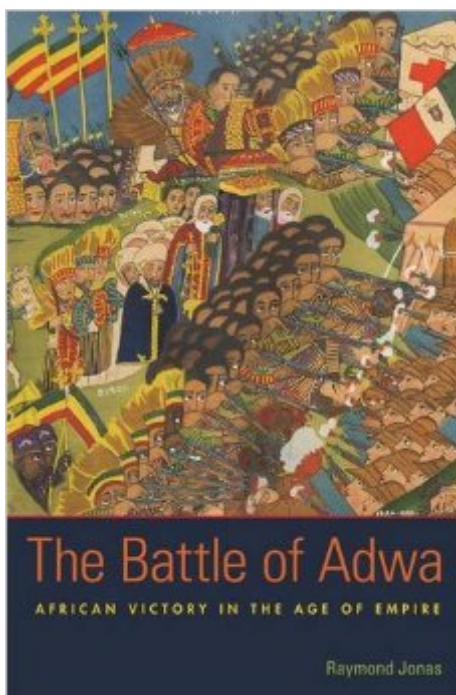


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The Battle Of Adwa: African Victory In The Age Of Empire



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The book has a limited scope. The careers of Emperor Menelik II and the prior two emperors are well drawn, but a bit more on the preliminaries and aftermath of Adwa would have been appreciated. We get a good view of the personality and career of Menelik's queen, Taytu as well as his main lieutenants, one of whom, Makonnen, is the father of future emperor, Haile Selassie. Careers and performance of many Ethiopian and Italians down to the level of captains and even draws on memoirs of soldiers to complete an interesting history, well written for readability. The book depicts Egyptian and Italian involvement with Ethiopia in the era around 1900. It's an excellent account of the failed Italian attempt to emulate British and Belgian colonial aggression in Africa. There is no extrapolation to later Italian involvement in the time of Mussolini and Haile Selassie. Adwa was a turning point in African history, the only example, besides Iswandala, where African numerical superiority overcame European technology and firepower. Menelik supported the British against the Mahdi in the Sudan. He first allied with the Italians, who helped him attain power, then fought to expel them from his northern provinces. The book contains interesting insights from

both African and Italian points of view. The book is short on sociology and economics as, for example, the Great Ethiopian Famine of 1888 to 1892 is barely mentioned as is Menelik's restriction of foreign trade. There is a degree of repetition, dwelling on horrors of warfare including enslavement and mutilation of prisoners. The Oromo cavalry (apparently dragoons) are involved at every turn. The maps are inadequate.

Raymond Jonas wrote a very interesting and well written book on Battle of Adwa (Adowa) which was fought in March of 1896. The battle is quite famous or infamous depending on your viewpoint since it was the key battle in a war fought and won by black Africans over a white European power. Decisiveness of this victory kept the Empire of Ethiopia from becoming another colonial territory and began the crack in the perception and concept of white supremacy which will be reinforced ten years later when Tsarist Russia was defeated by Imperial Japan in Russo-Japanese War. The book is easy to read and follow. The book is written in three parts. What led up to the battle, the battle itself which is the core of the book and the aftermath. I was bit surprised that the book did not investigate the Treaty of Wichale too closely where Italy tried to conned their way into lordship over Ethiopia. This was the cause of the war that followed and the battle that settled it. There are a lot of good background material and should served as a nice reference to this campaign. But overall, the book is fairly written with both sides well presented with their glory as well as their faults. It clearly show the flow and ebb of battle and explained clearly why the battle was won by the Ethiopians and lost by the Italians. It was nice to read the basic concept behind Ethiopian custom behind castration and emasculation explained without judgment. Italy suffered some major blow to their national ego after this war and no doubt, the 1936 invasion of Ethiopia was direct result of this war where Italy was publically humiliated in the eyes of the white colonial powers everywhere.

While the prior battles of the Little Bighorn and Isandlawana were defeats of imperial armies by indigenous forces, they amounted to no more than temporary setbacks. The battle of Adwa (or Adowa) in 1896 was a more permanent victory. The native Ethiopians decisively defeated a modern Italian invasion force and preserved Ethiopian independence for another generation. Raymond Jonas turns his very readable history of the battle into a broader review of the global impact it had on the concepts and realities of African freedom in the imperialist era. The book is quickly paced and simply divided into pre-battle, actual battle and post-battle sections which are self-supporting to the overall narrative. With very little else published on the battle for the non-specialist reader, this one is both fast and fun to read. Jonas is a gifted story teller and his word pictures of people and places

make you feel that you are actually there observing. There are bons mots galore in the author's text: In calling Ethiopia the Switzerland of Africa: "Ethiopia largely lacks evergreens and it certainly lacks chalets and lederhosen." Raio peak on the battlefield has a "...gnarly, bulbous profile bearing a passing resemblance to a walrus snout." The author does not play favorites when it comes to the two opponents. Both are depicted warts and all, be they heroes, cowards, scoundrels or saints. Neither side is romanticized. Jonas makes plain that the battle was very much a "black on black" fire fight with the Italians dependent on their own African askaris providing the bulk of their forces. The Ethiopian tradition of emasculating enemy dead, wounded or prisoners is handled in a straightforward and non-judgmental way.

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