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Anglo-Ethiopian Relations: 1840-1868

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of History
and the
Faculty of the Graduate College
University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
University of Nebraska at Omaha

by
Barbara in den Bosch
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Thesis Acceptance

Accepted for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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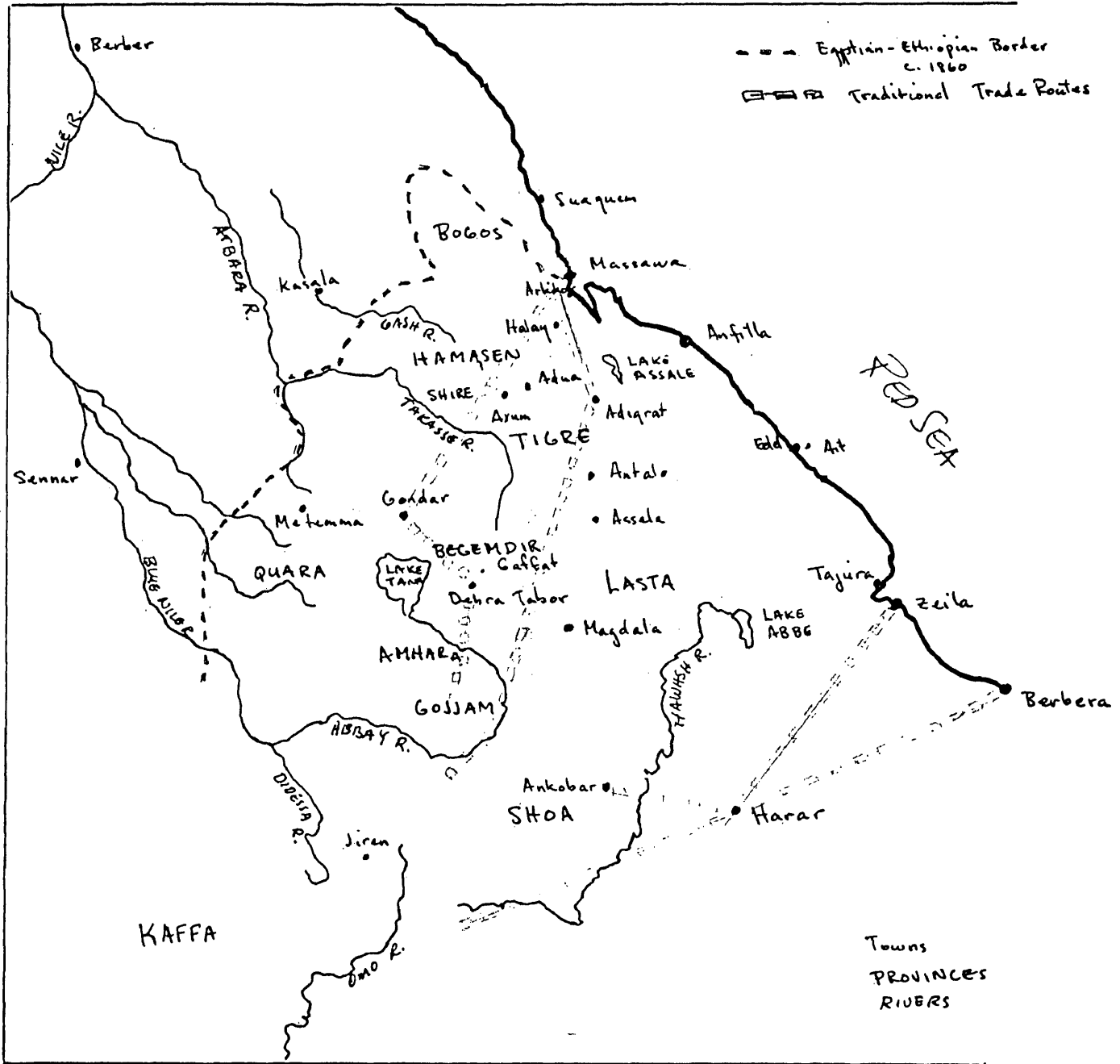
Oliver B. Cook

Chairman

December 21, 1979

Date

Ethiopia Circa 1860



from: Sven Rubenson, The Survival of Ethiopian Independence. London: Heineman, 1976, pp. 31, 216.

Mordechai Abir. Ethiopia and the Era of Princes. New York: Longmans, 1968, p. 45.

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Introduction

England, France, and Belgium began to search in the mid-nineteenth century for new commercial opportunities along the Red Sea. At the same time, Ethiopia was emerging from half a century of civil war to move toward the establishment of a unified state. Impelled by curiosity, expanding domestic needs, and the growing importance of the Red Sea trade route, Europeans looked southward to establish commercial, cultural, and diplomatic connections with the Christian society that traditionally had dominated the Horn of Africa. At the time that more European missionaries, traders, adventurers, and diplomats reached her boundaries, Ethiopia was being reunited under strong leadership and looking for Christian allies against expanding Egyptian power. Between the 1840's and 1860's, both Europeans and Ethiopians were pressured by the push for trade through a prospective Suez Canal and the explosive fragmentation of the Ottoman empire. There was every reason for Europeans and Ethiopians to come to a mutually beneficial modus vivendi. Nevertheless, by the end of the 1860's, the tenuous commercial and diplomatic ties established between Europe and Ethiopia* had snapped. The English expedition into Abyssinia was the apotheosis of the failure of a European nation to understand and to establish regular diplomatic

* The names Ethiopia and Abyssinia are used interchangeably. See glossary.

and commercial relations with the most powerful and unified country in East Africa. The intent of this paper is to explore from both the European and Ethiopian points of view the factors that led to diplomatic failure.

Most of the sources for this study are European. The travelers, missionaries, and commercial adventurers that probed Abyssinia wrote reports for their sponsors in Europe and narratives for the general public. Only three Ethiopian chronicles about this period have survived. Nevertheless, the contemporary European geographical, cultural, and diplomatic literature on Abyssinia offers a wide spectrum of viewpoints about what Abyssinia was and what it could be to Europe. Some Europeans stayed to settle in Ethiopia, adapted to Ethiopian customs, married Ethiopian wives, and wrote with sympathy of the Abyssinian response to Europe. Others came to Ethiopia to make a name for themselves by describing the exotic for a European market. A balance of sources within different European perspectives makes possible some approximation of the Abyssinian point of view.

In the initial contact between Europe and Ethiopia, Europeans saw in Abyssinia what they expected to see. They played out their own rivalries and attempted to engage Abyssinian rulers in their maneuvers. The Ethiopians had a series of rivalries and interests for which they attempted to make use of European knowledge and material. Between 1840 and 1860, there was a

dramatic increase of information and interaction between England, France, and Germany in Europe and between Amhara, Tigre, and Shoa in Ethiopia. One result of this increased contact was a serious attempt to establish regular commercial, cultural, and diplomatic relations between Victorian England and a reunited Ethiopia. The interest in regular intercourse between the two countries appeared to be mutual. Nevertheless, this venture in international relations failed and led to total rupture with the British Expedition to Abyssinia. The purpose of this thesis is to determine how this rupture came about by looking in some detail at both the European approach to Ethiopia and the Ethiopian response to Europe.

Chapter I:

Ethiopia Through European Eyes:

Western Perceptions of Ethiopia to 1840

From earliest times there has been a peculiar ambivalence in the European attitude toward Ethiopia. Ethiopia was at once the exotic land slightly beyond knowledge and the only African country with which Europeans felt any cultural affinity. Africa south of the Sahara was a dark continent to Europeans until the Portuguese and Spanish established trading stations on the African West Coast. They flooded their home countries with detailed, though strange, accounts of Arab trade and inter-African slavery.¹ Extant Arab accounts of early African empires were not read by Europeans until the twentieth century.² Ethiopia (in Greek, "the land of the burnt faces") was, on the other hand, a land with which a tenuous connection had been maintained since Greco-Roman times. The anonymous Periplus Maris Erythraei of the first century kept alive the memory of a highly developed civilization somewhere in East Africa that had traded with the Greeks.³ The legend

¹ Philip D. Curtin, The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850 (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), p. 9.

² Ibid, p. 11.

³ Periplus of the Erythraean Sea: Travel and Trade in the Indian Ocean, by a Merchant of the First Century, translated and annotated by Wilfred H. Schoff (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1912).

of Prester John brought back from the Crusades raised the chimera of a Christian empire somewhere in Africa or Asia.⁴ One consequence of this continuous relationship with Europe was that factual information about Ethiopia arrived in a fairly continuous stream rather than a sudden flood. Another was that over the centuries Europeans tended to see those practices in Ethiopian society that were similar to those of their own past and literary tradition. Information was so limited that Ethiopia remained for Europeans a part of exotic Africa; yet it was continuous enough that Ethiopia could be viewed as the furthest outpost of the Judaic-Christian tradition. Ethiopia has long been a perfect mine for the dreamer-adventurer. Arriving by sea, the adventurer found people with Caucasoid features and an almost Germanic feudal tradition. Arriving by books, the dreamer found the scattered sons of Ham and remnants of earlier Jewish and Christian practices.

A fairly detailed story of the ancient kingdom of Aksum and its network of trade with Arabia, Persia, and India was told by Cosmos Indicopleustes in Christian Topography in 525 A.D.⁵ This, like many other classical sources, was lost to

⁴ cf. Robert Silverberg, The Realm of Prester John (New York: Doubleday, 1972).

⁵ Cosmos, Christian Topography, translated and edited by J. W. McCrindle (London: Hakluyt Society, 1897).

Europe until the classical revival in the Renaissance. Medieval views of Ethiopia were based on the exotic imaginings of that eclectic compilation of tall-tales attributed to John Mandeville. For the readers of Mandeville, Ethiopia was the land of extremes and opposites.⁶ The water there was too salty to drink; the temperature was so hot that men had to sit in cool water all day to keep their testicles from hanging below their knees. Ethiopians ran on one foot, and very quickly. There was one well in Ethiopia that was too cold to drink from in the day and too hot to drink from at night. There was another well from which man could drink his perpetual youth.⁷ These apocryphal tales set the pattern of Europe's ambivalent and exaggerated view of Ethiopia. It was at the same time a land of horrible disease that afflicted all and a paradise that contained the long-sought-after source of youth and prosperity.

The Renaissance view of Ethiopia was dichotomized in another way. Legends of a fantastical land of extremes continued to circulate even as new empirical knowledge came in from the ever-widening reach of European travelers. A Summary of the Antiquities and Wonders of the World Out of the Sixteen First Books of Pliny translated into English in 1556 described Ethiopians as a mixture of peoples who had neither noses nor upper lips,

⁶ The Bodley Version of Mandeville's Travels edited by M. C. Seymour for the Early English Text Society (Oxford: The University Press, 1973), p. 87.

⁷ Ibid., p. 87.

spoke through signs and drank through straws made of oats. Some had one eye, some had no head, and others lived on the flesh of panthers and lions.⁸ On the other hand, Renaissance Europe had a quite accurate empirical description of Africa South of the Sahara in Leo Africanus' A Geographical History of Africa, published in Italy in 1550 and in England in 1600.⁹ This Arab work was based on the experiences of Arab travellers who had maintained contact with the trading ports of East and West Africa. Renaissance men of letters preferred the legendary tradition, and Leo Africanus' information was largely ignored until the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁰

Typically, it was the legend of Prester John that stirred the first tangible contact between Ethiopia and modern Europe. The Portuguese had heard of a Christian African monarch who sent embassies to the Pope in Venice in 1177 and to Florence in 1434¹¹ and hoped in him to find an ally against Islam. Pedro de Covilham and Alphonzo de Paynra were despatched to Ethiopia in 1487. Both evidently found their way into the

⁸ Quoted in Eldred D. Jones, The Elizabethan Image of Africa, Folger Booklets on Tudor and Stuart Civilization (The University of Virginia Press, 1971), pp. 5-6.

⁹ Johannes Leo Africanus, A Geographical History of Africa, translated by John Pory, London, 1600, reprinted as History and Description of Africa, edited by Robert Brown (London: Hakluyt Society, 1896).

¹⁰ Jones, The Elizabethan Image of Africa, p. 29.

¹¹ Charles Johnston, "Notices of Abyssinia as Historically connected with Europe, Syria, and the Holy Land," Original Papers, Syro-Egyptian Society, London (1844), p. 88.

country where Paynra died and Covilham stayed to marry.¹² Fifteen years later an Armenian named Mattheus arrived in Goa on the Indian peninsula with letters for Don Manuel of Portugal. He was at first distrusted and badly treated, but the soldiers arranged for his transportation to Portugal. Mattheus gave the King of Portugal a piece of the true cross and informed him that Prester John wanted to arrange a marriage between his children and those of the King of Portugal. Half believing in this hope of another Christian power on the flank of Islam, Don Manuel sent a mission under Roderigo de Lima to Ethiopia in 1520.¹³ The priest accompanying this first embassy, Father Francisco Alvarez, wrote a lengthy narrative of his experiences.¹⁴

Alvarez and his mission wandered about Ethiopia for five years seeking Prester John. They found many Europeans--Genoese, Germans, Basques, and Spaniards--living in comfort. Finally, they found the Negus Lebna Dengal in Gondar and decided he was Prester John himself. The Negus found the gifts of the

¹² Silverberg, The Realm of Prester John, pp. 200-205, and Edward Ullendorff, The Ethiopians (Second Edition; Oxford: The University Press, 1960), p. 2.

¹³ E. Denison Ross, "Early Travelers in Abyssinia," African Society Journal, XXI (1922), pp. 273-274.

¹⁴ Francisco Alvarez, The Prester John of the Indies, translated by C. F. Beckingham and G. W. B. Hunting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961). Also published as Narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Abyssinia during the years 1520-1527, translated and edited by Lord Stanley of Alderley (London: Hakluyt Society, 1881).

Portuguese embassy rather disappointingly simple. He was, nevertheless, interested in forming a Christian alliance with Europe to help stop the Muslim advance into Ethiopia. After extracting information about European power and geography, Lebna Dengal proposed that Spain could build a fort at Zeila, Portugal one at Massawa, and France another at Suaquem. Together the combined forces of Europe and Ethiopia could push back the forces of Islam. Roderigo de Lima assured Lebna Dengal that the power of Portugal alone was enough to stop the advance of Islam across Africa.¹⁵

This first Portuguese expedition to Ethiopia established patterns of interaction between Ethiopians and Europeans that were to be repeated with later Portuguese and British missions to the area. The Portuguese came to Ethiopia seeking a legendary empire that could help them in their fight against Islam. When they got there, they found a Christian king with a highly organized church who wanted to use the forces of Christian Europe to combat the expansion of Islam across East Africa. The Negus and his priests listened eagerly to Portuguese explanations of European geography, history, and doctrine and concluded that it would take more than one European country to halt Islam. The Portuguese meticulously observed and recorded the strange customs of this somewhat chaotic country and concluded that a few Europeans could work

¹⁵ Ross, "Early Travelers in Abyssinia," p. 278.

military and religious miracles in such an apt environment. With such mutual interest and mutual miscalculation, Roderigo de Lima left his second in command and several Jesuit fathers in Ethiopia and returned to report to his king. Twenty years later, the Portuguese returned with 400 soldiers to help Galawdewos defend against Ahmad le Gran's attack on the capital city of Gondar. The Portuguese killed le Gran, saved Galawdewos, and temporarily slowed the advance of Islam across Northern Ethiopia.¹⁶ The price, however, was that most of the Portuguese soldiers were either slain or chose to stay in Ethiopia. The Portuguese found Prester John and a Christian ally in East Africa, but this ally was under attack and the cost of friendship at such a distance was dear.

The Jesuit mission established by the Portuguese at Gondar was to be the source of careful and accurate information about Ethiopia for 150 years. Francisco Alvarez's 300-page narrative, published in Portugal in 1540 and in Madrid in 1557, was based partly on the travels of Covilham and partly on his own five-year experience. This was followed in 1589 by Peter Paez's three volume Historia da Ethiopia and in 1624 by Jerome Lobo's A Voyage to Abyssinia.¹⁷ All three works contain considerable

¹⁶ Reverend Sereno D. Clark, "Historical Sketch of the Abyssinian Church" in Samuel Gobat, Journal of Three Years' Residence in Abyssinia (London: M. W. Dowd, 1851), reprinted (New York: Negro Universities Press, Greenwood Press, 1969), pp. 65-100. Richard K. P. Pankhurst, The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles (London: Oxford Press, 1967).

¹⁷ Manuel G. DaCosta, "Heronimo Lobo Reveals Ethiopia to Europe in the Middle of the XVII Century," Proceedings of the Third International Conference of Ethiopian Studies (1966), pp. 125-126.

detail on the legends, customs, religion, and immediate history of the central kingdom around Gondar and the nomadic peoples of the coast. Parts of Alvarez's account were translated into English in S. Purchase His Pilgrims in 1625, but the English-speaking world got most of its information about this distant romantic land from Samuel Johnson's translation of Le Grand's French translation of Jerome Lobo's A Voyage to Abyssinia, which appeared in 1735. Lobo was most naturally concerned with the long history of administrative power and extensive theological dispute of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.¹⁸ He described a country extremely civilized in its laws but savage in some of its customs.¹⁹ The Portuguese Jesuits were particularly bothered by the Abyssinian habits of eating raw meat, of expecting presents at each mountain pass, and of using excommunication freely for political manipulation. They described Abyssinia as a temperate paradise, apt for European-style agriculture, and inhabited by hospitable but regrettably lazy people.²⁰

The Portuguese Jesuits had an extraordinary effect on the rulers of Gondar. They felt that the Abyssinian church was a heresy and debated theology long and hard with the nobles and priests of the court. Lebna Dengal and his successors made use of Jesuits' knowledge of how to build churches and canon. Jesuit technical

¹⁸ Jerome Lobo, A Voyage to Abyssinia, with Dissertations on Various Subjects by M. LeGrand, translated by Samuel Johnson (London: Cassell and Co., 1893), pp. 76-88.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 65-66, 74-75.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 53, 66-67, 77.

skills put them in such good stead that in 1626 Emperor Susenyos converted to Roman Catholicism. When the Abyssinian nobles and debtera realized that Roman Catholicism would mean total reform of the liturgy and a change in the balance of church power, they rebelled. Susenyos was forced to abdicate in favor of his son Fasilades, and the Jesuits were expelled. They had succeeded too well in establishing their religion at court.²¹

The thin stream of accurate information about Ethiopia was continued with Job Ludolf's Historia Aethiopica, Frankfurt, 1681, published in English 1682, Charles Poncet's A Voyage to Ethiopia, London, 1709 (translated from a Jesuit volume published in Cairo, 1704) and James Bruce's Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile in the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, and 1773, published in Edinburgh, in five volumes, in 1790. Ludolf actively tried to promote an anti-Turkish coalition between Ethiopia, England, France, and Holland. Unfortunately, his scholarly work was so ignored that it took nearly fifty years for his revisions of Portuguese maps to be accepted.²² Poncet secretly treated

²¹ E. A. Wallis Budge, A History of Ethiopia (London: Methuen, 1928), reprinted Ousterhout, 1970, pp. 389-401. J. Spencer Trimingham, Islam in Ethiopia (2nd edition; London: Frank Cass, 1965), p. 100.

²² Sir William Foster, editor, The Red Sea and Adjacent Countries at the Close of the 17th Century as Described by Joseph Pitts, William Daniel, and Charles Jacques Poncet (London: Haklyt Society, 1949), pp. 182-184.

the Emperor Iyasu I for nine months, and reported with wonder of the beauty, fertility, wealth, and strange wild animals of Ethiopia.²³ Bruce's unwieldy travelog was the lengthiest and most influential of these works. Bruce was a flamboyant Scot laird who spent twelve years seeking adventure in North Africa and Ethiopia. He returned to London in 1774 and told stories of Abyssinians cutting steaks from living cows, of black Shankellas being trapped like animals for slavery and of standing by the source of the Nile with his loyal Abyssinian retinue. The rather self-dramatizing Bruce had expected to be welcomed as a hero by London society when he returned, but he was simply not believed.²⁴ The English intelligentsia preferred to think of Ethiopia as that peaceful aristocratic society used by Samuel Johnson as the setting for Rasselas. In his speech and the five volumes that he wrote in the twenty years after retirement from travel, Bruce's presentation was detailed but confused. Eighteenth-century England preferred to maintain its image of all of Abyssinia as an extension of the court of Susenyous. Bruce's confused but usually accurate description was lambasted at the time, his volumes were not reprinted, and early 19th-century English travellers set off

²³ Ibid., pp. 116-139.

²⁴ J. M. Reid, Traveller Extraordinary: The Life of James Bruce of Kinnaird (New York: Norton, 1968), pp. 15-18.

for Ethiopia prepared to disprove his descriptions.²⁵ Later, more intently scientific travelers found that Bruce's stories were not so very fantastical after all.²⁶

For nearly 300 years, while Europe remained almost totally ignorant of the peoples and lands of the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, detailed information about Abyssinia trickled into Europe. Highly educated travellers presented the picture of a fertile but rugged country with highly developed feudal institutions and a few savage customs. Somehow, there was enough information to foster a rather attenuated version of the legendary land of Prester John.

The Nile and the Red Sea were both mysterious to Europe at the beginning of the 19th century; it was unclear what part these areas would play in the European jostle for world power. After the defeat of Napoleon in Egypt, England dispatched its first commercial mission to Abyssinia. The English mission, headed by Lord Valentia (George Amnesley), arrived at Massawa

²⁵ C. F. Beckingham, "Introduction" in James Bruce, Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile, selected and edited by C. F. Beckingham (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1964), pp. 15-18.

²⁶ John C. Hotten, editor, Abyssinia and Its People: Life in the Land of Prester John (London: Wyman and Sons, 1868), pp. 23-24.

in 1805 and exchanged letters with Welde Selassie, the Ras of Tigre. Valentia's secretary, Henry Salt, and two companions explored parts of Eritrea and Tigre but were not able to get to Gondar because of intense fighting. The mission reported enthusiastically about the trade possibilities of Abyssinia. The gold, ivory, and pearls that Abyssinia traditionally sent to Egypt could go to England instead.²⁷ Valentia advised his government to establish a free port at Massawa and send a legation there to promote regular trade before the French learned that Abyssinia was so accessible.²⁸ George III sent another expedition led by Henry Salt in 1809 with presents for the King of Abyssinia. Again, Salt was not able to get to the capital at Gondar because of fighting, and he gave the presents to Ras Welde Selassie of Tigre. Salt's report of the merchandise traded in Adua was glowing. He found ample lead, tin, copper, gold, ivory, and slaves to be exported and imported Persian carpets, Egyptian statues, Venician glassware, well-worked iron and brassware.²⁹ Unfortunately, he reported,

²⁷ George A. Valentia, Voyages and Travels to India, Ceylon, the Red Sea, Abyssinia, and Egypt in the Years 1802, 1803, 1805, and 1806 (4 vols.; London: Rington, 1811), III, pp. 266-269.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 257-259.

²⁹ Henry Salt, A Voyage to Abyssinia and Travels Into the Interior of That Country (London: 1814), reprinted (London: Frank Cass, 1967), pp. 425-426.

the Abyssinian trade was dominated by Turks who controlled the port Massawa with their guns and dhows and Mohammedans who controlled the trade within Abyssinia itself.³⁰ This enticing treasure of luxury trade within a civilized African nation was blocked to England by Muslim power. Aden was a more accessible entrepôt to protect England's Red Sea route to India,³¹ and English enthusiasm for trade with Abyssinia waned for the time being.

The French were more systematic about their interest in commerce with Abyssinia. Edmond Combes and Maurice Tamisier were sent out with 6000 francs a year to explore commercial possibilities in Egypt, the Red Sea, and Abyssinia.³² They were authorized to buy a port on the Red Sea, and their four volume work Voyage en Abyssinie, dans le pays des Gallas de Choa and d'Ifat (Paris, 1838) won the Légion d'Honneur for them. In 1837, the Société de Géographie sent two young scientists, Jules Dufey and Louis Aubert, to explore the possibilities of trade with Abyssinia through the port of Zeila. The most elaborate exploratory mission sponsored by

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 496-498.

³¹ N. Bentwick, "Early English Travellers in Ethiopia," Contemporary Review (January 1945), p. 56.

³² Richard K. Pankhurst, "The Saint Simonians and Ethiopia," Proceedings of the Third International Conference of Ethiopian Studies (1966), p. 156.

Louis Philippe was one organized under Théophile Lefebvre in 1839. Experts in the known sciences with all their awkward equipment carefully penetrated the southern lands of the Gallas, explored the coasts, and reached into northwest Abyssinia. The six volumes of this expedition³³ plus the reports of Dufey and Aubert added immeasurably to European knowledge of the geography and customs of the Galla and Somali peoples in the south and the Amhara and Tigre peoples in the north of Abyssinia. All three expeditions brought back glowing reports of the possibilities of trade with the Kingdoms of Tigre, Gondar, and Shoa. They advised that France would benefit both from the products and the well-developed trading system of Abyssinia.³⁴ There were two immediate consequences of France's systematic commercial exploration of Abyssinia in the 1840's. First, French exploration reawakened Britain's interest in trade with Abyssinia, and, second, their conclusions shifted French interest from the southern port of Zeila to the northern kingdom of Tigre. By 1840, all accounts by English travellers to Abyssinia had been translated into French.

In the Fall of 1839, a letter from Sahle Selassie of Shoa, expressing interest in an English embassy, reached Bombay. Hav-

³³ Théophile Lefebvre and others, Voyage en Abyssinie exécuté pendant les années 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842, 1843 (Paris: A. Bertrand, 1845-1849).

³⁴ Pankhurst, "The Saint Simonians and Ethiopia," pp. 196-203.

ing heard through the consular office in Aden of French exploration and the reputed wealth of southern Abyssinia, the Bombay Government immediately organized an elaborate expedition under the direction of India Army Captain William C. Harris. After a few days in the port of Tajura, Harris was forced to leave half of his baggage and half of his men for lack of carriers.³⁵ Crossing the withering desert, the embassy was befriended by Danakil nomads who showed them how to travel at night and to avoid the dreaded Adals.³⁶ Harris was appalled by the constant raiding between Galla, Somali, Adal, and Danakil tribes in the coastal areas and by the number of expensive gifts (bakshesh) that were necessary to buy the group's safe passage across the desert.³⁷ Once in Ankober, a treaty of peace and commerce between England and Shoa was signed with impressive ritual,³⁸ but Harris admitted privately

³⁵ Literary Gazette, September 25, 1841, quoted in Journal of Belles Letters, October 2, 1841, p. 641.

³⁶ Captain W. C. Barker, "Narrative of a Journey to Shoa," in Selections from the Travels and Journals Preserved in the Bombay Secretariat, edited by Sir George W. Forest (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1906).

³⁷ Major W. Cornwallis Harris, The Highlands of Aethiopia (3 vols.; London: Longmans, 1844), I, pp. 150-223.

³⁸ Harris, The Highlands of Aethiopia, II, p. 266.

that the difficulties of getting from the coast to Shoa were too great to make trade profitable.³⁹ Harris' report on his mission was extravagant, romantic, episodic, arrogant, and remarkably lacking in geographical or linguistic detail.⁴⁰ While other members of the mission found that Sahle Selassie was a wise and just ruler,⁴¹ Harris dubbed him a "savage" motivated by "revenge . . . and the insatiable love of plunder."⁴² Harris' visit provided a remarkable opportunity to present England with information about coastal groups and the customs of the Shoan court. Instead, the popular three-volume Highlands of Aethiopia which he published in 1844 provided little new information. Though Harris had doubts himself, his volumes included abundant praise of the fertility, commercial opportunities, and unplumbed resources that Shoa could provide for England.

At the same time that Combes and Tamisier, Aubert and Dufey, Th. Lefebvre and W. C. Harris were getting information for their governments, the German geographer Dr. Eduard Rüppell was exploring both the northern and southern kingdoms of Abyss-

³⁹ Dr. J. Lewis Krapf, Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours During an Eighteen Years' Residence in Eastern Africa (London: Trubner and Co., 1860), p. 31.

⁴⁰ "Review of W. C. Harris, Highlands of Aethiopia," Athenaeum (January 6, 1844), pp. 11, 13.

⁴¹ Barker, "Narrative of a Journey to Shoa," pp. 269-270.

⁴² Harold G. Marcus, "The Black Men Who Turned White: European Attitudes Towards Ethiopians, 1850-1900," Archiv Orientalni, XXXIX (1971), p. 156.

inia. He travelled in Amhara, Tigre, and Shoa from 1832-1838 and everywhere confirmed the observations of James Bruce.⁴³ His Reise in Abyssinien (two volumes, 1839) was perhaps the most thorough and accurate description of Abyssinian terrain and customs.⁴⁴ He produced the first relatively good map of Abyssinia and finally exploded the myth that Ge'ez was derived from Greek.⁴⁵ Throughout this period of initial geographical and commercial exploration, the German tabloid Das Ausland reported faithfully on the explorations and activities of European explorers, missionaries, and adventurers. Interestingly enough, it is the only remaining source of some letters by early British and French travellers.

After 1840 French commercial interest shifted to the more accessible province of Tigre and its port Massawa. An expedition led by the scientists P. V. Ferret and J. G. Galinier was sent to augment Lefebvre's information on Tigre and Simien.⁴⁶ The memoirs of their two-and-a-half year stay and articles in French geographical journals fill out several details and tell

⁴³ Dr. Eduard Rüppell, Reise in Abyssinien (2 vols., Frankfurt, 1838), reviewed by W. I. Hamilton, Esq., Journal of the Geographical Society, IX (1939), p. 491.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 498.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 573.

⁴⁶ Pierre Victore Ferret and Joseph-Germaine Galinier, Voyages en Abyssinie dans les provinces du Tigré, du Damen et de L'Amhara (Paris: Paulin, 1847, 1848).

of the initial success of a Lazarist mission established by Mgr. de Jacobis in Tigre in 1839.⁴⁷ Members of the English Christian Missionary Society established in Adua in 1829 had encouraged Ras Wube of Tigre and Ras Ali of Gondar to send trading missions to Europe. Their Protestant leader Samuel Gobat, his fellow missionaries J. L. Krapf and C. W. Isenberg, and the intellectual Charles T. Beke wrote glowing reports to the missionary society about the fertility of Abyssinia for both commerce and evangelism.⁴⁸ As French Lazarists moved into Tigre in the early 1840's, Protestant CMS missionaries shifted their focus to the particularly ripe Gallas in the Southwest.⁴⁹ Throughout this period there was significant interchange between geographers and missionaries. A man such as Charles Beke, whose active life was devoted to things Abyssinian, was both a geographer and a missionary. For missionaries and geographers, Abyssinia was a fruitful field for new endeavour.

⁴⁷ Roderick I. Murchison, "Address at the Anniversary Meeting, May 27, 1844," Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, IV (1845), lxii-lxiii.

⁴⁸ Samuel Gobat, Journal of Three Years' Residence in Abyssinia, pp. 488-490. "Abstract of a Journal kept by Rev. Messr. Isenberg and Krapf on their route from Cairo . . .," Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London, X, 2 (1840), pp. 455-468. Charles T. Beke, "On the countries South of Abyssinia," Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, XIII (1843), pp. 258-259, 263-265.

⁴⁹ Krapf, Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours, pp. xlix-li.

A Belgian diplomat/adventurer Eduoard Blondeel was the most forceful in urging immediate commercial interest in Abyssinia upon his government. From his consular post in Alexandria, he convinced Brussels to send 15,000 francs for a secret exploratory mission in northern Abyssinia. While British and French explorers and missionaries were jostling with various Rases, Blondeel convinced Detzmatch Goshu of Simien that opening up trade with Belgium would insure him both guns and instructors in the arts and trades. Blondeel's arguments for establishing a Belgian colony in Abyssinia were persuasive. Abyssinia was full of gold, spices, musk, slaves, and coffee;⁵⁰ it would be easy to conquer because of its lack of guns; and it was close to Egypt.⁵¹ A little artillery would scare away any serious opposition.⁵² Unfortunately for Blondeel, Detzmatch Goshu lost in battle to Ras Ali. By the time Blondeel had switched Abyssinian leaders, Brussels had pledged the money promised him for a colony in Guatemala.⁵³ Though Blondeel's venture looks ludicrous from the perspective of history, his vision of Abyssinians' adapt-

⁵⁰ Cornelius J. Jaenen, "Ethiopia before the Congo: A proposed Belgian Colony in Ethiopia 1838-1856," paper to the International Congress of Africanists, Third Session, December 9-19, 1973, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia, p. 8.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 13.

⁵² Ibid., p. 14.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 15.

ability and adoptability was not much different from that of the more serious English, French, and German explorers and missionaries that preceded him.

What then was the image that Europe had of Abyssinia in the early 1840's? One primary theme of geographical and missionary reports alike was that Abyssinia was a fertile source of products for Europe. Abyssinia already traded musk, hides, elephant's teeth, gumarabic, ghee, bee's wax, and slaves through the port of Massawa⁵⁴ to the value of \$200,000/year⁵⁵ and ivory, gold, slaves, coffee, and wax through Metemma in the southern Sudan to Egypt.⁵⁶ The trade routes centering on the cities of Massawa, Adua, Gondar, and Metemma were well-established.⁵⁷ If the export of slaves could be replaced by other available products, Europe would profit while Abyssinia

⁵⁴ Comdr. Nott, "Report from the acting Commander Nott of the Indian Navy on the traffic of slaves, etc., carried out of Massawa," Bombay Geographical Society, Transactions, II (1838), pp. 32-33.

⁵⁵ Ruppell, in Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, IX (1839), p. 492.

⁵⁶ Antoine de Abbadie, "A. M. Jomard," Bulletin de la Société de Géographie de Paris, 2, XIV (1841), p. 115.

⁵⁷ Louis Aubert, "Communication faite à la société de géographie première sur le voyage commercial en Abyssinie et sur la mer rouge de M. Dufey et Aubert; . . .," Bulletin de la Société de Géographie, 2, XII (1840), p. 282.

benefited.⁵⁸ In addition to the established trade, there were tremendous possibilities for developing tea, coffee and cotton, iron, coal and rich cereal crops,⁵⁹ which could be garnered after creating a few wants among the people.⁶⁰ One of the major concerns of British and French explorers was to find a river system that would give access to this unplumbed fertile land, and some thought they had done so.⁶¹ The major obstacle to these fabulous riches was the blistering desert that separated the highlands from the coast. By the mid-1840's, Europe had enough information to know that, though the Danakil and Galla peoples would aid caravans, the amount of desert and danger from the Adals made a direct route from Zeila to Ankober impracticable.⁶² The major obstacles to trade with the northern

⁵⁸ Charles T. Beke, "Abyssinia; Being a Continuation of Routes in that Country," Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, XIV (1844), pp. 2-3.

⁵⁹ J. L. Krapf, Travels, Researches and Missionary Labours, p. xlvi.

⁶⁰ Selections from Major W. C. Harris in John C. Hotten, Abyssinia and its People, pp. 75-76.

⁶¹ Charles T. Beke, "On the Countries South of Abyssinia," Journal of the Royal Geographic Society, XIII (1843), pp. 265-266. Commander H. A. Fraser, "Memoranda and Extracts from various sources, relative to the capabilities of the River 'Juba' in East Africa for Navigation; and the Resources of the Countries adjoining It," Bombay Geographical Society, Transactions, XVI, pp. 78-79.

⁶² Reports by Louis Aubert and Captain C. W. Barker already cited.

kingdoms through Massawa were the duties levied at various passes and Turkish control of the port.⁶³ Except for the rather subdued tone of Rùppell, all of these early explorers were more ebullient about the prospects of trade than discouraged by the difficulties.

Anyone following the various geographical journals, missionary pamphlets, and travel books would have a slightly confused picture of the peoples of Abyssinia. R. C. Latham's attempt to synthesize what was known of the peoples in the area for the British Association of the Advancement of Sciences came up with a barely (and often incorrectly) classified list of languages described by various missionaries.⁶⁴ Different peoples who had been moving into the highlands from the south and west for centuries, some Muslim, some "pagan" were known only collectively as Gallas.⁶⁵ Even the highland culture described by Lobo and idealized in the 18th century appeared confusingly chaotic. The missionaries reported that Abyssinia had been a classical empire, converted to Judaism and then

⁶³ Antoine de Abbadie, "Voyage en Abyssinie," Bulletin de la Société de Géographie, XI (1839), pp. 206, 213, 215. J. G. Bell, "Extrait du Journal d'un voyage in Abyssinie, dans les années 1840, 1841, et 1842," Nouvelle Annales des Voyages (May 1845), p. 140.

⁶⁴ R. G. Latham, "On the Ethnography of Africa as determined by its Languages," British Association for the Advancement of Sciences: Report (1844), pp. 79-80.

⁶⁵ Charles T. Beke, "On the Countries South of Abyssinia," Journal of the Royal Geographic Society, XIII (1843), pp. 254-269.

converted to an Orthodox Christianity, that stagnated in isolation.⁶⁶

The adventures of various expatriates, Nathaniel Pearce, William Coffin, and John Bell, and the first articles of Antoine and Arnaud d'Abbadie made it clear that this highland area was divided into shifting groups of warring kingdoms that were devastating the country.⁶⁷ There was disagreement among the Europeans as to which kingdom, Gondar of Ras Ali, Simien of Detzmatch Goshu, Tigre of Ras Wubu, or Shoa of Sahle Selassie, was the Abyssinia to be dealt with. The kingdoms were united only by the Orthodox church⁶⁸ and by similarity of customs. These kingdoms had a highly developed system of justice in which courts were numerous and hierarchically organized, and the local ruler was responsible for the minutest detail.⁶⁹ Divorce was simple and protected the property of

⁶⁶ Rev. Sereno D. Clark, "Abyssinia and its Inhabitants," in Samuel Gobat, Journal of Three Years' Residence in Abyssinia, pp. 33-34. Journals of Rev. Messrs. Isenberg and Krapf, Missionaries of the Church Missionary Society (London: Seeley, Burnside, and Seeley, 1843), reprinted (London: Frank Cass, 1968), pp. 264-265.

⁶⁷ Louis Aubert, "Fragment sur Gondar et le Négus," Bulletin de la Société de Géographie de Paris, 2, X (1938), pp. 145-157.

⁶⁸ C. E. X. Rochet d'Hericourt, "Les moeurs religieuses dans le royaume de Choa," Bulletin de la Société de Géographie de Paris, IV (1845), pp. 317-319.

⁶⁹ Captain C. W. Barker, "Narrative of a Journey to Shoa," pp. 270, 275.

male and female equally.⁷⁰ Personal injuries were dealt with by a recognized type of wergeld, and soldiers were levied for each battle on the basis of their loyalty and indebtedness to the local ruler.⁷¹ Much of the information that the geographers, missionaries, and adventurers had provided confirmed the European picture of Abyssinia as a country organized along feudal lines. Explorers had also confirmed the existence of customs which horrified Europeans. Steaks were cut from living cows, defeated enemies were castrated for war trophies, guests were force-fed raw meat, and tape worm, ophthalmia, and dysentery were endemic.⁷² The peoples of Abyssinia presented Europe with a confused mosaic of extreme civility and savagery, all a bit larger than life.

Information about Abyssinian religion, history, and ambitions was still rather limited. Missionaries reported that the Abyssinian church was full of absurd superstitions and en-

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 273.

⁷¹ Louis Aubert, "Communication faite à la société de géographie. . . ." p. 283.

⁷² Antoine d'Abbadie, "Voyage en Abyssinie," Bulletin de la Société de Géographie, 2, XI (1839), pp. 200-217. Dr. Eduard Rüppell, Reise in Abyssinien (2 vols., Frankfurt, 1838), reviewed in Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, IX (1839), pp. 490-498.

amoured of meaningless theological disputes.⁷³ Protestants were particularly horrified by Ethiopian worship of images.⁷⁴ CMS missionaries who had failed in Orthodox court circles were attracted to the dignity, democratic openness, and adaptability of Galla groups in the Southwest.⁷⁵ Charles Beke reported that remnants of older Jewish superstitions kept Orthodox Abyssinians from understanding the true dogma.⁷⁶ The French geographer Antoine d'Abbadie reported that the advance of Islam into the North was a serious threat to Abyssinian Christianity as long as it was torn by the ravages of civil war.⁷⁷ There was a real ambivalence among missionaries about the Abyssinian people.

⁷³ "Extracts from a Journal, kept at Ankobar, from 7 June to 2nd October, 1839, by the Rev. J. L. Krapf," Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London, X (1840), pp. 485-488.

⁷⁴ Samuel Gobat, Journal of a Three Years' Residence in Abyssinia, pp. 206, 456-457.

⁷⁵ Charles T. Beke, "On the Countries South of Abyssinia," Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, XIII (1843), pp. 254-256. "Extracts of a Journal . . .," Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, X (1840), p. 474.

⁷⁶ Dr. Beke's letter to the Royal Geographical Society, June 14, 1841, Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, XI (1841).

⁷⁷ Antoine de Abbadie, "Voyage en Abyssinie," Bulletin de la Société de Géographie, 2, XI (1839), pp. 214-215.

They were described sometimes as savage and unreliable and at other times as civilized and eager to learn. Neither the missionaries nor geographers at this time were ambivalent, however, about the value to be gained by opening up trade between Abyssinia and Europe. Trade would bring wealth to Europe and civilization to Abyssinia.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Louis Aubert, "Fragment sur Gondar et le Négus," Bulletin de la Société Géographie de Paris, 2, X (1838), pp. 156-157. Louis Aubert, "Communication faite à la société de géographie . . .," Bulletin de la Société Géographie de Paris, 2, XIII (1840), p. 282. Dr. J. Lewis Krapf, Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours, pp. xlvi, xlix-li.

Chapter II:

Ethiopia Through European Eyes:

Western Perceptions of Ethiopia to 1840

Inter-European rivalry played an important part in early 19th century exploration and missionary activity in Abyssinia. The mixture of European nationalities and their effect on Abyssinian events was slightly different in each section of the country. The actual connection between individuals in Abyssinia and the governments or organizations supposedly supporting them in Europe was usually confused and uncertain. Competition between French and English interests was most dramatic both in the northern Abyssinian kingdoms of Semien, Tigre, Gojjam, and Amhara and in the southern Abyssinian kingdom of Shoa.

Two Englishmen, Nathaniel Pearce and William Coffin, remained after the Valentia (1805) and Salt (1809) expeditions and made their way to the northern kingdom of Tigre. Pearce served as general and adviser to Ras Walde Selassie and left when he died.¹ William Coffin stayed on to serve as soldier, confidant, and perhaps adviser to Walde Selassie's successor, Sabagadis, who ruled the area around Adigrat. In 1827 Sabagadis sent Coffin to England to ask for tools, carpenters,

¹ Nathaniel Pearce, The Life and Adventures of Nathaniel Pearce, written by himself during a residence in Abyssinia from 1810 to 1819, edited by J. J. Halls (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1831).

painters, and 100 horsemen.² Coffin was discouraged by the British Consul in Cairo and snubbed for nearly two years by the Foreign Office when he reached London.³ While in Cairo, Coffin talked with the Christian Missionary Society missionary Samuel Gobat. A year and a half later, Samuel Gobat brought Bibles and enthusiasm to set up a Protestant mission outside the trading center of Adua. His group of CMS missionaries believed in combining the teaching of crafts with Christian doctrine, and it included a doctor and an architect. As long as they were relatively passive in their evangelism, the CMS missionaries were welcomed. They were left in peace for nearly a decade, even after Gobat's friend and benefactor Sabagadis was defeated by his powerful uncle Ras Wube of Semien.⁴

In 1839 Mgs. de Jacobis arrived in Tigre to establish a Roman Catholic Mission in Adua.⁵ Wube was worried about the

² Richard K. Pankhurst, "The Role of Foreigners in Nineteenth Century Ethiopia prior to the Rise of Menelik," Boston University Papers on Africa, II, African History, p. 191.

³ Sven Rubenson, The Survival of Ethiopian Independence (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 64.

⁴ Samuel Gobat, Samuel Gobat: Bishop of Jerusalem. His Life and Work (New York: Whittaker, 1885), p. 171.

⁵ Aleme Eshete, "Une Ambassade du Ras Ali en Egypte: 1852," Journal of Ethiopian Studies, IX, 1 (1971), p. 3.

raids and steady southward expansion of Mohammed Ali's Egyptian troops and approached both Gobat and de Jacobis about asking their governments to intercede for him with Egypt.⁶ Wube wanted to use the services of both religious groups to advise him about building churches and get arms and artisans from Europe,⁷ but the stiff-necked Protestants were resented by the dominant Sost Ledat faction of the Orthodox church. In 1839 the CMS missionaries Krapf, Beke, and Isenberg were ordered out of Tigre,⁸ and the CMS mission was closed.⁹ The ouster of the CMS mission was represented to the English public as an example of France's insidious designs upon the Red Sea.¹⁰ The explorers Combes, Tamisier, Lefebvre, and d'Abbadie had all passed through the court of Wube in the year 1838-1839 at about the same time that Mgs. de Jacobis arrived to establish his

⁶ Mordechai Abir, "The Origins of the Ethiopian Egyptian Border Problem in the Nineteenth Century," Journal of African History, VIII (1967), p. 453.

⁷ Richard K. Pankhurst, "The Role of Foreigners," pp. 192, 194.

⁸ J. L. Krapf, Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours in Eastern Africa (London: Trubner, 1860), p. 19.

⁹ Donald Crummey, Priests and Politicians: Protestant and Catholic Missions in Orthodox Ethiopia (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 40-46.

¹⁰ Foreign Quarterly Review (April 1844), pp. 85-87.

mission in Adua.¹¹ However, the Protestant missionaries themselves admitted that de Jacobis was a man of enormous tact and that he was willing to be flexible about the Abyssinian penchant for image worship.¹² Within a year he had been able to gain the sympathy of the Sost Ledat faction of the badly divided Ethiopian church.¹³ French British religious rivalry was expressed again in the theological battles of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

Ras Wube attempted to use the French Lazarist mission to increase his political authority in northern Abyssinia. The desolute and detested head of the Ethiopian church, Abuna Querilos, was not succeeded by a new Abuna until 1841. The new Abuna appointed by the Patriarch in Alexandria, Abuna Salama, had been educated by CMS missionaries in Cairo and was brought to Abyssinia by Wube's Amhara rival Ras Ali. Threatened by Ali's troops in the East and Egyptian raids into the Hamasen, Wube saw de Jacobis and his French connections as a

¹¹ Dr. Charles T. Beke, "The French and English in the Red Sea," St. James Chronicle, July 5, 1862, p. 8.

¹² Samuel Gobat, Bishop of Jerusalem. His Life and Works, p. 303. Crummey, Priests and Politicians, pp. 63-64.

¹³ Crummey, Priests and Politicians, pp. 79, 81.

possible way to increase his rule. He encouraged the development of Catholic missions as a barrier in the north¹⁴ and in 1842 sent de Jacobis to Rome to request a Roman bishop for Tigre.¹⁵ Wube's plan fizzled, however, as the Patriarch of Alexandria refused to authorize a Roman Catholic bishop,¹⁶ and Wube was not politically strong enough to incur the disfavor of the Orthodox Abuna Salama. Even with Wube's interest and good will, the survival of the French Lazarist mission in Tigre was tenuous.

Both Sabagadis and Ras Wube attempted to use their contacts with foreigners to get guns and ammunition for their internal wars. One purpose of Coffin's mission to London in 1827-1828 was to get guns in exchange for Sabagadis' promise of rich trade.¹⁷ Tigre dominated the main trade routes to Adua and

¹⁴ Aleme Eshetu, La Mission catholique lazariste en Ethiopie, Études et documents, no. 2 (Aix-en-Provence: Institute d'histoire des pays d'outre mer, 1972), pp. 3-4.

¹⁵ "Katholische Mission in Abyssinien," Das Ausland, 13 February 1843, p. 44.

¹⁶ Aleme Eshetu, "Une ambassade du Ras Ali en Egypte: 1852," p. 7.

¹⁷ Charles T. Beke, The British Captives in Abyssinia, second edition (London: Longmans, 1867), p. 12.

Gondar,¹⁸ but the Turks, and after 1848 the Egyptians, prohibited the import of firearms at Massawa.¹⁹ In 1835, Ras Wube sold Ait to Edmond Combes in an attempt to establish a port free of Turkish control and agreed in 1840 to cede the land opposite Massawa to Théophile Lefebvre in the same hope.²⁰ When Lefebvre took a proposed commercial treaty to Paris, the Quai de Orsay was not interested. Lefebvre had promised protection, craftsmen, and arms in exchange for land that the Quai de Orsay suspected was beyond Wube's control. Lefebvre returned to Abyssinia with arms but without a formal treaty.²¹ Wube began to suspect that the promises of Combes and Lefebvre for prosperous connections with France were a bit fantastic.²² He had added significantly to his arsenal of rifles through the

¹⁸ Richard Pankhurst, "The Trade of Northern Ethiopia in the Nineteenth and Early 20th Centuries," Journal of Ethiopian Studies, II, 2 (1964), pp. 58-59.

¹⁹ Richard Pankhurst, "An Inquiry into the Penetration of Fire-Arms into Southern Ethiopia in the 19th Century prior to the Reign of Menilek," Ethiopian Observer, XII, 2 (1969), p. 128.

²⁰ E. G. Ravenstein, F. R. G. S., "A Concise Account of Geographical Discovery in Eastern Africa," in Krapf, Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours in Eastern Africa, p. xxxviii.

²¹ Georges Malécot, Les Voyageurs français et les relations entre la France et L'Abyssinie de 1835 à 1870, Études et Documents, no. 2; (Paris: Société française d'histoire d'outre-mer, 1972), p. 30.

²² Sven Rubenson, The Survival of Ethiopian Independence, p. 90.

missions of Coffin and Lefebvre, but he was still not able to establish ascendancy in northern Abyssinia.

Ras Wube's nearest rival Ras Ali of Amhara made similar attempts to use European missionaries and explorers to increase his own power. Ras Ali's lands were threatened by rivalries with Detzmatch Goshu of Gojjam, Haile Mariam of Begemdir, and by the persistent southward expansion of Egypt under Mohammed Ali. In 1838 the puppet Emperor Sahela Dengal, backed by Ras Ali's mother Woizero Menen, asked the French explorer Antoine d'Abbadie to enlist French help against Egyptian raids and taxes in the northwestern province of Galabat.²³ Sahela wrote letters to the rulers of both France and England to intercede with Egypt in his behalf.²⁴ Queen Victoria's answer to Sahela Dengal was a vague discussion of the value of commerce and the need to protect British travelers in Abyssinia. No answer from the French government ever arrived.²⁵ Ras Ali discussed with Msg. de Jacobis the possibility of getting a Roman bishop for his province²⁶

²³ Arnaud d'Abbadie, Douze ans dans la Haute-Ethiopie (Paris: Hachette, 1868), p. 523.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 43, 45, 553-554.

²⁵ Rubenson, The Survival of Ethiopian Independence, pp. 81-82.

²⁶ Aleme Eshetu, "Une Ambassade du Ras Ali en Egypte: 1852," p. 6.

and even explored the prospect of a pact with Egypt that might somewhat bolster his power.²⁷

Combes, Lefebvre, d'Abbadie, and Msg. de Jacobis all approached Ras Ali, as they had Ras Wube, with the benefits and advantages of regular commercial relations with France. Unfortunately, Ras Ali was blocked by Egyptian control of trade routes to the North and by Ras Wube's control of trade routes to the East. By the time Ali (1853) and Wube (1859) were overcome by Tewodros, France had purchased two yet-to-be developed ports on the Red Sea. In the 1850's, all of these areas were controlled by Egyptian troops formally subject to the Sultan of Turkey.

The most concrete result of this flurry of French activity in northern Abyssinia in the 1840's and 1850's was to arouse British interest and fear of "French intrigue" along the Red Sea. Reports of land ceded to the French were confused about where and when the land was supposedly sold.²⁸ French geographical

²⁷ Pierre Victore Ferret and Joseph-Germain Galinier, Voyage en Abyssinie dans les provinces du Tigre, du Samen et de L'Amhara (2 vols.; Paris: Paulin 1847-1848), pp. 79-80. Aleme Eshetu, "Une Ambassade du Ras Ali en Egypt: 1852," p. 6.

²⁸ Lieutenant Barker, "On Eastern Africa," Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, XVIII (1843), pp. 131-133. "French in Abyssinia," Colburn's New Monthly Magazine (1860), pp. 127-128. E. G. Ravenstein, F. R. G. S., "A Concise Account of Geographical Discovery in Eastern Africa," in Krapf, Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours in Eastern Africa, pp. xxxviii-xxxix.

journals argued that Aden was commercially and strategically useless²⁹ while British geographical journals asserted that cessions by Abyssinian or coastal chiefs were meaningless transfers of land without sovereignty.³⁰ Most interesting was the antagonism between the English geographer Charles Beke and the flamboyant French geographer Antonie d'Abbadie. Beke accused d'Abbadie of describing exploration of places he had never been,³¹ of falsifying information about the sources of the Nile,³² and of trying to hoodwink both Abyssinian and French authorities in order to gain a personal fiefdom in northern Abyssinia.³³ The retort

²⁹ J. B. M. A. O. dela Roquette, ed., "Nouvelle geographiques Afrique," Bulletin de la Société de Géographie de Paris, IV (1852), pp. 602-603.

³⁰ "French in Abyssinia," Colburn's New Monthly Magazine, vol. 118 (1860), p. 128. Charles T. Beke, "French and English Rivalry in the Red Sea," St. James Chronicle, July 12, 1862, p. 5.

³¹ Charles T. Beke, An enquiry into M. A. d'Abbadie's journey to Kaffa in the years 1843 and 1844 to discover the source of the Nile (London: J. Madden, 1850), abstracted in Das Ausland, XXIII (1850), p. 1043.

³² Ibid., p. 1044.

³³ Charles T. Beke, Reasons for returning the Gold Medal of the Geographical Society of France (London: J. Madden, 1851), pp. 8-9.

of d'Abbadie was that Beke imagined river systems³⁴ and misunderstood Abyssinian customs.³⁵

Both d'Abbadie and Beke were honored by English and French geographical societies for their work, but both failed in their attempts to gain consular positions in Abyssinia. From 1840 to 1860, d'Abbadie tried to promote a scheme for French occupation or domination of Massawa.³⁶ However, when the French government chose a trading agent, they appointed Alexander Degoutin.³⁷ Beke had tried even earlier to arouse British interest in Abyssinia, but when a consul was finally chosen in 1848, the Foreign Office appointed Walter Plowden. For the travels-reading public of the 1850's,³⁸ this argument between a moralizing Englishman and a romanticising Frenchman was a familiar

³⁴ Antonie d'Abbadie, "Lettres écrites d'Abyssinie, août 1847," Bulletin de la Société de Géographie, III (1851), pp. 238-239, 241.

³⁵ Antonoine d'Abbadie, "Voyage en Abyssinie, Communication faite à la société de géographie," Bulletin de la Société de Géographie, 2, XI (1839), pp. 205-206.

³⁶ Aff. étr., Mem. et doc. Afrique 13, 7, in George Malécot, Les Voyageurs français et les relations entre La France et L'Abyssinie de 1835 à 1870, p. 21. Arnauld d'Abbadie, Douze ans dans la Haute-Ethiopie, pp. 483-485.

³⁷ George Malécot, Les Voyageurs français et les relations entre La France et L'Abyssinie de 1835 à 1870, p. 44.

³⁸ James Allen Casada, The Imperialism of Exploration: British Explorers and East Africa, 1856-1890 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1973), pp. 16-18.

story. One unfortunate consequence of Beke's vindictiveness in his arguments with d'Abbadie was that the British government tended to listen with less than half an ear to the detailed and reasoned proposals he submitted later during the diplomatic crisis between England and Abyssinia.

While Frenchmen with varying degrees of government and commercial support were exploring, describing, and trying to establish permanent trading agreements in northern Abyssinia, two former officers of the Indian service were helping Abyssinian rulers. Former Indian navy lieutenant John Bell led the armies of Detzmatch Goshu of Gojjam and later Ras Ali of Amhara during the devastating wars that plagued the area around Gondar in the late 1830's and 1840's. Detzmatches Birru and Goshu, and Rases Ali and Haile Mariam fought each other, Muslim raiders, and Egyptian troops to gain control of the fertile northwestern area that was the traditional seat of Amhara culture. Bell left parts of a journal of his 16 years of warfare in Abyssinia.³⁹ He describes the suffering, rituals, and obligations of Abyssinian fighting, the frequent taxing of goods

³⁹ J. G. Bell, "Extrait du Journal d'un voyage in Abyssinie, dans les années 1840, 1841, et 1842," Nouvelle Annales des Voyages (May 1845), pp. 136-171.

at markets and passes, and the Muslim domination of northern trade. His simple detailed account presents a picture of local wars highly circumscribed by long-standing customs of personal service, punishment by mutilation, and the plundering of conquered areas. Battles were short and full of bravado, and the size of armies was limited by immediate food supply.

In the early 1840's, Bell was joined by Walter Plowden, the younger son of an Indian army officer. Like Bell, Plowden served as a military officer and general adviser to Ras Ali and his mother Woizero Menen, who controlled the Amhara area around the traditional capital of Gondar. Plowden was impressed by the fertility of the area: "The fertile soil, variable as its climate, is fitted perhaps for almost every product of nature."⁴⁰ He saw Abyssinia as a possible source for grain, coffee, tea, rice, wild indigo, fruits and vegetables, grapes, beef, iron, gold, copper, and timber.⁴¹

For him, the country was a paradise left barren by its people's apathy, devastated by local warfare, and constantly challenged by expanding Islam.⁴² The customs of the country

⁴⁰ Walter Plowden, Travels in Abyssinia and the Galla Country with an Account of a Mission to Ras Ali in 1848, ed. by Travor C. Plowden (London: Longmans, 1868), p. 29.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 29-32.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 33, 35, 45.

reminded Plowden of Europe's past. The honey wine tej was like mead,⁴³ the songs of the kerar recalled ballads of Provencal jongleurs,⁴⁴ the system of personal loyalty to the chief, political equality within the band and distribution of spoils by rank and prowess in battle reminded him of Teutonic warfare.⁴⁵ Gondar was on the cutting edge of the Galla and Muslim invasion of Abyssinia, and Plowden looked to the re-establishment of traditional Orthodox kingdoms to stop the invasion of what were to him disruptive and less civilized peoples.⁴⁶ Abyssinia needed only the power of a strong hand to restore it to former glory.⁴⁷

In October, 1846, Plowden and a prominent merchant Neggadras Kidane Mariam left Massawa as an embassy from Ras Ali to London. Plowden submitted a lengthy memorandum describing the possibilities of trade with Abyssinia⁴⁸ at the same time that Charles Beke was putting pressure on the Foreign Office to do

⁴³ Ibid., p. 52.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 55.

⁴⁵ Walter Plowden, Travels in Abyssinia and the Galla Country, pp. 51, 61-62.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 34-35, 53.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 75, 395.

⁴⁸ Memorandum by Mr. Plowden, August 12, 1847, in Correspondence Respecting Abyssinia 1846-1868. Great Britain, Parliament. Sessional Papers, Vol. 1867-1868, LXXII (3955-II), #1^a.

something to counter French interests there.⁴⁹ Palmerston appointed Plowden as the British Consul to Abyssinia and sent him back with £400 worth of presents and a proposed treaty of commerce for Ras Ali.⁵⁰ After years of bickering about French activity from the sidelines, England was finally officially involved in the quest for commerce with Abyssinia.

This game of British-French one-up-manship was played out in the kingdom of Shoa in southern Abyssinia, too. The main trade route into southern Abyssinia in the second quarter of the 19th century linked Shoa to the Red Sea at Tajura.⁵¹ A trade of gold, ivory, and 2,000 to 3,000 slaves annually followed traditional Muslim controlled caravan routes to Tajura and on to Jidda and other Red Sea ports.⁵² The geographers Charles Johnston, Charles Beke, Charles Rochet d'Hericourt and missionaries J. L. Krapf and C. W. Isenberg first entered

⁴⁹ Sven Rubenson, The Survival of Ethiopian Independence, p. 121.

⁵⁰ Palmerston to Plowden, January 5, 1848, Correspondence Respecting Abyssinia 1846-1868, #5.

⁵¹ Mordechai Abir, "Salt, Trade, and Politics in Ethiopia in the 'Zamen Mesafint,'" Journal of Ethiopian Studies, IV (1966), p. 8.

⁵² Louis Aubert, "Communication faite à la société de géographie 1^o sur le voyage commercial en Abyssinie et sur la mer rouge de M. Dufey et Aubert . . .," Bulletin de la Société de Géographie, XIII (1840), pp. 282, 285. Lieutenant Barker, "On Eastern Africa," Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, XVIII (1848), pp. 130-136.

Shoa along this hot, dangerous, desert route.⁵³ India army officers reported a wealth of trade at Tajura where Abyssinian coffee, ghee, honey, dye, ivory, and slaves were exchanged for cloth, brass, and luxury items from India and Jidda.⁵⁴ Dr. Beke and British navy officers searched for a river route into Shoa that could open all of Central Africa to commerce and civilization.⁵⁵ Hopes for trade with Shoa were grandiose, but the caravan routes through Adel territory were dangerous and unreliable.⁵⁶

The French traveller Charles Rochet d'Hericourt arrived at the court of Sahle Selassie in Ankobar in October, 1839. Sahle found immediate use for his skills as a tanner and chem-

⁵³ Mordechai Abir, "Salt, Trade, and Politics," p. 9.

⁵⁴ Lieutenant Barker, "On Eastern Africa," pp. 133-136. Lieutenant Cruittenden, "On Eastern Africa," Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, XVIII (1848), pp. 136-139.

⁵⁵ Commander H. A. Fraser, "Memoranda and Extracts from various sources, relative to the capabilities of the River 'Juba' in East Africa for Navigation; and the Resources of the Countries adjoining it," Transactions. Bombay Geographical Society, XVI (June 1860-December 1862), pp. 78-87. Dr. Beke's letter in Literary Gazette, October 2, 1841.

⁵⁶ Louis Aubert, "Communication faite à la société de géographie 1^o etc.," pp. 285-287. Captain W. C. Barker, "Narrative of a Journey to Shoa," Selections from the Travels and Journals Preserved in the Bombay Secretariat, edited by Sir George W. Forrest (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1906), pp. 255-262.

ist.⁵⁷ A few months later when Isenberg, Krapf, and Beke arrived in Shoa after being expelled from Tigre, Rochet was busy establishing a sugar factory.⁵⁸ Krapf found that Sahle Selassie was extremely interested in European medicines and crafts.⁵⁹ He ordered artisans to work right at the court so he could watch and evaluate their progress.⁶⁰ In Ankober and on their tours of Galla peoples to the South, Krapf and Isenberg were frequently asked for medicine.⁶¹ Shoans were more interested in practical skills like making coins or distilling brandy than in hearing the gospel or arguing theology.⁶²

Sahle Selassie was more outwardly interested in European customs and manufactures than other Abyssinian princes, and he

⁵⁷ Georges Malécot, Les Voyageurs français et les relations entre la France et l'Abyssinie de 1835 à 1870, p. 56.

⁵⁸ C. F. X. Rochet d'Hericourt, Voyage sur la côte orientale de la Mer Rouge, dans le pays d'Adel et le Royaume de Choa (Paris: A. Bertrand, 1841), p. 191.

⁵⁹ "Extracts from a journal, kept at Ankobar, from 7th June to 2nd October 1839 by the Rev. J. L. Krapf," Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London, X, 2 (1840), pp. 469-473.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 470. Krapf, Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours in Eastern Africa, p. 23.

⁶¹ "Extracts from a journal, kept at Ankobar," pp. 470, 473, 484.

⁶² Krapf, Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours in Eastern Africa, pp. 110-111.

quizzed his visitors avidly on the benefits of trade with Europe.⁶³ In March of 1840, Rochet d'Hericourt went to Europe with letters, presents, and plans for establishing a commercial treaty between Sahle Selassie and Louis Philippe.⁶⁴ Krapf was afraid that France would capture a rich Shoan trade. He quickly wrote to Captain Stafford Haines the political agent in Aden explaining the French presence and the need for examples of what English trade could offer Abyssinia.⁶⁵ While Rochet was bargaining successfully for muskets and swords in Paris, the British Foreign Office ordered that a commercial embassy be sent from Bombay. The comically oversupplied and culturally arrogant embassy led by Captain W. C. Harris returned from Shoa with an elaborately signed but functionally useless commercial treaty. Sahle Selassie had wanted to increase his own internal power by

⁶³ Richard K. Pankhurst, "Misoneism and Innovation in Ethiopian History," Ethiopian Observer, VII, 4, part 1 (1968), pp. 291-292. Georges Malécot, Les Voyageurs française et les relations entre la France and L'Abyssinie de 1835 à 1870, p. 56.

⁶⁴ C. F. X. Rochet d'Hericourt, Voyage, pp. 362-363.

⁶⁵ Krapf to Haines, 1 July 1840, in Sven Rubenson, The Survival of Ethiopian Independence, p. 151. Charles T. Beke, "French and English Rivalry in the Red Sea," St. James Chronicle, July 12, 1862, p. 5.

aligning himself with the interests of the Protestants Krapf and Isenberg.⁶⁶ His intention backfired, however, as the Yasaga Lej sect of the feuding Abyssinian Orthodox Church that objected to the missionaries and their activities was gaining power in Shoa.⁶⁷ In 1843, Krapf, Isenberg, and Beke were expelled from Shoa, as they had been from Tigre. The resilient missionaries Krapf and Isenberg then went off to attempt to establish their activities among the Galla groups south of Shoa.

Sahle Selassie had expected something more concrete than decorous words and pompous behavior from the embassy of Harris.⁶⁸ When Rochet returned from Paris with muskets and cannon, Sahle signed the same treaty rights for the French as had been granted to the English.⁶⁹ Rochet had an expansive dream of using political inroads in Shoa as a way toward French domination of all of

⁶⁶ Richard K. Pankhurst, "The Role of Foreigners," p. 190. Donald Crummey, Priests and Politicians, pp. 56-57.

⁶⁷ Crummey, Priests and Politicians, pp. 54, 56.

⁶⁸ "Review of W. C. Harris' Highlands of Abyssinia," Athenaeum, January 6, 1844, pp. 11-13.

⁶⁹ C. F. X. Rochet d'Hericourt, Second voyage sur les deux rives de la Mer Rouge, dans le pays des Adals et le royaume de Choa (Paris: A. Bertrand, 1846), pp. 141-144.

Central Africa.⁷⁰ On their part, the Protestants Krapf and Beke believed that missions established in Shoa would ignite the spread of Christianity along river routes into the heart of Africa.⁷¹ Sahle Selassie, like his colleagues in the North, wanted architects for his churches, advisers to train his troops, and guns to maintain control over Galla incursions.⁷² He had dealt openly with these individuals from France and England, but did not understand why "special privileges" were necessary to the conduct of trade with Europe.⁷³ Judging from the mutual vituperation in their journals, both the English and the French undoubtedly warned Sahle of the machinations of their European rival.⁷⁴ Shortly after the departure of the Harris mission,

⁷⁰ Rochet, Voyage, pp. 362-363, 367-368. Krapf, Travels, p. 108.

⁷¹ Charles T. Beke, The British Captives in Abyssinia (Second edition; London: Longmans, 1867), p. xi. Krapf, Travels, pp. 31-32.

⁷² Richard K. Pankhurst, "Misoneism and Innovation," pp. 291-292. Richard K. Pankhurst, "The Role of Foreigners," p. 193.

⁷³ Sven Rubenson, The Survival of Ethiopian Independence, p. 162.

⁷⁴ cf. Krapf, Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours in Eastern Africa, p. 108, and C. E. X. Rochet d'hericourt, Second voyage sur les deux rives de la Mer Rouge, p. 135.

Sahle Selassie ordered that his borders be closed to incoming Frenchmen as they had already been closed to Englishmen.⁷⁵ The frantic activity of English and French to outdo each other resulted in the closing off of Shoa to all European trade until the time of Menelik. Though they knew that the routes between Shoa and Tajura and Zeila were arduous and dangerous, French and British travellers did not stop blaming each other for the lack of trade with Shoa.⁷⁶ The nationalistic, ideological battle continued even though the actual commercial benefits of Shoan trade for either European country were prospective at best.

By the time Tewodros was crowned Emperor in February, 1855, the major rulers in Abyssinia had had several experiences with European explorers, scientists, missionaries, and adventurers. Three German artists and scientists worked quietly in Tigre,⁷⁷ and six Sardinian missionaries were peacefully settled into missions in the Northwest.⁷⁸ The careful scientific work of Rüppell

⁷⁵ Georges Malécot, Les Voyageurs français et les relations entre la France et l'Abyssinie de 1835 à 1870, p. 71.

⁷⁶ cf. Krapf, Travels, p. 110. Rochet, Second voyage, p. 136.

⁷⁷ Richard K. Pankhurst, "The Role of Foreigners in 19th Century Ethiopia prior to the rise of Menelik," pp. 187-188.

⁷⁸ Robert L. Hess, "Italian Imperialism in its Ethiopian Context," The International Journal of African Historical Studies, VI, 1 (1973), p. 97.

had been conducted without disturbing anyone, but the fantastic colonization scheme of the Belgian Eduard Blondeel had clumsily failed and left a residue of suspicion in Amhara and Tigre.⁷⁹

The French investment in commercial and scientific exploration in Abyssinia had resulted in the relatively detailed and accurate reports of Combes and Tamisier, Ferret and Galinier, Lefebvre, Rochet, and d'Abbadie, and their Catholic missions in Amhara and Tigre had managed to influence the decisions of the northern Rases Ali and Wube for twenty years. Nevertheless, by the 1850's, French hopes for lucrative trade with Shoa were dead, and their Abyssinian allies were losing steadily in the contest for imperial power. British interest in Abyssinia had been less consistent and less frequently supported by home country agencies. The CMS missionaries Krapf and Isenberg and their friend the geographer Charles Beke had managed to ruffle the sensibilities of Rases Wube of Tigre and Sahle Selassie of Shoa and most of the leadership of the Abyssinian church in both the northern and southern kingdoms. On the other hand, the British ex-army and navy officers Pearce, Coffin, Bell, and Plowden had faithfully

⁷⁹ Cornelius J. Jaenen, "Ethiopia before the Congo: A proposed Belgian Colony in Ethiopia 1838-1856," paper to the International Congress of Africanists, Third Session 9-19, 1973, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia, pp. 10-11.

served Walde Selassie, Sabagadis, Birru, Goshu, and Ali and had gained trust and personal influence in northern Abyssinia. This busy activity of a few individual Europeans had resulted in the closing off of Shoa to European trade. It had also intensified political and religious rivalries in the northern provinces of Amhara and Tigre. As Tewodros began to unify the Abyssinian empire in 1855, trust in a few individual Englishmen proved more important in the struggle for influence in Abyssinia than the superior research, investment, and planning of French explorers and missionaries.

The gazette Das Ausland kept the German public informed of events in Abyssinia with regular translations from the French journals Propagation de la Foi and Nouvelles Annales des Voyages, de la Géographie, de l'Histoire et de l'Archeologie and from the English Athenaeum and Foreign Quarterly Review. Regular geographical reports from the Journal of the Royal Geographical Society and the Bulletin de la Société de géographie de Paris were summarized and abstracted in the literary tabloids Literary Gazette, Colburn's New Monthly Magazine, and Belles Lettres, and in the religious publications of the Catholic and Protestant missionary societies.⁸⁰ Questions about the origins of the Nile

⁸⁰ The most important of these publications were Congregation de la mission, Maison Lazariste, Paris, and Church Missionary Record, Church Missionary Society, London.

and strategic dominance in the Red Sea aroused increasingly wide public interest. The geographical debate between Speke and Burton about the source of the Nile was a public spectacular, and the arguments between Beke and d'Abbadie were reported in the London weekly St. James Chronicle. The increase in number and circulation of British newspapers coincided with more widespread interest in Africa and the Near East.

While British and French missionaries squabbled in Abyssinia, Palmerston tried to steer a policy of Anglo-French detente. Faced with the complicated problems of the Eastern question, a disintegrating Ottoman empire and an expanding Russia, Palmerston wanted a front of friendship between England and France.⁸¹ The anachronistic commercial rivalry between the French and English in the Red Sea did not make the delicate negotiation of detente any easier. The real barrier to trade for either France or England in northern or southern Abyssinia was Turkish (after 1848 Egyptian) exactions on trade at the Red Sea ports. Unfortunately, one cornerstone of Palmerston's foreign policy was support of Turkey as a buffer to Russian expansion.

⁸¹ Roger Bullen, Palmerston, Guizot, and the Collapse of the Entente Cordiale (London: The Athlone Press, 1947). P. J. V. Rolo, Entente Cordiale, The Origins and Negotiation of the Anglo-French Agreements of 8 April 1904, London, St. Martin's Press, 1969.

From the perspective of the nineteenth century European balance of power, Anglo-French religious, cultural, and commercial rivalry in Abyssinia looked like a familiar game which was not quite played out. From the perspective of the winding down of a long period of civil war in Abyssinia, British-French rivalry did not look so innocuous. It exacerbated Abyssinian antagonisms and helped to create increasing distrust and fear of foreigners.

Chapter III:
European Rivalry and Ethiopian Needs:
The Diplomatic Front 1850-1860

When Tewodros rose to power in the 1850's, the European image of Abyssinia became clearer and more definite. Tewodros succeeded in gaining control of Begemider, Amhara, Tigre, Simien, and the northern trade routes and was crowned emperor in Gondar in 1855. British and French diplomats were attracted by the apparent movement toward Abyssinian unity and the emergence of reformist leadership. As more information about contemporary Abyssinian events arrived in London and Paris, both distortion and British-French rivalry increased. Tewodros' consistent though rather limited movements toward foreign contact were first welcomed and then misconstrued. European preconceptions about things Abyssinian and the Foreign Office preoccupation with balance of power politics weighed down and later crushed Tewodros' efforts to establish regular relations with Europe.

The first British reports about the increasing hegemony of Tewodros were optimistic. Even before he conquered the troops of Rases Ali and Wube, the British Consul Walter Plowden reported that Tewodros was the most "civilized and able" of Abyssinian leaders¹ and the most open to British influence.² Meeting Tewodros

¹ Plowden to Lord John Russell, July 28, 1853, in Correspondence Respecting Abyssinia 1846-1868, Great Britain, Parliament, Sessional Papers 1867-1868, LXXII (3955-II), #139. Hereafter cited Correspondence.

² Plowden to the Earl of Clarendon, October 15, 1853, Correspondence, #147.

in June of 1855, Plowden was impressed with his vigorous interest in discipline and reform, his personal generosity, and the reasonableness of his opinions.³ Tewodros wanted to suppress the slave trade, establish an organized salaried army, eliminate tax abuse, and create a hierarchy of local governors supported by systematic taxation and loyal to a central Abyssinian government.⁴ Plowden found Tewodros more modern and open to friendship with Europe than most of his contemporaries.⁵ Tewodros' decision to expell all Roman Catholic missionaries and to convert Muslims in his area back to Christianity was welcomed by British officials.⁶

Consul Plowden consulted officially with him shortly after Tewodros was crowned emperor in Gondar. Tewodros reviewed the history of Ethiopia's earlier experiences with the Portuguese and their divisive consequences. He thought that all Roman Catholic priests had to be excluded from his lands to preserve

³ Walter Plowden, Travels in Abyssinia and the Galla Country with an Account of the Mission to Ras Ali in 1848, ed. by Trevor C. Plowden (London: Longmans, 1868), pp. 456-459.

⁴ Plowden to the Earl of Clarendon, June 25, 1855, Correspondence, #227.

⁵ Ibid., March 3, 1853, #217.

⁶ Earl of Clarendon to Plowden, November 4, 1853, Ibid., #137. Plowden to the Earl of Clarendon, November 28, 1854, Ibid., #195.

the unity of the Ethiopian Orthodox church and that the British idea of a consulate with its own jurisdiction was both unprecedented and unnecessary. He preferred the more traditional way of establishing diplomatic contact through an exchange of embassies. Plowden enthusiastically recommended to his government that England and Ethiopia exchange embassies as soon as was feasible.⁷ The Foreign Office replied that an exchange of embassies was acceptable on the condition that Tewodros renounce any plans of conquering territory in Massawa or the Northwest over which Turkey had titular sovereignty, and Lord Clarendon authorized Plowden to pay expenses for an Ethiopian embassy to England.⁸ This initial English image of Tewodros pictured a man who had the power to unite Abyssinia and the intelligence to reform and modernize her society along lines that appeared just and progressive to diplomats in London.

A young Englishman of independent means, Henry Dufton, travelled through northern Abyssinia shortly after Tewodros' rise to national power. Dufton, like Plowden, was deeply impressed

⁷ Plowden to the Earl of Clarendon, June 25, 1855, Ibid., #227.

⁸ Earl of Clarendon to Plowden, November 27, 1855, Ibid., #228.

with Tewodros' intelligence and understanding of Abyssinian needs.⁹ He had been horrified by the superstition of the Orthodox clergy and the jealousy of regional rulers that he saw on his way to Tewodros' court in Gondar.¹⁰ From his first meeting, Dufton was impressed by Tewodros' natural gentility. His gentleness, love of children, and generosity to his associates contrasted starkly with the suspicion and lack of charity Dufton had previously encountered.¹¹ Like Plowden, Dufton viewed Tewodros' interest in modern firearms, artisans, and munitions as the realistic designs of a patriot far ahead of his contemporaries.¹² While fighting with the forces of Ras Ali, Tewodros had been routed by Egyptian artillery.¹³ For Dufton, Tewodros was not a colorful barbarian seeking guns as showpieces, but an enlightened leader whose energy and dedication to eliminating slavery, uniting Ethiopia, and modernizing Abyssinian society would be encouraged by establishing limited but reciprocal politi-

⁹ Henry Dufton, Narrative of a Journey through Abyssinia (London: Chapman and Hall, 1867), p. 98.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 91-92.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 101-102, 104.

¹² Ibid., pp. 104-107.

¹³ Ibid., p. 120.

cal and commercial relations with Great Britain. From the perspective of Tewodros' court in the late 1850's and early 1860's, neither Plowden nor Dufton saw any necessity for insisting that Tewodros accept consular jurisdiction. He controlled the traditional sources of power and was an able, intelligent, and civilized leader. Both Dufton and Plowden advised that the most prosperous British policy would be to support Tewodros' plans for the reconquest of Massawa as the means both to eliminate the Muslim-controlled slave trade and to open up productive commerce with England.¹⁴ The responses of the liberal Secretaries, the Earl Clarendon and the Earl of Malmesbury, indicate that the British Foreign Office accepted Plowden's and Dufton's evaluations of Tewodros' political prospects and Abyssinia's commercial potential while they officially opposed any Abyssinian reconquest of Massawa.¹⁵

Frenchmen in Ethiopia at the time of Tewodros' rise to power were equally impressed with his character, ability, and interest in reform. The Lazarist Bishop Msgr. de Jacobis extolled Tewodros' apparently noble and generous behavior on the battlefield and the decrees he issued in 1855 forbidding slavery.

¹⁴ Plowden to the Earl of Clarendon, July 10, 1854, Correspondence, #177. Dufton, Narrative, p. 144.

¹⁵ Earl of Clarendon to Plowden, November 4, 1853, Correspondence, #137. Ibid., November 27, 1855, #228. Earl of Malmesbury to Plowden, March 3, 1857, Ibid., #266.

eliminating customary divorce, and requiring marriage by the sacrament.¹⁶ De Jacobis' high estimation of Tewodros' charity and sense of justice led him to hope that the Catholic mission would be allowed to continue in Ethiopia even after Tewodros had reunited the Abyssinian church under the leadership of the apparently pro-British Abuna Salaama.¹⁷ Though de Jacobis' hope proved mistaken and Tewodros expelled the French Catholic mission in 1857, Tewodros and de Jacobis held each other in mutual esteem until the latter's death in 1860.¹⁸ Another itinerate Frenchman, the geographer-adventurer Antoine d'Abbadie, met Tewodros when he served as a lieutenant for Ras Ali. For d'Abbadie, Tewodros was an image of almost feudal nobility--unostentatious dress, aquiline profile, compassionate toward enemies, generous to friends. He sympathized with Tewodros' efforts to restore family and church order by decree even though he saw it as a useless attempt to radicalize Abyssinian society from above.¹⁹

¹⁶ Lettres de Jacobis, ii, no. 360, Abyssinie, 13 September 1855, in Donald Crummey, Priests and Politicians: Protestant and Catholic Missions in Orthodox Ethiopia (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 96-97.

¹⁷ de Jacobis to Sturchi, 2 January 1854, and de Jacobis to Etienne, July 1854, in Donald Crummey, "Tewodros as Reformer and Modernizer," Journal of African History, X, 3 (1969), p. 458.

¹⁸ Guillaume Lejean, Théodore II, Le Nouvel Empire d'Abyssinie et les intérêts français dans le sud de la Mer Rouge (Paris: Amyot, 1867), pp. 69-71.

¹⁹ Antoine d'Abbadie, "Abyssinia and King Theodore," Catholic World, VII, 1868, p. 274.

The Protestant missionaries who had been previously expelled were even more enthusiastic about the rise of Tewodros to power than their Catholic counterparts. Tewodros' concrete efforts to eliminate polygamy and slavery during the first years of his reign encouraged the missionary Krapf to see him as a God-designated vehicle for eradicating the worst abuses of Abyssinian society.²⁰ Tewodros' decision to reorganize the Orthodox church under the aegis of an Abuna partially educated by Christian Missionary Society missionaries in Cairo stimulated hope that British connected evangelism could prosper in an atmosphere of benevolence and peace.²¹ It soon became clear, however, that for Tewodros establishing political and religious unity meant forbidding Protestant as well as Catholic evangelism.

Partially under the stimulus of Samuel Gobat, Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem since 1846, Tewodros allowed the establishment of Swiss-German Chrischona missionaries near Gondar. The members of this pietistic sect were skilled craftsmen who believed in being examples of Christian living. They were only indirectly evangelical and were, in fact, presented to and accepted by Tewodros prim-

²⁰ J. L. Krapf, Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours in Eastern Africa (London: Trubner, 1860), p. 441.

²¹ Ibid., p. 452.

arily as skilled craftsmen.²² By the time Tewodros discovered the Chrischona's evangelical purpose, the mission was quietly established and had delighted the emperor with the first book printed in Amharic.²³ These missionaries, especially Martin Flad and Theophilus Waldmeier, became friends and sometimes advisers to Tewodros. They predisposed him to looking to Protestant Europe for the technological assistance he craved and helped to mitigate somewhat misunderstandings that arose later with the British Foreign Office. Throughout the period of his reign, these missionaries were the staunchest supporters of Tewodros' character and politics.²⁴

Three Amharic chronicles of Tewodros' reign have survived. That by the Debtera Zeneb is the only one of the three written during Tewodros' time. Zeneb's chronicle follows the major battles of Tewodros' career through his second campaign into Wallo in 1859. It is a rather cut and dried account which tends

²² Crummey, Priests and Politicians, pp. 119-120.

²³ J. M. Flad, Notes from the Journal of J. M. Flad one of Bishop Gobat's Pilgrim Missionaries in Abyssinia. Edited with a brief sketch of the Abyssinian Church by the Rev. W. Douglas Veitch (London; 1860), pp. 33-34.

²⁴ cf. Theophilus Waldmeier, The Autobiography of Theophilus Waldmeier, Missionary: Being an account of Ten Year's life in Abyssinia and Sixteen years in Syria (London: S. W. Partridge, 1886). J. M. Flad, Notes from the Journal of J. M. Flad one of Bishop Gobat's Pilgrim Missionaries in Abyssinia.

to concentrate on Tewodros' heroism in battle and charity toward the abused peasantry.²⁵ Tewodros' early policies of distributing captured wealth and parceling land to the devastated peasantry were applauded during his own time and have become legendary since. He appointed local leaders as governors,²⁶ strictly punished soldiers who looted the poor or refused to follow orders,²⁷ and often gave amnesty to prisoners of war.²⁸ Even though Zeneb was reportedly a secretary and friend of Tewodros, the chronicle relates that Tewodros was increasingly cruel to the Gallas of Wallo.²⁹ The chronicle of Walda Maryam was written independently of that of Zeneb, probably during the 1880's.³⁰ Walda Maryam was a Shoan, and the chronicle concentrates on Tewodros' later cruelty. It is less sequential than that of Zeneb and appears to be based on popular stories rather than first-hand experience. Walda Maryam gives little space to the intentions of Tewodros' policy but dwells on Tewodros' brutal

²⁵ [Zeneb], "La cronaca di re Teodoro attributa al Dabtara," trans. by Martino M. Moreno, Rassegna di Studi Etiopici (Roma: Ministero dell Africa Italiana, 1942), p. 151.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 163.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 162, 164.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 172.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 169, 177.

³⁰ H. Weld Blundell (trs.), "History of King Theodore written by Walda Maryam," Journal of the Royal African Society, VI, 1906.

treatment of rebellious soldiers. The third chronicle, Yate Tewodros Tarik, is a later collection of anecdotes about Tewodros, many of which appear to be hearsay.³¹ It provides no new information and became the source of Tedessa Gebre Medhin's popular nationalistic play Tewodros. The image of Tewodros which appears in these chronicles is less flattering than that provided by European sources. There is no discussion of Tewodros' long-term goals for modernization and technological development. Tewodros is praised or blamed for individual acts of cruelty or charity in battle, and his attempts to abolish slavery and reform marriage customs by decree are ignored. In 1860, Tewodros told Flad he was not understood in his country because he thought like a foreigner.³² Some Abyssinian misunderstanding may explain why there are so few Amharic records of Tewodros' deeds and why he became a national hero only after the 1920's.

The tenuous dominance that Tewodros established over Abyssinia from 1855 to 1862 aroused the hopes of several Frenchmen and Englishmen and exacerbated their rivalry. In 1854 the French Lazarist missionary de Jacobis thought that centralization of

³¹ Sven Rubenson, The Survival of Ethiopian Independence (London: Heineman, 1976), p. 24.

³² J. M. Flad, Notes from the Journal of J. M. Flad, p. 58.

government under Tewodros could mean greater influence for his Catholic mission.³³ Unfortunately for de Jacobis, Tewodros' plans for unification of the country depended substantially on the support of a reinvigorated and monolithic Abyssinian Orthodox Church. Shortly after being crowned King of Kings by Abuna Salama, Tewodros ordered the French Catholic mission closed, and de Jacobis retreated to Halay just north of Massawa. In a letter to Delaye the French Vice-Consul in Massawa, Tewodros explained that Roman Catholics in his country would not be persecuted but national policy demanded that there be no evangelism in his territory.³⁴ The letters of de Jacobis indicate that, with the exception of the politically-involved Fr. Gebra Mihael, Ethiopian converts to Catholicism were not persecuted.³⁵

In his letter to Delaye, Tewodros expressed his interest in friendship and craftsmen from France.³⁶ As Delaye and the

³³ Guillaume Lejean, Théodore II, Le Nouvel Empire d'Abbyssinie, p. 44.

³⁴ Tewodros to Delaye, BN, Ethiop, 184, Sch 85, in Crummey, Priests and Politicians, p. 99.

³⁵ Lettres de Jacobis, ii, no. 360, Abbyssinie, 13 September 1855, in Crummey, Priests and Politicians, p. 98.

³⁶ Tewodros to Delaye, BN, Ethiop, 184, Sch 85, in Crummey, Priests and Politicians, p. 99.

Quai de Orsay would not consider a diplomatic agreement that excluded Catholic missionaries, Delaye did not answer Tewodros' letter and official relations between Tewodros and the French government ceased for five years. In May of 1855, Delaye was succeeded as Vice-Consul of Massawa by M. Chauvin Beillard. Beillard knew of the close relationship between the British Consul Walter Plowden and Tewodros and began to look to Tewodros' arch-rival Negussie of Tigre for a resurgence of French influence. Negussie could not defeat Tewodros without outside help, and in July of 1856 he wrote Napoleon III asking for arms and aid from France.³⁷ In a note that accompanied this letter, Beillard assured the French government that Negussie had agreed to make de Jacobis head of the Abyssinian church and to cede territory along the crucial trading routes to France.³⁸ While Tewodros concentrated on expeditions to Wallo and Shoa to the south, Negussie consolidated his power in Tigre, and Beillard encouraged his government to respond to Negussie's request for help. Beillard seemed to feel that a few cannon and guns would

³⁷ Negussie to Napoleon III, 9 June 1856, AECP, Massouah, 2, Fol 6, in Rubenson, The Survival of Ethiopian Independence, p. 190.

³⁸ Beillard to Walewski, 30 June 1856, AECP, Massouah 2, Fol 104-105, in Rubenson, Ibid., p. 191.

be enough to counter the power of Tewodros and the concomitant rise of British influence under his reign.³⁹ Beillard's enthusiastic dispatches went unanswered, and he avoided meeting with Negussie for a year. In May of 1858, Beillard was advised by the Quai de Orsay not to meddle in Abyssinian politics.⁴⁰

While Beillard was being snubbed by Napoleon III, Negussie increased his control of the Hamasen where Catholic missions had concentrated their efforts. In the Fall of 1858, de Jacobis organized an embassy of two Tigrean notables, Abba Immetu and Lij Taqaye, and a French traveler, Lepere de Laperease, to visit the Pope and Napoleon III on Negussie's behalf. Negussie still hoped that French arms or assistance would help him hold Tigre against the long-awaited attack by Tewodros,⁴¹ and de Jacobis dreamed of a French influenced northeastern Ethiopia in which to continue his evangelism.⁴² The embassy disappointed both. It was given audiences but little encouragement from the Pope

³⁹ Beillard to Walewski, 7 November 1857, AECP, Massouah 2, Fol 187, in Rubenson, Ibid., p. 193.

⁴⁰ Walewski to Beillard, 14 May 1858, AECP, Massouah 2, Fols 263-265, in Rubenson, Ibid., p. 193.

⁴¹ Crummey, Priests and Politicians, p. 103.

⁴² Guillaume Lejean, Théodore II, Le Nouvel Empire d'Abyssinie, pp. 88-89.

or Napoleon III. Even the 1500 rifles that Negussie's envoys purchased in France were confiscated by the Turks at Suez when the envoys were on their way back.⁴³

In the Fall of 1859, as Negussie continued to consolidate his power in Tigre, the French government sent an exploratory mission under Count Stanislas Russel to Massawa. The official purpose of Russel's mission was to explore commercial and political possibilities along the Red Sea coast and to seek labourers for the French colony of Réunion. Russel was advised to avoid any commitments whatsoever.⁴⁴ Russel's timing was execrable. He arrived in Tigre shortly after Negussie's troops had been routed by Tewodros, and Russel was forced to escape under cover of night to Halay. Russel never was able to meet with Negussie, and his mission was a fiasco. He brought back a treaty signed by Immetu that promised a French protectorate over the coast, the cession of Dese and Adulis, and authorization to recruit workers for Réunion.⁴⁵ There is reason to doubt that Negussie would ever have accepted such a treaty.⁴⁶ Negussie had asked

⁴³ Rubenson, The Survival of Ethiopian Independence, p. 199.

⁴⁴ Stanislas Russel, Une Mission en Abyssinie et dans la Mer Rouge (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit et co., 1884), pp. 263-266.

⁴⁵ George Malécot, Les Voyageurs français et les relations entre la France et l'Abyssinie de 1835 à 1870, Etudes et Documents, no. 2 (Paris: Société française d'histoire d'outre-mer, 1972), p. 93.

⁴⁶ Rubenson, The Survival of Ethiopian Independence, pp. 206-207.

for two battalions and arms in 1859, but even when near his downfall in July of 1860, all he ever promised the French was a treaty of friendship guaranteeing a consulate and protection of French subjects in Tigre.⁴⁷ The French flirtation with Negussie and hopes for real influence in northeastern Abyssinia collapsed with Negussie's overthrow by Tewodros in January of 1861. Negussie's cousin Gerad had been responsible for Plowden's death on the battlefield a year earlier, and Tewodros took revenge by executing Negussie and 1500 of his followers after his victory.

While French missionaries and consuls tried to establish a secure relationship with Negussie, the British adventurer John Bell, and the British Consul Walter Plowden traveled and fought with Tewodros' troops. Plowden first met Tewodros in June of 1855 and tried to get him to agree to a treaty of commerce and friendship with Great Britain similar to the one signed by Ras Ali in January 1849.⁴⁸ Tewodros agreed to reciprocal protection of subjects and the exchange of embassies with England. He balked at the notion of extraterritoriality for a consulate,⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Negussie to Napoleon III, 13 July 1860, AECP, Massawa, 2, in Crumme, Priests and Politicians, p. 106.

⁴⁸ Plowden, Travels in Abyssinia and the Galla Country, p. 459.

⁴⁹ Plowden to the Earl of Clarendon, June 25, 1855, Correspondence, #227.

but was willing to refrain from attacking Egyptian-held Massawa as the price of friendship with Great Britain.⁵⁰ Tewodros looked to Europe for the arms and advice necessary for Ethiopian unification, centralization, and increased prosperity.⁵¹ He wanted a salaried army disciplined along European lines to help him finish the unification of Abyssinia and drive back Muslim advances.⁵² He wanted uniform taxes and secure roads to promote trade between Abyssinia and Europe,⁵³ and artillery, rifles, and new ideas to put an end to the years of chaos and civil war in Abyssinia.⁵⁴ These goals were more modern and widesweeping than those of Tewodros' predecessors,⁵⁵ and Tewodros' daily contact with his Grand Chamberlain John Bell and

⁵⁰ Plowden to the Earl of Clarendon, March 1856, Ibid., #248.

⁵¹ Guillaume Lejean, Théodore II, Le Nouvel Empire d'Abyssinie, pp. 73-74. Plowden to the Earl of Clarendon, March 3, 1855, Correspondence, #217.

⁵² Henry Blanc, A Narrative of Captivity in Abyssinia (London: Smith, Elder & Company, 1868), reprinted (London: Frank Cass, 1970), pp. 37-38. Henry Dufton, Narrative of a Journey through Abyssinia, pp. 84-86.

⁵³ Plowden to the Foreign Office, March 1, 1859, Correspondence, #296.

⁵⁴ Barroni to Bruce, April 15, 1855, Ibid., #143.

⁵⁵ Sven Rubenson, King of Kings: Tewodros of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie Department of History Historical Study #2 (Addis Ababa: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 54.

his friend Walter Plowden encouraged him to look to England for help. By 1862 French influence in Abyssinia was negligible.

Like the Rases Sabagadis, Wube, Sahle Selassie, and Negussie before him, Tewodros had quite definite ideas about what he wanted from Europe. The exchange of embassies with presents and information was Ethiopia's traditional way of making contact with other countries. Sabagadis, Ali, and Sahle Selassie had all arranged embassies to England, and embassies from Wube and Negussie had been received in Paris. Traditionally, victorious Abyssinian rulers were expected to restore crumbling monasteries and erect new churches in their dominions. Being aware of these customs, Henry Salt brought religious pictures and windows on his expedition in 1809 and promised to look for architects to help repair churches for Walde Selassie of Tigre.⁵⁶ The German architect Eichenger had helped Sahle Selassie rebuild churches in Shoa, and Tewodros naturally included a request for a mason who could build churches in his early discussions with Protestant

⁵⁶ Henry Salt, A Voyage to Abyssinia and Travels into the Interior of That Country Executed under the Orders of the British Government in the Years 1809 and 1810 (London: Rivington Press, 1814), reprinted (London: Frank Cass, 1967), pp. 266-267.

missionaries.⁵⁷ Another important priority for Tewodros was guns. The Egyptian forces that defeated Ras Ali in 1848 had used French-made artillery to good effect.⁵⁸ Tewodros thought that a few good cannon would be enough to assure his dominance over the other leaders of northern Ethiopia. He was disagreeably surprised when he learned that none of the craftsmen of the Chrischona mission knew how to build either churches or guns.⁵⁹ In order to ensure the survival of their Protestant mission, the missionary Theophilus Waldmeier agreed to cooperate with a French adventurer, Joseph Mackerer, to make a large cannon for Tewodros. Tewodros watched Waldmeier's experiments with avid pleasure,⁶⁰ though the huge cannon that was the final effort exploded uselessly during the battle of Magdala.

For Tewodros, Plowden's encouragement of trade with England implied some British protection of Abyssinia's eastern trade

⁵⁷ J. L. Krapf, Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours in Eastern Africa, p. 456. Henry A. Stern, Wanderings among the Falashas in Abyssinia (London: Wertheim, Macintosh and Hunt, 1862), p. 222.

⁵⁸ Henry Dufton, Narrative of a Journey through Abyssinia, pp. 120, 124. Richard K. P. Pankhurst, "Fire-arms in Ethiopian History (1800-1935)," Ethiopian Observer, VI, 2 (1962), pp. 148-149.

⁵⁹ Richard K. P. Pankhurst, "Misoneism and Innovation in Ethiopian History," Ethiopian Observer, VII, 4, Part 1 (1963), pp. 295-297.

⁶⁰ Henry Dufton, Narrative of a Journey through Abyssinia, pp. 78-80, 84-86.

routes. After the Egyptian occupation of Massawa in 1848, Consul Plowden regularly interceded for Christian Abyssinian traders who were charged exorbitant duties at the port.⁶¹ Whether true or not, it was widely believed that the intercession of French and British diplomats had halted Egyptian expansion into the northwestern provinces in 1848,⁶² and Plowden frequently requested the Foreign Office to remonstrate with the Pasha about the enslavement of Abyssinian Christians by Muslim raiders into Bogos.⁶³ Between 1848 and 1854, the British representative in Constantinople interceded with the Pasha on behalf of Abyssinians being beaten, cheated, or enslaved in Massawa and Bogos.⁶⁴ Tewodros was very aware of Muslim expansion toward northern Ethiopia, for he himself had grown up in the frontier province of Quara. From his perspective, Britain and Ethiopia had a common interest in eliminating the Muslim slave raids in the Northeast and in

⁶¹ Plowden to the Earl of Clarendon, September 9, 1848, Correspondence, #25. Plowden to Viscount Palmerston, December 10, 1848, Ibid., #35. Viscount Palmerston to C. A. Murray, February 17, 1849, Ibid., #30. Plowden to the Earl of Clarendon, June 30, 1854, Ibid., #174.

⁶² Walter Plowden, Travels in Abyssinia and the Galla Country, p. 356.

⁶³ Plowden to the Earl of Clarendon, March 15, 1854, Correspondence, #156. Ibid., April 18, 1854, #161. Ibid., April 20, 1854, #163.

⁶⁴ Earl of Clarendon to Bruce, June 30, 1854, Correspondence, #166. Earl of Clarendon to Plowden, October 28, 1854, Ibid., #182.

guaranteeing equitable duties at Muslim-held port of Massawa. With their tendered friendship, Tewodros could expect British diplomatic intercession on behalf of Abyssinians mistreated by subjects of the Porte. This much the British had already done in the more chaotic times of Ras Ali.

Tewodros envisioned a British embassy that included men to teach Ethiopians to build roads and organize a disciplined army.⁶⁵ Abyssinia had a long tradition of generosity to resident foreigners. The German artist Christop Zeder had spent a life of comparative ease helping Sahle Selassie. Itinerate Greeks and Armenians had been welcomed as smiths and traders into Abyssinian society in southern Shoa and northern Tigre for centuries.⁶⁶ The reports of Protestant and Catholic missionaries are replete with comments on the personal generosity of Abyssinian rulers. The Church Missionary Society was given a house, lands, a church, and occasional funds to establish their mission.⁶⁷ Ras Wube treated de Jacobis with equally expansive kindness. When Tewodros accepted the Chrischona missionaries, he gave them rich

⁶⁵ Plowden to Viscount Palmerston, April 2, 1850, Ibid., #142.

⁶⁶ Richard K. P. Pankhurst, "The Role of Foreigners in 19th Century Ethiopia prior to the rise of Menelik," Boston University Papers on Africa, II; African History (1966), pp. 188-189.

⁶⁷ Samuel Gobat, Bishop of Jerusalem, His Life and Work. A Biographical Sketch Drawn chiefly from his own Journals (New York: Whittaker, 1885), p. 123. Henry A. Stern, Wanderings among the Falashas in Abyssinia, pp. 56-57.

land near the capital on which to establish their enterprise.⁶⁸ Even during the negotiations that preceded the Abyssinian expedition, the British envoy Hormuzd Rassam was at first given food, money, and every show of courtesy.⁶⁹ While foreigners whose skills were appreciated by Abyssinian rulers lived in comparative comfort, they sometimes encountered difficulty leaving the country. Charles Rochet d'Hericourt, who knew how to make gunpowder, had to slip out of the camp of Sahle Selassie in disguise.⁷⁰ The equally-valuable gunmaker Mackerer was stopped by Tewodros when he tried to make his way back to France. During negotiations with the British government in 1865, Tewodros allowed the Chrischona missionary Flad out of the country only on the condition that his wife and child stay behind as surety for his return. The Emperor Gwala of Gondar, Sabagadis of Semien, Haile Malechot of Shoa, Wube of Tigre, and Tewodros all asked the English government for artisans to build churches, guns, and roads.⁷¹ The European

⁶⁸ Theophilus Waldmeier, The Autobiography of Theophilus Waldmeier, Missionary, pp. 63, 66. Henry Dufton, Narrative of a Journey through Abyssinia, p. 83.

⁶⁹ Henry Blanc, Narrative of a Captivity in Abyssinia, pp. 134-135.

⁷⁰ Georges Malécot, Les Voyageurs français et les relations entre La France et l'Abyssinie de 1835 à 1870, p. 59.

⁷¹ Richard K. P. Pankhurst, "The Role of Foreigners in Ethiopia before the Rise of Menelik," pp. 191-195.

artisans living in Ethiopia were not mistreated until Mackerer was suspected of plotting against Tewodros in 1867.

Abyssinian rulers had come to look to British diplomats to protect their small but thriving religious community at the convent Dayr as Sultan in Jerusalem. That community was decimated by the plague in 1849, and the Turkish authorities burned its large library of documents.⁷² In 1852 the Rases Ali and Wube wrote Bishop Gobat in Jerusalem asking him to protect a growing number of Abyssinian pilgrims who were being persecuted by Armenian pilgrims and Turkish authorities.⁷³ The British Consul James Finn interceded on behalf of the Abyssinians' right to their convent in 1850, 1859, and 1862 and remonstrated several times with the Pasha about harrassment of Abyssinians by Turkish officials.⁷⁴ This British support for their countrymen was appreciated in Tewodros' court.⁷⁵ The Ethiopians who got to Jerusalem were usually from noble families, and they were admired for their courage in making the pilgrimage.⁷⁶

⁷² Finn to Viscount Palmerston, November 30, 1850, in Correspondence Respecting Abyssinians at Jerusalem, Great Britain, Parliament, Sessional Papers, 1867-1868, LXXII (3955-I), #1.

⁷³ Bishop Gobat to the Earl of Malmesbury, June 29, 1852, Ibid., #5.

⁷⁴ Finn to Viscount Palmerston, December 9, 1850, Correspondence, Ibid., #3. Finn to the Earl of Malmesbury, August 17, 1852, Ibid., #10. Finn to H. Bulwer, March 11, 1862, Ibid., #14.

⁷⁵ Finn to the Earl of Malmesbury, June 21, 1858, Ibid., #12.

⁷⁶ Aleme Eshetu, "The Role and Position of Foreign-educated Interpreters in Ethiopia," Journal of Ethiopian Studies, II, 1 (1973), pp. 17-18.

Tewodros' interest in political as distinct from religious reform, his close personal friendships with John Bell and Walter Plowden, and the customary British protection of Abyssinians from Turkish injustices all inclined him to look to Britain for expertise and commerce. Tewodros dealt continuously with English adventurers and the official British representative in Abyssinia from the time he assumed power in 1855, and the British Foreign Office had received a continuous flow of information about the customs and political situation in Abyssinia. Britain was dealing with a ruler who was admired by a wide spectrum of resident Europeans and feared by his Abyssinian rivals. They had won in their contest with France for political and commercial influence in the Abyssinian highlands. In the early 1860's, there appeared to be an abundance of information and a significant sphere of shared interest between England and Abyssinia. Tewodros was interested in commerce with Europe and in developing a more modern government. Britain was interested in having new markets and an ally on the eastern side of the Red Sea. The stage was set for regular, albeit small scale, diplomatic and commercial relations between England and Abyssinia.

Chapter IV:
Diplomatic Debacle:
The English Failure to Establish
Regular Relations: 1860-1864

While returning from an expedition with Tewodros in Bege-mider in February of 1860, the British Consul to Abyssinia, Walter Plowden, was attacked by Tigrean rebels and fatally wounded. Shortly after that, in Tewodros' penultimate confrontation with his arch rival Negussie of Tigre, the Englishman John Bell was killed. Tewodros sent a letter through the acting Vice Consul R. Barroni expressing deep regret for the death of his comrades in arms. He explained that he had revenged their deaths by executing 1500 of Negussie's men, including several to whom he was related by marriage, and expressed hope for a closer friendship with Great Britain.¹ Tewodros was still eager for his embassy to England and asked Barroni to come to Gondar to facilitate arrangements.² Unfortunately, Barroni had neither the authority nor the funds for an embassy to England, and he put Tewodros

¹ Tewodros to Barroni, January 1861, in Correspondence Respecting Abyssinia 1846-1868, Great Britain, Parliament, Sessional Papers, Vol. 1867-1868, LXXII (3955-II), Inclosure, #315. Hereafter cited Correspondence.

² Ibid., #315.

off with promises for nearly two years. It was October of 1862 before the new British Consul, Charles Duncan Cameron, reached Gondar.

Captain Cameron, like Plowden, was the son of an Indian Army officer. He had travelled widely and served various lesser appointments with the Foreign Office before being assigned to Abyssinia.³ He was appointed Consul in February 1861 but stayed in England until November of that year to collect information from travellers returning from Africa.⁴ In his baggage, he carried a brace of embossed pistols for Emperor Tewodros which were inscribed "In appreciation of Your Majesty's kindness to our servant Plowden." Cameron arrived in Massawa in March of 1862, and found Egypto-Turkish taxation, beating and enslavement of Abyssinians as reprehensible as Plowden had described them.⁵ He advised that only British power could stop the Muslim advance.⁶ Turkish armies had taken over parts of the Abyssinian coast, were

³ Captain Desborough to Earl Russell, February 2, 1865, Inclosure in Letter addressed to Her Majesty the Queen, Ibid., #437.

⁴ Earl Russell to Cameron, February 2, 1861, Ibid., #313. Inclosure, Ibid. Cameron to Earl Russell, November 16, 1861, Ibid., #325.

⁵ Cameron to Earl Russell, March 20, 1862, Ibid., #333.

⁶ Cameron to Mr. Hammond, May 27, 1862, Ibid., #339.

in control of the vital salt mines, and appeared prepared for further encroachments.⁷ Cameron saw the situation very much as Plowden had before him. The tone of his dispatches, however, is more straightforward and somewhat moralistic. On his way into the highlands for his first meeting with Tewodros, he looked forward to the effect of Britain's civilizing influence on Abyssinia.⁸

Cameron was appointed Consul to Massawa, not Abyssinia, and his instructions were more specific than Plowden's had been. He was to protect British subjects in Massawa and to transfer information about trade and agriculture to the Foreign Office.⁹ First, he was to present himself to Tewodros, give him the Queen's presents, and convince him to sign a Treaty of Friendship with England. When Cameron finally reached Tewodros' camp in October of 1862, both he and the Emperor took their first meeting very seriously. Tewodros provided a 12 gun salute and an escort of 6,000 calvary for the new Consul, and Cameron presented the Queen's silver-embossed pistols. Cameron immediately pressed Theodore for a Treaty of Friendship. He described enthusiastically Tewodros'

⁷ Ibid., #333 and #339.

⁸ Cameron to Earl Russell, April 26, 1862, Ibid., #335.

⁹ Earl Russell to Captain Cameron, February 2, 1861, Ibid., #313.

intelligence, interest in improving his country, curiosity about world affairs, and commitment to eliminating the slave trade in Abyssinia.¹⁰

Tewodros was quite specific about what he wanted from relations with Great Britain. He wanted arms and ammunition, architects and road builders, British support against Muslim attacks on the coast, and an embassy to England. He was ready to send the long-anticipated embassy immediately, but Cameron insisted that terms of a Treaty of Friendship be discussed first. For Cameron, discussion meant that Tewodros had to do something about slavery in his dominions and promise not to attack Turkish territory before an embassy would be considered. Cameron's approach placed Tewodros in an impossible situation. The slave trade was conducted by Muslims who raided areas around Bogos and Massawa and then retreated into Turkish territory.¹¹ The only way Tewodros could eliminate this trade would be by attacking raiders residing in Egyptian areas under nominal Turkish sovereignty. Tewodros had not attacked the extremely vulnerable Massawa as his prede-

¹⁰ Cameron to Earl Russell, July 22, 1862, Ibid., #341, and October 31, 1862, Ibid., #343.

¹¹ Plowden to the Earl of Clarendon, March 15, 1854, Correspondence, #156; April 18, 1854, Ibid., #161; and April 20, 1854, Ibid., #163.

cessors Ras Wube and Negussie had done. As Plowden, Cameron, and other visitors to Abyssinia reported, it was Egyptian armies supposedly under Turkish control that were attacking Abyssinia, not the other way around.¹² The Foreign Office had agreed to an Abyssinian embassy on the condition that Tewodros not attack Turkish territory,¹³ and Plowden had planned to accompany it to England.¹⁴ Tewodros fulfilled his part of the bargain and had every reason to expect that the arrival of a new consul would signal the organization of an Abyssinian embassy to Great Britain.

Cameron appears from his reports to have felt that negotiations with Tewodros went very well.¹⁵ Tewodros agreed to all aspects of the Treaty of Friendship except the clause about extra-territoriality, which the Foreign Office had already agreed in 1857 to eliminate from the Treaty anyway.¹⁶ Tewodros pointed to

¹² Plowden to Earl of Clarendon, June 30, 1854, Ibid., #177, and June 25, 1855, Ibid., #227. Cameron to Earl Russell, March 20, 1862, Ibid., #333, and May 27, 1862, Ibid., #339. Guillaume Lejean, Theodore II, Le Nouvel Empire D'Abyssinie (Paris: Amyot, 1867), pp. 152-153.

¹³ Earl of Clarendon to Plowden, November 27, 1855, Correspondence, #228.

¹⁴ Henry A. Stern, Wanderings Among the Falashas in Abyssinia (London: Wertheim, Macintosh & Hunt, 1862), pp. 149, 228-229. Plowden to the Earl of Clarendon, November 25, 1857, Inclosure, Correspondence, #284.

¹⁵ Cameron to Earl Russell, October 31, 1862, Ibid., #343.

¹⁶ Earl Russell to Plowden, March 3, 1857, Ibid., #266.

his record of military restraint and asked only that England prevent the French from aiding Turkish encroachments on his Eastern coastline. In his reports to the Foreign Office, Cameron showed his lack of tact. When Tewodros offered him the customary gifts of hospitality, Cameron indignantly refused them as if they were bribery. When Tewodros asked him to go to Massawa to prepare for the embassy, Cameron ignored the request and visited disputed territory in the Northwest instead. Cameron did not demonstrate the deference or respect that Tewodros had come to expect from Englishmen.

One issue of these first negotiations between Tewodros and Consul Cameron was a letter from Tewodros to Queen Victoria. In the letter, Tewodros lauds his own military accomplishments, tells of his revenge for the deaths of Bell and Plowden, thanks the Queen for her presents, and asks for safe conduct for his embassy to England.* Egyptian troops controlled both routes out of Abyssinia: the northwest through southern Egypt, and the coast through Massawa. As even a cursory reading of the letter shows, Tewodros did not request an expedition against "the Turks" but merely an escort through Turkish-controlled territory. This had all been agreed upon in Plowden's time, and it was understandable that the

* As this letter was the source of numerous misunderstandings and its treatment served as the causus belli of the subsequent Abyssinian Expedition, I have enclosed the Foreign Office translation in Appendix I.

curious and eager Tewodros expected a quick reply with the date that boats and an escort would meet him in Massawa.

In a series of short dispatches which Cameron sent with this letter, he reported: (1) Tewodros was keen to have Ethiopians trained in England; (2) he would accept English plans for the suppression of the slave trade and improved commercial conditions, but the long-promised embassy was the shortest route to this agreement; (3) British commercial and humanitarian interests would best be served by dislodging Muslims from the East Coast of Africa; (4) Tewodros was strongly predisposed in favor of the English, but he was becoming impatient and was requesting aid against Turkish encroachments on his territory from other governments, most notably the French.¹⁷ Cameron ended the series of dispatches that accompanied Tewodros' letter to the Queen with

I would beg to state that unless answers to my dispatches of today and yesterday are forwarded soon, next raining season, which begins in April may arrest the projected visit and put off everything for another 18 months, which time may be profitably employed by others.¹⁸

The day after writing Queen Victoria, Tewodros composed similar letters proposing new relations of commerce and friendship to the kings of Prussia, Russia, and France. Tewodros wanted

¹⁷ Cameron to Earl Russell, November 1, 1862, Ibid., #344, #345, #346.

¹⁸ Ibid., #346.

European know-how and support against Islamic expansion from any quarter. Tewodros' letters to Russia and Prussia were never answered. The letter to Napoleon III he sent with the French artist, scandal-monger and possible gunrunner Auguste Bardel.¹⁹ While Bardel was on his way to France with a letter from Tewodros, the new French Vice Consul to Massawa, Guillaume Lejean, arrived in Gondar. Lejean had accompanied an exploratory mission into the upper regions of the Nile in 1860 and 1861 and had heard there enthusiastic reports of the fertile possibilities of the Abyssinian highlands. In his report from that expedition, Lejean urged the French government to consider developing a cotton industry in Abyssinia where Tewodros reportedly offered land to willing Europeans.²⁰ Lejean was appointed Vice Consul shortly after that and was charged with inspecting the commercial possibilities of the highlands.²¹ Lejean arrived in Gondar with a letter from Napoleon III expressing interest in concluding a treaty of commerce and friendship with Abyssinia very similar to the one that Cameron

¹⁹ Sven Rubenson, The Survival of Ethiopian Independence (London: Heinemann, 1976), pp. 224-225, for a coalation of sources on Bardel's character.

²⁰ Charles T. Beke, "The French and English in the Red Sea," St. James Chronicle, July 5, 1862, p. 5.

²¹ Georges Malécot, Les Voyageurs français et les relations entre la France et L'Abyssinie de 1835 à 1870 (Paris: Société française d'histoire d'outre-mer, 1972), p. 95.

had been trying to negotiate. Talks between Tewodros and Lejean went well at first, even though Tewodros was rather disappointed by the simplicity of Lejean's presents.²² With a group of five or six Europeans, Lejean accompanied Tewodros on an expedition against the Galla near Lake Tana in Gojjam. He was impressed with Tewodros' comparative compassion toward prisoners and his willingness to share privation with his soldiers.²³ Lejean was treated well as long as he was the guest of Tewodros. When he began to request permission to return to Massawa, Tewodros refused to let him go. In a temper, Tewodros imprisoned Lejean for a day. The other foreigners with the court thought that Tewodros was keeping Lejean with him as surety that his letter to Napoleon III would be answered.²⁴

Consul Cameron, in the meantime, accompanied Tewodros' letter part way to the coast and then veered off toward Bogos in the northwest.²⁵ There he tried to finish negotiations that Plowden had started with Moshamet Bey for the release of enslaved Abyssinians captured during Egyptian raids. Cameron reported to the

²² Lejean, Théodore II, Le Nouvel Empire d'Abyssinie, pp. 140-141.

²³ Ibid., pp. 143-157.

²⁴ Cameron to Earl Russell, July 1, 1863, Correspondence, #393.

²⁵ Ibid., January 1, 1863, #348.

Foreign Office that Egyptian troops continually raided Abyssinian territory and that only their raids kept Tewodros from abolishing the slave trade entirely.²⁶ He advised that the best way to stop the slave trade on Abyssinia's east coast was to establish a British Consul in Bogus.²⁷ Cameron acted as magistrate for Abyssinians enslaved along other parts of the border with Egypt and reported that it was only fear of Tewodros that had kept several Tigrean chieftains from attacking and occupying Massawa.²⁸ The detail in his dispatches would indicate that consul Cameron took his assignment quite seriously. He tried to get Tewodros to agree to the Foreign Office reservations about an embassy to England on the one hand and attempted to present the Foreign Office with the best alternative for eliminating slavery on the other. Unfortunately, the perspective in London had changed. The Foreign Office wanted nothing that could pique the Ottoman leaders into lessening their support against Russia.²⁹ Cameron's many questions and suggestions were never responded to. The reply to Cameron's careful and lengthy reports was curt and

²⁶ Ibid., January 1, 1863, #349.

²⁷ Ibid., March 31, 1863, #355; Ibid., May 18, 1863, #361.

²⁸ Ibid., March 31, 1865, #355.

²⁹ Paul Hayes, Modern British Foreign Policy: The Nineteenth Century (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1975), pp. 97-107, 115.

off the mark. Either the Foreign Office did not read the conscientious consul's reports, or they were too preoccupied elsewhere to consider their import.

The mood in Tewodros' court, too, had changed by the time Cameron returned in October 1863. The number of Chrischona missionary-craftsmen had increased to nine by 1862, and these were welcomed for their tact and talent.³⁰ However, in 1860 the English Missionary Society sent two converted German Jews to establish an evangelical mission among the Judaic Falashas northwest of Gondar. This mission was accepted on the basis that it would lead Falasha converts to baptism in the Abyssinian Orthodox Church. Nevertheless, the outwardly evangelical purpose of the Falasha mission and the haughty demeanour of the new missionaries Henry Rosenthal and Henry Stern did not sit well with Tewodros.³¹ While Stern was making a courtesy call at Tewodros' court in September 1863, he and his papers were seized and his servants beaten by the Emperor's men. Tewodros charged that the manuscript of Stern's book on Ethiopia contained passages derogatory to Tewodros' parentage and that Stern had made an insulting gesture at

³⁰ [Zeneb], "La Cronaca di re Teodoro Attribuita Al Dabtara," trans. Martino M. Moreno, Rassegna Di Studi Etiopici (Roma: Ministero Dell'Africa Italiana, XX, 1942), p. 177.

³¹ Theophilus Waldmeier, The Autobiography of Theophilus Waldmeier, Missionary: Being an Account of Ten Years' Life in Abyssinia and Sixteen in Syria (London: Partridge, 1886), p. 41.

court.³² Whatever Tewodros' real reasons for arresting him, Stern's behavior with Tewodros had been less yielding than that of his predecessors Gobat and de Jacobis. Stern was at a disadvantage because he had no skill to offer Tewodros in his plans for modernization and reform. Since mid-1862, many more missionaries had been requesting admission into his domains, and Tewodros was becoming suspicious of their motives.³³

Immediately on his return, Cameron began to intercede with the Emperor on Stern's behalf. Unfortunately, Cameron's position was not as secure as he assumed. In September, Bardel had returned with a brisk letter from Paris. The letter was not written personally by Napoleon III and virtually demanded the reestablishment of Roman Catholic missions as a precondition for a treaty of commerce and friendship. Tewodros was insulted. His requests for an embassy, French artisans to reside in Abyssinia, and help to guarantee Abyssinian access to coastal routes were ignored.³⁴ Tewodros gathered the Europeans together and read this letter in a formal audience. He stomped with anger and indignation and ordered the French Vice-Consul Lejean to leave Abyssinia immedi-

³² Henry Stern to Mrs. Stern, April 1865, Correspondence, #498.

³³ Lejean, Théodore II, Le Nouvel Empire d'Abyssinie, p. 160.

³⁴ Cameron to Earl Russell, October 2, 1863, Correspondence, #382.

ately.³⁵ When a dispatch from the British Foreign Office arrived a month later, Tewodros was already angry with the Falasha missionaries and the French government. His hopes for an embassy, trained workers and guns to further unite his country focused on England. The dispatch from England brought more disappointment. It was a brief note from Earl Russell that did not mention Tewodros' letter to Queen Victoria at all. Instead, it reprimanded Cameron for staying so long in the Abyssinian highlands and ordered him back to Massawa.³⁶

Cameron had returned to Tewodros' court in October 1863 expecting to receive an answer to Tewodros' letter to the Queen and to begin preparations for the embassy to England which he planned to accompany.³⁷ Instead he found an angry and disappointed Tewodros and an answer from his government that totally ignored Tewodros' requests and his own dispatches. Tewodros was reportedly already upset with Cameron because he visited disputed areas in Bogos instead of proceeding to Massawa as the Emperor had ordered him to do.³⁸ Russell's dispatch was the last straw. It cast

³⁵ Henry A. Stern, The Captive Missionary: Being an Account of the Country and People of Abyssinia (London: Cassell, Petler and Galpin, 1869), pp. 38-43.

³⁶ Earl Russell to Cameron, August 13, 1863, Correspondence, #359. On its arrival in Abyssinia, Mr. Ayrton to Earl Russell, September 19, 1864, Ibid., #429.

³⁷ Cameron to Lord Russell, August 18, 1863, Correspondence, #394.

³⁸ Lejean, Théodore II, Le Nouvel Empire d'Abyssinie, pp. 168-169.

doubt on Cameron's very authority in the Emperor's dominions. In November, Cameron and his young Irish secretary Lawrence Kerans were put in chains.³⁹

From the perspective of his court in 1863, Tewodros had little reason to believe that the British still wanted a treaty of commerce and friendship with Abyssinia. Britain had yet to acknowledge the strong steps Tewodros had taken to stabilize his country and to abolish the slave trade as Plowden and Cameron had encouraged him to do. They had taken nearly three years to replace Walter Plowden, and Tewodros' plans for an embassy were put off by Cameron's conditions and then ignored altogether by the Foreign Office. In addition, British support against Turkish harassment of Abyssinians in Jerusalem had stopped abruptly in March 1862. The actively-committed Consul to Jerusalem, James Finn, had been replaced by the passive and apparently confused Noel Templeton Moore,⁴⁰ who was not even willing to challenge the Pasha's assertion that Abyssinians became Turkish subjects once they arrived in Jerusalem.⁴¹ The Earl of Clarendon had frequently

³⁹ Rev. Haussmann to Mr. Colquhuon, January 4, 1864, Correspondence, #388.

⁴⁰ Earl Russell to Moore, September 27, 1865, in Correspondence Respecting Abyssinians at Jerusalem. Great Britain. Parliament. Sessional Papers, 1867-1868, LXXII (3955-I), #21.

⁴¹ Moore to Earl Russell, September 28, 1863, Ibid., #20. Consul General Eldridge to the Earl of Clarendon, January 20, 1866, Ibid., #24.

ordered his Consul in Constantinople to complain to the Pasha about Egyptian treatment of Abyssinians in Massawa.⁴² Since 1859, this type of English protection of Abyssinians had also fallen into abeyance.⁴³ Walter Plowden had been appointed Consul to Abyssinia, but the new British Consul Duncan Cameron was appointed to Massawa, an area which Tewodros claimed but did not control. This appointment was strange, as there was little in Massawa but a few shacks and goods that passed through from the Abyssinian highlands.⁴⁴ The number of foreigners traveling with Tewodros increased dramatically in 1862-1863, but men like Cameron and Lejean did not adapt themselves to Tewodros' orders as Plowden and d'Abbadie had done before them. If Consul Cameron could be so reprimanded by a servant of his Queen, what authority could he possibly have to negotiate with an Emperor of Abyssinia?

Most books on the Abyssinian expedition look to later diplomatic maneuvers and political developments for the key to Eng-

⁴² Supra, Chapter III, footnote 64, p. 72.

⁴³ Vice Consul Walker, Report on Commerce at Massawa, June 5, 1863, Correspondence, #353.

⁴⁴ Sir H. Bulwer to Earl Russell, September 12, 1863, Correspondence, #367.

land's failure with Tewodros.⁴⁵ But the key to later diplomatic failure is in the change of interests that took place between 1860 and 1863. Tewodros had come to expect diplomatic intervention, an embassy, new knowledge, artisans, and increased commerce from Great Britain. When he was militarily ready to establish a closer relationship with England, he found his overtures ignored. There had been a steady flow of information between the two countries since the early 19th century and consistent diplomatic interaction since 1848. Tewodros was ready to make a more definite commitment, at a time that Her Majesty's government was preoccupied elsewhere. The fate of Tewodros' letter to Queen Victoria is indicative on this point. The Foreign Office received the letter on February 15, 1863. Someone (it was never determined who) in the Foreign Office read it, decided it did not require immediate action, and posted it off to the India Office. It sat on an undersecretary's desk there until it was quite urgently needed in May of 1864.⁴⁶ By then, Tewodros' imprisonment of Consul Cameron had reawakened British interest in relations with Abyssinia.

⁴⁵ cf. Charles T. Beke, The British Captives in Abyssinia (London: Longmans and Green, 1867). Hormuzd Rassam, Narrative of the British Mission to Theodore, King of Abyssinia; with Notices of the Countries Traversed from Massowah, through the Soodan, the Amhara, and back to Annesley Bay, from Magdala (2 vols; London: J. Murray, 1869). A. F. Shepherd, The Campaign in Abyssinia (Bombay: Times of India, 1868). Sir Clement R. Markham, A History of the Abyssinian Expedition, with a Chapter containing an Account of the Mission and Captivity of Mr. Rassam and his Companions (London: Macmillan & Co., 1869). Reprinted (Farnborough: Gregg International Publishers Ltd., 1970).

⁴⁶ Great Britain, Parliament. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates (3rd Series), CXC, December 5, 1867, (606).

After 1863, Tewodros began increasingly to distrust foreigners. Guillaume Lejean and Auguste Bardel both claimed to represent the French government, and each told stories of the other's unreliability.⁴⁷ Bardel warned Tewodros of British designs on Abyssinian territory,⁴⁸ and Cameron aroused fears of French plans to occupy the coast.⁴⁹ Egyptian armies had long been poised at Massawa and on their southern border.⁵⁰ Abyssinia was full of rumors that they were about to attack.⁵¹ Tewodros noticed a substantial increase in the number of Frenchmen visiting him and his Tigrean rivals, and there were rumors of a combined French, English, and Turkish invasion of his country.⁵² In 1863, a Belgian eccentric, Count de Bisson, received

⁴⁷ Stern, The Captive Missionary, p. 43.

⁴⁸ Stern to Mrs. Stern, April 1865, Correspondence, #498.

⁴⁹ Cameron to Earl Russell, October 31, 1862, Ibid., #343.

⁵⁰ Plowden to the Earl of Clarendon, February 5, 1857, Ibid., #271. Plowden to the Earl of Malmesbury, November 20, 1858, Ibid., #290.

⁵¹ Cameron to Earl Russell, March 20, 1862, Ibid., #333. Cameron to Earl Russell, May 27, 1862, Ibid., #339. Lejean, Théodore II, Le Nouvel Empire d'Abyssinie, pp. 152-153. Henry Dufton, Narrative of a Journey through Abyssinia in 1862-1863 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1867), reprinted (Westport, Connecticut: Negro Universities Press, 1970), pp. 185-186.

⁵² Stern to Mrs. Stern, April 1865, Correspondence, #498.

some help from Moosh Mahomet of Egypt in bringing forty poor but well-armed Europeans to establish a colony in the Hamasen. This colony failed to feed itself. The Count and his followers later withdrew, but Tewodros saw this as a foreshadowing of European intentions to take his land.⁵³ In the earlier years of his reign, Tewodros had sought out the company of Europeans who travelled in his kingdom.⁵⁴ He was surprisingly knowledgeable about events in the rest of the world⁵⁵ and deeply curious about Europe's more sophisticated methods of political and military organization.⁵⁶ In trying to understand European relations, Tewodros did not know which of the foreigners in his court to trust. He accepted Bardel's stories of imminent British invasion for some months and was all the more disillusioned with Europeans when he discovered that Bardel lied.⁵⁷ After the deaths of Bell and Plowden, there were no Europeans in his court whom Tewodros could trust.

⁵³ Rassam to Lt. Colonel Merewether, December 2, 1864, Ibid., Inclosure 2, #436.

⁵⁴ Plowden to the Earl of Clarendon, June 25, 1855, Ibid., #227.

⁵⁵ Henry Blanc, A Narrative of Captivity in Abyssinia (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1868), reprinted (London: Frank Cass, 1970), pp. 133-134. Dufton, Narrative of a Journey through Abyssinia, p. 152.

⁵⁶ Rassam to Lt. Col. Merewether, Merewether to the Earl of Clarendon, May 12, 1866, Correspondence, #593.

⁵⁷ Rev. Moses Margoliouth, Abyssinia: Its Past, Present and Probable Future; A Lecture With Notes and Appendices (London: W. Macintosh, 1866), pp. 41-42.

Tewodros' position in Abyssinia reached its apex at about the time he sent letters seeking treaties of friendship and commerce with Europe. He had succeeded in conquering the previously separate and perennially anarchical Semetic kingdoms of Amhara, Begemidir, Gojjam, Tigre, and Shoa and secured their loyalty by leaving local nobles a large measure of their former power.⁵⁸ His first campaign to subdue the Galla kingdoms in Wollo in 1859 was only temporarily successful. He became bogged down in wars in Wollo again in 1862 and 1864, and chiefs in the northern kingdoms led brief revolts against his authority. Tewodros' plans to both unite the north and subdue the Galla infiltrated south were beyond his military ability. Tewodros was not able to divide his army.⁵⁹ After 1864, Tewodros began to act with increasing irrationality toward his followers.⁶⁰ He looted and burned large sections of Abyssinia in revenge for real or imagined acts of disloyalty.⁶¹ As Tewodros' acts became cruel

⁵⁸ Kofi Darkwah, "Emperor Theodore II and the Kingdom of Shoa: 1855-1865," Journal of African History, X (1969), p. 111.

⁵⁹ Donald Crummey, "Tewodros as Reformer and Modernizer," Journal of African History, X (1969), p. 463.

⁶⁰ Donald Crummey, "The Violence of Tewodros," Journal of Ethiopian Studies, XI (1970), p. 123.

⁶¹ Walda Maryam, "History of King Theodore," trans. by H. Weld Blundell, Journal of the Royal African Society, VI (1906), pp. 14, 17-20, et passim.

and vengeful, more groups joined in rebellion against him. His military power steadily waned after mid-1864. Tewodros became more isolated from his own sources of power at the same time his crisis with Great Britain was growing to a climax.

Chapter V:
 Misunderstanding Magnified:
 Negotiations and the British Expedition:
 1864-1868

Tewodros may have imprisoned Consul Cameron for a variety of reasons. He accused Cameron of plotting an Anglo-Turkish alliance with the Egyptian forces in Bogos¹ and suspected that Cameron, like the Frenchman Auguste Bardel before him, had only pretended to have the authority to negotiate a treaty with Abyssinia.² Resident Europeans and Abyssinian specialists offered differing motives for Tewodros' sudden action. The missionary Martin Flad thought that Tewodros imprisoned Cameron to show his anger that the Consul had not brought a letter from Queen Victoria,³ and Henry Stern suspected that in his pride Tewodros wanted to avenge the British government's insult in not even acknowledging his letter to its Queen.⁴ Lt. Col. William Merewether hypothesized that Tewodros intended to use the captivity of their

¹ Rassam to Lt. Col. Merewether, May 12, 1866, in Correspondence Respecting Abyssinia 1846-1868, Great Britain. Parliament, Sessional Papers, Vol. 1867-1868, LXXII (3955-II), #593). Hereafter cited Correspondence.

² Mr. Stern's letter to the Missionary Society, August 9, 1865, in Rev. Moses Margoliouth, Abyssinia: Its Past, Present and Probable Future: A Lecture with notes and appendices (London: W. Macintosh, 1866), Appendix E, pp. 49-51.

³ Flad to Earl of Clarendon, July 10, 1866, Correspondence, #611.

⁴ Mr. Stern's letter to the Missionary Society, Op. cit., p. 51.

Consul to call Britain's attention to Abyssinian power and interest in a league against Islamic expansion.⁵ Dr. Charles Beke saw here, as he did in many other events in Abyssinia, the hand of French intrigue against British imperial authority.⁶ Several suspected that Tewodros imprisoned Cameron because he simply disliked Cameron personally. Whatever Tewodros' reasons for putting Duncan Cameron in chains in November 1863, this action provoked a new period in Anglo-Abyssinian relations. Dispatches from and about Abyssinia were now carefully read and responded to. Abyssinia, legendary and real, imposed itself upon Britain's image of the world.

Word of Cameron's imprisonment reached the Foreign Office through the Swiss missionary Rev. C. F. Haussmann on March 8, 1864.⁷ Earl Russell's reaction was immediate and straightforward. Russell, with his usual succinctness in dispatches regarding Abyssinia, wired the Consul General Robert Colquhuon in Alexandria to

⁵ Lt. Col. Merewether to Lord Stanley, February 15, 1867, Correspondence, #705.

⁶ Charles T. Beke, The British Captives in Abyssinia (2nd ed.; London: Longmans & Green, 1867), p. 82.

⁷ Rev. C. F. Haussmann to Consul Petherick, January 4, 1864, in Consul Petherick to Mr. Colquhuon, January 4, 1864, Correspondence, #388.

direct the British Resident in Aden to demand Cameron's release.⁸ The Political Resident in Aden from 1863 to 1867 was an efficient and well-informed officer of the Indian Army, Lt. Col. William Merewether. From March 1864 until the expedition into Abyssinia was well underway in November of 1867, he acted as intermediary in British efforts to free their Consul and other captive Europeans.

Consul Cameron got word to Her Majesty's Government that he would not be released until the Queen answered the letter Tewodros had sent in October 1862. He suggested that the government would have more success dealing with Tewodros tactfully than by using threats.⁹ After some scurrying around the Foreign Office, Tewodros' letter was found on the desk of an undersecretary in the India Office.¹⁰ On May 26, 1864, the Queen drafted the letter found in Appendix II. Merewether's First Political Assistant in Aden, Hormuzd Rassam, a Syrian by birth but "British by occupation,"¹¹ was charged with the assignment of delivering the Queen's

⁸ Russell to Robert Colquhuon, March 9, 1864, Ibid., #389.

⁹ Scribbled note arrived May 25, 1864, in Captain Desborough to Earl Russell, February 2, 1865, Inclosure, Ibid., #437.

¹⁰ Great Britain. Parliament. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates (3rd Series), CXC, December 5, 1867 (606).

¹¹ Mr. Layard in the House of Commons. Great Britain. Parliament. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates (3rd Series), CXC, December 7, 1867 (676).

answer to Tewodros and persuading him to release the Consul and the German missionaries, Aaron Stern and Henry Rosenthal, who were imprisoned with him.¹² Rassam arrived in Massawa July 23, 1864, armed with an Amharic translation of the Queen's letter and a thorough briefing of what the British remembered about Abyssinia.

Rassam's first act as Special Envoy to Abyssinia was to send a message to Tewodros requesting permission to enter his domains to present the Queen's letter. Rassam wrote three letters to Tewodros before he received the reply that he could come to Tewodros' court by way of Metemma.¹³ Tewodros had waited nearly two years before hearing any British response to his letter. Rassam waited one year in Massawa before being granted permission to bring Her Majesty's letter to Tewodros' court. Rassam received Tewodros' invitation to his court in August, 1865, when the rainy season and an outbreak of cholera made travelling dangerous. While waiting for the weather to change, Rassam travelled to Cairo to

¹² Instructions to be given Mr. Hormuzd Rassam, on his proceeding to Abyssinia. Inclosure in Mr. Hammond to Mr. Wedehouse, June 17, 1864, Correspondence, #410.

¹³ Mr. Rassam to Earl Russell, September 5, 1865, Ibid., #529.

purchase royal presents and receive further instructions. In Cairo he met Col. W. Gifford Palgrave whom the Foreign Office had sent out as an alternate envoy to Abyssinia.¹⁴ Reports had reached Massawa and Cairo that Cameron was released from his chains,¹⁵ so Palgrave and his mission turned back to London. By Fall of 1866, it appeared that the patient diplomacy of Rassam had a chance to succeed with Tewodros.

During Rassam's long wait in the heat of Massawa, the Foreign Office did its homework. In February 1865, Austen Layard replaced the letter originally given to Rassam, which did not answer Tewodros' inquiry about his embassy to England, with the letter in Appendix III, which did.¹⁶ Unfortunately, the Foreign Office forgot to have this second letter translated or to attach a translator to Rassam's mission. When Rassam finally reached Tewodros' court in January, 1866, the letter about which there had already been so much ado was translated into Arabic and then into Amharic by Abyssinian followers of the Emperor. One of these translators was the highly controversial Amhara Ato Samuel. Samuel

¹⁴ Earl Russell to W. Gifford Palgrave, July 21, 1865, Ibid., #506.

¹⁵ Mr. Rassam to Earl Russell, September 5, 1865, Ibid., #529.

¹⁶ Mr. Layard to Rassam, February 17, 1865, Ibid., #451.

had spent many years with Europeans abroad and in Abyssinia. He was sometimes the defender and confident of the captives, and at other times he was their most influential accuser.¹⁷ The British captives thought that the translation Tewodros received was not accurate.¹⁸

Rassam was given a gracious and elaborate reception by Tewodros,¹⁹ and months of alternately polite and vindictive negotiations began. Tewodros prefaced his promises to release the prisoners with recriminations of their and the British government's behavior.²⁰ Rassam and his companions Dr. Henry Blanc and Lt. William Prideaux of the Indian Army were given food, servants, relatively comfortable housing, and silver, and they were offered generous presents to take back to Queen Victoria.²¹

¹⁷ Lt. W. F. Prideaux, "The Mission and Captivity of Mr. Rassam and his Companions," Chapter III in Sir Clement R. Markham, A History of the Abyssinian Expedition (London: Macmillan & Co., 1869), reprinted (Farnborough: Gregg International Publishers, 1970), p. 97 et passim.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 99. Henry Blanc, A Narrative of Captivity in Abyssinia; with some account of the late Emperor Theodore, His Country and People (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1868), reprinted (London: Frank Cass, 1970), pp. 129-130.

¹⁹ Hormuzd Rassam, "Extracts of a letter of Mr. Rassam to Colonel Playfair," Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, X (1865-1866), p. 296-297.

²⁰ Rassam to Lt. Col. Merewether in Lt. Col. Merewether to the Earl of Clarendon, May 12, 1866, Correspondence, #593.

²¹ Extracts of Private Letters received from Mr. Rassam and the Others, April 18, 1866, Ibid., #616.

Rassam was impressed by Tewodros' interest in the ways of other countries and his knowledge of the events surrounding the Crimean and American wars.²² In March 1866, Tewodros released the captives Cameron, Stern, and Rosenthal into Rassam's care, and the group was given \$10,000 to begin their journey to England.²³ But before actually allowing Rassam and the captives to leave Abyssinia, Tewodros changed his mind. On April 17, 1866, he ordered Rassam and his associates Blanc and Prideaux to stay at their quarters in Korata and wrote a letter to Queen Victoria explaining that Rassam would remain in Abyssinia with him to discuss the extension of friendship between their two countries.²⁴ Tewodros sent the missionary Martin Flad to England with a specific list of what he wanted from friendship with Queen Victoria. He asked for two gunsmiths, an artillery officer, an iron founder, one or two boat builders, a cart and wheelwright, a steam engine, a turning bench, a distilling machine, a gun-caps manufacturing

²² Rassam to Lt. Col. Merewether in Lt. Col. Merewether to the Earl of Clarendon, May 12, 1866, Ibid., #593.

²³ Rassam to the Earl of Clarendon, April 18, 1866, Ibid., #609.

²⁴ King Theodore to Queen Victoria, April 17, 1868, Inclosure #3, in Rassam to the Earl of Clarendon, April 18, 1866, Ibid.

machine, a good telescope, a gunpowder mill, gunpowder and caps, carpets, a few double-barreled guns and pistols, two good regimental swords and other European curiosities.²⁵ Cameron, Stern, Rosenthal, and their associates were sent back to Rassam's quarters in Korata while Flad took Tewodros' letters asking for forgiveness and artisans to the Queen. Flad thought that Tewodros had planned connecting an illusory freeing of the captives with a letter of requests for the Queen since March.²⁶

The group of temporarily-released prisoners included Consul Cameron, the English wife of H. Rosenthal, two Irish assistants to Cameron, L. Kerans, and R. McKelvey, an Italian D. Pietro, the Frenchman A. Bardel, seven missionaries from the German states, and three children.²⁷ They stayed in relative comfort with Rassam, Blanc, and Prideaux until the entire group was moved to dismal quarters in Debra Tabor in July 1866. The captives blamed their reimprisonment on the anti-British story mongering of Auguste Bardel and the tactless private maneuvers of Dr. Charles Beke.²⁸

²⁵ King Theodore to Mr. Flad, n. d., Inclosure, Mr. Flad to Lord Stanley, July 17, 1866, Ibid., #617.

²⁶ Mr. Flad to the Earl of Clarendon, July 10, 1866, Ibid., #610.

²⁷ Inclosure #1. Rassam to the Earl of Clarendon, April 18, 1866, Ibid., #609.

²⁸ Flad to the Earl of Clarendon, July 10, 1866, Ibid., #611.

Flad and Merewether reported that Tewodros was using the captives in a desperate attempt to get British support against Egyptian forces poised to attack Northern Abyssinia.²⁹ Prompted by Flad's discussions in the Foreign Office, Her Majesty's Government recruited workmen in Britain and shipped them to Massawa. They sent Flad back with a letter informing Tewodros that the workmen would be sent to him from Massawa as soon as the captives were released.³⁰ A copy of this more politicly-worded letter is found in Appendix IV. Tewodros did not release the captives, and the workmen were sent back to England without having seen the Abyssinian highlands. Ignoring Tewodros in the early 1860's had not worked. Attempts at tactful bargaining between 1864 and 1867 did not work either.

During the negotiations with Tewodros, the Foreign Office faced increasing pressure at home. Missionary societies were angered by the neglect of Tewodros' letter to the Queen and horrified by Tewodros' continued imprisonment of missionaries.³¹ Mr. Purday of the English Missionary Society and Dr. Charles Beke

²⁹ Ibid. Flad to Lord Stanley, July 14, 1866, Ibid., #613. Lt. Col. Merewether to Lord Stanley, July 12, 1866, Ibid., #619.

³⁰ Memorandum for Mr. Flad on his Return to Abyssinia, October 6, 1866, Ibid., #663. Her Majesty to the King of Abyssinia, October 4, 1866, Ibid., #661. Copy in Appendix IV.

³¹ Margoliouth, Abyssinia: Its Past, Present and Probable Future, pp. 44-59. Extract from "The Intelligencer" for June 4, 1864, in Mr. Beecroft, M. P., to Mr. Layard, Inclosure #2, Correspondence, #403.

collected letters from the captives' families in England, and in March 1866 Beke set off for Abyssinia to appeal to Tewodros' compassion.³² Beke also wrote several memoranda to the Foreign Office and letters to the Times arguing that the Foreign Office underestimated the amount of French intrigue involved in England's troubles in Abyssinia and that it did not understand how to deal with Tewodros' barbaric nature.³³ The conservative Pall Mall Gazette leaked information about the captives in the Spring of 1865 and focused public attention on the British government's shoddy treatment of Tewodros.³⁴ It needed the government for heavily censoring material about negotiations and the conditions the captive missionaries were kept in.³⁵ After the supposed success of the Rassam mission in April 1866 turned out to be an illusion, criticism of the Foreign Office handling of the Abyssinian

³² The Foreign Office tried to discourage this mission which it thought might anger Tewodros and thus endanger the captives. Mr. Layard to Dr. Beke, July 21, 1865, Ibid., #501.

³³ Dr. Beke to Secretary of State, Ibid., #547, #717, #742, #745, #781, #783. Dr. Beke to Secretary of State, in Great Britain. Parliament. Sessional Papers, Vol. 1867-1868, XLIII (3955-IV). Papers Connected with the Abyssinian Expedition, #24, p. 57. Hereafter cited Abyssinian Papers.

³⁴ Thomas G. Marston, Britain's Imperial Role in the Red Sea Area, 1800-1868 (Hamden, Connecticut: The Shoestring Press, 1961), pp. 300-339.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 333-334.

question increased. The appropriateness of sending a low-ranking officer with "Eastern" background on such a sensitive diplomatic mission was called into question.³⁶

In the Summer of 1867, the focus of the British press changed. The conservative Pall Mall Gazette, and moderate Examiner, and the radical Reynold's Newspaper had all castigated the Foreign Office for its incompetence in dealing with Tewodros.³⁷ After the failure of Flad's attempt to free the captives with the promise of artisans, the press shifted its attention to the absurdity of a full-scale expedition to an "obscure and semibarbarous country"³⁸ to subdue a "capricious and variable barbarian."³⁹ Abyssinia was presented once again as the land of half-fantastical extremes⁴⁰ with fatal climate and diseases⁴¹ and a savage population⁴² about whom England knew almost nothing.⁴³ The years of

³⁶ Ibid., p. 332. Great Britain. Parliament. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates (3rd Series), CXC, December 7, 1867, (676).

³⁷ Richard K. P. Pankhurst, "Popular Opposition to the British Intervention against Emperor Tewodros of Ethiopia (1867-1868)," Ethiopian Observer, XVI, 3 (1973), pp. 141-144.

³⁸ Methodist Recorder, December 6, 1867, Ibid., p. 141.

³⁹ Times, November 18, 1867, Ibid., p. 142.

⁴⁰ "The Abyssinian Expedition," Quarterly Review, CCXLV (October 1867), pp. 268, 272, 275.

⁴¹ Reynold's Newspaper, September 8, 1867, Pankhurst, Op. cit., p. 145.

⁴² Examiner, September 21, 1867, Ibid., pp. 146-147.

⁴³ "The Abyssinian Expedition," Op. cit., p. 268. Times, November 19, 1867, Pankhurst, Op. cit., pp. 150-151.

careful travelogues and geographical investigation were forgotten in the excitement of an affront to British honor. The balanced assessments of Plowden, Cameron, and Flad were lost in an aura of public fear of another barbaric affront to the "civilized" nations.⁴⁴

After being informed by the India Office that an invasion of Abyssinia before the next rains was tactically possible,⁴⁵ the Foreign Office sent Tewodros an ultimatum: release the captives or face an invasion. There was no answer from Tewodros' camp.⁴⁶ The captives reported later that Tewodros, outwardly at least, appeared delighted with the prospect of an invasion.⁴⁷ Tewodros would not have English officers to train his men, but he would have the chance to see British troops in action.

The efficiency, organization, and apparent success of the British expedition into Abyssinia was impressive. The India Office

⁴⁴ Examiner, November 2, 1867, Ibid., p. 153.

⁴⁵ Telegram from the Government of Bombay to the Foreign Office, July 13, 1867, Abyssinian Papers, #3.

⁴⁶ Mr. Murray to Lt. Col. Merewether, July 10, 1867, Correspondence, #767. Lt. Col. Merewether to Lord Stanley, July 26, 1867, Ibid., #796. Lord Stanley to Lt. Col. Merewether, Ibid., #801.

⁴⁷ Blanc, A Narrative of Captivity in Abyssinia, p. 351.

placed Sir Seymour Fitzgerald of the Government of Bombay in charge of the expedition, and almost immediately nominated General Robert Napier, head of the Bombay Army, to lead it.⁴⁸ General Napier had made some preparatory arrangements even before the Cabinet decided on an invasion.⁴⁹ The Bombay Army worked with far more speed and thoroughness than the Foreign Office.

Napier shared the general English gentleman's picture of Abyssinia as a nearly-inaccessible land of mountains and chasms fraught with strange diseases and guarded by hords of steadfast warriors.⁵⁰ Even though he was advised that Tewodros' army had been increasingly in disorder since 1865,⁵¹ he immediately began planning for an army of 12,000 soldiers and 40,000 followers. Visions of British embarrassment in Afghanistan may have been dancing in his head as he made detailed plans for the transporta-

⁴⁸ Secretary of State for India to Government of Bombay, August 13, 1867, Abyssinian Papers, #28. Secretary of State for India to Government of Bombay, August 15, 1867, Ibid., #35.

⁴⁹ Telegram from the Governor of Bombay to the Secretary of State for India, July 28, 1867, Ibid., #11. Napier, H. D. Memoir of Field Marshal Lord Napier of Magdala (London: Arnold & Company, 1927), pp. 201-204.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Lt. Col. Merewether to Lord Stanley, May 17, 1867, Correspondence, #749. Letter of Dr. H. Blanc in Lt. Col. Merewether to Lord Stanley, May 24, 1867, Ibid., #750.

tion and supply of this large force. He knew that the Abyssinian countryside and people had been impoverished by years of civil war, the exactions of various local armies, and famine. Therefore, Napier wanted his army to be as self-sufficient as possible. He planned for a six-month expedition, hoping that his unwieldy force could march the 400 miles from Annesley Bay to Magdala, release the captives, and march back to Annesley Bay before the rains began in June.

Even before the British ultimatum had been decided upon, Merewether had been ordered to scout the markets of the Near East for animals to transport supplies for the expedition. All in all, 36,094 animals were brought into Abyssinia: 2,588 horses, 44 elephants, 17,678 mules and ponies, 5,735 camels, 1,759 donkeys, and 7,071 bullocks.⁵² They used 669 vessels for transport.⁵³ It cost the English government about £589,000 per month to pay for the expeditionary force.⁵⁴ The final cost to the Imperial

⁵² Appendix 2, in Report from the Select Committee on the Abyssinian War, Great Britain. Parliament. Sessional Papers, Vol. 1868-1869, VI (July 30, 1869), p. 143. Hereafter cited Select Committee Report.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Mr. Turner to the India Office, April 3, 1868. Estimate prepared by the India Office for the Abyssinian Expedition, 13 March 1868, Abyssinian Papers, #1. Mr. Turner to G. A. Hamilton gave the cost in May 1868 as £589,250 per month, Appendix 5, Select Committee Report, p. 152.

government was £6,612,000.⁵⁵ They paid for everything except the salaries of the 14,164 soldiers, which were paid by the Government of Bombay.⁵⁶

There was remarkably little grumbling about the amount of money engaged in the expedition. Disraeli avoided a statement of the estimated total cost⁵⁷ and the Cabinet politically waited for a Parliamentary recess before actually beginning the enterprise.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the Government knew from the beginning that the expedition would be expensive and was given an estimate of £600,000 per month or £5,000,000.⁵⁹ General Napier was given a free hand to plan and spend what he needed, even though the Governor of Bombay Seymour Fitzgerald, the Resident of Aden Lt. Col. William Merewether, and freelance experts like Dr. Beke and Dr. J. Lewis Krapf advised that a much smaller force would achieve the Government's objective of freeing the captives.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Appendix 1, Select Committee Report, p. 142.

⁵⁶ Mr. Turner to the India Office, Op. cit.

⁵⁷ Great Britain. Parliament. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates (3rd Series), CXC, November 26, 1867, (180).

⁵⁸ Parliamentary recess began August 12th and the expedition was ordered by the Cabinet August 14, 1867.

⁵⁹ For monthly estimate, Appendix 5, Select Committee Report, pp. 153-155. For Lord Fitzgerald's earlier estimates, Appendix 1, Ibid., pp. 139-141, and Appendix 6, Ibid., p. 155. Fitzgerald's personal correspondence had given Northcote high estimates back in February of 1867, Appendix 6, Ibid., p. 155.

⁶⁰ Memoranda in Correspondence. Mr. Murray to Lt. Col. Merewether, May 27, 1867, #738. Lt. Col. Merewether to Lord Stanley, May 24, 1867, #750. Sir. S. Fischer to Lord Stanley, July 13, 1867, #775.

Troops, supplies, and followers landed at Annesley Bay between October and December 1867. They dug their own wells, built piers (some of which still stand), and laid their own railway. Henry M. Stanley, of later fame, visited the encampment at Zula and sent back imaginative reports on how the Indian Army had transported its luxuries and social stratifications into Abyssinia.⁶¹ The British created a strange city in the midst of the desert, which was at the time the largest settlement on the East African coast north of Mombasa. The soldiers were mainly of the Bombay army, but some were recruited from the Bengali and Madras Presidencies. Of the fighting men, 4,114 were Europeans and 10,050 were "natives," i.e., from India. Forty-two thousand and twenty-six followers were landed at Annesley Bay to support the troops.⁶²

On January 25, 1868, the advanced guard of the army began its march of 380 miles from Senafe in the eastern hill lands of Abyssinia to Magdala. Only 4,044 of the soldiers (2,118 European and 1,926 Indian) ever reached Magdala, and only half of these, mostly the Europeans, met the Emperor Tewodros' troops in battle.⁶³ The rest of the soldiers were engaged in supply and

⁶¹ Henry M. Stanley, Coomassie and Magdala: The Story of Two British Campaigns in Africa (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1874), pp. 265-287.

⁶² Appendix 2, Select Committee Report, p. 143.

⁶³ Ibid.

support. There were two skirmishes: the Battle of Aroga on Easter Friday (April 10th) 1868 and the storming of Magdala the following Monday (April 13th). In both battles the Abyssinians were routed. Tewodros' troops charged with defective muskets and spears and suffered an estimated 1200 wounded and 700 dead.⁶⁴ The British tally was 20 wounded the first day, 10 wounded the last, and two dead.⁶⁵ Instead of killing the British captives as many had feared he would do, Tewodros shot himself when Magdala was taken. The Napier expedition was completely successful in achieving its military mission. The prisoners were freed unharmed. The army did not run out of supplies, have to skirmish with bands of warriors, or endure the rains. British honor was vindicated in suitably spectacular style.

Napier handled the political aspects of his mission with comparative tact. Before his troops advanced toward Magdala, he distributed proclamations assuring the Northern Abyssinians that his army was there to release the captives and would not ravage or occupy the country.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, only a small percentage of the Tigrean population of Northeastern Ethiopia and the Galla-

⁶⁴ Report of Napier to the Government, May 12, 1868, in Further Papers Connected with the Abyssinian Expedition: Selections from the Despatches of Sir Robert Napier. Great Britain. Parliament. Sessional Papers, Vol. 1867-1868(3955-V), #3, p. 746. Hereafter cited Further Abyssinian Papers: Selections.

⁶⁵ Report of Napier to the Government, Ibid., p. 748.

⁶⁶ Napier to the Secretary of State, February 2, 1868, in Further Abyssinian Papers: Selections, #23.

speaking peoples of the central plateau could read the Amharic proclamations distributed to them. Napier managed to arrange for local grain supplies through the Tigrean Ras Johannes. He acquired the friendly compliance of many nobles including Menelik of Shoa, Gobazah of the Lasta Galla, and Johannes of Tigre by his dignity and well-chosen gifts. Napier drafted a letter to Tewodros after the latter's defeat at Aroga in which Napier tried to offer what he considered honorable terms of surrender.⁶⁷ Tewodros preferred to surrender to his own silver-plated pistol.

The official British histories treat the Abyssinian expedition as one of the bright spots of Imperial history.⁶⁸ Writers who accompanied the expedition returned to tell a story of British subjects rescued unharmed from the clutches of a mad tyrant ruling a country distant and strange by an efficient military force that neither exploited nor colonized the country.⁶⁹ Sir Robert Napier is presented as an ethnically-conscious Sir Galahad

⁶⁷ Appendix C, Ibid., #52.

⁶⁸ A. W. Ward & G. P. Gooch, editors, The Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy, 1783-1919, III (Cambridge: University Press, 1923), pp. 16-18.

⁶⁹ cf. George A. Henty, March to Magdala (London: Tinsley, 1968). A. F. Shepherd, The Campaign in Abyssinia (Bombay: Times of India, 1868). Sir Clement R. Markham, A History of the Abyssinian Expedition (London: Macmillan & Co., 1869).

rescuing passive innocents. The expedition was also a fine showcase for the new Indian Army, reformed after the Indian mutinies of 1857-1858. There is, nevertheless, something out of proportion about the whole affair. Nearly seven million pounds, an army of more than 14,000 engaged for six months, a knighthood and a legend for Sir Robert, all to set free a British Consul and assorted European missionaries and adventurers.⁷⁰ It was an extraordinarily high price for England to pay for a bit of bungled diplomacy.

Looking at this period of Anglo-Abyssinian relations from another perspective, the expedition to Abyssinia was quite a victory for Tewodros. He had addressed the Queen of England as an equal, and five years later he had indeed managed to be treated as one. He gained nothing whatsoever from England by his kind treatment of Bell and Plowden and his interest in western commerce and technology. After he took hostages, he won from England the appearance, at least, of respect, promises for the artisans he wanted, and renewed British reprimands to the Pasha for invasions

⁷⁰ There were three Englishmen and one English woman on the list of 27 adults and 13 children released by Napier's troops. Some of the captives did not leave Abyssinia willingly. Napier to the Secretary of State for India, Further Abyssinian Papers: Selections, #1, Appendix G, p. 735.

of Abyssinian territory.⁷¹ Tewodros did not manage to send an embassy to England to view British methods of political and military organization, but he got second best. He had a chance to view an excellent example of both in his own country.

Tewodros had been too ambitious. He tried to unite the traditional Abyssinian kingdoms, to repel Egyptian invasions, and to conquer expanding Galla-speaking kingdoms in new areas as well. By late 1864, it was clear that he would fail. Without the Napier expedition and Tewodros' dramatic death before Magdala, Tewodros would have died just another petty Abyssinian tyrant and have been forgotten. As it is, he is remembered in Ethiopia as their first modern national hero.

The effects of muddled British diplomacy on Abyssinia were mixed. Anglo-French rivalry intensified and extended the already existing rivalries between Amhara, Tigre, and Shoa. European consuls, missionaries, and adventurers aroused hopes among Abyssinian leaders that their governments would not fulfill. Hope for European intervention may or may not have increased the number and the extent of battles Wube, Negussie, and Tewodros risked to establish their power. On the other hand, Britain's interest in Abyssinia was a consistent factor mitigating against Egyptian

⁷¹ Col. Stanton to Lord Stanley, July 23, 1866, Correspondence, #628.

invasion of northern Ethiopia in the mid-19th century. The guns and information that Napier left Johannes of Tigre were part of the matériel used by Johannes' troops to stop Muslim invasion in the Ethio-Egyptian War of 1875-1876. What does emerge clearly from this period of Anglo-Abyssinian relations is that the increased flow of information between England and Ethiopia tended to exacerbate rather than reduce their national conflict.

Appendix I

Sent November 1, 1862
Received February 12, 1863

King Theodore to Her Majesty the Queen of England

(translation from Amharic)

In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, one God in Trinity, chosen by God, King of Kings, Theodoros of Ethiopia, to Her Majesty Victoria, Queen of England. I hope your Majesty is in good health. By the power of God I am well. My fathers the Emperors having forgotten our Creator, handed over their kingdom to the Gallas and Turks. But God created me, lifted me out of the dust and restored this Empire to my rule. He endowed me with power, and enabled me to stand in the place of my fathers. By his power I drove away the Gallas. But for the Turks, I have told them to leave the land of my ancestors. They refuse. I am now going to wrestle with them. Mr. Plowden, and my late Grand Chamberlain, the Englishman Bell, used to tell me that there is a great Christian Queen, who loves all Christians. When they said to me this "We are able to make you known to her and to establish friendship between you," then in those times I was very glad. I gave them my love, thinking that I had found your Majesty's goodwill. All men are subject to death, and my enemies, thinking to injure me, killed these my friends. But by the power of God I have exterminated those enemies, not leaving one alive, though they were of my own family, that I may get, by the power of God, your friendship.

I was prevented by the Turks occupying the sea-coast from sending you an Embassy when I was in difficulty. Consul Cameron arrived with a letter and presents of friendship. By the power of God I was very glad hearing of your welfare, and being assured of your amity. I have received your presents and thank you much.

I fear that if I send Ambassadors with presents of amity by Consul Cameron they may be arrested by Turks.

And now I wish that you may arrange for the safe passage of my Ambassador everywhere on the road.

I wish to have an answer to this letter by Consul Cameron, and that he may conduct my Embassy to England. See how Islam oppresses the Christian!

from:
Great Britain. Parliament. Sessional Papers, Vol. 1867-1868, LXXII (3955-II), Correspondence Respecting Abyssinia 1846-1868, #343, Inclosure #3.

Appendix II

Sent May 26, 1864

Arrived Cairo June 16, 1864

Letter from Queen Victoria to the King of Abyssinia

Victoria, by the grace of God, Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Defender of the Faith &c &c to Theodore, King of Abyssinia, sendeth greeting.

We have duly received the letter which your Majesty delivered to our servant Cameron, and we have read with pleasure the friendly expressions which it conveys. We learn with satisfaction that your Majesty has successfully established your authority in the country over which you rule, and we trust you may long continue to administer its affairs in peace and in prosperity. We do not require from your Majesty the further evidence of your regard for ourselves which you propose to afford by sending a special embassy to our Court. The distance which separates Abyssinia from England is great, the difficulties and delays which would attend the journey of your Ambassadors might be hard to overcome; and much unavailing disappointment and regret might result from any accident which might befall your Ambassadors on the road. Our servant Cameron will convey to us your wishes, and he will assure you of our friendship and good will; we were glad to learn of by your letter that he had been duly received by your Majesty.

Accounts have, indeed, reached us of late that your Majesty had withdrawn your favour from our servant and had subjected him and many others in whom we feel an interest to treatment which is inconsistent with your professions. We trust that these accounts have originated in false representations on the part of persons ill-disposed towards your Majesty, and who may desire to produce an alternation in our feelings towards you. But your Majesty can give no better proof of the sincerity of the sentiments which you profess toward us, nor ensure more effectually a continuance of our friendships and goodwill, than by dismissing our servant and any other Europeans who may desire it, from your Court, and in affording them every assistance and protection on their journey to the destination to which they may desire to proceed. Our servant Cameron will than be able personally to explain to us your wishes in regard to any matters which you may desire to represent to us.

And not doubting that you will do this, we bid you farewell and recommend you to the protection of God.

Given at our Court at Balmoral, the 26th day of May in the year of our Lord 1864 and in the 27th year of our reign.

Your good friend

Victoria Rex

from:
Great Britain. Parliament. Sess-
ional Papers, Vol. 1867-1868, LXXII
(3955-II), Correspondence Respecting
Abyssinia 1846-1868, #404.

Appendix III

Sent to Rassam from F. O.
February 16, 1865
Received Theodore January 1866

Queen's Second Letter

Victoria, by the grace of God, Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, &c &c to Theodore, King of Abyssinia, sendeth greeting.

We have only duly received the letter which your Majesty delivered to our servant Cameron and We have read with pleasure the friendly expressions which it conveys. We learn with satisfaction that Your Majesty has successfully established your authority in the country over which you rule, and We trust that you may long continue to administer its affairs in peace and prosperity. Our servant Cameron has no doubt conveyed to you the assurances of Our friendship and goodwill and We are glad to learn by your letter that he had been duly received by your Majesty. Accounts have indeed reached Us of late that your Majesty had withdrawn your favour from Our servant. We trust, however, that these accounts have originated in false representations on the part of persons ill-disposed to your Majesty and who may desire to produce an alteration in Our feelings toward you. But your Majesty can give no better proof of the sincerity of the sentiments which you profess towards Us, nor insure more effectually a continuance of Our friendship and goodwill than by dismissing Our servant Cameron and any other Europeans who may desire it from your Court and by affording them every assistance and protection on their journey to the destination to which they desire to proceed. With the view of renewing to you the expression of Our friendship and of explaining to you Our wishes respecting Our servant Cameron, we have directed Our servant Hormuzd Rassam, First Assistant to the Political Resident at Aden to proceed to your residence and to deliver to you this Our Royal Letter. We have instructed him to inform your Majesty that if notwithstanding the long distance which separates our Dominions from those of your Majesty you should, after having permitted our servant Cameron and the other Europeans to take their leave and depart, desire to send an Embassy to this country that Embassy will be very well received by Us. And so, not doubting that you will receive Our servant Rassam in a favourable manner, and give entire credit to all that he shall say to you on our part, as well as comply with the requests which he is instructed to make to you, We recommend you to the protection of the Almighty.

Your good friend

Victoria Rex

from:
Great Britain. Parliament. Sess-
ional Papers, Vol. 1867-1868, LXXII
(3955-II), Correspondence Respecting
Abyssinia 1846-1868, #451.

Appendix IV

October 4, 1866
Received January 1867

Queen Victoria to the King of Abyssinia

[Abridged]

We will not disguise from your Majesty that we found it difficult to reconcile your assurances with the obstacles which were still opposed to the departure of our servants and the other Europeans from your country . . . we gave our sanction to the engagement in your Majesty's service of skilled workmen, such as you desired to employ in Abyssinia. These arrangements were made, and Flad was on the point of leaving England to rejoin your Majesty, when intelligence reached us that you had withdrawn from our servant Rassam the favour which you had hitherto shown him and had consigned him, together with our servant Cameron and the other Europeans, to prison. We have received no explanations from your Majesty of the grounds of a proceeding so inconsistent with the assurances and professions formerly made by your Majesty

Your Majesty must be aware that it is the sacred duty of Sovereigns scrupulously to fulfill engagements into which they may have entered; and that the persons of Ambassadors, such as our servant Rassam, and those by whom they are accompanied, are, among all nations assuming to be civilized, invariably held sacred. We have therefore the more difficulty in accounting for your Majesty's hesitation, and we invite your Majesty to prove to the World that you rightly understand your position among Sovereigns In the uncertainty we cannot but feel as to your Majesty's intentions, we cannot allow Flad to be the bearer of those tokens of goodwill which we purposed that he should convey to your Majesty. But in full confidence that the cloud which as darkened the friendship of our relations will pass away on the return of Flad, and desiring that you should as soon as possible thereafter receive the articles which we had proposed to send your Majesty in token of our friendship, we have given orders that those articles should be forthwith sent to Massawa, to be delivered, for conveyance to your Majesty's court, to the officers whom you may depute to conduct our servant Rassam, and our servant Cameron, and the other Europeans, so far on their way to our presence. And so we bid you heartily farewell.

Your good friend

Victoria Rex

from:
Great Britain. Parliament.
Sessional Papers, Vol. 1867-
1868, LXXII (3955-II), Corres-
pondence Respecting Abyssinia
1846-1868, #616

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Glossary of Ethiopian Names

ABUNA - Title of the head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. He was appointed by the Patriarch of Alexandria from the 3rd century A. D. until the reign of Haile Selassie.

ABUNA QUERILOS - Head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church from 1816 to 1830. He was an Egyptian, and the Ethiopian clergy resented his frequent drunkenness and gambling.

ABUNA SALAAMA - Replaced Querilos as head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in 1840. He was imprisoned at Magdala by Tewodros in 1865 and died in captivity there.

ABYSSINIA - Land of the "Habesh." Derived from the Arabic name for the Yemeni peoples who settled the northern Ethiopian plateau in a series of migrations beginning in the 3rd century B. C. It is the name most frequently used in the 19th century to refer to the area called Ethiopia today.

AXUM - The capital of a Sabeen empire centered in Eritrea and Tigre which was the forerunner of modern Ethiopia. The empire traded regularly with Arabia, Persia, and India, flourished until the 12th century, and left stele that are still admired today.

DETZMATCH - Title of the ruler of a district. The Amharic translates "commander of the gate." It is equivalent to the British title Earl.

DETZMATCH BIRRU - The son of Detzmatch Goshu. He challenged the power of Tewodros and led several rebellions against him.

DETZMATCH GOSHU - Ruler of Gojjam and the area south of Lake Tana in the 1830's and 1840's. He unsuccessfully opposed the growing power of Ras Ali.

DETZMATCH NEGUSSIE - Ruler of Semien in the late 1850's. He was the nephew of Ras Wube and attempted to unite all of northern Ethiopia against Tewodros. Tewodros defeated and killed Negussie in January, 1861.

ETHIOPIA - Land of "the burnt faces." Derived from the Greek, this name was used by Europeans indiscriminately to refer to any land south of the Sahara or inhabited by blacks. Since the late 19th century, its use has been restricted to the area conquered and controlled by Menelik II (1889-1912).

- GE'EZ - The classical language of Ethiopia from which Tigrinya and Amharic are derived. It is still used regularly in church liturgy and writing.
- JOHANNES - Governor of Tigre after the fall of Negussie. He aided Napier in 1868, was recognized as Emperor in 1872, and fell in battle against invading Madhist troops in 1884.
- MENELIK - The strong successor of Haile Malecot as governor of Shoa. He returned from imprisonment at Magdala in 1868 and reunited Shoa. After Johannes' death, he became Emperor. His campaigns into the southwest in the late 19th and early 20th centuries expanded Ethiopian jurisdiction by nearly a third.
- NEGUS - King. The highest title of the Ethiopian nobility. It indicates a ruler who controls several provinces.
- NEGUSA NAGAST - This title translates "King of Kings." It is equivalent to Emperor and can only be bestowed by the Abuna.
- RAS - Governor of a province. The title is second in rank only to that of Negus and is similar to the English title Duke.
- RAS ALI - Governor of Amhara in the 1840's and 1850's. He controlled most of eastern Ethiopia until he was defeated by his protégé Tewodros in 1855.
- RAS HAILE MALECOT - Son of Sahle Selassie. He ruled Shoa from 1847 to 1855. He died just before a decisive battle with Tewodros' conquering troops.
- RAS SABAGADIS - Originally the ruler of Semien, he gained control over Tigre from 1822 to 1831. He was the friend and protector of William Coffin.
- RAS SAHLE SELASSIE - Governor of the relatively independent province of Shoa from 1813 to 1847. He was respected for his strong and just rule by both Ethiopians and Europeans.
- RAS WALDE SELASSIE - Ruler of Tigre in the early 1800's. He met with the Salt expedition, but was more interested in British artifacts than in establishing commercial or diplomatic connections with England.
- RAS WUBE - Governor of Tigre in the 1840's and 1850's. He was Tewodros' most powerful rival.