The Palace of *Sheikh* Khojali in Addis Ababa: A Symbol of Early 20th Century Centre-Periphery Relations[*]

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Abstract

This paper discusses the relation between architectural symbolism and historiography. Its point of the departure is the palace of the early 20th-century ruler of Bela Shangul, *Sheikh* Khojali al-Hasan, in Addis Ababa, and the following question: what do the remains of the palace tell us about centre-periphery relations between Addis Ababa and Bela Shangul during the empire-building process of modern Ethiopia, somehow between the 1890s and 1930s? The paper compares similar palaces and architectural representations of other “semi-independent” regions, like Jimma, Naqamtee, and Gubba.

Introduction

“A tiny corner of the Sudan” in Ethiopia’s capital, is the impression the German traveller Max Grühl (1884-1941) left about a visit to the palace of Khojali al-Hasan (Grühl 1935, 374–77).[2] After the incorporation of Bela Shangul into the expanding Ethiopian Empire, the *watawit*[3] ruler *Sheikh* Khojali emerged as a powerful administrator over this area in western Ethiopia. Today his former realm is part of the modern administrative unit Beni Shangul-Gumuz Regional State. Throughout his rule he managed to keep ‘semi-autonomy’ and successively became one of the main suppliers for gold and slaves for the central government in Addis Ababa. This economic and political interdependence is manifest in Khojali’s *gəbbi* (‘palace’), in a quarter of the capital known until today as *šägole mədär*[4], where the *Sheikh* resided from time to time, “to hold court and do business”.[5] Khojali’s palace is an exceptional representative building for a non-Amhara ruler in the capital and bears witness to the region’s political and economic importance and the man himself. In the absence of much written record on the relationship between the *Sheikh* and the empire during the late 19th and early 20th century, the palace’s remains can illustrate and elaborate some aspects of centre-periphery relations underlining the interdependence of the two.[6]

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[*] This paper goes back to my PhD research in Beni Shangul-Gumuz between 2010 and 2015. The idea for this paper was first presented during the conference “Architectures of Power” (6-7 July 2012) at the University of Hamburg. A first draft of the paper received valuable comment from Alfredo González-Ruibal; other parts of it went into my PhD thesis (Meckelburg 2019). I am grateful to the team of the *JES* to allow me to present the paper here in full.

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[2] For reasons of convenience the quotations are taken from the English translation of Grühl’s account. A slightly longer account of the visit to the *Sheikh’s* palace is provided in the German original: Grühl, Max (1935): *Abessinien, die Zitadelle Afrikas*, Berlin. The main difference is the omission of Grühl’s somewhat obscene description of his “anthropological” observations during taking physical measurement of the “Sudanese” people around the place compound, in the English version.

[3] *Watawit* is an ambiguous term used for Bela Shangul’s historical ruling class of Sudanese Arab descend. The term is hardly used today. Etymologically it might refer to the Arabic “watan”, “homeland”. See also later in the text.

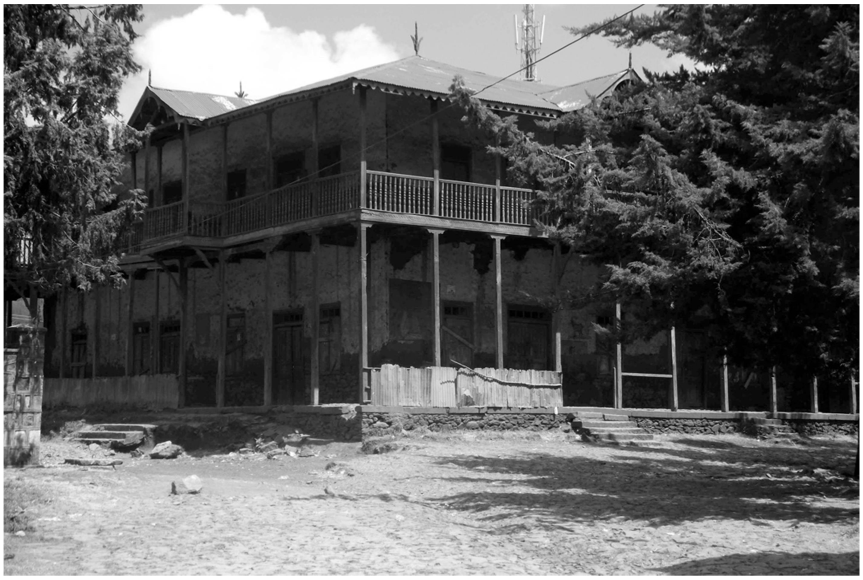

Figure 1: The palace from the west; Meckelburg, 2012

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[4] Ḫʷağalī (I use the simplified English transcription, Khojali, here) usually appears as ‘Šek̠ Hoğele’ (ሼኽ ሆጄሌ) in Amharic sources. The area of his palace in Addis Ababa is known until today as *šägole* (ሸጎሌ; cp. Märsəʿe Hazän Wäldä Qirqos 2006, 46), *šägole säffär* or *mədär* (indicating the camp or the field/area of Khojali; cp. Dandena Tufa (2008, 32ff., for the history of the royal camps or *säffers* which became the quarters of modern Addis Ababa). A vast area was given to the *Sheikh* by Emperor Mənilək II at the northern outskirts of the city-in-the-making. This area today is known as Gulläle sub-city. According to oral traditions from Beni Shangul the name Gulläle goes back to the Arabic “kullu li”, to mean “this is all mine” in Arabic, the alleged comment of Khojali upon receiving the land (interviews in Beni Shangul, October 2014). Gullaallee is also the name of the Oromo section originally inhabiting the area.

[5] Interview with Abdul Rahman al-Hakim al-Hassan Khojali, 28 June 2012, Addis Ababa.

[6] Some letters between Khojali and consecutive governments have appeared in previous writings (cp. Abdussamad H. Ahmad 2014; Meckelburg 2019; Yirga Tesemma 1973).

The architecture here appears as a source of historiography, and of performed social relations. The building contains evidence for the urbanization of Addis Ababa and the modernization of Ethiopia as a whole. The presence of the peripheral elite in the centre highlights the complex nature of the empire-making process in Ethiopian history: The gradual shift from the exploitation of the periphery (tributes, slaves and gold) to an early structured economy (trade, commerce and taxation), as well as the interplay between regional and central forces, mark the time of Khojali and the developments in the country. It is important to note that Khojali, as a peripheral ruler, moved his economic activities to Addis Ababa and became an investor, building and renting estate (s. further below). An aspect that is essential in questioning the conventional centre-periphery paradigm. This paper will give a brief introduction to the biography of Khojali and the incorporation of Bela Shangul into the Ethiopian empire-state. Then the paper proceeds to discuss other palaces as representations of power in the periphery to eventually discuss the Addis Ababa palace as a symbol of the permeation of centre-periphery with regards to the economic interdependence between Bela Shangul and Addis Ababa.

***Sheikh* Khojali, Bela Shangul and the Making of a 'Periphery'**

The career of *Sheikh* Khojali al-Hasan is clearly related to the military expansion of the Ethiopian centre and his own power grew with the consolidation of imperial rule during the time of Mənilək II (r. 1889-1913), *ləğ* Iyasu (1913-16) and *ras* Täfäri (1916-30, then crowned Ḫaylä Səllaśe). The history of Bela Shangul is relatively well explored prior to Khojali's ascent to power (Atieb Ahmad Dafalla 1973; Triulzi 1981). Khojali himself received some attention in the context of slavery and its suppression as a prominent representative of the *watawit* rulers of Bela Shangul (Bahru Zewde 1976; Miers 1997).

Historically Bela Shangul was a melting pot of Arab/Sudanese and Nilo-Saharan cultural trajectories. Initially inhabited by Nilo-Saharan peoples, the area, consecutively came under the control of the Funǧ sultanate in the Sudan. The first wave of immigrants of Funǧ origin mixed with the local population and their descendants came to be known as *"ǧäbelawin*" ("mountaineers"). The second wave of immigration, mostly by riverine Sudanese Arabs, most of whom came as Muslim teachers and traders, gradually established what came to be known as the *watawit*. After the fall of the Funǧ sultanate, their sheikdoms were exposed to the expanding Turco-Egyptian rule and demands for tributes. At the end of the 19th-century, the ruling *Sheikhs* were Abd ar-Rahman Khojali of Bela Shangul, Maḥmud Muḥammad of Khomosha, Khojali al-Hasan Aqoldi (Asosa), and Muḥammad al-Hasan of Fadasi. In the wake of the Mahdiyya (since ca. 1882) in the Sudan the *sheiks* became tributaries to the Mahdi (Triulzi 1975; 1981).[7]

Simultaneously, during the Ethiopian Empire's expansion, the ever-changing power networks were being challenged and shaken again. After the conquest of Qellem and Naqamtee (1883/84) by Mənilək's general, *ras* Gobanaa Dači, Jote Tullu and Kumsa Moroda came under the vassalage of Addis Ababa (Paulos Daaffa 1984; Triulzi 1986). Gold and ivory were the tributes laid on the rulers. Also, the centre demanded military contributions, and thus both leaders participated in the conquest of their northern neighbour Bela Shangul in 1897-98. The *watawit Sheikhs* submitted peacefully to the advancing troops of *ras* Mäk^{w}ännən except for Abd ar-Rahman Khojali (also known as Torr el-Gurri). From the start, Khojali cooperated with conquerors. *Subsequently,* the resistance of Torr el-Gurri was defeated (Atieb Ahmad Dafalla 1973, 43). Khojali sought an alliance with the central elites at the imperial palace in Addis Ababa and brought the territory under his control and vassal ship.

By about 1900 [*amatä merät,* 1907/8 A.D.], Khojali appears on a list of landlords and governors of the Ethiopian state as *yäabigar kəlfl gəži* (Amharic: "the ruler of the *abigar* area", or *yäabigar balabat*, the "lord of the abigar"; Märsəʿe Hazän Wäldä Qirqos, 2006/07: 45).[8] By then it appears Khojali al-Hasan had skilfully exploited his peripheral position. He was engaged in the cross-border slave trade, while at the same time he kept supplying the centre with tributes, such as slaves and gold. People coming from the Sudanese borderlands, as court and domestic and military slaves, were known in Addis Ababa and beyond as *Hojale* (Triulzi, Atied Ahmand Dafallah, and Bender 1976, 3–4). At the same time Khojali subjected large parts of the Berta and other ethnic groups under his control to forced labour in agriculture and gold-panning.[9] This was justified by the increasing demands for labour in the growing centre and the supply of slaves to satisfy it.[10] The early 20th century was characterized by an increase of slave raids and slave labour under Khojale (Abdussamad H. Ahmad 1999). Letter exchanges between central rulers and Khojale show the importance of Khojale across this period in regards to the exploitation of the periphery for tributes. The emperors demanded tributes and border administration from the *Sheikh* (Abdussamad H. Ahmad 2014; Meckelburg 2019). *Ras* Täfari required Khojali to supply his army with slave-soldiers. Most of these military slaves were captured from the "Koma" (i.e. the Koman speaking peoples along the border, like Komo, Gwama, Opo, etc., Johnson 1986, 229).

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[7] The Mahdiyya was a religious movement that fought Khedivial Egypt in Sudan between 1881 and 1898.

[8] The term "abigar" in this regard is especially important. It is the name for a type of cattle, and a language "between Gambella and the Baro" (cp. Kane, 1990: 1205). It was derogatively used in Amharic for the Nuer of Gambella and the Sudan. Originally the term was applied to Dinka living at the court of Jote Tullu, consecutively also applied for the Oromo-speaking Nuer, which mediated trade contacts between the Nuer and Oromo (cp. Johnson, 1986: 232).

[9] The Swedish gold miner William Avenstrup who visited Khojali in Addis Ababa briefly lived in the court of his son Al-Mahdi Khojali, who ruled on behalf of his father, and describes the *Sheikh* as having over "two million slaves" (Avenstrup 1935, 103) as a source of manpower for gold-washing and domestic activities. Slaves and gold were also the main

The legendary gold of the region has always been a motive in the regional history. In some cases slavery and gold have inspired the imagination of travellers and observers like in the case of Byron the Prorok, who described the 100 year old "Mad Sultan Ghogoli":

> "Tales of his savage cruelties were legend; the mere mention of his name is enough to terrorize the natives. (...) parties which had tried to cross his territory had disappeared and never been heard from again" (Prorok 1942, 76)[11].

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tributes demanded by the center. I would like to acknowledge the help of Sophie Küspert-Rokodondrainy in translating some of the passages of the Norwegian travel report.

[10] This is a very interesting point: Only in the federal composition of western Ethiopia, the term Berta has been re-introduced. The Sudanese Berta are today referred to as Fuññi (cp. Funǧ). On the Ethiopian side earlier names for the Berta were *ǧäbelawi* or *Bela Shangul.* Some groups within Berta have always referred to themselves as "Xoyalee or Hoyalee" (Triulzi – Dafallah – Bender, 1976:3). In the early 19th century the area of Beni- Shangul and the Funǧ area were known as the Dar-Bertat. The Berta of the early 20th century were rather the subjects of an otherwise Sudanese-Arab population known then as the *watawit.* Today the Berta and "Arabs" have, under political circumstances, largely grown together and the blended Nilotic and Arab cultural markers. Despite this, there is a class difference, I assume, between the descendants of the Nilotic population and those of Arab descent. Those Berta who claim a Sudanese -Arab genealogy largely neglect the term Berta and claim the *watawit* names like *mayyu* or *fadashi* for their groups.

[11] While such remarks seem entirely overexaggerated – this particular report may be rooted on hearsay, see further below – it is nonetheless it is interesting to note the international reputation that is subject to such statements.

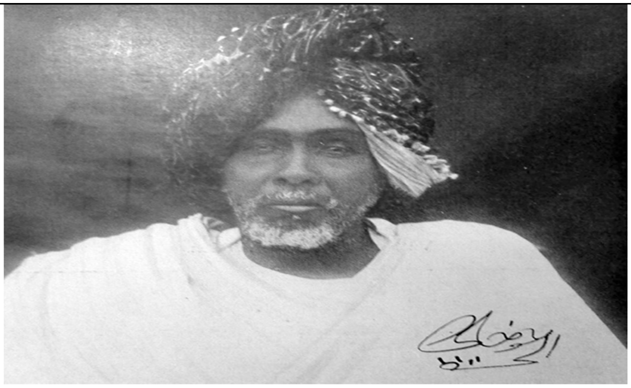

Figure 2: *Sheikh* Khojali, from Aventrup, 1935

Khojali skilfully exploited the peripheral position within the expanding central state, which radiated from Addis Ababa, to negotiate and defend his position in a non-linear process of power negotiations between the centre and the periphery. In advance of Italian troops and Addis Ababa's occupation by the forces of fascist Italy in May 1936, the Western Oromo Federation was established. Its leaders, Habte Mariam of Naqamtee, in alliance with the Gidami rulers Yohannes Jote and Hossana Jote (two sons of Jote Tullu, who both were in Addis Ababa under house arrest), and in coalition with *Sheikh* Khojali, "agreed to unite their people and to offer themselves to the League of Nations as a mandate territory with a view to establishing a future Oromo government". Hossana Jote declared himself ruler over Wallaga as soon as the Italians had conquered Ethiopia (1935-41). He ruled briefly over the western province on behalf of the Italians before they reached western Ethiopia (Meckelburg 2019, 138).

In 1938 Khojali regained control over Begi/Assosa, was named *sultan* and given administrative control over the *Benishangul Commissariato.* The circumstances of his death are uncertain. Some sources say he died in an Italian campaign against the Gumuz. According to another source, a rebellion erupted in Bela Shangul, demanding *däğğazmač* Mustafa's release, the hereditary ruler of Khomosha, an Italian prisoner, detained in Asmara. It seems certain that the *Sheikh* was fatally wounded and flown to Ras Dästa Hospital, where he may have been poisoned Addis Ababa (s. Meckelburg, 2019, 141). While the evidence is contested, the circumstances of this death seem to confirm again that Khojali was first and foremost a pragmatic leader, ready to exploit the periphery's political powers to remain in power.

The "periphery" is not a geographical concept *per se* but carries the notion of power in a given political setting. Peripheries need centres to designate socio-geographical arenas, but peripheries are not necessarily found at the states' margins alone. As Abbink (2002, 157) noted, "the notion of centre-periphery relations should not be based on geographical or cultural criteria, but primarily on a model of the structure and distribution of political power". When the Ethiopian Empire took shape, Addis Ababa, a city only established in 1886, created peripheries into which the imperial political institutions permeated, uprooted, changed, or accommodated peripheral socio-political institutions. In some areas, this aggressive expansion meant the breakdown of the regional political institutions, while in other areas, peripheral actors were able to expand their power and created peripheries in their own regard (Donham 1986). The latter would be the case of Khojali al-Hasan. Ethiopian empire-building was in quintessence a territorially motivated approach to control. The *kätämas* (garrison towns set up in the southern marches to control newly conquered areas) were conquest's architectural markers. They asserted control in areas where the population was put under the vassalage of soldiers and nobles of the Emperor's army, in so-called *gäbbar* areas, according to Donham famous typology (Donham 1986, 37–44). Bela Shangul, on the other hand, can be identified as a "semi-autonomous enclave" or *qurṭ gəbr* [*agär*] (i.e. an area paying a fixed tribute; ibid.). Such enclaves were regional political entities where traditional rulers submitted to the Emperor and thus retained power. In the west and south-west of Ethiopia, other such polities were Jimma (Guluma Gemeda 2002; Lewis 1965), (Leeqa) Naqamtee (Tesema Ta'a 2006; Triulzi 1986) and Gubba (Garretson 1982; Tsega Endalew 2006). All the polities mentioned above were economic engines of trade and commerce. The "monumental buildings" (e.g. González-Ruibal 2011 for Gubba) their rulers left, are representations of power in their own regard. These polities were centres in their own right, but one point would immediately emerge from a comparison: Except Khojali, none of the semi-autonomous rulers had a significant prominence in the centre. Here he left us a sign of his impact, seemingly challenging the distribution of power. In this building, the political centre and the periphery seem to merge.

The analysis of centre-periphery relations in Ethiopian history (especially the description of contemporary developments) has largely focused and highlighted how the centre was present in the periphery. This perspective brought about considerable historical analysis of the transmission of power (from the centre to the periphery) as well as regional patterns of territorial control. Less emphasis, though, has been put on the question of how power was maintained in the periphery itself, and how this affects patterns of regional "majority-minority" relations. It appears that the centre, in creating a periphery, in practice created regional centres which challenged its own neighbours into a peripheral status. The economic inter-dependency between the centre and the periphery is a springboard to speculate about how wealth was produced and how the production of wealth has affected the periphery itself. I argue that the relation between the centre and the periphery in this case study can be interpreted as a rather pragmatic and reciprocal exchange of wealth against a legitimation of authority. How can the remains of the building in Addis Ababa help to substantiate this argument?

Buildings as Performed History - *Monumentalism* in the Periphery

Buildings and architecture are more than mere containers of daily life. They give meaning to the social and the political context. Buildings are deeply grounded in the culture of any given society. They are the physical representation of social relations (González-Ruibal 2006). "Despite the evident social role of buildings the boundaries of architectural discourse are drawn so as to exclude it. Buildings are treated as art, technical or in investment, rarely as social objects" (Maran 2006, 10). Hirst (2005, 180) added that, "architecture is not just about art: it is also about power, control and social significance". In his *The Production of Space* Henri Lefebvre states that "space cannot be read like texts, because spaces and places change their meaning through time" (quoted in Maran 2006, 10). However, buildings are performed history, and as such they are a witness of the time and the social realities under which they were built. I argue, with Hirst (2005, 158), that "we can consider constructed objects as components of a discursive formation, and relate the practices of the construction, inclusion and exclusion of objects to the rules and patterns of such formations" (...) "in consequence buildings or planned environments become *statements*." Khojali's palace is such a statement. It is a *freeze-image* of a moment in history, a mention of the socio-political relation between centre and periphery at a given time. Similarly, the remains of the palaces which I will portray below are sights of memory of territorial and regional significance. They remind us that the regional centres created by the expanding empire became centres in their own rights. Not only in Bela Shangul had the consolidation of central control resulted in the submission of independent regional rulers, who made regional strong-men in return. Such rulers have left architectural remains being evidence of a mighty past. In this context, I look at three neighbours of Beni Shangul: Jimma, Naqamtee, and Gubba.[12] All of these regional semi-autonomous rulers built large compounds and palaces, each of which are symbolic sites of power and regional significance.

Jimma

The Oromo kingdom of Jimma Abba Jifar (1830-1932), "was a remarkable centralized, well-organized, and powerful monarchy" (Lewis 1965, xiv). Abba Jifar of Jimma, submission to Addis Ababa, helped to further conquer other territories like Wolaytta, Kullo, and Kafa (Guluma Gemeda 2002; Lewis 1965, 45). The kings of Jimma negotiated independence with the centre in Addis Abba by satisfying the levied taxes and tributes. Jimma's self-rule diminished with the death of Abba Jifar in 1932 and tendencies of centralization and political modernization under Ḫaylä Səllaśe (Guluma Gemeda 2002). The palace of Abba Jifar in Jiren, not far outside Jimma proper, was visited and described by various travellers, the reports of which Lewis used extensively (Lewis 1965, 68–73):

> "Jiren is located on a hilltop, the palace was a compound at least a kilometre in diameter, surrounded by a seven-or-eight-foot high fence woven split bamboo [supra note]. At its gate was a high tower, upon which stood guards; [...] Within the palace lived people who served some of the political, economic, and personal needs of the king and his family. Among these were hundreds of free servants, eunuchs, slaves, and concubines; over two thousand military men; artisans of all kinds, jailers, overseers, and organizers" (Lewis 1965, 69f.)

Naqamtee

Like Jimma, the rise of Leeqa Naqamtee built on the significant changes in the social system of the Oromo. The Leeqa leader Bakaree managed to expand and increasingly manifested his power over the surrounding groups (Asafa Jalata 2010, 44ff.). Thus, he became the first monarchical leader and founder of Leeqa Naqamtee. The urban growth of Naqamtee was primarily based on the peaceful submission of Bekeree’s son Moroda to Mənilək II, who stayed in power owing Addis Ababa a yearly tribute of gold and ivory (Tesema Ta’a 1993, 66). It was after the succession and coming to power of Moroda’s son Kumsaa (baptismal name: Gäbrä Ǝgzi’abəher) that the palace was built. Like his father, before him, Kumsaa sent tributes to Addis Ababa and managed to level a complex balance of autonomy and dependency with the centre. Inspired by a visit to Mənilək’s court, he built a “splendid three-storeyed palace around 1890” (Tesema Ta’a 1993, 67). By the 1920s the town had grown into a regional centre of trade and commerce and many European visitors like Weld Blundell, Le Roux, or Zervos, noted the level of Naqamtee’s urbanization, wealth and structured administration (cp. Tesema Ta’a 1993:67ff).

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[12] Also, Gidami (Leeqa Qellem) and Awsa of Afar under *Sultan* Ali Mirah (eastern Ethiopia) were such semi-independent regions. I am unaware of a palace in Awsa and found the house of Jote Tullu of Gidami relatively modest, thus I exclude both here. All buildings would deserve more in depth study in relation to their rulers and their time, which however is beyond the scope of this paper.

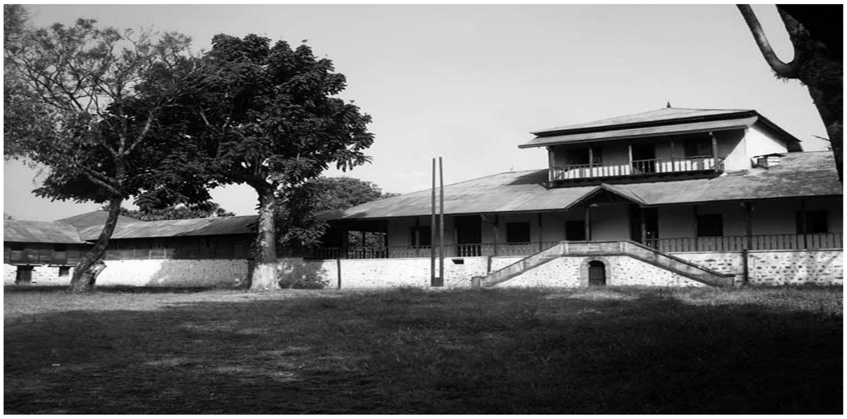

Figure 3: Palace of Kumsa Moroda, by Meckelburg, 2009

Gubba

Another contemporary of Abba Jifar II and Kumsaa Moroda was Hamdan Abu Shok (also known as *däǧǧazmač* Banǧa), the ruler of Gubba (Arabic: Qubba). Although there are some sources and written records used for historical analysis (Garretson 1982; James 1986; Tsega Endalew 2006), the case of Gubba is still one that would deserve more research and scrutiny. The sultans of Gubba emerged from an immigrant family of Jaa’lin descent from Sudan, integrated into the local Gumuz population and gradually took power over larger areas. Rich in gold, Gubba had been a tributary to the Funǧ sultanates and was incorporated into the Ethiopian Empire after 1902 and became a tributary to Qwara, the border province of Gondär. Nonetheless, Hamdan managed to strengthen his position and skilfully played his role as regional ruler. In 1925 Gubba belonged to the seven semi-independent regions of Ethiopia, and in 1935 *Sheikh* Hamdan was present at the Emperor Ḫaylä

Səllaśe coronation ceremony (Garretson 1982, 203). Cheeseman, who met Banǧa in the 1930s (a picture of Hamdan is published in his travel log [p. 365, ill.] is more concerned with the description of Hamdan's Model A Ford-motorcar than with the place structure (Cheesman 1936, 365).

During the Italian occupation, the palace became an Italian fort and was destroyed by British air-raids during the early days of the War of Liberation (González-Ruibal 2010). The palace structure's enormous remains were the subject of archaeological research (González-Ruibal 2010; 2011). The Archaeologists found two place structures. One belonging to the Hamdan and one to his father:

> "Both palaces were self-contained and connected with Sudanese and Islamic architectural traditions, and mark a break from local housing styles—except for the round huts of the concubines in the lower palace. In these aristocratic houses, lavish use was made of imported materials (including fired bricks and steel beams in the lower palace) and exotic architectural elements, such as arcades [...] and verandas. The Abu Shoks deliberately emphasised their foreign genealogy, drawing links to Sudan through a strong Funj mystique (*supra note*) and creating (violent) rift between them and the local Gumuz (*supra note*)" (González-Ruibal 2011, 271).

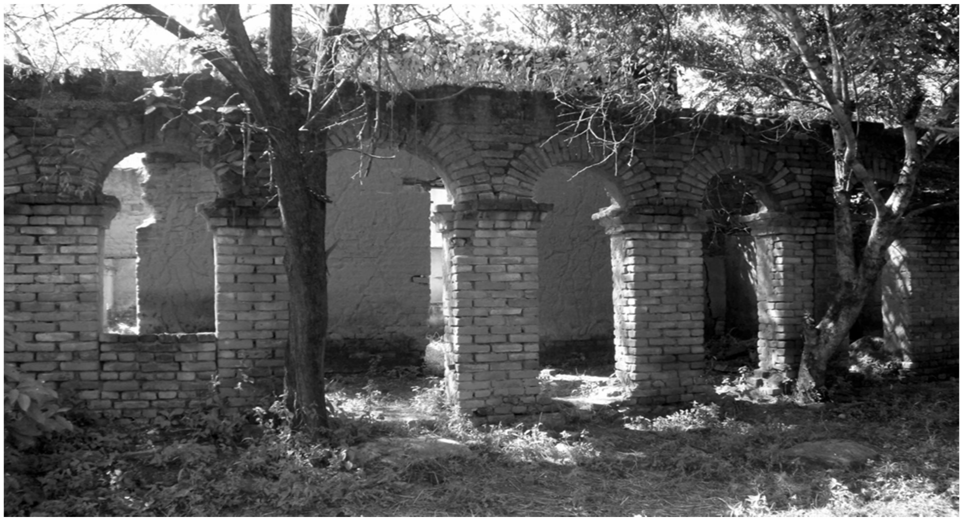

Figure 4: Qubba, by Meckelburg 2012

Asosa

There is a striking difference between the palaces of Jimma, Naqamtee and Gubba as compared to Asosa, where the courthouse of *Sheikh* Khojale al-Hasan is still preserved. The triumphant display of power as a sign of modernity and development were features of the peripheral rule (clearly visible the imitation of the architectural style of the Amhara lords in Addis Ababa in the case of Kumsaa or, the extravaganza in building materials in the case of Hamdan). The case of Asosa is different:

> "Khojele's palace was quite unique in its monumentality, extension and solidity in a landscape where round huts made of bamboo were the norm, but it was not completely out of place or especially luxurious. There was interaction with vernacular traditions, as shown in the round courthouse, the use of mud and straw, as well as in the maintenance of the compound (an assemblage of buildings) as the way of organising domestic space [...]" (González-Ruibal 2011, 271)

This modesty is also transmitted in oral data gathered from the family, which states that the round house was used as a court where Khojale received the other Bela Shangul lower *Sheikhs* with whom he sat together and held "democratic" conciliations.[13] Byron de Prorok (1942: 85) talked about a similar courthouse upon meeting a *watawit Sheikh*: "We entered a large but typical *toucul* [emphasis in the original]. It was like a great silo with a thatched cone-shaped roof." Hence the description of de Brorok might indicate a general style of oversized *tukuls* for the courthouses of the *watawit*. [14]

Jimma, Naqamtee, Gubba and Asosa/Bela Shangul, respectively, were polities characterised by the hierarchical distribution of power. The structures of wealth and authority were centralised in a single person or family. The rulers' ascent to power was marked by a complex web of changing traditional power systems, modernisation, and the administration's forceful centralisation. In all cases, regional power was sustained through conflicts with neighbouring peoples or polities and the control of decisive trade routes. The regions also showed a relatively high degree of political centralisation and were willing to protect their political power by cooperating with the invading Ethiopian forces. Semi-independence was primarily based on the political success of the ruler to negotiate autonomy by cooperation with the central government (Lewis 1965, 45)

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[13] Interviews with Abdul Rahman al-Hakim al-Hassan Khojali, 28 June 2012

[14] Although the author describes a meeting with the "mad sultan Ghogoli" it is doubtful whether he really met Khojali. The meeting is described in "Abu Moti" (cp. de Prorok, 1942: 83), which might be a reference to the seat of Muhmmad al Hasan's capital Fadasi. Mohammad was one of the lesser *watawit* sheiks and tributary to Khojali. His horse name was *abba mooti* and the mountain chain on which Fadasi lay, is known until today as *abba mooti*. Nonetheless the excerpt of de Prorok might indicate a general style of oversized *tukuls* for the courthouses of the *watawit*

While Khojali's power was less visible in the periphery, none of the other rulers were granted a visible sight of power in the centre in terms of the architectural symbolism of power. Their palaces were spatially confined to their own *centres*. They displayed their power and authority in triumphantly architectural form outstanding in the rural setting, far distant from their subjects, but similarly far from the political centre. The rift between the ruler and the population was obviously a concern for *Sheikh* Khojali and a strategy in maintaining his rule: Asosa was the antipode to his palace in Addis Ababa but no less a skilful manifestation of authority.

It should be mentioned that houses of Abba Jiffar and Kumsa Moroda have been transformed into museums. This is related to centre-periphery politics, too: for the Oromo, these regional sites are key centres of their political memory. It speaks to the fact, contrary to his contemporaries, the ruler of Bela Shangul sought prominence in the centre not in the area he ruled.

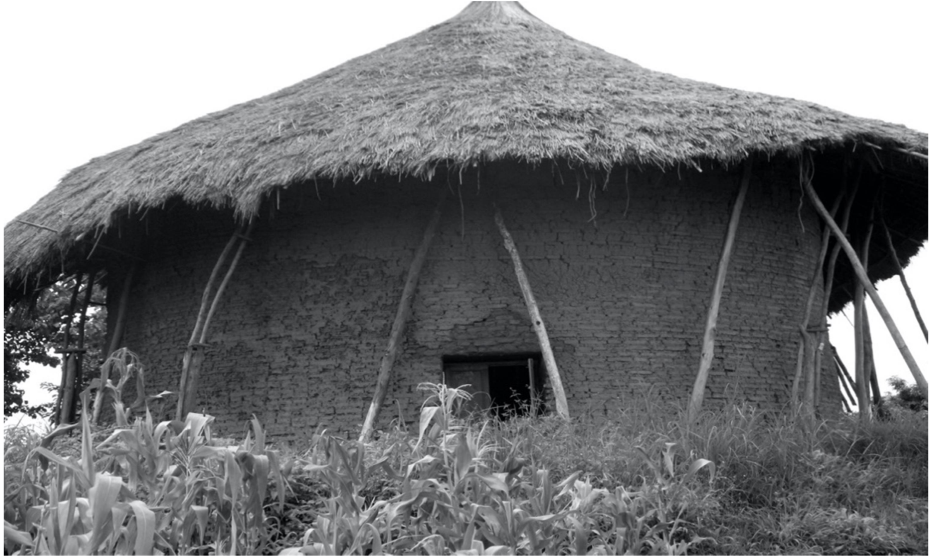

Figure 5: The courthouse in Asosa, photo, Meckelburg, 2012

Expanding the Periphery, Permeating the Centre

A modern travel guide to historical Addis Ababa locates and describes the palace of *Sheikh* Khojale:

> "As you go back to Ojale Street, turn left and follow it uphill until you find St. Rafael Church on the left. Take the church just opposite the church's main gate and follow it, passing the Mosque on your right. After around 250 metres, you will see, on your right, the outstanding palace that belonged to *Sheikh* Ojale Al- Hasan. It is a two-storey building, rectangular in plan, with chikka plastered stone walls and verandas running around three sides of both floors. The woodwork reflects the prevailing Indo-Islamic decorative influence, with windows and screens that recall some houses in Massawa. Presumably, the building dates back to the beginning of the 20th Century, after Ojale had become ruler of Asosa [...]" (Batistoni and Chiari 2004, 99)

Grühl's descriptions are more devoted to the area then the palace itself but it gives a colourful image nonetheless:

> "His house was situated away on the outskirts of the town. The way led first along the beautiful Gulali road. It then turned off to the right and wound between native huts over hill and dale and across rivulets to the foothills of the Entotto Mountains. The nearer we come to the *Sheikh*'s house the more we realised from those we met on the path that we had come on a tiny corner of the Sudan – dark Sudanese men with deeply tattoo faces and dark-skinned Sudanese girls wearing bright coloured beads. On reaching his house we announced ourselves to a boy and were received by the Chamberlain - a magnificent Sennar type- who led us into the forecourt. Here we left our animals and entered the house through a fine doorway. Here the *Sheikh* met us and greeted us warmly. He took my hand and led me to a shady nook where cushions had been laid ready for us. After the lengthy and very formal Oriental greetings (which has its use as affording an opportunity from mutual appraisement), we were served with coffee in tiny cups painted blue. The sultan then gave me an account of his adventurous life."(Grühl 1935, 375).

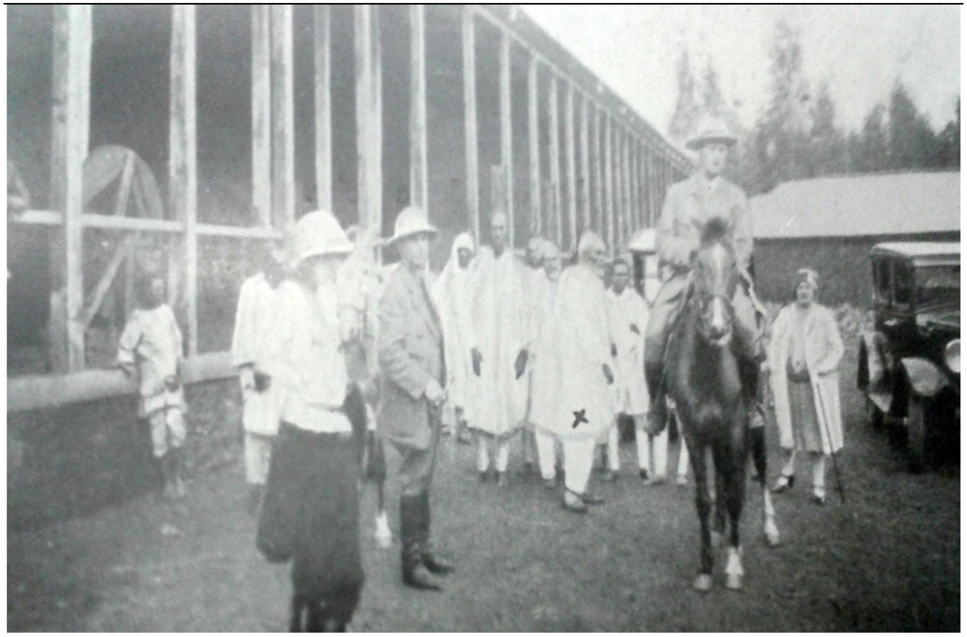

Figure 6: The compound in 1935; Avenstrup on the horse and Khojali is marked with a cross; from Avenstrup 1935

An interesting appraisal comes from Avenstrup, who recounts the *Sheikh* did not feel "at home" in Addis Ababa but rather like in exile. Khojali, according to Avenstrup, was too strong and powerful and hence was staying near the Emperor under surveillance (Avenstrup, 1935:50). As a ruler of immigrant descent, from the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Khojali ruthlessly ruled his realm with little attachment to his population. He benefited from the peripheral position of Bela Shangul, which allowed him to control not only trade routes but also the slave economy and the exploitation of natural resources, with little objection from the central government. Simultaneously, the centre depended on him as a middleman to extract resources and depended on his will to secure the boundary with British Sudan and keep the area under the Ethiopian Empire. Hence, the relation between the Emperor and the *Sheikh* can be understood as mutual dependent. Both ruler and ruled were able to sustain an equilibrium of power. This peripheral yet central position allowed *Sheikh* Khojali al-Hasan to become a successful trader and administrator, whose interest was focused mainly on the centre itself and less so on the periphery, which appears to be mainly an arena of economic opportunities.

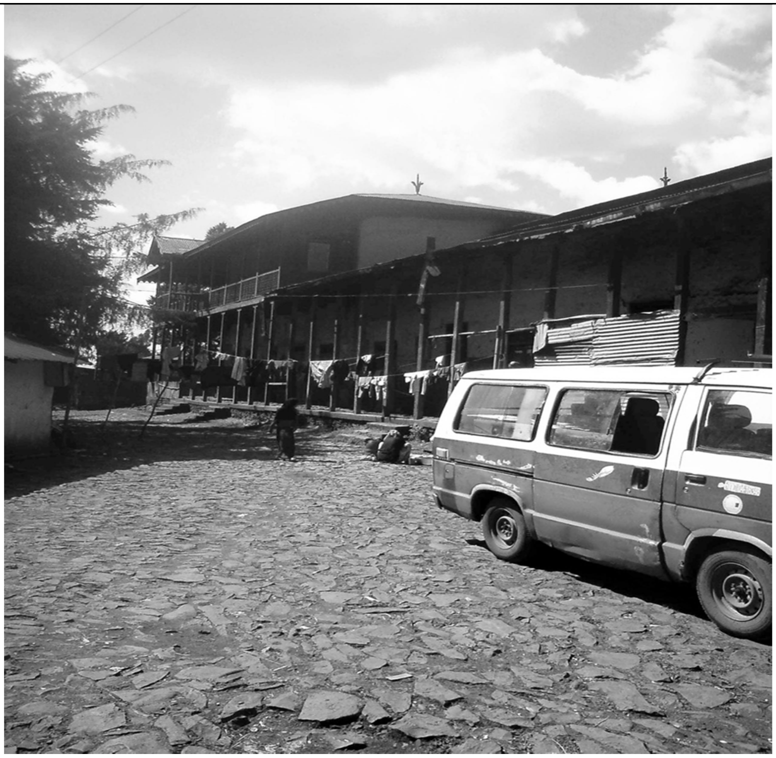

Figure 7: Life in the compound today, Meckelburg, 2013

Addis Ababa is a relatively recent town. Its structural development captures the idea of a central state-power, which Clapham (Clapham 2002, 9) noted:

> "Symbolically located close to the geographic centre of the state, Addis Ababa formed the nodal point of communications system spreading out to the furthest parts of the empire. Specific regions and communities could be defined as more or less peripheral, in accordance with their physical distance from the capital, their level of incorporation into the coercive and economic structures of government, and their degree of association with legitimizing myths of nationhood."

Sheikh Khojali seems to contradict this logic. With his centre in one of the most outlying regions, his palace seems to controvert the patterns of empire building. By the time the palace was built, in ca. 1910, Merab had estimated ca. 15.000 "Shankillas" and "Beni Shangul" in Addis Ababa (mostly for household work and slaves; cp. Reminick 2010, 87) presumably most of them trafficked to Addis through Beni Shangul. *Sheikh* Khojali set up a regime of plunder in the countryside, which enabled him to please the centre and play into his own pockets. Local traditions depict him as more intelligent (but also more ruthless) than the other rulers, e.g.: “he made us dig out 300 *wäqät* of gold, 200 were for his tributes, and the other was for himself”.

Accordingly, the Swedish traveller Avenstrup describes hearing about the fortified house on top of Mount Kirin, where the tributes and taxes that were taken from the population were hidden (Aventrup, 1935: 106). Khojali negotiated the looting of the countryside cleverly with his economic ends and, in a reciprocal way of giving and taking, he was able to keep control by keeping the emperors in the centre happy. The reciprocity enabled him to pass power to his heirs (Rashed Mohammad 1995).

The areal on which the compound was build was estimated at 340000 sqm. Only one half or the building still exists; the other half was demolished during the Därg time and a mosque was built on the ground (allegedly to please Muslim sentiments in the area during the revolution of 1974). According to information of the family, Armenian, India, and Turkish craftsmen were employed to build the palace; the tin-roof shows a French company’s logo. The family is ardently trying to maintain the building, and with great care to mending with original materials whenever possible. The idea to keep the building as a sight of memory (maybe in from of a regional museum) and a historical symbol for the importance of Beni Shangul and its population would be an important step to overcome patterns of centre-based historiography and to find ways to negotiate the marginalization of today’s emerging region of Beni Shangul with its historical realities and its actually proximity to the centre.

The palace was nationalized during the *Därg* time and parts of it were brought down. With the fall of the *Därg*, the family returned to the palace. The remains of the building today are symbols of a place-making project and reclaiming history. The family is determined to rehabilitate all parts of the building (some were used as a school and some were given to squatters). These claims embody the hope to defend the memory of an Ethiopian ruler; even more so to correct the omission of *Sheikh* Khojali, from the history of empire-making. Hence, the building’s remains become a symbol against the political and economic marginalization of a dynasty and parts of an ethnic community.

Sheikh Khojali al-Hasan continues to be an ambiguous character in Ethiopian history. Partially neglected by Ethiopian historiography, he ruled Beni

Shangul with an iron fist, yet his visitors described him as remarkably friendly and intelligent (Aventrup 1945, 49; Grühl 1935, 375). There is also a metropolitan side to him, which shows how cleverly he was able to position himself in Addis Ababa. Apart from his trading activities, gold concessions and slave trade, documents kept in family possession in his Addis Ababa palace also suggest investment activities in the capital city. Information omitted largely from Ethiopian historiography and not referred to in the analysis of the urbanisation process of Addis Ababa, the *Sheikh* was an early investor, who built a variety of houses around *Piyassa*, which housed e.g. *Cinema Adwa* or *Photo Mebrate*, as well as in Addis Katäma, and around the train station. His real-estate was rented out to businesses, craftsmen and companies. The havoc that evolved between the successors around the inheritance of their father's riches was also subject to the analysis of the family history (cp. Rashed Mohammad, 1995).

Sheikh Khojali built many modern houses in Addis Ababa and his said to have collected as much as 8 000 Maria Theresa dollars monthly from the rent (Rashed Mohammad 1995, 27). The economic activity of investments was continued by Khojali's son Abdulrahim who is said to have built about forty buildings in Asosa and Beggi, which he rented for "large amounts of money" (Rashed Mohammad, 1995: 26). A contract, retained by the family, signed with a certain limited company *Magdalinos*, states that Abdul Rahim Khojali ("in the name of the heirs of *Sheikh* Khojali") and Al Mahdi Khojali would receive "a monthly rent to 600 birr from the company equally shared by 2/3 and 1/3".[15]

The reprint to the map (figure 8, below) shows the contract between *Sheikh* Khojali and the city council of Addis Ababa as of 1922. The *Sheikh* rented 9, 430 sqm for "10 Birr and 1 *mähalläq*" [the name for an earlier Ethiopian currency], which would be evaluated and eventually increased". By the late 1920s land in Addis Ababa already cost as much as one to "four dollars a meter" (Pankhurst, 1966: 203; compare the ten *bərr* inscribed in the lease contract above). But it was not only in the capacity of the *Sheikh* to build the palace but also to invest in 20 further investments, which expanded his wealth.

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[15] Family Archive in Addis Ababa

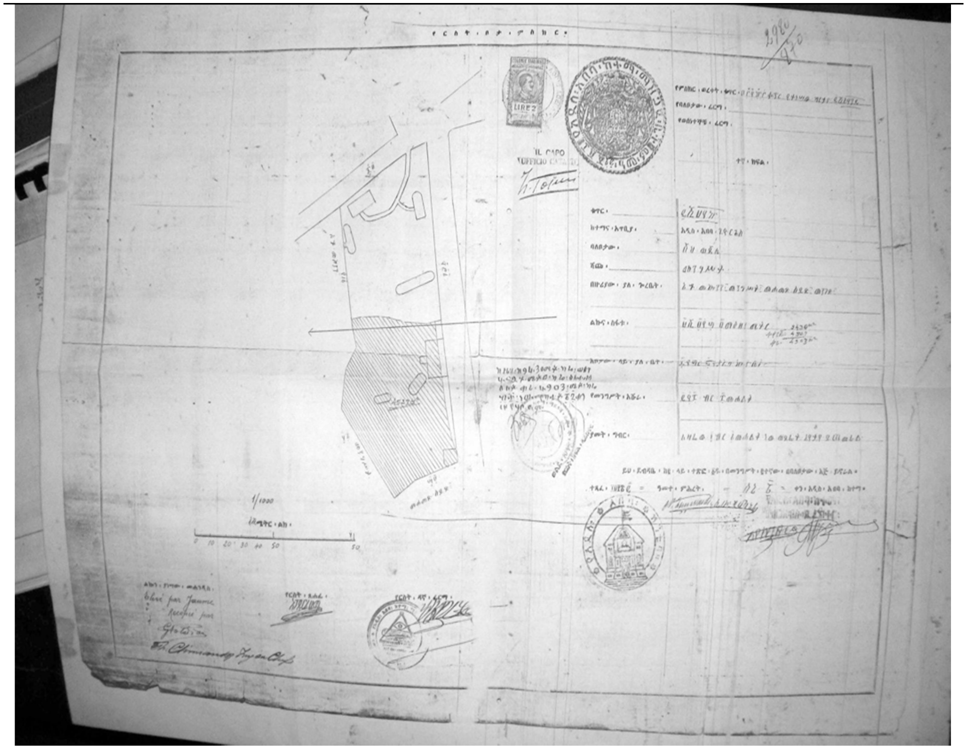

Figure 8: Cadastre map showing property on Piassa; Khojali family archive

Conclusion

Khojali's palace in Addis Ababa is a powerful symbol of political and economic capacity. The remains of the building offer a look at the centre-periphery dichotomy beyond the conventional top-down approach. The building is an indicator of the economic interdependence between centre and periphery and bears evidence for the economic foundation of authority in the periphery itself. It is also an important reminder that the *Sheikh* sought cosmopolitan statues and behaved more like a member of the central elites than a peripheral ruler. He didn't present himself in a "traditional" way in Addis, but used a modern house. This is the reverse of his representation in Asosa. This fact distinguished his rule from other peripheral rulers, who centred their power in the areas of origin. In Jimma, Gubba and Naqamtee the political structures are preserved in monumental residences—expressions of modernity in their own regard at the given time. Nonetheless, both in Asosa and Addis Ababa, Khojali symbolically legitimized his rule: in both directions, he negotiated his position by showing eye heights with the rulers and elite in the capital and stressing equality with his subjects in Beni Shangul. Presumably, with the decline of the slave trade and the parallel process of urbanization and modernization, real estate investment increasingly became a profitable business model. There is also an essential cosmopolitan element in Khojali's palace: the building follows the style typical of other turn-of-the-century buildings in Addis Ababa, that mix Eastern Africa, Central European and Indian elements. By using this hybrid cosmopolitan style, Khojali presented himself as a member of the global colonial elite, one that united Ethiopian lords, British, German and French administrators, and Indian merchants. Despite this, the land given to him lay at the margins of the capital, hence at the margins of the elites Khojali wanted to belong to.

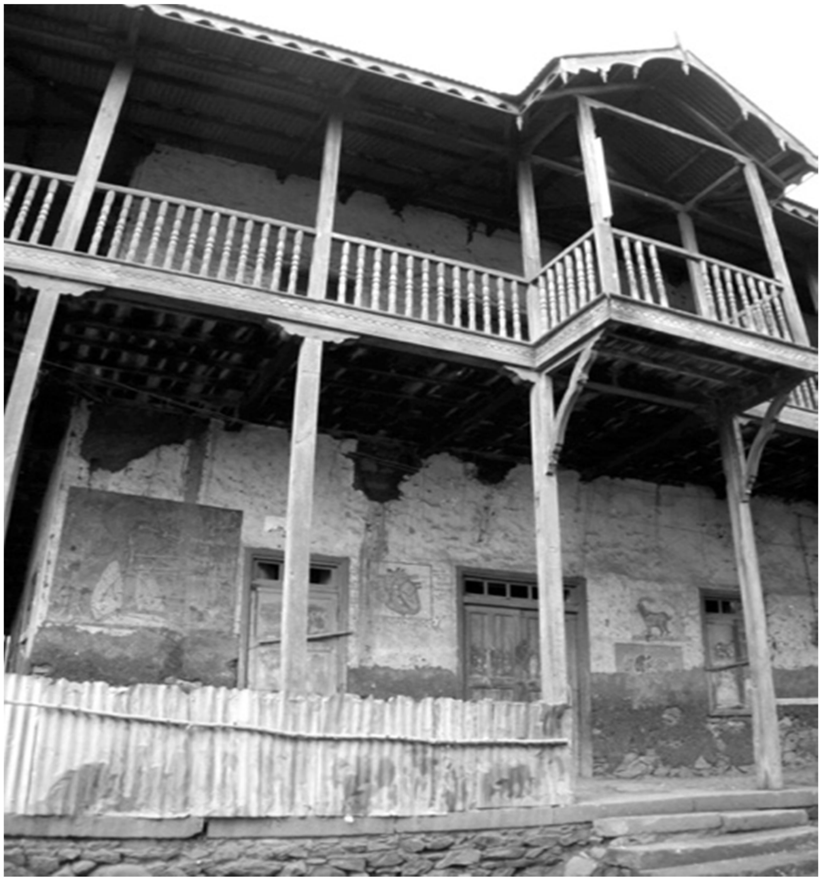

Figure 9: Detail; parts of the palace were used as a school; Meckelburg, 2013

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