

The Battle of Adwa: African Victory in the Age of Empire

By Raymond Jonas


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In 1896 a massive Ethiopian army routed an invading Italian force and brought Italy's conquest of Africa to an end. In defending its independence, Ethiopia cast doubt on the assumption that all Africans would fall under the rule of Europeans, and opened a breach that would lead to the continent's painful struggle for freedom from colonial rule.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Jonas has brought Adwa into the fold of transnational history, marrying the local and the global in lively, engaging prose in this excellent exercise in narrative history."

-- Teshale Tibebu, Temple University, *Choice* (A *Choice* Outstanding Academic Title for 2012)

"[Jonas has given] us a masterly account of one of the most dramatic moments in the modern history of Africa."

- Bahru Zewde, University of Addis Ababa, *Africa Review of Books*

Jonas offers the first comprehensive study of one of the most important events in modern African history. He brilliantly brings to life the story of Ethiopian leaders, Italian military officials, and quirky European advisors and observers. Written in a wonderfully evocative and lively style, this book firmly establishes the Battle of Adwa's place in world history and will appeal to a broad readership. (Jonathan Miran, author of *Red Sea Citizens*)

On March 1, 1896, near the town of Adwa, in Ethiopia, an African army convincingly struck down the colonizing Italian army in a battle that decisively shaped not only the contours of Ethiopia but also its future and that of the continent. As University of Washington historian Jonas so deftly observes in this nimble and artfully crafted work, the events at Adwa cast doubt upon Europeans' unshakeable certainty that Africans would eventually fall under their rule. Jonas draws vibrant portraits of the personalities at the center of these events, from the shrewd Ethiopian monarch Menelik and his bold, aggressive wife, Taytu Betul, to the unfortunate Italian general Oreste Baratieri, the leader of the defeated Italian forces. As Jonas points out, the African victory at Adwa commenced the crumbling of European dominance of Africa; Ethiopia thus became a source of pride and lineage often indistinguishable from Africa itself, and writers such as W. E. B. DuBois based their own model African states on Ethiopia. Weaving a colorful account from the stories of a dazzling array of characters, Jonas skillfully recreates this now mostly forgotten event that determined the color of Africa. (*Publishers Weekly* (starred review) 2011-09-26)

Jonas's lucidly woven account masterfully repositions the role of contingency in the unfolding of history and uses the little-known battle to stand for the audacious imperial quest for glory unleashed by Western powers in the "scramble for Africa." ...His remarkable cast of characters and insightful prose will be of interest to scholars of African history and issues related to counterinsurgency. (Brian Odom *Library Journal* 2011-10-15)

From the Author

Winner of the Toyin Falola Africa Book Award for 2012 from the Association of Third World Studies

About the Author

Raymond Jonas is Giovanni and Amne Costigan Professor of History at the University of Washington.

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Allen Green:

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