

Unit 3

SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN ETHIOPIA FROM MID-19th C. TO 1941

Introduction

This unit covers the history of Ethiopia from the mid-19th century to 1941. It is divided into five lessons, each focusing on different aspects of this historical period.

1. **Nineteenth Century Long Distance Trade and Cottage Industry:**
 - The first lesson discusses the long-distance trade routes that connected various regions of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. It also highlights the role of the cottage industry in the socio-economic development of the country during this time.
2. **The Making of the Modern Ethiopian State:**
 - This lesson examines the process of unifying the regions to create modern Ethiopia. It explores the administrative reforms, attempts at modernization, religious reforms, centralization policies, and territorial expansions under various rulers.
3. **External Aggressions and Heroic Resistance:**
 - The third lesson focuses on the external threats Ethiopia faced, including the Napier Expedition, Egyptian aggression, the Mahdist invasion, and the Italian encroachment, culminating in the Battle of Adwa in 1896, where Ethiopia defended its independence.
4. **Power Struggles Among the Ruling Elites (1906-1930):**
 - This lesson looks into the internal conflicts among Ethiopian leaders, which shaped the country's political landscape during the early 20th century.
5. **Fascist Italy's Aggression and Ethiopian Patriots' Resistance:**
 - The final section discusses Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in the 1930s and the patriotic resistance that followed, leading up to the liberation of the country in 1941.

Key Terms

- **Long Distance Trade:** Trade that connected different regions of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa through extensive trade routes.

- **Cottage Industry:** Small-scale, home-based industries like weaving, pottery, and blacksmithing that were essential to the economy.
- **Administrative Reforms:** Changes implemented by Ethiopian rulers to modernize and centralize the government.
- **The Battle of Adwa:** The decisive 1896 battle where Ethiopian forces defeated Italian invaders.
- **Territorial Expansion:** The process of unifying and extending Ethiopia's borders.
- **Diarchy:** A system of dual leadership, often referring to shared or contested power structures in Ethiopian history.
- **Fascist Aggression:** Italy's invasion of Ethiopia during the 1930s under Mussolini's fascist regime.

Lesson 1: Nineteenth Century Long Distance Trade and Cottage Industry

Long-Distance Trade:

- Ethiopia's trade routes connected the southern, northern, and eastern regions to the coast. Major trade centers included Bonga, Gondar, Adwa, and Harar. Goods such as ivory, civet musk, salt bars (amole), and slaves were commonly traded.
- Salt bars (amole) were a traditional medium of exchange, alongside the Maria Theresa Thalers (MTT), an Austrian coin introduced by Arab traders.

Cottage Industry:

- The cottage industry in Ethiopia included metalworking, pottery, and weaving. These small-scale industries were vital for local economies, producing tools, weapons, and household items.
- Despite their importance, artisans were often marginalized, leading to slow technological progress. Blacksmiths, for instance, made essential tools and weapons, showcasing the ingenuity of Ethiopian craftsmen.

Lesson 2: The Making of Modern Ethiopia

Emperor Tewodros II (1855-1868):

- Kassa Hailu, later known as Tewodros II, sought to unify Ethiopia and modernize its military and administration. He introduced military reforms,

established a national army, and attempted to reduce the power of regional lords.

- Tewodros's efforts were met with resistance from regional rulers and the clergy, who opposed his centralization policies. His reign ended after a confrontation with the British, leading to his defeat and suicide at Meqdela in 1868.

Emperor Yohannes IV (1872-1889):

- Yohannes IV continued the work of unifying Ethiopia, granting significant autonomy to regional rulers like Menilek of Shewa. He also sought to end religious divisions within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, leading to forced conversions of Muslims in Wallo.

Emperor Menilek II (1889-1913):

- Menilek II expanded Ethiopia's territory, incorporating regions such as Wolaita, Arsi, Harar, and Kafa. He modernized the country by establishing the first modern bank, school, and postal system, and initiating infrastructure projects like the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway.
- Menilek's expansion set the stage for Ethiopia's modern borders, formalized through treaties with colonial powers.

Lesson 3: External Aggressions and Heroic Resistance

- Ethiopia faced several external threats in the late 19th century, including invasions by the Egyptians, Mahdists, and Italians. The Battle of Adwa in 1896 was a significant event where Ethiopian forces, under Menilek II, defeated the Italians, preserving the country's independence.

Lesson 4: Power Struggles Among the Ruling Elites

- After the death of Menilek II, Ethiopia experienced internal power struggles among various leaders, including Ras Tafari (later Emperor Haile Selassie I). These conflicts shaped Ethiopia's political landscape leading up to the 1930s.

Lesson 5: Fascist Italy's Aggression and Ethiopian Resistance

- In the 1930s, Fascist Italy, under Mussolini, invaded Ethiopia, leading to a brutal occupation. Ethiopian patriots resisted the invasion, and with the support of Allied forces during World War II, Ethiopia was liberated in 1941, marking the end of Italian occupation.

External Aggressions and the Unity of the Ethiopian People in Defense of National Sovereignty (1871-1896)

The Context of the 19th Century

The second half of the 19th century was a crucial period for Ethiopia, during which the country's independence was severely tested. Ethiopian leaders recognized the need to modernize the nation to protect it from external threats, particularly from European powers and neighboring countries like Egypt.

Emperor Tewodros II and the British Expedition (1868)

Emperor Tewodros II sought to modernize Ethiopia and defend it from external threats by seeking military assistance from European powers, particularly Britain. In 1862, he sent a letter to Queen Victoria requesting military support, but his request went unanswered. In response to his growing frustration and the imprisonment of British citizens in Ethiopia, the British launched a military expedition led by Sir Robert Napier in late 1867. The British forces, aided by local Ethiopian leaders like Kasa Mercha (later Emperor Yohannes IV), defeated Tewodros's army at the Battle of Aroge in April 1868. Tewodros, facing defeat, released his European captives and later committed suicide at Maqdala. The British, after burning his fortress and looting treasures, left Ethiopia, showing no interest in occupying the country.

Egyptian Invasions and Ethiopian Resistance

Following the British expedition, Egypt, under Khedive Ismail Pasha, saw an opportunity to control Ethiopia and the source of the Nile. In 1875, Egypt launched multiple invasions into Ethiopia from different directions. Emperor Yohannes IV and his general, Ras Alula, successfully repelled the Egyptians in two major battles: the Battle of Gundat (November 1875) and the Battle of Gura (March 1876).

Italian Encroachments and the Battle of Adwa (1896)

Italy emerged as the most dangerous foreign power in the region in the late 19th century. After acquiring the port of Assab and Massawa, Italy began to

penetrate northern Ethiopia. However, Ras Alula defeated the Italians at the Battle of Dogali in 1887.

Following the death of Emperor Yohannes IV in 1889, the responsibility of defending Ethiopia fell to Emperor Menilek II. The Italians attempted to use the Treaty of Wuchale to advance their colonial ambitions, but Menilek rejected the treaty and mobilized the Ethiopian people for war. In 1896, the Ethiopians, led by Menilek, Empress Taytu, and various generals, decisively defeated the Italians at the Battle of Adwa. This victory was significant not only for Ethiopia but also for oppressed people worldwide, as it was the first major victory of an African nation over a European colonial power.

The Impact of Adwa and Subsequent Developments

The victory at Adwa ensured Ethiopia's status as an independent and sovereign state, recognized by major world powers. However, internal power struggles continued, particularly concerning the succession after Emperor Menilek's illness in 1906. The Italian defeat at Adwa did not end their ambitions in Ethiopia, and tensions persisted, leading to future conflicts.

Conclusion

The period between 1871 and 1896 was marked by significant external threats to Ethiopia's sovereignty. Despite the challenges, the Ethiopian people, under strong leadership, managed to unite and defend their nation, securing their independence and leaving a legacy of resilience and pride for future generations. The Battle of Adwa, in particular, became a symbol of Ethiopian unity and resistance against colonialism.