

UNIT THREE

Social, Economic and Political Developments in Ethiopia, Mid, 19th C. to 1941

Long-Distance Trade and Peoples' Interaction in the 19th Century

1. Revival of Long-Distance Trade

- **Factors:** The establishment of monarchical systems among the southwestern Oromo regions, especially the five Oromo kingdoms in the Gibe region, improved trade. Although regional feudal wars initially hindered trade, relative stability along the Red Sea coast after early 19th century developments increased trade opportunities.

2. Trade Routes and Market Centers

- **Main Routes:**
 1. **Bonga (Kafa) – Jimma – Saka – Assendabo – Basso – Gondar**
 - Gondar to Sudan via Metemma
 - Gondar to Massawa via Adwa
 2. **Bonga – Jimma – Assendabo – Aussa – Tajura/Obock**
 3. **Bonga – Jimma – Soddo – Ankober – Harar – Zeila/Berbera**
- **Market Centers:** Key trading hubs included Assendabo, Basso, Derita, Gondar, Harar, and Zeila. These centers facilitated the exchange of goods and cultural interactions between northern and southwestern Ethiopia.

3. Trade Items

- **Major Items:** Ivory, civet, gold, wax, animal skins, and slaves. Coffee gained importance as an export item in the late 19th century.

4. Slave Trade

- Ethiopian slaves were exported to Sudan and Arabia. Major slave markets included Yejjube in Gojjam and Abdul Rasul near Aleyu Amba.

5. Role of Merchants

- **Jabarti and Afkala Merchants:** Jabarti (Muslim traders from northern Ethiopia) initially dominated the trade but were later surpassed by the Afkala (Muslim traders from southwestern Ethiopia) who had better local connections and protections.

6. Impact on People's Interaction

- **Cultural and Religious Influence:** The long-distance trade facilitated cultural exchanges and the spread of Islam, which helped Oromo chiefs establish monarchies in the Gibe region.

Power Rivalry and Consolidating Central Government (1855–1913)

1. End of the Zemene Mesafint (Era of Princes)

- **Background:** Ethiopia experienced regionalism with weakened Solomonic kings and dominance of regional lords like the Yejju Rases. This period saw frequent civil wars and weakened central authority.

2. Tewodros II's Reforms

- **Rise to Power:** Kassa Hailu (later Tewodros II) ended the Zemene Mesafint by defeating regional lords in several battles (e.g., Guramba, Gorgora Bichen, Ayshal) and became emperor in 1855.
- **Reforms:** Tewodros II sought to unify Ethiopia through centralization, military reforms (including modern training and weapons), and land redistribution. He also clashed with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and faced internal resistance.

3. Conflict with the Orthodox Church

- **Church Disputes:** Tewodros II's attempts to reduce church landholdings led to conflicts with the clergy, notably with Abune Selama, who was imprisoned and died in captivity.

4. Downfall of Tewodros II

- **British Intervention:** Tewodros II's conflict with the British, over the hostages and failure to receive European technical support, led to a British military expedition. Tewodros committed suicide in 1868 following the British victory at Meqdela.

5. Successors and the Post-Tewodros Era

- **Emperor Yohannis IV (1872-1889):** Succeeded Tewodros II, attempted to unify Ethiopia with a more federal approach, granting autonomy to regional rulers. He defended Ethiopia from external threats, notably from Egyptian and Italian forces, but was killed in battle against Mahdist forces in 1889.

The Shift of the Political Centre from the North to Shewa

Background:

- **Emperor Tewodros II:** The pioneer of modern Ethiopian state formation but failed to achieve complete national unification.
- **Emperor Yohannis IV:** Improved the empire with regional autonomy but did not complete the unification.
- **Negus Menilek II of Shewa:** Ultimately completed the process of national unification, marking a shift in the political center from the north to Shewa.

Key Developments During Menilek II's Reign:

1. Territorial Expansion:

- **Initial Expansion (1870-1889):** Menilek began expanding Shewa's territory, incorporating the Oromo clans and the Kistane Gurage people. The resistance of Southern Gurage was subdued by Ras Gobena Dache in 1888.
- **Expansion and Conquest (1889-1896):** Following his coronation as Emperor, Menilek extended his control to southwestern Ethiopia, defeated Negus Tekle Haimanot of Gojjam in 1882, and incorporated several local kingdoms, including those of Jimma, Lega, and Neqamte.

2. Military Campaigns:

- **Arsi Campaign (1886):** The Arsi Oromo resisted fiercely, leading to six failed campaigns before their defeat in 1886 at the Battle of Azule.
- **Emirate of Harar (1887):** Menilek's forces defeated Emir Abdulahi at Chelenqo, ending Harar's independent existence and securing control over the important trade route.
- **Wolaita Campaign (1894):** The Wolaita kingdom fought vigorously against Menilek's forces. The campaign was particularly brutal, leading to the capture of the Wolaita king, Kawo Tona.
- **Kafa Campaign:** Following the victory at Adwa, Menilek expanded into Kafa. Despite fierce resistance, Kafa was incorporated, and its king, Tato Gaki Sherecho, was captured.

3. Land Tenure Systems:

- **North (Rist and Gult Systems):** Traditional communal land ownership persisted with rist (hereditary right to land) and gult (tax collection rights) systems.
- **South (Qelad System):** Menilek's expansion introduced the qelad system, which privatized land, alienated peasants, and increased state revenue, significantly altering land ownership dynamics in the south.

Conclusion:

- Menilek II's reign marked a significant shift in Ethiopia's political center from the northern regions to Shewa. His strategic military campaigns and land reforms consolidated the modern Ethiopian state, integrating diverse regions into a unified empire.

This historical shift was crucial in shaping Ethiopia's political and social landscape, influencing its development and interactions with external forces.

The Battle of Metemma and Its Aftermath

The Battle of Metemma (March 9, 1889)

Background: In the late 1880s, Ethiopia faced multiple threats. Emperor Yohannis IV confronted challenges from Mahdist forces attacking from the west, the Italians advancing from the north, and rebellious vassals in the south, including King Menilek of Shewa and Tekle Haymanot of Gojjam.

Strategic Decisions: Emperor Yohannis postponed his conflict with the Italians to deal with internal dissent. After suppressing rebellion in Gojjam and Shewa, Yohannis turned his attention to the Mahdists. His goal was to first tackle the external threat before addressing internal strife.

The Battle: On March 9, 1889, Ethiopian forces under Emperor Yohannis clashed with Mahdist troops at Metemma. Despite initial success, the Ethiopians lost the battle due to Yohannis being fatally wounded. His death marked the end of his reign, and the Mahdists' revenge was complete when they beheaded his corpse.

Consequences:

1. **Internal Impact:** The battle led to a shift in power from the Tigrean house to Shewa. Yohannis IV had appointed Ras Mengesha as his successor, but instead, Menilek II of Shewa became emperor.
2. **External Impact:** With Yohannis gone, the Italians took advantage of the weakened defense in the north, advancing further into the Mereb Melash region. By January 1, 1890, they declared it an Italian colony, Eritrea.

Religious Division and Doctrinal Debates

Religious Policies of Emperor Yohannis IV: Yohannis IV attempted to unify Ethiopia under a single religion, giving Muslims the choice to convert to Orthodox Christianity or lose their property. Some Muslims complied, while others

resisted. Yohannis also sought to resolve doctrinal disputes within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, imposing the Tewahedo doctrine and ending regional controversies.

The Battle of Adwa (March 1, 1896)

Background: The Treaty of Wuchale (May 2, 1889) between Menilek II and Italy contained a controversial Article 17. The Italian version implied that Ethiopia would become a protectorate of Italy, but the Amharic version allowed Menilek to conduct foreign relations independently. The differing interpretations led to conflict.

The Campaign: The Adwa campaign involved three phases:

1. **Battle of Ambalage (December 7, 1895):** Ethiopian forces defeated the Italians.
2. **Siege of Mekelle (January 7-21, 1896):** Ethiopian forces, led by Empress Taytu, besieged the Italians, cutting off their water supply.
3. **Battle of Adwa (March 1, 1896):** The final and decisive battle where Ethiopian forces secured a major victory.

Outcome: The defeat forced the Italians to retreat, and General Baratieri ordered a withdrawal. The battle ended Italy's colonial ambitions in Ethiopia and resulted in the Treaty of Addis Ababa (October 26, 1896), which nullified the Wuchale Treaty and recognized Ethiopia's independence, with Italy retaining control only over Eritrea.

Significance of the Victory of Adwa

International Impact: The victory at Adwa was a historic moment for Ethiopia and Africa. It was a symbol of black dignity and resistance against colonialism. The defeat of the Italians inspired anti-colonial movements and fostered a sense of pride among Africans and people of African descent globally.

Internal Impact: The victory affirmed Ethiopia's political independence and solidified its international boundaries. It showed the power of unity and resistance against foreign domination, reinforcing Ethiopia's sovereignty and shaping its future political landscape.

The Diarchy (1916-1930)

Overview: From 1916 to 1930, Ethiopia experienced a unique form of governance called the diarchy, where power was theoretically shared between

Empress Zewditu and Ras Teferi Mekonnen. Although both held power, Ras Teferi, later known as Emperor Haile Selassie I, gradually became the dominant figure.

Key Points:

1. **Restoration of Shewan Supremacy:** After the Battle of Segele, the Shewan political dominance was reasserted. In 1916, a coup led to the appointment of Empress Zewditu and Ras Teferi Mekonnen, with Zewditu as Empress and Teferi as heir apparent.
2. **Role of Zewditu and Teferi:**
 - **Zewditu:** Daughter of Emperor Menilek II, she was supported by traditionalists and Shewan nobility. Her reign was unusual as it was rare for a woman to be head of state.
 - **Teferi Mekonnen:** His role grew stronger over time. More ambitious and progressive, Teferi's influence increased while Zewditu's role became more symbolic.
3. **Political Struggles:**
 - **1918:** Teferi removed old ministers except for Fitawrari Habte Giorgis, a key traditionalist.
 - **1926:** Deaths of major opponents like Abune Matewos and Fitawrari Habte Giorgis removed obstacles to Teferi's power.
 - **1928:** Teferi overcame rebellions and acquired new territories. He was officially crowned as King by Zewditu in October 1928.
4. **End of the Diarchy:**
 - **1930:** Conflict with Ras Gugsa Wole, Zewditu's husband, led to the Battle of Anchim, where Ras Gugsa was defeated and killed. Zewditu died shortly after, and Teferi became Emperor Haile Selassie I.

The Emergence of Autocracy (1930–1955)

Overview: Following his coronation on November 2, 1930, Emperor Haile Selassie I established an autocratic state. His rule was marked by efforts to centralize power and modernize Ethiopia, but was interrupted by the Italian invasion.

Key Points:

1. **Consolidation of Power:**
 - **1931 Constitution:** This new constitution helped Haile Selassie strengthen his control by diminishing the power of hereditary rulers.
 - **Removal of Rulers:** In 1932, the last hereditary ruler of Gojjam was removed. By 1933, the kingdom of Jimma was also brought under central control.
2. **Military Reforms:**

- **1930:** Formation of the Imperial Bodyguard with Belgian assistance.
- **1934:** Establishment of the Holeta Military Academy.
- 3. **Italian Invasion:**
 - **October 3, 1935:** Italy, under Benito Mussolini, invaded Ethiopia, seeking revenge for its defeat at Adwa and aiming to expand its empire.
 - **Initial Resistance:** Ethiopian forces faced challenges due to lack of coordination and modern military equipment.

Italian Aggression and the Patriotic Resistance

Overview: Italy's invasion led to a fierce resistance from Ethiopians. Despite the initial setbacks and occupation of Addis Ababa, the patriotic struggle continued.

Key Points:

1. **Invasion and Occupation:**
 - **October 1935:** Italian troops crossed into Ethiopia, advancing towards Mekelle.
 - **May 5, 1936:** Italians captured Addis Ababa, leading to the establishment of Italian East Africa.
2. **Resistance:**
 - **First Phase (1935–1937):** Conventional fighting characterized the early resistance. Key leaders like Ras Desta Damtew fought valiantly but faced defeats.
 - **Second Phase (1937–1941):** Guerrilla warfare became prominent after the February 1937 massacre. This phase saw widespread resistance despite Italian military control.
3. **International Support:**
 - **British Involvement:** Following Italy's entry into World War II, the British supported Ethiopian patriots. They launched offensives that led to the liberation of Addis Ababa on April 6, 1941.
4. **Role of Women Patriots:**
 - **Support and Participation:** Women played crucial roles in the resistance, from providing support to participating in combat and espionage.

Summary: Ethiopia's struggle against Italian occupation showcased its resilience and determination to preserve independence. The combined efforts of Ethiopian patriots and international allies ultimately led to the expulsion of the Italian forces and the restoration of Ethiopian sovereignty.