

ETHIOPIAN RESISTANCE

Efiopiia v antikolonial'nykh voynakh. [Ethiopia in the Anti-Colonial Wars]. By GEORGI VIKTOROVICH TSYPKIN. Moscow: Izdat, 'Nauka', 1988. Pp. 310. Roubles 3.50.

Within a generally weak and derivative national tradition of African historical studies, Ethiopia has always been a special case for Russian, and later for Soviet scholars, who have been able to draw on a comparatively rich hoard of primary materials, both published and unpublished, dating as far back as the 1840s. This situation derived in part from Tsarist Russia's curiosity about what was then perceived as another Orthodox Christian country, as well as from the more usual materialistic European motives for interest in Africa.

Now that the Soviet Union and its client regime under Mengistu Haile Mariam in Addis Ababa have both disappeared, this may be fairly assumed to be one of the last works, if not the last, in the most recent and possibly least interesting phase of this tradition. Tsyarkin's book, which deals with three-quarters of a century of Ethiopian military history, from the British intervention of 1867 up to the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935, bears all the marks of the restrictions under which Soviet scholars were compelled to operate. These range from the obligatory and pointless list of citations of Marx, Engels and Lenin's few passing references to African affairs, through the use of such – perhaps anachronistic – terms as 'people's war' to describe Ethiopian resistance to European colonialism, and into the structure of the book itself.

Thus, the book follows the usual pattern of an introductory chapter on political

economy – in this case, of mid-nineteenth-century Ethiopia – followed by narrative chapters. Interestingly, however, Tsytkin includes a discussion of the ‘traditional military organisation of the Ethiopian feudal state’ (pp. 63–82) which makes extensive use of materials in the Russian Central State Military-Historical Archive, as well as of such early Russian works as K. Arnol’di’s *Voennye ocherki Abissinii* (St Petersburg, 1907).

This is followed by chapters on the Napier expedition of 1867–8; the resistance to the Egyptian and Sudanese threat in the 1870s; and the first war against Italy in 1895–6. The fifth chapter discusses the changes brought about in the early twentieth century by the country’s territorial expansion, as well as the impact of Haile Sellasie’s modernization campaigns on the army.

In the final section of the book, Tsytkin looks at the 1935 campaign against Mussolini’s invasion. In a long section on the Ethiopian guerrilla resistance to the Italian occupation between 1935 and 1941, to which he attributes a key role in the eventual defeat of the Italians, he looks at the republican ideas which emerged among the Patriots and at the influence of such ideas on the country’s later intellectual life.