

# THE PRE-WAR ATTEMPTS TO PROMOTE THE USE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF ETHIOPIA IN PLACE OF FRENCH

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## The Role of Dr. Charles Martin Worqneh

We have shown in a separate study the supremacy of the French language in the educational system of Ethiopia up to the Fascist invasion of Ethiopia in 1935.<sup>1</sup> We have also briefly shown in the same study the very insignificant position of the English language in Ethiopia, especially since the day the capital of the empire moved south to Addis Ababa, under Emperor Menelik, for at the courts of both Tewodros and Emperor Yohannes IV English was without doubt the dominant language for which there were a number of interpreters.<sup>2</sup>

## The Position of the English Language under Emperor Menelik of Ethiopia

In Shoa, where during both the reigns of Tewodros and Yohannes King Menelik allowed the establishment of the Catholic Capuchin Mission, dominated by French missionaries, the French language was practically the sole European language known, thanks to the mission schools and thanks also to the famous college for Abyssinians in Marseille (France) which, opened by the Capuchin Mission in Shoa, functioned from 1867-1870. A number of Shoans also left for Paris for education through the Capuchin Mission.

1. "Le Francais en Ethiopia," par Aleme Eshete (1973), A mimeographed summary of a more complete study on the subject now in preparation.
2. Please see my work on "The Role and Position of Foreign-Educated Interpreters in Ethiopia (1880-1889" *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. XI, No. 1 (January 1973).

When therefore King Menelik became emperor in 1889, and the capital of the empire moved from Dabra Tabor to Addis Ababa the European language at the Imperial court, the language of diplomacy, became quite naturally the French language. And this remained the position up to 1935, date of the Italian occupation of Ethiopia. The supremacy of the French language did not however remain unchallenged all this time. It was constantly threatened by its traditional rival, the English language.

The English language was almost non-existent at the capital of Menelik during practically the whole of the reigns of that emperor. British travellers, diplomats, etc. coming to Ethiopia had themselves to speak French and use French-speaking Ethiopian interpreters at the court of Menelik.

Thus when the Rod Mission arrived at Addis Ababa for frontier negotiation French was the language that was used all through, "the emperor having no English interpreter." And indeed letters to the emperor as well as proposed texts of treaties had first to be translated from English into French so that the French-speaking Ethiopians could convey their exact meaning to Menelik.<sup>3</sup>

But the problem is more clearly seen when we come to know the great difficulties the British Legation in Addis Ababa, opened in 1898, had to face in finding English-speaking Ethiopian interpreters for its communications with the Imperial court as well as with the principal Ethiopian chiefs. And the only Ethiopian interpreter they managed to employ was one that was educated in the mission school at Massawa-Mokully then part of Italian colony of Eritrea. This was Mikael Birru, son of Walqait Birru about whom we wrote in some detail in the last issue of this Journal.<sup>4</sup> Mikael (who was often referred to as Birru) spoke not only Amharic and English, but also Hindustani, Arabic, French, Italian and German. The Legation was however unable to find another competent English-speaking Ethiopian to assist Birru who had, as Harrington the British wrote, "his whole time taken up with transacting my official business with the Emperor Menelik. He not infrequently spends the whole day at the *ghebi* to

3. Rodd's reports in Public Record Office (London) Foreign Office (F.O.) 1-32.

4. «በቀድሞ ዘመናት ከ1889 ዓ.ም. በፊት ውጭ አገር የተማሩ ኢትዮጵያውያን ታሪክ» *The Ethiopian Journal of Education*, June 1973, Vol. VI, No. 1.

see His Majesty for five minutes." Therefore, to assist Mikael Birru the Legation had to employ an Irish resident in Addis who spoke Amharic, Mr. Mckelvie "an old man in weak health who is getting past work and who will soon have to be pensioned off."<sup>5</sup> Besides being an old man, the fact that Mckelvie was a foreigner was a real handicap, for as Harrington wrote, "the work of an interpreter here is not only to translate what I say, or what is said to me, but also to have a general idea of what is being said and done in the emperor's court and in Abyssinia generally. It is essential that he should be a native of the country with relatives and ties among the people themselves."

For a number of years, therefore, the embassy lived in real fear lest something may happen to Birru and the whole business of the Legation come to a standstill. Not one Ethiopian was to be found in the whole empire to serve as interpreter for the British Legation in Ethiopia while the French-speaking Ethiopians were in relative abundance. Harrington, therefore, proposed in 1905 to his government to send two young Ethiopians - sons of Basha Belaineh who had rendered some service to the British in the war against the Mad Mullah in Somalia - to Cairo to follow courses in English. But because the children were quite backward in the study of their own language it was thought inadvisable to send them to learn a foreign language. A new solution had, therefore, to be found, and in the meantime, the question of training new interpreters for the Legation was growing more pressing every day. Further, it was noted: "It is important that any youths who are selected for this purpose should belong to the higher class of Abyssinians and have, if possible some sort of connection with the court. Unfortunately, owing to the suspicious nature of Abyssinians, boys of this class are not easy to recruit, as their relatives are afraid of being accused of showing partiality to the English - an accusation which from the date of the Rod Mission has been enough to ruin several Abyssinians. . ."<sup>6</sup> Harrington adds: "It is no use educating low class boys, it is a waste of time."<sup>7</sup> In 1907, the position of English-speaking Ethiopians was as follows: There were only six people in Addis Ababa who could speak "tolerably," both English and Amharic. These were Mikael Birru, the first interpreter of

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5. F. O. 1-52 Harrington to F. O., Addis Ababa, 12 January 1905.

6. F. O. 371-190. Clerk to F. O. Addis Ababa, 21 Dec., 1906.

7. F. O. 371-90 Harrington in London, Note to F.O. 10-9-07.

the Legation, the Irish Mckelvie, a Swedish Missionary (probably Cederqvist), the Legation doctor (Dr. Wakeman), and two Abyssinians who were employed at the Bank of Abyssinia, and could not anyway serve the Legation as interpreters because they were of "Low standing," "hardly admitted inside the *ghibeh* (palace,) can rarely manage to obtain an audience and when they do are terrified out of their senses at the kings's Majesty. Really they hardly dare to speak to him.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, therefore, the Legation contacted the Swedish Mission at Massawa<sup>9</sup> to send them two students whom it was proposed to send not to Cairo but to Khartoum to learn English and serve as interpreters on their return. The two young boys arrived in Addis Ababa in October 1907; they spoke Italian and little English. From Addis Ababa they were sent to Khartoum in February 1908.

This was not really a permanent solution and in order to meet the need for English-speaking Ethiopians the best solution was to establish a school of English in Addis Ababa itself. And this was what Harrington proposed in 1908. "The only possible solution of the question," he wrote, "...is to establish a school in the Legation with free education in Amharic and English for a limited number of boys, and to send to England a certain number of the most promising to complete their education if we wish to obtain competent interpreters."<sup>10</sup> Again, this project did not materialise. The two young Ethiopians sent to Khartoum, of whom one was called Gabra Mariam, returned to Addis in May-June 1910 after having learnt English and Arabic. But that year Mikael Birru, the first interpreter of the Legation was found at fault and dismissed from the Legation. There was no one of his calibre to replace him. As for the Khartoum-trained interpreters one of them was sent to the southern Kenya-Ethiopia frontier, while the other retained in Addis was "at present of very little use." Birru was therefore replaced by a foreigner,

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8. F. O. 371-90 Hohler to F. O., Addis Abba, August 2, 1907.

9. Karl Cederqvist, the Swedish Missionary who arrived in Addis Ababa in 1907 had opened shortly afterwards, a school called by the Ethiopians the "English School" because English language (not French) was taught in the school. But it was too early for him to produce interpreters for the British Legation which explains this request to the Swedish Mission at Massawa.

10. F. O. 371-595. Harrington to F. O., Addis Ababa, April 16, 1908.

a Greek, though a British subject, Mr. Zaphiro, who spoke both English and Amharic fluently.<sup>11</sup>

In short, the English language continued to be practically nonexistent in Ethiopia for many years to come, and the number of English speaking-Ethiopians infinitely small. It is true that the Coptic (Menelik) School which was opened by Menelik in 1908 in Addis Ababa and where French was the language of instruction, did introduce in later years an English section which was attended by a number of Ethiopians, who after completing the elementary stage at Addis Ababa went to Victoria College in Cairo and then to London. But these young Ethiopians did not return home for service until the 1930's or end of 1920's. And therefore the marked absence of the English language in Ethiopia when compared to the French language, continued to the 1920's and indeed the 1930's.

It is precisely to reverse this unfavourable position of English vis-a-vis French that Dr. Charles Martin Worqneh exerted his force and influence to the full, both on the British government and the Ethiopian government.

#### **The Role of Dr. Charles Martin Worqneh in Promoting the Study of English in Ethiopia**

Dr. Charles Martin Worqneh was an Ethiopian who, as a child, was taken, to India by Colonel Charles Chamberlain of the British military expedition against Emperor Tewodros of Ethiopia in 1868. In India, the Ethiopian child was taken care of by a certain Colonel Martin of the British army, hence his name Charles Martin, after his two benefactors. Charles Martin went to school in India where after, matriculation he studied medicine and graduated in 1882 at the age of 22. Then, after seven years service in India, Charles Martin went to Glasgow (Scotland) in 1889 for further specialisation and returned to India in 1890. Dr. Charles Martin, who never forgot his Ethiopian origin, attempted to enter Abyssinia in 1896 at the time of the Italo-Ethiopian war of Adowa, but without success. But in 1899 Martin finally succeeded in coming to Ethiopia at the invitation of Emperor Menelik who was told of him by Harrington, the British representative at Addis Ababa. After his arrival in Ethiopia in October 1899,

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11. F. O. 371-892. Thesiger to F. O. Addis Ababa, 4 November, 1910.

it is presumed that he succeeded in finding at Addis Ababa his relatives from whom he had been separated 31 years ago; his grandmother in fact told him what his name was, and that is how Charles Martin gained his third name: Worqneh Eshetu. Dr. Charles Martin Worqneh stayed in Ethiopia for two years to learn Amharic and doing surgical work for Menelik who paid him \$2000 a year. According to Harrington, Menelik had the intention of opening hospital to be administered by Worqneh but the Russians who had a hospital in Addis Ababa were opposed to the project and represented Martin as "an English spy." Menelik therefore had to tell Martin that "he no longer requires his service." But Dr. Worqneh (or *Hakim* Worqneh as he was called in Ethiopia), who was annoyed by Menelik's attitude, wanted one more year of leave during which time he hoped to convince both Menelik and the Russians of his good intentions. And Harrington hoped that Martin would succeed, "as if he succeeds we shall have one near the king with an English education who at any rate will be a sympathiser with us and be able to counteract the action of those who take every occasion to misrepresent us."<sup>12</sup> But this additional leave does not seem to have been granted and Charles Martin Worqneh left Ethiopia in February 1901 to return to India where he continued his service. Dr. Charles Martin was back again in Ethiopia in 1908 as a temporary medical officer during the absence of Dr. Workeman who was sick and had to leave for England. This was the time when Menelik's sickness was most acute and Dr. Martin was one of the members of the medical team giving treatment to Menelik together with the French national, Dr. Vitalien. In those days medicine was rarely separated from politics and for one of the European powers represented at Addis Ababa, to have their national as the doctor of the emperor was a position that was sought for so dearly, and the doctor did indeed act, very often as the political agent of his country at the court of Menelik. That is how Dr. Martin was again the target of French opposition who continued to call him a British agent. In any case Dr. Martin had to leave Ethiopia in 1913 after 5 years stay and return to India. Dr. Martin did not return to Ethiopia, until 1919, after the deposition of Prince Iyassu and the rise to power of Empress Zawditu and her Crown Prince Ras Tafari. When Dr. Martin arrived in Ethiopia in 1919 power

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12. F. O. 1-39. Harrington to F. O., Addis Ababa, 12 January, 1901.

was in the hands of Ras Taffari who was then representing the progressive party against the conservative party represented by the Empress. Ras Taffari, as it were, was surrounded by foreign-educated Ethiopians of different training (French, English, Russian, German, Italian, etc.) whom he favoured in order to bring about progress and change. That also must be the reason for Martin's decision to remain for good in the service of Taffari who appears to have held him in high favour. Gradually Dr. Worqneh appears to have become more Ethiopian than British, but he never forgot his British education and up-bringing, which explains his determined, but not very successful fight, to eradicate French and replace it by English as the language of instruction and diplomacy in Ethiopia.

The movement that aimed at replacing French by English in Ethiopia seems to have started in 1920. Indeed Mgr. Andre Jarousseau, (Bishop of the Catholic Capuchin Mission in Southern Ethiopia, with its headquarters at Harrar,) who was the principal promoter of the French language in Ethiopia, wrote in May 1920, that, since April last, a certain movement, "sous des dehors nationaliste" was taking shape in Addis Ababa in view of achieving three objectives:

- the abolition of the use of the French language in the postal and customs administration of Ethiopia and its eventual substitution by English,

- the removal of the French mission-educated catholic Ethiopians from the jobs they occupied in government administration at Addis Ababa as well as in Harrar and Dire Dawa, and replacing them by graduates of the coptic Menelik School and others,

- the eventual closing of all the schools run by the French Capuchin Mission in Southern Ethiopia, and in particular in Harrar and Dire Dawa.

Mgr. Jarousseau believed that this movement was not, in reality directed only against the Capuchin Mission and its disciples but against the use of the French language in Ethiopia. Moreover the Catholic Bishop believed that this movement against the French language and the French Catholic Mission, which counted on the support of the Empress Zawditu and the Coptic, Abun, could not but be the work of the British Legation in Addis Ababa, helped by the pro-Britain Ethiopians who served as "propagandistes". Mgr.

Jarousseau remembered what he called the animosity of Harrington, (the first British representative at Addis Ababa.) against the Capuchin Mission which he considered to be an agent of French influence and the greatest enemy of British interest in Ethiopia. As far as the anti-French activity of certain Ethiopians was concerned Mgr. Jarousseau mentioned in name Ato Fassika Habta Mikael<sup>13</sup> as being the principal Ethiopian behind the movement under the directions of the British Legation.

Here is an extract of one of the letters of Mgr. Jarousseau written on the subject in May 1920 to Leonce Lagarde, the first French Minister at Addis Ababa, then working at the French Foreign Office in Paris:

“Vers le mois d’Avril dernier on voit se former a Addis Ababa un mouvement qui, sous des dehors nationalistes, avait pour but: premierement d’obtenir l’abolition de l’usage du francais dans le service des Douanes de Dirre Daoua, et deuxiemement le licensement de tous les employes travaillant dans cette langue. Dans l’idee des partisans de ce mouvement, l’abolition du francais obtenu pour la Douane de Dirre Daoua devait se poursuivre par le service des Postes, et peu a peu, de succes en succes, ces fanatiques seraient arrives a exiger la fermeture de nos ecoles. Je dois vous dire, Monsieur le Ministre, que les partisans de ce mouvement formaient deux categories: celles des extremistes, vieux abyssins, qui demandaient l’elimination de toute penetration etrangere dans l’administration des services publics; celle, non moins perfides, des eleves et affides des Ecoles Coptes qui admettaient l’emploi des langues etrangeres pourvu que le service leur fut confie.

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13. Ato Fassika Habta Mikael, a grand-son of Dejach Germame an important general of Emperor Menelik (who died around 1895) was one of the earliest pupils of Menelik School established at Addis Ababa in 1908 and run by Coptes recruited in Egypt by the Abun. After a few years of school there, Ato Fassika left with a French man for Egypt where he continued his studies and after seven years received his degree as a lawyer. The expenses of his studies in Egypt are said to have been paid by Ras Taffari. (F. O. 371-10877 Bentinck to F. O., Addis Ababa, June 17, 1925, Heruy Wolde Selassie, *Ya Hiywat Tarik* (Addis Ababa, 1915 Ethiopian Calendar) p. 101). Upon his return to Ethiopia (about 1920) Fassika, who belonged to the Orthodox Church was given important positions including the office of Ethiopian consul at Djibouti. But he never left for Djibouti, and remained in Addis where he served as advisor of Empress Zewditu. In 1925 Ato Fassika was 38 years old.



Ces derniers fortement appuyés par des propagandistes anglais et par l'Aboune avaient des grandes chances de réussite. Et leur réussite eut été au bout de trois mois la substitution pure et simple de la langue anglaise à notre langue française."<sup>14</sup>

The movement against the French-speaking Ethiopians educated by the French Catholic Capuchin Mission, and against the privileged positions which they occupied, continued, with intervals, up to the Italian occupation of Ethiopia. A number of them were removed from their jobs; others were even sent to prison for one reason or other. However, through the influence of Mgr. Jarosseau on Ras Taffari, who used to be one of his pupils in Harrar,<sup>15</sup> the French language continued to be used in postal and customs administration, and the French-speaking Ethiopians kept their privileged, although challenged, position until the war of 1935.

We have no evidence showing that Dr. Martin Worqneh was a party to this anti-French movement, but letters he wrote to the British Legation, and to the British Foreign office, as well as views expressed by the British Minister at Addis, confirm to us that he did not appreciate much the privileged position of French and French-speaking Ethiopians.

Here is an extract of Martin's famous letter of March 6, 1925 to Mr. Russell, the British Minister in Addis Ababa:

Dear Mr. Russell,

I have been thinking about Anglo-Abyssinian relations and trying to find some way of improving them. I find that not only the Abyssinian government, but the general public as well, are unduly afraid and suspicious of the British. Of this groundless dread and mistrust I have tried to purge those with whom I have come in contact, but I am afraid not with much appreciable success. This failure of mine I think is partly due to the influence and antagonism of the French-speaking Abyssinians. So this leads one to suggest that the British government and British people should make it a point

14. Archives des Capuchins, (Toulouse), Mgr. Jarosseau to Lagarde, Harrar, 27 mai 1920. See also Mgr. Jarosseau to de Coppet, French Minister at Addis Abqba, Harrar, le 27 mai 1920.

15. See my paper, "The influence of the Bishop of the Capuchin Catholic mission of Harrar, Mgr. Adu Jarossean (1900-1940) on Taffari Makonnen, later Emperor Haile Sellassie." paper prepared for the conference of the Historical Society of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, May 1973.

to help the people of the country to learn English and have some English education, which I feel sure will greatly help them to appreciate and understand the British temperament, British character, British ideals, British institution, British methods of business, and above all, the British high-standard of justice and fair play. It will no doubt cost somewhat to begin with, but I think that every pound spent in this laudable undertaking will at the end return a hundredfold profit in the immediate future in more ways than one."<sup>16</sup>

And Dr. Martin concludes requesting financial help to establish an English girls school in Addis Ababa. Mr. Russell, the British representative, commenting on the above letter wrote in March 1925:

"I am in agreement with what Dr. Martin says as to the regrettably limited extent to which English is learnt here. The only opportunity for its study is provided by a Swedish mission. There is no doubt as to the truth of what Dr. Martin says respecting the anti-English bias of the comparatively numerous abyssinians educated under French Catholic auspices, whose influence nothing at present is done to counteract."<sup>17</sup>

The Foreign Office in London also felt that the matter "merits our most serious attention," as one of the minutes connected to the above letters read. But it was not felt that the British government should involve itself financially. Instead it was recommended that the American Phelps Stokes Mission to Africa should be contacted to help Dr. Martin in his project. The Phelps-Stokes<sup>18</sup> Mission was accordingly informed by the Foreign Office of the projects of Dr. Martin but the latter obtained no financial help from that Mission.

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16. F. O. 371-10875. Dr. Martin to Mr. Russell, Addis Ababa, March 6, 1925.

17. *Ibid.*; Russell to F. O., Addis Ababa, March 14, 1925.

18. The Phelps-Stokes Mission was a private association to promote education in Africa. A delegation of the mission had already visited Ethiopia in February 1924 and although they remained only four days in Addis Ababa, they were able to produce a report on the educational situation of Ethiopia where they concluded modern education would be very earnestly desired.

## The Opening of the Taffari Makonnen School, (1925) and Dr. Martin

Already in 1924 during his visit to London, Ras Taffari had contacted the Irishman Gallogly to come with his wife, who was also a teacher, to Addis Ababa to open a school for his children and relatives. Taffari chose an Irish educationalist because he was "neutral," not French or English, and thus he hoped to attract less opposition from the two rival powers. But in spite of lengthy discussions and several alterations, the contact between Gallogly and Taffari never came to be signed.<sup>19</sup> Writing on the subject in June 1925, Zaphiro, the first interpreter of the British Legation in Addis Ababa, explained that Taffari hesitated to sign the contract with Gallogly out of fear of opposition from the priesthood "who had an enormous hold" on matters of education which was always associated with religion. The Ras, Zaphiro wrote, "in introducing an English or Irish teacher for his own children, will immediately be accused by the priests that his children have changed their religion."<sup>20</sup>

In any case, in 1925, Ras Taffari "with great difficulties and against the wishes of the *abun* and the priests"<sup>21</sup> succeeded in opening an European school which took the name of Lycee Taffari Makonnen.

Dr. Charles Martin became the administrator or superintendent of the new school, and not the director as it is often claimed. The director of the school was a French gentleman by the name of Jean Guillon. And although Dr. Martin may have desired English to be the principal language of the school, in reality the French language was the more dominant even at Taffari Makonnen School. In August 1925 out of five classes three were French and two English. All the boys had to learn both languages, but while only twenty-four of them made English their principal language fifty-seven chose French. (In December of the same year there were 100 for French and 60 for English). Moreover while French was taught by two French professors, English was taught by two Ethiopian young men, one of whom studied for five years at the American Mission College of Beirut

19. F. O. 371-10875. Minute of April 18, 1925.

20. *op. cit.*; Zaphiro to F. O., June 2, 1925.

21. *Op. cit.*

and the other spent four years at the American Mission school of Khartoum. These were Ato Efreem Tewelde Medhen (now *Blata*) and Ato Mangasha Kafala.<sup>22</sup> According to Mr. Charles Bentinck (later sir) the British Minister at Addis Ababa who succeeded Mr. Russell in 1925, the English of these two young Ethiopian teachers was judged "distinctly weak."<sup>23</sup> Later a third English teacher, an Armenian (Mr. Serkis Antablian)<sup>24</sup> was employed. Dissatisfied with this situation Dr. Martin, who had no time himself, pressed on Ras Taffari to appoint real English teachers.

#### Dr. Martin and The Origins of the Empress Menen School

Dr. Martin occupied himself at the same time to open an English girl's school although womens' education at the time was very unpopular in Ethiopia. Thus in October 1925, Bentinck wrote that Dr. Martin had opened a girl's school "at his own house with 10 girls including 2 daughters of Ras Taffari," and that he himself had already moved into another house. Furthermore, we learn that Ras Taffari who took interest in the school gave Martin a field close to his own house, and a sum of twenty-five thousand dollars, with which to construct a proper school building. This school which thus started at Dr. Martin's house and later moved to the field near Taffari's palace is what a few years later became known as the "Itege Menen School."

In order to run his girl's school properly Dr. Martin expected British and American help and in this he had the strong recommendation of Mr. Bentinck: "I consider Dr. Martin's schemes highly deserving of every encouragement on our part, and I trust that British and American educational or philanthropic societies may eventually be induced to come forward, and lend their assistnce."<sup>25</sup> In December 1925, other missionary schools, other than the Swedish Mission, had started giving English lessons to Ethiopians, in Addis and elsewhere. Thus the American Medical Mission had lately started English classes for girls, and a Danish Mission supplied with American funds also taught English. But the position of the English language was still far from satisfactory,

22. Sylvia Pankhurst, "Ethiopia A Cuitural History," (London, 1955), p. 588.

23. F. O. 371-10875. Bentinck to F. O., Addis Ababa, August 5, 1925.

24. Sylvia Pankhurst, *op. cit.*, p. 588.

25. F. O. 371-10875. Bentinch to F. O., Addis Ababa. 17th Oct., 1925.

number of Abyssinian boys and girls will greatly help to bring the much needed understanding between the two countries."<sup>30</sup>

Of the five girls sent to England, one was, as we have just seen, Princess Tsehai (also called Yeshimebet, born on 13 October 1919) daughter of Ras Taffari, together with three of the daughters of Dr. Martin including Sarah & Elizabeth and a daughter of Blata Heruy<sup>31</sup> (Amsale Heruy(?)) who had until then attended the American Mission School in Addis Ababa). After their arrival in Britain Dr. Martin himself had to look for schools for the girls. Princess Tsehai was sent to Chester (in charge of an English governess Miss Lloyd Clark) with two of the daughters of Dr. Martin. The other two elder girls were sent to a school at Southsea.

After this, Dr. Martin, proceeded to the United States with two purposes: to recruit Negro teachers for which purpose he visited Harlem, and secondly, the principal reason, to try and find an American first that would undertake to build a dam on Lake Tana under the auspices of the Ethiopian government. As the Ethiopian government had already been engaged for many years in negotiations with the British government for the building of the same dam this secret trip of Dr. Martin to the United States infuriated the British government not only against the Ethiopian government and Ras Taffari but also against Dr. Martin himself. Although it was explained that the step was taken to protect Ethiopian independence in the region by having neutral engineers build the dam which the Ethiopian government intended to rent to the British government, the Foreign Office continued to express dissatisfaction on the Ethiopian attempt to bring a third power into the Lake Tana region. This incident was later directly connected with the education in England of Taffari's daughter, Princess Tsehai.

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30. F O 371-12350, Martin to Murray (London), 18th August, 1927.

31. Blata Heruy, the Foreign Minister was another anglophile who sent his children to England for education. He himself was a traditional scholar who had no European education. But in the later part of the second decade of this century Blata Heruy had started (encouraged, it would seem, by Ras Taffari to study the British society and British way of life) to take English lessons with the Swedish Missionary Karl Cederqvist who died in 1919. In 1927, it was said that Blata Heruy spoke only very little English that the British Minister of Addis Ababa needed an interpreter in order to speak to him.

when one considered the continuing supremacy of the French and the dominating position of the presumed anti-English French-speaking Ethiopians. "Dr. Martin deplores," Bentinck wrote, "the paramount position occupied by France in Abyssinia, and he continued to hope that means may be found for promoting the study of English and spreading British ideals and principles among the youth of this country. At present English comes in through the back door of the Swedish and American Missions."<sup>26</sup>

In any case Dr. Martin's girls school does not seem to have continued functioning at Dr. Martin's residence and the construction of the future Empress Menen School was not complete until 1931. And when it was completed it did not turn out to be an English school as it was originally intended by Dr. Martin (who had then taken the post of a provincial governor out of Addis) but a French school where instruction was given in French. The directresses of the school, were like the Taffari Makonnen School, of French origin (Mme. Gariocoix, Mme. Havard, Mme. Garrigue).

1926 was not a good year for Dr. Martin who lost a considerable amount of his influence and position because of an ill-fated article which he wrote in the Addis Ababa, journal, *Berhanena Salam* (Light and Peace), in June 1926, in which he asserted that there still existed in Ethiopia considerable amount of slavery, and also hinted that the border conflict with the British colonial authorities was due to the incapacity of the Ethiopian frontier governors. To admit slavery in Ethiopia, when Ras Taffari's government was fighting determinedly to disprove Italian allegations on the same subject at the League of Nations in order to disqualify Ethiopian membership, was of course neither tactful nor wise to do. The immediate storm that arose against Dr. Martin is therefore understandable. Ras Taffari himself is said to have inflicted severe reprimands on *Hakim Worqneh*. As if that was not enough Dr. Martin wrote another article on 1st July, in the same paper denying all that he had said in the previous article and giving flimsy excuses for his "mistakes." He was quite down in the estimation of his countrymen or as Maclean, the British Charge d'Affaires, wrote, he made a "poor figure." This incident was not wholly unrelated to the French-English, language supremacy struggle in Ethiopia, and the British

26. F. O. 371-10877. Bentinck to F. O., Addis Ababa, June 17, 1925.

Legation thought that the French who had always treated Martin as an anti-French British agent, did contribute to worsen the consequences of this incident. "The French minister hates Martin," Maclean wrote, "I am confident the word 'hates' is not too strong."<sup>27</sup>

### Ras Taffari Sends His Daughter to England for Education

In any case Martin seems to have soon revived from his downfall, and in 1927, he again appears as active as before. As his school for girls had stopped functioning at his residence because of lack of material help and lack of teachers, Dr. Martin seems to have influenced Taffari in July 1927 to send his daughter to England for education, together with three of his own daughters. "Being disappointed," Bentinck wrote, "that the support promised him for his girl's school was not forthcoming, Dr. Martin after waiting two and a half years decided...to send his three elder girls to England." It may be noted here that Dr. Martin had his children (Theodore, Benjamin, Yosef, Sarah, John, Charles, Leah, and David) sent to England for education. Therefore, the influence of Dr. Martin on Taffari regarding British education was certain. And in his letter to King George V, Taffari wrote:

"As the education of Children and pupils in England has a good reputation, I have sent some boys for education there.<sup>28</sup> As there are also some girls in need of education, I am sending five to England for this purpose. Among the five girls there is my own daughter and the reason why I am sending my own daughter is to set an example to the noblemen of my country and to encourage others to do so and also to reap benefit therefrom myself. As I know, you have Ethiopia in mind, I am sending my daughter to your Majesty's country and recommend her to your Majesty. I hope, you will take an interest in her."<sup>29</sup>

In forwarding the above letter Dr. Martin wrote to the Foreign Office, "I shall personally be very grateful for the assistance given me in my endeavour to bring about a real friendship and better understanding between Great Britain and Abyssinia. In my opinion, English education of a large

27. F.O. 371-11572 - Maclean to F.O. Addis Ababa, 16th September 1926.

28. F.O. 371-12350. Bentinck to F.O., August 1, 1927.

29. *Ibid*

number of Abyssinian boys and girls will greatly help to bring the much needed understanding between the two countries."<sup>30</sup>

Of the five girls sent to England, one was, as we have just seen, Princess Tsehai (also called Yeshimebet, born on 13 October 1919) daughter of Ras Taffari, together with three of the daughters of Dr. Martin including Sarah & Elizabeth and a daughter of Blata Heruy<sup>31</sup> (Amsale Heruy(?)) who had until then attended the American Mission School in Addis Ababa). After their arrival in Britain Dr. Martin himself had to look for schools for the girls. Princess Tsehai was sent to Chester (in charge of an English governess Miss Lloyd Clark) with two of the daughters of Dr. Martin. The other two elder girls were sent to a school at Southsea.

After this, Dr. Martin, proceeded to the United States with two purposes: to recruit Negro teachers for which purpose he visited Harlem, and secondly, the principal reason, to try and find an American first that would undertake to build a dam on Lake Tana under the auspices of the Ethiopian government. As the Ethiopian government had already been engaged for many years in negotiations with the British government for the building of the same dam this secret trip of Dr. Martin to the United States infuriated the British government not only against the Ethiopian government and Ras Taffari but also against Dr. Martin himself. Although it was explained that the step was taken to protect Ethiopian independence in the region by having neutral engineers build the dam which the Ethiopian government intended to rent to the British government, the Foreign Office continued to express dissatisfaction on the Ethiopian attempt to bring a third power into the Lake Tana region. This incident was later directly connected with the education in England of Taffari's daughter, Princess Tsehai.

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30. F O 371-12350, Martin to Murray (London), 18th August, 1927.

31. Blata Heruy, the Foreign Minister was another anglophile who sent his children to England for education. He himself was a traditional scholar who had no European education. But in the later part of the second decade of this century Blata Heruy had started (encouraged, it would seem, by Ras Taffari to study the British society and British way of life) to take English lessons with the Swedish Missionary Karl Cederqvist who died in 1919. In 1927, it was said that Blata Heruy spoke only very little English that the British Minister of Addis Ababa needed an interpreter in order to speak to him.



Taffari's daughter did not get the care and protection which her father had hoped she would get from the British government and the prince-regent was said to have been "much disappointed at the lack of interest, shown by the royal family and His Majesty's government, in his daughter." Ras Taffari told Bentinck that he had hoped that the British government would arrange for the attendance of his daughter at a good school suitable to her rank, "where the princes go." As things stood, the princess Tsehai was said to be neither happy nor comfortable at Chester, and Ras Taffari regretted having sent her to England against the wishes of her mother. Bentinck, therefore, concluded that unless the Foreign office was prepared to respond favourably to the exigencies of Ras Taffari, the Ras may decide to call back his child to Abyssinia, which event, the British representative considered, may prove to be a cause for British interests "to lose ground in Abyssinia."<sup>32</sup>

But the Foreign Office was unshakeable. There was no reason why the British government should engage itself in finding schools for the girls of the Abyssinian princes and chiefs, for there was no "intrinsic political importance whether the girls are educated here or not. Indeed, started on such haphazard lines, it seems very doubtful whether their education could ever be carried through with success." In any case in view of the hostile attitude of Taffari in connection with the Lake Tana negotiations as shown by the trip of Dr. Martin to the United States, the British government should not ask King George V to support Taffari's demands.<sup>33</sup> "In these circumstances," the Foreign Secretary wrote, "I should not feel justified in submitting to the King that any regard should be paid to Ras Taffari's hints, and you are authorised to make this clear to him in whatever terms you consider most appropriate. He (Taffari) should be able to appreciate the impression produced here by the fact that Dr. Martin, when the bearer of an ostensibly friendly letter to the King in which his Majesty's personal interest (in the child) was solicited, should at the same time have had in his pocket instructions to attempt and deal with another power (America) behind our backs."

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32. F. O. 371-12350 Bentinck to F. O., (Addis Ababa, November 15, 1927.

33. F. O. 371-12350 F. O. to Bentinck, 25 November, 1927.

On being informed about the British government decision Taffari was most indignant at this political use that the government was trying to make out of the education of his daughter in England. He told Bentinck "that the French had been making difficulties about his daughter having been sent to England and had reproached him with lack of friendliness." He sent his daughter to England because "he admires British character above that of other nations." He therefore hoped that the British government would stop using his child's education as a "political matter." If, however, this condition of affairs persisted he was ready to fetch his daughter back home. On the other hand if she was given proper attention and education he was ready to send another of his children to England.

King George V supported Taffari in his view that the child's education should not be mixed up with politics and in spite of the unfavourable attitude of the Foreign Office the king managed to obtain the address of Princess Tsehai whom he invited to his court on 10th March, 1928. After the audience the British king wrote to Taffari.

"It was a great pleasure to the queen and me to receive today your daughter, Princess Yashimebet, and we were charmed by her manner and appearance. She seemed in excellent health and to be very happy with Miss Clark-Lloyd, who accompanied her. I hope, she may remain in England some time in order to complete her education."<sup>34</sup>

But Taffari, although grateful to George V for receiving his daughter at his court, was not satisfied with the condition of his daughter in England. Thus in July 1928, he sent the Armenian Abraham Koeurhadjian<sup>35</sup> to London to arrange new conditions for the education of Princess Tsehai. If the Ethiopian princess was to remain in England, she should go to school having for governess Mme. Thesiger (wife of a former British minister in Addis Ababa, well known to Ras Taffari) and not with Miss Lloyd Clark. And the Foreign

34. F. O. 37-13103, King George V to Ras Taffari Buckingham Place, 10th March, 1928.

35. Mr. Abraham Koeurhadjian who had then lived in Ethiopia for more than twenty years was first the general controller of the private property of Ras Taffari; later he was appointed administrator of the Customs of Forests and Mineral Water Resources at Addis Ababa. (See his picture and biography in A. Zervos, *L'Empire d'Ethiopie* (Addis Ababa, 1935).

Office was expected to contact Mme. Thesiger in view of obtaining her acceptance to serve as governess of Taffari's daughter. If this arrangement failed, Mr. Koeurhadjian had instructions to take Princess Tsehai to Switzerland, "pour y continuer ses etudes dans une ecole, sous la surveillance d'une famille en relation avec son Altesse."<sup>36</sup> The British Foreign Office, having refused to take any part in Ras Taffari's "domestic arrangements," Princess Tsehai left England for Switzerland, where she dropped her lessons in English, to take up French courses with her governess and tutor, Lola Flad, grand-daughter of the famous missionary of that name who lived in Ethiopia for many years in the nineteenth century.

Besides sending Princess Tsehai to England Ras Taffari had at the same time seriously entertained the idea of sending his eldest son, Asfa Wossen to Britain to pursue his education.

For this purpose Taffari had asked the British government to cooperate in finding him first, a tutor who would be willing to come to Addis Ababa and initiate the young prince in British education and way of life; secondly Taffari counted on the British government to find a suitable tutor who would take charge of his son's education in England. And if the Foreign Office refused to be in any way mixed up with the education of Princess Tsehai, they were, on the other hand quite keen to see the regent's eldest son, the future Crown Prince of Ethiopia, get an English education in Britain itself, for, as the Foreign Office openly admitted "if the boy's education here were to be a success we might well stand to gain politically ... We should bear in mind that if the boy does not come home, the Italians and the French may try their best to get him."<sup>37</sup>

The foreign Office, therefore, contacted a number of people who were most likely to find the tutors Taffari wanted for his son. As far as his education in England was concerned the person recommended as tutor was the Reverend Wells. And as for the tutor to be sent to Addis Ababa Reverend Wells recommended a sub-librarian at the Bodleian Library

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36. F. O. 371-13112. A. Koeurhadjian to Bentinck (London, 25 July 1925).

37. F. O. 371-12350. Munite of 23 November, 1927.

in Oxford, who had "some knowledge of Amharic." That was Stephen Wright who as a child had read Theodore Bent's "The Sacred City of the Ethiopians" (London, 1896) and got interested in Ethiopia and taught himself the Amharic language. It is therefore understandable that Stephen Wright, the now well-known Ethiopist, should be eager to take up the post of a tutor in Addis. According to the proposed agreement Wright should come to Addis Ababa as temporary tutor of Taffari's son, "at 30 a month plus travelling expenses," and bring back the child on his return to England.<sup>38</sup>

But the project of sending the Prince Asfa Wossen to England having been dropped, following, perhaps, the departure of Princess Tsehai from England to Switzerland, Stephen Wright did not come to Addis Ababa until after the war, and then he came as an employee of the British Council.

#### **Dr. Martin and the Arrival of the First Indian Educational and Technical Team in Ethiopia**

Upon his return from his visit to India in 1930, Dr. Martin came back with a group of 18 Indians (technicians, doctors, teachers, etc.) who thus constituted the first members of that country to be incorporated in the educational and technical schemes of Ethiopia. This is important to our study in that the Indians were instrumental in promoting the use of the English language in Ethiopia. But others have wanted to associate the arrival of the Indians at Addis Ababa with a deliberate policy of the Ethiopian government to use men of colour for the introduction of western education in Ethiopia. Thus the British minister at Addis Ababa wrote in 1930:

"The most interesting features of this experiment are, on the Ethiopian side, the belief based on nationalist and financial considerations that men of colour with western education are more suitable as aids to this country in its efforts toward reform than men of the white races, and on the Indian side the evident desire to accept, even unfavourable conditions of service, provided that thereby an opening can be secured outside an overcrowded and disturbed India."<sup>39</sup>

38. *Ibid.*, F. O. to Bentinck, 14th June, 1927,

39. F. O. 371-14598. (J1869-1869-1)

To conclude our study, it may be said that the English language had indeed made considerable strides in the pre-war period (before 1935) in Ethiopia, mainly through the Scandinavian and American Protestant Mission schools<sup>40</sup> as well as through the young Ethiopians who were sent to Egypt and Britain to receive British education. Thus in all the government schools that were opened in the Ethiopian regions confining the British colonies (Sudan, Kenya and British Somaliland) such as Gore (1928) Lekemte (1929), Gojam (1934), Gondar (1934), Adowa (1935), Makalle (1935), Jijiga (1929), Asba Taffari (capital of Chercher where the governor Dr. Martin opened an English language elementary school in 1931) all had English as the language of instruction.<sup>41</sup> But as far as the official and semi-official attempts (by Dr. Martin, by British ministers at Addis Ababa, and by the British government, especially the Foreign Office) to promote the study of English in Ethiopia, were concerned the result seems to have been a failure or at least a semi-failure. In all the principal schools we have seen, in particular the history of the two schools (the Taffari Makonnen School, and the Empress Menen School) which were intended to become English schools but which turned out to be French oriented Lycees. On the whole, therefore, it would be right to say that the superiority of French as the language of instruction and diplomacy in Ethiopia, although challenged by English, remained unaltered until the Fascist occupation of 1935.

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40. There were said to be 43 such schools in the whole of Ethiopia in 1935.

41. Sylvia Pankhurst, *op. cit.*, p 535 sqq.

42. *Loc. cit.*