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Ethiopia and Eritrea During the Scramble for Africa: A Political Biography of Ras Alulá, 1875-1897

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satisfy most Ugandans in the 1980's, he does not say how this can be achieved. Nevertheless, the present book, born out of a mixture of emotional and academic curiosity, still, is a substantial contribution to the subject. It is a commendable work considering that the author spent a reasonable period of time in Uganda interviewing "authorities" on certain aspects of the subject in addition to utilizing archives in both Entebbe and London. Some of his sources, therefore are virtually incontrovertible, given that they appear in his fieldnotes. On the whole, this book serves as a useful guide not only for specialists in the field who seek to understand the workings of colonialism and neo-colonialism, but also for general readership.

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NOTES

¹ See in particular: Gukina, Peter M. *A Case Study in African Political Development*, Notre Dame Press, 1972 and Kasfir, Nelson, "Cultural Sub-nationalism in Uganda" in *The Politics of Cultural Sub-Nationalism in Africa*, Victor Olorunsola (ed.), Anchor Books, Doubleday, New York, 1972, pp. 51-148.

² Mamdani, Mahmood, *Politics and Class Formation in Uganda*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1976.

³ Martin, David, *General Amin*, Faber and Faber, London, 1974.

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Ethiopia and Eritrea During the Scramble for Africa: A Political Biography of Ras Alula, 1875-1897. Erlich Haggai. *Ethiopian Series Monograph* No. 11. Michigan State University, East Lansing, 1982. 221 pages. Bibliography.

In the last two decades, Ethiopian historiography has made a notable advance in the investigation of a hitherto insufficiently studied period of Ethiopian history, namely the last two decades of the 19th century, i.e., when the real threat to Ethiopia's independence arose, between 1870-1896. A substantial part of this advance is due to the painstaking research effort of Ethiopian and foreign historians.

The period between 1870 and 1896 stands as a watershed in the annals of political, diplomatic and military history of

contemporary Ethiopia. At this crucial juncture, Ethiopia faced three well organized foreign armies, viz., Egyptian, Mahadist and Italian. Relying on the deep patriotic sentiment of her people, Ethiopia successfully defended her independence, defeating the Egyptian army at the Battle of Gundat and Gura in 1875-76, the Mahadist crusaders in Gonder in 1889, and the Italian Colonial invaders at the famous battle of Adwa in 1889.

These military exploits have presented a special fascination to historians for a considerably long period. How and why Ethiopia remained an independent country when the rest of the continent fell to colonial rule, has been an unanswered historical question until recently. It is to this important historical question that Haggai Erlich devoted his monograph--a study of one of Ethiopia's foremost military and diplomatic figures: Ras Alulá, who played a pivotal role in the defence of the country's territorial integrity.

As a political biography of Ras Alulá the monograph is written for people with background on Ethiopian history. The introduction sets the theoretical framework of the monograph by suggesting that "...it was the ability of [Ethiopia's] natural leaders to mobilize and organize militarily as well as politically, all levels of Ethiopian society" that proved to be the most decisive factor in maintaining Ethiopia's independence. The author elucidates this argument by stating that the "socio-political flexibility" of the Ethiopian society "...allowed talented individuals from whatever background" to emerge as leaders which enabled "Ethiopia to realize her military and political potentialities ...almost to the fullest in periods of external threat."

To substantiate the "flexibility" of the social structure and the mobility of individuals within it, Erlich correctly states that the observed mobility "was the result of a constant power game in which the hereditary rights...served to legitimize the outcome of struggle for power occurring ceaselessly all along the Ethiopian socio-political ladder." Although his assertion about the flexibility of the social structure is highly questionable, both on theoretical and empirical grounds, Erlich nonetheless proceeds to show how a son of a humble peasant family rose to become one of the most important patriotic heroes in the annals of Ethiopian history.

The rest of the monograph is devoted to a year-by-year account of the military activities of Ras Alulá during the reign of Emperors Yohannes IV and Menelik II. Erlich traces Ras Alulá's early activities as a member of Ras Araya's household and later as a door keeper and chamberlain for his nephew, Dadjazmach Kassa. From these early beginnings, Ras Alulá proved his military skills at an early age as an officer of Emperor Yohannes' army during the battle against the Egyptian army under Hicks

Pasha in November 1875-76, which ended with the Egyptian defeat at Gundat and Gura as stated above. This consolidated Emperor Yohannes' position, thus creating a measure of national unity. The military skills that Ras Alulá demonstrated proved to be useful and brought him closer to the center of power in Emperor Yohannes' court.

Meanwhile the British government hoping to halt French expansion in the region, tacitly favored Italian colonialism to occupy the Ethiopian coast. Thus, while Ras Alulá was preoccupied on the Western coast, the British Cabinet secretly agreed to an Italian occupation of Asmara. Italian Rear Admiral Caini entered Massawa on February 3, 1885 less than a year after the Anglo-Egyptian treaty which had pledged for the safe conduct of Ethiopian trade through Massawa.

As soon as the Italians felt secure, they began seizing more ports along the coast which virtually stopped Ethiopian external trade. Ras Alulá, who was then Governor of Hammassen, warned the Italians that their troop movements constituted a hostile act and an infringement on Ethiopia's territorial integrity. However, the politics of the Berlin Conference on the partition of Africa gave the Italians much needed political and moral strength to speed up their rapid consolidation and further fortification of their already established garrison at Sahati and Wai in Northern Ethiopia. Ras Alulá, fully realizing the implications of Italian consolidation, intercepted their troop advance and routed them in January 1887 at the Battle of Dogali. The Italians hurriedly evacuated their fortification at Sahati and Wai and declared a full scale blockade of all ships bringing supplies to Ethiopia.

Faced with the threat of war with Italy, Emperor Yohannes strengthened his northern defences by transferring the garrison stationed at Galabat on the Sudanese frontier. The Mahadists took full advantage of the border area by launching a full scale war. Emperor Yohannes gathered his army and personally directed the battle to repel them, but he was mortally shot at Matama. Although Ras Alulá fully participated in the war, he believed that the Italian threat rather than the Mahadists posed the greater danger to Ethiopia at that time.

The death of Emperor Yohannes at Matama led to a great confusion in Northern Ethiopia and robbed Ras Alulá of his main source of political power. The combination of constant war and the absence of a unifying central leadership shattered the Tigrean hegemony and led to the emergence of Menelik in Shoa, who became Emperor of Ethiopia. In the process Ras Alulá became aware that he could no longer be a champion of the Tigrean cause and accepted Menelik's leadership whom he later served as a trusted general.

During this period, the Italians were in possession of a stretch of territory on a plateau including the town of Asmara, which they made capital of their colony of Eritrea. The Italians succeeded in occupying a large territory including Adigrat, Amba, Alagi and Mekele, and began advancing southwards. Beginning in mid 1895, Emperor Menelik, realizing the Italian long term intentions, was preparing for the eventual war with the Italians. He appointed Ras Alulá to command the Imperial Army.

The Ethiopian forces in March 1895 inflicted a humiliating defeat upon the Italians at the Battle of Adwa. Although Ras Alulá pressed to cross the Mereb river and drive the Italians out of Africa, Emperor Menelik did not insist on an Italian withdrawal from Eritrea.

Ras Alulá emerged during this crucial period in Ethiopian history as a formidable African leader, his deep sense of patriotism and uncompromising anti-colonialist stand contributed greatly to preserving Ethiopia's national independence.

By focusing on and discussing in greater details Ras Alulá's activities between 1875-1897, Erlich's monograph has shed light both on this crucial period and on one of the most persistent anti-colonial political figures of Ethiopian history.

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The Transformation of Katsina: 1400-1883. Y.B. Usman. Ahmadu Bello University Press, Zaria, Nigeria, 1981. 267 pages, note on sources, bibliography, glossary (Hausa and Arabic), maps, charts, index. N 12.10.

Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria has long been considered one of the foremost Universities in West Africa. Its faculties of environmental and social sciences publish the valuable journal *Savanna*, its archaeological section carries out pioneering work in critical areas, and its Islamic scholars continue the centuries-old Islamic traditions of learning that once made the Sokoto Caliphate one of the most important Islamic empires of the 13th-19th centuries.

Thus it is no surprise that the Ahmadu Bello University Press History series is at the forefront of the changing perspectives of West African history. These works, by both Nigerian and foreign scholars, combine excellent scholarship with a