

What Ferdinando Martini wrote about Bahta Hagos



Media source: Dejazmatch Bahta Hagos

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This was what he wrote when Bahta was an ally of Italy (1891):

Our destination was Segeneiti and Bahta Hagos met us half the way. Behind him was his brother and his son Geremedhin was also there. Bahta was in his mid forties. He was tall and thin. When you look at him you get the impression that he is cunning and crooked. But his land that extends from here to Mereb, doesn't know any one who was more honest than him. He was a Muslim who converted to Catholicism with his wife. His new faith bestowed on him a greater degree of integrity. There is no chief in his caliber in the area. One word from him would put an end to any conflict. Every body respects him and submits to his rule because he is humble, generous and

committed to his friends and us, the Italians. He shows less pride than the other Eritrean chiefs because he is more intelligent than them. Lastly, Bahta Hagos is not a saint because he killed his brother

He belongs to one of the old families in Akle Guzai. Ras Alula harassed and followed him and Bahta Hagos took refuge together with his brothers with the Habab. Because the Habab were pastoralists, Bahta and his men protected the tribes from other invaders. After Bahta and his group were allowed to return to their homeland, one of his brothers wanted to be a robber to earn his living. Bahta tried to persuade his brother to stop robbery and help the family establish their rule in their land. He told his brother that by doing so they will be able to win more friends and to show in front of God that they will regain liberty for their people. His brother refused to listen. Later Bahta resorted to threats. He told his brother that he will either kill him or will he will surrender to Alula to kill him. His brother told Bahta, 'Go and surrender to Alula'. Bahta Hagos spent that night praying to God and at dawn went and killed his brother. But now he repents that and at times he suffers of nervous episodes. Unlike all the leaders that we met who treat their subjects with brutality, he resorts to asking for apology after any harsh measure, and treats his subjects like a father.

You cannot describe the Abyssinians through the character of Bahta Hagos. He was an exceptional character.

And this is what he wrote about him after he fought the Italians (March 1895):

What I wrote about him in 1891 was based on my own observations and based on the Italian officials who knew him closely. Ludwigi Marcatelli from Asmara wrote in the Newspaper 'Tribuna' on 12 February 1895, *"If there was any one who had doubts about Bahta Hagos, no person could have believed him. Yet, he rebelled against us. What he did was not a sudden thing or a revenge. He must have planned this over a long time to kill the whites who had stayed at Segeneiti and who respected him. We paid him a decent pension and we showered him with a lot of gifts, some of which were expensive. We bestowed on him the highest authority and honours that was never given to any Abyssinian before him. Yet he died fighting us near Halai on the 18th of december.*

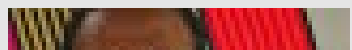
It is said that the Frech Jesuits encouraged him to revolt against us. They were angered by our decision to drive them out of Eritrea. This may be possible , because Bahta loved them and converted to the Catholic faith on their hands. He had also contributed towards buliding a church in Akhrur. But I do not believe this was the only or the main important reason for his revolt. The day he decided to cut the negotiations with us and imprisoned Captain Sagouini and moved with his forces to Halai; He sent a message to the whole of Akleguzai. The messengers told the people, "We are going to liberate you from those who came from across the sea to take our land, and my move is coordinated with Ras Mengesha who is coming to support us with a force. I did not take a move until now because I was waiting for a response from a distant place.."

This is an important point, as I explained before, the Italian families that came were given land in Seraye, near Akle Guzai in the area that was under Bahta Hagos and he did not like this. Other Italians were also given 25 hectares from Akle Guzai. He wrote three letters to Menelik, complaining about the confiscation of land and asking for his permission to attack the Italains. If Menelik did not agree, he asked him to raise the complaint to Italy. Menelik replied twice asking for patience and that he was waiting for a response from Italy. It is not known if Menelik gave the permission for the attack, but he sent 35 thousand rifles to Ras Mengesha.

From Ferdinando Martini's memories and impressions in his book, 'Nell'Africa Italiana' 1890.

He was a member of the Italian Parliament who was sent to evaluate the viability of Eritrea, as a colony. Pages 102 - 106 from the Arabic translated edition

Source: [Hedgait هديت: What Ferdinando Martini wrote about Bahta Hagos \(period 1891 -1895\)](#)



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