

EDITORIAL:**THE SPIRIT OF ADWA UNDER FIRE**

The Adwa victory of March 1896 was not an isolated incident. Ethiopia's survival as an independent nation was ensured also by other victories both before and after Adwa. Two decades before Adwa, Egyptian aggressors were defeated by the forces of Emperor Yohannes IV at the battles of Gundet and Gura'i both situated in present day Eritrea. At the time of the invasion, Egypt's army was no less formidable and modern than that of the Italians. Its officers included Dutch, other European and American commanders. The 48 American officers could count a major general, four Brigadier generals, eleven colonels, twelve majors, five captains, three surgeons with the rank of colonel most of whom were trained at West Point and had already fought in America.

For the Italians, Adwa was not the first defeat suffered at the hands of the Ethiopian army. In January 1887, an expeditionary force of some 500 soldiers was

annihilated at the battle of Dogali (some 30 kms inland from Massawa) by the forces of Ras Alula. In fact one reason advanced by the Italian colonial establishment to launch the aggression which led to Adwa was the "need to avenge the Dogali massacre and to restore the honor of the crown and the monarchy."

In 1935, Italy once again invaded Ethiopia. Although the fundamental reason for this invasion was Mussolini's urge to provide an "Empire" for Italy, the fascist aggression was presented to the Italian people as a move to "avenge the humiliation suffered at Adwa". Once again the Italians were defeated but this time after a five year war of resistance led by Ethiopia's **ARBEGNOTCH** (members of the Patriotic Resistance Movements) and at the cost of tremendous sufferings and over a million dead.

Ethiopia's victory at Adwa and other confrontations cannot be attributed to military factors alone and still less to international and outside support. Most of the European powers of the day - specially Great Britain and Germany - were clearly on the side of Italy. Convinced as they were that the army of the "barbaric tribes" would be smashed in no time by the "civilized European army", they did not even see the necessity of waiting for the outcome of the battle to recognize Italy's protectorate claim over Ethiopia. After the victory, which these European powers received with a sense of «collective doom», a dramatic shift of perception was observed: in the words of a contemporary British observer, they "started to compete for Menilek's friendship with undignified rush."

When Mussolini invaded Ethiopia the country was once again left to its fate. In violation of its own Charter, the League of Nations ignored Ethiopia's plea for justice. The major European powers prohibited any sale of arms to the Ethiopian government and rushed to recognize Italian sovereignty as soon as Mussolini's forces captured Addis Abeba on 5 May 1936. Claiming to be "neutral", the American government imposed an arms embargo "on both belligerents." Significantly, even the European "Left" which was busy raising an army of volunteers against Franco in Spain did

not mobilize in favor of Ethiopia and only a literal handful of Europeans fought Italian fascism alongside Ethiopia's patriots.

Why then these victories?

All serious historians and observers of Ethiopia agree that the Adwa victory and the survival of Ethiopia's independence were due to the strength of the Ethiopian spiritual and national identity and their centuries-old sense of belonging to a political, socio-cultural and religious entity embodied in the concept of "Zelalemawit Ethiopia" (Eternal Ethiopia).

Ethiopians went to war with a deep-rooted conviction that they were fighting for "a just cause of defending a holy land of their forefathers." This deep-rooted conviction was expressed by what Menilek's chronicler called a "patriotic anger comparable to a hot pan on fire". This "patriotic anger" was itself the result of traditional education which, generation after generation, emphasized a sense of loyalty to the Enat Ager (the Motherland), the Emperor and the Faith. The training of the young Ethiopian stressed the values of self-pride, dignity, self-reliance and above all bravery which should enable him to "defiantly look into the eyes of death" when it comes to defending the Motherland and the Faith. More relevant to the Adwa campaign, traditional education included defiance of foreign domination as a matter of course. According to Professor Baheru Zewde this made the average Ethiopian "respectful of foreigners but prone to react strongly if he detected the slightest sign of arrogance or affront."

The teachings of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which dominated the Ethiopian highlanders' social, cultural and ideological life for over fifteen centuries, hammered in this point by claiming that "As written in the Bible, Ethiopia is a holy land which 'stretches her hands unto God' given by Jesus Christ to his mother for protection". The ordinary Christian highlanders were brought up in the belief that they all belonged to one ENAT AGER (the Motherland) in a divinely ordained system led by a Neguse Negest (King of kings) having biblical origin. In the consciousness of the ordinary Ethiopian this suggested - according to Professor Baheru Zewde - "a sense of uniqueness, if not divine selection".

Ignorance of this deep-rooted conviction of Ethiopians is what led the Italians to very serious

miscalculations and to disaster in a conflict which, in the final analysis, was moral and ideological.

The Italians - and other European powers - considered the Ethiopians as racially "inferior" and absolutely incapable and unwilling to resist the colonial assault that was then sweeping over Africa. The Ethiopians on the other hand took it for granted that they were equal to whites and were "bewildered" by European claims to interfere in their national lives let alone to claim parts of «the God-given land».

Obsessed by their conviction of racial superiority, the Italians (and other European powers) were as much surprised by the Ethiopians' "pretentious claims" to equality with whites as the Ethiopians themselves were "puzzled" by European claims to racial superiority.

This racial prejudice, which is at the heart of their mistakes, led the Italians to ignore Ethiopian patriotism. The "patriotic anger against the enemy" was dismissed as unwarranted. According to the Italian commander-in-chief at Adwa an "excessive national consciousness" was only "a semblance of the idea of nationhood in the guise of hatred against whites."

Ethnic and regional rivalry and disunity in the country's political leadership were prevalent factors in the shaping of Ethiopian politics. But there was also sense of being part of the wider and centuries-old Ye Ethiopia Mengist (Ethiopian state) which encompassed several ethnic groups and regions, transcending ethnic and regional rivalries. The quasi permanent armed conflicts between rival chiefs which so characterized Ethiopian history were motivated by the rival chiefs' ambition to control the Ethiopia mengist. Even during the infamous Zemene Mesafent (Era of the princes) marked by the collapse of imperial power and central government, the 87 year civil war (1769-1855) between Amara, Oromo and Tigrean warlords was fought for control and supremacy of the center. Completely ignorant of this salient feature of ethnic and regional conflicts, the Italians easily (and wrongly) assumed that they could use these rivalries to promote their colonial design against Ethiopia. As it turned out, all the Rases and regional chiefs with whom the Italian high command was secretly negotiating were doing so with the knowledge and encouragement of the Emperor.

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EDUCATION OF THE ADWA FIGHTERS

Convinced that Ethiopia was a mere agglomerate of ever-quarreling savage tribes, the Italians overlooked the fact that for centuries the Ethiopian political order was organized and operated as a full-fledged state. This led them to underestimate the mobilization capacity of the state bureaucracy and to completely ignore the military intelligence aspects so decisive in any conflict between two states. As they were to discover after the war, Ethiopia had a "highly sophisticated intelligence network" and Ethiopian government agents were dutifully manipulating the unsuspecting Italian High Command during the entire Adwa campaign.

More important than the arms deployed by Menilek and his diplomatic and political skills, the causes for the Adwa victory are to be found in the above factors of patriotism, the sense of belonging and loyalty to a centuries-old entity which transcends ethnic and regional rivalries, "death defying bravery" of Ethiopia's foot soldiers and commanders, efficient and skillful organization and above all, self-confidence.

In view of the challenges of imperialism and colonialism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries these factors were considerable assets. Successive generations of Ethiopians, as proud as their forefathers were of this unique and glorious heritage, have tried but unfortunately failed to capitalize on these assets to face the challenges of modernization and to create a viable democratic order. Their struggle for a New Ethiopia firmly based on the spiritual and national identities which made Adwa possible has constantly been frustrated by both internal and external enemies of our people.

Now the centenary of Adwa is being celebrated at a time when the country has fallen under an ethnocentric dictatorship which stands against everything that Adwa represented to generations of Ethiopians. TPLF (and EPLF) leaders are trying to belittle the Adwa victory and distort its significance simply because the "spirit of Adwa" goes against the pseudo-scientific theories and ridiculous historiography they used to seize power and the divide-and-rule tactics they are employing to continue misruling the country.

Determined to undermine and destroy the patriotic attachment of Ethiopians to a historic motherland

which made Adwa possible and which can be used as a formidable weapon in the struggle against the ethnocentric dictatorship, TPLF (and EPLF) historiography shrinks Ethiopia's existence to a mere 100 years. As if this was not ridiculous enough it is now even being claimed that no such thing as an Ethiopian State exists. In an interview with the Financial Times on 5 May 1995 Mr. Dawit Yohannes, Speaker of the House of Representatives, has claimed "We say there is no country called Ethiopia, no State that defends the interests of the multi-ethnic community grouped under the name Ethiopia... So we must start again, from scratch."

Determined to pursue their policy of ethnic hatred and division of the country along ethnic lines, TPLF leaders deny the multi-ethnic dimension of Adwa's victory which according to all serious historians was a victory of an army which came from "every tukul and every village in every far off glen of Ethiopia." Their hatred against Emperor Menilek and the "Shoa/Amara" is such that the imperial army's presence at Adwa in 1896 is presented as an "invasion" of Tigray. In their programme adopted at the 2nd TPLF Congress in 1983 they claimed "Hundreds of thousands of Menilek's army, deliberately sent without food and provisions, plundered the villages of Tigray."

The urge to belittle the significance of the Adwa victory is such that TPLF leaders have the audacity to claim that this victory was not only worthless but that it was also contrary to the overall and long term interest of Ethiopia. At the symposium organized to celebrate the Adwa centenary, a certain Dr. Kinfe Abreha, TPLF's representative in Sweden, told the august assembly of historians that "If Ethiopia had lost the battle of Adwa the country's unity - including Eritrea - would have been preserved."

The Italians lost at Adwa because they had no knowledge of the spirit which mobilized Ethiopia's foot soldiers and commanders. The same can not be said of TPLF leaders. They understand what the spirit of Adwa was all about and consider it as a serious threat to their continued misrule of Ethiopia. They know that the spirit of Adwa is alive in the hearts of millions of Ethiopia's democrats and patriots, and sooner or later they will understand that simply trying to push it under the rug cannot help them avoid the disasters suffered by the Italians one hundred years ago.

THE BATTLE OF ADWA

The battle of Adwa, on March 1st, 1896, which lasted less than ten hours was fierce and extremely bloody. Casualties were high on both sides. The Italians counted 286 officers, 4600 rank and file dead, 1482 wounded and more than 1800 made prisoners. Out of the four major generals who led the attack on the Italian side, two were killed, one taken prisoner and the fourth wounded. The loss on the invaders' side was about 70% of the troops engaged which by all accounts was an incredible disaster for a modern army. For their part, between 4000 and 7000 Ethiopians were killed and some 10,000 wounded but none were taken prisoner.

Quarrel over interpretation

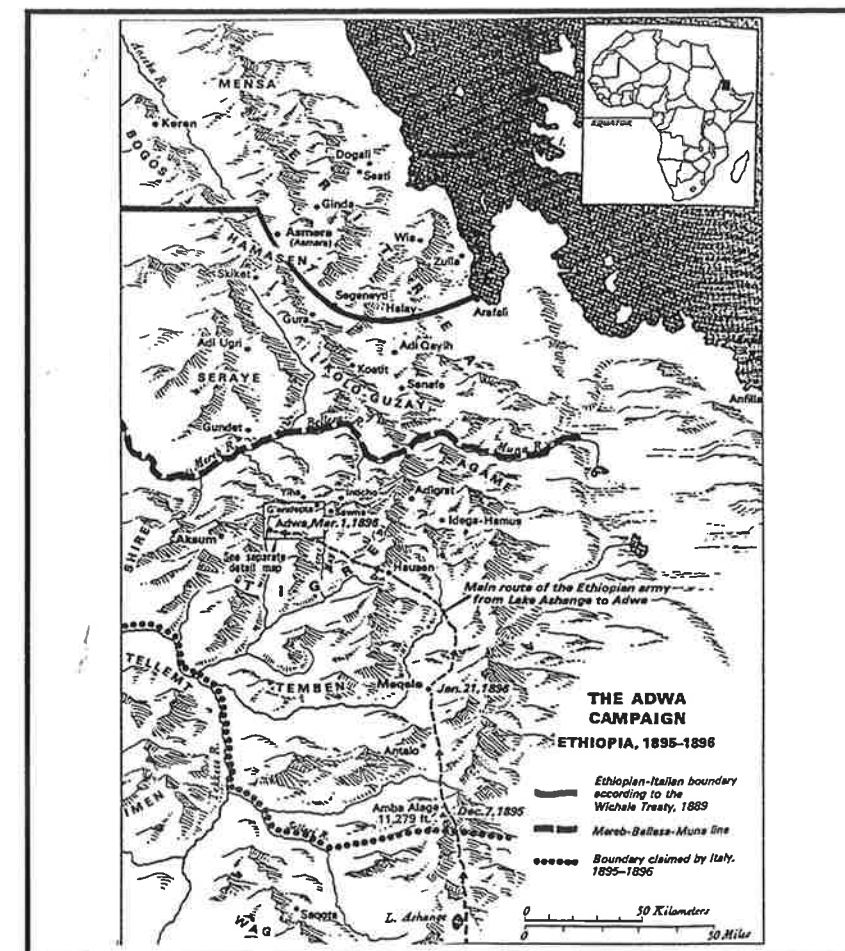
Although the origins of the battle lay in the ambition of Italy to establish an African colonial empire, the immediate cause of dispute that led to war was the

famous Article XVII of the Treaty of Wuchali signed between Emperor Menilek and Italy in May 1889. The treaty had two texts, one in Amharic, the official Ethiopian language, and the other in Italian. The Italian version bound Menilek to make all his foreign contacts through the agency of the Italian government, thus reducing Ethiopia to the status of an Italian protectorate. In the Amharic version, Ethiopia's use of Italian foreign relation services was optional.

Referring to their own version of Article XVII, the Italians claimed that Menilek had accepted Italian protection and notified Europe's major powers that «Ethiopia has become an Italian protectorate». Menilek protested against this «fraudulent» interpretation of the Treaty and wrote to all the major powers to affirm Ethiopia's sovereignty. Almost all the colonial powers of the day (except France) willingly recognized Italian claims. The

German Kaiser responded by asking Menilek to «respect» the treaty he had signed and to conduct all correspondence via the Italian government. Queen Victoria advised Menilek to come to terms with «the powerful» Italy and to wisely accept the Italian version of the treaty. The British erased Ethiopia from the maps which henceforth referred to the country as an «Italian protectorate». They started signing protocols defining frontiers between their East African territories and the supposed Italian protectorate.

This second issue of contention revolved around Italy's forced occupation of the districts of Serai and Akle Guzai (Southern Eritrea) which by virtue of the Treaty of Wuchali were still parts of the Ethiopian empire.



Ethiopia stretches her hands unto God

After lengthy and fruitless negotiations, it became clear to both sides that war was inevitable. In February 1893, Menilek purely and simply denounced the treaty. In a letter to the Italian government and all the European colonial powers he notified that the Treaty would cease on May 1, 1894.

«It is with much dishonesty that King Umberto pretending friendship has desired to seize my country. Because God gave me the crown and the power so that I should protect the land of my forefathers, I terminate and nullify this treaty ... My kingdom is an independent kingdom and I seek no one's protection.» He concluded his letter by quoting the biblical prophecy so familiar to Ethiopians, a phrase which appeared on Menilek's first coins and was printed on the country's passports during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie: «Ethiopia stretches her hands unto God».

The first engagements and the occupation of Tigray

The series of battles which culminated at Adwa in 1896 started in Southern Eritrea in December 1894 as a result of an insurrection led by Dejazmatch Bahta Hagos, ruler of Akle Guzai province earlier occupied by the Italians. Tigrean forces, under the command of Ras Mengesha Yohannes, who had instructions from Menilek to «push back the Italians to the Wuchali line», were overwhelmed by the modern Italian army. In the early months of 1895, the Italians crossed the Mereb river and during the following months, practically the entire Tigray region was occupied.

«Menilek in a cage»

The ease of these early victories caused the Italians to underestimate the difficulties to be encountered during the campaign against the Imperial army. «Victory rallies» were held in many Italian cities. In August 1895, the Italian commander in chief, General Baratieri, returned to Rome on a working visit and promised to cheering crowds at one of these rallies that he would «bring Menilek in a cage». Such enthusiasm was to say the least unwarranted and premature. The victory in Tigray had no demoralizing

effect on Ethiopians. Even Tigrean prisoners of war were in a defiant mood as testified by the words of one prisoner: *«For the moment you have been victorious because God so willed it. But wait for a month or two and you will see Menilek's soldiers. They are as numerous as locusts.»* In Italy not everyone shared Baratieri's enthusiasm. Anti-colonialist and left wing quarters opposed to the campaign warned the Italian government and military authorities not to underestimate Ethiopia's capacity for resistance. The socialist magazine *Critica Sociale* argued that «Behind Ras Mengesha was Ras Wolé, and behind him Ras Michael and then Ras Mekonen, then the Negus Menilek and then all Abyssinia which is in arms to liberate the soil of the mother land ...»

The call to arms

Menilek's mobilization proclamation issued on September 17, 1895 was carefully worded to exploit the nationwide revulsion against white men which arose as a result of the occupation of Tigray and was calculated to strengthen the religious solidarity of Ethiopian Orthodoxy in the face of the aggressor's ambition «to change the country's religion».

«Enemies have now come upon us to ruin the country and change our religion ... Our enemies have begun the affair by advancing and digging into the country like moles. With the help of God, I will not deliver up my country to them. Today, you who are strong give me your strength, and you who are weak, help me with your prayers.»

Response to Menilek's call to arms was beyond anyone's expectations. In what many historians called the greatest mobilization of Ethiopians from a wide stretch of the country since medieval times, «every tukul and village in every far-off glen in Ethiopia» sent out its warriors. The result was the mobilization of some 110,000 soldiers, comprising 80,000 riflemen, 8,600 cavalry, and about 20,000 lancers, spearmen and swordsmen who were ready to take over the rifles of those whomight fall in action. Menilek marched north at the head of his army of peasants into Tigray to challenge a heavily armed Italian force of some 20,000 men about half of whom were European troops and the rest Eritrean Askaris armed with obsolete rifles, machine guns and artillery.

«You have come to take my country ...»

After the occupation of Serai and Akele Guzai in present day southern Eritrea and the entire Tigray region, the Italian tactic was invariably the same: they dug in fortifications and showed no desire to engage the Ethiopians. Throughout the entire Adwa campaign, Menilek's problem was to force them out of their fortifications and to engage battle.

The first engagement between the Italians and the imperial army was a clear illustration of these strategies. It came at the natural fortress of Amba Alage in southern Tigray. It was said that this natural fortress was so strong a position that it was possible for «ten men with stones to defend it against an army of a thousand troops». The vanguard force of Menilek's army, under the command of Ras Mekonen - father of Emperor Haile Sellasie - reached Amba Alage in November 1895. As the Tigrean chiefs who knew the terrain advised against a frontal attack which could have proved vain and extremely bloody, the troops had to stay there waiting for the Italians to come out of their fortifications and to engage them.

The Italian tactic was so frustrating to the Ethiopian peasant army that Menilek at one point was obliged to send a provocative message to the Italians: «You have come to take my country. How are you going to do this without coming out and fighting me?» This of course was to no avail.

Victory at Amba Alage

The stalemate at Amba Alage where the two armies were facing each other without engaging in actual combat gave the commander in chief, Ras Mekonen, the opportunity to give peace another try by trying to negotiate peaceful withdrawal of Italian troops from Tigray. But while Ras Mekonen was negotiating with the Italians, one of the most daring and legendary heroes of the Adwa campaign, the Oromo Fitawrari Gebeyehu Gebo, commander of the Emperor's vanguard forces, led an unexpected assault and after tremendous losses in life on both sides (2000 Italians and Eritrean Askaris and some 4000 Ethiopians killed), defeated and dislodged the Italians.

The Italian commander complained to Ras Mekonen saying this attack was «unilateral and unprovoked». Surprisingly, Ras Mekonen, in a move probably

calculated to show the Italian public and the international community Ethiopia's peaceful intentions and desire to solve the problem through negotiations, told the Italian high command that this «incident» was regrettable and to persuade them that he was serious, he put Fitawrari Gebeyehu under arrest! The Fitawrari was released after an energetic intervention on his behalf by the Empress, only to die a hero's death at the battle of Adwa on March 1st.

Although achieved at a tremendous cost in life, the victory at Amba Alage - the first of the entire Adwa campaign - gave a tremendous moral and psychological boost to the Ethiopians. The Italian commander-in-chief, General Baratieri, later noted that this Italian defeat was a «political calamity» which increased the «boldness, confidence, strength and pretensions of the enemy».

The Italian disaster at Amba Alage was the first shock received by the Italian high command and the colonial establishment in Rome. It gave rise to a heated debate in the Italian parliament with Left wing groups calling for an end to the colonial adventure, and the colonialists led by Prime Minister Crispi, calling for a «decisive victory» over the barbarian Abyssinians in order to save «the honor of the army and the monarchy».

Italian humiliation at Mekelle

After Amba Alage, the Imperial army got another moral boost when Negus Tekle Haimanot of Gojjam arrived at the camp on 23 December. The Ethiopians then marched north and on 7 January appeared before the Italian fortified position at Mekelle. The next day, the Negus ordered the first of a number of attacks which lasted intermittently until 11 January when a final attempt failed.

In actual fact, this defeat was a turning point in the fate of the Mekelle garrison. As the water supply was outside the fortress, Empress Taitu, who had some 5,000 troops, ordered her forces to take all water wells around Mekelle at any cost. Oral tradition praises the valor of Dejach Balcha, who commanded the Ethiopian right and Dejech Abate, who held the left, in the series of battles in which the Italians lost all wells around their fortified position.

While Mekelle was under siege and its defenders

were starting to starve, the Italian government, again showing arrogant blindness about the morale of the Imperial army and the strategic position on the field, came out with a «peace proposal» which was so unrealistic that even the pro-Italian historian Berkley called it a document which «revealed the depths of Italian self-delusion». According to this peace proposal, Ethiopia was to recognize Italian annexation of Tigray, Harar was to be placed under an Italian protectorate, and Italy should represent Ethiopia (or what would have remained of it) in all foreign policy matters with a Resident in Addis Abeba empowered to handle Ethiopian international relations. While rejecting these «peace proposals», Menilek instructed Ras Mekonen to open negotiations with the isolated and beleaguered Italian garrison at Mekelle.

Accordingly, Mekelle's defenders were offered free passage, with their arms and baggage, to join their compatriots at Edaga Hamus. In view of the desperate situation, Baratieri had no choice but to accept this humiliating offer. The Italians thus surrendered on January 21st and marched to Edaga Hamus under the protection of the Emperor's army. The Italian High Command once again failed to get the right message and interpreted this gesture as a sign of Menilek's «fear to fight Italy's modern and powerful army».

But for many people in Italy, surrender at Mekelle marked the beginning of the end. The conquest of Ethiopia, as presented to the Italian people, was supposed to be a mass Sunday school picnic with the noble objective of «civilizing a bunch of barbarian tribes». After Mekelle, the Italian paper *Opinion* wrote:

«By now it should be clear that we are not dealing with a horde of savages armed with spears. We have before us an army which is three times stronger than ours, which is well equipped and organized. Given these circumstances, victory is becoming doubtful.»

Stalemate at Adwa

Italian surrender at Mekelle had a demoralizing effect on notorious Tigrean collaborators like Ras Sebbat and Hagos Teferri who, on the night of February 12, defected to the Emperor and started to seriously disrupt Italian communications with the rear and the headquarters in Asmara. Meanwhile, Menilek and all his generals had marched to the north to Adwa and

camped near the two Italian fortifications of Adigrat and Enticho some 60 and 30 kilometers away.

But with the Ethiopians reluctant to attack the fortified Italian positions and Baratieri unwilling to offer battle in the field, the stalemate at Adwa was extremely frustrating for both sides. Both for the Italians and the Ethiopians, the situation could not continue indefinitely as they were both running out of food supplies. As far as the imperial army was concerned, the troops' personal provisions had been exhausted long ago. By mid-February, the situation was so critical that Menilek described his army as «starving». The problem of provisions was no less acute for the Italians. The long line of communications was systematically threatened by bands of patriots in southern Eritrea led by Has Sebbat and Hagos Teferri. Towards the end of February, the situation was so serious that the Italians were living on half rations or even less.

Most absurd battle

Had it not been for these serious problems of provisions, the Italian army's interest was clearly to wage a defensive war and maintain this stance until the Ethiopians had exhausted the region's resources and Menilek compelled to retire or even disband his army. For his part, Menilek, while exploring other options, was reported to have taken the decision to break camp.

One of the options considered by the Ethiopian High Command was marching to Asmara. Menilek in fact ordered Ras Mengasha Yohannes and Ras Mekonnen to start the march north. But he had to recall them after they reported that there was no water in the Mereb river.

The second (somewhat suicidal) option was to attack the Italian's fortified position on February 26th. But meetings of the Rases and other military leaders reaffirmed the decision to fight the Italians only if they left their position and to cross into Eritrea if they did not.

Although Baratieri's strategy of waiting for Menilek's army to depart and disperse for lack of supplies was sound, he was under strong pressure for offensive action from the Italian Prime Minister Crispi and his generals. On February 25th, he received the notorious

telegram from the Prime Minister: «*This is a military phtisis, not a war. Small skirmishes in which we always find ourselves facing the enemy with inferior numbers; a waste of heroism without success. We are ready for any sacrifice to save the honor of the army and the prestige of the monarchy.*».

Baratieri called an informal meeting of his generals for the evening of 28 February. He told them that provisions would be exhausted by 3 March and suggested retreating, perhaps as far as Asmara. The generals unanimously voiced their readiness for battle and insisted that to retire at this point would only worsen morale. As his commanders left, Baratieri told them he was expecting to receive further intelligence, upon which he would base his decision. The next day, on the basis of «Intelligence reports», he made his decision. On the 29th, «*Unexpectedly, incredibly, there came the order for us to march in the direction of Adwa*», later noted an Italian field officer. As a result of the unanimous decision of the Italian High Command, the Italian army was led to what historian Roberto Ballaglia called «*the most incredible and absurd battle that has ever taken place in modern history*».

Double agents and would-be defectors

In his memoirs, Menilek's Swiss-born advisor, Ilg, attributed the Adwa victory to the «sophisticated intelligence apparatus of the Abyssinians», the existence of which the Italians did not even suspect. After the disaster, they were to discover that from the first days of the campaign, the Italian High Command was manipulated by Ethiopian government agents, mainly recruited in Tigray province and occupied Eritrea. During the month of February, all the double agents were mobilized to provide the Italians with «intelligence reports» which had one single purpose: persuading them to come out of their fortifications and attack: the Ethiopian army is desperately out of supplies; the High Command has decided to cross the Meréb into Eritrea; most of the soldiers have already returned to their homes; most of the Rases have decided to defect to the Italians; this or that Ras has died; Menilek is seriously ill ...

The «intelligence report» which Baratieri mentioned to his generals on the 28th, and upon which he said he would base his decision, reached him that same night. It came from Awalom Haregot, the Tigrean double

agent who advised an attack on March 1st. «*That day being St. George's day - specially venerated by the Ethiopians - practically all the remaining soldiers would go to the holy city of Axum, leaving Menilek and Taitu with only their personal guards. Menilek is sitting there alone for you to attack. You have got him. Today he will not escape you. Today is the day.*».

The double agents' efforts were bolstered by the Rases, who were in contact with the Italians in one way or another during the entire campaign. The Italians repeatedly offered rewards to chiefs who were willing to defect. Rases Mengesha, Michael, Mekonen, etc. maintained these contacts and at times gave positive but vague responses to Italian offers. What the Italians never suspected was that all this was done with the knowledge and approval of the Emperor. During the last days of February, the Italian High Command was literally harassed by these chiefs: they were asking the Italians to come out and attack so that they (the Rases) might seize the occasion to change sides and help destroy Menilek's army before it retreated further south.

Good news, the enemy is coming!

The Italians left their fortified positions at 9:00 p.m. and marched through the moonlit night hoping to obtain the advantage of surprise over a «greatly decimated army». Their objective was to occupy the hills around Adwa and position their superior artillery before the Ethiopians discovered what was going on.

Menilek and Taitu were at religious services with Rases Michael, Makonnen and Wole when they received the news of the Italian advance at 4:00 a.m. on Sunday. Menilek had become so accustomed to similar alerts over the previous month that upon receiving the news, he smiled, shrugged and continued to worship. But shortly after the first messengers had come, news of an enemy engagement of the Tigrean troops on duty that night under Ras Mengasha Yohannes, left no room for doubt.

«For the Motherland, the Emperor and the Faith»

The moving scene that followed was described by the French magazine «*Revue française de l'Etranger*» (August 1896), some months after the battle of Adwa: «*Special trumpeters were ordered to sound the call to*

arms, but the incredulous trumpeters remained silent. Fortunately, Ras Mekonnen appeared. The assembly was sounded and carried out in an instant... Priests passed among the assembled troops, hearing confession, giving Holy Communion, and blessing the soldiers. After Menilek, Taitu and the Rases had received the bread and wine, the green, orange and red flag was inclined towards the crucifix. The masses of humble Abyssinians beseeched the God of combat: «For the motherland! For the Emperor! For the faith!» Confidently, the troops rallied around the Emperor and the flag. The rising dawn lit this moving, grandiose scene of religious and military fervor. It was 5:30. The army got underway with the usual clamor.»

United Ethiopia in action

By daybreak, Menilek had disposed his Rases to meet the attack. The Italian forces led by Generals Albertone, Arimondi, Dabormeda and Ellena, using faulty maps, obeying vague and misunderstood orders, misled by Ethiopian double agents who, at the risk of their own lives, dutifully guided enemy troops to exposed positions and finally having lost the advantage of surprise, were in no position to challenge a nation united as it had never been since medieval times.

Tigrean forces under Rases Mengesha Yohannes and Alula, along with Wag Shum Guangul's army were ordered into action on the Ethiopian left wing. On the right, the army of Negus Tekle Haimanot of Gojjam was ordered to march forward to attack General Albertone's flank. At the center were Menilek and Taitu with the emperor's vanguard forces led by Fitawrari Gebeyehu from Showa and Fitawrari Tekle from Wollega. Then came Ras Mekonnen with his troops from Harar and Ras Michael heading the Wollo/Oromo cavalry, followed by other units under the command of Ras Wole Bitul of Yejjju, Ras Bitwodd Mengesha Atkim, etc.

The Ethiopians attacked at 6:00 a.m. By 9:00 a.m., the outcome was obvious at least for the forces under General Albertone on the Italian left wing. Having judged that this part of the battlefield presented the

first challenge, Menilek moved forward with overwhelming numbers to reinforce the Gojjam troops and to return the heavy fire of Albertone's attack. Casualties were high on both sides. Several of Menilek's commanders, including Fitawrari Gebeyehu - the legendary hero of the Adwa campaign - were killed early in the engagement. Gebeyehu's death somewhat demoralized the Ethiopian ranks, the High Command threw in fresh troops in overwhelming numbers to maintain the initiative until finally Albertone's army was completely crushed and the general was captured.

Immediately after Albertone's collapse, Menilek moved further to the west where forces of Ras Michael and Ras Mengesha Atkim had already engaged «a larger but disorganized Italian army» under Generals Arimondi and Ellena. The Ethiopians' move to this front was said to be so fast that at some places they arrived together with the fleeing remains of Albertone's brigade. Once again the Italians were facing overwhelming numbers, attacking from all sides, as the Ethiopian army used the difficult terrain to its best advantage. At noon, Baratieri ordered a general retreat.

On the Ethiopian left flank, Tigrean forces under Ras Mengesha and Alula were engaged against General Dabormida's army. As the other two fronts had been decisively crushed, the Ethiopians massively moved additional forces from the center and the Italians soon found themselves completely encircled. Very heavy fighting took place in this sector mainly between one and three o'clock in the afternoon. By mid-afternoon, General Dabormida had been killed in action and what remained of the Italian army was retreating in utter confusion. The battle of Adwa was over.

A few days later, the Italians began negotiations to end the war and recover their prisoners, who were all transferred to Addis Abeba and Harar. The peace treaty was signed in Addis Abeba on 26 October 1896. It declared that the state of war between Italy and Ethiopia was over and that the Treaty of Wuchali «is and will remain definitely annulled with its annexes». Italy recognized «absolutely and without reserve the independence of the Ethiopian Empire».

The battle of Adwa seen by an Ethiopian artist



Traditional pictures of the battle invariably place the Ethiopian army on the left and the Italian army on the right. The Ethiopians are depicted full face, with two eyes, the Italians in profile, with one. Italian dead and prisoners, however, are often shown full face as they are no longer enemies. Eritreans in Italian service are likewise shown in this manner, presumably because they were not really considered foreigners.

As the battle was fought on St. George's day, the Saint is often depicted in the sky fighting on the Ethiopian side, under a rainbow in the Ethiopian colors: green, yellow and red.

SOME SALIENT FEATURES OF ADWA

To Ethiopians, the Adwa victory brought relief and gratitude, mingled with regret that it should have been so costly in human life, but it «could not have come as a surprise», as Professor Robinson rightly noted. Menilek himself expressed the feeling of many Ethiopians when he wrote to a French friend one month after Adwa: «Their arrogance led them to attack me and they were defeated. But I have no cause to rejoice at this. When I see that their ignorance has resulted in so much Christian blood shed in vain, I have no reason to rejoice at this victory.» The reaction in Europe and America, however, was

one of shock and disbelief. The disaster suffered by the Italians at the hands of this «brave but barbarian foe», in the words of an otherwise sympathetic French paper, was so unexpected that the European press (eg. TIMES 5 March 1896) expressed «hope that there must be a mistake of transmission somewhere». European powers received the news with what an Ethiopian intellectual, Berhanu Teferra, called a sense of «collective doom.» Several factors explain this difference in reaction of Ethiopians and Italians/Europeans — the same which led to the Italian defeat.

ADWA: A VICTORY OF ETHIOPIAN SELF-CONFIDENCE OVER ITALIAN/EUROPEAN RACISM

Some 40 years after Adwa, Haron R. Prohazka, a pro-fascist European expelled from Ethiopia for «activities prejudicial to the internal and external security of the state», wrote a book ostensibly to justify Mussolini's invasion of the country. He stigmatized Ethiopians' «pretentious claims» to equality with Europeans and attacked their «senseless resentment and racial mania» against Europe's civilizing mission in Africa. In what he called «a land of boundless impossibilities» he warned his readers «It cannot be repeated often enough that the European can hardly form a true picture of the conditions in Ethiopia and the white man comes up against things he would never have thought possible. He is made to realize at every turn that they do not look at upon the white man as their teacher and protector much less their superior.»

The main problem for the Italians was their failure to understand, let alone admit, this «pretentious claim». From the very beginning of the Italian colonial adventure back in 1885, Ethiopia's rulers were «bewildered» by European claims on a land which Emperor Yohannes IV maintained was given to him by «Jesus Christ». In a letter to Queen Victoria who had sent an envoy to persuade the Emperor to come to terms with Italy by accepting some territorial concessions, headamantly responded «Reconciliation is possible when they are in their country and I in mine.» More blatantly, Ras Alula, at that time governor of the province of Hamassen, told the British envoy that «The Italians would be allowed to take over Sahati (region around Marsawa) when I become governor of Rome.»

Emperor Menilek for his part did not see the rationale behind Italian claims to «protect» Ethiopia because this country which «stretches her hands unto God» needed no such assistance: «God who had protected Ethiopia until this day will henceforth protect and increase her.»

This Ethiopian self-confidence and trust in God was never recognized by the colonial powers who «obsessed by their conviction of racial superiority... were unprepared to acknowledge the African as an equal human being» (Rubinson)

This obsession with «racial superiority» was so strong that while some in Europe acknowledged the victory of Adwa for what it was, ie «the first great victory of the black race over Europeans since Hannibal» (London Chronicle March 1896), other incorrigibly racist quarters went so far as to claim that Ethiopians were not blacks after all. As Prof. H. Marcus put it:

«Before the battle of Adwa, Western writings about Ethiopia were generally as racist as the discourse about the rest of the continent. Yet there was always a paradox present. That is Europeans had to explain the country's ancient history, its durable Christianity and its government's apparent conformity to European norms of monarchy. They recognized these differences but rationalized them away by dubbing them decadent and savage.»

After the battle of Adwa, Western writers understood the Italian defeat in terms of Ethiopia's ancient history, its durable Christianity and its monarchy which had been proved to be pure, unsullied and strong. In effect, Ethiopians were accorded the status of whites to explain their defeat of Italy.»

In fact, as they were unable to come to terms with the idea of a black army defeating a modern European state, some observers like the French journalist J. Reclus claimed that the Abyssinians were in fact «Europeans not Africans». Another wrote a book entitled «Ethiopians, these whites with a black face.» The Frenchman C. Mondo-Vidalhet, a friend of Ethiopia who played a crucial role in gathering some sympathy for the Ethiopian cause during the Adwa campaign, claimed Ethiopians were the «French of Africa». A manual published by the US Army accorded the status of white to half the population of the country: «In the highlands of Eastern Africa, there is a rugged inland country known variously as Abyssinia and Ethiopia. Italy had, tried in vain to conquer it in 1896. The population is partly white and partly negro; partly Christian and partly Mohammedan and pagan.»

To be sure, Ethiopians reacted to the white racist attitude with their own brand of racism. In the years preceding Adwa, there was nationwide revulsion against white men. It was said that «One recovers from the bite of a black snake but never from the bite of a white snake.» More relevant to the Adwa campaign (and victory) was the self confidence of the soldiers and commanders of the Ethiopian forces

in the face of a modern European army. «Every Abyssinian has a deep-rooted conviction of the superiority of the Abyssinian soldier and army over the armies of the European colonizing powers...» (Baron R. Prochazka)

ADWA: A VICTORY OF ETHIOPIAN PATRIOTISM OVER ITALIAN ETHNIC POLICIES

Over and above their racism, the Italians made another major mistake in discounting national self awareness and patriotism in Ethiopia. Menilek's refusal to recognize Italy's protectorate claims and the rising tide of anti-white feeling in Ethiopia in the years preceding Adwa were dismissed by the Italian commander General Baratieri as «a semblance of the idea of nationhood in the guise of hatred against whites.» This denial of Ethiopian patriotism in a country where the notion of «ENAT AGER» (the motherland) was one of the most salient and permanent features of its centuries-old existence as a political (and religious) entity, betrayed a simplistic and superficial understanding of the nature and implications of ethnic and religious rivalries among the country's rulers.

In a report backing the Italian contention that the country to be conquered was a conglomerate of ever-quarreling tribal chiefs with no sense of belonging to the Ethiopian nation, Baratieri wrote that «All the RASES are divided. All are self-centered, concerned with their own interests. The king of Gojjam is an internal enemy (of the emperor) Ras Mengesba (of Tigray) is on the verge of coming over to Italy. Ras Michael (Wollo/Oromo) is in permanent contact with us. Ras Mekonnen (Amara/Oromo and father of Emperor Haile Selassie), to whom we promised a separate state based in Harar, is constantly conspiring to avoid war...»

The central feature of Italian strategy was this supposed division among Ethiopia's rulers. But as Professor Rubinson noted «No serious student of Ethiopian history is likely to deny the existence of centrifugal forces in the Ethiopian state. Rivalry and disunity were indeed prevalent factors in the shaping of Ethiopian politics... The mistake of the Italians, as of other Europeans, was to take it for granted that all disunity and rivalry could be used by a foreign power against the integrity and independence of the Ethiopian state, in other words that it was a priori

treasonable.»

It was only after the Adwa defeat that the Italians learned this was not true. As they had done repeatedly in the past, Ethiopia's rulers checked their own ambitions and stood together to resist a foreign enemy which targeted their country for enslavement.

ADWA: A VICTORY OF ALL ETHNIC GROUPS AND REGIONS OF ETHIOPIA

In response to Menilek's call to arms «Every tukul and village in every far-off glen in Ethiopia was sending out its warriors» (Berkley) The Italians expected that Menilek would be able to raise only some 30 000 men, given the rivalry and division among the country's rulers. But the Emperor achieved what one historian called «the greatest mobilization of Ethiopians since medieval times.» Ethiopians from all the country's regions, ethnic and/or religious backgrounds took up the challenge and marched north to defeat the invading colonial army. Except for those assigned to security and administrative tasks elsewhere in the empire, all the great chiefs of the country were at Adwa. The southern leaders were sent back to guard the frontiers but Abba Jiffar of Jimma, King Tona of Wollayita, Dejazmatch Jotte of Quelem and Dejatch Gebre Egziabher of Wollega had accompanied the Emperor as far as Wore Ilu in Wollo region. Although the Italians persistently referred to the enemy as «the Shewan» or «Amara» forces, the top Ethiopian leaders and officers at Adwa were drawn from all the regions and major ethnic groups as is shown by the following list:

Leader's name and Ethnic group

Emperor Menilek, Amara
Empress Taitu, Amara-Oromo-Tigray
Negus Michael, Oromo
Ras Tekle Haimanot, Amara
Ras Mengeshe Yohannes, Tigrean
Ras Mekonnen, Amara, Oromo
Ras Sebehat Hagos, Tigrean
Ras Allula, Tigrean
Ras Wole Bitul, Oromo-Amara-Tigray
Ras Mengesha Atkim, Amara
Dejatch Baltcha, Gurage
Fitawrari Gebeyehu, Oromo
Dejazmatch Bahta Hagos, Tigrean
etc...

ADWA: A VICTORY OF EFFICIENT AND SKILLFUL ORGANIZATION: THE MILITARY INTELLIGENCE ASPECT

Until the decisive battle was fought and lost at Adwa, the Italians underestimated the enemy's capacity of response, ignored the military strategy and operational thinking of the commanders, and above all, totally misread the military intelligence capability of the Ethiopian state. The Italian High Command was deliberately kept in the dark on all these crucial aspects by what the Swiss advisor A. Ilg called the «sophisticated intelligence apparatus of the Abyssinians».

The Italians had no clear idea of the size of the army they faced, let alone its weaponry, entrenchments, supply and communication lines, and operation plans. As the historian Berkley noted:

«Never before in the history of the world had there been so curious an instance of a commander successfully concealing the numbers of his army and masking his advance behind a complete network of insinuations, false information and circumstantial deceptions.»

The Ethiopian High Command, on the other hand, had precise information on the enemy and efficiently used double agents to manipulate the unsuspecting Italians by providing them with deceptive intelligence. As one Italian commander commented to Berkley after the war *«From their sources, the Abyssinians knew all about the Italian force and movements, whereas the Italians knew but little of their enemy's. They had a splendid intelligence service - as we have since found out - composed of clever and faithful men whose work was facilitated by our ill-arranged and lax system of outposts, through which a flow of more or less genuine peasants, seemingly submissive and indifferent, came and went continually.»*

Tekeste Melake, in his paper on «The military intelligence aspect of Adwa» argues that this appears «to be the main factor in the final showdown at Adwa,» which he says came as a result of «effectively deceptive intelligence work conducted by intelligence personnel highly committed to the Ethiopian cause.»

Dedicated Tigrean spies

The least suspected Ethiopian spies - and therefore the most effective - were women from Tigray and occupied Eritrea who were «greatly used to obtain news, as they were able to learn the Italian language with astonishing speed, sustaining a conversation with ease and adjusting quickly to the Italian habits», as one Italian officer later commented.

The most prominent of Ethiopia's double agents, who is credited with providing the «intelligence» which led Baratieri to take the fatal decision to attack on the night of 29 February, was Aw'alom Haregot from the village of Entichio (Tigray region.) R. Pankhurst has the following to say about this great double agent:

«Aw'alom, a villager from Entichio, had some time earlier made contact with the Italians by supplying them with eggs, chickens and other produce and had been given 200 dollars by Baratieri to undertake espionage work. Aw'alom, whom we are told was a tall man of soldierly bearing, was entirely loyal to the Ethiopian cause and went immediately to Ras Mengasha to report upon the confidence which had been placed in him by the invader. It is related that Mengasha interrogated him privately and being convinced of the truth of his story... took him to Menilek and his generals. Ras Alula who was present urged that his services should be used to give false information to the enemy. Menilek agreed to this and handed Aw'alom a sum of money. This he refused, offering the Emperor instead the 200 dollars he had received from the Italians as his own personal contribution to the war. Menilek laughingly refused and asked the patriot to fall in with Alula's plan. Aw'alom agreed with regret as he had hoped to join Menilek's army as a soldier.»

After the war, Aw'alom best summarized his own role and that of other double agents, in the Adwa victory:

Menilek's genius made a master spy of a humble merchant like me. I became General Baratieri's servant in order to be in a position to give him orders. As I myself received my orders from His Majesty, it can be said that through me Menilek constantly passed his orders to Baratieri. That is how, during the

night of March 1st, 1896 I led the enemy to be trapped by Menilek's army.»

Some 40 years later, when Mussolini's army invaded

Ethiopia, the Italians in their own way recognized the incalculable harm caused by the «treachery» of Aw'alom and other double agents by burning his village and massacring its inhabitants...

INTERNATIONAL REACTION TO THE VICTORY OF ADWA

The battle of Adwa was fought and won during the culminating phase of the European «scramble for Africa» which for many Europeans was proof of the «invincibility of the white man in Africa». The news of the Italian disaster was received with shock and disbelief and a «sense of collective doom» by the community of «civilized nations». The shock was all the greater because Ethiopia stood virtually alone when Menilek issued his mobilization proclamation and went to war. This was hard to live with for many in Europe and America because this victory of a «barbarian foe» over a «civilized nation» could in no way be attributed to support from any European power.

The British, Germans and Austrians all supported the Italian claims. As the crisis was building, the three colonial powers banned all export of arms to Ethiopia. The French gave marginal and discreet support. Some 14,000 Talers were provided to Ras Mekonnen «as confidentially as possible» and 2000 rifles with spare parts and ammunition were discreetly supplied by Paris to help Menilek's army. More importantly, French arms dealers kept up the supply of arms for which Menilek paid gold, coffee, ivory etc.

To break his isolation, the emperor tried to promote closer relations with «orthodox Russia». In mid-1895 a mission was sent to St. Petersburg but came back with «a few weapons, some decorations and souvenirs.» This European mania of offering ridiculous «gifts» when what was needed was concrete and substantial support, so irritated Menilek that at one point he is said to have commented: *«Some nations see me as a child: giving me presents of a box of tricks, a magic lantern and a mechanical toy.»*

The reactions to the defeat were «one of sympathy with Italy, regret at its fate, dismay at its tainted prestige and hence deep concern for the future of all the European powers.»

The front-page story in the New York Times of 5 March, reported the defeat with sensational headlines: ITALY IS AWE-STRUCK

- Cabinet has decided to press its resignation
- Baldissera in command
- Why the attack was made and failed
- Military advocate general to investigate Baratieri
- Indignation of republicans against the government expressed at meetings and in riots
- Five thousand soldiers killed
- Only forty out of two hundred and forty-seven survive and the invading army retreats
- Kaiser condoles with Umberto

REACTION IN ITALY

Demonstrations, protests and disturbances all over the country immediately followed the news of the defeat. Crispi's government collapsed in an uproar of abuse. In the streets and squares, shouts of «a bas Crispi» and «via dall'Africa» even «Viva Menilek» were heard. Riots broke in Milan, Rome, Turin, Naples etc.

Newspapers of all political shades reported public reaction from around the country and attacked both the government and the Italian high command in the most violent terms. After the indignation which marked the first days, Italian public opinion calmed down towards the end of the second week of March. Now, the call was for a policy of «retrieving Italy's military dignity» and supporting the new government's «African policy». The dominant feeling was that «to withdraw from Africa at this time was an impossible humiliation.» Demonstrators demanded that «strong measures be taken to re-establish national prestige.»

The Left wing opposition demanded the recall of Italian troops from Africa, but King Umberto declared that he «would sooner abdicate the throne of Italy

than abandon the Italian province of Eritrea". The Italian government declared its intention to maintain its "foothold in Abyssinia" and, while seemingly negotiating with Menilek "mainly for the purpose of gaining time", it embarked on a policy of sending huge reinforcements to its Army in Eritrea. Arms, troops and beasts of burden were dispatched throughout the month of March and part of April.

Encouraged by the popular demand for "revenge" the new government announced "hostilities will continue and come what may, they will not be suspended until the interests of the colony and Italian feelings have been satisfied."

With the exception of the socialists and the Left opposition, the response to the statement that the war would continue was one of "general relief". Under these circumstances, even Italy's decision to open peace negotiations was rejected by a vociferous minority. The so-called 'Italian terms' were unrealistic, to say the least. The new prime minister who "rejected the policy of colonial expansion" outlined his terms for peace by asserting, among other things, that "It would be dangerous to Italian interests to renounce the territory of Tigray".

Although Menilek was aware of Italian reinforcements and preparations for war, and amid calls by many Europeans (especially in Great Britain and Germany) for an expedition to restore the "prestige of Europe in Africa", the emperor was in no mood to meet Italy's demands. He accepted Italy's offers of negotiation but insisted that this time, they would be sincere. The negotiations took time. In the end, the Italians realized they could not win at the negotiations table the protectorate that they had lost in the field around Adwa. Although the important and difficult issue of a permanent boundary was not settled, the peace treaty was signed on October 26. It was labeled a "treaty of eternal peace" between the two countries. But this "ever lasting peace" gave Ethiopia only forty years of unchallenged independence. In 1935, Italy under Mussolini again invaded Ethiopia.

REACTION IN THE REST OF EUROPE

In London, British public and government opinion were largely depicted in the Times, which on March 5 noted "what was at first euphemistically described

as a reverse to Italian arms was really a military disaster of the first magnitude." Doubts as to the accuracy of the reports were expressed with the paper stating "the latest accounts place the Italian loss in the battle of Adwa at a figure so high that we cannot but hope there is a serious mistake somewhere." Though prior to the victory the paper had systematically referred to Ethiopians as "barbarians and savages", the country was now described as "a civilized power".

The official British policy was described later in a statement by George Curzon, Parliamentary Secretary for the Foreign Office, who declared the British were "squarely in favor of and in sympathy with Italy in the latter's campaign in Abyssinia" and that the "disaster to the Italian army at Adwa... had been heard of throughout the United Kingdom with much sympathy and regret."

In France where many hoped for a setback of the rival power, the Italian rout was received with "sincere regret". The Times reported that "serious-minded Frenchmen were no doubt able to sympathize with the victims of so harsh a fortune even though they be Italians ... civilized France regrets the defeat of a civilized nation by forces belonging to the barbarian world".

Prominent French papers (*Le Temps*, *Le Figaro*, *La Gazette de France* etc.) indulged in attempts to explain why a "European state with a military tradition like Italy had been defeated by a petty king like Menilek?" Two of the most prevalent ideas were that the "Abyssinians were in fact Europeans not Africans" and that they were able to defeat the Italians because "the apparently fragile and disorganized Abyssinian institutions, in fact drew exceptional solidity from their age-old existence". (*Le Temps*)

In Germany, the Italian defeat was received with "deepest concern". The Kaiser sent a message of sympathy to the king of Italy, while military and official circles blamed Great Britain for its failure to assist Italy in its time of need.

In contrast to reactions in other parts of Europe, the Russians seemed to have been pleased at the defeat of Italians by the "Brave Orthodox Abyssinians". The Russian Czar awarded Menilek with the Grand

Cordon of St. George "The highest military decoration in the Russian empire". The Russian Red Cross, which already had a team working with the wounded from the Adwa campaign, dispatched another expedition with medical assistance to be "equally distributed between Italians and Abyssinians regardless of religion and politics". This initiative had opponents in Russia itself. Newspapers like *Novoe Vremya* were greatly disturbed by the prospects of Russia assisting the Italians and advised the Red Cross "to concentrate all its efforts upon the Abyssinians who have no other friends in the world."

REACTION IN AFRICA

Understandably, reaction to the Italian defeat was more vehement among the white community established in Africa. British controlled newspapers (*Lagos Standard*, *Gold Coast Chronicle*, *West African Gazette*, etc.) were all hostile to Menilek. They all avoided naming Ethiopia or Abyssinia and tried to belittle the multi-ethnic and national dimension of the victory by attributing it to "Shoan tribes." More importantly, they seemed to have apprehensions about the implications and consequences to "civilization" of this defeat of a white army by a "hoard of savage tribes."

The *Johannesburg Star* wrote on 5 March: «this is an utter and crushing defeat which represents the most disastrous check any European power has received at the hands of natives. It cannot but be deplored by white men in all parts of Africa. It is far from impossible that this great defeat may have even larger consequences than a temporary check to civilization in Africa."

In Cape Town, the settler paper *Cape Argus* called for "renewal" of Italy's colonial war "Italy is bound to

carry out her policy in Abyssinia to the bitter end. Menilek must be crushed at any cost."

This did not represent popular opinion in Africa, however. Adwa was received with acclaim and enthusiasm. To understand the significance of Adwa to Africans and black people everywhere, it must be remembered that the victory came at a time when the European scramble for Africa had reached its culminating phase.

In the years preceding Adwa, the scramble meant that European powers were physically overtaking the continent territory by territory, destroying the indigenous political entities. This encroachment by Europeans was challenged in most parts of the continent—resistance broke out with varying intensity almost everywhere: the Horn, West Africa, Matabeleland, Madagascar, etc...

West Africa, under Samori, Behanzen and others, had resisted the French. The "Mahdi" had already defeated the British in Khartoum. The Kwazulu king had defeated the British army in Southern Africa, etc. But all these victories were short-lived as they spurred the colonial powers on to longer wars ending in their final victory.

Adwa was a notable exception to this process. Menilek's victory delivered a decisive blow to the colonial myth of white European invincibility. As such it "put pride into the breasts of Africans everywhere." More importantly, it stimulated early African nationalism in West and Southern Africa. It gave impetus to Garveyism and the "Back to Africa" movement in the USA and to the Caribbean and the Pan African movement led by Du Bois whose congress in London in 1900 elected Menilek as its honorary chairman...

ADWA AND ERITREA

The resounding victory at Adwa was not complete in that Menilek failed to pursue the Italians and drive them out of the northern Ethiopian province of Mereb Melash ie occupied Eritrea.

By accepting the Ethio-Italian border, a line which arbitrarily cuts through the lands of the Tigreans,

the Afars and the Kunamas, Menilek left a problem which was to bedevil Ethiopia for decades.

Why did the Emperor act this way? According to the simplistic explanation of TPLF and EPLF leaders who wage a systematic campaign to belittle the significance of Adwa, Menilek's "withdrawal to