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## The Cycles of Progress and Regress in Ethiopian Civilization

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### Abstract

This is a study of the historical traditions of Ethiopia and their value as basis for national identity considering the inescapable evolutionary trajectories of modernization.

Specific watershed events with catastrophic effects besieged Ethiopia, resulting in the precipitous decline of the values, dignity, and solemnity of the Ethiopian State. Challenges that contributed to the distancing of Ethiopia's institutional identity from the loftiness of its roots will be covered.

The political and religious history of Ethiopia will be highlighted to establish landmark events of history, politics, and religion. Specific crises resulting in shifts in values, as well as various reactions to these shifts in values, will also be discussed. The rich tapestry of Ethiopian political experiences brings a challenge to the task of capturing the essential events that determined the country's existence.

This paper also reveals a situation in which a civilization's most basic values and unique ways of life have been threatened without being adequately replaced. It will also show the difficulties that ensue when civilizations, alienated from their unique ancient traditions, attempt to cope with new adversities without the support such traditions historically have supplied.

### Introduction

Ethiopia, one of the oldest countries in the world with grand civilization dating to the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE, is suffering from violent civil war and unrelenting interethnic violence. Bewildering tragedies are sweeping throughout the country, afflicting a land and a nation once known for its great artistic, aesthetic, literal civilization as well as for ancient historical legacies, and proven grandeur of imperial stature.<sup>1</sup>

The ascendance of Ethiopia's glory evolved due to the natural circumstances that included geographical, demographic, religious and historical processes.

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<sup>1</sup> Ethiopian and Eritrean troops have overrun the Ancient City of Axum, where around 325-335 A. D. Christianity was declared a state religion in Ethiopia. These troops have massacred innocent worshippers and destroyed ancient relics. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-in-tigrays-war-ancient-christian-and-muslim-houses-of-worship-risk/>.

These natural circumstances evolved as essential components of religious values and the requisite details of state formation.

While geographical spaces and borders were fluid and transient, religion and history remained static as common descriptors of the Nile Valley countries and the overlapping factors of their specific civilizations. They were particular in the exercise and demonstration of their specific values, but they shared common geographical perspicuity, common civilizational origin and common religious affects rooted in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It is true Judaism was a singular identity of the Jewish people from ancient days, but the dynamic nature of their history and the religious inspirations that flowed from Moses, the biblical prophets, Jesus Christ and Christianity resulted in similar patterns with varying effects in Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia. Islam has captured Sudan and Egypt, but Ethiopia remains the only state that remained the bearer of the ancient demographic, religious, and political expressions directly linked to the traditional and common civilization of the Nile Valley states.

### **What's About Civilization?**

Scholars agree on the definition of civilization; they differ in explaining the origin and the ownership or claim to a particular civilization (Melko, 2000, 55-76). In general, scholars agree that civilization is the identity of societies reflecting their path in history and the means of survival and interaction they utilized to have evolved to become the way they became throughout the ages.

Civilization is a positive state of being. The indicators of civilization include the creation of orderly societies, human-friendly governance, maximized outcomes of peace, harmony, prosperity, and predictable and frequently monitored and adjudicated outcomes of the means of governance.

Scholars of modernization and development put guardrails to the definition of civilization by conflating the term *modernization* with “being modern.” Being modern enables societies to put knowledge, science, and the instrumentalization of scientific theories to practical use as a means for harnessing their environment (Weber, 1948; Black, 1964; Huntington, 1984; Tilly, 1984; McClelland, 1961).

Thus, civilizations embody ‘sacred’ and “secular” elements factored into meaningful variables that can then be explored, experimented with, and articulated into high levels of human achievement.

Modernization is a specific product harvested as the result of fruitful industrialization, urbanization, the specialization of functions, and the division of labor (Lipset, 1959, 67-74).<sup>2</sup> Economic progress and democracy are process-related; civilization is inherent. Civilization cures those negative outcomes of modernization such as alienation, impersonal interaction, litigious social habits, and reduced capacities for the augmentation of social capital (Merton, 1957).<sup>3</sup> Civilization makes modernization disciplined and clean, aesthetically appealing and flourishing with social capital.

The value of modernization relative to civilization is shown in the ways civilization can inspire healthy modernization that pays homage to heritage, language, religion, and tradition without compromising their positive characteristics and elevating negative attitudes. If liberal democratic societies, irrespective of some imperfections, can show us they applied modernization for achievement and self-fulfillment without undermining their civilizational heritage, what prevents countries such as Ethiopia from doing so?

What caused Ethiopia, an ancient civilization, to be unable to operationalize its ancient civilization for effective modernization? This paper will answer these questions by defining Ethiopian Civilization from the classical, biblical, and the modernizing conditions available, but which were undermined by failures to make civilization practical for conflict resolution.

The difference between a dead civilization and a living civilization is shown in the betterment or impoverishment of citizen lives. Dead civilizations lead to decay and regress. Living civilizations embody the refinements of languages, artistic expressions, community wellbeing, and social and accumulation of political capital that enable societies to create harmonious political, social, and economic atmosphere. Living civilizations enable societies to capitalize on the refined elements of their civilization, to construct a democratic state capable of development, modernization, without circumventing or to the exclusion of their values and beliefs.

Ethiopian civilization exhibits symptoms of death and decay. Its constructive values are incapable of initiating a united, democratic, tolerant and a robust state system. Its inspiring values that could emanate from religious, social, and cultural developments contributed little or nothing to uplift the country to a respectable state of prosperity and democratic life in order to heal the debilitating effects of underdevelopment.

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<sup>2</sup> Lipset makes clear that economic progress as an aspect of modernization can lead to democratic outcomes, but democratic outcomes do not shield societies from exhibiting uncivilized attitudes. Lipset, S. M. "Some Social Requisites of Democratization: Economic Development and Legitimacy," *American Political Science Review*, Volume 53, No 1. (March 1959), pp. 69-107.

<sup>3</sup> Merton, R. (1957). *Social Theory and Social Structure*. The Free Press, New York, pp.185-214.

Ethiopian political leaders do not honor the edifying, uplifting, and constructive values of their civilization. Religious leaders do not consider the ancient Ethiopian heritage of tolerance and kindness. Instead, they call for wars, violence, and even massacres.

This study will focus on Ethiopian civilization from three historical perspectives to highlight the evolution of the civilization. The highlight will be followed by presentation of detailed historical episodes that have led toward the death and regress of Ethiopian civilization. The historical perspectives will be addressed as:

1. The Biblical Classical Angle,
2. The Ethiopic Angle, and
3. The Modern State System Angle.

The categorization highlights the rise and decline of Ethiopian civilization from its ancient sunrise to today. Extensive summary of major events that show a repeated inability of the Ethiopian Civilization's challenge to obstacles to progress will be offered below. These obstacles to progress and sources of regress to Ethiopian Civilization include religious wars, ethnic division, and the ideology of communist totalitarianism.

Religion activated as an instrument of mobilization expects a zero-sum outcome where contests must be settled by one side losing and the adversary totally defeated and reduced to nothing or zero. In some ways this is similar to communism. Communism is a totalitarian system. The logic and purpose of communism is revolution. Revolution is defined as a "sudden violence and complete destruction of existing institutions and replacing them with new ones" (Huntington, 1968; Skocpol, 1985). Ethiopian Civilization has been a victim of religious and secular totalitarianism. The adversity of both on Ethiopian societies will be discussed below.

### **Ethiopian Civilization in Historical and Political Context**

Ethiopian Civilization is ancient and rich. Augustus B. Wylde, a nineteenth century reporter and cataloguer of Ethiopian geography, society, government, and religion described Ethiopia's ancient history as follows:

There can be little doubt that Abyssinia formed part of a great southern nation that was contemporary with the earliest Jewish times; and in the reign of King Solomon when the Queen of Sheba visited this monarch in Syria [Jerusalem]<sup>4</sup> it had already reached to a high scale of civilization.

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<sup>4</sup> Budge, W (1922). *The Queen of Sheba and her only Son: The Glory of Kings*. The British Museum and the Medici Society, London. UK. Budge states that King Solomon's capital city was Jerusalem when Menelik I, son of Queen of Sheba and ruler of Ethiopia, was anointed as a king of Ethiopia.

It is nearly certain that this southern nation of Sheba extended to both sides of the Red Sea, embracing the Arab countries of Yemen and Hadramut and including the island of Socotra. Its limits in Africa are only a matter of conjecture, but most likely included all the ground where coffee and khat are cultivated, which would embrace in the south-west the whole western Galla country.

The state system of Ethiopia is ingrained in the historical evolution of Ethiopian Civilization. The Ethiopian state began as an imperial government starting with the epic narrative of the Queen of Sheba between 1000-900 BCE. The vast testimonials of biblical, and secular records refer to Ethiopia in broad geographical span covering much of Africa, the Middle East, and India. In the specificity of the term relative to historical, social, and anthropological terms, the name Ethiopia refers to Nubia/Kush and Ethiopia/Abyssinia. Historical and biblical records refer to the peoples inhabiting modern Sudan and Ethiopia as partakers of the same history, the same faith, and the same geographical proximity where cultural and civilizational materials were seamlessly exchanged for centuries until Islam rearranged the ideological border lines separating Islamic Sudan in contrasting historical trajectories from that of Christian Ethiopia.

### **The Biblical Classical Angle of Ethiopian Civilization**

The biblical and classical features of ancient Ethiopia history commence with the creation of the Garden of Eden. We learn from the book of Genesis, the Book of Creation, that one of the rivers that watered the Garden of Eden was called Ghion, the modern Blue Nile River.

Another Biblical angle incorporates a version of Judaism in vogue during the period of 581 B. C., the Babylonian captivity period, when remnants of the scattered Jewish refugees crossed over to Egypt and some of their contingent settled around northern Ethiopia (Tamirat, T. 1977). Spencer Trimingham stated:

The disposition of priests and some of their community may well have travelled southwards and so reached Abyssinia. If the interpretation of the prophesies of Zephaniah is more than empty rhetoric ‘from beyond the rivers of Kush (Nubia) my supplicants, even my dispersed community, shall bring mine offerings’ (Zeph. 3:10), then it may refer to Jews in Abyssinia (Trimingham, S. P, 1965:19).

The New Testament makes several references to how the Old Testament reinforced New Testament references of Ethiopian Civilization and faith. Theodore Dowling (1909, p. 1) refers to Origen as affirming that the Abyssinians were converted by St. Matthew, one of the disciples of Christ. He also adds:

For 1000 years the Ethiopian Church has preserved some old customs that have elsewhere become obsolete. Traces of Hebrew rites imply that there was an ancient connection between Abyssinians and Jews.

About the middle of the fourth century the Jewish religion was professed by a considerable number of Homeritae (people of the Red Sea Coast known as descendants of Abraham through Keturah)...and Professor Sayce confirms this view. St. Andrew, St. Matthew and St. Thomas are each mentioned by early writers as Evangelists of these regions.

Another direct reference to the link of church and state aspects of Ethiopian Civilization is the indication that Christianity arrived in the country in phases, beginning in the first century around 35-40 A. D when the Ethiopian Eunuch was baptized by the apostle Philip. This official of Queen Candace was travelling back to his country after fulfilling his annual religious pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He was reading scriptures that foretold of the coming of the Messiah from the Book of Isaiah. He was reading in the Jewish language; he interacted with Phillip the disciple of Christ in the Jewish language. He accepted the teachings of Christianity and introduced the faith to the region.

The Eunuch's profession of faith, the rite of baptism, and the introduction of Christianity to Ethiopia are scarcely mentioned in the annals of Ethiopian history. The Eunuch's confessional experiences are common heritage to both Nubia and Ethiopia by virtue of their geographical proximity.

Their apparent evangelistic outreach and the exchanges between the Ethiopian Nubia and Ethiopian Abyssinia radiated back and forth between the two neighbors who embraced the same Old and New Testament legacies.

The existence of a network of indirect interactions between regions as far as the Gash Delta (Kassala) to the west and the highlands in Yemen to the east, most likely included the highlands in Eritrea and Tigray, in the late 3rd to early 2nd millennia BCE.<sup>5</sup>

The strength of the above quote rests in its value in adding details not highlighted in the annals of Christianity and the region. The history of Nubia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia is interwoven in pre-Christian political and social settings. Textual Christianity poses as a universal faith with textual capacity to introduce, but not enforce peace.

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<sup>5</sup> Fattovich, R. (2015), "The Northern Horn of Africa in the First Millennium BCE: Local Traditions and External Connections," in *Rassegna De Studi Etiopici*, Roma, Italy.

Over the centuries, Christianity suffered setbacks when its hierarchies posed as propagators of colonialism, slavery, and genocide to the un-Islamized lands outside the Islamic world of the time.<sup>6</sup>

Wide skepticism prevailed from variety of corners and scholarly opinions. The undisputed fact is that Ethiopia is one of the first nations to embrace Christianity when Christianity was not categorized and redefined by modifications, non-scriptural opinions, and doubts of visibly recognizable condescending theological commentaries from Western scholars of faith and secular topics.

Biblical scholars who harbor a categorical belief of inherent racial inequality between races can normalize bigotry and the false tenets of racial superiority and inferiority. Famed Bible scholars such as Adam Clarke deny the universality of Natural Rights. They claim that God chose certain races as predetermined for eternal domination while others stand in favor with God.

A scriptural reference from the Book of Amos refers to Israel, God's chosen people, by comparing them to the Ethiopians:

Are ye not as children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel? saith the LORD. Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt? and the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir? Amos 9:7

The damages caused by the lopsided and prejudicial interpretations of the Bible is an endemic problem, one also observed by others. J. M. Powis Smith's description is as follows:

The Old Testament in its present form is the product of repeated revisions. These revisions involved modification, adaptation, and elimination of previously existing material as we have it...Perhaps the outstanding illustration is furnished by the Books of Chronicles in comparison with the Books of Kings. A scarcely less clear example is found in the development of the Hexateuch. Another proof exists in the editorial supplements to such prophetic books as Amos, Micah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah (Smith, J. M.P. 1917, p. 322).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Islam divides the world into two regions: Dar Islam (the abode of Islam) and Dar al Harb (the Abode of Jihad). Dar al Islam is pacified; it is peaceful abode of harmonious and one Islamic belief. The Dar al Harb is a target for conversion and expansion of the faith through the struggle of strenuous testimony and practical wars of conversion, Jihad (Lewis, B. 1983: 29).

<sup>7</sup> Smith, J. M. P (1917), "The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature", Vol. 33 No. 4 (July 1917), p. 321). Smith's analysis is illuminating and cogent; and his evidence solid.



In the above quote, Smith includes the book of Amos as one that was subjected to “modifications, adaptation, and elimination.” Smith was referring to the perspective of the Old Testament. Similar evidence exists in the New Testament, also.

Ethiopian clergies, biblical scholars, and scribes from ancient times to this day, read the above verse and teach that Ethiopians share the same blessings as the “chosen people of Israel.” The Prophet Amos included the Ethiopians particularly, preaching that God’s favors and blessings that were predestined as special favors to the children of Israel are equally merited to the Ethiopians. By contrast, Western biblical scholars and commentators in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and today give this scripture a different meaning.

The following description by Adam Clarke in his Bible Commentary is blatantly racist and misguided attribution of God’s character to Ethiopians. Clarke said:

*Are ye not as children of the Ethiopians* — Amos, to take away from the Israelites their false presumption, that the Lord was too much interested in their preservation to prevent their total ruin, says that, in consequence of their infidelity and revolt, God regards them not otherwise than as Ethiopians.<sup>8</sup> (Amos 9:7)

In the above scriptural explanation, the Israelites’ status is otherwise much higher than the lower status of the Ethiopians. Megabie Mistir Mebrahtu MobaE, an Ethiopic authority on the broader exigencies of Biblical scriptures, explains the above scripture to mean the opposite of the Western interpretation.

He explains by saying, in broad terms, that irrespective of the Israelites’ disobedience to God, the forgiving heart that God extends to the Ethiopians is equally available to the Israelites. By the mention of their name, God is acknowledging the cherished affection He has to the Ethiopians in equal measures that He has to the Israelites.<sup>9</sup>

Another Bible scholar, highly regarded by modern Protestant evangelicals, gives a real meaning to a thought process conditioned by a prejudicial worldview. Such a distorted worldview can overlook the vast and inclusive provisions of godly mercies as it is clearly stated in the Book of Acts Chapter 10, verse 28: “God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:28). Forgetting this foundation of natural rights and universal equality, Donald Smith Jones explained verse 7 of Chapter 9 in the Book of Amos as follows:

*Are ye not as children of the Ethiopians:* Israel's election to be God's people should not save them unless their conduct corresponded with God's choice. If they opened not, they were no better in his eyes than the heathen, their delivery from Egypt had no more significance than the migration of pagan nations.

<sup>8</sup> Clarke, A. (1999). Clarke Bible Commentaries. Abington Press, Nashville, Tennessee.

<sup>9</sup> Qomos Kessete SereKe referring to Megabie Mistir Mebrahtu MobaE. *Andim* (Commentary) (1985). Kokebe Tsibah Mahbere Hawariat Printing Press, Asmara, Eritrea.

Here is a contrast to Amos 6:1, etc. The children of Israel were now no dearer than the children of the Ethiopians (*Cushites*). The Cushites are introduced as being descendants of the wicked Ham, and black in complexion (as Jeremiah 13:23), the color of their skin being considered a mark of degradation and of evil character.<sup>10</sup> (Amos 9:7)

To an Ethiopian Bible scholar, this scripture informs God's loyalty and limitless affection to Israel as He does to the people of Ethiopia. There is no "contrast to Amos 6:1" by which one nation is typecast as "wicked Ham, and black in complexion".

The above quote is contained in the famous *Pulpit Bible Commentary*, an essential study tool for scriptural exegeses at Bible schools, homiletics, and a reference book for Sunday school teachers in American, British, and Canadian churches. Many socio-cultural habits and mores have changed since the year the above commentary tomes have been written, but the belief that the level of civilizations of non-Western societies does not measure up to that of the Western civilizations persists even today at religious institutions more than anywhere else.

### **The Ethiopic Angle of Ethiopian Civilization**

The Ethiopic Angle of Ethiopian Civilization is defined from the perspectives of the fifth century. Biblical events, manners of idol and monotheistic worship, cultural artifacts, linguistic, and archeological records found in Eritrea and northern Ethiopia show evidence of extensive interaction with Egypt, Nubia, Cush and the Middle East. A distant empire known as *D'mt* reigned over the vast expanses of the Horn of Africa extending its rule up to the Third Cataract of the Nile Valley (Tamrat, 1976, p. 9-11; Kobishanov, 1990, pp. 203-223). Religious events play large part by showing that the goddess Athtar (Astarte), a stumbling block to the Israelites, was worshiped in ancient Eritrea and Ethiopia. In subsequent centuries, Christianity made progress and under Emperor Zoskales, whose capital was in the QuHaito near the vicinities of Adulis at the Eritrean coast ruled as far as the Egyptian borders in northern Sudan, western Arabia in the northeast and Somalia and the Barbera coast of Somalia.<sup>11</sup>

Edward Ullendorff (1977), gives extensive analysis on how religion played a primary role in in the evolution of Ethiopian politics. He argues that the fundamental national orientations of Ethiopians and the Ethiopian state system were united in an amalgamation of Judaic and New Testament thought processes. Ullendorff further acknowledges Ethiopia as having an ideology that gives preeminence to scriptural strictures and reinforces them with political edicts such as citizenship duty, patriotism, and loyalty to king and state.

<sup>10</sup> Jones, D. S. (1985). *The Pulpit Commentaries* (1883). Hendrickson Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois.

<sup>11</sup> Bowersock, G. W. (2013). *The Throne of Adulis*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, p. 31.

Ultimately, the Old Testament influence was relegated to a secondary role to New Testament teachings, and Christianity:

The doctrinal position of the Abyssinian Church was always unenviable, caught as it was between the deeply rooted Judaic customs of the country and the necessity to maintain its theological prestige as a truly Christian body. Fortunately, these stresses became acute only in time of foreign pressures or religious controversy; at other times, the Abyssinian Church and nation have been at peace with their syncretistic Judeo-Christian civilization and folklore. (Ullendorff, E. 1973: 98-99)

Spencer Trimingham discusses the amalgamation of Judaism and Christianity in Ethiopia and notices that, in the end, Christianity, by virtue of its antipathy to Judaism as a competing faith, overpowered Judaism. The more Christianity retrenched in its conservative undertones, the more its theological authorities cast its Old and New Testament features as blending together to reinforce more conservative and devotional positions:

Abyssinia has steadfastly maintained its faith as a remote outpost of the Church, cut off from all relationship with outside churches except that of the Copts. This forced seclusion, the development of a purely indigenous form of Christianity, and the integration of the Church as the symbol of Abyssinian nationality, enabled it to preserve its faith against many dangers, although at the same time these factors paralyzed its spiritual life.<sup>12</sup>

Throughout Ethiopian history, politics was ingrained in the social fabric as an element of religious duty. Ethiopian politics was glorified, irrespective of its negative and positive applications, as an Ethiopian ideology to be owned by rulers and subjects as the parameters and guides for official and personal behaviors. Those who governed were to exercise their authority within specific rules that did not aggrieve the governed. The citizenry submitted to authority as a patriotic and religious task to obey those who govern and to serve the country.

The *Kibra Negast* and *Fitha Negest* stipulated the authority of kings and the duty of citizens. These documents and the political culture they fostered routinized political participation. Matters of human rights, tyranny, and arbitrary rule and lawlessness were unthinkable in Ethiopia, with some exceptions spawned by the aberrations of events.

The numerous Islamic invasions preoccupied Ethiopian rulers. The task of national defense overtook the task of nation-building. The ancient political, religious, and social orientations set the Ethiopian cultural milieu connecting pagan, Old Testament, and New Testament foundations for the ideological groundings of Ethiopia.

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<sup>12</sup> Trimingham, J. Spencer. *Islam in Ethiopia*. Frank Cass & Co. LTD, London, UK: 1965: 23

In the pre-Christianity epoch, the pagan underpinnings of faith were submerged by Old Testament Mosaic influences. The transition from paganism to Old Testament beliefs were replicated in the process of adapting Christianity and shedding most of Old Testament guidelines of life and solidly entrenching a dogmatic version of Christianity.<sup>13</sup> The Christian tradition first reached Ethiopia through the Ethiopian Eunuch of Acts 8: 27-33.

### **Ethiopian Civilization Considering a Modern State System**

Enshrining Christianity as an official state religion and making faith a component of the Ethiopian state system began around A. D. 335-340 when Patriarch Athanasius, the then Patriarch of the Egyptian Orthodox Coptic Church headquartered in Alexandria, sent a bishop by the name of Frumentius to introduce Christianity as a state religion and evangelize Ethiopia. The pre-Axumite Empire, the D'mt Empire, was preponderant and far reaching in its projection of power. It laid the foundations of classical and biblical Ethiopian Civilization. Its impact on modern Ethiopia is circumvented by the glorification of Emperor Ezana's conversion from Judaism to Christianity. The enshrining of Christianity seems to have perpetuated the tendency to credit the Ezana dispensation as a revolutionary era that has resulted in the ascendance of the Ethiopian Empire to heights that were not as lofty as the previous pre-Axumite Empires.

Emperor Ezana built on the sacrosanct foundations of Ethiopian Civilization that existed from ancient times. His fame is built on his imperial prowess and on internationalizing Ethiopian Christianity by integrating Ethiopian diplomatic and military interests with that of Europeans, specifically the Roman Empire. His diplomatic outreaches and trade relations bearing the Christian emblem enhanced Ethiopian civilization as a foundation for a robust Ethiopian State.

Emperor Ezana's baptism is said to have taken place in the monastery of *Debra Sina* (of Mount Sinai) in northern Eritrea, in the Anseba region. *Debra Sina* was the first monastery of Ethiopia while the Church of *Debarwa*, in central Eritrea, was the first Ethiopian Church built by Ezana; both the monastery and the church predate all Ethiopian and Eritrean churches and monasteries.<sup>14</sup> Ezana's capital was the ancient and storied town of Axum, also known by its ecclesiastical name as the Second Zion after the name of Jerusalem in Judea and Samaria, modern day Israel.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ullendorff, E. (1988). *The Two Zions: Reminiscence of Jerusalem and Ethiopia*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK. :10-67.

<sup>14</sup> MerGeta Yetbarek. *Tarik Orthodox Tewahdo Bete-Christian Eritra*. Bete-Christian Eritra Press, Asmara, Eritrea, pp. 7-16.

<sup>15</sup> Ullendorff, Edward. *The Two Zions: Reminiscences of Jerusalem and Ethiopia*. Oxford University Press, 1988.

Throughout the centuries, Ethiopian Christianity morphed elements of Judaism and Christianity to form a pattern of political, cultural and religious beliefs that have become “petrified” as indelible cultural habits of the people. (Trimingham, J. S. 1965:64)

Emperor Ezana was a contemporary of Constantine the Great. Theodore Dowling refers to Ezana as the “Constantine of Abyssinia” (Dowling, 1909, p.1). His embrace of Christianity enhanced Ethiopian stature among its contemporaries. With the embrace of Christianity came historic diplomatic and military accomplishments. Edward Gibbons begrudgingly admired Ethiopian civilization and said: “Christianity has raised that nation above the level of African barbarism. Their intercourse with Egypt and the successors of Constantine had communicated the rudiments of the arts and sciences; their vessels traded to the isle of Ceylon and the seven kingdoms obeyed the Negus (King) or superior prince of Abyssinia” (Gibbons, Volume 11, p. 152). Gibbon was making his reference to the Ethiopian Empire that became famous under successive emperors such as Bazen, 50-68 CE, Zoskales, 78 CE and Ezana 340 CE. Gibbon’s condescending acknowledgement of Ethiopia’s greatness was echoed in the twentieth century when Margery Perham added to the distorted Western scholars’ impression saying, “For all its debasement, Christianity had saved Ethiopia from the ‘wantonness of crime and excess of cruelty that stains the records of almost all of African races.’” (Perham, 1969, p. 119)

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church was a subordinate diocese of the Alexandrian Papacy. The head of the Ethiopian Church was always an Egyptian bishop since Patriarch Athanasius; Christianity in Egypt experienced a precarious existence. This was due to internal decay due to trivialized doctrinal discords that split its Christian theologians into bitter enemies. From its founding by St. Mark, the disciple of Jesus Christ, to the fourth century A. D. when still “Egypt was practically Christian”<sup>16</sup> the intensity of faith did not ensure survivability because of this backsliding into mundane trivialities of doctrines. The Egyptian clerical authorities did not show the same spiritual orthodoxy and clerical courage demonstrated by the Ethiopian Church hierarchies throughout centuries of trials. The Nubian Christians prevailed and fought valiantly against relentless jihad; they finally succumbed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century when Christianity was wiped out of Sudan and severely weakened in Egypt.

The elevation of Christianity as a coequal to the identity of the Ethiopian State shows zealotry and revivalist ambitions beginning with the Ezana reign. Adapting Zion of Jerusalem as an identity emblem for the Throne of Axum made Axum the abode of the “Second Zion.” (Ullendorff, 1988)<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Littman, E. fn. 2 above, p. 122.

<sup>17</sup> Ullendorff, E. (1988). *The Two Zions: Reminiscences of Jerusalem and Ethiopia*. Oxford University Press. Ullendorff’s vivid analysis brings to light the extensive Judaic influence on the Ethiopian State and society.

## The First Solomonic Dynasty and the Enshrining of a Christian State

During Emperor Ezana's rule, the Ethiopian State and the Ethiopian Church served as supreme guides of Ethiopian life. They served as coequal institutions controlling all affairs of state power, citizens' lives, and the projection of global power and influence of the Axumite Ethiopian Empire.

Emperor Ezana continued the tradition of greatness that had existed since the fourth and fifth century B. C. Under his illustrious rule, the Empire was driven by the inertia of previous Ethiopian Empires. It is true that during his reign, Ethiopia continued to flourish in trade, faith, and military might. It secured the respect and recognition of its contemporaries as a defender of the Christian faith when Christianity was under severe attack in the Arabian Peninsula. In 523, when the (self-proclaimed convert) Jewish King Dhu Nuwas of the Himyrites persecuted Christians in Arabia, the Byzantine Emperor, Justin I, implored the Ethiopian ruler, King Kaleb, to intervene on behalf of the Christians. The Ethiopian King obliged and fulfilled the mission in 525, delivering South Arabia from the heavy hand of Dhu Nuwas. (Ullendorff, E. 1973, p. 53)

The Ethiopic heartland was evangelized with churches in every village and in monasteries throughout the frontiers and remote wildernesses. Literature in Ethiopia was at a higher level of development than even in the time of Ezana. The Ethiopic scripts are indigenous with little or no outside influence. Scholars indicate there may be some Sabeian structural similarities, but not functional commonalities. One scholar observing the Ezana inscriptions stated:

The inscriptions reveal genuine eloquence, religious feeling and a free use of complex conceptions...The vocalized Ethiopic alphabet so closely reproduces the phonematic system of Ge'ez that it is inconceivable than any but an Ethiopian could have been its creator. This alphabet, with the addition of some signs, has been in continuous use in Ethiopia till this day and is generally regarded as the outstanding achievement of the Aksumite civilization. (Kobishanov, Y. M. 1981, pp. 393, 399)

As the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE concluded, the Ethiopian state and its ideological underpinnings faced existential threat under the recurrent attacks coming from Persia. Subsequently, the conversion of the Baja region to Islam resulted in fostering a deadly internal threat to the host religious, political, and social structure that formed the vital components of Ethiopian Civilization. Islam secured a permanent foothold on "Christian Ethiopia," guaranteeing perpetual competition and restless conspiracies that resulted in the 1529 Jihad invasion of Mohammad Grange. The celebrated Axumite Empire was enfeebled by the overwhelming technological and ideological dynamics arising from Persia and Arabia. Its civilizational capabilities as a storehouse of power were depleted and its energies too dissipated to mount effective challenges to the deadly forces of Islam.

## The Menace of Islamic Jihad

Around A. D. 600, the Baja people, with roots in ancient pharaonic Egypt, descended from the northern highlands of Eritrea and eastern Sudan, swept through the Eritrean plateau, drove out the Blen/Agaw (ZeAgawe) and besieged Axum, an erstwhile world class empire. The Baja were ancient Christians known as Belew Kelew who inhabited northern Eritrea and Eastern Sudan.<sup>18</sup> The ZaAguwe or the Zaguwe were driven from northcentral Eritrea with other tribal groups whose ancestral land was in the Hamasien and Karneshim region in northcentral Eritrea.<sup>19</sup> These historic events created population disruption that affected the demographic and cultural characteristics of the region. The most significant and lasting disruption to the basis of Ethiopian Civilization with respect to Old and New Testament heritages was the rise of Islam with ardent expansionist zeal.

The rise of Islam caused the progressive decline of Christianity in Nubia. Islamized Nubia began to be known as Aswad (a black person) and al-Sudan (plural) Sudan or *blad al Aswad*, meaning land of the blacks. Christianity was already well established in the Horn of African at the time Islam arrived in Africa. With invasion and occupation of Egypt by Amir Ibn-al As in 642, the ascendance of Islam was established, and its campaign for spreading Islam intensified. As Islam progressed, Christianity as the foundation of social and political life in Egypt and in those areas such as North Africa and the Sudan, gradually decreased its dominance, eclipsed by the furious and ardent activism of Islam.

Around 640, Egypt was taken by the Islamic invasion. The frantic campaign to replace Christianity and Islamize Egypt began with a purpose of affirming Islamic dominance. The Umar Pact of 636-650 A.C. formalized restrictions by imposing strict control and widespread discriminatory laws against non-Muslim communities in all conquered lands. The Fatimid Dynasty (710-1170) embarked on expansionist campaigns into neighboring countries. With the Islamization of the Baja, the Red Sea outlets for Ethiopia were occupied by hostile ethnic groups as a *dhimmi* enclave (tributary for further expansion of the Islamic faith into unreached lands). Axum, the mighty and golden empire of northeast Africa, expired. At the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Ethiopia experienced a brief recovery and started to reclaim its Arabian dominions. The recovery was short lived as another menace mounted by Queen Judith, a Jewish ruler, obliterated the Empire and its glorious vestiges.

Between 550 A. D when the Egyptian church and state were in turmoil, up to 640-647 A. D., when Islam took over Egypt and severely weakened Egyptian Christianity, the threat of Islamic incursions affected Sudan, Eritrea, and Ethiopia.

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<sup>18</sup> Kolmodin, J. A. *Tradition de Tsazzega et Hazzega* (Tarik nAy TzeAzegan Hazzegan – Tigrigniya -, Rome, 1910.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pp.5-7

Ethiopia/Eritrea stood fast and prevailed against the seemingly unstoppable Islamic jihad. The continuous assault by successive Islamic leaders in Ethiopia failed, and Ethiopian Christianity prevailed (Trimingham, S. 1966:53), but the scars of repeated aggressions resulted in converts at the outer periphery and in the lowlands of Eritrea and Southeastern Ethiopia.

The Axumite Kingdom experienced a precipitous decline and sudden fall due to internal and external foes that besieged its borders and withered its internal vitality. The Baja tribes migrating from ancient southeastern Egypt occupied northwestern Eritrea and the Red Sea coastal areas. They were followers of the Christian faith, but with the conquest of Egypt, they embraced Islam and carried forward the frenzy of conquests that overwhelmed Egypt and North Africa. The fervency of Islamic zeal in the 700s CE was intensely charged; the Baja, naturally gifted in military valor, were unstoppable in their conquest of Ethiopia. They weakened Axum and blocked all sea access points for Imperial Axum, thus causing the extinction of its bright civilization. During the destructive invasion of radicalized Baja jihadists in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the Zaguwe ethnic group who were concentrated in Eritrea, Tigray and Begemidir were rendered sojourners from northern and central Eritrea to the Wollo province and to northern and northwestern regions of Ethiopia.

### **Queen Judith/Gudit: A Jewish Warrior and an Avenger**

The Islamic invasion and the aftereffect of jihad were compounded by another internal insurgency of Jewish renaissance in Ethiopia. A segment of Ethiopian history that needs extensive attention before it could be declared as a substantial reference point is the possibility that the famous Queen Judith/Gudit may be from the religious and ethnic framework of the Zaguwe heritage. It seems she may be a progenitor of Dhu Nuwas (520-530) arising in the tenth century to avenge Emperor AtSbaha/Caleb's victory and the defeat of Du Nuwas in Arabia and northern Eritrea. The old religious animosities continued morphing into confessional wars between Jews and Christians in Ethiopia.

Emperor AtSbaha, crossing the Red Sea to firm up his rule, must have left a sense of defeat and affront to the descendants and inheritors of Dhu Nuwas legacies. The likelihood that Queen Judith was an aggrieved Jewish patriot arising to avenge the defeat that Dhu Nuwas suffered under King AtSbaha seems to make more sense than the nebulous speculations that the Queen's origin was in some unknown mountain ranges in northcentral Ethiopia. Queen Judith brought cataclysmic destruction to Ethiopia's ancient heritage. She destroyed churches, monasteries, massacred clergies and laid waste any heritage of civilizational legacy in the country. Her style of ruling resembles that of Dhu Nuwas when he massacred Christians in Arabia who were governed under the Orthodox diocese of Ethiopia.



His cruelty is described as follows:

He made war against the Christian city Najran, in Yemen, which was a dependency of his kingdom; and on its capitulation, in spite, it is said, of his promise of immunity from punishment, he offered the citizens the alternative of embracing Judaism or being put to death. As they refused to renounce their faith, he executed their chief, Harith (Aretas) ibn Kaleb, and three hundred and forty chosen men.<sup>20</sup>

Over four centuries after Dhu Nuwas was defeated by King Kaleb, whose son was most likely the “chief” of the Najran martyrs mentioned in the above quote, the grudge between Christians and Jews did not subside. Both faiths were inherently inclined to rigid orthodoxies of their beliefs and fought on and off. A pattern of aggression, counter aggression, and vengeance became ingrained, showing explosive episodes in the following decades and centuries. The rise of Queen Judith fits this pattern. She ruled for forty years and brought massive destruction of Ethiopian societies.

### **Resurrection and Renaissance Under the Zaguwe Dynasty**

The Eritrean version of historical narratives and legends record that the Zaguwe Dynasty originated from northern Ethiopia around 930 A. D. in modern day Eritrea and the Shimezana district, traversing the Eritrean-Ethiopian border.<sup>21</sup> Long before they consolidated a new capital location in the Roha district of Wollo, they reigned from locations that are not explicitly located in Eritrea. This is evidenced from church records, their biographies, and their patronage to the Church at the monasteries of Debra Bizien, Debra Mariam, and Debra Libanos, in modern day Eritrea. The testimonials and covenants they made as true believers and defenders of the Christian faith, found at the above monastery, indicate that they had deep founding roots in Eritrea and Tigray before finally settling at Roha. (Marie-Laure, 2010)

The Zaguwe may have been Jews when they embraced Christianity and may have received the Christian Gospel through those traditions that had begun with the Ethiopian Eunuch read in the Book of Acts, Chapter 8. Their cultural and religious ceremonies, strongly entrenched in The Old Testament rituals of birth, dedication, circumcision, marriage, death and burial indicate a strong Jewish influence, but they did not claim the Solomonic line.

In Ethiopian history and politics, those events that evolved after Christianity was declared state religion in A. D. 325-40 are accepted as the grounds for enshrining a legitimate state system of good governance.

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<sup>20</sup> Gottheill, R. and Broidee, I. (2002-2021), “Dhu Nuwas, Zu’rah Yusuf Ibin Tuban As’ad Abi Karib: Attacked from Ethiopia”, Jewish Encyclopedia, The Kopelman Foundation.

<sup>21</sup> Kolmodin J. (1912). *Tradition de Tsazzega et Hazzega*. C. De Luigi, Rome, It. Pp. 25-34.

The seeds of regress were then planted when the Christian state of Ezana became embroiled with contradictory doctrinal and theological conflicts.

In the first place, the Ethiopian State became an ardent Christian State, rejecting Judaism and becoming hostile to the followers of Judaism, which was widely practiced in Eritrea, northern and northwestern Ethiopia. The Jewish hatred became a blind perversion of Christian scriptures endorsed by the powerful Ethiopian Church.

The Zaguwe Dynasty, irrespective of the resistance they encountered, managed to take power. They did so as legitimate upholders of indigenous Eritro-Ethiopian faith that was not mediated by the conversion of Ezana. The Zaguwe Christianity rested on the pre-Ezana amalgams of Judaism and Christianity that were competing for ascendance. When Ezana proclaimed Christianity as a state religion, the state system was integrated with the Ethiopian Church which was also integrated with the Alexandrian patriarchate. The pressures imposed by Islam on the Alexandrian patriarchate were bound to affect both the Ethiopian state and the Ethiopian church. (Tamrat, T., 1972, pp. 207-231)

Doctrinal orthodoxies such as the Sabbath worship, Passover, baptism, and catechism rituals faced Islamic modification in Egypt. The Ethiopian Church was saddled with doctrinal divisions between those who adhered to the Alexandrian modification and those conservative adherents of the traditional pre-Islamic modification located mainly in Eritrea and northern Ethiopia. The doctrinal crisis evolved into a lasting friction between the traditional “nationalists” headed by Aba Ewostatewos representing the northern and Aba Tcelehaimanot representing the southern diocese of the Church. The main doctrinal controversies centered on the divinity of Christ, Sabbath worship, and circumcision. (Ullendorff, 1988, 12-45)<sup>22</sup>

The Zaguwe Dynasty deserved and earned the lasting recognition as proponents of Ethiopia’s greatness and national unity. They represented a segment of the rich and ancient Ethiopian heritage grounded in Judaism and Christianity. These ancient cultural heritages needed to be consolidated as the bases for national unity and crafted as means for the formation of a strong state. The Zaguwe Dynasty were fit and ready for such a task. They were rejected, however, by the followers of a newly minted dynasty calling itself the Solomonic Dynasty.

The renaissance under the Zaguwe rule rejuvenated creativity and ignited national pride. The Zaguwe kings took control of the Ethiopian throne in 1137 and continued to rule until 1270. Emperor Lalibela and his descendants were gifted in leadership and brought to the country spectacular religious architecture. Lalibela himself was a priest, later beatified and subsequently canonized by the Ethiopian Church.

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<sup>22</sup> Ullendorff, E. (1988). *The Two Zions: Reminiscence of Jerusalem and Ethiopia*. Oxford University Press.

They reoriented the state attention to the north by becoming patrons of the Monastery of Debra Libanos in Eritrea, perhaps the second oldest monastery next to Debra Sina, both in Eritrea. Zaguwe rule ended in 1270 when a dynasty from the Amhara under the leadership of Emperor Yukuno Amlak took over the Ethiopian throne.

ድል ናዖድ። ማእዳይ። ወእምድኅሬሁ ነግሠት እኪት ብእሲት ወዐማኒት፡ ትውለድ እሉ ዘስማ እሳቶ ብአምሓራ፡ ጉዲት በትግሬ። አማሰነት ወአመዝበረት ኣብያተ ክርስትያናት እስከ ፵ ዓመት። ኣፍለሰት መንግስት ትርዳእ ገበዝ ወተሃይደ መንግሥት ሃበ ህዝብ ኢኮኑ፡ እምነገደ እስራኤል (ካርሎ ኮንት ሮዚኒ ገጽ 335-359)።<sup>23</sup>

Following the fall of Dil Naod MaEday, the kingdom was usurped by gentiles who did not belong to the Tribe of Israel. Among them was a wicked woman (who) overthrew him. She was cruel and oppressive. Her name (was) *flamethrower* in the Amharic language; in the Tigrigniya language, they rendered her name to be *pyromaniac*. She ruled for 40 years during which time she destroyed churches and places of worship.

The Zaguwe Dynasty represented Ethiopia's renaissance after the Ethiopian dark ages due to the attack of the jihadi wars and the cataclysmic violence perpetrated by the Jewish Queen, Judith, around 900-950.<sup>24</sup> The Dynasty ruled from (1137-1270) until it was overthrown in 1270 by an insurgency triggered by the Solomonic Dynasty.

A point of no return from the path of downward regress for the Ethiopian civilization took place when the last Zaguwe Emperor was murdered at the holy of holies sanctuary of the Church of St. Chiriqos where he ran for shelter himself, expecting the Ethiopian norm where fugitives sheltering themselves at the Church were considered beyond reach for mortal or incidental threats.

### The Second Solomonic Dynasty, a Harbinger of Ethiopia's Dark Ages?

This newly configured dynasty represented the Amhara ethnic group from southcentral Ethiopia. It inaugurated a southward orientation of the state, abandoning the northern heartlands of the Ethiopian civilization. The Zaguwe Dynasty is credited for rehabilitating Ethiopia from the ruins perpetrated by Queen Judith, the steely Jewish aristocrat who ransacked Ethiopia at the last half of the seventh century. They introduced golden years of renaissance and cohesive political progress, national cohesion, and the flowering of architectural, artistic, and cultural values.

<sup>23</sup> Rossini, C. C. (1805), "Appunti ed Osservazioni Sopra I Re Zague", *Rendiconti Della Reale Accademia Dei Lincie*, Roma, Tipographia Della Accademia, Vol. IV., pp.341-359. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=chi.095565215&view=1up&seq=5>. (Translation by Tseggai Isaac).

<sup>24</sup> Tekeste Negash, "The Zaguwe Period Re-Interpreted: Post-Aksumite Ethiopian Urban Culture," [http://www.uu.se/digitalAssets/9/9640\\_NegashAll.pdf](http://www.uu.se/digitalAssets/9/9640_NegashAll.pdf). Viewed 25 May 2016.

They were most dedicated to the orthodoxy of the Orthodox Christian faith, so that when the Egyptian post-Fatimid ruler of Egypt, Saladin, persecuted Egyptian Christians, King Lalibela threatened to divert the Nile waters. His threat had the desired effect when Saladin sent gifts and words of retraction to his threat. They launched a literary renaissance by becoming a patron of churches, monasteries, priests, and scribes that produced manuscripts. They institutionalized good government and a strong state.

The dynasty was known for its refined architectural accomplishments and its strong diplomatic outreaches. They built churches still standing as lasting heritages of their dynasty. Their administrative system indicates an effective network of civil and military institutions which functioned in a highly structured order. The key figure of the Zaguwe Dynasty was Emperor Lalibela, in whose name eleven rock-hewn churches still stand in their capital, Roha. The chronicle of Lalibela narrates Emperor Lalibela's life and his saintly dedication to God and his subjects. He was a priest, and a renowned theologian as well as a creator of a vast governmental administration that functioned with sensitivity to advance the unity of the country.

When news of the persecution of Christians by the Egyptian rulers reached him, he threatened to divert the Nile River, cutting off the livelihood of Egypt, so the Egyptian rulers stopped the persecution, restored the church's rights and initiated diplomatic understanding between the two countries. Most significantly, he was a religious scholar, a lawgiver, and supremely gifted in the princely ways of governing. He ruled for 28 years, after which his son, Emperor Yetbarek, took over.

A pact was signed, agreeing to overthrow the Zaguwe King, to inaugurate what they called the Second Solomonic Dynasty. It ruled in rough and tumble style for seven centuries between 1270 and 1974.

Its inglorious beginning was marked by regicidal and sacrosanct violence when its founding father ascended to power by murdering the emperor who was the grandson of the famous Emperor Lalibela. Yetbarek engaged Yukuno Amlak's renegade insurgents. When Yukuno Amlak and his insurgents overran Emperor Yetbarek's defenses perimeters, he ran to the inner sanctuaries of the Church of Chiriqos for shelter. Yukuno Amlak breached cultural *mores* where the innermost sanctuary of a church can only be accessed by priests, ordained deacons, and Emperors, and killed Yetbarek at the holy of hollies platform.

Yukuno Amlak declared himself ruler, with the anointment by the head of the Amhara diocese of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Aba Tekle Haymanot (no relation to King Tekle Haymanot, the founder of the Zaguwe Dynasty, ancient line of kings to which Yetbarek belonged).

A renegade insurgent group hailing from the southern province of Showa, who considered themselves the scattered descendants of the Solomonic Dynasty, overthrew Yetbarek's government in a violent uprising. A calamity of catastrophic proportions set upon Ethiopia.

The change of dynasty and the shifts which it represented unleashed powerful social, political, and cultural energies which, in the fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, created an empire, the historical existence of which continues to shape the fortunes of the wider region within which it emerged. However, whether through the reaction produced by its own overreach or through autonomous regional process of environmental, social, and economic change in the course of the sixteenth century, the empire entered a convulsive period which threatened both the social order of Christian Ethiopia and the very existence of the state.<sup>25</sup>

Those who remained loyal to Judaism, the Falasha, had remained in a few enclaves around Tigray and Begimider until the state of Israel airlifted them in the 1980s during "Operation Moses."

### **Struggle for the Survival of Ethiopian Civilization**

Such a cataclysmic and regressive revolution took place in Ethiopia in 1270. A highwayman claiming he had filial affinity to the Amhara tribe — who claim they are descendants of the Queen of Sheba's King Menelik I, son of Solomon, son of King David of Zion/Jerusalem — assembled Amhara insurgents to violently overthrow the Zaguwe Dynasty. He secured the blessings of the Amhara-based diocese of the Orthodox Tewahdo Church of Ethiopia to spiritually legitimate his violent acts.<sup>26</sup>

The 1270 insurrection that dethroned the Zaguwe Dynasty was such an aberration. Yukuno Amlak, the leader of the insurrection who took over the throne, was rejected by Ethiopian society, particularly in the north. He used brutal means to secure his rule, and failed, but his son, AgbaA Zion, finally succeeded in securing the approval of the country, particularly the North. The aftereffects of the Zaguwe Dynasty's overthrow revealed patterns of Ethiopian politics that created tendencies towards disintegration.

The political objectives he pursued empowered the Amhara ethnic group of Ethiopia. They have never been able to muster the art of statesmanship and statehood to forge and consolidate an Ethiopia free from their parochial ethnic pride and narrow national perspectives. Ethiopia's current ills and the crippled state of existence that is the identifying mark of today's Ethiopia arise from that period.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 17,

<sup>26</sup> Ullendorff. E. (1973). *The Ethiopians: an Introduction to Country and People*. Oxford University Press, London, England.

From 1769 to 1855, Ethiopia was in chaos, because its central government was too weak to centralize power. An exception was Emperor Iyasu I the Great (1682-1706) who finally reunited the Country and expanded its borders in the north and northwest. He was a strong warrior with modernizing visions. He attempted to centralize power, raised revenue and created distribution methods through bureaucratization. After his death, chaos returned, and the Era of the Princes plunged the country into dark ages until they were briefly reunited by Emperor Tewodros in 1855.

The period is known as the Era of the Judges after the similar situation in ancient Israel when the kingdoms of Israel fell apart and their citizens were ruled by judges after the descendants of King David could not hold the center.

The Era of the Judges in Ethiopian politics had a catastrophic impact on the religious, cultural, and national cohesion of Ethiopia. Reverence for centralized authority on the basis of the cardinal values of Ethiopia's heritage were systematically rationalized to conform to secular modernization. Ethiopia was thrown into anarchy, the effects of which have never been resolved to this day. The undercurrents of regionalism and ethnic polarization that started in the 17<sup>th</sup> century were briefly put to rest in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but the 21<sup>st</sup> has revived this pattern of discord adding to the usurpation of power that had begun in 1270.<sup>27</sup>

The legacy of the Solomonic Dynasty sailed on the waves of the Era of Judges and sought ardently to exploit its divisive and conspiratorial characteristics. Emperor Tewodros defeated the various war lords of the Era of Judges. He centralized the country, but a war lord in the province of Shoa proved beyond his reach. Some conspired against Emperor Tewodros and thwarted his zeal for a united Ethiopia. His volatile temper, his random cruelties, and his poor sense of diplomatic exchanges resulted in imprisoning British diplomats and technicians.

After pleading for release of her prisoners, Queen Victoria dispatched the Abyssinian Expedition under the command of General Robert Napier to release the hostages. As the expedition approached Emperor Tewodros's Magdala Fort, they aimed and shot a salvo of cannon ball that ended breaching the Emperor's inner defense areas. As the British entered the fort, they found the Emperor's body where he committed suicide using the pistol Queen Victoria gave as a gift. Betrayed by remnants and descendants of the Era of Judges war lords, embattled by repeated attacks from Sudan, Egypt, and European intrusions, Emperor Tewodros died a martyr for Ethiopia.

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<sup>27</sup> See Abir, Mordechai. *Ethiopia: The Era of the Princes: The Challenge of Islam and the Reunification of the Christian Empire, 1769-1855*. Frederick A. Praeger, 1968.

Two of the regional war lords who resisted and contributed to the destabilization of the Tewodros's rule were Kasa of the ancient Tigray province, and Sahle Mariam from Shoa province; additionally, another from the ancient province of Tigray competed for power. Kasa won the remnants of the Era of the Judges. He was crowned as Emperor Yohannes IV reigning over a united Ethiopia.

He persuaded Sahle Mariam to be his prodigy as a governor of the Province of Shoa and serve as his successor after his death. Instead of honoring the royal contract, Sahle Mariam conspired with Egypt, Sudan, and Italy to undermine Emperor Yohannes's rule. He defeated the Egyptians in the Battle of Gundet, in 1875 and in the Battle of Gura in 1876 in the highlands of Eritrea. The Italians were defeated in the Battle of Saatti and Dogo Ali of 1887. In 1889, Emperor Yohannes IV fought the Madhi Jihad of Sudan, where he scored a decisive victory.<sup>28</sup> However, he died in this otherwise victorious battle.

Sahle Mariam, who had delayed and procrastinated in joining Yohannes in the protection against foreign enemies, declared himself Emperor Menelik II. Referring to the future of Ethiopia from the perspective of the beginning year of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in 1901, Augustus A. Wylde speculated as follows:

It will be interesting to watch the future of the country; as long as the chief ruler or King of Kings was a fair and just man like the late King Yohannes, he managed to hold the scale of justice with a firm and even hand, despite King Menelik II's rebellion and being attacked first by Egypt and then by Italy and the Dervishes. These campaigns were a great drain on the resources of the country, but the inhabitants undertook them cheerfully, as they were all working from the king downwards to protect their homes and religion from a common danger. (Wylde A., 1901, p. 7)

King Menelik II showed no interest nor intelligence to elevate his style of leadership to a uniting and strengthening level of statehood. He isolated the northern region first by agreeing to allow the secession of Eritrea and permitting it to become an Italian colony. Second, he systematically liquidated King Yohannes's officials and quarantined King Yohannes's region, exposing the people of Tigray to endless poverty. Third, he elevated Amhara chauvinism through internal colonization. He occupied southern peoples' lands and expanded Ethiopia's borders to the southern region. He appointed Amhara officials to administer Amhara settlers, who benefited from the labor of the region's native inhabitants. These officials were occupiers and oligarchic landowners expropriating the lands of Oromo, Gurague, Sidama, and many other ethnic groups.

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<sup>28</sup> Churchill, W. ((1902). *The River War: An Account of the Requeues of Soudan*. Amazon Public Domain Book, Page Location 1218 of 5099.

Menelik II was the climax of the Yukuno Amlak cohort of leaders who expropriated the symbol of Solomonic heritage to legitimate their divisive and shortsighted rule. The grand Ethiopian Empire under valiant leaders such as the House of Bazen, Caleb, Ezana, and the House of Mara TechleHayamnot that spawned the Zaguwe Dynasty, had held a firm grasp of preponderant power in East Africa and across the Red Sea in Arabia and up to southern Egypt.

The Solomonic Dynasty was more of a disruptive interlude, but when its third-generation kings assumed the mantle of statesmanship and effective leadership, we see: AmdeZion, Dawit, the intemperate and mercurial ZeraYacob, Yesahak, Glawdewos, Serse Dingil, Iyasu I the Great and the faithful Empress Helena donning the task of courageous authority to rehabilitate the ruins their great grandfather, Yukuno Amlak, had wrought in 1270.

The Solomonic Dynasty of 1270 came at the worst time in Ethiopian history. The misguided theme of “restoration” narrowed the scope of their legitimacy to an ethnic enclave and the neglect of the Ethiopian State’s universal pedestals. They became parochial, brutish, arrogant, and corrupt. Augustus Wyled’s observation is instructive when he said:

There is no harder worker than the Abyssinian peasant and no more harmless person when left alone and properly treated; ***and no more truculent, worthless, conceited, lazy and useless person than the Abyssinian soldier who formerly did nothing but prey upon the defenseless cultivator.*** (p. 3; emphasis added)

Perhaps most damning accusation was visited by the late Donald Levine who was an authority on what he called “the Amhara culture.” He openly praised the Amhara by equating the Amhara as the equivalent to the Axumites, who founded the Ethiopian Civilization. It wouldn’t have mattered even if he attributed ownership to other ethnic groups, because all of Ethiopia’s ethnoreligious sectors are owners of Ethiopian Civilization.

Referring to the political culture and system of government under the Solomonic Dynasty successors, he defined the entrenched Amhara leadership culture as follows:

The opportunities, both psychic and economic, were impressive. One was expected to avail himself of all the obsequious gestures which serve to swell the ego of any Abyssinian ruler. If so inclined, the governor could indulge his sadism *ad libitum*; sword, lash, and rope were, besides the *negarit* and seal, the official insignia of provincial ruler. He could order the peasant in his area to labor for him — to plow his lands or build his houses — as well as command them to military service.



## The Alienating Impact of Communism on Ethiopian Civilization

Ethiopia has had a defining rationale for the formation of an Ethiopian state perpetually guided by its ancient rules of a state system.

Ethiopian ideology interlinked with the ancient Ethiopian Civilization possessed strong ideological foundation comparable to Western and Asian civilizations. These were homegrown ideals and values that can be defined as guides to practical application of political and administrative goals.<sup>29</sup> Ideology provides fundamental rules for inspiring political order, social harmony, and ground rules for establishing or constructing governing apparatus. Governing mechanisms anchored on an ideologically defined political system, when guided for effective and efficient management of societies, guarantees capable institutions for the formation and implementation of legislative, executive, and judiciary centers of power.

By this standard, Ethiopia was an ideological state that expressed its values through the blending of biblical guidelines, irrespective of particularized and minute differentiation of concepts, and the cultural tastes of the society as well as the harmonious coordination of the institutions' procedural decision-making.

Islam and Christianity being sources of distinct spiritual inspirations and political purposes, the once inseparable geographical symmetry was altered. Colonialism and postcolonial political realities became now formalized in the principles of national sovereignties.

Putting the realities of modern state sovereignties aside, Ethiopia has historical and civilizational patterns that are clearly articulated in biblical and secular records. Over the years, frequent clashes with Islam and gradual interaction with European colonial and missionary ventures served to transform Ethiopian ideology from remaining a principle of robust and self-sustaining national values to a passive and self-doubting mindset of Ethiopian leaders. Due to leadership derelictions, it has backslidden and abandoned its unifying values.

The contemporary Ethiopian civilization today is a dead letter symbolized by what Ethiopia has become today, a madhouse of ethnic fragmentation with a history of genocidal episodes.

Traces of Ethiopian ancient history and tradition existed until 1974. The military council that overthrew the ancient regime of Emperor Haile Selassie was known as the *Derg*, meaning a ruling military committee.

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<sup>29</sup> Edward Ullendroff in his book *Ethiopia and the Bible*, detailed description and analysis summarizes the Ethiopian basis for political and religious thoughts. See *Ethiopia and the Bible*, Cambridge University Press, 1968.

The Derg was a collection of low-ranking military officers embracing Marxist ideology and inflicting painful violence against the Ethiopian families, using “Red Terror” as their slogan. They were inspired by Marxism-Maoism, and they were technically adept at using Stalinist methods. Their reign unleashed an unprecedented bloodbath commensurate to the 1525 Jihad that devastated Ethiopian civilizational legacies.

To this author, both Islamic jihad and communism stand out as ideologies that contributed to the defacement and debasement of Ethiopian Civilization.

The Derg’s Marxist Revolution was a campaign to erase the symbiotic relationship of the church and state system that had existed for over 3,000 years. The Marxist revolution climaxed into campaigns of mass mobilization designed to do away with the traces of ancient Ethiopian heritage, to be replaced by new thinking of collectivism under a totalitarian state system.

With the killing of the Emperor Haile Selassie in 1975, the last monarch of the Solomonic Dynasty that had been re-established in 1270, Ethiopia completed its civilization-destroying journey. It reached its current manifestations of famine, destitution, wars, and genocidal violence.<sup>30</sup>

What becomes apparent of Ethiopian Civilization is that Ethiopia’s glorious and ancient civilization was rejected by Ethiopian leaders whose sense of vision and heritage did not rise up to the level of capability for constructing political and cultural resources for nation and state building.

But this is in stark contrast to the revolutionary spirit that swept the country into killings and inhumane cruelties of communist mobilization during the 1974 Revolution. Donald Levine captured the catastrophe that Ethiopia found itself in after the overthrow and murder of Emperor Haile Selassie by the communist Derg in 1974. He stated:

When the shortcomings of Marxism became apparent, what was left? Ethiopia faced a cultural dilemma that proved no less formidable than the crises posed by a shattered economy and an enfeebled political structure. She stood in need of ideas and symbols that could fill the vacuum left by the overthrow of both of the Solomonic royal ideology and the revolutionary ideology of Marxism.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See Amnesty International’s 2021 Report of Ethnic cleansing directed at the region and people where the ancient Ethiopian Civilization was born, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/04/ethiopia-crimes-against-humanity-in-western-tigray-zone/>. See also, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/02/ethiopia-tigrayan-forces-murder-rape-and-pillage-in-attacks-on-civilians-in-amhara-towns/>.

<sup>31</sup> Levine, D. N. (1974). *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, ILL: xvii. Levine’s analysis is cast from the perspectives of the post-Derg Marxism years that resulted in the violent Emperor Haile Selassie’s government, the last Solomonic King. Levine makes clear he did not see any hope in Marxism as an alternative.

## **The Dilemma of Modernization**

The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, EPRDF, embodied the common philosophy of the egalitarian populist forces that struggled to overthrow the Haile Selassie government and then the Derg.

Regionally, the group spoke in unison, articulating regional security to mean Ethio-Eritrean cooperation to ward off traditional and prospective adversaries of the region, particularly Egypt's threats and Sudan's equivocations. Still, the EPRDF gave priority to domestic prosperity, and to regional cooperation as a step to permanent peace. Its persistent call for peaceful resolution to regional and internal crises bedeviling Somalia, Sudan and Ethiopia itself was in line with its egalitarian populist philosophy.

Given the level of utter destruction that the country experienced during the communist Derg rule, clearly it will take a long time to achieve Ethiopian prosperity and regional stability. Ethiopia today possesses the minimum rudiments for territorial defense. It has initiated and carried out policies that are promising, but the unpredictable nature of the region's politics adds enormous uncertainties.

## **The Sunset of the Ethiopian State**

Prime Minister Meles's departure on August 21, 2012, was also sudden and unexpected. He is no more with us, but his leadership legacies are immortal in their demonstrable testimonials for generations to come. His grand ideas, his broad and all-encompassing visions, and the nobility of his intents for his country, the region, Africa and the world are here on earth as a catalogue of a heroic leader, Meles Zenawi Lagasse.

Between August 2013 and July 2018, Ethiopia went through a series of dizzying convulsions. Turmoil raged, and lawlessness escalated, resulting in political crisis. The political crisis unleashed an avalanche of political, social, and religious violence. Furthermore, the blind rage of ethnically polarized youths known as Amhara Fanno and Oromo Qiero went on rampages, thus inflicting economic ruin and thousands of civilian deaths. Members of the Tigray ethnic group were targeted simply because they belonged to the ruling party's top leadership. Business and industrial establishments that were created in the previous 25 years were ruined, decapitating the capital formation capacity of Ethiopia.

We now know that those crises were the climax points of the fires that the Peoples Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) ignited as early as 2005. PFDJ, it must be clear to Eritreans and Ethiopians, is the post-liberation brainchild of Isaias Afwerki, an idea that he hatched and rooted at the strategic points that he cleared by disbanding, killing, exiling, and incapacitating the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the backbone of its leadership.

In the face of the bewildering ethnic violence, the well-meaning head of government, Prime Minister Desalegn Habtemariam, resigned, inviting the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) to choose a new leader. The Front thereupon selected a young leader, Dr. Abiy Ahmed, as third head of government of the Democratic Republic of Ethiopia that Meles Zenawi and the EPRDF had promulgated in the Constitution of 1995.

Abiy Ahmed, in the true sense of Ethiopian politics, is the protégé of the late Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, the organizing leader of the EPRDF. Ahmed showed his trustworthiness to Meles Zenawi and the TPLF/EPRDF causes. He was dutiful in fulfilling and seeing through the governing strategies of the Front. He was also highly adaptable.

As his reward, he swiftly rose through its ranks. He was visible and adept in addressing assigned tasks, and he was flexible in navigating through the refractory trajectories of a developing democratic state. Such a state needed ambitious, yet pliable, congenial, calculating, and adaptable youths. Abiy Ahmed fitted the bill. He combined the Oromo side of his identity to position himself at the access points in Meles Zenawi's open, equitable, and developmental and inclusive state.

### **Back to the Dark Ages of Ethiopia**

In 2018 a newly formed political organization calling itself the Prosperity Party came to power under the leadership of Abiy Ahmed. The young man possessed fleeting technocratic and dubious credentials of a military background, but he introduced himself as an accredited scholar, although the way he earned his graduate credentials are suspect as fraudulent.<sup>32</sup>

In office, Abiy Ahmed disbanded the EPRDF and its foundational platform of a federal system for Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Democratic Republic that was inaugurated under the 1995 constitution was thus disbanded. A new theme that anticipated an effective path to national unity was announced under the Amharic term *medemer*, meaning *to be united*. The true meaning of *medemer* implied a path for unity; it did not call for or aspire to an objective realization of national unity. At the same time, Abiy Ahmed repudiated the federal system. Federalism had given each region and ethnic group in Ethiopia freedom and liberty to govern and administer their states within the federal arrangement; this system was similar to that of other federal systems such as the United States, India, and Canada or Germany.

Unfortunately, Abiy Ahmed and his advisors rejected federalism as divisive and anti-unity. The disbanding of federalism opened up floodgates of ethnic violence, starting

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<sup>32</sup> DeWaal, A. (24 May 2022), "Reinventing Peace: Abiy Ahmed PhD?", World Peace Foundation, Tufts University, Somerville, MA.

in the south. The Amhara ethnic group, the dominant class ever since the Second Solomonic Dynasty, was targeted by the Oromos, the new Prime Minister's own ethnic group. Assaults on innocent Amhara citizens of Ethiopia constituted one of a series of violent attacks perpetrated by misguided Oromo insurgents, individuals who were trained in Eritrea to destabilize Ethiopia and to assist Abiy Ahmed's rise to power.

As soon as Abiy Ahmed was elected to the premiership in 2018, he pledged to solve Ethiopia's domestic and regional crises. In 2019, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for the promises that he made to reconcile and restore peace with Eritrea. On November 21, 2020, however, he unleashed a war against the Tigray Province, Emperor Ezana's capital and the center of Ethiopian civilization. According to the *New York Times*, (December 21, 2021), long before he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, Abiy Ahmed was conspiring with Isaias Afwerki, the president of Eritrea, to attack Tigray. The combined forces of Amhara militia, Eritrean Defense Forces, and the Ethiopian military and air forces thereupon unleashed a destructive war. Abiy Ahmed conspired with a foreign leader, the Eritrean tyrant, mobilizing soldiers comprising Amhara and Oromo ethnics, to attack his own country's civilizational center. Thus, the nadir of Ethiopian Civilization's death and decay was reached.

## Conclusion

Throughout Ethiopian history, even during aberrant periods, the civic culture was always civilized, transparent, and deeply affected by making the right political decisions. Edward Ullendorff summarized the Ethiopian political and societal culture by characterizing it as follows:

Most travelers and observers have gained the impression that Ethiopians are exceptionally intelligent, mentally agile, and quick to absorb knowledge. They are proud, yet courteous, and good manners are highly esteemed; they are also accomplished diplomats, perhaps somewhat suspicious, but generous and uncalculating. Ethiopians are given to litigiousness, but their sense of honor and justice is satisfied once the matter has been argued out at length; they will present a case with great dexterity and a distinct flair for oratory. Their hospitality retains something of a Biblical and patriarchal flavor; and few of those who have savored it have been able to resist their exquisite sense of humor and their compelling charm.<sup>33</sup>

This quote is instructive in the ways the edifying values of the Ethiopian political culture are reflected in the personal qualities of the Ethiopian citizenry.

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<sup>33</sup> Ullendorff, E. *Ethiopia and the Bible: The Schweich Lectures*, Oxford, London, UK: 1967: 4.

It resembles what Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba identified in their studies of five nations as the “civic culture,” an ideal political culture of civic virtues.<sup>34</sup>

The first catastrophe that overthrew the Zaguwe Dynasty introduced a progressive decay for centuries, one from which Ethiopia mightily struggled to recover. Unfortunately, they could not replicate the majesty of Ezana and the spiritually and politically glorious rule of the Zaguwe. The spirit of Ethiopia’s civilization still lives in a much-weakened landscape as relics left to testify of past greatness.

Today, Ethiopia has not achieved democratic capacities despite a national culture that was built on a civilization that was dedicated to the virtues of Natural Rights. Ethiopia represented a fertile political ground for combining religious values and national sentiment that is oriented to justice, equality, freedom, and peaceful coexistence. Successive leaders and political elites have devalued Ethiopian Civilization and its vast capacity to make the Ethiopian State survive for centuries without falling apart under the burden of neglect, poverty, and absence of enlightened leadership. The churches have abandoned their ancient religious traditions in favor of charismatic practices and cultic formalities that have little relationship to the traditional priesthood’s dedication to teaching a correct and guided life of citizenship. The government refrains from entangling itself in religious affairs even when ancient monasteries that are an integral part of Ethiopian identity are falling in disrepair and neglect. The catastrophic regress of the ancient Ethiopian Civilization goes on.

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<sup>34</sup> Almond, G. and Verba, S. *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Princeton University Press, 1963.