

**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**THE BLUE NILE ISSUE: A HISTORY
OF HYDROPOLITICS, 1884-1974**

**BY
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Abbreviations

F.O = Foreign Office of Great Britain.

IES = Institute of Ethiopian Studies.

US = United States.

ELF = Eritrean Liberation Front

UN = United Nations

E.C.A. = Economic Commission for Africa

OAU = Organization of African Unity

ABSTRACT

The hydropolitics of the Blue Nile had an impact on developments affecting modern Ethiopia. The issue has played a crucial role in the struggle between Ethiopia and the powers over the control of the lower basin, and was transformed in the nineteenth century. The century witnessed Egypt's vigorous attempt to secure the unimpeded flow of the Blue Nile River. This development became more acute and gained a new momentum when European powers developed an interest in the region and realized that both the economic survival of Egypt and the prosperity of the Sudan were dependent on the good will of Ethiopia that had direct jurisdiction over the source of the Blue Nile.

The main objective of the thesis is to show the dynamics of the hydropolitics of the Blue Nile within the broad context of Ethiopian history. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Blue Nile was one of the main factors that led the British to violate the Adwa or Hewett Treaty of 1884 and to promote the Italian colonial interest in Ethiopia up to 1896. By 1902, the British had ensured the unobstructed and continuous flow of the Blue Nile River. In the first half of the twentieth century, the British carried on protracted diplomatic negotiations with the Ethiopian government to secure a perennial water supply from the Blue Nile by constructing a dam at the outlet of Lake Tānā and turning the lake into a water reservoir. Even though the British diplomatic efforts were a fiasco, they had an impact on the history of Ethiopia and the major events of the period.

In the 1950s, Egypt's decision to build the Aswan High Dam relegated all previous plans of developing the entire Nile Basin to insignificance. The decision not only put the Lake Tānā Dam project to the side line but also brought the hydropolitics of the Nile into its vortex. Subsequently, Ethiopia called for the equitable and fair utilization of the waters of the Nile as

well as planned to develop the Blue Nile Basin. This was the main factor behind Egypt's hostile policy towards Ethiopia until the 1960s.

This study argues that lack of far-sightedness particularly on the part of the powers intensified the Nile issue. The river could not be disconnected from national sentiment and treated as a common and shared natural resource among the riparian states. This is a major impediment to equitable and fair utilization of the waters of the Nile.

INTRODUCTION

Rapid population growth and climatic change are increasingly making the question of the utilization of transboundary rivers a critical issue. Some statesmen and observers have speculated that the need for water may supersede religion, race and territory as a cause for regional conflict. The Blue Nile issue is not an exception. It is a source of mistrust, tension and fear.

The question of the utilization of the Blue Nile waters has assumed significance in contemporary Ethiopian political and economic discourse. Researchers of various disciplines have produced immense literature that mainly focuses on the current state of the Nile waters resource utilization, the present hydropolitical situation, legal institutions for equitable and fair exploitation of the resource, and hydraulic projects and works in the basin.

Unfortunately, however, rigorous scholarly works on the historical development of the hydropolitics of the Blue Nile hardly exist. It is possible to say that the Blue Nile issue as a topic of study has been of peripheral interest to the Department of History so far, despite the fact that the issue has moulded the history of war and diplomacy in the Ethiopian region and has had tremendous importance for an understanding of modern Ethiopian history on various levels. Hence, it deserves thorough historical investigation and analysis.

The thesis therefore is a modest attempt at studying the Blue Nile issue within the broad context of Ethiopian history with the aim of filling the existing lacunae. The study will try to investigate and identify the different aspects of the issue in order to shed light on the dynamics of the hydropolitics of the Blue Nile from 1884 to 1974. The first section of chapter one briefly surveys the hydrological features of the river as a major factor in

shaping the hydropolitics of the Blue Nile. The remaining section of the chapter is concerned with the changes and continuities in the history of the Blue Nile issue. The geopolitical importance of the Blue Nile and its impact on the historical development of Ethiopia are treated in chapter two. The dynamics of agreements and negotiations for the utilization of the waters of the Blue Nile, from 1902 to 1941, constitute the subject matter of chapter three. Chapter four is devoted to the negotiations for the use of the waters of the Blue Nile and the hydropolitical conflicts mainly between Egypt and Ethiopia from the post-liberation period until 1974. The impact of international politics on developing the Nile water system is also discussed in the chapter. Finally, the study provides a summary and a conclusion and suggests some recommendations on the basis of the study.

CHAPTER I

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

TO THE BLUE NILE ISSUE

1. AN OVERVIEW OF THE BLUE NILE BASIN

The mighty Blue Nile ¹ (Abbáy) “the father of rivers” is one of the two major tributaries of the main Nile, the longest river system on earth.² It emerges from Geshe Abbáy, ³ in Western Gojjám Administrative Zone, in the northwestern highland of Ethiopia. The river traverses about 100 kms before it joins Lake Téné and is known by the name of Gilgel Abbáy. ⁴ After some kilometers the Blue Nile flows through Lake Téné and forms the famous Tis-Isét Falls. Then it follows a circuitous route by flowing from southeast to the south, then west, and finally north.⁵ In its peregrination of 960 kilometers within Ethiopian territorial jurisdiction, ⁶ the Blue Nile collects the waters of over ninety tributaries. The tributaries rise from the high plateau and flow into the deep canyons to join, “their father,” the Abbáy River. The major tributaries of the Blue Nile are Dabus, Didessé, Finché, Gudar, Mugar, Jamé, Bashilo, Birr, Balas, and Walaqé, and numerous other small streams. In the Sudanese territory, the Dindar and Rahéd rivers also join the Blue Nile, and both originate from Ethiopia.⁷ According to some sources, the Blue Nile Basin covers one fifth of the total area of Ethiopia.⁸ The total distance of the river from Lake Téné until its confluence with the White Nile, near Khartoum, is estimated to be 1,500 kms.⁹

The Blue Nile passes through huge and deep gorges and valleys with a strong force until just before it crosses the Ethio-Sudanese boundary, where its descent begins to be much gentler¹⁰ and easier for irrigation. The river flows northwards across rolling plains and joins the White Nile, collects Atbārā and flows as the Main Nile to the Mediterranean Sea, its final destination, traversing through the Sudan and Egypt. Some 200 Kms before the sea the Nile creates two flanks that form the two sides of the Nile Delta Triangle,¹¹ which was the cradle of the ancient Egyptian civilization. Therefore, the Blue Nile covers parts of the territories of Ethiopia, the Sudan and Egypt. These countries are known as the three principal riparian states of the Nile Basin.¹² The Blue Nile with the Atbéc (Takkaze) and the Sobót (Baro-Akobo) supply some 86 per cent of the total annual water discharge of the Nile River.¹³ This figure soars to 95 per cent during the rainy season in Ethiopia (*kiramt*) between July and September.¹⁴ This shows that almost all the waters of the Nile depend on the amount of rainfall in the Ethiopian highlands. Needless to say, the Blue Nile carries the lion's share of Ethiopian annual water discharge to the Sudan and Egypt. The "Blue Nile Basin Master Plan" of the Federal Government of Ethiopia states that the river alone delivers about 60 per cent of the total annual water discharge of the main Nile.¹⁵ According to Waterbury, the contribution of the Blue Nile to the aforementioned figure varies from 59 to 68 per cent in the Ethiopian rainy season.¹⁶ The contribution of the White Nile is not more than 14 per cent of the water that irrigates the lower riparian states, Egypt and the Sudan.¹⁷ This was because the White Nile loses a considerable amount of its water in its long journey across the Great Lakes of Equatorial Africa and in the Sudd of southern Sudan due to seepage and evapotranspiration.¹⁸ Therefore, although the Luvironza River in Tanzania, from where the White Nile rises, and the Mediterranean Sea are always taken as geographic reference points, or source and

mouth, to measure the distance of the Nile, from the point of the volume of the water supply to Egypt and the Sudan, the main Nile is not as important as the Blue Nile.

Similarly, the dominance of the Blue Nile in the Main Nile River system can also be described in terms of its silt contribution. The river contributes almost the entire rich alluvial soil and silts that have made the cultivation of the barren areas of the downstream countries possible. Some sources indicate that the Ethiopian rivers transport 60 to 110 million tons of rich alluvial soil and silt to the downstream states per annum.¹⁹ The rich Ethiopian soil that has been eroded and washed away for millennia by the Blue Nile and other rivers to Egypt is estimated to have left 9 to 10 meters deep deposit along the Nile banks.²⁰ In short, as Shahin noted: “. . . the Egyptian delta composing modern Egypt consists almost entirely of silt carried from Ethiopia.”²¹ Indeed, it was the silt and the water of the Blue Nile that have made Egypt habitable and productive.

The Blue Nile traverses from its source to the Main Nile through diverse geographic, climatic and ecological zones. As we move from the source to the mouth of the river, there is a decrease in annual rainfall and an increase in aridity. The river rises from the Ethiopian highlands where the annual rainfall is estimated to be 1700 mm and flows through the Aswan High dam and Cairo that receive 25 mm of rainfall per year.²² On the contrary, the annual rate of evaporation increases from 600 mm to 2800 mm as the river traverses from the Ethiopian highlands to Egypt.²³ It was with this scientific fact in mind that powers which controlled the lower Nile basin from the first decade until the middle of the twentieth century attempted to turn Lake Téné (the largest Ethiopian lake around 1800 meters above sea level with a surface area of 3,100 Km²,²⁴) into a water reservoir by building a dam at the exit of the Blue Nile. The lake area has by far a lower rate of evaporation than any alternative reservoir in the Sudanese and Egyptian territories

or in the head water of the White Nile.²⁵ Therefore, it is this hydrological feature of the river that has shaped the hydro-politics of the Blue Nile.

Egypt has been the primary beneficiary of the waters of the Nile, and has contributed nothing to the annual water discharge of the river.²⁶ It is a country that practically receives no rainfall, except in the small Mediterranean strip and the Nile Valley. The rest of Egypt is a vast uncultivated and unsettled desert.²⁷ It is estimated that 95 per cent of the Egyptian population live along the Nile Valley.²⁸ Elhance thus described Egypt: “No other country in the world is so dependent on the waters of a single river [as Egypt] . . .”²⁹ Egypt made greater use of the Nile waters than that of the nine riparian states combined.³⁰

Ethiopia, the land of the Blue Nile, has always wanted to use its water resources as a remedy for the terrible famine and drought that recurrently hit the country. Nevertheless, its utilization of the water resource is still estimated to be 0.65 billion m³ of water per year, which is less than 1 per cent of the waters of the Nile.³¹ Despite the fact that the US Reclamation Bureau report disclosed that the Blue Nile Basin had an area of about 204,000 km² in central and western Ethiopia, with considerable agricultural and hydropower potential,³² the Ethiopian basin remains underdeveloped. This might be attributed to lack of the basic infrastructure and human resources that are usually needed to develop the basin. Above all, the absence of economic cooperation and understanding among the riparian states also hindered development projects in the Ethiopian basin that would have benefitted the whole region. Ethiopia’s desire to build dams and power stations to exploit her water resource, since the first half of the twentieth century, has been frustrated by Egypt’s apparent threat of military intervention and subtle ways of preventing Ethiopia from exploiting its water resource. With regard to the latter, Egypt is

said to have provided Ethiopia’s external enemies and internal power-mongers with military and strategic support as one method of destabilizing the country.³³ Therefore, the Blue Nile has had no significant economic value for Ethiopia; rather it has remained merely as symbol of prestige and national identity. The Ethiopians have composed songs, poems, folk stories and organized ritual performances for their river, the Blue Nile (Abbáy).³⁴ Nevertheless, the contribution of the Blue Nile for the economic development of Ethiopia is limited as illustrated by the following famous Amharic song: “
 ✪♦⌚ ℳ✪ ⑩★ ↻④✪✪ ↻④ ✪☐✪☺ ቆጭጭጭ” (Abbay [the Blue Nile] is only a name; but it has not benefited its home country).

The rapid expansion of modern irrigation techniques in Egypt and Sudan, since the second half of the nineteenth century, enabled them to feed their growing population.³⁵ On the contrary, in Ethiopia, in the country that has been called “the water tower of Africa,” people have died from thirst. Egypt, the Sudan and Ethiopia still depend on agriculture as their primary economic activity.³⁶ The years of water surpluses and deficits have a direct impact on the agricultural productivity of the basin states.³⁷ Sadly, the condition of the natural environment of the Blue Nile Basin is precarious due to traditional farming practices, rapid population growth, overgrazing and deforestation.³⁸ This has added more fuel to the flame of the hydropolitics of the Blue Nile. Water is becoming a scarce commodity in the basin and the Blue Nile issue is becoming very critical. The issue has assumed significance in contemporary Ethiopian political and economic discourse. Many writers have warned that unless the ongoing environmental calamities are overcome, they will substantially change the established ecological balance of the basin.³⁹ These anticipated climatic changes are likely to have devastating consequences for the already precarious ecological condition of the basin. They also would aggravate the current

hydropolitical situation of the basin. Some statesmen and observers have speculated that the need for, and control of, water may supersede religion, race, and territory as a menace to regional peace.⁴⁰ This is why scholars have suggested that all the basin states should pool their efforts to protect the environment and avert ecological disasters like drought, famine, desertification and floods.⁴¹ This study will analyse the historical factors that have hindered imperative cooperation and understanding among the Blue Nile Basin states over the utilization of the waters of the river.

2. HYDROPOLITLCS OF THE BLUE NILE: MYTH AND THE REALITY

The Blue Nile, as both life giving for Egypt and symbol of pride for Ethiopia, has captured human imagination since time immemorial. It is apparent that the Blue Nile was also a center of curiosity for outside explorers and travelers who ventured particularly to solve the riddle of its source. It is recorded that the issue of the source of the Nile attracted the attention of some famous historical figures and individual adventurers. Alexander the Great, Cambyses, and the two Roman Emperors, Julius Caesar and Nero are believed to have sent unsuccessful expeditions to locate the source of the Nile.⁴² Nonetheless, none of the above expeditions succeeded in “discovering” the source of the Blue Nile.

In April 1618, the Portuguese Jesuit priest, Pedro Paez, visited with emperor Susenyos the Sakalé district, from where the Blue Nile rises, and provided his own description about it.⁴³ The Portuguese traveler de Almeida, although he did not claim that he had discovered the source of the Blue Nile, gave a better description about the source of the river than Paez.⁴⁴ The Scottish traveler, James Bruce, who lived in Ethiopia,

from 1768 to 1771, visited the source of the Blue Nile, and wrote an account, his famous five-volume work entitled: *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile in the Years 1768-1773*.⁴⁵ The French traveler Antoine Thompson D'Abbadie was also in the area in 1838.⁴⁶ All these travelers introduced the river and its history to the outside world. It removed much of the mystery surrounding not only the river but also the land from where the Blue Nile rises.

Ancient, medieval and modern writers produced quite an immense and varied literature that blended reality with myth, which has, needless to say, vital importance for academic research. Sources of relevance for this thesis clearly indicate that the Blue Nile was a primordial factor of interaction and interdependence among Ethiopia, Egypt and the Sudan. It has particularly played a pivotal role in the historic relationship between Egypt and Ethiopia.

Egypt, as described by Herodotus, the Greek historian, in the 4th century B.C., was, and will forever be, "the gift of the Nile."⁴⁷ Indeed, had it not been for the Nile and its annual flood, it would have been very difficult to think not only of the Pharaonic civilization but also of the very existence of human life in the land of Egypt. This is what distinguishes the Nile from other great rivers of the world.⁴⁸ The Egyptians, who practically receive no rainfall, or had no other alternative source of water, understood the Nile as their source of life since the dawn of history. Thus, from ancient times to the present, the Nile River has been a symbol of hope and life for the Egyptians.⁴⁹ The geographical reality that the source of the Nile is located outside Egyptian territory has been their major headache. The river's vital flow, therefore, produced endless speculations and legends, which became part of Egyptian's cultural heritage.⁵⁰ The flow of the river was unstable, as it varied from year to year, because of the erratic rainfall in the Ethiopian

highlands, (or due to unknown reasons).⁵¹ Some sources indicate that whenever the amount of water that reached Egypt declined, the Egyptians suspected that the river was either blocked or diverted, from its main course, by powers that controlled the upper Nile.⁵²

The sources, albeit fragmented and far from conclusive, go to the extent of indicating the existence of hydropolitics between Egypt and Ethiopia at least since the early Middle Ages.⁵³ There is no substantive evidence that reveals that Ethiopia quarreled with Egypt over the utilization of the Nile waters. But it is known that Ethiopia used the Blue Nile as a diplomatic weapon in her historic relations with Egypt. It is worth mentioning that as Egypt depended much on the waters and the silt from the Nile, Ethiopia, the source of the greater portion of the water of the river, got its bishops from Egypt from the fourth until the middle of the twentieth century.⁵⁴

Ethiopian emperors had, at least since the early Middle Ages, used the Blue Nile as a diplomatic weapon whenever the predominantly Muslim Egyptian rulers refused to send bishops to Ethiopia, or persecuted Coptic Christians and /or demolished their churches. The Ethiopian emperors, who acted as champions of Coptic Christians, are said to have threatened Egyptian Muslim rulers with diverting the course of the Blue Nile.⁵⁵ On the other hand, whenever the volume of the Nile flood that reached Egypt declined, due to climatic or other factors, the Egyptians believed that the Ethiopian emperors diverted or stopped the flow of the Blue Nile.⁵⁶

It is recorded that the period between 1066 and 1072 A.D. witnessed a severe drought and famine in Egypt due to the decrease in the volume of the River Nile.⁵⁷ It was thought that Ethiopia had diverted the flow of the Blue Nile. The Fatimid Caliph Mustansir-bi'llah is reported as having sent his envoys and precious gifts to the Ethiopian

emperor demanding the release and continuous flow of the river.⁵⁸ Michael IV, the Alexandrian patriarch, was also in Ethiopia in 1091 A.D as a leader of another delegation of Mustansir to discuss the issue of the Nile with the Ethiopian monarch.⁵⁹ On the other hand, it is documented that Ethiopian embassies carrying the threat of diverting the course of the Blue Nile arrived in Egypt in different years from 1274 to 1481.⁶⁰

In 1325, Emperor Amda Seyon (r. 1314-44), angered by the persecution of Coptic Christians and the destruction of their churches in Egypt, dispatched a letter to Sultan Nasir stating that he would divert the flow of the Blue Nile unless the Egyptian Government desisted from such action.⁶¹ Amda Seyon's grandson, Emperor Dawit (r. 1380-1412) used the Blue Nile in his conflict with the Egyptian rulers. His attempt at diverting or stopping the flow of the Blue Nile is mentioned in some hagiographies, as cited by Tadesse Tamrat.⁶² Emperor Yeshaq (r. 1413-1430), successor of Dawit, sent a message to Egyptian rulers carrying the threat of interference in the flow of the Blue Nile.⁶³ Similarly, Emperor Zar`a Ya`eqob (r. 1434-1468), irritated by the demolition of a famous Coptic church, called Mitmaq, warned Egyptian Muslim rulers in 1443 that he would have stopped the flow of the Blue Nile had it not been for his fear of God and in consideration of the suffering in Egypt resulting from the diversion.⁶⁴

Although the idea that Ethiopia would divert the flow of the Blue Nile and thereby put Muslim Egyptians under jeopardy is almost implausible, it reached Europe through pilgrims who visited the Holy Land (Jerusalem).⁶⁵ This led to the birth in Europe of the myth that glorified the power and wealth of the legendary king of Ethiopia, the Prester John of the Indies.⁶⁶ Ethiopia's strategic importance as a source of the Nile was known to Christian Europe.⁶⁷ The Nile was used by the Christians to pressurize the Muslims during the Crusade, when the world was divided by religion, *viz.* Christians and Muslims. The

issue and the subsequent search for the land of the Prester John was important in the history of European expansion into the African continent. Obviously, the contact between Europe and Africa had a tremendous impact on the overall historical development of the latter. In Ethiopia, the coming of the Jesuit priests, following the Portuguese military intervention in the wars of Ahmad Grǎñ, led to the proclamation of Catholicism as a state religion of Ethiopia in 1622 resulted in bloodshed and chaos in the country. The teaching on the Jesuit missionaries also led to division of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church into many sects.

In the first decade of the eighteenth century, Emperor Takla-Haymanot I (r.1706-1708) wrote a letter similar to those sent by the aforementioned monarchs, after he had heard of the imprisonment of an Ethiopian envoy named Murad, a Syrian, and a French representative called Lenoir due Role by Turkish authorities in Egypt. Since the Egyptian authorities “ . . . have violated the law of nations,” Takla-Haymanot declared that:

We could very soon repay you in kind, if we were inclined to revenge the insult you have offered to the man Murad sent on our part; the Nile would be sufficient to punish you, since God hath [has] put into our power his fountain, his outlet, and his increase, and that we can dispose of the same to do you harm; . . .”⁶⁸

This and other declarations of medieval Ethiopian kings clearly show that they knew the disastrous consequences of the diversion of the flow of the Blue Nile for the people of Egypt. They used the statements to fulfill their national interest whenever the Egyptian rulers violated it but it seems that they did not want to stop the flow of the Blue Nile.

Moreover, it would be far from convincing to say that Ethiopia, at that historical juncture, had the capacity to carry out such a grandiose project.⁶⁹ Some of the Ethiopian emperors reportedly did no more than offering a prayer; others are said to have refrained

from constructing a dam across the Blue Nile due to fear of God's punishment. In short, these occasionally made threats, apparently, were never implemented. In this regard there is little evidence that the Ethiopian emperors ever made any plans for the diversion of the Blue Nile. As Pankhurst noted, the occasional threat of the Ethiopian emperors was "no more than roars of a paper lion."⁷⁰ It is also noteworthy that some of the rulers of Ethiopia did not have direct control over the Blue Nile.⁷¹ The Scottish traveler James Bruce, in the second half of the eighteenth century, expressed his opinion on the diversion of the Blue Nile as follows: "In my time, no sensible man in Abyssinia believed that such a thing was possible, and few [believed] that it had ever been attempted."⁷² Despite this, the myth of stopping the flow of the Blue Nile and turning Egypt into a barren desert had been a nightmare for the Egyptians.

All the above sources provide only circumstantial evidence since we have little information about the hydro-political developments taking place between Egypt and Ethiopia. Therefore, in a strict sense the above explanation of hydro-politics, on the basis of these sources, is little more than myth. The propaganda of hydro-politics concerning the Blue Nile seems to have been transformed when Egypt attempted to control the source of the river and planned to unite the Nile Valley in the nineteenth century.⁷³ This was a turning point in the history of the hydro-politics of the Blue Nile and was the result of Egypt's attempt to remove the fear and suspicion of the diversion of the flow of the Nile as well as of its effort to replace the traditional system of irrigation-by-flooding by perennial irrigation so as to make better use of the potential of the Nile waters and maximize its agricultural production.⁷⁴ The idea of perennial irrigation in Egypt emerged under Turkish rule in the first decades of the nineteenth century.⁷⁵ Muhammad Ali, the

Ottoman Turkish governor, sought to monopolize agricultural and industrial production in Egypt through the expansion of cotton cultivation by using the waters of the Nile throughout the year and by storing the excess water.⁷⁶

In the nineteenth century, therefore, Muhammed Ali and his successors pursued a vigorous expansionist policy to the source of the Nile River. He took the initiative to realize the grandiose scheme of safeguarding the security and prosperity of Egypt by securing control over the source of the Nile and unifying Nile Basin.⁷⁷ He attained success in the Sudan in the 1820s and 1830s. Places like Massawa, Kassalé, Matammé and Bogos fell under Egyptian rule at different times.⁷⁸ It is noteworthy that the Egyptians' suzerainty and increasing influence at Massawa and Bogos and their surroundings inspired the later conception of the present state of Eritrea.

When the Egyptians invaded the northwestern borderlands of Ethiopia as far as Matammé, Ethiopia was going through the period of the *Zamana Maséfint* (Era of the Princes), when the power and prestige of the central state declined at the expense of regional lords. Since the central state was weak, the responsibility of stopping the Egyptian border raids fell on *Dajjézméché* Kinfu Héylu who was the ruler of the area. Kinfu defeated the invading Egyptian army at a place called Wad Kaltabu, around Matammé, in April or May 1837.⁷⁹ A year later, in June 1838, the lords of the *Zamana Maséfint*, namely *Rés* Ali, *Dajjézméché* Wube and *Dajjézméché* Kinfu wrote letters to the British and French Governments demanding military aid to stop the cross-border invasion of the Egyptians.⁸⁰ Késc Héylu, the future Tewodros II, fought against the Egyptians at a place called Dabérki in 1848.⁸¹ Késc was outnumbered and outmanoeuvred by the Egyptian troops who were equipped with modern armaments.⁸² It is believed that Késc's

idea of creating a disciplined army and desire for modern weapons emanated from the Battle of Dabárki.⁸³ For Kács, the Egyptians remained the arch enemy of Ethiopia throughout his life.⁸⁴

The same ambitious policy of making the Nile an Egyptian river was adopted by *Khedive* Isma`il (1830-95), grandson of Muhammad Ali, who came to power in 1863.⁸⁵ Isma`il explained the reason for his invasion of Ethiopia in the 1870s, thus: "...nature was already sending him down the best part of Ethiopia with each flood of the Nile, he had no desire for the residue..."⁸⁶ To materialize such a dream, therefore, *Khedive* Isma`il strengthened his army by employing mercenaries, military advisors and commanders from Europe and other places. One of them was the architect of the Egyptian invasion of Ethiopia in the 1870s, the Swiss-born Werner Munzinger.⁸⁷ Munzinger is said to have made the remark that:

... Abyssinia with a disciplined administration and army, and a friend of the European powers is a danger for Egypt; therefore she (Egypt) must either take Abyssinia and Islamize it or retain it in anarchy and misery.⁸⁸

It was this that induced *Khedive* Isma`il to wage an all-out invasion of Ethiopia in 1875 and 1876.

Nevertheless, the attempt led to the disastrous battles of Gundat (1875) and Gura (1876). Between 15 and 16 November 1875, more than 2,500 Egyptian soldiers including their commander Arendrup were routed at the battle of Gundat.⁸⁹ It seems that the Egyptians thought that the debacle had been the result of the size of the Ethiopian army, so on 5 December 1875 a strong Egyptian army of some twelve thousand men were sent

from Suez to Massawa under the command of Muhammad Ratib Pasha, assisted by General Loring, an American officer in the *Khedive's* service.⁹⁰ However, this force was also annihilated at the Battle of Gurc from 7 to 9 march 1876.⁹¹ In that same year Munzinger himself was killed by the Afcr.⁹² Moreover, Egyptian control over the Sudan was shaken to its foundation by the Mahdist insurrection in the early 1880s.⁹³

The stalemate between Egypt and Ethiopia came to an end in 1884 when they signed the Adwa or the Hewett Treaty mediated by Great Britain. Because of the treaty, as Rubenson noted, Ethiopia “traded one weak enemy for two strong ones, the Mahdist state and Italy.”⁹⁴ The conflict with the Mahdist state led to the destruction of life and property, and to the death of Emperor Yohannes IV (r. 1872-1889). The conflict with Italy put the political sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ethiopia under jeopardy. Britain entered the conflict caused by the Blue Nile issue by mediating between Ethiopia and Egypt.⁹⁵ In that same year, Egypt’s interest in the Upper Nile was further frustrated by the success of the Mahdists and its forced withdrawal from the Sudan. This episode marked a new chapter in the history of the hydropolitics of the Blue Nile. Great Britain superseded Egypt as a dominant factor in the hydropolitics of the Blue Nile until the middle of the twentieth century.

NOTES

(CHAPTER I)

¹The Blue Nile River is known in Ethiopia by the name Abbáy. But, since this thesis deals with the history of the politics of the river in the context of Ethiopia's relation with the lower riparian states, and with some significant external factors that affected the development of the basin within Ethiopian territory, I am obliged to use its international name, the Blue Nile.

²The Nile traverses a distance of 6,875 kms from its most remote source, the Luvironza River in Tanzania, to the Mediterranean Sea. See Tesfaye Tafesse, *The Nile Question: Hydropolitics, Legal Wrangling, Modus Vivendi and Perspectives* (Munster-Hamburg: Lit Verlag, 2001) p.24.

³Gishe Abbáy, in Sakalé district, is considered by the local people as well as early European missionaries and travelers as the source of the Blue Nile. On the other hand, hydrologists or water engineers often cite Lake Téné as the source of the river.

⁴ Tesfaye, *The Nile Question . . .*, p.27.

⁵ Alan Moorehead, *The Blue Nile* (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1974) p.14.

⁶ Daniel Kendie, "Egypt and the Hydropolitics of the Blue Nile River," *Northeast African Studies*, vol. 6, No.1 (1999) p. 144.

⁷H.E Hurst, *A Short Account of the Nile Basin* (Cairo: Government Press, 1941) pp.20,41; Yacob Arsano, "Predicament of Cooperation in the Nile Basin", *Ethiopia in Broad Perspective: Papers of the XIIIth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. II (Kyoto: Shokado Book Sellers, 1997) p.30.

⁸ "The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ministry of Water Resources, Abbáy River Basin Integrated Development Master Plan Project phase 2, section2, Main Report, Summary Development Strategy and Scenario, April 1999", p.11.

⁹Arun P. Elhance, *Hydro-politics in the Third World: Conflict and Cooperation in International River Basins* (Washington D.C: US Institute of Peace Press, 1999) p.56.

¹⁰Tesfaye, *The Nile Question . . .*pp.27-28.

¹¹For a brief description of the Nile Delta's irrigation activities, see Hurst, pp. 23-24.

¹²The Nile River Basin generally comprises ten riparian states: Egypt, the Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda, Kenya, Congo Democratic Republic, Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanzania. The entire basin is estimated to be 3.1 million Km². This roughly represents one-tenth of the entire African landmass. Statistical evidence shows that the area is currently being inhabited by 40 per cent of the continent's population. See Hurst, p.1; Samir Ahmed, *Egypt and the Nile A White Book* (Cairo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1980) pp.11-12; Tesfaye Tafesse, "Hydropolitical Perspective of the Nile Question", (paper delivered at the 8th Nile 2002 Conference, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, June 26-30, 2000), p.12; Ashok Swain, "Ethiopia, the Sudan, and Egypt: The Nile River Dispute", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol.35, No.4 (1997) p. 675.

¹³ The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ministry of Water Resources... p.11; Zewde Abate, "The Integrated Development of Nile Basin Waters", in P.P. Howell, *et al* (eds.) *The Nile: Resource Evolution, Resource Management Hydropolitics and Legal Issues* (London: Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies, SOAS, University of London, 1990), p.139; Swain, p.675.

¹⁴John Waterbury, *Hydropolitics of the Nile Valley* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1979) p. 23.

¹⁵The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ministry of Water Resources..., p.11.

¹⁶Waterbury, p.23.

¹⁷Zewde, p.139.

¹⁸*Ibid.*; Waterbury, p.23.

¹⁹Tesfaye, *The Nile Question...*,p.31.

²⁰Waterbury, p.25.

²¹In Tesfaye, *The Nile Question...*,p.31.

²²*Ibid.*, p.23.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴Various figures are given for the altitude of the lake. See White Engineering Corporation, *Report on Lake Tana Outlet Control Works and Ethiopian Highway from Addis Ababa to Lake Tana* (New York,1932) p.22.

²⁵H.E. Hurst *et al*, *The Nile Basin, The Future Conservation of the Nile* (Cairo: Eastern Press, reprint 1951) p.8.

²⁶Waterbury, p.14.

²⁷Bonaya Adhi Godana, *Africa's Shared Water Resources* (London: Frances Pinters Limited, 1985) p.83; D.C. Watt, "The High Dam at Aswan and the Politics of Control", in W.M Warrant and N. Rubin, *Dams in Africa* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1968) p.106.

²⁸Daniel, p.142; Elhance, p.54.

²⁹Elhance, p.54.

³⁰Yacob, p.31.

³¹Tesfaye, *The Nile Question...*, p.44.

³²Bureau of Reclamation, US Department of Interior, *Land and Water Resources of the Blue Nile Basin: Ethiopia*, Main Report and Appendices I-V (Washington D.C.: Printing Office, 1964) p.13 (This valuable study is available at the Ministry of Water Resource's Documentation Center).

³³Daniel, pp.154-161.

³⁴Bairu Tafla, "The Father of Rivers: The Nile in Ethiopian Literature" in Haggai Erlich & Israel Gershoni (eds.), *The Nile: Histories, Cultures, Myths* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 2000) pp.154-6.

³⁵Elhance, p.60.

³⁶*Ibid.*; Godana, p.83.

³⁷Zewde, p.141.

³⁸The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ministry of Water Resources..., p.139.

³⁹Zewde, p.139; The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ministry of Water Resources..., p.16.

⁴⁰Tesfaye, *The Nile Question...*,p.4.

⁴¹*Ibid.*,pp.120-121; Zewde, p.139; Swain, p.693.

⁴²Philip Caraman, *The Lost Empire (The Story of the Jesuits in Ethiopia)*, (London: Sidgwick & Jackson Limited, 1985) pp.105-106; F. Balthazar Tellez, *The Travels of the*

Jesuits in Ethiopia, Book I (London: J. Knapton, 1710) p.12; Robert E. Cheesman, *Lake Tana and the Blue Nile: An Abyssinian Quest* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1936) p.13.

⁴³Caraman, p.105.

⁴⁴For Almeida's description of the source of the Blue Nile, see C.F. Beckingham & G.W.B. Huntingford (eds.), *Some Records of Ethiopia, 1593-1646* (Nendeln/Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint Limited, 1967) pp.22-23.

⁴⁵Bruce provided a detailed account of ancient and medieval attempts to discover the source of the Nile and of his visit to the source of the Blue Nile. See James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile*, vol. III (Edinburgh, 1790) pp.603-653.

⁴⁶For a description of the source of the Blue Nile, see Antoine D'Abbadie, *Géographie de L'Éthiopie* (Paris: Gustave Mesnil, 1890) pp. 358-361.

⁴⁷Samir, p.1.

⁴⁸Moorehead, p.23.

⁴⁹Robert O. Collins, *King Leopold, England and the Upper Nile, 1889-1909* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968) p.10.

⁵⁰ Erlich and Gershoni (eds.), *The Nile...*, pp.1-3.

⁵¹Whether the factor was climatic or not needs to be ascertained.

⁵²Richard Pankhurst, "Ethiopia's Alleged Control of the Nile", in Erich and Gershoni (eds.), *The Nile...*, p.25.

⁵³Such stories were largely based on the writings of Arab writers and on other external sources. Indigenous sources have hardly been cited in writing the history of the idea of diverting the flow of the Nile in the early medieval period.

⁵⁴E.A Wailis Budge, *A History of Ethiopia, Nubia and Abyssinia* (London: Methuen Ltd, 1970) pp.279, 289; Pankhurst, "Ethiopia's...", p.25.

⁵⁵Budge, p.289; John Spencer Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952) pp.70-71; A.H.M. Jones & Elizabeth Monroe, *A History of Ethiopia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955) p.3; Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270-1527* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972) p.262.

⁵⁶Negussay Ayele, "The Blue Nile and Hydropolitics among Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan," *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol.I (Moscow: Nauka Publishers, 1986) pp.39-40.

⁵⁷Job Ludolphus, *A New History of Ethiopia* (London: Samuel Smith Book Sellers, 1682) p.41. (I used the one which was reprinted by Sasor Publishers in 1982); Enrico Cerulli, *Etiopi in Palestina, storia della comunita etiopica di Gerusalemme* Vol.I, (Roma: Scuola Tipografica Pio X, 1943), p.117; Budge, p.279.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁰Richard Pankhurst, *An Introduction to the Economic History of Ethiopia* (London: Lalibela House, 1961) p.269.

⁶¹Trimingham, pp.70-71,73; Budge, p.289.

⁶²Taddesse, p.256.

⁶³Pankhurst, "Ethiopia's....," pp.29-30.

⁶⁴Taddesse, pp.262-63.

⁶⁵*Ibid.* p.256; Cerulli, pp.117-118; O.G.S. Crawford, *Ethiopian Itineraries, ca.1400-1524* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958) p.145.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

⁶⁷Pankhurst, "Ethiopia's....," p.31.

⁶⁸Bruce, *Travels...*, Vol.II, p. 526.

⁶⁹The Europeans seem to have abandoned the idea of the diversion of the course of the Blue Nile by building a dam within Ethiopian territory in the late 17th century. In 1682, the German Ethiopianist, Ludolf, perhaps influenced by European visitors to Ethiopia, noted that: "I must confess, this thing has very much perplex'd my thoughts, ...For either to raise a Mole or Dam of stones, and then to remove it again, are things requiring so much toyl and labour, that the task does not way agree with the nature of the Abessines. And it seems somewhat unlikely that so vast a River, so long accustom'd to a declining and headlong course, should be diverted and compell'd to change its Channels." Ludolphus, pp.42-43.

⁷⁰Pankhurst, "Ethiopia's....," p.31.

⁷¹The first supposed attempt was in 1095 A.D. This was explained by Salt as follows: "The ignorance of the times may have favoured the opinion of the possibility of such an undertaking, but in all probability the only source of a river over which Lalibala had a command was that of the Tacazze, which takes its origin in Lasta." See Henry Salt, *A Voyage to Abyssinia, and Travels into the Interior of the Country* (London: W.Bulmer, 1814) p.473.

⁷²Bruce, *Travels...*, Vol. III, p.715.

⁷³Trimingham, p.115.

⁷⁴Gabriel Warburg, "The Nile in Egyptian-Sudanese Relations, 1956-1995," in Erich and Gershoni (ed.), *The Nile...*, p. 229.

⁷⁵Waterbury, p.32.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*

⁷⁷Trimingham, p.115; Mordechai Abir, *Ethiopia: The Era of the Princes* (London: Longman Group Ltd, 1968) p. 96.

⁷⁸Daniel, p.144

⁷⁹Sven Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* (reprinted), (Addis Ababa: Kuraz Publishing Agency, 1991) p.69.

⁸⁰For the texts of the letters see Sven Rubenson (ed) *Acta Aethiopica vol. I Correspondence and Treaties 1800-1854* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press & Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 1987) pp.34-37.

⁸¹Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991* (second edition) (Addis Ababa : Addis Ababa University Press, 2002) p.28.

⁸²*Ibid.*

⁸³*Ibid.*

⁸⁴It is also important to note that the major reason that led Tewodros to imprison Hormuzd Rassam was the latter's return to Ethiopia through Egypt.

⁸⁵Rubenson, *The Survival...*,p.311; Zewde Gabre-Sellassie, *Yohannes IV of Ethiopia: A Political Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975) p.54, Haggai Erlich, *The Cross and the River: Ethiopia, Egypt, and the Nile* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 2002) pp.66-67.

⁸⁶Czeslaw Jeasman, "Egyptian Invasion of Ethiopia", *African Affairs*, Vol.58, No.230 (1959) p.76.

⁸⁷Bahru, p.50.

⁸⁸Rubenson, *The Survival...*,p.290.

⁸⁹Zewde, pp.61-62

⁹⁰*Ibid.*,pp.64-66.

⁹¹*Ibid.*,pp.71-73

⁹²*Ibid.*,p.63

⁹³G.N Sanderson, *England, Europe and the Upper Nile, 1882-1899* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1965), p.3.

⁹⁴Rubenson, *The Survival...*,p.362.

⁹⁵Sanderson, p.13.

CHAPTER II

HYDROPOLITICS OF THE BLUE NILE IN THE ERA OF COLONIAL RIVALRY, 1884-1902

The opening of the Suez Canal, as an indispensable waterway between Great Britain and her important colony of India, in 1869, dramatically transformed the strategic importance of the Nile Basin. The Suez Canal was the primary factor that increased Egypt's importance in the eyes of British and French imperialism. The competition between the two powers continued in a different form even after Britain had unilaterally occupied Egypt in September 1882.¹ Subsequently, this episode added a new momentum to the hydrogeopolitics of the Blue Nile.

The British were well aware that Egypt heavily depended on the Nile waters. They also understood that their position as well as interest in Egypt could only be safeguarded if the British Government crystallized an elaborate policy that protected the security of the upper Nile. Hence, almost right from the British occupation of Egypt, British statesmen prompted their Government to protect the waters of the upper Nile, or at least keep it out of the reach of rival colonial powers. They recognized that any European penetration towards the Nile Basin posed a serious threat to Egypt, which would eventually put Britain's interest in jeopardy. In the 1880s, Sir Samuel Baker, in a series of letters to *The Times*, quoted Biblical texts referring to the seven years of famine that hit Egypt, in order to support his argument that the famine was the result of the diversion of the course of the

Nile River by the powers which were in control of the upper part of the river.² In October 1888, he stated that dams could be easily built across the Blue Nile and other rivers which spring from Ethiopia and flow to the Nile. Such dams would cause "the utter ruin and complete destruction of Egypt proper."³ Similarly, the British statesman in Cairo, Sir Evelyn Baring (later Lord Cromer), once reported to London as follows: "Whatever power holds the upper Nile must, by the mere force of its geographical situation dominate Egypt."⁴ Their warnings emphasized that British interest could only be secured when Egypt received uninterrupted flow of the Nile. Thus, protecting the Sudan and the upper basin areas from other powers had to be a priority in Britain's policy. Ultimately, the British Government crystallized its own official Nile policy in line with the aforementioned recommendations.

The upper Nile therefore became a subject of serious political concern to the British Government. The entire basin of the Nile, from the source of the river, was then believed to be necessary for the security and even survival of Egypt. Moreover, any interference within the Nile Basin by a rival power would put British position at the Suez Canal in peril.⁵ Apparently, this in turn might upset the balance of power in the Mediterranean region. Since the region not only served as the shortest route to India, but also provided Britain with naval ascendancy that would support Great Britain's diplomacy in the Near East and even in the continent of Europe.

The British concern was greatly increased by the growing interest of other European powers in the Nile Basin. Particularly the British considered the French and German penetration into the Nile Valley, since 1884-85, as a great danger.⁶ The Berlin Conference accelerated the process of the partition of the Nile Valley and the entire continent in general, which was caused by Bismarck's desire for territorial gains following

the British unilateral occupation of Egypt and France's subsequent disapproval of the annexation.⁷ The history of the Blue Nile issue therefore cannot be understood without some knowledge of the diplomatic history of the intricate rivalry among Great Britain, Italy and France that dominated the struggle for the control of the Upper Nile and of Ethiopia's struggle for survival as an independent state, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The British Government decided to safeguard the Blue Nile Basin either through diplomacy or any other possible means. It inherited the age-old Egyptian fear that the flow of the Blue Nile could be obstructed by their political enemies, if not by Africans, but certainly by technically advanced European powers.⁸ As explained in the previous chapter, the security of Egypt traditionally depended on control of the upper Nile, whose waters make the desert bloom. Ernest Work described the geopolitical significance of the Blue Nile as follows:

Since upon its mountains fall the abundant rains which furnish the very life of Egypt and the eastern Sudan, it is possible for the state in possession of these mountains to flood the valley of the Nile or make of it a blistering desert at will.⁹

It must be noted therefore that the real danger to Egypt's water supply was not to be found in the White Nile but rather in the Blue Nile.

Blue Nile's geopolitical importance during the era of colonial rivalry was described by Mesfin Wolde Mariam as follows:

The power that controlled Ethiopia controlled the Nile Valley including the Sudan and Egypt; the power that controlled the Nile Valley and Egypt controlled the Suez Canal; and the power that controlled the Suez Canal controlled the world.¹⁰

Apparently, it was with this concept in mind that Great Britain feared the penetration of other rival European powers into Ethiopia but encouraged Italian colonialism as a counterweight against other colonial powers.

As part of its concern for the security of the Blue Nile, the British Government violated the Adwa or Hewett Treaty of 1884 and gave the green light to Italian colonial ambition over Ethiopia. This British indirect maneuver through Italy was described by Earnest Work as follows: "They [Italians] could not have taken it [Ethiopia] without the approval of the British and most certainly did not without her invitation..."¹¹ More explicitly Bahru explained the basis of the Anglo-Italian friendship and conspiracy against Ethiopian independence: "...they [the British] wanted someone to watch over the Blue Nile and its Ethiopian sources and tributaries. This was the Anglo-Italian collision over Ethiopia..."¹² As the two authors clearly put it, the British Government attempted to safeguard its interest in the water of the Blue Nile through colonial horse-trading. Therefore, the Blue Nile issue was one of the basic factors behind the British benevolent neutrality to Italian colonial interest in Ethiopia.

In the period between 1885 and 1896, in the eyes of the British Government, Italian colonial penetration to the Ethiopian highlands seems to have been considered as having two advantages: keeping Ethiopia out of the Sudan and as a counterweight against its main rival in the Upper Nile, France, which had already established her position at Djibouti, and wanted to expand her empire towards the Nile.¹³ As Bahru noted: "Preventing the mortal enemy, France, from encroaching on the waters of the Nile became the primary objective of British imperialism."¹⁴

In January 1884, the negotiator of the Hewett or Adwa Treaty, Rear-Admiral Sir William Hewett, reported that the French Government through its consul at Massawa was

working to boost its diplomatic influence in Ethiopia.¹⁵ In November 1884, it was reported that the French vice- consul in Khartoum, M.Gaston Lemay, was ordered to send a mission to the court of Emperor Yohannes IV with the aim of establishing more active political and commercial contacts with the Ethiopian Government by securing the emperor's consent to the posting of a permanent French diplomatic agent at Adwa.¹⁶ Therefore ,the activity of the French in the country of the source of the Blue Nile River made the British ill at ease. This induced the British to decide to safeguard the security of the Blue Nile waters.

After the British-led Egyptian army had escaped from total annihilation in the Sudan, through Ethiopian territory, the British Government violated the terms of the Hewett Treaty and allowed Italy to occupy Massawa and its surroundings in 1885.¹⁷ The presence of the Italians, who had an ardent colonial interest in Ethiopia, in the region dated from their occupation of Assab, in 1869.¹⁸ Obviously, Italy was selected as an ally of Great Britain and allowed to establish herself around the source of the Blue Nile due to her weak position. The occupation of Massawa by Italy was described by Ernest Work as "---the first move in the game with Ethiopia as a pawn."¹⁹ The replacement of the Egyptians by the Italians at Massawa, as Rubenson noted, was the beginning of a new chapter in "---[Ethiopia's] struggle to preserve her integrity and independence."²⁰

The Italians from their base at Massawa penetrated deep into the healthier highland parts of northern Ethiopia. This Italian move was halted by the Ethiopian army under the command of *Rés Alulé* at the Battle of Dogéli on January 26, 1887.²¹ The aftermath of the incident clearly displayed Britain's conspiracy with Italy, her ally in the politics of the Blue Nile, against Ethiopian independence. The British Government, which pretended to be a mediator between Italy and Ethiopia, wrote to Emperor Yohannes informing him

that: "[Italy was] a powerful nation, with friendly and good intentions," which had been attacked "unjustly by Alula."²² Moreover, the British Foreign Minister, Lord Salisbury, dispatched a mission led by Gerald Portal from the British Legation in Cairo to Ethiopia to negotiate a settlement. The British Foreign Office attempted to coerce Emperor Yohannes to "...give entire credence to all that he [Portal] shall say to [him]--- on behalf of the Queen and Her Majesty's Government."²³ At that time Italy demanded that the Emperor apologize for *Rés* Alula's assault and recognize Italy's claim over some provinces north of the Marab River.²⁴ However, Emperor Yohannes rejected all the demands presented by the British Government on behalf of Italy.²⁵

In 1888, the Emperor and his force marched to Sa'ati, where the Italians had built a fort. Unfortunately, the Italians did not come out of their fort.²⁶ At that same time the Mahdists launched a major raid as a result of their hostility to Ethiopia following the peace settlement with Egypt. Consequently, the Emperor decided to deal with the Mahdists and lost his life fighting at the Battle of Matammé on 9 March 1889. Taking advantage of this episode and the subsequent power vacuum in the northern parts of the empire, the Italians occupied many places in the north and expanded westward to occupy Kassalé and thus gained a foothold in the Nile Valley.²⁷ It was during this time that the British began to be suspicious towards their Italian allies.

In August 1889, the British agent in Egypt, Baring, reported to Lord Salisbury that the westward advance of the Italians would bring the security of the Nile waters under jeopardy, if they were not checked.²⁸ In his reports to Salisbury from 15 December 1889 to January 1890, Baring stressed that the Italians had to be strained from their expansion towards the Blue Nile Basin.²⁹ On 15 March 1890, Baring also reminded Salisbury of the need to keep the Italians out of the Nile Valley. In his report, Baring emphasized that if

Britain failed to do so, any technically-advanced European power like Italy, trying to control the upper Nile, would dominate Egypt.³⁰ Salisbury's responses to the reports of Baring most certainly assured the latter that the British interest in the Nile Valley would be safeguarded whatever the cost might be. Finally, Baring concluded that only the immediate reconquest of the Sudan would safeguard the security of the waters of the Nile against Italy and other European powers, not "mere diplomatic remonstrances."³¹

The Italian aspiration to gain a foothold in the Blue Nile Basin shook Anglo-Italian friendship to its foundation since one of the basic factors for the creation of the alliance between the two powers was the issue of the Blue Nile waters. The year 1889 therefore can be taken as a landmark in the evolution of the British policy of the Nile. It was in this year that the British Government for the first time translated its policy of the Nile into action by giving an official warning to Italy.³²

The reasons why the security of the upper Nile became a dominant objective of British foreign policy in Africa since 1889 might be associated with the following developments: first, it was in that year that the British Government decided to make its occupation of Egypt permanent.³³ Secondly, the 1888 lowest flood record demonstrated that Egypt was entirely dependent on the waters of the Blue Nile.³⁴ Subsequently, from 1889 onwards the British not only began to pursue an active policy of defending the Nile waters but also to think of the need for some kind of hydraulic works in the upper Nile.³⁵ It is important to note that a sharp decline in the Nile flood in 1888 coincided with the Ethiopian Great Famine or *kifu qan* (1888-92). The famine is believed to have been caused by a terrible cattle plague that made it difficult for the peasants to cultivate their farmlands.³⁶ The low level of flood in Egypt indicates that there was a shortage of rainfall in the Ethiopian highlands, which was also a factor for the outbreak of the famine.

In March 1890, Great Britain officially cautioned Italy to stop encroaching upon the Blue Nile Basin.³⁷ On 2 May 1890, Baring suggested that Salisbury ask the Italian prime minister, Crispi, to send his representative to Cairo in order to exchange views regarding the delimitation of the two powers' spheres of influence.³⁸ Italy seems to have been enthusiastic to endorse this request because it wanted to use the deteriorating political situation in Ethiopia to materialize her age-old dream of establishing its rule over Ethiopia with the goodwill of Great Britain. This eventually led to the Anglo-Italian Treaty of 24 March 1891 which was signed between Dufferin, the British Ambassador in Italy, and di Rudini, the Foreign Minister of Italy.³⁹ According to this treaty, Italy agreed to stay out of the Blue Nile Valley and in return Britain gave recognition to Italy's spheres of influence over the Ethiopian highlands.⁴⁰

This *rapprochement* eventually led to the signing of perhaps the first major treaty on the Nile waters between Great Britain and Italy in Rome on April 15, 1891.⁴¹ The treaty was one of the two protocols signed between Great Britain and Italy to delimit their spheres of influence in Northeast Africa.⁴² It was signed after the Italians had occupied much of what is today Eritrea. There is a reference to the waters of Atbéré in Article III of the protocol. Therefore, the main issue in the treaty was the river not the boundary delimitation since this treaty had been signed long before the British reconquest of the Sudan. The article of the treaty pertinent to our discussion reads as follows: “---- The Italian Government engages not to construct on the Atbara [Takazze], in view of irrigation, any work which might sensibly modify its flow into the Nile.”⁴³ Moreover, Italy abandoned her prior claims of establishing a foothold within the Blue Nile Basin.⁴⁴ In other words, it recognized Britain's monopoly of interest in the Nile Valley. In return, Britain granted Italy the right to occupy Kassalé for temporary military use⁴⁵ against the

Mahdists who were in control of the middle course of the Blue Nile. The treaty was an outcome of a *rapprochement* between the two powers and enabled them to renew their friendship.

The Italians signed with *Negus* Menilek of Shawć, the Treaty of Friendship and Commerce in 1883 and the agreement of Neutrality in October 1887, (the latter in the event that the Italians went to war against Emperor Yohannes IV).⁴⁶ The relationship between the two attained its peak when the Wichale Treaty was signed on 2 May 1889.⁴⁷ On the basis of the Italian version of Article XVII of the Treaty, Antonelli, the Italian agent at the court of Shewć, endeavored to realize the Italian dream of a protectorate over Ethiopia. Menilek's appeal first for the amendment of the Treaty and later its termination clearly reflected the drama of the hydropolitics of the Blue Nile. The European powers recognized Italy's claims except France, Russia and Turkey, who were sympathetic to Ethiopia.⁴⁸ Particularly, the support of Britain for Italy and France for Ethiopia was a reflection of the Nile Valley politics. On 27 February 1893, Menilek informed the Italian Government that the treaty would cease to be valid as of May 1st 1894. Britain attempted to convince Menilek that he could not declare the Treaty null and void.⁴⁹

On the other hand, as a counterweight to the Anglo- Italian collusion against Ethiopian sovereignty, Emperor Menilek pursued an active policy of consolidating his friendship with the French and the Russian Governments.⁵⁰ Particularly, the French had an ardent interest in the upper Nile. Apparently, their interest in the region was not aimed at acquiring territory but rather at controlling the headwaters of the Nile and forcing Great Britain to enter into negotiations. This would enable the French Government to win a great diplomatic victory and undermine public criticism of the French loss of Egypt.⁵¹ The French, by rejecting Italy's colonial claim over Ethiopia, appeared as the latter's main ally.

Official correspondence between France and Ethiopia continued almost until the Battle of Adwa in 1896. Similarly, the French tried to obtain the goodwill of the Mahdists with the same motive.⁵² It was believed that French policy towards Ethiopia was more dangerous than their west-to-east advance in the African continent. It is important to note that since 1893 there was a widespread rumor in Europe that a French engineer named M. Victor Prompte was planning to construct a dam at the confluence of the Sobat and the Nile that could ruin Egypt " by drought or untimely flood."⁵³

The French Government offered Menilek a guarantee of the supply of arms and ammunitions,⁵⁴ which he was unable to import through Massawa after the area had been occupied by Italian troops. Needless to say, this French support contributed to Ethiopia's victory over the Italians at the Battle of Adwa in 1896. Moreover, the French Government promised to send Léonce Lagarde, governor of French Somaliland, to settle any difference of opinion about the boundary between Ethiopia and French Somaliland in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation.⁵⁵

The Ethiopian victory at Adwa was a major event in the history of the hydrogeopolitics of the Blue Nile. Adwa taught Britain that Italy was no longer prepared to serve as an instrument of the policy of safeguarding the security of the waters of the Blue Nile since Italy suffered a humiliating defeat and thus her position in the Nile Valley situation was greatly weakened. The victory brought Britain's carefully-constructed policy of safeguarding the waters of the Blue Nile to an end. It proved that the Italians were not able to ward off French penetration into the Nile Valley. Therefore, the British interest in the Blue Nile, which they thought had been saved by the Anglo- Italian alliance, was now in jeopardy. Apparently, this episode and the subsequent close understanding between Ethiopia and France, and their 1897 Treaty, worried the British very much.

After Ethiopia's victory over the Italians, the French became more active in Ethiopia. The Addis Ababa- Djibouti railway project that had been suspended since early 1894, when the railway agreement was first concluded, now began to be implemented.⁵⁶ On November 24, 1896, the French cabinet decided to send a mission to Addis Ababa led by Lagarde.⁵⁷ The mission was able to sign two major public and secret conventions with Emperor Menilek in Addis Ababa. As regards the first, Ethiopia acquired a large territory from France; in the second convention Ethiopia pledged to support France in her Nile valley struggle against Britain, whenever it was asked.⁵⁸

Menilek seems to have been aware that the British would eventually expand their territory to control the source of the Blue Nile. He therefore sent a number of missions proposing better relationship with the Mahdists and even to create a Nile Valley alliance against European powers.⁵⁹ In July 1896, he proposed an alliance against all Europeans, particularly 'the red English.'⁶⁰ Menilek also promised to provide information regarding the movement of the British.⁶¹ Unfortunately, however, such an alliance that could have halted the southward advance of the British, did not materialize because the Mahdists demanded that Menilek should stop completely any kind of dealings with the European powers, including commerce.⁶²

In April 1897, the British special envoy, Rennell Rodd, Lord Cromer's chief lieutenant in Egypt, accompanied by Wingate, arrived in Addis Ababa.⁶³ The major objectives of the mission were: to undermine the growing Franco-Ethiopian relations and to allay Emperor Menilek's suspicion that the British southward military operation in the Nile Valley under Kitchener was directed against Ethiopia.⁶⁴ Rodd was instructed to inform Menilek that the British military advance along the Nile River would be undertaken:

...for the purpose of regaining provinces which were formally under Egyptian rule, and that there is no intention whatever of taking any steps which could be considered hostile to Abyssinia or which would involve any encroachment on Abyssinian territory.⁶⁵

This mission eventually concluded a treaty with Emperor Menilek on 14 May 1897.⁶⁶ In the treaty the Emperor declared the Mahdists to be the enemies of his empire and agreed not to allow supply of arms and ammunitions to them through his territory.⁶⁷

The mission was also authorized to make concessions on the Blue Nile with Emperor Menilek II, based on the instruction received from Lord Cromer before it left Cairo.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, however, Menilek's reaction to the issue of the frontier between Ethiopia and the Sudan induced Rodd to abandon the Blue Nile issue as a point of discussion.⁶⁹ It is noteworthy that when the boundary issue was raised, Emperor Menilek referred to his famous circular of April 1891, in which he had made clear his own territorial claims. He claimed the whole area of the upper Nile as far as Khartoum and Lake Albert as a basis for negotiations with the British.⁷⁰ Hence, until the Battle of Omdurman and the Anglo-Egyptian occupation of the Sudan and the British reconnaissance of the area, the British believed that Menilek effectively occupied the upper part of both flanks of the Blue and the White Niles.⁷¹

The Rodd mission tried to point out that the Ethiopian claim was not incompatible with the Anglo-German Agreement or the Heligoland Treaty of 1890⁷² by which the British put the security of the source of the White Nile under their control. However, the Emperor said that he had never heard about the agreement and made it clear that he would not renounce his territorial claim.⁷³

The Rodd mission to Addis Ababa was, in broader terms, less successful than what the British Government expected. Nevertheless, the British Government became aware of the need to handle the emperor very carefully. It was to avoid any possible military confrontation with the Ethiopian army that in January 1898 Salisbury informed Emperor Menilek that the dispatch of the British troops to the Sudan did not pose a threat to his Empire.⁷⁴ Similarly, Queen Victoria sent Menilek a message of goodwill that was recorded on a phonograph.⁷⁵ As a means of avoiding any sort of complication with Ethiopia, Cromer also suggested a very generous territorial settlement that would cede to Ethiopia a large territory in the Sudan if the Emperor recognized the right of Egypt over the Nile along its whole length.⁷⁶

Finally, Rodd suggested that the negotiations concerning the frontier and the Blue Nile issue be postponed until Britain strengthened its naval force on the White Nile. At the end of his mission, Rodd reported to Salisbury as follows:

. . . very little could be gained by a discussion of our claims, or of the claims of Egypt in the Nile Valley until such time as Great Britain conquered the forces of the Khalifa in the Soudan;... we should have that moral force behind us in stating our claims...⁷⁷

Although the discussion on the frontier and the Blue Nile issues was postponed Rodd suggested the appointment of a permanent British diplomat in Ethiopia.⁷⁸ The Foreign Office accepted Rodd's proposal and appointed John Lane Harrington as Britain's agent in Ethiopia in November 1897.⁷⁹ In March 1898 Salisbury instructed Harrington to inform Menilek that the British Government supported the right of Egypt over the entire Nile Valley.⁸⁰ Referring to Salisbury's dispatch to Rodd, Cromer also reminded Harrington that before the Mahdist insurrection, the entire Nile Valley had been under Egyptian suzerainty. Thus, the right of Egypt over the area was generally accepted by

Great Britain; so in his dealings with Emperor Menilek regarding the matter “ . . . [Harrington] can give no answer [for Menilek’s request regarding the Nile Valley] without referring the matter home.”⁸¹ In April 1899, Harrington started a series of negotiations with Emperor Menilek regarding the western border with the Sudan and the waters of the Blue Nile and its affluents.⁸² But this does not mean that Harrington raised the Nile issue with the Emperor for the first time. Some sources indicate that he had started to discuss the Nile issue with the Ethiopian Government since November 1898. In the correspondence between Harrington and Rodd, Alfred Ilg, Menilek's advisor, is said to have remarked that the Emperor “knew his rights, and [was] well aware that he would not be alone as regards the valley of the Nile question, that it was an international question and Menilek would have the support of other powers.”⁸³

The Emperor insisted on his claim for sometime even after Harrington became British representative in Addis Ababa. Hence, Harrington, after he had learnt of Emperor Menilek's conviction, reported to Salisbury as follows: "under [the] impression that, no protest having been made, we [should] accept [the] proclamation [of] 1891."⁸⁴ Nevertheless, finally renouncing his earlier claims, in 1902 Menilek decided to settle the issue of the Blue Nile with the British by agreeing not to build a dam that would completely obstruct the flow of the river to the Sudan.⁸⁵

Indeed, the British diplomatic intervention in Ethiopia regarding the Blue Nile issue was not successful until 1898. As a result, the British Foreign Office seems to have been eager to effect its Nile policy by influencing Emperor Menilek, who until that time believed to have effectively occupied both flanks of the upper Nile. The British policy of securing the whole of the Nile Basin, including the Blue Nile, was finally resolved as a

by-product of Britain's military victory at Omdurman and Fashoda over the Mahdists and the French, respectively.

More than any other factors, the Ethiopian victory at Adwa and the subsequent weakening of Italy's position as guardian of the Blue Nile hastened the British occupation of the Sudan.⁸⁶ The Anglo-Egyptian army led by Lord Kitchener began slowly advancing southwards along the Nile. In September 1898, at the Battle of Omdurman, the Mahdist state fell under the Anglo-Egyptian forces.⁸⁷ As a result, the entire Sudan and the greater part of the Nile River came under British colonial rule. The British Government called their newly-conquered colony the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. This was done, as some writers have suggested, "to overcome European (primarily French) objection to its domination of the Nile."⁸⁸ As will become evident in the next chapter, the British occupation of the Sudan further galvanized the hydropolitics of the Nile River.

The British occupation of the Sudan demonstrated that Britain accepted the age-old Egyptian view of the entire Nile Basin as one economic and political unit. As Collins summarized: "The Nile was essential to Salisbury's overall imperial strategy [in Africa] the Cape-to-Cairo route was not."⁸⁹

After the fall of the Mahdist state, Britain confronted its main rival, France. The French expeditionary force led by Colonel Marchand marched to the upper Nile. This led to the Fashoda Crisis of 1898. The incident brought the two colonial powers to the very brink of war.⁹⁰ However, eventually France renounced her claim on the upper Nile because at that time it was not ready to go to war against Britain, a power with superior military and naval strength.⁹¹ The aftermath of the Fashoda Crisis clearly displayed that Britain had become an undisputed master of the upper Nile.

Rés Tasammé, who had marched in the direction of Fashoda was obliged to return in May 1897 after his soldiers had suffered from the lowland disease.⁹⁵ *Rés* Tasammé dispatched 800 troops under the command of *Fitéwréri* Héyle and accompanied by two Frenchmen, to the junction of the White Nile and the Sobót. They hoisted Ethiopian and French flags on the right and left side of the Nile, respectively. Then they withdrew from the place some twenty days before Marchand arrived at Fashoda.⁹⁶ Finally, the French, who were seeking Menilek's support, pledged by virtue of the declaration of 21st March 1899, not to acquire any territory or political influence within the Nile Basin.⁹⁷

The reason why Menilek refrained from providing effective support to the French was perhaps the fear that the British might regard him as potential enemy of their Nile policy and would send a military operation against him in order to secure the source of the Blue Nile. Menilek's policy towards the Nile Valley was apparently based on safeguarding Ethiopian interest without undermining the interest of any other European powers. Therefore, France's attempt to use Ethiopia as an instrument in her competition with Britain over the Nile Basin was doomed to failure. Finally, even though Ethiopia did not maintain her territorial claims, which were stated in the 1891 circular letter it was able to preserve her independence and integrity, and its jurisdiction over the Blue Nile and its source through an active diplomacy.

The British victories at Omdurman and Fashoda and their subsequent occupation of the Sudan also made the planning of comprehensive development schemes over the entire Nile Basin possible. Soon after the French had been forced to give up their claim over the Nile, Lord Cromer dispatched a reconnaissance expedition to the upper Nile led by Sir William Garstin, the chief of the Egyptian Public Works Department, in 1898.⁹⁸

Garstin compiled his report in 1899 and 1903.⁹⁹ This laid the foundation for the later hydraulic studies regarding the control and efficient utilization of the Nile waters.¹⁰⁰

Garstin's scientific expedition to the upper Nile stimulated modern irrigation in the lower riparian states, particularly in Egypt. Indeed, it is quite clear that irrigation by flooding in Egypt dates back to ancient times. The method of irrigation highly depended on the seasonal variation of rain around the source of the river. Human intervention using modern techniques in this Egyptian traditional method of irrigation by flooding had been insignificant until the first half of the nineteenth century.¹⁰¹ It was during the time of Muhammad Ali /1769-1849/, who is associated with the beginning of modern agriculture and industry in Egypt, that irrigation-by-flooding started to be replaced by perennial irrigation.¹⁰² This was accompanied by the construction of modern flood control works in the Nile Valley. Subsequently, in the early 1860s, the Egyptians were able to complete the Rosetta and Damietta barrages. These barrages symbolized the beginning of modern water regulation mechanism or engineering works in Egypt.¹⁰³ Such a shift towards modern control techniques was further intensified and began to be implemented as a basin-wide project soon after the occupation of the Sudan.

The British experts in Egypt introduced various plans for regulating the Nile waters through different mechanisms such as: damming, canalization and diversion. The Nile flood fluctuated from year to year. In one year it became low and some times the flood threatened the foundations of the dams. This necessitated designing a basin-wide hydraulic project for long-term storage. Among the most ambitious hydraulic projects that were conceived and practically implemented under British colonial administration in Egypt and the Sudan was the "Century Storage Scheme."¹⁰⁴ This plan was first proposed by William Garstin of the Egyptian Public Works Department in 1902.¹⁰⁵ It should be

noted that this scheme was aimed at safeguarding Egyptian interest in the basin. The construction of hydraulic work outside the political boundary of Egypt apparently made Egypt more vulnerable than ever before. But for the British the hydraulic works, as will become apparent in the next chapter, seem to have been considered as a means for safeguarding their interest in Egypt.

The “Century Storage Scheme” was a complex system of dams, canals, and diversions stretching from the two sources of the Nile up to the Egyptian Delta. Turning Lake T́cnć, the headwater of the Blue Nile into a water reservoir was therefore part of this ambitious plan.¹⁰⁶ However, Collins unconvincingly noted that until 1903 the Ethiopian rivers, including the Blue Nile, did not receive any attention from the British engineers who were in the service of the Egyptian Public Works Department. He wrote: “The holy spring of Sakala, the emerald waters of Lake Tana, and the wine dark flow of the Abbai remained an after thought in the Anglo-Egyptian designs for Nile control.”¹⁰⁷ The Foreign Office archival sources reveal that in 1899 an engineer named Russel Aitken, in his memorandum, clearly noted that British engineers had almost precise knowledge about the potential of Lake T́cnć and the Blue Nile. He wrote:

In my letter of 1899 I stated that it is absolutely necessary that the works at Lake Tana should be in charge of an independent company, working on a concession to be granted by the Emperor Menelek II of Ethiopia, as His Imperial Majesty is not at all likely to allow a Foreign Government to possess works and land and so to get a footing in his country.¹⁰⁸

Moreover, he even estimated the amount of water that Lake T́nā could store in 1899.¹⁰⁹ This clearly indicates that the British had undertaken some sort of hydraulic studies in the Blue Nile Basin before 1899. After all without prior knowledge of the potential of Lake T́cnć, it could not have been mentioned in both the 1902 Exchange of Notes¹¹⁰

and the Ethio-Sudanese Boundary Agreement.¹¹¹ From this it is possible to say that the idea of building a dam at Lake Tana had already been conceived before the turn of the century.

Apparently, the “Century Storage Scheme” targeted the Blue Nile Basin, not the White Nile because the Blue Nile contributes not only the greater portion of the annual Nile Waters discharge but also it shows a high degree of fluctuation in the volume of its flood as compared to the White Nile. The latter rises in the equatorial rainforest region, where rainfall is almost permanent throughout the year, and hence does not show irregularity. Therefore, it was the Blue Nile that necessitated human interference to ensure the availability of water throughout the year for permanent irrigation and for expanding the land under irrigation.

After the British identified the Blue Nile as source of the water supply for Egypt,¹¹² they attempted to control the source of the Blue Nile through a series of diplomatic initiatives taken by their agent, Harrington, aimed at gaining Emperor Menilek’s consent through a written agreement. Harrington’s efforts of securing the agreement of Emperor Menilek concerning the Blue Nile and Lake Tānā eventually succeeded when notes were exchanged between Harrington and Menilek’s advisor, Alfred Ilg, on 18 March 1902 (two months before the Ethio-Sudanese boundary agreement was signed):

Harrington wrote to Mr. Ilg:

That there is no interference with the waters of the Blue Nile and Lake Tsana, except in consultation with His Britannic Majesty's Government and the Government of the Sudan; that in case of any such interference, all other conditions being equal, preference will be given to the proposals of His Britannic Majesty's Government and that His Majesty the emperor Menelik has no intention of giving any concession with regard to the Blue Nile and Lake Tsana except to His Britannic Majesty's Government and the Government of the Sudan, or one of their subjects.¹¹³

Mr. Ilg after saying that he was authorized by Emperor Menilek repeated the words of Harrington in assurance of the latter's request as follows:

Il n'y aura aucune intervention pour les eaux du Nil Bleu et du Lac Tsana, excepté en consultation avec le Gouvernement de sa Majesté Britannique et le Gouvernement du Soudan; qu'en cas d'une telle intervention, toutes les autres conditions étant égales, préférence va être donnée aux propositions du Gouvernement de sa Majesté Britannique et du Gouvernement du Soudan; et que sa Majesté l'Empereur Menilek n'a aucune intention de donner une concession regardant le Nil Bleu et le Lac Tsana à d'autres qu'au Gouvernement de sa Majesté Britannique et au Gouvernement du Soudan, ou à un de leurs sujets.¹¹⁴

That there is no interference with the waters of the Blue Nile and Lake Tsana, except in consultation with His Britannic Majesty's Government and the Government of the Sudan; that in case of any such interference, all other conditions being equal, preference will be given to the proposals of His Britannic Majesty's Government and that His Majesty the emperor Menelik has no intention of giving any concession with regard to the Blue Nile and Lake Tsana except to His Britannic Majesty's Government and the Government of the Sudan, or one of their subjects.

The notes clearly show that Great Britain's interest was the Blue Nile and Lake Tānā. After the British got this guarantee of non- interference with the waters of the Blue Nile and Lake Tćnć, the way was clear for the signing of the Ethio-Sudanese Boundary Agreement of 1902.

NOTES
(CHAPTER II)

¹Ernest Work, *Ethiopia: A Pawn in European Diplomacy* (New Concord, 1935), p.11; Robert O. Collins, *King Leopold, England and the Upper Nile, 1899-1909* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969) pp.7-8; Haggai Erlich, *The Cross and the River. . .* ,p.66.

² Collins, *King Leopold. . .* p.5.

³ Quoted in William L. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, second edition, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p.106.

⁴ Quoted in Collins, *King Leopold . . .* , p.12

⁵ Sanderson, *England* , p.34.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.34.

⁷ Langer, p.101.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.116.

⁹ Work, p.11.

¹⁰ Mesfin Wolde Maryam, *An Introduction to Geography of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa Berhanena Selam Printing Press, 1972) p.4.

¹¹Work, p.64.

¹² Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1974* (London: James Currey Ltd, 1991) p.73.

¹³ Work, pp.58-59; Langer, pp. 108-109.

¹⁴ Bahru, *A History. . .* p. 73.

¹⁵ Harold Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II, Ethiopia 1844-1913* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975) p.82.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷For the Italian occupation of Massawa see Bahru, *A History Modern Ethiopia*, p. 56.

¹⁸For the Italian acquisition of Assab, see *ibid.*

¹⁹ Work, p.378.

²⁰ Rubenson, *The Survival . . .* , p.63.

²¹See Taddesse Beyene *et al* (eds.) *The Centenary of Dogali: Proceedings of the International Symposium*, Addis Ababa-Asmara, January 24-25, 1987 (Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1988) p.5.

²² Quoted in Rubenson, *The Survival . . .*, p.381.

²³ Letter No. 1, The Marquis of Salisbury to the King of Abyssinia, Foreign Office, London, October 12,1887, in Gerald H. Portal, *My Mission to Abyssinia* (London: Edward Arnold, 1892) p.170.

²⁴ Yohannes to Her Majesty the Queen, Ashangi, 24th Hedar, 1880, in Portal, *My Mission. . .*,P.174.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶Rubenson, *The Survival . . .*, p.383.

²⁷Collins, *King Leopold . . .* p.13.

²⁸Sanderson, *England. . .*, p.70.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰*Ibid.*,pp.70-71.

³¹*Ibid.* p.71

³²Harold Marcus, “Ethio-British Negotiations Concerning the Western Border with Sudan, 1896-1902”, *Journal of African History*, vol.4, No.1 (1963) p.81; Collins, p.13.

³³Marcus, “Ethio-British . . .,” p.81.

³⁴ Langer, p.106-7: 574.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ For the Great Ethiopian Famine or *kifu qen* see Bahru, *A History.. .*, pp. 71-72.

³⁷ Collins, *King Leopold . . .*,p.13.

³⁸ Sanderson, *England. . .*, p.72.

³⁹ Sir E. Hertslet, *The Map of Africa by Treaty*, Vol.3 (London:Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1967) p.948.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Bahru Zewde,“Relations Between Ethiopia and the Sudan on the Western Ethiopia Frontiers, 1898-1935” (PhD Thesis, University of London, 1976) p.27.

- ⁴³ Hertslet, p.950.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 949-950.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.949.
- ⁴⁶ Rubenson, *The Survival. . .* , pp.379; 383.
- ⁴⁷ For the Treaty of Wichale See Hertslet, Vol. II, pp.454-455.
- ⁴⁸ Rubenson, *The Survival. . .* , p.395.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.394.
- ⁵⁰ Bahru, “Relations. . . ,” p.27.
- ⁵¹ P.M. Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan 1881-1898*, Second Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970) p. 226.
- ⁵² Sanderson, *England...*,p.255.
- ⁵³ Patricia Wright, *Conflict on the Nile: the Fashoda Incident of 1898* (London: Heinemann, 1972) p.45.
- ⁵⁴ Harold G. Marcus, “The Foreign Policy of the Emperor Menelik 1896-1898: A Rejoinder,” *Journal of African History*, Vol.VII, No.1, 1966,p.119.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁶ For the background to the work of the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway see Shiferaw Bekele, “The Railway Trade and Politics: A Historical Survey 1896-1935” (MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1982) pp.18-78.
- ⁵⁷ Marcus, *The Life and Times. . .* p.179.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁹ G.N. Sanderson, “Contributions from African Sources to the History of European Competition in the Upper Valley of the Nile,” *Journal of African History*, Vol.III, No.I (1962) pp.84-85.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.84.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.* p.85.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*
- ⁶³ For Rodd’s appointment as British special envoy to Ethiopia see F.O. 1/32, Salisbury to Rodd, Instructions, 27 February 1897.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ F.O.1/33, Rodd to Salisbury, 14 May 1897.

⁶⁷ F.O. 1/32, Rodd to Salisbury, 15 May 1897; Hertslet, Vol. II, p.424.

⁶⁸ F.O. 1/32, Salisbury to Rodd, Instructions, 27 February 1897.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Menilek gave Rodd the following circular in 1891:



Previously, on *Myazya* 14, 1883 E.C., I sent to all European Governments a letter that referred to the territorial limit of the Ethiopian Government. However, since you said that this letter had never reached your Government, I am now sending you a copy of that letter. I would like you to notify the British Government as soon as you arrive home.

FO1/32, Menilek to Rodd, 7 *Ginbot* 1889 E.C/May 15, 1897).

⁷¹ Sanderson, *England...*, p.259.

⁷² F.O. 1/32, Rodd to Menelik, 14 May 1897.

⁷³ FO1/32, Menilek to Rodd, *Ginbot* 7, 1889 E.C (May 15, 1897).

⁷⁴ Sanderson, *England...*, p.260.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ F.O.1/35, Cromer to Salisbury, Telegram. No 77^a, 5 March 1898

⁷⁷ F.O. 1/32, Rodd to Salisbury, 4 May 1897.

⁷⁸ F.O. 1/32, Rodd to Salisbury, 18 June 1897.

⁷⁹ Marcus," *Ethio-British ...*," p.85.

⁸⁰ Sanderson, *England...*, p.260.

⁸¹ F.O.1/35, Cromer to Harrington, 5 March 1898.

⁸² Marcus," *Ethio-British ...*," p.88

⁸³ F.O.1/35, Harrington to Rodd, 23 November 1898.

⁸⁴ F.O.1/35, Harrington to Salisbury, Telegram No.2, 2 May 1898.

⁸⁵ See note No 99.

⁸⁶ Bahru described the episode as follows: “ ...it remains true that Adwa, as much as it assured the political independence of Ethiopia, hastened the British conquest of the Sudan.” Bahru, “Relations...,” p.29.

⁸⁷ For detailed discussion on the collapse of the Mahdist state, see Holt, pp.223-43.

⁸⁸ Gabriel Warburg, “The Nile in Egyptian- Sudanese Relations, 1956-1995” in Erlich and Gershoni (ed.), *The Nile...*,p.229.

⁸⁹ Collins, *King Leopold...*, p.27.

⁹⁰ For detail discussion about the Fashoda Incident of 1898 see Wright, pp. 118-209.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.209.

⁹² G,N Sanderson “Emir Suleyman Ibn Inger Abdullah An Episode in the Anglo-French Conflict on the Upper Nile, 1896-1898,” *Sudan Notes and Records*, Vol.35 (1954) p.63.

⁹³ F.O.1/34, Harrington to G.J.Walher, 11 May 1898.

⁹⁴ Takla Iyasus, “Ya Ityopyc Tcrik: Nigus Takla Héymcnot” Institute of Ethiopian Studies, MS 254, Addis Ababa University, Folio 105-106.

⁹⁵ Marcus, *The Life...*, p 187.

⁹⁶ F.O.1/34, Harrington to G.J.Walher, 11 May 1898.

⁹⁷ F.O. 371/12341, Foreign Office Memorandum by Mr. Ronald, 31st May 1927.

⁹⁸ Robert O. Collins, “The Best Laid Schemes O’ mice and Men’: In Search for the Waters of the Nile,1900-2000”, Paper for July 1998 Training Program ~Debre Zeit Workshop, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.” (This paper is available at the Library of the Ministry of foreign Affairs).

⁹⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁰¹Hurst *et al*, *The Nile Basin the Future Conservation of the Nile*, (Cairo: Eastern Press, reprinted 1951), p.3; D.C. Watt, “ The High Dam at Aswan and the Politics of

Control”, in W.M. Warrant & R. Rubin, *Dams in Africa*, (New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1968), p.106.

¹⁰²H.E. Hurst, *A Short Account of the Nile Basin*, (Cairo: Government Press, 1941), p.50.

¹⁰³Tesfaye, *The Nile Question...*,p. 34.

¹⁰⁴For a detailed description of the “Century Storage Scheme” see Hurst *et al*, pp.3-9.

¹⁰⁵George Tombe Lako, “The Impact of the Jonglei Scheme on the Economy of the Dinka”, *African Affairs*, Vol. 84, No.334, (1985), pp.16-17.

¹⁰⁶See Note.104.

¹⁰⁷Collins, “The Best Laid...,” p.3.

¹⁰⁸F.O.1/52, Memorandum by Mr.Russel Airken, 29 March 1905.

¹⁰⁹F.O. 371/2 W.M. Bell to the Earl of Cromer , 22nd March, 1906.

¹¹⁰F.O.93/2/8, Harrington to Mr.Ilg, Addis Ababa, March 18,1902; Mr. Ilg to Harrington, Addis Ababa, le18 Mars, 1902.

¹¹¹F.O.93/2/5, Treaty Between Great Britain and Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, 15 May 1902.

¹¹²See F.O. 1/52, Memorandum by Mr. Russel Aitken, 29 March 1905. In his memorandum Aitken in 1899 wrote to the Foreign Office stating the need for a granting of a concession from Emperor Menilek to build a dam at the outlet of Lake Tćnc.

¹¹³ F.O.93/2/8, Harrington to Mr. Ilg, Addis Ababa, March 18, 1902.

¹¹⁴F.O.93/2/8, Mr. Ilg to Harrington, Addis Ababa, le 18 Mars, 1902.

CHAPTER III

THE DYNAMICS OF AGREEMENTS AND NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE UTILIZATION OF THE WATERS OF THE BLUE NILE, 1902-1941

After the entire Nile Basin, extending from the source to the mouth of the river, except Ethiopia and Belgian Congo, had fallen under the British colonial rule, some of the legal agreements that denied the upper riparian states the right to unilateral utilization of the river and its tributaries within their territorial jurisdiction were concluded. Britain employed its supremacy in Northeast African power politics, which she had achieved after the Fashoda Incident of 1898, to coerce the powers in control of the upper riparian states to sign these agreements that are now considered as major impediments to equitable and fair utilization of the waters of the Nile River. The discussions and negotiations that led to the Nile waters agreements of the colonial period, as will become evident later, were not aimed at facilitating the utilization of the water resource of the Nile by the riparian states. Instead, as convincingly argued by scholars, the Nile waters agreements favoured the lower riparian states, Egypt and to some extent the Sudan, at the expense of the upper ones.¹

After Britain had established its rule over the Sudan and discovered that the Blue Nile was a major source of the Nile waters, it found it necessary to safeguard her interest in the waters of the Blue Nile, whose source lay outside its direct control, through treaties and other instruments. To this end, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Britain, through its permanent diplomatic agent in Addis Ababa, Harrington, invoked the formal agreements and made protracted efforts to obtain more concessions on the utilization of the Blue Nile waters from the Ethiopian Government. Eventually, Harrington, succeeded in signing an agreement on the Blue Nile waters with Emperor Menilek II in Addis Ababa on 15 May 1902. It was signed as part of the Ethio-Sudanese Boundary Agreement between the Emperor and Harrington, the latter on

chapter. But it is important to point out that Egypt's misinterpretation of the article is one of the major factors that has politicized the Blue Nile issue.

The British themselves did not question Ethiopia's right of utilizing the waters of the Blue Nile. Exactly twenty five years after the aforementioned treaty had been signed, they referred to Ethiopia's right to use her water resource in a draft treaty they brought for the negotiation of the Lake Tānā dam. Article 8 of the draft agreement of 1927 reads as follows:

The riparian rights of the inhabitants dwelling on both sides of the Blue Nile throughout its length in Ethiopian territory to use this water for domestic purposes, as well as for the cultivation of food crops necessary for their own subsistence, will not be questioned, but it is understood that no attempt will be made to arrest, divert or obstruct in any way the flow of the Blue Nile or its tributaries in a manner contrary to Article 3 of the treaty with the Emperor Menelik of the 15th May 1902.⁶

In the literature, scholars have analysed the agreement in relation to the question of the utilization of the water resource of the Blue Nile.⁷ Such analysis was made from the perspective of Ethiopia's present need for using the waters of the Blue Nile. Hence it does not help us to understand the agreement in a historical context. A more objective way of examining the treaty, in my view, would be to pose (and answer) the question: Why did Menilek sign the agreement? One possible explanation is that he was coerced although apparently indirectly. Had Menilek refused to recognize Britain's interest in the waters of the Blue Nile, the British would not have signed the treaty that delimited the Ethio-Sudanese boundary. Although Ethiopia did not confer its water right on the British, it is apparent that the Emperor gave more attention to the boundary issue than to the utilization of the waters of the Blue Nile. It is clear that rain-fed agriculture was

enough for the population of the country. Problems of recurrent drought, environmental degradation, overpopulation and exhaustion of the land resources of the country were not critical issues, in the days of Menilek, as they are today. Therefore, the diplomatic benefit that Menilek hoped to and did obtain from the treaty was the delimitation of the boundary between Ethiopia and the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.

However, this does not mean that the border question had greater significance than the Blue Nile waters issue, as Marcus argued.⁸ For the British the boundary was not a matter of priority but rather the Blue Nile waters. This fact can be inferred from the following remark:

... he [Baring] had of course long been aware of the need to safeguarding the waters of the upper Nile, but once the Nile waters had been secured he was prepared to give away the mere territory of the Southern Sudan to any one who would take it-to King Leopold, to the Negus Menelik, even to the French if they would stop their 'constant heckling in Egypt.'⁹

It was with this in mind that the British exchanged notes concerning the waters of the Blue Nile with the Ethiopian Government before they entered into a boundary agreement.

After Britain had obtained assurance from the Ethiopian Government about unobstructed and continuous flow of the Blue Nile River to Egypt and the Sudan through political and legal manoeuvres, it tried to obtain Italian and French acknowledgement of its interest in the Blue Nile and its source. This led to the signing of the Tripartite Agreement of 1906 between Great Britain, Italy and France. The agreement was signed in London on December 13, 1906.¹⁰ In the treaty, Britain succeeded in obtaining recognition of its interest in the Blue Nile waters by France and

Italy. The terms that stressed the importance of the Blue Nile Basin for British interest are stipulated in Article IV (a) of the Tripartite Agreement in which, France and Italy agreed to act together and to safeguard:

the interests of Great Britain and Egypt in the Nile Basin, more especially as regards the regulation of the waters of that river and its tributaries [due consideration being paid to local interests] without prejudice to Italian interests.¹¹

The treaty might not be accepted as a legal agreement since it contradicted with their recognition of Ethiopia as an independent state. It was concluded between the three colonial powers without the knowledge and involvement of the Ethiopian Government. Nevertheless, as will become evident later, the Tripartite Agreement became one of the major impediments to an agreement on or grant of concessions for the construction of a dam on the Blue Nile at its outlet on Lake Tānā. Apparently, the agreement increased the suspicion of the Ethiopian state since granting a concession for the construction of the dam to Britain might undermine Ethiopian sovereignty and territorial integrity.

According to the Tripartite Agreement, Italy was given a corridor through which to construct a railroad that would connect its colonies of Eritrea and Italian Somaliland.¹² The area west of Addis Ababa was considered by Italy as its colonies' economic hinterland.¹³ In this division of spheres of influence, France was awarded exclusive monopoly over the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway.¹⁴

The Tripartite Agreement of 1906 was signed without the knowledge of the Ethiopian Government which was asked later to endorse the terms of the agreement. However, Emperor Menilek repudiated the agreement with the following declaration:

we have received the arrangement made by the three powers. We thank them for their communication and their desire to keep and maintain the independence of our Government. But let it be understood that this arrangement in no way limits what we consider our sovereign rights.¹⁵

The first decade of the twentieth century witnessed a major breakthrough in the hydrological study of the Blue Nile Basin. British water engineers collected data required for designing hydrological projects for the Blue Nile from which the peoples of Egypt and the Sudan would benefit. This clearly reflected a shift from protecting the Blue Nile and its source from any possible rival power to developing the water system for the benefit of the downstream states. At that time merely safeguarding the flow of the river was no longer sufficient to satisfy the growing need for water both in the Sudan and Egypt. It was this effort that enabled the British engineers, working for the Egyptian Public Works Department, to understand that the Blue Nile contributes by far a greater amount of water to the main Nile.

Successive expeditions to Lake T́cnć were planned partly for scientific purposes but mainly for optimal utilization of the waters of the Blue Nile for irrigation in the Sudan and Egypt. Although agriculture was Ethiopia's main basis of economy, its expansion by using the water of the Blue Nile seems to have been abandoned as an issue under the pretext that Ethiopia was fairly blessed with abundant rainfall. Such expeditions that did not take the development of the Ethiopian basin into consideration were sent to Lake T́cnć to study the feasibility of the dam project under British sponsorship in 1902.¹⁶

In 1902, the Egyptian Government was authorized by Emperor Menilek to send a mission led by C.E. Dupuis, Inspector-General in the Egyptian Irrigation Service, to Lake Téné in order to explore the possibility of turning the Lake into a reservoir.¹⁷ The result of this study was published under the title “Report upon Lake Tsana and the Rivers of the Eastern Sudan” in 1904 in Sir William Garstin’s *Report upon the Basin of the Upper Nile*.¹⁸ Dupuis reached the conclusion that the construction of a control structure at Bahir Dar would help store the surplus water of the rainy season and discharge it during the dry season or whenever the water was needed.¹⁹ Both Dupuis and Garstin agreed that the Lake was the most suitable site of the reservoir but they expressed their fear that immediate realization of the project could not be achieved due to political reasons. Hawkshaw and Vernon-Harcourt expressed their fear in 1906 as follows:

The only objections...against the utilization of Lake Tsana for supplying the additional water so urgently needed for the extension of summer irrigation in Egypt are the political obstacle caused by the jealousy of the Emperor Menelek with regard to any foreign Government obtaining a footing in Abyssinia for fear that it might endanger the independence of this Country...²⁰

Based on scientific reports and recommendations, the British Government, relying on the promise made during the 1902 Agreement, began to request the Ethiopian Government to authorize it to construct a dam across the Blue Nile at its outlet on Lake Téné, at Kanfaro.²¹ Side by side with its efforts to protect its interest in the Blue Nile

and its source, Britain made several attempts to obtain a concession from the Ethiopian Government that would enable her to use the waters of the Blue Nile and build a dam at the outlet of Lake T́nć and constructing a reservoir in the area where there was a minimum evapo-transpiration rate as compared to places in the Sudan and Egypt and at a minimum cost.²² Moreover, it seems that the British Government became aware that British position in Egypt and the Sudan would be safe if it exploited this resource as a political instrument by building the dam in Ethiopian territory and used it whenever Egypt and the Sudan challenged British rule.²³

The idea of the dam project was closely associated with the British plan of establishing a cotton farm in the Sudan, i.e, the famous Gezira Plantation Scheme.²⁴ Since its establishment in 1902, the British Cotton Growing Association (BCGA), prompted the Government to establish a cotton farm in the British empire.²⁵ After the collapse of the American raw cotton export to Europe, the British textile mills at Lancashire and Manchester experienced shortage of cotton supply.²⁶ The search for another source of raw cotton led to the birth of the Gezira Cotton Plantation in the Sudan that could rely on the utilization of the waters of the Blue Nile.²⁷ The possibility of building an irrigation canal from the Blue Nile made Gezira an ideal center for cotton plantation. Moreover, the connection of Gezira to the Red Sea coast by rail increased the profitability of the project.²⁸ Therefore, the building of a dam at the outlet of Lake T́nć was considered as a remedy for the colonial administrative expenses of the British Government in Egypt and the Sudan.²⁹

Hydraulic studies of the Blue Nile's annual water discharge made it clear that the river supplied more water than what the Gezira Cotton Plantation required.³⁰ However, the flow of the Blue Nile fluctuated within a year. It was estimated that the Blue Nile

discharged half of its annual water supply during the Ethiopian rainy season (from July to the end of September). On the other hand, the discharge became very low during the dry season (between January 1st and July 15th).³¹ In this season the plantation required additional supply of not less than 13,000 or 14,000 million cubic meters of water.³² Therefore, since the British colonial administration gave priority to Egypt's agriculture, cotton production in the Sudan became important only in the season when the Blue Nile supplied its maximum flood, during the Ethiopian rainy season. Thus the implementation of the most ambitious scheme of the Gezira directly depended on the creation of a perennial water supply of the Blue Nile by turning Lake Ténć into a water reservoir.³³ It was believed that by creating the water reservoir at the source of the Blue Nile at least one million acres of cotton farm could be cultivated in the Sudan without reducing the water demand of Egypt.³⁴

Therefore, the British began their protracted diplomatic negotiations with the Ethiopian Government to secure the dam concession through a legal agreement. The earliest reference to the British effort of constructing a dam at Lake Ténć by promising annual payment to the Ethiopian Government can be traced back to some time before March 1905. A letter submitted to Emperor Menilek by Russel Aitken, a British engineer, stated that he was ready to pay 100,000 pounds sterling per annum to the Ethiopian Government if the Emperor agreed to grant him the dam concession.³⁵ It was stated that the construction of the dam would be completed within two years. In this period the payment would be 25,000 pounds sterling per year with the first payment to be made on January 1st, 1906.³⁶ Nevertheless, such proposals by private individuals or companies were not palatable to the Anglo-Egyptian Government. Instead, the stand of the Government was reflected in Cromer's remark on 9 April 1906: "The Egyptian

Government is not prepared to support any proposal which involves placing any of the main sources of the water supply of the Nile in the hands of private individuals.”³⁷ This idea sharply contradicted with the interest of the Ethiopian Government and became a major obstacle to the negotiation process.

In 1907, the British Legation in Addis Ababa was instructed to notify Emperor Menilek that the British Government promised an annual payment of 10,000 pounds sterling to the Ethiopian Government if the latter agreed to offer the Lake Táná Dam concession.³⁸ Apparently, the Ethiopian Government never accepted the proposal of the British Government for the dam project. Nevertheless, the British Government ventured to materialize its interest through various methods of diplomatic maneuvering. Although the prolonged attempt of the British Government was doomed to failure, the issue left a decisive imprint on the history of Ethiopia in the first half of the twentieth century. The issue of the dam project played a major role in shaping Ethiopia’s diplomatic relations with Great Britain, Italy and the USA in the aforementioned period. Major historical events in the period were also directly related with the issue under discussion.

The major reasons why the British effort of developing the Blue Nile waters by constructing the dam in Ethiopian territory through a legal concession were not endorsed by the Ethiopian Government in the first decade of the twentieth century were: /1/ apparently, Ethiopia’s awareness of the Tripartite Agreement of 1906 and its earlier historical experience with the repercussions of agreements with foreign powers made the ruling class look at the British proposal for the Blue Nile waters concession with suspicion;³⁹ and /2/ Menilek’s illness and the subsequent power vacuum, which was filled by Empress Táyitu until 1910⁴⁰ was not an appropriate time to grant such a

big concession. Nevertheless, the British Government decided to raise the issue of the dam project in the time that it considered appropriate to get the consent of the Ethiopian Government.

In 1911, there was a rumor that the Ethiopian Government would offer the concession of the dam project to a certain German firm. This induced the British agent, Doughty Wylie, to hold discussions with *Naggádrés* Hécyle Giyorgis, the Ethiopian Minister of Foreign Affairs.⁴¹ In the discussions, Wylie stated that if Ethiopia violated the terms of the 1902 Blue Nile waters agreement, the consequence “could only be war.”⁴² Moreover, he noted that:

If they [Ethiopian officials] were blind enough to listen to any counselor in this matter of Lake Tsana other than the British Government, they would be infallibly assisting the very people who wished by a quarrel between Abyssinia and England to break up not only our long friendship but the Ethiopian Empire...⁴³

Naggádrés Hécyle Giyorgis raised several interesting questions that reflected the awareness of the Ethiopian Government about the importance of its water resource. How much land would be flooded in the area where the dam would be erected? What would be the extent of the Ethiopian right to irrigate its land? Would a private company or the British Government construct the dam? Wylie failed to answer these basic questions.⁴⁴

The Italians also considered the Lake Ténéc area as part of their sphere of influence according to the Tripartite Agreement of 1906. Hence, they undertook studies in the Lake area. In this regard Giuseppe Ostini, who was an Italian commercial agent in Gondar from 1909, declared that the region was one of the most resourceful areas in tropical Africa.⁴⁵ In 1910, he proposed the construction of a railway from Dalgi, on the

western shore of Lake T́cnć, to Massawa via Sa'ćti and Aqordat.⁴⁶ There is no doubt that this study strengthened Italy's view that the region was the economic hinterland of its colonies, through which Italy planned to construct a railroad to connect its economically poor colonies of Eritrea and Italian Somaliland. In short, at that time the stand of the Italian Government was that the Lake T́cnć region would be within the Italian sphere if Ethiopia was disintegrated.⁴⁷ The British argued against this on the ground that it was not the correct interpretation of the Tripartite Agreement. Therefore, there were intermittent discussions among the diplomats of Great Britain and Italy to reconcile their conflicting interests over the source of the Blue Nile. In 1913, Grey remarked that: "...we could not possibly consent to the passing of Lake Tsana under any control but our own if Abyssinia broke up..."⁴⁸ He added that the Italians could connect their colonies through a railroad west of Addis Ababa but not through the Lake T́cnć region which was far away from Addis Ababa.⁴⁹ Any way these conflicting stands of the two Governments concerning Lake T́cnć remained unchanged until they came closer to a *rapprochement* in their Exchange of Notes in 1925.

The British effort at getting the dam concession from the Ethiopian Government was also an issue during the reign of *Lij Iyyćsu* (r. 1913-1916). The British made some attempts to convince *Lij Iyyasu* to allow them to build the dam cross the Blue Nile. In 1914 the British prepared a draft agreement on the dam project and submitted it to the Ethiopian Government.⁵⁰ Although the draft agreement was not accepted by the Ethiopian Government, the two Governments agreed to make further studies of Lake T́cnć in 1915.⁵¹ As a result of this diplomatic negotiation, in 1916 a joint Egyptian, Anglo-Sudanese and Ethiopian commission was dispatched to Lake T́cnć to make further studies on the feasibility of the dam project.⁵² The mission was led by A. Burton

Buckley, who was Director of the Sudan Survey Department.⁵³ Like the previous studies, it was undertaken to assess the capacity of Lake T́cnc as a reservoir and regulate the flood of the Blue Nile to the best advantage of Egypt and the Sudan. The report of the mission was published in 1917 by the Egyptian Ministry of Public Works.⁵⁴ It was found out that the study was not successfully completed because the country was suddenly thrown into political turmoil in 1916.⁵⁵

The British attempt of building the Lake T́cnc Dam through legal agreement during the reign of Iyýcsu was not a successful one. Iyýcsu, who pursued a foreign policy hostile to the colonial powers, did not accept the British demand for developing the Blue Nile water system. He demonstrated this stand when he openly sided with member countries of the Triple Alliance⁵⁶ that were fighting against Britain during the WWI. Hence, in broad terms the reign of Iyýcsu was not a convenient time for the British to obtain the dam concession from the Ethiopian Government. It is noteworthy that the British Embassy played a role in the *coup d'état* against *Lij* Iyýcsu in 1916.⁵⁷

After *Lij* Iyýcsu had been overthrown and Empress Zawditu crowned Empress of Ethiopia, the British resumed the issue of negotiations for the waters of the Blue Nile. From 1917 onwards, political power was shared between the empress and *Ŕcs* Tafari, who was appointed regent and heir to the imperial throne. At that time, *Ŕcs* Tafari was mainly responsible for the country's foreign affairs and was in charge of such serious issues dealing with foreign powers.⁵⁸ Diplomatic sources indicate that the Blue Nile issue was *Ŕcs* Tafari's major concern.⁵⁹ In the year when Tafari ascended to political power the British minister in Addis Ababa urged him that the relationship between Britain and Ethiopia would essentially depend on the Lake T́cnc Dam concession.⁶⁰ Hence *Ŕcs* Tafari

entered into protracted negotiations concerning the dam project with foreign powers since 1917.

Apparently, from the very beginning *Rés* Tafari was aware that the Blue Nile issue was very crucial not only for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country but also for his political position at home. Hence, what *Rés* Tafari did concerning the dam project was to buy time through giving lip service to the British diplomats. Tafari's response did not negatively affect the British plan of building a dam at the outlet of Lake Téné. He seems to have been aware that rejecting the British request for the dam concession would induce them to make either diplomatic or military assaults against Ethiopia. The dam project was used by *Rés* Tafari to preserve Ethiopian independence and to strengthen his political position at home. Tafari also used the scheme as a best instrument in his effort of centralizing and modernizing the Ethiopian state.

Great Britain failed to achieve a diplomatic breakthrough with the Ethiopian Government to control the headwaters of the Blue Nile during the time of *Rés* Tafari. The difficulties in arriving at an agreement on the dam project at that time were multifarious. The British project of erecting the dam at Lake Téné encountered fierce opposition from the conservative elements of the ruling class. This group presented staunch opposition on the ground that an increase in the volume of the Lake would eventually lead to the flooding of the monasteries and churches on the islands of Lake Téné.⁶¹ It was in these churches and monasteries that the bodies of some medieval Ethiopian emperors were preserved.⁶² Moreover, in time of wars and other internal disturbances, Christian relics from other parts of the empire were hidden there until peace and order were restored.⁶³ Therefore, even though the British diplomats tried to convince the Ethiopian Government that engineering techniques would be employed so as to prevent any damage to the

monasteries and the churches,⁶⁴ their argument was not convincing enough to the conservatives.

The other major hurdle to the dam negotiation was the fear within the Ethiopian Government circle that granting such a big and sensitive concession would ultimately put the country's independence and territorial integrity under jeopardy.⁶⁵ *Rés* Tafari who had learnt from the failure of *Lij* Iyyésu did not dare act against the will and strong influence of the conservatives, particularly in the beginning of his political career as regent and heir to the throne. Indeed, the fear and suspicion of the Ethiopian Government were not totally unfounded. Hence the failure to arrive at the agreement cannot be attributed to mere thinking on the part of the Ethiopian conservative ruling circles since the plan and activities of the British also added to the suspicion of the Ethiopian Government.

The British Government became more and more involved in the Blue Nile issue and was obsessed with the Lake Tānā region. It saw the region of Lake Téné and the Blue Nile as economically tied with the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. In 1913, on the order of the British Government, Lord Viscount Kitchener, conqueror of the Sudan, prepared a map of the Anglo- Egyptian Sudan on the basis of the terms of the Tripartite Agreement of 1906.⁶⁶ The map incorporated the Blue Nile with all its tributaries and Lake Téné into the Anglo- Egyptian Sudan.⁶⁷ It is perhaps therefore not surprising that the Governor of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, General Wingate, accepting Kitchener's map, informed the representative of the British Legation in Addis Ababa, W.G. Thesiger, to discuss the issue with the Ethiopian Government.⁶⁸

The British Government also insisted that an access road and a telecommunication network required for the dam project be constructed from Roseires, in the Sudan, straight to Bahir Dér via Gubbé.⁶⁹ It also proposed that the materials for the construction of the

dam be transported from Khartoum.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the Ethiopian Government objected to this demand and recommended the construction of the Addis Ababa-Lake T́cnc highway to transport the construction materials.⁷¹ Obviously, the reason why the Ethiopian Government did not agree to the British proposal was that it would undermine the territorial integrity of the country.

The British Government also made separate hideous diplomatic dealings with the lords of the Lake T́cnc region to fulfill its ardent desire of controlling the headwaters of the Blue Nile. In 1920, Charles Rey started tentative negotiations with *Ŕcs H́cylu* of Gojj́cm concerning the issue of diverting the region's trade network towards the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan through overland road transport.⁷² The British set up the seat of their North-West Ethiopian British Consulate at D́cngiĺc in 1919.⁷³ The British attempted to provide assistance either to *Ŕcs H́cylu* of Gojj́cm or to *Ŕcs Gugśc* of Bagemidir if they supported the dam project.⁷⁴ All these added to the suspicion of the central Government regarding the territorial integrity of the country.

Opposition from the lords of Gojj́cm and Bagemidir undermined the negotiation process between the central Government and Britain concerning the erection of the dam across the Blue Nile. The issue of Lake T́cnc dam project was a matter of direct concern to these lords. It is clear that *Ŕcs Tafari* or any person from the central Government would not be able to offer any kind of concession without the consent of *Ŕcs H́cylu* and *Ŕcs Gugśc*. The two lords had absolute autonomy over their territory. Hence, they considered the lake as their own property. No European was allowed to approach the lake for scientific studies or other similar purposes even if he had letter from the central Government unless it was confirmed by the aforementioned lords. Dupuis, who came to study the Lake during the reign of Emperor Menilek, noted that his mission might face a

problem if he did not obtain the permission of *Rés Gugsé*.⁷⁵ Similarly, in 1920, Grabham noted that expedition to Lake Téné was impossible without the consent of *Rés Hélyu* and *Rés Gugsé*.⁷⁶ Hélyu once stated his undisputed authority over the lake as follows:

The British expedition[led by Grabham] which came some years ago to survey the lake, was unable to accomplish anything when at first I withheld my assistance...only when I withdrew my refusal to assist, were they able to proceed with their work.⁷⁷

Hélyu and Gugsé were rivals of *Rés Tafari*, the person in charge of the dam project negotiation. Gugsé was the husband of the reigning Empress although they had been separated when his aunt, Empress Télyu, was overthrown by a *coup d'état*.⁷⁸ *Rés Hélyu* of *Gojjém* was one of the most powerful rivals of *Rés Tafari*. Hélyu like *Rés Tafari* had an ardent desire to take the imperial throne.⁷⁹ In the 1920s, Hélyu grew in power and wealth and became the richest lord of the country.⁸⁰ His keen interest in accumulating wealth indicates that Hélyu most certainly expected some kind of economic benefit from the construction of the dam across the Blue Nile.

Indeed, diplomatic sources reveal that *Rés Hélyu* threatened to stop the dam construction unless the central Government allowed him to take a portion of the money that had been promised.⁸¹ The British Government also planned to pay the local authorities around the lake through the *Déngilé* Consulate. The documents indicate that Home, the British consul at *Déngilé*, had already promised to give *Rés Hélyu* 5,000 pounds sterling. Similarly, an equal amount of payment was allocated to *Rés Gugsé*. *Dajjéch* Ayélew who administered some districts around the lake was also promised 2,000 pounds sterling.⁸²

Therefore, it was Hélyu's desire to benefit from the dam project that attracted the British officials who were eager to realize the project. In 1919, the British established the

seat of their Northwest Ethiopian Consulate at Dúngil, which was within *Rés Hýlu*'s domain.⁸³ Apparently, the office of the Consulate was set up at Dúngil with the aim of protecting the British interest in the Lake Téné Dam project. This was clearly reflected in the activities of the British Consul at Dúngil.

The second British Consul at Dúngil, Major R.E. Cheesman, 1925-34, was more of a surveyor of the Blue Nile Basin than a consul.⁸⁴ He eventually wrote a book entitled: *Lake Tana and the Blue Nile*. In this work, Cheesman discussed his study of the Blue Nile Basin in the years between 1926 and 1929.⁸⁵ He is said to have made the first recorded trip along the full course of the Blue Nile River, on foot and mule back.⁸⁶ According to his book, the main objective of his exploration was to find out if there were lakes in the basin other than Lake Téné, other major falls besides the Tis Isét Fall, and irrigable lands within Ethiopian territory.⁸⁷ Cheesman finally suggested two possible reservoir sites in the Blue Nile Basin within Ethiopian territory: at Zemmi bridge near the junction of the Gudar and Blue Nile, and around Yaringe hill, near the Ethio-Sudanese border.⁸⁸

Rés Hýlu also reportedly discussed a treaty and a loan agreement of 1,000,000 pound sterling with Sir Lee Stack, Commander of the British troops in the Sudan.⁸⁹ *Hýlu* and Stack met in Cairo in 1924, when *Hýlu* went to Europe with *Rés Tafari*.⁹⁰ The British, on the other hand, planned to conclude a separate deal concerning the issue of the Blue Nile with *Rés Hýlu*. In one of his reports of February 1923, the Minister of the British Legation in Addis Ababa, Claude Russell, remarked as follows:

I would next advise that Ras Hailu of Gojjam should be detached from his allegiance to the central Government, his independence recognized in a treaty, and an agreement made with him for the construction of the dam.⁹¹

The role of the two powerful lords of the Lake Téné area in this sensitive and big issue undoubtedly affected the process of the negotiations between the Ethiopian and British Governments until *Rés* Tafari eliminated them one by one. First, Tafari defeated *Rés* Gugsé with the help of the British at the battle of Anchem in 1930.⁹² Then, after his coronation ceremony, *Rés* Tafari arrested *Rés* Hélylu, who was hated and unpopular in his own domain due to overtaxation and maladministration, and threw him into jail.⁹³ This episode brought the role of the lords of the Lake Téné area in the hydropolitics of the Blue Nile to an end.

Although *Rés* Tafari emerged victorious over the regional lords and the conservative elements, he did not grant the dam concession to the British Government. In this regard, McCann's generalization that *Rés* Tafari had an ardent desire to grant the concession of the dam project to the British⁹⁴ is not convincing. This judgment is not substantiated by local sources that have been consulted for the purpose of this thesis.

During the period of his regency, *Rés* Tafari used the dam project to strengthen his political position against the conservative elements around the Imperial Court and the regional lords. He utilized the dam concession as part of his political strategy to get British assistance until he was crowned as *negusa nagast* (King of Kings) of Ethiopia. *Rés* Tafari reputedly informed the British diplomats that he was in favour of granting the dam concession to Britain despite the opposition of the Empress and her supporters. The British diplomat Wilfred Thesiger noted that *Rés* Tafari had provided support to the British Government regarding the dam project since his regency in 1917 and that he needed time to surmount the staunch opposition of the Empress and the conservative notables.⁹⁵ Hence, developments concerning the dam project were reported by the British Legation in Addis Ababa to the Foreign Office as if the concession had been obtained

through the good offices of *Rés* Tafari. In 1920, negotiations with the Ethiopian Government to get permission for two British engineers to reside near Lake Téné for the purpose of hydraulic survey were reported to have made progress through the help of *Rés* Tafari, “who experienced considerable difficulty in obtaining consent of the Empress and the Government”.⁹⁶

The two engineers who entered Ethiopia through Gállóbét were: W. Grabham, Sudan Government's geologist, and Robert P. Black of Egyptian Physical Department.⁹⁷ They were accompanied to the lake by two Ethiopian Government representatives, *Ato* Tasfáy and M.Hovian.⁹⁸ At that time *Rés* Tafari and Empress Zawditu wrote letters to *Rés* Hýlu and *Rés* Gugsé, respectively, to provide assistance to the study mission.⁹⁹ Grabham and Black stayed at the lake from 1920 to 21 and their report was published in 1925 by the Egyptian Ministry of Public Works.¹⁰⁰ The report noted that the reservoir at the headwater of the Blue Nile would be a remedial measure to solve the scarcity of water for the agricultural needs of Egypt and the Sudan in the months between March and July.¹⁰¹

In the 1920s, in one of the discussions of the dam project, *Rés* Tafari confirmed his support of the project to the British Legation in Addis Ababa and in return he asked for Britain's support in his domestic political struggle with his contenders.¹⁰² On 6 March 1920, *Rés* Tafari is said to have reported to the British Legation in Addis Ababa that the Ethiopian Government was not in a position to negotiate with the British Government on the issue of erecting the dam across the Blue Nile.¹⁰³ According to the report of Consul Dodds, Tafari himself stated that: “For his own part, the Tsana question and many others would be settled if his hands were not tied by the Empress and her supporters who were merely obstructionists to the welfare of Abyssinia.”¹⁰⁴ Moreover, *Ato* (later *Bilóten-Geté*)

Heruy Walda-Sellässie,¹⁰⁵ who was described in Foreign Office sources as a friend of the British and conversant with the issue of the dam project, was quoted as saying:

When Ras Taffari is crowned Emperor of Ethiopia he will be in a position to explain to his people that the Tsana Treaty will not harm Abyssinia, but before that day the British cannot hope to obtain the control of the waters of Tsana short of depriving Abyssinia of her independence.¹⁰⁶

Therefore, it was these statements that led Dodds to recommend British support to *Ras* Tafari.¹⁰⁷ Such statements were interpreted by McCann as if Tafari was willing to offer the dam concession to the British Government.¹⁰⁸ In actual fact, however, Tafari was exploiting the British interest in harnessing the waters of the Blue Nile by building the dam of Lake Tānā, as a means of getting European support in his power struggle at home. After Tafari had become emperor, he did not grant the concession of the dam project to the British Government as Heruy had said and the British had hoped.

Negus Tafari also regarded the issue of the dam project as an important source of revenue that would strengthen his policy of modernization. After Ethiopia had bought its first state bank, the Bank of Abyssinia, from the British, it requested a loan from an American bank in order to consolidate the financial basis of the new bank in the mid-1930s.¹⁰⁹ When the bank asked the Ethiopian Government for a collateral, as a condition for providing the requested loan, *Negus* Tafari presented the dam project and appealed to the British Legation in Addis Ababa to pay an advance fee of 230,000 pounds sterling of the twenty-three year rent on the basis of 10,000 pounds Sterling per annum, that is, from the year that the British Government had promised to the Ethiopian Government in 1907 up to 1930.¹¹⁰ However, the British Government did not meet Tafari's request on the ground that the money would be paid when the construction work of the dam started.¹¹¹

In 1916 E.C. [1924] when we went to London as guests of His Majesty King George V, we met by appointment, with Prime Minister MacDonal to discuss and conclude[the discussion on] some of the issues that concerned the two Governments. While we were discussing, he raised a question to us that they would be glad if we implemented the Lake Téné dam issue, which we had previously started discussing with the Anglo-Sudan Government. We expressed our opinion that it would be good if we rented you the dam of Lake Téné after we had it constructed by well-known engineers and signed an agreement that respected the interests of the two Governments.

However, the interest of the British Government was to obtain the dam concession from the Ethiopian Government through diplomatic bargains and coercion and to build the dam itself. These conflicting interests posed a great obstacle for the success of the dam project.

The British wanted to use the Blue Nile as a diplomatic and political leverage to strengthen their control over Egypt. This was reflected in the negotiation process of the Lake Téné dam project after 1922. The question of Egyptian political independence of 1922¹¹⁴ seems to have brought the issue of the Blue Nile into its vortex. Hence, the question of the construction of the dam at the source of the Blue Nile acquired tremendous political importance for the British Government. According to a Foreign Office source: “Ever since the reconquest of the Sudan, the British authorities in that country and in Egypt have realized the ultimate necessity of controlling the waters of the Blue Nile at their source.”¹¹⁵ The importance of this strategy in relation to Egyptian independence has been described as follows:

His Majesty’s Government are indeed in the position of being able to threaten Egypt with the reduction of her water supply, and this is sufficient in itself to create a feeling of anxiety and resentment in Egypt; on the other hand His Majesty’s Government cannot offer to increase the water

supply of Egypt unless the construction of the Tsana reservoir is undertaken.¹¹⁶

Hence, the British offered important benefits in order to obtain the consent of the Ethiopian Government in November 1922. They proposed that if the Ethiopian Government was ready to give them the dam concession, they would in return hand over the Bomc plateau, a disputed area in the Southwest, and the Zeilc port, to the Ethiopian Government. Moreover, they promised to arrange for a visit of the Prince of Wales to Ethiopia that would strengthen the good relations between the two countries.¹¹⁷ The British, who were determined to avoid any further delay in the grant of the concession also proposed an increment in the annual payment that had been promised to the Ethiopian Government. In December 1922, they proposed an annual payment of 10,000 pounds sterling as of the date of the signing of the agreement and 20,000 pounds sterling per year in rent from the commencement of the work of the dam.¹¹⁸ It was said that the Sudanese Government could hand over the payment of the initial rent from its current resources.¹¹⁹ These proposals were made through Major Dodds in order to reopen the negotiation with the Ethiopian Government.¹²⁰ On the other hand, the British Government pursued coercive methods to obtain Ethiopia's acquiescence without delay. In this regard Britain opposed Ethiopia's admission into the League of Nations unless the latter agreed to the dam project.¹²¹ It also used the existence of slavery as a pretext for its staunch opposition to Ethiopia's admission into the League.¹²² However, Ethiopia became a member of the League on 28 September 1923.¹²³

Earlier in February 1923, Lord Curzon of the British Foreign Office proposed a 10,000 pounds sterling payment to *Rcs* Tafari, 50,000 as a first installment for the Ethiopian Government, with 150,000 as a final donation, and an annual payment of 50,000

for the water of the Blue Nile.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, to the despair of the British Government both the diplomatic bargains and the coercive measures turned into a fiasco. In February 1923, Claude Russell proposed a new mechanism that would enable the British Government to obtain the dam concession in the event that the Ethiopian Government rejected the British proposal. Russell decided to stop direct diplomatic dealing with the Ethiopian Government. He stated: "I would suggest that in the event of failure [of negotiations with the Ethiopian Government], need for concerted action with Italy..."¹²⁵

Subsequently, after long and unfruitful diplomatic negotiations with the Ethiopian Government and after its proposals had been rejected, the British Government officially interrupted the negotiation of the dam project with Ethiopia and turned its attention to Italy towards the end of November 1923.¹²⁶ It appealed to Italy for a joint action to put pressure on the Ethiopian Government.¹²⁷ As a result, the issue of the dam project became a subject of diplomatic bargain between Great Britain and Italy.

Among the major obstacles to an agreement on the dam concession was the conflicting interest of Britain and Italy in the Lake Téné region. Italy advanced the claim that the Lake Téné region was within its sphere of influence in accordance with the Tripartite Agreement of 1906. Thus there were a series of diplomatic dealings between Britain and Italy after 1919. Even though the Italian Government suggested a round table conference to the British Government in 1919 and 1922 to reconcile their conflicting interests over the Lake Téné area,¹²⁸ the latter turned down the offer on the ground that it would obstruct the impending agreement with the Ethiopian Government.¹²⁹ However, in 1925, the British proposal for a discussion on Lake Téné got an immediate response from the Italian side and eventually led to the Anglo-Italian Exchange of Notes of December 1925. In the arrangement Britain promised to support Italy in obtaining concessions from

the Ethiopian Government: Sir R. Graham wrote to Signor Mussolini on 14th December 1925:

I have... the honour, under instructions from His Majesty's principal secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to request your Excellency's support and assistance at Addis Ababa with the Abyssinian Government in order to obtain from them a concession for His Majesty's Government to construct a barrage at Lake Tsana, together with the right to construct and maintain a motor road for the passage of stores, personnel, & C. from the frontier of the Sudan to the barrage.¹³⁰

The British offered the following: "His Majesty's Government in return are prepared to support the Italian Government in obtaining from the Abyssinian Government a concession to construct and run a railway from the frontier of Eritrea to the frontier of Italian Somaliland."¹³¹ Finally, the Notes stated:

In the event of His Majesty's Government, with the valued assistance of the Italian Government, obtaining from the Abyssinian Government the desired concession on Lake Tsana, they are also prepared to recognize an exclusive Italian economic influence in the west of Abyssinia and in the whole of the territory to be crossed by the above mentioned railway. They would further promise to support with the Abyssinian Government all Italian request for economic concession in the above zone. But such recognition and undertaking are subject to the proviso that the Italian Government on their side, recognizing the prior hydraulic rights of Egypt and the Sudan, will engage not to construct on the head waters of the Blue or White Niles or their tributaries or affluents any work which might sensibly modify their flow into the main river. It is understood that the above proviso would not preclude a reasonable use of the waters in question by the inhabitants of the region, even to the extent of constructing dams for hydro-electric power or small reservoirs in minor affluents to store water for domestic purposes, as well as for the cultivation of the food crops necessary to their own subsistence.¹³²

Mussolini responded on 20 December 1925. After the acceptance of the Note by the Italian Government, he stated that:

...the Italian Government will send the necessary instructions to the Italian representative in Addis Ababa in identical sense to those which the British Government will send to their own representative, to concert a common line of action with the Abyssinian Government in order to obtain that the concessions asked for by the British and Italian Governments regarding Lake Tsana and the railway connecting Eritrea and Somaliland should be granted contemporaneously.¹³³

Britain and Italy therefore pledged each other to work together in the spirit of the 1906 Tripartite Agreement and to put pressure on the Ethiopian Government, to grant them concessions in which they had interests. This Anglo-Italian arrangement excluded France, one of the signatory of the Tripartite Agreement of 1906, most certainly on the ground that it had no interest in the Lake Táná area. Nevertheless, the British Government tried to secure either the support or at least benevolent neutrality of the French Government in the Anglo-Italian arrangement. To this end, the British ambassador in Paris addressed a note on 18 January 1926 to the French Government expressing his hope that France would support the Anglo-Italian arrangement.¹³⁴

Towards the end of May 1926, the representatives of the British and Italian Governments in Addis Ababa notified the Ethiopian Government about the 1925 agreement.¹³⁵ This episode was a bolt out of the blue to the Ethiopian Government. The situation in Addis Ababa and in the rest of the country was described by Charles Rey as follows: "... the arrangement fell like a bomb shell in Abyssinia, and no one unfamiliar with the country can imagine the effect it produced."¹³⁶ Inevitably, the Exchange of the Notes led to a further diplomatic crisis between Ethiopia, Britain and Italy.

The news about British request for permission from the Ethiopian Government to build a dam at the outlet of Lake Ténéc was printed in *The Times*.¹⁵⁰ The British Government asked for the necessary permission to construct the dam across the headwater of the Blue Nile and provided full guarantee to the safety of the churches and monasteries of Lake Ténéc. The memorandum also stated that Britain would respect the rights of Ethiopia to utilize the Blue Nile and its tributaries within her territorial jurisdiction.¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, the British continued to insist on the construction of the dam by themselves. Ethiopia, on the other hand, did not want to leave the dam project either to the British Government or to any British company.

The Ethiopian Government did not give an immediate response to the memorandum. The British seem to have suspected that Ethiopia was employing delaying tactics to slow down the negotiation process or stop it. Hence, the issue was raised in the British parliament. A British parliamentarian, Lieutenant Colonel Howard-Burry asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir A. Chamberlain, to present a report to parliament concerning the state of negotiation with the Ethiopian Government on 13th July 1927. Chamberlain said that an agreement was being worked out between his Government and Addis Ababa.¹⁵² Some days after this, in response to a request from the British Legation in Addis Ababa, *Rés* Tafari told the British minister that a committee was still examining the memorandum.¹⁵³ But in his unofficial discussion with Bentinck, *Rés* Tafari noted that the Ethiopian response to the memorandum would most certainly be based on his correspondence with the British Prime Minister in 1924 when he visited London.¹⁵⁴ This meant that the construction work should be carried out by a private company.

Similarly, in his conversation with the British Minister, *Azzéj* Warqinah (Dr. Charles Martin) stated that the Ethiopian Government wished that the Lake Téné Dam be constructed by a private company preferably a non-British one. He also added that the Ethiopian Government wanted to construct the dam by itself with a loan obtained from America.¹⁵⁵

In 1927, British officials attempted to link the appointment of a new Ethiopian Orthodox Church *abun* with the issue of the Lake Téné Dam.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, the British Government also prepared an official visit to Ethiopia by Prince Henry in August 1927.¹⁵⁷ But these diplomatic efforts were not successful in getting the response of the Ethiopian Government to the aforementioned memorandum. Hence, in the beginning of September 1927, the British Minister, Bentinck, asked *Biláten-Geté* Heruy for the response of the Ethiopian Government. Heruy's response was that the central Government could not decide on the issue alone without consulting the various chiefs and peoples of the country, which could not be possibly done because of the rainy season.¹⁵⁸ Therefore, the response of the Ethiopian Government was delayed until 26 September 1927. Finally, the Ethiopian Government in its official response to the British memorandum stated that it wanted to construct the dam with its own money or it would grant a concession to a private company and rent the surplus water to the British Government. It also stated that British subjects would be allowed to buy some of the shares of the company.¹⁵⁹

The Ethiopian Government was aware that Great Britain was discussing the issue with the Italian Government and still ready to provide support for Italian interest in Ethiopia in return for the dam project concession. It was at that time that Ethiopia demanded the involvement of another major power in the issue of the dam project. The Ethiopian Government dispatched *Azzéj* Warqinah as its special envoy to New York in

order to negotiate the building of the Lake T́cné Dam with the J.G. White Engineering Corporation in November 1927.¹⁶⁰ At the same time, *Azźj Warqinah* also agreed to the reopening of the American Legation in Addis Ababa.¹⁶¹ Obviously, the reason for Ethiopia's preference for the American company was its desire to use the United States as a counterweight against Italy and Britain that were threatening its existence as an independent state. Nevertheless, American intervention in the Blue Nile issue was tied to the dam project and hence could not serve as a means of safeguarding Ethiopian independence as it had been expected.

The agreement of the Ethiopian Government with the American company was soon reported by the British and Italian embassies in Washington to London and Rome,¹⁶² respectively. On 4 November 1927, the issue appeared in many famous newspapers. The matter was published in *The Daily Chronicle* under the headlines: "Nile Dam Scare, American's Plan to 'sell water' Scotched, An Impossible 'Pact' with Abyssinia"; in *Westminster Gazette*, under "U.S. Stealing a March in Abyssinia, Blue Nile Dam Secured, Peril to Egypt, British Interest Involved"; and in *Daily Express*, "Egypt's Water in Peril 'Dam to be Built by American Firm' Pact Mystery". Similarly, *The Times*, *The Daily Mail*, *Telegraph*, *Daily News*, and *Yorkshire Post*, carried their own stories and analyses.¹⁶³

The issue of the agreement between the Ethiopian Government and the American company on the construction of the dam at the headwater of the Blue Nile also became big news in Egypt, reflected in the Egyptian press. The Egyptian press asserted that the agreement was Britain's devilish act and posed a danger to Egypt.¹⁶⁴ At that time, the Egyptian Prime Minister, Sarwat Pasha, was in London to discuss the future of Egypt with the British Government. Sir A. Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for Foreign

Affairs, disclosed to Sarwat the diplomatic correspondence that he had received and dispatched regarding the American “intervention” in the Blue Nile issue.¹⁶⁵ Apparently, the British Government did this to disprove the accusation of the Egyptian press.

It is noteworthy that even after *Azz'j Warqinah's* mission to America and his dealings with the J.G White Engineering Corporation, the Ethiopian Government entertained German and Italian requests for the concession of the Lake T'ncé dam project.¹⁶⁶ From this it is possible to argue that at that time the intention of the Ethiopian Government seems to have been basically not to offer the dam concession but rather to use the water politics of the Blue Nile to preserve the country's territorial integrity and independence by undermining Britain's chance of securing an exclusive control over the headwaters of the Blue Nile. In this regard Ethiopia achieved diplomatic success until the Italian invasion of 1935.

The first American Minister in Addis Ababa, the Hon Addison E. Southard arrived in March 1928.¹⁶⁷ The issue of the Lake T'ncé Dam project became a major concern of the Legation.¹⁶⁸ This indicates that the United States' interest in the Blue Nile issue began to grow. However, the agreement between the Ethiopian Government and the American firm was not implemented due to another round of negotiations with Britain and Egypt.

British diplomatic sources indicated that at that same time the British Government was also working with the Italian Government. In 1928, Britain believed that it had friendly relations with the Italian Government in global politics, in general, and in Ethiopia, in particular. Therefore, the Government came to the conclusion that its interest in the waters of the Blue Nile would be better safeguarded if Italy controlled Ethiopia.¹⁶⁹

On the other hand, the British Government also continued its diplomatic dealings with the Ethiopian Government through its minister in Addis Ababa, Bentinck. Hitherto

the British Government had insisted on exclusive control of the headwater of the Blue Nile. In a conversation between Bentinck and *Rés* Tafari, on 12 March 1928, the latter, by referring the Anglo-Italian arrangement of 1925, noted that although the Ethiopian Government was not convinced by the existing public opinion that offering the dam project to Britain would put the independence of the country under jeopardy, taking the will of the nation into account, it would never give the dam concession either to the British Government or to a British private company.¹⁷⁰

Finally, on March 24, 1928, the minister at the British Legation in Addis Ababa addressed a note to *Rés* Tafari stating that the British Government would negotiate with the Ethiopian Government on the basis of the latter's demand that the Lake Téné dam project be given to a non-British company.¹⁷¹ In other words, the British Government agreed to the construction of the Lake Téné dam by the American firm the J.G. White Engineering Corporation. The Ethiopian Government replied to the note expressing its pleasure that the British Government had agreed that the dam would be constructed by the Ethiopian Government, and made it clear that it was now negotiating with the J.G. White Engineering Company. It promised to disclose the terms of the agreement to the British Government.¹⁷² Therefore, a major obstacle to the success of the negotiation with the company was overcome.

Hence, *Rés* Tafari requested the American Minister in Addis Ababa, Southard, to contact the Company on condition that the Company sent its representatives for discussion with the Ethiopian Government. Subsequently, Southard transmitted a telegram to the company on January 1st, 1929.¹⁷³ As a result, the vice president of the Company, Henry A. Lardner, arrived in Addis Ababa on April 24, 1929.¹⁷⁴ Lardner soon started the discussion

on the dam project with *Rés Tafari* and *Biláten-Geté Heruy* who was Director of Foreign Affairs.¹⁷⁵

While the Ethiopian Government was negotiating with the representative of the Company, the 1929 Nile Waters Agreement was signed. This agreement was signed between British officials, representing the Sudan, and Egypt on May 7, 1929,¹⁷⁶ without the participation of the Ethiopian Government. It approved the so-called Egypt's "natural and historic rights" over the Nile River and its tributaries.¹⁷⁷ In other words, the agreement gave Egypt the right to impede any development projects on the Nile Basin outside its political boundary. Egypt acquired the privilege to inspect and investigate any kind of hydraulic projects in the upper Nile that would regulate the flow of Nile water to Egypt.¹⁷⁸ According to the agreement, any kind of hydraulic work in the basin needed prior agreement from the Egyptian Government.¹⁷⁹ It also allocated the Nile waters between Egypt and the Sudan. Consequently, 48 billion cubic meters of water were allocated to Egypt while the Sudan got 4 billion cubic meters.¹⁸⁰ Clearly, the 1929 Nile Waters Agreement was deliberately signed to frustrate the on-going negotiation between the Ethiopian Government and the J.G. White Engineering Company.

The entry of the Company into the Lake Téné dam project was also a headache to the Italian Government. It was described by one Italian diplomat, who was in Addis Ababa in the summer of 1929, as: "... an unfortunate and unnecessary invasion by the Americans of a British and Italian sphere."¹⁸¹ The minister of the Italian Legation in Addis Ababa, Giuliano Cora suggested that if Ethiopia's negotiation with the J.G White broke down, an Italian firm might move into the project.¹⁸² Indeed, he strove to realize the Italian dream of investment in the project to the exclusion of other powers. In 1929, an Italian firm submitted a bid to the Ethiopian Government to build the Lake Téné Dam at

considerably less cost than what others had offered.¹⁸³ However, the Ethiopian Government rejected the Italian offer.

Despite this apparent intrusion by Britain and Italy, the discussion between the representatives of the J.G. White Engineering Company and the Ethiopian officials, mainly *Rés* Tafari and *Biláten-Geté* Heruy, continued until June 30, 1929.¹⁸⁴ As a result, on June 22, 1929 *Rés* Tafari announced Ethiopia's intention of granting the Lake Téné Dam and the Addis Ababa- Béchir Dér highway concessions to the J.G White Engineering Company.¹⁸⁵ But the work of the company was delayed until the British Government , which would use the water and cover the cost of the dam and the highway, approved the grant and an agreement was reached on the amount of money that Britain would pay to the Ethiopian Government. To settle the matter it was decided to hold the first of a series of conferences where the representatives of the Ethiopian, Anglo-Sudan and Egyptian Governments, and the J.G White Engineering Corporation in December 1929.¹⁸⁶

As a result, Mr. R.M MacGregor, Irrigation Advisor of the Anglo-Sudan Government, and Mr. Lardner, Vice President of the J.G. White Engineering Corporation arrived in Addis Ababa on December 27, 1929.¹⁸⁷ The conference was opened in January 1930 and continued until February 1930.¹⁸⁸ The participants of the Addis Ababa Conference were: *Rés* Tafari, *Biláten-Geté* Heruy, Sir Sidney, Barton, minister of the British Legation in Addis Ababa, Mr. MacGregor and Mr. Landner.¹⁸⁹ Finally, before proceeding further with the discussions, it was decided to send the J.G White Engineers to the lake to undertake a reconnaissance study and submit a report on the cost of the building of the dam and the highway from Addis Ababa to Béchir Dér. It was also agreed that the cost of this survey would be financed by the Anglo-Sudan Government. A sum of 16,000 Ethiopian *birr* was to be given to the Ethiopian Government which would

eventually be transferred to the company.¹⁹⁰ After the money was secured, the Ethiopian Government transmitted its instruction through its foreign Minister *Biláten-Geté* Heruy to the J.G White Engineering Corporation to undertake its reconnaissance mission to Lake Téné.¹⁹¹

Subsequently, the J.G. White study mission led by Major Roberts arrived in Addis Ababa on September 24, 1930.¹⁹² Leaving the capital on October 28, the mission reached the shore of the Lake, at Béchir Dér Giyorgis, on December 23.¹⁹³ The mission carried out the surveying and designing for the building of the Lake Téné Dam until March 21, 1931.¹⁹⁴ Then the mission returned to Addis Ababa via Dabra Mécqos where it made a reconnaissance survey for the highway. On the way, with the permission of the Ethiopian Government, one member of the mission, named David Giboney, stayed at Dégilé, where the Northwest Ethiopian British Consulate was found, to do a survey of the road to be built between the frontier of the Sudan and the lake.¹⁹⁵ It is important to note that the study of Giboney was not included in the report of the J.G. White Engineering Corporation of 1932. Finally, the mission arrived in Addis Ababa on May 7, 1931 and reached its headoffice in New York, on June 12, 1931.¹⁹⁶ This was the first organized attempt that the Ethiopian Government made to develop the Blue Nile Basin using hired foreign engineers.

While the study was in progress, in July 1930 the Ethiopian Government requested the British Legation in Addis Ababa to advance the annual payment 10,000 pound sterling on the basis of the promise that had been made in 1907. The response of the British Government was that the payment would be effected when the construction work on the barrage started. Moreover, the payment could not be made since there was a change in the circumstances under which the offer had been made and since the original offer had lapsed.¹⁹⁷ In March 1931, Emperor Haile Sellassie also asked Sir Sidney Barton, minister

of the British Legation in Addis Ababa, about the cession of the port of Zeil  to the Ethiopian Government as a bargain to the Lake T nc issue on the basis of the British proposal of the early 1920s.¹⁹⁸

In 1932, the J.G. White Engineering Corporation published the report of its study entitled: *Report on Lake Tana Outlet Works and Ethiopian High way from Addis Ababa to Lake Tana*. In this report, the J.G White Engineering Corporation made the following points: the dam at the outlet of the lake could be built without exposing the island monasteries and churches to inundation, and the Tis-Is t Water Fall could be used as a source of hydroelectric power. But the study also suggested that at that time electric power had little economic value due to the small demand for electricity in the region other than for the construction of the regulating structure at the lake. Finally, the study concluded its report by submitting the estimated cost of the project.¹⁹⁹

This report was discussed in a conference organized by the Ethiopian Government in Addis Ababa, in February 1933.²⁰⁰ The representatives of the J.G. White Engineering Corporation, the Ethiopian, Anglo-Sudanese and Egyptian Governments took part in the conference.²⁰¹ This clearly indicates that the Egyptian Government which had been represented by the British Government now began to participate directly in the Lake T nc Dam negotiation. Finally, an agreement was reached by which the J.G. White Engineering Corporation would undertake further investigation into the project in order to determine whether the cost of the erection of the barrage could be reduced or not. Thus, a mission to Lake T nc was sent for the second time whose expenses would be covered by the Anglo-Sudan and Egyptian Governments.²⁰² The mission carried out further study of the project in the period between the fall of 1933 and late spring of 1934.²⁰³ It was reported that the mission proposed a lower cost for the construction of the Lake T nc reservoir.²⁰⁴

not be left out or be prevented from contributing in the examination of schemes connected with the building of a dam at Lake Tana or with any other works whose undertaking should be considered in the Zone in question.”²¹¹

Indeed, the Italians also undertook their own studies on the Lake Táné area. The Italian consul in Gondar from 1932-35, Raffaele Di Lauro, in this regard provided a detailed scientific study of the Táné area in his book entitled: *Le terre de Lago Tsana: Possibilita economiche attuali del nord ovest etiopico*.²¹² In this book, Lauro indicated how the Tis-Isét Water Falls could be utilized as a source of hydroelectricity. He also described the potential of the Blue Nile for the economic development of the Táné region. In his view the Lake Táné area had the fertility and the potential for agricultural development. It was with this point in mind that Lauro declared that the region was suitable for settlers.²¹³ He also noted that other than the aforementioned economic benefits, Italy’s control over the head waters of the Blue Nile would enable it to secure a dominant position in Northeast African power politics.²¹⁴ Clearly, in the 1930s, Italy was developing colonial designs over Ethiopia. As a result, particularly after the Walwal Incident of 1934, the Blue Nile issue seems to have been increasingly overshadowed by the threat of Italian invasion. Finally, the war with Italy disrupted Ethiopia’s plan of developing the Blue Nile Basin through the J.G. White Engineering Corporation.

The Blue Nile issue in general and the 1925 Anglo-Italian agreement in particular laid the groundwork for the 1935 Italian fascist invasion of Ethiopia. This is clearly reflected in Mussolini’s speech to the Italian Chamber of Deputies in May 1935: “The Italo-Ethiopian problem does not date from to day [May 1935] nor from January 1935, but as documents which we will publish in due course will demonstrate, it goes back to 1925.”²¹⁵ Moreover, a few days before the outbreak of the Italo-Ethiopian war, Mussolini

in an interview with a periodical is also reported to have said: “In 1925 Sir Ronald Graham and I signed an agreement that practically cut Abyssinia into pieces.”²¹⁶

In October 1935, Italy launched its campaign against Ethiopia and its troops marched and approached the source of the Blue Nile and the Lake Táná area. The episode alarmed both the Egyptian Government and public. It was at that time that the Egyptian Prime Minister, Ali Maher Pasha, suggested that British troops be dispatched to occupy the source of the Blue Nile.²¹⁷ In response, the British Government instructed its high commissioner to remind the Egyptian Prime Minister’s about the long association of Egypt with British right over the headwaters of the Blue Nile under the Tripartite Agreement of 1906 and the Anglo-Italian Exchange of Notes of 1925. The British Government also noted that on various occasions before the outbreak of the war, the Italian Government on its own initiative had given formal assurance that it had no intention of injuring the hydraulic right of Britain over the waters of the Blue Nile and its tributaries.²¹⁸ Indeed, in 1935 Mussolini assured the Government of Great Britain that in the event of war against Ethiopia, Italy would respect British interest in the headwaters of the Blue Nile.²¹⁹ It was after getting this assurance that Britain recognized the Italian occupation of Ethiopia.²²⁰ Apparently, Ethiopia’s appeal for collective action to be taken against Italy by the League of Nations was ignored because of Great Britain’s satisfaction with Italian assurance.

The Italian Government also instructed its representative in Cairo to assure Ali Maher Pasha that the rights of Egypt in the headwaters of the Blue Nile would be respected. Subsequently, the Italian minister in Cairo submitted the following written statement to Ali Maher Pasha on 8 April 1935:

Au cours d'une visite qu'il a faite à son Excellence le président du conseil, le Ministre d'Italie l'a informé que le Gouvernement italien, désireux de continuer en l'avenir sa politique de paix, de collaboration cordiale et d'amitié sincère avec l'Égypte et de respect des intérêts égyptiens, ... en tout ce qui concerne la question des eaux du lac Tsana et du Nil bleu.²²¹

During a visit that he made to his Excellency the President of the Council, the Italian Minister has informed that the Italian Government, anxious to continue in the future the politics of peace cordial collaboration and sincere friendship with Egypt and respect for the interests of the Egyptians... concerning the waters of Lake Tānā and the Blue Nile.

This was the result of Britain's diplomatic bargain with the Italian Government. However, the Egyptian Government and public were still apprehensive about the fall of the headwaters of the Blue Nile into the hands of Italy and the danger that this posed to Egypt. Particularly, Italian activities after their occupation of Ethiopia increased Egyptian suspicions.

After Ethiopia had fallen under Italian rule, Italy realized her long dream of incorporating the source of the Blue Nile into her colonies of Eritrea and Somaliland when it created Italian East Africa. The Italians soon made a survey of the headwaters of the Blue Nile. The objective of the study, as reported to the British Foreign Secretary, was to construct a dam at the outlet of Lake Tānā and to sell water to Egypt and Britain.²²² At the same time the intention of the Italian Government was to make direct diplomatic dealing with the Egyptian Government but not through the British Government.²²³

As a result, the issue became a serious one for British policy-makers. In November 1936, the matter was raised in the British parliament by Mr. Bellenger who asked Mr. Eden, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, whether the Italian Government would respect Egyptian and British rights over the headwaters of the Blue Nile in line with the

Tripartite Agreement of 1906 and the Anglo-Italian Exchange of Notes of 1925. Eden's answer was that Italy had already officially given its assurances through her ambassador in London in April 1935. At that time the ambassador confirmed that the Italian Government had no aim of "overlooking or repudiating" its previous agreements with Britain concerning the waters of the Blue Nile.²²⁴ Similarly, on 27th April 1936, Mr. Leckie, a British parliamentarian, posed a question to Viscount Carborne, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Leckie asked Carborne about what action he was thinking of taking to secure Egyptian right over the waters of the Blue Nile after it had fallen under Italian rule. Carborne's answer was that both Egyptian and British rights were fully protected by previous agreements with both the Ethiopian and Italian Governments.²²⁵ Nevertheless, in actual fact the British once again attempted to reach a formal agreement with Italy on the Blue Nile issue.

Meanwhile, the Italians continued to survey the Lake T́cńc and the source of the Blue Nile primarily for their own economic advantage. In January 1937, the Italian Government sent its scientific mission to Lake T́cńc to study its economic potential. The news was published in the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times* on 5th and 6th January 1937,²²⁶ respectively. In late 1937, the Egyptian *Abun* Qerlos IV, head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, decided to return to his home country. The Italians declared the independence of the Ethiopian Church and appointed an Ethiopian *abun* as head of the church.²²⁷ The Italian decision that separated the Ethiopian Orthodox Church from its historic connection with the Coptic Church of Egypt was linked with the Blue Nile issue and hence became shocking news to Egypt.²²⁸ As Erlich noted:

The idea that Mussolini, the brutal, unrestrained imperialist, had obtained control over the Blue Nile aroused the deepest anxiety in Egypt. The fascist dictator was depicted as a mad,

evil monster lurking behind Lake Tana, looking down the Nile, his greedy eyes fixed on Egypt.²²⁹

Nevertheless, what the Egyptian Government could do was to rely on the British Government and start a series of negotiations with the Italian Government until the latter agreed not to interfere with the flow of the Blue Nile without the prior consent of the British and Egyptian Governments in 1938.

The stand of the Italian Government concerning the waters of the Blue Nile was that no agreement had been reached between the British and Ethiopian Governments. It insisted that although Britain had prior rights on the basis of the Tripartite Agreement of 1906 and the Anglo-Italian Exchange of Notes of 1925, Italy had a recognized economic and territorial right over Lake Tánć and the source of the Blue Nile. Italy epitomized its interests in the region as "...interests no less important than those of the Sudan and Egyptian Governments."²³⁰ It was with this idea in mind that Italy undertook scientific studies in the region and planned to develop the water resource of the basin. In this regard, it is important to note the studies of L. Pontecorvo. In 1938, he proposed the erection of three dams on the course of the Blue Nile below Lake Tánć and one on the Didessć River that could store 9,000 million cubic meters of water for down stream irrigation. He also proposed, like earlier studies, a control structure at the outlet of Lake Tánć. But unlike earlier studies, he suggested that the water reservoir would be diverted through a tunnel into the Balas River for the purpose of producing hydro- electricity and for irrigation in the Sudan.²³¹

However, eventually Italy and Britain were able to reconcile their conflicting interests in the Blue Nile when they concluded, after a series of diplomatic dealings an agreement in 1938 to maintain the *status quo*. Britain and Italy exchanged notes on April

16, 1938. At that time, the Italian Government confirmed Britain's interest in the Blue Nile waters as follows:

The Italian Government confirm to the Government of the United Kingdom the assurance given by them to the Government of the United Kingdom on the 3rd April, 1936, and reiterated by the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs to His Majesty's Ambassador at Rome on 31st December 1935, to the effect that the Italian Government were fully conscious of their obligations towards the Government of the United Kingdom in the matter of Lake Tana and had no intention whatever of overlooking or repudiating them.²³²

In return, the British and Egyptian Governments recognized Italian East Africa. Britain also agreed to settle boundary issues between its colonies and Italian East Africa in favour of the latter.²³³

On that same day, an exchange of notes was also made between Italy and Egypt. According to this, the Anglo-Italian exchange of notes on Lake Tānā and the Blue Nile apply equally to Egypt. In return, Italy's right to use the Suez Canal was confirmed as a compensation for its assurance of Egypt's rights over the headwaters of the Blue Nile.²³⁴ Moreover, after they had secured this Italian confirmation, the Egyptians dropped the issue of the separation of the church.²³⁵ Thus the British and Egyptian Governments were able to secure their paramount interests in the waters of the Blue Nile through the aforementioned diplomatic breakthrough.

However a year later, in 1939, the Second World War broke out. Hence, armed fighting started between Britain and Italy. The British Government began to provide substantial military support for Ethiopian patriots. Foreign Office archival sources clearly indicate that the British fought on their side in the hope of gaining concessions concerning the Blue Nile when Ethiopia regained its independence.

The Blue Nile issue was raised during the deliberations on British policy towards Emperor Haile Sellassie. However, the British cabinet held the view that the time was not appropriate for negotiations with the emperor since it and the Ethiopian patriots had to concentrate all their efforts on gaining military victory over the Italians.²³⁶ The British expected either actual possession of or some form of suzerainty over the source of the Blue Nile and the Lake Téné area as a reward for their support of Emperor Haile Sellassie.²³⁷ It is perhaps therefore not surprising that the British interest in taking direct control over the source of the Blue Nile revived during the war of liberation. The British demanded territorial concessions from the Ethiopian Government, i.e., to transfer the source area of the Blue Nile to direct control of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudanese Government at the cost of a swap of territory.²³⁸ But after they had realized that this was impossible to achieve the British abandoned the whole idea. In March 1941, Lampson reported from Cairo, on the impossibility of securing the region of the Blue Nile from Ethiopia:

In any event, I am quite confident that neither the emperor nor any other Ethiopian ruler or Government would ever consent to any such cession, whether in exchange for territory elsewhere or not. The Lake Tsana region lies in an area which has always been Ethiopian-that is, Amhara-and it is consequently dear to Amhara hearts.²³⁹

In that same month, the British Government officially decided to postpone its diplomatic dealings concerning the Blue Nile issue until the Italians evacuated from Ethiopia and peace returned to the country.²⁴⁰

NOTES

(CHAPTER III)

¹Godana, p.103; Yacob, “Predicaments...,” p.41; Tesfaye, *The Nile Question...*, p.71.

²F.O.93/2/5, Treaty Between Great Britain and Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, 15 May 1902.

³“Ethiopia’s Rights to Waters from the Blue Nile and Lake Tsana,” Confidential, *Nahcse* 26, 1964 E.C. (Institute of Ethiopian Studies Manuscript, No. 2982), p.17.

⁴Negussay, p.42; Tesfaye, *The Nile Question...*,p.72.

⁵ In contrast, the Imperial’s regime policy document argued that Egypt was not justified in citing the terms of the 1902 Agreement as follows: “... the Treaty of 1902 concerns only the relations between Ethiopia and Sudan, and no other riparian state has any standing in connection with it. Egypt therefore cannot make any claim whatsoever according to the treaty.” See “Ethiopia’s Rights...,” p.21.

⁶ F.O. 371/12341, Bentinck to Austen Chamberlain, May10, 1927.

⁷See Note 4.

⁸See Marcus, “Ethio-British Negotiations...,” pp. 82-85.

⁹Sanderson, *England, Europe and the Upper Nile*, p. 19.

¹⁰Hertslet, Vol.II, p.442.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵ Quoted in Wondimneh Tilahun, *Egypt’s Imperial Aspirations over Lake Tana and the Blue Nile*, (Addis Ababa: United Printers Ltd., 1979), p. 77.

¹⁶ C. Dupuis, “Report upon Lake Tsana and the Rivers of the Eastern Sudan,” in Sir William Garstin, *Report upon the Basin of the Upper Nile*,(Cairo: National Printing Department, 1904), p.3.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸ F.O.371/2, J.C. Hawkshaw & L.F. Vernon-Harcourt to Cromer, 15th March, 1906. For Dupuis' explanation about the existing political situation as a major obstacle to the realization of the project see Dupuis, pp. 24-25.

¹⁹Dupuis, p.21.

²⁰ F.O.371/2, J.C. Hawkshaw & L.F. Vernon-Harcourt to Cromer, 15th March, 1906.

²¹The British had raised the question with the Ethiopian Government some time before March 30th, 1905. See F.O. 1/52, Russell Aitken to His Imperial Majesty the Emperor Menilek II, 30th March, 1905.

²² F.O.1/52, Memorandum by Mr. Russell Aitken, 29 March 1905.

²³ See F.O.371/7151, Memorandum by R. Sperling, 8 November 1922.

²⁴ The Gezira plantation was roughly located 125 kms south of Khartoum. It has been described as a triangle since the Blue and the White Niles form the two sides and the city of Khartoum and the Ethio-Sudanese boundary its apex and base, respectively.

²⁵McCann, p.671.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷Hurst, *A Short Account of the Nile Basin*, pp. 57, 63.

²⁸James McCann, "Ethiopia, Britain and Negotiations for the Lake Tana Dam, 1922-1935", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (1981) p. 671.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p.667, 671, 680.

³⁰F.O. 1/52, Memorandum by Mr. Russell Aitken, 29 March, 1905.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²*Ibid.*

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴F.O. 371/7151, Memorandum by R. Sperling, 8 November, 1922.

³⁵F.O. 1/52, Russell Aitken to Menelek II, 30th March, 1905.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷F.O. 371/2, Cromer to J.C. Hawkshaw & L.F. Vernon-Harcourt, 9 April, 1906.

³⁸McCann, pp. 670-71.

³⁹This can be inferred from many of the diplomatic dealings between the

Ethiopian authorities and British diplomats on the Blue Nile issue. See for example the discussion between *Nagádrés* Hécyle Giyorgis and Doughty Wylie, F.O. 371/1044, Doughty Wylie to Sir Edward Grey, 1st November, 1911.

⁴⁰Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, pp. 117-18.

⁴¹F.O. 371/1044, Doughty Wylie to Sir Edward Grey, 1st November, 1911.

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵Abdussamad H. Ahmad, “Anglo-Italian Conflicting Interests in the Lake Tana Region 1913-1935,” *Études éthiopiennes: Actes de la X^e Conférence internationale des études éthiopiennes Paris, 24-28 août, 1988*, Vol. I, (Paris: Société française pour les études éthiopiennes, 1994), p.619.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷F.O. 371/1572, Sir Edward Grey to Mr. Dering, 12 November 1913.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

⁵⁰F.O. 371/4388, Ernest Scott to Dodds, 6th August, 1920.

⁵¹*Land and Water Resource ...*, p. 8.

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³*Ibid.*

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

⁵⁶For Iyyasu’s support to the Triple Alliance see Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, p.127.

⁵⁷For the role of the British Legation in the *coup d’état* against Iyyasu see Asfa Yilma (the Princess), *Haile Selassie Emperor of Ethiopia*, (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co.Ltd., 1936), p.127.

⁵⁸David Hamilton, “Ethiopia’s Frontiers: The Boundary Agreement and their Demarcation, 1896-1956”(PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 1974), p.325.

⁵⁹As it will become evident later on, the British diplomats were conducting almost all of the discussions concerning the dam project with *Rés* Tafari.

⁶⁰Hamilton, p.324.

⁶¹See Haile Sellassie, *Hiywate enné Ya-Ityopyé Ermejjé* (My Life and Ethiopia's Progress), Vol. I, (England: Bath, 1929 E.C., p. 101.

⁶²At the monastery of Dagé Estifénos the bodies of the following Emperors are still preserved: Déwit I, Zar'éc Yé'qob, Susenyos and Fésiladas. See LaVerle Berry and Richard Smith, "Churches and Monasteries of Lake Tana, Ethiopia, 1972," *Religion Miscellania* 3, (Institute of Ethiopian Studies Library), p.161.

⁶³For a detailed discussion of relics of the Lake Tana island churches and monasteries see *Ibid.*, pp.146-63.

⁶⁴See F.O. 371/12341, Memorandum handed to *Rés* Tafari by Mr. Bentinck, 3rd May 1927.

⁶⁵Such thinking among the the members of Ethiopian ruling elite dates back to the turn of the nineteenth century. See F.O. 1/52, Memorandum by Mr. Russell Aitken, 29 March 1905.

⁶⁶F.O. 371/1571, Kitchener to Edward Grey, 29 May 1913.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*

⁶⁸Abdussamd, p.622.

⁶⁹For example Article II of the 1914 Lake Tana Draft Treaty that the British submitted to the Ethiopian Government seems to have added to the suspicion of the latter by insisting on the construction of a motor road or railway from the Sudan to the Lake. See F.O. 371/4388, Ernest Scott to Dodds, 6th August 1920.

⁷⁰For the 1914 Lake Tana Draft Treaty see *Ibid.*

⁷¹See the J.G. White Engineering Corporation's report.

⁷²McCann, p. 676.

⁷³F.O. 371/1059, Dodds to Curzon, 27 October 1919; Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, p.96.

⁷⁴F.O. 371/8403, Russell to Curzon, 2 February 1923.

⁷⁵Dupuis, p. 9.

⁷⁶See Note 82.

⁷⁷Quoted in McCann, p. 675.

⁷⁸For the *coup d'état* against Térytu see Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, pp. 118-20.

⁷⁹McCann, p. 690.

⁸⁰For Hélylu's wealth and power in the 1920s see Bairu Tafla, "Two of the Last Provincial Kings of Ethiopia," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol.11, No.1, (1973), p.46.

⁸¹See McCann, p. 690.

⁸²F.O.371/12341, Bentinck to Sir Austen Chamberlain, 2 May 1927.

⁸³F.O.371/1059, Dodds to Curzon, 27 October 1919.

⁸⁴On Cheesman's appointment as British consul at Dégilé see Robert E. Cheesman, *Lake Tana and the Blue Nile: An Abyssinian Quest*, (London: Frank Cass & Co.Ltd., 1936), p.1.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, p.65, 223.

⁸⁶According to the American Interior Bureau of Reclamation report. See *Land and Resource...*, p.9.

⁸⁷Cheesman, p.5.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 373-75.

⁸⁹McCann, p. 678.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*

⁹¹F.O. 371/8403, Russell to Curzon, 2 February 1923.

⁹²For the Battle of Anchem see Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, p.137.

⁹³In June, 1931, Hélylu was sentenced life imprisonment. See Bairu, "Two of the Last...", p.46.

⁹⁴McCann, pp.678-79.

⁹⁵F.O. 371/4396, Thesiger to Balfour, 11 October 1917.

⁹⁶F.O. 371/4388, Dodds to Curzon, 18th February 1920.

⁹⁷F.O. 371/4388, Allenby to Dodds, 24th March 1920.

⁹⁸F.O.371/4388, Dodds to Curzon, 17th June 1920. M. Hovian was an Armenian and an astrologer by profession. He was employed by the Ethiopian Government in various capacities in the first decades of the twentieth century. *Ato* Tesféy was said to have accompanied previous scientific expeditions to Lake Téné representing the Ethiopian

Government. Dodds noted that Hovian was his intimate friend who might not make any kind of obstacle to British interest but *Ato Tesfáy* “can be propitiated with promises and provision of liquor.” See F.O. 371/4388, Dodds to Curzon, 17th June 1920.

⁹⁹F.O. 371/4388, Empress Zauditu to *Rés Gugsá*, 10th June 1920; *Rés Tafari* to *Rés Háylu*, 13th June 1920.

¹⁰⁰J.G. White Engineering, p. 2.

¹⁰¹*Land and Water Resource...*, p.9.

¹⁰²McCann, p.679.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴F.O. 371/4388, Dodds to Curzon, 6th March 1920.

¹⁰⁵According to Dodds, Heruy was one of the two Ethiopians who accompanied the British engineers to Lake Táná in order to follow up their work and report to the central Government. See F.O. 371/4388, Dodds to Curzon, February 25, 1920.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷F.O. 371/4396, Dodds to Curzon, 8th June 1920.

¹⁰⁸See Note 94.

¹⁰⁹McCann, p. 693.

¹¹⁰F.O. 371/14596, Barton to Foreign Office, 4 September 1930; *Háile Sellássie*, p.118.

¹¹¹*Haile Sellassie*, p.118.

¹¹²See Note 71.

¹¹³*Haile Sellassie*, p. 102.

¹¹⁴Egypt achieved nominal political independence in 1922.

¹¹⁵F.O. 371/7151, Memorandum by R. Sperling, 8th November 1922.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.* To cite an example in this regard: in 1925, following the assassination of the British representative in Cairo, Sir Lee Stack, the British Government threatened Egypt with diverting a substantial amount of the Nile waters as a punishment for the failure of the Egyptian Government to bring the culprits to justice and its refusal to meet other British demands. The Egyptian Government succumbed to the British pressure and made some concessions to the latter. Particularly, after the British had assured Egypt to respect their interests in the Suez Canal, they lifted their threat. See *Zewde G/Sellassie*,

“The Nile River Question in a New Era of Cooperation among Riparian States” (Paper presented to the Eighth Nile 2002 Conference, June 26-29, 2000, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia), p. 6.

¹¹⁷F.O. 371/7151, Memorandum by R. Sperling, 8 November 1922; F.O. 371/12341, Foreign Office Minute by Sir A. Chamberlain, 16th May 1927.

¹¹⁸F.O.371/7151, Allenby to Foreign Office, 15th December 1922.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*

¹²⁰*Ibid.*

¹²¹See F.O. 371/8404, “Lake Tana File 5,” enclosed in Russell to Foreign Office, 24th September 1923.

¹²²See Antoinette Iadarola, “Ethiopia’s Admission into the League of Nations: An Assessment of Motives,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol.8, No.4, (1975), p.608.

¹²³*Ibid.*, p.620.

¹²⁴F.O. 371/8403, Curzon to Allenby, 8 February 1923.

¹²⁵F.O. 371/8403, Russell to Curzon, 2 February 1923.

¹²⁶F.O. 371/8404, Foreign Office to Russell, 29 November 1923.

¹²⁷F.O. 371/8403, Russell to Curzon, 24 September 1923.

¹²⁸Hamilton, pp. 325-26.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*

¹³⁰“Notes Exchanged between the United Kingdom and Italy Regarding Lake Tana, together with Extracts from Correspondence Respecting the above Agreement, 1926.” (Appendix C) in Charles Rey, *In the Country of the Blue Nile*, (London: Duckworth, 1927), p.279.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, pp. 279-80.

¹³²*Ibid.*, p. 280.

¹³³*Ibid.*, p. 284.

¹³⁴F.O. 371/19185, Memorandum by Mr. Grey, 26 February 1935.

¹³⁵Haile Sellassie, p. 109.

¹³⁶Rey, p. 229.

¹³⁷Haile Sellassie, p. 110.

¹³⁸*Ibid.*,

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 111.

¹⁴⁰See Rey, p. 289.

¹⁴¹Haile Sellassie, p. 116.

¹⁴²*Ibid.*

¹⁴³Antoinette Iadarola, "The Anglo-Italian Agreement of 1925: Mussolini's 'Carte Blanche' for War against Ethiopia," *Northeast African Studies*, Vol.1, No.1, (1979), p.45.

¹⁴⁴McCann, p.685.

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶Ras Tafari to Mr. Bentinck, 15th June 1926. (Appendix C, No.2) in Rey, p.286.

¹⁴⁷Haile Sellassie, p.116.

¹⁴⁸McCann, p.686.

¹⁴⁹F.O.371/12341, Bentinck to Austen Chamberlain, May 10, 1927.

¹⁵⁰F.O. 371/12431, Press Extract enclosed in Bentinck to Austen Chamberlain, 10 May 1927.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*

¹⁵²F.O. 371/12431, Parliamentary Question, 13th July 1927.

¹⁵³F.O. 371/12341, Bentinck to Foreign Office, 25th July 1927, Telegram No.109.

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵F.O. 371/12341, Mr. Bentinck to Sir Austen Chamberlain, July 25, 1927.

¹⁵⁶McCann, p.680.

¹⁵⁷F.O. 371/12341, Bentinck to Murray, 1st August 1927.

¹⁵⁸F.O. 371/12341, Bentinck to Murray, 6th September 1927.

¹⁵⁹F.O. 371/12341, Bentinck to Murray, 26th September 1927, Telegram No. 113.

¹⁶⁰Haile Sellassie, p.117.

¹⁶¹F.O. 371/12342, Foreign Office Minute # 3080/24/1, 4th November 1927.

¹⁶²F.O. 371/12342, E. Howard to J. Murray, 4th November 1927, Telegram No. 469.

¹⁶³The Press Extracts enclosed in F.O. 371/12342, Foreign Office Minute by Mr. Norton #3080/24/1, 4th November 1927.

¹⁶⁴F.O. 371/19185, Foreign Office Memorandum by Mr. Grey, J689/381/1, 20 February 1935.

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶McCann, p.688.

¹⁶⁷The *Daily Chronicle*, Press Extract enclosed in F.O. 371/12342, Foreign Office Minute # 3080/24/1, 4th November 1927; J.G. White Engineering, p.2.

¹⁶⁸Addison E. Southard was directly involved in the dam project. He also facilitated discussions with *Rés Késé* and *Rés Hélyu* concerning the issue when they were in Addis Ababa for the coronation ceremony of Emperor Haile Sellassie, See White Engineering, p.4.

¹⁶⁹F.O. 371/13109, Memorandum by Patrick, 22 February 1928.

¹⁷⁰F.O. 371/19185, Foreign Office Memorandum by Mr. Grey, J689/318/1, 20th February 1935.

¹⁷¹*Ibid.*

¹⁷²*Ibid.*

¹⁷³J.G. White Engineering, p.2.

¹⁷⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p.3.

¹⁷⁶Tesfaye, *The Nile Question...*, p.74.

¹⁷⁷Godana, p.170.

¹⁷⁸Tesfaye, *The Nile Question...*, p.75.

¹⁷⁹Godana, p.169.

¹⁸⁰*Ibid.*, p.170; Tesfaye, *The Nile Question...*, p.175.

¹⁸¹F.O. 371/19185, Foreign Office Memorandum by Mr. Grey J.689/318/1, 20th February 1935.

¹⁸²*Ibid.*

¹⁸³McCann, p.689.

¹⁸⁴J.G. White Engineering, p.3.

¹⁸⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸*Ibid.*; F.O. 371/19185, Foreign Office Memorandum by Mr. Grey J689/318/1, 20th February 1935.

¹⁸⁹J.G. White Engineering, p.3.

¹⁹⁰F.O.371/19185, Foreign Office Memorandum by Mr. Grey J689/318/1/, 20th February 1935.

¹⁹¹Gano Dunn to His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I, December 1st, 1931, enclosed in J. G. White Engineering, p.iv.

¹⁹²*Ibid.*

¹⁹³*Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷Haile Sellassie, p.118; F.O. 371/19185, Foreign Office Memorandum by Mr. Grey, J689/318/1, 20th February 1935.

¹⁹⁸F.O. 371/19185, Foreign Office Memorandum by Mr. Grey, J689/318/1, 20th February 1935.

¹⁹⁹The J.G. White Engineering Corporation provides a detailed discussion of these points.

²⁰⁰F.O. 371/19185, Foreign Office Memorandum by Mr. Grey, J689/318/1, 20th February 1935.

²⁰¹*Ibid.*

²⁰²*Ibid.*

²⁰³*Ibid.*

²⁰⁴*Ibid.*

²⁰⁵F.O.371/19185, S. Barton to M. Lampson, 25th January 1935, Telegram No. 50(R).

²⁰⁶*Ibid.*

²⁰⁷F.O.371/19185, M. Lampson to Barton, Telegram No. 50 (R), 16th February 1935; S. Barton to Lampson, 6th February 1935, Telegram No.31.

²⁰⁸Haile Sellassie, p.118.

²⁰⁹*Ibid.*; F.O.371/20934, Eden to Lampson, April 1st, 1937.

²¹⁰Hamilton, P.328.

²¹¹F.O. 371/19185, Foreign Office Memorandum by Mr. Grey, J689/318/1, 20th February 1935.

²¹²The work is summarized in Abdussamad, “Anglo-Italian...,” pp. 669-21.

²¹³*Ibid.*, p.621.

²¹⁴*Ibid.*

²¹⁵Cited in Iadarola, “The Anglo-Italian Agreement...,” p.52.

²¹⁶*Ibid.*

²¹⁷F.O.371/20934, Eden to Lampson, April 1st, 1937.

²¹⁸*Ibid.*

²¹⁹F.O. 371/20193, Ingram to Eden, September 3, 1936.

²²⁰F.O. 371/27536, Murdock MacDonald to Prime Minister Winston Churchill, 23rd January 1941.

²²¹F.O. 371/20934, Eden to Lampson, April 1st, 1937.

²²²F.O. 371/20193, J. Sanderson to Viscount Cranborne, 7 May 1936.

²²³F.O. 371/20193, Press Extract, *Daily Telegraph*, J4775/1632/1,

15th May 1936.

²²⁴F.O. 371/20193, Parliament Question by Mr. Bellenger, J8466/1632/1,

11th November 1936.

²²⁵F.O. 371/20193, Parliament Question by Mr. Leckie, J3660/1632/1,

27th April 1936.

²²⁶F.O. 371/20934, Press Extract, *Daily Telegraph*, J106/106/1, 6th January 1937.

²²⁷Erlich, *The Cross...*, p.112.

²²⁸*Ibid.*, p.113.

²²⁹*Ibid.*

²³⁰F.O. 371/20193, Signor Fracassi to Mr. Peterson, 20th February 1936.

²³¹*Land and Water Resource...*,p.11.

²³²Quoted in Wondimneh, p.105.

²³³*Ibid.*

²³⁴*Ibid.*

²³⁵Erlich, *The Cross...*, p.113.

²³⁶F.O.371/27536, Foreign Office to A. Bevier, 28th January 1941.

237F.O.371/27536, M. Lampson to Foreign Office, 17th March 1941; F.O. 371/27536, Murdock MacDonald to Prime Minister Winston Churchill, 23rd January 1941.

²³⁸*Ibid.*

²³⁰F.O.371/27536, M. Lampson to Foreign Office, 17th March 1941.

²⁴⁰*Ibid.*

CHAPTER IV

HYDROPOLITICS OF THE BLUE NILE, 1941- 1974

One important consequence of the liberation of Ethiopia from Fascist occupation in 1941 was the revival of the Blue Nile issue. Shortly after liberation, the Blue Nile became a major diplomatic issue with a strong bearing on Ethiopia's foreign relations with the outside world, in general, and with the powers in control of the lower Nile Basin, in

particular. The major events of the post liberation history of the country were directly or indirectly related to the hydropolitics of the Blue Nile. In short, the Blue Nile issue had a significant impact on the history of Ethiopia in the period between 1941 and 1974.

The post-war negotiations on development projects in the Blue Nile Basin and Ethiopia's response to the request for the dam concession took almost exactly the same course as in the period before the Italo-Ethiopian War. No sooner had Emperor Haile Sellassie been restored to his Imperial throne than the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and Egyptian Governments began to urge the British Government to revive the question of a dam across the Blue Nile, at its outlet from Lake Ténć, with the Ethiopian Government after the negotiations had been interrupted due to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia.¹ The growing demand for additional water was a major factor behind the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan Government's desire for the re-opening of the negotiation process.² It demanded the conduct of the negotiations with the Ethiopian Government on the basis of equal share of the water, which would be supplied by the dam at the outlet of Lake Ténć, with Egypt. Hence, the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan Government proposed to Egypt that the dam concession to be granted to itself.³ Unfortunately, however, the latter wanted to involve itself directly in the dam concession process with the Ethiopian Government. In this regard, in June 1941, the Egyptian ambassador in London strongly reminded the British Government that: "... recognition of [Egypt's] rights for the waters of Lake Tsana and Blue Nile must be proceeded within the shortest possible time."⁴ Therefore, this difference between the two Governments hampered the re-opening of the negotiation on the Lake Ténć dam project in the early 1940s.

Eventually, the British Government hosted a conference to resolve the differences at the Foreign Office on 30th October 1941.⁵ The Financial Secretary of the Anglo-

Egyptian Sudan Government and Mr. McGregor were invited to participate. Finally, the conference reached an agreement by which the the British Government would conduct the negotiation with the Ethiopian Government assisted by the Sudanese and Egyptian consultants. This was the basis of the negotiation process with the Ethiopian Government on the construction of a dam across the Blue Nile. Moreover, Britain and Egypt also agreed that the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan Government should cover the cost of the construction of the dam and the reservoir to benefit Egypt and the Sudan equally.⁶ Perhaps this very important resolution of the conference was clearly declared: "... the water should be shared equally by Egypt and the Sudan," who would finally share the cost of the construction of the dam.⁷ It is important to note here that nothing was said about the kind of benefit that Ethiopia would obtain from the construction of the dam within her territorial jurisdiction. However, this proposal was held in abeyance and was not submitted to the Ethiopian Government until June 1943.

On June 10, 1943, Mr. Howe, the British representative in Ethiopia, finally submitted a memorandum to Emperor Haile Sellassie stating the aforementioned proposal concerning the concession.⁸ Howe recorded the Emperor's immediate response to the issue of the Lake T́cńc dam as follows: "... His Majesty remained silent for sometime and then replied that he would consider what I have said and give me a reply in a few days."⁹ Moreover, the memorandum that Howe submitted to the Emperor requested: (1) some area around Lake T́cńc, which would be defined later on, where the British Government would be free to build and operate hydraulic works in the Blue Nile Basin; (2) free use of overland transportation and the construction of new ones from the Sudan to Lake T́cńc; and (3) the construction of an airport around the shore of Lake T́cńc with the expenses to be covered by the British Government.¹⁰ At that time it was noted that the British and

Anglo-Egyptian Sudan Governments would consider obtaining the aforementioned facilities around the Lake T́cńc area as "a fitting and practical expression of gratitude" for their role in helping the Emperor to gain his Imperial throne.¹¹

The Emperor responded to Mr. Howe's memorandum, after two months, on August 12, 1943.¹² In his response, the Emperor noted that Great Britain demanded the Lake T́cńc dam concession from Ethiopia while the latter was still demanding "certain things" (unspecified) from the former.¹³ This clearly indicates that the Emperor most certainly used the dam project as a diplomatic bargain as in the pre-war period. Emperor Haile Sellassie added that there existed too many difficulties between the two Governments to reach an agreement on the Lake T́cńc project. Thus, he proposed to go to London himself "to clear away these misunderstandings."¹⁴ However, the Emperor never implemented his suggestion and the discussions were interrupted for some time.

Apparently, the British political predominance over Ethiopia immediately after liberation in the name of occupied enemy territory and the latter's struggle to regain its complete political independence overshadowed the Blue Nile issue in the early 1940s. This precluded the reopening of serious negotiations on the dam project between the two countries. Moreover, according to British sources, the Emperor wanted to use the Lake T́cńc issue as a bargain for political, territorial and financial gains from the British Government. For instance, when the Emperor needed the support of the British in suppressing internal rebellions against his regime, he is said to have considered the T́cńc dam concession as a bargain.¹⁵ The British also realized that the T́cńc dam concession could not easily be obtained unless they extended other benefits to the Ethiopian Government. It was therefore suggested that the negotiation process be postponed until the end of the Second World War.¹⁶ On the other hand, Egypt continued to urge the

British Government to re-open the negotiation process with Ethiopia and to respect its right of participation in the concession. On 26 September 1943, Nahhas Pasha, the Egyptian Prime Minister, wrote to the British Government stating that Egypt wanted to participate in the negotiation process, on the basis of the 1935 J.G. White Engineering Corporation proposal, as soon as possible.¹⁷ The J.G. White Engineering Corporation declared that it was still interested in participating in the Blue Nile Basin hydraulic project and pledged not to involve in any work without prior consultation with the British Government on 29 February 1944.¹⁸

In 1944, one of the major obstacles to the re-opening of the negotiation process was overcome when the Anglo-Ethiopian Agreement was signed and the relations between the two countries became smooth.¹⁹ Unfortunately, however, the relations between Britain and Egypt deteriorated and made it difficult to reach a joint agreement with the Ethiopian Government.²⁰ Moreover, although the war for the liberation of Ethiopia was over, the World War II was still raging and Britain obviously concentrated its attention on the ongoing war. Therefore, time was not favourable for the re-opening of the negotiation process and hence the Blue Nile issue was not taken seriously as a top diplomatic agenda.

In the post-World War II period, the Blue Nile became a top diplomatic issue between the British, Egyptian and Ethiopian Governments. Subsequently, in February 1945, the British Government again proposed that the negotiation process to be resumed after it had been abandoned as a result of the Italo- Ethiopian War.²¹ A conference was planned to be attended by the representatives of the J.G. White Engineering Corporation, the Ethiopian, Egyptian and Anglo-Egyptian Sudan Governments. Apparently, the motive of the British Government was to meet the Sudanese demand for additional water by

constructing the Lake T́ncé reservoir.²² The reason behind the British urgent need to secure their interest in the waters of the Blue Nile, at that particular time, in relation to their general policy towards Ethiopia was summarized by the Foreign Office as follows:

... in view of the necessity of further agricultural development in the Sudan and the impossibility of securing adequate additional water supplies in any other manner, the Lake Tana project should be revised before the time comes for a general settlement with Ethiopia ...²³

Unfortunately, however, the intended conference never took place and hence the negotiation could not be re-opened. Apparently, the root of the problem was, as it will become evident later, Egypt's new strategy of securing her interest in the waters of the Blue Nile that it began to pursue shortly after the end of the Second World War.

This period witnessed Egypt's increasing involvement in the hydropolitics of the Blue Nile. Egypt adhered to a policy of securing its interest in the whole of the Nile waters to its exclusive advantage through various diplomatic bargaining positions over the Blue Nile waters. The Egyptians began to press a strong claim to Massawa.²⁴ For the Egyptians genuine interest behind their claim to Massawa and later to Eritrea, one can get a clue from a remark of a person named Kamil Bey Abdel Rahim who was quoted as saying that: "... about reaching agreement with us on the policy to be pursued: the Egyptians have always had an idea of using Eritrea as a direct bargaining counter in connexion with Tsana."²⁵ It is therefore not surprising that Egypt confused these two questions.

At the Paris Peace Conference of 1946, Egypt openly advanced her claim to Eritrea.²⁶ This completely contradicted with Ethiopia's age-old interest in obtaining its province which had been unjustly taken by Italy in 1890. In actual fact, Egypt was determined to use the claim as an instrument to consolidate its diplomatic bargaining

position *vis-à-vis* the Ethiopian Government concerning the Lake Tānā dam and to push the latter into the negotiation process. The second possibility was that if Egypt succeeded in gaining control over Eritrea and Ethiopia's access to the sea, it would have a strong bargaining position with Ethiopia that controlled the source of most the Nile waters. In short, the crux of the matter or Egypt's genuine interest behind its claim to Eritrea was the waters of the Blue Nile.

The Egyptian Government seems to have been confident enough to try to obtain the Lake Téné dam concession from the Ethiopian Government. Hence, even violating its agreement with Britain, to make a joint negotiation with Ethiopia, the Egyptian Government directly sought the dam concession from Ethiopia without involving the British and Anglo-Egyptian Sudanese Governments.²⁷ In actual fact, however, the new strategy that Egypt pursued to re-open the Blue Nile waters negotiation encountered staunch opposition from the Ethiopian Government. As pointed out by the Foreign Office, in February 1946, the Egyptian claim to Massawa and the conflict between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Egyptian Coptic Church became a hindrance to the utilization of the waters of the Blue Nile by turning Lake Téné into a reservoir.²⁸ Moreover, Egyptian demand for unilateral dealing with the Ethiopian Government became a source of disagreement between Egypt and Britain in the immediate years after the Second World War. In this regard Campbell expressed the view of the British and Anglo-Egyptian Sudan Governments as follows:

... neither His Majesty's Government nor the Sudan Government would wish that the Egyptian Government should conduct the negotiations with the Ethiopian Government on behalf of His Majesty's Government and the Sudan Government.²⁹

This difference between Egypt and Britain went on unresolved until December 1946.

Egypt also tried to force the Ethiopian Government into the Nile waters dialogue by using some other strategies. In April 1947, two American army officers made a secret trip from Cairo to Addis Ababa to caution the Ethiopian Emperor against a possible assassination attempt. It is noteworthy that the information was later on proved unfounded. Undoubtedly, the American officers had been dispatched by King Faruk of Egypt with the intention of urging the Ethiopian Government to re-open the negotiation for the waters of the Blue Nile.³⁰

Under these circumstances, Ethiopia refused to enter into any kind of negotiation with the Egyptians concerning the waters of the Blue Nile. In June 1947, for example, in a conversation between the Ethiopian Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, *Ato* Aklilu Habta-Wald and the British diplomat, Mr. Farquhar, the former noted that the time was not proper to negotiate on the Lake Táná dam project.³¹ The British diplomat expressed Aklilu's intention concerning the dam project as follows: "... [Aklilu] did not disguise his feelings of hostility towards the Egyptian Government, whose claim to Massawa sticks in the Ethiopians' throats."³² Tacitly, Ethiopia was against Egyptian claim to access to the sea as a bargain for the waters of the Blue Nile. Needless to say, the Ethiopian Government staunchly and consistently opposed the Egyptian approach instead of negotiating in the manner that Egypt calculated.

Emperor Haile Sellassie noted that his Government did not want to negotiate with the Egyptian Government concerning the Blue Nile issue. He also made it clear that Ethiopia's preference was to deal with the British but not with Egypt.³³ The Emperor said: " the Egyptians were making a mistake in thinking that Lake Tana already belonged to them."³⁴ Moreover, the Ethiopian Government declared through its Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, *Ato* Aklilu Habta Wald, that hitherto Ethiopia had approached Egypt on

the issue thinking that the latter was jointly working with the British Government³⁵ The British Government also notified Ethiopia that Egypt was not prepared to make such a joint approach.³⁶ Therefore, this misunderstanding between the three Governments became a major obstacle to the resumption of the negotiation process for the Lake T́cné dam project.

In December 1946, Britain and Egypt were obliged to make preliminary technical discussions on the Lake T́cné dam project in Cairo. At the meeting, Egypt was represented by Mohammed Kamil Pasha Nabih, under-secretary of state in the Ministry of Public Works, while the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan Government was represented by W.N. Allan, Irrigation Consultant of the Sudan Government.³⁷ The two Governments signed an agreement to supplement the 1935 Agreement of Cairo. The meeting was concerned with the basis on which they should recommence the negotiation and hence drafted instructions to their respective delegates. Perhaps the most important decision of the meeting was that the two Governments agreed to re-open the negotiation process and decided to make a joint agreement with Ethiopia.³⁸

However, there was also another major hurdle. This was the Egyptian and British demand to utilize the waters of the Blue Nile without any concession to Ethiopia in the period after the Second World War.³⁹ This is clearly reflected in the study of the Egyptian Ministry of Public Works concerning the management and utilization of the Nile waters in 1946. This was the "Century Storage Scheme" that was proposed by the British water specialists, H.E. Hurst, R.P. Black and Y.M. Simaika, who were in the service of the Egyptian Ministry of Public Works. The study was published under the title: *The Nile Basin: The Future Conservation of the Nile*.

The study noted that after the Second World War, the need for additional hydraulic projects to expand agricultural production and to protect Egypt from untimely floods were again given considerable attention by the Egyptian Government. It was therefore proposed that the "Century Storage Scheme" along the whole length of the Nile instead of a hydraulic project with an annual storage capacity within Egyptian territory be established to meet the aforementioned demands.⁴⁰ According to this scheme, lakes in the upper Nile would be turned into water reservoirs. This was believed to help increase the volume of water for Egypt and the Sudan without a significant increase in the surface exposed to evaporation since the rate of evaporation could be balanced by rainfall and altitude.⁴¹ In this regard the Lake T́cńc dam project was expected to benefit Egypt and Sudan by expanding irrigation agriculture.⁴² The Egyptian Minister of Public Works, Abd al-Kawi Pasha, described the "Century Storage Scheme" enthusiastically as follows:

This is the first time that the full development of Egypt has been considered in detail and a new idea, that of "Century Storage " is introduced. The book [*The Nile Basin...*] makes it clear that we can no longer proceed by small stages leaving the ultimate development for future consideration. The new ideas show that on important points a decision must be made now. The main projects are seen to be closely connected parts of one whole, and their connection is a complicated one.⁴³

However, the " Century Storage Scheme" was not endorsed by the Ethiopian Government.

Apart from its little advantage to Ethiopia, Egyptian foreign policy contradicted with Ethiopian interest and became a hindrance to the realization of the " Century Storage Scheme". The latter was clearly reflected in the protracted diplomatic jostling over the Eritrean question that went on between Great Britain, Egypt and Ethiopia in the newly founded United Nations Organization.

also promised to me to transmit instructions to Dafawzi, their representative in New York.

Moreover, in 1950, the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared that the Government was very much exasperated by Egyptian policy towards Eritrea, particularly by the resurrection of their claim to the port of Massawa. As a result, the Ethiopian Government could not accept the idea of having Egyptian representation in the negotiation concerning the Lake Táné dam project even if they had consented to British full participation, unless they renounced their claim to Massawa.⁵⁰ Finally, some days before the UN decided on the question of Eritrea, Emperor Haile Sellassie declared that Ethiopia had the right to use the waters of the Blue Nile.⁵¹ After this linking of the question of Eritrea with the Blue Nile issue, Egypt abandoned its claim over Eritrea and even voted in favour of the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia in December 1950.⁵²

After the Eritrean question had been resolved, the relations between Egypt and Ethiopia improved but it was short lived. On 20 July 1951, Britain and Egypt reached an agreement on the composition and terms of reference of the joint Egypto-Sudanese delegation, which was set up under Egyptian chairmanship, to discuss the technical aspects of the Lake Táné reservoir with the Ethiopian Government.⁵³ Nevertheless, even though the British and Egyptian Governments were able to resolve their differences, Ethiopia was not ready to discuss with them any technical matters. Subsequently, Ethiopia asked for six weeks' time to examine the technical aspects of the project in order to endorse their proposal for discussion. The Ethiopian Government primarily demanded experts' technical briefing to know the potentialities of the Lake Táné dam to generate hydroelectric power. It also expected some kind of financial assistance from the Egyptian

and the Sudan Governments for the construction of the reservoir.⁵⁴ As a result, the negotiations between Britain, Egypt and Ethiopia were interrupted in October 1951.

In the early 1950s, the Ethiopian Government showed a great interest in studying its water resources and gather the necessary hydraulic data so as to design its own policy. As a result, in April 1952, two American water specialists, Jon A.Clark and H.Greenhalgh, arrived in Addis Ababa, in response to Ethiopia's request for the study of the potential of the waters of the Blue Nile Basin within its territory.⁵⁵ This study was conducted under the auspices of the American Bureau of Reclamation through the U.S. Foreign Aid Programme.⁵⁶ It made a preliminary reconnaissance of the Blue Nile Basin in April and May 1952 with the aim of collecting hydraulic data. The mission suggested that investigations be conducted in the following dry season. It also recognized the existence of irrigation and hydroelectric power potentiality in the Blue Nile Basin within Ethiopian territory.⁵⁷ The study became a precursor of the US Bureau of Reclamation's comprehensive study on the land and water resources of the Blue Nile Basin in the period between 1958 and 1964.

While Ethiopia was trying to study the potentiality of its river, a revolution with far reaching consequences for the hydropolitics of the Blue Nile took place in Egypt on July 23, 1952.⁵⁸ Young military officers led by Colonel Gamal Abd al-Nasser seized political power in Egypt. The Egyptian revolutionaries needed a spectacular and visible symbol to demonstrate the revolution to the people of Egypt and the world. To this end, within two months after it came to power, the Revolutionary Command Council considered the erection of the High Dam at Aswan, as a monument to the vision of the revolution.⁵⁹ The revolutionaries adopted the plan of building the Aswan Dam on the basis of the proposal of Adrian Daninos, an Egyptian-Greek engineer, and Luigi Gallioli, an Italian, that they

had prepared in 1948.⁶⁰ It was the most important change introduced by the Egyptian revolution that marked a change in Egyptian Nile policy. Therefore, the beginning of the construction of the Aswan Dam, as will become evident later, brought a meaningful change to the hydro-politics of the Blue Nile.

The High Dam at Aswan was planned to store water for irrigation and to generate a huge amount of hydroelectricity for the expansion of industries in Egypt.⁶¹ But, as observed by scholars, it was "the wrong dam in the wrong place."⁶² Because the building of this gigantic and expensive dam in Egyptian territory had several disadvantages from the point of effective utilization of the water resources of the Nile. The dam faced the problem of huge amount of water loss, due to evaporation, seepage, and siltation problems.⁶³ In spite of this, the Aswan Dam freed Egypt from the imagined and real threat from upstream states by providing over-year storage within its territory.⁶⁴ Hence, all previous proposals including the "Century Storage Scheme" were abandoned as British vanity. Therefore, the decision for the Aswan Dam marked a watershed in the history of development schemes throughout the Nile Basin.

Side by side with its new policy of developing the Nile within its territory, the Egyptian Government under Nasser revived the Egyptian slogan of the unity of the Nile valley and launched a campaign to that end.⁶⁵ The idea was aimed at unifying the Nile Basin states under Egypt. In other words, it called for the unification of Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, British, Italian and French Somalilands, Kenya and Uganda under Egyptian political hegemony.⁶⁶ To this end, Nasser extended repeated official invitations to Emperor Haile Sellassie to make a state visit to Egypt.⁶⁷ But the Ethiopian Emperor never accepted this invitation until 1959 when he made his official visit to Cairo to finalize the independence of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.⁶⁸

Nasser also proposed a military alliance between Egypt, the Sudan and Ethiopia.⁶⁹ He raised the issue to the Ethiopian ambassador in the Sudan, *Ato Mallass Andom*. In December 1956, Mallass was instructed by the Emperor, to discuss the matter with President Nasser.⁷⁰ At that conversation, *Ato Mallass* told Nasser, as he later informed the British ambassador in Ethiopia:

You [Nasser] claim to be an Arab and to lead the Arab world... [But] we Ethiopians are not Arabs. We are Africans and we are black. We do not belong to your world although like you we drink the water of the Nile. You have tried to interfere in our affairs and also make trouble for His Majesty...secondly, you may have military objectives. We do not know exactly what they may be but we have no confidence in the strength of your armed forces, and we are strongly against the communists who arm you. For these reasons your proposal is unacceptable and we are not prepared to discuss it even.⁷¹

In the final analysis, in the early 1950s, Egypt's policy of the unity of the Nile Valley and its decision of building the Aswan Dam had the following repercussions in Addis Ababa, as Spencer described:

The fact that it [Egypt] did so without consulting Ethiopia, the prime source for the waters of the Lower Nile, created near-panic in Addis Ababa-particularly as Nasser had renewed king Farouk's proposals for the so-called unity of the valley of the Nile under Egyptian domination.⁷²

Even though Egypt abandoned its stand on the "Century Storage Scheme" on the ground that hydraulic projects outside its political territory would increase its vulnerability, Ethiopia continued to study its basin through expatriate water specialists. The Ethiopian Government realized that it lacked the necessary data concerning the Blue Nile to design development projects and to draft its own water policy. Moreover, such a

study was also believed to help the Government in resolving some legal and other problems arising from the question of utilizing the waters of the Blue Nile.⁷³ Subsequently, in April 1953, the Ethiopian Ministry of Public Works requested J. Seymour Harris and Partners to make a study on the feasibility of the Lake Tānā reservoir and its water utilization.⁷⁴ Particularly, they were expected to provide advice on: (1) the maximum and minimum water levels of the Lake Téné reservoir; (2) the site of outfall channel from the lake, if any; and (3) the position of regulator in the Blue Nile and the rate of annual water discharge of the lake.⁷⁵ The mission was also instructed to develop plans for a new capital city on the shore of Lake Téné.⁷⁶

The need for a new political and economic centre around Lake Téné dates back to around 1951.⁷⁷ The Imperial Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs memorandum, prepared by S.M. Gelberg in February 1955, stated that comprehensive studies on two projects, i.e. the utilization of the waters of Lake Téné and the establishment of a new capital city around the lake carried out by Messrs Seymour Harris and Partners since 1951.⁷⁸ The study report suggested that the projects would cost 100 million Ethiopian *Birr*.⁷⁹

The Ethiopian Government set up a committee to examine the study of the two projects and outlined a tentative plan for the realization of the study. The committee was called the Lake Téné Committee. Its members included two officials from the Ministry of Public Works and Communications, one from the Water Resource Office of the United States Operations Mission to Ethiopia (Point Four) and one from the Highway Authority. Upon the conclusion of its technical analysis of the projects, two members from the Ministry of Finance, Commerce, and Industry, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were

added to the committee.⁸⁰ After its technical work, the Lake T́cnć committee made a recommendation on the two projects as follows:

from the purely economic stand point, a capital city at Lake Tana will not emerge from nothing by itself. It is more likely that a town will arise in the wake of the regulator, rather than that the regulator plans will be a projection of the plans for the city.⁸¹

Tacitly, the committee suggested that the reservoir should be given more priority than the new capital city because transferring the capital from Addis Ababa to B́chir D́cr would be too costly and could not be materialized unless the lake was turned into a reservoir.

Moreover, the Lake T́cnć Committee noted that:

The work already done has to some extent been made complicated by the linking up of the water question with a scheme for building a new city at Bahir Dar. In our view, the survey should concentrate upon the simpler issue of converting Lake Tana into a storage reservoir and producing definite plans for doing so, with an estimate cost.⁸²

However, the idea of shifting the capital to B́chir D́cr was not totally abandoned. According to one informant, *Ato Get́chaw Baqqala*, who was governor of B́chir D́cr *Awŕjjć* in 1961, the city was to be named after the Emperor and until 1961 many plots of land in the town were still in the hands of the Emperor, his family and high-ranking officials.⁸³ In 1961, the idea of shifting the capital was abandoned and the aforementioned land was taken over by the *Awŕjjć* administration and distributed to those who needed land for development purposes.⁸⁴ A hydroelectric power generator at Tis-Isćt Falls, the Polytechnic Institute, the Falaga-Hiywot Hospital, the Pedagogical College and other service-giving institutions for the city around Lake T́cnć were constructed.⁸⁵

In the middle of the 1950s, proposals for the Lake Téné reservoir were submitted to the Ethiopian Government. On November 11, 1954, a Swedish Consulting Engineering Firm prepared a memo that discussed the importance of the Lake Téné reservoir and estimated that the work required 65,000,000 Swedish Kr.⁸⁶ After his visit to Ethiopia, Professor B. Hellström, a Swedish engineer, prepared a memorandum that was presented to the Emperor in February 1955.⁸⁷ Hellström, like the report of the Point-Four water specialists submitted to the Shewé Electric Light and Power Authority in January 1955,⁸⁸ recommended that the Ethiopian Government should develop the Qoqé Dam instead of the Blue Nile, which required a greater amount of capital and tied to the hydropolitics, as source of hydroelectric power for Addis Ababa.⁸⁹ This report clearly indicates that the Lake Téné dam project was abandoned not only because of the conflict with the Egyptian Government but also because the water specialists under the service of the Ethiopian Government were against it.

Indeed, at this historical juncture the Aswan Dam project superseded the Lake Téné Dam project. The Egyptians therefore began to oppose any kind of hydraulic development plans in the Blue Nile Basin and concentrated their efforts on building the High Aswan Dam. On January 6, 1956, Egypt announced that the United States and Britain had promised to provide financial aid for the Aswan Dam project. The two Governments pledged a total of US 70,000,000 dollar for the first five-years after the construction of the dam.⁹⁰ At the same time, the Egyptian Government was also negotiating with the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development for a loan. The Bank expressed its readiness to provide the loan.⁹¹ The USA and Britain considered their financial aid to the Aswan Dam, which was described by the *New York Times* as "... the backbone and, indeed, the ribs, of premier Nasser's revolutionary concepts,"⁹² and as

the best way to win the friendship not only of the Egyptians but also of the entire Arab world.⁹³ Meanwhile, the other major power, the U.S.S.R. also promised to provide a loan at two percent interest.⁹⁴ It is important to note that Egypt was at first a member of the Non-Aligned Nations.⁹⁵

After the news of the Aswan Dam project had appeared in international media, the Ethiopian Government began to examine the matter critically. A long debate was held among Government circles on whether or not an official statement was to be issued on the dam project. Indeed, the Government faced several legal and diplomatic obstacles to issue the official statement: (1) Egypt was not legally bound by prior agreement not to undertake such a project in her territory, as Ethiopia was not; (2) Ethiopia did not have the necessary hydraulic data about the potentialities of the Blue Nile Basin if its official statement was reviewed by international conference; therefore it was believed that Ethiopia would be in an embarrassing situation;(3) the project did not cause any immediate crisis since much of its engineering work was not yet completed; therefore an official statement was considered a little bit premature; (4) the final agreement concerning the financial cost of the project was not yet concluded and if Egypt failed to secure funds from the west, it was feared that Egypt might put the blame upon Ethiopia; and (6) since the USA, Britain and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development were on the Egyptian side, the official statement would be considered as a futile diplomatic effort.⁹⁶ On the other hand, permitting Egypt to strengthen both the legal and diplomatic bases for the construction of the Aswan Dam was considered tantamount to sacrificing Ethiopia's right over the waters of the Nile. Moreover, public opinion in Ethiopia demanded some action by the Imperial Government.⁹⁷ Finally, the Ethiopian Government realized that the country's diplomatic prestige would be seriously undermined unless it

issued an official statement at that crucial time. However, it was decided to issue the official statement in the form of a communiqué addressed not to Egypt or to any other particular country or organization, but to the world in general.⁹⁸

The Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs released the communiqué on 6 February 1956.⁹⁹ It described that the expansion of Ethiopian economy and the growth of its population necessitated the exploitation of its water resources for irrigation and as a source of hydroelectric power. The Ethiopian Government therefore openly expressed its view and rights regarding the water resources within its territorial jurisdiction and invited foreign firms to undertake hydraulic development projects as follows:

The Imperial Ethiopian Government expects shortly to call for a series of international and hydro- electric projects now under preparation. In the allocation of bids, financing terms and conditions will be taken into consideration.¹⁰⁰

Indeed, the Ethiopian Government had a strong desire for involving countries like USSR, which it was thought would not obtain the concession of the Aswan Dam from Egypt, and would help in the effort to develop the Blue Nile Basin.¹⁰¹

The Egyptian decision of building the Aswan Dam therefore encountered objection from the Ethiopian Government and hence drew the question of the Nile waters into its vortex. Ethiopian opposition seems to have been reasonable since it did not directly attack the Aswan Dam project. At that time, the Ethiopian Government believed that it needed to study the potentiality of its water resources before taking decisive measures. Hence, in 1956, it concentrated its attention on the Blue Nile issue and began to take some political and administrative measures. In that same year on the order of Emperor Haile Sellassie the Ministry of Public Works and Communications began to examine earlier studies that had been conducted in the Blue Nile Basin. After this work had been completed, the Water

Resource Office was transferred from the Ministry of Finance, Commerce and Industry to the Ministry of Public Works and Communications, mainly to study the Blue Nile Basin. A committee consisting of high-ranking Government officials was also set up.¹⁰² Moreover, the Government attempted to involve the American Technical Assistance Mission (Point Four) in the study of the Blue Nile Basin.¹⁰³ Finally, in June 1956, the Ethiopian Government succeeded in signing an agreement with the USA Government. In this agreement the USA agreed to assist the Water Resource Office in its effort of studying the Blue Nile Basin and prepared a plan that Ethiopia could utilize its water resources on the basis of the agreement of June 1951.¹⁰⁴

In 1956, Dr. *Dajjézméčh* Zawde Gabra Selléssie, then Vice Minister of Public Works, Transport, and Civil Aviation, and also Chairman of the Highway Board and President of Ethiopian Airlines, made an unofficial deal with the American State Department on the Blue Nile issue on his way to Washington D.C. on a different state mission.¹⁰⁵ On his return, Emperor Haile Sellassie instructed him to negotiate and sign an agreement with the USA Government in August 1957 that led to the establishment of the US –Ethiopian joint study project on the Blue Nile Basin known as : The USA – Ethiopian Cooperative for the Study of the Blue Nile Basin.¹⁰⁶ This was done one month after the US Government officially announced its withdrawal from the Aswan Dam project.

In July 1956, the USA, Great Britain and the International Bank withdrew from the Aswan Dam project after a complicated story of financing the project. Reportedly, the USA changed its decision on the ground that Egypt could not reach an agreement with the upper Nile states of the Sudan and Ethiopia concerning the erection of the High Dam at Aswan.¹⁰⁷ In connection with this, on July 19, 1956, the USA issued a declaration that the

right and interests of all riparian states of the Nile should be respected after the construction of the Aswan Dam as follows:

[The project] involves not merely the right and interests of Egypt, but of other states whose waters are contributory including Sudan, Ethiopia and Uganda...with the understanding that accomplishment of the project as a whole would require a satisfactory resolution of the question of the Nile waters rights ... and the United States Government has concluded that it is not feasible in present circumstances to participate in the project. ¹⁰⁸

In actual fact, the US Government strengthened its alliance with the Ethiopian Government due to Egypt's political shift from neutrality to alignment to the USSR. In this regard, it was eager to exploit the Blue Nile as a political leverage against the Egyptians who had ceded the Aswan Dam concession to the Soviets. Therefore, the Nile issue became part of the politics of the Cold War in Northeast Africa. In other words, regarding the Nile waters question the two major actors of the Cold War, the USA and the USSR, allied with Ethiopia and Egypt, respectively.

Some months after the West had withdrawn its financial aid to the Aswan Dam and the USA made the aforementioned declaration, President Gamal Abd al-Nasser retaliated by nationalizing the Suez Canal by decree on the ground that Egypt needed to finance the dam project with the benefits that would accrue from the Canal.¹⁰⁹ The decree led to the most serious international crisis since the end of the Second World War. Subsequently, Britain, France and Israel invaded Egypt.¹¹⁰ At that time, Ethiopia was invited by the British Government to attend the Suez Canal Conference, held in London in August and September of 1956, to find a peaceful settlement to the crisis.¹¹¹ Ethiopia

This clearly indicates that Ethiopia's official statements and its subsequent plans to develop the Blue Nile, on the one hand, and Egypt's threat against the peace and stability of Ethiopia, on the other, escalated the political tension between the two countries.

In 1958, the Ethiopian Government already secured the support of Israel against Nasser in the hydropolitics of the Nile.¹¹⁸ Emperor Haile Sellassie had delivered the aforementioned speech a few days after he had received the following message from Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion of Israel:

There is a growing danger that the military junta in Egypt will double its efforts to subvert its neighbors and undermine their independence. Moreover, the initial help pledged by the USSR to Egypt to build the Aswan High Dam constitutes another source of danger to Egypt's African neighbors. Unfortunately, there is little awareness in the world that the Nile is not exclusively an Egyptian river, but that rather it is above all an Ethiopian and Sudanese river. I have instructed all our representatives abroad to mention this geographic fact in their communications with Governments and public opinion makers.... It is my hope that Ethiopia will forcefully stem the hostile and subversive policy of its northern neighbour.¹¹⁹

Moreover, Israeli water experts frequently toured to the Blue Nile Basin with the consent of Emperor Haile Sellassie. Nevertheless, the Israel Government did nothing to develop the basin other than trying to address Ethiopia's right to interfere with the flow of the Blue Nile to the Egyptian Government.¹²⁰ It was the USA that made a prolonged study of the Blue Nile Basin with the Ethiopian Government although the study was politically motivated.

In March 1957, the US Vice President, Mr. Nixon, paid a state visit to Ethiopia and reaffirmed that the US Government's belief that the Nile waters should be utilized by all riparian states.¹²¹ In the beginning of the following year, in January 1958, the Ethiopian Government began to discuss the study of the Blue Nile Basin with the representatives of

the United States. The conference was held in Addis Ababa in the office of *Dajjézméch* Zawde Gabra- Sellassie on January 13, 16 and 17, 1958. It was attended by the US representatives: Assistant Commissioner Nielson, Mr. Damour and Mr. Byrnes of the US Bureau of Reclamation, Mr. Sawyers, Mr. Rivers and Mr. Bygate. The Ethiopian government representatives were: *Dajjézméch* Zawde Gabra-Sellassie, *Lej* Mikael Immiru, *Ato* Kabbada Abozin, *Ato* Minése Lammé, and Mr. Scott.¹²² After three days of discussion on the objectives of the study, the Bureau of Reclamation agreed on many points. To mention: (1) to produce a reconnaissance study report on the Blue Nile on which Ethiopia's future water resource development policy would be based; (2) to prepare a study report that would serve Ethiopia as a foundation for international negotiations with other Nile riparian states; (3) to assist Ethiopia to set up a Water Resource Division under the Ministry of Public Works as a permanent organ to carry on hydraulic studies and plan the country's water resource development; (4) to train Ethiopians in the field of water resource development; and (5) the Bureau of Reclamation was finally committed to produce its reconnaissance report of the Blue Nile Basin within seven years. The participants also agreed on many technical matters related to the study of the Blue Nile.¹²³

Subsequently, after it had completed its preparation, the US-Ethiopia joint study mission began its prolonged study of the Blue Nile Basin in September 1958.¹²⁴ The study mission set up its temporary camps near the towns of Béchir Dér, Dabra Mécqos, Naqamt, and Asosé. For the study, the Water Resource Office employed 50 engineers and 250 technicians.¹²⁵ The study was a comprehensive one and reflected a detailed discussion on hydrology, water quality, geology, soil, mineral resource, hydroelectric power potential, irrigation potential, dams, land use, local economy and ground water of the entire Blue Nile Basin, in the period between 1958 and 1963.¹²⁶ The field work of this intensive study

of the Blue Nile Basin was completed on June 30, 1963. The personnel of the Bureau of Reclamation returned to America except two water specialists who decided to remain in Addis Ababa to provide the Water Resource Department with expertise assistance.¹²⁷ The report of the study was finally published in many volumes entitled: *Land and Water Resources of the Blue Nile Basin: Ethiopia*.¹²⁸

The study recognized that the Blue Nile had considerable potential for the purpose of irrigation and as a source of hydroelectric power. In this regard, it identified 33 projects in the basin, of which 8 were for both irrigation and hydroelectric power and 14 for irrigation.¹²⁹ The study proposed four major dams on the Blue Nile River between Lake Téné and the Ethio-Sudanese border with combined water storage capacity of 51 billion cubic meters. These dams would have benefits such as: electric power, irrigation, navigation, recreation and fish breeding. The dams were estimated to have the capacity of generating over 25 billion KW hydroelectric power annually,¹³⁰ which was about three times the hydroelectric power potential of the Aswan Dam.¹³¹ This would enable Ethiopia to export hydroelectricity to the Sudan, Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula. Moreover, the study indicated that Ethiopia would have about 434,000 ha. of irrigated land in the Blue Nile Basin¹³² representing 17 per cent of the then Egyptian land under cultivation.¹³³ These proposed hydraulic projects, although benefiting Ethiopia economically, would reduce small amount of the Nile waters to the downstream countries. The amount of water that Ethiopia planned to utilize in the aforementioned projects would not very much exceed the amount of water lost in the territories of Egypt and the Sudan due to the high rate of evaporation. Hence, experts arrived at the conclusion that the down stream riparian states would not be affected by the projects in the Blue Nile Basin.¹³⁴

The joint study report suggested that the Finché, Dabana, Upper Balas, Débus, Lower Didessé, Lower Gudar, Arjo-Didessé, Angar, Amarti- Nashe and Gilgal Abbéy projects were most desirable for Ethiopia's economic development plans.¹³⁵ However, of these projects, it was only the Finché sub-basin project that has hitherto materialized. This project consisted of a dam with a capacity of 2 million cubic meters of water, which was supposed to produce 80, 000 KW hydroelectric power, and 15,000 ha. land with irrigation potentiality for sugar cane plantation. The Finché hydropower plant was appraised by the World Bank in 1969 and became operational in 1972.¹³⁶ The Fincha hydroelectric power station was estimated to meet the demand for electricity only until 1978. This situation led to the conception of two important hydroelectric power projects called the Amarti River Diversion and the Wébi Shaballe Malké Wékénné.¹³⁷

The estimated cost of the US - Ethiopian joint study project in the Blue Nile was more than 20 million Ethiopian *Birr*.¹³⁸ In broader terms, the Ethiopian people gained almost nothing.¹³⁹ Of course, activities related to the study project became the basis for the foundation and development of some important Governmental institutions like the Ministry of Water Resources, the Ethiopian Mapping and Geography Institute, and the Ethiopian Meteorological and Hydrological stations in the country.¹⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the study project failed to attain its initial objectives and hence its several volumes of published report also remained little more than decoration on paper. From this it is possible to say that the US Government tricked Ethiopia and its involvement in the Blue Nile Basin was merely to threaten Egypt that strengthened its friendship with its archenemy, the USSR. At the same time, the US also needed Egypt's friendship, because of vital strategic value for American interests in the Middle East.

The US-Ethiopian joint project in the Blue Nile also seems to have been the main factor for Egypt's hostile policy towards Ethiopia in the late 1950s. Certainly, the Egyptian Government began to use its geopolitical and strategic position in the region to hamper any kind of development activity in the Blue Nile Basin. Its strategy can be divided into two: legal and hostile policy. Legally, Egypt signed a bilateral water agreement with the Sudan and insisted that the upper riparian states respect the agreement. Concerning the second, Egypt pursued a policy of destabilizing Ethiopia, the source of most of the Nile waters, so as to ensure unrestricted utilization of the Nile waters.

While Ethiopia was studying the Blue Nile Basin, Egypt was able to persuade the Sudanese Government to sign on 8th November 1959 a Nile Waters Agreement. It was an agreement " for the full utilization of the Nile Water " without the participation of Ethiopia and other Nile riparian states.¹⁴¹ The Sudan entered into this agreement because it demanded the 1929 Nile Waters Agreement to be repudiated and superseded by another fair Nile waters agreement.¹⁴² Above all, in May 1959 the president of the World Bank, Eugene Black, decided that the Sudan had to sign a water agreement with Egypt to get its request for a loan for the Roseires Dam Project.¹⁴³ At the 1959 Nile Waters Agreement, all problems related to water shares, cost and financial, irrigational, administrative, and human problems between Egypt and the Sudan were settled.¹⁴⁴ The two Governments also established a Joint Commission to study further development possibilities in the Nile Basin for the benefit of the two countries by holding regular meetings in Cairo and Khartoum.¹⁴⁵

Egypt and Sudan agreed to share any possible additional water that could be obtained from future development of the upper Nile basin on equal basis.¹⁴⁶ It is important to note that from then on Egypt and Sudan concentrated developing the White Nile by

digging the Jonglei Canal ¹⁴⁷ and hence they ignored the Blue Nile Basin of the Ethiopian territory. Moreover, as will become evident later, Egypt's policy concerning the Blue Nile was based on preventing any kind of development plans in the basin.

In connection with the hydropolitics of the Nile, Egypt and the Sudan adopted a common policy and shared a common attitude towards the upper riparian states. This view is summarized under Article II of the Agreement as follows:

In case any question connected with Nile waters needs negotiating with the Governments of any riparian territories outside the Republic of Sudan and the United Arab Republic, the two Republics shall agree before hand on a united view.... Since other riparian countries..... claim a share in the Nile waters, both Republics agree to study together these claims and adopt a unified view thereon.¹⁴⁸

It must be underlined that the agreement called for the " full utilization of the Nile waters" without prior consultation with Ethiopia and other riparian states and hence with complete disregard for their rights and water needs. It is not surprising that according to the agreement, the upper riparian states including Ethiopia had to get prior permission from Egypt and the Sudan in order to utilize some amount of the Nile waters within the territories under their jurisdiction. As Erlich noted: " The 1959 agreement, still valid today, was tantamount to declaring Ethiopia irrelevant." ¹⁴⁹

The British Government expressed its protest against the agreement on behalf of its East African colonies, Uganda, Kenya and Tanganyika. It stressed that the correct path should have been arriving at an agreement by organizing a diplomatic conference attended by the representatives of all Nile riparian states.¹⁵⁰ However, Ethiopia's reaction to the 1959 agreement is not clearly known. The Ethiopian Government did not issue any official statement to express openly its protest, as in the earlier cases. Indeed, the

Ethiopian Government continued its study of the Blue Nile Basin with the US Bureau of Reclamation. Moreover, in the same year, following Emperor Haile Sellassie's official visit to Cairo, Egyptian and Ethiopian religious ties were cut off.¹⁵¹ As a result, the Coptic Church of Egypt ceased to be the spiritual mother of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Ethiopia appointed its own patriarch who consecrated Ethiopian *abuns*. The religious matters, once and for all, and the Nile issue, for some time, were no longer relevant in Ethio-Egyptian relations.

Despite British open and Ethiopia's silent opposition, Egypt and the Sudan never amended the terms of the 1959 Nile Waters Agreement. Egypt, apparently, later compromised on its view that has widely been expressed in the phrase "acquired rights" or "priority of appropriation" of the Nile waters.¹⁵²

The second major strategy that Egypt employed in the end of 1950s to undermine Ethiopia's demand for equitable and fair utilization of the Nile waters and its plan of developing the Blue Nile Basin within its territory was by menacing Ethiopia's peace and security. Egypt began to provide Ethiopian external and internal enemies with substantial moral and material support. The Egyptian Government under Nasser re-commenced its attack against Ethiopia, not directly as it had been in the 1870s, but rather indirectly. Egypt's attempt to destabilize Ethiopia and its strategic support for the Eritrean Liberation Front and Somali irredentism was a direct outcome of the hydro-politics of the Blue Nile. Certainly, Egypt began to believe that its permanent interest in the waters of the Blue Nile could be secured by this very short-sighted policy.

In the late 1950s, Egypt started a radio broadcast from Cairo that instigated Ethiopian Muslims, especially those in Eritrea, against Christian political hegemony. Through this media, the Egyptian Government politicized Christian-Muslim relations in

Ethiopia.¹⁵³ Obviously, its aim was to create a chaotic situation in Ethiopia by dividing the people into two antagonistic religious groups and inducing them into an endless civil war. Nevertheless, the Egyptian attempt in this regard was a fiasco.

Radio Cairo also offered thousands of young Muslim Eritreans military training in Egypt.¹⁵⁴ The Egyptian Government established a military camp near Alexandria where the Eritreans received military training on how to set up a modern guerrilla movement modelled on the Pan-Arab Algerian FLN.¹⁵⁵ The Christian Tigreans who opposed the reunification of Eritrea with Ethiopia were also given military training. The founders of the Eritrean armed struggle, like Walda Ab Walda M'crycm, received their military training in Egypt. They also had a special radio programme through which they transmitted anti-Ethiopian propaganda and called upon young Eritreans to join the armed struggle.¹⁵⁶ As a result, in 1959 the Eritrean fighters completed their military training and established the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) with its head-quarters in Cairo.¹⁵⁷ Subsequently, the ELF launched an open armed struggle using Sudanese territory as a military base in 1961.¹⁵⁸ Egypt also assisted the ELF in obtaining the support of the Arab world. Consequently, in April 1962, the Arab League promised full solidarity with and support to the ELF.¹⁵⁹ In short, ELF was born, nurtured and brought to full maturity by the Egyptian Government in order to wage a struggle against Ethiopia that was advocating the principle of equitable and fair utilization of the Nile waters and developing the Blue Nile Basin. In the final analysis, Egypt contributed to the most protracted and destructive civil war that led to the loss of many human lives and the depletion of the country's resources.

Similarly Egypt also prodded Somalia, which had gained its independence in July 1960, to invade Ethiopia. In the early 1960s, after acquiring moral and material support from the Egyptian Government, it began to advance the claim that around one-third of

Ethiopian territory was part of "Greater Somalia".¹⁶⁰ In September 1960, Emperor Haile Sellassie said, following Somali invasion of Ethiopia, that: " the Somalis would have never dreamt of such an idea without being incited by Nasser."¹⁶¹ Similarly, the reason for the Somali invasion of Ethiopia according to Mesfin, who has studied the Ethio-Somalia conflict in depth:

Certainly, the reason for this is not to be found in Somalia's underestimation of the Ethiopian armed force in comparison to those of Kenya or of Djibouti. It will be more reasonable to assume that Somalia's attempt to invade Ethiopian territory is an indication of Arab strategy rather than that of Somalia.¹⁶²

Egypt's motive behind its no less significant support for Somalia was its permanent interest in unrestricted utilization of the Blue Nile waters through weakening and destabilizing Ethiopia. In this regard, one writer summarized Egypt's involvement in Ethio-Somali conflict in relation to the Blue Nile issue as follows:

More must be done to keep the Somalia problem contained within the orbit of the Horn of African peoples. Egypt once occupied the Somali ports and wants to return to the Southern straits of the Red sea. She cannot be in different of what goes on at the headwaters of the Blue Nile...¹⁶³

Therefore, apparently, aware of the aforementioned dangers, the Imperial Government of Ethiopia, at least officially, began to restrict itself from denouncing Egypt in relation to her policy of the Nile. Instead, it called for friendly relationship with Egypt which now started to take precedence over Ethiopia's national water security interests and concerns. For example, as mentioned earlier, Ethiopia did not make any strong official statement protesting the 1959 Nile Waters Agreement. There is no doubt that the rationale for this was to undermine Egypt's hostility against the sovereignty of the country. During the African Electric Power Meeting of the E.C.A held in Addis Ababa from October 21 to

31, 1963, when the Technical Advisor of the Ethiopian Water Resource Department Mr. D. Jovanovic, raised the 1959 Nile Waters Agreement between Egypt and the Sudan that had ignored the water right of the upper riparian states, the chairman of the Ethiopian delegation responded negatively.¹⁶⁴ Obviously, the chairman's negative response emanated from his fear that the question would be damaging to Ethiopia's relations with Egypt and Sudan.

In the 1960s the aging Emperor tended more and more to avoid or to ignore difficult issues, like the Blue Nile one, and instead concentrated on external diplomatic affairs that would yield immediate reward and prestige. One important diplomatic arena in which the Emperor scored a major diplomatic victory for himself and for Ethiopia in the 1960s was the Pan-African movement. He saw himself as the "father" of the Organization of African Unity and was able to make Addis Ababa the headquarters of the newly-founded organization. The Emperor's diplomatic success in the movement had also its own impact on the history of the hydropolitics of the Blue Nile. In this regard, Emperor Haile Sellassie was also able to make President Nasser his ally in the Pan-African movement. The two heads of state cooperated in the establishment of the OAU. In May 1963, Nasser came to Addis Ababa to take part in the founding conference of the organization.¹⁶⁵ He was also given the chance to host the next congress of the organization in his capital in 1964.¹⁶⁶ In short, the OAU helped the two leaders to form a life-long friendship and hence pushed the hydropolitics of the Blue Nile to the side.

From 1963 onwards, as the Emperor ignored the Blue Nile issue, Nasser restrained himself from his anti-Ethiopian Government activities.¹⁶⁷ Emperor Haile Sellassie paid official visits to Cairo in 1963,¹⁶⁸ 1966,¹⁶⁹ and 1969¹⁷⁰ but he never raised the Blue Nile issue for discussion with Nasser. Reportedly, strengthening the OAU and relations among

African states, the Arab-Israel conflict and other international issues were subjects of discussion between the two leaders. Particularly, during his 1966 official visit, the Emperor and Nasser seem to have been agreed not to raise issues, like the Blue Nile, which would likely create dissension between African states.¹⁷¹

Towards the end of September 1970 when President Nasser died, the Emperor took part in his funeral ceremony in Cairo.¹⁷² At that time, *The Ethiopian Herald* lamented Nasser's death in a manner that gives a clue to the Ethiopian Government change of view concerning the Nile issue in the 1960s as follows:

Nasser was one man who did not need to die before he was praised. He was a leader who became a legendary figure in his own time.

In the last 14 years of his highly regarded leadership, Nasser has probably done more for Egypt than his predecessors had done in 1400 years. It was to the common man that he dedicated his service... even more so in carrying reforms in Egypt to benefit the mass of his people. While his ancestors built the great pyramids for the dead, he built the Aswan dam for the living.

In him, Ethiopia loses a great friend.¹⁷³

Canonizing Nasser with the sentence: " While his ancestors built the great pyramids for the dead, he built the Aswan dam for the living" completely contradicts with Ethiopia's view of the Aswan Dam, in the middle of 1950s. It is important to note that after the Emperor and Nasser became close friends in the Pan-African Movement, not only was the Blue Nile abandoned as a major diplomatic issue but also studies and plans of hydraulic projects in the basin were given peripheral attention, as it became apparent after 1964.

After the completion of the US-Ethiopian joint study and the publication of the report in 1964, no major study or development plan was made concerning the Blue Nile Basin in the late 1960s. During this time the hydraulic development interest of the down

stream states also changed to the White Nile River system. In this regard the Egyptian-Sudanese Joint Technical Commission worked with Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya to establish a new technical commission to undertake a hydrometeorological survey of the upper Nile Lakes. The founding conference of the new technical commission was held in Entebbe, in Uganda, in March 1968. This new committee was made up of Egypt, the Sudan, Uganda, Zaire, Kenya, Burundi and Tanzania.¹⁷⁴ Ethiopia was invited at the founding conference by Uganda but as an observer.¹⁷⁵ Accepting the invitation, Ethiopia sent *Ato Asaffé Mangashé*, Assistant Minister of the Water Resource Department, and *Ato Muhammad Hémid Ibréhim* and *Ato Getéchw Takla-Héyménot*, both experts in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ethiopian delegates discussed with the representatives of other riparian states on cooperation concerning the Nile waters.¹⁷⁶ But the conference did not lead to any Nile waters dialogue in line with the argument of the Ethiopian delegation.¹⁷⁷

Perhaps the major work that the Ethiopian Government carried out in the early 1970s was the preparation of the country's policy document on the Blue Nile and Lake Téné. This was the first legal document on the country's water resource, in general, and the Blue Nile issue, in particular, after the 1955 Ethiopian constitution which had described Ethiopia's water resource as: "... a sacred trust for the benefit of present and succeeding generations of the Ethiopian people."¹⁷⁸ The exact year when this policy statement was issued is not mentioned. Most certainly, it was prepared in 1972 because up until then some sources say that the Ethiopian Government had no policy on the utilization of the water resources of the country.¹⁷⁹

According to the new Ethiopian policy on the Blue Nile and Lake Téné, Ethiopia had " the right to use waters for the benefit of her people and her economy, while having

regard also for the needs of the other riparians."¹⁸⁰ Moreover, it stressed that it would not allow monopoly rights over the Nile waters in the name of water agreements which excluded the Ethiopian Government as:

Any agreements or treaties made without the participation and prior consent of Ethiopia cannot bind in any way the Imperial Ethiopian Government and Ethiopia may not recognize or take into consideration any project or undertaking for the utilization of the Nile water planned or constructed without her consent or approval.¹⁸¹

This policy document stated that Ethiopia would not surrender its rights over and interests in its water resources. Instead:

Whenever Ethiopia has felt that her sovereignty over and the control of the sources of the Nile were encroached or endangered in any way by other Governments, the necessary statements and steps were under taken by the Imperial Government in order to assert her inherent rights to the waters of the Nile.¹⁸²

Even though Ethiopia prepared an elaborate policy document and defended her rights over the Blue Nile on many occasions, it was not able to develop its water resources due to financial constraints. It was frequently mentioned that, for Ethiopia, it was very difficult to get loans for the development of the Blue Nile Basin from donor Governments or financial institutions due to apparent opposition from the lower basin states. This was said to have been one major obstacle to translate the US-Ethiopian joint study of the Blue Nile Basin into action in the 1960s.¹⁸³

Moreover, particularly in the early 1970s the revolutionary situation in the country caused further upheavals that undermined development activities in the Blue Nile Basin. The spread of revolutionary ideas and frequent popular movements captured the attention of the Imperial Government. All the efforts of the Government were made to maintain the peace and stability of the country. One of my informants, who was then Minister of

Public Works, said: “Our major work was not on the Blue Nile issue but how to handle the workers of the ministry who were frequently conducting work strike and demanding the dismissal of their immediate bosses from their posts”.¹⁸⁴ The other consequence of the spread of revolutionary ideas was that it created strong public hostility towards America which was a major Ethiopian ally on the Blue Nile issue.

After the Blue Nile issue had been abandoned as a major diplomatic issue, and Ethiopia's plan of developing it was pushed to side, the relations between Ethiopia and Egypt remained cordial almost until the 1974 Ethiopian revolution. After the 1973 war with Israel, the successor of Nasser, President Sadat was inclined towards Western Camp.¹⁸⁵ On the contrary, Ethiopia turned to the opposite camp after the 1974 Revolution when it adopted the socialist ideology. Soon after the Revolution, the new Government sent its delegation led by the Prime Minister *Lej Mik'el Immiru* to Egypt and other Arab countries. Although the objective of the mission was to win support for the changes taking place in Ethiopia, it also informed the Egyptian Government that the new Ethiopian Government was ready to settle the Nile question peacefully and with understanding.¹⁸⁶ However, the ideological differences became a barrier for further talks between the two Governments on the Blue Nile issue.

NOTES

(CHAPTER IV)

¹F.O.371/46081, Lake Tana: The Present Position, J709/643/1 February 20, 1945.

²*Ibid.*

³*Ibid.*

⁴F.O.371/27536, Eden to M. Lampson, June 13, 1941. This file includes the memorandum of the Egyptian ambassador.

⁵F.O.371/46081, Lake Tana: The Present Position, J 709/643/1, February 20, 1945.

⁶F.O.371/27536, Foreign Office Minute by Mr. Baring, J 3450/979/1, 30th October 1941; Hamilton, p.328.

⁷F.O.371/ 69303, Lake Tana: The Present Position, J709/ 643/1, February 20, 1945.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹F.O.371/35644, Howe to Eden, 11th June 1943.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²F.O.371/ 46081, Lake Tana: The Present Position, J 709/ 643/ 1, February 20, 1945.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵F.O.371/ 35646, Howe to A. Eden, 29 October 1943.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Hamilton, p.328.

¹⁸F.O.371/ 69303, Lake Tana: The Present Position, J 709/ 643/ 1, February 20, 1945.

¹⁹For a detailed treatment of the Anglo-Ethiopian Treaty of 1944, see Harold G. Marcus, *Ethiopia, Great Britain, and the United States, 1941-1974* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) pp.22-78.

²⁰Hamilton, p.328.

²¹F.O.371/ 46081, Foreign Office Minute by Mr. MacGregor,
4th February 1945.

²²F.O.371/ 46081, From Foreign Office to Cairo, 7th June 1945.

²³F.O.371/46081, Foreign Office Minute by Mr. MacGregor, 4th February 1945.

²⁴F.O.371/63130, Foreign Office Minute by D.M.H. Richer, J5240/326/1, 14
February 1946.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶John H. Spencer, *Ethiopia at Bay* (Algonac: Reference Publishers Inc., 1984)
p.188.

²⁷See F.O. 371/ 63130, R. Campbell to Ernest Bevin, 17th April 1947.

²⁸F.O.371/63130, Foreign Office Minute by D.M.H. Richer, 14 February 1946.

²⁹F.O.371/63130,/ R. Campbell to Ernest Bevin, 20th February 1947.

³⁰Spencer, P.188.

³¹F.O.371/ 63130, Mr.Farquhar to Foreign Office, 8 June 1947.

³²*Ibid.*

³³F.O.371/63130, Mr.Farquhar to Foreign Office, Telegram No.435, 20th
December 1947.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵F.O.371/ 69303, Foreign Office Minute by Mr.D.Scott Fox. J 56170/ 466/ 1, 30
July 1948.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷F.O.371/ 53468, W.N. Allan to Serivener, 5 December 1946.

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹H.E.Hurst, Black & Simaika, *The Nile Basin: The Future Conservation of the
Nile*, Physical Departement Paper No. 51 (Cairo: Eastern Press, Reprinted 1951). (I
consulted this reprint, which is available at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies.)

⁴⁰*Ibid.*,pp. 1-5.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²*Ibid.*, pp. 92-98.

⁴³*Ibid.*,p.xi.

⁴⁴Wondimneh, pp.30-31.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p.31.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷Erlich, *The Cross and the River*, p.128.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁹Sahc'fé-tizz'cz Aklilu Habta Wald, "Lamarméri Komision Yaqarrabut Sihuf", *Masikaram* 10, 1967 E.C, p.36.

⁵⁰F.O.371/80241, Mr. Lascelles to Foreign Office, Telegram No.139, 6th May 1950.

⁵¹Erlich, *The Cross and the River*, p.128.

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³F.O.371/96805, Foreign Office Minute, by M.Busk, # JE 1421/57, 14th March 1952.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵F.O.371/96805, T.A. Clark, W.H. Greenhalgh, "Reconnaissance Report Blue Nile River Basin, Ethiopia", United States Department of the Interior, Washington D.C., August 1952.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

⁵⁸Robert O. Collins, "The best laid Schemes O'mice and men": In Search for the Waters of the Nile, 1900-2000", Paper for July 1998 Training Program ~Debre Zeit Workshop, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia." (This paper is available at the Library of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

⁵⁹Yoram Meital, "The Aswan High Dam and Revolutionary Symbolism in Egypt" in Erlich and Gershoni (ed.), *The Nile* , pp.219-225.

⁶⁰Collins, "The best laid Schemes...", p.12.

⁶¹D.C. Watt, "The High Dam at Aswan and the Politics of Control", in W.M. Warrent and N. Rubin, *Dams in Africa*, New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1968, p.107.

⁶²Erlich has summarized the views of John Waterbury, Robert Collins, Rusldi Sa'id in *The Cross and the River*, p.132.

⁶³Collins, "The best laid Schemes...", p.12; Elhance, pp.78-79; Yacob Arsano, "Prospects and Prognosis of Cooperation in the Eastern Nile" Paper Presented at 10th Nile 2002 Conference held in Nairobi, Kenya December 24-26, 2002, p.8. (I found this paper in the office of the African Affairs Directorate, Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

⁶⁴Watt, p.111.

⁶⁵Spencer, p.188; Daniel, p.153.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

⁶⁷Erlich, *The Cross and the River*, p.131.

⁶⁸See Note 161.

⁶⁹Erlich, *The Cross and the River*, p.134.

⁷⁰Daniel, p. 154.

⁷¹Quoted in Erlich, *The Cross and the River*, p.134.

⁷²Spencer, p.287.

⁷³*Informants: Dr. Dajjézméčh Zawde Gabra Selléssie; Lej Mikā'eImmuru.*

⁷⁴"Confidential Memorandum by S.M. Gelberg, Addis Ababa, February 5, 1955" in the Nile and Lake Tana File of The Imperial Government of Ethiopia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, MS 1772.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

⁷⁶*Ibid.*

⁷⁷F.O.371/96718, W.N. Allan to R.T.D. Ledward, 18th April 1952.

⁷⁸"Confidential Memorandum by S.M. Gelberg..."

⁷⁹*Ibid.*

⁸⁰*Ibid.*

⁸¹"Lake Tana Committee, Report of the Sub-Committee upon the Economic Aspects of the Lake Tana Situation, Addis Ababa, March 30, 1955", in the Nile and Lake Tana File of the Imperial Government of Ethiopia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

⁸²*Ibid.*

⁸³*Informant: Ato Getéčhaw Baqqala.*

⁸⁴*Ibid.*

⁸⁵*Ibid.*

⁸⁶"VATTENBYGGNADSBYRAN (VBB), of the Swedish Association of Consulting Engineers, Stockholm, Date 11-11-1954", in the Nile and Lake Tana File of the Imperial Government of Ethiopia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

⁸⁷"Memo Regarding Observations and Suggestions in Connection with a Visit to Ethiopia in February 1955 by Professor B. Hellström", in the Nile and Lake Tana File of the Imperial Government of Ethiopia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*

⁸⁹*Ibid.*

⁹⁰*The New York Times*, January 7, 1956. (I found this as a press extract in the Nile and Lake Tana File of the Imperial Government of Ethiopia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

⁹¹*Ibid.*

⁹²*Ibid.*

⁹³*Ibid.*

⁹⁴*Ibid.*

⁹⁵*Informant: Lej Miké'el.*

⁹⁶"Should Ethiopia Make, At this Time, An Official Statement in Regarding to the Aswan and other Projects for the Utilization of the Waters of the Nile? January 9,1956", in the Nile and Lake Tana File of the Imperial Government of Ethiopia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*

⁹⁸*Ibid.*

⁹⁹"Communique Released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, 6 February 1956" in the Nile and Lake Tana File of the Imperial Government of Ethiopia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁰¹"Should Ethiopia Make..."

¹⁰²"Sila Abbáy Wanz Mécstéwashé" *,Birtu Mistir, Nahése 26, 1964E.C* (no author's name) Institute of Ethiopian Studies, MS. p.11.

¹⁰³*Ibid.; Informant: Lej Miké'el.*

¹⁰⁴"Sila Abbáy Wanz...", p.12. This US withdrawal from the Aswan Dam project and its increasing involvement with the Ethiopian Government in studying the Blue Nile

Basin were considered by the Egyptian Government as an imperialist conspiracy against her anti-colonial struggle in Africa and in the Middle East. See John Bulloch & Adel Darwish, *Water Wars Coming Conflicts in the Middle East* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1993) p.102.

¹⁰⁵*Informant: Dr. Dajjézméché Zawde.*

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷"Sila Abbéy Wonzi...", p.13.

¹⁰⁸Quoted in Wondimneh, pp.27-28.

¹⁰⁹*Informant: Lej Miké'el; Spencer, p.287.*

¹¹⁰*Informant: Lei Miké'el; Bulloch & Darwish, pp. 104-105.*

¹¹¹*Informant: Lej Miké'el; Sepencer, p.288.*

¹¹²*Ya Girméwi Qadéméwi Haile Sellassie Nigusa-nagast Za Itiyopyié Ya- 27 ñéw Ya Zawd Ba'él Matésabiyé, Tiqimt 23, 1950 E.C, Girméwi Nigusa-nagast Yédarragut Nigiggir, Addis Ababa, Tiqimt 23, 1950 E.C; Informant: Lej Miké'el.*

¹¹³Spencer, p.288.

¹¹⁴"Sila Abbéy Wanz...", p.11.

¹¹⁵Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Aide-Memoir", September 23, 1957, in Nile and Lake Tana File of the Imperial Government of Ethiopia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹¹⁶*Addis Zaman, Year 17th, No. 29, Tiqimt 23, 1950 E.C.*

¹¹⁷Quoted in Haggai Erlich, *Ethiopia and the Middle East* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 1994) p.36.

¹¹⁸Ethiopia is said to have cut off its diplomatic relations with Israel to satisfy the insistent demand of the Arab states. See Mesfin Wolde Mariam, *The Horn of Africa Conflict and Poverty* (Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Enterprise, 1999) p.85.

¹¹⁹Erlich, *The Cross and the River*, p.135.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, p.136; Bulloch & Darwish, p.92.

¹²¹"Sila Abbéy Wonzi...", p.13.

¹²²"Minutes of Water Resource Conference, January 22, 1958", in the Nile and Lake Tana File of the Imperial Government of Ethiopia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹²³*Ibid.; Informant: Lej Miké'el.*

¹²⁴Bureau of Reclamation, *Land and Water Resource...*, p.14.

¹²⁵"Héyla Giyorgyis Warqinah to His Imperial Majesty Haile Selléssie, *Tirr* 26, 1952 E.C.", in "Ya-Abbáy Wanz Shalaqo Tinét Achir Maglaché", Institute of Ethiopian studies, MS 1372.

¹²⁶Bureau of Reclamation, *Land and Water Resource...*, p.15.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*

¹²⁸Bureau of Reclamation, *Land and Water Resources of the Blue Nile Basin: Ethiopia*, Main Report and Appendices I-V, Washington D.C.: Printing Office, 1964. (This valuable study report is available at the Ministry of Water Resource's Documentation Center).

¹²⁹"Memorandum III, 'Amarti River in the Blue Nile and Wabi Shebelle River at Melka Wakana' as a combined project to Follow the Present Finchaa Project ", (no date) Institute of Ethiopian Studies, MS 2982.

¹³⁰A report of the Bureau of Reclamation summarized by Guariso and Whittington in " Implications of Ethiopian Water Development for Egypt and Sudan"(Paper for July 1998 Training Program ~Debre Zeit Workshop, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia). (This paper is available at the Library of the Ministry of foreign Affairs).

¹³¹*Ibid.*

¹³²*Ibid.*

¹³³*Ibid.*

¹³⁴*Ibid.*, p.114. These authors arrived at the following conclusion:

If Ethiopia were to develop the Blue Nile Basin, the amount of water available for agricultural use in Egypt and Sudan would actually increase, because the river could be more easily regulated downstream, thus reducing storage requirements in Sudan and evaporation losses from the Aswan High Dam Reservoir.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, p.108.

¹³⁶"Memorandum III, 'Amarti River...'"

¹³⁷*Ibid.* In 1966, the Ethiopian Government signed an agreement with the French Government to make a comprehensive study of the Wébi Shaballe River Basin.

¹³⁸Wondimneh, p.29.

¹³⁹Bulloch & Darwish, pp. 102-103. They pointed out that internal conflicts prevented Ethiopia from translating the study into action.

¹⁴⁰*Informant: Dr. Dajjézméčh Zawde.*

¹⁴¹Collins, "The best laid Schemes...", p.14.

¹⁴²Yacob, "Prospects and Prognosis...", p.7; Elhance, p.70. As a result of the agreement the Sudan's share progressed from 4 billion to 18.5 billion meter cubic. See Bulloch & Darwish, p.92.

¹⁴³Collins, "The best laid Schemes...", p.13.

¹⁴⁴Samir Ahmed, p.30.

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p.36.

¹⁴⁶Collins, "The best laid Schemes...", p.14.

¹⁴⁷*Ibid.*; Watt, p.123.

¹⁴⁸Quoted in "Ethiopia's Rights to Waters from...", p.3.

¹⁴⁹Erlich, *The Cross and the River*, p.133.

¹⁵⁰Godana, p.185; Bulloch & Darwish, p.101. The British declared that:

[Her colonies'] position must be safeguarded, and His Majesty's Government have informed the Government of Egypt and the Sudan that they formally reserve the right to negotiate for a fair share of the waters of the Nile for these territories at the appropriate time.

Quoted in Wondimneh, p.45.

¹⁵¹Erlich, *The Cross and the River*, pp. 128-129.

¹⁵²"Ethiopia's Rights to Waters from...", p.3.

¹⁵³Daniel, p.154.

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵Erlich, *The Cross and the River*, p.130.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*; *Informant: Lej Miké'el.*

¹⁵⁷Daniel, p.155; Erlich, *The Cross and the River*, p.130.

¹⁵⁸*Ibid.* Nevertheless, the Sudan openly declared its support to ELF in the middle of the 1970s when President Nimeiri said that his country would " support the Eritrean people in their just struggle for independence." See Mesfin, *The Horn of Africa*, p.85.

¹⁵⁹Daniel, p.155.

- ¹⁶⁰Erlich, *Ethiopia and the Middle East*, p.134.
- ¹⁶¹*Ibid.*
- ¹⁶²Mesfin, *The Horn of Africa*, p.87.
- ¹⁶³Quoted in Wondimneh, p.32.
- ¹⁶⁴D.Jovanovic, "The Effect of the Blue Nile Basin Development in Ethiopia on Downstream Countries, First Report" (Confidential, Addis Ababa, August 1972, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, MS. 2982).
- ¹⁶⁵Erlich, *Ethiopia and the Middle East*, p.139.
- ¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*
- ¹⁶⁷*Ibid.*; Spencer, p.309.
- ¹⁶⁸*The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. IV, No.561, November 5,1963; *The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. IV, No.562, November 6,1963.
- ¹⁶⁹*The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. VI, No.546, October 16,1966; *The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. VI, No.547, October 18,1966.
- ¹⁷⁰*The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. VII, No.446, June 17,1969.
- ¹⁷¹*The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. VI, No.547, October 18,1966.
- ¹⁷²*The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. VIII, No.225, October 1,1970.
- ¹⁷³*The Ethiopian Herald*, Vol. VIII, No.224, September 30,1970.
- ¹⁷⁴Samir Ahmed, p.37.
- ¹⁷⁵*Ibid.*
- ¹⁷⁶*Addis Zaman*, Year 27, No. 981, *Maggébit* 13, 1960 E.C.
- ¹⁷⁷*Ibid.* After returning from Entebbe, the Ethiopian delegation reported that the conference was more political than technical. See "Sila Abbéy Wanz...", p.19.
- ¹⁷⁸*Revised Constitution of Ethiopia, Negarit Gazeta*, 15th Year, No.2, (Addis Ababa, November 4, 1955) p.32.
- ¹⁷⁹"Sila Abbéy Wanz...", p.23.
- ¹⁸⁰"Ethiopia's Rights to Waters from...", p.15.
- ¹⁸¹*Ibid.*
- ¹⁸²*Ibid.*, p.5.
- ¹⁸³*Informant*: Dr. Dajjézméch Zawde; "Sila Abbéy Wanz...", p.16.
- ¹⁸⁴*Informant*: Ato Getéchw.

¹⁸⁵Erlich, *The Cross and the River*, p.163.

¹⁸⁶*Informant: Lej Mikć'el.*

SUMMARY

The Blue Nile issue is one of the factors that has shaped the history of modern Ethiopia. The role of the issue in the relations between Ethiopia and the lower riparian states was transformed in the nineteenth century. The medieval story of blocking the flow of the Blue Nile as a diplomatic leverage in the historical relationships between Egypt and Ethiopia was transformed when the former attempted to control the source of the river and

ambitiously planned to unite the Nile valley. Egypt under Muhammad Ali and *Khedive* Isma'il launched a vigorous southward expansion to make the Nile an Egyptian river and to end the age-old fear and suspicion of the diversion of the river up until it suffered major defeats at the Battles of Gundat (1875) and Gurc (1876). The stalemate that reigned between Ethiopia and Egypt, after Gurc, came to an end when they signed the Adwa or Hewett Treaty in 1884 negotiated by Great Britain. The treaty brought two foreign enemies into the picture: the Mahdist state and Italy.

The coming of British colonialism to the Nile Valley marked a new chapter in the history of the Blue Nile issue as it became a source of new conflict in the hydropolitical issue of the Blue Nile. After the British had realized that Egypt depended on the Nile waters, they inherited the unremitting nightmare of the Egyptians that their political enemies could obstruct the flow of the Blue Nile. The British also understood that their position and interest in Egypt could only be safeguarded when they crystallized an elaborate policy of protecting the security of the upper Nile from powers that were antagonistic to them. Hence, the British Government violated the Adwa or Hewett Treaty of 1884 and gave the green light to Italian imperialist penetration in Ethiopia as a counterweight against other rival powers encroaching on the upper Nile, particularly the French. Nevertheless, the Italians suffered a humiliating defeat at the Battle of Adwa in 1896.

Ethiopian victory at Adwa was important for the history of the hydropolitics of the Blue Nile. The battle incapacitated Italy in the Nile Valley power situation and proved that Italy could not ward off rival powers penetration into the Nile. Thus, the victory put Britain's carefully planned policy of safeguarding the Blue Nile in peril. Moreover, the

subsequent intimacy between Ethiopia and France worried the British very much. As a result, Britain attempted to make diplomatic intervention in the growing Franco-Ethiopian relations through her special envoy, Rennell Rodd. The situation also hastened the British occupation of the Sudan.

Emperor Menilek tried to halt the southward military expansion of the British into the source of the Blue Nile. Although he was not successful, the Emperor tried his best to form a military alliance with the Mahdists against all European powers particularly the British. He also cooperated with the French concerning the Nile Valley politics but by safeguarding Ethiopia's interest.

The British policy of securing the Nile Basin after Adwa was a by-product of their military and diplomatic victories at Omdurman and Fashoda, in 1898, over the Mahdists and the French, respectively. Soon after this, the British concentrated their efforts on securing the waters of the Blue Nile through diplomatic dealings. The British diplomatic agent in Ethiopia, Harrington, first exchanged notes with Emperor Menilek's major advisor, Alfred Ilg, on 18 March 1902, and then signed a treaty with the Emperor, on 15th May 1902, that bound Ethiopia not to obstruct or completely divert the flow of the Blue Nile into the Sudan. But it is important to emphasize that the agreement did not prohibit Ethiopia from using the Blue Nile waters. The British also succeeded in obtaining Italian and French recognition of their interest in the Blue Nile and its sources by the Tripartite Agreement of 1906.

After the British had ensured the unobstructed and continuous flow of the Blue Nile River, they began protracted diplomatic negotiations with the Ethiopian Government to secure a perennial water supply from the Blue Nile by constructing a dam at the outlet of Lake Táné and turning the lake into a water reservoir. The dam project was a major

issue in the diplomatic relations between Britain and Ethiopia in the first half of the twentieth century. This issue had a decisive imprint on the history of Ethiopia and the major events of the period.

The British prolonged diplomatic efforts to erect the dam across the Blue Nile were not successful. Among the weighty factors for the failure was extreme xenophobia within the Ethiopian Government circle that granting such a big and sensitive concession would ultimately put the country's independence and territorial integrity under jeopardy. The suspicion of the Ethiopian Government was intensified by the British separate diplomatic dealings with Italy and some lords of the Lake Tánč region. Moreover, the British demanded that the dam concession be given only to the British Government. Britain wanted to exploit this sensitive resource as a political canon by building the dam in Ethiopian territory to secure her position in Egypt and the Sudan.

Ethiopia was not willing to grant the dam concession not only to the British Government but also to any British company. *Rés* Tafari's reluctant and sometimes misleading cooperation with the British, during the period of his regency, should be understood as tactful strategy of exploiting British interest to obtain support against the conservative elements around the Imperial Court and his political rivals. After realizing Ethiopia's implacable stand on the dam concession, Britain exchanged notes with Italy in 1925 to put pressure on the Ethiopian Government. This arrangement laid the groundwork for the 1935 Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Ethiopia took the matter to the League of Nations and continued its opposition against the arrangement. Moreover, it began to turn to an American company, the J.G. White Engineering Corporation, to which it granted the dam concession. Certainly, Ethiopia did this with the intention of using the

United States as a counterweight against Italy and Britain that were threatening its existence as an independent state but the calculation bore no fruit. Italy invaded Ethiopia and obtained recognition for its colonial rule over Ethiopia from Britain and Egypt in return for its guarantee of safeguarding their interest in the headwaters of the Blue Nile.

At the time of the war of liberation, Britain hoped for some form of suzerainty over the source of the Blue Nile as a reward for its support of Emperor Haile Sellassie's restoration to his throne. However, the British later on abandoned the idea when they realized that Ethiopia would not cede the Blue Nile to them. The British therefore decided to obtain the dam concession by diplomatic means as they had tried in the pre-war period.

In the post-liberation period the Blue Nile became a major diplomatic issue that affected Ethiopia's foreign relations. However, as in the pre-war period, all diplomatic efforts by the British to obtain the dam concession were doomed to failure mainly due to strained diplomatic relations and misunderstandings between the Ethiopian, British, and Egyptian Governments. Particularly, after the Second World War, Egypt's strategy of securing control of the waters of the Blue Nile by linking the issue of the dam with the Eritrean question coupled with the British and Egyptian Governments' demand to build the dam without offering anything to Ethiopia were major obstacles to the dam concession. Ethiopia also effectively utilized the issue of the Blue Nile waters not only to put pressure on Egypt to abandon its claim to Eritrea but also to vote in favour of the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia in December 1950.

The 1952 Egyptian Revolution had a far-reaching consequence for the hydropolitics of the Blue Nile. The revolutionary leaders' decision to construct the Aswan

Dam put away all previous plan of developing the entire Nile Basin. Hence, the Aswan Dam superseded the Lake Táné Dam project. Ethiopia's objection to the project together with the withdrawal of the western countries from financing the construction of the dam and the involvement of the Soviets in the dam project drew the hydropolitics of Blue Nile into its vortex. Particularly the USSR and the US alliance with Egypt and Ethiopia, respectively, concerning the Nile issue made the hydropolitics of the river part of the geopolitics of the Cold War.

In the 1950s, Ethiopi's call for equitable and fair utilization of the Nile waters and its plan of developing the Blue Nile Basin became the main factor behind Egypt's hostile policy towards Ethiopia in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Egypt began to implement some hostile policies to hamper any kind of development activity in the Blue Nile and to safeguard its interest in the unrestricted utilization of the Nile waters. In 1959, Egypt and Sudan signed a bilateral Nile Waters Agreement for "full utilization of the Nile waters " without Ethiopia's participation. Egypt also began to believe that its permanent interest in the waters of the Blue Nile could be secured by following a policy of destabilizing and weakening Ethiopia. To this end, Egypt launched a radio programme that was intended to incite the Ethiopian Muslims against Christian political hegemony and to foment a civil war in the country. Moreover, it provided substantial moral and material support to the Eritrean Liberation Front and Somalia irredentism. Indeed, due to this and other factors, Ethiopia was not able to harness her water resources to the advantage of her people. Eventually, Egypt abandoned its anti-Ethiopian campaign when Ethiopia began to restrain itself from advocating the policy of equitable and fair share of the Nile Waters and Emperor Haile Sellassie was able to cultivate good friendship with President Nasser.

In the final analysis, failure to proper hydraulic solution and projects that would benefit all the basin states can be traced to the distant past. Lack of far-sightedness particularly on the part of the powers on control of the lower basin intensified the Nile issue and hence it could not be disconnected from national sentiment. As a result, comprehensive water sharing agreements on the basis of internationally accepted principles could not be reached between the riparian states of the Nile. This in turn has remained a major impediment to the equitable and efficient utilization of the waters of the Nile.

CONCLUSION

The study attempted to shed some light on the historical development of the Blue Nile issue. It argued that the issue had played a significant role in shaping the history of modern Ethiopia. Lack of far-sightedness particularly on the part of the powers that controlled the lower basin, have intensified the issue of the hydropolitics of the Nile. This has been a major impediment to equitable and fair utilization of the Nile waters. The Nile waters agreements and hydraulic works that were planned by both the British and the independent Egyptian and Sudanese governments made Ethiopia more of a spectator than beneficiary of the Nile waters. Absence of clear, well-articulated and acceptable water-sharing agreement in the basin is not only a legal impediment to proper utilization of the Nile waters but also a major source of mistrust and tension among the riparian states. The existing water agreements failed to bring a lasting basin-wide solution for the issue of the hydropolitics of the Nile Basin.

On the basis of this study, my conclusion is that the problems that arose in the past must be critically examined and a basin-wide acceptable solution sought. The lower riparian states must revise their short-sighted policy of keeping Ethiopia destabilized in order to ensure unrestricted utilization of the Nile waters. It should be understood that neither diplomatic hostility nor a military option can contribute to a permanent solution; but will add more fuel to the flame of the hydropolitics of the Nile. Instead, they must listen, and provide practical answer, to Ethiopia's and other upper stream states' increasing voice for fair and equitable Nile waters distribution.

The tendency of taking this big and sensitive issue aside on the part of the Ethiopian Government and concentrating on minor ones should be revised. This study strongly believes that a settlement of the Blue Nile issue will have multifarious effects on

the many problems that Ethiopia is now facing. The Ethiopian public opinion tendency that there is no need to consult the lower riparian states and other powers to utilize “our river” should be corrected. The Blue Nile must be understood and treated as an international river system.

The Blue Nile should be disconnected from national sentiment and treated as a common and shared natural resource among the riparian states. Therefore, urgent and concrete steps should be taken to improve the existing hydropolitical situation. In this regard, all agreements of the colonial period and the 1959 Nile Waters Agreement must be revised in the interests of all riparian states. The new water-sharing agreement should be based on far-reaching views and internationally-accepted principles. Moreover, institutional mechanisms and cooperation frameworks among the basin states should be built to address the problem of water allocation in an integrated manner. A basin-wide cooperation should be underlined as the most fundamental and viable solution to minimize and/or alleviate the existing political tension over the utilization of the waters of the Nile.

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PREFACE

This thesis is a modest attempt to study the Blue Nile issue within the broad context of Ethiopian history. The issue has played a significant role in determining the diplomatic stand of the powers on control of the lower basin and their policies towards Ethiopia in the period between 1884 and 1974. The year 1884 is taken as a starting point because it witnessed the replacement of Egypt by Great Britain as a dominant power in the hydropolitics of the Nile. 1974 was the year in which, the monarchy in Ethiopia that had more or less pursued the same policy concerning the Nile question, was overthrown. Moreover, the source of most of the Nile waters, Ethiopia, and its greatest beneficiary, Egypt, reversed their ideological orientation, respectively.

The research is based on a systematic collection and analysis of primary and secondary sources in order to understand the general sense of the period and the issue under discussion. The secondary sources that I have been able to consult, both general

works on Ethiopian history and specific works on the Blue Nile by scholars of various disciplines have provided me with a useful starting point to deal with the history of the Blue Nile issue. Nevertheless, almost all specific works on the Nile consulted for the purpose of this thesis, share the following salient features: their primary focus of analysis is the current state of the hydropolitics of the Nile and its water resource utilization; they do not offer an exhaustive and thorough analysis on the historical development of the Blue Nile issue; they fail to look at the history of the hydropolitics of the Blue Nile within the broad context of Ethiopian history; and some authors who sought to render historical depth for their analysis, focus only on the issue of "diverting the course of the Nile" in medieval Ethio-Egyptian relations, and on Egyptian expansion into Ethiopia in the nineteenth century.

This study heavily relies on careful investigation of primary sources: British Foreign Office archives, the documents of the Imperial Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, feasibility study reports, periodicals and others. However, since the issue was restricted to diplomatic circles and high-ranking Government officials, I was not able to get a good number of informants who are knowledgeable about the issue. Therefore, I interviewed only some ministers of the Imperial regime who had directly or indirectly participated in the issue under discussion. The British Foreign Office archives on microfilms kept at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies are rich in materials that show the dynamism of the hydropolitics of the Blue Nile up until the early 1950s. They also shed light on the Ethiopian perspective concerning the issue. Unfortunately, however, they mainly reflect the British point of view.

Finally, the source materials for the study of the history of the hydropolitics of the Blue Nile are many and varied with their own limitations. It is difficult, if not impossible, to present a complete and exhaustive treatment of this big and complicated issue. However, it is my hope that the points raised in this thesis will inspire other scholars who want to follow the inquiry that I have not developed fully in the thesis.

Oral Source

No	Name	Age	Date of Interview	Place of Interview	
1	Getāchaw Baqqala, <i>Ato</i>	76	5 August 2003 4 November 2003	Addis Ababa	
2	Mikā'el Immiru, <i>Lej</i>	74	12 January 2004	Addis Ababa	
3	Zawde Gabra Sellāssie, Dr. <i>Dajjāzmāch</i>	74	28 January 2002	Addis Ababa	