

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, Behanzin 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 i.e. 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

Shoa" without liberating Mereb Melash was a deliberate move to "weaken Tigreans" by accepting their division into Tigray and Eritrea. Others on the other hand argue that the military and diplomatic context of the time was such that Menilek had no choice. As Professor H. Marcus notes *"Menilek's reasons for leaving Eritrea in Italian hands were substantial and reasonable and no amount of reductionism can explain away his need to act for the greater good of Ethiopia. He could not have foreseen the post-modern age in which many eschew empirical data and regard history as relativistic, to be manipulated for the greater good of this or that political order."*

Before going into the "substantial reasons" which led to Menilek's "abandonment" of Eritrea we believe it would be appropriate to give a brief chronology of events which, over a period of almost 25 years, led to the formation and expansion of the Italian colony in Northern and North eastern Ethiopia.

ITALIAN OCCUPATION OF MASSAWA AND EXPANSION INTO MEREB MELASH (1885-1889)

In January 1885, an Italian force under Rear admiral Pietro Caim occupied the port of Massawa and issued a proclamation declaring: "The Italian government, in accord with the British and Egyptians, and without doubt also the Abyssinians, has ordered me to take possession of the Port." Emperor Yohannes IV of Ethiopia protested against the seizure of Ethiopian territory and demanded immediate withdrawal of the Italian forces.

1885/1886 The Italians, encouraged by the British government, consolidated their hold on the coast and the Dalhak Islands and prohibited all imports of arms through Massawa.

THE BATTLE OF DOGALI

January 1887: Ras Alula, governor of Mereb Melash, the capital of which was Asmara, demanded withdrawal of the Italians from Sahati, some 30 km to the west of Massawa. The Italian government rejected this demand considering that "any move to evacuate Sahati would be an affront to Italian national dignity."

January 25 1887: The first Italo-Ethiopian battle at DOGALI. Ethiopian forces under RAS ALULA annihilated an Italian expeditionary force of 500 men. Uproar in Italy and call for "revenge" against the "Barbarians."

February / May 1887: Popular outburst in Italy. *"Dogali managed to unify the country: North and South, rich and poor, church and state, all lined up to ask for a proud return to Africa."* A Roman Piazza was rebaptized *"Dei cinquecento"*...at popular level, the newly coined PIZZA MARGUERITA' with the three colors of the Italian flag - the red tomatoes, the white mozzarella cheese and the green basil - was the symbolic representation of the newly reconciled country. Thus Dogali played a crucial role in the new colonial policy and marks a turning point in contemporary Italian history. *The march to Adwa had already begun.*" (Alessandro Triulzi) More concretely, the Italian parliament voted a budget of 20 million lire and some 20,000 soldiers with 814 officers, 138 canons, 28 machine guns, 3000 horses, 2000 mules and 18,000 camels were assembled in the territory then known as "Red Sea Italian possessions."

ETHIOPIAN "ARROGANCE"

Following the Dogali defeat, the British government sent a delegation to Emperor Yohannes IV to mediate between Italy and Ethiopia and to bring about reconciliation between the two countries. The mission failed as the Emperor told the British envoy that reconciliation would be possible "only when the Italians are in their country and I in mine." As the envoy reported, the response to Italy's demands, given by the "arrogant" and "fanatic" Ras Alula, was even more blatant and straightforward: **"The Italians would be allowed to stay in Sahati when I become governor of Rome."**

1888: Emperor Yohannes responded to the Italian reinforcements by raising an army of some 154,000 from Mereb Melash, Tigray and Wollo. Ethiopian attempts to lure the enemy into an open field engagement failed. The Italians remained in their fortified positions. Shortage of supplies and harsh weather conditions in the inhospitable lowlands compounded the difficulties of the Ethiopian forces. In addition, the country was at the same time threatened at its

western borders. Muslim fundamentalist forces seized the opportunity to invade the western regions. They defeated the army of the King of Gojjam - Negus Tekle Haimanot - seized and burnt the historic city of Gondar.

March 1889: The Emperor's forces evacuated from the eastern front fought and defeated the Sudanese fundamentalist forces at the battle of Metemma where Emperor Yohannes died from a stray bullet after the Ethiopian victory.

ADULIS ? NUEVA ETHIOPIA ? ERITREA ?

April 1889: King Menilek of Shoa becomes King of Kings of Ethiopia. In May 1889 he signs the Treaty of Wuchali which ceded the "territory to the east of the Ethiopian highlands" (including the town of Asmara) to the Italians.

January 1st. 1890: After a debate in Italy to find a name to what was then called "Italian possessions of the Red Sea", the Italian government opted for the name "Eritrea" — the two other proposals were Adulis and Nueva Ethiopia.

1890-1895: Italy made further incursions into the interior and forcibly occupied the Ethiopian provinces of Seraye and Akle Guzai in present day Eritrea. By early 1895, Italian forces led by General Osero crossed the Mereb-Muna and attacked Tigray. Adwa, Mekelle, Adigrat, Axum etc. were occupied in what the Italians presented as a campaign to "Liberate Tigray from Amhara rule."

THE EXPANSION OF THE ITALIAN COLONY (1900-1908)

October 1897 - Signing of the Treaty of Addis Abeba between Ethiopia and Italy. Italy abandons its demands for a frontier along the Mereb-Belessa-Muna line. Seraye and Akle Guzai still under Ethiopian sovereignty.

July 1900: Under pressure from the pro-Italian lobby in Addis Abeba, Menilek accepts the Mereb-Belessa-Muna line as the new frontier between Ethiopia and

the Italian colony. Seraye and Akle Guzai passed to Italian sovereignty.

May 1902: Secret agreement between Emperor Menilek and the Italian government. For the first time the latter obtains territory south of the Gash-Mereb rivers. The Kunama country to the south of Setit river ceded to the Italians.

May 1908: Treaty regarding the strip of Afar hinterland between the port of Assab (occupied by Italy in 1869) and Arafali was signed. This strip was then attached to the Eritrean colony.

* * *

What were the substantial reasons which prevented Menilek from driving the Italians out of Eritrea?

The first was the Ethiopian High command's recollection of the Italian response after the defeat at Dogali. The call for revenge against the "barbarous Abyssinians" was so widespread in Italy that the country's colonial lobby had no problem in getting a very substantial budget approved to fortify Italian holdings around Massawa. After Adwa, the humiliation suffered by the Italians was such that the military and political establishment threatened to continue the war in the absence of "an honorable and decorous peace."

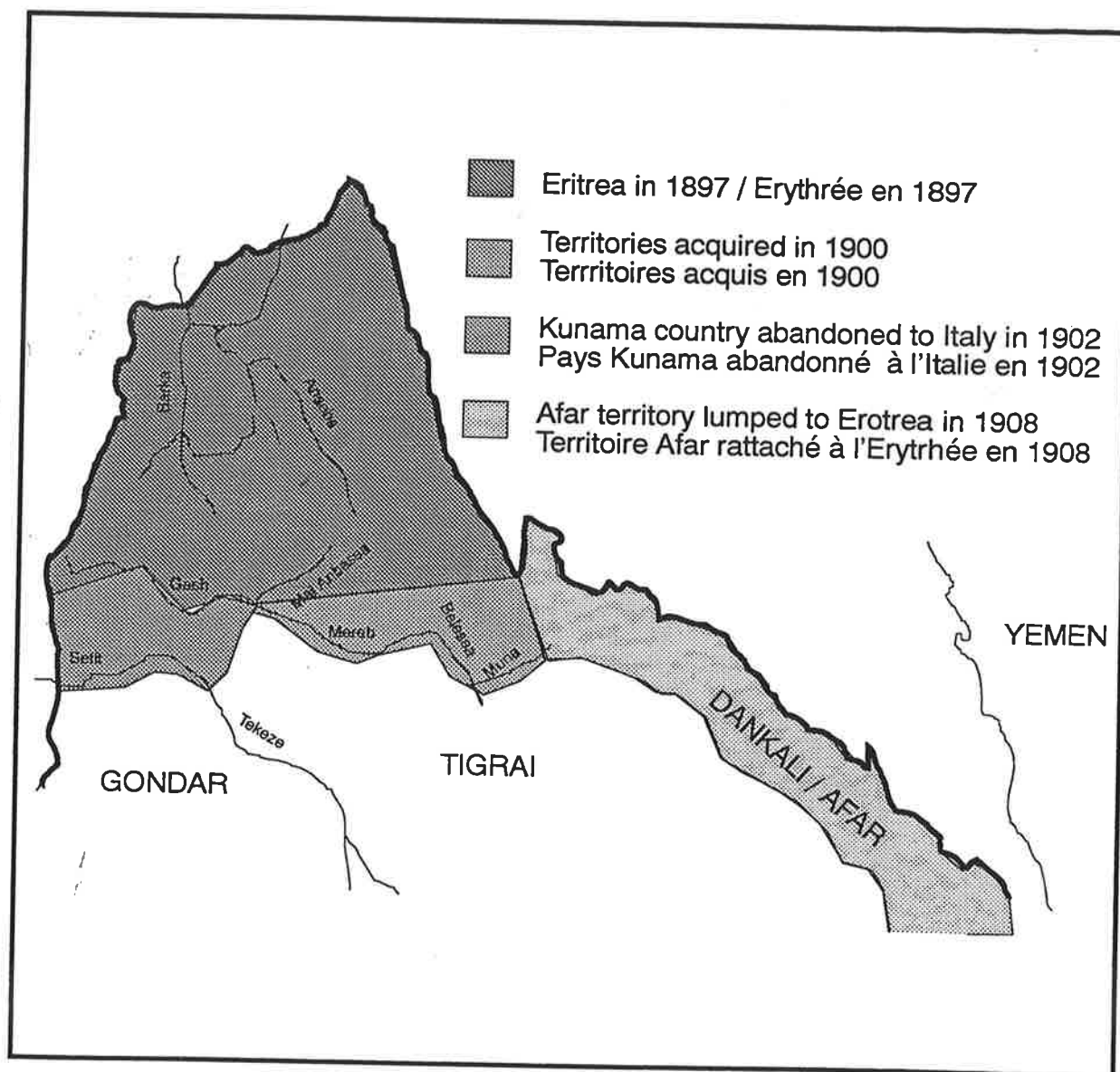
The second reason was reaction in the "civilized" world. All colonial powers considered the Adwa victory as a potential danger to their presence in Africa. The entire white community in Africa was unanimous in calling for the war to continue and for Menilek to be "crushed at any cost". German papers widely believed to reflect opinion of the government not only blamed Great Britain for not having assisted Italy, but openly called for concerted action to bring to an end this "threat to civilization" in Africa. More concretely, the British swiftly moved troops to DONGOLA (in the Sudan) in order to "relieve the pressure upon the Italians" because Lord Salisbury's cabinet felt that "the collapse of Italy would jeopardize British interests in the region." Their objective was to

destabilize Menilek's rear - that is the western and southwestern regions of Ethiopia.

Third and most importantly, the Ethiopian peasant army was exhausted. It had run desperately out of supplies and had to cope with thousands of wounded soldiers. Under these circumstances, Menilek had no desire to lead this army through the poor and already ravaged country north of Adwa to breach the heavily fortified positions into which the Italians had retired. As Professor H. Marcus put it: "*He did not want to*

risk his military reputation and his army's hard-won prestige by fruitlessly attacking stone walls."

The best the Emperor could do was to maintain Ethiopia's claims to Mereb Melash. This he did during the negotiations for a peace treaty between the two countries. Article 5 of the Treaty of Addis Abeba signed in 1897 barred the Italian government from passing on the territory under its occupation and stated that if it had to do so, the territory was to be returned to Ethiopia.



THE EXPANSION OF THE ITALIAN COLONY (1900-1908)