

## The Bet Tawke

Contributed by Aida Kidane posted on 09 Jan 2003

From the Sundstrom collections, Uppsala, Sweden. Translated from the original Tigre to Tigrina by Ato Gebru Kifle, Uppsala 1997.

The Bet Tawke are presently in Keren area and speak Blin. It is commonly assumed that the Tawke and Tarke were brothers. They had different origins and history. According to Munzinger, the Bet Tawke converted to Islam 1830-40s

The WELEDO OF BET TAWKE Hatsei Dawit came from Bahri and settled in Gonder. And there he begat Hatsei Tedros, who begat Hatsei Gebre Dengil, who begat Hatsei Menelik, who begat Hatsei Fasil.

Hatsei Fasil begat Hatsei Tekle Giorgis, who begat Hatsei Iyasu who begat KaluK. KaluK begat CHaluK who begat MaluK. MaluK begat Tsenai and Hizbai. Hizbai begat Ker Medaf who begat Shashe-FeTin, who begat Zanoi, who begat Yohannes. Yohannes begat Fre MeHaKun who begat Jimegan and TewKejan. TewKejan begat Abraham who went up to Halhal and Teséin was born there. Tes'ein begat Menkerios who begat Tes'ein, who begat Gergis, who begat Blenai. Blenai Begat Zafi' who begat Gaim, who begat Dere', who begat Raka. Raka begat Hidad, who begat Mohammed who begat Fikak.

Gebre Kristos is the som of Abraham. He begat Ya'Kob, who begat Tsefa' and Gebsha. Taydes is the son of Abraham, who begat Tsenai and Hizbai.

### HOW ABRAHAM CAME TO HALHAL.

This is how Abraham came to Halhal. Semere-en son of TawKe entered Halhal from Adi Teklezan. While he lived there, his father TawKe came to him. At that time the Bet Musi of Anseba were strong and many. TawKe went to them to be friends and know them more, together with his son. After a whole day with the Bet Musi, they started returning home to Halhal at sunset. On their way some Bet Musi youths stopped them and killed TawKe, but his son fled away. Adi ShesheKe are TawKe's mother clan. They carried his body and reached Satifa, who carried him further to GibCHu. The GibCHu carried him to Begedai who carried him further to the Lemechelli people, who carried him to his place of burial. When they started to take up the body, the bed he lied on seemed stuck to the ground and however they tried to raise it, it was impossible that he was buried right there.

The brothers of Semere-en gave him a sack of pebbles. He was to throw one pebble every morning and when finished, to meet them at his father's burial place. He did as told and when the pebbles were finished, went to his father's grave and waited for his brothers.

The Bet Musi were as many as having seven chiefs. Then, all Hamasien and TawKe people went to the Bet Musi country and started a battle and fought for three days. There was no man from the Bet Musi who escaped death. The TawKe then gathered the Bet Musi cattle and took them.

That day, Semere-en asked who of his brothers shall stay behind with him. Abraham said if he is given seven men (werazut), he would stay. The seven given to him were one from Dengen, one from Lagon, Galey, Sekhrenai, Hamassenai, wedi Gabul, Nehabai, Sehartai, WaTai. Abraham took all these and entered Halhal. There were Barya people living there and the new comers killed them. One girl was left and he married her. (In 1995 I met a Bet Musi Family in Firdigi village west of Keren, and the father told me the few Bet Musi still survived. Aida)

### **RAID ON BET TAWKE**

The Hedarib raided Bet Tawke and kidnapped Awelbeb wedi Ali Nor. The Bet Tawke to retaliate asked Nesur wedi Beyed to return them the kidnapped son. He refused this and they returned empty handed. The son was related to Hakin wedi Medin, as a nephew. After two months, they decided to ask Hakin to help them.

Bet Tawke went to Hakin wed Medin and spent the night eating and drinking. At sunrise, they told Hakin how the Hedarib had kidnapped his nephew. Hakin asked why they delayed so long. You should have told me at that hot moment. Hakin sent five men to Nesur wedi Beyed, saying you have had my nephew for a long time and return him now. Nesur had not known their relationship that with the cattle, returned the son back to Bet Tawke

### **BET TAWKE**

Book: Zanta Eritrea, Tigrina, by Mikael Hasama Raka 1986 3rd Edition, 1992 Franchescana Printing Press, Asmera. (my translation) Bet 'TawKe (Tawke) The sons of Simirtsim, son of Dembezan. They first settled in Aberkia near Ad Teklezan. The brothers 'TawKe and Bidel are sons of Simirtsim. TawKe begat Semerechon, Abraham and Tekle-Zan. Semerechon's cattle were plenty and with them migrated to Degu'a Halhal. There he met two men Chinfaya and Shibakha living in a cave. Finding the Halhal lands vast and fertile, he took milk to these two men and asked them to be allowed to settle there. Chinfay accepted him but Shibaka refused at first, claiming that his sons would inherit the lands, but later agreed to it. Therefore Semerechon settled in Halhal.

A strong people the Bet Musi from Agaw settled in Deber Musi in lower Anseba. Because this made him fear, Semerechon sent word to his father in Ad Tekle-Zan about it. TawKe followed by his soldiers came to Halhal. He recognized the land to be fertile and was pleased. Before returning home, he went to the Bet Musi and asked for promise that they would not harm his son. When they confirmed not to hurt his son, he wanted to leave. They asked him not to go now as they had sent raid groups out who may attack him. But he refused saying he must hurry back home. On the way back, the raiding group met with TawKe and wounded both him and his soldier. When Semerechon heard of this he

went there and carried the wounded back to his village, and sent word to his brothers. His brothers came from their Adi and carried the wounded towards home. When they reached Emba Derho Tahtai, both wounded died. They buried the soldier there and decided to bury TawKe in Adi Tekle-Zan, but the corpse refused to be risen. The brothers then took out the corpse of the soldier and buried them both in Ad Tekle-Zan.

After forty days Halhal and Ad Tekle-Zan gathered and decided to raid the Bet Musi for revenge. That they would not miss the day, everyone carried forty pebbles in his sack and threw one every morning. When the day arrived as agreed, they met in battle. The Bet Musi were not brave but also crafty and met the over numbering force with courage. The craft makers of Bet Musie were behind the fighters making new spears and spread them around. The Bet TawKe were disturbed by the unending flow of spears. Semerechon hid away and coming to the back of the enemy found the spear maker and wounded him. The wounded man cursed "Eh! May your tribe not be plenty!" and died. The Bet Musi were defeated for lack of spears. Perhaps the curse worked that Semerechon's clan did not flourish.

After the battle, Abraham went from Ad Tekle-Zan and settled in Halhal. He had many children there. But all his children died and giving up hope, decided to become a hermit. On the way he met a man who asked Abraham where he was going. He told his story and his decision to become a hermit. The man said; go back to your village and trim the tree near your house on that day. Next morning if the tree has fallen to the west, go to a convent to be a hermit. If it falls to the east get married and settle in your village.

Abraham returned to his village and did as the man told him. The next morning he found the tree fallen to the east that he married and settled in his village. He had many children. Now his descendents are the larger of the Tawke. They are found in the five villages of Adi Chefa, Adi Gabsha Adi Feza, Adi Harish (Adi Petros), and Lamziri

Tekle-Zan the youngest son of TawKe stayed in his father's home (dembe) and begat Seriat Segede, who begat Tekle Haimanot and Fremekha. Kiflr Gergish and Elos from the clan of Tekle-Zan competing each other ruled over Dembezan.

When the descendents of Meroni became plenty they spread out to hold lands. One part of deki Dembezan son of Meketer stayed in the original place the Meroni came to and named it Dembezan. The people who had been there before them and those coming after them, they called them "Meket" and ruled over them. They refused to share or give power with them. (39. A. Pollera "LE POPOLAZIONI INDIGENE DEL L'ERITREA" p. 92.). The Alet who had mingled with the deki Meroni are found in Ta'reshi, Agaw. Alberto Pollera states that there are a small pocket of people in Shema Negus Tahtai coming from Tembien, and in Zengeren coming from Axum.

Before the rule of the Italians, the people of Dembezan spoke both Tigrina and Tigre. But this new generation speaks Tigrina only, except for the Wara people. (40. Ibid. P 93). The elders of Dembezan had many "hilai" (poems) but are not recorded. As the Tigre

poems are heart touching, poets (haleyti) use it in happy or sad events, even Blin and Tigrina speakers used it.

The people of Dembezan are also known as "Hamushte Zemat". They are proud of their origin and are courageous as history states. It is apparent in the time of Degiat Hadgembes they are known for defending against the Italians strongly and unbendingly fighting for the freedom of Africa.