

RICHARD PANKHURST

**The Quest for “Civilization”:
The Pre-World War II Modernizing Policies of Ras Täfäri Mäkonnen
(later Emperor Haylä Sellasé) as Expounded in His *Autobiography*,
and in the *Chronicle of Empress Zäwditu***

Abstract

The reign of Täfäri-Mäkonnen-Haylä Sellasé was unique in Ethiopian history not only in that it witnessed a considerable escalation in the modernization process initiated by Emperor Menilek, but in that it is described not only in a chronicle – but also by the ruler himself. We know of this period in fact from two primary Ethiopian sources: the chronicle of Empress Zäwditu (which covers the period when Täfäri was Regent and Heir to the Throne) and in his own *Autobiography* (in which he writes in the First Person Imperial). Both works refer to modernization as the coming of “civilization” – by which they mean European “civilization”. Be that as it may the period was significant in that it covered such developments as Ethiopia’s entry into the League of Nations, decrees to curtail the slave trade, Täfäri’s visit to Europe, the coming of the first aeroplane, and radio, new hospitals, schools, roads, and the Parliament, etc.

Ras Täfäri Mäkonnen, subsequently Emperor Haylä Sellasé I, was the last of Ethiopia’s four unifying and modernizing monarchs. The reigns of his three predecessors, Téwodros II, Yohannes IV, and Menilek II, are all the subject of at least one Ge‘ez or Amharic chronicle describing their policies and achievements. A chronicle covering Haylä Sellasé’s early years, as a young courtier and later Heir to the Throne and Regent, is likewise embodied in *Aläqqa* Gäbrä Egzi’abher’s *Chronicle of Abéto Iyasu and Empress Zäwditu*, covering the period from Menilek’s death in 1913 to the demise of Empress Zäwditu in

1930. This Amharic work was edited and translated into English by Reidulf Molvaer, and published in 1994.

Haylä Sellasé, however, also produced an *Autobiography*, entitled *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress*. In it he speaks in the imperial first person singular, i.e. “We”. Though criticized for its “official”, impersonal, tone it is generally more informative than the *Chronicle*. One indeed wishes that previous rulers might have told us their ideas and aspirations. The first volume covers its author's life from his birth in 1892 to the work's completion in 1938, but is mainly concerned with the time from his appointment as Heir to the Throne in 1916 to his address to the League of Nations in 1936. This work was translated into English by Edward Ullendorff, and published in 1976.

Desire for “Civilization” – a Paternal Legacy

Central to Täfäri Mäkonnen/Haylä Sellasé's thinking is what he describes in his *Autobiography* as his commitment to “civilization” – by which, as we shall see, he actually means European civilization. What he understood by this is evident where he writes of his father, Ras Mäkonnen, governor of Harär, whose attitude to “civilization” he claims to have inherited. The Ras, he recalls, had been to Europe twice, in 1889 and 1902, and had thus “seen European civilization” – and acquired “a strong desire to see the [Ethiopian] people get accustomed to the work of civilization which he had observed in Europe”. [U 17]

Confirmation of Täfäri's recognition of his father's modernizing aspirations is found in the *Chronicle*. Recalling that Menilek's interest had been to “ascend the mountain of civilization”, and make Ethiopians “like Europeans”, it describes Mäkonnen as “chief” among the Menilek's followers seeking to ascend that mountain. [GM 306]

European Education

Mäkonnen, his son recalls, had also “conversed” with foreigners in Ethiopia, and was “convinced of the value of [their] education”. His father's interests had far-reaching implications for Täfäri because the Ras had “strongly desired” that his son should learn a foreign language. Mäkonnen could arrange this as he had established a modern hospital in Harär, run by a French-speaking physician from Guadeloupe, Dr. Vitalien. The Ras requested him to teach his son French for “an hour or so a day when he could be spared from curing the sick”. Mäkonnen, however, soon realized that such lessons would not bring Täfäri “close to the target” of mastering the language. He therefore spoke with the renowned French missionary André Jarosseau, who agreed that an Ethiopian Catholic, Abba Samwél, should provide Täfäri with more thorough tuition – for a decade. [U 18]

First Reforms in Harär

Täfäri became governor of Harär in 1910. He was confronted with many administrative problems. One of the first was that the quarters of the officers and soldiers lay far apart, with the result that the armed forces "did not always know each other either by sight or in the chain of command". This, Täfäri believed, was "very damaging to good discipline". To quarter the troops – in fact on European lines – he instructed his officials to tour Harär province, and count the number of peasants who could pay taxes. The officials reported that there were 70,000 such inhabitants. Landowners, officers and soldiers were then registered, district officers appointed, and their duties defined by proclamation. A detailed schedule, based on the increasing monetarization of taxes was also issued. Such modernization was, however, accompanied by an essentially traditionalist decree confirming a previous as religious-based prohibition on working on the Sabbath. [U 38–40]

Täfäri's Appointment as Heir to the Throne – and Regent

After the death of Menilek in 1913, and the overthrow of his grandson Lej Iyasu – whose rule lies beyond the scope of the present paper, the old Emperor's daughter Zäwditu was crowned Empress, on 11 February 1917 – Täfäri, whose modernizing interests were now put to the test, was appointed Heir to the Throne. Government was divided between two rulers, each with their own courtiers, palaces and policies. Zäwditu headed the monarchy, with all its religious and secular ceremonial, while Täfäri took over most modern aspects of government, including foreign relations, which were to prove decisively important. He came to be known abroad as *La Lumière d'Éthiopie*, or Light of Ethiopia, a designation reminiscent of Louis XIV, *le Roi Soleil*, and of Menilek's consort Empress Taytu who, punning on her name which meant The Sun, called herself *Berhan zäiltyopya*, i.e. Light of Ethiopia. Täfäri, an advocate of modernization in a largely conservative society, was initially in a difficult position. The American Consul, Addison Southard observed, on 24 November 1917, eight months after the Coronation, that Täfäri was "the actual head of the government", but was "controlled to a certain extent" by other prominent personalities. The Ras, he added, "wished to be made Prince Regent, and is commonly given that title, but the Council of Ministers have never actually made him more than Heir Apparent, because as Prince Regent he would possibly be able to dispute their own power". [SS up]

Ethiopian society was then divided, according to the *Chronicle*, into three factions: (1) Zäwditu's supporters, mainly "persons above the age of forty, the clergy, widows and orphans". (2) Täfäri's supporters, essentially bureaucrats, young people, and persons who had learnt foreign languages. (3) Lej Iyasu's supporters, who allegedly "did not like to work, but obtained their wealth by looting and capturing prisoners in time of war, and boasted of their long line of nobility". However, many other people, including peasants and merchants, wanted only "a peaceful ruler", and did not take sides. [GM 418]

Tāfāri's position was gradually consolidated. The *Chronicle* recalls that Empress Zāwditu officially appointed him Regent in 1922, when she gave "a lavish banquet" in his honour. [GM 392, 418, 425]

Early Modernization

This period witnessed significant governmental re-structuring – introduced largely with an eye to the outside world. One of the first signs was the appointment, in March 1918, of Advisers to the Ministries. No less significant was the appointment of Wässané Zä'emanu'él as Kāntiba, or Mayor, of Addis Ababa. He was chosen – significantly as the *Chronicle* recalls, "because he had learnt French at the Menilek II School" – the foreign community welcomed the advent of an official who spoke a foreign tongue. Two other modernizing acts, in 1920–21, were the construction of a Ministry of Foreign Affairs building; and the establishment of a Special Court to try cases involving Ethiopians and foreigners. [U 392, 424]

Foreign Relations, and the League of Nations

Tāfāri's interest in foreign affairs, and commitment to "civilization", was apparent in November 1918, when he dispatched envoys to Europe and the United States to congratulate the Allies on their victory in World War I. He subsequently strove hard for Ethiopia to join the Post-war League of Nations. He states in his *Autobiography* that he discussed the latter frankly with his Nobles and Ministers, telling them that entry would be "of great benefit" to their country, but warned that to gain admission it would be "necessary gradually to improve" the country's "entire machinery of government". His listeners, he claims, agreed "unanimously", replying "that it was impossible to effect major improvements within one year, but that it was their wish to improve the entire work of government year by year in slow stages". They thus concluded that it was "right" to enter the League. [U 77]

Corroborative evidence of the nobility's attitude is provided by the *Chronicle*. It recalls that a council appointed to consider League entry concluded that "if we remained apart [from the League], we might lose the freedom of our country", whereas "we could preserve it by strengthening the friendship between European governments and the government of Ethiopia". [GM 428]

Slavery Reform, and Accession to the League

The principal reform needed to join the League (though this is not spelt out in either the *Autobiography* or the *Chronicle*) was the abolition of slavery. To achieve this objective Tāfāri issued an important proclamation, on 31 March 1924, ordering that slaves should

"no longer to be sold or purchased". Anyone caught buying or selling slaves could be punished, and provision was made for freeing of slaves purchased or captured prior to the edict. Courts for the law's enforcement were set up in Addis Ababa and various provincial regions, and judges and secretaries appointed. A British anti-slavery adviser, Mr. Frank de Halpert, was recruited, and over 100,000 slaves were reportedly freed within a decade.

This reform, though gradual, was so successful, in the Regent's opinion, that he assured the British Anti-Slavery Society, that "within fifteen or at most twenty years... all slaves would go free"; and that slavery in Ethiopia would be "totally eliminated". Writing in personal vein, he concluded: "Our conscience does not rebuke us... We have done everything possible as regards the liberation of slaves". [U 80–81]

Täfäri's anti-slavery initiative was in fact so internationally successful that Ethiopia gained formal accession to the League of Nations on 28 September 1923.

Visit to Europe

In the following year, 1924, Täfäri, preoccupied with what he terms "civilization", undertook a state visit to Jerusalem, Egypt and several European countries. This enabled him – and his nobles – to visit the principal developed countries of Western Europe – and witness their might, wealth, and industrial progress. In France, he and his party inspected Paris airport, an aeroplane display, a parade of tanks, shooting at the French Artillery College – and the Paris Mint (which had struck Ethiopian coins since Menilek's day). In Belgium, he and his companions visited an ammunition and a match factory, coal mines, crop improvement and cattle-breeding stations. In Italy, the Ethiopian party inspected museums in Rome, cannon-firing at Bracciano, a military hospital, the FIAT car factory, and St. Stephen's convent in the Vatican, where their compatriots had studied since medieval times. In Britain, the visitors were taken to Buckingham Palace, the House of Commons, St. Thomas's Hospital, and the Zoo, with its "many different wild animals".

Much impressed by these many – and very varied – wonders, Täfäri later expressed much satisfaction at having visited such "civilized" countries; and on returning to Addis Ababa urged his compatriots to follow the path of "civilization". He hoped that Ethiopia, by "educating and civilizing her sons", would "attain as high a level as she had in the past".

This fascination with foreign countries – and their "civilization" – was reflected by Täfäri's protégé (and future-son-in-law) Andägachäw Mässay, a student in France. He declared that he and his companions were "unceasingly grateful" for being sent abroad to "follow European civilization". [U81–123, GM 426–445]

Diplomatic Objectives

Besides seeking to familiarize himself – and his nobles – with the wonders of European "civilization", Täfäri sought to raise with his hosts several important issues affecting

his country. Foremost among these was his desire for access to the sea, which could be achieved only in co-operation with one or more of the three neighbouring European colonial powers, France, Italy and Britain.

His objective in France was to ask that Ethiopia be given “a free gateway to the sea at Jibuti”. The French Prime Minister, Raymond Poincaré, is quoted by Tāfāri as agreeing only to present the matter to the French Parliament, which would “think about it in the most friendly possible manner”. Nothing more on the issue, however, was ever heard.

Tāfāri then proceeded to Italy, where he met Mussolini, and proposed “the amicable granting” to Ethiopia of Assab port as a “free zone”. The Italians, evidently well prepared for these talks, responded quickly. On the following day their Minister to Ethiopia, Count Colli di Fellizano, brought Tāfāri the text of a proposed treaty (which was never implemented). It stated that Italy would consign to Ethiopia, for 99 years, “an access point to the sea” at ‘Assab, and a place suitable for a railway to the Ethiopian frontier.

Tāfāri also discussed access to the sea with the British Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, to whom he explained that Ethiopia had formerly “experienced great difficulty” because it “did not possess a seaport which would bring about contact with foreign countries”. Elaborating on his quest for “civilization”, he declared “that skill and wealth are acquired when trade expands as one nation meets and encounters others by sea and by land. The entire object of the Ethiopian Government for the future” was “to get very close to foreign countries by undertaking the tasks of civilization. Indeed”, he concluded, “our accession to the League of Nations... proves our intention to work for civilization and to develop our country”. Turning specifically to Anglo-Ethiopian relations he declared, optimistically, that should Britain give Ethiopia “a sea-port as patrimony” the two countries would be joined in “eternal and unshakable friendship”. MacDonald, however, excused himself on the ground that he had not previously “heard about the matter”, and could not therefore give “an answer immediately”. He nevertheless assured Tāfāri that the matter would be “submitted to Parliament at the appropriate time” – which it was not. [U 93–94, 100–104, 145]

Despite this rebuff Ethiopia’s access to the sea remained Tāfāri’s abiding interest. After his accession as Emperor in 1930 he declared that he was “frequently distressed about the fact that it was an obstacle to civilization that our country lacked a sea-port of its own”. He argued that it was because they had “remained cut off from other countries” that his people had been “unable to secure the advantages which the great civilizations of today confer.” [U 183]

Early Reforms

Tāfāri’s early achievements were largely, but not entirely, connected with his quest for “civilization”. One of the first was the founding of a reformist Amharic newspaper *Berhanennä Sālam*, i.e. ‘Light and Peace’, which spread the gospel of reform. Another step, more nationalist in character, was the erection of an impressive Mausoleum for Emperor

Menilek. Not long after this, in 1924–25, Täfäri lectured the nobles on the importance of humility, urged them to address each other in the polite Amharic verbal form, and advised them to follow the precepts enunciated in *Berhanennä Sälam*. He also advised them educate all their children, both boys and girls – the latter a significant innovation possibly borrowed from Europe, and declared that anyone who did not do so could be considered a murderer. [GM 448, 455]

Orders for marriage reform were also issued at this time. They stated that couples marrying in church, as well as men and women becoming monks or nuns on the death of their spouse, should be given clothing by the Palace. Steps were also taken to increase the supply of Christian religious texts: 250 calligraphers were recruited by the Palace to produce parchment copies of Amharic translations of Ge‘ez texts – and 40 Armenian orphans from Jerusalem were given asylum in Ethiopia. Some coming from musical families, they soon constituted a much-appreciated band. [GM 456–457, 461–462]

The Täfäri Mäkonnen and Menilek Schools

A major development in the educational field was the Regent’s founding on 27 April 1925 of the Addis Ababa school which bore his name. Financed from his private purse it cost 150,000 Ethiopian dollars, taught English and French, and catered for 1,000 students. Not a few were later dispatched for study abroad – in France, America, Egypt and Lebanon, and many became prominent in Ethiopian government. [GM 422]

Täfäri however also gave his support to Emperor Menilek’s old school, called after the previous Emperor. Speaking in December 1922 he told boys from poorer families that they could rise through hard work and ability; and urged all students “to be diligent in their studies... so that love of their country should be stamped on their minds”. [GM 424]

Other Early Reforms

The year 1925 witnessed a series of other reforms. One of the first, enacted in February, was the abolition of the traditional institution of *lebashay*, or thief-catcher, which the *Chronicle* dismisses as “a bad thing, harming soul and body”. [GM 462–463]

Later, in October, with a view to modernizing the army, “and helping those eager for civilization”, as the *Chronicle* puts it, Täfäri held an impressive parade on the Addis Ababa field of Felweha, below the Palace compound. Those participating included his own soldiers and those of the Municipality, as well as small children, who sang, the reformist song “Addis Ababa will bloom”. A few weeks later he presented the Empress with a large, “nicely fitted” saloon car, which could reportedly hold no less than ten passengers, beside the driver. Subsequently, in May 1926, he opened contacts with British churchmen by inaugurating a building for the London-based British and Foreign Bible Society, which was then distributing Scriptures in Amharic and other Ethiopian vernacular

languages. There was at this time growing discontent about the Orthodox Church. Many Ethiopians complained that the clergy were not involved in appointing their bishops, who were Egyptians chosen by the Coptic Church of Egypt. A further complaint was that Ethiopia had only one bishop, stationed in Shawa, who was unable to consecrate priests and deacons from distant areas. A final complaint was that the incumbent bishop, Abunä Matéwos, who had been in the country 45 years, sent all the money he collected to Egypt, and constructed nothing in Ethiopia. [GM 470–473, 487]

These questions were not immediately solved, but, according to the *Chronicle*, created much controversy. “All the young people” (Täfäri included) demanded reform, but the old declared that they did not wish to break with tradition. One conservative priest declared that he wanted to be blessed not by a black hand, but by a white. This statement was much criticized by the young: one declared that the cleric was looking at the issue through the white of his eye, rather than through his pupil. [GM 492–494]

Täfäri at around this time took steps to succour Addis Ababa’s destitute population by providing free daily lunches to the unemployed and those in need. A year or so later, he laid the foundation-stone in Addis Ababa for a railway hostel for passengers going by train to and from Jibuti. [GM 458, 501]

Täfäri’s Reform Diary

By action such as the above Täfäri sought, as the *Chronicle* states, to “expand the mirror of civilization according to the example of Europe”, and, following Menilek, to “remove the speck of ignorance from the eyes of Ethiopia”. [GM 505] To carry out this grand objective he declared that his entire week should “not be spent without working”. He therefore made a programme, and allocated daily tasks, as follows:

Sundays, after Mass: matters connected with the clergy.

Mondays: affairs relating to soldiers and the army.

Tuesdays: staff appointments proposed by the Ministers.

Wednesdays: legal appeals to the *chelot*, or royal court of justice.

Thursdays: holding court, “looking into people’s problems”, and “settling them according to the generosity of his will”.

Fridays: acting as supreme judge, in accordance with the *Fetha Nägest*, or traditional legal code.

Saturdays: examining cases in the Special Court dealing with cases jointly involving Ethiopians and foreigners. [GM 500]

As a result of this strenuous programme Täfäri earned a reputation as “an indefatigable worker”, the American traveller James Baum observes. “The affairs of government occupy his time from early morning until sunset, there is not one thing, however small, that has to do with the government that he does not attend to personally.” [B 31–32]

Misoneism

Täfäri's modernization was opposed by many misoneistic, or conservative, interests. Admitting this in his *Autobiography*, he states that he faced considerable opposition to innovation from some of Empress Zäwditu's supporters. Their "object", he claims, "was to see that old habits should not be changed and education not be developed". Elaborating on this he recalls that traditionalists opposed a mining contract he had granted to a French company. Opponents of modernization, he declares, likewise resisted the introduction of aeroplanes, on the ground that this would forcibly deprive the Empress of her crown and throne. He states that such opponents had "many supporters", and "squeezed me like wood between two pieces of iron". [U 6, 64]

The Dispute of 1925–26 with the British and Italians

Two years after Ethiopia's entry into the League of Nations, and a year after his European tour, Täfäri became involved in a bitter dispute with the British and Italian governments, who were collaborating in a joint attempt to obtain exclusive economic privileges in Ethiopia: the British by building a barrage in the Lake Tana region, and the Italians by constructing a railway across the country to link their colonies of Eritrea and Somalia.

Täfäri appealed to the League against this attempt to pressurize him into accepting Anglo-Italian wishes – and did so once again by presenting himself as an apostle of "civilization". Writing to Count Colli di Felizzano, the Italian Minister to Ethiopia, he thus observed: "Our constant wish [is] to lead [the Ethiopian people] on the road of civilization and improvement". Emphasizing the difficulties involved, he deplored that "time has not yet permitted us to get accustomed so quickly to entirely new conditions... for, though our past history is glorious, it is only very recently that We have begun to follow the path of modern civilization". Adding a Biblical gloss, he continued: "Even creation itself was not created all at once. Where is the country that has changed all its works within one year?" [U 136]

He also looked at the differences between Ethiopia and what were subsequently called "developed" countries, and observed:

"If the countries whose geographical position has enabled them to out-distance us were to give us friendly advice and the necessary time, then – with our genuine eagerness – Ethiopia would go on improving uninterruptedly to attain a higher level in future just as she has always done in the past".

He nevertheless added one significant caveat – that "to make undue haste" might "bring the danger of accidents" – presumably social disruption or disorder. [U 137]

The Regent's show-down with the British and Italians also figures extensively in the *Chronicle*. Recalling earlier French participation in the Tripartite Treaty of 1906 (which had partitioned Ethiopia into three spheres of interest) it suggests that France was also looking for illicit "advantages" in the country. [GM 489–492]

Täfäri's initiative was so successful that the British and Italians, apparently taken aback by the vigour of his response, withdrew from their earlier position, and disclaimed any intention of pressurizing Ethiopia.

Täfäri's Accession as King

Täfäri's increasing power became apparent toward the end of 1928, when he was crowned king. His coronation, on 7 October, was a precursor of his subsequent internationally renowned Coronation as Emperor. The ceremonies were intended to display the country's advance in modernization. The capital's principal roads and houses were thus bedecked with flowers, and – an ultimate manifestation of progress – electric lights were installed along the main streets. [GM 507–508]

Establishment of Ethiopian Embassies Abroad

One of the first events after Täfäri's royal coronation was the appointment of Ethiopian Ministers to the three neighbouring colonial powers: Britain, Italy and France. These envoys facilitated diplomatic correspondence which had formerly been carried out through foreign legations or temporary missions (Lej Tyusu had however established a consulate in Asmara.) To strengthen relations, Täfäri also appointed foreign advisers to the all-important Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Commerce. [GM 515]

Land Reform

Täfäri chose the occasion of his coronation to issue several important proclamations. The first two, issued on 21 October 1928, dealt with Land-ownership and Education. The Land-ownership decree, which is reminiscent of two issued by Emperor Téwodros over sixty years earlier, and one by Menilek a decade and a half earlier, specified that any Ethiopian working a piece of land should enjoy "firm and certain" ownership. This meant that tenants could thereafter assume the status of land-owners. That tenants continued to exist would however suggest that the decree was by no means universally implemented. The proclamation also stated that anyone guilty of a crime could be imprisoned, flogged or fined, but under no circumstances be deprived of his land. The only exception was in case of treason, where land could be taken from the convicted person – but had to be transferred to his child, or, failing that, to his relatives up to the third generation. The

guilty man's family could on no circumstance be evicted, but they were expected to look after his daily upkeep. [M 115]

Education

The Decree on Education specified that anyone failing to teach his child to read and write, and hence to distinguish between good and evil, should be fined 50 Ethiopian dollars. This fine was to be given to the Church to provide food and clothing for the poor. Children were expected also to learn a manual skill to ensure subsequent employment. Parents of youngsters who failed to obtain such training were liable to a fine of 50 dollars, half of which to go to a school for the poor. Father-confessors were ordered to advise parents to educate their children, and if such advice was ignored were expected to report the matter to the local governor. Churchmen who failed to collaborate in educating children were threatened with demotion. [GM 516–517]

Other Proclamations

Four other important proclamations issued at this time dealt with the peasantry, cattle-breeders, craftsmen, and the unemployed.

The Decree on the Peasantry stated that since they cultivated the land they should be exempt from forced labour for the Government. Peasants working on State lands had to work no more than three days a year, or pay three *qunna*, i.e. the equivalent of 30 kilos, of grain. Holders of such lands were forbidden from going to peasant houses or to ask them for additional services, for ploughing, transporting supplies, or fence-building. Peasants constructing government stores, or working for the Church, were obliged to work only during two Spring months without ploughing or harvesting. Landlords owning their own land were prohibited from ordering their tenants to plough for more than five days a year, and could ask for other services, such as house-work or fence repair, only when neither ploughing nor harvesting was in progress. Landlords and peasants were jointly instructed to cultivate the land, and – to encourage this – anyone failing to work due to laziness was expected to pay the normal tithe. Further to encourage production persons bringing under cultivation previously unoccupied lands were exempted from taxation and tithes for the first year. They were expected to pay reduced fees on an increasing scale for the next three years, after which they were taxed in full.

The Decree on Cattle-breeding stated that owners of livestock capable of ploughing were prohibited from slaughtering their cattle for feasts. Provision was made for exceptions to this rule, but had to be authorized by local government officials.

The Decree on Craftsmen specified that they should work, and pay taxes, at agreed rates, but were under no circumstances expected to work for government officials or

others without payment. Craftsmen were to work no more than eight hours a day, and not to work from morning to evening without a break.

The Decree on Unemployment ordered that unemployed people in the countryside capable of working must work, for local peasant farmers, and avoid becoming vagabonds. Peasants employing such labourers were only expected to provide them with daily rations. Unemployed urban-dwellers were likewise to work on road-building, and thus to avoid vagabondage. They too were also entitled to their daily sustenance.

Church Reform

Though the above proclamations were all concerned primarily with productivity and social justice, one other dealt exclusively with Church matters. It declared that fasting, prayer, and religious holidays should be honoured – and that anyone violating them should be fined. One-third of the fine was to go to the accuser and judge, and two-thirds to a local church school.

Täfäri, throughout these years, was actively concerned with the emancipation of the Ethiopian Church. A major step, taken after long negotiation with the Egyptian Coptic Church, was finally taken in May 1929, when the latter agreed to the appointment of Ethiopian Bishops. The way was thus opened for the eventual establishment for a national Church.

The First Aeroplane

Opposition to the coming of aeroplanes was finally overcome in the summer of 1929. The first plane to arrive landed in Addis Ababa on 15 August. Piloted by a Frenchman, André Maillet, who later served as Chief Supervisor of Aviation, it landed on an open space in the capital's Jan Hoy Médä field. The plane marked a new era in transportation, which was to become increasingly important as the years rolled by.

The Imperial Coronation of 1930

Following Zäwditu's death, on 2 April 1930, Täfäri succeeded to the imperial throne as Emperor Haylä Sellasé. Wanting an impressive coronation, with prominent foreign dignitaries, besides guests from Ethiopia's far-flung empire, he postponed the ceremony for seven months, until 2 November. Discussing the succession problems from which his country had long suffered, he once more alludes in his *Autobiography* to European "civilization" – recalling that since Ethiopia had joined the League of Nations, and signed treaties with twelve foreign governments, it was "proper", and "in accordance with the practice of the most civilized governments", to invite their representatives to his coronation.

The coronation's delay was useful moreover in making it possible to display the capital's further modernization. Steps were thus made to repair the principal roads and adjacent buildings, and to install electric light along the main streets and in houses which the guests were expected to pass.

The Emperor's coronation took place in St. George's Cathedral. His oath was significant: he swore not only to strengthen the Orthodox faith, to protect the interests of the people, and to safeguard the realm, but also "to establish schools at which secular and spiritual education would be developed... and in which the gospel would be preached".

As part of the festivities the new Emperor unveiled a statue to his predecessor Menilek. [U 171–175]

The Constitution of 1931

The year after his coronation, Haylä Sellasé instituted Ethiopia's first written constitution. Its text, though supposedly a royal gift, was in fact an extensively debated compromise between the traditional nobles and the Emperor's new administrators. Describing how he reconciled their divergent views he recalls – significantly – that he had explained to the nobles that since "feudal rule had ceased in the world", it was "not proper" to re-affirm it in Ethiopia.

In a proclamation issued at this time he declared that on receiving the throne of Ethiopia, "and his great trust from God", he had recognized the immense duty imposed upon him. Describing this duty once again in terms of "civilization", he announced his wish that:

"Our realm be strengthened, the standard of living of Our people be improved, and Our population be led on the road to higher civilization and enjoyment, by which they will obtain all the good things which the free and civilized nations have achieved".

In issuing the Constitution, his "lofty idea", he reiterated, was to "bring Our realm to the highest level in its long history". He argued that his Constitution was directly related to "civilization" for two reasons: firstly, as he stated in his opening address, because it resembled those of the "civilized and educated nations".; and, secondly, as he writes in the *Autobiography*, because, under his rule, "Our people have progressively advanced... to a higher level of civilization", thus permitting him to "establish a constitution".

An important implication of thus relating the Constitution to the progress of "civilization", was stated by Bäjerond Täklä Hawaryat, the Russian-educated Minister of Finance, who was largely responsible for its drafting. In an introductory speech, later reprinted in the *Autobiography*, he stated that when the people had been "educated to an adequate standard of knowledge", they would be "permitted to elect" men to whom would be accorded "the privilege of counsellorship". [U 181–185]

Church Buildings

One of Haylā Sellasé's first proclamations as Emperor dealt with the church repair. Addressed to those who were concerned, as it says, only with their private affairs, it declared that the sign of true Christianity was the erection of churches. The decree urged the repair of old church buildings. Governors were however warned against ordering peasants to work beyond reasonable limits, but were threatened that if after a year churches had not been rebuilt they would be fined twice the amount that should have been dispensed on repair. [GM 554–555]

The Emperor's Reforms: Components of "Civilization"

The Emperor's reforms – what he perceived as the principal components of the "civilization" he was introducing – are discussed in Chapters 12 and 26 of the *Autobiography* and Chapter 65 of the *Chronicle*. Some of these reforms, their author insists, were fraught with difficulty, for it was "essential", he believed, to "carry out everything patiently, in order to prevent upheavals, bloodshed, and tribal divisions". [U 6]

The first chapter in the *Autobiography* deals with "the improvement, by ordinance and proclamation, of internal administration", and "efforts to allow foreign civilization to enter Ethiopia". The *Chronicle* likewise describes these reforms as "works of civilization".

Administrative Reforms

Some of the most important reforms were the enactment of the 1931 Constitution, the growth of the bureaucracy, and the establishment of a Parliament, with senators and deputies, albeit appointed by the Emperor.

The *Autobiography*, referring to what it terms the "straightening out" of the administration, notes that this involved the importation from Europe of regulations and books on government, and the construction of buildings for the various ministries. Elsewhere, discussing the rôle of his ministers, the Emperor observes that though he appointed them, he still had to devote "a great deal of thought and effort" to government, since "the ultimate responsibility" was his. [UGS 72–73]

Legal Reforms

Other important reforms related to legal matters. These included:

1. The reorganization of the law courts and legal system. Every court was provided with regulations and reference books; and the amputation of hands and feet, and other "cruel punishments" sanctioned in by the *Fetha Nägest* were abolished.

2. The introduction of fixed punishment and fines for specified crimes, to minimize arbitrary decisions; and the appointment of an official executioner (who used a rifle), with a fixed location for executions. This terminated the old system in which such punishment was effected by the family of the murdered party. The appointment of an official executioner, we may note, had been attempted – unsuccessfully – eighty years earlier by Emperor Téwodros.
3. The institution of special courts for legal cases jointly involving Ethiopians and foreigners; and the appointment of foreign legal advisers, notably the Swiss lawyer Maître Jacques Auberson. This reform terminated the “unequal treaty” signed in Menilek’s day with the French envoy Klobukowski which had provided unfair advantage to French nationals and by extension all foreigners.
4. The construction of a modern prison, with washing and clinical facilities, and instruction in reading, writing and manual work; and the abolition of the old practice whereby prisoners’ feet were fettered.
5. The division of the country into twelve parts, and the appointment of a judge for each.
6. The printing of an abbreviated version of the *Fetha Nägest*.
7. The requirement that all judges should take an oath not to receive bribes.
8. A promulgation that judges should only sit in regular court up to 1 p.m., and that, after 3 p.m., they should only hear royal orders and decisions from higher courts, and issue receipts.
9. The issue of printed receipts, bearing the date, and reason for court appearance – a device to prevent cases being heard out of turn. [U 66–70]

The Expansion of Printing

Another major area of reform, according to the *Autobiography*, was related to the coming of printing. This period witnessed the establishment in Addis Ababa of two printing-presses, which, according to the *Chronicle*, turned out “many” Ge’ez and Amharic works, which were considerably cheaper, and hence more accessible, than manuscripts.

The development in printing was followed by the publication of not only the weekly reformist *Berhanennä Sälam*, but also by a monthly cultural journal *Käsaté Berhan*, i.e. “Revealer of the Light”. Government funds were also allocated to the setting up of a private printing establishment, the Märha Tebäb press. It produced the newspaper *Aymero*, i.e. “Knowledge”, which dated back to Menilek’s day, and “many books and stationery for the various ministries”. [U 47]

Educational Developments

This period also witnessed a dramatic expansion in modern secular education. A number of schools for instruction in foreign languages were set up in Addis Ababa

and several other towns. Schools in every province were also opened in collaboration with foreign missions. Many students were sent abroad, and subsequently found employment in various ministries.

On the rôle of Swedish Protestant missionaries Haylä Sellasé recalls that while Regent he had his Education Ministry investigate their activities, and found that they were “engaged in teaching through goodness and generosity alone”. Convinced that they had “no thought other than teaching languages and religious knowledge”, he provided them with land and money, and gave them “every assistance”. He likewise enabled missionaries to build schools in Harär and Läqämti. [EU 206–207]

Emphasizing the importance of provincial educational developments the *Chronicle* notes that schools were established in six centres: Däsé, Harär, Däbrä Tabor, and an unspecified town in Tegräy – perhaps Adwa or Mäqälé, as well as Läqämti and Goré. Schools in Wäläga and the south and south-east (near to British possessions) taught in English; those in Harär and the east (towards France’s Jibuti territory) in French; and those in Tegräy (towards Eritrea) in Italian. Schools in Shäwa, Bägämdar, Gojjam and Wällo, on the other hand, made little use of foreign languages, and taught mainly in Ge’ez and Amharic. [GM 458–459]

Progress in Public Health

This period, the *Autobiography* states, also witnessed the opening, partially in collaboration with foreign missionaries, of “many hospitals”. They were situated in Addis Ababa and other towns, as a result of which “the health of many people began to be safeguarded”.

The capital’s principal hospital, the “well-known and widely respected” Bét Sayda, was run by a Swedish physician, Dr. Kurt Hanner. It was well-equipped, with ex-ray equipment”, which had “never before” been seen in Ethiopia. [U 69–70, 297]

Foreign Relations

The *Autobiography* puts considerable emphasis on Ethiopia’s foreign relations. Explaining that he had “directed that European civilization should enter the country”, the Emperor recalls that he arranged visits from “the sons of foreign royalty and princes”, including the Duke of Gloucester, from Britain; the Swedish Crown Prince Gustav Adolf; and the Italian Duke of Abruzzi.

The Emperor’s desire to open up foreign relations also led, he declares, to the coming to his coronation of representatives of a dozen foreign governments: Britain, Italy, France, the USA, Germany, Egypt, Sweden, Holland, Belgium, Greece, Turkey, and Japan. This development was an expression, he claims, of his determination that his country “should progress on the path of even higher civilization” – and indeed proved Ethiopia’s “ascent to a higher level”. A related development was the establishment of Ethiopian legations and Consulates, which assisted inter-governmental business, and obviated the need to

dispatch special missions for the delivery of messages to other countries. He also in concluded international agreements to permit the purchase and import of fire-arms for the protection of Ethiopia's independence, security and peace. [EU 68, 71–72]

Improved Communications

Ethiopia's foreign relations in this period, the *Autobiography* explains, were much facilitated by progress in the field of communications, notably:

1. The introduction of wireless, which greatly assisted government business and trade.
2. The expansion of telephone and postal services, and the resultant improvement of communications for government and people alike. Testimony to such improved communication was provided after the defeat of Negus Mika'él at the battle of Sagale in 1915 when Täfäri announced the news to Addis Ababa by telephone.
3. The construction, and maintenance, of roads from Addis Ababa to the east, west, north and south. enabled areas hitherto ten or fifteen days' distance away from the capital to be reached by car or lorry in two or three days.
4. The purchase, and import, of a growing number of aeroplanes, which greatly facilitated transport and communication.
5. The introduction into Addis Ababa of "many cars, motor-cycles, bicycles and lorries".

Another innovation mentioned in the *Autobiography* was the installation of electric light: in the palace, ministerial offices, nobleman's houses, and major churches, as well as along the principal street, Ras Mäkonnen Avenue, also in Harär and Déré Dawa, and in government buildings in Däsé and Däbrä Marqos. [U 56, 64–76]

Army Reforms

Considerable attention was also paid to the modernization of the army. This was accomplished by:

1. The establishment of a military college at Holota, 45 kilometres west of Addis Ababa.
2. The institution of civil and military uniforms.
3. The founding of an Ethiopian branch of the Boy Scout movement, headed by the Emperor's favourite son, Mäkonnen. It was set up "so that boys should carry out their duties well". [U 70]

Economic Reforms

The *Autobiography* also recalls a series of reforms in the economic field, notably:

1. The prohibition of the old practice whereby troops looted the peasantry. This reform was once again reminiscent of one unsuccessfully attempted by Emperor Téwodros.

2. The purchase of the privately-owned Bank of Abyssinia, an affiliate of the National Bank of Egypt, and its replacement by a national Bank of Ethiopia.
3. The establishment (not mentioned in any other source) of a fixed rate of interest, of 9%, for borrowing and lending, and the prohibition of the old practice whereby defaulting borrowers were handed over to their lenders.

Other economic reforms included decrees abolishing the slave trade – and of all forced labour. Violators were liable to 15 years imprisonment and a fine of 500 Ethiopian dollars. [U 68–71, GM 458]

Reinforcing National Identity

Action, the *Autobiography* notes, was also taken to underline Ethiopia's identity as an independent country, by:

1. The introduction of a National Anthem, and a popular military march, the *Täfäri March*.
2. The designing of special tri-colour flags for the Emperor, Empress, and Crown Prince, as well as for the army, postal services and shipping.
3. The institution of civil and military uniforms.
4. The inauguration of official orders and other decorations. [U 69–71, 74]

Innovations in Economic and Social Life

There were also several major innovations in the field of economic and social life. These, according to the *Autobiography*, included:

1. Curtailing the powers of the landed gentry, in the provinces of Wällo, Gojjam, Bägemder, Yäggü, Wäläga and Jimma, and the appointment of centrally-appointed officials.
2. The gradual abolition of rule by provincial military chiefs, and their replacement by centrally-appointed government officials, in the districts of Jigjiga, Chärchär, Balé, Wäläga, Sayo and Jimma. The above reforms once again recall the centralizing objectives of Emperor Téwodros.
3. The prohibition of unpaid forced labour.
4. The abolition of *liebasha*, or traditional system of detecting thieves, which, as we have seen, was considered responsible for abuse and corruption. [U 70–75]

Church Affairs

Modernization also took place in relation to the Church, and to the rôle and status of the clergy.

Perhaps the most dramatic event of this field was the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria's appointment of five bishops chosen from among Ethiopian nationals. This obviated the country's former dependence on Coptic ecclesiastics, and marked a major step in the road towards the eventual emancipation of the Ethiopian Church.

Important reforms in the Church's internal organization were also introduced. Explaining this in his *Autobiography*, the Emperor recalls that Ethiopian monarchs had formerly been responsible for Church as well as state affairs, and had for example appointed and dismissed church officials. Because of the "gradual expansion of government business and the occasional waging of wars" the country's rulers had, however, later lacked the time to control Church to the full. The establishment of government ministries, had however given him the time, he claimed, to devote to Church affairs: to meet Church leaders and others with a view to achieving what he called "a progressive and step by step improvement in the work of the clergy". These "improvements", several of which had a major impact on the population at large, consisted of:

1. Translation of the Scriptures, including those for Holy Mass, from Ge'ez into Amharic, and the printing of religious texts in the latter tongue. The people were thereby enabled to understand "when a text was read out to them in their own language, even if not all of it, then at least the main part".
2. Issuing of administrative regulations for deans, priests, church custodians, abbots, monks and others.
3. Strengthening marriage ties by urging that couples when married should take the Eucharist at a church ceremony.
4. Reform of traditional mourning ceremonies to prohibit the cutting of hair, beating of breasts, wailing, and wearing of special mourning clothes – "other than a black patch" – (as in Europe).
5. Prohibiting the excessive consumption of food and drinking of alcohol at *tüzgars*, or memorial ceremonies for the dead. Such consumption "did not conform", he argued, to the "new era of civilization" he was establishing, and was moreover "forbidden by Holy Scriptures". For his own part he states that when his daughter Princess Zänäbä Wärq had died he had avoided undue ostentation, and had merely distributed money to several churches and monasteries. Many people, he claims, had subsequently followed this example.
6. Recognizing his responsibility to protect the Church, and its laws, he reiterates that he set aside one day a week (as noted above) to receive churchmen, and discuss Church affairs.

Besides the above reforms it was his intention, he states, to abolish the clergy's hereditary ownership of land, and to make land directly available to the churches. The land thus saved was to be allocated among priests and others on the basis of their service. He declared that any surplus wealth should be allotted to the establishment of "schools and hospitals, homes for the aged and educational establishments for the children of the poor".

In view of the time it would have taken to introduce the above reforms throughout the country, he began, he says, by introducing them at the monasteries of Zeqwala, Addis Aläm and Assäbot, and at the principal Addis Ababa churches. [U 144, 161–167]

The Facist Ivasion, the Emperor's Dedication to "Civilization" – and Rebuttal of Italian Propaganda

The Emperor reverts to his efforts to introduce "civilization" in the concluding sections of the *Autobiography*, where he discusses the Italian fascist invasion of 1935–6. He recalls that his objective since his assumption of government responsibility had been to introduce "the new civilization" which he also refers to, revealingly, as "foreign-inspired civilization". He claims that he had "not ceased striving" to obtain "the benefits of modern civilization", and that his country had for that reason "begun to follow the path of civilization". Turning to the virulent Italian propaganda then being launched against him and his country, he claimed that the fascists had "misinterpreted everything We were doing for the sake of civilization". [228, 302]

As for the enemy's motivation he claims that the Italians were "stricken with envy at Our setting up a constitution to strengthen and consolidate Ethiopia's unity, at Our opening schools for boys and girls, at Our building hospitals in which Our people's health was to be safeguarded, as well as all sorts of other initiatives of Ours by which Ethiopia's independence would be affirmed".

Thus presenting the Italian invasion as the antithesis of his government, and a blow to civilization, he declares that while he was engaged on all the "careful work" described in his memoirs, and was "beginning to lead Our people on the road to civilization, Our enemy rose up with violence sending to Our country many troops with modern equipment as well as many warplanes and tanks..." [U 6–7]

Summary and Conclusions

Ras Täfäri Mäkonnen's regency and subsequent reign as Emperor Haylä Sellasé – up to the Italian invasion – are the subject of two basic, and remarkably comprehensive, Ethiopian historical works: *Aläqä Gäbrä-Egzi'abher Elyas's Chronicle of Abéto Iyasu and Empress Zewditu*, and the first volume of the Emperor's own autobiography *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress*. The first work is essentially in the tradition of Ethiopian royal chronicles, while the latter marks a point of departure in that it is written by the ruler himself. It differs moreover from earlier chronicles – and is important – in that it provides us with his own account of his aspirations and policies.

Taken together the two works provide detailed documentation on the pre-war modernizing interests – and achievements – of Täfäri Mäkonnen-Haylä Selassé. Both works reveal his abiding interest in what he terms "civilization", by which he in fact means modern European civilization.

Täfäri's fascination with Western technology (which he shared with his predecessor Emperor Menilek), was inherited, as he claims, from his father Ras Mäkonnen. The latter had arranged for his son to receive a European education, albeit without his traveling abroad, as a small but growing number of Ethiopian intellectuals were beginning to do.

Täfäri’s interest in the advancement of what he considered “civilization” was long-lasting – and indeed appears as the leit-motiv of his *Autobiography*. We see it not only as the reason for the introduction of new technology – most notably the expansion of roads, the introduction of the radio and aeroplane, the founding of schools and hospitals, and the dispatch of students abroad – but also for many aspects of governmental transformation. These include curtailing the power of the old feudal rulers, centralization of modern state power, development of the ministerial system (with specially designated buildings), suppression of the slave trade, and the reorganization of church affairs, as well as entry into the League of Nations, a state visit to Europe, coronation festivities, increasing contact with the outside world, through the means of legations – and even the country’s on-going opposition to European colonial pressures, as well as, finally, resistance to the Italian invasion of 1935–6.

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