



Aethiopica 8 (2005)

International Journal of Ethiopian and Eri-
treat Studies

RICHARD PANKHURST, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa

Article

Innovation and Misoneism during the Reign of Emperor Yohannəs IV (1872–1889)

Aethiopica 8 (2005), 48–71

ISSN: 1430–1938

Published by

Universität Hamburg

Asien Afrika Institut, Abteilung Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

Hiob Ludolf Zentrum für Äthiopistik

Innovation and Misoneism during the Reign of Emperor Yoḥannəs IV (1872–1889)

RICHARD PANKHURST, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa

Introduction

The process of modernisation in Ethiopia, which Emperor Tewodros had envisaged – and had been interrupted by his dramatic suicide on 13 April 1868, continued, albeit in a different manner and at a different tempo, during the ensuing reign of Emperor Yoḥannəs. The object of this article is to assess the extent of such innovation, in various fields, in the period between Tewodros and Mənilək, against the back-drop of the country's prevailing misoneism, i.e. opposition to change.

Some of the developments of these two decades, such as the arrival of new imports, including medicines and anti-smallpox vaccine, were due to improved transpiration and increasing contacts with the outside world; others, among them growing opposition to slavery and the slave trade, resulted from events on the wider international stage; others again, particularly in the field of land tenure, class relations; the increasing diffusion of fire-arms, and the resultant depletion of wild life, had their origin in the internal dynamics of the post-Tewodros era. Most such changes occurred independently of Emperor Yoḥannəs, and were largely market-motivated. Other developments, notably the allocation of increasing areas of land to the Church, the forced conversions of Muslims, the banning of foreign missionaries, the prohibition of tobacco, the official abolition of slavery and the slave trade, the introduction of a national flag, the appointment of the country's first honorary consul, the establishment of an Ethiopian church in Jerusalem, and increasing use of foreign-educated officials, all reflected the Emperor's personal predilections, and were in many cases carried out by imperial command.

Conflict, Tranquility and Renewed Conflict

The period after Tewodros's death was a time of difficulty. *Däggazmač* Kassa, the future Emperor Yoḥannəs, defeated his rival Təklä Giyorgis, formerly *Wag šum* Gobaze, at the battle of Assam, near ʿAdwa, on 11 July 1871, and thereupon adopted the throne name of Yoḥannəs.

This victory opened an auspicious, but short, period of peace, which was conducive for development. Civil war, which had long been the bane of the country, thus came to an end. This was a time, as the British traveller the Earl of Mayo noted in the mid-1870s, when “tranquillity prevailed”, and people could “cultivate their land in peace”.¹

This period of peace was, however, soon interrupted by destructive warfare. Fighting with the Egyptians, in the 1870s, led in the north of the country to considerable destruction of buildings, and depopulation, as well as to the disruption of trade with the Red Sea coast. The British traveller Emelius de Cosson reported that the old settlement of Asmāra was “almost deserted, and the plains around it depopulated, for, being so near the frontier [with the Egyptians at the coast], they [the people of the area] had been exposed to the ravages of the Egyptian soldiers ... who had made many pillaging expeditions ... and caused most of the inhabitants to fly into the interior for safety”.²

Emperor Yoḥannəs’s victories over the Egyptians, at the battles of Gundāt in 1875 and Gura in 1876, preserved Ethiopia’s independence, but did not restore stability. Raiding was continued by a local rebel chief, *Ras Wäldä Mika’el*, who, according to the British envoy Augustus B. Wylde, “commenced to raid and devastate the seat of his old Government, and turned the Hamasien plateau, formerly known as the plain of the thousand villages, owing to its fertility and industrious population, into a howling wilderness of ruined houses, with a few half-starved peasantry”.³

The subsequent war with the Sudanese Dervishes in the 1880s, which resulted in the sacking of Gondär, led to major ravages in north-western Ethiopia, and hence to the disruption of the trade route to Sudan and Egypt. The British big-game hunter Percy Powell-Cotton noted over a decade later that evidence of the destruction was still visible. “The nearer we approached Gondar”, he wrote, “the more numerous became the ruins of the villages, farmsteads and churches ... Up to the Dervish invasion ... Gondar ... was still a considerable place ... Many rich Nagadis [i.e. traders] lived there, who despatched their caravans in every direction, but nearly all these lost, not only their wealth, but their lives as well ... Now there is only one large merchant residing in the place”.⁴

¹ MAYO, EARL OF, *Sport in Abyssinia* (London, 1876), p. 219.

² EMELIUS ALBERT DE COSSON, *The Cradle of the Blue Nile* (London, 1877), II, 150.

³ AUGUSTUS BLANDY WYLDE, *Modern Abyssinia* (London, 1901), p. 28. See also RICHARD PANKHURST, “The Effects of War in Ethiopian History”, *Ethiopia Observer* (1963), VII, 151–55.

⁴ PERCY HORACE GORDON POWELL-COTTON, *A Sporting Trip through Abyssinia* (London, 1902), p. 301.

Such fighting, and destruction, naturally militated against orderly development, and the introduction of innovations, outside the purely military field.

Advances in Transport and Communications

Ethiopia's contacts with the outside world were greatly facilitated by the cutting in 1869 of the Suez Canal, which turned the Red Sea in a sense into an extension of the Mediterranean. Communications were further improved by the Egyptians on the Red Sea coast. They developed the port of Massawa in the early 1870s, by building a causeway to link the then island port with the mainland. In order to penetrate militarily into the interior, they also constructed a road from Addi K^wala to Gundät.⁵

The Emperor, for his part, was slow to carry out any corresponding improvement on the road from the Ethiopian highlands to the coast. According to his British assistant John Kirkham he was uninterested in such work, and "preferred to keep his money hoarded up".⁶ The German traveller Gerhard Rohlfs, putting a slightly different complexion on the matter, declared that Yoḥannəs was more interested in building churches than roads.⁷

Some road-work to the coast was, however, carried out by the Swedish missionaries at Mənkullu, inland from Massawa, who cleared a track through jungle country.⁸ Wylde nevertheless declared that the road up to Ginda^c, on the edge of the plateau, was "a nasty climb". The Abyssinians, he explained, had "for political reasons", i.e. fear of foreign invasion, not improved it, and he could not help commenting, "I suppose they are right".⁹

Transportation was, however, later facilitated by the opening, by Emperor Yoḥannəs's commander *Ras* Alula, of a good road between the highlands and the coast. The British envoy Francis Harrison Smith was surprised, in 1890, to find that the track had been "cleared of obstructions", and was "in many places ... so broad and level that one might with ease and safety drive a coach and four along it".¹⁰

⁵ MAYO, 1876, p. 42; AUGUSTUS BLANDY WYLDE, '83 to '87 in the *Soudan* (London, 1888), II, 45; RICHARD PANKHURST, *Economic History of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 1968), p. 288.

⁶ MAYO, 1876, p. 219.

⁷ GERHARD ROHLFS, *Meine Mission nach Abessinien, 1880–81* (Leipzig, 1883), p. 238.

⁸ MAYO, 1876, p. 42.

⁹ WYLDE, 1888, I, 20.

¹⁰ HORACE FRANCIS HARRISON SMITH, *Through Abyssinia* (London, 1890), p. 239.

The Italians, after occupying the port of Massawa in 1885, were also active in improving transport facilities in the steadily increasing area of their occupation. The British envoy Gerald Portal commented a few years later that “the horrors and dangers” of the old mountain-path from Asmara to the coast had disappeared “for ever”, and had been replaced by a “wide and well-constructed road”. This he noted, significantly, was “fit for the passage of cavalry and artillery” – both of which were soon to be advancing into the Ethiopian interior.¹¹

Improvements in the road to Massawa led to the growth of the nearby settlement of Mənkullu, where merchants travelling to and from the interior spent much of their time, particularly when the heat at the coast was unbearable. The place, which was outside Emperor Yoḥannəs’s control, but within easy reach of his dominions, was also the site, as we shall see, of an important Swedish mission station.¹²

Expanding Trade – and New Imports

The principal focus of commercial innovation in northern Ethiopia at this time was the town of ʿAdwa, which for over a century had been the main commercial centre of Təgray. Its market handled a continuous influx of new imports. De Cosson, in the mid-1870s, remarked that “traders from the coast” brought such precious articles as “common glass bottles for drinking *täggä*; and even round looking-glasses, in which great ladies who can afford them see their charms reflected”.¹³ A decade or so later Wylde noted that the “great imported staples” of ʿAdwa included “cottons of all sorts from England and the Continent, cotton prints of many sorts, silks, satins, Birmingham sundries in the way of cutlery, beads, needles and all sorts of little things, Bohemian glass-ware, kerosene lamps” as well as what he terms, “Africa trade in general”.¹⁴ Harrison Smith shortly afterwards reported the import at ʿAdwa of “little French mirrors”, as well as “unbleached cotton goods from the Colaba mills at Bombay”, and superior Egyptian shirting, bearing a trademark of Pyramids and camels. Manchester goods, he adds, were “chiefly represented by the manufactures of Messrs. Tabbush”.¹⁵

¹¹ GERALD HERBERT PORTAL, *My Mission to Abyssinia* (London, 1892), p. 250.

¹² RICHARD PANKHURST, R., *The History of Ethiopian Towns from the Mid-Nineteenth Century to 1935* (Stuttgart, 1984), pp. 138–39.

¹³ DE COSSON, 1876, I, 112.

¹⁴ WYLDE, 1888, I, 284.

¹⁵ SMITH, 1890, pp. 155–56. See also GABRIEL SIMON, *Voyage en Abyssinie* (Paris, 1885), p. 150; ROHLFS, 1883, pp. 161–62.

A growing number of European imports were by this time also reported at other markets, notably at Kudo Felassi, in Säraye. By the late 1860s traders there were using Egyptian coins, and by the early 1870s dealt in numerous foreign imports, including needles and sundry nick-nacks.¹⁶

New imports were taken from such commercial centres to lesser markets far and wide. Itinerant merchants travelled around with their ever-changing stock-in-trade, which consisted, according to Wylde, in pins and needles, cotton cloth, and a “variety of Birmingham goods”, i.e. ironwork manufactured in the British industrial city of that name.¹⁷ The profits on such articles were, he claims, “enormous”, for “the commonest and most gimcrack things” from Europe were “changed for the mighty [Maria Theresa] dollar or bartered for valuable produce”, including ivory, musk, gold and skins.¹⁸

One of the most colourful imports increasing in importance in this period were ceremonial silk umbrellas, which were carried above the heads of the Emperor, great church leaders, and nobles. “The King’s umbrella and that of the Chief Priest”, Wylde exclaimed, “were the most gorgeous and wonderful fabrications – made in Paris – purple silk covered with hand-work flowers and gold sticks”.¹⁹ The cultural significance of such umbrellas was emphasised, in the early 1890s, by the British traveller Theodore Bent. He notes that they were “used by great men solely as a mark of distinction”. Red umbrellas could thus be worn only by “great princes”. “Ordinary officials”, by contrast, used imported white umbrellas, while the common people carried the “far more picturesque” locally-made umbrellas woven out of grass.²⁰

Another spectacular import to be seen at ‘Adwa towards the end of the century was the metal roof of the great Šállase, or the Holy Trinity Church – the first such roof in the country. Bent, far from pleased with this innovation, observed in the early 1890s that the city had been “spoilt irretrievably”, and adds: “This horrible roof catches the sun”, “gleams provokingly”, and is a “perpetual eye sore”.²¹

¹⁶ ALEX GIRARD, *Souvenirs d’un voyage en Abyssinie* (Cairo, 1873), pp. 63–64;

ACHILLE RAFFRAY, *Abyssinie* (Paris, 1880), p. 62.

¹⁷ WYLDE, 1888, I, p. 292.

¹⁸ WYLDE, 1888, I, p. 284.

¹⁹ WYLDE, 1888, II, pp. 6–7.

²⁰ JAMES THEODORE BENT, *The Sacred City of the Ethiopians* (London, 1896), pp. 29–30. See also ROHLFS, 1883, pp. 217–18, WYLDE, 1888, I, pp. 281–82.

²¹ BENT, 1896, p. 99; see also p. 126. For a picture of the building when still thatched see PIPPO VIGONI, *Abissinia* (1881) opposite p. 100.

Urban Developments, and Town-Building

The reign of Yoḥannəs witnessed significant, though limited, urban development.²² The Emperor, on assuming the throne, travelled to Däbrä Tabor, Tewodros's former capital in Bägemdər, and established a new palace and other buildings at nearby Sämära. He also ordered the construction nearby of the modern-style church of Ǧəruy Giyorgis, which was erected with the help of an Italian craftsman Giacomo Naretti.²³

Yoḥannəs also spent much of his time at Mäqälä, a new settlement in Təgray, which he virtually founded. There he built the church of Mädhane ʿAläm, and a fortress-like palace of novel design, likewise designed by Naretti.²⁴ The town as a whole developed considerably during the reign, after which Wylde reported that “nearly every house” had “a large garden with an irrigation channel to it”.²⁵

Significant building was also carried out at both ʿAdwa and Aksum. At the former settlement Yoḥannəs erected the above-mentioned great church of Śəllase, and rebuilt the neighbouring 18th century palace, which dated back to the time of *Ras* Mikaʿel Səḥul.²⁶ Construction work was also carried out at Aksum, where at least one building was put up by Naretti.²⁷

Some important building work also took place further north, in the country of the Baḥər Nägaš, where *Ras* Alula established a palace at Asmära.²⁸ Portal describes it as “circular ... forty-five feet in diameter, its lofty dome-shaped roof supported by numerous poles”.²⁹

Yoḥannəs had one other notable urban achievement to his credit: the founding of the town of Däse, soon to emerge as the capital of Wällo. The settlement was established in 1882, and commemorated that year's “Great Comet”.³⁰

²² PANKHURST, 1995, p. 356.

²³ ROHLFS, 1883, pp. 196–202; BIANCHI, 1884, pp. 44–45. See also PANKHURST, 1995, pp. 75–77.

²⁴ BAIRU TAFLA, 1977, pp. 121–23. See also PANKHURST, 1995, pp. 120–24.

²⁵ WYLDE, 1901, p. 306.

²⁶ BAIRU TAFLA, 1977, p. 93; BENT, 1896, p. 126; PANKHURST, 1995, pp. 90–93.

²⁷ BENT, 1896, 108–09; PANKHURST, 1995, p. 108.

²⁸ WYLDE, 1888, I, 222; SMITH, 1890, p. 107; PANKHURST, 1995, pp. 113–15.

²⁹ PORTAL, 1892, pp. 74–76.

³⁰ MARIUS CHAINE, “Histoire du règne de Iohannes IV roi d'Éthiopie”, *Revue Sémitique* (1913), 188–89; PANKHURST, 1995, pp. 235–36.

Increasing Foreign Contacts

Innovation, at this time, was fueled not only by expanding trade, but also through foreign contacts. Increasing numbers of Ethiopians were by now travelling abroad, or to the coast, or were consorting with foreign missionaries, and foreigners in other walks of life.

The impact of foreign travel was apparent by the mid-1880s, when Wylde noted that the “few” Ethiopians who had been to Massawa wore European-made trousers, “either white or of some coloured washing material”, with a coat buttoned up to the neck. Such clothing innovations were however, “hardly ever” worn without the traditional *šamma*, or toga, which was still widely used.³¹

Though banned by the Emperor from his domains, foreign missionaries played a modernising role on the country’s periphery, where they provided a limited amount of European-style skilled training. The principal missionary centres were at the Swedish Protestant school at Mənkullu, and the French Lazarist institution at Kārān, in the west of the country. Wylde described the former as “very well conducted”. It provided male pupils, he says, with “a very useful education”, which included such crafts, as those of blacksmiths, carpenters, or masons, while female students were taught cooking, sewing, and household work.³²

The value of such training was, however, limited by the static character of the economy, and the consequent restricted demand for the trainees’ services. This was recognised by another British observer, Frank James, who observed: “the Fathers and Sisters confessed to us, the difficulty of finding institutions for their *protégés* after they had reared and educated them. Outcast from their own people and unable to find employment ... they are thrown on their own resources, which proves more fatal to the women than the men”.³³

Ethiopians Educated Abroad

The idea of sending Ethiopian students abroad for study was at this time still in its infancy, and did not in any case appeal to Yoḥannəs, who probably felt that it might endanger their Orthodox Christian faith. Like his predecessor Tewodros, he nevertheless made significant use of a handful of Ethiopians who had in one way or another been abroad.

³¹ WYLDE, 1888, I, p. 283.

³² WYLDE, 1888, I, p. 7.

³³ FRANK LINSLEY JAMES, *The Wild Tribes of the Soudan* (London, 1883), p. 243.

Yoḥannəs had three main foreign-educated Ethiopian assistants: Maḥdärä Qal Täwäldä Mädḥən from Təgray, and two men of partial Armenian descent, Mərça Wärqe, and Yoḥannəs Mäšäša.

Maḥdärä Qal, who had studied in Paris and later in Malta, played an important role at court. He translated the Emperor's correspondence with foreign Powers, and also served as official interpreter on several occasions, such as the visit of Colonel Charles Gordon, who represented the Egyptian Government of Sudan.³⁴

Mərça Wärqe, who had been educated in Bombay, advised the then Däḡgazmač Kassa at the time of the British expedition to Mäqdäla, and served as a liaison with it. He was so successful that he was accorded the prestigious title of *Liqä mäq^was*, and was later despatched in 1870 on a diplomatic mission to London. He subsequently negotiated with the Egyptians in 1875–76, and was involved in concluding the Tripartite Treaty of 1884, after which he undertook a much publicised mission to England, on which occasion he was accompanied by his nephew Yoḥannəs Mäšäša. Mərça also served for a time as the Emperor's chief treasurer, a post in which he was succeeded by the latter.³⁵

Though utilising his three above foreign-educated compatriots, Yoḥannəs was apparently not enamoured by mission-educated youngsters. The Swiss missionary Martin Flad reports that when two returnees from abroad, Arägawi and Agagi, appeared before the monarch, the latter commented unfavourably on the fact that they had adopted the European practice of wearing shoes. "If you appear again before me", he reportedly said, "come barefoot: we Ethiopians do not wear shoes: dress yourself according to the custom of the land".³⁶

Foreign Entrepreneurs and Craftsmen

By the reign of Yoḥannəs a small number of foreign entrepreneurs and craftsmen were active in Təgray. The existence of a saw-mill at Sabaguma, in the far north of the country, was reported by de Cosson in the 1870s. Run by a Frenchman with an Ethiopian wife, it was situated in a valley

³⁴ RICHARD PANKHURST, "Foreign Educated Ethiopians in Ethiopian Service at the Time of Emperor Yohannes", in: TADDESSE BEYENE, RICHARD PANKHURST and SHIFERAW BEKELE, *Kasa and Kasa. Papers on the Lives, Times and Images of Təwodros II and Yohannes IV (1885–1889)* (Addis Ababa, 1990), pp. 253–71. See also JACQUES DE COURSAK, *Le règne de Johannes (Romans, 1926)*, pp. 159, 169, 185, 258).

³⁵ WYLDE, 1901, pp. 42, 44, 169, 296–98, 321; PANKHURST, 1990, pp. 259–64.

³⁶ JOHANN MARTIN FLAD, *60 Jahre in der Mission unter den Falashas in Abessinien* (Basel, 1922), p. 280.

“surrounded on all sides by thickly wooded mountains”.³⁷ Further south at ʿAdwa, Harrison Smith met a German who had reportedly set up “a number of power-mills”.³⁸

Several foreigners were likewise prominent as gunsmiths. The best known was a Frenchman, Jean Baraglion, who had lived in Ethiopia for over a decade, and, according to Wylde, enjoyed a monopoly at ʿAdwa and “the north part of the country”.³⁹ Baraglion had, however, at least two rivals: A Hungarian called André, who also made artificial limbs;⁴⁰ and a Greek, who had lived in Šawa for several years before entering the service of Yoḥannəs.⁴¹ Another Greek, called Christopholos, who had earlier wielded an elephant gun for *Ras* Gobaze had by this time established himself at Gondär. People whispered, according to de Cosson, that he was “really a magician”, who practiced the “black art”.⁴²

An even more remarkable foreign innovator at ʿAdwa was the German botanist Dr. Wilhelm Schimper, who had come to Ethiopia in 1836, and subsequently introduced water-cress into some nearby streams.⁴³ His courtyard, according to de Cosson, was “full of inventions”, including candles made of beeswax cast in paper molds with wicks of local cotton cloth; a smoking-pipe consisting of a “wonderful combination of wood, metal and clay”, and “good champagne” made by bottling *täggä*, or honey wine, with brandy and sugar. Schimper also assisted Yoḥannəs on one occasion by writing for him to the German chancellor Otto von Bismarck.⁴⁴

Yet another foreign innovator was an unidentified Frenchman, who introduced the cultivation of potatoes. Mayo described them as “very small” and “wretched looking things”, but “excellent eating”.⁴⁵

Three Traditional Fields of Innovation

Though the growth of foreign trade, and the expansion of external contacts brought about many such innovations, others were the personal achievements of Emperor Yoḥannəs himself. Many, like those of previous Ethiopi-

³⁷ DE COSSON, 1877, I, p. 36.

³⁸ SMITH, 1890, pp. 244–45.

³⁹ WYLDE, 1888, I, p. 293–95.

⁴⁰ GIRARD, 1873, pp. 240–41.

⁴¹ SMITH, 1890, p. 195.

⁴² DE COSSON, 1877, II, p. 128.

⁴³ WYLDE, 1888, I, p. 264.

⁴⁴ GIRARD, 1873, pp. 17, 100, 121–29; DE COSSON, 1877, I, 119–20; DE COURSAC, 1926, pp. 91–93. See also BAIRU TAFLA, *Ethiopia and Germany: Cultural, Political and Economic Relations, 1871–1935* (Wiesbaden, 1981), p. 325, index.

⁴⁵ MAYO, 1876, p. 121.

an rulers, fell in the three traditional fields of innovation: palace-building, medicine and armament.⁴⁶

The Palace – and Imperial Dress

Yoḥannəs, continuing the practice of a number of his predecessors, arranged for the construction of an entirely new palace. Situated at Mäqälä, and designed and largely erected by Naretti, it was an immense and spectacular structure, at least partially inspired by the 17th century castles of Gondär, this immense building was a spectacular edifice.⁴⁷ A detailed description is provided by Harrison Smith, who writes:

“The basement, which is entered by a heavy double door of Abyssinian wood forms a banqueting hall, the ceiling of which is supported by solid, well-founded columns of masonry. Leading out of this hall, which occupies the nave of the building, is a large audience or council chamber ... From the basement one ascends by a double flight of broad, well-built stairs, such as one finds in old English houses.”

“In the first floor are a number of apartments of various sizes, all well lighted and airy, and the roof forms a fine promenade, from which an extensive panoramic view of the surrounding country is obtained, while the turret at each corner, and the castellated parapet which surrounds the promenade, have all been designed with a view to the defence of the building”.⁴⁸

Another notable building was erected at around the same time at Säqoṭa, the capital of Lasta. There the local ruler, *Wag šum* Täfäri, arranged for M. Dubois, a Swiss carpenter, to erect a royal church.⁴⁹

Yoḥannəs for his part was not averse to wearing new types of clothing. Though he had hitherto gone about shoeless, dressed only in a *šamma*, as Harrison Smith notes, the Englishman subsequently saw him wearing a “suit of blue and white striped tick”. A broad pistol-belt encircled his waist, and from it dangled a knife, and a compendium of tools and corkscrews. Thick woolen stockings were pulled up outside his trousers, and heavy boots and a tweed coat completed his attire.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ RICHARD PANKHURST, “Misoneism and Innovation in Ethiopian History”, *Ethiopia Observer* (1964), VII, pp. 287–320.

⁴⁷ VIGONI, 1881, pp. 18–19.

⁴⁸ SMITH, 1890, pp. 228–29.

⁴⁹ RAFFRAY, 1880, p. 184.

⁵⁰ SMITH, 1890, pp. 96–97.

Medical Innovation; The Emperor's Court Physician

The second field of traditional innovation in which Yoḥannəs played a prominent role was medicine. He accepted the presence at his court in 1885–86 of a Greek physician, Dr. Nicholas Parisis, lent by King George I of the Hellenes. Yoḥannəs was thus the first Ethiopian ruler to have his personal physician.

Parisis was, however, more than a mere court physician. He introduced European-style vaccination, based on a serum imported from France, to a moderately wide section of the population. This arrived during the great smallpox epidemic in 1886, and resulted in the vaccination of many prominent figures. They included Emperor Yoḥannəs himself, the Abun, or head of the church, King Mənilək of Šäwa, King Täklä Haymanot of Goḡgam, and *Ras* Alula, as well as “many generals, officials, soldiers, and numerous children”.⁵¹ Yoḥannəs was so convinced of the superiority of modern vaccination over traditional Ethiopian variolation that he issued a decree forbidding his subjects from practicing the latter. The force of this decree is confirmed by Harrison Smith, who declares that the old practice was declared a “heinous” offence; and that “great efforts” were made to replace it by European-style vaccination.⁵²

Other Medical Developments

Other medical developments took place in this period throughout much of northern Ethiopia. One of the most remarkable innovations was due to the arrival in ʿAdwa of the afore-said Hungarian armourer, André, who made artificial limbs for thieves and other persons amputated in accordance with the traditional Ethiopian legal code. He reportedly charged ten Maria Theresa dollars per limb, in addition to being given presents of grain, meat, honey, etc. The French traveller Alex Girard⁵³ reported that when Yoḥannəs first saw André's artificial limbs he “could not believe his eyes”.⁵⁴

There was likewise some medical activity by European missionaries, who, though excluded from the Ethiopian empire as a whole, had an impact

⁵¹ NICOLO PARISIS, *L'Abissinia* (Milan, 1888), p. 130.

⁵² PARISIS, 1888, p. 130, SMITH, 1890, p. 113.

⁵³ Girard, it is interesting to note, had many ideas for the modernisation of Ethiopia. These included the publication of a monthly periodical to bring the country in contact with the outside world, the establishment of clinics in ʿAdwa and Gondär, an Ethiopian school in Paris, a specially trained royal bodyguard to render the monarch independent of feudal chiefs, a French consulate at Massawa – and the cultivation of silk-worms (GIRARD, 1873, pp. 17–19).

⁵⁴ GIRARD, 1873, pp. 240–41, 262.

in peripheral areas. The Roman Catholic Filles de la Charité reputedly treated around a hundred patients a day at their two mission stations at Massawa and Kārān, and the Swedish missionaries at Mənkullu were also active.⁵⁵

New medicines were also imported in the course of trade, or brought in by foreign travellers. This resulted in a significant expansion in the use of mercury sulphate preparations in the treatment of syphilis. This cure was by then replacing the older sarsaparilla treatment, and by the early 1880s was commonly used, Rohlf's says, in much of northern Ethiopia.⁵⁶

The Emperor, Military Training; and the Acquisition of Fire-arms

Yoḥannəs was fully aware of the importance of modern fire-arms. They had first been displayed for his benefit by members of the British expedition to Mäqdāla, and had later proved decisive in their assault on Tewodros's citadel.

Yoḥannəs, like Tewodros, appreciated the value of modern European military skills, and was interested in European-style military training, as well as in the acquisition of up-to-date fire-arms. At the close of Mäqdāla expedition, and while still only *Däğğazmač* Kassa, he requested the British commander, General Robert Napier, to lend him two or three members of the latter's force to teach his men how to use the weapons he was being given by the British. Napier, however, refused, on the grounds that "the soldiers belonged to the Queen of England, and could not be left behind without her special orders".⁵⁷

Undeterred by this rebuff Yoḥannəs sent emissaries to England in 1870 with a letter, strangely reminiscent of one of Tewodros, declaring, "I should like that somebody would come to me, who might teach arts or wisdom". General Edward Stanton, the British consul in Egypt, who interviewed the envoys there, reported, that they were "very anxious to induce English Engineers and Artizans to go to Abyssinia, adding that they would be well received and that they are also desirous of obtaining the services of people clever at working mines, as Abyssinia produces gold, silver, tin, lead, and coal, but owing to their ignorance of the proper method of working the mines they get but little for them."⁵⁸ The British Government, unwilling to

⁵⁵ JEAN BAPTISTE PIOLET, *Les missions catholiques au XIX^{ème} siècle* (Paris, n.d.), p. 38.

⁵⁶ PARISIS, 1888, pp. 135–36.

⁵⁷ HENRY MONTEGUE HOZIER, *The British Expedition to Abyssinia* (London, 1869), p. 260.

⁵⁸ GREAT BRITAIN, FOREIGN OFFICE, F.O., 1/28, Stanton to F.O., 13 January 1871.

become further involved in Ethiopia, left the letter unanswered for over a year, and then ignored the monarch's request for craftsmen.

Yoḥannəs nevertheless succeeded privately in obtaining the services of a British sergeant, John Kirkham, who had served in the expedition, and became the Emperor's military adviser, with the title of General. He was recompensed with the gift of an estate at Ginda^c on the northern edge of the plateau. He was entrusted with the task of training a corps of selected young military trainees, but this was apparently not a success. The American author William Mc E. Dye reports:

“King John authorized him to drill about one thousand soldiers. These soon showed great improvement and proved themselves capable of being made the best light troops in the world – said Kirkham. But it required time, as they were impatient under rigid discipline; and this the King did not permit him to enforce. After a few months the men complained of the restraint, and the system was abandoned ...”⁵⁹

Kirkham was also despatched on an important diplomatic mission to Europe.⁶⁰

Yoḥannəs also for time made use of a Frenchman, called René, with an Ethiopian wife. He served in the administration of Kärän.⁶¹ This period also coincided with a great transformation in the armament of the Emperor's forces. On the departure of the British in 1868, they gave Yoḥannəs six mortars and six howitzers, both then scarcely known in Ethiopia, as well as 725 muskets with fixable bayonets, then also a novelty for the country.⁶² Some of the rifles acquired from the British were given, according to Girard, to an elite force of *Tältäl* soldiers.⁶³

The victories of Yoḥannəs over the Egyptians at the battles of Gundät in 1875 and Gura in 1876 also had a major impact in the field of armament. In these two engagements the Emperor's men captured a total of something

⁵⁹ WILLIAM MC. E. DYE, *Moslem Egypt and Christian Abyssinia* (New York, 1880), p. 472.

⁶⁰ SIMON, 1885, pp. 277–79; DE COSSON, 1877, I, 302, II, pp. 63–64; DE COURSAK, 1926, pp. 107–18; WYLDE, 1901, pp. 216–17.

⁶¹ GIRARD, 1873, pp. 31–32, 35–38, 271.

⁶² TREVENON JAMES HOLLAND and HENRY MONTEGUE HOZIER, *Record of the Expedition to Abyssinia* (London, 1870), II, pp. 94–96.

⁶³ GIRARD, 1873, pp. 104–05.

approaching 20,000 Remington breech-loading rifles, which until then had been a virtually complete monopoly of foreign soldiers.⁶⁴

The transformation resulting from this immense acquisition of fire-arms was noted by Rohlf's. Recalling that during a visit to the country in Tewodros's time he had seen only a very few primitive rifles, he states that Ethiopian soldiers had at that time relied mainly on spears, swords and shields. Such old-time weapons could still be seen towards the end of the reign of Yoḥannəs, but were by then going out of fashion, as evident from the fact that shields ornamented with gold and silver filigree were seldom any longer seen. Almost all Ethiopian soldiers by then carried rifles, including models using percussion caps, as well as many breech-loaders.⁶⁵ The value of such weapons was, however, significantly limited, first by the Egyptians, and later by the Italians, both of whom used their control of the coast to impose a strict prohibition on the import of ammunition.⁶⁶

Hunting and Its Effect on Wild Life

The considerable influx of fire-arms in this period resulted in intensified, and more successful, hunting, particularly in the north of the country. This led, during the reign of Yoḥannəs, to a steady decline in wild life, for the time being limited to the north of the country. Evidence of this in the Kärän area was noted in 1883 by James. He observed that "a few years ago elephants and rhinoceros were plentiful in places that the former now visit only at rare and uncertain intervals and where the presence of the latter is a thing entirely of the past".⁶⁷ Most hunting was carried out by the people of the country, but the travels of the British hunter the Earl of Mayo, author of *Sport in Abyssinia, or the Mareb and Tackazee*, published in 1876, was a portent of foreign big-game hunters – and travel writers – to come.

The coming of fire-arms was warmly welcomed by the indigenous hunters, whom it enabled to penetrate into hitherto virgin lands to the south. Support for the elimination of wild life was likewise voiced by the aforementioned Mərča Wärqe, who addressing an audience in Britain in 1884 claimed that "the people of Abyssinia were making strenuous efforts to clear the country of lions and other beasts".⁶⁸

⁶⁴ DYE, 1880, p. 141; DE COSSON, 1877, II, pp. 165–66; ROHLF'S, 1883, pp. 62–63; WYLDE, 1901, pp. 24–28; SVEN RUBINSON, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* (London, 1976), pp. 323, 335.

⁶⁵ ROHLF'S, 1883, pp. 136, 146–47, 204.

⁶⁶ WYLDE, 1901, p. 263.

⁶⁷ JAMES, 1890, pp. 113–14.

⁶⁸ *The Globe*, 27 August 1884.

Land Grants to the Church, and Apparent Democratisation of Land Tenure

The structure of land tenure, and class relations between lords and peasants, during the reign of Yoḥannəs, underwent significant changes. These came in the wake of a long period of instability resulting from civil war, including the fighting of Emperor Tewodros's reign, which had been accompanied by the rise of a class of soldiers-cum-bandits who lived by looting the countryside. Instability may also have been engendered by report of Tewodros's attempts to curtail church land. The period after the accession of Yoḥannəs was, as we have seen, likewise potentially unstable, as a result of three successive major wars – with the Egyptians, Dervishes and Italians.

The Emperor, a strong supporter of the Church, reversed his predecessor's anti-clerical land policy, by reinforcing and apparently even extending church control over the land. To that end he confirmed the priests of Aksum in their former landed possessions, allocated them further estates, notably in Tämben, and had much church property registered in writing. He also issued a decree re-establishing the monastery of Däbrä Bizän in its former fiefdoms, and granting lands to several other religious establishments.⁶⁹

Yoḥannəs, at the same time, also presided over an apparent democratisation of land holdings. On the eve of the fighting with the Dervishes in 1888 he and *Ras* Alula issued two important and far-reaching decrees. One, designed to raise money for the war, laid down that anyone paying tribute on land was considered to hold it as *rəsti*, i.e. inheritable private property. This decision considerably extended the ranks of *rəstənyatat*, or *rəst*-holders.

The other edict granted “squatters' rights”, akin to rights of *rəsti* to anyone who had held land for forty years or more. Women, in some areas, likewise for the first time received the right to inherit *rəsti* land from their fathers.⁷⁰

A more benevolent attitude than in the past towards the peasantry is likewise suggested by Wylde. He declares that by the end of the reign of Yoḥannəs “the peasant and cultivator were ... better off and less molested by the soldiery, as only enough men were kept permanently under arms to enable the king to enforce his rule, and it was only in war time when expeditions had to be undertaken that the able-bodied peasantry were called out”.⁷¹

⁶⁹ RUFFILLO PERINI, *Di qua del Maré*b (Florence, 1905), p. 85; GERALDO VILLARI, “I ‘gulti’ della regione di Axum”, *Rassegna Economica dell’Africa Italiana* (1938), XVI, pp. 1432–40; GEORGE WYNN BRERETON HUNTINGFORD, *The Land Charters of Northern Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 1965), p. 79.

⁷⁰ SIEGFRIED NADEL, “Land Tenure on the Eritrean Plateau”, *Africa* (1946), XVI, pp. 7, 11, 17–18.

⁷¹ WYLDE, 1901, p. 44.

Status of the Nobility, and Reduced Oppression of the Peasantry

Significant developments also took place in the status of the nobility, and in the restrictions imposed on the peasantry. These issues found expression in two seemingly unrelated incidents, which took place apparently towards the end of the reign.

The first, which seems to have had far-reaching consequences in the countryside, occurred in the Mäqet area of Bägemdär, and is recorded in the memoirs of the Ethiopian scholar *Aläqa* Lämna Ḥaylu. Getahun Gesse, a prosperous peasant, wising to hold a feast in honour of the Virgin Mary, challenged the traditional law prohibiting the peasantry from slaughtering cattle or making *tägg*, or honey wine. The local peasants were all invited to the party, and much merry-making resulted. One of the guests, however, later reported the matter to Emperor Yoḥannäs, who ordered Getahun to be brought before him. After the charge against him was levied, he was allowed to reply, and declared:

“I farm extensively, so I have much grain. Since my forests are good for bees I have plenty of honey. My land is so large that I have many cows and oxen. I do not sell all my produce as I have enough money. If I try to keep what I produce the grain will be consumed by the *näkäz* [a grain-eating insect], the honey and butter will go bad, and the cattle will become too numerous for the available land. Considering these facts I decided to give a banquet in honour of the Church, for the priests and congregation. Apart from holding this feast for St. Mary I have not killed *frida* [cattle] for myself, or prepared *täj* for my own use.”

The Təgray nobles around the Emperor were, it is said, strongly opposed to Getahun’s pleading. “In the time of our fathers and grandfathers”, they said, “persons found with *täj* in their houses were deprived of their land; persons discovered sleeping on leather beds had their riches taken away from them. People followed their masters from the *qolla* [lowland] to the *däga* [highland] in order to win the privilege of the *qämis* [shirt], and thereby gain the right to kill *frida* and make *täj*. Many people have become rich by farming and cattle-rearing, and if they were granted these privileges no one would attend court any more. The law clearly specifies that the defendant is guilty; he should therefore be punished”.

Yoḥannäs, however, ruled against the nobles. His judgment was as follows:

“The defendant was not found stealing someone else’s money, or behaving like a robber in the jungle. If he is not going to be left without

oxen with which to plough, it does not matter if he kills his own *frida*. Providing he does not become destitute there is no objection to his drinking his own honey. Moreover, what he did was done in honour of St. Mary. He is therefore not liable to any punishment, and henceforward the people may live as they wish.

When the populace heard this epoch-making ruling they reportedly returned home rejoicing. The *ballabat*, or squires, and other rich people prepared large quantities of *täj*, killed as much cattle as they wished, and there was much rejoicing in the land.”⁷²

The second incident, which was no less important, involved *Ras* Alla, the ruler of Ḥamasen, who issued a pro-conservative decree prohibiting the peasantry from preparing *täḡḡ*, either for their own use, or for weddings or funerals. This edict was justified, according to the oral history of Šä^cazzäga and Hazzega, on the ground that *täḡḡ* was “the drink of the King”, and that it was “not appropriate for everyone to drink it”.

Not long after this edict a certain Hadgembesa, a man of good but not noble family, decided to make *täḡḡ* for his marriage feast. His friends appealed to him not to break the law, but he refused. He was duly found guilty by the *Ras*, who banished him to the Habab county, after which he defected to the Italians who had by then established themselves in the north of the country, soon to be named Eritrea.⁷³

Opposition to Slavery and the Slave Trade

Yoḥannäs was significantly influenced by the nineteenth century European, and more specifically English, agitation against slavery and the slave trade, and was virtually the first Ethiopian ruler to take an official stand against them. Both institutions were then long established in the country. Hallowed by time, they were accepted, albeit with some qualifications, in the Ethiopia’s traditional legal code, the *Fəṯḥa Nägäšt*, or Law of the Kings.

The question of the slavery and the slave trade came to the fore early in Yoḥannäs’s reign. The matter was apparently first brought to the Emperor’s attention in 1873 by the British traveller de Cosson, who shared his countrymen’s passionate hatred of slavery. Yoḥannäs, according to the traveller, “listened attentively” to his interpreter’s translation of the arguments against the institution, after which he declared that he had “thought gravely over these matters, and that it was true that slavery was distasteful

⁷² MÄNGESTU LÄMMA, *Māshafä Tezeta* (Addis Ababa, 1959 E.C.), pp. 50–56.

⁷³ JOHANNES KOLMODIN, J., *Traditions de Tsaggega et Hazzega* (Uppsala, 1915), pp. 192–93, 195.

to him as a Christian sovereign”. No European Power, he said, had, however, “ever requested him ... to abolish the slave trade, and that while he was only Prince of Təgre it would have been out of his power to do so, as the measure would have been opposed by many of his chiefs, whom he could not have controlled”. Power, he explained, was, however, “now ... in his hands”, and he trusted that God would favour his efforts “to deliver his country from the attacks of the Mussulmans”, as well as to gain the friendship of Britain. De Cosson proceeded to argue that the abolition of slavery would give great pleasure to the British, and continues:

“I had his promise that he would take immediate measures to enforce the punishment of death against all traders, Mahometan or Christian, who should in future attempt to buy, sell, or kidnap slaves in his country, or attempt to pass them through it. I begged his Majesty, while he is doing so much, to complete the work by declaring free the slaves then existing in Abyssinia, as those who were contented with their lot would be no worse, while those who pined for liberty would be able to enjoy it like their fellow creatures. This also he said he would do, and, at my request, promised to pledge himself to do these things in letters written under his great seal, which he would ask me to convey for him to our Government.”⁷⁴

De Cosson was so confident in the Emperor’s support that he reported to the British Foreign Secretary, Earl Granville, on 30 July, that Yoḥannəs had agreed, “not only to execute sentence of death on slave traders”, but “also to declare all slaves now existing free”.⁷⁵

The Emperor duly instructed Kirkham, his English aide, to write to Granville under the imperial seal. The letter declared that the Emperor, as a Christian sovereign, found slavery “distasteful”, and promised “to put an end to all traffic in slaves in his kingdom, and to declare all slaves now existing in Abyssinian territory free men”. He also announced his intention of issuing a proclamation that “if any of his subjects shall buy or sell a slave, they will be punished by death without mercy”.

Though the efficacy of these decrees, like those subsequently issued by Mənilək, was only limited, Yoḥannəs had thus explicitly committed himself to the anti-slavery cause. Rohlf, in 1881, confirmed that the Emperor had declared the trade illegal, but feared that the monarch closed his eyes to the capture of slaves by his followers when those seized were not Christians. On the positive side, however, the great Ethiopian slave market at Galabat on the

⁷⁴ DE COSSON, 1877, II, 35–39. See also DE COURSAK, 1926, pp. 215–19.

⁷⁵ GREAT BRITAIN, FOREIGN OFFICE, F.O. 1/27B, de Cosson to Foreign Office.

Sudan frontier, was, according to the British traveller William Winstanley, officially closed.⁷⁶

Yohānnās shortly afterwards committed himself by international treaty to the abolition of both slavery and the slave trade. In the short-lived Tripartite Treaty of 3 June 1884 he undertook “to prohibit and to prevent, to the best of his ability, the buying and selling of slaves”, as well as “the import or export of slaves to or from his dominions”. He agreed also “to protect, to the utmost of his power, all liberated slaves, and to punish severely any attempts to molest them, or to reduce them again to slavery”.

Wylde, who as British Vice-Consul for the Red Sea was relatively well informed, commented that the Emperor “faithfully carried out this treaty”, and that there was “no known case of slaves passing through his dominions from the time when it was signed until his death”, in 1889.⁷⁷

The underground slave trade nevertheless continued, as it did indeed for many decades to come. The tiny port of Ĕmbārāmi near Massawa, according to Wylde, was “noted for the shipment of slaves”, and “many a kidnapped Abyssinian child” had there “seen the last of Africa”. Many Abyssinian women, he declared, were likewise lured to Galabat by the promise that they could “make plenty of money by immoral practices. Once being taken there they were regularly sold to the slave dealers, and ... never saw their native country again”. Women were similarly persuaded by promises of work to go down to the port of Massawa, and were then exported to Arabia as slaves.⁷⁸ The last years of the Emperor’s reign also witnessed considerable slave-raiding by the Dervishes of the Sudan.⁷⁹

Imposition of Religious Orthodoxy

Several of Emperor Yohānnās’s most pressing concerns – and resultant innovations – were in the religious field. A loyal child of the Church, he believed that the political unification of the Ethiopian empire “must be accompanied”, as the modern Ethiopian historian *Däggazmač* Zewde Gäbre Sellassie declares, “by measures designed to establish religious uni-

⁷⁶ ROHLFS, 1883, pp. 267–69; WILLIAM WINSTANLEY, *A Visit to Abyssinia* (London, 1888), I, p. 50, II, pp. 77–78.

⁷⁷ WYLDE, 1901, pp. 474–75.

⁷⁸ WYLDE, 1888, I, pp. 52–53, II, p. 165.

⁷⁹ GUEBRE SELLASSIE, *Chronique du règne de Ménélik roi des rois d’Ethiopie* (Paris, 1930–31), I, 251–52; JEAN DUCHESNE-FOURNET, *Mission en Ethiopie (1901–1903)* (Paris, 1908), I, pp. 138, 141.

formity in the Orthodox Church”⁸⁰ – as well as by the paramountcy of the Church in the country at large.

Following his victories over the Egyptians at Gundät and Gura in 1875–76, he insisted that the principal Muslim leaders of Wällo, Muḥammad ʿAlī and Abba Wəqaw, together with their followers, should abandon their faith, and be baptised as Christians. The two chiefs, anxious to retain their positions, complied, and became apparent loyal followers of Christ, but many of their subjects did so only nominally – and came to be known as “Christians by day; Muslims by night”. These conversions, such as they were, had interesting consequences in that they extended land ownership rights to many supposed Christians who eventually turned out to be followers of Islam.⁸¹

Another notable development of the reign (and one which recalls the abortive attempt by the Zag^we ruler King Harbe to increase the number of bishops in the country) came in 1881 when Yoḥannəs persuaded the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria, Kyrilos V, to expand the number of bishops in Ethiopia. The Egyptian Patriarchate accordingly consecrated a Metropolitan, *Abunä* Peṭros, and three additional bishops, Mattewos, Marqos and Luqas. Peṭros remained in the north, in charge of the diocese of Təgray and Märäb Mällaṣ, while Marqos was assigned to Bägemdär and Sämen; Mattewos to Šäwa; and Luqas to Goḡgam and its then political appendage Kaffa.⁸²

Banning of Foreign Missionaries

The Emperor’s insistence on religious uniformity also found expression in another of his innovative policies to which reference has already been made: the banning from the country of foreign missionaries of all denominations, Protestant as well as Catholic.

Harking back in a sense to the expulsion of the Jesuits in the early 17th century, Yoḥannəs re-enacted the earlier Ethiopian ban on European missionaries from entering the country. His action was innovative in that it brought an end to the early 19th century missionary activity, and excluded missionaries from Ethiopia for several decades. His attitude to the penetration of foreign missionaries is exemplified by a conversation attributed to

⁸⁰ ZEWDE GABRE-SELLASSIE, *Yohannes IV of Ethiopia: a Political Biography* (Oxford, 1975), p. 94.

⁸¹ PERINI, 1905, p. 344; RICHARD PANKHURST, *State and Land in Ethiopian History* (Addis Ababa, 1966), pp. 103–04; ZEWDE GABRE-SELLASSIE, 1975, pp. 98, 100, 102.

⁸² BAIRU TAFLA, *A Chronicle of Emperor Yohannes IV (1872–89)* (Wiesbaden, 1977), p. 153.

him by the Italian traveller Gustavo Bianchi. On the arrival of a party of Swedish missionaries, the monarch is said to have asked, "Are there Jews in your country?" "Yes, Your Majesty", the visitors replied. "And through which country did you pass to reach mine?", he asked. "We went through Egyptian territory", they responded. "Then why", he exclaimed, "did you not stay in your own country or in Egypt to baptise the people there? We have no need for this here!"⁸³

Yoḥannəs reverted to the same line of thought when talking with Winstanley, to whom he declared that the British, with their involvement in Egypt, would be better occupied in teaching Christianity there than in Ethiopia which had been converted to that religion over a millennium earlier. "Foreigners", he declared, "I cannot say I love or trust ... Why do foreign nations come here Christianizing Christians? They make trouble in my country, and are not wanted. Are there no men who are pagans to be converted? In the history of my nation, the preachers of foreign religions have filled a bloody and disastrous page. We are Christians like yourselves, with different forms; you represent a Mussulman government [i.e. that of Egypt]. and I find western nations profess a great interest in Egypt. Why do not your European missionaries convert these, your friends, to Christianity?"⁸⁴

The Emperor was, however, in Wylde's opinion, somewhat less unfavorably disposed to Swedish Protestant missionaries than to Roman Catholics (who were either French or Italians, i.e. foreigners with neighbouring foreign colonies suspected of harbouring imperialist ambitions at Ethiopia's expense). He was, however, obliged to forbid groups both from his country, the Englishman argues, for if Yoḥannəs made an exception in favour of one group "other nations would have asked for the same rights".⁸⁵

Imperial Prohibition of Tobacco

Yoḥannəs, because of his Orthodox faith, attempted to maintain, and indeed strengthen the traditional opposition to tobacco, as manifested by the Ethiopian Church. He forbade both smoking and the taking of snuff, declaring that anyone indulging in either should be beaten on the first offence, and that any repetition would be followed by amputation of the mouth in the case of smoking or of the nose for taking snuff. These punishments, according to the Greek consul, M. Mitsakis, were however only nominal,

⁸³ BIANCHI, G., *Alla terra dei Galla* (Milano, 1886), p. 67.

⁸⁴ WINSTANLEY, 1888, II, p. 243.

⁸⁵ WYLDE, 1888, II, p. 1. See also, ID., 1901, p. 164.

and were not in fact carried out. Wylde confirms this by stating that “on some four or five occasions men caught smoking or snuffing in or near the precincts of the royal palaces ... had their lips or nose scarified so that, until the wound was healed, they could not use tobacco”.

The extent of imperial toleration is also indicated by the same observer’s statement that Yoḥannəs never forbade European visitors from using tobacco, and that he “repeatedly told them that if they wished to smoke in his presence they might”. He adds that when *Ləḡ Mərča*, his foreign-educated aide, took out his silver snuff-box at court, and “was going to help himself, quite forgetting that he was in the king’s presence, His Majesty said, ‘Not before me, Ledj Mercha, whatever you may do before others’, and the box went back into his pocket very quickly”.⁸⁶

The Emperor’s prohibition of tobacco seems, however, to have been far from permanently effective, for Yoḥannəs, as Wylde says, could no more prevent people from indulging in tobacco when out of his presence than he could stop them eating or drinking.⁸⁷

Opening of Diplomatic Relations, Introduction of a National Flag, the Restitution of the *Kəbrä Nəgəšt*, and the Founding of a Church at Jerusalem

Though rulers of Ethiopia had despatched diplomatic-cum-commercial missions to Europe since early medieval times, Yoḥannəs was the first Ethiopian monarch to appoint a permanent representative abroad. The latter was an Englishman based in London, a certain Henry Seymour King, who was accorded the title of Ethiopian Honorary Consul.⁸⁸

Yoḥannəs was likewise the first Ethiopian monarch to request the repatriation of artifacts looted from the country. He was grieved in particular at the loss of two items seized by the British expedition to Mäqdäla in 1868. One was a manuscript of the *Kəbrä Nəgəšt*, or Glory of Kings, the marginalia of which contained important data on land holdings in the Aksum area; the other was an icon of the *Kʷərʹatä rəʹəsu*, or Christ with the Crown of Thorns, which had for centuries been carried by the Ethiopian soldiers on campaign. Deeply concerned at the loss of these two irreplaceable items he despatched two letters to London: one to Queen Victoria; and the other to the British Foreign Secretary, Earl Granville.

As a result of this intervention the British Government returned the manuscript, which, it transpired, had been acquired by the British Museum

⁸⁶ WYLDE, 1901, pp. 45–46.

⁸⁷ WYLDE, 1888, I, p. 190. See also GIRARD, 1873, pp. 246–47.

⁸⁸ DE COURSAK, 1926, p. 116.

(now British Library). The volume was subsequently transferred to Emperor Mənilək's custody, and is currently in the possession of St. Ragu'el's church in the market area of Addis Ababa.

The icon had on the other hand been acquired by Sir Richard Holmes, the British expedition's "archaeologist", who kept its possession a secret for several years. Queen Victoria and Earl Granville accordingly both wrote back to Yoḥannəs that they "did not believe" that the painting had been taken to Britain". Sir Richard only revealed his ownership of the painting much later, with the result that it remained in his possession, and that of his heirs and subsequent purchaser, and was accordingly never repatriated.⁸⁹

Yoḥannəs meanwhile had the distinction of being the first Ethiopian ruler to introduce a national flag. Two designs were produced, both entirely different from the one later inaugurated by Mənilək. The first, according to Winstanley, was "a gorgeous production of silk, a tricolour, the coloured divisions running laterally. The highest portion was crimson, the centre white, and the lowest amethyst blue. The whole was surrounded by a rich gold fringe. On the white ground was a gilt and painted representation of the Lion of Judah, with a defiant tail, and a crucifix in his right paw".⁹⁰ The second version, described by the French traveller Gabriel Simon, consisted of two bands of red silk divided by a blue band on which was embroidered the Ethiopian *lion marchant*. The shaft was surmounted by a double cross.⁹¹

One other achievement of Emperor Yoḥannəs deserves mention: the founding of the Church of Däbrä Gännät at Jerusalem. This place of worship was initially funded with gold he had captured from the Egyptians at the battle of Gura in 1876. He subsequently made the church many further payments, to a total value of 328,500 Maria Theresa dollars, of which 141,500 dollars were for construction purposes.⁹²

"Well-being"

Any assessment of changes in the quality of life during the reign of Yoḥannəs can only be subjective. The "welfare" of the population presumably varied greatly from one area to another, as well as between various classes

⁸⁹ PANKHURST, "The kwr'ata re'esu: The history of an Ethiopian icon", *Abba Salama* (1979), X, pp. 169–87. See also DE COURSAK, 1926, pp. 111–13.

⁹⁰ WINSTANLEY, 1888, II, p. 245.

⁹¹ SIMON, 1885, p. 347.

⁹² BAIRU TAFLA, 1977, pp. 163–75, 179–87; KIRSTEN PEDERSEN, *The History of the Ethiopian Community in the Holy Land from the Time of Emperor Tewodros II till 1974* (Jerusalem, 1983), pp. 39–48.

and occupations. The overall happiness of the people was presumably much affected, both nationally and regionally, by many of the issues discussed in this article: most notably by the prevalence of peace and stability, the exactions of the military, tax-collectors and bandits, as well as by such imponderables as the character of land tenure and status of the peasantry, improvements in transportation and the growth of trade, the expansion or curtailment of slavery and slave-raiding, the level of education and “enlightenment”, the efficacy of vaccination against smallpox, and the eradication of wild animals.

In this connection the considered opinion of A.B. Wylde may be quoted. Having travelled across the country in the 1880s – and again in the 1890s, he emphatically observed:

“The country that King Johannes ruled over at his death had greatly improved during the time he was on the throne. The leading men were more enlightened than their predecessors, and took more interest in the welfare of their subjects. There were more rich merchants than formerly, and owing to the brigandage being nearly put down, internal trade in the county had greatly increased and more foreign goods were imported ... The peasant and cultivator were also better off and less molested by the soldiery ...”.⁹³

Summary

The article attempts to examine the character and extent of innovation and misoneism during the reign of Yoḥannəs, i.e. the period between the largely frustrated aspirations of Tewodros and of more substantial achievements of Mənilək. The study suggests that the reign of Yoḥannəs in fact witnessed changes in many fields of life. These included improvements in communication between Ethiopia and the outside world; the advent of new imports; changes in land tenure and class relations; the strengthening of church land-holding; attempted action against slavery and the slave trade; increasing diffusion of fire-arms; the forced conversion of Muslims, and prohibition of foreign missionaries; the banning of tobacco; the depletion of wild-life; the introduction of a national flag, the appointment of a foreign consul abroad, and the building of a church in Jerusalem.

⁹³ WYLDE, 1901. p. 44.