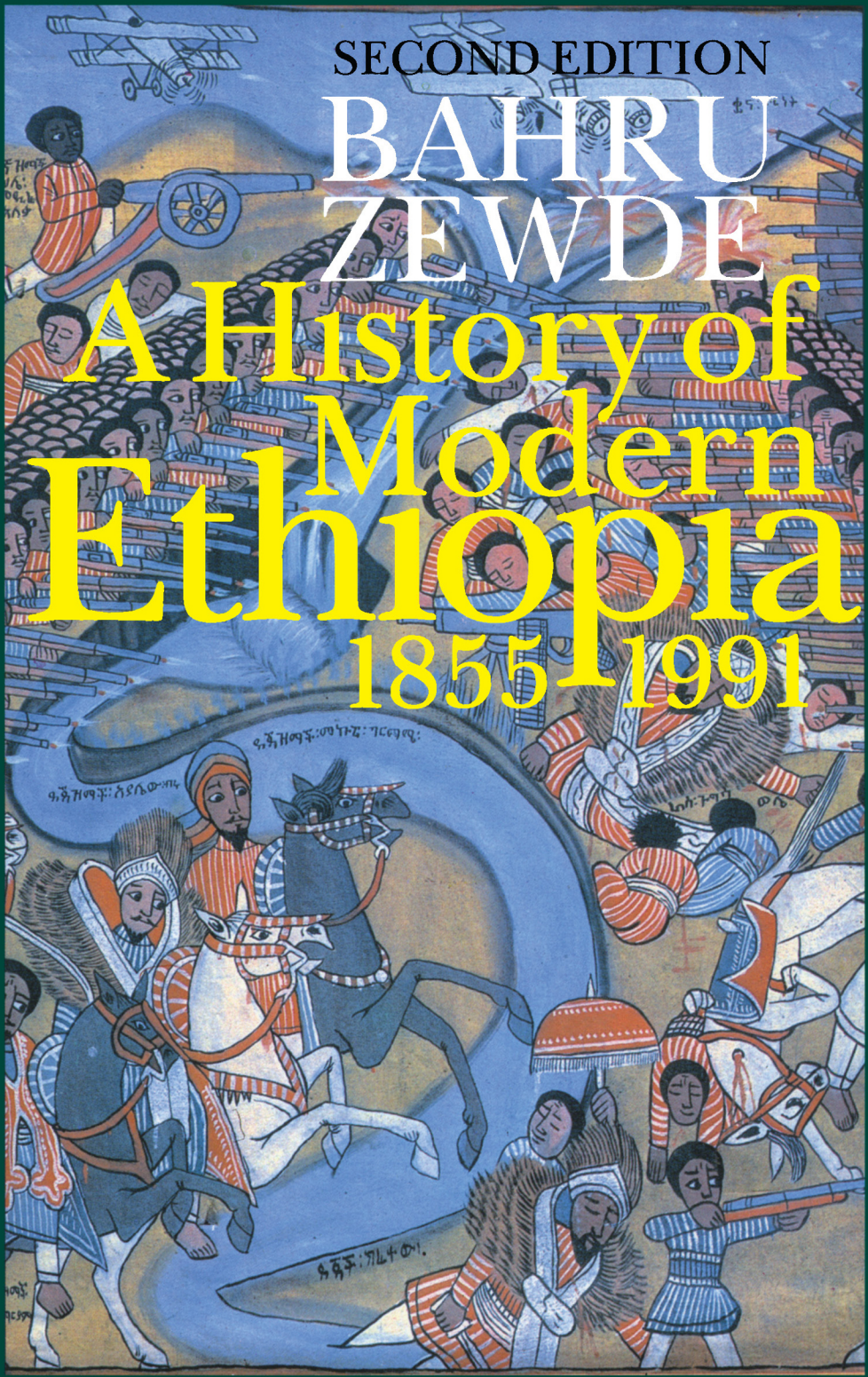
SECOND EDITION

BAHRU ZEWDE

A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855–1991



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Bahru Zewde

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Acronyms

CADU	Chilalo Agricultural Development Unit
CELU	Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions
COPWE	Commission for Organizing the Workers' Party of Ethiopia
EAL	Ethiopian Airlines
EDU	Ethiopian Democratic Union
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
EPLF	Eritrean Popular Liberation Forces (Front)
EPRDF	Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front
EPRP	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
ESUE	Ethiopian Students Union in Europe
ESUNA	Ethiopian Students Union in North America
HVA	Handelsvereenging Amsterdam
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IHA	Imperial Highway Authority
Ich'at	Amharic acronym of Ethiopian Oppressed Peoples' Revolutionary Struggle
Imaledeh	Amharic acronym of Union of Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organizations
Ma'ison	Amharic acronym of All Ethiopia Socialist Movement (AESM)
Malerid	Amharic acronym of Marxist-Leninist Revolutionary Organization
NDR	National Democratic Revolution
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
PDRE	People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
PMAC	Provisional Military Administrative Council
POMOA	Provisional Office for Mass Organizational Affairs
PPG	Provisional People's Government
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
WPE	Workers' Party of Ethiopia

Preface

For far too long, the absence of a general history of Ethiopia has been acutely felt by specialists engaged in Ethiopian studies, by educators in institutions of higher learning, and by many readers interested in Ethiopia. Yet few historians have turned their attention to the writing of such a general history, although Ethiopian historiography has made remarkable advances in the last two and a half decades. The dramatic changes that Ethiopia has been going through, particularly in the last two of those decades, have made the need for a background history leading up to those events more urgent.

The genesis of this present book is to be sought in considerations of the above nature. The book addresses itself to what historians of Ethiopia have come to regard as the modern period of the country's history, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. No attempt has been made to go to earlier periods, except in the brief remarks in the Introduction, nor do the events of the post-1974 period find coverage here, because the time for a dispassionate and documented historical analysis of those occurrences has not yet arrived.

The pitfalls of writing a general history are obvious. As one tremendous exercise in precis-writing, it glosses over too many intricate processes. To dispense with the detailed acknowledgements that a general history would entail leaves me with a sense of guilt. Yet no one is more aware than I myself of the great value of the lists of books, articles and theses appended to the chapters as sources for the writing of this book. I would like to draw special attention to the sound scholarship embodied in Sven Rubenson's *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence*, and to the BA and MA theses which have made possible a much fuller reconstruction of the recent Ethiopian past than could have been hoped for in previous decades.

To the Department of History of Addis Ababa University, which initiated me into the basic canons of historical investigation, I owe almost everything in my training as a historian. Here I have found an ambience combining warm co-operation and academic stimulation that has sustained me through the years, some of them difficult. The Institute of Ethiopian Studies has been my second academic home, and the rich collection of Ethiopiana in its Library has provided a vast basis of sustenance. The Research and Publications Office of the University has been an unfailing source of financial support for my research endeavours, and the preparation of this manuscript for offering for publication was made possible by a grant from that office.

A number of colleagues at Addis Ababa University read the manuscript in full or in part, and made many useful suggestions for its improvement. In this respect, I would like to thank Daniel Ayana, Daniel Gamachu, Eshetu Chole, Hussein Ahmed, Merid Wolde Aregay, Shiferaw Bekele, Shumet Sishagn, Taddesse Tamrat, and Tekalign Wolde Mariam. I am also indebted to Donald Crummey of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for his comments, and to Terence Ranger of St Antony's College, Oxford, for encouragement in the initial stages of the manuscript's preparation. I record with gratitude the generous assistance of Denis Gérard, who devoted a great deal of his time and his financial resources to preparing some of the illustrations. Thanks are also due to Kabbada Bogala for processing the remaining illustrations, to Metasebia Demessie for drawing the maps, and to Manna Zacharias for typing the manuscript.

Finally, I am very grateful to the General Editor of Addis Ababa University Press, the person next to myself who is most closely associated with this book, for dedicated application to editing the manuscript.

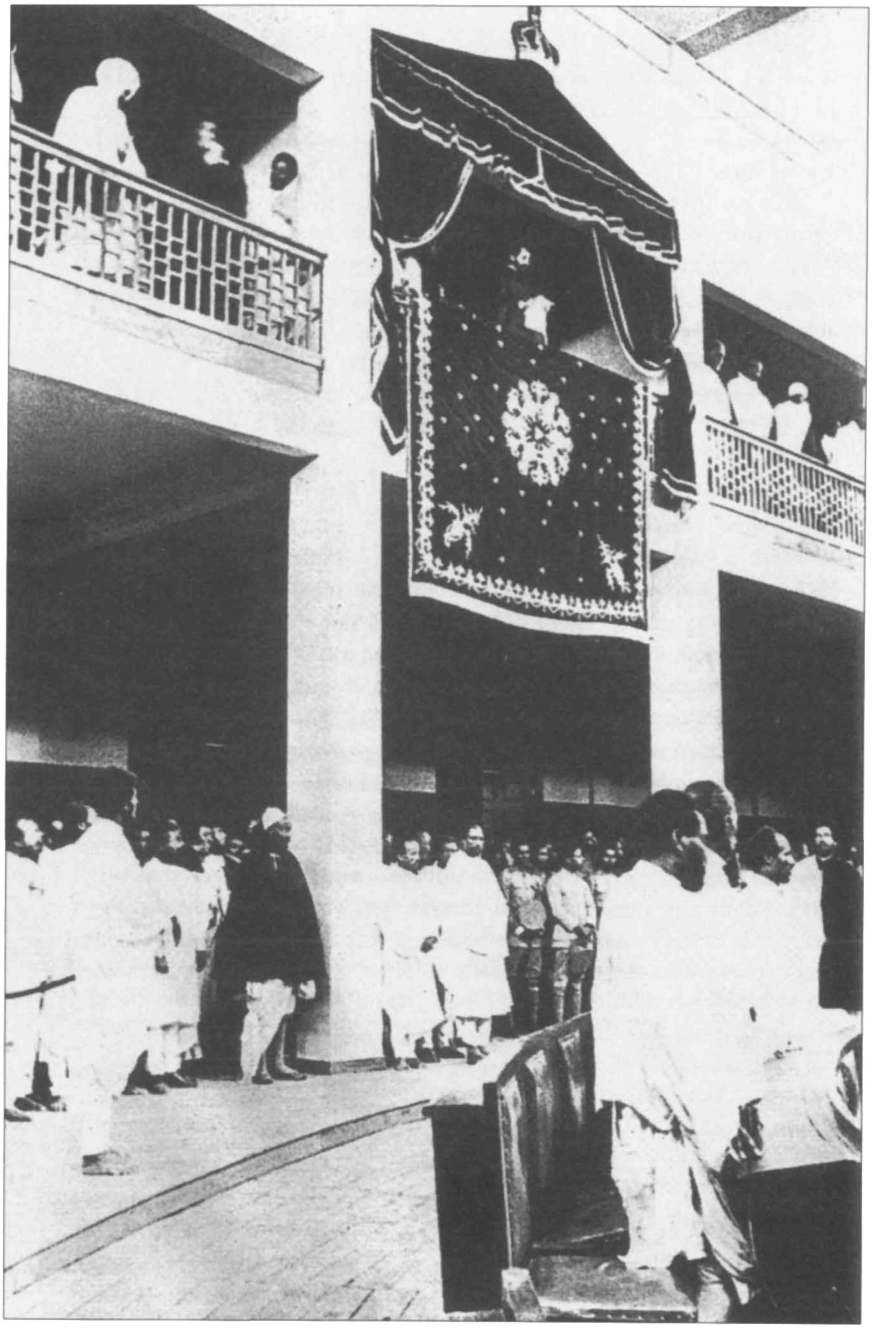
Preface to the Second Edition

Since its publication in 1991, *A History of Modern Ethiopia (1855–1974)* has had a gratifyingly favourable reception. It has managed to capture a wide readership and its impact both inside and outside Ethiopia has far exceeded my expectations. The academic reviews have also been generally encouraging. A recurrent source of disappointment has been, however, the fact that the story stops in 1974. This new edition, which brings the narrative to 1991, has been prepared primarily to address that concern.

'Contemporary history' is a treacherous ground and historians generally fear to tread it. In the preface to the first edition of the book, I justified the terminal date on the ground that 'the time for a dispassionate and documented historical analysis of those occurrences [i.e. of the period 1974–1991] has not yet arrived'. Those two impediments exist now to a much lesser degree than when the book was first written. Now that Darg rule is over, a requiem of that past has become possible. Although Darg officials are still on trial, the passion of the revolutionary years has subsided considerably. Moreover, in addition to the many secondary works that have been written on the period, we have also seen a sizeable number of testimonials by active participants of the period. Chapter 6, which is the major innovation of this new edition, has now been made possible because of these developments.

Yet, the chapter can not be anything but a synopsis of that complex period. While the importance of that period certainly merits wider treatment and the wealth of data invites it, I have striven as much as possible to maintain the balance of the whole book. After all, the revolutionary period lasted only seventeen years, a small fraction in a narrative that has the span of a century and a half. Revisiting the manuscript has also enabled me to rectify minor errors pointed out by the reviewers as well as to attune certain phrases to the contemporary setting.

I am grateful to my colleagues Shiferaw Bekele and Taddesse Tamrat for reading an earlier draft of the sixth chapter and making suggestions for improvement. My thanks are also due to Douglas Johnson of James Currey Publishers for the gentle pressure he has been exerting on me to expedite the writing of the revised edition. As so often, I am indebted to my loyal friend, Denis Gérard, for preparing the photographs. The first edition was criticized by some for not having a decent photograph of Emperor Hayla-Sellase. I have now rectified that omission, which was induced not by any personal antipathy I might have had for the sovereign but by a conscious decision not to cloud the fate of the whole book for the sake of one photograph.



A session of Ethiopia's first parliament being addressed by Emperor Hayla-Sellase I, 1935 (see Chapter 3)

Introduction

Ethiopia is an ancient country located in north-east Africa, or, as it is generally known, the Horn of Africa, so called because of the horn-shaped tip of the continent that marks off the Red Sea from the Indian Ocean. It is bounded by Sudan in the west, Eritrea in the north and north-east, Kenya in the south, Somalia in the south-east, and Djibouti in the east. To the outside world, it has long been known by the name of Abyssinia. This appellation apparently derived from 'Habashat', one of the tribes that inhabited the Ethiopian region in the pre-Christian era.

The term Ethiopia is of Greek origin, and in classical times was used as a generic and rather diffuse designation for the African land-mass to the south of Egypt. The first known specific application of the term to the Ethiopian region is found in the Greek version of a trilingual inscription of the time of Ezana, the Aksumite king who introduced Christianity into Ethiopia towards the middle of the fourth century AD. This adoption of the term continued with the subsequent translation of the Bible into Ge'ez, the old literary language. The *Kebra Nagast* ('Glory of Kings'), written in the early fourteenth century, which gave the 'received' account of the story of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon, not only linked the Ethiopian kings to the House of Israel, but also sealed the identification of the term Ethiopia with the country: since the thirteenth century, when a dynasty that claimed to represent the restoration of the Solomonic line came to rule the country, its rulers have styled themselves 'King of Kings of Ethiopia'. While it is not uncommon for Ethiopians to refer to themselves, particularly in informal circumstances, as 'Habasha' (Abyssinians), officially they prefer to be called Ethiopians.

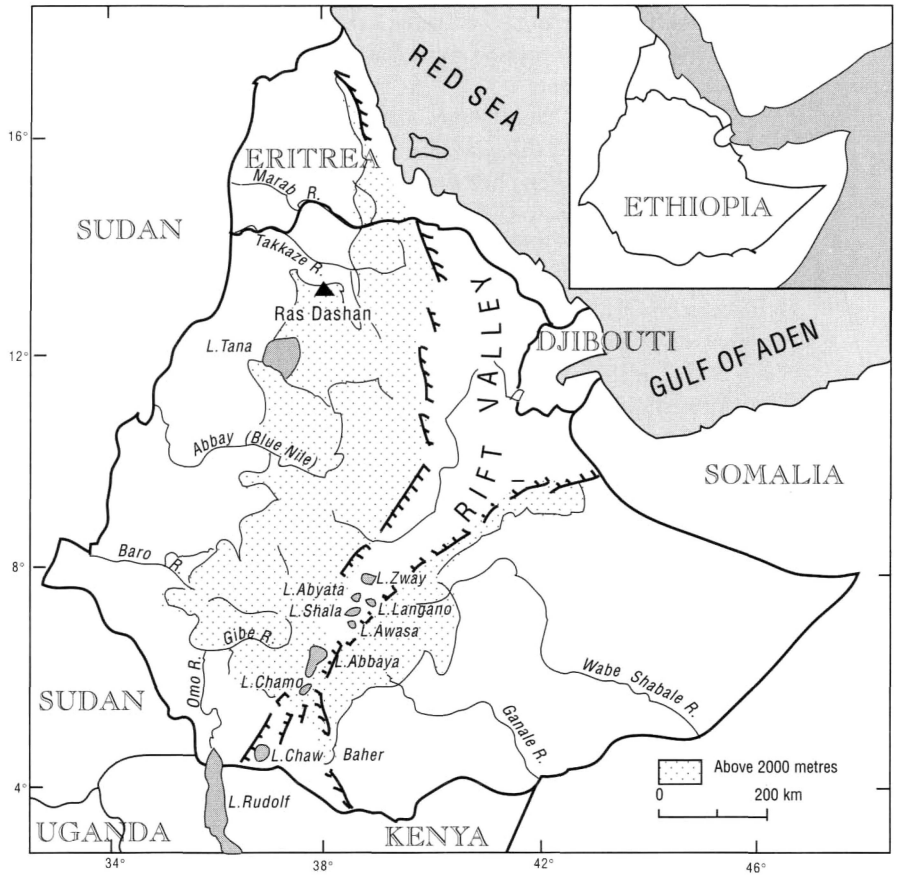
Present-day Ethiopia is located between longitudes 33° and 48°E, and latitudes 3° and 15°N. Although thus lying very near the Equator, the country on the whole is far from 'tropical' in the accepted sense of the term. On the contrary, the elevated nature of its highlands, rising to over 1,500 metres, gives it a decidedly cooler climate than its geographical location seems to suggest. The highlands are criss-crossed by numerous river valleys, and, on an even grander

scale, divided by the Rift Valley. The valley is part of the great geological fault that cuts across large parts of eastern Africa, including Kenya and Tanzania. It diagonally slashes Ethiopia into two unequal parts. The bigger part contains the mountainous north, where the country's highest peak, Ras Dashan (c. 4620 metres), is located, and the gentler plateau of the south-western highlands. The smaller part includes the south-eastern highlands of Bale, Harar, Arsi and Sidamo, and tapers down to the lowlands inhabited by the Oromo (formerly known as the Galla) and the Somali. With the exception of the south-western tip of the country, the highlands are surrounded by an almost uninterrupted ring of lowlands. A steep escarpment abruptly descends from the northern highlands to the Red Sea plains; elsewhere, the descent from highland to lowland is relatively more gentle.

The northern highlands are dotted with hills and mountains, often flat-topped, known as *amba*. These *amba* have had an important place in the historical evolution of the country, serving as sites for churches, prisons (like the royal prison of Amba Geshen in Wallo) and battles (Amba Alage in 1895 and Amba Aradom in 1936). Ethiopians divide their country topographically into three major zones: *daga* (the rather cool highlands where the annual average temperature is about 16 °C), *wayna daga* (the intermediate zone where most of the settled population lives) and *qolla* (the hot valleys and plains attaining their hottest and lowest levels in the desert conditions that prevail in the north-eastern end of the Rift Valley). Although originally climatic designations, these terms have come over time to assume broader meaning, denoting differing modes of life and character.

The country is watered by four major river systems. The first consists of the Takkaze, the Abbay and the Baro, known respectively as the Atbara, the Blue Nile and the Sobat in Sudan; they all flow westwards into the Nile. Of these, the Abbay (Blue Nile) is certainly the most famous; its source, Lake Tana, for long exercised the imagination of travellers and geographers, until the Scottish traveller James Bruce settled the issue in the second half of the eighteenth century. To the second group belong the Ganale (known as the Juba in Somalia) and the Wabe Shabale; they both flow towards the Indian Ocean. The Gibe (Omo in its lower course) originates and ends in the south-western highlands, with Lake Rudolf (also known as Turkana) on the Ethio-Kenya border as its terminus. The Awash sets off from the highlands west of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital, and streams along in a leisurely loop, for the most part across the Rift Valley, until it vanishes in its north-eastern sands.

It is also in the Rift that the country's major chain of lakes is located. Three parts are discernible in the chain: the northern cluster (including Lakes Zway, Langano, Abyata, Shala and Awasa), Lakes



1. Relief map of Ethiopia

Abbaya and Chamo in the middle, and Lake Rudolf at the southern tip. There is also a string of volcanic crater lakes around the town of Dabra Zayt, formerly named Beshoftu, some 31 miles (50 km) to the south of Addis Ababa.

The rains that fill these rivers and lakes come twice a year. The main rainy season in Ethiopia falls between June and September and is known as *keramt*. The 'heavy rains', as they are also known, are caused by moist air from the high pressure area of the South Atlantic and the Indian Ocean moving into the low pressure area of the Sahara desert and Arabia. The south-westerly nature of the wind means that south-western Ethiopia gets the heaviest dose of these rains, which progressively decrease as we move northwards and eastwards. The 'little rains', also known as the *balg* ('autumn' in the Ethiopian context, but spring in Europe), generally occur between March and May. They are caused by monsoon winds blowing from the Indian Ocean. Rains in Ethiopia, whether 'heavy' or 'little', are characterized by torrential downpours. The long rainy season has historically been marked by a hiatus in military activity, as flooded rivers and wet ground made campaigning difficult.

The rainfall pattern has had a direct bearing on the vegetation scene. The heavy and almost year-round rains in the south-west have given rise to a dense concentration of tropical broad-leaf forests, particularly in the administrative regions of Illubabor and Kafa. Although deforestation has reduced the wooded area to about a tenth of its original size, the south-west still accounts for some 65% of the country's total forest resources. It is this region which has traditionally been the source of most of the natural products of commerce, ranging from elephant tusks to coffee. The northern and central parts of the country were initially covered with coniferous forests and temperate grasslands; currently, less than 1% of the original forests remain, the result of intense human activity attended by an even more disastrous rate of deforestation than in the south-west. We can say that, over the years, the country's vegetation has generally been characterized by a decrease in the forest area and an increase in the area covered with grass and scrub. Of late, the even faster degradation of land has brought about the recurrent droughts which have made the country so notorious.

Keramt is the main growing season in Ethiopia, although the *balg* rains are also crucial for some parts of the country. The temperate conditions of the northern and central highlands have permitted the growing of a wide variety of food crops. Of these, the most important is *tef* (*Eragrostis tef*) a small cereal indigenous and peculiar to the country; it is processed into the distinctive bread, *enjara*, the staple diet of a large proportion of the country's population. *Tef*'s equivalent in the southern parts of the country is the root-crop *ensat* (*Ensete ven-*

tricosum). The country's abundant grasslands have also supported a large livestock population, reputedly the largest in Africa. The possession of livestock is not confined to the lowland pastoralists. Highland farmers also keep a fair proportion of livestock for their food value, as transport animals and, in the case of oxen, as draught-animals to pull the plough.

Like many other African societies, Ethiopia presents a mosaic of nationalities speaking a multiplicity of languages. Linguists have divided these languages into four groups, three of them tracing a common ancestry to a parent language called proto-Afroasiatic. From this parent language sprang not only the languages spoken in Ethiopia but also a number of languages spoken in the northern half of Africa and in south-western Asia. The three language groups of the proto-Afroasiatic family spoken in Ethiopia are known as Cushitic, Omotic and Semitic. Cushitic and Omotic are the most ancient in the Ethiopian region; the Semitic languages are the most recent. A fourth group of languages belong to an independent family known as Nilo-Saharan.

The Nilo-Saharans are situated in a more or less continuous line along the western fringes of the country. The Kunama in south-western Eritrea form the northernmost group. Further south, in Matakkal in western Gojjam, are to be found the Gumuz. They spill over into the adjoining region of Wallaga, home of the Barta and the Koma. The southern end of the Nilo-Saharan corridor is composed of the Majangir, on the escarpment leading from the Oromo-inhabited highlands to the Baro plains, and the Anuak and Nuer, who dwell in the plains; some sections of the Anuak and even larger sections of the Nuer are to be found on the Sudanese side of the boundary.

Of the Cushitic-speaking peoples of Ethiopia, historically the most important in ancient times were the Agaw and the Beja. The Agaw have now been largely assimilated into the dominant Semitic culture, with a pocket waging what looks like a rearguard fight for survival in the Gojjam administrative region. An Agaw pocket, the Belen or Bilen, is also found in the Karan district in Eritrea. The Beja are now to be found largely in Sudan. The Oromo now constitute the largest single nationality in Ethiopia; they began to migrate from the south in the sixteenth century, and later settled over large parts of the country. Linguistically closest to the Oromo are the Somali, a predominantly pastoralist people now found scattered in Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia and Kenya. Other Cushitic-speaking peoples are the Afar, inhabiting the hostile environment at the north-eastern end of the Rift, the Saho on the escarpment to the north, the Hadiya and Kambata in Shawa administrative region and the Gedeo (Darasa) and Konso further to the south.

 2. Linguistic map of Ethiopia, showing the distribution by the nineteenth century

The Omotic-speaking peoples derive their name from their location on both sides of the Omo river. Situated exclusively in south-western Ethiopia, they have been distinguished by two important features: the large-scale cultivation of *ensat* and the evolution of highly organized polities. The Dorze, Janjaro, Kafa and Walayta were of particular significance in the latter regard. Showing comparative levels of complexity were the Dizi (Gimira) and Maji, found in the extreme south-west.

The Semites have played the most dominant role in the country's history. The kingdoms and empires that successively emerged in the region have invariably been under their control, particularly that of the Tegregna- and Amharic-speaking peoples of northern and central Ethiopia. The oldest of the Semitic languages, Ge'ez, now confined to ecclesiastical use, has served as a sort of lingua franca of the Semitic-speaking peoples. The most akin to Ge'ez is Tegra, spoken by the inhabitants of northern and eastern Eritrea. The Tegregna-speakers are found in highland Eritrea and in Tegray. Amharic, which is the official language of the country, is the native tongue of most of the inhabitants of the north-central and central highlands. Two Semitic language pockets in a predominantly Cushitic environment are Gurage in south-central Ethiopia and Harari in the east.

Conventionally, Ethiopian history began with the visit of the Queen of Sheba, allegedly from Ethiopia, to Solomon, King of Israel, in the tenth century BC: hence the reference to Ethiopia's 'three thousand years of history' that we hear and read so often. Aside from the fact that this association has scarcely any scientific basis, it represents too short a view of the Ethiopian past. Archaeological and linguistic research in recent years has made possible and necessary the adoption of a longer and more scientific perspective. On this basis, the beginnings of the Ethiopian past are to be sought not in the historical but in the prehistoric period.

Archaeological discoveries of the late 1960s and early 1970s have lent this past more than national significance. The discovery in 1974 of the earliest hominid in Hadar, in the Afar desert, has focused international palaeontological research on the country. Named 'Lucy' by foreigners, and 'Denqenash' ('You are Marvellous') by Ethiopians, this female ancestor of the human race was dated to three and a half million years ago. In the Omo valley in the south-west, too, human fossils dating from one to two and a half million years ago have been found. Much nearer in time, there are other manifestations of prehistoric culture: the neolithic site of Malka Qunture, some 31 miles (50 km) to the south-west of Addis Ababa, and the cave paintings found in Eritrea in the north, Sidamo in the south and Harar in the east. An important facet of this prehistoric culture was the domestication of plants and animals, believed to have started some six thousand years ago. *Ensat* was cultivated in the Omotic south-west and *tef* and

dagusa (*Eleusine corocana*, finger millet) in the northern and eastern highlands. Barley and wheat were subsequently introduced into the region. The emergence of the ox-drawn plough signalled a revolution in agricultural production, and at the same time gave the country one of its distinctive marks over the centuries.

The developments described above constituted the basis for the emergence of states in the Ethiopian region. Not much is known about the predecessors of the Aksumite kingdom, which has been the focus of much of the historiographical attention. But such centres as Yeha, to the north of Aksum, attest to the flourishing of a rich civilization which appears to have been an amalgam of the indigenous culture and external influences, notably from South Arabia. Aksum flourished from the first to the seventh century AD. Its elaborately carved stelae and the ruins of palaces and other edifices attest to high attainments in building technology. Its towns included the eponymous capital and Adulis, a Red Sea port of international repute. Aksum was above all sustained by trade, both inland and maritime. The latter not only made it an integral part of Mediterranean commerce and culture but also brought it into contact with India and the Far East. Military expansion, as so often, followed trade. At the height of its power, the Aksumite state controlled large parts of northern Ethiopia and the Arabian coastline across the Red Sea. The conversion of the Aksumite king Ezana to Christianity in the 330s ushered in a new chapter in the country's history. The creed, in its Orthodox form, came to express the cultural identity of a large section of its highland population. Ideologically and diplomatically, the Ethiopian church and state were thenceforth tied up with the Alexandrian patriarchate in Egypt, who had sole authority to consecrate a bishop for the Ethiopian church, the *abun*.

From about the middle of the seventh century, Aksum entered a process of decline. The rise of Islam and the subsequent disruption of the Red Sea trade sapped Aksum's source of life. Beja pressures from the north combined to force the Aksumite state to recoil further inwards. It was in these circumstances that the Agaw, hitherto subjugated, seized state power and inaugurated their almost eponymous dynasty, Zagwe. While the origins of this dynasty are shrouded in obscurity, the period for which we have some reliable documentation lasts from about 1150 to 1270. The Zagwe left their deepest imprint on Ethiopian history through the construction of eleven monolithic churches in Lalibala, named after one of the more famous of their kings.

In 1270, the Zagwe were overthrown by Yekunno-Amlak, a chieftain of one of the subject peoples, the Amhara (then inhabiting the Wallo region). He inaugurated a dynasty which called itself 'Solomonic', to emphasize its legitimacy as opposed to the Zagwe,

who were portrayed as usurpers. Yekunno-Amlak and his successors, notably Amda-Tseyon (r. 1314–1344) and Zar'a-Yaeqob (r. 1434–1468), built an empire which matched, and in some respects surpassed, its Aksumite predecessor in military might and territorial extent. The period also witnessed a further expansion of Christianity to the south, as well as to the Lake Tana region and Gojjam. But Islam posed a serious challenge in the south-east. The bid to control the vital trade route linking the Gulf of Aden port of Zeila to the southern interior, even more than religious divergence, pitted the Christian state against a string of Muslim principalities that had emerged since the turn of the ninth century. By the end of the fifteenth century, the supremacy of the Christian kingdom over these principalities had become an established fact. Simultaneously, the quest for 'Prester John', a legendary Christian king of superlative wealth and power believed to rule somewhere beyond the Muslim crescent which shut Europe off from Asia, brought the Portuguese to Ethiopia. An important Portuguese mission visited the country in 1520, and established the basis for future co-operation.

In 1527, the tide began to turn against the Christian kingdom. Galvanizing for his own ends an irresistible population movement of the nomadic Afar and Somali, a military genius by the name of Ahmad ibn Ibrahim, more popularly known as Ahmad Gragn or Gragn ('the Left-Handed'), led the Muslims in a series of sweeping victories over the Christian kingdom. In 1529, at Shembera Kure, a site about 44 miles (70 km) to the south-east of what is now Addis Ababa, Gragn scored his first major victory over the Christian forces led by Emperor Lebna-Dengel (r. 1508–1540). Harried from one part of his realm to another by the conquering foe, the king died a fugitive in 1540, after sending a desperate request for Portuguese military assistance. A force of some 400 Portuguese, led by Christopher da Gama (son of Vasco da Gama, discoverer of the route round South Africa to India), arrived the following year, and helped to defeat Ahmad Gragn at the Battle of Wayna Daga, to the east of Gondar, in 1543.

But the damage had already been done. The Christian kingdom could not easily recover its former might. Indeed, like two exhausted gladiators, both the Christian kingdom and the Muslim state of Adal in the Harar region, whence Gragn had launched his phenomenal assault, lay prostrate as the Oromo swept across the highlands like a tidal wave. This was the most significant population movement in the country's recent history, changing its demographic shape and its political geography. The political centre steadily retreated to the north. In the mean time, the Jesuit missionaries, who had come to Ethiopia hoping to make religious capital out of the atmosphere of friendship generated by the Portuguese military support of the

Christian state, made continued attempts to convert the kings and their country to Catholicism. They nearly succeeded in doing so with Emperor Susneyos (r. 1607–1632), who embraced the new creed in the hope of strengthening the declining power of the monarchy. Nobility, clergy and peasantry rose against him. Appalled by the ensuing civil war, he gracefully abdicated in favour of his son, Fasiladas (r. 1632–1667). The first act of the new king was to expel the Jesuits.

Fasiladas is also famous in Ethiopian history for founding Gondar as the imperial capital in 1636. Coming as it did after a long period when Ethiopian kings had ruled from roving royal camps, the establishment of Gondar marked a new chapter in the country's urban history. Fasiladas led the way in the construction of a number of impressive castles and churches in and around the town. But this flourishing of urban culture did not check the decline of monarchical power. The power of regional lords continued to grow at the expense of the monarchs. By the second half of the eighteenth century, the emperors in Gondar merely reigned; they did not rule. This period of Ethiopian history is known as the *Zamana Masafent* ('Era of the Princes'). It forms the prelude to the modern history of Ethiopia.

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1 The Background

1. The internal scene in the first half of the nineteenth century

The northern principalities

The year 1769 symbolizes the initiation of the period in Ethiopian history known as the *Zamana Masafent*. It was in that year that a Tegrean prince named *Ras* Mikael Sehul (the second name being an epithet to describe his astuteness) made a bloody intervention in royal politics in Gondar. He killed the reigning emperor, Iyoas, and put his own favourite, Emperor Yohannes II, on the throne. Before a year was out, Yohannes himself incurred *Ras* Mikael's disfavour, and was in turn deposed and replaced by Emperor Takla-Haymanot II.

This making and unmaking of kings by *Ras* Mikael marked the nadir of imperial power. While the intervention of other members of the nobility was not to be so dramatic, the long-standing struggle for power between the monarchy and the nobility had been decidedly resolved in favour of the latter. Until 1855, when Kasa Haylu became Emperor Tewodros II and restored the power and prestige of the imperial throne, the successive emperors were little more than puppets in the hands of the forceful nobility. An emperor had practically no army of his own. In the 1830s and 1840s, his annual revenue was estimated at a paltry 300 Maria Theresa silver dollars, the Austrian currency then in use in Ethiopia, whereas *Ras* Walda-Sellase of Tegre had 75,000 thalers at his disposal, and *Negus* Sahla-Sellase of Shawa had some 85,000 thalers.

Ras Mikael's domination of Gondar politics was itself short-lived. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, a strong man by the name of Ali Gwangul had emerged as a powerful figure and kingmaker. He initiated what came to be known as the Yajju dynasty, after their place of origin in present-day northern Wallo. From their base in Dabra Tabor, successive members of this dynasty controlled the throne for about eighty years. Although Muslim and Oromo in

origin, they had become Christianized, and followed other Amhara customs. The power alignments for or against them were dictated less by ethnic and religious considerations than by self-interest and regional aggrandisement. Yajju power may be said to have reached its peak in the 'reign' (1803–1825) of *Ras* Gugsa Marsu.

On the southern side of the Bashilo river, where Islam is believed to have had establishment previous to the Ahmad Gragn period, the Muslim and Oromo elements were more pronounced. Known as Amhara in medieval times, the region came to be identified by the name of Wallo, after the most important tribe that had settled in the area. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, a dynasty known as the Mammadoch and based at Warra Himanu established its hegemony over the whole region. The name of the dynasty was apparently derived from its founder Muhammad Ali (more popularly known by his 'horse-name', Abba Jebo, 'father of Jebo', his war-horse). The death of his grandson Abba Jerru Liban in 1825 marked the decline of Mammadoch power, as his descendants began to fight among themselves for supremacy. This state of affairs gradually reduced Wallo to a buffer zone which invited the expansion and interference of its more powerful neighbours.

In Tegre, a term denoting the Marab Melash ('the land to the north of the Marab river') and the Red Sea coastal region, as well as present-day Tegray, a strong ruler emerged in the person of *Ras* Walda-Sellase, at about the beginning of the nineteenth century. By reason of his region's proximity to the sea, he was the first Ethiopian ruler to come into contact with European travellers of the nineteenth century. With total obliviousness to the Ethiopian reality, the British traveller and artist Henry Salt, who met Walda-Sellase at his capital Antalo in 1805, described him as the 'Prime Minister' of Ethiopia. Such a flattering appellation did not move Walda-Sellase into allowing Salt to pass on to the imperial seat in Gondar, which was then controlled by Walda-Sellase's bitter opponent, *Ras* Gugsa Marsu.

Some years after the death of *Ras* Walda-Sellase in 1816, *Dajjach* Subagadis Waldu of Agame in eastern Tegre established himself as the lord of Tegre, and continued his predecessor's bid for control of the imperial throne. This led him into a bloody clash with the Yajju lord, *Ras* Mareyye Gugsa of Bagemder, at the Battle of Dabra Abbay (14 February 1831). Both leaders lost their lives: Mareyye fell in the course of the battle, and Subagadis was executed by Mareyye's victorious troops. The man who picked up the pieces was *Dajjach* Webe Hayla-Maryam of Semen, head of another important area of regional power consolidated by his father and predecessor, *Dajjach* Hayla-Maryam Gabre. The most significant results of the battle were the end of Tegrean autonomy and the extension of *Dajjach* Webe's overlordship to that region. By the mid-nineteenth century, Webe had