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THE VISIT TO EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ETHIOPIA OF THE ARMENIAN JEWELLER YOVHANNĒS T'OVMAČEAN

VREJ NERSESSIAN and RICHARD PANKHURST *

Eighteenth century Ethiopia, which witnessed the decline of the Gondär monarchy, though well endowed with chronicles, was described by few foreign travellers. The only such accounts of the period generally known are those of the French physician Charles Poncet who was in the country at the very beginning of the century, in 1699-1700, and of the renowned Scottish laird James Bruce of Kinnaird who did not land at the port of Massawa until 1769 and left Gondär for Sennar two years later.

This dearth of contemporary travel literature greatly enhances the importance of the memoirs of the Armenian jeweller Yovhannēs T'ovmačean (Hovannēs Thomadjian), only incomplete extracts of which have thus far been published in the original Armenian. The work has never appeared in any European translation.

T'ovmačean, who was born in Constantinople in 1717, was taken by his father to Venice in 1732 and enrolled in the Mekhitarist Armenian monastery there. After only five days he returned to Constantinople, but soon came back to the Mekhitarist fathers in Venice where he was in due course ordained. He subsequently became a merchant, and travelled widely selling jewels. In the course of his travels he landed at Massawa, in January 1764, and proceeded via Aksum and Adwa to Gondär where he was appointed «treasurer» to empress Mentewwäb before making his way back to the coast in the spring

(*) The text was translated by Vrej Nersessian and edited and annotated by Richard Pankhurst. Most names and terms are rendered in their Ethiopian form. A short index of the Armenian spelling used by T'ovmačean is appended at the end of the article.

of 1766. His visit to the Ethiopian capital thus preceded that of Bruce by almost six years.

At the end of his travels T'ovmačean returned to Venice where he was allowed to rejoin the Armenian monastery, in 1785; and in 1790, at the request of its abbot, he wrote an account of his journey. The manuscript was carefully preserved by the Mekhitarists in Venice, and some excerpts from the Ethiopian section of it, edited by Fr. Ēłiay P'ēč'ikean, were long afterwards published in their journal *Bazmavēp,* in 1937, under the title «H. Yovhannēs T'ovmačeani ułevorut'iwn Yet'ovpia (The Journey of Yovhannēs T'ovmačean to Ethiopia)» **.

T'ovmačean's narrative is written in a lively style. Though as a merchant dealing in luxury goods his commercial contacts were mainly with the royal family and high aristocrats, several of whom he mentions by name, he has something to say about people in other walks of life, including traders and craftsmen, as well as clerks, guards, servants, and priests. He provides a unique account of the treasury at Gondär and its operation, an interesting description of the spectacle in which lions hunted down cattle in a public arena near the palace, and glimpses of several facets of eighteenth century Ethiopian life not elsewhere recorded for posterity.

The following is a translation of pages 200 to 263 of the manuscript, *Patmut'iwn Yovhannisi T'ovmačean,* i.e. *History of Yovhannēs T'ovmačean,* a photocopy of which was kindly made available by Fr. Levon Zekiyan of the Academia Armena di San Lazzaro in Venice. Thanks are due also to Fr. Sahak Djemdjemian.

TRANSLATION

Eventually they crossed the Red Sea, and reached the island of Meṭewwa (1) on January 29, 1764. They were detained at the customs where T'ovmačean tried to hide his jewels from the official, and declared

(**) *Bazmavēp* (1937), pp. 138-140, 142-155. A summary of the work also appears in R. Pankhurst, "The History of Ethiopian-Armenian Relations", *REArm,* 12 (1977), pp. 334-345.

(1) Maṭewwa, as Bruce discovered half a decade later, was «a small island» immediately off the «Abyssinian shore», and had an «excellent harbour» with water deep enough for «ships of any size» to approach it. J. Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile,* Edinburgh, 1790, vol. III, p. 1. Ethiopian personal and

only the textiles for which they levied a tax of 88 *kuruṣ* (2), and altogether T'ovmačean and his son Pōłos (Boghos) paid a total of 100 *kuruṣ* for permission to enter the island of Meṭewwa, the beginning of Africa. To the ruler of the coast, an Ottoman lord called Abū 'Alī, he presented a gift worth 150 *kuruṣ* and to his gransdon Aḥmad 'Abdullāh 82. Also to his son for the purchase of two mules and two donkeys for the journey 130, (and the) fee for the boat 50. Thus the total expenditure from Jeddah to Meṭewwa amounted to 600 *kuruṣ*.

On February 14 at twelve o'clock T'ovmačean began his journey with his son and Bijo, and after seven days they reached Degsa (3) which is a village of Abyssinia. T'ovmačean purchased a sheep for slaughter, divided its meat among the villagers, and gave thanks to God for having saved him from the infidel Muhammadans. He did the same on his return from Abyssinia, when this same T'ovmačean sacrificed two sheep at Degsa, this time for having been saved from the Abyssinians, as you will see in the course of this account. He stayed in Degsa for six days, and nine days later, on March 5, reached Adwa (4) which is known as the city Balä (5) Mika'él (6). It is named after

place names, titles and other words are given in this translation in their local forms, and transliterated according to the system adopted by the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* in Addis Ababa.

(2) *Xuruš* = *kuruṣ*, a Turkish term widely used for silver dollars. One of the more popular, that of the Ottoman emperor Mahmud I, weighed 24 grammes. S. Lane-Poole, *Catalogue of Oriental Coins in the British Museum*, London, 1843, vol. VIII, p. 174.

(3) Degsa, or «Dixan» as Bruce called it, a village on the edge of the Ethiopian plateau, was built on the top of a hill «perfectly in the form of a sugar loaf», and had a population of both Christians and «Moors», i.e. Muslims; Bruce, *op. cit.*, vol. III, pp. 84-5.

(4) Adwa, the capital of Tegré, consisted, according to Bruce, of «about 300 houses», but occupied «a much larger space than would be necessary for these to stand on». Bruce, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 119.

(5) *Balä*, an Ethiopic article of possession. A Dillmann, *Lexicon Linguae Aethiopicae*, Lipsiae, 1866, cols. 527-8. Adwa, the author reveals, was thus spoken of as *Balä* Mika'él, or possession «of Mika'él», being so called after its notable governor Mika'él Sehul (later *Ras* Mika'él).

(6) Mika'ēl Sehul, or Mika'él, the «astute» (Arm. Mik'ayēl), had been appointed governor of Tegré in 1748 — over a decade earlier — with the title of *Däjjazmač*. I. Guidi, *Annales Regum 'Iyāsu II et 'Iyo'as*, Paris, 1910, translation, p. 155. See also Ismail Ali, *The Career of Mika'él Sehul of Tigray (1692-1780)*, Haile Sellassie University senior essay, 1971.

Mika'él, a stern and merciless man, for all the people of the town who commit crimes have the responsible part of their body severed. Thus if the offence was carried out with the eyes these would be plucked out, or if a robbery was effected with the hands these would be amputated, etc. (7).

On the day when T'ovmačean and Bijo arrived in Adwa *Däjjazmač* (8) Mika'él was away. He had left on an expedition to a place five days' distant, so they were obliged to go and see him where he was. When they reached that place, and presented themselves, he called his interpreters and began to speak with T'ovmačean inquiring where he had come from, what was the purpose of his visit, and what was his profession. T'ovmačean, being afraid that his property would be confiscated, did not admit to being a merchant, but insisted that he was a doctor, and, taking out a small quantity of gold and silk scarves and belts, presented them to the chief. The latter thanked T'ovmačean kindly, and told him that he would be returning to the city on the morrow as he had heard that his wife (9) was ill, and that the traveller's visit was timely as he (T'ovmačean) could go and treat her. So T'ovmačean, through his own fault, had put himself into difficulties. The ruler did not allow them to depart, but kept them so that they would return with him to the palace (10) to visit his wife. When T'ovmačean duly saw her he found her suffering from coughing. He held her hand, and felt her pulse as though he were a real physician. He remembered that while in Constantinople his daughter had displayed similar symptoms, and that when they had called a medical practi-

(7) Though Mika'ël Sehul was doubtless a stern ruler it should be noted that the Biblical concept of «an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth» was deeply established in northern Ethiopia. M. Parkyns, *Life in Abyssinia,* New York, 1854, vol. II, p. 196.

(8) *Däjjazmač,* literally «commander of the gate», an Ethiopian military title given at this time to autonomous or semi-autonomous governors of provinces. H. Weld Blundell *The Royal Chronicle of Abyssinia 1769-1840,* Cambridge, 1922, p. 508; G. Massaia *Lectiones grammaticales pro missionariis qui addiscere volunt linguam amaricam,* Paris, 1867, pp. 255-6; Gäbrä Sellasé, *Chronique du règne de Ménélik II,* Paris, 1930-1, vol. I, p. 94.

(9) Mika'él was married to *Wäyzäro* Wälättä Gabre'él by whom he had two sons, Wäldä Häwaryat and Wäldä Kidan. Bruce, *op. cit.,* (1813 edition), vol. IV, p. 422.

(10) The palace at Adwa stood, Bruce says, «upon the top of a hill», but was «not distinguished» from any other house in the city «unless by its size», Bruce, *op. cit.,* (1790), III, p. 119.

tioner he had recommended that she should be kept warm. So he (T'ovmačean) suggested the same. It worked, and she too got well. So he became known as a good doctor (11). The husband, *Däjjazmač* Mika'ēl, expressed his thanks to T'ovmačean, saying, «God has sent you. I am old (12); would you not like to stay here with me?» T'ovmačean became very sad and confused at the suggestion of the tyrant. Bijo, however, told him not to be afraid, saying that he would write a secret letter to the king (13) at Gondär (14), and would hire someone to take it to him.

Meanwhile every day T'ovmačean used to go to Mika'ēl's house, and one day the chief's wife told him that one of her relatives was ill, and begged him to go and treat her. T'ovmačean, not wishing to refuse, went and visited her. He told those who were looking after her to boil a small chicken, and, when it was cooked, to give her the broth to drink. He also instructed them to wrap her up in blankets, and not to give her anything to drink for three days. This treatment cured her. After this T'ovmačean went and told Mika'él that he was not a doctor who liked travelling from place to place, but was capable only of looking after his (Mika'él's) family. The chief agreed that T'ovmačean should henceforth not be expected to treat anyone outside the palace. Mika'él sent provisions to T'ovmačean and Bijo every day to their house, and also presented T'ovmačean with a mule. In this way 50 days passed, during which time they were not allowed to leave. At the end of 50 days, however, three people arrived with a letter from the king addressed to *Däjjazmač* Mika'él, commanding that T'ovmačean and Bijo be permitted to depart, for the king, on Bijo's recommendation, had invited T'ovmačean to come to him. «So we have sent

(11) Many foreign visitors to Ethiopia over the years, including Bruce, claimed or were popularly believed to possess some medical knowledge, and accordingly treated members of the royal family, nobility and others with whom they came in contact. R. Pankhurst, «The Begginings of Modern Medicine in Ethiopia», *Ethiopia Observer,* IX (1965), no. 2, pp. 114-21.

(12) Bruce, who met Mika'él half a decade later, describes him as an «old man» who was lame, and suffered from «sore eyes». Bruce, *op. cit.*, (1790), vol. III, pp. 217, 226.

(13) The king at this time was, as T'ovmačean later explains, emperor Iyo'as. Being a minor he had not yet assumed his full regal powers which were exercised by his grandmother, the redoubtale empress Mentewwäb.

(14) Gondär was then, as for over a century, the capital of the Ethiopian realm.

two mules, one for T'ovmačean and the other for his son Pōłos; let them be sent on to me immediately».

Mika'él, on seeing this, was a little saddened, and, calling Bijo, said, «I do not understand the motives behind this, but to satisfy the wishes of the king I shall provide two mules, and despatch T'ovmačean to him. I shall also give the travellers plenty of food for the journey». So they left Adwa on April 24, 1764. After journeying for three days they rested at a village called Saba (15) which was in ruins (16). This city was named after a woman of ancient times called Saba (17) whose numerous very tall and beautifully carved stelae were erected in more than ten places. Some of these stelae are still standing, while others have fallen and lie buried (18). The woman Saba had also built a palace (19) for herself. It was made of stone like that in a nearby mountain. This stone after being cut and fashioned was used to erect a three-storey structure with several halls and rooms, beautiful staircases, doors and windows, as well as a dining room, attics, basements, granaries, and a yard with stables. The roof and floors were cut from a single rock, and the palace was altogether a remarkable edifice. However, because it was not used, and perhaps on account of wars,

(15) T'ovmačean by this name refers to Aksum which, as Bruce says, then consisted of «about six hundred» houses. Bruce, *op. cit.*, (1790), vol. III, p. 132. Aksum's identification with Saba, i.e. the Queen of Sheba, had already been noted, in the sixteenth century, by the Portuguese priest Francisco Alvares who called it «the city, court, and residence (as they say) of the Queen Saba». C. F. Beckingham and G.W.B. Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, Cambridge, 1961, vol. I, p. 145.

(16) The archaelogical remains at Aksum had likewise earlier caught the eye of the Portuguese Jesuit Manoel de Almeida. C. F. Beckingham and G. W. B. Huntingford, *Some Records of Ethiopia, 1593-1646*, London, 1954, p. 90.

(17) i.e. the Queen of Sheba.

(18) T'ovmačean is referring to the famous obelisks at Aksum which do not, however, seem ever to have been associated with the Queen of Saba. Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, vol. I, p. 158; Bruce, *op. cit.*, (1790), vol. III, pp. 129-130.

(19) This palace which, curiously enough, had not been described by previous travellers was subsequently excavated by the Deutsch Aksum-Expedition of 1906, and has more recently been discussed by David Buxton and Derek Mattews in «The reconstruction of vanished Aksumite buildings», *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, XXV (1971-2), pp. 53-6 (which contains a bibliography on Aksum on pp. 76-7). The German archaelogists had supposed that the structure was of four storeys, but the latter authors argue that it had but three — as T'ovmačean affirms.

one side of this palace, as well as various other parts of it, had fallen to ruin. Half the building was nevertheless still standing, and T'ovmačean personnally inspected it completely.

There was also a large and ancient Abyssinian church (20) where they said a piece of the stone tablet of the Ten Commandments carried by Moses had been preserved (21), and they took T'ovmačean and Bijo into the church, and showed him a closed altar said to contain this tablet of the Ten Commandments, but they refrained from opening it. However, on the insistence of Bijo, who claimed that he was a relative of the king, they very hesitatingly obliged. They took out a parcel wrapped in cloth, and began ceremoniously to unwrap it. There was a packet wrapped in another parcel of velvet, and it was not until they had removed a hundred such wrappings that they at last took out a piece of stone with a few incomplete letters on it, and, kneeling, they made the sign of the Cross, and kissed the stone, after which the object was again wrapped up, and put back into the altar which was then closed. This was a great relic — if it was indeed really a piece of the tablet of the Ten Commandments which God gave to Moses. The next day T'ovmačean and Bijo left the city of Saba, and on May 6 they reached the capital city Gondär (22).

(20) This building is described *inter alia* in G. Valentia, *Voyages and Travels to India, Ceylon, the Red Sea, Abyssinia and Egypt*, London, 1809, vol. III, pp. 88-90.

(21) Legend, as embodied in the *Kebra Nagast*, or «Glory of Kings», held that the Ark of the Covenant had been brought from Jerusalem by Menilek, son of Solomon, and placed in the cathedral at Aksum. J. T. Bent, *The Sacred City of the Ethiopians*, London, 1896, pp. 71-73. There, according to the contemporary Ethiopian historian Sergew Hable Sellassie, it is «believed to be still in existence today». Sergew Hable Sellassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270*, Addis Ababa, pp. 71-73. The *tabot*, or altar slab, at Aksum was, as T'ovmačean suggests, always carefully guarded, and indeed scarcely ever shown to foreigners. The only travellers who claim to have seen it were, interestingly enough, two other Armenians, archbishop Isaac of Kharpert and Dimothéos vardapet Sapritchian who assert that it consisted of a piece of reddish stone 24 centimetres long by 22 wide and 3 thick, with two columns of writing, and, though regarded as the «most sacred» relic in Ethiopia, did not seem to be of any antiquity. R. P. Dimothéos, *Deux ans de séjour en Abyssinie*, Jerusalem, 1871, vol. I, pp. 141-2. For bibliographic references to the *tabot* see also Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, vol. II, pp. 543-8.

(22) On Gondär in this period see *inter alia* A. A. Monte della Corte, *I castelli di Gondar*, Roma, 1938, *passim*; R. Pankhurst, *History of Ethiopian Towns*, Wiesbaden, 1982, pp. 142-179; and O. A. Jager and I. Pearce, *Antiquities of North Ethiopia*, Stuttgart, 1914, pp. 35-60.

Concerning how T'ovmačean presented himself to queen Etégé (23), *and to her grandson the king* (24), *and how he presented them with valuable gifts. How he was made treasurer, how he left, and with his son Pōlos returned to Jeddah. And an account of various ceremonies of the Abyssinians.*

When T'ovmačean reached Gondär they took him to the palace, and gave him a house there with five rooms, as well as an honourable man to serve as his attendant and to take care of anything he might need. Then there came a message from queen *Etégé*, stating that after he had rested for three days and recovered from the hardships of the journey he should present himself before her. The house which he had been given was bare except for a small carpet on the floor. After three days a message arrived from the queen to Bijo who said to him (T'ovmačean), «Let us go to see the queen. Take with you the golden silk cloth to present to her». (For this I had spent 1,100 *kuruṣ* before coming to Gondär). Then, rising, T'ovmačean went with him, and entered the reception hall where the queen was waiting, sitting with her grandson the king on a bed covered with a carpet in the presence of many princes and high dignitaries. An interpreter was summoned, and T'ovmačean, having expressed his respectful greetings, took out his gift and presented it to the queen, saying, «There is but little that I can ofter to Your Majesty, but in accordance with my humble means I acquired this for you; it is all that I can provide». After the interpreter had translated T'ovmačean's speech, the queen Zeristo (25) expressed her thanks, which she does not do to everyone, and a courtier in the hall instructed T'ovmačean and his son to fall on their faces to show their respect (26) to her. But T'ovmačean, though expressing gratitude, replied that there was only One Being whom he could so

(23) *Etégé*, an Amharic title given to a queen, empress, or more generally, wife of an important ruler, and often used without mention of her name. Guidi, *Vocabolario amarico-italiano*, cols 457-8. The Etégé here referred to was of course empress Mentewwäb. The author's apparent use of the title as a proper name is incorrect.

(24) Emperor Iyo'äs reigned from June 1755 to April-May 1769, W. Wright, *Catalogue of the Ethiopic Manuscripts in the British Museum*, London, 1977, p. viii.

(25) There is no evidence that the queen was in fact called Zeristo, as T'ovmačean asserts. In the chronicle of this period she is referred to sometimes as Berhan Mogasa and sometimes as Mentwwäb.

(26) On the traditional Ethiopian mode of bowing see *inter alia* Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, vol. II, p. 426.

revere, whereupon the queen, perceiving T'ovmačean's attitude, ordered that he should be allowed to display his respect according to his own custom. T'ovmačean, following the manners of the Ottomans, then bowed, raising and lowering his hands thrice, and did so again, once more, to the princes. Then the queen welcomed T'ovmačean and promised to give him a high position, adding, «I have heard you have also done some healing while at Adwa». T'ovmačean replied that being afraid that his jewellery would be seized he had merely pretended to be a doctor. The queen, thereupon, ordered him to bring his jewels to the palace on the following day, and commanded him to go in peace.

T'ovmačean returned home, very happy, for the queen had said she would give him an important post, and had expressed the desire to see his jewels, and he hoped that she might wish to buy some of them — according to Bijo for a sack of gold (which I doubted.) The next day all the princes mentioned above again gathered in the palace with the queen, and T'ovmačean, taking the jewels with him, presented himself before her. He spread out all jewels in front of the queen who approved them at a glance. Her grandson (27) picked up a red ring which had a border decorated with emeralds, and placed it on his finger, and all the other princes likewise chose rings. Some of the princes, however, began whispering among themselves, «The white men are very crafty, and the merchant may only have brought glass trinkets with which to trick us, and it may be the same with the gold».

When T'ovmačean came to know this through his interpreter he was very sad, and realised that he had become the victim of a fraud organised by Bijo; he, therefore, quickly bent down to collect the jewels, saying, «You have said it very correctly, for I came to this city trusting to the advice of Bijo». The queen, seeing what had happened, scolded the princes, saying, «Without understanding what the stones are, you have passed a rude judgement and disgraced yourselves». She then confessed to T'ovmačean that the stones were of high quality, but declared that he should keep them, for in her kingdom such jewellery was not worn, and in consequence people did not know about it. «But it is not on account of the jewels that I am going to entrust you with an important responsibility», she said. She then told him to return to his house in peace. After this she turned to her grandson, and ordered him to take the red ring from his finger and give it back

(27) I.e. the infant emperor Iyo'äs.

to T'ovmačean. The latter, however, interrupted her, insincerely, to observe that since the ring had been worn by her grandson, it was not proper to receive it back. The queen nevertheless took it, and handed it to T'ovmačean, saying, «I will purchase that ring only, but when the time comes». And, in accordance with her promise, when the time arrived for T'ovmačean to leave of the country she in fact purchased it for her grandson.

Then T'ovmačean returned to his house, and accused his superintendent of giving him wrong information, and, shouting at Bijo, asked him why he had tricked him by telling him that his wares would bring him a camel-load of gold in a city where they did not care about precious stones and did not use jewellery. «You heard the queen herself declare that in her city they made no use of jewellery», he cried. The man replied, «If I had not spoken as I had, you would not have come, and it is not for the sake of the jewellery that you have been invited. I knew you to be an honest man, and brought you to enjoy the hospitality of our country, and as a person whom the queen respects and admires, and wishes to entrust with an important post which will provide you with enough to keep you, so that without having to sell any of your own property you will become a very rich man». T'ovmačean, on hearing this, became a little calmer and more hopeful, and asked Bijo to whom he should present some of the jewels. Bijo replied that he should give them to *Däjjazmač* Ešäté (28), who was the queen's relative and lover (29), and to her guards. T'ovmačean agreed to this, and presented Ešäté with goods to a value of 150 *kuruṣ*, and, through Bijo, sent further gifts worth 70 *kuruṣ* to the royal guards. Three days later a large crowd arrived, singing and drumming, bringing the anticipated gifts to T'ovmačean from the king and queen. T'ovmačean ran forward with joy to receive the presents expecting to obtain gifts worth five of six thousand *kuruṣ*. What an unfortunate disappointment was in store for him, for, when they took him into

(28) Presumably *Däjjazmač*, earlier *Balambaras* Ešäté who is often mentioned in the chronciles of this period and became ruler of Damot shortly earlier in 1762. I Guidi, *Annales Regum 'Iyāsu et 'Iyo'as*, pp. 180, 184, 188-192, 194, 207, 213; H. Weld Blundell, *op. cit.*, pp. 208-210

(29) After the death of her first husband, emperor Bakaffa, Mentewwäb is said by Bruce to have «descended to a variety of attachments of short duration». Bruce, *op. cit.*, (1790), vol. II, p. 612. One of these, if we can believe T'ovmačean, must have been with *Däjjazmač* Ešäté, but no such association is mentioned either in the chronicles or by Bruce.

the room where the gifts were, he found only a cow, a sheep, ten chickens, fifty pieces of bread, and a jar of water, but nothing else. He turned round to his adviser to ask if that was all they had brought with so much ceremony? The man, realising at once that T'ovmačean was unimpressed, replied that what had been brought was to be his daily rations. T'ovmačean exclaimed that he would have been satisfied with only one sheep and two chickens a day, «for what am I going to do with the remainder? I, a poor man, gave presents worth, 1,400 *kuruṣ*, expecting, in accordance with the custom of my country to receive from the king three-fold. I never imagined that what has just occurred could happen!» One of the queen's counsellors duly reported all this to his mistress who thereupon summoned Bijo and told him to comfort T'ovmačean, and tell him to be ready, for next month he would be given an important position, and that if he had need of anything he should inform Bijo. The latter suggested that the queen should give T'ovmačean 20 *wäqét* (30) of gold, worth 500 *kuruṣ*, to reimburse him for that amount which he had borrowed while in Meṭewwa. Then Bijo went to T'ovmačean, reprimanded him for having voiced his discontent, and, handing him the 20 *wäqét*, informed him that the following month he would be appointed to a higher post.

T'ovmačean, though somewhat comforted, replied, «I am a merchant, and all I want to do is to sell my goods, and return home, as I have a wife and family, and am not interested in any office!» Bijo replied, «Now that you are convinced that this is not the place to sell your goods, and since you have incurred so many expenses, you should try to recoup at least part of them by remaining here for several years. Do not tell anyone that you wish to leave». T'ovmačean, on hearing these words, became contented again, and began to consort with the people of the city, and also with the priests. Every month he received his salary, and came to be loved by most of the citizens, especially by *Däjjazmač* Ešäté who several times invited him to dinner. One day *Däjjazmač* Ešäté informed him that he (T'ovmačean) was about to be appointed the queen's treasurer (31), that he would be called to the

(30) *Wäqét*, an Amharic weight of Arabic origin, roughly the equivalent of an ounce, and the principal measurement for the weighing of gold. Guidi, *Vocabolario amarico-italiano*, col. 577.

(31) T'ovmačean, though writing of his appointment as «treasurer» does not in fact seem to have been the chief of the treasury, or *eqa bét*, for that institution

palace, and that he should therefore make himself ready. When T'ovmačean heard this he thought that it would be an important post, with a large salary, and therefore returned home happy. At this time the queen's treasurer was an Armenian, an uncultivated and demanding man who had been there a long time, and was called *Usta* (32) *Selef* (33). After some days the latter was summoned to the palace and ordered to give an account of the treasure entrusted to him, and to explain what he had done with it. T'ovmačean and his son Pōłos were also called, and with them six accountants. In front of each of the latter was a large piece of parchment on which they were to write their accounts, and *baklay* (34) which they were to use for counting. Parchments and *baklay* were also given to T'ovmačean and to his son. T'ovmačean, who was surprised that their method of counting was so rudimentary, put aside the parchment and the *baklay*, and took from his pocket a silver pen and paper, and began in his own way to write down the amounts in figures. While the others were calculating by adding and subtracting the *baklay*, T'ovmačean quickly completed his arthmetic, and told those present what this or that amounted to.

appears to have been under the control of an Ethiopian who held the title of *Bajerond* of the *Eqa bét*. The courtier holding this position at the time of T'ovmačean's arrival in Gondär was, according to the chronicle, Ešäté Mammo who was replaced in September 1765 by Neṣa (or Henṣa) Krestos who held the post throughout the remainder of the Armenian's residence in Ethiopia. Guidi, *Annales Regum 'Iyāsu et 'Iyo'as*, pp. 203, 207, 212, 213, 230, 234.

(32) *Ustadh*, the Arabic for «master», also used in Ottoman Turkish.

(33) Though there is no record of this individual in the chronicle it is interesting to note that another foreigner, a *Gabṣawi*, i.e. Copt or perhaps other person of Orthodox faith, had been appointed as *Bajerond* of the *Eqa bét*, i.e. treasurer, in 1751. He was, however, replaced by an Ethiopian courtier in the following year. Guidi, *Annales Regum 'Iyāsu et 'Iyo'as*, pp. 164, 167. Bruce, it is interesting to note, refers to an Amenian who had been brought to Ethiopia at the time of emperor Iyasu II (died 1755) and had served as a companion of honour to emperor Iyo'äs, but was later expelled. The Scotsman, who met this courtier with his father at Loheia, in Arabia, in 1769, says he had «just then arrived from India, and had a considerable quantity of diamonds, and other precious stones to sell»; Bruce, *op. cit.* (1790), vol. II, pp. 666-7. Though it would be tempting to identify these Armenian jewellers with the T'ovmačeans the chronology would appear to make this impossible — unless we assume that the Scotsman's memory was here, as elsewhere, seriously at fault.

(34) *Baklay*, probably a rendering of the Amharic *beqéla*, or bean, which could well have been used as an aide to counting. Guidi, *Vocabolario amarico-italiano*, col. 335.

The accountants were amazed because they were scarcely able to count. The officials then went and reported everything to the queen. She summoned T'ovmačean, and told him that her people were making their calculations with *baklay,* «but it is your duty to teach them to do the accounts in figures, and I will reward you for this». The treasurer took seven days to complete his accounts, and, on his submitting them, it transpired that he owed the king 300 *wäqét* of gold, or 7,500 *kuruṣ*, for which reason his house and land was confiscated, after which he was still 70 *wäqét* in debt, and was accordingly imprisoned.

After this a celebration was organised, and T'ovmačean and his companions were invited, and formally presented to the queen and to her grandson who gave him the keys of the treasury, and appointed him treasurer. This happened on August 13, 1764. Then the princes and all the courtiers accompanied T'ovmačean to the treasury where he was entrusted with full responsibility over it, with thirty accountants to help him. Many people came from all over the country to congratulate T'ovmačean, and among them was Gevorg (i.e. the Ethiopian name Giyorgis) (35), the priest of the church, and many other ecclesiastics. On August 15, two days after he took over the post, there occurred the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (36). On that day the queen's grandson, who was then thirteen years old (37), was taken for the first time in procession to church. T'ovmačean, as treasurer, was one of those presented, together with other guests, among them Greeks (38) and Muhammadans (39) dressed in long robes.

(35) The Giyorgis referred to was conceivably Fesa Gérgis who later became *Aläqa,* or head, of Ledata church in Gondär in 1766. Guidi, *Annales Regum 'Iyāsu et 'Iyo'as,* p. 231.

(36) The Feast of the Assumption, the exact date of which varies with Easter, but usually falls in the Ethiopian month of Nähasé, or August. H. M. Hyatt, *The Church of Abyssinia,* London, 1928, pp. 155, 157; Aymro Wondmagegnehu and J. Motovu, *The Ethiopian Church,* Addis Ababa, 1970, p. 61.

(37) Iyo'äs was indeed still little more than a youth, as evident from the chronicle which states that he had been a «small child» at the time of his accession in 1755, nine years earlier, Guidi, *Annales Regum 'Iyāsu et 'Iyo's,* p. 226, see also p. 176.

(38) On the Greek community which Bruce saw in Gondär later that decade see Bruce, *op. cit.* (1790), II, pp. 633-4 *et passim;* also R. Pankhurst, *An Introduction to the Economic History of Ethiopia,* London, 1961, pp. 292, 301, 304-5, and P. G. Fouyas, «James Bruce of Kinnaird and the Greeks in Ethiopia», *Abba Salama* II, (1971), pp. 161-178.

(39) The Muslims of Gondär lived not in the city proper, but rather, as Bruce explains, in a «large town» in the valley below it. This settlement had a population

Attendants with trumpets and flutes (40) went in front of the king. T'ovmačean and his son Pōłos, who were dressed for the occasion in expensive garments, walked at the head of the procession. Within three months the six accoutants were taught the new method of keeping the books, the palace abandoned the use of the *baklay*, and for his services the king and queen rewarded T'ovmačean with 20 *wäqét* of gold which is worth 500 *kuruṣ*.

Do not imagine that the treasures of the Abyssinian king are as great as ours, for they do not have immeasurable quantities of gold and silver jewellery. I am going to explain in a few words what the treasures consisted of. First and foremost they do not have jewellery. In one of the chests there were some emeralds which T'ovmačean exchanged with their permission for *mérčan* (41) which were more valuable. The treasury also contained the fine weapons and cloth of former kings, and their names, and rolls and rolls of material of various colours, among them fifteen or twenty rolls of heavy Venetian gold cloth which was used for the king's vestments and adornments, and ten or fifteen rolls of silver cloth, as well as 150 Ottoman rifles. There were likewise in the hands of the treasurer from 3,000 to 4,000 *wäqét* of gold, (one *wäqét* of gold equals 25 *kuruṣ*) or 75,000 *kuruṣ*, which constitutes 150 sacks. The weight of a single *wäqét* is eight drachma of Constantinople (42). 3,000 *wäqét* of gold is paid to the king by one of the conquered territories of this realm, and passed to the treasurer to provide the salaries of the soldiers. In return for selling the gold the treasurer receives ten per cent, which makes 15 sacks. Besides this he possesses a village from which he obtains an income of 1,000 *kuruṣ* a month. He has is in addition a monthly salary from the queen of 50 *kuruṣ*. His total wages are therefore 10,000 *marč'il* or *kuruṣ* and he

which he variously described as consisting of «about a thousand» and «about 3,000». Bruce, *op. cit.*, (1790), vol. III, pp. 198, 381.

(40) The use of such musical instruments was reported half a century or so earlier by the French traveller Charles Poncet who described a procession at Gondär where the Emperor marched with tumpets, kettle-drums, flutes and hautboys which «made a good agreable harmony». W. Foster, *The Red Sea and Adjacent Countries at the Close of the Seventeenth Century*, London, 1949, p. 117.

(41) Perhaps *märäged*, the Ethiopic term for an emerald, Dillmann, *op. cit.*, cols. 170-1; Guidi, *Vocabolario amarico-italiano*, col. 69.

(42) The *wäqét* was generally considered equal not to eight but ten drachma. H. Ludolf, *Lexicon Aethiopico-Latinum*, Frankfurt, 1699, col. 318; Bruce, *op. cit.*, (1790), vol. III, p. 55, vol. IV, p. 486.

gains 20 sacks of *kuruṣ* a year. His expenses, however, are likewise considerable. The upkeep of the thirty servants was expensive, although he was not wasteful, and spent very little on himself. He was in consequence unable to save enough to recoup the 1,500 *kuruṣ* he had spent on the gifts presented to the king. T'ovmačean was treasurer for eighteen months, and when he left Gondär he had only 40 *wäqét* of gold worth 1,000 *kuruṣ*, though some people who did not know this assumed that he earned a vast amount while in Abyssinia. Subtracting the expense of his travels from Gondär to Jeddah the 15,000 *kuruṣ* was insufficient, and he had still to spend another twenty-six months there, and was not able to see his son Pōłos.

Leaving all this aside let us return to history.

The queen, who was known as Etégé, had been the wife of the king (43) by whom she had a married son. On the death of her husband this son became king in his father's place. He in turn had a son. After reigning for four (44) years her son, the king, died, and queen *Etégé* became the ruler (45) as her grandson was too young to govern being only five years old. As soon as he reached the age of sixteen she had, however, entrusted the government to him. When the king dies they bring one of the heirs from a mountain. For there is a high and inaccessible mountain six hours journey from Gondär where all the heirs of the Abyssinian line live (46). Their provisions, meat and vegetables, are obtained from farms there, and they have their own church and priests. There are special rules and regulations for members of the royal family to follow, and anyone going there from the city without the approval of the king would not be allowed to enter, except with his permission. There is no path up the mountain which can be reached only from one place with the help of a rope 150 double arms' span long by which visitors are raised or lowered. And if the

(43) Empress Mentewwäb's first husband was emperor Bäkaffa (reigned 1721-1730) by whom she had a son, emperor Iyasu II, who succeeded his father. Iyasu was in turn succeeded, in 1755, by his son Iyo'äs who was a minor at the time of T'ovmačean's visit.

(44) Iyasu II in fact reigned almost 15 years from September 1730 to June 1755.

(45) Mentewwäb was, as T'ovmačean here indicates, regent for her son and later for her grandson. Guidi, *Annales Regum 'Iyāsu II et 'Iyo'as*, pp. 22, 177.

(46) The mountain of Wähni south-east of Gondär where members of the royal family were detained to prevent their conspiring against the reigning monarch. Guidi, *Annales Regum 'Iyāsu II et 'Iyo'ās*, pp. 289-93; T. Pakenham, *The Mountains of Rasselas*, London, 1959, *passim*.

king is to be taken down he and those with him keep their order, each descending according to his rank.

In T'ovmačean's time queen *Etégé* ruled the country, with great success, as her grandson was then still but fourteen years old. T'ovmačean as treasurer visited the palace several times. The fourteen year old king had occasion to see T'ovmačean's son Pōłos who was the same age as he, white and attractive. The king later told his grandmother queen *Etégé* that he had met T'ovmačean's son and asked her to permit him to come and play with him. The queen summoned T'ovmačean and asked him to allow his son Pōłos to go to the palace two or three times a week to be with her grandson. T'ovmačean was at first not too happy at this, for he was afraid that his son would become spoiled, but he duly gave him permission to spend his time with the king. Pōłos later acted as an intermediary to the king, and succeeded in getting many of his father's requests granted, for he became very bold and influential at the palace, and whatever demands he made to the king or the princes on his father's behalf were immediately agreed to. In this way Pōłos was able to do many things both for himself and for his father because he was very well regarded.

All the city's craftsmen work under the supervision of the treasurer, as do the weavers, who are all Muhammadans (47) and slaves, and the Jews (48), who are also slaves. If any of these people committed an offence the usual practice was for them to be seized, taken to the treasurer at the palace, thrown into jail, and kept there for six or seven days, or even ten, according to their crime. The treasurer, T'ovmačean, on the other hand, used to pardon them, and did not treat them harshly, and even allowed them food. In some instances, however, he might whip them, and, depending on their offence, give them 100, 150, 200 or up to 300 lashes. This punishment he had learnt from the Muhammadans of Constantinople who inflicted it on the Armenians and Greeks, and, following this practice, T'ovmačean did it to the Muhammadans. The latter became so afraid of the whip that they were prepared to go hungry rather than be flogged. They protested to the

(47) Weaving was an occupation in Ethiopia in which Muslims were traditionally much employed. R. Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia 1800-1935*, Addis Ababa, 1968, p. 40.

(48) Ethiopian Jews, or *Fälaša*, were engaged in manual work in and around Gondär as masons, roof-builders and potters. Bruce, *op. cit.* (1790), vol. II, p. 634, vol. III, pp. 190, 195.

queen, but she merely reprimanded them for this, and they returned shamefaced, for T'ovmačean had beforehand obtained her permission to dispense this penalty.

On December 25 they celebrated the birth of Our Lord (49), and at the end of the year there were great festivities at the palace. During the celebrations the queen sat with her gransdon on a high decorated platform (50). Servants attended at each table before the queen. The nobles did not eat with their own hands for it was considered shameful to do so in the presence of the queen. The guests merely opened their mouths, and the servants fed them by taking morcels of food and placing them in their mouths (51). The bread is not made of wheat, but of some other grain, *tief* (52), and was very soft; it was dipped into the food and a morcel was pushed into the mouth with fingers and thumb. T'ovmačean and his son were present at the banquet. They sat near the queen, but at a separate table, and they fed themselves in accordance with their own customs with the help of wheat bread, while the other guests, who were fed by their servants, and considered themselves thus honoured, jeered at them. T'ovmačean and his son, nevertheless, ate unperturbed. The queen also laughed at T'ovmačean. When the meal was nearly finished raw meat from freshly slaughtered cattle was brought in, and also fruit, and the servants began cutting up the meat into pieces, and putting it into the mouths of their masters. T'ovmačean was asked if he too would like to eat raw meat. He not only declined, but refused to allow those near him to do so. Queen *Etégé* was pleased at this as she also did not eat raw meat. When T'ovmačean realised that she did not approve of the custom he in turn began boldly to jeer at the other guests. Because they eat raw meat they drink a certain kind of medicinal liquid (53)

(49) This statement is inexplicable, for the Ethiopians, as Eastern Christians, celebrated Christmas on January 7. Hyatt, *op. cit.*, pp. 158, 169; C. H. Walker, *The Abyssinian at Home,* London, 1933, p. 81.

(50) This raised platform, which was screened off, was soon afterwards also described by Bruce. Bruce, *op. cit.*, (1790), vol. III, pp. 266, 271-2, vol. IV, pp. 73-76.

(51) The custom whereby Ethiopian nobles were fed by their servants and others was well established, as noted by Bruce who observes, «No man in Abyssinia, of any fashion, feeds himself, or touches his own meat», Bruce, *op. cit.* (1790), vol. III, p. 303.

(52) *Téf,* or finger millet *(Eragrostis tef),* was one of the commonest cereals in Ethiopia. H. F. Mooney, *A Glossary of Ethiopian Plant Names,* Dublin, 1963, p. 39.

(53) The practice of eating raw meat, and the resultant prevalence of tapeworm, in Ethiopia is well attested. The most common taenicide was an infusion of the

four times a year, for otherwise they would suffer from tapeworm and their teeth would decay. T'ovmačean discovered this, and many of the princes, thereafter, refrained from consuming raw meat, and whenever he visited other people's houses they would immediately remove it from sight. Here I shall give an account of the reasons why they eat raw meat, and the origin of the custom, and of their eating habits ... (54).

So far I have related the eating manners of the nobles and described those who serve the food. The diners sit on both sides of a table, and in the middle is placed a huge pile of bread (55). It is so high that if the nobles wanted to eat it with their own hands they could not touch the top of it, as they are seated, but the servants, who are standing, can reach it, so the nobles are most conveniently fed. The cooks are obliged to be present at their masters' table, and before the meal they taste all the food on the table (56), after which the masters begin eating. They have a sauce which resembles *mačun* (i.e. *majun* = yogurt) used to give flavour to their meals, which they prepare and keep in their houses. It is made of the following materials. Firstly

flowers of the *kosso* tree *(Hagenia abyssinica)*, but there were many others. See R. Pankhurst, «The Traditional Taenicides of Ethiopia», *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, XXIV, no. 3 (1969), pp. 323-334.

(54) The next five pages of the manuscript are devoted to a long historical digression occasioned by the belief of the Ethiopians that the custom of eating raw meat had originated at the time of the conflict with Ahmäd Grañ, in the sixteenth century, when the Christians as T'ovmačean states, «could not light fires with which to cook because the smell of the smoke and the light of the fire would have attracted the attention of the Turks who would have killed them». This statement is interesting in that it would seem the first expression of a tradition which is known to have been later widely held. E. A. De Cosson, *The Cradle of the Blue Nile*, London, 1877, vol. II, p. 312; Gäbrä Sellasé, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 597-8. Though the practice may have owed something to the fighting with Grañ, it should be noted that the Ethiopians already consumed uncooked meat before that time as Alvares testifies. Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, vol. II, p. 150. Tapeworms did not of course cause tooth decay.

The ensuing paragraphs on the war (which are not here translated) are based on hearsay, and are essentially anachronistic in that T'ovmačean had been led to believe that the fighting and many of the events connected therewith took place at Gondär though the city had not been founded until almost a century later in 1636. The author also makes several factual errors which need not concern us.

(55) For in some ways a not dissimilar description of a royal feast see Bruce, *op. cit.* (1790), vol. III, pp. 301-306.

(56) A precaution of course against poisoning.

fresh *zenčēfil* (57), which grows plentifully, onions, garlic, red pepper, and salt mixed together in suitable proportions to make the sauce looking like *mačun*. They put neither salt nor anything else in their cooking and use only this sauce which they serve with a spoon, and makes a very tasty and noble food.

The preparation of wine is also surprising and interesting. They bring honey from the hive, place it a large container together with six times the amount of water, and then add the bark of a tree (58), dried and beaten which has acquired the consistency of ashes, after which they seal the opening of the vessel with a plate and clay. They then plaster the sides of the jar with cowdung (59) and set fire to it on all sides. When the dung is completely burnt they leave the container for three days and nights for it to cool and mature. Then they open the lid to find the honey turned to wax. They first remove the wax and strain the contents. By doing this three times they get rid of all the wax. They then transfer the honey wine to new vessels the tops of which are again sealed with clay, and put into the cellar for ten days. After the honey wine has been freed of all impurities which collect at the bottom of the container, and are thrown away, they leave it for a further five days, and then begin to drink it (60). It tastes like the smell of flowers, and does not intoxicate like wine made from grapes. It is an excellent drink, and even T'ovmačean learnt to consume it, and found it fine.

During Holy Week they eat only at mid-day after leaving church, and, like members of the Armenian church, observe two days of abstinence a week, Wednesdays and Fridays, but can eat fish on those days as well as in Holy Week (61). A child whether male or female is

(57) Perhaps *zenjebel*, or ginger, or *siänafeč*, or mustard. The use of the latter in Ethiopia had earlier been reported by Alvares. See Mooney, *op. cit.*, pp. 34, 45; Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, vol. II, p. 390.

(58) The fermenting agent traditionally used in the preparation of *täj*, or Ethiopian mead, was *gešo (Rhamnus prinoides)*. Eshete Tadesse, «Preparation of tag among the Amhara of Šawa», *University College of Addis Ababa Ethnological Society Bulletin*, VIII (1958), pp. 101-2; Mooney, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

(59) Wood being scarce cow-dung was in fact the main burning agent in many parts of Ethiopia.

(60) For a modern account of the traditional Ethiopian method of preparing *täj* see Eshete Tadesse, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-109.

(61) On the abstinence ordained by the Ethiopian church see *inter alia* Hyatt, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-159.

circumcised eight days after birth (62), and is baptised and confirmed after 40 days (63). For confirmation they use olive oil which they bless. They observe Saturday almost as the Sabbath (64), and people do not work on that day. They do not use guns to hunt birds, neither do they eat their flesh. Some people keep lion cubs in their houses, and allow them to roam freely. One day T'ovmačean met in the street a family with a lion, and when it saw T'ovmačean, a white man dressed in unusual costume, it began to roar. The master and servants protected T'ovmačean from the beast, because it was not accustomed to seeing white men, but T'ovmačean presented it with a cow to eat and became its friend.

At about this time (65) there was in Gondär a young Armenian jeweller from Constantinople who was called Step'an and was very strong and brave. He came to T'ovmačean asking to be introduced to queen *Etégé*. T'ovmačean went to the queen and introduced the man whom she accepted into her service with a salary of one *wäqét* of gold a month which is 24 *kuruṣ*. He worked under T'ovmačean's supervision as a jeweller in the palace. There is at the palace a large open space where during celebrations they let lions free with a few bulls. The royal dignitaries and the populace stand around and watch how the lion after a great struggle kills the bull which it takes by the throat, and sucks its blood, after which the animal sinks to the ground and the visitor begins to tear it up. This is regarded as a great sport. Step'an seeing this, and finding it a cruel and disgusting passtime, went to T'ovmačean and proposed an alternative, saying,

(62) Circumcision, as corroborated for example by Mansfield Parkyns, was invariably carried out in Ethiopia after eight days, whether the child was male or female. Parkyns, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 35.

(63) Baptism and confirmation in the Ethiopian (and Armenian) church take place immediately after each other on the same day. According to Ethiopian custom the ceremony for boys occurs, as the author says, 40 days after birth, but, in the case of girls, after 80. Parkyns, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 35; Hyatt, *op. cit.*, p. 91; Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 4; Aymro Wondmagegnehu and J. Motovu, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-33.

(64) The keeping of Saturday as well as Sunday as the Sabbath was a long established practice in Ethiopia, and, as recently explained by Dr. Taddesse Tamrat, was on occasion a subject of controversy. Taddesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270-1520*, Oxford, 1972, pp. 207-209, 213-219, 222, 224-230, 291. See also the account of Alvares in Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, vol. I, p. 63, vol. II, p. 357.

(65) The paragraph beginning «At about this time» is unnumbered and it is uncertain where in the text the author wished to place it.

«I have a Persian knife with which I could kill my first lion». Tʿovmačean advised him against undertaking any such exploit, but the man refused to listen. He went to the palace, and told the officials and soldiers there that if they gave him 50 *wäqét* of gold, which is 1,200 *kuruṣ*, «I will kill the largest lion, not with a gun, but with my Persian knife. If I succeed give me fifty *wäqét* of gold; if the lion kills me let the blood be on my head». (This he wrote in a letter). The letter containing Stepʿan's request was discussed at the palace where Tʿovmačean, who was present, refused to give his permission. When Stepʿan heard that it was Tʿovmačean who had obstructed his wishes he went to the latter's house, and shouted abuses, declaring, «You are not my father. I have always been your friend, and now you are repaying good with evil by depriving me of fifty *wäqét* of gold». Tʿovmačean's servants rushed out of the house wishing to kill the man, but their master immediately appeared on the scene, called them in, and prevented them from doing him any harm. A few days afterwards the man handed in another letter at the palace, declaring that Tʿovmačean was not his father. The palace officials discussed the matter among themselves, reasoning that they would not be committing any sin by agreeing to the offer, for the man had himself volunteered to sell his life for 50 *wäqét* of gold. They therefore decided to give their consent in order to judge the bravery of the white man. Then queen *Etégé* and her grandson, the noblemen and citizens, all assembled at the arena on the appointed day to watch the fight between Stepʿan and the lion. The Abyssinians deliberately intended to allow the animal to kill Stepʿan so as to avoid having to pay the 50 *wäqét* of gold. Men and women gathered, as well as soldiers and military commanders with shining spears. Then Stepʿan, trusting to the strength of his arms, entered the arena, greeted the crowd, made the sign of the Cross, and prayed to God for His help. Stepʿan, who had put on a cape, kept his left hand folded, and held the knife, which was covered by his sleeve, in the right. Kneeling down he began to crawl forward. He did this so that if the lion hit him he would not fall over. Then they released the lion, which, seeing Stepʿan on his knees, did not charge at once, but reposed a little to build up its appetite, and then began stealthily to advance. Stepʿan also started to move forward. Then the lion jumped at him. Stepʿan slapped the beast's face with the sleeve of his cloak, and then with his right hand struck with the knife at its throat. The beast fell, and the people began to shout at the victory of the white man whose renown grew great. The lion-keepers bandaged

Stepʿan's head, for he had a small wound on it. Then he cut off the animal's head with his knife, stuck it on the blade, and stepped forward in front of the queen proudly to claim the victory. He was immediately given his 50 *wäqét* of gold, and the officals collected another 50 from the crowd, which made a total of 100, equal to 2,400 *kuruṣ*. This achievement enhanced the reputation of all white men, Tʿovmačean included. After the contest Stepʿan went with some of his relatives to Tʿovmačean's house, and asked forgiveness for the things he had said. Later, this Stepʿan, because he had committed a fraud, was sent outside Gondär to a place called Kallayi (66) where gold was obtained. There he quarrelled with the guards, and killed some of them, and in retaliation hundreds of people collected with spears and killed him. Such was the end of a man who did not know his limits, and who by his stupid pride was responsible for his own death — from such people may the Lord save us!

The Abyssinians, men and women, walk about bare-footed, their heads uncovered. Women servants go naked except for a waist-cloth (67), while men servants wear shorts down to the knees, as well as a kind of bed-sheet which serves as a coat (68). When they come to see their masters they tie this cloth round their waist and stand before them naked from their waist upwards (69). In their houses the nobles are bare-footed, and have their heads uncovered, but when they go out they wear shoes the ends of which are twisted upwards like small boats (70). There are no carriages, and none are used. The well-to-do travel on mules, while those of moderate means ride on horses. While on mule — or horse — back riders take off their

(66) Kallayi. It has proved impossible to identify this place.

(67) Alvares, a couple of centuries earlier, had observed that in Ethiopia «married women wear very little covering, and single women, who have neither husbands nor lovers, have less shame». Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, vol. I, p. 143.

(68) The traditional Ethiopian *šämma*, or toga, worn by persons of all walks of life.

(69) On this long-established Ethiopian mode of showing deference, see A. J. Hayes, *The Source of the Blue Nile*, London, 1905, plate opposite p. 69.

(70) The use of such slippers in Ethiopia was later noted by Mansfield Parkyns who wrote that the feet were «seldom covered», but that «great ladies, and some one or two elderly chiefs, wear a sort of clumsy shoe made of red and black leather, with the toes very much turned back, like some of the Indians». Parkyns, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 29.

shoes, because the opening of their stirrups is only very small, large enough to hold but two toes, the big one and the one next to it, while the three others remain outside. When the streets are full of mud they put their legs up to the knees into a kind of sack, so that they do not become dirty, and they travel in this manner until they reach their destination whereupon they take it off. It is in this undignified manner that they ride on a mule or horse. The king and queen travel in exactly the same way. Horses and mules are not shod. People do not carry watches, and do not use them, for their clock is the sun. They divide the day into four parts. They make a man stand in front of the sun, and, looking at his shadow, they can say, «It is not yet mid-day, for the second half is not full», or, «It is after mid-day», if the third part is not full, and the same for the fourth (71).

The Abyssinian patriarchs have successively been brought from the city of Alexandria, from the seat of St. Peter, from the Coptic monastery of St. Mark, and, elected from among the brethren and the bishops, are taken to Abyssinia and made patriarch (72). The brethren of the Coptic church are never uncouth or uneducated, as T'ovmačean knows for he has been to the city of Alexandria and has visited the monastery and seen them. The priests of the Abyssinian church do not marry (73), and there are also *vardapets* [i.e. archimandrites] (74) who are also celebate, and are compelled to wear a cassock throughout the day. Over this garment they wear various kinds of multi-coloured crosses. These are the preachers. There are many famous churches, all of them circular (75), as in a plan I have provided (Fig. 1), and, as

(71) On the traditional Ethiopian method of measuring the time see O. Neugebauer, *Ethiopic Astronomy and Computus*, Vienna, 1979, and on the use of shadows see also R. Pankhurst, «Eugène Gaspard Marin's impressions of Addis Ababa in 1930-1931», *Africa-Terveren*, XXII, nos. 2-4 (1967), p. 99.

(72) On relations between the Ethiopians and the Coptic Church of Egypt see A. P. Stanley, *Lectures on the History of the Eastern Church*, London, 1883, pp. 10-12; Hyatt, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-6; E. Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians*, London, 1973, p. 103.

(73) Priests of the Ethiopian church, it should be noted, could be married before ordination, but not thereafter. Hyatt, *op. cit.*, p. 53; Aymro Wondmagegnehu and Motovu, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

(74) T'ovmačean, who uses the Armenian term *vardapet*, is referring here to Ethiopian monks on whom see Taddesse Tamrat, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-7, 107-118, 163-167; Hyatt, *op. cit.*, 69-72.

(75) Though the majority of Ethiopian churches are round, as T'ovmačean suggests, there were of course many rectangular churches, notably in Tegré, as well as several even in Gondär.

with the Armenians, have but one service a day in each church. For the communion bread they use *nšxar* [unleavened bread] which they distribute to the communicants after the service. As with the Armenians the officiating priest does not go home at night, but sleeps in

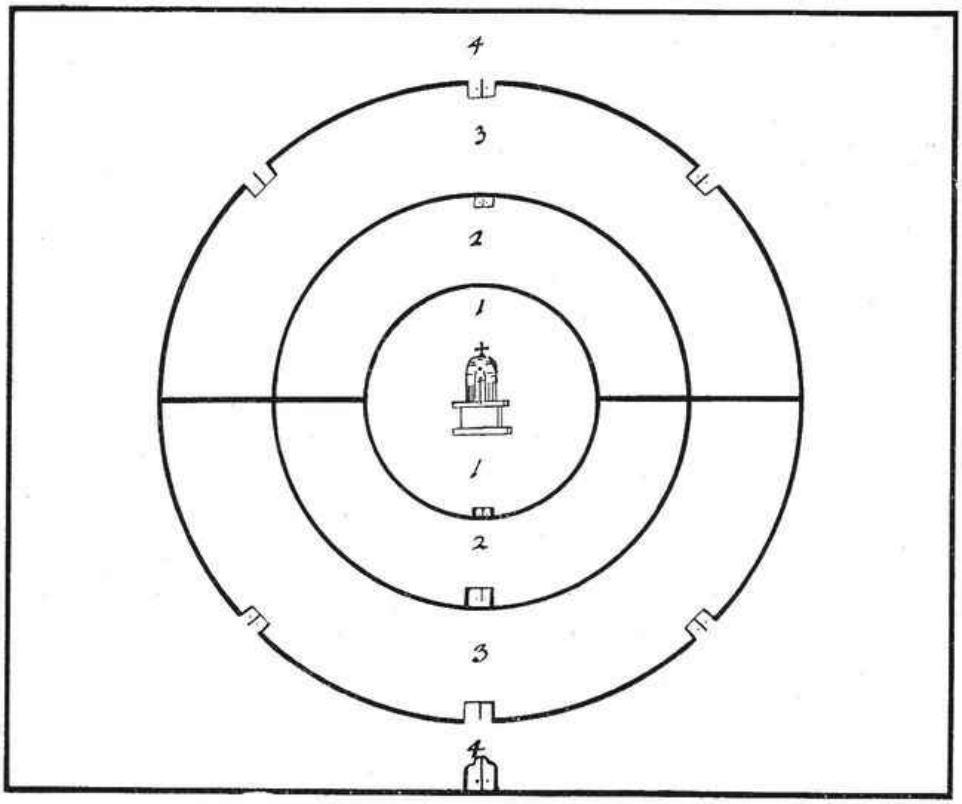


Fig. 1. T'ovmačean's plan of an Ethiopian church; east is at the top.

the church. Each church has several priests whose duty it is to go everyday to perform the services and say Mass. If any priest fails to attend church he forfeits his income for the day. Their churches are round, and are divided into three parts (76). In the central the

(76) On the arrangement of Ethiopian churches see also Bruce, *op. cit.* (1790), vol. III, p. 314. The three concentric sections are the *Mäqdas,* or sanctuary, which is the innermost part of the church, the *Keddest,* or nave, which lies around it, and the *Qené Mahlet,* by the building's exterior walls. Aymro Wondmagegnehu and Motovu, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

priests and assistants perform the liturgy; in the second, the unmarried gather; and in the third, the married. The fourth area is outside the church where the sinners remain in the open air. If anyone, whether married or unmarried, considers that he has committed a sin, and feels guilty, he does not go to his normal place in the church, but stands outside with the sinners until he has confessed. No one mocks them for having sinned. The priests when outside the church wrap round their heads a white cloth, the top of which is open, and during the service they remove it, and hold it in their hands, and sing alternately on both sides of the church. That is how they carry out the service. Usually the Abyssinians have but one wife, but some also keep concubines, and they look after the children born from them. If anyone, either of the nobility or of the ordinary people, dies, his relatives and servants disfigure their faces. They tear them so much that blood pours out, and this they take to the deceased (77).

They have an unusual manner of washing clothes that may seem strange to readers. T'ovmačean himself had his clothes washed in this way. Washing is done by men. They take the dirty clothes to the river, and then spread out a large hide, and place stones around it, thus forming a basin of considerable size. They first put into it the white garments and pour cold water over them; then they stamp on them jumping and singing to clean them. You thus see them wash the clothes not with hot, but cold water, and they manage to whiten the clothes without soap. The Abyssianians collect a type of plant called *endoy* (78) which they dry and then pound until it becomes an ash-coloured powder. They then spread two or three handfuls of it over the clothes, and again stamp on them, thereby creating more foam than with ordinary soap. The process is repeated three times,

(77) The Ethiopian practice of disfiguring the face as part of the mourning ritual was subsequently described by other writers. Parkyns, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 56; Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 59; Negga Tessema, «The Death Customs in the Province of Tigre», *University College of Addis Ababa Ethnological Bulletin*, V (1956), p. 13; Fassika Billete, «The Death Customs among the Amharas of Šawa», *idem*, VII (1957), p. 25.

(78) *Endod*, or *Pircunia abyssinica*, the use of which for washing was reported by numerous travellers in Ethiopia, among them the Jesuit Almeida. Beckingham and Huntingford, *Some Records of Etqiopia*, pp, 98-9, The washing of clothes in Ethiopia was, as T'ovmačean says, traditionally a man's occupation.

and as a result the garments become as white as snow. They wash the coloured clothes in the same way but separately (79).

It is worth knowing that when they go to war against unbelievers instead of severing the heads of their enemies as we do in our city (80), they cut off the privy parts of those who are killed (81). These they put into a sack, and bring to Gondär. Then the queen and king sit on a platform, and all the salted parts are displayed before them. An official counts and examines each one by one, for if any were circumcised it would have been that of a Christian. The man then throws them down in front of the queen as proof of bravery and receives a reward from her.

One day a well-known Abyssinian archimandrite and preacher came to the palace to see T'ovmačean, and, after a long disputation, declared, «All Christians should resemble Christ in their body through baptism and circumcision, but you who have baptism why do you not accept circumcision?» (82). T'ovmačean pondered a while, and then

(79) For descriptions of the traditional Ethiopian method of washing clothes see De Cosson, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 142; H. A. Stern, *Wanderings among the Falashas in Abyssinia*, London, 1868, p. 316; P. Mérab, *Impressions d'Ethiopie*, Paris, 1921-1929, vol. III, p. 592.

(80) Constantinople.

(81) The practice of castration during or after battle is frequently mentioned in Ethiopian chronicles of the Gondär period. I. Guidi, *Annales Iohannis I, 'Iyāsu I et Bakāffā*, Paris, 1903, translation, p. 277; *idem*, *Annales Regum 'Iyāsu II et 'Iyo'as*, p. 79; Weld Blundell, *op. cit.*, pp. 208-9. See also C. S. Coon, *Measuring Ethiopia and Flight into Arabia*, p. 125 and preceding plate.

(82) Circumcision was long a matter of discussion and dispute between Ethiopian and other Christians. For the early history of this see Taddesse Tamrat, *op. cit.*, p. 209. Subsequently, in the sixteenth century, the Portuguese priest Alvares was asked why he and his compatriots «were not circumcised, since Christ had been». Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies*, vol. II, p. 349. A generation later emperor Gälawdéwos laid down in his Confession of Faith: «we do not circumcise after the manner of the Jews, for we know the word of the doctrine of Paul, the foundation of wisdom, who saith, 'circumcision availeth nothing, neither doth uncircumcision help, but rather the new creation, which is the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ'». Circumcision, he explained, was therefore practiced not «to observe the Law of the Pentateuch, but in accordance with the custom of the people». E. A. Wallis Budge, *A History of Ethiopia, Nubia and Abyssinia*, London, 1928, vol. II, pp. 354-5. Despite T'ovmačean's statement that privy parts were examined to ascertain that their owners were not circumcised, and therefore not Christian, it should be noted that circumcision was in fact also practised by most non-Christians of the area. See for example G. W. B. Huntingford, *The Galla of Ethiopia*, London, 1955, pp. 40, 47; I. M. Lewis, *Peoples of the Horn of Africa*, London, 1955,

replied, «We follow the command of Christ who told his Apostles to go and preach everywhere, teaching them to do what He commanded them, and to baptise in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. There was in this injunction no mention of circumcision. As for us who dwell in a Muhammadan country, if it were known that any of us had been circumcised he would immediately be seized and turned into a Turk (83). Your practice of circumcision is furthermore unnecessary as it is neither the command of Christ nor of the Apostles». Then the archimandrite replied, «You are right, and I only invited you to be circumcised because of my love for you. You know it». After saying this he departed. This invitation by the archimandrite became so widely known among the servants that even the queen heard about it. She called T'ovmačean and asked him, «Who was it that suggested you should be circumcised?» T'ovmačean, realising that she spoke in great anger, and not knowing her intentions, tried to hide the offender's identity, but on her insistence had to inform the queen that it was a preacher who had spoken by way of advice. This did not help, for she found out the name of the man, and ordered him to be summoned. While he was being searched for they were preparing the mules to take him into exile. He was duly brought before the queen who asked him, «Who appointed you to preach in the palace, and in particular to the white treasurer whose customs you do not know? For this offence I am going to send you to a place where you cannot do any more such preaching!» Then they made him sit on a mule, and sent him into exile. After a few days it became widely known that it was because of T'ovmačean that he had been exiled, and people came to him to appeal that he should help to free him. Though he was not in fact responsible for the preacher's exile he asked his son Pōłos to intervene, and the latter went to plead with the king who asked his mother *Etégé* for the man to return.

It is also worth knowing that the land of the Abyssinians has many kinds of minerals, such as red copper, which is called *paxər* (84), yellow copper, and iron. From Degsa to Adwa and Gondär there are many places on the way where iron is mined. On the other hand they do not have forests, and do not know how to mine gold. Two

pp. 25, 73, 105-6, 134-5; 169, and W. A. Shack, *The Central Ethiopians*, London, 1974, pp. 57, 87, 128-130.

(83) The term used in Armenian for a Muslim.

(84) *Paxər*, probably from Turkish *bakır*, copper.

or three days distance from Gondär there is a high hill containing gold which they cannot excavate. Instead they wait until there is heavy rain and hail storms after which the gold is washed down into the valley. When the water drains away the king sends two hundred men to collect and guard the gold. These men take pieces of bamboo half a span long and fashion them into belts which they tie around their waists. Then they search in the sand for the gold and when they find some they put it into their belts. A lot of gold, however, escapes the eyes of the officials, and people come and wash the sand, and in this manner they obtain gold, but they do not know how to purify it. T'ovmačean tried several times to get the sand collected, but he was not allowed to do so. After the gold has been found it is melted down, hundreds of drahms at a time, and brought to the queen who has it put in the treasury, and gives some to the treasurer. The latter cuts the gold into measures of 8 drahms, and wraps each in a piece of cloth and seals it. This 8 drahm packet of gold they term a *wäqét*. When he receives orders from the king to pay wages the treasurer hands out these little packets. If money is required for small purchases he gives one drahm of gold and receives in exchange for it 15 bars of salt (85). With this salt they do business with each other. When trading with one or two bars they may also break them into smaller pieces, and use them for exchange or consume them at home. This is how they have commercial intercourse with each other. Trade takes place two days a week when all the poor people go to market, and obtain what they need by bartering things, such as wheat for barley, chickens for meat, etc. Even in the city they do not have shops in which to sell things. They all keep in their houses stocks of grain for making bread, and they bake at home, for there are no bakers in the city. Except among the higher classes they do not use wheat for their bread.

Four hours journey from Gondär there is a large lake (86) which is the source of the Egyptian Nile. There are many islands there, on some of which there are hermits, monasteries and convents (87),

(85) On such bars of salt termed *amolé* in Ethiopia see R. Pankhurst, *An Introduction to the Economic History of Ethiopia*, pp. 261-265; *idem, Economic History of Ethiopia 1800-1935*, pp. 460-464.

(86) Lake Tana.

(87) On the islands of Lake Ṭana and their churches see Bruce, *op. cit.* (1790), vol. III, p. 387; R. E. Cheesman, *Lake Tana and the Blue Nile*, London, 1936, *passim*.

and the boats (88) travelling on the lake sometimes get stuck in the reeds. There are also in the lake many four-legged animals without tusks whose next of kin do not go into the water but remain on land (89). In several places men shoot them with guns, and kill them. The hunters take the meat, as well as the skin from which they make shields (90), for, after being dried, this skin, which was four fingers thick, has the thickness of only one finger, and is so tough that it can be pierced neither by a sword nor a bullet. In the land of the Abyssinians there are many and various kinds of animals, among them elephants, bears (91), lions, and thousands of monkeys which roam about in flocks of divers species. If these animals were not afraid of guns nobody would be able to travel. There are also crocodiles in the rivers which I, T'ovmačean, once encountered, but was saved from death.

So much for information about the capital, Gondär; let us now return to the history of the treasurer, T'ovmačean, for the year of Our Lord 1765.

T'ovmačean had an Abyssinian clerk who recorded, in his own language, the income and expenditure, and knew where T'ovmačean kept the keys of the gold chest where there were also twenty rolls of Venetian cloth and 200 *wäqét* of gold. During the Feast of the Holy Spririt (92) the treasury is closed for three days, and at that time a single guard is on duty at the entrance and also in the compound of the treasury. Whosoever knocks at the door the guard will not open it, except with the permission of the treasurer. The latter's house is in the palace compound a little distance away. The wicked clerk went and banged at the door of the treasury, telling the guard that he had been sent by T'ovmačean, whereupon the guard, knowing him, his position,

(88) A reference to the *tankwa,* or reed boats, traditionally used on the lake. See R. Pankhurst, *An Introduction to the Economic History of Ethiopia,* p. 276 and plate opposite p. 223.

(89) The presence of these animals, in fact hippopotami, had earlier been noted by Almeida who says that there were «many» such beasts in the lake who «come out to graze on land in some of the more level meadows». Beckingham and Huntingford, *Some Records of Ethiopia,* p. 35.

(90) For descriptions of such Ethiopian shields see De Cosson, *op. cit.,* vol. I, p. 104; Count Gleichen, *With the Mission to Menelik, 1897,* London, 1898, p. 199; J. Duchesne-Fournet, *Mission en Ethiopie (1901-1903),* Paris, 1908-9, vol. II, p. 332 and plate XXII.

(91) There are of course in fact no bears in Ethiopia.

(92) Pentecost, according to the Ethiopian church, one of the nine major feasts of Our Lord. Aymro Wandmagegnehu and Motovu, *op. cit.,* p. 58.

and the trust he enjoyed, believed him, opened the door and allowed him to enter the building, and then closed the door. Then the clerk told the guard that T'ovmačean had given him the keys to the treasury in order to collect some things to give to certain people as he had gone to some villages out of town. The clerk took out of his pocket a piece of twisted iron which he had previously prepared, and with it gained entry to the treasury. At this point the guard remembered that he was not supposed to allow anyone to take anything out, but the clerk bribed him with three *wäqét* of gold, thinking this would silence him. The clerk found the key of the chest and opened it, but wisely took only 30 *wäqét* of gold out of the 200 *wäqét* which were there. He also grabbed three rolls of cloth out of the twelve there. He gave three of the 30 *wäqét* of gold to the guard, and took another three himself, but did not dare to remove the remaining 24 *wäqét*, so he buried them in a corner of the room. He left the three rolls of cloth there too, thinking that if T'ovmačean did not notice them he could take them another time, but if the latter saw them he could say that he (T'ovmačean) had forgotten them and left them there. With this idea the guard was much relieved, and each of them richer by 3 *wäqét* of gold. They left the chest of gold open and in disorder, as they were afraid that T'ovmačean and his son Pōłos might at any moment appear on the scene. Then the clerk departed, leaving the guard behind.

At the end of the feast T'ovmačean gave the key to his son Pōłos and sent him to open the treasury. Pōłos went, and saw that the door had been forced, and he pushed it open without a key. Surprised at this he immediately sent one of the servants to tell his father to come at once. Father arrived, and, very surprised, opened the chest in which the gold was kept, and saw that it had been rifled. On checking the accounts he discovered that 30 *wäqét* of gold and three rolls of cloth were missing. He called the guard, and asked him who had entered the treasury, but the man replied that he did not know, and had not seen anyone. Then T'ovmačean had him chained in a cell, and ordered two of his servants to beat him. T'ovmačean again demanded who had came in, and the guard, unable to bear the pain, replied, «You sent your clerk who came in your name, and I opened the door, but I do not know anything». T'ovmačean thereupon had the guard locked up, and placed another man at the door.

After an hour the clerk arrived at the treasury to go, as usual, to his place of work. T'ovmačean stopped him, and ordered the servants to deprive him of his sword and the privileges he enjoyed as the

clerk of the king. Then they tied him up, and T'ovmačean said, «I did not send him on the feast day to take anything», and asked the clerk, «How dare you use my name to enter the treasury, and steal things?». The clerk answered that T'ovmačean knew him well enough to realise that the charge was false, but T'ovmačean replied, «You do not know me well enough, for if the king and queen hear about the theft they will hang you. You had better confess to me. I will not let anyone know, but if you refuse to tell the truth the king and queen will hang you!» Then T'ovmačean went and told the whole story to the queen who despatched her guards to the treasury. They tied up the clerk who pleaded his innocence by alleging that T'ovmačean had been selling treasury property for his own benefit, and now, knowing that things were missing, had invented the incident. The king's men, having heard this story, believed it, and reported it to the queen, but she, knowing T'ovmačean well, refused to accept it. She was convinced that T'ovmačean would not steal 30 *wäqét* of gold and three rolls of cloth, but if it had been two or three hundred *wäqét* of gold she might have believed it! T'ovmačean, learning of this conversation with the guards, went to the queen, and asked, «Why did you send people to investigate the matter when I had already made the clerk confess the theft, and why did you allow the man to make such allegations against me?». The queen replied, «I was informed about the crime by the guard, and will have to hang the clerk». T'ovmačean begged the queen not to hang either the clerk or the guard as he would like to procure full information on the theft through torture, after which she could do what she liked with them, and she gave him permission to do what he thought fit. T'ovmačean decided not to resort to immediate torture, but proposed that they prepare a feast at which the clerk would be allowed to eat and drink, after which his penis would be tied up to prevent him from urinating as this would force him to tell the truth. The queen agreed to the plan. T'ovmačean then went out, and ordered three servants to take the clerk from the cell, and tell him, «The palace authorities want to pardon you, and after this you will be free to go home». Then they all sat at table, and T'ovmačean, who had already given instructions to his servants, made the clerk drink. The man felt proud, for he thought that his accusations had been accepted, and that he had gained important friends. Then two faithful servants entered, and, shouting at T'ovmačean in a loud voice, demanded to know where was the clerk who was accused of stealing the gold, as the queen had ordered them to inves-

tigate the matter. T'ovmačean replied that he had invited the man to dine with him after which he would be allowed to return to his house. The two servants answered, «Before he is sent home we must interrogate him — and then you!»

Then they took the clerk to a cell, tied his hands and feet, and wound a soft piece of cloth round his testicles, thus making him uncomfortable, while T'ovmačean and three secretaries sat in front of the window, and wrote down everything the thief said good or bad. He at first made several accusations against T'ovmačean, but beginning to feel severe internal pains, begged to be untied, and promised if this was done to tell the truth. They replied, «Until you confess we will not undo you». Then he cried out, «I will tell the truth, provided you do not kill me!» T'ovmačean gave him this assurance. Then the clerk began to confess, and told them to go to the treasury hall and dig in the corner where they would find the 24 *wäqét* of gold. He added, «I took three *wäqét,* and gave three more to the guard. The three rolls of cloth are in the upper room». The three secretaries went and found all the things, and brought them to T'ovmačean who after three hours set the man free. The entire conversation had been written down, and was duly placed before the queen. She remarked that she been correct in asserting that T'ovmačean would not have stolen so small an amount, and expressed admiration at the cleverness with which he had succeeded in making the criminal confess. Then she gave orders that the clerk and the guard be hung facing each other. T'ovmačean, however, fell on his face before the queen, and begged her to set the culprits free as he had promised them this. The queen, who loved T'ovmačean greatly, yielded to this entreaty, but insisted that although they should not be killed they must be banished from the city. The secretary then went back to the prison, and told the two wrong-doers that the queen had at first decided to execute them, but since T'ovmačean had promised to free them, they were instead being sent into exile. They were then summoned to the palace, and ordered to bring with them the three *wäqét* of gold they had each stolen, but the clerk admitted he had spent one *wäqét* on his house. The queen pardoned him for this, and then exiled them both. T'ovmačean's prowess, and kindness in setting the thiefs free instead of taking revenge on them, and in allowing them to keep three *wäqét* of gold, which amounts to 75 *kuruṣ* brought him substantial fame in the city, as well as influence with the queen, and in consequence wherever he went he was given a great welcome.

After all this time T'ovmačean despaired of ever being able to return to his own city, for they did not want him to leave, and, rather than do so, kept on raising his salary. The fact that he had saved the lives of the two thieves, and the renown this had brought him, provided, however, a good opportunity for him to ask in addition to his post as treasurer that he be appointed customs officer. At this time a kind and honourable individual, and a good friend of T'ovmačean, came to the city. He was an adviser to the queen, and was called *Ato* (93) Haylu. T'ovmačean went to discuss the matter with him, and explained to him that as his expenses had increased, and he could no longer live on the salary of a treasurer alone, he wanted his friend to «request the queen to give me the post of customs officer as well». The man, by the gracious intervention of the Holy Virgin Mary and Saint Anthony, frowned a little and for a long time refrained from answering, and then, with a deep sigh and sense of pity, replied, «Does this mean that you do not want to remain in our country much longer?». T'ovmačean, as if awakening from a very deep sleep, said, «Can I leave?» His friend replied, «Why not, if that is really what you wish». Encouraged by this answer, T'ovmačean exclaimed, «Oh my master *Ato* Haylu, show me the way which I can depart from here!» Then the blessed *Ato* Haylu began to tell him, saying, «First, write a tragic letter as if received from home pleading with you to return. Second, there are seven advisers to the queen of whom I am not troubled about two as I shall speak to them, but as for the other four give them a gift of 100 *kuruṣ* each and go to their houses and read your letter as though it had come from your home. Every week we have a meeting with the queen. Come at that time, read out your letter requesting you to return home, and then leave. We shall then try to obtain permission from the queen».

The grace of the Lord and His providence arranged the theft which made T'ovmačean a great benefactor in the eye of the nobleman, *Ato* Haylu, who was to rescue him from the city, for on his recommendation T'ovmačean wrote a remarkably pathetic letter, and went with gifts to each of the advisers all of whom agreed to help him. When Saturday came everyone assembled at the palace, and T'ovmačean entered, weeping, with the letter in his hand, and began to read it. His

(93) *Ato*, an Ethiopian honorofic title applied at this time only to persons of substance. Guidi, *Vocabolario amarico-italiano*, col. 457; Gäbrä Sellasé, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 67.

son Pōłos acted as translator of the letter, for he had learnt the Abyssinian language. Then the blessed queen Etégé commanded T'ovmačean to withdraw, and return after a week to obtain her answer to his request. This happened on November 15, 1765. Then, on the following week, T'ovmačean went again to the palace to receive the queen's reply. The permission was drafted in a way that suggested that T'ovmačean had desired to depart, but to leave his son behind. This was because the queen's grandson would not let the latter go as he was his favourite playmate. T'ovmačean was to stay in the city for another four months until Match 6, 1766, the end of the year for them (94), and then hand over the accounts as of March to his son Pōłos who was to be appointed treasurer in his place. This was how the queen's reply was formulated, and the fact that Pōłos had to remain behind saddened T'ovmačean and he wanted to say so. However, when the young man heard that the queen was going to allow his father to depart, and wanted to keep him as treasurer instead, he advised his father not to question the decision, «for it is possible that on my account they will also stop you from going. Leave me here, and I will join you later. Since you have received permission to depart, prepare to do so. That is the only way we can be saved». The father replied, «If I go and leave you here, because you are young they will overawe you, and make you marry, after which you will not be able to go away at all». His son promised, however, that he would not marry, get lost, or abandon his faith. Then the father, trusting his son, made all the necessary preparations, and purchased many splendid gifts to present to the high dignitaries in Meṭewwa and Jeddah.

When the time came to depart T'ovmačean took his son and went to the queen and king, and, holding his son in his arms, gave him to the queen, saying, «He is no longer my son, but yours, and the king's». They received the boy with pleasure. The queen asked the whereabouts of the red ring which T'ovmačean had earlier sought to give to the king. T'ovmačean rushed to his house, and brought the ring, which was worth 500 *kuruṣ*. The queen, not knowing its value, thought it was worth only 40 or 50 drachma, and on that basis decided to pay T'ovmačean 20 *wäqét* of gold which makes 500 drachma — much less than its real value. As an act of grace she also gave T'ovmačean ten sheets of blank paper on which were printed only the seal of the king and queen, so that «whoever sees our seals will receive you gra-

(94) The Ethiopian calendar year in fact ends early in September.

ciously, and whatever you write beneath them will be performed». Though T'ovmančean knew that the papers were worthless he accepted them as he did not want to appear ungrateful, and one of these seals, never previously seen, I attach to this document (95). In some places when people saw the seal of an Abyssinian king they showed external respect, and it was the subject of questioning and the like.

After remaining in Gondär for 22 months I departed with great joy on March 3, 1766, sad because I was separated from my son Pōłos, but happy that I was at last free to escape from the sad city. Several servants and a large crowd including his son accompanied T'ovmačean. At mid-day they all rested and had lunch. T'ovmačean wept during the meal at being obliged to leave his son behind. After this they separated. Pōłos and the servants then returned to Gondär, while T'ovmačean and twenty servants journeyed to Adwa where he arrived on March 13. When we had passed through it on our way to Gondär the ruler of the place was *Däjjazmač* Mika'él (96) about whom I wrote earlier. Because they had been close friends, T'ovmačean was not allowed to leave for five days during which time the wages of his servants were paid for him. Then, having been given many presents, he left Adwa on March 18. After he had journeyed for three days robbers broke into his tent at night, and stole all his clothes and other belongings, without the twenty servants who were with him knowing, but by the grace of God the thieves did not see the chest of precious stones which had been placed under his bed. The next morning, after searching for the robbers in vain, they set forth for Degsa which is on the northern borders of the Abyssinian kingdom. In passing through that place on his way to Gondär T'ovmačean had presented a sheep to the poor. I wrote about it earlier. Now he sacrificed two sheep. He prayed to the merciful God who had saved him that He would deliver also his son Pōłos — who in fact left Gondär five months later, and in due course caught up with his father in Venice.

Five days after setting forth from Degsa, T'ovmačean reached

(95) A photograph of this seal is reproduced in R. Pankhurst, «Ethiopian Royal Seals of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries», *Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Rotterdam, 1985.

(96) Mika'él, to judge from the chronicle of the time, was then on campaign, and did not return to Adwa until the end of May. Guidi, *Annales Regum 'Iyāsu II et 'Iyo'as*, pp. 217-221.

Arkiko (97), on April 3, 1766, and stayed with his servants at the home of Abū 'Alī, the judge of the place. While in Arkiko he gave Abū ʿAlī five mules, two donkeys, two rings of gold and one of silver, a load of Abyssinian coffee, a quantity of spirits, and a tent — goods to a total value of 800 *kuruṣ*. That was all he possessed when he went to Abyssinia, and in that country he had spent 1,460 *kuruṣ*, and the value of the goods he had given to the king and others amounted to 2,540 *kuruṣ*, which makes a total of 4,000 *kuruṣ*. After this he sailed from Meṭewwa on April 12, and arrived at Jeddah on May 16, 1766. On the journey from Gondär to Jeddah he had expended 73 days, and since leaving Jeddah on January 11, 1764, to his return to the same city on May 16, 1766, there had elapsed two years, four months, and five days. Why, trusting Bijo, did I waste so much time, spend so much money, and lose my son?

INDEX OF TʿOVMAČEAN'S ARMENIAN SPELLING OF OFTEN USED NAMES AND TERMS

Atvay = Adwa
Bala Mikʿayēl = Balä Mika'él
Bijoy = Bijo
Čittē = Jeddah
Čzmatʿi = Däjjazmač
Harkʿikō = Arkiko
Iatvay = Adwa
Itʿēkē = Etégé queen
Keōntēr = Gondär
Msovayē = Meṭewwa
paxar = Turkish, *bakır*
Tikʿsē = Degsa
Tʿovmačan = Tʿovmačean
Sabay = Saba
Šetʿēi = Ešäté
Selēf = Selef
vakʿiē = *wäqét*

(97) Arkiko, the principal mainland port serving northern Ethiopia, lay to the south-west of the bay of Massawa, and was described by Bruce as being «a large town». Bruce, *op. cit.* (1790), vol. III, p. 4.