

PRESENTATION OF HAYLE SILLASIE IN PHOTOGRAPHS FROM IMPERIAL ERA ETHIOPIAN BOOKS

The aim of this article is to show how the presentation of the Emperor in photographs published in books during the imperial era conveyed a message of power. In the article the use of traditional symbols from Ethiopian paintings as well as new influences will be taken into consideration.

Publishing in Ethiopia was one means of spreading education and introducing modernity – two aims perceived by Hayle Sillasje to be among the most important tasks of the state. The Emperor was also aware of the opportunities provided by the printed word and by pictures for conveying a message of power. Apart from written texts, every single detail of the books published in Ethiopia under Hayle Sillasje's rule was thoroughly and precisely designed and served a specific purpose. The appearance of the books, the way of conveying bibliographical information within a book, the design of the title pages and so on, were employed to convey a specific message, one which emphasised Hayle Sillasje's right to rule the country, his power and his political program.¹⁾ In this respect, a special role was played by photography, and especially by the portraits of His Majesty himself and other members of the royal family. Such portraits were published within the editorial pages of most Ethiopian books. In this article, analysis will be limited to the information concerning power conveyed by the images of Hayle Sillasje I in the opening pages of Ethiopian books.

¹⁾ On the role of Ethiopian books and photography within the system of legitimising power, cp: Rubinkowska (2010).

SOURCE MATERIAL

This article refers to books published in Ethiopia after the Italian occupation and before 1974, i.e., the date of the fall of Haile Sillase. The source material comes from the Library of the Department of African Languages and Cultures at the University of Warsaw.

This library holds a vast number (over 500 titles) of volumes of Ethiopian books published during the imperial era. Most of these books came to Warsaw as a result of an exchange between the Institute of Ethiopian Studies at the then Haile Sillase I University and the Department of Semitic and African Studies at the University of Warsaw. This exchange was initiated during one of Professor Stefan Strelcyn's visits to Ethiopia.²⁾ The first books which are marked in the documents of the Library of the DALC as acquired through the exchange came to Warsaw in 1964, and the exchange lasted until 1969, when Stefan Strelcyn left Poland in connection with the political events of 1968. Additionally, several books were added to the register at a later date, in 1971, also as a result of this exchange. There were also other sources of obtaining books: many of them came to Warsaw as gifts presented to the library by prominent persons, including Mersie Hazen Welde Qirqos and Haile Sillase himself.

Today these books constitute a rare and magnificent collection. At the time they were brought to Poland, they mostly served as language material. Today they constitute a splendid source for researching various aspects of Ethiopian history during Haile Sillase's times. The DALC library at the University of Warsaw holds a collection which is not only vast in number but also representative of what was published in Ethiopia in the period following the Italian occupation and up until the late 1960s, when the exchange with the Institute of Ethiopian Studies ceased. Many of the most important publications of the period are to be found in the library collection, such as the works of Tekle Tsadiq Mekuriya, Kebede Tesemma, Mersie Hazen Welde Qirqos, aleqa Tayye, Kebede Mikael, and many others, but also a lot of books which are not so regularly consulted by historians and researchers, such as the works of Yariel Gebre Mikael or those compiled by Welde Giyorgis Welde Yohannis.

²⁾ Stefan Strelcyn initiated Ethiopian Studies at the University of Warsaw and was the head of the Department until 1969. He was a respected scholar. Haile Sillase himself awarded Strelcyn with the Haile Sillase I Prize, the highest Ethiopian reward for the most esteemed contributors to Ethiopian studies worldwide.

THE ROLE OF PHOTOGRAPHY

A great deal of the publications from Hayle Sillasia's period were richly illustrated with photographs and, to a much lesser extent, with drawings. I believe that specialists in Ethiopian studies and those well-acquainted with Ethiopian books – both in terms of how they look and of their content – treat the photographs as somehow natural elements of the books, something well-known, and thus we consider the quantity of iconographic material as obvious. However, if the issue is reconsidered, the amount of photography in Ethiopian publications should amaze us. Taking into account the poor technical level of how the books were edited and published, the poor quality of the paper and print, such an extensive amount of pictures should be surprising. However, it is much less so if we accept that the purpose of the photographs used in Ethiopian publications was not only to illustrate the text. Obviously, some of the iconographic material served such a purpose, but a large part of the photographs (including those published on the front pages) were not related to the subject of the book and served the purpose of presenting a portrait of the Emperor. These pictures, published in most Ethiopian books from the period under discussion, introduced the image of the Emperor to a growing number of Ethiopian people, mostly those who were able to read or attended schools; hence, that part of society which was expected to become the “new man” of Ethiopia. This new Ethiopian society was to be made up of the educated and the pro-modern, but simultaneously the patriotic, those who respected Christian Ethiopian tradition, and thus were in agreement with the Emperor's ideas of how the state and society should function.

There were many photographs published in the first pages of the books which presented the Emperor. The image of the Emperor differed within the publications. It was a complex image, containing many various aspects represented in the discussed material. Before discussing this issue, however, let us take a look at the history of photography in Ethiopia in connection with power, as it was not Hayle Sillasia who introduced this medium into Ethiopian propaganda.

It should also be remembered that an important aspect of introducing photography to Ethiopia was its impact on church art. Alongside Western art, photography had a strong influence on how portraits of the monarchs were painted on church walls in the 20th century, as they took on more realistic physical features so as to be easily recognisable, unlike the earlier artistic portrayals in which the rulers could only be recognised through the deciphering of various symbolic accessories.

From its very beginnings (i.e. the second half of the 19th century), this medium was often used for political purposes. Ethiopian rulers and politicians often used photography as a tool in the struggle for power. Already Emperor Yohannis IV (1872–1889) had used photography as a medium for conveying a political message. A good example is the famous photograph showing him and his son, Ras (= ‘Duke’) Araya in a pose symbolising the anointing of Araya as his heir. The hand of the Emperor, who is seated above his son, bearing all the regal insignia, rests on Araya’s arm. This image was meant to convey the information that the righteous heir to Yohannis IV’s throne was his son, Araya.³⁾ History decided differently and it was Menelik II (1889–1913) who claimed the throne following Yohannis’s death. Menelik was also very keen on using photography as a medium for legitimising his power. We know many pictures of the Emperor in his regal clothes and with the insignias of power. There are also photographs which are obviously meant to symbolise the Emperor’s wish to transfer his power to his grandson – Lij (= ‘Infant’) Iyasu (1913–1916).⁴⁾ With the passage of time, the better availability of photography and the increasingly less stable political situation in the Empire, the issue of how photographs were used in the struggle for power became even more intriguing. The period of Iyasu’s rule is rich in events in which both photography presenting real events and fake photography played a significant role.⁵⁾ Another way of using photography in the service of power can be illustrated by Menelik’s gibbir (= ‘banquet’) with photographs, hanging on the poles of the gibbir tent, of Menelik and his wife Taytu. Another example are the pictures of Menelik’s daughter, Empress Zewditu (1916–1930), and the heir to the throne, Teferi Mekonnin (later Haile Sillasié I), placed alongside various elements of the imperial insignia: the three Ethiopian colours and a symbol of the lion, on the arches erected along the pathway Zewditu travelled from the church to the palace during her coronation in 1917.⁶⁾

With such a history, it is not surprising that during Haile Sillasié’s reign photography was as eagerly used for political purposes as it had been before. The novelty, however, already introduced by Ras Teferi during his regency, and

³⁾ Pankhurst, Gerard (1996: 42).

⁴⁾ Pankhurst, Gerard (1996: 61).

⁵⁾ During Iyasu’s time photography was used by Iyasu himself and by his father to emphasise Iyasu’s right to rule, cf. Pankhurst, Gerard (1996: 61ff). Photography also served also as a tool used against Iyasu, possibly also by the British, cf. Pankhurst, Gerard (1996: 31). On the political role of photography during Iyasu’s time, also see Smidt (2001).

⁶⁾ Mersie Hazen Welde Qirqos (2006/2007).

then later developed during his reign as Hayle Sillasié, was the use of books for such a purpose – for the propagating of photographs and hence for spreading the message transferred by this media.

SOME NOTES ON ETHIOPIAN BOOKS

It is worth noting some particular features of the way Ethiopian books were edited so as to obtain a more in-depth perspective on the role of photography within this framework. It is especially worth emphasising that Ethiopian books seem to present a mixture of features based on European rules of editing books and of non-European standards. Use of photography can be perceived as having been taken both from the European and Ethiopian tradition.

When Hayle Sillasié was crowned emperor, the traditional art of preparing manuscripts was still at its height and gave no sign of yielding to printed books. However, publishing activity was growing rapidly. The Italian occupation marks an obvious turning point for every aspect of the social and political life in Ethiopia. The same applies to print and book editing. After 1941, the number of books printed in Ethiopia was incomparably greater than of those published in the period before the Italian invasion. However, the subjects most frequently covered by the books published before the invasion (i.e. church books and material referring to state matters) were still among the topics most often discussed by the publications from the later period.⁷⁾ Nevertheless, after 1941, they were broadened by other subjects, including Ethiopian literature and translations from other languages.⁸⁾ The number of publications continued to rise significantly and constantly throughout the whole period of Hayle Sillasié's reign.

The books from the library of the Department of African Languages and Cultures constitute a good example of what was published in Ethiopia in the post-war period. As mentioned above, a large part of these books dealt with Ethiopian history, or they presented matters related to the state and Hayle Sillasié I's court. We may perceive them as propaganda material, even though according to the Emperor's words: "this word [propaganda] does not exist in the Amharic language".⁹⁾ The majority of these books were written and printed in order to show both the past and the present glory of the Ethiopian Empire.

⁷⁾ Denis Nosnitsin (2007: 138–141).

⁸⁾ On the development of modern Ethiopian literature, see: Molvaer (1997), Kane (1975).

⁹⁾ Haile Sellassie (1936: 734), after: Marcus (1980).

They were addressed to readers inside and outside Ethiopia, as most of them were published in Amharic or English. Their aim even then, among other things, was to serve both in that period of time and in the future as a source for those researching Ethiopian history. We may assume as something obvious that the topics of these books were carefully chosen and the texts were also composed with the utmost care. However, they – together with other books dealing with other topics – were even more carefully designed than it might seem at first glance. It was not only the words that were used to convey a very specific message.

One of the most significant features of imperial era Ethiopian publications was how the opening pages were edited. Apart from editorial information concerning the given book, they contain information connected with imperial power. Many – and, judging from the available Warsaw sample, actually the majority – of the publications were edited so as to include a portrait of the Emperor in front of the text of the book. In some cases only a photograph of Haile Sillasié was included, whereas sometimes this picture was followed by portraits of his family; at other times, by a portrait of the writer – in rare cases accompanied by pictures of the writer's family. There are also rare examples of other historical figures, whose photographs were included in the editorial pictures of Ethiopian books from the times of Haile Sillasié.

What also seems noteworthy is that the covers of Ethiopian books are mostly free of artistic designs which are often a part of European-style printed books. This difference in comparison to the European manner of editing books introduces certain consequences. The main decoration of Ethiopian books are the pictures discussed here, and thus they seem to constitute a part of the book which catches the eye easily and hence attracts the attention of a reader to an even larger extent than usual, making the photographs all the more striking.

SYMBOLS OF POWER IN ETHIOPIAN TRADITIONAL PAINTING

One of the sources in which we can analyse the history of presenting rulers in Ethiopia (be it the emperor or local landlords) is traditional Ethiopian painting. There is a vast number of representations of monarchs and landlords to be found both in Ethiopian churches and in manuscripts. The subject is broad, thus only very general remarks will be provided with the aim of throwing light on the subject.

With minor exceptions, the subject itself – the monarchs and local landlords – was introduced into church art as late as during the Gondarine period (1635–1855). Obviously from then on, as time passed, the manner of presenting rulers changed, as did the methods and means of expression used in Ethiopian painting. Still, it is possible to search for some basic common symbolic features which shed light on the presentation of a ruler through this medium before the times of Hayle Sillasié.

One of the most crucial facts about the traditional presentation of those in power is that no attempt was made to capture a likeness of the physical features of the monarchs. Stress was placed on the symbolic representation of power: the monarch could be identified mostly as a result of wearing particular garments and crowns.¹⁰⁾ As Chojnacki stated: “...artists take great care in depicting costumes, ornaments, weapons and other accessories”.¹¹⁾ Thus, a portrayal of a monarch in his ceremonial robes constitutes a representation which would be read as being a traditional Ethiopian way of depicting rulers.

It should also be remembered that the set of symbols of power presented in Ethiopian paintings is not necessarily related to human power, but was often used for emphasising the message on the elevated status of saints and angels. Both representations of monarchs and of saints and angels are equipped in such symbols of status and power as umbrellas, swords, richly ornamented cloaks; on many occasions the images portray the figures as mounted on horses. Equestrian saints are among the most respected in the Ethiopian church tradition, for as María-José Friedlander put it: “In the stratified society of highland Christian Ethiopia where only noblemen were trained in the art of horsemanship and war, victorious equestrian saints had a specific appeal”.¹²⁾

As for the patrons, who were introduced into paintings in the Gondarine period alongside the rulers, their position was also emphasised by their garments and swords: “An over-tunic of sheer fabric is depicted around the waist of noblemen allowing the scabbard of their richly decorated sword – a status of symbol – to be seen bulging sideways from the body”.¹³⁾

Another feature which should also be stressed is that the traditional image of a ruler is, without a doubt, a static one. This feature seems to be very impor-

¹⁰⁾ Pankhurst (1966).

¹¹⁾ Chojnacki (1999: 49).

¹²⁾ Friedlander (2007: 41).

¹³⁾ Friedlander (2007: 54).

tant in terms of the further interpretation of the changes introduced into the portraits of Haile Sillasié.

An analysis of Ethiopian traditional painting from another perspective brings different conclusions. As both the church paintings and manuscripts were devoted to religious subjects, the presentation of the monarchs is mostly related to religion. The depicted image stresses that the rulers were subject to God's power, thus the paintings meant to emphasise the monarchs' respect towards the King in the Heavens. Hence, by showing their relation to God, the acceptance of God's will, His superiority, and also their full surrender to God's grace, Ethiopian kings also showed their own privileged position on Earth. As an example may serve a painting of Queen Mintiwab reclining at the feet of Holy Mary from the Nerga Sillasié Church at Lake Tana¹⁴⁾ or a similar representation of Emperor Iyasu II within one of the manuscripts¹⁵⁾ – both originating from the Gondarine period. The idea of the heavenly kingdom represented on Earth was treated as a basis which would remind the king's subjects about their position in respect to the ruler.

However, a reflection of this idea is very difficult to find in the presentations of Haile Sillasié in the photography published in the books. Haile Sillasié, even though stressing his devotion to the Christian religion and the Ethiopian Church, did not present himself in the photography in any relation to the King in Heaven. Haile Sillasié himself was the one to take the highest position in the country and among his subjects, and this was meant to be reflected in the photographs.

THE PRESENTED SYMBOLS

Article 4 from the Revised Constitution of 1955 states: "By virtue of His Imperial Blood, as well as by the anointing which He has received, the person of the Emperor is sacred, His dignity is inviolable and His power indisputable".¹⁶⁾ The photographs which those reading an Ethiopian book encountered upon opening one of the books were supposed to bring this idea to the mind of the reader. In this respect, photography – to some extent – took on the role of traditional visual art which had presented Ethiopian rulers in their ceremonial clothes. The

¹⁴⁾ Leroy (1964: XL).

¹⁵⁾ British Museum, Oriental 533, cf: Leroy (1964: XLIX, 58).

¹⁶⁾ Revised Constitution of 1955, Article 4.

photographs presented the Emperor himself as a symbol of a specific idea of the state. However, a large number of additional details of symbolic meaning produce a rich and diverse image of the Emperor.

The symbolism of power is presented through the pose, garments, royal insignia and arrangement of space surrounding the ruler. Many of these symbols – including the crown or throne – are obvious and easy to interpret, even for those from outside the Ethiopian cultural sphere. Furthermore, Christian symbols (for example the cross) are very easy to decipher. However, there is a huge amount of symbols which are not possible to interpret without a deep insight into Ethiopian culture. Symbolism is apparent in every aspect of Ethiopian life, and this applies equally to everyday life and its most sophisticated aspects, such as the state and issues of power. The amount of symbols and their meaning often does not allow for a presentation of all possible explanations. The same can surely apply to the photographic material presenting symbols of power. However, as stated above, there were several different aspects of the ruler, and they were all represented in the discussed material. I will try to analyse which aspects the Emperor considered as those he wanted to show to his people and which were the symbols the Emperor applied to present the image/idea he intended to spread. Because of the limited capacity of this article, only some examples of the photographs can be discussed.

THE OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH
OF THE EMPEROR IN CORONATION ROBES – THE TRADITIONAL
PRESENTATION

An example of such a presentation is to be found in an anonymous official compilation of information on the Emperor's life and achievements: *Tarikinna sira (bachiru)* ("History and work (in short)").¹⁷⁾ A photograph of the Emperor is provided on the cover which, similarly as in a large number of Ethiopian books, takes on the role of a title page. The notion behind the picture of the Emperor is strengthened by additional information placed beneath it which states: "When God has chosen Us to lead Ethiopia, He bestowed great work on Us which We try from Our heart to accomplish with the whole knowledge We possess." These words are signed with the name Hayle Sillasié I and the date, 5 September, 1935.

¹⁷⁾ *Tarikinna sira* (1946).

The photograph of the Emperor presents Hayle Sillasje I in his full coronation garments and this is an official picture of a ruler wearing his royal insignia. Putting the discussion of the changes in the presentation of the emperors over the centuries aside, we may read this photograph as presenting an image of Hayle Sillasje rooted in what was supposed to be understood as a traditional vision of imperial and Christian symbols. Taking as a source fragments from two significant Ethiopian books related to history and describing Hayle Sillasje's period, Tekle Tsadiq Mekuriya's *YeItyopya tarik* ("History of Ethiopia") and Mahteme Sillasje Welde Mesqel's *Zikre neger* ("Memorabilia"), we may compare the royal insignia which was delivered to the Emperor during the coronation ceremony in 1930 and that which is visible on the above-mentioned picture.

Tekle Tsadiq Mekuriya provides a description of three elements constituting the insignia offered to the new ruler. As the first element, he writes about a sword decorated with gold and diamonds; as the second, he describes the presentation of the sceptre; and as the third, he writes: "[the Emperor] holding a diamond ring, two golden spears, a Holy Book decorated with gold and after putting the royal garment on, was anointed with royal oil (...). The Archbishop approached the emperor and while saying 'this crown let [God] make for you a crown of justice and of gratitude' crowned him".¹⁸⁾ Mahteme Sillasje Welde Mesqel provides descriptions of eight elements and names the insignia: a sword with gold and diamonds, a sceptre, a pearl, a diamond ring, two golden spears, a royal garment, a crown, and a Holy Book covered with gold.¹⁹⁾

On the basis of these two descriptions, we seem to have a complete picture of the royal insignia used by Hayle Sillasje. However, how does this relate to what we see in the photograph? The royal garment, the crown and the sceptre – all bearing the symbol of the cross – are presented in the picture. The diamond ring, which can be seen on other pictures, is not apparent here. It is possible, however, that the quality of the print does not allow us to see such details. The rest of the insignia was probably not meant to be a part of the garment one can observe on a photograph. Therefore, the sources confronted here – in other words what the observers of the coronation ceremony tell us and what we can see in the picture – complement each other. However, more symbols are presented on this photograph of the Emperor, and also on many others, such as the orders which decorate Hayle Sillasje's chest. Again the quality of the print does not allow us to see exactly what these decorations are, but the

¹⁸⁾ Tekle Tsadiq Mekuriya (s.d., 9th ed.: 192).

¹⁹⁾ Mahteme Sillasje Welde Mesqel (1949/1950: 746).

Order of King Salomon undoubtedly hangs on a chain around the Emperor's chest. This provides a new element, not directly related to the power granted to the Emperor during the coronation ceremony, but surely adding to the glory of Hayle Sillasia and legitimising his power. This can also be read as hinting at a Western-like concept of stressing the significance of a person.

Another interesting example of a presentation which can be read as traditional but differs from the one discussed above is to be found in *Girmawit itiegie Menen: mesamirtu leqedamawi Hayle Sillasia niguse negest zeltyopya* ("Her Imperial Majesty Itiegie (= 'Empress') Menen, the wife of His Imperial Majesty Hayle Sillasia I, Emperor of Ethiopia") by Yariied Gebre Mikael.²⁰⁾ This book was published to celebrate the 67th birthday of Empress Menen. As Menen is the one to whom the book is dedicated, her picture is at the front of the book. However, it is followed on the title page by a portrait of her together with her husband, and this picture is arranged according to the traditional style of exposition, whereby Menen's face is partially covered with the face of her husband. This kind of presentation (with faces covered by other faces, a method of providing perspective) is often to be seen in traditional Ethiopian church paintings. For a careful reader, this would constitute a direct link to the glorious and idealised Ethiopian tradition preserved in churches. In this picture, the imperial couple (with only their busts presented) are shown in traditional, official, but not coronation robes. However, it is only their faces and the way the picture is arranged which convey such a message, with not much room left for other details. This style of presenting the imperial couple (with the face of the Empress partially covered with her husband's face) is also to be found in other publications, for example another publication by Yariied Gebre Mikael, *Yetarik sew* (A man of history),²¹⁾ where the couple is presented in the same manner, but this time wearing coronation robes and crowns.

THE EMPEROR AS WELL-ROOTED IN ETHIOPIAN TRADITION BUT HEADING TOWARDS MODERNITY

(THE USE OF TRADITIONAL CLOTHES WITH MODERN ADDITIONS)

Hayle Sillasia's main idea of how to present his Empire and his role in it was based on two elements – a simultaneous inclusion of traditional aspects and of signalling the effort made at modernising the country. The need for stressing the role of tradition came from the deep belief in the special role of Ethiopian

²⁰⁾ Yariied Gebre Mikael (1948).

²¹⁾ Yariied Gebre Mikael (1955/1956).

culture and civilisation as well as of their exceptional value. These Ethiopian achievements were supposed to constitute the fundamentals for the development of a modern country, to open up opportunities for constructing a new, powerful and modern state and society which would function as an equal to world powers, both during the colonisation era and after 1960.

The presentation of the Emperor stressing this message can be seen in pictures combining elements of both Ethiopian tradition and modern/foreign additions. This can be observed in *Jepan indemin seletenech?* ("How did Japan become civilised?"), the famous work by one of the most prominent Ethiopian writers and intellectuals, Kebede Mikael.²²⁾ This work, analysing the impact of western civilisation on non-western countries and the problems with introducing modernisation in the latter countries, was published with a photograph in colour of Haile Sillasié included on the page following the editorial page. This particular image was often used in the opening pages of publications. Sometimes such an image was printed in black and white, sometimes in colour, sometimes only the part presenting the Emperor's bust was printed, but the Emperor always appeared in a similar pose and wearing a military uniform. The pictures, which give the impression of being similar enough that they may have been taken during the same photography session with only slight alterations (for example, a hat on the side table is missing), after a thorough analysis turn out to have been taken with – probably – a few years difference between them.²³⁾ This suggests that such a pose and stylisation was consciously chosen by the Emperor as one which met his expectations the most fully.

On the photograph Haile Sillasié is standing still – a feature common to almost all of his presentations published in the opening pages of Ethiopian books. Without going into a detailed analysis of his garment, the uniform he wears refers to both Ethiopian and foreign elements. For example, the Emperor is decorated with many medals, including the Order of Emperor Menelik (introduced during Zewditu's rule, the order was awarded to senior military and court officials) and the Order of the Trinity (introduced in 1930 by Haile Sillasié himself, the order was awarded for outstanding services to the crown). The decorations obviously function as a means by which to refer to the achievements of his predecessor but at the same time they constitute a modern addition. The uniform itself seems to bring to mind the idea of a European

²²⁾ Kebede Mikael (1954).

²³⁾ Similar pictures are to be found, among others, in *Yeqedamawi Haile Sillasié tor timhirt biet tarik* (1958) or Kebede Mikael (1956/1957).

outfit, while the cloak is a strong reference to a *kabba* – the traditional outfit of Ethiopian aristocrats.

There are also some additions which for a European observer seem too obvious to be noticed, but for an Ethiopian reader in the 1950s still held special significance. In the picture Haile Sillasié is wearing elegant shoes, an obvious detail matching the uniform. However, even as late as in the 1930s, the Emperor's bodyguards, who were the best trained, well-equipped and uniformed part of the Ethiopian army, went barefoot. At that time, wearing European-style shoes was perceived as a foreign influence; hence, even this detail in the Emperor's photograph from some years later can convey a particular message.

HEAD OF STATE

AND HEAD OF THE ARMY PRESENTED IN UNIFORM

The most popular presentations of the Emperor include those in which Haile Sillasié is wearing a modern uniform. This idea, of a ruler ready to fight for the independence and well-being of his people, was especially important after the war with Italy (1935–1941). It was extremely important for Haile Sillasié to remind (or persuade) Ethiopians that he had led the Ethiopian army during the time of war, and that he had spared no effort to fight the enemy. And also that he would be ready to do the same in the future. The task of conveying this message to his subjects was tricky. In 1936, after the battle of Maychew which decided the fate of Ethiopian independence and allowed for the Italian victory, Haile Sillasié, followed by his family and entourage, left the country. The Emperor was aware of his situation and of the danger he would have faced had he decided to remain in Ethiopia. After the Parliament made such a decision, he left for England where he spent his time engaged in a diplomatic struggle to regain independence for his country. His efforts in combination with the global situation brought results and he returned to Ethiopia in 1942, accompanied by the British army. However, many of his political adversaries claimed that the Emperor's flight abroad was an act of treason and never accepted Haile Sillasié on the imperial throne again. This provided all the more incentive for the Emperor to stress his role in the war and his presence on the battlefield at Maychew in 1936. The number of pictures presenting Haile Sillasié in a military uniform is vast, but there are also some photographs (very often published in diverse types of media, both books and newspapers, and portraying different situations)²⁴⁾ which present the Emperor on the battlefield. Such a picture

²⁴⁾ A very interesting case is a copy of four photographs of the Emperor from the time of

was published, among others, in *Iwnet yetemaw sew* (“A man searching for the truth”) by Dawit Degefu.²⁵⁾

The symbolism of the Emperor wearing a uniform was not only meant to bring to mind past events. It also presented a modern head of state, whereby a uniform was a good option vis-a-vis deciding between the traditional Ethiopian outfit and a European-style suit. This is one of the possible explanations as to why the majority of photographs from Ethiopian books presenting the Emperor portrayed him in a military uniform.

AN INTELLECTUAL AND A FATHER-FIGURE –
A HUMANISED VERSION OF THE EMPEROR AS ONE WHO TEACHES
AND WHO PROVIDES

An example of Haile Sillasié presented as making an effort to educate the Ethiopians and care for every single one of his subjects is to be found on the page following the title page in the book *Kibre negest* (“Glory of Kings”), published as “A gift for His Imperial Majesty Haile Sillasié I prepared on the occasion of the 16th anniversary of the coronation” (as stated on the title page). Further information is provided that the material in the book was “collected from newspapers and bulletins and edited by Welde Giyorgis We[lde Yohannis]”.²⁶⁾ The image under discussion presents Haile Sillasié and his wife, Menen. The royal couple are shown sitting on their thrones and handing out gifts to schoolgirls. The sentence under the photograph says: “His Imperial Majesty Emperor and Her Imperial Majesty Itiegie always upon meeting children at school motivate them to study diligently – in this picture we see Her Imperial Majesty Itiegie giving awards to girls.”

The exact same picture is to be found also in other publications but it is not the only portrayal of the Emperor as one taking great effort to educate his

the war with Italy painted in the panel on the walls of St. Georg Church in Addis Abeba. On the panel and its meaning see: Hanna Rubinkowska-Anioł, “Malarstwo w kościele Św. Jerzego w Addis Abebie jako sposób przekazywania informacji o historii i władzy w Etiopii XX wieku” (= Paintings in St. Georg Church in Addis Abeba as a method of transmitting information about history and power in 20th century Ethiopia), *Forum Politologiczne* 17, in print.

²⁵⁾ Dawit Degefu (1956).

²⁶⁾ Welde Giyorgis Welde Yohannis used a short version of his name on the editorial pages of the books/booklets he compiled, i.e. “Welde Giyorgis We”. Welde Giyorgis We[lde Yohannis] (1946).

subjects. Pictures of the Emperor as an intellectual (he is captured on various photographs while writing or surrounded by books) were among those most frequently used.²⁷⁾

A FAMILY MAN

A presentation of the Emperor together with his family, accompanied by his wife and surrounded by his children, bore a message of powerful connections on one hand, and on the other, stressed the family tree connecting the Emperor with the previous monarchs and also with the legendary Menelik I, the son of Queen of Sheba and King Solomon. This legend – the founding myth of Ethiopia – was the most important element legitimising the imperial right to rule the country. While for every Ethiopian family connections decide about their place within society and about their real opportunities in life, such connections had an even more significant meaning in respect to the Emperor as they constituted one of the most important fundamentals of his practical power.

This notion was stressed by photographs presenting Hayle Sillasia's family and an example can be found in the collections of poems praising Hayle Sillasia collected by Welde Giyorgis Welde Yohannis, *Amha fiqir weselam* ('gift of love and peace').²⁸⁾

THE PRESENTATION OF HAYLE SILLASIE AS BOTH INCORPORATING TRADITIONAL ELEMENTS AND CONSTITUTING A STEP TOWARDS MODERNISATION

There are different versions of the Emperor looking up at us from the pages of the books. He wears various types of clothes and plays different roles. Some pictures are strictly official, where he is presented in full regal dress and bearing the insignia of his power, while others show the Emperor at his everyday tasks. The most official representations are related to the coronation, in which Hayle Sillasia is shown in coronation robes, crown and sometimes sitting on the throne. By their reference to tradition and the traditional Ethiopian method of legitimising power, they proved his right to rule the country. On the other hand, readers are confronted with the Emperor in different types of uniform, sometimes with and sometimes without orders. At the other end of the scale,

²⁷⁾ A picture of the Emperor in his library is to be found in: *Yearbenyoch tiqil* (1948/1949), and captured while writing in: Mekonnin Indalkachew (1954/1955).

²⁸⁾ Welde Giyorgis Welde Yohannis (1947).

there is an intellectualist-like representation of a man wearing a suit in the ninth edition of *YeItyopya tarik* or a soldier on the cover of Dawit Degefu's *Iwnet yetemaw sew*.²⁹⁾

As is widely known, Hayle Sillasié put a lot of effort into presenting himself as a perfect combination of tradition and modernity, both of which he aimed to propagate in Ethiopia in order to serve the best interests of the Empire. The photographs under discussion make use of different symbols – some conveying a traditional message, while others signify change and include modern additions. In most of the pictures, however, one can trace symbols referring both to tradition and change, in different proportions.

The presentation of Hayle Sillasié during his reign changed from showing a distant person, in poses suggesting very limited motion, into a much more relaxed, active, smiling image of the Emperor, and with less distance towards his subjects and others. This can be observed on the films and in photographs published in different media.³⁰⁾ However, this is not the case in the pictures of the Emperor in the opening pages of Ethiopian books. In this case, the image of the Emperor, even though altered over the years, remained immobile with the strongest emphasis placed on the dignity of the monarch. This set of pictures seems to be more official than images of the Emperor published in newspapers, magazines and brochures, which usually included illustrations from events honoured by the presence of Hayle Sillasié.

The presentation of the Emperor, even if to a lesser degree than in photographs published elsewhere, changed with the passage of time. First, the photographs did not make the Emperor seem any younger – he grew older as time passed. Obviously, the older photographs, sometimes taken at significant historical moments,³¹⁾ were still republished at a later date, but the majority presented the Emperor as he looked at the moment of the publication. Also the way he presented himself changed – there was development from wearing traditional Ethiopian garments, including full regal dress, into a more European

²⁹⁾ Tekle Tsadik Mekuriya (s.d., 9th ed.) and Dawit Degefu (1956).

³⁰⁾ A very good example of a relaxed, smiling and friendly Emperor, who shakes hands with those he meets, are photographs from his official visits to the USA and European countries in the 1950s, for example the Emperor waving his hand while sitting in his car wearing sunglasses in Greece in 1954. *Girmawi niguse negest* (s.d.).

³¹⁾ As in the case of the pictures from the war with Italy mentioned above or a quite amazing picture of Hayle Sillasié in a traditional Ethiopian lion's mane head-dress. In the picture Hayle Sillasié is visibly much younger than he was in 1946 when the book was published (Welde Giyorgis We[lde Yohannis] (1946).

style. In later books, he was often presented in uniform (military clothes of a typical European style). Quite unfortunately, I have never found a photograph in the editorial pages of the Emperor wearing traditional Ethiopian garments. The well-known style of the Emperor from his trip to Europe in 1924 or to the League of Nations during the Italian occupation, when he wore Ethiopian-style clothes, is not to be found in the editorial pages of Ethiopian publications. It seems that a “modern” image of the Emperor is the one which in his eyes suited him better.

Photographs presenting the Emperor Hayle Sillasié I and members of the royal family in the opening pages of publications constituted one of the components of a whole system of legitimising power in Ethiopia. As they are related to the existence of any monarchy, these symbols of power were an integral element in the providing of a message concerning who held the right to rule over the country. Still, in the case of Hayle Sillasié the presentation of such symbols was taken to new heights. John H. Spencer made an observation regarding one of the Emperor’s features, described as a: “(...) fatal weakness which he revealed to a peculiar degree (...) – namely, an obsession with the symbols of authority, with form rather than substance”.³²⁾ In this context, the iconographic material from the editorial pages of Ethiopian books can serve as an argument in a possible discussion with this theory.

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³²⁾ Spencer (1978: 29).

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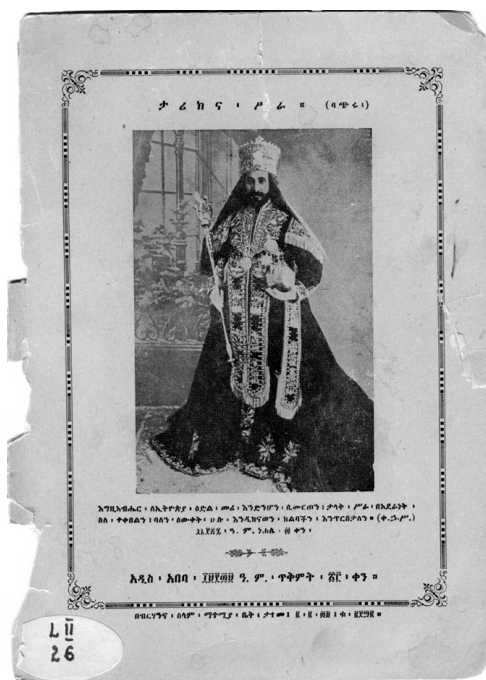


Fig. 1. Haile Sillase I in his coronational robes. From *Tarikinna sira* (1946)

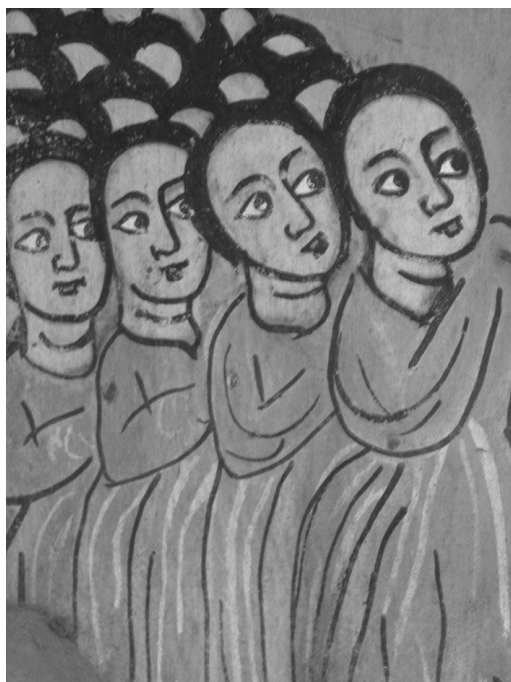


Fig. 2. Fragment from the traditional representation of the last judgement in one of the Ethiopian churches at the Tana Lake islands



Fig. 3. Hayle Sillasje I and his wife, Menen. From: Yaried Gebre Mikael (1948)



Fig. 4. Hayle Sillasje I in his office. From: *Yearbenyoch tiqil* (1948/1949)



Fig. 5. Haile Sillasie I surrounded by his family. From: Welde Giyorgis Welde Yohannis (1947)