

The Diversion of Abbay/ Nile¹ by Ethiopian Emperors: Claims and Disclaims

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Abstract: After Egypt occupied by the Arabs in 641, the relationship between Christian Ethiopia and Muslim Egypt was quarrelsome. Successive Muslim leaders of Egypt continue to convert Christians forcefully and this kind of maltreatment against Copts worsens the relationship between the two countries. In retaliation, Ethiopian Emperors took different measures against Muslim leaders. Sometimes they have invaded Upper Egypt and at another time diverted the course of Abbay so as to compel Egyptian Sultans with their request. Accordingly, Egyptians had been encountered a terrible famine because of the diversion of Abbay, to mention some, from 963 to 969, 1066 to 1072 and, 1199 to 1202. Regrettably, however, the ability of Ethiopian Emperors to divert the course of Abbay in order to stop the persecution of Copts considered as a myth. This paper attempted to examine medieval sources of Egypt and Ethiopia and offers substantial evidence as Abbay was diverted by Ethiopian Emperors.

Key words: Abbay, Copts, Diversion, Famine, Relationship;

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¹ In this paper I used the name Abbay instead of Nile because the name Nile is derived from the Geez Nil to mean blue in colour and parallel historically with the biblical Gihon from time immemorial up to nineteenth century. The Ethiopian great river has three names, Abbay (Abbawi), Geyon and Nil and these names signify the greatness of the river, its flow and colour respectively. See, Edward Ullendorff, *Ethiopia and the Bible*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006rpt), P.1, Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube (eds.), *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklik, NY, 2000), P. 143, Yared Shiferaw, *Mätsehafä Säwasew Märeho Mätsaheffet* (A Book of Grammar and a Guide to Books), (Bahr Dar: St. George Printing Press, 1997, E.C.), P.349, Taye Gebremariam, *Mätsehafä Säwasew* (A Book of Grammar), (Asmara: Il Poliographique P. L. C., 1938), P.100
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1. Introduction

In the relationship between the two countries two things can be considered as factors. This includes Christianity and Abbay. Christianity was one of the factors that united Egypt and Ethiopia and Abbay was another factor that played a predominant role in the relations between the two Countries. Abbay was instrumental for Ethiopian Emperors and whenever Copts persecuted by the Muslim rulers of Egypt, or when they failed to send annual tribute, several Ethiopian Emperors have sent threatening letters either to block the flow of Abbay or invade Egypt. Thus, Egyptians were under threat from Ethiopia for about a millennium and hence Abbay remained as a source of conflict, mistrust and fear between Ethiopia and Egypt and this is supported by medieval sources of both Ethiopia and Egypt. Unfortunately, recent writers dismissed these medieval sources as a myth.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

There are two narratives to be addressed in this paper. Medieval European travelers relate us that Ethiopian Emperors were powerful and able to divert the course of Abbay and this is in line with sources available both in Ethiopia and Egypt. On the contrary, later writers including the late professor Richard Pankhurst and some others flatly rejected these sources as a myth. Accordingly, almost all research papers, MA Theses and PhD dissertations produced on the Abbay Basin are in line with these writers. The main objective of this paper is to address this gap and show that:

The course of Abbay had been diverted at Khartoum and Upper Egypt was invaded several times by Ethiopian Emperors

The occurrence of famine in Egypt for seven or nine consecutive years was not associated with the drought in Ethiopia but by the diversion of Abbay.

2. Methodology

Method of data gathering and analysis is focused on literature review. Literature review includes both primary and secondary sources. I have consulted primary sources available at Institute of Ethiopian Studies and Ethiopian National Archives and Library Agency. Concerning secondary sources, I have examined both published and unpublished materials including research papers, MA Theses, PhD dissertations, books and internet sources exhaustively.

3. Results and Discussion

Results expected from this discussion: Besides the main finding, when the paper gets publication, it will inspire researchers to conduct their own researches as to whether Sudan was part of the Ethiopian empire or not. Besides, it will also serve as a source of information towards addressing similar issues.

River Abbay was a diplomatic weapon in the historic relations between Ethiopia and Egypt and even today it remains an overriding issue in the relationship between the two countries. The issue of Abbay, I think, will continue up until doomsday. This is due to the fact that while Ethiopia is the origin of more than 86 percent of the Nile waters, Egypt is dependent on it. Regarding the bounty of Egypt and where it emanates Penn states that 'The Nile is a text book example of an exotic stream, one that flows in a dry region and receives water somewhere else, in this case from the Blue Nile.'² Harris, the leader of British embassy to Ethiopia, gave similar expression. He states that 'Abyssinia holds in her Christian hands the inexhaustible riches of Egypt.'³ The dependency of Egypt on the Abbay further elaborated by Moorehead as:

The Blue Nile brings life down from the mountains to the desert and the delta. Without it the people of Egypt and of a great part of the Sudan could not exist for a single day. Even 'low Nile'- an annual flood that has been less than average is a disaster. This has always been so and is likely to continue forever.'⁴

As stated above clearly, due to exceptionally low flow of Abbay, Egypt had been affected by terrible famines repeatedly. Besides these recurrent famines, there were also repeated invasions made by Ethiopian Emperors against Egypt. The first invasion, after the latter occupied by the Arabs, recorded in the eighth century when Abba Michael I (743-767 A.D.) was Archbishop. At this time Egyptian Christians had faced a very great tribulation and as a result many of them fled from the land of Egypt and twenty-four thousand others denied Jesus Christ.⁵ Besides, Abba Michael, was imprisoned by the last Umayyad Khalifa ,al-Wallid II, and when the Ethiopian Emperor heard the news of his imprisonment, he was filled with indignation and invaded Upper Egypt as far as al-Fustat and the caliph realized the invasion happened for the sake of the Abba Michael, then he released the patriarch from prison and implored him as follows:

² James R. Penn, *Rivers of the World: A Social, Geographical and Environmental Source Book*, (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2001), P.28.

³ W. Cornwallis Harris, *Highlands of Ethiopia*, (New York: J. Winchester New World Press, 1843), P.137.

⁴ Alan Moorehead, *The Blue Nile*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc. 1962, PP. 18-19.

⁵ E.A. Wallis Budge (trans.), *Synaxarium: The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church*, (Garland, USA: The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Debre Meheret St. Michael Church, ND), P.406.

Then the king of Egypt entreated this father to write a letter to the king of Ethiopia, order him to return to his own country. And this father sent a letter to the king of Ethiopia wherein he invoked blessings upon him, and upon his governors and generals, and all his army, and he said unto him “Behold God hath delivered us from the bonds of captivity through thee. And now return to thy country in safety and peace, and God reward thee in the kingdom of heaven for the toil which thou hast undertaken for me.” When the king of Ethiopia had read the letter sent to him by this father Archbishop Abba Michael, he rose up quickly and returned to his country in peace.⁶

This invasion was retaliation for the persecution of Copts.

In 963 (A.H. 352), as recorded by Muslim Historians, Egypt was afflicted with a terrible famine and it lasted for seven years, or as some say for nine years. And as a result, about 600,000 Egyptians perished by this famine in Fustat and neighbouring towns of Babylon and Misr alone.⁷ Bianquis relates us that Egypt had never experienced this kind of famine caused by a series of low Nile floods from 963 to 969.⁸ In 971 (A.H.361) after a long period of starvation, Abbay rose to its full height and this happened because the new dynasty relieved the Christians from taxes, enforced public order and safety.⁹ As stated above, it appears that the famine began in 963 caused by the diversion of Abbay. Because, in 956 and in 967 Egypt was invaded by Ethiopians, albeit some sources called Nubians.¹⁰ The contemporary Ethiopian Emperor, Janseum (965-1005), who considered himself as the guardian of Copts, remembered by his menacing letter against the Fatimid caliph. The reason why he sent an ultimatum was that an Egyptian bishop, who was nominated as the metropolitan of Ethiopia, had been promised to the Fatimid caliph to pursue a pro-Muslim policy in Ethiopia. And when he attempted to implement his promise in building mosques secretly, the mosques demolished and the bishop jailed. In reprisal, the Fatimid caliph sent a threatening letter to destroy the churches of Egypt, if Janseum failed to rebuild mosques and in return, the Ethiopian Emperor replied that, if any church in Egypt to be destroyed, he would himself dismantle the Ka’aba in Mecca.¹¹ The cause of famine from 963 to 969 indicates as Abbay was diverted by Janseum’s predecessor.

⁶ Budge, *Synaxarium*, P.407

⁷ E. L. Butcher, *The Story of the Church of Egypt, Being an Outline of the History of the Egyptians Under their Successive Masters from the Roman Conquest Until Now*, (London: Smith, Elder & Co., Vol. I, 1897), P.497

⁸ Thierry Bianquis, “*Autonomous Egypt from Ibn Tulun to Kafur, 868-969*”, in Carl F. Petry (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Egypt: Islamic Egypt, 640-1517*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Vol. I, 2008), P.117

⁹ Butcher, Vol. II, P.8

¹⁰ Ibid. Vol. I, PP.496-497.

¹¹ Abba Gorgoryos, *Ya Ityopia Orthodox Tawahedo Beta krestian Tarik (A History of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawahedo Church)*, (Addis Ababa: Tensae Zagubae Printing Press, 1993, 4th ed.), P.32

There was another terrible famine in Egypt, which lasted for seven years (1066-1072). Regarding this famine, Lane-Poole relates us that “Cairo and Fustat were cut off from supplies, and a terrible famine which had begun with the low Nile of 1065, and lasted unbroken for seven years (1066-1072), brought the country to the utmost pitch of misery.”¹² This disastrous famine destroyed two-thirds of Cairo.¹³ This famine was called al-shidda (the calamity) by medieval chroniclers.¹⁴ A thirteenth century writer, Imam al-Dahabi, compared this famine with that of Joseph’s time. Al-Dahabi states that during the reign of al-Mustansir there was a famine in Egypt, the like of which had never seen since the time of Joseph and that famine continued for seven years so that multitudes devoured each other.¹⁵ Similarly, the harshness of the famine that devastated Egypt in the eleventh century described as:

In Cairo, Fostat, and Babylon, a loaf of bread was sold for fifteen dinars, one egg for a dinar, a cat for three dinars, a dog for five. Even the supply of dogs and cats ran short, and one man was convicted of driving a regular trade in human flesh. He decoyed women and children (no doubt with offers of food), strangled them, and exposed the flesh for sale. All the immense establishment of horses, mules and camels belonging to the Kaliph had been eaten, except three horses; the ornaments of the tombs of his ancestors and the wardrobes of his women had been sold for bread.¹⁶

Anyone who examines the causes of recurrent famines in Egypt, it is certain that they were all directly associated what was happened in Ethiopia-either by a severe drought or else by the diversion of Abbay. A famine caused by the failure of the flow of Abbay and which is recorded in one of Egyptian inscriptions described as:

For seven years the Nile has not risen. There is no grain, the fields are dry, no man buries his neighbour, everyone flees, to return no more, the children weep, the young men faint, the old men wither. Their legs have lost their strength; with folded arms they crouch on the ground.¹⁷

It is evident that the cause of famine in Egypt cannot be a failure of local rainfall because Egypt is dependent on the annual flood of Abbay. Thus, the low flow of Abbay was caused either by the diversion of Abbay or by a severe drought in Ethiopia. It is apparent that the volume of Abbay will be reduced by drought and it is also true that drought appears within

¹² Stanley Lane-Poole, *A History of Egypt in the Middle Ages*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Son, Vol. VI, 1901), P. 146.

¹³ Wladyslaw B. Kubiak, *Al-Fustat: Its Foundation and Early Urban Development*, (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1987), P.12

¹⁴ Paula A. Sanders, “*The Fatimid State, 969-1171*,” in Carl F. Petry(ed.), *The Cambridge History of Egypt: Islamic Egypt, 640-1517*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Vol. I, 2008), P.152

¹⁵ H.S. Jarrett (trans.), *History of the Caliphs*, (Calcutta: J. W. Thomas Baptist Mission Press, 1881), P. 439

¹⁶ Butcher, Vol.II, P.51

¹⁷ Mary Lindsay(trans.) *The Nile: The Life-Story of a River*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd,1960) P.439

certain part of Ethiopia occasionally but there no historical evidence as Egypt afflicted by famine due to the prevalence of drought in Ethiopia. For instance, in 1913, before dams constructed and in 1984 Ethiopia had been encountered a severe drought and hence the annual discharge of Abbay reduced from its highest level 150 billion cubic metres of water to its lowest 42 billion cubic metres but famine was not recorded in Egypt.¹⁸ The lowest flow of Abbay in 1913 affected only the cotton crop of Egypt.¹⁹ As stated above, all the famines recorded in Egypt were associated with the low flow of Abbay and if the lowest flow of Abbay in 1913 does not affect any food crop in Egypt, so any severe drought happened in Ethiopia cannot be a cause of famine in Egypt.

The cause of famine in Egypt in the period 1066-1072, for example, caused by the low flow of Abbay and when one examines whether it caused by the diversion of Abbay, or not, there are ample sources that signify as Abbay was diverted into the Red Sea. The news for the diversion of Abbay was widely disseminated and this stated aptly by Donzel as 'For at least 600 years, perhaps even a millennium, Arab, Ethiopia and European sources mention that the Ethiopians were able to or thought to be able, to block off the Blue Nile, or divert its course, so as to starve Egypt and bring Islam to its knees.'²⁰ It is evident that Abbay has been diverted by an Ethiopian Emperor in the eleventh century and this confirmed by the subsequent Coptic writer, Jiris al-Makin. Al-Makin reports that the course of Abbay had been turned by Ethiopians and later the flow of the river restored to its old bed through mediation.²¹ The mediation made by Abba Mikhail IV to restore the flow of Abbay reported as:

It then happened that one year the Nile inundation was low. The caliph al-Musta 'li, who had succeeded al-Mustansir- knowing that the sources of the eternal river lay in Ethiopia, requested Abba Mikhail IV to go there, meet the king, present him with sumptuous gifts, and entreat him to find the means by which the Nile waters could readily reach the desired amount. Abba Mikhail was only too glad to perform this service. He was welcomed in Ethiopia with joy. The king ordered his men to remove all the impediments in the course of the river. This led to a rise of over five feet during one night. St. Mark's successor spent some time in Ethiopia, and consolidated the bonds of

¹⁸ Terje Oestigaard, *Water Scarcity and Food Security along the Nile: Politics, Population Increase and Climate Change*, (Uppsala: Nordiska Africainstitutet, 2012), P.48

¹⁹ Lindsay(trans.), *The Nile*, P.376

²⁰ Emery Van Donzel, *The Legend of the Blue Nile in Europe*, in Haggai Erlich &Israel Gershoni(eds.), *The Nile: Histories, Cultures, Myths*, (Boulder &London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.,2000), P.121

²¹ E.A. Wallis Budge, *A History of Ethiopia, Nubia and Abyssinia*, (Oosterhout N.B.-The Netherlands: Anthropological Publications, Vol., 1970), P.279

friendship between the caliph of Egypt and the king of Ethiopia, which both greatly appreciated.²²

Similarly, Makrizi, a well-known Egyptian writer (1364-1442), relates that the seven years famine in Egypt was resolved with the intervention of the patriarch, who had been sent to Ethiopia. However, Makrizi failed to tell us what looks like the mediation between the patriarch and the Ethiopian Emperor. He merely states that 'Then the king ordered a certain enclosed valley whence the Nile flows in to Egypt to be opened. No sooner was this done than the Nile rose three yards in one night, and went on rising until it overflowed the country and the crops.'²³ As stated above plainly, there is no valid reason to doubt that in the eleventh century Abbay was diverted and the motive behind Ethiopian Emperor to divert the course of Abbay against Egypt seems retaliation to the persecution of Christians. During the reign of al-Mustansir, Egyptian Christians suffered a lot. For instance, in 1057 - al-Yazuri, Wazir of al-Mustansir, closed churches, imprisoned the patriarch and tortured three bishops to death.²⁴ According to Abba Gorgoryos, the diversion of Abbay in to the Red Sea was made by Emperor Yimrihane-Kristos(1084-1093), an Ethiopian Emperor from Zagwe Dynasty, but the period he claimed do not match with the period of 1066-1072 .²⁵

During the reign of Lalibela (1167-1207), Egypt again devastated by a severe famine from 1180-1182 and from 1199-1201. The famine that started in 1180 resolved in 1182 when Salah al-Din, the famous Egyptian ruler, came to power. While Salah al-Din was in power, it seems that the situation for Copt Christians was safe. In 1189 Salah al-Din restored a number of churches to Ethiopian monks in Jerusalem.²⁶ After he died in 1193, his successor began to persecute Egyptian Christians. As a result, multitudes immigrated in to Ethiopia and other parts of the world. Concerning the migration of Egyptian Christians, Malaty states that with the permission of the Nubian king, Lalibela accepted 10,000 Copts to refuge them in present day Sudan.²⁷ To revenge the persecution of Copts, Ethiopians, albeit some sources erroneously called Nubians, led by Lalibela invaded Upper Egypt and diverted Abbay. In

²² El Masri, P.137. The period 1066-1072 falls under the fifth Fatimid caliph of Egypt, al-Mustansir (1036-1094) and during this time Abba Mikhail IV was not patriarch of Egypt, but a local bishop. It was from 1092-1102 that Abba Mikhail became patriarch of Copt Christians.

²³ Butcher, Vol. II, P. 73

²⁴ Mark N. Swanson, *The Coptic Papacy in Islamic Egypt (641-1517)*, (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010), P.62

²⁵ Abba Gorgoryos, P.35

²⁶ Tadesse, "*Ethiopia, The Red Sea, and the Horn*" in Roland Oliver (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa, From c.1050 to c.1600*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Vol. 3, 2008), P.114

²⁷ Tadros Y. Malaty, *Introduction to the Coptic Orthodox Church*, (Alexandria: St. George's Coptic Orthodox Church, 1993), P.154

consequence, the flow of Abbay became very low and the canals built for irrigation completely dried for about three years, 596-598 A. H. (1199-1200 A. D.). The famine from 595-598/1199-1202, as Chamberlain claims, described as the second worst since the conquest of Egypt by Fatimid dynasty.²⁸ The retaliation of Emperor Lalibela was unbearable for Egyptians and this depicted by the contemporary writer, Abd el-Latif, as:

The wretched people abandoned their desolate fields and crowded in to the towns along the river; there was no reserve of money or food to fall back upon, and the poorer classes almost from the beginning had to subsist on the flesh of dogs, of horses, of those men and women who had died before them of starvation. Some of them went still further and devoured their own children in their extremity; some set up a regular trade in human flesh, decoying women and children with offers of food, murdering them, and exposing the flesh as meat for sale.²⁹

Regarding this diversion, Taye states that Lalibela dug a canal at Khartoum in order to deflect the flow of Abbay in to the Sahara.³⁰ Similarly, Tekle-Iyesus elaborated the campaign and its effect as “፩ ጊዜ በዘመኑ የአማራን ጦር ሰብስቦ ወደ ምስር እስላም ዘመተ፤ እስላሞቹም ሸሹ። ደግሞ የምስር ሰዎች ያለ ዓባይ ውሃ የላቸውም ሲል ዓባይን በሌላ ሥፍራ መግደል ቆፍሮ በስናር በረሃ ሰደደው። ከዚህ በኋላ የምስር ሰዎች ሲቸግራቸው ጊዜ ግብር አመጡለት።”³¹

(Having gathered Amhara fighters, once upon a time Lalibela has made a campaign against Muslim Egyptians, then the Muslims retreated. Again, when he realized that Egyptians have no water without Abbay, Lalibela diverted Abbay into the Sennar desert and here after the people of Egypt suffered (with lack of water) and hence they brought a tribute to him.)

Some European travellers claimed that the source area of Abbay was not under the control of Emperor Lalibela but their claim is groundless. The hagiographer of Emperor Näakuto lä Ab (1207-1247), successor of Lalibela, confirms that Abbay was diverted by Lalibela for three years and three months. The scribe states as “ወእቀሞ ለማየ ተከዚ ቺ ዓመተ ወቺ አውራጋ በኃይለ ጸሎቱ ወኃጥኡ ማየ ዘይሰትዩ።”³²

²⁸ Michael Chamberlain, “Crusader Era and the Ayyubid Dynasty,” in Carl F. Petry (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Egypt: Islamic Egypt, 640-1517*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Vol. I, 2008), P.221.

²⁹ Butcher, Vol. II, PP. 117-118

³⁰ Taye Gebre-Mariam, *Ya Ityopia Hezeb Tarik (A History of the People of Ethiopia)*, (Addis Ababa: Central Printing Press, 1964), P.50.

³¹ Sergew Gelaw (ed.), *Ya Ityopia Tarik (A History of Ethiopia)*, (Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press, 2002 E.C.), P.26.

³² Gädelä Näakuto läAb (A Hagiography of Emperor Näakuto läAb), Institute of Ethiopian Studies, MS. 55. P.73.

(By the power of his (Lalibela) prayer the emperor had stopped the flow of Tekeze for three years and three months and they (Egyptians) suffered with lack of drinking water).

Here the scribe seems ignorant as Tekeze is tributary of Abbay. On other hand, the effect of diversion reported as “ወይቤሉ እሙንቱ ሰብአ ግብጻዊያን ቀዲሙ ነበርን በኢየሱምሮትነ ከሊኣነ አምኝ መንግስትከ የምኒ አምጸኝነ አምኝ መንግስትከ ከመ አእመርነ ኃይለ ጸሎትከ ወቀሰፈነ ረኅብ ወምንዳቤ፡”³³

(The Egyptians said that due to our ignorance we have been reluctant to bring your tribute but today we have brought because we understood that your prayer has made us suffered with starvation).

There is no doubt that Abbay was diverted by Emperor Lalibela and traces of these diversion discovered by the British explorer, Charles Beke.³⁴

The use of Abbay as a bargaining chip continued in the medieval period. In 1321, anti-Christian riot led the destruction of sixty churches in Egypt and so many Copts converted into Islam.³⁵ In the year 1325, when the violence of the persecution of Copts had abated, Emperor Amdatseyon (1314-1344), sent emissaries with a threatening letter to Cairo. The content of the letter stated as ‘Nasr received a letter from the Emperor of Abyssinia, commanding him to rebuild the churches which he had thrown down by the Moslems, and to treat the Christians better, or he would thrown down every mosque in the kingdom of Abyssinia and intercept the course of Nile.’³⁶ Concerning the mighty and prosperity of the Ethiopian Emperor, Jordanus, a contemporary of Amdatseyon and who was in northern Ethiopia reported as:

The lord of that land I believe to be more potent than any man in the world, and richer in gold and silver and in precious stones. He is said to have under him fifty-two kings, rich and potent. He ruleth over all his neighbours towards the south and the west.... To that emperor the Soldan of Babylon giveth every year 500,000 ducats of tribute as ‘tis said.³⁷

³³ Ibid. P. 74.

³⁴ Charles F. Rey, *Unconquered Abyssinia: As It Is To-day*, (London: Seeley, Service & Co. Ltd, 1923), P.89

³⁵ Swanson, P. 102.

³⁶ Butcher, Vol. II, P.201

³⁷ Henry Yule(trans.), *The Wonders of the East*, (London: Hakluyt Society, 1863), P.46

Similarly, Kaula states that ‘The king would block the river’s flow if the persecutions were not stopped. Moreover, he demanded tribute, and this the Egyptians paid regularly until about 1400.’³⁸ Nasr, the Egyptian Sultan, complied for the demand of Amdatseyon favourably. Regarding this, Erlich tells us that “Al-Nasir Muhammad ordered the Coptic Patriarch to send a letter of appeasement to Amdatsyon. ‘The Ethiopians claim they were the guardians of the Nile’, wrote the contemporary Egyptian historian Fadlallah ibn al-Umari.”³⁹ This external intervention by Amdatseyon on behalf of Copts was quite efficacious. His intervention appreciated as:

His [Amdatseyon] threatening power was strong because he menaced on the one hand to deflect the course of the Nile, and on the other to retaliate against Abyssinian Muslims. By posing these threats, he was able to come to terms with Egypt’s Sultan to relieve the Copts to some degree of the pressures and hardships they had been suffering.⁴⁰

The tension between the Muslim Egypt and Christian Ethiopia continued during the reign of Sayfa Ar’ed also known as Newayä Krestos and Constantine (1344-1372). During the reign of Sayfa Ar’ed many Copts forced to embrace Islam and churches pulled down and mosques built instead. For instance, in Kalioub, an Egyptian town in Upper Egypt, more than four hundred and fifty Christians became Muslims in a single day.⁴¹ Furthermore, the Sultan dismissed all the Copts from government offices and above all Abba Mark IV (1348-1363), patriarch of the Copts, thrown into prison and treated cruelly. According to Butcher and el-Masri, Abba Mark released from prison with the involvement of a Nubian king by seizing all the Muslim merchants in his own territory as hostages until the sultan complied with his request.⁴² On the other hand, the Ethiopian Synaxarium relates us the cause of Abba Mark’s imprisonment differently as:

And the king of Mesr (Cairo), a Hanafite, forced him [Abba Mark] to send an embassy to the king of Ethiopia, who was in submission to him, concerning the Muslims who dwelt under his rule. Now there was in his days a king, whose name was Sayfa Ar’ed, and he was also named Constantine, and he slew many of the Muslims who rebelled against him, and some of them he drove out of his country and they went to the king of Mesr (Cairo) and took refuge with him. And they said, “The king of Ethiopia hath made an end of the Muslims; some of them he hath slain, and some of them he hath made Christians.” When the king of Mesr (Cairo) heard

³⁸ Edna Mason Kaula, *The Land and People of Ethiopia*, (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1972), P.125

³⁹ Haggai Erlich, *The Cross and the River: Ethiopia, Egypt and the Nile*, (Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2002), P.43.

⁴⁰ El-Masri, Book III, P.190.

⁴¹ Butcher, Vol. II, P.211.

⁴² Ibid., El-Masri, Book III, P.188.

these words, his zeal for his religion rose up, and he compelled the archbishop to dispatch elders to [Ethiopia], and he told him that he held him as hostage for the obedience of the king of Ethiopia and the safety of other Muslims who were in his kingdom.⁴³

As a result Abba Mark sent two honourable bishops, Abba John and Abba Cyril, to Ethiopia and Sayfa Ar'ed received them with a great honour but he never allowed returning back to their homeland.⁴⁴ However, there is no an indicative whether Emperor Sayfa Ar'ed complied with the request of Abba Mark and released from prison in consequence. In 1363, patriarch Mark died and in the following year Egypt hit by a terrible famine but due to scanty of sources, it is impossible to ascertain it whether this famine was a revenge of Sayfa Ar'ed or not.⁴⁵

During the reign of Newayä Maryam, also known as Wedem Asfaré or Germa Asfaré (1372-1382) there was a famine in Egypt in 1373 owing to the low Nile, and the usual liturgical processions held by both Christians and Muslims to cry loud for water. In this prayer, Makrizi took part while he was nine years old.⁴⁶ This famine led to discontent and next a revolution among the Mamlukes and hence the regent deposed, then killed by his own guard.⁴⁷ As stated above, the cause of this famine in Egypt seems man made, but due to scanty of sources, it is difficult to confirm it. In 1380, Makrizi reports that forty-nine Copts murdered and some of these martyrs remembered in Copto-Arabic Synaxarium.⁴⁸ This kind of massacre intensified the enmity between Germa Asfaé's successor, Dawit (1382-1411) and his contemporary Egyptian leader, Barquq (1382-1399). In retaliation for the maltreatment of Copts, Dawit invaded Upper Egypt. The scribe of his chronicle reports as:

ወከነ ሠራዊቱ እለ ወረዱ ምስሌሁ ብሔረ ግብጽ! የየ አፈራሰ ወ፤ የየ አብቅልተ ወ፤የየአግማለ ወሶበ በጽሐ ንበ ክርቱም ወወጠነ ከመ ይሚጦ ለፈለገ አባይ ንበ ክርቱም ከመ ይክልአሙ ለሰብአ ግብጽ ማየ ፈለገ ዓባይ ዘይሰመይ ግዮን፡...ወሶበ ሰምዐ ንጉሠ ኢትዮጵያ ዳግማዊ ዳዊት ምጽአቶ ለሊቀጳጳሳት አባ ሚካኤል ወወረደ ምስለ ንዳጣን ሠራዊቱ እስከ ምድረ አስዋን ዘውዕቱ ወሰን ማዕከለ ኢትዮጵያ ወግብጽ ፡፡⁴⁹

⁴³ Budge (trans.), *Synaxarium*, P.102.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Butcher, Vol. II, P. 212.

⁴⁶ Ibid. P.213.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Swanson, PP.115-116.

⁴⁹ *Yä Atse Dawit Tarik* (A History of Emperor Dawit), Ethiopian National Archives and Library Agency, ብሔራዊ-507 ፣ PP.54-55

(The number of troops descended to Egypt (with Dawit) were some hundred thousand on the horse back, hundred thousand others on the mule, and hundred thousand on the camel. And when he arrived at Krtum, he began to divert River Abbay to the Krtum(canal) in order to prevent the people of Egypt from the water of Abbay called Geyon.... When Dawit II, king of Ethiopia, heard the coming of Abba Michael, a patriarch, he descended with some of his troops to the land of Aswan, which is a border between Ethiopia and Egypt).

The invasion made by Dawit against Egypt is beyond the shadow of doubt because it also accepted by Egyptian writers. Regarding Dawit's invasion, El-Masri reports as 'For when the Nubian [Ethiopian] king raided Aswan, Barquq did not war against him, but asked Abba Matheos to write him a letter of conciliation.'⁵⁰ Similarly, Malaty, another Egyptian writer, tells us that 'When David, the king of Ethiopia raided Aswan, the pope sent him a bishop with a message, accompanied by a delegate from the sultan, the king responded favourably and returned to his country.'⁵¹ Moreover, Makrizi, the contemporary writer, reports that, as cited by Taddesse, Dawit 'had invaded the territory of Aswan, defeated the Arabs and ravaged the lands of Islam.'⁵² These Egyptian sources, however, are silent about the diversion of Abbay by Emperor Dawit. The reason why Dawit diverted the course of Abbay stated as **‘ወውዕቱ ዳዊት ዘሜሶ ለፈለገ አባዊ ከመ ኢይረድ ግብፅ በምክንያት ዘሞቅሮ ንጉሠ ግብፅ ለአባ ዮሐንስ ሊቀ ጳጳሳት ዘለእስክንድርያ በምክንያተ ፀባህት ወበይነዝ ፈነዎ ሎቱ ንጉሠ ግብፅ አምሃ ለዳዊት ንጉሥ ግማደ መስቀሉ ለክርስቶስ::**⁵³

(At that time Dawit has diverted River Abbawi, not to flow to Egypt because the Egyptian Sultan jailed Abba Yohannes, patriarch of Alexandria, due to their quarrels and hence the Egyptian Sultan sent a gift to king Dawit a piece of the True Cross of Christ).

Ethiopian writers, unlike Egyptians, focus on the diversion of Abbay. Tekle-Iyesus, for example, asserts that when Emperor Dawit had realized that all the Christians of Egypt would be embraced Islam forcefully, he went to Khartoum and diverted the course of Abbay into the Sennar desert and the Muslims of Egypt forced to reconcile with him.⁵⁴ It appears that Dawit initially had invaded Upper Egypt and after some years he diverted the course of Abbay.

⁵⁰ El-Masri, Book III, P.198.

⁵¹ Malaty, P. 171.

⁵² Taddesse Tamrat, *"The Horn of Africa: The Solomonids in Ethiopia and the States of the Horn of Africa,"* in D.T. Niane(ed.), *Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century*, (California: University of California Press, 1984), PP.450-451.

⁵³ Tekletsadik Makuria, *YäGragñ Ahmad Wārära (An Invasion of Ahmad Gragn)*, (Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press, 1966), P.90, During the reign of Dawit, the Patriarchs of Alexandria were Abba Mathewos I(1375-1409),and Abba Gabriel V(1409-1427).

⁵⁴ Sergew(ed.), P.34.

Regarding this, Erlich states that ‘Dawit began his rule in 1381 by raiding Upper Egypt and inflicting heavy blows on the Muslims.’⁵⁵ At this time famine was not recorded in Egypt. It was in 1403 that Egypt afflicted by a terrible famine as recorded by Makrizi and he relates us that during this famine one of his daughters was ill, and bought two chickens for her with seventy-four pieces of silver.⁵⁶ In 1400, following the death of Barquq, patriarch Matheos was imprisoned by the successor of Barquq.⁵⁷ As stated above, the justification behind the diversion of Abbay by Dawit was associated with the imprisonment of the patriarch, though the name of the patriarch wrongly called Abba Yohannes instead of Matheos. The invasion and victory of Dawit against Egypt seemed familiar for European kings and I think, this was the motive behind Henry IV of England to send a letter to Emperor Dawit in 1400, with an intention of forming a crusade alliance against Muslims.⁵⁸ Some writers, however, consider that the diversion of Abbay by Dawit as a fiction. For instance, Veronika Six dares to criticize the claim of Ethiopian scribes as ‘Ethiopian imagination therefore takes for granted that fiction may turn in to reality, because it is established in the Ta’amrä Maryam.’⁵⁹ This is an abrupt and misleading conclusion because it was usual for Ethiopian chroniclers to associate any achievement or victory of an emperor either with the help of God or with the prayer of saints but this does not necessarily mean that the achievement or victory of that emperor was false. To mention one example, the victory of Adwa was associated with the help of St. George.

Emperor Yeshaq (1414-1429), followed the policy of Dawit. He began his reign by invading the rebel Muslims of Ifat and subdued Zeila in 1415.⁶⁰ In 1427, Yeshaq dispatched delegates to Valencia and Aragon for the purpose of establishing friendly relations with European Christians. In response to his request, Alfonso, king of Aragon, proposed a double marriage union between his kingdom and Ethiopia.⁶¹ In 1429, a secret treaty was signed between Emperor Yeshaq of Ethiopia and the ‘Franks’ to engage in a holy war against Muslims of the world. The agent of this treaty and ambassador between Ethiopia and Europe was a Christian merchant disguised himself as a Muslim. This merchant carried out his negotiations with the

⁵⁵ Erlich, P.43.

⁵⁶ Butcher, Vol. II, P. 221.

⁵⁷ Swanson, P. 114.

⁵⁸ Andrew Kurt, “*The Search for Prester John, a Projected Crusade and the eroding Prestige of Ethiopian Kings, c.1200-c.1540*,” in *Journal of Medieval History*, (Vol. 39, No. 3, 2013), P.309.

⁵⁹ Veronika Six, “*Water, The Nile and the Ta’amrä Maryam: Miracles of the Virgin Mary in the Ethiopian Version*,” in *Aethiopica*, *International Journal of Ethiopian and Eritrean Studies*, (Hamburg: Hamburg University, Vol. II, 1999), P.59.

⁶⁰ Erlich, P.44.

⁶¹ Matteo Salvatore, “*The Ethiopian Age of Exploration: Prester John’s Discovery of Europe, 1308-1458*,” in *Journal of World History* (Vol. 21, No. 4, 2011), P.611.

Franks successfully but while he was returning to Alexandria, he was betrayed by his own slave and the plot against Egypt disclosed, so that the kadis tried him and sentenced to death with two other Ethiopian monks.⁶²

Emperor Zara Yaeqob (1434-1468), who was one of the greatest monarchs in Ethiopia's history, considered himself as the protector of Orthodox Christians of Egypt. In 1437, he sent delegates to sultan and requested the good treatment of Copts and their churches.⁶³ In 1443, Zara Yaeqob received a letter from Abba Yohannes XI (1427-1453) about the destruction of Dayr al-Maghtis or Menas, a monastery which had been a way station for Ethiopian pilgrims to Jerusalem. Zara Yaeqob angered and sent a delegation with a threatening letter to Jaqmaq. In Nov. 1443 a delegation from Zara Yaeqob handed this letter to Sultan Jaqmaq.

From the righteous ... Zar'a Yaeqob ... king of kings of Ethiopia... to the noble, elevated Imam, the royal sultan al-Zahir Jaqmaq, sultan of the Muslims and of Islam in Egypt and Syria. It is our goal to renew the understandings that existed between our predecessors. Let these understandings remain preserved without interruption. You, may the good Lord save you, know well what the shepherd needs to do with his sheep. Our father the patriarch and our brothers the Christians, who are under your government and under your noble kingdom, are very few, weak and poor. They cannot be more numerous than just one Islamic community in one of the regions of our country. And you, may the good Lord save, are not aware of the Muslims under our government, that we are the rulers of their kings and we always treat them well, and their kings live with us wearing golden crowns and riding horses? And are you not aware, you and your Sultan, that the River Nile is flowing to you from our country and that we are capable of preventing the floods that irrigate your country? Nothing keeps us from so doing only the belief in God and the care for His slaves. We have presented to you what you need to know and you should know what you have to do.⁶⁴

Sultan Jaqmaq, however, was reluctant for the letter of Zara Yaeqob and in 1448 Abba Yohannes arrested, beaten, imprisoned and his property confiscated.⁶⁵ Besides, Abba Yohannes was forbidden from writing to the Ethiopian Emperor and ordaining for him any bishop or priest without his permission.⁶⁶ When Jaqmaq wrote a letter to the new Adalite sultan of Ethiopia suggesting that he has to make peace with Zara Yaeqob, the Adalite Sultan

⁶² Butcher, Vol. II, PP. 229-230.

⁶³ Swanson, P. 124.

⁶⁴ Erlich, P.46.

⁶⁵ Butcher, P.124.

⁶⁶ El-Masri, Book III, P.212

responded in 1449 that Emperor Zara Yaeqob had built a navy of 200 ships in preparation for an attack on Mecca and he further warned that Zara Yaeqob has an intention to block the flow of Abbay.⁶⁷ The panic of Egyptians stated as:

To add to the trouble of the Copts, news came that the king of Ethiopia was preparing to invade the Hijaz; and that he was going to accumulate impediments in the midst of the Nile at the borders of his country so as to stop its flow into Egypt. It happened in the following season that the inundation was so low that even the sultan began to be afraid. He asked the caliph to pray and he distributed money and clothes among the poor. A cry was sent out that all people were to go out to the desert and pray there. And such was the panic which prevailed that even the Copts were allowed to go out and pray. The multitudes continued to pray incessantly until God's Mercy overtook them, and the Nile began to rise. And the wonder of it is that the raise began in September in which time the eternal river usually reaches the height of its inundation.⁶⁸

The rise of inundation in September certainly indicates as Abbay was diverted by Emperor Zara Yaeqob because the rainy season in Ethiopia is from June to September and hence rain fall starts in June, not in September. During the reign of Eskender (1478-1495) there was a similar trend. In 1488 an Ethiopian emissary was sent to Cairo and his speech reported as:

In his silken tent-so we read of an audience in Cairo in 1488-the Sultan reclined on his divan, and the ambassadors of all the white powers kissed the ground twice before him. But the ambassador of the Negus was borne in on his litter, ignored the demand to rise, and reclining on his litter like the sultan, asked: 'Lord, will you have peace with your lord and mine, the Archpriest John?' 'My fathers were always at peace with that priest.' 'Say not, that priest, say my lord.' And when this preposterous demand had been repeated three times, the sultan said slowly: 'It is my wish to be at peace with my lord, the Archpriest John.' Then the Abyssinian presented the sultan of Egypt with a bow and six golden arrows, saying: 'It is well for you to say 'my lord.' In his hands lie your life and your death. You ask why? From our land comes the Nile. If my lord wished, he could cut off your water and you would all perish of thirst.' 'It is true,' said the sultan.⁶⁹

Regarding this kind of periodic warnings, Hassan, an Egyptian writer, reports that "The Ethiopians periodically threatened to exterminate the Muslims and divert the Nile waters from Egypt so that its people would starve to death."⁷⁰ In 1496, Arnold Von Harff, a German

⁶⁷ Erlich, P.46.

⁶⁸ El-Masri, Book III, PP.212-213.

⁶⁹ Lindsay(trans.), The Nile, P.327

⁷⁰Yusuf Fadl Hassan, "*The Historical Roots of Afro-Arab Relations*," in *The Arabs and Africa*, (Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 1984), P.3.

traveller, has confirmed the power of Ethiopians over Egyptians in controlling the flow of Abbay and not to be stopped the flow of the river, the sultan of Egypt had to pay yearly tribute to the Ethiopian Emperor.⁷¹ Furthermore, Harff states that when Ethiopians came to Jerusalem no injury was to be done on them because of the fear that the flow of Abbay would be diverted.⁷² In the sixteenth century, Emperor Lebena Dengel sent a letter to the pope of Portugal and he requested ‘quarry men to dig through a hill, where [ancestors] formerly diverted the Nile, in order to turn it there again and damage Egypt.’⁷³

In contrast to Ethiopia’s initiative to divert the course of Abbay, modern Egyptian writers assert that the Portuguese had attempted to convince Ethiopian Emperors to divert the course of Abbay into the Red Sea.⁷⁴ William Lithgow, a Scottish writer, tells us that the Turkish sultan paid an annual tax of 50,000 gold coins to the Ethiopian Emperor in order to avoid the diversion of River Abbay.⁷⁵ Similarly, George Abbot, who was Archbishop of Canterbury as well as the fourth Chancellor of Trinity College in Dublin, reported as:

The princes of Ægit have paid vnto the gouernor of the Abisines, a great tribute time out of mind; which of late, the great Turke supposing to be a custome needelesse, did deny; till the people of the Abisines by commandment of their prince did breake downe their dams; and drowning Egipt, did intorce the Turke to continue his pay, and to give much money for the new making of them very earnestly, to his great charge, desiring a peace.⁷⁶

The yearly tribute paid by Egyptian sultans to Ethiopian Emperors was associated with the fear that Abbay would be diverted. In the eighteenth century, probably the last menacing letter to the Sultan of Egypt came from Emperor Teklehaymanot I (1706-1708) of Ethiopia. A letter sent to Cairo by Emperor Teklehaymanot presented by Bruce as:

We could very soon repay you in kind, if we were inclined to revenge the insult you have offered to the man Murat sent on our part; the Nile would be sufficient to

⁷¹ Muse Tegegne, Däqīqā Orit ‘Gojjam’ the Stigma: The Abyssinian Pariah, (Geneva: Guihon Books, 1993), P.25.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Fasil Amdetsion, “*The Scrutinizing the Scorpion Problematique: Arguments in favour of the continued Relevance of International Law and a Multidisciplinary Approach to Resolving Nile Dispute*,” Texas International Law Journal, (Vol.44, No. 1, 2008), P.14.

⁷⁴ Hamdy A. Hassan and Ahmad al-Rasheed, “*The Nile River and Egyptian Foreign Interests*,” in African Sociological Review, (Cairo: Cairo University Press, Vol. 11, No.1, 2007), P.30.

⁷⁵ Richard Pankhurst, “*Ethiopia’s Alleged Control of the Nile*,” in Haggai Erlich (eds.), The Nile: Histories, Cultures, Myths, (Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. 2000), PP.32-33.

⁷⁶ Michael E. Brook, *Prester John: A Re-examination and Compendium of the Mythical Figure who helped Spark European Expansion*, (Unpublished Ph. D Dissertation, The University of Toledo, 2009), P.304.

punish you, since God hath put in his fountain, his outlet, and his increase, and that we can dispose of the same to do you harm.⁷⁷

From the letter of Teklehaymanot we understood that he knew very well about the diversion of Abbay by his predecessors.

There is plethora of evidence that signify as Upper Egypt had been invaded by Ethiopian Emperors repeatedly and it also accepted by modern writers but they cast a serious doubt on the technical capability of Ethiopian Emperors to divert the course of Abbay. For instance, the late professor Richard Pankhurst had attempted to underestimate the assertion of Ethiopians and fancifully concluded as ‘claims of Ethiopia’s ability to divert the Nile thus proved to be no more than roars of a paper lion.’⁷⁸ Similarly, the testimony given by al-Umari vilified by Erlich as ‘However, in his writings al-Umari repeated al-Makin’s version of the eleventh century story of the Ethiopia’s blocking and subsequent freeing of the Nile. He thus contributed significantly to the recycling of that myth.’⁷⁹ Regrettably, writers like Teferi influenced by the work of modern writers considered the claim of Ethiopian Emperors as a myth.⁸⁰

The assertions of Pankhurst and Erlich are not plausible. Their misunderstandings mainly emanated in identifying between the ancient territorial boundary of Ethiopia and the present-day Ethiopia. The present-day Sudan was part of the ancient Empire of Ethiopia. Regarding this, Lobo, a seventeenth century missionary, states that the ancient territory of Ethiopia extended ‘from the Red Sea to the Kingdom of Congo and from Egypt to the Indian Sea.’⁸¹ It was based on this historical reality that Emperor Menelik II of Ethiopia in his circular letter to Europe in 1891 declared that ‘In defining today, the present border of my empire, I shall attempt, if God grants me life and strength, to re-establish the old frontiers as far as Khartoum and Nyanza.’⁸² Furthermore, indigenous sources signify that Sennar was one of the tributary States of Ethiopia up to the second half of eighteenth century.⁸³

⁷⁷ James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile, in the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772, and 1773*, (London: Gregg International Publishers Ltd, Vol. 2, 1972), P.526.

⁷⁸ Pankhurst, P.31.

⁷⁹ Erlich, P.51.

⁸⁰ Teferi Mekonnen, “*The Blue Nile Issue: A History of Hydro politics, 1884-1974*,” (MA Thesis, Department of History, Addis Ababa University, 2004), P.18.

⁸¹ Henry Morley(ed.), *A Voyage to Abyssinia*, (London: Cassel & Company Ltd, 1887), P.30.

⁸² Muse, P.54.

⁸³ Weld Blundell (ed.), *The Royal Chronicle of Abyssinia, 1769-1840*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1922), P.42.

Unaware of where the diversion of Abbay took place, Tellez argues as it is impossible to divert the waters of Abbay on the steep and rugged mountains of Ethiopia.⁸⁴ In fact, the spot of diversion for Ethiopian Emperors was not in present day Ethiopia. It was at Khartoum in Sudan and the name Khartoum derived from the verb *kärtämä*, meaning to break or to cut.⁸⁵ A French cleric, Abba Joachim Le Grand, underestimated Ethiopia's ability and declares that 'we do not pretend that a canal cannot be dug from the Nile to the Red Sea, but the Abyssinians cannot do it.'⁸⁶ In reality, diverting the course of Abbay to the Red Sea was an easier task than invading Upper Egypt for Ethiopian Emperors. Abba Gorgoryos, mentor of Job Ludolf, states that he had heard from persons of great credit that except a single mountain, the land towards the east was levelled and Abbay would rather flow towards it than in to Egypt.⁸⁷ In addition, Baker argues that 'I have seen a spot about 230 miles from the mouth of Atbara, where the river might be deflected without difficulty and be forced to an eastern course towards the Red Sea.'⁸⁸ In 1884, Baker recommended to the British government to occupy Khartoum in order to avoid the diversion of Abbay and his comment stated as 'If a civilized, even semi-civilized, enemy be in possession of that point, the waters of the Rahad, Dinder, Blue Nile and Atbara Rivers could be diverted from their course and dispersed throughout the deserts, to the utter ruin and complete destruction of Egypt proper.'⁸⁹ His recommendation seems acceptable by the British government because in the border treaty between Britain and Ethiopia in 1902, they inserted Art. III, as "The Emperor Menelik engages not to construct or to allow to be constructed any work across the Blue Nile, Lake Tana, or the Sobat which would arrest the flow of their waters in to the Nile."⁹⁰ Some writers had attempted to associate the acute water scarcity that Egyptians had faced at various times in the past with the fluctuation of the flow of Abbay. However, other sources do not support this claim. For instance, Meigh and others state that 'The floods of the Blue Nile are less variable than those of rivers in many parts of the world.'⁹¹ Furthermore, the fluctuation in

⁸⁴ Pankhurst, P.33.

⁸⁵ Bairu Tafla, "*The Father of Rivers: The Nile in Ethiopian Literature*," in Haggai Erlich and Israel Gershoni(eds.), *The Nile: Histories, Cultures, Myths*, (Boulder & London: Rynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. 2000), P.161.

⁸⁶ Pankhurst, P.34.

⁸⁷ Ibid. P. 33.

⁸⁸ Donzel, P.127.

⁸⁹ William L. Langer, "*The Struggle for the Nile*," *Foreign Affairs*, (Vol. 14, No. 2, 1936), P.262

⁹⁰ Hailu Wolde-Giyorgis, *La Abbay Wuha Muget*, (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2001 E.C), P.304

⁹¹ J.V. Sutcliffe & Y. P. Parks, "*The Nile and Its Tributaries*," in *The Hydrology of the Nile*, (IAHS Special Publication, No. 1, 1999), P. 138.

the flow of Abbay in the last century is limited either with an increase or a decrease of 20 percent in the total flow of Nile.⁹² So such a fluctuation does not lead to starve to death.

In the second half of eighteenth century the Empire of Ethiopia was collapsed and the kingdoms were divided by regional war lords. Divided and weak Ethiopia without a strong central government continued for more than eighty years. This was an opportunity for Egyptians to reverse the situation. There is no doubt that Abbay was a threat to Egyptian national security because the source of Abbay on which their life is dependent lying beyond Egyptian borders.⁹³ So, State officials in Egypt in the nineteenth century feel unsafe unless they control the whole course of Abbay in their hands.⁹⁴ Accordingly, to control the Upper course of Abbay, Egypt under Muhammad Ali (1805-1849) invaded Sudan in 1820 and in 1830s his troops continued their invasion on the peripheral territory of north western Ethiopia.⁹⁵ It was from that time on ward that the power of balance shifted in favour of Egypt and Ethiopia remained under the threat of Egyptian leaders for the last two hundred years. To accomplish the dream of his grandfather and the advice of Munzinger, Khedive Ismail continued his invasion on Ethiopia aggressively. Munzinger, a Swiss born mercenary and a counsel of Khedive Ismail remarked that ‘Ethiopia with a disciplined administration and army, and a friend of European powers, is a danger for Egypt. Egypt must either take over Ethiopia and Islamize it, or retain in anarchy and misery.’⁹⁶ Although the first option of Egypt ended in fiasco in 1876 at Gura, the second option is still underway. Egypt, for instance, supported Eritrean Liberation Movements during 1950s and 1960s and is thought that Egypt has provided military aid to Eritrea in the Ethio-Eritrean border war of 1998-2000. Egyptian national security interest in the last two hundred years has been always ‘either to dominate Ethiopia or to neutralize whatever unfriendly regime that might appear there.’⁹⁷ This is because Abbay, on which Egyptians are dependent, emanates from Ethiopian highlands.

⁹² Declan Conway, “*The Climate and Hydrology of the Upper Blue Nile River*,” in *The Geographical Journal*, (Vol. 166, No. 1, 2000), P.58.

⁹³ Hassan & Rasheed, P.26.

⁹⁴ Langer, P.261.

⁹⁵ Hailu, PP.80-81.

⁹⁶ Sven Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence*, (Addis Ababa: Kuraz Publishing Agency, 1991), P.290.

⁹⁷ Fasil, P. 37.

4. Conclusions and Recommendation

Ethiopian Emperors, unless pre-occupied by internal problems, were zealous to respond for the cry of Copts. Whenever there was a persecution against Copts, Ethiopian Emperors responded either by invading Upper Egypt or by diverting the course of Abbay so as to stop the persecution. As the Amharic saying goes aptly ‘no smoke without fire’ and without something happened, the news of diversion would not be reverberated throughout Europe and Middle East. There is no doubt that Abbay was used as a trump card for Ethiopian Emperors in retaliation against the persecution of Copts. Ethiopia’s ability in diverting the flow Abbay was not roars of a paper lion or a myth as some writers supposed. The ability of Ethiopian Emperors well supported by the letter of Zara Yaeqob as ‘Nothing keeps us from so doing only the belief in God and the care for His slaves’. In the final analysis, it is safe to conclude that the course of Abbay was diverted at least by five Ethiopian Emperors namely, Lalibela, Dawit, Zara Yaeqob and two other lesser known Emperors of the Zagwe dynasty. If the diversion of Abbay had not been occurred, two things would unlikely to be happened. Firstly, Egyptians would not be affected by a terrible famine repeatedly. Any kind of drought in Ethiopia cannot be a seven years famine in Egypt. If the famine of 1066-72, for example, had been occurred due to a severe drought in Ethiopia, its reoccurrences will be continued within intervals at least until dams were built. Secondly, a threatening letter would not be sent by Ethiopian Emperors against Egypt to block the flow of Abbay. Ethiopian Emperors knew the disastrous consequences that Egypt had encountered in the past due to the diversion of Abbay and for that reason they sent menacing letters repeatedly to Egyptian Sultans. For instance, when Emperor Teklehaymanot said that ‘the Nile would be sufficient to punish you’ unless he had historical evidence that River Abbay had been diverted by his predecessors; this kind of warning is really unthinkable. Finally, I want to recommend for quantitative researchers to conduct their own research as to whether the occurrence of drought in Ethiopia can be a cause of famine in Egypt or not.

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