

= Zara Yaqob =

Zar 'a Ya`qob or Zera Yacob (Ge 'ez ??? : ??? zar '? y??iq?b " Seed of Jacob , " modern zer 'a y? 'iq?b) (1399 ? 26 August 1468) was n?gusä nägäst (19 or 20 June 1434 ? 1468) of Ethiopia (throne name Kwestantinos I Ge 'ez ?????? q?ast?nt?n?s or Constantine I) , and a member of the Solomonic dynasty . Born at Tilq in the province of Fatagar (now part of the Oromia Region , near the Awash River) , Zara Yaqob was the youngest son of Dawit I and his youngest queen , Igzi Kebra .

The British expert on Ethiopia , Edward Ullendorff , stated that Zara Yaqob " was unquestionably the greatest ruler Ethiopia had seen since Ezana , during the heyday of Aksumite power , and none of his successors on the throne ? excepted only the emperors Menelik II and Haile Selassie ? can be compared to him . "

Paul B. Henze repeats the tradition that the jealousy of his older brother Tewodros I forced the courtiers to take Zara Yaqob to Tigray where he was brought up in secret , and educated in Axum and at the monastery of Debre Abbay . While admitting that this tradition " is invaluable as providing a religious background for Zar 'a @-@ Ya 'iqob 's career " , Tadesse Tamrat dismisses this story as " very improbable in its details . " The professor notes that Zara Yaqob wrote in his Mashafa Berhan that " he was brought down from the royal prison of Mount Gishan only on the eve of his accession to the throne . "

= = Reign = =

Upon the death of Emperor Dawit , his older brother Tewodros ordered Zara Yaqob confined on Amba Geshen (around 1414) . Despite this , Zara Yaqob 's supporters kept him a perennial candidate for Emperor , helped by the rapid succession of his older brothers to the throne over the next 20 years , and left him as the oldest qualified candidate . David Buxton points out the effect that his forced seclusion had on his personality , " deprived of all contact with ordinary people or ordinary life . " Thrust into a position of leadership " with no experience of the affairs of state , he [Zara Yaqob] was faced by a kingdom seething with plots and rebellions , a Church riven with heresies , and outside enemies constantly threatening invasion . " Buxton continues ,

In the circumstances it was hardly possible for the new king to show adaptability or tolerance or diplomatic skill , which are the fruit of long experience in human relationships . Confronted with a desperate and chaotic situation he met it instead with grim determination and implacable ferocity . Towards the end of his life , forfeiting the affection and loyalty even of his courtiers and family he became a lonely figure , isolated by suspicion and mistrust . But , in spite of all , the name of this great defender of the faith is one of the most memorable in Ethiopian history .

Although he became Emperor in 1434 , Zara Yaqob was not crowned until 1436 at Axum , where he resided for three years . It was not unusual for Ethiopian rulers to postpone their coronation until later in their reigns .

After he became Emperor , Zara Yaqob married princess Eleni , who had converted from Islam before their marriage . Eleni was the daughter of the king of Hadiya , one of the Sidamo kingdoms south of the Abay River . Although she failed to bear him any children , Eleni grew into a powerful political person . When a conspiracy involving one of his Bitwodeds came to light , Zara Yaqob reacted by appointing his two daughters , Medhan Zamada and Berhan Zamada , to these two offices . According to the Chronicle of his reign , the Emperor also appointed his daughters and nieces as governors over eight of his provinces . These appointments were not successful .

He defeated Badlay ad @-@ Din , the Sultan of Adal at the Battle of Gomit in 1445 , which consolidated his hold over the Sidamo kingdoms in the south , as well as the weak Muslim kingdoms beyond the Awash River . Similar campaigns in the north against the Agaw and the Falasha were not as successful .

After witnessing a bright light in the sky (which most historians have identified as Halley 's Comet , visible in Ethiopia in 1456) , Zara Yaqob founded Debre Berhan and made it his capital for the remainder of his reign .

In his later years , Zara Yaqob became more despotic . When Takla Hawariat , abbot of Dabra Libanos , criticized Yaqob 's beatings and murder of men , the emperor had the abbot himself beaten and imprisoned , where he died after few months . Zara Yaqob was convinced of a plot against him in 1453 , which led to more brutal actions . He increasingly became convinced that his wife and children were plotting against him , and had several of them beaten . Seyon Morgasa , the mother of the future emperor Baeda Maryam I , died from this mistreatment in 1462 , which led to a complete break between son and father . Eventually relations between the two were repaired , and Zara Yaqob publicly designated Baeda Maryam as his successor .

= = The Ethiopian church = =

At the time Zara Yaqob assumed the throne , the Ethiopian church had been divided over the issue of Biblical Sabbath observance for roughly a century . One group , loyal to the Coptic bishops , believed that the day of rest should be observed only on Sunday , or Great Sabbath ; another group , the followers of Ewostatewos , believed with their founder that both the original seventh @-@ day Sabbath (i.e. , Saturday , or Lesser Sabbath) and Sunday should be observed .

He was successful in persuading two recently arrived Egyptian bishops , Mikael and Gabriel , into accepting a compromise aimed at restoring harmony with the House of Ewostatewos , as the followers of Ewostatewos were known . At the same time , he made efforts to pacify the House of Ewostatewos . While the Ewostathians were won over to the compromise by 1442 , the two Egyptian bishops only agreed to the compromise at the Council of Debre Mitmaq in Tegulet (1450) .

Emperor Zara Yaqob also continued as the defender of the Patriarch of Alexandria . When he heard in 1441 of the destruction of the Egyptian monastery of Dabra Mitmaq by Sultan Jaqmaq , he called for a period of mourning , then sent a letter of strong protest to the Sultan . He reminded Jaqmaq that he had Muslim subjects whom he treated fairly , and warned that he had the power to divert the Nile , but refrained from doing so for the human suffering it would cause . Jaqmaq responded with gifts to appease Zara Yaqob 's anger , but refused to rebuild the Coptic Churches he had destroyed .

According to Richard Pankhurst the Emperor was also " reputedly an author of renown " , having contributed to Ethiopian literature as many as three important theological works . One was Mahsafa Berha (" The Book of Light ") , an exposition of his ecclesiastical reforms and a defence of his religious beliefs ; the others were Mahsafa Milad (" The Book of Nativity ") and Mahsafa Selassie (" The Book of the Trinity ") .

= = Foreign affairs = =

Zara Yaqob sent a diplomatic mission to Europe (1450) , led by a Sicilian Pietro Rombulo who had previously been successful in a mission to India , specifically asking for skilled labor . Rombulo first visited Pope Nicholas V , but his ultimate goal was the court of Alfonso V of Aragon , who responded favorably . The Catholic Ecumenical Council of Florence (1438 ? 1445) declared that Zara Yaqob was the legendary rumored king Prester John .