

EXHIBITION

RIAS TAFARI IN LUSOBLAND



ON THE FIFTY YEARS OF HOME SPANNISH
OFFICIAL VISIT TO PORTUGAL, 1958-2008

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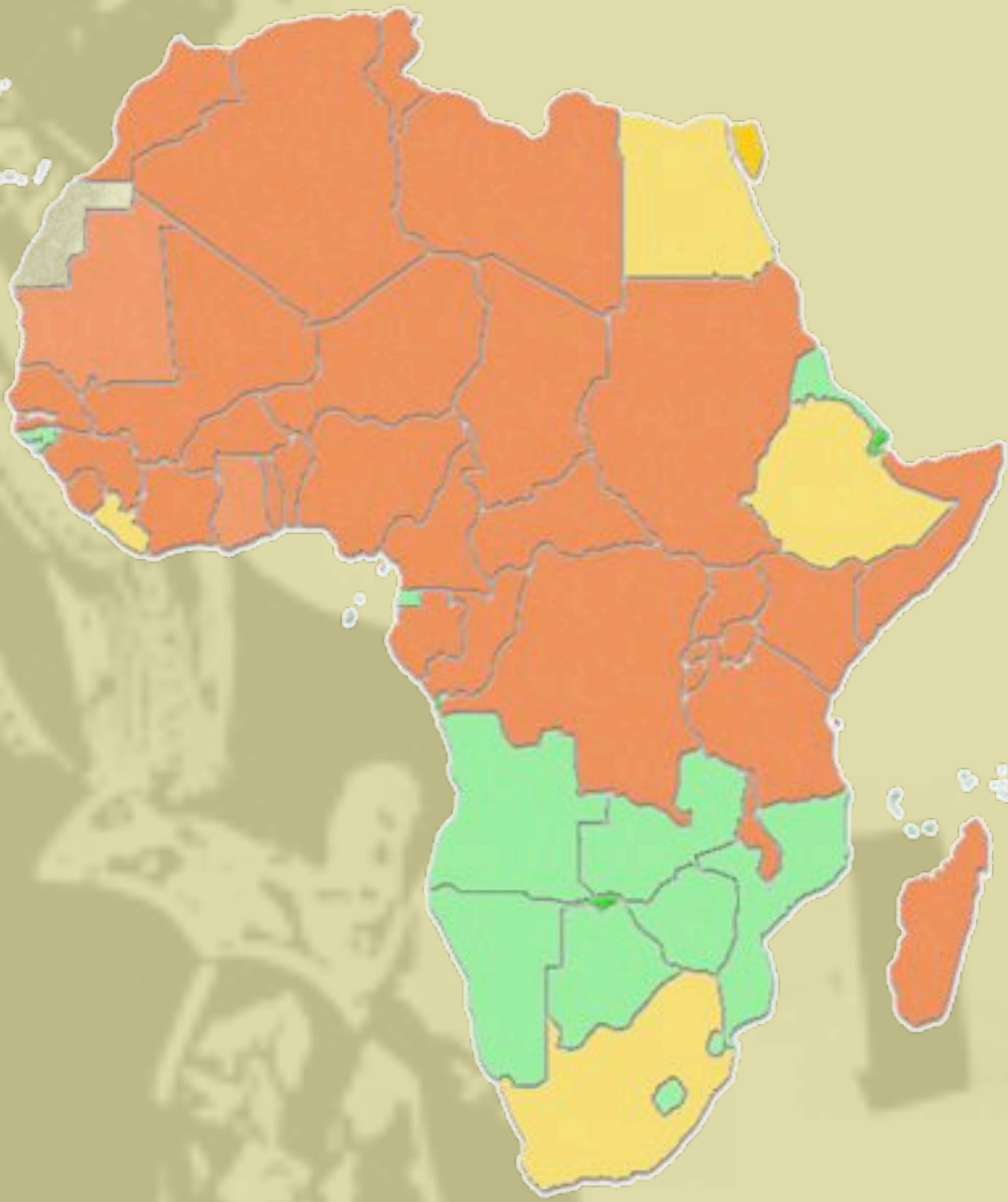
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- Independent countries before 1950
- Independencies achieved from 1951 to 1963
- Independencies achieved after 1964

In 1950, the large majority of African people lived under the dominance of a foreign colonial power or the violence of a racist regime. Later, in 1959, a large array of Sub-Saharan territories was vying for self-determination and independence, following the examples of Ghana and Guinea-Conakry, and stepping into an era of changing. The launching of the Afro-Asiatic movement in 1947 and the Bandung Conference in 1955 may be considered marking steps on the process of decolonization. As they won an increasingly stronger voice claiming for citizenship, dignity, self-representation, self-determination, the colonized started also the hard and long process of decolonizing their minds.

In this context, Haile Selassie as the head of an ancient African nation aware of its historical role, portrayed himself as an African leader among younger leaders as Kwame Nkrumah. The invitations addressed to him by heads of state all over the world proved that 'Ethiopia was taking an increasing position in the concert of nations'. Thus, On June 23rd 1959, His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I departed from Addis Ababa on a state tour to six countries. Egypt, the USSR, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, France and Portugal. He also made a private visit to Yugoslavia in early September, and returned for the Ethiopian New Year festivities, having stayed abroad for more than three months.



July 24th-26th: Sailed in Portuguese navy frigate from Bayonne, France, to Lisbon. The Portuguese government couldn't find a suitable navy vessel to sail all the way from Massawah to Portugal.

On previous similar trips, Haile Selassie always took some of his sons or grandsons with him as part of their training. This time the choice fell upon his granddaughter Aida Desta, who was around thirty years old and a discreet and educated young woman, daughter of Tenagne Worq (1912-2003) and Ras Desta Demtew (d. 1937). Members of the Ethiopian cabinet, such as Vice-Prime Minister Tsehafe Te'ezaz Aklilu Hapte Wold, the Minister of the Imperial Court, Tsehafe Te'ezaz Taffarra Worq Kidane Wold, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ato Yilma Deressa, also went on the state visit.



July, 26th: Welcomed by the Portuguese President, Admiral Américo Thomaz, at Cais das Colunas, Lisbon. The weather is very hot at this time of the year.

The Portuguese National Secretariat for Information produced a ceremonial protocol for the visit which was highly detailed, with a precise description of what would be happening day by day. Abundant information was produced for the first day, 26th July. The Emperor would arrive at Cais das Colunas and the procedure of the ceremony was laid out minute by minute - who should disembark first from the Nuno Tristão, which boat would receive the dignitary, what colour the crew should be wearing...



July 26th : Saluted the navy, army and police forces in parade at Terreiro do Paço. The square was decorated with Ethiopian and Portuguese flags. Two years before, Queen Elizabeth II was received here in the same manner.

After landing, Haile Selassie and his granddaughter were greeted by President Thomaz and his wife, who introduced them to the members of the government and distinguished personalities invited for the greeting ceremony that included volleys of gunfire and big parades to the sound of military marches and the Ethiopian and the Portuguese anthems.



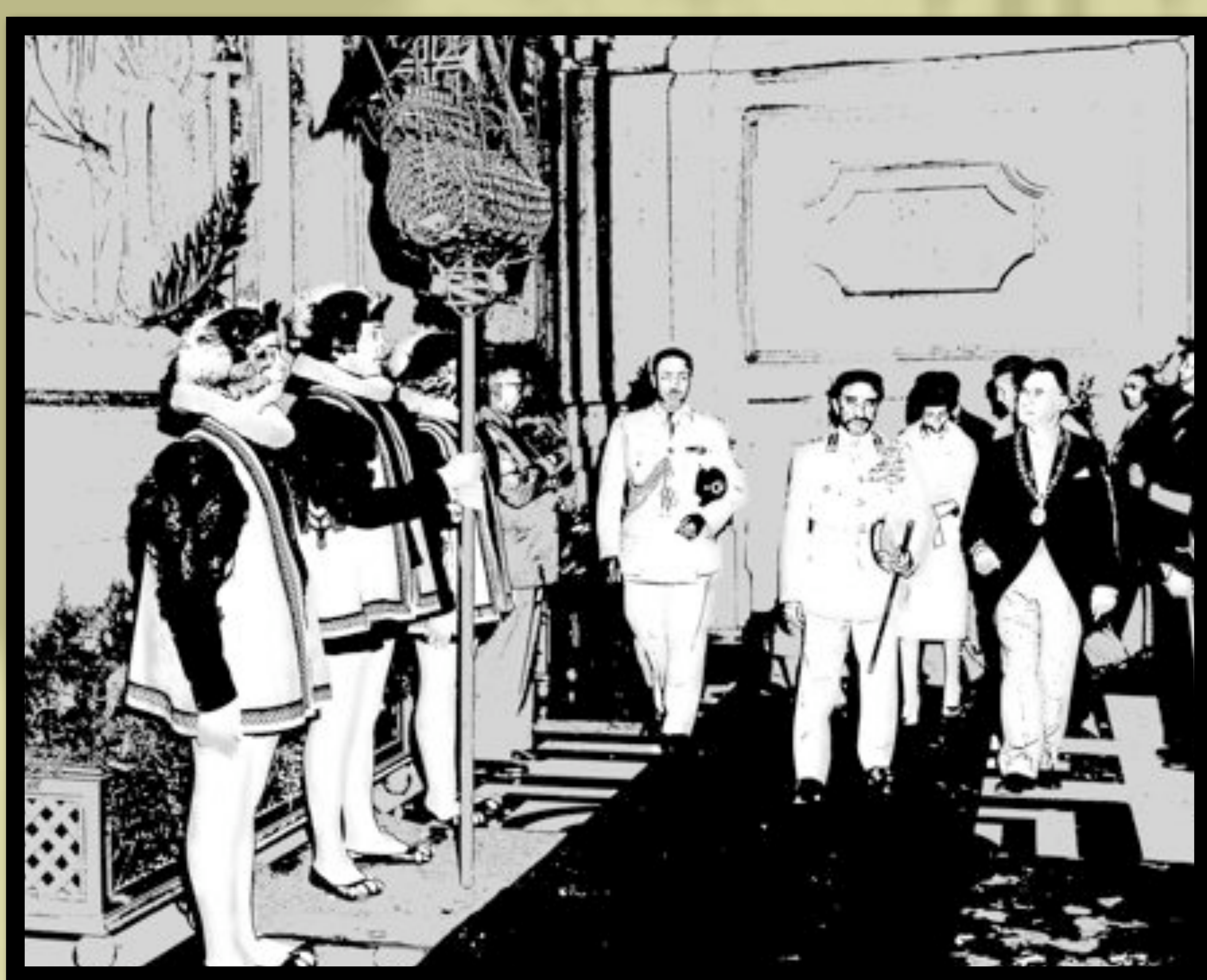
July 26th: Hailed by the people. Kept saluting them in the presidential Rolls Royce through downtown Lisbon on the way to Palácio de Queluz. There, awarded the Order of the Queen of Sheba to the President, gave him a golden case with Ethiopian insignia in ivory, and a jewellery case to his wife. Lunched and rested. Went to Palácio de Belém to be awarded the Bend of the Three Orders; also awarded the Council Chairman Oliveira Salazar with the Cross of Salomon and offered him another case. Returned to Queluz.

The preparations in Lisbon for hosting Haile Selassie involved many different measures. Queluz Palace had to be renovated to receive the emperor and his retinue. Collections of rich furniture and tapestry from different museums and palaces were borrowed for the banquets that would take place in Mafra Palace and Leiria Castle. Lists of Portuguese personalities and guest from the diplomatic legations to invite for the different receptions were prepared. Ethiopian flags and a variety of gifts were ordered. Messages were published urging the population to participate in mass in welcoming the guest.



July 27th: Mosteiro dos Jerónimos' church: deposited a bronze palm with a plaque depicting the castle of Gondar on the tomb of Vasco da Gama, the father of the martyr of Ethiopia. Visited the Museum of Carriages and received a collection of postcards. Went to the stadium of the Football Club Os Belenenses. Earlier, reception in Queluz attended by the diplomatic body credited in Lisbon.

This visit was "the most important from a moral standpoint, for it was an act of gratitude" (Ato Mechecha Haile), in reference to the combined forces of the Portuguese artillery and Ethiopian army that led Ethiopia to victory in 1543. The death of Cristóvão da Gama, the captain of the former, at the hands of the imam Ahmad al-Ghazi, reported in Ethiopian and Portuguese chronicles and traditions, has been depicted as martyrdom, reinforcing the image of heroism and sacrifice.



In Lisbon Town Hall, after saluting a police parade in the adjoining Praça do Município. Members of Lisbon's Firemen Brigade dressed in mediaeval paraphernalia, and holding a miniature caravel and two ravens brought from the local Zoo (emblems of the city and of its patron, Saint Vincent of Saragossa). Offered two elephant's tusks to the Mayor.

The visit was also "an almost religious peregrination to sound the genius of the Portuguese people", Haile Selassie declared. To him however, Portugal was but a pawn in the complex diplomatic chess game he had started to play with Western countries, the Soviet block and the emergent non-aligned group, as African independencies were becoming visibly inevitable, to achieve a series of interconnected goals.



He wanted to keep Ethiopia's external partnerships and its standing as the beacon of African resistance against the appearance of charismatic new African leaders and to control Nasser's popularity whom he apparently loathed and feared, to ensure a greater diversity of outside financial aid to the country, to ensure that the OAU's permanent seat would be Addis Ababa, and to achieve his intentions of absorbing Eritrea as an integral part of the Ethiopian territory, and so to reverse what he saw as an illegitimate British-influenced UN decision.

July 27th: Presented the Mayor, Brigadier França Borges, with an Ethiopian handcrafted box. Signed the Book of Honour and so did Princess Aida Desta. Received silver basin and jar, also a silver flowerpot. Leisure visit to Cascais and Sintra, tea at the romantic Palácio da Pena.



July 27th: Discussed African politics with the Council Chairman Oliveira Salazar at Palácio da Ajuda. The Portuguese government's position seems untenable.

Council Chairman Oliveira Salazar stressed: "I have followed with the closest attention the anti-colonialist campaign whereby an attempt is being made to compromise our Country. (...) We have been in Africa for 400 years which is not quite the same as having arrived yesterday. With us, we carried a doctrine, and this is not the same as being carried by self interest. We are present there with a policy which the administration is steadily following, something different from abandoning the destiny of human beings to the so-called 'winds of history'."

"We are an old nation attached to her traditions and therefore prepared to pay with heavy sacrifices the legacy of the past. The Portuguese nation believes to be her duty to civilize other people and to pay in sweat the work of colonization."



July 27th: Toasted to both countries in the banquet at Ajuda. Evoked common history and Portuguese generous assistance to Ethiopia in the sixteenth century.

During the official dinner at Ajuda Palace in Lisbon, the Emperor lauded the Portuguese ancestors' efforts in the search for the Christian kingdom of Prester John. This enterprise, the Emperor claimed, was pivotal to the opening of the maritime routes to India and the Far East. He praised the Portuguese government for its contribution to the progress of Western civilization and for the extension of its civilizing message to the New World. On this occasion Portugal's illegitimate sovereignty over overseas territories in Africa was not mentioned.



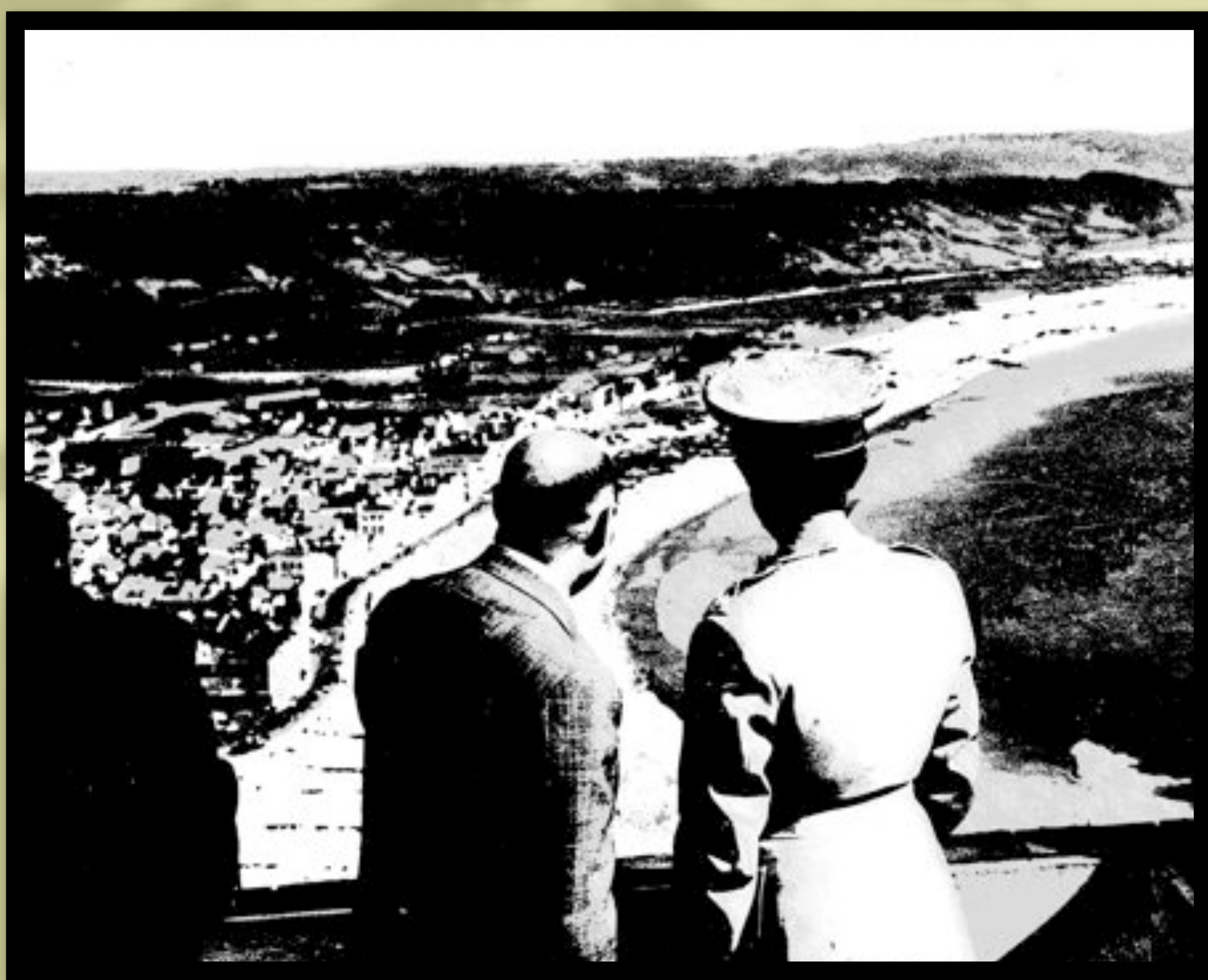
July 28th: Trip to Leiria. After lunch at the castle, offered a folkloric dance show, performed by two different groups. Here two young men dance the fandango. In the morning, visit to the monasteries of Alcobaça and Batalha. Deposited flowers on the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, defender of the Ethiopian freedom. Distributed Ethiopian coins to the local children.

But a few years later the Ethiopian emperor would declare: "In Central Africa, a sad and dangerous situation exists today. No African can remain content when he is confronted with the plight of his brothers in Nyasaland and in Northern and Southern Rhodesia. (...) Nor can We refrain from mentioning Mozambique and Angola. We remain confident that the Government of Portugal will follow the example of the other colonial powers and grant independence to the African people whom they have so long ruled, and We call upon the Portuguese Government and people to act while the occasion to do so with honour still remains."



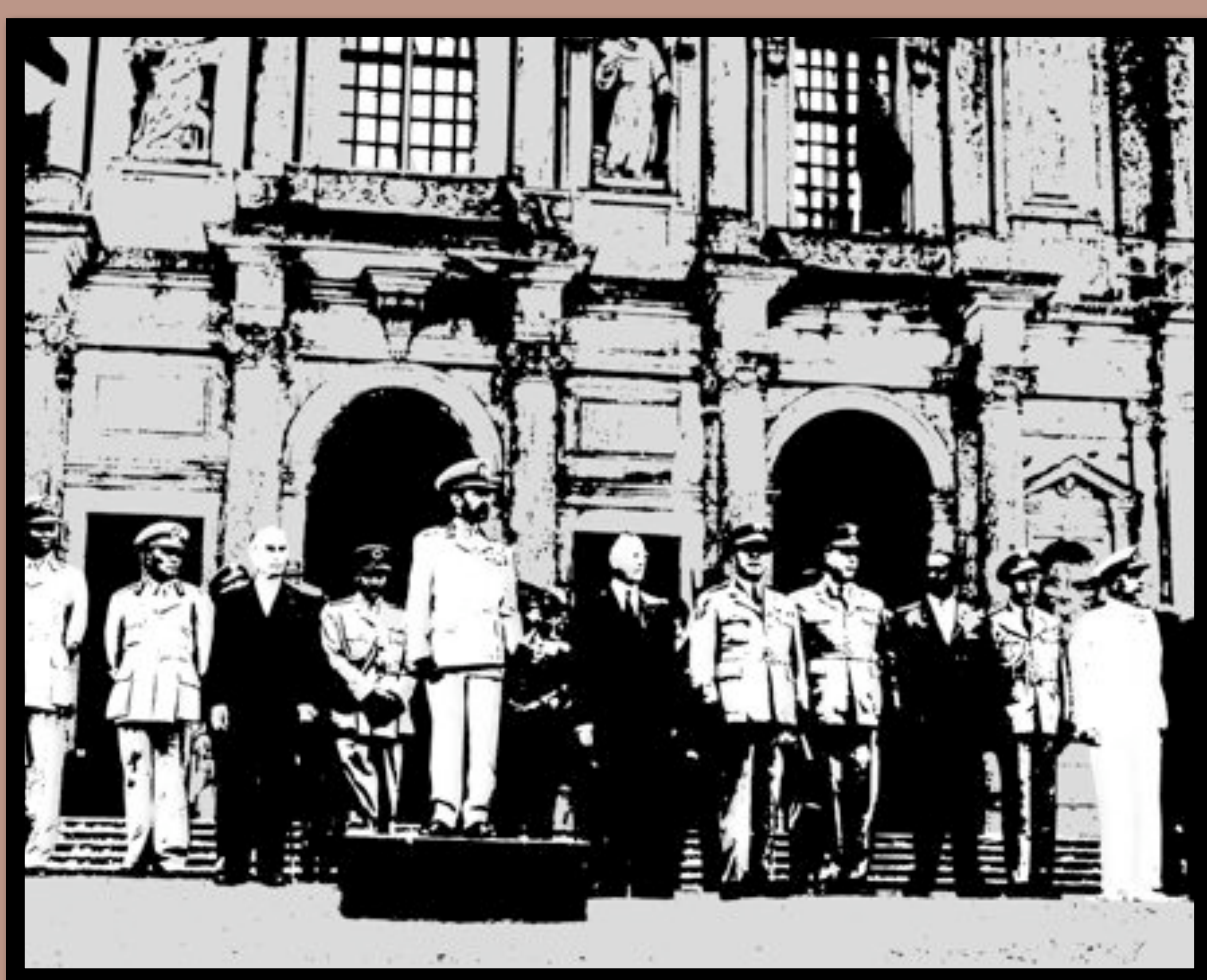
July 28th: Greeted by the folkloric dancers in the Castelo de Leiria, after the show.

Haile Selassie travel agenda was in line with general Ethiopian foreign policy goals combining the emperor's state and personal desiderata. In times of change like those of the late fifties, characterized by the challenges posed by the bipolarization of world politics and the emergence of the former colonized or peripheral countries as alternative voices and forces, his agenda was drawn along the line of neutrality and his skillful manipulation of rhetoric was displayed differently to different audiences.



July 28th: Gazing at the Atlantic Ocean and Nazaré fishing village, from Sítio (a promontory dedicated to Our Lady of Nazareth).

The Bandung and Accra principles of coexistence and cooperation were stressed in Czechoslovakia, the USSR, Egypt and Yugoslavia, plus the idea of non-alignment for the last two. He played the gratitude card for old historical links, or the more recent favorable disposition towards Ethiopia in the League of the Nations in Portugal. A state visit wasn't the arena for controversy.



July 29th: Honorary review of army cadets parading in front of the monumental Convento de Mafra.

The official purpose of this visit to Portugal was to reinforce the old friendly link between the two countries and sign a cultural agreement. Any political significance had to be read between the lines.



July 29th: Watched live fire exercises in the Tapada de Mafra, accompanied by Mr. Marcelo Mathias, the Portuguese minister of Foreign Affairs, and the army commanders.

The Portuguese government paraded the 'Prester John' king around Lisbon and the surrounding Western region as a reminder of Portugal's ancient presence in Africa, so as to stress its argument that its African territories weren't colonies but 'provinces' with the same administrative and legal status as the metropolitan ones.



July 30th: Lunch in a tent at the Santa Margarida military camp (next to Tan-cos), with army and air force high commanders. For dessert, a huge tank-shaped cake.

By sailing in Portuguese naval vessels, on being given the honorary title of general of the Portuguese army and on witnessing a series of supposedly spectacular (but frankly shabby) army maneuvers and air force shows, he was given the signs that Portugal had both the will and the power to defend its colonial possessions in the face of the general independence process.



July 30th: Received the insignias of honorary general of the Portuguese land army, on a tribune at the Santa Margarida military camp. Offered a traditional Ethiopian shield and two spears to the Portuguese Defence Minister, General Botelho Moniz.

From the collection of gifts the emperor's staff provided him with, he could choose to present his hosts with a set of two spears and a shield, gold and silver crosses or two elephant tusks tipped with gold and mounted on a wooden base. Gold and ivory cases were special gifts to heads of state and government and their wives. In former and later visits, the same kind of traditional weapons would be offered both to civil and military authorities.



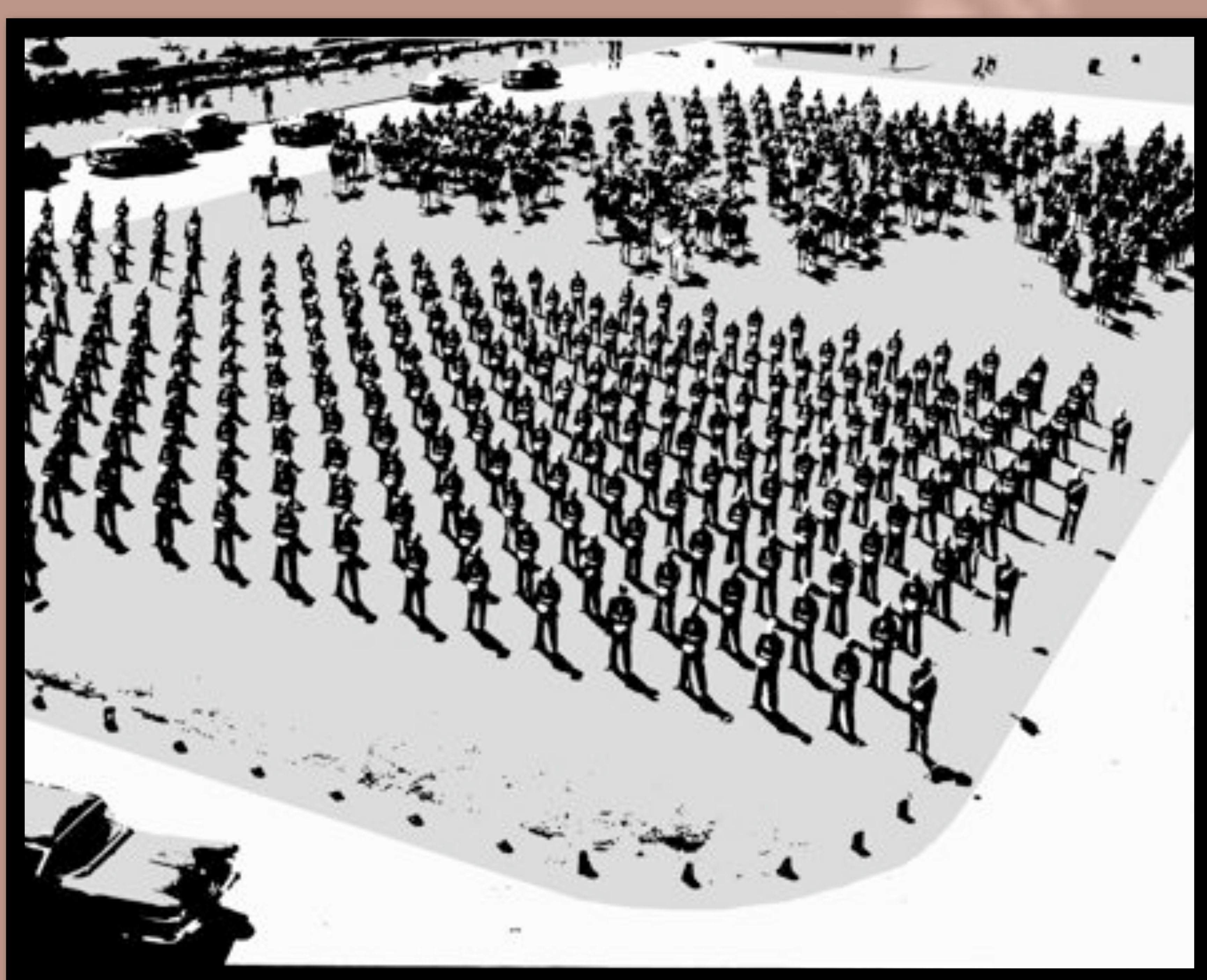
July 30th: Reviewing the troops at the Santa Margarida military camp.

Receptions at town halls, universities and technical schools, state residences, national palaces, military and industrial facilities, including gifts and exchanges of honorific awards and flowers for the ladies, followed by special lunches or dinners with pompous speeches and happy toasts, and by classic or folklore musical performances, or some other cultural or sports events, were another common facet of protocol.



July 30th: Conducting the first lady, Mrs. Gertrudes Thomaz, to the table of the banquet in Queluz. Behind, the Portuguese president, Admiral Américo Thomaz, with Princess Aída. After the dinner, formal speeches and ball. Some trouble dancing with the first lady.

At the Palace in Addis Ababa people used to repeat a good-humored comment by Haile Selassie on the lessons a statesman should learn from traveling abroad: avoiding above all the national dish and the folklore soirée.



July 31th: One last military parade offered to the emperor of Ethiopia at Lisbon airport's square.

After watching the last parade, Emperor Haile Selassie left Portugal to have a month's holiday in Germany where he spent at least one week in Baden Baden to rest and cleanse his body after the highly demanding diet of the previous five weeks and went to Bad Nauheim to meet King Ibn-Saud of Arabia.



July 31th: Farewell, Portugal! Next stop: Baden Baden.

The time would come for the breaking of the diplomatic relationship between Ethiopia and Portugal. In 1963 Haile Selassie would stand for anti-colonialism and anti-racism: "Africa's victory, although proclaimed, is not yet total, and areas of resistance still remain. Today, We name as our first great task the final liberation of those Africans still dominated by foreign exploitation and control. (...) Our liberty is meaningless unless all Africans are free. Our brothers in the Rhodesias, in Mozambique, in Angola, in South Africa, cry out in anguish for our support and assistance. We must urge on their behalf their peaceful accession to independence."