Emperor Menelik II of Ethiopia

Imagine you are the ruler of Ethiopia, a continually expanding empire, during the 19-20th century. You soon discover your allies tried to trick you and take over your empire. Do you sign a treaty? How could you even fight your allies? What is your plan of defense? This is what happened to Emperor Menelik II when he fought the Battle of Adwa, a battle that would prove Ethiopia's power and solidify its independence.

Menelik was born with the name Sahle Miriam, on August 17, 1884 in Ankober, Ethiopia. Menelik's father was Haile Malakot the king of the Shewa region and his mother was a servant who married the king after Menelik was born. In an 1855 invasion, his father was seized and killed by the emperor at the time. Menelik was taken prisoner and raised in the royal family of Ethiopia as one of their own. He escaped in 1865 and returned home to claim his seat as King of Shewa. He also had his eye on the imperial throne but an opponent named Kassa stood in his way. Kassa was victorious and became 'Emperor Yohannes IV.' Menelik worked for Yohannes but was plotting how to overthrow him simultaneously. He tried to get help from the Egyptians and France but they would not help him. Nevertheless, Menelik kept expanding his territory as the King of Shewa. Yohannes later died in a battle and since no one could match Menelik's power he claimed the throne.

As the emperor, Menelik worked on expanding his empire. He followed many of his predecessor's footsteps and ruled from many different camps but resided in the capital, Entotto. However, the cold, tiresome ascents and descents to and from Mount Entotto made the region undesirable and as a result it did not remain as the capital. At the encouragement of his wife, Taytu Betel, in November of 1886 a new settlement called Addis Ababa or 'New flower' replaced the diminishing Entotto and officially became the capital in 1892.

After this move, the empire was at risk of colonization. Menelik leased Eritrea to the Italians, Djibouti to the French, and Somalia to the British to bring new technology to the empire. Nevertheless, the Italians wanted more power and in 1896 the famous Battle of Adwa was underway. Several years before the battle there was the signing of the 'Treaty of Wichale'. In the treaty, Menelik agreed to provide

Italy with land in exchange for weaponry. There were two versions of the treaty, the Italian version, and the Ethiopian version. The Italian version was altered in Rome to make Ethiopia a protectorate of Italy's. When Menelik learned of this he denied the treaty. So General Oreste Baratieri came up with a battle plan and fought. Italy remained confident even with the imbalanced numbers since the Italians carried guns while the Ethiopians had mainly spears and horses. The Italian troops in addition to not being equipped with enough supplies and soldiers, lacked organization and were unable to navigate the surroundings. On March 1st the Italians retreated from Ethiopia but still controlled Eritrea which they later colonized.

After the battle, Menelik was seen as a powerful figure in Africa, as well as in Europe, and accomplished many great things. There was a significant expansion of Ethiopian territory, as well as advancements in health and education, and an increase in trade. Menelik commissioned the Addis-Djibouti railway which made it much easier to contact the world around him, and receive news, supplies, etc. Ethiopia obtained telephone poles, motor vehicles, bikes, more railroads, and electricity. He had the country join the international postal union as well. After sponsoring these developments Menelik passed away due to a series of strokes at the age of 69. His wife Taytu Betel took power and continued to rule the country; however the public was opposed to her authority, and eventually required her to step down. There would be many rulers after Menelik. Ethiopia would later dabble in periods of imperial conquest, communism, and finally settle as a democratic republic.

Most nights at the dinner table I hear my parents talking about Ethiopia and Eritrea (the history, current events, past rulers, etc.) and I have always wondered how they seem to know so much about a country that I know so little about. My dad lived in Ethiopia until he was twelve and my mom lived there for periods of her life as well and when the opportunity came to learn more about one of the country's I came from, I embraced it. As for why I chose Menelik specifically, he was the ruler that modernized Ethiopia, made the greatest impact, and accomplished more than his predecessors ever had, all through strategic waiting, analysis and strength.

As an Ethiopian-American it makes me proud to have the opportunity to write about one of the great leaders of Ethiopia and an example to the countries in. Menelik brought Ethiopia into a new age and

made sure that it was not left behind in a period of new advancements in agriculture, technology, and power. He was the beginning of Ethiopia's progression, but he would not be the end.

Bibliography

Biography.com Editors. "Menelik II." *Biography* , A&E Television Networks, 9 June 2020, www.biography.com/political-figure/menelik-ii.

Greenfield, Richard David. "Menelik II emperor of Ethiopia ." *Britannica*, Encyclopedia Britannica, 8 Dec. 2020, www.britannica.com/biography/Menilek-II.

Hoh, Anchi. "Emperor Menelik II of Ethiopia and the Battle of Adwa." *Library of Congress*, 31 Mar. 2020, blogs.loc.gov/international-collections/2020/03/emperor-menelik-ii-of-ethiopia-and-the-battle-of-adwa.