

Imperialism Ancient and Modern: a study of British attitudes to the claims to Sovereignty to the Northern Somali coastline

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Among the official British documents relating to the various claims to territorial sovereignty in the Red Sea and along the Somali coast of the second half of the last century, lies a fascinating sheet of the smallest size of Foreign Office notepaper.¹ It records a question and two answers, written in 1879, just ten years after the opening of the Suez Canal. Commenting upon Britain's policy of encouraging Turkey to support Egypt's claim to the Somali coastline the Acting Senior Clerk, Mr H. Clarke Jervoise (later Sir Harry), asks:

Does it not seem rather an inopportune moment to be urging the Porte to assist the Khedive to obtain an extended territorial jurisdiction when the relations between this country and Egypt are so far from satisfactory?

In reply the Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir Julian Pauncefote (later Lord Pauncefote of Preston), minuted at the bottom of the page:

It is a mere formality and necessary for anti-slavery purposes. J.P.

But the note must have passed on to the Secretary of State, for Lord Salisbury, disagreeing, had turned it lengthwise to write up the page, and in red:

No. It is no formality but it is our only security against any other European Power obtaining a footing opposite Aden. S. 30/5.

There are many remarkable things about this note—among them being the mere fact of its survival among the records. But above all it is intriguing that at this period, when the British Foreign Office was at the height of its powers, the then Senior Clerk to the Foreign Office should show serious doubts about a policy actually being pursued, while the senior Civil Servant directly concerned and the Minister of State responsible should express quite different reasons for pursuing it.

It is true that this apparent contrariness may be due as much to careless oversimplification as to genuine differences of view, and perhaps that uncertainties of this sort as to policies and their motives in international affairs, although seldom so clearly revealed, are more common than it is comforting to suppose. Be that as it may, the mere fact that such uncertainty could have existed at such a time and under

1. F.O. 78/3190: "Claims to Sovereignty in the Red Sea, Africa and Arabia (Somali Coast), January 1878—June 1879", at the Public Records Office, London.

the Ministry of a man of the calibre of Lord Salisbury, and that evidence of it should have been preserved, implies a situation that seems to call for some explanation.

Working mainly from contemporary correspondence and official papers at the Public Records Office in London,² this paper seeks to clarify some of the immediate issues by considering the questions:

Firstly, what were the Egyptian claims to sovereignty on the Somali coast, and upon what were they based?

Secondly, what other nations had designs upon the coast?

Thirdly, what were British interests in the matter, and how could support of Egyptian claims advance those interests?

And lastly, why did Britain subsequently abandon this policy, to negotiate a series of treaties³ herself in the 1880's with the Somali tribes opposite Aden and in the 1890's with various European Powers and with Ethiopia by which the Somali deserts were crossed with a number of relatively arbitrary international boundaries.

The Basis for the Egyptian Claim

In the years following the opening of the Suez Canal, it became apparent to the maritime nations using it that some reliable power should assume responsibility for the Somali coastline. It seemed intolerable that there should be no-one capable of, and officially responsible for, lighting the coast as an aid to navigation, and exercising some control over the tribesmen of the region to safeguard life and property in the event of shipwreck. The basis of the Egyptian claim to be that power lay in their presence *de facto* on the coast, and was justified in an historical argument which asserts that from time immemorial the coastal towns along the northern Somali shores have been politically subject to the Arabian states by which they were traditionally founded, that since the sixteenth century Arabia has been subject to Turkey from whom, during the nineteenth century, Egypt acquired control of the western shores of the Red Sea and along the Somali coast, exercising it at first in the name of the Sultan of Turkey but, since the Firman of 1873, as a hereditary part of the Khedivate.

2. Documents in the series "Claims to Sovereignty in the Red Sea, Africa and Arabia (Somali Coast)" are bound together in generally chronological order, the time period covered in each volume being determined solely by the volume of documentation preserved during that period. Since volumes are of uniform size, some cover several years, others only a few months: no numbering or index system is employed so there is no means of referring precisely to the location within a volume that a particular document may be found.

Many of the documents referred to in this paper are in manuscript and by now presumably unique: others, especially those which were widely distributed at the time, will be familiar to students of the period. For the sake of uniformity, reference to a particular document or piece of correspondence quoted hereafter will be primarily to its author, description and date, with the number of the volume in which it is located in the British archives following in brackets.

3. For the texts of these treaties and a full discussion of the policies which inspired them and the problems they have created, see *The Somali Peninsular: a New Light on Imperial Motives*, Information Service of the Somalia Government, 1962, and Mesfin Wolde Mariam, "The Ethio-Somalia Boundary Dispute", in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol 2, No. July 1964.

The Somali coast has certainly had ties of dependency with Arabia since very early times. Classical references include Herodotus, who makes mention⁴ in the 4th century B.C. of temporary settlements established down the East African coast by Phoenicians; and Agatharkhides, a Greek geographer living in Alexandria in the days of Ptolemy Philometer, tells us in 150 B.C.⁵ that the first permanent colonisers were the Sabaeans from Southern Arabia, whom he describes as being

strong, warlike and expert seamen. They possess large ships and sail to the land of the aromatic products⁶ where they found colonies. . . . It is they who provide the Phoenicians with an endless variety of merchandise and prodigious profits.

Some two hundred years later the important “Periplus of the Erythraean Sea”⁷ was written in Greek by an unknown Alexandrian merchant. It is a kind of geographical and mercantile guide to the Red Sea, the East African and Arabian coasts. Part of paragraph 16, referring to the Somali coast, records:

The inhabitants of this coast, men of huge stature, are given to piracy; they live each in their own district, their own masters. In accordance with some ancient right, this district is subject to the sovereignty of the state that becomes most powerful in Arabia, and so is now ruled by the Mapharitic chieftain. From the king it is held tributary by the people of Muza⁸ who send there many ships with Arab captains and agents who enjoy the friendship of the natives, intermarry with them and thus become familiar with the coast and its language.

This description clearly implies a situation which, although it seemed scarcely changed nearly 2,000 years later, was already a traditional state of affairs within a decade or so of the death of Christ. Indeed, in May of 1879, in the light of the looting of arms from S.S. “Vultiger” when she had run ashore near Alula only a few weeks earlier, and with Sir Louis Mallet’s recent defence of Turkish-Egyptian claims to sovereignty over Zeila “in virtue of an annual payment of ancient date made by its Chiefs to the Sheriff of Mocha”⁹ in mind, Lord Salisbury might feel the situation had hardly changed at all!

But the years between had not been uneventful. Although the history of this part of the world for the first 1,500 years of the Christian era is only dimly recorded, the main outline of events is clear. In the third and fourth centuries A.D. the Ethiopian Kingdom of Axum was at the height of its powers and extended for a time over a considerable portion of south-western Arabia. It may be that Zeila, or Aulites

4. Herodotus, *Book IV*, p. 42.

5. R. Reusch, *History of East Africa* (New York, 1961), p. 45.

6. The ancient description of the Somali coast; cinnamon and incense are still widely produced around Cape Guardafui.

7. *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, from the translation of Dr. J. L. Whiteley quoted in Zoe Marsh, *East Africa through Contemporary Records* (Cambridge, 1961).

8. Probably present-day Mocha, in Yemen.

9. Sir L. Mallet of the India Office (writing incidently on behalf of Lord Salisbury who was then Secretary of State for India) to the Foreign Office, Sept. 25, 1874. (F.O. 78/3187).

as it was then called, was founded during this period, for Burton writes that it was “in its earliest ages dependent upon the Kingdom of Axum”.¹⁰

Christianity reached Ethiopia in the fourth century and, after being adopted by the King of Axum and his court, spread rapidly. In the middle of the sixth century an Axumite army again crossed the Red Sea and, after conquering much of southern Arabia, set up a number of Christian Governors responsible to Axum. But it was not to last: by the end of the century they were displaced by the Sassanid Persians who swept in by sea from the south, and who themselves only lasted about 30 years before the message of Islam arose to clear Arabia of its invaders. The Axumites retained command of the Red Sea for a time, but by the eighth century Adulis had been destroyed and they were forced back into the mountains, leaving the Red Sea under Moslem control.¹¹

Thereafter, the pattern becomes clearer: the Christians withdrawing to the Ethiopian Highlands, and Arabia becoming permanently Moslem and “Arab”—with the coastal strip and the Somali plains at the mercy sometimes of one and sometimes of the other, but for the most part becoming Arabised and Moslem.

It is not quite clear when Islam came permanently to the Somali coast, but it must have been during the Prophet’s lifetime¹² or very soon after it: certainly all Somali genealogies go back to Arabian origins and to the Prophet’s lineage,¹³ the common ancestor being Aqil Abu Taalib, Mohammed’s cousin who died in Mecca in 620 A.D. Zeila was re-built and revived in the tenth century by Arab immigrants¹⁴ on the site, it seems, of Aulites, a port of importance in much earlier times, as previously mentioned. Also, the Somali clan-family system must have originated at about this time.¹⁵

The situation now settles into a long dimly-recorded period during which, as Gibbon says “the Æthiopians slept near a thousand years”¹⁶ and which, as far as the Somalis were concerned, lasted through to modern times. But it was a fitful sleep — with constant feuding between the lowlands and the highlands, between the Moslems and the Christians. “There is something almost monotonous”, writes Miss Perham, “almost conventional about the records. Year after year the fortunes of war swung this way and that over the borders; massacres and enslavements, trusts

10. R. Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa* (London, 1856), p.66. But in a footnote on the same page Burton comments that “the Arabs were probably the earliest colonists of this coast. Even the Sawahil (Swahili?) people retain a tradition that their forefathers originated in the South of Arabia”.

11. M. Perham. *The Government of Ethiopia* (London 1948), p. 29.

12. J. S. Trimingham; *Islam in Ethiopia* (Oxford, 1952), p. 44, quotes Mohammed as telling his followers “If you go to Abyssinia you will find a King under whom none are persecuted”, and suggests the first refugees went there in 615 A.D.

13. I. M. Lewis; *A Pastoral Democracy* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 11–12.

14. *Ibid.*, p 17.

15. *Ibid.*, p 4, asserts that “many people of the Darood clan-family count not less than thirty named generations to their common ancestor” and (p 15) that “the earliest mention of a Somali clan is of the Hawiye whom the Arab geographer Ibn Sayid (1214–1287) describes in virtually their present situation, near Merca, in southern Somalia. The name ‘Somalia’ itself does not occur until the fifteenth century when it is recorded in an Ethiopic hymn celebrating the victories of the Abyssinian King Negus Yeshaaq (1414–1429) over the Moslem and partly Somali state of Adel based on Zeila”.

16. E. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London, 1909), V, 165.

and treacheries recur . . .”¹⁷ At times the Moslems penetrated far into Ethiopia, and at times the Christians roved widely over the Somali peninsula. They sacked Zeila, now the chief port of entry from Arabia, on a number of occasions; and, for a time in 1445, reached as far south as the Webbi Shebelli River not so far from Mogadishu.

With the opening years of the sixteenth century, this interminable struggle comes more into world focus. About 1500 the Ottoman Turks conquered the Yemen and “took possession of Zeila”,¹⁸ and at about the same time the Portuguese appeared bombarding Mogadishu in 1499, Zeila in 1516, and landing an embassy to the Ethiopian King at Massawa in 1520. With the help of Turkish firearms and with both Arab and Turkish troops, the Imam of Zeila, Ahmed-el-Ghazi,¹⁹ led his followers into a holy war against Ethiopia which was to destroy most of the country and which lasted from 1527 until 1542 when Emperor Claudius, now aided by the Portuguese and their firearms, surprised and shot the Imam near Lake Tana, and routed his forces.

Hereafter, having thus decisively helped restore the *status quo*, the Portuguese play only a minor role in the story. In 1588, they were much discomfited when their forces on the coast were overwhelmed and the Turks assumed virtual control of the Red Sea. They remained in Ethiopia until 1633, however, when they finally left following the abdication of Emperor Susenyos and the failure of their attempts to establish Catholicism as the official religion. Apart from the visits of a few individual travellers²⁰ to the area, Europe displayed little further interest or concern for the next two hundred years.

The Turks, for their part, were destined to stay much longer and to play a much more important role. In 1517 the Sultan, Selim I, had conquered Egypt, and in so doing had acquired Egypt’s interest in a great part of Arabia, including the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. He was also able to induce the Caliph, who had inherited from the successors of Mohammed considerable, if undefined, authority as Protector of the Holy Places, to make over to him this office, together with its symbols, the Cloak and Standard of the Prophet, which he carried back with him to Constantinople.²¹ Thereafter, Selim and his successors claimed privileges of wide spiritual authority as Caliph, in addition to temporal authority as Sultan.

It is not quite clear what Burton meant when he asserted that the Turks “took possession of Zeila” following their conquest of the Yemen. Certainly they could not have done so at this time against the wishes of the inhabitants without a struggle, and there is no record of Zeila having been conquered by the Turks. The probability is that, in their conquest of the Yemen, they acquired suzerainty over Zeila on the basis of the same “ancient right” of which the Periplus spoke when the coast was a dependency of whoever “becomes the most powerful in Arabia”. We see that, following the departure of the Portuguese in 1633, the Turks withdrew their garrisons

17. Perham, *Government of Ethiopia*, p. 36.

18. according to Burton, *First Footsteps*, pp. 68–69.

19. the Left-Handed, known also as Mohammed Grañ.

20. The two most famous accounts are probably those of James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile*, (1763–1773); and Henry Salt; *A Voyage to Abyssinia*, (1814).

21. Lord Eversley, *The Turkish Empire* (London, 1917), p. 112.

at Suakin, Massawa and Zeila, in consequence of which, according to Hertslet, Zeila “then fell under the rule of the Imam of Senna, in Arabia”²²—where it was to remain for some time to come.

Indeed, no substantially new elements seem to appear until the beginning of the nineteenth century when Mehemet Ali becomes Pasha of Egypt, and so invigorated that country that it soon began to rival its suzerain, Turkey. Since Egypt’s claim arises as an outcome of this rivalry, we must follow its rather confusing course with some care, at least as it affects the sovereignty of the Red Sea and Somali coasts.

For the first few years of his reign, the Pasha was occupied with restoring peace and bringing order and prosperity to Egypt after the years of Mameluke misrule and the shock of Napoleon’s occupation from 1798 to 1801. Having proved his ability to administer and govern, Mehemet Ali soon became ambitious to extend his rule. In 1825 there were rumors that his troops in the Hedjaz had received orders to take possession of Aden, Mocha, and the other seaports of the Yemen. However, on 9th June of that year Henry Salt, now British Consul at Alexandria, reported:²³

I am happy to say that His Highness explicitly disclaimed all intention of taking possession of any of the ports of the Imam, as well as of Aden. . . . In these sentiments I believe him for the moment sincere. . . .

Consul Salt’s report goes on to say that the Pasha had confidently admitted that the Porte (i.e. the Turkish Government) had often urged him to take these ports, but that he was unwilling to do anything “which might embroil him with our India Government”. Indeed, it was rumored in Alexandria that the Sultan issued a Firman (official decree) in 1830 specifically authorizing the Pasha to take possession of the Yemen. In the event, however, Mehemet Ali’s attention was now focused elsewhere, and he was preparing for his forthcoming invasion of Syria in revolt against the Sultan’s suzerainty. When this occurred, in 1832, the Egyptian troops at Jeddah also rebelled. But as the Pasha soon made his peace with the Sultan and became his loyal subject once more, their rebellion merely supplied the pretext for Mehemet Ali to send an expedition against them the following year, to subdue, thus, troops who had joined a revolt he himself had started. And in 1835 considerably stronger forces under the Pasha’s nephew, Ibrahim Pasha, landed in Arabia, and occupied Mocha and “most of the seaboard towns”. Mehemet Ali was thought to be planning a huge expedition to sweep down south to conquer Aden, the Hadramout, and then on to the Persian Gulf—though this was, once more, vigorously denied. There exists independent confirmation of the position at this stage from a Captain James Mackenzie, of the Bengal Light Cavalry, who travelled through Arabia and Egypt in 1837, and reported that the Egyptians were then controlling the entire eastern coast

22. Sir Edward Hertslet, *Memorandum on Turkish Claims*, (1874), p. 2. (F.O. 78/3187). With respect to Massawa, Richard Pankhurst, in “Ethiopia and the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden Ports in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries” in *Ethiopian Observer*, vol. VIII, No. 1, p. 38, says that the descendants of the original garrison stayed on, each family getting until at least the end of the 18th century, a share of the customs dues established by virtue of its relation to one or more of the original garrison of 400. He agrees, however, that control shifted from Constantinople to Arabia.
23. F.O. 78/3185. see also Hertslet, *Memo on Turkish Claims*, p. 4.

line of the Red Sea, as well as its western seaboard down to a point south of Suakin, approximately where the present Sudanese-Ethiopian border reaches the sea.²⁴ Although they only held it for a mile or so inland, this gave the Pasha command of all commerce from the Hedjaz and Yemen.

In 1838 the British acquired Aden, and thus a permanent base for her interests in the area. In view of the rising presence of Egyptian forces, the British Government felt it necessary the following year to warn the Pasha that “England could not see with indifference any attempt to invade or conquer the country lying at or beyond the mouth of the Red Sea”²⁵—referring specifically to the Somali coast, it seems, since the Pasha was given another, similar, warning later that year concerning “the independence of native Chiefs in the vicinity of Aden”.

In August 1840, the famous Red Sea hydrographer, Captain Robert Moresby of the Indian Navy, was sent to establish friendly relations with the Chiefs of Tadjoura and Zeila. On August 19th, he concluded a Treaty of Peace and Commerce with the Sultan of Tadjoura,²⁶ which secured mutual promises of furthering trade and an undertaking that the Sultan would not enter into any treaty or pact, political or commercial, with any other European Power without first bringing it to the notice of the British authorities at Aden. In exchange, the East India Company promised “that it would act in no manner which might have an evil tendency towards the States of Tadjoura”. At the same time, Captain Moresby bought the nearby island of Mussa, for which he paid 1,100 German Crowns, 32 bags of rice,²⁷ “besides other presents of small value”, but of which, apparently, the East India Company never in fact took possession. The Sultan of Tadjoura at that time was, it appears, paying some 1,200 Crowns annually to the Sultan of Zeila as “a very old standing custom”,²⁸ but not, it was stressed, as a sign of dependence.

When Captain Moresby reached Zeila however he found the Sultan there unwilling to make any treaty since “Zeila is entirely dependent upon Mocha”.²⁹ Now Mocha, it will be remembered, was in the hands of Egyptian forces, although traditionally subject to the rule of the Imam of Senna. And Senna was independent.

24. Captain James Mackenzie, *Report and Map of the Conquests of Mohammed Ali, Pasha of Egypt, on the Shores of the Red Sea*, July 4, 1837. (F.O. 78/3185).

25. Foreign Office to Consul-General in Egypt, May 24, 1838. (F.O. 78/3185).

26. Sir Charles Aitcheson, *A Collection of Treaties relating to India*, London, p. 177. see also Sir Edward Hertslet, *Map of Africa by Treaty* (London, 1894.), I, 276; II, 832.

27. Although, apparently at the Sultan's special request and “to satisfy Moslem custom”, the Deed of Sale refers only to 10 bags of rice. (Aitcheson op. cit, p. 178)

28. Lieutenant Barker, of H M S “Euphrates”, who visited the coast at the same time, reported that “We were given to understand that, though Tadjoura was an independent state, still that it paid a head tax upon all slaves sold to the Sultan of Zeila; that, in other respects, Tadjoura was tributary to no-one; that the tax which was levied by the Sultan of Zeila appeared to be a remnant of an old custom when Zeila was the principle city on the coast, and received regular tribute from all other states”

29. Hertslet, *Memo on Turkish Claims*, p. 12 (F.O. 78/3187) Moresby writes that: “It appears Zeila is entirely dependent upon Mocha, from which place a Governor and an armed force are sent for the protection of the place, for which the inhabitants pay yearly 500 dollars. Now there are no independent Chiefs at Zeila or about it, wandering tribes surrounding the place, which, like Tadjoura, is a market for slaves”.

Senna's independence was clearly recognised by Egypt, for that same year, 1840, Mehemet Ali sent an Ambassador to the Imam offering him first money and supplies if he would drive the British out of Aden, in which case he would recognise the Imam's right to the territory conquered. Secondly the Ambassador proposed that "the Imam should make over his Sovereignty of Senna to Mehemet Ali who, in return would grant him a suitable pension for life",³⁰ which even more clearly acknowledged Senna's sovereignty and independence. The Imam rejected both offers and so retained his independence, but he seems to have lost any ultimate rights to sovereignty over Zeila that he may have had — perhaps because he was now no longer the "most powerful" ruler in Arabia. At all events, when Moresby did finally achieve a Treaty with the Sultan of Zeila,³¹ he obtained it at Mocha, under Sheriff Hussein, a vassal of the Pasha.³²

During the 1840's and 1850's the spotlight turns once more upon the Turks, who come more into the center of the stage and, for a time, assume the initiative. Following his second bid to break with Turkey, Mehemet Ali was ultimately forced by the concerted action of England, France and Russia not to only pay the annual tribute to Turkey which symbolized his dependency, but to renounce all titles and claims to sovereignty except that of the Pashalik of Egypt. It is said that the Agreement of September 20, 1841, between the Pasha and the Great Powers, broke the old man's heart; certainly for some time to come the vigour seemed gone from Egyptian ambitions, at least inasmuch as they affected the Somali coast.

Two years later a tax dispute in Jedda evoked sweeping Turkish claims to sovereignty over Abyssinia (as it was then called), the Yemen and other adjacent territories. These arose from the Porte's interpretation of the scope of the Anglo-Turkish Commercial Treaty of 1838, whose regulations, it was agreed, were to apply "throughout the Turkish Empire, whether Turkey in Europe, or Turkey in Asia, in Egypt or other African Possessions belonging to the Sublime Porte. . . ." The question as to what these "other African Possessions" were, to which Britain had given tacit recognition, soon became a matter of some moment, and was passed first to the India Board and then to the Queen's Advocate.

The Turkish claim lay in part in the Sultan's titles at the time that the treaty was signed, which accorded to the Sultan sovereignty over, amongst other places, "all Arabia, Africa and Abyssinia".³³ The India Board and the Queen's Advocate,

30. Ibid., p. 9.

31. Signed on Sept. 3, 1843, and generally similar to that concluded at Tadjoura.

32. Although Egyptian troops had been withdrawn from the Yemen in 1840, Egyptian authority was exercised through a Governor, Sheriff Hussein, who paid 90,000 German Crowns annually to the Pasha for "the seaport towns of the Yemen and the Tehema". Hussein was reputed to be very hostile to all foreigners and especially to the British.

33. The titles of the Sultan at the time were, in part: "Moi qui, par la grace spéciale et la bonté infinie du Très Haut, et par les miracles éminens des Prophètes, je suis le Sultan des Sultans, le Khakan des Khakans, le distributeur des Couronnes, l'ombre de Dieu sur la terre, le serviteur des plus nobles parmi les villes et les habitations, la vénérable Mecque et la resplendissante Médine, qui sont les Kiblés des Musulmans et l'autel vers lequel tous les fidèles se retournent; le protecteur et le Gouverneur de la Sainte Jerusalem; l'Empereur des trois grandes villes de Constantinople, d'Andrinople et de Brouses; le Souverain de Damas, de Tripoli de Syrie, de Caire, *de toute l'Arabie de l'Afrique*, de Barca, de Kirvan, d'Alep, . . . de Bagdad, . . . *de l'Abyssinie*, d'Alger, de Tripoli, . . . avec des Iles et les Côtes. . . ."

Sir J. Dodson, were in substantial agreement that, nevertheless, the Porte had no claim over Abyssinia whatever, nor any over the Yemen over than at Mocha. Neither commented upon the sovereignty of the Somali coast, either as its being dependent upon Mocha or in its own right, since no specific claim to it had been made. It may be relevant here to quote extracts from the findings of the Queen's Advocate as representing a careful British assessment of the situation as it then seemed to be:³⁴

Abyssinia cannot be considered as now forming part of the Turkish Empire. . . . No authority of any kind either as to the appointment of Governors or otherwise is, or has for a very long time past, been exercised by the Turkish Government. . . . The mere fact of its being comprehended among the titles of the Sultan is a matter of very slight importance.

With respect to the Yemen generally, it is to be observed that there can be no doubt that it did, at one time, belong both *de jure* and *de facto* to the Turkish Empire: but it appears . . . that in the year 1663, in the reign of Murad the Fourth, the Ottoman army was defeated, and the dominion of the Yemen then passed to the Seids, since which time, with the exception of temporary military occupation of some portions of it, it had been governed by the Imam of Senna (the Chief of the Seids), who is described as in all respects independent, acknowledging no superior, temporal or spiritual. There can, therefore, in my opinion, be no just pretence for ascribing to the Yemen a Turkish character.

As regards Mocha, which is situated in the Yemen, it appears . . . to have been seized by Toorche Bilmar, from whom it was afterwards, viz December 1833, taken by the Bedouins, at the instigation of the Pasha of Egypt, and subsequently delivered into the hands of Ibrahim Pasha, by whom it was held until the evacuation of the Yemen by the troops of Mehemet Ali in 1840. Sheriff Hussein was then appointed to rule over it, on condition of paying tribute to the Pasha, which tribute, it is stated, has been regularly paid. It must therefore be admitted that the Turkish Government possess *de facto* some authority over Mocha.

But both Arabia and the Yemen were soon to acquire more of a "Turkish character", for, in 1847, Turkish troops were again sent to garrison Jedda, Mecca and Medina, and in 1849 the Imam of Senna was persuaded to place himself and his territory under the sovereignty of the Turkish Sultan. Despite the fact that only the previous year the Imam's forces had defeated those of Sheriff Hussein and he had retaken Mocha, he signed an agreement in July 1849,³⁵ whereby:

First: That the country held by the Imam of Senna should continue under his Government, but be considered as the territory of the Porte, and under the sovereignty of the Turkish Sultan.

Secondly: That the revenues be divided, one half being paid into the Treasury of the Sultan and the remainder applied to benefit the country and maintain its civil, judicial and military law, and that 1000 soldiers of the Porte should be placed in the fortress to maintain order and obedience from unruly tribes.

34. Advisory Opinion of Queen's Advocate, dated May 15, 1844.

35. India Board. Aug. 31, 1849. (F.O. 78/3185).

Thirdly: That the Imam should receive for his personal expenses and to support his dignity, 3,700 German Crowns monthly from the revenues before deduction for the Turkish Treasury is made.

The Political Agent at Aden, in reporting this to the Bombay Government,³⁶ pointed out that the Imam was at the time very short of money and, as an inducement, had received 25,000 German Crowns from the Turks over and above the monthly retainer specified. He went on to say that the Imam “perfectly understands the Turkish character and is, I firmly believe, acting a wily part towards them . . .”—which seems, in view of his rejection of Mehemet Ali’s similar proposal only seven years earlier, not altogether improbable!

On the Ethiopian shores of the Red Sea Turkish forces were also active. In 1849, Suakin and Massawa were restored by Egypt to the Porte, and Turkish troops occupied Massawa; whereupon the British Consul in Abyssinia wrote to the Foreign Office expressing the hope that it would issue a declaration to the effect that “the English Government did not consider the possession of Massawa Island to involve any authority over the coast”.³⁷ Later that year Consul Plowden concluded a treaty with the Emperor Theodore in which, amongst other things, they mutually agreed “to keep open and secure the avenues of approach betwixt the sea-coast and Abyssinia”.³⁸ But in all this, despite Plowden’s efforts,³⁹ it is clear that the British Government recognised, de facto at least, Turkish authority at Massawa. Indeed, the extent of British recognition of Turkish authority over the coast between Massawa and the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb can best be seen from noting British reaction to French activities on the coast at this time.

In 1850, M. de Goutier, a former French Consular Agent at Massawa, offered to sell a concession which he claimed to have acquired, of territory at Edd. In the correspondence which led up to the British Government’s rejection of this offer, the British Agent in Egypt commented that he did not consider Edd to be Turkish since the original French purchase had been from Abyssinian Christians. But in 1851 and 1852, when there were more rumors of French designs upon territory at Amphylal and elsewhere along the south-western shores of the Red Sea, the British Government advised the Porte to prevent French establishments in the Red Sea (meaning *anywhere* in the Red Sea). In 1859, the French Consular Agent at Aden, M. Lambert, was drowned whilst sailing from Hodeida to Zeila in a boat belonging to the port of Zeila. The French Government first sent a gunboat to arrest the Governor of Zeila and five or six others, and took them to Hodeida, whose Governor refused to try

36. Letter dated July 27, 1849 (F.O. 78/3185).

37. Letter no. 78, dated Jan. 28, 1849 from Adwa (F.O. 78/3185).

38. Hertslet, *Treaties*, IX, 1.

39. Fascinatingly enough it seems Plowden’s plea was heard and almost acted upon, for Lord Stratford de Redcliffe, British Ambassador in Constantinople was instructed, in despatch no. 264, dated Mar. 6, 1856, to urge the Porte to transfer Massawa to the Ethiopians . . . but owing to difficulties in Constantinople at the time, and to subsequent events in Ethiopia, no further steps were taken in the matter. See also Pankhurst: “Ethiopia and the Red Sea”, *Ethiopia Ovserber*, vol. VIII, no. 1, 1964, pp. 58–59.

them, and then to Jedda, where the Governor-General of the Yemen also declined to act in the matter. They then appealed directly to the Porte for redress, and received 30,000 dollars in compensation. Thus by admitting in this way some responsibility, the Turks obtained significant recognition for a claim that they had not even made at that time. It was not until 1864, five years later, that they sent troops to Zeila and laid formal claim to the whole Somali coast. And even then, the protests from the British authorities at Aden were more against the restrictions upon shipping and the increased taxation upon merchandise passing through the Somali coast to Aden imposed by the Turkish Governor, than upon the establishment of the garrison itself.

Then, as if the occupation of Zeila was achievement enough, the spotlight shifted once more back to the Egyptians. In May, 1865, a Firman was issued by Sultan Abdul Aziz granting Ismail Pasha, then Viceroy of Egypt, the administration of the ports of Massawa and Suakin; the following year he issued another Firman assigning to Ismail and to his descendents "the Government of Egypt, with the territories which are annexed to it, and its Dependencies with the Kaimakamates of Suakin and Massawa".⁴⁰

Four years later, in 1870, the Khedive of Egypt (as he now became called) appointed a Governor with jurisdiction from Suez to Cape Guardafui, and sent a warship to visit the coast. Although no record in the British archives seem to confirm this, the rationale for the appointment seems clearly to have been an assumption that Zeila, and indeed the whole Somali coast, was included in the grant of the Kaimakamate of Massawa in the Firman of 1866. Certainly from an Egyptian point of view there is some justification for this, for the troops occupying Zeila and the ships that visited the coast will have come from, or at least through, Massawa, and the Egyptian Governor of Zeila since 1866 will have been more in contact with Massawa than with Zeila's traditional over-lords in Mocha or Hodeida on the Arabian coast.

Furthermore, this view, that the Egyptian Government regarded Zeila as a dependency of Massawa, seems to have been accepted by the Turks. For, in April 1872, the Turks, advancing inland from Hodeida, captured Senna. Yet even now, when holding both Mocha, upon which Zeila was traditionally dependent, and Senna, upon which Mocha was traditionally dependent, the Porte made no protest about the Egyptian appointment. Indeed, the following year, the Sultan issued another Firman establishing that the Egyptian succession now extended to "the Khedivate of Egypt and its Dependencies, with the Kaimakamates of Suakin and Massawa *and their Dependencies*".⁴¹

The two questions which immediately arise are: firstly, was the sovereignty the Sultan had acquired over Zeila by virtue of his conquest of Mocha and Senna sufficiently tangible to be given away? And, secondly, was it in fact given away? Like so many of the best questions, these appear to remain largely unanswered. The British neatly side-stepped the issue when, four years later, they negotiated an

40. Firman of May 27, 1866.

41. Firman of June 8, 1873.

Agreement⁴² with the Egyptian Government proposing to recognize the jurisdiction of the Khedive, under the suzerainty of the Sublime Porte, over the Somali coast as far as Ras Hafoun under certain conditions, the most important of which were that Berbera and Bulhar should be free ports and that import and export duties at Zeila and Tadjoura should not exceed 5% and 1% respectively. Of this Agreement T. H. Sanderson, in a Foreign Office Memorandum dated May 1, 1880,⁴³ writes:

The concluding article of the Convention stipulated that it should definitely come into operation as soon as the Sultan should have given formal assurance to Her Majesty's Government recognizing the Somali Coast as a dependency of Egypt under the hereditary rule of the Khedive, and engaging similarly that no portion of it should be ceded on any pretence whatever to any Foreign Power.

At the time of the conclusion of the Convention it was not thought opportune to make application to the Porte for the assurances in question, and the whole matter stood over until October 1878, when Sir H. Layard was instructed to bring the Convention to the knowledge of the Porte, and to enter into negotiations for the formal delivery of a declaration to the effect specified.

From this time on he has been ineffectually struggling to obtain this declaration. . . .

Before turning to Britain's reasons for first encouraging Egyptian claims (in the 70's) and then for abandoning them (in the 80's), the position of other foreign countries with interests in, or designs upon, the Horn should be considered.

The Claims of other European Powers

In order of appearance, the first upon the scene was the United States of America. Her interests were entirely commercial and rather short-lived. However, is it an interesting fact that America was the first country to sign, in 1833, a commercial treaty with Seyyid Said, Imam of Muscat and Sultan of Zanzibar: the British did not conclude a similar treaty until 1839, nor the French until 1844.⁴⁴ In 1840 the volume of American trade with Zanzibar was greater than that of any other nation, save only India with whom, of course, Zanzibar, through Muscat, had close and long-standing commercial ties. In 1835, two American warships visited the southern coast of Arabia, apparently seeking a spot where an agency or factory might be set up. But the project was not pursued and nothing came of it. The trade with Zanzibar, emanating mainly from Salem, Massachusetts, continued until the outbreak of the American Civil War.

Next upon the scene were the French. French contact with the Somali coast may be traced back to 1839, when Henri d'Hericourt landed at Tadjoura on the first

42. Agreement signed Sept. 7, 1877.

43. F.O. 78/3193.

44. Sir Reginald Coupland, *The Exploitation of East Africa, 1856-1890*, (London, 1939), p. 9. See also N. R. Bennett, "Americans in Zanzibar 1825-1845, and 1845-1865, in *Tanganyika Notes and Records*, Mar. and Sept., 1961.

of his journeys to Shoa, to the court of King Sāhlā Sellasé.⁴⁵ D’Hericourt’s account of his journeys show that he became the King’s close friend and that he obtained from him, in 1842, the Treaty of Freidnship between Ethiopia and France which paved the way for the Franco-Ethiopian commerce upon which Obock was later to be founded and upon which Djibuti still stands. At the time, however, his dreams inspired little interest.

Two Frenchmen, MM Combes and Tamisier, bought a strip of land at Edd, some 70 miles south of Massawa, in 1840.⁴⁶ It was this title that de Goutier offered to the British Government in 1850, having acquired it from Combes and Tamisier. But since he could persuade neither the British nor anyone else to buy it, the scheme lapsed. In 1856, the French Government made its first overt move by instructing M. Lambert to make enquiries as to the possibility of securing a French station in the vicinity of Aden. In July of the following year, it was reported that the French had bought Edd⁴⁷ (possibly as a new purchase, but more probably the report refers merely to a revival of interest in the original concession of Combes and Tamisier). When they tried to occupy it in September, however, they were refused possession by the Danakil villagers. Then, in 1859, came reports that a French company in Constantinople was sending someone to the Red Sea to purchase “an island called Socotra, which commands its mouth, and which belongs to an Arab Chief”.⁴⁸

In December of that year, the French merchant ship “Le Yemen” visited Massawa and Zula, ostensibly to land an expedition to Emperor Theodore. But when the British Resident at Aden visited Disseh (near Zula) a month later, he found clear signs of a recent French survey of the island. The acting Chief told him that the French had been there and told the people that the island and the mainland around Zula was now French, “although they were not told who it was that had made over the island to the French Government”.⁴⁹ They were promised, however, that the island would greatly prosper from the trade with Abyssinia which the French would shortly establish. At the time it appeared that the islanders paid no taxes, either to the Porte or to the Na’ib of Arkiko (the mainland town opposite Massawa), and that they believed in a Firman of Sultan Selim to their ancestor Sheikh Adam, conceding Disseh’s independence.

Of all this Lord Crowley, Ambassador in Paris, wrote to the Foreign Office:⁵⁰

M. Thouvenal, having seen in the public papers that Captain Roussel had

45. Rochet d’Hericourt, *Voyage sur la Côte Orientale de la Mer Rouge, dans le pays d’Adel et le Royaume de Choa*, (Paris, 1841); and *Second Voyage sur les deux rives de la Mer Rouge*, (Paris, 1846).

46. Hertslet: *Memo. on Turkish Claims*, p. 34, (F.O. 78/3187) quoting Consul Plowden. Pankhurst in *Ethiopia Observer*, vol. VIII, no. 1, p. 42, quoting Ferret and Galinier, names the purchasers Combes and Broquand, and the former French Consul as De Goutin.

47. Coghlan to the Govt. of Bombay, no. 517, of July 4, 1859. (F.O. 78/3186).

48. On learning of this, the British Foreign Office cabled Sir H. Bulwar, the Ambassador in Constantinople, shortly and to the point, “Make the Porte refuse the island”: to which Bulwar replied, “Fuad Pasha thinks that the island . . . belongs to the Imam of Muscat, but that if it turns out that the Porte has jurisdiction over it, he will give the order required”. (F.O. 78/3186).

49. Hertslet, *Memo. on Turkish Claims*, p. 4. (F.O. 78/3187)

50. Crowley to Lord John Russell, May 25, 1860. (F.O. 78/3186).

taken possession of the Island of Disseh in the Red Sea, took occasion, while the Ministers were assembled in Council in the Emperor's presence, to ask the Minister of Marine what foundation there was for the report. Admiral Hamelin admitted its accuracy. M. Thouvenal then, appealing to the Emperor, said that it was very extraordinary that a transaction of this nature and importance, and which related to foreign matters, should have been accomplished without any previous communication with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who might be called upon at any moment for an explanation on the subject.

M. Thouvenal went on to say that, on seeing the report in the papers, he had made enquiries in his Department, but had not been able to find any trace of any correspondence relating to it between his predecessor and the Minister of Marine, and that most assuredly had any question been put to him by the British Ambassador regarding the truth of the statement, he should at once have denied it. He argued that the taking of possession of this island was a most impolitic act; that, if it was intended as a demonstration against England, it would fail of effect, and might possibly induce the British Government to endeavour to obtain possession of other ports on the Red Sea; and that, moreover, the Porte had certain prescriptive right of sovereignty in those waters, and that the Commercial Treaties between France and Turkey were applicable to them.

The Emperor observed that he did not consider the matter to be of much importance, and with that the conversation dropped.

A few days later M. Thouvenal admitted, however, that the French Government had some idea of forming a coaling station in the Red Sea. In December Lord Crowley again called on M. Thouvenal to ascertain the views of the French Government in regard to Abyssinia and the western coast of the Red Sea, and found him "very ignorant" on the subject. Apparently he admitted his ignorance and Lord Crowley concluded that the French Government really had no fixed policy for the region beyond a vague desire to "appear to be the protector of the Roman Catholic religion", which would seem to be only marginally relevant!

Yet, in that same month, December, 1860, one M. Lamoureux, the agent of a company newly formed under the Imperial guarantee for navigating the Red Sea and farther East, passed through Aden and announced that in addition to the long contemplated settlement at Disseh, it was intended to form another one on the African coast opposite Perim Island.⁵¹

But it was not to be; for on December 14, the Kaimakam of Massawa sent a Governor and some soldiers to Disseh to take possession of the island and to hoist the Turkish flag. Captain Cameron, visiting the area in March 1862, reported that the Turkish flag was flying at Disseh, Adulis and Edd, with Governors appointed at Disseh and Adulis, and a Sheikh placed in power at Edd.⁵²

51. Hertslet, *Memo. on Turkish Claims*, p. 44-45. (F.O. 78/1387).

52. Consul Cameron to Foreign Office, May 20, 1862. In concluding his report Cameron stresses that "It is the advancement of Turkey at the expense of Abyssinia".

There follows an even more intriguing episode. The men whom two years before the French had accused of murdering M. Lambert were returned to Zeila in the care of the Chief Dragoman of the French Embassy in Constantinople, M. Shaeffer. Shaeffer had passed through Egypt under an assumed name "to escape the jealous observation of British agents", and carried with him a considerable sum of money. Although, as we have seen, by their demand of the Porte for compensation for Lambert's death, the French Government clearly recognized Turkish sovereignty in the area, Shaeffer took the opportunity of buying from the Sultan of Tadjoura and Rahaita the harbor of Obock and its adjoining plains for 10,000 dollars.⁵³ The land was not occupied; and, apart from a survey of the harbor in 1864, the only tangible sign of French interest in their purchase was a tricolor left with an elderly Dankali who was carefully instructed to raise it should anyone visit the port.

Then in January 1869, two Frenchmen, MM Mass and Poilex, purchased from the Sheikh of the Hakurni tribe for 80,000 dollars a spot on the Arabian coast opposite Perim Island called Sheikh Seyd Bunder, or more commonly Sheikh Said, to establish a factory there. It subsequently transpired that the harbor was too shallow to be serviceable and the project was abandoned. But in the controversy over the sale, the Turks claimed sovereignty over the place and forbade the sale: in this way they were supported by the British Resident at Aden and Subadar Ranco Jaslou, the Indian commanding officer at Perim. Sheikh Ali Tarbat of the Hakurni was astonished at this, and declared that "the territory had never been governed by anyone but himself and his ancestors".⁵⁴ For its part, the Company, with a beautiful piece of French logic, was ready "to admit the validity of the opposition of the Porte with reference to suzerainty, (yet) it maintained that it was no less incontestable that the proprietary rights of the Sheikh could not be disputed". Somewhat later, M. Aubert, Secretary of the French Embassy at Constantinople, argued to Lord Lyons that the sovereignty of the Sultan over these remote regions was far from being established, and, at all events, that the European Guarantee of the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, established at the Congress of Paris in 1856, could not be held to extend indefinitely in directions in which the frontier was not distinctly mentioned.⁵⁵

And with this succession of seemingly empty purchases, French interest in the Horn ended for the time being, her energies now being consumed by the war of 1870 with Prussia and its aftermath. Indeed, the decade ended with France expressly renouncing her interests in the area in a notification dated December 25, 1880,⁵⁶ announcing that no sovereignty had ever been exercised and that no trading concessions could be granted. This did not by any means terminate French interest or activity in the Horn, but it does indicate that at the time that Clarke Jervoise's question was put, the French were not active in the region.

53. On Mar. 11, 1862. See Sir Edward Hertslet: *Map of Africa by Treaty*, 3rd ed. (London, 1909), II, 6ff.

54. Hertslet, *Memo. on Turkish claims*, p. 56. (F.O. 78/3187).

55. Letter from Sir H. Elliot, no. 703, July 8, 1870. (F.O. 78/3186).

56. Hertslet, *Map of Africa by Treaty*, I, 272.

By contrast, the Italians were just commencing their activities. It appears that early in 1870 the Rubattino Steam Packet Company bought from the Sultan of Rahaita some property at Assab for 8,200 dollars in order to set up a coaling depot for the steamers they planned to run through the Suez Canal to India and the Far East. It was at this moment that Raouf Pasha was appointed Egyptian Governor of all the African coast from Suez to Cape Guardafui, and an Egyptian warship, the "Khartoum", was sent to investigate. The Egyptians found and entered an uninhabited hut at Assab, apparently manhandled a few of the local inhabitants, and removed an Italian flag.⁵⁷ The Italians made no attempt to return to Assab until 1879. In April of that year, the Italian corvette "Rapido" visited the area with an exploration party sent by the Italian Geographical Society under Captain Martini. In May, the frigate "Victor Pisani" visited Berbera with the Duke of Genoa on board. During the summer Assab was occupied, and, in November, Commander Rubattino announced that Assab Bay had been bought by his company for their shipping services within the Red Sea and to the East, and that the Government "never had an idea of obtaining the cession of it": he then went on to "express the hope that the Italian Government will grant (his Company) that protection which all Italians owning property and engaging in commerce abroad have the right to expect".⁵⁸

Two days later Sir A. Paget, British Ambassador in Rome, wrote to the Foreign Office confirming that the Italian Government had informed him that they felt "bound to afford this encouragement and support to Signor Rubattino in a district where there was no sort of protection for life and property", and that they were therefore sending two warships, one of them an Ironclad, to the Red Sea.⁵⁹ But the Minister of Foreign Affairs made "the most positive declaration, several times repeated, that Signor Rubattino's intended establishment at Assab Bay was not a Government enterprise, that the Government had no connection with it further than what was stated, and that they had no idea of raising a question as to the sovereignty of the district in question . . . , and that they had no political objects in view."

On January 20, 1880, H.M.S. "Seagull" visited Assab and found the Italian men-of-war "Esploratore" and "Ischia" and a steamer belonging to the Rubattino Company. There was no sign of military occupation and only the Italian merchant ensign was flying on shore. In the early part of the month an Egyptian warship had visited the Bay, and her Captain had raised no objection to the proceedings of the Italians. A pier was being run out, a condenser capable of distilling two tons of water a day had been landed and a bakery had been established. In Commander Heron's opinion it was possible that the Italians might eventually make a good trading-place of Assab and that was all that they appeared then to be attempting. In March however, it was learned that they had already bought the island opposite Assab for 7 000 dollars in January, and that they were negotiating for five or six of

57. Hertslet, *Memo. on Turkish Claims*, pp. 52-53. (F.O. 78/3187).

58. Letter to *Corriere Mercantile*, Nov. 18, 1879.

59. Sir A. Paget to Lord Salisbury, despatch no. 443, Nov. 20, 1879; also quoted in *Correspondence relating to the Italian Occupation of Assab Bay*, Political and Secret Dept., Foreign Office, May 14, 1880, p. 5. (78/3193).

the largest islands in the Bay with the Sultan of Rahaita. All this caused quite a stir in Aden and when Captain Hunter, the Resident's Assistant, went to Assab that month he came to the definite conclusion that "the development of trade is but a flimsy excuse". Suspicious of everyone, he reported:⁶⁰

Whoever finds the money, all the superintendence is performed by officers of the "Esploratore" and the "Ischia", and the men of those vessels were engaged in lime-pointing the outside of Mr Sapeto's house. . . .

The capabilities of the place are great, and in time of war it could be converted into a far more commodious rendez-vous for vessels of war than Aden. . . . Altogether the place is so well suited for warlike and so ill-adapted for peaceful purposes, that it is hard to believe that the present energy and expenditure for Messrs Sapeto and Amezaga had their sole object in the harmless desire of Mr Rubattino to possess a coaling station of his own in the Red Sea.

Furthermore I saw at Assab a brother of Ali Tarbat, the Hakurnee Sheikh who sold Sheikh Said to the French. Any day the Porte may allow some other Foreign Power to quietly buy that place from the local Sheikh unless steps be taken to prevent it.

The Contract of Sale between Rubattino's agents and Sultans Abdullah Schiahim, Hassan-Eben-Ahmed, and Ibrahim-Eben-Ahmed offers nothing to show that the Italian Government was a party to the transaction, although it is stated that the purchasers are to have "the full power to establish themselves as they think best, and to hoist the national flag in token of their absolute ownership ('padronanza') of the place".

In other documents,⁶¹ however, the right of acquisition was defended by the Italian Government as an Affair of State rather than merely a private contract, and, in a despatch of May 19, 1881, M. Visconti Venosta stated that though Signor Rubattino had become "the private proprietor of the territory of Assab, the Royal Government had become its Sovereign". Assab was formally transferred from the Rubattino Company to the Italian Government by an Agreement signed in Rome on March 10, 1882.⁶²

British Interests in the Area

What now were the British interests in the region: and how could they be furthered by support of Egypt against these incursions?

Throughout the period we are considering, Britain's interests were dominated by two main themes; firstly, to keep open and maintain the trade routes to India, and secondly, from the opening of the nineteenth century onwards, to secure the

60. Letter from Aden, no. 14, Mar. 25, 1880: *Correspondence relating to Italian Occupation of Assab Bay*, pp. 15-19. (F.O. 78/3193).

61. *Correspondence relating to the Italian Occupation of Assab Bay*, p. 22. (F.O. 78/3193). See also *Italian Proceedings on the African Coast of the Red Sea*, Political and Secret Dept., Foreign Office, Sept. 19, 1881. (F.O. 78/3366).

62. C. Rosetti, *Storia diplomatica dell'Etiopia* (Torino, 1901), p. 20.

abolition of the Slave Trade. And her policy was as pragmatic as could be: she sought to achieve these ends indirectly by influencing whatever native rulers she might find with whatever degree of advice, persuasion or coercion seemed necessary, and, further, at the minimum possible cost to herself.

Until Napoleon's final defeat in 1815, Britain had been much preoccupied with the need to control the Indian Ocean in order to protect her rapidly expanding trade with India from the actions of the French or, earlier, the Dutch fleets, or of pirates. With this menace largely disposed of, she now turned her attention with increasing vigor to the abolition of the Slave Trade. Of the position up to the middle of the last century, Sir Reginald Coupland writes:⁶³

By the abolition of Slavery in the British Isles in 1772-4, of the British Slave Trade in 1808, and of Slavery in the British Colonies in 1834, by cajoling, badgering and bribing other European nations to enact laws against the Slave Trade and to enforce, or allow Britain to enforce, their execution, and by maintaining naval patrols for the prevention of slave smuggling on both sides of the Atlantic, the British people—and from 1790 onwards it was a genuinely popular movement—had done all they could do to destroy the slave system in the West. In the East it was more old-established, more widespread and more difficult to combat; but from 1807 onwards a series of attacks was made on it. The prohibition of the Slave Trade was enforced in British India, and the protected Indian rulers on the north-west coast induced to follow suit; treaties for the suppression of the Trade were concluded with Persia and the Arab tribes of the Persian Gulf; and in 1843 the legal status of Slavery was abolished in British India. But these repressive measures were only concerned with the countries into which slaves were imported; and no effort to end the Trade could succeed unless measures were also taken in the countries of export. As long, in fact, as slaves were obtainable, somehow or other they would be obtained, at any rate in countries less amenable to British control than India, whatever treaties might be signed or orders issued by their signatories.

Along the East African coast slavery was gradually controlled and finally abolished by regularly applying pressure upon the Sultans of Zanzibar to enact the requisite legislation, which the British would then enforce by means of the Royal Navy. Along the Somali coasts, and in the Red Sea, the problem was harder still, for neither the Porte nor the Khedive nor the local Chieftains were very ready to consider abolishing an institution which was at one time their most lucrative source of revenue, and upon which Arab society had been based since the dawn of history.

The first British settlement of any sort in this area was during the war against Napoleon when British troops occupied Perim Island for a time in 1799. In 1827 H.M.S. "Tamar" visited Berbera to investigate the looting of the brig "Marianne" after she had run aground nearby two years previously. Before leaving, however, her captain concluded a Treaty of Friendship and Commerce with the Habr Awal,

63. R. Coupland, *East Africa and its Invaders* (Oxford, 1956), pp. 10-11.

which included a clause under which the Habr Awal agreed to suppress the Slave Trade. In 1835, a detachment of British troops was posted on Socotra, but was withdrawn when the Sultan of Kisseen refused to sell the island; then, in 1838, the British acquired Aden and established there a coaling station and naval base.

Since then, at least until the Suez Canal was opened in 1869, British interests seem primarily to have consisted in keeping free and open lines of commerce between Aden and the Somali coast which supplied most of its fresh foodstuffs, protecting shipping, preventing the looting of ships wrecked along these wild coasts, and restricting the traffic in slaves: in short, in promoting trade generally.

Like the true gentlemen who seeks to protect every woman from every man except himself, Britain conceived that the best way of achieving these objectives was by preserving the *status quo*—by which was meant respecting the independence of those people traditionally independent and sustaining the ties of allegiance and dependency for the rest as formed throughout the centuries, and resisting thereby the incursion of all new, and possibly disruptive, forces. It will be remembered how, soon after acquiring Aden, Britain warned both Egypt and Turkey not to extend their claims to sovereignty beyond the Red Sea. In her treaties of 1827, 1840, 1855 and 1866 with Chiefs along the Somali coast⁶⁴ Britain sought generally to establish friendly links, to acquire the right to install a British agent, to encourage trade both by sea with Aden and with the interior, to prohibit traffic in slaves, and, probably most important of all, to prevent other European Powers concluding independent treaties “which might be detrimental or injurious to British interests” without first informing the authorities at Aden. In 1847, the Foreign Office informed the Porte⁶⁵ that it would not sanction Egyptian encroachments upon Abyssinia, nor to occupy Suakin or Massawa. Yet five years later, as we have seen, following the efforts of de Goutier to sell the supposed concession at Edd, the Porte was advised by the British Government to prevent French establishments in the Red Sea. Then, for a time at least, it looked as if the problem of keeping other European Powers out of the region had resolved itself, when all of them agreed at the Congress of Paris of 1856 to respect the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. This seemed to ensure the *status quo*.

But it was not really as easy as that: for while the European Powers agreed not to encroach upon the territories of the Porte, the Porte was not so restricted, and only two years later Brigadier W. M. Coghlan, Political Resident at Aden, felt it necessary to warn the British Consul-General in Egypt:⁶⁶

The territorial pretensions of the Porte are boundless: the Sultan is ever ready to assume the Sovereignty of any Mohammedan Country. This disposition should not be lost sight of, as awkward complications may hereafter arise if any act of ours should ever give an implied recognition of such pretensions.

But not only did the local British officials suspect the Ottoman authorities of seeking to expand their jurisdiction, they also started to doubt the efficacy of relying

64. Aitcheson, *Collection of Treaties*, pp. 154, 178–184.

65. Despatch no. 312, Dec. 6, 1847. (F.O. 78/3185).

66. Coghlan to Consul-General, Dec. 28, 1858. (F.O. 78/3186).

solely upon the Porte for the maintenance of peace and good order. In May 1859, the Acting Consul-General in Egypt wrote to the Foreign Office, in connection with the setting up of telegraph stations in the area:⁶⁷

I avail myself of this opportunity to call the attention of Her Majesty's Government to the advisableness not only of keeping a sufficient naval force in the Red Sea, but of causing the principal ports to be frequently visited by small cruisers. The Governments, both Turkish and Egyptians, are very weak in that direction; and there is too much fanaticism on the part of the Mussulman populations to allow of their being left long without the appearance of a controlling force, that may hold them in respect, at least on the sea board.

Rather than take action herself, however, to enforce the "respect" the Consul-General thought necessary, Britain continued her policy of obtaining her ends by indirect pressure and suggestion, and through rather than against the Ottoman authorities. Thus it was the Turks who countered the French attempts of the 1860's to establish themselves in the Red Sea or at Obock: but, in encouraging them to do so, the British found themselves forced to acquiesce in Turkish occupation of Zeila and to recognise, *de facto* at least, their claims to the whole coast.

For most of the decade following the appointment of Raouf Pasha as Governor of the African Coast from Suez to Cape Guardafui, in 1870, Her Majesty's Government was unable to decide whether or not to recognize the appointment, and the claim to sovereignty that it implied. In April of that year, there was correspondence between the Political Resident at Aden and Djemali Bey, the officer in command of the Egyptian warship "Khartoum", as to the ship's purposes on the coast. Djemali Bey argued that his visit was at the request of the natives to effect a reconciliation between a number of the tribes, and that "as the country had from time immemorial belonged to the Sublime Porte and the inhabitants were Ottoman subjects, there could be no question of conquering the country". In June, Charif Pasha sent General Stanton, the Consul-General in Egypt, copies of this correspondence asking him to submit the case to Her Majesty's Government "with the view of removing any doubts which the Governor of Aden might entertain as to the rights of the Egyptian Government over that territory". General Stanton forwarded the correspondence to Lord Clarendon at the Foreign Office on June 3, 1870⁶⁸—and over four years later had still received no reply.

And by 1874 the Egyptians were much more firmly established. The Sultan's Firman of June 8, 1873, confirmed, in the Khedive's opinion, Egypt's right to the coast with its grant of "Suakin and Massaws and their Dependencies".⁶⁹ In the autumn of that year, H.M.S. "Dalhousie" reported that, on visiting Berbera she found the Egyptian corvette "Arkha" well established there, and was offered assistance "as if the territory belonged to the Egyptians".⁷⁰ At that very moment, in fact, Raouf Pasha's troops were on their way to Harar, where they were to conquer

67. Acting Consul-General Walne to Lord Malmesbury, May 28, 1859. (F.O. 78/3186).

68. Stanton to Lord Clarendon, no. 60, June 3, 1870. (F.O. 78/3186).

69. Stanton to Lord Derby, no. 78, Sept. 15, 1874. (F.O. 78/3187).

70. Hertslet, *Memo. on Turkish Claims*, p. 61. (F.O. 78/3187).

the Province and establish a substantial garrison. What now should Britain do? Should she recognize the Khedive's authority, or should she still insist that the Egyptians have no rights outside the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb? And what should happen to the French claims? A decision would soon have to be made.

An indication as to the direction that Sir Edward Hertslet thought the decision should take may be gained from the fact that the very last sentence of his long "Memorandum on the Turkish Claims to Sovereignty over the Eastern Shores of the Red Sea and the whole of Arabia; and on the Egyptian Claims to the whole of the Western Shore of the same Sea, including the African Coast from Suez to Cape Guardafui" of March 5, 1874, already much quoted in this paper, suggests:⁷¹

If our men-of-war more frequently visited Massawa, Suakin, Zeila and Tadjoura, and the other ports on that coast, an appreciable effect might soon be produced in checking the Slave Trade in the Red Sea and its neighbourhood.

The uncertainty of their position at this time is reflected in Lord Tenterden's minutes of a meeting at the Foreign Office on June 2, to co-ordinate policy between the Foreign and Indian Offices, at which it was decided that:⁷²

Looking at the great difficulties which surround the question of the Turkish claims to sovereignty and our relations with the Somalis and other independent tribes, the best way will be to have a comprehensive statement drawn up at the India Office showing what our Treaty rights are, and which are those on which we lay stress. . . .

On September 25, Sir Louis Mallet wrote to the Foreign Office to express the views of the Secretary of State for India, then still Lord Salisbury, on the matter. He concluded:⁷³

As far, therefore, as the information now before him enables him to judge, Lord Salisbury is inclined to adhere to the opinion that the extension of Egyptian power over the Somali coast, with especial reference to Bulhar and Berbera, is not under existing circumstances to be desired; for it cannot be looked upon at present as tending to the suppression of the Slave Trade or the diminution of Ottoman influence in the neighbourhood of Aden.

This letter must, however, have crossed with a despatch from General Stanton in Egypt which was to turn the decision in the other direction. After stating the basis of the Egyptian case, Stanton goes on to stress the need for, and the benefits that might accrue from, "the establishment on the Somali coast of a regular administration capable of suppressing the inter-tribal feuds which have hitherto prevented any extension of commerce in those regions". And he submits that the Egyptian Government is perhaps best qualified to fulfil that role. He points out that trade with Aden has gone up slightly in 1874, and that the Egyptians are preparing a trade mission

71. F.O. 78/3186.

72. Present at this meeting were Sir H. Rawlinson, Sir L. Mallet, Col. Pelly, Mr Aitcheson and Major Burns from the India Office, and Lord Tenterden and Mr Bourke of the Foreign Office.

73. Sir L. Mallet to the Foreign Office, Sept. 15, 1874. (F.O. 78/3187).

to go up to Harar—which, he feels, should prove that “the fears entertained by the Government of India that the occupation of Berbera by the Egyptians would endanger the supply of provisions drawn by Aden from the Somali country, are chimerical”. Indeed he points out that, by the Commercial Treaty now in force between Great Britain and the Porte, which is also binding upon Egypt, the duty charged should be only 1% instead of the 5% now prevailing. He even suggests that the Egyptians might agree to declare Berbera and the other ports as “free ports”, should the Foreign Office wish it.

With regard to the Slave Trade, he points out that the Agreements with the Chiefs of the Habr Awal and other tribes for the suppression of this trade, have in fact had little effect. He thus goes on to urge:

As His Highness the Khedive is preapred to conclude a convention with Her Majesty’s Government to prohibit the export of slaves from Egyptian territory, it would at least appear that the Egyptian occupation of this coast would hardly have the disastrous effect, with reference to the Slave Trade, contemplated by Sir Bartle Frere: it would, I imagine on the contrary, tend rather to the suppression of this traffic in these regions by the substitution, in lieu of the present divided authority, of a strong Government which could be held responsible for the acts of its subjects and for the due performance of its treaty obligations in this important matter.

The policy of the Egyptian Government is now far different and far more enlightened than was the case in Mehemet Ali’s time, when the country was in a state of great disorganisation and when commercial relations with the rest of the world were barely developed, and the reasons which then induced Her Majesty’s Government to resist any extension of Ottoman territory beyond the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb can now, as far as commercial interests are concerned, hardly be said to exist.

Furthermore, he felt that “the Egyptian Government would be more ready to listen to and act on the representation of Her Majesty’s Government and to give greater trading facilities to Her Majesty’s subjects, than other Powers who might become possessed of that country in the event of the Egyptian claim being disallowed. . . .”

Under these circumstances I would venture with great deference to submit that both for Political and Commercial reasons as well as with a view to the suppression of the East African Slave Trade, the right of the Egyptian Government to the Somali country should be recognised by Her Majesty’s Government, under the conditions that Berbera should be declared free, that facilities should be given for opening up commercial relations between Abyssinia and the Egyptian porte, and that the Egyptian Government should enter into a formal engagement to prohibit the export of Slaves and to use every endeavour to suppress the Slave Trade within its territory.

Stanton prevailed. Lord Derby’s minute on the letter itself began:

I am very much disposed, like Lord Tenterden, to think that General Stanton takes the right view . . .

And in reply to Mallet's letter of September 25, but with Stanton's considerations much in mind, Lord Tenterden wrote tersely, but firmly:

I see nothing in this letter to alter my opinion as to the correctness of General Stanton's views.

The India Office concurred, and, for good or will, a decision had been made; the decision which, five years later, Mr Clarke Jervoise was to call in question.

Although endorsed, as we have seen, by both the Under-Secretary of State and the Secretary of State, the policy was not, of course, to last. As a result of the Arabi rebellion in Egypt and the Mahdi rising in the Sudan, Britain came to play an increasingly direct and militant role in the area, occupying Egypt in 1882, the Sudan the following year, and, after the overthrow by Menilek's troops of the Egyptian forces in Harar, to negotiate a series of treaties herself, in 1884–86, with the Somali peoples opposite Aden, and in the 90's with France and Italy and with Ethiopia, to establish her protectorate over what is now northern Somalia.

It may now be seen that the northern Somali coast has been subject to outside interference and control—of a sort which we would today call imperialistic— for an extraordinarily long time. Furthermore the tale confirms considerations of trade, religion and territorial expansion as being among the main motives for such interference with astonishing consistency over twenty or more centuries.

In using as our yardstick British attitudes to the claims to sovereignty over the northern Somali coastline, we begin with the British felt "need" for responsible government along these important and dangerous shores. As Pankhurst points out,⁷⁴ the first British treaty with the Somali tribes in 1827, and with the Sultan of Aden in 1838, followed in each case the plundering of ships wrecked on their respective coasts, which seemed, to the British, quite literally intolerable. But implicit in this assumption of the need for responsible government is the view that government on the coast prior to this was either irresponsible or non-existent—as assumption which, as most sociological and anthropological commentators, from Burton to Lewis and Drysdale, point out, is far from justified. Traditional Somali government, exercised within its nomadic and clan-family framework, is, indeed, probably amongst the most democratic in the world. Burton described the Somalis as "a fierce and turbulent race of Republicans": he found every decision to be made only after full and public discussion in which all adult men have an equal say. The system itself is one which recognises no permanent and all-embracing leaders, who might assume even in part a monarchical, aristocratic or dictatorial role: every man elected to lead is elected to lead for a particular period and in a particular sphere of public concern. Lewis submits that⁷⁵ whilst Somali political contract may not correspond in all respects to any one of the many doctrines of the Social Contract of the political philosophers, it does, nevertheless, "include essentially contractual elements having closest

74. Pankhurst, *Ethiopia Observer*, vol. VIII, no. 1, pp. 42, 41.

75. Lewis, *A Pastoral Democracy*, p. 196.

affinities with those political theories which saw the origins of political union in an egalitarian social contract".⁷⁶

What is at stake, then, is not so much the degree of the government's activity or responsibility, per se, as the extent to which its responsibility is relevant to and co-operative with the needs of other governments. There is little doubt as to the existence, during the nineteenth century, and exercise of government in the northern Somali-lands, nor even, within its own frame of reference, as to its responsibility. Its weakness lay, rather, in the fact that it offered the outside world no visible central authority, nor was there any earnest of desire to accord to foreigners who might come, by design or accident, to their shores, the respect and safety that had come to be regarded as a near-international right.

To what extent this excessive insularity of government may have been a feature forcing the Sabaeans "to found colonies" along the coast in ancient times, we cannot, of course, now tell. But we may suppose that it may have been a factor, for we know that these early colonies were founded for purposes of trade; and regular established trade requires a definite measure of "responsible" government, providing and guaranteeing safety and security to the lives and property of the traders. It may even be that such insularity of "native" government, rather than its non-existence or irresponsibility, has been a persistent cause, and to some extent even a justification, of imperialism in many parts of the world'

Trade has been, of course, a prime motive for territorial aggression of various sorts which we today would call imperialistic, from the early Sabaean colonies until the present day. Lord Salisbury's insistence that the reason for supporting Egyptian presence in the area in 1879 was "our only security against any other European Power obtaining a footing opposite Aden" was, presumably, to safeguard Aden's food supplies, whilst at the same time ensuring British supremacy in the region without herself having to acquire directly additional responsibilities. And Britain's interest in Aden lay, similarly, in its location as a coaling and naval station vital to the expansion, then, of trade and Empire in India and the Far East, and, increasingly, as a trading centre in its own right.

Religion has been another consistent factor since at least the sixteenth century, when the Ottoman, and Moslem, Turks "took possession of Zeila" and established themselves along the coast and in the Red Sea. In this connection it is significant that since the region was already Moslem, the Turks withdrew active control of their garrisons at Suakin, Massawa and Zeila following the departure of the Catholic Portuguese in 1633. To what extent the British anti-slavery movement of the nineteenth century may be termed "religious" is hard to determine. Dr Eric Williams, and other scholars more recently, have argued that the Abolition Movement, at least as regards the Atlantic Slave Trade, was economically motivated.⁷⁷ Be that as it may, it can hardly be said that Britain's interest in destroying the East African slave trade was primarily economic, since few British, or even British-protected persons were in any direct way involved. The evidence that by the second half of the last century

76. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

77. E. E. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, 1944).

the British conscience was considerably disturbed by the continual existence of slave-trading in East African and Arab waters is considerable. The connection between the Society for the Suppression of the Slave Trade, the church and missionary movement as a whole, and what might be called the British national conscience, seems sufficiently close to warrant the suggestion that Britain's interference "for anti-slavery purposes" was but a nineteenth-century liberal-humanitarian manifestation of religiously-motivated imperialistic tendencies.

And, lastly, the most simple explanation for imperialism, the straightforward desire for land, has likewise been a consistent factor — but with a distinctive variation. So harsh and unattractive is the Somali hinterland that the various imperial Powers, perhaps from the Sabeans of old and certainly from the Turks in the sixteenth century to the British in the nineteenth, have regularly been satisfied by merely keeping possible rivals out. Just as the Turks withdrew as soon as the Portuguese departed in the seventeenth century, so Lord Salisbury was primarily concerned not so much with conquering the area as with preventing other Powers from doing so.

Thus it may well be, following Professor Eisenstadt's line of thought,⁷⁸ that it is not so much a country's economic viability as its capacity to accept and absorb new and changing pressures and obligations imposed upon it from the outside world, which determines its ability, and perhaps even its right, to stand alone. Such a thesis would go far towards explaining the consistency and persistence of outside interference experienced by the Somalis in the past, as to the exercise of government in the area, and would go some way to support the rather obvious thought that foreign interference in the area may not end for some time to come. It is all too easy to see how the attempts by other Powers to pursue their national interests as regards trade, religion and/or ideology, and territorial security and perhaps even aggrandisement, could continue to be factors in shaping the future of the Somali Horn unless and until the Government there can not merely achieve economic viability, but sufficient internal strength and external respect to dominate the conflict between the interests of the outside world and of the indigeneous people. Such a Government would have to be strong and wealthy enough to meet, without question, every obligation that the outside world might impose, and to match, primarily from its own resources, every threat that the outside world might present — which perhaps suggests the imperative need for larger units in Africa: for the question arises very quickly, in this case as in several others in the continent, as to whether the climate, land and population of the area concerned makes possible, even under ideal conditions, the creation and maintenance of so strong a government.

78. Professor S. N. Eisenstadt, Opening Address at the Conference on Social and Political Change in French-speaking Africa, in Washington, Aug. 17-21, 1964.

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