A STUDY ON THE FORMATION OF AN IMPERIAL CITY IN TIGRAY,
ETHIOPIA, AT THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Construction of Mekelle during and after the reign of Yohannes IV

This paper aims to analyze the urban formation of the historical city of Mekelle, the current capital of Tigray Region in northern Ethiopia. Mekelle has once been the capital of Ethiopia in the second half of the 19th century during the reign of Emperor Yohannes IV. A series of surveys have revealed the construction process of this imperial city, which gathered nobles and warriors around the imperial palace. Their residences, first loosely connected, came to be more concentrated in accordance with the population growth. The typological observation of the case study area clarifies the chronological development of such residences since the end of the 19th century up to the Italian occupation of the 1930's. The planning will of the locals of this period succeeded in generating an exceptionally proper townscape of a stone city.

Keywords: Mekelle, Yohannes IV, Urbanization process, Hidmo, Land adjustment, Historical Heritage

1. Objective and Research Method

1.1. Objective

Mekelle is the present capital of Tigray Regional State, one of the eleven regional states in Ethiopia [Fig.1]. In the course of the long history of Ethiopia, Mekelle is a young city, born only in the second half of the 19th century. Despite its short history, the city is renowned with the presence of a palace in the middle of the city. This palace has always been considered as a symbol of the history of Mekelle. In comparison with other historical cities registered in the UNESCO World Heritage list such as Aksum, Gondar and Harar, historical value of Mekelle is not highly estimated, but the old town stretched itself in the heart of the urbanized zone, surrounding the palace.

The development of Mekelle can mainly be divided into four stages: 1) Before the end of the 19th century, there were nine villages structured in an organic way, 2) At the end of the 19th century Emperor Yohannes IV built a palace and urbanization started when aristocrats and warriors immigrated to have their residences around the palace, 3) In the 1930's the Italians occupied the town and created a gridded urban plan next to the indigenous quarter, 4) After the mid-20th century, the gridded streets were extended by the master planning of 1967 by Arturo Mezzadimi.

The objective of this paper is to clarify the formation of the imperial city during and after the reign of Yohannes IV at the end of the 19th century. Great masonry buildings still remain in the central historic area creating a unique landscape which helps to trace the urban history of Mekelle. However, the recent population growth and the change in people's lifestyle have brought new developments in the historic center. Therefore urgent evaluation of this site is in need in order to develop a sustainable plan for the future development.

1.2. Research Method to be Applied

The investigation of central Mekelle started in 2008 when the Institute of Paleo-environment and Heritage Conservation of Mekelle University launched a project for the evaluation of the central district. As a fellow of this institute, the author gathered all the initiatives of the interested bodies such as the municipality, Tigray Cultural Association, the public library, the Institute of Ethiopian Studies at Addis Ababa University as well as the representatives of residents. In order to evaluate the present situation of heritages, a case study area was set up in the central district for sampling purpose. The area is situated in Kebele 14, renamed Keten Maebal afterward, in Kedamay Weyane Sub-city. Two field surveys were undertaken successively there, in March 2009 and June-July 2009, targeting all the buildings and the households of the case study area as complete surveys. All the housing units were measured one by one to complete a comprehensive site plan of the target area. The interview with the inhabitants helped to understand the history of old families and buildings. The typological observation of the heritages in the research area and the analysis of old documents collected from various archives clarified...
the urban formation process of central Mekelle.

2. Identification of Preexisting Settlements

It is believed that the imperial city of Mekelle was constructed by the strong initiative of Emperor Yohannes IV in the second half of the 19th century, but the historical documents do not prescribe the detailed process of the urban construction. Only a few existing documents including the diary of the Italian architect-carpenter Giacomo Naretti, who served the emperor and was commissioned to design Yohannes Palace, dictate the construction of the palace between 1864 and 1876, but documents related to the formation of surrounding towns are not found and it is uncertain whether or not Mekelle had already become a concentrated settlement. However, the written documents of contemporary European travelers and sketches are useful to understand the pre-Yohannes state of Mekelle. Among them, the publication by a British traveler, Henry Salt, who was an artist and collector of antiquities accompanying the trip of Viscount Valentina to Ethiopia as secretary and draughtsman in 1809-1810 [Fig.2], provides a realistic landscape drawing of Mekelle. Salt’s drawing remains as a hand-colored engraving executed by D. Havell by the name of "Mucculla in Abyssinia", specially made as an artwork for sales. Although there exists a different version of this drawing, no other image of Mekelle during and before the reign of Yohannes IV was found. Salt’s drawing is suggestive because the topography indicated in the drawing corresponds clearly to the present view of the district called Gonay Daero, eastern hillside of the city [Fig.3]. The original sketch must have been drawn in 1809-1810, when Salt passed by Mekelle, but this picture was executed sometime afterward. The observation point of this picture is easily identified as the starting point climbing up to Enda Meskel Church. Enda Yesus Church, deformed in exaggeration in this picture, stands on the top of the mountain on the right side. The shape of the mountain on the left slightly differs from the present due to the installation of a radio tower. However, the profile of the mountain on the right matches the sketch. A group of huts with thatched roof form a village alongside an alley upward the church. The site of this village is identified in the map, following the position of the alley and rocks.

Provided that the description of Henry Salt is reliable, the original state of Gonay Daero district at the beginning of the 19th century was regarded as a village formed by some 15 houses grouped in the middle of the mountain. The projection of these buildings on to the present map of Mekelle defines their location. Today this site is built up with new structures, but the aerial photo from the 1960’s shows the original state of this area [Fig.4,5]. Land division by a limited number of hidmo-type compounds clearly corresponds to the territory of the old village of the early 19th century. According to Tadesse Sequar, who analyzed the local legend, proved that, before the reign of Yohannes IV, the area of what is now known as the city of Mekelle consisted of nine villages: Enda Meskel, Gonay Daero, May Degene, May Liham, Chomea, Enda Gabir, Enda Anania, Ada Gafaf, and May Gafaf.

The topographic identification of the site of Gonay Daero from Salt’s drawing justifies the reliability of this legend as far as this village is concerned. The recent investigation on Enda Meskele district clarified the existence of an old hidmo which was constructed even before the foundation of the Yohannes Palace. The ancestor of the family residing in this hidmo, who served Mirtcha Wolde, father of Yohannes IV, had settled in this village in the middle of the 19th century. The typological feature of this area is similar to that of Gonay Daero, that is, spontaneous layout of some 10-15 hidmo compounds according to the aerial photo of the 1960’s. This typology could
be considered as a typical rural settlement pattern. Field surveys including interviews to the locals proved that the names of the nine villages are still kept in each area. This fact enables the identification of the location of these villages although some of them are completely absorbed into the condensed townscape of today.

The identified sites of the nine villages, plotted on the map [Fig 6], indicate certain characteristics. The villages are situated in a certain distance among them but the different topographical levels make them visible to one another creating a “dispersed” pattern. Visual and even acoustic relation is a key factor for such a community. This type of urban and rural formation is not only found in Mekelle but many examples are found in Ethiopian villages both in Amhara and Tigray regions.

3. Yohannes's Palace and the Settlements of His Subjects

One of the most important events in the urban history of Mekelle was the construction of the imperial palace starting from 1872 by Emperor Yohannes IV. Although the detail of its construction process has not yet been analyzed despite the existence of the 400 page diary of an Italian architect-carpenter, Giacomo Naretti, urban formation caused by this palace could be recognized by its topographic condition. The site of the palace is slightly elevated, which looks down on the stream of May Liham River in the south. This hill is also a focal point among existing nine villages.

To understand the urban situation of Mekelle at the end of the 19th century, the picture shown in the French magazine, L'Illustration, in 1896 reporting the Ethiopian-Italian war, provides whole townscape of this city [Fig.7]. This picture may have been drawn based on a photo taken from a western hill. Hidmos were dispersed loosely around the palace. Road system was not clearly identified as the vacant spaces among hidmos served as passage connecting each district. New masonry houses were constructed on such loose and natural urban tissue.

"Land adjustment" process is the key to understand the formation of the built-up area of the central district. The settlement of nobles and warriors in the surrounding areas of the newly constructed palace resulted the distribution of large compounds loosely connected at the first stage as shown in L'Illustration. This semi-rural pattern was rather similar to that of Enda Meskel, a village dominated by some important noble families, but in the course of time, the central district became more concentrated. Each large-scale compound was divided into several parcels and inter-related each other by inheritance and concession [Fig.8]. The land was thus “adjusted” for more urbanized block-and-street pattern.

The investigation of one of the most historical areas in the central district of Mekelle, Kebelle 14, or Keten Maebel, brought about many new findings about the families who have lived in this area for generations as well as the origins of their residences. Many of them were proved to be the descendant of important nobles and warriors who served the emperor in the court. They settled here in accordance with the construction of the palace and stayed.

The most peculiar case is the descendant of Ras Haile Mariam Gugsa, nephew of Yohannes IV and governor of Wadla (1878-1889) during his reign. An old woman, born around 1930, still holds the tenure in the area although the land was nationalized by the Derg (socialist government) in 1973. Before the expropriation her family possessed much wider area in the south of the palace. Even from the land division system of this block, it is not difficult to trace the original wider compound that her family possessed.

According to Tadesse Sequare, Ras Bitwodid Gebre Kidane, who married Empress Dinqinesh after she returned back from Gondar, resided in this area, but no descendent was found during the field survey by the author. However, the residence of Dejazmach Tefari Gebre Kidane, another nephew of Yohannes IV, was identified in the west of the already formulated central city in the aerial photo taken in the 1960’s. This residence still kept the form of a round compound shape, the same as in Enda Meskel. Currently this compound is occupied by the church, probably due to the concession to the church by his family.

Other examples of noble families within the central districts could be referred as well. Descendants of noble families who possessed the aristocratic titles of Ras, Dejazmach, Kegnmasch, Blata, Etege according to the court and military hierarchy were found in this area. Descendants of a Blata who was known in the Battle of Adwa of 1896 still live in the house constructed in 1898 while another descendant of a Kegnmasch possess the largest masonry house in Mekelle constructed in the early 1930’s. All these residences were constructed in much smaller parcels.

In 1910, 20 years after the death of the cousin of Emperor Yohannes IV, Dejazmach Abraha Araya constructed his own castle in the south of the already formulated central city. It is said that due to the delicate political relation with the contemporary Tigray Prince Ras Seyum Mangasha, grandson of Yohannes IV, who resided in Yohannes Palace, this rich nobleman, who made a fortune by salt trading, dared to build his own castle neighboring to the old village of May Gafaf with a certain distance from the existing built-up district. Although his family abandoned this residence in the 1930’s, the outstanding feature of this castle became a landmark for the future expansion of the city. In fact the Italians, who occupied Ethiopia from 1935, made use of Yohannes Palace...
time of the survey. Besides the attributes of the residents, the building aspects of each units such as building age, material, building use, and type of housing units were investigated.

Building age of each building could be detected by interviews with local residents as well as observation in situ. Piano Regolatore, master plan published by the Italians in 1937 and the aerial photo around 1960 were used to verify the building situation. Although their shape and the position were not accurate, the former plotted the existing buildings in the middle of the 1930’s and the latter showed existing buildings around 1960.

The building age was divided into the following four periods:

- a. Yohannes and post-Yohannes period (mid-19C to mid-1930’s)
- b. Italian and post-Italian period (mid-1930’s to mid-1950’s)
- c. Post-war growing period to Derg period (mid-1950’s to late 1990’s)
- d. Present time (1990 to present)

The result of the survey suggested that the number of existing post-Yohannes period buildings is comparatively high (15 among 127 building units, or 11.8%) although those constructed before the end of the 19th century was scarce. Among them those forming the alignment of the streets are worth noting while several buildings are situated in the center of the parcels. These tendencies could be read among the old buildings in the study area: construction of row houses along the streets and the presence of detached houses in the middle of the compounds. Before the arrival of the Italian force in 1935, the urban pattern of central Mekelle had already evolved from a semi-rural type to a more urbanized block-and-street type.

4.2. Extraction of Old Historical Houses

The interview carried out during the survey of 2009 proved the history of a certain number of old masonry houses existing in the target area. Besides the palace and the castle, these houses are the testimony of the life of the old families who settled in Mekelle since the second half of the 19th century although many of them are currently inhabited by the poor or immigrants from Eritrea. The author has tried to reconstruct their original aspect by measuring all these buildings and observing their construction details. Among 127 measured buildings within the target area, a certain number of old residences were considered to have been built before the Italian occupation and were chosen for a detailed survey. In addition, a report published in 1971 by a Swedish research team who was invited for the purpose of housing amelioration provided plans and sections of characteristic houses situated all over Mekelle. Two of them were identified as houses existing in the target area. This enables the comparison of the state of the houses from the late 1960’s to the present. The figure shows four typical houses erected before the Italian invasion.

(1) Balambaras Getahun Hailu House

Interview with the present owner, Kiros Girmay, revealed that this house had been built two years after the Battle of Adwa in 1896 by her grandfather, Balambaras Getahun Hailu, a renowned military officer of Ras Aula. The Swedish team has conducted an interview in 1967 to Girmay Getahun, Kiros’s father. Their concern was limited to the living conditions, but the plan published in the report shows the original state of the building. Some walls have been added to enlarge the space and currently there are three families living in this building. The original construction is clearly identified due to

and Abraha Castel as two important focal points for the master planning of Mekelle.

Dejazmach Tefari Gebre Kidane, son of Dinqinish and nephew of Yohannes IV, also built his residential compound near this castle. The aerial photo taken around 1960 shows both this castle and the house of Tefari although the latter was replaced by Mikael Church afterwards. This change represents the transformation process from the loose and organic hidmo pattern to the parcel-and-block pattern which occurred in the second half of the 20th century. [Fig. 9,10]
consisted of 4 blocks, comprising 400 inhabitants and 136 households at the areas of central Mekelle, the 20th century. [Fig. 9,10] A photo taken around 1960 shows both this castle and the house of Tefari Yohannes IV, also built his residential compound near this castle. The aerial Mekelle.

3. Research area in Aerial map of central Mekelle: 1. Yohannes Palace, 2. Abraha Castle,_hidmo compound to contemporary residential blocks, drawn by the author (left 1960's, right 2010) Transformation (land adjustment) of a Tefari Gebre Kidane, son of Dinqinish and nephew of Dejazmach Kebele living in this building. The original construction is clearly identified due to have been added to enlarge the space and currently there are three families published in the report shows the original state of the building. Some walls Swedish team has conducted an interview in 1967 to Girmay Getahun, Balambaras Italian invasion. Two of them were identified as houses existing in the target by a Swedish research team who was invited for the purpose of housing and were chosen for a detailed survey. In addition, a report published in 1971 from Eritrea. The author has tried to reconstruct their original aspect by a certain number of old masonry houses existing in the target area. Besides these tendencies could be read among the old buildings in the study area: a construction of row houses along the streets and the presence of detached units, or 11.8%) although those constructed before the end of the 19th century Yohannes period buildings is comparatively high (15 among 127 building was scarce. Among them those forming the alignment of the streets are Piano Regolatore

Fig. 12 Housing typologies found in the research area: 1. A.H./ S.M. House (demolished in 2010), 2. Balambaras Getahun Hailu House (demolished in 2010), 3. Grazmach Gebru Gebrumikael Mansion, 4. Kegnazmach Mekonen Tsegay House, all drawings are reconstruction of the houses its regularly layered bond of stone materials. The plan was quite simple: rectangular plan with symmetrical façade. Since the title of balambaras equals to a military officer, this house could be regarded as the ordinary house of a middle-rank warrior.

2) Grazmach Gebru Gebrumikael Mansion

The interview with the present owner, Asmelash Gebru, proved that this house had been built by his father, Grazmach Gebru Gebrumikael, one of the highest rank nobles in Mekelle, before the Italian invasion, and extended in 1943 after the Italian retreat. Although the date is uncertain, it could have been in the 1920’s considering his father’s age. The house was succeeded to Gebru’s daughter, Almaz Gebru, however since she left the country, the present owner, her brother, received the ownership of the house. Currently, half of the building is being rented to another family. In 1996, an Italian research team published the plan of this house in their report based on the fieldwork carried out during 1993-1994. When comparing the current house with the plan made by this Italian team, it is easily recognized that some major changes have been made. For example, the exterior stairway has been taken away and a new staircase has been added inside the building. By undergoing a reconstructive process, the original state was proved to be a two-story building with tri-parted plan. The exterior masonry stairways are found only in two buildings for post-Italian buildings. The exterior stairway could be thought to have started during this period.

3) Blata Tsegay Seifu Mansion

This mansion is one of the largest buildings built in Kebele 14 or Ketena Maelbe, regarded as impressive architecture in Mekelle besides palace buildings. The interview with the present owner, Kegnazmach Mekonen Tsegay, revealed the founder and the date of the construction. It was Blata Tsegay Seifu, the father of current owner, who constructed this mansion in 1934, one year before the Italian invasion. A series of pictures were taken by the Swedish team in 1967 and published in their report of 1971. The building forms the shape of L along the border of the parcel. Its major part is two-story building with an exterior stairway while its wings consist of row houses containing smaller housing units. The roof of this row house is used as a kind of roof terrace. Besides the fact that some parts of the building have been collapsed and that the first floor ceiling has water leakage, the building is well in shape and has not much changed since the 1960’s. The roof and the eaves have been transformed to some extent. Currently there are seven families residing in this mansion all of which are rented by the owner who has his own house in a different place.

4) A. H. and S. M. House

This building, currently divided into two housing units, is a typical row house along a street. Banal, but its masonry suggest the construction in the same period as the Balambaras Getahun Hailu House, that is, around the turn of the century. Today the building was possessed by kebele as public housing. The present occupants, A.H. and S.M., one prostitute another unemployed, had resided there only for one year. No record was left with regard to the former owner before the house had been expropriated by the government during Derg period. Its plan resembles the tri-parted hidmo with a moderate size, but no specific interior composition was to be seen. Most probably, this house was constructed by one of the landlords as a tenant house for speculation purpose.

5. Land Adjustment and Evolution of Typologies

The typological difference among the above-mentioned mansions and houses could be read as the variation and the evolution of housing typology in accordance with the transformation of the investigated area as seen in the preceding paragraph. To verify this process, the author will focus on the relation of the mansions and houses with parcels they belong to. Except the current cadastral map, no precise maps related to the cadastral system in the central district is found, but the presence of Italian documents made during the occupation period would assist the understanding of the land and the building system even before their occupation.

The viceroy of A.O.I (Africa Orientale Italiana) made decree for master planning of major occupied cities as soon as they finished the process of conquering Ethiopia. The master plan of Mekelle was elaborated in comparatively early stage of the occupation. Although the original plan was not found, the report by the Italian Government called "Gli Annali dell’Africa
were well designed by situating row houses in L shape. Small alleys, which
central district was systematized by streets as long as continuous row houses
would become the main streets of this central area. It is uncertain whether
of the investigation on the building age and the typology.
abstracted from the comparison between the Italian master plan and the result
in the second half of the 19th century. The followings are the considerations
"dispersed" system attributed to the original period of the urban formation
constructed following the alignment. This is apparently different from the
They correspond to the Italian master plan of 1937. Some of them were found
the area were supposed to have been erected before the Italian occupation.
are the completing of the urbanized housing layout on the basis of the block-and-street pattern. The streets are considered to have been completed with a planning will around the 1920’s or early 1930’s. Row houses correspond to the population growth in the 1920’s due to the settlement of merchants dealing with salt trading and other activities.
5.3. Cadastral aspect
Tracing around the borders of certain parcels enables the reconstruction of
the original compound of nobles. In fact, the old compound of the descendant
of Ras Hailemariam Guga, nephew of Yohannes IV, is still readable, but
some smaller parcels were already cut off in order to house new residents.
The northern part of the study area must have been occupied with several large compounds of the nobles, but already adjusted to the street system.
On the contrary, the southern part was characterized by the presence of
smaller parcels, including that of the Balambaras Getahun Haile House.
The development of the land adjustment process made the former large-scale compounds of high-class nobles reduce to compact size and fit to the newly set street system. Lower class warriors who set their residences in the outer areas in the south also adjust their parcels to the new streets, but kept appearance of single houses. On the contrary, to house new comers including the merchants, the nobles set up smaller but oblong parcels along the streets.
This is an early stage of speculation by the landlords. The case of the Blata Tsegay Seifu House, which possesses row houses for renting purpose, attests this process as a matter of fact
6. Conclusion
The origin and the urban formation of Mekelle has not been discussed as
many scholars, Ethiopian and foreign, thought that Ethiopian cities took the
form of urbanized complex after the intervention of Italian master planning
in the late 1930’s. The indigenous district was regarded as the extension of
rural villages. However, the survey undertaken in 2009 revealed the early urbanization process from the end of the 19th century.

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Italiana" was published in 1939 as "Piano Regolatore di Macalle 1937?". This
master plan is useful to understand the urban situation of the central district
as the Italians plotted existing buildings by using aerial photos [Fig.14]. Although some of the plotted streets and buildings do not correspond exactly to the existing pattern, it gives some descriptions and characteristics of this area. For example the street system as well as large mansions and street-side buildings are illustrated distinctively in this plan although the cadastral system was not recognizable. Overlapping this master plan and the measured site plan of the target area suggests the urban situation just after the Italian occupation, that is, in the middle of the 1930’s. The master plan does not trace the exact street pattern, which could be detected by field surveys and interviews, nor the buildings. Although it suggests the general layout of the indigenous area, they may have been drawn using an aerial photo with a tilted perspective. What is noteworthy is the fact that the notion of urban blocks had appeared already before the master planning by the Italians. Although their shapes are not rectangular, street-side buildings delimit the blocks. This means that the idea of alignment was already present.

Currently the target area of Ketena Maebel is well divided by grid pattern,
but in the middle of the 1930’s the streets were pierced partly within the groups of hidmo compounds. Interviews were made during the surveys in 2009 and observation of structural details enabled the buildings within the target area classified according to the building age. At least 15 among 127 buildings in the area were supposed to have been erected before the Italian occupation. They correspond to the Italian master plan of 1937. Some of them were found constructed following the alignment. This is apparently different from the "dispersed" system attributed to the original period of the urban formation in the second half of the 19th century. The followings are the considerations abstracted from the comparison between the Italian master plan and the result of the investigation on the building age and the typology.

5.1. Street Pattern
In the 1930’s the study area was already delimited by wider streets, which
would become the main streets of this central area. It is uncertain whether
the lines drawn by the Italians indicate the exact border of the parcels and the streets in the European sense, but it could be understood that the central district was systematized by streets as long as continuous row houses appeared along the streets. A.H./S.M. House is typical of this phenomenon, most probably generated by speculation by the landlord. Besides, crossings were well designed by situating row houses in L shape. Small alleys, which were not drawn by the Italians, may have existed within the area. As a matter of fact, the slightly meandered layout of Blata Tsegay Seifu Mansion could be recognized to have reflected on the curve of such alleys. The interview with its owner supported this hypothesis.

5.2. Typology
Comparison between the Italian and the present plan as well as the dating of the existing buildings clarifies the coexistence of three different housing types in the target area: hidmo type noble’s residence with large compound, middle class warrior’s residence with much smaller parcel, and street-side row houses following the line of the streets. The early example of the first type has already disappeared except a few. The Grazmach Gebru Gebrumikael Mansion which is judged to have been erected sometime before the Italian occupation, was typical of this. The second type is found mostly in the southern part of the target area. Such is the case for the Balambaras Getahun Haile House, built in 1898. This is a detached house independent from the street plan. The streets delimiting and piercing the target area suggest the presence of the third type. A.H./S.M. House built around the turn of the century and Blata Tsegay Seifu Mansion, which is the combination of the noble’s mansion and the street-side row houses constructed in the early 1930’s, as well as other row houses on its opposite side are regarded as the completion of the urbanized housing layout on the basis of the block-and-street pattern. The streets are considered to have been completed with a planning will around the 1920’s or early 1930’s.

Fig. 13 Map of research area in 1930’s (left) and 2009 (right). Numbers correspond to the drawings of Fig. 12
Before the reign of Yohannes IV, Mekelle was only a vast area consisting of nine villages. However the urban formation process took place in a rapid way soon after the construction of the palace started by the emperor’s initiative. The settlements of his subjects, that is, nobles and warriors, around the palace promoted the urbanization, first with large hidmo compounds connected loosely. Great mansions built with high masonry technique at that time still remains in the old historical quarter of the town which is now inherited by their descendants. The prosperity of the city by salt trade in early 20th century promoted the densification and the extension of the built-up zones despite the transfer of the capital to Addis Ababa.

From the building typology point of view, village type masonry houses with large compounds were introduced at the first stage, but in the course of densification of the central districts, the surrounding areas of the palace came to be adjusted so as to formulate a street and block pattern. New typologies such as street-side mansions and row houses appeared corresponding to the change of land management and rental housing system. These are unique housing types with properly ordered masonry construction.

The basis of the present townscape with concentrated masonry buildings originated in the early 20th century when the urban economy reached to a certain level of maturity. It is crucial to proceed onto the future planning of historical districts on the basis of the evaluation of such historical buildings and urban systems still existing there.

Notes
1) According to the census carried out by the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia, the population of Mekelle increased from 22,230 in 1965 to 215,546 in 2007.
2) Kebele is an end administrative unit, which is equivalent of neighbourhood, created in 1975. Even after the evacuation of Derg Government, this autonomous system was inherited for local governance. Kebele ran public housing, forest management and other economical activities to guarantee income. Currently it is replaced by a new administrative unit called ketena, which is the present smallest administrative unit.
3) Giacomo Naretti (1831-1889) was an Italian architect, who migrated to Egypt during the period of construction of Suez Canal, then to Ethiopia as a carpenter, together with other engineers. He became an official architect at the court of Yohannes IV. He constructed the Palace of Mekelle, and Kidane Memeret Church of Mekelle and Enda Selassie Church of Adwa. He died in Asmara. His diary with 742 pages was an excellent document on the reign of Yohannes IV.
4) See Henry Salt “Voyage to Abyssinia, and Travels into the Interior of that Country, executed under the Orders of British Government, in the Years 1809 and 1810”, Carey, Philadelphia, and Wells & Lilly, Boston, 1816
5) Hidmos are traditional masonry buildings with rectangular shape in Tigray region, Ethiopia.
8) Ras (commander-in-chief), Dejazmach (commander or general of the gate), Kegnazmach (commander of right wing), Blata (high court officials), Elege (empress) are the Ethiopian court and military hierarchy.
9) Keiena Mechele is the southern district of Yohannes Palace which consists of 21 blocks.
10) Due to the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea which broke out in 1998, Ethiopian who resided in Eritrea were forced to go out of Eritrea. Since Tigrinya language is used both in Tigray and Eritrea, many of Tigrayans were working there, especially in Asmara, Eritrean capital. In Mekelle, these returners gathered and made their own communities.

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