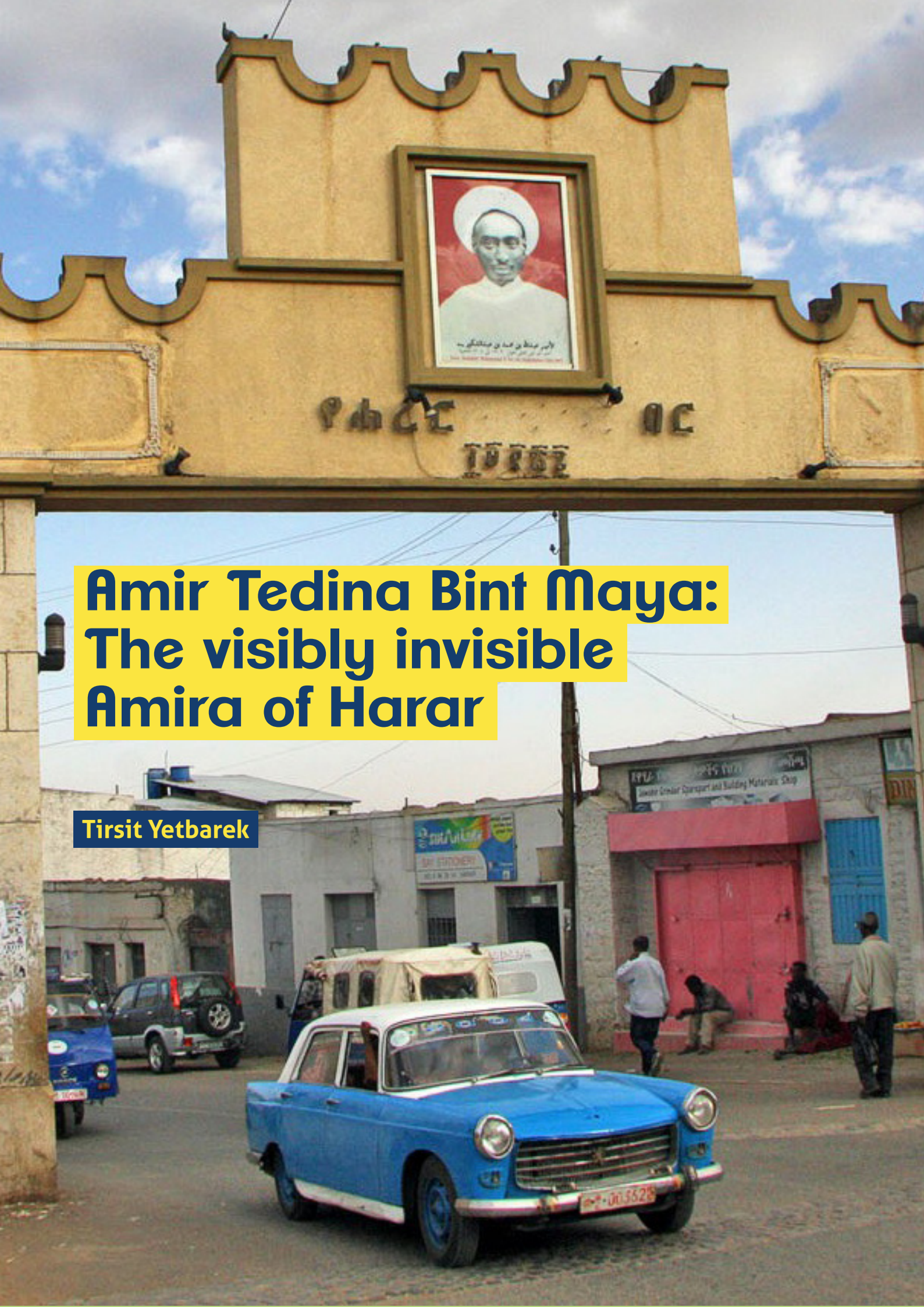


# Amir Tedina Bint Maya: The visibly invisible Amira of Harar

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## Introduction

Horn of Africa is endowed with a civilization that granted it a visible space in the image of the world. Starting with the origin of humankind, to the creation of entities even prior to that of "state" in the Westphalia definition are elements that add to its uniqueness. In this big picture is where one finds the Harari civilization that had preserved its unique aspects within the widely narrated and attributed "highlander civilization" of Abyssinia/ Ethiopia.

Another layer of a unique aspect of the Harari civilization is that of the self-governance of the Harari Dynasty through the 76 Amirs who led it even after the battle of the expansionist mission of Menelik who has accepted to leave Harar for self-administration making it one of the first federation even before the Europeans had one. Among the 76 Amirs of the Harar dynasties, Amir Hoboba Bin Ibrahim (892-828) was the one known for establishing the first dynasty that resulted in the cycle of successive powers concluded after almost 1000 years, with Amir Abdullahi B Mahamed (1885-1887). Another very important and interesting aspect of the Harari power system is the exceptional named female Amir, Amir Tedina Bint Maya (1105-1128), who was the 12th Amir of Harar that is acknowledged in the list of the Harar dynasty by name but seems to be omitted in the histories of Harar and Hararian memories. Hence, this paper explores the legacy of this exceptional woman by looking at the memory of the contemporary Hararian, especially women. It attempted to explore the place Amira Tedina

has by asking about their awareness of her existence, if they are aware of her, asking questions pertaining to their imagination of her physically, intellectually, her authority as a woman, and as a leader. The article also equally walk-through explanations of why the community seems to be not in awareness of her in comparison to the space they give to the Amirs of the dynasty. Accordingly, this paper will address the what, how, and why of the only female Amir through the memories of the contemporary Hararian.

### Background

Harar is named the city of love and peace along with the recognition it has for a civilization of a unique and powerful dynasty that lies in the eastern part of the Great Rift Valley in the Horn of Africa specifically in Ethiopia at a distance of 515 kilometers to the south-east of Addis Ababa (UNESCO, 2006). The oral histories narrated by Harari elders and manuscripts found so far trace the origin of the Hararians from the seven main Harla tribes which are Gidaya, Awari, Wargar, Gaturi, Adish, Hargaya and Abogn. A good number of researches covering Harar and the Horn of Africa also goes in agreement with the oral history that Harar's foundation is based on the Harla even though what Harla covers both geographically and social is still in search of clarity (Banti, G., 2003; Cervick & Braukamper, 1973; Wilding, R., 1975; Jamal ad-Din and Hashim, 2000). Nevertheless, it is this conception of Harar and Harla that supports that the name Harari is derived from Harla which also became the name of the place of their residence too even though the Amharas and Oromos call them Adare



while the Hararies call themselves Gey-usu'. It is also stated that the Hararis lived temporarily in a series of settlements in seven different villages prior to the foundation of Harar the city which are Eskhanti gey, Tukhun gey, Hassan Gey, Harawe gey, Ruqiya gey (Ruhuq gey), Feraqa gey, and Samti gey (Khanti gey up until they found in the 7th century today's Harar. After the foundation of the city, it is recounted that Harar had two prior names, viz. Balad Gatur (Country of the Gatur) and Bandar Awliya (Village of Awiliya) (Cerulli, 1936).

The rich history of Harar and the people also is highly grounded in the role the city played as center of Islamic teachings to the level that it is called the 4th holy city of Islam. Harar functioned as the capital of the Harari Kingdom from 1520 to 1568, became an independent emirate in the 17th century, and was integrated into Ethiopia in 1887. From the late 16th century to the 19th century, Harar was an important trade center between the coast and the interior highlands and a location for Islamic learning (UNESCO, 2006). This is believed to have been facilitated through the location of it being closer to Red Sea and the Gulf. The people also were recognized for their massive involvement and leadership in local long-haul transportation and in the cross-border trade. A review of their multifaceted interactions with the peoples and communities in the Harar Plateau indicated that they had a well-connected relationship with the Somali, Argoba, Afar, Oromo, Silte and other peoples in the Horn.

Looking into the state structure of Harar, for centuries it seems to have

been akin to a Monarchical system in that the Sultans, Imams, or Amirs were the highest authorities in the state structure (Abas,1992). This is also believed to be the base for the transfer of power and leadership to the members of the male line of the sovereign's relatives along with the succession power regulated by local circumstances. The law of the Sultanate was essentially based on the Islamic religion. Political, military, economic, and administrative organizations were all governed by Sharia Law. To this end, the Amir, Sultan, or the Imam and his close associates worked closely with religious scholars- the Ulama. The Ulama served as councilors to the Amir on issues pertaining to secular matters by giving the necessary guidance to the Dameen, Garad and Malaq. They were appointed directly by the council consisting of the Amir, eminent religious scholars, and members of the nobility, called Majlis and the criteria for appointment included the social status, family background, and administrative capabilities (Abbas, 1992).

This is the foundation in which an only acknowledge female Amir is stated to have been a governor and is listed among the 72 Amirs who governed the sultanate. This is the triggering point for the research and for this article to explore what it was like to be the only female leader in such a structure and become a unique element of the system by inheriting the king's bed as the only child. This article explores that in a critical analysis theoretical eye along with a feminist perspective that questions how the stories are framed around Amira Tedina Benti Maya, the unique figure that is mentioned only in the list of Amirs.

## Methodology

The data was collected through a set of oral history semi-structured interviews, that targeted informants of different ages, professions, and levels of education, that included 15 informants of the 20-30 age group, 5 of 30-50, and 5 of 50+. Two focused group discussion sessions were conducted. Guiding questions were prepared to facilitate the interviews as well as the FGDs. The data collected is intertwined with the literature on the history of Harar and Hararians, the history of Islam in the region, and the community relation in medieval and modern Ethiopia where Hara became one of the Regional States. The interviews were conducted in three languages; Amharic, Harari, and English depending on the preference of the interviewee. The interviews were the length of an hour and above. Translation for the languages the researcher didn't have command of (Harari) was provided by a professional linguist from the region. The absence of documented literature pertaining the Amira and her time has set a major challenge for the research along with the wide and somehow contradictory characterization of the women by participants. The latter is taken as a great input for further research while the prior is something that was not able to counter with a solution.

# LIST OF AMIRS OF HARAR GEY

NO	NAMES	YEARS	NO	NAMES	YEARS
1	HABOBA	969-1000	39	GARAD ABON	1522-1525
2	UMAR ALRIDA SHEKH ABADIR	1000-1020	40	S. ABUBAKAR B. S. MAHAMAD	1528-1527
3	UMARDIN I	1020-1033	41	IMAM AHMAD B. IBRAHIM	1527-1543
4	NASIR I	1033-1033	42	S. UMARDIN	1527-1553
5	F. NASROY	1033-1038	43	NUR I	1551-1559
6	NASIR BINI GAMALDIN	1038-1038	44	S. ALI B. UMARDIN	1553-1553
7	MUHAYADIN YOUSUF I	1038-1038	45	S. BARAKA B. UMARDIN	1555-1559
8	UMAR AR'IDA II	1065-1066	46	NUR II	1559-1567
9	MUHAYADIN YOUSUF II	1066-1067	47	USMAN B. BADLAY (ALHABASHA)	1567-1569
10	IDAL (ABDAL)	1067-1086	48	S. TALHA	1569-1571
11	MAYA LAMA	1086-1105	49	S. NASIR	1571-1572
12	TADIN BINTI MAYA	1105-1128	50	S. MAHAMAD VI	1572-1577
13	S. HARHAR (HAZBA'IZ)	1128-1183	51	MANSUR B. MAHAMAD	1577-1577
14	S. HUSSEN	1183-1202	52	IMAMAM AHAMAD	1577-1583
15	S. ABDALLA I	1202-1216	53	SAAD'ADI III	1583-1617
16	S. UMAR WALASMA I	1216-1293	54	ABRO B. ALLAM	1617-1646
17	BAZ YAWI B. WALASMA I	1293-1313	55	SADDIK B. YAHYA	1646-1646
18	HAKKADIN B. WALASMA I	1313-1320	56	M. ADAM B. SADDIK	1646-1646
19	S. SABRADIN B. MAHAMAD	1320-1324	57	AHMAD II	1646-1647
20	GAMALADIN B. MAHAMAD	1324-1331	58	ALI B. DAWID	1647-1662
21	QAT ALI B. SABRADIN	1331-1364	59	HASHIM B. ALI DAWID	1662-1670
22	AHMAD B. QAT ALI	1364-1366	60	ABDALLA B. ALI DAWID	1670-1699
23	HAKKADIN B. MAHAMAD II	1366-1386	61	TALHA B. ABDALLA...	1699-1721
24	S. SAAD'ADIN B. MAHAMAD	1386-1415	62	ABUBAKAR B. ABDALLA... II	1721-1732
25	SARBADIN B. SADIN	1415-1424	63	KHALID B. ABUBAKAR...	1732-1733
26	GAMALADIN B. SAADIN II	1424-1432	64	HAMD B. ABUBAKAR...	1733-1747
27	S. BADLAY B. SAADIN	1432-1445	65	DAWID B. ABUBAKAR...	1747-1755
28	S. MAHAMAD B. BADLAY	1445-1471	66	AHMAD B. ABUBAKAR... III	1755-1782
29	IBRAHIM B. MAHAMAD I	1471-1471	67	AHMAD B. YOUSUF... VI	1782-1783
30	SHAMSADIN B. MAHAMAD	1471-1487	68	ABDUSHAKUR B. YOUSUF...	1783-1784
31	IBRAHIM B. QAT NASRADIN II	1487-1488	69	AHMAD B. MAHAMAD... V	1794-1821
32	M. MAHAMAD AZHARADIN II	1488-1518	70	ABDURAHMAN B. MAHAMAD...	1821-1825
33	S. MAHFUZ	1492-1517	71	ABDUKAIM B. MAHAMAD...	1825-1834
34	S. MAHAMAD III	1518-1519	72	ABUBAKAR B. MAFTAL... III	1834-1852
35	IBRAHIM B. AHMAD II	1519-1519	73	AHMAD B. ABUBAKAR... IV	1852-1856
36	GARAD MAHFUZ	1519-1519	74	MAHAMAD B. GARAD DAWID... RAUF BASHA	1856-1875
37	MANSUR I	1519-1519	75	Adminstretion of Egypt	1875-1885
38	IMAM MAHFUZ B. MAHAMAD	1519-1520	76	ABDULLAHI B. MAHAMAD...	1885-1887

B. BINI S. SULTAN  
E. FAKI

## The queen

Tedina Bint Maya is the only acknowledge female Amir of Harar who is listed as the 12th Amir of the Harari Dynasty governing Harar from 1105-1128 following her father Amir Maya Lama [1086-1105] even though the only solid evidence for this comes from the list that the Harari Cultural Centre produced which has no physical document as supporting evidence for doing so. It is told in oral history by a few who get to know her existence through oral history that she inherited the power as she was the only child of Amir Maya Lama which is quite unique as the leadership was supposed to go through the paternal lineages. It was not possible to find any written document regarding her or her family's history during this study. The rare supporting documents available with speculation of the story being about Tedina are one manuscript found at the Abdella Sharif's private museum in Harar which talks about the right of a woman to inherit power and resources through the Islamic Sharia Law that governed the kingdom and publication by the Harari Cultural Office that has a mythical fable that talks about a notorious female leader that narrates a story of her killing wise men.

The other one was found in Enrico Cerulli work of 1963 a mention of a female strong leader of Harar even though it is still as stated speculation. Pertaining to the first manuscript, Abdullahi Sharif believes that is a proof of the fact that she indeed inherited the power from her father as the law of the land by then has enshrined the right to do so. The other documents seem to make a connection with a later description of the lady Amir yet still it is open for contestation.

In spite of the difficulty to get documented and even orally preserved information about her, her name is listed and presented at all places that talk about Amirs of Harar is something that should be considered a starting point.

It is learned from the interaction with the research participants that she has no space not only in written identified documents but also in memories of the Hararians irrespective of gender, age or occupation. Most of them didn't even recognize or understood that she was female even after reading the list of recognized Amirs posted on the heritage sites of the city and published books about Harar and Hararians. One justification given for not being able to recognize her in the list was started by a partici-

pant that;

"The noun 'Amir' is associated with the male leader and the fact that her name was also written as Amir Tedina which was not helpful in signifying her gender which is a unique aspect."

Emir on its root form, Amir in this case, is defined as a ruler, chief, or commander in Islamic countries. The feminine form is Emira (أميرة 'amīrah). When translated as "prince", the word "emirate" is analogous to a sovereign principality. In contemporary usage, the term may indicate a Muslim head of state of an Emirate or a leader of an Islamic organization. ((Gibb & Bearman, 1960)

Despite being named Amir and listed on printed profiling documents in current times, there seems to be no evidence accounting for her so far obtained regarding her and her leadership. Hence, for most, it remains unknown or is in the contested oral history of herself and her time. Few who say have heard her story describes her and gives the reason for her missing from the popular memories in different manners.

One oral account found on a socially shared media presents her as a skilled horsewoman who used to mount her horse by leaping onto it (instead of mounting it one foot at a time). It further states that she was never seen on the roads of Harar off her horse. It adds that she was rarely seen riding slowly, rather she would race through the streets. This might have a base in the description of the Maya Community who in the Futuh Al-Habashi are stated as horsemen with a good fighting skills (The conquest of Abyssinia 1897: page 70). She was also described as an experienced warrior and really skilled with a spear. It was said about her that she was bloodthirsty adding that during her rulership Harar was always conquering or colonizing cities and tribes even till the Axumite empire. It was said Harar went bankrupt twice because of her expensive war campaigns. Many attempted to set a coup to overthrow her but they did not succeed. Even though there is no ground to attest to this account as true or imaginative, the key question in it is that this account fails to state the battles, the cities she concurred, and even the timeline with the Axumite empire which makes it challenging.

What makes it worth incorporating the above perspective in the search for this mysterious queen is the details such as the story stating that some participant has nar-



rated an oral history that included the existence of a female leader that the Awach (Elders/Community leaders) were beginning to have their doubts about the female leader (Tidina's) ability to rule the city. It further states that the elders of the city gathered and advised her to be wiser in her actions and that there is more to being a ruler than war. Upon the queen's refusal to adhere to the elder's advice, it is said that they gathered their soldiers and waged war against her. Tidina being experienced in war tactics beat every one of her opponents.

It is said that the worried elders decided to resort to the saints of the city. They gathered and visited the saints in the caves of Mount 'Ay Kokahoy' (where the Sufi saints spent their time worshiping Allaah). Upon their arrival, it is said that the saints had a very long dua' written for the elders. They advised them to carry out certain actions than to return to their homes and recite this dua' repeatedly.

The saints also left them a wasiya that this dua' has to be passed down through the following generations and to be recited on a regular basis. The elders did so, the queen passed away and was buried in an area called Abaa Hurayra within the walls of Harar. The following lines are said to be the dua' even though research participants stated that this is just any prayer for blessing and wish for a calm time.

Subhaana daa'imo hamdin takhey Allaah  
Subhaana daa'imo shukrin takhey Allaah  
Nazo nazo yabradey Allaah  
Rahmaan (rahmatzo) yawradey Allaah  
Yifaachubo zaykabtubo Allaah  
Faachnamaan rakhabnabeiw Allaah  
Geizamnamaan amanabeiw Allaah  
Farnamaan salatnabiew Allaah (.....)

To this day the dua' is still recited, in some homes on a yearly basis (every Mawlid, the birth of the prophet) and in other homes monthly/weekly. Originally it was written as one long dua' but as time passed it was cut into pieces the first part done by the mothers and the second part by the fathers (in the famous Zikri Yimaaj Nikhashana). (Harari\_Dinniya social media account)

Looking through more of the accounts from the interview indicated that she got her queenship as the only child of the Amir Maya who himself doesn't have a comprehensive description and information in the accounts

of Amirs. It should be clarified that it is true that there are other Amirs who have no profile as well and the Harari Cultural Beaurio argues that her's and her family's missing stories are not the only missing.

This seems to be the way for almost all informants of the research irrespective of the age and academic status. The prominent answer is that they don't know her. Even they have never heard of the name despite the fact that her name is listed among the Amirs. Asked if there was any female Amir they know of, none seem to have had known anything so they answered "there was no Female Amir".

Asked in another way of saying if they have known a women leader in the history of the Amirs of Harar, only they state the wife of Amir Ahmed Gureey who is called Bati Dil Wanbera. The story behind this lady and her husband is a result of the political marriage of the most significant leaders of the Imam that was demonstrated by the successive victories he achieved over the Christian kingdom. Stories emphasize that his success, indeed, was as a result of his political marriage to Bati Dil Wanbera, the youngest daughter of the late Amir Mahfouz. She is also described by many as the most prominent and famous woman of the Horn of Africa in the 16th century (Mina, 2018). In the history of her and her husband, it is stated that when Mahfouz was killed in 1518 by the Christian kingdom and Bati Dil Wanbera, the only daughter of the Amir, became a symbol of succession and a uniting figure for keeping the integrity and protecting the sovereignty of the Sultanate against Abyssinian aggression. Bati's role was far from being only a symbol; she was an energetic helpmate to her husband. When the Imam embarked on the conquest of the Christian kingdom, she took the field with him in spite of the protests of his followers (Chemestov S., 2003). She gave birth to several sons among whom Muhammad, Nasr ad-Din and Ahmed Najashi who were mentioned in Arabic and Abyssinian sources (Mith, F. C., 2003). It is important to state that this woman has a place in the mind of the Hararians across generations and gender even though not as an Amir or a leader but as a strong woman in the political shadow. That is why most respondents brought her as the female leader when pressed if they know of any Amir with the first line of the answer being "there was the wife of the king...". Her being an only daughter and even one that should have and could be an Amir on her own has never been a depiction for her too. In fact, she is the one who is entitled to inherit the kingship and

has been a leader for more than 16 years but the only account people have of her is as the wife of two kings.

Hence, Tedina in this case is assumed to be Bati Dil Wanbera which again when explained to the research participants the difference between the two, they affirm that they don't know Tedina at all. Hence, for ordinary Hararian Tedina doesn't exist or has no place in their memory.

### Existing accounts

According to historians and researchers who have worked on Harar and the region, few seem to acknowledge her existence and stated that there is difficult to get more information about her or her family. That is why their imagination of her and her historical accounts are different and sometimes incoherent too.

Mr. Ayub is Head of the Harari Cultural Office and a team member of the ongoing research on the Amirs of Harar that aims to develop a new profile for the listed Amirs of Harar. He has stated the difficulty to find data about the female Amir for two reasons; one it is not recorded and might have had lost in the oral historical accounts that has selective memory preservation and the other, according to him, is the language used for documentation which is Arabic for existing manuscripts. From the ongoing research results, he has indicated that Tedina will be the 11th Amir and Dill Wanbera will be also added as Amira being the 46th Amir too.

For him, Tedina is physically described as a light-skinned, very tall, and well-built lady that has the skill of leadership and negotiation. He also describes her leadership time as peaceful and that has been her distinctive from other Harari leaders. He adds that she is characterized as one who has worked on the dissemination of Islamic teachings. Saying she is the one who worked in the creation of the 20 verses of the Quran for easy memorization. He stated that he has heard of this as an oral account and has not been able to find documented evidence.

His account of the Islamic teaching role she played seems to be shared by Abdilahi Sharif, the founder, and director of the only private museum in Harar that has the biggest private manuscript collections in Ethiopia. He stated that he has no recollection of her as an Amir but he said that in the manuscripts there is one that clearly indicated the law that assured the inheritance right for women which he believes to be evidence for her existence and corollate to that of her time as he insisted that Harar is the

first place to assure women's inheritance right in the Sharia that he says is should be the way she was granted the power of Amir.

He also talked about the Islamic books created as a subunit for easy memorialization associating with her as the manuscripts are said to be written by women. Nevertheless, he insisted that he is not certain if it is her or Yodit Guudit another prominent female figure in the Islamic history of Ethiopia one characterized as the responsible women for winning the Christian dynasty and burned down many churches and religious manuscripts. Very few other informants also associated Tedian with Guudit even though they themselves has stated that they are not sure of this account. Their argument is that she must be very strong to be a leader and this kind of leadership is what they have heard even though the name of the queen was not Tedina. It should be also indicated that the date for Yodit Guudit is not matching with that of Tedian as Guudiit is a recent account in the Ethiopian History. However, this is one aspect of memory people relies to create for Tedian.

Other particular account comes from a man named Fami who is a son of one of the religious scholars who followed the teachings of the Sh. Awberkedle and also was significant in the Harari straggle during the HileSellase time through the "Hanolato" movement. Fami is currently collecting the manuscripts and working on reorganizing religious scholars to resume his father's mission of teaching Islam in Harar. He starts with his acknowledgment of the oral history that Tedian as an Amir from the Maya family who he said used to live at the location of the current Haromaya which is in 30 km away from Harar. The contemporary historiography places this location as a place of an Oromo community and stated that the queen is more known to the Oromo community than to Harari. Yet still, this is more of an oral account than a documented reference he states. Fami insisted this is the Benti Maya and described her as a very strong woman that had the wisdom of spear fight and has managed to travel to her battlefields and lead the nation for a long. He also presents her as a defiant to the structural leadership headed by the old men of the community who wished to inherit the crown and was not pleased with a woman in power. He also narrates the story of their attempt to remove her from power in any way possible including a coup that never succeeded as she was very cautious, observant, and self-reliant.

His description of her death relates to the published fable story even though in the fable story it is a different animal and cause for death.

Nevertheless, he states her death as an account that came as a result of her desire to ride on a bull whereby the old men were more than happy to assist her to be on the ride as a wish for her death. And that, he said is her way of death as the old men have tied her to the bull that left her defenceless to the collides of the bull in all directions. She died cut into pieces that gave the old men a saying that "these women of power with no wisdom".

This account is one that also go side by side with some other who stated that they have had heard of a queen who is said to be very strong and led by force and had no mercy. They also have stated that the Harari by then were in chaos as she had battles with everyone around her.

Ahmed Zekeriya (Conversation at Addis Ababa University, November 2020) who is a known historian of Harar also affirms the difficulty to locate and talk about the queen even though he has heard of her name but has no account of hers. He stated that she is from a family that is even contested for their historical origin and place of residence, the Maya family. He also agrees with those who say there is a connection between the Haromay and Maya communities but he stresses that there is no clear connection and proof yet.

Dr. Muna a female anthropologist from the Harari community who has mainly worked on the manuscripts and phenomenal Muslim women of the Horn of Africa also stated that she has no recollection of this wom-

en's memory other than that she was part of the leadership.

## Conclusion

The search for the memory of the only recognized Amira of Harar can be said is yet a loss as there is a huge gap in truly locating, describing, and also assuring her existence, her leadership style, and achievements. The fact that she is not even recognized by the community while being listed in the Amirs is evidence that people have no recollection of her at all. The mixing of her with other strong women with a "maybe" story also tells the fact that the women have no known history of her own and also questions the historical depiction of the other strong ladies of the region too.

Even among those who said they have heard of her existence; her presentation is wide away from each other as one presents her as the peace-loving with high moral guidance of religious leaders while the other presents her as a defiant to the existing system that was not abiding by the laws and was a problem for the nation itself. As hard as it is to reconcile these two accounts, it should be insisted here that history has always been good in documenting notorious battle stories and if Tedian was as notorious, warmongering, and even powerful with height as one of the accounts presents her, it would have had made the history books of the bigger nation, Ethiopian state-building stories, and chronicles which had documented almost all battles with all their prejudices and selective perspective of defining who is the hero and the villain. The other account that illustrated her as a morally grounded peace-

ful leader might be a good starting point if we accept the hypothesis that Peace Day doesn't call for more attention and might not come as a must to record in the history books as most of the globally recorded history is an account of the battles and misfortunes the world has had with a high naming and profiling of the prominent actors in it. The case of Dill Wonbera who is recognized as a strong women leader from the Eastern part of Ethiopia (Somali community also recognizes this woman as their leader calling her Araweelo who might be the same or different person) by Hararis but across the Horn of Africa along with Yodit Gudat, one is kept documented as the most influential notorious female leaders is good argument points here.

Whichever way it is, Tedian Bent Maya is recognized only by name as part of the list of Amirs and is a very sad status for one and only female leader in a historical dynasty that has made the history of its own not only in the nation but globally. Is this a historiographical discrimination and purposive deletion of women in history? What has happened and what exactly can explain this? is the story of her that is missing in the academics that need to be investigated more.



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