-law, Fitāwrāri Dabbab Ar'āyā was soon to become his most bitter enemy.

September-December 1878: The submission of Walda Mikā'el

Hearing the news of Alulā's return to Adwā, Rās Walda Mikā'el cancelled his plan to cross the Marab. Instead he started reconstructing Hazagā where he built a new castle,<sup>2</sup> intending to make this village the administrative and commercial centre of his territories.

But Gordon Pasha strongly disapproved of the Egyptian policy of backing Walda Mikā'el. On a visit to Massawa in late May 1878, just after Bāriyāwu's death, he dismissed the governor of Massawa, nominating for the post his devotee 'Alā' ad-Dīn Pasha who closely followed Gordon's instructions to stop supplying Walda Mikā'el.<sup>3</sup> During the early rains that year Walda Mikā'el marched towards Aylet with his hungry troops, but was denied grain from Massawa. The arrival of a British warship to the port persuaded the outlaw that he had been abandoned.<sup>4</sup>

In the meantime Rās Alulā had mobilised a 20,000 man strong army in Tegre and "on the first Saturday after Masqal [27 Sept.]

---

<sup>1</sup>p. 64.  
See below. Also Matteucci, p.233.

<sup>2</sup>Kolmodin, No. 260; G. Simon, L'Ethiopie, Paris 1885, p.58.

<sup>3</sup>Wylde, '83-'87, I, pp. 334, 335; FO 407/11, Gordon, "Abyssinie 1877-1879", 15.9.79.

<sup>4</sup>FO 78/2857, Lascelles to Salisbury, 26.9.78, 17.10.78; Kolmodin, No. 261.

1878" he crossed the Marab and entered Hamāsen. An advance guard cut the Hamāsen-Bogos road in order to allow Walda Mikā'el no escape route.<sup>1</sup>

"When there was heard the news of the coming of the man of God, Ras Alula" wrote his biographer,<sup>2</sup> "a man resolute and warlike ... fear and trembling seized this wicked man Däjjazmac Wälda Mikael, and he melted like wax before the fire ... And after this he sent emissaries to him, to Ras Alula, saying 'Forgive me, Ras Alula, my lord, and do not look on the evil of my deeds, because I will not fail to ... [bless you]; and you, do not lose the opportunity for mercy.' He said this, not desiring to make peace and love, but because of the fear and trembling which had come on him. After this they made reconciliation and peace."

This meeting between Alulā and Walda Mikā'el took place in Aksum where the desperate rebel came in December 1878, accompanied by three hundred followers. Alulā then invited him to come to Yohannes, who was camping at Dabra Tābor.<sup>3</sup>

"And Ras Alula said to him, 'Come, let us go to where our lord, Yohannes, King of Kings, is, that we may see his face, and bow down to the glory of his kingship, for he is forgiving and not revengeful.'

When Yohannes, King of Kings, saw Däjjazmac Wälda Mikael bowing before him and doing homage to the glory of his kingship, he remembered the word of the Book which says, 'If your brother sins, forgive him seventy times seven.' He gave him authority over the land of Hamāsen, and granted him a name greater than all names ..... that is to say, Ras Wäldä Mikael. And they returned with joy and gladness, as Ras Wäldä Mikael praised Yohannes ... and magnified the name of Ras Alula, saying: 'What can I give back to Ras Alula for all he has done for me? For he has made me great, and has lifted me up above the chiefs of Hamāsen.'<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>MAE(F), Massauah 4, Carbonnel to MAE, 13.9.78, 10.11.78.  
FO 78/2857, Gordon's memo. 19.10.78.

<sup>2</sup>Mannawe MS. Compare with Kolmodin No. 261.

<sup>3</sup>Kolmodin No. 261. According to B. Hill, pp. 328, 329, Yohannes received Walda Mikā'el in Gondar.

<sup>4</sup>Mannawe Ms.

In Dabra Tābor Yohannes confirmed the title of Rās which Walda Mikā'el had been given by the Egyptians and nominated him as vice governor of Hamāsen under Alulā.<sup>1</sup> This was done apparently with a dual aim: to let the people of Hamāsen also have an hereditary ruler in their government and to use Walda Mikā'el as a check on Alulā. It was also a demonstration of a most liberal and moderate policy but not exceptional for that emperor. Unlike his current reputation in Europe which was derived from his attitude to foreigners, missionaries and religious minorities, Yohannes's domestic policy (in sharp contrast to Tewodros's) was to try to unite his country through gaining the good will and cooperation of his vassals. Thus he forgave Menilek, Adāl and others whom he could at certain moments militarily crush, hoping they would join him to campaign against the Gāllā or to face external threats.

This time Yohannes forgave his doubtful vassal also because he probably wanted Alulā to accompany him on a campaign which he then conducted against the Gāllā in Wallo.<sup>2</sup> Thus, while Rās Walda Mikā'el returned to the Hamāsen in January 1879 Rās Alulā was camping near Menilek's border.<sup>3</sup> He returned to Dabra Tābor in late March 1879.

March-April 1879: Anglo-Egyptian envoy

Before leaving for the Gāllā country, Emperor Yohannes, aware of Gordon's positive role in subduing Walda Mikā'el, sent a letter

---

<sup>1</sup>Kolmodin, No. 261.

<sup>2</sup>BM Add. Mss. 51304, Winstanley to Gordon, 20.3.79.

<sup>3</sup>Matteucci, p.95.



to the Egyptian-employed British Governor-General in Khartum. Repeating his declaration of 1876 in which he had sworn not to negotiate directly with the Egyptians, Yohannes now asked Gordon to mediate.<sup>1</sup> But Gordon's policy was based on the justified suspicion that any cession of coastal territory to Ethiopia might result in its undesired control by other European powers.<sup>2</sup> As an Egyptian official Gordon adopted a tough approach to any Ethiopian territorial demands and to Bogos in particular. So, in January 1879, when he sent his personal envoy, Mr. W. Winstanley, to meet Yohannes at Dabra Tābor, he authorised him to offer the emperor no more than what had been offered through Alulā early in 1877 (plus the dubious attraction of the return of Tewodros's captured crown).<sup>3</sup>

When Yohannes and Alulā returned to Dabra Tābor, Winstanley was waiting for them. Reportedly Alulā's influence was at its height. Winstanley defined his position among the other Ethiopian Rases (together with that of Rās Ar'āyā) as "very superior" and described Alulā as the king's intimate friend.<sup>4</sup> Members of an Italian geographical mission to Yohannes spoke of Alulā as a "prime minister"<sup>5</sup> and expected him to be made Negus.<sup>6</sup> They

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 78/2998, Vivian to Salisbury, 11.1.79.

<sup>2</sup>FO 78/3004, Lascelles to Salisbury, 5.10.79: "... I have received from Gordon pasha [a private letter] pointing out that if a port on the Red Sea were to be given to King John, there would be a great risk of his conceding it to French or Italian adventurers."

<sup>3</sup>FO 78/2998, Vivian to Salisbury, 7.2.79. Quoting Gordon to Vivian of 9.1.79.

<sup>4</sup>BM 51304, Winstanley to Gordon, 22.5.79. Winstanley, op.cit., vol. II, pp. 224, 225. Also: Matteucci, In Abissinia 3p, 231; V. Pippo, Abissinia, Milano 1881, p.181.

<sup>5</sup>Matteucci, 18.5.79; Cosmus, vol. V, p.258; In Abissinia, p.231.

<sup>6</sup>Matteucci, 12.3.79; Cosmus, vol. V, p.189.

reported that Alulā was appointed by Yohannes as protector and supervisor to his only son, the eleven-year old Rās Ar'āyā Sellāsse.<sup>1</sup>

During the many discussions Winstanley had with the emperor in late March and early April 1879 Alulā was always with his master, and often Alulā was the only other man present. Winstanley was well received by Alulā and his friendly attitude was reflected in the visitor's reports. Yet the Rās remained passive and the emperor's reaction to Gordon's offers was utterly negative: "I do not wish a consul at Massawa" he told the envoy, "I wish Massawa."<sup>2</sup>

July-September 1879: Alulā's first offensive on Bogos

It was probably Winstanley's mission which persuaded the emperor to take the initiative against the Egyptians. The Ethiopians had now an enormous advantage due to the unity achieved in 1878. The Egyptian garrisons in Massawa and Karan together numbered merely 3,000-4,000 troops,<sup>3</sup> while Alulā was reported in July 1879 to have 25,000-40,000 troops with as many again under the nominal command of the young Rās Ar'āyā Sellāsse.<sup>4</sup>

In July 1879, with Rās Walda Mikā'el in his camp,<sup>5</sup> Rās Alulā crossed the Marab and camped at Gurā' in Akalla Guzāy. The French vice-consul in Massawa, Raffray, telegraphed to the

---

<sup>1</sup>G. Bianchi, Alla terra, p.50.

<sup>2</sup>Winstanley, II, p.244.

<sup>3</sup>L. Pennazzi, Dal po ai due Nili, Milano 1882, p. 56.

<sup>4</sup>FO 407/11, Wylde to Malet, 18.10.79, Zohrab to Salisbury, 12.9.79.

<sup>5</sup>Kolmodin, No. 262.

French consul in Egypt: "Yohannes<sup>5</sup>/intentions unclear but certainly he has ordered them to take territory up to Kassala and the Red Sea."<sup>1</sup> Alulā himself told the French missionary Duflos, "I have come to retake Massawa from the Egyptians, I will not go away until my horse has drunk from the Red Sea." The French vice-consul in Massawa commented with alarm: "Coming from Alula, these are weighty words indeed. Everyone, his enemies foremost, agrees that Ras Alula is frank, determined, and steadfast. What he says he is going to do, he does."<sup>2</sup> The French in Massawa were worried about a possible Ethiopian advance, especially to Bogos where their Lazzarist missionaries (whose religious activities Yohannes denounced) had also served the Egyptian cause and had harboured Ethiopian outlaws like Walda Mikā'el and Bāhtā Hagos. Moreover French and Italians in Bogos had plantations of tobacco, a plant Yohannes had prohibited.

The French government instructed its vice consul in Massawa, Raffray, to demand security from Alulā for the missionaries and other French citizens and protégés. Raffray wrote to Alulā and received a polite and affirmative reply.<sup>3</sup>

The British who wanted to maintain the status quo in Massawa had their own reason to be worried and from Khartum Gordon asked the British consul in Cairo to ask Alulā to avoid attacking or at least to postpone the attack to enable further diplomatic negotiations to take place.<sup>4</sup> A British warship arrived at Massawa.

---

<sup>1</sup> MAE(F), Massauah 4, Raffray to Consul, Egypt 8.9.79.

<sup>2</sup> MAE(F), Massauah 4, Raffray to MAE, 13.8.79.

<sup>3</sup> MAE(F), Massauah 4, Raffray to Alula 8.9.79; Raffray to MAE 22.9.79; Pennazzi, p.224; Alame Eshete, Evolution et Resolution du Conflict Egypto-Abyssinien ... 1877-1885. Doctoral thesis, Aix en Provence, 1965 (Available in IES), p.93.

<sup>4</sup> FO 78/3003, Lascelles to Alula 28.8.7 and Lascelles to Salisbury 29.8.79.

In August 1879 Alulā ordered his deputy Walda Mikā'el to send his troops to raid Bogos. Commanded by one of Mikā'el's devotees, Kantibā Shawish,<sup>1</sup> the Ethiopian army entered Bogos. The raiders taxed the various tribes, European colonists and missionaries,<sup>2</sup> while the besieged Egyptian garrison at Sanhīt remained passive. However, since that fort was invincible, no permanent Ethiopian government was then established in Bogos.

December 1879: The fall of Walda Mikā'el

Alulā used the Ethiopian expedition to Bogos of August-September 1879 to bring about the final fall of Walda Mikā'el. Either for this purpose or as a response to the British request, Alulā did not send any of his own troops towards Massawa. Thus while his most loyal followers were raiding Bogos, Walda Mikā'el remained at Gurā' surrounded by Alulā's men. According to oral tradition in Hamāsen, Alulā then plotted against him by falsely accusing Walda Mikā'el of hiding arms and of being in secret communication with Massawa and Sanhīt. Walda Mikā'el's nephew, Kantibā Haylu, to whom Alulā promised the governorship of Hazagā, testified against his uncle, while potential witnesses for Walda Mikā'el were intimidated. Rās Walda Mikā'el, together with his sons Dadjāzmāch Masfən and Lədj Hayla Malakot and his son-in-law Balāambarās Kefle Iyāsus, was arrested and sent to Yohannes in Adwā. The troops of Walda Mikā'el who later returned from Bogos were told to surrender their arms or enrol in Alulā's regiments.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>MAE(F), Massauah 4, Raffray to MAE, 13.8.79.

<sup>2</sup>MAE(F), Massauah 4, Raffray to Consul, Egypt 8.9.79; Raffray to MAE 30.9.79.

<sup>3</sup>For details, see Kolmodin, Nos. 262-265. MAE(F), Massauah 4, Raffray to MAE 22.9.79. Also Takla Šādeq Makuriyā, Ya'itiopyā tārīk, Addis Ababa 1960 E.C., pp. 57, 58.

In December 1879 Alulā was ordered by the Emperor to restore Walda Mikā'el's confiscated property and come to Dabra Tābor for trial.<sup>1</sup> At the emperor's court Alulā repeated his accusations, and "placed Yohannes in the position of having to choose between his faithful servant and the former rebel."<sup>2</sup> Walda Mikā'el was subsequently condemned by the emperor and in January 1880 was put on Ambā Salāmā together with his sons. (He was then around sixty-years old,<sup>3</sup> yet survived to be released by Alulā eleven years later.<sup>4</sup>) Walda Mikā'el was the last hereditary ruler to be in power in the Marab Mellāsh. It would never again be ruled by a local prince. People in Eritrea still remember Alulā's name in that connection.<sup>5</sup>

As an Ashkar in the court of Rās Ar'āyā Demṣu in the late sixties Alulā "Wadi Qubi" reached a *very high* position for a man of humble origin. Having no hereditary rights over landed property he could never join the Tigrean ruling class which derived its power from the combination of hereditary family ownership of land and imperial office. But Alulā fully exploited his chances. His function as a ligābā in the emperor's court was the last one in the administrative-feudal scale and simultaneously he started his way up in the newly created scale: the imperial one. As the emperor's best and devoted general Alula quickly

---

<sup>1</sup> MAE(F), Mass. 4, Raffray to MAE, 14.12.79, 18.12.79. Gordon also heard that Yohannes was very angry with Alulā and put him under his son Rās Ar'āyā Sellāsṣe, FO 407/11, Gordon to Malet 14.12.79.

<sup>2</sup> MAE(F), Mass. 4, Raffray to MAE 27.5.1880. Unlike Kolmodin, No. 261 and Perini, p.123, who claimed that Yohannes was a party to the plot to get rid of Walda Mikā'el.

<sup>3</sup> According to Puglisi he was born around 1823, Puglisi, p.291.

<sup>4</sup> See below, p. 246, 290, 299, 320.

<sup>5</sup> Kolmodin, No. 261. Interviews, W. Wallata Berhān, 98 year-old woman from Asmarā. Asmarā, March 1972.

and brilliantly had managed to reach the top of that ladder too.

Unlike the Tigrean *nobles* who could mobilise some few hundred followers from their self-armed peasantry, Alulā was commanding thousands of imperial troops given to him by the authority of the emperor. This however did not enable him to enter the hereditary agrarian élite nor did he succeed in doing so by marrying into it. To support his devoted follower the emperor could provide him with Gult lands, i.e. territorial fiefs donated as usufructus. Alulā was apparently given such a small fief in his birthplace of Mannawe,<sup>1</sup> but practically the Təgre could not provide the emperor with free lands which could be donated without depriving the local élite.<sup>2</sup> The court of Yohannēs, ever roving among his various headquarters, did not develop a non-feudal and central administrative or a military system which could supply the ambitious Turk Basha with adequate economic resources to support his imperial rank.

Thus for Yohannēs, the need for strategic reasons to rid himself of the unfaithful local élite of the MarabMellash coincided with the need to install Alulā, an outsider in the feudal Təgre, in a province of his own.

---

<sup>1</sup>See below, p. 343.

<sup>2</sup>Alulā, later in 1882, was given Agaw Meder probably as Gult. See below, p. 58

D. 1880-1882 - "RIVAL OF SHOA, RULER OF MASSAWA"<sup>1</sup>

During the period of 1880-1882 Rās Alulā would work *untiringly* to maintain his dual basis of power: the government of the Marab Mellash and his being the Turk Bāshā of the emperor. As Yohannes's Turk Bāshā he would spend the dry season (*October May*) of those years fighting on the home front to help his master preserve the throne, or tax the Gāllā. To his province, kept for him by his deputy Belāttā Gabru, Alulā would return in the rainy season,<sup>2</sup> in order to tax it and its neighbouring tribes. The reason for this was clearly explained by Raffray:

"At this time ~~the dry season~~ the fields have not yet been planted and thus nothing prevents the rural peoples from fleeing into inaccessible mountains or the deserts at the least move to collect taxes; it is for this reason that the Ethiopians are in the habit of waiting until August or September at which time the harvest is ready, the people then prefer to submit and pay the tribute rather than lose their crops by fleeing."<sup>3</sup>

During those years the busy Alulā would indeed treat his province as but a source for finance and manpower and would do very little to administer it. His only concern in administration was apparently the organization of the profitable caravan route to Massawa<sup>4</sup> and this he started in late 1879.<sup>5</sup> Even when freed from helping

---

<sup>1</sup>According to oral tradition<sup>5</sup>/collected by Bayru Tafla of IES, Alulā used thus to refer to himself, after he established his government in the Marab Mellāsh. Interview, Bayru Tafla, Addis Ababā, Jan. 1972.

<sup>2</sup>Kolmodin, No. 268.

<sup>3</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 4, Raffray to MAE, 16.3.80.

<sup>4</sup>See below *section I*.

<sup>5</sup>BM. Add. Mss. 51294, Gordon to Augusta 12.9.79.

Yohannes on the home front Alulā would have to concentrate mainly on the border problems of his province. Here, as will be sketched below, the failure of diplomacy left the Ethiopian-Egyptian border, and particularly the Bogos country, as an arena of continuous raids and clashes.

Rainy season 1879: The failure of diplomacy to solve the border problems

A few days after the arrest in Gurā' of Walda Mikā'el, in early September 1879, Alulā received a short letter from Gordon announcing his arrival at Massawa to resume negotiations.

Having actually nothing new to offer,<sup>1</sup> Gordon was delighted to hear from Raffray that Alulā was authorised by Yohannes to deal with the question of the northern frontier. His correspondence with the Rās made Gordon even more optimistic. Alulā asked him not to let out anything they would talk about<sup>2</sup> and Gordon probably got the impression that Alulā would conduct a policy independent of Yohannes. According to his own past experience and Winstanley's reports, he thought Alulā's approach would surely be a more flexible one. Gordon then optimistically wrote to his sister: "I think when I see Alula I will avoid discussing the question of the frontier, i.e., the retrocession of Bogos."<sup>3</sup>

On 16th September 1879 Gordon climbed to Alulā's camp on the top of the hill of Gurā', and to his surprise was coolly received:

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 407/14, Extract from the "Royal Engineer Journal", 1.5.80.

<sup>2</sup>FO 407/11, Gordon to Consul in Jedda, 13.9.79.

<sup>3</sup>BM Add. Ms. 51294, Gordon to Augusta 12.9.79.



"Solemn silence prevailed; nearly every one had his robe to his mouth as if something poisonous had arrived. The figure at the end never moved, and I got quite distressed, for he was so muffled up that I felt inclined to feel his pulse. He must be ill, I thought. No, this was my friend Aloula. He just saluted me, and motioned me to a very low seat, covered with silk, at his side."

A little later the atmosphere became more friendly and Alulā, as if to hint to his visitor that he was capable of conducting quite an independent policy said:

"You may smoke, if you like, though the king has forbidden his people to do so."<sup>1</sup>

Then, before starting to talk business Alulā came to what he himself probably regarded as the main point.

"Aloula said once or twice, 'You are English, and your nation are my brothers'. I quietly denied the soft impeachment, and said that 'here I could only be looked on as the Envoy of the Khedive, and a Mussulman for the time;' adding 'if I were to pretend to be anything else, anything I arranged with him would be useless, if the Khedive knew of my false pretences.' Well, after some time, I took leave of the invalid, and left."<sup>2</sup>

Thus the Rās who was fully prepared to negotiate with an English official (even above the head of his master?) found himself facing an Egyptian official. All that Gordon could achieve in those circumstances was to obtain Alulā's permission that the feared advance on Massawa would be postponed for a period of four months.<sup>3</sup> Alulā sent Gordon to Dabra Tābor by the right bank of the Takazze River, the most difficult route. He reached the Imperial Camp after more than a month's travel to find Yohannes more inflexible

---

<sup>1</sup>B.Hill, pp. 403, 404.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>FO 407/11, Lascelles to Salisbury 4.10.79.

than his Rās.<sup>1</sup>

A few days after Gordon's departure from Gurā' Alulā received a letter from another Englishman, Augustus Wylde, who asked for an interview.<sup>2</sup> Wylde, a merchant and formerly the Jedda-based British vice-consul at the Red Sea, had been invited by Gordon to accompany him to Alulā and Yohannes. When Wylde came to Massawa Gordon had already left on his mission. Though unauthorised, Wylde, an anxious supporter of the Ethiopian cause,<sup>3</sup> contacted Rās Alulā as if he was still a British official, and as such was warmly welcomed by him in Addi Taklay. Presenting himself as a channel to Her Majesty's Government Wylde heard from Alulā a clear political statement.

Complaining about Egypt "General Alula particularly mentioned these points: continual annexation of their territory, stoppage of intercourse with other countries, religious rights denied them by the prevention of the Aboona entering Abyssinia, whereby their civil and religious customs were nearly at a standstill, and a general treatment such that a Christian country could not tolerate."<sup>4</sup>

Alulā told Wylde "that he had no orders to treat with Egyptian Representatives" and expressed his sorrow for Gordon presenting himself as such. Alulā rejected the possibility raised by Wylde that Ethiopia would be compensated for Bogos: "He

<sup>1</sup>B.Hill, pp. 410-416. FO 78/3140, Gordon to Malet 25.12.79.

<sup>2</sup>FO 407/11, Wylde to Alula 22.9.79.

<sup>3</sup>FO 407/11, Wylde's memo 16.9.79.

<sup>4</sup>FO 407/11, Wylde to Salisbury 20.10.79.

Alulā immediately retorted: 'Whether England would be contented if Russia annexed part of India and paid her over the revenues?'<sup>1</sup> Yet as for the most important question of Massawa Alulā was most moderate in talking to the British:

"I explained fully to General Alula the responsibilities they would incur by having a seaport, and how easy it would be for Egypt to prevent them establishing themselves on the coast, and after a little pressing he told me that in reality Abyssinia did not wish one, but that they wished to import arms and ammunition, and the usual munitions of war, that they never claimed the coast, but wished to enforce upon Egypt the necessity of allowing them to trade through Massowah."<sup>1</sup>

Judging from his future policy and response to British mediation<sup>2</sup> it may be assumed that Alulā was ready to compromise. But his points: British mediation, cession of the Bogos and satisfactory commercial arrangement in Massawa, were not even discussed in London. The Foreign Office severely condemned Wylde for his unauthorised step. He was deprived of any future official service and had to write to Alulā explaining that he had acted without authority.<sup>3</sup> Simultaneously the Queen wrote to the Emperor encouraging him to reach an understanding directly with Egypt.<sup>4</sup> That small window to <sup>having</sup> Britain/~~been~~ shut, there were no direct diplomatic relations with Ethiopia for the next four years.

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>See Bellow, "1884: Treaty with Britain!"

<sup>3</sup>FO 78/3005, Malet to Salisbury 29.12.79; FO 407/14, Wylde to Zuhrah 16.12.79.

<sup>4</sup>FO 407/11, Victoria to King John 12.12.79.

"Ruler of Massawa": The Bogos arena: Raids and clashes

Gordon's failure to be a British mediator and the fall of Walda Mikā'el resulted in the Egyptians and the Ethiopians again facing each other directly. As Alulā was interested, for commercial reasons, in maintaining a modus vivendi on the road to Massawa, it was the Egyptian-held Bogos which became the arena of the inevitable clashes. Yet the fact that Alulā was occupied in being Yohannes's best general in the Ethiopian home front *together with* the fact that the Egyptians preferred to stay in their strong forts rather than fight, prevented an open war. Thus the Ethiopians could raid Bogos and other border areas and tax them but without being able to establish a permanent government. It was naturally the local inhabitants, tribesmen, and missionaries who suffered from such a situation.

These misgoverned territories became the natural shelter and base for outlaws.

After imprisoning Walda Mikā'el on Ambā Salāmā in early 1880, Yohannes marched southwards to meet Menilek in Wallo and left Alulā in Adwā. In February 1880 Alulā was said to be going to join his master, but was soon ordered to remain in the north because the son of the late Rās Bariyāwu, Dadjāzmāch Gabra Madhan, was in revolt near Adwā.<sup>1</sup> Only in early March did the Rās move to Maqalle to stay there, inactive, closer to the emperor's headquarters in Zabul.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 1/1-3, quoting Moniteur Egyptien, 15.2.80.

<sup>2</sup>F.O. 407/11, quoting Moniteur Egyptien, 21.3.80, MAE Mass.4, Raffray's 16.3.80, 12.4.80.

Left as ruler over Hamāsen, Alulā's lieutenant Belāttā Gabru established his headquarters at *Daro Cavalos*.<sup>1</sup>

"Belata Gabrov," his character was sketched by Wylde,<sup>2</sup> "is an ugly, middle-sized man ... with a reputation for being a good general, a quick mover, and cruel to his enemies, and a great robber. There is no doubt that he does take over and above his tribute and pound of flesh, and reads his instructions as to tribute a hundred cattle from one tribe, as a hundred of the fattest and best milch cows belonging to them."

A native of Tamben and son of a mere *tenant* like his master, the tough Gabru was trusted and backed by the busy Alulā, who authorised him to crush opposition in the Marab Mellāsh and raid the neighbouring claimed territories. Gabru managed to eliminate some remnants of Walda Mikā'el's followers<sup>3</sup> but failed in *pursuing* the rebellious native of Akalla Guzay Bāhtā Hagos. Bāhtā fled and joined the Egyptians in the fort of Sanhit (Karan).<sup>4</sup>

In July 1880, following some successes of Yohannēs south of Tēgre,<sup>5</sup> Alulā returned to Ṣa'zagā in Hamāsen. He returned with new instructions from Yohannēs concerning Muslims and foreign missionaries.

Working for internal unity and ever suspicious that religious minorities served Ethiopia's foreign enemies Emperor Yohannēs persistently fought against the existence in Ethiopia of what he considered as non-Ethiopian religions.<sup>6</sup> While giving a

<sup>1</sup>Kolmodin, No. 267.

<sup>2</sup>Wylde, 183, I, p.205.

<sup>3</sup>Kolmodin, No. 267; FO 407/14, extract from Moniteur Egyptien, 21.3.80.

<sup>4</sup>E.Bucci, Paesaggi e Tipi africani, Torino 1893, p.232. Based on meetings with Bahta in Eritrea.

<sup>5</sup>IO L/PS9-4 Political Resident, Aden to Bombay 7.6.80

<sup>6</sup>J.S.Trimingham, Islam in Ethiopia, Oxford 1965 (sec.ed.), pp.112, 123; O. De Lacy, The Ethiopian Church, London 1936, p.76.

most liberal interpretation to Yohannes's policy against the Muslim inhabitants,<sup>1</sup> Alulā strictly followed his instructions which were aimed at the stoppage of missionary activities and the destruction of their Ethiopic-written literature.<sup>2</sup> The first to be affected was the Swedish mission at Galab, among the Mansā' tribes. The head of that mission was ordered to send his native priests to Dabra Bizan "to study the true Ethiopian religion" and the mission was subsequently closed.<sup>3</sup>

As the Lazzarist mission in Karan was known to be under French auspices this policy of Alulā was also probably aimed at obtaining the desired European recognition of Ethiopian rights over Bogos. The French vice-consul at Massawa, Raffray, alarmed by Alulā's rumoured threat to raid Bogos, hurried to meet the Rās in July 1880 at Addi Taklay. Raffray's long speech about the friendly relations between France and Ethiopia and his request that the Rās would refrain from taxing the mission was responded to by Alulā's claim that Bogos was Ethiopian and that he had the right to tax it. The embarrassed vice consul answered that he could not interfere in Ethiopian-Egyptian relations. "In fact," he insisted, "the Egyptians are the masters of that country, where they have a large and modern equipped army which governs the country and we must obey them... if you want the revenue of Bogos, go and ask for it from the Egyptians."<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>See below: *Section I*

<sup>2</sup>R. Pankhurst, Economic History of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa 1968, p.670, citing I.M.Flad, 60 Jahre in der Mission, Basel 1922.

<sup>3</sup>A. Eshete, "The Swedish Protestant Mission 1866-1889", unpublished article, IES.

<sup>4</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 4, Raffray to MAE 25.10.80. Eshete *Evol.* 179-184.

The French refusal to recognise Ethiopian rights on Bogos and their support to the missionaries was a source of bitterness for Alulā. The Bās was later reported as underestimating the power and influence of France,<sup>1</sup> and this probably affected his future tendency to rely only on Britain as a mediator with his neighbours. As for the missionaries, Raffray's policy soon proved to be quite harmful.

Alulā's campaign in Bogos of October 1880 was considered by European observers as a masterpiece of tactics.<sup>2</sup> At the end of September he led out his 12,000 strong army descending into the valley of the Ansabā. On 10th October<sup>3</sup> he crossed that river towards Karan near the Egyptian post of Shabāb<sup>b</sup>. A detachment was sent to neutralise the fort of Sanhīt (Karan) while the bulk of his army reached the Hallal high plateau and established a camp on top of a mountain. In this fortified camp Alulā stayed for three weeks and sent strong raiding groups to all the neighbouring tribes: Habbābs, Banū 'Amir, Mansa' Barka and others. The European colonists and the French missionaries were robbed and maltreated.

Some of these harassed tribes and missionaries who had already paid their annual tax to Egypt appealed to the commander of the Sanhīt fort, Rashīd pasha, but he made no immediate effort to protect them by force. One Italian writer later claimed that Rashīd had written challenging Alulā:

£

<sup>1</sup>See: MAE(F) Mass. 4, Raffray to MAE 20.8.81, 22.11.81.

<sup>2</sup>O. Baratieri, "Di fronte agli abissini", NA, 1888.

<sup>3</sup>For the raid, see, among others, MAE(F), Mas. 4, Raffray to MAE, 25.10.80; Pennazzi, p.307; L. Nègri, Massaua e dintorni, Valenza 1887, pp. 60, 71, 72; E. Littmann, Publications of the Princeton Expedition to Abyssinia, vol. IV B; Lieder der Tigrē-Stämme, Leyden 1915, Song 704, p.1065.

"Why do you not come to attack me in the fort of Sanhit instead of bothering innocent civilians?"

"Ras Alula answered him instantly that he was in his own territory and had the right to come and tax it. He concluded his letter with the following clever and mocking sentence: 'You, who prohibit these innocent civilians from paying the tribute they owe me, why don't you come out of your fort to defend them?'"<sup>1</sup>

Only in late October did the Egyptian commander, together with his superior in Massawa and with the help of Bāhtā Hagos,<sup>2</sup> react by mobilising some seven thousand riflemen to cut the Ansabā valley. To avoid the trap, Alulā led his army with more than ten thousand head of cattle on a most difficult route to arrive safely at Ṣa'zagā early in November 1880.<sup>3</sup>

Alulā's successful raid of late 1880 failed to re-establish Ethiopian government over Bogos. Though he had a more numerous military force, the Ras must have realised that as long as the Egyptians held their fort of Sanhit, which could be reinforced from Cairo in three weeks,<sup>4</sup> he would not be able to achieve anything better. Unable to assault successfully a fortified position, all he could do then was to threaten: "If Egypt would not restore the stolen territories we shall destroy Massaua and Kartum."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Spedizione Militare Italiana in Abissinia. Pensieri di un ufficiale superiore dell'esercito, Rome 1887, pp. 71, 72.

<sup>2</sup>E. Bucci, op.cit., p.232.

<sup>3</sup>Raffray to MAE 25.10.80.

<sup>4</sup>E.Tagliabue, "Egiziani e abissini", L'Esploratore, 1881, p.64.

<sup>5</sup>G.Rohlf, L'Abissinia, Milano 1885, p.110.



Yet the raid brought home to Alulā the fact that he could tax and raid that country in every rainy season. He would do so for the next five years.

"Ruler of Massawa": Egyptian supported outlaws

The lack of a well defined border line between Egypt and Ethiopia and the existence of vast misgoverned yet raided and taxed territories was not an intolerable situation for Alulā. The continuous raids were not only a reason for the existence of his provincial army but probably the main source for its maintenance. The Egyptians, unable to face the raiding Ethiopians, returned to their old method of supporting Ethiopian outlaws as a nucleus of resistance in the disputed territories between the Massawa coast and the Bogos country. This proved to be quite a good counter-measure.

Rās Alulā spent the whole of the dry season of 1881 with Emperor Yohannes in the Gāllā country and Zabul<sup>1</sup> while Gabru went on raiding the Banū 'Amir and the Bogos tribes.<sup>2</sup>

Returning to Addi Taklay late in the rainy season of 1881 Alulā led another expedition to Bogos in December. This time he did not evacuate the Egyptian-held territory as hastily as in the previous year. On 16th January 1882, he camped with his army at Dabra Sinā and published an Awādī regarding rates of taxes for the neighbouring tribes. "Most of these unfortunate people",

---

<sup>1</sup>MAE(F) Mass. 4, Raffray to MAE 29.1.81, 20.8.81, 22.11.81.

<sup>2</sup>See in: MAE(F) Mass. 4, Raffray's 6.1.82; SOAS M.518 Documents from the Central Record office in Khartoum, R.8 Rep. 42. D. Mosconas, "Sudan orientale e Abissinia", L'Esploratore 1882, pp. 24, 25, 76, 262-264. FO 407/27, Stewart to Malet 18.4.83.

reported the new French vice-consul at Massawa, "bring the tax, while Rashed pasha [The Egyptian commander] who can not protect them, burns their villages when he hears that they are paying."<sup>1</sup> Around 15th February Alulā pillaged for two days the Ad-Tamāryam and Bedjuk and returned to Addi Taklay with 7-8,000 sheep or goats, almost as many cattle and some 15,000 thalers.<sup>2</sup>

Before leaving Egyptian territory, following Yohannes's instructions, he appointed a new Abbot in the monastery of Dabra Sinā, and proclaimed that henceforward the neighbouring tribes should pay tribute to that monastery.<sup>3</sup>

The opposition to Alulā's step among neighbouring Muslim Habbāb tribes stiffened and the Egyptians were quick to send Bāhtā Hagos to organise them.<sup>4</sup> After the departure of Alulā, Bāhtā led his new followers to Dabra Sinā, pillaged there and killed ten people.<sup>5</sup>

On the Massawa coast the Egyptians were equally successful in supporting another dangerous outlaw, Dabbah Ar'āyā, the son of Rās Ar'āyā Demṣu, the brother of 'emlasu and Alulā's brother-in-law crossed the non-existent border line to the Egyptian-held Harkikū where he was connected by marriage to the local Nā'ib.<sup>6</sup> Only a few years younger than Alulā, this son of a Rās was still

---

<sup>1</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 4, Herbin to MAE 1.4.82.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. Also Annales de la Congregation 1882, pp. 249, 250.

<sup>3</sup>C.Conti Rossini, Principi di diritto consuetudinario dell'Eritrea, Rome 1916, pp. 419, 420. Asrāta Māryam, Zenā Dabra Sinā (with Italian trans.), Rome 1910.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-40, Baratieri to MAE 15.10.91.

<sup>5</sup>Conti Rossini, Principi, p.420.

<sup>6</sup>Wylde, '83, I, p.51. MAE, Mass. 4, Herbin to MAE 1.3.82, 1.7.82. Makuriya, p.58.

a frustrated Fitāwrāri.<sup>1</sup> His appeals for a higher rank being rejected by the emperor, Dabbab wrote in early 1882 to the Egyptian governor of Massawa: "My father is Rās Arāyā my brother is the King Yoḥannā but I was deprived by Yūhannā my country and have come to you." "No one is with the king," he boasted, "they will all join me..."<sup>2</sup>

In April 1882 Alulā returned from <sup>^</sup>Ṭegre to punish the Habbābs. He returned to Dabra Sinā and reinforced it.<sup>3</sup> A few days later he had to return hastily to Adwā on his way to rejoin his master in Dabra Ṭābor. He must have been aware now of the fact that it was no longer possible to govern the Marab Mellāsh as a part-time job.

#### "Rival of Shoa": Menilek again

In June 1882 Yohannēs's hegemony was threatened again. Menilek of Shoa defeated Negus Takla Hāymānet (formerly Rās Adāl) of Godjām in the battle of 'embābo, 6th June 1882, and gained control over all the territories south of the Abbāy. Yohannēs intervened because the two vassals had not settled their differences through him.<sup>4</sup>

According to the Shoan historian, Aṣme, Yohannēs was determined to march against Menilek, but wanted to postpone the campaign until after the rainy season. His generals, however, are supposed to have replied: "Shoa is a strong kingdom let alone with Godjami arms. Even without those we fear them; so let us strike now before the weak as well as the horses have regained their strength."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Dabbab (also Dabbaba and Debbēb) killed a man when he was young and had to live as an outlaw, see Takla Ṣādeq Makuriyā, pp. 58, 59.

<sup>2</sup>AA Soudan 3-6, Rubenson's coll. IES. Dabāb to Tawfiq and Dabāb to Rashīd pasahā, 1882, n.d.

<sup>3</sup>Conti Rossini, Principi, p.420; Mikael Ghabr, Bogos (1849-1890), B.A.thesis H.S.I.U., 1971, p.33.

<sup>4</sup>Zewde, pp. 233, 234.

<sup>5</sup>Aṣme, p.92.

Yohannes left Dabra Tābor at the beginning of July.<sup>1</sup>

The Tigrean army marched eastwards, but again, as in 1878, a frontal clash with the Shoans was avoided. Menilek immediately wrote to the emperor who had camped at Warrā Ilu<sup>2</sup> and in early August arrived there with the king of Godjām.<sup>3</sup> After some discussion, Takla Hāymānot was permitted to return to his country having been given back some of his arms. The greater part of these arms were taken by the emperor and given to Turk Bashā Alulā.<sup>4</sup> Menilek was also deprived of Wallo which was given to Rās Ar'ayā Sellāsse with Rās Mikā'el as deputy. Yohannes also took the Agāw Medər from Takla Nāymānot and gave it to Alulā.<sup>5</sup> Alulā never went to Agaw Meder and according to one of his descendants it was subsequently governed by Wagshum Beru.<sup>6</sup>

As a gesture of appeasement and to reinforce national unity, Yohannes married his only son, Rās Ar'ayā Sellāsse, to Menilek's daughter, Zawditu. According to oral tradition, Alulā much opposed the marriage, arguing that the bride was not beautiful enough (a poor argument considering the fact that she was only a child). "Policy is not decided by the straightness of the nose,"<sup>7</sup> Yohannes is said to have answered his general. Nevertheless

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 4, Alula to Raffray, Were Ilu, 14 Hamle 1874/20.7.82.

<sup>3</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 4, Yohannes to Raffray, 17.8.87.

<sup>4</sup>Zewde, p.234, quoting Heruy, "History of Ethiopia", p.60.

<sup>5</sup>Takla Şadeq Makurya, p.58.

<sup>6</sup>Int.Fit.Bayana Abrehā.

<sup>7</sup>Int. with Tigrean teacher who wishes to remain anonymous.

Alulā accompanied Rās Bitwadam Gabra Masqal and Rās Gabra Kidane (the governor of Zabul, Yohannes's brother-in-law) to Menilek's camp to escort the bride.<sup>1</sup> On 24 October 1882 the young couple were married with great ceremony.

\*

\*            \*

During late 1882 and the whole dry season of 1883 Rās Alulā was away from the Marab Mellash. He and Rās Gabra Kidane followed Yohannes to tax the Gällā area of western Wallo before returning in January 1883 to Dabra Tābor.<sup>3</sup> In March and April, he camped just outside Adwā and then in Aksum.<sup>4</sup> In June he went back to Dabra Tābor to see his master before returning to his province.<sup>5</sup>

During these four years (late 1879-June 1883) in which Alulā was wandering between the internal Ethiopian arena and the northern border he was surely feeling the difference between being a "rival of Shoa" and a "ruler of Massawa". In Yohannes's court fighting against Menilek or the Gällā, Turk Bāshā Alulā was a good general. In his own province Rās Alulā was actually an independant governor and almost an independant statesman. In Tēgre his humble

---

<sup>1</sup>Guèbrè Sellassie, op.cit., p.185.

<sup>2</sup>H.Marcus, "Menelik II" in N.Bennett, Leadership in Eastern Africa, six political Biographies Boston 1968, p.27.

<sup>3</sup>FO 407/27, 'Alā' ad-Dīn to Eg. Gov. 14.2.83 in Malet to Granville 15.2.83.

<sup>4</sup>G.Branchi, Missione in Abissinia(1883), Rome 1889, p.20.

<sup>5</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 4, Herbin to Soumagne 8.6.83.

origin was probably well remembered while in the Marab Mellash he was the only Rās. As Yohannes's general, in the internal arena, he was put over soldiers whose hereditary devotion belonged to others while back in the north, among Belattā Gabru, Lədj Fanta, Shālaqā Ar'āyā and his other followers, he was already the head of a new hierarchy.<sup>1</sup>

For the next five years Alulā would seldom cross the Marab southward. His province also became the stage for important historical developments.

---

<sup>1</sup>For Alulā's government in the Marab Mellash, see below **Section 2.**

E. 1883: THE EVE OF A SECOND EGYPTIAN-  
ETHIOPIAN WAR

Egyptian Initiative

While the Ethiopians in the Marab Mellāsh went on with their almost routine profitable raids on the Egyptian-occupied territories<sup>1</sup> the Egyptian authorities in Massawa were trying to reorganise their defences. In December 1881 all their territories bordering Ethiopia were combined into a new Hukumdāriyyat Hudūd al-Habasha, i.e. "the Hukumdāriyya of the Ethiopian frontier",<sup>2</sup> and they started paving a new road from Karan to Kassala. In late 1882 a commission of four Egyptian officers headed by Zakki 'Abd ar-Rahmān were sent to study the border problems. In a long report submitted in early 1883<sup>3</sup> they suggested a reorganisation of the frontier "in order to prevent Rās Alulā and Blātā Gabrū from pillaging our tribes." The officers recommended that a chain of forts should be erected in Kumaliya, Sabarguma Ira and other places, to be supported by newly organised administrative centres in Massawa, Karan and Amidib. These forts and centres had to house over ten thousand troops. The neighbouring tribes had to be organised under new Shaykhs known to oppose the Ethiopians, those Shaykhs being subordinated to an Egyptian appointed Nāzir.

---

<sup>1</sup>For Ethiopian raids on Egyptian protected tribes in Bogos and the coast, see: A.S.MAI 36/2-11, Coanoti to MAE 19.1.83, Branchi to MAE 10.1.83. FO 403/81, Dowding to Moncrief 21.2.83. SOAS M.518 R.8 'Alā' ad-Dīn to Eg. Govt. 15.3.83, 18.4.83.

<sup>2</sup>FO 78/3326, Malet to Granville 12.12.81. SOAS M.518 R.8 Rep.49.

<sup>3</sup>SOAS M.518 R.8 Rep.49.

The officers' suggestions could not be met by Egyptian resources in 1883 and it seems that little was done to implement them. Yet the will reflected in the report to regain strategic positions motivated a new Egyptian initiative.

The brother of 'emlasu

The Egyptian authorities at Massawa returned to their old system of harbouring and financing Ethiopian outlaws. Dabbab Ar'ayā, the rebellious son of Rās Ar'ayā and Alulā's brother-in-law, was well received and given a monthly salary,<sup>1</sup> and started raiding the borderlands. Leading a well armed gang of 400 Assāwurtā tribesmen he robbed his first Ethiopian caravan in October 1882,<sup>2</sup> and intensified these activities throughout the next year. In April 1883 he even robbed a caravan carrying the property of the French vice consul.<sup>3</sup> His booty was openly sold in the markets of Massawa and Harkīkū.

In June 1883 Rās Alulā returned to Addi Taklay to find that the commercial links with Massawa were paralysed.<sup>4</sup> This was not only because of Dabbab's activities. <sup>The</sup> Egyptian authorities in the port town also did their best to place in difficulties Ethiopian (and their own) interests as part of their new offensive initiative. In January 1883 an Egyptian military detachment

---

<sup>1</sup>AA 3/6 No. 41 and 42, Rashīd Kemāla to Eg. Gov. 16.5.83. Memo. on Dabbāb 1883, n.d. Rub.Col. IES.

<sup>2</sup>Wylde, '83, I, pp. 337, 51; FO 406/1, V.Baker, Memo 9.1.84 in Baring to Granville 18.1.84.

<sup>3</sup>FO 407/27, Stewart to Malet, 18.4.83.

<sup>4</sup>For commerce with Massawa, see below. **Section I.**



was sent to the coast near Zulā where Alulā smuggled in arms bought for him by Greek merchants (mainly those of the Massawa-based agency of Müller and Vogt). A consignment of 840 rifles with 32 boxes of ammunition bought by an agent named Moskulas was confiscated and brought to Massawa. In May while still in Adwā Alulā tried unsuccessfully to obtain the release of these arms through the good offices of the French vice consul.<sup>1</sup> Once back in his province Alulā immediately wrote to Mukhtār pasha. He clearly stated that Massawa would be devastated unless the arms were restored and Dabbab turned over to him. Alulā's first demand was instantly met. Pleased with the restored rifles, Alulā summoned Vogt from Massawa and ordered another 1,800 promising to send the payment that September.<sup>2</sup>

Dabbab however was not abandoned by Mukhtār. The outlaw went on with his activities and in September 1883 he carried out his most daring campaign. Just two hours away from Massawa he robbed a very rich caravan, killing an Ethiopian priest who had tried to protect a sum of 3,000 thalers.<sup>3</sup> This was probably part of the money that Alulā had sent to Vogt for the purchase of the 1,800 rifles and their ammunition. The priest was a very close friend and agent of Wayzara 'emlasu, Alulā's wife, with whom she also sent some valuable articles to be sold in Massawa.<sup>4</sup> Happy with himself - an Italian journalist later

---

<sup>1</sup>Rohlf's to Allen in The Times, 11.7.83. A.S.MAI 36/2-11, Branchi to MAE 10.11.83. MAE(F), Mass. 4 Müller-Vogt Co. to Soumagne 15.4.86.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Perino, p.76.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

reported<sup>1</sup> - Dabbab sent a letter to Rās Alulā mockingly asking him to thank his wife - Dabbab's sister - for the presents she had sent him.

Dabbab's insults came at a bad time. A few weeks later, in October, 'əmlasu died.<sup>2</sup>

And  
"Especially sorrow described the biographer of the Rās, "seized Ras Alula and he wept greatly, saying 'Amläsu was the covering of my head, the epaulettes of my collar and the shield of my arm. Behold, the wall of my house has fallen, woe is me, woe is me, for my light is darkened and my lamp extinguished, woe is me, woe is me. My praise has become silent, my thought is weakened and my strength trambäas...'

He Alulā wrote a letter about her death to his lord, Yohannes. The King sorrowed and grieved on account of her strong faith and princely deeds, for he loved her greatly, more than all the female relatives of his father and mother."<sup>3</sup>

Undoubtedly, it was at this time that Alulā developed a strong personal hatred for Dabbab and his capture became for Alulā something more than a political objective. Alulā prohibited merchants from going to Massawa and writing to Mukhtār Bey the Egyptian governor there he made a further diplomatic effort to obtain Dabbab's surrender:

"The reason why I ~~have~~ not sent you the merchants and the caravans is that the other day I have sent you a letter that I would send you the merchants if you catch

---

<sup>1</sup>Perino, p.76.

<sup>2</sup>FO 406/1, Hewett to Admiralty 7-10. Jan. 1884.

<sup>3</sup>According to the evidence of old people in Mannawe W. 'əmlasu was brought to Addi Taklay by Alulā just before she died. Being very ill he sent her back to Tegre and she died on the way. She was buried at Dabra Dāmo.

and send me Debbub. Now imprison him and send him to me. He is sitting with the family of the Naib of Harkeeko and his children. You yourself also know it."<sup>1</sup>

This was the situation on the eve of the first Ethiopian-Egyptian direct clash since the battle of Gurā'.

October 1883: Sahāti, "Dogali of the Egyptians"

The lack of a defined border-line between the Egyptian and the Ethiopian territories was a result of their failure to negotiate a peace treaty and of the nature of their mutual relations in the last eight years. While a common commercial interest necessitated some agreement about caravan routes, <sup>the</sup> Ethiopian "taxing" and raiding system contradicted any concept of a separating line. Thus, the "4 Egyptian officers' Report" suggesting tactical defence based on a fortified line was actually an offensive plan. By suggesting that the line should pass west of Sabarguma they clearly stated a policy of rearranging areas for years regarded as under Ethiopian control.

The Ethiopians, on the other hand, were clearly in an aggressive mood. Yohannes aware of the collapse of <sup>the</sup> Egyptian government in the Sudan, and supposedly suspicious of British-Egyptian action against <sup>st.</sup> him, was preparing his armies for a quick preventive campaign. Menilek was ordered to move to Wallo, Takla Hāymānot to Bagemder, Rās Mikā'el to Tēgre, and Alulā's forces on the border were much reinforced.<sup>2</sup> Undoubtedly Alulā was eager to exploit his military advantage along the frontier to regain territories

---

<sup>1</sup>Wylde, '83, I, p.59.

<sup>2</sup>Zewde, pp. 268, citing Bosphore Egyptien, 24.12.83.

lost since 1872. This interest was probably strongly reinforced by his personal desire for revenge in the case of Dabbab and his supporters.

Following Alulā's renewed demand for the surrender of Dabbab, the Egyptians in Massawa advised Dabbab to go to Sawākīn for a while.<sup>1</sup> Either because of Alulā's threats or because they started acting according to their new tactical plan, the Egyptians, in early October 1883, sent a company of troops to fortify Sahāṭi (then an almost deserted water-point<sup>2</sup>) on the Massawa-Hamāsen commercial route. Alulā protested to Mukhtār Bey only to receive the reply that the troops were sent there to protect Ethiopian caravans.<sup>3</sup>

"Saati is neutral ground," Alulā explained two years later,<sup>4</sup> "when the merchants gather at Ailet I shall go with them down to Saati, and the Egyptian soldiers should be sent by their Government to escort them. There is no necessity to have a garrison at all at Saati."

But it also seems as if Alulā was not upset to hear the Egyptians' refusal to his ultimatum to evacuate the place. In the last days of October 1883<sup>5</sup> he personally marched there.

"Ras Alula," described the writer of the Mannawe MS,<sup>6</sup> "having heard the matter of their coming ... he could

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 407/60, A. Baker to Granville, 5.1.84.

<sup>2</sup>A. Salimbeni, "Diario", p.131.

<sup>3</sup>FO 407/28, Moncrief to Baring, 4.11.83.

<sup>4</sup>FO 78/3808, Marcopoli to Chermiside, 26.8.85.

<sup>5</sup>G. Branchi, op.cit., p.51.

<sup>6</sup>Ms. Mannawe.

not be patient, and he rose up to fight them. He said to the officers and troops who were with him, 'In faith be brave, and do not fear...'"

And going they found them [The Egyptians] digging the ground, gathering wood and piling up stones to make a strong wall....."

Surprised by the Ethiopians the Egyptian company was actually annihilated, 45 of the troops being killed and 15 taken prisoner.<sup>1</sup> Probably remembering Dabbab's last letter to him, "Ras Alula", wrote a British visitor,<sup>2</sup> "with his usual pleasantry, sent word to Massawa, thanking the authorities for sending him so many excellent Remington rifles."

The clash of Sahāṭi (later to be described as the "Dogali of the Egyptians"<sup>3</sup>) and rumours of Yohannes's preparations convinced European observers that Massawa was about to be attacked.<sup>4</sup>

\*

\*       \*

Alulā's attack on the Egyptians at Sahāṭi was apparently his own initiative. It was not his first time to confront the Egyptians and he undoubtedly did not need Yohannes' approval to attack a small company of them. For such purposes his local provincial army was quite sufficient. Heading such a force of his own, consisting of officers and troops personally devoted to him<sup>5</sup> Alulā did not act as the Imperial Turk Bashā but as the

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 407/28, Moncrief to Baring, 4.11.83. According to The Times, 26.11.83 and Branchi, op.cit., the number of the dead Egyptians was 60.

<sup>2</sup>"A Journey to the Court of King John", The Daily News, 7.5.84. Several articles, 7.5.84 to 8.7.84. They were probably written by Mr. Villiers, the artist of Graphic, who accompanied the Hewett Mission.

<sup>3</sup>Camera dei deputati: Discorso dell'onorevole Luigi Chiala sul credito di 20 milioni per l'azione militare in Africa 29.6.87, Rome 1887, p.24.

<sup>4</sup>The Times, 22.12.83; FO 407/60, Hewett to Admiralty, 18.12.83.  
<sup>5</sup>See below, p.149

governor of the Marab Mellāsh.

This time, however, things were different. Egypt was already under British control and the massacre of the company at Sahāji was no longer a mere border clash. The new international situation would soon turn it into the starting point of a new period in Ethiopian history and would enable Alulā to develop his local independence and become a leading figure in Ethiopian diplomacy.

F. 1884: TREATY WITH BRITAIN

The diplomatic situation having been deadlocked for years and with the Egyptian local authorities in Massawa in an aggressive mood, the Sahaḥi clash could well have become the beginning of more intensive hostilities between Ethiopia and the exhausted Egypt. In fact, Ethiopia's next moves clearly indicated their eagerness to march. Following the mobilisation of the various Ethiopian provincial armies, the Bogos tribes were again put under Ethiopian pressure and the Sanhīt-Massawa telegraph line was cut by Alulā's troops.<sup>1</sup>

By the end of 1883 the overall situation of the Egyptian African empire was becoming critical. A few days after the Sahaḥi clash, Hicks pasha's expedition was annihilated by Mahdist forces on 5th November 1883. The Mahdiyya movement was rapidly spreading also among the eastern Sudanese tribes, and the Egyptians there, still organised in their "Hukumdāriyya of the Ethiopian frontier", were apparently slow to understand that they were possibly facing total destruction. Their garrisons in the Hukumdāriyya, those of Al-Qallābāt (Matammā), al-Jīra and Kassala, became in late 1883 and the first half of 1884 actually besieged by superior Mahdist armies and tribes.<sup>2</sup> Rumours were spread in Europe that the Mahdist leader of the eastern Sudanese marches, 'Uthmān Diqna, had written to Yohannes and Alulā suggesting common action.<sup>3</sup> The

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 407/28, Granville to Baring, 26.12.83; FO 407/60, Baker to Baring 27.12.83; SOAS A.518 R.8, "Affairs in eastern Sudan", The Times, 22.12.83.

<sup>2</sup>See P.M.Holt, The Mahdist State of the Sudan 1881-1898, Oxford 1970 (2nd ed.), pp. 166, 167,

<sup>3</sup>A.Eshete, pp. 240, 241.

Muslim tribes in the areas between Massawa and Kassala were put under Mahdist pressure and influence. Thus the Egyptian garrisons of Amīdīb and Sanhīt though not surrounded by aggressive armies became partly disconnected from Massawa.

But British policy makers, now officially in charge of Egyptian affairs, were fully aware of the new developments. Their traditional policy (since 1868) of minimising relations with Ethiopia was finally to be altered and, though opposed by the "Muslim" Gordon, the newly adopted line was to meet some of Yohannes's demands in order to gain Ethiopian cooperation, a quiet frontier and assistance in relieving the besieged garrisons.<sup>1</sup> It was decided in London and imposed on Cairo to contact the Ethiopians and offer them the Bogos country and free trade in Massawa in return for a peace treaty. Lacking any existing diplomatic channels with the emperor, it was Alulā, the man in charge of the Egyptian frontier, whom the British preferred to contact.

In December 1883, simultaneously with the appointment of Rear-Admiral Hewett as the head of the future diplomatic mission to Ethiopia, General V. Baker was sent to Massawa to make overtures to the Rās. Baker arrested Dabbab in Sawākīn<sup>2</sup> and reached Massawa in late December. Replacing Mukhtār, the Egyptian governor there, by the Egyptian employed American Mason Bey,<sup>3</sup> and appointing

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 407/60, Granville to Baring 10.3.84. Other document there and FO 1/30.

<sup>2</sup>FO 407/60, Baker to Granville 5.1.84. Dabbab was then transferred to Cairo. FO 407/61, Granville to Egerton 30.4.84.

<sup>3</sup>FO 406/1, V. Baker's Memo. 9.1.84 in Baring to Granville 18.1.84.



A.B.Wylde in charge of pacification of the frontier, he wrote to Alulā on 29 December 1883. In his letter<sup>1</sup> V. Baker promised Alulā the arrest of other outlaws. He asked him to agree to receive British and Egyptian envoys in the near future in order to establish friendly relations between the Khedivial government and Emperor Yohannes.

Baker's letter was followed by a letter from Wylde in which the Britisher reminded Alulā of their previous cordial meeting of 1879. Wylde promised to do his best about Dabbab's followers, and asked the Rās to normalise the situation by renewing the commerce with Massawa, to which Alulā immediately and positively responded.<sup>2</sup>

Alulā's response was probably not only a result of the promises but mainly of his belief that the negotiations with Great Britain, which he had hoped for since his meetings with Gordon and Wylde in 1877 and 1879, would restore Ethiopian territories and result in Ethiopia having a guaranteed access to firearms through Massawa. From that moment onwards he would do his best to secure the British as partners to a treaty.

#### French interference

It was at that time that the French Government, already in fairly close contact with Alulā and Yohannes, started a diplomatic initiative in order to jeopardise the success of <sup>the</sup> projected British mission. The new vice-consul at Massawa, Soumagne, wrote to Alulā on 12 January, 1884 warning him against the British and urging him

---

<sup>1</sup>Baker wrote his letter in Arabic. Text: AA Rub.Coll. Soudan 3/6. Baker to Alula, 27 Safar 1301 H.

<sup>2</sup>Wylde, 183, I, pp. 48-49. FO 407/72, Wylde to FO, 13.2.88.

not to discuss anything with the British before consulting a French representative. Soumagne wrote a similar letter to the emperor offering to act as his commercial agent at Massawa for the import of French arms.<sup>1</sup> The emperor's suspicions were aroused. "Aṣe Yohannes was suspicious of the British envoys" wrote a contemporary Ethiopian historian. "He thought that they were followed by an army, for white traders on the coast used to warn him."<sup>2</sup> In early April 1884 Yohannes wrote to Soumagne appointing him as his commercial agent (Wakīl) in Massawa.<sup>3</sup> Two weeks later he summoned a newly arrived French official, Labosse, to come to him before the arrival of the Anglo-Egyptian mission.<sup>4</sup>

As for Alulā, his future activities clearly show that he perfectly understood that though France was then able to supply him with arms, England was in actual control of all the territories in question and of the port of Massawa.

#### Alulā's initiative

From the beginning the British were convinced that Rās Alulā was the key to success in their negotiations. This policy, soon to be justified, was probably a result of the impression that Alulā was actually conducting quite an independent policy on the border. Regarded as "the mouthpiece of the Emperor"<sup>5</sup> Alulā was

---

<sup>1</sup>Eshete, Evol., pp. 273-278.

<sup>2</sup>Aṣme, p.94.

<sup>3</sup>Eshete, Evol., p.244.

<sup>4</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 4, Labosse to MAE 29.6.84.

<sup>5</sup>FO 401/6, Hewett to Baring 6.3.84.

considered as *more than a mere channel* to Yohannes. In Massawa Hewett was undoubtedly informed by the local Egyptian authorities and by Wylde about Alulā's strong position in the court and about his interest in the Massawa trade. "Ras Alula" wrote Hewett,<sup>1</sup> "the Abyssinian generalissimo and apparently the moving spirit of that country ... is well disposed towards Great Britain and anxious to arrive at a peaceful solution of the present lock-up of trade: a properly accredited British Commissioner could alone do this."

Returning to Addi Taklay on 31st January 1884, Rās Alulā found a British officer, Lieutenant Graham, waiting for him with a letter from Hewett. The Lieutenant told the Rās about the mission (which was being organised) and was told by Alulā to tell Hewett to come inland only by way of his camp at Addi Taklay. Alulā probably had reason to suspect that the emperor might instantly reject the British overtures and wanted to take charge of the preliminary stage of the negotiations. He then gave Graham a letter to Hewett stating that Yohannes was "not very far, at Wofillah Hashenghi" and inviting Hewett to come "whenever he likes" promising to receive him and to send him to the emperor.<sup>2</sup>

The hot springs in Lake Ashange were not by any stretch of the imagination "not very far away". In fact, for a mission as large as Hewett's (of about 150 men) it would have required several weeks to get there. In any case the British wanted the emperor to meet Hewett near the coast as it was *thought* that if Yohannes became

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 406/1, Hewett to Admiralty, 7-10 Jan. 1884.

<sup>2</sup>FO 406/1, Alula to Hewett, 31.1.84 in Graham to Hewett 1.2.84.

hostile the mission's members might be in danger.<sup>1</sup> Thus in early February 1884 Commander Rolfe was sent to Alulā to try to arrange a more convenient meeting place.

Rolfe was warmly received in Addi Taklay on 10 February 1884 and the anxious Alulā made a further step undoubtedly taking advantage of the fact that they were alone in the tent:

"He again answered that he could not order the King to come to the coast, but that he Ras Alulā had authority to receive letters, and if necessary conclude treaties, and would come down to Massawa if desired. I Rolfe told him I did not think you Hewett would deliver the letter otherwise than personally to the king of Abyssinia."<sup>2</sup>

Asked about Ethiopia's demands, Alulā told the Lieutenant "that Abyssinia wanted Bogos and a seaport."<sup>3</sup>

"Before leaving," reported Rolfe nine days later, "Ras Alula again sent for me, and told me that he had sent letters to the king begging him to settle the time and place for you to meet him."

He again wrote to the British Rear Admiral asking him to come by Addi Taklay and promising to take him to Yohannes.<sup>4</sup>

When Alulā's letter reached Massawa, the British could see that Alulā was anxious to conclude a treaty, but the emperor gave them no reason to be optimistic. Yet the need for a treaty was rapidly growing. V. Baker's defeat by the Mahdists at Tokar seriously aggravated the situation; "Kassala is only provisioned for one month" telegraphed Hewett, "I think that the mission had better go."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>FO 401/6, Pauncefote to Admiralty, 29.1.84.

<sup>2</sup>FO 406/1, Rolfe to Hewett, 12.2.84.

<sup>3</sup>FO 401/6, Hewett to Baring, 6.3.84.

<sup>4</sup>FO 406/1, Rolfe to Hewett, 12.2.84, 21.2.84.

<sup>5</sup>FO 407/60, Baring to Granville, 29.2.84.

Persuading Yohannes

On 18 April 1884 the Hewett mission accompanied by the American, Mason Bey, as the Egyptian envoy, entered Asmarā. Its reception by Alulā "was most cordial and magnificent".<sup>1</sup> The correspondent of the Daily News gave an interesting account of Alulā's behaviour:

"Sir W. Hewett dismounted a few paces from the door of the tent, and Ras Aloola walked forward and shook him by the hand. The Admiral, Mason Bey and Captain Speedy entered the marquee, and were seated on the right of the Ras, who squatted on a dais in the centre of the tent ... with his toga gracefully thrown about him, he looked as nearly as possible like some of the statues of the great Caesar. But all this majesty soon disappeared. Squatting on his throne, his gesticulation, the continued clutching at his drapery, the swaying to and fro of his body, and his long curved sword, worn on the right side and ever sticking behind, broke the illusion."<sup>2</sup>

Indeed the Rās had good reason to be nervous. Asked by Hewett where his master was "Alula again said he did not know as the King is always unpredictable about his movements."<sup>3</sup>

Together the Rās and his visitors proceeded to Addi Taklay having preliminary discussions on the proposed treaty. "I am able to report," Hewett wrote from Addi Taklay on 18th April 1884,<sup>4</sup> "that so far my interviews with Ras Aloula have been satisfactory", but as for a quick meeting with Yohannes Hewett was over. optimistic. During the slow march inland towards Adwā, no letter came from the emperor to instruct Alulā about the mission. At their camp in Gurā'

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 406/1, Mason to Nubar 7.5.84.

<sup>2</sup>Villiers? "A Journey to the Court of King John", The Daily News, 16.5.84 (Several articles, 7.5.84 to 8.7.84).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>FO 406/1, Hewett to Admiralty 18.4.84.

on the night of 23rd April 1884 Hewett drafted a detailed letter for Yohannes. "Through Alula" Hewett wrote,<sup>1</sup> "I sent a letter to the King, in which I stated the terms which I was empowered to offer. To the Ras at his own request, I gave a copy of my letter to the king: the former appeared pleased with the object of my mission, and hastened to dispatch my letter to the King."

The next day, when Alulā was on his way to the emperor, he met a messenger with a letter instructing him to bring the mission to Maqalle. Alulā continued towards the imperial camp which he found in late April at the hot baths of Dabbah Hadra, Tamben. The annoyed British Envoy (probably having in mind Rolfe's report of the Rās' readiness to act on his own) sent with Alulā to Yohannes: "If your Majesty is unable to come to Adowa ... and if you should be desirous of settling the affairs on which we have come, you will send such of your counsellors as we have confidence in, to discuss and conclude the said affairs."<sup>2</sup> He then proceeded, arriving at Adwā the next day (26 April).

In the meantime Yohannes had written on 18th April 1884 to Labosse beseeching him to come "most promptly and by the shortest route possible."<sup>3</sup> The British Envoy who heard of this and <sup>ascribed?</sup> the delay in his meeting the emperor to French intrigues, was relieved to hear later that Labosse was redirected to go to Adwā and not directly to the king in Maqalle.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 1/31, Hewett to Admiralty 9.6.84.

<sup>2</sup>FO 1/31, Hewett to John 25.4.84.

<sup>3</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 4, Labosse to MAE 29.6.84.

<sup>4</sup>FO 407/61, Hewett to Adm. 5.5.84.

May-June 1884: Drafting the treaty

On 30th April 1884 Alulā wrote to Hewett to inform him that the emperor would come to meet him in Adwā.<sup>1</sup> Four days later the Rās, "to whose interest is doubtless due the decision of the king",<sup>2</sup> arrived at Adwā carrying Yohannes's letter to Hewett: "I have sent you Ras Alula to assist you in counsel, provisions and everything... I am coming soon."<sup>3</sup> But the emperor was not quick to come. This gave Alulā and Hewett much time together and it was with the Rās that Hewett worked out the draft treaty: "Availing myself of the opportunity of discussing with the Ras the matters which were embodied in the treaty," Hewett reported,<sup>4</sup> "I was enabled to draw up the treaty in rough, in order that as little detention as possible should take place after the King's arrival."

At last, on 26th May 1884, the emperor came to Adwā. On the same day he received the mission with only Alulā and the 'echage present. "Alula" the correspondent of the Daily News reported, "who a few weeks ago was playing the haughty chieftain with surroundings more regal and a retinue as large as the king's ... now stood abashed and humble before his monarch with his Shemma down to his waist and lowered head."<sup>5</sup>

The first meeting with the British was merely a ceremonial one and the next day Yohannes summoned the Frenchmen Labosse and

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 1/31, Alula to Hewett 30.4.84.

<sup>2</sup>FO 407/61, Hewett to Adm. 5.5.84.

<sup>3</sup>FO 1/31, John to Hewett 1.5.84.

<sup>4</sup>FO 1/31, Hewett to Granville 9.6.84.

<sup>5</sup>"Journey", DN, 8.7.84.

his interpreter, the missionary Coulbeaux. Coulbeaux had asked Alulā to remind Yohannes "that a Treaty could only have worth if it were sanctioned by France,"<sup>1</sup> but it looks as if the Rās did not wholly follow this advice. "We were received cordially," reported Labosse,<sup>2</sup> "but Yohannes' court *persuaded* him to accept Hewett's proposals though they favoured Britain, and Yohannes too feared losing what they did offer so he signed."<sup>3</sup>

During the next few days the Emperor and the Envoys discussed the future of Massawa and Kassala. According to Hewett the emperor was then persuaded that "he would not be a gainer by having ports of his own ... but declared his intention of taking Kassala from the Arabs [The Mahdists] should it fall into their hands."<sup>3</sup>

On 3rd June 1884 in a ceremony attended by the emperor's son, Rās Ar'āyā Sellāsse (soon, in the same month, to become the crown prince), Rās Mikā'el and Rās Alulā, the peace treaty of Adwā, better known as the "Hewett Treaty" was signed by Yohannes, Hewett and Mason Bey.

By Article III of the treaty,<sup>4</sup> Yohannes agreed "to facilitate the withdrawal of the troops ... from Kassala, Amedib, and Sanhit

---

<sup>1</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 4, Labosse to MAE, 24.6.84. See also FO 407/62, Egerton to Granville 3.8.84. Eshete, p.287.

<sup>2</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 4, Labosse to MAE 24.6.84.

<sup>3</sup>FO 1/31, Hewett to Granville 9.6.84.

<sup>4</sup>English text in FO 1/31.



through Ethiopia to Massowah." In return he was promised "free transit through Massowah ... for all goods, including arms and ammunition, under British protection, "(Art I) and that Egyptian authorities would return any fugitives from justice (Art. V, a mutual undertaking). Of special importance for Alulā was the retrocession of Bogos provided in Article II:

"On and after the 1st day of September 1884, corresponding to the 8th day of Maskarram, 1877, the country called Bogos shall be restored to His Majesty the Negoosa Negust; and when the troops of His Highness the Khedive shall have left the garrisons of Kassala, Amedib, and Sanhit, the buildings in the Bogos country which now belong to His Highness the Khedive, together with all the stores and munitions of war which shall then remain in the said buildings, shall be delivered to and become the property of His Majesty the Negoosa Negust."

\*

\*       \*

The "Hewett Treaty" was the only one Emperor Yohannes ever signed with a foreign power, and it was undoubtedly Alulā who gained the credit for what was considered by Ethiopians as <sup>a</sup>"moral and political victory".<sup>1</sup> Alulā was proud of the diplomatic achievement. The emperor's demand that any treaty with Egypt be guaranteed by Britain, a requirement which had seemed impossible in 1879, "had become an accomplished fact".<sup>2</sup>

Article I of the treaty was soon to be interpreted by the British as an abandonment of Ethiopian claims to Massawa, though for the emperor it was only a first step towards making these

---

<sup>1</sup>Zewde, p.315.

<sup>2</sup>Wylde, '83, II, p.19.

claims good.<sup>1</sup> On 25 June in fact he wrote to Victoria asking her "to make me take hold of the port of Massawa".<sup>2</sup>

Article II formally recognized what had actually been the case for several years, i.e. that Bogos, except for the fort of Sanhīt, was in the hands of Alulā. Kassala was not clearly promised<sup>3</sup> and Al-Qallābāt (Matammā), though much desired by Yohannēs, was not even mentioned. (The British thought it already had fallen into Mahdist hands.) It well may be that Alulā, who was little interested in districts outside his immediate sphere, had neglected pressing Hewett to be specific about places other than Bogos. On the other hand, it looks as though Article V, of which nothing was mentioned in Granville's instructions to Hewett, was initiated by Alulā. As a result of his experience with Walda Mikā'el, Dabbab, Kēfle 'eyāsus and Bāhtā Hagos, the Rās was interested for political as well as personal reasons in the extradition of his enemies.

The Ethiopian concept of that time of a border not as a well defined line but as a sphere of influence, or rather a sphere of raids,<sup>4</sup> was well reflected in the Treaty. The fact that no specific arrangements were made to delimit the frontier would become, in the near future, the source of important problems.

It has been rightly said that in the Treaty of Adwā Ethiopia traded one weak enemy (Egypt) for two strong ones.<sup>5</sup> The Ethiopians

---

<sup>1</sup>S. Rubenson, "The Adwa peace Treaty of 1884", Third International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa 1966, pp. 9, 10. (Proceedings, p. 225)

<sup>2</sup>FO 95/743, Yohannes to Victoria 25.6.84.

<sup>3</sup>See below, p. 86, 87.

<sup>4</sup>See below **Section I.**

<sup>5</sup>S. Rubenson, "Some Aspects of the Survival of Ethiopian Independence", Univ. Coll. Rev., Addis Ababa 1961.

committed themselves to *actively* provoking the Mahdists<sup>1</sup> and got no guarantee about the port of Massawa which was soon to be occupied by the Italians. Indeed, on the eve of such a critical period of her history, Ethiopia might have been able to obtain a better document or have used her military superiority more advantageously. It may also be argued that the desire, which especially motivated the Ethiopian architect of the Treaty, to have a European partner in international affairs rather than an African neighbour, was based on harmful naivety.

Alulā was soon to be disillusioned by the treaty and with the Europeans.

---

<sup>1</sup>For the implications of the Hewett Treaty on the Mahdist-Ethiopian relations, see below, p. 249.

G. 1884: DISILLUSIONMENTThe emperor and "his mouthpiece"

While the Hewett mission was wending its way back to the coast, everything seemed to be going smoothly in the Ethiopian camp. Rās Mikā'el's 20,000 Gāllā horsemen were said to be attached to Alulā's army awaiting the first rains in order to march on Kassala. Alulā himself returned to Hamāsen for further preparations and the emperor was said to be organising another force to march parallel with Alulā's through Addi Abo to the besieged town.<sup>1</sup> Yet the emperor may have felt that his beloved "Bālamwāl" was growing too great. Though standing with his Shammā down and humbly introducing the foreign envoys, was not he, Alulā, actually imposing the treaty, successful as it might have been regarded?

Many of the influential Tigrean dignitaries could hardly stomach the fact that the "Wadi Qubi" had become such "a moving spirit" in the country's high policy. Some of these dignitaries<sup>2</sup> were reported to be open enemies of Alulā. The governor of Adwā (probably Dadjāzmāch Hagos or Rās Bitwadad Gabra Masqal) had done his best to create difficulties for the Hewett Mission.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 1/31, Hewett to Adm. 22.6.84.

<sup>2</sup>Unfortunately the documents consulted did not contain the names of Alulā's opponents during that period. Yet judging from events and information regarding a later period, it may be assumed that those were mainly leading figures in Rās Abūyā's family, Rās Gabra Kidane, the emperor's brother-in-law and Dadjāzmāch Hagos (later Rās Hagos).

<sup>3</sup>FO 1/31, Hewett to Adm. 9.6.84.

It was probably owing to these feelings and to French advice that the government of Akalla Guzāy, through which the newly opened route for the arms trade with Massawa could pass, was taken away from Alulā. The governor of that province and a devotee of Alulā, Bāshā Gabre, was replaced by the Bajerond Lawte, a loyal follower of Yohannes.<sup>1</sup>

In their meetings Yohannes had already told Hewett not to let arms from Massawa pass into Ethiopia unless they were ordered personally by the emperor,<sup>2</sup> and indeed in early August 1884 a consignment of 3,000 rifles was released by the customs only after the British saw to it that they would not be carried inland by Alulā's men.<sup>3</sup>

With Alulā out of the picture, Soumagne, the new Wakīl, started conveying arms to Yohannes through the R.C. Mission in Akkrur.<sup>4</sup> In late September Alulā wrote an assistant of Coulbeaux with evident surprise: "Why have you brought the firearms by some other route when Yohannes has ordered that all should pass through here Hamasen?"<sup>5</sup> The missionary was relieved by Bajerond Lawte's assurances: "The man from Hamasen, whom you know well and whom I would not even name, you say has written to you demanding to know why you brought arms some other way: do not worry. It was I who required you to do so by order of Yohannes,

---

<sup>1</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 4, Coulbeaux to Soumagne 30.6.84. Lawte's background is unknown to me. He was probably another Bālamwāl of Yohannes who became his Bajerond, treasurer. In 1878 he served as go-between for Yohannes and Menilek.

<sup>2</sup>FO 407/62, John to Speedy 13.8.84.

<sup>3</sup>FO 407/62, Egerton to Granville 5.8.84, Speedy to Egerton 27.7.84.

<sup>4</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 4, Coulbeaux to Soumagne 30.6.84.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., Alula to Abba Yohannes 23.9.84. For Alulā's interest in the arms trade, see below, p. 142, 143

so do not let this person - however great he may be - bother you."<sup>1</sup>

July: Again into Bogos

On 24 July 1884 Rās Alulā led his provincial army into the Bogos country but did not, as was expected, head for Kassala. Though the emperor was anxious to occupy the besieged town, it seems as if Alulā did not want to remain passive till an imperial army was assembled. Alulā was apparently more concerned about establishing his government immediately in the Bogos and, as the frontiers of that country were not defined, to extend it over the neighbouring Muslim tribes.

For nine days Alulā's troops raided the Bogos tribes, the Banū 'Āmir and the Ḥabbāb, who were forced to pay a tribute of 5,000 thalers. Lədj Fanta's men cut the Sanhit-Massawa telegraph line and clashed with an Egyptian newly mobilised company of Banū 'Āmir's horsemen.<sup>2</sup>

Alulā's raid on Bogos six weeks before it was officially to be restored to the emperor was poorly timed. It caused panic among those tribes which, owing to recent developments, had either to join the Mahdist movement or Alulā's future government over Bogos. The Banū 'Āmir who had already applied to Yohannēs for anti-Mahdist support<sup>3</sup> were now desperately opposing the Egyptian evacuation of Bogos. Among the Banū 'Āmir's traditional rivals, the Ḥabbāb, pro-Mahdist tendencies emerged. During his raid Alulā appointed

---

<sup>1</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 4, Bajeronḍ /Lawte/ to Abba Yohannes, 27.9.84.

<sup>2</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 4, Labosse to MAE, 5.8.84, 9.8.84. FO 407/62, Speedy to Egerton, 30.7.84, 19.8.84. Detailed descriptions also: K. Winqvist, En liten återblick, Stockholm 1908, p.7. DN 27.12.84.

<sup>3</sup>FO 78/3673, Egerton to Granville 7.5.84.

Kantibā Ḥamīd as the supreme Shaykh of the Ḥabbāb<sup>1</sup> and ordered him to pay tribute thus rendering good service to the pro-Mahdist party in that tribe.<sup>2</sup>

The raid also served as a warning to the British that sending Alulā to Kassala might not be such a good idea.

"The tribes hitherto loyal to the Khedive", wrote Speedy,<sup>3</sup> "... prefer anything rather than become subjects of a Christian Monarch ... it is quite possible that Ras Aloola ... is... merely looking forward to a grand foray, on a larger scale than usual."

Finally, the raid probably caused further disappointment to the emperor who subsequently ordered Alulā to apologise to Mason Bey and Captain Speedy. "I have done nothing to break the peace," Alulā then wrote to Mason, trying to minimise the whole affair, "I am ever your friend."<sup>4</sup>

September: "Restoration" of Bogos

In the meantime, in early July 1884 it was suddenly found out by the British that the Egyptian-besieged garrison at Al-Qallābāt (Matammā) had not actually fallen. A new policy was subsequently adopted according to which the Ethiopian projected march on Kassala was to be cancelled and their military effort was to be diverted to Al-Qalābāt. In the Massawa-Kassala area, the newly arrived Governor of the Red Sea, Colonel Chermiside, hoped to organise an anti-Mahdist Muslim tribal front for which the fort of Sanhit (Karan) was designated to be the main base. It was therefore decided that this fort would not be ceded to Ethiopia together with the restoration

---

<sup>1</sup>O. Baratieri, "Negli Habab", NA 1892, p.205;

<sup>2</sup>FO 407/62, Speedy to Egerton 30.7.84, Ras Alulah to Mason Bey 12.8.84.

<sup>3</sup>FO 407/62, Speedy to Egerton 30.7.84.

<sup>4</sup>FO 407/62, Ras Alulah to Mason 12.8.84. Also: John to Speedy 13.8.84.

of Bogos.<sup>1</sup>

In late August 1884 Alulā met Mason Bey and Captain Speedy between Addi Taklay and Sanhit. "The Ras was anxious to know if he would be put in possession of the fort ... when Bogos be ceded. Mason Bey explained that the fort and buildings must be retained until the arrival of the Kassala and Amadeb garrisons. Ras Alula after some argument merely dropped the subject saying: 'We ask no more than what is in the Treaty'."<sup>2</sup>

Alarmed, the Rās hurried to Aksum to meet his master:

"You are thoroughly acquainted with the whole affair of the Treaty," Yohannes then wrote to Speedy, "yet you say Ras Aloolah has made a mistake. He has made no mistake. Is it not written in the Treaty that the soldiers of the Khedive stationed at Bogos should be withdrawn on the 1st September (o.s.)? Now this Treaty has been ratified by all. 'Words may be forgotten, but writing cannot alter.' However, if the soldiers are not ready to leave at once, I will not insist on the literal rendering of the Treaty, but let them remain till the end of Maskarrem (10th October), as I am anxious that the country should be governed by my Chiefs in accordance with the Treaty. Are we not ~~me~~, bound by friendship?"<sup>3</sup>

While the English version of the relevant Article II of the Treaty could have been interpreted as stipulating the evacuation of Kassala and Amadib as a precondition to the cession of the buildings and equipment in Sanhit,<sup>4</sup> the Amharic version was significantly different, and could well be translated as follows:

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 407/62 Egerton to Granville 16.7.84. FO 78/3799, Chermiside to Nubar 27.12.84.

<sup>2</sup>"Abyssinia out of its Treaty obligations", The Daily News, 27.12.84. FO 78/3678, Speedy to Egerton 31.8.84.

<sup>3</sup>FO 407/63, John to Speedy 10.9.84.

<sup>4</sup>See FO 1/31, Hewett to Admiralty 22.6.84: "There is a possibility, however, that King John, knowing that the date on which he will acquire possession of the garrison of Keren depends on the relief of Kassala and Amedib, intends to precipitate matters by effecting the relief of those two garrisons as soon as possible."



"When the troops of the Egyptian khedive leave, having left Kassala Amadīb and Sanhit, the buildings (ገዛዎች) of the Khedive in Bogos, the equipment and war materials, everything left in those places (ገጠታዎች) shall become the property of the Emperor."<sup>1</sup>

According to that version it may well have been clear to the Ethiopians that Kassala and Amadīb were thus included in the promised country of Bogos and the buildings in those three places would become theirs, logically, when each of those places would be evacuated. Captain Rolfe, one of the members of the Mission, asked about his understanding of the verbal preliminary discussions in Adwā, wrote: "The Bogos country, including the fort of Sanhit and Amadib, were to be given to Abyssinia on the first of September or sooner if the garrisons could be withdrawn. Kassala should be given over to Abyssinia as soon as that country is ready to take it over and garrison withdrawn."<sup>2</sup> But the emperor's objections were dismissed.

On 12 September 1884 "the country called Bogos was publicly restored to the Negusa Negust of Ethiopia". But what was actually handed to the Ethiopian officer deputed by Alulā was a small fort four miles from Sanhit. It was a disillusioned Alulā who sat down in Addi Taklay to draft a letter of protest to Captain Speedy. Repeating the demand for Sanhit itself he concluded: "what was done was simply to make a public pronouncement and handing over a small subsidiary fort, while the Egyptian garrison still remained in full strength in possession of the main fort."<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 93/2/2.  
"The Adwa peace treaty".

See S. Rubenson,

<sup>2</sup>FO 1/31, Rolfe's account 5.7.84.

<sup>3</sup>FO 78/3678A, Speedy to Baring 15.9.85, in Baring to Granville, 30.9.84.

The fort of Sanhīt was kept in Egyptian hands for the next seven months.

British refusal to let Alulā march on Kassala

In his meeting with Yohannes in Aksum, September 1884, Alulā's next step had to be decided. The British wanted him to go and relieve Al-Qallābāt because it was besieged and they were also anxious to avoid an Ethiopian march on Kassala and further raids on the Muslim tribes which they hoped to draw into their own alliance. Yohannes, on the other hand, wished to send Alulā to Kassala because, as he understood the treaty, the town had been promised to him. Moreover, as the British now stipulated the relief of Kassala as a precondition to the cession of Sanhīt, he may well have considered it as his right and duty to march there. Thus, in late October 1884, while accepting the British request to facilitate the relief of Al-Qallābāt garrison,<sup>1</sup> Yohannes ordered Alulā to ready his armies and lead them to Kassala.<sup>2</sup>

The British reaction to the emperor's new initiative was definite and clear. Instructed by Baring "to use firm language to King John"<sup>3</sup> Speedy then wrote to the emperor requesting him "to suspend all preparations relative to your contemplated movements regarding the evacuation of Kassala".<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>The garrisons of Al-Qallābāt and of al-Jīra were relieved by Ethiopian forces supervised by the brilliant Egyptian officer Major Sa'd Rif'at. Sa'd reached Asmara from Massawa in December 1884 (and not in August as claimed by Sa'd) but failed to persuade Alulā to march with him to Al-Qallābāt. See Major Sa'd's long report in SOAS M.518. An English translation was made and is kept by Professor P.M.Holt, SOAS. See also P.M.Holt, The Mahdist State, pp. 167-169. Also documents in FO 78/3799, 407/63, 407/66.

<sup>2</sup>FO 78/3679, Alula to Speedy (received 21.10.84) in Speedy to Baring 22.10.84.

<sup>3</sup>FO 407/63, Baring to Granville 8.11.84.

<sup>4</sup>FO 407/63, Speedy to John 21.10.84.

For Alulā the British opposition to Yohannes' plans was probably a fortunate development. . Having priorities in Bogos, it might even be that he had written to Speedy in order to jeopardise the march.

Growing opposition among the Habbābs. Dabbab.

In June 1884 just after the safe return of the Hewett mission, the British sent Fitāwari Dabbab to Massawa for trial.<sup>1</sup> He was brought there from Cairo in early October and almost immediately, on the night of 8<sup>th</sup> October 1884, managed to escape and rejoin his Assāwurtā followers.<sup>2</sup> Yohannes angrily wrote to Speedy and, reminding him of Article V, he stated: "How disgraceful to break a treaty".<sup>3</sup>

Alulā's disappointment must have been increased when the emperor, aware of Alulā's personal quarrel with his own nephew, ordered Bajerond Lawte and another enemy of Alulā, Rās Gabra Kidane (the emperor's brother-in-law)<sup>4</sup> to chase Dabbab.<sup>5</sup> Lawte and <sup>Gabra</sup> Kidane raided the Asāwurtā, hitherto considered to be under Alulā's care and burned the coastal village of Zulā.<sup>6</sup> Dabbab himself fled to the Habbāb and joined one of its sub-tribes, with which he soon raided the Mansā<sup>7</sup> who were tributary to Alulā.

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 407/61, Egerton to Granville 23.6.84.

<sup>2</sup>FO 407/63, Molyneux to Hay, 21.10.84, Speedy to Baring 15.9.84.

<sup>3</sup>FO 407/63, John to Speedy 22.10.84.

<sup>4</sup>Int. Dadjāzmāch Zawde.

<sup>5</sup>FO 407/66, Report by a chief from Harkeeko, 11.12.84 and an enclosure by M. Manopole.

<sup>6</sup>FO 407/63, Baring to Granville 18.12.84.

<sup>7</sup>Roden, p.124.

Thus, at the end of October 1884, three personal enemies of Alulā: Dabbab, Bāntā Hagos and Kefle 'eyāsus, were active among the Ḥabbābs.

The various Ḥabbāb sub-tribes were then in a delicate situation. As traditional rivals of the loyal Mansā' as influenced by Ethiopian outlaws, and as Muslims, they were reluctant to submit to Alulā's government in Bogos.<sup>1</sup> They were also bitter rivals of the Banū 'Amir who were loyal to the Egyptians and as such they could not cooperate with Massawa. Under the growing pressure of 'Uthmān Digna's envoys the pro-Mahdists among the Ḥabbāb, led by Shaykh Ḥaddād and Shaykh 'Umār of the Ad' Tamāryan started acting in full cooperation with the Mahdist movement. When the Shaykhs 'Umār and Ḥaddād intensified their activities,<sup>2</sup> Mason Bey had no alternative but to ask Alulā to "enter their country and crush them".<sup>3</sup> Similarly Kantibā Ḥamīd seeing his own position challenged "went to Abyssinia and prayed Ras Alula to come with his troops".<sup>4</sup>

Alulā made no haste to interfere. During November 1884, he was busy constructing a strong fort in Bogos near the old Egyptian fort at Shabbāb.<sup>5</sup> Only in about the middle of December, when he had secured his position near the Egyptian occupied Sanhīt, did he move off towards the Ḥabbābs.

---

<sup>1</sup>For the hesitations of a member of that tribe, see Littmann IV.B, Song 633, p.975.

<sup>2</sup>FO 407/63, Speedy to Baring 20.9.84, Chermside's Report 18.11.84.  
FO 406/66, Crowe to Molyneux 24.12.84. Daily News, 16.10.84, 30.10.84.

<sup>3</sup>FO 407/63, Speedy to Baring 20.9.84. Molyneux to Hay 4.10.84.

<sup>4</sup>FO 406/66, Crowe to Molyneux 24.12.84. See also: FO 407/63, Speedy to Baring 22.10.84.

<sup>5</sup>FO 407/36, Chermside to Baring 12.11.84; Crowe to Molyneux, *ibid.*

The raid proved to be only partially successful.<sup>1</sup> None of the outlaws who were being *pursued* were captured and the Ḥabbāb's resistance was not broken. Alulā returned to Hamāsen in late December having realised for the first time it seems that there was a Māhdist threat to his domains.

Late 1884: Failure of the Anglo-Egyptian "Local Muslim Government" in the Kassala-Massawa Area.

Colonel Chermside, in charge of the relief of Kassala, strongly believed that Alulā's army was unable to march and defeat the Māhdists near the besieged town<sup>2</sup> and that it was impossible to unite the Muslim tribes with the Ethiopians in a common operation.<sup>3</sup> He therefore started working for "a local Muslim government"<sup>4</sup> in the Kassala-Massawa area.

Having the support of Baring<sup>5</sup> Chermside considered that the Mīrghanī family, headed at the time by Sayyid 'Uthmān,<sup>6</sup> was capable of supplying spiritual leadership to the desired front which had to be based on the political and military skills of old Shaykh 'Alī Bakhīt of the Banū 'Āmir. The fort of Sanhīt, which had been *deliberately* denied to Alulā, was to become "a point d'appui"

---

<sup>1</sup>Crowe to Molyneux, loc.cit.

<sup>2</sup>The most detailed descriptions of the siege of Kassala are in Na'um Shuqayr Shouchair, Ta'rīkh as-sūdān al-qadīm wal-hadīth wajighrafiyatuhā, Cairo 1903, pp. 331-343; Holt, op.cit., pp. 166-169; F.R.Wingate, Māhdism and the Egyptian Sudan, London 1901, pp. 150-151, 241-242, 247-248.

<sup>3</sup>FO 78/3799, Chermside to Nubar 27.12.84; FO 78/3805, Chermside to Mudir of Taka (Iffat Bey) 29.1.85.

<sup>4</sup>Chermside to Iffat 29.1.85.

<sup>5</sup>FO 78/7678, Baring to Speedy 24.9.84.

<sup>6</sup>On the Mīrghanīs' influence on the Eritrean tribes, vide: Trimingham, op.cit., pp. 244-245.

for the Muslim tribesmen.<sup>1</sup> At the request of Sayyid 'Uthmān it was heavily reinforced in order to prevent Alulā, then building his fort near Shabbāb, ~~from interfering~~<sup>ing</sup> with the new "Government" affairs.<sup>2</sup>

Though reported an immediate success, as Chermside was happy to write to Alulā,<sup>3</sup> the plan proved to be a failure. With the exception of the Banū 'Amir almost all the other tribes who were expected to join the cause failed to do so. "Reaction in favour of the Mahdi" admitted Chermside, "has swept almost to the gates of Massawa".<sup>4</sup> This situation, though partly caused by the raids conducted by Alulā,<sup>5</sup> was mainly the result of an over<sup>ly</sup>, soft policy towards those tribes which were severely threatened by Mahdist envoys.<sup>6</sup> The sudden death of Shaykh 'Alī Bakhīt (18 November 1884), the defeat of the Kassala garrison aided by some friendly tribes at Julsīt on 2 January 1885<sup>7</sup> and the fall of Khartum (26 January 1885) were final blows to the idea.<sup>8</sup> In January 1885 Chermside was still "unwilling to bring down this Christian power on the Moslem population"<sup>9</sup> but the situation in

<sup>1</sup>FO 78/3799, Chermside to Nubar 27.12.84.

<sup>2</sup>FO 407/63, Chermside to Morghani 13.11.84. Morghani to Chermside, Sanhit, N.D.

<sup>3</sup>FO 407/63, Chermside to Alula 16.11.84.

<sup>4</sup>FO 78/3805, Chermside to Baring 28.6.85. For Alulā's punitive mission against the Assāwurṭa in January-February 1885, see: FO 403/83, Chermside to Baring 18.1.85, FO 78/3801, Chermside to Watson 21.2.85. For Mahdist influence over the Ḥabbāb and others, see Littman, op.cit., vol. II (Tales, Customs, Leyden 1910), pp. 194, 195.

<sup>5</sup>FO 78/3799, Chermside to Nubar, 6.1.85.

<sup>6</sup>As predicted by Wylde in early 1884. The Times, 18.2.84.

<sup>7</sup>2.1.85, see "Sa'd Report", FO 78/3801, Chermside to Watson 21.2.84, Baker to Baring, 1.3.85, SOAS M.518, Reel 8. "Report on the Fall of Kassala" by Ibrāhīm Eff. Khayrallah.

<sup>8</sup>FO 78/3805, Chermside to Baring, 28.6.85; FO 78/3809, Chermside to Egerton, 16.9.85.

<sup>9</sup>FO 78/3805, Chermside to Iffat Bey, 29.1.85.

Kassala continued to deteriorate.<sup>1</sup> Thus, finally, on 8 February 1885 Chermside wrote to Yohannes urging him to send Alulā to Kassala. This time he promised to hand over the fort of Sanhīt<sup>2</sup> whose garrison was now actually besieged by the neighbouring pro-Mahdist tribes. This was the beginning of a long series of letters sent directly to Alulā asking him to decide on a relief expedition.<sup>3</sup> Ironically enough, three days earlier the Italians had landed in Massawa.

\*

\*        \*

At the end of 1884 and the beginning of 1885 Rās Alulā was also busy in constructing Asmarā , his new capital in the Marab Mellāsh. This was the culmination of Alulā's efforts to try to establish his government there on an economic basis, mainly of trade with the coast. The wider aspects of this will be described below. Here it must only be emphasised that in his continuing dilemma of whether to march against Kassala or to establish his government over the territories between Hamāsen and the coast, Alulā's economic interest lay definitely with the second option.

With the establishment of Asmarā as a new centre of a province which was directly involved in Anglo-Egyptian, Italian, Mahdist, French and Ethiopian interests, the existence of Rās Alulā

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 78/3800, Baring to Granville 3.2.85, 3.2.85, Baker to Baring, 4.2.85; FO 78/3802, Baker to Baring 15.3.85.

<sup>2</sup>FO 78/3805, Chermside to Yohannis, 8.2.85; FO 78/3805, Chermside to Baring 28.6.85.

<sup>3</sup>FO 78/3804, Baring to Granville 31.5.85.

there as an increasingly independent political figure was to become significant.



H. 1885: "THE YEAR IN WHICH THE DERVISHES WERE CUT DOWN"<sup>1</sup>

February-May: The Italian landing and the emergence of

Alulā's dilemma

For Alulā and Yohannēs, the Italian landing at Massawa was a most surprising development.<sup>2</sup> The Italian Naretti, then staying with the emperor and his Rās at Maqalle, testified that Yohannēs' first reaction was: "But why did England not warn me?"<sup>3</sup> Alulā was immediately sent to camp at Asmarā facing the coast and lost no time in sending troops to the outskirts of Massawa. Seven Egyptian soldiers were killed by the Ethiopian raiders<sup>4</sup> whose mission was undoubtedly to collect more information about the newcomers.

In fact, it seems as if Alulā was not *unduly* alarmed by the arrival of the Italians. Though surprising, it was not contradictory to the Hewett Treaty, and it could make no *practically* difference to him if the port, as a free one, was to be run by other Europeans. He was also busy in constructing his new capital and was mainly concerned with the fort of Sanhīt, still held by the Egyptians, and with the Mahdist danger in Bogos and in the coastal lowlands.

On 18 March 1885 the official Italian envoy to Yohannēs, Ferrari, was well received by Alulā in Asmarā. Together with

---

<sup>1</sup>Littmann, op.cit., II, p.196.

<sup>2</sup>LV.XVII, Ferrari to MAE 23.3.85.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 2/2-13, Naretti to Lucardi 17.2.85.

<sup>4</sup>FO 78/3801, Chermside to Watson, 21.2.85.

Nerazzini, who joined him four days later, he explained to the Rās the circumstances leading to the Italian landing and assured him of its friendly nature towards Ethiopia. Alulā then raised the subject of the Hewett Treaty "and especially regarding the country of Bogos" and was assured by the envoys that "what was concluded between H.M. the King of Abyssinia and the representatives of the British Government will not be changed by our government".<sup>1</sup>

Alulā seemed to be convinced and according to the Italians he sent a calming letter to the worried emperor.<sup>2</sup> Having other priorities, Alulā was undoubtedly relieved to understand from the Italian envoys that their government would function in Massawa as the long desired European neighbour.

In the meantime the negative implications of the past British "Muslim and diplomatic" policy became more obvious as pro-Mahdist, or rather anti-governmental, tendencies<sup>3</sup> among the tribes in the still Egyptian-held territories were strengthened. The Ad-Tamāryam tribe was most turbulent especially after its Shaykh 'Umār was replaced by Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir,<sup>4</sup> the more energetic ex-qāḍī of Sawākin and a faithful follower of 'Uthmān Diqna. Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir organised a substantial force which threatened

<sup>1</sup>LV. XVII, Ferrari to MAE 23.3.85.

<sup>2</sup>LV. XVII, Ferrari to MAE 25.5.85.

<sup>3</sup>It would be a mistake to attribute pro-Mahdist tendencies solely to religious motives and especially so in Eritrea, where even several Christian or semi-pagan tribes occasionally sided with the Mahdi\* cause. It should rather be attributed to centrifugal and anti-government tendencies.

<sup>4</sup>Wingate, op.cit., pp. 247, 254. FO 78/3805, Chermiside to Baring 28.6.85.

the Egyptians in Karan and actually cut the road from Asmarā to Massawa. He initiated friendly terms with Kantibā Ḥamīd, hitherto considered as Alulā's man among the Ḥabbābs. Though 'Abd al-Qādir did not succeed in persuading Ḥamīd to join openly the Mahdist camp, he strengthened the latter's tendency not to join his traditional rivals, the Banū 'Amirs, or his Ethiopian master, Rās Alulā.

The new British approach envisaging a future Ethiopian expedition to Kassala necessitated a total shift from the "Muslim policy" towards encouraging co-operation between the tribes and the Ethiopians. The promise to hand over Sanhīt, it was thought, might persuade Alulā to march, but, without the aid of the Banū 'Amirs and other tribes, he might be unsuccessful. Thus, simultaneously with the letters to Alulā in early February, Chermside instructed the Mudīr in Kassala, 'Iffat Bey, and sayyid 'Uthmān al-Mīrghanī in Daqqa to organise the loyal tribes and prepare them for future common action with Alulā.<sup>1</sup> Chermside also advised the Mudīr to apply to Alulā and Yohannes authorising him to offer them money, arms and the buildings in Kassala (thus retrospectively recognising the Ethiopian version of Article II of <sup>the</sup> "Hewett Treaty").

From his headquarters in Daqqa, Shaykh 'Uthmān al-Mīrghanī succeeded in convincing several shaykhs to join the new line. He distributed money, used his religious and political influence and described the power that would be created from the combination of British arms and Ethiopian troops.<sup>2</sup> On 18 April 1885 he arrived

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 78/3805, Chermside to Mudir, 8.2.85; FO 78/3805, Chermside to Baring 28.6.85.

<sup>2</sup>FO 78/3806, Mirghanī to Chermside, n.d. FO 78/3805, Chermside to Izzet Bey, 7.5.85; FO 78/3804, Baring to Granville, 31.8.85; FO 78/3805, Chermside to Baring 28.6.85.

at Massawa with five of these tribal leaders.<sup>1</sup> "The Shaykhs", wrote al-Mirghanī to Chermside in Sawākin, "are quite satisfied with the arrangements made by the government to put them under Abyssinian protection to which they thankfully agreed."<sup>2</sup>

Such a declaration, however, made by representatives of tribes, which hitherto had trembled with fear on hearing the name of Alulā or one of his lieutenants, sounded very strange and so indeed it was. But it was soon learnt that only Shaykh Mūsā al-Fil of the Banū 'Amir and Shaykh 'Alī Nūrīn of the Sabdrat were real figures.<sup>3</sup> As the Sabdrat were known to be siding with the Mahdiyya<sup>4</sup> it was only the strong Banū 'Amirs whose cooperation Colonel Chermside could really promise to Rās Alulā.

Alulā must have been pleased with the new developments. On 10 April 1885 the Egyptian garrison of Sanhīt (Karan) and of Amidīb left for Massawa and Belattā Gabru, Alulā's lieutenant, occupied the long desired invincible fort of Sanhīt.<sup>5</sup> Alulā demonstrated his goodwill by warmly receiving in Asmarā the Egyptian Major Sa'd Rif'at and the relieved garrison of al-Qallābāt:

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 78/3806, Morghani to Chermside 18.4.85.

<sup>2</sup>FO 78/3806, Morghani to Chermside, n.d. (translation from Arabic made by Marcopoli Bey is dated Sawakin 2.7.85).

<sup>3</sup>FO 78/3805, Chermside to Baring 28.6.85.

<sup>4</sup>A. Pollera, I Baria e i Cunama, Rome 1913, p.46.

<sup>5</sup>For details about the evacuation of Karan (Sanhīt) and Amidīb, vide: Shuqayr, op.cit., p.330; FO 78/3803, Baker to Baring, 10.4.85, 14.4.85. Since the garrison of Karan (and also of Amidīb) was held in his fort for a period of about seven months after the restoration of Bogos, as above described, in contrast to Alulā's will, and was finally evacuated by itself (since it was not really besieged), it is definitely wrong to attribute to Alulā the relief of that garrison, of of al-Qallābāt and al-Jira which was conducted by other Ethiopians. For such a mistake, see, among others: Wylde, Modern Abyssinia, p.35.

"He ordered that we were to have everything necessary for our comfort ... his music played to welcome our arrival. He gave us hospitality for three days and showed true friendship..."<sup>1</sup>

In order to transfer the Egyptian refugees to Massawa, Alulā had to clash with the pro-Mahdist Ḥabbābs led by 'Abd al-Qādir.

In a battle near Aylet in late April 'Abd al-Qādir was defeated but managed to escape. The Mahdist leader then wrote to 'Uthmān Diqna in Sawākin and was subsequently strongly reinforced by new warriors.<sup>2</sup>

Pleased with the result of the Bogos issue, which was no doubt a lesson in "wait and bargain" policy, and worried about the growth of pro-Mahdist or rather anti-Ethiopian tribal power in his vicinity, Alulā had to face new developments in the Massawa coast.

Contrary to Alulā's hopes the Italians had no intention of staying merely in Massawa, and their commanders in the town were not closely supervised by Rome.

"And here I must ask" the correspondent of L'Opinione in Massawa expressed the feelings among the local Italian Commanders"<sup>3</sup> "... are we, because we have a robber for our neighbour, to be suffocated in that furnace Massowah?"

On the same 10th April 1885, when the fort of Sanhīt was finally restored to Alulā, the Italian commander, Colonel Saletta, sent his troops to occupy Arafali. Alulā, returning from Sanhīt where he had inspected the taking over of the fort, advanced to Aylet and proceeded to Arāfali and Wi'ā. From Wi'ā Alulā, on 20

---

<sup>1</sup>Sa'd Report.

<sup>2</sup>Sa'd Report, FO 89/3805, Chermiside to Baring 28.6.85; Depretis to Ricotti, 1.8.85; C.Giglio (ed.), L'Italia in Africa, Serie Storica, Etiopia e Mar Rosso, Vol. V, No. 17, p.12.

<sup>3</sup>Extract from L'Opinione, 15.2.85, in FO 407/65, Lumley to Granville, 22.5.85.

April sent Shālaqā Ar'āyā to raid Ḥarkīkū and returned to Asmarā.<sup>1</sup>

Back in his capital Alulā must have had his first doubts about the new neighbours. As he undoubtedly understood the agreement with the Anglo-Egyptians, Massawa and its port had to be governed by the British but only as protectors. The Italians however, were quick to reveal their intention to march inland and inherit at least the territories hitherto disputed between him and the Egyptians.

On 21 April 1885, while Alulā was still heading back to Asmarā, Saletta occupied Ḥarkīkū with Italian troops. On 26 April 1885 the Italian wrote to the Rās announcing his intention to take over Sahāṭī from the Egyptians.<sup>2</sup> Alarmed, Alulā did not even reply to Saletta but hurriedly wrote to Yohannes, then in Ambā Chara.<sup>3</sup>

Sahāṭī was clearly claimed by Alulā as in Ethiopian territory. The place was occupied during the time of the Hewett Mission by Egyptian Irregulars with the permission of Alulā. After the return of Hewett, Alulā agreed that the Egyptians would remain there to secure the newly opened commercial route.<sup>4</sup> Worried about Alulā's possible reaction, the British Col. Chermside, then working to appease Alulā, refused to let the Italians *replace* the Egyptian irregulars there.<sup>5</sup> The bitter dispute over that remote

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 2/2-13, Maissa to MAE, 25.4.85.

<sup>2</sup>Ministero della Guerra, Storia Militare della Colonia Eritrea, Rome 1935, pp. 92, 94. Maissa to Mancini 14.5.85, Giglio III, No.493, p.181.

<sup>3</sup>FO 78/3808, Marcopoli to Chermside 26.8.85.

<sup>4</sup>Marcopoli, op.cit.

<sup>5</sup>FO 403/90, Chermside to Portal 22.8.87.

little spring was but temporarily delayed.

From <sup>the</sup> Anglo-Egyptian point of view the Italian advance from Massawa was poorly timed. With Karan already in his hands. but quite seriously threatened by Mahdist forces and the very suspicious and dangerous developments in the more important coastal areas, Rās Alulā was really losing interest in going to relieve the besieged Egyptians in far-off Kassala.

The British, the Mudīr from Kassala and the influential Mirghanī, promised Alulā arms, money, property and the co-operation of the tribes<sup>1</sup> but he now had no reason to be in a hurry. On the contrary, it was the Anglo-Egyptians who were now losing precious time as the situation in Kassala became extremely serious.<sup>2</sup> "Every step I could think of with Abyssinia, Musulman tribes and religious shaykhs was taken months since", complained Chermiside on 31 May 1885, "I have made liberal offers to King John and Ras Alula and so did the Commandant of Sinhit and the Mudir."<sup>3</sup>

Alulā however was not in a position to reject such offers of money and arms, but he could not leave the sphere of his more urgent interest. He also did not fail to understand that his bargaining position was strengthened by the <sup>of</sup> passage/time.

#### May-June: Alulā hopes for Italian aid against the Mahdists

In spite of those developments, Alulā's attitude to the Italian presence at Massawa was still far from being hostile. The Mahdist

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 78/3805, Chermiside to Yohannes; FO 78/3813, Baring to Granville 31.5.85.

<sup>2</sup>On 3.5.85 the famous suburb of Kassala and the centre of the Mirghanīs, al-Khātimiyya, fell into the hands of the besiegers, "Sa'd Report", Shuqayr, op.cit., p.339.

<sup>3</sup>FO 78/3813, Baring to Granville 17.6.85.

threat in the Asmara-Massawa-Karan triangle seemed to be much more acute and the Italians did their best to persuade him that they were themselves fighting with that very enemy. On 9 May 1885 Saletta sent a company of irregulars to occupy Ambā but they were defeated the next day by the Mahdist forces of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir, Shaykh 'Umār and Bālabārās Kefle 'eyāsus.<sup>1</sup> Kefle, the Habbāb-based old rival of Alulā, was said to have been nominated as the Mahdist future governor of Bogos.<sup>2</sup> From Aylet on 11 May 1885 Alulā wrote to Saletta that he was going to fight that pro-Mahdist group.<sup>3</sup> Heading some 5,000 troops, on 12 May 1885 near Ambā Alulā encircled the 1,000 followers of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir and annihilated a third of them.<sup>4</sup> Happy with his victory, Alulā then wrote to Saletta:

"Those who call themselves Dervishes were destroyed and annihilated by me, I am very pleased *with* that and hope that you will share my pleasure."

Simultaneously, Alulā asked the Italian officer to facilitate the passage of a new consignment of arms which he expected to be brought to Massawa by his Greek agents.<sup>5</sup>

Saletta agreed to Alulā's demand about the arms (the customs were in any case still in Egyptian hands) but repeated his request to be permitted to occupy Sahāṭī. To this Alulā replied with a diplomatic but quite clear denial:

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI, 2/2-13, Maissa to MAE, 14.5.85.

<sup>2</sup>M.Savelli, La Spedizione, Rome 1886, p.162.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI, 2/2-13, Alulā to Saletta, 11.5.85.

<sup>4</sup>Savelli, op.cit.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 2/2-13, Alulā to Saletta, 13.5.85.



"I have sent Scialaha Arhaia to Sahati to receive rifles," Alulā wrote on 14th May 1885, "and the Italian soldiers who accompanied them can return from Sahati."<sup>1</sup>

During the rest of May and the first three weeks of June the Italians remained passive and Alulā seemed to be less suspicious about their intentions. Ferrari and Nerazzini who returned from Yohannes were cordially received by Alulā on 11 June 1885 in Asmarā. They reported that the Rās was happy about his good relations with Saletta.<sup>2</sup> He also permitted an Italian detachment to proceed to Aylet in order to escort the envoys back to Massawa.<sup>3</sup> Two Italian journalists, Belcredi of La Tribuna and Colaci, were permitted to come to Asmarā where they were well received by the Rās on 17 June 1885. Alulā refused their request to proceed to Karan but they were allowed to stay in Asmarā as long as they liked.<sup>4</sup>

June-July: Growth of Alulā's concern over coastal affairs while Kassala in desperate situation

On 11 June 1885 Alulā replied to Chermside's letter:

"I received your letter concerning Kassala, ... I am ready to do what you require. The cause of my delay is my waiting for rains to fall."<sup>5</sup>

This explanation, repeated several times by Alulā,<sup>6</sup> was well understood in Sawākīn, Cairo and London as it was known that it was

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 2/2-13, Saletta to Alulā, 5.5.85; Alulā to Saletta, 14.5.85.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 36/3-23, Ferrari's report, 14.9.85.

<sup>3</sup>Maissa to Mancini, 15.6.85; Giglio, III, No. 504, p.191.

<sup>4</sup>G.Belcredi in La Tribuna Illustrata, 26.6.90. Savelli, p.163. They were later expelled following the Italian occupation of Sahāṭi.

<sup>5</sup>FO 78/3806, Alulā to Gov. of Massawah 11.6.85.

<sup>6</sup>FO 78/3805, Chermside to Baring, 28.6.85; FO 78/3806, Baker to Egerton, 20.7.85. Similar letter by the Muslim shaykhs in Alulā's camp, FO 78/3807, Egerton to Salisbury, 15.8.85.

impossible to lead thousands of troops such a long distance without the "khawrs" being full with rainwater, and especially in the western Eritrean plains in which Ethiopian highland warriors always suffered from the heat.

But the situation in Kassala continued to deteriorate and Chermside did his best to try and persuade Alulā to move immediately to the besieged town. Alulā's demands to release from the customs of Massawa an additional 1,015 rifles which he had purchased from his Greek merchants were instantly met by the Egyptian sub-governor 'Izzat Bey.<sup>1</sup> Though Chermside undoubtedly remembered the emperor's demand not to sell arms to Alulā, but only directly to himself, he instructed 'Izzat:

"do everything according to Alulā's request ... ask him /Alulā/ whether he wants any ammunition for rifles and supply. In case of your making sure of his advance to Kassala you may supply him also with rifles and ammunition if he asks for the same."<sup>2</sup>

Beside the problem of the rains and the will to obtain more arms, Alulā's delay, or rather his loss of interest in the proposed expedition, was due to the constant deterioration of the situation in the coastal plain and the areas east and north of Asmarā. Many of the Ad-Tamāryam and the Ḥabbāb warriors were fully cooperating with 'Uthmān Diqna's envoys, headed by Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir, and in early June they were reported as intending to mobilise 12,000 men.<sup>3</sup> They not only survived their defeats by Alulā in April

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 78/3806, Ras Alula to 'Izzet Bey 7.6.85, 11.6.85.

<sup>2</sup>FO 78/3806, Chermside to 'Izzet Bey, 12.6.85.

<sup>3</sup>Ricotti to Depretis, 8.8.85; Giglio, op.cit., No. 20.

and May but also dared to renew their attacks on Ethiopian caravans to Massawa.<sup>1</sup> Their ability to achieve a real success was entirely dependent on the hitherto wavering Ḥabbābs and on supplies which could be brought only through the Ḥabbābs' area. Alulā, who had every reason to be angry with his nominee among these Tribesmen, the Kantibā Ḥamīd, had demanded from the Egyptian authorities in Massawa not to trade with him.<sup>2</sup> The wavering Kantibā, afraid of Alulā, of the Banū 'Amirās<sup>3</sup> and of the Mahdists, contacted the Italians in Massawa and in early June was allowed to purchase food there.<sup>4</sup> Extremely annoyed, Alulā wrote to Saletta:

"The Muslims are encouraged and they all say they are Dervishes. The people of Habab provide the rebels with supplies. Why do you permit them to purchase it there? ... Hereafter do nothing of the kind and have the greatest hatred for them."<sup>5</sup>

The Italian step, though it might have been justified as a measure taken in order to prevent Ḥamīd from joining the Mahdists was a great factor in Alulā's growing suspicion. This suspicion was well nourished by the Italian occupation of Saḥati on 26 June 1885.<sup>6</sup>

In the meantime Cherm-side was still doing his best to persuade Alulā to march westward. Following his instructions, Shaykh

<sup>1</sup>Alula to Saletta, Asmara, n.d.; Saletta to Alula, 11.7.85; Giglio, op.cit., No. 20, pp. 14, 15, 16.

<sup>2</sup>FO 78/3811, Egerton to Salisbury 10.11.85.

<sup>3</sup>FO 78/3811. Egerton to Salisbury, 10.11.85.

<sup>4</sup>Ricotti to Depretis 8.8.85, Giglio V, No. 20, pp. 13, 14.  
n.d.; Saletta

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 4/1-2, Alula to Saletta/to Alula 11.7.85.

<sup>6</sup>See below, p. 156

Mūsā al-Fīl, Shaykh 'Alī Nūrīn and some other shaykhs arrived in June at Alulā's camp in Asmarā.<sup>1</sup> They were warmly received by Alulā, the man whom they had hitherto considered their most bitter enemy.<sup>2</sup> Responding to these steps, Alulā wrote to Col. Chermside, on 6 July 1885, 8 July 1885 and in mid-July, and also to the Italian, Col. Saletta, on 10 July 1885, promising them he was about to move to Kassala, from where he had just received a new plea for assistance.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the Mudīr wrote to Chermside to the effect that finally it was raining in the Kassala area,<sup>4</sup> and the British in Sawakin were convinced that "Ras Alula's future advance in the plains to Kassala is difficult but now perhaps practicable and... it is not too late to stimulate Abyssinian attention by immediate subsidy."<sup>5</sup> But in fact it was too late, as on 30 July 1885 Kassala finally fell into Mahdist hands. The expectation of Alulā's arrival was the only thing that had given hope to the starved garrison during the last six months. By 9 June 1885 the Mudīr had already written four letters to Alulā and received no answer.<sup>6</sup> Finally, after a fierce battle which took place on 13th June,<sup>7</sup> the Mudīr was ready

---

<sup>1</sup>Ricotti to Depretis, 8.8.85; Giglio, V, No. 20, p.14. G. Conti Rossini, "Documenti per lo Studio della lingua tigre", Giornale della Società Asiatica Italiana, Firenze 1903, XVI, p.26.

<sup>2</sup>FO 78/3808, Marcopoli to Chermside 26.8.85.

<sup>3</sup>FO 78/3806, Baker to Egerton, 20.7.85.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>FO 78/3806, Baker to Egerton, 20.7.85; FO 78/3813, Egerton to Salisbury, 29.7.85.

<sup>6</sup>Shuqayr, op.cit., p.398; FO 78/3806, Iffat Bey to Chermside, 9.6.85.

<sup>7</sup>"Sa'd Report", Shuqayr, op.cit., p.398; FO 78/3806, Baker to Egerton, 20.7.85.

to surrender when on 23 June 1885 a messenger arrived from Rās Alulā saying: "Take courage, I am coming to help you soon."<sup>1</sup> The starved and exhausted garrison went on fighting and Rās Alulā was again petitioned.<sup>2</sup> According to the unknown author of Alulā's Ge'ez biography who saw the whole affair as a pure Christian-Muslim conflict, the people of Kassala wrote to Alulā:

"If you get us out of this trouble and affliction and great pain, will we not give you much gold and silver without measure?' He /Alulā/ said to them: 'I do not want your much gold and silver, but I desire your faith. If you worship the word /Christ/ and bow down to him, I will get you out of this amazing trouble."<sup>3</sup>

This could hardly have encouraged the Egyptian garrison. When the Mudīr surrendered the town was plundered but, in contrast to all expectations, there was no bloodshed. Furthermore, fierce quarrels began among the various elements of the victorious besiegers which lasted till 'Uthmān Diqna's arrival at the town in late August. Though "the usual severities were practiced on the officers to extract booty"<sup>4</sup> the garrison and inhabitants were *allowed* to leave in peace<sup>5</sup> and thus was the problem of Kassala actually solved. However, more than three weeks had passed before the first news about the new development reached Sawākin.

---

<sup>1</sup>Shuqayr, op.cit., p.398; "Sa'd Report", SOAS M.518, Ibrāhīm Khayralla Report.

<sup>2</sup>FO 78/3808, Marcopoli to Chermiside, 12.8.85.

<sup>3</sup>MS. Mannawe.

<sup>4</sup>Holt, p.169.

<sup>5</sup>Details: Shuqayr, op.cit., p.399; "Sa'd Report", SOAS M.518, Reel 8, Khayralla's Report.

Was it really the problem of the rains which prevented Rās Alulā from marching on the besiegers of Kassala? To answer that question one must quote the following passage written by A.B.Wylde, who met Alulā and had many talks with him eleven years later:

"The Ras has repeatedly told me that he informed the Egyptians that the majority of his army is always disbanded in the month of June to enable the men to go to their villages to plant their crops, and it is only on Holy Cross day, in September, that they come back to headquarters, when all planting has been finished."<sup>1</sup>

Wylde was kept ignorant by British officials about their correspondence with Alulā,<sup>2</sup> but the existence of such contradictory evidence cannot but lead to the conclusion that the whole matter was merely an excuse or a polite and "diplomatic" refusal by Alulā to undertake the Kassala expedition. Sitting in high Asmarā observing the developments on the coastal plains, in the newly restored Bogos country and the Shoho district, facing in this arena both new Mahdist and Italian threats, no wonder the Rās was reluctant to shed the blood of his soldiers far away in Kassala in order to save a few hundred of those who not long ago had been his enemies. On the other hand it seems that Alulā perfectly understood he could not afford to reject the offer by which he could gain arms, and money and re-establish the Ethiopian hegemony in eastern Eritrea. He was in a dilemma but he was not in a hurry.

---

<sup>1</sup>A.B.Wylde, Modern Abyssinia, London 1900, p.36.

<sup>2</sup>See above, p.49.

Growing pressure on Alulā

From early June onwards until after the battle of Kūfīt, Yohannes' name was not mentioned at all in the correspondence concerning the Kassala issue.<sup>1</sup> It was solely Rās Alulā who was approached by the British and Egyptians, and actually he was conducting an independent policy. Yohannes was said to have authorised Alulā to decide on such an expedition,<sup>2</sup> but it was rumoured that he promised Alulā a kingdom in Kassala if he managed to occupy her.<sup>3</sup>

"Ras Alula might possibly carve a principality for himself, under the suzerainty of King John" wrote Mason Bey, "if he could once get hold of Kassala and its neighbourhood."<sup>4</sup>

But Colonel Chermside and his superiors well understood that Alulā's eyes were, in the new circumstances, fixed on the coast. In late July Chermside suggested that he should promise Alulā to hand over Zulā to Ethiopia as the price for an immediate move to Kassala.<sup>5</sup> The idea, which could have been most attractive to Alulā and a great blow to Italian ambitions, was dropped.

In order to entice Alulā to move to the besieged town and abandon his more important "eastern front", on 24 July 1885 Chermside instructed 'Izzat Bey "to do everything in your power

---

<sup>1</sup>During the period of March-November 1885, Yohannes stayed in Bagemder See Zewde, p.433.

<sup>2</sup>FO 78/3806, Egerton to Salisbury 26.7.85.

<sup>3</sup>Fasolo, op.cit., p.206.

<sup>4</sup>78/3806, Egerton to Salisbury, 26.7.85.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

to induce him to start as soon as possible." An Egyptian envoy, Marcopoli Bey, was to be sent to Asmarā "to use every persuasion to get him to move quickly". This envoy was ordered to hand Alulā a sum of 50,000 Thalers "payable on condition of his really advancing" and to promise the Rās expenses up to 300,000 Thalers for the expedition. Alulā was to be promised arms, ammunition and supplies.<sup>1</sup>

Marcopoli Bey reached Asmarā on 11 August 1885 and was very kindly received by Alulā "who showed a great desire to be agreeable to the government by assisting Kassala".<sup>2</sup> Alulā was given the sum of 50,000 Thalers and was told that some 800-1,000 Remington rifles were expected to reach his camp from Massawa.<sup>3</sup>

The next day, on 12 August 1885, Alulā summoned the envoy and in sharp contrast to the cordiality he had demonstrated the day before he accused the Anglo-Egyptian authorities at Massawa:

"Why do you not turn out the Italians from Massawa? What business have they to remain there? ... Why have you allowed them to camp at Saati, this is a neutral ground they must abandon the place! ..." and the Ras-Marcopoli described - "growing rather excited rose on his angareb exclaiming: No, I will not march to the relief of Kassala before I see what the authorities at Massawa shall do on these matters."<sup>4</sup>

While the Rās was still unmoved about the expedition, Shaykh 'Uthmān al-Mirghanī left on 8 <sup>August</sup> /85 for the Banū 'Āmir centre in Daqqa in order to prepare the neighbouring tribes for the

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 78/3807, Chermside to Izzet Bey 24.7.85.

<sup>2</sup>FO 78/3808, Marcopoli to Chermside, 12.8.85.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>FO 78/3809, "Marcopoli Diary" in Egerton to Salisbury, 2.10.85.



expected expedition of Alulā.<sup>1</sup> He sought to threaten the pro-Mahdist tribes "with the Abyssinian sword" and, on the other hand, to move Alulā by creating a convenient anti-Mahdist atmosphere in the Kassala area. He was most successful in the first part of his mission; his envoys were spread among the al-Jādīn, Sabdrāt, Baraka and Baria tribesmen, telling them about the enormous forces of Ethiopians aided by Banū 'Amir warriors and supplied with British arms.<sup>2</sup> He instructed them to prepare cattle to feed the expedition and the garrison.<sup>3</sup> This caused panic among the neighbouring tribesmen<sup>4</sup> and the victorious besiegers in Kassala. The head of the Hadendowa warriors, who constituted the main element among the Mahdist forces in and around the fallen town, Shaykh Mūsā Ṣadīq, hastened to consult the Mudīr about the situation. Consequently, Mūsā declared he would deny any plunder from 'Uthmān Dīqna, and he returned the wounded prisoner Shaykh Bakrī al-Mirghanī to the town sending a letter of conciliation to Rās Alulā in Asmarā.<sup>5</sup> The Hadendowa's revolt against the Mahdist official leaders really created a new situation, much more critical than Shaykh 'Uthmān al-Mirghanī, or his British employers, had expected.

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 78/3807, Cameron to Egerton, 11.8.85.

<sup>2</sup>As might be concluded from Muṣṭafā al-Hadal's letter see below, p. 113, he probably told them also that British troops would come too.

<sup>3</sup>A. Pollera, I Baria e I Cunama, Rome 1913, p.46.

<sup>4</sup>For evidence from local informants of fear among the tribes around Kassala concerning Alulā's future advance, see: FO 78/3807, Egerton to Salisbury, 23.8.85.

<sup>5</sup>FO 78/3813, Egerton to Salisbury, 15.8.85, 18.8.85.

Mahdist threat to invade Ethiopian territories

On 12 August 1885 'Uthmān Diqna was informed about Alulā's preparations and the new developments in Kassala. By that time he had already planned and made preparations to shift his struggle towards the Massawa coast and fight the non-Mahdist Muslim tribes and the Ethiopians.<sup>1</sup> He already had a nucleus of an army in that arena commanded by Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir. He had reason to believe that he might be much more successful there, where, he probably thought, the Egyptian evacuation had created a sort of vacuum, than in the Sawākīn area (where the British blockade on the Red Sea trade was causing starvation to his followers.<sup>2</sup>) He therefore sent the troops he had under his lieutenant Khaḍr to reinforce Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir near Karan<sup>3</sup> and he himself, with only a few followers, hastened to Kassala, leaving Tamai on 13 August 1885. On 21 August 1885 he took possession of Kassala, granted security to the inhabitants and garrison, urging them to join the Mahdiyya, recruited the frightened tribes of al-Ḥalāniqa and Shukriyya and caused the disobedient Hadendawas to fly northward to Filīk.<sup>4</sup> A few days later 'Uthmān heard that Mirghanī's envoys were confiscating cattle only a few miles from the town.<sup>5</sup> Having undoubtedly read Marcopoli Bey's letter to the Mudīr in which it was promised that Alulā would capture Kassala by 18 September 1885,<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 78/3806, Egerton to Salisbury 4.8.85.

<sup>2</sup>For his failure in Sawākīn, see Holt, pp. 186-187.

<sup>3</sup>FO 78/3806, Egerton to Salisbury 4.8.85, Chermiside to Watson, 30.7.85; FO 78/3808, Egerton to Salisbury 23.8.85, Depretis to Ricotti, 1.8.85; Giglio, *op.cit.*, No. 17, p12.

<sup>4</sup>"Sa'd Report", FO 78/3807, Egerton to Salisbury, 20.8.85. Holt, p.169. Shuqayr, *op.cit.* p.400 (according to Shuqayr it was on 26.8.85). (According to Wingate, *op.cit.*, p.249, Diqna came to Kassala "about the middle of August").

<sup>5</sup>Shuqayr, *op.cit.*, p.400.

<sup>6</sup>FO 78/3809, "Marcopoli Diary", Egerton to Salisbury, 2.10.85.

'Uthmān Diqna declared war on the Ethiopian Rās. In late August he collected his warriors and left Kassala for the Baria country, from where his commander in chief Muṣṭafā Hadal<sup>1</sup> wrote to Ras Alulā on 29 August 1885:

"From the slave of God and faithful Mustafa Hadal to the King of Infidels, to Ras Alula his devil, and to Mussa Mohammed /al-Fil/ ... This is to tell you that I know you said you would bring English troops to fight against the servants of the Prophet. But all your sayings are a delusion. They have not come, and now you say you will fight me with an Abyssinian army; but in this you cannot succeed. The emir of emirs, Osman Abu Bakr Digna, has now decided to conquer every province; he came to Kassala, where all the inhabitants joined him, and now we have come down to the hills in your neighbourhood. Therefore come out and meet us. Do not delay, but if you cannot come and are afraid, then let me know by the bearer of this and I will come to you with my 'ansar', and will fall upon you and utterly exterminate and destroy you and all those who do not believe in God and His Prophet, and all your souls shall go down straightway to hell."<sup>2</sup>

Did 'Uthmān Diqna really intend to invade Ethiopia? Somehow this question, which is no doubt vital to an understanding of the period, has been neglected. A study of 'Uthmān Diqna's correspondence with the Khalīfa leads however to the clear conclusion that he did mean to invade.<sup>3</sup>

"We heard the news of your advance to Ethiopia" wrote the Khalīfa to Diqna, "... but my beloved, things should be arranged according to their importance and we have heard that the problems in Kassala are still unsettled ... and so is the situation in Sawākin ... and the desired need is that you will pay attention to what is the more important."<sup>4</sup>

"Do not attach great importance to the Ethiopian affair... leave the Ethiopians and do not enter their country now..."

<sup>1</sup>The other Mahdist Amīrs were: Al-Ḥasan Wad Hāshi, Bilāl al-'Awad and 'Abd al-Karim Kāfūt.

<sup>2</sup>Wingate, op.cit., p.250. Wingate's belief that this letter was sent from Kūfīt is definitely false as the Mahdists had not reached Kūfīt by that date.

<sup>3</sup>See also Littmann, op.cit., vol. II, Leyden 1910, pp. 194, 195.

<sup>4</sup>Mahdia Y80, 1. MSS Letter Book of 'Uthmān Diqna. SOAS 101491. (Collection of the Mahdi's and the Khalifa's letters to Diqna 1881-1888.), p. 48, Khalīfa to 'Uthmān Diqna, Muḥarram 1303H./October 1885.

return to Sawakin, that is what we want."<sup>1</sup>

'Uthmān Diqna could not of course act according to the Khalīfa's advice as these letters reached him two months after his defeat. It is clear however that he wrote to the Khalīfa about an intention to divert his military efforts from the Sawākīn area to a new arena inside Ethiopia, probably Bogos and the Massawa coast.

Arriving at the Baria's tribal area 'Uthmān Diqna hoped to mobilise the various neighbouring tribes to join his campaign. Shaykh Arāy of the Baria disappeared with his cattle and warriors and so did the tribesmen of Al-Jadīn Sabdrāt Ḥamrān and others.<sup>2</sup> Thus, due to the fear of Alulā's army, 'Uthmān Diqna was unable to mobilise the very strong Hadendowas, hitherto the backbone of Mahdist power in the Kassala area, nor the warriors of the Baria, Sabdrāt, Ḥamran or Al-Jadīn. His army was therefore made up of the Ja'aliyyin tribesmen, al-Ḥalāniqa, a very few Hadendowa<sup>3</sup> and some of the "Bāshībazūks" of the Kassala garrison. It was estimated variously as numbering between 6,000 to 12,000 warriors.<sup>4</sup> The fact that Diqna stayed more than three weeks in this tribal area and could not proceed to the battlefield with a stronger army took Alulā mid-way to victory, though the Rās himself, seated in far away Asmarā, could not know this. 'Uthmān Diqna, however, must have either underestimated Alulā's power or, more probably, overestimated the power of his followers in Bogos

---

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., Khalīfa to 'Uthmān Diqna, 21 Muḥarram 1303 H./31.10.85.

<sup>2</sup> Pollera, I Baria, pp. 46-47.

<sup>3</sup> FO 78/3811, Egerton to Salisbury, 17.11.85.

<sup>4</sup> FO 78/3810; Egerton to Salisbury 12.10.85; FO 78/3811, Egerton to Salisbury 10.11.85; Shuqayr, p.401 and H.C.Jackson, Osman Diqna, London, 1926, p.112, estimated the army at 10,000, Wingate, op.cit., p.250, at 8,000-10,000, "Khayrallah Report", op.cit. at 9,000, Shaykh Musa al-Fīl in FO 78/3813, Egerton to Salisbury, 25.10.85, at 6,000-9,000.

under Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir. 'Uthmān left for Kūfīt on 12 September 1885, ordered his troops to entrench there, and wrote to Rās Alulā in Asmarā "threatening him again with invasion".<sup>1</sup>

New British interest in Alulā's march. Alulā's decision to go.

By mid-August a combined force of Banū 'Amir warriors and Ethiopians was concentrated near Karan. It consisted of about 2,000 fighters commanded by the governor of Karan and Alulā's lieutenant, Belāttā Gabru. It seems that, at least at that time, this force had the urgent task of facing the newly reinforced Mahdist camp of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir, who, camped in <sup>the</sup> Ad-Tamāryam area, not far from Karan, and was a real threat to the Bogos country.<sup>2</sup>

It was probably only in late August that Alulā began to consider this force as a potential advance guard. On 24 August 1885, 'Uthmān al-Mirghanī's envoy, Khalīfa as-Ṣūfī, who had come to Alulā's camp from Sawākīn two days earlier, left Asmarā to join it in order to act as mediator with the other tribes.<sup>3</sup> On 26 August 1885 Alulā ordered Belāttā Gabru (in the presence of Marcopoli Bey and possibly in order to please him) to organise the force in preparation for a march to the Banū 'Amir centre of Daqqa,<sup>4</sup> but in fact he was told not to move before Alulā himself marched with the main army on 13 September 1885. Gabru's force was occasionally sending reconnaissances towards Kassala, one of which was annihilated around mid-September,<sup>5</sup> but his main

---

<sup>1</sup>"Sa'd Report".

<sup>2</sup>FO 78/3806, Chermiside to Watson, 30.7.85; FO 78/3807, Egerton to Salisbury, 24.8.85; FO 78/3807, Egerton to Salisbury 20.8.85.

<sup>3</sup>FO 78/3809, "Marcopoli Diary" in Egerton to Salisbury, 2.10.85.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>"Sa'd Report".

function remained that of facing the immediate threat and, later, of collecting cattle and transportation animals for Alulā's possible march.<sup>1</sup>

On 20 August 1885<sup>2</sup> British authorities in Sawakin received information that the town of Kassala had already fallen and that the lives of the Egyptians had been spared.<sup>2</sup> If the purpose of Rās Alulā's projected expedition was only the relief of the Kassala garrison, this had now become pointless from the British point of view. Had Kassala fallen a little earlier the Ethiopians, no doubt, would not have been asked to organise such a mission. But now, when 'Uthmān Diqna was known to be moving his headquarters there and to be making efforts to revive the Mahdist power, possibly through a renewed march towards the Massawa area, the question of mobilising Alulā against him became much more important to the British policy-makers. Subsequently neither the Rās nor his sovereign were informed and they probably did not know<sup>3</sup> about the fall of the town which they were so energetically urged to save. Col. Chermiside was confident of his own ability to cancel any future march of Alulā to the west. "Even now," he said on 21 August 1885, "they are absolutely dependent on the tribes for camel transport, this transport is not even with Ras Alula, but assembled on his flank. A word from the government and Mirghanī and all this melts into the air ... The Abyssinian advance on Kassala

---

<sup>1</sup>Ricotti to Depretis, 23.9.85; Giglio, op.cit., No. 55, p.64; FO 78/3810, Egerton to Salisbury, 12.10.85.

<sup>2</sup>FO 78/3807, Egerton to Salisbury, 20.8.85.

<sup>3</sup>According to Marcopoli Bey, Rās Alulā said on 29.8.85 that he did not believe Kassala had fallen: "We are only six or seven days distance from Kassala, how could we not have heard of such a capitulation?", FO 78/3809, "Marcopoli Diary", Egerton to Salisbury, 2.10.85.

unsupported by us would partake more of the nature of a raid."<sup>1</sup>  
 But Cherm-side and his superiors had now no other power to face Mah-  
 dism in the eastern Sudan. "I have no wish to stop him," wrote Cherm-  
 side on the same day to his envoy in Alulā's camp, Marcopoli Bey,  
 "Alula's advance may prove of great assistance."<sup>2</sup>

On 25 August 1885 Marcopoli Bey received in Asmarā a new con-  
 signment of arms and, meeting Alulā, he handed him 640 Remington  
 rifles. Alulā reacted warmly, thanked the British and Egyptian govern-  
 ments, and re-emphasized that "what he was doing for Kassala is for  
 the greater glory of God and not for presents and rewards". "Alula,"  
 reported Marcopoli Bey, "said he had many preparations and could not  
 leave before his new year's day, 8 <sup>September</sup> /85." Alulā also informed the  
 Egyptian official that he was expecting the arrival of troops who  
 would have to guard the frontier,<sup>3</sup> and face suspected Italian acti-  
 vities.<sup>4</sup> Rās Alulā made this step not without reason, as his next  
 day's interview with Marcopoli Bey revealed. Alulā, Marcopoli re-  
 ported, "read the letter" which he had received from Saletta

"... asking permission to build huts on Saati heights...<sup>5</sup>  
 and the answer he had given to Saletta. He refuses  
 the authorisation ... then Alula said to me: What  
 are the Italians doing at Massawa? It is not their  
 country. Let them go home and the sooner the better...  
 Why did not the Italians stop Debbeb<sup>6</sup> ... There is no

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 78/3808, Egerton to Salisbury, 1.9.85.

<sup>2</sup>FO 78/3808, Cherm-side to Marcopoli Bey, 21.8.85; FO 78/3813,  
 Egerton to Salisbury, 19.8.85.

<sup>3</sup>FO 78/3808, Marcopoli Bey to Cherm-side, 26.8.85.

<sup>4</sup>FO 78/3811, Egerton to Salisbury, 10.11.85.

<sup>5</sup>Sahāḥi was occupied by the Italian irregulars on 24.6.85 (see above,  
 p.105. ). For this most important issue see below, p.156 *passim*.

<sup>6</sup>For Dabbas' raid on villages considered as Ethiopian on 26.8.85  
 (Ricotti to Depretis, 23.9.85; Giglio, *op.cit.*, No. 55, p.63) and  
 Alulā's suspicion that he was encouraged by the Italians, see below,  
 p. 155, 156.

necessity to have a garrison at all at Saati.  
 Tell England and Egypt that Abyssinia is not pleased  
 at the presence of the Italians at Massawa and other  
 places on the coast."<sup>1</sup>

Upon receiving this report Col. Chermside really had good reason  
 to believe that, in spite of the arms and the money, the Ethiopian Rās  
 would not move from his position facing the coast to the Sudanese  
 town. He therefore wrote on 4 September to his delegate at Alulā's  
 camp and ordered him to promise Alulā that he would do his best to  
 catch Dabbab.<sup>2</sup>

But Rās Alulā undoubtedly did not calculate his moves according  
 to such assurances or according to the state of the Egyptians in  
 Kassala. The Ethiopian Rās had been seriously threatened with invasion  
 by Mahdist moves and words and he planned his military expedition in  
 accordance with Ethiopian interests. The temptation to take Kassala  
 was now accompanied by the need to respond to Diqna's challenge. He  
 had a short period of hesitation as to the risk of abandoning his  
 "eastern front" during which luckily enough the British (and Egyptians)  
 motivated by their own interests supplied him with some of the means  
 he needed for the future struggle on both his fronts.

---

<sup>1</sup> FO 78/3803, Marcopoli Bey to Chermside, 26.8.85.

<sup>2</sup> FO 78/3808, Chermside to Marcopoli 4.2.85. For Anglo-Egyptian  
 trials to catch Dabbab, some of them admittedly false, see Depretis  
 to Ricotti 20.9.85, Giglio V, No. 50, p.47; Zerboni to Depretis  
 22.9.85, Giglio V, No. 53, p.55; FO 78/3810, Marcopoli to  
 Chermside 20.9.85, Egerton to Salisbury 21.10.85.



Alulā's imperial army

Rās Alulā could not afford a long period of hesitation. A further delay could cause the wavering tribes to side with 'Uthmān Diqna<sup>1</sup> and probably enable him to cooperate with 'Abd al-Qādir's force. In such circumstances even the Banū 'Amir, encircled by Mahdist forces, would be in a very bad situation, while the Ḥabbāt would inevitably join the enemy's camp. From Alulā's point of view it was not impossible that he might soon find himself facing both the Italians and the "dervishes". His option of marching westward would soon lapse as "in about mid-October the water in khors dries up and there is a malaria in the plains which punishes the Abyssinian hill men very heavily."<sup>2</sup>

Convinced, however, that he should march away from the "eastern front", Alulā did not want to confront the Italians at that stage and, on the eve of his departure from Asmarā, on 13 September 1885, he warmly replied to Col. Saletta about the newly-formed Italian intention to send an official mission to the emperor for the signing of a treaty of friendship.<sup>3</sup> A strong anti-Italian feeling in his camp no doubt stirred by Alulā himself was however convincingly described by both an Egyptian<sup>4</sup> and an Ethiopian visitor to Asmarā.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>According to Luca dei Sabelli Diqna intended to make the al-Jadin Sabdrat and the Baria the advanced guard of the Mahdiyya. Sabelli, vol. III, p.339.

<sup>2</sup>FO 78/3809, Chermside to Egerton, 16.9.85.

<sup>3</sup>Zerboni to Depretis, 8.9.85; Depretis to Ricotti, 20.9.85; Giglio, op.cit., Nos. 39, 50, pp. 32, 33, 46.

<sup>4</sup>FO 78/3809, "Marcopoli Diary", Egerton to Salisbury, 2.10.85.

<sup>5</sup>Zerboni to Depretis, 23.9.85, Report of the interpreter Hailu on his visit to Alulā's camp, 11-13.9.85; Giglio, op.cit., No. 54, pp. 58&62.

The Ethiopian visitor, Haylu, an interpreter employed by the Italians, stayed in Alulā's camp during the last two days before the army moved to Kūfīt. He was deeply impressed by the strength of Rās Alulā's army and estimated it as numbering 10,000 troops "all armed with Remingtons".<sup>1</sup> "Thousands of Remington rifles and abundance of ammunition," described a British official, "have been conveyed during the last months from Massawa up to Alulā's headquarters ... the Abyssinian expeditionary force is now all armed with breech loaders."<sup>2</sup> There are several different estimates as to the number of troops that Alulā had at his disposal but they are not necessarily contradictory. During the march Rās Alulā's imperial army was constantly reinforced (as well as supplied) by further troops who had been collected by local chiefs and sent to wait along the route. This was no doubt carefully executed as the Rās and his emperor proclaimed heavy penalties for absentees.<sup>3</sup> "He [Alulā]", wrote the author of the Mannawe Ms,<sup>4</sup> "sent round a heraq, who said: 'Every man who goes here and there at the time of battle, I will kill with a cruel death, and he will have no hope of life in the Kingdom of Heaven.'" Thus, Marcopoli Bey, who stayed in Asmarā up to the beginning of September, estimated the army as numbering 8,000 troops.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> ibid.

<sup>2</sup> FO 78/3808, Cameron to Egerton, 9.9.85.

<sup>3</sup> FO 78/3808, Cameron to Egerton, 8.9.85.

<sup>4</sup> Ms. Mannawe.

<sup>5</sup> FO 78/3813, Egerton to Salisbury, 2.10.85. Wingate, op.cit., p. 250, estimated the whole army, including the advance guard, as 10,000 men.

Italian sources, based probably on Haylu's evidence of 13 September 1885, put the number at 10,000<sup>1</sup>, and sources based on Mahdist evidence taken in the battlefield quoted a number as high as 20,000.<sup>2</sup> This was actually the first time that Alulā was leading such an imperial army on the northern frontier and the first time he led such an army not under the direct guidance and command of the emperor. Yet, apparently not a single prominent Tigrean leader joined that army. Belatta Gabru, Alulā's lieutenant, was the only known leader whose name was mentioned by the relevant sources as serving under the command of Alulā in the forthcoming battle.

Praising Alulā's ability as an organiser and his diplomatic success in combining the Ethiopians and the Muslim tribes, a British official concluded: "Everything there promises success, and in all probability we are on the eve of the most remarkable and extraordinary episode in the history of the rebellion in the Sudan."<sup>3</sup> But for Rās Alulā the coming battle was not a chapter in Sudanese history. On 14 September 1885 he received 'Uthmān Digna's threatening letter,<sup>4</sup> which was probably the final argument in favour of beating the "Nagārit" and ordering the army to march.

"I will not trouble you to move from your place," he wrote on the same day to 'Uthmān Digna in Kūfīt, "make ready all your preparations, and I will come to you."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Sabelli, op.cit., III, p.339. Pollera, I Baria, p.46, 12,000 (including advance guard).

<sup>2</sup>Shuqayr, op.cit., p.401.

<sup>3</sup>FO 78/3808, Cameron to Egerton, 9.9.85.

<sup>4</sup>"Sa'd Report".

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

The contemporary biographer of Alulā quoted the Rās's letter to Diqna as a Christian reply to the Mahdist challenge:

"How have you dared to come against me, O evil and troublesome man? Do you not fear the Lord God who made heaven and earth and all that is in them?"<sup>1</sup>

But according to other sources, Alulā's reply was not that dry:

"I heard that you came to Kūfīt and your aim is to penetrate Ethiopia. Wait for me three days and God willing I shall send you soon to hell."<sup>2</sup>

#### The battle of Kūfīt.

"May we tell you the accounts of Kufit?  
The Dervishes came like clouds.  
Can it be that they had not heard of Abbā Nagga?"<sup>3</sup>

Not a single European took part in or witnessed the fierce battle which took place in Kūfīt on 23 September 1885 between Rās Alulā and 'Uthmān Diqna.<sup>4</sup> Mahdist sources neglected the subject for obvious reasons<sup>5</sup> and the scattered pieces of evidence can provide only an incomplete picture.

Arriving at Karan from Asmarā, Rās Alulā sent ten horsemen to the country of the Baria who brought him the information that about 3,000 "dervishes" were entrenched in the khōr of Kūfīt.<sup>6</sup> This underestimate proved to be very dangerous. Subsequently, the Rās divided

<sup>1</sup>Ms. Mannawe.

<sup>2</sup>Shuqayr, op.cit., p.401; see also Jackson, p.113.

<sup>3</sup>A song from a Ms. written in the monastery of Dabra Bizan. Found by Ato Māmō Wudnah, Asmarā.

<sup>4</sup>The idea that a British officer would accompany the mission was dropped after it was ascertained that Kassala had fallen.

<sup>5</sup>The only Mahdist description of the battle of Kūfīt is a false description based on a report from 'Uthmān Diqna. On 9 Ṣafar 1303 H./18.11.85, the Khalīfa wrote to 'Uthmān Diqna: "We want to inform you, my beloved, that your entertaining letter of 20 Muḥarram [30.10.85] reached us and in which you told us how you had gone to the Sabdirāt and al-Jadīn and others because they became enemies of God and how they positively responded to you and joined your army, and that you advanced to Kūfīt in order to spread the real faith and thus reached the country of the Ethiopians, the enemies of God, and that you invited them to join the

his army into three columns: Belatta Gabru and his horsemen in the front, Alulā with the infantry in the rear, while another column of riders was in the wing accompanied by the camelmen with the commissariat. By 19 September 1885 the Ethiopian army had left Karan and arrived at Kūfīt three days later.

On 22 September 1885 the Mahdist troops commanded by both 'Uthmān Diqna and Muṣṭafā Hadal<sup>1</sup> were well-entrenched along the steep banks of the Khawr, the bed of which was broken and full of bush.<sup>2</sup> They were reported to be confident that the Ethiopians would not attack them as they thought that their enemies were still celebrating their feast,<sup>3</sup> but it was soon to be proved that it was impossible to surprise them in such a good position. Ignoring the nature of the ground and Alulā's order to out-flank the enemy<sup>4</sup> and probably under-estimating the Mahdist power, Belāttā Gabru decided to try and beat the entrenched enemy by direct assault. He had been promised by Marcopoli Bey a sum of \$1,000 "If he could assist Kassala before the arrival of Alula ... and he promised to do his best".<sup>5</sup>

---

God to which they refused. You therefore fought them the war of the victorious God, destroyed, destructed and defeated them, till God annihilated no less than six thousands of them ... so we became happy ..." MS Letter Book of 'Uthmān Diqna, op.cit., p.50.

<sup>6</sup>FO 78/3810, Egerton to Salisbury, 12.10.85.

-----  
<sup>1</sup>Some sources claimed that 'Uthmān Diqna was the commander and others Muṣṭafā Hadal. Diqna was reported as not taking active part in the fighting as he was wounded in 1883. It seems, therefore, that Hadal was in charge of combat actions and Diqna was present on the battlefield, or somewhere in the neighbourhood, in order to encourage his followers and influence the wavering tribes.

<sup>2</sup>Pollera, I Baria, p.47; Wylde, Modern Abyssinia, p.36.

<sup>3</sup>Report of Muḥammad al-Fīl in Zerboni to Robilant; Giglio, op.cit., No. 71, p.77.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>FO 78/3809, "Marcopoli Diary" in Egerton to Salisbury, 2.10.85.

"The forces of Blata Gabru", reported Sa'd Rif'at, "were in front of the force of Ras Alula and they hastened their advance, hoping to encounter the dervishes in order to take the glory from Ras Alula. His troops met those of 'Uthmān Digna and fighting began between them. The dervishes won the victory while Blata Gabru and his troops were defeated. The only persons to escape from that fearful engagement were those who brought the news."<sup>1</sup>

Gabru's attack was a disastrous mistake. The bush and the broken ground created a trap for his Ethiopian and Banū 'Āmir horsemen,<sup>2</sup> the latter probably wearing their clumsy armour.<sup>3</sup> Even in better conditions he had only a small chance as the Mahdists were entrenched on higher ground, 3,000 of them armed with rifles. In such circumstances there was no chance of a direct assault and Belāttā Gabru paid with his life for the mistake. The remnants of his force "rallied when they found themselves some way in the rear of the Dervish position and only camp followers to oppose them, and reformed".<sup>4</sup>

To the discredit of Rās Alulā it must be said that his first move was to follow his lieutenant's mistake:

"When the news reached Ras Alula who was in the rear of the army, "Major Sa'd continued with his colourful description, "it filled the hearts of his troops with fear and they didn't wish to advance and fight. When they reached the battlefield 'Uthmān Digna met them with firm hearts and sharp swords and high spirit. Fighting took place. The troops of Ras Alula were defeated and dispersed. His horse was killed and

---

<sup>1</sup>"Sa'd Report". The report of Major Sa'd Rif'at written in 1889 and based on evidence given by some participants is the most detailed account of the battle.

<sup>2</sup>Wingate's version that Gabru attacked with infantry (op.cit., p.251) seems unlikely.

<sup>3</sup>They were reported as carrying such an armour in their fight against Ladj Fanṭa in August 1884. "Abyssinia out of its treaty obligations", The Daily News, 27.12.84.

<sup>4</sup>Wylde, Modern, p.36.

threw him. His nephew<sup>1</sup> brought him his steed and they fled in disguise and stopped on a high mountain at four hours' distance from the battle-field. He beat his drum to muster the fugitives as it was rumoured in his country that Ras Alula was slain."<sup>2</sup>

Slightly wounded<sup>3</sup> and having a beaten army the Rās had to reorganise his troops and do what should previously have been done, namely, cause the Mahdists to come out of their trenches. He subsequently formed two detachments which he instructed to out-flank the enemy position simultaneously from both sides. This movement absolutely surprised the dervishes, whose position had been arranged only to face the enemy coming from their front.<sup>4</sup> The Mahdists, either forced by Alulā's manoeuvre or being encouraged by their recent success (or, probably, running out of ammunition) decided to launch a counter-attack<sup>5</sup> and marched towards Alulā's centre. In the meantime the Rās had arranged his main force "in phalanx formation":<sup>6</sup>

"He set his forces in order by means of Mūsā al-Fīl Nāgīr of the Banū 'Amīr." Sa'd Rif'at reported, probably over-emphasizing the role of the Egyptian trained Banū 'Amīr horsemen. "The cavalry/surrounded the infantry and he ordered that anyone who avoided the battle should be killed by the cavalry. By this means he kept them steady and they advanced until they reached the headquarters of 'Uthmān Dīqna on the morning of 23.9.85.

---

<sup>1</sup>According to Muḥammad al-Fīl the one who gave Alulā the new horse and thus saved him was Shaykh Mūsā of the Nabtab sub-tribe of the Banū 'Amīr. See Zebroni to Robilant, 9.10.85; Giglio, op.cit., p.76.

<sup>2</sup>"Sa'd Report".

<sup>3</sup>Pollera, I Baria, p.47.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid; Shuqayr, op.cit., p.401.

<sup>6</sup>Wylde, Modern, p.36.

The two armies met and the battle lasting four hours took place on that day. The cavalry were only employed in keeping watch on the infantry. When the Abyssinian troops realised that they had fallen between the two enemies, their hearts were strengthened. They stood firmly in the battlefield and slaughtered the dervishes."<sup>1</sup>

The wounded Rās Alulā was reported heading his men shouting:

"We must conquer or die".<sup>2</sup> Soon the clash was no longer a battle but a massacre, and the religious biographer of the Rās described it as follows:

"There was a great killing from sunrise until sunset, and Ras Alula conquered and killed off the wicked and apostate men who brought division on the name of Christ and who make arguments over the Messianic law. There was not one of them left."<sup>3</sup>

In fact about 3,000 "dervishes" were reported killed in the confrontation,<sup>4</sup> and almost all the rest were massacred while trying to escape by the reorganised cavalry of the advance guard and the hitherto passive Baria warriors. The Barias had arrived near Kūfīt, headed by their shaykh Aray, on the evening of 22 September 1885 when the battle was in progress. They anticipated the result of the fight and later began to kill the fleeing Mahdists and their camp followers.<sup>5</sup> The al-Jadīn warriors, hitherto also passive, intercepted a Mahdist

---

<sup>1</sup>"Sa'd Report".

<sup>2</sup>Wingate, loc.cit.

<sup>3</sup>Ms. Mannawe.

<sup>4</sup>Wylde, Modern, p.37; Wingate, loc.cit.; FO 78/3813, Egerton to Salisbury, 7.10.85.

<sup>5</sup>Pollera, I Baria, p.47.



reinforcement column consisting of al-Halāniqa tribesmen which was approaching the battlefield from the Kassala area.<sup>1</sup> A total estimate of the Mahdist casualties was made by an Ethiopian officer, claiming 5,050 killed.<sup>2</sup> Only 150 of the Mahdists were said to survive the battle in which no prisoner was given quarter. Other sources claimed the number of killed to be as high as 10,000.<sup>3</sup> The Mahdist leadership in the eastern Sudan suffered heavily as almost all the shaykhs and commanders were identified among the dead.<sup>4</sup> 'Uthmān Diqna himself was considered dead for a relatively long period<sup>5</sup> but he actually managed to escape. His defeat however "had a cooling effect on the ardour of the local tribes" and 'Uthmān Diqna began to find difficulties in maintaining <sup>in/</sup> an adequate fighting force even in the Sawākīn area, where he subsequently returned.<sup>6</sup> Ethiopian casualties were not small either. No less than 1,500 warriors were reported killed and 300-500 were wounded. Besides Belāttā Gabru some forty officers did not return from the battle-field.<sup>7</sup> The fact that their names were not known or referred to by any of the sources is

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 78/3813, Egerton to Salisbury, 7.10.85; FO 78/3810, Egerton to Salisbury, 14.10.85.

<sup>2</sup>FO 78/3811, Cameron to Egerton, 25.10.85.

<sup>3</sup>Wylde, Modern, p.38. Wylde explained his estimate, commenting that: "nearly all the wounded that escaped died afterwards from want of food".

<sup>4</sup>For a list of their names see Zerboni to Robilant, 9.10.85; Giglio, op.cit., No. 71, p.77.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid; Depretis to Ricotti, 5.10.85; Giglio, op.cit., No. 62, p.69; FO 78/3813, Egerton to Salisbury, 7.10.85.

<sup>6</sup>A. Paul, A History of the Baja Tribes of the Sudan, Cambridge 1954, p.114.

<sup>7</sup>Wingate, loc.cit.; Seven according to Zerboni to Robilant, 7.10.85; Giglio, op.cit., Nos. 71, 77; FO 78/3811; Memorandum, Chermiside, 10.11.85.

indicative of the fact that prominent leaders from the Təgre did not join Alulā's army but probably preferred to send only their followers.

"From his troops," it was then recorded in Mannawe,<sup>1</sup> "many faithful died, those called Blatta Gäbru, Assällafi<sup>2</sup> Hagwas Wärräta ... For the rest no one knows their names, but their names are written in Heaven, in the book of life ... for they became martyrs for the faith..."

Alulā's "retreat" from Kūfīt and its effect on western Eritrea

The facts that Alulā's army suffered relatively heavy casualties in the battle, that the Rās himself was wounded and that his exhausted troops suffered from sickness<sup>3</sup> were mentioned by contemporary British officials as the cause of Alulā's not proceeding to Kassala after the Mahdists' defeat.<sup>4</sup> Others suggested that the rains prevented him from doing so,<sup>5</sup> or that he could not proceed because the retreating dervishes could still be easily reinforced by neighbouring tribes.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, it was suggested that "he believed that such a signal victory as he had gained must enable the garrison to retire without further help on his part".<sup>7</sup> The Egyptian Marcopoli Bey who witnessed Alulā's pre-Kūfīt period did not attribute the retreat to the result of the fighting:

---

<sup>1</sup>Mannawe MS.

<sup>2</sup>*An officer in charge of setting the troops in order during the battle.*

<sup>3</sup>FO 78/3811, Cameron to Egerton, 25.10.85. For the Ethiopian soldiers suffering from the heat in the plains see "Our Abyssinian Allies", The Daily News, 15.7.84.

<sup>4</sup>FO 78/3811, Egerton to Salisbury, 10.11.85.

<sup>5</sup>See Wingate, op.cit., p.252.

<sup>6</sup>Pollera, I Baria, p.47.

<sup>7</sup>Wingate, loc.cit. FO 78/3811, Egerton to Salisbury 10.11.85.

"Ras Alula", he stated, "was exceedingly nervous as to the possible hostile action of the Hababs, supported by or co-operating with the Italians ... solicitude as to Italian action was one of the principal reasons which decided Ras Alula not to advance after Kufit."<sup>1</sup>

The real reason must lie in the inevitable conclusion that Rās Alulā never intended to go to Kassala: he did not consider the operation as a relief expedition but as a defensive measure against the Mahdist threat. Had 'Uthmān Diqna not come to Kassala and advanced to Kūfīt threatening Ethiopia by words and deeds, Alulā would probably have merely sent an expedition similar to Belāttā Gabru's advance guard to demonstrate his goodwill towards the British. Had the Italians not come to Massawa Rās Alulā would surely have been delighted to establish Ethiopian hegemony over the Egyptian evacuated Western Eritrea and even annex the town of Kassala. But in the circumstances he could not afford to stay even in the Kūfīt-Karan area, a fact which proved to be very important in the long run.

Deciding to return to his "eastern front" Rās Alulā still tried to use the effect of his victory as a base for an anti-Mahdist tribal front in the western marches. On the morning of 24 September 1885 Alulā sent a letter to the Mudīr in Kassala informing him of Diqna's defeat and asking him what he wished the Ethiopians to do on his behalf. The next day he began his march to Karan.<sup>2</sup> Arriving at the capital of Bogos, the Ethiopian Rās issued a proclamation to the various tribes around Kassala instructing

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 78/3811, Memorandum by Chermside 17.11.85.

<sup>2</sup>FO 78/3813, Egerton to Salisbury 7.10.85, 25.10.85; FO 78/3811, Egerton to Salisbury, 10.11.85.

them to assist its garrison and provide it with supplies or else they would be destroyed by his forces.<sup>1</sup> He promised the tribesmen he would soon be back and ordered the Baria and the al-Jadīn to make the appropriate preparations, including the digging of new wells.<sup>2</sup> A new but rather small detachment consisting of the remnants of the advance guard with their Banū 'Āmir companions was told to be ready to move back to the tribal country.<sup>3</sup> Ordering the various shaykhs to come to Karan, Rās Alulā announced that he appointed the local Shaykh Mūsā al-Ḥīl of the Banū 'Āmir as "Shaykh 'Umūmī" (i.e. General Chief)<sup>4</sup> making him a sort of unofficial Ethiopian governor instead of an Egyptian "Nāzir". Shaykh Arāy of the Baria, who attacked the Mahdists only after their defeat had become obvious, and who had previously disobeyed Alulā's instructions to collect cattle for the expedition, hastened now to appease Alulā by bringing with him to Karan a consignment of 100 oxen as a present.<sup>5</sup> Alulā, however, did not forgive the wavering Barias and took his revenge a year later, when it coincided with his political and strategical calculations.<sup>6</sup> The loyal Shaykh

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid; FO 78/3811, Memorandum, Chermside, 10.11.85.

<sup>2</sup>FO 78/3813, Egerton to Salisbury, 7.10.85, 25.10.85; FO 78/3811, Egerton to Salisbury, 10.11.85.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Pollera, I Baria, p.47.

<sup>6</sup>See below, p.179.

'Alī Nūrīn, whose return to his tribe caused his warriors to join Alulā's side by intercepting pro-Mahdist reinforcements, came to Karan with the captured shaykh of al-Ḥalāniqa, Shaykh Muḥammad b. 'Awaḍ. The shaykh, a former Egyptian nominated Nāzir,<sup>1</sup> who had become one of the important Mahdist Amīrs in the eastern Sudan<sup>2</sup> was accompanied by his lieutenant Shaykh Nāfi' al-Ḥalāniqi and sixteen of his followers. Ordered by Rās Alulā, the Egyptian irregulars' commander 'Abd al-Qādir Bey hanged the pro-Mahdist tribesmen in the centre of Karan.<sup>3</sup> The bodies of Shaykh Muḥammad and Shaykh Nāfi' were later brought to Asmarā where on 17 March 1886 Harrison Smith, the visiting British envoy,<sup>4</sup> saw them hanging "as a warning to the Musulmans ... not to join the cause of the Mahdi".<sup>5</sup> But Alulā's idea of creating such a buffer zone on the "Western front" by forming an anti-Mahdist tribal front proved to be a failure similar to that of the previous year's "Muslim policy" of Col. Chermiside.<sup>6</sup> The various Muslim tribes of northern Eritrea and eastern Sudan proved to be too weak to maintain such an independent role and Alulā's failure to return to their area damaged the credibility of his promises and threats. The many shaykhs who still remained in his camp in Karan (and later in Asmarā) and whose personal status

---

<sup>1</sup>At the time of the battle al-Ḥalāniqa Nāzir was Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir, who remained loyal and accompanied Alulā's camp.

<sup>2</sup>For his activities, see: "Sa'd Report", Shuḡayr, op.cit., p.401; MS 'Uthmān Diqna Letter Book, p.49; SOAS M.518 Reel 8, Ibrāhīm Khayrallah Report on the Fall of Kassala; Jackson, op.cit., p.114.

<sup>3</sup>FO 78/3811, Egerton to Salisbury, 10.11.85, 22.11.85; SOAS M.518, Reel 8, Report of 'Abd al-Qādir Agha.

<sup>4</sup>See below, p. 171.

<sup>5</sup>FO 403/87, Harrison Smith's Diary in Baring to Rosebery 21.5.86.

<sup>6</sup>See above, pp. 91.

was dependent on Alulā, did their best to *persuade* him to return to their country, but were unsuccessful. The tribesmen themselves demonstrated their anti-Mahdist line through helping many Egyptian refugees from Kassala to cross their country and reach Alulā's capital of Asmarā, from where they were transferred by the Rās to Massawa.<sup>1</sup> Facing, however, the immediate threat from the Mahdists and lacking Alulā's support, the tribes in the Kassala area who had deserted 'Uthmān Diqna in the first months after the battle, were obliged to submit themselves to him by the end of the year.<sup>2</sup> Many of the other tribes, fearing Mahdist revenge and lacking Ethiopian support, hastened to ask for Italian protection.

#### October: Alulā's return to Asmarā

Rās Alulā stayed in Karan for more than a week before returning to his new headquarters in Asmarā. He told Marcopoli Bey that he was very anxious to receive a letter from the Mudīr of Kassala so that he could decide his future action.<sup>3</sup> A more likely explanation of his delay is that Alulā was busy trying to create the above mentioned tribal front. Indirectly, his promise to return to that arena proved to be critical to the fate of the Egyptian functionaries in Kassala. On 5th October 1885 'Uthmān Diqna returned to the town and immediately arrested the Mudīr who, he was told, had tried to regain control and had written to Rās Alulā informing him about the weakness of the Mahdist force at Kassala. Diqna's soldiers - it was suggested - found on Kūfīt's battlefield evidence of correspondence between 'Iffāt and Alulā<sup>4</sup> and the Mahdist leader had very good reasons

---

<sup>1</sup>SOAS M.518 Reel 8, contains much evidence to this effect. See Reports of Farāj Effendi, Ghabriyal Eff. Jārallah, 'Issā Ismā'il Agha and others.

<sup>2</sup>"Sa'd Report".

<sup>3</sup>FO 78/3811, Egerton to Salisbury, 10.11.85.

<sup>4</sup>"Sa'd Report". Farāj Effendi: "Report on the Fall of Tuka", SOAS

to be afraid of a possible Ethiopian advance. The fear that the Egyptian Mudīr might persuade Alulā to renew hostilities was described by the secretary of 'Iffāt Bey, Ghabriyyāl Effendi Jarallah who fled from Kassala on 23 September 1885 trying to reach Massawa through the Ḥamrān tribe and Ethiopian territory. On his way he heard that 'Uthmān Diqna's envoys were looking for him "as some of the rebels accused me of carrying letters to Rās Alulā to call him to destroy them".<sup>1</sup> In order to minimise this danger 'Uthmān Diqna, on 30 October 1885, ordered the execution of the Mudīr and six of the most important Egyptian functionaries.<sup>2</sup> Thus in retrospect it could be seen that for the Egyptians in Kassala Alulā's expedition was a mistake, and even a disaster. As a senior Egyptian officer said, referring to the possibility of renewal of the expedition, "If Ras Alula went now to Kassala, it will be an excuse to slaughter the remainder of soldiers and officers there ... and it is the same with the Arabs<sup>3</sup> and their chiefs who say they write to him about his coming to them with his army to relieve them."<sup>4</sup>

But the Rās probably did not even consider for a moment an advance and especially not in order "to save" a few Egyptians<sup>5</sup> after

M.518 op.cit.; Shuqayr, op.cit., p.401.

<sup>1</sup>Ghabriyyal Eff. Report, SOAS, M.518, op.cit.. The Egyptian secretary fled subsequently to Walqayt province where he joined the refugees of al-Jira garrison with whom he reached Massawa in February 1886. For details on Jira garrison, see Shuqayr, op.cit., pp. 328-329.

<sup>2</sup>"Sa'd Report".

<sup>3</sup>i.e. tribesmen in the terminology of that period.

<sup>4</sup>"Report on the Fall of Taka", SOAS M.518, op.cit.

<sup>5</sup>Most of the Sudanese and some of the Egyptian troops of the garrison joined the Mahdiyya and fought against Alulā in Kūfīt. Abd al-Qadir Bey, SOAS M.518, op.cit.

so many Ethiopians had been killed. Inevitably his thoughts were directed to the "eastern front" where in the meantime the Italians were taking advantage of the situation. Their activities were indeed becoming dangerous for Alulā. Col. Saletta strengthened his relations with the chief of the Ḥabbābs, Kantībā Ḥamīd and officially granted him protection.<sup>1</sup> The Rās, who "was exceedingly nervous as to this possibility", preferred therefore to stay in Karan which was the natural springboard to the Ḥabbāb's country. He had, however, another reason not to hasten to Asmarā. The army was really exhausted after the bloody fight and the long marches. Alulā himself suffered from pains in his chest and in his stomach and he probably did not want to demonstrate this weakness to the Italians.<sup>2</sup> He was already in a situation of "a cold war"<sup>4</sup> with them and needed a demonstration of power: On 6 October 1885<sup>5</sup> "Rās Alula made a triumphal entry into Asmara at the head of his army, and preceded by priests in full canonicals, while the victorious troops carrying the captured arms and banners<sup>6</sup> shouted out songs of victory. Alulā himself was directly preceded by a raised dais, on which lay the banner of Osman Digna".<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See below, pp. 160.

<sup>2</sup> Winqvist., op.cit., p.10.

<sup>3</sup> This was also the reason for his ill-treating an Italian medical mission (initiated by Marcopoli Bey). He preferred that his wounded soldiers should be treated by the Swedish missionary Winqvist.

<sup>4</sup> R.A.Caulk, "The origins and development of the Foreign Policy of Menelik II, 1865-1896", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, SOAS, London University, 1966, p.137.

<sup>5</sup> FO 78/3810, Egerton to Salisbury, 18.10.85.

<sup>6</sup> "The Abyssinians brought to Asmara somewhat over half the Remingtons supposed to be in the hands of the dervish force", FO 3811, Egerton to Salisbury, 10.11.85.

<sup>7</sup> Wingate, op.cit., p.252. (The date in Wingate's text is 22.10.85).



"And the men of the land of Hamasēn said: 'Praise to you, O Ras Alula, who protected us .... For you saved us from sudden death and took us out of bitter bondage, that is, bondage to the Dervishes, ...' The priests and monks praised and sang, melodious song, saying: 'Blessed is Ras Alula, who comes in the name of God'."<sup>1</sup>

Emperor Yohannes probably knew nothing about the battle of Kūfīt and Alulā's retreat before the middle of October. In late September he enthusiastically wrote to Victoria promising her he would soon join Alulā to fight the besiegers of Kassala,<sup>2</sup> and evidently he started preparations by sending the governor of Adwā (Dadjāzmāch Hagos) to the direction of Kassala.<sup>3</sup> It was only on 12 October 1885 when Yohannes, then in Dabra Tābor, received Alulā's letter written (probably in Karan) on 29 September 1885:<sup>4</sup>

"Behold, our foes and enemies, who heaped boasting and pride upon us... became before me like wax before the face of the fire and like smoke blown by the wind. All the Muslims, whom they call Dervishes, were destroyed."<sup>5</sup>

"When the written message," described the biographer of Alulā, "filled with joy and gladness, reached Yohannes, king of kings, he ... assembled all the chief officers ... The officers and troops, having heard this written message and seen the weapons of the enemy Dervishes, were amazed and astonished, and blessed God saying: 'Power to you... who have made Ras Alula great...'"

As will be seen by his reply, the emperor was undoubtedly satisfied with Alulā's success at Kūfīt and probably had to accept the Rās's

<sup>1</sup>Ms. Mannawe.

<sup>2</sup>F.O. 78/3810, Egerton to Salisbury 2.10.85.

<sup>3</sup>Zerboni to Robilant 7.10.85; Giglio, op.cit., No. 71, p.78.

<sup>4</sup>The dates according to Yohannes's letter of 14.10.85.

<sup>5</sup>MS. Mannawe.

explanations for his return to the Hamasen. Though he wanted him to take Kassala he either did not want to impose the matter on Alulā or was persuaded by his arguments. His reply to Alulā, a letter kept by one of the Rās's descendants went as follows:

"Letter of the elect of God Yohannēs ... Let this reach the honoured Rās Alulā, who is a Turk Bāshā, a faithful man after my heart. Peace to you! ... your pleasant and clear letter which was written on the 20th of Maskarm [1878 E.C.] reached me on the 3rd of Teqemt ... and when we opened it and read it ... then our mouth was filled with joy and our tongue rejoiced ... And all those who have been killed and have fought against those pagans let God pour his mercy over them and give them the merits of their toil ...."<sup>1</sup>

As for the British, they preferred now to remain passive: "The Abyssinians should no longer be pressed to advance to Kassala," wrote Egerton to Salisbury, "but left to act as they think best."<sup>2</sup>

It became clear now in Sawākīn, Cairo and London that a renewed trial to divert Alulā again from his "Italian front" would be both futile and destructive to their relations with the Ethiopian Rās, who had proved to be "A man of considerable judgement and ability and has behaved well."<sup>3</sup>

The British were also afraid that Alulā's anger over the Italian advance would lead to Ethiopian revenge on Egyptian refugees, those of the al-Jira garrison still held (because of the rains) in the Walqāyt province, and those who continued to escape from Kassala through Ethiopian territory.<sup>4</sup> But the Rās was more friendly to the

---

<sup>1</sup>Yohannēs to Ahlā, Teqemt 5th (1878 E.C.). Written at Samera (Dabra Tābor), was kept by the late Fit. Aṣbēhā Abrahā of Aksum, a grandson of Alulā, and was given to an Ethiopian student of Dr. R. Caulk of H.S.I.U.

<sup>2</sup>FO 78/3811, Egerton to Salisbury, 10.11.85. Also: FO 78/3811, Chermiside, Memorandum, 11.10.85.

<sup>3</sup>FO 78/3810, Egerton to Salisbury, 10.11.85.

<sup>4</sup>FO 78/3811, Chermiside, Memorandum, 11.10.85.

Egyptians than ever:

"When we came to Asmara," reported Farāj Eff. Bey, a Commander of irregulars who had fled from Kassala, " ... Ras Alula gave us permission to proceed to Massawa and treated us with great honour and respect. We reached Massawa in early November 1885."<sup>1</sup>

The relieved garrisons of Al-Qallābāt and al-Jīra and the refugees from Kassala were so far the only ones, in the entire Sudan, to be saved from falling into Mahdist hands and it was realised in London that "it is owing in no small degree to the ability of Ras Alula that the operation of the Abyssinian forces led to a successful result".<sup>2</sup> Rās Alulā, however, was fully aware of the fact that, while supporting Italian ambitions on the Eritrean coast, the British were doing their best to use him as an anti-Mahdist weapon. He was actually pleased with this as it helped him finally to conduct his own policy, but he absolutely lost his naive belief in the Europeans.

The Rās who for years wanted a signed treaty with England met A. Wylde again eleven years after Kūfīt and six months before his death.

"... The Ras turned all his followers out of the room and said, 'Now I want to have a talk with you. Why do you forget your old friends. What does England mean by destroying Hewett's treaty and allowing the Italians to take my country from me?' Pulling from underneath his pillow a copy of Hewett's treaty of June, 1884, he unfolded it before me and went on: 'What single article of that treaty have you kept? Look at the first article .... You gave Massowah away to the Italians. Arms and ammunition could not be imported by the king .... As to the second and third articles,' the Ras went on, 'did I not relieve the Egyptian garrison in the Bogos country?

---

<sup>1</sup>"Report on the Fall of Taka", SOAS M.518. Also "The Fall of Sennar", SOAS, M.518,.

<sup>2</sup>FO 1/31, Salisbury to Treasury, 30.12.85.

Did I not fight at Cassala when it was too late?  
 Have I not done everything I could? You English  
 used us to do what you wanted, and then you left  
 us. ... Article IV, about the Aboona, is the only  
 thing that you have carried *out*.<sup>1</sup>

\*

\* \*

European historiography has almost totally neglected the battle of Kūfīt. When the event has been referred to, it has generally been described as an Ethiopian military victory which came too late to achieve its purpose - the relief of the Kassala garrison.<sup>2</sup> Further research however seems to lead to the conclusion that both the circumstances and the implications of the episode were not that simple.

Putting the battle of Kūfīt and its preliminaries in the total picture of Ethiopian history it would be no exaggeration to call it a step in the struggle to guard Ethiopia's independence. While in the "Adwā treaty" Ethiopia traded one weak enemy for two strong ones, Alulā's military and diplomatic skill liquidated the threat of immediate Mahdist invasion and supplied some of the arms needed to face the Italian ambitions.

---

<sup>1</sup>A.B.Wylde, "An Unofficial Mission to Abyssinia", The Manchester Guardian, 14.5.97. (17 long articles, ibid., 10.5.97 to 1.7.97.)

<sup>2</sup>See among others: R. Hill, A Biographical Dictionary; Jackson, op.cit., p.112; Longrigg, p.112; Pollera, I Baria, p.46; G.H. Portal, My Mission to Abyssinia, London 1892, pp. 6-7; Paul, op.cit., p.114; Puglisi, p.14.

I. ASMARA

Up to the end of 1884 Alulā's military headquarters in the Marab Mellāsh was in Addi Taklay, a good springboard to the country of Bogos, his main strategical interest. In the second part of 1884, probably following the restoration of Bogos to Ethiopia in September, Yohannes was reported to have visited his Rās<sup>1</sup> in Addi Taklay and ordered him to abandon it:

"'This place,' he said - as quoted by the collector of the oral tradition of Hamāsen,<sup>2</sup> 'is a bad place; what cannot serve as a barrier against the enemy is not suitable as a royal residence. Choose therefore a better place and establish the camp there!' And thus he Yohannes returned to his country Tegre. After that ras Allā Alulā, saying: 'Let it be as the king has said,' chose Asmara to establish his camp there."

Another strategical reason, probably the more important one, was the Italian landing in Massawa in February 1885. One of the first Europeans to visit Alulā in Asmarā at his new headquarters (on 27 March 1885) was the French official Lemay. Lemay was returning from Maqalle where he had been the first one to bring the news of the Italian landing to the Emperor. Alulā, who had also been in Maqalle, was reported to have left it immediately and to have hurried to the town of Asmarā,<sup>3</sup> later described as the gate to Tegre from the coast.<sup>4</sup>

The establishment of Asmarā as Alulā's capital was not a mere strategical move. As suggested above,<sup>5</sup> the rise to power of Emperor

---

<sup>1</sup>Annales de la Congregation de la Mission 1885, p.250. Paillard's letter of 25.12.84. Kolmodin, No. 271.

<sup>2</sup>Kolmodin, No. 271.

<sup>3</sup>MAE(F). Mass. 4, Lemay's report of 25.8.85. Also A.S.MAI 2/2-13, Naretti to Lucardi, 17.2.85.

<sup>4</sup>G. Branchi, "Argumenti in favore dell'occupazione di Asmara", LV XIV, 29.4.89.

<sup>5</sup>See above, pp. 10, 43, 44.

Yohannēs created, by the late seventies, the chance for the "Wadi Qubi" to avoid the Tigrean *Local* hierarchy by becoming the king's man. His high position at court, and his lack of agrarian hereditary rights meant that the prestigious Turk Bāshā was actually an outsider for the Tigrean élite.

Thus, for Yohannēs, the removal of the unfaithful ruling élite of the Marab Mellāsh, necessary on strategic grounds, was also well coordinated with the need to instal Alulā over an area of his own. But in the Marab Mellāsh the new imperial governor Rās Alulā faced quite a similar stabilised and traditional agrarian system.<sup>1</sup> Here again, speaking in terms of agrarian rights and property, in spite of his imperial rank and function, he was a complete outsider.

According to Pollera,<sup>2</sup> Yohannēs authorised Alulā to confiscate one tenth of the lands in the Marab Mellāsh in order to give them to his Tigrean officers and himself. But this effort to create large Gult (territorial fief) was fiercely opposed by the local inhabitants and was unsuccessful.<sup>3</sup> In any case it seems that those fiefs which were actually established were too small to cover the expenses of maintaining such an army as Alulā had beyond the Marab, and some other implications of that will be discussed below.

As can be concluded from the few facts available, Alulā tried to attack the hereditary existing agrarian system in the Marab Mellāsh.

---

<sup>1</sup>While the Tigrean structure still awaits its description, the Eritrean agrarian structure was analysed in: S.F.Nadel, "Land Tenure on the Eritrean plateau", Africa, vol. XVI, 1946, pp. 1-21, 99-109.

<sup>2</sup>A. Pollera, Il Regime della proprietà terriera in Etiopia e nella Colonia Eritrea, Rome 1913, p.90.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

This was mainly based on the hereditary family ownership, the

Resti.

"The right of resti," Nadel concluded, "can never be forfeited by absence from the land or failure to work it ... only in certain special cases can women or their offspring claim a share in the paternal hereditary land." This hereditary right "invests him [The owner] almost for ever with the status of a member of the hereditary families, almost of a landed aristocracy, which looks down upon 'newcomers' who have come later and had to acquire land by purchase or lease. Indeed the term restenya, resti-owner, is hardly ever used without this secondary meaning."<sup>1</sup>

During his government in the Marab Mellāsh Alulā managed to make a few loopholes in the Resti system in order to enable newcomers to join the feudal upper-class. The first was the formulation of the "Forty years' Right" according to which a squatter who actually cultivated a deserted Resti land could claim legal ownership of it.<sup>2</sup> The second was the issuing of an edict which laid down that every owner of land, by whatever title, who paid tribute on the land in his possession would hold his land by the right of Resti. This famous edict, issued according to Nadel<sup>3</sup> in 1888, started with the words: "Man is free; land is tributary." It may however, be assumed that this was the actual policy of Alulā even before that last year of his government there.<sup>4</sup>

Another loophole was to give the right of inheritance to local women,<sup>5</sup> many of whom probably married Tigrean newcomers and other outsiders. Alulā was also reported to have exploited the fact that collective village ownership of land was widespread in the Hamāsen

---

<sup>1</sup>Nadel, op.cit., pp. 7-9.

<sup>2</sup>Nadel, pp. 17, 18.

<sup>3</sup>Nadel, p.11.

<sup>4</sup>See also Pollera, Il Regime della proprietà, p.90.

<sup>5</sup>Conti Rossini, Principi, p.314.

(Diesa).<sup>1</sup> He used to confiscate one-quarter of the land of such villages for the use and ownership of his Tigrean soldiers, forcing the others to compensate those deprived of their property.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of these few, limited successes, Alulā must have been aware that he could not really fight or even join the well-established agrarian élite of the Marab Mellāsh. Evidently he quickly realised that the future economic base for his government in those territories must lie not in agrarian wealth but in urban commerce. This could be obtained through the contribution of two external elements which were, like him, outsiders to the local agrarian structure: Muslim traders and Tigrean soldiers.

Immediately after his arrival in Hamāsen in 1879, Alulā renewed Ethiopian commerce with Massawa,<sup>3</sup> hitherto adversely affected by the Egyptian campaigns and the struggle with Rās Walda Mikā'el.<sup>4</sup> From that moment onwards, as described above, Alulā did his best to *make* that trade route <sup>secure</sup> in spite of the international problems involved. His main commercial interest became the highly profitable arms trade, for which the Rās was in constant commercial relations with various Greek traders in Massawa. As described by Harrison Smith,<sup>5</sup> Alulā was not ashamed to deal in small quantities of that

---

<sup>1</sup>Nadel, pp. 11, 12.

<sup>2</sup>A. Pollera, L'Abissinia di ieri, Asmara 1940, pp. 60, 61.

<sup>3</sup>FO 407/11, Gordon to Consul in Jedda, 12.9.79.

<sup>4</sup>Wylde, '83, I, p.216; Pankhurst, Economic, p.573.

<sup>5</sup>H. Smith, Through Abyssinia, London 1890, p.75.



merchandise and his well known transactions were described above.<sup>1</sup> The arms trade was but a part of the commercial life in the Tēgre-Massawa route which was encouraged by Alulā. It was undoubtedly for that purpose that the Rās was so anxious to have the port of Massawa protected and managed by the British: and this may be regarded as one of his main reasons for working so hard for the Hewett treaty: "Ras Alula", Hewett wrote in early January 1884,<sup>2</sup> "the Abyssinian generalissimo ... is well disposed towards Great Britain and anxious to arrive at a peaceful solution of the present lock-up of trade: a properly accredited British commissioner could alone do this."

On the Massawa-Tēgre caravan route the tiny little village of Asmarā, described as numbering 150 inhabitants in 1830,<sup>3</sup> was chosen by Alulā as his commercial headquarters. In 1880 (or even before) Alulā appointed there a Naggādrās to organise the caravans.<sup>4</sup> At the beginning of 1881 the population of Asmarā was estimated by Rohlf's as numbering a "few hundred".<sup>5</sup> In early 1884 Wylde's estimation was "three hundred houses":

---

<sup>1</sup>See pp. 63, 83, 104, 110.

<sup>2</sup>FO 406/1, Hewett to Admiralty, 7-10. Jan. 1884.

<sup>3</sup>Pankhurst, Economic, p.693. Wylde's suggestion ('83, I, p.216) that before the war with Egypt the population of Asmarā was "some 5,000 people" seems to be a figment of his imagination. We have no numbers for the period of 1830-1880. In an English map of Ethiopia, probably drawn for or after the 1868 campaign (see WO 33/55 Eritrea Report) Asmarā appears as a little village, smaller than Ṣa'zaqa or Aylet. In 1873 the town was described as "almost deserted", see Pankhurst, op.cit., p.573.

<sup>4</sup>Puglisi, p.44.

<sup>5</sup>Pankhurst, Economic, p.693.

"The town of Asmara," described Wylde,<sup>1</sup> "is not laid out in streets, nor is there any regularity about it; it has been built haphazard on two low hills or mounds above the ordinary plateau level, and now consists of perhaps three hundred houses at most, the only clearing in it being near the church, towards which most of the lanes that represent streets run out.

The market of Asmara, which takes place weekly", Wylde described this new commercial centre,<sup>2</sup> "is held on the green outside of the Town. The sellers come in with their wares, which consist chiefly of flour, made of wheat, dhurra, and other grains, ghee, chillies, honey, cotton, shammās ... rock salt, oxen, cows, sheep, goats, horses and mules. Asmara is about the only market where one sees poultry, guinea-fowl, and francolin for sale; these are bought up by the petty pedlars who trade with Massowah. They go down to the coast with a crate of about fifty on their heads, walk the whole way down, and bring back some few cotton clothes, coloured pocket handkerchiefs, and snuff; the latter they sell contraband."

The correspondent of The Daily News, who saw the town along with Wylde, estimated the number of its inhabitants as two thousand.<sup>3</sup>

The first Naggādrās of Asmarā in Alulā's time was a Muslim, a native of the Shoate Ansabā named Berhānu Hagos.<sup>4</sup> Rās Alulā was undoubtedly a devoted Christian<sup>5</sup> and his dedication in fighting the Māhdist threat was, as reflected in his Mannawe biography,<sup>6</sup> motivated also by a sincere religious motive. He was aware of the national problems created in his time by divisions in the Ethiopian orthodox church<sup>7</sup> and built many churches in Hamāsen.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Wylde, '83, I, p.222.

<sup>2</sup>Wylde, '83, pp. 225, 226.

<sup>3</sup>The Daily News, 16.5.84, "A Journey to the Court of King John".

<sup>4</sup>Puglisi, p.44. According to Puglisi, Alulā discovered in 1880 that his Naggādrās was a Muslim. A.B.Wylde, "An Unofficial Mission to Abyssinia", The Manchester Guardian, 13.5.97; also '83, I, p.216.

<sup>5</sup>See P. De Lauribar, Douze ans en Abyssinie, Paris 1898, p.605.

<sup>6</sup>See above, p. 107.

<sup>7</sup>See M. Da Membro, La Missione dei Minori Cappuccini in Eritrea, Rome 1953, p.17.

<sup>8</sup>For example, see T. Bent, The Sacred City of the Ethiopians, London 1896, p.60.

While Alulā shared Yohannes's concern about external Muslim threats, his attitude towards Ethiopian Muslim inhabitants was quite different.<sup>1</sup> In 1880 Yohannes issued an Awādj ordering all the Muslims in Ethiopia to be baptised or to leave the country. Alulā verbally followed his master's policy but did not pursue it practically. Being much concerned with commercial interests, he actually encouraged Muslims, among them many refugees from areas south of the Marab, to settle in Asmarā and be active there as traders with (the Muslim) Massawa. For the same reason he also opened the gates of Gindā' to them.<sup>2</sup> Alulā even persuaded Yohannes to abolish the edict forbidding Muslims to own land and property in the Marab Mellāsh.<sup>3</sup> He publicly demonstrated his respect for Islam<sup>4</sup> and was even taken by some local Christians to be an "enemy of the Christians".<sup>5</sup>

"I never met an Abyssinian official who was less fanatical," wrote Wylde<sup>6</sup> "and many of his friends and agents were Mahomedans, not Dervishes."

The other external element to the agrarian society in the Marab Mellāsh which became a main factor in the construction of the new capital was the Tigrean soldiery. These self-armed peasants who followed their master, accompanied, according to the Ethiopian custom by their families. In the Marab Mellāsh they found a new economic

---

<sup>1</sup>See such a distinction in Puglisi, p.44.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI, 3/2-17, Gené to MAE, 22.1.87.

<sup>3</sup>Perini, p.349.

<sup>4</sup>F. Martini, Nell'Africa Italiana, Milano 1891, p.109.

<sup>5</sup>E. Littmann, op.cit., Vol. II, p.171.

<sup>6</sup>Wylde, Modern, p.149.

base in the situation of ceaseless raids on the neighbouring Muslim tribes and lost their interest in returning to Tēgre. The Ethiopian concept of a border not as a well defined line but as a sphere of influence, or rather a sphere of raids, was undoubtedly created and maintained for that purpose.<sup>1</sup> Tribal areas like Bogos or the Asāwūrṭa were not only a reason for Ethiopian military presence in Hamāsen but also a principal means for maintaining its existence. Yet this naturally proved to be an insufficient resource, and Alulā had to encourage the settlement of those immigrant soldiers of his, mainly the nucleus of those one to two thousand devoted veterans who had been following him since the days he commanded them as an unknown Shālaqā. These were originally recruited from the self-armed peasantry of Tēgre. Having stayed for years in the Marab Mellāsh they apparently had no reason to return to Tēgre where they had left no agrarian property of their own. In the first years of Alulā's government in Hamāsen the local inhabitants suffered heavily from a rotative system of billeting those soldiers, from frequent robberies and raids.<sup>2</sup> This was partly solved by the confiscation of lands from the villages of collective land ownership.

We have no evidence for the existence of a separate agricultural colony of those Tigrean newcomers and apparently, as also may be concluded from this system of confiscation, they quite quickly integrated with the local self-armed peasantry of Hamāsen.

As these colonised soldiers had to go back to their villages in the rainy season, the growing need for a professional standing army was met by the establishment of a salaried soldiery. As the

---

<sup>1</sup> See G. Rohlfs, *L'Abissinia* (N.D, but 1885) pp. 113, 114.

<sup>2</sup> Int. Wallata Berhān.

maintenance of such a salaried force depended on the existence of an economic centre, the removal of Alulā's military headquarters from Addi Taklay to his commercial centre of Asmarā was inevitable.

There, in the new capital, Alulā had a standing force, the nucleus of his armed forces. Those salaried soldiers, probably no more than a thousand, were not rewarded with a great fortune. Reportedly, their annual salary was five thalers and thirty-two litres of Tef (cereal) a month.<sup>1</sup> Yet as this central army could exist only on a kind of central economy, against the background of the *agrarian* Tēgre this may be regarded as an innovation.<sup>2</sup>

People from all over Hamāsen were brought to Asmarā to construct the new government headquarters.<sup>3</sup> On the top of the steep hill which overlooks the town three tukul-shaped stone houses<sup>4</sup>, larger than those seen before in Hamāsen, were constructed. Surrounded by a wall, they resembled, and actually were, a fortified military camp<sup>5</sup> capable of housing some 2,000 troops,<sup>6</sup> and temporarily even 10,000.<sup>7</sup>

The biggest of the three "Tukuls" was the Rās' Addārāsh or banquet-hall. Here in the big hall, 18 metres in diameter, the élite

<sup>1</sup>F. Fasolo, op.cit., pp. 206, 207.

<sup>2</sup>Troops who were mobilised in the Marab Mellāsh were rewarded by their families being exempted from paying taxes, see Genè to Robilant, 8.10.86; Giglio, V, No. 257, p.359. The standing salaried army of Yohannes is probably to be identified with what was described by Portal as the Emperor's guards. They numbered some 5,000 troops. See Portal, op.cit., p.257.

<sup>3</sup>Perini, p.387.

<sup>4</sup>"Tukul di Ras Alula", Puglisi, p.14.

<sup>5</sup>Wallata-Berhān; Fosolo, p.207.

<sup>6</sup>Perino, p.21.

<sup>7</sup>The interpreter Ailu to Zerboni, 17.9.85; Allegato 2 in Zerboni to Depretis, 23.4.85; Giglio V, No. 54, p.60.

of the new régime used to assemble for consultation and frequent war councils. For their own reasons, Italian *writers* and observers used to refer to Alulā and his leading followers as the representatives of a foreign Tigrean occupying régime. And, indeed, following the arrest of Rās Walda Mikā'el and the other important members of the Ṣa'zagā house and the slower *deprivation* of power of the other local dignitaries,<sup>1</sup> the leading figures of the Hamāsen élite had no chance of returning to their previous status. The removal of that élite from political power by Alulā's régime was decidedly new phenomenon <sup>on</sup> in the history of that country. Though frequently pressed by foreign powers and almost always dependent on the Ethiopian emperor, this local élite had not failed to maintain its authority over its hereditary government.<sup>2</sup> Judging it *only from* that aspect, Alulā's government *could seem* <sup>to be</sup> a Tigrean conquest of the Marab Mellāsh.

As the main functionaries in his new centralised régime, Alulā had, around himself, almost exclusively Tigreans: Belāttā Gabru "Abbā chaqun", his deputy, a native of Samre from Tamben,<sup>3</sup> who was killed in Kūfīt some six to eight months after the construction of the new "Tukuls" in Asmara; Ledj Fanta Wudā'el from Sar'e near Adwā; Shālaqā Ar'ayā from Zuqlī,<sup>4</sup> Alulā's birthplace, who governed

---

<sup>1</sup>For examples, see Puglisi, p.147; Ghilagaber Habtezien, Perini, pp. 72, 245, 391.

<sup>2</sup>For background, see among others: G. Bonacci, Il Mareb Melass, Rome 1905; Longrigg, op.cit.; Enc. Brit., 11th Ed., "Eritrea"; Kolmodin, op.cit.

<sup>3</sup>Interview, Kagnazmāch Abreḥā Fanta, Asmarā, March 1972.

<sup>4</sup>Abreḥā Fanta.

the strategically vital region of Ginda'; Dadjāzmach 'əngdā "Abbā Shawul" in charge of the munition stores in Asmarā; Bāshā Tādā'Fanja, Alulā's nephew,<sup>1</sup> and Dadjāzmāch Hayla Səllāsse, Alulā's son-in-law.<sup>2</sup> Those were all natives of Tamben, and like their master Alulā they came from the lower rungs of the <sup>social</sup> Tigrean ladder. Except for Lədj Fanta, people in Tamben could not remember the names of their parents nor were they recorded by contemporary writers. It may be wrong to suggest that they were committed to a Tigrean cause, as such as they were not affiliated with the Tigrean ruling class. Self-consciously they were rather the followers of the Rās to whom they owed their new status.<sup>3</sup> Their establishment in Asmarā was for them undoubtedly the culmination of a successful immigration. They probably considered themselves rather as the new local élite of Hamāsen than as foreign conquerors. In Təgre itself they had left nothing of importance and when later, for reasons which will be described below, they had to return there, they actually disappeared from the political scene.

While the top local élite of the Hamāsen was utterly deprived by the Tigreans, the low-ranked local functionaries, the Shum Addis

---

<sup>1</sup>Interview, Ato Yekunwamlāk Ar'āyā, Maqalle, Feb. 1972.

<sup>2</sup>See below, p. 225.

<sup>3</sup>The following passage from the Mannawe Ms may be interpreted as reflecting not only the personal devotion of these followers to Alulā but also their being aware of the fact that his death would automatically end their own careers: "The powerful chiefs of his army, namely Blatta Gäbru, Salāka Araya, Lejj Fānta, Baša Tālla Wāddi, Basa Fānja, Basa Dāsta, Abba Ga'i, Basa Asro Bālla, came to him when they heard that he had risen up for battle. They said to him, 'it is not good that you go to the battle, but we ourselves will go, and we will do battle while you help us praying? with your great power.'..."

and Shum Gultis<sup>1</sup> who had been in office before the arrival of Alulā, continued during his rule. The Shum Gultis were the heads of the local families recognised by the Imperial Government (i.e. Alulā) as the leaders of their groups. The Shum Addis or the Chəqqa Shums, were the administrative governors of the various villages, a function traditionally kept for Resti holders. Those were subordinated to the Məslanes, or district officers, also <sup>mostly</sup> an hereditary function.<sup>2</sup> People who held such functions in this period of Rās Walda Mikā'el and remained in office under Alulā are well-remembered by old people in the Hamāsen. Among many were: Bāshā Karkas in Marguz, Dadjāz-mach Tasfa Māryam in Addi Quala, Bāhar Nagāsi Godefa in Gurā', Belattā Walda Gabri'el in Ansabā Agala etc.<sup>3</sup>

The members of this local administrative élite were strictly and directly controlled by Asmarā. They not only had to report there from time to time, but they were also checked and inspected by a network of Farasnyas or "horsemen". These were people appointed directly by Alulā in various places in Hamāsen. They served as tax collectors, deputy governors and as a communication line to and from the capital, and were able to report very quickly to Asmarā.<sup>4</sup> This was not a new institution in the administrative structure of the area but the use of outsiders - Tigreans - by Alulā was presumably an innovation.

The establishment of a permanent headquarters in Asmarā was also aimed at a further centralisation of the economic and commercial

---

<sup>1</sup>See Perini, p.69.

<sup>2</sup>Nadel, op.cit.

<sup>3</sup>Interview, W. Wallata Berhān, Asmara, March 1972;

<sup>4</sup>Kolmodin, No. 269; interview, Bayru Tafla. Nadel, op.cit.



life of Alulā's province. It was now forbidden by the Rās to produce the drink of Ṭadj throughout the country "as it is the drink of the king", and, according to an episode recorded by Kolmodin, Alulā managed to enforce this.<sup>1</sup> The Rās, himself known to be very fond of that drink, probably produced it in Asmarā.<sup>2</sup> According to Perini there were three main markets in the Marab Mellash before the arrival of Alulā, in Ṣa'azaga, Godofelasi and Edaga Hamus, and trade was free of tax all over the country. Alulā closed all the markets and opened a big one in his new capital, Asmarā. A functionary of his, a Shum Edaga, the Chief of the Market, "who was, naturally, a Tigrean" was authorised to tax the sellers and buyers there.<sup>3</sup> Though this description by Perini is undoubtedly exaggerated, as it was impossible to force the people from all over the Marab Mellash to walk to Asmarā to change a few chickens for a small sack of dhurra, it may be well assumed that at least the bulk of the long-distance trade was transferred to Alulā's capital.

Taxes during the time of Alulā's government were evidently quite high. Rich traders - according to the evidence of an old Ethiopian trader<sup>4</sup> - had to pay an enormous sum of about two thalers for a loaded mule, while a farmer, an owner of two oxen, had to pay about ten thalers per annum, plus two-fifths of his production.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Kolmodin, No. 273.

<sup>2</sup>See description of the production of the Ṭadj in G. Portal, op.cit., pp. 66-68. Portal noticed that Alulā's Ṭadj was different from the Ṭadj given to him by "ordinary chiefs of districts" and this may lead to the assumption that the Rās did not quite manage to force his will.

<sup>3</sup>Perini, p.386.

<sup>4</sup>Int.Kan. Abrehā Fanta. Asmarā, March 1972.

<sup>5</sup>DN, 4.6.84.

Centrally governed and administered, Alulā's provinces paid a substantial revenue to the Ethiopian treasury. During his ten years of government in the Hamāsen (1879-1889) this province paid the total sum (during the whole period) of 125,000 thalers,<sup>1</sup> while in the early seventies the annual income had been around 5,000 thalers.<sup>2</sup> Akalla Guzāy, when under Alulā, paid 7,900 per annum compared with 5,000 in previous years.<sup>3</sup> Sarāya revenues went directly to the church of Aksum.<sup>4</sup>

After the restoration of the Bogos the neighbouring tribes had to report to Asmarā annually about their financial situation. During the period up to 1889 the tribes of the Ḥabbāb, Bogos, Maria and Banū 'Āmir had to pay together a sum around 7,750 thalers per annum.<sup>5</sup>

The fact that, judging from the above mentioned numbers, Alulā only doubled the revenue paid to the imperial treasury, in spite of his central economy and arms trade, may well lead to the assumption that Alulā's private treasury in Asmarā contained a substantial sum. Evidently a big part of it was donated by Alulā to churches, mainly in Tēgre<sup>6</sup> where, presumably, he could purchase no agrarian property with that money. It is a fact, however, that in his future career, once out of the Marab, Alulā did not have

---

<sup>1</sup>Corazzini, in La Tribuna, 20.6.90.

<sup>2</sup>Pankhurst, Economic, p.536.

<sup>3</sup>F. Martini, Diario, III, p.380.

<sup>4</sup>MS Mannawe.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI, Eritrea 169, Report by Al-Ḥusayn Ḥamīd, 3.1.89.

<sup>6</sup>See pp. 310, 311.

much savings to maintain even a small army of a few hundred.

It was suggested by many, mostly Italians, that Alulā's central government was oppressive and contrary to local customs and that this oppression subsequently helped a foreign power gain control over the area.<sup>1</sup> This seems to be only partly true. In fact, it looks as if the common people of Hamāsen, those who had no share in the government during the previous, semi-independent period, accepted the new régime after it started functioning following the establishment of Asmarā. The flourishing commerce and better security for farmers<sup>2</sup> were emphasized by Alulā's efforts to establish justice.<sup>3</sup>

"Justice like that of Lālibalā  
Legislation like that of Alulā"<sup>4</sup>

is a saying used nowadays in Eritrea. Though the Tigrean highlanders, the "Dog'o"<sup>5</sup> were considered as foreigners by the Eritreans, the people of Hamāsen, facing an external threat like the Mahdist movement and having no other leadership, united under Alulā and constituted the major and most active part of his expedition force to Kūfīt.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Perini, pp. 38, 192, 193; V. Mantegazza, Gl'Italiani in Africa, Firenze 1896, pp. 242, 245.

<sup>2</sup>See description in FO 403/88, "Report by Mr. Bearclerk on the commerce of Massowah" in Lumley to Iddesleigh, 13.10.86. For a general description of commerce in Eritrea, see Wylde in The Manchester Guardian, 29.6.97.

<sup>3</sup>A. Sapelli, Memorie d'Africa (1883-1906), Bologna 1935, p.53 (unlike Perini, p.373); H. Smith, op.cit., p.111; Longrigg, p.112.

<sup>4</sup>Māmo Wudnah, Yaertrā tārīk, Asmarā 1962, EC, p.59.

<sup>5</sup>Wallata Berhān.

<sup>6</sup>N. Corazzini, in La Tribuna, 23.7.90; Kolmodin, No. 275.

In this respect a clear distinction has to be made as to the geographical limits of Alulā's government. It seems to be quite clear that the Tigrinya-speaking provinces of Hamāsen Sarāya and Akalla Guzāy plus a permanent military presence in the Bogos were under his direct government. As for the Muslim tribal zones later contained in the future Eritrea, such as Assawurṭa, Ḥabbāb , Banū 'Āmir etc., these were actually part, during Alulā's time and according to his concept and necessities, of the raided areas on the border. They were not directly gove<sup>r</sup>ned by Asmarā and naturally resisted any central government, especially that of Alulā which only taxed and raided them. It was mainly those peripheral Muslim tribes which later supported the Italians during their struggle to take over from Alulā in the Marab Məllash.

J. 1885-1886: THE ITALIANS IN MASSAWA:  
FROM A EUROPEAN NEIGHBOUR TO A LOCAL RIVAL

"The Faranji and Qunqun are the same.  
 Qunqun is the smallest of insects but it eats  
 up a large tree, causes it to dry up and fall down."<sup>1</sup>

The pre-Kūfīt period: Increasing Italian involvement and first  
 signs of a rupture with Alulā

When Rās Alulā left Asmarā in September 1885 to face the  
 Mahdist threat in Kūfīt he was already in a situation of a "cold  
 war" with the Italians on the coast. This was by no means a desir-  
 able state of affairs for the newcomers. In fact, according to  
 reports of two of their officials the *original Italian* idea was  
 to create friendly relations with the neighbouring Rās:

"... Ras Alula is the most serious the most in-  
 fluent and the strongest personality in today's  
 Abyssinia. The word of Alula is heard with enthusiasm  
 and confidence by the king ... one can say that it  
 is very easy to get anything from the Negus of Abyssinia  
 once Ras Alula is interested in it."<sup>2</sup>

"Ras Alula is the Ethiopian chief with whom we shall  
 be in contact most frequently and directly as his  
 province is on the border. We must neglect nothing  
 in order to have him as a friend."<sup>3</sup>

But their slow advance out of Massawa, which they began in April  
 1885, the occupation of other places evacuated by the Egyptians,  
 and their friendly relations with tribes considered by Alulā as  
 under his control, eliminated the chance "to have Alula as a friend".  
 Alulā suspected the Italians of supporting Dabbab who was socially

---

<sup>1</sup>In a letter of the Ethiopian interpreter Petros Giyorgis to Rās  
 Alulā, Massawa, 18.1.87. Quoted in: Garima Tāffere, Yamakarā dawal,  
 Asmarā, 1963, E.C., p.8.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI, 36/3-23, Ferrari's report, 14.9.85.

<sup>3</sup>LV, XVII, Maissa to MAE, 20.3.85.

and practically connected with the Nā'ib of the Italian held Ḥarkīkū.<sup>1</sup> When Dabbab went on with his raids on Ethiopian caravans and Alulā retaliated in late July 1885 by plundering his Assā-wurṭa supporters Col. Saletta wrote to the Rās demanding explanation and threatening to stop the sending of arms to Asmarā.<sup>2</sup> Astonished by the insolent demand Alulā did not even reply "As if he wanted to say that it was not our business".<sup>3</sup>

On 24th June 1885 Saletta sent Italian troops to occupy Sahāṭī. This was done secretly and without asking the permission of Alulā, and it was only on 12th August 1885, after the Egyptian garrison had finally left there, that the Ethiopian Rās verbally reacted. He demanded from the Egyptian envoy Marcopoli Bey, then staying in his camp, to ask his superiors to force the Italians to abandon the place.<sup>4</sup> In mid-August Saletta wrote to Alulā regarding Sahāṭī and indirectly asked his approval by announcing his intention to construct there some few huts to protect his troops from the coming rains.

"You have told me that you had come to plant your huts in Saati," replied Alulā on 25<sup>August</sup> 1885. "This can not be. Not only the huts but also the people who are at Saati cannot stay there. The land belongs to the Negus ... Therefore, evacuate Saati."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 78/3808, Marcopoli to Chermiside, 26.8.85.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 2/2-13, Saletta to Alula 28.7.85, 15.8.85.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 2/2-13, Saletta to MAE, 22.8.85.

<sup>4</sup>See above, p. 110.

<sup>5</sup>LV, XVII, Zerboni to MAE, 1.9.85; Storia Militare, p.94.

The Italians were informed by their spies that Alulā received a letter from Yohannes "instructing him to attack Saati if the Italians would construct there houses, and not to do so if they remain in Zariba".<sup>1</sup> It was decided in Rome to ignore Alulā's demands about the evacuation of Sahāṭi but to calm him and his master.<sup>2</sup> On 7 September 1885 Saletta wrote to Alulā notifying him of the intention of his government to send an official mission to the emperor to sign a treaty between Ethiopia and Italy.<sup>3</sup> Threatened by the Mahdists in Kūfīt, Alulā was relieved to receive such a sign of at least temporary peace in his "eastern front". "Your *welcome* letter has reached me," he replied to Saletta, "I shall forward it direct to the Negus."<sup>4</sup> And on the next day he started his march to fight 'Uthmān Diqna in Kūfīt.

Returning from Kūfīt. Alulā at the peak of his career.

Authorised by Yohannes to deal with the Italian question.

Ever troubled by his domestic affairs Yohannes seems to have had but little knowledge of the developments in the Massawa area, for which he had to rely mainly on Alulā himself. Yet when the relations between his vassal and the new powerful neighbours began to deteriorate Yohannes had to keep his eye on his confident general and restrain him from careless activities.

In early July 1885 Alulā initiated an anti-Catholic campaign in Akalla Guzāy where he led a small expedition and maltreated the missionaries.<sup>5</sup> This was probably regarded by Alulā as a preventive

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI, 4/1-2, Zerboni to MAE, 3.9.85.

<sup>2</sup>LV, XVII, MAE to Zeroni, 2.9.85.

<sup>3</sup>Zerboni to Depretis, 8.9.85; Giglio, V, No. 39, pp. 32-33.

<sup>4</sup>Alulā to Saletta (misdated 4.9.85, must be 13.9.85, see Giglio, V, p.61) in Zerboni to Depretis, 23.9.85; Giglio, V, No. 54, p.57.

<sup>5</sup>Annales de la Congregation de la Missin, 1886, p.261.

measure against a possible Italian influence in that area. (And probably also as a retaliation for the missionaries' role in diverting the arms trade in late 1884.)<sup>1</sup>

If Coulbeaux is to be believed, the emperor sent to Alulā the following angry words:

"Don't you know that the French and the Italians are of the same faith? If you indulge in this sort of activity I shall send someone else to take your place. My throne is established only on prayer and cautious diplomacy, not on the force of my arms."<sup>2</sup>

This, together with Yohannes' instructions not to attack the Italian troops at Sahāṭi, "if they remain in the Zariba", and encouragement of Alulā to march on Kassala suggests that the emperor was worried about Alulā's policy vis-à-vis the Italians. But this seems to have changed after the returning of Alulā as victor from Kūfīt.

Alulā's victory over the Mahdists of 23 September 1885 was undoubtedly a great relief to the emperor who must have been extremely worried about a possible Mahdist influence on the rebellious Muslim Gāllā tribes. The emperor's son was hopelessly facing an overwhelming rebellion there.<sup>3</sup> Yohannes had to hurry to the Gāllā country and before leaving he appointed the victorious Alulā over the north of his empire:

"Alula", described the French vice consul Soumagne on 26 Feb. 82,<sup>4</sup> "is 'premier ministre' of the Emperor and his powers have been extended by the sudden diversion of Yohannes to the south ... at Yohannes's orders all the other Commanders remaining in Tigre have joined forces with Alula at Asmara under his

<sup>1</sup>See above, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup>MAE (F) / .105, Aby. IV, Coulbeaux to Soumagne, 7.8.85.

<sup>3</sup>FO 403/87, Smith to Baring, 12.3.86. L'Informatore Ghermai Arcu to Gené, 21.1.86 in Gené to Robilant, 21.1.86. Giglio, V, No. 165, p. 205.

<sup>4</sup>MAE, Mas. 5, Soumagne to MAE, 26.2.86.



command. At the time that I arrived /Feb. 86/ Dadjazmach Tedla /Ayba/, governor of Meqelle, Dadj. Hagos governor of Adwa and Balambaras Debab, in charge of Tembien, were in Alula's camp."

It seems that Alulā's new high position was also a recognition by Yohannes of his political judgment, as might be illustrated by the evidence of the Ethiopian Mamher Walda Samāyāt who came in May 1886 to Massawa on his way to Jerusalem. Walda Samāyāt told the Italian General Genè that Yohannes had told him:

"You want a letter to the Italian general? Some people tell me that the Italians came to invade my country, others say they are my friends. I give you a letter to Ras Alula, as he is there near them he is better than me in this business."<sup>1</sup>

But in spite of his strong position the Rās was apparently strictly denied by his master the option of taking any military initiative against the Italians.<sup>2</sup> With the imperial army involved in the Gāllā campaign, with Alulā's forces still exhausted from the Kūfīt massacre, and with the promised Italian diplomatic mission creating the illusion of a possible understanding, open hostilities were postponed to a later stage.

#### September-October 1885: Italian direct involvement in Alulā's affairs

Alulā's victory in Kūfīt, though but partly effective against the Mahdist movement in the western marches of future Eritrea, was a final blow to their aspirations in the coastal zone. Ironically it was mainly the Italians who were to profit from this.

In late September 1885 Bālabārās Kefle 'eyāsus, who before

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI, 2/2-13, Genè to MAE, 21.5.86.

<sup>2</sup>L'Informatore Ghermai Arcu to Gene, 21.1.86, in Gene to Robilant, 21.1.86; Giglio, V, No. 165, p.205. Antonelli to MAE, 11.5.86, LV, XV, p.228.

that battle was known to be siding with 'Uthmān Diqna, contacted Saletta in Massawa. Well received, he persuaded Kantibā Ḥamīd and other chiefs of the Ḥabbāb to strengthen their relations with the Italian authorities.<sup>1</sup> The Kantibā did not participate in Kūfīt and was consequently ordered by Alulā to report to Asmarā, and it was obviously too late for him to join the victorious camp. On 7 October 1885 Ḥamīd was ceremonially received by Saletta in Massawa<sup>2</sup> to sign, two days later, a document putting his tribes under Italian protection. This treaty which was also signed by Ḥamīd's brother and former pro-Mahdist rival Shaykh Ḥassan Ḥaddād<sup>3</sup> was clearly a step against Alulā's interests and claims.

Alulā's reaction was bitter and determined. On the same day, 7 October 1885, when the Ḥabbāb tribesmen entered Massawa, an Italian medical mission composed of six members left the town heading toward Asmarā to help the wounded Ethiopian soldiers who returned to Kūfīt. The mission was sent by Saletta "to obtain the Ras' friendship on the eve of the promised mission"<sup>4</sup> but failed to do so. Hearing the news of the Ḥabbāb-Italian treaty, Alulā expelled the medical team from Asmarā without even giving its members provisions for the way.<sup>5</sup> They reached Massawa on 18 October 1885 carrying Alulā's letter in which the Rās demanded the extradition

<sup>1</sup>Puglisi, pp. 161, 174.

<sup>2</sup>L. Chiala, La Spedizione di Massaua, Torino 1888.

<sup>3</sup>Zerboni to Robilant, 9.10.85; Giglio, V, No. 72, pp. 80, 81.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 2/2-13, Saletta to MAE 8.10.85.

<sup>5</sup>FO 408/125, Tomielli to Salisbury 30.4.90. A.S.MAI 2/2-13, Zerboni to MAE 23.10.85.

of Kantibā Ḥamīd.<sup>1</sup>

"I destroyed those you hate," Alulā added on 23 Oct. 85,  
"therefore you should not like those I hate."<sup>2</sup>

Saletta's reply of 28 October 1885<sup>3</sup> claimed that he thought Ḥamīd was a friend of Alulā. He added that upon hearing Alulā's complaints he stopped selling food for the Ḥabbāb and concluded:

"I believe I proved to you my friendship to Ethiopia which is Christian like Italy."

November-December 1885: Italian attempt to appease Alulā and Yohannes

Indeed, in spite of Alulā's insulting attitude to the medical mission the Italians turned to what they regarded as an appeasing policy.<sup>4</sup> Saletta was instructed by Robilant, the new prime minister, to order the Italian troops at Sahāḥī to evacuate the place and to substitute <sup>with</sup> *them* irregulars.<sup>5</sup> Robilant tried to adopt a more moderate approach to the Ethiopian question and to restrain the energetic Italian commanders in Massawa. Colonel Saletta was subsequently replaced by Major-General Genè as C-in-C. there.<sup>6</sup> The new commander corresponded in a friendly manner with Alulā. He underlined his good intentions by facilitating the passage of a new consignment of arms.<sup>7</sup> On 2nd December 1885 the Italians finally seized from the

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 4/3-12, Alula to Saletta, 15.10.85.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 4/3-12, Alula to Saletta, 23.10.85.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 4/3-12, Saletta to Alulā, 28.10.85.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 2/2-13, MAE to Saletta, 20.10.85, Robilant to Genè, 6.11.85; Giglio, No. 100, p.126.

<sup>5</sup>Ricotti to Saletta, 21.11.85, in A. Bizoni, L'Eritrea nel passato e nel presente, Milano 1897, p.138. For British unfavourable reaction, see FO 78/3811, Cameron to Egerton 5.11.85.

<sup>6</sup>Giglio, V, p.383.

<sup>7</sup>A.S.MAI 2/2-13, Alulā to Genè, 21.11.85; 17.12.85, Genè to Alulā, 20.12.85.

Egyptians the administration of the port of Massawa and, probably due to Robilant's policy, this turned out to be a non-event from the Ethiopian point of view. The British Captain Smith reported from Massawa on 19 February 1886 that "The relations between the Italians and the Abyssinians seem to have changed much for the better of late."<sup>1</sup>

December 1885-January 1886: Alulā attempt to outmanoeuvre the Italians through a French treaty

It was again the French, as in 1884, who were invited to intervene before a treaty was to be negotiated with / another European power. On 25 November 1885 the vice-consul at Massawa, Soumagne, left for Asmarā to meet Rās Alulā. In his report<sup>2</sup> Soumagne wrote that their meeting had been actually initiated by the Rās. Disillusioned with the British and already most suspicious of the Italians, Alulā turned to the only other possible diplomatic option.

Confident in his new position in charge of Ethiopia's northern border affairs, Alulā probably thought that, as in 1884, he could conduct high policy and make the emperor sign the papers.

"He alone," wrote Soumagne,<sup>3</sup> "could not do so, [sign the Treaty] but he assured me that Yohannes would accept our work and the pourparlers were begun and concluded rapidly. ..."

Alulā's idea was to let the French have the small port of Zula from where - as a European neighbour should do- they would supply Ethiopia with firearms and act on the emperor's behalf if the empire's integrity were threatened by the Italians. Alulā was interested in a French

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 403/87, Smith to Baring 19.2.86.

<sup>2</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 4, Soumagne to MAE, 19.2.85.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

presence at Zulā also because this could well help him in subduing the Assāwūrta and catching Dabbab. The outlaw was still at large in those territories trying in vain to get direct Italian support.<sup>1</sup>

At Alulā's prompting, in order, as he put it, "to settle this treaty in calm",<sup>2</sup> Soumagne wrote to Yohannēs from Asmarā suggesting that

"Till such time as I can come to see you we should seal a treaty as events at Massawa go quickly and the enemy's [The Italian's] encroachment may outdistance us if we wait."<sup>3</sup>

In late December 1885, Yohannēs left the Gāllā country and made his way to Ashange to meet the Frenchman but was forced by events in the south to return there.<sup>4</sup> He therefore wrote to Alulā instructing him to conclude the matter with Soumagne as an Ethiopian representative at Massawa.<sup>5</sup>

Soumagne returned to Asmarā on 3 February 1886 and on the next day he agreed verbally with Alulā on a draft of a treaty which formally merely confirmed his nomination of 1884 as a wakil in Massawa.<sup>6</sup>

"In the final evidence Alula invited all the chiefs in Asmara ... to attend so that they might witness his success as a diplomat! ... He told me: Yes, telegraph to your government that I have done all this by the Emperor's orders and that 'everything is settled definitely'."<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 5, Soumagne to MAE, 27.1.86.

<sup>2</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 4, Soumagne to MAE, 19.12.85.

<sup>3</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 5, Soumagne to Yohannēs, 9.12.85.

<sup>4</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 5, Alula to Soumagne, 3.1.86, 15.1.86.

<sup>5</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 5, Soumagne to MAE, 26.2.86.

<sup>6</sup>See above, p. 72.

<sup>7</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 5, Soumagne to MAE, 26.2.86.

In fact, the idea of Soumagne and Alulā to invite the French to Zulā was not that straightforward, as the place was actually (though still not officially) under Italian control. It seems, however, that both men left it to be decided by future events.

Even less realistic was Alulā's attempt to establish diplomatic relations with Russia through the adventurer Ashinov who stayed with him during the last three weeks of 1885. The Russian falsely claimed to represent the Tsar and promised the Rās to purchase arms for him in Europe. In spite of Alulā's efforts, Yohannes refused to meet the adventurer and nothing resulted from that episode.<sup>1</sup>

December 1885-March 1886: Failure of last attempt to reach Italian understanding with Alulā and Yohannes

While Rās Alulā was vainly trying to make a successful diplomatic move before the arrival of the promised Italian mission, it was decided in Italy not to rely on the Rās as a channel to the emperor. On 17 November 1885 Robilant wrote to Gené that because of Alulā's behaviour with the medical group no mission would leave for Ethiopia until its acceptance was approved by Yohannes.<sup>2</sup> But the letters written to the emperor were never replied to.

"They are not people of good faith", Yohannes was said to have written to Menilek about his feelings towards the Italians,<sup>3</sup> "they are intriguers. ... The Italians have not come here because they lack

---

<sup>1</sup>Le Vicomte de Constantin, "Une Expédition Religieuse en Abyssinie", La Nouvelle Revue, Paris, 1 and 15 February 1891, pp. 13-17; P.J.Rollins, Russia's Ethiopian Adventure 1888-1905, Ph.D. thesis, Syracuse University 1957, p.43; FO 403/87, Morier to Salisbury, 27.1.86.

<sup>2</sup>Giglio, V, No. 115, p.140.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI, 36/3-28, Antonelli to Robilant, 26.11.85. The letter reached Menilek 18.11.85.

pastures and fat in their own country, but they come from ambition to better themselves, because there are many of them and they are not rich. With the help of God they will depart again, humiliated and disgraced in the eyes of the world."

In late January 1886 the head of the planned mission, General Pozzolini, arrived at Massawa carrying detailed instructions from the Foreign Minister. The mission's aim was "to ape the Hewett Treaty in its entirety, but at the same time give it a new twist to their [The Italians'] benefit."<sup>1</sup> Accordingly Ethiopian sovereignty over Bogos was to be recognised but with the exception of the tribes to the north of Massawa - Mansa Heba<sup>b</sup>bs and others - where the Italians wanted to retain "a complete liberty of action". Concerning Sahāṭi Pozzolini was permitted to leave it to the Ethiopians, if badly desired by them, but Italian protection over the coast from Massawa to Assab was to be recognised. Dabbab was to be denied Italian help but also was not to be extradited to the Ethiopians.<sup>2</sup>

With these objectives the Italians were right to try to avoid Alulā as a negotiator. Pozzolini, in Massawa from late January 1886, was well aware of the fact that the Rās never recognised and indeed was most sour about the occupation by the Italians of any piece of land outside Massawa,<sup>3</sup> and Alulā's subsequent activities merely emphasised this fact. In early January 1886 Alulā wrote to the Nā'ib of Harkikū, Dabbab's relative, ordering him to report to Asmarā. on 15 January he also notified Genè about that matter.<sup>4</sup> The Italian

---

<sup>1</sup>Zewde, p.425.

<sup>2</sup>Robilant to Pozzolini, 8.1.86; Allegato 3, Giglio V, No. 158, pp. 189-200.

<sup>3</sup>Pozzolini to Robilant, 21.2.86; Giglio, V, No.190, p.228.

<sup>4</sup>Genè to Robilant, 21.1.86; Giglio, V, No. 165, p.204.

hurried to exploit the chance to declare indirectly Italian protection over the Assāwurṭa:

"The subjects are free to go to you," he wrote to Alulā, "because I do not stop people or merchandise to come from or go to the kingdom of Abyssinia, for this is the will of my king because of his friendship with Emperor Giovanni."<sup>1</sup>

Alulā's reaction was to raid, in late January, the Zulā plain.

Ten people of the Assāwurṭa were killed but Dabbab managed to escape.<sup>2</sup>

In mid-December 1885 Alulā wrote to Genè about the Ḥabbāb again warning him not to let them purchase food in Massawa and demanding the extradition of Kantibā Ḥamīd. Genè's reply was an evasive one<sup>3</sup> and thus, on 16 February 1886, Alulā raided the Ḥabbāb as "a protest against the Italian activities there". Leading his force in a deep penetrating raid the Rās was reputed to have killed 200-400 people and to have driven away a lot of cattle.<sup>4</sup>

Alulā's attitude to the Italians was a result, not only of their territorial claims, but also of their own attitude to him. In spite of the friendly letters of Saletta, Genè and Pozzolini, Italian newspapers did not spare mocking names when referring to Alulā, to Yohannes or to the Ethiopians. Extracts (like the one quoted above from L'Opinione) were translated and sent, probably by French agents or Greek merchants, to Alulā in Asmarā.<sup>5</sup> The Popolo

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 5, Soumagne to MAE, 27.1.86; FO 403/87, Watson to Baring 6.2.87.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 2/2-13, Alulā to Genè, N.D.; Genè to Alulā 24.12.85.

<sup>4</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 5, Soumagne to MAE, 26.2.86; FO 403/87, Smith to Baring 27.2.86.

<sup>5</sup>FO 403/87, Lumley to Salisbury 12.1.86, 15.1.86.



Romano of 16 March 1886 stated: "The semi-barbarous sovereigns of Central Africa cannot be reckoned upon as though they were civilised European monarchs." Judging from the contents of the above quoted letter of Yohannes to Menilek some extracts of these were sent from the Rās to his master.

According to Soumagne Alulā wrote to Yohannes on 9 February 1886 warning him that the Italian envoy "seeks only to trick you".<sup>1</sup> On 23 January 1886 General Pozzolini, the head of the mission, arrived at Massawa, and three days later sent to Alulā introducing his colleague, Dr. Nerazzini.<sup>2</sup> Nerazzini, who had already visited the Rās in March 1885, was sent to Asmarā twice, in early February and early March 1886, to prepare the ground for the mission and ensure its acceptance by the emperor. Reaching Asmarā on his second visit on 2 March 1886, Nerazzini heard from Rās Alulā a clear determined statement: "You Italians come to Massawa, according to your declarations, in order to facilitate the commerce with Abyssinia, with amicable intentions towards our country and not in the spirit of conquest.... You, our friends, have taken not only Massawa but also other places, and now, for the sake of your friendship I demand that you withdraw the troops from there".<sup>3</sup>

Though Alulā and his lieutenant, Shālaqā Ar<sup>ʿ</sup>ayā, impressed on Nerazzini that the mission was welcome to negotiate,<sup>3</sup> it must have been quite clear to both parties that it was impossible to

---

<sup>1</sup> Alulā to Yohannes, 9.2.86, in MAE, Mass. 5, Soumagne to MAE 26.2.86.

<sup>2</sup> Chiala, pp. 310, 311.

<sup>3</sup> Nerazzini to Genè, 2.3.86; Giglio, V, No. 200, p.241; Pozzolini to Robilant, 14.2.86, No. 184, p.225.

come to terms without one of them giving up territories and prestige.

On 16 February 1886 Antonelli's report quoting Yohannes's letter to Menilek reached the Italian Foreign Ministry.<sup>1</sup> Its contents, together with the fact that the emperor was camping at Boru Medā, some fifty days' march from Massawa,<sup>2</sup> brought about the final Italian decision to cancel the mission.<sup>3</sup>

\*

\*        \*

The cancellation of the projected Italian mission ended a period in which diplomatic methods used by both sides helped only to delay the inevitable hostilities. The Italians' appeasing diplomacy, which was supposed to culminate in the mission, could never succeed as it was accompanied by expansion over areas and involvement in affairs regarded by the Ethiopians as exclusively theirs. For Rās Alulā, the man in charge of the frontier's problems, this was not merely a question of national prestige, or even of national security.

When, in 1884, the Rās was working enthusiastically to bring the British to Massawa he was probably regarding the Europeans as a collection of Mitchells, Gordons, Wyldes and the Greek merchants of Massawa who came and went, traded and mediated. Those representatives of a higher technology imported arms, mediated with rival

---

<sup>1</sup>See Giglio, V, p.148 (not for the letter itself).

<sup>2</sup>F. Crispi, La prima Guerra d'Africa, Milano 1914, p.14.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 2/2-13, Robilant in Camera dei Deputati; Robilant to Gené, 18.3.86; Giglio, V, p.248.

neighbours and could work wonders with watches and geological apparatus. They could surely run and manage a good port at Massawa and continue to be a source for all that goodness. They had of course their own interest in those businesses but those interests were anchored elsewhere. They never participated in the local game consisting of Christian-Muslim, tribal-governmental, Tigrean-Eritrean and other rivalries. Even in the Ethiopian-Mahdist or Ethiopian-Egyptian conflicts they were only indirectly involved. The British under Napier, or under Hewett, came and returned leaving arms and illnesses. But when Europeans who came in order to stay, like the missionaries, started to participate in the local game they began to be regarded as one of the local elements and were no longer looked on as privileged Europeans. The slow Italian penetration into Ethiopia was not for Alulā just a question of losing territories.

"With you," he told the Italian officer Mulazzani in July 1896,<sup>1</sup> "I have made a great problem over a small piece of land, arid, sandy and of no value."

It was much more than that. It seems that for Ethiopians it was a question of outsiders trying to participate in what they regarded as their own game. When the Italians came to Massawa and Alulā hoped they would stick to the port and facilitate trade (as he had thought that the British would do, or planned that the French would do at Zulā), they were welcomed by the Rās. But, once they started cooperating with the Ḥabbābs, the Nā'ibs, the Assāwurṭa, or Dabbab, clashed (and were defeated) with the pro-Mahdist Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir, etc., they were regarded as though they were one of these elements.

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 3/17-136, Mulazzani Report, 26.7.96; Conti Rossini, Italia ed Etiopia, p.465.

Another interesting and important point in this context was that, once considered as local political enemies, the Italians were taken by many Ethiopians as religious enemies. A contemporary chronicle of Yohannes refers to the Italians in the following words:

"After this many powerful and conceited pagans came from Jerusalem intending to exterminate the religion of our Lord Jesus Christ, to construct their temples and destroy our churches."<sup>1</sup>

As such the Italians were sometimes regarded as Muslims<sup>2</sup> and even as Dervishes.<sup>3</sup>

Putting themselves in the position of a local element the Italians exposed themselves to the merciless rules of the local game.

---

<sup>1</sup>Ge'ez chronicle of Aksum, written by Abbā Hayla Māryām. Translated by Tesfayohannes Fessehaye, H.S.I.U.

<sup>2</sup>C. Conti Rossini, "Canti popolari Tigrai" Zeitschrift für Assyriologie, Strassburg 1906, No. 153.

<sup>3</sup>Ms. Mannawe.

K. 1886-1887: DOGALIAlulā's policy: War with the Italians

The first Italian move after the cancellation of the Pozzolini mission was to occupy areas in the peninsula of Buri on the eastern coast of the Bay of Zulā. One of the local Shaykhs who was promised money by the Italians for his cooperation refused it and hurried to Alulā in Asmarā. The move was interpreted by the Rās as a threat to the province of Agāme<sup>1</sup> and he subsequently led forces to camp at Sanāfe where a new fort was being erected.<sup>2</sup>

Back in Asmarā on 18 March 1886 Alulā received the British envoy, Mr. Harrison Smith, who was sent to thank him and Yohannes for their help in relieving the Egyptian garrisons.

"When a man comes for friendship and commerce", Alulā complained to the Britisher on the next day, "he keeps in his own place, and does not take places outside, and get nearer to another man's country. Why have the Italians occupied places in Buri and Raguali, which is on the way to my country?"<sup>3</sup>

Another source of bitterness to Alulā was the fact that Dabbab Ar'āyā was still acting freely in the Assāwurṭa territories. *the Italians* Though/still denied ~~him~~ direct help, they at least tolerated his existence in the area. Acts of robbery could only justify further occupation under the pretext of security measures. In a long statement Alulā complained to Smith that the Italians were purposely refraining from stopping Dabbab and other outlaws. Alulā also "alluded to the Italians' intercourse

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 403/87, Smith to Baring 20.5.86.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI, 2/2-13, Genè to MAE, 19.3.86.

<sup>3</sup>FO 403/87, Smith to Baring 20.5.86.

with the Kantibai Hamed ... whom he regarded as a rebel dependent of Abyssinia".

"It is apparent, however, from what the Ras said to me about Debbub, that this is a source of considerable annoyance to him;"

"Generally, the Ras evinced much irritation on the subject of the Italian occupation, and he spoke threateningly, as if he had every intention of assuming the offensive shortly. He said that I should be a witness that he had given the Italians sufficient warning, and that he would not be doing wrong if he went down to drive them away from those parts of his country which they had occupied."

"... while at Asmara," Smith expressed his opinion, "with this evidence before me, I was forced to the conclusion that the Italians were pursuing a policy which my knowledge of the Abyssinians told me could not be otherwise than fatal to the best interests of their enterprise at Massowah."<sup>1</sup>

With the emperor still in the Gällā area, Alulā was not permitted yet to open hostilities. He started fortifying Asmarā and awaited further instructions.<sup>2</sup>

#### Yohannes's policy: Appeal for British mediation

Informed by Rās Alulā about the situation on the frontier, Yohannes subsequently shared his vassal's views about the new neighbours. According to the Greek physician Dr. Parisis, who spent a long period with the emperor, Yohannes even instructed Alulā not to let Pozzolini's mission enter the country (his letter reached Alulā only in early April).<sup>3</sup> Unlike his attitude to the projected Italian mission, Yohannes, upon hearing of the arrival of Smith, left the

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 403/87, Smith to Baring 20.5.87.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 2/2-13, Genè to MAE 16.4.86.

<sup>3</sup>La Tribuna, 25.9.86. Quoted in Chiala, p.312.

Gāllā country and met the British envoy near Lake Ashange.

On 17 April 1886 Smith had a long discussion with Yohannes about the Italians and the Britisher was *led to believe* that:

"the king, in common with all his subjects, is convinced that it is the object of the Italians to annex territory claimed by Abyssinia, and eventually Abyssinia itself. He states that they have already done this by the occupation of Arafale, Sahaati, and places in Buri".<sup>1</sup>

But while Yohannes shared Alulā's views regarding his new European neighbours he still believed that European mediators could restrain them. Alulā coldly received the British envoy and openly demonstrated his distrust.<sup>2</sup> He even stopped his aid to those Egyptian troops who were still escaping from the Eastern Sudan via Asmarā and Massawa.<sup>3</sup> Yohannes on the other hand, influenced by the envoy's arguments and Victoria's calming letter to him,<sup>4</sup> applied for British diplomatic help and told Smith that "he looks to England to protect his interests at Massowah".<sup>5</sup>

"... We had no quarrel before because you told me to be in friendship with the Italians," Yohannes then wrote to Victoria.<sup>6</sup> "Now I do not know how to be in friendship with them. Write to me explaining how to do it."

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 403/87, Smith to Baring 30.5.86.

<sup>2</sup>Smith to Baring, *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 2/2-13, Sa'd to Genè, in Genè to M.E, 15.4.86.

<sup>4</sup>FO 95/747, Victoria to John, 8.12.85. The letter contained a promise that Britain would see to it that Italy would follow the Hewett Treaty, i.e., maintain a free port in Massawa.

<sup>5</sup>FO 403/87, Smith to Baring 30.5.86.

<sup>6</sup>FO 95/747, Yohannes to Victoria, 12 Miyāziā 1878 E.C. 19.4.86.

May-July 1886: Alulā in disgrace with Yohannes

In late April Yohannes left Ashange for Maqalla where he summoned Alulā<sup>1</sup> whom he had not seen since February 1885. This time they had what was probably their first open argument:

"Ras Alula," reported Smith, "was far more bigoted against them [The Italians] than the king and I think the feelings of the latter were considerably influenced by Her Majesty's letter."<sup>2</sup>

With the visit of Harrison Smith the period in which Yohannes considered Alulā as "better than me in that [Italian] business" ended. The emperor, calmed by Victoria,<sup>3</sup> was reported to be angry with his general. Yohannes, quite unfamiliar with the border problems, was addressing the Queen of England asking to know "how to be in friendship" with the Italians while Alulā seemed to doubt if this was the right step.

"It was on my previous representations of the good intentions of Italy," Smith claimed a year and a half later,<sup>4</sup> "that the Abyssinians did not push matters to extremities when the Italians were comparatively unprepared to cope with them."

Alulā was reported to be in disgrace with Yohannes, not only for urging an immediate war, but also for being so uncompromising over what seemed to be minor questions like the Ḥabbāb. After Alulā's raid of mid-February on that tribe, Kantibā Ḥamīd wrote to Yohannes complaining that he was actually loyal to Ethiopia. He added that he had sent presents to the emperor but they had been confiscated by the revengeful Alulā.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Genè to Robilant, 23.4.86; Giglio, V, No. 216, p.253.

<sup>2</sup>FO 403/87, Smith to Baring 30.5.86.

<sup>3</sup>FO 403/90, Smith to FO 22.10.87.

<sup>4</sup>FO 403/90, Smith to FO 22.10.87.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI, 2/2-13, Genè to MAE 21.5.86, 22.7.86.



Ever suspicious of his Muslim citizens and of Muslim neighbour states as the most dangerous threat to the Ethiopian existence and being in May 1886 under the impact of the Gāllā revolts, Yohannēs seemed to be more tolerant towards the Italian threat than Alulā. On the other hand, Alulā was still under the influence of his victory at Kūfīt and surely more confident than his master about a Muslim threat. Yohannēs, owing his own way to power to the British, was more willing to rely on their assurances regarding the Italians than Alulā, whose recent experiences with European diplomacy undoubtedly caused him to be at least sceptical.

Alulā stayed with Yohannēs in Maqalle during the months of May and June 1886. Information about his being in disgrace with his master constantly reached Massawa,<sup>1</sup> and he was deprived again of the government of Akalla Guzāy.<sup>2</sup> The Tigrean chiefs who, just six months before, had to praise the victorious "Wadi Qubi" and were put under his command now did their best to blame Alulā as irresponsible and uncompromising. It was reported in Massawa by spies coming from Maqalle that it was only due to the influence of Rās Ar'āya Demṣu that Alulā remained in office as governor of Hamāsen and Sarāya.<sup>3</sup>

Back in Asmarā in early July Alulā was reported ~~to be~~ extremely depressed. He then had to return hastily to Maqalle as it was rumoured that Yohannēs was about to release old Rās Walda Mikā<sup>4</sup>el from Ambā Salāmā and nominate him over Alulā.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI, 2/2-13, Genē to MAE 29.7.86.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 2/2-13, Genē to MAE, 22.7.86.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

August-October 1886: Yohannes diverts Alulā to the Mahdist Front

The rainy season was about to start and it was the Mahdists who took the initiative this year in raiding the Bogos, Banū `Āmir and other tribes. The emperor, already worried about Mahdist activities on the other fronts,<sup>1</sup> reportedly ordered Alulā to prepare an attack on the pro-Mahdist tribesmen who were concentrating at Kūfīt.<sup>2</sup> On 9 August 1886 Alulā returned to Asmarā<sup>3</sup> and almost without stopping there led his followers to the Ḥabbāb area. According to various reports this was the most effective raid he had ever launched on that tribe. About two-thirds of their cattle and camels were confiscated by the angry Alulā.<sup>4</sup> The Rās was undoubtedly aware of Ḥamīd's complaints to the emperor and thus had his personal reason for the merciless raid. He also regarded the Ḥabbāb as a part of the Mahdist camp and he needed their cattle and camels for further anti-Mahdist expeditions. From the Ḥabbāb area in September he proceeded to the Bogos country and clashed with some unimportant pro-Mahdist groups near Karan and the Ḥallal plateau.<sup>5</sup> Returning to Asmarā later that month he was again summoned to the emperor who was camping between Adwā and Aksum.<sup>6</sup>

Alulā's position in the court was deteriorating constantly.

Bajerond Lawte, the finance minister of the emperor and ex-governor

<sup>1</sup>See Holt, *op.cit.*, p.170.

<sup>2</sup>Genè to Robilant, 8.10.86; Giglio V, No. 257, p.358.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI, 2/2-13, Genè to MAE 12.8.86.

<sup>4</sup>Chiala, *op.cit.*, p.325.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 2/2-13, Genè to MAE 23.9.86.

<sup>6</sup>A.S.MAI, 2/2-13, Genè to MAE 5.10.86.

of Akalla Guzāy, was reported to be undermining Alulā's position. He was supported by the newly appointed governor of Akalla Guzāy. The latter (whose name is not mentioned in the informer's report) complained that Alulā, when he was temporarily given back the government of that province, purposely mobilised too many troops, thus exempting their families from paying taxes.<sup>1</sup> Mahdist pressure on <sup>the</sup> Ethiopian western frontier was growing and the Italians being inactive,<sup>2</sup> Yohannes probably wanted to take the initiative in that area and occupy Kassala, which he regarded as given to him in the Hewett Treaty.

His position being so shaky, Alulā spent the last three weeks of October with his master in Dabra Damo where the governor of Adwā Dadjāzmāch Hagos and of Shire Dadjāzmāch Mangashā together with 'echage Tewoflos were summoned for consultations.<sup>3</sup> "Bowling down to the ground, as usual" Alulā left his master to enter Asmarā on 31 October 1886.<sup>4</sup>

November-December 1886: The march on Kassala. Alulā loses his prestige as an invincible general

Alulā must have been in a mixed mood when he entered his capital. Undoubtedly he was not pleased with the projected move. The emperor had put under his command an imperial force of 10,000 troops headed by Dadjāzmāch Tadla of Ayba, Dadjāzmāch Walda Gabriel, and Bāshā Gabriel of Addi Abo who had already left Adwā for Karan and awaited him there.<sup>5</sup> The Rās presumably thought he could make a

---

<sup>1</sup>Genè to Robilant, 8.10.86; Giglio V, No. 257, p.359.

<sup>2</sup>The Italians enjoyed a quiet period as a result of Alulā's being in disgrace and in May 1886 Genè sent home some 2,000 troops to save them from the heat of Massawa. Popolo Romano, 1.6.87.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 2/2-13, Genè to MAE, 25.11.86.

<sup>4</sup>A. Salimbeni, "Diario", NA, 1936, p.431.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 2/2-13, Genè to MAE, 25.11.86.

better use of that power if he could lead them down to the coast. But, on the other hand, he probably felt that, by a successful march on Kassala, he might regain his master's grace. In that respect Alulā badly needed a success, and an impressive one.

Before leaving for Karan, Alulā found out that Shālaqā Ar'āyā had been in touch with Dabbab in order to persuade him to come to Yohannēs.<sup>1</sup> Alulā nominated his brother Bālambārās Tasammā over Gindā' and Asmarā and took Ar'āyā to Karan where he was put in prison.<sup>2</sup>

In the meantime, Alulā's envoys were sent to the Baria tribes informing them about the march to Kassala and ordering them to prepare cattle for the coming troops.<sup>3</sup> Alulā reached Karan on 13th November 1886, where he was awaited by the Ethiopian army and Banū 'Amir warriors led by Shaykh Mūsā al-Fīl and Shaykh 'Alī Nūrīn.<sup>4</sup> The Baria's Shaykh Arāy came there with no supplies, was well received by the Rās but was ordered to return in order to collect and bring to Kūfīt as many rifles and cattle as he could take from his followers.

Reaching Kūfīt with his army on 17th November 1886, Alulā met Shaykh Arāy awaiting him with only fifty oxen and fifteen rifles. Alulā camped with his army at the site of the previous year's battle and sent spies towards Kassala. He again sent the Baria leader to collect more cattle and arms and guide him to the local springs. On 22 November 1886 the Rās ordered his army to march some eight miles

---

<sup>1</sup>See below, p. 209

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 2/2-13, Genè to MAE, 25.11.86.

<sup>3</sup>Pollera, I Baria, pp. 50-51.

<sup>4</sup>The dates given below of Alulā's activities during the Kassala expedition are according to a report by one of the participants, Muḥammad Maḥkūmī of Harkīkū, in A.S.MAI 2/2-13, Genè to MAE, 31.12.86.

southwards to the spring of Magalo. There he camped again and the next week saw the greatest plunder in the history of the Baria tribes.<sup>1</sup> Two-thirds of the people and cattle of the Baria and Kunama north of the Gash were destroyed. On 1 December 1886 Alulā ordered his army to march back to Təgre. Again, as in the previous year, he did not see the gates of Kassala. Alulā's biographer excused his hero's failure by stating it was the emperor's order which stopped him:

"After this he went to the land of Kāsāla, and the king sent after him 3 times, saying, 'My son, return, and do not go there. If you go, you are not a doer of my will and a fulfiller of my wishes.'

Hearing this, he Alulā returned, and reached a place which they called Mägālo. He stayed there a short time, not very long, and he destroyed all the rebels and apostates of that place, and took much spoil and captured many men and women, young men and virgins; he did not leave any cattle, goats or sheep. In this majesty of appearance he returned and entered his country by another way, and arrived at the reception-room of the king."<sup>2</sup>

But this argument of Alulā's biographer cannot be accepted. Yohannes was anxiously awaiting success in Kassala. His son Rās Ar'āyā Sellāsse together with Negus Tekla Hāymānot of Godjām were facing Mahdist pressure in Gondar<sup>3</sup> and it seems that much depended on Alulā's campaign. Trying to explain Alulā's retreat, Pollera suggested that the Rās never really intended to go to Kassala but to devastate the Baria country in order to create a deserted buffer zone between the Mahdists and Ethiopia and simultaneously feed and

---

<sup>1</sup>For a colourful description, see Pollera, I Baria, pp. 50-52.

<sup>2</sup>MS. Mannawe.

<sup>3</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 5, Soumagne to MAE, 30.12.86; Also: Genè to Robilant, 17.12. 85; Giglio V, No. 272, p.373.

supply his troops in preparation for his coming anti-Italian campaign.<sup>1</sup> This can hardly be accepted. Alulā, accompanied by many devotees of Yohanns, was in no position to disobey his master. His retreat could also not be fully explained by lack of water on the route to Kassala<sup>2</sup> because, according to Shaykh Arāy's evidence, "It was unfortunately raining".<sup>3</sup> A better explanation for Alulā's return seems to be the assumption that the spies sent from Kūfīt to Kassala returned with the news that the town was fortified and ready for the invaders.

On 6 September 1886 'Uthmān Diqna had been defeated at Tamai, in the Sawākin area, by the Amrār tribesmen. Again, as in 1885, he moved to the neighbourhood of Kassala and, upon hearing the advance of Alulā, 'Uthmān entered the town and prepared it for defence.<sup>4</sup> Though so badly in need of a prestigious victory, Alulā knew that a siege of the strongly fortified town, which was surrounded by Muslim tribesmen, could only lead to his destruction. Frustrated and "in order not to return empty handed"<sup>5</sup> he destroyed the Baria, whose wavering during <sup>the</sup> pre-Kūfīt period he probably remembered.

Before ordering his army to return, Alulā was careful enough to consult with his lieutenants, who unanimously approved his decision.<sup>6</sup> Yet Alulā had good reason to be afraid of the emperor's

<sup>1</sup>Pollera, I Baria, p.54.

<sup>2</sup>As in Genè to Robilant, 17.12.86; Giglio V, No. 272, p.373.

<sup>3</sup>Pollera, I Baria, p.51.

<sup>4</sup>The Times, 26.1.87; Gleichen, p.190.

<sup>5</sup>MAE(F), Mass. 5, Soumagne to MAE, 30.12.86.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

anger, and not only because of his military failure. One of the participants in the Kassala expedition, Bāshā Gabriet of Addi Abo, sent to Yohannes complaining about Alulā's maltreatment of the Baria.<sup>1</sup> Shaykh Arāy himself followed the returning army in order to raise the matter with the emperor.<sup>2</sup> Alulā returned via Addi Abo and Shire and reached Adwā on 10 December 1886, three days after Yohannes had left for Maqalle.

November-December 1886: Further Italian advances and personal relief for Alulā

Yohannes movement from Adwā to Maqalle was a result of a deteriorating situation in the Gāllā area and on the Mahdist Mattammā front.<sup>3</sup> He was undoubtedly displeased and the Rās was probably busy looking for excuses to save his shaky position, when he learned of the new developments on the coast.

After their peaceful occupation of Zulā on 1 September 1886 the Italians exploited the opportunity of Alulā's being in the Kassala area and of Shālaqā Ar'āyā being removed from Gindā,<sup>4</sup> and, on 23 November 1886, occupied Wi'a.<sup>5</sup> For Alulā's personal position it was a well-timed relief. It finally proved to Yohannes that the Rās's accusations of the Italians were not exaggerated.

"At that time," Alulā told Salimbeni three years later,<sup>6</sup> "I was in a mission against the Muslims who threatened Keren and its territory. When I returned I heard about the occupation of Ua'a and Saati.

<sup>1</sup>Genè to Robilant, 17.12.86; Giglio V, No. 272, p.375. According to Pollera, op.cit., Bāshā Gabriet himself was very active in plundering the Baria.

<sup>2</sup>Pollera, I Baria, loc.cit.

<sup>3</sup>MAE Mass. 5, Soumagne to MAE, 30.12.86.

<sup>4</sup>According to Alulā's biographer, the Rās regretted the imprisoning of Shālaqā Ar'āyā: "Why did I put him in prison and order that his hands and feet be bound. If he had been there, the Italians would not have come to the field of Sāhaṭi and would not have made a wall there."

<sup>5</sup>This was done under the pretext of a need to protect the commercial

If we could have a dispute about Saati, we could not have it about Va'a which was undoubtedly in Imperial territory."

In late December Alulā entered the emperor's Addārash at Maqalle. Instead of having to explain his failure in Kassala, Alulā was put in charge of the future anti-Italian campaign, as described by the following passage from Yohannēs's chronicle of Aksum.<sup>1</sup>

"He [Yohannēs] said the following to Ras Alula who was his favourite, as David was the favourite of God. He [Alulā] knew what he [Yohannēs] thought and at what he pointed. He was God-loving and firm in his faith and love of Yohannēs, the Nēgusa Sion, the Nēgusa Nagast. He [Yohannēs] said to him: 'Go in your faith and you will defeat your enemies and do not hesitate.' Ras Alula said to him, 'Alright my Lord, I shall never fear the evil doer, for you are on my side.'"

Judging from subsequent events, Alulā was again nominated over all the troops then available in northern Ethiopia. His biographer described this nomination:<sup>2</sup>

"And he [Yohannēs] said to him, 'Rejoice and be glad, my son, who have been faithful over me; I appoint you over many...' He [Yohannēs] commanded the troops and said to them, 'All that he commands you, do; and that which he says to you, observe.'"

January 1887: "May I tell you the accounts of Ted'ali"<sup>3</sup>

On 5 January 1887 Rās Alulā returned to Asmarā<sup>4</sup> and on the same day, probably according to his master's instructions, warmly

---

route from Dabbab. A.S.MAI 2/2-17, Genè to MAE, 22.1.87.

<sup>6</sup>N. Corazzini, "La pace", La Tribuna, 8.6.90.

-----

<sup>1</sup>A. Ge'ez book. A chronicle of Yohannēs found in Aksum written by Abbā Hāyila Māryam. Translated by Dr. Caulk's student Tesfayohannēs Fessehaye.

<sup>2</sup>MS Mannawe.

<sup>3</sup>From a poem found by Ato Māmo Wudnah in a Ge'ez manuscript of Dabra Bizan. Ted'ali - the Ethiopian name for Dogali.

<sup>4</sup>Salimbeni, Pioniere, p.437.



received an Italian mission which was on its way to build a bridge in Godjām. On 10 January 1887 the Italians A. Salimbeni, T. Savoiroux and F. Piano, were about to leave for Adwā when Alulā had them arrested.<sup>1</sup>

Alulā's return to Asmarā, after he had been considered in Massawa as being in disgrace with Yohannes, was interpreted by the Italians as a preliminary step to an Ethiopian attack. On 6 January 1887, General Genè sent substantial reinforcements to Wi'a. On 10 January 1887, receiving a letter from Alulā which demanded that he should evacuate the place, Genè sent Italian regular troops equipped with some artillery to *replace* the irregulars at Sahāḥi.<sup>2</sup>

On 12 January 1887 Alulā led his forces down to Gindā'.<sup>3</sup> He was still unaware of the occupation of Sahāḥi by Italian troops and told his prisoners that he still hoped that the Italians would peacefully return to Massawa "where he would like them to stay".<sup>4</sup> To Genè he wrote again on the same day, asking him to stop commercial relations with the Ḥabbābs. . He concluded his short letter:

"The troops who camp at Wa'a must be cleared out by the 13 of Terr 21.1.877, those who camp at Zula must be cleared out within a month 6.2.877. If friendship is to continue you must do this. Otherwise you must know that the friendship is at end."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Salimbeni, Pioniere, p.437.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 3/2-17, Genè to MAE 22.1.87.

<sup>3</sup>Salimbeni, op.cit.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI, Eritrea II, Salimbeni to Genè 12.1.87.

<sup>5</sup>Crispi, p.15.

Alulā's insistence on the evacuation of Zulā suggests that he was still hoping for a free port to be run there by the French. In fact on 17 January 1887 Soumagne from Massawa again sent to Alulā a draft of a treaty according to which the French, once given authorisation to establish a port, would promise not to extend their possessions.<sup>1</sup> It seems also that the Greek arms traders, such as Nicola Giorgi Kaligi, who were suspected by the Italians of inciting Alulā to be uncompromising with the Italians<sup>2</sup> were also supporting the plan of a French port at Zulā.

Alulā's letter of 12 January 1887 to Genè was considered in Massawa as a most insulting ultimatum and was replied to accordingly by Genè on 15 January.<sup>3</sup> The Italian rejected the demand and concluded:

"I tell you that in order that you will know that the Italian Government respects others, but wants *to be* and must be respected *in its turn*".<sup>4</sup>

Alulā received Genè's reply together with the news about the occupation of Sahāḫī. "I told you," he addressed his prisoner Salimbeni, "to write to the General in order that he would evacuate Ua'a and instead he sent to occupy Saati."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>MAE(F), Documents Diplomatiques français, 1871-1914, Afrique 138 Aby.V., Soumagne to Alula, 17.1.87.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 2/4-32, Baldissera to M.d.G., 5.7.89.

<sup>3</sup>See text in Crispi, op.cit.

<sup>4</sup>In a meeting which took place three and a half years later Alulā explained that it was his duty "to fix time for the evacuation." "Then Count Antonelli has answered: 'This was exactly your fault. You can not say to Europeans 'Get out from there or I attack you!' This is the way to make a retreat impossible for them. They will all prefer to die than give up like that.'" N. Corrazini, "La pace", La Tribuna, 8.6.90.

<sup>5</sup>Salimbeni, op.cit.

On 16 January 1887 Alulā drafted a new letter to Genè in which he threatened to execute his prisoners, whom he accused of being spies, if the places were not evacuated.<sup>1</sup> As a reply Genè, hinting at the Rās's personal position, threatened Alulā:

"Now if you want to break the friendship which exists between us and hurt Christian and Italian brothers, you will be responsible before your king the Negus Neghest and before my king."

On the next day Genè wrote directly to Yohannes informing him "that Ras Alula is breaking our friendship", and asking <sup>for</sup> the release of the prisoners.<sup>2</sup> The Italian general was then confident that "Alula and his soldiers hesitate to attack"<sup>3</sup> but the Rās's subsequent letter of 20 January should have convinced him that Alulā meant business:

"You sent to tell me: 'You will be responsible before the Negus Negest and my king.' You are responsible. In order to avoid war you stayed in the middle of the sea like fishes. Later you came out and like rats you have dug trenches inside which you established yourselves. You who are sad for the bad fate of Salimbeni, what will happen to you and your troops?"<sup>4</sup>

According to information collected by the Italians there were two things which prevented Alulā from attacking them. The first was that Alulā was ordered by the emperor to remain passive. An Ethiopian informant alleged on 21 January 1887 that he had been told by Bālambārās

---

<sup>1</sup>Salimbeni, op.cit.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI, Eritrea II, Genè to Alula 18.1.87.

<sup>3</sup>L.V. XVII, Genè to MAE 22.1.87.

<sup>4</sup>Alula to Genè 20.1.87 in Genè to Robilant 21.1.87; Giglio VI, p.11.

Tasammā that Alulā received a letter from Yohannes saying:

"You have plundered the Baria ... Now you want to fight those who say that they are my friends. You do not have to move against them. If they advance write me about it and I shall come with my troops."<sup>1</sup>

The other reason for Alulā's hesitation, as it was regarded in Massawa, was his soldier's reluctance to fight the modern equipped Europeans. According to another piece of information, the Rās ordered his troops to march on Sahāṭi on 19th January 1887 but "all chiefs lay around him with stones on their necks ... asking him not to advance." One of the chiefs, a certain Bālabārās Wurqu said "that the Italians did no harm, and that the Ethiopians will find nothing at Sahati but lead bullets, which will kill them all."<sup>2</sup>

According to an Ethiopian writer, on 21 January Alulā received from the Italian-employed Ethiopian interpreter Petros Giyorgis a letter dated Massawa, 18 January 1887, urging him to attack the "Faranji": "Come and fight them quickly, let them perish, or else your country *will* destroyed ... Think for your country, yout Tadj and meat, moreover for your great honour."<sup>3</sup>

Two days later the Italians made a further step undoubtedly regarded by the Rās as an aggressive one. Kefle 'eyāsus, Alulā's old rival, joined their forces and was stationed with some one hundred followers at Otumlo.<sup>4</sup> This, together with the reception of Soumagne's renewed proposals sent to him on 17 January 1887,<sup>5</sup> was

---

<sup>1</sup>Genè to Robilant 21.10.87; Giglio VI, No. 6, p.10.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Garima Taffere, loc.cit.

<sup>4</sup>Fuglisi, p.174.

<sup>5</sup>See above, p.184.

probably what convinced Alulā to take the initiative. On 23 January 1887 he wrote to the emperor that he was going to attack Sahāṭi,<sup>1</sup> and according to the memoirs of an old Eritrean who claimed to have participated as a boy in the forthcoming battle, he addressed his troops encouraging them to fight the better-armed Italians.<sup>2</sup> The events of the 25 and 26 January 1887 are detailed fully in Italian accounts.<sup>3</sup> On 25 January 1887 Alulā led a direct attack on the fortified camp of Sahāṭi in which hundreds of Ethiopians were massacred by the cannons' fire and only four Italians were injured. The next day Alulā ambushed at Dogali a battalion consisting of five hundred Italian troops which was on its way to reinforce Sahāṭi. The Italians, surrounded by thousands of Ethiopians, fought heroically, but were almost totally massacred. Only eighty wounded troops managed to escape the notice of the Ethiopians and were eventually rescued.

Alulā's biographer recorded it with the following lines:

"He rose up and travelled by night, while an angel led him. Fear did not enter his heart, because our Lady had made the matter certain for Ras Alula, from the beginning to the end. He prayed and besought God ... And further he said, 'why does the powerful Italian boast in his evil, and rebel all the time?' ... After he had finished his prayer, he went to the place of battle shaking like a calf filled with its mother's milk, and like a bridegroom going to the wedding. ... When he went, many powerful men followed him, and passed him, and waited in ambush on a difficult path and a

---

<sup>1</sup>According to Savoiroux as told to the correspondents of "Riforma". See Antona Traversi, p.69.

<sup>2</sup>Ishaq Yosef, op.cit., chapter 12.

<sup>3</sup>See among others a long list of sources in the entry "Dogali" in the Enciclopedia Italiana.

narrow pass. They surrounded them from one evening till the next, and in the morning they joined battle. When Ras Alulā heard the battles and the sound of battle, he drew near and arrived, while the Holy Spirit, which rested on him encouraged him. And when his powerful men - namely Lejj Fānja Tāsāmma Šarīf, Basa Mārša, Basa Tālla Wāddi, Basa Fānja, Basa Tālla Addi Mellalē, Basa Dāsta, Abba Ga'i - when they saw him, they were strengthened and given power in the time of battle, and they did not turn their faces from side to side, for Ras Alula, a man resolute, powerful and warlike, was among them. They made a great slaughter, and many of the troops died."<sup>1</sup>

#### Dogali - Alulā's own initiative

It is beyond any doubt that Alulā's military campaign of 25 and 26 January was not directly ordered by Yohannes. In fact, on 26 January Yohannes was still hoping for a peaceful solution, as he then wrote from Maqalle to Genè:

"In the first place you took Ua'a; and now you have also come to Saati to erect fortress... Is not this country mine? ... Evacuate my country...."<sup>2</sup>

Yet, three years after Dogali, when Rās Alulā had the chance to discuss the subject with some Italian officials, he spoke as if he was convinced that he had been following his master's instructions:

"In any case, he told Salimbeni and Antonelli on 17 May 1890, "you have to pardon me. Before attacking I asked instructions from the Emperor, and such were the orders. Being a soldier I executed them."<sup>3</sup>

The above quoted passage from Yohannes's Tarik<sup>4</sup> leaves, too, the firm impression that Alulā was authorised to attack. Count Antonelli, the strongest supporter of a pro-Shoan policy, and therefore interested

---

<sup>1</sup>MSS. Mannawe.

<sup>2</sup>Giovanni to Genè, 26.1.87, Giglio VI, No. 14, Allegato 3, p.30.

<sup>3</sup>N. Corazzini, "La Pace", La Tribuna, 8.7.90.

<sup>4</sup>See above, p. 182.

in incriminating the Tigrean emperor for what was regarded by the Italians as a horrible crime, suggested the Rās was acting on Yohannes's orders.<sup>1</sup>

The Mannawe Ge'ez manuscript of Alulā's history gives no substantial new evidence regarding that question. The biographer wrote nothing about Yohannes and Alulā planning an anti-Italian campaign during their meeting of December 1886. He merely hints that, on his way to Asmarā, visiting Aksum, Alulā dreamt about his future victory over "the pagans" and subsequently attacked them at Sahāṭi and Dogali.

It seems that Yohannes's letter to Victoria of 9 March 1887 sheds more light on that question:

"... But when at last he ~~the~~ The Italians came where the Egyptians had been Sahāṭi he said: 'We shall occupy this'. Then I said, 'What have you to do with my country?' Therefore, they came by force and made in two places forts, and stopped there. Rās Alulā went down to inquire 'What business have you to do with other people's country? The Italian chief gave an order to prepare to meet him, and fought with him."<sup>2</sup>

The Emperor, who was most irritated about the Italian activities, sent his most uncompromising general at the head of a large army "to inquire" or rather threaten those whom he, Yohannes, regarded as invaders. For two weeks Alulā was making "inquiries" and in his own diplomatic style tried to reach a peaceful solution. Having failed to do so, Alulā <sup>Probably</sup> thought that he had the option to start a war. Actually, he had an urgent need of a spectacular victory to reestablish his prestige and had reason to believe that his military success would be followed by a political one. His

<sup>1</sup>Antonelli in Camera dei Deputati, 5.5.91, vide: Discussione sull' Africa, p.5. Antonelli to MAE, 19.9.87; Giglio VI, No. 209, p.240.

<sup>2</sup>FO 95/748, Yohannes to Victoria, Yakatit 30th, 1879 E.C. 9.3.87.

previous campaign in that area, his annihilation of the Egyptian Company at Sahāṭi in late October 1883 resulted in the arrival of the Hewett Mission. Destruction of the Italians at Sahāṭi and their expulsion from Zulā might well result, Alulā may have thought, in signing a favourable treaty with the French. The fact that Alulā slaughtered European troops as he had the Egyptians and other local rivals was probably the reason for Yohannes's reluctance to back his general. It seems that Yohannes wanted Alulā to expel the Italians from the occupied territories but he could not guess that Alulā would do this in such a bloody battle.

\*

\*   \*   \*

The battle of Dogali was undoubtedly one of the most important events in the history of Ethiopia in the late 19th century. It created open enmity between the Tigrean emperor and the Italians and this contributed significantly to the rise of the Shoan hegemony over the Empire.

The personality of Rās Alulā, whose activities were a main factor in the history of Ethiopia during the coming years, became identified with that bloody event. This identification, as will be described below, was by itself an important factor in that history.



L. 1887: THE END OF ALULĀ'S GOVERNMENT  
IN THE MARAB MƏLLASH

February-March 1887: Alulā condemned for Dogali but needed  
on the threatened frontier

After Dogali Alulā did not proceed as was expected, towards Massawa. This was attributed by the Italians to what were considered to be his great losses at Dogali.<sup>1</sup> In fact, it appears as if the Rās was to await his master's approval of his campaign, which he himself had initiated, and further instructions. From Dogali Alulā sent emissaries to Yohannēs, who was in Maqalle, and to Karan to release Shālaqā Ar'āyā,<sup>2</sup> whose arrest had proved to be such a mistake. Other emissaries of Alulā were sent to Menilek of Shoa carrying letters in which the Italian defeat was colourfully described.<sup>3</sup> On 29 January he passed through Gindā', leaving there Bālabārās Tassamā, and entered Asmarā on 31 January 1887.<sup>4</sup>

According to Salimbeni, Alulā's prisoner, the Rās's letter to the emperor contained an urgent petition to send him reinforcements in order to resume his march to the coast. Yohannēs's reply, according to the Italian prisoner, reached Alulā while he was administering justice in public. "Reading the message the Ras's face darkened, he suspended the tribunal and returning to his hut he did not want to eat".<sup>5</sup> Reputedly the letter contained the

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI Eritrea II, Genè to MAE 4.2.87. But Antona-Traversi suggested that the number of Alulā's losses was only 730. C. Antona-Traversi, Sahati e Dogali, Rome 1887, p.54.

<sup>2</sup>Salimbeni, "Pioniere", Genè to MAE, 14.2.87. LV, XVII. See above, p.178.

<sup>3</sup>Antonelli to MAE 2.4.87; LV, XV, C. Zaghi, Le origini della Colonia Eritrea, Bologna 1934, p.145.

<sup>4</sup>Salimbeni, "Pioniere"; Antona-Traversi, p.50.

<sup>5</sup>Salimbeni, op.cit.

following *passage*:

"Who gave you permission to go and make a war there?  
Those soldiers are not yours but mine; I shall cut  
off your right hand."<sup>1</sup>

Salimbeni testified that Alulā did not give up his aggressive ideas and said that during the next month he sent many petitions to his master urging him to reinforce him and let him resume hostilities.<sup>2</sup>

Probably following the emperor's instructions, Alulā resumed the correspondence with Genè, emphasizing an interest and will for peace, but with the Italians remaining in Massawa alone.<sup>3</sup> Genè's reply of 5 February was to accept Alulā's call for peace and to demand the release of the prisoners.<sup>4</sup>

But the Rās had his reasons not to be in a hurry about freeing the hostages he kept. He wanted to enforce the fulfilment of Article V of the Hewett Treaty and make the Italians extradite Kefle Iyāsus, Dabbab and some of the Assāwurṭa leaders whom he had managed to mobilise before Dogali. Those, supplied by Alulā with a few hundred rifles, deserted during the battle.<sup>5</sup> Another reason for not being in a hurry about the hostages was the danger of an Italian counter attack. Alulā was also doing his best to gain time in order to persuade his master to take the military initiative.

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid. The two other Italian prisoners, Piano and Savoiroux, also testified that Yohannes condemned Alulā's initiative. See: A.S.MAI, Eritrea II, 1887, Verbal note by Piano, 8.3.87; FO 403/90, Savile to Salisbury, 6.10.87. See also Puglisi, p.14.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 3/2-15, Salimbeni to the editor of Gazzetta Piemontese, 7.5.88.

<sup>3</sup>Alula to Genè, 2.2.87, LV XVII. Also Giglio VI, No.14, Allegoto 4, p.30.

<sup>4</sup>LV XVII, Giglio VI, p.31.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 3/2-16, Genè to MAE 27.2.84.

During the month of February and early March Alulā negotiated with Genè.<sup>1</sup> The Italian warned Kefle Iyāsus and sent him from Massawa to Halhal and promised him a monthly payment of 1,000 Thalers.<sup>2</sup> In early March however he sent the eight Assāwurṭa leaders and their rifles to Asmarā.<sup>3</sup> Piano and Salimbeni were subsequently released on 11 March 1887 but Souvoiroux was kept in Asmarā,<sup>4</sup> undoubtedly as agreed by the emperor.

According to Salimbeni it was around the 20 February 1887 that the emperor, though still disapproving of Alulā's initiative in Dogali, consented to reinforce his general with more troops. But it was only as a defensive measure.<sup>5</sup> Expecting an Italian punitive campaign, Yohannes could not punish the general upon whose military reputation he had to rely. In late March he summoned Alulā to Maqalle<sup>6</sup> and it was rumoured that he again appointed him as "a governor of all the Taccazze country as far as the Red Sea, excepting the province of Makkale".<sup>7</sup> In fact, Alulā's power was considerably restrained by the emperor. He had to return to Asmarā together with the loyal and calm Rās Hagos whom Yohannes appointed as "a companion and a watchman" to Alulā.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Vide A.S.MAI Eritrea II, Alula to Genè, 14.2.87, 25.2.87; Salimbeni, "Pioniere".

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI, "Collection Vitale", Saletta to M.d.G., 7.5.87.

<sup>3</sup>The tribesmen were immediately released by Alulā, The Times, 22.3.87.

<sup>4</sup>La Tribuna, 16.3.87.

<sup>5</sup>Salimbeni to editor of GP., loc.cit.

<sup>6</sup>A.S.MAI 3/2-15, Genè to MAE, 26.3.87.

<sup>7</sup>La Tribuna, 22.5.87; The Times, 23.5.87.

<sup>8</sup>De Simone to Crispi, 4.1.88, quotes Antonelli's letter of 9.12.87, Giglio VI, No. 257, p.286; FO 403/91, Portal to Baring 1.1.88; Antonelli to MAE, 19.12.87, LV XVII.

Repercussions in Europe to Dogali

The defeat of the Italian troops at Dogali was a terrible blow to the prestige of the Italian army and created in Italy a great sadness and feeling of revenge. It was followed by a governmental crisis and changes in the leadership of the Massawa authorities. The parliament voted finance for a *large* scale punitive mission and war in the near future seemed to be inevitable. Rās Alulā, hitherto regarded by officials and the press as a leader of "forty thieves"<sup>1</sup> was described as a monstrous African, *whose destruction* became almost a national objective.<sup>2</sup>

The immediate diplomatic result of Dogali was the French decision to call home Soumagne with whom Alulā tried to resume the correspondence regarding their projected treaty. It was decided in Paris to cancel any further steps towards signing such a document with Ethiopia.<sup>3</sup> In Britain, to whom Yohannes appealed for mediation, a possible Ethiopian-Italian war was regarded as a negative development. The Manchester Guardian of 2 February 1887 analysed in its leader:

"... It is not yet clear whether the KING is responsible for what has happened, or whether RAS ALULA has struck that blow on his own account. We hope the latter. A war between Italy and Abyssinia could lead to nothing..."<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Harrison Smith, in a memorandum written on the same 2 February 1887, expressed what later became the governmental opinion:

---

<sup>1</sup>La Tribuna, 24.1.87.

<sup>2</sup>For the image of Rās Alulā in Italy, see the play of A. Castelleto, La Figlia di Ras Alula, Milano 1888. See English translation in Ethiopia Observer, 1972, No. 3, and a short article there by R. Pankhurst.

<sup>3</sup>Documents Diplomatiques français, 138, Flourens to D'Aunay, 19.2.87, and Alula to Soumagne, 5.3.87.

<sup>4</sup>The Manchester Guardian, 2.2.87.

"The attack referred to may have been over-precipitate action on the part of Ras Alula, in which case there is yet time to make honourable terms with the king, and humble Mr. Ras Alula as well, for the King will do that by shutting him up in an 'Amba', or punishing him with death."<sup>1</sup>

April-August 1887: Religious policy in the threatened

Marab Mellash

Another immediate consequence of the Dogali affair was the beginning of the collapse of Alulā's regime in the Marab Mellāsh. Facing the threat of Italian retaliation, Alulā himself began to intimidate the Muslim population of Hamāsen and Sarāya, hitherto the backbone of his commercial activities. The Muslims of Hamāsen and particularly of Asmarā suffered heavily from the deterioration of commerce following the Dogali clash, especially after 1 May 1887, when Alulā's prohibition of trade with Massawa,<sup>2</sup> was re-declared by a complete blockade / Saletta, newly promoted to be Italian C.-in-C.<sup>3</sup> On 7 April 1887 Alulā issued an Awādj according to which the Muslims of Hamāsen (or rather those who were the Asmarā based traders) were concentrated in two places outside the province where their activities were strictly controlled.<sup>4</sup>

The stoppage of the trade, followed by the (temporary) removal from Asmarā of the Muslim traders, was virtually a mortal blow to the economic basis of Alulā's regime in the Marab Mellāsh. Alulā's switch to an anti-Muslim policy could be effective only in the area directly controlled by his government. As for the peripheral tribes, it looks as if the Italians gained the upper hand.

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 403/89, Memorandum by Mr. Harrison Smith 2.2.87.

<sup>2</sup>The Times, 23.5.87; A.S.MAI "Vitale", "Nota del segretario per gli affari indigeni", 18.4.87.

<sup>3</sup>Tribuna, 3.5.87.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI, "Vitale", "Nota del segretario per gli affari indigeni", 18.4.87.

The tightening of the cooperation with these tribes was suggested by General Genè immediately after Dogali.<sup>1</sup> Alulā's new anti-Muslim policy and the weakness of the Mahdiyya in that area after Kūfīt contributed greatly to the Italian success among those tribes.

In early May 1887, immediately after an official state of war was declared by Saletta, the Italian-Ḥabbāb relations were renewed.<sup>2</sup> "The chiefs of the tribes of the Beni Amer" it was reported by a British observer,<sup>4</sup> "seem disposed to make common cause with Italy." The Assāwurṭa and Dabbab were also reported to be considered as "allies and friends" of the Massawa authorities.<sup>5</sup> Alulā's reaction was to try and adopt a system of hostages to be captured from those tribes,<sup>6</sup> but he apparently met no success.

Simultaneously with the confrontation with his own Muslim population, Alulā seemed to be suspicious of a possible cooperation between the Italians and the French Catholic missionaries, a suspicion which was possibly strengthened following the French diplomatic withdrawal.

During the months of May-August 1887 the French Father Paillard mediated between Alulā and the Italians for the release of Savoiroux. Alulā agreed to exchange the prisoner for the sum of 15,000 Thalers

---

<sup>1</sup>Genè to Robilant, 29.1.87, IX XVII, Giglio, VI, No. 11, p.23.

<sup>2</sup>La Tribuna, 9.5.87.

<sup>3</sup>Saletta to M.d.G., 9.7.87; LV XVII.

<sup>4</sup>FO 403/89, Kennedy to Salisbury, 19.6.87.

<sup>5</sup>Saletta to Bertolè-viale, 17.8.87; Giglio VI, No. 174, p.208.

<sup>6</sup>Storia Militare, p.193.

and the release of the head of the Ethiopian convent in Jerusalem, Walda Samāyāt,<sup>1</sup> who was detained on his way back to Ethiopia. Alulā also demanded that Father Coulbeaux would guarantee the exact execution of the deal. On 17 August 1887 Savoiroux was liberated and the money transferred to Alulā but not in the currency accepted in Ethiopia. Walda Samāyāt was not permitted to go into Ethiopia and had to return to Jerusalem. Father Coulbeaux was subsequently arrested by Alulā and was kept in prison for a period of two months. Alulā, who had already accused the Catholic missionaries of spying and being agents of the Italians,<sup>2</sup> on 23 August 1887,

"with 500 soldiers encircled the mission of Chern, chained 6 native priests 40 students and 13 members of the sect and forced them to march, chained in couples, to Asmara."<sup>3</sup>

Father Picard, the head of the mission, reported that "Alula said that Yohannes had ordered him to bring all of us to Asmara" where he was told to stop his missionary activities.<sup>4</sup> Judging from the following passage from the Mannawe MS the action against the mission of Keren was not a unique episode.

"He Alulā said to Abba Täklä Maryam ān Ethiopian priest mentioned many times in the manuscript as being an adviser of the Rās "... Remember me, father, in your holy prayer, and give me permission that there be an assembly in this place and settlement; because there are wicked priests who divide the Word Christ from his Father and from the Holy Spirit, in honour and in form, in wish and in volition...."

---

<sup>1</sup>See above, p. 159.

<sup>2</sup>A. Eshete, La Mission catholique Lazariste en Ethiopie, Institut d'Historie.. Universite d'Aix-en-Provence, Etudes et Documents No. 2 (1970-1971), Available at IES, p.84, quotes Mercinier to d'Anay, 23.4.87.

<sup>3</sup>Da <sup>N</sup>Membro, p.18.

<sup>4</sup>MAE(F) Mass. 5, MAE to Mercinier, 9.9.87.

"... They had an assembly, and he set up for them a quotation from the books, which says, 'And as the Father has life, so to the Son he gave life, in order that life might be with him.' There was this and more like it. The men of Sārāyē and Hamasen who were assembled in that assembly lacked anything to say, and were troubled on that day.... The faith was corrected and they worshipped the Word."<sup>1</sup>

November-December 1887: British mediation: An effort to remove Alulā in order to prevent a war of revenge

After Dogali the Italians evacuated Sahāṭi and Arāfali and actually remained in Massawa. For Yohannes this could be a satisfactory state of affairs as he was reported to have written to Menilek:

"For my part, if the Italian government does not come to take possession of my country and allows the free passage of goods at Massawa, I am disposed to make peace and come to an agreement."<sup>2</sup>

Alulā, who was most active in preparing his province for a defensive war, and annoyed over Italian activities among the peripheral Muslim tribes, was also reported as continuing to seek for peace in such terms. As quoted by Savoiroux, he said on 17 August 1887 "that he was most ready to make peace, to forget the past and ask you [Saletta] to open the roads to commerce and that he would never cause any more troubles to the Italians".<sup>3</sup>

But the cry for revenge for Dogali was growing in Italy during 1887. On 14 July 1887 the "Corpo speciale d'Africa" was organised by General Saletta to be reinforced during October and November

---

<sup>1</sup>MS Mannawe.

<sup>2</sup>Yohannes to Menelik 21.11.87 in A.S.MAI 36/4-42.

<sup>3</sup>Savoiroux to Saletta 22.8.87; Giglio VI, no. 173, p.207.



and numbered some 20,000 troops with thirty-eight pieces of artillery.

It was clear, however, in London and to some parts of the Italian public opinion that no strategical or political benefit could be derived from such an expedition,<sup>1</sup> which was purposely aimed at restoring the honour of the Italian army and taking revenge on those responsible for Dogali.

In Britain an Italian-Ethiopian war was regarded as something to be avoided and when, on 14 July 1887, Yohannes's letter of 9 March 1887 was received in England, his request for further explanations on the British attitude to the Italian presence in Massawa was rightly interpreted as a call for mediation.<sup>2</sup> This was accepted by Crispi for reasons which had nothing to do with Ethiopia.

The British Foreign *office*, "wishing to do all that is possible for King John without, however, in any way giving umbrage to the Italian government"<sup>3</sup> decided to send a special envoy, G.L. Portal, to the emperor carrying the Italian conditions for peace. According to these terms Yohannes had to express his regret "for the unjust attack" and to recognise Sahaḥi and Wi'ā as "definitely Italian territory" with Gindā' as the Ethiopian frontier town. The Assāwurḥa and Ḥabbāb were to be put under Italian protection and "the region of Sanhit" to be occupied by the Italians. "A treaty of Peace, Amity and Commerce" was then to be signed between Italy

---

<sup>1</sup>See FO 403/90, Savile to Salisbury 2.11.87.

<sup>2</sup>See FO 403/90, Salisbury to Kennedy 2.8.87.

<sup>3</sup>The Times, 20.4.87.

and Abyssinia.<sup>1</sup>

Though not included in these written conditions, the removal, at least, of Rās Alulā from the political scene, as had been suggested by Harrison Smith, was clearly a main objective of Portal's mission. This policy was more enthusiastically adopted by Portal after he was told by General Saletta that "He Saletta thinks that Italy should be amply satisfied by cession of Sahati and Oua and removal of Ras Alula from this district".<sup>2</sup> This was fully supported by Baring, who added: "I am of opinion that these conditions could be obtained. The last one may be worked by urging that Ras Alula command an army for Sennar."<sup>3</sup>

As it was impossible to travel to meet the emperor, then in Debra Tābor, without crossing Alulā's territory, it was decided by Portal, in spite of opposing Italian advice,<sup>4</sup> to take the risk and meet the Rās on his way. On 30 October 1887 he sent for Alulā, then camping in Gurā "threatening the Assaurta"<sup>5</sup> and notified him about his mission.<sup>6</sup> On 4 November 1887 Alulā replied, calling for peace, according to the spirit of the Hewett Treaty.

"We have no conflict between our two governments.  
What causes enmity between us, traders having been

<sup>1</sup>FO 403/90, Salisbury to Baring 31.10.87.

<sup>2</sup>Portal to Baring in FO 403/90; Baring to Salisbury 1.11.87.

<sup>3</sup>FO 403/90, Baring to Salisbury 1.11.87.

<sup>4</sup>FO 403/90, Salisbury to Savile 21.11.87.

<sup>5</sup>Popolo Romano, 1.11.87.

<sup>6</sup>FO 403/90, Crispi to Catalani, 12.11.87.

impeded, is on account of this rebel called Dabbab, ... let it be that you seize him in accordance with our treaty [Hewett Treaty] and our friendship. It is Dabbab who has involved us in conflict with the Italians. I mean that, if the rebel who stands between the two governments were to be eliminated, it is my contention that the friendship between the governments would be strong and traders would be able to trade as usual. But my saying this is not in the nature of a command but is in view of our friendship."<sup>1</sup>

As he had told Savoiroux ten weeks earlier, Alulā again expressed his wish for peace, demanding only the extradition of Dabbab. Dabbab, already in closer relations with Saletta since August,<sup>2</sup> was now leading quite a substantial force of 1,900 armed followers<sup>3</sup> and was reported to be constantly raiding Ethiopian territories, mainly in the Assāwurṣa and Gindā' regions.<sup>4</sup> But Portal was *probably* led astray by his interpreter,<sup>5</sup> who for some unknown reason, was interested in jeopardising any chance of understanding between Alulā and Portal. Subsequently, Portal's understanding of the letter was as follows:

"The Ras said that he would receive me at Asmara and begged me to come on to him at once. So far the letter was civil, but the latter part of it consisted entirely of violent abuse of the Italians, which was less encouraging."<sup>6</sup>

Thus, when the Rās and the envoy met in Asmarā on 11 November 1887 Portal was convinced that Alulā's policy was "war at any price"<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> E. Ullendorff, "Some early Amharic Letters", BSOAS, vol. XXXV, part 2, 1972, pp. 250, 251.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 196.

<sup>3</sup> B. Melli, L'Eritrea, Milano 1902, p.19.

<sup>4</sup> The Times, 13.12.87, 19.12.87.

<sup>5</sup> See FO 403/91, Portal to Baring 6.1.88.

<sup>6</sup> Portal, p.66.

<sup>7</sup> Portal, p.85.

and, as he later analysed in his letter to Baring.<sup>1</sup>

"Ras Alula is determined to do everything in his power to bring about a war with Italy. He alone is responsible for the massacre of Dogali. A peace with Italy would imply censure of his action on that occasion, and would entail his downfall; he has already many enemies among the King's immediate followers, and, indeed, throughout the country, and it is only by achieving some brilliant military success that he can hope to triumph over them all, and to raise himself to the level of the great Chiefs of the Abyssinian Empire."

In their meeting Portal avoided telling Alulā what was the aim of his mission, "as it was easy to see that the acceptance by King John of the Italian terms ... would probably lead to his Alulā's downfall, or at least to his removal to another province."<sup>2</sup>

But Alulā was undoubtedly aware of the significance of Portal's mission and even was informed about the Italian's territorial demands, which he most emphatically denied.

"The Ras," Portal reported, "proceeded to speak with great excitement" and said that the "Italians should come to Sahati only if he could go as Governor to Rome; that he had beaten them once, and if they advanced he would beat them again."<sup>3</sup>

On 12 November 1887 Alulā sent emissaries to the emperor<sup>4</sup> who in the meantime had left Dabra Tābor to march to Ashange. He did not let Portal and his retinue proceed inland before the 19th November 1887, when he received Yohannes's reply instructing him to do so. It looks as if Alulā was playing the cards slowly in order to gain time.

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 403/91, Portal to Baring, 1.1.88. Also Portal, p.85.

<sup>2</sup>Portal, pp. 80, 81; also FO 403/91, Portal to Baring, 1.1.88.

<sup>3</sup>Portal, p.81.

<sup>4</sup>FO 403/90, Salisbury to Savile, 21.11.87.

The Italian expedition was already concentrated on the coast, anxious to march, and any delay could only serve the Ethiopian cause. He also needed time to enable the emperor to reach Ashange from Dabra Tabor and to supply him with more evidence about Italian aggression before his own fate might be decided between Yohannes and Portal.

It was only on 7 December 1887, a week after Portal was supposed to finish his mission,<sup>1</sup> and, if unsuccessful, let the Italians start their campaign, that Portal was received by Yohannes in Ashange. He presented the emperor with introductory letters from Victoria and Salisbury and a written document that he himself had drafted which strictly distinguished between the offender and the friend:

"Her Majesty Queen Victoria, whilst deeply regretting the massacre of 450 Italians committed by Ras Alula in January last, is very sorry to see that her friend, His Majesty King John, is in a state of war with the King of Italy."<sup>2</sup>

And the document continued with the above-mentioned Italian conditions for peace. The emperor's reply was most bitter and he rejected the conditions with the following words:

"I did not give them Massowah; England gave it to the Italians, but I will not give them an inch of land. If they cannot live there without Sahati, let them go; and as for Senhit, it is mentioned in the Treaty, and England cannot ask me to give it up."<sup>3</sup>

After seeing that the emperor was so uncompromising about the written conditions, Portal appealed to Yohannes about the unwritten one:

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 407/90, Salisbury to Baring, 31.10.87.

<sup>2</sup>Portal, p.167.

<sup>3</sup>Portal, p.158.

"I then remarked that the whole population of ... the civilized world, had been surprised and made indignant by the news of the massacre at Dogali ... I even went so far as to hint that I thought - though I added that I was not authorised to say so - that if Ras Alula were appointed to some other province not on the frontier, some of the difficulties in the way of peace might, perhaps, be removed. ... His Majesty then continued: 'Ras Alula did no wrong; the Italians came into the province under his governorship, and he fought them, just as you would fight the Abyssinians if they came into England.'"<sup>1</sup>

Portal's mission was a failure. His presentation of the Italian conditions was too one-sided and only persuaded Yohannes that Alulā was right when reporting about the aggressive plans.<sup>2</sup> Such territorial demands, and the request to remove his best general, while the Italian expedition concentrated on the coast, amounted to an ultimatum which the Ethiopians, *no more than* the Europeans, could accept. The only achievement of his mission was to delay the hostilities.<sup>3</sup>

On 23 December 1887 Portal passed through Asmara<sup>4</sup> carrying Yohannes's letter to Victoria in which the emperor blamed the Italians for the developments leading to Dogali.

"If your wish were to make peace between us," Yohannes concluded, "it should be when they are in their country and I in mine. But now on both sides the horses are bridled and the swords are drawn; my soldiers like the sand, are ready with their spears. The Italians desire war, but the strength is in Jesus Christ. Let them do as they will, so long as I live I will not hide myself from them in a hole."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Portal, pp. 159, 160.

<sup>2</sup>Alulā wrote to Yohannes that the Italians were actually advancing. FO 403/90, Portal to Baring, 25.12.87. Portal, pp. 161, 162.

<sup>3</sup>See M. Perham, The Government of Ethiopia, London 1969, p.54.

<sup>4</sup>Portal, p.217.

<sup>5</sup>Yohannes to Victoria, 12.12.87 in FO 95/748; also Portal, pp. 172-174.

December 1887-February 1888: Alulā persuades Yohannes to  
fight the Italians

"Alulā Abbā Naggā go soon to Massawa,  
I do not like people beyond the sea.  
Bad weeds grew in lowland Massawa  
Get rid of it before it is multiplied."<sup>1</sup>

While Portal was still with the emperor at Ashange, General San Marzano assumed the command over the Italian punitive mission which numbered 20,000 troops and was concentrated at Massawa. Headed by four more generals, the expeditionary force was occupied in entrenching and securing the positions around Massawa, and soon moved inland. By the beginning of January 1888, the 1st and 2nd Brigades commanded by the Generals Gené and Cagni were encamped in the neighbourhood of Dogali.<sup>2</sup>

Alulā's emissaries to Yohannes, reporting on the preparations for these advances, had arrived at Ashange while the emperor was still with the British envoy. According to Portal, Alulā's message contained a false description of a new Italian aggression and he attributed to it the emperor's refusal to come to terms.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the previous correspondence between Yohannes and Menilek clearly indicates that the emperor would not comply with Portal's terms.<sup>4</sup>

The biographer of Alulā described Alulā's message as a prayer to God made at the king's side:

---

<sup>1</sup>A song from an Amharic calendar book, Qēdus Abrehā, Addis Ababa 1963 E.C.

<sup>2</sup>For a good and detailed account, see WO/33/55 A322, "Eritrea Report".

<sup>3</sup>FO 403/90, Portal to Baring, 25.12.87. Portal, pp. 161, 162.

<sup>4</sup>Yohannes to Menilek, 21.11.87, A.S.MAI 36/4-42, quoted by Caulk, p.232. Also in LV, XV.

"Rise up, O Lord, from your resting place and from the Ark of your sanctuary. For behold, our foes and enemies have exulted and have heaped pride upon us, and surrounded the land of Hamāsen. For they do not know that which the book says, 'Do not be proud and do not shout in houses'.

The king hearing this word, was angry. 'How has Satan filled the heart, and how have you dared to come against me?' And the Italian rose up and went to the land of Hamasen."<sup>1</sup>

Threatened by an Italian army and feeling deserted by British diplomacy Yohannes fully responded to Alulā's call for a national war.

"The whole country is under arms," Portal described the scenes he saw on his way back, "very large armies are advancing towards the frontiers."<sup>2</sup>

By Portal's own account of the Ethiopian mobilised army, Rās Alulā had 16,000 men at Asmarā, mostly armed with rifles. At Karan, Rās Hagos had a further 20,000 men, again mostly rifle men. Rās Mikā'el, also in the north at Agulā, had 25,000 men, largely Gāllā horsemen. The emperor had an Imperial Guard of some 5,000 men, while his nephew Mangashā's force was about the same size. Rās Hāyla Māryām had over 16,000 men who were on their way from Wādīlā to join Yohannes at his camp, and Rās Ar'āyā Sellāsse's army of 40,000 was concentrating near Adwā.<sup>3</sup>

From a strategical point of view the emperor's decision to concentrate such a massive army at the Italian front was not an easy one. Mahdist pressure was growing on the Sudanese frontier<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>MS Mannawe.

<sup>2</sup>FO 403/90, Portal to Baring, 25.12.87.

<sup>3</sup>PP.C. 5431, Enclosure 4 in No. 65; Portal, op.cit., pp. 256-261.

<sup>4</sup>See below, p. 210.



where Negus Takla Hāymānot was ordered to face this threat alone. Negus Menilek, already suspected of non-cooperatin by the emperor,<sup>1</sup> was ordered by him to go to Boru Medā to guard the Wallo and assure communications in the rear while the army of Wallo Gāllā, under Rās Mikā'el who was considered loyal, was marching to the aid of Alulā. In Asmarā, Alulā was reported to be making efforts to prepare supplies for those huge armies. The people of the Marab Mellāsh were ordered to concentrate their cattle at Asmarā<sup>2</sup> and Muslim inhabitants were told to surrender their arms.<sup>3</sup> In early January 1888 Yohannes was in Adwā and constantly in touch with Alulā.<sup>4</sup> But when everything seemed to be ready for the anti-Italian campaign alarming news reached the emperor in the Tigrean capital. The Mahdist advance into Amhara under Abū 'Anja seemed to be much more serious than expected. Simultaneously, well established rumours about Menilek's rebellious intentions were constantly being spread.<sup>5</sup> On 16 January, Alulā and Hagos were therefore summoned to Adwā to be consulted by the emperor.<sup>6</sup> Spies returning to Massawa from the Tigrean capital reported that Yohannes was extremely angry with Alulā, whom he now blamed as leading him to be thus caught

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI, "Diarii Informazioni" 1888, 24.1.88. The "Diarii Informazioni" are two files kept in A.S.MAI which contain the information received from native spies returning from Ethiopian territory throughout 1888 and 1889. The file "Diarii Informazioni" 1888 is kept in "Collezione Vitale" and contains mainly the summarised reports. The "Diarii Informazioni" 1889 is kept in "Archivio Eritrea" No. 109 and contains many original reports. D.I.7

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 8.1.88, 9.1.88. San Marzano to M.d.G., 20.12.87, IV. XVII.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 23.1.88.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 9.1.88.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 24.1.88, Informant: Adām; 25.1.88, 30.1.88, 8.2.88.

<sup>6</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 16.1.88, 24.1.88. Also FO 403/91, Kennedy to Salisbury, 26.1.88.

between so many enemies.<sup>1</sup> The emperor seemed to be hesitant about his next move and it was reported that he intended to leave the Italian front and march towards Menilek taking Alulā with him.<sup>2</sup> But it looks as if Yohannes was again persuaded by Alulā to remain and face the Italian threat. He was reported to have nominated Rās Mikā'el over Akalla Guzāy, reinforcing him with Bajerond Lawte and Rās Hāyla Māryām, and Rās Hagos over Sarāya, both to be under the command of Alulā.<sup>3</sup>

In late February Alulā returned to Asmarā to face the Italians, who in the meantime had reoccupied Dogali constructing a railway on their way to Saḥāṭi,<sup>4</sup> which they heavily fortified with artillery.<sup>5</sup>

February 1888: Dabbab's return to the Ethiopian camp

But the Italians' plan suffered a heavy blow in late February. Dabbab Ar'āyā, who served as their commander of the irregular troops and adviser, defected to the Ethiopian camp on 22 February 1888.<sup>6</sup> According to Lamlam it was his father, Rās Ar'āyā Demṣu who addressed him from Adwā:

a

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 2.2.88. Evidence collected among Alulā's troops in Gindā'.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 30.1.88.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 3.2.88, 8.2.88.

<sup>4</sup>See a long report by Lt. Col. Slade in FO 403/91, Savile to Salisbury, 12.1.88.

<sup>5</sup>For a detailed account of this operation to re-occupy Saḥāṭi, see: Relazione A.S.E. Il Minisero Della Guerra sulla Operazione Militare eseguita Nell' Inverno Del 1887-88 per la Rioccupazione di Saati. This is based on an Extract from the Rivista Militare Italiana, 1888. See also: "Eritrea Report".

<sup>6</sup>FO 403/91, Kennedy to Salisbury, 4.3.88. Zewde, p.520.

"The Italians have come to fight us. Do you dare to fight us being one of them? And now if you do not come, I shall curse you. Be cursed.' And Dabbab fearing the curse of his father, sent to the Jānhoy saying '... I have sinned. Please have mercy on me... and send an army to escort me.'"<sup>1</sup>

Dabbab was also annoyed by a new development. Dadjāzmāch Mangashā, the young ambitious nephew of the emperor, was reported to be in touch, from early February, with the Italians. Being superior to Dabbab, he was better received by the Italians.<sup>2</sup>

Accompanied by some 300 followers, Dabbab was received by Alulā in Asmarā. It must have been a terrible moment for the Rās, to be forced by his master to receive honourably his most bitter personal enemy. Alulā accompanied Dabbab to Adwā, where the latter with a rope around his neck<sup>3</sup> fell before Yohannes and declared:

"I deserve to be hanged. I deserve to be *executed*. Forgive me.' Being pleased with him, the Jānhoy rewarded him with everything except the crown."<sup>4</sup>

Earlier in late 1886, when Rās Alulā had been diverted by the emperor from the Italian front it had been reported that Dabbab was about to be pardoned by Yohannes.<sup>5</sup> The emperor, judging from his subsequent policy, probably considered Dabbab influential enough in Akalla Guzāy to be a possible substitute for Alulā as a governor

<sup>1</sup>Lamlam, p.34.

<sup>2</sup>FO 403/91, Slade to Kennedy, 24.2.88; Slade to Savile, 19.3.88; WO 33 155 Eritrea Report, p.22. "I treated with the Italians, and I submitted to them," Dabbab complained in writing to a British officer, "They made other chiefs ... and I decided to desert them." IO L/p & s/9/7, Debeb to Hogg, 23.12.88.

<sup>3</sup>See also Antonelli to MAE, 10.5.88, LV, XVII.

<sup>4</sup>Lamlam, p.35.

<sup>5</sup>Genè to Robilant, 16.11.86; Giglio V, No. 262, p.362.

in the Marab Mellāsh. Now in 1888 Dabbab was not only pardoned by the emperor but, to the great sorrow of Alulā, was appointed by his uncle Yohannes as his personal adviser for Italian affairs.<sup>1</sup> It was but little comfort to Alulā that the rehabilitated Dabbab also urged the emperor to take the offensive against the Italians.<sup>2</sup>

March 1888: Alulā's failure in enticing the Italians to fight in the open

On 16 March 1888 the most dramatic and worrying news reached the emperor at Adwā.<sup>3</sup> The Mahdist army of Abū 'Anja had heavily defeated King Takla Hāymānot's army on 21st January 1888. The Mahdists entered Gondar on 23rd January 1888<sup>4</sup> where, as claimed by Abū 'Anja,<sup>5</sup> forty-five churches were set on fire.

The appeal of the clergy of Godjām must have deeply moved Yohannes: "O Lord! the pagans have invaded thy preserve, thy sacred shrine they have profaned, Gondar have they laid in ruins."<sup>6</sup>

In his court the greater part of his counsellors advised the emperor to abandon his Italian front and march to Amhara. But Rās Alulā was reported saying: "Your return without fighting the Italians not only would be useless, but may well prove to be a cause

---

<sup>1</sup>Int. Dadzāzmāch Zawde.

<sup>2</sup>Antonelli to MAE, 10.5.88; LV, XVII.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 20.3.88.

<sup>4</sup>Holt, p.172; Shuqayr, pp. 475-477.

<sup>5</sup>Shuqayr, p.477.

<sup>6</sup>Heruy's MS, History of Ethiopia, pp. 86-87, quoted by Zewde, p.526. See a similar text quoted from "An Ethiopian informant" in A. Levine, Wax and Gold, Chicago, 1965, p.28.

for the destruction to your throne."<sup>1</sup>

According to Alulā's biographer the Rās was supported by Rās Mikā'el,<sup>2</sup> who said to the king:

"Give authority to me and to Ras Alula, that we may go to the snake and to the scorpions - who are the Italians...' And he /Yohannes/ said to them, 'Go in peace... May God give you power and strength in time of battle. I will come with you, and I will not leave you to be orphans."<sup>3</sup>

Alulā's plan, as approved by the emperor who subsequently moved down to Sabarguma, was anticipated by the Italians.<sup>4</sup> As the new fort of Sahāṭi was justifiably considered invincible, Alulā thought he would again, as in Gurā, Kūfīt and indirectly in Dogali, perhaps manage to entice the enemy to leave his fort and meet him in the open. The next developments were fully described by a British observer<sup>5</sup> who, after analysing the Ethiopians' movements, concluded.

"It is difficult for the moment to satisfactorily explain the Negus' motives, and various are the opinions expressed; but I am of opinion that all along he has only had one object in view, and that of endeavouring to entice the Italian force to leave their intrenchments and fight him in the open, and that he never advanced with the view of attacking Saati, and this, I consider, is borne out by the flank movement of the Abyssinian cavalry, evidently to be held in readiness to attack either in flank or in rear, as opportunity afforded..... Again, his advance at the last moment was evidently with the intention of throwing down the gauntlet in the hopes that it would lead to a fight in the open."

---

<sup>1</sup>AS MAI, D.I., 20.3.88.

<sup>2</sup>Rās Mikā'el and Alulā were then apparently in very good relations and Alulā was reported as having in his camp Rās Mikā'el's son. D.I., 8.2.88, 29.2.88.

<sup>3</sup>Mannawe MS.

<sup>4</sup>FO 403/91, Savile to Salisbury, 12.1.88. Slade to Kennedy, 24.2.88, reports on his conversation with Colonel Dal Verme.

<sup>5</sup>FO 403/91, Slade to Savile, 4.4.88.

Alulā's failure of 25 March 1888<sup>1</sup> was thus described by his contemporary biographer:<sup>2</sup>

"The two of them [Rās Alulā and Rās Mikā'el] went to the place of battle, Ras Alula leading them. And when he came to the edge of that place in which the Italians were, Ras Alula, taking off his adornments, made a crown of gold and clothes of gold braid and of silver, and he took a shield of gold and silver and girded his sword that was adorned with gold and silver. ... He said [to the Italians], 'come, come out of this den, and let us see each other face to face'. And he [the Italians] said to him 'I will not come out of this house of mine, unless you have gone away.' The king [Yohannes] and his troops went away. And he [the Italians] went away.

After this the king said to him [Alulā], 'My son, stay here, and I will go where God commands me.'"

From the Italian side Alulā's effort seemed ridiculous.

"When the army with the emperor approached the Italian camp, the Italian General ordered a balloon to be raised to watch the enemy from above. The effect of the balloon frightened the Ethiopian soldiers who, without listening to their commanders, turned back. Many took the way to their homeland saying: 'We can face an army of human beings, but not the army of God which comes from the sky.' In the night Ras Alula sent near the Italian fortress some twenty Tigrean soldiers who shot a few shots. The Italians illuminated them with the electric lights.<sup>3</sup> The soldiers of Tigre being illuminated like in daytime stood terrified and frightened not knowing what to do. The Italians did not even shoot at them but remained laughing watching the Tigreans' flight."<sup>4</sup>

March-May 1888: Yohannes's decision to abandon the Italian front. The end of Alulā's government in the Marab Mellāsh

In Aylet on 26 March 1888, faced with the sack of Gondar and the failure of his Rās to fight the Italians, Yohannes decided

---

<sup>1</sup>F.O. 403/91, Slade to Savile, 4.4.88; San Marzano to M.d.G., 3.4.88, LV. XVII.

<sup>2</sup>Mannawe MS.

<sup>3</sup>For the effect of that on the Ethiopians, see Kolmodin, No. 276.

<sup>4</sup>LV.XV, Information received from Ambaciera, 17.5.88, in Antonelli to MAE, 10.6.88.

to turn to the Mahdist front. He sent to San Marzano calling on him to "abide *by* the treaty that the English have made me make with the Egyptians" and to join hands together against the Mahdiyya. "Ras Alula," Yohannes added, "did what he did In Dogali without writing <sup>to</sup> me and you also told me nothing. It was the work of the Devil."<sup>1</sup> But Yohannes's appeal to return to the Hewett Treaty was not accepted by Rome. Though the bulk of the Italian expedition had to return home and no military revenge for Dogali was taken, the Italians still insisted on the "conditions communicated by Mr. Portal to the Negus."<sup>2</sup> Thus, while the emperor was leading his armies back into Ethiopia, the problem of his Italian frontier was *farther* than ever from being solved.

Yohannes's decision to abandon the Italian front signified the end of Alulā's government in the now ruined province of Hamāsen. For so many years Yohannes had relied on his Rās as his warden of the northern frontier. He now realised that under the care of his invincible general that very frontier had become a source of diplomatic isolation and a military threat. Silhouetted against the background of what then seemed to be Menilek's friendly relations with the Italians, Yohannes must have thought that Alulā's policy vis-à-vis those neighbours was probably too inflexible and had led to the present situation.

Indeed, Alulā's policy in the Marab Mellash had proved to be based on two contradictory but *irreconcilable* elements: the encouragement

---

<sup>1</sup>Yohannes to General Marzano, Ailet, 26 March 1888; Giglio VI, No. 307, p.331.

<sup>2</sup>FO 403/91, Kennedy to Salisbury 30.3.88.

of the trade with the coast and a tough policy towards Massawa. The inevitable hostilities led to the decline of the trade, the alienation of the Muslim inhabitants and the actual fall of his regime on the one hand and, on the other hand, to Alulā's failure to free Yohannes from the problem.

According to rumours quoted by spies returning from Asmarā to Massawa, Yohannes was now seriously reconsidering the removal of Alulā from that area.<sup>1</sup> This was the only Italian-British condition for peace that he could accept without giving up the Hewett Treaty. With Alulā in his camp, Yohannes marched southwards from Asmarā to Adwā. Spies returning to Massawa constantly reported on Alulā's being in disgrace with Yohannes and contradicted each other only in their information about the future governor of Hamāsen. Among those mentioned were Rās Hagos, Wāgshum Gabru the governor of Bagemdər and others.<sup>2</sup> Alulā's brother, Dadzāzmāch Tasammā, described by Portal as his Bāldarabā (host), and a commander of 3,000 of the emperor's troops,<sup>3</sup> was deprived of his office on 7 April 1888, and his property was confiscated.<sup>4</sup> Even Rās Ar'āyā Sellāsse, the emperor's son, for whom Alulā had been a guide and protector was quoted as complaining to his father: "I told you not to listen to him. He will lead to our destruction in order to serve his own purposes."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>According to informants returning from Adwā in early May 1888. A.S.MAI D.I., 19.5.88.

<sup>2</sup>San Marzanò to M.d.G., 4.4.87, LV. XVII. A.S.MAI D.I. various documents, 8.4.88, 18.4.88, 9.5.88, 12.5.88.

<sup>3</sup>Portal, p.152.

<sup>4</sup>D.I., 9.4.88.

<sup>5</sup>D.I., 9.4.88.



In Godofellasi on 12 April 1888 the emperor ordered the Rās to return to Asmarā and prepare a list of the firearms which he, Alulā, had distributed among his devotees in Hamāsen. The number quoted by the informants as 1,000 Remingtons<sup>1</sup> clearly indicates that Yohannes's aim was to disarm those old followers of Alulā, the veterans of his brigade as a Shālaqā and the backbone of his government in the Marab Mellash. Accompanied by some officers of the emperor, Alulā returned to Asmarā on 13 April 1888 and was reported as not emerging from his "Tukuls".<sup>2</sup> Fresh rumours about his being nominated over a remote province in Amhara or even possibly being put on an Ambā reached Massawa.<sup>3</sup> On 19 April 1888 his servants, including Berhānu his Naggādrās and all his removable property, left the town heading for Adwā. The officers carrying the requested list of firearms left on the next day accompanied by some of Alulā's lieutenants: Bālabārās Tasammā, Ledj Fanta and others.<sup>4</sup> Alulā issued a pathetic Awādj calling the people of Hamāsen to be tranquil and return to their work and, on 23 April 1888, he left Asmarā.<sup>5</sup>

On 27 April 1888 Yohannes assembled in Adwā the important leaders who were then present at his court: Ras Mikā'el, Rās Hagos,

---

<sup>1</sup>D.I., 12, 13, 15.4.88.

<sup>2</sup>D.I., 15.4.88, 18.4.88.

<sup>3</sup>D.I., 12.4.88.

<sup>4</sup>D.I., 21.4.88.

<sup>5</sup>D.I., 20.4.88, 23.4.88.

Dadjāzmāch Tādīā of Ayba, Bajərond Lawte, Dabbab Ar'āyā and Rās Alulā. His son, Rās Ar'āyā Sellāsse had already continued to Tamben<sup>1</sup> to be closer with his army to the other arenas which will be subsequently described. Rās Hagos, it was reported, was said to proceed to Shire, Dadjāzmāch Mangashā's province, in order to be closer to the Mahdists, while the emperor would stay in Maqalle for the coming rainy season. Rās Mikā'el was to return to Wallo<sup>2</sup> and he only waited for 500 Remington rifles which were confiscated from Alulā's followers and brought from Asmarā by Shālaqā Ar'āyā around mid-May.<sup>3</sup> Shālaqā Ar'āyā was preceded by Lədj Fantā and Alulā's other lieutenants and in Asmarā only sixty troops were left under Kantibā Kaffa, Alulā's elder brother.<sup>4</sup> These lieutenants of the Rās, having no hereditary rights or property in their native province of Təgre, were soon, with the fall of Alulā's government in the Marab Mellāsh, to lose their political prominence.

Alulā's position was still reported to be shaky. In late April and the first half of May, during which Alulā stayed with the emperor at Adwā and Aksum, the latter was reported to be heavily pressed by Alulā's enemies to remove him from the political scene. Judging from his last letter to San Marzano of 10 May 1888 from Aksum, Yohannes was ready now to sacrifice Alulā's career in order to appease the Italians:

---

<sup>1</sup>D.I., 19.5.88. Informant Sa'īd Muḥammad who was in Adwā 27.4.88 to 8.5.88 (notice the absence of Dadjāzmāch Mangashā).

<sup>2</sup>D.I., 19.5.88, Sa'īd Muḥammad.

<sup>3</sup>D.I., 12.5.88, 15.5.88.

<sup>4</sup>D.I., 13.5.88, 12.5.88, Informant Idrīs.

"... You say that Ras Alula offended you. Therefore, let an high-officer of yours come and I shall summon Ras Alula in front of him and in the presence of the Abuna, the Echege and all the officers. *If he is found guilty I shall make him pay and restore all that he had unjustifiably taken.*"<sup>1</sup>

On 9 May it was reported by informants in Massawa that Rās Hagos and Fitāwrari Dabbab again accused Alulā of leading Yohannes into a chaotic situation.<sup>2</sup> On 19 May 1888 the same informants wrote to Baldissera that Dabbab Ar'āyā not only demanded Akalla Guzāy from Yohannes<sup>3</sup> but also accused Alulā of mal-administering it. Alulā was said to oppose the nomination of Dabbab<sup>4</sup> but, judging from subsequent developments, his opposition was overruled. The Fitāwrari managed even to humiliate Alulā by demanding his share in 'emlasu's property, which must have deeply annoyed Alulā. He was, however, forced by Yohannes, in accordance with Ethiopian law, to restore some of the property, including fifty servants.<sup>5</sup>

\*

\*   \*

Yohannes, probably acting in reaction to Alulā's traditional policy of emphasising the Italian threat, left the Marab Mellāsh without making any serious arrangements for its future defence. His only relevant but most doubtful step was to nominate Dabbab over Akalla Guzāy. The removal of Alulā from Asmarā was soon to prove

---

<sup>1</sup>Storia Militare della Colonia Eritrea, Vol. I, p.170.

<sup>2</sup>D.I., 9.5.88.

<sup>3</sup>Which he visited on his way to Adwā, D.I., 11.4.88.

<sup>4</sup>D.I., 19.5.88, Sa'id Muḥammad.

<sup>5</sup>D.I., 6.6.88.

a great and fatal mistake which undoubtedly enabled the Italians to become, during the coming stages, such an important factor in Ethiopian history.

Trying to defend his government in the Marab Mellash, Rās Alulā had to deal with three major elements: the existence of an ambitious European neighbour, the existence of an undefined border and the establishment of his capital as a commercial centre. Alulā failed to create the necessary balance between those elements which could only have been achieved by a compromising approach. Had he compromised with Italian participation in governing what he regarded as his territorial sphere of raids, Asmarā could well have become a flourishing commercial centre. But Alulā was too proud to compromise; he wanted the peripheral tribes to be raided, the Italians to keep to the port of Massawa and he wanted an active and peaceful commercial contact with the port there. Though from a legal and national point of view he was right, such an inflexible approach had proved to be quite disastrous.

M. 1888-1889: THE END OF THE TIGREAN EMPEROR

May 1888: The Mahdist threat - a personal relief for Alulā

As analysed by P.M.Holt,<sup>1</sup> "warfare against the Abyssinians aroused some repugnance among Sudanese Muslims because a tradition ascribed to the Prophet excepted them from the jihād, on account of the asylum granted by the Negus to the Prophet's Companions." But this repugnance, which was also a reason for the Khalīfa's order to 'Uthmān Dignā of October 1885 not to invade Ethiopia,<sup>2</sup> disappeared following what the Khalīfa regarded as Ethiopian aggression against his state:

"So we did not allow the army of the Muslims to raid your land until from your side serious aggressions repeatedly took place against the weak Muslims who are near your country ... while the apostates from their Faith as Muslims took refuge with you."<sup>3</sup>

It can be quite clearly established that the Mahdist decision to launch a holy war on Ethiopia was mainly a result of the Ethiopians' activities to fulfil their part of the Hewett Treaty. Judging from the following passage from a manuscript by the Mahdist historian Ismail b. 'Abd al-Qādir it looks as if Alulā's role in these developments was not underestimated in 'Um Durmān:

"When Yūhanā ascended the throne of Abyssinia... he became proud, exorbitant and insolent... and looked to the land of Islam. And he sent his troops to the Red Sea coast where he took from the Turks the Egyptians several cities and put on the frontier the best of his men who are famous for cunning, bravery

---

<sup>1</sup>Holt, p.150. See there the Khalīfa's letter of Jan.-Feb. 1887 to Yohannes.

<sup>2</sup>See above, p.113.

<sup>3</sup>Holt, op.cit., quotes Shuqayr, pp. 467-469.

and steadiness such as Ras Allulā and others.  
 Ras Allulā was one of the famous and brave men,  
 in war very experienced in the tactics of battles.  
 He was a bone in the throats of the British,  
 Italian and Turkish Egyptian Empires ....."<sup>1</sup>

The Mahdist invasion of Amhara, which culminated in the defeat of Negus Takla Hāymānot (referred to in the Mahdist correspondence as Rās 'Adār) and the destruction of the old capital of Gondar, was not just a new Mahdist raid. It can, rather, be regarded as the first anti-Ethiopian battle initiated under the slogan of the jihād. 'Uthmān Digna's plan to invade the Egyptian evacuated areas of the future Eritrea was an attempt to exploit a certain strategical situation. It was aimed at the conquest of mainly Muslim populated areas and it was rejected by the Khalīfa Abū 'Anja's expedition and his burning of churches was, however, a totally different matter, as was clearly explained in the Khalīfa's letter to Yohannes. This was written after Abū 'Anja's expedition and probably reached the emperor in April or May 1888:

"And later we have written you the same as the Mahdī had written to you and told you that if you do not act according to our command [i.e. adopt Islam] there will be no alternative to the entrance of the armies of the Islām into your territories, their fighting you and their killing of your men..."<sup>2</sup>

Deeply moved by this new Muslim threat, Yohannes undoubtedly consulted his vassals in Adwā about his future action. Alulā must have been extremely reluctant about leaving the Marab Mellāsh, but more than ever before he urgently needed a military campaign

---

<sup>1</sup> Ismā'īl b. 'Abd al-Qādir, At-tirāz al-maḡūsh bibushrā gatl Yūhanā malik al-hubūsh, a Ms. kept at the library of the School of Oriental Studies, Durham, pp. 33, 34.

<sup>2</sup> Shuqayr, p.474.

to save his lost prestige and status. Undoubtedly he was not in a position to suggest a renewal of the anti-Italian campaign and apparently he tried to appease his master by reminding him of his previous anti-Mahdist successes. The writer of the Mannawe manuscript of Alulā's history wrote about a consultation the emperor held in Aksum.<sup>1</sup>

"And the king of kings revealed their impure religion The Mahdist's and hateful works. Their religion says as follows - 'Say "No" to God, and "Yes" to the demon which is Mohammed.'

Yohannēs then described the destruction of Gondar.

"At that time the Holy Spirit filled Ras Alula... He opened his mouth and said, 'What really are these pagans, who do not know God? Let us go and do battle with them, on behalf of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ....'

The king said to him, 'you have spoken well, O elect Ras Alula, a man faithful after my heart'. And the matter ended with this good counsel."<sup>2</sup>

In late May 1888 Ras Alulā returned to Asmarā to recruit the troops of the Marab Mellash for the anti-Mahdist campaign.<sup>3</sup> The emperor left Adwā for Maqalle to spend the coming rainy season there. The Rās stayed in his "Tukuls" up to 14 June 1888.<sup>4</sup>

June 1888: Menilek and Takla Hāymānot revolt against Yohannēs

In February 1888 when Yohannēs was camping in Adwā, facing the Italian threat and receiving the news about Abū 'Anja's invasion, he ordered Negus Menilek of Shoa to march northward from

---

<sup>1</sup>Yohannēs and his court were in Aksum on 10.5.88. See above p. 216, 217.

<sup>2</sup>Mannawe MS.

<sup>3</sup>D.I., 6.6.88.

<sup>4</sup>D.I., 16.6.88.

his camping place at Wallo.

"The Muslims," Yohannes was said to have written to Menilek<sup>1</sup>"... went to massacre the Christians and burn the churches of Gondar... I am occupied with my battle; order your soldiers and come to Gondar. If they come against you, fight them."

Menilek welcomed the invitation to march to Amhara far away from the Italian front. He had already been in touch with the Italians about a secret treaty between Shoa and Italy and it was thought that he was actually awaiting the defeat of the Imperial army:

"I am sure," Antonelli wrote in late May,<sup>2</sup> "he wanted an absolute Italian victory over the emperor so that he could present himself to the people as the saviour of Ethiopia."

Menilek slowly led his 120,000 strong army to enter Dabra Tābor on 8 March 1888 and camped near the ruined Gondar on 18 April 1888.<sup>3</sup>

Yohannes, who was undoubtedly aware of his vassal's relations with the Italians for which, according to Menilek himself, he was blamed by both Alulā and Dabbāb<sup>4</sup>, was clearly angry with Menilek's activities. The large Shoan army was camping, inactive, in Bagemder actually ruining the country. From Maqalle in May, Yohannes angrily ordered Menilek at Dabra Tābor to return to Shoa through Wallo.

Menilek asked permission to return via Godjām, and permitted to do so,<sup>5</sup> he crossed the Abbāy River and, on 2 June 1885,<sup>6</sup> met Nəgus Takla

---

<sup>1</sup>An Amharic short biography of Rās Gubanā, a MS. kept with Dr. R. Caulk, H.S.I.U.

<sup>2</sup>Antonelli to MAE, 22.5.88, LV, XV.

<sup>3</sup>Caulk, 245; Zewde, pp. 527, 528.

<sup>4</sup>Antonelli to MAE, 10.6.88, LV, XV.

<sup>5</sup>Lamlam, p.36. Ašme, p.98.

<sup>6</sup>Zewde, p.533.



Hāymānot. "He received him with joy," Lamlam described, "they took an oath never to submit to Aṣe Yohannes for the second time."<sup>1</sup>

"Menelik," Antonelli wrote <sup>2</sup>, "vexed by Yohannes' treatment of him, took the Gojjam road. There he found Tekle Haimanot who treated him as if he were the emperor. The King of Gojjam was even more annoyed than Menelik with the emperor because he believed that the defeat inflicted by the Dervishes had been provoked by the emperor to weaken him."

"They /Menilek and Takla Hāymānot/ have made a pact of mutual aid. Each has fixed to stay in his own kingdom, to obey no orders from the emperor and in case he should invade and occupy their territories, they would unite to fight him."

June-July 1888: The death of Yohannes's son. Alulā's departure from Asmarā

On 13 June 1888 while Rās Alulā was still in Asmarā trying quickly to mobilise the army of Hamāsen before the rainy season, he received a letter from the emperor informing him that on his way back from Godjām Menilek had unauthorisedly penetrated the Wallo Gāllā territories.<sup>3</sup> The next day, on 14 June 1888, taking with him his entire army, numbering no more than a thousand, Alulā left Asmarā for Maqalle. On his way, while camping at 'Addi Rāsi Alulā received the news of the death of the crown prince Rās Ar'āyā Sellāsse, who, while leading his 40,000 man army towards Bagemder to face a newly rumoured Mahdist invasion,<sup>4</sup> had died on

---

<sup>1</sup>Lamlam, p.36.

<sup>2</sup>Antonelli to MAE, 11.6.88, LV, XV.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 16.6.88.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 13.6.88.

10 June 1888 from sunstroke.<sup>1</sup> An interview<sup>er</sup> of Alulā later described:<sup>2</sup>

"It was a great blow for him, as he was accustomed to see the son of Emperor Giovanni as the future emperor ... He was for many years the second father of Ras Area Sellassia...

... Hearing the sad news Ras Alula ordered to beat the drums and ordered all the people to pray for the soul of the dead prince."<sup>3</sup>

The death of Rās Ar'āyā Sellāsse, the husband of Menilek's daughter Zawditu, was perhaps the end of any hope of saving the emperor's relations with Shoa. It apparently had also an enormous psychological effect on Yohannes, who henceforth suspected almost everyone as a potential enemy. With the Italians, the Shoans, the Godjamites and the Mahdists as his enemies Yohannes seemed again to be relying on his old Rās Alulā. They spent a period of two weeks together in late June and early July in Maqalle, during which they undoubtedly discussed where to lead their exhausted armies. They received further details on the Menilek-Takla Hāymānot agreement and the new invasion of Ḥamdān/Abū 'Anja, who started on his way to Gondar from Matammā (al-Qallabāt) on 17 June 1888.<sup>4</sup>

On 6 July Alulā returned to Asmarā with his 1,000 men. He was again accompanied by his officers and two of his relations - his brother Dadjāzmāch Tasammā and nephew Bāshā Tādālā - previously held as prisoners of the emperor and now freed to accompany the

---

<sup>1</sup>Zewde, p.536.

<sup>2</sup>N. Corazzini, "La pace", La Tribuna, 30.6.90.

<sup>3</sup>DI, 18.6.88.

<sup>4</sup>Holt, p.173.

rehabilitated Rās.<sup>1</sup> The emperor left Maqalle on 7 July 1888<sup>2</sup> heading, under the heavy rains, for Dabra Tābor and aiming to fight in Godjām the weakest of his rivals. Alulā stayed in his capital for a week, during which he summoned all his available troops, including the garrison of Karan commanded by his son-in-law Dadjāzmāch Hāyła Sellāsse.<sup>3</sup> On 13 July he left Hāyła Sellāsse in charge of Asmarā with some hundred troops and hastened to Ashange to meet his master en route to Dabra Tābor.<sup>4</sup> Back in Təgre the experienced warrior Alulā was not nominated over the Imperial army. The emperor was apparently aware of the fact that while Alulā, as an outsider in the Marab Mellāsh, could be feared and respected there, in Təgre, where he had no hereditary rights, the nomination of him over the army would have caused but bitterness and even resistance among the great chiefs. Thus, <sup>when</sup> /Rās Hāyła Māryām Gugsā, Yohannes' nephew arrived at Dabra Tābor in late July, it was he who was nominated as Commander-in-Chief and possibly as a crown prince.<sup>5</sup> Rās Alulā would never again return to Asmārā. From then on, having no province from which he could mobilise or finance an army, he would have to rely exclusively on the emperor's *goodwill*.

---

<sup>1</sup>D.I., 8.7.88, 10.7.88. Informant Muḥammad Ibrāhīm.

<sup>2</sup>A Ms. from Dabra Bērḥān Sellāsse, Gondar, kept in IES, English translation kept by Dr. R.Caulk, H S.I.U.

<sup>3</sup>Dadjāzmāch Hāyła Sellāsse was the son of Fitāwrāri Walda Taklay, a local chief from Wāg. Married Alulā's daughter Şahaywarda and nominated governor of Karan. Interview w. Yashashwarda.

<sup>4</sup>D.I., 16.7.88. Informant Keflu Drar.

<sup>5</sup>Interview Dadjāzmāch Zawle. Sahle Woldegaber, "The Background to the battle of Metemma", BA Thesis H.S.I.U., 1968, p.17. Hāyła Māryām Gugsā was the son of an elder brother of Yohannes, was appointed governor of Wādā in 1878, see Zewde, Appendix, Biographical data.

August-September 1888: The Imperial army in Godjām.Alulā establishes his position in the Court.

On 6 August 1888 the emperor crossed the Abbāy River to Godjām where Nēgus Takla Hāymānot took refuge on the fortified Ambā of Gibella.<sup>1</sup> Alulā was ordered to stay at Dabra Tābor and march to Dambiyā to face Abū 'Anja,<sup>2</sup> but the latter had already left the area on 30 July 1888.<sup>3</sup> The Rās was, however, instructed to stay near Gondar where he spent the next month.

In early September Alulā was reported to be crossing the Abbāy and joining the imperial forces in Godjām.<sup>4</sup> There, fortified in his Ambā of Gibella, Nēgus Takla Hāymānot was successfully standing against his besiegers. His son Dadjāzmāch Beḷo had managed to flee to Menilek in Shoa<sup>5</sup> and it seemed that the rebel king would not be militarily defeated by the Tigreans. With the arrival of the famous general Alulā an intensive siege started, to be finished after three weeks with no further success. The province of Godjām and particularly the district of Damot was systematically devastated by the angry Tigreans led by the frustrated emperor. It was then given to Rās Mikā'el whose Wallo province was actually under Menilek's control.<sup>6</sup> Yohannes was again reported as suspecting his vassals as traitors. This time it looks as if

---

<sup>1</sup>A MS. From Dabra BerhānSəllāsse, Gondar, kept in IES; English translation kept by Dr. R. Caulk, H.S.I.U.

<sup>2</sup>Antonelli to MAE, 12.10.88, LV, XV, D.I. 30.8.88.

<sup>3</sup>Holt, p.173.

<sup>4</sup>D.I., 7.9.88.

<sup>5</sup>Antonelli to MAE, 31.10.88, LV, XV.

<sup>6</sup>Antonelli to MAE, 25.10.88, 10.12.88, LV, XV; Lamlam, f.37.

Alulā's advice was better accepted and Rās Hagos, accused as a friend of Mēnilēk, was deprived of his new post over Bagemder which was subsequently given to Alulā. This was probably an act of revenge by Alulā on Hagos, an obedient follower of the emperor, who early in 1887 had been appointed to inspect Alulā's activities and had apparently become one of those who, a year later, demanded the removal of Alulā. This was probably the beginning of the rivalry between these two natives of Tamben, Alulā the son of a Gabār, and Hagos the son of Mirtcha a former governor of Tamben and a relative of Yohannes.<sup>1</sup> Another enemy of the Rās, Bajerond Lawte, recently promoted to be the Fitāwrāri, who had led the advance guard to Godjām, was accused of secretly contacting Takla Hāymānot and was subsequently placed in chains.<sup>2</sup> Informants reaching Massawa reported that Rās Alulā, Rās Hāyla Māryām and Dadjāzmāch Mangashā were among the few prominent leaders trusted by Yohannes.<sup>3</sup> Dadjāzmāch Mangashā rejoined the Imperial camp after the death of Rās Ar'āyā Sellāsse. In May 1888 he was still in touch with the Italians, though, apparently, camping among the Assāwurṭa, he was acting independently.<sup>4</sup>

October-December 1888: Asmarā is threatened while Alulā<sup>^</sup> is with Yohannes

The retreat of the imperial forces from Sahāṭi in early April 1888 was not immediately exploited by the Italians to penetrate

---

<sup>1</sup>See Martini, Diario, II, p.411. Also Wylde, Modern, p.174.

<sup>2</sup>Antonelli to MAE, 10.12.88, LV, XV. He was later condemned to death by Yohannes, but was saved by Alulā's appeal. A.S.MAI D.I., 16.1.89, informant Gabra Masqal.

<sup>3</sup>D.I., 3.11.88.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 14.5.88. A letter from Mangashā to Baldissera. Also D.I., 14.6.88.

inland and for their own reasons they stuck to Sahāṭi as the advance post. But General Baldissera's policy to encourage local opposition to Alulā's government in the Marab Məllash became effective. On 15 July 1888, a few days after Alulā's son-in-law, Dadjāzmāch Hāyła Sellāsse, had left Karan, the Italian promoted Dadjāzmāch Kəfle 'eyāsus wrote to his masters asking permission to take the town. Kəfle was promised supplies and money and was instructed to remain among the Ḥabbāb and the Banū 'Āmir,<sup>1</sup> but he soon started clashing with Alulā's nominee in Asmarā. In one of these skirmishes, which took place in late October, Bāshā Gabra Māryām, Hāyła Sellāsse's second in command, was reported killed.<sup>2</sup> At his headquarters at Saganieti, as the new governor of Akalla Guzāy, Dabbab Ar'āyā did not renew his relations with the Italians. He even clashed, on 8 August 1888, with an Italian expeditionary force which was sent to catch him, causing it heavy casualties.<sup>3</sup> Soon he started lusting for the almost deserted capital of Hamāsen and his clashes with Dadjāzmāch Hāyła Sellāsse started in early October. On 18 October the latter received a written ultimatum from Dabbab: "Evacuate Asmara because I am going to assume its government. If you disagree prepare yourself for battle." "I do not leave Asmara," Hāyła Sellāsse was reported by the Italian informant as answering, "before I receive a written order from my master Alula. If you want to use force, I am ready."<sup>4</sup> Dabbab

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI, "Vitale", Kafel to Baldissera, 15.7.88; Baldissera to Kafel, 9.12.88.

<sup>2</sup>D.I., 28.10.88.

<sup>3</sup>WO 33/55, Eritrea Report, p.25.

<sup>4</sup>D.I., 20.10.88.

was apparently looking for something more than just the government of Hamāsen and did not want, for the time being, to risk such a provocation as a direct clash with Alulā's nominee. Instead, he marched in early December 1888 to Adwā and established his headquarters in the Tigrean capital itself. While the emperor and Alulā occupied Godjām and Bagemdər he vainly tried to persuade Alulā's Greek arms traders to supply him with new rifles.<sup>1</sup> He revealed his pretensions in a letter which he sent on 23 December 1888 to the British Resident at Aden:

"... I am no way in accord with the Negus... I am of Royal birth. If, with the help of Jesus Christ, I secure your goodwill, I shall have no more troubles. I have given my heart to you. Love me. I love you. It is you who have put King John upon the Throne; consequently after Jesus Christ, I look to you for support."<sup>2</sup>

Encouraged by the threats to Alulā's government in December 1888 old Rās Walda Mikā'el, at Ambā Salāmā, drafted a letter to the Italians in Massawa and to his son-in-law Kefle 'eyāsus camping near Karan, calling them to take the road inland. His letter was intercepted by Dadjāzmāch Hāyla Sellāsse and despatched to Alulā in Bagemdər.<sup>3</sup>

Another potential threat to Alulā's government in the Marab Mellash, and indeed to the whole Tigrean government of the emperor was Dadjāzmāch Seyum Gabra Kidān, "Abba Gubaz". This son of Yohannēs sister had been imprisoned many years previously by Yohannēs and

---

<sup>1</sup>D.I., 15.12.88.

<sup>2</sup>IO L/P&S/9/7, Dadjasmuk [Dadjāzmāch] Debeb to Brig. Gen. Hogg, 23.12.88. Dabbab's referring to himself as a Dadjāzmāch could be a false pretention, but Yohannēs may have promoted him to that rank following his defection in the spring.

<sup>3</sup>D.I., 12.12.88.

was kept on an Ambā in Godjām. After Takla Hāymānot's agreement with Menilek Seyum was released and with the advance of the Imperial army to Godjām he was sent to Menilek's court in Shoa. Following the Tigrean siege on Takla Hāymānot and the devastation of Godjām, Menilek was reported intensifying his preparations to face a possible invasion of Shoa. He, however, did not keep to defensive measures only but did his best to outmanoeuvre Yohannes by enticing the Italians to advance from the coast and take Asmarā.<sup>1</sup> For his part he undertook to instigate a revolt in Tēgre to be headed by Dadjāzmāch Seyum.<sup>2</sup> In the middle of December 1888 Seyum, armed by Menilek, was reported taking the road to 'endartā, camping not far from Maqalle.<sup>3</sup>

Camping in Bagemder or fighting in Godjām, Rās Alulā was constantly informed by Dadjāzmāch Hāyla Sellāsse on the developments in the Marab Mellash and Tēgre. But the Rās was apparently unable to do very much about them. Around mid-August 1888, upon hearing in Dabra Tābor about the activities of Kefle 'eyāsus, he sent 120 troops with Ledj Fantā and Shālaqā Ar'āyā to Asmarā,<sup>4</sup> and this small force was probably the only one he could detach. Threatened and surrounded as it was, Asmarā was still kept by Dadjāzmāch Hāyla Sellāsse only because it was constantly rumoured that Alulā was about to return. During the months of November and December 1888 the

---

<sup>1</sup> Antonelli to Crispi, 23.9.88. LV, XV. According to a report sent in September 1888 (Dhū al-Hijja 1305 H) by Abū 'Anja to the Khalīfa (SOAS M.518 Reel 9) he was corresponding with Menilek. He added that "Minilik spread the rumours that after destructing Yuḥannā he would adopt the Islam and would rule the Abyssinians under the auspices of the Mahdiyya." If true this was apparently an appeal by Menilek to the Mahdists to fight Yohannes.

<sup>2</sup> Antonelli to MAE, 12.10.88, 30.10.88, 10.12, 88, LV, XV.

<sup>3</sup> D.I., 24.12.88.

<sup>4</sup> D.I., 25.8.88.



Rās sent many letters to his nominee instructing him to announce his return.<sup>1</sup> Cattle were frequently gathered at Asmarā as if ready for the feeding of the returning army.<sup>2</sup> But Alulā, though he undoubtedly urged his master to let him return, was ordered by Yohannes to remain in his camp.<sup>3</sup> Apparently the emperor trusted Dabbab Ar'āyā and needed his best general to help him decide and make his next move: a march on Menilek or a preventive anti-Mahdist campaign.

January 1889: Yohannes decides to fight the Mahdists

During late December 1888 and up to 17 January 1889 the emperor corresponded with his great Shoan vassal. Menilek, threatened by a possible invasion of the Imperial army, was working to appease the emperor, blaming Negus Takla Hāymānot as the instigator of their rebellion.<sup>4</sup> The latter, in late December 1888, after a long siege was pardoned by Yohannes.<sup>5</sup>

In Yohannes's camp, it was reported, Alulā for tactical reasons, was against crossing the Abbāy into Shoa<sup>6</sup> but it looks as if Yohannes, towards the end of December 1888, was ready for

<sup>1</sup>D.I., 9.11.88, 13.12.88.

<sup>2</sup>D.I., 20.12.88, 21.12.88.

<sup>3</sup>D.I., 15.12.88.

<sup>4</sup>See Zawde, pp. 542-544, quotations from Heruy Walda Sellāsse MS, History of Ethiopia, pp. 81-85.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI, D.I., 4.1.89, Sūlimān Zakāriya, 16.1.89, informant 'Alī Kabssay; Lamlam, f.38.

<sup>6</sup>Antonelli to MAE, 26.12.88, LV, XV.

the march . In a long letter that he wrote on 25 December 1888 to Abū 'Anja at <sup>AL/</sup>Qallabāt, he offered a common action against the Europeans (Āfrānj) and asked for peace, presumably in order to secure his rear: "I have no wish to cross my frontier into your country nor should you desire to cross your frontier into my country."<sup>1</sup> Abū 'Anjā received the letter on 11 January 1889 and replied on the same day,<sup>2</sup> insulting Yohannēs and calling him to adopt Islam.

"If you have power and courage as you claim, attack us," Abū 'Anja concluded. "You would not have hesitated up to the present, had it not been for your cowardice. And if you do not come, stay in your place and you will have no choice but to be destroyed by the followers of God..."<sup>3</sup>

Yohannēs received Abū 'Anjā's challenging letter probably simultaneously with Menilek's letter of 18 January 1889 in which the Shoan ruler was emphasizing his interest in peace.<sup>4</sup> As suggested by a Mahdist historian, it was too much for Yohannēs to see Ḥamdān Abū 'Anja penetrate into his country.<sup>5</sup> In his court Yohannēs was pressed by the clergy and the senior officers, probably headed by Alulā, to abandon the projected Shoan campaign. According to Heruy they advised him:

"It does not seem to be convenient to march to Shoa leaving the Dervishes behind. Let us first destroy

---

<sup>1</sup>Shuqayr, p.479.

<sup>2</sup>SOAS M.518, reel 9, Abū 'Anjā to Khalīfa, 11.1.89.

<sup>3</sup>Shuqayr, pp. 480, 481.

<sup>4</sup>Zewde, p.544, quotes Heruy's MS, History of Ethiopia. See Appendix, pp. 642-644.

<sup>5</sup>Ismā'īl, At-Tirāz, p.108.

the Dervishes, and then, when we return back we shall go to Shoa."<sup>1</sup>

According to Lamlam, Yohannēs was persuaded:

"... if I come back I can fight Shoa later on when I return. And if I die at Matammā in the hands of the heathens I shall gain heaven..."<sup>2</sup>

He wrote an appealing letter to Menilek and marched to the Sudanese border.<sup>3</sup>

February 1889: Dabbab trusted by Yohannēs, takes Asmarā

In late January the imperial army was concentrating in Dam-biyā to march on Qallabāt (Matammā). In Yohannēs's camp the following leaders, beside Alulā, were reported as assembling: Nēgus Takla Hāymānot, Rās Mikā'el, Rās Hāyla Māryām and Rās Mangashā. The latter had recently been given the rank of a Rās and the provinces of the late crown prince, including Bagemder.<sup>4</sup> Rās Alulā was reported as being nominated over a well equipped force of 15,000 riflemen.<sup>5</sup>

Worrying news from Dadjāzmāch Hāyla Sellāsse in Asmarā was constantly reaching Alulā. The town was threatened by both Dabbab and Kefle 'ēyāsus. Thus, while the emperor was planning his campaign in the western frontier, Alulā was asking for leave to return

---

<sup>1</sup>Hēruy Walda Sellāsse, Ityopyānā Matammā, Addis Ababa 1901, EC, p.11.

<sup>2</sup>Lamlam, f.38.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 26.1.89, informant 'Abd al-Karim.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 21.2.89, informant Kefle Māryām, who left Godjām on 30.1.89. This is contradictory to 'ēchage Tewoflos's evidence given in 1895 to Baldissera according to which in the battle of Matammā Mangashā was still a Dadjāzmāch. See Conti Rossini, Italia ed Etiopia, p.461.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 21.2.89, the informant Kefle Māryām who left Godjām 30.1.89.

and settle the affairs in his own provincial capital.<sup>1</sup> But Yohannes was reported to have full confidence in Dabbab Ar'āyā to whom he sent, in the middle of December 1888, a present of a horse and a sword: "with the horse travel into the country you like" the attached letter was rumoured to contain,<sup>2</sup> "and with the sword cut whoever you like." Thus the only thing that Alulā could obtain from the emperor was permission to send a nephew of his, Bāshā Dastā, with a few armed followers to reinforce Dadjāzmāch Hāyila Sellāsse in Asmarā.<sup>3</sup> But Dabbab was too ambitious to be a mere dependent provincial governor. Simultaneously with his letter to the British Resident in Aden he sent from Adwā to Baldissera in Massawa expressing his wish to be forgiven and have Italian support.<sup>4</sup>

In late January 1889 he left Adwā leading his 2,000 followers and marched to Saganeiti where, on 2 February 1889, he met the Italian Major Piano and General Baldissera. Immediately afterwards he marched on Asmarā and in a short and decisive battle which took place on 9 February 1889 at 'Addi Baro he killed Dadjāzmāch Hāyila Sellāsse and some 150 of his followers and entered Alulā's capital on the same day.<sup>5</sup>

Dabbab made his headquarters in the "Tukuls" of his great

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 22.1.89, 23.1.89, informant: Berhano.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 3.1.89, informant: Haylu.

<sup>3</sup>D.I., 22.1.89, 23.1.89, informant: Berhano.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 12.1.89, Dabbab to Baldissera, 24.12.88.

<sup>5</sup>Storia Militare, p.192; D.I., 13.2.89, 10.2.89, informant: Muhammad al-Fil, FO 403/123, Slade to Dufferin, 15.2.89.

rival.<sup>1</sup> As can be concluded from his letter of 10th February 1889 to Baldissera, Yohannēs still hoped to make him his governor of the Marab Mēllash:

"I have just received a letter from the king saying: 'Dear brother, return to me and leave the Italians... I am your brother. I shall give you the title of your father /Rās/. Answer me.'"²

But Dabbab had other ideas concerning his future career:

"The king only gave me a title /Dadjāzmāch/ but I was not convinced he was my friend. I want to be a ruler .... I have now half of Ethiopia in my hands. You and I should help each other to our victory... I ask you no arms and no money but your friendship."²

On 6 February 1889 an Italian expeditionary force accompanied by Dadjāzmāch Kefle Iyāsus entered Karan where the latter was to remain under the Italian flag.<sup>3</sup>

March 1889: The death of Yohannēs in Matammā. His heir, Mangashā, put under the care of Alulā.

Rās Alulā was not the commander of the Ethiopian army in the battle of Matammā (Al-Qallabāt) which took place between the 8 March 1889 and 11 March 1889. Hearsay even suggests that he did not like to participate in the battle or that he opposed the emperor's tactics.<sup>4</sup> According to the evidence of the 'ēchage Tewoflos which was taken six and a half years later<sup>5</sup> the new young

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 13.2.89, informant: Sūlimān.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., Dabbab to Baldissera (Arabic), 10.2.89.

<sup>3</sup>WO 33/55, Eritrea Report.

<sup>4</sup>Tesfai Seyoum, op.cit., p.34, quoting an informant, Bashai Tzegai Ghebremikael. Also int. with Bairu Taflu of IES, Jan. 1972, who had collected oral sources in Tetre.

<sup>5</sup>Conti Rossini, Italia, pp. 461, 462.

favourites of the emperor, Mangashā<sup>1</sup> and Hāyla Māryām, commanded the two wings of the imperial forces. Of these two princes, and presumably brothers, sons of Yohannes's brother Dadjāzmāch Gugsā,<sup>2</sup> Rās Hāyla Māryām was superior. According to oral evidence and a well informed European observer, Hāyla Māryām was regarded by the emperor as his heir.<sup>3</sup> Alulā was described as fighting in the right wing together with Mangashā,<sup>4</sup> the newly promoted Rās and the governor of the domains of the late crown prince.<sup>5</sup>

The Mahdist army, led by Az-Zākī Tamal, recently nominated following the death of Ḥamdān Abū 'Anja on 29 January 1889, was entrenched in a Zariba.<sup>6</sup> According to the description given by 'echage Tewoflos<sup>7</sup> the armies confronted each other on Saturday, 9 March 1889, and the Ethiopian right wing under Mangashā managed to penetrate the Mahdist Zariba. In that early stage of the battle Alulā was wounded in four places. This, confirmed by more than one source,<sup>8</sup> did not affect his activities. On the left wing, however, a real disaster occurred when Rās Hāyla Māryām was shot dead. Confusion was created on the left wing and success reigned in Mangashā's

---

<sup>1</sup>Mangasha was born in 1868, see C. Zaghi, Crispi e Menelich; Nel diario inedito del Conte A. Salimbeni, Torino 1956, p.24.

<sup>2</sup>For Mangashā being the son of Gugsā, see Takla Ṣadeq Makuriya, p.63.

<sup>3</sup>Wylde, "Unofficial", MG, 10.5.97.

<sup>4</sup>Wylde, "Modern", p.41.

<sup>5</sup>In Heruy, Ityopyānā Matammā, p.12, Mangashā is not mentioned among the Rases, but on p.13, Yohannes called him a Rās.

<sup>6</sup>Holt, pp. 173, 174.

<sup>7</sup>Conti Rossini, Italia, pp. 461, 462.

<sup>8</sup>Mannawe MS, A.S.MAI D.I., 2.4.89, informant: Uthmān 'Umān.

right, where he advanced, causing the emperor, hitherto in-  
specting the battle from the rear, to move forward and encourage  
the army.<sup>1</sup> "Rās Mangashā sent /to Yohannes/ saying: 'There is  
an entrance which we have broken, come'."<sup>2</sup> Yohannes, according  
to Tewoflos, enthusiastically moved forward, firing his rifle.

"A bullet hit his right hand. But he wrapped it  
in his shamma as if it were nothing. Still he ad-  
vanced wanting to fire. Another ball pierced his  
left hand, struck his chest and lodged there. The  
Negus was carried to his tent."<sup>3</sup>

With the emperor being carried back the Ethiopian's attack was  
finally repulsed and they suffered many losses. Nightfall was a  
relief for them, but not for the wounded emperor:

"That night the king passed the time in great pain.  
When it was morning /Sunday, 10 March 1889/,<sup>4</sup> de-  
scribed Alulā's biographer,<sup>4</sup> "Ras Alula came to him  
to know his condition, and he /Yohannes/ told him  
secret mysteries concerning the house of the kingdom  
and concerning the house of his son Ras Mangasha."

"To all," Tewoflos added,<sup>5</sup> "he declared that  
Mengasha was his son, not his brother's and that  
feeling the approach of death, all must recognise  
him as his successor."

"And he /Mangasha/,<sup>6</sup> it was recorded in Mannawe,<sup>6</sup>  
'came to him /Yohannes/, and his father said to Ras

---

<sup>1</sup>Wylde, "Unofficial", MG, 10.5.97.

<sup>2</sup>Lamlam, f.39.

<sup>3</sup>Conti Rossini, Italia, loc.cit.

<sup>4</sup>Mannawe MS.

<sup>5</sup>Conti Rossini, Italia, loc.cit.

<sup>6</sup>Mannawe MS.

Alula, 'O my beloved and faithful one, behold your son, this Ras Mangasha. Protect your trust which I have handed over to you.' And to his son he said, 'My son, behold your father, Ras Alula, do not depart from his counsel, nor transgress his commands.'

Having spoken like this, he made a promise, and rested from the toil of this transitory world..."<sup>1</sup>

According to a report made by a European much involved in Ethiopian affairs, those who attended the tent of the dying emperor were the 'echage, Rās Alulā, Yohannes's confessor Mamher Walda Giyorgis, Alulā's brother Dadjāzmāch Tasammā and Rās Gabra Kidān of Zabul (Seyum's father).<sup>2</sup> Nēgus Takla Hāymānot (Rās Adal), though reported by Mahdist sources as a participant in the battle, was not actually there, as he had been released, according to Lamlam, by Yohannes.<sup>3</sup> Rās Mikā'el was reported leaving the site of the battle and returning to his country taking with him a lot of arms.<sup>4</sup> It can be assumed that at least he, and possibly many others opposed the declaration of Mangashā as an emperor. This can be well established by evidence given by Alulā himself to A.B.Wylde in July 1896.<sup>5</sup>

"It was not till the next day [Sunday 10 March 1889] when quarrels arose as to the succession to the throne, that the Abyssinian army retreated."

Deserted by most of their troops and their commanders, Rās Mangashā and Rās Alulā began a hasty retreat to Təgre. Rās Alulā

<sup>1</sup>See also Takla Şadaq Makuriyā, p.63.

<sup>2</sup>Mem et Doc 138, p.161, Report by Labosse, 17.2.90.

<sup>3</sup>Lamlam, f.38 bis. He was also not mentioned in Heruy's list of participants. Heruy, p.12.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 6.4.89, Informant: Gabra Masqal Kāfil.

<sup>5</sup>Wylde "Unofficial", MG, 17.5.97. On the same occasion Alulā rejected Slatin's account of the battle (see Slatin, pp. 439-442) as inaccurate. After Wylde read it to Alulā, he reacted: "How can Slatin describe a battle which he never saw?"



proclaimed: "All the people of Tigre follow me".<sup>1</sup> The emperor's body was captured and old Rās Ar'āyā Dəmṣu was killed by the Mahdists who *Pursued* the retreating Ethiopians.<sup>2</sup> According to Ismā'īl b. 'Abd al-Qādir's description this second clash developed into a real battle which took place on Tuesday, 12th March 1886 (Rajab the 9th, 1306H) near the Atbara River.

"Most of the Abyssinian chiefs who escaped from the first battle were killed in this. Rās Alulā, although he was the fire of the Abyssinians's fire [this time] he ran away."<sup>3</sup>

On the same day Az-Zākī Tamal wrote to the Khalīfa boasting that he sent to him the heads of Yohannes and Rās Alulā.<sup>4</sup> In another letter of the same day he claimed also to have found the seal of Alulā.<sup>5</sup>

What was claimed to be the head of the Ethiopian general was sent to various places in the Sudan.<sup>6</sup>

\*

\* \*

Although Rās Alulā did not lose his head in the battle of Matammā, he lost almost everything else. With the death of Yohannes

<sup>1</sup>LV, XV, Antonelli to MAE, 27.3.89.

<sup>2</sup>Heryu, Tyepyānā Matammā, p.14; Conti Rossini, Italia, p.26, note 2.

<sup>3</sup>Ismā'īl, At-Tirāz, ff. 125-130.

<sup>4</sup>Shuqayr, p.485.

<sup>5</sup>Shuqayr, p.486. See a correction by Shuqayr on p.487.

<sup>6</sup>A.S.MAI, D.I., 28.5.89. A letter of Ahmad al-Jīr to Muḥammad al-Fīl, 21.4.89. He was in Khartum and saw the heads of Alulā and Yohannes. For similar stories, see in: FO 407/88, Baring to Salisbury, 8.5.89, and Smith to Grenfell, 11.4.89. Also J. Ohrwalder, Ten Years' Captivity in the Mahdi's Camp, London 1892, p.268.

he lost his main source of power. Though frequently in disgrace with his master, Alulā was still justifiably regarded by Yohannēs as his most loyal and trusted vassal. While others proved to be rivals and contenders, Alulā was only to be blamed for being inflexible with the Europeans. Though thus leading his master to disasters, his loyalty was beyond any doubt. Alulā's interest in creating an independent base for himself in the Marab Mēllāsh was mainly aimed at securing economic <sup>re</sup>sources and social status <sub>a</sub> and he never aimed at the creation of/politically independent unit. Had Yohannēs survived the battle, he would have undoubtedly nominated the Rās over a new and important province, would have given him an important task in the possible future war against Menilek or even restored his rule over Hamāsen.

With the fall of Asmarā and his provinces Rās Alulā lost the chance to overcome the blow of the death of his patron through deriving power from a provincial domain. He lost his source of finance and manpower, a safe base and in fact his home. All he could do now was to return to Tegrē where he was actually the "Wadi Qubi", destitute of wealth and hereditary rights.

N. 1889-1890: ALULĀ'S FAILURE TO PRESERVE TIGREAN HEGEMONY

Tigrean hegemony - Alulā's only option for survival

Having no traditional rights in Tēgre, no feudal domain and consequently no military or economic power, Alulā had to return again to the status of being the king's man. His only chance to survive as a prominent political figure was to become the prestigious Turk Bāshā of the future Emperor Mangashā, as he had been in the late seventies and early eighties at Yohannes's court. Alulā's political existence was now totally dependent on the preservation of the Tigrean hegemony. His future relations with Rās Mangashā were not merely a result of Yohannes's will but was his only way to political survival. With Tēgre as but one of the provinces, Alulā would have no chance to have an imperial office. In that case he would have to return and find his place in the feudal framework of Tēgre. Here the best he could hope for was to be given a small piece of land, probably in Tamben, as a Gult, or, as Alulā himself said later, to enter a convent<sup>1</sup> and finish his life with prayers. But the task of reestablishing the Tigrean imperial court was beset with difficulties. Nəgus Takla Hāymānot, Rās Mikā'el and other important leaders whose loyalty to the Tigrean throne was hitherto doubtful and conditional were obviously tending to side with the ambitious Shoan Nəgus Menilek, as they actually did in the next few weeks.

The Tigrean hegemony was threatened not only by external strong powers but also by the traditional local rivalries hitherto

---

<sup>1</sup>See below, p. 273. Also: Zaghi, Crispi, p. 74.

partly restrained by Yohannes. Those tendencies became probably stronger during the last eight months of Yohannes's absence.

As described by Conti Rossini<sup>1</sup> there were three great families in Təgre which competed over its government, to which they had historical rights. The first was the family of Emperor Yohannes, which originated in Tamben and which included great forefathers like Rās Mikā'el Sə'ul, who governed Təgre for about forty years before he died in 1780. This family was headed now by Rās Mangashā. The second family was that of Rās Ar'āyā Demṣu from 'əndartā, headed now by Dabbab Ar'āyā whose forefathers included Rās Walda Sellāsse who governed the Təgre after Rās Mikā'el Sə'ul until 1816. Thirdly there were the descendants of Sebāgādis, the Dadjāzmāch from Agāme, who governed the province from 1818 to 1831. These were headed by Dadjāzmāch Səbhat Arigāwi, the hereditary prince and governor of Agāme.

To these open rivalries one can add contenders who derived their power from a non-Tigrean source, such as Dadjāzmāch Səyum "Abba Gubaz" of Yohannes's family, soon to be nominated by Mənilək as his governor of Təgre. This internal political division was worsened by a disastrous economic situation, the result of one of the worst periods of famine and epidemic in Ethiopian history.<sup>2</sup> The feeding of a small army even for a very short time was soon to become impossible in the shattered Təgre. The situation being so

<sup>1</sup>Conti Rossini, Italia ed Etiopia, p.26.

<sup>2</sup>See Conti Rossini, Italia, p.17, n.2; R. Pankhurst, "The Great Ethiopian Famine of 1889-1892", University College Review, Addis Ababa, Spring 1969, pp. 90-103. See also a detailed description in L. Mercatelli, "Nel paese di Ras Alula", Corriere di Napoli, 13-14 May 1891.

unstable, Rās Alulā was apparently trying to persuade Rās Mangashā to crown himself as the emperor of Ethiopia.<sup>1</sup> Probably for that purpose he guided the young Rās to Aksum, the traditional site of Ethiopian coronations. According to the Mannawe Ms. they marched from Matammā to Sēmen<sup>2</sup> and proceeded to Tamben where they arrived in early April.<sup>3</sup>

"Passing on from there, they arrived at the country of Aksum [on 20 April 1889<sup>4</sup>] and the people of Zion received them, weeping and making lamentation for themselves and for Yohannes their king. ... They assembled and went to Ras Alula, and they said to him, 'Praise to God in heaven.... for he has shown us your face, and has spared you for us, the seed of Yohannes. If he had not spared you for us from death, we would have been like Sodom, and we would have resembled Gomorra.'"<sup>5</sup>

April-May 1889: Sēbhat and Dabbab refuse to unite under Mangashā

Rās Mangashā apparently refused Alulā's demand to proclaim himself as the emperor of Ethiopia. Described as a weak personality,<sup>6</sup> he had practical reasons too for not making such a gamble. The establishment of his supremacy in the Tēgre itself, a most necessary precondition for a claim to the throne, was far from being achieved. Threatened by both Shoa and Italy, soon to become officially allied

---

<sup>1</sup>Interview Dadjāzmāch Zawde Gabra Sellāsse.

<sup>2</sup>According to oral tradition the governor of Sēmen at that time, Zagade, attacked Mangashā and Alulā but was defeated. See Tesfai Seyum, p.34. According to D.I., 3.4.89, informant Ghermai Arko, the name of the attacker was Afle and Alulā lost 150 men.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 10.4.89, informant "Wakīl Mulḥaq Ḥarkīkū", 6.4.89, informant Gabra Maskel Kafil.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 24.4.89, informant Maḥmūd 'Abd al-Ḥāfiz; 22.4.89, informant Berhano.

<sup>5</sup>Mannawe MS.

<sup>6</sup>This is agreed by many sources. See, among others, Wylde, Modern, p.12; Conti Rossini, p.465; FO 403/239, Gleichen, "Memorandum on Ras Mangascia", 13.2.96.

under the Treaty of Uccialli (2nd May 1889), young Rās Mangashā and his experienced counsellor and protector Alulā were still but working to achieve that aim.

The ruler of Agāme, Dadjāzmāch Səbhat Arigāwi, could at first be regarded as a possible ally. He participated in the battle of Matammā, in the subsequent clash between the Mahdists and the retreating Tigreans on the Atbara River, and in the later clash in the Səmen. He apparently accompanied Alulā and Mangashā on their way through Tamben to Aksum and Adwā. There, in the Tigrean capital, having an old dispute with Dadjāzmāch Tadrā of Ayba, a follower of Mangashā,<sup>1</sup> he secretly left the camp of Mangashā and Alulā and hastily returned to Agāme. Among his people in his hereditary province he remained to watch further developments<sup>2</sup> and in the later part of 1889 he started cooperating with the Italians. If he was contacted by Alulā and Mangashā and offered an alliance, he apparently rejected the offer.<sup>3</sup>

Dabbab Ar'āyā lived in "Alulā's Tukuls" in Asmarā for about a month (from 9 February 1889) exchanging written threats with Yohannes's devotees in Adwā and Aksum, Dadjāzmāch Tadrā Ayba and the Nəbura 'əd (governor of Axum) Walda Giyorgis.<sup>4</sup> Then in early March he decided to move to his natural base in Saganeiti, probably in order to mobilise more troops for a possible return

---

<sup>1</sup>On Dadjāzmāch Tadrā, see Conti Rossini, *Italia ed Etiopia*, p.98, note 1. Also *La Tribuna*, 22.1.95.

<sup>2</sup>See manuscript kept by Dr. R. Caulk, "The Life of Ras Sibhat Aregawi" written by one of Səbhat's descendants, a graduate of H.S.I.U.

<sup>3</sup>No evidence of such an offer was found in the D.I.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 11.3.89, informant Bakhit Scialeb.

to Adwā.<sup>1</sup> Consequently Tādīlā Ayba marched to the deserted capital of Hamāsen and entered it in mid-March proclaiming that he was acting in the name of the emperor.<sup>2</sup> In Saganieti Dabbab was reluctant to take the road to Adwā as rumours about the return of Yohannēs and Alulā were spread all over the country. In late March Dabbab and Tādīlā Ayba clashed between Saganieti and Asmarā, each of them suffering some 10-20 casualties.<sup>3</sup> Tādīlā Ayba returned to Adwā<sup>4</sup> while Dabbab, being informed in the meantime of the arrival of Mangashā and Alulā at Tamben, returned to Saganieti.

Following the death of Rās Ar'āyā Dəmṣu at Matammā Alulā was shrewd enough to chain two of his sons,<sup>5</sup> as a means to control the behaviour of their rebellious brother Dabbab. On their way to Aksum and Adwā, one of the two managed to escape.<sup>6</sup> From Adwā in early May Alulā sent an envoy to Dabbab, a certain Dadjāz-Māch Barhe, to negotiate a settlement. Dabbab's reply was reported to be a demand for Alulā to free his brother and a refusal to negotiate with one whom he called a usurper of others' rights. He simultaneously wrote to Mangashā assuring him of his will to compromise but asked for the delivery of Alulā into his hands as a sign of sincere friendship. Mangashā's reply, according to informants who reached Massawa, was that Alulā was his father and a

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 4.3.89, informant: Muḥammad Ibrāhīm.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 19.3.89, informant: Ali Sciagherai.

<sup>3</sup>D.I., 3.4.89, informant: Ghermai Arko; 4.4.89, Di Maio to Baldissera.

<sup>4</sup>D.I., 31.3.89, informant: 'Alī Shukrī; D.I., 6.4.89, informant: Muḥammad Idrīs.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI, 10.d.89, informant: Wakīl of Ḥarkīkū.

<sup>6</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 19.4.89.

son should never betray his father.<sup>1</sup> It was, however, the first proof to Mangashā that his identification with Rās Alulā could cause difficulties on his search to reunite Tēgre under his domin-  
ance.

April-May 1889: A failure to unite with the local élite of Hamāsen

Simultaneously with the diplomatic effort to unite Tēgre Alulā conducted another diplomatic campaign to regain the Marab Mellāsh. Reaching Tamben in early April, he camped with Mangashā near Ambā Salāmā on the top of which the leaders of the old aristocratic families of Hamāsen were still imprisoned. Alulā understood that he had no chance of restoring Ethiopian government beyond the Marab by the Tigrean sword. The power of his Tigrean followers in Hamāsen had been broken and many of their leaders who accompanied the Rās to Matammā, returned to Tēgre and disappeared from the political scene. Old Rās Walda Mikā'el refused to leave the Ambā on which he had spent the last ten years.<sup>2</sup> He was legally a free man now as the death of Yohannes was an automatic release for him. His son Masfen, however, seemed to be willing to cooperate. He was released by Alulā from the Ambā and accompanied him to Aksum and Adwā,<sup>3</sup> and rumours were spread that Alulā would give him his daughter, the widow of Hāyla Sellāsse.<sup>4</sup> But Masfen could not forget the recent history of the relations between his father and Alulā. From Adwā

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 11.5.89, informant: 'Alī Adam and Idrīs Zakāriya; 13.5.89, Kuflu Derau; 22.5.89, Muḥammad Idrīs.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 22.4.89, 26.4.89.

<sup>3</sup>D.I., 30.4.89, 'Uthmān 'Umān.

<sup>4</sup>D.I., 18.5.1889.



he secretly sent to Baldissera in Massawa notifying him of his intention to help the Italians against the old bitter enemy of his family. He added that his father and younger brother, Ḥāyḷa Malakot, were still kept on the Ambā as hostages.<sup>1</sup>

Alulā's plan was to influence Dadjāzmāch Kefle 'eyāsus, Masfen's brother-in-law, to betray his Italian supporters and help him regain Asmarā.<sup>2</sup> Kefle, who had some 2,000 followers and 600 rifles,<sup>3</sup> had already raided Asmarā around mid-March 1889<sup>4</sup> and actually captured it for a period of a few days in early April.<sup>5</sup> Kefle seemed now to be willing to cooperate with Masfen and Alulā and was subsequently reinforced by Alāmayahu Gabru, the son of Belāttā Gabru and Alulā's devotee in Bogos.<sup>6</sup>

Kefle was encouraged to side with Alulā, probably because of his being threatened then by an expected move of 'Uthmān Digna on the Banū 'Amir and Ḥabbāb.<sup>7</sup> and by the Italian policy of non-intervention. According to that policy General Baldissera suggested "that no action should be taken by the Italian colonial forces until the strength of the conflicting parties in northern Ethiopia was entirely exhausted".<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., Mesfin to Baldissera, 11.5.89.

<sup>2</sup>D.I., 8.6.89, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ḥāfīz.

<sup>3</sup>LV, XVI, Baldissera to M.d.G., 5.6.89.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 16.3.89, informant: 'Abd al-Ḥāfīz, 19.3.89; informant: Musa Domfa; Puglisi, p.174.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 2.4.89, informant: 'Uthmān 'Umān, 9.4.89.

<sup>6</sup>D.I., 31.5.89.

<sup>7</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 13.5.89.

<sup>8</sup>WO 33/5 Eritrea Report, p.29. See Baldissera's "Relazione" in LV XVI, 1.9.1889.

But Alulā and Mangashā were doing their best to unite those conflicting parties. In late May it was reported that Alulā was making final preparations to cross the Marab. The Italians, however, aware of their opponent's moves, decided to intervene. Dabbab, in late May again in the deserted Asmarā, was mobilised to cooperate with an Italian Major. They led a strong force to Karan and took it on 2 June 1889. Kēfle was arrested and was sent to die in a prison at Assab, and the capital of Bogos was left in Italian hands.<sup>1</sup>

May 1889: Isolation and military weakness

Mangashā's camp in Adwā, as was reported in Massawa on 18 August 1889,<sup>2</sup> was headed by the following few prominent leaders: Rās Mangashā himself, Rās Alulā, Rās Hagoṣ, Dadjāzmāch Tādālā Ayba, Alulā's brother Dadjāzmāch Tasammā, and Shālaqā Ar'āyā. A nephew of Alulā, Bāsha Tādālā Fanja, was rumoured to be wavering in his loyalty.<sup>3</sup> The failure to unite with additional forces not only emphasized the political isolation of those who tried to restore the hegemony of Tēgre but also proved to be disastrous even to the existence of their relatively small military power. Their estimated force of 8,000 warriors<sup>4</sup> which was assembled in Adwā to march on Hamāsen was reported to be quickly diminishing as a result of the famine.<sup>5</sup> This army which was supposed to feed itself

---

<sup>1</sup>WO 33/55 Eritrea Report, p.29. Masfen went to the Italians on 11.8.89. IV, XVI Baldissera, "Relazione Sulla Occupazione dell'Asmara", 1.9.89, and "Estratto della relazione... sull'occupazione di Keren...", 16.6.89.

<sup>2</sup>D.I., 20.5.89, informant: Gabru.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 18.5.89, 'Uthmān 'Umān.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 2.5.89, XV, XVI, Baldissera to M.d.G., 5.6.89.

<sup>5</sup>D.I., 1315.89, informant: Kuflu Derau.

being on the move, had no chance to exist when the projected march was cancelled. On 10 May 1889 Alulā distributed among his men what was probably his last resource, the royal stores of Aksum. These contained only some hundred rifles and forty boxes of ammunition.<sup>1</sup> In the third week of May Alulā sent a detachment of his best troops to raid and feed themselves beyond the Marab<sup>2</sup> but the others seemed to be losing their patience.

On 24 May 1889 Dabbab wrote to Baldissera that Shālaqā Ar'āyā had deserted his master Alulā and joined his camp bringing forty riflemen.<sup>3</sup> A day later - it was reported by another informant - Alulā's brother Tasammā deserted also.<sup>4</sup> Nəbura 'ed Walda Giyorgis was arrested by Alulā because his two sons <sup>had</sup> left the camp with 150 men.<sup>5</sup> The same informant told his Italian employers that in Alulā's camp near Aksum (Mangashā's men were then in Adwā) only two hundred troops were left. In early June came more news about deserters from Alulā to Dabbab.<sup>6</sup> Alulā was reported as sending his devotees to block the ways of Dabbab's camp,<sup>7</sup> but he was surely aware of the fact that this was not the way to regain a Tigrean hegemony.

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 20.5.89, informant: Mensa, 18.5.89, 'Uthmān 'Umān.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 20.5.89, informant: Mensa.

<sup>3</sup>D.I., Dabbab to Baldissera, 24.5.89; D.I., 27.5.89, 28.5.89, Idrīs Zakāriya. They had already been in touch before Dogali, see above, p.178.

<sup>4</sup>D.I., 28.5.89, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ḥāfiz.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 28.5.89, Idrīs Zakāriya.

<sup>6</sup>D.I., 2.6.89, informant: Mensa.

<sup>7</sup>D.I., 6.6.89, informant: 'Umār Adam.

June 1889: Menilek's appointee fails to enter Tēgre

On 2 May 1889 Menilek, aiming also "to neutralize Mangasha's pretensions as well as regularise his own status"<sup>1</sup> signed the treaty of Uccialli with Italy. In order to get official Italian recognition of his accession to the throne, as well as the important right to import military supplies duty free through Massawa, Menilek agreed in the treaty that a joint commission should fix the frontier on a line from Arāfali on the Red Sea along the highlands, leaving Asmarā and the Bogos with Karan to Italy [Article III]. During the preliminary negotiations on 26 March 1889 Menilek wrote to King Umberto, calling on him to order his troops at Massawa to guard the frontier towards Asmarā, and to give no heed to the appeals of outlaws (sheftoch) or rebels against his authority in Tēgre, nor to allow arms to pass through to them.<sup>2</sup> Thus assuring Italian support in his fight against the Tigrean contender, Menilek who in June had gained the support of Rās Mikā'el<sup>3</sup> and Nēgus Takla Hāymānot,<sup>4</sup> sent Dadjāzmāch Seyum northwards as his nominee over Tēgre. Deserted by their few hungry troops and with no possible ally, Mangashā and Alulā, in early June at Adwā, were threatened by Italy and Dabbab from the north and Menilek and Seyum from the south.

In late May it was rumoured that Menilek would personally lead his forces to Tēgre, but in fact he did not do so merely promising

---

<sup>1</sup>Marcus, op.cit., p.31.

<sup>2</sup>S.Rubenson, Wichale XVII, Addis Ababa 1961, p.56.

<sup>3</sup>Before giving up to Menilek Rās Mikā'el was reported to have contacted Alulā and Mangashā and offered a joint campaign against the Shoan. D.I., 2:5.89, 24.5.89. But the latter apparently could offer him no help. In late June Rās Mikā'el and Takla Hāymānot were reported to be with Menilek in Dabra Tābor. D.I., 29.6.89.

<sup>4</sup>D.I., 29.6.69, 'Uthmān Umān. Also LV, XV, Consul General in Aden to MAE, 12.6.89.

Dadjāzmāch Seyum to follow him after the rainy season.<sup>1</sup> Seyum advanced to Lāstā from where the local governor Wāqshum Beru, a rival of Seyum, fled to Saganieti and united there with Dabbab on 6 June 1889.<sup>2</sup> Seyum passed the lake of Ashange and in early June entered the Tigrean province of 'endartā where - according to Italian employed informants - he was well received by the population.<sup>3</sup> 'endartā and especially its capital Maqalle had been the headquarters of the late Rās Ar'āyā Sellāsse and his young wife Zawditu. Zawditu had been given large areas in 'endartā as a Gult by Yohannes in 1882. Following the death of Ar'āyā, Zawditu had returned to her father Mēnilēk but many of her devotees remained in that province and were in favour of a Tigrean recognition of the Shoan Emperor.<sup>4</sup> Emperor Yohannes's sister, W. Dēqnash, Seyum's mother, was also living in Maqalle.<sup>5</sup>

In Adwā Alulā and Mangashā faced a difficult dilemma as they could not abandon the Tigrean capital and risk a possible advance of Dabbab from Soganieti on it.<sup>6</sup> Thus Dadjāzmāch Tadrā Ayba was sent by the two in early June to try and stop Seyum. Tadrā clashed with Mēnilēk's nominee a few miles to the south of Maqalle

---

<sup>1</sup>Conti Rossini, *Italia*, p.17; D.I., 28.5.89, Idrīs Zakāriyya.

<sup>2</sup>D.I., 8.8.89, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ḥāfiz.

<sup>3</sup>D.I. 22.6.89, "Many informants who left Adwa on 16.6.89."

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE 6.4.91, *Corriere di Napoli*, 13-14 May 1891; A.S.MAI 3/6-46, Salsa to MAE, 30.7.97.

<sup>5</sup>Int. with Yashashwarq.

<sup>6</sup>D.I., 12.6.89, 'Uthmān 'Umān.

but was defeated. He retreated to the southern outskirts of Maqalle and constructed a Zariba there.<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime, Alulā and Mangashā's camp continued to suffer from the growing stream of deserters. In the last week of May Alulā was reported to be unsuccessfully *pursuing* some of them.<sup>2</sup> The two Rāses had to realise that they must be on the move if they wanted their followers to remain with them. Thus, on 4 June 1889, they left Adwā<sup>3</sup> and marched to fight Seyum near Maqalle. Seyum avoided the clash and retreated to Ashange, while Mangashā and his mentor returned to Tamben<sup>4</sup> to camp between the threatened Adwā and the threatened Maqalle.

"After this, two rulers /Seyum and Dabbab/ rose up in rebellion," wrote the biographer of Alulā, "and Ras Alula said to Ras Mangasha 'Arise, let us go to fight Dājjač Seyum, because he has come from the eastern land, in order to destroy us and to remove the kingdom of Yohannes'. The heart of Ras Mangasha rejoiced at this counsel, and they went together towards the east /Maqalle is south east of Adwā/ to search for him; and they did not find a trace of his path."<sup>5</sup>

Yet Menilek's appointee as a governor of Təgre was not defeated; his retreat to Ashange proved later to be but a tactical step.

#### June-July 1889: Dabbab takes Adwā and is imprisoned by Alulā

Before leaving Adwā for Maqalle Rās Mangashā appointed Dad-jāzmāch 'embāye over the Tigrean capital. 'embāye was a nephew

---

<sup>1</sup>D.I., 22.6.89, "Many informants who left Adwa on 16.6.89."

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 12.6.89, 'Uthmān 'Umān.

<sup>3</sup>D.I., 8.6.89, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ḥāfiz.

<sup>4</sup>D.I., 21.6.89, 5.7.89, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ḥāfiz.

<sup>5</sup>Mannawe MS.

of Dabbab and it was probably suspected that he might cooperate with his uncle but Mangashā and Alulā apparently had no choice. As they had no other followers they had to make hazardous and quick appointments before leaving the district. Thus Dad-jāzmāch Gabra Madhan, the son of the late Rās Bāryāwu and a sworn enemy of Alulā,<sup>1</sup> was nominated by Mangashā over the country from Adwā to the Marab. The loyal Rās Hagos was sent to the province of Shire to collect its revenue and report at Maqalle.<sup>2</sup> On 17 June 1889 it was reported in Massawa that Dabbab had left Saganieti for Adwā,<sup>3</sup> and it was well established by various informants<sup>4</sup> that Dadjāzmāch 'embāye invited him to take the Tigrean capital. In late June Dabbab was reported in Agāme and on 1 July 1889 that he had met Dadjāzmāch 'embāye in 'enticho.<sup>5</sup> Dabbab's followers took charge of Adwā and on 3 July it was reported that a certain Bāshā Gabraesgi, an envoy sent by Alulā to collect the revenue of Adwā, had been shot dead in the town.<sup>6</sup>

In early July Mangashā camped in Tamben with his reported 1,000 at 'Abbi 'Addi and Alulā with 500 in his native village of Zuqlī.<sup>7</sup> Reportedly they had a bitter dispute over their relations

---

<sup>1</sup>See above, p.35.

<sup>2</sup>D.I., 22.6.89, "Many informants who left Adwa on 16.6.89."

<sup>3</sup>D.I., 17.6.89.

<sup>4</sup>D.I., 29.6.89, 'Uthmān 'Umān, 27.6.89, Idrīs Zakāriya.

<sup>5</sup>D.I., 1.7.89.

<sup>6</sup>D.I., 3.7.89, informant: Mūsā Fākir.

<sup>7</sup>D.I., 5.7.89, informant: 'Alī Kassai.

with Dabbab. Mangashā, willing to compromise, was corresponding with the Italian-supported Dadjāzmāch. Yet an informant returning from Tamben to Massawa said that "many people believe that the dispute between Mangashā and Alulā is but a trap for Debeeb".<sup>1</sup> On 12 July 1889 it was reported that Dabbab had left for Tamben<sup>2</sup> and two days later that he had just met Rās Hagos, returning from Shire to Mangashā's camp, fought with him and killed some one hundred of his followers.<sup>3</sup> Mangashā and Alulā, possibly to avoid battle, left for Maqalle<sup>4</sup> while Dabbab entered 'Abbi 'Addi and devastated Zuqlī..<sup>5</sup> During the week between 17 June 1889 and 24 July 1889 many informants reported in Massawa that Mangashā and Dabbab were corresponding intensively.

One of Dabbab's followers later described how his master was preparing to march on Maqalle and fight the two Rāses when Mangashā's envoys came and offered that he should share the kingdom with Yohannes's successor. Dabbab reacted: "Now I have Tamben. The stronger would be the king." So they brought him the clothes and the horse of Yohannes. Debeeb said: 'If I can have it without fighting, it is better' and he made peace."<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>D.I., 10.7.89, Report by Albertone.

<sup>2</sup>D.I., 12.7.89, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ḥāfīz.

<sup>3</sup>D.I., 14.7.89, informant: Bakit Scialeb.

<sup>4</sup>D.I., 17.7.89, Muḥammad Idrīs.

<sup>5</sup>D.I., 25.7.89, Bahta Hagos to Baldissera.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., 28.7.89.



It was probably between 17 July 1889 and 19 July 1889 that Dabbab entered Maqalle.<sup>1</sup> "Three days they were making a feast. Debeb was dressed in the clothes of the Negus and as Mangascia had promised him he himself declare Debeb as the king of Ethiopia. After 3 days Mangascia invited him to his palace in Makalle where Alula was waiting to arrest him."<sup>2</sup> Dabbab was reported entering the palace with two of his followers and was immediately arrested by Alulā's soldiers. Those of his followers who were waiting outside the palace were surrounded and gave up their arms.<sup>3</sup> On the same day, probably between 20 July 1889 and 23 July 1889, Dabbab was *put in* chains and sent to Ambā Salāmā.<sup>4</sup>

Alulā's biographer did his best to describe the arrest of Dabbab as a heroic deed of the Rās:<sup>5</sup>

"Secondly, Däjjazmač Däbäb followed after them until he reached the land of Endërta, and Ras Mangasha and Ras Alula returned towards him. He /Dabbab/ feared and trembled. ... Däjjazmač Dabäb said, 'Have mercy on me, my lords; and especially my lord Ras Alula, forgive me.' And he made reconciliation and peace, and there was great joy at that time.

On the third day, he /Däbäb/ wished to return to his former work, and his evil counsel and the deceit of his heart were known to Ras Mangasha and Ras Alula, the good lords. Ras Alula seized with his right hand that man /Däbäb/, and with his left hand his brother, and they did not move at all. Is not this man strong of arm like Samson, and resolute like Joab?

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI D.I., Bahta Agos to Baldissera 25.7.89, already contained the story of Dabbab's arrest.

<sup>2</sup>D.I., 3.8.89.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. Baldissera's "Relazione" in LV, XVI, 1.9.89.

<sup>5</sup>Mannawe MS.

They bound him with a strong chain, and returning, he Alulā took him to the high hill which is called the burial place of Abba Sälama."

Like the treacherous arrest of Rās Walda Mikā'el ten years earlier, still remembered in Eritrea to Alulā's discredit, the arrest of Dabbab, though inevitable and necessary for the Tigrean interest, increased the distrust between Alulā and the Tigrean nobility. Justifiably enough, the removal of Dabbab from the political scene was attributed exclusively to Alulā and Mangashā's name is hardly mentioned in that context. Alulā's step also increased the rivalry between 'endartā, where many leaders of the royal family lived, and the poor Tamben, Alulā's native province.<sup>1</sup>

W. Denqnash, Yohannēs's sister, the mother of Seyum and the cousin of Dabbab, was quoted singing:

"... people of Tamben who are liars  
killed Dabbab, and made the son of Qubi a king."<sup>2</sup>

August 1889: The Italians take Asmarā. Alulā's new policy -  
appeasement of the Italians

Six days after the arrest of Dabbab, Rās Alulā departed from Mangashā and left Maqalle heading for Adwā.<sup>3</sup> He probably had agreed with Mangashā that the latter would stay to face Seyum and he himself would regain control over northern Tēgre. Alulā passed Adwā and Dabra Dāmo and in early August crossed the Bellesa river and camped in Co'atit.<sup>4</sup> It was rumoured that he intended to proceed

---

<sup>1</sup>See Mercatelli's article in La Tribuna, 4.6.95.

<sup>2</sup>Interview w. Yashashwārq. The song was probably sung two years later when Dabbab was killed in a battle with Alulā, see below, p. 296.

<sup>3</sup>D.I., 3.8.89.

<sup>4</sup>D.I., 4.8.89, informant: Naib of Arkiku.

to Saganieti and take possession of Dabbab's property there.<sup>1</sup>  
 Thus he corresponded with the Shaykhs of the Assāwūrṭa and tried to reach agreement with them.<sup>2</sup> It was probably then that Alulā heard the news of the Italian occupation of Asmarā.

On 25 July 1889 the Italian war minister withdrew his opposition to Crispi's proposal to take the town. Baldissera was instructed to march<sup>3</sup> and on the night of 2-3 August the capital of Hamāsen was taken without opposition. The supreme commander, Baldissera, arrived there a few days later and established his headquarters in "Alulā's Tukuls".<sup>4</sup>

"Negghe Alula!

Your master /he was/ O Hamasen and Asmara.  
 In the camp of yours /O Alulā/ Muslim  
 chiefs /an insulting reference to the Italians/ are camping."<sup>5</sup>

"Alula was humiliated and surprised" described one of Belattā Gabru's sons, Ledj Abrehā (who, on 10 August, left the Rās's camp and defected to Asmarā). He was frustrated by not being able to march on the town as he had only 1,000 men armed with 700 rifles.<sup>6</sup>

Rās Alulā was in no position to act according to his sentiments. With Təgre threatened by Mēnilək and Səyum and his own personal position quite in doubt, he could not afford to open another

<sup>1</sup>D.I., 5.8.89.

<sup>2</sup>D.I., 4.8.89, informant: Naib of Arkiku; also 11.8.89, 13.8.89.

<sup>3</sup>For Baldissera's policy, see his "Relazione sulla occupazione dell'Asmara" in LV, XVI, 1.9.89. Also FO 403/123, Slade to Dufferin, 10.5.89.

<sup>4</sup>WO 33/55, Eritrea Report; Storia Militare, p.197.

<sup>5</sup>C. Conti Rossini, "Canti popolari Tigrāi", No. 153.

<sup>6</sup>D.I., 15.8.89, informant: Abraha..

front with the Italians. It seems that Alulā was perfectly aware of the fact that he had to find a strong ally if he wanted to put Mangashā on the throne or even maintain Tigrean independence. From then on, for the next three years, Rās Alulā the hitherto bitter enemy of the Italians would do his utmost to appease these neighbours and persuade them to cooperate with an independent Tēgre. Though fighting the Mahdiyya was probably Alulā's last concern in that period, he had to raise that matter as the only possible common interest with the new authorities of Asmarā. To Major Piano he wrote on 15 August 1889:

"Some time ago my master Mangascia and I myself have sent you friendly letters ... Now, our early enmity should end and friendship must be established between us in order that we join hands and destroy the Dervishes. I send you Kantiba Sahle to establish peace with you. I come to Sarae to treat for peace. Send me an answer."<sup>1</sup>

The carrier of Alulā's letter also asked, in the name of his master, for Italian permission to raid Akalla Guzāy and Sarāya.<sup>2</sup> Alulā himself advanced to Godofelasi and was reported heading towards Gurā,<sup>3</sup> probably aiming to reach Saganieti and contact the Assāwurṭa.

But the Italians had no intention of becoming reconciled and cooperating with the Rās responsible for the massacre of their troops in Dogali; Piano was instructed by Baldissera to *PURSUE* and catch Alulā. Alulā, informed of the Italian's intention retreated hastily, marching the whole day of 16 August and the subsequent night. He crossed the Bellesa River and camped in Maraguz.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>D.I., 15.8.89, Alula to Piano.

<sup>2</sup>Conti Rossini, Italia, p.18; A.S.MAI 3/5/33, Baldissera to M.d.G., 19.8.89.

<sup>3</sup>D.I., 17.8.89, Piano to Baldissera.

<sup>4</sup>Baldissera, "Relazione", LV, XVI, 1.9.89; D.I., 18.8.89, Di Majo quotes Bahata Hagos' letter to him of the same day .

On 17 August 1889 Baldissera wrote to Alulā, clarifying the Italian lack of confidence in him:

"With the exception of the last letter I never received a letter from you and not from Mangascia. ... You always write me words of friendship but from other people one can conclude just the opposite, therefore it is very difficult for us to understand each other. We came to Massaua (as the whole world knows) in order to help the English fight the Dervishes. It was only after Dogali that we had to vindicate our poor slaughtered soldiers instead of destroying the Dervishes. We desire very much peace with Abyssinia but we do not have to ask for it because it was you who broke it.

The negotiations for peace must be conducted directly by Ras Mangascia. I know very well the great influence you have over Ras Mangascia and that he approves everything which you like to conclude but we must stick to this formality."

In Rome it was agreed that Mangashā and Alulā would be replied to positively about settling a peace but only if they recognised Menilek as the Emperor of Ethiopia.<sup>2</sup> From Maraguz on 21 August 1889 Alulā sent to Baldissera explaining that he was not to be blamed for Dogali; he added that he had sent on his answer to Mangashā and concluded merely saying: "I do not like enmity, I like friendship".<sup>3</sup>

September-November 1889: Alulā saves the hesitant Mangashā from Seyum

Following his failure to appease the Italians Rās Alulā did not return to Maqalle to rejoin his young master. The latter was presumably impressed by the negative image of Alulā among his own

---

<sup>1</sup>D.I., 17.8.89, Baldissera to Alula.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-33, Crispi to M.d.G.

<sup>3</sup>D.I., Alula to Baldissera, 21.8.89.

relatives in 'endartā. Mangashā's subsequent step was to pardon Dadjāzmāch 'embāye and Wāgshum Beru, the former allies of Dabbab.<sup>1</sup> As suggested by General Baldissera, Rās Alulā was suspicious that Mangashā might betray him<sup>2</sup> and according to Aṣme:

"Rās Mangashā was sending messages to Seyum saying 'Let me also submit to Aṣe Menilək'. But S̄yūm was refusing saying 'The whole if it [Tegre] is for me.' He was also intercepting all Mangashā's letters [to Menilək?]." <sup>3</sup>

In early September Mangashā left Maqalle for Adwā after calling on Alulā to join him there. But the annoyed Alulā, probably aware of Mangashā's policy, ignored his orders.<sup>4</sup>

Alulā spent the months of September and October 1889 camping in Kohayn trying to keep his small army organised and fed. At the end of August his force was estimated to be numbering some 2,000 followers, of whom 500 were armed with rifles.<sup>5</sup> He managed to maintain that camp by raiding various regions in Sarāya and Akalla Guzāy. In late August he confiscated the food stores of Maraguz.<sup>6</sup> Since however in the middle of September he was deserted by his nephew Bāshā Tadrā Fanja, who returned to Tamben,<sup>7</sup> it may be concluded that Alulā met no glorious successes in the southern part of

---

<sup>1</sup>They were reported to be with him in Adwā. D.I., "Estratto settimanale" 19-26 Sept. 1889.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-33, Baldissera to M.d.G., 14.10.89.

<sup>3</sup>Aṣme, op.cit., p.10.

<sup>4</sup>D.I., 27.8.89, Muḥammad Idrīs, 7.10.89, Wakīl of Ḥarkikū.

<sup>5</sup>D.I., Tenente Zuiraghi, 30.8.89.

<sup>6</sup>D.I., 27.8.89, Muḥammad Idrīs.

<sup>7</sup>D.I., "Estratto settimanale", 19-26 Sept. 1889. Also 14.10.89, Wakīl of Harkikū.

Marab Mellāsh.

In late October Dadjāzmāch Seyum entered Maqalle and immediately led his 1,500 well equipped troops towards Adwā.<sup>1</sup> Mangashā was reported to be camping there with only 300 troops, many of them ill. Upon hearing of the advance of Seyum, Mangashā called Tādīlā Ayba and Wāgshum Bēru who were leading their troops in various parts of the Tēgre seeking for food.<sup>2</sup>

"After this," it was recorded in Mannawe,<sup>3</sup> "in the fourth month [after the arrest of Dabbab] Dājjazmač Seyum came towards him [Mangasha] secretly, and not in public; and when he knew the news of his coming, Ras Mangasha sent to the rulers, saying 'Come to me'. But no one came. There were those who stayed away from fear, and those who stayed away from deceit."

While Tādīlā Ayba and Bēru "stayed away from fear", Dadjāzmāch Sēbhat is probably the one referred to who "stayed away from deceit".

In early September, on his way from Maqalle to Adwā, Mangashā camped for a few days at Hawzen to receive there Dadjāzmāch Sēbhat's submission.<sup>4</sup> Sēbhat was frustrated by the Italian support of his neighbour Dadjāzmāch Bāhta Hagos who went from force to force in Akalla Guzāy.<sup>5</sup> On the last day of that month he secretly betrayed his new master, Mangashā, and wrote to Baldissera declaring himself an obedient servant of Menilek.<sup>6</sup>

From Saturday morning to Sunday evening, 2nd and 3rd November

<sup>1</sup>D.I., 9.11.89, 29.10.89, Wakīl of Ḥarkīkū. Unlike Conti Rossini, Italia, p.19.

<sup>2</sup>D.I., 27.10.89; also 29.10.89, Wakīl of Ḥarkīkū.

<sup>3</sup>Mannawe MS.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-33, Baldissera to Bertole Viale, 5.9.89. D.I., 10.9.89, Nā'ib Abd al-Karīm.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-33, Baldissera to Bertole Viale, 4.9.89. Also: Orero to MAE, 10.3.90.

<sup>6</sup>D.I., 30.9.89, Sēbhat to Baldissera.

1889, Seyum and Mangashā fought in the outskirts of Adwā.<sup>1</sup>

"They made peace on Sunday," described a citizen of the Tigrean capital. "It was said: 'The crown to Degiāt Siyum!' and Ras Mangascia subsitted..."<sup>2</sup>

Seyum himself reported to Baldissera that the priests of Aksum asked him to forgive Mangashā but upon doing so Mangashā fled on the same night, between Sunday and Monday.<sup>3</sup> Seyum immediately left Adwā northwards to chase Mangashā, who apparently was making his way to Alulā's camp in Kohayn. His messengers reached Alulā while he was collecting durra and he left everything immediately<sup>4</sup> and in a rapid march approached Adwā. According to Alulā's biographer Seyum tried to influence Alulā to abandon the defeated Mangashā and join him, the representative of Emperor Menilek II:

"He arose from Kohayn with a burning heart and came with enthusiasm. He arrived at the place which they call Daero Tākli NE of Adwā. While he was there, Däjjazmač Seyum sent to him, saying, 'Come to me, my lord, and I will give you up to the half of my kingdom'. But Ras Alula hearing this, was very angry, and became like fire, and said, 'What have I to do with you. For me, I have no king except Ras Mangasha, son of Yohannes the king. But wait for me in the place you have chosen.'"<sup>5</sup>

On 6 November 1889, three days after Menilek was officially crowned emperor of Ethiopia, his representative in Tēgre was defeated by Rās Alulā. The battle was at 'endā Abuna Pantaleum near Aksum<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-33, Baldissera to M.d.G., 15.11.89.

<sup>2</sup>L. De Vito, Esercizi di lettura in Lingua Tigrigna, Rome 1893, p.19. "About Dejiat Siyum". A passage in Tigrigna written by the Ethiopian Abraham of Adwā, and translated into Italian by De Vito. Also D.I., 10.11.89, informant: 'Alī Ḥamad Nūr and Samra Idrīs.

<sup>3</sup>D.I., Seyum to Baldissera, 8.11.89. According to Conti Rossini, Italia, p.19, Mangashā fled assisted by 'embāye.

<sup>4</sup>D.I., 10.11.89, 'Alī Ḥamad and Samra Idrīs.

<sup>5</sup>Mannawe MS.

<sup>6</sup>Conti Rossini, Italia, p.19. A.S.MAI 3/5-33, Baldissera to M.d.G., 15.11.89.



and it was reported that the Rās had 150 dead and 300 wounded while Seyum suffered more.<sup>1</sup> Seyum hastily crossed the Marab and marched to Asmarā to be comforted on 14 November 1889 by his Italian allies.<sup>2</sup>

"Ras Alula sent to Ras Mangasha, saying, 'Come, enter your house, for I your father have conquered Dājjazmač Seyum, our enemy'. Ras Mangasha came with joy and gladness, and gave him /Alulā/ the throne of his father Yohannes, with the result that the officers and troops were amazed, and said, 'How good is all the work of this Ras Alula!' There were those who said, 'But I would not have given honour to a non-relative'..."<sup>3</sup>

A descendant of Alulā's relative strongly suggested that Mangashā, being desperate, did offer the throne to Alulā, but the latter refused, saying: "The throne belongs to its owner".<sup>4</sup> A famous popular song known all over Ethiopia may be also interpreted as hinting this.

"A brave man is born Alulā Abba Nagā  
who heard on Monday, marched on Tuesday  
and fought on Wednesday.  
Who smashed them like pumpkin....  
and restored the throne to the owner of the throne."<sup>5</sup>

December 1889: The battle of Zabān Cha'ā: Alulā and  
Mangashā face Seyum and Səbhat.

While Mangashā and Alulā were fighting Seyum Dadjāzmāch Tadolā Ayba, the wavering ex-follower of Mangashā, united in Agāme with

<sup>1</sup>D.I., 12.11.89, informant: Berhano.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-33, Baldissera to M.d.G., 15.11.89.

<sup>3</sup>Mannawe MS.

<sup>4</sup>Interview with Fit 'embassā Abbāy, son of Dadj Abbāy, 'Abbi 'addi, Feb. 1972.

<sup>5</sup>Interview with Bayana Abreha. Other versions in Abba Gasparini, Yaityopya tārik, Asmara, 1955, p.187. I. Guidi, "Storie e brevi testi amarici" a paper presented to a seminar in Berlin 1907 kept in Faitlovich Library. C. Conti Rossini, Proverbi Tradizioni e Canzoni Tigrine, Rome 1942, p.297.

Sēbhat Arigāwi, the ruler of Agāme. They both wrote to Baldissera on 8 November 1889 assuring him of their loyalty to Italy and Menilēk.<sup>1</sup> Mangashā and Alulā stayed in Adwā until the end of the third week of November awaiting the possible return of Seyum.<sup>2</sup> Their recent success undoubtedly rebuilt their confidence and prestige and Baldissera estimated the number of their troops to be as high as five thousand.<sup>3</sup> Then they were reported marching towards Agāme aiming to attack Sēbhat and Tadrā Ayba or, as it was speculated in Asmarā, to try to influence him to unite and take Akalla Guzāy from the Italian supported Dadjāzmāch Bāhtā Hagos.<sup>4</sup> Seyum was therefore immediately rearmed by the Italians and was instructed to unite with Sēbhat,<sup>5</sup> who again, in a letter dated 28th November 1889 to Baldissera, emphasized his devotion and loyalty to the new emperor.<sup>6</sup> The next day, 29 November 1889, both Seyum and Sēbhat in separate letters informed Baldissera that they were united and faced the two Rases in Hawzen.<sup>7</sup> In order to help his allies, Baldissera sent Bāhtā Hagos to Dabra Dāmo and an Italian

---

<sup>1</sup>D.I., 10.11.89, 'Alī Ḥamad and Samra Idrīs; 8.11.89, Sēbhat and Tadrā to Baldissera.

<sup>2</sup>D.I., 18.11.89, Wakīl of Ḥarkīkū, 21.10.89, 26.11.89, Muḥammad 'Uthmān.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-33. Baldissera to M.d.G., 24.11.89, Baldissera's first thought was to instruct Seyum to work for a conciliation between Alulā and Seyum but this was rejected by Rome. See 3/5-33, MAE to M.d.G., 20.11.89.

<sup>4</sup>D.I., 28.11.89, Albertone to Baldissera, A.S.MAI, 3/5-33, Orero to MAE, 10.3.90.

<sup>5</sup>For details about the creation of that union, see A.S.MAI, 3/5-33, Orero to M.A.E., 10.3.90.

<sup>6</sup>D.I., Sēbhat to Baldissera, 28.11.89.

<sup>7</sup>D.I., Seyum and Sēbhat to Baldissera, 20 Ḥedar 1882 E.C.

commanded force beyond the Marab towards 'enticho.<sup>1</sup> On 2 December 1889 the three pro-Italian Dadjāzmāches met the three Rāses, Alulā, Mangashā and Hagos, at Zabān Gha'ā east of Ambā Sion in Haramat. The battle lasted for three days, during which Alulā and Hagos were wounded.<sup>2</sup>

"Dājzamač<sup>V</sup> Sebat and Dājzamač<sup>V</sup> Seyum were united in one counsel and one wish. Ras Mangasha and Ras Alula, hearing this, went towards them, and found them in a place which they call Zeban Čā'a. They had a battle and fought until all the officers were scattered separately. Some fled to Tāmben and some to Endārta, ... Ras Alula alone remained with him, and did not leave Ras Mangasha alone. He did battle for three days and three nights ... But many chiefs of his troops died."<sup>3</sup>

In spite of his losses at Zabān Cha'ā, Alulā found the energy to try and prevent Seyum from re-establishing himself in Maqalle. According to the following passage of his Mannawe biography Alulā followed Seyum down to near Ambā Alāje in 'endā Makonni. This area was undoubtedly governed by Seyum's relatives and Alulā leading there his followers, mostly natives of Tamben and Adwā, had to suffer another cruel battle.

"That Dājzamač Seyum escaped as before and preceded them on the path as far as the boundary of Enda Mākwāni. He arrived there, and they followed after him. They found him at the foot of Alajē, and did battle with him for many days. ... In this battle Ras Alula was wounded,<sup>4</sup> and fear and trembling entered the heart of the officers. For against them were assembled the men of Enda Mākwāni and the men of Azābo, the men of Wajerat and the men of Endārte. Ras Alula led them out of the place of battle as Moses led Israel out of Egypt. And he returned to Tāmben on 19th December 1889<sup>5</sup>, the country

<sup>1</sup>Conti Rossini, Italia, pp. 19, 20; A.S.MAI, 3/5-33, Orero to MAE 10.3.90.

<sup>2</sup>D.I. Albertone, 9.12.89, 16.12.89; Samuel Giyorgis, 16.12.89; A.S.MAI 3/5-33, Orero to MAE, 11.12.83.

<sup>3</sup>Mannawe MS.

<sup>4</sup>See A.S.MAI 3/5-33, Orero's "Relazione sul occupazione di Adua", 10.3.90, Allegato: Di Maio's report of 13.2.90.

<sup>5</sup>D.I. 23.12.89, informant: Berhano. A.S.MAI 3/5-33, Orero to MAE, 10.3.90.

of his birth, which is Mänāwē, and Ras Mangasha followed after him."

But though they suffered heavy losses Alulā and Mangashā were not defeated. Seyum managed to return to Maqalle and Səbhat to Addigrāt<sup>1</sup> but their combined force proved to be insufficient to eliminate the Rases of Təgre. Back at Tamben, Alulā and Mangashā had to wait for an expected direct attack by the Italians and the Shoans.

January 1890: Italian effort to catch Alulā

On 3 November 1889 Menilek was crowned ~~as the~~ emperor of Ethiopia and on 1 January 1890 the Italians, who had already advanced to the Marab River, issued a decree consolidating their possessions in an autonomous colony under the name of Eritrea. The Shoan-Italian cooperation was thus proved to be mutually beneficial and the Italian leaders of the so-called "politica Sciona" were hoping to gain more from their southern ally. The main question was the colony's southern frontier, as the one agreed on in the treaty of Uccialli was not <sup>s/</sup>satisfactory from the Italian point of view.<sup>2</sup> With their forces already camping on the right bank of the Marab, which was regarded as the natural border of Eritrea, the Italian government decided to persuade Menilek to modify the relevant article of their treaty. It was also hoped by that party in Rome and Asmarā that the grateful new emperor would march to Təgre and crush the local chiefs and especially the ex-governor of the Marab Məllash, Rās Alulā.

On 17 December 1889, upon hearing of the unsuccessful activities of Seyum, his nominee in Təgre, emperor Menilek left his capital and marched to the turbulent province.<sup>3</sup> On 23 February 1890,

---

<sup>1</sup>D.I., 24.12.89.

<sup>2</sup>LV, XXIII bis, No. 12, Perini to MAE, Memoria, 1895.

<sup>3</sup>Aşme, p.101.

leading a very strong army, he entered Maqalle, the capital of 'endartā, and resided at Yohannēs's palace there.<sup>1</sup>

In Asmarā in early January 1890 Menilek's advance was interpreted by the new military and civil governor, General Orero, as the beginning of the expected combined action against Mangashā and Alulā. In order to help the emperor, placate him and get his agreement to a modified frontier, Orero penetrated Tēgre and on 26 January 1890 occupied Adwā to ~~commemorate~~ there the third anniversary of Dogali. From Adwā Orero planned to join forces with Dadjāzmāch Sēbhat of Agāme and march southward to crush Mangashā and Alulā in Tambe n.<sup>2</sup>

"My temporary occupation of Adua," Orero wrote,<sup>3</sup> had to be culminated by the sending to Italy of Ras Alula."

"The General launched the war like a medieval knight aiming to catch Ras Alula," Orero's chief of staff added, "and only when he saw that it was not that simple to catch Alula, he changed his plan into the occupation of Adua."<sup>4</sup>

General Orero was soon to be disillusioned about the prospects of the "Politica Sciona". The people of Adwā and Aksum whose chiefs he gathered did welcome Italian protection (and food supply) but totally rejected any possibility of being governed by a Shoan ruler. They emphatically expressed their wish to be ruled by Rās Mangashā

<sup>1</sup>WO 33/55, Eritrea Report, p.36; Conti Rossini, Italia ed Etiopia, p.27.

<sup>2</sup>Berkeley 26-27. A.S.MAI, "Vitale" Orero to Sēbhat, 17.1.90. See also: B. Orero, "Ricordi d'Africa", Nuovo Antologia, 1901, see pp. 200 201, 202, 203, 500, 501, 511, 679, 681; Storia Militare, pp. 214-221; WO 33/35 "Eritrea Report", p.35. Luca dei Sabbelli, vol. III, pp. 367-69; FO 403/125, Dufferin to Salisbury, 27.1.90; A.S. MAI, 3/5-33. Various despatches of Orero January 1890 and his "Relazione sul occupazione di Adua", 10.3.90.

<sup>3</sup>See R. Truffi, Precursori dell'Impero Africano, Lettere inedite, Milano 1936, p.176; Orero's letter to Dal Verne of 22.2.90.

<sup>4</sup>Truffi, p170.

whom they regarded as the only legal heir of the late Tigrean emperor.<sup>1</sup>

Menilek himself, pressed by a strong Tigrean party in his court, was not slow to express his disapproval of Orero's invasion of Tēgre and the Italian general was subsequently urged by Rome to withdraw his forces back to Eritrea. Dadjāzmāch Sēbhat, upon whose cooperation Orero relied, was deliberately slow in his march to Adwā. He was probably aware of Menilek's disapproval of the Italian advance and was justifiably reluctant to join hands in such circumstances against Mangashā and Alulā.<sup>2</sup>

February 1890: Mangashā submits to Menilek against Alulā's advice

In Tamben Mangashā and Alulā were facing a possible immediate destruction. The Tēgre was shattered, hungry and invaded. Agāme under Sēbhat was hostile, Adwā was in Italian hands and the neighbouring 'endartā was occupied and destroyed by the enormous Shoan army. In Mangashā's court Rās Alulā was the only one to reject submission to Menilek, though he apparently could offer no reasonable alternative. In the last page which was found from the Mannawe manuscript it was recorded:

"When they /Mangashā and Alulā/ were in their country /Tamben/, the king Menelik came, and entered at Makalle, the residence of the king, and entered into the reception-room of the king /Yohannes/.

When Ras Alula heard that he had gone into the reception-room of the king, spiritual zeal seized him, and he sorrowed greatly. His viscera blazed like a reed stem

---

<sup>1</sup>LV, XXIII bis, Perini to MAE, No. 12, Memoria, 1895.

<sup>2</sup>Storia Militare, pp. 219-221; A.S.MAI 3/5-33, Antonelli to MAE, 29.1.90; Cossate to M.d.G., 30.1.90.

before the face of the fire, and he said, 'Where is the land of Yohannes, and where is his resting place? Where will be found the traces of his path?' He further said, 'I will not pay homage to him Menilek, and I will not bow down to the glory of his kingship, because he is - - - house of the king.' Ras Alula did not change his word at all, because he did not fear anyone, neither king or anything that is. Was he not a man powerful and warlike! And he counselled against him Menilek that he Menilek should seize him Mangasha on the path and take his possessions. But the rulers and princes were not in agreement with this counsel, and they said to Ras Mangasha, 'Go in to him, and bow down to him.' And he Mangasha went in against his Alulā's will, because the counsel of the rulers overruled him."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, while Alulā stayed with their army in Tamben, Mangashā, accompanied by some of his officers, including probably Dadjāzmāch 'embāye<sup>2</sup> and Bajerond Lawte<sup>3</sup> presented himself to Emperor Menilek in late February 1890 at Aguddi near Maqalle.<sup>4</sup>

March 1890: Mangashā is recognised by Menilek to be guided by another adviser

Contrary to Alulā's warnings Menilek did not deprive the submitting Tigrean Rās of his local government. The new emperor had been already criticised in his court for giving in to the Italian territorial claims,<sup>5</sup> and his feelings about them were strengthened

---

<sup>1</sup>Mannawe MS.

<sup>2</sup>Conti Rossini, Italia, p.27.

<sup>3</sup>Bajerond Lawte was mentioned as one of the followers of Mangashā and Alulā in their meeting in Adwā with Salimbeni and Antonelli, see N. Corazzini, "Colloquio con Ras Alula e Mangascia", La Tribuna, 20.6.90.

<sup>4</sup>Conti Rossini, Italia, p.27.

<sup>5</sup>Marcus, op.cit.; p.33.

by Orero's invasion of Adwā. Having reached the Imperial throne his top priority became Ethiopian unity and he probably realised that he would never be able to appease the Tigreans once he deprived him whom they regarded as the son and heir of Emperor Yohannes. Like Orero in Adwā, Menilek in 'endartā could have no illusion about the possibility of installing a Shoan or any other Tigrean but the son of Yohannes over the Tēgre.<sup>1</sup> In order, however, to minimise the danger of Tigrean restoration under Mangashā, Menilek nominated Dadjāzmāch Seyum over the eastern parts of Tēgre and his old devotee Dadjāzmāch Mashashā Warqe<sup>2</sup> as governor of the regions of Adwā and Aksum up to the Eritrean border.<sup>3</sup>

In the middle of March in Hawzen the living Italian spirit of the "Politica Scioana", Count Antonelli, had to face a partial failure of his policy.<sup>4</sup> Menilek, ceremonially receiving the submission of Mangashā on 16 March 1890<sup>5</sup>, agreed only to a minor modification of the frontier and rejected the Marab as the colony's border. On 19 March 1890 he left Hawzen for Shoa. Səbhat Arigawī who attended the meeting as Antonelli's candidate for the Tigrean government hastily marched back to Agāme to defend it from Seyum

---

<sup>1</sup>See Berkeley, p.27.

<sup>2</sup>Mashasha Warqe, a son of Bajəronđ Warqe from Gondar, was from 1886 Yohannes's delegate in Menilek's court (Zaghi, Crispi e Menelich, p.87). He was described by Berkeley, p.30, as "a poor paralytic old man who was practically a nonentity." See also Orero, op.cit., p.679.

<sup>3</sup>See Berkeley, p.28, note 1.

<sup>4</sup>Berkeley, p.28.

<sup>5</sup>C. Zaghi, Crispi e Menelich, p.58, Antonelli's telegram of 18.3.90 to MAE.



to whom his province was given.<sup>1</sup> Unable to take Agāme from its hereditary prince, Səyum had to follow the emperor back to Shoa. Antonelli, disappointed as he was, accompanied Dadjāzmāch Mashashā Warqe to Adwā. Mashashā, the devoted old follower of Mēnilək, was put between Mangashā and the Italians and actually had to become the new guide of the young Rās of Təgre. The old guide Alulā had to be removed from the scene.

Emperor Mēnilək must have been very disappointed not to see Rās Alulā among the submitting Tigreans. The Tigrean Rās was still known to be very annoyed with Mēnilək's policy towards Italy,<sup>2</sup> and it was thought that Mēnilək did not proceed to Aksum to be crowned in the Ethiopian holy city because Alulā, as an old rival, refused to submit.<sup>3</sup> The emperor surely considered Alulā as the moving spirit of Tigrean resistance to the new Shoan hegemony, and he instructed Rās Mangashā to exclude Alulā from any military command or a provincial government and let him have only his private land property.<sup>4</sup> (As Alulā's houses in Adwā and Aksum were included in Mashashā Warqe's new province, this probably referred to the poor village of Mannawe.) Mēnilək gave assurances to the Italians that Rās Alulā, "the most offensive culprit in the Italians' eyes, would be excluded from any command in Tigre".<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Berkeley, p.28; Conti Rossini, Italia ed Etiopia, pp. 28, 29.

<sup>2</sup>See interesting note of Salimbeni in Zaghi's Crispi e Menelich, p.10.

<sup>3</sup>Un ex funzionario Eritreo, La nostra politica africana, Imola 1895, p.26.

<sup>4</sup>Antonelli to Crispi, Massawa, 13/14-4.90. A note taken by Dr. R.A.Caulk from the seria Riservatissima, Etiopia I, p.190.

<sup>5</sup>Caulk, p.316.

May 1890: Alulā pretends to recognise Menilek as an  
appeasing step towards the Italians

To the surprise of the "pro-Shoan" Italians, it was Menilek himself who, by recognising Rās Mangashā as a governor in Təgre, undermined their own policy. His definite rejection of a modified frontier also contributed to the strengthening of those in favour of "Politica Tigrina". They suggested that the colony's southern unrecognised border would be safer if the Tigrean neighbours would serve as a buffer between themselves and the Ethiopian capital. The existence of Rās Mangashā as a semi-independent ruler could well serve that interest, particularly when his own government had to be based on Italian economic support to overcome famine and could be easily threatened if necessary by Italian support for local rivals like Dadjāzmāch Səbhat of Agāme.<sup>1</sup> For the supporters of that policy the only main obstacle to the creation of such a co-operation between the colony and Rās Mangashā was the fact that the latter was still regarded as being under the influence of Rās Alulā who had still to be punished for Dogali. Alulā was also regarded in Italy and Eritrea as perhaps the only remaining aspirant for the restoration of the Tigrean government in Asmarā and as such a sworn enemy of the colony.

This interpretation seemed to be based on facts when in early April 1890 Gerāzmāch Sadur, an uncle of Mangashā, contacted the Italians and informed them that the young Rās of Təgre had written them a friendly letter which Alulā intercepted. Sadur assured the Italians that his master Mangashā would not only recognise the Marab

---

<sup>1</sup>See Conti Rossini, Italia ed Etiopia, pp. 20, 21. [E. Cagnassi] / I Nostri Errori, Torino 1898, p. 73.

frontier but might also perhaps turn over Alulā as a sign of friendship.<sup>1</sup> But in fact, as mentioned above, Alulā was already a dedicated supporter of a Tigrean Italian approach. Judging from his subsequent policy, Alulā's aim was to receive Italian aid or, at least, secure their neutrality, in order to fight Menilek.<sup>2</sup> As this could not immediately be achieved, Alulā's first objective was to appease the Italians and hope for better circumstances. In Adwā on 10 May 1890 Mashashā Warqe assured Salimbeni

"That Ras Alula is the one who more vivaciously recommends an accord with the Italians, as a last chance of salvation for the country. Ras Alula said that he was tired of running from Amba to Amba,"

he wanted peace and expressed his wish to retire from political life.<sup>3</sup> Alulā was working hard to create a new image of himself: a tired and old man who accepts the established new facts.

An Italian journalist who interviewed him on several occasions in May 1890 described an old and tired Alulā:

"One of those medieval knights loyal to one flag, to one man, to one principle ... One of those faithful men who do not live but for the principle Tigrean hegemony and Yohannes's will or for the man whom they support Mangasha. ... Menelik has no son, ... Mangascia is young, he can wait. The peace with Menelik being accomplished, and the crown of Tigre assured to his protégé.... The old hero believes that his mission on earth is finished. In fact he has already manifested his will to go to Jerusalem and shut himself in a convent there."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Orero to Crispi, 10.4.90. Riservatissima Etiopia I, no. 209, kept with Dr. R. Caulk. Also Conti Rossini, Italia ed Etiopia, p.34.

<sup>2</sup>See above, pp.258.

<sup>3</sup>Zaghi, Crispi e Menelich, p.74.

<sup>4</sup>N. Corazzini, "La pace - Ras Alula - Un banchetto ad Axum", La Tribuna, 3.6.90.

On 16 May 1890 Rās Mangashā, Mashashā Warqe, Antonelli and the Count Salimbeni, who more than three years before had been Alulā's prisoner,<sup>1</sup> assembled at a meeting in Adwā. "Universal peace and goodwill were agreed upon and sworn to."<sup>2</sup> Mangashā accepted the installation of Mashashā in Adwā and both parties emphasized their intention to execute carefully article XIII of Uccialli, which laid down the reciprocal surrender of rebels who might escape across the frontier.

In the meeting of the next day, 17 May 1890, Rās Alulā attended sitting on the floor to the left of Mangashā.

"Ras Alula seemed to be very old," Salimbeni described in his diary,<sup>3</sup> and an Italian writer who was present there wrote:<sup>4</sup>

"Mangashā said:<sup>7</sup> And now that we are in peace, it is my wish that that blessed peace would include also Ras Alula. We are in an unfortunate state, a state of blood, but those who died were from both parties. Let us forget the past, Ras Alula wants to justify himself. Listen to him.' Alula now started speaking in a voice which was a little trembling at the beginning and became stronger and clearer later...."

Rās Alulā started explaining the reasons for Dogali. He blamed the Italians for giving him provocative replies and added that he was acting according to the instructions of Yohannes.<sup>5</sup> And the proud

---

<sup>1</sup>And now on his way to Menilek's court for a new diplomatic mission.

<sup>2</sup>WO 33/55, "Eritrea Report", p.36.

<sup>3</sup>Zaghi, Crispi, p.80.

<sup>4</sup>Corazzini, "La pace".

<sup>5</sup>See above, p. 188.

Tigrean who, but less than three months ago so energetically refused to submit to Menilek, went on with his speech:

"Today I am a servant of Menelik, a servant of Ras Mangascia, whatever they want I want and whatever they love I love. I ask you to make and maintain the peace as I swear to maintain it.' And he waved his right palm in front of himself in a ceremonial act..

Animated by that speech ... his face lost any element of vulgarity.

Ras Mangascia now asked us if we wanted to seal the amnesty with hand-shakes ... and the first to shake the hand of Alula was Count Salimbeni."<sup>1</sup>

On 20th May 1890 the same correspondent of La Tribuna, Corazzini, was allowed to visit Alulā and Mangashā in their camp near Adwā. There he again heard a humble servant of Emperor Menilek . Asked about the question of the frontier "Ras Alula shrugged his shoulders. 'We shall respect every decision of the Emperor,' he said. And Ras Mangasha added; 'He is the master, we are his servants.'"<sup>2</sup> Corazzini carried<sup>a</sup>/camera to the Rasés' camp and after a lot of persuasion and argument Alulā agreed that his picture *should* be taken.

The people who saw the picture, wrote another Italian writer,<sup>3</sup> did not believe that this was the man who shed so much Italian blood.

"No," he added, "this is the portrait of another kind of Alula, an Alula who had to accept the peace, who has seen his army exhausted and diminished not because of battles, but of famine and defections..."

---

<sup>1</sup>N. Corazzini, "La pace", La Tribuna, 8.6.90.

<sup>2</sup>N. Corazzini, "Colloquio co<sup>n</sup> Ras Alula e Mangascia", La Tribuna, 20.6.90.

<sup>3</sup>G. Belcredi, "Ras Alula", La Tribuna Illustrata, 26.6.90.

I remember the other Alula, who was completely different from today's one. I remember his riding proudly all dressed in red<sup>1</sup> ... famous as a just and invincible man ..... Ras Alula honourably accepted the peace, in the same way as he courageously had faced his wars. Would he keep his word? Would he remain obedient under Ras Mangascia?"

Salimkeni must have been sceptical about that question when he wrote in his diary:

"*Sometimes* it looked to me as though he Alulā revealed his superiority over Mangascia. Today, for example during the meeting of 17 May 1890 when he Mangasha spoke, he Alulā interrupted him saying 'hold your tongue'..."<sup>2</sup>

\*

\* \* \*

Alulā's failure to make Tēgre under Mangashā a united anti-Shoan force was the result of two facts. The first one was that the exhausted province could really no longer maintain its internal military superiority and Mangashā was realistic enough to act accordingly. The second fact was that for the Tigrean aristocracy Alulā continued to be an outsider. His origin and lack of hereditary rights could hardly make him the unifying leader of that province.

In order to avoid a final submission to Menilek, to be symbolised by Mangashā reporting to Addis Ababa, Alulā had to persuade the Tigreans, and particularly Mangashā, that it was still possible at least to maintain their independence.

---

<sup>1</sup>Belcredi visited Asmarā and interviewed Alulā on 17.6.85. See above, p. 103.

<sup>2</sup>Zaghi, Crispi e Menelich, p.81.

O. 1890-1892: ALULĀ'S FAILURE TO CREATE A TIGREAN-  
ERITREAN FRONT AGAINST MēNILEK

September 1890-February 1891: A war against Agāme prevents  
Mangashā from going to Menilek

After the imprisonment of Dabbab Ar'āyā, Dadjāzmāch Sēbhat of Agāme remained the only challenger to Mangashā's supremacy over the Tigreans.

Described as a clever and intelligent man in his early forties, an excellent administrator but not a distinguished warrior,<sup>1</sup> Sēbhat had a new practical reason to disobey Mangashā. Mangashā, as a nominee of Mēnilek, and especially as an aspirant to the title of a Negus, had to execute Mēnilek's policy regarding Agāme. This was to instal a loyal follower of the Shoan court in that strategic province which in the partition of Tēgre of March 1890 was designated as Dadjāzmāch Seyum's<sup>2</sup>. Since Seyum had no chance of being accepted by Mangashā himself, Mēnilek demanded that a certain Dadjāzmāch Wolde<sup>3</sup> should share the government of Agāme together with Sēbhat.<sup>4</sup> On 20 May 1890 Mangashā sent an ultimatum to the prince of Agāme to come to Maqalle and submit officially to him. "I fight him," Mangashā told the Italian Corazzini, "only because he refused to submit to the Emperor."<sup>5</sup>

Around mid-June 1890 Sēbhat partially agreed to Mangashā's

---

<sup>1</sup>See an article on Sēbhat by Mercatelli in La Tribuna, 20.2.96.

<sup>2</sup>See above. p.270.

<sup>3</sup>On Dadjāzmāch Wolde see Conti Rossini, Italia ed Etiopia, p.465.

<sup>4</sup>Corazzini, "Colloquio", La Tribuna, 20.6.90.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

demands by sending his son Dastā to Adwā to be kept there as an hostage.<sup>1</sup> But when a few weeks later Mangashā demanded a share in the revenue of Agāme the proud descendant of Sebāgādīs refused. When threatened by invasion Sebhat reportedly sent a symbolic sum of money to Mangashā in Maqalle.<sup>2</sup>

With Agāme at least partially recognising Mangashā's supremacy, Tēgre seemed to be reunited under the son of Yohannes as a nominee of Menilek. The influence of Rās Alulā over Rās Mangashā was reported to be rapidly diminishing, while Menilek's man, Dad-jāzmāch Mashashā Warqe, was considered to be the main adviser of the Rās of Tēgre.<sup>3</sup> As arranged by Mashashā Warqe in August, the Italians supplied 18,000 litres of grain to the Tigreans, the price of which had been paid by Menilek.<sup>4</sup> The grateful Mangashā, influenced by Mashashā Warqe and tempted by the rumoured possibility that the emperor would make him a Nēgus, was reported intending to leave for Shoa after the coming Masqal (September 1890).<sup>5</sup> Mangashā's projected visit to Addis Ababa which was supposed to symbolise final recognition of Shoanhegemony, became as such the most important issue in the history of Tēgre during the next four years.

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., A.S.MAI 3/3-35, Orero to MAE, 26.5.90.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-35, Gandolfi, Rapporto 1 July - 15 August 1890.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-35, Gandolfi to MAE, 21.8.90, "Rapporto politico-militare", 1 July - 15 August 1890.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. L. Mercatelli, "Cronaca di una fuga", Corriere di Napoli, 1-2 June 1891.

<sup>5</sup>Gandolfi, "Rapportopolitico-militare" 1 July-15 August 1890. A.S.MAI 3/5-35, Gandolfi to MAE, 4.9.90, "Rapporto" 15 August-1 Sept. 1890.



Rās Alulā, according to his own evidence, refused to accept the grain paid for by Menilek and did so only after it was declared to be an Italian gift.<sup>1</sup> Yet though he did not hide his opinion about Mangashā's projected trip to Shoa, it seemed that he could do very little about it.

In late August 1890 the son of Dadjāzmāch Sēbhat fled from Adwā, where he had been kept as a hostage, and returned to his father in Agāme. Sēbhat refused to send him again and a war with Agāme seemed inevitable.<sup>2</sup>

In early September Mangashā and Alulā were reported assembling their troops and calling Rās Hagos from Shire.<sup>3</sup> The new Italian governor of Eritrea, Gandolfi,<sup>4</sup> was asked by Mangashā and Mashashā to close the border of Agāme with Akalla-Guzāy in order not to let Sēbhat supply himself by raiding in that direction.<sup>5</sup> A follower of Mangashā and governor of Haramat, Dadjāzmāch Mashashā Mahru tried on 20 September 1890 to capture Ambā Sion from the rebelling Shum-Agāme and failed to do so, paying with his life.<sup>6</sup>

From early September 1890 to early February 1891 Alulā and Mangashā's forces were camping near the border of Agāme, reportedly

---

<sup>1</sup> Marcatelli, "Cronaca".

<sup>2</sup> A.S.MAI 3/5-35, Gandolfi to MAE, 22.9.90, "Rapporto", 1-15 Sept. 1890.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> He replaced Orero on 4.6.90 with Baratieri as a deputy.

<sup>5</sup> A.S.MAI 3/5-35, Gandolfi to MAE, 22.9.90, "Rapporto", 1-15 Sept. 1890.

<sup>6</sup> A.S.MAI 3/5-35, Gandolfi to MAE, 5.10.90, "Rapporto", 16-30 Sept. 1890.

not daring to invade it.<sup>1</sup> Sebhat was fortified on Ambā Sardibo rejecting any challenge to leave it and fight in the open. The two armies were apparently exhausted and made supreme efforts just to maintain themselves. For that purpose Alulā was reported moving his camp occasionally within the triangle of Hawzen, Faras Māy, Adwā, while Mangashā did the same in Garaltā.<sup>2</sup>

Though no direct evidence can be adduced, it seems that Rās Alulā was this time engaged in a war which he did not want to win.<sup>3</sup> It was probably at this stage that Alulā understood the irony that a Tēgre united under Rās Mangashā might well be the end of his career and of the hope of regaining Tigrean hegemony. Mangashā proved to be over anxious to become a Negus of Tēgre under the supremacy of Menilek and it was only the internal troubles, this time the war with Agāme, which prevented him from taking the road to Shoa.<sup>4</sup>

March 1891: Alulā's first rebellion against Mangashā, his only option to prevent Mangashā from going to Menilek

In early February 1891 Rās Mangashā decided that it was time to leave his province and go to Menilek, who was in Addis Ababa discussing with Antonelli and Salimbeni his relations with Italy. Mangashā therefore offered the most favourable conditions for peace and

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-35, Gandolfi's reports to MAE of 4.11.90, 18.11.90, 4.12.90, 25.12.90, 20.1.91, 6.2.91, 22.2.91.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>See also Belcredi's article "Ras Sebath", La Tribuna, 20.2.96.

<sup>4</sup>As analysed by Gandolfi in his report of 6.2.91.

they were accepted by Sēbhat. The ruler of Agāme was even given new territories to govern, especially in Haramat. All he had to do was to promise his loyalty to Mangashā and Menilek and guarantee it by sending hostages. Consequently Mangashā left his camp at Asbi near Agāme and returned southward to Maqalle,<sup>1</sup> probably heading for Shoa. With Sēbhat pacified and Dabbab in prison it seemed that nothing could stop Rās Mangashā, as a ruler of a united Tēgre, from becoming an honourable vassal of Menilek.

In early January 1891, however, Alulā confiscated a consignment of 400 rifles sent by King Umberto of Italy via Massawa and Adwā to Menilek. At first Alulā justified himself by writing to Mashashā Warqe that he had borrowed the arms only for fighting Menilek's enemy, i.e. Sēbhat, and would return them immediately following the latter's submission.<sup>2</sup> When Mangashā reconciled with Sēbhat, Alulā quickly left his camp with 200 of the confiscated rifles, disobeying Mangashā's order to collect them from his soldiers and restore them.<sup>3</sup> Alulā headed towards Adwā and sent raiders towards Shire. He himself waited near the town to ambush Dadjāzmāch Mashashā Warqe who, then in Eritrea, was known to have received Menilek's orders to return to Shoa with Mangashā. On 21 February 1891 Mashashā approached Adwā but was astonished to see that, contrary to Ethiopian custom, no one came out to receive him. Entering his town he found that one of his chiefs, a certain Lēdj Hāyilu, had

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-35, Gandolfi to MAE, 22.2.91, "Rapporto", 1-15 Feb.1891.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-35, Gandolfi to MAE, 20.1.91, "Rapporto", 1-15 Jan.1891.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

just defected to Alulā with his 150 followers. Two days later, instead of proceeding to Maqalle, he panicked and recrossed the Marab notifying the Italians that Alulā was in a state of rebellion against Menilek.<sup>1</sup>

In Maqalle, again among those in favour of recognising the Shoan hegemony and who were enemies of Alulā,<sup>2</sup> Rās Mangashā faced further pressure to proceed to Shoa. But in Adwā and Tamben, the prestige of Alulā as the only real opposition to what was regarded there as humiliating steps, was quickly being rebuilt.<sup>3</sup> After removing Mashashā from the local political scene Alulā gathered there a substantial force (for which figures were not given) and in March 1891 dared to enter Maqalle and face Mangashā.

In Asmarā it was thought that the two Rases were about "to make some more steps towards greater independence of Tigre from the Shoan court. They hope that Italy and Menilek would soon spoil their relations, and then they may rely on us."<sup>4</sup> But it was soon reported that Mangashā refused to accept that policy.<sup>5</sup> In late March Alulā left Maqalle, heading for Tamben, a step which was justifiably regarded as an obvious act of rebellion.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-35, Gandolfi to MAE, 7.3.91, "Rapporto", 16-28 Feb. 1891. L. Mercatelli, "Cronaca di una fuga", Corriere di Napoli, 1-2 June 1891.

<sup>2</sup>See above, p.

<sup>3</sup>Mercatelli, "Nel paese di Ras Alula", Corriere di Napoli, 13-14 May 1891.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-35, Gandolfi to MAE, 21.3.91, "Rapporto", 1-15 March 1891.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-35, Gandolfi to MAE, 13.4.91.

<sup>6</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, 21.4.91, "Rapporto", 1-15 April 1891.

Alulā's policy: Recognition of Eritrea and war with Menilek

Back at Mannawe, "the most bitter enemy of Shoan hegemony over Ethiopia", as Alulā was then described by Gandolfi,<sup>1</sup> was visited by an Italian correspondent, L. Mercatelli.<sup>2</sup> "Speaking of dignity," Mercatelli quoted Alulā, "Ras Mangascia comes before me, but I am above him in bravery and wisdom."<sup>3</sup> He reported that Alulā's opposition to Mangashā's desire to submit to Shoa had enormously raised his prestige in Tēgre, or rather in Tamben and Adwā.

"In fact," the Italian was impressed, "Alula is the master. It is sufficient to stay for few days in Tigre to be convinced ... 'Rassi-imut' [Tet the Rās die] is an oath which comes immediately after 'Johannes-imut' - in Tigre they still swear on the name of the Negus - and before 'Mancascia-imut'... If Alula dies, Tigre would fall into such a state of anarchy and exhaustion ... As a matter of fact even now Tigre is but a corpse that only the strong character of Alula makes it walk."<sup>4</sup>

In the tiny village of Mannawe Mercatelli spent a few days with Alulā whom he described as a lonely and a melancholic leader, who still lived as a widower.

"In the house of Ras Alula not a single woman can be seen except his widow daughter who lives with him<sup>5</sup> ... His confessor<sup>6</sup> told me that since the death of his legal wife Alula pays no attention to the weaker sex."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, 6.4.91.

<sup>2</sup>Mercatelli was a correspondent of Corriere di Napoli in the early nineties and of La Tribuna in the period prior to the battle of Adwā; probably as a result of his experience with Alulā in 1891 he became interested in Alulā's subsequent career, as reflected in his many articles quoted below.

<sup>3</sup>Mercatelli, "Nel paese di Ras Alula", Corriere di Napoli, 13-14 May 1891.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Şahaywarada, the widow of Dadjāzmāch Hāyla Sellāsse.

<sup>6</sup>Alulā's confessor was probably the Bishop of Adwā, Melaka Berakanat, described by Ferdinando Martini as "The Confessor of the Ras and his Adviser", F. Martini, Cose Africane, Milano 1897, p.111.

<sup>7</sup>Mercatelli, loc.cit.

The rebellious and lonely Alulā urgently needed a practical alternative to Mangashā's policy. This could be achieved only by Italian support for independent tendencies in Tēgre. For that purpose Rās Alulā was ready to give the Italians more than Menilek had given them in Uccialli: the whole of Marab Mellash, his previous one and only domain. He told Mercatelli:

"We have been enemies, this is true, but I was serving my king. We have made peace and all I have to say is just one word. Negus Menelick sent an instigator between us, Degiacc Mesciascia, who wants to cause me harm. Why can not we negotiate our own affairs directly? This country is ours, and if we submitted to Menelick this is because we became very few after Metemmah, and caught between two fires. But everyone is the master of his own house only up to his door. He can sell it, let it for money or give it as a gift to a friend. But if he Menilek gives as a present what is out of his door the Marab Mellash the present is of no value. You want the country to the Mareb to cultivate your gardens, to build your houses, to construct your churches...? We can give it to you. And not Menilek. Let the Italian soldiers come to Adwa, I shall come to meet them like a friend."<sup>1</sup>

As for the motives and possibilities of establishing an independent Tēgre as an ally of Eritrea, Alulā explained:

"But Menelick launched war on Giovanni Yohannes when the latter was fighting the infidels, and everyone knows that Giovanni died for a sacred cause. I have my master who is the son of King Giovanni, why should I look for another in Scioa?

And you why do you look for distant friends? We are neighbours and can serve each other. You want the road open and I want the road open. You would guard it to the Mareb, and I shall guard it to Gondar and even beyond Gondar. We must be able to go to the coast where we can trade in order that our country should flourish, with the help of God. Menelick is too far to be of any use to you. Let us make friendship between us."

Alulā probably felt that this economic temptation was not a great attraction for the Italians. He therefore tried to persuade his

---

<sup>1</sup>Mercatelli, "Nel paese".

host that it would be strategically beneficial for them to adopt his offered plan:

"Tigre can not be a servant of Scioa, because our people are soldiers, while the Shoans fight only against people armed with spears."

When Mercatelli reminded him of Menilek's 50,000 rifles,

"he answered with a look of contempt: 'It is sufficient that the Italians would be my friends' - And you could hear in that all the bitterness of a year of forced submission."<sup>1</sup>

But Alulā's plan was not merely based on emotions. Though he had but <sup>a</sup> limited knowledge of Shoan-Italian relationships he did not fail to understand that the idea of an independent Təgre had supporters (like Mercatelli himself) in the Italian camp.<sup>2</sup>

April-May 1891: Italian-Shoan rupture and Dabbab's mutiny<sup>^</sup>  
bring Mangashā and Alulā closer again

After Mashashā Warqe had fled from Alulā to Eritrea, Rf's Mangashā sent there an envoy to persuade him to retake the road to Maqalle but take a route on which he could avoid Alulā.<sup>3</sup> In early April Mashashā did arrive at Maqalle only to find Mangashā extremely reluctant about the projected trip to the Shoan court.<sup>4</sup>

There were two main reasons for that reluctance. The first was that Antonelli and Salimbeni's meeting with Menilek of January and February 1891 in Addis Ababa proved to have a negative effect

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>The future policy of Alulā (see below, pp.297 *passim*) proves that this Italian journalist did not exaggerate the extent to which Alulā was seeking rapprochement with the Italians.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, 13.4.91, 6.4.91, "Rapporto", 16-31 March 1891.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, 8.5.91.

on Shoan-Italian relations.<sup>1</sup> The first obvious signs of the rupture over the Uccialli treaty probably convinced the young Rās that Alulā's advice to approach the Italians independently could well become a successful policy.<sup>2</sup>

The second and probably the immediate reason was that in the first days of April 1891 there was a mutiny in the fortress on Ambā Salāmā. Ledj Hāyla Malakot, the youngest son of Rās Walda Mikā'el, fled to Asmarā. Dabbab Ar'āyā managed to gain control over the large magazines of arms and food on the Ambā and prepared himself for a long siege.<sup>3</sup> Dadjāzmāch Sēbhat of Agāme, it was reported, was showing anxiety to join hands with Dabbab who could help him take Akalla Guzāy from the Italian supported Bāhtā Hagos. Sēbhat allowed many of Dabbab's followers from Akalla Guzāy to cross his territory, hasten to Ambā Salāmā and unite with their leader.<sup>4</sup>

Other rebellions against Mangashā's authority in Wādjrāt by Dadjāzmāch Tadrā Wāhid<sup>5</sup> and by Dadjāzmāch 'əmbāye<sup>6</sup> at the same time made it absolutely impossible for Mangashā to go to Menilek.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See Zaghi, Crispi e Menelich, Chapter XII, pp. 289-307.

<sup>2</sup>As analysed by Gandolfi in his A.S.MAI, 3/5-37, "Rapporto" of 8.5.91 covering 16-30 April 1891.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, 30.4.91, 25.5.91, Corriere di Napoli, 13-14 May 1891.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, 25.5.91, "Rapporto", 1-16 May 1891.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, 30.4.91, on Dadjāzmāch Tadrā Wāhid. See Conti Rossini, Italia ed Etiopia, p.463.

<sup>6</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, 11.6.91.

<sup>7</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, 30.4.91, 8.5.91, Corriere di Napoli, 13-14 May 1891.



Facing such an internal threat Mangashā called Alulā from Nannawe and the two Rases met in Chini to lay siege to the Ambā,<sup>1</sup> where three of Alulā's officers, namely Kagnāzmāch Abbāy, Bālambārās Ghetzai (Gazehgne?) and Shālaqa Takla were sent.<sup>2</sup> Mashashā Warqe left Maqalle for Shoa in late April with Mangashā's permission though Alulā wanted him arrested. Mashashā, however, was denied the 400 confiscated rifles of his master, Emperor Menilek.<sup>3</sup> Alulā was again first counsellor to Mangashā.

"The accord between Alula and Mangascia," Gandolfi reported on 8 May 1891, "looks at last to be re-established and in the market of Adua /and probably all over Tigre/ Mangascia issued a proclamation saying that a most complete accord exists between him and Alula."<sup>4</sup>

May 1891: Dabbab offers a united Tigrean action against Eritrea

On Ambā Salāmā, Dabbab <sup>e</sup>portedly captured some old artillery pieces, which made a successful siege impossible for Alulā's hungry and badly supplied army.<sup>5</sup> Mangashā was soon back again in Maqalle while Alulā was busy fighting the rebels

"Mangascia enjoys the good <sup>things</sup> of Macalle," Gandolfi reported, "but Ras Alula, the loyal and shrewd counsellor watches restlessly and only with his own troops

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, 30.4.91.

<sup>2</sup>Mercatelli, "Nel paese di Ras Alula", Corriere di Napoli, 15-16 June 1891.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, 8.5.91; L. Mercatelli, "Cronaca di una luga", Corriere di Napoli, 1-2 June 1891.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, 8.5.91, "Rapporto", 16-30 April 1891.

<sup>5</sup>Mercatelli, "Cronaca". For a very good description of Ambā Salāmā, its history and the siege, see Mercatelli's "Nel paese di Ras Alula", Corriere di Napoli, 15-16 June 1891. The article was written near the Ambā, 20.5.91.

prevents a general revolt and anarchy, succeeding with force or with temptations to subdue the rebels and bring them to Ras Mangascia."<sup>1</sup>

Confident as he was and with his followers awaiting him between Faras May and Hawzen, Dabbab demanded his complete liberty and recognition of his rights over Sarāya Akalla Guzāy and the Assā-wurṭa from Mangashā.<sup>2</sup>

Rās Mangashā - it was reported in Eritrea - was inclined to agree to Dabbab's demands.<sup>3</sup> This would enable him to reunite Tēgre and possibly even please Mēnilek. Informants brought to Asmarā the news that the three leaders, the representatives of the houses of Dadjāzmāch Sēbāgādīs, of Rās Ar'āyā Demṣu and of Emperor Yohannes, were corresponding and planning their future accord.<sup>4</sup> But Rās Alulā, now having in his camp Rās Hagos and old Rās Walda Mikā'el,<sup>5</sup> was reported to be strongly opposed to such an alliance.<sup>6</sup> Dabbab <sup>apparently</sup> made it a precondition that Alulā would be extradited to him,<sup>7</sup> so the Rās could have no illusion about his own future once Mangashā and Dabbab united.

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, 11.6.91, "Rapporto", 16-31 May 1891.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, 30.4.91, 21.5.91.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid; Mercatelli, "Cronaca".

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, 24.6.91, 8.7.91.

<sup>5</sup>Conti Rossini, Italia ed Etiopia, p.56.

<sup>6</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, 8.5.91.

<sup>7</sup>See below, p. 293

Ironically, it was Rās Alulā whom the Italians in Eritrea regarded now as the only Ethiopian who could save them difficulties on their southern frontier and guarantee "the tranquillity of our colony."<sup>1</sup>

"Ras Alula," Gandolfi *reported*,<sup>2</sup> "the bitter enemy of the Europeans in general and of the Italians in particular, is regarded today in Eritrea as a valuable means to achieve its goals ... He understood that alone he can hardly match the internal enemies /Dabbab and the pro-Shoans/ and that he would die if they manage to unite with external enemies /the Shoans/. This is why he does his best to make the past be forgotten and to calm the Italians."

May-June 1891: Alulā works for an alliance with Eritrea

Around mid-May 1891 while his three lieutenants were laying siege to Dabbab, Alulā was near Abbā Garima *pursuing* a certain Dadjāzmāch Tagagnā, one of the many Tigrean chiefs who disobeyed Mangashā in *this* period of anarchy.<sup>3</sup>

"Anywhere that a chief raises his head," Mercatelli then testified from Alulā's camp there,<sup>4</sup> "Alula is there to fight him and subdue him. Today he is in Gheralta, tomorrow in Kedia, the day after tomorrow in Nadier."

But the Italian writer was not there just to admire Alulā's energy. He had returned to the Ras's camp with a most important political mission. As unofficial envoy of an Italian Commission of Inquiry then visiting Eritrea, he was to check the possibility of a meeting between the Commission and the Tigrean Rases. In such an encounter it was hoped that the Marab would be recognised as the southern frontier of the Colony and the Tigreans would guarantee

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, 8.5.91.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, 11.6.91.

<sup>3</sup>L. Mercatelli, "Il Convegno di Ras Alula", Corriere di Napoli, 30 June, 1 July 1891.

<sup>4</sup>Mercatelli, "Nel paese", Corriere di Napoli, 15-16 June 1891.

the security of its southern bank.<sup>1</sup>

Mercatelli left Adwā on 11 May 1891 to return to it with Alulā on 19 May 1891 in order to discuss the matter also with the Italian resident there, De Martino.<sup>2</sup> According to Mercatelli<sup>3</sup> Alulā did not respond immediately to the proposed meeting but remained hesitating for a few days. In fact, it seems that, as Mangashā was then considering an anti-Italian action together with Dabbāḥ Alulā had to frustrate such an alliance by responding positively to the Italian offer.

"Finally, one morning," Mercatelli went on, "Ras Alula called me and in the presence of degiet Vold-Enkiel<sup>4</sup> and the Bishop of Adua told me: 'From the first day I was convinced that your words were good. But we are dealing with a very serious matter and I wanted that my chiefs *should* also know how the situation *lies*. I can tell you that if the great generals of the Commission agree to speak to us about our affairs I am willing to meet them. But this meeting cannot take place before eleven days as I want that this degiacc Vold-Enkiel will go to Makalle to have the advice and assent of Ras Mangascia."

Alulā then rejected the idea that the meeting would take place on the northern bank of the Marab. He tentatively agreed with De Martino and Mercatelli that he would meet the Italian commission on 2 June 1891 at Daro Takla, between the Marab and Adwā.<sup>5</sup>

Alulā's step forced the hesitant Mangashā to communicate with the Italians. On 28 May 1891 (21 Genbut 1883 EC) from Maqalle he wrote to De Martino in Adwā. He apologised for not being able

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 11/2-16, De Martino (to Gandolfi?) 20.5.91.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 11/2-16, De Martino (to Gandolfi?) 20.5.91.

<sup>3</sup>Mercatelli, "Il Convegno".

<sup>4</sup>Probably this was old Rās Walda Mikā'el.

<sup>5</sup>L. Mercatelli, "Il Convegno di Ras Alula", Corriere di Napoli, 30 June-1 July 1891. A.S.MAI 11/2-16, Mercatelli to Piano 22.5.91; Piano to Baratieri 23.5.91; De Martino (to Gandolfi?) 20.5.91.

to come to the meeting but added that he had written to Alulā to receive the Italians and confirm the friendship with the colony. Actually he gave Alulā no authority to conclude anything. His letter read:

"When the Italian dignitaries come, listen to what they say and send it to me in a letter, and then when I see their words, I shall give them my reply in a letter."<sup>1</sup>

But though Mangashā was not enthusiastic about Alulā's policy, it seems that Alulā's step was well enough timed to jeopardise the anti-Italian plan offered by Dabbah.

The Italian officials did not cross the Marab on 2 June 1891 to negotiate with Alulā. Gandolfi, the governor of the colony, was insulted by this interference by the Commission in his political affairs and blamed its members for ignoring the fact that Mangashā was the Rās of Tēgre, not Alulā. The idea, attributed to some of the Commission members, of paying Alulā a monthly salary of 1,000 Thalers for his promise to keep the security along the Marab was published in Italy and was regarded as a national calamity.<sup>2</sup>

On the same 2 June 1891 Alulā wrote to Borgnini, the president of the Commission re-emphasizing his will to meet and "make friendship and that this friendship will be confirmed".<sup>3</sup> Borgnini's reply was polite but evasive. He expressed his sorrow that he and his friends were ill and had to leave for Italy. He asked Alulā

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 11/2-16, Mangashā to De Martino, 21 Genbot (1883 E.C.). The letter carried a significant seal: "A seal of Rās Mangashā Yohannes King of Kings of Zion King of Kings of Ethiopia". Thus referring to himself as a Rās on the one hand, Mangashā emphasised on the other hand that he was the son of the emperor.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 11/2-16, Borgnini to MAE, 2.6.91, Gandolfi to MAE, 29.6.91; Corriere di Napoli, 30-31 May 1891, 14-15 June 1891. The Commission was sent by the new Italian Prime Minister, Rudini, who rejected Crispi's colonial policy. Rudini was for at least minimising the Italian involvement in Ethiopian affairs but the Commission suggested contacting the Tigrean Rases in order to secure the Marab

to send their regards to Rās Mangasā.<sup>1</sup>

June-July 1891: Mangashā sides with Dabbab and is attacked  
by Alulā

In late May 1891 Dabbab escaped from Ambā Salāma<sup>2</sup> and came to Wādjrāt where 500 of his followers were awaiting him together with some 3,000 followers of his new ally, Dadjāzmāch Padlā Wāhid. A detachment of Mangashā's troops led by a certain Dadjāzmāch 'Alī was reported to have been defeated by them in early June.<sup>3</sup> Yet this time Mangashā did not urge his general Alulā to hurry from Adwā and subdue the rebelling Dadjāzmāch Dabbab. Informants reaching Asmarā from Təgre repeatedly stated that the young prince of Təgre was again under the influence of his counsellors in Maqalle, "all rivals of Alulā".<sup>4</sup> Correspondence between Səbhat (in Agāme) and Mangashā (in Maqalle) emphasized the possibility that Dabbab was about to join them.<sup>5</sup>

It was again Rās Alulā, "the great fighter for Tigrean independence", who stood against the united front of the three Tigrean

border. See C. Zaghi, "Il Convegno del Mareb", Rivista delle Colonie, Anno XI, No. 2, pp. 175-184.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 11/2-16, Alulā to Borgnini, 26 Genbot (1883 EC). Alulā's letter carried a challenging script: "A seal of Rās Alulā who is a Turk Bāshā. Yohannes king of kings of Ethiopia." This seal was not an old one left from the period of the late emperor, as the seal which Alulā had used in his letter to Baldissera of 15 August 1889 (see above, p. 258.) carried the same script but was different in shape.

-----

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 11/2-16, Borgnini to Alula, N.D.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 11/2-16, Mangasha to De Martino, 21 Genbot (1883 EC).

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI, Gandolfi to MAE 24.6.91; "Rapporto", 1-15 June 1891; Corriere di Napoli, 30 June-1 July 1891.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, 8.7.91, 16-30 June 1891.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, 24.6.91, "Rapporto", 1-18 June 1891.

Tigrean families. Dabbab Abbāyā, his Italian-granted rank of Dadjāzmāch now recognised by Mangashā,<sup>1</sup> was again institing on the removal of Alulā from the political scene.

"The conditions of peace between me and Mangascia," he later wrote to Gandolfi,<sup>2</sup> "were that Ras Alula must remain our servant, as we are sons of kings."

In late June Alulā was invited by Mangashā to report to Maqalle but he refused to do so. Subsequently Mangashā urged Sebhat and Dabbab to fight him.<sup>3</sup> Sebhat, characteristically, did not move from Agāme but sent his brother Dadjāzmāch Abbāy.<sup>4</sup> According to Dabbab's letter, the only piece of evidence available, Alulā took the military initiative but lost and was forced to make peace with Mangashā and Dabbab:

"He Alulā desiring to take our throne" Dabbab wrote to Gandolfi,<sup>5</sup> "came to fight Mangascia. Ras Mangascia fled to a fort which he refused to leave. All the noblemen of the country came to me to ask me to destroy Ras Alula ... I answered that it was good. Ras Mangascia left the fort. Alula knowing my accord with Mangascia immediately asked for peace."

At Zabba Māryām in Saharte around mid-July, Mangashā, Alulā and Dabbab made peace and sent letters to Gandolfi to announce this.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Conti Rossini, Italia ed Etiopia, p.56.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI, Archivio Eritrea 55/A, Debeb to Gandolfi, 6.9.91.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE 8.7.91, "Rapporto", 16-30 1891.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, 6.8.91, "Rapporto", 1-31 July 1891.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI, 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, 6.8.91, "Rapporto", 1-31 July 1891.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

This strange peace, probably arranged by the priests, had no chance of enduring.

September 1891: Mangashā follows Alulā's pro-Italian policy. The end of Dabbab

In late July 1891 Mangashā, accompanied by the two enemies, Alulā and Dabbab, proceeded to Adwā.<sup>1</sup> There, in the proud centre of Tēgre, Mangashā was probably struck, as Orero had been in January 1890, by the hatred of Menilek and the admiration for the late Emperor Yohannes. From that moment onwards Mangashā clearly followed Alulā's policy of trying to obtain Italian aid against Menilek.

Informants who reached Asmarā after mid-August 1891 repeatedly announced that Mangashā was now completely under the influence of Alulā. According to those sources of information it was only due to their military weakness that the two Rases of Tēgre did not take the road to Shoa to fight the emperor.<sup>2</sup> As for the Colony, Gandolfi reported: "They [Mangashā and Alulā] lose no chance to demonstrate their good will towards us."<sup>3</sup> "What I want," Mangashā wrote on 6 August 1891 to the king of Italy, "is to make friendship with you, and that our friendship will ever grow and become eternal."<sup>4</sup>

As a part of the new policy Dabbab was ordered by Mangashā to refrain from raiding beyond the Marab.<sup>5</sup> Dabbab, aspiring to be

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, 25.8.91.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, N.D., "Rapporto", 27 Aug.-18 Sept. 1891, 25.8.91, "Rapporto", 1-25 Aug. 1891.

<sup>3</sup>Gandolfi to MAE, 25.8.91.

<sup>4</sup>Conti Rossini, Italia ed Etiopia, p.57; Bizzoni, p.255.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Gandolfi to MAE, 25.8.91.



governor of Akalla Guzāy, did not like the order. He reacted by leaving Adwā in early August to camp at 'enticho.<sup>1</sup> Hostilities between him and the two Rases started immediately. Sebhat refrained from siding with either of the parties.<sup>2</sup> Dabbab did his best by writing to try and appease the Italians<sup>3</sup> but they had an obvious reason to side with Mangashā and Alulā. No direct military aid was sent to Mangashā and Alulā but an Italian observer accompanied their camp when, on 29 September 1891, at Abbā Garima, they clashed with Dabbab.<sup>4</sup> Mangashā had 1,200 troops and Alulā 600. Dabbab with 1,000 men was entrenched on the mountain of Atghebat north of 'Addi Nefas. On the morning of 29 September 1891<sup>5</sup> the Rases, led by Ahlā, marched towards the mountain but after an hour they found that during the night Dabbab had moved to the mountain of Alesca, south-west of 'Addi Nefas. At 7.50 a.m. shouting loudly "and according to the Ethiopian custom arranged in a line they marched forward to storm the enemy". This frontal attack having failed, Alulā reorganised the attacking forces and outflanked Dabbab's position. At 8.30 a.m. it was all over and Dabbab, with some of his followers, ran to the shelter of a few trees on the summit of the mountain. According to the Italian observer, Mangashā

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Gandolfi, "Rapporto", 27 Aug.-18 Sept. 1891.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI Archivio Eritrea 54/A, Debeb to Gandolfi, 17.8.91.  
See also Conti Rossini, Italia, p.59.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 3/5-37, Baratieri to MAE, 6.10.91, contains detailed descriptions by Mulazzani who, on 13.9.91, was sent to Alulā and Mangashā's camp.

<sup>5</sup>In Storia Militare, p.233, the battle was misdated 6.10.91 (the date of Baratieri's report).

had promised 200 thalers to the soldier who would bring him Dabbab alive<sup>1</sup> but Mangashā was now probably somewhere in the rear. A bullet struck Dabbab and he died instantly.<sup>2</sup> Many of his followers were killed in their flight, among them one of Dabbab's brothers, Haylu. Dabbab's body was carried to Adwā where, as a Dadjāzmāch, he was ceremonially buried in the Trinity church.<sup>3</sup> The death of Dabbab was attributed in Tēgre solely to Alulā. According to Alulā's great-granddaughter, Alulā killed Dabbab in retaliation for the death of his (Alulā's) son-in-law, Dadjāzmāch Hāyila Sellāsse.<sup>4</sup> But for Alulā it was also part of his wider plans and it was the only way to stop Mangashā's wavering. In this Alulā was successful.

"The battle consolidated Mangascia's authority in Tigre," concluded the Italian observer, "and many chiefs who regarded themselves as independent since the battle of Metemma are coming to submit to the son of Emperor Giovanni."<sup>5</sup>

December 1891: The meeting on the Marab - Alulā's greatest step towards an independent Tēgre

His victory over Dabbab and his repeated failure to comply with Menilek's invitations to come to Shoa made Mangashā, towards the end of 1891, the undisputed leader of Tēgre.

---

<sup>1</sup>Mulazzoni's report in Baratieri to MAE, 6.10.91.

<sup>2</sup>According to Conti Rossini, Italia, p.59, Dabbab was killed by one of Alulā's officers.

<sup>3</sup>Mulazzani's report in Baratieri to MAE, 6.10.91.

<sup>4</sup>Int. W. Yashashwarq.

<sup>5</sup>Mulazzani.

"The authority of Mangascia," Mercatelli described from Adwā,<sup>1</sup> "is absolute and undisputed, they all recognise him as the son and heir of Emperor Giovanni who is worshipped like a saint after he fell fighting the Dervishes. ... On the other hand Menelik's authority is denied here. Nobody recognises him, and Alula speaks of him always in great contempt."

Mangashā was now confident enough to follow Alulā's advice about an alliance with Eritrea. Gandolfi, the governor, and his superiors in Rome were quite ready now for their own reasons to the tighten/strings with the independent Tigreans. On 20 October 1891, Dr. Nerazzini, accompanied by De Martino, arrived at Adwā at the request of Mangashā to be nominated as an Italian resident there.<sup>2</sup> Nerazzini also brought King Umberto's reply, dated 15 September 1891, to Mangashā's letter of 6 August 1891. The king wished Mangashā to have/friendly interview with the governor of the colony, but he was careful to refer to Mangashā only as the Rās of Tègre and to mention Menilek as the emperor.<sup>3</sup>

During the first half of November, Nerazzini and De Martino were preparing with the Rases of Tègre an official meeting with Gandolfi. In his report of 2 November 1891, Nerazzini described Alulā as working to have Italian friendship in order to be free to go southwards and fight Menilek.<sup>4</sup>

"It can not be ignored," summarized Gandolfi,<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>L. Mercatelli, "Le trattative Italo-Tigrine", Corriere di Napoli, 29-30 Dec. 1891.

<sup>2</sup>C. Zaghi, "Il convegno del Mareb"; also Storia Militare, p.233, Mangasha to Baratieri, 20.8.91.

<sup>3</sup>Umberto to Mangashā, 15.9.91, quoted in Bizzoni, p.255; see also Zaghi, "Il convegno".

<sup>4</sup>Conti Rossini, Italia, p.465.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-40, Gandolfi to MAE, 17.1.92.

"that among the chiefs of Tigre it was mainly Ras Alula who wanted the friendship with Italy and in the councils held by Mangascia he was insisting on a policy of cordial relations with Eritrea. ...

He was tirelessly working for a long time to eliminate any causes of discord with that part of the Mareb, in order to be able, once an aid and any kind of help is assured, to divert his attention against Menelik who ... is the object of Alula's great contempt, in order to liberate Tigre from the hated Shoan."

The Italians conducted their policy according to the spirit of King Umberto's letter. Friendship was to be established with the Tigreans but at the same time they took care not to alienate the Shoan emperor. Consequently it was agreed that the Tigreans would consider the Mareb as their border with Eritrea but Sarāya and Akalla-Guzāy were declared to be a political part of Ethiopia, as had been agreed between Menelik and Antonelli on 6 February 1890. No direct military support was promised to Mangashā except for a small quantity of arms and ammunition to be supplied only in the case of Tigre being attacked by the Mahdists. Commercial caravans were guaranteed a safe route from Adwā to Massawa and the Italians took it upon themselves to reconstruct the Trinity church in Adwā and build there a new place for Mangashā.<sup>1</sup> The construction of such a palace for Mangashā in Adwā was probably intended by Alulā to separate his young master from the pro-Shoans in Maqalle.

Though he received no direct Italian support to fight Menelik, the understanding with Eritrea was undoubtedly Alulā's greatest achievement in his long struggle to persuade Mangashā to lead an

---

<sup>1</sup>Gandolfi to MAE, 15.11.91, La Tribuna, 17.1.92.

independent Tēgre. This had been his policy for the past two years. Yet Alulā's image, which was created in the period of Dogali, as the great enemy of the Italians led many contemporary observers to believe that he was against that understanding and that he was forced to attend the subsequent ceremonial meeting with the Italians on the Marab.<sup>1</sup> It must, however, be remembered that once Alulā gave up the idea of restoring his government on the Marab Mellash, the Italians there were no longer considered as interfering in his own affairs. Being now only interested in restoring Tigrean hegemony or at least in safeguarding the independence of Tēgre from ~~Shoa~~, he soon regarded the Italians in Eritrea as European neighbours whose friendship and help had to be obtained.

The meeting between the Tigrean Rases and Gandolfi was fixed for 28 November 1891, but it had to be delayed as Alulā had to advance towards Agāme and face a raid launched by Sēbhat,<sup>2</sup> the only major chief who did not join Mangashā's camp. On 6 December 1891, on the Italian bank of the Marab River, the official meeting finally took place between the Governor of Eritrea and the leaders of Tēgre: Mangashā, Hagos, Alulā and the old Rās Walda Mikā'el.

---

<sup>1</sup>For such a passage see Berkeley, pp. 36, 37. Gandolfi explained the source for such information by stating that Dr. Nerazzini, as a supporter of the "politica Scioana" "had a natural hatred for the greatest rival of that policy and he considered Alula as opposing friendship with us, while in fact he is the most enthusiastic supporter of such friendship", A.S.MAI 3/6-40, Gandolfi to MAE, 11.12.91.

<sup>2</sup>La Tribuna, 17.1.92; Corriere di Napoli, 29-30 Dec. 1891. In November Mangashā nominated Dadjāzmāch Walde and Sēbhat's brother Dadjāzmāch Abbāy over Agāme. See Conti Rossini, Italia, p.466. Sēbhat's raids were probably an act of retaliation.

According to the correspondent of Popolo Romano<sup>1</sup> Mangashā was first to cross the Marab and to be warmly received by Gandolfi. Gandolfi was then asked by Mangashā to swear that the Dogali affair was entirely forgotten and, after the Italian General acceded, Alulā was sent for to cross the river.

"On Ras Alula's arrival General Gandolfi addressed him in patriotic language, stating that time had healed a cruel wound, which it was better not to recall. Old difficulties and causes of misunderstanding had ceased to exist, and in common interest it was desirable to work together, and further the interests of the Tigré and the Italian Colony, by a policy of peace and order, and a loyal and honest interchange of intercourse between the two parties. General Gandolfi alluded to Ras Alula as a gallant soldier, willing to sacrifice his life in the interests of his country.

Ras Alula, deeply impressed, desired to be allowed to embrace General Gandolfi, to which he acceded."

The next day final negotiations were held in which the previously agreed conditions were verbally confirmed. Mangashā ceremonially nominated Gandolfi as a Rās and this was later humourously treated in Rome.<sup>2</sup> In fact it was quite a serious matter as Mangashā, being himself only a Rās, was not authorised to make such a nomination and by doing so he was clearly challenging the emperor.<sup>3</sup> The Italians, as mentioned above, were careful to try and minimise the damage to Menilek's prestige. The meeting resulted in no official paper being signed by the parties. Gandolfi and his officers, in the name of their government, and Mangashā, Alulā, Hagos and the other Ethiopian chiefs swore an oath to be

---

<sup>1</sup>As quoted in FO 403/177, Slade to Dufferin, 6.1.92.  
For a similar description see: A.S.MAI 3/6-40, Gandolfi to MAE, 11.12.91.

<sup>2</sup>La Tribuna headline for the article describing the meeting was "Ras Gandolfi", La Tribuna, 11.12.91.

<sup>3</sup>See below, pp. 302.

faithful to the engagements entered into.

"After a cordial leave-taking at which, as a sign of respect, Ras Alula kissed General Gandolfi's arm, the two camps broke up, and the negotiations and ceremonious became a matter of history."<sup>1</sup>

December 1891-March 1892: Mangashā regards himself a sovereign.

Tegre is united.

When the Tigrean Rases and the Italian officials in their meeting on the Marab swore "to be a friend of your friend and an enemy of your enemies",<sup>2</sup> Alulā's policy of relying on Eritrea against Menilek seemed to be most successful. The coming months saw the strengthening of that policy and of his personal position.

During the months of January and February 1892 Rās Mangashā and Rās Hagos marched southwards to camp at the southern part of 'endartā near Ashange and face the expected advance of the Shoan emperor on the independent Tegre.<sup>3</sup> This time, however, having internal problems in his camp and afraid of Tigrean influence in Amhara, where in late 1891 Mangashā and Alulā managed to strengthen pro-Tigrean elements,<sup>4</sup> Menilek's advance was stopped and on 17 February 1892 he turned back to his capital.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 403/177, Slade to Dufferin, 6.1.92.

<sup>2</sup>Alulā was reported as changing the agreed text and saying: "I am a devoted servant of Mangascia and therefore swear to be a friend of his friends". See I Nostri Errori, p.131.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-40, Gandolfi to MAE, 13.2.92.

<sup>4</sup>See Conti Rossini, Italia ed Etiopia, pp. 72, 73.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 36/16-147, Gandolfi to MAE, 10.3.92.

Rās Alulā was in the meantime working to remove the last main political obstacle to Tigrean unity. He marched to the border of Agāme and met there Dadjāzmāch Səbhat Arigawi. He could offer the ambitious descendent of Səbāgadis the pardon of Mangashā and a participation in what he hoped would be an anti-Shoan campaign.<sup>1</sup> As a sign of friendship and faith the Rās gave to Səbhat the daughter of his dead brother, Bāshā Gabra Maryām, W. Shoanesh.<sup>2</sup> Səbhat's brother, Dadjāzmāch Abbāy, married a daughter of Alulā, W. Damaqach.<sup>3</sup>

In Hawzen on 8 March 1892, the three Rases of Təgre and 'əchage Tewolflos were assembled. Dadjāzmāch Səbhat, carrying a stone on his neck, was ceremonially pardoned by Mangashā. The latter appeared dressed as a Nəgus and carrying a royal and red umbrella. Two days later he left no doubt about his claimed new status of sovereign by appointing Səbhat as a Rās.<sup>4</sup> The combined Tigrean forces of Səbhat, Mangashā, Hagos and Alula were estimated as numbering some 10,000 troops "by far better trained than the Shoans". Those of them who were assembled at Hawzen addressed Mangashā as Jānhoy, the appellation of an emperor of Ethiopia,

---

<sup>1</sup> A.S.MAI 3/6-40, Gandolfi to MAE, 13.2.92.

<sup>2</sup> W. Yashashwarq; Mercatelli in La Tribuna, 20.2.96; Conti Rossini, Italia, p.77; A.S.MAI 3/17-136, Mulazzani Report, 26.7.96.

<sup>3</sup> W. Yashashwarq.

<sup>4</sup> See: Afawārq Gabra 'əyāsus, Dəgmāwi aṣe mənilek, Rome 1901 EC, p.82.



demanding that he lead them to Shoa.<sup>1</sup>

March-June 1893: Alulā's policy jeopardised by new Italian policy

The economically ruined Tēgre could not, however, supply such a military expedition to Shoa as demanded by Alulā and the Tigrean soldiery. Gandolfi, the Eritrean governor, seemed to be willing to go a step further in his pro-Tigrean policy and, in early 1892, he sent 35,000 cartridges to Mangashā.<sup>2</sup> The prince of Tēgre, aware of the fact that this was only a symbolic quantity, applied for more cartridges and grain.<sup>3</sup> His letters, as those of a sovereign, were now sealed on their tops.<sup>4</sup>

On 28 February 1892 Gandolfi was replaced by Baratieri as the governor of Eritrea, a change which marked the Italian return to a pro-Shoan policy. Immediately after his arrival Baratieri contacted Makonnen, Menilek's right hand, and started doing his best to appease the emperor.<sup>5</sup> Regarding Tēgre Baratieri was to calm Mangashā and assure him of Italian friendly intentions but ignore any request for material support which might encourage his independent line.

"I have not sent them even one cartridge," Baratieri reported on 18 August 1892,<sup>6</sup> "and of the

---

<sup>1</sup>Conti Rossini, Italia, pp. 74, 75. A.S.MAI 3/6-40, Gandolfi to MAE, 16.3.92, 3/6-42, Baratieri to MAE, 15.4.92. L. Mercatelli, "Ras Sebat", La Tribuna, 20.2.96.

<sup>2</sup>Conti Rossini, p.75. According to A.S.MAI 3/6-42 Baratieri to MAE 15.4.92, the number of cartridges was 25,000.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-16-148, Baratieri to MAE, 18.8.92.

<sup>4</sup>Mercatelli, "Ras Sebat"; Conti Rossini, Italia, p.75.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-148, Baratieri to MAE, 18.8.92.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

20,000 sacks of grain which they asked for two and a half months ago I have not sent them even a single one."

As for Rās Alulā, he was regarded by Baratieri as "the head of the Tigrean uncompromising elements",<sup>1</sup> and, as such, the main obstacle to his policy of calming Mangashā and donating Təgre to Menilek. Rās Alulā, Baratieri thought,

"is a turbulent chief, an enemy of the Shoans and of the Italians and indeed of the Tigreans themselves whom he does not let have even one quiet hour."<sup>2</sup>

Baratieri's attitude to Alulā was a result of his pro-Shoan policy, a cool political step based on logical strategical thinking, but also on the wrong assumption that the Alulā of 1892 was the same enemy of the Italians as the Alulā of 1887. Baratieri was wrong in thinking that Alulā's ultimate aim was to reoccupy Asmarā, and his subsequent moves seem to indicate also a politically harmful desire to take revenge from Alulā for Dogali.

The Tigrean Rases, still hoping to succeed in their independent policy, were naturally slow to understand the change in Italian policy. Baratieri was pleased to report that Mangashā and Alulā were doing their best to move the colony to their side.<sup>3</sup> An Awādj proclaimed in Adwā on 21 April 1892<sup>4</sup> called the people to assemble in Alulā's camp and forbade any anti-Italian raids. Baratieri was asked to send engineers to Adwā to build the promised palace and reconstruct the Trinity church. An Ethiopian rebel, Lədj Bayana, who

---

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Baratieri to MAE, 13.1.93.

<sup>3</sup> A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Baratieri to MAE, 30.5.92.

<sup>4</sup> According to Conti Rossini, Italia, p.76, it was proclaimed on 24.4.92.

had caused the Italians trouble in Sarāya and escaped to Təgre, was hunted by Alulā.<sup>1</sup> Around mid-May all the Tigrean chiefs assembled again in Mangashā's palace in Maqalle where they jointly re-emphasized their request to Baratieri for cartridges and grain. As there was no positive response, Alulā suggested he would raid the Baria tribes with the dual aim of obtaining the needed food supplies and of putting pressure on the Italians.<sup>2</sup> Yet Alulā was still doing his best to appease Baratieri before spoiling relations with Eritrea by raiding those tribes. Back at Tamben<sup>3</sup> on 28 May 1892 Alulā wrote to Baratieri trying to arrange a meeting in order "to make our friendship more solid"<sup>4</sup> Baratieri replied on 22 June 1892 praising Alula and stating that "the pact of friendship sworn by Gandolfi is sacred for me",<sup>5</sup> On the same day Baratieri answered Mangashā's letter of 20 May 1892 asking again for food supplies.<sup>6</sup> Neither Alulā's request for a meeting nor Mangashā's request for grain were mentioned in Baratieri's polite replies.

Alulā who fully understood that without Italian help no anti-Shoan campaign could take place, still worked to gain the confidence of Baratieri. On 3 July 1892, after being strongly

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Baratieri to MAE, 10.5.92.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Baratieri to MAE, 30.5.92, 6.6.92.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Baratieri to MAE, 30.5.92.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Alulā to Baratieri, 28.5.92.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Baratieri to Alula, 22.6.92.

<sup>6</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Mangascia to Baratieri 20.5.92.

advised by De Martino not to raid the Baria, Alulā discussed the matter with Rās Hagos and 'echage Tewoflos in Adwā, and subsequently notified the Italian resident that he would refrain from doing so.<sup>1</sup> Simultaneously Alulā invited to Adwā the anti-Italian rebel Lēdj Bayana and treacherously imprisoned him.<sup>2</sup> Hearing that Baratieri was visiting Sarāya around mid-July, he pressed De Martino to arrange a meeting with the governor, but was again rejected.<sup>3</sup>

\* \* \*

Alulā's failure to unite with Eritrea against Menilek was no fault of his. His political plan seemed to be most realistic and successful and at Hawzen in March the Tēgre seemed to be about to become an independent buffer province. What rendered it a failure was a change in the Italian policy and this was unpredictable at least for someone with Alulā's limited knowledge of Shoan-Italian relationships.

This change, vital and important to the history of the period, can be also partly attributed to the existence in Rom<sup>e</sup> and in Asmarā of the identification of Rās Alulā with the Dogali massacre of January 1887.

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Baratieri to MAE, 17.7.92.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

P. 1892-1894: "WADI QUBI" CHALLENGING THE SON OF YOHANNES

July-September 1892: Mangashā decides to go to Menilek.

Alulā fails to organise an opposition

While Alulā's pro-Italian and anti-Shoan policy was collapsing renewed pressure was put on Mangashā to submit to Emperor Menilek. The emperor wrote to the clergy of Təgre to persuade Mangashā to come to him.<sup>1</sup> Mangashā's personal envoy, Belattā Tasfaye Hantalo, a former supporter of Seyum, was travelling between Maqalle and Addis Ababa serving as a mediator between Menilek and the Rās.<sup>2</sup> Baratieri through his resident in Adwā, De Martino, also pressed Mangashā to write an appeasing letter to Menilek.<sup>3</sup> Confusion prevailed in the province<sup>4</sup> and Mangashā lost his confidence.

In Aksum in late August and early September 1892 Rās Alulā met with Rās Səbhat of Agāme. The two Rases could not reconcile themselves to the fact that Mangashā was about to submit to Menilek. According to the reports of De Martino, Alulā suggested the overthrow of Rās Mangashā (probably if he went to Shoa) and offered the crown of Təgre to Səbhat.<sup>5</sup> Judging from Alulā's activities immediately following the meeting, it may be assumed that De Martino's sources were fairly reliable.

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 36/13-148, Baratieri to MAE 9.8.92.

<sup>2</sup>See Conti Rossini, Italia ed Etiopia, pp. 77, 78.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 36/16-149, Baratieri to MAE 2.10.92.

<sup>4</sup>In July Mangashā was almost assassinated by some discontents of Rās Ar'āyā Demṣu's family, Conti Rossini, Italia ed Etiopia, p.79, note 1. Later in the same month Tadrā Wahid revolted again in Wādjrāt but was defeated by Mangashā, A.S.MAI 36/16-148, Baratieri to MAE, 18.8.92.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Baratieri to MAE 13.9.92; A.S.MAI 36/16-149, Baratieri to MAE, 2.10.92.

The combined force of Alulā and Sēbhat was estimated at 7,000 troops. But - according to the Italian resident - the loyalty of Rās Hagos to Mangashā made it hazardous to march on Maqalle.<sup>1</sup> Having been invited to Maqalle by Mangashā to celebrate the Masqal there Alulā and Sēbhat came there in early September. "They told you that I would not obey your order to come here," Alulā humbly complained to Mangashā,<sup>2</sup> "here I am arrest me." But Mangashā was clever enough to ignore the request and notified the chiefs present that he was about to leave for Shoa. Rās Hagos and 'echage Tewoflos reportedly praised the decision and Sēbhat immediately quit the place and returned to Agāme. Alulā, De Martino reported,<sup>3</sup> reacted furiously and performed the traditional war dances, inflaming everyone to shout anti-Shoan slogans. Mangashā ignored Alulā's dances but the latter preferred to stay with him in Maqalle to try to prevent his projected journey.

On 22 September 1892 De Martino was instructed by Baratieri to hasten to Maqalle to ensure that Alulā would not cause Mangashā to deviate from his resolve to submit to the emperor. He ordered the resident to promise economic support to Tēgre once a peaceful agreement with Menilek was reached.<sup>4</sup> De Martino arrived at Maqalle after the pro-Shoan decision had been announced by Mangashā.

"Ras Alula," he described, "sees in the new Italian policy towards Tigre the downfall of his aspirations

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, De Martino to Baratieri, 5.10.92.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 36/16-149, Baratieri to MAE, 2.10.92.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 36/16-149, Baratieri to MAE, 2.10.92; A.S.MAI 3/6-42, De Martino to Baratieri, 5.10.92.

and predicts the fall of Mangascia ... He is afraid ... and from day to day he is being deserted by his followers. He is aware of his growing isolation... but he still has not lost hope and is patiently awaiting the chance to persuade Mangascia not to make peace with Menelik. ... Mangascia is determined to go to Shoa and only because of the memory of his father and respect for the age, the influence and the rank of Ras Alula ... he tries to disarm his gently..."<sup>1</sup>

December 1892: Alulā openly rebels against the hereditary prince of Tēgre

On 23 October 1892 Tāsfaye Hantalo, the envoy sent by Mangashā from Maqalle to Menilek, entered the Shoan capital. In front of the two Abuns, Peṭros and Matewos, Menilek on 6 November 1892 publicly swore not to deceive Mangashā nor cause him any harm. Three days later Tāsfaye started on his way back to Tēgre<sup>2</sup> carrying the emperor's demand that the prince of Tēgre should come to Boru Medā together with Rās Alulā.<sup>3</sup>

In the meantime Mangashā, Alulā and Hagos had marched from Maqalle to Adwā from where Mangashā hoped to go to meet Baratieri.<sup>4</sup> The Italian governor, unwilling to annoy Menilek, avoided the encounter. To appease Baratieri, Mangashā ordered Alulā to hand his prisoner, Ledj Bayana, over to the Italians. Alulā, already aware of Baratieri's policy, refused to do so. Mangashā then, on 18 November 1892, sent Rās Hagos with an armed escort to Alulā's camp where they took the rebel and sent him to the Italians. After this public

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, De Martino to Baratieri, 5.10.92.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 36/16-157, Salimbeni to MAE, 26.1.93, contains Capucci's report of 10.11.92.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, De Martino to Baratieri, 14.12.92.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Mangascia to Baratieri, 5.10.92; Baratieri to MAE, 17.12.92.

humiliation for the proud Alulā,<sup>1</sup> Mangashā left him in Adwā and hastened to Maqalle to meet the envoy returning from Menilek.

Alulā's first step was to send to Sēbhat in Agāme and inform him about his next move.<sup>2</sup> This move was an open rebellion against Mangashā. On 12 December 1892 Rās Alulā arrested in Adwā three of Mangashā's devotees including Dadjāzmāch 'ēmbaye and receiving then an invitation from Mangashā to come to Maqalle, Alulā responded by beating the Nagārit in order to assemble an army.<sup>3</sup>

But Rās Sēbhat, afraid of fighting Mangashā and exposing his province to a possible Italian punitive expedition, did not come to Alulā's aid,<sup>4</sup> nor did 'ēchage Tewoflos support the old Rās. He left Adwā on 14 December 1892 heading for Mangashā's camp in Maqalle.<sup>5</sup> This was a great blow to Alulā. The 'ēchage was known as a great enemy of Menilek<sup>6</sup> and a dedicated supporter of Tigrean hegemony. He and the clergy of Aksum were also known to be supporters of Alulā.<sup>7</sup> The Rās not only symbolised for them the Tigrean cause but had close personal relations with them. As mentioned above, he had dedicated the revenue of Sarāya, when governor of the Marab Mellash, to the church of Aksum.<sup>8</sup> "He," wrote the author

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Baratieri to MAE, 17.2.92. Bayana was extradited on 18 November 1892. F. Martini, Il Diario Eritreo, vol. II, p.410.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Baratieri to MAE, 17.12.92.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Baratieri to MAE, 17.12.92.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, De Martino to Baratieri, 14.12.92.

<sup>6</sup>See Mercatelli's short article on Tewoflos in La Tribuna, 5.7.95. Also A.S.MAI 3/6-42, De Martino to Baratieri, 14.12.92.

<sup>7</sup>For his support in Alulā's nomination as a Turk Bāshā, see above, p. 30.

<sup>8</sup>See above, p. 152.



of Alulā's biography referring to the period during which he was the governor of Hamāsen, "gave all his property to the poor and wretched, and to all the churches. Most of all, for our mother of Zion Ḥksum"<sup>1</sup> Yet the 'echage refrained now from supporting the rebellious Alulā against the son of Yohannes,

Taking De Martino and the five Italian workers then in Adwā as hostages, Alulā left for Tamben in mid-December. There in his poor birthplace near the church of Mannawe, Alulā constructed a Zariba.

During the years of 1891 and 1892 Rās Alulā had frequently visited Mannawe where he reconstructed the church.<sup>2</sup> Having no private land Alulā managed to maintain himself due to his power, prestige and authority as a Rās to mobilise troops. He had some financial resources since Mangashā had donated to him (probably in 1889) the profits from the customs of Adwā.<sup>3</sup> Yet as he had no hereditary feudal domain to serve him as a base of power (like Agāme was for Sebhat) the isolated Alulā could promise very little to the people of Tamben and Geraltā whom he now tried to assemble in Mannawe.<sup>4</sup>

"He is now my enemy," Mangashā wrote to Baratieri from Maqalle on 19 December 1892,<sup>5</sup> "and therefore he is also your enemy ... send troops as quickly as possible."

But Mangashā did not really need Italian help as Alulā was unable to mobilise any substantial force. A declaration of open rebellion

<sup>1</sup>Mannawe MS.

<sup>2</sup>Int. with the people of Mannawe, Feb. 1972. The bell of the church was brought by Alulā from Eritrea. It carries the inscription: "Anno 1891, P. Bastanzetti Arezzo Udine".

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Baratieri to MAE, 12.3.93.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, De Martino to Mulazzani, 30.12.92.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Mangascia to Baratieri, 19.12.92.

against the hereditary prince had little chance of success in Tēgre, even though it came from a prestigious leader like Alulā. The tired and hungry people of Tamben had other reasons now not to join the isolated Rās who could only promise them a fight against Mangashā, the Shoans and the Italians. During the year which had passed since the meeting on the Marab, the Tigreans had had enough time to realise that they could not take a military initiative against Menilek. The new policy of Baratieri caused disillusion with the slogan of Tigrean independence which had hitherto been Alulā's source of power.

Alulā fortified himself in Mannawe with a few hundred followers and refused to free his Italian hostages. On 27 December 1892, with 2,000 troops commanded by Rās Hagos, Mangashā approached Mannawe, took up a position on the surrounding hills, and started ruining the fields and orchards. In the evening one of Mangashā's lieutenants managed to penetrate Alulā's Zariba but was repulsed.

Around midnight, accompanied by only fifty followers including Dadjāzmāch Abbāy and Dadjāzmāch Tādālā Fənja "the lame", Alulā left his camp "Like a thief running for his life". He led his small group of followers to an Ambā in Avergalle.<sup>1</sup> On the way he was deserted by Dadjāzmāch Abbāy who brought the Italian hostages to Mangashā's headquarters near Mannawe.<sup>2</sup>

"In Menne," De Martino reported,<sup>3</sup> "we were received by more than 2,000 soldiers ... they all shouted: 'Alula kufu, kufu [bad, bad]'".

Alulā is morally finished even in Tigre. All his chiefs have deserted him, even Degiac Tacle Aimanot

---

<sup>1</sup>38° 50' 13" 18'.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, De Martino to Mulazzani, 30.12.92. Interview with Fitāwrāri 'embassā Abbāy, the son of Dadjāzmāch Abbay, 'Abbi 'Addi, 18.2.72.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

and Degiac Abai. He is left only with Tedla 'the lame', Fitaurari Desta and forty followers on an Amba in Avergalle /Ambā Sarago<sup>1</sup> from where he sends asking for mercy."

January 1893: Italian demand to get rid of Alulā rejected

by Mangashā

Hearing about Alulā's rebellion, Baratieri wrote directly to Mangashā explaining to him "the danger of setting free such a boastful and perjured enemy"<sup>2</sup> who cannot be useful for any future settlement.<sup>3</sup>

"The governor of Eritrea," Baratieri testified about himself, "spared no effort to persuade Mangascia to finish with that treacherous rebel because he was the greatest obstacle to the pacification of Abyssinia under the hegemony of the emperor."<sup>4</sup>

At the beginning of the third week of 1893, after brief negotiations and the mediation of 'ēchage Tewoflos, Alulā submitted to his young master. In a ceremony held at the Trinity church of Adwā, Alulā approached Mangashā with a rope on his neck and a stone on his shoulders.<sup>5</sup> To the bitter surprise of the Italians, Alulā was pardoned and was given permission to keep 200 riflemen. Mangashā left him the right to enjoy the profit from the customs of Adwā, though he now had to share it with Dadjāzmāch 'ēmbaye. Alulā promised not to interfere any more in political affairs and was appointed governor over a small area between Avergalle and Tamben.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Conti Rossini, Italia, p.462; De Martino, Il Diario Eritreo, vol. II, p.411.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Baratieri to MAE, 12.3.93.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Baratieri to MAE, 13.1.93.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 36/16-150, Baratieri to MAE, 9.4.93.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Baratieri to MAE, 12.3.92; La Tribuna, 20.1.93.

<sup>6</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Baratieri to MAE, 12.3.93.

It was probably not only for sentimental reasons or the interference of the clergy that Mangashā did not entirely finish Alulā's political career, as Baratieri had suggested. The existence of Alulā as an anti-Shoan warrior could serve as an excuse for Mangashā not to go to submit to Menilek. Mangashā had to gain time and wait, especially in early 1893 when Italian-Shoan relations were approaching the rupture which started when Menilek denounced the Treaty of Uccialli on 27 February 1893. Mangashā was probably also aware of the fact that Rās Alulā, hitherto a supporter of an alliance with Eritrea, was now disillusioned enough to return to an anti-Italian policy. As such he might well prove to be a useful card in the future.

February-May 1893: Alulā revolts again

Rās Alulā wasted no time in breaking his promise and rebelled again against Mangashā in order to prevent his march to Shoa. On 21 February 1892 Rās Alulā attacked a column of Mangashā's troops passing through Tamben.<sup>1</sup> Mangashā was then in Maqalle and the Italian Resident in Adwā was convinced that Alulā would come there to get him. The English archaeologist Bent, then researching in Aksum, described how

"Everything was excitement and terror ... some said Ras Alula was only a few hours off, that he was cutting off the right hands and left feet of all his opponents who fell into his power. 'He is sure to cut mine off' said the terrified Italian 'for I am an old enemy of his' "<sup>2</sup>

"Ras Alulā," Bent described a conversation he then had with Dadjāzmāch 'embaye the newly appointed governor

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Baratieri to MAE, 27.2.93, La Tribuna, 1.3.93.

<sup>2</sup>Bent, op. cit., p.149.

of Adwā,<sup>1</sup> "was spoken of as the devil who came up like smoke from hell, and the Dajatch remarked that it would be necessary to put up a cross on either door to keep him out."<sup>2</sup>

But the wary Alulā was not strong enough to enter the Tigrean capital and risk Italian retaliation for ill treating De Martino. Leading his handful of fifty followers, including Dadjāzmāch Tadrā Fanja, he returned again to Mannawe and fortified himself. In late February Rās Mangashā sent a force of only 300 led by Dadjāzmāch Abbāy to catch Alulā. This relation and ex-follower of Alulā did not dare to attack his old master; he was tempted by the Rās to visit him and returned to his service.<sup>3</sup> By early March 1893 Alulā had assembled 200 warriors and climbed up to Ambā Dibuk in Avergalle.<sup>4</sup>

From early March to early May 1893 Mangashā's forces commanded by Rās Hagos were camping around the Ambā on the top of which Alulā and his followers suffered hunger. Mangashā was advised by Baratieri to get rid of Alulā and this time he promised to do so.<sup>5</sup> He wrote Baratieri many times asking for cannons to shell the besieged Ambā but was denied these by the Italian governor. Baratieri, as instructed by Rome, had to refrain from direct military

---

<sup>1</sup>Conti Rossini, Italia ed Etiopia, p.82.

<sup>2</sup>Bent, op.cit., p.117.

<sup>3</sup>Interview with Fitāwrāri 'embasā Abbāy, A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Baratieri to MAE, 12.3.93.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Baratieri to MAE, 7.4.93.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

interference in Tēgre<sup>1</sup> and annoying Menilek as Orero had done in early 1890. Nevertheless, the Italian governor urged Mangashā to do the job with his own power.<sup>2</sup>

May 1893: Menilek saves Alulā

Again, for the second time in 1893, the defeated Alulā had a stone on his shoulders, a rope on his neck, and prostrated himself before the young Rās of Tēgre.<sup>3</sup> Alulā asked for a pardon and a restoration of his former status but Mangashā refused. 'echage Tewoflos hurried from Aksum in order to prevent Mangashā from doing any harm to Alulā.<sup>4</sup>

It was undoubtedly at that stage that Emperor Menilek interfered to save the old Rās, hitherto his greatest Tigrean enemy. With the Ethiopian-Italian crisis over the Uccialli treaty and the quick deterioration of his relations with Rome, Menilek shrewdly recognised that the prestigious general, the warrior whose name was identified with humiliating Italian defeat, could be a useful agent in the future. Rās Mangashā, who in early April had assured Baratieri that Menilek was anxious to get rid of Alulā,<sup>5</sup> was strongly advised by two envoys from Emperor Menilek to pardon the Rās.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 36/13-150, Baratieri to MAE, 9.4.93.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Baratieri to MAE, 23.5.93, 30.6.93, quotes Mangasha to Baratieri, 19.5.93.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 23.5.93.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 36/16-150, Baratieri to MAE, 9.4.93.

<sup>6</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Baratieri to MAE, 23.5.93.

"Rās Mangascia," Baratieri complained,<sup>1</sup> "who from the end of March was swearing to liberate Ethiopia forever from the rebel Alulā pardoned him on conditions which he himself knows cannot be maintained." Alulā was permitted to have an army of 500 men and was probably given adequate financial<sup>re</sup>/sources. On 16 May 1893, near Ambā Dibuk, Mangashā publicly swore alliance to Menilek. The next day, with Alulā in his camp, they started for Maqalle.<sup>2</sup> It was undoubtedly from that time that the grateful Alulā started considering an orientation towards Menilek.<sup>3</sup>

Alulā's treatment was in sharp contrast with that meted out to Sēbhat. In late May 1893 Rās Sēbhat who had refrained from fighting Mangashā left his province and came to Maqalle.<sup>4</sup> He was well received by Rās Alulā,<sup>5</sup> but Tasfaye Hantalo and Rās Hagos pressed Mangashā strongly to punish him. Around the middle of June (after 13th June 1893) Rās Sēbhat together with his son, Dadjāzmāch Dastā, were *put in chains* and put on Ambā Salāmā. Mangashā, accompanied by Hagos and Tasfaye, and Alulā, penetrated Agāme on 22 June 1893 and spent the winter there. Tasfaye Hantalo was appointed governor over that province, having received from Mangashā the title of Shum Agāme.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Luca dei Sabelli III, p.386.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 36/16-152, Baratieri to MAE 18.6.93, 21.6.93.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Baratieri to MAE, 30.6.93 quotes Shimper from Maqalle, 13.6.93.

<sup>6</sup>Baratieri to MAE, 30.6.93, 21.7.93.

June 1893-April 1894: Alulā holds no position at Mangashā's court

Alulā's activities during the period of June 1893 to April 1894 were not recorded by those who were responsible for the policy of the Italian colony of Eritrea. The only piece of information found in Italian reports was that the Rās was celebrating the masqal of September 1893 with Mangashā, Hagos and TASFAYE HANTALO in Hawzen where their camp numbered some 2,000 followers. Arimondi, the new Eritrean governor, reported that Menilek again "asked" Mangashā to come to Shoa. The invitation included a threat to invade Tēgre. Rās Hagos and TASFAYE HANTALO wished Mangashā to go immediately but Alulā was still against it.<sup>1</sup> Yet Alulā must have been aware of the fact that the Italians would never forgive him for Dogali and a rapprochement between them and Mangashā might well lead to his destruction.

Now it was Mangashā who, during this period, was working to obtain Italian goodwill and support, even though his many letters to Asmarā and Massawa were devasively answered.<sup>2</sup>

Alulā's name was not even mentioned in connection with Mangashā's efforts to acquire Italian aid by common action against the Mahdists.<sup>3</sup> This fact, together with the imprisoning of Rās Sebhat, to which Alulā <sup>was</sup> opposed, clearly indicate that Alulā was no longer considered by the prince of Tēgre as one of his devotees.

Alulā must have realised by now that even if "the throne

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-42, Arimondi to MAE 22.10.93.

<sup>2</sup>Conti Rossini, Italia, p.97; A.S.MAI 36/-17-162, Baratieri to MAE, 5.4.94.

<sup>3</sup>Conti Rossini, Italia, p.97.



was restored to his owner", Mangashā, he himself would not return to the status of "the king's man", his only way to political survival.

Twice humiliated in public by Mangashā, he no longer had strong motives to fulfil Yohannes's will. His prestige in Tēgre, even in Tamben where he was so miserably defeated, was lost and so was his image as a fighter for Tigrean independence.

It was during this inactive period of his, in late 1893 and the first half of 1894, that Alulā gave up his dreams about restoring Tigrean hegemony. Having no chance to re-establish his position in Tēgre he could now hope for only two alternatives: a re-establishment of his government in the "Tukuls" of Asmarā or a return to the status of a "king's man". With Italy and Ethiopia being on the eve of an open war, Alulā had no doubts that his chances lay in Addis Ababa. There in the imperial capital his name, as in Rome and Asmarā, was still identified with Dogali.

1894-1897: A KING'S MAN AGAIN, AN ACCEPTANCE  
OF SHOAN HEGEMONY

June 1894: Submission to Menilek

In early April 1894, after being pressed again and again by Menilek and frustrated by Italian passivity, Rās Mangashā decided to march to Shoa and submit to the emperor of Ethiopia. Alulā, whose position in Mangashā's court was described by Baratieri as humiliating,<sup>1</sup> had probably but little say in the discussions held at Adwā which led to that decision.

During the second half of April and the whole month of May 1894 the Tigrean camp was marching southwards with Rās Alulā, together with Tasfaye Hantalo, leading the advance column numbering some 2,000 men.<sup>2</sup>

On 2 June 1894 they entered Addis Ababa, where 12,000 well-armed troops equipped also with twenty-five cannons were concentrating to impress the exhausted and humiliated visitors.<sup>3</sup>

"The Ras /Mangashā/ preceded by the clergy of the holy church of Aksum who carried the shrine of Mary, was followed by his Rases, Alula, Hagos and Voldenchiel, modestly advanced towards the Royal residence, where, seated on the throne, with the Royal crown on his head, surrounded by Ras Darghè, Ras Micaël, Ras Oliè, by his major chiefs and by Europeans, the king of kings awaited him. ... At the door, the four Rases of Tigre, like rebels who come to submit, loaded a big stone on their naked shoulders: they arrived in front of the king and bowed down to the ground asking pardon. With one word Menlich declared that he granted it. Mangasha was seated; the others were firsty taken away, but after a few moments were

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 36/17-162, Baratieri to MAE 5.4.94.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-46, Salsa to MAE, Diario di maggio, 1894.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-46, Salsa to MAE, 30.7.94, "Diario Informazioni del mese di luglio, 1894".

called back and were also seated. For a quarter of an hour a dead silence prevailed, everyone gazing in absolute immobility, as if immersed in his thoughts..... For the Tigreans the sacrifice was completed. Only Alula, his shoulders turned to the king, with one hand on his mouth, still seemed to represent the old Tigrean pride."<sup>1</sup>

During the next three days the Tigrean Rases and the Ethiopian emperor met for conversations and banquets during which Mangashā was coolly received by Menilek to whom he donated 100 rifles and 6,000 thalers.<sup>2</sup> Then on 6 June 1894 the four Rases were again invited to Menilek's court where the emperor, in front of a few intimates, demanded the following as a sign of loyalty: a) The transfer of the province of Ṣallamti hitherto governed by Rās Hagos, to the hands of Empress Taytu. b) That the Nəbura'ed, the chief of the holy city of Aksum, would be nominated by the emperor. c) That the revenue of Təgre be paid to the imperial treasury. d) That the Gult rights of Zawditu over 'endertā be renewed. The Rases were given two days to discuss the matter before swearing to those conditions. Mangashā, it was rumoured, was secretly promised by the emperor that he would be nominated later in the same year as a Nəgus of Təgre, not to include Ṣallamti and Zabol but to include the claimed territories beyond the Marab.<sup>3</sup>

Alulā's stand towards these points was not recorded and in fact they had but little to do with his next move. According to

---

<sup>1</sup>Conti Rossini, Italia, p.99. Based also on Guèbre Sellassie, p.354.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-46, Salsa to MAE, 30.7.94, "Estrato del Diario Informazioni del mese di luglio, 1894".

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

information received by the Italian intelligence service in Asmarā, Rās Alulā was not permitted by Mangashā to attend the consultations which he then held with Hagos and the other Tigreans and was not allowed into their room.<sup>1</sup> Undoubtedly Mangashā was suspecting Alulā of being already "Menilek's man". Baratieri could predict on 8 June 1894<sup>2</sup> that the old Rās would stay in the Shoan court and surely Mangashā was also aware of the new policy of Alulā. This was later analysed in a summary by the Italian:

"The rivalry of Ras Alula to the Shoan hegemony was overcome by his hatred of the Italians, and by the desire to gain any support for the fulfilment of his aspirations to a government on the right bank of the Mareb. To this one can add his disgust at staying any longer with Mangascia in a position by far inferior to his past and to his pretensions."<sup>3</sup>

Alulā was also undoubtedly deeply impressed by the greatness and strength of the emperor and by his well organised political and military power, by far greater than that which/shattered the Tegre could have mobilised, even if united. The British traveller and merchant A. Wylde, who thought that "King Johannes as a monarch certainly ranks before any of his modern predecessors"<sup>4</sup> was thus impressed in his first visit to Addis Ababa in late 1896:

"King Menelek seems to be a very eloquent speaker and a very intelligent man, well informed on all things local and foreign, and certainly the cleverest

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-46, Baratieri to MAE, 8.6.94.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-46, Baratieri to MSE, 5.7.94.

<sup>4</sup>Wylde, Modern Abyssinia, p.45.

Abyssinian that I have ever come across. King John was a child compared to him. Ras Mangascha, the would-be pretender to the throne, who says the world is flat, can never hope to make any headway against such a powerful opponent. As long as King Menelek, his nephew Ras Merconnen and his brother-in-law Ras Woly are alive there can be no chance of any rebellion."<sup>1</sup>

Was Alulā also so impressed?

When on 11th June 1894 the Tigrean Rases came to the court to swear allegiance to Menilek and be given permission to return to Tēgre, Alulā was reported to have refused to join them. Instead, "He asked the Emperor's permission to stay with him and not follow Mangaschia to Tigre. Menelik agreed on the spot and received him favourably."<sup>2</sup>

"As my master's son submits," Alulā was quoted as saying when he left the room,<sup>3</sup> "I will go to the real master."

On 21 June 1896 Wylde met Rās Alulā in Aksum.

"He much regretted the death of King John," Wylde described,<sup>4</sup> "and said it was 'God's work', but now, he added, Menelek was a good man, and had forgiven him for the attacks the Ras had made on him in the old days by King John's orders. He said: 'I have been to see Menelek, and he was very kind to me.' ... He then added: 'I then turned to King Menelek as the only man who could restore order, and since that time I have thrown all my influence on his side, in order to unite Abyssinia once more.'"

When Mangashā and his retinue left the Ethiopian capital on 13 June 1894, six hundred of the Tigrean troops preferred to stay

<sup>1</sup> A.B. Wylde, "An Unofficial Mission to Abyssinia", The Manchester Guardian, 28.5.97.

<sup>2</sup> A.S. MAI 3/6-46, Salsa to MAE, 30.7.94 ("Diario").

<sup>3</sup> Mondon to Le Temps, N.D., published in Le Temps, 18.10.98.

<sup>4</sup> A.B. Wylde, "An Unofficial Mission to Abyssinia", The Manchester Guardian, 14.5.97.

there with Alulā<sup>1</sup> and planted their tents around his new headquarters at Urā'el Safar in Addis Ababa.<sup>2</sup> In Maqalle the returning Rās Mangashā was reported to have declared Alulā to be a rebel.<sup>3</sup>

November 1894: Full acceptance of Shoan hegemony

Alulā decided to stay in Addis Ababa in order to return northwards with an all-Ethiopian army and regain the Marab Mellash. In the Shoan court, according to our sources,<sup>4</sup> he became an enthusiastic and strong supporter of war in the immediate future with Eritrea. Apparently he was not slow to reveal his intentions: as early as late June 1894 he reportedly suggested the imprisonment of Colonel Piano, the newly arrived Italian envoy to Addis Ababa.<sup>5</sup>

For the Italians, the fact that Alulā was welcomed by the emperor served as a clear indication of the latter's hostility. For Baratieri,<sup>6</sup> this was proved "by his keeping in his own service Ras Alula who is the major enemy to the Italian name and the claimant to the domain of the Mareb Melasc". While Rās Makonnen

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-46, Salsa to MAE, 30.7.94 ("Diario").

<sup>2</sup>Alaqā Kenfu's Diary, p.1, in the possession of Dr. Alame Eshete, IES.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-46, Salsa to MAE, 30.7.94 ("Diario").

<sup>4</sup>It seems that one can rely on the Italian sources though in the past, as shown above, they tended to exaggerate Alulā's antagonism. As analysed below Alulā had then no other option but to serve as the emperor's war-drum.

<sup>5</sup>Conti Rossini, Italia, p.101.

<sup>6</sup>A.S.MAI 36/17-168, Baratieri to MAE, 10.8.94.

was reported as cordially congratulating the Italians for their victory of 14 July 1894 over the Mahdists and the capture of Kassala,<sup>1</sup> Alulā reacted differently. Upon hearing the news from the Italian Capucci, "He made a wry face, twice swallowed his saliva, and told me word by word: 'It is better that the Christians won', a very cold and even villainous phrase."<sup>2</sup> Alulā was probably remembering the days of Kūfīt when "he could have carved out a principality for himself in Kassala" had not the Italians come to the arena.

The emperor was said to have treated the Rās with great honour<sup>3</sup> but he was playing his cards slowly. Alulā, on the other hand, "keen on active life started being tired of the easy life in Addis Ababa". In September it was said that "He wants to go back to the north but Menelik wants to keep him close by."<sup>4</sup>

If rumours spread during that month in Addis Ababa are to be believed, Alulā was pressing his new master to give him a command over an army and to let him return to Tēgre in order to surprise and replace Mangashā.<sup>5</sup> Menilek was undoubtedly glad to have such rumours spread for the use of Alulā as a constant threat to Mangashā was one of his main reasons of having him in his court. The other principal reason was that Alulā was regarded still as

---

<sup>1</sup>La Tribuna, 3.10.94.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 36/17-168, Capucci to Baratieri, 29.8.94.

<sup>3</sup>Heruy Walda Sellasse, Yaheywat tārīk, p.47.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 36/17-164, Traversi to MAE, 4.9.94.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-46, Salsa to MAE, 9.10.94, "Diario del mese di settembre".

an invincible general:

"... It is exactly for that," Capucci explained, "that the king keeps him in case he should need him. They are all convinced here that Ras Alula is a kind of a great bogey to us the Italians." <sup>1</sup>

"Keen on active life" and having nothing to do in the Shoan capital, the old Rās was eager for action. The time spent in Addis Ababa and the rumour that Mangashā had proclaimed him as a rebel badly damaged his prestige among his Tigrean followers who started deserting him and returning to their province. <sup>2</sup>

"Alula feels uneasiness and regrets his staying here," Capucci wrote on 17 October 1894. <sup>3</sup> "He is now very dissatisfied because almost all his troops left him to return to Tigre."

On 4 November 1894 Capucci added:

"The other day I saw his camp which is extremely poor. He did not have with him more than 30 soldiers. The others were sent to eat here and there. Totally he does not have more than 200 men, if he has such a number at all." <sup>4</sup>

To keep Alulā active, but for the time being out of the Italian-Tigrean arena, the emperor wanted the Rās to join his projected conquest of Wallāmo. <sup>5</sup> Alulā was promised a command over 700 men, the sum of 2,500 thalers and a monthly payment of 30

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 36/17-168, Capucci to Traversi, 17.10.94.

<sup>2</sup>According to a well experienced Italian, one of Alulā's devotees Dadjāzmāch Fanta, the former Ledj Fanta, decided to serve the Italians "when Alula decided to unite with the Shoans". ("To you the Italians," Fanta told him, "Tigre will always be the Imperial province: with the Shoans we shall become subjects.") Sapelli, op.cit., p.88.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 36/17-168, Capucci to Traversi, 17.10.94.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 36/17-168, Capucci to Traversi, 4.11.94. Similar description in A.S.MAI 3/6-46, Salsa to MAE, 6.11.94 and 10.12.94.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 36/17-164, Traversi to MAE, 4.9.94, 36/17-168, Capucci to Baratieri, 18.9.94.



thalers, plus salt and pepper, to maintain the troops.<sup>1</sup> Yet he was reported as rejecting the offer.<sup>2</sup> For Alulā participation in a march on a southern province while the Tēgre was threatened and indeed soon to be invaded by the Italians, was a cause of deep frustration. From Alulā's point of view, if not from an historically objective perspective, Menilek's policy had always been to let Emperor Yohannes face the external threats in the northern arena while he could expand the southern frontier of the Shoan kingdom.<sup>3</sup> Yet when in mid-November the Wollāmo expedition left Addis Ababa led by Menilekand Rās Mikā'el it included the proud Rās Alulā leading only a small battalion of 200 troops.<sup>4</sup> It was the clearest possible sign of his acceptance of Shoan hegemony in Ethiopia.<sup>5</sup>

March 1895: Alulā nominated by Menilek over an imperial army

Before the expedition to Wallāmo Alulā was said to have sent emissaries to Tēgre to spread the rumour that after his return Menilek would nominate him over Tēgre and send him there with a large army.<sup>6</sup> During the battles in Wallāmo and on the

---

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 36/17-168, Capucci to Traversi, 16.11.94.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 36/17-168, Capucci to Traversi, 3.10.94; 3/6-46, Salsa to MAE, 6.11.94.

<sup>3</sup>See a short summary of Menilek's expansion to the south in Trimingham's Islam in Ethiopia, pp.125-129.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 36/17-168, Capucci to Traversi, 16.11.94; 3/7-47, Agenzia Stefani from Aden, 3.1.95.

<sup>5</sup>Interview Dr. Dadjāzmāch Zawde Gabra Sellasse, Addis Ababa, March 1972.

<sup>6</sup>Capucci to MAE, 15.12.94 in Carlo Zaghi, "L'Italia e l'Etiopia alla vigilia di Adua", Gli Annali del'Africa Italiana, 1941, p.533.

way to it, Rās Alulā was making efforts to justify his name as a great general though having such a small command he could have but little success. "Wanting to distinguish himself," Capucci wrote from Addis Ababa,<sup>1</sup> "and show his bravery, Alula was surrounded by the Galla and ā certain dagiacc Besciah saved him with great difficulty." Alulā played such a minor role in the Wallāmo expedition that his name was not even mentioned in a book which described it.<sup>2</sup>

While Alulā was doing very little in the south, Rās Mangashā in Tēgre started being involved in hostilities with the Italians. As later proved by captured documents,<sup>3</sup> Mangashā was corresponding with Menilek during the second half of 1894 and planned to cooperate with the Mahdists against Eritrea.<sup>4</sup> He also had a major role in inciting the Italian-nominated governor of Akalla Guzāy, Dadjāzmāch Bāhtā Hagos, to rebel against his masters only to be killed by Baratieri's troops on 18 December 1894.<sup>5</sup> To prevent a joint operation by Mangashā with the Mahdists against the Italian occupied Kassala, Baratieri entered Adwā on 28 December 1894 and, having made a powerful demonstration there, he returned on 1 January 1895 to Akalla Guzāy.<sup>6</sup> Mangashā took the initiative. Leading some

---

<sup>1</sup>Capucci to M.E, 16.12.94 in Zaghi, op.cit.

<sup>2</sup>J.G.Vanderheyem, Une expédition avec le négous Mèmelik, Paris 1896.

<sup>3</sup>See FO 403/221, Ford to Salisbury, 19.10.95, "précis of Italian Green Book" which summarises LV, XXIII. The letters from Menilek to Mangashā were found in Mangashā's tent after his defeat at **Senafe**.

<sup>4</sup>Though simultaneously he wrote to the British as the son of Emperor Yohannes asking for friendship and hinted that he was eager to help them against the Mahdiyya. See FO 403/206, Rās Mangasha to Her Majesty the Queen, 21.9.94 and Ras <sup>A</sup>Mangasha to General Kitchener, 22.9.94.

<sup>5</sup>The archival material for the famous revolt of Bāhtā Hagos is mainly in A.S.MAI 3/7.

<sup>6</sup>FO 403/221, Ford to Kimberley, 5.1.95; Mercatelli in La Tribuna, 5.1.95.

10,000 troops of what seemed now to be a united Tēgre, he crossed the Marab on 9 November 1894 to be engaged in a fierce battle at Ko'atit on 13 and 14 January 1895. Driven back by Baratieri, Mangashā hastily retreated to San'āfe where on the following night he was surprised by a brilliant Italian move and suffered a disastrous defeat. Mangashā himself managed to escape but Dadjāzmāch Tadrā Ayba was killed and Rās Hagos, impressed by the Italian power, abandoned Mangashā.<sup>1</sup>

In late January and early February 1895 the news of Mangashā's activities, of Baratieri's temporary occupation of Adwā and of the outcome of Bāhtā Hagos's revolt reached Addis Ababa. On learning the news, Alulā was reported to have become furious "for not being there to fight for his country".<sup>2</sup> His frustration was undoubtedly embittered by the fact that Bāhtā Hagos, his old rival and the devotee of the Italians, was now regarded as a national hero while he was sitting idle in the distant capital. Fortunately for Alulā, Menilek was now in a belligerent mood and started using the Rās as "the bogey of the Italians". Alulā was reported as being most frequently consulted by the emperor and most favourably supported by Empress Taytu who was also pressing for a quick war.<sup>3</sup> Reportedly Menilek intended, in late February 1895, to send northward a force combining the Tigreans under Alulā to be united with the Shoan army under Rās Wale, the Gallas of Rās Mikā'el and Godjamite troops under their Nēgus, Takla Hāymānot. This plan was

---

<sup>1</sup>WO 33/56, Eritrea Report, p.19. A short article on Dadjāzmāch Tadrā Ayba, La Tribuna, w2.1.95.

<sup>2</sup>Capucci to MAE, 6.2.95; Zaghi, Vigilia. Hagos started cooperating with the Italians in the second half of 1895. See LV XXIII, Baratieri to MAE, 25.11.95.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 3/7-49, Capucci to MAE, 3.3.95.

opposed by various elements in the Shoan court who were in favour of sending only the Tigreans before taking the measure of a total war on Italy,<sup>1</sup> Mēnilək, who considered the separation of Alulā from Mangashā as vital to the Shoan interests, was reluctant to send Alulā alone.<sup>2</sup> In the meantime the old Rās had difficulties in assembling the 3,000 Tigreans said to be spread in Shoa. Though the emperor in early February proclaimed an Awādj to this effect,<sup>3</sup> he received only a meagre response. The Tigrean warriors, tempted by the possibilities of launching easy and rewarding raids on the Gāllā, and other elements in Southern Ethiopia, found it less attractive to join the tireless leader and return with him to the impoverished Tēgre to fight the powerful Italians.<sup>4</sup> A rumour spread by Alulā, probably encouraged by Mēnilək, that he would soon be nominated by the emperor over the Marab Mellash,<sup>5</sup> did not seem to have the desired effect on the minor Tigrean chiefs in the Shoan capital. These, namely Dadjāzmāch 'endārgāchawu of 'endartā, Wāgshum Kabaze of Lāstā, Dadjāzmāch Hāyla Māryām of Ayba, Kagnāzmāch Hāyla Māryām, Fitāwrāri Negus and Azmāch Abarrā of Hamāsen,<sup>6</sup> were probably also persuaded by the anti-war party in

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. Also FO 403/221, Slade to Ford, 29.3.95.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 3/7-49, Capucci to MAE, 3.3.95.

<sup>4</sup>Di Gennaro, "Menelich e Ras Alula", La Tribuna, 25.5.95.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 3/7-49, Capucci to MAE, 3.3.95.

<sup>6</sup>L. Mercatelli in La Tribuna, 5.7.95.

Addis Ababa to remain there. Reportedly some of them told Menilek that they did not recognise Alulā as their leader.<sup>1</sup> Tasfaye Hantalo, Alulā's rival and governor of Agāme, who had stayed in Addis Ababa since the Tigrean's submission of June 1894, was also reported as trying to convince Menilek that Rās Alulā was no longer admired or even wanted in the northern province.<sup>2</sup> In Eritrea in late March it was wishfully thought that Alulā's nomination as the commander of the Tigreans in Shoa was cancelled.<sup>3</sup>

But Alulā was now definitely in a strong position in the emperor's court, as indicated by the rumours being spread that he might be sent as a commander of an expedition against the threatening Sulṭān of Awsā<sup>4</sup> and that he might even replace Rās Makonnen as the governor of Harrar.<sup>5</sup>

In late March, though he still had not managed to complete assembling the Tigreans, Rās Alulā was reported to have been appointed to what may be regarded as his highest position since the period prior to Dogali. Menilek, it was reported, nominated him as the commander of a 12,000 man expedition to be led by him with Rās Mikā'el and Wāgshum Bēru as deputies. Alulā had to lead this column to Adwā where Mangashā was to wait for him. A sum of 50,000 thalers was designated by the emperor to help mobilise additional Tigrean troops and to attract those employed by the Italians to defect. Twelve thousand thalers were immediately sent to Mangashā but the

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>LV, XXIII bis. Baratieri to MAE 27.3.95.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Capucci to MAE 7.4.95; Zaghi, Vigilia.

<sup>5</sup>FO 403/221, Jopp to India Office, Aden, 24.4.95.

rest of the money was to be given to Alulā once he started for Tēgre. He was also said to be given a large quantity of ammunition. The provinces of Ashange and Zabul were granted to him to serve as a depot for assembling the soldiers.<sup>1</sup>

April-December 1895: The projected expedition is cancelled,  
Alulā remains in Shoa

During the whole month of April 1895 Rās Alulā stayed in Addis Ababa making preparations and reportedly still having difficulties in assembling the Tigreans.<sup>2</sup> W. Kāssā of Haramat,<sup>3</sup> a woman he had married in late 1891, came to the Shoan capital from Tēgre in October 1894,<sup>4</sup> probably with their three year old son<sup>5</sup> but was said, for unknown reasons, not to be accompanying him to the coming war.<sup>6</sup> As reported by Capucci, Alulā was confident he was going to defeat the Italians and the spy suggested that it was vital to worst Alulā in the first clash in order to demolish his image of an invincible warrior.<sup>7</sup>

But it was Baratieri who made the next move. To prevent the Ethiopians from using the Tēgre as a base against his colony he marched southwards and, on 25 March 1895, entered Addigrāt. Adwā

---

<sup>1</sup>Capucci to MAE, late March 1895; Zaghi, Vigilia, p.545.  
FO 403/221, Blanc to Ford, 17.5.95, "Intelligence from Massowah", 27.4.95; A.S.MAI 3/7-49, Capucci to MAE, 28.4.95.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 3/7-49, Capucci to MAE, Memo., 15.4.97.

<sup>3</sup>Int. Fitāwrāri Bayana Abrehā. Aksum, Feb. 1972.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-46, Salsa to MAE, 6.11.94.

<sup>5</sup>See A. Wylde, "An Unofficial Visit to Abyssinia", MG, 14.5.97. Alulā married her probably in late 1891 as Mercatelli, who interviewed the Rās in March 1891, wrote that he was still an unmarried widower. See above, p.283. Quotations from "Corriere di Napoli", 13-14.5.91.

<sup>6</sup>A.S.MAI 3/6-46, Salsa to MAE, 6.11.94.

<sup>7</sup>A.S.MAI 3/7-49, Capucci to MAE, 21.4.95.

and Maqalle were taken during the subsequent week.<sup>1</sup> With northern Tēgre in Italian hands, the offensive plan of the Ethiopians was altered. It was reportedly decided now by the emperor that Alulā would lead his column through the Danāqīl desert and, flanking the occupied northern Tēgre, would penetrate Akalla Guzāy and Hamāsen. Another column, led by Rās Wale was to march through Walqāyt and unite with Mangashā.<sup>2</sup>

On 2 May 1895 Alulā left 'entofo to march to Tēgre leading some 3,000 men including almost all the Tigreans then in Shoa, with Dadjāzmāch 'endārgāchawu of 'endartā, Wāgshum Kabeze of Lāstā, Dadjāzmāch Hāyila Māryām, Kaqnāzmāch Hāyila Māryām, Fitāwrāri Nēgus and Azmāch Abarrā of Hamāsen and Dadjāzmāch Tadrā Wāhid, the latter recently liberated from his prison. He arrived at Warra Illu on 14 May 1895 and proceeded to Boru Medā (17 May 1895) where Rās Wale had to transfer the province of Zabul to his hands.<sup>3</sup> Rās Wale, Tāyту's brother and one of the most influential personalities in Menilek's court undoubtedly opposed the hazardous military plan, for he was then offering his services to Baratieri as a mediator with Menilek.<sup>4</sup> Wale refused to give Alulā the command over Zabul and the two Rases had to return to Menilek who, in the meantime, had advanced to Warra Illu. They met their master there and as a result of Menilek's decision Alulā had to proceed to Saqofā instead of Zabul.<sup>5</sup> By that time Menilek was probably persuaded

---

<sup>1</sup>FO 403/221, Slade to Ford, 29.3.95. LV, XXIII bis, Baatieri to MAE, 30.5.95.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 3/7-49, Capucci to MAE, 20.4.95, 23.4.95. A.S.MAI 36/17-168, Bienenfeld to MAE, 4.6.95. Di Gennaro, "Menelich e Ras Alula", La Tribuna, 25.5.95.

<sup>3</sup>L. Mercatelli in La Tribuna, 5.7.95; LV, XXIII bis, Baratieri to MAE, 2.6.95.

<sup>4</sup>LV, XXIII bis, Baratieri to MAE, 25.5.95.

<sup>5</sup>Mercatelli, La Tribuna, 5.7.95.

that the coming rains would make the projected operation impossible. He sent Tasfaye Hantalo to reinforce Mangashā<sup>1</sup> who was reported camping near Hantalo with only 300 followers.<sup>2</sup>

Alulā, who spent the whole month of June in Lāstā, was pressing his master to let him advance immediately and retake Agāme. "Call me a woman," Alulā was reported addressing his Tigrean followers,<sup>3</sup> "if we do not spend the rainy season in Hausen or on Amba Augher In Agāme." But Menilek had different ideas and he could not risk letting Alulā unite with the Tigreans of Mangashā and gain a prestigious victory in Agāme. He was probably also asked by Mangashā, advised now by Tasfaye Hantalo, not to send the patronising Rās to his small camp. Mangashā had an additional practical reason to oppose the sending of Alulā as the latter was demanding from Menilek the government of most of the Tigrean territories now held by the Italians.<sup>4</sup>

With the offensive plan delayed until after the rainy season, Rās Alulā was no longer needed, for the time being, as a "bogey of the Italians". The 1,500 Tigreans in his camp were now taken from him and sent to Mangashā commanded by Dadjāzmāch 'endārgāchawu where they were reported to be bitterly surprised to see the poor state of Mangashā's camp. They lamented the absence of Alulā, "the only man, according to themselves, who may stop the adhesion of the Tigrean chiefs to the Italians".<sup>5</sup> Having no real command, Alulā

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>LM, XXIII bis, Baratieri to MAE, 25.5.95,

<sup>3</sup>L. Mercatelli in La Tribuna, 18.7.95 (From Adwa, 27.6.95).

<sup>4</sup>L. Mercatelli in La Tribuna, 16.7.95 and 21.7.95.

<sup>5</sup>L. Mercatelli, La Tribuna, 14.8.95.



left Lāstā and returned to a domain at Mēndjār, on the left bank of the Awāsh River, which Mēnilēk had granted him the previous year. He there spent the rainy season of 1895.<sup>1</sup>

Alulā's political role in the preliminaries to the battle of Adwā.

The fact that Rās Alulā was kept away from Addis Ababa by the emperor during the rainy season of 1895 was not without significance for his political position. By persistently suggesting a total war on Eritrea and demanding its reconquest, Alulā had put himself in a position of being a mere war-drum which had to be kept in reserve while diplomacy was considered useful.

Since this was the hope during the whole period of late 1895 and early 1896, Rās Alulā played no significant role in the preliminaries to the battle of Adwā.

"Probably the only man," Berkeley praised Alulā's inactivity,<sup>2</sup> "whom no diplomacy, and no change of fortune, could have brought to desert his side was Ras Alula, and consequently for him alone of all their enemies have the Italians any real admiration."

Augustus Wylde, who spent a few weeks in Eritrea just after the battle of Adwā, reported how the Italians themselves called him "the Garibaldi of his land".<sup>3</sup>

To put the romanticism of the contemporary observers in historical perspective one must remember that Rās Alulā had then no other option. From his past experience he was perfectly aware that he could have no chance of any beneficial cooperation with

---

<sup>1</sup>E. Di Gennaro in La Tribuna, 15.12.95.

<sup>2</sup>Berkeley, op.cit., p.163.

<sup>3</sup>Wylde, "An unofficial mission to Abyssinia", The Manchester Guardian, 10.5.97.

the Italians. The reconquest of the Marab Mellash seemed to be his only chance to become again a governor of an important province and to avoid returning to a lowly position in the feudal Tēgre.

Alulā's tactical skill was used by the Emperor in the preliminary battles. His military role in the battles of Ambā Alāje of 7 December 1895 and in the siege on Maqalle of January 1896, where the Italian advance posts and armies were beaten by a column led by Rās Nakomnēn, was well described by the military historian of the period, Berkeley.<sup>1</sup> But as for a real command, Menilek was careful enough not to damage any chance of peaceful settlement by giving an official post to the warlike Rās. Rumours spread around mid-January 1896 about Alulā's nomination as the future governor of Hamāsen and Sarāya<sup>2</sup> were soon denied and La Tribuna of 15 February 1896 quoted Ethiopian informants bringing the news that "Menelich has driven Alula, who is extremely hostile to us, from the front line, as he is afraid that any reckless move by Alula might damage the negotiations for peace".<sup>3</sup>

March 1896: Alulā's contribution to the victory of Adwā

While an all-Ethiopian army numbering some 12,000 troops<sup>4</sup> was camping in Tēgre in late February 1896 facing the Italians, the

---

<sup>1</sup>See, inter alia, Berkeley, op.cit., especially pp. 114, 134, 137, 146, 147, 163, 205. Also various documents in "Documenti sul combattimento d'Amba Alagi e sulla difesa di Macalle", Woghera, Rome, 1896. In LV, XXIII and L Guido, L'Assedio di Macalle, Rome 1901.

<sup>2</sup>La Tribuna, 21.1.96.

<sup>3</sup>La Tribuna, 15.2.96. In late January Baratieri reported that Alulā had no troops at all. LV XXIII bis, Baratieri to MAE, 27.1.96.

<sup>4</sup>For various estimates, see Conti Rossini, Italia, pp. 340-342.

leaders of that ruined province had but little influence on the course of events. Rās Hagos and Rās Sēbhat had no command at all. Sēbhat, who was released by the Italians in December 1895 from his prison at Ambā Alāje,<sup>1</sup> had been cooperating with them until the eve of the battle of Adwā when he secretly joined the Ethiopian camp. Rās Hagos, who stayed in Tamben in late 1895 as an ally of the Italians<sup>2</sup> was clever enough to change sides in time but was not reported as having any command. Rās Mangashā had a relatively small force.<sup>3</sup>

As for Rās Alulā, his force numbered no more than 3,000 troops<sup>4</sup> but since he was justifiably regarded by Menilek as well acquainted with the area and the enemy he served as a kind of chief-of-staff.<sup>5</sup> His image as the great anti-Italian hero doubtless contributed to the morale of the Ethiopians:

"I am not afraid of the whip like a maid servant  
for Abbā Naggā comes spitting fire"<sup>6</sup>

As such, the old Rās Alulā had a major role in one of the most important battles in Ethiopian history.

A. Wylde was the only European reporter who managed to penetrate to the Tēgre just after the battle of Adwā. His account

<sup>1</sup>He had been transferred there from Ambā Salāmā by Mangashā.  
See: Mercatelli in Corriere di Napoli, 15-16 June 1891.

<sup>2</sup>La Tribuna, 7.1.96, 23.1.96.

<sup>3</sup>For their number, estimated variously between 4,000 and 12,000, see Conti Rossini, Italia, pp. 340-342.

<sup>4</sup>Conti Rossini, Italia, p.342, note 1.

<sup>5</sup>See below. p.338.

<sup>6</sup>Abba Ayla Takla Haymanot, "Il Wata: Una tipica figura folcloristica dell'Etiopia e la sua professione interdotta", Proceedings of the Third International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Vol. II, Addis Ababa 1970.

of the battle was published as an article in the Manchester Guardian of 20 May 1897, and may be regarded as based on a research. Wylde claimed that he had discussed the battle with Alulā, Mangashā, Menilek, "as well as with most of the other leaders who had taken part in the fight".<sup>1</sup> In Addis Ababa he had many conversations with the Italian prisoner General Albertone and had with himself for six months "the former native secretary of the Italian Intelligence Department".

"I think, therefore," he wrote, "I may fairly claim to have had exceptional opportunities of getting at the facts, and I hope I shall be credited with the desire to state them as impartially as I can."

After analysing the military and political developments prior to Saturday, 29 February 1896, and in which Rās Alulā had no share at all, Wylde continued:

"The greater part of the Abyssinian army was collected in and about the town of Adowa, the left wing, under Ras Alula, being posted, however, somewhat further north from Adi Aboona to Gescherworka to guard the northern road. As negotiations for peace were actively going on, and communications on the subject had taken place as late as on the Saturday evening 29.2.96, there was no reason for the Abyssinians to expect an attack, and as the next day was both a Sunday and a feast-day of the Abyssinian Church, many of the soldiers had gone overnight to the sacred city of Axum, some fifteen miles distant from Adowa as the crow flies, to pray at the churches there. Many, especially of Ras Alulā's and Ras Mangescha's men, were absent in this way, thus leaving the left wing of the army, to which they belonged, a good deal weaker than the right and centre. The command of the Abyssinian army was of course with the King and Ras Alula, who may be described as the head of the Abyssinian staff. It is to his skilful dispositions and sleepless vigilance that the sweeping victory of the Abyssinians was largely due. Not trusting for safety to the temporary cessation of hostilities, he had taken care to be informed by means of his spies

---

<sup>1</sup>The Manchester Guardian, 20.5.97.

in the Italian camp of every movement of the enemy's forces.<sup>1</sup>

By eleven o'clock on the night of Saturday, February 29, the whole of the Italian army was on the march, advancing towards Adowa. By four o'clock on Sunday morning Ras Alulā's spies had reached his camp, some fifteen miles distant, and he at once sent word to the different Generals, and himself made haste to King Menelek to warn him of the enemy's advance.<sup>2</sup>

Alulā's role in the battle itself is not known. He was leading but a small force and such was probably his part in the actual fighting.

A governor of northern Tēgre under the auspices of Menilek

The decisive defeat of the Italians at Adwā did not result in Ethiopia regaining the Marab Mellash. Alulā was reported as pressing Menilek to cross the Marab and drive the Italians out of Eritrea,<sup>3</sup> but the emperor was apparently reluctant to do so. Though his first move was towards Dabra Damo, probably with the dual aim of laying siege to the Italians in Addigrāt and of penetrating into Akalla Guzāy, he was soon persuaded to leave the area and return to Shoa. He promised the Italian Major Salsa that the Tigreans would not threaten Hamāsen<sup>4</sup> and justifiably created the impression that he was going to do nothing about the restoration to Ethiopia of the Marab Mellash. "It appears" - a British observer

---

<sup>1</sup>Unlike R. Greenfield, Ethiopia, A New Political History, London 1965, p.123, who suggested that the victory was a result of a "master plan" of Alulā.

<sup>2</sup>According to oral tradition Alulā was informed about the Italian advance by a certain Ethiopian named Aw'alom Fit. Bayana Abreha, Aksum, A Ge'ez Tarik in IES by Kāssā Mashashā Tewodros. According to one of Rās Sēbhat's descendents it was Rās Sēbhat who then betraying the Italians sent the message to Alulā, The Life of Ras Sēbhat Aregawi. For Alulā's role in Adwā, see also Berkeley, pp. 279, 280.

<sup>3</sup>See below. p. 343.

<sup>4</sup>Bibliothèque Nationale No. 269, Mondon-Vidailet Collection, No. 82,

could report as early as 13 April 1896 - "that Menelik is willing to accept the line of the River Mareb as the Italian frontier."<sup>1</sup>

Before leaving Tēgre, Mēnilēk reorganised the government of that province. Rās Mangashā was again promised the crown of a Nēgus. As proposed by Empress Tāyto the prince of Tēgre married her niece, the daughter of Rās Wale, Wayzarit Kafāi and was granted the sum of 32,000 thalers by Mēnilēk.

"For the time being," wrote an Italian envoy,<sup>2</sup> "the Ras Mangashā decided to go on with a policy of complete submission and obedience to Menelich whose power in the eyes of all the Tigreans is really great."

As agreed in Addis Ababa in June 1894 Rās Mangashā had to accept a new Nēbura 'ed in Aksum, Mamher Walda Giyorgis from Amhara, who was known as a strong sympathiser of the Shoan court.<sup>3</sup> Dadjāzmāch Tādīā Abbāguben, Dabbab's brother and a former rival of Mangashā, was put in Maqalle over 'ēndartā, undoubtedly also to be able to report on the attitudes in Rās Mangashā's castle there. The provinces of Tamben and Shire were given to Rās Hagos (together with a certain Dadjāzmāch Hadgu) while Tasfaye Hantalo, whose devotion to the Shoan court was proven, was given Wādjrāt and Ashange. Rās Sēbhat's government over Agāme was confirmed but he had to share it with Rās Hagos Tafari,<sup>4</sup> a relative of his who had cooperated

---

Gabre Sellassie to Mondon N.D. An Amharic document kept by Dr. R. Caulk, H.S.I.U. For a detailed description of the military situation after the battle of Adwā, see WO 33/56, J.R. Slade, "Eritrea and Abyssinia", Sept. 1896. Also Berkeley, pp. 362-363.

<sup>1</sup>FO 407/137, Slade to Ford, 13.4.96.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 3/17-136, Mulazzani Report, 26.7.96, Lambertinti to M.d.G., 22.9.96.

<sup>3</sup>On Walda Giyorgis, not to be identified with the previous Nēbura 'ed of the same name, see Wylde's article in the Manchester Guardian, 21.5.97.

<sup>4</sup>See a short article on Hagos Tafari in La Tribuna, 20.2.96.

with the Italians and governed Agāme in their name since April 1895.<sup>1</sup>

For the first time in his career, Rās Alulā was nominated over a substantial area in the Tēgre province. All the territories between Māy Wari and the Marab were given to him with Adwā as his capital. The Tigrean Emperor Yohannes could not or had not wanted to impose him on the Tigrean élite by whom he was regarded as an outsider. With Mangashā, or against him, Alulā had to wander from place to place in the Tēgre in a ceaseless effort to maintain himself as a roving military leader with no chance of establishing himself in one place. Having no hereditary rights and no agrarian property, he could exist then only by offering action or a chance of booty, but never as a provincial or district governor. Menilek in his shrewd strategy of installing outsiders over the various provinces, in which he differed from Yohannes, nominated Alulā over the most important part, at least from the historical point of view, of northern Ethiopia. Thus, paradoxically, but quite significant for the feudal structure of Tēgre, it was the Shoan emperor who installed one of the great warriors for Tigrean hegemony, though not a member of its élite, as a local governor there.

Alulā was now a grateful supporter of Emperor Menilek:

"I am quite sure," Baldissera reported, "that Scium Tesfai Rantalo, the same as Alula, is directly dependent on Menelik. They obey or disobey Mangascia according to their will."<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>For the partition of Tēgre by Menilek, see: A.S.MAI 3/17-136, Mulazzani Report, 26.7.96. Also, Mercatelli, La Tribuna, 30.5.96.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 3/17-136, Baldissera to M.d.G., 23.5.96. See also Barattieri's letter of 25.5.96. Mercatelli in La Tribuna, 30.5.96.

And on 21 June 1896 in his new house at Aksum, Rās Alulā told Wylde how he had turned to Menilek "as the only man who could restore order. ... I have thrown all my influence on his side in order to unite Abyssinia once more."<sup>1</sup>

The appointment over that important district, the very heart of the historical Tēgre, did not recreate Alulā as a strong and influential leader. Tēgre as a whole and the district of Adwā in particular had paid dearly for the lack of a government since the death of Yohannes, the constant internal and external warfare and the famine.

"When I visited Adowa in 1884," Wylde described the situation of Alulā's new capital,<sup>2</sup> "it was a flourishing town of about 15,000 inhabitants, the commercial centre of the district. Now it is a ruin and a charnel-house. War and pestilence have done their work, leaving their mark in ruined houses and blackened walls. I do not think there were a thousand people left in Adowa."

Alulā's government over that area which was given to him by the emperor enabled him to mobilise a local army, but since it was not combined, as it was in the traditional local feudal system, with land ownership, Alulā could not maintain a real force.

The Italian officer Mulazzani who visited Alulā's camp at Atzina, 5 km. east of Aksum during 18-22 July 1896 described Alulā as being worried by the fact that because of lack of food he could hardly maintain 300 riflemen. A sum of 800 thalers which Alulā had been given by Menilek was spent by the Rās on presents.<sup>3</sup> According to Mulazzani, Alulā "manages to maintain his few men by some

---

<sup>1</sup>A. Wylde, "An unofficial visit to Abyssinia", the Manchester Guardian, 14.5.97.

<sup>2</sup>A. Wylde, "An unofficial mission to Abyssinia", the Manchester Guardian, 17.5.97. For Adwā in 1884, see a detailed description in FO 1/31, Hewett to Admiralty, 9.6.84. "Adowa, as a representative Abyssinian Town". Hewett also estimated the number of the inhabitants as



taxes or gifts given to him by rich people and also by confiscating property from innocent people".<sup>1</sup>

"My army now is only a small one," Alulā told Wylde on 21 June 1896,<sup>2</sup> "I have but 8,000 troops of my own.<sup>3</sup> When I had the Hamasen I could raise 40,000 men. My property [The government of Asmara] is gone, and I have only my estates near Abbi Adi [Mannawe]."

#### Alulā accepts Menilek's Italian policy

Alulā's full acceptance of Menilek's government over Ethiopia led him to a reconsideration of his policy towards Eritrea. This continued to be, in the first months after Adwā, based on his strong desire to return to the Marab Mellash and reestablish his government in Hamāsen.

"Will there be peace?" Alulā asked Wylde in their conversation of 21 June 1896.<sup>4</sup>

"I replied: 'I believe so.'

He then said: 'Please God, there never will be peace until our country is given back to us. I asked the King to give me his cavalry the day after the battle of Adowa, and if he had I would have driven the Italians into the sea ... [But]... My master made peace with them, and agreed to give back all the prisoners he had taken...'"

When Wylde said:

---

15,000. "The population of Adowa is estimated at 15,000," Hewett wrote, "it was formerly much greater, but famine following the wake of war swept away over two-thirds of the population only eight or nine years ago."

<sup>3</sup>See an interesting story on the way Alulā spent that money by giving presents, in Sapelli, op.cit., p.53.

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 3/17-136, Mulazzani Report, 26.7.96.

<sup>3</sup>This must have been an exaggeration by Alulā, even if he spoke about his potential army.

<sup>2</sup>A. Wylde, "An Unofficial Mission", MG, 14.5.97.

<sup>4</sup>Wylde, "An Unofficial Mission", MG, 14.5.97.

"You are not the first nation that has lost some of its territory. You should be contented that things are not worse."

Alulā reacted:

"Nothing can be worse for us than to have lost the Hamasen. My advice in all the councils is to make war. We are stronger now than ever we were before. We have over a quarter of a million of breech-loading rifles, with plenty of cartridges, and we know how to use them. As soon as the cattle disease is at an end, and we can begin ploughing again we shall have plenty of food. I cannot see the good of peace."

An interesting episode told by Wylde seems to reflect Alulā's feelings in this stage of his life when he had to realise that, due to his master's policy, the great victory at Adwā was to be followed not merely by an anti-climax but would actually leave him with nothing to fight for.

"On that I said 'Good-bye', and went home, where Ras Alulā's small son, aged four, came to visit me. He proved to be a most amusing child. The next morning the Ras sent for me, and I found him seated near the big tank. His son came up, leading a sheep, and told the Ras that he had had a long talk with me, and had decided not to be a soldier, like his father, but to be a merchant, adding that he had already bought this sheep for two dollars, and was going to sell it to the Englishman for three. Ras Alula turned round to me and said, 'What have you been telling my son?' The little boy replied that he had made up his mind that it was no good fighting, that he would join Mr. Wylde and be a merchant. Ras Alula observed that if peace were made his own occupation would be gone; therefore, perhaps, it was better to be a merchant, as his son proposed.' This conversation highly amused some three hundred soldiers who were gathered round the Ras."<sup>1</sup>

Rās Alulā was in fact far away from the capital in which the relevant councils were held. He actually had no say at all

---

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

regarding that vital question and apparently he became realistic enough to understand that if he wanted to continue to be trusted by the Shoan emperor he must follow his pacific policy. Thus, the Italian officer Mulazzani, a month after Wylde's interview, heard from Alulā a different speech:

"You may be sure that I have no other will than that of my master Mangascia. I shall do nothing which he does not order me to do. If he would like to be your friend I shall also be your sincere and true friend... Before the battle of Adua I was your black sheep, your bitter enemy and the reason for that enmity. But in Adua all the Ethiopian leaders took part, no one was missing, so there are many now to share my guilt... The country needs peace and quiet."<sup>1</sup>

In September 1896 Alulā practically demonstrated his goodwill towards the Italians by renewing the hitherto prohibited commerce with Eritrea<sup>2</sup> and in the third week of October he wrote to the Italian Resident at Addi Qayh "assuring him of his pacific intentions".<sup>3</sup> Thus when on 26 October 1896 Menilek signed a new treaty with Italy stating also that "The rivers Mareb, Belesa, and Moona are the lines which by both parties shall not be violated,"<sup>4</sup> it was practically a non-event for the ex-governor of Hamāsen.

Alulā's share in the future fall of Mangashā.

The new appointments made by Menilek in Tēgre undermined the supreme authority of Mangashā in his province.

"The leaders in the Tēgre" Lambertini reported,<sup>5</sup> "are divided into two camps, the first supports Menelick

1A.S.MAI 3/17-136, Mulazzani Report, 26.7.96.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 3/17-136, Lambertini to M.d.G. 22.9.96.

<sup>3</sup>A.S.MAI 3/17-136, Baldissera to M.d.G. 23.10.96.

<sup>4</sup>See Amharic text sent by Wylde to the Manchester Guardian, 16.3.97.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 3/17-136, Lambertini to M.d.G. 22.9.96.

and the other hates the Shoans. The first camp is stronger thanks to Imperial support and the second one is more admired by the population. Among the first one Ras Alula is the more prominent and the others are the Nebreid of Aksum, Shum Tesfai Hantalo and Ras Sibhat. The second camp is led by Ras Mangascia."

According to the same source the emperor was constantly corresponding with Alulā, Sēbhat and the Nebura 'ed,<sup>1</sup> his devotees in Tēgre

Rās Mangashā could indeed do very little to restore his supremacy. His only reported step in the internal Tigrean arena was to try and deprive Sēbhat of his position in Agāme and put in power his co-holder of the government there, Hagos Tafari. In that conflict Alulā remained passive, possibly as a retaliation to Sēbhat's past action in refraining from helping him against Mangashā. Sēbhat was beaten in a minor clash in early September near Addigrāt and a month later made peace with Mangashā<sup>2</sup> without being deprived of his share in the dual government of his province.

It looks as if Rās Mangashā now adopted Alulā's old idea of an alliance with Eritrea against Mēnilēk. In the present situation, after the Italian defeat and while the emperor was willing to compromise with the existence of Eritrea, this was a most unrealistic policy. Yet on 22 April 1896 Mangashā sent to Queen Victoria referring to himself as the heir to Yohannes and applied for her mediation between him and Italy.<sup>3</sup>

Rās Alulā was one of the channels through which Mēnilēk was informed of the intentions of Rās Mangashā. On 2 October 1896

<sup>1</sup>A.S.MAI 3/17-136, Lambertini to M.d.G. 5.9.96.

<sup>2</sup>A.S.MAI 3/17-136, Lambertini to M.d.G. 22.9.96; 3/17-1326, Baldissera to M.d.G. 18.10.96, 25.10.96; Wylde in the Manchester Guardian, 21.5.97.

<sup>3</sup>FO 403/239, Ras Mangasha to Queen Victoria, Miazia 14th, 1888 E.C., 22.4.96.

Wylde was in Maqalle where Rās Alulā was celebrating the Masqal with Mangashā.

"I asked if he had seen what Ras Mangescha had written to England," Wylde reported, "and he said that he had read it. He added that it only confirmed his knowledge that Ras Mangascha had long been intriguing, and that he himself was writing to King Menelek about it all."<sup>1</sup>

We have no direct evidence, but a few indirect pieces of evidence support the assumption that in early 1897 Rās Alulā's planned to take over the government of Tēgre,<sup>2</sup> as a representative of Menilek. A well informed Italian observer suggested that the emperor planned, as early as the beginning of that year, to remove Rās Mangashā and divide the northern province between Alulā and Sēbhat.<sup>3</sup> Alulā was apparently in constant touch with the emperor as can be concluded from the fact that in late 1896 he was well informed about the Italo-Ethiopian peace negotiations in Addis Ababa while Mangashā knew nothing about them.<sup>4</sup> The following document also powerfully suggests that Alulā was involved in such a plan of Menilek to remove the hereditary prince of Tēgre:

"In the first days of the new year," Baldissera reported in early 1897,<sup>5</sup> "Mangascia said that Menelich had called him to Shoa in order to crown him as a Negus of Tigre. But yesterday Alula secretly told two monks, informants of ours that Ras Mangascia would never return to Tigre because he was prosecuted by the Negus. Ras Maconnen would come to govern Tigre. It seems that in the meantime,"

---

<sup>1</sup>A. Wylde, "Unofficial mission to Abyssinia", the Manchester Guardian 21.5.97.

<sup>2</sup>See Mercatelli in La Tribuna, 26.1.97.

<sup>3</sup>Martini II, p.411.

<sup>4</sup>A.S.MAI 3/17-1549, Baldissera to M.d.G. 22.12.96.

<sup>5</sup>A.S.MAI 3/17-27, Baldissera to M.d.G. 9.1.97.

Baldissera went on with his excellent analysis, "Alula wants to take the government of old Ras Hagos [i.e. Tamben and Shire]."

January 1897: The end of Alulā

While Rās Mangashā was making his way to Shoa in January 1897, Alulā assembled a force of 700 men to march on Rās Hagos. The fact that he could not organise a stronger force may indicate the fact that the campaign was his own initiative and not coordinated with the emperor. Alulā probably hoped that, once he established himself also in Tamben and Shire, he would be recognised by Menilek as the governor of these regions.

For Alulā the fighting of Rās Hagos was also a matter of personal revenge. As a devotee of Yohannes and of Mangashā, Rās Hagos, the moderate and loyal follower, had been a rival to Alulā. This culminated in his fighting him in 1892<sup>1</sup> and 1893 when Alulā revolted against Mangashā. In late 1895 when Rās Alulā returned to Tēgre with the all-Ethiopian army, Rās Hagos started cooperating with the Italians mainly out of fear for Alulā's revenge. On 19 January 1897 at Addi Chumāy in Shire the small army of Rās Alulā clashed with a similar force of Rās Hagos. Alulā was among the first participants to be wounded - in his leg. His young nephew Bāshā Gare Ezghebèr<sup>2</sup> was captured and was immediately shot by Hagos's troops.<sup>3</sup> Yet Alulā's troops proved to be stronger and the day resulted in their victory. Fifty of Alulā's men were reported

---

<sup>1</sup>For Rās Hagos see Conti Rossini, p.462 and Martini, Diario II, p.411.

<sup>2</sup>Conti Rossini, Italia ed Etiopia, p.463.

<sup>3</sup>Martini, Diario II, p.412.

dead, compared with one hundred of Hagos.<sup>1</sup> Hagos himself was captured and brought before the wounded Alulā who immediately ordered his nephew Dadjāzmāch Tādālā Fanja to shoot him. Hagos was instantly killed and the wounded Alulā was carried to Aksum from where he dictated a letter to the Italian Resident at Addi Qayh narrating the affair.<sup>2</sup>

"On mid-day of February the 15th ~~1897~~ at Abba Garimma," it was telegraphed to Rome, "Ras Alula died. Tigre is in total anarchy."<sup>3</sup>

\*

\* \*

"Were you, Abba-Nagga, met by a killer?" lamented a Tigrean follower.

"You darted like a poisonous snake,  
camped on the slopes like locusts,  
with your arms you could break like a lion.  
The husband of Kassala and lover of the sea."<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> La Tribuna, 27.1.97. For a colourful description of the battle, see Martini, Diario II, p.412; La Tribuna, 25.1.97, 26.1.97, 9.2.97.

<sup>2</sup> La Tribuna, 25.1.97. I failed to find that letter. According to oral tradition (Fit. 'embassā Abbāy) and to an Italian writer (A. Sapelli, Memorie d'Africa (1883-1906), Bologna 1935, p.48) Alulā refused to take medicines which were sent to him by the Italians. This, explained as a gesture of contempt to Europeans, can hardly be believed as both Vinquist (see above, p.134.) and Paris's (N. L'Abissinia, Milano 1888, p.130) testified that they had given Alulā medical treatment.

<sup>3</sup> A.S.MAI 3/17-229, V. Governatore to M.d.G. 25.2.97. For anarchy in Tigre, see below, p.

<sup>4</sup> Heruy, Yaheywat t̄arik, p.47. (The song is in Tigringna and was translated for me by a Tigrean student.)

CONCLUSION

As remembered by the Ethiopians and reflected in their literature "the famous and brave Ras Alula"<sup>1</sup> was a great warrior whose bravery and military skill contributed greatly to various important victories over Ethiopia's enemies. "Since he was feared and well known for his bravery" Heruy summarised,<sup>2</sup> "he always defeated and drove away the external enemies who came from the side of Hamāsen"<sup>4</sup>

"In Hasasen (where you defeated Ras Walda Mikā'el)  
You established a market - you brought rifles  
without paying for them /ās booty/  
In Cassala you established a market...  
In Saaṭi you established a market...  
Stay in peace, my master, Abba Neega!  
After you, we shall not find a /resting/ bed."<sup>3</sup>

Both Italians and Ethiopians regarded Alulā as the most persistent opponent of Italian involvement in Ethiopian affairs. His relevant policy and activities were sometimes described by foreigners as motivated by xenophobia: "He possessed, <sup>4</sup> a modern historian was impressed, "a fanatical hatred of Europeans approximating that of the Mahdi." Ethiopians, on the other hand, also tended to remember his role in Dogali and Adwā but not his Italian policy in the period between these two battles:

---

<sup>1</sup>Takla Ṣādeq Makuriyā, op.cit., p.48.

<sup>2</sup>Heruy, Yaheywat tārik, p.47.

<sup>3</sup>Conti Rossini, Canti popolari tigrāi, p.338, song. 165.

<sup>4</sup>D.A.Limoli ., F. Crispi: A Study in Italian Foreign Policy, Princeton Univ. Ph.D. 1961, p.235.



"Those Italians how happy they are  
 In Rome they have shot the cannons  
 Near the sea they have shot the cannons  
 In Asmara they have shot the cannons  
 In the place of which, in Dogali their  
 testicles were plucked by handfuls  
 In the place of which, in Adua their  
 testicles were plucked by handfuls.  
 But Negga is dead they can again sleep peacefully."<sup>1</sup>

Yet it seems clear now that Alulā was not motivated by hatred. He wanted Europeans as good neighbours and as partners in economic or political activities and opposed them when they started interfering in Ethiopian affairs. During the period of 1890-1892, having compromised with the loss of the Marab Mellash, Alulā was clearly working for an alliance with the Italians in Eritrea.

Alulā's pride and uncompromising approach to the interfering Italians, especially during the years of 1885-1887, was, and still is, a source of pride for the Ethiopians.<sup>2</sup> From a historical point of view, however, this policy must be criticised. It seems that a slightly more moderate approach and a more constructive diplomacy could have resulted in the Italians staying in the Massawa coast, and could have prevented further imperialist involvement with such chaotic consequences for Northern Ethiopia.

\*

\* \*

Alulā's role in the internal history of Ethiopia during that period was no less significant than his role in facing external enemies. In the main process of the decline of Tēgre and the rise

---

<sup>1</sup>Conti Rossini, Canti, p.338, No. 164.

<sup>2</sup>See Garima Taffere, op.cit., Mamo Wudnah, op.cit.

of Shoa Alulā was a most important figure, and surely the only prominent Tigrean who survived throughout the whole period as an active leader. He started as one of the main builders of Tigrean power and was actually the last one to fight for its independent existence.

Retrospectively speaking, the Tigreans had but little chance to maintain their hegemony over Ethiopia. The northern part of the Empire was constantly threatened by foreign powers: Egyptians, Mahdists and Italians. Costly battles were fought, mainly by the Tigreans, throughout the two decades following the Egyptian invasion of 1875. The commercial routes of the north with the Sudan and with the Massawa coast were ruined and the famine contributed to the growing military weakness. Finally the sudden death of Emperor Yohannes left the various proud Tigrean hereditary chiefs without their hitherto main or even only unifying figure. The combination of the hesitant young Rās Mangashā and the proud Alulā, an outsider for the Tigrean nobility, failed to provide an undisputed leadership for the shattered and disunited province threatened by Shoans, Mahdists and Italians.

Thus the Tigreans in such unfortunate circumstances and as victims of their own internal conflicts could not face successfully the rising power of Shoa. There in the south/warfare and expansion, the shrewd and clever internal and external policy of Menilek and more favourable political circumstances led to the creation of a more central-minded and strong government.

Fighting for the fulfilment of the will of Yohannes and for his own political existence Alulā had to overcome all these difficulties. His policy was not unrealistic. The Tēgre might have been

able to survive as an independent entity had the Italians in Eritrea wanted it to serve as a buffer against Menilek. Paradoxically it was the image of Alulā himself, his being remembered as the architect of Dogali, which at least in part caused the Italians to abandon such a policy.

During late 1893 and early 1894 Alulā finally realised that he was no longer the champion of the Tigrean cause. He could not be a unifying element for the Tigrean nobility and could never become an ally of the Italians. His failure in doing so and his subsequent recognition of Shoan hegemony may be regarded as a fatal, if not final, blow to Tigrean independence.

\*

\*      \*

In early January 1897 Rās Mangashā was in Addis Ababa but failed to be nominated as a Nəgus.<sup>1</sup> Insulted, the prince of Təgre returned to his province to learn of the death of Hagos and Alulā. His position was now challenged by the young Dadjāzmāch Gabrasəllāsse Bariyā Gabir, a son of one of Yohannes's followers who died in Mattamma.<sup>2</sup> Gabrasəllāsse returned in October 1896 from Eritrea and entered Alulā's service just before the battle of Addi Chumai. Before dying Alulā appointed him as a Dadjāzmāch and left him his arms and followers. Gabrasəllāsse disobeyed Mangashā who, for his part, openly revolted against Menilek and was supported by

---

<sup>1</sup>For events in Northern Ethiopia after the battle of Adwā, see Martini, Diario. Check index for Annual Reports in FO 371.

<sup>2</sup>See Zawde Gabre-Sellassie, p.547. For Gabrasəllāsse's career, see Şahay Hayle: "A Short Biography of Dajjazmatch Gabrasallasse Bariya Gabir (1873-1930)", B.A.thesis, H.S.I.U. 1972.

Rās Sēbhat and Tasfaye Hantalo. In September 1898 Menilik sent Rās Makonnen to Tēgre with Pās Mikā'el and Wāgshum Beru, and in December Mangashā was surrounded in Edaga Hamus. Three months later, on 18 February 1899, Rās Mangashā and Rās Sēbhat submitted ceremonially to the emperor and Rās Makonnen was appointed over Tēgre. Mangashā and Sēbhat were imprisoned in Addis Ababa, from where Mangashā was later transferred to Ankobar in which prison he died in November 1906.

In Tēgre itself the new generation of local hereditary princes went on with their internal rivalries. Dadjāzmāch Seyum Mangashā, the son of Rās Mangashā, Dadjāzmāch Gugsa Ar'āyā-Sellāsse, the son of Rās Ar'āyā Sellāsse Yohannes the late crown prince, Dadjāzmāch Abrehā Hagos, the son of the late Rās Hagos, Dadjāzmāch Abrehā Ar'āyā, the son of Rās Ar'āyā Demṣu and the brother of the late Dabbab, Shum-Agame Desta Sēbhat, the son of Rās Sēbhat Arigāwi, and Dadjāzmāch Gabrasellasse leading the ex-followers of the late Rās Alula.

In 1909 Abrehā Ar'āyā was imprisoned in Shoa and on 28 February 1914 Rās Sēbhat, who had been released from his prison in Shoa after the death of his son Desta, fought Dadjāzmāch Gabrasellasse and met his death in the battlefield. Gabrasellasse, defeated six days later by Seyum Mangashā, took refuge in Eritrea. Seyum, the son of Rās Mangashā, was made a Rās in the same year by the new Emperor Lēdj 'eyāsu and was appointed as the governor general of Tēgre, now quite a remote province of the Ethiopian Empire.

\*

\* . \*

Berkeley's statement that Alulā was "the greatest leader that Abyssinia has produced since the death of Emperor Theodore" must be taken with a grain of salt. Alulā did not stand out "in bold relief against the background of intrigues"<sup>1</sup> nor was he "a turbulent chief"<sup>2</sup> nor a "treacherous rebel".<sup>3</sup> It seems that Alulā was a brave and fortunate warrior and a great tactician whose tenacity, energy and shrewdness helped him in the battle-fields and in the internal political struggles. It was his character, not hereditary rights or economic resources, which enabled him to maintain his prominence throughout his long career. In addition to his tactical skill Alulā was not entirely deprived of quite a good concept of wider aspects. He sensed better than Yohannes that the Italian ambitions rather than the Mahdist fanaticism was the real threat to Ethiopia. Yet, as but a provincial governor at the top of his career and later as a leader of hungry people in isolated areas, Alulā had but limited knowledge of the diplomatic and political developments in which he was involved. Thus he was quite slow to realise the nature of the Italian-Shoan relations in the early 1890s.

Alulā was not "one of those faithful men who do not live but for the principle" as he was described by a sentimental observer.<sup>4</sup> He was quite loyal to his masters and to his own way but mostly managed to do so serving his own purposes and without

---

<sup>1</sup> Berkeley, op.cit., p.13.

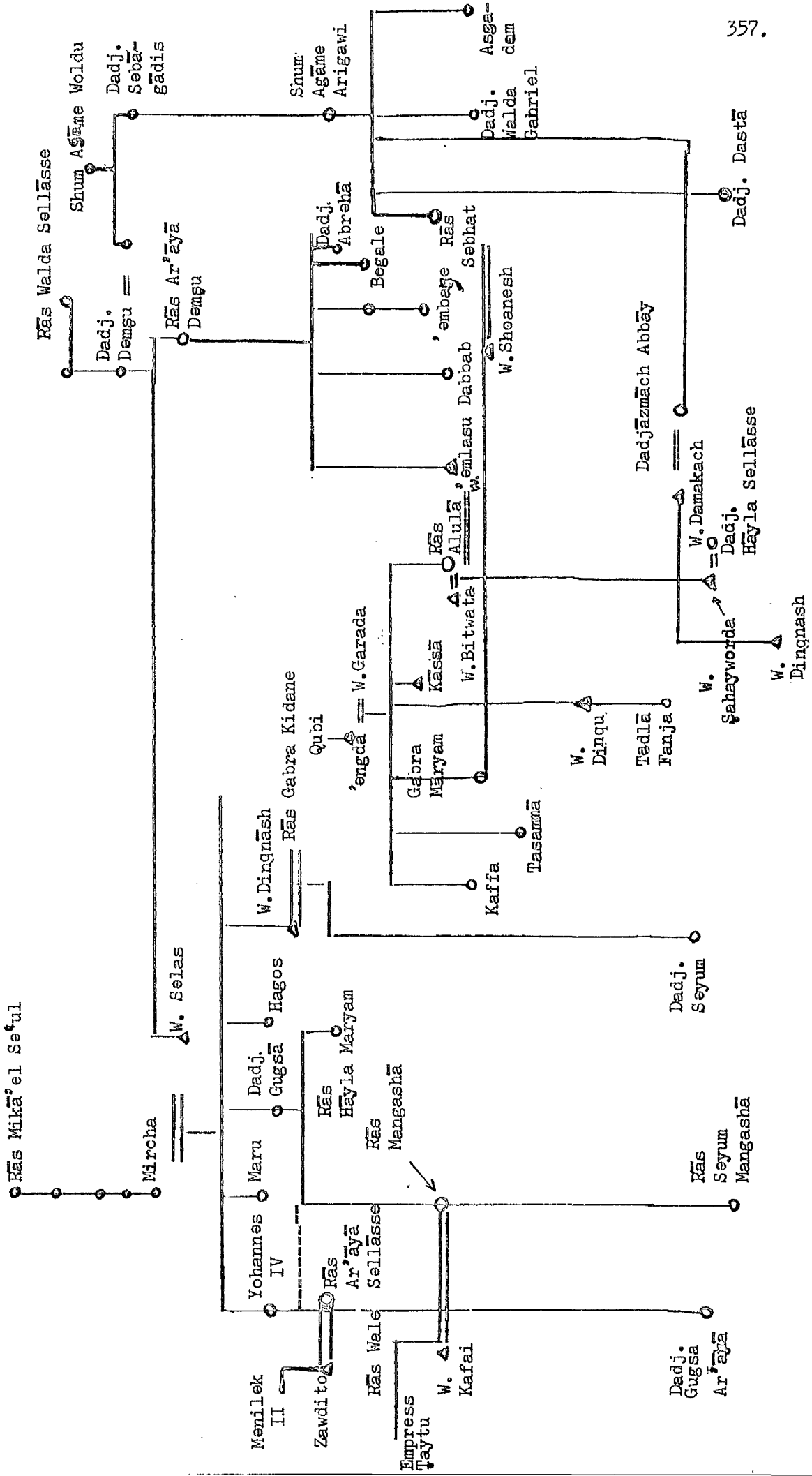
<sup>2</sup> A.S.MAT 3/6-42, Baratieri to MAE 13.1.93.

<sup>3</sup> A.S.MAI 36/14-150, Baratieri to MAE 9.4.93.

<sup>4</sup> N. Corazzini, "La pace", La Tribuna, 3.6.90.

sacrificing his own interests. He was, indeed, too proud to sacrifice anything. For, first and foremost, Alulā was a proud Ethiopian whose pride, so generously shared by his fellow-countrymen, was a source of strength and weakness, victories and defeats in such an important period of their history.

Genealogy of Alulā and the Tigrēan élite



GLOSSARY

Abun (Abuna if followed by the name).	Title of the head of the Ethiopian church
*echage	Premier monk of the realm
Afa Nəgus	An official who speaks in the name of the king, like an interpreter
Agāfari	The organiser of meals in the court
*elfəgn Kalkāy	Chamberlain, door keeper.
Ambā	Flat-topped mountain
*ənjarā	Round and flat bread
Aṣe	Sovereign; title of the emperors of Ethiopia
Ashkar	Servant, follower
Awādj	Proclamation
Bajerond	Treasurer
Belāttā	Counsellor. Title of senior official
Bālāgar	Inhabitant, peasant
Bālambārās	Military title of intermediate seniority
Bālamwāl	Favourite
Bāshā	Chief of riflemen
Cheqqa Shum	Village chief
Dadjāzmāch	'Commander of the door': originally: senior, court official, general. Title of senior dig- nitaries, district chiefs. &c.
Farasgna	An horseman, a military delegate of the governor to the various regions.
Fitāwrāri	'Commander of the spearhead': Title of inter- mediate seniority.



Gerāzmāch	'Commander of the left': Title of intermediate seniority
Gult(i)	Territorial fief; land held free of tribute
Janhoy	Title of emperor of Ethiopia; originally probably a judicial invocation.
Kagnāzmāch	'Commander of the Right': Title of intermediate seniority
Kantibā	Mayor, governor. (Here, only of the Ḥabbāb)
Lədj	Title of young nobleman
Ligabā	Official introducer and master of ceremonies at the court. Sometimes in charge of the king's personal domains.
Mamher	'Master'. Title of abbots
Marab Mellash	'Beyond the Marab river', i.e. Eritrea
Meslane	District officer, "deputy"
Mudīr (Arabic)	District governor in Egypt and its empire
Masqal	Feast of the cross, 27 September
Nəgus	King
Nəgusa Nagast	King of kings. Emperor
Nagārit	Drum (preceding royal proclamations)
Nā'ib (Arabic)	'Deputy'; indigenous chief of Harkikū and Massawa. Originally appointed by Ottoman Government
Naggādrās	Chief or trader of the customs
Nəbura *əd	Chief of Aksum
Qāqī (Arabic)	Muslim judge
Rās	The most senior title, just below that of Nəgus - comparable to 'Duke'
Rest(i)	Hereditary ownership of land

Shālaqā	Chief of a thousand
Shammā	Toga-like garment
Tukul	Indigenous hut
Ṭadj	Ethiopian honey-mead
Wāgshum	Chief of the country of Wāq
Wayzāro	Lady
Zabagna	Guard, watchman
Zarība	A temporary camp fortified by thorn fences.

BIBLIOGRAPHYI Unpublished Documentary SourcesA Ethiopian material

A Ge'ez Ms of 95 pages by an unknown author narrating the history of Rās Alulā (Mannawe MS) kept in the church of Mannawe, Tamben. Was lent by the priests there to Mr. H. Erlich. A few additional pages were found later in Abbi Addi. The MS was translated by Mr. Roger Cowley of Maqalle.

Alaqā Lamlam, Ya'ase Takla Giyorgisnā Ya'ase Yohannes t̄arik, MS Ethiopiens No. 259 (Collection Mondon Vidaillet No. 72), Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. A copy is kept by Dr. R. Caulk, Haile Sellassie I University, Addis Ababa (H.S.I.U.).

Aḡme Giyorgis, Yaqāllā t̄arik, Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES), MS 138.

A Ge'ez MS, a T̄arik of Yohannes in the church of Dabra Berhān Sellāsse, Adwā.

A Ge'ez MS of Yohannes's history. Found in Aksum. Written by Abbā Hāyla Māryam. Translated by Tesfayohannes Fessehaye. Kept with Dr. R. Caulk, H.S.I.U.

An Amharic short biography of Rās Gubanā. A MS. kept by Dr. R. Caulk, H.S.I.U.

A Ge'ez MS from Dabra Berhan Sellāsse, Gondar, kept in IES. English translation kept by Dr. R. Caulk, H.S.I.U.

"Alaqā Kenfu's diary", MS in possession of Dr. Alame Eshate, IES.

B Egyptian material

Documents from the 'Abidīn Archives, Cairo (AA) were collected by Prof. S. Rubenson of H.S.I.U. and are available at IES: "Rubenson Collection".

Correspondence of Egyptian officers and officials from Massawa to Cairo and reports by Egyptian soldiers who escaped from the Sudan through Ethiopia in SOAS M.518.

Sa'd Rif'at, "Report on the insurrection and evacuation of the Red Sea Stations (1889)" (Arabic). English translation kept by Prof. P.M.Holt, SOAS. Arabic version in SOAS M.518.

C Sudanese material

School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, SOAS M.518:

Documents from the Central Record Office in Khartoum.

SOAS Library, Mahdia Y.80,1, MSS Letter Book of 'Uthmān Digna, SOAS 101491.

Ismā'īl b. 'Abd al-Qādir, Aṭ-tirāz al-Manqūsh bibushrā qatl yūhanā malik al-hubūsh. A MS kept at the School of Oriental Studies, Durham.

D British material

British Museum (BM), Add. MSS 51294 and 51304, Gordon's letters to his sister.

India Office (IO), R/20 AA, L/PS/9-4 etc.

PRO, Foreign Office Papers (FO) 1/30, 1/31, etc.

E French material

Ministère des Affaires Etrangères [MAE(F)], Correspondence Politique

des Consuls, Egypte 4: Massauah 1875-1885;

Egypte 5: Massauah 1886-1888.

MAE(F), Memoires et Documents, Afrique [M. et D.]

F Italian material

Archivio Storico del soppresso Ministero dell'Africa Italiana,

Rome [A.S.MAI]. In the Ministero degli Affari

Esteri [MAE] 36/3-23, 36/2-11 etc.

"Archivio Eritrea" in A.S.MAI

"Collezione Vitale" in A.S.MAI

II Published Documentary sources

Camera dei deputati, Rome, occasional publications.

Italian Libri Verdi (Atti parlamentari) [LV].

L'Italia in Africa, Serie Storica, Etiopia - Mar Rosso, ed. Carlo

Giglio, Ministero degli Affari Esteri,

Comitato per la Documentazione Dell'Opera Dell'

Italia in Africa, Rome 1959 - , Vols. II, III,

V, VI [Giglio]

MAE(F), Documents Diplomatique français (1871-1914) (Paris, 1929).

III Unpublished theses

Alame Eshete, Evolution et Resolution du conflict Egypto-Abyssinien...

1877-1885, Doctoral thesis, Aix en Provence,

1965 (available in IES).

---

"The Swedish Protestant mission 1866-1889",

unpublished article, IES.

- Caulk, R.A., The origins and the development of the Foreign Policy of Menelik II, 1865-1896, Ph.D., SOAS, London Univ., 1966.
- Ghabr Michael, Bogos (1849-1890), B.A. thesis, H.S.I.U. 1971.
- Limoli, D.A., F. Crispi: A Study in Italian Foreign policy, Princeton Univ. Ph.D., 1961.
- Rollins, P.J., Russia's Ethiopian Adventure 1888-1905, Ph.D.thesis, Syracuse Univ., 1967.
- Şahay Hayle, A Short Biography of Dajjazmatch Gabrasallasse Bariya Gabir (1873-1930), B.A.thesis, H.S.I.U., 1972.
- Sahle Woldegabr, The Background to the battle of Metemma, B.A.thesis, H.S.I.U., 1968.
- Tesfai Seyoum, Ras Alula Abba Nega: A Biography, B.A.thesis, H.S.I.U., 1970.
- Zewde Gabre-Sellasie, The process of Reunification of the Ethiopian Empire 1868-1889, D.Phil thesis, Oxford, 1971.

#### IV Newspapers and periodicals

Annales de la Congregation de la Mission, Paris.

Corriere di Napoli, Naples.

Cosmus, Rome.

The Daily News, London DN.

L'Esploratore, Rome.

The Manchester Guardian, Manchester MG.

Popolo Romano, Rome.

Rivista Militare Italiana, Rome RMI.

The Times, London.

La Tribuna, Rome.

La Tribuna Illustrata, Rome.

Yazārgyatu 'Ityopiā, Addis Ababa.

V Published works

Abba Ayla Takla Haymanot, "Il Wata: Una tipica figura folcloristica dell'Etiopia", Proceedings of the Third International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, vol. II, Addis Ababa, 1970.

Abba Gasparini, Yaityopā tārīk, Asmara, 1955

Affawārq Gabra 'eyāsus, Dāgmāwi aṣe Menilek, Rome, 1901 EC.

Anonimo: Spedizione Militare Italiana in Abyssinia-pensieri di un ufficiale superiore dell'esercito, Rome, 1887.

Antona-Traversi, C., Sahati e Dogali, Rome, 1887.

Asrāta Māryam, Zenā Dabra Sinā (with Italian Trans.), Rome 1910.

Bairu Tafla, "Three distinguished Ethiopian military leaders",  
A paper presented at the Social Science Conference,  
Nairobi, 1969.

Baratieri, O., "Negli Habab", Nuova Antologia, 1892.

--- "Di fronte agli abissini", Nuova Antologia, 1888.

--- Memorie d'Africa (1892-1896), Torino, 1897.

Bent, T., The Sacred City of the Ethiopians, London, 1896.

Berkeley, George F., The Campaign of Adowa and the Rise of Menelik,  
London, 1902; New Edition, London, 1935.

Bianchi, G., Alla terra di Galla, Milano, 1884.

Bizzoni, A., L'Eritrea nel passato e nel presente, Milano, 1897.

Bonacci, G., Il Mareb Melasc, Rome, 1905.

Bonacucina, Alfredo, Due Anni in Masawa, Fabriano, 1887.

Branchi, G., Missione in Abissinia (1883), Rome, 1889.

- Bucci, E., Paesaggi e tipi africani, Torino, 1893.
- Castellato, A., La Figlia di Ras Alula, Milano, 1888. See English translation in Ethiopia Observer, 1972, No.3.
- Chiala, L., La Spedizione di Massaua, Torino, 1888
- Cagnazzi, E. I Nostri Errori, Torino, 1898.
- Constantin, Le Vicomte de, "Une Expedition Religieuse en Abyssinie", La Nouvelle Revue, Paris, February, 1891.
- Conti-Rossini, Carlo, Italia ed Etiopia, Rome, 1935.
- Principi di diritto consuetudinario dell'Eritrea, Rome, 1916.
- "Documenti per lo studio della lingua tigre", GSAI, XVI.
- "Canti Popolari Tigrari", Zeitschrift für Assyriologie, Strassburg, 1906.
- Crispi, F., La prima Guerra d'Africa, Milano, 1914.
- Da Membro, Metodio, La Missione dei Minori Cappuccini in Eritrea (1894-1952), Rome, 1953.
- De Lacy, O., The Ethiopian Church, London, 1936.
- De Lauribar, P., Douze ans en Abyssinie, Paris, 1898.
- De Vito, L., Esercizi di lettura in Lingua Tigrigna, Rome, 1893.
- Douin, George, Histoire du Règne du Khédive Ismaïl, Rome, 1933-1941.
- Dye, W.M., Moslem Egypt and Christian Abyssinia, New York, 1880.
- "Epistolario Africano", Italiani in Africa, Rome, 1887.
- Eshete, Alame, La Mission Catholique Lazariste en Ethiopie, Institut d'Historie des pays d'Outre-Mer, Université d'Aix-en-Provence, Etudes et Documents No. 2 (1970-1971) (Available at IES).
- Fasolo, F., L'Abissinia e le Colonie Italiane, Caserta, 1887.



- Garima, Tāffere, Yamakarā Dawal, Asmarā, 1963 E.C.
- Gentile, L., L'Apostolo dei Galla, Torino, 1916.
- Greenfield, R., Ethiopia, A New Political History, London, 1965.
- Guèbre, Sellassiè, Chronique duregne de Menelik II, Paris, 1930-22.
- Guidi, I., "Storie e brevi testi amarici", a paper presented to a seminar in Berlin, 1907, kept in Faitlovich Library, Tel-Aviv University.
- Guido, L. L'Assedio di Macalle, Rome, 1901.
- Heruy Walda Sellāsse, Yaheywat t'arik, Addis Ababa, 1914 EC.
- Ityopyānā Matammā, Addis Ababa, 1901 EC.
- Hesseltine and Wolf, The Blue and the Gray on the Nile, Chicago, 1961.
- Hill, G.B., Colonel Gordon in Central Africa 1874-1879, London, 1881.
- Hill, R., A Biographical Dictionary of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Oxford, 1951 (Sec.Ed., London, 1967).
- Holt, P.M., The Mahdist State of the Sudan 1881-1898, Oxford, 1970 (Sec.Ed.).
- Ilyās al-Ayūbī, Ta'rikh Misr fī 'ahd al-Khidīw Ismā'il bāshā, Cairo, 1923.
- Ishaq Yosef, Hade eritrawi, Asmara, 1961 EC.
- Jackson, H.C., Osman Digna, London, 1926.
- Kolmodin, J.A., Traditions de Tsazzega et Hazzega, Rome, 1912-1916.
- Levine, A., Wax and Gold, Chicago, 1965.
- Littmann, E., Publications of the Princeton Expedition to Abyssinia, vol. II, Leyden 1910; vol. IV, Leyden, 1915.
- Longrigg, S.H., A Short History of Eritrea, Oxford, 1945.
- Māro Wudnaḥ, Yaertrā t'arik, Asmarā, 1962 EC.
- Mantegazza, V., GL'Italiani in Africa, Firenze, 1896.
- Marcus, H., "Menelik II", in N. Bennett, Leadership in Eastern Africa, Six political Biographies, Boston, 1968.

- Martini, F., Il Diario Eritreo, Rome, N.D.
- Nell'Africa Italiana, Milano, 1891.
- Cose Africane, Milano, 1897.
- Matteucci, P., In Abissinia, Milano, 1880.
- Melli, B., L'Eritrea, Milano, 1902.
- Ministero della Guerra, Storia Militare della Colonia Eritrea,  
Rome, 1935.
- Mitchell, L.H., Report on the Seizure by the Abyssinians of the  
Geological and Mineralogical Reconnaissance  
expedition, Cairo, 1878.
- Nadel, S.F., "Land Tenure on the Eritrean plateau", Africa, vol.  
XVI, 1946, pp. 1-21, 99-109.
- Negri, L., Massaua e dintorni, Valenza, 1887.
- Ohrwalder, J., Ten Years' Captivity in the Mahdi's Camp, London, 1892.
- Orero, B., "Ricordi d'Africa", Nuova Antologia, 1901.
- Pankhurst, Richard, Economic History of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, 1968.
- "Ras Alula in Italy," Ethiopia Observer, 1972, No. 3.
- "The Great Ethiopian Famine of 1889-1892",  
University College Review, Addis Ababa, Spring, 1969.
- Paul, A., A History of the Beja Tribes of the Sudan, Cambridge, 1954.
- Pennazzi, L., Dal Po ai due Nili, Milano, 1882.
- Perham, M., The Government of Ethiopia (Sec.ed.), Evanston, 1969.
- Perini, R., Di Qua dal Mareb, Firenze, 1905.
- Perino, E., Vita e gesta di Ras Alula, Rome, 1897.
- Pollera, Alberto, I Baria e I Cunama, Rome, 1913.
- Il Regime della proprietà terriera in Etiopia  
e nella Colonia Eritrea, Rome, 1913.
- L'Abissinia di Ieri, Asmara, 1940.

- Portal, G.H., My Mission to Abyssinia, London, 1892.
- Puglisi, G., Chi e? dell'Eritrea, Asmara, 1952.
- Rif'at, Muḥammad, Jobr al-kasr fī al-Khilās min al-Asr, Cairo,  
1314 H.
- Rohlf, G., L'Abissinia, Milano, 1885.
- Rubenson, S., Wichale XVII, Addis Ababa, 1964.
- "The Adwa peace treaty of 1884", Third Inter-  
national Conference of Ethiopian Studies,  
Addis Ababa, 1966.
- "Some Aspects of the Survival of Ethiopian In-  
dependence", University College Review, Addis  
Ababa, 1961.
- Sabelli, Luca dei, Storia d'Abissinia, Rome, 1936.
- Salimbeni, A., "Diario d'un pioniere africano", Nuova Antologia, 1936.
- Sapelli, A., Memorie d'Africa (1883-1906), Bologna, 1935.
- Savelli, M., La Spedizione, Rome, 1886.
- Shuqayr, Na'ūm, Ta'rīkh as-Sūdān al-qadīm wal-hadīth wajighrafiyatuhā,  
Cairo, 1903.
- Simon, G., L'Ethiopie, Paris, 1885.
- Smith, H., Through Abyssinia, London, 1890.
- Takla Ṣadeq Makuriyā, Ya'ityopyā tārik, Addis Ababa, 1960 EC.
- Trimingham, J.S., Islam in Ethiopia, (Sec.ed.), Oxford, 1965.
- Truffi, R., Precursori dell'Impero Africano, Milano, 1936.
- Un ex funzionario Eritreo, La nostra politica africana, Imola, 1895.
- Vanderheyem, J.G., Une expédition avec le négous Mènèlik, Paris, 1896.
- Wingate, F.R., Mahdism and the Egyptian Sudan, London, 1901.
- Winqvist, K., En liten återblick, Stockholm, 1908.

- Winstanley, W., A visit to Abyssinia, London, 1881.
- Wylde, A.B., '83-'87 in the Soudan, London, 1888.
- Modern Abyssinia, London, 1900.
- Zaghi, Carlo, Le origini della Colonia Eritrea, Bologna, 1934.
- Crispi e Menelich; Nel diario inedito del  
Conte A. Salimbeni, Torino, 1956,
- "Il Convegno del Mareb", Rivista delle Colonie,  
Anno XI, No. 2, pp. 175-184.
- "L'Italia e l'Etiopia alla vigilia di Adua",  
Gli Annali del'Africa Italiana, 1941.

#### VI Informants quoted in the Thesis<sup>1</sup>

- A collective interview with the people of Mannawe, February, 1972.
- Dr. Abbā Gabra Iyāsus Haylu, Addis Ababa, January 1972.
- Kagnazmāch Arbehā Fanta, Asmara, March, 1972.
- Fitāwrāri Alame Tafari, Maqalle, February, 1972.
- Fitāwrāri Bayana Abrehā, a descendent of Alulā, Aksum, February, 1972.
- Ato Bairo Tafla of IES who had collected oral sources in Tegre,  
January, March, 1972.
- W. Worqu Imām, Asmarā, March, 1972.
- W. Wallata Berhān, Asmarā, March, 1972. A tape of an interview  
with her about Alulā is available in IES.
- W. Yashāshwarq Bayana, a descendant of Alulā, Abbi Addi, February, 1972.
- Ato Yekunūamlāk Ar'āyā, Maqalle, February, 1972.
- Dr. Dadjāzmāch Zawde Gabra Sellāsse, an historian, Addis Ababa,  
March, 1972.
- A Tigrean teacher who wishes to remain *anonymous*, February, 1972.

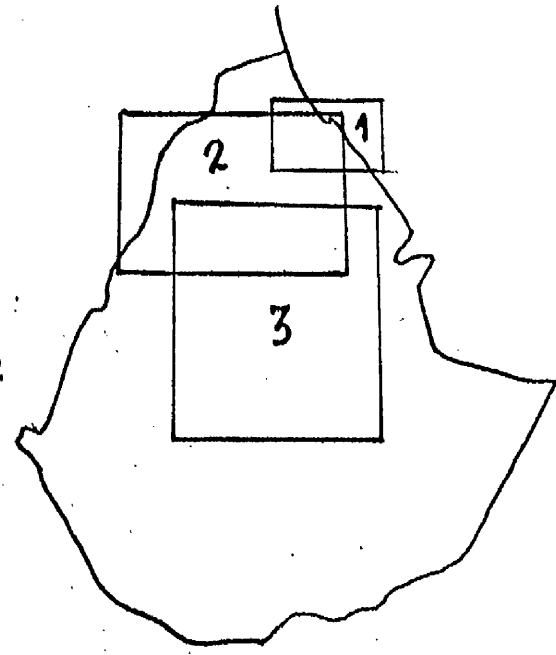
<sup>1</sup> A tape of an interview with W. Wallata Berhān is available in IES. Notes from an additional interview with her, as well as from the other informants are being deposited at the SOAS.

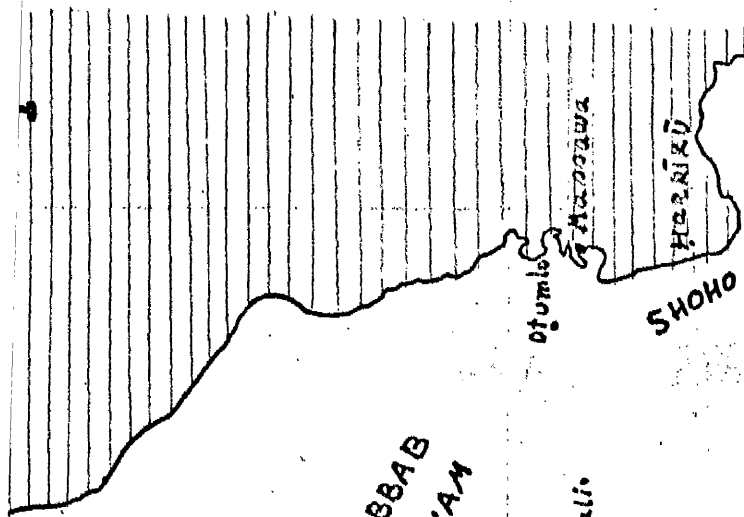
Garima 2  
 Addi 2  
 Amāryam 1  
 Arāt 2  
 Qayh 2  
 Rāni 1  
 Taklay 1  
 Abāba 3  
 Taklis 1  
 2  
 he 2  
 Modar 3  
 la Guzāy 2  
 m 2  
 ka 2  
 ā 1  
 ā Alāje 3  
 Dibuk 3  
 ā Salāmā 2  
 ā Sion 3  
 ib 2  
 Makonni 3  
 rtā 2  
 nsabā 1  
 ho 2  
 ali 2  
 auge 3  
 arā 1  
 wurta 1  
 galle 3  
 t 1  
 bo Gāllā 3  
 emdar 3  
 ū 'Amir 2  
 ia 2  
 ka 2  
 juk 1  
 on 2  
 u Medā 3

Buri 2  
 Dabra Bizan 1  
 Dabra Damo 2  
 Dabra Sinā 1  
 Dabra Tābor 3  
 Dambalān 2  
 Dambiyā 3  
 Damā 3  
 Dagga 2  
 Daro Takla 2  
 Dogali 1  
 Edaga Humus 2  
 Faras Māy —  
 Filiq 2  
 Garaltā 3  
 R. Gash 2  
 Gindā — 1  
 Godyām — 3  
 Godojelasi 2  
 Gondar 3  
 Gundat 2  
 Guzā 2  
 Hadendowa 2  
 Halāniya 2  
 Halhal 2  
 Hamāsen 1  
 Hantalo 3  
 Haramat 2  
 Hawzen 2  
 Hazagā 1  
 Ira 1  
 Jira 3  
 Katan 2  
 Kassala 2  
 Kolatit 2  
 Kohayn 2  
 Kūfit 2  
 Kumāliyya 2.  
 Kuna mā 2

Lāstā 3  
 Magalo 2  
 Magdalā 3  
 Mannawē 2  
 Mannā 1  
 Magalle 2  
 R. Marab 2  
 Matguz —  
 Massawa 1  
 Matammā 3  
 Otumlo 1  
 Sabarjema 2  
 Sabdizāt 2  
 Saganieti 2  
 Sahāṭi 1  
 Saharte 2  
 ṣallanti 3  
 Sanāfe 2  
 Sanhit (Karan) 1  
 Saqotā 3  
 Sarāya 2  
 Sa'zagā 1  
 Sarāya 2  
 Sa'zagā 1  
 Seloā 3  
 Sōmen 3  
 Senāfe 2  
 Shabbāb 1  
 Shirē 2  
 Shoa 3  
 Shoho 1  
 Takkaze 2  
 Tamben 3  
 Wādālā —  
 Wādālā —  
 Wādjrāt 3  
 Wāg 3  
 Wallo 3  
 Wannā Ilē 3

Wīā 2  
 Yedju 3  
 Zabul 3  
 Zuguli 2





ASSÄWURTA

M. Gedem

otumlo

Hararid

Hararid

SHOHO

imba HABBAB  
Ad Tarkia AD-TAMARYAM  
MENSA  
ADUD

Sakati Pogali

Sakati

Aylet

Sabarguma

Ginda

Bigen

HAMÄSEN  
Ad Hefao  
Kajjagä  
Sajjaga Aomara  
SAHARTE

Addi Tackalay

Addi Rani

Galab

Shabbab

Dabra Sina

M. Ina

R. ANSABA

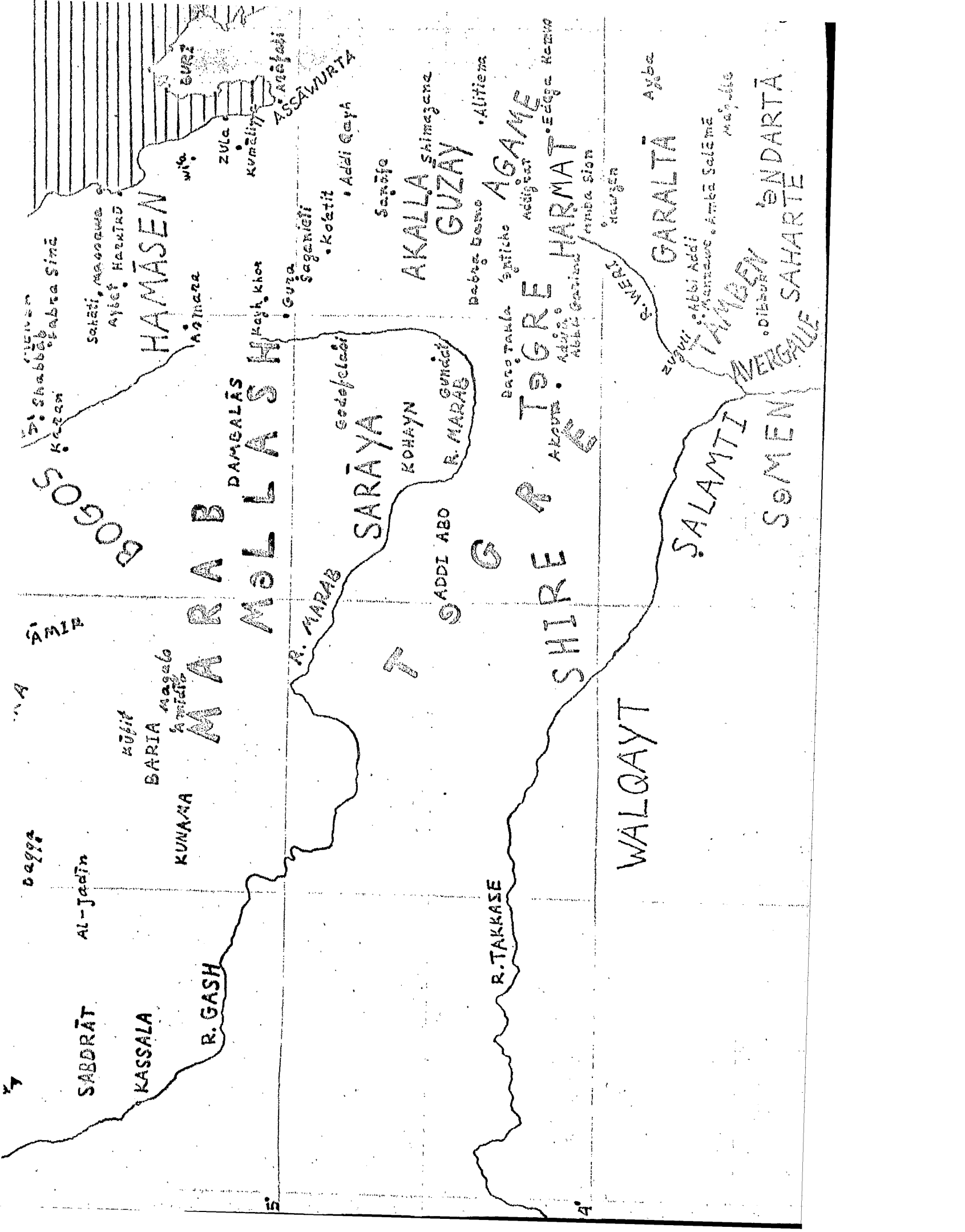
SHOATE ANSEBA

BET JUK

(Sahrir)

Kakay

BOGOS



Shabbab  
Karam

Solati, Mawana  
Abel Harat

HAMASEN  
Asmara

Zula  
Kumaliya  
Anafati

ASSAWURTA

BOGOS

MARAB  
DAMBALAS  
MOLASH

KUNARA  
BARIA  
Kufit

AL-Jadīn

SABDRAT  
KASSALA

R. GASH

SARAYA  
KOHAYN

gedefelabi

ADDI ABO

R. MARAB  
GUNDI

AKALLA  
GUZAY

Shimejane  
Alitena

G

R. TAKKASE

SHIRE

TIGRE  
Akova

Daro Takla  
Tigicho

AGAME  
Addigat

HARMAT  
Amba Sion

WALQAYT

SALAMTI

GARALTÄ

Ayba

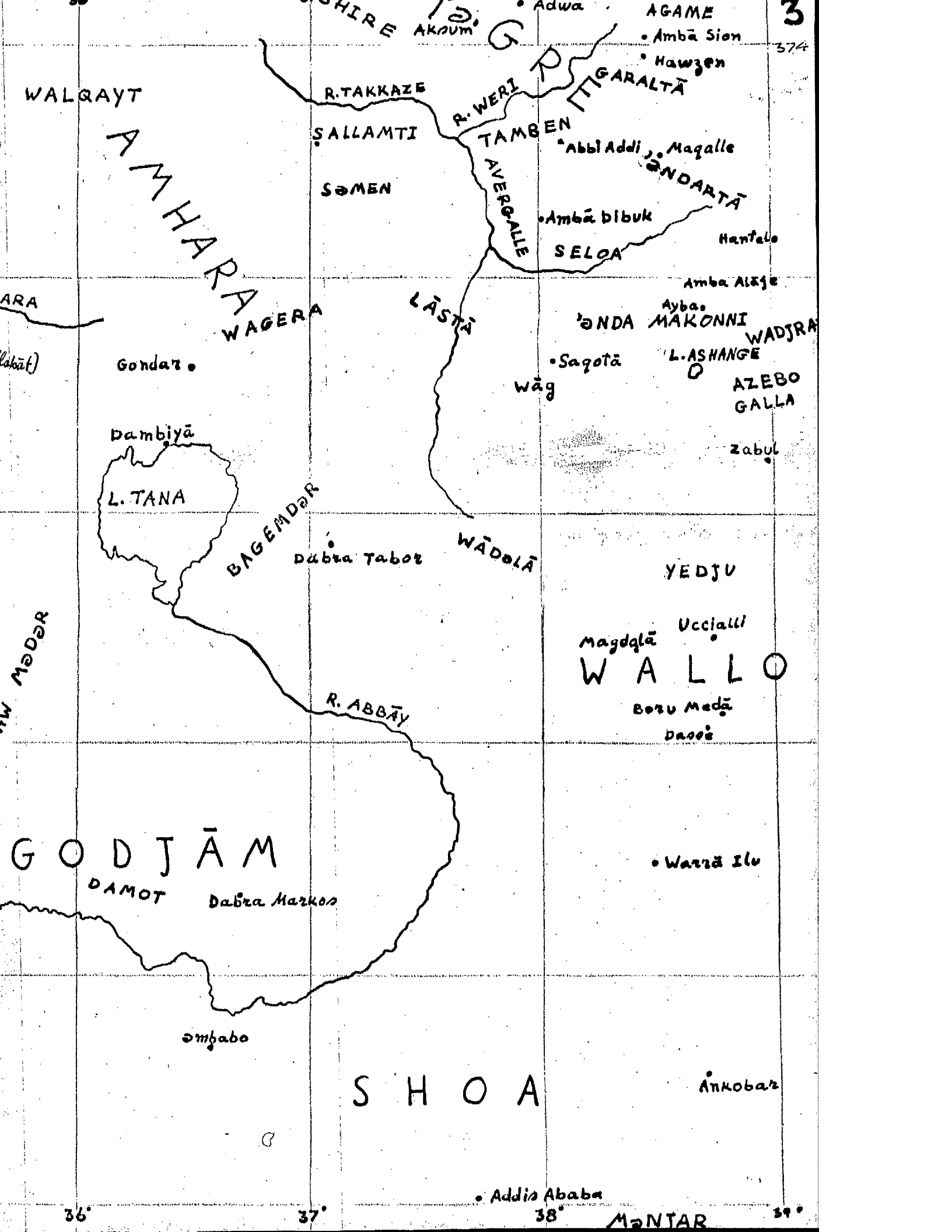
TAMBEW  
Dibba

SOMEN

ENDARTÄ  
SAHARTE

Abbi Addi  
Mantawo  
Amba Selame  
Magale

S. MER  
Harjen



WALQAYT

AMHARA

R. TAKKAZE

SALLAMTI

SAMEN

R. WERI  
TAM BEN

AVEGALLE

Abbi Addi

Magalle

AGAME

Amba Sion

Hawzen

Amba Dibuk

SELOA

Hantelo

Amba Alaje

ONDA MAKONNI

L. ASHANGE

WADJRA

AZEBO  
GALLA

Sagotä  
Wäg

Zabul

ARA

(labät)

Gondar

WAGERA

LÄSTÄ

Dambiyä

L. TANA

BAGEMDAR

Dabra Tabor

WÄDOLÄ

YEDJU

Magdälä

Uccialli

WALLO

Bozu Medä

Daso

Medar

R. ABBAY

GODJÄM

DAMOT

Dabra Markos

Warrä Ilu

Amhara

SHOA

Ankobar

Addis Ababa