

Education Language and History: An Historical Background to Post-War Ethiopia

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Ethiopia, a largely mountainous country in the eastern corner of Africa, enjoys a unique position in history. Regarded by medieval Europe as the somewhat mythical Land of Prester John, and later, in the eighteenth century, as the site of Samuel Johnson's mountains of Rasselas and James Bruce's *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile*, the country, then popularly known abroad as Abyssinia, was in the 1930's the focus of international excitement as a result of Mussolini's invasion. On regaining its ancient independence, under its world famous Emperor, Haile Sellassie, its capital became in more recent times a centre of inter-African diplomacy, the headquarters of both the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the Organization of African Unity.

The educational system in Ethiopia has been profoundly moulded by the past. It owes much of its distinctive character to the fact that it is the only African country to have both remained predominantly Christian for over a millennium and a half, and to have preserved its ancient independence throughout the European Scramble for Africa. Contacts with the nearby Arab World have, however, had a strong influence in certain areas, while the activities of missionaries of various nationalities and creeds have also at various times had a by no means insignificant impact.

The Ethiopian Church, established after the conversion of the Aksumite empire, apparently by Frumentius, a shipwrecked Greek-speaking Christian from Syria, in the fourth century A.D., became in course of time a truly indigenous institution, and one which exercised immense influence on the country's every day life.

In the highlands of Christian Ethiopia, as in far away European Christendom, the church for centuries constituted the main guardian of traditional culture, and provided the only schools in the land.

The Ethiopian church schools, which have in all probability existed for more than a thousand years, are attached to individual churches and monasteries which today number over 15,000 though all have not yet been counted. The education they have so long given is primarily religious, and consisted in the first stages of the student's career in learning to read, write and recite a few Biblical texts in Geez,

aptly referred to as the "Latin of Ethiopia" in as much as it is a dead, ecclesiastical language as well as the root of all the present day Semitic languages of Ethiopia. This language, which is to be found on stone inscriptions dating back to the first centuries of the Christian era, was written in an alphabet, or more correctly syllabary, consisting of twenty-seven basic consonants each with seven different vowel combinations, or a total of 189 symbols. Amharic, which became the court language some time in the middle ages and is today the official language of Ethiopia, as well as the language of modern literature, employs an additional six basic characters or 42 symbols.

Most students on mastering the syllabary, which was often taught by perusal of the Psalms of David, abandoned their studies, but others, who were more dedicated to scholarship, proceeded to more advanced courses, which led them in due course to specialise in one or other field of traditional learning.

Though of considerable antiquity the church schools of Ethiopia receive scant attention in historical literature until relatively recent times. There are nevertheless brief passing references to education in a few of the Ethiopian royal chronicles, that of Emperor Yohannes I (1667-1682) for example stating that this sovereign "was raised carefully in wisdom and discipline, learnt the holy books, that is to say the Old and New Testaments, learnt the use of the spear and how to pull a bow, as well as riding and swimming."¹

The first writer to describe traditional education in any detail was the early nineteenth century Swiss Protestant missionary Samuel Gobat, who, writing of the youth of the peasantry, a class which constituted the vast majority of the population, observes: "After the age of 6 or 7 years, the children are considered as servants. The boys are shepherds till the age of 14 to 15, and reside with their parents; but if their parents are poor, they leave them, by their own choice, at the age of eight or nine years, in order to get their livelihood by keeping cattle elsewhere. The girls are occupied in managing the little affairs of the house, and begin to fetch water, which is always at a distance, as soon as they can walk steadily; at the age of eight or nine years they begin to fetch wood from the mountains. They do not begin to grind till they are 13 or 14 years old."

Turning to the education of this peasant class, he continued: "There are some fathers who send their children into convents, or elsewhere, to have them instructed; but there are many who will not do this, lest their children should become monks: on this account many boys desert their parents, in order to seek instruction for themselves. Some enter the house of a priest or another teacher, as servants during the day, and they receive instruction at night; others go, after their lessons are over, to get food by begging. There are also some persons, in easy circumstances, who support those children who seek instruction without the help of their parents."

1. I. Guidi, *Annales Iohannis I, Iyasu I et Bakaffa* [Louvain, 1955] p.1.

Education for the children of the aristocracy seems, however, to have been more general. "Nearly all the great men," Gobat records, "send their children into convents, to learn reading, and to repeat the Psalms from memory: this is all the education they receive." Girls had substantially fewer educational opportunities than boys. "The daughters of the higher class," the same observer notes, "learn nothing but spinning and managing the affairs of the house: there are, however, a few ladies who can read."²

Traditional church education as noted by De Jacobis, an Italian Roman Catholic missionary of the early nineteenth century, was "entirely gratuitous," the upkeep of the teachers being the responsibility of the church or monastery. The student had, however, to submit to almost incredible privations. "Without speaking of the personal service, often the most menial character rendered by the pupil, to his master, a service, however, which their filial affection for their tutors seems to make sweet and easy to them, the student leaves his home and family, carrying on his back the sack of pease or meal which is his whole subsistence during his college term; and when that is exhausted, his only resource is to beg in order to live.

Add to this, that the length of the course of study is perfectly despairing." Seven years, he said, might thus be devoted to *Zema*, or chanting, nine to *Sawasew*, or Geez dictionary and grammar, four to *gene*, or poetry, and ten to the Old and New Testaments. Civil and canonical law, astronomy and history could, he adds, also be studied, but few students had "the courage to embark on them." Many a humble church teacher, he concluded, nonetheless had "more real knowledge than the most learned professors in our European schools."³

Several writers immediately prior to the Italian invasion of 1935 have also left accounts of the traditional schools of their day. The Rev. Douglas O'Hanlon reports that "in the Christian parts of Abyssinia there is a church in almost every village. Every church has its school, which is an honoured institution. The school is the recruiting ground for the Church service, it is the mortar in the building of the Christian life of the country, and in the outlying districts it is the main missionary factor."

Describing a visit to the central province of Shoa he observes: "Church schools are nearly always in the precincts of the church, generally within the outer wall of the church green.

"The impression on a stranger is that the average teaching priest is earnest and painstaking. The buildings are small and dark, and for the most part ramshack-

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2. S. Gobat, *Journal of Three Years' Residence in Ethiopia* [London, 1834], pp. 312-13.
 3. Lady Herbert, *Abyssinia and its Apostle* [London, 1867], pp. 81-2. Vide also I. Guidi, *Vocabolario amarico-italiano* [Rome, 1901], col 23.

le, with no attempt at uniformity of design. The hours are long, writing materials, books and furniture scanty. Lessons, therefore, are largely oral and the degree of memorisation is high.

"Often the first sound that greets the visitor to an Abyssinian village," he adds, "is the chorus of voices raised in some jointly repeated lesson."⁴

C.H. Walker, a sometime British Consul, likewise gives us a glimpse of this old-time education in relatively recent days. He says: "In a big town there may be 30 boys who are under three teachers, but in a monastery town there may be as many as a hundred, and at Zeig Amal and at Addis Ababa one may find a thousand. But the children of officers will learn at home, for an officer will build a hut nearby where the Confessor will teach them the alphabet, arithmetic and the Psalter."

Turning to the popular attitude to education and the type of teachers employed he observes: "A poor father will say, 'not even for myself and my boy have I money enough. How then can I enter him in the house of a teacher?' So he will leave the boy untaught, unless his god-father demand the lad and have him instructed.

"The teacher may be a priest who is a Liq, or Professor, who knows much learning. Some of the Liguant have a medicine which they give to the boys that they remember well. Or he may be an ordinary priest or even a scribe, though the scribe they praise not overmuch, for he may work cunning and wander here and there round the town. But a priest will sit as a judge and will punish the boy who errs, crying: 'Was that what I told thee yesterday?' Pulling and twisting his ear, till he pours forth tears. Thus he will learn, perforce."⁵

Despite such frequent severity, relations between teacher and student in this essentially paternalistic society, seem to have been generally cordial.

The French ethnologist Marcel Griaule for example describes it as a typical practice for boys in Begemder province to gather in the house of their teacher on a particular saints' day and bring him cake, roasted barley and beer,⁶ while Walker says that when the student had completed his study of the Psalms of David "the teacher will send to the father, saying ('give me the reward) of good news. Thy son has finished his reading,' and the father will give him a cow or £15, and to the boy a horse or a calf or a sheep. Also the boy will go round among his kin to tell them of the good news, and to beg a dollar or a sword...

"When the pupils rise to go home, they will bless their teachers, saying, 'May God cause thy word to be heard and make thee to arrive at earth in Debra Liba-

4. D. O'Hanlon, *Features of the Abyssinian Church* [London, 1946] pp. 13-14.

5. C.H. Walker, *The Abyssinian at Home* [London, 1933], p. 12.

6. M. Griaule, "Les saints patrons en Abyssinie" *Orientalia*, [1934], pp. III, 106-7.

nos and to be evergreen like the *cibaha*. May He broaden thee as the sycamore and cause thee to shine as the moon! So the priest will bless them in turn and say, 'Take care that ye come early tomorrow.'

Though the majority of the students in church school dropped out after doing little more than learn how to read and write the more persevering proceeded to such fields as church music, poetry, theology, church history, philosophy, manuscript writing and painting, most of which disciplines had their own "school." The *Zema Bet*, or "school of music" had three main branches. In the first the student learnt *degwa*, or church music, in the second *Zemare* and *mewaset*, songs sung respectively at the end of the Eucharist and at commemorative services and funerals, and in the third *Kedase*, prayers and chants studied only by priests and deacons. The School of *Aquaquam*, literally "how to stand," gave additional training in the above branches of music, but also dealt with beating time and dancing. Two years or more might be needed to become proficient in any one of these fields.

The *Qene Bet*, or "school of poetry," provided instruction in the subtle arts of versification, while the last type of traditional school, the *Masahaf Bet*, or "school of reading," was divided into classes for the Old and New Testaments, the Fathers and special books on monastic life.⁸

Such traditional schools, like those in Europe in former times were attended by only a minority of the population. The literacy rate was therefore not high, the more so as church instruction was entirely in Geez, a dead language. There seems, however, to have been significant regional variations in literacy, in part at least because Amharic was the only living language to be written, and that literacy in consequence tended to presuppose a knowledge of that language. Gobat believed that whereas a fifth of the people in Amharic-speaking areas could "read a little" the figure in the Tigrinya-speaking north was only one in twelve.⁹ By international standards of those days this was, however, by no means low, and Blondeel, a Belgian observer, expressed the opinion at about the same time that the proportion of the population able to read and write was about the same as in Western Europe in his day.¹⁰

The civil wars of the mid-nineteenth century may well have led to a decline in standards, for a British Consul, Walter Plowden, noted in 1854 that "the number of persons that can read is diminishing daily,"¹¹ while another British observer of this time, Mansfield Parkyns, asking the question, "who can read", in Tigre,

7. Walker, op. cit., pp. 12-13.
8. E.S. Pankhurst, *Ethiopia. A Cultural History* [Woodford Green, 1955], pp. 234-66; O'Hanlon, op. cit., p. 19.
9. Gobat, op. cit., pp. 312-13.
10. E. Blondeel von Cuelebroek, *Rapport Général de Blondeel sur son expédition en Abyssinie* [Bruxelles, 1839-42], p. 64.
11. Great Britain, *Correspondence respecting Abyssinia 1844-1868* [London, 1868], p. 110.

replied: "some, but not all of the priests, the scribes, and a very few men of the highest rank."¹² The missionary Waldmeier, discussing the situation in Begemder, a generation later, took a not dissimilar view, declaring "people do not know how to read or write; this is an art known only to the priest or debterra,"¹³ the latter, it should be noted, being an order of lay clerics. Other late nineteenth century observers also emphasise the limitations of traditional education. Thus the British linguist Armbruster reported after a visit to Gojam that he had "met with a great many individuals who could read and write Amharic after a fashion, but with comparatively few who could read it fluently, and only three or four who could write it without continually making gross mistakes in spelling."¹⁴

It is therefore perhaps not surprising that Dr. Merab, an acute Georgian observer long resident in Ethiopia, should have expressed the view early in the twentieth century that there was perhaps 90% illiteracy in the country as a whole. He adds that he had reason to believe that only half the then council of Ministers could read and write with ease, that three could do neither and that two more knew no more than sign their names.¹⁵

Among the women folk, the position, he says, was even worse, for apart from the princesses those who could read and write could be counted on the fingers.¹⁶

The traditional church schools of the Christian highlands and their parallel in the Qoranic schools of the Muslim-inhabited areas to the east and west of the country. Some of these areas had enjoyed close ties with neighbouring Arabia for many hundreds of years, Ethiopia's earliest relations with Islam dating back indeed to the time of the Prophet Muhammed, several of whose followers during a period of persecution in Arabia had at their master's command found refuge in the Aksumite empire. Most of these Muslim areas had to a greater or lesser extent formed part of the Ethiopian empire of the early sixteenth century, but had later become separated from it, though they were re-integrated in the Empire by Emperor Menelek II in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The Qoranic schools, the existence of which largely escaped the notice of the travellers of former times, appear to have been culturally important for Charles Johnston, an early nineteenth century British visitor noted that "great numbers" of Somalis and Dankalis "who had never resided in towns... were able to read

12. M. Parkyns, *Life in Abyssinia* [London, 1853], I, 139.

13. T. Waldmeier, *Autobiography* [London, 1887], p. 16.

14. Great Britain, Foreign Office papers, 401/11, "General Report on Mr. Armbruster's Journey to Abyssinia."

15. P. Merab, *Impressions d'Ethiopie* [Paris, 1921-9], III, 344.

16. *Ibid*, III, 347.

and write Arabic.”¹⁷ The walled city of Harar seems to have had particularly good Qoranic schools, as was noticed by an Egyptian observer, Muhammed Moktar, who later in the century found education there “very well developed.” He reports that children learnt to read and write in small schools during the day, while many adults studied Muslim law with the Qadis, or religious leaders, in the evenings.¹⁸ Another foreign observer, the Frenchman Mountandon, declared that to the west in Jimma many of the Muslims could likewise read the Qoran in Arabic.¹⁹

The strength of orthodox Ethiopian Christianity, and to a lesser extent of Islam greatly limited the impact of European missionaries who were in consequence far less successful in Ethiopia than in many other parts of Africa. Contacts with the Portuguese began in the sixteenth century when Christopher da Gama, son of the famous Vasco, arrived with an expeditionary force to assist Emperor Lebna Dengel whose country had been largely overrun by Ahmed Gran, a Muslim rebel from Harar. The Portuguese, as the price of assisting in his defeat, attempted, but in vain, to bring the country over to the Roman Catholic faith. The most successful of the early missionaries was the Spanish Jesuit Pero Paes who three-quarters of a century later established a school at Fremona in Tigre where, according to the German historian Ludolf, he taught the children of the Portuguese then in the country, “and in a short time so measurd them, that they were able to answer to any Question propounded to them concerning the Christian Faith.” This achievement, we are told, was “a thing both unwonted and wonderful to the Habessines,”²⁰ i.e. to the Ethiopians, and a significant factor in helping Paes win the favour of Emperor Za Dengel, who, like his successor Emperor Susneyos, embraced the Church of Rome, albeit largely in the hope of obtaining Portuguese fire-arms. By 1617 Jesuits at Fremona had a seminary with sixteen Portuguese children and two sons of Ethiopian noblemen, and were giving instruction in their own houses to an unspecified number of local children; the missionaries had in addition a seminary with thirty-four youngsters in Dembea and a school for thirty-five children in Gojam. The students were taught to read and write in both Portuguese and Amharic, in which latter language one of the fathers had already translated a treatise on the alleged doctrinal errors of the Ethiopians as well as sundry religious texts. these being to all intents and purposes the first written works in Amharic.²¹ Susne-

17. C. Johnson, *Travels in Southern Abyssinia* [London, 1844], I, 422.

18. Mohammed Moktar, “Note sur le pays de Harrar,” *Bulletin de la Societe Khediviale de Geographie du Caire* [1877], I, 365.

19. G. Montandon, *Au pays Ghimirra* [Paris, 1913], p. 90.

20. J. Ludolf, *A New History of Ethipia* [London, 1684], p. 326.

21. *Letere annue del Jiapone, China, Goa et Ethiopia scritte al M.R. P. generale della Lettere annue del Jiapone, China, Goa et Ethiopia scritte al M.R.P. generale della Compagnia di Giesu (Milano, 1621)*, pp. 126-8, *Vide also Lettere annue di Ethiopia del 1624, 1625 e 1626 scritta al M.R.P. Mutio Vitelleschi Generale della Compagnia di Giesu* [Roma, 1628], pp. 72, 207, 218-19.

yos, on being converted to Catholicism, attempted to force his subjects to adopt his new faith, but this led to intense popular discontent. He found himself obliged to abandon his efforts, and abdicated in 1632 in favour of his son Fasiladas who then expelled the Jesuits, concluded agreements with the rulers of the Red Sea Ports to prevent the entry of Roman Catholic priests, and, as a chronicler declares, later "burnt the books of the *ferenje*, or Franks".²² A German Lutheran missionary, Peter Heyling, who arrived early in the reign, was nevertheless well received at the court of Fasiladas, and, as Ludolf notes, devoted himself to "the Instruction of Youth in the Greek and Hebrew Tongues, wherein he became so famous that even the Principal Nobility accounted it a singular Privilege to have their Sons educated under his Tuition."²³ Fear of Jesuit intervention nevertheless was instrumental in creating a climate of isolation which kept the country more or less effectively closed to missionary activity for the next two centuries.

Contacts with Europe were re-opened in the early nineteenth century which witnessed the advent of numerous Protestant and Roman Catholic missionaries who engaged in a certain amount of teaching. Two Protestant missionaries, Isenberg and Krapf, ran a school for 30 to 40 boys in Shoa in the 1830's while a generation later another Protestant, Flad, taught about 20 children at Awora and later at Magdala, and two of his colleagues Brandeis and Staigler had a small school at Darna.²⁴ To facilitate this schooling, which seems to have been conducted entirely in Amharic, Isenberg published the first secular works in that language: a spelling and reading book and a geography, both in 1841, and a history of the world in the following year. The Swedish Evangelical Mission also displayed considerable interest in the area, and established its first mission school at the port of Massawa in 1866,²⁵ while the Lazarists founded a boys' school at Alitena as early as 1847.²⁶

The British and Foreign Bible Society in London meanwhile began printing in Geez in 1810, when it produced the Psalter in that language, and in Amharic in 1824, when a diglot Geez-Amharic edition of the Four Gospels appeared. Geez and Amharic versions of the New Testament followed in 1825, and an Amharic Old Testament in 1836. By 1853 4,120 copies of Geez and 10,016 of Amharic texts had been produced, and thereafter print orders were steadily increased in these and other Ethiopian languages. These works were freely distributed by missionaries and other travellers but met with a mixed reception. Emperor Tewodros, in some ways the founder of modern Ethiopia, is said to have much preferred the Amharic to the Geez testaments, and observed of the former, according to Gobat, "Whe

22. R. Basset, *Etudes sur l'histoire d'Ethiopiae* (Paris, 1882), p. 138.

23. Ludolf, op. cit., pp. xxv.

24. *Les Missions Catholiques* [1875], pp. 262-3.

25. P. Stjarne, "The Swedish Evangelical Mission in Ethiopia." *Ethiopia Observer* [1960] IV, 77-8.

26. *Les Missions Catholiques* [1875], pp. 262-3.

do you bring such books which nobody understands? The translation is much better." The Abuna, or head of the church, on the other hand, took the opposite view, praising the Geez printings, and, according to Canton, the Bible Society's historian, "would not touch a copy in Amharic, a profane tongue."²⁷

Increasing foreign contacts in the first part of the nineteenth century resulted in the departure in one way or another of a handful of young Ethiopians for education abroad. One of them Mahedere Qal, was taken to Paris by the French envoy Lefebvre and was placed in a Jesuit establishment, the College Henri IV, and later attended a Protestant school in Malta before travelling for private study in England and Egypt, and is said to have spoken English and French "fairly well." Another young man of partly Armenian descent, Mercha Warque, made his way to India, and was educated at the Rev. Dr. Wilson's Missionary Establishment at Bombay where he learnt both Hindustani and English. His brother, Birru Warqe, spent several years in England in the house of a Norfolk clergyman and was reported to be fully conversant with English and Arabic. All three young men were later employed as interpreters by Emperor Tewodros, and subsequently passed into the service of his successor Emperor Yohannes IV.²⁸

After the battle of Magdala in 1868 members of the British expedition carried off with them to India a small child of four, called Warqneh, who in due course pursued medical training in Lahore, and later in Edinburgh and Glasgow, and subsequently returned to his native land towards the end of the century as its first modern physician, Dr. Workneh Martin.²⁹

Several score of youngsters were also taken to different countries by missionaries of one persuasion or another. Thus the Roman Catholic De Jacobis took 23 young men to Rome for religious studies in 1841, while a further 18 were installed in France in the College St Michel at Marseilles. Most of these students later devoted themselves to seminary work, but one of the returnees from Marseilles, Grazmacch Josef, afterwards became a prominent official of Emperor Menelik II. By 1869 the Protestants had eight boys in two missionary schools in Jerusalem and as many again, mainly Falashas or converted Jews, at their missionary institute at Chrischona in Switzerland. Students of that institution included Mikael Aragawi, a

27. W. Canton, *A History of the British and Foreign Bible Society* [London, 1904-10], II, 23, 277, III, 267-70. Vide also W.D. Veitch, *Notes from the Journal of J.M. Flad* [London, 1860], pp. 34, 77, 82-3.

28. E.A. De Cosson, *The Cradle of the Blue Nile* [London, 1877], II, 52-3, 55; J.M. Flad, *60 Jahre in der Mission unter den Falaschas in Abessinien* (Basel, 1922), p. 52; Earl of Mayo, *Sport in Abyssinia* [London, 1876], p. 40; G.A. Henty, *The March to Magdala* [London, 1868], p. 263.

29. *New Times and Ethiopia News*, 21, 11, 1936, 7.9.1940, 14.2, 1940, 22.8.1942, 25.10, 1952.

converted Falasha who was later active in missionary work as well as in the editing of the Amharic translation of the Bible, and Gabru Desta who subsequently became a notable political figure of the reigns of Emperors Menelik and Haile Sellassie. The Swedish Evangelical Mission in 1873 brought to Sweden Onessinus Nesib, an ex-slave who later became a translator of the Bible, the first of five Ethiopians to be ordained in Sweden in the next decade or so, while the French Semitic scholar Halevy took a Falasha, Alaqa Daniel, to Egypt for Rabbinical studies, and the Russian adventurer Ashinoff had an Ethiopian boy and girl educated in Moscow in a monastery and nunnery respectively.³⁰ By the latter part of the century Ethiopia thus possessed a small but significant number of persons who had received education in a variety of foreign countries.

Missionary education, conceived as it was primarily to convert the student or to qualify him for the conversion of others, naturally made little appeal to most orthodox Christian rulers of Ethiopia who were in the main content with the traditional schools of the church. For many countries, indeed ever since the advent of fire-arms in neighbouring lands placed the country in a position of military inferiority, there were, however, rulers who realised the need for a measure of foreign training in the military sphere, though most of them until the time of Emperor Tewodros saw the solution of their difficulties in the import of foreign specialists rather than in the education of native Ethiopians.³¹ The fifteenth century Emperor Yeshaq I is, however, known to have used a Turk from Upper Egypt, Tabunga Mufriq, to train his army and to instruct it in the making of "Greek fire," as well as a Copt from Cairo, Fakhr ad-Dowla, also for the training of the soldiers.³²

Emperor Tewodros, though sharing the military preoccupations of former rulers, seems to have realised to a greater extent the possibility of training his compatriots in skills hitherto largely monopolised by foreigners. Even before becoming Emperor he had employed some Turks and a half Greek, half Italian called Dominico to instruct his soldiers in modern methods of warfare, and later entrusted this work to Bell, an English adventurer. Tewodros likewise appealed to the British Government to send him "instructors" as well as engineers, in order, as he said, to make his country "civilised." In requesting gunsmiths from Britain he expressly observed that they should "teach us and return," and made the same point in a letter to the British envoy Rassam in which he declared: "If they wish to remain in my country, I shall make them most happy, But, if they, after having taught (sic) my people their arts for some years, wish to return to their country, I shall, through the power of God, give them a splendid pay." The idea of teaching seems to have

30. R. Pankhurst, "The Foundations of Education, Printing, Newspapers Book Production, Libraries and Literacy in Ethiopia," *Ethiopia Observer* [1962], VI, 253-4.

31. R. Pankhurst, "Misoneism and Innovation in Ethiopian History," *Ethiopia Observer* [1964], VII, 288-90.

32. E.A. Wallis Budge, *A History of Ethiopia* [London, 1928], I, 302.

also been in his mind when he agreed to receive a group of Protestant missionary craftsmen. Dufton, a British observer, recalls that this Emperor entrusted them with "several Gallas... for instruction in mechanical arts," that after a few years "the Abyssinians were beginning to profit by inter-course with these artisans," and that Tewodros "also contemplated sending natives to England and France for the purpose of learning useful trades."³³

A decade or so after the death of Tewodros the Scramble for Africa led to the acquisition by the European powers of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden coast of Africa which had been under Egyptian and previously Turkish rule. The Italians in particular occupied the port of Massawa in 1885 and a couple of years later began to penetrate northern Ethiopia territory where they carved out their colony of Eritrea which came into formal existence in 1890. The colony, which had long had traditional church schools like those already described, became an integral part of Ethiopia after World War II and is therefore of direct relevance to this study. Eritrea was the site of a considerable amount of missionary education work by the Swedish Evangelical Mission which established a boys' school at the Eritrean capital of Asmara in 1897. Education was partly in the local language, Tigrinya, and partly in Italian, the language of the occupying power, and courses were given in typography, bookbinding and carpentry. Another school for boys was set up at Gheleb in the Muslim country to the west, and two girls' schools, with emphasis on spinning, needlework and house-work, at Belessa and Addi Ugri both on the Christian plateau; by 1905 the mission had about a hundred students at these and several smaller schools.³⁴

The Roman Catholic Lazarists were also active. Establishing themselves at Keren in the west as early as 1872 they established a seminary there which by 1880 had some 40 inmates. The missionaries at Keren also ran a mixed school and an orphanage, with enrolments of 50 and 35 students respectively, as well as a boys' school at Akkur in Akele Guzay province where 20 children were taught to read and write both Amharic and Tigrinya, the brightest students being sent in due course to the seminary at Keren.³⁵ The Lazarists, because they were French, were, however, regarded with disfavour by the Italian authorities and were expelled from the colony in 1894.³⁶ The Italian Government at this time took little interest in

33. *Correspondence respecting Abyssinia*, pp. 76, 143, 568; H. Dufton, *Narrative of a Journey through Abyssinia* [London, 1867], pp. 165-7, 183-4; H. Rasam, *Narrative of the British Mission to Theodore* [London, 1869], II, 101, 472, 478, 484.

34. J. Iwarson and A. Tron, *Notizie storiche e varie sul. missione evangelica Svedese dell' Eritrea* [Asmara, 1918], pp. 25-7, 29, 31-2, 41; R. Perini, *Di qua del Mareb*, [Firenze, 1905], pp. 350-2.

35. F.L. James, *The Wild Tribes of the Soudan* [London, 1883], pp. 241-3, J.B. Piolet, *Les missions catholiques au XIX siecle* [Paris, n.d.], II, 21, 36, 39-40, 42, 77.

36. C. De la Jonquiere, *Les italiens en Erythree* [Paris, 1895], pp. 199-211.

education other than for Italian children, but gave rudimentary courses in Italian to their *askari*, or native troops, who were also taught a little Arabic, Amharic, arithmetic and geography.³⁷

In independent Ethiopia meanwhile the ideas of Emperor Tewodros on education, as on several other aspects of government policy, appear to have exercised a significant influence on Emperor Menelik who may with justice be termed the founder of the modern Ethiopian State. In the last decade or so of the century he despatched the first students ever to be sent abroad by an Ethiopian ruler. Three of them, including Afaworq Gabra Iyasus, later a prominent Ethiopian intellectual and author, went to Switzerland in the care of the Emperor's Swiss adviser Alfred Ilg, and, after spending some time in Neuchatel, made their way to Italy where they studied in Turin. Six other young men, the most prominent of whom was Takla Hawaryat, subsequently a leading Government official, were sent to Russia, a country then much favoured in Ethiopia because of its orthodox religion and the sympathy it had shown at the time of Menelik's conflict with Italy. At least two other students went to Germany, while Dr. Workneh Martin, who had spent some time in Burma, arranged for the education there of five of his compatriots. The Emperor's attitude was clearly revealed in a report by Skinner, the first United States envoy, who had discussed the possibility of sending Ethiopians for study in America, and quotes Menelik as observing: "our young men must be educated."³⁸ The sovereign's view, as summed up by Ashaber Gabra Haywat, a foreign educated Ethiopian of the ensuing generations, was that Ethiopia needed educated people "to ensure our peace, to reconstruct our country and to enable it to exist as a great nation in face of the European powers."³⁹

The first significant steps for the creation of modern education in the country itself were taken in the first years of the twentieth century when Menelik established a school at the palace. This educational institution, according to the German envoy Rosen, was run by one of the Emperor's nobles, Kenyazmach Ibsa, and attended by a number of young courtiers who were instructed in good manners, as well as reading, writing, calligraphy, religion, Ethiopian history, law and Geez.⁴⁰

A few years later the Emperor, who was clearly aware of the inadequacy of this first school, decided to import teachers from abroad. He was faced, as Mahtama Sellassie notes, by strong opposition from the Church.⁴¹ and above all by Abuna

37. O. Baratieri, *Memoires d'Afrique* [Paris, 1899], pp. 172-3.

38. R. Pankhurst, "The Foundations of Education, Printing, Newspapers, Book Production, Libraries and Literacy in Ethiopia," pp. 257-8; R.P. Skinfler, *Abyssinia of Today* [London, 1906], pp. 101-2.

39. Achaber Gabre Hiot, *La verite sur l'Ethiopie* [Lausanne, 1931], p. 32.

40. E. Rosen, *Eine deutsche Gesandtschaft in Abessinien* [Leipzig, 1907], p. 267.

41. Mahtama Sellase Walde Masqal, *Zekra Nagar* [Addis Ababa, 1942, E.C.] p. 616

Matheos its Egyptian head, but to overcome objections from that quarter adopted the diplomatic policy of recruiting teachers from among the Copts of Egypt. In 1906 some ten Copts arrived, and were stationed at Addis Ababa, Harar, Ankober, and Dessie, under the general direction of one of their number, Professor Hanna Saleb Bey.

Ethiopia's first Government - operated modern school, the Ecole Imperiale Menelik II, was opened by the Emperor in October, 1908. In accordance with the then practice in Egypt the language of instruction was French, which was also the most popular subject with the students, who nevertheless also studied English, Italian and Amharic, as well as mathematics, science, physical training and sports. Schooling was open to any one who could read and write Amharic. Board and lodging was entirely free, and there was no age limit, many students being indeed married. The subsequent Phelps Stokes mission of 1924 described attendance however, as "the worst in the world".⁴²

Menelik also established Ethiopia's first provincial school which was set up, also in 1908, in Harar, and in the following year Hanna Salib was appointed Director of Education.⁴³

Another school which had come into existence shortly earlier in 1907 was established by the French community in Addis Ababa. Intended primarily for Ethiopian children it was run by the Brothers of St Gabriel until 1910 when it was taken over by the Alliance Francaise, an Ecole Francaise being formally opened in 1912. Instruction was in French but the students spent one hour a day on Amharic. A similar school was also instituted at Dire Dawa.⁴⁴

The reign of Menelik was significant also in being marked by major developments in the field of non-Government education. Dr. Merab says that during this period about a hundred private schools sprung up in the capital, Addis Ababa, where large numbers of children were taught to read and write. Such schools were usually held in the open air with the students sitting on sheepskins which they brought every morning and took away in the evening. There were also several boarding schools for children whose parents wished to be free of them or lived far from the capital. In either type of school the teacher would be surrounded by perhaps thirty students who learnt to read by shouting or singing aloud, the primer

42. Guebree Sellassie, *Chronique du regne de Menelik II* [Paris, 1930-2], II, 530; Merab, op. cit., II, 127-8; T.J. Jones, *Education in East Africa* [London, n.d.] p. 326; A. Zervos, *L'empire d'Ethiopie* [Alexandria, 1936], p. 224; C.F. Rey, *Unconquered Abyssinia* [London, 1923], p. 157; L. Farago, *Abyssinia on the Eve* [London, 1935], p. 170.

43. E.S. Pankhurst, op. cit., pp. 534-5.

44. Merab, op. cit., II, 125-7; Jones, op. cit., p. 327; Zervos, op. cit., 439.

as in other traditional-type schools being almost invariably the Psalms of David. Groups of four or five students would teach each other to spell while looking at a single book. Instruction was generally free, the teachers being paid sometimes by the Government, sometimes by the church, and sometimes by a rich or pious philanthropist. The teacher, who was usually an old priest, and, according to Merab sometimes could not even write, would normally receive no more than six or ten Maria Theresa dollars a year, besides food and clothing. Self-respecting parents, who could afford to do so, also in many cases employed their own teacher who would be treated as a member of the family.⁴⁵

Girls' education, however was still in a very poor state, Merab noting that few even among rich families were willing to employ a priest to educate their daughters.

It was popularly believed, he said, that an educated woman would not look after the house, and prejudiced persons even claimed that the husband of a wife who could read would never live long for his spouse would resort to curses or other wicked practices to kill him. One Ethiopian when asked why he did not educate his only daughter put forward, however, another view, replying: "Where have I the money to pay a priest or a *debtera* to teach my daughter, and to buy a eunuch to supervise the priest or *debtera*."⁴⁶

Other significant developments of these years included the introduction by the Emperor of the first printing press,⁴⁷ the production by a foreign educated Ethiopian, Mikael Berru, of the first mathematics book in Amharic,⁴⁸ and the founding of the first Amharic newspaper *Aimro*.⁴⁹ There was also extensive import of publications of the British and Foreign Bible Society in most Ethiopian languages. Menelik is said to have taken great interest in this development, and in 1873, after distributing Amharic and Gallinya Bibles to his troops, wrote to the Society, declaring: "Everywhere my soldiers are sitting on the ground, spelling or reading."⁵⁰

The death of Menelik, in 1913, deprived the country of the force which had driven a largely unwilling country along the path of modernisation. The impetus for advance in education as in other fields was therefore largely lost. The European

45. Merab, op. cit., II, 127-8.

46. *ibid*, III, 347.

47. R. Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia 1800-1935* [Addis Ababa, 1968], pp. 676-7.

48. M. Cohen, "La naissance d'une littérature imprimée en amharique," *Journal Asiatique* [1915], CCVI, *passim*.

R. Pankhurst, "The Foundations of Education, Printing, Newspapers Book Production, Libraries and Literacy in Ethiopia," p. 262.

50. Canton, op. cit., III, 271, 274.

missionaries, on the other hand, were increasingly active, particularly after World War I, with the result that the education they provided became increasingly more widely diffused than government education as is clear for example from the Phelps-Stokes report of 1924. The Lazarists by then operated two boys' schools, with enrolments of about 70 pupils, at Alitena and Gula, and two girls' schools, at Addis Ababa and Alitena, with 50 and 30 students respectively: instruction, which was in French and Amharic, was entirely free. The Capuchins ran seven secondary schools, with 160 men and 120 women students, 24 primary schools with 800 boys and 360 girls, and 14 orphanages with 434 inmates.

The Istituto della Consolata di Torino had two primary schools for boys in Kaffa with an attendance of 110. Other Roman Catholic schools of some size were to be found in Addis Ababa, Harar, Dire Dawa and Sofi, while according to the report there were also "a considerable number" of schools of this denomination in the interior though the majority were "small out-schools." On the Lutheran side the Swedish Evangelical Mission ran eight schools, the three most important having a total of 115 students. The school in Addis Ababa, the largest of all, had 85 student and gave instruction in Amharic, Gallinya, English and French, as well as religious knowledge, church history, arithmetic, geometry, singing and gymnastics and, in the case of girls, needle-work. Parents paid fees according to their capacity. The Swedish Friends of the Bible Mission had three schools with an enrolment of 125 students. The majority were in Addis Ababa where a school for boys had been established in 1921 and a girls' school in the following year. The former were taught by the headmaster in English and French and by the Ethiopian staff in Amharic, while the latter received their schooling in Amharic alone; the curriculum in both cases was very similar to that of the Evangelical Mission school. The Seventh Day Adventists had a school for 60 students in Addis Ababa and a smaller institution at Addis Alem, both established in 1923, giving instruction entirely in Amharic, some of the teachers working with the aid of interpreters. Instruction was free, though parents who could afford to do so were expected to pay for the board and lodging. Courses given included reading, writing, arithmetic, hygiene, drawing, gymnastics and singing. The last missionary group operating at this time was the United Presbyterian Church of North America which had established a school at Sayo in 1922 where some 80 students were taught exclusively in Gallinya.⁵¹

Missionary education, though extensive, was on the whole much inferior to that given in the Menelik school, and was not in great vogue in Government circles, Ashaber Gabra Haywat noting that the graduates of mission schools seldom rose above the level of the clerks and interpreters, and were frequently almost devoid of patriotic sentiment.⁵²

51. World Dominion Press, *Light and Darkness in East Africa* [London, 1927] p. 184; Jones, op. cit., 324, 327-30; S. Bergsma, *Rainbow Zmpire* [Grand Rapids, 1932], pp. 269-70, 274.

52. Achaber Gabre Hiot, op.cit., pp. 61-2.

The advent of Ras Tafari Makonnen (the future Emperor Haile Sellassie) as Regent and Heir to the Throne in 1916 was an important event in the history of Ethiopian education, as of modernisation in general. Himself a graduate of the Menelik school he took a lively interest in the furtherance of education, and as early as 1923 established his own printing press on which he issued his own newspaper *Berhanena Salam*, literally "Light and Peace," and later various educational and other works.⁵³

In 1927 he opened the Tafari Makonnen School, despite opposition from traditionalists, who, according to a British observer Charles Rey, had delayed the project for a couple of years. In his opening speech the Regent declared that the time had passed for mere lip service to their country, and that the crying need of the people was for education, without which they could not maintain their independence. The proof of real patriotism, he declared, was therefore the founding of schools. Progress he averred, could be carried out only little by little; for his own part he had built the school as a beginning and as an example, and appealed to the wealthy among the people to follow.

The Tafari Makonnen school, which cost 430,000 Maria Theresa dollars to build and soon had an annual expenditure over 80,000 dollars, was both more spacious and more modern than the old Menelik school, and the education given was markedly more French orientated. The school had a succession of French head masters, and students attended the French Legation annually to sit for the French Government's examination of competence in primary studies. There were, however, two streams of instruction, one in French and the other English: the former, in 1928-9, was followed by 124 students, and the latter by 76. Though most of the instruction was in French there was also a smaller stream of students who studied in English, the two groups in 1928-9 numbering 124 and 76 respectively. The curriculum included French, English, Arabic, mathematics, chemistry, physics, history, gymnastics and sport.

Most of the teaching staff was made up of Frenchmen and French-speaking Lebanese, but there were also several Ethiopians who taught Amharic and elementary French. The richer boarders paid nine Maria Theresa dollars a month, though the poorer students were fed and educated at the founder's expense, a monthly allowance being indeed later paid to each student. This was needed, according to Merab, not only to meet the student's expenses, but also to overcome the still widespread parental opposition to education.⁵⁴ To meet this and other expenditure the first education tax, 6 per cent *ad valorem* on all imports and exports

53. Cohen, op. cit., p. 350; C.F. Rey, *In the Country of the Blue Nile* [London, 1927] pp. 28-9.

54. Rey, *In the Country of the Blue Nile* p. 210; Zervos, op. cit., pp. 223-4; E.S. Pankhurst, op. cit., pp. 535, 586-9; E.J. Bartleet, *In the Land of Sheba*, [Birmingham, 1934] pp. 22, 48, 57; Rey, *In the Country of the Blue Nile*, p. 30; Merab, op. cit., III, 347.

was introduced in 1926, and by 1929-30 produced a revenue of 163,874 Maria Theresa dollars.⁵⁵ Other educational developments of these years included the establishment of a school in Addis Ababa for freed slaves in 1927,⁵⁶ and St George's school, also in the capital, in 1929. The latter institution, which was under the direction of a Swiss schoolmaster, gave free education in French to about 200 students.⁵⁷ Between 1928 and 1929 provincial schools were likewise established at Dessie, Dire Dawa, Jigjiga and Lekempti. The first of these schools had French as its language of instruction, the second French and English, and the remaining two English.⁵⁸

The development of Ethiopian education was further accelerated after Emperor Haile Sellassie's coronation in 1930. The new Emperor, whose principal objective was the creation of modern government, established a Ministry of Education and Fine Arts in the same year, the first Minister being Blattengetta Sahla Sedalu, a graduate of the Menelik school.⁵⁹ The Ministry was allocated two per cent of the Treasury's revenue in addition to the afore-mentioned education tax. The Emperor gave orders at about the same time that soldiers should learn to read and write, and that the priests should busy themselves by instructing the youth.⁶⁰ An educational adviser, Professor Ernest Work formerly of Muskingham College in the United States, was appointed, and in due course drew up a report envisaging a system of six years of primary, six years of secondary, and four years of university education, with special emphasis on teachers' training and agriculture. The basic problem as Work admitted, was, however, that there were no teachers to implement the plan.⁶¹

Notwithstanding many difficulties the next five years witnessed hitherto unprecedented educational advance, seven Government schools being established in the capital and a further eight in the provinces.

The first of these schools to be set up, in 1930, was the Lycee Haile Sellassie I which was designed to give technical and linguistic training to about 100 students. Instruction was in French, and the subjects studied included mathematics, physics, chemistry, civil engineering, veterinary science, and modern languages.⁶²

55. *Rey In the Country of the Blue Nile*, p. 195; G. Mackereth, *Economic Conditions in Ethiopia* [London, 1932], p. 24.

56. N. Norden, *Africa's Last Empire* [London, 1930], p. 283; Zervos, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

57. Zervos, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

58. *ibid.*, p. 441.

59. *ibid.*, pp. 231-2

60. General Virgin, *The Abyssinia I Knew* [London, 1936], p. 54.

61. W.J. Makin, *War over Abyssinia* [London, 1935], p. 104.

62. Zervos, *op.cit.*, p. 241.

The modern education of girls began in the following year, 1931, when the Empress Menen founded the girls' school which bore her name. Students, who by 1935 numbered about 80, followed their courses in French, had a succession of French headmistresses, and sat at the French Legation for the French certificate in primary studies. Subjects taught comprised science, mathematics, drawing, household management and physical training.⁶³

The school of the Redeemer for Orphans, which gave free education in both French and Amharic to about a hundred male students, was established in 1932, subjects taught including science, mathematics, smithcraft, shoe-making and other trades.⁶⁴

A Teacher Training School and a Boy Scouts' School, both employing French as the language of instruction, were established in 1934, and an art school, the Academie des Beaux Arts, came into existence at about the same time under the direction of an Ethiopian painter, Aganew Ingida, who had studied in Paris.⁶⁵

Progress had meanwhile also been achieved in the field of provincial education where schools using French as the medium of instruction were set up at Harar, Ambo, Jimma and Salale, and, using English, at Asba Tafari, Gondar. Debra Marqos, Adowa and Maqale.⁶⁶

Special schools, intended primarily for the children of Addis Ababa's foreign community were founded in this period by the Greeks, Armenians and Indians. The Greek school, the largest, had 250 students in 1935.⁶⁷

While these developments were taking place in the country increasing numbers of students were being sent by the Government abroad or encouraged to go there at their own expense. Students sponsored by the Government went to schools or colleges in three Middle Eastern countries, Egypt, Lebanon and the Sudan, from which many proceeded to universities in Europe or America. Others went directly to France, Britain, Italy, Germany, Switzerland or the United States. At least twenty students went in this way to Egypt and as many to Lebanon, while half a dozen or more to the Sudan. The largest proportion, about sixty, including a good number of future Ministers, went to France, some twenty, among them the children of at least two prominent Ethiopian statesmen, to Britain ten, including a daughter of the Emperor and four other girls, to Switzerland, nine to the United States,

63. *ibid*, pp. 224-5.

64. *ibid*, pp. 225-6.

65. E.S. Pankhurst, *op. cit.*, pp. 536, 703; Farago, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-17, 189; Virgin, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

66. Zervos, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

67. *ibid*, pp. 226, 463, 496.

another nine to Italy, two each to Germany and Belgium, and one to Spain.⁶⁸ Subjects studied by these pioneering students included medicine, veterinary science, engineering, law, pedagogy, economics, literature, painting, journalism, and aviation, as well as military science, no less than thirteen students being enrolled at the French army school at St. Cyr.⁶⁹ In addition to these young men and women sponsored by the Government about forty Roman Catholics, many of them from Eritrea went to the Vatican, under missionary auspices, while twenty-five Falashas were taken by Jewish funds to various parts of Europe where some followed Rabbinic studies and other a variety of practical subjects, including medicine, printing, weaving, carpentry and mechanics.⁷⁰

Pre-war Ethiopia had thus laid the foundations of modern education, albeit on a modest scale, around 4,000 children attending school in the last year of peace. Schools, it should be emphasised, were open, wherever they existed, to children more or less irrespective of regional or ethnic background, an official history of the Tafari Makonnen school noting in passing for example that in 1925-6 there arrived 30 boys from Walaga and 18 from Gojam.⁷¹

Schools were thus accepted as contributing to the nation-building process. It was for this reason that Amharic, as will have been noted, was the sole Ethiopian language to be employed in Government schools, though the need for foreign contacts as well as dependence on foreign teachers and textbooks, resulted in the extensive employment of French and to a lesser extent of English as the language of instruction.

The decade or so prior to the Italian invasion was characterised by significant advances in literacy as well as education. Christine Sandford, a British resident of long standing, claims to have discerned a steady rise in literacy during this period. "It was quite remarkable," she notes, "that whereas in 1920 the boy on the household staff who could read and write was a notable exception, in 1935 among the same society there were few men and boys who had not mastered the elementary processes of reading and writing the Amharic script."⁷² This view was accepted by a British report of 1932 which commented that the level of education, though "not high", was nevertheless "higher than usual" in countries of a similar stage of evolution. A Swedish missionary, Eriksson, agreed that "the number of persons able to read is definitely increasing," but expressed the fear that youngsters going

68. R. Pankhurst, "The Foundations of Education, Printing, Newspapers Book Production, Libraries and Literacy in Ethiopia," pp. 272-5.

69. C. Sandford, *Ethiopia under Haile Sellassie* [London, 1946], p. 69.

70. R. Pankhurst, "The Foundations of Education, Printing, Newspapers, Book Production, Libraries and Literacy in Ethiopia," pp. 277-8.

71. E.S. Pankhurst, *op. cit.*, p. 588.

72. Sandford, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

to school "often acquire a love of town life; very few find their way back to their villages."⁷³ Education before the war was thus already beginning to effect a significant transformation of society.

The Italian invasion of 1935 brought Ethiopia's pre-war education largely to a halt, for though the traditional church schools seem to have been virtually unaffected, the Government schools were closed down, and in many cases converted for the schooling of Italian children.

Italian policy in Eritrea had been based since as early as 1907 on the principle of different schools for Italians and "subjects."⁷⁴ After the advent of fascism in Italy in 1922 this policy had been accentuated. Difficulties of all kinds had been placed on the teaching activities of the Swedish missionaries in Eritrea.⁷⁵ Education for "natives" above the sixth grade was brought to an end, the earlier established Eritrean "medium schools" being suppressed, on the grounds, as an official report stated, that they created "misunderstandings" among the "natives" whose aspirations were "many many times in excess of their status."⁷⁶ Schools for "half-castes" were later also closed down, it being decreed by law that such persons, who were forbidden to bear the names of their European parents, or to be educated at their expense, could be accepted only in "native" schools.⁷⁷

Fascist philosophy held that schooling for "natives" should in fact be "rigidly circumscribed" to prevent them developing subversive ideas or a training which would enable them to enter occupations reserved for "nationals," i.e. Italians. Thus Andrea Festa, director of Government primary education in the then Italian colony of Eritrea, explained in 1934 to the Second Congress of Colonial Studies in Florence that for the "native pupil" to become a "conscious propagandist" of Italian civilization, let alone "a conscious militiaman in the shade of our flag," it was necessary to abolish from the "native" syllabus such subjects as the history of the Italian Risorgimento, as well as "all such ideas" as were "unnecessary or at in any way unsuited to the modest possibilities of the native."⁷⁸

After their occupation of Addis Ababa in May 1936 the Italians, as earlier in Eritrea, devoted a large proportion of their attention to the education of Italian

73. Mackereth, op. cit., p. 17; O. Eriksson, "Education in Abyssinia," *Africa* [1932] V, 342.

74. Italy, *Raccolta ufficiale della leggi e dei decreti del regno d'Italia* [Rome, 1909], I, 253-4.

75. Wrl'd Dominion Press, op. cit., pp. 185-6; Four Power Commission of Investigation for the Former Italian Colonies, *Report on Eritrea* [London] 1948], Appendices 84, 85, 86.

76. A. Festa, "Le istituzioni educative in Eritrea." Centro di studi Cononili, *Atti del Secondo Congresso di Studi Cononiali* [Firenze, 1936], II, 294.

77. *Giornale Ufficiale del Governo Generale dell' Africa Orientale Italiana* [1940], V. 606.

78. Festa, op. cit., p. 295.

children, a matter of no small concern to them as they considered their Empire as intended for large-scale European settlement. The old Tafari Makonnen school for example was split up into an academic and a technical school for Italians.⁷⁹ while various other exclusively Italian institutions came into existence which have no relevance to the present study.

The Italians, who, unlike the previous Ethiopian Government, had no interest in national unity, decided from the start on rejecting any kind of national language for Ethiopia. They laid down by an edict of 1936 that teaching should be in the main local language of the six administrative units of their East African Empire, namely Tigrinya in Eritrea, Amharic in Amhara, Amharic and Gallinya in Addis Ababa, Harari and Gallinya in Harar, Gallinya and Kafficho in Galla-Sidama, and Somali in Somalia, the Governor-General being empowered to establish the use of any other local language by decree. It was provided at the same time that Arabic should be used in addition in all schools in Muslim areas.⁸⁰

Fascist educational policy also differed from that of the old Ethiopian Government, whose schools had been open to all in that it was based on the principle of a rigid racial discrimination for the "defence" of the Italian race and its prestige. This theory was clearly stated by the Italian dictator Mussolini in a widely quoted speech at Trieste in 1938 in which he declared: "history teaches us that empires are conquered with arms, but are held by prestige. To maintain prestige we must have a strict and clear racial consciousness, which will establish not only differences but also absolute superiority."⁸¹ The application of this thesis was expounded by Giuseppe Fabbri, editor of an Italian publication entitled *Etiopia*, in which he argued that when of old Agricola had educated the children of the native chiefs of Britain he had "betrayed Rome." To prevent a similar fate befalling Mussolini's empire in Africa he urged that the "native" be excluded from any kind of participation in government activity, and declared:

"We are opposed to the invasion of colonial offices by native officials or employees, because this constitutes a formidable danger. When they see themselves invested with a function which we ourselves carry out their mentality leads them to consider themselves our equals.

"Moreover the native mass always tends to admire this kind of aristocracy of their own race, thus producing noxious germs fatal to our empire.

"The office must seem a mysterious place for the native where the white man officiates as at an altar, and the documents encased in the book-shelves must have

79. "La costruzione dell' impero," *Gli Anàli dell' Africa Italiana* [1939], III No. 7, 681.

80. Italy, Ministero delle Colonie, *Bollettino Ufficiale* [1936], p. 315.

81. "La politica di razza," *Gli Anàli dell' Africa Italiana* [1939], II, No. 3, 70; "Razza e impero," *Etiopia* [1938], II, No. 11-12, p.2.

put in contact with such instruments of civilization that the natives cease to feel the the appearance of sacred papers which the natives cannot touch. It is when they are Put in contact with such instruments of civilization that the natives cease to feel the distance between us and them. It in fact begins a gradual process of assimilation, which produces grave, if not fatal, consequences for our supremacy, because if it is true that our natural racial superiority remains it is nevertheless true that the values of our race are affected at the most vulnerable point: prestige."⁸²

Further to prevent such feared insubordination fascist education placed very considerable emphasis on political indoctrination, as was noted by Polson Newman a British observer of this time, who avers that "loyalty to the King-Emperor and the Duce takes a prominent part in school life."⁸³ Text -books were accordingly specially written for the "natives" and contained injunctions such as the following:

"O children of Ethiopia, love the three colours of the Italian flag, salute it, raising your right hand towards it, and promise to serve it with faithfulness and honour."⁸⁴

"Or again: "O children of Ethiopia, you must feel proud to belong to the great Italian nation, and to work under the insignia of the lictor's fascio."⁸⁵

Another text-book informed the "native" student that "to the Duce who watches you with his profound, immovable and scrutinizing eyes, you must say, raising the arm and stretching out the hand... 'I will always be at your orders'".⁸⁶

Italian policy, though expressly designed, as Polson Newman says, to avoid "over-educating natives,"⁸⁷ led to the establishment of small elementary schools at a score or more provincial towns which had hitherto been without Government schools or had been served only by mission establishments.

Such centres included Holetta, Addis Alem, Debra Berhan, Debra Sina, Fiche and Mendida in Shoa province, Aksum, Abbi Abdi, Hauzen, Entecho, and Azbi in the north, besides several others in Eritrea, Adigrat, Enda Medhane Alem, Amba Alagi, Mai Chew, Qoram, Waldea and Lake Haik on the Asmara Addis Ababa

82. G. Fabbri, "Razze domino", *Etiopia* [1938], II, No. 1-12. pp. 20-1.

83. E.W. Polson Newman, *The New Abyssinia* [London, 1938], p. 110.

84. Italy, Ministero dell' Africa Italiana, Scuole elementari per indigeni dell' Africa Orientale Italiana, *I Libro della seconda classe* [Firenze, n.d.] pp. 43-4. vide also R. vide also R. Pankhurst, "The Textbooks of Italian Colonial Africa," *Ethiopia Observer* [1968], XI, 327-32.

85. Ministero dell' Africa Italiana, op. cit., p. 216.

86. Ministero dell' Africa Italiana, Scuole elementari per indigeni, *Il libro delle terza classe* [Firenze, 1937], pp. 29-30.

87. Polson Newman, op. cit., pp. 18-19.

highway, Debra Tabor and Debarek in the north-west, and Agaro, Bonga, Gimbi and Gore in the west.⁸⁸

Teaching, as Newman explains, was "given in Italian and the native language or languages... and there is always an interpreter... The school teachers are chiefly Eritreans supervised by Italians, who are in many cases priests or nuns with a knowledge of the country."⁸⁹ School attendances, as Italian reports state, were, however, very poor, as many children dropped out of the schools either to return to their homes or to become interpreters for the Italians,⁹⁰ while the low level of education even among Italian "native" troops was later recognised by George Steer, a British officer in charge of Allied wartime propaganda, who recalls that in preparing leaflets to be dropped by air "we were writing on the assumption gained ... by experience, that about five per cent of our readers in the Italian colonial army were literate."⁹¹

The Italian presence, as well as the use of Italian as the principal language of instruction, was nonetheless of no small linguistic significance in diffusing a knowledge of Italian among thousands of Ethiopians. Most of the Eritrean "native" troops had formerly been taught a simplified or pidgin Italian based largely on the indiscriminate use of infinitives,⁹² and this gained popularity also in Ethiopia despite opposition from the fascists who denounced it as an undesirable type of hybridism.⁹³

The collapse of Italian fascist rule in 1941, and the ensuing restoration of Ethiopian Government, constituted a major turning-point in the history of Ethiopian education. Though most of the old church schools continued to function education was at a low ebb.

The Government schools established by Menelik and Haile Sellassie had been closed throughout the five year occupation period which had also witnessed the expulsion of foreign missionaries, particularly Protestants, while the ending of Italian rule resulted in the termination of such meagre schooling as had been vouchsafed to the "native" population.⁹⁴ Such was the background to the re-establishment of modern schools in post-war Ethiopia.

88. "La costruzione dell' impero," passim.

89. Polson Newman, op. cit., p. 110.

90. *Addis Ababa: Rivista del Governatorato* [1939], I, 69-70.

91. G.L. Steer, *Sealed and Delivered* [London, 1942] p. 93.

92. R. Martinelli, *Sud. Rapporto di un viaggio in Eritrea ed in Ethiopia* [Firenze, 1930], p. 108.

93. A.M. Perbellini, "I meticci linguistici. Del parlare italiano con gli indigeni," *Etiopia* [1937], I, No. 1, pp. 49-50.

94. R. Pankhurst, "Education in Ethiopia during the Italian Fascist Occupation [1936-1941]," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* [1972], V, 361-96.