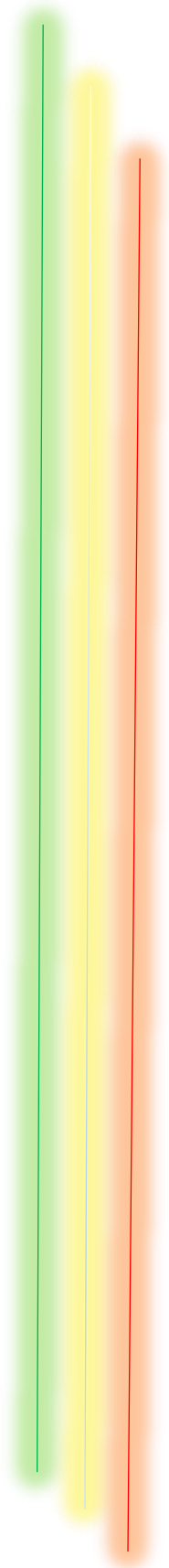




# **ETHIOPIA**

## **A brush with History**

By  
Ian von Heintze



**For Kim**

Having spent just under a decade of my formative years growing up in Ethiopia, I returned to London to start a career with the Police in 1973. My step-father, mother and sister stayed behind in the capital – Addis Ababa, where they remained for a further ten years. Within months of my leaving, the Emperor Haile Selassie – whom my sister and I had met in 1968, was overthrown and the country descended into revolution and eventually into civil war.

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## INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia is once more in the news. The developing situation in the Tigre region of the north of the country – where centuries of turmoil need to be peeled back if one is to get at the true picture of what is happening today, has coaxed me to re-visit some of Ethiopia's history in order to make sense of it.

To my shame, I really wasn't paying enough attention when I lived there between 1966 and 1973. As a youngster, I was far too interested in preparing for, taking part-in and then recovering from the many expeditions and camping trips, regularly travelling into Ethiopia's un-charted wilderness with the school scout troop. It is no surprise whatsoever that my attempt to get to the bottom of the complexities of Ethiopia's current problems and to better understand her journey from 'Empire' of the 1970's to its present-day status of 'Federated Democratic People's Republic', requires me to take a crash course in history. This short book – that should only take about an hour to read, is borne out of the copious 'notes to self' made during my recent foray into Ethiopia's past; I have decided to save for posterity, as an unpublished book, this very brief outline of some of the key moments and personalities that are instrumental in the country's story. The process has helped me to fit together at least a few of the jigsaw pieces belonging to the broad picture of the puzzle – that is Ethiopian history<sup>i</sup>.

In catching up with modern historical accounts of the events that pushed Ethiopia into revolution in 1974 and later into civil war in 1991, I had to de-clutter much of what I was reading; At one end of the narration of the tale, Ethiopian history can all too often to be shrouded in the seductive mysticism of enduring myth and legend. At the other end – that of the academic historical survey, it is almost impossible to read a work in one go. In both cases I found it necessary to revert to a number of sources along the

way, in order to either disentangle the distortion by fantasy, or the abstruseness of the true historical picture that I was so keen to try and understand.

I believe it is no secret that a thoroughly modern and up-to-date, all-embracing review of Ethiopian history is still eagerly awaited. For the purpose of my own research, I have relied rather heavily upon three existing studies of Ethiopia in order to reproduce this very brief chronology of some of the country's history: I started by referring to a work by John Markakis, *Ethiopia – Anatomy of a Traditional Polity*, taken from the Oxford Series of Studies of African Affairs; secondly, I turned to a relatively new work by Edmond Keller – professor of Political Science at the University of California (*Revolutionary Ethiopia* published by Indiana University Press in 1991), and thirdly, I have used some information from what is considered, by some, to be one of the defining – if rather dated, evaluations of Ethiopia by Margery Pelham (*The Government of Ethiopia* published by Faber & Faber in 1969). With the help of books from my own collection and a little research on the internet, I have been able to cobble together this short, general history.

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS

In the summer of 1966, I was nine years old. One sunny, summer afternoon I recall leaving the house in Muswell Hill in North London – together with my mother, Theresa and sister – Fifi, about to embark on what was surely to be for any children of our age, the most exciting, interesting and life-changing of journeys. When my mother closed the front door for the last time to the house where we had been living since 1957, and as we opened the doors of the car parked in the road outside – filled with suitcases, so loomed the beginning of a new chapter in all of our lives. We were about to fly-off to Africa and to a new life in Ethiopia, one of the oldest, most fascinating, mysterious and enchanting countries in the world.

A few months beforehand, Witold – our stepfather, had negotiated (through Polish contacts he had made in London) a permanent contract with the Ethiopian Ministry of Finance. As one of three financial advisers from Britain to the Ministry, he would work closely with the office of the Finance Minister – Ato Yilma Deressa. This arrangement to supply aid in this way to Ethiopia dated back to Agreements made between the British and Ethiopian Governments during the 1930's. Although he went on to hold this post for eighteen years, half way through his term as the first signs of political unrest in the country started to appear, these would force Witold to review his contractual arrangements. From 1969 onwards, his later tenure would be managed under the auspices of the United Nations Development Programme (U.N.D.P.)<sup>ii</sup>.

Returning to 1966, Witold had already moved into an apartment in Addis, to pave the way for us to join him there. I'm afraid that at the time I didn't quite grasp the enormity of what was going on and recall only the most insignificant detail of our moving home.

To my mother's credit though, all the prior packing, organisation, planning, preparations, inoculation and general arrangements to get two children and her own life mobilised for the move abroad, had been carried out with next to no fuss whatsoever. I seem to recall the red, leather-smelling upholstery trim of my uncle's Humber Hawk in which he drove us to the airport and then later, the reek of the aviation fuel as we crossed the tarmac at Heathrow airport to board the steps of the ALITALIA Boeing 727, for the first leg of the flight. At the time there were no direct connections between Britain and Ethiopia and the journey involved a change of aircraft – onto an Ethiopian Airlines Boeing 707 jet in either Frankfurt or Rome, with subsequent refuelling stops at Cairo or Khartoum prior to eventual arrival at Bole (pronounced '*Bolay*') International Airport, on the southern outskirts of Addis Ababa.



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**Ethiopian Airlines Boeing 707, on the tarmac at Bole Airport  
Addis Ababa c1968**



©Ian von Heintze 1967

**Above, image of the original Bole International  
Airport Terminal  
Addis Ababa c1967**



©Panoramio

**‘Ethiopian’ (the national carrier) new fleet of Boeing aircraft on the tarmac at the new Bole International Terminal Building c2007**



©ethioports.com

**New terminal building, Bole International Airport  
Addis Ababa in 2020**

The journey from London to Addis can be a long one, even by today's standards. Allowing for transfers, flight-time and inevitable delays, in the 60's the journey could – and often did, take more than twenty hours (it is only seven hours direct flying time today). Needless to say, my mother, sister and I made it unscathed and on eventual arrival at our flat in Addis it seemed that I needed to sleep for days – quite literally. The higher altitude had taken its toll; Addis Ababa sits on a plateau at about 7,726 feet (2,355 metres) and it took me a little time to adjust. I remember being woken a full day or so after our arrival by the sound of rain. Not rain as I knew it, rather the sound of a torrential clattering as I had never heard before. This was perfectly normal for the time of year – as we had arrived during Ethiopia's rainy season that lasts roughly between June and September. The bedroom in our flat looked out over one of many sprawling villages that were dotted throughout the capital, frequently punctured by abundantly tall, swaying eucalyptus trees. The sky provided a menacingly dark grey background but the sun was shining directly onto the wet leaves of the trees which accentuated their lusciously green colour. The 'tukul' huts as they are known and more conventional 'chicca'- covered dwellings (mud-huts) of the village, were painted white but were encrusted with a brown, two-foot high band around the base, where mud splattered continuously when pounded by the rain. All the lodgings in the village were covered with corrugated iron roofs and the teeming rain with intermittent hail, crashing down and bouncing off such a huge sea of metal, really did make an impressive sound. I took a photograph – my first one ever, from the bedroom window and the impression remains with me to this day.

And so, started our new life. We were the recently arrived ‘ferangi’ (Amharic for ‘foreigners’ - Amharic was the language spoken in much of the region surrounding the capital) and the new occupants of a mezzanine apartment on the first and second floors of a block of eighty-two flats, known colloquially in as ‘semania hulet appartama’ (‘82 Apartment building’). The development, built in 1962 to house visiting foreigners and government employees, was located in Menelik II Avenue on the eastern side of the capital, immediately adjacent to what would become one of the capital’s landmarks - that of the future Hilton Hotel (only a building-site at the time and eventually officially opened in 1969, three years after our arrival).



©Zalman Enav & Michael Tedros Architects

**82 Apartment Building, Menelik II Avenue, Addis Ababa c1962**



©Ian von Heintze 1966

**Above, my first view of the village from the bedroom of 82 Apartment Building, a day or so after arrival in Addis Ababa in 1966**



©Ian von Heintze 1968

**Fifi and 'Nebritu' in the car-park of 82 Apartment Building, Addis Ababa, 1968. The unfinished Hilton Hotel is in the background**

**ADDIS ABABA SKYLINE**  
**LATE 60's & EARLY 70's**



© UNPhoto/Yutaka Negata

**This is an aerial picture of *Africa Hall*, located on the eastern side of the capital outskirts. The photograph also shows an adjacent building - the *Africa Star Building*, from which I took the series of five panoramic images reproduced on the pages that follow, looking out over the capital's skyline in a westerly direction. The arrows indicate the rough direction in which each image was taken.**

**Africa Hall is another of the capital's landmarks and permanent headquarters of UNECA – The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.**

**The images on the next few pages give an impression of the capital's skyline during the late 60's and early 70's and it is worth comparing with the more recent image of Addis Ababa, included towards the end of this book.**



©Ian von Heintze 1970

**(Image 1 of 5) The roof of Africa Hall is in the foreground, image taken facing towards the south-west**



©Ian von Heintze 1970

**(Image 2 of 5) View towards the south-west**



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**(Image 3 of 5) facing due west. Viewed with a magnifying glass, two sentries of the Imperial Guard can be seen on duty at one of the main entrances to the Jubilee palace (known as the ‘Gibbi’), signifying that the Emperor was in residence.**



©Ian von Heintze 1970

'A'

**(Image 4 of 5) Menelik II Avenue, with arrow pointing to the Ministry of the Interior building.  
In the far distance is the Municipal City Hall Building ('A')**



©Ian von Heintze 1970

**(Image 5 of 5) Towards the North-west, Menelik II Avenue, with arrow pointing to the 82 Appt. Building.**

**The edge of the Hilton Hotel is just visible to the right of the picture and the hotel grounds take up most of the shot.**

**The large white building on the left of the image, was the Mapping and Geography Institute. In the distance, are the foothills of Mount *Entoto* (3,200 m).**

**The road in the foreground is *Josif Tito* Street.**

## **NATIONAL FLAG AND MAPS OF ETHIOPIA**

**ETHIOPIAN NATIONAL FLAG**

©2020Flagsimporter.com

**Above, Imperial flag used between 1941 and 1974**

©commsmea.com

**National flag, officially adopted in 1996 and used to present-day**

(NOT to be confused with the national flags of: Bolivia, Myanmar, Ghana and Lithuania – that are made up of the same horizontally arranged colours (red, yellow and green)).

**Bolivia****Myanmar****Ghana****Lithuania**

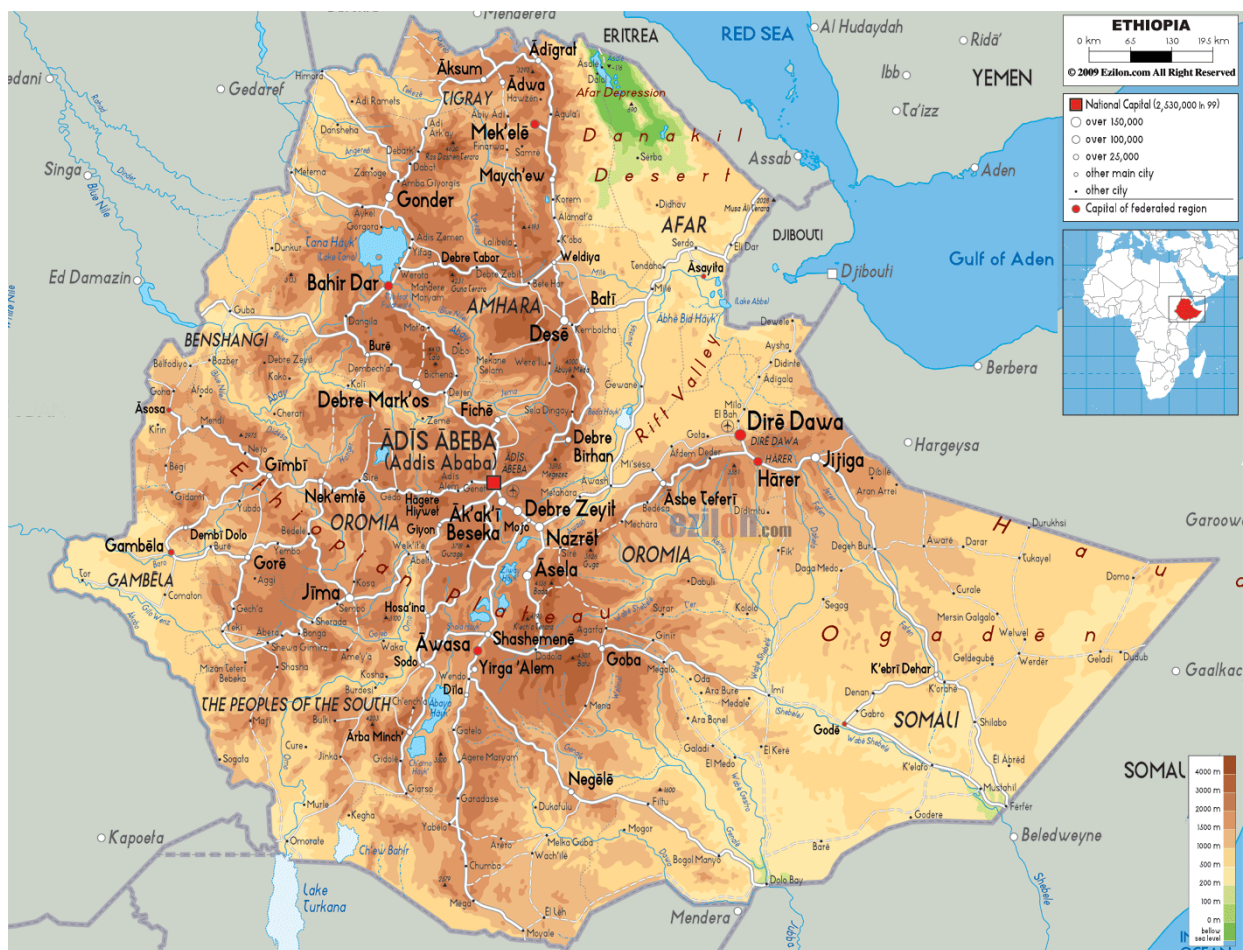
**RELIEF MAP OF ETHIOPIA IN 1973**  
**(showing detail of the country's former 14 provinces)**



©mapsland.com

## RELIEF MAP OF ETHIOPIA IN 2020

(Following introduction of new ethnically-based administrative regions introduced in 1996 and after restoration of Eritrea as an independent state in 2004)



© WordPress.com

## **HISTORICAL TIMELINE<sup>iii</sup>**

**2<sup>nd</sup> century CE**

Semitic people from the Arabian Peninsula are believed to establish the kingdom of Aksum.

**4<sup>th</sup> century CE**

Coptic Christianity is introduced to the region via Egypt.

**1530-31**

Ahmad Gran, a Muslim leader, invades Ethiopia and gains control of most of the territory.

**1818-68**

Lij Kasa conquers Amhara, Gojjam, Tigre, and Shoa.

**1855**

Lij Kasa is renamed Emperor Tewodros II.

**1868**

Emperor Tewodros II is defeated by British expeditionary force. He commits suicide rather than risk capture at the battle of Maqdala.

**1872**

Tigrayan chieftain becomes Yohannes IV.

**1889**

Yohannes IV is killed while fighting Mahdist forces. He is succeeded by the king of Shoa, who becomes Emperor Menelik II.

Menelik II signs a bilateral friendship treaty with Italy at Wichale. Italy now considers Ethiopia to be one of its protectorates.

Addis Ababa is named the capital of Ethiopia.

**1895**

Ethiopia is invaded by Italian forces.

**1896**

Italian forces are defeated by the Ethiopians at the battle of Adowa. The treaty of Wichale is annulled; Italy recognises Ethiopia's independence but retains control of Eritrea.

**1913**

Menelik dies and is succeeded by his grandson, Lij Yasu.

**1916**

Lij Yasu is deposed and is succeeded by Menelik's daughter, Zawditu – who rules through the regent, Ras Tafari Makonnen.

**1923**

Ethiopia becomes a member of the League of Nations (which converts to the United Nations Organisation in 1945).

**1930**

Empress Zawditu dies, her successor – Ras Tafari Makonnen, becomes Emperor Haile Selassie Ist.

**1935**

Italy invades Ethiopia.

**1936**

Italians capture Addis Ababa, Haile Selassie goes into exile.

**1941**

With the help of British and Commonwealth soldiers, Ethiopian resistance fighters defeat the Italians. Haile Selassie returns to Addis Ababa to reclaim the throne.

**1942**

First Anglo-Ethiopian Agreement, Proclamation of abolition of slavery.

**1943**

Council of Ministers established

Revolt in Tigre

**1945**

Establishment of Ethiopian Airlines, the national airline

**1948**

Establishment of the Ministry of Health

**1951**

University College of Addis Ababa opened.

**1952**

The United Nations federates Eritrea with Ethiopia following an earlier resolution in 1950.

**1954**

British withdrawal from the Ogaden region.

**1955**

Emperor Haile Selassie's Silver Jubilee.

**1956**

Ethiopia enters a team for the first time into the Olympic Games held in Melbourne.

**1957**

Death of Emperor's son, Prince Makonnen.

Promulgation of the new Penal Code.

Opening of the first Ethiopian Parliament.

**1958**

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa established in Addis Ababa.

**1960**

Attempted coup d'état in Addis Ababa.

Abebe Bikila wins Olympic games marathon in Rome. (Also wins again four years later in 1964 at the Games in Tokyo).

**1962**

Haile Selassie annexes Eritrea and claims the territory as an Ethiopian province.

Death of Empress Menen.

Complete integration of Eritrea into Ethiopia.

**1963**

The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) holds its first conference in Addis Ababa.

**1964**

Border skirmishes between Ethiopia and Somalia: mediation by Sudan.

**1965**

Queen Elizabeth II's visit to Ethiopia.

**1966**

Aklilu Habte Wold made Prime Minister.

United States supplies super-sonic jet aircraft.

President De Gaulle visits Ethiopia and Djibouti.

Continuing Somali border troubles.

**1967**

Brigadier Tadesse Biru tried for plot against the state.

Tension with Somalia.

Disturbances in Djibouti followed by referendum to remain under France.

French Somaliland re-named Territory of the Afars and Isas.

President Kenyatta visits Ethiopia.

**1968**

Shah of Iran visits Ethiopia.

Mamo Wolde wins the marathon at the Mexican Olympic Games.

**1971**

President Al-Nimeiry visits Ethiopia.

**1972**

Visit of Liberian President, William Tolbert to Ethiopia.

**1973-74**

President Pompidou visits Ethiopia.  
Approximately 200,000 people perish in Tigre and Wollo provinces due to famine.

**1974**

Haile Selassie is deposed in a coup d'état led by Tefari Benti.

**1975**

Haile Selassie dies in mysterious circumstances whilst in custody

**1977**

Tefari Benti is assassinated and replaced by Mengistu Haile Mariam, head of the *Derg* – a pro-Soviet military regime.

**1977-1979**

Mengistu Haile Mariam orders the death of thousands of government opponents. The Tigrayan Peoples' Liberation Front starts a war to obtain regional autonomy.

**1977**

Ethiopia's Ogaden region is invaded by Somalia.

The Soviet Union and Cuba offer Ethiopia assistance and help defeat Somali forces.

**1980**

Miruts Yifter wins gold medals at 5,000m and 10,000m events at the Moscow Olympics.

**1985**

Western countries send food aid to stave off the worst famine in 10 years. Thousands of people are forced to resettle from Eritrea and Tigre.

**1987**

With a new constitution, Ethiopians elect Mengistu Haile Mariam to serve as their president.

**1988**

Ethiopia signs a peace treaty with Somalia.

**1991**

Rebel forces of The Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and Tigre Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF) seize Addis Ababa and Mengistu Haile Mariam flees the country.

Eritrea establishes its own provisional government ahead of seeking full independence.

**1992**

The remains of Haile Selassie are discovered.

Derartu Tulu wins gold medal in the women's' 10,000m Olympic event at Barcelona (and again in 2000 in Sydney).

**1993**

Eritrea gains independence.

**1994**

Ethiopia's new constitution divides the country into regions based on ethnicity. Over the next year, Transitional Government replaced by Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

**1995**

Meles Zenawi becomes prime minister.

The EPRDF, a coalition comprising Amhara, Oromo and Tigre groups becomes ruling party. Other political parties include, The Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (CEDF), The United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) and The Somali Peoples Democratic Party (SPDP).

**1996**

Haile Gebresalassie wins gold medal for 10,000m (and again in 2000 in Sydney) and Fatuma Roba wins the women's' marathon at Atlanta Olympics.

**1998 -1999**

Border dispute between Ethiopian and Eritrea escalates into war.

**2000**

Three years of drought leave eight million Ethiopians facing starvation.

Haile Selassie's remains officially interred in Addis Ababa's Trinity Cathedral.

Ethiopia and Eritrea sign a peace accord in Algeria. Prisoners taken during the war and displaced persons are permitted to return to their homes.

Milon Wolde wins the 5,000m at Sydney Olympics, Gezanhegne Abera wins the marathon.

**2001**

Ethiopian withdrawal from Eritrea is completed under UN supervision.

Meles Zenawi announces the foiling of a coup by a dissident group of the Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front.

Thousands of demonstrators clash with police in Addis Ababa over demands for political and academic freedom.

Intelligence and Security chief Kinfu Gebre-Medhin, a key ally of President Zenawi, is assassinated in Addis Ababa.

**2002**

Ethiopia and Eritrea accept a common border although disputes continue over the town of Badme.

**2004**

Ethnic unrest breaks out in the remote western region of Gambella with the death of 200 people. Large numbers of people are forced to flee.

A resettlement programme is introduced to move more than two million people out of the Northern Ethiopian highlands that has been experiencing a severe drought.

Ethiopia accepts, in principle, the UN boundary commission's ruling on its border with Eritrea.

Kenenisa Bekele wins 10,000m race at Athens Olympics.

**2005**

A Human Rights organisation accuses the Ethiopian army of wide-scale atrocities against the Anuak people of Gambella.

**2005**

An obelisk looted from Aksum in 1937 is returned from Rome to Ethiopia.

During national elections, protesters accuse the ruling party of electoral fraud; over 30 people are gunned-down in Addis Ababa during clashes in the streets. Thousands of dissenters are detained during the following months.

Amid reports of increased troop activity along the Ethio/Eritrean border, the UN threatens both countries with sanctions unless they return to the 2000 peace plan.

An international commission based in the Hague rules that Eritrea violated international law in its attack on Ethiopia in 1998.

**2006**

Ethiopian troops enter Somalia to oust al-Shabab Islamists controlling large parts of the country.

Exiled dictator – Mengistu Haile Mariam is convicted in absentia of genocide and condemned to death.

**2008**

Kenenisa Bekele wins 5,000 and 10,000m and Tirunesh Dibaba wins the women's events at the same distance at Beijing Olympics

**2012**

Prime Minister Meles Zenawi dies and is replaced by Hailemariam Desalegn.

**2016**

Government announces state of emergency following months of violent anti-government protests.

**2018**

Hailemariam Desalegn resigns and is replaced as Prime Minister by Abiy-Ahmed, an ethnic Oromo. Becomes the leader of the ruling EPRDF party and launches a comprehensive programme of political reform.

Thousands of political prisoners are released and state of emergency is lifted.

Ethiopia and Eritrea announce their war is over and Ethiopian troops are withdrawn from the disputed area.

**2018**

Government signs a peace deal with the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) ending a 34-year armed rebellion.

Parliament elects Sahle-Work Zewde as the first female president since the reign of Empress Zawditu in 1930

**2019**

Prime Minister merges ethnically-based parties that formed the governing EPRDF coalition into The Prosperity Party.

Prime Minister awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to bring peace to the long-standing dispute with Eritrea.

Army Chief – Seare Mekonnen and Amhara State Governor, Ambachew Makonnen killed while putting down a coup attempt against the federal government.

**2020**

Ethiopian national government elections postponed until 2021 due to COVID pandemic.

Tensions increase between the federal government and the Tigre region where a state election takes place anyway but is deemed unconstitutional and illegal. Government send troops to the region following an attack on a military base in Mekelle by rebel members of the Tigre Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF).

Hundreds of People flee the Tigre region to neighbouring Sudan.

TPLF launches rocket attack at airport in *Asmara* in neighbouring Eritrea.

**A BRIEF HISTORY**  
**OF**  
**ETHIOPIA & ITS RULERS**

## PREHISTORY

### **Geographic formation**

Ethiopia stands on rock that is estimated to be 600 million years old. During the Oligocene era of geological chronology (about 20 million years ago) a massive upheaval of the earth shook and lifted the Ethiopian landmass, causing a series of faults through which lava was able to escape. Particularly in the north of the country, the molten rock settled to a thickness of 3,000 metres above sea level, over an area of at least 15,000 square kilometres forming the Simien mountains – one of Africa’s major mountain massifs. The tremendous out-pouring of lava weakened the earth’s crust on such a huge scale across the eastern side of the African continent, that it precipitated a collapse of the land along two faults to create a long and uneven chasm, extending some 6,000 kilometres from Syria, south through Ethiopia and beyond as far as Mozambique. This crevasse became known as the African Rift Valley.

Discoveries of hominids in modern-day Ethiopia have revealed that human ancestors lived in this region of Africa over four million years ago<sup>iv</sup>. It was in the Ethiopian Rift Valley that the human race may indeed have first emerged. Support for this view lies in the discovery at Hadar, in the Afar region of the Awash Valley in 1974, of the bones of the oldest known hominid (erect walking human ancestor). They were the remains of a woman believed to be 3.2 million years old weighing perhaps only 60 pounds. Known internationally as ‘Lucy’ she is called ‘Berqenash’ in Ethiopia. Additionally, stone tools unearthed in Gona, Eastern Ethiopia in 1992, are amongst the oldest such implements to have been found anywhere in the world.



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**Aerial view of a section of the Ethiopian Simien mountain range, part of the African Rift Valley in the north of the country**

## ANCIENT CIVILISATION

Although historians have different views about the true origins of the earliest people to colonise Ethiopia, there is evidence pointing to a settlement in the northern mountains of the country, (roughly covering an area in present-day Eritrea and the northern Ethiopian province of Tigre), possibly originating from Arabia. A people of Semitic Sabaean origin are believed to have crossed the Red Sea from south-west Arabia to lay down roots in the Ethiopian highlands, and the civilization here went on to become an amalgam of inhabitants of Cushite and Semite origin. Archaeological findings from relics of Sabaean settlements date the first, verifiable realm of significance and forerunner of modern Ethiopia to make historical entry into the ancient world, as the Kingdom of Aksum, originating and rising to power roughly between 80 BCE and 825 CE. Claims of the existence of an earlier Ethiopia are considered to be mythical<sup>v</sup> but this possibility is still being researched.

The word 'Ethiopia' – (or 'Aethiopes') in ancient Greek writings may be very loosely translated from ancient Greek as 'burnt faces' and is thought to have been assigned to that region of the Horn of Africa – known as Cush (and later called 'Nubia' by the Romans), roughly today's southern Egyptian borders with the Sudan. The area was considered for a long time in ancient Greece to be the frontier of civilisation. Very approximately, during the fourth century CE, immigrant Syrian monks who came to the region are thought to have ascribed the name 'Ethiopia' to the ancient Aksumite empire during the period of conversion of Aksumite kings to Christianity. Its rulers and clerks would later use these references to Ethiopia in ancient and holy writings, entering the name into the canons and chronicles during the centuries that followed. Unlike other cultural imports which later disappeared with the demise of the Aksumite civilisation, the new religion was to take root and grow to become the dominant

cultural phenomenon in the Ethiopian highlands, the only place on the African continent where Christianity managed to survive as a truly indigenous creed (other than the Copt community of Egypt, with which Ethiopian Christianity is closely associated).

Although the exact dates of the immigration are not known, two Semitic Hamarite tribes living on the opposite coast on the Red Sea bequeathed their names to both the later name of the country and to its ancient language; The name of a 'Hibsh' or 'Habashat' People, was later translated into Latin, and becomes 'Abyssinia'<sup>vi</sup>. This name for Ethiopia became an exonym (an external name for a geographical place) and was assigned to this region of Africa up to the nineteenth century – although the people native to Ethiopia have always called themselves 'Ethiopians' and generally use it to refer to the Christian population of the ancient provinces of Ethiopia. Secondly, the 'Ag'az' or Agaziyan tribe gave its name to the Semitic language of 'Ge'ez' which was developed by the emigrants to become the classical tongue of the first kingdom in Ethiopia and into which language the Greek Bible was later translated. From then onwards, travellers and writers could take their choice between the words 'Ethiopia' or 'Abyssinia' when referring to the mountain kingdom. The Anglo-Saxon countries generally chose the first form and Latin writers the second. In 1941, however, following the re-conquest of the country from the Italians, The Emperor (Haile Selassie I) decreed officially that the country's name was to be Ethiopia<sup>vii</sup>.

The history of this ancient kingdom of Aksum is drawn from a number of sources<sup>viii</sup>. There are fragmentary references from the literature of the early centuries together with a handful of coins – that although may not always be totally decipherable from Greek, are divisible from their symbols of the crescent and the disk or the cross, into a

pagan or a Christian period. Thirdly, there are legendary lists of the earliest kings, albeit unfortunately full of discrepancies and of course there are archaeological and inscribed remains of the Aksumite kingdom itself, that are still evident today. In this ancient site of Aksum today there are clearly visible broken stones and remains of ruins and other architectural structures scattered over a wide area together with great monolithic steles, some of which are still standing and measure 21 metres in height above ground. The origins of the steles are vague and their original purpose inexplicable, although their construction attest to a technical skill of an indigenous civilisation which apparently owes little or nothing to the great cultures of Egypt, Greece or Rome. Despite the information gathered from inscriptions that have been deciphered from some of the Aksumite artefacts, it has been virtually impossible to place accurate dates onto the references translated or indeed to be exact about the names of the kings to whom they referred.



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**One of several steles still standing and dating to the first century CE in the vicinity of the ancient city of Aksum, Northern Ethiopia**

Authorities on the subject have differed and dates of the steles fall between the first and fourth centuries; the Italian Scholar Conti Rossini inclines to the view that one of the earliest kings may have been King Aphilas and the date of the inscriptions, between 277 CE and 290 CE. Other engravings found upon the stone panels of the royal thrones and etched onto a stele at Aksum, evidently take historians onto more firm historical ground, revealing chronicles of long military campaigns written in Greek, Sabean and in Ge'ez and relating to the reign of King Aezanas between 325 CE and 350 CE. Some justification is given to the inference by these inscriptions that not only a new religion had already penetrated the kingdom but that in years to come, through the story of the life of Frumentius<sup>ix</sup>, the Ethiopian church would later align itself to the Coptic Christian Church of Egypt, Syrian and Armenia.

## THE MIDDLE AGES

In the fourth and fifth centuries, a theological controversy (The 'Great Schism') emerged that was to split the Christian Church in two, over the mystery of the Incarnation and the true nature of Christ. The Greek and Latin (Roman) branches of the Church held that both the divine and the human spirit had been brought together in the person of Christ but these were not united; the belief maintained that Christ's physical, human body was just like everyone else's body but his spiritual nature made him unique. Representatives of the Syrian, Armenian and Egyptian branches of the Church (known as Coptic Christians) on the other hand, argued that Christ had but one true nature, a divine one; Christ's human body was therefore different from other human bodies. Although the Ethiopian Church took little part in the controversy, it followed its parent church and identified with the Egyptian 'Monophysite' Christian point of view.

During the middle of the sixth century another king emerges – Ellesbaas, who also appears to be an ally of Christianity. Conditions were said to be unsettled in Arabia and along the Eritrean coast in particular during this period, and the Aksumites began to lose influence along the Red Sea as the power of the Sassanid Persians eventually appropriated Arabia for their empire.

Very loosely around this time it is believed that Jewish settlers escaping persecution had crossed the Red Sea and settled in the kingdom of Aksum. Hebraic beliefs were deeply implanted upon the Hamitic descendants of these settlers who would become known as the Falashas.

By the eighth century, the Red sea had become a Muslim-dominated channel. High up in the Ethiopian mountains, however, the Aksumite kingdom remained protected

and untouched in its isolation from the west, from the civilised world and from the rise of Islam for another eight centuries. That said, the Ethiopian rulers were not idle and conducted campaigns further into modern-day Eritrea and Tigre and slowly spread their influence southward over an open frontier, absorbing Hamitic and Agaw-speaking peoples along the way. This great territorial expansion and the incorporation of a large number of ethnic groups which now inhabit the larger part of the state collectively outnumbering the empire builders, would have a profound effect on the country's history<sup>x</sup>. During the late tenth century, a Muslim dynasty began to dominate the Dahlak islands in the Red Sea, off the coastal town of Massawa. A number of Muslim states also began to set themselves up over what is now southern Danakil and northern Somali country.

During the middle of the twelfth century, by which time the integration of the Agaw had progressed far enough to make it possible for an Agaw dynasty, named Zagwe, to come into prominence, set its power base around the principal town of Lalibela in north-central Ethiopia – in the district of Lasta (today the Ethiopian Semien Wollo Zone, located between the provinces of Tigre and Shoa). Native chronicles give the Zagwe 133 years of power between the eleventh century and 1270, and its most striking memorial is the group of churches at Lalibela cut away from solid rock and then hollowed out (named after one of the Zagwe rulers – King Lalibela (c1185-1225)).

In 1270 a rival to the Zagwe Kings, Yekuno Amlak (1270-1285), who claimed to be of a dynasty in the province of Shoa and that had truly descended from the biblical line of Solomon (see below), seized the throne. He appears to have been the first Christian ruler over the whole of Ethiopia. Chronicles appearing from this time reveal Ethiopia's protracted and savage conflict with its Muslim neighbours in the south-east that would last for centuries.



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**One of eleven, twelfth-century Rock-hewn church at Lalibela, north-central Ethiopia**



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It is perhaps convenient to pause at this point and to explain the adoption into Ethiopian history of the legend and myth that asserts, quite convincingly, that the descendants of the biblical King Solomon were somehow later represented by the line of Ethiopian Kings – even though it is not apparently even certain whether the line of the dynasty of the Late Emperor Haile Selassie Ist can be traced back further than the thirteenth century<sup>xi</sup>. The alleged connection between Ethiopian Emperors and the royal House of Solomon purportedly brought them into a blood relationship with Christ and the House of David, thus giving the emperor and the rulers before him, a sacred supremacy in the minds of their Ethiopian subjects. This claim is however considered to be unhistorical and the ensuing legend is described as a most bold and ingenious invention<sup>xii</sup>. In spite of the fact that the evidence is apparently presented by chronicles imbued with the desire to affirm this sacred and politically essential continuity, scholarly examination of the genealogies reportedly reveals at least two very uncertain links in the chain later in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. The lavish concubinage of the many princely houses in Ethiopia, the frequency of divorce, and the apparent tolerant attitude towards illegitimacy – taken together, are cited as making the precise tracing of a dynasty virtually impossible. The legend has been nonetheless used so effectively and manipulated by Ethiopian rulers with such conviction over the centuries, that it is today profoundly entrenched and referred-to with much frequency in records of Ethiopia's history.

The fourteenth century in Ethiopia was apparently one of great literary activity in which the Ethiopians added much to their somewhat meagre literature<sup>xiii</sup> most of which had been imported. Not only were translations now made from Arabic and

Coptic works, but a few original books of devotion and chronicles of the kingdom began to be written. It was at this time, from 1314 to 1322, that the myth of the descent of the Ethiopian kings from Solomon and the Queen of Sheba was committed to writing in Ge'ez in the characteristic work entitled *Kebre Negast*, 'The Glory of the Kings'. Believed to have been written by six Tigrayan clerics, in one of the 117 chapters of this book the Queen of Sheba – an Ethiopian queen, travelled to visit king Solomon with whom she had a son, Menelik I. The latter, upon coming of age returned to see his father and purportedly stole from him the Ark of the Covenant, which he brought back to Ethiopia. When the Jews rejected Christ, the legend goes on to explain how the Ethiopian line of kings – and by definition the heirs of David, therefore became a double sacred dynasty.

Returning to the present chronology of Ethiopia's history, it has been said that Ethiopia was cut off from the world from the time of the Muslim advance of the seventh century to the beginning of the sixteenth – some 900 years later. Historians say this is true as a rough generalisation. During the first half of the sixteenth century Ethiopia suffered a devastating invasion led by Ahmad Ibn Ibrahim al Ghazi (1506-43) who became notorious in Ethiopian history as 'Gran'. Setting off on a holy war into Ethiopia from the direction of Harar, the attack would bring chaos to the Christian population as well as subsequent mass conversion to Islam by force. Although Europe at the time was only dimly aware of the existence of a vague region called Ethiopia, rumours of a Christian kingdom were of special interest to the Portuguese as they reached out in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries around the coast of Africa. In 1520 a Portuguese embassy was sent into Ethiopia and following a six-year visit to the

country during which they aided the Ethiopians in repelling the Muslim onslaught, one of the members of the mission (Father Francisco Alvarez) is claimed to have produced one of the best accounts of Ethiopia ever compiled. Describing the country as it was at the end of the Middle Ages, Alvarez's account (later published in Europe in 1540) deals with its institutions on the eve of the Muslim invasion from the east. From the information he recorded, the provinces of Tigre, Amhara, Gojjam and Shoa had all previously taken shape.

The Portuguese adventure in Ethiopia was to have a bitter aftermath. Having helped the Ethiopians to fend off Islam, the Portuguese tried to impose Catholicism on the country, more or less by force. The Ethiopian king became a fugitive in the mountains until 1543, when King Galawdewos (1540-1559), aided by a small Portuguese contingent of soldiers that had survived the earlier Portuguese campaign of aid, was able to regain some control. The Muslim tide ebbed back as quickly as it had come which was fortunate as the Turks now dominated the whole coast line and had completely seized Massawa, cutting Ethiopia off from further external aid from across the Red Sea.

Although King Galawdewos set to work to re-build his own power base and to restore both the ravaged country and its church, he faced the continuing threat from the East and South where a number of Hamitic and largely pagan tribes had collected after migrating from Arabia and the Somali coast. Though they had no unity they were known collectively as the Gallas, or Oromo<sup>xiv</sup>. These warrior tribes would initially raid and rustle to prove themselves before taking longer-distance expeditions and spreading widely into Ethiopia, availing themselves of the collapse of the frontier defences of both Christian and Muslim states.

The Ethiopians were additionally about to face a very different kind of threat to their religious unity. News of their kingdom and of its isolated and heretical church was of the deepest interest to the Jesuit Roman Catholics, now in full vigour of the counter-reformation. Despite many of the accounts of the evangelisation and attempted conversion of Ethiopia to Roman Catholicism being made by the missionaries themselves, historians value the background impressions of Ethiopia's traditions and institutions that are revealed in the priests' chronicles. Arriving in Ethiopia in approximately 1557, the Jesuit priests would face a period of 100 years of theological obstinacy on the part of the Ethiopians and their rulers; King Minas (1559-1563), King Dengel (1563-1596), King Susenyos (1607-1632) and King Fasiladas (1632-1667) were not all converted and the Jesuits were unable in the end to transform the conservative country from its tenacious and ancient faith. During the reign of King Fasiladas, war continued against the Gallas in an attempt to stem the tide of their advance. He was able to restore the great church at Aksum, partially destroyed by the earlier Muslim campaign and the quasi-nomadic mode of life customarily led by Ethiopian emperors, was abandoned in favour of his court coming to rest at a fixed site – that of Gondar, in the northern reaches of Lake Tana. Gondar became the most important city in Ethiopia until the founding of Addis Ababa at the close of the nineteenth century. From his capital, he was able to eliminate the catholic influence in Ethiopia by expelling the Jesuits from the domain.



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**Above, part of the palace at Gondar built in 17<sup>th</sup> century**



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**Map of Ethiopia showing the predominantly Oromo - speaking region**

## THE 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

Looking away from Ethiopia, a wealth of knowledge about her was by now available to read in Europe. Important books about the country were written by the Portuguese in 1540, 1660 and 1667. The first serious attempt to write a history of the country was made in 1681 by Hiob Ludof<sup>fxv</sup> a work that remained the chief authority for 200 years after its publication. In Rome, by the middle of the sixteenth century there was actually a special college and chapel for Ethiopians at the Vatican. In early 1548, a Latin translation was made of the Ethiopian mode of baptism (and is available today in the Bodleian collection at Oxford University).

Returning to the late seventeenth century, historians are generally agreed that Ethiopia was about to face a long period of decline due the various overwhelming pressures on the country already discussed: the Muslim invasion, religious rebellion and the ceaseless penetration of Ethiopian lands by Galla tribes, all took their toll and a civil war was shortly about to make an impact. The continued advance over the next century into north and central 'Abyssinia' by the militarily inferior Cushitic Oromo people – that could rely upon the might of numbers to win battles, progressively unsettled the stability of the now predominantly, Amhara-led state; the segmented structure of Galla organisation that divided this ethnic group into numerous independent tribes – given to intertribal warfare, ensured that despite their numbers and momentum, the Gala did not seriously endanger the existence of the Ethiopian nation.

During the reign of Iyasu II (1729-1753), Empress Mentewwab (1730-1769) and eventually King Iyoas I (1755-1769), who was himself half Galla, the Amhara nobility was rendered virtually powerless which added to the inevitability of civil war. Most of

the characters of the period come to vivid life in the pages of James Bruce, the Scottish explorer who arrived in 1769 in Gondar<sup>xvi</sup>. He details wars, conspiracies, treacheries and bloody reprisals in his work that becomes almost the only external evidence of events that occurred in Ethiopia during the eighteenth century.

Between 1769 and 1855 Ethiopia is said to pass into a barren and squalid period that is even more confusing than the preceding years and eventually ceased to exist in all but name. The Ethiopian monarchy fell victim to perennial rivalry and to the force of highly virile provincialism, which historically has divided the Christian society into a number of self-conscious provincial units that became mutually antagonistic and stubbornly resistant to the centralised rule represented by the imperial throne. The legacy of the religious upheavals during the seventeenth century and the consequent weakening of the throne, together with a continuing interference of the Galla in political affairs, led to an increasing reliance upon the leadership of the provincial nobility.

## THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

The period that followed became known as “The Era of the Princes” (the ‘Zemene Mesafint’) as Ethiopia regressed into feudal, regionally autonomous compartments, giving rise to provincial dynasties that became embroiled in endless contests for supremacy. The situation would last until the middle of the nineteenth century. Local warlords and the traditional nobility competed amongst themselves for supremacy during a period when Ethiopia was ruled by fifteen different puppet emperors. The main political divisions at the time were the provinces of Tigre, Wag-Lasta, Simen, Begemdir and Gojjam. Only the province of Shoa remained relatively stable and unified. The emperorship changed hands twenty-seven times in seventy-one years, several individuals holding the throne on multiple occasions. Only one emperor – Eqwala Seyon (1801-1818), ruled for more than five years and another – Baeda Mariam III (1797), for only four months. The dominant ruling house of the time was the Yejju, Galla dynasty (of Oromo, and Muslim origin) but in 1855, Ras<sup>xvii</sup> Kassa from the north-west of Ethiopia was crowned the Emperor Tewodros II.

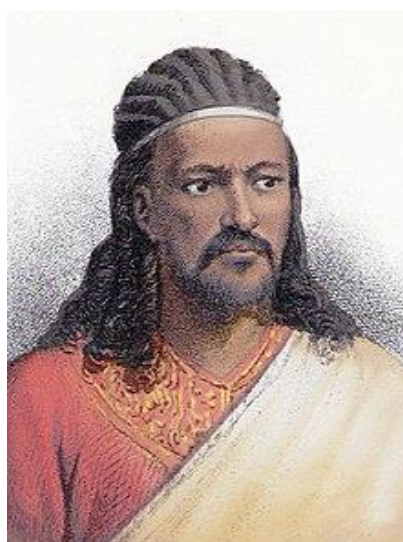
According to one of the religious documents that form the basis of Ethiopian myth and custom, the ‘Fikkere Iyesus’ (The Interpretation of Jesus), Jesus is said to have prophesied that after a prolonged era of evil deeds among the ‘chosen’ Ethiopians, a period of divine punishment would ensue<sup>xviii</sup>. Many people looked upon the hard times of the Zemene Mesafint as the wrath of God, that had been heaped upon the Ethiopians for their corruption. Legend had it that there would emerge a righteous and popular king called ‘Tewodros’ who would reign for forty years and restore Ethiopia to its former unity. Although many claimed during the period of the Zemene Mesafint to be

Tewodros, none possessed Ras Kassa's credentials and when the opportunity arose, he was quick to prove his entitlement to the title.

Tewodros II is credited with being the founder of the Ethiopian state and his reign is perhaps usually considered a useful point to start painting a picture of the modern history of Ethiopia. Born in 1820 in north western province of Qwara and the son of a local chief with only obscure connections to the Solomonic line, Tewodros emerged as a successful warlord – albeit with a reputation of somewhat of a brigand, attracting a sizeable number of loyal followers during his successful campaign to subdue the established provincial dynasties. He gradually crushed the armies of neighbouring kings before being crowned himself, at a certain point taking the boy Menelik (and future emperor) who represented the Shoan dynasty, to live at his court and eventually to marry one of his daughters before Menelik's escape in 1865. Significantly, the Shoan dynasty had wanted to create at least a fictional link to the Solomonic line and to legitimise the notion that the future ruler of the province and grandson (Saleh Maryam) of the then Shoan ruler (Saleh Selassie), would become a unifying emperor. At birth, Saleh Selassie gave his grandson the formal name 'Menelik' after the mythical founder of the Solomonic line.

Tewodros proposed to deprive the provincial nobility of its basis of power by breaking down the traditional divisions of Ethiopia into smaller administrative units governed by individuals of his own choosing. Moreover, realising that the strength of the nobles rested on the control of locally raised army units, Tewodros made a start towards the creation of a national army whose units comprised soldiers from different provinces, serving under crown appointees and receiving salaries from the imperial treasury.

Tewodros envisioned nothing short of total reunification of the historical Abyssinian Empire. He wanted to abolish the feudal system, to have paid governors and judges and to disarm the people whilst strengthening and professionalising an army that was loyal only to him. Having built roads largely in order to move his growing army around the country, he is credited with inaugurating somewhat of an industrial revolution in Ethiopia.

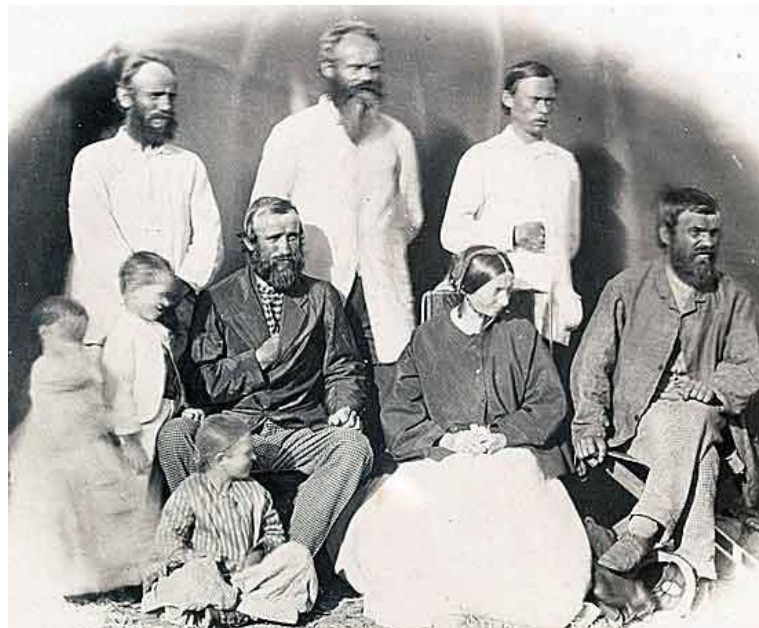


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### **Emperor Tewodros II (1855-1868)**

His predominant concerns were to maintain political control and to ensure Ethiopia's territorial integrity. Initially cowed, but not broken, the provincial nobility soon resumed its rebellious habits, forcing Tewodros to undertake a series of increasingly brutal punitive campaigns. His methods provoked mounting resistance, engulfing the country in a storm of rebellion. The Galla also resumed their raids, and lawlessness once again claimed the Ethiopian countryside. By 1868, Tewodros was virtually encircled in the mountain fortress of Maqdala in Eastern Ethiopia where he had established his capital.

When it came to Foreign policy, Tewodros was unable to achieve his aims but wanted to have his regime recognised on an equal footing with the great powers of Europe. In an effort to force Britain to aid him in his fight against the Muslim Turks and to meet the threat of Egyptian expansionism, he incarcerated the British Consul together with several British nationals and held them hostage until he received the help he needed. After two years of negotiations with Britain, in 1867/8 a military contingent under Sir Robert Napier – General Officer commanding Britain’s Indian Army, moved from Massawa through Tigre to Tewodros’s capital of Maqdala (today called Amba Mariam in the Debub Wollo Zone of the Amhara Region). During the fighting that followed his forces were out-manoeuvred, and rather than suffer the humiliation of defeat, Tewodros committed suicide. Ironically, the British at the time had no intentions in establishing a permanent presence in Ethiopia and withdrew after only a few days.



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**European prisoners of the Emperor Tewodros II c1868**



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**Emperor Tewodros II surrounded by his entourage c1868**



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**27th Bombay Native Light Infantry in Abyssinia in 1868**



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### **Lieutenant General Sir Robert Napier, British commander at the Battle of Maqdala on 13th April 1868**

At the time of Tewodros's death, three rivals emerged to stake claim to the throne: Menelik – the King of Shoa, Ras Gobeze – ruler of Amhara Wag- Lasta and Dejasmatch<sup>xix</sup> Kassa of Tigre. Following a brief period of conflict that saw the brief and self-proclaimed rule of Tekle Giorgis (1868-72), on January 21<sup>st</sup> 1872, at Aksum – the ancient capital, the Tigrinian, Kassa, was crowned Emperor Yohannes IV (1871-1889). Whereas Tewodros had sought to develop an extremely centralised and nationally oriented professional bureaucracy – concerned that those he appointed governor not remain in one post for fear they would develop power bases against him, Yohannes valued efficient political stability even more and wanted to maintain as widespread a base of support for his rule as possible. Rather than jailing his subdued

enemies as Tewodros had done, he secured their fidelity through submission and allowed them to continue to govern their people. He gave these men important responsibilities, allowing them to expand their own dominions.

Tewodros had brazenly demanded respect from the European powers; Yohannes on the other hand followed a course of patient diplomacy. As a consequence, he was able for a while to present an image of a united and relatively strong Empire that effectively deterred European adventures into Ethiopia. By the end of the nineteenth century however, the force of European expansionism and the Islamic threat from the Mahdist Holy War in the Sudan was to have repercussions on Ethiopian sovereignty. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 restored the importance of the Red Sea coast and presaged a struggle for its control. The Egyptians, who had replaced the Ottomans on the coast and displayed expansionist interests, were themselves quickly pushed aside by the imperialist powers of Europe. Following the occupation of Egypt by the British in 1882 however, the Egyptian forces began fading from the coast. Within a year of brokering a Treaty between Egypt and Ethiopia in 1884 and in order to facilitate Italy's own interests along the Red Sea, Britain allowed Italy to take control of the Eritrean port of Massawa. Italy had already claimed the port of Assab in 1879 fully intending to eventually claim 'Abyssinia' as a colony by gradually increasing its military presence in Ethiopia. At the same time, the Sudanese forces of the new Madhist jihad had begun an invasion from the west, sweeping into the province of Gojjam in 1888 and defeating its King – Tekle Haimenot. At this critical moment, Yohannes called upon the Shoa King – Menelik, who had by then conquered stretch after stretch of Galla territory to the south and west of Shoa, building-up a competent army. Additionally, Menelik had also entered into a treaty with the Italians about the maintenance of communications

with the port of Assab, through which he hoped to eventually obtain the European weapons essential to his future plan. Yohannes could therefore expect no help from him against the Italians as they pushed inland from Massawa. As the Sudanese forces now reached and sacked Gondar, Yohannes led his army to face them at the battle of Metemma on the Ethio/Sudanese border in March 1889 and during the fighting was mortally wounded.



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**Emperor Yohannes IV (1871-1889)**



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**"The World's Sovereigns". A photomontage made in Europe in 1889 with the main heads of state in the world.**

**From left to right: Yohannes IV of Ethiopia, Tewfik Pasha of Egypt, Sultan Abdülhamit II of the Ottoman Empire, Naser al-Din Shah Qajar of Persia, Christian IX of Denmark, Luís I of Portugal, William III of the Netherlands, Pedro II of Brazil, Milan Obrenović IV of Serbia, Leopold II of Belgium, Alexander III of Russia, Wilhelm I, German Emperor (deceased 1888), Franz Joseph I of Austria, Victoria of the United Kingdom, Jules Grévy of France (left office 1887), Pope Leo XIII, Emperor Meiji of Japan, Guangxu Emperor of China (not confirmed), Umberto I of Italy, Alfonso XII of Spain, Oscar II of Sweden and Chester A. Arthur of the United States (left office 1885, deceased 1886)<sup>xx</sup> .**

The throne now passed to the most powerful of the provincial rulers, Sahle Mariam also known as King Menelik II of Shoa. The period of his reign is considered another milestone in Ethiopia's history and under his rule, the first signs of an emergent modernising bureaucratic empire began to appear<sup>xxi</sup>.



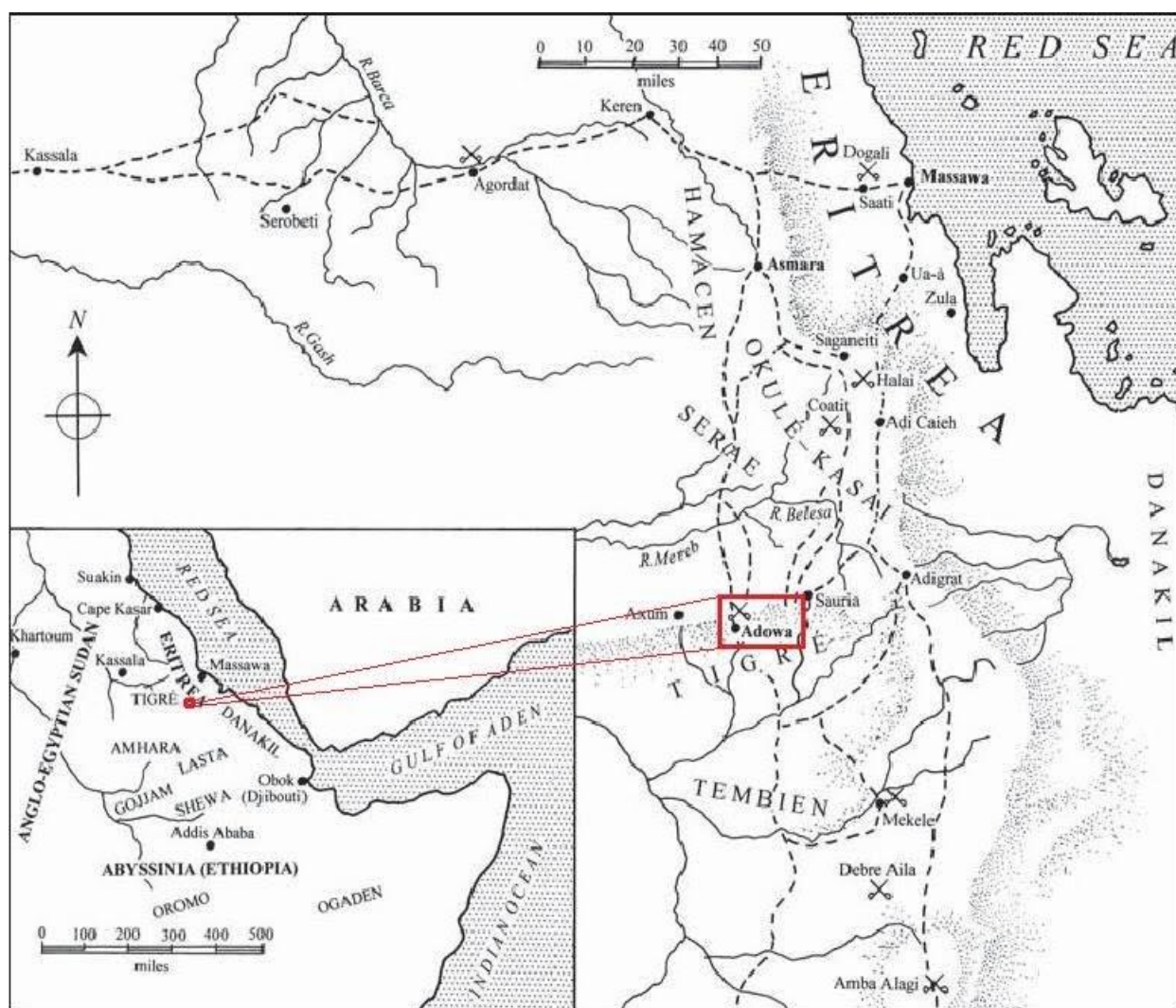
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### **Emperor (Sahle Mariam) Menelik II (1889-1913)**

Among the initial challenges facing Menelik was the issue of Italian encroachment into the Ethiopian northern hinterland and paradoxically, the conclusion of negotiations over a treaty with the Italians that had started 2 years previously. Seven weeks after the death of Yohannes, the “Wichale Treaty of Perpetual Peace and Friendship” was signed and the state of war that had existed between Yohannes and the Italians was officially ended. Menelik was recognised by the Italians as King of Kings. Italian rule of the port of Massawa was agreed, providing Ethiopia could use it freely for trade. The treaty also called for the ceding of part of the Tigrayan highlands as a buffer to safeguard Italian interests. In practise however, the Italian forces would later move from Massawa inland beyond the terms of the agreement, substantially enlarging the extent of their new colony, Eritrea. A problem also arose with the drafting of the terms of the treaty – written in both Italian and Amharic. Virtually identical, the Italian version implied that Ethiopia would become its protectorate, a fact which Menelik attempted to correct and iron-out over the following three years. In 1894, as Menelik began work on building Addis Ababa as the new capital, he informed the Italians of his intention to withdraw from the treaty and between March and April 1895, as Italy annexed a portion of Tigre, Menelik began in earnest to prepare to defend Ethiopia’s integrity.

The first skirmish leading up to the battle of Adowa occurred on December 7<sup>th</sup> 1895. The Ethiopian forces of Ras Makonnen (a cousin and one of Menelik’s most loyal generals who would later be given control of the south-eastern province of Harar) resoundingly defeated an Italian war party at Amba Alaji. Menelik’s ranks swelled as regional leaders gained confidence in the possibility of defeating the Italians,

entrenched in fortified positions at Addigrat. The decisive battle of Adowa erupted on 29<sup>th</sup> February and lasted for six days. Once again, the Ethiopians were victorious and in the following year the Italians sued for peace – signing an accord in Addis Ababa on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1896. The impact of the Ethiopian victory at Adowa was profound, sending shock waves throughout Europe and causing the reigning Italian government to fall. Menelik agreed to the Italians maintaining their colony of Eritrea.



©weoponsandwarfare.com

### Site of the Battle of Adowa, 29<sup>th</sup> February 1895



©weoponsandwarfare.com

**Menelik II, Battle of Adowa, 29<sup>th</sup> February 1895**



©zantana.net

**Major General Oreste Baratieri (Governor of Eritrea and Commander of Italian forces) at the Battle of Adowa 1895**

Menelik, unlike his predecessors found that his neighbours were now ready to normalise relations with Ethiopia after Adowa. Britain, France, Russia and Italy became eager to arrange the exchange of ambassadors and to conclude diplomatic agreements establishing their spheres of influence in the Horn of Africa in relation to Ethiopia. Both British and French Missions to Menelik's court were concerned with establishing firm geographical boundaries between their respective spheres of influence and those of Ethiopia in the region. It was agreed that Menelik would not contest any British or Egyptian claims in the Sudan or aid the Mahdists in any way, and France would relinquish to Ethiopia a large tract of land to the east – known as French Somaliland. Britain further ceded 13,500 square miles of land in Somaliland to Ethiopia – which would prove the source of bitter disputes between Somalia and Ethiopia for years to come. The border between Ethiopian and Italian Somaliland however remained fluid and was to serve as a pretext for renewed Italian aggression later in the 1930's. Menelik continued to bring more and more territory in the south and east under his control and between 1890 and 1906, he added Ogaden, Bale, Sidamo, Wollamo, Kaffa and Illubabor to his domain. By the end of 1897, the boundaries of Ethiopia – except for Eritrea and a very small part of the western border, were virtually set and remain to this day. Historians maintain that it is generally ignored but in large measure, Ethiopia was itself a participant in the colonial 'scramble for Africa', enlarging the size of the country and permanently incorporating these newly acquired territories. The Ethiopians' effectively doubled the domain of the Solomonic throne and imposed its rule on a large number of ethnically diverse peoples. As a result, the composition of the society would change radically as expansion on such a radical scale had its profound effect upon both the conqueror and the conquered.

## THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

At the turn of the century, some attention was given to training and professionalising a standing, salaried army although command remained in the hands of regional nobles – as it always had been. As was customary in feudal societies, every Ethiopian peasant was a potential soldier, to be called-up by his ruler at any time. In addition to strengthening the administrative and judicial capacity of the state, Menelik formed a cabinet of nine ministers and introduced monetary policies that saw Ethiopia mint her own currency and replace the Austrian Maria Theresa Dollar with the ‘Bir’. A national bank was created and Menelik was known for his building programme of schools, hospitals, postal and telephone systems, bridges, roads and even a railroad, with the assistance of the French. As early as the 1890’s young Ethiopians were sent abroad to Europe, Russia and Sudan to study.

But even as Menelik engaged in consolidating his empire and introduced various innovations into Ethiopian society, his health started to decline from about 1906. There was no obvious successor to follow him as he had had no children with his third wife and the empress - Taitu. His daughter, by a previous marriage – Princess Zawditu had a son named Yasu whom, though only fifteen years old, Menelik proclaimed to be his heir and nominal ruler, in 1909. Menelik suffered several strokes and eventual paralysis before his death in 1913.

Although there was an expectation in British and Italian circles that the country might break up following the emperor’s death, at first Lij Yasu, by then seventeen – the son of the Muslim Oromo leader of Wollo province, continued to be accepted as ruler in

his own right until, under the pretext that he had converted to Islam, a coup in 1916 was staged by Shoan nobility headed by Tefari Makonnen (son of Menelik's trusted general, Ras Makonnen). Lij Yasu's mother – (Zawditu (Menelik's daughter)), was crowned empress in February 1917. Tafari Makonnen (Zawditu's cousin) was made regent to the empress and heir to the throne. He was also given the title of 'Ras'. A traditionalist nobleman, Habte Giorgis, was made minister of war and for the following ten years the government remained stable enough to stand up to those provincial noblemen attempting to exploit a perceived power vacuum at the centre.



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**Above, Empress Taitu with Emperor Menelik II**



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**Empress Zawditu (1917-1930)**  
**on the day of her coronation – 11th February 1917**



©wikipedia.com

**Lij Yasu Menelik (1913-1916)**

Tafari Makonnen gradually built up against his rivals a position which was founded once again upon a claim to membership of the Solomonic family and the possession in Harar of a prosperous and well-administered province which supplied a strong army.



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**Menen Asfaw, (later Empress consort) married to Tefari Makonnen in  
1911 and died in 1962**

He undertook several visits abroad and in 1923 successfully oversaw Ethiopia's request for membership of the League of Nations. Upon the death of Habte Giorgis in 1926, Tafari Makonnen took over his army, brought troops into Addis Ababa and strengthened his forces in the nearby province of Harar. Princess Zawditu realised that Ras Tafari had begun his drive to power and she plotted to have the regent deposed. Two years later, he led a coup d'état in which he surrounded Zawditu's palace in the capital, arrested the commander of her guard and went on to successfully confront the council with a demand for the title of king. Ras Tafari was crowned emperor Haile Selassie I in November 1930, he was thirty-seven years old and would be the last Ethiopian emperor of the Solomonic line.



©Asfa Wossen Asserate

**The Ethiopian Regent Ras Tafari Makonnen with the Duke of York (later King George VI) on the occasion of the Regent's first state visit to London in 1924**

In November–December 1934, an Ethiopian army patrol clashed with an Italian garrison at the Welwel oasis in the Ogaden which pushed the Italian incursion into the country to the next level. In October 1935, on learning that Italian forces had crossed the frontier, Haile Selassie ordered his forces to mobilise. During the subsequent seven-month Italo-Ethiopian War, the Italians progressively overcame the emperor's armies and he was forced into exile in Britain on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1936.

For five years (1936–41) Ethiopia was joined to Eritrea and Italian Somaliland to form Italian East Africa. Resistance to the occupation continued, however. While the Italians dominated the cities, towns, and major caravan routes, Ethiopian patriots sporadically harried Italian bases in the larger garrison towns. When Italy joined the European war in June 1940, the United Kingdom recognized Haile Selassie as a full ally.

It is perhaps opportune at this stage to examine in a little more detail the developments that would lead to Haile Selassie's eventual return to Ethiopia.

In October 1940, Italy's offensive campaign in Africa during the Second World War had taken root in Egypt and was now threatening the frontier with Libya. With equally strong armies in Italian East Africa, the British feared a two-pronged Italian attack on the Suez Canal (Britain's lifeline with India and the Far East). At a conference held in Khartoum on 28<sup>th</sup> October between the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, South African Prime Minister Jan Smutts and Haile Selassie, plans were put in place by General Wavell, the officer commanding the Middle Eastern theatre of operations that included fomentation of a rebellion against the Italians in the western Ethiopian province of Gojjam, prior to an eventual British aided offensive by Ethiopian forces on Addis Ababa. This event would initially be orchestrated by 'Mission 101' – a small guerrilla unit overseen by Colonel Dan Sandford, working for the British Special

Operations Executive (SOE)<sup>xxii</sup> and supported from different directions by units of the Sudan Defence Force (SDF) (including the 5<sup>th</sup> Indian Division), a South African Division and local Battalions of the Kings Own African Rifles.

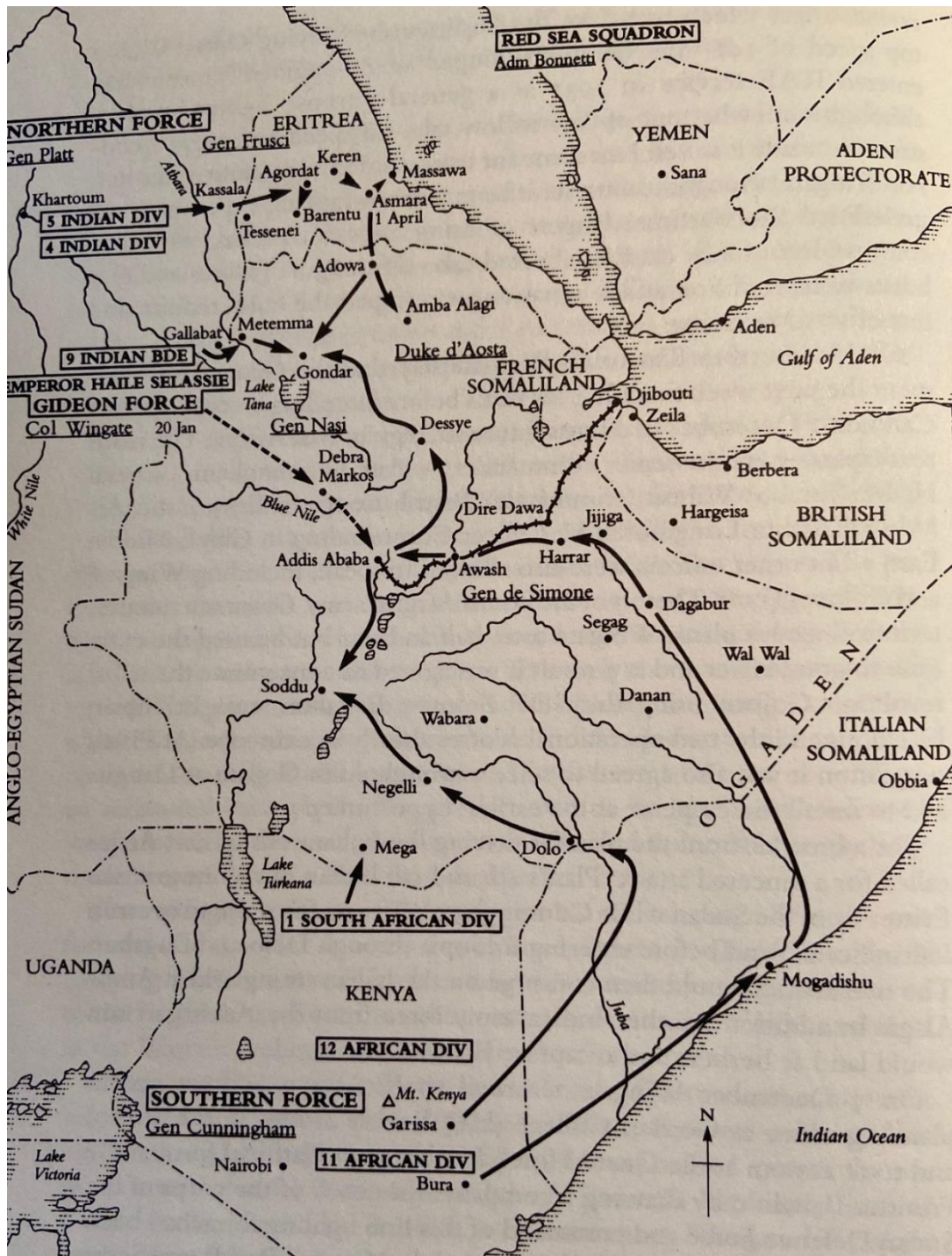
By January 1941, General Sir Arthur Cunningham – General Officer Commanding in East Africa, had sufficient British forces to pursue the war into Ethiopia with the intention of defeating the larger Italian army led by the Duke of Aosta (the Italian Viceroy of Italian East Africa) and restoring Haile Selassie to the throne. Additionally, training would have to be given to the Ethiopian army that would form the nucleus of the revolt. This task was undertaken by Colonel Orde Wingate who became the tactician behind the assault on Ethiopia whilst leaving the politics of the situation to Colonel Sandford. Broadly, the plan for driving out the Italians from East Africa called for a pincer attack striking on three fronts – from Eritrea in the north, from the direction of Sudan in the west and after overrunning Italian Somaliland, entering Ethiopia from the east. The attack was ordered for 18<sup>th</sup> January 1941. Haile Selassie's party accompanied by a small group of war correspondents was flown to Umm Idlaa in a very old Valentia transport aircraft, escorted by two elderly Gauntlet fighters. On arrival the Emperor's re-entry into Ethiopia was widely reported in the British press. The ceremony of arrival completed, Haile Selassie and his Ethiopian battalion set-off by truck on the difficult cross-country route which Wingate had planned for them. Haile Selassie, preceded by the main camel convoy, accompanied by what became known as 'Gideon Force' crossed over the frontier accompanied by Colonel Wingate's men, on the first part of the journey to take him to Belaya. It took the column two weeks to reach its destination, losing several hundred beasts along the way. Unused to the appalling terrain after the soft sands of the Sudanese plains, the camels could

simply not cope with the harsh conditions. Of the 17,000 camels purchased by Wingate for the campaign, few survived.



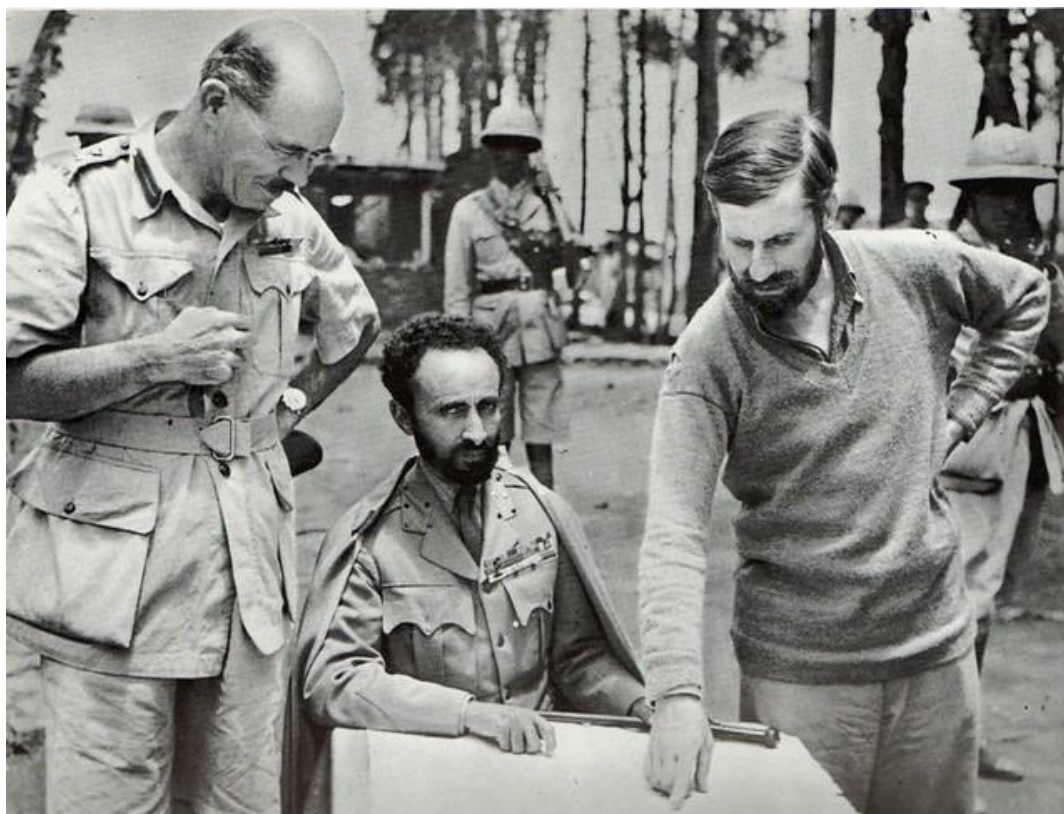
©Weidenfeld & Nicolson

**The ships of the desert find it hard going in the scrublands of the Gojjam. Few of the 20,000 camels purchased by Colonel Wingate survived the campaign in 1941 to return Haile Selassie to Ethiopia.**



©Weidenfeld & Nicolson

Map of the British East African Campaign 1941



©Weidenfeld &amp; Nicolson

**Emperor Haile Selassie being briefed by British military advisers leading ‘Gideon Force’ assisting Ethiopian troops re-take Ethiopia from Italian forces in 1941.**

**Brigadier Dan Sandford\* (on the left) and Colonel Orde Wingate (later Major General) on the right.**

**\*Dan Sandford and his wife Christine settled in Ethiopia after the war and founded the ‘English School’ in Addis Ababa. My sister and I attended this school between 1996 and 1973. Eleanor – the Sandford’s daughter, was married to the school Headmaster – Lionel Casbon, and she wrote about her parent’s life in Ethiopia in the book entitled ‘*The Incurable Optimists*’<sup>xxiii</sup>**

Within the first week, Wingate discovered that the planned route was impassable for motor transport – the rocky ground and sharp escarpments provided a daunting barrier. When the emperor arrived on Belaya on 6<sup>th</sup> February, he formally accepted the loyalty of the Patriot chiefs who had assembled to support him. Alerted by the troop movements around the area, the Italians had started flying bombing raids which played into Wingate's plan to divert their air power away from the British attack into Eritrea – begun on 19<sup>th</sup> January. The next intention was to wreck communication lines between Gondar and Dessei. Surprise was already on their side and from Sandford's intelligence sources, it was learned that the Italians had over-estimated the size of the British-Ethiopian contingent and were making preparations to evacuate Dangila, a key garrison on the route towards Addis Ababa.

The next stage of the journey took six days, overcoming the 3,000-foot escarpment at Matakal, often travelling at night to avoid aerial detection. By March the first moves in the campaign had been successful and Gideon Force was given instructions to concentrate its efforts between Debra Markos and Safartak, avoiding contact with the hereditary governor of Gojjam – Ras Hailu, who had thrown in his lot with the Italians. Using hit and run tactics on enemy positions, Wingate was able to give the impression that his force was much larger than it was. There was also some air support from a single Blenheim bomber that attacked Debra Markos on 15<sup>th</sup> March, forcing the Italians to abandon their positions overlooking the Gullit River.

As the emperor entered Debre Markos on 6<sup>th</sup> April to be greeted by an honour guard drawn from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ethiopian and Frontier Battalions, the victory was crowned by the surrender of Ras Hailu's men; Addis Ababa surrendered to the 11<sup>th</sup> African Division and two days later the port of Massawa was captured.

On 27<sup>th</sup> April, escorted by three Sudanese Defence Force Bren gun platoons, the emperor and his personal escort, preceded by units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ethiopian army guarding the road, travelled in a motorised convoy from Debra Markos, crossed the Blue Nile on 3<sup>rd</sup> May and reached Fiche on the north side of the capital to re-group. The official entry into Addis Ababa was led by further units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ethiopian army, the SDF Frontier Battalion and the emperor himself was driven in an open Ford followed by the rest of his party in nine other vehicles. The whole parade was led by Colonel Wingate, riding a grey horse. The streets were thronged with cheering crowds who were kept in order by a loudspeaker lorry giving instructions in Amharic. At the royal palace, a Nigerian guard of honour was drawn up to allow the emperor to take a royal salute prior to the making of speeches.



©utube.com

**Emperor Haile Selassie returns to Addis Ababa in May 1941 following five years of exile.**



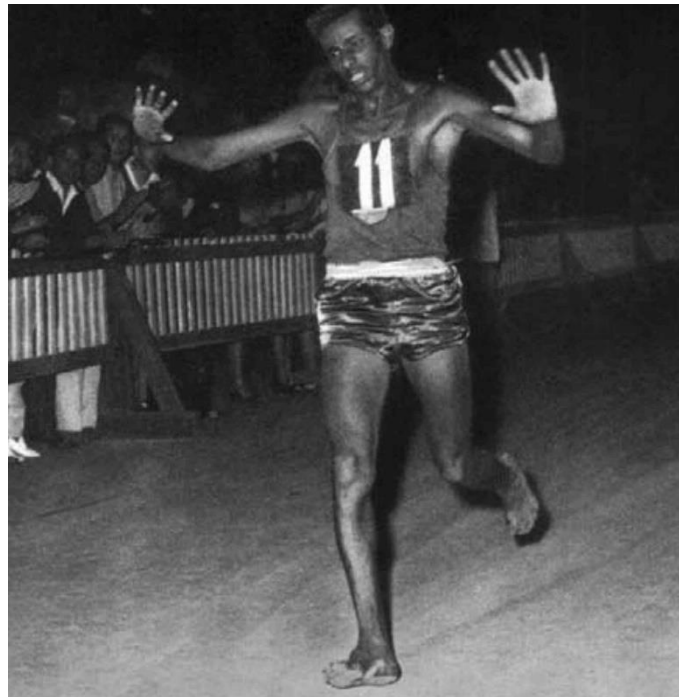
©wikipedia.com

**Colonel Orde Wingate leading the procession of troops accompanying Emperor Haile Selassie during his return to Addis Ababa in May 1941**

Despite Haile Selassie's triumphant return to the capital, the campaign was not immediately over as significant numbers of Italian forces remained at large. Several day and night clear-up operations led by Colonel Wingate were made into the following weeks until a final surrender from the Italians was received at the end of May.

In February 1945 at a meeting with U.S. President Roosevelt, Haile Selassie submitted a case for annexing Eritrea and thereby gaining free access to the sea. The countries would be eventually joined in September 1952.

During the 1950's, Ethiopia's coffee sold well in world markets. Revenues were used to centralize the government, to improve communications, to develop a national system of education based on the western model and to modernize urban centres. In November 1955, the emperor promulgated a revised constitution.



pininterest.com

### **Abebe Bikila winning the marathon (barefoot) at the Olympic Games in Rome, 1960**

In December 1960, while the emperor was abroad, members of the security and military forces attempted a coup d'état. The coup rapidly unravelled and in February 1961, the emperor began to name a new government but was unable in years to come

to implement significant land reform which only led to further opposition. Ethiopian forces became embroiled in intractable conflicts in Eritrea and with Somalia.

An insurrection in Eritrea, which had begun in 1960 mainly among Muslim pastoralists in the western lowlands, came to attract highland Christians disaffected by the government's dissolution of the federation in 1962. The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) was formed during the early seventies and an increasingly radical student movement in Addis Ababa became progressively anti-regime and protests in the capital often spiralled into violent clashes. It was during one of these demonstrations that my great uncle – Jas Szuldrzynski was shot in the legs whilst lecturing at Addis Ababa's university. Hospitalised for several weeks and eventually making a full recovery, he received a visit from the emperor whilst in hospital who made him a gift of a crystal vase – which I have to this day.



©gettyimages.com

**HM Queen Elizabeth II pictured with emperor Haile Selassie during her  
State visit to Ethiopia in 1965.**



©gettyimages.com

**Mamo Wolde winning the gold medal in the marathon at the Olympic Games in Mexico in 1968**



©Ian von Heintze 1972

**Mounted officer of the Ethiopian Imperial Guard in ceremonial dress, leading the emperor's motorcade along Menelik II Avenue, Addis Ababa November 1972.**



©Ian von Heintze 1972

**Motorcade that had just left the Jubilee palace conveying H.I.M. Haile Selassie I and President Tolbert of Liberia during the latter's state visit, along Menelik II Avenue, Addis Ababa November 1972.**

**Members of the Imperial Bodyguard are lining the route and a police officer wearing standard uniform, can be seen to the right of the picture, facing the onlooker (i.e. me).**



©Ian von Heintze 1972

**Rolls Royce Wraith conveying H.I.M. Haile Selassie I and President Tolbert of Liberia, along the lined route of Menelik II Avenue, Addis Ababa, during the latter's official visit to Ethiopia in November 1972**



©Ian von Heintze 1970

**16 Apartment Building, Menelik II Avenue, directly beside Africa Hall.  
We moved here in 1970. Our car – the Ford Taunus (1968 model) is  
parked by the front entrance.**



©Ian von Heintze 1970

***‘Yadete’*..... Whenever anything needed repairing in the apartment, he would find a solution – no job was too small and there was nothing that he couldn’t fix. I spent hours watching him work and occasionally even got to help.**



©Ian von Heintze 1972

**The block of flats that we lived in had a ‘guard’ (a ‘*zabagna*’) on duty 24 hours of the day. One of the zabagnas – a great character, who enjoyed a drink and made it his mission to chase us around the block for misbehaving, had been discharged from the Imperial Guard. Above, the uniform that he was wearing (tunic, trousers and greatcoat) were all former military issue. The badge worn on the cap was instantly recognisable as that worn by soldiers of the imperial guard, on the side of their uniform head-dress.**



©Ian von Heintze 1971

**Police (BMW) motor cycle escort for the Haile Selassie's limousine as the motorcade returns to the Jubilee Palace along Menelik II Avenue. The emperor had just accompanied President Jaafar Muhammed an-Nimeiry to the airport, following the latter's six-day state visit to Ethiopia in November 1971.**



©Ian von Heintze 1971

**Haile Selassie's limousine comes into view as the motorcade returns to the Jubilee Palace along Menelik II Avenue. Africa Hall can be seen in the background.**



©Ian von Heintze 1971

**Imperial Guard present arms as Haile Selassie's limousine returns to the Jubilee Palace. Ten to twelve men of the imperial Guard also follow the emperor's car in two Ford Galaxy 500's (1964 models) on all road journeys through the capital.**



©Ian von Heintze 1971

**Emperor Haile Selassie on an official engagement in Addis Ababa in 1971  
accompanied here by the Prime Minister - Aklilu Habte-Wold**



©Ian von Heintze 1973

**Completed in 1961, built across the Awash River and located about 110 km south-east of Addis Ababa in the Oromia Region, The KOKA dam is Ethiopia's oldest dam providing hydro-electric power to the capital. Motor vehicles could be driven across the top of the dam to access a nearby hotel that had a small swimming pool – used as a tourist resort.**



©Ian von Heintze 1973

**Ethiopian Police force, liveried Mercedes-Benz 350SLC, used as the pilot car preceding the state coach procession with President Pompidou during his arrival for the state visit to Ethiopia on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1973. The pomp and ceremony in the capital was in stark contrast to the little known and catastrophic famine developing in the provinces of Wollo and Tigre – news of which was first broadcast to the world later that year by the BBC’s Johnathan Dimbleby. The famine was one of several factors that led to the downfall of the emperor’s regime the following year.**



©Ian von Heintze 1973

**Carriage procession conveying President Pompidou and Emperor Haile Selassie along Menelik II Avenue (just passing Africa Hall), on the journey between Addis Ababa airport and the Jubilee Palace, during the late afternoon on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1973**



©britannia.com

**Georges Pompidou pictured with H.I.M. Haile Selassie I, during the French President's State visit to Ethiopia in January 1973**



©Ian von Heintze 1973

**A picture of the River Awash, approximately 200 km from Addis Ababa, taken in 1973. A small crocodile can be seen nestling on a rock on the far side of the river.**



©Ian von Heintze 1973

**The River Awash, 200km south-east of Addis Ababa. 1973**



©Ian von Heintze 1971

**On a three-week expedition with the English School Scout Troop in 1971. I am seen here following another scout behind a guide, along the Muger River-bed during the dry season. The river is an important tributary of the River Nile.**

By the early 1970s one-third of Ethiopia's 45,000 soldiers were in Eritrea, and others were putting down rebellions in the Oromo region of Bale, Sidamo, and Gojjam. In January 1974 there began a series of mutinies led by junior officers and senior non-commissioned officers, who blamed the imperial elites for their impoverishment and for the country's economic and social ills. Inflation was difficult to control. For the government, the situation was greatly worsened by drought and famine in the north, the news about which became an international scandal. In June, representatives of the mutineers constituted themselves as the Coordinating Committee (the Derg) comprising representatives of the Armed Forces, Police, and Territorial Army. Major Mengistu Haile Mariam, of Harar's 3rd Division, was elected chairman. The Derg proceeded to dismantle the monarchy's institutions and deposed the emperor who was taken into custody on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1974.



©face2faceafrica.com

### **Arrest of Haile Selassie at the Jubilee Palace, September 1974**

The Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC) was established, managed by the Derg which assumed the functions of government – with Lieutenant General Aman Andom as chairman and titular Head of State. Mengistu became the first vice-chairman.

Tensions within the Derg soon fuelled a power struggle and led to what became known as ‘Bloody Saturday’ (23<sup>rd</sup> November 1974), when as many as 60 leaders, including General Andom, were executed. Andom was replaced by Brigadier General Tafari Benti. The new government issued a Declaration of Socialism on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1974.



©Buzzkenya.com

**Above, Lieutenant General Aman Andon (b.1924-d.1974)**



©wikipedia.com

**Brigadier General Tafari Benti (b.1921-d.1977)**



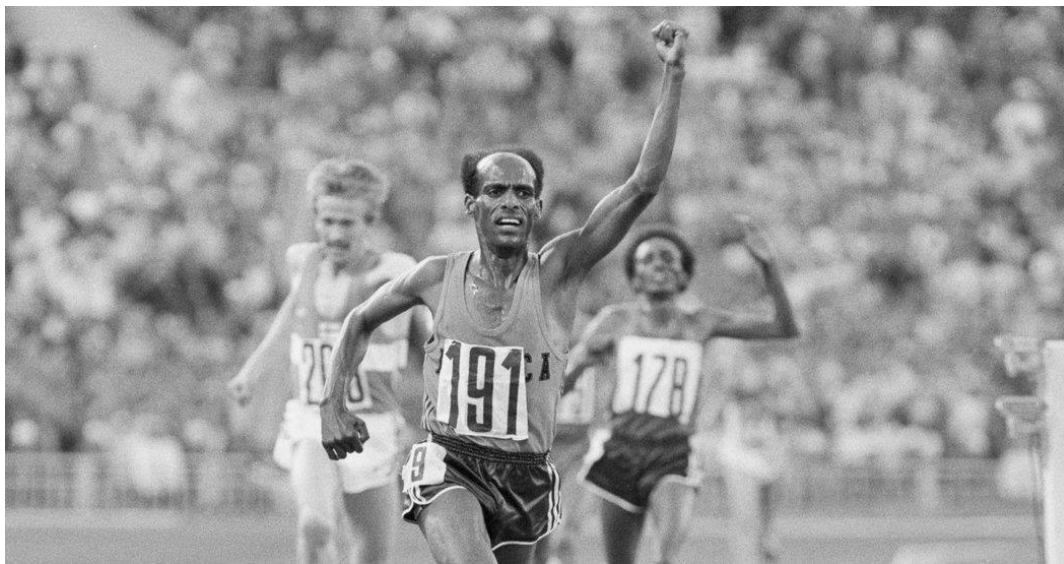
©accidentaldissent.com

### **Mengistu Haile Mariam (b.1937-?)**

A series of EPRP attacks against Derg members and their supporters was countered by Mengistu's 'Red Terror', a bloody campaign that crushed armed opponents among the EPRP and other groups, as well as members of the public. As a result of the campaign, which continued into 1978, thousands of Ethiopia's best-educated and promising youngsters were killed or exiled; in all, as many as 100,000 people were killed, and thousands more were tortured or imprisoned.

Meanwhile, in May and June 1977, Somalia's army advanced into the Ogaden. The U.S.S.R. labelled Somalia the aggressor and diverted arms shipments to Ethiopia, where Soviet and allied troops trained and armed a People's Militia. Unable to entice

the United States into resupplying its troops and faced with renewed Ethiopian military intervention, Somalia withdrew its forces in early 1978. Mengistu immediately shifted troops to Eritrea, where by the end of the year the Eritrean nationalists had been pushed back into mountainous terrain around Nak'fa.



©New York Times

**Miruts Yifter ('Yfter the Shifter') Won Gold medals in the 10,000m and 5,000m events at the Olympic Games in Russia in 1980**

Mengistu issued a land-reform proclamation effectively transferring ownership of all land to the state and provided allotments to individual peasants who farmed the land themselves. Extensive nationalization of industry, banking, insurance, large-scale trade, and a building programme completed the reforms. To implement the measures introduced, Peasant Associations were created. In 1984 the Workers' Party of Ethiopia was formed, with Mengistu as secretary-general, and in 1987 a new parliament inaugurated the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, nominating Mengistu as president.

Despite initial expectations, farmers failed to generate the high yields expected from the land that had been turned over to them to cultivate. In order to raise food stocks, the government tried to force the peasant Associations to deliver grain at below-market prices, a measure that alienated many and actually did little to stimulate production. Meanwhile, yearly droughts intensified and in 1984 the small rains were very minimal and the main rains failed altogether. A famine followed. With one-sixth of Ethiopia's people at risk of starvation, Western countries made available enough surplus grain that enabled the crises to be managed by mid-1985. A population-resettlement program moved people from the drought-prone and crowded north to the west and to the south of Ethiopia, albeit with little provision of proper housing, tools, medical treatment, or food for the 600,000 farming families being relocated. By 1985–86 the government was facing serious revolt throughout most of Eritrea and Tigray.

In December 1987 the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) broke through the and waged an increasingly successful war against Ethiopian national troops using weapons captured from demoralized government troops. The following year the EPLF began to coordinate its attacks with the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which had long been fighting for the autonomy of the Tigrayan Province and for the reconstitution of Ethiopia on the basis of ethnically autonomous regions. In February 1989, a series of defeats and a worsening lack of arms forced the government to withdraw its forces from Tigray. The TPLF organized the largely Amhara Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement. Together, these two groups formed the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and their forces advanced through Gondar and Wollo provinces before occupying Massawa; this advance eventually

broke the Ethiopian stranglehold on supplies entering the country, forcing Mengistu to end many of the regime's most unpopular socialist measures.

Inhabitants immediately abandoned their new villages to return whence they came, and with the dismantling of administrative structures the regime was weakened further. In southern Ethiopia, the long-dormant Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) became active. By May 1991, with EPRDF forces controlling Tigray, Wollo, Gondar and Gojjam and about half of Showa, the ruling regime was unable to stop the rebels' advance on Addis Ababa. Mengistu fled to Zimbabwe<sup>xxiv</sup>, and on May 28 the EPRDF seized total power.

The new government, led by a Tigrayan – the EPRDF chairman Meles Zenawi, together with other political groups (including the OLF), agreed to the creation of a transitional government that would engineer a new constitution and elections, towards creation of a national charter that recognized both an ethnic division of political power, and to the right of nationalities to secede from Ethiopia. This paved the way for Eritrea's bid for independence, which was eventually ratified in 1993.

The new regime began to lay the foundations for Ethiopia's first federal administrative structure, the component units consisting of ethnically homogeneous regions. However, there were fears in some quarters that the governing regime was weakening the country's unity. During regional elections in June 1992 the OLF left the government over the conduct of these elections and has been in increasingly armed opposition ever since.

Throughout 1992–93 the transitional government worked with donor governments and the World Bank to forge a structural-adjustment program. This program devalued the Ethiopian currency (the Bir), sharply reduced government intervention in the

economy, reduced the size of the civil service and made it easier for foreign companies to invest in Ethiopia. However, the government refused to denationalize land and foreign investment was slow to return. The economy grew modestly but experienced no structural transformations. Yet another famine, stemming from a lack of national integration and the stifling overregulation of business – complicated by drought, put millions of Ethiopians at risk in 1994, largely in the north and the east of the country. The same year, the EPRDF adopted Ethiopia's third constitution in 40 years; it was promulgated in 1995, creating the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. This constitution enshrined the principles of regionalism and ethnic autonomy, devolving power to regional states, several of them coalitions of smaller ethnic groups. It also enshrined, for the first time as a constitutional principle, national ownership of land. The country's first multiparty elections were also held in 1995, but they were boycotted by most opposition groups in protest over alleged harassment by the EPRDF-led government. As a result, the multi-ethnic EPRDF retained its control over parliament. Negasso Gidada, a Christian Oromo who had served as minister of information in the transitional government, became president, and Meles Zenawi was nominated Prime Minister. The ethnic balance of the country was reflected in the later selection of members to the Council of Ministers.



©ethiogrio.com

**Negasso Gidada (b.1943-d.2019)**  
**President of Ethiopia 1995-2019**



© Getty Images

**Haile Gebrselassie, winner of the 10,000m at the Olympic Games in  
Atlanta in 1996 and again later in Sydney in 2000**



©bornrich.com

**Meles Zenawi (b.1955-d.2012)**  
**President of Ethiopia 1991-1995**  
**Prime Minister of Ethiopia 1995-2012**

The economic-reform efforts that had begun in 1991 were somewhat successful, as the economy showed improvement in the mid-1990s.

By 1998 simmering border tensions between Eritrea and Ethiopia again erupted into war.

**THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY**

©New York Times

**Tirunesh Dibaba, winner of the Olympic gold medal in the 5000m & 10,000m in Beijing (2008) and later the 10,000m in London in 2012**

A cease-fire signed in June 2000 provided for a UN mission (United Nations Mission in Eritrea and Ethiopia: UNMEE) to monitor the cease-fire and deploy troops in a buffer zone between the two countries while the border was being settled. A peace agreement signed in Algeria in December ended the conflict, although relations between Ethiopia and Eritrea remained tense with the issue of demarcation still unsettled.

Meanwhile, the EPRDF remained in power into the 2000's, although it was weakened by internal dissent in 2001 when the EPRDF's TPLF faction split over the government's anticorruption policies. Against the backdrop of political infighting, drought and famine continued to periodically plague the country, particularly in 2003,

when the crisis was exacerbated by widespread incidence of waterborne illnesses and an outbreak of a malaria epidemic.

A strong performance by opposition parties in the May 2005 elections greatly increased the number of seats held by these parties in parliament, although the EPRDF clung to power. Accusations of fraud and an unjust result led to protest and demonstrations in Addis Ababa, leaving more than three dozen people dead, hundreds injured, and 3,000 arrests. This was followed in November by further rioting and more deaths. Tensions continued into the next year, with thousands of Ethiopians—including activists, journalists, and other legislators—being detained across the country.

During the same year, an Islamic organisation seen by many as having ties with al-Qaeda, the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), spread its influence throughout neighbouring Somalia. Ethiopia provided logistical support to the Transitional Federal Government that opposed the Islamists. In December 2006, fighting broke out between the ICU and Ethiopian Army and the former retreated and hid amongst the civilian population. Ethiopia was later accused of indiscriminate killing of civilians during the Battle of Mogadishu (March – April 2007). Ethiopian forces pulled out of Somalia in January 2009, leaving a small African Union force and smaller Somali Transitional Government force to maintain peace. Reports immediately emerged of religious fundamentalist forces occupying one of two former Ethiopian bases in Mogadishu shortly after withdrawal.

Meles Zenawi died on 20th August 2012 and was succeeded as Prime Minister by Hailemariam Desalegn. On 7<sup>th</sup> October 2013, Mulatu Teshome was elected president of the country.

Ethnic violence in 2017 saw clashes between the Oromo, who make up the largest ethnic group in the country and ethnic Somali, leading to the displacement of a further 400,000 people.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2018, Abiy Ahmed was declared Prime Minister. Sahle-Work Zewde was sworn in as the 4th and current President of Ethiopia, the first woman to hold the office.

Clashes between the Oromo and the Gedeo people in the south of the country led to Ethiopia having the largest number of people to flee their homes in the world in 2018, with 1.4 million people being displaced. In September 2018 during protest that took place in Oromo near the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, 23 people were killed. Some have blamed the rise in ethnic violence by the Oromo on the new Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's policies of increased ethnic inclusion in government.



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**Hailemariam Desalegn (b. 1965-)**  
**Prime Minister of Ethiopia 2012-2018**



©wikipedia.com

**Girma Wolde Giorgis (1924-2018)**  
**President of Ethiopia 2001-2013**



©wikipedia.com

**Mulatu Teshome Wirtu (b. 1957)**  
**President of Ethiopia 2013-2018**



©wikipedia.com

**Sahle-Work Zewde (b.1950-)**  
**President of Ethiopia 2018- present**



©wikipedia.com

**Abiy Ahmed (b.1976 -)**  
**Prime Minister of Ethiopia 2018-present**

At the time of writing, the Ethiopian embassy in London has issued its monthly newsletter which carries a copy of a statement made by the Ethiopian Prime Minister, accusing the factions in Tigre of acting illegally during the developing situation in the north of the country, when they carried out attacks on Ethiopian soldiers in November 2020. Additional topics of note highlighted by the bulletin include a reaffirmation that treasures looted by British forces following the battle of Maqdala in 1868 and today housed at the V & A Museum – should be returned to Ethiopia without further delay. The progress towards completion of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam also continues to figure in headlines with talks continuing between authorities in Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt over completion of the project and agreements in respect of the future water supply to the affected countries.



©wikipedia.com

**Present-day Addis Ababa skyline towards the south-west, image taken from one of the lower levels of the Hilton Hotel. This picture can be compared with images 2 and 3 in the series of shots shown at the beginning of the book.**



## **Bibliography**

This reading-list will appeal to anyone with an interest in Ethiopia and sets out details of publications covering a range of topics about Ethiopian history that have been written in English<sup>xxv</sup>. I have tried to list as many publications (of both general or specialised interest) that have been printed in book form, either as hardback or paperback editions and that are available to the general public today. The majority of the works shown, if not still in print, at the very least can be accessed relatively easily from larger libraries or obtained over the internet.

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## FOOTNOTES

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### **INTRODUCTION**

- <sup>i</sup> As an aside, producing something as tangible as this book has given me somewhere to embed a few photographs that I took as a youngster in Addis Ababa during the late sixties and early seventies – (a non-digital age) using the tiniest of Kodak ‘Instamatic’ cameras.

### **FIRST IMPRESSIONS**

- <sup>ii</sup> On the one hand, the move to the U.N. had its advantages as it elevated Witold’s status to that of a diplomat. On the other, I recall that whilst he had to have an evening suit (white tie) made by his tailor (an Armenian called Mr Karabedian) and my mother might have rejoiced at having to make herself a couple of evening dresses, Witold actually had no time or interest for the cocktail parties and official dinners that were to follow whenever dignitaries came to town.

### **HISTORICAL TIMELINE**

- <sup>iii</sup> The format of this timeline has been taken from the BBC’s web version, although I have added the occasional event.

### **A BRIEF HISTORY OF ETHIOPIA AND ITS RULERS**

- <sup>iv</sup> Johanson D.C. *Lucy – The beginnings of humankind*, Simon & Schuster 1990
- <sup>v</sup> Markakis J. *Ethiopia - Anatomy of a Traditional Polity*, Clarendon Press 1974 p.13
- <sup>vi</sup> Perham M. *The Government of Ethiopia*, Faber & Faber 1969 p.12
- <sup>vii</sup> Ibid. p.15
- <sup>viii</sup> Ibid. p.19
- <sup>ix</sup> Christianity was introduced into Ethiopia by Frumentius, a monk of the See of the Coptic Church of Alexandria (Egypt) at about the 4<sup>th</sup> Century CE. Among the first converts were the King Ezana and the royal family.
- <sup>x</sup> Markakis J. op.cit. p.3
- <sup>xi</sup> Perham M. op.cit. p.70
- <sup>xii</sup> Ibid. p.70
- <sup>xiii</sup> Ibid p.35
- <sup>xiv</sup> The origins of this name are not known

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- xv Later translated in 1684 into English by J.P. Ghent, entitled *A new History of Ethiopia*
- xvi See *Travels to discover the source of the Nile*, 1768-1773, 5 vols., Edinburgh, 1790
- xvii 'Ras' is the Amharic word for roughly the equivalent of 'Duke'
- xviii Levine D.N. *Greater Ethiopia: Evolution of a Multi-ethnic Society*, University of Chicago Press 2000 p.211
- xix 'Dejazmatch' is the Amharic word for roughly the equivalent of 'General' or 'Count'
- xx Three of the photographers, who provided (willingly or not) photographic-material for the photomontage, are identified: Photo of Abdul Hamid II. by W. & D. Downey, London <https://www.liberaldictionary.com/abdul-hamid-ii/> (File used in picture is bottom-left). Franz-Joseph I.'s photo comes from Ferenc Kosmata, photographed in Schloss Schönbrunn. Umberto I. was photographed by Stereoscopic Coy. London Due to the fact, that Queen Victoria had been photographed by both, W&D Downey and Stereoscopic Coy., it is likely, that her photo comes from one of these sources.
- xxi Keller E.J. *Revolutionary Ethiopia* Indiana University Press 1991 p.36
- xxii T. Royal Orde Wingate – *Irregular soldier* Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1995
- xxiii United Writers Publishing 1993
- xxiv To the dismay of many, Mengistu continued to live in exile in Zimbabwe, despite the Ethiopian government's repeated attempts during the 1990s to lobby for his extradition. Nevertheless, he was tried – in absentia on charges of genocide for his role during the period of the Red. In December 2006 he was found guilty, and the next year he was given a life sentence. Following a successful appeal from the prosecution, he was sentenced to death in May 2008.
- xxv Books about the history of Ethiopia are of course written in a number of languages (Amharic, German, Italian and French to name but four) but my book-list shows only publications either written in, or translated into English.