

UNKNOWN EMPIRE

THE TRUE STORY OF MYSTERIOUS ETHIOPIA
AND THE FUTURE ARK OF CIVILIZATION

DEAN W. ARNOLD

 CHATTANOOGA
HISTORICAL
FOUNDATION

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For Dottie

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It is the glory of God to conceal a matter.

—Solomon

UNKNOWN EMPIRE

PART ONE

The Barefoot and the Castrated

The Ark for Africa's Greatest Battle with the West

PROLOGUE



I DID NOT want to ask him *if* the Ark of the Covenant was in Ethiopia. It is a question that is too often asked, and I had already asked the question to a great many people.

As I sat down to interview this theological leader of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, I wanted to know the answer to the deeper question: *Why?*

Why, if the Ark really does exist, is it in Ethiopia of all places?

“Why didn’t God just hide such a relic in a cave somewhere, or let it decompose?” I asked him. “Why, in his wisdom, do you think God decided that this particular artifact would be so preserved by one particular nation? What is the purpose? What is the reason?”

He laughed. Then I laughed. His was not a light-hearted chuckle. It was a sentiment of compassion. He was exhibiting what I have found to be part of the Ethiopian character: a gentle and quiet meekness that disguises an almost incomprehensible confidence.

He smiled again and spoke with hesitation.

“The response... would be somehow difficult for you to accept... or to believe in.”

I waited. I hadn’t traveled to the country three different times to let him off the hook at this critical point.

“There is a belief or a tradition in Ethiopia,” he said, “or a consideration...”

He hesitated again.

“...that Ethiopians are...”

He was right. It was too much to handle right away.¹

CHAPTER ONE



THE RUNNER CREATED a stir at the starting line of the 1960 Olympic marathon in Rome, land of emperors. This thin Ethiopian caught the attention of his Western opponents. “Oh, well, that’s one we can beat,” quipped an Australian runner to his teammates.

No black African had ever won a gold medal, not in any sport. Abebe Bikila, twenty-eight, had only started training four years before. He had one other glaring handicap as he waited for the starting gun to fire. He was barefoot.

Bikila had actually hidden in the tent a few minutes earlier to avoid the snickers from his opponents. He had tried running shoes at various times, but they hadn’t felt right. Boys in Ethiopia grow up walking and running several miles a day in search of good grazing for their livestock. They never seemed bothered by the blazing sun that the ancient Greeks assumed must be closest to mankind in this land of ‘burnt faces,’ as they called it (*Aeth* ‘to burn’ + *ops* ‘face’). Many people in 1960 also used the later Latin-Arab term *Abyssinia*, meaning ‘mixed,’ which shows up even today in the various shades of color and sharp-to-round features across the population. However, the people themselves leaned toward the earlier term, as Greek writings are filled with fantastic compliments of this ancient race. Homer called them the “blameless Ethiopians.”¹

As a child, Bikila spent his days like other barefoot children, caring for animals and attending church school. Like today, they lived in straw-roofed mud huts. The largest building in his village was the church, an institution that likely has modeled heaven for the earthly tribe for over a thousand years. Ethiopia claims one of the most ancient Christian traditions in the world, beginning with the biblical character

they call “Bacos,” the well-known Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8 in the New Testament. This secretary of the treasury under Queen Candace was baptized by Philip after asking the apostle questions about the book of Isaiah, which Bacos was reading while sitting in his chariot—adding credence to Ethiopia’s claim to 1,000 years of Old Testament worship before the time of Christ.



ABEBE BIKILA RUNS BAREFOOT IN THE 1960 OLYMPIC MARATHON

For the twenty-six-mile race (forty-two kilometers), Bikila wore bright red shorts and a green shirt with the number 11 on it. Video of the Olympic coverage provides a lengthy shot of the odds-on favorite, Russian runner Sergei Popov, looking confident, laughing and joking with a friend as they wait for the race to begin. For a moment the camera shows Bikila’s face. The commentator asks: “And what’s this Ethiopian called?”²

The *New York Times* provides a description of the beginning of the race: “It started at Campidoglio Square, designed by Michelangelo, skirted the Circus Maximus and the Baths of Caracalla, went along the 2,000-year-old Appian Way, and ended at the Arch of Constantine. As

the lean, little Ethiopian approached the brilliantly illuminated arch, close by the ruins of the Forum and Colosseum, thousands cheered.”³

The Roman imagery was highly ironic. Bikila was forced to move to another village at the age of three when the Italian military invaded his country to claim their long-desired colony. Ethiopia was the last holdout for an African continent otherwise completely conquered by Europe. A few years earlier, Italian Colonel G. B. Luciano objected when colonization was being questioned: “I have no intention of degrading the Abyssinian race, strong, intelligent, and noblest among the indigenous peoples, but I insist that in many respects we are superior to it, especially as to civilization, and we should not renounce the supremacy of the white race over these peoples.” He continued his thoughts on interbreeding, which he felt “causes the downfall and decay of a superior race.”⁴

Bikila was never critical of the Italians. “He was very polite, very humble,” said Onni Niskanen, his Scandinavian trainer. “From the bottom of his heart, he was a good man.” Niskanen told his family back in Sweden that the Ethiopians were rather quiet but “very nice.”

Nevertheless, the people, historically, have never taken a liking to invasion. A few decades before Bikila’s village was occupied, Emperor Yohannes IV gave a clear response to the Italians who first demanded they hand over their country for colonial purposes: “How could I ever agree to sign away the lands over which my local ancestors governed?” said Yohannes. “Christ gave them to me.”

Conflicts inevitably ensued. The “very nice” Ethiopians had a penchant for castrating both their dead trophies and prisoners of war. In one account, it took eight men to hold down one Italian soldier. “I still have my hands,” he said. “When I heal, I want to mow down all the Abyssinians!”⁵

Ethiopia’s reputation existed as far back as 50 BC, when it was described by Diodorus Siculus, one of the most reliable ancient historians: “They have never experienced the rule of an invader from abroad, and although many and powerful rulers have made war upon them, not one of these has succeeded in his undertaking.”

Ethiopia is “the Land of God,” according to other ancient writers, a phrase repeated by a publication approved by the Ethiopian church, which adds: “And she will survive until the end of the world.”⁶

In between fighting colonists in the modern era and defeating invaders in the ancient and classical ages, Ethiopia has spent a millennium fighting Muslims on its borders as a majority Orthodox Christian country. However, within her borders, Ethiopia remains somewhat peaceful today with its thirty-five percent Muslim minority (Muhammad allegedly outlawed jihad there when the Christian Emperor Armah took in Muslim refugees.) However, Islamic countries have relentlessly attempted to encroach on every side of the country, making Ethiopia “the island of Christianity” in Africa and the source of the medieval Prester John legend of the only non-European Christian nation in a land of mountains far, far away.^{7*}

The TV commentator finally dug up the name of the Ethiopian runner among the sixty-nine contestants. “Bikila, the African, hasn’t taken part in international competition before,” he noted. *World Sport Magazine* said Ethiopians “run past farmers driving teams of oxen, ploughing the land in much the same way as their forefathers did in biblical times.”

This statement was no stereotype. They grow the grain *teff* and make the honey wine *tej*. “We Abyssinians are a poor people with no mechanical support,” Bikila said in a later interview. “So we run everywhere on foot. Forty kilometers are nothing to me.”

Before the race, one resourceful reporter found a translator and was able to ask a few questions.

“Why do you run barefoot?”

“Habit.”

“Will you be able to finish the race?”

“If I were not going to finish the race, I would not start it to begin with.”⁸

* An asterisk (*) indicates further commentary with the note at the back of the book. A reference number without an asterisk provides only the source or sources used in the previous section.

Bikila may have been a bit energized by the date, September 10, a day before the Ethiopian New Year—September 11 by the calendar. However, liturgically he was indeed running on the New Year, the eve of which was being celebrated back home. Traditionally, a day begins with prayers in the evening before the celebration of the Eucharist the next morning at the house of worship, and that ritual starts with the priest cutting loaves in a side building they call Bethlehem (“house of bread”)—all corresponding to the pattern in Genesis 1: “And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.”

Ethiopians also celebrate on this day the return of the Queen of Sheba to Ethiopia after visiting Israel’s King Solomon, the two luminaries of ancient Ethiopia. This famous Old Testament story does not include the interesting details in the Ethiopian tradition, which tells us that their visit was so good that they had a son (not beyond the pale for a king with a thousand partners, according to 1 Kings 11). Through this connection, Ethiopia claims to hold the Ark of the Covenant, the golden chest built by Moses, the central object of the Israelite temple and perhaps the greatest treasure in history. Do they? This book will follow the trail.

As the 1960 marathon commenced, Abebe Bikila was not among the leaders. With thousands of spectators nearby, a “mob scene” developed that even the police couldn’t dissolve in the short term. Nevertheless, the runners were able to get through the host of excited onlookers and successfully onto the long road.⁹

One by one, the competitors began to fall off the pace like a flock of birds dissolving. Within a few kilometers, two groups of four or five runners each emerged at the front. Bikila was in the second group with the Russian, Sergei Popov, and a New Zealander, Barry Magee. The lead group included a former French soldier, an Englishman, and a Belgian.

Belgium was an infamous pioneer of colonialism. While Britain was establishing colonies from “the Cape to Cairo,” France gobbled up North Africa and Algeria. Belgium targeted the Congo. Sometime after 1876, Belgium’s King Leopold II sent Henry Morton Stanley on a deep state secret mission inside the Congo. Of the sixteen million people there, only eight million survived the brutality of Leopold’s regime.

However, most people only remember the romantic story of Stanley meeting a missing white missionary in the Congo's interior and saying "Dr. Livingston, I presume."¹⁰

Ethiopia's past success against invaders provided inspiration for African countries in the twentieth century as they fought to gain back their lands from Western occupation and domination.

Many take refuge regarding such harsh views and behaviors by Westerners as being only a thing of the past. But some are still fans of the Belgian emperor: "We need a modern King Leopold to assist the noble savage for a better life," according to a comment on an article by Doug Casey, an author who a few years ago spent weeks as number one on the *New York Times* Best Seller list. "Africans don't have the Protestant work ethic of Europeans," wrote Casey. "The continent has no civilization, no economy, no technology, no military power."

Another *NYT* bestselling author, a Harvard and Oxford scholar, is also quite willing to defend Western civilization: "It's not eurocentrism," writes Niall Ferguson in *Civilization: The West and the Rest*. "It's a statement of the obvious."¹¹

A strategic investment advisor, Casey is actually a fan of the continent's future. "Africa is going to be the epicenter of what's happening in the world for years to come" he admits, basing his conclusions on birthrates, which are below replacement level in the West. They are strong but declining in Asia. In Africa, they are booming. These mathematical certainties point to a civilizational shift that we may not have seen since the Northern European barbarians camped across the Rhine river from Roman territory in the fifth century. When the river froze over, they marched across and defeated the Romans and went on to sack the capital of the 1,000-year-old empire. They had no idea their battle would mark the end of an age. "Ethiopia... is regarded by modern Europeans much in the same way as ancient Britain was regarded by the Romans," says Ethiopian scholar Sergew Hable Selassie.¹²

Another commenter on Casey's article understands what is at stake: "If there is not some form of mandatory birth control, we are in real trouble." This might sound like an offhand remark, but the latter part of this book will address in great detail the substance of his comment.

As the Arch of Constantine, illuminated by the setting sun, faded from the view of the marathon contestants, a shift began to emerge in the leading groups. The shoeless Ethiopian had moved up from the second group of runners. He had now passed the Russian, the favorite at the beginning of the race. By the fifteenth kilometer, he had reached the back of the leading group, a pack of four that included only those associated with Britain, Belgium, and France.

“And there’s that unknown Ethiopian we saw earlier,” announced the commentator. “He’s called Abebe Bikila. He’s barefoot.”¹³