



**ETHIOPIA AFRICA BLACK INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS  
MIAMI BRANCH**

**117<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF THE BIRTH OF  
HIM EMPEROR HAILE SELASSIE I  
KING OF KINGS, LORD OF LORDS  
CONQUERING LION OF THE TRIBE OF JUDAH**

**HAILE SELASSIE I**

## A Brief Biography of His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I

Taken from the book , by Gregory *Ethiopia Reaches Her Hand Unto God: Imperial Ethiopia's Unique Symbols, Structures, and Role in the Modern World* Copley.

His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I was born as *Lij* Tafari Makonnen on July 23, 1892, in the town of Ejarsa Gora in the Harage Province, some 18 miles outside the city of Harar, Ethiopia. *Lij* Tafari was given the religious name, Haile Selassie. He was the son of *Ras* Makonnen, Governor of Harar under his kinsman, Emperor Menelik II. *Ras* Makonnen, a Shoa Amharan noble, was married to an Oromo, Yashimabet, who died two years after *Lij* Tafari's birth.

In a significant break with precedence, *Lij* Tafari Makonnen was raised with an understanding of world affairs, and with an exposure to the outside world. He was to become the first Emperor of Ethiopia to have traveled extensively abroad.

*Ras* Makonnen, and therefore *Lij* Tafari Makonnen, were directly of the Solomonic Line, as was Emperor Menelik himself and Tafari Makonnen's great-great grandfather, *Negus* Sahela Selassie, of Shoa. King Sahela (Sahle) Selassie had already made treaties with foreign states, including Queen Victoria's Britain.

*Lij* Tafari Makonnen was, unusually for the period, brought up with both a strong education in Shoan Amharic traditions and in Western history, languages and statecraft. He was named *Dejazmatch* literally keeper of the door; the equivalent of the title of Count in Western terms for part of Harage province at the age of 13, in 1904, only about a year before his fathers death.



*His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I, wearing the sash of the Order of Solomon's Seal. The top star on his tunic is also the Order of Solomon's Seal, beneath which are stars of the US Chief Commander of the Legion of Merit (left), Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Holy Trinity (centre right), and the Order of Emperor Menelik II (below).*



The governorship of Harar, and the army which went with it, went to another Tafari's half-brother, Yelma when *Ras* Makonnen died, and *Lij* Tafari Makonnen was named to the lesser governorship of Selale. But, because of palace politics, he was forced even to administer this governorship from the confines of Emperor Menelik's palace in Addis Ababa, where he learned first hand the art of political manoeuvre. Emperor Menelik, one of *Lij* Tafari's supporters, suffered a severe stroke in 1908, and Tafari was exiled to the southern frontier area where he served as governor of Sidamo province. There, however, he had an army of 3,000.

Emperor Menelik had, the year before, designated his 12-year-old grandson, *Lij* Iyasu, as his heir. Emperor Menelik's wife, Empress Taitu, promoted the interests of Zauditu, her daughter. At this point, however, Yelma died and the governorship of Harar again became vacant. So in 1910, with the loyalty of the various armies (including Harar) and princes, Tafari, with the Shoa Amharan nobility, was able to insist that Empress Taitu devote her energies to nursing the ailing Emperor, with day-to-day management of the Empire handled by *Ras* Tasamma as Regent. *Ras* Tasamma was one of the most powerful *rases*, commanding an extensive army of his own; he had been the traditional advisor-guardian to *Lij* Iyasu.

But Tasamma died in 1911, and *Lij* Iyasu began a determined bid for the throne. Emperor Menelik died in 1913, but Iyasu still could not be crowned: his apparent conversion to Islam, the religion into which his father was born, discredited him in the eyes of the monophysite Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Shoan nobles. In 1916, they confirmed Zauditu as Empress and the 25-year-old *Ras* Tafari as Supreme Regent and Heir Apparent (Crown Prince). He was to remain Regent for the next 13 years, a period during which as *de facto* ruler of Ethiopia he began the transformation of Ethiopia into a modern state, in the international sense.

*Lij* Iyasu attempted during this period to press his claim to the Throne and was arrested in 1921, and died 12 years later.

Empress Zauditu had, in response to the growing power and popularity of the Regent and Crown Prince, crowned *Ras* Tafari as *Negus* (king) on September 7, 1928 (Meskarem 27, 1921, in the Ethiopian calendar). It was the first occasion that an Emperor (or ruling Empress) had granted the title of *Negus* in the Ethiopian context; previously the title *Negus* had been used only by the kings of the constituent states of Ethiopia (such as the *Negus* of Shoa, etc.).

Empress Zauditu, herself resentful of the growing popularity of the Regent, in 1930 sent her husband's sizable army against Tafari's forces, but the army was immediately crushed and her husband killed. <sup>2</sup>But on April 2, two days after Negus Tafari's victory against her husband, Empress Zauditu died.

As Regent and *Negus, Ras* Tafari had undertaken the modernization of Ethiopia on a significant scale, bringing the country into the League of Nations in 1923 (the application had been lodged in 1919), abolishing slavery (in 1923, the trigger to admission into the League of Nations), creating schools and universities, and generally began the development of a modern national infrastructure.



The sudden death of Empress Zauditu led to the coronation of *Negus* Tafari as Emperor on November 2, 1930 (Tekent 23, 1922, in the Ethiopian calendar), and his elevation to the highest Throne for which he adopted the Throne name Haile Selassie I was the cause for a further consolidation of his programme of reforms.

He founded the Bank of Ethiopia in 1931, and encouraged the creation of newspapers.

Throughout this period, however, there were mounting tensions with Italy, which had occupied Eritrea from the 1890s. This flared into open conflict in September 1935, although the League of Nations exonerated both states. This gave confidence to Italian leader Benito Mussolini, who ordered a full invasion of Ethiopia. This time, still conscious of their defeat at the hands of Meneliks army in the 1896 Battle of Adwa, only 40 years before, the Italians pushed forward with massive resources and an extensive use of chemical weapons. By May 2, 1936, Emperor Haile Selassie was forced into exile and in June he went before the League of Nations in Geneva to call international attention to the plight of Ethiopia.

It was this speech which both drew Ethiopia to the center-stage of world politics for the first time and at the same time highlighted the impotence of the League of Nations. But World War II was to prove Italys undoing in Ethiopia and elsewhere. When Italy joined the Axis powers in June 1940, Britain began working with Haile Selassie to remove the Italian forces from Ethiopia. The Emperor moved to the Sudan, with his son, Crown Prince Asfa Wossen (later Emperor Amha Selassie I), to coordinate action between his own troops and those of the British. And with an Army of British, South African, Ethiopian and other African forces, Emperor Haile Selassie re-entered Addis Ababa on May 5, 1941. Fighting, however, continued on Ethiopian soil until January 1942.

With the end of World War II, the Emperor brought Ethiopia into the United Nations as a founding member, and greatly expanded the countrys diplomatic relations. Domestically, he established a new, central judiciary, and ensured that the new, post-war Government was filled with educated ministers with more specific powers. The new judiciary had the task of appointing its own judges, removing them from the hint of political preference.

By 1955, Haile Selassie was ready to introduce the new national Constitution. It was created through a consensus of input from an Ethiopian educated class which had never before been seen in the country and which was, to a great extent, created by the international exposure many Ethiopians had received because of the war.

To a great extent in the post-war era, Ethiopia enjoyed an unprecedented period of relatively uninterrupted stability and progress. It was, therefore, something of a surprise when a *coup detat* was attempted in Addis Ababa on December 13, 1960, whilst the Emperor was abroad in Brazil on a diplomatic mission. While initially appearing to be successful, the coup by the Imperial Bodyguard, the police chief and some radical intellectuals, lacked public support. The Emperor, on hearing word of the coup attempt, flew immediately to Monrovia, Liberia, and then on to Ft. Lamy (now Ndjamena, capital of Chad), and thence despite engine trouble on his DC-6 aircraft on to Asmara, Eritrea. There, his son-in-law, Gen. Abiye Abebe, was Governor. And with the Emperors final return to Ethiopia, the coup was all but over. It collapsed completely on December 16.

The Army and Air Force, and the Church, had remained loyal to the Emperor, but the incident polarized some elements of the society.

Attempts at land reform through changes in the tax system failed in Parliament in 1966 because of the grip on Parliament and society by landowners. And the years leading up to 1974 were replete with mounting inflation, corruption and famine.

Some elements of the Army mutinied on January 12, 1974, and several provinces fell into the hands of mutineers in February. By early June, the mutineers had formed a 120-man *Dergue* (committee), initially claiming allegiance to the Emperor. But they soon began arresting older politicians and nobles connected with the old order, and in July 1974 demanded a new constitution.



The *Dergue* seized the Emperor on September 12, 1974, and embarked on a reign of terror not dissimilar to the terror of the Robespierre-controlled First Republic in France in the late 18th Century. Civil war ensued.

## **KING SELASSIE I JAH RASTAFARI**

### **Isaiah 9 (King James Version)**

6) For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

7) Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

8) The Lord sent a word into Jacob, and it hath lighted upon Israel.



### **Psalms 87 (King James Version)**

1) His foundation is in the holy mountains.

2) The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.

3) Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. Selah.

4) I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this man was born there.

5) And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the highest himself shall establish her.

6) The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there. Selah.

7) As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there: all my springs are in thee.



### **Revelation 5 (King James Version)**

1) And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.

2) And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?

3) And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.

4) And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.

5) And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

6) And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

7) And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.

8) And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

9) And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

10) And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

11) And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the



beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;

12) Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

13) And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.

14) And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshiped him that liveth for ever and ever.



**HOLY EMMANUEL I SELASSIE I JAH RASTAFARI**