

**THE BEGINNING OF ITALIAN EXPANSION  
IN  
NORTH EAST AFRICA  
AND  
COMPLICITY OF GREAT BRITAIN**

**BY  
V. A. TROFIMOV**

**USSR ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, INSTITUTE OF THE PEOPLES OF ASIA  
COLONIALISM OLD AND MODERN  
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**THE BEGINNING OF ITALIAN EXPANSION  
IN NORTH-EAST AFRICA AND COMPLICITY  
OF GREAT BRITAIN (THE '80s OF THE 19th C.)**

In recent years the ruling circles and monopolies of Italy have been trying especially intensely to penetrate the economy of the African countries. They have been using all kinds of means for this purpose: from sending economic missions to holding in Italy special congresses of representatives of African countries. The same aim is pursued by numerous articles in the Italian press extolling the benefits the Italian colonialists allegedly bestowed on Africa.

Let us consider just a few examples.

In 1958 an Italian economic mission visited Liberia, Ghana and Nigeria. In December 1959 the Italian Ministry of Foreign Trade and Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent an economic mission to Sierra Leone, Guinea, Senegal, and the Ivory Coast. Explaining why these missions were sent, Salvatore Foderaro, President of the Italian Institute of Africa, wrote, "It would be indeed unpardonable if Italy, so respected and valued on this continent, were forced to remain outside Africa. That would entail dangerous consequences, both political and economic, not only for our country, but for entire Europe."<sup>1</sup>

A conference widely representing African countries and concerned with the development of "economic and

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<sup>1</sup> *Africa*, Roma, 1960, No. 1, p. 4.

ven years shorter than a white man's; he will earn only half of what his white counterpart will.<sup>64</sup>

The riot of racism would be unthinkable without the connivance of American authorities. Martin Luther King, the Negro clergyman and leader, bitterly said that today we must admit, sad as it is, that the American Government is the largest supporter of racial discrimination.<sup>65</sup>

There is ample historical evidence to show that racism, chauvinism and intense reaction at home are always accompanied by aggressiveness abroad, a policy supporting the most reactionary regimes, and vice versa. This regularity is dramatically displayed in the policy of the United States. Therefore, the Alabama events and the U.S. policy in Africa are closely interlinked and interdependent.

Condemning racial discrimination, Lenin exclaimed in 1913, "Shame on America for the plight of the Negroes!"<sup>66</sup> These bitter words are apposite today as well.

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Правда*, 22 сентября, 1962.

<sup>66</sup> В. И. Ленин, „Русские и негры“, — *Полное собрание сочинений*, т. 18, стр. 509.

trade relations with the African continent" was held in Italy in September 1959. At the conference the Italian representatives described in the brightest colours the benefits of economic and trade relations with Italy for the African countries and, of course, they missed no chance to emphasise their old "services". Salvatore Foderaro tried to convince the audience that Italians had been always going to Africa as builders, as creators. "Throughout the world Italians are patiently helping other nations to build their own homes,"<sup>2</sup> he alleged.

Many Italian bourgeois authors are determined to inculcate upon their readers' minds that the main purpose of Italian ambitions in Africa was the desire to carry the light of civilisation to backward nations.

In this connection an investigation of the diplomatic efforts and first steps of the Italian colonialists in Africa as well as the purposes which they pursued seems to us extremely important, all the more so since the Italian bourgeois historians are trying to make the Italian expansion in Africa an object of national pride. In his *L'impresa di Massaua* Giglio wrote, "Here is described one of the most important stages of Italy's activity in Africa, that activity which in its ultimate sum does credit to our country which has given Africa more than has been received from it."<sup>3</sup> Giglio declares Mancini under whose direct leadership the invasion into Africa began well-nigh a national hero of Italy.<sup>4</sup>

Another reason which has prompted the present author to turn to the subject under discussion is the fact that the role of the British ruling circles in the unleashing of Italian expansion in Africa has been essentially distorted by bourgeois historians. New diplomatic documents published in Italy in the '50s make it possible to solve this problem more authentically. However, Italian bourgeois historians draw sometimes wrong conclusions from these documents. Thus, Giglio who has published several new very important diplomatic documents pertaining to the Italian landing in Massowah in 1885 underestimates in his conclusions that immense and indeed

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<sup>2</sup> *Africa*, 1959, Nos. 5, 6.

<sup>3</sup> C. Giglio, *L'impresa di Massaua (1884-1885)*, Roma, 1955, p. VI.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

decisive role which the ruling circles of Great Britain played in these events.<sup>5</sup> On the basis of new documents the author of the present article attempts to give a more comprehensive treatment of the problem and evaluate correctly the events of that time.

The events under discussion in the present article date from the beginning of that period of which Lenin said: "Revolutionary-democratic Italy, i. e. revolutionary-bourgeois Italy, the Italy that cast off the yoke of Austria, the Italy of the times of Garibaldi, is changing before our eyes into an Italy that is oppressing other peoples and plundering Turkey and Austria, an Italy of a crude, repulsively reactionary and rapacious bourgeoisie whose mouth waters at the prospect of a share in the lool."<sup>6</sup>

Having not yet completed the national unification of the country, the Italian Government captured in 1869 Assab, a port on the Red Sea (now Eritrea). Taking this step, the Italian Government complied with the requirements of rich merchants and steamship companies who were striving to use the opening of the Suez Canal to ensure for themselves commercial and political domination in North-East Africa. These forces also aimed at having in the Red Sea an intermediate base for eastern trade.

The operation to "acquire" Assab proceeded in the following manner. In September and October 1869 the Italian Government negotiated with Giuseppe Sapeto, a catholic missionary, traveller, a student of eastern languages and an ardent advocate of colonial ventures. On October 2, 1869, Sapeto signed a secret agreement with the Government to this effect: "Hereby I declare that I have received from the Italian Royal Government an assignment to buy on the shores of Asia or Africa lands which would seem to me suitable for the purposes indicated to me. I pledge myself to make the aforesaid purchases for the benefit and on behalf of the Italian government."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> C. Giglio, "L'Inghilterra e l'impresa italiana di Massaua," — *Nuova antologia*, November 1952, pp. 251-277; C. Giglio, *L'impresa di Massaua*, pp. 176-177.

<sup>6</sup> В. И. Ленин, "Империализм и социализм в Италии (заметка)", — Полное собрание сочинений, Изд. 5, т. 27, стр. 15.

<sup>7</sup> *L'Italia in Africa*, Vol. II, Roma, 1955, pp. 80-81.

On October 12, i. e. only ten days later, Sapeto and a representative of the Government Admiral Acton went on a secret mission to Africa. Acton had been instructed to "find the most suitable place militarily and commercially for establishing a colony."<sup>8</sup> The Italian Government's emissars settled on Assab Bay whose advantages were, in their opinion, a good communication with the ports of the Arabian peninsula and nearness to Bab el Mandeb. Sapeto and Acton expected Ethiopian trade to run now via Assab and not via Massowah, Tajoura and Zeila.<sup>9</sup>

On November 15, 1869, Sapeto imposed on the Danakil sultans a convention on the sale to him the Assab territory for 6,000 talleros (250 talleros cash down, and 5,750 to be paid not later than March 10, 1870). Then Sapeto returned to Italy. On his arrival in Rome he was surprised to learn that he had acted allegedly not on behalf of the Government but as an agent of the Rubattino steamship company. Sapeto himself wrote, "I do not know under the action of what secret forces I am being converted into an agent of señor Rubattino."<sup>10</sup> It appeared that it had been officially declared in Rome that the acquisition of Assab was a purely commercial project effected by the above company.

The emergence of Rubattino company on the Red Sea was not accidental. The owner of the company was one of the first persons who realised the immense importance of the Suez Canal for commercial navigation. Well in advance he had the Italian Parliament and Government grant him 4,000,000 liras as a loan bearing no interest for the building of ships with a view to developing trade through the Suez Canal.

In Florence on February 2, 1870, a representative of *Rubattino and Co.* and four ministers of the Italian Government signed a secret convention according to which the company was to dispatch to Assab no later than February 12 at least 200 tons of coal for the Royal Navy,

<sup>8</sup> Cit.: R. Battaglia, *La prima guerra d'Africa*, Torino, 1958, p. 81.

<sup>9</sup> R. G. Woolbert, "The Purchase of Assab by Italy," — *Essays in the History of Modern Europe*, edited by Donald C. McKay, New York-London, 1936, p. 118. Soon Acton returned to Italy where he became a member of the Cabinet.

<sup>10</sup> Cit.: R. Battaglia, *La prima guerra d'Africa*, p. 81.

unload the coal in Assab and "acquire in its name but actually in the interest and on behalf of the Government a part of the territory situated in Assab Bay which will be indicated by Professor G. Sapeto."

The Government pledged itself in turn to transfer to Rubattino the money for buying the land, to compensate all the expenses and pass the plot for the station into the complete possession of the company. The convention was to remain secret as long as the Italian Government deemed it necessary.<sup>11</sup>

On March 11, 1870, Sapeto forced the three sultans to sign the final convention on the sale to *Rubattino and Co.* of the territory adjacent to Assab Bay.<sup>12</sup>

The Italian Government preferred to hide behind the back of a trading company for two reasons, in our opinion. First, the political unification of Italy had not yet been completed, and the government feared that its colonial venture which might incur heavy expenses would encounter a stiff opposition at home. Second, the Government wanted to avoid any international complications. Her relations with France being strained to the utmost, Italy was apprehensive of a sharp deterioration of her relations with Britain and Egypt. Even then it was clear that the "ruler of the seas" would try to get control of such an important water-way like the Suez Canal. Nor could Britain's indifference be expected when her interests in the Red Sea were affected. Besides, the British had from the start been hostile to Sapeto's activity and thwarted it as much as possible.<sup>13</sup>

The Government of Egypt insisted on its vested rights with respect to Assab.

Owing to this combination of home and foreign factors, Italy did not in the subsequent decade use or extend her first colonial possession in Africa. The amount of Italian goods intended for export in that period was too insignificant and their competitiveness too low to require their export into remote countries of the East. In 1870 Italy accounted for only 1 per cent of the cargo shipped

<sup>11</sup> *L'Italia in Africa*, Vol. II, pp. 82-83.

<sup>12</sup> *Trattati, convenzioni, accordi, protocolli ed altri documenti relativi all'Africa, 1825-1906*, Vol. I, Roma, 1906, pp. 27-28.

<sup>13</sup> R. G. Woolbert, *The Purchase of Assab by Italy*, pp. 127-128.

through the Suez Canal.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the problem of a port in the Red Sea as a "transshipment station" was not topical either.

The problem of colonies re-emerged at the close of the '70s. Aggravation of class contradictions in the country, "excess" rural population, the desire of the landed aristocracy to get rid of it, and the hankering of a certain part of big industrialists and tradesmen after profitable markets for buying raw materials and selling products were the factors which drove the Italian ruling circles to colonial expansion in this and subsequent historical periods.

"Something is seething and may now splash over any moment," was the way a bourgeois author of the time described the social situation in Italy early in the '80s. "Colonies (he wrote) play for states the role of a safety-valve against home unrest, especially now when it is spearheaded against the social order, property, capital."<sup>15</sup> The Italian ruling classes believed that "excess population", that "fuel" of the revolutionary movement, could be transferred to colonies; at the same time the trading-industrial circles would still be able to exploit this population. The fact is that emigration was growing at an explosive rate at the close of the 19th century; it was bound mainly for America and Europe. Between 1876 and 1880 108,797 persons emigrated (3.9 per 1000), while the figure for 1886 to 1890 was 221,669 (7.4 per 1000).<sup>16</sup>

The resolution passed by a special government commission, set up in March 1881 for the development of merchant marine indicated that the "existence of colonies abroad would give immense advantages not only to our commerce and industry but also to navigation."<sup>17</sup>

The more intense colonial trend in Italy early in the '80s was expressed in the establishment of all kinds of societies "for the exploration of Africa", sending of expeditions to sound the potentialities of various areas of Af-

<sup>14</sup> R. Battaglia, *La prima guerra d'Africa*, p. 93.

<sup>15</sup> R. Battaglia, *La prima guerra d'Africa*, p. 160.

<sup>16</sup> Touzet, *Le problème colonial et la paix du monde*, Paris, 1938, p. 75.

<sup>17</sup> R. Clasca, *Storia coloniale dell'Italia contemporanea*, Milano, 1940, p. 71.



rica as regards commerce and economy, and vigorous discussion of colonial problems in the press.

In 1876 the Italian Geographic Society, which acted under the auspices of the Government, dispatched a "grand expedition" to Ethiopia. A Society of Trade Research in Africa was set up in Milan in 1879, with prominent industrialists, bankers and tradesmen of Lombardian as its steering committee. The society sent its agents to Africa. Shortly thereafter on its basis sprang up an Italian Society for Trade with Africa, with 800,000 liras as stock capital. The Society set up four agencies: in Mas-sowah, Khartoum, Iloleida and Zanzibar. In 1882 the tradesmen of Naples sponsored an African Society of Italy which began working for the acquisition of colonies.<sup>18</sup>

Against this background the Italian Government was not averse from "passing into the official possession of Assab". However, on the advice of its Ambassador in London, Menabrea, the Italian Government decided to continue to act behind the back of Rubattino and Co.<sup>19</sup> Late in December 1879 Sapeto went to Assab as instructed by the Italian Government.<sup>20</sup> On December 30, 1879, and March 15, 1880, he "acquired" on behalf of Rubattino a group of islands in Assab Bay and a coastal area between Ras Lunah and Ras Sintia.<sup>21</sup> Then Sapeto began to enlist in Aden manpower for building projects in Assab.

In response to Italy's activity, Egypt, evidently instigated by Britain, sent to Assab Bay a gunboat which was followed by the arrival of the British ship *Sea Gull*. The British Governor of Aden for his part forwade sending the enlisted workers and purchased materials to Assab.<sup>22</sup> The measures taken by the British authorities stemmed from an openly hostile stand maintained by the British conservative government, which considered at that time undesirable any change in the *status quo* of the African shore of the Red Sea.

Lord Salisbury, British Foreign Secretary, declared

<sup>18</sup> R. Battaglia, *La prima guerra d'Africa*, pp. 104-108.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.  
<sup>20</sup> *L'Italia in Africa*, Vol. II, p. 91.  
<sup>21</sup> *Traffico*, Vol. I, pp. 39-40, 42-43.  
<sup>22</sup> *L'Italia in Africa*, Vol. II, p. 92.

that Assab lay within Egypt, that the Red Sea was a sensitive cord of the Empire and that Britain did not want anything political about the Italian enterprise in Assab.<sup>23</sup> On February 7, 1880, Salisbury wrote to his ambassador in Italy that the British government "can adopt no other course than to continue to respect that which they believe to be the legitimate sovereignty of the coast, and which, according to their judgement, unquestionably resides in the ruler of Egypt...."<sup>24</sup>

It should be borne in mind that Britain was bringing Egypt more and more under her sway. The Anglo-Egyptian convention of September 7, 1877, actually gave the British control over the entire coast of Somali from Cape Guardafui to Bab el Mandeb as well as the Red Sea shore, though Egypt formally continued to hold the sovereignty of these areas.

In April 1880 the Italian Government explained to London that its plans with respect to Assab had an "exclusively commercial and scientific character" and that "never will Assab Bay become a government colony of a military type, never will military garrisons be stationed there, nor will any fortification work be carried out either on the continent or the islands."<sup>25</sup>

However, Granville, Foreign Secretary in Gladstone's Government, said that he had told the Italian ambassador in London that the "Egyptian Government held the sovereignty of the country of which the bay (i. e. Assab Bay.—Auth.) formed part, and that we protested against the exercise or assertion of any right of sovereignty on the part of Italy."<sup>26</sup>

Meanwhile on September 20, 1880, Sapeto and the Sultan of Raheita signed a treaty "on protection, friendship and good neighbourhood", under which the sultan proved to be actually under Italian protectorate.<sup>27</sup> On January 8, 1881, an Italian civil commissar already ar-

<sup>23</sup> See: R. Battaglia, *La prima guerra d'Africa*, p. 144; R. Ciasca, *Storia coloniale...*, p. 88.

<sup>24</sup> "Correspondence Between Great Britain, Egypt, Italy and Turkey Respecting Assab Bay. (1880-1882)," — *British and Foreign State Papers*, Vol. 73, 1889, p. 1298.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1241.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1241.

<sup>27</sup> *Trattati...*, Vol. I, pp. 49-51.

rived in Assab. However, up to September 1881 the British Government waived all claims of Italy with respect to Assab and the adjacent territory.

On September 13, 1881, Granville instructed MacDonnell, a British chargé d'affaires in Rome, to inform Mancini, Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, that the British Government would sound the position of Egypt and Turkey and would support Italy if the latter was prepared to sign an official agreement with Egypt on acquiring the Assab Territory (provided a trade centre and not a naval base was set up there).<sup>28</sup>

Literally in a day Mancini thanked Granville for his proposal and underscored the fact that it corresponded to the wish of the Italian Government.<sup>29</sup> On September 16 Menabrea, Italian Ambassador in London, told Granville that Italy was ready to submit to Britain for approval a draft Italo-Egyptian convention.

The draft was sent to London on October 9, 1881. The basic propositions of the convention were as follows:

(1) The Khedive recognises the acquisition of the Assab Territory made by the Government of Italy in 1870 to 1880 (at this point the Rubattino screen was discarded and the spade was called the spade) including all rights of ownership, jurisdiction and sovereignty. The Khedive forgoes any claims to this Territory.

(2) The Italian colony in Assab will have a purely commercial character and will not be intended for military purposes. The Italian Government preserves the right to the defence of the Territory as well as the entry of warships into Assab Bay.

(3) The transfer of arms and ammunition via Assab is forbidden (the Italians meant to propose a special article stipulating the ban on carrying and delivering weapons to Ethiopia via Assab, but then abandoned it since the anti-Ethiopian orientation of this item of the draft was obvious enough even as it stood).<sup>30</sup>

Granville adopted the draft on the whole and made small amendments. Thus, generously, he suggested that Italy's right to "take necessary measures for security

<sup>28</sup> *British and Foreign State Papers*, Vol. 73, p. 1257.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1258-1259.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1261-1262.

against natives" should be emphasised, i. e. he made the draft still more aggressive.

On November 17 Granville dispatched the draft to Dufferin, British Ambassador in Turkey, and Malet, Consul-General in Cairo, and suggested that they should have the Egyptian Government approve the convention.<sup>31</sup> However, the Khedive refused to sign the convention. For nearly three months the Foreign Office was pressing Egypt to recognise the Italian claims to Assab. Meantime the British Government demanded that Italy should recognise the sovereignty of Turkey and Egypt over the territories situated north and south of Assab.

Finally, agreement was reached on February 15, 1882. Italy recognised Turkey's and Egypt's sovereignty of the areas north and south of Assab, with a reservation with respect to the Raheita Sultanate. Otherwise the text of the convention coincided with the Italian project. On February 23 and 28, 1882, the Italian ambassador in London and Granville exchanged letters, which signified the signing of the convention by both governments.

Though the Egyptian Government declared again on March 26, 1882, its refusal to sign the convention,<sup>32</sup> this interested no one any longer. On July 5, 1882, the King of Italy signed a law "respecting the Territory of Assab as an Italian Colony under Italian Sovereignty".<sup>33</sup> Thus the British Government complied with the desire of the Italian ruling circles to obtain a colony in North-East Africa.

The destiny of Assab was not decided by the population of this territory whose opinion no one thought worthwhile to consult, not even by the Sultan of Raheita. Nor by Ethiopia or Egypt. The destiny of Assab was decided in London and Rome by the European colonialists, for whom their own gains meant far more than the interests of the African nations.

Now, what explains the change in the position of the British Government which passed so promptly from the non-recognition to the recognition and support of the Italian claims to Assab? Perhaps, Gladstone's Liberal

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1264-1265.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1293.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1337.

Government abandoned in principle (as Agatha Ramm suggested) the protection of British interests along the route to India?<sup>34</sup> Or perhaps the bourgeois historian Knaplund is right contending that Gladstone recognised "the equality of the weak with the strong" and "loved Italy" as a result of which "he was more anxious than his colleagues to gratify Italian ambitions for colonies on the Red Sea?"<sup>35</sup>

The explanation is certainly not Gladstone's demagoguery, and still less the alleged altruism of the British Government in the matters of colonial policy.

First of all, the Italians acted in this case with sufficient determination: despite the objections of the Foreign Office they actually seized Assab in 1880. Therefore, the Gladstone Government faced the choice of either denying Italy's right to Assab and hence running into a conflict with her or recognising this right.

In the British Government there were groups which favoured the first alternative and there were others which preferred the second.

When the Assab question came to a head (in August and September 1881) a Cabinet member, Hartington, believed, according to Granville, that it was necessary to take up immediately a stiff stand on Assab Bay. His view was shared in essence by Granville who "desired to oppose any further acquisitions by Italy near Assab Bay in the Red Sea, believing that such acquisitions must entail the early and immediate destruction of the balance of power in those waters".<sup>36</sup>

Gladstone believed that, first, Assab Bay "could be a source of weakness and not of strength to Italy" and, second, British "stiff" policy could lead to a conflict with Italy and the need of sending the British navy to Assab,<sup>37</sup> which was undesirable at the time. Gladstone's point of view triumphed. The fact is that the growing strength of

<sup>34</sup> A. Ramm, "Great Britain and the Planting of Italian Power in the Red Sea 1868-1885," — *The English Historical Review*, Vol. LIX, 1944, № 234.

<sup>35</sup> P. Knaplund, *Gladstone's Foreign Policy*, New York-London, 1935, pp. 8, 83.

<sup>36</sup> Ed. Fitzmaurice, *The Life of Granville George Leveson-Gower*, Vol. II, London, 1906, pp. 234.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

France in the Mediterranean owing to her capture of Tunisia (spring 1881) impelled the British Government to think of a counterbalance to French influence. By supporting Italy on Assab since autumn 1881 onward, Britain took the first steps towards acquiring an ally in the Mediterranean. Characteristically, pro-British feelings came to be expressed aloud by that time in the Italian ruling circles.<sup>38</sup>

Having got a foothold in Assab, the Italians intensified their activity aimed at enhancing their commercial and political influence in Ethiopia. Their main ambition was Shoa, a province of Ethiopia. They expected to use its ruler, Menelik, to strengthen their influence in the country. However, Menelik by no means relished the idea of being led on a leash. By making small concessions to the Italians he tried to make full use, in the interests of his country, of the benefits which accrued from good relations with the Italians. Late in the '70s he tried to get arms through an Italian mission which arrived in Shoa.<sup>39</sup>

On May 21, 1883, Antonelli, an agent of the Italian Government, and Menelik signed a friendship and trade treaty under which the Italian merchants obtained most favoured nation privileges and Menelik the right of tariff-free conveyance of goods through Assab.<sup>40</sup> By this treaty Italy tried to channel to Assab the trade from Shoa and through Shoa and obtain a bridgehead for strengthening her positions in the province. Simultaneously, the Italian Government made an attempt to get in contact with Emperor Johan IV of Ethiopia and have him sign a trade agreement which would attract to Assab trade from North and North-East Ethiopia as well as impose on the Emperor some economic projects.<sup>41</sup>

Apart from selling goods to Ethiopia and cheap imports from the country, the Italian ruling circles had a good mind to convert this country into a semi-colony for Ital-

<sup>38</sup> W. Langer, *European Alliances and Alignments, 1870-1890*, New York, 1956, pp. 228, 244.

<sup>39</sup> *L'Italia in Africa*, Vol. II, p. 128.

<sup>40</sup> "Documenti diplomatici presentati al parlamento italiano del presidente del consiglio... (Crispi)". *Etiopia*, serie I, Roma, 1890, pp. 128-131 (quoted further as *Etiopia*).

<sup>41</sup> *L'Italia in Africa*, Vol. II, pp. 136, 146-147.

ian settlers. This is strongly confirmed by a letter from the Minister of Agriculture of Italy to Mancini, Minister of Foreign Affairs. The author of the letter wanted a treaty with Ethiopia which would provide for:

(1) free access for all Italian peasants to Ethiopia without any preliminary permission of authorities; the freedom to settle in any area of this country and engage in trade and crafts;

(2) the "exemption of the luggage, goods or any belongings of the Italian peasants from any tariffs and customs inspection at the frontier in both entry and departure;"

(3) granting to "Italians the possibility of becoming landowners and establishment of guarantees exempting them from any arbitrary taxation on the part of the governors of provinces and tax-collecting authorities."<sup>42</sup>

All these plans remained on paper because Johan IV distrusted the Italian schemes.

The area of Ethiopia and the Red Sea shore was not the only object of Italian ambitions in Africa. In 1883 and 1884 plans sprang up in the ruling circles of Italy for the capture of Tripoli. However, these plans were not supported in London.<sup>43</sup>

At this juncture Rome received in the autumn of 1884 very important news from Cairo and then from London concerning the African Red Sea shore. A highly favourable situation for Italy's aggrandisement developed in this area in 1884. A popular uprising against British rule broke out in the Sudan in 1881. Frightened by the uprising, the British Government decided that the Egyptian garrisons stationed at the ports of the Somali coast and the Red Sea shore south of Massowah ought to be used elsewhere: against the Mahdians. Besides, preoccupied with the struggle against the Mahdians, Egypt could not, in the opinion of Britain, reliably protect British interests in this area against encroachments of other powers. Under constant British pressure, the Egyptian Government was forced to evacuate these garrisons. Simultaneously, Britain suggested that Turkey should capture the area

<sup>42</sup> *Etiopia*, pp. 137-138.

<sup>43</sup> C. Zaghi, P. S. Mancini, *L'Africa e il problema del Mediterraneo, 1884-1885 (Con documenti inediti)*, Roma, 1955.

between Zeila and Suakin to protect British interests in this area against French encroachments.<sup>44</sup>

However, Turkey showed no desire to occupy the Red Sea shore. Therefore, the Foreign Office had another idea: to use Italy in lieu of Egypt at some points of this area.

On October 8, 1884, Granville instructed Baring, British Consul-General in Egypt (later 1st Earl of Cromer), and the India Office to order Hunter, a British agent in Somaliland, not to impede a possible expansion of Italy's possessions near Assab into Africa's hinterland.<sup>45</sup>

Having learned about the British intentions, Egyptian Premier Nubar Pasha suggested on October 15, 1884, to de Martino, Italian consul in Cairo, that the Italian possessions on the Red Sea shore should be expanded. The news reached Rome on October 20.<sup>46</sup> On the same day Granville met in London the Italian Ambassador Nigra and told him the following (as was reported by Nigra): "The British Government does not want to occupy the Massowah port on the Red Sea. Nor does it want to leave it in the control of the barbarians or in the power of a rival state. The British Government has proposed or will propose to Turkey ... to occupy it. If, however, Turkey has difficulties, would Italy like to occupy it?" Granville emphasised the fact that the conversation was private and that he had expressed his personal opinion, not the opinion of the entire Cabinet.<sup>47</sup>

Having not yet been informed by Nigra on this talk, Mancini, under the influence of the news from Cairo, instructed Nigra on October 29 to sound Granville as to how the British Government would take a certain expansion of the Italian Red Sea possessions and her occupation of Beilul, for example.<sup>48</sup> On the same day he received a letter from Nigra in which his talk with Granville on October 20 was described; that was an instantaneous appetiser for the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs. He sent Nigra a telegram which indicated emphatically.

<sup>44</sup> E. Cromer, *Modern Egypt*, Vol. II, London, 1908, pp. 53-54.

<sup>45</sup> *Blue Book*. "Egypt. No. 14 (1885)," London, 1885, p. 52.

<sup>46</sup> C. Zaghi, *P. S. Mancini...*, p. 90.

<sup>47</sup> *L'Italia in Africa. Etiopia—Mar Rosso*, Vol. I, Tomo III. *Documenti (1883-1885)*, Roma, 1960, p. 70.

<sup>48</sup> C. Giglio, *L'impresa di Massaua*, p. 27.



that the capture of Massowah would be very important for Italy, especially if made with British consent. In this connection Mancini requested several questions to be specified: on what formal ground could the occupation be effected; would any conditions be imposed on Italy; could effective aid from the British armed forces be expected in case of a conflict with Ethiopia?<sup>49</sup> At the same time Mancini tried to underplay Italy's interest in the capture of Massowah and represented Granville's probing as a request of the British Government.

On November 5, 1884, Nigra found out in his talk with Granville that the British Government had no objections against Italy's seizure of Beilul.<sup>50</sup>

Massowah presented a different case.

Even earlier, in his talk with Nigra on November 5, Granville was evasive with respect to Italy's seizure of Massowah. Mancini, who believed that this action would be of advantage to Britain and who made a special point of the fact that the British had requested Italy to take this measure, sent Nigra on November 7, 1884, a telegram in which it was recommended to refrain for the time being from raising the Massowah question and to wait for Granville to make a formal proposal to Italy on that account. Thereafter (wrote Mancini) the Italian Government would tell Britain the terms on which Italy would agree to occupy Massowah. According to Mancini, these terms implied the transfer to Italy of the entire territory between Assab and Massowah.<sup>51</sup>

The British Government kept silence. Then it occurred to Mancini to have Britain acquiesce in the seizure of Harar whence the withdrawal of Egyptian troops began just at that time, early in November.

The Italian Government was kept well informed on the events in Somaliland and Harar through its consul in Aden Bienenfeld, a prominent tradesman in Trieste, who was personally interested in Harar as a new market. In his report of November 4, 1884, Bienenfeld informed Mancini that in connection with the seizure by France of Sagallo and intention to seize Harar he proposed to An-

<sup>49</sup> *L'Italia in Africa*, Vol. I, Tomo III, pp. 71-72.

<sup>50</sup> C. Giglio, *L'Impresa di Massaua*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>51</sup> *L'Italia in Africa*, Vol. I, Tomo III, pp. 74-75.

tonelli who was in Shoa to prompt Menelik to "realise his old design with respect to Harar". "Harar is a very rich area, and if Menelik gets it, I am sure that the Italians will be able to derive great benefit out of it,"<sup>52</sup> Bienenfeld wrote.

However, in Rome they decreed otherwise. On November 20 Mancini instructed Antonelli to abstain from "expressing to Menelik any point of view on this question".<sup>53</sup> On November 21 Mancini wrote to Nigra in London, "It would be interesting for us to know as soon as possible and with high accuracy the intentions of the British Government concerning this area (Harar.—Auth.) which is rumoured to have fertile soil and would be of special importance to us in the future from many points of view."<sup>54</sup>

In another of his letters (November 23) to Nigra Mancini exclaimed, "What will now happen to this area which the French are apparently trying to get and which may in their hands prove a dominating if not menacing position for the landing stations Zeila and Berbera, for the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea itself?" On November 24, Mancini bluntly proposed to Nigra to declare to Granville that Italy was prepared to seize Harar.<sup>55</sup>

On November 25 Nigra informed Rome on Granville's reaction to this proposal. The British Foreign Secretary declared that the Egyptian Government was not going to evacuate Harar at the present moment.<sup>56</sup> This was untrue, since the withdrawal of Egyptian troops from Harar had begun. However, Granville's reply indicated that at that time the British Government did not wish the Italian occupation of Harar. To all intents and purposes the British lorded it there themselves. Besides, they still held the key to Harar and Zeila, a port the British troops had occupied on August 23, 1884. Therefore, in his subsequent letters to Nigra Mancini did not discuss in specific terms the Harar question but laid emphasis on the need for an Italo-British agreement, mainly on the

<sup>52</sup> C. Giglio, "Il primo tentativo di Mancini per Zella e l'Harar," — *Il Risorgimento*, 1954, No. 3, p. 170.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>54</sup> *Nuova antologia*, November 1952, pp. 267-268.

<sup>55</sup> *L'Italia in Africa*, T. III, pp. 81-82.

<sup>56</sup> C. Giglio, *L'impresa di Massaua*, p. 59.

African Red Sea ports.<sup>57</sup> The Italian Government insisted on a clearcut answer, and Nigra was compelled to inform his superior that Granville was behaving "evasively and dragging out a decision" and that a new *démarche* would bring no better result at the moment.<sup>58</sup>

On December 7 Nigra informed his Government that in the British Cabinet there were "differences on nearly all issues", that the Cabinet had not apparently determined its final stand on the Red Sea and that this stand depended "on all kinds of possibilities like the success of the expedition to Khartum, and the attitude of the powers to the latest British financial proposals on Egypt".<sup>59</sup>

Since the Egyptians dragged out the evacuation of Beilul, the British Government recommended the Italians on December 9 to deal with Beilul just as the British had dealt with Zeila, i. e. land their troops before the withdrawal of the Egyptian garrison.<sup>60</sup> In January 1885 Italy complied with this advice.

Throughout the first half of December the Italian Government brought up several times before Britain the question of the destiny of the African ports on the Red Sea. On December 15 Mancini requested Nigra to sound the attitude of Britain towards Italy's contemplated capture of Zula (Zula is situated south of Massowah).<sup>61</sup> On December 17 and 22 Nigra and Granville had decisive talks a detailed account of which can be found in Nigra's message to Mancini of December 23, 1884.<sup>62</sup>

Nigra put the following basic questions to Granville: (1) what is the opinion of the British Government on the future of the ports on the Red Sea and the Red Sea coast, and (2) has the British Government objections against Italy's capture of Zula?

Granville's response reduced to the following. Egypt could not hold all points on the Red Sea coast. They were

<sup>57</sup> *Il Risorgimento*, 1954, No. 3, p. 176. At the same time (in November and December 1884) the Italian Government sent, without Britain's knowledge, its agents to Tajoura Bay, where it tried in vain to establish a protectorate over one of the local sultanates.

<sup>58</sup> *Nuova antologia*, November 1952, p. 270.

<sup>59</sup> C. Zaghi, *P. S. Mancini...*, p. 160.

<sup>60</sup> *Nuova antologia*, November 1952, p. 271.

<sup>61</sup> *L'Italia in Africa*, Vol. I, T. III, p. 89.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 92-94; C. Zaghi, *P. S. Mancini...*, pp. 161-163. In Zaghi's book the message is misdated November 23.

to be returned to Turkey. If Italy wanted to take possession of some ports on the Red Sea, she must have it out with Turkey. However, the British Government would not object against Italy's seizure of Zula, Beilul or Massowah. Nigra requested Granville to inform the Turkish Government that Britain thought useful the appearance of the Italian navy off the Red Sea coast. "Granville told me that, if necessary, he would instruct to express to the Sublime Porte this opinion with which he agreed," Nigra wrote. The Italian ambassador evaluated Granville's answer as the "most favourable that could ever be expected. It leaves us free not only with respect to Beilul and Zula but Massowah as well".<sup>63</sup>

On receiving Nigra's report the Italian Government immediately stopped its preparation of an expedition into Tripoli and in January 1885 sent out troops first for the capture of Beilul and then of Massowah. The troops landed in Massowah on February 5. The Egyptian vice-governor of Massowah, still uninstructed by his Government, objected against the landing of the Italian troops. However, he changed his mind when Domville, Commander of the British gunboat *Condor* (which escorted the expedition, according to Saletta in command of the Italian troops), pointed it out that since Britain was not against the landing, the vice-governor would do well to refer himself to Cairo where there evidently was an adequate agreement on that issue.<sup>64</sup>

It is noteworthy that it was British diplomacy which undertook the "pacification" of Turkey. Even before the Italian landing in Massowah Baring proposed on January 28, 1885, the following plan of bringing pressure on Turkey: "Let the Government of Italy write to the Egyptian Government that an Italian traveller was killed and question it (the Egyptian Government.—Auth.) whether or not it is able to maintain order in Massowah. The Egyptian Government would reply essentially in the negative.... The Government of Egypt would notify the Porte on the Italian letter and its own reply, giving more effective arguments than before in favour of the need of the evacuation of Massowah. Now, I could manoeuvre

<sup>63</sup> C. Zanghi, *P. S. Mancini...*, p. 162.

<sup>64</sup> R. Battaglia, *La prima guerra d'Africa*, p. 183.

here."<sup>65</sup> After the Italian landing in Massowah the Turkish ambassador in London and a special envoy sent to London told Granville on February 13 that if the Italian Government insisted, this intransigence might lead to a war between the two countries, to which Granville replied, "I believe that the Porte will take no rash steps."<sup>66</sup> Under the pressure of Britain the Turkish Government did not go beyond an expression of displeasure.

Thus, the British Government was that force which encouraged and inspired the Italian expansion in the Red Sea area. Right from the start the British Government intimated to the Italian ruling circles that it favoured an expansion of the Italian colony on the Red Sea, and indeed suggested a seizure of Massowah. It also indicated a method of occupying the Red Sea ports: they were to be captured before the Egyptian garrisons withdrew. If the position of the British Cabinet had not been so favourable, the Italian vulture would not probably have dared to pounce on Massowah at that time.<sup>67</sup>

Now, what were the aims of the British Government in its policy re Massowah? What was behind the British position?

First, Britain aimed at getting an ally: Italy. In 1884 and early in 1885 Britain found herself among the great powers in isolation which was by no means "splendid". Indeed, following the British occupation of Egypt in 1882 the relations between Britain and France sharply deteriorated. The advent to power in France of the Jules Ferry Government intensified the French colonial expansion, which also aggravated the Anglo-French contradictions. Germany entered the sphere of active colonial policy in 1884. Her ambitions met with an openly hostile attitude of the British Government. In this connection from the middle of 1884 there was a rapprochement between France and Germany on the colonial issues, this rapprochement being directed against Britain.<sup>68</sup> A very sharp antago-

<sup>65</sup> C. Giglio, *L'impresa di Massaua...*, p. 69.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>67</sup> In this connection it seems to us that Giglio underestimates the role of Britain in the Italian expansion in Africa in that period (see his paper in *Nuova antologia*, November 1952, and his book *L'impresa di Massaua*).

<sup>68</sup> W. Langer, *European Alliances and Alignments*, New York, 1956, p. 299.

nism between Britain and Russia in Central Asia did not abate. In August 1884 the British Cabinet watched with anxiety the course of events in this area.<sup>69</sup> In this situation even such a weak ally as Italy could prove useful for Britain.

Second, Britain did not want Massowah and other ports of the Red Sea to be captured by France. In his very first talk with Nigra concerned with Massowah (October 20, 1884) Granville pointed to the threat of the capture of Massowah by "rival powers". In autumn 1884 France consolidated her positions in Somaliland, and there was a persistent rumour that she aimed at the Red Sea ports as well.

Citing the Foreign Office records, the British historian Agatha Ramm wrote that the British Government was all the more nervous after reliable information had been received that France was preparing to capture Massowah as well as because of presence in the Red Sea of French ships which were supposed to be bound for Madagascar.<sup>70</sup> In one of his messages to Granville Baring communicated at that time that Italy might be anticipated by a "less friendly" government.<sup>71</sup>

The feelings of the British if the French had been ensconced in Massowah next to Ethiopia and the Mahdians can readily be imagined.

Finally, the British policy was closely linked with the developments in the Sudan. After the failure of the Gordon mission (he failed to establish a Sudan which would be dependent on Britain) the British Government decided on June 25, 1884, to send an expedition to the Sudan. Preparations for the expedition were in progress in September and October 1884. In the opinion of the British Government, Italy's occupation of Massowah could detract part of the forces of the Mahdians from the British expedition, especially the detachments of Osman Digna, and prevent a possible capture of this port by the Mahdians. Having certified themselves as to the Italian desire to get Massowah, the British ruling circles concluded that their consent would immediately lead to an Italian landing.

<sup>69</sup> S. Gwynn and G. Tuckwell, *The Life of the Rt. Hon. Sir Charles: W. Dilke*, Vol. II, London, 1917, pp. 87-88.

<sup>70</sup> A. Ramm, *Great Britain...*, p. 234.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

in Massowah. However, the British gave no explicit consent until December 22, 1884. The fact is that the expedition along the Nile had merely begun its journey to the Sudan and, besides, an immediate Italian landing in Massowah could have interfered with the rescue of the Egyptian garrisons by Ethiopia, which would no doubt have interpreted the British action as a violation of the Hewett treaty (it was just at that time that the British requested Johan IV to come to the rescue of the Galabat garrisons).

The reason why the British Government did not initially consent to the Italian capture of Massowah was, in our opinion, the fact that Massowah opened a way to the Sudan: the entire range of problems connected with the Sudan was behind Massowah. Several remarks which Fitzmaurice (Foreign Under-Secretary of Britain in 1883 to 1885) expresses in his book indicate that the British Cabinet attached great importance to the diversion of the Mahdi forces from the side of the Red Sea. At the same time Fitzmaurice mentions in passing that role which London assigned in this undertaking to Italy. Thus, he states that by October 1884 it had been decided that the "expedition into Sudan should start and that a diversion should also be made on the Red Sea coast to keep Osman Digna engaged".<sup>72</sup> Emphasising elsewhere that in 1884 Digna threatened both Kassala and Massowah, the author remarks, "It appeared to the British Government that there might be advantages in the occupation of Massowah at this juncture by Italy."<sup>73</sup> And then, "The occupation of Massowah by Italy not only relieved the pressure (of the Mahdians.—Auth.) on Kassala, but also secured the good-will of the statesmen at Rome...."<sup>74</sup>

In Italy the plans for possible participation of Italian troops in the operations against the Mahdians in the Sudan began to shape only in the second half of January 1885, after a *démarche* undertaken by Lumley, British Ambassador in Italy.

As follows from Mancini's letter to Nigra of January

<sup>72</sup> Ed. Fitzmaurice, *The Life of Granville...*, Vol. II, p. 398.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 437.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 439.

22, 1885, Lumley suggested that Mancini considered the possibility of joint operations of British and Italian troops in the Sudan and in particular the dispatching of an Italian detachment 5,000 to 6,000 men strong to Suakin for subsequent operations in the direction of Berber and Khartoum. According to Lumley, the Italo-British cooperation would enable Italy to get a firm foothold in the Sudan and convert this country into an area of commercial and colonial activity. According to Lumley, Anglo-Italian joint military operations in Sudan would be a beneficial prelude of Italy's colonial might.<sup>75</sup>

Several days later the British ambassador almost literally repeated this proposal to Malvano, Director General of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, early in February 1885 Nigra notified Rome that, in his opinion, the British Government had not instructed Lumley to make that proposal.<sup>76</sup> It is hard to say whether the British Government instructed Lumley to this effect or he undertook this démarche on his own.<sup>77</sup> It is beyond doubt that the British Cabinet wanted to sound Italy's stand on possible Italian operations in the Sudan since Britain needed an ally at that time. The following fact *inter alia* points to such feelings in the high political quarters of Britain: on January 17, 1885, independently from Lumley, Malet, British Ambassador in Berlin, wrote to Granville that the "Assab expedition (the Italian troops sent to Beilul.—Auth.) might be used very usefully at Suakin".<sup>78</sup>

Anyway, the British probing whetted the appetite of the Italian ruling circles. They already visualised themselves as masters of the Sudan. The Italian press was discussing the joint Anglo-Italian operations in the Sudan as a foregone conclusion. The newspaper *Corriere della sera* noted on January 31, "What is meant is to help

<sup>75</sup> C. Zaghi, *P. S. Mancini...*, p. 164.

<sup>76</sup> *L'Italia in Africa*, Vol. I, T. III, p. 113.

<sup>77</sup> Giglio believes that the démarche was Lumley's personal initiative (see: C. Giglio, *L'impressione di Massaua*, pp. 117-118). Curiously enough, Mancini once described Lumley as a very cautious person who undertook nothing without his government's knowledge.

<sup>78</sup> "Letters from the Berlin Embassy, 1871-1874; 1880-1885," edited by P. Knaplund, — *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1942*, Vol. II, Washington, 1944, p. 378.



Britain to suppress the uprising in Sudan."<sup>79</sup> On February 6, 1885, Mancini requested the War Minister to send him a plan for the forthcoming operations in the Sudan and telegraphed to London the readiness to give a sympathetic treatment to the British Government's invitation.<sup>80</sup>

On January 26 the Mahdians liberated Khartoum. The British Government was thrown into confusion. At a Cabinet meeting next day Khartoum and the "Italians as against the Turks in the Red Sea" were discussed.<sup>81</sup>

Early in February "it was decided that the Italians should be allowed to go to Kassala—a decision which was afterwards reversed,"<sup>82</sup> Dilke, a Cabinet member, wrote. The Italian Government, for its part, came to the conclusion not later than February 8 that it would have been more to Italy's advantage from all points of view if she had been invited to take part in the Sudan expedition along with Britain. "The main point is that Granville should know this as soon as possible and have no doubt whatsoever that we will be ready to cooperate if Britain requests us to do," wrote Mancini to Nigra in the evening on February 8. The Minister emphasised that his Cabinet colleagues even insisted that the "proposal on our aid should be made of our own will, immediately, without reservation and without any conditions".<sup>83</sup>

This extraordinary zeal embarrassed the British Cabinet. To let the Italians into the Sudan at a time when the British Government was not absolutely certain that it would conduct active operations there and when the British troops sustained defeat after defeat in the Sudan would mean to allow the Italians too much. Besides, the conflict with Russia had been disturbing the British ruling circles more and more. On February 5, just a few hours after the news of the fall of Khartoum, the Cabinet met in London on the question of Central Asia, and on February 18 the government commission on Central Asia recommended that arms should be resorted to if the situation deteriorated.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>79</sup> See: C. Zaghi, *P. S. Mancini...*, p. 94.

<sup>80</sup> See: R. Battaglia, *La prima guerra d'Africa*, p. 190.

<sup>81</sup> S. Gwynn and G. Tuckwell, *The Life...*, Vol. II, p. 109.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> C. Zaghi, *P. S. Mancini...*, pp. 167-168.

<sup>84</sup> S. Gwynn and G. Tuckwell, *The Life...*, Vol. II, p. 115.

Not later than on February 9 Nigra telegraphed to Rome about the refusal of the British Government to accept Italian aid. On February 10 and 11 Nigra reported that Granville agreed only to sending an Italian detachment for the rescue of the Egyptian garrison of Kassala.<sup>85</sup> On February 12 Mancini proposed to Nigra to stipulate an expedition to Kassala by signing an agreement on that issue between Britain and Italy.<sup>86</sup> At that time the Italian General Staff was already contemplating in all earnest the Italian campaign to Khartoum.<sup>87</sup> On February 13 Nigra reported again that in Britain they agreed to a "spontaneous" campaign of Italian troops to Kassala but refused to sign a preliminary "convention on alliance and cooperation".<sup>88</sup>

On March 12 the Italian Government proposed through Nigra to Britain to make use of Italian troops against Osman Digna in Suakin,<sup>89</sup> but Britain again turned down the proposal. Any other reaction could hardly be expected. It is on that day that the British Government decided to restrict the military operations in the Sudan, and Dilke made this record: "We took a decision that war preparations against Russia should be made in India."<sup>90</sup>

Thus, the events of January-March 1885 indicate that the British Government did not wish to conclude any agreements with Italy which would give wide scope of activity for the Italians in the Sudan, but merely wanted their operations to be local, since the Sudan was to belong exclusively to Britain, in the opinion of the British ruling circles.

Italy's seizure of Massowah caused serious resentment in Ethiopia. Emperor Johan IV declared several days after the fall of Massowah that the British had broken their pledge given to him. He emphasised the fact that the Italians had acted as intriguers, but the main source of evil was Britain.<sup>91</sup> Later in November 1885 Johan sent

<sup>85</sup> C. Zaghi, *P. S. Mancini...*, pp. 169, 171, 173.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 175-178.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 179-180.

<sup>90</sup> S. Gwynn and G. Tuckwell, *The Life...*, Vol. II, p. 115.

<sup>91</sup> A. Gianni, *Italia e Inghilterra alle porte del Sudan. La spedizione di Massaua*, Pisa, 1940, p. 97.

to Menelik, the ruler of Shoa, a letter in which he urged him to give a joint rebuff to the Italians. "If we two are always united, we shall defeat not only the weak Italians, but also other, strong nations,"<sup>92</sup> the Emperor wrote. The strained relations between Johan IV and the Malidians as well as the contradictions at home prevented him in 1885 from taking decisive measures in connection with Italy's capture of Massowah.

Meanwhile, though Britain had cancelled the proposal to send the Italian troops to the Sudan, she did not want to worsen her relations with Italy. In his letter of February 13, 1885, to the British ambassador in Rome, Granville stressed the fact that the British policy with respect to Italy must be as friendly as possible.<sup>93</sup>

In March 1885 Granville wrote to Nigra, "I cannot express too strongly how much we appreciate the friendly feeling of the Italian Government."<sup>94</sup>

Having realised that the British were not going to permit Italy to act on a wide scale in the Sudan, Mancini decided in March 1885 to bring up before Britain again the question of the transfer to Italy of Zeila and Harar. The Italian Government considered this all the more necessary since Mancini's colonial policy came under more and more intense criticism in the country and Parliament. The critics pointed out that Italy's capture of Massowah held out no prospects. Therefore, when Mancini had learned that the Egyptian troops were to be soon withdrawn from Harar and that the population of Harar was in uprising against the British authorities, he dispatched on March 23, 1885, a letter to London in which he proposed sending a detachment of Italian soldiers to Zeila and Harar allegedly for "maintaining public order there."<sup>95</sup> At the same time Mancini requested General Ricotti, Minister of War, to contemplate the preparations for an expedition into Zeila, Berbera and Harar.<sup>96</sup> However, not later than at the beginning of April 1885 the Italian governmental circles abandoned the idea of seizing Berbera, but continued their efforts to get Zeila and Harar.

<sup>92</sup> *Etiopia*, pp. 203-204.

<sup>93</sup> Ed. Fitzmaurice, *The Life of Granville*, Vol. II, p. 438.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 439.

<sup>95</sup> *L'Italia in Africa*, T. III, p. 153.

<sup>96</sup> C. Giglio, *L'impresa di Massaua*, p. 142.

On April 18 Granville informed Nigra that the British were not inclined to give away Zeila to Italy (Britain allegedly protected it for Turkey), but they did not object against the seizure of Harar.<sup>97</sup> Britain consented to transfer Harar (and later Zeila as well) to Italy because the situation in Harar was rather strained. Hunter, a British agent on the Somali coast, believed, for example, that in view of the feelings current at that time among the local population it would hardly be possible for the Emir placed into power by the British to hold it without foreign armed forces. Therefore, Hunter proposed that if Britain did not consider it possible to send troops to Harar, it would be better to transfer it to Italy.<sup>98</sup>

The growth of French activity in Zeila and adjacent areas also alarmed the British. On March 26, 1885, France imposed a protectorate agreement on the chiefs of Somaliland's tribes.<sup>99</sup> A French agent arrived in Zeila in March. According to the information of Italian agents, he had been instructed to make preparations for the French occupation of Zeila and Harar. On April 21 London received Baring's report that the French had captured another point on the Somali coast.<sup>100</sup> On the same day Mancini requested Granville to be informed that it would be impossible to occupy Harar until an Italian or Anglo-Italian garrison were stationed in Zeila.

On April 22 Granville and Nigra came to an agreement that the British would not leave Zeila without having consulted the Italian Government.<sup>101</sup> Meanwhile the British Cabinet exchanged opinions as to the concession of Zeila to Italy.

On April 27 the India Office informed the Foreign Office that if Britain consented to Italy's seizure of Zeila and Harar the Italian Government should accept the following conditions:

- (1) no arms were to be sold to the Somalis;
- (2) no tariffs were to be established in Zeila higher

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>98</sup> C. Giglio, "Il secondo tentativo di Mancini per Zeila e l'Harar (marzo-giugno 1885)," — *Il Risorgimento*, 1955, No. 2, pp. 107-108.

<sup>99</sup> Ed. Hertslet, *The Map of Africa By Treaty*, Vol. II, London, 1909, p. 633.

<sup>100</sup> *Il Risorgimento*, 1955, No. 2, pp. 108-109.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 97, 109-110.

than 5 per cent of the value of imports and 1 per cent of that of exports; and

(3) no tariffs were to be established on cattle.<sup>102</sup>

The first condition was intended to protect the European colonialists against the just retaliation of the militant Somalis, and the second and third to guarantee British trade interests.

In his talk with the Italian ambassador on May 4, Granville's stand on Zeila was less intransigent. And on May 20, to Nigra's question about the position of the British Government with respect to a possible landing of Italian troops in Zeila (as a base for a campaign to Harar) Granville replied that Britain would by no means resist it by force.<sup>103</sup> Actually, Britain consented to the Italian occupation of Zeila. But this consent was quite peculiar. The British diplomats refused to say bluntly "yes", nor did they want to undertake any pledges or conclude any agreements. Nigra expressed very accurately the essence of the British Government's position when he said that "it wants ... to reserve a possibility to wash its hands if necessary when complications originate on the part of Turkey or other countries."<sup>104</sup>

However, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs was not satisfied with the British reply. His position in the Government and Parliament was so shaky that he wanted to take no chances and therefore continued to work for Britain's official consent to the Italian occupation of Zeila.<sup>105</sup>

In June 1885 the Gladstone Cabinet fell, and soon Mancini was also forced to resign. The question of Zeila and Harar was not taken off the agenda for good, but both the new British Cabinet and the Italian Cabinet now showed more reserve in this matter.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 110-111.

<sup>103</sup> C. Giglio, *L'impresa di Massaua*, p. 151.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Il Risorgimento*, 1955, No. 2, pp. 113-114.

<sup>106</sup> Let us note in passing that in his paper, quoted here, in the magazine *Il Risorgimento* for 1955 and his book *L'impresa di Massaua* Giglio reproaches Mancini for his hesitation as a result of which he missed such a favourable opportunity for the seizure of Zeila and Harar. "One of the more remoted causes of what happened eleven years later on the day of the battle of Aduwa was that we had not got to Zeila in May 1885," he meditates, turning everything upside

On July 14, 1885, Malvano, Director General of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, proposed to Nigra to sound the intentions of the conservative Salisbury Cabinet regarding Zeila and Harar, "without making a formal inquiry and without committing ourselves to the previous negotiations".<sup>107</sup> It was only on August 20 that Salisbury replied that he saw no means to change the *status quo* of Zeila and Harar.<sup>108</sup>

As a result of Salisbury's reaction and news showing that the situation in Harar was extremely complex which interfered with European activity there, the Italian Government decided to discontinue all negotiations on that issue and at the close of August instructed accordingly its representatives in London and Aden.

Nevertheless, throughout April to October, 1886, the Italian Government was again developing plans for the seizure of Zeila and Harar and attempted several times to have London consent to this action. However, the British Government did not want to give away to Italy Zeila which was of increasing importance to Britain as a vital point *en route* to India.

At the same time Italy launched openly aggressive operations against Ethiopia.

How monstrous were the plans which the Italian colonialists were hatching, and even beginning to realise at that time with respect to the nations of North-East Africa we can judge by a plan whose author was, according to the Italian official edition, Cecchi, an extreme advocate of colonial expansion. The "Cecchi doctrine" can be summed up as follows: "To capture Massowah in order to oppose Abyssinia ... and prevent her from making trouble for us in the south; to capture Harar ... and set up there a large colony which will expand on its own ... to-

down. The fact that Italy had to forgo the seizure of Zeila and Harar in 1885 delivered the people of Italy and this area of Africa from sacrifices which would have been only in the interests of a handful of Italian rulers. As for the battle of Aduwa, it was a consequence of the aggressive policy of Italian imperialism, and its issue was decided mainly by the determination of the people of Ethiopia to defend their independence.

<sup>107</sup> C. Giglio, "Episodi della rivalta anglo-franco-italiana in Africa Orientale (Estate 1885)," — *Il Risorgimento*, 1957, No. 1, pp. 22—23.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

wards the upper reaches of the Webbe Shibeli and will isolate Shoa from the areas of Galla; to get a firm hold on the mouth of the Juba, ensuring thereby that vast waterway.... To prevent finally by slow strangulation, by a rigid and persistent blockade the development of Ethiopian military power, which began immediately after Magdala, in order to make use of the first favourable opportunity of the first outburst of internal anarchy and eliminate the obstacle (i. e. Ethiopia.—Auth.)." <sup>109</sup>

Thus, from 1880 to 1885 the ruling circles of Italy displayed great persistence in order to set up a colony in North-East Africa. It is not their concern for civilisation and the welfare of African population, as Italian bourgeois authors are inclined to contend, but the selfish economic and political interests of the Italian landlords and bourgeois that were the moving force of the Italian expansion.

Italy wreaked vast hardships and sufferings on the population of the African continent and slowed down the progressive political and economic development of the peoples downtrodden by the Italian colonialists. The Italian expansion on the Red Sea coast developed with a decisive support and the encouragement of Britain, which pursued her own imperialist aims.

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<sup>109</sup> "Ministero della guerra. Comando di corpo di Stato Maggiore (Ufficio Storico)." *Somalia*, Vol. I, Dalle origini al 1914, Roma, 1933, p. 44.