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**THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**Present:**

**THE LIFE & TIMES  
OF  
HER IMPERIAL MAJESTY EMPRESS MENEN (WOLETE GIORGIS)  
(1891-1962)  
118<sup>th</sup> EARTHDAY CELEBRATION**



**Queen of Queens**



When the struggle for black self determination is studied, the focus is often on the brave and courageous men who gave their lives for the independence and improvement of their country. Even so, little study has been given to the black women who made vital contributions in the fight for freedom and equality.

Every great man in history came into the world from the womb of a woman. Historically black women have been the pillar of strength throughout Africa and the Diaspora. Without examining the contributions made by black women throughout the ages, the full story of the black experience and struggle cannot be told.

This report aims to focus on the life and works of a virtuous woman, Empress Menen, Queen of Queens of Ethiopia.

H.I.M Empress Menen was born on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1891(25<sup>th</sup> Megabit 1883) in the Egua village of the Ambassel region of the Wollo province. She was baptised Wolete Giorgis in the St Delba Giorgis Church. Her name Menen was given for the most beautiful respected ladies. Woizero Menen was the granddaughter of Negus (King) Mikael from the Wollo province. Her father was Jantirar Asfaw and her mother was Woizero Sehin, daughter of Negus Mikael. Empress Menen was known to be kind, compassionate and devoutly God fearing. She knew her native language of Amharic and was a well read and skilful writer, having gained various acadamic qualifications including home economics and spinning - an Ethiopian tradition. As a young lady (approx. 1902) she was married to Ras Lul Sagad, bearing two daughters and two sons, but she later divorced him.

### **Sacred Marriage with H.I.M and Adult Life:**

Woizero Menen was married to H.I.M Emperor Haile Selassie I, in a church ceremony on 30 July 1911, in the province of Harar. She travelled from Addis Ababa to Harar where the people wished the couple to be like the sacred marriage of Abraham and Sarah. H.I.M Emperor Haile Selassie as Governor of Harar in His twentieth year said of HIM Itegue Menen “**...Her character is such that, apart from goodness, there is no evil or malice in her. Ever since, we were married, we lived together, by virtue of her being fertile, in one family joy, as well as sadness...**” For the first time in Ethiopian history, Empress Menen was crowned Queen of Queens, alongside Emperor Haile Selassie I, King of Kings on 2 November 1930 at St Giorgis Church in Addis Ababa. On Coronation day, H.I.M Itegue Menen was given a gold and ivory sceptre. On the entablature at the foot of the sceptre is engraved the ineffable name of God and the Pentacle King of Solomon. She was crowned Itegue Menen, Itegue being the title of an Empress. It is to be noted that H.I.M Emperor Haile Selassie I, set a new precedent for how women were viewed, by changing the course of Ethiopian history insisting that the Empress be Coronated on the same day as the Emperor and not three days later as was the custom. Both from the Solomon and Sheba lineage. “Prophecy has revealed that the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready” - King Alpha and Queen Omega.



Their sacred and happy union lasted forty-seven years during which time they had six children - three daughters and three sons and many grandchildren. Listed below are details of their children:

1. Their first daughter: **Princess Tenagne Worq** was born in January 1913, being christened Fikirte Mariam. She married Ras Desta and then Ras Andargatchew, having six children and many grandchildren.
2. First son: **Prince Asfa Wossen**, heir Prince born in July 1916. He was christened Amha Selassie. He married first Princess Walata Israel and then Princess Medferiach. He had five children including Prince Yacob.
3. Second daughter: **Princess Zenabe Worq**, born in July 1918 and christened Hirute Selassie. She married Haile Selassie Gugsa but she passed way in March 1933 having had no children.
4. Third daughter: **Princess Tsehay**, born in October 1920 and christened Wolete Birhan. She married Galabiye Abebe and passed away in August 1942 without having any children.
5. Second son: **Prince Makonnen**, later Duke of Harar was born in October 1923 and christened Araya Johannes. He married Princess Sarah Gizau and passed away in May 1957, having had five sons.
6. Third son: **Prince Sahile Selassie**, born in February 1931. He was christened Aba Dina and was baptised at Mekane Selassie Church in Addis Ababa.

Empress Menen's contributions to churches, schools, hospitals are widely recognised as unparalleled by any other woman in Ethiopian history. She was not just an Empress, leading a secluded life in a palace away from the people; she was a champion to many causes such as, building and visiting churches, schools, hospitals and social service institutions; H.I.M Itegue Menen sought to serve the people instead of demanding services from them.

In 1923, Empress Menen fulfilled her promise to Empress Taitu (who fought triumphantly as a soldier in the Battle of Adwa) invested large sums of money to completely build a church east of Addis Ababa, around the Entoto Tigret region. Empress Taitu gave this project to Empress Menen because she knew spiritually; Princess Menen would be Empress of Ethiopia in the future. The church became a monastery and called Hamere Noh. This monastery is still a shelter for many Christians. There is Holy water near to the church where people immerse and drink from. People from every corner of Ethiopia gave thanks to Empress Menen for this Holy water.

1930 Her Imperial Majesty founded a new school "The Itegue Menen School for Girls in Ethiopia". This was the first girls' school in Ethiopia, later a girls' hostel was added to the school. She constructed the St Hana Church at Furi on her estate. She gave a lot of acres of land to the priests and deacons of the church including urban land to the residents.



1933 Itegue Menen went to Jerusalem for the second time. Inaugurated the St Trinity Church for the Ethiopians from her personal account donating vast sums of monies for the monastery and clergymen. Empress went on to visit and inaugurate Prince Makonnen, Duke of Harar being Prince of the province of Harar.

In 1935 fascist Italy were prepared to invade Ethiopia. Empress Menen gathered Ethiopian ladies, preparing logistic support, and first aid materials. In October of the same year, the Empress established the Ethiopian Women Association, the first Women's Welfare Organisation in Ethiopia. Her Imperial Majesty Itegue Menen orchestrated the women in Ethiopia to render support and first aid to the wounded on the battlefield (1945-1936). She prayed day and night in churches and also when exiled in Bath England for the freedom and victory of the patriotic troops. Her Imperial Majesty stayed with His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I as His advisor. She disclosed the aggression to the world Women Association and appealed to all world nation states with her famous speech in September 1935. Her Imperial Majesty said:

**"We are indeed glad for this evening which has caused our voice to be heard by all women throughout the world. Regardless of the different climate they live in, women in this world are connected and have the same desire in maintaining world peace and love. Obviously, war is one of the major problems which bring disaster in the life of mankind. In spite of the difference of colour, race, creed and religion between women in this world, they all hate war because the fruit of war is nothing but disaster. War exterminates their beloved husbands, their brothers and their children. It destroys and eliminates their families. At this hour, and such a tragic and sad period where aggressors have planned a very heavy war upon our lives, we would like to bring this to the attention of all women throughout the world, that it is their duty to voice and express solidarity against such acts."**

On 5 May 1941 Victory Day, His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie returned to the capital city in Addis Ababa victorious.

In 1942 Empress Menen reconstructed the Itegue Menen School for Girls, destroyed by the fascist Italians. In May and November of the same year, Empress Menen visited the Ethiopian Women Association, advising on how the Association would grow in strength. Also in 1942 Her Imperial Majesty inaugurated the Handicraft School, with approximately 400 students of both sexes in attendance. The school covered areas such as carpet weaving, dyeing, fine silver work, garment making, hand and machine knitting, embroidery, Amharic, English, Mathematics and moral instructions.

Her Majesty also gave her estate for orphans whose fathers and mothers were killed by the enemies and to freed slaves. She opened Siwaswe Birhan School which also catered for children who were either blind and to children who could not read or write.



In January 1945 she inaugurated the new Trinity Church and held a ceremony for patriots and a remembrance service for the late Princess Tsehay. In February 1945 Her Imperial Majesty visited the Empress Menen Handicraft School, which progressed and became fruitful. A new annexe was constructed for a further 300 girls.

September 1945, the Empress and His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I visited Gondar and Lake Tana by aeroplane. Itegue Menen received and conversed with the ladies of Gondar, donating her money to encourage them.

In July 1947 Her Imperial Majesty sent her crown to the Bethlehem Church where Christ was born

During March 1948 the St Mary Church at Sebeta was completed and inaugurated by Empress Menen. She again gave her estate and residence area for priests and deacons in the St Mary Church. In September 1948 His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I gave instructions to the people that Ethiopians should wear cultural dress so that the coming generations would follow this as an example. Her Imperial Majesty, Itegue Menen took the initiative to wear cultural dress for the first time in that New Year.

In December 1949 Empress Menen visited the new St Trinity Spiritual School as she was a model for spiritual deeds.

In 1950, fourteen sacred books from the church were printed by Empress Menen. There were 3,800 books which were sold and donated to the Siwaswe Berhan St Paul School. The total monies collected from the sale of the books amounted to 19,000 Birr. During 1950 Empress Menen renovated the Gishen Church located in the Ambassel region in the Wollo region - her native province with her own money. In addition to that she allowed the construction of a road which would enable believers to gain access to the church. Empress Menen also reconstructed the Boro Trinity Church, which was devastated by the Italian aggressors in the Wollo province. She also donated 5650,000 Birr from her private account and modernised the church building in 1951.

In April 1950 Empress Menen inaugurated alongside His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor Haile Selassie I Bridge. This bridge was built across the Abay River, the first in Ethiopia. In January 1951, Her Imperial Majesty went to Debrezeit to visit His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I Air Force School. She observed the war tactic demonstration at Hamedana and evaluated the progress of the cadet of the Air Force. During April 1955, Empress Menen visited Nazareth and its surrounding areas.

In April 1957 Itegue Menen celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Empress Menen School for Girls. Over the years the school had shown progress, giving chances to many girls to be educated, students received scholarships to foreign countries; in this the school had fulfilled one of its objectives. Empress Menen delivered a significant speech on the occasion.



**“His Imperial Majesty, Emperor of Ethiopia believes that there is nothing better for the development of a country’s progress and development except education. In this regard on His willingness He built many schools for boys. But girls are left behind without having regular education may have disadvantages. Therefore, I have opened this School for the merit of girls twenty-five years ago since I believe that girls should learn as boys. This School was discontinued by the invasion of the fascist Italian but by the grace of God it resumed its functions after the victory. Many girls have been given a chance to be promoted at the higher level of education after graduating in this School. Many of them are working in government offices and private Organisations. In my country, girls get chances to learn a good standard of education; I hope they will contribute a lot as their brothers. There were no more than fifty students when the School opened twenty-five years. But today there are approximately 1300 students. This number is increasing because girls are aware of the advantage of education and I am very happy to see this progress.**

**I thank the Almighty God for which I celebrate this 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Empress Menen School for Girls. I thank the Director of this School and lady teachers which share the problems and the progress of the School.”**

In May 1957 the Empress her beloved son – Prince Makonnen, Duke of Harar died in a car accident. The next day she went to the funeral in Addis Ababa, where she mourned for the death of her beloved son until September 1957.

Five years later, on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1962 Her Imperial Majesty Itegue Menen passed away in Addis Ababa, leaving the Emperor, two sons and daughters and many grandchildren. His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia, on the passing of Her Imperial Majesty Empress Menen of Ethiopia said:

**“All of you knew her well but she was more intimately known to me. She was devoutly religious and did not lose her faith even in time of hardship. During the memorable days of Our companionship, We never had differences that needed the interventions of others. As Sarah was to Abraham, so was she obedient to me. Our wishes were mutual until We were separated by the Almighty. Her assistance for the good of the young, the old and the needy requires no testimony for they are greater than thoughts and words.**

**We have been extremely pleased to live long enough in the perfect union that enabled Us to see Our offspring, Our grand children and Our great grand children. We are thankful to the Almighty for having vouchsafed to Us that long and uninterrupted union which is not very common in the world today. There could be no more profound prayer for me to utter.” 15<sup>th</sup> February 1962**

It is not possible to recount all of Empress Menen’s good deeds. Her passing at the age of 72 was mourned not only by every Ethiopian but by many others over the world. The fact that she passed away was a severe blow to the Ethiopian Church. No woman in the history of the country had taken so much interest in the affairs of the Church as did Itegue Menen - Queen of Queens.

Itegue Menen, Queen of Queens, Queen Omega, Negesti Negast we salute your greatness.

Many thanks to all the Sistrens and Brethrens, both near and far, who contributed in the compilation of this Report.



**H.I.M Emperor Haile Selassie 1<sup>st</sup> says: "Spiritual and cultural education leads them back into unity on the national as well as the personal level....." July 1957.**

One Perfect Rastafari Love, One Aim, One Destiny!

**SOURCES OF INFORMATION:**

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Revelation - The Last Prophecy by Sheba Amlak

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Rastafari Livy by Ras Kwende Anbessa-Ebanks

Websites: Wikipedia - The Free Encyclopedia

Empress Menen

Rasta Ites



Itegue Menen with her son in 1933





## QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is the full title of the Empress in Amharic? .....
2. What is the ancient capital city of Ethiopia? .....
3. What is the baptismal name of the Empress? .....
4. When was the Empress born? .....
5. In which province of Ethiopia was the Empress born? .....
6. Name the capital of Ethiopia? .....
7. Give the date in which the Empress was married? .....
8. What date was the Coronation of the Empress? .....
9. What did the Empress build for girls? .....
10. How many children did Empress Menen have before Her marriage to HIM? .....
11. How many children did the Emperor and Empress have between them? .....
12. What is the name of the Empress' grandfather? .....
13. Which Empress reigned before the Empress? .....
14. Give the names of other buildings that Empress Menen inaugurated in Ethiopia?  
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**FULL NAME:** ..... **AGE:** .....

**Capital Letters)**

**NOTHING TO LOSE AND EVERYTHING TO GAIN - SPECIAL PRIZES TO BE WON  
ENTER OUR QUESTIONNAIRE BY CORRECTLY ANSWERING THE ABOVE QUESTIONS!  
JAH BLESS!**