

# The 20th Century Revisited: Relations between former Czechoslovakia and Ethiopia

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## **The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revisited:** **Relations between the former Czechoslovakia and Ethiopia**

**An exhibition funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, and prepared, and supported by Jimma University, Addis Ababa University, the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, and the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Addis Ababa**



Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
of the Czech Republic

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Dear guests and visitors,

We are pleased to welcome you to our exhibition dedicated to exploring the relations between the former Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic) and Ethiopia, two countries that share a long history of friendly and fruitful relations, dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. From Central Europe to the Horn of Africa and back, this is the story of our mutual relationship, including reference to our diplomatic, cultural, and economic engagement. However, this exhibition does not set out to be exhaustive and all-encompassing as it is impossible to encapsulate all the details of mutual Czech-Ethiopian relations within the limited space provided by our panels.

The panels, which you will have the opportunity to view and read, are organized both chronologically and thematically. Firstly, primary focus is given to the historical development of mutual relations, with specific themes that deserve special attention having their own space on separate panels. We have focused on the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as this is logically the period of greatest intensity when considering the historical relationship between the two countries. We also take the opportunity, as one of many attempts, to explore the depth of this interesting, though still rather neglected, topic. The results might well be of use for professional historians and academics, as well as for the general public.

## **THE CZECH REPUBLIC (THE FORMER CZECHOSLOVAKIA)**

The Czech Republic is a country in Central Europe, bordered by Germany, Austria, Poland and Slovakia. The area of the Czech Republic is 78,866 square meters and the population is around 10.5 million. It was established in 1993 after the peaceful partition of the former Czechoslovakia, which had existed since 1918 as one of the hereditary states of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The short existence of the independent Czechoslovakia was interrupted by the Munich Agreement and the ensuing occupation by Nazi Germany. After the end of World War II, the strong position of the Soviets in Central Europe led to a communist putsch in 1948. The communists, being heavily influenced by Moscow, remained in power until 1989.

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## ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia is a country located in the Horn of Africa and bordered by Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Kenya. The official name of the country is the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The name derives from the constitution that was adopted in 1994.

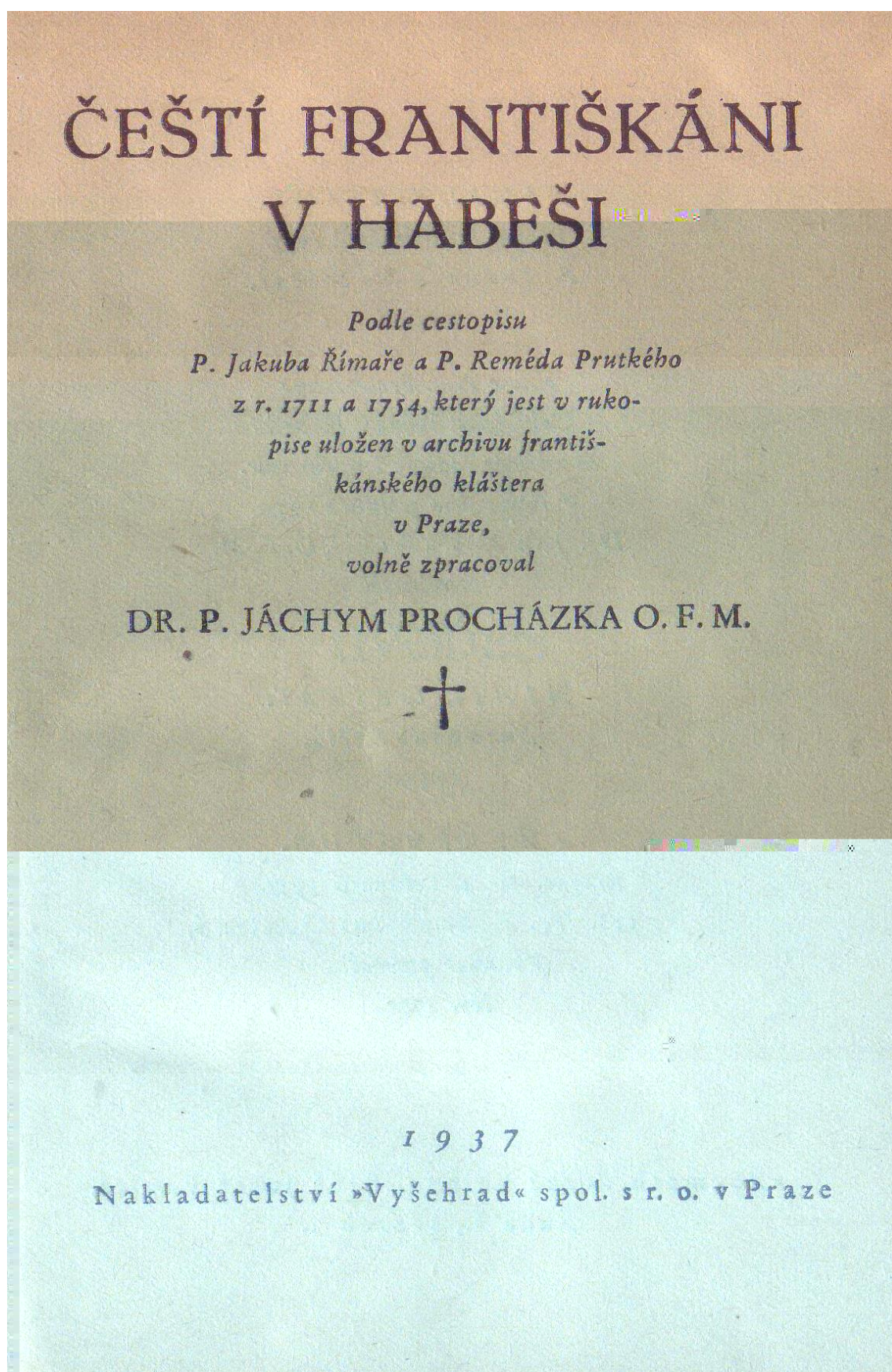
With a population of 94 million, Ethiopia is the second most populated country on the African continent, occupying a total area of 1.1 million square kilometers. Its capital, Addis Ababa, is one of the most highly developed capitals in Africa, benefiting mainly from Chinese investment. Ethiopia is the only African country that was able to defeat the European colonial powers and maintain its territorial independence, with the exception of the short period of Italian occupation between 1936-1941. It was the first independent African member of the League of Nations. Until 1974, Ethiopia was the last ‘traditional’ African Empire with a sovereign, Haile Selassie, who could trace his origins back to the Solomonic dynasty. After the coup d’état of 1974, power was seized by a military junta, the Derg, which was backed by the Soviet Union until the end of its existence in 1991.

## X erc Tgo g0k R0 m

Due to the presence in Ethiopia of the Czech Franciscan missionary, Václav Remedius Prutký (1751-1753), who was followed by a number of other travelers at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Czech lands have had a long history of contact with Ethiopia. Václav Remedius Prutký was a Czech Franciscan who spent two years in the Ethiopian Highlands and left behind his writings for us to study. Unfortunately, the personal accounts of his travels across Ethiopia remained largely unknown to the broader public due to the success of James Bruce’s *Travels to Discover the Sources of the Nile*. This was published a couple of decades later and becoming a “bestseller” in its genre, inspiring other European travelers to explore the continent during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Prutký’s travel records are of great value as they provide us with many “ethnographic” as well as geographical accounts of Ethiopia in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. They were retold in Czech in the 1930s and, in 1991, were finally translated into English by Arrowsmith-Brown.

In May 1751, Václav Remedius Prutký embarked on a journey from Cairo to Ethiopia, together with his fellow missionaries, Martin Lang and Paul of Agnona, who had already had some experience of Ethiopia. In November 1751, they arrived at Massawa on the Red Sea, later continuing to Gondar, where they were received by the Emperor. The Ethiopian monarch was very curious and engaged in religious debates with his guests. Remedius Prutký also discussed his mission with the Empress Mentewab. Remedius Prutký gathered a great deal of information about Ethiopia’s natural history, its culture, customs, and politics, as well as the Amharic language.





Pic. 1: Cover of the book dedicated to Czech Franciscan missionaries in Ethiopia

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## **ETHIOPIA IN THE 18<sup>th</sup> CENTURY**

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Ethiopia was still an isolated country, the result of an ideological clash between Portuguese Jesuits and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The expulsion of the Jesuits was followed by international isolation and the reinforcement of Orthodox Christianity. In the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Ethiopia became fragmented as several parts of the Empire were ruled almost independently of the central Imperial court. This period, from 1769 to 1855, is known as the *zemane mesafint*.

## **Ethiopia in early Czech books, exploration reports, and travelers' accounts**

Among those who continued the work started by Prutký was Dr. Antonín Stecker, who from his early years was interested in natural sciences and geography and thus it is not surprising that he continued to explore these subjects throughout his life. His travels to the Ethiopian Highlands formed part of Gerhard Rohlfs' expedition to the Horn of Africa in 1878. One of the main outcomes resulting from this expedition, and a testament to Stecker's heritage, was the first detailed map of Lake Tana and its environs, which served as the basis for future geographical surveys.

In 1923, another Czech traveler, Vilém Němec, launched his "campaign" to establish intensive business contacts in Ethiopia, which he claimed to be a country offering excellent business opportunities. At the beginning of 1924, more than thirty Czechoslovak citizens settled in Ethiopia but they were soon to discover how difficult life was there. From the very beginning it was Vilém Němec who was the most significant proponent and instigator of Czech settlements in Ethiopia and through his numerous books Czechoslovaks gained extensive information about Ethiopia. Vilém Němec wrote an adventure book, "Under the Burning Sun", subtitled "A Traveler's Account of an Expedition conducted in 1899-1900 through the Eastern Sudan, Abyssinia and the Italian Colony of Eritrea", which is the only account of Czech travelers from the time of Emperor Menelik's reign. Shortly after Czechoslovakia's independence in 1918, Vilém Němec offered his services to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, claiming he was willing to serve as a consul in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Hejaz.

## **CPV P P UVGEMGT**

The Czech traveler Antonín Stecker (1855-1888) spent several years in Ethiopia (1880-1883), where he joined Gerhard Rohlfs' expedition. Stecker was a witness of the wars between Gojjam and Shawa and became a hostage of Menelik, King of Shawa. Later, he explored several lakes and one of the sources of the Awash River. His main contribution was the detailed exploration and description of Lake Tana in northern Ethiopia.



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Pic. 2: dr. Antonín Stecker

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## Czech Entrepreneurs in Ethiopia

Life in Ethiopia, especially outside Addis Ababa, was not easy for the Czechs since their struggle was not only with the lack of infrastructure, but also with natural misfortunes, such as malaria. Although Mr. Krob, head of the *Frères Krob* company in Dire Dawa, died of malaria soon after settling in the town, his sons were able to develop the company into a successful business and they were also involved in the import of Czechoslovak military material into Ethiopia, including ammunition from the Sellier and Bellot company in 1928. This was the beginning of a long tradition of Czechoslovak exports of this type of ammunition to Ethiopia.

The Czech journalist and traveler Viktor Mussik, who spent some time in Ethiopia at the beginning of the 1930s and was a witness to the coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie, wrote about a community of Czech, Polish, Hungarian and German citizens gathered together in Addis Ababa. On this occasion, he mentions a certain Mr. Konvalinka, who was engaged in supplying the Emperor's stable with horses and oats. Viktor Mussik also interviewed Emperor Haile Selassie at his Imperial Palace.

Some of the Czechs working in Ethiopia served there as butchers, such as Mr. Karel Peterka, who opened a butchery in Addis Ababa. Peterka's accounts relating to butchery reveal that the market for meat was underdeveloped and the quality of the meat was low; therefore, it was necessary to rely on his own farming activities. However, in spite of his butchery activities, it was mainly the export of bovine by-products to Czechoslovakia and Germany that helped Peterka maintain his business in Ethiopia.

One of those who were significantly interested in Ethiopia was a businessman named Ervín Mandelík, who sought to gain concessions for his planned cotton and banana farms in Ethiopia. As one of the most industrialized and economically developed countries of the interwar period, Czechoslovakia wished to establish new trade routes to Ethiopia as well as to open up the way for engineers, merchants, craftsmen and advisors. A letter of extreme importance was written by Ervín Mandelík to the Ethiopian Emperor, in which the Czechoslovak businessman provided Haile Selassie with advice and his accounts on the management of the agricultural sector. In this letter, Mandelík describes Ethiopia as a country rich in natural resources, identifying that the necessary development of the country depended

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on, and needed to start with, the agricultural sector. For Mandelík, the only way to develop Ethiopia's economy was through acquiring the help of European advisors and instructors, who would teach and instruct their Ethiopian counterparts so that they might eventually replace them and work alone. The "government has to help itself by employing qualified European instructors and later its own people, who will gain qualifications and experience in Europe. They will then introduce the perfect economy in different parts of Your country, by which the broader classes of Your nation may gain knowledge in the conduct of a rational economy."

Mandelík's vision for Ethiopia was based on a commitment to openness in relation to foreign investors but, coming as he did from Czechoslovakia, he was keen to reassure the Emperor that Czechoslovakia "with its geographical position and the mentality of its inhabitants cannot ever have plans to conquer the country." Czechs were looking for suitable markets for their industrial goods and opportunities for lower classes in a country where they could work and establish new homes. Therefore, an agreement between the two countries was needed in order to implement Mandelík's proposed plans. It was not until 1934 that the Czech-Ethiopian agreement was signed, and then only by the Ethiopian side, due to the encroaching war that had started in Ethiopia in October 1935. As Italian aggression increased, words of solidarity emanated from around the world, including from the former Czechoslovakia and from Czechs living in Ethiopia.

### **ETHIOPIA AND THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS**

In 1923, Ethiopia became a member of the League of Nations, a major success for an African independent country in the face of opposition, primarily from Great Britain. In 1924, Ras Tafari Mekonnen visited Europe on several state visits in order to extend the network of international partners. At the beginning of the 1930s, Ethiopia's membership in the League of Nations began to be questioned by Italy under Mussolini's regime, accusing Ethiopia of barbarism, slavery, and provocations against Italy.



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Pic. 3: A shop owned by L. Kalvoda

### **The supply of weapons to Ethiopia**

Czechoslovakia was, in the period between the World Wars, one of the most industrialized and most developed countries in Europe. Because it was a non-colonial country, Czechs had a very good start when compared to colonial European nations. Moreover, Czech armaments were valued for their reliability and high quality. However, we should not exaggerate the level of Czechoslovak-Ethiopian economic interaction, as in the first years after the establishment of an independent Czechoslovakia it was relatively small. This trend was to change for the better after 1923. First of all, Ethiopia became a member state of the League of Nations, and in 1924 the Emperor Haile Selassie toured Europe in order to establish closer contact with European powers and partners. As a result, Czechoslovakia's industrial production increased remarkably.

The Czechoslovak armaments company, Zbrojovka Brno, became the primary exporter of weapons to Ethiopia. It was 1933 when the first positive developments occurred in the weapons trade involving the two countries, as this was when Belatchew Yadeq visited the Zbrojovka Brno factory and observed the construction of automatic rifles (type ZH 32), as well as light machine guns (types ZB 26 and 30). The acquisition of advanced weaponry was

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only one part of Haile Selassie's efforts to modernize the army. He became increasingly reliant on European advisors and experts, most of whom came from Belgium, Sweden, Switzerland, and other countries, including Czechoslovakia, as shown by the example of Adolf Parlesák.

According to archival documents from Zbrojovka Brno, the final contract with the Ethiopian government before the Italian invasion was made in relation to the supply of weapons on 26<sup>th</sup> September, 1934, dispatched from Brno on 28<sup>th</sup> January, 1935. It consisted of: 22 light ZB machine guns, with a heavy barrel, caliber 22mm.; 160 light machine guns, caliber 22 mm.; 2 million cartridges, Mauser 7.92 "S"; 100 automatic ZH 32 rifles, caliber 7.92 mm.; and various sets of additional technical materials. A further consignment sent from Brno to Addis Ababa was blocked by the Italian government and later, during the summer of 1935, the Czechoslovak government stopped the weapons trade with Ethiopia due to the crisis between Italy and Ethiopia, which the League of Nations was not able to resolve.

### **THE ITALIAN-ETHIOPIAN WAR AND OCCUPATION (1935-1941)**

As a member of the League of Nations, the Italians could not easily attack Ethiopia. Therefore, a pretext was needed in order to legitimize the invasion. The so-called Walwal incident acted as the starting point for increased Italian aggression, which the League of Nations was unable to prevent. On October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1935 Italian troops entered Ethiopia and soon afterwards, Adowa, the site of the famous Italian defeat and Ethiopian victory of 1896, became the first major target of their invasion. Originally, the Italians planned a quick invasion but it quickly turned into a protracted war in which they had to resort to the use of banned poison gas in order to break Ethiopian resistance. In May 1936, Africa Orientale Italiana (Italian East Africa) was proclaimed, composed of Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Italian Somalia.

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Pic. 4: A machine gun made by Zbrojovka Brno, placed at the Ethnographic Museum at Addis Ababa University



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### Czechoslovakia -Ethiopian War

One of the most significant Czech travelers and advisors in Ethiopia must surely be Adolf Parlesák (1908-1981), who had at an early age already visited a long list of countries and had stayed at the Ethiopian court of Haile Selassie. Later, during the Italian-Ethiopian war, he actively participated in the resistance movement against the Italian invasion. Adolf Parlesák is thus rightly considered to be one of the most important Czech travelers from the interwar period. Parlesák began his career as an adventurer, initially traveling to many countries close to Czechoslovakia (including Austria, Germany, Romania, Italy and San Marino). Later, he traveled further afield, visiting Turkey, Syria, Palestine and Egypt. In 1928, he undertook his first major journey with his friend, Alois Polák, when they traveled across the Middle East, down the river Nile to the south and Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia. Then they continued on a small Arab sailing boat to the port of Hodejda, followed by a journey by camel train, which traversed Yemen as far as San'a, finishing their trip in Aden before departing for Europe. In the 1930s, during his second stay in Ethiopia, Parlesák spent five months in Ethiopia at the court of Haile Selassie, even though he had begun as an adventurer, traveling through the country. His famous memoirs – Abyssinian Odyssey (*Habešská odysea*) – remains one of the most important accounts of the war.

His ability to speak several languages helped Parlesák to gain the respect of Ras Kassa, the superior commander of the Ethiopian army on the northern front. Adolf Parlesák offered his services as a voluntary military advisor, training the Ethiopian army in preparation for the Italian attack. As only an advisor he did not have a major impact but he was certainly able to contribute to the development of a particular strategy that was later approved by the Ethiopian military commander. Even during his first visit to Ethiopia in 1929-1930, when Parlesák had visited the Italian colony of Eritrea, he had witnessed the mounting Italian fortifications along the Ethiopian border.

Despite being well informed about the massive superiority of the Italian troops over the Ethiopian army, Adolf Parlesák chose to fulfill his duties with complete professionalism and style. Until the very last moments of the Italian-Ethiopian war he stood alongside his Ethiopian comrades, giving them his backing, advice, and moral support. His service in the Ethiopian army brought him recognition from Haile Selassie I. Parlesák was then a witness to

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Haile Selassie's departure into exile, shortly before the fall of Addis Ababa. He was an eyewitness of the Emperor's farewell in Djibouti, where he boarded a British military ship. The whole ceremony was rather modest and appropriate, given the outcome of the war. The Emperor was dressed in an ordinary Ethiopian raincoat and was accompanied by his wife, the French governor, and other colonial officers.

Parlesák's military mission during the Italian-Ethiopian war lasted for only a couple of months as he was forced to leave Addis Ababa after its fall to the Italians. In his work "An Abyssinian Odyssey" he gives some valuable and worthwhile accounts of the Ethiopian army that faced the Italian troops. His detailed account remains one of the most significant sources on this period of Ethiopian history and was translated into Amharic.

Parlesák, as was the case with Viktor Mussik, had many opportunities to meet Haile Selassie I, although in very different circumstances. He was a frequent visitor of the Emperor in Addis Ababa and knew the Imperial Palace very well; however, in the first months of the war the Emperor was forced to move to a secret location, a cave hewn into the rocks, where no signs of Imperial luxury were in evidence. The Emperor was dressed in the uniform of an Ethiopian marshal and Parlesák was surprised by "the Emperor's noble calm, despite the catastrophic news that had arrived during the previous weeks, which would have devastated men in much better physical condition".

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Pic. 5: A cover of the book “Abyssinian Odyssey” translated into Amharic and published in Addis Ababa in 2011

### **Hanzelka and Zikmund in Ethiopia**

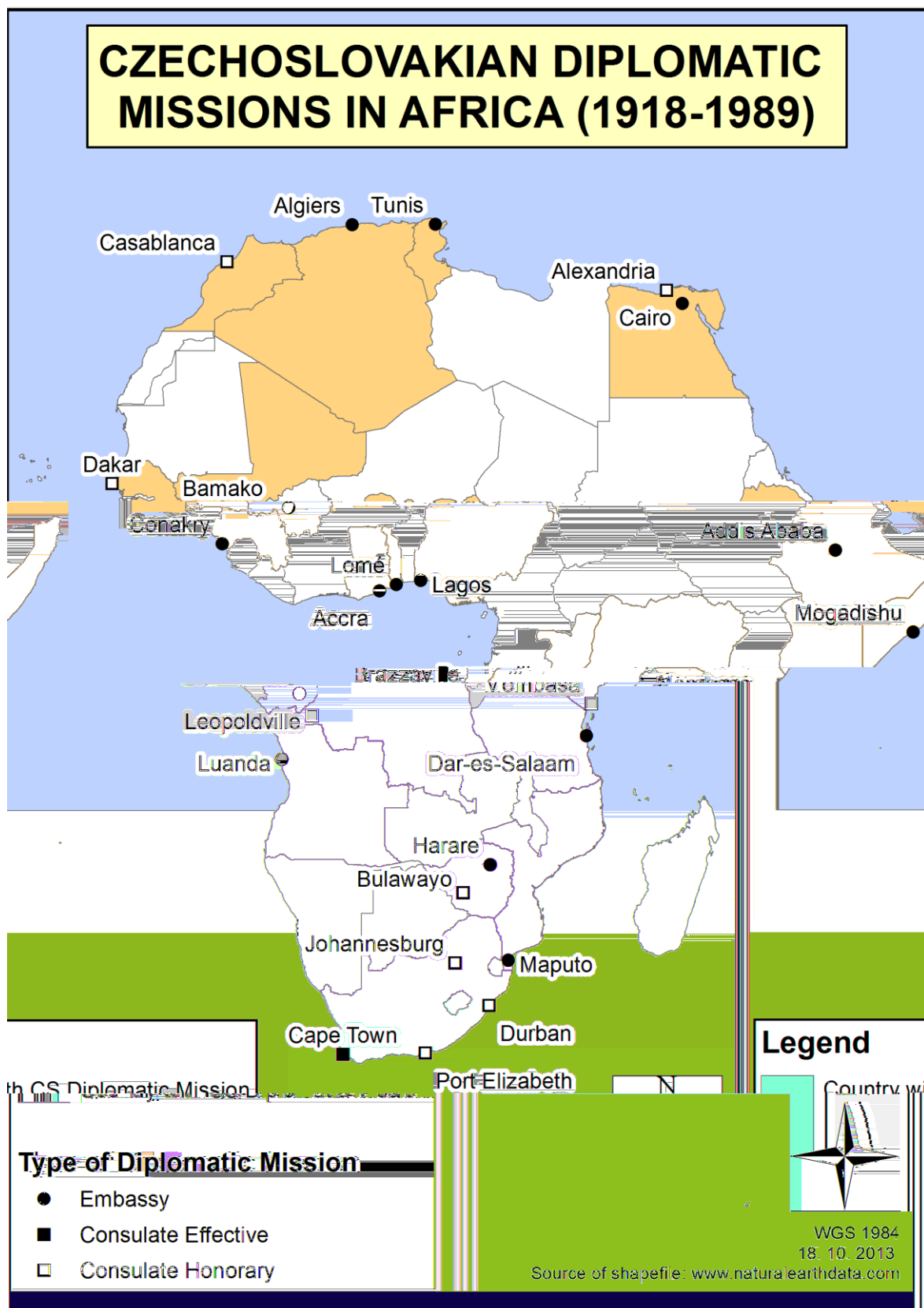
In 1947 and 1948, the famous Czech travelers Jiří Hanzelka and Miroslav Zikmund traveled across Africa in order to promote Czech industry, namely the Tatra Company. Hanzelka and Zikmund visited Ethiopia during the Era of Empire under the rule of Haile Selassie I. Addis Ababa was seen by them as a flourishing capital that was ready for the introduction of automobiles. Their accounts on, for instance, the Ogaden and Jigjiga reflected the impact that the Italian occupation had had of Ethiopia, especially everyday life and issues relating to disputed borders.

### **The Czechoslovak Embassy in Addis Ababa, 1955**

In 1950 both governments agreed to the establishment of a Czechoslovak diplomatic mission in Addis Ababa. The first Czech envoy to Ethiopia was Jaroslav Švejnoha who served since 1943 in Cairo and represented Czech interests in Addis Ababa. Having an embassy was a necessary step towards the establishment of fruitful and more intensive economic, diplomatic, and cultural relations between the two countries. The foundation of the embassy in Addis Ababa in 1955 followed the growing climate of political-economic cooperation that had been marked by a 68% growth in exports during the previous year. At the beginning of the 1950s this trend was slowed down by the Korean war, in which Ethiopia participated as part of the United Nations forces, while Czechoslovakia was forced to follow the Soviet line by offering political support to North Korea.

The official date of its foundation was 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1955, when the first Czech Ambassador, Arnošt Karpíšek, was accredited in Ethiopia. Both countries were interested in deepening the mutually beneficial relationship and began to prepare cooperation agreements that were signed at a later stage, during Haile Selassie's visit to Prague in 1959.

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Pic. 6: Czechoslovak Diplomatic Missions in Africa

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### **ETHIOPIA AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA IN THE 1950s**

After the end of the Second World War, Czechoslovakia transformed its political and economic orientation. The main emphasis was placed on the relationship with the Soviet Union and its communist allies. Little by little, the political, as well as economic, rapprochement was focused on the Third World. The contacts with Ethiopia were strengthened as a consequence of a communist coup d'état in February 1948, the result of the Soviet political strategy, which stemmed from a determination to provide general support to developing countries, as well as from deeply held ideological assumptions relating to such concepts as anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism. This tendency led to a willingness to promote the relationship with Haile Selassie, even though the imperial regime was pro-western and under the strong influence of the USA. Czechoslovakia continued its traditional friendship with Ethiopia in the 1950s, in spite of the fact that mutual relations had been temporarily frozen during the Korean War, where the Ethiopian units had served alongside other UN forces.

Ethiopia had a history of equipping its forces with Czechoslovak army supplies, the most common Czechoslovak export item. Cooperation in this specific industrial sphere was to continue after 1945. In 1948 the communist government signed a contract for the construction of an ammunition plant in Addis-Ababa. The project had started almost immediately, but progress then slowed, owing to the political fall-out following the outbreak of the Korean War, with both parties having completely different attitudes towards this conflict. However, the construction and the import of the associated technical supplies started again after 1953. About 15 Czechoslovak technical advisers were responsible for the construction, as well as in the training of local laborers.

The relationship during the 1950s was mainly determined by the establishment of the Czechoslovak embassy in 1955, which made a significant contribution to the strengthening of mutual ties. This trend reached its zenith in 1959, when the Emperor visited Prague in order to negotiate the general conditions for a series of treaties deepening the level of political, economic and cultural cooperation. Worthy of note is that this was the crucial moment that enabled dozens of Ethiopian students to come to Czechoslovakia and attend local universities.



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### E N PGN X V UNCXL UGHT U M 3: 7-1955)

One of many military officers of Czech origin serving in Ethiopia was Colonel Vítězslav Josef Rosík. During World War II, he enlisted with the Royal Air Force, as did many other Czechoslovak pilots. After the Communist coup in February 1948, Colonel Rosík was expelled from the Czechoslovak army but in 1949 his long-time friend, Colonel Toby, recommended Colonel Rosík to His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I. Both Colonels then assisted in the development of the Ethiopian air force. Colonel Rosík died in Addis Ababa on May 9<sup>th</sup> 1955, where he was buried.



Pic. 7: A tomb of Colonel Rosík in Addis Ababa

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### **Haile Selassie I in Prague**

The visit of Emperor Haile Selassie to Czechoslovakia was planned for a long time. The Emperor himself had good memories of Czechoslovak support against the Italian aggression as well as of Adolf Parlesák whom he considered a true friend. From 13<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> July 1959, the Emperor spent a remarkable and fruitful days in Prague, on his way from the Soviet Union. His grandiose stay resulted in significant success as several agreements were signed. Ethiopian representatives were particularly interested in three key investments – flax industry, cotton industry, and rubber footwear industry. Both sides were open to scientific cooperation, especially geological research, as well as scholarships for Ethiopian students. Agreement on scientific cooperation in sections such as mining, health care, agriculture, industry, and broadly speaking science and technology which started to be implemented since November 1959. Accordingly Czechoslovakia began to send experts, technical personnel, equipment and technology; and, received first students from Ethiopia. The Emperor's visit to Prague in 1959 ushered in decades of fruitful cooperation between both countries and was largely covered by both Czechoslovak and Ethiopian newspapers.

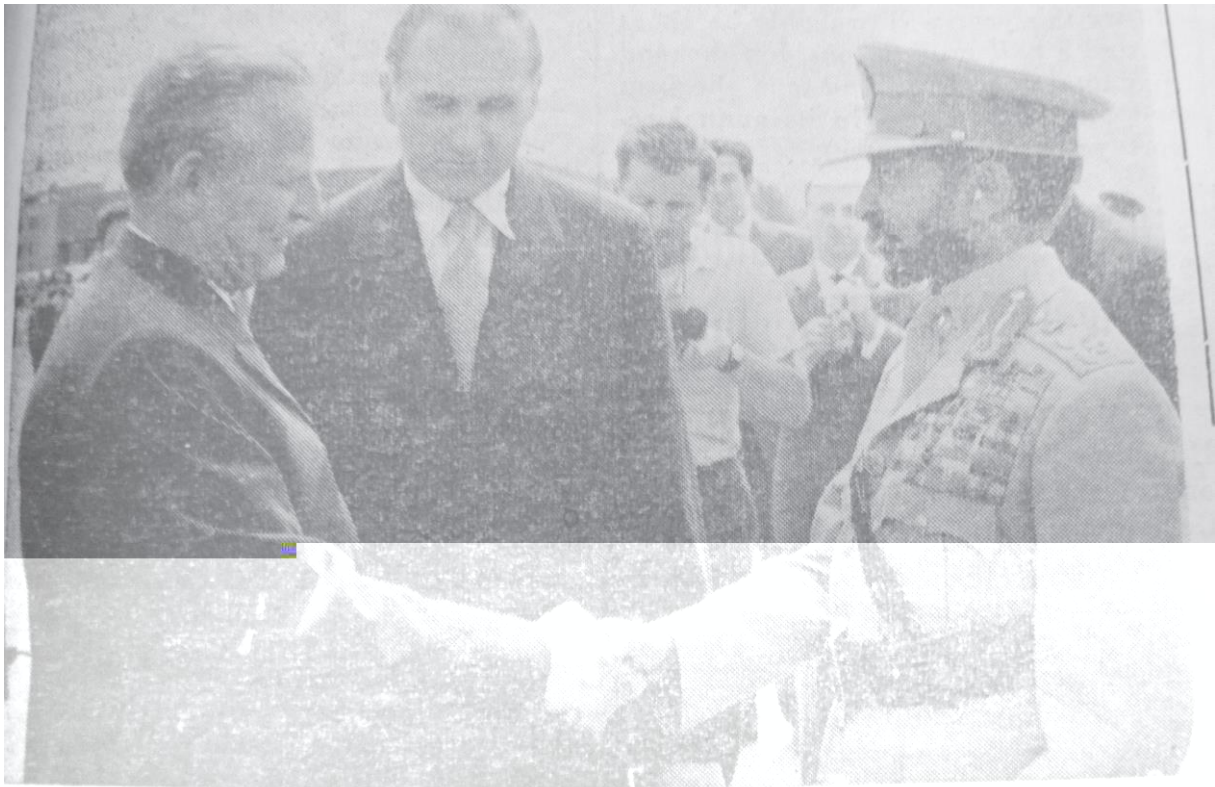
During Emperor Haile Selassie's visit to Prague, he had an interesting occasion to meet Bedřich Hildprandt, an aristocrat who used to breed horses at the Blatná castle. After 1948, Hildprandt was deprived of property as well as horses. Because the Emperor loved horses as well, he asked Czechoslovak representatives to send Bedřich Hildprandt to Addis Ababa to take care of his imperial horses which Hildprandt did for the following twenty years.

### **HAILE SELASSIE**

Emperor Haile Selassie (1930-1974) was an Ethiopian emperor who played a crucial role particularly on African issues. Rastafarian movement was inspired by him and up to nowadays he is known for his nobility, diplomatic skills and respect he enjoyed all around the world. During the Cold War, he was able to maintain friendly relations with both the West and the East including former Czechoslovakia. However, inside Ethiopia he became criticized for centralization, oppression, and lack of development. A combination of social, economic, ethnic, and religious factors contributed to the revolution in 1974 that brought an end to the so called Solomonic dynasty. Haile Selassie is still remembered in the process of modernizing Ethiopia in the sphere of education in primary, secondary, and tertiary senses.

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*President Antonín Novotný shakes' hands with His Majesty, the Emperor as he heartily welcomed the Emperor to Prague on his 4-day state visit to the Republic of Czechoslovakia.*

Pic. 8: President Novotný welcoming H-I-M. Haile Selassie in 1959 in Prague

### **EXCERPTS FROM HIS ADDRESS TO THE NATION OVER RADIO ADDIS ABABA, 1959**

“We visited Czechoslovakia from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> of July. The relations between Ethiopia and Czechoslovakia are of long standing. It was from this country that Ethiopia was able to acquire most of the arms and munitions needed to defend her jealously guarded independence against the Fascist invaders. Czechoslovakia was among the very few nations that courageously raised their voices in denouncing the Fascist invasion and in giving Us support in Our plan to appeal to the League of Nations.”

“During Our sojourn in Czechoslovakia, we were able to visit great industrial establishments, agricultural centres, institutions of higher learning and other famous historical places. We

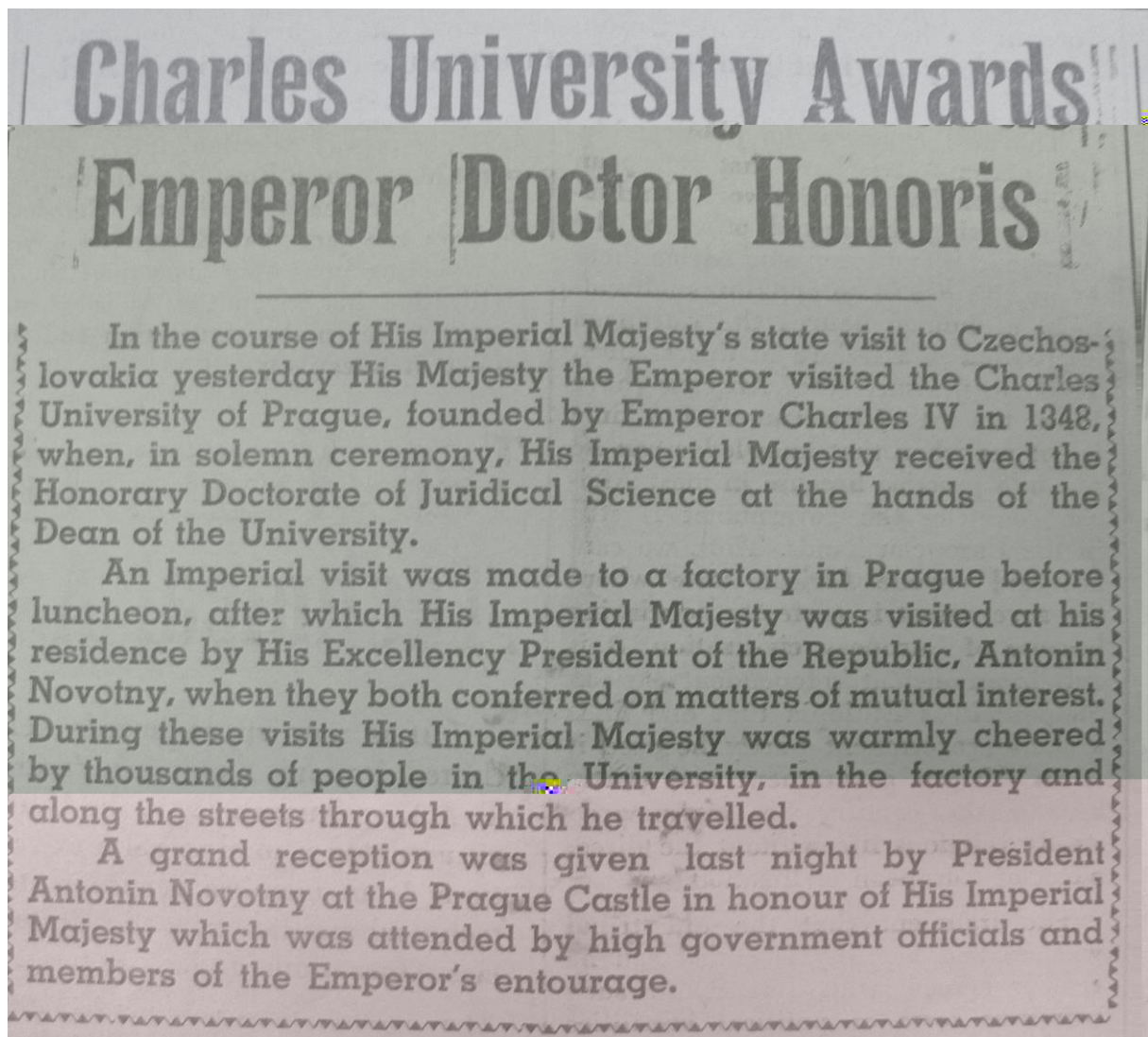


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were highly impressed by the tremendous progress achieved in the industrial as well as in the general economic field by the Czechoslovak people, especially in the post-war period.”

“The Czechoslovak Government has expressed its willingness to help Us in Our effort to develop our nation’s economy and to raise the standard of living of Our people by making it possible for Us to purchase from that country industrial and agricultural equipment by way of credit, which will greatly assist Us in the implementation of Our economic plans.”



Pic. 9: An article published in the Ethiopian Herald about Haile Selassie’s visit to Prague

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### **D O n V d n 3 36-3 :9 V g G o g l c k O h n E n g n V d**

One of the most famous people linking the former Czechoslovakia and Ethiopia is Bohuslav Tobyška, known as Colonel Toby. The main reason for his stay in Ethiopia was to control and monitor the development of civil aviation and the military air force. The Emperor also used him in special foreign missions to France, Egypt, and India. Colonel Toby was also involved in the preparation of the Emperor's visit to Prague in 1959.

Haile Selassie trusted Colonel Toby so much that he named him as financial controller, whose work included monitoring the fulfillment of foreign aid agreements and the use of the financial reserves of the imperial treasury. Paradoxically, he was later accused of financial mismanagement and seriously beaten up by a group of unknown attackers in a subsequent incident. When in 1960 Ethiopia experienced a coup attempt, it was a signal for Colonel Toby to leave the country, which he did at the end of 1961. He received the Menelik II order for his service to Haile Selassie, and, after spending twelve years in Ethiopia, left for Italy, where he engaged himself in the activities of Czechoslovak migrants. However, Tobyška still maintained his relationship with Ethiopia. Shortly after the 1974 coup, he met with the Minister of Defense, General Aman, and came to the conclusion that the new regime could save the country from its problems. A little later, his hopes were dashed, following the violence that engulfed Ethiopia.

Colonel Toby visited Ethiopia for the last time in 1975, when he was kept in a hotel and interrogated. After two months, he was allowed to leave the country but had to leave all his possessions behind, including a house built on land given to him by the Emperor. While Haile Selassie died imprisoned and isolated, Colonel Toby left for Spain with his family, where he died in 1987.

### **Czechoslovakia and the Derg**

The 1960s and early 1970s were characterized by growing social tensions in Ethiopia and rebellions that resulted in the revolution of 1974. The Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown and the rule of the Solomonic dynasty came to an end. The newly established regime of the Derg (1974-1991) that followed the principles of Marxism-Leninism turned its attention towards the Socialist bloc countries, including Czechoslovakia. In 1981, the Czechoslovak

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President, Gustáv Husák, visited Ethiopia in order to strengthen the mutually beneficial economic relations that mainly affected the industrial and military sectors.

### **THE DERG**

The Derg (the Provisional Military Administrative Council) took power in 1974, after carrying out a coup d'Etat and overthrowing Emperor Haile Selassie I. It remained in control until 1987, when its main political leader, Mengistu Haile Mariam, dissolved the Derg and established the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Mutual relations between Ethiopia and Czechoslovakia significantly strengthened, not only in terms of military supplies, which reached their highest level during the Ogaden War, but also in the industrial field. Some important industrial plants were constructed in Ethiopia during this time and some of them are still operating today. The political rapprochement between the two countries, which both sought to defend the ideological premises of communist doctrine, was not surprising and Ethiopia, with large support from the entire Eastern Bloc, became the strongest and longest lasting communist country on the African continent.

### **CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND THE SOVIET OCCUPATION (1968-1989)**

On the 21st August 1968, Czechoslovakia was invaded by Warsaw Pact troops, directed by Moscow. The main reason behind the occupation was the deep disagreement of the Soviet communist party with the events in Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring. This was the period from the beginning of 1968, when Alexander Dubček became the first secretary of the Party, to later in the year when the invasion took place. The Prague Spring was characterized by the call for general liberalization, as well as political and economic reforms. The main goal of these reforms was to achieve the freedom of the press, the freedom of speech and the freedom of movement. In addition, the possibility of a multiparty government was discussed within the reformist communist movement led by Dubček. The new form of democratic socialism was referred to as "Socialism with a human face". After the Soviet occupation, several Czechoslovaks serving in Ethiopia went into exile.

### **Industry, Agriculture, Beer, and Wine**

The first main Czechoslovak commercial project to be undertaken in Ethiopia after World War II was the construction of an ammunition factory in Addis Ababa. It formed a central plank of the Czechoslovak export drive in non-European countries. For Ethiopia, the success of such an installation would mean the future expansion of mutual trade and exchange. The ammunition factory was also the first facility where Czech experts were used for both the construction work and in the training of local workers.

Even by the early 1960s, an experimental farm, Ciaffa, had been established in order to explore new approaches to agriculture. Other concrete examples of Czechoslovak assistance in the development of Ethiopian industry include the hydroelectric dam, Melka Wakana, a textile factory in Kombolcha, the construction of a new military hospital, the provision of

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twelve L-39 aircraft, breweries in Harar and Bedele, the development of vineyards, and the sending of several dozen medical doctors to Ethiopia.

In 1983-1985, Ethiopia was affected by a famine of disastrous proportions, which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people and galvanized the international community into providing help for those in need. In response to this emergency Czechoslovakia provided more than 40 tons of medical equipment and food.



Pic. 10: Bedele Brewery

### Science and Development

One of the most significant spheres of cooperation has been hydro-geological research as water is such an important commodity and many parts of Ethiopia still struggle with a lack of access to clean and safe water resources. Jiří Šíma, an expert from the Aquatest Company, began his career in 1984 in cooperation with Ethiopian colleagues from the Geological Survey of Ethiopia (GSE). His experience demonstrates that the establishment of this type of research was not easy, due to the ongoing conflict taking place in Ethiopia, which made the



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collection of data difficult. The infrastructure in Ethiopia was far from ideal and hardly comparable to the current situation. The hydro-geologists searched for, monitored and analyzed water sources, such as wells, and chemically analyzed the findings in various regions of Ethiopia. The results were transformed into topographic maps; however, with limited resources and equipment, the quality of these was not of the highest order.

Things have changed since the fall of both regimes in 1989 and 1991, after which cooperation was renewed and the newly established Aquatest Company took the opportunity to collaborate with GSE. Projects were funded by the Czech Development Agency and the Czech national budget.



Pic. 11: Drilling of water well in Wallo

### **Cooperation between the University of West Bohemia and Ethiopian Universities**

The University of West Bohemia in Pilsen established the Centre of African Studies in 2012, with the aim of revitalizing African Studies in the Czech Republic. A part of our activities has been to further expand and enhance the degree of cooperation with African universities,

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primarily two Ethiopian higher education institutions, Addis Ababa University and Jimma University. Ethiopia has become the natural center of our interest in Africa.

In 2013, cooperation agreements were signed with Addis Ababa University and Jimma University and a joint Centre of African Studies was established in Jimma. In 2015, working together with both institutions, we prepared this exhibition and have continued to collaborate on numerous occasions. An example of this was the first Ethio-Czech Conference on Africa, which took place at Jimma University in September 2014. Similarly, a project entitled “Gibe Valley Revisited” was inspired by the desire to study the region from a multidisciplinary perspective. A big thanks goes to the Czech Embassy for their support and enthusiasm in relation to Czech-Ethiopian cooperation in the fields of education, science and research.



Pic. 12: The 1<sup>st</sup> Ethio-Czech Conference on Africa, co-organized by Jimma University and the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen