

The Portuguese - Jesuit Settlement of Fremona, Tigray: 1565-1640

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1. Origins of the Settlement

From 1557 to 1632 the Catholic missionaries led a religious mission in the Ethiopian highlands. Missionaries from the Society of Jesus established a number of residences, principally in Dämbiya, Tigray, Gojjam and Agäw land. The first to have been founded and one of the most important was the settlement of Fremona, near 'Adwa.¹

The missionaries settled in Fremona in the mid-1560s, in a moment of political turmoil. In April 1557, the Bishop Andrés de Oviedo and five other companions had landed at Massawa and one month later they reached the court of Gälawdewos (r. 1541-59). At the court religious discussions ensued and Oviedo's uncompromising approach clashed with Gälawdewos lack of will to join the Roman faith. Soon the Jesuits abandoned the *kätäma* and retreated to the north, where they counted with the protection of *baḥer nägash* Yishäq and *tigre mäkwännin* Yohannes.² A further motivation for this move could have been to be close to the Red Sea, which would facilitate the organisation of a military operation involving forces sent from Goa.³

- 1 One of the few studies on 'Adwa is that by Merid Wolde Aregay, "Gondar and Adwa: A tale of two cities", in: Tadesse Beyene (ed.), [*Proceedings of the Eighth International conference of Ethiopian Studies. University of Addis Ababa [26-30 November 1984]*], Addis Ababa - Frankfurt am Main-Wien: Peter Lang, 1988-89, vol. 2, 57-66, 61-62.
- 2 *Abetecom* Yohannes was a cousin of *nigus* Gälawdewos, and had lands at Amba Sämayti; cf. Andrés de Oviedo to King of Portugal, 18 June 1567, in: Camillo Beccari, *Rerum Aethiopicarum scriptores occidentales inediti a saeculo XVI ad XIX*, Roma: C. de Luigi, 1902-17 (repr. Brepols Publishers 1969), 15 vols. [henceforth RASO], vol. X, doc. 61, 222.
- 3 During the first four decades of mission the Jesuits repeatedly invited the Portuguese officials in India to send a military force to the Red Sea. They considered that the occupation of Massawa and Arquico would demand a small number of soldiers – between 500 and 2,000 – and even planned a broader invasion further inland. In 1567, for instance, Patriarch Andrés de Oviedo wrote to the Pope that "for what regards having hopes in the reduction of Ethiopia to the Catholic Church, I am very much convinced indeed of this

Meanwhile in 1559, Gälawdewos died during a campaign against the Sultan of Adal Nur bin Mujahid. Under Gälawdewos' successor Minas a serious regional crisis erupted. *Baḥr nāgash* Yishāq, who had grown in confidence with his contacts with the Ottomans and the friendship with the Jesuit missionaries and the Portuguese settlers⁴, declared his rebellion and challenged Minas on the Solomonic throne. With the support of a share of the nobility of the kingdom *abetobun* Yishāq tried to bring to power the puppet Marqos, son of Minas' brother Ya'iqob. As the enterprise failed – Marqos was killed in the province of Wāggāra – in 1562 he united with the Ottoman governor of Massawa “Ozdemir Pasha” and supported Marqos' brother, Tāzkara Qal, as new candidate to the throne. On 20 April 1562, the rebel army and the forces of Minas met.⁵ The historical record is ambiguous as to the actual outcome of the battle. Some sources attribute the victory to Minas and other records to the opposite side. This notwithstanding, after the battle the alliance between the Muslims and the Christians faded. The Turks, now facing the opposition of Yishāq, were pushed back to Massawa and Ḥirgigo and soon had to give up their quest to dominate the Eritrean highlands.⁶ The *negus* had to flee southwards to face renewed Oromo incursions and in one of them he would eventually perish. Yishāq, in his turn, was not successful in accomplishing his political ambitions but in the ensuing decades managed to secure a tight control of northern Tigray and Ḥamasen. He made northern Ethiopia his own political fief and pursued steadfastly the quest to rule over the Ethiopian kingdom until his own death in 1578, during a clash against Sāršā Dengel's army.⁷

possibility if from India we send some five or six hundred Portuguese soldiers, as we have allways wished” (... *quanto a tener mejor esperanza de la redución de Ethiopia a la Iglesia Catholica, sin duda la tengo, si de la India se embiassen a esta tierra quinientos o seiscientos soldados Portugueses como siempre esperamos*); Andrés de Oviedo to Pius V, 15 June 1567, in: Antonio de Arana, *Historia de la Santa vida, muerte y virtudes de el Santo P. Andres de Oviedo, Religioso de la Comp.^a de Jesus, Obispo de Hierapolis, y Patriarcha d'Ethiopia*, 24 July 1631, manuscript, in: Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa, cod. 4473, 110.

- 4 A few hundreds Portuguese had settled in Ethiopia in the 1540s and formed a mixed race group, known locally as *Burtukan* or simply *Ferenj*. I have elsewhere reconstructed their history and identity: Andreu Martínez d'Alòs-Moner, “Les fils de Christovão da Gama: les *Burtukan* de l'Ethiopie”, in: *Publications du 3ème Congrès du Réseau Asie*, 26-28 September 2007, *Maison de la Chimie-Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris*, on-line publication: http://www.reseau-asie.com/cgi-bin/prog/pform.cgi?langue=fr&Mcenter=colloque&TypeListe=showdoc&email=&password=&ID_document=447.
- 5 Andrés de Oviedo et al. to Viceroy of India, 14 July 1564, in: RASO X, doc. 47. Also in Couto, *Decadas VII-X-VI*.
- 6 Manuel Fernandes to João Nunes Barreto, 31 March 1563, Debarwa, in: RASO X, doc. 45, 176; Oviedo, 1564, in: RASO X, doc. 47, 185.
- 7 Emphasizing the independence of the *baḥer nāgash*, Patriarch Oviedo informed that: “there won't be need to wait until the approval of the king, because he is far away and has no dominion over these lands of Tigray, which are controlled by the *baḥer nāgash*” (... *y no sera menester esperar el beneplacito del Rei de aqua, que esta longe, y no manda*

The Jesuits and some Portuguese led by captain Francisco Jacome settled initially at Debarwa but following the Turkish incursions from 1562 they had to flee. In 1563, the foreign group took refuge for a brief period at the monastery of Inda Abba Gärima.⁸ Some time later, probably in 1565, the bulk of the Catholic group, probably under permission of or at the request of Yishaq, relocated in Fremona and in a second unmentioned village nearby.⁹ Fremona was situated on a hill overlooking the 'Adwa plateau and dominating an important junction. The area was crossed by major trade routes: One running west-eastwards and connecting Shire with Inderta and another, south-northwards connected Tigray with Ḥamasen and the Red Sea.

The Europeans gained herewith a secure base from which to minister to the small group of Catholics. Yishaq, who had already welcomed the Portuguese military company of Christovão da Gama in 1541, also secured the help of the Portuguese militia and the diplomatic skills of the Jesuits. It is therefore not by chance if after this episode and throughout the 1560s and 1570s the *baḥer nāgash* and the *tigre mäkwännin* Yohannes led, with the support of the Europeans, an active diplomacy to gain alliances with the Portuguese.¹⁰ From this moment until the fall of the mission, Fremona turned into one of the most important Catholic settlements in Ethiopia.¹¹

por estas partes del Tigray aora, sino el Bernagays ..."); Andrés de Oviedo to Viceroy of India, 11 May 1567, in: RASO X, doc. 55, 203.

8 Manuel Fernandes to Viceroy of India, 31 March 1563, in: RASO X, doc. 45, 175.

9 The episode is described in Oviedo, 1567, in: RASO X, doc. 55, 203; Antonio Fernandes to Provincial of India, 22 Septemeber 1575, in: RASO X, doc. 84, 263. Jesuit sources do not inform of the exact date when they settled at Fremona but in a letter by Andrés de Oviedo from 15 June 1567 recorded in Arana's hagiography the Patriarch wrote that "in all, we are about 230 Catholics reunited in two small villages, which we have been trying to arrange for the last two years" (... *estaremos iuntos como duezentos y treinta chistianos en dos poblaciones pequenas, los quales procuramos edificar de dos años aesta parte ...*); ARANA, *Historia de la Santa vida, muerte y virtudes de el Santo P. Andres de Oviedo*, 113.

10 On the 'alliance' between these three actors, cf. Portuguese in Ethiopia to Viceroy of India, 13 June 1567, in: RASO X, doc. 58, 208.

11 The origins of the name of Fremona are not clear. The first time it appears in the missionary record is in 1603 in a letter by Pedro Paez; Pedro Paez to Provincial of India, 24 July 1603, Fremona, in: RASO XI, doc. 14, 54. The French historian Hervé Pennec has attributed its origin to the Jesuit missionaries; Hervé Pennec, *Des jésuites au royaume du Prêtre Jean (Ethiopie): Stratègies, rencontres et tentatives d'implantation (1495-1633)*, Paris: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian - Centre Cultural Calouste Gulbenkian, 2003, 154-59. However, a Franciscan "frate Raphaello" was reported by Zorzi (1522) to have travelled southwards through "Flemona" and "Axon" [Aksum] early in the 16th century; O.G.S. Crawford (ed., tr.), *Ethiopian itineraries circa 1400-1524*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948, 140. Moreover, a reference to "Debre Ferem" in the *basani* Dan'el inscriptions in Aksum could suggest the existence there of an ancient monastery dedicated to Frumentius aka Sälama Kesate Berhan; I am grateful to Gianfranco Fiaccadori for indicating me this fact; cf. Gianfranco Fiaccadori, "Epigraphica Aethiopica", *Quaderni Utinensi* 8 [15/16], 1990 [pub. 1996], 325-33, 327. Finally, during the last years of the

2. Development of a Catholic-Portuguese Centre in Ethiopia

The initial Catholic population at Fremona was relatively small and increased at a slow pace during the first decades. A group of Portuguese accompanied the Patriarch Oviedo and the other five Jesuit missionaries. They comprised one or two dozens soldiers, headed by their captain Francisco Jacome, and their families, numbering in total about 230.¹² Soon, a group comprising two Jesuits, Manuel Fernandes and Francisco Lopez, and a few Portuguese relocated to Dämbeya, where Särša Dingil granted them estates.¹³ In the ensuing decades, the birth of the first generation of Ethio-Portuguese made the Catholic settlement grow: In 1575 a Jesuit informed that in Ethiopia there were 70 homes and nearly 1,000 people, a big share of which must have lived in or near Fremona.¹⁴

During the first decades of the settlement, the missionaries made a few proselytizing though relatively unproductive missions in neighbouring spots such as Inda Abba Gäräma or Aksum. Albeit never being completely isolated, they made few contacts with the core of the Ethiopian kingdom. Whilst their missionary work was unimportant, their work with the Portuguese bears mention. Together with the Portuguese captain, they provided leadership to the Catholic group. At this point, it is important to mention that the veterans of Christovão da Gama's expedition and their descendants of mixed-race were considered by the Crown of Portugal its subjects and it is principally to take care of them that the Crown will set up the Jesuit mission. The Jesuits helped the *Burtukan* keep their Catholic faith alive and provided education to their children, thereby also contributing to the use of Portuguese as a lingua franca among the Catholic population in Ethiopia. The Portuguese also contributed to preserving their own identity by transmitting Portuguese traditions to their offspring. An important element was the use of Portuguese family and personal names, a custom that continued unchanged into

mission the missionaries tended to refer to Fremona with the name *Maigoga* (i.e., May Gwagwa), which still today identifies the river flowig through the 'Adwa valley. Cf. Andreu Martínez, "Fəremona", in: Siegbert Uhlig (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 1, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005, 527-28.

12 On the Jesuits being the reason for the Ethio-Portuguese settling there, a source indicated that: "In the year 1566, the father Patriarch and the other fathers settled here in the Tigray... when the captain Francisco Jacome and the rest of the Portuguese saw that the church became established there they came with their families" (*No anno de 1566 se asemtou aqui neste Tigare o padre Patriaca com todos os mais Padres... O capitão francisco Iacome como os mais Portugueses, como virão que a igreja aqui se asemtava, loguo se vierão com suas familias*); António Fernandes to the Preoposite of India, 22 September 1575, in: RASO X, doc. 84, 264.

13 Manuel Fernandes to Superior General, 10 June 1568, in: RASO X, doc. 74, 244 seq. The group went back to Fremona in the early 1580s following an Oromo incursion in Dämbeya.

14 Fernandes, 1575, in: RASO X, doc. 84, 264.

the 17th century.¹⁵ Moreover, military skills seem to have been keenly cultivated by them for at Fremona were born or were educated important figures of the Portuguese militia. It must be nonetheless mentioned that the Ethio-Portuguese group had to make some compromises to local traditions, too. The practice of circumcision, for instance, seems to have been more widespread among the children of the Portuguese than the Jesuit missionaries – overtly opposed to this rite – might have wished to.¹⁶

A few Portuguese figures that lived in Fremona are worth mentioning. By looking at their biographies we may also better grasp how interwoven the Jesuit mission was with this mixed-race group (cf. Appendix). One of the first leaders of the Portuguese group was one Francisco Machado, who had participated in the expedition of Christovão da Gama. He had been with Andrés de Oviedo at Debarwa and became one of his closest officers at Fremona. At the turn of the 17th century, as an old man, he also joined efforts with other Portuguese leaders to help the Jesuits in India introducing new effectives into Ethiopia. His son, Luiz Machado, had a estate in Amba Sänayti, participated in the meetings that took place in 1598 and 1602 to reinstate the Jesuit mission and welcomed the Patriarch Mendes in 1625 during the latter's trip from the Danakil desert to Fremona.¹⁷ Another veteran of the 1541-43 expedition was the Sintra-born Gonçalo Soares Cardim, who had joined the rebellion of Yishaq against Minas and when in the end of the century Jesuit effectives were reduced he took care of the management of the church of Fremona.¹⁸ Yet, perhaps the most interesting figure was the Ethiopian-born João Gabriel (Appendix b). Allegedly of Portuguese-Italian descent, Gabriel (b. ca. 1556)

15 In an earlier prosopographical analysis on the Ethio-Portuguese population, I found that from 67 'Portuguese' born in Ethiopia 57 had Portuguese personal names and six bore Ethiopian names. Among the Portuguese names, the most popular were António (8), Manuel (4) and Damião and Pedro (3).

16 Towards 1582, for instance, the Portuguese priest Manuel Fernandes complained to the Jesuit General that the Portuguese in Ethiopia circumcised their sons. He tried, nevertheless, to justify their transgression: "this they did not do because they believed it was necessary for their salvation but simply to protect themselves from the insults with which Ethiopian Christians condemn the uncircumcised" (... *isto não foi por lhes servir de necessitate salutis, senão somente por recusarem a afronta com que os christãos desta terra iniurão aos incircuncisos*); Manuel Fernandes to Superior General, 3 July 1582, in: RASO X, doc. 108, 329.

17 Missionary sources indicate that Machado was born in Setuval ca. 1522 and died a nonagenarian in Fremona ca. 1613; Antonio Fernandes to Superior General, 25 June 1628, Enfraz, in: RASO XI, doc. 77, 293; Tomás Barneto to Provincial in India, 1628, Goa, in: RASO XI, doc. 86, 312; Lorenzo Romano, [?] Annual letter, 1613, in: Archivum Romanum Societatis Jesu [henceforth ARSI], Goa 39 I, 103-110v, 110v. On his son Luiz Machado, cf. RASO IV, II; Afonso Mendes to Jesuits in Portugal, 9 July 1625, Fremona, in: RASO XII, doc. 47, 158; RASO VI, *liv.* VIII, ch. XX.

18 Diogo do Couto, *Da Asia*, Lisboa: Regia Officina Typografica, 1782, *Década VII, liv.* X, ch. VI; Balthazar Tellez, *Historia geral de Ethiopia a Alta ou Preste Ioam*, Coimbra: Manoel Dias, 1660, 202.

became an active asset in the mission: he participated in the meetings of 1598 and 1602 held at Fremona to introduce Jesuit priests into Ethiopia and as captain of the Portuguese assisted the missionaries who arrived to Ethiopia during the second missionary period. Moreover, he fathered Basilio Gabriel and was the grandfather of Antonio de Andrade. His son Basilio became in the 1620s captain of the Portuguese militia, thus inheriting the office from his father and also became a close aide to the Jesuit missionaries.¹⁹ Antonio de Andrade studied at the Jesuit school in Fremona and was admitted into the Society of Jesus in the late 1630s.²⁰ Another family that can be traced in sources was the Nogueira (Appendix c). One Bernardo Nogueira, born and educated at Fremona and descendant of a Francisco Nogueira from Braga, served as aide to the Jesuit Manuel de Almeida during proselytizing missions and as secretary to Afonso Mendes. When the mission terminated in 1632, he was one of the leaders of the Catholic group and like Andrade was chosen by the Jesuits as a candidate to join their order.²¹ Another Nogueira, Paulo, probably a distant cousin of Bernardo, was also aide to the Jesuit missionaries and provided important logistic help to the Jesuits who came to Ethiopia in 1624 and 1625.²² Finally, one Jacobo Alexandre (Appendix d), a descendant of an Italian captive of the Ottomans who had joined the Portuguese community in the 1560s, was the superintendent of the house of Fremona in the 1620s and was ordained a priest by Mendes.²³

3. Political Status and Local and Regional Interactions

As far as the relations between the Catholic group and the neighbouring populations are concerned information is more scant. The historical record attests that Fremona

19 Gaspar Paes, Annual letter, Tamqha, 15 June 1625, in: ARSI, Goa 39 I, 236r-59v, 250v; Antonio Roiz, Annual letter, 13 February 1625, Goa, in: ARSI, Goa 39 I, 220r-30r, 220v; RASO III, *liv.* IV, ch. II.

20 Reportedly Andrade was born near the Täckäze river ca. 1610, was educated in Fremona and in 1633 was taken to Goa with the Jesuit exiles. There he studied grammar, rhetoric, philosophy and theology and joined the Jesuits. Ca. 1641, he made a failed trip to contact the clandestine Catholic group in Ethiopia and in 1650, as he had been nominated Vicar Apostolic of Ethiopia with the title of Bishop of Calliopoli, he died during a second attempt to reach Ethiopia with two Franciscan priests; RASO I, 179; Afonso Mendes, 20 December 1645, Goa, in: RASO XIII, doc. 78, 251-52.

21 Afonso Mendes, 12 December 1633, Fremona in: RASO XIII, doc. 2, 7; Diogo de Mattos to Superior General, 22 September 1635, Diu, in: RASO XIII, doc. 10, 63-64.

22 He was further described as “a wealthy Portuguese from Fremona and *xum* of lands belonging to the [Jesuit] fathers” (*a Portuguese honrrado de Fremoná e Xumo de humas terras dos padres*); RASO VI, *liv.* VIII, ch. XIX; RASO VI, *liv.* VIII, ch. XVII.

23 Alexandre was eventually killed in 1628 by the rebel and governor of Tigray (1628) Täklä Giyorgis; RASO VII, *liv.* IX, ch. IV; Afonso Mendes to Superior General, 1 June 1629, Dänqáz, in: RASO XII, doc. 94, 340; Id. to Eudem, 8 July 1629, in: RASO XII, doc. 97, 368.

enjoyed of a semi-independent status. Most of the local and national rulers active during the Jesuit period, from *baḥer nāgash* Yishaq and *Tigre mākwennin* Yohannes up to *nigus* Sārṣä Dingil, Zä Dingil and Susinyos, granted to the site and its dwellers privileges and political protection. Sārṣä Dingil would have thus engaged most of the *Burtukan* in his service and given a third of them to his daughter Krestosawit, the wife of the powerful lord in Tigray Kiflä Waḥid.²⁴ The same ruler, probably endorsing an earlier privilege granted by *baḥer nāgash* Yishaq, granted to Fremona a *gult* and the right to be governed by a 'Portuguese' *xum*. This implied that the settlers could resolve themselves disputes and juridical issues and were freed from paying taxes.²⁵ Later, *negus* Zä Dingil (r. 1603-04) informed his 'friend' the Spanish King Felipe III (r. 1598-1621) that "the Portuguese remained with great honours, so that until their death they had everything they required".²⁶ Successive rulers, *nigus* Ya'iqob (r. 1597-1603, 1605-07) and Susinyos (r. 1607-32) would have confirmed the special juridical status of Fremona and the Ethio-Portuguese.

In addition, there is evidence that the Portuguese in Fremona had contacts with other areas of northern Ethiopia and Eritrea. Sources thus attest of 'Portuguese' settlers at Amba Sänayti and at Massawa, where they probably worked as couriers between the port and Fremona.²⁷

24 "The Emperor Mälak Sägäd, father and uncle of those who fought for the Sceptre, took to his service most of the Portuguese who survived the wars with the moors and those who were born later, and he gave a third of them to his daughter who married Kiflä Waḥed, Viceroy of Tigray... and this one placed them here in Fremona for he has his camp nearby" (... *O imp. Malacaget [i.e., Särṣä Dengel], paj e tio dos que estes annos pelearão sobre o ceptro, tomou pera sua pessoa os mais dos Portugueses que das guerras dos mouros escaparão e depois ca nacerão, e hum bom terço deu a sua filha que casou com Cafluade visorey do Tigre... e elles os pos aqui em Fremona, porque tem commumente aqui perto seu arrayal ...*); Luis de Azevedo to Provincial of India, 22 July 1607, Fremona, in: RASO XI, doc. 20, 87.

25 "The *xum* is appointed by us, because Fremona is *gult* of the church, that is to say it has privileges, such as legal autonomy, exemption from payment of tributes and the right to be governed under the laws of Portugal" (*O xum ... he posto por nos, por Fremona ser gulde da igreja, idest privilegiado pera suas justiças aqui não entrarem, nem os que nelle morarem pagarem tributos, e serem governados polas leis de Portugal*); Luis de Azevedo to Provincial in India, 22 July 1607, Fremona, in: RASO XI, doc. 20, 100; cf. also 117.

26 *Lusitani remanserunt cum multo honore, ita ut nulla re, quam vellent, indigerent ad mortem usque*; Zä Dengel to Felipe III, 26 June 1604, in: LEVY MARIA JORDÃO et al. (ed.), *Bullarium Patronatus Portugalliae Regum in ecclesiis Africae, Asiae atque Oceaniae*, Appendix III: *Documenta historiam ecclesiae habessinorum: 1601-1700*, vol. 2, Olissipone: Typographia Nationali, 1868-70,

27 The Jesuit *mestre* Gonçalo informed that Hirgigo "belongs [sic] to a Portuguese whose servants stay here to send on the rents" and of a "Christian who has been placed there by the Portuguese" (*he de hum portugues cujos criados tem aqui pera arrecadar as rendas*)... "*este christao que esta posto neste Arquico por mandado dos Portuguezes*"); Gonçalo Rodriguez [aka *mestre* Gonçalo] to Balthassar Diaz, 12 March 1555, Arkico, in: RASO X, doc. 13, 51. In 1560, another Jesuit stated that in Massawa there were some Portuguese; Fulgencio Freire to João Nunes Barreto, 12 August 1560, in: RASO X, doc. 27, 105.

The way of life at the Catholic village must not have differed greatly from the wider Tigray society. With the exception of those working as professional soldiers or those engaged actively in the mission such as interpreters, translators, advisers, priests, most of the Catholics were simple peasants and thus had to cope with the hardships of rural life in the highlands. Similarly, the houses of the missionaries were initially relatively modest, as the fellows who came in the 17th century would witness. The house of the Patriarch, for instance, was a round hut 4,4 m in diameter and another house, presumably lodging the other missionaries, measured 6,6 m.²⁸

Nevertheless, the presence of Jesuit missionaries, the contributions sent from Portugal²⁹ and the privileges received from the Ethiopian state unquestionably placed this group on a far better ground than the surrounding populations. There is for instance evidence that the Ethio-Portuguese were well provided of clothing, which was regularly imported by the missionaries from Diu and Massawa and it could be assumed that they had as well easier access to food – Jesuit sources, for instance, frequently record famines affecting human groups in Tigray but seldom mention the Ethio-Portuguese as affected by them.³⁰

As it appears, the privileges, actual or imagined, of the Catholic group stirred the envy of the wider population and formed an atmosphere of suspicion against the Catholic community. Predictably, the Catholic village and its inhabitants were the target of frequent hostile incursions. In 1608 or 1609, *nebur'a'ed* Thomas, head of the church of Aksum Şeyon, with a 800-man force tried to storm the Catholic village. The rebel group, probably largely composed of poor peasants, had been moved to action “from having heard of the wealth of the Portuguese”.³¹ Moreover, the upgrading of status of the Catholics during the years of major expansion of the

28 Measures in sources are given in feet (*piedi*); 20 *piedi* and 30 *piedi*, respectively; Luis de Azevedo to Superior General, 12 July 1605, Fremona, in: RASO XI, doc. 15, 62.

29 The Portuguese Crown, as it considered the Ethio-Portuguese its subjects, sent a yearly alm for the Portuguese children and the welfare of this community. The first of such payments was recorded in 1595 and consisted in 200 *pardãos* (60,000 *reis*). Presumably, the sum grew progressively as in 1628 sources reported 1,000 *pardãos de larim* (ca. 600,000 *reis*) being given to the Portuguese; Felipe II to Francisco da Gama, 26 January 1598, in: RASO X, doc. 144, 401; RASO VII, *liv.* IX, ch. IV; Felipe IV to Viceroy of India, 17 April 1628, in: RASO XII, doc. 73, 244; Tomás Barneto to Provincial in India, 1628, Goa, in: RASO XII, doc. 86, 312, 319.

30 As of 1607, the Portuguese in Fremona were receiving from India as alms sent them by the royal treasury around half a *teada* of cloth per person; Luis de Azevedo to Provincial in India, 22 July 1607, Fremona, in: RASO XI, doc. 20, 93.

31 *Pela fama que avia da riqueza dos Portuguezes*; RASO VI, *liv.* VII, ch. V and X. The perception of the Catholics as a prosperous group in all probability increased with the expansion of the mission system. A document from 1624 informed that an old man from Tigray, as he was young and proud owner of some mules (an indication of wealth in rural Ethiopia), was once told that “when the law of the Portuguese comes he would have much more wealth” (... *No tempo da ley dos Portuguezes avia de ter ainda muito mais fato*); Gaspar Paes, Annual letter, 15 June 1625, Tamqha, in: ARSI, Goa 39 I, 236r-59v, 247v.

mission – 1610s and 1620s – might have but increased the image of the *Burtukan* as a privileged elite.

4. Early 17th century expansion

As mentioned above, in the first decades of the 17th century the Jesuit mission experienced its most propitious time. A new generation of young and spirited missionaries, such as Antonio Fernandes, Pedro Paez, Luis de Azevedo and Francesco Antonio de Angelis, reinvigorated the missionary project. By the end of the 1610s Susinyos and a number of noblemen, higher clergy and state officers had been 'reduced'. The Jesuits expanded also the number of missionary settlements (Gorgora, Qollela, Ancasha), thereby transferring their activities from the periphery of the kingdom (Tigray) to the centre (Dämbeya and Gojjam).

The new scenario gave a boost to the settlement of Fremona. Although now the centre of the mission moved southwards, the Tigrayan residence retained its prominence as the historical 'capital' of the Portuguese-Catholic group and also turned into a strategic asset. On the one hand, the site continued to provide most of the aides and associates to the mission. The opening of a Jesuit school around 1604 – and later also of a seminary for young boys – importantly contributed to this purpose.³² The Jesuits, notorious for their pedagogic skills, carefully prepared the Ethio-Portuguese children to become a skilled workforce in the service of the mission. In the late 1620s, a number of those educated at Fremona were ordered priests by Patriarch Afonso Mendes and played an active role in the many fronts the mission was then active in. Such was the case of the above-mentioned Jacobo Alexandre, Bernardo Nogueira and António de Andrade as well as of Lourenço da Costa and António de Almança. Almança and Costa later became two of the four Ethio-Portuguese priests who were left in Ethiopia when the mission was abolished.³³

On the other hand, the expansion of the missionary settlements turned Fremona into a vital element in a network formed by the Jesuit residences, royal and regional *kätäma* and Ethio-Portuguese settlements. Halfway between the port

32 The first reference to the school of Fremona appears in a letter from 1605, when it was reported to host 12 boys; Luis de Azevedo to Provincial in India, 22 July 1607, Fremona, in: RASO XI, doc. 20, 85. By 1616, when a new class might have joined in, the number had increased to 16 and it would reach its peak in 1623, when 33 students were recorded; RASO VI, *liv.* VIII, ch. X; Antonio Fernandes to Superior General, 30 April 1623, in: RASO XI, doc. 66, 510. The other learning centre in the mission was the residence of Gorgora, which in 1626 counted as much as with 100 students; Antonio Fernandes to Superior General, 30 April 1623, in: RASO XI, doc. 66, 510.

33 Cf. Francisco Rodriguez to Afonso Mendes, 20 January 1636, in: RASO XIII, doc. 15, 100, 102.

of Massawa and the province of Dämbiya,³⁴ the village was an obliged halt for all the caravans that from the Ottoman seaport aimed at the Lake Ṭana region. Moreover, the geographical features of the hill made it a natural fortress, an important precondition for survival in a land renowned for its want of rebellions and *sbefta* (i.e., robbers). Therefore, all the 31 missionaries that came to Ethiopia during the second period first stayed for a period at Fremona, where they could exchange news with the more experienced companions and receive instructions on their forthcoming tasks. From the same spot, the Jesuits managed the important traffic of objects and information that transited between India and Ethiopia. The annual letters that were sent on a yearly basis to India and Europe were received and 'posted' at Fremona. The Jesuits in Tigray were also in close contact with the Turks, *banians* and Beja tribesmen so that all the materials and objects sent from India and Europe reached safely the mission.



Fig. 1: Remains of the Water Cistern.

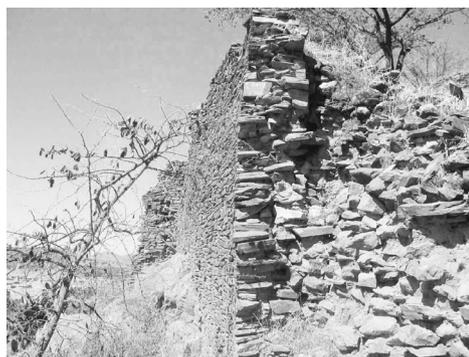


Fig. 2: View of the Walls in the Western Flank.

Because of its important function soon the Jesuits and Ethio-Portuguese upgraded the facilities of the residence/fortress. The huts of the first mission period were abandoned and the missionaries relocated towards the extreme north of the hill. In 1606, they built a first ring of walls with defensive purposes and by then the site could already be described as a "fortress" (*fortalesa*).³⁵ The works came with perfect timing for in ca. 1616 the site resisted an Oromo raid that ravaged the neighbouring areas.³⁶ This would be the first of a series of improvements, some of which are still visible today. Three years later there was further renewal of the fortress and a water pool was built.³⁷ However, the most important upgrading occurred in the

³⁴ From Massawa, caravans took in average seven days to reach Fremona and from there to Gorgora another 14 days; Pedro Paez to Superior General, 22 June 1616, Gorgora, in: RASO XI, doc. 44, 374, 376; Diogo de Mattos to Superior General, 2 June 1621, in: RASO XI, doc. 61, 472.

³⁵ Pedro Paez to Tomás de Iturén, 14 September 1612, in: RASO XI, doc. 34, 254; Luis de Azevedo to Provincial of India, 3 July 1619, Fremona, in: RASO XI, doc. 54, 434.

³⁶ RASO V, *liv.* IV, ch. XXII; RASO VI, *liv.* VII, ch. XXIX.

³⁷ Azevedo, 1619, in: RASO XI, doc. 54, 434.

mid-1620s, in parallel to the ambitious architectonic programme implemented in the residences of the Lake Ṭana area. In 1624, under the supervision of the Jesuit Diogo de Mattos, a major renewal of the fortress began, which probably focused in reinforcing the weaker spots in the western and eastern flanks with bastions and in elevating the wall.³⁸ Towards 1627, probably following a plan inspired from the beautiful churches being erected at the residences of Gorgora, Gännätä Iyäsus and Innäbesse by the architect João Martins and Indian masons, construction of a modern Catholic church of lime and stone initiated. Additional elements that improved the site were two defensive towers, houses for the missionaries and for the school and a water cistern, reportedly the first to be made in Ethiopia.³⁹ By 1628, Patriarch Mendes could proudly inform Mutio Vitelleschi superior that Fremona was “a Portuguese village, strong due to its location and works, for they built there a fortress, which is the only one that exists nowadays in Ethiopia”.⁴⁰

Attention has to be given to the involvement of local authorities in this architectonic enterprise. Indeed, as it happened with the works carried out in the Lake Ṭana area, friendly political authorities generously supplied the funds and workforce needed. Without them none of the works above described could have ever been attempted. In 1619, Susinyos, who was already investing large resources in the southern residences, gave to Fremona 300 cows. Towards 1624, the pro-Catholic Qibä Kristos, who was the governor of Tigray from 1621 to 1628, granted lands to the settlement⁴¹ and the church, also benefited from his direct patronage.⁴² In 1628 or 1629, Susenyos attributed 20 *oukeas* (ca. 60,000 *reis*) for improvements in the fortification and increased its *gult*.⁴³ By the end of the decade, Fremona was the beneficiary of a network of tributary lands and villages. The network reached as distant locations as May Da‘iro, north of Shire, and Zelot, near Asmära. Moreover, for a short period, from 1626 to 1631, the Jesuits from Fremona controlled two more residences in the Ḥamasen, in areas where they already had been granted lands, ‘Adegada and Dibarwa (cf. map).

Political patronage and the joint work of missionaries and Ethio-Portuguese made Fremona for some years one of the most important spots in northern Ethiopia. When Qibä Kristos established his *kätäma* in ‘Adwa, the missionaries and the governor paid each other frequent visits. There is evidence that the Jesuits were influential figures at the regional *kätäma* and it was indubitably at their

38 Antonio Roiz, Annual letter, 13 February 1625, Goa, in: ARSI, Goa 39 I, 220r-30r, 229r.

39 RASO V, 198; Tomé Barneto to Stefano da Cruz, 12 March 1627, Fremona, in: RASO XII, doc. 60, 181; Manoel Barradas to Superior General, 20 March 1631, in: RASO XII, doc. 113, 482.

40 ... *He povoação de Portuguezes, forte por sitio e arte, por elles terem alli feito huma fortaleza, que he a unica que até hoje ha em forma em Ethiopia*; Afonso Mendes to Superior General, 8 July 1629, in: RASO XII, doc. 97, 364.

41 Barradas, 1631, in: RASO XII, doc. 113, 434; Roiz, 1625, in: ARSI, Goa 39 I, 229rv; Paes, 1625, in: ARSI, Goa 39 I, 251r.

42 RASO VII, *liv.* IX, ch. V, 26; RASO VII, *liv.* IX, ch. X.

43 Barradas, 1631, in: RASO XII, doc. 113, 482

instigation that the governor accomplished in 1628 a harsh repression of religious dissent.⁴⁴ The same nobleman provided troops to escort proselytizing campaigns led by the missionaries. The tomb site of Patriarch Andrés de Oviedo at Fremona was reportedly the object of a local pilgrimage. Infirm, old and destitute people rendered visit to the tomb and expected to be favoured by the alleged thaumaturgic powers of *abune* Andreas, as the Spaniard was locally known.⁴⁵ Similarly, the icon of the Virgin of St. Luke, which was imported from India towards 1605 and placed on the altar of the Jesuit church, was the object of widespread devotion throughout the whole Tigray. People would turn up in the church from afar to see it and soon copies spread to other areas, including to such prominent landmarks as the monastery of Inda Abba Gärima and the church of Aksum Tsyon.⁴⁶

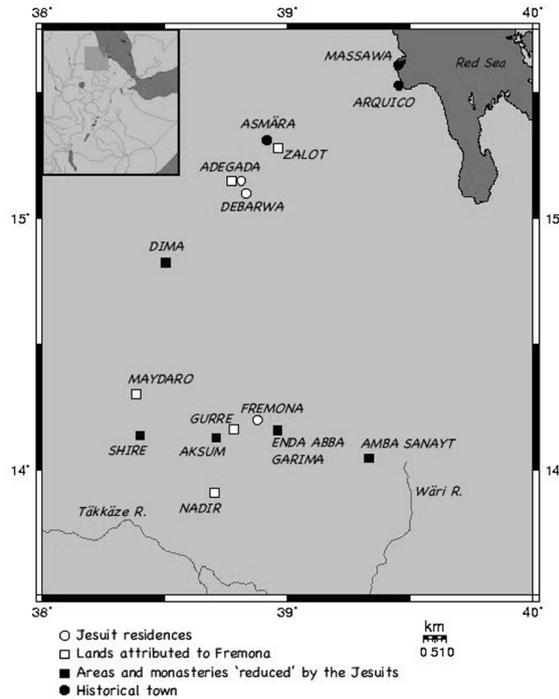


Fig. 3: Fremona and associated places, ca. 1565-1630
Graphic Source: OMC Map Creation

⁴⁴ For evidence on harsh repression of dissent, cf. RASO VII, *liv.* IX, ch. V; and Afonso Mendes to Superior General, 8 July 1629, in: RASO XII, doc. 97, 371.

⁴⁵ Azevedo, 1607, in: RASO XI, doc. 20, 115.

⁴⁶ On the veneration of the image at Fremona, cf. Luis de Azevedo to Provincial in India, 22 July 1607, Fremona, in: RASO XI, doc. 20, 115. The *mabamer* of Betä Abba Gärima and one certain *abba* Baracato were among the illustrious figures who payed visit to the image; id. 109, 118. In 1625, Diogo de Mattos, on a visit to the monastery of Abba Gärima found a copy of the icon said to be of “bad quality but revered by the community” (... *De pintura tosca mas estimada delles*); Paes, 1625, in: ARSI, Goa 39 I, 250v. The next year his comrade Tomé Barneto, on a visit to the church of Aksum Seyon, saw “two *retablos* of Our Lady of St. Luke” (... *dous retablos de Nossa Senhora de sam Lucas*); Paes, 1625, in: ARSI, Goa 39 I, 250v. Also Barneto, 1627, in: RASO XII, doc. 60, 189.

5. Fall of the Mission and Decline of the Settlement

In 1632 the missionary adventure in Ethiopia ended abruptly. Susinyos died in September that year and his son Fasilädäs and heir to the throne began a fierce re-establishment of the Orthodox credo. The missionaries were expelled and the Catholic population persecuted. Within a few decades the bulk of the Catholic faithful was murdered or sent into exile.

Predictably, Fremona remained an important spot during this period of crisis. On 29 March 1633, following orders by Fasilädäs, a large group of Catholics, which included all the Jesuit missionaries and hundreds of Ethio-Portuguese and Catholic supporters, had to abandon Infraz, the last of the Jesuit residences in the Lake Ṭana area that still remained in Catholic hands. About a month later, in late April, the group reached Fremona, where they settled under the watchful eye of the Orthodox governor Zä Maryam.⁴⁷ Their stay there, however, would be short. Towards September 1634, fearing that the Catholics in Fremona would establish connections with India, Fasilädäs ordered the expulsion of all the missionaries and the Ethio-Portuguese to be resettled near his *kätäma* in Dämbiya.⁴⁸ This might have granted the *coup de grace* to the Catholic village of Fremona. Most of the Jesuit missionaries and a group of their best aides went to India, hoping at some point to be able to reestablish the mission. The Catholics and Ethio-Portuguese that stayed behind went clandestine and practiced the Catholic religion in secret.⁴⁹ A few Catholics might have stayed in Fremona and in the Adwa plateau and other groups refugeed in such areas as Ḥamasen and Bur.⁵⁰ The Jesuit church and buildings in Fremona might in all probability have been plundered in one of the anti-Catholic upsurges that between 1635 and 1640 erased most of the traces of the foreign faith in Ethiopia.⁵¹

47 RASO VII, *liv.* X, ch. XI.

48 On this particular, cf. RASO VII, *liv.* IX, ch. XIII; *liv.* X, ch. III.

49 The scattered Catholic clusters were initially served by fifteen priests; seven were Jesuits, namely Gaspar Paes, João Pereira, Jacinto Francisco, Francisco Rodrigues, Apollinar de Almeida, Bruno Bruni and Luis Cardeira, four were of Ethiopian origin and four of Ethio-Portuguese origin, namely Bernardo Nogueira, Lourenço da Costa, Pero da Costa and Antonio Dalmança; Francisco Rodriguez to Afonso Mendes, 20 January 1636, in: RASO XIII, doc. 15, 102.

50 Mattos, 1635, in: RASO XIII, doc. 10, 52. On the practice of a clandestine Catholicism, at the court of Yohannes Akay the Jesuit João Pereira feigned to be one of his servants whilst his fellow Francisco Rodriguez was dressed like a soldier, pretending to be a member of the Ethio-Portuguese militia; Mattos, 1635, in: RASO XIII, doc. 10, 53; Mendes, 1639, in: RASO XII, doc. 47, 172.

51 By 1640, all the Jesuits had been assassinated together with at least six local Catholic priests and assistants. Repression also abated with force over Ethiopian individuals who did not want to renounce to Catholicism: within the period 1634-40, Jesuit sources provide the names of at least fifteen Ethiopians whose belongings were confiscated or who were sent into exile. In ca. 1633, *abetohun* Zä Iyasus, grandson of Säršä Dingil and

In the 17th or 18th century Ethiopians built an Orthodox church, Inda Giyorgis, on the site where the Jesuit church stood. The stones from the Catholic temple might have been reused in the new church for the interiors of the Ethiopian temple presented traces of Portuguese craftsmanship.⁵²

husband of Wälättä Giyorgis, together with other Catholics, was sent into exile to Qwara, dying shortly after; in the same year, *azmach* Yämanä, cousin of second degree of Susinyos, had his belongings expropriated and the captain Gedewon, a servant of Susinyos from the *casta Adea* (of Haddiya origin?) was judged and killed. One year later, in 1634, Täklä Amanu'el, *xum* of Assa, who had protected the Jesuits in his lands, was removed from office. In 1635, a boy and former servant of Gaspar Paes named Nasso was killed. In 1636, Mälak Deb, a servant of Si'ilä Kristos, had to endure a trial because found with Catholic devotional objects ("a cross and relics") but managed to avoid chastisement; meanwhile, one *abba* Horassi Kristos, who had been ordered by Mendes, was killed at the royal *kätäma* by a mob at publicly professing his Catholicism and one *azzaj* Taca was said to have died a Catholic. In 1638, a boy named Baxa Krestos, who served at the monastery of Däbrä Semonä, was hang from a tree because he refused to comulgate in the Orthodox rite and *bäđerond* Ambäsäy, who had served Apollinar de Almeida, was nearly hang from a tree at refusing to comulgate with the Orthodox rite. In ca. 1639, *abba* Asira Kristos, also a scholar (*mestre*) from Däbrä Semonä was martyred. In 1639, *abba* Libsä Kristos, publicly confessed Catholicism and in ca. 1648 an homonymous *abba* of Selalo died; BÉGUINOT 1901, 51; Afonso Mendes to [Felipe IV], 9 May 1633, in: RASO I, *parte* II, doc. 30 (summary), 149; Diogo de Mattos to the Superior General, [September 1635], in: RASO I, *parte* II, doc. 35 (summary), 160; RASO VII, *liv.* IX, ch. XXX; *liv.* X, ch. II; *liv.* X, ch. XXXI; Bruno Bruni to the Fathers of the Indian Province, 17 July 1635, in: RASO XIII, doc. 9, 37; Mattos, 1635, in: RASO XIII, doc. 10, 54, 56, 60, 71; Diogo de Mattos to Alvares Tavares, 26 September 1635, in: RASO XIII, doc. 11, 80; Rodriguez, 1636, doc. 15, 99; Francesco, 1636, in: RASO XIII, doc. 18, 109; Afonso Mendes, [1636], in: RASO XIII, doc. 19, 115; Bruno Bruni to Afonso Mendes, 19 February 1637, in: RASO XIII, doc. 22, 124; Mendes, 1639, in: RASO XIII, doc. 47, 174-75, 179.

⁵² Theodor von Lüpke – Enno Littmann – Daniel Krencker (eds.), *Deutsche Aksum-Expedition*, vol. III: *Profan- und Kulturbauten Nordabessiniens aus älterer und neuerer Zeit*, Berlin 1913, 66.

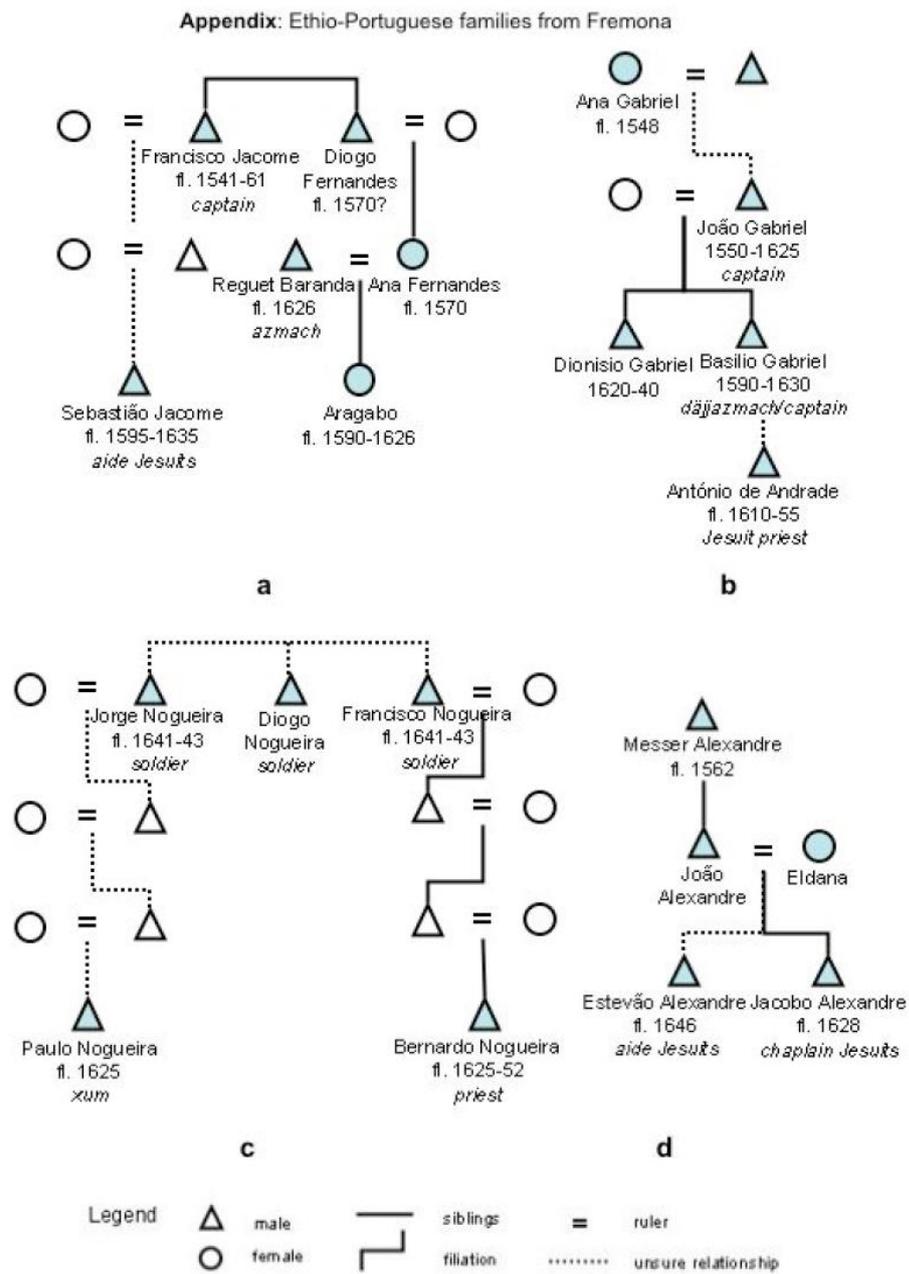


Fig. 4: Ethio-Portuguese families from Fremona