

The Growth of Bahir Dar: 1941-1974

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Abstract

In the 1940s and 1950s Ethiopia embarked upon national plans of administrative and economic development. The plans envisaged the Lake Tana and Blue Nile basin as one of the major centers for economic development. Bahir Dar town 10a was selected to develop as a center of regional economic development in the basin. A lot has been invested to stimulate the economic development of towns such as Bahir Dar. Data were collected from published and unpublished materials as well as oral information from knowledgeable elders. A historical analysis of the data shows that the Ethiopian government took several political and economic measures that promoted the growth of Bahir Dar. Among others, it made Bahir Dar capital of the districts in the lower Tana basin with a municipally status. It also prepared a comprehensive master plan of the town that gave Bahir Dar an important industrial, health, and educational role to play in addition to its becoming an administrative and trading center. These developments were intimately linked with an economic plan of the Lake Tana-Blue Nile Basin. One major aspect of this comprehensive plan was the laying out of the basic infrastructure that connected Bahir Dar by air and motor road transport with Addis Ababa, Asmara and the Red Sea ports of Massawa and Assab towards which south-western Ethiopia would be drawn. Such developments made it definite that Bahir Dar would grow as an example of a regional economic development of the basin. This paper, therefore, explores the administrative and economic plans and the resultant growth of Bahir Dar as a locus of regional development in north-western Ethiopia.

Key words: *Growth, History and Bahir Dar*

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^a The term “town” is sometimes affixed to Bahir Dar because there is a similar use for other geographical denominations like Bahir Dar *Awraja* or district, Bahir Dar *Warada* or sub – district.. Hereafter, Bahir Dar is used to refer to the town under study.

Introduction

Urban study had its beginnings towards the close of the 19th century and as a discipline it has become an important issue since the dawn of the 20th Century. This resulted in the emergence of urban sociology as a separate discipline. This was followed by the evolution and growth of other disciplines such as urban geography and urban history.

In the African context, urban studies have begun to appear since the early 1950s but to discuss about this issue here is beyond the scope of this study. In the Ethiopian situation, Richard Pankhurst can be taken as a pioneer urban researcher (Pankhurst, 1961; 1962). Afterwards, several sociologists, geographers and historians have made significant contribution to non - historical and historical urban studies in Ethiopia.

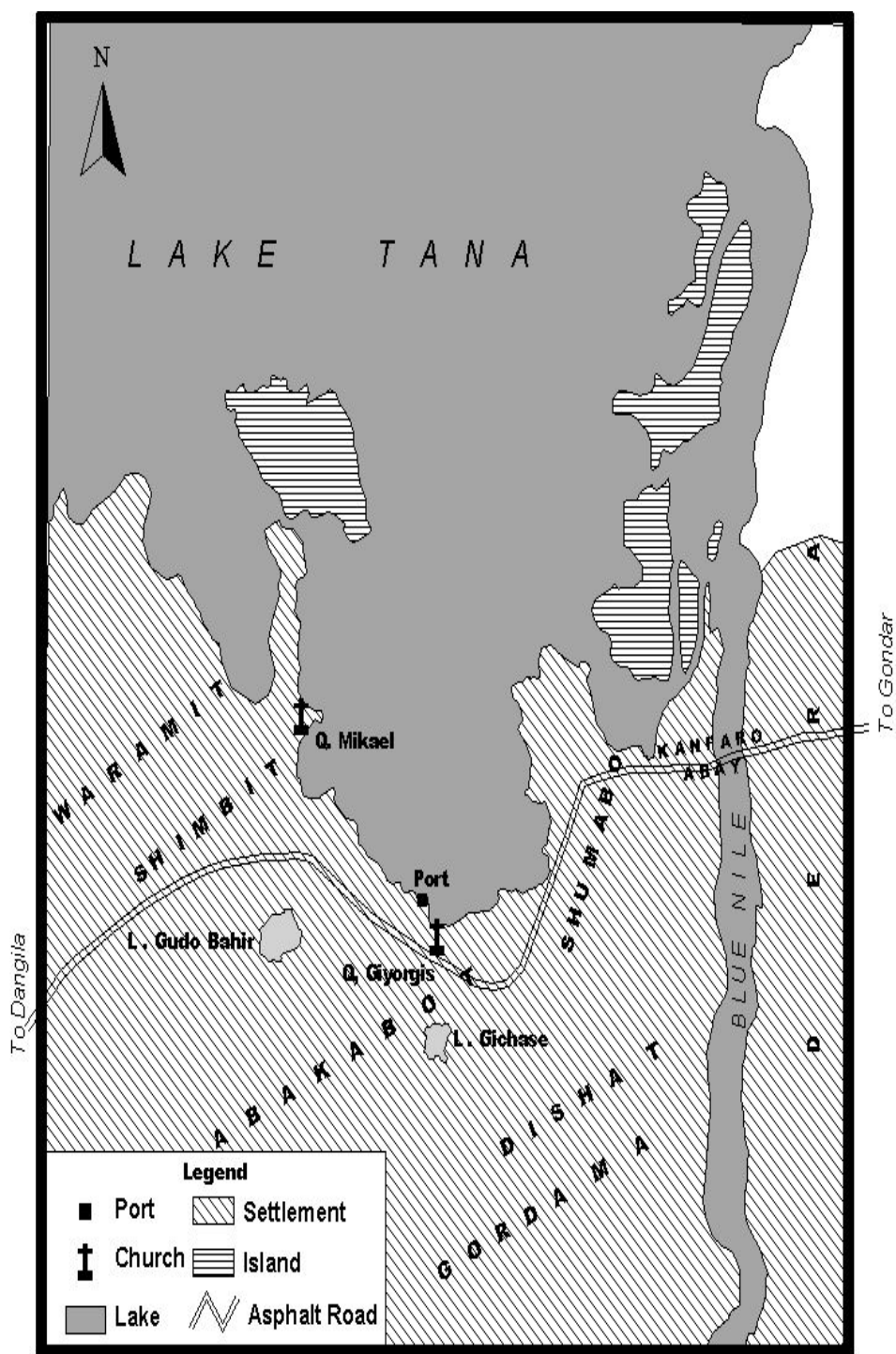
However, as far as contribution to historical urban studies is concerned, there is no parallel to the bulk of urban studies made by undergraduate and graduate students of the Department of History, Addis Ababa University. Though it is difficult to list them here, almost every town of importance has been studied at undergraduate level. The department has also taken urban studies a step further by making Bahir Dar, Jigjiga and Shashamane studied at graduate level.¹ These pioneering urban studies were followed by similar other studies. Today out of 171 works studied at master's level, over 20 papers are historical urban studies at that level. This current study has benefitted much from the unpublished major work on Bahir Dar.

As can be seen from the map below, Bahir Dar, located at the exit of the Blue Nile from Lake Tana, is 565 kilometres from Addis Ababa by way of Dabra Marqos. Until the mid 1930s it had been the seat of Bahir Dar Giyorgis Monastery that administered the settlement and its surrounding. In 1936 the Italians made Bahir Dar an administrative capital of the Lake Tana southern territories. This gave the town a civilian administration and, hence, political significance. For the first time, Bahir Dar was linked with modern water transport with Lake Tana ports and air transport with Gondar, Addis Ababa and Asmara.

Today Bahir Dar is one of the fastest growing towns in Ethiopia. As already noted, it got its first urban features during the Italian occupation (1936 -1941). But it was in the post – liberation period (1941 – 1974) that Bahir Dar grew on sustained basis. It became the declared policy of the Ethiopian government to develop Bahir Dar as:

1. an administrative and economic center for the realization of the economic development plans it envisaged in the Lake Tana - Blue Nile basin;
2. a commercial and industrial center of the basin as well as a linking bridge between the rich south-western regions of the country with the Red Sea ports of Massawa and Assab, and
3. an education, health and tourist center in north – western Ethiopia.

In order to bring the desired growth of the town, and as it will be discussed throughout this study, the Ethiopian government took important measures such as laying down the basic infrastructure in transport and communications, trade and industry, hydroelectric power, health, education and other social services to make Bahir Dar grow as a modern urban center. This study, therefore, assesses primarily the government measures that have been taken to make Bahir Dar grow as an administrative, trading and economic development center of the Lake Tana – Blue Nile basin.



Location of Bahir Dar and Its Surrounding

Research Methods

Bahir Dar experienced a sustained growth of development from about early 1940s to mid 1970s. The principal actor was the Ethiopian government that mobilized huge quantities of resources to make the town grow as planned. How much the town has grown in light of what has been planned and accomplished needs investigation?

This study is basically qualitative. It employed a historical method of inquiry that used qualitative procedures of data collection and analysis. It is descriptive in that it depicts past events and measures officially taken by the Ethiopian government to speed up the urban growth of Bahir Dar during a span of three decades.

Both primary and secondary sources have been used to generate appropriate data. This includes archives, official government documents and policies. Moreover, interviews of knowledgeable elders and former municipality employees of Bahir Dar have been used to elicit as much data as possible. Finally, applying historical inquiry, the data were carefully organized, analysed and checked as to their reliability and accuracy.

Early Government Initiatives (1941 -1959)

In another study, I have discussed the early history of Bahir Dar before and during the Italian occupation (Seltene, 2012). The occupation ended in 1941. However, what survived the Italians was the secular administration and trade initiation that they once tried to demonstrate in Bahir Dar. Similarly, their studies revealed the Lake Tana and Blue Nile basin, as one of the potentially rich areas for economic development in the country. Their attempts also showed that Bahir Dar could grow as a town if not as a center of regional economic development in the basin.

However, the sustained growth of Bahir Dar took place during the post-liberation period. Immediately following the Italian evacuation, the Ethiopian government focused on developing Bahir Dar. Between 1941 and 1945 the government took several administrative and economic measures that promoted the growth of the town. First,

a provisional administration was set up. Its major duties were to keep law and order and take care of property left by the Italians.² This was soon supplanted by a *warada* or sub - district administration empowered to govern the territories of Achafar, Mecha and Yilmana Densa. Parallel with this a *gimjabet* or finance office was formed to collect revenue. This office had jurisdiction over financial matters in Bahir Dar and the districts responsible to it. Moreover, the government established other offices like court, prison, police and post office. It also opened a school and a clinic simultaneously.

In 1945 the Ethiopian government took another important administrative measure that speeded up the growth of Bahir Dar. It established a town administration that gave Bahir Dar a municipality status (*Nagarit Gazette*, 1937 E.C.). The new administration took some crucial steps characteristic of an urban area. It registered the landholding of the town people, and assigned new lands. As it will become clear in a later discussion, elders relate that this time Bahir Dar began to experience its first preliminary town plan.

Again in 1947-48, the government took other measures that contributed to the economic growth of Bahir Dar. It reopened both water and air transport which had been interrupted due to Italian evacuation. The water route connected Bahir Dar with several trading posts like Zage, Dalgi and Gorgora on Lake Tana. This route, because of its extension by way of Gondar to Asmara and Massawa with a motor transport, became a major feeding line for Bahir Dar as well as the rest of Gojjam. The air transport that linked Bahir Dar with Asmara, Gondar and Addis Ababa helped the town benefit from the exchange of trade items with Addis Ababa in addition to those coming and going to and from the northern Ethiopian trade. These growing economic activities increasingly convinced the Ethiopian government about the trading prospects of Bahir Dar and its surroundings.

Another factor that helped Bahir Dar attract more government attention was probably its extreme attractive location. In the early 1950s, there arose a new idea in higher government circles that an alternative administrative capital of the country be constructed. Bahir Dar was considered the best site for this purpose.³ For this and other reasons like making Bahir Dar grow as an economic

development center, in 1950-51, Emperor Haile Selassie visited Bahir Dar several times. This was soon followed by a visit of international consultants or town planners from London. This team, led by J. Seymour Harris, submitted a preliminary feasibility study of the town and of its locality.⁴ The team recommended several scientific studies such as geodetic, geological and meteorological to be carried out in Bahir Dar and the area around.

In 1952 the government reassigned Harris to study Shashamane as an alternative site for national capital. But Harris still found Bahir Dar as a better site than Shashemene. He argued that Bahir Dar is endowed with abundance of water, the possibility of harnessing hydro – electric power and rich agricultural potentiality of the Lake Tana-Blue Nile basin⁵.

Be this as it may, Bahir Dar was affected by another political measure. As part of the national administrative reform, in 1956 the town was accorded the status of an *awraja* or district capital in addition to its becoming a *warada* administrative center. This time, several offices at *awraja* level were opened. As it will again become clearer later, there was an attempt to make a spatial plan for Bahir Dar for the second time. From the preceding discussion, it can be understood that basically Bahir Dar grew up with government initiative as an administrative and trading center. There were even some previous attempts in developing a plan for Bahir Dar. But none of them was linked with any economic planning at national or local level. However, the future growth of Bahir Dar, as one of the major planned towns in the country, was strongly linked with government schemes of economic development. In this connection, in order to lay out the foundation of the national economy, the Ethiopian government began to undertake various scientific studies on regional plans of economic development. As already noted, one of these was the Lake Tana –Blue Nile basin on which Bahir Dar is strategically located. This plan was revealed in 1949 when Haile Selassie remarked: “We realize... that great wealth and necessary services could result from utilizing by modern means the waters of the Blue Nile from Lake Tana, and this project is under study” (Ministry of Information, 1967:27). In line with this from 1950 to 1959 a Blue Nile basin survey under the Cooperative Program between Ethiopia and the United States was taken up. For this the growth of Bahir Dar as a

selected center for the future economic development in the basin was increasingly becoming important.

The government's commitment to develop the region came more to the open in 1957 when the First Five-Year Development Plan was launched (Ministry of Planning, n.d.:174). As part of the laying out of the basic infrastructure of the country in transport and communications, the plan stressed the urgent need of ending the relative isolation of the Blue Nile basin and Bahir Dar by linking them by an all-weather road with the central market, that is, Addis Ababa, and the Red Sea ports of Massawa and Assab (*Ibid*). Furthermore, as the Italians had shown the possibility earlier, the plan gave particular attention to Bahir Dar grow as a market and as a center of transport for the future economic development of the basin. For this purpose and other reasons like the idea that Bahir Dar might develop as an alternative capital of the nation, several scientific studies such as geodetic, geological, meteorological, agricultural, hydro-electric and highway were conducted particularly in the Lake Tana and Blue Nile zone of Bahir Dar.

One of the evaluative studies entitled "Regional Tana Basin Project 1958-59" came out with several suggestions as to how Bahir Dar could grow as an important center in the basin⁶. The construction of a bridge over the Blue Nile in Bahir Dar that connected the town with Gondar by way of Yifag and with Addis Ababa by way of Dabra Marqos would result in the growth of the size and importance of Bahir Dar as an entrepot for both road and inland water transport (*Ibid*). Furthermore, the study proposed that Bahir Dar be provided with water and better electricity facilities. It also suggested that the *Tis Esat* or Blue Nile Falls on the Blue Nile could be harnessed as a good source of electricity for the nation.

At this juncture, it would be appropriate to reiterate the prominent reasons that convinced the Ethiopian government to make Bahir Dar grow as a regional development center in the Tana-Blue Nile basin (Chamber of Commerce, 1960: 5, 11; Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 1960:6). One is the historical and natural importance of the area. This includes the abundance of medieval sites known for their historical relics and religious monuments, the natural beauty of Lake Tana and the *Tis Esat* or Blue Nile Falls. These factors were hoped to become attractions for the promotion of tourism, the prospects of

which were already noticed by a navigating transport company on the lake during the late 1950s.

The selection of Bahir Dar to develop as a center for the overall regional economic development of the Lake Tana - Blue Nile basin was perhaps due to its extreme commanding location. As the various studies on the basin recognized, the fertility of the soil, the existence of abundant water, the wealth in cattle, the possibilities of harnessing hydro-electric power and the availability of labour were encouraging factors to develop this basin agriculturally and industrially, and promote Bahir Dar as an example of a regional economic development center. This is why Bahir Dar, as a strategic position for future transport and communications for the vast region of north-western Ethiopia in general, and as a nucleus for the future economic development in the region was sought to develop into a major center. Hence, to meet this demand, further planning and growth of Bahir Dar became a matter of urgent necessity.

Bahir Dar's Master Plan and Its Immediate Impact (1960 – 1963)

As we have already noticed, in 1948 and 1956 the Ethiopian government had made preliminary town plans for Bahir Dar. Unfortunately, none of them is readily available for study. Details of what has been done in this respect were reconstructed from oral data collected from former employees of the municipality administration. Nevertheless, as already illustrated in the text, the implementation of the two town plans no doubt contributed to the urban making of Bahir Dar.

By 1959 the government began to give serious consideration to the proposals recommended in previous discussion. Bahir Dar was provided with piped water, a better diesel electric light and power facilities. Moreover, some improvements were made on the lake port of the town. The emperor declared that his government had drawn up a comprehensive master plan for promoting the growth of Bahir Dar:

As part of the development of this region [Lake Tana-Blue Nile basin] we have had plans drawn for the city of Bahir Dar. Plans include a school, a textile factory,

and a hydro-electric plant, all of which would have greater importance to the prosperity of the city (Ministry of Information, 1967:171-2).

In order to implement its plan, the government carried out several projects simultaneously⁷. One was the improvement of the transport system. The port facilities were already improved. The air flights that connected Bahir Dar with Gondar, Asmara and Addis Ababa were increased from once a week to daily flights. Moreover, a textile factory and a hospital were under construction.

But one of the great remarkable accomplishments that played a major role in the growth of the town was the construction of the Blue Nile Bridge in 1960. This bridge, a replacement of the Italian built and burnt wooden bridge, for the first time after the Italian evacuation, linked the peoples of Gojjam and Begemder (today's Southern Gondar zone) by a motor road. This was soon followed by the construction of an all-weather road that connected Bahir Dar with Asmara and Massawa by way of Gondar to the north and with Addis Ababa by way of Dabra Marqos to the south.

Additionally, as Table 1 shows, the government established several important institutions, of which the hydroelectric power provided the town with better electric light and power facilities. This enabled the Bahir Dar Textile Factory to produce at full capacity. Similarly, the Felege Hiwot Hospital provided medical services for the town as well as for the wider region around Lake Tana.

Table 1: Summary of Major Establishments: 1959-1963

| Year | Project | Source of Fund |
|------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1959 | Lake Port Facilities | Government |
| 1959 | Electric Light and Power | Government |
| 1959 | Water Supply | Federal Republic of Germany |
| 1960 | Blue Nile Bridge | Government |
| 1963 | Textile Mills | Reparations Fund (Italian) |
| 1963 | Tis <i>Esaf</i> H. Electric Plant | Reparations Fund (Italian) |
| 1963 | Falaga-Hiwat Hospital | Federal Republic of Germany |
| 1963 | Commercial Bank of Ethiopia | Government |

Source: Compiled from miscellaneous documents. See also Seltene Seyoum, ("A History of Bahir Dar Town: 1936-1941", M.A. Thesis, Department of History, Addis Ababa University, p.120).

But the most remarkable measure the government took in order to promote the growth of Bahir Dar was the preparation and implementation of a new master plan. It should be recalled that in 1948 and 1956 some town plans had been made for Bahir Dar. The first plan did not bring any major change on the settlement zoning of the town. Nevertheless, several new roads were opened; some improvements were made on the Old Italian road and new houses began to appear along both sides of the road.

Another new government measure was the way land was allocated. Unlike the early tradition of the municipality, land was now divided into different plots with definite boundaries and distributed to different users. Demolishing Italian pre-fabricated buildings in the administrative zone, the *awraja* and town administration built several new buildings including the court, town police, post office, the telecommunications, school and clinic. Likewise, town dwellers and merchants built new houses for residential and shopping purposes in the residential and commercial zones.

The second town plan was made when Bahir Dar was raised to an *awraja* level.⁸ It resulted in the reorganization of the town in a new manner. The former administrative zone was expanded to include the southern hinterland of Lake Tana, extending from the Giyon Hotel to the Arti Quarta Bay, east of *Qidus Giyorgis* Monastery. As in several other zones of the town, here more streets were opened and many buildings to house the court, police and prison at *awraja* level were constructed. Even one of the big storehouses constructed by the Italians, along the entrance to the port, was renovated and made the *awraja* administration office. Likewise, most of the former buildings at *warada* level were destroyed and replaced by new ones.

The new town plan also brought change on the commercial zone of the town. The market place was removed from the area between Haji Ali *Safar* or quarter and the lake port to what is today called the *Aroge Qedame* (Old Saturday) market around which an area of meters 10x10, 10x15 and 15x20 were distributed to merchants for the construction of shops. Moreover, along different areas of the

town there was the assignment of 625 square meters of land allocated for residential purposes. Other plots of 2,500 square meters were also distributed to people for the plantation of eucalyptus trees. Despite such developments, Bahir Dar required a comprehensive master plan.

The latest master plan, prepared in 1960-62, changed everything. This new plan was prepared by a town planning group of German experts led by Professor Max Guther (Federal Republic of Germany, 1962:2). The plan was based on two major concepts. One dealt with the physical layout of the town and the other was the preparation of a comprehensive economic plan of the town in relation to the regional and national economic plans of the country. The physical layout envisaged a much-enlarged town with the Blue Nile in the middle and Lake Tana in the north. The Ministry of Pen disclosed:

ይህ የባሕርዳር ከተማ አንደኛውም የታሰበበት ቦታ ካሁን ጀምሮ አንደጠበቅ አስፈላጊ ስኬት ፣ የባሕር ወንዝ ተሻግሮ ወደ ምስራቅ ሲኔ ዋናው የባሕር ዳር ከተማ አንደኛውም ቤተ መንግሥትና የመንግሥት መ/ቤቶች በዚህ ክፍል አንደሆኑ መሆናቸው ስኬታዊ ነው። ይህ ክፍል ዛሬ በቤጌምድር ጠቅካይ ግዛት በደራ ወረዳ ስም የሚተዳደር ነው። ስኬታዊ ፣ ይኸው ሆኖ ወደ ባሕር ዳር አውራጃ ግዛት አንደዛወር . . . አስታውቃለሁ ።

This can be roughly rendered as:

It has become necessary to reserve the area where Bahir Dar town is going to be established; the engineer has selected the region crossing the Abay [Blue Nile] river to the east as the main area where the town is to be located and, be set up. It is said that this region is administered by the *Warada* of Dara, in the Begemder *Taqalay Gizat* (regional division). I now instruct you... that this part be transferred to the administration of Bahir Dar *Awraja*⁹.

In accordance with the new master plan a large area comprising 17 parishes from the Begemder side and an additional area of about 28.5 *gashas* from the Gojjam side of the Lake Tana and Blue Nile River territories such as Shum-Abo, Shimbet, Waramit, Gordama-Dishat, etc. were brought under the town administration (See map, Location of Bahir Dar...)¹⁰ Until 1959, the total area under

municipality administration was about 28 *gashas*. The area added from the Gojjam side alone more than doubled the former hold of the town administration. But the new total area under the municipality, though we do not exactly know the new size added from Begemder, is estimated to have grown to about 400 *gashas*. However, actual development expansion of the town reached only about 120 *gashas*.

In line with the new preliminary draft town plan, in 1961 the Ministry of Labour and Communications issued a directive instructing all government branch offices in Bahir Dar to follow the new plan strictly in future construction activities. The directive stated:

...Residences, houses, trees and shops, markets, clubs and entertainment places, industry and factory areas, government offices, hospitals, roads and sidewalks, electric plants and electric lines, hotels and bars, schools and university site, telephone lines and other new projects have to be carried out in conformity with the new Bahar Dar town plan.¹¹

The study of the new plan was completed in January 1962 (Appendix I). According to the plan, the land use of the town was divided into administrative, residential, commercial, industrial and recreational zones (Appendix II). A group of experts appraised the spatial relationship between the zones.¹² The business zone, comprising an area of about 1,548,000 square meters, is said to be logically placed in the geographical center of the town and within easy reach of any part of it. The residential area located both to the east and west of the commercial zone, is a larger area that included other facilities like hospital, church and school. Like that of the business area, the administrative zone is also centrally located immediately within the lake shore, leaving the shore area free for recreation purposes. The same zone occupies a commanding central position and, again, like the commercial zone, it is within easy access to the other zones of the town. Located along the southern outskirts of the town, and following the natural drainage pattern of the Blue Nile, an area of over 3,700,000 square meters is reserved for the industrial zone. This is considered ideal for industries because wind from this direction is prevented from blowing to the rest of the town. What is also beautifully located in the town plan is a recreational zone of

about 1,374,000 square meters. This zone extends along the southern edge of the lake and the banks of the Blue Nile where actually Bahir Dar is located.

The plan also foresaw the development of transport services in the future. Separate areas for bus and railway stations were assigned. Along the western extreme of the town, land for airport was allocated (It is exactly where the current airport is built). Adjustments were also made to accommodate the technical school and the textile factory because they were already under construction. But surprisingly enough, this plan lacked any study of the sewerage system of the town, which was left by the town planners to be studied in a later period. This lack of proper study of sewerage persists as a serious problem of the town to this day.

The other component to the study of the master plan, as stated above, was plan for the economic development of the region. This was hoped to give a strong economic base to Bahir Dar. Again, another group of German experts (a component of the town planners) conducted a study on the general economic situation of the surroundings. The whole objective of this group was to make a plan for the installation of factories that would materialize the existence and growth of the new town on sound basis.¹³ Studying the total economy of the area of Bahir Dar in terms of the relationship between population and money, and understanding that the lack of money for exchange and lack of transport were responsible for the absence of a developed monetary income in the area, the experts came out with new feasibility studies to change the economic stagnation prevailing and to enhance the over-all organic growth of the town.¹⁴ Among the major recommendations was the idea of establishing “industrial chains”, that is, groups of industries and operations that would mutually support and promote each other.

Parallel with this the experts studied the “the agricultural prospects” of the area of Bahir Dar in relation to its hinterland. They recommended that the agricultural productivity of the surrounding areas must be improved and linked with the consumption and industrial future of the city. For this purpose they suggested “50 kilometres radius [from Bahir Dar] can be accepted as an agricultural area for the city”(Ibid). This agricultural area, considered suitable for

the supply of Bahir Dar, extended as far as Dangila in the south-west. It comprised about 400,000 hectares of which 245,950 hectares were arable land in the south-west and the rest for cattle breeding around Bahir Dar. Furthermore, to promote agricultural productivity in this area, the settlement of new peasant families and their inducement by favourable lease agreements was proposed. It was also stressed that the beginning of any mechanization of agriculture had to go hand in hand with the industrialization of the area.

The preceding discussion clearly shows that Bahir Dar was planned to grow as an industrial town. As shown in Table 2, over 20 industries were planned to be established here. The expectation was that "...the planned industries and industrial establishments will be the economic basis and the foundation of the new city"¹⁵. It was also expected that trade, handicraft and cottage and home industries would flourish here to evolve as integral parts of the economic base of the city. If these economic options were accomplished, the town was planned to accommodate about 300,000 inhabitants within a period of 50 years. One it formed a new administration over the area by bringing all the localities in the town plan under Bahir Dar *Awraja* administration. To fully grow the town, the *awraja* and town administrations were brought under one officer, the *awraja* administrator, and at the same time, empowered him to become head of the municipality.

The other major problem of urbanization to be resolved was the question of landownership. It would be recalled that before the Italian occupation, land in Bahir Dar was communally held by lineage groups of *balabat* or native landowning families. The Italians for the first time had introduced a private ownership of land in the town by grabbing land from the local peasants and the monastery. But after liberation, for a period of 20 years, bitter contradictions over land persisted in the town (Seltene, 2000: 235-45). This generated a strong resistance between the local *balabats* (native landowners) and the *kahinat* or clergy of Bahir Dar Giyorgis, on one hand, and the town administration and the central government, on the other. This problem, however, was brought to an end when in 1963 the emperor declared land in Bahir Dar government land. This released land from its traditional bondage and paved the way for the further urbanization

of Bahir Dar as a planned town. This was done, as Seltene recounts, without making any remuneration for the landowners and the monastery except assigning them plots of urban land freely.

Table 2: Factories Proposed to be established in Bahir Dar

| S.N | Factory | Deutch Mark | Empl oyee | Source of Raw Material | | Sale Market | | Exp ort |
|-----|---------------------------|-------------|--------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|----------------------------------|------------|
| | | | | Bah ir Dar | Ot he r Pt s. Eth | Bah ir Dar | Ot he r Pt s. Eth | Exp ort |
| 1 | Textile Factory | 23,000,000 | 3000 | | + | | ++ | |
| 2 | Cotton Plantation | - | 1110 | + | | ++ | | |
| 3 | Sand Production | 23,000 | 63 | + | | ++ | | |
| 4 | Clay and brick production | 580,000 | 103 | + | | ++ | | |
| 5 | Trachyte | 115,000 | 65 | + | | ++ | | |
| 6 | Limestone work | 170,000 | 67 | + | | ++ | | |
| 7 | Coffee production | 90,000 | 100 | + | | | | |
| 8 | Castor oil | 1,409,000 | 142(1) | + | | | | - |
| 9 | Oil Mill | 1,000,000 | 50 | | | ++ | | - |
| 10 | Slaughtering House | 125,000 | 6 | + | | ++ | | - |

| | | | | | | | | |
|----|----------------------------|---------|-----|---|--|----|----|---|
| 11 | Dairy | 640,000 | 120 | + | | ++ | | |
| 12 | Meat Production Factory | 983,000 | 100 | + | | | ++ | - |
| 13 | Leather Factory | 400,000 | 100 | + | | ++ | ++ | - |
| 14 | Glycerine Factory | 400,000 | 100 | + | | ++ | ++ | - |
| 15 | Food Factory | 135,000 | 35 | + | | ++ | | |
| 16 | Soap Factory | 900,000 | 70 | + | | | ++ | |
| 17 | Casing Factory | 70,000 | 15 | + | | ++ | | |
| 18 | Margarine Factory | 160,000 | 33 | + | | ++ | | |
| 19 | Paint Factory | 170,000 | 36 | + | | ++ | | |
| 20 | Brewery | 180,000 | 15 | + | | ++ | | |
| 21 | Distillery | 110,000 | 10 | + | | ++ | | |
| 22 | Cement Production | - | 35 | + | | | | |

Source: "Report". No author and no date. It is a 51 pages comprehensive economic study of Bahir Dar (Unpublished).

Further Government Initiatives (1963 - 1974)

In 1963 the government officially launched a development program for the ensuing seven consecutive years. The budget for developing the town came from two sources. One was, principally a capital budget allocated from the central treasury and another local revenue collected by the municipality from the town.

Two major parallel developments characterized the implementation of the program. One was the demolition of various old quarters of the town segregated along class, occupation and religion lines, and the other its replacement, was a reconstruction of the town depending on the differentiation of living and working quarters as indicated by the spatial plan.¹⁶ Accordingly, the town was demarcated into different land uses such as residential, business, industrial, administrative and recreational (Appendix II). The program focused on the business, residential and recreational zones. The major works included the opening of new roads, the construction of houses, the creation of parks and the installation of water and electric supplies.

By way of encouraging trade, there was much focus on the business area. The Italian-built road and the other roads instituted later were further improved and new major and minor roads were constructed. Several one or two lane streets were constructed. This was accompanied by the construction of pedestrian sidewalks with the view to ease the movement of traffic. The main avenues and streets

were asphalted and provided with fluorescent lamps. The Old Saturday Market was abandoned in favour of a New Saturday Market where several stalls and grain verandas were built. Moreover, slaughtering houses were constructed for both Christians and Muslims. A garage and a fire brigade were set up as sectors in the municipality. Furthermore, in an attempt to keep the town clean, the researcher observed that some public buildings for toilet and shower facilities had started giving service.

Similarly, in order to encourage settlement, more attention was given to the expansion of residential areas along various sites of the town. The opening of new streets, the provision of electric light and the allocation of new plots of land for the construction of living quarters further bolstered the settlement and urban expansion process.

The government strove to convince people that Bahir Dar would grow as planned. To this end, new institutions were established of which the municipality building, the town and cinema hall, the stadium, the *Qidus* Giyorgis Church and the royal palace at Bazait hill stood important¹⁷. Moreover, two lane roads – that extend from Tewodros Stadium to the New Saturday Market and a similar road that branches from the former road at a square in front of the *Qidus* Giyorgis Church and continues to the Blue Nile Bridge were asphalted. The road extended to the palace on Bazait hill.

Still another aspect of the development program was the beautification of the town. Park development went side by side with other construction activities. Plants and trees for shade as well as for decoration were planted in the recreational area along the shores of Lake Tana, the double lane avenues of the town and the road that connected the palace with the rest of the town. Table 3 shows a summary of some of the major construction and park development works in 1965-71.

Table 3: Road, House Construction and Park Development: 1965-1971

| Year | Project | Expenditure in Birr |
|------|--|---------------------|
| 1965 | Market stalls, fences, houses road construction and park | 441,038.54 |

| | development | |
|-------|---|---------------|
| 1966 | Royal palace | 592,812.27 |
| | Qidus Giyorgis Church | 465,218.06 |
| | Road , house, fence and park development | 138,398.70 |
| 1967 | Road, house construction and park development | 388,000.00 |
| 1970 | Road construction | 47,805.68 |
| 1971 | Road and house construction | 299,567.48 |
| Total | | 2,372,,840.73 |

Source: Habta-Mariam Walda-Kidan, "Bahir Dar Town Municipality Annual Report (1956 and 1957 E.C.), pp.23-4; *idem*, (1958 E.C.), 13; (1960 E.C.), p.12; "General Report on the Development Activities Accomplished in Bahir Dar; (1962 E.C.), p.10. For further discussion, see Seltene Seyoum, "A History of Bahir Dar Town", p.137.

The realization of the spatial plan could also be seen from the extent of houses destroyed for road line, government and public services and the compensation the government made for this purpose. For the period from 1964 to 1969 alone this amounted to *Birr* (Ethiopian currency) 641, 489¹⁸. As the preceding discussion shows, Bahir Dar was planned to grow as an industrial city supported by small-scale handicraft and cottage industries. The government expected investment to take place, but facilities such as infrastructure and other provisions in the town had lagged much behind. So, with the exception of the textile industry it was only small private enterprises that expanded in the town. This was more evident in the spheres of manufacturing and traditional crafts. In fact, it was commerce on private basis that flourished in the town. This was due to small private investment.

As anticipated earlier, Bahir Dar grew as a significant center for tourism. Improvements in transport and hotel accommodations in the town must have contributed to this development. The process in this direction might be understood from the rising number of tourists from 1,310 in 1964 to 4,242 in 1968¹⁹.

The growth of Bahir Dar was also accompanied by the expansion of education. Particularly, after 1960 several schools at primary and secondary level were opened. It would also be recalled that a technical school, that is, the Polytechnic Institute, was set up as part of a plan to speed up the growth of the town. Similarly, in 1972 a

college of education called the Academy of Pedagogy was established. These and other institutions made Bahir Dar grow as an important learning center in north-western Ethiopia.

These and other activities added together resulted in progressive population boom in the town (Central Statistical Office, 1966, 1968, 1972, 1975). In 1960, the population of Bahir Dar was estimated to be 3,500. This rose to about 11,990 in 1965 and 29,000 in 1974. According to the 1984 census the population of Bahir Dar reached about 55,000. Studies show that the growing trade, employment and educational opportunities increasingly attracted more rural and urban migrants mainly from Eritrea, Tigray, Begemder and Gojjam into the town.

When the development program of the spatial aspect of Bahir Dar was approaching completion, the government in 1969-70 brought forward the idea of developing Bahir Dar into an industrial town from another perspective.²⁰ To facilitate this development, however, the creation of a new autonomous administrative zone comprising the whole Lake Tana-Blue Nile basin centered at Bahir Dar was thought necessary. But a higher body relegated to study this possibility came out with the suggestion that, at the moment, it would be difficult to introduce any administrative changes in the region. Instead, it recommended that the industrial development of the town would continue respecting the traditional administrative structure of the region. Whether this convinced it or not, the government did not attempt either to enforce its approval or objection to the suggestion of the higher body probably because it had already noticed the reluctance of Begemder officials to participate in its plans of developing Bahir Dar.²¹ It can be understood from the minutes that the latter officials had already shown some reluctance if more land be taken from the Begemder side of the Blue Nile and added to Bahir Dar which they thought the town belongs more to Gojjam than to Begemder.

Soon in 1974 a nationwide revolution broke out in Ethiopia. This time a new all-weather road connected Bahir Dar with Addis Ababa by way of Mota and with Assab by way of Warota and Waldia. Again, as indicated in the master plan, an edible oil factory was established and an international airport was constructed. Bahir Dar also grew to

become the seat of several administrative, transport and communications, trade and educational institutions at a regional level.

Conclusion

During the first three decades of the post - liberation period (1941 - 1974) Bahir Dar experienced a sustained growth of urban development primarily due to government initiative. Several measures brought combined effect on the urban growth of the town. The selection of the Lake Tana - Blue Nile basin as one of the potentially promising areas for economic development was one major factor. The national plan envisaged that Bahir Dar should grow as an administrative, trade and market center of the basin. To realise this, the Ethiopian government first ended the isolation of the region by linking Bahir Dar with all weather road and air transport with Addis Ababa, Gondar and Asmara. Thus, Bahir Dar emerged to serve as an entrepot connection center in north-western Ethiopia.

As already indicated, the Ethiopian government made another study of how Bahir Dar could grow as an industrial town as well as a market center of the Lake Tana - Blue Nile basin. This comprehensive study, contained in the master plan of Bahir Dar (1960 - 1962), included the following three major aspects:

1. It detailed the infrastructure and spatial lay out of the town, the implementation of which substantially changed the physical appearance of the town.
2. It showed how Bahir Dar could develop as a market center for the agricultural products of the basin. The town plan envisaged the development of mechanized agriculture in the basin with a 50 km radius from Bahir Dar by leasing peasants' land. However, as this has not been realized, the development of agriculture remained having less direct bearing on the growth of the town.
3. The plan envisaged that Bahir Dar could develop into an industrial town. For this 22 factories were studied to be established as a 'chain of industries' with the objective of making the town grow as a major market center for industrial products. However, with the exception of the textile mills and an edible oil factory (a later addition) no other factory has been set up in Bahir Dar. Instead, it was largely private

enterprises on small scale handicraft and cottage industries that considerably expanded in the town.

According to the master plan, Bahir Dar has not grown as much as it was expected. Among other things, the lagging behind of the infrastructure like hydro-electric power, the land question in the basin and, above all, the outbreak of the Ethiopian revolution (1975 -1991) that abolished free market economy, could be accounted for as major factors that delayed Bahir Dar from growing fast.

Nevertheless, one thing remains certain of Bahir Dar. Though it has not grown as much as expected, its development as a locus of administrative, trading and market, education and tourist as well as an industrial center has attracted planners to select Bahir Dar as the political and administrative capital of the Amhara National Regional State. However, Bahir Dar could have grown more if at least some aspects of the integrated development of mechanized agriculture and chains of industry sought to be developed in the Lake Tana – Blue Nile basin were realized. This still remains a challenge for planners as well as policy makers.

End Notes

¹ Benti Getahun. “A History of Shashamane from Its Foundation to 1974.” MA Thesis. Department of History, Addis Ababa University, Seltene Seyoum “A History of Bahir Dar Town, 1936 – 1974.” MA Thesis. Department of History, Addis Ababa University; Tibebe Eshete, “A History of Jijjiga Town 1891 – 1974.” MA Thesis. Department of History, Addis Ababa University.

²Oral informants : *Ato* Tamir Shiferaw, age 75, interviewed in Bahir Dar on 5 August 1986; *Alaqa* Sirak Zagaye, age 79, interviewed in Bahir Dar on 9 July 1986; *Qes* Tibabu Hailu, age 71, interviewed in Bahir Dar on 15 May 1984; *Wayzaro* Abarash Afawarq, interviewed in Bahir Dar on 21 May 1986. The former two worked in the Municipality and the latter ones were descendants of *balabat* or native families of Bahir Dar.

3 Report prepared by Mulugeta Sinagiorgis to Mahtama-Selase Walda-Masqal, Ministry of Labour and Communications, Bahir Dar Giyorgis, File No.631-68, *Genbot* 12, 1956 E.C. See also, Ayalew Mangasha, Agaw-Bahir Dar *Awraja* Office, Dangila to Gojjam *Taqlai Gizat* Office, No. 128/45, *Ginbot* 27, and 1945 E.C.

4 Mulugeta Senagiorgis to Mahtama-Selase Walda-Maqaal, *Genbot* 12, 1956 E.C. For further information, see Seltene Seyoum, "A History of Bahir Dar Town: 1936-1974..." Pp.85-6.

5Seymour Harris, "Preliminary Survey Report upon Proposed Development of the Town of Shashamane", (Birmingham, 1954), pp.1-6.

6 IEG, The Economic Assistance Administration Board, "Preliminary Appraisal of the 1958-59 Programme, an Indication of Some Aspects for that of 1959-60", (Bolton, Hennesly & Partners, Addis Ababa, November 1958), p.34.

7Seltene Seyoum," A History of Bahir Dar Town", pp. 117-8.

⁸Oral informants : Sirak Zagaye, Tamir Shifaraw; *Ato* Wibe Kassa, age c.80, interviewed in Bahir Dar on 15 September 1987. For additional evidence, see Bahir Dar *Awraja* Administration Office, File No.-35/43, Bahir Dar Municipality minutes, *Hedar* 5, 1949 E.C.

⁹Katama Yifru, Ministry of Pen, to Kifle Dadi, Ministry of Interior, *Ter* 24, 1952 E.C.

10 For areas added from Begemder side, refer to a letter from Kifle Dadi to Andargachaw Masai, No.13/2259/52, *Ter* 5,1952 E.C.; For the Gojjam side, see Bahir Dar *Awraja* Finance Office, "YaBahir Dar *Giber* List", showing land estimation and land tax in 1953 E.C. (in possession of Tamir Shifaraw, Bahir Dar). For details, see Habta-Mariam Walda-Kidan, "Bahir Dar Town Municipality Annual Report" (1960 E.C.), p.12. A *gasha* is a local unit of land measurement or an area of land equivalent to 40 hectares or 400,000 square meters.

11Mamo Taddasa to the Ministry of Interior, No. 1426/11/34/11/53, 27 *Magabit* 1953 E.C.; Salih Hinit to Balata Gabra-Sadiq, No.51/40/53, *Miazia* 26, 1953 E.C.

The directive is contained in the monastery of Bahir Dar Giyorgis, File No.631-68, Ministry of Labour and Communications (available in the Ministry of Housing and Development Archives Office, Addis Ababa).

¹² The appraisal is based on “Comments of Bahir Dar Town New Plan” (N.D.), and “Summary Report of Discussion Held with the German Town Planning Group”, Yekatit 22, 1954 E.C. Both documents are available in file n. 631-68(No author and addressee). For the areas of the different zones, see Habta-Mariam, “Bahir Dar Town Municipality”, (1964 E.C.), pp.5-8.

¹³ Flender (no last name) the First Secretary, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany to Salh Hinit, June 25, 1960, file n. 638-68.

¹⁴ “Report” (No author and no date). It is a 51 page comprehensive study of Bahir Dar and its surrounding, (in the possession of Habta-Mariam Walda-Kidan), pp.1-41.

¹⁵Report, p.45. For more information, see *Europress Information Service*, V.2, N.2, p.2, September 1962.

¹⁶Seltene Seyoum,” A History of Bahir Dar Town”, p.134.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p.136.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p.141.

¹⁹On the development of tourism, see Habta-Mariam Walda-Kidan’s annual reports of 1960 E.C. and 1962 E.C.

²⁰Ministry of Pen to Ministry of Interior, N.323/62/3/17, *Teqemt* 11, 1962 E.C. See details in: Ministry of Interior minutes, *Teqemt* 19, 1962 E.C.

²¹*Ibid*; Ministry of Interior to Tamirat Yigazu, N.18/11308, *Miazia* 7, 1962 E.C.

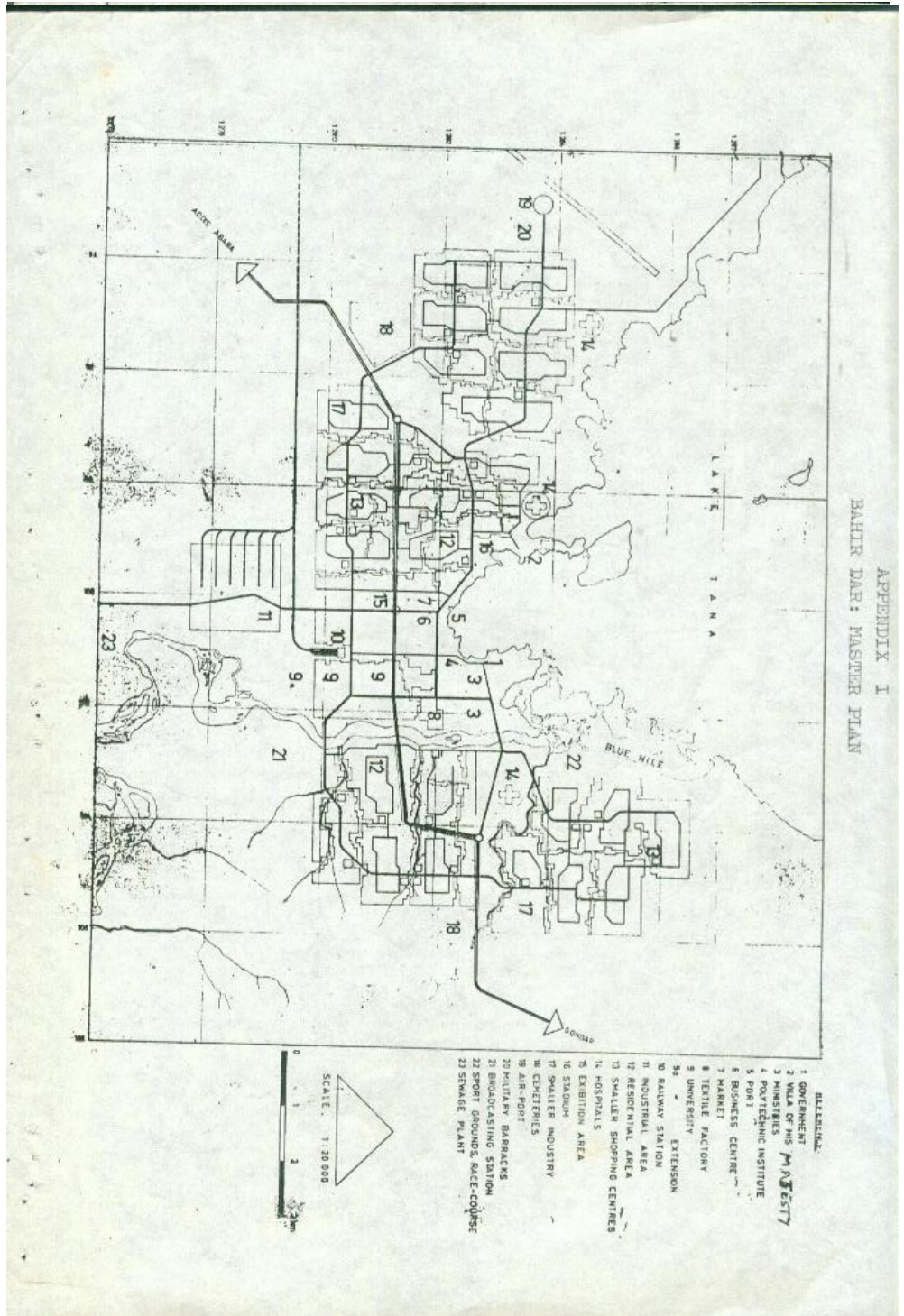
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Source: Adapted from the master plan and other detailed maps of Bahir Dar. For further information, see Seltene Seyoum, “A History of Bahir Dar Town”, pp. 126 – 8.

Glossary

| | |
|--|---|
| <i>Alaqa</i> ----- | Title of a church figure |
| <i>Aroge Qedame</i> ----- | Old Saturday |
| <i>Ato</i> ----- | Mister (Mr.) |
| <i>Awraja</i> ----- | District |
| <i>Balabat</i> ----- | Native land owner |
| <i>Birr</i> ----- | Ethiopian national currency |
| <i>Gasha</i> ----- | Unit of measurement equivalent to 40 hectares |
| <i>Geber</i> ----- | Tax |
| <i>Genbot</i> ----- | May |
| <i>Ginjabet</i> ----- | Finance Office |
| <i>Hedar</i> ----- | November |
| <i>Kahinat</i> ----- | Clergy |
| <i>Magabit</i> ----- | March |
| <i>Matshet</i> ----- | Journal/Publication |
| <i>Miazia</i> ----- | April |
| <i>Qes</i> ----- | Priest |
| <i>Qidus</i> ----- | Saint |
| <i>Safar</i> ----- | Quarter |
| <i>Taqalay Gezat (Yager Gezat)</i> ----- | Regional division of a country |
| <i>Teqemt</i> ----- | October |
| <i>Ter</i> ----- | January |
| <i>Tis Esat</i> ----- | Smoke of fire [Blue Nile Falls] |
| <i>Warada</i> ----- | Sub-District |
| <i>Wayzaro</i> ----- | Mistress (Mrs.) |
| <i>Yakatit</i> ----- | February |