

## ***MENELIK II (1844-1913)***

The emperor of Ethiopia. From 1865 to 1889, he was king of Shewa (Sawa), and from 1889 to 1913, emperor of Ethiopia. He was the last Ethiopian sovereign to expand the empire by conquest and he enlarged it to about three times the original size of the Christian core area. He also set the empire on the course of modernization by establishing an economic infrastructure, constructing means of communication, reorganizing the state administrative institutions, and opening schools in which the [Copts](#) played a significant role.

Menelik's parents were the negus Khayla Malakot of Shewa and a woman of humble origin named Eggegayyahu. Upon the death of his father in 1855, he was taken captive by Emperor Tewodros II (1855-1868) who incorporated Shewa into the empire after over a hundred years of autonomy. He was treated well, as the emperor saw to it that he continued his education.

Later he gave him his own daughter in marriage. But as the political instability of the empire increased in the 1860s, the emperor kept him in confinement. Menelik escaped in 1865 and installed himself on the throne of his fathers. In 1867, he threatened the stronghold of Magdala on behalf of the Coptic metropolitan, Abuna [Salama](#) IV (c. 1817-1868), with whom he was in secret contact, but he withdrew soon for strategic reasons. The metropolitan died in confinement in October of the same year.

Though he claimed the imperial insignia and title, Menelik was not crowned nor did he have a bishop. The territorial acquisition of Ismail Pasha around the Red Sea resulted in a conflict with Emperor Yohannes IV, and Menelik tried to exploit the situation by entering into correspondence with the khedive. He sent an educated cleric as an envoy, who returned with an Egyptian force led by Munzinger Pasha, who tried to reach Shewa through the Danakil depression, but the commander and his force were surprised and routed.

Yohannes IV defeated two other Egyptian contingents in the north in 1875-1876 and then with his newly captured weapons turned southward to Menelik, who submitted to Yohannes IV without fighting in 1878. He assured his subjects of his [orthodox](#) faith and tried to implement the imperial policy of obliging the [Muslim](#) subjects to convert to Christianity. In 1882 Yohannes IV assigned to Menelik one of the four bishops he had brought from Alexandria, Abuna Matewos.

After the death of the emperor, Menelik became the logical heir to the throne, and the metropolitan, Abuna Petros, submitted to him. But Menelik favored Matewos and after consulting with the patriarch in Alexandria, he raised him to the status of a metropolitan, by whose hands he was crowned emperor of Ethiopia in November 1889. Menelik also involved the metropolitan in state affairs. In 1902, he sent him on a diplomatic mission to Russia, and in 1907 he let him take control of education. Traditionally, education was sponsored by the Ethiopian [Orthodox](#) Church.

Early in the twentieth century, Menelik initiated the first [secular](#) government schools in Addis Ababa and some of the provinces, and staffed them with Coptic Christian recruits. One of their number, Hanna Salib Bey, became the first director of the school opened in the capital, and a year later he became director of education for the whole empire. Menelik suffered a stroke in the same year from which he never fully recovered.

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