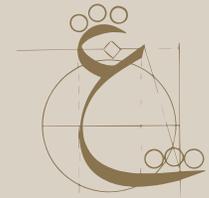
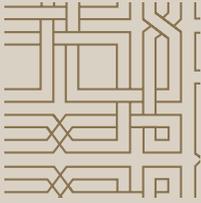




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Ethiopia's Relation with the Ottomans: From Hostility to Understanding



NIGUSU ADEM YIMER*
BELAY BEYENE CHEKOLE**

ETİYOPYA'NIN
OSMANLILARLA İLİŞKİSİ:
DÜŞMANLIKTAN ANLAYIŞA

ABSTRACT

This study examines the long-standing hostile and distrustful relations between Ethiopia and the Ottoman Empire. The Ethio-Ottoman antagonistic relation was not coincident; somewhat, the interest of the Ottoman to supervise the political, economic, and religious life of the Red Sea and Northeast Africa regions primarily stemmed the hostility. The presence of the Portuguese in the Red-Sea region and its subsequent alignment with Ethiopia further worsened the Ethio-Ottoman belligerency. The positioning of the Ottomans with the Adal Sultanate had also complicated the relations and brought with them generations of distrust. This article recounts the dynamics of the Ethio-Ottoman relations, mainly focusing on the changing aspects of hostility and understanding. The paper addresses the relations in three major sections. The first section of the study explains the root of the Ethio-Ottomans' hostile and distrustful relations. The second one is devoted to showing the dynamic of the essence of the Ethio-Ottoman relations in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. The last section elucidates the Ethio-Ottoman connections during the era of Sultan Abdülhamid II. The study employs an analytical, interpretive approach to analyze archival documents and secondary works of literature.

Keywords: Ethiopia, Ottoman, Relations, Africa, Red Sea.



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ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Etiyopya ile Osmanlı arasındaki uzun süreli düşmanca ve güvensiz ilişkileri incelemektedir. İki devlet arasındaki bu türden bir ilişki tesadüf değildi; mücadeleleri esas olarak Osmanlı'nın Kızıldeniz ve Kuzeydoğu Afrika bölgelerinin siyasi, ekonomik ve dini yaşamını denetleme ilgisinden kaynaklanıyordu. Ek olarak, Portekizlilerin Kızıldeniz bölgesinde bulunması ve daha sonra Etiyopya ile yakınlaşması, Osmanlı ve Etiyopya arasındaki husumeti kızıştırdı. Osmanlı'nın Adal Sultanlığı'nın yanında yer alması Etiyopya-Osmanlı ilişkilerini daha da karıştırdı ve beraberinde nesiller boyu sürecek düşmanlık ve güvensizlik getirdi. Makale, Etiyopya-Osmanlı ilişkilerini üç ana bölümde ele almaktadır. İlk bölüm, Etiyopya-Osmanlı arasındaki düşmanca ve güvensiz ilişkilerinin kökenini açıklamaktadır. Makalenin ikinci bölümü, on yedinci, on sekizinci ve on dokuzuncu yüzyıllarda Etiyopya-Osmanlı ilişkilerinin öz dinamiğini göstermeye ayrılmıştır. Son bölüm, II. Abdülhamid dönemi Etiyopya-Osmanlı ilişkilerini izah etmektedir. Çalışmada, arşiv belgelerini ve ikincil literatür eserlerini analiz etmek için analitik yorumlayıcı yaklaşım kullanılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Etiyopya, Osmanlı, İlişkiler, Afrika, Kızıldeniz.

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1. Context

In the dynamics of Ethiopian history, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries experienced different dynamics such as, among others, political and military challenges between lowland Muslims and the people of Christian Highland Kingdom. Additionally, population movements had also tested the existing demographic and political arrangements of the country. The military, economic, political, and religious rivalries between the Muslim lowlanders and the Christian highlanders had remarkable contributions to country's later era political, social, economic, and cultural settings. Against this background, the animosity between the Muslim Adal Sultanate and the Christian Highland Kingdom has a remarkable place in the fifteenth and sixteenth century's political dynamics of Ethiopia. It is vital to note that the long-standing rivalry and hostility between the two sides was reached its pinnacle in the 16th century. It is also essential to note that the confrontation between the Christian Highland Princes and the Adal Sultanate was primarily stemmed from commercial and political motives. The religious tone of the two group's hostility got much more weight than their commercial and political causes. Magnifying the religious tone got primacy with intent because both sides were well aware that the religious card brought much profit to mobilize their followers and to get the support of religious-affiliated international actors.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the ancient commercial, political and religious rivalries of the Adal Sultanate and the Ethiopian Christian Highland Princes unfolded the tension over the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden regions. In the process of their rival relations, the two sides had long been concerned with the control of trade routes inland along the Gulf of Aden regions, where a substantial amount of the country's imports and exports were conducted. Apparently, in the dynamics of the hostile relations between the Adal Sultanate and the Christian Highland Princes, Imam Mahfouz was among the prominent Adal rulers that organized up to twenty-five expeditions annually against the Christian Highland Princes.¹ Most of Imam Mahfouz's expeditions were organized under the name of *Jihad* and Mahfouz himself was represented by many spectators as prominent Adal ruler that dedicated himself to *Jihad*.² In 1517 Mahfouz died while fighting with the Christian Highland king named Lebna-Dengel.

Imam Mahfouz and his successors' rivalry with the Christian Highland Princess coincided with a period of major international developments in the Red Sea region. The primary development in the Red-Sea and Gulf of Aden regions that escalated the hostility between the Adal Sultanate and the Christian Highland Princes was the aggressive diplomacy and rivalry between the Portuguese and the Ottomans over the commercial activities in the Red-Sea and Gulf of Aden. The two mutually rival global powers, the Portuguese and the Ottomans positioned themselves as major actors of the Red sea and the Gulf of Aiden regions. Thereupon, the Portuguese positioned itself with the Christian Highland Princes while the Ottomans stand with the Muslim Adal Sultanate. Apparently, the Portuguese and the Ottoman's rivalries over the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden regions were primarily stemmed from the ambition to have the monopoly on the lucrative spice commercial route to

1 Abdu Muhammed Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri: Karşılıklı Şüphe ve Anlaşmazlıktan Karşılıklı Anlayış ve İşbirliğine* (Ankara: Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Institute of Social Science, Ph.D. Dissertation, 2012), 33.

2 Haggai Erlich, *Ethiopia and the Middle East* (London:L. Rienner Publishers,1994), 30.

India via the Red Sea. Likewise, the two global actor's rivalry was complicated because the Red Sea was a remarkable waterway that had vital value to sell goods from Asia and India at European and Ottomans markets. Regarding this issue mentioning Cengiz Orhonlu, Abdu Muhammed Ali argues that:

“[After 1517] The Ottoman state, appreciating the importance and benefits of eastern trade coming from India and other directions, decided to revive this trade by eliminating the stagnation period caused by the war; for this reason, it started to organize the gold and spice trade. The first action to be taken was to try to establish security between the Mediterranean Sea and India after gaining dominance and control in the Red Sea. It is claimed that their contacts with the east-Turkistan, India, etc. could be provided by the sea. The greatest rivals of the Ottomans were the Portuguese, who claimed that they had the monopoly of the eastern trade.”³

On the other hand, the Ottomans tried to control Ethiopia and the Red Sea not only to fight back the Portuguese over the Red Sea trade. Rather, the Ottoman's primary interest in Ethiopia was stemmed from its ambition to benefit from the geostrategic significance of Ethiopia. To signify the strategic importance of Ethiopia to the Ottomans, Abdu Muhammed Ali argues:

“The reasons that pushed the Ottomans to Abyssinia were not only the gold issue. Another reason was the issue of the eastern trade monopoly. To put an end to the Portuguese dominance in the Indian Sea, navies were dispatched under the administration of Piri Reis and Seyid Ali Reis. The Ottomans chose Abyssinia as their target to compensate for this situation. The state, which captured this country, which has coasts on the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, could seriously intervene in the eastern trade between East Africa and India along its coasts. Another issue was the difficult situation of the Muslims in this region, whose future was in danger, in recent years.”⁴

The Ottoman authority presented their maximum military and material support to the rival groups of the Ethiopian Christian Highland Princes to benefit from the weaknesses of the latter through establishing a strong bond with the emerging regional powers of the period such as, among others, the Adal Sultanate. However, it is quite apparent that the Ottoman's support to the Adal Sultanate brought with them generations of hostility⁵ and distrust between the Ottomans and Ethiopia. Against this background, the dynamics of the Ethio-Ottoman relations, in this paper, are organized in three major tracts. The first section of the paper is dedicated to address the root of the Ethio-Ottomans hostile and distrustful relations. The second section of the paper is devoted to show the dynamic of the essence of the Ethio-Ottoman relations in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The last section of the paper is committed to elucidate the Ethio-Ottoman relations during the era of

3 Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 35.

4 Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 35.

5 The primary cause for the long standing hostility and distrust between Ethiopia and the Ottomans was “the Ahmad Gragh Syndram” deriving from the vivid, ever-recycled memory of the sixteenth-century destruction of the Christian Kingdom by Muslims” (Erlich, “Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Ethiopia”, 9). Especially, the damage on the Ethiopian Orthodox church by Imam Ahmed where the Ottoman commanders were asserted as the primary strategic engineers of the Imam “has remained engraved in many [Ethiopian] Christian mind” (Erlich, “Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Ethiopia”, 9) that eventually caused generations of hostility between the two nations. However, as it is illustrated in the last section of this paper that the long-standing distrust and hostility between Ethiopia and the Ottoman improved during the era of Sultan Abdülhamit II and Menelik II (r. 1889-1913).

Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876-1909).

2. The Roots of the Ethio-Ottoman Hostile and Distrustful Relations

The Ottoman's long interest and involvement in the political, commercial, religious, and cultural life of the Red-Sea and Northeast Africa regions had paved the way for its confrontation with the then global and regional actors of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden regions. The unfolding reality of the political, commercial, and religious rivalries between the Muslim lowlanders and the Christian highlanders in Ethiopia throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries gave fertile ground for the Ottomans to look easy penetration towards the political, religious, and cultural life of Ethiopia in particular and the Red-sea region in general. In the dialectical dynamics of the Ottoman's involvement in the Red-Sea and Horn regions politics⁶, the religious card had a remarkable role. For instance, Haggai Erlich argued that while the Ottomans supported the Adal Sultanate, "Ahmad Gragn was [accepted] as a holy warrior from the local town of Harar who was inspired and helped by...Ottomans commanders in Arabia and the Middle East and managed to unite the Muslims of the Horn of Africa".⁷

Against this background, in many ways, the Ethio-Ottoman relations throughout the sixteenth and the seventeenth Centuries were full of suspicion, fear, detestation, and demonization⁸ of one another. The centuries-old rivalry amid the two powers (i.e., the Ottomans and Ethiopia) make happen a big scar on the later era Ethio-Ottoman political, commercial, and cultural relations in which culminated with long-recycling memory of animosity, suspicion, distress, and demonization. Particularly, the sixteenth century Ottoman's support to the Adal Sultanate and other religious-affiliated factions in the region and the subsequent success of Imam Ahmed to control the Christian Highland territories laid the foundation for the legacy of the hostile approach of the latter against the former.⁹

On the other hand, there was a long-standing notion and perception that the Ottomans would be a great challenge for the traditional patterns of the political statuesque and cultural traditions of the Ethiopian Highland Princes. This basic understanding was practically exhibited while the Ottomans were actively involved in supporting the predecessors and successors of Imam Ahmed. Imam Ahmed's challenge against the Christian Highland Princess was not taken plainly by the latter because the situation was implicated as a challenge to the very political order and political tradition of Ethiopia in which kings were expected to be descendants of King Solomon of Jerusalem. So, during the period, accepting Islamic rulers such as Imam Ahmed as a political core of the Christian Highland Kingdom of Ethiopia was an odd reality for the political culture of the country. In light of this, the Ottoman's support to the Adal rulers to challenge the political and cultural hegemonic cycle of the Ethiopian

6 To understand more about foreign powers rivalry in the Horn of Africa region see for e.g., Nigusu Adem Yimer-Turgut Subaşı, "Ethiopia's Quest For Frontier Recognition From Somalia: A Brief Historical Analysis", *Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi* 35 / 2 (December 2020), 753-774.

7 Haggai Erlich, "Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Ethiopia: The Messages of Religions", *The Fifth Annual Levzion Lecture* (2013), 9.

8 As Erlich illustrated, the suspicion, fear, detestation, and demonization between Ethiopia and Ottoman was stemmed from the so called "the Ahmad Gragn syndrome" where the Ottomans were the active backer of the Imam (Erlich, "Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Ethiopia", 9).

9 Erlich, "Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Ethiopia", 9.

Christian Highland Kingdom was taken seriously by the latter and caused an ever-recycling hostility in the memory of the Highland Princes. In the same tone, it is arguably right that the moving forces behind the Ottomans hostile attitude towards the Ethiopian Christian Highland Princess were the possible cooperation and alliance between the latter and the Portuguese in which Mordechai Abir argued that “the Portuguese threat to the heart of the Islamic world...and the alliance between them [i.e., the Portuguese] and the Ethiopians [were] considered a realistic possibility by the Muslim rulers of the region”.¹⁰

Ethiopia’s foreign policy on the politics of the Red-Sea region had an influence on the relationship between the Ottomans and the Christian Highland Princess. Meaning, Kings of Ethiopia had a strong interest to benefit from the lucrative trade of the Red Sea while the Ottomans did not want to see the active participation of Ethiopia in the politics and commercial life of the Red Sea region. Subsequently, the Ottoman authority worked on exploiting anarchy and disregarding the Ethiopian Highland Princess in collaboration with the Adal rulers- who had the same disregard against the Ethiopian Princess. The hostility and distrust between the Ottomans and the Christian Highland Kings became far more meaningful with “the appearance of a Christian European power in the Indian Ocean”¹¹ and the active collaboration of the Ethiopian Princess with the Christian European powers such as the Portuguese.

Not less important was the attempts of the Ethiopian Christian Highland Kings to receive technical assistance from their co-religious European powers that had a rival attitude with the Ottomans should also not be ignored. Particularly, the reign of Libne Dingil was one of those important periods in which the Christian Highland Kingdom enhanced its cooperation with the Christian European powers. The situation seriously challenged the already hostile relations between Ethiopia and the Ottomans. On top of this, the hostile approach of the Ethio-Ottoman relations in the sixteenth century stemmed from the move of the Portuguese and the Ethiopian Princess to block the Ottomans by seizing military bases on the Red Sea. In the same tone, the Ottoman’s firearms support to the power contenders of Ethiopia in the region (i.e., the Adal) and the disciplined soldiers who could use firearms against the Christian Princes further complicated the Ethio-Ottomans relations. Thereupon, the point discussed above reflects that the Ottoman-Portuguese rivalry in the Red Sea region changed the pattern of the political order and alignment of nations in the region- where the Ethio-Ottoman hostility escalated.

3. The Post Gragn War Ethio-Ottoman Relations

In the anatomy of medieval Ethiopian politics, the war of Gragn had remarkable ramifications. For all its unique importance, in more than a literal sense the Gragn war¹² had a profound effect on the political dynamics of Ethiopia in particular and the Red Sea region in

10 Mordechai Abir, *Ethiopia and The Red Sea: The Rise and Decline of the Solomonic Dynasty and Muslim-European rivalry in the Region* (Great Britain: Frank Cass and Company Ltd., 1980), 72.

11 Abir, *Ethiopia and The Red Sea*, 78.

12 The war of Gragn was fought between the Christian Highland ruler and the Adal sultanate from 1527-1543. Despite the political and economic rivalry between the highlanders and the lowlanders was a kind of tradition that rise and fall at different times, the coming of Gragn as a ruler of the Adal lowlanders boiled the hostility between them. In 1527, Gragn declared full-scale war against the Christian Highland prince named Lebine Dengil and defeated him at the battle of Shimbrakure. In the war, Gragn was backed by the Ottoman.

general. This is possibly true because in the political undercurrents of the region it was Imam Ahmad (Gragñ) that successfully challenged the Ethiopian Christian Highland Kingdom and soon managed to unite and rule territories that stretched from the Red Sea to the coasts of the Indian Ocean and from Massawa to the territories of the Ethiopian Christian Highland Kingdom. Thus, in all of its dimensions, conceivably it appears that in the process of Imam Ahmed's war and territorial expansion the roles of the Ottomans were very high.¹³ In the course of Imam Ahmed's (Gragñ's) war with the Christian Highland princess at Shembra Kure, for instance, "about two hundred Turkish musketeers joined Ahmad as mercenaries".¹⁴ Against this background, while the Gragn war strengthened the cooperation and partnership of the Ottomans and the Adal rulers; yet, it worsened the hostility and distrust between Ethiopia and the Ottomans.

In the same vein, regarding the active involvement of the Ottomans in the battle of Shembra Kure, the material of Yusuf Sarıñay illustrates that:

"Upon the Portuguese provocations on the people in Abyssinia, Ahmed bin Ibrahim declared war against the kingdom of Abyssinia in 1527. He gained great success with the Ottoman's support during this struggle. The Sultan and the Calip Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent had been very pleased about this success and addressed him as "Sultan Ahmet El Hakim be Vilayet-i Habeş"¹⁵.

Once scoring a decisive victory over the army of Lebna-Dengel in 1529 at the battle of Shembra Kure, Imam Ahmad had tried to establish himself as one of the emblematic representatives of Muslim power in the Red-Sea region. Yet again, in the course of his move to the territories of the Christian Highland, Imam Ahmad built a civil administration of his men and collaborators. Afterward, by 1535, he managed to build a vast empire in the region in which stretched from Zeila to Massawa to the hinterland of the Ethiopian Highland Kingdom.¹⁶

Subsequently, the defeated king of Ethiopia (i.e., Lebna-Dengel) had no alternative but to live a fugitive life until his death in 1540. Yet, in the course of his fugitive life, Lebna-Dengel's cry for help reached the Portuguese in 1535, which had the same interest to undermine the Ottoman's supremacy over the Red Sea and Northeast Africa regions. But it is unfortunate to note that the Portuguese help for Lebna-Dengel arrived after the death of the King in 1541. In the meantime:

"When they [the Portuguese soldiers] arrived in the highlands, the governor of Tigray raised an army to be recognized and retrained in European tactics. The Imam immediately recognized the danger, but when he finally caught up with the Ethio-Portuguese army in April 1541, he was defeated by the well-directed firepower of four hundred muskets. The great leader [i.e., Imam Ahmad] was pained only by a slight wound, but his movement was mortified by the Christian affront".¹⁷

13 Bahru Zewde, *A Short History of Ethiopia and the Horn* (Commercial Printing Enterprise, 1995), 80; Nigusu Adem Yimer, *The Trilateral Political Relations between Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya (1960-1991)* (Sakarya: Sakarya University, Institute of Social Science, Ph.D. Dissertation, 2021), 49.

14 Bahru Zewde, *A Short History of Ethiopia and the Horn* (Commercial Printing Enterprise, 1995), 80.

15 Yusuf Sarıñay, *Ottoman Archives and the Ethio-Ottoman Relations* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2001), 9.

16 Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 32.

17 Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 33-34.

Imam Ahmad, subsequently, explained about the pitfall of the Ethio-Portuguese joint forces for his ideological ally, the Ottomans.¹⁸ In his privileged insight about the downside of the Ethio-Portuguese alignment, the Imam noticed the Ottomans about the threat of the joint force towards his power in particular and the Muslim hegemony in the region at large. In light of this, to bottle up the joint Ethio-Portuguese forces the leading global Muslim power of the time, Istanbul automatically sent nine hundred men that comprise mercenaries, musketeers, and ten cannons. In the end, Imam Ahmad once again scored a remarkable victory over the joint Ethio-Portuguese forces in late August 1542. In the war, Imam Ahmad killed hundreds of soldiers of the joint force including the commander of the Portuguese army named Christopher da Gama, who was beheaded after being captured at the battlefield. Eventually, the turning point of Imam Ahmad's overriding position in the regional political economy of the Red Sea came to decline when "a happy and now confident Imam thanked his Turkish allies for services rendered, rewarded them with goods doubtless looted from the church, sent them home, and ordered his army back to their camp".¹⁹

In the meantime, in 1543 the Christian Highland force reorganized itself with the help of the Portuguese and soon launched an organized assault against the Imam's army. However, at this time the Christian Highland Princes of Ethiopia under its new Emperor, Galawedos (r.1540-1559) followed a hit-and-run tactic to weaken the military might of Imam Ahmad. Of all development, the hit-and-run tactic highly affected Imam Ahmad's military power and the Imam had lost a significant number of his army. This was true because the Imam never knew when and where his rival strikes the army. In the same vein, the hit-and-run tactic was difficult to manage for the Imam because he was confused about where to station his forces. Eventually, Ahmad's (Grag'n's) army was defeated on 25 February 1543 around Lake Tana on which Imam Ahmad himself was killed in the battlefield.²⁰

Following the death of the Imam at the war front with the Ethio-Portuguese joint force, Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent has appointed Ozdemir Pasha on the Ottomans province of Abyssinia to reinforce the ascendancy of the Ottomans in the region. Ozdemir Pasha was hired as the viceroy (*serasker*) of Yemen. Ozdemir Pasha was allotted as the "Serasker" of Abyssinia in 1548. In light of this, the Ottomans province of Abyssinia was founded on July 5, 1555. Subsequently, officials of cadis (*kadılık*) were organized to ensure law and order in the province. The first cadi of the Ottoman province of Abyssinia, Abdulwehab Efendi was appointed on November 30, 1555. After the formation of the Ottoman province of Abyssinia, Swakin became the center of the province. In 1560, Ozdemir Pasha died and soon he was replaced by his son Osman Pasha. The coming of Osman Pasha on the foot of his father, Ozdemir Pasha, reflects that officials of the Ottomans state of Abyssinia were primarily selected based on their experience on the political economy of the region. This was mainly done and accepted in the principles of the Ottomans authority because the Ottoman's province of Abyssinia was far from the center of the Empire, Istanbul.²¹

On the other hand, after its success in "calming down" Yemen, the Ottomans army

18 Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 33-34.

19 Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 34.

20 Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 34.

21 Muzeyin Hawas Sebsebe, "Ethiopia and the Rising Powers: A Case Study on the Post-Cold War Era Ethio-Turkish Relations", *Akademik Hassasiyetler Dergisi* 2/3 (2015), 91-92; Yusuf Sarinay, "Ottoman Archives and Ethio-Ottoman Relations", 9-10.

strengthened its forces on the Ethiopian coast and succeeded in renewing its offensive power against Ethiopia in early 1572. Accordingly, the Ottomans were sent back to the coastline by *Bahir Negash* Yishak; however, in the following years, Bahir Midir was successfully captured by the Ottomans forces. *Bahr Negash* Yishhak, who did not respond to his requests from the king, thought that he had been deliberately abandoned to his fate. Subsequently, *Bahir Negash* Yishak allied himself with Ahmed Pasha, son of Habesh governor Iskender Pasha, which would lead to the Ethio-Ottoman War in 1578. As explained by the Italian historian Conti Rossini, *Bahir Negash* Yishak and Ahmet Pasha, who had their first defeat at Enticho on 13 November 1578, were routed and lost their lives in the Battle of Adi Qoro in December.²²

After a short period of peace, in 1588 the Ottomans once again attacked Debarwa; but this time they were easily repulsed by the army of Emperor Serse Dingel. Thus, the 1578 victory of Emperor Serse Dingel frustrated the last serious Ottoman attempt to conquer Ethiopia, until the Muslim forces on the coast once again threatened the existence of Christian Ethiopia in the 19th century. At the same time, Ethio-Ottoman relations continued in the form of war and conflict until 1578. However, after 1578, this environment of war and conflict was replaced by an environment of relative peace, and we can say that there were a kind of friendly relations between Ethiopia and the Ottoman Empire.²³ Orhonlu describes this situation as follows:

“It is seen that in the last days of Sartsa Dengel, who is an Abyssinian, a diplomatic relationship has been established between him and the [Ottoman] governors of Abyssinia. It cannot be determined whether there was such a relationship before. Certainly, this relationship was at least established during the time of Mustafa Pasha’s governorship. For example, it is understood that he invited the Ottoman soldiers who used firearms in the operation he did to the Semen region, which he could not achieve with his forces. Emperor Sartsa Dengel took about 30 Turks under his command during his campaign to suppress the rebellion in the Semen region in 1587; they were skilled in climbing up the castle with a rope ladder as well as using firearms rifles. In this expedition, the Turkish mercenaries under his command played a major role in the defeat of the rebels and the capture of the chief officer with his entourage of 50-60 people by raiding his headquarters.”²⁴

The relatively peaceful and friendly relations between Emperor Serse Dingel and the Ottoman province of the Abyssinian governor ended in 1590 according to Ethiopian sources.²⁵ Yet, the Ottoman sources argued that the short period of relative peace between Ethiopia and the Ottomans ended in 1589. Regarding when and why the friendship period between the Ethiopian Emperor and the Ottoman province of Abyssinian governor ended, it is also understood that “the friendship period between the Ethiopian and the Abyssinian lords ended in 1589. The fact that the Abyssinian king kept his soldiers in mass and left Mustafa Pasha in doubt played a role in this.”²⁶

On top of this, it is also understood that in the 27th year of his reign (1590), Emperor Serse

22 Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 63.

23 Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 64-65.

24 Cengiz Orhonlu, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Güney Siyaseti Habeş Eyaleti* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1996), 65-66.

25 Richard Pankurst, *The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 88.

26 Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 66.

Dingel advanced towards “Dahono (Arkiko)” and engaged in a war with the Ottoman *Basha* (Pasha) Kadaward (he was the Ottomans governor in the region that fought against Serse Dingel in 1590). It is also agreed that, after this, the pasha was killed by the sword of Abetto Yona’el, the Son of the Emperor. We come across a similar piece of information in Bruce in which the only difference is that the murderer was an Ethiopian officer named Robel.²⁷

On the other side of the discussion, as Ali argued, it is understood that neither the Ottoman sources nor indeed the official royal chronicle of Emperor Serse Dingel confirms that Kadaward was killed. In fact, from the last part of the chronicle, we learn that in the 27th year of Emperor Serse Dingel’s reign, at the beginning of the war in the region of the governor in the north of the Muslim region, Dabarwa was invaded by the Ottomans for a short time and the Ottomans from Dahono (Arkiko) launched a surprise attack over *Bahir Negash* Daragot. In addition to the defeat of the Ottomans forces in the first battles, the courage of *Bahir Negash* Akabe Mikael, who killed two Ottoman commanders, was also striking. Yet again, according to Ali’s argument, a Pasha, whose name is not mentioned, withdrew to the castle in Dohono (Arkiko) with some of his soldiers, but the castle could not resist the attacks of Emperor Serse Dingel and the Pasha was wounded in the clashes. The remaining Ottomans went to Massawa by sea.²⁸

Subsequently, Emperor Serse Dingel punished those who aided and abetted the Ottomans. Among them was the local Muslim Emir, *Sheikh* Ali Garad, who probably fomented the chaos with the support of the Ottoman reinforcements. Although he belonged to the Emperor’s subjects, *Sheikh* Ali Garad sided with the Ottomans, not with Emperor Serse Dingel. The victorious Emperor Serse Dingel took his sworn testimony and beheaded him in Darfo, a village near Asmara. Additionally, the area around Hammassien was plundered by Ethiopian soldiers. Yishak Wolde Ezum (Waddi Ezum), a villager from Hammassien, who was appointed as Bahir Negash and received military and ammunition aid by the Ottomans, was also captured and executed by Emperor Serse Dingel.²⁹

However, despite this short friendship and successive victories of Serse Dingel against the Ottomans, Ethiopia remained a landlocked country. Additionally, with all its problems, the weak Abyssinian Province of the Ottomans Empire continued to exist. To put this point differently, whatever its internal problems, the Ottomans established Abyssinia governor continued to be a chronic headache for Ethiopia’s access to the sea. Against this background, Emperor Serse Dingel, who bottled up with the Ottoman’s threat, gave a second chance to the Portuguese. Especially, after the death of d’Oviedo on June 30, 1577, and the Portuguese government’s policy of non-interference in Ethiopian affairs in 1580, the Portuguese “regained many of the privileges that they had acquired during the Galwdewos period and were reinstated to their positions in the imperial army”.³⁰

In light of this, initially, instead of forming any military alliance with the Portuguese government, open doors were sought for sending missionaries by the Jesuit Missionaries. Thus, after 1588 a large number of Jesuit Missionaries managed to enter Ethiopia. But the arrival of

27 Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 65-66.

28 Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 66.

29 Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 66.

30 Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 68.

these missionaries was thwarted or prevented by the Ottomans rulers in the Red Sea region. For example, while Pedro Paiz and Antonio de Montserrate were captured by the Ottomans rulers and released for ransom in 1595, another Jesuit Missionary, Abraham Georgis, was executed in Massawa by the colonel of the Ottoman garrison in the same year.³¹

Emperor Serse Dingel died in 1597 without entering into a major struggle with the Ottoman's regent in the Red Sea region. The death of Emperor Serse Dingel started a period of anarchy and power rivalries in the Ethiopian empire. His successors, Emperor Yakob and Emperor Zadingel were both weak and busy with internal turmoil, and for this reason, they did not ascribe importance to Ethiopia's access to the sea.³²

As mentioned before, from the last decade of the sixteenth century, the Abyssinian Province of the Ottoman Empire entered a period of decline. That's why in the seventeenth century, both the Ethiopian empire and the Abyssinian Province entered into the phase of looking inward towards their internal problems rather than working to destabilize one another. So, they entered the seventeenth century as two weak neighbors who preferred to immerse themselves in their internal problems rather than clashing with each other. As a result, there was no significant conflict between the two powers in the first years of the seventeenth century.³³

On the other hand, in the subsequent period, with the ascension of Emperor Susenyos to the Ethiopian throne, the Ethio-Ottoman relations entered a new era. The era of Emperor Susenyos was the other remarkable period on the hostile and distrustful relations of Ethiopia with the Ottomans. The reign of Emperor Susenyos (r.1606–1632) is best known for the fact that Roman Catholic Christianity was the official religion of the state. The pressures of Pedro Paez and the hopes of military aid from Portugal and Spain attracted Susenyos, and soon he showed interest in Catholicism.³⁴

It is quite apparent that after Emperor Susenyos's official conversion to Catholicism in March 1622, regular Jesuit raids from Massawa to Ethiopia began to arrive. However, it was not effortless for Emperor Susenyos to open the line of Massawa. Several times the emperor had to tell Sawakin's Pasha and the vice-governor of Massawa asserting that if they did not allow the Portuguese to pass, he would not allow their merchants to procure and produce products in which the island (and ports) of Massawa depended. The efforts of the Ottoman governors in Massawa and its environs to break their dependence on the hinterland by besieging the coast and plundering the rural areas were suppressed by Emperor Susenyos. Afterward, both sides (i.e., Ethiopia and the Ottomans) found the ground for agreement.³⁵

Against this background, regarding the relative normalization of the relations of Emperor Susnyos with the Ottomans representative and/or Pasha at Swakin, Manuel d'Almeida's witness reads:

"...We arrived at Sawakin on December 4, 1622, and anchored there.... Then we went to visit

31 Franz Amadeus Dombrowski, *Ethiopia's Access to the Sea* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1985), 25.

32 G.W. Huntingford, *The Historical Geography of Ethiopia from the First Century AD to 1704* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 149.

33 Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 69-70.

34 Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 70.

35 Franz Amadeus Dombrowski, *Ethiopia's Access to the Sea* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1985), 26.

Pasha with the captains, pioneers, and chief traders. He greeted us with respect and kindness. He told us that he would send us safely to Ethiopia, because he was a friend of the Emperor and he wanted to have peaceful and friendly relations with him, so he asked him to treat us well and deliver our Priests (missionaries) safely.”³⁶

Emperor Susenyos continued to establish close relations with the Ottomans, who were accepted to hold Sawakin, Massawa, and Arkiko. Referring to Pankhurst, Ali illustrated that an agreement was reached in 1624 with the help of the Jesuits:

First, all imperial property that has landed in Sawakin should be exempt from taxes and tributes, whether they come from India or elsewhere. Second, the emperor, whether Moorish or Arab, has the right to pass his agents through Massawa as far as India, and these agents have the right to freely enter and leave ports, free from harassment and casualties. Third, all property belonging to the Catholic Bishop and prominent priests, including clothing, if they are within the church, will be exempt from tax, and if they are in private use, no higher amount should be claimed. Fourth, Jesuit priests and servants and slaves may freely go to and return to India. With this agreement with the Ottoman, the preconditions for stable trade were created. So the trade was able to exist despite the fact that the Ethiopian empire did not have a port.³⁷

In light of this, Emperor Susenyos’s threats and pressure on the Ottomans in Massawa brought gains such as (i) transportation to the sea; (ii) transportations to and from Ethiopia, and; (iii) the admission of many missionaries to the country. However, through the passage of time the Jesuit Missionaries began to pose a grave threat to the security and integrity of the Ethiopian Empire. Especially with the arrival of the new Jesuit Bishop named Mendez in 1625, the situation became intolerable for the Ethiopian people, whose majority belonged to the Orthodox Church. Mendez embarked on an activity called the “religious revolution” and sought to make Catholicism the “official” religion of Ethiopia. The forced adoption of Catholicism led to civil war and split the society into two factions, with those who sided with the emperor (i.e., Susenyos) and adopted Catholicism on one side, and those who opposed the new religion. This civil war was registered as one of the bloodiest civil wars in Ethiopia’s long history. For instance, in a single conflict in July 1631, 8,000 Ethiopians were killed.³⁸

In the meantime, less than a year later, on June 14, 1632, Emperor Susenyos declared that those who wished could belong to the Catholic faith, but that no one could be subjected to further intimidation. At this point, the only answer that Patriarch Mendes could give was to accept it, as it was the will of his patron, the Emperor. After this announcement of tolerance, Emperor Susenyos abdicated to leave his place to his son Fasiladas.³⁹

After assuming the imperial throne in June 1632, Fasiladas (r.1632-1667) promptly reinstated the official status of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. In his policies against the Ottoman Turks, Fasiladas continued his father’s policy of subordination to Ottomans rule in

36 C.F. Beckingham - G.W.B. Huntingford, *Some Records of Ethiopia 1593-1646 Being Extracts from the History of High Ethiopia or Abassia by Manoel de Almeida Together With Bahrey’s History of the [Oromo]* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1961), 177-180.

37 Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 70.

38 Girma Beshah - Merid Wolde Aregay, *The Question of the Union of the Churches in Luso Ethiopian Relations (1500-1632)* (Lisbon: Junta de Investigações do Ultramar and Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1964), 92-93.

39 Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 72.

Sawakin, Massawa and Arkiko with a different purpose, namely to implement the policies of deportation of foreigners and isolation. Given that, the first step of his new policy was to ban all Jesuits and Europeans from Ethiopia. Bishop Mendez and his missionaries were ordered to assemble at Maygoga and soon leave the country. Those who chose to hide instead were caught by the Emperor and executed or killed by the villagers. Mendez and the other Jesuits appeared to pursue the protection of *Bahir Negash* Yohannis. However, *Bahir Negash* Yohannis handed them over to the Sawakin Pasha and held them captive. The hatred of the Europeans went so far that Emperor Fasiladas agreed with the Pasha in 1648 to ensure that the doors of Ethiopia were closed to the Portuguese and other Europeans, especially the missionaries. Thereupon, the Muslim Ottomans, once the enemies of the empire, were now the guards to prevent Christian Europeans from entering Christian Ethiopia.⁴⁰

While Emperor Fasiladas cut his ties with Europe, he became close to Muslim countries such as Yemen in the Middle and Near East and the Mogul empire in India. The reason for the close relations of Emperor Fasiladas with the Imam of Yemen, which had gained its independence from the Ottoman Empire at that time, was to obtain weapons. It was known by Fasiladas that “the only person who could supply weapons to the Ethiopian emperor at that time was the Imam of Yemen”. However, Fasiladas could not obtain the number of weapons he needed.⁴¹ In 1650, Fasiladas had also tried to establish relations with the Ottoman Sultan named Mehmet IV. Regardless of its effort, however, it seems that the ties established with the Ottoman Empire did not bring any significant results.⁴²

Emperor Fasiladas died in 1667 and was succeeded by his young son, Yohanis I (r.1667–1682). Emperor Yohanis I was quite preoccupied with internal problems. He paid less attention to Ethiopia's foreign affairs. As Ali illustrated, the only information we encounter in the chronicle of Ethiopia's foreign relations during the administration is that he sent a man named Murad, who was an Ottoman citizen, to Jakarta in 1672 to meet with the Dutch governor-general. Therefore, regarding the Ethiopia-Ottoman relations during the reign of Yohanis I there was no significant historical development. Emperor Yohanis I died in July 1682, and his successor was Emperor Iyasu I or Iyasu the Great, who ruled Ethiopia until he died in 1706. Emperor Iyasu I was a far-sighted leader. He had the idea of putting an end to Ethiopia's long-standing isolation from the Western Christian world. Emperor Iyasu sent the elderly Armenian named Murad to Jakarta in 1689 to establish good commercial relations with the Dutch East Indies Company, as his father, Yohanis I, had done more than ten years ago. Subsequently, in early 1693, Murad returned to Massawa. Looking at the many goods he brought with him, when he reached Massawa in 1693, *Naip* Musa bin Umar Qunnu did not allow him to pass.⁴³ As deliberated by Ali, this event is mentioned in the chronicle of Emperor Iyasu in February 1693 as follows:

The king's agent named Murad came with the goods in his hands. However, Umar Qunnu's son, *Naip* Musa, decided to seize the properties that were with Murad, and Murad without wasting time sent the following letter to the King (i.e., Iyasu I). The letter of Murad

40 Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 72-73.

41 Van Donzel, *Foreign Relations of Ethiopia 1642-1700: Documents Relating to the Journeys of Khodja Murād* (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-archaeologisch Instituut, 1979), 10; Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 73.

42 Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 73.

43 Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 74.

reads “here, *Naip* Musa confiscated all the goods in my hands under the name of tribute”.⁴⁴ Hearing this, Iyasu was “extremely angry” and “his face changed”. Thereupon, the king sent Abesellus, Gebre Kristos, Zar’a Bruk, and all the representatives of Hamassein a message. In the message, Iyasu ordered the messengers to note that “no one should go to Massawa with honey, oil, legumes and other food products...”.⁴⁵ Those who disobeyed this order would be punished with death and all their property would be confiscated. Afterward, all the leaders of Hamassein, who received the news that the king would punish those who sent food to *Naip* Musa, cut off the food shipment to the Regent.⁴⁶

Subsequently, when *Naib* Musa learned that the king had ordered a food cut, he was shaken by fear and did not know what to do. He pondered and realized that he could do nothing to save himself except to make peace with the king (i.e., Iyasu I). Additionally, *Naib* Musa did not hesitate to return the king’s goods and added them to the thousands of things he had taken from others. Afterward, he met the king in Aksum and bowed before him, “have pity on me, O my great King; and forgive me for all the things I shouldn’t have done!”⁴⁷ He cried. The king’s high officials begged him to forgive *Naib* Musa; for mercy was his custom. Subsequently, he (i.e., the king) rebuked the *Naib* and reproached him and soon he stood before him with all his royal majesty and forgave him.⁴⁸ Thus, despite minor conflicts and incidents like this, we can say that the Ethio-Ottomans relations were uneventful when it comes to the Abyssinian province in the seventeenth century.

In the eighteenth century, the domestic political economy of Ethiopia was not stable. The domestic political instability highly influenced the foreign relations of the Ethiopian empire. In the same tone, the weakening of Ethiopia in the eighteenth century coincided with the decline of the Ottoman Empire. The policy of the Ottomans in the eighteenth century was to protect the lands on its hands rather than the policy of expansion and conquest.⁴⁹ As a result, the Ottoman authorities were not as such thoughtful to the administration of its distant provinces such as the Ottoman provinces of region, which did not bring a significant return for the Ottomans. Against this background, during this period, the policy of the Ottomans towards Ethiopia and the Ottoman provinces of Abyssinia were leaving them to the local administrators and soon the local elements started to play relatively independent roles in the state administration.⁵⁰

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Ethiopia has divided among powerful regional lords and the power of the central authority was weak to influence the regional feudal lords. The emperor- who usually continued to reside in Gonder- enjoyed absolute authority just in theory. In practice, however, they (i.e., the emperors in Gonder) were reduced to the puppet position. As a result, they were ruled by powerful feudal lords who were described as almost independent and had conflict among themselves.

44 Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 74.

45 Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 74.

46 Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 111.

47 Pankhurst, *The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles*, 75.

48 Pankhurst, *The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles*, 75.

49 Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 77-78.

50 Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 77-78.

Against this background, throughout the era of princes (1769-1855) the country (i.e., Ethiopia) which had previously been organized around a strong emperor was now divided among powerful regional lords. In light of this, during the period, the first and most important among these Ethiopian states was Tigray, a northern province. The province of Tigray held commerce at Massawa, a Red Sea port, and, due to its connection to the coast and had long held the country's largest stockpile of firearms. Tigray was also the owner of salt production areas, a source of considerable wealth. The second-largest political unit of the empire was Gojjam, Gonder, and Wollo. The third separate part of the empire was Shewa in the south.

On the flip side, Ethiopia- which was a fragmented empire in the first half of the nineteenth century- began to feel the effects of the Industrial Revolution, which was underway in Western Europe at that time. Innovations in the area of communications, including the development of railroads and steamboats, brought with them an ever-increasing influx of Western adventurers, who would later become merchants, diplomats, and scholars. Thus, the nineteenth century had a significant impact on Ethiopian rulers to open their closed doors to the outside world, particularly to the west. These rulers, on a large or small scale, were involved in the diplomatic and commercial opening of the country to the outside world.⁵¹

In the nineteenth century, nearly all Ethiopian leaders sought friendship with European Christian powers, and all these Ethiopian regional warlords stood against the Ottoman's presence in Massawa and around. For example, *Decazmach* Goshu of Gojjam, ruler of parts of northwestern Ethiopia, presented a letter to King Leopold of Belgium in September 1841. In his letter, Goshu asked King Leopold to expel the Ottomans from Massawa. The expedition of *Decazmach* Wube against the Naib, for example, illustrates that the Ottoman's regent on the coast of the Red Sea still gave the Ethiopian rulers a headache. In their interaction with the kings of Ethiopia, Naibs saw themselves as the patrons of the Red Sea coast. Regarding this issue, in 1805, *Naib* Idris Osman (r.1801-1831), for instance, used the phrase "I am the gate of Ethiopia", while in 1840s *Naib* Hassan Idris (r.1844-1845) said, "the Sultan was in Istanbul; the Pasha reigns in Egypt; [and] *Naib* Hasan is in Massawa!"⁵²

The other event that shaped Ethiopia's relation with the Ottomans was Mohammed Ali Pasha's⁵³ and Khadive Ismail Pasha's⁵⁴ southward expansionist policy.⁵⁵ Regarding the southward expansion of Mohammed Ali Pasha, M. Abir stated that

"Between 1841 and 1842 there was a general belief that Muhammad 'Ali, having concentrated large Egyptian forces not very far from Wekhnie on the way to Gondar, intended to

51 Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 86.

52 Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 88.

53 Mohammed Ali Pasha was the governor of Egypt and one of the powerful Pashas under the Ottoman government that worked for the rise of the Ottoman influence in the Red Sea region in the 19th c. Mohammed Ali Pasha is also well remembered for his southward and eastward expansionist policy. While his southward expansion policy was passively seen by the British, the same policy of Mohammed's expansion towards the Red Sea was strongly opposed by the British authority. Because, for the British authority, Ali's expansion towards the Red Sea would sooner or later cause a grave challenge against the British stronghold in India (M. Abir, "The Origins of the Ethiopian-Egyptian Border Problem in the Nineteenth Century", *The Journal of African History* 8/3 (1967), 445-446).

54 Khadive Ismail Pasha was the successor of Mohamed Ali Pasha. Like his predecessor Khadive had employed an expansionist policy towards the south of Egypt. The expansionist policy of Khadive confronted him with Ethiopia at the battle of Gundet (1975) and Gura (1876) in which the Egyptian forces war defeated at the hands of Ethiopia on both battles. All along this development, the Ethiopian authorities accused that the main backer of the pashas in Egypt were the Ottomans.

55 Fatma Yıldız, "The Ottoman Empire As An External Actor And Its Effect On Politics In Ethiopia From Emperor Tewodros To King Iyasu V", *Africana-Inönü Üniversitesi Uluslararası Afrika Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1 (1) (2021), 179.

invade Ethiopia... since 1838 rumors had persisted that the leaders of the Muslim population of northern Ethiopia, with a number of Muslim [Oromo] lords, were conspiring with the Egyptians-if they had not actually invited them to conquer Christian Ethiopia.”⁵⁶

Eventually, the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 increased the interest of global actors such as Great Britain and France in the Red Sea and Northeast Africa Regions. The active role of these global powers challenged the influence of the Ottomans in the region. Thereupon, the situation in return overshadowed the interests of the Ottomans to control the political economy of Ethiopia, and gradually the hostile relations between Ethiopia and the Ottomans changed into understanding.

4. The Ethio-Ottoman Relations during the Era of Sultan Abdülhamid II

In the dynamics of analyzing the Ethio-Ottoman relations, the era of Sultan Abdülhamid II had essential values to effectively comprehend the progressive diplomatic traffic between the two nations. In the last years of the nineteenth century, radical changes were observed in the centuries-old belligerent Ethiopia-Ottoman relations. Accordingly, the Ethio-Ottoman relations that had been based on mutual discord and conflicts for a long time stepped into a period of mutual understanding and cooperation. Meaning, the Ethio-Ottoman relations, which lasted for centuries with wars and conflicts, continued with ups and downs and progressively became amicable as never before. This was true because of the changes in the foreign policies of Ethiopia and Ottoman during the reign of Menelik II (r. 1889-1913) and Sultan Abdülhamid II respectively. The friendly approaches between Ethiopia and Abdülhamid II partly stemmed from events related to the controversial Deir al-Sultan Monastery, and changes in the international geopolitical system.

Deir al Sultan- “the monastery on the roof of the Chapel of St. Helena, where Ethiopian and Coptic monks had lived together”⁵⁷ is a spot of disturbance, demonstration, and fight between Ethiopians and the Copts for a long time. All along the long period of disturbance and fight between the Copts and Ethiopian the latter tried to approach European powers such as, among others, British, France, and Italy to protect the Ethiopian community at Deir al-Sultan. It looks that the demand to European support was grown because the local network or the local support from the Greek Orthodox and Armenians did not satisfy the interest of Ethiopia. Thereupon, European assistance was considered as a supplement to the local network against the fight with the Copts to defend the Ethiopian community at Deir al-Sultan.⁵⁸

But still the Ethiopian government looks for ally to strengthen its network of support to defend the Ethiopian community at Dier al-Sultan. On that account, at the end of the nineteenth century, Sultan Abdülhamid II showed a good sign of support to Menelik’s request to protect the Ethiopian community at Deir al-Sultan.⁵⁹

56 Abir, “The Origins of the Ethiopian-Egyptian Border Problem in the Nineteenth Century”, 456.

57 Stéphane Ancel, “The Ethiopian Orthodox Community in Jerusalem: New Archives and Perspectives on Daily Life and Social Networks, 1840–1940”, in *Ordinary Jerusalem 1840–1940: Opening New Archives, Revisiting a Global City*, eds. Vincent Lemire and Angelos Dalachanis (Brill, 2018), 50.

58 Ancel, “The Ethiopian Orthodox Community in Jerusalem”, 59.

59 Ancel, “The Ethiopian Orthodox Community in Jerusalem”, 59.

With the support of the Russians, Ethiopia and the Ottoman were going to discuss the question of ownership of the Deir al-Sultana monastery, which had been seized by the Copts. Abba Giyorgis and his friends demanded the establishment of regular relations between Emperor Menelik and the Ottoman government to ensure justice in Jerusalem. Against this background, Grazmaç Yosef and Lebontiev left the Russian city of Odessa on 29 December 1896, and on 31 December, they meet with Sultan Abdülhamid. Thereupon, Grazmaç Yosef handed Abdülhamid a medal he had received from the Ethiopian emperor. The next day, Abdülhamid hosted them again to present their appeal in the name of Menelik.⁶⁰ To understand more about the issue of Deir al-Sultan in shaping the Ethio-Ottoman relations, please see Annex- II and Annex- III at the end of this paper.

Additionally, regarding Emperor Menelik's delegation to Sultan Abdülhamid II, Yusuf Sarıınay wrote the following:

"During the time of Menelik II, King of Abyssinia, *Ato* Josef, and Kont dö Leonitif were sent to Istanbul as ambassadors. This delegation presented the king's letter of goodwill as well as several presents to the Ottoman Sultan. Among them, a lion and a golden buckler pleased the Sultan. Menelik II stated in his letter that the Muslims being in his state worship freely and they are acted equally to the Christian citizens ...he [also] requested support for the Abyssinian properties in Jerusalem, especially for the monastery of Deyrũ's Saltan."⁶¹

Subsequently, Sultan Abdülhamid replied to Emperor Menelik's letter by promising to consider the issue of Jerusalem carefully, and soon two letters were sent on the same date to Bishop Qerilos in Egypt and Abdülhamid's deputy in Jerusalem.

In 1904, Sadik al-Mueyyed Pasha was sent to Ethiopia by Sultan Abdülhamid for Menelik's request on the issue of Jerusalem and to establish strategic cooperation against the Italians in Libya. The Ottoman delegation reached Addis Ababa from Istanbul via Marseille, the Suez Canal, the Red Sea, Djibouti, and the Muslim populated areas of eastern Ethiopia. The Ottoman delegations were warmly received by Menelik. The well coming ceremony was very warm. As Ali presented it explicitly, Sadik el- Müeyyed Pasha illustrated the welcoming ceremony with the following words: It was on Saturday 12 June 1904 that the delegates were appointed to meet with His Excellency (i.e., the emperor of Ethiopia). The delegates go to the hall of his Imperial majesty loading the gifts of the Sultan. When the delegate reached the imperial palace they were warmly welcomed by a big crowd. All along their way to the imperial majesty, the crowds were greeting them from all sides sincerely. Upon their arrival at the hall, where the Emperor found, his Holiness the Emperor was on a big chair; about a hundred people of the palace were behind him and beside him. As soon as the delegation members entered the hall, the balls started to explode.⁶² With this in mind, a letter from Sultan Abdülhamid to Menelik reads that "the close relations of Abyssinians to Muslims were known for a long time and that this is a tradition coming from ancestors. The Sultan [also]

60 Dagmawi Ayele Tilahun, *Ethiopia-Turkey Economic Relations: An Assessment on Trade and Foreign Direct Investment from 2006 to 2018* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, Institute of Social Science, M.A. Thesis, 2019), 2; Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 120.

61 Sarıınay, *Ottoman Archives and the Ethio-Ottoman Relations*, 12; see also İlhami Yurdakul, "Kudüs Deyrussultan Manastırında Habeşlilerin ve Mısır Kiptilerinin Dini-Siyasi Nüfuz Mücadelesi", *Vakanüvis* 1 (Special Issue on the Middle East) (2016), 205.

62 Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 124.

sent...some presents like two horses, pistol, rifle, telescope, watch, sword, etc.”⁶³ Additionally, “the Sultan was against Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia.”⁶⁴

On the same tone, on July 10, 1907 a letter of friendship was written by Emperor Menelik II to Sultan Abdülhamid II. The letter clearly shows the warm relations between the two leaders. In his letter, Menelik II wished good health and peace to Sultan Abdülhamid II’s family, his people, and his empire. Additionally, in the letter, the emperor thanked Sultan Abdülhamid II for the positive measures taken regarding the Deyrus Sultana Monastery and asked the Sultan for more help in the welfare of the Ethiopian community in Jerusalem.⁶⁵ For more information about the letter of Menelik II to Sultan Abdülhamid II on July 10, 1907, see Annex- I.

On the other hand, in the process of Menelik II and Sultan Abdülhamid II’s diplomatic interaction the issue of Ottoman Armenians in Ethiopia got particular attention. The Armenians were actively working on several handicraft firms in Ethiopia. Additionally, the Armenians said to have got Menelik’s particular consideration and honor because of their contribution on the field of handicraft firms. Abdulhamit Ali Sadiq was also Ottoman merchant in Ethiopia and he had visited Sultan Abdülhamid II.⁶⁶ In the middle of their discussion, the Sultan asked the merchant (i.e., Abdulhamit Ali Sadiq) about the Armenians in Ethiopia. As Richard Pankhurst illustrated, the replay of the merchant reads:

“There were ‘quite a few’ there, whereupon the Sultan observed that there were ‘quite enough to destroy Ethiopia’. On another occasion the Sultan interrogated the Ethiopian envoy Kántiba Gäbru on the same matter and asked him to expel Serkis Terzian and all the other Armenians. When this was reported to Menilek he is said to have declared that the Sultan should ‘send me all the Armenians he does not want’.”⁶⁷

However, the divergence of interests between Menelik II and Sultan Abdülhamid II over the Armenians did not affect the peaceful diplomatic dialog between the two leaders.

As a result of the warm relations between Ethiopia and the Ottoman Empire, the numbers of not only Ethiopian monks and nuns but also Ethiopian pilgrims increased in Jerusalem at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Additionally, the first Ottoman Consulate General in Ethiopia was established in the city of Harar in the eastern part of the country on April 4, 1912. However, it is unfortunate to note that Emperor Menelik II died before he could bear the fruits of his admirable policies against the Ottoman Empire. Sultan Abdülhamid II did also not witness the official start of the diplomatic relations between the Ottoman Empire and Ethiopia; because he was deposed on April 27, 1909.⁶⁸

63 Sarıay, *Ottoman Archives and the Ethio-Ottoman Relations*, 12.

64 Yıldız, “The Ottoman Empire As An External Actor And Its Effect On Politics In Ethiopia”, 176.

65 Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 128.

66 Richard Pankhurst, “Menilek and the Utilisation of Foreign Skills in Ethiopia”, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 5/1 (January 1967), 74.

67 Pankhurst, “Menilek and the Utilisation of Foreign Skills in Ethiopia”, 75.

68 Kemal Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam: Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 241; Ali, *Etiyopya-Türkiye İlişkileri*, 128.

CONCLUSION

This article attempted to address the dynamics of the belligerence and understanding between Ethiopia and the Ottomans. In the process of examination, it is realized that the long-standing hostile and distrustful relations between Ethiopia and the Ottoman were not a coincidence; rather their belligerence was primarily stemmed from the interest of the Ottoman to supervise the political economy of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aiden regions. Additionally, there has been pressure on the part of the Ottoman to secure its trade and political interests in the Red-Sea region from the expansionist policy of the Portuguese. In the same vein, it is also evident that the positioning of the Portuguese with the Ethiopian Christian Highland princes, while the Ottoman stood with the Adal Sultanate, fueled the latter's ambition to control Ethiopia. It is also understood that the Ottomans' interest to control Ethiopia and the Red Sea was stemmed not only to fight the Portuguese's presence in the region; rather the Ottomans' interest over Ethiopia primarily stemmed from the ambition of the former to benefit from the geostrategic significance of Ethiopia. The political, economic, and religious rivalries, above all, between the Ethiopian Christian Highland princes vs. the Adal Sultanate as well as the subsequent support of the Ottoman to the Adal, brought with them generations of hostility and distrust between Ethiopia and the Ottoman.

More critically, the unfolding reality of the political, commercial, and religious rivalries between the Muslim lowlanders and the Christian highlanders in Ethiopia throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries gave fertile ground for the Ottomans to look easy penetration towards the political, religious, and cultural life of Ethiopia in particular and the Red Sea region in general. Strictly speaking, in the dialectical dynamics of the Ottoman involvement in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aiden regions, the religious card had an outstanding role to bottle up enemies. Despite the fluidity of the Ethio-Ottoman relations in other eras, it is quite apparent that the two nations' interactions throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were full of suspicion, fear, detestation, and demonization of one another. Thereupon, from the point of conceptual expression, the examination of the Ethio-Ottoman relations is an imperative research inquiry that provides important notes at least on the following four points. First, the Ethio-Ottoman foreign policy on the politics of the Red Sea together with the involvement of the Portuguese in the political life of the Red Sea and the Gulf regions complicated the basic understanding exhibited on the Ethio-Ottoman relations.

Second, for all its unique importance, the post-Gragh war Ethio-Ottoman relations oscillated between positive and negative. Meaning, geo-strategic, commercial, and religious interests made them see in a wary eye. At other times, the positive shift in their domestic political system transformed the Ethio-Ottoman relations into normalization. Emperor Fasilades's closed-door policy against Europeans, for instance, attracted the Ottomans to normalize its relations with Ethiopia and soon the Muslim Ottomans, once the enemies of Ethiopia became the close ally of the Emperor. Third, in the eighteenth century, the domestic political economy of Ethiopia was too fragile and arguably the situation has coincided with the decline of the Ottoman in which its policy was shifted from expansion and conquest to preserving lands at hand. Fourth, unlike the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Ethio-Ottoman relations in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century were comparatively more complimentary and cooperative than hostile. The mutual understanding and

cooperation between the two nations were stemmed from the changes in the foreign policy of Menelik II of Ethiopia and Sultan Abdülhamid II of the Ottoman. The other remarkable point in focus that helped for the normalization of the Ethio-Ottoman relations in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century was the change in the international geopolitical system.

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Annex III: A letter from Emperor Menelik II to Sultan Abdülhamid II July 3, 1907.

(Source: Yusuf Sarıнай, *Ottoman Archives and the Ethio-Ottoman Relations* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2001), 46.)

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