

Prelude:

*This article is dedicated to and in memory of the **Mensa Gelazghi Kifle Bareh**. Mensa is the only one I know who was named the prestigious name, Mensa. I witnessed his life as a young boy growing up in Chicago. He was handsome, polite and orderly. His life was cut short suddenly. His name is among us. He will never be forgotten because of his name, Mensa. As I write this article let it be to his honor and fund memories of his life on earth. We miss him. Rest in peace!*

Mensa

by

Dr. Fickak Habtes, DPA., MHSA., MPH

Mensa is one of the oldest respected tribe of warriors in Eritrea. The stories and history is huge but less documented. I would like to start this article with a question. What do you know about Mensa's history, Origin, and life style?

I would like to be the first one to confess that I know little. However, to overcome my ignorance, I am surfing the internet and researching the books trying to learn more about my tribe and the history behind it. I am triangulating my research with documented facts and legend history who passed to us from generation to generation. Modestly, I would like to come forward that I am just introducing you to Mensa in small scale rather than writing a history. In my introduction to the history of Mensa I am just scratching the surface and leave behind so many important facts which need to be mentioned and addressed eloquently. In this essay I am not doing justice of telling full history of one of the greatest tribes in Eritrea, so please forgive me ahead of time.

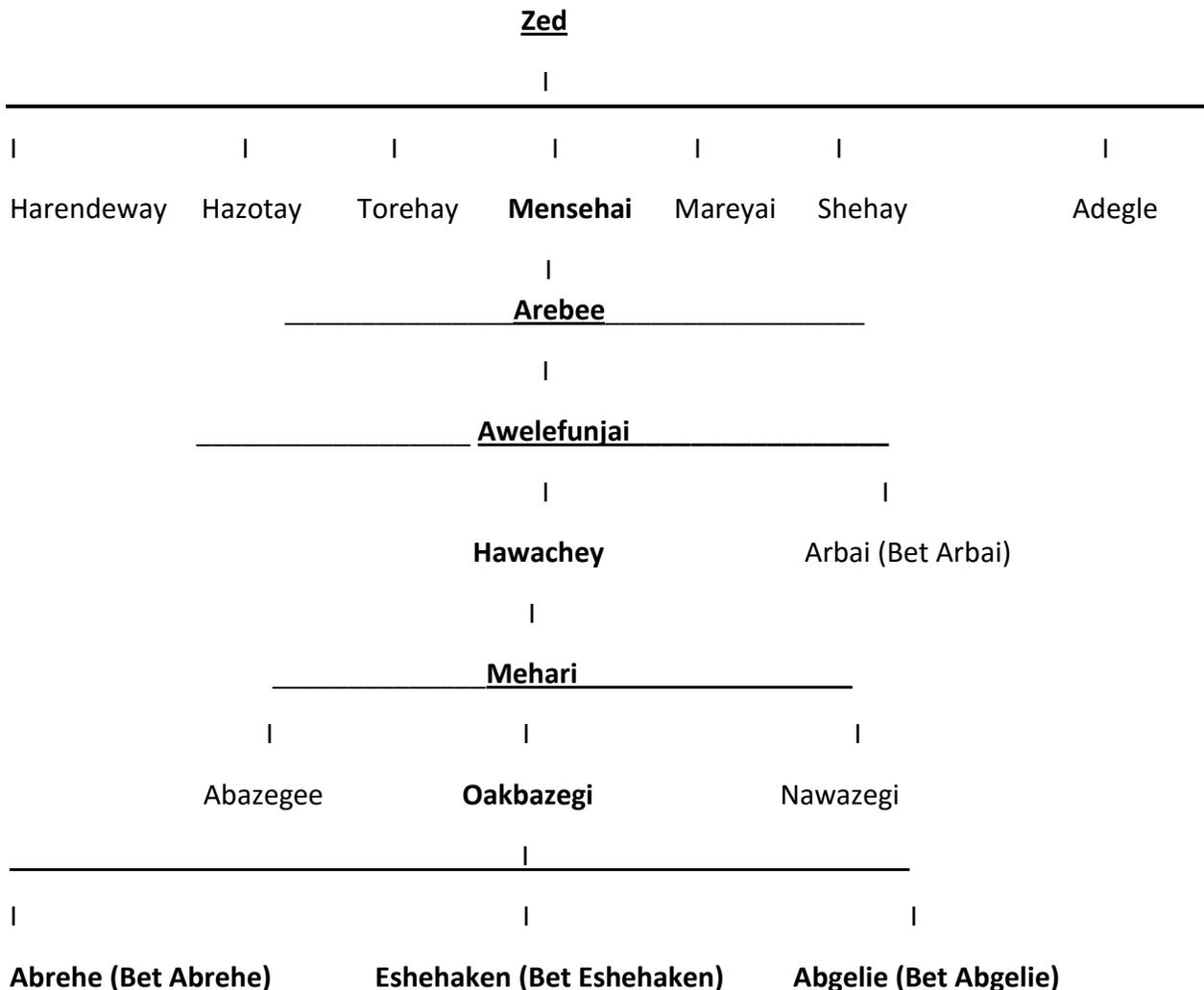
As I write this short introductory essay about Mensa, there are a lot of proud history and moments need to be mentioned. There are many ups and downs as a tribe among each other and outside invaders. However, as a proud Mensai, if I hit the "high note" of proud moments and show overwhelming pride of Mensah among many others relevant factors please remember that I am not putting Mensah above all the other Eritrean tribes. All Eritrean tribes are equal and have their own proud history and location. Even though I am a proud Mensai, I am more proud as Eritrean rather than confined narrow nationalist in a tribal form.

My contribution in writing is to give a brief history and highlights of Mensa. I am sure this will motivate you to comment, add more, or give constructive criticism. I am just acting as a weak catalyst to jump start the participation to offer and tell the story of the greater Mensa.

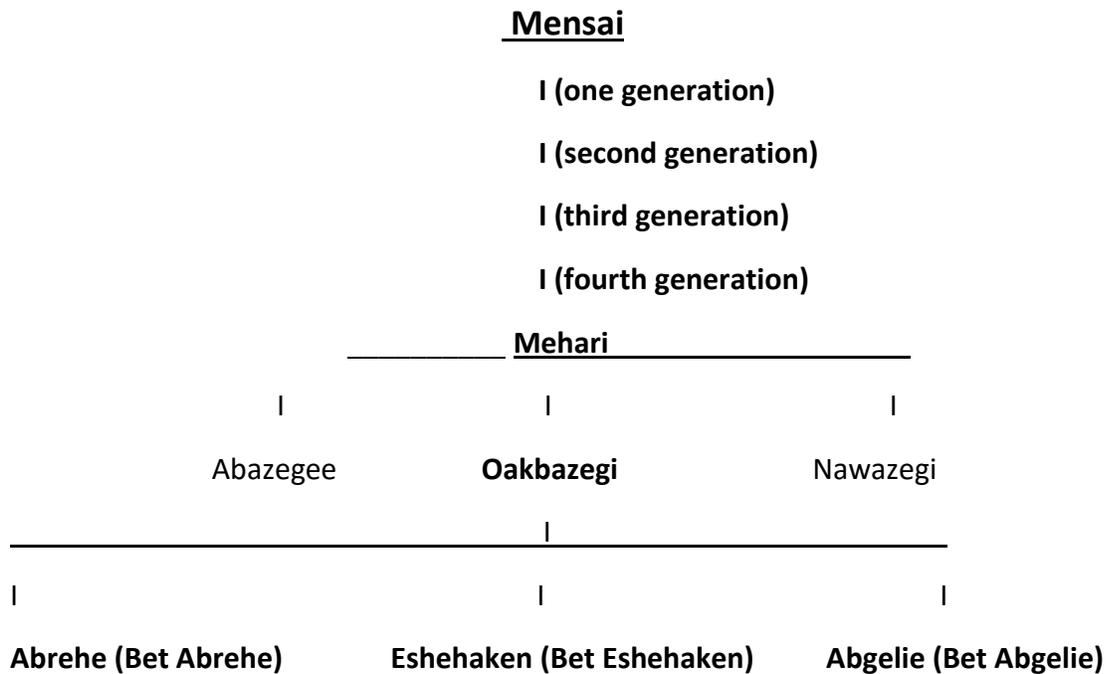
The origin of Mensah:

Mensah is directly linked to the Semite and more to the Arabs as most Eritrean tribes do. Interestingly enough, Mensa are blood related and come of the same blood-line of Prophet Mohammed. Mensah's greatest grandfather is **Koresh**. Prophet Mohammed is from the tribe of Koresh. The direct descendent of **Koresh** is **Mehawya** and the direct descendent of Mehawya are two brothers **Zed and Zebed**. According to the Ftih Mahari **Zed** left the so called Arab land and crossed the Eritrean Sea (Red Sea) to Eritrea. First he landed in Buri, Dankiel area and then moved to Mensa. **Zed** was blessed with seven boys who developed their own family and tribe. These tribes are **Harenduwai (Hedareb), Hazotai, Torehai, Shehai, Adegle, Mensahai and Mariyai**. To explain their current status, location and life style I will leave this task of knowledge to the well-rounded Bekit's brothers for further detailed explanation.

Below is the family tree starting from the migrant Zed to Mensai, Mehari, Oakbazegi, Abrehe, Eshaken and Abgelie.



Our grandfather Mensai after four generation descended to Mehari and Mehari gave birth to Abazegi, Oakbazegi and Nawazegi. Okbazegi gave a birth to Abrehe (Bet Abrehe), Eshehaken (Bet Eshehaken) and Abgelie (Bet Abgelie). These three brothers grow up in number. Due to a power struggle a conflict started between Bet Abrehe and Bet Shehaken and rivalry escalated into property robbery. Abrehe stayed in the Gheleb area and Esahaken settled in Mehelab and its vicinity. Bet Abgela dissolved and became mixed up with Bet Abrehe and Bet Shehaken due to its small number and lack of power and classified under the name of “ketan Shemagle”.



Religion:

If Mensa is the decedent of Koresh. Reasonably we can assume our forefathers are Muslims. Not too fast! Yes they were Muslims but they did not keep practicing Islam all the way. There was a fluctuation and constant change of religion due to a foreign invention and Mission work from overseas. If you see the top names on the family tree resembles Muslim names but in the bottom of the family tree resembles more or less Christian names. If you refer to the family tree starting from Koresh down they carry Muslim names. Christianity was also introduced a long time ago. So, we conclude at present that Mensa has been Muslims and Christians through the beginning. Until today the most common religions in Mensa is Islam and some Christians in the form of Lutherans (Kenisha), Catholic and Orthodox are also available.

Education:

Gheleb was the cradle of civilization in Eritrea. The missionaries moved to Gheleb settled and established schools in the form of boarding schools for anyone without denomination to learn and stay in Gheleb. This attracted so many people from the surrounding and other parts of Eritrea. Some European came to Gheleb to do a research and expanded the Tigre language and produce many publication. The first man from Eritrea who gained scholarship to further his education was a Mensai, by the name **Etman Nafah** who published many book with his teacher and colleague Mr. Litman, a German scholar and a researcher who once visited Gheleb to do a research. Mr. Etman Nafah after a considerable time of study and travel in Europe decided to come back home, to Gheleb. The jealous, fascist Italians throw him in the ocean not to benefit and pass his knowledge to his people. Gheleb produced countless educated people from inside and outside. Not to discount women's progress, the first lady who got a driver license to drive a car is from Mensa by the name Abrehat Yonas.

Meheleab followed the same sisterly positive competition and established school and church through the Catholic Missionaries from Italy. Even though Bet Shaken is smaller than bet Abrehe, its size did not deter its ambitious desire of education and produced great leaders and educators through the region. Higher education was supported and sponsored by the Catholic Church as it was in Gheleb supported by the Lutheran Swedish Church. Mehelab produce great leaders inside and outside of its territory. These gentlemen mentioned below made their marks all over Eritrea administratively. To mention a few of the great leaders who came out of Mehelab (Bet Shaken) are **General Zeremariam, Azazi, Gherazemach Michael Hasama, Ato, Melles Weldemariam., Ghreashemach Legajam Eshak** and many more.

Mensa is blessed with abundance of food. Rarely Mensa starved due to the biannual harvest seasons one in the Awlet and the second in Kelakel. These blessing sustained Mensa survive comfortably from one harvest to the other without running out of food.

Naturally Mensa are a good communicators and have the gift of gab. As Grasemauch Michael Hasama put it in his book, the previous Mensa were more civilized then the present once. Education started in Mensa a long time ago. Many talented educators was introduced as a form of modernity to Mensa trough the missionaries. Some of the modern European fashion attraction started in Gheleb. European attraction we copied and use in today's society introduced in Mensa with the help of the Missionaries such as "velo" the brides dress (European fashion) was introduced in Gheleb with help of the Missionary's wife made of Abjedid.

Democracy:

Mensa has laws to be governed with. Democracy was the vein of government. When disputes occur they gather elderly and try to reconcile the differences. They choose three to four wise men from each tribe to solve the dispute. If things escalated to the second level they choose a leader (Shum) to finalize the judgment based on the written and known law, Fith Mehari, the constitution of Mensa. Most of the dispute settle before it reaches the highest leader (Shum) by the elders of the community. Majority opinion was the highest law of the community and people to abide by and try to mend and solve their problems. Democratic decision making was the common form of governance. The two and first shumes from Mensa who ruled equivalent were Zereit Keleb from Bet Shehaken and Okbamical, from Bet Abrehe.

The split of Mensa into Bet Abrehe and Bet Shehaken.

The two brothers, Abrehe and Eshaken lived as one family. As we all know power struggle is a family breaker. Zereit left his area and moved to Rora Kebesa. In the meantime, went to Azai Fasiel and request to be inducted as a leader of Mensa and got confirmed. As approval of his new position as the leader of Mensa, Azai Fasiel give him Negaret (giant drum) to Zereit as confirmation and approval as the new and anointed leader of Mensa. A proud new leader came back home and announced his new position through the sound of the Negaret in a place called Chomerat and request of the people to come out and meet him and acknowledge his new position. Zereit requested with jubilation the people to accompany him as the new shum to Gheleb. The self-declared Shum of Mensa without the approval of the people came to unexpected big surprise. News reached the elderly of Mensa and that dismayed and angered them. The elderly went to him, met him, slapped him in his face, shackled him and took the Negaret a way and gave it to Oakbamicael. The rational of demoting Zereit and choosing Oakbamicael was because Oakbamicael was the older of the two and they said deserve the position of Shum.

After a year-long imprisonment of Zereit his brothers stole him from his confined place and let him free. Zereit left town and settled in Zawel. Immediately, Oakbamical went to Azai Fasiel and presented his case that he is the oldest and has the respect of his people and asked Azai Fassil why he gave the title of shum to Zereit. Azai Fassil told him that Zereit misrepresented himself as the deserving one for the position and reversed his decision. Azai Fassil told Shum Oakbamical to keep the Negaret and gave him a sword and confirmed him as the new leader (shum) of Mensa. After that the rest of Bet shaken left the area and moved to Zawel, and other places such as Seleba, Hamhem and Algeata. Then the two Mensa split was pounced openly. Those who stayed in the area under the leadership of Oakbamicel was called Bet Abrehe and those who moved called Bet Shehaken. Bet Abrehe and Bet shaken after a long fight and rivalry,

a good men reconciled the two brothers and settled their differences and lived in peacefully ever after.

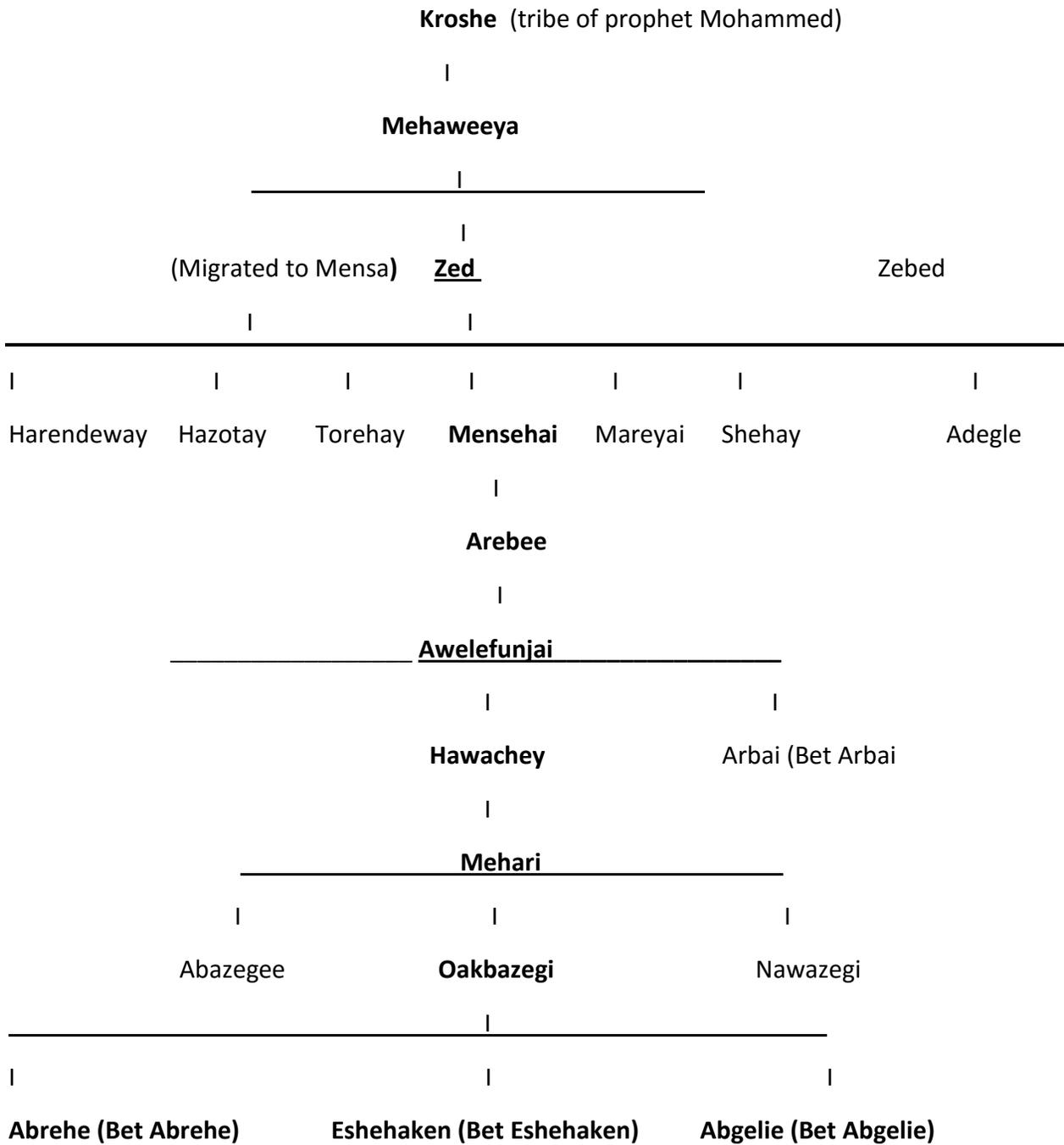
Life Style of Mensa:

In general it safe to say that Mensa are nomadic farmers and cattle herders. The life style I would say did hardly changed until today except for those who took advantage of the Mission work in the form of converting to Christianity which is a way to education and a new better life style. Regardless of lack of education in the mass, there is great ingenuity, wit and wisdom among young and elderly in the greater Mensa.

Even though our ancestors came from the other side of the sea and classified as white race, at present Mensa are classified as black people who live in black continent and accepted their race, identity with pride and honor as black people.

In conclusion here is the big family tree below of Mensa whom I adapted it from Fith Mehari to see where our ancestors came from and how it descended down to our present grandparent.

Mensa's Family Tree from Kroshe to Abrehe, Eshaken and Abgelie.



Until I see you on my next publication be safe and stay healthy.

Disclaimer: *The significant part of this essay is compiled from Fith Mehai. The Author does not deserve a credit of adding any new history to the existing one. However, he takes a full responsibility in summarizing, editing, and analyzing the facts and redirecting some ideas based on the history of Mensa.*