

ARTY CATS

Three variations of the Lion of Judah are on monuments in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Fig. 2, traditional; Fig. 3, stylized; and Fig. 4, in bas-relief on a tomb.

Ethiopian Lion Monuments By Greg Balagian

To Ethiopians, the Lion of Judah is the symbol of heroism and resistance. As an imperial icon, the lion symbolizes that Emperor Menilek I was the son of the Queen of Sheba and the Biblical King Solomon.

One of the royal titles is "Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah." The lion is always shown marching east carrying a cross and wearing the imperial Ethiopian crown. It holds a staff topped by a cross with ribbons in the three national colors: red, yellow, and green.

Ethiopia issued a set of four stamps in 2012 depicting notable monuments in Addis Ababa; three of the four stamps feature the Lion of Judah.



Figure 1. Lion of Judah statue

Erected in 1930 at the square in front of the railway station, the bronze statue is mounted on a black granite pedestal decorated in bas-relief by several Ethiopian rulers and emperors, such as Empress Zewditu, Menelik II, Ras Makonnen, and Haile Selassie I.

In 1935 during the fascist occupation, the statue was looted by Italians and carried away to Rome. Thirty years later it was returned and re-erected on the original site on the anniversary of its unveiling.



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

This gorgeous monument also appears on a stamp issued by Ethiopia in 1950 (Scott 305). Smaller versions of the statue in Addis Ababa are depicted atop monuments on two other stamps: the Victory Monument in 2009 (Scott 1732) and Decorating the Martyrs' Monument in the same set (Scott 1733).

The 40c stamp (Fig. 3) depicts a Lion of Judah sculpture created in a contemporary stylized fashion by the prominent French sculptor Maurice Calka in 1954. It was commissioned by Emperor Haile Selassie to express the vision of Africa entering the modern era, and the monument subsequently became a cultural symbol of Afrocentrism.

The third stamp (Fig. 4) depicts the tomb of Ras Makonnen (inscribed 'Mekonen'), who was the father of Emperor Haile Selassie. The tomb is decorated with a Lion of Judah in bas-relief.

The Lion of Judah is an enduring Ethiopian symbol. ♣