Aethiopica 1 (1998)

International Journal of Ethiopian and Eritrean Studies

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Article

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Aethiopica 1 (1998), 64–84

ISSN: 1430–1938

Published by

Universität Hamburg
Asien Afrika Institut, Abteilung Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik
Hiob Ludolf Zentrum für Äthiopistik

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a. The Source of the Nile and the Source of the Patriarch

Ethiopia and Egypt are two of the oldest political entities. Both enjoy long and enduring histories of vicissitudes and continuity. The relations between them are perhaps some of the oldest in the history of international politics. Though lacking a common border, the two civilizations have shared a continuous diplomatic, cultural, and religious dialogue over the centuries. These relations, always of considerable mutual significance, occasionally acquired central importance, and in some historic junctures even led to armed conflict. The two entities have been bridged by three spheres of common interest.[1]

The first sphere was the strategy of the Red Sea basin. The Red Sea was both a traditional Egyptian sphere of expansion and Ethiopia's outlet to the world. Relevant past cases of diplomatic and military histories are too numerous to mention here. In recent decades, Red Sea affairs, from our perspective, have revolved primarily around the Eritrea question. Eritrea has been the scene of a continuous struggle between nationalist ideas and concepts of revolution influenced by Egypt and the Arab world, and equivalent concepts stemming from Ethiopian values and structures.

The second sphere was religious-cultural in nature. Ethiopia's political institutions, indeed her entire canonical culture, have been inseparably connected with the Coptic Monophysite Church, centered in Alexandria, Egypt.[2] From the

[1] In this short article I avoided elaborating on many background issues. For a detailed analysis of Ethiopian-Egyptian relations throughout history, for the development of their mutual perceptions, and for necessary bibliographical references, see: HAGGAI ERLICH, *Ethiopia and the Middle East*, Lynne Rienner Press, Boulder, 1994.

[2] For a summary of relations between the churches of Egypt and Ethiopia see OTTO MEINARDUS, *Christian Egypt: Faith and Life*, Cairo 1970, pp. 369–398. (There is no mention in this summary of the 1924 story).

4th century to the aftermath of World War II, Ethiopia's head of Church, the Abun, was an Egyptian bishop, promoted and appointed by the Egyptian Coptic Church. The Abun, an Arabic speaking Egyptian, usually too old really to integrate into the Ethiopian world, enacted the vital religious legitimacy necessary to Ethiopia's monarchs. Since Ethiopian politics and power game have often been volatile, the availability of an Abun, and his own political inclinations and loyalties, were of the utmost importance. On the other hand, the welfare of the Coptic minority in Muslim Egypt was occasionally secured by the Ethiopian connection. If Egyptian medieval and early modern rulers toyed with the idea of denying the Ethiopians a new Abun, or if they grossly maltreated their Coptic Christians, Ethiopian emperors retaliated by airing the idea of blocking the Nile.

The third sphere was indeed the politics of the Nile River. No less than two-thirds of the river's waters reaching Egypt (and, even more to the point, four-fifths of the flood waters which irrigate the country) come from the Blue Nile, the Ethiopian Abbai. It originates in Lake Tana and flows more than a thousand kilometers through Ethiopian territory. The Egyptians fear that the Ethiopians would erect a dam in the deep gorge (a technological enterprise of doubtful feasibility) or block some of its many tributaries, is nearly as old as Egypt herself. Records show that the idea that Ethiopia could inflict a major disaster on Egypt, either by innocently diverting more water for her own needs, or by purposely punishing Egypt, has occasionally been placed at the top of the Egyptian agenda, from the days of the 11th century Fatimid rulers to the days of Husni Mubarrak.

This balance of mutual dependency gave ground to a multi-faceted history of common relations which saw periods of constructive cooperation as well as periods of acute conflict. One such drama, directly related to the theme of this article, was the Ethio-Egyptian War of 1875–6. When Khedive Isma'il of Egypt (1863–1879) wanted to bridge his newly occupied Red Sea ports (primarily Massawa) and his newly revitalized administration in the Sudan, he planned the conquest of northern Ethiopia (today the territory of Eritrea). He was defeated, however, by Emperor Yohannes IV (1872–1889, who, as a Tigrean, considered the same parts of Ethiopia to be the very center of his power). The Battle of Gura, in today's Eritrea, 11 March 1876,[3] was in fact the first significant defeat of modern Egypt, the first military disaster since Muhammad Ali Pasha's establishment of Egypt's modern

[3] For the Battle of Gura see: HAGGAI ERLICH, *Ras Alula and the Scramble for Africa*, (New edition), Red Sea Press, New Jersey, 1996, Chapter 1.

armed forces in the 1820's. It was carved into the Egyptian collective memory as a significant turning point. The Gura defeat (frustrating Egyptian designs to build an efficient communication network with the Sudan), led directly to the loss of Isma'il's entire African Empire. Indeed, it marked the beginning of the rapid countdown towards the very loss of Egypt's political sovereignty and the British occupation of 1882. Moreover, the humiliation at the hands of the Ethiopians was a formative episode in the shaping of the early modern Egyptian nationalist movement. Colonel (Amir alai) Ahmad 'Urabi, the first to raise the slogan "Egypt to the Egyptians", personally experienced the calamity of Gura. It was the Ethiopian-inflicted sense of humiliated pride that turned this son of an Egyptian peasant from an ordinance officer into the leader of the first modern protest movement.

If Gura, 1876, was the peak of Ethio-Egyptian hostilities, Ras Tafari's visit to Cairo of 1924 was the historical peak of friendliness.

Ras Tafari Makonnen (b. 1892), the designated heir of Empress Zawditu at that time, was an ambitious politician, already well on his way to becoming Ethiopia's autocrat. He was to be crowned Emperor Haile Selassie I in 1930, and to shape Ethiopia's history until 1974. By 1924 he was already in control of Ethiopia's political center and had begun building his power through modern reforms. The 1924 journey of Ras Tafari to Western European capitals, and to Cairo and Jerusalem, was the first time (since the Queen of Sheba) that Ethiopia's head of state had ventured abroad to see the wide world, and the modernizing prince declared it a study tour in preparation for further reforms and progress. 1924 was also a year of rising progressive expectations in Egypt, perhaps the best year ever for the secular and liberal dimensions of Egyptian nationalism, an issue to which we shall return. The visit of Ras Tafari to Cairo in May 1924 was marked by the willingness of the Egyptian leadership and public to build a new dialogue with the old Ethiopian neighbour – a modern, fresh, tolerant dialogue stemming from the then-prevalent interpretation that Egyptianism itself was a pluralist identity.

b. Islam and Egypt in Christian Ethiopian Eyes

It is impossible to grasp the significance of the 1924 meeting without a short discussion of earlier mutual Ethiopian and Egyptian images and concepts.

The image of "the other" often stems from one's self-image and self-definition, and traditional Ethiopian concepts of Egypt were no exception. Most of Ethiopia's

rulers and members of the political elite considered themselves to be inseparably Christian and Ethiopian. The *Kebra-Nagast* ethos linking the Ethiopian emperorship to King Solomon was introduced in the 13th century. It added Jerusalem to the already existing Coptic connection as vivid dimensions of Ethiopian Christian identity. Both Zion and Alexandria were part of Ethiopian Christian self-identity, and Ethiopia was perceived as an island in the midst of an Islamic sea. Islam itself, namely the Middle Eastern political empires, was generally perceived as a monolithic threat. It was considered by Christian Ethiopians to be a wall of siege and alienation, ever ready to become actively hostile and work for the destruction of Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian fear of Islam was never a fear of direct Middle Eastern military onslaught. Rather, the Ethiopian Christian establishment was afraid of potential Middle Eastern influence on the Muslims of the Horn of Africa. The latter, no fewer than the Christians in number, lacked a common language and advanced Islamic institutions, and failed to unite. Throughout history they managed to join forces only once, and for a short episode. A 16th century Muslim leader from Harar, Ahmad bin Ibrahim "Gragn", managed to benefit from a contemporary Islamic revival in the Arab peninsula and from Ottoman penetration to the Red Sea, and united Muslims of various groups under the banner of an anti-Ethiopian Jihad. His conquest of Ethiopia, 1529–1543, was arguably the single most important event in the country's long annals. Ethiopia as a Christian culture was destroyed, churches and monasteries were wiped out, and, according to Ethiopian tradition, nine-tenths of the population was forcibly converted to Islam. Ethiopia was saved as a result of Portuguese intervention and the sudden death of the Muslim leader, but the "Ahmad Gragn trauma" remained, engraved in Ethiopian memory, and would shape enduring perceptions of Islam. The "Ahmad Gragn Syndrome" caused Ethiopia to disconnect itself from the Middle East, ignoring the entire region, whenever possible. Egypt, main center of Islamic politics and learning (most Islamic scholars of the Horn of Africa studied in the "riwaq al-jabartiyya" of "madrasat al-Azhar" in Cairo) was no exception. Medieval and early modern Ethiopian emperors, for example, flatly perceived Egypt as a hostile Islamic country. Tewodros II (1855–1868) and Yohannes IV mentioned Ahmad Gragn whenever dealing with Egypt. The former rejected appeasement diplomacy initiated by Saʾid Pasha (1854–1863); the latter, the victor of Gura, refused to recognize Khedive Ismaʾil as a European-oriented modernizer, and incorrectly saw him merely as an Islamic enemy. Yohannes faced the challenge of Egyptian

involvement, resorting to roughly the same terminology he used in simultaneously facing the Islamic radicals of the Sudanese Mahdiyya state.

c. 1924: Egypt as a Part of Europe

Twenty years after Gura, Ethiopia scored another overwhelming victory in nearby Adwa, this time over representatives of European might. With Middle Eastern Islam already weakened and Egypt conquered, the victory over the Italians secured Ethiopian sovereignty. However, it also cemented Ethiopia's self-image of excellence and worked to entrench conservatism. Of the generation that emerged in Ethiopia in the early twentieth century, it seems that only a few truly understood the meaning of Western civilization and were ready to adopt some of its models and values. Ras Tafari, no doubt, was one of these few, and their leader. He had acquired elements of Western education (including fluent French), admired Europe, and considered Western style modernization, primarily of administration and education, as the key to efficiently building his future autocracy. In September 1923, against the concerted opposition of the elders of Adwa, he managed to get Ethiopia admitted to the newly established League of Nations. Having declared more reforms he prepared his visit to Europe.[4] In his memoirs he defined the purpose of his study tour thus: "To see with my own eyes European civilization and the beauty of the cities of Paris, London, Rome, Brussels, Athens, and Cairo, about which I had read in books, first at school and later on in office".[5]

Tafari began his European tour by spending over two weeks in Egypt and Palestine (24.5.1924–9.5.1924). During the entire visit he reportedly betrayed no feelings of suspicion towards Islam. He acted rather, as we shall emphasize, as though visiting a part of the West. He was, however, far from departing from his Christian Ethiopian religion and identity. On the contrary, the first thing he did on Egyptian soil was to take a special train from the Suez Canal and, together with his

[4] For description and analysis of the trip to Europe, see HAROLD MARCUS, *Haile Sellassie I, The Formative Years, 1892–1936*, University of California Press, 1987, Chapter 4. For Tafari and the "Adwa generation" see also my *Ethiopia and the Challenge of Independence*, Boulder 1986, Chapter 1.

[5] See the autobiography of Emperor Haile Sellassie, *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress*, translated and annotated by EDWARD ULLENDORFF, Oxford University Press, 1976, p.84. The memoirs of Haile Sellassie contain a detailed description of the journey to Jerusalem and Egypt.

entourage of 27 men, travelled to Jerusalem. His purpose was to regain Ethiopian ownership of the country's share in the Deir al-Sultan convent. The convent, adjacent to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and shared by Egyptian Copts and Ethiopians, is a courtyard with a dome in the center, and a cluster of hovels, occupied by Ethiopian monks, possibly since the 5th century. This was Ethiopia's modest hold in the eternal city of Jerusalem, the source of Ethiopia's Solomonic royal ethos. In 1834, when Jerusalem was under Egyptian control, the Ethiopian monks fell victim to a plague, and Egyptian Copts gained control over the gate leading to their corner, agreeing to accept the Ethiopians back only as guests. Efforts made by Ethiopian emperors and their representatives to regain the keys to that gate had come to naught. Tafari's intensive efforts in Jerusalem and Egypt to redeem this source of historical religious legitimacy were also to be frustrated, as we shall see later.

However, as Tafari himself stated, his purpose in visiting Egypt was also to witness her modernization. Unlike Yohannes IV, he had no dread of Islam or of Egypt's modern identity. In fact, Egypt in 1924, though developed and prosperous in many ways, was not a threat. Egypt enjoyed some internal political autonomy, but had been under British occupation for two generations, and in terms of foreign relations was even incapable of negotiating for her very source of life C the waters of the Nile. In 1924 the issue of the Nile itself was far from dormant; it was in fact well at the top of the Ethiopian-British agenda. From the beginning of the century the British had hoped to revolutionize the Nile irrigation system by building a dam at Lake Tana, turning it into a major water reservoir. Such a project, of course, was to be under British imperial control and its implementation, in whatever possible arrangement, would have meant practically tearing Western Ethiopia from the Addis Ababa government, and bringing it under British rule. Since this was unthinkable for the Ethiopians, they conducted futile and prolonged negotiations, frustrating the British policy makers.[6] When Tafari visited Cairo in 1924, the Anglo-Ethiopian issue was burning, but the Egyptians themselves had no say in it. Moreover, it seems that the Egyptian public was unaware of the very nature of the

[6] On the Tana project and Ethio-British negotiations see: ABDUSSAMAD AHMAD, "Gojjam: Trade, Early Merchant Capital and World Economy, 1901–1935", PhD Thesis, Urbana, Illinois, 1986. Also: JAMES MCCANN, "Ethiopia, Britain, and Negotiations for the Lake Tana Dam, 1922–1935". *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 14, 4 (1981), pp. 667–699.

issue.[7] Instead, numerous newspaper articles discussed and recycled the old Egyptian fear that Ethiopia might one day block the Nile, and in some articles relevant medieval episodes were mentioned.[8] The Lake Tana project was apparently not discussed in Tafari's meetings with Egyptian leaders. Tafari visited a Delta barrage site, but this was the only official episode related to the Nile. He also visited Al-Azhar and another major mosque, and this was the only Islamic connection. Most of Tafari's curiosity was focused in three other fields.

The first was Egypt's Pharaonic past.

During the nine days of his sojurn on Egyptian soil (the tour to Palestine lasted from 25 April to 1 May), Tafari dragged his entourage to all major historical sites, to the Pyramids, the Sphinx, the Cairo Museum of Antiquities, a two day journey to Luxor and its temples, to the Valley of the Kings and to the newly discovered tomb of Tutankhamen. This intensive exposure to pre-Islamic Egypt was doubtless encouraged by his Egyptian hosts, themselves immersed at the time in their renewed "Pharaonic-Egyptian" identity. But it is also most apparent that Tafari was ready and willing to see and accept Egypt primarily as a cradle of universal civilization, a major source of global and Western culture; a symbolic corridor, in this respect, on his own journey to the capitals of Europe, rather than an imperial Egyptian or Islamic capital.

The second field was the modernization of Egypt.

Tafari was very interested to see the urban modernization of the country, especially of Cairo, and made a point to visit various industrial plants, municipal institutions, and hospitals. Of major interest was Egypt's system of modern education. Tafari visited some of Cairo's institutions of higher education, the schools of law, engineering, and agriculture. He also paid visits to numerous Coptic elementary and secondary schools. The development of modern education was already perhaps the leading element in Tafari's plan for advancing Ethiopian society and government, and no doubt he was fully aware of Egypt's relevance. As a young prince in 1908, he had attended the opening of Ethiopia's first modern

[7] For British efforts to conceal their negotiations from the Egyptians see PRO FO 371/9989, Allenby to MacDonald, 17 May 1924. (The British decided to talk to Tafari about the matter in London only, and invited relevant Ethiopian chiefs, Ras Hailu and Ras Nado, to return via the Sudan).

[8] For example, ألمقطم, 3, 9 May 1924, ألمقتطف, 1 July 1924.

primary school in Addis Ababa, established thanks to the help and management of eight Egyptian schoolmasters. The first director of the Ecole Premier de Ménélik II, the Copt Salib Hanna, was among the many Egyptian celebrities who received Tafari's entourage upon its arrival in Port Suez.

Tafari devoted nearly the whole of his short stay in Alexandria to visiting the nearby famous Victoria College. He paid special attention to the few Ethiopian students at the College, two of whom were sons of Blata Heruy Walda-Selassie, a prominent writer and historian, the mayor of Addis Ababa, a devotee of Tafari and a member of his touring entourage. The elder son, Faqade, made a welcoming speech in which he tried to depict Ethiopia, somewhat pretentiously, as an historical extension of Hellenic and Christian Egypt, a land of a glorious Oriental past which Tafari would restore to greatness.

His father, Heruy Walda-Selassie, kept a detailed diary of the entire trip. Later that year in Ethiopia he published this diary (printed by The Ras Tafari Press) under the title of "Destana Kibir", Happiness and Glory. Its first two chapters covered the journey to Palestine and Egypt. They were replete with descriptions of Egypt's pre-Islamic Pharaonic antiquities on the one hand, and of Egypt's modern, European-style appearance, on the other.[9] Modern education in Egypt, however, was the focus of Heruy's admiration. The Egyptian education system, he marvelled, contained many institutions at all levels. "The government of Egypt not only saw to the establishment of schools," he wrote.[10] "With the help of the Ministry of Education, the poor and the deprived of Egypt also send their children to these schools. All the children in Egypt, even of the poorest of families, learn to read and write in these schools".

One of Tafari's first initiatives, taken immediately after the tour, was the opening in 1925 of Ethiopia's second primary school in Addis Ababa. The Tafari Makonnen school, like its predecessor, was staffed by many Egyptian Copts, themselves of modern educational background. It was to become a pivotal factor in the creation of new groups of modern oriented youngsters in Ethiopia.

[9] See: ጎሩይ ፡ ወልደ ፡ ሥላሴ ። ደስታና ፡ ክብር ፤ የኢትዮጵያ ፡ መንግሥት ፡ አልጋ ፡ ወራሽና ፡ እንደራሴ ፡ ልዑል ፡ ተፈሪ ፡ መኮንን ፡ ወደ ፡ አውሮፓ ፡ ሲሔዱና ፡ ሱመለሱ ፡ የመንገዳቸው ፡ አኳኋን ። (አዲስ ፡ አበባ ፤ ተፈሪ ፡ መኮንን ፡ መተሚያ ፡ ቤት ፡ ፲፱፻፲፮ዓም) "printed in the Publishing House of His Highness Ras Tafari, the Heir to the Ethiopian Throne, 1916 EC (1923/1924)". Heruy's book is the most detailed source for the entire 1924 trip. The Jerusalem visit was described on pp. 11–20, the visit to Egypt on pp. 21–30.

[10] See HERUY, "Dastana", p. 28.

The third field was Egypt as the home of the Coptic Church.

Tafari and his entourage were received enthusiastically by the Coptic community, by leaders of the Church as well as by Coptic members of the Egyptian elite: dignitaries, politicians, intellectuals, government officials. Daily receptions were held, culminating in an official ceremonial meeting with the old Patriarch Qerilos (died 1927) and his designated successor, Yohannes. Beneath the facade of warm friendliness, however, tensions mounted. One of Tafari's greatest adversaries in Ethiopia was Abuna Matewos, a sworn enemy of reform and change. Tafari's long-range plans included demanding Ethiopia's right to ordain Ethiopian bishops for Ethiopia and indeed full Ethiopianization of the Ethiopian Church, but separation from Alexandria was not yet to be aired, at least not directly. Tafari put the keys to Deir al-Sultan on the agenda. This was his purpose, in first going to Jerusalem. During the week he spent in the Holy Land (including a tour to the Sea of Galilee, Nazareth, and the Jordan River) he signed a contract with Greek Orthodox leaders in Jerusalem securing a room for the Ethiopian monks. While in Egypt he forcefully demanded the keys to the gates of the convent. On 4 May 1924, in Cairo, Tafari met the Coptic Community Council, and emphasized the need for unity but on condition that the keys were handed over. A tense discussion followed, in which the Coptic leaders stated that Deir al-Sultan was the property of the Egyptian Church. They said they were ready to continue hosting their fellow Ethiopians, even improving their condition, but only on that basis, and only after a general assembly of the community's dignitaries had approved it.

When Tafari left for Europe the Coptic community began preparing for such a general assembly. It was also immersed in a discussion, some of it conducted in the public press. The majority were against Tafari and his demand. Many insisted on the Convent being Egyptian only, others thought that Tafari was ambitious because he wanted to overshadow his rivals at home, notably empress Zawditu and Abuna Matewos, who had failed to obtain the keys. One opponent of returning the keys argued that the Queen of Sheba was a Yemenite, not an Ethiopian; thus, because the Ethiopian Solomonic ethos was unfounded, Ethiopia did not deserve an autonomous share in Jerusalem.[11] On 1 August 1924 the Copts' general assembly voted for the convent to remain exclusively an Egyptian property. It also decided to form an Egyptian-Ethiopian joint committee to help the Ethiopian guests of the convent in daily religious matters.

[11] See أملقطم, 2 May 1924, "Who is the Queen of Sheba".

When Tafari ended his European tour, later that August, he returned via Egypt to meet the Coptic Council once more. The meeting was again uneasy and tense, but it ended with some compromise. Tafari agreed not to threaten with disunity but refused to sign a document recognizing Egyptian possession of Deir al-Sultan. The Council, for its part, agreed that half of the convent would unofficially be kept by the Ethiopian monks, and that the gate would remain open, but all pending an approval by the community's general assembly. However, the Coptic Church, for reasons we shall discuss later, was apparently not prepared to make this gesture, and no such an assembly was actually convened.[12] (The keys to Deir al-Sultan were returned to Ethiopian hands only in 1969, after Israel had captured East Jerusalem during the Six-Day War).

Tafari's visit to Egypt in 1924 was, in any case, a very positive event. The Ethiopian prince considered Egypt both an ancient cradle of Western and global civilizations, and a new, modern gate to Europe. To him it represented a pluralistic society, giving cultural, even political, equality to fellow Christian Copts, and enlightened enough to receive him with open arms. The entire occasion was marked by overt and mutual respect and friendliness, as if the Nile issue and the Deir al-Sultan disappointment were merely marginal matters.

During the years following 1924 the mutual goodwill continued. Ethiopia went on hiring and inviting Egyptian schoolmasters, and sent more youngsters to study in Egypt. A new Abun replaced the conservative Matewos, who died in 1926, and in 1928 the new Coptic Patriarch Yohannes paid a nearly unprecedented official visit to Ethiopia. In 1929 an Egyptian Consulate was opened in Addis Ababa, and in 1930, when Tafari was crowned Emperor Haile Selassie, a high ranking Egyptian mission came to pay its respects. Egypt's special interest and goodwill towards Ethiopia culminated in 1935, during the year of the "Abyssinian Crisis". When Mussolini threatened to destroy Ethiopia, the majority of the Egyptian public favored supporting its African sister. Hundreds of newspaper articles condemned the fascist aggressors, and books by leading public opinion-makers called for solidarity with their fellow Oriental neighbour. A "Committee for the Defence of Ethiopia" registered volunteers and sent three Egyptian Red Crescent medical

[12] For a detailed discussion of Tafari's negotiations with the Copts in 1924 see: أنتونى سوريا عبد ٱلسد, دير ٱلسلطان بٱلقدس (Subtitled: "A Documented Study of the Coptic-Ethiopian Historic Rivalry Over the Convent"), ألقاهره ١٩٩١ See Also ألاهرام, 8 May 1924: "Between the Ethiopians and the Copts"; Haile Sellassie's autobiography, p.120; HERUY's "Dastana", pp. 118–120.

missions which took part in the actual fighting. Indeed, all those who stood for the preservation of the open spirit of the 1920s in Egypt herself, a spirit well reflected in our story of 1924, identified with Ethiopia in 1935 and with the besieged Haile Selassie. There were other voices in the Egypt of 1935, to which we shall return.

In 1936 Haile Selassie was defeated by Mussolini and wrote his memoirs in exile in 1937. His trip to Europe in 1924 was described in great detail, and his visit to Egypt was portrayed as an organic part of that formative study tour. In fact the whole first chapter of the section on the European journey was devoted to Egypt, but for some reason, without any direct context, Haile Selassie decided to begin this chapter with an extended paragraph on Ahmad "Gragn".[13] In fact, Heruy Walda-Selassie had done the very same thing in his book written in 1924, having begun his survey of the tour with a short description of the 16th century Islamic conquest and destruction of Ethiopia.[14] Indeed, it seems that even the 1924 period of grace in Ethio-Egyptian relations could not wipe out the old "Gragn syndrome," the Ethiopian-Christian traumatic fear of political Islam, a concept in which Egypt, in whatever form, remained a central factor.

d. Egyptianism, Islam and Their Concepts of Ethiopia

The year 1924 was also a year of rising liberal expectations, of openness and hope in Egypt. In 1923, Egypt enacted a new, European-style constitution, stipulating the establishment of a monarchical-parliamentarian system. In the first elections, held in January 1924, the popular nationalist "Wafd Party" won a decisive victory, and its charismatic leader, Saʾd Zaghlul, a sworn parliamentarian and persistent rival of the British occupiers, headed the first constitutional government. His "peoples' government" survived only until November when the British found an excuse to topple it. In retrospect, however, the 1924 short-lived Zaghlul government perhaps marked the climax of the entire decade and its spirit. The spirit of the 1920s in Egypt was a blend of modern liberalism and "pharaonic" inspiration. Egyptian nationalism was now interpreted as stemming primarily from the long history of Egypt itself, with its many cultural eras, rather than from the legacies of Islam. Such a pluralist understanding of the Egyptian self-image as a multicultural entity enabled a new acceptance of the Ethiopian neighbor.

[13] See Haile Selassie's autobiography, pp. 81–82.
[14] See HERUY's "Dastana", p. 11.

Assimilated in this new cultural concept was a renewed territorial definition of the Egyptian identity. The framework of the Egyptian nation was defined by the slogan "Unity of the Nile Valley". First raised in 1899, it implied modern nationalist unity with the Sudan, not with Ethiopia; but inescapably, however, it rendered Ethiopia more proximate and relevant. On the basis of this spirit, the new Egyptian state, savoring the taste of political autonomy (Fuad was declared King in 1922, and the Constitution was enacted in 1923), was fully ready to give Tafari a warm reception amidst state ceremonies, royal parades and official banquets.

A new generation of liberal Egyptians in the 1920s was seemingly ready even to shelve the military calamity of Gura. The 1876 Ethiopian victory had caused such damage, that the first generation of modern Egyptian nationalists was not inclined to forgiveness. For example, when Ethiopia defeated the imperialist Italians at Adwa in 1896, she earned no respect whatsoever. Apart from sparse lines of trivial information in the Egyptian press, the Ethiopian triumph was nearly ignored. Moreover, a few months following Adwa, a book by a survivor of Gura was published in Cairo, strongly depicting Ethiopia as both barbarous and primitive. (When, in 1905, Japan scored a victory over Russia, it inspired many in Egypt to consider it a model for Oriental reawakening.) During Tafari's 1924 visit, however, there was very little mention of Gura. In the weekly magazine Kashkul, for example, an old Egyptian ex-officer lamented this forgetfulness. He wrote about the atrocities he had suffered at the hands of the Ethiopians when taken prisoner at Gura (48 years earlier), and demanded a boycott of the representatives of Ethiopia, "a barbarous land, incapable of change, which should not be accepted among the civilized nations."[15] This, however, was a lone voice in the wilderness, compared to the prevalent cordiality.

Liberal Egyptian nationalism enhanced the status of the Copts; thus it was natural that they would do their best to emphasize their new equality as Egyptian citizens in leading the reception of the Ethiopians. But the Coptic attitudes revealed during that visit also reflected an ambivalence, and this in turn reflected a duality in the general Egyptian attitude.

On the one hand stood the Coptic religious establishment. Clerics in the upper echelons of the Church, as we have seen, proved very hesitant about Tafari. They were apparently moved by the old Coptic fear that the Muslim public in Egypt would overtly identify them with Ethiopia. An Islamic concept of the Copts as potential collaborators with the Ethiopians, a dangerous enemy positioned on the

[15] See كشكول, 2 May 1924, a short article by a Coptic ex-officer, Sawirs Mika`il.

source of the Nile, was part of an old tradition. In 9th century eschatological Islamic literature, for example, the Copts were depicted as traitors who would sit idly by while the Ethiopians invaded and destroyed Egypt.[16] It was presumably this fear of radical Islamic reaction that moved the Church establishment to reject returning the keys of Deir al-Sultan to the Ethiopians. On the other hand, the more modern Copts, politicians and journalists, were fully ready to identify with Ethiopia and with Tafari, and to return the keys of the Jerusalem convent. (They, in turn, were blamed for inflating the importance of the visit in order to attain personal promotion in government).[17] Indeed, Coptic intellectuals and politicians (such as the historians Murad Kamil, Zahir Riyad, and statesman Boutrus Boutrus Ghali) would become advocates of diplomatic closeness and understanding with Ethiopia, beginning in the 1940s.

This Coptic duality mirrored a general modern Egyptian ambivalence between fear of Ethiopia and a need for her friendliness. These modern Egyptian concepts of Ethiopia, we argue, were themselves, in turn, related to inherent traditional Islamic concepts of that country. In order to appreciate better the 1924 Egyptian reception of Tafari we must resort, however briefly, to these Islamic concepts of Ethiopia.

Traditional Islamic concepts of Ethiopia were marked by a polarized dichotomy. They included, on the one hand, a uniquely positive attitude towards this non-Islamic entity, and on the other, a total negation, unique in its harshness, of Ethiopia's legitimacy.

The formative period of these concepts of Ethiopia were the very years of Islam's birth. The Prophet Muhammad was said to be knowledgeable about Christian Aksumite Ethiopia, and he befriended the Negus – "najashi" in Arabic – of his time. All relevant Muslim chronicles tell the same story about the Christian "najashi" who saved Muhammad's first group of followers. In 615 AD, facing destruction at the hands of the Meccan aristocracy, Muhammad commanded his followers to emigrate to Ethiopia. Najashi Ashama not only received them most generously, refusing to betray them to a Meccan delegation, but also rendered the Prophet other services of vital importance, thus contributing significantly to his victory. By the same tradition, in 628 AD, the "najashi" himself converted to

[16] See: نعيم إبن حمد , كتاب ألفتن ,بيروت١٩٩٣, p. 409.
[17] See: كشكول,"بين ألاقباط و ألحبشة" , 9. 5. 1924.

Islam; his people did not follow him in his conversion, however, and he died in 630, deserted and betrayed.

The story of the "first hijra" to Ethiopia and of the righteous "najashi" left a double message which has endured to this very day. On the one hand, there was the message that the king of Ethiopia had become a Muslim, and therefore, the country was already a part of "The Land of Islam". The fact that the Ethiopians remained loyal to their Christianity was considered Islam's first defeat ("the first Andalus"). It was a painful calamity with practical and principal consequences. The redemption of Ethiopia by the reinstatement of a "Muslim najashi" became, for the followers of this interpretation, an obligation of utmost importance. Ethiopia was denied legitimacy, and an holy war was to be launched against her. The image of Christian Ethiopians became demonic, and they were depicted as Islam's worse enemies. Some medieval traditions exposed the deepest fear and hostility. The Ethiopians, it was said, would invade Egypt and steal her treasures. Moreover, they would destroy the Kaʿba before the Muslims could unite with Allah's help, and destroy them.[18] Such vehement anti-Ethiopian motives have been recycled on many occasions, and have even re-surfaced recently in radical Islamic anti-Ethiopian literature published during the 1980s, mostly in Egypt.

On the other hand a totally different legacy of gratitude to Ethiopia stemmed from the initial story. The Prophet, it was said and written, was so grateful to the "najashi, the righteous king," that he ordered all Muslims to "leave the Ethiopians alone as long as they leave you alone." This famous "hadith" (a saying attributed to Muhammad) was generally interpreted as a declaration that Christian Ethiopia was "a Land of Neutrality" ("Dar al-hiyyad"), a country exempted from Jihad. By this interpretation, Ethiopia though non-Muslim, was accepted and recognized, and according to many Islamic jurists, it was the sole exception.

Whenever Ethiopia was placed on the Muslim agenda an argument arose between these two extreme concepts. Needless to say, it was also an argument over the very nature of Islam itself; was this nature flexible and tolerant, or monolithically fanatic. Thus the Ethiopian case sometimes came to the fore even when the country itself was not of direct relevance. For example, moderate Muslims who seek co-existence with a non-Islamic government often refer to the way the very pioneers of Islam lived under the non-Muslim, righteous Ethiopian Christian king, by the order of the Prophet himself. Ethiopia, such a model of lofty, universal justice, today serves the arguments of Islamic leaders in Britain,

[18] See, نعيم إبن حمد , كتاب ألفتن, بيروت١٩٩٣ , the chapter: "The Ethiopians' Invasions", pp. 403–406.

the USA, even of the Islamic movement of Israeli Arabs. Recently, the more moderate wings in the Palestinian Hamas and Islamic Jihad movements recognized the Palestinian Authority, under Yasser Arafat, based on the Islamic legal precedence of the righteous, non-Islamic Ethiopia.

The centrality of Ethiopia as a principal case in Islamic concepts of non-Muslims deserves a much wider context. (A closely related issue of principal importance was the special status of Black Ethiopian Muslims in Islam.) Here we simply wish to state that it seemed that some elements of traditional Islamic delegitimization and demonization of Ethiopia were transmitted to modern Egyptian nationalism, and were combined with the legacy of the Gura calamity and the inherent fears about the Nile waters. We must emphasize, however, that in 1924, during the Ethiopian visit, only a few cases of such anti-Ethiopian emotions were revealed. The Egyptian leadership went out of its way to demonstrate good will toward Tafari, the would-be "najashi." The public, judging by the extensive coverage of Tafari's visit in the local press, was most curious about Ethiopia.

e. Liberal Egyptianism and the Modernizing Prince

Tafari's visit was covered in much detail by the Egyptian press. Articles about Ethiopia, her Oriental culture and Semitic languages, and her historic proximity to Egypt, continued to appear in the leading newspapers and weeklies, even in July and August.[19] As we have seen, first generations of Egyptian nationalists had ignored Ethiopia. Muslims, we recall, even those grateful to Ethiopia, had been ordered to "leave the Abyssinians alone", and indeed, throughout the centuries revealed little curiosity as to Christian Ethiopia itself. Now, in 1924, the Egyptian public was suddenly curious. For example, a series of three articles appeared on the front page of "Al-Ahram" (3, 4 May)[20] beginning with a paragraph on Egypt's

[19] See for example an article titled 1. 7. 1924 ألهلال, "ألحبشة و مكانها" in which the culture of Ethiopia was presented as connected with Egypt and the Arab peninsula, and in which it was noted that her merchants were mostly Arabs, and that the Church was Egyptian. See also a series of two articles in ألمقتطف 1 July, 1 August 1924. These articles contain a description of Egypt's dependency on the Nile, originating in Ethiopia, and present a related 11th century episode.

[20] See ألاهرام, "ولى عهد ألحبشة" 3.–4. 5. 1924, front page, and a second part in inner page, 3 May 1924; third part in ألاهرام, 4 May 1924.

general ignorance regarding Ethiopia and the newly aroused curiosity. The author, "our envoy to Addis Ababa" (the name was not given), was most probably one of the Egyptian schoolmasters in Ethiopia. He had spent five years in Ethiopia and was in an excellent position to give good, basic information. His articles were full of data on Ethiopia: ethnic structure, political institutions, languages, customs, a summary of history, the image of Tafari. It is apparent that he wanted to enhance positive attitudes. He did his best to emphasize how much Ethiopian culture was an extension of Oriental civilization. (He even told a strange story that the Ethiopian language of Geᶜez had originated in Gaza, "a port in Palestine with which ancient Ethiopians traded"). Ethiopians, he wrote, by their colour and appearance, were not so different from Arabs. An Arabic speaker would feel at home there, and be able to communicate, even though no Ethiopian could speak real Arabic.

The "Al-Ahram's correspondent" to Addis Ababa also wrote about the Solomonic Ethos and mentioned it as a dimension of Ethiopia's Oriental connection. At the same time, he avoided mentioning any Christian-Islamic dichotomy in the country's history. For example, he told his readers about Tafari's climb to power and his conflict with the declared heir of emperor Menlik II, his grandson, Lij Iyasu. However, he chose to ignore any mention of Iyasu's conversion to Islam as the official reason for his 1916 deposition by Tafari's camp. He said only that the heir of Menelik was deposed "because he did not behave according to the country's customs". The articles contained no patronizing attitudes, even when the author surveyed the poor state of infrastructure and of modern education. He wrote that the number of Ethiopians who had received regular education was very small, but immediately added that, by nature, the Ethiopians were a very sophisticated people and "perhaps the best politicians in the world". Their best leader, he wrote, was Tafari. He portrayed him as an educated person, fluent in French, even speaking some Arabic, and the great pioneer of modernization. He described him as the initiator of change, challenging the entrenched conservatism of the old guard. Tafari, he concluded, attached great importance to his visit to the West. He explained that, in preparation for the event, Tafari had written a pamphlet which he published in Amharic, a booklet encouraging the young to venture out, to see Europe and learn. It contained practical advice as to how an Ethiopian could witness the achievements of modernization without exposing his own ignorance.

Nearly all the dozens of other relevant articles in various newspapers were entitled "The Visit of the Heir to the Ethiopian Throne". Indeed Tafari, was not

yet a "najashi" of Ethiopia, and, perhaps conveniently, the Egyptian press could thus avoid writing about Islamic traditions. Even so, some of these articles reflected the traditional ambivalence. The popular satirical weekly "Kashkul", for example, published a long letter by one reader.[21] He reconstructed a conversation during Tafari's visit which he had overheard, (probably fictitious, a popular literary genre at the time). It began with an al-Azhar Muslim scholar who complained about the excessive attention given to the Ethiopian guest. A commander in the Egyptian navy replied that it was well deserved, since Egypt and Ethiopia were both in need of mutual understanding. An engineer said that there was no technical feasibility to the assumption that the Ethiopians could block the Nile. A citizen added that the Ethiopians, with the help of the British, were considering invading and conquering the Sudan, to which the naval commander replied that they were not militarily capable of doing so. The Al-Azhar scholar said that they, the Ethiopians, were very devious and shrewd, and they might indeed capture the Sudan (and the Upper Nile). The engineer agreed, adding that the Ethiopians had proven their military might by defeating Egypt at Gura. But the naval commander assured him that the 1876 defeat was merely a result of stupid intelligence mistakes, rather than a true reflection of Ethiopian power.

Whatever was on the minds of the Egyptians, the reception of Tafari and his entourage was exceptionally cordial. The British High Commissioner, Lord Allenby, reported that the Egyptians had spared no effort to give their guests the royal treatment. From the moment of their arrival to the point of departure the Ethiopians were surrounded by welcome delegations, governmental ministers, army officers and leaders of Egypt's society and culture. Upon their return from Jerusalem, at the border railway station, they were received by high ranking officials, a military band and a 21 cannon salute. Ras Tafari met King Fuad no less than three times, and on three different occasions, Saʿd Zaghlul. King Fuad, in a very special gesture, reciprocated Tafari's visit to Abidin Palace by coming to see Tafari in his hotel. He told Tafari that he had seen Ras Makonnen when Tafari's father was in Italy on a mission in 1889. Zaghlul was Tafari's host during a closed meeting, from which nothing was leaked. He also hosted Tafari's farewell party, held outdoors near the monument entitled "Egypt's Awakening". (A joke was circulated that Zaghlul had learnt some Amharic, and hoped that the Ethiopians would erect his statue in Addis Ababa). During their entire nine-day stay on

[21] The following passage is a summary of an article by Zakiyya al-Maraghi, "Al-habsh wamisr" (the Ethiopians and Egypt), كشكول, 16 May 1924.

Egyptian soil, the Ethiopians had King Fuad's three-car special royal train at their disposal.

The picture, however, was not entirely one of harmonious cordiality. The Ethiopians, no doubt, were hurt by their failure to obtain the keys to Deir al-Sultan. The Egyptians must have felt that they were not even informed about the Nile issue. Yet, all in all, the Tafari visit of 1924 was a demonstration of good will, a mutual effort to open a new modern page in the long history of misconceptions; an hour of grace which was made possible by Egyptian secular liberalism. This spirit, as we mentioned, did not die out, but reached another moment of culmination during the "Abyssinian Crisis" of 1935–6. However, in the 1930s liberal Egyptianism came under severe attack by other emerging dimensions of the Egyptian soul: resurgent Islamic militancy, pan-Arabism and proto-fascist integral nationalism. These trends, in their turn, all had their own, different concepts of Ethiopia, and they raised their voices during the stormy crisis of the Mussolini onslaught. Some of these yearned for the destruction of Ethiopia and the fall of Haile Selassie, resorting, in their propaganda, to old motives mentioned earlier.

The collapse of Ethiopia and the victory of Mussolini helped recycle Ethiopia's negative images. A new generation of revolutionary pan-Arabs translated the old radical Islamic concepts into modern nationalist ones. During the 1950s and 1960s, Ethiopia became identified by the Nasserites of Egypt and other pan-Arabists with imperialism and Zionism, and her illegitimacy led to their concept of "Eritrea's Arabism". In Ethiopia, the old "Ahmad Gragn trauma" was fully reactivated, and Haile Selassie did his best to separate himself and his country from the Middle East. His second royal visit to Cairo took place in 1959, but this time he came to put an end to the relations between the Coptic and the Ethiopian churches.

f. The Nile, British Paternalism, and the Abyssinian Crisis

Tafari Makonnen's visit to Egypt in 1924, a grace period in Ethio-Egyptian relations, is a significant story from today's perspective. Though church relations are already a matter of the past (the Egyptians are still demanding the return of the Deir al-Sultan keys from Israel), the Nile issue remains and most serious. Ethiopia, especially in the wake of the mid-1980s disasters, is in dire need of a modernized irrigation system, and Egypt cannot afford to lose any amount of the river's water. The matter is simply one of survival, and without creative solutions,

based on mutual good will and understanding, it may well lead to a disaster of the greatest magnitude. Ethio-Egyptian relations are at present replete with sensitivities and suspicions. It would be wise for all involved to learn the messages of the past, demystify demonization, and build on common interests.

The Nile issue itself, as we have seen, was not discussed by Tafari and his hosts in 1924, though it was then at the top of the Ethio-British agenda. The British hoped to construct a dam at Lake Tana which would increase the amount of water and regulate the flow of the Blue Nile. Such a dam would have been much better a solution than the Aswan High Dam, built later by Nasser. Such an enterprise, however, was supposed to be under complete British control, and could not but lead to the eventual fall of western Ethiopia under British influence and rule. Since the Addis Ababa government needed a project which would contribute to Ethiopia's progress and unity, not undermine it for the sake of British interests and the welfare of Sudan and Egypt, the negotiations became a very frustrating process for the British. (The "Al-Ahram" correspondent said, with good reason, that the Ethiopians were the best politicians in the world ...). When Tafari planned his trip to Europe in 1924, the British were in no mood to receive him warmly. Leading British policy makers wanted to humiliate him, so that he would accept their Nile schemes. The British Minister to Addis Ababa, Claud Russel, whose correspondence should be studied as the ultimate embodiment of colonial paternalism, opposed the very invitation of Tafari to London. He considered Tafari the worst kind of a native, one who pretends to be a well mannered westerner. (In a report he sent after Tafari's return, Russel stated sarcastically that the only good thing which had come out of his journey was an orchestra of young Armenian players, hired by Tafari in Jerusalem, and which entertained the foreign diplomatic community in Addis Ababa.) To convey his message clearly, Russel purposely offended Tafari by absenting himself from the large farewell ceremony, attended by all other diplomats, at Addis Ababa railway station.

The British offended Tafari a second time when he reached the Suez Canal and took the train to Jerusalem. Tafari understood that the special royal train, prepared by the Egyptians for his visit, would take him and his entourage to the Holy Land. He was then told by the British, on High Commissioner Allenby's personal instructions, that because Palestine was a different territory, he would have to hire his own train, paying for it in advance. They rubbed the insult in by carefully

checking all the passports, prohibiting one member of the entourage from entering Palestine.[22]

A third humiliation at the hands of the British awaited Tafari in Jerusalem. The High Commissioner of Palestine, Herbert Samuel, failed to show up at the railway station. Moreover, although it had been arranged that Tafari would stay at the government palace, he was told that this was impossible, and that he could sleep in the Ethiopian Church in West Jerusalem or in one of the hotels in town.[23]

When Tafari arrived in Egypt, High Commissioner Allenby had been already instructed by London to apologize to Tafari for the behaviour of Russel and Samuel. (The Egyptian public, the British reported, was mocking British behaviour exposed by the train story.) He was also instructed to return the money paid by the Ethiopians for the train to Jerusalem. But as Allenby reported, Tafari merely listened politely, and refused to take the money.[24]

Not even this demonstration of Ethiopian elegance in the face of his own rudeness impressed Allenby. Later that month, he summarized the rationale of British policy in his report to London.

"From the point of view of our desiderata, the Abyssinian characteristics, which I gather to be vanity and sensitiveness side by side with unreliability and lack of method in affairs, need, I should imagine, considerable correction; and I cannot but think that it would have been better if the Allies, instead of encouraging the former defects in costly competition with one another, had been able to agree in their own mutual interests to combine to remedy the latter with a firm hand."[25]

British cultural paternalism, so different from the enlightened cordiality demonstrated at the time by the Egyptians, was indeed to prove most costly. In 1925 Britain and Italy, signatories to the 1906 Tripartite Agreement (with France) dividing Ethiopia into spheres of influence, resumed negotiations regarding the British idea of constructing a dam on Lake Tana. In December 1925 they agreed that, in exchange for Italian support to build such a dam, Great Britain would recognize Italy's right to construct a railway from Somalia to Eritrea, and acknowledge Rome's "exclusive economic influence in the west of Ethiopia". The

[22] For details see: PRO FO 371/9989 Allenby to FO, 1 May 1924, 3 May 1924, Allenby to MacDonald, 18 May 1924.

[23] PRO FO 371/9989 Herbert Samuel to C. Russel, 30 April 1924, Allenby to MacDonald, 18 May 1924.

[24] PRO FO 371/9989 Allenby to MacDonald, 18 May 1924.

[25] PRO FO 371/9989 Field-Marshal Allenby to Mr. McDonald, Cairo, 18 May 1924.

British and the Italians exchanged letters to this effect without even informing Ethiopia, by then a legitimate member of the League of Nations. This same cultural attitude of paternalism, which meant that the affairs of "savage Abyssinia" would better be settled with civilized white Italy, eventually led to the Abyssinian Crisis of 1935, to the sale of Ethiopia to Mussolini and his "civilizing mission", and to the destruction of the League of Nations with all due consequences to Britain and the entire world.