

APPENDIX 18

FOUR POWER COMMISSION OF  
INVESTIGATION FOR  
THE FORMER  
ITALIAN COLONIES

REPORT ON ERITREA

LETTER OF TIGRÉ REPRESENTATIVES  
dated Keren 25th November, 1947.

With due respect, we the undersigned, legal representatives of all races (TIGRÉ) of Arabic origin, dwelling in the provinces of Keren - Nacfa - Agordat - Tessenei, have the honour to submit this letter to the Hon. Four Power Commission so that it may be examined and brought to the attention of the DEPUTIES OF THE FOREIGN MINISTERS OF THE FOUR GREAT POWERS, in order to have full justice from the United Nations, justice which has been proclaimed and confirmed by the Atlantic Charter of the United Nations which obligates the world.

As regards the future of Eritrea, all of us (almost half a million people) accept the point of view of the Moslem League of Eritrea, to which we belong unanimously, and we are even prepared to give our opinions individually and also through our legal representatives, properly elected and accepted by us. Our case is that submitted to your Commission in the memorandum of the Moslem League and referred to by its delegation; however we have the honour to state our wishes clearly and briefly; they can be summarised as follows:-

- 1°) We reject categorically any system of annexation or union with Ethiopia or any other nation;
- 2°) We claim the full independence of our country and we consider ourselves to be in a position to obtain this.
- 3°) Failing our obtaining full independence, we accept an international trusteeship for ten years under the control of Great Britain or of an organ of the United Nations itself, with internal independence.

Furthermore it is our duty to explain to your Commission, with great displeasure, the very ugly situation in which we, the Tigré of Eritrea, find ourselves; a situation which has lasted for more than three centuries; a situation which could not even be applied to animals, seeing that there are laws that protect them from ill-treatment, and people who break these laws are liable to punishment.

We, in Eritrea have to face two Governments, one different from the other.

One is the legal government, the other is a disguised government formed by the so-called noblemen of Eritrea (Bet Asghedé - Nabtab of the BENI AMER - Ad Sheck - Ad Shium); and we have to pay two different contributions to each of these governments. The rule is that, when we have to pay one shilling as contribution to the government, we must pay to the Choeves from 5 to 10 times this amount and so on for everything. In other words, we find ourselves in a continuous state of slavery; slavery which has been fought against and abolished in every part of the world, except in our country and in Ethiopia.

Therefore, /



Therefore, it is with great hope that we present this letter to your Commission which tomorrow is to be interrogated by the BIG FOUR; you will also be interrogated by God if you should fail to take into consideration our oppression or should you fail to help the poor humanity crushed on Eritrean soil by the above-mentioned oppressors, so that we may obtain the freedom enjoyed not only by human beings but also by animals.

We represent almost the entire Moslem population of the western provinces of Eritrea, that is about 95% of the population consists of our so-called "Tigré or arabs", who speak local dialect. In spite of this we have no right to hold political posts, nor do we enjoy equality with the so-called noble class, known under the name of "Thanit"; we are forced to plough our land in order to give food to these noblemen; we milk our cows to supply them with milk; we collect fire-wood to keep them warm; we draw water from the wells to supply them with drinking water; we are also forced to supply them with beasts of burden and we transport their luggage for them without any remuneration, not even a word of thanks; when we marry our daughters to them we have to offer them a present, otherwise the marriage is not valid. Our position is worse than any form of slavery, a form that not even the Nazis have given the world, while they are being accused of the ill-treatment of humanity, humanity created partially by God, with all the organs of the body and the senses of man.

Furthermore we beg to clarify our position as follows:

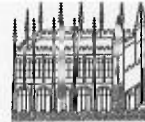
Our most important races are called: ALMADA, RUGBAT, ASFADA, AFLANDA, BET MAALA, AB HASCELA, DEG DEGHE, DOBAAT, AGBO, CHEBBE, HAFARA, BALAU, MAHRAGAB? BET AUAD, BET TESFAI, AD BATUGRI, DENGHEN, AD MACATTAR, BET MARIAITT, BET ABBARIAITT, ANGALAASA, UILIDNORO, AFRID, MAALA, KATTAN, DANCHELE, MAHLIT-KINAB, HARABSO, HIDAREB, SAB MIDIR, AD AMDOI, SEIHO, SAB LAALIT, EL GUDAB, ALLABIA, KARATAB KARAB KINAH, plus about a hundred other groups, kindred to us.

Further, all these races of purely Arab origin came from the East, who, after centuries, changed their Arabic mother tongue into the local dialect called Tigré, and also adopted the local ones. It should be added that the word "Tigré" is applied to the above-mentioned races by the feudal families, with an insulting meaning. For instance, when a feudal family want to insult a member of the above-mentioned races they say "you are only my Tigrai" which means "my servant"; another word which is also used and means "my slave" is "gheberai."

The major part of the above-mentioned races live in the Keren-Agordat Province and is divided into tribes; these are sub-divided into the so called "Bet Asghede, Ad Scium, that is Maria Rossi and Maria Neri, Mensa, Ad Scek, Nabtab and the dominating Tigré."

#### HISTORICAL HINTS

Fuller information on the origin of the Almada, Rugbat, Asfada, Scimaghelle, Maria Neri etc., is to be found in Chapter XXXV of the Manual edited by Pollera, entitled "Le popolazioni indigene" The Native Population of Eritrea, page 191 and further.



## 3.

ASGHEDE

(1) These peoples are of Abyssinian origin from Hamasien and Akkhele Guzai. They were established about the middle of the 17th century on the mountains, called by them "Rore Asghede". As we and the original inhabitants of the country had two means of a livelihood, i.e. breeding of cattle and cultivation, which necessitated our moving from the highland to the lowland, according to seasons, it has been easy for the Asghede to keep us under their subjection.

When Negus Lebna Dinghil (or Uobe) arrived on the spot, having escaped from Imam Ahmad, Negus (Gragne), the Asghede or Asghedom, received him and succeeded in obtaining from him the title of Supreme Head of the Sahel (Nacfa) region, due to his Abyssinian origin and to his Christian religion.

(2) It would be impossible to write with accuracy a story or a chronicle of the events which took place in countries where the custom of writing was not known or, to state it more clearly, in a country which was mute.

To compensate for this official deficiency we have the well known system of genealogical memory, both amongst the Christians and the Moslem populations of the place; genealogical memory which places on record facts and events in support of which tradition supplies details, not only simple erroneous legends.

For this purpose we have avoided putting down names and events which we can only quote from our memory. More convincing and reliable would be the records kept by impartial writers, in publications that we can quote with precision. Equally convincing is the fact that these publications correspond with the evolution of the facts and the present and past state of our society.

3) We read in a speech by Count Rossini, contained in a publication of the "Eritrea Economica" (Istituto Geografico De Agostino - Novara - Roma 1912), where, when speaking of the Asghede (a tyrannically dominating class) he describes as rulers of their tribes a "dominating class whose economic exploitation, with time", ends by becoming monstrous: a human octopus, of a few thousand parasites exploiting a great number of vassals." (page 83).

To start with, the Asghedem were farmers as indeed were the Abyssinians of Hamasien, but, gaining in strength not only numerically, they ended by tyranizing the local populations such as the Almada, Rugbat, Asfada, Deg Deghe, Dobassat, Bet Maala, etc., called Tigré. Such people since then have lived with their flocks and herds, changing their domicile with the seasons. Far from leading them to agriculture and to a better standard of civilisation, the Asghede themselves completely assimilated their customs, their way of life and their language (page 83).

(4) On page 127-128 of the book "Ethiopia e Gente d'Etiopia" (Carlo Conti Rossini - ediz. Bemporad - Firenze 1937) it is stated that the populations of Tigré language are mostly shepherds. Their social composition was characteristic: there was, and there is, much less, a difference between the noble class, of foreign origin (Abyssinian from Hamasien and Akkhele Guzai although the Bet Asghede are from Eritrea) and the vassal classes, who are known as Tigré in general and Tigrai in particular. The relations between the two classes changed much/





much from tribe to tribe according to the manner in which the former succeeded in imposing their will. Sometimes they were subjected to complete economic exploitation, arriving to the point of recognising the lords' right to kill or sell the vassal as "slave" (The Asghede had the right to declare their vassal "slave" for the smallest offence, and the poor slave had to serve his new master until he was able to pay 20 (twenty) Maria Teresa Dollars for a male and 30 (thirty) for a female, in order to obtain his freedom.)

(5) An excellent indication of the origin and life of the Asghede is found in the Manual, edited by Poller, mentioned on page two of this letter. We recall all of it in view of the importance of information contained therein, but we shall only cite certain statements having special importance for our subject.

- a) The Bet Asghede (Lords) were originally Christians and remained such for some time, while the populations they found on the spot "Bacrium - Almada - Asfada, etc." were Moslem, nomads and were only engaged in sheep farming (page 195).
- b) The Bet Asghede, having subjugated these tribes "making them almost slaves, and living off the products of their herds, ceased to feel the necessity for engaging in agriculture, and this aristocratic class became parasites on their dependents.." (page 196).
- c) On pages 196/197 of the same Pollera Manual, are stated ~~the~~ obligations of the Tigré towards their lords. Moreover such obligations were rendered more ~~severe~~ and humiliating by the Bet Asghede by abuse of their power. On page 197 Pollera describes an interesting declaration made many years ago by a numerous group of Tigré to the Regional Commissioner of Cheren of that time, Mr. Fioccardi: "Since the Italian Government came to administer the country, we are quieter within our boundaries, the noblemen limit their requests and leave our wives in peace, a thing that never happened before. Before, they often pulled us out of our beds and took our places - "hospitality" which is not prescribed for in the book.

If we did not present them with a full jug of milk they would not accept it and insulted us, without thinking that in order to give them the milk we had to take it away from our wives and little children.

Cases of the kind happened when the Bet Asghede arrived in the "zeriba" of the Tigré when the men were out with their herds of cattle (page 198).

#### EVOLUTION OF TIME - EVOLUTION OF RELATIONS.

6) From what is stated above, which is the result of enquiries made by educated people, it is clear that there has been a great evolution from the first days of the Asghede's rule to this date.

Backward evolution to a certain degree, because not only did we, the dominated, adopt the religion, customs, and language of the rulers but they adopted the religion, language and customs of the dominated. Those who had been rulers and remained at first agriculturists, abandoned their cultivation, preferring to live as parasites on us, the shepherds. We, the dominated, remained mainly shepherds, but there is also a fair number of us who have succeeded in progressing from pastoral pursuits to agriculture, obtaining state lands to cultivate./



cultivate. (Two thirds of the Eritrean territory is not cultivated because of these noblemen who forbid the people to plough freely, and grant permission to cultivate only to those who agree to share one third of the crops with them;) it is because of this that Eritrea does not produce enough cereals to satisfy her own needs.

Comparing the two parties, it is evident that the ruling class are in the process of retrogression, while the dominated have progressed enormously, passing from shepherds and cultivators to the arts, the free professions, commerce and employment both in government and commercial institutions. Most of the class of employees are sons of Tigrés.

7) What was the result of this evolution on the relations between the two parties? What action was taken by the government in guiding, with time, such an evolution? We have already stated that 'domination' became less severe (without, however, reaching complete freedom, and liberating us from the yoke of this slavery) as a result of the development of events and, without doubt as directed by the Authorities, particularly during these seven years of British domination, without which the Bet Asghede would certainly not have renounced the parasitical benefits which they enjoyed.

Abuses have been abolished and many 'established rights' have also been definitely abolished, whilst the few that remained were abolished in 1947. There now remains personal freedom, equality in rights and duties, and we quote some of the factors which still suppress personal freedom in every form:

The Tigrés have no right to accept any post - they cannot be seated if there is a nobleman present - they cannot speak, nor express their opinion - they cannot contradict the will of the nobleman, not even if it is wrong or detrimental to them or their community - they cannot marry noble girls while the noblemen can marry Tigrés, as the latter are considered "their own animals" and private property.

8) The enlightened, in their publications, generally speaking, did not treat the various questions in detail, tribe by tribe and race by race; their interpreters belonged as a rule to the aristocratic classes.

As stated above, the noblemen gave the land to those who gave them one third of their crops, and this practice has greatly militated against the development of agriculture, in such a way that almost two thirds of the very fertile lands which could be used for the cultivation of tobacco, cotton, sesam, peanuts, corn, castor, etc. are not cultivated because nobody will willingly put up with the various difficulties arising from such hard work, and only to divide their crops with loafers who want to enrich themselves by other peoples' labour.

During the rule of the Italian Government, in the time of His Excellency Signor Gasperini, we, the Tigré (particularly the Rugbt, Almada and Degdeghé) continued to insist on the system of contribution to the ruling classes, contribution which the Asghede unjustly claimed from us; at the same time we asked to have each of us, a separate chief, so that we could become independent and enjoy freedom, thus ending this long slavery; but His Excellency Signor Gasperini, not only did not accede to this last request, but promulgated a law as per attached original sheet, by which he forced us to pay the dues to the Asghede, and amongst these dues was a charge in favour/



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favour of the head of each group, in the following proportions:-

- (1) - One milking cow from each herd of 24 heads, to be given in turn to the chief of section, from his dependents;
- (2) - One goat to be offered on the occasion of the Moslem feast of EL HAGG.
- (3) - One camel to be used for transportation of luggage in case of transfer from one locality to another.

We leave out many other small charges about which it is inopportune to speak.

(9) Standing firm by our rights, we did not agree to this arrangement and many of us were exiled for many long years in Nocra and Assab. A series of accusations and intervention, through the "Commissari regionali," followed in Keren but all in vain; this meant that the oppressors and parasites found the protection of another great oppressor, namely the Italian Administration.

(10) Going back to those far distant times of our submission to the Asghede, their high handed action was very much like a conquest. They were in reality the sovereigns of this territory. It was logical that they should accept tribute from us, they were protecting us against threats, raids and danger from abroad while they did nothing but put out their hands to seize others property without paying for it, while we did our best to defend ourselves by ourselves against anyone threatening our individual security.

(11) ~~Under what title~~ would the Bet Asghedi be willing to get men, cattle and land. The answer is clear: at that time we were completely ignorant, because of lack of education, because of the absence of justice on the part of the Italian Administration; they could ask for and get all that they wanted. At present there is no longer ignorance in our territory and everybody knows how to defend his own life and his own rights. Our eyes are open at last; and now we are in a position to see very far. When the Egyptian administration replaced the Turkish administration and when this country was occupied by the Italians, and, lately, by the British, with their strong and just government, the semi-sovereignty of Asghede ceased and was substituted by an efficient and single sovereignty.

Because it is obvious that two governments cannot rule on the same territory so is it obvious that it is unjust to pay tribute to two governments which oppress poor humanity. But it is obvious that one of these governments has to be recognised as the sovereign rule of the territory: this corresponds in a sense to the behaviour of the Italian and Asghede governments. It is now obvious that everybody should be allowed to live freely and enjoy his own property without restriction which obtained in the past.

OBSERVATIONS/





OBSERVATIONS ON FAMOUS CHIEFS AND THEIR ORIGIN.-

AD SCHEK

This tribe arrived about a century ago. Their leader was a saint. With his good manners he ingratiated himself with the population, so did his sons, nephews, etc. who subjected the population by the same system and treatment which the Asghede practiced on their people. This system was practised in two ways; one compulsory and the other religious, though the Islamic religion does not impose such barbarous and abusive forms but they carried out the system in a false way, according to our law which is sanctified in the Koran.

AD SCIUM, as MENSA AND MARIA.

The Ad Scium showed the same indifference towards their people as did the Asghede. The former live under conditions of slavery which retards the progress of human civilisation and freedom. The Ad Scium arrived from the Arabian coast and penetrated up to Gheleb where the chief of Mensa Bet Abrehe at present lives. On branch called Mursal or Masciu remained there; the other branch, Mura or Mariu, migrated towards the territory called Maria Rossi and Maria Neri where they live at present. The population of these territories were subject races. The system practised by Ad Scium is even worse than that of the Asghede, because they subject to their domination even weak kindred tribes. Pollera says in page 174: Among the nobles a kind of degradation exists. Such degradation directs that a high noble is bound to be downgraded. So he may become a low noble or a dada (?).

He who puts himself under the protection of another noble because of his democratic weakness or because of his misery is declared a low-noble. He who becomes guilty of a serious offence against his tribe - such as espionage, an offence against the community, the usual delinquency etc. - is downgraded as well, even if he has applied for mercy. He who commits violence or an offence against individuals or against the property of high nobles, directly or through agents and is not in a position to compensate for the damages and the offences committed is downgraded to dada. In such a case the person who has been offended or injured has the right to declare that he renounces any compensation; in other words, to leave the head of the offender free. That means that the offender does not become a slave but that he is considered as a dada by the whole community. The stigma of dada also falls on the attacked and it continues on his descendants and cannot be thrown off by paying compensation. It constitutes, however, a moral sanction of great value. For instance all the Spiumagallé from Maria, known as the sons of Mariu himself, are at present being considered on the same level as Tigré, or worse. This is the reason why many of them have signed this letter.

NABTAB

This tribe came from the Sudan (Saadinab). Because of assistance from Fung - the governors of that time - they subjected the population of Barka which were of Tigré origin and which had been compelled to immigrate following the threats and oppression of the Asghede - Ad Scheik - Ad Scium Maria and Mensa with Bileni.



8.

The Nabtab treat their people in very much the same way as the above mentioned Asghede.

COMPULSORY TRIBUTE TO THE NOBLES, BESIDES  
TRIBUTE DUE TO THE GOVERNMENT.

The Italian Government helped the feudal system. In order to strengthen the system, the Italian Government imposed a kind of internal tribute called "Hidderit". Therefore, each chief appointed his own representative with the object of collecting a super tax on all beasts sold or on all goods sold by the Tigrés on the local markets (it is understood that such tax was imposed on cattle or goods brought from the various tribes and not from abroad). It is therefore clear that there were two kinds of governments to which the Tigrés had to pay two heavy taxes. Therefore we have listed hereunder the various taxes which the Tigré had to pay to the nobles before, and during, the sixty years of Italian administration. It is therefore clear that the Italian Government did not abolish the feudal system but approved and confirmed it by proclamations such as that signed by His Excellency Signor Gasperini, which we attach herewith as undeniable proof.

BET ASGHEDE

Each Tigré had to pay his respective master (or Bet Asghede) the following tribute:

- 1) MEDHANET - Every supply of a certain quantity of butter corresponding to the value of MT. Dollars 4 for each herd of oxen and of the value of 2 MT. Dollars, for each flock of sheep or goats owned by the Tigré (a flock including at least a number of 40 oxen or 50 sheep or goats, without distinction of sex or age).
- 2) TALIT HEGH - Supply of one goat or sheep to be slaughtered on the occasion of the feast of "Hag" (great Bairam or "Eid el Adha").
- 3) UAAT TZAHAI - (Uaat the cow, tzahai the dry season). Obligation to supply to Bet Asghede for his own use, during the dry season, one milk cow for each herd owned by the Tigré.
- 4) UAAT HALIB - (Milk cow). Same duty as above during the rainy season.
- 5) UAAT MAKAN - (Sterile cow). Yearly obligation to supply a cow to be slaughtered, for each herd owned by the Tigré.
- 6) NAGGALAT HALEGH - Obligation to supply to the Bet Asghede - when he is suffering from Syphilis - goats or lambs to be slaughtered, till his complete recovery. Such obligation was extended to each Tigré to whom the Bet Asghede would apply for even if he is not his direct dependent, in case his illness lasts and he is away from his family.
- 7) TALIT HALIB - (Milk goat) Obligation to supply a milk goat to be substituted periodically with a new one in case the first goat does not give any more milk.
- 8) SHIMMET GHILZA. Obligation to supply one woollen blanket spun and woven by the Tigré's family, for the use of the wife of his own master.
- 9) GAMEL TZAAN. (transport camel) Obligation to supply one camel for the transport of the Bet Asghede's family, on the occasion/





occasion of the seasonal migration from the coast to the highland and vice versa (twice a year).

10) RIGGAZ (funeral commemoration) Obligation to supply heads of cattle on the occasion of a funeral commemoration, for each dead Bet Asghede, without distinction of sex.

11) TZIMBALAT (Marriage present) Obligation to supply heads of cattle to the bridegroom of the family of the master on occasion of his marriage.

12) RIAL MASHIANGEL (Dollar due by each individual) Obligation to supply the master with one yearly dollar for each full grown man of the family of Tigré - besides all that due for other reasons.

13) OSPITALITA Obligation to offer his own master hospitality whilst he sojourns in the zeribe of the Tigré.

14) UADEKO - (I have decided) Order given by the Bet Asghede masters to their vassals for any purpose and at any moment, in order to enforce the compulsory issue of grain, cattle, money, butter and so on.

15) NADA (warning) General order to report to masters. If the Tigré fails to report he will be punished by the confiscation of one third of his property.

16) CABIR (Burial) Obligation to participate to the burial of a Bet Asghede's dead master. He who does not attend at the burial is declared a slave and his property is confiscated. This punishment is applicable as well to those who attend with clean and well combed hair.

17) SIBIR - (A pedigree cow) If a pedigree cow of Sibir stock owned by the master and in the care of a Tigré breaks a bone or falls from the precipice or her calf dies, the master has the right to declare his vassal a slave.

18) MUKLAT - During the harvest the Asghede has the right to come to the thrashing floor of the vassal and to fill with his own hands the largest bin with durra for the purpose of feeding his horse or his camel.

19) If a colt is born the vassals are obliged to feed it with milk supplied by their own cattle thus depriving their own sons and wives thereof.

The above were the obligations imposed by tradition, but the insolent behaviour of the Bet Asghede made them even more humiliating.

#### AD SCIUM MARIA

The Tigré or vassals used to furnish their respective nobles or masters - the Taniit - with the following supplies and periodical services:

1) Yearly offer of one "medanet" of butter (about 8 litres)

2) One "gabata" of durrah (about 30 kgs).

3) One pint of milk per week.

4) Obligation to hand over to the master each head of cattle found.



- 5) Obligation to hand over to the master all meat of animals which had to be slaughtered because of injuries.
- 6) Obligation to hand over to the master certain parts of the animal (such as the breast and fillet) slaughtered for any other reason.
- 7) Obligation to supply, for slaughtering all the sterile cows.
- 8) If an individual became ill owing to a miserable standard of living the Ad Scium used to take away his sons and sell them (many of these are at present with the Ad Occud (Beni Amer) tribe.
- 9) ZARAF - A cow taken by force. If a master sees a nice cow owned by his vassal, the Ad Scium has the right to take possession of it without paying any compensation whatsoever.
- 10) GIALUT - Head of cattle to be slaughtered for healing. If an Ad Scium is bitten by a snake, the Tigré must supply him with goats to be slaughtered for his benefit and cure.
- 11) If a Tigré frightens a pregnant woman of noble birth, causing an abortion, the nobles have the right to declare the vassal a slave.
- 12) If a cow (of good pedigree stock because it is owned by nobles) dies when she is in the care of a vassal, the latter must compensate the owner by giving four cows in exchange of the dead one.
- 13) All illegitimate children are the slaves of the nobles. At the present time over ten villages are populated with these so called bastard-slaves. If one of these wishes to become a free man, he must pay the price fixed by the nobleman. Sometimes it happens that the nobles refuse to accept the money because they say that it is insufficient. The man must, therefore, remain a slave.
- 14) When a noble woman gives birth to a child the meat of all the slaughtered or dead cattle must be brought to her house. If one eats meat from his own cattle he gets into trouble.
- 15) If a Tigré owns land, the nobles have the right to take possession of such land in the following manner: the master says a visit to the land and selects the best plot. Then he says this field is mine under a title of ownership. His sons, his grand-sons, and so on, follow the same system, so that finally all the vassals' land becomes the property of the master.
- 16) When a vassal dies and leaves immovable property, the nobles take advantage of it by being present when the estate is being divided among the heirs. They arrogate to themselves these rights by assuming the title of "garhat Mambar". The same thing happens when cattle and other property are divided or allotted.
- 17) If a girl of noble race becomes pregnant as a result of a sexual intercourse with a vassal - or in case she has falsely declared so out of spite - the suspected vassal may be declared a slave.
- 18) If a foreigner dwells with a noble a full year, the noble may declare him his own slave.
- 19)/



19) If a noble tends the marriage of vassals, such marriage cannot be solemnised unless a cow is given to the above noble (Uaat Neggarat).

20) A chief must be afforded hospitality when he sojourns in the Zeribbe of the vassals, in connexion with his official tours. It is understood that the chief has no fixed abode when carrying out his legal duties. In such way he has the opportunity of exploiting his people.

21) Each village populated by the "Maket" race is obliged to give to the chief of the tribe 7 quintals of durrah per year.

Besides the above duties to be paid to their masters, the Tigré have to pay other duties to the Scium, especially at a Reggaz (funeral of one of the nobles) when all the Tigré who were subjects of the deceased have to offer so many cows equal to the number of full grown men of their families. The nobles accepted only one head of cattle, according to the number of the members of their families. Of this cattle, part was slaughtered on the grave of the deceased and was eaten at the funereal banquet; ten heads of cattle were taken by the Scium (Supreme Chief of the Tribe) and became his private property; the remaining cattle were given to the heirs of the deceased.

At the weddings of nobles, the dowry of the bride is fixed by the head of the tribe, or by the vice-head, according to whether the wedding is that of a member of the family of the Scium (noble chief) or of another noble, in proportion to the ritual donations of the wedding, by means of a tribute of heads of cattle, divided among the Tigré of the same tribe, from which the Scium still take another ten cows.

Furthermore the Tigré was obliged to aid the noble in the payment of the "price of blood," if he was sentenced for murder; this was a very severe penalty as such a price, in the case of the murder of another noble, was not less than 800 cows, which in Maria Teresa dollars is equivalent to 1,600 dollars. A greater danger was run by the Tigré, if the master killed another Tigré, because the master of the murdered Tigré had the right to kill any Tigrés belonging to the family of the murderer; thus the Tigré was in danger of losing his life for an offence which he had not even committed (see Pollera pages 182-83). But the troubles of the Tigré did not by any means end there, as he had to tolerate the abuse of his master; he had to lend money without any hope of repayment and could not prefer a claim, so great was the solidarity of the nobles and of the Scium in maintaining the prerogatives of their class; woe to the Tigré who had not fulfilled his duties; he would be immediately declared by his master "dada" and therefore a slave. The slaves, who in the past were among the Maria, were mostly of this origin, while a few of them were bought from other regions. In order to accentuate the difference between the nobles and the Tigré, the Tigrés and their women were forbidden to wear gold or silver ornaments or jewels, which were reserved only for the nobles, while the subjects had to content themselves with iron ornaments, or even copper or brass. Similar to the system in force in Abyssinia between the free people and the slaves.





AD SCIUM DEI MENSA

The Tigré of the Mensa have no right to speak at or take part in the meetings of the tribè. They nevertheless were subject to the following obligations:

1. Contribution of a certain quantity of butter, as a payment for the rent of their cultivated fields.
2. Obligation to lend an ox to the master for the transportation of provisions during the annual migration from the high lands to the low ones and vice versa.
3. Obligation to supply a milk cow to the master, and to change it every season, so that he may always have milk for the whole family.
4. Contribution of the greater part of game shot.
5. To hand over the meat of the cattle which the Tigré was forced to kill as a result of it being damaged by wild beasts.
6. Contribution of presents of heads of cattle and produce of the land (obligatory) at weddings or funerals taking place in the family of the master, or in the case of foreign guests.
7. The subject has no right to change his master of his own free will.

BILENI (BOGOS)

Relations between master and the sub-chiefs were once very elastic, as the very light tie could all of a sudden be changed into a tie of slavery which placed the master in the position of being able to sell the slaves to anyone who would take them. Vassalage is hereditary for the serfs as for the master. No matter how rich the serf may be, no matter how brave and famous for his deeds in action, the serf can never break away from such a tie and become a member of the nobility, as nothing in this world could infuse into his veins the blood of a noble of Gabré Tarché. In the same way, no noble, however poor, can ever become a serf. The vassal is always the eldest of the noble family (see Pollera folio 160 and following).

Not long ago, in certain localities the following took place: when a noble died his body was washed over his vassal who was put under the bed. When a vassal died his body could not be taken out of the main door; instead it was taken out from the back of the house by breaking down the wall.

NOBLE NABTAB (BENI AMER)

The dues payable by the vassals to their masters were not fixed: they were approximately as follows:

- 1) One goat out of every herd, in the case of a noble woman giving birth to a baby.
- 2) Payment of wedding dowries in the case of the marriage of a poor nobleman, as follows:- 1 goat for every herd - 1 cow, etc.
- 3) Obligatory payment of 4 Maria Theresa dollars in the case of/



15.

authorities, although favouring the removal of injustices and abuses in the whole of the Western province have not given complete freedom, saying that they did not have the power to introduce radical changes as they considered themselves a provisional administration.

#### MOBILISATION.

In the case of mobilisation of men and beasts of burden, only the Tigré and their animals were mobilised, while the nobles and their properties were exempt, except for a few volunteers. On the other hand, it happened that even when the locusts destroyed our cultivations and our cattle were destroyed by the drought, instead of obtaining help and mercy we were always obliged to pay just the same our dues to the nobles as if we had not suffered any damage as well as the taxes and tribute to the government as if our cattle had not been destroyed.

#### INSTABILITY OF THE NOBLES.

It is pointed out that lately the Asghede, Ad Shek, Ad Scium and Nabtab nobles have shown their instability, that is, they have never succeeded in reaching a political decision for the future of Eritrea, without changing their minds. In the initial stages of their political development and the above-mentioned nobles, with all the Chiefs (Meslenie and Nazir - Christians or Moslems) secretly signed a document in which they asked for a British Trusteeship, without being supported by the will of the population. When the British Administration gave permission to all of the population to express their opinion in respect of the future of Eritrea, the nobles, chiefs, nazir and meslenie, were very perturbed at seeing that such freedom of thought was allowed their vassals and they therefore changed their minds, seeking those who could preserve their "feudal" rights. This is why the nobles and chiefs today support the Unionist Party and the pro-Italy party. The former gave secret guarantees that they would still be allowed to carry on their feudal system under the Ethiopian Government; as regards the latter, Italy had preserved all their illegal rights during its 60 years of Administration.

It has generally been ascertained that these nobles and Chiefs are lacking in any sense of patriotism, having tried practically all the parties in Eritrea; and this is not in the interests of the population in general.

Before ending this report, we want to stress again that we support wholeheartedly the views expressed by the Moslem League of Eritrea, as may be ascertained from our written and verbal statements already submitted to the Members of the Commission.

We reject any form of annexation or union with Ethiopia or any other nation, and claim complete independence. If this is not possible we ask for international trusteeship under British or UNO control. This is motivated by the fact that Great Britain has shown, during 7 years of occupation, her will to promote Eritrea's cultural awakening, besides freedom of thought and expression. Our population is aware of Britain's work in the Sudan, Iraq, Transjordan, in India and elsewhere. Therefore we prefer and trust Great Britain from whom we await justice and progress.





16.

We, the undersigned, have to stress that the Italian administration often rejected our appeals for justice and that we believe that Italy was defeated because of god's punishment and because she did not protect our rights. For the above reasons we beg the United Nations to grant us individual and general freedom and justice.

We are confident that the United Nations will be moved when reading this report which deals with the great injustice that has for so many years been perpetrated against the poor Tigré population. Fortunately the formation of this Commission of Enquiry has given us the opportunity of informing the United Nations of the system, instituted by Italy, based on oppression, injustice, raids and privileges (which no religion admits); that Italy was backed for helping the oppressors and by granting them illegal rights which, through her assistance, became lawful; Italy never showed any mercy towards the Tigré, who were treated as wild beasts.

We beg you to examine carefully the present report in order to appreciate the true situation of the Tigré population of Eritrea who form 90% of the whole population of the Western province, besides the population of the whole Samhar (Massawa) and of other districts of the Eritrean highland. We repeat that we, the Tigré, estimate that we are about 500,000 people who suffer conditions of continuous slavery under the rule of about 1,000 parasites.

A population of a half million souls is subjected to the will of 1,000 parasites.

We claim justice by the granting of a freedom genuine, internal and external - collective and individual freedom.

Keren, 25th November, 1947.



For all the Population of TIGRÉ DEL BARCA GASC  
AND SETIT.

Mohd Ibrahim Ali	Saleh Hag Idris Sciadili			Osman Adum Abdalla
Rugbat Beni Amer	Bet Mala (Beni Amer)	Daud Idris Asfada Beni Amer	Hamid Ali Uilidnoho Beni Amer	Taura Ben Amer
				Farag Idris
Hamid Fareg (Uilidnoho Beni Amer)		Ahmed Mohd Adum Bet Mala Beni Amer	Abhascela Beni Amer	

Saleh Ali

Abhascela Beni Amer

Signatures and Thumbprints of the Delegates of SAHEL ZONE and  
of the District of Keren

Hamid Said Osman Ad Caiè Habab	Ahmed Mohd Fagaira Halata Habab	Hamid Abdelkerim Asfada Habab		
Ali Mohd Said	Hamid Idris Dued	Mohd Ali Ammar		
Asfada Ascias Habab	Asfada Habab	Dobat Habab	Mohd Abdalla Adum seiho Habab	
Ahmed Mohd Amir	Idris Dued - Sab Laalit Habab	Hussein Mussa (Rugbat Habab)		
Mahmud Ibrahim Hag Ad Abul Gassim Ad Scek	Mohd Said Faki Ali Rugbat Ad Scek	Mohd Ali Derar - Balau Ad Scek		
Mohd Messud	Mohd Omer Hamid Idris Ali Fair	Mohd Omer Derar	Hamid Humed	
Osman Ad Caiè Tirhè (Ad Scek)	Ad Caiè Fidel (Ad Scek)	Agdub Rugbat Ad Temariam	Teel (Agdub Ad Teeles)	
	Igel Osman Igel	Adum Idris		
Mohd Ner Ali Inkisra Ad Scek)	Hadarab Mensa Bet Abrehe	Soliman (Atlil Ad Tecles)	Omer Mohd Humared Giamil (Rugbat Ad Tecles)	
		Mohamed Ali Abdel	Ali Idris Abdel kader	
Mohd Osman Mahmud	Barih Idris Seiho Habab	Seiho Habab	Ad Caiè Fidel (Ad Scek)	
Rugbat (Ad Temariam)			Ali Mircab Giamil	
Mohd Osman Mahmud Nafè	Mohd Ali Abdalla Asfada Hatir Habab		Zaghir ad Temariam	
Rugbat Muscè (Ad Temariam)				
Abdelkader Mohd Dakala	Idris Adun Fecac	Omer Said Dain		
Mariam Neri	Bet Tesfai Mari Neri	Rugbat Gimel Ad Temariam		
Mariam Hummad Agdubain Ad Tacles				

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