

**The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles 4. For the OAU (AU) Golden Jubilee 2013. seymour31@hotmail.co.uk.**



**Menas (Ge'ez ሜናስ *mēnās*), throne name Admas Sagad I (Ge'ez አድማስ ሰገድ *admās sagad*, Amh. *ādmās seged*, "to whom the horizon bows") was *nəgusä nägäst* (1559 - February 1, 1563) of Ethiopia, and a member of the Solomonic dynasty. He was a brother of Gelawdewos.**

According to a genealogy collected by James Bruce,

Menas' father Lebna Dengel arranged Menas to be married to the daughter of Robel, governor of Bora and Selawe; upon becoming empress she took the name **Adimas Moas**. They had two children, **Fiqtor and Theodora**.

**During Ahmad ibn Ibrihim al-Ghazi's invasion of Ethiopia, Menas had been captured but treated well as a valuable prisoner.**

Although the fate of prisoners of war at the time was to be castrated and enslaved, due to the intervention of **Bati del Wambara, wife of Imam Ahmad Gragh, Menas escaped this mutilation**, and was married to Bati del Wambara's daughter—an act Whiteway describes as "a unique act of clemency."

**This clemency came to an end in 1542, when the Imam, desperate for help from his fellow Muslims, included Menas in an assortment of extravagant gifts to the sultan of Yemen in return for military aid.**



However, Imam Ahmad's son was later captured in the aftermath of the Battle of Wayna Daga, Gelawdewos used his prisoner to recover his brother Menas; according to Pankhurst, "when the royal family was reunited there were many days of celebrations."

Menas was made king at Mengistu Samayat, southwest of Debre Werq in Gojjam, and shortly afterwards he campaigned against the Falasha in Semien province.

He banished the Jesuit bishop **André de Oviedo** and his companions to a village between Axum and Adwa called Maigoga (**Tigrinya** *may gwagwa*, 'noisy water'), which the Jesuits optimistically renamed Fremona, after the missionary Frumentius.

About one year into his reign, **Bahr Negus Yeshaq** rose in revolt in Tigray against Menas, proclaiming Tazkaro, the illegitimate son of **Emperor Menas'** brother **Yaqob** as *negus*.

Tazkaro was supported by the leader of the Portuguese who had followed **Cristóvão da Gama** into Ethiopia, and allegedly by "the Prime Men of the Kingdom."

This revolt occupied Menas' attention for the remainder of his short reign. He marched into Lasta, at which point Yeshaq retreated into Shire.

The Emperor found him there and defeated Yeshaq, then turned south to Emfraz where he defeated the remaining supporters of Tazkaro on 2 July 1561.

Tazkaro was captured, and Menas afterwards ordered him thrown from the rock of Lamalmon to his death.

Bahr Negash Yeshaq then obtained the support of **Özdemir**, the Ottoman Pasha of Massawa, and proclaimed Tazkaro's infant brother, **Marqos**, *nəgusä nəgäst*. Menas marched north again, but was defeated at Enderta by Yeshaq.



According to the *Royal Chronicle* of his reign, which Bruce follows in his account, the Emperor fell back to Atronsa Maryam to regroup for another assault on the **Bahr Negash**, but came down with a fever during the march, and died at **Kolo on 1 February 1563**.

However, some European writers, such as Hiob Ludolf and Baltazar Téllez write that Minas was slain fleeing from the battlefield.

**Sarsa Dengel** (Ge'ez ሠረጸ ደንግል *śarṣa dingil*, Amh. *serṣe dingil* "Sprout of the Virgin", 1550 - 4 October 1597) was *nəgusä nägäst* (throne name **Malak Sagad I**, Ge'ez መልአክ ሰገድ *mal'ak sagad*, Amh. *mel'āk seged*, "to whom the angel bows") (1563–1597) of Ethiopia, and a member of the Solomonic dynasty.

The son of Menas and Admas Mogasa, Sarsa Dengel spent his reign in constant campaigning, **repelling Ottoman advances inland from the Red Sea; and Oromo advances from the south**.

**He was elected King by the Shewan commanders of the army and the Queen Mother**. Upon his coming of age **Bahr Negus Yeshaq**, who had rebelled against his father, presented himself to **Sarsa Dengel** and made peace.

However, Sarsa Dengel had to confront a number of other revolts: his cousin Hamalmal in 1563, another cousin Fasil two years later. Yeshaq once again revolted with support of the Ottoman Empire; Sarsa Dengel then marched to Tigray in 1576, where he defeated and killed in battle the Bahr Negash and his allies, Özdemir Pasha and Sultan Mu-hammed IV of Harar.

When the Ottomans attempted to advance inland to capture Debarwa in 1588, Emperor Sarsa Dengel responded by sacking Arqiqo the following year.

Sarsa Dengel was the first Emperor of Ethiopia to confront the encroachment of the Oromo, who had defeated Nur ibn Mujahid as he returned home from killing his uncle Gelawdewos in battle.



**In his tenth regal year (1573), campaigning in the south, he defeated the Oromo in a battle near Lake Zway. He campaigned against them again in his 15th (1578) and 25th (1588) regnal years.**

**Sarsa Dengel campaigned against the Falasha in Semien in 1580, then again in 1585. He also campaigned against the Agaw in 1581, and in 1585.**

**He campaigned against the Gambo who dwelled in the lands west of the Chomen swamp in 1590. He made a punitive expedition against the Ottoman Turks in 1588, in response to their raids in the northern provinces.**

**Sarsa Dengel campaigned in Ennarea twice, the first time in 1586, and the second time in 1597. On the final campaign against the Oromo, his Chronicle records, a group of monks tried to dissuade him from this expedition; failing that, they warned him not to eat fish from a certain river he would pass.**

**Despite their warning, when he passed by the river the monks warned him about, he ate fish taken from this river and grew sick and died.**

**His body was interred in Medhane Alem church on Rema Island. When R.E. Cheesman visited the church in March 1933, he was shown a blue-and-white porcelain jar, which his entrails were brought from the place of his death.**

**Yaqob I (Ge'ez ያዕቆብ *yā'iqōb*, Amh. *yā'iqōb*) was *nəgusä nägäst* (throne name **Malak Sagad II**, መልአክ ሰገድ, *mal'ak sagad*, Amh. *mel'āk seged*, "**to whom the angel bows**"; 1597–1603; 1604–1606) of Ethiopia, and a member of the Solomonic dynasty.**

**He was the eldest surviving son of Sarsa Dengel; his mother was either Queen Maryam Sena (so E. A. Wallis Budge), or Woizero Harego of the Beta Isra-el.**

**Because Yaqob had at least three sons before his death, it is likely he was born no later than 1590.**



**Sarsa Dengel** had intended to make his nephew **Za Dengel** his successor, but under the influence of his wife **Maryam Sena** and a number of his sons-in-law, he instead chose **Yaqob**, who was seven when he came to the throne, with **Ras Ante-natewos of Begemder** as his regent.

**Za Dengel** and the other rival for the throne **Susenyos**, the son of **Abeto Fasilides** – were exiled, but **Za Dengel** escaped to the mountains around **Lake Tana**, while **Susenyos** found refuge in the south amongst the **Oromo**.

When **Yaqob** came to adulthood six years later, he quarrelled with **Ras Antenate-wos**, and had him replaced with **Ras Za Sellase**.

However, **Za Sellase** deposed **Yaqob**, exiling him to **Ennarea**, and made his cousin **Za Dengel** Emperor.

When **Za Dengel** proved more troublesome than **Yaqob**, **Za Sellase** recalled **Yaqob** from exile.

Not long after **Za Dengel** was defeated and killed in battle, **Susenyos** marched north at the head of an army raised amongst the **Oromo**, and sent a message to **Ras Antenatewos** proclaiming himself as king and demanding support from **Antenatewos**; unable to communicate with **Za Sellase**, the **Ras** sent his troops to support **Susenyos**.

A similar message to **Za Sellase** only served to steel **Za Sellase** into action: he marched on **Susenyos**, who, sick from fever, retreated into the mountains of **Amhara**.

This lack of resolve convinced **Ras Antenatewos** to waver in his support, and as the rainy season passed **Za Sellase** began to negotiate his submission to **Susenyos**.

At this moment **Yaqob** revealed himself in **Dembiya** and both **Ras Antenatewos** and **Za Sellase** flocked to his side.



Susenyos managed to first surprise and decimate the forces of Za Sellase at Manta Dafar in Begemder; when Za Sellase escaped to Yaqob's camp, the Emperor's derision caused Za Sellase to defect to Susenyos.

For several days, the armies of the two rival emperors manoeuvred in the mountains of Gojjam, to at last meet in the **Battle of Gol 10 March 1606**, where Yaqob and Abuna Petros II were killed in battle, and his troops slaughtered.

**Yaqob** had married some years before a foreigner named **Nazarena**, by whom he had three sons, one of whom had died before the **Battle of Gol**.

Nazarena sent her surviving sons to safety in exile: **Cosmas, the older, went south and was not heard of again; the younger, Saga Krestos, went to the safety of the Kingdom of Sennar where he was treated well and came of age.**

**When King Rabat proposed that Saga Krestos marry his daughter, Saga Krestos refused,** and was forced to flee to another refuge, adopting Roman Catholicism while at Jerusalem.

**Eventually he found his way to Rome (1632), and eventually to Paris, where he was given lodgings by Cardinal Richelieu.**

**Saga Krestos died of pleurisy in 1638 at the age of 38. Thomas Pakenham provides a brief sketch of Saga Krestos' European life in his *The Mountains of Rasselas*, and the book ends with a description of Pakenham's visit to Saga Krestos' grave in Rueil-Malmaison.**

**Za Dengel** was *negusä nägäst* (throne name **Asnaf Sagad II** or As.naf Seged or Atsnaf Seged, Ge'ez አፅናፍ ሰገድ, "**to whom the peaks bow**"; 1603–1604) of Ethiopia, and a member of the Solomonic dynasty. He was the son of Lesana Krestos, the brother of Sarsa Dengel.



**Za Dengel** may have been married to *Woizero Wangelawit*, eldest daughter of his second cousin **Susenyos Fasilides (later emperor)** and lady **Wolde Saala of Walaqa and Marabete (later Empress Sultan Mogassa)**.

**Sarsa Dengel** had intended to make his nephew as his heir, recognizing that to avert the civil war that would likely follow his death an adult would be needed, and the emperor's

own sons were quite young.

**These plans were changed primarily through the influence of Empress Sena Maryam, stepmother of Emperor's eldest surviving son Prince Yaqob, who was made emperor in 1597.**

**The empress had Za Dengel seized and confined in a religious retreat on the island of Dek in Lake Tana. Za Dengel eventually managed to escape, taking refuge in Gojjam.**

**In 1603 Za Dengel was made Emperor by Ras Za Sellase, who intended Za Dengel to be little more than a figurehead.**

**He was crowned as Asnaf Segad ('He to whom the horizons bow'). However, Za Dengel summoned the Jesuit Pedro Páez to his court at Dankaz, who persuaded him to embrace Catholicism.**

**This religious conversion led to Za Sellase not only withdrawing his support, but actively working against him and stirred up a revolt in Gojjam.**

**Za Dengel** marched to the plain of Bartcho to put down this revolt, but despite the help of **200 Portuguese musketeers Za Dengel** perished in battle on **October 24.**

**According to James Bruce, Za Dengel's corpse lay unclaimed on the battlefield for three days, until some peasants buried it "in a little building, like a chapel (which I have seen), not above six feet high, under the shade of a very fine tree, in Abyssinia called sassa."**

The body was reinterred 10 years later in Daga Estifanos monastery on Daga Island in Lake Tana.



**Susenyos** (also **Sissinios**, as in Greek, Ge'ez ሱስነዮስ *sūsinyōs*; throne name **Malak Sagad III**, Ge'ez መልአክ ሰገድ, *mal'ak sagad*, Amh. *mel'āk seged*, "**to whom the angel bows**"; 1572 - 7 September 1632) was *nəgusä nägäst* (1606–1632) of Ethiopia.

His father was **Abeto (Prince) Fasilides**, a **grandson of Dawit II**; as a result, while some authorities list him as a member of the Solomonic dynasty, others consider him, instead of his son, as the founder of the Gondar line of the dynasty (ultimately a subset, however, of the Solomonic dynasty).

As a boy, a group of marauding Oromo captured him and his father, holding them captive for over a year until they were rescued by the **Dejazmach Assebo**.

**Upon his rescue, he went to live with Queen Admas Mogasa, the mother of Sarsa Den-gel and widow of Emperor Menas.**

**In 1590s, Susenyos** was perceived as one of the potential successors to the throne, as **Emperor Sarsa Dengel's** sons were very young.

**In order to eliminate him from the competition, Empress Maryam Sena had Susenyos exiled, but Susenyos managed to escape and find refuge amongst the Oromo.**

At the death of his one-time ally, **Emperor Za Dengel**, he was proclaimed his successor and returned to the realm, although the fight against **Emperor Yaqob** continued.

**Susenyos became Emperor following the defeat of first Za Sellase, then on 10 March 1607 Yaqob at the Battle of Gol in southern Gojjam.**

After his defeat, Za Sellase became a supporter of Susenyos, but eventually fell out with Susenyos early in his reign, and was imprisoned on an amba in Guzamn.



**After a year, Za Sellase managed to escape and lived as a brigand for a year until he was killed by a peasant, who sent his head to the Emperor.**

**In 1608, a rebel appeared near Debre Bizen.** Because the body of **Yaqob** had never been found after the **Battle of Gol**, there had been some doubt that the previous Emperor was truly dead, and a pretender announced that he was the **dead Emperor Yaqob**.

The pretender managed to disguise the fact he did not resemble Yaqob by keeping part of his face covered, claiming that he had suffered grievous wounds to his teeth and face from the battle.

**The governor of Tigray, Sela Krestos**, eventually heard of the revolt, and not trusting the loyalty of a general levy of troops struck against the rebel with his own household and the descendants of the Portuguese soldiers who had followed Cristóvão da Gama (son of the legendary Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama) into Ethiopia.

Despite defeating the rebels three different times, the pretender managed to escape each battle to hide in the mountains of Hamasien.

Meanwhile, **Emperor Susenyos** was preoccupied with raiding parties of the Oromo.

An initial encounter with the Marawa Oromo near the upper course of the Reb River ended in a defeat for the Ethiopians; **Susenyos** rallied his men and made a second attack which scattered the Oromo.

**The Marawa allied with other Oromo**, and the united force entered Begemder to avenge their defeat. Upon hearing of this, the Emperor responded by summoning his son-in-law **Qegnzmach Julius and Kifla Krestos** to join him with their troops, and defeated the raiders at Ebenat on **17 January 1608**.

**According to James Bruce, the *Royal Chronicle* of Susenyos reports 12,000 Oromo were killed while only 400 on the Emperor's side were lost.**



With the Oromo threat dealt with, Susenyos now could turn his attention to Yaqob the pretender; he marched to Axum by way of the Lamalmo and Waldebba, where he was formally crowned Emperor 18 March 1608, in a ceremony described by João Gabriel, the captain of the Portuguese in Ethiopia.

Despite this act legitimizing his rule, Susenyos had no luck capturing the pretender, and was forced to leave the task to his servant **Amsala Krestos**.

**Amsala Krestos** induced two brothers who had joined the rebellion to assassinate Yaqob the pretender, who then sent the dead man's head to Susenyos.

Without a scarf obscuring his features, writes Bruce, "it now appeared, that he had neither scars in his face, broken jaw, nor loss of teeth; but the covering was intending only to conceal the little resemblance he bore to king Jacob, slain, as we said before, at the battle of Leb-art."

According to his *Royal Chronicle*, Susenyos made his power felt along his western frontier from Fazogli north to Suakin.

Susenyos' reign is perhaps best known as the brief period in Ethiopian history when Roman Catholic Christianity became the official religion.

The Emperor became interested in Catholicism, in part due to Pedro Páez' persuasion, but also hoping for military help from Portugal and Spain (in union at the time of Susenyos's reign).

Some decades earlier, in 1541, Cristóvão da Gama had led a military expedition to save the Ethiopian emperor Gelawdewos from the onslaught of Ahmed Gagn, a Muslim Imam who almost destroyed the existence of the Ethiopian state.

Susenyos hoped to receive a new contingent of well-armed European soldiers, this time against the Oromo, who were ravaging his kingdom, and to help with the constant rebellions.



Two letters of this diplomatic effort survive, which he entrusted to Páez to send to Europe: the one to the King of Portugal is dated 10 December 1607, while the other is to the Pope and dated 14 October of the same year; neither mention his conversion, but both ask for soldiers.

He showed the Jesuit missionaries his favour by a number of **land grants**, most importantly those at Gorgora, located on a peninsula on the northern shore of Lake Tana.

**In 1613, Susenyos sent a mission heading for Madrid and Rome, led by Fr. António Fernandes.**

The plan was to head south, in an attempt to reach Malindi, a port on the Indian Ocean in what is **Kenya today**, hoping to break through the effective blockade that the **Ottoman conquests** had created around the Ethiopian empire by sailing all the way around the southern tip of Africa.

**However, they failed to reach Malindi, due to delays caused by local Christians hostile to the mission.**

**Susenyos at last announced his conversion to Catholicism in a public ceremony in 1622**, and separated himself from all of his wives and concubines except for his first wife, **Wäld Šä'ala**.

However, the tolerant and sensitive **Pedro Paez** died soon afterwards, and he was replaced by **Afonso Mendes**, who arrived at **Massawa on 24 January 1624**.

**E.A. Wallis Budge** has stated the commonly accepted opinion of this man, as being "**rigid, uncompromising, narrow-minded, and intolerant.**"

Strife and rebellions over the enforced changes began within days of Mendes' public ceremony in **1626, where he proclaimed the primacy of Rome and condemned local practices which included Saturday Sabbath and frequent fasts.**



**Yet a number of Ethiopians did embrace the new faith: Richard Pankhurst reports 100,000 inhabitants of Dembiya and Wegera alone are said to have converted to Catholicism.**

The most serious response was launched by a triumvirate composed of his half-brother **Yimena Krestos**, a eunuch named **Kefla Wahad**, and his brother-in-law **Julius**.

Susenyos avoided their first attempt to assassinate him at court, but while he was campaigning against Sennar they raised a revolt, calling to their side "**all those who were friends to the Alexandrian faith**".

**However, Susenyos had re-turned to Dembiya before the rebels expected, and quickly killed Julius.**

**Yimena Krestos** held out a while longer on Melka Amba in Gojjam, before Af Krestos captured him and brought him to Dankaz where Susenyos had his camp; here the Emperor's brother was tried and sentenced to banishment.

**More revolts followed, some led by champions of the traditional Ethiopian Church. One revolt which resisted all of Susenyos' efforts to put down was by the Agaw in Lasta.**

Their first leader was **Melka Krestos**, a distant member of the Solomonic dynasty, whom the Agaw had recruited.

**Susenyos' first campaign against them, which began in February 1629 with raising an army of 30,000 men in Gojjam, was defeated and his son-in-law Gebra Krestos slain.**

**While Melka Krestos' master of horse was slain along with 4000 men not long after while pillaging Tigray, at the same time the men of Lasta made a successful raid out of their mountains into Susenyos' territory.**

When he attempted a second expedition against the rebels in Lasta, Susenyos found his men's morale so low that he was forced to allow them to observe one of the traditional Wednesday fasts—**which brought an immediate reproach from the Catholic Patriarch.**



Although Susenyos eloquently defended himself, Bruce notes that **"from this time, it plainly appears, that Socinios began to entertain ideas, at least of the church discipline and government, very opposite to those he had when he first embraced the Romish religion."**

Despite this concession to his troops, and despite the fact they reached Melka Krestos' headquarters, his forces fell to an ambush and **Susenyos** was forced to return to Dankaz with nothing to show for his effort.

**Susenyos attempted one more campaign against the rebels, only to find his men mutinous.**

They saw no end to unrewarding expeditions to Lasta, and when at home confronted by the executions used to enforce **Catholicism on Ethiopia.**

While expressing some skepticism at the matter, Bruce states the *Royal Chronicle* reports his son told the troops that **if they were victorious in Lasta, the Emperor would restore the traditional Ethiopian practices.**

**However as they marched behind Susenyos to Lasta, his scouts reported that Melka Krestos had descended from Lasta with 25,000 men, and were at hand.**

**On 26 July 1631 the armies clashed; 8,000 of the rebels were dead and Melka Krestos had fled the field.**

Upon viewing the field of battle, **Susenyos' son Fasilides is reported to have said, These men, whom you see slaughtered on the ground, were neither Pagans nor Mahometans, at whose death we should rejoice -- they were Christians, lately your subjects and your countrymen, some of them your relations.**

This is not victory, which is gained over ourselves. In killing these, you drive the sword into your own entrails. **How many men have you slaughtered?**



**How many more have you to kill? We have become a proverb, even among the Pagans and Moors, for carrying on this war, and apostatizing, as they say, from the faith of our ancestors.**

Less than a year afterwards, on **14 June 1632 Susenyos** made a declaration that those who would follow the Catholic faith were allowed to do so, but no one would be forced to do so any

further.

At this point, all **Patriarch Mendes** could do in response was to confirm that this was, indeed, the actual will of the Emperor, his protector. **Catholic Ethiopia had come to an end.**

**In 1630, the Viceroy of Begemder, Sarsa Krestos, proclaimed Susenyos's son Fasilides emperor; Sarsa Krestos was promptly captured and hanged.**

**Despite this, the two stayed on good terms. After announcing his act of toleration, Susenyos abdicated in favor of his son, Fasilides. He was buried at the church of Genneta Iyasus.**



**Fasilides** (Ge'ez ፋሲለዳስ *Fāsīladas*, modern *Fāsīledes*; throne name ' **Alam Sagad**, Ge'ez ዓለም ሰገድ: *Ālam Sagad*, mod-ern *Ālem Seged*, "to whom the world bows"; 1603 - 18 October 1667) was *nəgusä nəgäst* (1632 - October 18, 1667) of Ethiopia, and a member of the Solomonic dynasty.

**He was the son of Susenyos and Empress Sultana Mogassa, born at Magazaz in Shewa before 10 November 1603.**

**Fasilides was proclaimed Emperor in 1630 during a revolt led by Sarsa Krestos, but did not actually reach the throne until his father abdicated in 1632.**



**Once he became Emperor, Fasilides immediately restored the official status of the traditional Ethiopian Orthodox Church.**

He sent for a new *abuna* from the Patriarch of Alexandria, restoring the ancient relationship that had been allowed to lapse.

He confiscated the lands of the Jesuits at Dankaz and elsewhere in the empire,

relegating them to Fremona.

When he heard that the Portuguese bombarded Mombasa, Fasilides assumed that **Afonso Mendes**, the Roman Catholic prelate, was behind the act, and banished the remaining Jesuits from his lands.

**Mendes** and most of his followers made their way back to Goa, being robbed or imprisoned several times on the way. **In 1665, he ordered the "Books of the Franks" -- the remaining religious writings of the Catholics—burnt.**

He is commonly credited with founding the city of **Gondar in 1636**, establishing it as Ethiopia's capital.

Whether or not a community existed here before he made it his capital is unknown. Amongst the buildings he had constructed there are the beginnings of the complex later known as **Fasil Ghebbi, as well as some of the earliest of Gondar's fabled 44 churches: Adababay Iyasus, Adababay Tekle Hay-manot, Atatami Mikael, Gimjabet Maryam, Fit Mikael, and Fit Abbo.**

He is also credited with building seven stone bridges in Ethiopia; as a result all old bridges in Ethiopia are often commonly believed to be his work.

The rebellion of the Agaw in Lasta, which had begun under his father, continued into his reign and for the rest of his reign he made regular punitive expeditions into Lasta.

**The first, in 1637 went badly, for at the Battle of Libo his men panicked before the Agaw assault and their leader, Melka Kristos, entered Fasilides' palace and took the throne for himself.**



**Fasilides quickly recovered and sent for help to *Qegnasmach* Dimmo, governor of Semien, and his brother Gelawdewos, governor of Begemder.**

**These marched on Melka Kristos, who was still at Libo, where he was killed and his men defeated.**

The next year Fasilides marched into Lasta; according to James Bruce, the Agaw retreated to their mountain strongholds, and **"almost the whole army perished amidst the mountains; great part from famine, but a greater still from cold, a very remarkable circumstance in these latitudes.**

**Fasilides dispatched an embassy to India in 1664-5 to congratulate Aurangzeb upon his accession to the throne of the Mughal Empire.**

**In 1666**, after his son Dawit rebelled, Fasilides had incarcerated at Wehni, reviving the ancient practice of confining troublesome members of the Imperial family to a mountaintop, as they had once been confined at Amba Geshen.

**Fasilides died at Azazo, five miles south of Gondar, and his body was interred at St. Stephen's, a monastery on Daga Island in Lake Tana.**

**When Nathaniel T. Kenney was shown Fasilides' remains, he saw a smaller mummy also shared the coffin.**

**A monk told Kenney that it was Fasilides' seven-year-old son Isur, who had been smothered in a crush of people who had come to pay the new king homage.**

**Yohannes I** (Ge'ez *yōhānnis*, Amh. *yōhān-nis*, also sometimes called **John I**), throne name **A'ilaf Sagad** (Ge'ez *a'ilāf sagad*, "to whom tens of thousands bow") was *nəgusä nəgäst* (1667 - 1682) of Ethiopia, and a member of the Solomonic dynasty. **He was the fourth son of Fasilides.**

**Yohannes was appointed *nəgusä nəgäst* by a council of the senior dignitaries of the Empire, at the encouragement of the noble Blattengeta Malka Krestos.**



**The council then imprisoned the other sons of Fasilides on Mount Wehni, continuing the practice Fasilides had revived.**

According to G.W.B. Huntingford, Yohannes spent much of his reign campaigning, stating that 6 of the 11 itineraries he reproduces were military expeditions.

**Three of these were against the Agaw in Gojjam, and Agawmeder, one against the Oromo, and two punitive expeditions to the area around Mount Ashgwagwa -- Angot and Lasta -- to quash the revolts of Feres (in 1677) and Za Maryam (1679).**

**Emperor Yohannes died on 19 July and was buried at Teda.**

Due to the violent religious controversy that Catholic missionaries had caused in Ethiopia under the reign of his grandfather **Susenyos, he acted harshly towards Europeans.**

**In 1669, he directed Gerazmach Mikael to expel all of the Catholics still living in Ethiopia; those who did not embrace the beliefs of the Ethiopian Church were exiled to Sennar.**

**Six Franciscans sent by Pope Alexander VII to succeed in converting Ethiopia to Catholicism where the Jesuits had failed 30 years before, were executed during his reign.**

As a result, he favoured Armenian visitors, whose beliefs also embraced Miaphysitism, and were in harmony with the Ethiopian Church.

These included one **Murad**, who undertook a number of diplomatic missions for the **Emperor; and in 1679, the Emperor Yohannes received the Armenian bishop Yohannes, bearing a relic of Ewostawos.**

The growing controversy over the nature of Christ had grown severe enough that in the last year of his reign Yohannes called a synod to resolve the dispute.

The Ewostathian monks of Gojjam advocated the formula "**Through Uncion Christ the Son was consubstantial with the Father**", by which they came to be known as the **Qebat ("Uncion")** faction, who were supported by the



**Emperor's own son Iyasu;** they were opposed by the monks of Debre Libanos, who at that time still advocated traditional Miaphysitism.

The outcome of the synod is in dispute: according to E.A. Wallis-Budge and H. Weld Blundell, **Emperor Yohannes** was convinced to condemn the ***Qebat* doctrine, which led to Iyasu attempting to flee his father's realm;** but according to Crummey, Yohannes favored

the Gojjame delegation for political reasons: at the time Gojjam was an important province.

**These decisions were revisited once Iyasu became Emperor, at a synod he called in 1686.**

**Iyasu I** (or **Joshua I**, Ge'ez ኢየሱስ ), also known as **Iyasu the Great**, was *nəgusä nägäst* (throne name **Adyam Sagad**, Ge'ez አድሃም ሰገድ, "**to whom the confines of the earth bow**") (19 July 1682 - 13 October 1706) of Ethiopia, and a member of the Solomonic dynasty. He was the son of Yohannes I and Empress Sabla Wangel.

According to G.W.B Huntingford, **Iyasu "owed his reputation partly to the mildness of his character, exemplified in his treatment of the princes on Wehni in his first year, and his attention to religious matters, and partly to his abdication, retirement, and murder."**

**He was serving as governor of Gojjam when his father Yohannes summoned him and made him heir at the age of 20.**

**(However, he did not have himself crowned until 1693.) During the first year of his reign he attended to his brothers and other relatives imprisoned on Wehni, a moment recorded by James Bruce who describes how the Emperor replaced their rags with proper clothing and furnished the starving royals with a banquet.**

His reign is noteworthy for the attention he devoted to administration, holding a large number of councils to settle theological and ecclesiastical matters (the first in **1684**, in the public square of Gondar), matters of state, and to proclaim laws.



**In 1698, Iyasu** undertook a number of reforms, affecting customs and taxation, which encouraged trade.

In the second year of his reign, he confronted an invasion of the **Yejju and Wollo Oromo into Amhara**, defeating them at **Melka Shimfa**.

After **Qegnasmach Wale of Damot and Tabdan the Hermit** proclaimed **Yeshaq** emperor in his fourth year (1685), **Iyasu** quickly suppressed this revolt, and captured **Yeshaq**, then waited a year before marching beyond southern **Gojjam** in a punitive expedition against the **Agaws** who had supported the rebels.

It was during his reign that individual **Oromo** first found service in the Imperial court.

His *Royal Chronicle*<sup>[5]</sup> recounts how when the **Ottoman Naib** of **Massawa** attempted to levy a tax on **Iyasu's** goods that had landed at **Massawa**, he responded with a **blockade** of that island city until the **Naib** relented.

**Solomon Getahun** observes that "unlike his immediate predecessors, **Iyasu's** tenure was noted for endeavours to establish diplomatic ties with **Christian monarchies** like **Louis XIV** of **France** and **Ethiopian delegates** had been sent to **foreign countries**."

**Solomon** notes that one of the benefits of these efforts to reach out to other countries was that **Emperor Iyasu** received a **bell** from the **Dutch governor** in **India**, which was then donated to **Debre Berhan Selassie Church** in **Gondar**.

This also led to the visit by a **French physician**, **Charles Poncet**, who travelled to the **Empire** to treat **Iyasu** and one of his sons.

**Poncet** arrived at **Gondar** **21 July 1699**, and stayed until **September 1700**. **Poncet** published an account of his visit in **Paris** in **1704**, which included his personal impression of **Iyasu the Great**:

Although' he be not above one and forty years old, yet he has already a numerous issue. He has eight princes and three princesses.



The Emperor has great qualities -- a quick and piercing wit [i.e. intelligence], a sweet and affable humour, and the stature of a hero.

He is the handsomest man I have seen in Ethiopia. He is a lover of curious arts and sciences; but his chief passion is for war.

He is brave and undaunted in battles, and always at the head of his troops. He has an extraordinary love for justice, which he administers to his subjects with great exactness; but whereas he is averse to blood, 'tis not without reluctance that he condemns a criminal [to death].

Such eminent qualities make him equally feared and beloved by his subjects, who respect him even to adoration.

While he was campaigning in Gojjam against the Oromo, Iyasu learned that his favorite concubine, Kedeste Kristos, had died.

Stricken with grief, he retired to an island in Lake Tana. Supported by Empress Malakotawit, some of the officials argued, after the precedent of king Kaleb that he had abdicated, and crowned his son Tekle Haymanot Emperor.

According to some accounts, this was not Iyasus' intent, and he marched from his hermitage in Lake Tana towards Gondar to protest this; in any case, during this time he fell sick and was assassinated at Tekle Haymanot's orders.

Iyasu's death caused much distress in the capital, especially amongst the priests of Debre Berhan Selassie, who openly displayed his gifts to them, and mourned their dead monarch for a month.

Bruce writes that Iyasu was buried on Mitraha Island, where he was shown Iyasu's body interred amongst "the bodies of all his ancestors".

Once his brother Tewoflos became Emperor, he initiated Iyasu's canonization.

Tekle Haymanot I (Ge'ez , "Plant of religion," throne name Le`al Sagad Ge'ez , "to whom the exalted bows") was *nägasä nägäst* (27 March 1706 - 30



June 1708) of Ethiopia, and a member of the Solomonic dynasty. He was the son of Iyasu I and Empress Malakotawit.

He is often referred to as "Irgum Tekle Haymanot" or "Tekle Haymanot the Cursed"

Tekle Haymanot became Emperor following Iyasus' retirement to an island in Lake Tana.

With the support of his mother Empress Malakotawit, some of the officials argued, after the precedent of king Kaleb, that Iyasu had abdicated, and crowned Tekle Haymanot *nəgusä nəgäst* in Gondar.

This act was not embraced by the entire state, and the resulting civil strife led to Iyasu's murder at the order of his son Tekle Haymanot.

In September, 1707, a rebel in Gojjam declared himself *nəgusä nəgäst* under the name Amda Seyon, and made his way to the capital city, where he had himself crowned.

Tekle Haymanot quickly returned to Gondar, despite the difficulty of travel during the rainy season, forced the usurper to flee, and celebrated his triumph. Amda Seyon was later killed in battle in Maitsa.

However his unpopularity for having ordered the murder of his widely revered father was profound and he never overcame it.

The involvement of his mother Meleketawit, and the acceptance of his position by other members of the dynasty did irreparable harm to the image of the monarchy.

His own courtiers plotted against him, and discussions abounded about whether it was worthy to keep such a corrupt dynasty in power.

While travelling in the provinces, Tekle Haymanot was stabbed to death by some of his late father's courtiers.

Some historians date the beginning of the Ethiopian Zemene Mesafint or "Era of the Princes" (a time of disorder when the power of the monarchy was eclipsed by the power of local warlords) the murder of Iyasu the Great by his

son Tekle Hay-manot, and the resultant decline in the prestige of the dynasty.



**Iyasu II** or **Joshua II** (Ge'ez ኢየሱ; 21 October 1723<sup>[1]</sup>– 27 June 1755) was *nəgusä nägäst* (throne name **Alem Sagad**, Ge'ez ላለም ሰገድ 'Alām Sägäd, "to whom the world bows") (19 September 1730 – 27 June 1755<sup>[2]</sup>) of Ethiopia, and a member of the Gondar branch of Solomonic dynasty.

**He was the son of Emperor Bakaffa and Empress Mentewab (also known by her Baptismal name of Welete Giyorgis).**

**The Empress Mentewab played a major role in Iyasu's reign, perhaps against her will.**

Shortly after he was proclaimed Emperor, a rival claimant assaulted the Royal Enclosure for eight days, only leaving the capital Gondar when an army of 30,000 from Gojjam appeared.

Although the rebels failed to penetrate its walls, nonetheless much of Gondar was left in ruins.

Instead of taking the title of regent upon the succession of her underage son, **Empress Mentewab** had herself crowned as co-ruler, becoming the first woman to be crowned in this manner in Ethiopian history.

**Empress Mentewab wielded significant authority throughout the reign of her son, and well into the reign of her grandson as well.**

**During Iyasu II's reign, a Czech Franciscan Remedius Prutky visited his kingdom, and engaged Iyasu in talks about religion and European politics.**

Although he and his two companions were popular because of their medical skills, Prutky and his Catholic companion were asked to leave because of complaints from the local clergy after a year.

**Despite Mentewab's counsel, Iyasu proved to be an ineffectual monarch.**

According to Paul Henze, Iyasu "came under criticism for devoting too much time to pleasure (he loved hunting) and for spending too many resources on



embellishing the capital, paying foreign workmen, and importing luxury goods, ornaments and mirrors from Europe."

Prutky, on the other hand blamed Iyasu's constrained revenues to the actions of his mother Mentewab: "Since the youthful emperor Jasu had only reached the age of eight when he ascended the throne, his

mother the Queen divided out the provinces among the chief ministers in such a way that, at the time of my sojourn there, the Emperor, now over thirty years of age, saw his treasury diminished and scarcely enough for his ordinary expenses." Prutky adds that during the year Prutky was in Ethiopia (1752), the emperor was engaged in a struggle with his own sister over the revenues from Gojjam.

In a bid to gain the respect of his subjects, the Emperor Iyasu engaged in a campaign against the Kingdom of Sennar, which ended in defeat at the Battle of the Dindar River in 1738; an icon of Christ and a piece of the True Cross carried into battle were captured, and had to be ransomed for 8,000 ounces of gold.

This defeat decisively ended any hope by Iyasu to prove himself competent in military affairs; as Donald Levine writes, "The subsequent subdual of Lasta, a rebel region for generations, and Iyasu's raids against tribes in the Atbara district were not sufficient to redeem that defeat or restore the force of Gondar."

During his reign two infestations of locusts afflicted the land, and an epidemic took the lives of thousands. When Abuna Krestodolos died, the treasury lacked money to pay for procurement of a new *abuna*.

According to Edward Ullendorff, his authority "scarcely extended beyond Begemder and Gojjam; Shoa and Lasta acknowledged only a token allegiance, while in the Tigrai the long rule of the powerful Ras Mika'el had begun."

Emperor Iyasu also resented deeply the romantic liaison his mother entered into with a young member of the Imperial family.



**Empress Mentewab** became involved with Iyasu, the son of her former sister-in-law Romanework, who was herself the sister of the late **Emperor Bakaffa**, and on her father's side descended in male line from another cadet line of the Solomonic dynasty.

Mentewab's relationship with the much younger nephew of her late husband was considered a great scandal, and the young Prince was derisively referred to as "**Melmal**

**Iyasu**", or "**Iyasu the Kept**".

The Empress had three daughters by this **Melmal Iyasu**, one of whom was the beautiful **Woizero Aster Iyasu** who took **Ras Mikael Sehul** in **1769** as her **third husband**.

**Emperor Iyasu** became very attached to his half-sisters, but was deeply resentful of their father. **It is said that it was the Emperor himself that ordered the murder of his mother's lover by having him pushed from a cliff top near Lake Tana in 1742.**

**Death Iyasu** fell seriously ill in **May, 1755**, and died the next month. It was generally believed that he had been poisoned by the sister of **Melmal Iyasu**, in revenge for her brother's death.

**When the Empress Mentewab sought funds from the treasury for his funeral, only a few dinars could be found.**

**Saddened by this situation, she threatened to retire to her palace convent at Qusquam, but a group of nobles persuaded her to instead become regent for her grandson Iyoas I.**

**Mentewab** (Ge'ez : *min-tiwwāb*, Amharic: "**How beautiful**"; ca. 1706 - 27 June 1773), was **Empress of Ethiopia, consort of Emperor Bakaffa, mother of Iyasu II and grandmother of Iyoas I.**

She was also known officially by her baptismal name of **Welete Giyorgis** ("**Daughter of St. George**"). **Mentewab** was a major political figure during the reigns of her son the **Emperor Iyasu and grandson Iyoas.**



**Mentewab was born in Qwara province, and was rumoured to have had a Portuguese grandparent; because of this, she was often suspected of harbouring secret Roman Catholic sympathies.**

**She was a daughter of *Dejazmach* Manbare of Dembiya by his wife, *Woizero* Yenkoy.**

**Mentewab married Emperor Bakaffa in**

**Qwara 6 September 1722, becoming one of his secondary wives.**

Following the death of her husband, Empress Mentewab took up a romantic liaison with her late husband's nephew.

**The Empress' much younger lover was derisively called "Melmal Iyasu" (Iyasu the Kept) by members of the court.**

**Mentewab would have three daughters by "Melmal Iyasu", including *Woizero Aster Iyasu*, who would marry the powerful Tigrean warlord *Ras Mikael Schul*.**

**Empress Mentewab** built several significant structures in Gondar, including her own castle in the Royal Enclosure, and a large banqueting hall as well.

Most significantly she built a church dedicated to the **Virgin Mary at Qusquam** (named for a site in Egypt where the Holy Family had stayed during their exile) in the mountains outside of Gondar. **Empress Mentewab also built a palace adjoining her church, which became her favored residence.**

**King of Kings Iyasu and Empress Mintuwaab An Original from Magdala**  
**Empress Mentewab was crowned co-ruler upon the succession of her son in 1730, and held unprecedented power over government during his reign.**

**(She descended in her own right from emperors who reigned two centuries earlier.)** Her attempt to continue in this role following the death of her son 1755 led her into conflict with **Wubit (Welete Bersabe)**, Iyasu's widow, who believed that it was her turn to pre-side at the court of her own son Iyoas.

**Fasil Ghebbi is a fortress-enclosure located in Gondar, Ethiopia. It served as the home of Ethiopia's emperors in the 17th and 18th centuries.**



Its unique architecture shows diverse influences including Nubian, Arab, and Baroque styles. The site was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in **1979**.

**This complex of buildings includes Fasilides castle, Iyasu's Palace, Dawit's Hall, a banqueting hall, stables, Mentewab's Castle, a chancellery, library and three churches.**

**The conflict between these two queens led to Mentewab summoning her Qwaran relatives and their forces to Gondar for support.**

**Wubit responded by summoning her own Oromo relatives and their considerable forces from Yejju.**

**Mentewab summoned the powerful Mikael Schul (who was to become her son-in-law) to mediate the dispute and prevent a bloodbath. Upon arriving in Gondar, he was made *Ras*.**

**Mentewab had hoped that he would land firmly on her side, but instead *Ras* Mika-el seized power for himself, and eventually engineered the murder by strangulation of Emperor Iyoas I, at which time Mikael also married the aunt of his victim.**

**Empress Mentewab was distraught at the murder of her grandson. She retreated to Qusquam and buried her grandson there next to her son, and refused to return to the city of Gondar. She lived at her palace there in seclusion till the end of her life.**

**Mikael Schul (Tigrigna "*Mikael the Astute*"; his name at birth was *Blatta Mika-el*; c.1691 - 23 June 1779) was a *Ras* or governor of Tigray 1748-71 and again from 1772 until his death.**

**He was a major political figure from the reign of Emperor Iyasu II, and his successors until almost the time of his death.**

**Mikael was a son of Abeto Hezeqyas Wolde Hawaryot and Woizero Ishate Mari-am, the daughter of Azzaz Yakub.**



They claimed descent from the Solomonid dynasty through his ancestor Ras Faris the Great, and his father used the title Abeto, a prince of imperial cadet line. His first official wife was Woizero Walatta Gabr'el (died at Adwa after 1766), and later to Woizero Aster.

He first enters history as having a part in some of the difficulties that was experienced by the delegation sent to Cairo to obtain a new

**Abuna for the Empire in 1745.**

On their outbound trip, the party had been held up at Massawa by the local Naib for six months, and only released them after they gave him half of their funds.

**On the return trip, Abuna Yohannes was held for ransom at Arqiqo until the abbot of the monastery of Debre Bizan helped him to escape.**

**This affront was too serious to be overlooked, and the then Dejzmach Mikael was subjected to a punitive campaign by the Emperor. However Dejzmach Mikael remained too powerful, and he was soon forgiven.**

In the reign of Iyasus's successor Iyoas I, Dejzmach Mikael found himself the beneficiary of two dynastic ties to the Imperial house: Empress Mentewab in 1769 married him to her daughter Aster, and Mikael's son, Wolde Hayawrat, had married to another daughter of the Empress. It was at this time that Mikael was granted the title of Ras.

**Ras Mikael** intervened in the Ethiopian Church, and was a champion of the Karva Haymanot doctrine.

He found offence in the behaviour of his superior Ras Anda Haymanot during a hunting expedition, and returned to Adwa which he fortified, and rebelled from Anda Haymanot.

**Eventually Ras Mikael fought, captured then executed his one-time master in 1759.**

**Adwa was located at a strategic point on the trade route between Massawa and Gondar, and from the fees and duties he extracted he was able to recruit an army of 8000 men and arm them with muskets.**



**Upon the death of Iyasu II, his son Iyoas took the throne and rivalry exploded between the mother of the late Emperor, and his widow.**

**Empress Mentewab** had been crowned co-ruler when her then underage son had succeeded her husband.

Now that her son was gone, she believed that she was entitled to remain as co-ruler.

**However, Iyasu's widow, Welete Bersabe (known as Wubit) of the Oromo,** strongly believed that it was her turn to take the leading role at the court of her son Iyoas as her mother-in-law had done during the previous reign.

**The young Emperor took the side of his mother against his grandmother.**

**Empress Mentewab gathered her relatives from her native Qwara and their forces flooded into Gondar to support her claims.**

**When news of the arrival of the Qwaran troops arrived, Welete Bersabe also summoned her relatives from Yeju, and throngs of Oromo soldiers arrived from that district to uphold her claims.**

**The city of Gondar was swamped by these two tense armies, and a bloodbath seemed imminent.**

**To resolve the standoff, Empress Mentewab looked to her son-in-law Ras Mikael to intervene.**

**Mikael Sehul arrived with an army of 26,000 promising to mediate the dispute between the two queens and their followers. He took control of the capital city of Gondar and assumed an increasingly dominant role.**

**On 22 January 1768, Mikael was made Ras Bitwodad and Enderase (Viceroy) of the Empire. His growing power alarmed Emperor Iyoas, and after secretly exchanging messages with Fasil the Emperor ordered Ras Mikael to return to Tigray.**

**The Ras disobeyed and defeated Fasil's army.**



**He returned to Gondar and demanded an assembly of the nobility so Ras Mikael Sehul could show his proof that the Emperor Iyoas had plotted to have him killed while he was defending his throne for him.**

The assembly was presented with testimony, and agreed that it was a grievous crime, deserving of death, but that as a monarch could not be killed, they merely confined the

Emperor to his palace.

**Mikael Sehul then ordered the Emperor killed. As it was considered wrong to pierce the heir of Solomon with a spear, cut him with a sword, or to strike him with bullets, Mikael Sehul ordered the Emperor strangled with a length of silk in imperial red in January 1769.**

**This alarmed both dowager queens, Empress Mentewab and Welete Bersabe, and Mentewab secluded herself at her palace at Qusquam where she buried her grandson with much pomp and grandure.**

**Ras Mikael then appointed the next two Emperors: Yohannes II, who proved to be a nonentity and was quickly gotten rid of; then Tekle Haymanot II.**

Despite his power over the throne, the populace rebelled; Ras Mikael responded with a reign of terror over Gondar (1770), but failed to control the countryside where the armies of Fasil, Goshu of Amhara, and Wand Bewossen of Begemder allied to fight him.

The parties met at Sarbakusa, where Ras Mikael was finally defeated, and finally surrendered to Wand Bawasan on 4 June, 1771.

Wand Bawasan imprisoned Mikael Sehul for a year, then either sent him back to Tigray to live out his last years as governor of that province, or Ras Mikael voluntarily retired to that province.

**He was succeeded, each briefly, by his son Wolde Samuel of Tigray, then by his grandson Wolde Gabriel, and ultimately by his nephew Gabre Maskal.**