

ETHIOPIA

POPULATION: 22 TO 25 MILLION—CAPITAL: ADDIS ABABA

Ethiopia is bounded on the north by the Sudan and the Red Sea, on the east by French Somaliland and the Somali Republic, on the south by Kenya, and on the west by the Sudan. The area totals about 460,000 square miles—roughly equal to the combined areas of Texas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico. The capital, Addis Ababa, has a population of about 450,000; Asmara, Ethiopia's second largest city, has approximately 130,000 inhabitants.

The dominant feature of the topography is the high central plateau, varying from 6,000 to 10,000 feet, which is cut by numerous rivers—notably the Blue Nile rising from Lake Tana—and is split diagonally by the Y-shaped Great Rift Valley. This feature is traced by a chain of lakes starting in the southwest and opening out onto the low, dry Danakil Plains in the northeast. The elevation of the two halves of the plateau is generally highest just before the point of descent, via precipitous escarpments, to the Rift Valley. The transition to the lowlands of the Sudan on the west and the Somali-inhabited plains to the southeast is accomplished by generally more gradual slopes.

The climate is hot in the lowlands and temperate on the plateau. In Addis Ababa and Asmara, both at approximately 8,000 feet, maximum temperature is about 75° F., and the minimum temperature about 47° F. The seasons are divided between wet and dry. The wet season is subdivided into the period of the "little rains," intermittent showers occurring between February and April, and the "big rains," which begin toward the end of June and end by mid-September.

THE PEOPLE

The population, estimated to be between 22 and 25 million, is of a mixed character with Semitic, Hamitic, and Cushitic peoples predominating. More than 40 different tribes and peoples are represented, the most important of which are the Amhara, Tigreans, and Galla. It is estimated that over a third of the people are Christians—the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has long and close ties with the Coptic Church—but there is also a large Moslem population and a considerable number of pagans. In general, the Christians inhabit the highlands and the Moslems and pagans inhabit the coastal and lowland areas.

HISTORY

Ethiopia is a Christian kingdom which has existed for centuries in the highlands of east Africa. Herodotus, the Greek historian of the 5th century B.C., described Ethiopia in his writings. The visit of the Ethiopian Queen of Sheba to Jerusalem is recorded in the Old Testament, and the ruling house of Ethiopia claims descent from Menelik I, the son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Christianity was introduced in the fourth century.

The modern history of the country is generally considered to begin with the reign of the Emperor Menelik II (1889–1913), under whom the kingdom began to emerge from its medieval isolation. Upon Menelik's death his grandson, Lidj Yassu, succeeded to the throne. However, Yassu was deposed in 1916, and Menelik's daughter, Zauditu, became Empress, and her cousin, Ras Tafari Makonnen, was proclaimed her heir and successor. The Empress died in 1930, and on November 2 of that year Ras Tafari Makonnen, adopting the throne name Haile Selassie, which means "The Power of the Trinity," was crowned Emperor.

The reign of Haile Selassie I was interrupted in 1935 by the Italian invasion and occupation. He took his cause to the League of Nations, and when that organization failed to respond to his plea for assistance in accordance with the principle of collective security, he was forced into exile and went to England. On May 5, 1941, exactly 5 years after Italian occupation forces had taken over Addis Ababa the Emperor reentered the city at the head of his resistance forces and with British troops, which had fought their way into Ethiopia from the Sudan.