

**Book Review**

**Rey, C. F. Unconquered Abyssinia as it is To-day: An Account of a Little Known Country, Its Peoples & Their Customs, and Considered from the Social, Economic & Geographic Points of View, Its Resources & Possibilities, & Its Extraordinary History as a Hitherto Unconquered Nation. Seeley, Service & Company Limited p,1923,312p.**

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“*Unconquered Abyssinia as It is To-day*” is a richly descriptive account that blends travel narrative, political analysis and cultural and religious portraiture of Ethiopia at a crucial moment in its modern history. The book is organized into 25 chapters which could be condensed into five major themes, describing historical facts ranging from the little known remote past to the future possibilities and prospects. A significant portion of the book focuses on Ethiopia’s political climate in the early 20th century, particularly during the reign of Empress Zewuditu and the rising influence of *Ras* Tafari Makonnen, later Emperor Haile-Selassie.

In the first succeeding chapters, Rey focuses on sharing his general observations of the country’s landscape and the great historical achievements. He marvels at the beauty of the country to the point of being speechless, “a garden surrounded by desert”, and explains that the reason it has remained largely unknown to the rest of the world is due to the abomination and dissolution of gate ways with hard wastes, which gave no promise of the wonderful land that lie beyond. After surveying the ancient history of the country on bird’s eye view, the author swept into describing the races of Abyssinia that primarily concerned to address questions: what are the ethnic identities and what were their peculiar and common features? As the author has already noted, he gives the data with all reserve and with no claim to meticulous accuracy, so long it is difficult to do a thorough research work on the language, race, religion, and customs and practices of a country of diverse population. After carefully and clearly exploring the issues of race, which still requires an in-depth anthropological research, Rey continued to examine the customs and

practices of the people. This was another dangerous trap of Rey, because the subject requires not only a simple description of what he saw and heard, but also need experts who specialize in the field. However, the author has left aside issues that require in-depth professional analysis and has conducted an interesting survey by presenting only what he saw as a testimony.

It is from this point that Rey begins to explore the subject matter that makes him seem like a historical researcher. From chapter five to the last section he had explored historical developments ranging from analyzing the origin of the Abyssinians to recommending future possibilities and prospects. In this section he presents major historical events in the country in a very remarkable way, referring them in relation to legends, myths, and official records, which can be corroborated with other historical records. Given that Ethiopia's historiographical tradition was undergoing significant developments, Rey explains that he had the opportunity to consult not only the works of travellers but also indigenous court historians and chronicles (p. 83).

After completing a comprehensive historical survey of the country, the author moved on to explore the key political, military, economic, social, and religious dynamics. The first thing that Rey preferred to reconsider following his extensive discussion on the history of Abyssinia was examining the form of government by giving an emphasis to his time. Rey significantly provides a splendid first hand evidence about the forms of government mainly during the reign of empress Zewditu. Alongside Rey also highly concerned to single out the issue of law and administrative justice.

Be that as it may, Rey is an unparalleled writer of his time in his clear analysis of the history and overall appearance of religious practices in the so called Abyssinia. Although Ethiopian religious study is a vast and in-depth subject that requires extensive research, Rey has no difficulty in presenting this vast subject in concise and clear fashion, which is a testament to the writer's unique talent.

However, this does not mean that the book is presented without flaws. The author intentionally or unintentionally, makes minor errors, making it appropriate to review the book carefully. It is clear that the author is not expected to do a flawless job, given the inconsistent approach to understanding Africa by western writers and the fact that the era was a time of great colonial

expansion. Rey writes as a European observer who believes Western institutions are superior so that his tone sometimes leans toward paternalism, mainly when discussing concepts of modernization, and civilization. Despite its shortcomings, however, the book remains to be a valuable document and shed an important light on the historiography of the early twentieth century Ethiopia.