

Ethiopia in the Age of Imperialism

Stations

Independent Africans

- ❑ The Ethiopians kept their freedom through a successful military resistance.
- ❑ Emperor Menelik II modernized the army, along with roads, bridges, and schools.
- ❑ When the Italians invaded, they were defeated so badly by Menelik that no other Europeans tried to take Ethiopia.

Menilek II (1889–1913)

Sahle Miriam declared himself emperor of Ethiopia on March 25, taking the name Menilek II, and at Wichale (or Ucciali, as the Italians called it) in Wallo on May 2 he signed a treaty of amity and commerce granting Italy rule over Eritrea. The Italian version of Article XVII of the Treaty of Wichale made Rome the medium for Ethiopia's foreign relations, whereas the Amharic text was noncommittal. Both texts agreed that in the case of differences the Amharic text was to prevail. Learning that Rome had used the mistranslation to claim a protectorate over all of Ethiopia, Menilek first sought a diplomatic solution; meanwhile, during 1891–93 he sent expeditions south and east to obtain gold, ivory, musk, coffee, hides, and slaves to trade for modern weapons and munitions. In December 1895, after two years of good harvests had filled Ethiopia's granaries, Menilek moved his army into Tigray.

Menilek II (1889–1913)

Rome believed that as few as 35,000 soldiers could control Ethiopia, but it was proved wrong on March 1, 1896, at the Battle of Adwa, where Gen. Oreste Baratieri led 14,500 Italian troops on a poorly organized attack against Menilek's well-armed host of some 100,000 fighters. The Italian lines crumbled, and at noon retreat was sounded. The emperor retired into Ethiopia to await negotiations, and on October 26, 1896, he signed the Treaty of Addis Ababa, which abrogated the Treaty of Wichale.

Menilek II (1889–1913)

Menilek subsequently directed the Solomonic state into areas never before under its rule. Between 1896 and 1906 Ethiopia expanded to its present size, taking in the highlands, the key river systems, and a buffer of low-lying zones around the state's central core. Revenues from the periphery were used to modernize the new capital of Addis Ababa, to open schools and hospitals, and to build communication networks. Menilek contracted with a French company to construct a railway between Addis Ababa and Djibouti, which thus spurred the exploitation of the country's produce by foreign merchants in cooperation with the ruling elites.