



A Victorian Gentleman & Ethiopian Nationalist

The life & times of Hakim Wärqenäh, Dr. Charles Martin

PETER P. GARRETSON

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Dr. Charles Martin*

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James Currey
is an imprint of Boydell and Brewer Ltd
PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF (GB)
www.jamescurrey.com

and of

Boydell & Brewer Inc.
668 Mt Hope Avenue, Rochester, NY 14620-2731 (US)
www.boydellandbrewer.com

© Peter P. Garretson, 2012
First published 2012
1 2 3 4 5 16 15 14 13 12

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record is available on request
from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-84701-044-5 (James Currey cloth)

This publication is printed on acid-free paper

Typeset in 10.5/12 pt Monotype Garamond
by Long House Publishing Services, Cumbria, UK
Printed and bound in the United States of America

Transliteration

The Transliteration system is as follows:

Vowels: 1st order = ä, 2nd order = u, 3rd order = i, 4th order = a,
5th order = é, 6th order = e and 7th order = o.

Consonants: ch = the explosive variant of ‘ch’, p = the explosive variant of ‘p’, q = the explosive variant of ‘k’, t = the explosive variant of ‘t’, ts for the explosive variant of ‘s’, ñ = the second Amharic ‘n’ and germination is indicated by doubling consonants.

Note on the Ethiopian Calendar

The Ethiopian calendar differs a good deal from the Gregorian calendar. The years are seven to eight years later and the days of the month from six to eleven days later. This book uses dates from the Gregorian calendar and not the Ethiopian one.

Glossary

<i>Abba</i>	‘father’, reverend, title but also a term of respect for an elder
<i>Abunä</i>	title of the head of the Ethiopian church or ‘bishop’
<i>Afä Negus</i>	‘mouth of the king’, equivalent of the chief justice
<i>Ato</i>	it is now the same as ‘Mr’, but during Menilek’s reign was the equivalent of Sir, usually reserved for important officials of the court
<i>Azaj</i>	chamberlain of the imperial court, head of a household
<i>Balambaras</i>	a military title of intermediate seniority
<i>Bäjerond</i>	treasurer
<i>Bitwäddäd</i>	‘beloved’ or most favored courtier
<i>Blatta</i>	abbreviation of <i>blattén géta</i> , title for learned
<i>Däjazmach</i>	‘commander of the door’, a senior military official
<i>Dergo</i>	pension in kind, regular food allowance from the court
<i>Echägé</i>	highest Ethiopian ecclesiastic position (until 1929), abbot of Däbrä Libanos
<i>Etégé</i>	queen or empress
<i>Fitawrari</i>	‘commander of the spearhead’, title lower than <i>Däjazmach</i> , but of greater import when appointed by an emperor
<i>Cebbi</i>	palace or imperial palace
<i>Crazmach</i>	‘commander of the left’ a military and later political title below <i>Qäñazmach</i>
<i>Hakim</i>	doctor or physician
<i>Käntiba</i>	originally mayor of Gondär, but became broader with time
<i>Léba shay</i>	‘thief catcher’, a boy is used to search out a thief
<i>Lej</i>	‘child’, title of a young nobleman in the court
<i>Mabbär</i>	a monthly gathering in honor of a saint; later similar to an NGO
<i>Näggadras</i>	‘head of merchants’, originally head of a caravan, later head of customs
<i>Negus</i>	king
<i>Qäñazmach</i>	‘commander of the right’ first a military and then political title below <i>Fitawrari</i>
<i>Ras</i>	‘head’ highest military and political title after <i>Negus</i>

Glossary

<i>Ras Betwüddäd</i>	a title combining the power of the <i>Ras</i> and the imperial favor of <i>betwüddäd</i>
<i>Tsähañe Te'ezax</i>	head of the imperial scribes, keeper of the imperial seal and title of Minister of Pen after 1907
<i>Wäyñäro</i>	now equivalent of Mrs. But pre WWII, equivalent to Lady
<i>Zämächa</i>	a raid or forceful gathering of tribute

Acknowledgements

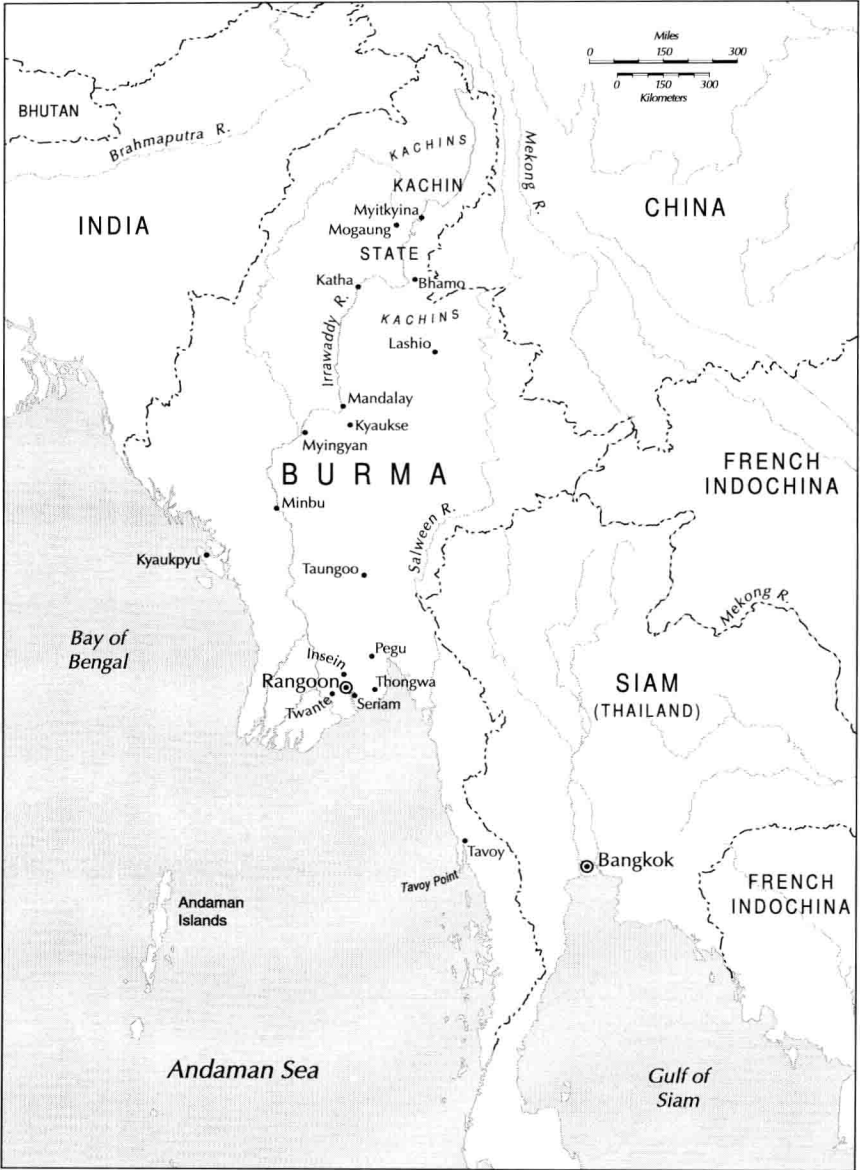
The list of those whose help and encouragement was essential to the completion of this book is long, too long to include everyone and I do so very much hope that those not on this list will not take it amiss. All have my deepest heartfelt thanks. I am especially grateful to the Wārquenāh family who have not only given me access to the diary and autobiography of *Hakim* Wārquenāh but so much more. Elizabeth Deressa first asked if I would like to see them and became like a second mother to me in Addis Ababa. Mesfin Samuel has graciously taken the lead in answering my endless questions and helping throughout the long, long process of the book's gestation. I could not have asked for a more helpful, gracious and patient friend. The Wārquenāh family as a whole have been remarkably generous with their time and encouragement and I would like to thank them all.

It is also a great pleasure to thank the many students who have given their time and energy to help me with a task that stretched beyond a decade. Kinde Endeg Mihretie, has over the last few years been an inspiration and a great help and I will also always be deeply appreciative to the late Prof. Hussein Ahmed to whom I owe a great debt of gratitude. Over more than a decade most all of my students here in the United States have helped in numberless ways to move the project forward in particular Bryan St. Laurent, John Dunn, José Alvarez, David Crist, Jeanne-Marie Warzeski, Joanna Nielson, Brian Parkinson, Jonas Kauffeldt and Vicky Penziner Hightower. Last but not least, let me thank Doug Johnson for all that he has done.

I need also to thank Florida State University for providing funds for me to travel and work in Ethiopia in 2001 and Strozier library who never complained at my all too numerous interlibrary loan requests and so much else. The Institute of Ethiopian Studies in Addis Ababa and the Department of History of Addis Ababa University were of immense help. The responsibility for any failings in this biography lies, of course, with me.



Map 1 Ethiopia 1900–1950



Map 2 Burma 1898–1919

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Source of illustrations. The photographs above are reprinted by kind permission of the Workeneh Family Foundation.

Introduction

Hakim Wārqnāh Eshāté's¹ life was one full of change, often dramatic change. A statesman, administrator, author and Ethiopia's first western trained physician, he was a major progressive influence on modern Ethiopian history. He played a significant role in influencing twentieth century medicine, education, diplomacy and economic development in Ethiopia. His appointment in 1935 as Ethiopian ambassador to London marked the climax of his career. Although born an Ethiopian, he spent most of his life outside his home country. He was a product of his Victorian upbringing and the British educational system - more international than national, living in many different countries but never wholly belonging in any of them. His search for his identity, and how he and others defined it, played a significant part in his life.

Wārqnāh was born in Gondar, Ethiopia on October 22nd, 1865, a member of the northern Ethiopian elite who were in the process of being overthrown. As an infant he and his parents were imprisoned by Emperor Tēwodros on an isolated plateau, Mäqdāla, in central Ethiopia. In 1868 when Britain invaded Ethiopia to free western hostages taken by Tēwodros, the three-year-old Wārqnāh was abandoned on the field of battle. Colonel Charles Chamberlain of the 23rd Indian Pioneer Regiment of Rawalpindi, India picked him up and took him to India where he was brought up and educated. Colonel Chamberlain died three years later leaving the young boy in the care of another military figure, Colonel Charles Martin, who paid for his education at various missionary schools in India. As a result, the young Ethiopian was given the Anglo-Saxon name of Charles Martin and was heavily influenced by codes of Victorian morality. He would later refer to himself as a 'prize' picked up on the battlefield of Mäqdāla. During 1871, the boy was baptized and handed over to Mrs Robert Clark, wife of the English bishop of the Punjab. Wārqnāh then attended mission schools, a boarding school and in 1877 he began his medical studies at Lahore Medical College. He graduated third in the exam in 1882 with a Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery. His schooling would influence the rest

¹ Most of this biography is based largely on Wārqnāh's diary which is in the family's possession, and thus references to it are only made in direct quotes. *Hakim* is the title given to a doctor in Ethiopia, see glossary. The family's spelling of his name as Eshātē will be used in this book.

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of his life, laying the foundation for his future attempts to be a 'gentleman'. At the same time he was an outsider, an 'oriental', who never really belonged to any one culture, be it Ethiopian, British, imperial, Indian or Burman. Bright, forceful and motivated, he excelled in his studies and when he successfully completed his initial medical degree, he became the first western educated Ethiopian medical doctor.

His professional education did not end on the Indian sub-continent, however, he pursued his aims further in higher education elsewhere in the British Empire - in Scotland. His education was clearly not just vocational, instilling a preference for advancement based on merit, but it was also based firmly on the foundation of a lifelong commitment to dialogue, tolerance and mediation. Throughout his long life, he moved among Christians, Muslims, Hindus and people of most of the world's creeds and many of its nations. His attitudes and actions were committed to tolerance and living by the golden rule ('do as you would be done by'), a motto he inscribed on the flyleaf of many of his diary volumes. He dedicated his life to instilling these principles into the hearts and lives of his superiors, colleagues, protégés, students, friends and children. From late 1889 to 1890, Wärgenäh went to Great Britain for graduate work at Edinburgh and Glasgow as he rightly judged his prospects for preferment in India to be limited. In 1891, he was appointed a Civil Surgeon in Burma and served in that capacity in several Burmese provinces. Up to this point he had largely been a product of the British Empire in his training and outlook, but major changes were in store for him.

At the end of the nineteenth century, shortly after the Battle of Adwa of 1896, Wärgenäh decided to return to his native Ethiopia to care for the Ethiopian wounded. On the fifth day of the new century, he was officially presented to Emperor Menilek. Soon the emperor had given him a house to live in and a salary. Furthermore, his relatives came to his tent and dramatically recognized the boy, long lost at Mäqdäla. He learned his real name, Wärgenäh Eshäté and began to study Amharic and became familiar with the elite of Ethiopia. His pay became increasingly irregular, however, and he decided to return to Burma, which promised more stable financial arrangements. On his way he fortuitously met the head of a joint Anglo-Ethiopian mission which was coordinating Ethiopian and British actions against Muhammad Abdille Hassan of the Somalis, known as the 'Mad Mullah' by the British. He was of course neither mad nor a mullah. His participation in the anti-Somali campaigns was approved by the governor of the eastern province of Ethiopia, *Ras* Mäkonnen Wälda Mika'el (cousin of the Emperor Menilek and father of Emperor Haylä Sellasé). He served on two campaigns in Somaliland, often acting as a mediator between the Ethiopians and the British. *Ras* Mäkonnen awarded him with a grant of land for his services. It was during this period in 1899 that he started keeping a diary, a task he continued faithfully for the next fifty years and which is the basic source for this biography, which along with his unpublished autobiography allows for a detailed and nuanced account not only of his own life, but those of his family and aspects of the imperial court.

Next Wārqenāh returned to Burma as a civil surgeon and served in many of its towns through 1907. By this time he had passed several official exams including ones in the Chinese and Kachin languages, adding to the half dozen languages he already knew. From November, 1907 to October, 1908 he undertook post-graduate work in London at Kings College London and the Skin College at Fitzroy Square. While there he became romantically involved with a British woman he had met in Burma and they had a son Tēwodros (Theodore).

His return to Ethiopia in 1908 aged 43, accelerated a process of redefining his identity which had begun in his 30s. Was he primarily a subject of the British Empire, or was he an Ethiopian? A progressive crusader for reform, especially in the eradication of slavery, he was faced with the dilemma of either adopting or rejecting his Ethiopian identity. This conflict took him years to resolve. He had only just begun to identify himself as an Ethiopian and had only just stopped referring to Ethiopia and Ethiopians as 'them'. He did not distance himself properly from his British imperial identity, however, until Britain stabbed Ethiopia in the back at the time of the Italian invasion in the 1935. Only then did his defense of things British crumble and his Ethiopian nationalism emerge fully formed.

His 1908–1913 stay in Ethiopia was a particularly significant period in his life. At first he was simply the resident doctor of the British legation in Addis Ababa. However, when Emperor Menilek's treatment for tertiary syphilis reached a crisis, Wārqenāh was appointed his official doctor and immediately became an influential figure in the court. He soon married Qātsälā Wārq Tullu, which gave him an entrée into the Ethiopian elite since she was not only a member of one of Ethiopia's foremost Oromo families, but was closely related to the reigning Ethiopian royal family. Two sons were born to the couple (Benyam and Yuséf) and the foundations laid for one of modern Ethiopia's most influential families. His wife's influence at court not only rivaled his but after 1916 was probably greater. After Menilek's incapacitation and the rise of *Ləj* Iyasu as the major power at the center, the new ruler agreed to be godfather to the couple's eldest boy. Life was becoming increasingly unstable, however, and Wārqenāh's salary often remained unpaid, so he and his wife Qātsälā made the decision for him to return to Burma and serve there until he was eligible for his Indian civil service pension.

He returned to Burma for six years, watched his family grow until he had fifteen children, and built upon his already wide contacts within Indian and British administration and society. By this point in his career he was a fairly senior member of the Burmese administration and would often temporarily take over the duties of the district commissioner and, in effect, serve as the governor of a sub-province. Thus he had broad and varied experience as an administrator at the local level in Burma, which would prove most valuable when he was appointed a governor of an Ethiopian province in 1930. Once World War I was over, the India Office agreed to his retirement and he returned to Ethiopia.

In 1919 Ethiopia was at the height of the great influenza epidemic and Wārqenāh began another especially significant period of his life. Both of his wife's parents died during the epidemic, she became the executor and head of

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her family and then he too became infected and very nearly died. She was closely related to the new Empress, Zāwditu, and to the future Emperor Haylā Sellasé's wife, Mānān and thus played a very influential role in the court. From 1919 to 1935 Wārquenāh ran farms, flour mills, developed a mineral spring in Addis Ababa (Fel Weha), became involved in the running of a major Ethiopian printing press, helped run a gold and platinum concession, but practiced less medicine. He served as the first director of the regent's principal school, the Tāfāri Mäkonnen School, which quickly became the best secondary school in Ethiopia. He also helped found a school for girls, a school for former slaves and he founded 'The Love and Service Organization', or *Fegrenna Agälgelot Mabbär*, an organization which admitted dozens of Ethiopia's brightest intellectuals and courtiers, who met weekly to discuss the major issues of the day, raise money for worthy causes and network to advance their pet schemes and careers. It began as an anti-slavery organization and helped to identify and train many progressives who started as his protégés. On top of that, he served as a diplomat, representing Ethiopia on a trip to the United States to obtain support for the construction of the projected dam on Lake Tana and also to recruit teachers for Ethiopia from the African-American community. He then went to India to recruit teachers, nurses, engineers and middle level managers, all of whom could be obtained at lesser salaries than European expatriates. A signal achievement was his authorship of Ethiopia's first *World Geography* text book in Amharic which transformed Ethiopia's perception of the world. He also served as president of the special mixed court in Ethiopia for foreigners. Of similar, if not greater importance, he was Ethiopia's major campaigner against slavery and the slave trade. This was quite a portfolio of major projects and Wārquenāh was at the forefront of almost every progressive issue in Ethiopia from 1920 to 1935. His family too, became one of the most progressive in his country. He sent most of his children overseas to obtain a solid education unavailable in Ethiopia and none of his children had an arranged marriage but all were encouraged to marry for love. His family in many ways was a model for progressives in Ethiopia.

From 1930 to 1935 he administered one of Ethiopia's first model provinces, Chärchär. There he was able to implement locally many of the aims of progressive Ethiopians – building roads, fighting slavery and the slave trade, opening dispensaries and founding schools. Most importantly, however, he instituted in a systematic form, modern administration in provincial Ethiopia, including: young and educated salaried administrators, the eradication of bribery and made more progress toward the end of slavery and the slave trade than any other province in Ethiopia. He also introduced new plants and encouraged modern farming practices. He obtained land in the area and helped introduce trucks to transport produce, especially coffee, to the nearby railway. He was a popular governor but encountered difficulties working with the governor of the neighboring province of Harar. He had expected to report directly to Addis Ababa and not through Harar and had to fight to maintain his autonomy. The Danakil province was added to his brief and he proved to be popular among Muslim as well as Christian Ethiopians, establishing a model for Christian/

Muslim relations and for the administration of peripheral pastoral peoples. He clearly used his administrative experience from Burma effectively while he was a governor in Ethiopia.

Between 1934 and 1935 he went through a very painful divorce from his wife and mother of 13 of his children and then was appointed Ethiopian ambassador to the Court of St James, London. At the age of 70 he had reached the pinnacle of his career and for five years was an international figure, acting as one of Ethiopia's major spokesmen on the world stage. He worked closely with the Emperor Haylā Sellasé and other Ethiopian diplomats abroad and went with the emperor to the League of Nations when the emperor gave his famous speech. He, with English as his native tongue, his British upbringing in India, his imperial administrative experience, and his long stays in Britain, was able to move more adroitly than almost any other Ethiopian in British circles and was recognized as the most talented of their fundraisers abroad for monies to be used for Ethiopia and against Mussolini. He worked closely with Sylvia Pankhurst, of suffragette fame, to present the Ethiopian side before, during and after the Italo-Ethiopian war, mobilizing British public opinion. He also met and worked with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Lugard, Lloyd George, Lady Gladstone, Lady Napier and many others of the British elite. Wārqnāh played a key role in mobilizing British opinion for Ethiopia. But after the Italian military conquest of Ethiopia, and the increasing threat of Hitler, the Ethiopian cause was doomed and donations to it fell to a trickle. The emperor, by now in exile in Bath, fell on hard financial times, and difficulties about money caused a growing rift between the two men. Nonetheless, Wārqnāh was clearly Ethiopia's most effective diplomatic representative before World War II.

In 1940, Wārqnāh retired to India aged 75 largely because it was cheaper and safer for him to live there with his younger children. His pension went further in India than it did in England. There he continued various activities, but at a less frenetic level, to keep the Ethiopian cause before the media and managed to meet with Nehru when he was imprisoned nearby. However, as soon as Ethiopia was liberated in 1941 he focused his energy on returning home, finally reaching there in 1942 while World War II was at its height.

Wārqnāh's last decade was passed in Addis Ababa. Most of his children had already returned from exile and the emperor restored him to favor. He lived out his last years as an elder statesman and was often consulted by the emperor and people of all walks of life. His children were close to the imperial family and his sons-in-law held high government positions. The vast bulk of his time was spent with his family, his friends and on private affairs. His family remained famous and influential for generations after his death. He died on October 8th, 1952, just shy of his 87th birthday.