



Biography

Taytu Betul

Taytu Betul (c.1851–1918), wife of Menelik (King of Shoa and later Negus Negast or King of Kings), was a formidable queen and empress of Ethiopia.

She used her exceptional intelligence to strengthen and extend her power through an adroit blend of patronage, political marriages and leadership craft.

Determined to resist imperialist designs on her country, she increasingly opposed any negotiations that would result in the loss of Ethiopian territory. When diplomacy gave way to war, she rode out at the head of her own army, at her husband's side.

It was she who devised the plan which led to the Ethiopian victory at Makalle, and her presence was crucial in the Ethiopian victory at Adwa in 1896, the most significant victory of any African army during the climax of European colonialism.



Portrait of Taytu shot in the 1880s.



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She founded Addis Ababa, which remains Ethiopia's capital city today, and the final decades of her reign witnessed a period of modernization, which gradually opened Ethiopia up to trade and greater technical expertise. She also provided the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian community in Jerusalem with dignified housing, and financed the construction of the dome of the impressive church Debre Genet. As her husband fell ill, she began to concentrate more and more power in her own hands. This eventually provoked public agitation against her, and forced her into retirement.



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