

They are machete-like and have again undecorated wooden grips. Me'en blacksmiths admit that they cannot or do not make beautifully decorated grips.<sup>8</sup>



Fig. 2: *wolit*

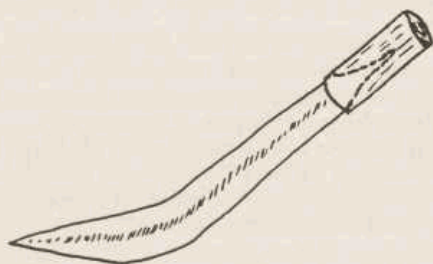


Fig. 3: *ma:ša*

(3) The spear (*ber*) may be a traditional form, also common in the days of pastoralism. It is used in defense (or attack) against people or wild animals. The complete spear is about 2 to 2.30 m. long.



Fig. 4: *ber*

(4) A typical cutting instrument found among the Me'en and various neighbouring peoples (e.g., Dizi) is the *wole* (Me'en term), a cut-



Fig. 5: *wole*

<sup>8</sup> The Me'en have their own blacksmiths. They do not form, as in traditional Amhara society, a despised caste. The craft was learned from surrounding non-Me'en groups, among them the Dizi: the Me'en probably conquered the Geša area (with iron mines) from them (cf. Haberland 1983: 253).

ting instrument used for grass, tobacco, sugar cane, bush, etc. (cf. Haberland 1981: 126 and fig. 5.2).

It is perhaps remarkable that the Me'en never took over the plough, which they saw used by the Amhara. This may be related to differences in social organization among both groups. The Amhara unit of production is the household. The male household head does most of the agricultural work (clearing, ploughing) himself. The individualist character of Amhara society has often been emphasized. The Me'en, on the other hand, knew more patterns of collective work. Clearing, burning, and planting took place by members of a localized descent group. Collective effort (accompanied by beer servings) was the norm. The planting of the seeds was done with the digging stick (or *bango*), made of wood. The scarcity of plough oxen may also have inhibited the widespread use of the plough.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

A survey of other material objects (pottery, clothing) would also reveal the far-reaching extent of 'acculturation' of the sedentary Me'en population to an agricultural way of life similar in many respects to that of their sedentary neighbours. In the domain of religion and ritual (cf. Abbink 1986b) there is also a notable similarity. The few indications given here – to be pursued in further field research – attest to the process of socio-economic and thus also ethnic change among the populations in the area. From the literature and from a knowledge of their core values it is clear that a large part of the population of the western Me'en consisted of (former<sup>9</sup>) pastoralists. They started moving to their present location some 150 years ago, already before the Amhara conquest of the region after 1897. Although not enough (ethno)historical data are yet available on the subject, it can be surmised that the Amhara and the Me'en (then composed of various different groups, also conquered ones) became competitors for a common economic-ecological niche in these southern highlands. The Me'en (designated as 'Tishena' by the Amhara) resisted the northerners for some 25 years, but were gradually sub-

<sup>9</sup> It can certainly be assumed that Me'en groups coming from the east side of the Omo river brought their cattle along; but most of it was probably lost due to disease – the area (above 1000 m!) is infested by the tsé-tsé fly (*Glossina*; various species).