

# Egypt's Historic Right over the River Nile

By G. E. Gorfu

Since the first foundation stone was laid on the Grand Renaissance Dam (GRD) Egypt has shown its eternal belligerence towards Ethiopia, demanding Ethiopia honor the 1929 and 1959 Colonial treaties. At times Egypt walks out from the negotiations; at times it pretends to go along with the agreements but refuses to sign the Nile Basin Treaty; at times Egypt demands more studies to be done, refusing to accept various studies done so far; at times it threatens it would wage war. And it continues to harp on its "Historic Right" over the waters of the River Nile.

Abdelatty, spokesman of Egypt's Foreign Ministry, said: "Ethiopia should also respect colonial-era agreements and the 1959 accord between Sudan and Egypt that allocates all of the river's flow excluding evaporation to those two nations... By 2020, Egypt will require all of its assigned 55 billion cubic meters a year for vital use such as drinking, washing and sanitation"<sup>1</sup>

What is Egypt's Historic Right? It is appropriate to look into what that history has been like over the last many centuries in order to see if Egypt has any Historic Rights at all to demand respect from Ethiopia. Neither space nor time allows us to enumerate in this short article the countless times through the centuries that Egypt covertly and overtly manipulated Ethiopian body politics through its control of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Papacy which used to be appointed by the Orthodox Church in Alexandria, nor the many times through the centuries that Egypt, with the help of its Colonial masters, first The Ottoman Turks, and then, the British, continued its sinister machination and manipulations to maintain control over the Nile River.

These evil machinations were based on nothing more than the fear being expressed openly today, that Ethiopia will stop the waters of the Nile from flowing to Egypt. It is this fear that also was the cause for Egypt to mount several invasions into Ethiopia, with the intention of occupying the source of the Nile. In one of these invasions, Munzinger Pasha in 1875, serving Khedive Ismail of Egypt, marched his Egyptian troops into Aussa, where he got lost in the Afar Danakil desert. He was routed and beaten by Sultan Mahammad Ibn Hanfadhe. Munzinger Pasha, his wife, and his son, were all killed<sup>2</sup>. The most decisive defeat soon followed in the same year, where, headed by Hassan, the son of Egypt's Pasha, Khedive Ismail, Egypt invaded Ethiopia and met the forces of Emperor Yohannes in Gurrae'. Egyptian forces were defeated and utterly destroyed. Hassan was captured<sup>3</sup>, but was later released only after a large ransom was paid to Ethiopia. This then is a brief account of that history Egypt needs to know when it harps on its historical right.

And what can we say of more recent history? While fresh Nile waters were flowing in Ethiopia, millions perished due to drought and famine in 1970s and 80s. What was Egypt doing during all that time? Did it try to save some lives? Did it come to the aid of Ethiopia? No! Egypt was busy in the international arena blocking Ethiopian efforts of getting loans to fund the building of a dam that would have averted the famine and starvation. Egypt was also busy, and is culpable for its material and moral support of the rebels in the thirty years war of Eritrean secession and the ultimate breakaway. And this war was an additional cause that exacerbated the famine.

It must be remembered that it was during that time of Ethiopia's desperate hour when millions were starving due to drought and war (1980) that President Anwar Sadat of Egypt declared he was going to divert the waters of the Nile into Sinai: "...and if Ethiopia does not like it, it can go to hell..."<sup>4</sup> That was like rubbing salt to the wounds of Ethiopia, and will never be forgotten.

Is it not enough that your father, grandfather, and great grandfathers, for many millennia, have all been crossing into our orchard and eating our apples and telling us to go to hell? Now that we are building a fence around our orchard, how dare tell us you have a historic right to continue eating our apples? What right does Egypt have to demand that Ethiopia not build a dam on its own land and on its own God given river, especially when Egypt has built its own Aswan Dam? What grounds does Egypt have to threaten us with a war? You be the judge, dear reader.

In all these, it must be known that Ethiopia has never done any harm to Egypt. In fact, three Ethiopian security policemen died protecting Mubarak during the assassination attempt<sup>5</sup> on his life by some Arab Muslim extremists (Islamic Brotherhood?) in Addis Ababa. (June 1995) There is no history of Ethiopia ever invading Egypt, or of supporting any clandestine organization to destabilize it. In short, this then is your history, Egypt, a history of shame – shame on you!

Egypt's own evil deeds over the centuries not Ethiopia's are coming to haunt it, and Egypt is still operating from a totally unfounded and hysterical fear when it makes threats of war now. Rather than sabre rattling and threatening Ethiopia with war, would it not be in Egypt's best interest to work with Ethiopia and all Riparian nations towards a future of progress and mutual benefit from GRD and the electricity that would soon be generated? There is a great deal to be gained from cooperation for all the peoples in the Nile Basin, which number over half of the population of Africa. But pray, what would be gained from war?

Instead of looking forward, if Egypt insists to look backwards to its historic rights, it must be told that it is not a history of pride, but one of shame, where its sinister machinations caused the death of millions due to famine and starvation. It is a history of Egypt's clandestine support of secessionist forces to exacerbate misery. Is that what Egypt wants to perpetuate in Africa today?

Otherwise, there is no substance or sanity in asking Ethiopia to honor the 1959 accord between Egypt and Sudan, or the 1929 Colonial Treaty to none of which it is signatory. The treaty that appropriated the Nile waters entered between Egypt and its Colonial master, Britain, would make more sense if the waters came from the River Thames, not the Nile. What sanity is there in a treaty that allots Ethiopian waters to Egypt by a Colonial power that had no authority or protectorate over Ethiopia? Egypt would be well advised to approach the British to honor their Colonial Treaty and see if they might share some of their own waters from The Thames.

#### Notes:

1- <http://mobile.bloomberg.com/news/2014-03-19/ethiopia-sees-output-from-africa-s-biggest-power-plant-by-2015.html>

2- Wylde, Modern Abyssinia, p. 25

3- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isma'il\\_Pasha](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isma'il_Pasha)

4- Gebre Tsadik Degefu *The Nile: Historical, Legal, and Developmental Perspectives* p. 148

5 - [http://articles.latimes.com/1995-06-27/news/mn-17703\\_1\\_president-mubarak](http://articles.latimes.com/1995-06-27/news/mn-17703_1_president-mubarak)