



Linguistic and Ethnic Groups in Begemder and Semyen, and the Tigre– Begemder Boundary: Evidence from Frederick J. Simoons (1960) and The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia (1710)

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Abstract

This study examines the linguistic, ethnic, and political-geographical composition of Begemder (in some sources spelled as Begameder), and Semyen and its borderlands through two historical sources. The first is Frederick J. Simoons's "Northwest Ethiopia: Peoples and Economy" (1960), based on eight months of fieldwork in Begemder and Semyen in 1953–54, which documents the presence and distribution of Tigrinya, Amharic, Agow, Gumis, and Hametsh groups in the province. The second is "The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia" (1710), an early eighteenth-century account which establishes that the Tekezé (Tacazé) River was not the external political boundary between Tigre Kingdom and Begemder and Semyen Province during the period it documents. Together, these sources provide complementary historical evidence: the first for the ethnic and linguistic composition of the Begemder and Semyen Province in the mid-twentieth century, the second for the political geography of the Sire Province/the Tigre Kingdom–Begemder and Semyen Province relationship in the early eighteenth century.

1. Introduction

The historical composition of the Begemder (in some sources spelled as Begameder), and Semyen province, its peoples, languages, and territorial organization, is documented in a range of sources spanning several centuries.



Two such sources are examined here. The first is Frederick J. Simoons's "Northwest Ethiopia: Peoples and Economy" (1960), which provides firsthand ethnographic and linguistic observations from fieldwork conducted in the early 1950s.[1] The second is "The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia" (1710), published in *A New Collection of Voyages and Travels into Several Parts of the World*, Vol. II (1711), which describes the political geography of northern Ethiopia in the early eighteenth century.[2] These two sources address different questions and draw on different types of evidence. Frederick J. Simoons's work is a demographic and linguistic study; the Jesuit account is a political-geographical one. Read together, however, they provide complementary evidence concerning the peoples and territorial arrangements of Begemder and Semyen and the adjacent Sire Province/Kingdom of Tigre.

The article deliberately uses these two sources to clarify the distinction between political boundaries and demographic and linguistic composition. Frederick J. Simoons's evidence concerns the presence and distribution of ethnic and linguistic groups. The Jesuit evidence concerns the location of rivers, provinces, and kingdoms. The two categories of evidence are related but not identical: a political boundary is not automatically an ethnic or linguistic boundary. By keeping these evidentiary functions separate, the article avoids conflating political geography with demographic and linguistic composition. This methodological distinction is important because a river, a provincial limit, or a kingdom's boundary does not necessarily correspond to a linguistic or ethnic divide. The article therefore treats Frederick J. Simoons (1960) as evidence for demographic and linguistic composition, and *The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia* (1710) as evidence for political geography, without extending either source beyond what it establishes.

2. Frederick J. Simoons (1960): Linguistic and Ethnic Groups in the Begemder and Semyen Province

2.1. The Source and Its Context

Frederick J. Simoons (1922–2009) was an American geographer and anthropologist whose scholarly work focused extensively on Ethiopia and other parts of Africa.[3] His research combined geographical, anthropological, and ethnographic approaches and relied substantially on firsthand fieldwork. *Northwest Ethiopia: Peoples and Economy* was published by The University of Wisconsin Press in 1960.[4]



In the preface, Frederick J. Simoons explains that his study was based substantially on field research. He spent eight months in the region in 1953–54, "dealt with local people," and relied heavily on firsthand observations, local travel, and interviews.[5] He further explains that "the Northwest" coincided with the Province of Begemder and Semyen.[6] His observations concerning the peoples and languages of Northwest Ethiopia therefore relate directly to the population of the province of Begemder and Semyen as defined within his study.

2.2. Textual Demographic and Linguistic Evidence From Frederick J. Simoons (1960)

Frederick J. Simoons provides the following account:

"Within Begemder and Semyen, most people of the several ethnic groups are of the Ethiopian physical type. There are, however, two groups living along the Sudan border (see Map 4) the Gumis and the Hametsh, who are Negroes. These people are, on the average, slightly shorter in stature, somewhat heavier in build, and darker in skin color than the Semitic-and Cushitic-speaking groups (Figs. 22, 23 and 24); they have wide, low-bridged noses, and hair that is kinky or in a few cases, peppercorn in form. The other peoples of the area recognize the difference in physical type between themselves and the Gumis and Hametsh, for they call the latter two groups shank'illa (blacks) or barña (slaves), as they do Negro peoples of Africa. Hereafter, when the term 'Negro' is used with reference to Northwest Ethiopian groups, it will apply specifically to the Gumis and Hametsh.

Amharic, which is spoken by more of the world's people than any other Semitic language except Arabic, is the most important language of Northwest Ethiopia. It is spoken not only by the Amhara themselves, but by most Ethiopian Moslems (Jabartis) and Jews (Falasha) as well as the Wayt'o of Lake T'ana. Even among groups whose native tongue is not Amharic, there are at least a few men in every village who know it, for government affairs are conducted in Amharic and most merchants are Amharic-speakers. After Amharic, Tigrinya is the most widely spoken Semitic language in Ethiopia; in the Northwest, there is a considerable section bordering Tigre Province which is occupied by people who speak this language (see Map 4). In addition, there are many Tigrinya-speaking people, migrants from northern Begemder and Semyen or from Tigre or Eritrea, who live and work in towns and cities throughout the province." [7]



2.3. Tigrinya Speakers in the Northern Begemder and Semyen Province

Frederick J. Simoons's discussion of language provides particularly important evidence. He states that Amharic was the most important language of Northwest Ethiopia and that, after Amharic, Tigrinya was the most widely spoken Semitic language in Ethiopia. He then writes:

".... in the Northwest, there is a considerable section bordering Tigre Province which is occupied by people who speak this language" (p. 21).[8]

Frederick J. Simoons distinguishes the Tigrinya-speaking inhabitants of the border area from Tigrinya-speaking migrants living and working in towns and cities throughout the province. He identifies these migrants as people originating from northern Begemder and Semyen, Tigre, or Eritrea.[9]

Two distinct statements should therefore be noted:

First, Frederick J. Simoons describes a "considerable section" of Northwest Ethiopia bordering Tigre Province as being occupied by Tigrinya-speaking people. This concerns the geographical distribution of a resident Tigrinya-speaking population.[10] Second, he separately describes Tigrinya-speaking migrants from northern Begemder and Semyen, Tigre, and Eritrea who lived and worked in towns and cities throughout the province. This concerns migration and urban residence.[11] Taken together, the passage provides evidence for the presence of Tigrinya-speaking communities in northern Begemder and Semyen, particularly in the area bordering Tigre Province, as well as for Tigrinya-speaking migrants in urban centers elsewhere in the province.

2.4. Cartographic Evidence: Map 4

The accompanying page from Frederick J. Simoons's text (p. 22) provides both the map and critical textual corroboration for the distribution of these groups.[12]

Map 4: Begemder and Semyen Peoples

Map 4, from Frederick J. Simoons's *Northwest Ethiopia: Peoples and Economy* (1960), depicts the distribution of linguistic and ethnic groups in the Begemder and Semyen Province as follows:



Map 4, titled "Begemder and Semyen Peoples," visually represents the distribution of linguistic and ethnic groups in Begemder and Semyen as documented by Simoons.[13] The legend identifies three primary linguistic categories: Semitic (Amharic and Tigrinya), Cushitic (Agaw), and unclassified Negro, the last being Simoons's term for linguistically unclassified groups. It also marks Wayt'o hamlets and indicates land elevation.[14]

A. Semitic Languages (Amharic and Tigrinya):

1. Amharic: Amharic-speaking areas occupy much of the central and southern parts of the Begemder and Semyen province.[15]
2. Tigrinya: A distinct Tigrinya-speaking area is represented in the northern part of Begemder and Semyen, adjoining or bordering Tigre Province. The map therefore provides visual corroboration for Frederick J. Simoons's statement that a considerable section bordering Tigre Province was occupied by people who spoke Tigrinya.[16]



B. Cushitic Languages (Agow):

The map identifies Agow-speaking areas. The accompanying text on page 22 clarifies:

"(Agau), dialects of which are spoken by three unassimilated groups: the Agow of Sahalla, the K'amant, and the Kumfel. The K'amant, the largest of these groups, are located northwest of Lake T'ana, entirely within Begemder and Semyen, centering on the towns of Ch'ilga and Tikil Dingai. The Agow of Sahalla are simply an extension into the Northwest of a larger Agow group which is centered in the provinces to the east, and the Kumfel are one section of a group found also in Godjam Province, where there are also large additional groups of Agow-speaking people." [17]

C. Unclassified Groups:

The western lowland areas along the border are represented as belonging to groups outside the principal Semitic and Cushitic classifications discussed on the map. Page 22 states:

"The Negro Gumis and Hametsh of the western lowlands of Begemder and Semyen are not related in language to the Semitic- and Cushitic-speaking peoples of Ethiopia." [18]

It further notes that Joseph Greenberg, in his 1950 classification of African languages, "was unable to relate the language of the Gumis to any of the large language families of Africa." [19]

Frederick J. Simoons refers the reader to Map 4 in connection with this geographical distribution. [20] Because he identifies Northwest Ethiopia with the Province of Begemder and Semyen, his statement provides evidence that a considerable section of Begemder and Semyen, specifically in the area bordering Tigre Province, was occupied by Tigrinya-speaking people. Map 4 provides a visual representation of this linguistic and ethnic distribution.

2.5. Conclusion on Frederick J. Simoons's Demographic and Linguistic Evidence

Taken together, Frederick J. Simoons's firsthand field observations from 1953–54, his identification of Northwest Ethiopia with Begemder and Semyen Province, his discussion on page 21, and his reference to Map 4, corroborated by the textual details on page 22, provide evidence for the presence of Tigrinya-speaking communities in northern parts of the Begemder and Semyen during the period of his field research.[21]

The demographic and linguistic evidence is therefore sufficient to establish the historical presence of Tigrinya speakers in parts of northern Begemder and Semyen in the early 1950s. The most precise characterization supported by this source is that Tigrinya-speaking people or Tigrinya-speaking communities were present in parts of northern Begemder and Semyen during the period documented by Frederick J. Simoons, including a considerable section bordering Tigre Province. The source also documents the presence of Agow (Cushitic) groups, specifically the K'amant, the Agow of Sahalla, and the Kumfel, as well as the linguistically unclassified Gumis and Hametsh in the western lowlands.[22]

3. The Jesuit Account (1710): The Tekezé River and the Tigre Kingdom–Begemder and Semyen Boundary

3.1. The Source and Its Context

An early eighteenth-century account published in *A New Collection of Voyages and Travels into Several Parts of the World*, Vol. II (1711), under the title *The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia* (1710), provides important evidence concerning the political geography of northern Ethiopia.[23] The account describes the principal kingdoms of the Abyssinian Empire, including Tigre, Begameder, Angot, Amahara, Gojam, and Dambea, and the rivers and boundaries that defined them.[24]

The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia was compiled by Balthazar Tellez (1596–1675) from the reports of Jesuit missionaries who had worked in Ethiopia. The English translation was published in 1710 and included in *A New Collection of Voyages and Travels* in 1711. The passages discussed here reflect the geographical knowledge transmitted by those missionaries.



3.2. The Tacazé and the Province of Siré

The account states:

"There is another River in Ethiopia, known and famous, call'd Tacazé. Mercator says this is the River Ptolemy calls Astaboras... The Tacazé has its source on a Ridge of Mountains, call'd Arivagua, on the Frontiers of the Kingdom of Angot, next that of Begameder. This River Tacazé crosses the Kingdom of Tigre, cutting through the midsts of Siré, a Province of the said Kingdom, leaving the best Lands of that Province on the East, and its famous Desert Aldoba on the West." [25]

This description is significant because it explicitly places the Tacazé within the Kingdom of Tigre and, more specifically, states that the river passed "through the midst of Siré," which the author identifies as a province of the Kingdom of Tigre. [26]

The wording indicates that Siré extended to both sides of the Tacazé. The author describes the "best Lands of that Province" as lying to the east of the river and the "Desert Aldoba" to the west. Thus, according to this account, the Tacazé was not presented as the external boundary of Siré; rather, it was a river running through the province itself. [27]

This is important when evaluating claims that the Tacazé functioned as the administrative or political boundary separating Tigre from Begameder during this period. The passage does not support such a characterization. On the contrary, it describes the Tacazé as a geographical feature within the Kingdom of Tigre and within the Province of Siré. [28]

The passage should nevertheless be interpreted precisely. It is evidence concerning the political and geographical organization described by the Jesuit author; it does not, by itself, establish an ethnic boundary. The text does not state that the populations east and west of the Tacazé belonged to different ethnic groups. Accordingly, the evidence should not be extended beyond what the source actually establishes. [29]

3.3. The Relationship between Tigre Kingdom and Begameder and Semyen Province

The same account provides further evidence concerning the relationship between the Kingdom of Tigre and the Province of Begameder and Semyen. In its description of Tigre Kingdom, it states:

"The Kingdom of Begameder Borders on Tigre to the North East, on the due East it has the Kingdom of Angot, and thence runs along the Kingdom of Amahara, which is its Southern Boundary, till it comes to the Nile, which is its Limit on the West. Between these Two Kingdoms of Begameder and Amahara, runs the River Baxilo, which is very large, and after parting the said Kingdom, loses itself in the Nile." [30]

The author therefore identifies Tigre Kingdom and Begameder and Semyen as neighboring regions. This statement is especially significant when read together with the description of the Tacazé and Siré. [31]

The geographical and political structure presented by the account can be summarized as follows:

A. Siré is identified as a province of the Kingdom of Tigre. [32]

B. The Tacazé crosses the Kingdom of Tigre. [33]

C. More specifically, the Tacazé passes "through the midst of Siré." [34]

D. Begameder and Semyen borders Tigre Kingdom to the northeast. [35]

This combination of statements places the Tacazé inside the territory that the author identifies as Tigre and, specifically, within Siré. It therefore does not support the simple equation of the Tacazé with the external boundary between Tigre Kingdom and Begameder and Semyen. [36]

The distinction is important because a river can simultaneously serve as a geographical feature, a local boundary, or, in another historical period, a political boundary. The fact that a river was used as a boundary at one time does



not establish that it necessarily functioned as the same boundary in another period. In this particular account, the Tacazé is explicitly described as crossing Siré rather than separating Siré from another kingdom.[37]

3.4. Clarification on the Nile as Begameder and Semyen's Western Limit

The passage states that Begameder and Semyen's western limit is the Nile. This refers to the Blue Nile (Abay), not the White Nile.[38] In the 1710 account, the author is describing the Ethiopian river system in which the Nile (Abay/Blue Nile) flows through the region of Gojam and Lake Tana and eventually continues westward toward Sudan.[39]

So when the text says:

".... till it comes to the Nile, which is its Limit on the West."

the Nile means the Blue Nile (Abay), which the author uses as the western limit of Begameder and Semyen. This is consistent with the surrounding passage, where the author discusses Gojam, Dambea (Lake Tana), and the Nile, describing the Nile as rising in Gojam and passing through Lake Tana before continuing westward.[40]

If "the Nile" means the Blue Nile/Abay, then the author is saying that the western limit of the Province of Begameder and Semyen reached the Blue Nile. In other words, the described western boundary was not the Tekezé River. It was the Nile/Abay farther west.[41]

The passage gives this sequence:

Tigre — northeast

Angot — east

Amahara — south



Nile/Abay — west

According to this particular 1710 description, therefore, Begameder and Semyen extended westward until it reached the Blue Nile. One important qualification: this tells us the western limit of Begameder and Semyen as described by this source, but it does not by itself give us an exact modern map coordinate or a precise line along the river. It is a broad historical description of the kingdom's territorial extent.[42]

3.5. Clarification on the Relationship between the Tekezé and Begemder

Based strictly on the historical text provided from *The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia* (1710), the text does not state that the south of the Tekezé River is Begameder and Semyen. Instead, the text outlines Begameder and Semyen's boundaries as follows:

A. Northeast: Tigre.

B. East: Kingdom of Angot.

C. South: Kingdom of Amahara (separated by the Baxilo River).

D. West: The Nile.

The text places the Tekezé River further north, running through Siré (a province of the Kingdom of Tigre) rather than defining the southern border of Begemder.[43]

The 1710 account tells us two separate things:

1. The Tekezé was inside Tigre/Siré: The author says the Tacazé "crosses the Kingdom of Tigre, cutting through the midst of Siré, a Province of the said Kingdom." Thus, parts of Siré/Tigre were on both sides of the Tekezé.[44]

2. Begameder and Semyen bordered Tigre Kingdom to the northeast: The author says, "The Kingdom of Begameder Borders on Tigre to the North East," and gives the Nile as Begameder and Semyen's western limit.[45] Therefore, one cannot infer that everything south of the Tekezé was Begemder and Semyen. The text specifically places territory of Tigre/Siré south and/or north of the Tekezé, depending on the section of the river.[46] The stronger conclusion is: The Tekezé was not, according to this account, a simple north–south political boundary separating all of Tigre Kingdom from Begemder and Semyen. The river passed through Siré, a province of Tigre Kingdom, while Begemder and Semyen Province was separately described as bordering Tigre to the northeast.[47]

3.6. Historical Significance

Taken together, these passages provide evidence that the political geography described in this early eighteenth-century Jesuit account was more complex than a simple division in which the Tacazé constituted the boundary between Tigre and Begameder. The author expressly describes the Tacazé as running through Siré, a province of Tigre Kingdom, while separately describing Begameder as bordering Tigre.[48]

The evidence therefore supports the following conclusion:

According to the Jesuit account published in 1711, the Tacazé was a river that crossed the Kingdom of Tigre and passed through the Province of Siré, with parts of Siré located on both sides of the river. The account consequently does not portray the Tacazé as the external administrative boundary separating the Kingdom of Tigre from Begameder.[49]

The source by itself establishes the ethnic identity of the populations inhabiting either side of the river. This supports a claim concerning a specifically ethnic boundary regarding the languages, identities, or ethnic affiliations of the populations in the respective areas.[50] However, the account not be understood as proving that the Tacazé could never have served as a political boundary at another time. Political jurisdictions changed over time, and different sources may describe different political territorial arrangements. What this source establishes is the political geography as described in the account for the period it documents.[51]



4. Synthesis: Complementary Evidence

The two sources examined here address different dimensions of the same broader region and, when read together, provide a more complete picture than either does alone.

4.1. Frederick J. Simoons (1960) establishes the following for the mid-twentieth century:

4.1.1. A significant, contiguous Tigrinya-speaking population existed in the northern Begemder and Semyen province, bordering Tigre Province.[52]

4.1.2. The Begemder and Semyen province was linguistically diverse, containing Agow (Cushitic) groups—specifically the K'amant (centered on Ch'ilga and Tikil Dingai), the Agow of Sahalla, and the Kumfel.[53]

4.1.3. The Gumis and Hametsh of the western lowlands were linguistically unclassified and distinct from Semitic and Cushitic populations.[54]

4.1.4. Amharic was the dominant language of government and commerce, spoken by Amhara, Jabartis, Falasha, and Wayt'o.[55]

4.1.5. Tigrinya speakers were present both as a resident border population and as migrants in urban centers.[56]

4.2. The Jesuit account (1710) establishes the following for the early eighteenth century:

4.2.1. The Tacazé River ran through the Kingdom of Tigre, specifically through the midst of Siré, with Siré territory on both sides of the river.[57]

4.2.2. Begameder and Semyen province bordered Tigre to the northeast, Angot to the east, Amahara to the south, and the Nile (Blue Nile/Abay) to the west.[58]



4.2.3. The Tacazé was not described as the external boundary between Tigre Kingdom and Begemder and Semyen province.[59]

The two sources are complementary in the following respects. Frederick J. Simoons documents the ethnic and linguistic composition of the Begemder and Semyen province and demonstrates the presence of Tigrinya-speaking communities in the northern part of the province bordering Tigre. The Jesuit account documents the political geography of the Tigre–Begemder & Semyen relationship and demonstrates that the Tekezé River was not the external boundary between the two kingdoms in the period it describes. Both sources therefore contribute to an understanding of the historical relationship between the Tigre and Begemder and Semyen regions and the peoples who inhabited them.[60]

It should be noted, however, that the two sources document different periods and different types of information. Frederick J. Simoons's evidence is ethnographic and linguistic, derived from fieldwork in the 1950s. The Jesuit evidence is political-geographical, derived from an early eighteenth-century account. Neither source should be extended beyond what it actually establishes. Simoons's evidence establishes presence and distribution, not demographic dominance or exclusive territorial control. The Jesuit evidence establishes political geography, not ethnic identity. Together, they provide complementary historical context.[61]

5. Conclusion

This study has examined two historical sources concerning the Begemder and Semyen province and the adjacent Kingdom of Tigre. Frederick J. Simoons's *Northwest Ethiopia: Peoples and Economy* (1960), based on eight months of fieldwork in 1953–54, documents the presence and distribution of Tigrinya, Amharic, Agow, Gumis, and Hametsh groups in Begemder and Semyen. It establishes that a considerable section of the province of Begemder and Semyen bordering Tigre Kingdom was occupied by Tigrinya speakers, and that Tigrinya-speaking migrants were present in towns and cities throughout the province. It also documents the presence of Agow (Cushitic) groups and the linguistically unclassified Gumis and Hametsh.[62]

The *Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia* (1710) documents the political geography of the Tigre–Begemder relationship in the early eighteenth century. It establishes that the Tacazé River ran through the Kingdom of Tigre, specifically through the midst of Siré, with Siré territory on both sides. It further establishes that the Begemder and



Semyen province bordered Tigre Kingdom to the northeast and that its western limit was the Nile (Blue Nile/Abay), not the Tekezé. The account therefore does not portray the Tacazé as the external boundary between Tigre Kingdom and Begemder and Semyen province.[63]

Taken together, these sources provide complementary evidence concerning the peoples and territorial arrangements of Begemder and Semyen Province and the adjacent Kingdom of Tigre. They establish the historical presence and distribution of Tigrinya-speaking communities in northern Begemder and Semyen, and they demonstrate that the Tekezé River was not a fixed external boundary between the Tigre Kingdom and Begemder and Semyen Province during the period documented.[64]

End Notes

[1] Frederick J. Simoons, *Northwest Ethiopia: Peoples and Economy* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1960). Frederick J. Simoons (1922–2009) was an American geographer and anthropologist whose research focused extensively on Ethiopia and other parts of Africa.

[2] *The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia* (1710), in *A New Collection of Voyages and Travels into Several Parts of the World*, Vol. II (London: Printed for J. Knapton, Andrew Bell, D. Midwinter, Will. Taylor, A. Collins, and F. Baker, 1711). The account describes the principal kingdoms of the Abyssinian Empire, including Tigre, Begameder, Angot, Amahara, Gojam, and Dambea.

[3] For Frederick J. Simoons's biographical details and scholarly contributions, see his obituary and the prefatory material in *Northwest Ethiopia: Peoples and Economy* (1960).

[4] Frederick J. Simoons, *Northwest Ethiopia*, title page and preface.

[5] *Ibid.*, preface. Frederick J. Simoons states that he spent eight months in the region in 1953–54, dealt with local people, and relied heavily on firsthand observations.



[6] Ibid., preface. Frederick J. Simoons explains that "the Northwest" coincided with the Province of Begemder and Semyen.

[7] Frederick J. Simoons, *Northwest Ethiopia*, 21. The passage describes the ethnic and linguistic composition of Begemder and Semyen, including the Gumis and Hametsh, the dominance of Amharic, and the presence of Tigrinya speakers.

[8] Ibid., 21. Frederick J. Simoons states: "in the Northwest, there is a considerable section bordering Tigre Province which is occupied by people who speak this language."

[9] Ibid., 21. Frederick J. Simoons distinguishes resident Tigrinya speakers from migrants originating from northern Begemder and Semyen, Tigre, or Eritrea.

[10] Ibid., 21. This statement concerns the geographical distribution of a resident Tigrinya-speaking population.

[11] Ibid., 21. This statement concerns migration and urban residence.

[12] Frederick J. Simoons, *Northwest Ethiopia*, 22, including Map 4, "Begemder and Semyen Peoples."

[13] Map 4, "Begemder and Semyen Peoples," in Frederick J. Simoons, *Northwest Ethiopia*, 22.

[14] Map 4 legend, in Frederick J. Simoons, *Northwest Ethiopia*, 22. The legend identifies Semitic (Amharic and Tigrinya), Cushitic (Agow), and Unclassified Negro categories, and marks Wayt'o hamlets and land elevation.

[15] Map 4, in Frederick J. Simoons, *Northwest Ethiopia*, 22.

[16] Map 4, in Frederick J. Simoons, *Northwest Ethiopia*, 22. The map shows a distinct Tigrinya-speaking area in the northern part of the province, adjoining or bordering Tigre Province.



[17] Frederick J. Simoons, *Northwest Ethiopia*, 22. The text describes the Agow of Sahalla, the K'amant, and the Kumfel.

[18] *Ibid.*, 22. The text states that the Gumis and Hametsh "are not related in language to the Semitic- and Cushitic-speaking peoples of Ethiopia."

[19] *Ibid.*, 22–23. Joseph Greenberg's 1950 classification of African languages was unable to relate the Gumis language to any large language family.

[20] Frederick J. Simoons, *Northwest Ethiopia*, 21–22. Frederick J. Simoons refers the reader to Map 4 in connection with this geographical distribution.

[21] *Ibid.*, 21–22. The combination of textual and cartographic evidence supports the presence of Tigrinya-speaking communities in northern Begemder and Semyen.

[22] *Ibid.*, 22. The source also documents Agow (Cushitic) groups and the unclassified Gumis and Hametsh.

[23] *The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia* (1710), in *A New Collection of Voyages and Travels*, Vol. II (1711). The account provides evidence concerning the political geography of northern Ethiopia.

[24] *Ibid.*, 10–13. The account describes Tigre, Begameder, Angot, Amahara, Gojam, and Dambea.

[25] *Ibid.*, 10. The passage describes the Tacazé River, its source, and its course through the Kingdom of Tigre and the Province of Siré.

[26] *Ibid.*, 10. The author identifies Siré as "a Province of the said Kingdom" of Tigre.

[27] *Ibid.*, 10. The "best Lands of that Province" lay to the east of the river and the "Desert Aldoba" to the west.



[28] Ibid., 10. The passage does not support the characterization of the Tacazé as the external boundary between Tigre Kingdom and Begameder and Semyen Province.

[29] Ibid., 10. The source does not establish an ethnic boundary; it describes political and geographical organization.

[30] Ibid., 10–13. The passage describes the boundaries of Begameder and Semyen Province.

[31] Ibid., 10–13. The statement that Begameder and Semyen Province borders Tigre Kingdom to the northeast is significant when read with the description of the Tacazé and Siré Province/ A Province of Tigre Kingdom.

[32] The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia (1710), in A New Collection of Voyages and Travels, Vol. II (1711), 10–13. The passage identifies Siré Province as a province of the Kingdom of Tigre (10), states that the Tacaze crosses Tigre and passes through Sire (10), and describes Begameder and Semyen Province bordering Tigre Kingdom to the northeast (10–13).

[33] Ibid., 10. The Tacazé crosses the Kingdom of Tigre.

[34] Ibid., 10. The Tacazé passes "through the midst of Siré."

[35] Ibid., 10–13. Begameder and Semyen Province borders Tigre Kingdom to the northeast.

[36] Ibid., 10–13. The combination of statements places the Tacazé inside Tigre/Siré and does not support its equation with the external boundary between Tigre Kingdom and Begameder and Semyen Province.

[37] Ibid., 10–13. The account describes the Tacazé as crossing Siré rather than separating Siré from another kingdom.

[38] Ibid., 10–13. The Nile referred to is the Blue Nile (Abay), not the White Nile.



[39] Ibid., 10–13. The author describes the Ethiopian river system, including Gojam, Dambea (Lake Tana), and the Nile.

[40] Ibid., 10–13. The Nile is described as rising in Gojam and passing through Lake Tana before continuing westward.

[41] Ibid., 10–13. The described western boundary was not the Tekezé River but the Nile/Abay farther west.

[42] Ibid., 10–13. The passage gives a broad historical description of the kingdom's territorial extent, not an exact modern map coordinate.

[43] Ibid., 10–13. The text places the Tekezé River further north, running through Siré, rather than defining the southern border of Begemder and Semyen Province.

[44] Ibid., 10. The author states that the Tacazé "crosses the Kingdom of Tigre, cutting through the midst of Siré, a Province of the said Kingdom."

[45] Ibid., 10–13. The author states that "The Kingdom of Begameder Borders on Tigre to the North East" and gives the Nile as Begameder and Semyen Province's western limit.

[46] Ibid., 10–13. The text places territory of Tigre/Siré on both sides of the Tekezé.

[47] Ibid., 10–13. The Tekezé was not a simple north–south political boundary separating all of Tigre from Begemder and Semyen Province.

[48] Ibid., 10–13. The author expressly describes the Tacazé as running through Siré while separately describing Begameder and Semyen Province as bordering Tigre Kingdom.

[49] Ibid., 10–13. The account does not portray the Tacazé as the external administrative boundary separating the Tigre Kingdom from Begameder and Semyen Province.



[50] Ibid., 10–13.

[51] Ibid., 10–13. Political jurisdictions changed over time, and different political-geography sources may therefore describe different administrative territorial arrangements.

[52] Frederick J. Simoons, Northwest Ethiopia, 21–22.

[53] Ibid., 22.

[54] Ibid., 22–23.

[55] Ibid., 21.

[56] Ibid., 21.

[57] The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia (1710), 10.

[58] Ibid., 10–13.

[59] Ibid., 10–13.

[60] Frederick J. Simoons, Northwest Ethiopia, 21–22; The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia (1710), 10–13.

[61] For a discussion of the historical significance of each source, see the relevant sections above.

[62] Frederick J. Simoons, Northwest Ethiopia, 21–23.

[63] The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia (1710), 10–13.



[64] The two sources are complementary: Frederick J. Simoons documents ethnic and linguistic composition; the Jesuit account documents political geography.

Primary Sources

1. Tellez, Balthazar. The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia. In *A New Collection of Voyages and Travels into Several Parts of the World*, Vol. II. London: Printed for J. Knapton, Andrew Bell, D. Midwinter, Will. Taylor, A. Collins, and J. Baker, 1711.
2. Frederick J. Simoons. *Northwest Ethiopia: Peoples and Economy*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1960