THE HISTORY OF DÄBRÄ TABOR (ETHIOPIA)

By Richard Pankhurst

Däbrä Tabor, the capital of Begemdir and headquarters of Emperors Tewodros II and Yohannes IV, was established, according to tradition, by the remarkable Oromo, or Galla, chieftain Ras Gugsa Mersa who held sway in the province from 1798 to 1825.[1] He was the nephew of Ali Guangul, the founder of a Muslim dynasty, which as the *islamisant* Spencer Trimingham asserts, ' became nominal members of the national Church for political reasons '.[2]

Gugsa, as mentioned in a contemporary chronicle [3] and later in Gäbrä Sellase's great chronicle of Menelik,[4] began his career as ruler of the province at a place called Lebo, a mountainous district some 60 kilometres south-east of Gondar. Early in the nineteenth century, however, he moved his capital to one of the many natural fortresses in the mountainous country further south, and gave it the name of Däbrä Tabor.[5]

Gäbrä Sellase, following the old Ethiopian tradition of giving prophetic explanations for great events, claims that the site was selected through the intervention of a monk who told Gugsa, ' Your town must not be built here, choose another place; you will find as a guide a female leopard who has just lain down; you must kill this beast, and clear the forest; there you must build your town '. Gugsa, we are told, thereupon ' searched the area, and found there a female leopard who had just lain down. Having killed her he ordered the clearing of the forest, built a town called Däbrä Tabor, and lived there '.[6] Whatever the truth of this legend which, as the French editor of the chronicle, Maurice de Coppet, notes, is entirely uncorroborated,[7] there were good reasons for choosing the site. An early nineteenth-century French observer Arnauld d'Abbadie remarked that it must have appealed ' on account of its central location, its advantageous military position, and because of the abundance of its pastures, its hunting, and its pleasant cool climates ',[8] while the subsequent German traveller Gerhard Rohlfs argued that the town enjoyed much better communications with the empire as a whole than was the case for example with the earlier capital Gondar.[9]

Water moreover was plentiful for there were numerous springs (though many of these have since dried up largely on account of the coming of the eucalyptus tree). Ato Agmase Mäkonnen, an elderly farmer and local historian, asserted to the present writer that there were once no less than 68 springs, while Fitawrari Dämis Mängestu, another scholar of the town, said that there might

[1] H. Weld Blundell, *The royal chronicle of Abyssinia*, Cambridge, 1922, 462, 465, 485. See also W. Plowden, *Travels in Abyssinia*, London, 1863, 400; G. Massaia, *I miei trentacinque anni di missione in alta Etiopia*, Roma, Milano, 1885, I, 114, XI, 141.

[2] J. S. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, London, 1952, 110–11.

[3] Weld Blundell, op. cit., 479, 482.

[4] Guèbrè Sellassié, *Chronique du règne de Ménélik II, roi des rois d'Éthiopie*, Paris, 1930–2, I, 201.

[5] C. Conti Rossini, ' Nuovi documenti per la storia d'Abissinia nel secolo XIX ', *Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, III, 1947, 361, 364; G. Rohlfs, *L'Abissinia*, Milano, n.d., 145–57; G. Bianchi, *Alla terra dei Galla*, Milano, 1884, 48; Guèbrè Sellassié, op. cit., I, 93, 202.

[6] Guèbrè Sellassié, op. cit., I, 202.

[7] ibid, I, 202.

[8] A. d'Abbadie, *Douze ans de séjour dans la Haute-Éthiopie (Abyssinie)*, Paris, 1868, 189. See also *idem*, *Observations rélatives à physique de globe faites au Brésil et en Éthiopie*, Paris, 1873, 116; *idem*, *Géographie de l'Éthiopie*, Paris, 1898, I, 98, 299.

[9] Rohlfs, op. cit., 156–7.

even have been more. Ato Käbbädä Neguse, a sometime mayor, in 1953 counted 47.[10] The naming of the settlement after the Biblical Mount Tabor was, it should be added, fully in the Ethiopian tradition, as remarked by at least two foreign travellers of the mid-nineteenth century, the Englishman Henry Dufton [11] and the Italian missionary Guglielmo Massaia.[12]

Däbrä Tabor remained Ras Gugsa's capital throughout the rest of his life.[13] It was there that a contemporary chronicle describes him receiving many visitors, among them monks,[14] and there that he buried the remains of his beloved son Alula Gugsa who had previously been interred in Damot.[15] It was at Däbrä Tabor that Gugsa made many of his appointments,[16] and there that he died, and was buried, in 1825,[17] at the church of Iyasus situated south-east of the palace on a mountain whence Lake Ṭana can be seen in the distance. Gugsa's son and heir Imam also ruled at this capital, and was buried there in 1828.[18] Ras Marye, the latter's brother and successor, likewise ruled his dominions from Däbrä Tabor, but three years after his accession to power left for Tigre where he died in 1831. He was succeeded by yet another brother, Ras Dori, who followed the family tradition of governing from Däbrä Tabor where he died also around 1831, and was buried beside the grave of his father.[19] The chiefs at Däbrä Tabor thereupon elected Dori's nephew Ali Alula, then a child, as his successor.[20] Däbrä Tabor was thus the residence and seat of government of Gugsa, his three sons Imam, Marye, and Dori, and his grandson Ali Alula, often called Ali the Great. These Oromo chieftains, as d'Abbadie later noted, ' returned there after their always happy expeditions, disbanded their feudatory followers, and held their court with a guard which varied, according to contingencies, from two to ten thousand men '.[21] This period of Oromo hegemony was also later described by Gäbrä Sellase who claims that the town then knew ' nothing but glory and joy '.[22] Gugsa and his family are commemorated by a memorial building within the precincts of Iyasus church. The egg-shaped dome and crenellations of this memorial are in Gondarine style, and may still be seen today.

Our first description of Däbrä Tabor, then scarcely more than two decades old, is provided by the French Saint Simonians, Edmond Combes and Maurice

[10] Information kindly provided by Fitawrari Dämis Mängestu and Ato Agmase Mäkonnen of Däbrä Tabor. I am indebted to Dr. Kenafä Regb Zälläqä for help in interviewing these and several other informants. On the abundance of water see also Rohlfs, op. cit., 156.

[11] H. Dufton, *Narrative of a journey through Abyssinia*, London, 1867, 94.

[12] G. Massaia, *Lectiones grammaticales*, Paris, 1867, 248. See also Martial de Salviac, *Les Gallas*, Paris, n.d., 38.

[13] Conti Rossini, ' Nuovi documenti ', 361, 364–7; *idem*, ' La cronaca reale abissina dall' anno 1800 all' anno 1840 ', *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei*, Ser. v, xxv, 1916, 885–7, 891.

[14] *idem*, ' Nuovi documenti ', 364.

[15] *idem*, 366. See also Conti Rossini, ' La cronaca reale abissina ', 884.

[16] *idem*, ' Nuovi documenti ', 367.

[17] Weld Blundell, op. cit., 485. See also Conti Rossini, ' La cronaca reale abissina ', 885, 891; E. A. Wallis Budge, *A history of Ethiopia*, London, 1928, II, 480. On Gugsa and his dynasty see also M. M. Moreno, ' La cronaca di re Teodoro attribuita al dabtara "Zaneb" ', *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, II, 2, 1942, 149; R. Perini, *Di qua dal Marèb* (*Marèb-Mellàsc*), Firenze, 1905, 218–19; Trimingham, op. cit., 110.

[18] Conti Rossini, ' La cronaca reale abissina ', 904.

[19] *idem*, ' Nuovi documenti ', 377; M. Parkyns, *Life in Abyssinia*, New York, 1854, II. 99.

[20] Weld Blundell, op. cit., 485–6; Conti Rossini, ' La cronaca reale abissina ', 909. See also *idem*, ' Nuovi documenti ', 372, 374.

[21] D'Abbadie, *Douze ans*, 189.

[22] Guèbrè Sellassié, op. cit., I, 202. See also F. Rosen, *Eine deutsche Gesandtschaft in Abessinien*, Leipzig, 1907, 389.

Tamisier, who visited it in August 1835. They refer to it as the place where Ras Ali Alula, then a young man, resided ' during peace, that is to say in time of the rains ',[23] for in the dry season he often left on expeditions. Describing the town, situated amid many chains of mountains, one behind another like a ' multiple rampart ', the travellers state that it was ' built on an uneven plateau ', and occupied ' a vast space of land, as its houses were scattered '. The settlement was ' dominated ' by the palace of Ras Ali, with a ' spacious court ' formed by a wall of unshaped stones held together with clay, while amid the houses, which resembled ' low windmills ', there were a number of ' most elegant churches '.[24] The town, it transpired, had been sacked only six months earlier, i.e. in the spring of 1835, by an army from Lasta in one of the civil wars of this period. On that occasion ' all ' the houses had been burnt, but since the town ' belonged to the soldiers the agricultural labourers were ordered, on the return of Ali, to bring the straw and wood necessary for the construction of the huts, so that the troops, thanks to the mobilized peasants, had the disaster repaired '.[25]

Elaborating on the appearance of the palace the travellers tell of a ' vast court ' where they saw some men sitting on stones, and others, in two rows, standing upright. On entering the royal apartment the Frenchmen found that it consisted of a ' fairly large room ' with two *sarirs*, or divans, and many ' fine weapons '. In the centre of the chamber was a large hearth with a huge wood fire the sparks from which flew up as far as the ceiling, while between the interior and exterior walls there were three recesses reserved for the Ras's favourite horses. This made the reception hall ' almost a stable ', for ' the most grand personages of Abyssinia ', the Saint Simonians note, ' feel an extreme pleasure to see near them their animals which they passionately love '. Around the palace the land seems to have been rough, for the Frenchmen report that travelling by night they found ' the road, covered with mud and enormous boulders, impracticable: the lights were extinguished, and, despite our slow pace and caution, we could not avoid several falls '.[26]

The inhabitants of Däbrä Tabor, according to these observers, were supplied from a near-by market, ' one of the most notable in Abyssinia ', which was held every Monday on high land a quarter of an hour's distance away. Local tradition indicates that this market then as now lay to the east of the palace compound. Silk, the Frenchmen assert, was in great demand, and a Maria Theresa dollar exchanged for some 16 *amolé*, or bars of salt. The people of the town also enjoyed a good supply of game from the neighbouring countryside where wild life, notably guinea-fowl ' of a remarkable size', was plentiful.[27]

Turning to the character of the settlement, and of its inhabitants, Combes and Tamisier observe that Däbrä Tabor was essentially a military camp. They complain that it was ' inhabited by soldiers, who, more accustomed to take than to give, refused to provide us lodging, on the pretext, perhaps valid, that all the huts were occupied '.[28] The same observers describe the place as ' a town of joy ', and add:

> ' Its population is almost entirely composed of soldiers who enjoy the present without being disturbed about the future, and who spend freely the

[23] E. Combes and M. Tamisier, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, Paris, 1838, II, 54.
[24] ibid., II, 83.
[25] ibid., II, 84.
[26] ibid., II, 54, 58–9.
[27] ibid., II, 84.
[28] ibid., II, 54.

booty which they acquired during the war. Their life of carelessness and pleasure attracts to them a large concourse of dancers and *courtesanes* from all countries who live in this capital; these women are all adorned with jewels, and their profession is as lucrative for them as it is agreeable for the others. To terminate a time of severe abstinence by rejoicing, numerous dancers wandered the streets, stopping in front of important houses to execute their pantomimes, and never withdrew without having obtained their wages in eatables or rather in drink. To their Abyssinian dress they had added a waist-cloth made of large rushes, and many were dressed, like the soldiers, in magnificent sheepskins '.[29]

One of the effects of the general profligacy, the travellers assert, was that venereal diseases were ' the curse of this town '.[30] The Frenchmen's visit coincided with the feast of Yohannes, as a result of which the town was a place of great festivity. They recall that ' dancers wandered through the town and gave us new displays; rifle-shots were fired, and a rude and savage music was performed. As soon as our door was opened the young girls of the neighbourhood brought us bouquets to give scent to our cottage '. Other persons making their appearance that day included ' a large number of priests from the surrounding countryside '.[31]

Combes and Tamisier make no attempt to assess the size of the population—always a difficult task with Ethiopian military camps—for they explain that it was ' so variable, depending on the wars and the seasons, that it is impossible to give an estimation of it '.[32] The significance of this observation is underlined later in their memoirs where they report that on returning less than six months later, in January 1836, they found the capital almost deserted. Writing with nostalgia of their earlier visit to Ras Ali's capital they exclaim:

> ' When Debra Tabor began to appear to us our joy changed to sadness, and this sadness increased as we approached. The houses had become old, and their aspect was sombre: the roads were deserted and silent. This was no longer that animated and noisy town which had so fascinated us; no more dances, no more songs, no more pleasure: returning, a short while earlier, from his expedition against Aligas-Fares, the Ras found himself almost alone in his capital. After a long absence, the greater part of the persons whom we had once known at Debra Tabor had gone to visit their domains, their villages, and we were alone in this city where we had previously been sought after with such eagerness '.[33]

Court life at Däbrä Tabor was linked at this time with the much older settlement of Mahdärä Maryam some 25 kilometres to the south-west, which was the principal abode of Ras Ali's mother, Empress Mänän.[34] The latter place, where Emperor Susneyos had camped in the seventeenth century,[35] was the site of a church and monastery of importance [36] and had long been a place of asylum, used as such in 1797 by Ras Gugsa's brother Ras Aligas, though on that occasion the old tradition had been violated by his enemies.[37]

[29] ibid., II, 61–2.
[30] ibid., II, 84.
[31] ibid., II, 81–2, 84.
[32] ibid., II, 83.
[33] ibid., III, 324–5.
[34] Conti Rossini, ' Nuovi documenti ', 375, 382, 398.
[35] F. M. Esteves Pereira, *Chronica de Susneyos (1607–1642), rey de Ethiopia*, Lisboã, 1900, text, 99, 117–19, 259–60.
[36] Weld Blundell, op. cit., 387, 449; Conti Rossini, ' La cronaca reale abissina ', 862, 891.
[37] Weld Blundell, op. cit., 442–5; Conti Rossini, ' La cronaca reale abissina ', 863.

Combes and Tamisier, much impressed by Mahdärä Maryam, declare that no other place ' better merited ' the status of a town, and that ' the life, the movement which one sees there, and the importance of its inhabitants ' would justify its being called a city, for it was ' a town of aristocrats '.[38] Its houses were surrounded by high hedges which gave it a shady but elegant simplicity. The principal edifice, not surprisingly, was that of the Empress which stood in a compound with ' numerous ' other dwellings, and was a building of ' perfect workmanship ' and ' a small masterpiece ' with a fine roof of nicely painted and artistically interlaced reeds.[39] The elegance of the courtiers and the fineness of their dress—one saw few people without shoes—made Mänän's court ' one of the most brilliant ' in the land. Still a place of asylum it could not be entered ' except on foot, leading one's horses behind one ', though the Empress and several of her courtiers had the right to ride as far as her palace.[40] Hard times subsequently befell Mahdärä Maryam, for it was burnt down in fighting in 1849, a little over a decade after Combes and Tamisier's visit, but was soon rebuilt. The church, according to a contemporary chronicle, was then re-dedicated,[41] the work of restoration being effected, Gäbrä Sellase states, through the munificence of King Sahlä Sellase of Shoa.[42]

Däbrä Tabor, the seat of government of Ras Ali throughout the greater part of his rule, and the abode of his officials and followers, was visited by many of his dependents and others seeking justice or appointment.[43] Others coming to the capital, as recorded in contemporary chronicles, included clergy from Gondar, Gojjam, and Begemdir.[44]

A second sacking of Däbrä Tabor took place in 1842 when Ras Ali left the town to fight against Däjjazmač Webe, the ruler of Tigre. The battle, according to a contemporary chronicler, Däbtära Zänäb, took place at Ajbar. A field of this name still exists immediately to the north-west of the palace, but, according to Agmase Mäkonnen, was formerly much larger as it has since been encroached upon by eucalyptus trees and a modern secondary school. In the course of the fighting Webe made his way to the capital and pillaged it.[45] Ali, however, somehow won the day and managed to capture Wube.[46] As the British traveller Mansfield Parkyns noted, the victorious chief then ' arrived at Debra Tabor quite unexpected by his generals (many of whom had considered him dead), and found the chiefs in consultation, some doubt having arisen as to who should succeed him. His appearance . . . put an end to these speculations, and his first act was to reward most liberally those of his soldiers who had distinguished themselves for courage and fidelity in the trying moments which had just passed '. He later showed his clemency by acceding to a request by the Abun, or head of the church, Abba Sälama, to release his distinguished captive.[47]

[38] Combes and Tamisier, op. cit., II, 91, 94.
[39] ibid., II, 91–2.
[40] ibid., II, 94–5. See also 320–1.
[41] Conti Rossini, ' Nuovi documenti ', 298–9.
[42] Guèbrè Sellassié, op. cit., I, 76.
[43] Conti Rossini, ' Nuovi documenti ', 379, 380, 385, 388, 393, 394, 396, 400, 403, 407; *idem*, ' La cronaca reale abissina ', 914.
[44] Weld Blundell, op. cit., 491; Conti Rossini, ' Nuovi documenti ', 383–4.
[45] Moreno, art. cit., 150; T. Lefebvre and others, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, Paris, 1845–9, I, 357.
[46] Moreno, art. cit., 150; F. Praetorius, *Die amharische Sprache*, Halle, 1879, 495, 497; Parkyns, op. cit., II, 111–17; P. V. Ferret and J. G. Galinier, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, Paris, 1847, II, 460–82; G. Lejean, *Théodore II, le nouvel empire d'Abyssinie*, Paris, 1865, 14, 43; Conti Rossini, ' Nuovi documenti ', 381; Budge, op. cit., II, 485.
[47] Parkyns, op. cit., II, 115; Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Carte d'Abbadie*, V, No. 17, 158, 469. See also S. Rubenson, *King of Kings Tewodros of Ethiopia*, Addis Ababa, 1966, 35.

As a result of the battle of Däbrä Tabor, as it is often called,[48] Ras Ali retained control of his capital where he received a number of foreign visitors. Those coming in the next decade or so included an envoy from Britain, Walter Plowden,[49] and one from France, Rochet d'Héricourt,[50] the Belgian consul in Egypt, Blondeel von Cuelebroeck,[51] the French traveller Arnauld d'Abbadie,[52] the British adventurer John Bell,[53] and the Greek trader Yohannes Kotzika of Kassala.[54] Bell, according to his friend Plowden, actually took up residence in a house four or five hours' journey from the town ' on a very high hill, part of a mountain-range, whose cold, fogs, barley and fir-trees reminded me of Scotland '.[55] It was there that Bell's daughter Mary was born in 1853 to Wäyzäro Wärqnäš Yelma who their descendants later claimed to have been a princess related to Emperor Tewodros.[56]

Two of the above-mentioned travellers, d'Abbadie and Plowden, have left valuable descriptions of Däbrä Tabor in the heyday of Ras Ali's rule. The settlement, according to the former who arrived in 1843, consisted of 1,600 to 1,700 dwellings, which, if we assume an average of 6·5 persons per house postulated at about this time by the German explorer Edouard Rüppell, would suggest a population of well over 10,000, much larger than most Ethiopian towns of this period.[57] The dwellings, the Frenchman explains, consisted of ' houses, huts and shacks of all sizes ', and ' even some tents in which dwelt the soldiers on duty, companies of riflemen, courtiers, all those in short who habitually live around the Ras '. Turning to the latter's palace compound the same observer notes:

> ' To the north of the village, and on the highest part of the mountain two large concentric enclosures made of strong wattle conceal many scattered large round huts where he lives with a part of his followers; the huts constructed of wattle are covered with conical roofs of thatch. There was the so-called house of the horses, that of the cooks, that of the honey-wine, that of the goldsmiths, that of the confessor and the clergy, as much writers as lawyers, that of the treasury which was said to be usually empty, and lastly the dwelling of the wife of the Ras and of her favourite followers '.[58]

Plowden, who first came to Däbrä Tabor in 1849, and was impressed by its ' cold and healthy ' climate,[59] confirms its essentially military character, for he observes that it had ' no stone house in it but that of the Ras ', and was ' in fact ... more of a camp than a town '.[60] D'Abbadie, describing his arrival, remarks that he saw a crowd of soldiers and courtiers sitting on the ground,

[48] Conti Rossini, ' Nuovi documenti ', 400, 403, 407.

[49] Great Britain, House of Commons, *Correspondence respecting Abyssinia 1846–1848*, London, 1868, 29–30. See also Budge, op. cit., II, 492.

[50] Lejean, *Théodore II*, 31. See also C. E. X. Rochet d'Héricourt, ' Rapport sur le troisième voyage en Abyssinie ', *Comptes Rendus Hebdomadaires des Séances de l'Académie des Sciences*, XXXII, 1851, 217–18.

[51] Blondeel van Cuelebroeck, *Rapport général de Blondeel sur son expédition en Abyssinie*, Bruxelles, 1839–42, Annexe 37, 1.

[52] Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, op. cit., 183–5, 364–6, 369.

[53] Plowden, op. cit., 408.

[54] Metropolitan Methodios of Aksum, ' An unpublished document edited and translated into English ', *Abba Salama*, I, 1970, 62.

[55] Plowden, op. cit., 408.

[56] S. Armbruster, *Life and history of John Bell and his descendants*, Palma and Mallorca, 1966, 4, 15. See also Asfa Yilma, *Haile Sellassie, Emperor of Ethiopia*, London, n.d., p. vi.

[57] E. Rüppell, *Reise in Abyssinien*, Frankfurt, 1835–40, I, 82; R. Pankhurst, *An introduction to the economic history of Ethiopia*, London, 1961, 406.

[58] D'Abbadie, *Douze ans*, 190.

[59] Great Britain, House of Commons, op. cit., 29–30.

[60] Plowden, op. cit., 400. See also T. Heuglin, *Reise nach Abessinien*, Jena, 1868, 306.

and, passing through them, made his way into a second enclosure and thence through a door into a large circular building at the end of which Ras Ali was seated in the midst of his chiefs and other intimates.[61] Describing the palace precincts, the courtiers, soldiers, and other followers of the Ras, and the numerous petitioners who were a characteristic sight at any Ethiopian capital, he declares:

> 'We set foot at the entrance of the first enclosure, in the midst of a bustling and noisy crowd. The picturesque and fearless manner in which most of them were robed in their tattered togas, their hair braided, their poses proud, their gestures manly, the absence of grey heads, all indicated men of action, apprentice pillagers in the service of their lords. They were pages, soldiers, sort of gentlemen attendants who always accompany them everywhere, watching over them, sharing their joys and sorrows, ever ready to receive their confidences or their orders at church, at table, on the march, everywhere, sleeping next to them. They are the embodiment of their patrons whose qualities and vices they borrow, whose affairs they know better than their masters and whose interests they watch over more vigilantly. In exchange for their devotion these men receive investitures and positions which often make it possible for them to become in their turn the protectors or even the masters of their former masters. There were there the carriers of the weapons of the master, carriers of the shield and the spear of the master; others carrying double-edged swords with cross-shaped handles decorated with silver which are carried on the shoulder in long scarlet sheathes before the Dejazmatches and other chiefs of high degree; grooms; riflemen with their wick-guns, their cartridge-belts with hanging priming-horns; mules richly caparisoned; combat horses prancing under their bright saddle-cloths; shields with brilliant silver, silver gilt or copper plating; spears and swords of all shapes. . . . Here a group of peasants with short hair, awaiting the propitious moment to complain of some avarice; there some buffoons jesting amid laughter; dusty feet of all sorts; dogs on the leash growling at each other; sprightly pages, their togas in shreds, darting about everywhere, sparring, challenging each other, mocking some unfortunate passer-by'.[62]

On entering the second enclosure, d'Abbadie reports:

> 'The spectacle was very different. About three hundred men, some standing, others squatting on the dusty soil were conversing in groups; their fine white togas covered them from head to foot; their deportment bore witness to aristocracy: they were the masters of that boisterous crowd left outside. . . . I was pointed out the most notable: some Dejazmatches and some chiefs of numerous bands; the ushers showed them special deference. The other chiefs entered alone, sword at their side; but they were admitted with some followers, a servant of arms holding their shield and spear, and a page carrying on his shoulder their sword covered in a scarlet sheath. All these chiefs, large and small, were occupied in paying their court which consisted in sending civilities through the ushers to the Ras. The most zealous spent the day there; the others presented themselves there morning and evening to wish him good morning and good night. When the army was dispersed for some time the direct vassals of the Ras came to Debra Tabor for a

[61] A. d'Abbadie, 'Deux fragments inédits du tome second de *Douze ans dans la Haute-Éthiopie*', *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*, xxv, 2, 1961, 37.
[62] D'Abbadie, *Douze ans*, 190–1.

couple of weeks to be invigorated by the atmosphere of the court, or to hasten the conclusion of some case or other matter pending '.[63]

The appearance and something of the atmosphere at the court was also recalled by Plowden who observes:

> ' The scene, though familiar enough to me, would be curious to a stranger. Outside the door of the Ras's house were sitting men of all grades—some of the highest rank in the country—amidst filth of every description, on large stones or on the ground, and with no shade from the sun; perhaps they had been living so for weeks, in hopes of passing the grim porters in the first court. This, though it by no means involves a sight of the King, is still a coveted privilege; and the porters strike with their long sticks, without respect of persons, whoever attempts to enter without license—nay, they sometimes rush out and ply the crowd without apparent reason, but really to pay off a grudge to some one they see there, who has not given them a douceur. As they get no pay, these douceurs are their chief source of livelihood '.[64]

The two principal palace buildings at this time were those inhabited by Ras Ali and his mother who seems to have left Mahdärä Maryam. The two buildings were about 200 metres apart. Ali's house was, according to d'Abbadie, much the larger of the two. It was there that the Frenchman saw him, ' seated on a Persian carpet with a score of favourites standing around him, in two rows by the door '. An interesting feature earlier noted by Combes and Tamisier was the presence of four or five horses, tethered to the internal columns of the house, who were nibbling at the cut grass on the ground.[65] The existence of this building, which is said to have stood to the east of the palace compound, is still remembered. It is often related that because people craned their necks to see its beautifully decorated roof it was referred to as *yangät eda*, literally ' punishment of the neck '. A few paces from this site lies a large outcrop of stone known at the *wänbär*, or seat, of Ras Ali, and it is said that it was there that he sat in judgement.

Mänän's house, though smaller than that of Ras Ali, was built, according to d'Abbadie, on the same model, and:

> ' consisted of a vast conical roof of thatch lying on a circular wall of wattle clothed in mud and on twelve columns or tree trunks placed around the interior about two metres from the outer wall. This wall forming the shell of the house was three metres high and the interior ten to eleven metres in diameter. The interior was illumined only through two doorways without doors cut opposite each other; the principal was graced outside with an old soldier's toga by way of a door; the other, narrower and reserved for service, threw light to the end of the house on the column facing the entrance where the Waizero stood behind a curtain. Four or five young men, toga adjusted according to the strictest etiquette, stood by the columns, immobile as statues, feet hidden in the thick heap of green grass which carpeted the floor '.

The Empress herself was ' seated Turkish style on a high bed, decorated with a carpet from Anatolia ', and reclined ' between two large cushions covered with bright pillow-cases '.[66]

Though Ras Ali and his courtiers spent much of their time at Däbrä Tabor

[63] ibid., 191–2.
[64] Plowden, op. cit., 400.
[65] D'Abbadie, *Douze ans*, 195, 197; *idem*, ' Deux fragments inédits ', 37.
[66] D'Abbadie, *Douze ans*, 193–4.

they would often descend to a near-by plain which was used for military reviews, mock battles, javelin throwing, and other sports, in which the chief himself participated in competition with the humblest of his followers. The plain also served for the festivities associated with Mäsqäl, or the feast of the Cross, when vassals from far and near would come to render their homage.[67] D'Abbadie's description does not make it clear whether the plain in question was that of Ajbar or the area later to be known as we shall see as Jan Meda.

Ali, who ruled at Däbrä Tabor for over two decades, is remembered as a great builder of churches. No less than four were built around the town in his time: Iyasus on the mountain to the south-east, Ennatitu Maryam, literally Mary the Mother, and Lejitu Maryam, Mary the Daughter, i.e. an older and a younger church both dedicated to Mary, to the east, and Ṭegur Mika'el to the north.[68]

Däbrä Tabor witnessed much of the tension, and intrigues, which accompanied the rise of Däjjazmač Kassa, later Emperor Tewodros. Ras Ali, faced with the growing power of Kassa, who was then a rebel chief, called upon him around 1848 to come to the capital to offer his submission, but Kassa dallied until after the rains, and later openly disobeyed the summons.[69] The two men were subsequently reconciled, the British historian Clements Markham stating that around 1850, or a little later, Kassa was for ' a short time . . . in attendance ' on the Ras at Däbrä Tabor.[70] A contemporary chronicle tells of Kassa going there at Mäsqäl when he presented his lord with much silver, gold, and slaves which the latter received with joy.[71]

By the beginning of 1852 relations between Ali and his rebellious vassal had, however, once more deteriorated. Fighting broke out in November.[72] In April of the following year Kassa approached the hill of Iyasus near Däbrä Tabor, and assembled his army at Jan Meda, literally the ' King's field '. This was a wide stretch of country which Lejean places on his map to the south-east of the town,[73] as is confirmed by the fact that a plain in this area is still so named, and local tradition has it that this was the Jan Meda of former times. Kassa won the day, and Ali was obliged to flee.[74] In the course of these operations the victorious chief ravaged Begemdir, as Plowden reports, ' in various directions . . . even as far as Debra Tabor ',[75] where, according to a chronicler, he set fire to Ras Ali's house on two occasions.[76] Kassa seems to have remained in the town for several months. A contemporary chronicle states that he spent the rainy season there, at which time he issued a proclamation ordering the princes and nobles who claimed feudal and hereditary property to submit to him ' in order that you should not say " Why have I been expropriated ? " '. He tarried at Däbrä Tabor, the chronicle says, until after

[67] *idem*, *Douze ans*, 189, 197, 199.

[68] G. Lejean, *Voyage en Abyssinie*, Paris, 1870, 14–15.

[69] Conti Rossini, ' Nuovi documenti ', 397; Rubenson, op. cit., 40.

[70] C. R. Markham, *A history of the Abyssinian expedition*, London, 1869, 62. See also Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, op. cit., 339–40.

[71] L. Fusella, ' La cronaca dell'imperatore Teodoro II di Etiopia in un manoscritto amarico ', *Annali dell' Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli*, VI, 1954–6, [pub.] 1957, 70.

[72] Rubenson, op. cit., 41–2.

[73] Lejean, *Voyage*, atlas, ' Devra Tabor '.

[74] Fusella, ' La cronaca dell'imperatore Teodoro II ', 75–6.

[75] Great Britain, House of Commons, op. cit., 75. See also G. Douin, *Histoire du règne du Khédive Ismaïl*, Le Caire, 1936, III, part I, 54.

[76] Conti Rossini, ' Nuovi documenti ', 407. See also C. Mondon-Vidailhet, *Chronique de Théodoros II, rois des rois d'Ethiopie*, Paris, n.d., 5; H. de Monfreid, *Ménélik tel qu'il fut*, Paris, 1954, 60; Rubenson, op. cit., 43; Budge, op. cit., II, 488.

Mäsqäl,[77] as is confirmed by Plowden who recorded, in September, that the chief was still there.[78] Kassa left for Gojjam early in 1854, whereupon Ali reappeared at Däbrä Tabor,[79] ' trusting to his cavalry for a retreat ', Plowden notes, ' in case he should not by some lucky chance regain his power '.[80] Fortune was not in fact kind to him, for the British Consul recorded in June that the Ras had ' entirely abandoned the contest ', and was ' living in a sanctuary by permission ' of his enemy.[81]

After assuming the imperial title in February 1855 Tewodros travelled widely through his dominions, but, though refraining from living exclusively in any one capital, paid numerous visits to Däbrä Tabor and its environs, notably to Jan Meda.[82]

Tewodros arrived at Däbrä Tabor, according to his chronicler Aläqa Wäldä Maryam, in September 1856 in time for the celebrations of Mäsqäl, when he inspected his soldiers who had left their garrisons. A few months later, in December, he was encamped at Jan Meda, when he obtained news of the coming to Ethiopia of the Egyptian Patriarch Cyril,[83] whom he received at Däbrä Tabor in January 1857, and, after keeping him a virtual prisoner for the greater part of the year,[84] presented him with a parting gift of a ' large quantity of ivory ' as Plowden reported.[85] The monarch at this time was said by the same observer to be ' concentrating his forces ' in this area,[86] but soon afterwards made his way to Tigre to confront enemies there.[87]

Some years later, early in 1860 according to the British traveller Henry Blanc,[88] the emperor returned to Däbrä Tabor to celebrate his marriage to Ṭeruwärq, the daughter of his old enemy, Däjjazmač Webe, in the presence of many thousands of his followers. Stern, who visited the town during the festivities, recalls, ' all was animation and activity. The wide tracts of meadowland, a few weeks before so lonely and desolate, were now dotted with herds of browsing cattle, and the roads, formerly so deserted and untrodden, were thronged by detachments of troops and knots of peasants '. Writing as a hostile observer he adds, ' In the royal city . . . all was gaiety, mirth, and dirt. Men and women, lazy beggars, and loathsome dwarfs, rioted in piggish gluttony and noisome orgies '.[89] Not long afterwards, during the rains of 1860, Tewodros was again in Däbrä Tabor, as recorded by Lejean,[90] who visited the town as the envoy of France,[91] and the emperor was there once more in 1861 [92] when his army consisted, according to Markham, of ' upwards of 150,000 men '.[93] The emperor returned again in January 1863 when his arrival was greeted, by

[77] Fusella, ' La cronaca dell'imperatore Teodoro II ', 76.
[78] Great Britain, House of Commons, op. cit., 79.
[79] Conti Rossini, ' Nuovi documenti ', 407.
[80] Great Britain, House of Commons, op. cit., 82.
[81] ibid., 92.
[82] Mondon-Vidailhet, op. cit., 22.
[83] Moreno, art. cit., 167–8; H. A. Stern, *Wanderings among the Falashas in Abyssinia*, London, 1862, 78.
[84] ibid., 79–80.
[85] Great Britain, House of Commons, op. cit., 175–6, 183. See also Mondon-Vidailhet, op. cit., 22; Lejean, *Théodore II*, 83.
[86] Great Britain, House of Commons, op. cit., 182. See also Rubenson, op. cit., 75.
[87] Great Britain, House of Commons, op. cit., 192–3.
[88] H. Blanc, *A narrative of captivity in Abyssinia*, London, 1868, 19.
[89] Stern, op. cit., 116.
[90] Lejean, *Théodore II*, 106.
[91] Douin, op. cit., III, part 1, 68.
[92] ibid., III, part I, 58.
[93] Markham, op. cit., 72.

the firing of cannon.[94] Subsequently, in June, he issued a proclamation in the town, declaring that he had punished those who had comforted his enemies, but that because he ' wished the people well ' he ordered all further punishments to cease, and instructed the peasant to return to his plough, the merchant to his business, and everyone to go back to their occupations in peace.[95]

The emperor's close association with Däbrä Tabor and its environs was recognized by several observers, among them Dufton, who remarked in sweeping terms that Tewodros ' generally ' resided there,[96] and the German traveller Theodor von Heuglin who declared that the sovereign had spent several rainy seasons either at Däbrä Tabor or Jan Meda where he had built large grain stores for his soldiers.[97] Lejean likewise reported that Däbrä Tabor was one of the ruler's half a dozen ' favourite residences '.[98] It was on one of his stays there that Tewodros's son Alämayyahu was born, on which occasion, Aläqa Wäldä Maryam relates, ' rifle shots and cannon were fired, and there were great rejoicings there. Five hundred prisoners were freed '.[99] Däbrä Tabor at the height of Tewodros's power was thus the site on a number of occasions of the imperial camp. For that reason it was from time to time the home of the Abun, Abba Sälama, who, according to Agmase Mäkonnen, lived to the north-east of the Ajbar field on the road to Gafat. Other occasional residents included several foreign envoys, notably the British consul Plowden.[100] The royal lions, as indicated by local tradition gleaned by Mälakä Tabor Täšomä Zärihun, director of a present-day theological seminary in Däbrä Tabor, were likewise often kept in the city, in a quarter which was called Asfaw Grar after a large *grar*, or acacia tree, growing on the property of a nobleman of that name.[101]

One of several descriptions of Däbrä Tabor in this period is provided by Dufton who says that the settlement, ' situated a little below the highest point ' of the mountain, had a population of about 5,000, and that the principal church, that of Iyasus, was ' situated in a plantation of magnificent forest trees, the *kosso*, the cyprus and the juniper amongst others '.[102] Lejean, who also describes the town, says that it consisted of 500 or 600 houses, and that this church possessed ' several interesting paintings '.[103] The market, which was still held every Monday,[104] did an extensive trade in grain, legumes, cattle, *kosso*, i.e. purgative against tapeworm, and other supplies.[105]

Another account of the town at this time is given by Stern, a poor observer whose writings are often more revealing of his own irritation with Tewodros than of the country. The missionary describes Däbrä Tabor as a ' horrible place ' where he would not remain longer than ' absolutely necessary ', and observes that it was an ' unsightly and forlorn town, abounding with slimy puddles that afforded a luxuriant growth to a rank vegetation, and a number of shaky hovels, where foul and polluting vice held their perpetual carnival '.

[94] Lejean, *Théodore II*, 139. See also Douin, op. cit., III, part I, 67.
[95] Lejean, *Théodore II*, 156.
[96] Dufton, op. cit., 83.
[97] Heuglin, op. cit., 306.
[98] Lejean, *Théodore II*, 198. See also Rohlfs, op. cit., 157.
[99] Mondon-Vidailhet, op. cit., 30.
[100] Great Britain, House of Commons, op. cit., 175–6, 182–3, 193.
[101] Information kindly supplied by Mälakä Tabor Täšomä Zärihun.
[102] Dufton, op. cit., 177.
[103] Lejean, *Voyage*, 8, 14.
[104] Heuglin, op. cit., 307.
[105] Lejean, *Théodore II*, 274.

Describing the ' miserable state of this royal city ' he wrote of ' its frequent occupation by hordes of rapacious and profligate troops, who drove away all the families that were respectable, and, in their stead, peopled the vacant dwellings with a reckless multitude of the shameless, the dissolute, and the abandoned '. Turning to the imperial compound he dismissed it as consisting only of ' a few isolated huts ', surrounded by a ' crumbling parapet '.[106] In a later passage he writes of Tewodros sitting ' in most unkingly style, on the loose uncemented stones of a dilapidated wall that overhung a dizzy dell, where thousands of veteran warriors, in heaving and surging masses, were congregated together '. The emperor's *sägänät*, or reviewing stand, is remembered in oral tradition. Agmase Mäkonnen and others state that Tewodros surveyed his men from a tower situated beneath the palace just above the present-day secondary school, and that the troops disported themselves on the adjacent plain of Ajbar. Elsewhere in the palace environs Stern says that ' hordes of mendicants, clad and unclad, sound and diseased, some smitten with the curse of leprosy, and others with virulent scrofula, in promiscuous confusion lay hideously exposed in their own pest-creating atmosphere. On seeing us they all either stretched out their withered hands, or ghoulishly came hobbling near, and in the name of *Kudas Michael*, *Tecla Haimanot*, or some other noted saint, almost forcibly demanded our charity '. On visiting the royal residence ' to attend a grand levee ' he adds: ' The usual tumult in and around the Imperial premises was entirely hushed; and beggars and peasants, chieftains and their vassals, all with the *shama* girded round the waist, either noiselessly crept about to execute certain orders, or with hands clasped across their denuded chests, stood expectant of some command '.[107]

The plain of Jan Meda meanwhile continued to be used for military purposes. Lejean, who states that it was then considered as crown land, declares that it was ' superb ' for military manoeuvres, and in May and June was covered with bright flowers of all colours which gave it a ' splendid appearance '.[108] In more gruesome vein he reports seeing there a gnarled old mimosa tree where Tewodros was said to have hung a priest found guilty of selling church property. Fitawrari Dämis Mängestu and Agmase Mäkonnen, probably referring to the same incident, relate that a priest in an attempt to discredit a fellow churchman hid a *tabot*, or ' holy of holies ', and that the emperor on discovering the deceit had the culprit hanged. The spot is still known as *Qes mäsqäya*, or priest's hanging place.

Though Däbrä Tabor was essentially a Christian town local tradition indicates that there was, as at Gondar, a sizeable Muslim community, which doubtless included many merchants. This Muslim village, an hour's walk to the north-east, was called Adengot, and was spoken of as *Eslam bet*, or ' houses of Muslims ', or, as noted in Lejean's map,[109] as Salamge, a term capable of being translated as ' country of Eslam ', i.e. Muslims, or *Sälam*, i.e. peace.

Another community of some interest lay an hour or two to the north-east of the town in the area of Gafat, a name which suggests that the place was once inhabited by the ethnic group of that appellation,[110] who, as the Ethiopian scholar Aläqa Tayyä has observed, are traditionally considered to be handicraft

[106] Stern, op. cit., 95–6.
[107] ibid., 121–2.
[108] Lejean, *Voyage*, 33. See also Stern, op. cit., 147–8; *idem*, *The captive missionary*, London, 1868, 193. See also J. M. Flad, *Zwölf Jahre in Abessinien*, Basel, 1869, 132.
[109] Lejean, *Voyage*, atlas, ' Devra Tabor '.
[110] W. Leslau, *Gafat documents*, New Haven, Conn., 1945, *passim*.

workers, weavers, blacksmiths, and tanners. Some of this industrious people had long lived in the vicinity of Sälamko.[111] A number of them are known to have incurred the wrath half a century or so earlier of Ras Gugsa, who, according to a contemporary chronicle, ' surrounded the land of Gafat and devastated it, and all the men of Gafat perished '.[112] The presence of blacksmiths in this area was noted by Lejean who states that because they were traditionally regarded as *buda*, or persons possessed by the evil eye, ' some *negus* or other on a day of pious zeal had burnt these poor people *en masse* and had their village razed to the ground '. In support of this story he states that he was shown numerous pieces of volcanic slag which the inhabitants believed to have been left by the blacksmiths. A near-by hill called small Gafat was ' also covered ' with such slag.[113] The existence of these craftsmen caused one of the hills in this area to be referred to as *ṭayboč*, the Amharic term for artisans,[114] as indicated in Lejean's map.[115] The name, we may add, is still used in the locality where the inhabitants state that craftsmen were still living there some 50 years ago.

To the south of Däbrä Tabor the town of Mahdärä Maryam was also described by Lejean who notes that it possessed two churches, those of Ennatitu Maryam and Lejitu Maryam. There was also a ' much frequented market '. The population was largely Christian, but there were two groups of Muslims, one near the market, and the other in a village to the east of the flank of a deep ravine.[116] The town, according to Markham, was well supplied with grapes which came to ' perfection ' there.[117]

An interesting development during the reign of Tewodros was the arrival in the Däbrä Tabor area of a group of German and Swiss Protestant missionary craftsmen despatched by Samuel Gobat, the Protestant bishop of Jerusalem, who had himself been in the country a decade or two earlier. The coming of these foreigners was arranged early in the emperor's reign by two German Protestant missionaries, J. L. Krapf and J. M. Flad, who travelled to Däbrä Tabor for this purpose. The first of the missionaries, all of whom were trained at the Pilgrims' mission at St. Chrischona in Switzerland, were Messrs. Bender, Kienzlen, and Mayer who arrived in Ethiopia in 1855 and were joined in 1858 by two others, Messrs. Waldmeier and Saalmüller.[118] All five, together with a number of foreigners who came individually to seek their fortune, were settled by the emperor at Gafat,[119] where Consul Plowden had earlier resided in the 1850's.[120]

Gafat was conveniently situated only an hour's walk from the capital, and enjoyed a good supply of water throughout the year from numerous springs which joined to form the Zufil stream, known further down as the Bongo river. The area soon developed as a centre of missionary activity, and the site of the

[111] Aläqa Tayyä, *Yä-Ityoṗya hezb tarik*, Addis Ababa, 1946, 1953–4, 34.
[112] Weld Blundell, op. cit., 481. See also Conti Rossini, ' La cronaca reale abissina ', 880.
[113] Lejean, *Voyage*, 8.
[114] C. W. Isenberg and J. L. Krapf, *Journals detailing their proceedings in the kingdom of Shoa*, London, 1843, 89, 237–40. See also Flad, op. cit., 85.
[115] Lejean, *Voyage*, atlas, ' Devra Tabor '.
[116] Lejean, *Voyage*, 16. See also Stern, *Wanderings*, 148–9.
[117] Markham, op. cit., 110.
[118] Dufton, op. cit., 80–1, 83.
[119] Dufton, op. cit., 77–92; Stern, *Wanderings*, 97–9; Blanc, op. cit., 169–70.
[120] Stern, *Wanderings*, 97.

royal workshops and arsenal.[121] Waldmeier relates that he and his wife, with their colleagues, Mr. and Mrs. Flad, Mr. and Mrs. Mayer, Mr. Bender, Mr. Saalmüller, and Mr. Kienzlen, arrived there in June 1860. ' Here ', he records, ' we built twelve small houses or huts, each in five days, from small pieces of wood, covered with straw outside, and well plastered within. Each of us had two huts, one for dwelling and sleeping, the other for a kitchen. The Gaffat hill was thus converted into quite a colony of Europeans.' He claims that their arrival ' attracted the Abyssinians who soon came in large numbers to visit us ', thus providing an opportunity ' for real apostolic mission work '. Together with Saalmüller he ' taught some of the young men mechanical work ', which, he says, ' brought us into great favour with the King and people ', while the missionaries also opened ' a boarding school for poor children, who were instructed in reading and writing, ... the older ones learned some useful handicrafts. Every Sunday ', he adds, ' we had divine service in our own language for ourselves, and another service in the Amharic language for the Abyssinians '.[122] Most of the missionaries were married when they came, but the two bachelors, Waldmeier and Saalmüller, married Bell's daughters, Susan and Mary.[123] Other foreigners at Gafat included Bourgaud, a French gunsmith who had previously lived in Egypt,[124] Moritz Hall, described by Dufton as ' a Polish deserter from the Russian army ' and by Waldmeier as an Israelite whom the missionaries converted,[125] and David, a Piedmontese adventurer who had come by way of Khartoum,[126] as well as a German scientist Dr. G. H. G. Schimper,[127] and his compatriot C. E. Zander, an artist who lived for a time on the near-by hill of Sälamko.[128] Mention may also be made of a Frenchman from Alsace called Makerer, his compatriot Jacquin, who was a metal worker, a British adventurer Speedy, and two German Protestant missionaries Staiger and Brandeis.[129]

These foreigners, who possessed a wide range of skills and were to all intents and purposes prisoners of the emperor, are said to have worked together harmoniously. They served, Heuglin notes, as smiths, carpenters, engineers, saddlers, carriage-builders, and even armourers and manufacturers of cannon, besides on occasion acting also as advisers.[130] They seem to have been hard-working, and, Waldmeier asserts, soon erected ' a powerful water wheel for moving different kinds of machinery '.[131]

One of the highlights of the foreign craftsmen's presence was the manufacture of cannon, the first such enterprise carried out in Ethiopia. The manner in which the workmen were pressed by the emperor to undertake this task was

[121] T. Waldmeier, *Erlebnisse in Abessinien*, Basel, 1869, 3; Flad, op. cit., 18, 36, 50, 52, 54–5, 67–9, 85, 87, 88.

[122] T. Waldmeier, *The autobiography of Theophilus Waldmeier*, London, 1866, 63–6. See also *idem, Erlebnisse*, 55–8, 61–2; Flad, op. cit., 18, 35, 67, 85, 97; Markham, op. cit., 75.

[123] Armbruster, op. cit., 5, 15, 36.

[124] Heuglin, op. cit., 305.

[125] Dufton, op. cit., 82–4; Waldmeier, *Erlebnisse*, 9, 47. See also D. Crummey, *Priests and politicians*, London, 1972, 132; R. Pankhurst, ' Fire-arms in Ethiopian history 1800–1935 ', *Ethiopia Observer*, VI, 2, 1962, 140.

[126] Heuglin, op. cit., 305.

[127] Great Britain, House of Commons, op. cit., 323–4, 348–9. See also Massaia, op. cit., VII, 31.

[128] Stern, *The captive missionary*, 258–60; Lejean, *Voyage*, 7; Markham, op. cit., 341. See also S. F. Veitch, *Views of central Abyssinia*, London, 1868, *passim*.

[129] Waldmeier, *Erlebnisse*, 7, 15, 55; Great Britain, House of Commons, op. cit., 324; C. T. Beke, *The British captives in Abyssinia*, London, 1867, 140–1, 204, 274; Massaia, op. cit., VII, 31.

[130] Heuglin, op. cit., 304. See also Waldmeier, *Erlebnisse*, 13.

[131] Waldmeier, *Autobiography*, 73. See also Crummey, op. cit., 128, 132, 137.

later vividly told by Dufton, one of their visitors, who, writing of their residence on the hill, relates:

> ' Here each worked at his respective trade, for which they got well paid by the king, and things went on smoothly for some time, until one day an order came from his Majesty to the effect that he wished them at once to commence the construction of mortars and bombshells. The order came upon them like the bursting of a bomb itself, for none of them had ever had an idea that they would have been required to undertake work of that description. They of course demurred, informing the king that, not having learnt the founding of cannon, they were totally unprepared to enter into an engagement of that description, and that if he really desired to have these war implements in his country, manufacturers in either Germany, England or France would supply him with a much better article than they could possibly produce. The king was dissatisfied with their reply: he wished to have these things made in his own country, and to be quite independent of other nations. They still, nevertheless, objected, more on the ground of inability than unwillingness; but their refusal only vexed the king the more, and he now seized all their servants and put them in chains, there to remain until their masters gave consent to carry out his will. In their perplexity they could not do otherwise than promise to try. Only one of them, Herr Moritz, could be said to have the slightest acquaintance with the work at all, and his knowledge only extended to the formation of the mould; the clay to be used in the construction of the fire-bricks, the formation of the furnace, the proportion of the metals, and the making of the fusee, being equally unknown to him as to the rest. However, by putting their heads together, and seeking information from books, they eventually managed to turn out something. What? A mass of vitreous matter formed by the melting of the fine sand of the bricks, the metal refused to flow. Their only resource was to try again; and away they went over the country to seek better fire-brick clay, and now another venture was made. The result was a flow of metal that came pouring out in a molten stream now, and all hearts are hopeful that at last their object is gained; but alas! the metal had stopped, and the mould was only half full. They tried again. To the inexpressible joy of these persevering men, and the intense delight of the king himself, their wishes are accomplished, and Debra Tabor for the first time saw the balls soaring up into the air and bursting with a loud crash, which made the hills resound with a hundred echoes.
>
> The success was the cause of great favour being conferred by the grateful king on his " children ", as he called them. Shirts of honour, horses and mules with gold and silver trappings, and 1,000 dollars apiece, were the reward of their persevering efforts '.[132]

Waldmeier records that on the completion of the first successful cannon ' the King was pleased beyond all measure with our little piece of metal, kissed it, and cried, " Now I am convinced that it is possible to make everything in Habesh. Now the art has been discovered, God has at last revealed Himself, Praise and thanks be to Him for it " '.[133]

[132] Dufton, op. cit., 83–6. See also Flad, op. cit., 36, 54; Waldmeier, *Erlebnisse*, 7; H. Rassam, *Narrative of the British mission to Theodore*, London, 1869, I, 50, II, 24, 131; Blanc, op. cit., 36–8, 319; Moreno, art. cit., 177; Massaia, op. cit., VII, 30–1; Heuglin, op. cit., 304–5; Mondon-Vidailhet, op. cit., 58; L. Fusella, ' Le lettere del *dabtarā* Assaggākhañ ', *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, XII, 1953, 89, 91; Pankhurst, ' Fire-arms in Ethiopian history ', 140–2.

[133] Waldmeier, *Erlebnisse*, 16.

Though not allowed to leave the country the foreigners at Gafat were well treated by the emperor,[134] who, whenever in the neighbourhood, paid frequent visits to inspect the progress of their labours. The British envoy Hormuzd Rassam noted in June 1866 that the monarch ' used to go down almost every day to see his artisans at work ',[135] while Pauline Flad recorded in her diary that in the following month he inspected the pouring of a large cannon.[136] Thanks to Tewodros's encouragement, and the craftsmen's efforts, the hill of Gafat was ' transformed ', as her husband afterwards observed, ' into a large arsenal and factory where gunpowder, carriages, cannons, and bombs were manufactured and broken flint-locks were repaired '.[137] The British traveller Charles Beke described the place as ' a sort of Abyssinian Woolwich Arsenal ',[138] while a contemporary Amharic chronicle referred to it as ' a town of Europeans '.[139] Many Ethiopians, however, also worked at Gafat. Waldmeier claims that ' all the clever men of Abyssinia, were brought thither by order of the king '. The Ethiopian labour force comprised 300 Oromos, 300 Christians, and 200 Fälašas, or Jews, some of whom the missionaries converted.[140]

The European establishment at Gafat made a deep impression on the Ethiopian population. An anonymous chronicler of the time of Tewodros states that the foreigners had built a ' beautiful town ' with running water inside and outside the compound, a water-mill capable of cutting wood and grinding and sieving powder, and a ' beautiful house ' with glass doors and windows. The compound was surrounded by a strong wall with openings for guns and cannon as in a fortress, and was protected by four cannon. These defences were needed, according to the chronicle, during the Emperor's expedition to Shoa.[141] The foreigners at Gafat did not pass away without leaving any trace. The ruins of their houses and the surrounding wall as well as of their workshop can still be seen. Abbäbäw Yegzaw, an Ethiopian librarian from the area who revisited his birthplace in 1971–2, observed in an Amharic newspaper article that amid the ruins he had been able to discern the manner in which the water of the stream had been made to flow into four successive compartments. ' What is astounding ', he wrote, ' is that the remains of iron and glass are still found. The elders of the area know orally what each compartment was used for. This is where the charcoal was prepared, here was the area for smelting, etc.'. Explaining that the land was being ploughed over each year he added, ' I am afraid that if this continues no remains will be found in the near future '.[142]

The Däbrä Tabor–Gafat area was also the site, in the 1860's, of Tewodros's first road-building efforts, the most impressive such work up to then attempted in the country. As early as 1862 Dufton stated that the emperor, with the assistance of the Gafat workers, had ' commenced the construction of roads ', and that the network then under way was based on Däbrä Tabor which was being connected with Gondar, Gojjam, and Mäqdäla.[143] Lejean, discussing

[134] Dufton, op. cit., 83, 85–6; Heuglin, op. cit., 305.
[135] Rassam, op. cit., II, 148. See also Great Britain, House of Commons, op. cit., 531–2.
[136] Flad, op. cit., 87.
[137] ibid., 35. See also 90; Beke, op. cit., 138, 203–4, 209, 216, 235–6.
[138] Beke, op. cit., 180.
[139] Fusella, ' La cronaca dell'imperatore Teodoro II ', 104.
[140] Waldmeier, *Autobiography*, 73; *idem*, *Erlebnisse*, 19, 46.
[141] Fusella, ' La cronaca dell'imperatore Teodoro II ', 105–6.
[142] Abbäbäw Yegzaw, ' *Gafat yä-Aṣe Tewodros yaberäta berät fabrika* ', *Yä-Zareyitu Ityopya*, 25 Ter 1956/1973–4.
[143] Dufton, op. cit., 137. See also Stern, *Wanderings*, 103; Flad, op. cit., 18; Beke, op. cit., 143; Blanc, op. cit., 338–9, 343–4; R. Pankhurst, *Economic history of Ethiopia 1800–1935*, Addis Ababa, 1968, 284–7.

operations near Däbrä Tabor, relates that the work had begun with the help of soldiers who had murmured against being obliged to engage in manual labour, whereupon Tewodros descended from his horse, and, throwing off his embroidered toga, seized a heavy stone and carried it to the side of the track. ' Now ', he said, ' he who is too noble to do like me let him tell me ! ' There was no need to inquire whether or not the ruler's example was followed.[144] Tewodros later also used Oromo prisoners on the track between Däbrä Tabor and the Blue Nile. Lejean states that they had been captured by the emperor while on campaign in Wällo, and that a ' large colony ' were settled in a new village about a kilometre from the Gafat road.[145] They were ' well fed ' and ' regularly paid ', and able to save part of their earnings.[146]

Road-building continued to the very end of the reign. In January 1867, Tewodros ordered two of the missionary craftsmen, Staiger and Brandeis, to assist a Frenchman called Bardel in the construction of a road north-westwards from Däbrä Tabor to Amora Gädäl,[147] and later in the year began work on a road needed to transport his artillery from Däbrä Tabor eastwards to his fortress at Mäqdäla.[148]

In the last years of his reign Tewodros lost control of most of the empire, the area under his rule shrinking to little beyond Begemdir, Wadla, and Dälanta. This contraction of his dominions made him increasingly interested in Däbrä Tabor, the principal settlement subject to his power, the more so as Gondar, the nominal capital, displayed growing opposition, or disloyalty, to his rule.

The emperor, having resided at Däbrä Tabor from 23 June to 2 August 1865,[149] returned there on 15 June of the following year [150] when he fled with his army from a cholera epidemic then raging in the lowlands near Lake Ṭana.[151] Several incidents of this period are recorded. On one occasion the emperor is reported by Rassam to have erected at Däbrä Tabor ' a large black tent made of goats' hair '.[152] On another he brought to Gafat four royal lions from Däbrä Tabor, and ' directed their keepers to let them loose, in order ', the envoy says, ' that I might see how tame they were. They ran about after cattle and mules in the plain below for a long time, and, at a signal from the King, their keepers called them back and conveyed them to their dens '.[153] At about this time the monarch was becoming irritated with some of the missionaries, especially with Stern who had published a book in which he stated that the emperor's mother had been a vendor of *kosso*. It was at Däbrä Tabor that Tewodros staged a trial of Stern, a fellow-missionary Rosenthal, and the Frenchman Makerer who, as Pauline Flad reported, were ' charged that they had calumniated the King before the English Government '.[154] Shortly afterwards, in July, he paid yet another visit to the town, as Rassam reports, but left in November, in the hope of surprising his enemies in Gondar.[155]

[144] Lejean, *Théodore II*, 124.
[145] *idem*, *Voyage*, 15.
[146] *idem*, *Théodore II*, 124.
[147] Flad, op. cit., 95; Great Britain, House of Commons, op. cit., 613.
[148] Rubenson, op. cit., 81.
[149] Great Britain, House of Commons, op. cit., 434–5.
[150] Rassam, op. cit., II, 130–1. See also Great Britain, House of Commons, op. cit., 530–1.
[151] Waldmeier, *Erlebnisse*, 54–5; Markham, op. cit., 109–10; Fusella, ' La cronaca dell' imperatore Teodoro II ', 104; Douin, op. cit., III, part I, 331. See also Budge, op. cit., II, 507.
[152] Rassam, op. cit., II, 141. See also Great Britain, House of Commons, op. cit., 531.
[153] Rassam, op. cit., II, 148.
[154] Great Britain, House of Commons, op. cit., 507. See also 560.
[155] Rassam, op. cit., III, 164; Douin, op. cit., III, part I, 335.

Disaffection with the emperor was then spreading to Begemdir as a result of which Tewodros had recourse to violent acts of repression. Wäldä Maryam, a hostile chronicler, states that 'the King pillaged the grain supplies of Begemdir, and then put fire to them; he gave orders that the herds of oxen and cattle, which the men drove before them, should be sent up to Däbrä Tabor, and divided them among the soldiers, ordering them to kill and leave behind those that they could not consume.... The number of animals thus killed was so great that the hyenas and birds of prey could not devour them '.[156]

At about this time Tewodros took steps to found a church of his own at Däbrä Tabor. It was dedicated, like the emperor's churches at Mäqdäla and Č̣äč̣äho, to Mädhane Aläm, the Saviour of the World, and contained several *tabots*, one of which had been taken from a church of the same name in Adet in Gojjam, earlier despoiled by Tewodros. The looting of Adet is recalled in a poem remembered by Mälakä Tabor Täšomä Zärihun, where an old woman of the place declares:

እንግዲህ ፡ ለታቦት ፡ አልሰጥም ፡ ስለት ፤
አዴት ፡ መድኃኔዓለም ፡ ነዶ ፡ አገኘሁት ።

'I shall not henceforward make vows to the *tabot*.
For I have found Adet Mädhane Aläm burnt down.'

Tewodros was at this time bitterly critical of what he considered the excessive number of priests in the country. Wäldä Maryam relates that the emperor while building Mädhane Aläm gave orders that the number of ecclesiastics at any church should be reduced to five officiating priests. On subsequently explaining the size of the new church at Däbrä Tabor to Aläqa Fänta of Mahdärä Maryam, a priest in his entourage, the latter wryly commented, 'For five priests the church is always large enough!'. The monarch was not pleased with this and other remarks of the Aläqa who, the chronicler says, was later arrested and subsequently executed.[157]

The new church of Mädhane Aläm, as suggested in a sketch reproduced by Waldmeier, was an imposing circular edifice. It stood on massive stone foundations which extended beyond the building and covered the entire summit of the palace hill, thus forming a spacious surrounding precinct. The hill, which was virtually treeless, was densely studded with tents and a few huts, and was surrounded as in Ras Ali's day by two high concentric palisades. Access was by a single track which, we may assume, led down to the plain of Ajbar. To the east of the path on the lower slopes of the hill there were a number of larger buildings between the two fences. These structures comprised three big huts standing in their own compound which may have been the imperial quarter.[158]

On another occasion when Tewodros was in the town two monks who were quarrelling were apprehended and taken before him. After listening to their arguments he complained that they and their like neither worked in the fields nor went to war.[159]

The importance which the emperor attached to the church he had built, and to the town, is underscored by Wäldä Maryam, who observed:

'It may interest you to know why Tewodros made a town of Däbrä

[156] Mondon-Vidailhet, op. cit., 42. See also Budge, op. cit., II, 498.
[157] Mondon-Vidailhet, op. cit., 31–2. See also Fusella, 'La cronaca dell'imperatore Teodoro II', 91; G. J. Afevork, *Grammatica della lingua amarica*, Roma, 1905, 303.
[158] Waldmeier, *Erlebnisse*, 55, and plate opposite p. 54.
[159] Fusella, 'La cronaca dell'imperatore Teodoro II', 91.

Tabor. Indeed, from here to the sea one did not find buildings comparable to those which had been built there. The churches had been erected in places which had been flattened like the covers of *däbtäras*' Bibles; in one of them the king had an arch built, the sides of which were bound with strips of iron. The king had imagined that in presiding over this work when it would be completed the Saviour of the World would bless his reign as the reign of David had been blessed. The town had begun at a time when he was still inclined to goodness; when it was finished (the character of the king having changed) it was made into a prison '.[160]

There was in fact a prison at Däbrä Tabor. Those detained there in February 1867 included the emperor's enemy, Däjjazmač Webe, by then an old man, as well as, Pauline Flad says, ' almost the whole nobility ' of the town and some of the missionaries.[161]

The people of Begemdir meanwhile continued their opposition. Wäldä Maryam states that they ' held secret meetings, and became enemies of the king; they hurled insults when they entered the town at night or stopped on the hill. Once whilst he was moving in great haste towards Bäläsa the peasants, not daring to shoot rifle shots, had recourse to slings. Infuriated, the king ordered everything to be torn out of the fields, even maize and pumpkins. . . . Then the peasants, having overturned their houses, voluntarily set fire to them, so that fire could not be made with the debris, and so that they could not be used in case a camp were to be established in the area where they were located '. When Tewodros returned to Däbrä Tabor, the chronicler concludes, ' none of his acts were inspired any longer by pity, but rather by fury '.[162] Gäbrä Sellase subsequently noted that ' many men and cattle were butchered, and blood ran there freely '.[163]

The emperor, according to Wäldä Maryam's indictment, later made his way in 1867 to Mahdära Maryam, another focus of disloyalty, where he vented his anger on the priests. The chronicler claims that they came out to greet their sovereign as was their custom, but ' while they were in the act of singing praises in his honour the king surrounded them with his soldiers and exterminated them. It is estimated that they were four hundred and fifty in number '. The remainder then fled and succeeded in escaping, but their town, according to Pauline Flad, was burnt.[164]

On returning to Däbrä Tabor Tewodros is said by Wäldä Maryam to have despatched a group of his soldiers from Reb towards Ferqabär. On this expedition they seized some 1,700 peasants whom they burnt to death in their houses, and then took the victims' wives and children back to Däbrä Tabor to share a similar fate. The emperor, seeing their distress, had, however, pity on them, and allowed them to return to their country.[165] He then undertook an expedition in the direction of Lake Ṭana after which he returned once more to Däbrä Tabor, whereupon Begemdir again felt its ruler's wrath. ' Each day, on the most futile pretext ', Wäldä Maryam states, ' people were taken and put to death, to the point that it became like a habit, and it was not possible to tell the number of the victims. All round the royal camp hedges of thorny bushes had been set up, to a height greater than a man. This should not cause surprise

[160] Mondon-Vidailhet, op. cit., 42.
[161] Flad, op. cit., 98–9. See also Waldmeier, *Erlebnisse*, 61.
[162] Mondon-Vidailhet, op. cit., 42–3.
[163] Guèbrè Sellassié, op. cit., I, 202.
[164] Mondon-Vidailhet, op. cit., 46. See also Flad, op. cit., 124.
[165] Mondon-Vidailhet, op. cit., 46–7. See also Stern, *The captive missionary*, 300–1; Blanc, op. cit., 337; Waldmeier, *Erlebnisse*, 64–5.

for the king was execrated to such a point that fighting broke out during the night. . . . To prevent his men from deserting the camp and his enemies from penetrating it he had recourse to this system of enclosure '.[166]

Tewodros, the chronicler continues, now ' raided all the crops of Begemdir, and having had the grain taken to Däbrä Tabor, he issued an edict forbidding the giving of grass or straw to horses and mules, and ordered that they should eat only grain. For three months the animals, like people, ate nothing but cereals so that at the end of this time there were no provisions left '.[167] Food in consequence became so scarce that ' people began to die of hunger; it reached such a point that a poor woman carrying a child on her back, having abandoned it on the road, nobody picked it up, and this child died of hunger and was trampled upon by the horses and mules '. As a result of these events, Wäldä Maryam concludes, ' the king's enemies became so numerous ' that ' the troops were no longer allowed to leave to conduct razzias ', and the exhaustion of supplies resulted in a famine ' so great that in the town a *qunna* of grain sold for a thaler '.[168]

Despite such miseries, which are confirmed in the writings of the missionaries, Däbrä Tabor was the beneficiary of the emperor's displeasure with the priests and other citizens of Gondar, and of the consequent looting of their city. Tewodros, as an Ethiopian scholar Däbtära Assäggakañ noted on 14 April 1867, issued a decree stating that Däbrä Tabor was to be a new Gondar.[169] Confirmation of the edict is given by Wäldä Maryam who produced a graphic, if indignant account of the monarch's attack on the old capital in December 1866. Describing the depredations at Gondar, he declares that the monarch's soldiers ' began to strip the priests of their clothes; this having been done the soldiers entered the houses, and, having pillaged them one by one, they carried away all they could find, they then ransacked the monasteries. All the ornaments of the churches were taken away; the crosses which surmounted them were taken down; the treasures and the silks of Quesquam were put aside, some were embossed with gold; there were at Däbrä Berhan [170] two bells, one big and one small, which could be heard from afar when they were rung; in the monasteries they found nine hundred and eighty-one manuscripts. The king had it all taken to Däbrä Tabor so that it could not be said that, having destroyed Gondar he was incapable of making a capital. It is for that reason ', Wäldä Maryam somewhat maliciously concludes, ' that he decided that Däbrä Tabor should be a new Gondar '.[171]

The above account is corroborated, at least in outline, by several of Tewodros's European captives. Stern remarks that the emperor's soldiers, ' unheedful of the supplications of the laity, and the deprecations of the clergy ', carried off from Gondar ' vestments, mitres, crosses, pictures, and chalices, in fact, everything which, on account of its antiquity or value, had for ages been regarded with veneration ', and that these ' shameless trophies ' were then taken to Däbrä Tabor.[172] Blanc, writing of Däbrä Tabor immediately after the looting of Gondar, affirms that gold, silks, and dollars were ' abundant in the royal camp ' and that Tewodros was therefore received ' with all the

[166] Mondon-Vidailhet, op. cit., 47–8.
[167] ibid., 49.
[168] ibid., 49–50. See also Waldmeier, *Erlebnisse*, 64–5; Douin, op. cit., II, part I, 385.
[169] Fusella, ' Le lettere del *dabtarā* Assaggākhañ ', 89.
[170] Däbrä Berhan Sellase, a church on the outskirts of Gondar.
[171] Mondon-Vidailhet, op. cit., 49, 58. See also Budge, op. cit., II, 500, 560.
[172] Stern, *The captive missionary*, 298–9. See also Blanc, op. cit., 313–14.

triumphal honours bestowed on a victor ',[173] while Mrs. Flad, then resident at Däbrä Tabor, noted in her diary on 13 December, ' today the king returned from Gondar laden with gold and treasures '. She adds that she had herself received 50 dollars from the loot, ' though the money burns in me, and I sighed in stillness as I thought of the poor unfortunates from whom it had been robbed '.[174]

Some of the loot from Gondar was taken also to Gafat where Staiger reported that the emperor's men brought *tabots*, church paraphernalia, and a great mass of crowns, of gold, silver, and brass. The last were melted down as metal for the cannon, while the silver were given to the jewellers for the making of shield decorations.[175]

The collapse of the emperor's power in the last year or so of his reign resulted in the abandonment in 1867 first of Gafat and then, six months later, of Däbrä Tabor itself. The rebellion had ' become so universal ' by April 1867, Blanc declares, that Tewodros, fearing that the European craftsmen at Gafat ' might be seized by some rebel . . . determined upon removing them to his camp '.[176] On 15 April he ordered them to leave their hill.[177] They were then 27 strong, 15 of them men, three women, and nine children, and had been working on the manufacture of artillery to the very last moment.[178] The installations, Waldmeier reports, were then largely destroyed.[179] These, according to a chronicle, included the water-mill and two moulds for casting cannon.[180]

The craftsmen, on evacuating Gafat, were taken to Sälamge, i.e. the Muslim quarter, which was much nearer to Däbrä Tabor where the emperor had been accumulating a stock of grain, and where they continued frantically to work as armourers.[181] Assisted, Waldmeier says, by ' thousands of workers ',[182] they at once erected a new foundry with two furnaces, and, with a view, Blanc says, to ' regaining the Emperor's favour . . . cast an immense mortar for him '.[183] This weapon, which weighed no less than 16,000 pounds, was cast on 21 September, and was proudly christened the Great Sebastopol after the town besieged in 1854–5, in the Crimean War.[184] Rassam described this gun as ' a wonderful piece of ordnance ' and ' more wonderful still as the workmanship of his Majesty's European artisans who had previously no experience of casting cannon ', and stated that the emperor told him that the day of its casting was one of the happiest days of his life.[185] Some recollection of these guns is to be seen in the local tradition that a *mädf bet*, or ' cannon house ', once stood to the north-east of the palace compound overlooking the plain of Ajbar.[186] The

[173] Blanc, op. cit., 314.
[174] Flad, op. cit., 92. See also 91, 111; Great Britain, House of Commons, op. cit., 561.
[175] Flad, op. cit., 111. See also Mondon-Vidailhet, op. cit., 58.
[176] Blanc, op. cit., 321. See also Great Britain, House of Commons, op. cit., 651; Fusella, La cronaca dell'imperatore Teodoro II ', 105.
[177] Flad, op. cit., 103; Blanc, op. cit., 322. See also Flad, op. cit., 102; Waldmeier, *Erlebnisse*, 61–4; *idem*, *Autobiography*, 91–2; Great Britain, House of Commons, op. cit., 652, 654–5.
[178] Great Britain, House of Commons, op. cit., 581, 651; Flad, op. cit., 110–11, 121, 130–1; Stern, *The captive missionary*, 316–17.
[179] Waldmeier, *Erlebnisse*, 62–3.
[180] Fusella, ' La cronaca dell'imperatore Teodoro II ', 106.
[181] Rassam, op. cit., II, 302; Great Britain, House of Commons, op. cit., 680, 684, 694, 695, 730
[182] Waldmeier, *Autobiography*, 93.
[183] Blanc, op. cit., 323.
[184] Flad, op. cit., 130–1; Waldmeier, *Erlebnisse*, 66–7, 69; Rassam, op. cit., II, 303–4.
[185] Rassam, op. cit., II, 304, 306.
[186] Statement by Fitawrari Dämis Mängestu, Ato Agmase Mäkonnen and others.

craftsmen, according to the anonymous chronicler, also constructed ' many ' *addaraš*, or halls, and other buildings of wood which were erected in the vicinity of Mädhane Aläm church.[187] The presence of these edifices is confirmed in Waldmeier's sketch which depicts four rectangular gabled buildings of obviously foreign construction towards the foot of the palace hill facing the plain of Ajbar. One of these was apparently of considerable size.[188] The emperor's position in the summer of 1867 was, however, so precarious that he was obliged once again to raid the surrounding countryside in search of cattle and other supplies.[189] The shortage of food was so great that it was found necessary, on 19 August, to poison the imperial lions with arsenic, as Pauline Flad records.[190]

News of British intervention and, Waldmeier argued, the acute shortage of supplies [191] caused Tewodros to decide upon moving from Däbrä Tabor to the mountainous fortress of Mäqdäla some 150 kilometres to the east-south-east. The artillery made by his European craftsmen, including the great mortar Sebastopol,[192] and almost all the loot from Gondar, was therefore removed from the capital. Almost the only thing left behind, the chronicler relates, was the larger of two bells which was too heavy to transport.[193] Efforts to hang it at Mädhane Aläm were made on a number of occasions, notably during the subsequent reign of Emperor Yohannes, but proved unsuccessful. The bell was, however, later hung during the Italian occupation, but fell when the bell tower was hit by lightning. The bell, over half a metre high, 60 centimetres in diameter at the top with a base circumference of over two-and-a-half metres, lies today just within the church precincts by the surrounding wall to the south, and is oxidized to a fine greenish hue.

Before leaving Däbrä Tabor, where they had spent Mäsqäl, Tewodros's soldiers burnt the town, on 10 October.[194] Blanc claims that the monarch ' destroyed the whole place ', and left ' only as a record of his stay ', the church he had ' built as an expiation of his sacrilege at Gondar '.[195] The emperor's camp was then set up at Jan Meda.[196]

Tewodros, accompanied, Markham notes, by some 6,000 soldiers, a ' vast host of camp followers ', and his European craftsmen,[197] then began his heroic march to Mäqdäla which entailed dragging the great mortar and the other artillery across some of the most rugged terrain in the country. Mrs. Flad records that the emperor and his men left Däbrä Tabor with 24 carriages constructed by European artisans [198] while Sebastopol was placed on a carriage which, according to Waldmeier, was equal to it in weight and was pulled by as many as 400 men tethered to it like oxen. To assist its progress a road had to be constructed. Progress was often no more than two miles a day, and the half-starved men frequently fell exhausted to the ground, so that the emperor had to make periodic halts to allow his soldiers to rest and conduct raids in quest of food.[199] This march, which terminated the association between

[187] Fusella, ' La cronaca dell'imperatore Teodoro II ', 106.
[188] Waldmeier, *Erlebnisse*, plate opposite p. 54.
[189] Fusella, ' La cronaca dell'imperatore Teodoro II ', 106–7.
[190] Flad, op. cit., 125–6.
[191] Waldmeier, *Erlebnisse*, 69.
[192] ibid., 69; Douin, op. cit., III, part I, 385.
[193] Mondon-Vidailhet, op. cit., 49–50, 58–9. See also Douin, op. cit., III, part I, 385.
[194] Fusella, ' La cronaca dell'imperatore Teodoro II ', 109; Flad, op. cit., 132.
[195] Blanc, op. cit., 337. See Budge, op. cit., II, 509; Rubenson, op. cit., 82.
[196] Flad, op. cit., 131–2.
[197] Markham, op. cit., 292. See also Douin, op. cit., III, part I, 385; Rubenson, op. cit., 82.
[198] Flad, op. cit., 132. See also 35; Fusella, ' La cronaca dell'imperatore Teodoro II ', 109.
[199] Waldmeier, *Erlebnisse*, 69. See also Flad, op. cit., 35, 132.

Tewodros and his erstwhile capital was, Blanc comments, 'indeed, the most wonderful feat he ever accomplished; none but he would have ventured on such an undertaking; and no other man could have succeeded in accomplishing the arduous journey that lay before him: it required all his energy, perseverance, and iron will to carry out his purpose under such immense difficulties'.[200]

The Däbrä Tabor he had left behind had almost ceased to exist. The French traveller Achille Raffray, who visited it a few years later in the early 1870's, found it almost empty, and declared:

> 'We approached without meeting anyone; we entered the town, nothing: one could call it a necropolis. The Negus has left, carrying away his army, and Debra Tabor, a camp rather than a town, is today deserted. Nothing remains but the vultures who hover in the air disputing among themselves over some carcass, the remains of a last farewell feast, and the black storks who stride about with long steps on the humid earth looking for some frog'.[201]

The advent of Emperor Yohannes IV marked a new era in the history of Däbrä Tabor which within less than a decade was to resume the importance it had enjoyed before its destruction and abandonment by Tewodros.

Yohannes, who spent the first years of his reign in other provinces, later resided in Begemdir on a number of occasions. Though usually establishing himself at Däbrä Tabor he does not seem to have camped on the old site used by Ras Gugsa, Ras Ali, and Emperor Tewodros, but, following the custom of earlier Ethiopian rulers who often abandoned the capitals of their predecessors, he chose an entirely new site on the mountain of Sämära, in Ge'ez 'he chose her',[202] a place an hour or so's mule ride to the north-east of the former settlement.[203] The emperor first arrived in the area, according to a contemporary chronicle, in the sixth year of his reign, i.e. 1876, when he put up his tent and was visited there by Ras Adal, the ruler of Gojjam. Yohannes subsequently left for Amba Çara and Shoa, but returned to his camp at Däbrä Tabor in 1878. After leaving for Yeju and the Oromo country a year later, he was back again in 1879–80.[204] In October 1879 he negotiated there with General Gordon, then in Egyptian service in the Sudan, who reports seeing 'black soldiers' whom the emperor had captured from the Egyptians at the battle of Gundet in 1875 and Arabs whom Ras Alula had captured at Ailet in 1877.[205] During this residence at Däbrä Tabor Yohannes crowned Ras Adal as King Täklä Haymanot. The ceremony took place, according to the Italian traveller Gustavo Bianchi, on 20 January 1881, those present including King Menelik of Shoa.[206] Yohannes subsequently left Däbrä Tabor,[207] and did not return until 1887, when he learnt, a chronicler records, that the Italians were advancing inland from Massawa, and set forth to confront them.[208] Däbrä Tabor was later again visited by Menelik, who, Gäbrä Sellase says, spent 18 days there in March and April 1888, in the course of an expedition against the

[200] Blanc, op. cit., 337.
[201] A. Raffray, *Abyssinie*, Paris, 1876, 240.
[202] C. F. A. Dillmann, *Lexicon linguae aethiopicae*, Leipzig, 1865, 235.
[203] Guèbrè Sellassié, op. cit., I, 201. See also Bianchi, op. cit., 525.
[204] M. Chaine, 'Histoire du règne de Iohannes IV, roi d'Ethiopie (1868–1889)', *Revue Sémitique*, XXI, 2, 1913, 186–7.
[205] G. B. Hill, *Colonel Gordon in Central Africa*, London, 1884, 411–15.
[206] Bianchi, op. cit., 528. See Bayru Tafla, 'Two of the last provincial kings of Ethiopia', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, XI, 1, 1973, 36.
[207] Chaine, art. cit., 188–9. See also Bayru Tafla, art. cit., 38.
[208] Chaine, art. cit., 190–1. See also J. Faïtlovitch, *Quer durch Abessinien*, Berlin, 1910, 109.

Dervishes.[209] Such imperial and royal visits brought to the town many personalities both religious and lay. Several bishops, among them Abuns Petros, Luqas, and Marqos, were reported by Gäbrä Sellase as visiting the town, and Abunä Marqos died there in 1882.[210] Another religious visitor seen in Däbrä Tabor by several foreign travellers was the Eč̣äge who often accompanied Emperor Yohannes on his peregrinations.[211]

The coming of the court, though infrequent and often separated by long intervals, temporarily inflated the population of Däbrä Tabor, and led to renewed building activity which caused Bianchi to remark that the capital had ' risen with the King '.[212] The town was in fact referred to in the late 1870's as *yä-Aṣe Yohannes kätäma* ' town of Emperor Yohannes '.[213]

Däbrä Tabor in this period, as in former times, had all the characteristics of a military camp. The British traveller W. Winstanley, who visited it during the residence of the emperor, recalls that the ' extremely steep ' hill on the summit of which the imperial residence stood was thronged with ' a large crowd, amounting to hundreds of petitioners and retainers, hanging about waiting or hoping for admittance ',[214] while the German Rohlfs recorded that part of the town was ' almost exclusively inhabited by soldiers and employees of the court '. Though there were also citizens and peasants, many living in groups of small huts around the church of Mädhane Aläm, i.e. the site of the earlier settlement, they were all connected with the army either as contractors or salesmen.[215] Bianchi likewise reports seeing chiefs great and small, soldiers, priests, and *däbtäras*, or lay clerics.[216] The presence of church school students then or at some other time in the history of the town is suggested by the fact that an area north of the field of Ajbar is known to this day as *daba maṭäbiya*, i.e. place for washing the *daba* or skin cloaks traditionally worn by such students. The town, Rohlfs says, ' did not lack professional beggars ',[217] while the Italian traveller Pellegrino Matteucci claims that he and his compatriots were constantly visited by sick persons seeking medical treatment.[218] Visitors of this period thus noticed more or less the same categories of people who would have been seen earlier in the century at the time of Gugsa, Ali, or Tewodros. The resident population during this reign was given by the Italian compiler E. Q. M. Alamanni at about 3,000,[219] but this was much swollen on the arrival of the sovereign and his army, and might exceed 30,000, as noted by the Greek physician Nicholas Parisis.[220]

Several foreign travellers, among them Winstanley, Bianchi, Matteucci, and Rohlfs, provide descriptions of Däbrä Tabor during this reign. Much of the town was then clustered on the mountain of Sämära where Rohlfs reported the presence of numerous compounds each with one, two, or three houses, depending

[209] Guèbrè Sellassié, op. cit., I, 255.
[210] ibid., I, 282, 303.
[211] Massaia, op. cit., XI, 145; Rohlfs, op. cit., 163, 173; Hill, op. cit., 410.
[212] Bianchi, op. cit., 44. See also D. Odorizzi, ' Lettere dell'Etiopia ', *Bollettino della Società Africana d'Italia*, XXIV, 1905, 207; Faïtlovitch, op. cit., 109.
[213] Bianchi, op. cit., 44. See also Massaia, op. cit., XI, 141.
[214] W. Winstanley, *A visit to Abyssinia*, London, 1884, II, 189.
[215] Rohlfs, op. cit., 171.
[216] Bianchi, op. cit. 87.
[217] Rohlfs, op. cit., 170.
[218] P. Matteucci, *In Abissinia*, Milano, 1880, 232.
[219] E. Q. M. Alamanni, *La colonia Eritrea e i suoi commerci*, Torino, 1891, 821.
[220] N. Parisis, *L'Abissinia*, Milano, 1888, 47. See also P. Vigoni, *Abissinia*, Milano, 1881, 185.

on the status of the owner. The roads between them were often tortuous and uneven, though scarcely worse, he says, than those in Russia or Hungary.[221] The imperial enclosure as described by Bianchi and Matteucci in 1879 was nearly oval and surrounded by a stone wall 300 metres in perimeter, and three or four metres high, here and there fenced with a palisade. Inside the enclosure stood three well-built large round edifices, depicted in the illustrations to Bianchi's book, and about the same number of smaller poorly-constructed houses. The courtyard, which was often crowded with visitors, dignitaries, functionaries, and soldiers, also contained piles of stones and fallen tree trunks.[222] Access to the enclosure was afforded by a single gateway set in the rough stone wall which was there somewhat higher than elsewhere. This gateway was surmounted by a parapeted platform with three openings, one in the front and two in the sides, which served for the placement of cannon.[223]

Within the enclosure the three round houses stood one behind the other, and thus served like separate chambers in a multi-roomed apartment. Each house was built with wattle and daub walls and thatched roofs, and was thus, the travellers report, similar in form to most huts then found in Ethiopia, albeit larger, better constructed, and cleaner. The first two houses were 18 to 20 metres in diameter, 15 metres from the ground to the top of the roof with walls some six metres high, while the third house was somewhat smaller.[224] A feature of particular beauty in all three houses was their conical roofs made of split poles and canes held together with cane and creeper, and covered with carefully laid thatch which extended more than a metre beyond the outer walls, thus providing extra protection from the rain. The canes were artistically arranged and painted on the inside, thus giving the ceiling a pleasing appearance. The roof was held up internally by a colonnade of poles about four metres from the walls, and by a central pole which did not reach the ground but rested on two beams fitted to four of the poles of the colonnade at a height of some 10 metres.[225]

The first of the buildings as one entered the compound served as an antechamber, and was, Matteucci notes, always crowded. Persons seen there, as in the royal compounds at Däbrä Tabor in previous times, included chiefs great and small together with their followers, servants carrying messages to or from provincial governors, persons coming from the remotest parts of the empire, Oromos bearing gifts to the king who threatened to conquer their lands, priests, and Arabs coming to request permission to trade in the empire. The chamber would thus be thronged with 'persons of all countries, all languages, all customs, and all religions, who had a single aspiration, that of seeing and speaking with the King of Kings'.[226]

The second building, which, according to Winstanley, was somewhat larger, was reserved for the emperor's audiences, and also served as a court of justice. On the right as one entered were the monarch's favourite horses and mules tethered between the colonnade and the wall, while slightly to the left of the rear of the room, under a red and green canopy, was a throne on which the

[221] Rohlfs, op. cit., 158.
[222] Bianchi, op. cit., 44–5 and illustrations on 33, 41, 45; Matteucci, op. cit., 213. See also Hill, op. cit., 410.
[223] Bianchi, op. cit., 44–5; Matteucci, op. cit., 213; Rohlfs, op. cit., 158–9. See also Winstanley, op. cit., II, 189.
[224] Bianchi, op. cit., 45; Matteucci, op. cit. 213. See also Winstanley, op. cit., II, 193, 203.
[225] Bianchi, op. cit., 46.
[226] Matteucci, op. cit., 214. See also Winstanley, op. cit., II, 202–3.

sovereign would sit when pronouncing sentence.[227] Winstanley says that this room was ' without ornament or furniture, nor was there any carpet on the ground which was bare and unboarded ',[228] but Matteucci, who attended a banquet, remarks that the floor was then covered with dried grass and hay. Yohannes was seated on a silk-covered divan, while to the right three horses and four mules munched hay and flour and sipped water. The Italian visitors, who were assigned a stretch of floor between the emperor and the animals, lay on an old Persian carpet, while several groups of chiefs sat in the centre of the room, and were served by a host of slaves.[229]

The third building constituted the private chamber of the monarch, and it was there that he slept, dined, and received courtesy calls from visitors. The Italian travellers, who were themselves received in this third house, relate that Yohannes was seated Arab-style on his *alga*, or couch, which was covered with a large carpet, several silk cloths, and two large cushions, thus giving it an ' original and elegant appearance '.[230] The room, which was illumined only by two open doors, one opposite the other, had no other furniture than the divan, which occupied a large part of its area, but behind it on the wall was a rifle, a round buffalo-skin shield richly worked with silver, and two silver-decorated spears. The floor was covered with carpets and freshly cut grass.[231]

The remaining houses in the compound consisted of huts of simple construction which had been erected, Bianchi says, in two or three days and lacked any claim to distinction. These huts, if small, were held up by a single central pole which was fixed to the middle of the roof and ran down to the ground, but if large were additionally supported by five or six poles placed around the interior of the wall. In such houses transverse poles with walls of wickerwork were sometimes fitted, thus forming a number of rooms, some of which were used for keeping horses, mules, donkeys, cows, goats, and sheep.[232]

During the emperor's residence at Sämära there was a considerable amount of building and rebuilding in the palace area. Shortly before the arrival of the Italian travellers three new, well-constructed buildings were erected immediately outside the enclosure, and were surrounded by a special palisade. Within this enclosure a large tent, a gift from Menelik who had earlier received it from the Italian geographical expedition, was also put up and placed at the disposal of the Italian party, as well as other later visitors.[233] Not long afterwards the platform over the gateway to the enclosure was fitted with a conical thatched roof.[234] A short while later one of the three circular palace buildings was replaced by a rectangular stone-roofed construction created by two Italian craftsmen, the brothers Giacomo and Giuseppe Naretti.[235]

By the time of Rohlfs's visit in 1881 the imperial compound had in fact been largely rebuilt. On passing through the afore-mentioned gateway, which the German described as crowded with officials, palace servants, and peasants bearing gifts or taxes, the visitor found himself in an entirely new rectangular entrance hall, 100 metres long by 20 wide, which had a gabled roof of obviously foreign design. In this chamber there were four rows of soldiers armed with

[227] Bianchi, op. cit., 55–6; Matteucci, op. cit., 214, 226; Winstanley, op. cit., II, 203.
[228] Winstanley, op. cit., II, 203.
[229] Matteucci, op. cit., 226–7.
[230] Bianchi, op. cit., 45, 49–50; Matteucci, op. cit., 214.
[231] Bianchi, op. cit., 32.
[232] ibid, 46.
[233] Matteucci, op. cit., 214–15; Rohlfs, op. cit., 102.
[234] Bianchi, op. cit. 44.
[235] ibid., 45. See also Rohlfs, op. cit., 153; Faïtlovitch, op. cit., 109.

Remington rifles captured from the Egyptians, and many nobles in black or brightly coloured skins with blue and red shields decorated with silver or filigree gold, the ensemble presenting a picturesque appearance. This hall led on to one of the remaining circular buildings, likewise full of officials and other functionaries. It was here that during the rains, the emperor delivered justice. The visitor passed thence to a courtyard at the end of which were some steep stone steps which led up to another new building constructed by Giacomo Naretti. Likened by Rohlfs to a country house in the mountains of Umbria or Emilia, it was made of blocks of unworked basalt held together with cement, and a low gabled roof. The interior consisted of but a couple of rooms, from the rear one of which the emperor could pass directly into his round houses. The front chamber, in which the traveller was received, was ten metres long by eight wide, and illumined by a single open door. Here again almost the sole item of furniture was the imperial divan decorated with beautiful carpets, furs, and carpets of silk, upon which Yohannes, enveloped in his *šämma*, sat Turkish-style between two cushions, while two painted white seats with red silk cushions were supplied for his visitors. The walls were covered with dazzling white *šämmas*, with red borders, while several niches contained beautiful gold and silver jugs and cups of Ethiopian workmanship. The floor was covered with soft Persian carpets.[236]

Yet another building erected at this time was the church of Heruy Giyorgis, a large rectangular building of stone some 26 metres long by 16 wide which stands to the south of Sämära. Apparently also built with Naretti's help it today contains the throne, flag, spear, and hand-bell of its imperial founder.

Naretti, who is perhaps best known as the carpenter responsible for Emperor Yohannes's throne,[237] was, we may add, perhaps the principal foreigner associated with the town in this period. He had married Theresa Zander who had been born there. The daughter by an Ethiopian wife of the German artist of that name, she had been educated by Swedish missionaries in Eritrea,[238] and, according to Agmase Mäkonnen, was locally known by the Ethiopian name of Abozänäč.

The emperor's establishment at Däbrä Tabor was fortified at this time with four large 'cannon of eight', 'the glorious triumphs', as Matteucci observes, of the victories of Emperor Yohannes over the Egyptians in 1875–6. These weapons were placed on the right of the entrance to the first of the three royal buildings.[239] Though these guns have long since disappeared the ruins of Emperor Yohannes's capital at Sämära can still be seen.[240]

Däbrä Tabor during these years continued to hold a large Monday market which was supplemented by smaller ones in the area. One such market which may well have gained prominence in this period was the present-day Saturday market which was held in the vicinity of Sämära, to the east of Däbrä Tabor. This market, according to Abbäbäw Yegzaw, is referred to as Sämära market and subject to the control of the Aläqa of Emperor Yohannes's church of Heruy

[236] Rohlfs, op. cit., 158–60. See also Faïtlovitch, op. cit., 109.

[237] Bianchi, op. cit., 44.

[238] Massaia, op. cit., XI, 151; Rohlfs, op. cit., 153, 174–6. See also G. Puglisi, *Chi è? dell' Eritrea, 1952*, Asmara, 1952, 217, and, for a photograph of Signora Naretti, A. De Jaco, *Di mal d'Africa si muore*, Roma, 1972, opposite p. 129.

[239] Bianchi, op. cit., 46; Matteucci, op. cit., 213; Rohlfs, op. cit., 159; Winstanley, op. cit., II, 202–3, seems to have been wrong in asserting that these cannon were part of the gift received by Yohannes from the British after their expedition against Emperor Tewodros.

[240] Italy, Consociazione Turistica Italiana, *Guida dell'Africa Orientale Italiana*, Milano, 1938, 391.

Giyorgis. Prices, according to Rohlfs, were cheap, since for a dollar one could purchase 30 or 40 pounds of coffee, three or four dyed ox-skins, or a well-made shield of buffalo or rhinoceros skin.[241]

The plain below the town was still used, as in former days, for military displays. Bianchi tells of hundreds of cavalry and thousands of infantry taking part in manoeuvres and martial sports.[242] The mock battles of the cavalry, Matteucci recalls, provided a ' surprising spectacle '. Members of the court, chiefs, and officials dressed in skin cloaks and coloured shirts, enveloped in white *šämmas*, armed with shields, spears, and swords, and mounted on fine large horses with trappings richly decorated with silver, presented a ' stupendous scene '. Emperor Yohannes, like Ras Ali before him, shared in the sport, and was no whit less dextrous than his followers.[243] The emperor, like his predecessors, would also often visit near-by sites. Matteucci records for example that the imperial camp was on one occasion situated an hour and a half's distance south of the town on the hill of Jan Gafat,[244] and consisted of a group of huts, surrounded by soldiers' tents which Yohannes always had at his camps.[245]

Däbrä Tabor was affected during this period by Emperor Yohannes's insistence that Muslims throughout the empire should embrace the Christian faith. Many Muslims accordingly adopted names consonant with the dominant faith, as recalled by Nägadras Hudi Flate of Mahdära Maryam, who states that his grandfather Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir assumed the name Abba Wäldä Giyorgis.[246]

The death of Yohannes and the rise of Menelik, whose capital and power base was further south in Shoa, led almost inevitably to a decline in the status of Däbrä Tabor. The town nevertheless remained a significant provincial capital. It was for a time the residence and seat of administration of Ras Zäwde, a governor of Begemdir who rebelled against Menelik but was later pardoned,[247] and, after 1901, of Ras Gugsa Wäle, the husband of Menelik's daughter Zäwditu.[248] Gugsa, who was referred to by chronicler Gäbrä Sellase as ' the second Gugsa ', an allusion of course to Ras Gugsa Mersa, the original founder of the town,[249] played an important role in its development, for, abandoning Emperor Yohannes's establishment at Sämära,[250] he placed his camp on a hill to the north-west of the earlier camp of Ras Ali and Emperor Tewodros,[251] and a few years later, according to local tradition, the first eucalyptus trees were planted, and the first wells dug.[252] Later, in the early twentieth century, the town was linked with Wara Illu, and thence to the capital and the principal centres in the empire,[253] by a telegraph line laid by an

[241] Rohlfs, op. cit., 170–1.
[242] Bianchi, op. cit., 64.
[243] Matteucci, op. cit., 225.
[244] Matteucci, op. cit., 212.
[245] ibid., 209.
[246] Statement kindly given by Nägadras Hudi Flate.
[247] Guèbrè Sellassié, op. cit., I, 311, 478.
[248] ibid., I, 202; J. Duchesne-Fournet, *Mission en Éthiopie*, Paris, 1909, I, 119–20; Faïtlovitch, op. cit., 109–10; C. Annaratone, *In Abissinia*, Roma, 1910, 215; Rosen, op. cit., 389; R. Forbes, *From Red Sea to Blue Nile*, London, 1925, 243; J. E. Baum, *Savage Abyssinia*, London, 1928, 44, 97–9; H. Norden, *Africa's last empire*, London, 1930, 174, 206, 219; R. E. Cheesman, *Lake Tana and the Blue Nile*, London, 1936, 46, 214, 231, 234.
[249] Guèbrè Sellassié, op. cit., II, 489.
[250] Cheesman, op. cit., 158.
[251] Odorizzi, art. cit., 208.
[252] Statement by Ato Agmase Mäkonnen.
[253] L. De Castro, *Nella terra dei Negus*, Milano, 1915, II, 286.

Italian engineer Dominico Tavano, and operated at Däbrä Tabor by one of his compatriots called Piga.[254] Subsequently, around 1907–8, the town's communications with Gojjam and Shoa were improved by the repair, on the orders of Menelik and Gugsa, of the old bridge over the Blue Nile.[255] This was a valuable development, for the river, according to the German traveller Jacques Faïtlovitch, had previously been impassable between July and January.[256] Däbrä Tabor was on a convenient caravan track from Gondar across Gojjam to Shoa, and was also connected with Lalibäla and Lasta, as noted in the second decade of the century by the Italian physician Lincoln De Castro.[257]

Däbrä Tabor, though less important than in Yohannes's day, maintained much of its earlier significance both as an administrative and commercial centre, as recognized by the Italian traveller Dante Odorizzi who remarked in 1903 that it was ' a vast city ', and one of the principal settlements of central Ethiopia,[258] an opinion which was shared by Faïtlovitch.[259] Odorizzi, obviously taken with the place, described it as essentially a town of flowers. ' There are ', he exclaimed, ' flowers and scents everywhere, on the roads, on the slope of the hillock on which the city stands, and between the houses which seem submerged in high grass and a coloured wave of flowers '. These included jasmine, acacia, and wild roses, and gave the city ' a seductive smile ' which ' danced amid roses '.[260] Commercially the town possessed one of the most important markets in central Ethiopia, as Odorizzi and Faïtlovitch both note.[261] Another Italian, Carlo Annaratone, recorded that Däbrä Tabor now held two markets, a Saturday one as well as the Monday one reported by earlier travellers, and was ' renowned for horses and especially for riding mules '.[262]

The population, as in former times, consisted largely of the followers of the local ruler, i.e. Ras Gugsa for much of this period. The place, the Italian geographer Maurizio Rava remarked in 1908, was thus ' above all a camp of soldiers ',[263] but there were also, according to the French Duchesne-Fournet mission, ' numerous priests ',[264] besides ' beggars dressed in skins' as Rava notes.[265] The size of the population was, as previously, difficult to assess. Rava estimated that it consisted of ' four or five thousand inhabitants, about two thousand of which are the armed followers of the Ras ',[266] while Faïtlovitch wrote of ' a few thousand people, largely soldiers of the Ras ', living in ' a few hundred huts '.[267] Annaratone, on the other hand, a few years later observed, with probable exaggeration, that the town had ' over 10,000 inhabitants, without taking count of the number of soldiers which fluctuated with the presence or absence of the chief '.[268]

By the early twentieth century many of the buildings erected at Sämära during the reign of Yohannes were in ruins, as Faïtlovitch notes,[269] and the

[254] ibid., II, 286; M. Rava, *Al lago Tana (il mar profondo d'Etiopia)*, Roma, 1913, 104.
[255] Cheesman, op. cit., 248.
[256] Faïtlovitch, op. cit., 110.
[257] De Castro, op. cit., II, 277, 284–6. See also Cheesman, op. cit., 246, 248, 250.
[258] Odorizzi, art. cit., 204.
[259] Faïtlovitch, op. cit., 109.
[260] Odorizzi, art. cit., 207.
[261] ibid., 204; Faïtlovitch, op. cit., 109.
[262] Annaratone, op. cit., 215.
[263] Rava, op. cit., 102.
[264] Duchesne-Fournet, op. cit., I, 120. See also Rava, op. cit., 101.
[265] Rava, op. cit., 101.
[266] ibid., 102.
[267] Faïtlovitch, op. cit., 109.
[268] Annaratone, op. cit., 215.
[269] Faïtlovitch, op. cit., 109.

attention of foreign observers was mainly directed to those constructed by the ruling lord. The palace itself, which was situated in an area often referred to as *juba*, or forest—an indication that it was earlier covered with trees—was surrounded by a wall of stones held together without mortar by poles stuck in the ground about half a metre from each other, surmounted with a hedge of red thorns. Within this enclosure the visitor had to pass, Rava says, through many hedges arranged like a maze. In the middle were a number of houses, some of them of wattle and mud and others of masonry, with thatched roofs projecting well beyond their walls, and ceilings interlaced with brightly painted straw and wood such as Däbrä Tabor had seen before. These buildings included the private apartments of the Ras, a banqueting hall, and some store-houses.[270]

The private building of the Ras was circular with a ceiling of bright colours. The banqueting hall was a rectangular building 24 metres long by 14 metres wide consisting of a single room. It had a ceiling of brilliant colours, an internal colonnade of poles painted in red, yellow, and blue, with pieces of cloth instead of window panes, and contained low basket tables on which food and drink were served.[271] The palace compound, which caught the eye of many travellers,[272] was later visited by a British woman, Rosita Forbes, who remarked in 1925 that it consisted of ' a number of large huts, some square, some round, with an imposing quadrangle, which seems to hang over the very edge of the cliff, looking south towards Mahadera Maryam ', while on the other three sides the ' mushroom town ' was scattered ' pell-mell over several slopes, sometimes struggling amidst scrub and stunted trees '.[273]

Ras Gugsa attempted a certain amount of building and renovation in and around Däbrä Tabor. The British Consul R. E. Cheesman noted in the 1920's that the governor ' had a passion for building new churches ', and somewhat critically added :

> ' He spent all his spare time and money on building them round Debra Tabor, where there were already plenty of churches for the people's needs. . . . I was invited to see his latest architectural effort, the church of Inatu Mariam. . . . The Ras was waiting me there and proudly showed one over it, climbing and stumbling over piles of rock that were dumped there awaiting the attention of the masons, so that we both narrowly escaped sprained ankles. Swarms of retainers dashed here and there getting in everyone's way '.[274]

Gugsa in fact made a mark on the town, for besides building his palace, the ruins of which can still be seen near the present-day police station, and the above-mentioned church Ennatitu Maryam he also rebuilt the churches of Iyasus, Lejitu Maryam, and Ṭegur Mika'el, and redecorated Emperor Yohannes's church of Heruy Giyorgis. The town had at this time a number of skilled church painters, among them Aläqas Kassa, Alämu, Bäyyänä, and Amrot.[275]

Ras Gugsa Wale was succeeded as governor of Begemdir in 1930 by Ras Kassa Haylu's son Däjjazmač Wänd Bäwäsän whose residence was in Däbrä Tabor. Soon after his appointment a group of local Muslim traders, followers

[270] Rava, op. cit., 97.
[271] ibid., 100–1. V. T. Zammarano, *Alle sorgenti del nilo azzurro*, Milano, etc., n.d., 129–31.
[272] Odorizzi, art. cit., 204; Annaratone, op. cit., 215.
[273] Forbes, op. cit., 243. See also 356; V. Varanini, *L'Abissinia attuale sotto tutti i suoi aspetti*, Torino, 1935, 34.
[274] Cheesman, op. cit., 47–8.
[275] Information from the churches as well as from Ato Agmase Mäkonnen.

of the prophet Shaykh Zäkaryas,[276] requested the Seventh Day Adventist Mission in Asmara to open a hospital at Däbrä Tabor. A mission and hospital was duly established on land provided by the government on the western side of the Ajbar field. The emperor and Däjjazmač Wänd Bäwäsän contributed 30,000 and 10,000 dollars respectively to the hospital which was run by a Norwegian, Dr. Gunnar Gundmundsen.[277]

Däbrä Tabor was occupied by Italian troops under the Fascist general Achille Starace on 28 April 1936.[278] On 19 May the Italian government decreed that one of the five principal roads of the empire was to be built from Gondar via Däbrä Tabor to Däse.[279] Work in this mountainous region was started at both ends of the proposed road, but was handicapped by the operations of the Ethiopian patriots and made but slow progress.[280] Several roads were, however, constructed within the town where an air-strip was cleared.[281] There was also a certain amount of new building in the town, mainly in stone and cement. The town plan was influenced by the fascist racial policy of preventing the 'promiscuous cohabitation' of Italians and 'natives'.[282] As a result the buildings for Italians were mainly constructed to the south of Ras Gugsa's palace on flat land to the south-west of the Ajbar field. These buildings, which are rectangular in shape and strictly aligned with each other, include the present administrative offices and an Italian church a little way up a hill behind them. The Italians also established a primary school,[283] and operated a multi-purpose clinic as well as a specialized clinic for the treatment of venereal diseases.[284] The administration also rebuilt Tewodros's old church of Mädhane Aläm,[285] which had been largely destroyed when earlier hit by lightning, and, as we have seen, erected the great bell which Tewodros had brought from Göndar. Being generally sympathetic to Islam, they also took steps for the erection of the town's first mosque which was completed shortly after the Fascist surrender of the town on 1 July 1941. This period also witnessed a considerable expansion of the eucalyptus tree and the digging of many wells.[286]

The history of Däbrä Tabor, one of the major provincial capitals of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ethiopia and an imperial city during two successive reigns, is at once illustrative of the continuity and the instability of such settlements. The place was selected, as we have seen, early in the nineteenth century by Ras Gugsa Mersa who was probably attracted by several fairly obvious geographical factors, among them the site's central location in Begemdir, its position on an imposing and easily defendable mountain, the vicinity of abundant pastures, and a good supply of water. Having established his camp on the mountain Ras Gugsa proceeded to build himself a palace, thus endowing the settlement with an element of permanence, while the presence

[276] D. Crummey, 'Shaikh Zacharias: an Ethiopian prophet', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, x, 1, 1972, 55–66.

[277] Information kindly provided by Dr. Kristian Hogganvik of the Seventh Day Adventist mission, Däbrä Tabor.

[278] A. Starace, *La marcia su Gondar*, Milano, 1936, 113–20.

[279] G. Cobolli-Gigli, *Strade imperiale*, Milano, 1938, 13–14.

[280] 'Il opera pubbliche', *Gli Annali dell'Africa Italiana*, II, 4, 1939, 352–3, 355–6.

[281] 'Le communicazioni e i trasporti', *Gli Annali dell'Africa Italiana*, II, 4, 1939, 464–5.

[282] 'Le amministrazioni municipali nei maggiori centri urbani nell' A.O.I.', in Africa Orientale Italiana, *Opera per l'organizzazione civile in Africa Orientale Italiana*, Addis Abeba, 1939, 210.

[283] 'La scuola e le istituzioni educative', *Gli Annali dell'Africa Italiana*, III, 1, 1940, 687.

[284] 'I servizi sanitari', *Gli Annali dell'Africa Italiana*, III, 1, 1940, 823–4.

[285] 'La tutela dei culti', *Gli Annali dell'Africa Italiana*, III, 1, 1940, 703.

[286] Great Britain, Ministry of Information, *The Abyssinian campaigns*, London, 1942, 137.

of the chief's courtiers, soldiers, and camp-followers gave the place a considerable population and led to the growth of a market of no mean importance. By the time of Gugsa's death in 1825 Däbrä Tabor was apparently such a flourishing centre that its founder's heirs and successors apparently saw no need or advantage in transferring their headquarters to any other site. Though almost razed to the ground in 1835 and pillaged in 1842 and twice more in 1853 the town thus remained the capital of the dynasty of Ras Gugsa, and notably of Ras Ali Alula who ruled there from around 1831 to 1854, and is remembered as a great builder of churches.

The geographical factors which had led to the original selection of the site, and the political significance which the town had acquired during the Gugsa dynasty, doubtless influenced Emperor Tewodros in establishing himself at or around Däbrä Tabor on a number of occasions, and in making it his first capital after his destruction of the old city of Gondar in 1866. Though he dismantled much of Däbrä Tabor before leaving for Mäqdäla only two years later his presence in the town, if only for a short while, doubtless also contributed to its importance in the eyes of Emperor Yohannes. The latter, though moving the site of his camp, resided in the area, and made it his capital on several occasions in the first part of his reign. The presence of this succession of rulers, and the host of followers who accompanied any Ethiopian potentate of former times, laid the basis of Däbrä Tabor's greatness, and were the cause of its relatively large population, as well as of palaces and churches which made the city in its day one of the finest in the empire.

Däbrä Tabor, like other settlements depending essentially on the presence of a ruler, nevertheless, lost much of its *raison d'être* whenever its master left, either in the course of campaign or, as in the case of Emperors Tewodros or Yohannes, if he chose to transfer his headquarters elsewhere. The destruction of the city by the first of these sovereigns, its abandonment by both, and the subsequent residence of Emperor Menelik elsewhere, led to a sharp fall in the population, the suspension of imperial building activity, the decline of commerce and thus to the arrest of urban growth. The development of the town was also hindered by the shifting of its centre eastwards to Sämära by Emperor Yohannes and north-westwards by Ras Gusa Wäle. By the early twentieth century Däbrä Tabor, once a great imperial metropolis, had once more been reduced to the status of a modest provincial capital.