

**ANGLO-ITALIAN RELATIONS IN THE RED SEA
AND ZANZIBAR, 1880-1888**

by

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ABSTRACT

When Italy became a fully united country in 1870, Britain was an enthusiastic supporter of the new state. This feeling was reciprocated, with Italy regarding Britain as her most sincere friend in Europe. In February 1887 Britain joined Italy, Germany and Austria-Hungary in the Mediterranean Agreements, by which Britain guaranteed support for Italy in the event of attack upon her. However, by then circumstances had changed. The British occupation of Egypt and the Mahdist uprising had led to Britain becoming a significant Power in North-East Africa. During the same period, Italy had started establishing colonial settlements on the Red Sea. This led to a conflict in the region between Italian and British interests. In addition, Franco-Italian friction increased as Crispi, the Italian Premier since August 1887, continually provoked France, culminating in a crisis which nearly tipped Europe into a full-scale war in 1888. At the same time, Italy was trying to establish a colony on the Benadir coast of Zanzibar, which also disturbed British authority in East Africa. The combination of Italian challenges to British interests, and her provocation of France, led to an erosion of British trust in Italy and eventual dissolution of Britain's association with her.

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Georges Boulanger, French Minister of War and Prime Minister

Lodovico Corti, Italian Diplomat

Francesco Crispi, Italian Prime Minister

Agostino Depretis, Italian Prime Minister

Rene Goblet, French Prime Minister

Earl Granville, British Foreign Minister

Pasquale Mancini, Italian Foreign Minister

Count Robilant, Italian Foreign Minister

Lord Salisbury, British Prime Minister

List of Abbreviations

CAB - Cabinet records

DDF - *Documentes Diplomatiques Francaises*

DDI - *Documenti Diplomatici Italiani*

DMI - Director of Military Intelligence

FO - Foreign Office

GDD - German Diplomatic Documents

HMG – Her Majesty’s Government

HMS – Her Majesty’s Ship

IO – India Office

SP – Salisbury Papers

INTRODUCTION

Theories abound as to why European countries - especially Britain, indisputably the most successful of all - came to develop Empires during the late nineteenth century. *Inter Alia*, as early as 1885 Seeley expressed a belief that the British Empire grew, like a fungus, as an extension of the country's underlying social, economic and political integration:¹

Hobson's opinion was that they grew out of a conspiracy of capitalists who might be expected to gain from its creation, such as armaments manufacturers;² Hilferding typified the Marxist view that they were an effort to utilise surplus capital by exporting it;³

Schumpeter believed that they resulted from the atavistic urges of the European ruling classes to conquer, regardless of the cost;⁴ Robinson and Gallagher's thesis - broadly speaking - is that 'informal Empire' (resulting from commercial expansion abroad without the connivance of Government) generally led indirectly to the spread of Imperial power, which only became 'formal' when changing circumstances, such as rival Empires or indigenous resistance, made life difficult for informal practitioners and forced the intervention of governmental agency;⁵ while more recently, the views of Cain and Hopkins, whose theory of 'Gentlemanly Capitalism' - basically that Hobson's rising

¹ See D. Wormell, *Sir John Seeley and the Uses of History* (Cambridge: University Press, 1980).

² J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (New York: James Potts & Co., 1902)

³ R. Hilferding, *Das Finanzkapital* (Vienna: Volksbuchhandlung, 1910)

⁴ J. Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951 - English translation)

⁵ Gallagher & Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', pp.1-15; for Africa specifically see their *Africa and the Victorians*. For a brief critique of Cain & Hopkins' argument, see A. Webster, 'Business and Empire: A Reassessment of the British Conquest of Burma in 1885', *The Historical Journal*, 43: 4 (December 2000), pp.1003-25, especially pp.1004-5 & 1006-8.

industrialist bourgeoisie rode on the coat-tails of Schumpeter's atavistic aristocrats - has gained much traction.⁶

Whatever the reason, the percentage of the world's land surface occupied or controlled by Europeans rose from 35% in 1800 to 84.4% by 1914.⁷ Much of this occurred during the 'Scramble for Africa' in the last quarter of the century. Britain's Imperial acquisitions were, however, greater during the 1815-1914 period than those of any other world power. Between 1871 and 1900 Britain added four and a quarter million square miles and sixty-six million people to her Empire,⁸ two and a half million miles and forty-four million people of those during the premierships of Lord Salisbury.⁹

Yet Britain, for all her naval and imperial might, was not so strong in terms of land forces as to be immune from attack from Europe. Though choosing to avoid formal alliance with European Powers after 1815,¹⁰ and thereby avoid being dragged into European conflicts, British statesmen of every hue were aware of Britain's vulnerability to invasion from Europe. Thus, when Salisbury finally decided to become loosely associated with the Powers of the Triple Alliance via the Mediterranean Agreements of 1887, it was in large part due to the friendship which had grown between Britain and Italy since the end of the Napoleonic era.¹¹

⁶ P.J. Cain & A.G. Hopkins, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas II: The New Imperialism', *Economic History Review* (2nd series) XL: 1 (1987), pp. 1-26. And see their *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914* (London: Longmans, 1993 - 3rd edition, 2016). For a fuller discussion of the nature of Imperial expansion, including Fieldhouse's (see note 7 below) Theory of Peripheral Expansion, see Chapter 3.

⁷ D.K. Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire 1830-1914* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973), p.3.

⁸ P.M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: Penguin, 1976), p.181.

⁹ Sir Robert Gascoyne-Cecil, 3rd Marquis of Salisbury (1830-1903), Secretary for India 1866-67 and 1874-78, Foreign Secretary 1878-1881, Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary 1885-February 1886, Prime Minister August 1886-1892 and 1895-1902 (Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary 1895-1900). And see A. Roberts, *Salisbury: Victorian Titan*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1999), p.844.

¹⁰ The Crimean War being the very temporary exception proving the rule.

¹¹ Italy having joined Germany and Austria-Hungary in the Triple Alliance of 1882.

The creation of a united Italian nation state, and its admission into the “comity of nations” in 1870 was greeted in Britain with almost universal enthusiasm.¹² Since the end of the Napoleonic Wars, Italy had held a special place in the hearts and minds of the English.¹³ Byron¹⁴ had been involved with the Carbonari,¹⁵ and with the evolution of the ‘Grand Tour’,¹⁶ Italy became the most favoured destination of English travellers. Gladstone¹⁷ had always been a fervent supporter of Italian independence¹⁸ - indeed, it was practically the only subject upon which Gladstone and Palmerston saw eye-to-eye¹⁹ - and by 1887 Salisbury was speaking no more than the truth when he wrote that ‘there was no nation with whom common action would be more agreeable to the people of this country than with Italy’.²⁰ The Italians, for their part, reciprocated the feeling, with

¹² A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe* (Oxford: OUP, 1954), p.124. ‘Unofficial opinion in England... was wildly enthusiastic over the achievement of Italian independence, and half a million Londoners lined the streets to cheer Garibaldi when (he) paid a visit in 1864...’; D. Mack Smith, *Italy: A Modern History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1959), p.118.

¹³ D. Beales, *England and Italy 1859-60* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1961), p.xi. See also K. Bourne, *The Foreign Policy of Victorian England 1830-1902* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), p.98

¹⁴ George Gordon Byron, 6th Baron Byron (1788-1824), poet.

¹⁵ The Carbonari (lit. “Charcoal Burners”) were an association of revolutionary Italian secret societies active from c.1800, and established as a republican, anti-Monarchical, liberal nationalistic movement after the Bourbon restoration of 1815. They were absorbed into Mazzini’s (q.v.) *Young Italy* movement in 1831; A.W. Palmer, *A Dictionary of Modern History, 1789-1945* (Harmondsworth: Cresset Press, 1962 (Penguin edition, 1964)). See also R. Lansdown, ‘Byron and the Carbonari’ *History Today* 41:5 (May 1991), pp.18-26.

¹⁶ ‘The classic Grand Tour usually covered Florence, Venice, Paris and Rome’. A. Roberts, *Salisbury: Victorian Titan* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1996), p.15.

¹⁷ William Ewart Gladstone (1809-1898), Prime Minister 1868-1874, 1880-1885, February-August 1886, 1892-1894.

¹⁸ P. Magnus, *Gladstone* (London: John Murray, 1954), pp.138-39; J Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1911) (3 vols), vol.1 pp.289-292; R. Shannon, *Gladstone: God and Politics* (London: Continuum, 2007), pp.133-34; D.M. Schreuder, ‘Gladstone and Italian Unification 1848-70: The Making of a Liberal?’, *English Historical Review* Vol.85: 336 (July 1970), pp.475-501.

¹⁹ P. Knaplund, *Gladstone’s Foreign Policy* (London: Frank Cass & Co.Ltd, 1935), pp.3-4; R. Shannon, *The Crisis of Imperialism 1865-1915* (St. Albans: Granada, 1974), p.47. It is notable, however, that this enthusiasm applied mainly to the creation of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861. The final reunification of 1870, which incorporated the Papal States, was received, for a variety of reasons, with far more muted praise; O. Wright, ‘British Foreign Policy and the Italian Occupation of Rome, 1870’, *International History Review*, 34: 1 (March 2012), pp.161-76.

²⁰ Salisbury, letter to the Queen 2nd February 1887, in C.J. Lowe, *Salisbury and the Mediterranean* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), p.17.

England being held to be 'the most sincere friend we have in Europe'.²¹ From 1870 onwards, Italy and Britain supported each other where possible in diplomatic matters.²²

With the Triple Alliance of 1882 effectively augmented by the accession of Britain to the Agreements of 1887, it seemed that a satisfactory political and strategic wedge had been driven between the two countries, France and Russia, long regarded as posing, in combination, the most serious threat since Napoleon's First Empire to British security and overseas interests.

Yet behind the façade of amity there was, from at least 1880 onwards, growing evidence of a conflict of interest between British and Italian aims and objectives, a conflict which continued to grow without resolution until amity between the two countries had effectively disappeared by 1896. Much of this conflict resulted from friction between the two countries in the Red Sea during 1880-1891.

²¹ Tommaso Catalani (Ambassador to London December 1888-October 1889) to Robilant (Carlo Felice Nicolis, Conte di Robilant (1826-1888), soldier and diplomat: Ambassador in Vienna 1871-85, Foreign Minister June 1885 - February 1887, Ambassador to London 1888), 26th September 1886, quoted in Lowe, *ibid.*, p.11.

²² Count Lodovico Corti (1823-88), Italian Minister at Washington 1870-75, Commissioner for British Claims in the *Alabama* arbitration under the Treaty of Washington 1871-72, and Foreign Minister 1878, was very supportive of Britain in the *Alabama* affair. Gladstone noted that the result of the arbitration, which favoured America, was '... harsh in its extent and unjust in its basis' (quoted in R. Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister 1865-1898*, (London: Allen Lane, 1999) p.113), but that Corti's actions led to an initial proposal which was 'a very fair one', while Granville (Granville George Leveson-Gower, 2nd Earl Granville (1815-91), *inter alia* Foreign Secretary 1870-74 & 1880-85) opined that Corti did 'very well indeed for us'; Granville - Gladstone, 20 July 1871, in A. Ramm(ed), *The Gladstone-Granville Correspondence*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1998 - combined volume of 2-volume work first published in 1952 and covering 1868-1876) p.252.

However, the anomalous relationship of the Italian State with the Papacy after 1870 sometimes made Anglo-Italian relations a tricky proposition for Britain. Gladstone could not afford to offend the sizeable British/Irish Catholic constituency by being seen to support the Italian government in actions appearing inimical to Papal welfare, hence his and Granville's temporising when asked for support by the Italians. See Granville - Gladstone, 10 October 1870 and (particularly) Granville - Gladstone, 6 April 1871 in Ramm, *Correspondence*, pp. 142 & 234-5; and Cadorna - Venosta (Marquis Emilio Visconti-Venosta (1829-1914), Foreign Minister 1870-76, 1896-98 & 1899-1901), 27 & 28 September 1870, in *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani* (2nd Series: 1870-1896, Vol. 1 (DDI 2/I) (21 September - 31 December 1870)), pp. 74 & 88.

Relatively little has been done in terms of research and scholarship on the subject of Anglo-Italian relations in the Red Sea during the late nineteenth century. This is, I believe, because it has been regarded as an insignificant side-show to main events unfolding during the Empire-building period of European activity from the Berlin conference of 1884 (when the 'Scramble for Africa' is traditionally thought to have begun in earnest) to the end of that phase around 1900, by which time European spheres of influence had been more or less settled. Indeed, Lord Salisbury himself

was sceptical of the strategic interests involved on the Red Sea coast which, he thought, 'require a magnifying glass of military theory to be visible at all'.²³

What activity that did occur between the two powers during 1880-1888, in Zanzibar as well as in the Red Sea, has heretofore been thought of as resulting largely from friction between the 'men-on-the-spot',²⁴ who, representing either their own interests or those of their countries, occasionally came into confrontation over matters of purely local importance which had little to do with the wider geo-political aims of their respective metropolitan governments. Such brushfire issues were common among all the local agents of the Empire-building European states in areas in which they came into contact, and generally speaking have not been regarded as indicating anything other than the

²³ Text and quote in C.J. Lowe, *The Reluctant Imperialists: British Foreign Policy 1878-1902*, volume 1 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 142.

²⁴ See Chapter 3 for a definition and discussion of these entities and their role in Empire-building.

inevitable friction resulting from contiguous areas of possession, or spheres of interest, rubbing up against each other before the formal delineation of Imperial frontiers.²⁵

However, my research has indicated that, while British and Italian (and, for that matter, French, German and Russian) ‘men-on-the-spot’ in Africa did indeed oftentimes act upon their own initiative, there existed on the Italian side a concerted policy of Imperial expansion, initially on the Benadir coast of Zanzibar but also later on the Red Sea coast and in the Sudan. The existence of this policy, which I believe commenced at least as early as 1884 (and possibly, though not very probably, as early as 1882), has not heretofore been recognized, mainly because the materials indicating its genesis have been buried in largely unexplored Italian primary documents from the period, principally in those of the *L’Italia in Africa* series covering the years 1859-1889.

It seems unlikely that the Italians would have followed an avowedly Imperial policy on the Benadir coast on the one hand while following a different policy, or no policy at all, of Imperial activity in the Red Sea area on the other. What does seem likely, however, is that, while their policy was more or less openly Imperial regarding their activity on the Benadir coast, it was Imperial *but covert* in the Red Sea and Sudan. This was because, while they could in theory establish an Imperial presence on the Benadir coast without upsetting either Britain or Germany, their major allies,²⁶ they could not do the same in the Red Sea/Sudan because this would involve direct confrontation with Britain; thus, her activities in this area were hidden under the cloak of ‘men-on-the-spot’ spontaneity.

²⁵ As Stoler states, ‘Imperial architectures are not wholly visible or wholly opaque. Oscillation between the visible, secreted, and opaque structures of sovereignty are common features’; A.L. Stoler, ‘On Degrees of Imperial Sovereignty’, *Public Culture*, 18: 1 (2006), pp.125-143 (p.141).

²⁶ Their main target, the port of Kismayu, was well to the North of either British or German spheres of interest in Zanzibar. See Chapter 3.

However, the Italian practice of intruding upon the British sphere of influence in the Red Sea was not compatible with the maintenance of amity between the two countries, no matter how hard the Italians tried to cloak their actions under avowals of friendship for Britain. This activity was aggravated by at least two other factors: the Italian habit of claiming British support for provocative actions in both Africa and Europe, when in fact no such support had been offered (examples of which can be found throughout my thesis); and the often irrational and volatile behaviour of the Italian Premier, Francesco Crispi²⁷ which, combined with his virulent Francophobia, often created diplomatic crises, especially with France, and which on one particular occasion in 1888 nearly triggered a European war (see Chapter 2).

My principal primary sources for each side have been the records of the India Office (Aden) in the British Library and the published volumes of documents in *L'Italia in Africa* (Red Sea and Indian Ocean volumes). I have also drawn extensively on published Italian diplomatic sources in *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani*, the Salisbury Papers at Hatfield House, Foreign Office and Cabinet records in the National Archives at Kew, the published Gladstone-Granville correspondence, *Hansard* (archived at the University of Birmingham library) and French and German printed diplomatic primary sources archived at the library of Cardiff University.

In the first of my three chapters, I will touch upon Britain's role as first a European, then an Imperial, Power during the latter part of the nineteenth century, and how under Salisbury's leadership she was induced to enter the Mediterranean Agreements of February 1887. Thereafter I will explore Italy's social, economic and political

²⁷Francesco Crispi (1819-1901), radical activist in the *Risorgimento* under Mazzini and Garibaldi, Italian Premier and Foreign Minister 1887-91 and Prime Minister 1893-96.

background, and illustrate how these factors made her unfit to follow any course leading to attempts at Imperial aggrandizement. I will also examine the effect upon Italy's fortunes following the succession of Crispi to power after the death of the Italian Premier, Agostino Depretis,²⁸ in August 1887.

In Chapter two I will look at the effect upon Anglo-Italian relations of Crispi's volatile behaviour. My research will show that, in July-August 1888, Crispi's actions over a Franco-Italian dispute in Massawa nearly sparked a European war with France (and possibly Russia) on one side and Germany, Britain, Austria and Italy on the other, an event that has gone almost completely unnoticed in any historical publications on the period. The discovery of this event has led me to conclude that Duggan's theory that Crispi, during the late 1880's, was actively trying to engineer a war with France,²⁹ is correct, and would have dragged all the major Powers into a conflagration equivalent to that which occurred in 1914. Anglo-Italian relations during Crispi's reign of 1887-1891 had been increasingly strained due to Italian actions in the Red Sea area; the Massawa crisis effectively marked the beginning of the end of the Anglo-Italian alignment of interests which had led to the Mediterranean Agreements barely a year before. The close relationship between Russia and Greece, and the assumed alignment of interests of Russia, Greece and Abyssinia against Italy, were also germane to the eruption of the Massawa crisis, and these will also be examined in the overall context of the issue.

In Chapter three I will examine matters from the Italian point of view and expand upon events in the Red Sea and, particularly, Zanzibar, which have led to my belief that

²⁸ Agostino Depretis (1813-1887), Prime Minister 1876-78 and 1879-1887.

²⁹ See C. Duggan, *Francesco Crispi 1818-1901: From Nation to Nationalism* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), and 'Francesco Crispi and Italy's Pursuit of War against France, 1887-1889', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 50: 3 (2004), pp.315-23.

there was a concerted and coherent plan of Italian Imperial expansion aimed ultimately at dominating all of the North-East of Africa, a plan that was originated in Rome and directed from there.

The Accidental Imperialists

Introduction

As we have seen, in 1887 Lord Salisbury aligned Britain, by way of the Mediterranean Agreements, with Italy, Austria-Hungary³⁰ and Germany. Those countries had formed a Triple Alliance in 1882, aimed at providing mutual security against France and Russia. These latter two powers were perceived by Britain as the greatest threat to her interests, both in Europe and the East. Britain and Austria had long been *de facto* allies, due to Austrian fears of Russian activity destabilizing Austrian and Turkish control in the Balkans, and to British concerns about Russia's ability to cause disturbance in the Eastern Mediterranean and India. It was, thus, little more than an extension of existing strategic considerations for Britain to join with the powers of the Triple Alliance.

This chapter will argue that Italian geo-political aspirations were incompatible with British interests, and were in fact to lead the two countries to the brink of armed conflict on the Red Sea littoral by 1887, the very year in which they appeared to cement their friendship. It will also examine the reasons for the apparent reluctance of the British governments of the 1880-1887 period to recognize that friction in the Red Sea between British and Italian nationals on the spot even existed, let alone that it presaged a much greater conflict of interest for both countries in the years to come.

³⁰ Hereinafter referred to as Austria.

It will do so by first examining the history of Anglo-Italian relations, especially in the Mediterranean context, and then proceed, through the utilization of British and Indian Government records, to show that the outward semblance of an amicable friendship was belied by developments in the Red Sea area.

Part 1. The Comity of Nations

The countries with which we are most liable to go to war are
France and Russia, and the worst combination we have any
reason to dread is an alliance of France and Russia against us.³¹

The Crimean War had been the last major military effort of Britain in Europe, and had done little but show that she was no longer to be taken seriously as a significant military contender on the European stage. After 1870 the British army was designed for service in India or for colonial expeditions and not for service on the continent;³² it was deployed in penny packets across the empire, engaged in what Bismarck³³ contemptuously referred to as “Gentlemen’s wars.”³⁴

³¹ Director of Military Intelligence (D.M.I.), April 1887, in C.J. Lowe, *The Reluctant Imperialists: British Foreign Policy 1878-1902* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967) (2 vols); vol. I, p.94. ‘The growing jealousy of (Russia and France) against Prussia is natural... But to us there is... rather a gain (in) the interposition of a solid barrier between the two great aggressive powers of the Continent’; Edward Smith-Stanley, 15th Earl of Derby (1799-1869), Prime Minister February-December 1852, 1858-1859 and 1866-68, Foreign Secretary 1874-8, quoted in P. Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism 1860-1914* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980) p. 18.

³² J. Joll, *Europe since 1870: An International History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973), p.15.

³³ Otto Eduard Leopold, Prince of Bismarck, Duke of Lauenburg, (1815-98), Minister-President of Prussia 1862-1871, Chancellor of Germany, 1871-1890.

³⁴ Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, p.180.

Indeed, the home army was hard put to raise sufficient drafts for service overseas, such as in the Looshai and Ashanti campaigns of 1871-2 and 1873-4 respectively,³⁵ and found that even relatively minor affairs could provoke major surprises, as Lord Chelmsford found at Isandhlwana in 1879,³⁶ and General Colley at Majuba in 1881.³⁷

The Royal Navy, however, reigned supreme – ‘If there was any period in British history when Britannia... ruled the waves, then it was in the sixty or so years following the final defeat of Napoleon’.³⁸ But there was a limit to how useful the Royal Navy could be in terms of European power politics. Palmerston’s defeat by Bismarck over Schleswig-Holstein in 1864 had demonstrated that sea power alone often possessed but a limited effectiveness in European politics.³⁹ As Lord Salisbury conceded to the Queen in August 1886

As land forces go in these days, we have no army capable of meeting even a second-class Continental Power... The result is that... our diplomatists can only exhort, they cannot threaten; and this circumstance often deprives their words of any weight.⁴⁰

³⁵ Shannon, *Crisis*, p.85.

³⁶ D. Morris, *The Washing of the Spears* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1966).

³⁷ T. Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991), pp. 101-106.

³⁸ Kennedy, op.cit., p.149. ‘The soldiers who painted the globe the colour of their coats did so under the navy’s protecting wing’; R. Holmes, *Redcoat: The British Soldier in the Age of Horse and Musket*, (London: HarperCollins, 2001 (2002 ed.)), p.20.

³⁹ Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, p.181.

⁴⁰ Lowe, *Reluctant I*, p.104. Gladstone was aware of British weakness when it came to intervention in Europe. In 1864, during the Danish crisis, he further reduced the military budget, making it clear that no action on behalf of the Danes would be countenanced, either by himself or the electorate; even if naval power might have been used to sway the issue, the Royal Navy was already too committed elsewhere to be able to aid the Danes. As Clarendon (George William Frederick Villiers, 4th earl of Clarendon (1800-1870), Foreign Secretary 1853-58, 1865-66 & 1868-70) said, “We are willing to do anything for the maintenance

Yet for Britain to remain a world power, it had to maintain the *avoids* necessary for a great power that would make any other major European power (or alliances thereof) leery of attacking her.

There were two ways to attain this end. The first was to maintain and, when expeditious, expand the Empire. There was also an economic imperative for Britain. As Joll noted, by the 1870s Britain was the world's leading trading nation, with London the international centre for finance and the world's biggest merchant fleet,⁴¹ while Kennedy points out that Britain's return on investment had multiplied eightfold between 1847 and 1887 with, by 1890, more registered tonnage than the rest of the world put together.⁴²

With commercial expansion had come territorial acquisition, as noted in the introduction. Necessarily, such a far-flung Empire had to rely upon naval strength, so British defence spending after the Crimean war concentrated on naval resources. Defeat in a maritime war, thought Selborne, would mean 'a disaster of unparalleled magnitude in (British) history'.⁴³ Whether trade followed the flag or vice versa,⁴⁴ '...the mutually-supporting triangle of trade, colonies and navy had worked to Britain's benefit'.⁴⁵

of peace except (commit) to a policy of action"; Kennedy, *Anglo-German*, pp.10-22 (p.16). For an account of how different the situation was in Prussia regarding the population's preparedness for war, see F.L. Muller, 'The Spectre of a people in Arms: The Prussian Government and the Militarisation of German Nationalism, 1859-1864', *English Historical Review*, 122: 495 (February 2007): pp.82-104.

⁴¹ Joll, *Europe*, p.15.

⁴² Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, p.151. 'A writer in the Annual Register (1867) (wrote that) "England owes... her great influence, not to military successes, but to her commanding position in the area of industry and commerce. If she forgets this, she is lost..."' Quoted in A. Briggs, *The Age of Improvement 1783-1867* (Burnt Mill; Longmans, 1959 (1979 ed)), p.523.

⁴³ William Palmer, 2nd Lord Selborne (1859-1942), First Lord of the Admiralty 1900-1905, quoted in Lowe, *Reluctant I*, p.5.

⁴⁴ A subject that will be examined in Chapter 3. For detailed analysis of the Trade/Flag conundrum, see R. Robinson & J. Gallagher, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', *Economic History Review* 6: 1 (1953), pp.1-15, and J. Darwin, 'Imperialism and the Victorians: The Dynamics of Territorial Expansion', *English Historical Review* 112: 447 (June 1997), pp. 614-642. Also Fieldhouse, *Economics*, pp.10-37; J. Gallagher & R. Robinson, with Alice Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism* (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 1961 - 1981 2nd ed.), chapters IX, X & XII; B.R. Tomlinson, *Economics and*

However, much of Britain's Imperial power and prestige depended upon her possessions in the Far East, particularly India.⁴⁶ The loss of India would, it was widely felt, render Britain 'insignificant in the eyes of Europe and the World'.⁴⁷

India's importance was not merely economic. Though by 1870 India held one-fifth of British overseas investments and received nearly a tenth of total British exports,⁴⁸ it had also come to embody, for Britain, everything that was great about the Empire. It was, truly, "The Jewel in the Crown",⁴⁹ and enabled Britain '... to control an entire hemisphere, stretching from Malta... to Hong Kong.'⁵⁰

There were two routes from Britain to the Far East and India - the sea voyage round the Cape of Good Hope, which took from five to eight months and, since 1845, the route via Suez from London to Bombay. This reduced the travelling time between London and India to thirty days.⁵¹

Empire: The Periphery and the Imperial Economy, and M. Lynn, *British Policy, Trade, and Informal Empire in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, in A. Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume III, The Nineteenth Century*, (Oxford: University Press, 1999), pp. 53-75 & 101-121 respectively.

⁴⁵ Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, p.155.

⁴⁶ Fieldhouse, *Economics*, p.156.

⁴⁷ V.T. Harlow, *The Founding of the Second British Empire 1763-1793* (London: Longmans, 1964) (vol.2), p.140.

⁴⁸ Shannon, *Crisis*, p.320; Fieldhouse, *Economics*, p.152.

⁴⁹ First so described by Benjamin Disraeli (18-7-81) created Earl of Beaconsfield in 1876; inter alia, Prime Minister 1868 and 1874-80. In 1875 he personally engineered the purchase of 40% of shares in the Suez Canal company; Crystal Palace speech, 24 June 1872, in R.C.K. Ensor, *England 1870-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1936), p.31.

⁵⁰ N. Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Penguin, 2003 (2012 ed)), p. 163.

⁵¹ A time which was further reduced in 1857 by the opening of a rail link from Cairo to Suez; P. Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire 1781-1997* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), p.142; M. Barthorp, *Blood-Red Desert Sand: The British Invasions of Egypt and the Sudan 1882-1898* (London: Cassell & Co, 1984 - 2002 ed.), pp.17-18; A. d'Avray, *Lords of the Red Sea: The History of a Red Sea Society from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996), p. 107.

Clearly, the importance of securing the fastest route to India was, for political, military and economic reasons, a paramount consideration, especially after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869.⁵²

The security of the Mediterranean route to India explains the apparent obsession of successive British governments with having both a strong British presence in the Mediterranean, and robust support for the Ottoman Empire, at least up until the 1890s.⁵³ As Grenville says, ‘... the independence of the Sultan and the maintenance of Turkish sovereignty over the Straits had been a prime objective of British foreign policy’.⁵⁴ Egypt and the Levantine lands through which the route to India ran were still, if only nominally in the case of Egypt, Ottoman fiefdoms.⁵⁵

Then there was France. Anglo-French relations, always volatile, remained variable throughout the nineteenth century, and were subject to sudden fluctuations during times of European tension or Imperial frictions, such as during the Fashoda crisis of 1898.⁵⁶

So, the acquisition of a friendly power in the Mediterranean was, diplomatically speaking, a Godsend. At last, in Italy there was an ally - with a friendly coastline, friendly

⁵² Which made it seem to some that the French were reasserting their position in Egypt; Brendon, op.cit., pp.42-43. See also J. Marlowe, *Cromer in Egypt* (London: Elek Books, 1970), pp. 7-8. Britain seemed constantly to be having to catch up with leads set by the French; the first British ironclad, H.M.S *Warrior*, was built in 1858 in response to the appearance of the first ever seagoing ironclad, the French *La Gloire*, launched earlier the same year: Ferguson, op.cit., p.166; Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, p.173.

⁵³ See, for instance, Taylor, *Struggle*, p.60; Kennedy, op.cit., pp. 13-34.

⁵⁴ J.A.S. Grenville, *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy: The Close of the Nineteenth Century*, (London: Athlone Press, 1964), p.81. ‘It was, said Palmerston, of ‘utmost importance’ to Britain to keep the Ottoman Empire an independent state’; Lord Palmerston, 11 July 1833, quoted in Lynn, *Informal Empire*, in Porter, *Oxford*, p.111. There was also another, covert but profound, reason for Britain to support Turkey against Russia. As the sapient von Holstein of the German Foreign Ministry noted on September 14th 1886, ‘the English, unless they are mad, cannot allow the Sultan, who as Caliph wields authority over eighty five million Indian Mohamodans, to become a vassal of Russia, or else her rule in India will be over’. Quoted in Roberts, *Salisbury*, p.399. For the tensions between Christian rulers and Moslem ruled in India, see R. Ghose, ‘Islamic Law and Imperial Space: British India as “Domain of Islam” circa 1803-1870’, *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 15: 1 (Spring 2014), pp. un-numbered.

⁵⁵ See Appendix 4.

⁵⁶ See Appendix 1 for a profile of differing views regarding Anglo-French relations during 1815-1914.

navy and friendly ports, and a northern border secured by Austria - which could both dilute the threat from France and offer safe harbour to British ships in the event of war.

The Mediterranean Agreements did not, in truth, commit Britain to very much in terms of obligation to military or naval action in support of Italy. They were couched in the vaguest terms possible consistent with remaining *bone fide* diplomatic documents, and amounted to little more than an expressed desire to see the *status quo* maintained in the Mediterranean and its bordering areas:

In the interests of peace, and of the independence of the territories adjacent to the Mediterranean Sea, (H.M.G.) wish to act in the closest concert and agreement with that of Italy. Both powers desire that (all lands in the Mediterranean littoral) shall remain in the same hands as now. If (things change for the worse), both Powers desire that there shall be no Extension of the domination of any other great power over any portion of those coasts.⁵⁷

Earlier, in preparation for this, Salisbury had written to the Queen, reassuring her that on no account would Britain be committed to going to war on behalf of Italy unless Italy was subjected to an attack for which she bore no blame, and that even in the event of the Italians making a pre-emptive attack to forestall French aggression, he did not ‘... hold out any hope of English sympathy and aid.’⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Salisbury - Corti, 12 February 1887, in Lowe, *Reluctant* (vol.2), pp.56-57.

⁵⁸ Salisbury to Queen Victoria 2 February, 1887, in Lowe, *op.cit.*, pp.54-55.

It is important to realize that Salisbury's actions had not committed Britain to a treaty, but amounted only to an "exchange of notes" which bound Britain to very little in terms of obligation or action, '... a method which would enable him to deny to Parliament that he had signed anything'.⁵⁹

Salisbury was adept at such wordplay, and at taking evasive action when pressed for details. For instance, in March 1887 he was asked in the House of Lords if Britain had been associated with an alliance between Germany and Italy. He replied that '...An alliance is so vague and general a phrase that I don't feel it is possible, under any circumstances, to give any answer...'.⁶⁰ Remarking on the Afghan Border question, the German ambassador to Britain, Count Hatzfeldt,⁶¹ told Bismarck that Salisbury was a master of the 'round-about phrase, thus leaving the other party to guess his drift.'⁶²

This was not just because Constitutional considerations prevented Britain from concluding concrete alliances with Continental powers;⁶³ it was because Salisbury did not wish to antagonize either France or Russia by concluding an open Treaty with the Triple Alliance. Equally, he did not wish to stand so aloof from the Powers of the Triple Alliance that they would end up aligning themselves against Britain with either France or

⁵⁹ Lowe, *Salisbury*, pp.16-17.

⁶⁰ *Hansard*, Series 3 (3), House of Lords (HL) 3 March 1887, Volume (v) 313, pages (cc) 37-8.

⁶¹ Melchior Hubert Paul Gustav Graf von Hatzfeldt zu Trachenberg (1831-1901), Ambassador to Constantinople (1878-81), Foreign Secretary (1881-85), Ambassador to London (1885-1901).

⁶² Hatzfeldt - Bismarck, 3 August 1887, *German Diplomatic Documents, Vol. 1 (GDD 1), Bismarck: Relations with England, 1871-1890*, pp. 308-09.

⁶³ The Agreements 'were as close an alliance as the Parliamentary character of our institutions will permit.' Letter, Salisbury to the Queen 10 February 1887; Lowe, *Reluctant II*, pp.55-56. When asked by the honourable Member for Northampton if Salisbury intended to play a great or a little part in European politics, Salisbury replied that he intended to play no part at all if he could help it; *Hansard*, 3, House of Commons (HC), 3 February 1887, v.310 cc.562.

Russia, or both. Hence the nebulous - and very secret - nature of the Agreements, which effectively allowed Salisbury to have his cake and eat it.⁶⁴

The Germans, too, viewed Britain's association with the Triple Alliance with favour. It was widely believed in Germany that the next European war would be between Britain and France,⁶⁵ so that her alignment with Italy and, through her, with the Central Powers, would benefit everyone involved.⁶⁶ Hatzfeldt told the German Foreign Office that Salisbury recognized the identification of British with Italian interests in the Mediterranean, and that Corti had assured Salisbury that Italy, despite the existence of recurring irredentism, only had Austria's best interests at heart. Bismarck exhorted Hatzfeldt to

... please inform Lord Salisbury... that we rejoice (in any)

rapprochement (between) England and Italy as

⁶⁴ Lowe, *Salisbury*, pp.16-18; Lowe, *Reluctant I*, pp.110-12. Press speculation about a new alliance was quelled '...by stating in the House of Commons that no engagements had been made with any other Powers which was as literally accurate as it was intentionally misleading... (In the Lords, Salisbury) when asked ... whether there was an alliance between Italy and the German Powers... answered that he was "wholly unaware"... The fact that only days earlier Britain, Austria and Italy had formed an entente... he felt under no obligation to divulge'. Salisbury was no stranger to making clandestine agreements of this sort, having secretly negotiated with Ignatiev over Turkey in March 1877 and having made secret conventions with Turkey, Austria and Russia prior to the Treaty of San Stefano in 1878. As Roberts said, Salisbury's bent for secrecy allowed him 'to keep all the strings of his complex global policy securely in his own hands'; he 'delighted in giving as little information as possible to the House of Commons' and was 'perfectly prepared to conduct his own foreign policy'; Roberts, *Salisbury*, pp.170, 193-96, 433 & 509. See L.M. Penson, 'The Principles and Methods of Lord Salisbury's Foreign Policy' *Cambridge Historical Review* 5:1 (January 1935), pp.87-106, for an interesting appraisal of the convolutions and sometime contradictions inherent in Salisbury's practice of Foreign Policy.

'Disraeli's (Foreign) policy was not always consistent. Foreign policy seldom is. He took opportunities as they came. He sometimes contradicted himself. He sometimes veered with changing winds'. So with Disraeli (under whom Salisbury learnt much of his trade), so for Salisbury and so, probably, for every Foreign Secretary that ever lived; R. Blake, *Disraeli*, (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967 (University Paperback edition, 1969)), p.658.

⁶⁵ Bismarck felt that 'France is the most bellicose State in Europe, and (that) isolating her would assure European peace... even reasonable Frenchmen (look) forward to a Russo-German war in order to attack Germany...'; Bismarck - Hatzfeldt, 8 August 1887, in GDD I, p. 313.

⁶⁶ Count Herbert Bismarck, Memorandum, December 27 1886, *ibid*.

(both countries are so friendly towards us)⁶⁷

Bismarck felt that Salisbury recognized the *quid quo pro* offered him; namely, that without tacit British support of Germany against France and Russia via the Mediterranean Agreements, there would be no reason for Germany to support Britain against France in Egypt or to oppose Russian action against Constantinople, Afghanistan or India.⁶⁸ Without a doubt,

Italy's friendship would (lessen the inequality between Russia and Austria) and strengthen Austria's confidence in herself, while (the) Italian passion for acquisition can always be used in countering the schemes of conquest of other Powers⁶⁹

As Herbert Bismarck⁷⁰ wittily put it, '... for Austria and Italy to stay together British cement is necessary'.⁷¹ However, Hatzfeldt also noted that Salisbury felt some anxiety that the Italians hadn't yet forgotten Tunis and that this could cause problems in the future, especially as Corti (despite his protestations of undying love for Austria) had

⁶⁷ Hatzfeldt - Foreign Office, Berlin, 2 February 1887, *ibid.*

⁶⁸ Salisbury recognized that, whatever happened, there was no hope of German support against France in the Far East, but that, closer to home, an understanding with the Triple Alliance would bolster German support for Britain's position over Constantinople; Hatzfeldt - Bismarck, 13 February 1887, *ibid.*

⁶⁹ Bismarck - Hatzfeldt, 3 February 1887; see also Hatzfeldt - Bismarck, 6 February 1887, *ibid.*

⁷⁰ Nicolaus Heinrich Ferdinand Herbert von Bismarck (1849 – 1904), German Foreign Minister 1886-90. Son of Otto von Bismarck..

⁷¹ Herbert Bismarck - Hatzfeldt, 8 November 1887; GDD 1, p.335.

asked Salisbury not to reveal to Austria the clauses of the Agreements regarding any Anglo-Italian response to future French actions in the Mediterranean.⁷²

Irredentism remained a prominent factor in Italian politics, whatever Corti might say. As Haines noted, before the Near Eastern Crisis of 1875-78, Italian irredentism was somnolent and factional and of no great import; but after 1878 it grew to be a significant force, with its exponents advocating violent struggle to free the Italian provinces. Further, most prominent Italians of the era sympathized with the movement.⁷³ With considerable prescience, Salisbury confided to Hatzfeldt that future Italian potential for instability concerned him

... since there is always the chance that Count Robilant might be followed at some future date by a less competent and trustworthy statesman⁷⁴

Given the volatile state of Italian domestic politics, it was more likely than not that Salisbury's caveat about Robilant's successors would come to pass.

As indeed it did.

Nevertheless, the very fact that Salisbury had been persuaded to go as far as enter an alignment, however nebulous and non-committal, as the Mediterranean Agreements was a source of self-congratulation on the part of the Germans.⁷⁵

⁷² Hatzfeldt - Foreign Office, Berlin, 3 February 1887, *ibid.* with

⁷³ C.G. Haines, 'Italian Irredentism and the Near Eastern Crisis, 1875-78', *Journal of Modern History*, 9: 1 (March 1937), pp. 23-47. Visconti-Venosta, Menabrea (Luigi Federico Menabrea (1809-1896), Prime Minister of Italy 1867-69, Ambassador to London 1875-82), Crispi, Cairoli (Benedetto Cairoli (1825-1889), *inter alia* Prime Minister March-December 1878, both Prime Minister - in joint office with Depretis - and Minister for Foreign Affairs 1879-1881), Depretis and even King Victor Emmanuel II (1820-78; King of Sardinia-Piedmont 1849-61, King of Italy 1861-78) all identified, or were identified with, irredentism.

⁷⁴ Hatzfeldt - Bismarck, 6 February 1887, GDD I.

Salisbury, unlike Gladstone, was no believer in sentiment or morality in foreign policy.⁷⁶ ‘National interest rather than moral ethics’ should be the touchstone of all policy decisions.⁷⁷

However, in terms of Italian domestic politics, Salisbury could probably not have chosen a better time to conclude such an understanding. In the capable hands of Depretis, Italy had approached the nearest thing to stability that it had so far been able to do.

The entente with Italy meant an indirect strengthening of relations with Austria and, via Austria, with Germany. Count Andrassy⁷⁸ had as early as 1871 bruited the idea of incorporating Britain into a four-power alliance with Austria, Germany and Italy ‘... to reinforce Austria-Hungary as a bastion of the status quo... and to keep the restless powers, France and Russia, “on their good behaviour”’.⁷⁹ Baron Haymerle,⁸⁰ who succeeded Andrassy as foreign minister, thought as late as February 1880 that while Austrian interests were still ‘...so closely parallel to those of the English we should be unwise to abandon England’.⁸¹ For his part, Salisbury regarded Austria as ‘England’s ancient and true ally, and bound to her by the only bond of union that endures, the absence of all clashing interests’.⁸² Even after Austria fell into the diplomatic orbit of a

⁷⁵ ‘It is no mean feat, our having induced England to engage herself so far as we have’; Ct. Herbert Bismarck - Reuss (German Ambassador to Vienna), 16 February 1887, *ibid.*

⁷⁶ ‘...Salisbury had identified himself with the Victorian tradition of entering into no alliances in time of peace... and of retaining a ‘free hand’ for British diplomacy’; Grenville, *Lord Salisbury*, p. 3. ‘Salisbury’s realism in dealing with problems as they emerged was (his hallmark. The) image of him as a keen lawyer protecting the interests of his client and determined to get the best bargain... in the market place of international politics is apt’; D. Gillard, *Salisbury*, in K.M. Wilson (ed.), *British Foreign Secretaries and Foreign Policy: From Crimean War to First World War* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), pp.119-37 (p. 134).

⁷⁷ Roberts *Salisbury* p. 610.

⁷⁸ Gyula Andrassy de Csikszentkiraly et Krasnahorka (1823-1890), Hungarian Minister-President 1869-71, Austrian Foreign Minister 1871-79.

⁷⁹ F.R. Bridge, *From Sadowa to Sarajevo: The Foreign Policy of Austria-Hungary, 1866-1914* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p.62; quote from Lytton to Granville, 27 December 1871.

⁸⁰ Heinrich Karl von Haymerle (1828-1881), Austrian Minister for Foreign Affairs 1879-81.

⁸¹ Lowe, *Reluctant I*, pp. 24-25; Bridge, *op.cit.*, pp.111-15.

⁸² Quoted in Roberts, *Salisbury*, p.431.

newly Anglophobe Germany after the accession of Kaiser Willhelm II in 1888, as late as 1902 the Emperor Franz Joseph II was known to express his affection for England.⁸³

Good relations with the Central Powers remained key to British efforts to keep France and Russia at bay. Salisbury gave a clear exposition of the strategic view to the Duke of Edinburgh in March 1888

Germany (is playing) a double game in being friendly with Russia while (encouraging) the antagonism (to Russia) of Austria, Italy and England. (But I believe) that Austria is (essential to Germany, hence Bismarck's) efforts... to provide Austria with (Italy and England as allies)... If there was war between France and Germany, Italy (might) join in, and France (would) defeat her at sea... (if Russia attacked Austria) the sole chance of Italy being able to help Austria... would be that the coast should be protected by us from a French naval attack. Without our naval alliance, the Germans (hold) that Italy would count for nothing and be paralysed.⁸⁴

⁸³ 'At a court ball, (Franz Joseph) had declared in the presence of foreign diplomats, that with regard to (the Boer War) he was completely English. King Edward felt himself ever in the Emperor's debt as a result.' J. Van der Kiste, *Emperor Franz Joseph: Life, Death and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire* (London: Sutton Publishing, 2005), p.183.

⁸⁴ SP A/46/87 Salisbury - HRH Admiral the Duke of Edinburgh, 27 March 1888; and see Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, p.189. Salisbury's opinion of Bismarck was always based first and foremost on distrust - 'He had no illusions (about Bismarck). "(Bismarck's) plan of speaking through different channels is very perplexing and by no means reassuring. He means evidently to hoodwink somebody or he would not conceal so much. Is it Russia or England that is to be hoodwinked?"'; Salisbury - Queen Victoria, 11 December 1885, quoted in Lady Gwendolen Cecil, *Life of Robert, Marquis of Salisbury*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1931, 4 Volumes; vol. III (1880-1886)), p.253. His '... deep and long-lasting distrust of Bismarck... remained unaltered... despite the tactical necessity of leaning towards Berlin on many occasions', because he was convinced that Bismarck's ultimate aim was to crush France after having embroiled the rest of Europe in war; Kennedy, op.cit., p.193. 'Experience shows that friendship with Germany is a more uncertain staff to lean upon than friendship with France'; Salisbury to Sir Edward Baldwin Malet (1837-1908), agent and Consul-general to Egypt 1879-83, Minister to Belgium 1883-84, Ambassador to Germany 1884-1895, 11 April 1888, quoted in Cecil, *Marquis*, (vol. IV (1887-1892), 1932), p.100. If he could say this in the face of France's '... unreasonable (and) incurable hatred of England' (quoted in Marlowe, *Cromer*, p.136), then clearly he placed no faith in Bismarck's Germany.

In this context, then, the arrival of Italy as an ally of both Germany and Austria in 1882 (an alliance which was the central prop of Italian foreign policy until 1914)⁸⁵ was seen from London as a welcome addition to an already sound concert of interests and powers. From 1884 successive Italian foreign ministers⁸⁶ had tried to align themselves with Britain, offering help with the relief of Khartoum during 1884-1885 (which was refused)⁸⁷ and generally indulging in ‘...the almost frantic search for a British alliance’.⁸⁸ This Italian desire was based, *inter alia*, upon a fear of French expansionism in North Africa and a fear of abandonment by Germany.⁸⁹ Since Salisbury had actively sought an understanding with some Mediterranean power since the Bulgarian crisis of 1885,⁹⁰ the Mediterranean Agreements were in most ways a logical conclusion to these British and Italian manoeuvrings. And, though publically reserved about any alliance with Italy, in private he was enthusiastic

There is no state with whom we could work more heartily. Our political objectives seldom clash and we have the enormous advantage (of) no accumulation of grudges in the past

⁸⁵ M. Clark., *Modern Italy 1871-1982* (Burnt Hill: Longman, 1984), p.46.

⁸⁶ Pasquale Stanislao Mancini, 7th Marquess of Fusignano (1826-1888), Foreign Minister, May 1881 - June 1885; Robilant, 1885-87.

⁸⁷ Cabinet note February 9 1885: “On the acceptance of Italian aid. Disapproved as tending to impair moral effect & exhibit weakness. Must bear on our own shoulders alone... any military exigencies arising out of fall of Khartoum”; H.C.G. Matthews (ed), *The Gladstone Diaries* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986, 2 Volumes) (vol. II, July 1883-December 1886), p.293.

⁸⁸ C.J. Lowe and F. Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy 1870-1940* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p.37.

⁸⁹ Lowe & Marzari, *ibid.*, pp.32-34; Lowe, *Reluctant I*, pp. 9-12.

⁹⁰ Lowe, *ibid.*, p.94.

to smother kindly feeling in the present⁹¹... there has never been a period at which it has been more cordial... on both sides than it is now.⁹²

But as early as 1880 there were clear signs that Italian activity, as regards its desire to establish its place in the world as a Power of international standing, was destined to come into conflict with British interests, especially in the Red Sea and Sudan.

Trasformismo; making a country, undoing a government

The drive led by Mazzini⁹³ towards Italy's independence throughout the years of the *Risorgimento* had both generated, and been fuelled by, a renewed belief in Italy's destiny. The liberation of Rome in 1870 was not only a symbolic act but was to function as the catalyst which would lead the new state not merely to the status of a Great Power, but to that Holy Grail of all Italian nationalist longing - '...the revival of the Empire of Ancient Rome'.⁹⁴

But the road to the Grail was beset with difficulties. As it was, quite how the New Roman Empire was to be brought about was hard to see. It was riven by divisions social,

⁹¹ Salisbury - Sir Savile Lumley (British Ambassador at Rome), 21 January 1887, quoted in Cecil, *Marquis IV*, p.20.

⁹² Salisbury, *Hansard*, 3, HL, 29 July 1887, v.318 cc. 511-14.

⁹³ Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872), revolutionary, journalist, republican nationalist, founder of the *Young Italy* movement and principal figure of the *Risorgimento*.

⁹⁴ Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, pp.8-10.

geographic, economic and political, and stricken by poverty. It was its own little powder-keg, ready to explode at a moment's notice.⁹⁵

Yet Depretis managed to hold it all together. A man of the moderate left, he proved 'expert at forming.... Parliamentary majorities, drawing support from both centre left and centre right...(he) was prepared to accept and even invite men of conflicting opinion into the government... he would stress what they had in common and play down their differences'.⁹⁶

For instance, Minghetti,⁹⁷ a capable and experienced Piedmontese politician of the Right, he was in favour of a federated Italian state and not above fighting a duel with a fellow parliamentarian in 1863 after an argument over fiscal matters.⁹⁸ Something of a political gadfly, he was fonder of the sound of his own voice than of actually dealing with parliamentary matters. In 1881, during a debate in the Chamber, he demanded an "interpellation" of the fiscal ramifications of a point of foreign policy. Mancini said that the matter was one for the cabinet and not a subject of "vague and general questions". Minghetti insisted on his right to have the matter debated, upon which Mancini

⁹⁵ For a detailed description of conditions in Italy, see Appendix 6.

⁹⁶ M. Robson, *Italy: Liberalism and Fascism, 1870-1945*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992), pp.21-23. Depretis, despite his skill at manipulating parliament, still had to deal with unending turmoil in parliament. For instance, in July 1885 he had to deal with a Chamber that both accused him of not being vigorous enough in promoting colonial policy - even though he, Crispi and Mancini had been vocal opponents of an Imperial strategy - and of concluding a secret treaty with Britain (which at this time was untrue). At the same time he was unable to give the post of Foreign Minister to Mancini, his original choice for the post, because of the opposition to the idea in the Chamber, and because of Mancini's reluctance to take up the post in the face of the Chamber's behaviour. His second choice was Tornielli (Giuseppe, conte Tornielli-Brusati di Vergano (1836-1908), *inter alia* Minister for Foreign Affairs 1867 & 1878-79, Ambassador to Bucharest 1879, Belgrade 1879, Madrid 1887, London 1889, Paris 1895), but he was so anti-Austrian that such a thought was impracticable. Robilant eventually secured the post; SP A/38/28, Savile - Salisbury, 2 July 1885. Tornielli's later Ambassadorship to London was to have significant consequences for Anglo-Italian relations.

⁹⁷ Marco Minghetti (1818-1886), Finance Minister of Piedmont 1859-63, Prime Minister 1873-76.

⁹⁸ Mack Smith, *Italy*, pp. 64-65.

...asked whether Minghetti thought it opportune to place before the budget debate a question of foreign policy which could have no result beyond demonstrating his own brilliant genius.⁹⁹

But Depretis rose above it all; 'so long as liberals stuck together, the regime would be safe from republicans and radicals of the left and reactionary catholics on the right'.¹⁰⁰

So to Salisbury, seeking above all a stable and biddable partner, Italy under Depretis (and his foreign minister Robilant)¹⁰¹ must have seemed to fit the bill; a country whose main declared aim, on joining the Alliance in 1882, was to secure '... a period of internal tranquility which she could use... to develop her resources and raise herself to the rank of the great powers'.¹⁰² Visconti-Venosta, Italy's Foreign Minister for much of the 1870s, had for the same reasons the very *trasformismo*-sounding aim of 'hastening the moment when (Italy) would finally succeed in making itself little talked about'.¹⁰³ But ironically, the very success of Depretis's measures and methods led to his downfall, and to the unleashing of his volatile and highly unbiddable successor, Crispi.

This was because the Depretis method of diplomacy - to avoid confrontation, to make Italy a submissive quasi-Power quaking in the shadows of the real Powers – made a

⁹⁹ FO45/430, Sir Augustus Paget (1823-1896), Ambassador to Rome 1867-1883, Ambassador to Vienna 1884-1893 - Granville, 1 July 1881.

¹⁰⁰ Robson, op. cit., p.22. Though as time went on, political expediency saw to it that extremists were also co-opted into government; also see Mack Smith, *Italy*, pp.107-10.

¹⁰¹ Without whom Salisbury might never have been persuaded to enter the Agreements. 'Robilant's forceful diplomacy... completely transformed Italy's diplomatic position. By the agreement with England... he obtained what had eluded Mancini, a British guarantee of the *status quo* in the Mediterranean... As Robilant said on resignation (in 1887), he left his country 'in an iron cask'. Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, p.40. This is an overstatement of the strength of Italy's position vis-à-vis British "guarantees" of support, given Salisbury's talent for diplomatic sleight-of-hand, but under the circumstances was probably the best that any Italian could have done.

¹⁰² Umberto I, King of Italy 1878-1900, quoted in Lowe & Marzari, *ibid.*, p.27.

¹⁰³ F. Chabod, *Italian Foreign Policy: The Statecraft of the Founders, 1870-1896* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951: 1996 ed.), p.439.

growing number of Italians ashamed of their patrimony. On the International stage, he kept a low profile; 'Whenever I see an international crisis on the horizon I open my umbrella and wait till it passes'.¹⁰⁴ Yet Italy's abstention from Imperial adventures did not seem to garner any rewards; she had come away empty-handed from the Berlin Congress of 1878 while a free Bulgaria was consolidated, Rumania, Serbia and Montenegro made gains, Britain had Cyprus and Austria took Bosnia-Hercegovina from the Turks.¹⁰⁵ Yet nothing disturbed Depretis's serenity. Southern Italian rage at the French occupation of Tunis in 1881 did not affect his attitude to France,¹⁰⁶ and his ministers supported his views; Mancini, having declined to join the British in occupying Egypt in 1882,¹⁰⁷ had averred as late as May 1884 that it was downright dangerous for a young nation like Italy to 'launch out in perilous and expensive adventures in distant lands',¹⁰⁸ while Depretis regarded the occupation of Massawa in 1885 as a waste of scarce resources and may have planned to abandon it as soon as possible.¹⁰⁹ Yet could Italy hold her head up with such behaviour as a Power amongst nations?

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in R.J.B. Bosworth, *Italy, the Least of the Great Powers: Italian foreign policy before the First World War*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1979), p.3.

¹⁰⁵ A.W. Palmer, *A Dictionary of Modern History, 1789-1945* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p.46. 'At (the Congress) Italy had been ignored... Only the Italian representatives returned... with their hands clean - and empty'. Taylor, *Struggle*, p.272.

¹⁰⁶ 'As Morocco belongs to the Iberian peninsula, and Algeria to France, Tunis, the key to the central Mediterranean... belongs visibly to Italy'; Mazzini, *Politica Internazionale* (1871), quoted in Chabod, *Statecraft*, p.159.

¹⁰⁷ Lowe, *Reluctant I*, p.140. British views on the advisability of Italy joining Britain in the occupation of Egypt were mixed; for instance, Sir Charles Dilke (1843-1911), Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs 1880-82, was in favour of the idea and on 18 July 1882 told Lord Dufferin (ambassador to Italy at the time) to propose that Italy should join the enterprise in concert with France - see S. Gwynn & G.M. Tuckwell, *The Life of the Rt. Hon. Sir Charles Dilke, Bart., M.P.* (London: John Murray, 1917, 2 vols (vol.1)), p.471. However, following Italian perfidy over the annexation of Assab Bay the previous March, Granville was hotly opposed to the idea (see note 238 below).

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, p.37.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.11. Surprisingly, Crispi also regarded the occupation of Massawa as a waste of resources at this stage, though of course he later changed his mind; *ibid.*, p.37, and see M. Choate, 'From Territorial to Ethnographic Colonies and back again: The Politics of Italian Expansion 1890-1912', *Modern Italy*, 8: 1 (2003), pp.65-75 (p.67).

Part 2. The Importunate Gadfly

For years, the Italians expressed their resentment against France over Tunis at every opportunity. For instance over the French military action at Sfax in July 1881 and the French ban on “contraband” needed by legitimate Italian mining operations there;¹¹⁰ over complaints that the change of government from Gambetta to Freycinet made no difference to the plight of Italians in Tunis,¹¹¹ and that the French were unable to restore order in the regency;¹¹² that an outbreak of violence between French and Italian workers at the Salindres mining district (resulting in Italian deaths) was due to the jealousy of French workers for their Italian counterparts who worked much harder and thus got paid higher wages;¹¹³ that the Franco-Italian protocols of 1884 were being abused by France; that the French were trying to organize a *coup* in Morocco in 1884 (see below, p.27-28), and that the administration of justice by the French in Tunisia was inequitable.¹¹⁴ In almost every case the Italians appealed to Britain for assistance or sympathy, but in the main without success.¹¹⁵

The truth was that no-one but the Italians saw anything wrong with France’s occupation of Tunis. Britain had not been in the least concerned when France moved into Algeria in 1830,¹¹⁶ and regarded the French extension into Tunis benevolently

¹¹⁰ FO45/430, Paget-Granville, July 5 1881 and FO45/452 Paget-Granville, 4 January 1882.

¹¹¹ FO45/452, Paget-Granville, February 23 1882.

¹¹² FO45/636, article by *Popolo Romano* reported by Paget to Granville, 27 March 1882.

¹¹³ FO45/636, Paget - Granville, 21 March 1882.

¹¹⁴ FO45/636, Catalani - Salisbury, 1 February 1889 and memo by Catalani of July 1889.

¹¹⁵ Though Salisbury did sanction support for an Italian appeal against French tribunal procedures in January 1889; FO45/636, Catalani - Salisbury, 7 & 15 January 1889.

¹¹⁶ Britain regarded Algeria as a quagmire into which France had blundered and which would not be injurious to British interests; A. Middleton, ‘French Algeria in British Imperial Thought, 1830-1870’, *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 16: 1 (Spring 2015), pp. un-numbered.

‘... M. Waddington¹¹⁷ remembered with entire accuracy... the pleasure with which England looked upon a legitimate extension of the highly civilizing influence of France (into Tunis), and the entire absence of any pretension on our part to dispose of the destinies of the portions of (Africa) contiguous to (French) territories’.¹¹⁸

The French, as Count von Bulow¹¹⁹ had noted, made it clear at the Berlin Conference that they sought to take Tunis as their own,¹²⁰ and the Germans, like the British, regarded their ambition with insouciance.¹²¹ When Italian frustration with France became too much of an irritant to the other Powers, they reacted with anger.

This was amply illustrated by events in Morocco in 1884. Fearing that French activities there would lead to yet another occupation in North Africa and further humiliation for Italy, the Italians tried to stir Britain and Germany into supporting them in censuring the French over the actions of Joseph Ordega,¹²² their unruly and provocative Ambassador to Morocco, whom they feared was trying to engineer a coup. Bismarck responded testily by telling them to mind their own business. Mancini, when asked by the

¹¹⁷ William Henry Waddington (1826-94), French Foreign Minister 1877-79, Prime Minister February-December 1879, Ambassador to London 1883-93. He was instrumental in gaining Salisbury’s agreement for France to occupy Tunis.

¹¹⁸ CAB37/5/11, Salisbury - Lyons (HM Ambassador to Paris), 12 May 1881.

¹¹⁹ Count Bernhard von Bulow (1849-1929), German Attaché and Secretary at Paris 1876-84, Ambassador to St. Petersburg 1885- 1893, Ambassador to Rome 1893-97, Foreign Secretary 1897-1900, Chancellor 1900-09.

¹²⁰ Bulow - Hohenlohe (German Ambassador at Paris), 17 March 1878; GDD 1, pp. 81-94

¹²¹ ‘France’s objective is Tunis, as it is considered essential to the consolidation of their power in Algeria... This will be a much lesser cause of anxiety to Britain than for Italy’; Count Georg Herbert Munster (German Ambassador to London 1873-85 and to Paris 1885-1900) - Bismarck, 20 April 1878, GDD 1, p. 94.

¹²² Ladislav-Symphorien-Joseph Ordega (properly spelt ‘Ordenga’) had been French consul to Trieste before, in 1882, being posted to Tangiers, where he immediately started to cause uproar by his heavy-handed, egotistical and blatantly self-serving activities; F.V. Parsons, ‘The “Morocco Question” in 1884: An Early Crisis’, *English Historical Review*, 77: 305 (October 1962), pp.659-683 (pp.660-62).

Chamber what he was going to do about this latest French affront to Italian prestige, stated that Jules Ferry,¹²³ the French premier, had promised to make satisfactory explanations. Ferry responded by saying that he had promised no such thing and opined, like Bismarck, that it was none of Italy's concern anyway.¹²⁴ Turning to Britain the Italians had Granville simply brush them off, declining to even bring the matter to the attention of cabinet or parliament.¹²⁵ Italy had clearly been told to leave such matters to the big boys.

She was even criticized, in April 1885, for trying to convene and host a conference on Cholera, a laudable attempt at humanitarianism which was pilloried as nothing more than a vanity project. The Germans condemned it as "premature and unnecessary" and said that the matter should instead be discussed at the Suez Canal conference, then in session in Paris. The Italians objected, quite rightly, that this had nothing to do with health matters (but everything to do with the Suez Canal), whereas the proposed Rome conference would deal purely with scientific and sanitary issues of vital importance to all nations. The British condescendingly regarded the idea as something that could be allowed to occur as "a favour to Italy", while Lumley, the British Ambassador at Rome, described the idea as "thoroughly unsatisfactory" and an "absurd "notion."¹²⁶

No-one took Italy seriously as a genuine Power. Even Gladstone, once the champion of Italian aspirations, wrote as early as October 1870 that 'To put Italy forward, & this

¹²³ Jules Ferry (1832-93), French premier 1881-81 and 1883-85.

¹²⁴ Attempts to place words into the mouths of other statesmen, as with Ferry, resulted from their feelings of powerlessness - Bismarck, Salisbury, Kalnocky, Ferry and Giers, to mention but a few, never did such things - and accumulated over time to their detriment, as will be shown as such episodes occur.

¹²⁵ Parsons, op.cit., pp.671-79.

¹²⁶ British criticism was oddly at variance with the experience of her merchant marine, as the previous year the steamer *Brighthouse* had been stoned by locals, who suspected it of bringing cholera from Naples, when it tried to land at Gioia; FO45/528, Paget-Granville 29 January & 10 April 1885, and Lumley-Granville 1 & 7 May 1885.

too as the Power which can best support its diplomacy by arms, is little short of ridiculous'.¹²⁷ Bismarck, always contemptuous of Italy,¹²⁸ referred to her as the 'sixth wheel of the chariot',¹²⁹ Salisbury as 'the *quantite negligeable*',¹³⁰ while the German Chief of Staff, Helmuth Von Moltke, called the Italians 'a gang of thieves and beggars'.¹³¹ Such comments show the 'characteristic mixture of irritation and scorn' with which other governments viewed the new kingdom.¹³²

The humiliation to which Italy found herself repeatedly subjected was typified in the responses of the other Powers to her attempts to find a place among them. Italy, as we have seen, came away from the Congress of Berlin in 1878 with nothing but a 'burning sensation of failure', which even the Russians felt bound to comment upon.¹³³ Furthermore, the Italians knew that, because of their ceaseless and desperate search for security, which manifested itself in approaching first one Power then another, so that none of them could be sure of her real intentions, they were not trusted. An example of this occurred in March 1880. Menabrea called on Granville and read out a letter from Cairoli regarding Italian Foreign Policy. Meant to reassure Britain that Italy would

¹²⁷ Letter to Lord Granville October 14 1870 in Ramm, *Correspondence*, p.146.

¹²⁸ Bismarck compared Italy to the hyena 'who timid and with furtive eyes creeps about the battlefields seeking to devour greedily the remains which the beasts of prey have left' (quoted in M.P. Hornik, 'Italy and the Soudan', *The Contemporary Review*, 156 (July 1938): pp.334-43). When trying to find a way of insulting the Belgian King Leopold's pretensions to Empire in the Congo, he could find no better comparison than with an Italian, saying "his Majesty displays the pretensions and naïve selfishness of an Italian who considers that his charm and good looks will enable him to get away with anything"; quoted in A. Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1999, p.83), and opined that 'Italy is not a serious state; she should make painters, musicians, singers and dancers, that is her real role'; Quoted in Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, p.20.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4 & 33.

¹³⁰ Bosworth, *Italy*, p.7.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p.7; Taylor, *Struggle*, p.283.

¹³² W.L. Langer, *European Alliances and Alignments, 1871-1890*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931; 1966 edition), p.220.

¹³³ 'The Russian ambassador, Uxkull, said (to) Mancini one day (that) Italy ought not to think of itself as a great power(sic); if the great powers had admitted Italy to their councils, that had been done out of courtesy, not because they believed its consensus was indispensable'; Chabod, *Italian Foreign Policy*, p.455. Yet another mixed message to confuse the Italians.

always support her, Granville responded by saying that ‘I expressed great satisfaction (at language) which dissipated suspicions (of Italy) which we ourselves have never entertained, *but which undoubtedly had been widely disseminated*’.¹³⁴

As we have seen, the occupation of Tunis in 1881 drove the Italians to seek British support. This was not just to bolster their position regarding Tunis, but to bring Italy and Britain closer together at the expense of France. Yet these initiatives failed ignominiously. Italian attempts to imply that France was an untrustworthy ally for Britain over Egypt rebounded. Paget reported to Granville in February 1882 that his conversations with Blanc showed that the Italians were trying to imply that France had prodded Britain to intervene in Egypt, and that France was an untrustworthy ally over Egypt, arrangements with which country would end in “catastrophe” for Britain. Blanc’s statements made it clear that Italy wanted Britain to sunder her relations with France, and that Italy would support her as ‘all Europe knew that Britain was not an aggressive power’ and was entitled to protect her interests in Egypt. Paget responded by telling Blanc that Britain’s actions had been made on her own initiative without any urging from France, and that HMG regarded France as a loyal and trustworthy ally. Paget was sufficiently disturbed by what he perceived as Italian perfidy to tell Granville that ‘... *I think it was my duty to lose no time in reporting (this conversation) to Your Excellency*’.¹³⁵

Rebuffed by Britain, Italy turned, after a last attempt by the Italian press to cajole Britain into an alliance with Italy,¹³⁶ to Austria and Germany. This proved even more

¹³⁴ FO45/400, Granville - Paget, 25 March 1880 (my italics).

¹³⁵ FO45/452, Paget - Granville, 9 February 1882. My italics.

¹³⁶ *Popolo Romano*, ‘the mouthpiece of Depretis’, opined that despite Italy assisting Britain to avert a Greco-Turkish war, Britain had done nothing to help Italy over Tunis, with the result that Italy would be

humiliating; the Italians had to go cap-in-hand to the German Powers, and even then ended up with membership of an alliance which, while it demanded little, gave even less. As Scott points out, ‘... believing himself to be the head of an important power, but nonetheless excluded from the councils of the great, (King Umberto) recognized that he was unacceptable to the German sovereigns... (Bismarck) brushed aside (Italian overtures), leaving the picture of an importunate Italy begging for crumbs at his diplomatic table (while) Mancini’s reserve with regard to Russia would make Italy a worthless ally in Austria’s eyes’.¹³⁷ Taylor has it that ‘The Triple Alliance... bolstered the myth of Italian greatness (and gave them recognition as a Great Power), and therefore staved off internal discontent for almost a generation’.¹³⁸ Nothing - apart from the use of the term ‘myth of Italian greatness’ - could be further from the truth. The Triple Alliance accentuated Italy’s weakness rather than hid it.¹³⁹

Thus, to many Italians, hungry for recognition and respect on the international stage, the *trasformismo* years meant ‘the grey era...of parliamentary intrigues and corruption, and of timidity in foreign affairs’,¹⁴⁰ of an Italy cowering in the shadows of the real Powers surrounding her, the ‘ridiculous imitation of a Great Power, impressive only to professional diplomats and literary visitors’.¹⁴¹ As a result, ‘... the baptism of blood theme was present long before (D’Annunzio and) the art of irrational politics made their

forced to seek an alliance with her so-called ‘natural ally’, Germany; FO45/430, MacDonald (temporary Ambassador to Rome) - Granville, 3 August 1881.

¹³⁷ I. Scott, ‘The Making of the Triple Alliance in 1882’, *East European Quarterly*, 12: 4 (Winter 1978), pp.400-21 (pp.408-09).

¹³⁸ *Struggle*, p.276.

¹³⁹ Bridge, *Sadowa*, pp.130-32.

¹⁴⁰ Clark, *Modern Italy*, p.92.

¹⁴¹ A.J.P. Taylor, *The Habsburg Monarchy, 1809-1918: A History of the Austrian Empire and Austria-Hungary* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1948 ((Peregrine Edition, 1964)), p.237.

appearance... It remained for a new generation (to fuel) the... fires of national redemption'.¹⁴²

But how were these fires to be brought about? The figures speak for themselves.

Industrial Output¹⁴³

| | <u>Coal</u> | | <u>Iron</u> | | <u>Steel</u> | |
|---------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| | <u>1870</u> | <u>1914</u> | <u>1870</u> | <u>1914</u> | <u>1870</u> | <u>1914</u> |
| G.B. | 112.0 | 292.0 | 6.0 | 11.0 | 0.7 | 6.5 |
| Germany | 34.0 | 227.0 | 1.3 | 14.7 | 0.3 | 140 |
| France | 13.3 | 40.0 | 1.2 | 4.6 | 0.3 | 3.5 |
| Italy | 0.05 | 0.75 | 0.05 | 0.5 | 0.0 | 0.9 |

Defence estimates¹⁴⁴

| | <u>1870</u> | <u>1914</u> |
|---------|-------------|-------------|
| G.B. | 23.4 | 76.8 |
| Germany | 10.8 | 110.8 |
| France | 22.0 | 57.4 |
| Italy | 7.8 | 28.2 |

¹⁴² J.A. Thayer, *Risorgimento Achievements and Post-Risorgimento Problems*, in A.W. Salomone (ed.), *Italy from the Risorgimento to Fascism: An Inquiry into the Origins of the Totalitarian State* (Newton Abbot: David Charles, 1970), pp.89-100 (p.97). There were also elements of Italian nationalism that looked back to a period of relatively recent history unconnected with the stimulus of Ancient Rome. The triumphs of city-states such as Venice, Pisa and Genoa, over Ottonian and Hohenstaufen Germans and Ottoman Turks, during the medieval and renaissance periods provided micro-models of what the new, unified Italian nation-state could achieve if properly led. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 added stimulus to this idea, turning the Mediterranean - and by inference Italy - once again into a major factor in international trade and diplomacy: G. Barraclough, *The Origins of Modern Germany* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962 (2nd ed)); Chabod, *Italian Foreign*, pp.243-45.

¹⁴³ Taylor, *Struggle*, pp. xxix-xxx; figures denote millions of tons.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., pxxviii; figures denote millions sterling.

| | <u>Battleships</u> ¹⁴⁵ | |
|---------|--|-------------|
| | <u>1883</u> | <u>1887</u> |
| G.B. | 38 | 62 |
| Germany | 11 | 12 |
| France | 19 | 36 |
| Italy | 7 | 12 |

Clearly Italy was, in comparison to its European neighbours, militarily weak, economically underdeveloped, and scarcely worthy of the title of a European Great Power, even though she had, in theory, been admitted to that exclusive club in 1870.¹⁴⁶

Perhaps worst of all, the sheer poverty of the Italian state held it up to constant humiliation on the International stage. There were ‘... many sceptics... who thought that the vessel of Italy was destined for wreckage on the shoals of finance from the moment it was launched on its voyage’.¹⁴⁷ With an economy propped up in large part by ‘invisible assets’ such as tourism and emigrants’ remittances,¹⁴⁸ in 1870 Italy inherited a shambolic financial situation, with seven different systems of tax collection and six regional note-

¹⁴⁵ Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, p.209. These three sets of figures are sourced from tables that also give statistics for Austria, Japan, the U.S.A. and Russia, but for reasons of comparative consistency and geopolitical relevance I have included only the figures for Britain, France, Germany and Italy.

¹⁴⁶ ‘... Italy would be confronted by a constant gap between appearance and reality... (history) alone defended Italy’s title as a Great Power... or, at least, the history of that “geographical expression”, Italy. By any other criteria, Italy’s role from 1860 to 1914 had more in common with that of a small Balkan state... than a Great Power’; Bosworth, *Italy*, p.2.

¹⁴⁷ Chabod, *Italian Foreign*, p.408.

¹⁴⁸ Bosworth, *op.cit.*, p.4

issuing banks, a staggering trade deficit and an economy so unstable that Italian investors usually invested abroad rather than risk their capital by keeping it in Italy.¹⁴⁹

Yet Italy needed a large military and naval establishment to be both recognised as a Power and to be enabled to behave as one. But attempts to establish credible armed forces invariably incurred the censure of foreign commentators. Bismarck, speaking to Venosta in Berlin during September 1873, stated that ‘You only have one enemy you must conquer at all costs, and that is the deficit’. Throughout the 1870-90 period, efforts to finance military activity met with a barrage of denunciation in the Press of the world, and from the financial institutions abroad which financed the Italian deficit.¹⁵⁰ It was seriously suggested that Italian finances should be placed under International control, so that she would ‘... sink to the level of Egypt, a country under the financial control of others and thus a colony, not a free nation’.¹⁵¹

How, then, was Italy to re-establish her longed-for Roman Empire? The lands of Europe that had once been part of the Roman Empire were no longer available for

¹⁴⁹ Chabod, op.cit., pp. 403-09; J. Cohen & G. Federico, *The Growth of the Italian Economy, 1820-1960* (Cambridge: University Press, 2001), pp. 70-72.

¹⁵⁰ In 1870, of the 8 billion lire that constituted the total Italian public debt, 2 billion was held abroad, while foreign investment in Italian capital projects, mainly the railways, amounted to over 1 billion lire. The British, German and American Press were most vociferous in their condemnation of Italian military expenditure. ‘(The *Times* stated that) no other country had less room for (profligate military spending)... the *Standard* wanted the Italians to work more and spend less. The *Pall Mall Gazette* dwelt on the lack of courage (of) Cavour’s successors in failing to deal vigorously with their financial situation. In sum, the English press was unanimous (while American, German and French commentators chimed in agreement that) Italy was synonymous with deficit’; Chabod, op.cit., pp.411-13.

¹⁵¹ Chabod, op.cit., p.413. In July 1881 Paget reported to Granville that the Chamber had voted an allotment of 214,736,426 Francs to the army and 46,134,660 to the navy, at the same time as it had floated a loan to which the Duchess of Cambridge (with the support of the Queen) had donated 1million sterling (the subsidies from London alone covered by more than twice the amount required by the loan). In January 1882 he reported a further “extraordinary military expenditure” of 144,180,000 lire (about 5.8 million sterling) for 1882-86. Such action might be viewed as wildly profligate, but in an (especially pre-Triple Alliance) world in which Italy could not be sure of her safety from attack, and long before she had decided to embark upon an Imperial course, it could also be viewed as a necessity; FO45/430, Paget - Granville, July 1 and 15-16 July 1881; and FO45/452, Paget-Granville, January 15 1882. Given, despite the shambolic state of Ottoman finances, the willingness of the other Powers to underwrite Turkey’s ruinous economy on a continuous basis, such criticism of Italy seems unduly harsh (and see Chapter 3).

colonization. The nominal Turkish fiefdoms of North Africa were a possible source of Imperial acquisitions. Since 1870 Italians - principally landless Sicilian peasants - had made up the largest part of the European population of Tunis, while Tripoli was also a possible target for Italian expansion.¹⁵² However, before 1881 there was little appetite for annexing any of the North African territories - such an enterprise was regarded as being too expensive for the young, poor state, while interest in Tripoli was practically non-existent,¹⁵³ though later developments were to change Italian views on the desirability of obtaining such territories from the Porte.

The apparent solution came almost by accident.

In 1869 the Rubattino shipping company had purchased Assab Bay from the Sultan of Raheita and, from 1873, had run a government-subsidised monthly steamer service from Genoa to Bombay via the Suez Canal, thus establishing an Italian presence in the Red Sea.¹⁵⁴ In addition to this, since 1880 Italian traders and explorers had penetrated to the heart of the Arabian peninsula and established trading links with Arabia Felix,¹⁵⁵ and at the very beginning of that year a chain of events began which pointed to the course of future Italian aims and objectives in the Red Sea coast and North-East Africa.

¹⁵² At least 9,000 in 1881, compared to 200 French; Clark, *Modern Italy*, pp.46-48. And see Pakenham, *Scramble*, p.581. One of the reasons for the outburst of fury which followed the French annexation of Tunis in 1881, apart from the preponderance of Italians over French in a territory that had once been part of the Roman Empire and which lay just across the sea from Sicily, was that France already possessed Algeria and did not suffering from chronic over-population pressure; Langer, *European Alliances*, p.218.

¹⁵³ Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, p.21.

¹⁵⁴ R. Ben-Ghiat & M. Fuller (eds), *Italian Colonialism* (Houndsmill: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pxiv. Clark, *Modern Italy*, p.47; M. Fiore, *Anglo-Italian Relations in the Middle East 1922-1940* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p.12.

¹⁵⁵ Fiore, op.cit., p.12.

Whose Colony is it anyway?

The first colonists in modern times of the Red Sea coast were the Ottomans, who expanded during the sixteenth century into Mesopotamia, the Arabian peninsula and the Red Sea and Persian Gulf during the reign of Suleiman 1 (1520-66), establishing provinces in Basra, Lahsa and Yemen, as well as a presence in ports such as Aden, Suakin and other minor coastal sites East to Mogadishu, but doing little beyond maintaining a symbolic presence in the least important sites.¹⁵⁶ Then, in the nineteenth century Egypt, still subject to her Ottoman suzerain but for most purposes by this time an independent country, began to flex her muscles, first under Muhammed Ali,¹⁵⁷ and later under Ismail (Khedive of Egypt 1863-79).¹⁵⁸

As we have seen, by the 1870s the African side of the Red Sea coast as far East as Mogadishu was a direct dependency of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁵⁹ Even at the height of

¹⁵⁶ Many of the Ottoman settlements of the coastal ports of the Persian Gulf and Red Sea were made in response to power struggles with Persia, and as a result of strategic and commercial rivalry with the Portuguese, who had established a dominant position in the spice trade with India during the early-to-mid sixteenth century; see R. Matthee, *The Portuguese Presence in the Persian Gulf: An Overview*, in J.R. Macris & S. Kelly, *Imperial Crossroads: The Great Powers and the Persian Gulf* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2012), pp. 1-13. *Detente* with Persia and the decline of Portuguese power led to a fairly minimal Ottoman presence in such places - the Ottomans were aware that, in trying to establish themselves in such places as lands east of the Euphrates, and in the Red Sea, they were overextending their power, so that they contented themselves with holding onto small but strategically important places such as Baghdad, Aden and Massawa: C. Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire 1300-1923* (London: John Murray, 2005), pp. xxii, 128-37 & 561. '... the (Ottoman) emphasis was not on settler colonization (but) establishment of minimum governmental order maintained amongst the aboriginal population...'; M. Minawi, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and the Hijaz* (Stanford: University Press, 2016), p.48. See also G. Wyman Bury, *Arabia Infelix; or, the Turks in Yamen* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1915), pp.11-14; S.N. Fisher, *The Middle East: A History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), pp.225-56; and F.F. Anscombe, *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp.12-14.

¹⁵⁷ Who sent an expedition into Sudan in 1820 (see Appendix 4 for biographical details) and who by 1842 had been recognized as Governor-General of Sudan by the Sultan; Fisher, op.cit., p.292. And see Appendix 4 for details of Egyptian history and background.

¹⁵⁸ Fisher, op.cit., pp.286-87.

¹⁵⁹ South of Mogadishu the Somali coast remained until 1889 a dependency of Zanzibar; G.N. Sanderson, *The Nile Basin and the eastern Horn*, in R. Oliver & G.N. Sanderson (eds.), *The Cambridge History of*

Ottoman power in the sixteenth century, the Red Sea littoral had been relatively low on the Imperial agenda and had been fairly lightly garrisoned, due not only to a paucity of resources but also to the fact that the Red Sea coast had fairly few useful harbours or anchorages.¹⁶⁰ However, Ismail had Imperial dreams of his own, wishing to build an Egyptian Empire stretching South from Egypt down to the Lakes of Central Africa and East to the Indian Ocean.¹⁶¹ Modernising his army and building a navy, he started, with the willing approval of an Ottoman *Firman*,¹⁶² by extending Egyptian power along the Red Sea coast, taking Suakin and Massowa in 1866.¹⁶³ With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, and with the ultimate aim of conquering Ethiopia, he went on to occupy Keren (1872),¹⁶⁴ Zeila and Darfur (1874),¹⁶⁵ Berbera and Harar (1875)¹⁶⁶ and extended his reach to Ras Hafun, on the Indian Ocean, by 1877.¹⁶⁷ These actions were to have a profound effect on the course of developments in the Red Sea during the 1880-1888 period.

Africa, vol. 6: from 1870 to 1905 (Cambridge: University Press, 1985), pp.592-679 (p.669). And see Chapter 3.

¹⁶⁰ Finkel, op.cit., pp. 120-21 & 155-56. For a fuller description of the Ottoman strategic position in the Red Sea and Arabian Gulf, see Appendix 4.

¹⁶¹ Isma'il's push south extended to Lake Victoria and Lake Tana, the sources of the two Niles, and in 1869 he commissioned Sir Samuel Baker, the British explorer who had discovered Lake Albert, to establish a province in the far South called Equatoria: Pakenham, *Scramble*, p. 77.

¹⁶² The balance of power between Turkey and Egypt was never clear-cut in these matters. The toppling of Isma'il was facilitated by the Sultan and the Egyptians were always mindful of not offending the Porte unnecessarily, (vide Baring's concerns, Chapter 2, p.55) but the Egyptians could be quite forceful where their direct interests were concerned - 'During the... 1840s, sovereignty over (Massawa) was exchanged between Ottomans and Egyptians three times'; J. Miran, *Red Sea Citizens: Cosmopolitan Society and Cultural Change in Massawa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), p.60.

¹⁶³ K.V. Ram, *Anglo-Ethiopian Relations 1869-1906: A Study in British Policy in Ethiopia* (New Delhi: Concept Press, 2009), pp.11-12. And see Appendix 4.

¹⁶⁴ R. Caulk, "*Between the Jaws of Hyenas*": *A Diplomatic History of Ethiopia (1876-1896)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2002), p.131; see also R.J. Reid, *Frontiers of Violence in North-East Africa: Genealogies of Conflict since c. 1800* (Oxford: University Press, 2011), pp.66-73, and T. Natsoulis & T. Natsoulas, 'Arthur Rimbaud: Trade and Politics in Northeast Africa 1880-1891: Part 1', *Northeast African Studies*, 3: 2 (1981), pp. 49-68 (pp.49-50).

¹⁶⁵ See note 184, below.

¹⁶⁶ Caulk, op.cit., p.18; see also Natsoulis & Natsoulas, *Rimbaud*, pp.49-52..

¹⁶⁷ 'Until the 1870s northern Somalia was nominally a direct dependency of the Ottoman Empire. The Benadir (Indian Ocean) coast as far north as Mogadishu remained until 1889 a dependency of Zanzibar.' Sanderson, *Nile*, p.669.

Aden and the Red Sea route to India

Direct British/Indian interests in the Red Sea coast dated from 1839, when Aden was annexed.¹⁶⁸ Once a key part of ancient India's trading empire, it had declined into desuetude by the nineteenth century, when the rise of steam power made it a desirable base, with its sheltered deep-water harbour, for a coaling station between Suez and Bombay. By 1839 it had proved so successful that it was seized in January and made part of the Bombay presidency.¹⁶⁹ As it was somewhat isolated and surrounded by Ottoman territory, the Indian government made a series of treaties with the local tribes in the Arabian hinterland,¹⁷⁰ treaties aimed both at protecting Aden from attack and neutralizing the possibility of any other European powers forming agreements with those same tribes without prior British consent. As Aden depended on food exports from Somali ports,

¹⁶⁸ J. Blyth, *Empire of the Raj: India, Eastern Africa and the Middle East, 1858-1947* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp.2-5; Brendon, *Decline*, p.95; Lynn, *Informal Empire*, pp.108-9, in Porter, *Oxford*. 'Aden was the best coaling station on the new steamship route from Egypt to India. This route... was already important, and its importance was likely to increase with the rapid improvement of (maritime steam transport)'; E.L. Woodward, *The Age of Reform, 1815-1870* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), p.226. 'The acquisition of Aden... had followed naturally from Palmerston's conception of the importance of the short route (to India). A high regard for its prosperity marked British policy (from 1837). It provided the motive for Britain's anxiety to maintain... peace and order along the Somali coast; for through the ports of the coast Aden's garrison drew its supplies of fresh meat and her native population drove the trade upon which it largely depended'; A. Ramm, 'Great Britain and the Planting of Italian Power in the Red Sea 1868-1885', *English Historical Review*, 59: 234 (May 1944), pp.211-36 (p.212). Control of the Red Sea was part of a wider strategic imperative which also affected the Persian Gulf - 'In the first half of the nineteenth century (the) British penned a series of peace treaties with ... local Arab sheikhs (in the Persian gulf) to cement Britain as the ultimate arbiter of security, and to prevent the encroachment there of other great powers (hence the conclusion of) an agreement with the Sultan of Oman in 1798 in response to (the French) occupation of Egypt. A chief aim of British policy in the nineteenth century (became) preventing other great powers from drawing close to India.' Macris & Kelly, *Crossroads*, p.xii; see also A.Giannini, *L'Ultima fase della Questione Orientale (1913-1939)* (Milano: Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, 1941), pp.234-40, and E. Rossi (ed), *Documenti Sull'Origine e gli Sviluppi della Questione Araba (1875-1944)* (Roma: Istituto per L'Oriente, 1944), pp. XV-XIII.

¹⁶⁹ It remained part of the Bombay Presidency until 1932; the matter of who was responsible for expenditure in the Red Sea was a matter of contention between London and Bombay for that entire period (and see notes 175 & 185, below) ; H.J. Liebesny, 'International Relations of Arabia: the Dependent areas', *Middle Eastern Journal* 1: 2 (April 1947), pp.148-168 (p.150).

¹⁷⁰ The nine Cantons, or "Nine Tribes" - including the Subayhi, Aqrabi, Abdali, Howbashi, Alawi, Yafii, Fadli and Awlaqi - were the principal political Yemeni groups involved in treaties with the Aden government: J.E. Peterson, 'South West Arabia and the British during World War 1', *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, 11: 4 (Summer 1979), pp.18-38.

similar treaties were made by the Indian government with the Somali tribes surrounding those ports, such as Berbera. Inevitably, a vital strategic role also developed for Aden, particularly after 1869, dominating as it did the Straits of Bab-el-Mandab, from which the Red Sea opened out into the Indian Ocean. Although the Indian government did not want to use its political foothold in Somalia and Aden for expansionist purposes, it kept an Imperial eye on potential threats to its position and dealt with them promptly when they appeared. When the French tried in 1856 to occupy the strategically important island of Perim, which sat between the two pincer-like arms of Bab-el-Mandab, they were pre-empted by an Indian expedition which seized the island. A similar reaction happened when the Italians and Austrians showed an interest in Socotra, an island group in the Arabian Sea about halfway between Aden and the Horn of Africa.¹⁷¹

Though at first hostile to the superimposition of Egyptian power on the littoral opposite to Aden (hence the 1839 annexation), Britain by 1875 was reconciled (due to the pliability of Khedive Isma'il) to its presence as a safeguard against occupation by a rival

¹⁷¹ Blyth, *Raj*, p.66. The British/Indian authorities had ambivalent views about Perim; some thought that whoever held it had 'the key' to the Red Sea, others that, because of its lack of water supply and other resources, holding it was pointless for any power unless that power already controlled the Red Sea. The Indian government objected to the cost of fortifying it on the latter grounds, though commercial interests promoted its value as a better port than Aden, and during 1855-56 it was agreed that India would pay for a lighthouse to be built on it: see, *inter alia*, IOR L/MIL/7/6506, Malet-Spalding, 5 August 1882; IOR L/MIL/7/6507, Hartington (HM Secretary of State for India) - Salisbury, 9 October 1882, Earl of Kimberley (HM Secretary of State for India) - Salisbury, 25 March 1883; IOR L/MIL/7/6508, Kimberley - Governor-General, India in Council, 15 May 1886. Perim played a minor but recurring part, both direct and indirect, in Anglo-Italian relations, as will be seen in Chapter 3.

European power¹⁷², and recognized Egyptian authority as far as Ras Hafun on condition that Egypt should never alienate any of these territories to another power.¹⁷³

So, by 1875 there were two layers of authority, first Ottoman and then Egyptian, the latter still subject to the former, over the Red Sea littoral. However, a third layer of power came to be added shortly after, that of Britain. In 1876, Ismail's attempts to occupy Abyssinia after the successes of the mid-1870s came to an abrupt and bloody halt, when the forces of Yohannes, the *Negus Negast* of Abyssinia's forces, led by a then-unknown Ras Alula,¹⁷⁴ decisively defeated an Egyptian expeditionary force at Gura in March 1876.¹⁷⁵ The deposition of Ismail in 1879, arguably the result as much of his defeat at Gura as by the disastrous enterprises which had bankrupted Egypt in 1875-6,¹⁷⁶ was

¹⁷² i.e. France, which had bought the enclave of Obokh in 1862 and during 1884-85 extended its reach to include the whole of the Gulf of Tadjoura; H. Brunswick, *French Exploration and conquest in tropical Africa from 1865 to 1898*, in L.H. Gann & P. Duignan, *Colonialism in Africa 1870-1906* (3 volumes), *Volume 1: The History and Politics of Colonialism, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: University Press, 1969 (1977 ed)), pp. 132-164 (pp.140 & 156).

¹⁷³ Most of the opposition to Egyptian expansion along the Red Sea coast came not from Britain but from India, where fears about the independence from Egyptian control of local Somali tribes, with which the Indian government had treaty obligations, the security of Aden (which depended upon imports from Somali ports - particularly Berbera - falling under Egyptian control) and the safety of British shipping in the Red Sea dominated Bombay's response to Isma'il's campaign. However, London regarded Egypt as an important client state whose co-operation in the drive against the slavery trade was essential, and Isma'il's activities were viewed with circumspect tolerance; Blyth, *Raj*, pp. 68-69. In addition, Isma'il comforted Gladstone by claiming he would use the occupation of Massawa and Suakin to stop the slave trade between Arabia and Sudan: Pakenham, *Scramble*, p.77; Woodward, *Age*, pp. 354-55.

¹⁷⁴ Yohannes' chief general and engineer of the defeats of the Italians at Dogali (1887) and Adowa (1896); see H. Erlich, 'Alula, 'The Son of Qubi': A 'King's Man' in Ethiopia, 1875-1897', *Journal of African History*, 15: 2 (1974), pp.261-274, and R. Jonas, *The Battle of Adwa: African Victory in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2011), pp. 18-46 & 173-207. See Appendices 4 & 5 for a background description of Abyssinia's role in the region.

¹⁷⁵ Caulk, *Jaws*, pp.18-19; Jonas, op.cit., pp.18-19. What most textbooks don't mention is that the Egyptians sustained an equally serious defeat by the Abyssinians prior to Gura, at Gundet, in November 1875 (FO881/3058, Stanton - Derby, 27 November 1875). Given the long history of conflict between Egypt and Abyssinia a solitary, if major, defeat at Gura probably would not of itself have brought Ismail to such a crisis; but two massive defeats, close together, would.

¹⁷⁶ Ismail was deposed, with the connivance of the Sultan, as a result of action from the European powers, spurred on by the massive amounts of debt owed by Ismail to European bondholders; Barthorp, *Blood-Red*, pp.22-23; A.L. Al-Sayyid-Marsot, *The British Occupation of Egypt from 1882*, in Porter, *Oxford*, pp.652-64 (pp.652-53); Pakenham, *Scramble*, pp.75-85. But defeat at Gura had 'shattered Ismail's dream of an African Empire for Egypt (and) solidified (the Abyssinian) claim on what would become Eritrea'; Jonas, *Adwa*, p.19.

followed by the accession of the Ottoman-nominated Tewfik.¹⁷⁷ Unfortunately, Tewfik was seen by Egyptian nationalists as a tool of the foreign powers that, since 1876, had effectively run Egypt on their own behalf, which led to the nationalist Urabi uprising of 1881 and its ultimate defeat, by British forces under Wolseley, at Tel-el-Kebir in 1882.¹⁷⁸ This left the British, who had been left to deal with the revolt alone, as the *de facto* imperial power running Egypt.¹⁷⁹ As Porter says, ‘This system, whereby the Egyptians supposedly ruled their own country, but were manipulated by British advisers responsible to no-one save Baring,¹⁸⁰ came to be known as the “Veiled Protectorate”’.¹⁸¹ Thus, a third layer of power was superimposed on the governance of the Red Sea - a British, or, strictly speaking, an Anglo-Egyptian,¹⁸² authority which overlaid or intermingled with the existing Ottoman and Egyptian ones.

From 1882 onwards the main controlling power in the Red Sea was undoubtedly Britain. But for her to pay mere lip service to Ottoman suzerainty and Egyptian control was not enough. Though controlling Egyptian purse-strings, Britain had to be careful not to challenge or undermine Ottoman suzerainty, and had to be seen to be allowing Egypt to physically rule the African littoral. However, further subdivisions of power on the

¹⁷⁷ Ismail Pasha, ‘one of the shrewdest, though perhaps not one of the best men that ever lived’ (had said of his son Tewfik) that “He had neither heart, nor head nor courage” - a pretty good opinion for a father to have of a son’; Sir Wilfrid Lawson, *Hansard*, 3, HC, 14 February 1884, v.284 cc. 896-979.

¹⁷⁸ M.A. Al-Hajj, *The Nile Valley: Egypt and the Sudan in the Nineteenth Century*, in J.C. Anene & G. Brown, *Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, for the University of Ibadan Press, 1966), pp. 161-180 (pp. 173-75); Brendon, *Decline*, pp. 167-69; Al-Sayyid-Marsot, *Occupation*, in Porter, *Oxford*, pp. 653-54.

¹⁷⁹ Since the Ottoman and French governments, who might reasonably have been expected to display an active interest in the matter due to their fiscal and political interests in Egypt, refused to have any part in the quelling of the revolt. As an Austrian commentator remarked at the time, Gladstone inaugurated a ‘silent annexation *a la* Bosnia’ (quoted in Shannon, *Heroic*, p.305). And see Appendix 4.

¹⁸⁰ Sir Evelyn Baring, (1841-1907), 1st Earl of Cromer, Controller-General of Egypt 1879 and Consul General 1883-1907.

¹⁸¹ Al-Sayyid-Marsot, *op.cit.*, p.655.

¹⁸² “Anglo-Egyptian” meaning, as Porter described the situation in Sudan at the end of the century, “a condominium government in which ostensibly Egypt and Britain ruled jointly, but where in practice Britain ruled and Egypt paid”; Al-Sayyid-Marsot, *op.cit.*, p.655. And see Appendix 4.

British side had the potential for adding complications to the mix - the view from London (particularly during Salisbury's times as Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary), regarding the best way to handle events in Sudan, the Nile Valley and the Red Sea, often conflicted with the view from Cairo (especially during the Baring/Cromer years), while the rivalry between the India Office and the Foreign Office over who should rule - and pay for the cost of running - the Red Sea also had the potential to cause friction.¹⁸³ Aden alone generated a complex inter-departmental turf war involving several British and Indian governmental departments over a long period.¹⁸⁴ The situation in the Ottoman Red Sea's African littoral was much more complicated, and offered plentiful opportunity for confusion, misunderstanding, strife, chaos and disorder. Even without Italian exploitation of these confused layers of power (which, as we shall see, developed soon after the beginning of 1880) and sporadic French interference,¹⁸⁵ the situation was muddled; despite British insistence, and French acquiescence in the idea, that the Red Sea littoral belonged to Turkey via Egypt, there was often confusion about the details, e.g., did local Sultans independent of the Egyptians prior to their expansion to Cape Guardafui now

¹⁸³ The 1885 expedition to reinforce Suakin, and its maintenance thereafter until 1887, when it was withdrawn, caused a prolonged argument between London and Bombay. The Indian government felt that it should not have had to pay for the expedition in the first place, as the situation in Suakin was one "in which India had no direct interest" (unlike the 1882 expedition to Suez, in which Indian interests were definitely involved), particularly at a time when India had to deal with the Burmese emergency (see Webster, *Burma*), while the Garrison's upkeep after its objective - the (apparent) defeat of Osman Digna - had been met should have been the responsibility of either London or Cairo according to a precedent set by Salisbury in June 1876 (whereby HMG should bear all expenses of Indian troops sent to places where Indian interests were not at stake): IOR L/MIL/7/6937, *inter alia* Dufferin - Kimberley, 17 February 1885; Dufferin - Cross, 26 October 1886; Cross - Governor General of India, 3 February 1887.

¹⁸⁴ Blyth, *Raj*, pp.66-75.

¹⁸⁵ In 1869 the French made an abortive attempt to establish a presence on the African coast opposite Perim, buying land from a local Sheikh. The Turks claimed sovereignty and forbade the sale, supported by the British and Indian authorities at Aden and Perim. The Sheikh concerned declared that he owned the land outright and owed no allegiance to the Porte. The French responded by saying they would "admit the validity of the (Porte's opposition re suzerainty, but) maintained that it was no less incontestable that the (Sheikh's claim) could not be disputed". M. Aubert, of the French Embassy at Constantinople, and Lord Lyons had a prolonged and circuitous discussion on this esoteric matter; see D.Hamilton, 'Imperialism Ancient and Modern: a study of British attitudes to the claims to Sovereignty to the Northern Somali coastline', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 5: 2 (July 1967), pp. 9-35 (p.23).

owe obeisance to Egypt as well as Turkey, or just to Turkey, or just to Egypt, or effectively to neither?¹⁸⁶

This confusion bedeviled relations, not just between Britain and Italy but also among Britain, Italy, India, Turkey, Egypt, Abyssinia, France, Russia and even Greece,¹⁸⁷ and affected not only the Red Sea littoral but also its extensive hinterland, from the Somali coast in the East to the Egyptian border in the West, and from the Red Sea coast in the North to the borders with British East Africa and the Belgian Congo in the South.¹⁸⁸

Experience - evident, in retrospect, since January 1880 - was to show that the blurred spheres of authority created by the existence of such an ambiguous situation was to give the Italians a golden opportunity to insinuate themselves into positions of influence and power in the Red Sea that they might not otherwise have enjoyed.

“So much for secrecy!”: Assab, The De Amezaga letter and Operation “Messina”

It is clear that, in 1872, some Italians at least genuinely believed that the Egyptians did not have power over Assab. As far as they were concerned, Egyptian power stopped at Massawa, a good 30 miles north-west.¹⁸⁹ Nevertheless, surviving documents pertaining to

¹⁸⁶ see Natsoulis & Natsoulas, *Rimbaud*, pp.49-50, and Hertslet's Memorandum of May 1882, FO881/4590

¹⁸⁷ See Chapter 2, 'The Massawa Incident'.

¹⁸⁸ Once the Mahdiya was underway, 'In Egypt, the reforms initiated by the British... had only just begun. The authority of the old ruling classes had been profoundly shaken... the Egyptian government did not even know how far it was free to act independently... the British (were in) physical occupation but loudly disclaiming any intention to stay, or (shoulder) any direct responsibilities. On the other side was the Sultan... powerful to obstruct, but unwilling to assist... it was not surprising that the Egyptian government (floundered in indecision)...'; A.B. Theobald, *The Mahdiya: A History of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, 1881-1899* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1951), pp.67-68.

¹⁸⁹ '... a Massawa sull'estremo territorio egiziano'; Strambio - Venosta, 28 May 1872, *L'Italia in Africa*, Vol. I, Tomo II (1859-1882) (I/II), (Roma: Istituto Poligrafico Dello Stato, 1959), pp.13-14. In the same letter, Zeila was referred to as '... poco lontana, sulla frontiera del littorale del Mar Rosso nel territorio abissinese (further down the coast, at the point where the Red Sea meets Abyssinian territory)', thus, from

Italian interest in Assab remained, by and large, only concerned with the commercial possibilities of obtaining a presence there at least until several years later.¹⁹⁰ In one of them, the explorer Giuliotti even wrote to Depretis how the Sultan of the Danakil had upbraided Rubattino for the Italians' lack of courage in asserting their power over Assab, the want of which meant they had lost the chance to become equal partners with the Danakil in exploiting trade opportunities there and to challenge the Egyptian customs monopoly at Zeila.¹⁹¹

Lowe and Marzari imply that the shift in emphasis from commercial to political in Italian polity towards Assab came from Matteucci's influence over Cairoli, during or after 1880.¹⁹² However, it seems much more likely that a letter from Captain Carlo De Amezaga, commander of the Italian Man O'War *Esploratore*, to the Ministry of Maritime Affairs, written in September 1879, was the catalyst for the change in Italian intent towards Assab, and very possibly for their realization that they could exploit the fault-lines of power in the Red Sea to their own advantage.

the context of the letter, also clearly not regarded as an Egyptian possession. Interestingly, though, Negri (Secretary-General at the Foreign Office at this time) wrote that '*... la loro superiorita (dalla i Turchi e gli Egiziani) nel mar Rosso era incontrastata* (the superiority of the Turks and Egyptians in the Red Sea was undisputed)' (Negri - Artom, 2 July 1872, , *ibid.*, p.16), while the explorer Giuliotti mentioned the 'much-vaunted' Egyptian sovereignty over the Bay of Assab and their 'customs post' at Zeila as late as 1879 (Giuliotti - Depretis, 23 February 1879, *ibid.*, p.23). Clearly, a lack of willingness among some Italians to recognize Egyptian authority over the Red Sea littoral did not preclude a recognition of their presence by others.

¹⁹⁰ See letters, *passim*, *ibid.*, pp.13-32, containing documents up to mid-1879. Despite the assumption that the Italians at this time were more concerned with developing trade with Yohannes and Tigray, many of the documents, especially those from Antonelli during 1879-1883, accentuate the possibility of developing trade routes with Menelik's Shoa; Lowe & Marzari *Italian*, p.36; S. Bompiani, *Italian Explorers in Africa* (London: The Religious Tract Society 1892; translated from the Italian), pp.157-61.

¹⁹¹ Giuliotti-Depretis, 23 February 1879, *L'Italia* I/II, p.23.

¹⁹² Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, p.35. However, Matteucci only receives the briefest of mentions in published Italian African documents, none of them indicating any communication with Cairoli (see *L'Italia* I/II, pp. 48, 56, 59 & 86). He seems, while accompanying the Borghese - Massari expedition to central Africa in Spring 1880, only to have gone from Cairo, via Suez, as far down the Red Sea coast as Suakin before striking inland, thus making his assessment of that coast beyond Suakin nugatory, while his activity in the Red Sea area postdates De Amezaga's letter; Bompiani, *op.cit.*, pp. 47-49.

In this letter,¹⁹³ De Amezaga exalts the importance and potential of Assab, claiming (wrongly) that it was the riches of the Somali region that attracted the British to Aden, and that with good management the Italians could channel those riches through Assab to the world beyond. The economic woes of Italy could be cured by such a development, and if Italy did not enact it, either some other Power would, or it would be strangled by the development of similar ports elsewhere on the Red Sea coast. Since everybody knew that the Rubattino Company had owned the Bay for ten years, there should be no problem in gaining recognition of the Italian right to develop it to Italy's advantage.

However, where his words diverge from similar missives in the past is in their insistence that state aid in the form of a political and military presence would be essential to such development. The Rubattino Company had done well in developing trade from Italy along the Red Sea route to India; but the hazards and travails faced by the contemporary Antinori expedition¹⁹⁴ to Shoa, showed how vulnerable to hostile indigenous forces any undefended commercial settlement would be. This, combined with the jealousy from foreign Powers, *especially from the English*, which was sure to follow Assab's success, made it essential that *the new colony of Assab* be protected by *the Italian Government*.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ In an earlier one, of June 1879, he had extolled not just the economic, political and geographical advantages of Assab - its potential as a conduit from Shoa, the idea that Italian occupation would not upset the other Powers of the region but would be mutually advantageous to Egypt, Abyssinia and Italy, its proximity to other important sites such as Bab-el-Mandeb, Aden and Berbera - but also the notion that Italian success there would embolden them to confront France on the ground in Tunis and stop them expanding into Tripoli; De Amezaga - Bonelli, 19 June 1879, in *L'Italia* I/II, pp.28-32.

¹⁹⁴ See Caulk, *Jaws*, pp.21-28, and Correnti (President of the Italian Royal Geographical Society)-Cairolì, 8 April 1878, in *L'Italia* I/II, pp.18-21.

¹⁹⁵ 'La nuova colonia di Assab, di fronte all'inevitabile gelosia, che essa desterà negli stranieri in genere, e negli'inglese in particolare, deve assolutamente trovarsi coperta dall'autorità morale e materiale del governo italiano'; De Amezaga - Ministero della Marina, 16 September 1879, *L'Italia* I/II, pp.34-36. All italics mine.

Furthermore (he continued), the Italian government should not, through the habit of subservience to an arrogant Britain - terrified at the thought of humiliation at the hands of Italy - give in to the covert pressure that would be exerted from London and Aden to desist from such a course of action. Nor should they take notice of British attempts to encourage the Egyptians, as vassals of the Porte, to assert their “so-called rights” to the African coast, since they held the coast on warrant from the Porte. The Turkish Sultan who, as Caliph of all Islam, was undoubtedly the *Religious* leader of the (mainly Moslem) region, should not be assumed - as he was by the British, as well as by both Turks and Egyptians - also to be the *Political* leader. This, De Amezaga implied, *did not follow*.¹⁹⁶ Thus, the Italians could feasibly regard as invalid any Turco-Egyptian claim to temporal power over any of the Red Sea coast south of Massawa and, in the absence of any other claim to legitimate power by any other country, assert their own right to colonise Assab.

Though De Amezaga held no political power, his letter must have had considerable impact, for it was from this point that Italian commercial and political entities started to describe Assab as a potential acquisition, and in effect a colony. By December 1879, Cairoli and Maffei were exchanging letters with Rubattino and De Amezaga on the matter, and the intent to start colonizing Assab, under the guise of a purely commercial operation, had begun, under the name of Operation *Messina*.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ ‘Ricevuto dispaccio. Assistito Assab operazioni *Messina*’; De Amezaga - Cairoli, 31 December 1879, in *L’Italia* I/II, p.57. De Amezaga had been placed in command of the whole operation from November 1879 (see Cairoli - Menabrea, 13 November 1879, *ibid.*, p.50). The Operation (or, strictly speaking, operations - *operazioni* is plural), which began on 26 December 1879 may have been named after the steamer *Messina*, which had already moved a lot of material (particularly coal) to Assab, and was escorted by *Esploratore* from that date on until several days later when the operation - to stock and establish a permanent trading post, complete with residential facilities and a military presence - was complete; De Amezaga - Cairoli, 3 January 1880, *ibid.*, pp.58-59. The precise date of the inception of *Messina* is hard to pin down, but on 11

Not that *Messina* proceeded without a hitch, arousing anxiety among some Italians who feared the reaction of Britain. In November 1879 the Italian paper *Popolo Romano* published a report of the heretofore secret ‘*affare di Assab*’, which greatly alarmed Rubattino.¹⁹⁸ Menabrea, Ambassador to London at this time, noted with relief that, although other Italian papers had subsequently picked up on the matter, in Britain only *The Times* had made any reference to it, and that Salisbury, when he last saw him, had not mentioned the matter.¹⁹⁹ However, the issue had not gone completely unobserved by English eyes. Cairoli cautioned Menabrea to be careful how he phrased his words when discussing the matter, should it arise, with the British,²⁰⁰ and he also informed De Amezaga that the British Ambassador had told him that London was content for the commercial operation to go ahead provided there was no military occupation.²⁰¹ De Amezaga also noted that Gordon Pasha²⁰² had expressed vehement opposition to Italian activity of *any* sort in Assab - but that, in compensation, while the natives were extremely anti-English and -Egyptian, they were highly pro-Italian, and that in any case Italy *could not fail to get rich* from her activities there.²⁰³

By this time the *Esploratore* affair had blown up, and all pretence at, or need for, secrecy had gone.

November Rubattino wrote to Castagneto (role unknown) of ‘*L’affare di Assab (che Voi conoscete meglio di me, perche in parte e opera vostra) - ‘The Assab affair (of which you know better than me, because it is in part your work)’*, implying strongly that it had been underway already for some considerable time, perhaps since not long after De Amezaga’s letter of 16 September; Rubattino - Castagneto, 11 November 1879, *ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

¹⁹⁸ He noted that the papers *Il Diritto* and *La Gazzetta d’Italia* did what they could to undo the damage, but as he commented to Malvano, ‘*Ma addio segreto!*’ - ‘*so much for secrecy!*’; Rubattino - Malvano, 13 November 1879, *ibid.*, p.50.

¹⁹⁹ *La Capitale* and *Liberta* had also mentioned the matter, in addition to more reportage by *Popolo Romano*, but ‘*L’ultima volta ch’io vidi Lord Salisbury, egli non me disse parola di quell’incidente*’; Menabrea - Cairoli, 20 November 1879, *ibid.*, p.51-52.

²⁰⁰ Cairoli - Menabrea, 13 November 1879, *op.cit.*

²⁰¹ Cairoli - De Amezaga, 17 December 1879; *L’Italia* I/II, p.54.

²⁰² General Charles George Gordon, Governor-General of the Sudan 1877-1880.

²⁰³ Amezaga - Cairoli, 3 January 1880, *ibid.*, pp.58-63.

Part 3. The *Esploratore* Affair

On 1 January 1880 General Francis Loch, the Political Agent in Aden, sent a Memorandum to the Chief Secretary of the Government of Bombay, detailing his encounter with the Captain of an Italian Man O' War. The *Esploratore* had sailed from Massawa to Aden, with the intention of proceeding to Assab Bay and landing a 'Scientific' expedition, led by Sapeto,²⁰⁴ after taking on board supplies and artisans destined for the Italian settlement at Assab. Gen. Loch had been informed by De Amezaga,²⁰⁵ that the landing at Assab Bay was unconnected with the purchase, ten years before, of the Bay by the Rubattino company. However, General Loch was concerned that, though the Rubattino company had taken no further action since its purchase of the Bay,

... now that European nations are looking for new countries to colonise (and are) turning their attention (to) Africa ... the Italian Government have determined on assistance to the Rubattino company, to carry into execution their former plans in reference to Assab Bay (and that) it is the intention... to have... steamers constantly running between the principal ports of the Red Sea, especially Massowah, Assab Bay, Tajourra, Hodeida and Jeddah... so that they may open out

²⁰⁴ Giuseppe Sapeto (1811-1895), cleric, explorer and author, had been involved in trying to organize European penetration of Africa since 1837, when as a young monk he had been the first Italian to go as a missionary into Abyssinia; Ramm, *Planting*, p.214. In 1869 he was the emissary of the Rubattino company.

²⁰⁵ De Amezaga had commanded the ship that surveyed Assab Bay for the Rubattino company in 1869; IOR/20/A/529.

the trade both on the African and Arabian coasts.²⁰⁶

The intention to take workers and supplies²⁰⁷ seemed strongly to imply that the Italians meant to expand their presence at Assab. Added to this, the French reported that the Italians intended to raise their flag in the new settlement, despite the fact that the coastline still lay under jurisdiction of the Egyptians, represented by Gordon,²⁰⁸ while the Russian Consul in Aden reported that a fleet of Italian troopships were en route to Assab and would land within days. General Loch protested the legality of Italian actions to the Italian Consul in Aden, Sr. Giuseppe Bienenfeld-Rolph,²⁰⁹ who responded vigorously. The British, he claimed, had no business interfering in purely commercial dealings undertaken by the Italians amongst themselves and would in so doing be in violation of the 1867 treaty regarding trade between Britain and Italy.²¹⁰

During the 5-8th, General Loch felt sufficiently alarmed by the escalating crisis to both cable London regarding the matter and to order the gunboat H.M.S. *Seagull*, scheduled to leave the Red Sea Station, to stand by in case the *Esploratore* tried to leave Aden for Assab, General Loch having in the meantime made it quite clear to the Italians

²⁰⁶ IOR/20/A/529.

²⁰⁷ '...a large number of gunny bags of coal and provisions for coolies... have been purchased (by the Italians)...', Goodfellow to Loch, 3 January 1880, IOR/20/A/529; 'The Italians are inviting Aden traders (namely 4 carpenters, 2 blacksmiths and 20 labourers) to settle Assab Bay...', Loch to Secretary of State for India, 4 January 1880, IOR/20/A/529.

²⁰⁸ According to a report received from the French, the Italian action was forestalled by an Egyptian warship which reached Assab first and raised the Egyptian flag; IOR/20/A/529. See also Hamilton, 'Imperialism Ancient', p.24.

²⁰⁹ Italian Consul at Aden until 3 May 1880, when he was succeeded in that position by his son, Victor. IOR/20/A/531. Victor was up to this time a business competitor of several French merchants, Arthur Rimbaud among them, who were endeavouring to develop the coffee trade between France and Abyssinia; Natsoulis & Natsoulas, 'Rimbaud', p.52.

²¹⁰ The Treaty of London, 11 May 1867; Bourne, *Foreign Policy*, pp.117-19. Bienenfeld-Rolph assured Loch that '... the mission of (Sapeto) is purely commercial , and not in any way connected with politics...', though Sapeto's mission had been described as "Scientific" by De Amezaga; Bienenfeld-Rolph to Loch, 5 January 1880, IOR/20/A/529.

that he would not allow the *Esploratore* to leave Aden without further guidance from London. Luckily, by the 9th the matter seems to have been settled, London having assured Loch that his actions had been correct, a cable from the Secretary of State for India assuring him that the Italians had decided to conform to British desires in the matter.²¹¹

Whether or not a fleet of Italian troopships had actually been en route to Assab was never established (India Office and Foreign Office documents from this time abound in rumours, many of which proved to be unfounded),²¹² though it seems that the Italians had managed to satisfy Salisbury²¹³ that there never was such a fleet, since Paget in Rome, in a note dated 10 January 1880, thanked Maffei²¹⁴ for his (believed to be truthful) ‘denial of (a report)... that the *Esploratore* and some troop ships were about to proceed to Assab Bay’.²¹⁵ Perhaps word from London to Rome had had them diverted; perhaps they were only ever a rumour. But the fact that the rumour, if rumour it was, had been given credence at all - even by the Russians, who at this time had scarcely any involvement with the Africans of the Red Sea - would seem to indicate that already there were strong suspicions of Italian assurances of goodwill to Britain being not all that they might seem. And, indeed, the *Esploratore* affair proved to be the thin end of the wedge.

Despite assurances that they had no intention of doing anything other than setting up a trading post at Assab, there were clear signs that the Italians were preparing to

²¹¹ Continued observation by HMS *Seagull* appeared to confirm that the Italians were doing no more, following the crisis, than erecting a minor trading post; IOR/20/A/529. Most of the correspondence relating to this episode is printed in *L'Italia*, I/II, pp.66-71.

²¹² At least three other Italian ships - the *Garigliano* and the *Ischia* (i *piroscafi* - steamships) and the *Varese* (a *Corazzata* - battleship) are mentioned in Italian documents as being involved in Operation *Messina*, so the rumours were not so far from the truth; see, for instance, Bonelli - De Amezaga, 6 November 1879, *L'Italia* I/II, pp.45-46. Their presence belies the sincerity and truthfulness of Maffei's statement to Paget of 10 January (below).

²¹³ Disraeli's foreign secretary April 1878-April 1880.

²¹⁴ Marquis Carlo Alberto Ferdinando Maffei di Boglia (1834-1897), Secretary-General to the Consulta 1878-92, First Secretary at the Italian Embassy to London in 1880.

²¹⁵ FO45/400, Salisbury - Paget, January 9 1880; Paget - Maffei, 10 January 1880, in *L'Italia* I/II, p70. My italics.

challenge the validity of Britain's claim that Assab was a *bone fide* Egyptian possession, and to thereby exploit the division of power in the Red Sea to their advantage.²¹⁶

As we have seen, the turbulent first week of January 1880 ended with a defusing of the confrontation between Britain and Italy, the latter power having managed to reassure the former that they had no intention of extending their Imperial reach. However, during the incident, Loch had felt constrained to point out to De Amezaga and Bienenfeld-Rolph that any landing of Italian troops, even if only a small number intended purely for the defence of the projected commercial post at Assab, would be in contravention of the 1877 convention entered into between the governments of Egypt and Britain (on 7 January, Loch had told Amezaga that he would at once provide his "hearty co-operation" for the expedition '... If you can show me any authority conveying the sanction of the Egyptian government... as I deprecate any unfriendly feeling to (Italy from Britain)').²¹⁷ On the same day, 7 January, Mr. Paget, of the Foreign Office, informed Salisbury that Maffei 'denies that Assab Bay belongs to the Italian government, but contests Egyptian ownership'. Next day the Secretary of State for India cabled both Aden and London that he had been assured by the Italian government 'that no interest exists of annexing Assab or interfering with the sovereignty of the Egyptian government'.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ It is interesting that the Italians alone felt so confident in asserting that neither Egyptians nor Turks had any claim to this area, since both the British and the French readily acknowledged their rights, and always had; see Sir Francis Hertslet, 'Memorandum: French and Italian designs in the Red Sea', May 1882, FO881/4590.

²¹⁷ Loch to Goodfellow, 6 January 1880; Paget to Salisbury, 7 January 1880; Loch to Amezaga, 7 January 1880, in IOR/20/A/529. 'The 1877 Convention' was the Somali Coast Convention of 7 September 1877, which recognized Khedival jurisdiction over the Somali coast up to Ras Hafun, under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Sultan; Ramm, 'Planting', p.218. Ram, in *Anglo-Ethiopian Relations*, incorrectly gives the Convention date as 1874. Ram's book is very useful but is full of misprints, so must be used with caution.

²¹⁸ It is interesting that the Italians mentioned the term *annexation*, since no-one else had used it in connection with Assab Bay; perhaps they had unknowingly revealed their true purpose, as they annexed Assab in 1882; 'The Sultan protested, but generally the Powers saw no cause for alarm in the act' (A. d'Avray, *Lords of the Red Sea: The History of a Red Sea Society from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries*, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996), p.108.

However, on 9 January, Maffei, having been challenged on his apparent denial of Egyptian sovereignty, 'clarified' his meaning by saying that he had meant that the Turks had ultimate ownership, since Egypt was a vassal state of the Ottomans. Then, on the same day, he further 'clarified' that 'What I meant to say (is) that (though Italy made no territorial claim to Assab) in our opinion neither the Porte nor Egypt have any right to claim it' - clearly the implications of De Amezaga's definition of what constituted sovereignty over Assab²¹⁹ had not been fully digested or clearly thought through in Rome, hence Maffei's garbled responses.²²⁰ On 12 January 1880 Maffei²²¹ wrote to Paget that

... I (want) to express the... regret (I) felt in receiving your (note)...

By which you inform me that (Salisbury) considers (that Assab)
belongs to Egypt...

We think it is rather hard to believe that what was white before and

²¹⁹ During the abortive attempts in 1882 to formulate the 'Assab Bay convention' (see note 244 below), the Italians continued to insist that the Sultan of Raheita was independent of the Porte and could conclude any treaty he liked with any foreign power he chose, and that the same condition applied to various other independent Sultans along the Red Sea coast that Italy might want to 'protect'. Britain then pointed out that the logical conclusion of this train of thought was that, if any "Independent" Sultan of the region could align themselves with any power he liked, these might include such potentially unfriendly powers as France and Russia. Mancini was forced to rapidly backpeddle on the matter as the meaning of this point percolated through, and stated that 'This was a matter ... upon which the Italian government entirely shared the view of HMG', even though it undid the logic of Italian claims to the region as not belonging to the Porte or Egypt; FO45/452, Paget - Granville, 1 February 1882.

²²⁰ Paget- Salisbury, 9 January 1880, IOR/20/A/529. The political position of the Sultan of Raheita is unclear; according to d'Avray 'The owner of the region.... was the Sultan of Lake Aussa ('a long way off in the interior' - presumably the Danakil district)', an independent and fierce entity who was 'the only ruler of substance in those regions (who) in no way sought to restrain his Danakils, and the Negus or Emperor had neither interest nor influence in the area' and who, if he offered no tribute to the Abyssinian monarchs nearby, was unlikely to do so to the Ottomans on the coast. This Sultan, Hamfei, was thought to have been responsible for the deaths of Munziger (Werner Munziger (1832 -November 1875), diplomat, explorer and soldier) in 1875 and the Giulietti expedition of 1881 (see pp. 68-9, below). However, since Assab lay in a stretch of coast recognized as being under Khedival control by the 1877 Convention, it would seem there was no doubt that Assab fell within the Ottoman/Egyptian demesne.

²²¹ In Rome, in his role as Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

up to 1870 has suddenly and without any tangible fact become black ... But even admitting (Salisbury's) version... that (Assab) belongs to Egypt, we have too great an opinion of (his) fairness and good feeling towards us, to suppose for one moment *he would interfere in a matter concerning Egypt and Italy alone*... we do not want to trespass on (any Egyptian claims of sovereignty) but at the same time we also intend to reserve as a government any right arising according to the law of nations from the purchase of Assab Bay by an Italian firm.²²²

This is a quite astonishing letter, implying as it does that Assab did not belong to Egypt,²²³ though it was only the Italians that contested Egyptian (or Turkish) ownership of the territory; that a purely commercial agreement implied a right of Italy to claim sovereignty over territory the possession of which had never been revoked by Egypt, and which the Italians had given assurances would never be claimed as Italian; and that Salisbury had somehow suddenly made a *volte face* on the issue of Egyptian possession of the territory, when in fact he had done nothing of the sort (quite apart from any other fact, he had not been in power in 1870 - Gladstone and Granville were Prime and Foreign Ministers respectively at this time).

²²² Maffei - Paget, 12 January 1880, in *L'Italia* I/II, p.71. On 9th January, however, Salisbury had cabled Paget regarding the matter as reflected in Maffei's comments of the 12th - "Thank Ct. Maffei (for his intelligence that the Italian fleet did not exist, but) inform him that whatever opinion may have been expressed *before 1870* about the effects of which I am not (in a position to effect a) judgement, the case (shows from HMG's point of view) that Assab Bay belongs to Egypt". Clearly, Salisbury already knew about Maffei's baffling and gnostic "1870" views. However, he wanted everyone else to know his own on the Assab matter too, as he requested that copies of his 9 January cable be sent to Egypt, Paris, the India Office and the Admiralty. He also advised Paget to "express (his views re Assab) in writing (but) *in a letter not in formal diplomatic note*"; FO45/400, Salisbury - Paget, 9 January 1880. All italics in text and notes mine.

²²³ The Egyptians took possession of it, part and parcel with the rest of the Red Sea coast, during their expansion of the 1866-77 period.

As we have seen, Britain, though not initially pleased about the Egyptian occupation of the Red Sea coast, soon accepted it as a *fait accompli* favourable to British interests. Neither Gladstone nor Granville had raised any concerns over the Egyptian expansion into the Red Sea, let alone objected to it,²²⁴ and Salisbury had certainly never cast doubt upon Egypt's right to sovereignty over Assab. 1870 was a meaningless date, apparently plucked out of the air by Maffei.²²⁵

Admittedly, Maffei's action occurred fully two years before Britain started the process leading to Egypt becoming effectively a Condominium of Britain, but still it seems a remarkably hostile missive for Italy, so far still without allies in an explosive and unpredictable world, to make to a country for whose support she was desperate. However, antecedent behaviour on the part of the Italians show, as we have seen, how their apparently sudden assertiveness regarding Assab had in fact been brewing for some time.

The Accidental Imperialists

Shortly after the *Esploratore affair*, on 17 January 1880, Salisbury cabled Paget that he had spoken to the Italian *Charge d'Affairs* (M. Ressa) on the 15th regarding Assab, who reassured him that Italy had absolutely no political, military or naval objective in that area. However, Salisbury had restated the British position that, while wishing Italy

²²⁴ Their only references to matters pertaining to the Red Sea during 1869 - there were none in 1870 - had been to express a desire that Turkey would not interfere unduly in Egyptian affairs; see Gladstone - Granville, 26 August, 2 & 18 October 1869, in Ramm, *Correspondence*, pp.49, 63 & 68.

²²⁵ The only possible construction that can be placed upon Maffei's selection of this year as somehow significant is that it followed 1869, when the Rubattino Company purchased (whether legally or not) Assab Bay from the Sultan of Raheita. The fact that by 1870 no-one had objected - or maybe even noticed - the purchase may somehow have conferred in Maffei's mind the Italian right to start regarding it as Italian territory rather than just land hired, or bought for strictly commercial purposes, from the Porte.

success in any commercial venture, ultimate authority over the area remained with the Khedive 'in whose territory the Bay lies', and that 'I reminded him more than once that England was particularly sensitive as to all that concerned the shores of the Red Sea'.²²⁶ Maffei had been assured (probably as a result of the *Esploratore* affair and Salisbury's subsequent warnings) by Lord Tenterden²²⁷ in February 1880 that 'Nothing was more likely to raise Parliament and the entire nation against Italy than the attempt to create an Italian possession in the Red Sea'.²²⁸

However, by this time Cairoli had decided that Rubattino should purchase Assab with a secret guarantee of reimbursement once the territory was declared Italian sovereign territory,²²⁹ though he was still able, in March 1880, to deny to Salisbury that Italy had 'any idea of conquest on the coasts of the Red Sea'.²³⁰ In January 1881 Granville wrote to the Italian *Charge d'Affairs*, Sr. Constantino Ressa, stating that

²²⁶ FO45/400, Salisbury - Paget, January 17 1880.

²²⁷ Charles Stuart Aubrey Abbott, third Lord Tenterden, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office 1873-1882. Tenterden, though only a junior member of government, was listened to by Disraeli and, later, by Salisbury. He had a deep-seated distrust of Italian actions and motivations. He was 'mainly concerned (to maintain) Britain's ability to act unilaterally. He was, therefore, not enamoured with Disraeli's... project of a Mediterranean League with Italy (and) soon grew doubtful about the scheme...(and) Italian pretensions in the Red Sea... "what a serious matter it is to have an Italian colony placed on the Red Sea". (He) had no illusions (about Italy's weakness), but warned that her aim was "to get something out of any war as a bribe to be quiet"'; K. Neilson & T.G. Otte, *The Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, 1854-1946* (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), pp.54-58. He told his Italian counterpart in February 1880 that 'England could never (allow) any part of (the Red Sea Coast) to be transferred to another Power... We could never tolerate it, never...', and went on to advocate (to both Granville and Salisbury) naval and military action against the Italians in Assab on the grounds that control of Assab by any other Power 'would be fatal to our control of the Red Sea' and thereby to our route to India; quoted in Ramm, 'Planting', p.226. See also Lowe & Marzari, op.cit., pp.35 & 422.

²²⁸ Quoted in Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, p.422.

²²⁹ Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, p.35. According to Mrazkova, Assab was bought from the Rubattino company on the death of Rubattino in 1882, so whether such an arrangement predated his decease is open to question; J. Mrazkova, 'The Colonial War in Ethiopia, 1885-1896,' *Archiv Orientalni*, 48 (1980), pp. 195-216. However, Bosworth has it that the Rubattino company had been amalgamated with the Florio company in 1881 to create the *Societa di Navigazione Generale Italia* (SNGI) which in turn was heavily linked to the ship-building Orlando concern in Liguria; Bosworth, *Least*, p.25. This meant that Assab in fact belonged to the SNGI and not the Rubattino company.

²³⁰ Lowe & Marzari, op.cit., p.35.

Assab Bay lies within the territory of Egypt (It) is now my duty to assure you that (HMG are) unable to arrive at any other conclusion than that (Assab belongs) to the Porte directly... and to the Khedive, under the Porte's suzerainty (and that) I have (to) request that you will inform Your Government that they take note of the categorical and peremptory declaration of Signor Cairoli... that no Italian (military establishment) will ever be formed at (either the islands or mainland of Assab Bay)²³¹

However, a complication arose in May 1881, with the massacre of the Giulietti expedition by the Afars near Beilul. The outraged Italians demanded that the killers, thought to have been responsible also for the murder of Munziger and hiding out in the territory of the Sultan of Aussa,²³² be brought to book by the Egyptians; they also asked Granville if the British could help if, as had happened with Munziger, the Egyptians did nothing.²³³

The Italians noted that their anger had raised suspicions among the British at Aden that they were using the Giulietti disaster as a cover for sending a military expedition to the Red Sea coast. Clearly the British at Aden had been sensitized to the possibility of

²³¹ Granville - Ressman, 26 January 1881, in *L'Italia*, I/II, pp.170-71. In September 1881, an Italian Green Book recorded that the sovereignty of Assab had been ceded to Italy by Egypt and Turkey, and that Lord Granville had proposed a convention among the countries concerned, to be negotiated under British auspices; *Hansard*, 3, HC, June 19 1882, v.270, cc.1610-11.

²³² d'Avray, *Lords*, pp. 88-89.

²³³ Menabrea - Mancini, 13 & 17 June 1881, and Martini (Italian Ambassador to Cairo) - Mancini, DDI 2/XIV, pp. 26 & 38-39, and pp.34-36. At the time of his death, Munziger had been leading an Egyptian expedition against Abyssinia; Giulietti was leading a scientific exploratory mission. The Sultan Hamfeï, of Aussa, suspected of being responsible for both killings, was supposedly a subject of the Egyptians (see p.59, note 221, above).

Italian expansionism at Assab and possibly elsewhere by the activities of 1879-80, and Aden's concerns made their way to London via Rome.²³⁴

Granville recognized the Rubattino company's acquisition of Assab in February 1882, on the understanding that the base remained purely commercial and unfortified, and that it remained the territory of the Porte - this was merely a continuation of what had been decided in 1879. But on 10 March, Italy's government took over the port from the Rubattino company, thus making it an official Italian colony. Granville was annoyed by Italy's sleight-of-hand but too pre-occupied with Egypt to do anything about it.²³⁵

Three days after the official colonization of Assab by the Italian government on 10 March they were again negotiating with the Sultan of Raheita,²³⁶ this time for the purchase of a group of islands in Assab Bay, an enterprise of which the British authorities took a very dim view.²³⁷ Furthermore, the negotiations were being undertaken by Sapeto,

²³⁴ Mancini informed Menabrea (in London) that the attitude of a few Englishmen at Aden showed a persistent distrust of Italy which could further hamper the establishment of a *modus vivendi* between Assab and Aden, and that Menabrea, by explaining things to Granville, might greatly contribute to a 'cordial understanding', as could measures such as having an English agent from Aden accredited to Assab and *vice versa*; Mancini - Menabrea, 8 June 1881, *ibid.*, p. 14. There is no hint, in the 'Giulietti correspondence' of the DDI, that anything underhanded was being contemplated.

²³⁵ Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, p.36. There is no mention of the matter in the Gladstone-Granville Correspondence for February-March 1882; A. Ramm (ed.), *Political Correspondence of Mr. Gladstone and Lord Granville 1876-1886* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962) (vol.1: 1876-1882), pp. 339-352.

However, the affair made its mark on Granville. During Autumn 1882, in correspondence with Paget, he rejoiced at the Italian refusal to join Britain in the pacification of Egypt. They had (he wrote), "behaved abominably" since 1881 because of Tunis, constantly trying to gain "petty advantages over the French" and giving false assurances to the Porte. But now, receipt of Menabrea's refusal to join in the action '... delights me. We have done the right thing; we have shown our readiness to admit others; and we have not the inconvenience of a partner'. He concluded that 'I am afraid the Italians have been at the bottom of much of the Egyptian mischief...'; letters, July 28 and 11 August 1882, quoted in Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice, *The Life of Granville George Leveson of Gower, Second Earl Granville K.G., 1815-1891* (vol. II)(London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1905; 2 vols.), pp.270-71.

²³⁶ Described by Commander Berners (see below) as 'Sultan Boorham' - in fact Abu Bakr ibn Burhan (Caulk, *Jaws*, p. 223). Berners' letter referring to these negotiations (see below, note 231) was dated 13 March, so the Italians had started negotiating with the Sultan of Raheita more or less immediately after their official announcement.

²³⁷ '... in my opinion the possession of these islands by a foreign power would be extremely disadvantageous to (Britain) in time of war as (they would) afford a coaling station within 50 miles of the Persian Straits and an anchorage for the largest vessels, which might easily be defended (and would be a far greater asset than Aden)'; Commander Berners, R.N. of HMS *Philomel*, to Loch, 13 March 1880,

who was only supposed to be pursuing very limited scientific or commercial objectives.²³⁸ Despite having been warned off trying to establish a sovereign presence in the area, and having promised not to do so, the Italians were making a concerted effort to do exactly that.

It is possible that by this time they had realized that they could exploit the fault-lines in power over the region to their advantage; hence their decision to press ahead with negotiations over the Islands of Assab Bay - negotiations that they must have known would annoy Britain. It is equally possible that significant elements of the Italian government, and those involved with the colonization venture, still genuinely believed that the Ottomans and Egyptians really had no say in the matter, and that it was no business of the British. However, what is clear is that at this time the Italians were completely new to the game of Imperialism, and maybe only just starting to realize the potential that the divisions of power in the region could bring. Maffei's confusion over what he meant regarding Ottoman sovereignty in the region is one indication of this.

IOR/20/A/529; see also De Amezaga-Cairolì, 18 March 1880, *L'Italia* I/II, pp.94-96. In March 1880 Captain, later Major, Hunter of the Aden Residency staff bribed the Sultan of Raheita not to sell any more land or islands to the Italians; Ramm, 'Planting', p.220. According to Hamilton (op.cit., pp.24-25), the Italians succeeded in buying one of the islands of Assab bay; Hunter was convinced that the Italians had a hidden agenda, as '... the development of trade is but a flimsy excuse' and that '... it is hard to believe that (Amezaga and Sapeto) had as their sole object (possession of) a coaling station', since '... the place is so well-suited to warlike and so ill adapted for peaceful purposes' that strategic reasoning must have underpinned their actions. However, it seems that Hunter's worries were groundless; apart from the one island his bribe worked, as the Italians never developed Assab as a naval base and it did indeed prove useless for commercial purposes, despite De Amezaga's exhortatory letters to the contrary.

A letter from Antonelli to Mancini in March 1884 shows that the Italians were by then alive to the reality of Assab's commercial inutility; although Antonelli dismisses the descriptions he records of Assab's problems as being figments of French imagination and malice, he cannot hide his concerns that all the inducements in the world will not make it a place to which native traders would wish voluntarily to go; Antonelli - Mancini, 19 March 1884, in *L'Italia* I/III (1883-1885), pp. 44-46.

²³⁸ Five islands - Arabia, Damakia, Jamirat, Fatima and Halib - were under discussion; Loch to Secretary of State for India, 10th March 1880, IOR/20/A/529. Presumably Hunter's bribe put an end to this project.

Another is the Italian failure to capitalize on the British invitation to them to join the occupation of Egypt in July 1882.²³⁹

In April 1882, *Popolo Romano* published an article on Egypt and Assab, in which it excoriated Arabi Bey for attempting to negotiate with the Rubattino company on sovereignty rights over Assab, rather than with the Italian government -

M. Mancini would do well to (assist) Arabi Bey in the struggle for independence (and in Egypt's rejection of British attempts to impose limits on her sovereignty in the region, since he has), with an ingenuity which surpasses the grossest knavery, declared himself ready to negotiate with M. Rubattino... as though the friendly intervention of the English for the regulation of the question were not the most explicit confirmation of (Italy's sovereign rights to the territory). We... do not attach much importance to this Bey, but it does (seem) curious... that (he) should set up a claim to rights which the Sultan himself... had never claimed...

(though) Our possession of Assab Bay has (in reality only been of) a commercial character (Arabi) pushes (Egyptian) independence to the extremes of thrusting the Italian government aside (in favour of) a private individual (but) Italy has no intention of giving the ambitious and fanatical colonel the chance of drawing his scimitar...²⁴⁰

²³⁹ For the full Italian explanation of why they felt unable to join Britain in the pacification of Egypt in 1882, see the letter of Alberto Blanc (1835-1904), Ambassador to Spain 1870-71 & 1883-87(?), to The U.S.A 1875-80, to the Porte 1880-82 & 1886(?)-91, Minister for Foreign Affairs 1893-96, in Gwynn & Tuckwell, *Dilke*, pp.477-80.

This entertaining article clearly illustrates that some Italians at least retained the idea that neither the Ottomans nor the Egyptians had any legitimate claim to the Assab region, and that the interests represented by this article wanted to see Britain kept out of Egyptian (and, by extension, Italian) affairs in the Red Sea.²⁴¹

More importantly for future developments, however, if one ignores the assumption that Britain's involvement with the ill-fated Assab Bay Convention could be described as a 'friendly intervention',²⁴² and if one ignores also the apparent purposelessness in claiming Italian sovereignty over an area that was bought by a private Italian individual for purely commercial purposes, it foreshadows one of Italy's Great Missed Opportunities.

Conclusion

If the Italians had joined Britain in occupying Egypt less than three months later, it would have obviated the need on the part of Granville and Tenterden to object to their assertion of sovereignty over Assab. What moral right or necessity would Britain have had to

²⁴⁰ FO45/636, *Popolo Romano*, 'Egypt and Assab', 11 April 1882. See also Corti (at Constantinople)-Mancini, 29 March 1882, DDI 2/XIV, regarding the refutation by Egypt of the Assab Bay Convention (see below, note 282) in favour of an agreement with the Rubattino company (p.661).

²⁴¹ In his communications with Corti (Constantinople) and Martino (Cairo) of 27 March 1882, Mancini informed them that the physical occupation of Assab presented the world with a *fait accompli* '... irrespective of the Assab Bay Convention'. Regarding his conversations on the subject with Granville, Menabrea makes it perfectly clear to Mancini, in his cable of 30 March 1882, that he was successfully using the obfuscation of the floundering Assab Bay Convention, and the ongoing confusion over Turkish and/or Egyptian sovereignty over Assab, to help cement Italian claims to the Bay; DDI 2/XIV, pp. 653-54 & 662. His cable to Mancini of 8 May 1882 shows that by this time the Convention had been hopelessly mired in confusion, claim and counter-claim, and that he fully expected Britain to soon '...put a stop to the game'; *ibid.*, p.625.

²⁴² Intended to facilitate agreement between Britain, Italy, Egypt and Turkey, the British proposal for a Convention among the four countries to regularize the status of Assab '... was declined. It fell to the ground, and nothing whatsoever was done'; Sir Charles Dilke, *Hansard*, 3, HC, 15 June 1882, v.270 cc.1268-72.

object to a tiny Italian presence in Assab when she herself had effectively not only taken over all Egyptian lands and properties lock, stock and barrel, but allowed Italy to join the party too? Additionally, moving into Egypt would have been much easier, and potentially more economically beneficial, for Italy than her adventure in the Red Sea. It was far closer, offered well-developed markets and an established economic infrastructure, and would have employed the logistical support of the British, as well as giving her a geographical proximity to parts of North Africa which she already coveted and over which she might, in the future, have been able to challenge France.

But the opportunity was missed, probably for two reasons. One is already well-documented; the Italians felt that they couldn't afford it (though in hindsight it was a monumental false economy).²⁴³ The second results from the first - the Italians didn't want to join in not only because of costs, but because *they didn't feel ready to become an Imperial Power*. In terms of sentiment and strategy, they just couldn't see that far ahead and, in all likelihood, probably still couldn't see all the implications - if *Popolo Romano* was a bellwether of Italian opinion - of a governmental takeover of Assab which fundamentally altered the state of things from when it had been merely a patch of privately-owned land bought for a coaling station. Certainly their action in making Assab an Italian colony was political, and done in full knowledge not only that it was against what had already been agreed with Britain, but also that it was possible to get away with because Britain had by this time become pre-occupied with Egypt. But, thus far, it was a

²⁴³ To salvage their *amour propre*, the Italians claimed that they could not join an operation, mounted only by Britain and France, not approved by the Concert of Europe; Mancini-Menabrea, 15 May 1882, DDI 2/XIV, p.770. However, they were careful not to offend Britain by appearing to disapprove of the operation, and made their approbation clear in various high-profile diplomatic communications; see, *inter alia*, Mancini-Launay (Berlin), Corti (Constantinople), Menabrea (London), Marochetti (Paris), Nigra (St. Petersburg) & di Robilant (Vienna), 13 & 28 July 1882, DDI 2/XV, pp.128 & 168; see also Blanc's letter of March 1888 to Dilke, in Gwynn & Tuckwell, *Dilke*, p.477 (and note 239 above).

contained action, not yet part of a grander strategy of significant expansion - otherwise they would likely have leapt at the chance to join Britain in Egypt, whatever the cost.

However, within five years their mindset had changed. By 1887 the Italians had found a way to further their aims in the region, a way which had not actually existed prior, firstly, to Egypt's expansion along the Red Sea during the 1860-80 period and prior, secondly, to Egypt's withdrawal from that region in the face of the Mahdist threat after 1884. As with the almost accidental beginning of Italian power in the Red Sea resulting from their capricious purchase of Assab bay in 1869, a feature - or a faultline - of the political landscape of the Red Sea was fortuitously revealed to them, over time, as a result of the aftermath of the *Esploratore* affair.

THE MASSAWA INCIDENT, 1888

“... the face of the political ocean is extraordinarily quiet, but it is a treacherous sea, and tempests arise very suddenly.”²⁴⁴

Introduction

During July-August 1888, in Massawa, a Franco-Italian squabble over unpaid taxes nearly tipped Europe into full-scale war. This incident has hardly been reported in any published text,²⁴⁵ but is highly significant in that it illustrates how easily the complex interactions among the Powers could, through the unconsidered actions of individuals, spin rapidly out of control and threaten to trigger a cataclysm.

This chapter will examine the background to developments in the Red Sea from the Italian colonization of Assab in 1882 to the Massawa Incident of 1888 (including the effect of the accession to power of Crispi in August 1887), what the incident was, how it arose, and how it reflected occult²⁴⁶ factors which, usually unseen or unconsidered, lay under the surface of normal inter-state relations but which could, unexpectedly and suddenly, emerge and destabilize an otherwise visible and largely comprehensible, if not tranquil, geo-political landscape. I will also highlight how, despite the best efforts of more sober Italian minds to contain and undo the damage done, it severely strained an Anglo-Italian relationship which, already fraught with difficulties, was irreparably damaged by Crispi's accession to power.

²⁴⁴ Salisbury Papers (SP) A/46/87, Salisbury - HRH Admiral the Duke of Edinburgh, 27 March 1888.

²⁴⁵ There is one fleeting reference to it in Duggan, *Francesco Crispi*, p.551; none other has been located.

²⁴⁶ Here I am using the term “occult” in the sense of hidden, rather than supernatural, meaning.

**PART 1. THE ITALIAN OCCUPATION OF MASSAWA –
BRITISH TREACHERY, ANGLO-ITALIAN CONSPIRACY
OR GLADSTONIAN MUDDLE?**

In a diplomatic circular of 25 July 1888, Crispi retrospectively explained the necessity for, and justification of, the Italian occupation of Massawa in February 1885. The menacing advance of the Mahdists (he wrote) caused the Egyptians to recall their more distant garrisons. Massawa, lying outside of the defensive lines established by the Khedival government, needed to be evacuated without delay. Invited to occupy it, the Turks declined, thus negating all entitlement to be considered the rightful owners of this strategically important port on the Red Sea. Massawa, thus abandoned, was exposed to the double danger either of Mahdist tyranny or of falling into a state of anarchy. For the same reasons of general order that the Anglo-Egyptians deemed it wise to hold onto Suakin, the Italians found it necessary to occupy Massawa. Italy had been prepared for such an eventuality; she already had, not far away, an existing colonial establishment (Assab) which was also menaced by the Mahdists. The only question was; should Italy take immediate action, or wait until the last Egyptian soldier had left Massawa, and thus risk it becoming *res nullius*? The former action was deemed the wisest, to ensure a smooth transfer of power without leaving a vacuum. Thus, according to international law (*Jus gentium*), the retreat of Egypt and the refusal of Turkey to take up occupation gave Italy a perfect right to sovereignty.

States friendly to Italy (he concluded) thus saw, with satisfaction, the spread of order and civilization in the Red Sea. Turkish objections post-facto found no echo of sympathy, and French complaints were clearly based on nothing more than jealousy.²⁴⁷

Certainly the signs had been propitious for such an Italian move. Though before 1882 they had been frustrated at every turn in their attempts to become a credible Power, the Italians significantly improved their international position by joining the Triple Alliance, thus securing their northern border and gaining allies against France. Also, the Turks, though still immovable in the Mediterranean, were starting (independently of the Egyptians) to pull out of the Red Sea, ceding Zeila to Britain and Obock and Tajourra to France, all in 1884,²⁴⁸ implying that there might be room for the Italians to expand from their toehold in Assab.

Despite the lukewarm enthusiasm for Imperialist adventure in most parts of Italian society, Italian interest in exploration had begun as early as the 1850s,²⁴⁹ long before the 'official' period of Italian Imperialism began in the 1880s. The *Societa Geografica Italiana* (SGI), Italy's foremost exploratory/scientific society, was founded in Florence in 1867. It was dominated by diplomatic, military and political interests (just 11% of its members were *bona fide* geographers),²⁵⁰ and sent exploratory missions to Tunisia

²⁴⁷ 25th July, 1888, Crispi - Italian representatives in the Hague, Athens, Belgrade, Berlin, Berne, Brussels, Bucharest, Cairo, Cetinje, Copenhagen, Constantinople, Lisbon, London, Madrid, Monaco, Sofia, Paris, St. Petersburg, Stockholm, Tunis, Vienna and Washington, in *L'Italia* 1/VII (1888-1889), pp.45-48.

²⁴⁸ Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, p.36.

²⁴⁹ 'Italy did not yet have Rome as its capital, when people began to talk about Africa, (even) before... the war with Austria in 1859, and before Garibaldi landed in Sicily...' F. Bandini, *Gli Italiani in Africa*, quoted in d'Avray, *Lords*, p.108.

²⁵⁰ One of the earliest members of the SGI was none other than the (later to be) General Oreste Baratieri (1841-1901); as a result of his work on the military periodical *Rivista Militare*, and of his travels and military service in North Africa, he was elected during the 1880s to the governing council of the SGI - 'which (type of organization) in Italy, as everywhere else, was an incubator of colonialist sentiment' - and which action showed the symbiotic relationship that existed between the SGI and those avid for colonial expansion in Africa; Jonas, *Adwa*, p.96. He became Governor of Eritrea in 1892 and later led Italian forces

(1875), Morocco (1876) and Abyssinia (from 1876 onwards). Similar societies sprang up in Milan, Turin and Genoa, as well as in the Southern city of Naples and in Bari,²⁵¹ and 'Since 1879, Milan's Society of Commercial Exploration in Africa (*Societa di esplorazioni commerciali in Africa*) had been the country's most prestigious proponent of colonial investment.'²⁵² This was because, by the 1870s, Italian industrialists had become alive to the possibility of the commercial advantages that Imperialism could bring. And, while Lombardian and Piedmontese capitalists looked to North Africa for the possibility of commercial gain, the *Societa Africana d'Italia* of Naples (a poorer, but still significant, corollary of the Milanese society), together with the Ligurian and Umbrian bourgeoisie, looked to the Red Sea. The Genovese shipping magnate Raphaele Rubattino²⁵³ had been roused by the opening of the Suez Canal to purchase Assab in 1869.²⁵⁴ In 1882, when the Italian government declined to join Britain in pacifying Egypt, these Ligurian shipping interests sharply criticised the government for missing the chance to gain a foothold in Africa, with the result that it bought Assab from the Rubattino company after Rubattino's death in 1882.²⁵⁵ It is notable that Lombardy, though the most advanced industrial area of

in a successful campaign against the Mahdists during 1893-95, before presiding over their catastrophic defeat at Adowa in 1896; Jonas, *Adowa*, p.194 & passim, and Pakenham, *Scramble*, pp.482-84.

²⁵¹ D. Atkinson, *Constructing Italian Africa: Geography and Geopolitics*, in Ben-Ghiat & Fuller, *Italian Colonialism*, pp.15-27.

²⁵² Choate, 'Territorial', p.68. And see Mrazkova 'The Colonial War', p.196.

²⁵³ January 1810-November 1882. Genoa is in Liguria, which is part of North-Western Italy's Mediterranean littoral. Rubattino was active in the Risorgimento and, with Sapeto, was instrumental in facilitating the Italian purchase of Assab; L. Villari, 'The Italian Red Sea Colonies', *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, 14: 2 (1927), p.115-29. He '... played a very important role in co-ordinating the action of national governments in northern Africa both setting up shipping lanes... and (in) the purchase of the Tunisi-La Goletta railway (an action considered essential by Italian diplomats to stop the French acquisition of it)'; G.L. Podesta, *Sviluppo insutriale e colonialismo. Gli investment italiani in Africa orientale 1869-1897* (Giuffre: Milan, 1996), p.150. The Rubattino company went bankrupt in 1882 following Rubattino's death; D. Strangio, 'Italian colonies and enterprises in Eritrea (XIX-XX Centuries)', *Journal of European Economic History*, 39: 3 (2010), pp.599-623 (p.608)

²⁵⁴ Mrazkova, op.cit., pp.195-96.

²⁵⁵ The Genovese newspaper *Corriere mercantile* of January 15, 1879, had accused the government of 'ignoring national interests', being 'passive, overfrightened, impotent' and being 'heedless of the country's future' - quoted in A. Codignola, *Rubattino* (Bologna: Licinio Cappelli Editore, 1938), pp.300-302. On 29

Italy, was the centre of opposition to Imperialism in the Red Sea, as its main industrial activity, textiles, could not at this stage benefit from expansion into Africa.²⁵⁶ It was the shipowners, merchants, speculators and arms manufacturers of Liguria and elsewhere that looked to fresh markets in Africa, where the conquest even of a poor colony would provide impetus to existing shipping and ordnance industries, and the stimulation of new ones.²⁵⁷ At least in theory.

However, what is thought to have really galvanized Italian hopes for Imperial advancement was the Berlin Conference of winter 1884. As Lowe and Marzari remark:

Until October 1884 Mancini had shown no interest...in Africa... Assab
he... had done nothing with...(in) May 1884 he had... asserted his
conviction that it was ... dangerous for a young nation like Italy 'to launch
out in... perilous adventures in distant lands'... Yet by January 1885 (he)

July 1882 Crispi - still in opposition - wrote to Mancini, the Foreign Minister, saying 'I am deeply grieved by your refusal of the English offer to intervene in Egypt. I wish... this step... may not still further compromise Italy's position in the Mediterranean... You should have accepted the offer without hesitation' - quoted in F. Crispi (ed. T. Palamenghi), *Politica estera (1876-1890). Memorie e documenti* (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1912; 2nd.ed., 1929). The commercial faction thus aligned itself with the oppositional parliamentary group around Crispi; Mrazkova, *ibid.*, p.196.

²⁵⁶ Lombardian businessmen, politicians and journalists were not opposed to Imperialist expansion *per se*, but were critical of its location in the Red Sea. As the *Corriere della Sera* of Milan wrote on 29 January 1885, '... the Red Sea cannot be our aim. We may admit the ownership of one seaport, but to strive to acquire a vast territory, some sort of Algeria? We have enough untilled... land in Italy... The farther we move from Italy and the more we waste in other countries, the weaker we shall become in the Mediterranean' - quoted in Battaglia, *Prima Guerra*, pp.187-89. After the occupation of Massawa and in the face of such criticism, Mancini defended the government's action with his mystifying statement that the key to the Mediterranean lay in the Red Sea. What he meant was that, if Italy helped Britain in Africa, Britain would defend Italy in the Mediterranean. His critics pointed out that this was all three years too late; Mrazkova, *op.cit.*, p.199.

²⁵⁷ The Pirelli company (of Milan) laid submarine cables from Italy to Abyssinia, while the General Shipping Company and the Terni company of Umbria, central Italy, equipped expeditions to Africa; significantly, the last two concerns emerged in 1882 and 1884 respectively. Mrazkova, *op.cit.*, pp.196-97.

seemed a man transformed. The African fever generated by (the conference) had him in its grip.²⁵⁸

It also led Italy onto the path of a disastrous confrontation with Abyssinia which ultimately led to the collapse of their hard-won Empire in 1896.

A Series of Unfortunate Events: Abyssinia and the Mahdia

In 1876, an Italian Geographical expedition²⁵⁹ entered the southern Abyssinian kingdom of Shoa in search of a route to the Nile-Congo basin. This was the start of Italy's association with the *Negus* Menelik, King of Shoa,²⁶⁰ though for several years, well into the 1880s, the Italians concentrated their efforts on developing relations with the *Negus Negast*, Yohannes IV,²⁶¹ who was still the dominant figure in Ethiopia and remained in control of the hinterland to the Red Sea.²⁶²

²⁵⁸ Lowe & Marzari, op.cit., p.37. But see Chapter 3 for signs that the Italians had already, by the end of 1884 and BEFORE the Berlin conference, started on an Imperial adventure in Zanzibar.

²⁵⁹ The Antinori expedition; see Caulk, *Jaws*, pp.21-23, and his 'Minilik II and the Diplomacy of Commerce: Prelude to an Imperial Foreign Policy', *Journal of African Studies*, vol.17 (November 1984), pp.62-87.

²⁶⁰ Sahle Maryam Abeto Menelik (1844-1913), King (*Negus*) of Shoa 1866-1889, Emperor (*Negus Negast*, or King of Kings) of Abyssinia 1889-1913.

²⁶¹ Lij Kassay Mercha, or Yohannes IV, *Negus Negast* of Abyssinia 1871-1889. See Appendix 4 for the story of Abyssinia.

²⁶² The French cannily developed relations with Shoa by establishing an arms trade via Djibouti and Tajourra. As Menelik began to turn against the Italians after 1889, '... inevitably French offers of help became increasingly welcome to Menelik and the arms supplies swelled to a flood... When Lagarde, the Governor of French Somaliland (visited) Addis Ababa, his (entirely correct) idea of an acceptable gift (to Menelik) was 100,000 rifles and... two million rounds of ammunition'; Wright P., 'Italy's African Nightmare', *History Today* Vol.23:3 (March 1973); pp.153-8 (p.156). See also Rubenson S., 'Some Aspects of the Survival of Ethiopian Independence in the Period of the Scramble for Africa', *University College Review* Vol.1:1 (Spring 1961), pp.8-24 (p.22); Natsoulas & Natsoulis, *Rimbaud*, pp.49-54; and Caulk, *Jaws*, pp.72-74 & 228-33 for detail on Lagarde's activities.

However, the Italian colonization of Assab in 1882 led to a search for active trading partners from the interior and, consequently, increased economic links with Shoa, since Yohannes displayed little interest in developing trade with the Italians - unlike Menelik, who eagerly developed trading links with both French and Italians, and especially with the latter after Antonelli arrived in 1881 and initiated the exchange of gold and ivory for modern armaments.²⁶³

But in 1882, the Mahdiya - a religious movement which drew on the stresses in Sudanese society created by the oppressive rule of Egypt – began the process of overthrowing Egyptian rule in Sudan.²⁶⁴

Despite the apparent success of Isma'il's attempt to regenerate an Egyptian Empire, his hold upon the Sudan was 'precarious in the extreme, dependent on the vigour of a handful of European officials rather than upon the superiority of the forces at their command'.²⁶⁵ Mehemet Ali's rapacious campaign in the 1820s, the barbarous and inequitable Egyptian taxation system, and the putative suppression of the slave trade²⁶⁶ had all left a legacy of lasting hatred for Egypt.²⁶⁷ So the rise of the Mahdia, sweeping the

²⁶³ Ibid., pp.19-25; And see Caulk, 'Minilik', and Appendix 4, for the desultory nature of European-Abyssinian attempts to establish thriving trade links throughout the 1870-88 period.

²⁶⁴ P.M Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan 1881-98: A Study of its Origins, Development and Overthrow* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), p.3. And see Appendix 4.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p.31. And see Appendix 4.

²⁶⁶ The slave trade was banned in Britain in 1807 and slavery itself made illegal in 1834; moral imperatives lay behind much of the reasons for its banning, but economic factors, principally the introduction of large-scale maritime steam transport - allowing the mass transport of raw materials and manufactured goods to and from Europe and the rest of the globe - were also a major factor; Pakenham, *Scramble*, p. 18. See also Woodward, *Age*, pp. 354-55. The Anglo-Egyptian Anti-Slavery Treaty was concluded in 1877; S. Serels, *Starvation and the State: Famine, Slavery and Power in Sudan, 1883-1956* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) pp.35 & 119.

²⁶⁷ Al-Hajj, *The Nile Valley*, in Anene & Brown, *Africa*, pp.177-79; G.N. Sanderson, *The Nile Basin and the Eastern Horn, 1870-1908*, pp. 592-679, in Oliver & Sanderson, *Cambridge*, pp. 609-13. Despite the 1877 Treaty, many Khedival officials sympathised with Sudanese opposition to this long-established core of the Sudanese economy - Isma'il was a slave-owner himself and only appointed zealously anti-slavery officials such as Gordon to gain international respectability (Brendon, *Decline*, p. 169); this, combined with the fact that many of the enforcing officials were Christians and therefore Infidels, laid fertile ground for the Mahdists. And see Chapter 3 - 'Slavery, Trade and Massawa; an Italian Perspective'.

hated Egyptians away in a seemingly unstoppable tide, was highly popular in Sudan and made it clear to both Egypt and Britain that, not only was the Mahdist threat not going to go away, but that it threatened the very existence of Egypt - and with it the British control over the Eastern Mediterranean and the Suez Canal.²⁶⁸

Between 1882 and 1885 a catalogue of disasters befell the Anglo-Egyptians, including the massacre of the Hicks expedition and the death of Gordon at Khartoum. Egyptian forces were trapped, with the Mahdists in the West and the Abyssinians in the East, in isolated positions including Khartoum,²⁶⁹ Kassala and Keren.²⁷⁰ The Egyptian army was powerless to stop the Mahdists, having been effectively (and ironically) disbanded in 1882 after the Urabi uprising, which itself had led to the British occupation of Egypt.²⁷¹ The only way to rescue the trapped Egyptians and Europeans was to get them out. And the only way to do that was (even more ironically) with Abyssinian help. This resulted in the Hewitt²⁷² treaty of 1884, whereby the Abyssinians - who heretofore had been treated largely with contempt by Britain²⁷³ - agreed to facilitate the Egyptian withdrawal in return for recognition of their claims to territories previously held, or disputed, by Egypt. This included a right to occupy Massawa, land-locked Abyssinia's

²⁶⁸ See Appendix 4.

²⁶⁹ Made the capital of Sudan as a result of Muhammed Ali's expedition of 1820. Holt, *Mahdist*, pp.2-3.

²⁷⁰ Ram, *Anglo-Ethiopian*, p. 48.

²⁷¹ Ibid., pp.48-49; Owen, op.cit., pp.187-88.

²⁷² Rear Admiral Sir William Nathan Wrichte Hewitt (1834-1888). Hewitt is spelt both 'Hewett' and 'Hewitt' in different sources. As most contemporary sources used 'Hewitt', I will too.

²⁷³ See Appendix 5. However, there were sound strategic reasons for the British tendency to keep Abyssinia at arm's length - the British relationship with, and interests in the stability of, Egypt from the mid-Nineteenth century onwards meant that Britain dared not become too close to the Abyssinians for fear of a conflict of interest in the not-unlikely event of a major Egyptian-Abyssinian conflict; see P. Arnold, *Prelude to Magdala: Emperor Theodore of Ethiopia and British Diplomacy* (London: Bellew Publishing, 1991), pp.47-59, and Ram, *Anglo-Ethiopian*, pp.11-58.

only route to the Red Sea, if the Egyptians withdrew altogether.²⁷⁴ So, Yohannes was not best pleased when, on 5 February 1885, the Italians occupied Massawa.

By coincidence, Britain had been thinking about letting the Italians have Massawa (though it was not theirs to give, being still an Egyptian territory) from around January 1884.²⁷⁵ So the possibility of the Italians taking over the Anglo-Egyptian policing role in at least part of the Red Sea area was passingly attractive, especially as they were seen as a counterbalance to emerging French influence in the region.²⁷⁶ As Gladstone succinctly put it, 'I care *more* that we keep out of the Soudan than who goes in'.²⁷⁷ Accordingly, he suggested on 10 January 1884 that 'Massowah, give it up (to Italy) to make a friend'.²⁷⁸

Of course, this remark was made before the Hewitt Treaty (June 1884) and the Congress of Berlin (November 1884), but it was sure to appeal to Italian ears made extra-vigilant for the possibility of gain after 'Imperial fever' set in.²⁷⁹ On 6 October 1884

²⁷⁴ The treaty was concluded in June 1884 and was the only treaty ever concluded by Yohannes with a foreign power. It ostensibly brought peace with Egypt, with whom the Abyssinians had had at least 16 battles with between 1832-76; D.H. Shinn & T.P. Ofansky, *Historical Dictionary of Ethiopia* (Lanham, Maryland; Scarecrow Press, 2013 (2nd ed.), p.214. For all the conditions of the Hewitt treaty, see d'Avray, *Lords*, pp. 104-106, and R.A. Caulk, 'Yohannes IV, the Mahdists, and the colonial partition of north-east Africa', *Transafrican Journal of History*, 1: 2 (July 1971), pp 23-41 (pp.28-29).

²⁷⁵ Lowe, *Reluctant* (vol.1), p.69.

²⁷⁶ See, for instance, Ramm, 'Plantation', pp.213-15.

²⁷⁷ Gladstone to Granville 7 January 1884, in Ramm, *Political Correspondence* (vol.II; 1883-1886), pp.145-46; Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, p.69. And see C.L. Smith, *The Embassy of Sir William White at Constantinople, 1886-1891* (Oxford: University Press), pp.8-9.

²⁷⁸ Lowe & Marzari, *op.cit.*, p.69.

²⁷⁹ Some writers believe that 'Imperial fever' was triggered more by the British occupation of Egypt in 1882 than by the 1884 Congress: see, for instance, R. Hyam, 'The Primacy of Geopolitics: The Dynamics of British Imperial Policy, 1763-1963', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 27: 2 (1999); pp.27-52. However, as Makki points out (in 'Imperial Fantasies', p.741), the Italian quest for Empire acquired 'a sense of immediacy' due as much to the pressures of the Southern question and the desperate economic crises of the 1880s as to jealousy of the other Powers, though of course such factors were far from negligible. Certainly Antonelli's frequent letters from Shoa to Rome during the 1882-85 period, with their tales of the hardships of camel caravans trying to cross impassable terrain, the dangers of inadvertently wandering into wars between the Danakil and the Isa or the Galla and the Oromo, the constant threat of extortion or murder on any given route between Shoa and the coast, and the incessant interference of the French from Obokh, cannot have lit any fires of Imperial enthusiasm on their own. But such letters did, if nothing else, keep alive the possibility of Italian expansion into the Abyssinian hinterland, and may, augmented by the enthusiasm following the Berlin conference, have made the

Gladstone mentioned that Massawa could not after all be handed over to the Italians,²⁸⁰ but the remark likely did not go beyond Cabinet. His comment about making a friend of Italy, however, was a gift to Mancini, who was able to represent it as a request from Britain for assistance.

Between the beginning of October 1884 and the occupation of Massawa in February 1885 the Italians, at the highest diplomatic level, did everything to avoid treading on British sensibilities or interests in the region, though, crucially, by the end of October, Mancini had become convinced that Britain was asking for Italian aid, despite the absence of any evidence for this.²⁸¹ At the beginning of November he told Count Nigra,²⁸² Italian Ambassador to London, to ensure that proposed Italian moves to occupy Beilul, along the coast from Assab, would not meet with British opposition or be seen to infringe upon British interests.²⁸³ Granville, following consultation with the Cabinet, assented to this request without demur, but with a caveat regarding the desirability of also obtaining the Porte's consent - '... I was able to assure (Nigra) that we felt no jealousy

acquisition of Massawa as a commercial alternative to Assab seem essential; see *L'Italia*, I/II, the Antonelli letters, no.246 (5 March 1882) & passim.

²⁸⁰ 'Massowah - we cannot hand to the Italians'. Cabinet note 6 October 1884; Matthews, *Diaries* (vol.11), p220. Whether or not this comment was made in view of the Hewitt Treaty of the previous month is hard to ascertain; it might have been helpful to ensure that the Italians knew of this view, but so far as can be ascertained it remained within Cabinet.

²⁸¹ See document 344, Nigra-Mancini, 20 October 1884, and document 345, Mancini-Nigra, 29 October 1884, in *L'Italia* I/III (1883-1885), pp.70-72.

²⁸² Count Costantino Nigra (1828-1907), ambassador to London. Nigra was highly regarded by the Italian authorities, having accompanied Cavour and Victor Emannuelle to Paris and London during 1855-56, was Italian plenipotentiary to Paris in 1855 and 1861-76, to St.Petersburg 1876-1882 and to London, 1882-85. See letter from Venosta to Nigra at Paris, 20 June 1871, in DDI II/II, p.592-94, for an idea of the high esteem in which he was held by the Italian authorities.

²⁸³ 'The events occurring in the Valley of the Nile... have called forth (the possibility of Italy establishing itself) between Massowah and Assab if that coast was abandoned (by Egypt)... we must assume that England would look without jealousy upon a moderate extension of our (little) Colony of Assab... and should prefer (that the authority of) Italy, for whom friendly relations with England are a constant political tradition, might be established in whatever form it was found convenient... We want, first of all, to be sure of a perfect understanding with (London and) abstain, therefore, from any definite resolution until we know their advice'; No.88, Mancini - Nigra, (copy to Granville), 3 November 1884, in *Correspondence Respecting Ports in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, and the Province of Harrar* (Egypt No.14, 1885).

over the extension of Italian influence... and should, on the contrary, be prepared to welcome it (though H.M.G.) could not consent to give away that which did not belong to them (and recommends) coming to an arrangement with the Porte on the matter'.²⁸⁴ Granville, following Gladstone's cue from 6 October, had perforce told Nigra²⁸⁵ on 13 November 1884 that there was 'no question of Italy doing England a service',²⁸⁶ since the Italians remained convinced that Britain secretly wanted their help in the shape of an Italian presence in the Red Sea ports²⁸⁷ - but by then it was too late. Mancini declared that 'in response to a British invitation we consented to guard with our protection the coasts of the Red Sea'.²⁸⁸ Hence the arrival of the Bersaglieri in Massawa the following February.

A battalion sailed from Naples, to a crescendo of enthusiasm not seen since the sailing of Garibaldi for Sicily a quarter of a century before.²⁸⁹ The ostensible catalyst for this event was the murder of some Italian travelers,²⁹⁰ but clearly such an operation could not be mounted at the drop of a hat and must have been planned well in advance.²⁹¹ It

²⁸⁴ No.90, Granville - Lumley, 5 November 1884, *ibid.*

²⁸⁵ Costantino Nigra (1828-1907), Italian Ambassador to London 1881-85.

²⁸⁶ Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, p.38. Granville's remarks to Nigra, at least as reported by the latter, were highly ambiguous: 'Granville m'a fait observer a ce sujet que l'occupation de cette localite par l'Italie... *ne devait pas etre, selon la pensee du Gouvernement Anglais, un service que l'Italie rendrait a l'Angleterre, mais une marquee d'amite de l'Angleterre envers l'Italie.*' - i.e., any such Italian action shouldn't be regarded by the British government as a help to Britain but, on the contrary, as a favour by Britain to Italy. Nigra concluded by writing that this was the most that he had been able to extract from Granville, and that any further pressure upon him would not lead anywhere; Nigra - Mancini, 13 November 1884, in *L'Italia* I/III, p.77 (my italics); and see FO45/540, Nigra - Rome (translation of conversation with Granville and Nigra's commentary upon same), 11 February 1885 - "(England) shows that the (offer of Italian help) is appreciated, *but that they could not (currently) ask for (help) from anyone, no matter how friendly*, without weakening the moral effect of (measures decided upon)". One can see why Nigra might easily have taken all this as diplomatic-speak for a "nod and a wink" from Granville in tacit approval of an Italian advance.

²⁸⁷ See documents 349 (7 November 1884), 352 (12 November 1884) & 353 (13 November 1884) between Mancini and Nigra in *L'Italia in Africa* I/III, pp.74-77.

²⁸⁸ Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, p.37.

²⁸⁹ d'Avray, *Lords*, p. 108.

²⁹⁰ Theobald, *Mahdiya*, p.138.

²⁹¹ In a letter dated 9 January 1885, Mancini told Cecchi, who was in Spezzia awaiting the launch of an expedition to the Congo, that the mission would be postponed as two ships apparently earmarked for his

was a deliberate imitation of the landing of 'The Thousand' (who were transported by ships of the Rubattino company) to show that Italy was, in 'liberating' Massawa from the tyrannous Egyptians and the threat of the Mahdists, adhering to the laudable aims of the Risorgimento - '... a poor people's mission of peace among other poor folks ruled by foreign despots'. The opposition also invoked the Risorgimento to oppose the occupation, but Depretis, ever the opportunist, chose to enlist the support of the Imperialists by backing them, so Imperialism won.²⁹²

When the Italians occupied Massawa, Yohannes was naturally incensed, both at the Italian action - which he believed, correctly, prefigured Italian expansionist action thereafter - and what he believed to be British perfidy in encouraging the Italian move, since his understanding of the Hewitt Treaty was that an Egyptian evacuation of Massawa would leave it in Abyssinian hands.²⁹³ Clearly, and perfectly understandably, he mistook muddle and preoccupation for treachery; though many British people on the spot thought that the Abyssinians couldn't be trusted to run a port like Massawa,²⁹⁴ and that if the Italians hadn't moved in then the French would have, there was, as we have seen, no deliberate treachery on the part of either Gladstone or Granville. As no Abyssinian occupation of Massawa in the event of an Egyptian withdrawal had been written into the Hewitt treaty, it is more than likely that both were unaware that such an expectation

expedition, the *Amerigo Vespucci* and *Garibaldi*, had in the meantime been diverted for a "special mission" in the Red Sea. This can only have been for the occupation of Massawa, showing that at least one month (and probably more, since the decision to divert the ships would have been taken before Mancini's letter of 9 January) lay between the operation's conception and its execution; Mancini - Cecchi, 9 January 1885, in *L'Italia*, vol. II, *Oceano Indiano*, Tomo II, *Documenti Relativi a Zanzibar e al Benadir* (1884-1891), pp. 9-10.

²⁹² Triulzi, 'Adwa', p.100. As Edward Said observed, 'Every single empire... has said that it is not like all the others... that it has a mission to (enlighten and) bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort'; E. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 2003), p.xxi.

²⁹³ 'A... conviction (that the British had brought the Italians to Massawa and would aid them because they were acting for Britain) at the Imperial court kindled Yohannes' anger at his betrayal by the signatories of the Hewitt (*sic*) treaty'; Caulk, *Between*, p.61.

²⁹⁴ Neither did Yohannes (see Appendix 4, and Jonas, *Battle*, p. 39.)

existed in the mind of Yohannes. Nevertheless, Yohannes watched the Italians expand outwards into territory that was indisputably Abyssinian.²⁹⁵ Following the occupation of Massawa, the Italians continued to probe outwards, occupying Arafali and Arkiki (coastal settlements North-West and South of Massawa respectively) and Sahati (inland towards Sudan) by June 1885.²⁹⁶ At first, once Yohannes' initial hostility to the Italian actions had died down, he began (as early as 19 February 1885, a mere fortnight after the Italian occupation) to see advantages to the situation, such as in the fact that the Italian presence lent greater security to caravans travelling from Sahati to Massawa, and that Yohannes openly declared that he didn't feel able to hold Massawa himself; so that, if anyone else was to hold it against the Mahdists, it might as well be the Italians, provided they acted under British tutelage.

However, this confidence didn't last - Yohannes grew suspicious that the Italians were getting too friendly with the Habab (one of the dominant tribes around Massawa and Suakin that were being influenced by Osman Digna from his base in Tokar - see Chapter 3), and that, though Massawa looked to be remaining in Italian hands for the foreseeable future, he felt that Arkika, Sahati and other places adjacent to Massawa should, as ex-Egyptian/Turkish possessions, revert to him under the terms of the Hewitt Treaty.²⁹⁷ Ras Alula made several fruitless attempts to dislodge the Italians from Sahati in January 1887 before managing to turn the tables on them with a victory at Dogali later in

²⁹⁵ But see Caulk, *Jaws*, p.49, for an alternative view of this matter.

²⁹⁶ By November 1888 they had added Raheita and Beilul; Ram, *Anglo*, p. 63.

²⁹⁷ 'Now that (Yohannes) understands that the Italians occupy Massawa with the sanction of England, he acquiesces (and) does not desire the port for himself, as he is aware (he) could not hold it, but he looks to England to protect his interests (there), no matter who may hold the town. As regards (places adjacent to) Massawa, (he) considers... every other place in the countries of the Habab, Shoho and Danakil (as his own, since they) belonged to Abyssinia till the Turks took them (and should thus now) revert to him, as they do not form part and parcel of Massowah'. All information from letters written between 19 February and 20 May 1886 by Harrison-Smith to Baring and quoted in d'Avray, *Lords*, pp.112-17.

the month. Yohannes protested to Queen Victoria that Dogali would not have happened if the Italians hadn't violated the Hewitt Treaty.²⁹⁸

To be fair to the Italians, Granville and Gladstone had long taken a somewhat aleatoric approach to relations with Italy, sending mixed messages to Rome regarding the position on the Red Sea throughout 1884.²⁹⁹ In January 1884 Gladstone had made his comment about giving Massawa to the Italians and, although in November 1884 Granville told Nigra that Britain did not need Italian help, by December 1884 he was again writing to Gladstone to the effect that, if the Turks didn't mind the Italians taking some of their Red Sea possessions, then Britain - including Baring, in Cairo - wouldn't either, and that he would tell Nigra so.³⁰⁰ If the Italians had stuck to their positions in Assab and Massawa, then Britain would probably have turned a blind eye to their presence in the Red Sea, Tenterden's comments notwithstanding. After all, most of the countries of Europe were after a slice of the African cake; why should Italy be any exception, especially as she had so little to start with, and such a lot to prove? As Salisbury said, 'Italy, it is true, is eminently a hungry Power: but the objects of her

²⁹⁸ Jonas, *Battle*, pp.39-43.

²⁹⁹ And earlier. In June 1880, following the *Esploratore* affair, Granville wrote to Paget saying that the Italian ambassador (Menabrea) had stated that Italy was applying for authority over Assab under the *Exequator* rule. Though he had repeated the British line that Assab was Egyptian territory and thus not amenable to being placed under Italian sovereignty, he told the Italian ambassador that '... however, I could look into the matter and *let him have a positive answer*'. What were the Italians to think when they constantly received such mixed messages? FO45/400, Granville - Paget, 8 June 1880.

³⁰⁰ 'Nigra comes... today. I send a draft (of) the questions he is about to (put to me regarding the Red Sea ports) and some despatches from Baring on the same question ... I will immediately press the Turks (on whether or not they intend to take possession of their Red Sea ports, and if they don't)... it will not be our business to object to Italy taking Beiloul, Zulla and Massowah...' Granville to Gladstone December 20th 1884, in Ramm, *Political Correspondence*, (vol.II) p.298. Ramm also mentions a confidential note of November 3rd 1884, in which Gladstone and Granville discuss British and Egyptian policy regarding the Red Sea and recommend acquiescence in an Italian occupation.

hunger are no great matter to us'.³⁰¹ With luck '... they might be looked upon as proxy Brits without any claim on the public purse',³⁰² helping to keep order like Special Constables, as Gladstone had surmised they might when he pondered giving them Massawa. However, having gained Massawa, the Italians decided to push the envelope as far as they could.

British Intelligence had, throughout the mid-1880s, started to become increasingly concerned about international activity on every part of the African littoral. Brackenbury³⁰³ noted the increasing French presence in the Mediterranean and East and West Africa, as well as their presence in the Red Sea since 1884, potentially threatening British routes to Suez, the Cape and India.³⁰⁴ Yet it was the Italian attempt to expand into Abyssinia from Assab and Massawa that Brackenbury was most concerned to bring to the attention of the Foreign Office from 1886 onwards. Though he knew that 'Our object is to remain on the most friendly terms possible',³⁰⁵ with Italy, Italian actions were causing grave concerns among those dealing with both the local population and with the Italians themselves.³⁰⁶

The British authorities were often baffled by what the Italians did or did not want. Salisbury (while Foreign Secretary) wrote to Wolff in Constantinople, asking him to

Find out... if you can exactly what the Turks wish for (re the Italian occupation of Massawa). The whole scheme (i.e. the occupation) was

³⁰¹ Quoted in Roberts, *Salisbury*, p.440. By 1887 he had started to change his tune.

³⁰² Beaver, *Under*, p.199.

³⁰³ Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Brackenbury (1837-1914), Director of Military Intelligence January 1886-December 1890; *ibid.*, pp.136-92 & 328.

³⁰⁴ Beaver, *op.cit.*, pp.198-99.

³⁰⁵ TNA FO 78/3975 Brackenbury H., 'Italy, Egypt and the Red Sea' 21 December 1886.

³⁰⁶ Beaver, *op.cit.*, pp.198-99.

so insane that I am not surprised that the Italians claim that (Granville) forced them to do it, and that they want to get out. But they want something for their pains, and I can't quite make out what it is.³⁰⁷

Also, there seems to have been genuine confusion in London regarding what lay behind the occupation of Massawa, and concern about its implications for British Imperial policy. As Salisbury wrote to Lumley in September 1885

Lord Granville told me that England had had no share in inducing Italy to (occupy Massawa). M. de Nigra told me that it was (done) at the instigation and by the instruction of England. I do not know which (of them) was guilty of a mistake. I suppose that... communications took place (by) hints and suggestions... and that (Granville) imagined he was absolutely passive (while Nigra) imagined that Granville was pushing him on. But the result is a situation of considerable complexity. The Italians are at Massawa in defiance of the Treaty of Paris. They might reply that we are in the same position (in Egypt) for neither of us have the consent of the Porte.³⁰⁸ (But the) advance into Egypt was forced upon us (by events) while the Italian invasion... is absolutely spontaneous.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁷ SP A/44/33, Salisbury - Wolff, 18 August 1885.

³⁰⁸ The Treaty of Paris, 30 March 1856, was concluded by the allies, following the Crimean War, to guarantee the integrity of the Ottoman Empire against external aggression. Aimed mainly at keeping Russia out of Ottoman territories, the Black Sea and the Balkans, it was followed on 15 April by a further treaty formed by Austria, France and Britain to further guarantee the Ottoman Empire against any threat, from whatever source, to its independence and integrity; Bourne, *Victorian*, pp.79-80.

³⁰⁹ But see Crispi's comments of July 1888 regarding the occupation of Massawa, above.

The Turks are very sore about it, and it is a difficulty in our present negotiations. We do not want to throw Italy over. She has been a very good friend to us. (But) it is very difficult to defend her action to the Porte...³¹⁰

There was considerable confusion, too, in the British Parliament about whether or not Italy had acted upon instructions from, or with the permission of, Britain, a matter which Granville's vagueness didn't much help to clarify. Earl de la Warr, in a general debate in the House of Commons on the matter of Italian activity in the Red Sea, commented that preoccupation with developments in Egypt and Sudan had engendered silence over what would otherwise have attracted significant comment (i.e. the occupation of Massawa).³¹¹ In part of the same debate Granville did little to clarify matters, stating that

...(When) the Italian Ambassador enquired whether HMG was opposed to an extension of Italian jurisdiction (from Assab to Raheita and Beilul and thence to Massawa and possibly Zeila) I assured him that HMG felt no jealousy (towards Italy over such Matters) *but would, on the contrary, welcome it.*³¹²

Such comments merely reinforced the impression in some British parliamentary circles that the occupation had resulted from active British connivance. Sir Michael Hicks-

³¹⁰ SP A/44/20, Salisbury - Lumley, 14 September 1885. Salisbury noted in the letter that '(Nigra, before leaving London) asked us point blank whether we wished Italy to stay in the Red Sea or not... it (is a question which is) difficult to answer. We should prefer Italy to any other European power... But until the position is regularized, we can hardly (approve) of it.'

³¹¹ Gilbert George Reginald Sackville, 8th Earl de la Warr (1869-1915), politician and soldier, *Hansard*, 3, HC, 23 February 1885, v.294 cc.1004-07.

³¹² Granville, *ibid.* My italics.

Beach,³¹³ in the discussion over whether or not the Italians should be asked to help relieve Kassala, revealed that it was

‘...(HMG) who first suggested that Massawa should be occupied by Italy (with or without the assent of the Sultan) and that by the same token (should allow them) to help in the relief of Kassala.’³¹⁴

Granville and Hicks Beach’s comments could hardly fail to be seen by anyone as anything but an active encouragement of Italian expansion in the area; the fact that he concluded his comments by saying that HMG could not give away what it didn’t possess, and that the Turks should have followed British advice and occupied the ports themselves, made no difference to the impression he created of British complaisance in the matter. In this atmosphere it is not surprising that Gladstone’s assertion that ‘Italy (has) most cordial relations with this country; but (there) is no alliance or plan of military co-operation between the two countries’ was largely forgotten.³¹⁵

It is not difficult, whichever way one looks at it, to see why the Italians thought Britain was *actively* encouraging her to expand her presence in the Red Sea, despite Tenterden’s warnings of 1880 - witness Savile’s comment to Salisbury

(there is) no doubt that (the occupation was) the spontaneous

³¹³ Michael Edward Hicks Beach (1837-1916), 1st Earl of Aldwyn, Chancellor of the Exchequer 1885-86 & 1895-1902.

³¹⁴ Hicks-Beach, *Hansard*, 3, HC, 2 March 1885, v.294 cc.1784-803. Gladstone had declined the offer as inimical to British prestige; see note 52, p.13.

³¹⁵ Gladstone, *Hansard*, 3, HC, 26 February 1885, v.294, c.1416.

Act of the (Italians). Negotiations were done principally at Constantinople but (Granville) said as it didn't belong to (Britain) he couldn't dispose of it, *though he would rather see Italy there than any other power...*³¹⁶

The disparity between British and Italian views over what really happened regarding Massawa set the tone for Anglo-Italian relations over the next decade, as the activities of Italian 'men on the spot' began to cause serious friction between British and Italian authorities in the region, however much the Italians tried to assuage British concerns at the highest diplomatic level. Such actions also began to cause problems with Egypt - in August 1883 the Egyptians visited Raheita and raised their flag, only to have Italians from Assab pull it down.³¹⁷ In October the Egyptians retaliated by evicting an Italian party trying to make a trading post at Samawanag, between Zeila and Berbera.³¹⁸ Nothing daunted, Antonelli himself visited Zeila in the Italian corvette *Castel Fidardo* in June 1884 to demonstrate that the Italians would support and befriend those who sought their aid, and to show the Rasheida of Zeila the 'inadvisability of interfering with Italian traded with Shoa'.³¹⁹

With the political imprint of Italy being firmly established in the Red Sea, Italian trade (much of it illicit) was by this time burgeoning, and also breaking the tacit agreements among the Powers to inhibit the importation of munitions to the coastal

³¹⁶ SP A/38/29, Savile - Salisbury, 9 October 1885. My italics.

³¹⁷ IO L/PS/9/55, Blair - Chief Secretary, Bombay, 20 August 1883.

³¹⁸ IO L/PS/9/55, C.N.M. Sealy (acting Consul for Somali coast) - Baring, 30 October 1883.

³¹⁹ IO L/PS/9/55, Hunter - Baring, 5 June 1884. The Rasheida, an Arabian tribe, were notorious for causing trouble, and it is unlikely that they would have been particularly bothered by Italian bluster. And see Appendix 5.

hinterland. In October 1884, six cases labeled 'worked iron' were consigned for shipment to Assab on the initiative of Bienenfeld-Rolph. They were found to contain 150 guns, and were followed shortly by another shipment, this time correctly labelled but without an import license. In order not to disturb Anglo-Italian relations these arms were allowed through, but, as Blair pointed out,

It is needless to point out the very great danger (of) allowing arms to circulate freely in the Danakil country and (from there to) Galla and Somali (territories). Political considerations alone would (justify) HMG in remonstrating against unrestricted (arms imports) into Assab ... for disposal to native tribes. (Also the import of arms to Assab is) detrimental) to British interests in that the slave trade will be immensely aided by (an influx of firearms into these lands) - further, the safety of the Gulf of Aden ports will be imperilled with travelers and trade routes subjected to (increased dangers).³²⁰

Again, it must be emphasized that British reports implicated the French quite as much as the Italians in the pursuit of illegal arms imports to these territories,³²¹ but increasingly both Powers were being mentioned as being jointly responsible for such activities, and while the French made no secret of their Imperial and commercial aims in the area, or of

³²⁰ IO L/PS/9/55, Blair - General Secretary, Bombay, 10 October 1884.

³²¹ For instance, Hogg sent letter, dated 19 February 1886, to the French Vice-Consul at Aden, concerning the 'very large' import of arms- 2,100 rifles, 30,000 remington cartridges, 12 pistols and 1 can of powder - imported by French merchants via Obokh or Tajourra, none of them properly documented, between 14 February 1885 and 1 February 1886; IO L/PS/9/56, Hogg - Political Department, Bombay, 22 February 1886.

their indifference to British objections, the Italians were supposed to be the devoted friends and allies of Britain, and thus might reasonably be expected to co-operate more in such activities.³²² On 6 May 1886, for instance, Baring reported to Lord Iddesleigh³²³ that Italian boats ‘which were recently captured whilst trading with the rebels’ had also attempted to raise the Italian flag at Taklai (Mersa Teklay, halfway between Massawa and Port Sudan). In what was to become a familiar pattern of behaviour, the Italians at first denied all knowledge of the incident, then eventually admitted it, opining that perhaps the authorities at Massawa had been ‘somewhat indiscreet’ in sending out boats which at once broke trading rules and tried to raise a flag in territory which didn’t belong to them. On 6 December 1886, Baring again had to report to Iddesleigh that Italian boats were engaging in illegal trade with natives hostile to the Anglo-Egyptian authorities North of Massawa, and once again had tried to hoist the Italian flag at Taklai.

The boats had been seized under the authority of Lieutenant-Colonel Kitchener,³²⁴ though (in what was to become a familiar pattern of behaviour) the Italians denied all knowledge of any impropriety on the part of their subjects and demanded the release ‘... in somewhat imperious terms’³²⁵ of the seized boats. Speaking to Sir J.S. Lawley³²⁶ later in the month, the Italian diplomat Giacomo Malvano³²⁷ said that he

³²² As Hunter pointed out, while in terms of commercial strength and influence ‘... neither France nor Italy are in a position to compare with (Britain) at present (the) arms traffic can only affect us injuriously without affording any.... commercial advantages to (either France or Italy), while ‘... when the Somali are in possession of an unlimited supply of guns it will be (practically) impossible to administer the Somali coast ports’; IO L/PS/9/55, Hunter - Baring, 20 November 1884.

³²³ Stafford Henry Northcote, First Earl of Iddesleigh (1818-1887), Chancellor of the Exchequer 1874-80, Foreign Secretary August 1886 - January 1887.

³²⁴ Horatio Herbert Kitchener (1850-1916), Governor of East Sudan and the Red Sea Littoral from September 1886.

³²⁵ IOR/20/A/1171.

³²⁶ British Ambassador at Rome.

³²⁷ Secretary-General at the Consulta 1896-1907; exact office at this time unknown. Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, p.473.

... regretted that the feeling of suspicion of the designs of Italy exists in the minds of the Egyptian authorities (but that the Italians) would prove that the policy of Italy is not activated by aggressive aims, but by the desire to be allowed to develop in tranquility the trade... of Massowah.³²⁸

Despite such silken assurances, over the following months the Italians continued to flout the rules, still trading illegally, and also allowing Italian merchants to trade tax-free at Massawa, while taxing everybody else. In April 1887 another Italian boat was seized by HMS *Albacore* running contraband, shortly before the 'lead' incident. In all three incidents, the Italian government denied all knowledge of the incident before temporizing and then tacitly admitting foreknowledge.³²⁹

Running contraband was one thing - no doubt the Italians were not the only ones guilty of such activity, and no doubt such localised, individual enterprise was not always known to or approved of by the Italian authorities. However, they also consistently interfered with the functioning of normal rules of trade, laying down one set of rules regarding import-export customs for Italians, and another for non-Italians. Wartime exigencies were used as the excuse for this more systematized form of commercial abuse. On 3 March 1887 Lawley reported that 'Italian trade (was) wholly free from duties at Massowah while others (were) taxed'. Challenged on the topic, M. Malvano said that this action 'was due to disruption of trade caused by fighting with the Abyssinians' and that

³²⁸ IOR/20/A/1171.

³²⁹ IOR/20/A/1171.

otherwise the high duties being levied on non-Italian imports would have gone down.³³⁰

But as late as October 1887 the same strictures were still being imposed by the Italians, who weren't the only ones at war but who were alone in showing such blatantly unbalanced trading practices. On 10 October, Baring informed Salisbury that Kitchener had obtained a set of Italian excise regulations whereby 'no customs duties will be levied along the coast under Italian supervision', meaning that all other ports along the Red Sea coast, e.g, Agig, an Egyptian port, would lose all trade to the Italians (as indeed would Zeila, Berbera, and Obokh). Baring pointed out - in yet another example of how good the Italians were becoming at exploiting the confusion of governance in the Red Sea littoral - that the Egyptians could scarcely be seen to be objecting to this practice, since to do so would alert their Turkish masters and get them into trouble for having allowed the Italians to behave in such a way in the first place. Salisbury reported to Baring, on the 17 March, that the Italians had dropped this action on HMG's request; but it didn't mean that they had given up on trying to rig the local market.³³¹

³³⁰ IOR/20/A/1171.

³³¹ It is interesting to note that, despite Crispi's claim that 'this bourgeois habit of always counting the cost' in "francs and centimes" of Imperial enterprise was unpatriotic and unbecoming an Imperial power (see note 439 below), the Italians were always very keen on counting everyone else's money when they found they could tax it, and not at all fussy about how they got it. Though all colonial powers used force to extract revenues from the indigenous inhabitants, the Italians, as witnessed by their treatment of Indian merchants (see note 332 below) and non-Italian subjects in Massawa (see 'The Massawa Incident', below), and the readiness of tribesmen once friendly to the Italians to flee their 'protection' in favour of shelter from even the hated Egyptians, indicates that they were unusually ruthless in their treatment of subjected peoples. As Labanca notes, 'The propensity of Italians to use a heavy hand in matters of colonial order (indicated that) Italian colonialism manifested authoritarian inclinations from its inception... the autonomy Rome conceded to the colonies; the strong role the armed forces played there; the undisputed recourse to military tribunals and summary executions (and other abuses of power) is attested to by... a Commission of Inquiry in 1891, whose (examination of military and civilian activities in Massawa) led to an important criminal proceeding'; N. Labanca, *Italian Colonial Internment*, in Ben-Ghiat & Fuller, *Italian Colonialism*, pp. 27-36 (p.29); and see S.C. Bruner, *Press and Parliament, Liberalism and Colonialism: Italy's 1891 Livraghi Affair and the Waning Influence of the Civilising Mission*, (Chicago: Loyola University, PhD Thesis, December 2011). However, there were hidden reasons that might explain this apparently excessive rapacity - see 'Slavery, Trade and Massawa - an Italian perspective', Chapter 3).

On 20 March 1887, Baring once again had to inform Salisbury of Italian irregularities; he had received petitions from ‘numerous British-Indian subjects resident at Massowah’ that, while under the Ottomans and Egyptians these traders had been happy and prosperous, under the Italians they were very unhappy. The Italians had imposed punitively heavy duties on Gold,³³² high charges for wharfage, refused all compensation for goods damaged while in Italian warehouses, set the value of goods as they pleased and arrested and imprisoned anyone who didn’t register properly as an alien.

Additionally, the British in Aden were becoming uneasy at the amount of cattle being exported by the Italians from Berbera, since Aden and its hinterland depended on cattle exports from Berbera for its meat.³³³ Furthermore, it appeared that the Italians were trying to use their preparation for war against the Abyssinians as a cover for expanding their territorial gains on the Red Sea littoral at Anglo-Egyptian expense. Kitchener, in a letter to Baring of 20 May 1887, pointed out that all the signs were that they meant to occupy Kassala and even advance into Sudan via territory ceded by Abyssinia to Egypt.³³⁴ As Kitchener said in May 1887, the results of this kind of activity were that

³³² ‘This is unique in the world and harmful to Indians who only send gold home as silver is not accepted in India’. Later, the Italians alienated their allies in the Eritrea-Sudan region, especially the Habab and Beni-Amer tribes, by similarly rapacious methods of taxation. But see Chapter 3.

³³³ ‘Hunter is getting rather uneasy at the quantity of cattle exported by the Italians from Berbera, on which Aden depends... It might be well to warn the Italian government that difficulties may arise if they depend too exclusively on the Berbera supply’; IOR/20/A/1171, Baring- Salisbury, 9 October 1887.

³³⁴ ‘I am... sorry to hear (about the planned Italian campaign against Abyssinia, and) that they intend (using) the Lebla river, which is in our territory... I cannot help thinking (that) they want to drive us... 150 miles north by persuasion (and turn) the proposed expedition into one of conquest of a position in the Soudan between us and Abyssinia, and then acquire a road to Kassala through the province recently delegated to Egypt by Abyssinia... it behoves us to be very cautious in allowing their demands (and that we need) to have a clear guarantee of (their future actions and frontiers) In Abyssinia, Soudan is looked upon as Egyptian, and we have had help from the Abyssinians and have very friendly relations with them...’ IOR/20/A/1171, Kitchener-Baring, 20 May 1887.

‘Italy has a very bad name in the Soudan’,³³⁵ and that they weren’t winning themselves any friends.

They also (particularly Bienenfeld-Rolph, in Aden) practiced the import of lead and other materials useful as munitions to Abyssinia (which could, and frequently did, fall into the hands of the Mahdists), despite the danger that this posed to all European colonists along the Red Sea littoral and its hinterland, and despite the fact that the British and French had mutually agreed to ban all such trade owing to the dangers entailed by such actions. And, worst of all from a Gladstonian moral standpoint, they (apparently) continued to turn a blind eye to the slave trading going on under their noses.³³⁶

In 1887, Bienenfeld-Rolph’s successor (his son, Victor),³³⁷ also featured on the diplomatic landscape, this time having granted, some time during April 1887, a license to export seven tons of lead from Aden to Assab. Concern was raised by Baring to Salisbury about this on 28 April 1887, since lead was a principal constituent of ammunition manufacture, and it was feared that any such import could end up being used by the Mahdists against any of the colonizing powers.³³⁸

This particular episode resulted, on 29 April 1887, in the British and French announcing a blockade on the Red Sea coast, from Tajourra to Suakin, of any materials

³³⁵ Ibid, IOR/20/A/1171.

³³⁶ Britain regarded itself as being the moral pioneer in the fight against slavery. ‘Pride in British morality reinforced the arrogance of British Power. The British sense of superiority as the World’s leader in liberty... accorded with their view of themselves as uniquely benevolent among nations. This self-regarding aura of exceptionalism became stronger after 1815 when the coincidence of power (the defeat of Napoleon) and virtue (the ending of the slave trade) suggested... that the two were linked’; D. Pavlakis, ‘The development of British Overseas Humanitarianism and the Congo Reform Campaign’, *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 11: 1 (Spring 2010), pp. un-numbered. In the first decades of the nineteenth century the British government, in its concerted drive against slavery, had paid other countries to stop partaking of the trade - Portugal received 300,000 pounds in 1815 and Spain 400,000 in 1820 (Woodward, *Age*, pp. 354-55). One wonders, considering the parlous state of Italian finances in Eritrea (see Chapter 3) what effect paying the Italians to stop their active continuance of the slave trade in the Red Sea after 1882 would have had.

³³⁷ IOR/20/A/531.

³³⁸ IOR/20/A/1171.

that might be used for waging war against the colonial powers. On 30 April, Kennedy cabled Salisbury from Rome that, according to M. Malvano, the Italian government knew nothing of such actions, that such an export was as much a threat to Italian nationals as to anyone else, and that the Italian government would investigate the matter. Despite this, the export went ahead.³³⁹

Shortly after this, on 3 May, the Italians (with breathtaking sleight-of-hand) turned the announcement of the Anglo-French blockade to their advantage. Under the cover of appearing to join in the blockade, they proposed dividing the surveillance of the Red Sea coast from Massawa to Suakin between Britain and Italy, taking Ras Kasar (halfway between Massawa and Suakin, on the Eritrean-Sudanese border) as the point of demarcation. Simultaneously, they announced a blockade of the coast from Hankila³⁴⁰ to Difnan island (slightly North of Massawa), announcing their intention to blockade the coast from Massawa to Suakin.

There were good reasons, from the British point of view, for wanting to prevent the extension of Italian influence as far North as Ras Kasar. Local tribes owed what allegiance they cared to offer the colonists to the Anglo-Egyptian authorities in Suakin - though they had had commercial dealings with the Italians, they did not recognize their political authority and, if they found themselves under Italian domination, would likely align themselves with tribes hostile to Britain.³⁴¹

Kitchener had suggested that the Italians should have dominion only over a stretch from Massawa to Ras Harb, considerably south of Ras Kasar, since the coast North of

³³⁹ It can hardly be a coincidence that the exporting company, to which Bienenfeld-Rolph had granted the license, belonged to himself; IOR/20/A/1171.

³⁴⁰ Location unknown - possibly North of Assab.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

Ras Harb still belonged to Egypt, and any extension of Italian influence North of it would upset the delicate tribal balance of the district. 'Against this opinion M. Malvano remonstrated vehemently, stating... that (enforcing such a Southerly limit to the Italian blockade) would imply an unfriendly feeling towards Italy...' ³⁴²

By 18 May the matter was reaching boiling point. '... (Malvano) was expressing himself (vehemently) on the expectation of the Italian Government that their action would be actively opposed by Great Britain (and that Kitchener) might oppose by force any application of the blockade (North of Ras Harb)' ³⁴³

Even Lord Salisbury, who so far had been complaisant about Italian activity in the area, was eventually moved to express concern about these peremptory actions. On 4 August he wrote to Baring that

... the right of surveillance (if granted to the Italians) would probably involve sooner or later the assertion of territorial rights... I feel sure that (the Anglo-Egyptian authorities) would strongly object to Italian authority being pushed so far North... ³⁴⁴

In the three months between the British accession to the Mediterranean Agreements in February 1887 and the dispute over the limits of the Italian blockade in May, Britain and

³⁴² Kennedy (Ambassador to Rome) to Salisbury 7 May 1887; *ibid.*

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁴ Salisbury-Baring, IOR/20/A/1171. As he said later, '...the Italians will never lose anything for want of asking'; Salisbury - Malet, FO 343/2, January 24 1888. However, as we shall see in Chapter 3, the Italians had very good reasons, of which the British were unaware, for wanting to extend their sphere as far north as Ras Kasar.

Italy had come to the brink of armed conflict. Just as it seemed things couldn't get any worse, they did; Francesco Crispi came to power in August 1887.

Part 2. The Crispi Era

Depretis and Crispi were both Southern Italians who drew their political support from the South, but there the resemblance between them ended. Crispi, one of Garibaldi's Thousand,³⁴⁵ had been active during the turbulent days of the Risorgimento. But his character and experiences, while making him an effective revolutionary, did not necessarily provide the makings of a Statesman. 'Crispi the Foreign Minister and Crispi the follower of Mazzini were indistinguishable: he could never shake of the days of his youth (spent) as a conspirator in exile, with a love of... dramatic personal interventions... (his) temperament was disastrous in a Foreign Minister... a man of impulse... he lashed out on every issue in which Italian prestige was remotely involved'.³⁴⁶ He was regarded as a 'wild man' who inspired 'alarm rather than confidence' in foreign diplomats,³⁴⁷ and '... treated all criticism of himself as unpatriotic'³⁴⁸ - hardly desirable attributes for a man tasked with steering the young and vulnerable Italian state through the tricky waters of European diplomacy. To quote Lowe, 'The Italy of Crispi was not (that) of Robilant.

³⁴⁵ Roberts, *Salisbury*, p.530. Interestingly both Haymerle and Andrassy who, like Crispi, became Prime Ministers of their country later in life, were also revolutionaries in their youth, and were involved in the 1848 uprisings; Andrassy had fled Austria under sentence of death for treason in 1849 and Haymerle, in later life regarded as uncommonly timid and pedestrian (Bismarck joked that he always 'uttered an emphatic "No" three times on waking... for fear of having undertaken some commitment in his sleep'), also narrowly escaped execution; Bridge, *Sadowa*, pp.72, 90 & 108; and see Lyall, Sir Alfred, *The Life of Lord Dufferin and Ava* (London: John Murray, 1905, 2 Vols), vol.2, p.216.

³⁴⁶ Lowe, *Salisbury*, pp.29-31. Roberts cites Salisbury's comment about Crispi's 'incurable propensity for breaking windows'; Roberts, *Salisbury*, p.499.

³⁴⁷ Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, p.49.

³⁴⁸ D. Mack Smith, *A Prehistory of Fascism*, in Salomone, *Italy*, pp.103-22 (p.118).

When Salisbury had made his initial agreement in 1887 Italian foreign policy was in safe hands, but... under Crispi, it became less reliable and even began to clash with British interests',³⁴⁹

There were three main areas in which Crispi's expansionist ideas came into conflict with British interests. Firstly, one of the main features of Crispi's Imperialist dream was a violent antagonism to the Ottoman Empire, which was composed in large part of territories, European and African, once incorporated into the Roman Empire. Ostensibly, his animus was based upon the familiar Mazzinian grounds that it was an Oppressor of the Peoples, though there is no evidence that Crispi's neo-Roman Empire would have been any more beneficent to its subjects.³⁵⁰ From 1887 he tried to force the Porte to undertake a wholesale reform of the Empire (thereby incurring the lasting hostility of the Sultan), and supported Cretan and Bulgarian independence efforts during 1887-89, threatening at one point to bombard Benghazi for some "imagined slight".³⁵¹ Salisbury had continually to remind him that the object of the second Mediterranean Agreement (of December 1887³⁵²) was to uphold the Ottoman Empire, not divide it, though Crispi's undisguised aim was to prise Tripoli away from the Ottomans as a first step in the recreation of the Roman Empire.³⁵³

³⁴⁹ Lowe, *Reluctant*, p.48.

³⁵⁰ Pan-Slavism, as an expression of Russian expansionist policy, Crispi regarded as inimical to Italian interests, since it posed a threat to Austrian security; unlike Mazzini, the only Balkan peoples whose liberation struggles he favoured were the Greeks (who were non-Slav) and the Bulgarians (who were anti-Russian). Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, pp.51-52. 'Only Austria...(was) capable of opposing a stout barrier to the menacing expansion of Russia, against the danger of a tsarist unification of the Balkans, which would directly threaten Italy from the Adriatic'; Chabod, *Statecraft*, p.60.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.53.

³⁵² See Salisbury to Karolyi and Catalani 12 December 1887, in Lowe, *Reluctant II: Documents*, p.61.

³⁵³ Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, pp.52-53.

Secondly, there was his constant hostility towards France. Although Salisbury was adamant that 'France is, and must always remain, England's greatest danger',³⁵⁴ nevertheless the favourable political climate between France and Britain continued in a positive direction throughout the nineteenth century, the occasional invasion scare and territorial squabble notwithstanding.³⁵⁵ The fact that from 1887 Britain was effectively aligned with the Central Powers did not mean that Salisbury was prepared to seek a quarrel, much less war, with France: we have seen that he stoutly refused to be drawn into an anti-French aggression pact with an Italy led by the sober Depretis and Robilant in February 1887. However, Crispien spent much of the 1880s and 1890s indulging in behaviour that threatened to spark a war between Italy and France. He 'felt no gratitude for Magenta and Solferino, only annoyance at the persistence of French moral tutelage over Italy',³⁵⁶ continually sniped at the French over Nice, Savoy and Corsica and from 1887 onwards goaded them at every opportunity. He made Italy's already parlous economic situation immeasurably worse by escalating the Tariff war between the two countries - a war which had its origins during the Depretis era, but which escalated during 1886-87 and led to a full-blown economic depression in Italy during 1887-90, a near-collapse of the banking system and a revolution in Sicily in 1893.³⁵⁷ And, continuing a

³⁵⁴ Quoted in Roberts, *Salisbury*, p.499. 'Deeply suspicious of France's foreign policy, especially towards Italy and Mexico, he worried that her 'unscrupulous worship of military glory' might eventually lead to war with Britain' (Ibid., p.45), and that '(the French were)... unreasonable and have so much incurable hatred of England' (quoted in Marlowe, *Cromer in Egypt*, p. 136).

³⁵⁵ 'It was only (during the last third of the nineteenth century) that Russia and France came to be regarded as the traditional, the eternal, enemies of Great Britain (but) With France, friendship had been the rule ever since 1815, hostility the exception. (The fact of their colonial activities) did not necessarily make them enemies; it often made them partners. (Minor disputes) were dwarfed by (Anglo-French co-operation) in Syria, China and Mexico (and when) conflicts arose... there was enough common sentiment to ensure that these would be settled... by negotiation, not war.' Taylor, *Struggle*, pp. 284-85. Contrast this view with those others expressed in Chapter 1.

³⁵⁶ Lowe, *Salisbury*, p.9 & 31; Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, p.48.

³⁵⁷ Clark, *Modern Italy*, pp.93-99 & 101-04. Lowe, *Salisbury*, pp.27-28; Mack Smith, *Italy*, pp.157-62; Robson, *Italy*, pp.24-25. As Whitfield says, 'Crispien looked to Africa with imperial dreams, building roads

long line of belief among many of the Italian Left, particularly those from the South, that Italy's fate was bound up with that of Germany, her "natural ally",³⁵⁸ he was responsible for the Italo-German military convention of January 1888. This, not surprisingly, alarmed the French into believing that he was actively preparing for war against France, as did the rise in Italian naval armaments that led, briefly, to Italy having the second-largest and most modern fleet in Europe.³⁵⁹

The traditional view of Crispi's intemperate activity has, until recently, been that his actions and rhetoric were, in fact, based more upon fear of France than upon hatred - 'What seemed to successive French ambassadors as deliberate bellicosity on Crispi's part was simply his unfortunate manner, his normal method of doing business with anyone'.³⁶⁰ However, Duggan has convincingly argued that Crispi actually intended to provoke a war with France, in which the features of the Triple Alliance and the Mediterranean agreements would see her crushed by Germany on land and Britain at sea. Certainly his actions during the Massawa Crisis are highly indicative of such a wish. On this reading, his view was that defeat of France would remove two of his greatest fears, a French invasion via Italy's long and vulnerable coastline, and the obviation of any

there when there were none in Sicily', making the island - of which Crispi was a native - ripe for revolution; J.H. Whitfield, review of D.M. Smith, *A History of Sicily* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968), in *Italian Studies* Vol.24:1 (1969); p. 115.

³⁵⁸ For a dissection of the convoluted thought-processes that led Crispi and others of the Left to the "glittering mirage" of Germany as a shining beacon of liberalism and the natural ally of Italy, see Chabod, *Statecraft*, pp.1-66.

³⁵⁹ Robson, *Italy*, p.23; see also Clark, *Modern Italy*, pp.26, 46-48 & 94-96.

³⁶⁰ Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, pp.48-49. In February 1891, as the result of a minor bankruptcy case involving Italian interests in Philippopolis, Bulgaria, Crispi insisted that "... no concessions could be made by the Italian Government, who demanded full reparations and that they were ready to proceed to any extremity"; Hardinge of Penshurst, Lord, *Old Diplomacy: The Reminiscences of Lord Hardinge of Penshurst* (London: John Murray, 1947, pp. 43-44). A month after the Philippopolis affair, having '... done all in his power to provoke his fall by his imperious and overbearing attitude, and by a violent outburst in the Chamber against a party of the Right that was supporting him', Crispi fell from power; Hardinge, *ibid.*, p.44.

possible Franco-Papal plot to demolish the Italian state.³⁶¹ Crispi feared a French conspiracy with the Vatican as part of a plan to destroy the Italian state (even when the rest of the Left had ceased to worry about such an eventuality).³⁶² He feared even more a French seaborne invasion along Italy's long and vulnerable coast which, large navy or not, it would have been practically impossible to stop. This fear was greatly magnified by two factors during the 1885-90 period: the emergence of the revanchist Boulanger in France, which made the onset of war between France and the Central Powers seem extremely likely; and the achievement by 1888 of French naval parity with Britain, one result of which was a concentration of the French fleet at Toulon, a move caused in great part by fear of attack by Italy;³⁶³ 'Crispi, it was firmly believed, in contrast to Bismarck, was bent on war'.³⁶⁴

As if this was not bad enough, as time passed it became obvious that Italy would, in the event of a war with France, be a liability and not a help. The commentary in Chapter 1 on Italy's developmental background shows that she was behind all the other Powers in economic and military development. Throughout the 1880-90s she suffered a series of defeats at the hands of the natives of Abyssinia - at Dogali in 1887, Amba Alage in 1895, Mekele and Adowa in 1896³⁶⁵ - following which Salisbury was moved to comment that 'I

³⁶¹ For a full exposition of Duggan's view, see *Francesco Crispi*, pp.550-69, and 'Italy's pursuit of War against France', pp.315-29.

³⁶² Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, p.49. 'In Italy... the breach between Church and State (prevented the formation of a parliamentary opposition to the Left-dominated governments of the post-1870 years) so that (between 1870 and 1919) it has been suggested (that) the working of democracy in Italy suffered from the absence of a responsible conservative party'. Joll, *Europe*, p.7. One of Crispi's greatest nightmares was a joint Franco-Austrian plot to join the Papacy in overthrowing the Italian state, hence his hostility to irredentism and his constant anxiety to keep the Triple Alliance viable and Britain onside.

³⁶³ Lowe, *Salisbury*, pp.26-53.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.48. See Duggan, 'Pursuit of War', for an analysis of Crispi's labyrinthine thought-process regarding France as a potential aggressor.

³⁶⁵ Caulk, *Jaws*, pp.76-127 & 421-564; Jonas, *Adowa*, pp.40-43, 120-147 & 173-207.

(wish) our Italian friends had less capacity for being beaten'.³⁶⁶ The brief burst of naval build-up in the late 1880s made no real difference to this. The Italian navy was not fit for purpose. 'The ships are good but the personnel are absolutely useless. They... pray to Heaven in a gale, (but) Heaven (will never) steer the ships... (Prayers) are excellent additions to energy and muscle, but no protection against shot and shell',³⁶⁷ while in 1893 a Royal Navy officer wrote that 'If I had a heavy job on hand... I would rather... attempt it without than with Italian help'.³⁶⁸ Salisbury wearily commented in 1891 that

... the Italian alliance is an unprofitable and... onerous corollary on the German alliance... Germany and Austria are very useful friends (and) value the Italian alliance greatly, because it means many battalions to them: and for their sake we value it too.³⁶⁹

Admittedly, Crispi cannot be blamed for all of the ills which beset Anglo-Italian relations after his accession to power in August 1887. Though, as we have seen, Mancini and Depretis publicly abjured any Imperialist adventures before the Berlin Conference of 1884-85,³⁷⁰ it is true that some Italians became obsessed with colonial expansion -

³⁶⁶ Quoted in Roberts, *Salisbury*, p.641.

³⁶⁷ Beresford to Balfour 21 December 1891, quoted in Lowe, op.cit., p.34.

³⁶⁸ Quoted in Taylor, *Struggle*, p.344. Historical factors, dating from the proto-union of Italy in 1861, meant that the Italian navy had little chance to develop in the shadow of the army (land-locked Piedmont favoured the army and, despite Cavour's attempt to establish a national navy, took no notice of the seagoing traditions of Sardinia, to the fury of seasoned Neapolitan naval veterans - another factor exacerbating the North-South divide), while crushing defeat at the hands of the Austrian navy in 1866 at Lissa meant that the Italian navy became even more neglected than hitherto, and learned to fear battle; Sullivan B.R., 'A Fleet in Being: The Rise and Fall of Italian Sea Power, 1861-1943', *The International History Review*, 10:1(February 1988); pp. 106-124.

³⁶⁹ Salisbury to Dufferin, January 1891; Roberts, *Salisbury*, p.554.

³⁷⁰ Which was generally acknowledged to have started the "Scramble for Africa". Chamberlain, *Scramble*, pp.55-60; Pakenham, *Scramble*, pp.239-42 & 251-4. Roberts notes, however, that 'The Scramble for Africa' was 'never so much a scramble as an orderly carve-up, over which no European nations ever

Mancini, who a few months before had disclaimed any ideas of Imperial adventure, asked the Chamber of Deputies in January 1885 whether ‘Italy could refuse to pay her contribution to the fight of civilization against ignorance and barbarism?’ and afford not to abandon prudence in order to do so.³⁷¹

However, the ‘hysteria’ that is reputed to have ‘engulfed’ Italy after the Berlin conference is exaggerated. There is plenty of evidence that opposition to such adventures endured among large segments of Italian society. Lowe & Marzari point out that ‘All the evidence suggests that in 1887-8 Crispi’s attitude (to Africa) was much nearer that of Depretis than Mancini. In January 1888 he offered to abandon Massowa to Britain in exchange for Zeila and (then) attempted to sell it to Bismarck, (while) his Minister for War, Bertole-Viale, had no enthusiasm (for an Italian campaign in Africa), an attitude fully shared by most Italian diplomats’.³⁷² Most imperial enthusiasm was confined to those with a vested interest in the matter. As Jonas writes,

Public opinion in Italy (for Empire) had been tepid... Northern newspapers (were) openly skeptical (and) The vision fared little better in the south... following Ambe Alage, students... took to the streets shouting “Viva Menelik!” (in) possibly Europe’s first anticolonial demonstration’.³⁷³

Though the *Societa Geografica Italiana* was the source of much Italian colonial adventurism, ‘not every “geographer” rushed to the colonial cause... both the *Societa di*

actually went to war’; Roberts A., ‘Salisbury: The Empire Builder who never was’, *History Today* Vol.49:10: October 1999: pp.44-49.

³⁷¹ Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, p.37.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, p.56.

³⁷³ Jonas, *Adwa*, pp.303-04.

studi geografici (in Florence) and the Genoa-based journal *La cultura geografica* ... articulated anticolonial sentiments and urged attention for Italy's chronic domestic problems before colonial adventurism'.³⁷⁴ In May 1887, Kennedy (Ambassador to Rome) reported to Salisbury that the Italian government's "energetic measures" to prosecute war with Abyssinia after the defeat at Dogali 'serve to keep up an uneasy feeling in Italy in regard to the (government's) policy towards Abyssinia'.³⁷⁵ Salisbury himself was no keener on the idea, opining that such a war would be a calamity for all Europe,³⁷⁶ while in July 1887 Count Robilant reminded the Senate of his original and unchanging opposition to the occupation of Assab and Massawa, though by now he accepted it as "a *fait accompli*".³⁷⁷ In April 1888 it was reported from Rome that 'The Italian public (view) the withdrawal of Italian troops (from Africa) with satisfaction... as the country realizes the present unsettled state of Europe, and considers that the presence of the Expeditionary force in Italy will be more satisfactory' than if it was to remain in Africa.³⁷⁸

Salisbury was well aware that, though 'Under Crispi's hand Italy is running a little wild',³⁷⁹ 'Crispi is not Italy. The King was extremely sincere in his desire to maintain peace: an attitude shared by people like General Robilant'.³⁸⁰ However, Crispi it was that led Italy, and whose inflammatory words and attitudes towards France - with his attempts to enlist British support for the tariff war, claims for Tripoli in face of the

³⁷⁴ Atkinson, *Constructing*, in Ben-Ghiat & Fuller, *Italian Colonialism*, p.18.

³⁷⁵ IOR/20/A/1171, Kennedy-Salisbury, 5 May 1887.

³⁷⁶ Catalani-Crispi, 10 August 1887, DDI 2/XXI, p.19.

³⁷⁷ Much as Lord Caernarvon (Henry Howard Molyneux Herbert, 4th Earl of Caernarvon, Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies 1858-9, Colonial Secretary 1866-7 and 1874-8) grudgingly accepted the British occupation of Perat in 1857(see Chapter 3); IOR/20/A/1171, Kennedy- Salisbury, 7 July 1887.

³⁷⁸ IOR/20/A/1172, Slade-Savile, 18 April 1888. Their Austrian allies, given Italy's history of irredentism, did not share this view.

³⁷⁹ Salisbury to White, 19 August 1887, quoted in Smith, *Embassy*, p.90.

³⁸⁰ Quoted in Lowe, *Salisbury*, p.49.

second Mediteranean Agreements and strident fears about French attack from Bizerta³⁸¹ - made diplomatic life difficult for Salisbury. Prior to amending the Mediterranean Agreements in December 1887³⁸² Salisbury referred to Crispi, in a letter of 28 October, as “longing for some splashy interference in Bulgarian affairs”;³⁸³ in just a few months he had got his measure of a man who he reviled for as long as Crispi held power. He regarded Crispi as an adventurer, a gambler desperate for domestic popularity and willing to go to any lengths to get it - not unlike his domestic *bête noir* Randolph Churchill.³⁸⁴ ‘In meanness, in mendacity, in treachery, in brutality, in cynical and arrogant injustice it is impossible to surpass Crispi’ he told Goschen in October 1888, and compared to whom Bismarck was ‘an angel of light’.³⁸⁵ And he was actively dangerous - ‘His conspirators temper... leads him to political gambling (that makes him) a danger to world peace’.³⁸⁶ It was, perhaps, inevitable that Salisbury’s view of Italy³⁸⁷ was coloured by his view of Crispi - in December 1888 he opined to the Queen that ‘It is the extreme untrustworthiness of the present ruling powers (in Rome)’ that made British vigilance in

³⁸¹ R. Taylor, *Lord Salisbury* (1975 London: Allen Lane), pp.139-42. The British Foreign Office tried to persuade Crispi that Bizerta was a chimera - at no time in history had any European power tried to establish a permanent strategic presence anywhere on the North African littoral, as without complete control of the sea such a fort, in time of war, would be isolated; cut off from supplies and reinforcements, the responsibility for defending its dockyard and arsenal would encumber all operations by its owner, and the necessity of relieving its garrison would dislocate the plans of any campaign. However, Bizerta was the African promontory closest to Sicily, and the Italians would not be comforted; Lyall, *Dufferin*, p.248.

³⁸² The December modification was made specifically to include Turkey, thus providing her with protection against Russia in the interests of maintaining the *Status Quo* defined in the original February documents; see document in Lowe, *Reluctant II*, pp.61-62.

³⁸³ Salisbury to Lumley 28 October 1887, *ibid.*, p.61.

³⁸⁴ Taylor, *Lord Salisbury*, pp.139-40. In fact, Salisbury himself described Crispi as “the Randolph Churchill of Italy”; SP A/66/78, Salisbury - Queen Victoria, 31 January 1888.

³⁸⁵ Quoted in Roberts, *Salisbury*, p.530.

³⁸⁶ Salisbury, quoted in Gailey A., *The Lost Imperialist: Lord Dufferin, Memory and Mythmaking in an Age of Celebrity* (London: John Murray, 2015), p.301.

³⁸⁷ ‘Salisbury believed ... in national stereotypes... (according to him), the Italians had ‘very much the huffiness (you see) in the governess of a family. They are always thinking themselves slighted’; Roberts, *op.cit.*, p.229.

all dealings with them essential.³⁸⁸ A consequence of this distrust led to, or resulted from, the third obstacle to Anglo-Italian harmony during the 1880-1891 period - Italian activity in the Red Sea littoral and its hinterland.

The Greek Factor: “...there is no denying (the Greeks) are a most rascally set...”³⁸⁹

Greece, like Italy, was, up to its independence in 1831, regarded with reverence and sympathy by all the Powers. Both countries, each the source of all the “Classics”, represented and provided the cultural, moral and juridical bases for all that was regarded as good and great about Western civilization.³⁹⁰ Both countries were then deprived of Nationhood, subjected to tyranny (by the Ottomans in Greece and assorted Habsburgs and Bourbons in Italy) and longing for freedom. In their struggles for liberation they were not alone; Byron marched with the Carbonari and died among Greeks at Missolonghi,³⁹¹

³⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 524.

³⁸⁹ Canning, quoted in H.W.V. Temperley, *The Foreign Policy of Canning, 1822-1827: England, the Neo-Holy Alliance, and the New World* (London: Bell, 1925), p. 329.

³⁹⁰ ‘... the revival of... enthusiasm for ancient Greece, which began in Germany in the (late) eighteenth century with Winckelmann and Wolf... laid the foundation of the political Philhellenism of the nineteenth century’: L. Gossman, ‘Philhellenism and Antisemitism: Matthew Arnold and his German Models’, *Comparative Literature* Vol. 46: 1 (Winter 1994); pp 1-39 (p. 3). The political aspect of European admiration for the Greeks was underlain by a racial aspect: ‘The doctrine of racial determinism (developed during the late 18th century) introduced into anthropological thought (the concept that) Human races were permanently unequal physically, in regard to beauty and strength, and culturally, in relation to their civilisational achievements. In all these hierarchies the Europeans, or white race, were at the top, and within the European category, the Greeks occupied the highest rank’; A.S. Leoussi, ‘Nationalism and Racial Hellenism in Nineteenth Century England and France’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 20: 1 (1997); pp. 42-68 (p. 43).

³⁹¹ See D. Dakin, ‘The Political Influence of Byron’s Death on Britain’, *The Byron Journal*. January 1 1977: Vol. 5; p. 44, for a brief but interesting analysis of the effect of Byron’s death upon the British political establishment, and upon the future course of Greek history.

while Italians fought in their thousands for the Greeks during countless uprisings and insurgencies against the Turks.³⁹² As Penn wrote, in every European country

The Romantic imagination of poets and painters was set afire; the piety of the religious was stirred; the feelings of humanitarians were aroused; the sympathy of liberals was awakened. The strength of reaction during these years produced strong, though checked, opposition which found one good outlet in the cause of Greece.³⁹³

Of course, Italian irredentists and imperialists in their turn railed against Austria over the Veneto and Trentino, and against the Turks in the Balkans and North Africa. But, as Bismarck noted, “The Italians have a big appetite but poor teeth”³⁹⁴, were (as yet) in no position to take land away from Turkey or Austria, and thus (most of the time) presented no real threat to the stability of Europe, antagonism with France and Austria notwithstanding. The Greeks, on the other hand, though never a “Power”, presented a very real threat to the viability of the Ottoman Empire, and thus to the stability of Europe (see Appendix 3 for the full story of Greek influence in Russia and Europe).

³⁹² See G. Salice, ‘The Greek Mirror: Philhellenism and Southern Italian Patriotism (1750-1861)’, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* Vol.20:4; pp.491-507., and G. Pecout, ‘Philhellenism in Italy: Political Friendship and the Italian Volunteers in the Mediterranean in the Nineteenth Century’, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 9:4; pp. 405-27.

³⁹³ V. Penn, ‘Philhellenism in Europe, 1821-1828’, *Slavonic and East European Review*, 16 (January 1, 1937); pp. 638-653 (quote from p.638).

³⁹⁴ Quoted in H.L. Wesseling, *Divide and Rule: The Partition of Africa, 1880-1914* (Westport, Ct: Praeger, 1996), p.20.

Capitulations: The Trigger

Throughout the Ottoman Empire, from the sixteenth century onwards,³⁹⁵ wherever foreign powers had established a presence, ‘Capitulations’ were granted,³⁹⁶ which effectively meant that non-Ottoman subjects would be exempt from certain Ottoman financial, legal and religious impositions. Originally given to European merchants in order to encourage commerce with Christian states, capitulations indicated procedures, laws, regulations and responsibilities of foreign nationals residing and trading in the Ottoman Empire. Of these, laws, taxes and tariffs were most important. For instance, foreigners had the right to be tried in their own consular courts, where laws of their own countries prevailed; they were exempt from local taxes, so they could trade at a financial advantage to their local competitors; and export tariffs were moderated by ‘most favoured nations’ clauses.³⁹⁷ Of particular significance to Massawa during the crisis of 1888 was the French treaty of 1740, which allowed the French government to adopt representation of non-French nationals whose governments possessed no treaty with the Porte.³⁹⁸ The capitulations as exercised at Massawa, combined with the latent confusion inherent in the

³⁹⁵ The first capitulations were granted in 1535 by Suleiman the Magnificent, to the French; Marlowe, *Cromer in Egypt*, p.9.

³⁹⁶ ‘Originally, the Capitulations had been unilateral grants made by Ottoman Sultans to European Governments (enabling) European merchants to live and trade in Ottoman cities (under) the jurisdiction of their Consuls, and to be generally exempt from the ordinary processes of (Islamic laws) as applied to Ottoman subjects... they were grants and not treaties since there was no reciprocity... (they) impinged hardly at all on the rights of (Ottoman subjects) and... provided for the Consul a necessary measure of authority over (merchants) for whose behaviour he was responsible...’; Marlowe, *ibid.*, p.9.

³⁹⁷ Fisher, *Middle East*, pp.299-300.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.301. This treaty was predicated by the first, of 1536 (1535 according to Marlowe - see above, note 396) by which France obtained “a position of uncontested influence throughout the Turkish Empire”, with the right of appointing her own consuls who would judge cases involving French subjects, as well as guaranteeing the right of free Catholic worship. “Christians of all nationalities came under (French) protection, and though this was not specifically provided for in any treaty, it came to be accepted not only in Turkey but by all the Christian Powers, including the Papacy”. Peace Handbooks vol.xi no.66: *France and the Levant* (London: HMSO, 1921), quoted in Hallberg, *Suez Canal*, p. 35. This French monopoly was challenged by the Russians with the treaty of Kutchuk-Kainardji of 1744, but in future it meant that both French and Russians in concert could pressure the Turks to do their bidding.

multiple layers of authority in the Red Sea, afforded the Italians a golden opportunity to cause mayhem. However, it seems likely that Crispi's desire to find a pretext for triggering a war with France also played a major part in their behaviour.

On 30 May 1888 the Italian authorities at Massawa imposed a tax of between 2 and 7 francs a month on all traders, dealers and other businessmen, irrespective of nationality, to cover municipal costs of lighting, roadworks, etc, and a further tax (amount unspecified) levied on comestibles for the same sort of reason. Twenty-three persons (two French, one Swiss, twenty Greeks) refused to pay these taxes on the grounds that they were exempted under the rules of pre-existing capitulations. They appealed to their diplomatic protectors, the French agents in Massawa, for representation.³⁹⁹ Trouble began to brew.

Preparing the Ground

Thus far, the growing friction between Italy and France seems to have been the result of a brushfire confrontation resulting from a spontaneous refusal of non-Italian subjects to pay a tax impudently imposed by the Italians and who, *faute de mieux*, had to fall back on French diplomatic protection. However, there is evidence from Italian documents that, possibly, this incident had been engineered by Crispi, with the collaboration of others, up to three months before July 1888.

As early as February 1887 Lyons (HMG Ambassador to Paris) had raised concerns that Boulanger's sabre-rattling was driving Italy into an alliance with Germany, and this

³⁹⁹ Circular, 25th July 1888, Crispi - Italian representatives in Aia (The Hague), Athens, Belgrade, Berlin, Berne, Brussels, Bucharest, Cairo, Cetinje, Copenhagen, Constantinople, Lisbon, London, Madrid, Monaco, Sofia, Paris, St. Petersburg, Stockholm, Tunis, Vienna and Washington, in *L'Italia* I/VII, pp.45-8.

with the sober Depretis still in charge.⁴⁰⁰ After Crispi's accession, and with the atmosphere still charged, things became much worse.

Shortly after becoming both Prime Minister and Foreign Minister in August 1887 following the death of Depretis in July,⁴⁰¹ Crispi visited Bismarck in Friedrichsruh, in October 1887.⁴⁰² His purpose was to forge a secret Italo-German military convention (which was signed on 28 January 1888).⁴⁰³ The visit '... caused a diplomatic storm, especially in Paris, where Crispi was already viewed with grave suspicion'.⁴⁰⁴

Bismarck was not in favour of war with France, and neither were many in Italy.⁴⁰⁵ In February 1882 General Ricotti had prophesied that Italy would not be in a position to fight a major Power for 8-10 years,⁴⁰⁶ and many in Italy still felt such to be the case. The Italian Minister of War, Bertole-Viale⁴⁰⁷ (who had been critical of Crispi's bellicosity from the moment he took power) was convinced that France would crush Italy in the event of war.⁴⁰⁸ But Crispi's actions were driving the French to desperate measures.

In February 1888 Kennedy reported to Salisbury his '... profound mistrust of (Crispi's political designs, especially regarding 'a secret Italo-German treaty', and that M.

⁴⁰⁰ CAB37/19/6, Lyons - Salisbury, 3 February 1887.

⁴⁰¹ Duggan, *Crispi*, p.494.

⁴⁰² Duggan, 'Pursuit of War', p.317.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., p.320.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., p.319. Prince Henry VII of Reuss (German Ambassador to Vienna 1878-1894) informed Bismarck that Kalnoky (Count Gustav Kalnoky (1832-98), soldier and diplomat; *inter alia*, Austrian Ambassador to St. Petersburg 1880-81, Minister for Foreign Affairs 1881-1895) '... thinks it will be no light task to keep the still somewhat inexperienced Italian Foreign Minister (Crispi) in a good humour and restrain him from ill-considered actions'; Reuss - Bismarck, 13 September 1887, GDD I, p. 321.

⁴⁰⁵ The fiery Baron Blanc (Italian Ambassador at Constantinople, along with Abele Damiani, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1887-89 & 1889-91) were two of the very few who held the view that 'If there is to be war at all, it is in Italy's interests to have it as quickly as possible'; Salisbury - Malet, 1 September 1888, quoted in Duggan 'Crispi's Pursuit', p.322.

⁴⁰⁶ FO45/452, Paget - Granville, 25 January 1882.

⁴⁰⁷ Ettore Bertole-Vitali (1829-1892), minister of war 1869-1870 & 1887-91.

⁴⁰⁸ Duggan, 'Crispi's Pursuit', p. 320.

Flourens (the French Foreign Minister)⁴⁰⁹ was actively involved with his colleagues and the French press in trying to obtain an inkling of the contents of the treaty by ‘.. inflicting upon Italy a series of premeditated provocations with a view to eliciting some remonstrance from Germany’, and thereby gaining some clue as to the nature of the supposed secret treaty. In response, Crispi was referring to France as ‘a bad neighbour’ and talked about ‘bringing her to her knees’ in the question of an impending commercial treaty. He was also having the Italian press publish details of French plans to invade Italy (obtained from the French military magazine *Avenir Militaire*), the massing on the Alpine border of troops meant for Tonkin, and the random dismissal of Italian workers.⁴¹⁰

The Italians were busy making life difficult for the French in the Red Sea too. In September 1887 the Italians refused to accept the newly-appointed French Vice-Consul to Massawa, M. Mercinier. This, apparently, was because he had not given written evidence for his appointment, had not gone through the correct channels, and was not, thus, accepted by General Saletta⁴¹¹ as a valid diplomat.

Furthermore, the Italians refused to recognize the French as the representatives of the Greeks. Despite firmly-established historical and diplomatic precedents for French representation of the Greeks, the Italians claimed that the Greek government, not the

⁴⁰⁹ Emile Flourens (1841-1920), French Foreign Minister 1886-April 1888.,

⁴¹⁰ FO45/601, Kennedy - Salisbury, 21 February 1888 (And see Duggan, ‘Crispi’s Pursuit’, p. 319). Kennedy was no fan of Crispi; in this letter he referred to him as ‘...unfitted for the post of foreign minister which he delights (and that) his natural rashness and impulsiveness has given rise to frequent misunderstandings and unpleasantness both at home and abroad’. A month before he had fulminated to Salisbury that Crispi ‘... exercises a virtual dictatorship’, and that ‘systemic opposition’ to him comes from ‘... his restless avidity for self-glorification... to his want of tact and violence’, and that he ‘... arbitrarily thrusts himself and his country (into) postures beyond their strength, and in spite of his 30 years experience... has no real following... (He is someone to whom) the epithets of “humbug” and “windbag” are openly applied (and who only obtained power because) wearied of the colourless and feeble (Depretis) administration (the Italians) elected a man known (to be) at least be fearless and energetic’; FO45/601, Kennedy - Salisbury, 31 January 1888.

⁴¹¹ Tancredi Saletta (1840-1909), soldier; led occupation of Massawa in February 1885. Replaced as governor there in November of 1885 by General Carlo Gene, reappointed governor April-November 1887.

French, represented the interests of Greeks in Massawa, and this despite the protestations of M. Nicolopoulo, the most prominent of Greek citizens in Massawa, that this was not the case. The Italians were obdurate; having France represent the Greeks undermined their authority in Massawa; Greek representation should come from Athens, not Paris.⁴¹²

Then, in January 1888 the French consular agent at Massawa notified the French Foreign Ministry that the Italians were not, 'under the present circumstances', prepared to allow a caravan carrying provisions for the French residency to enter Massawa from Abyssinia, in direct contravention of an existing agreement between the two powers regarding such matters.⁴¹³ Clearly, there was a strategic plan in place to prepare the ground for conflict with France, howsoever it might be brought about.

Finally, Crispi tried to drag Salisbury into the matter by the scruff of the neck. Salisbury had reluctantly agreed, in January 1888, to send the Channel Fleet to Genoa and Spezia in a gesture of solidarity with Italy. On 14 February an Italian newspaper reported that the British Admiral had declared on arrival in Genoa that '... If, in a conflict with France, England will be of little help to you on land, at sea it will show you that it counts for something'. The Admiral denied having said any such thing.⁴¹⁴ The French were naturally alarmed by this, and by the sending of further Italian troops to Massawa which, combined with further demands from Crispi to Salisbury for more British naval reinforcements, was causing 'legitimate apprehension' in Paris.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹² Crispi - Ressman (Italian ambassador at Paris), 6 September 1887, DDI 2/XXI, p.90.

⁴¹³ Flourens - Mouy (French Ambassador to Rome), 31 January 1888, in *Documents Diplomatique Français* (1871-1914) Volume 1, Tome VII (1 January 1888 - 19 March 1890) (DDF 1/VII).

⁴¹⁴ Duggan, 'Crispi's Pursuit', p.321.

⁴¹⁵ Waddington - Flourens, 10 February 1888, in DDF 1/VII.

If Kennedy was right about French actions being designed to provoke Italy in order to discover the nature of the Italo-German pact, it seems that the French were, if Duggan's interpretation is correct, unwittingly playing right into Crispi's hands.⁴¹⁶

On 14 April 1888, Catalani wrote to Crispi about an encounter with Salisbury the previous day. Salisbury had told him that he hoped the Italians would not go against his wishes and abandon Massawa,⁴¹⁷ but that if they did they must first ensure that the Turks would immediately reoccupy it in order to forestall an otherwise inevitable occupation by either France or Russia, since Britain had renounced all enterprises in Sudan and would thus not be in a position to stop any unfriendly foreign power taking Massawa. Then, 'as delicately as possible',⁴¹⁸ Catalani sounded out Salisbury on the position in India in particular and on the situation with the Russians in Central Asia in general. Salisbury's response was that he had no fears at that time of problems with the Russians in the region, and with that the conversation drew to a close.⁴¹⁹

What is interesting about this communication (quite apart from the surprising revelation that Salisbury wanted the Italians in Massawa at all) is Catalani's referral to his 'delicate' questioning of Salisbury about the situation in Central Asia. Why did it have to be delicate, and what had it got to do with Massawa? The only possible construction on such circumspect wording is that Catalani was trying to see if, in the event of war breaking out between France and Italy, Britain would be free to come to Italy's aid as expected under the terms of the Mediterranean Agreements, or whether she would be too

⁴¹⁶ According to Duggan, Crispi claimed that the forces of the Triple Alliance would have the upper hand until 1889, but not thereafter, hence his anxiety to provoke a war before then; Duggan, *op.cit.*, p.318.

⁴¹⁷ Quite a disclosure, since he had always expressed the thought that the Italian occupation of Massawa was insane and unsustainable.

⁴¹⁸ "Dans le cours de l'entretien je l'ai sondé, *aussi délicatement que possible*, sur l'état de choses aux Indes"; my italics.

⁴¹⁹ 14th April 1888, Catalani-Crispi, in *L'Italia* 1/VII (1888-1889), pp. 6-7.

tied down elsewhere to tender assistance. Given that such aid would only be tendered in the event of an unequivocally unjustified attack upon Italy by France, such a question could only have been made if French aggression was confidently expected. If this was the case, Catalani's sounding out of Salisbury must have been because he knew that some kind of action resulting in war was in the offing; and the excessive delicacy with which he mooted the question must have been because he did not want Salisbury to twig that the Italians were up to something.

Over the following weeks Catalani tried to whip Salisbury into a Francophobic frenzy, though with indifferent results. On 4 June he received from Crispi a telegram informing him of French intrigues against Italy in Abyssinia, and on 5 June 1888 he informed Crispi, in a Top Secret message, that he had told Salisbury of these intrigues, and that His Lordship had 'once again' displayed disbelief as to why France should wish to so embarrass Italy in the region. In commiseration, Salisbury further revealed that the French had disbursed such large bribes to local coastal chieftains that Britain had had to respond with even bigger bribes to stop the erosion of British influence in the region, while his ignorance of French machinations in Harrar, disclosed by Catalani, led him to state in disgust that they were indeed no better than 'goaded wasps'.⁴²⁰ Two days later, on 7 June, Catalani told Crispi he had shown Salisbury the telegram dated 4 June, and that Salisbury had replied that they had to find a way to combat French intrigue and stop them from 'walking all over us' in Abyssinia. After a moment of reflection (Catalani wrote), Salisbury decided to telegram Baring in Cairo and ask him to find a way of averting the Negus from ceding Ras Amoti, Gazoti and Hasot to the French, which

⁴²⁰ Catalani - Crispi, 5th June 1888, *ibid.*, p.19. However, given the relatively low priority that the Red Sea had in Salisbury's mind at this time, and his growing distrust of the Italians, it is likely that this and his subsequent comments to them on this matter were just intended to humour them.

apparently was set fair to be one of the results of French intrigue.⁴²¹ However, this action backfired on the Italians - on 12 June 1888, Catalani had to report to Crispi that Baring had replied to Salisbury, saying that there was no knowledge in Cairo of any such French intrigues, or for that matter in Suakin or Aden either.⁴²²

By 12 June however, the French for their part were starting to respond to Italian actions. De Mouy, French Ambassador to Rome, verbally informed Crispi that the French agent in Cairo had received news of the tax increases in Massawa, which drew the same objections from non-Italian nationals as had the tax on exported Gold in March 1887.⁴²³ Furthermore, it was felt among the recusants that the measures adopted were not founded on any considerations except those of military - i.e. Italian Imperial - exigencies, since purely municipal matters had always been catered for by the capitulations. The French government vigorously contest the imposition of such new taxes.⁴²⁴

Crispi then informed General Menabrea, the Italian Ambassador at Paris, of the French ambassador's complaints, and of Italian parliamentary reaction to the matter. Damiani remarked that he had never heard Crispi mention the necessity of imposing new taxes. Crispi replied, and reiterated to Menabrea, that since Ottoman law no longer applied at Massawa the matter of whether old or new taxes took precedence was irrelevant. In consequence, no hindrance to the imposition of new taxes as levied by the undisputed new Power could be brooked - and since the French were doing exactly the same in Obokh as were the Italians in Massawa, they had no right to complain.⁴²⁵ On 28

⁴²¹ Catalani - Crispi, 7th June 1888, *ibid.*, pp.19-20. Location of these places unknown.

⁴²² Catalani - Crispi, 12th June 1888, *ibid.*, p.20.

⁴²³ See note 333 above.

⁴²⁴ 12th June, De Mouy, French Ambassador at Rome - Crispi, *ibid.*, pp.20-21.

⁴²⁵ 25th June, Crispi - Menabrea, *ibid.*, p.26.

June, Crispi telegraphed Menabrea that General Baldiserra⁴²⁶ (Officer Commanding Massawa) had reported that the protest of the recalcitrant Greeks had been instigated by the French Consul, and vented his outrage that the Greeks, lacking their own diplomatic representative, had hidden behind the skirts of the French, who had taken up their cause as a result. The action of the French was one 'not only of substance but of form', and demonstrated a profound lack of respect for Italian authority in the matter.⁴²⁷ All this led to Crispi's advisory note to the governments of the countries adumbrated in his circular of 25 July 1888, explaining why the taxes had been applied and how, in other Ottoman territories occupied by other countries (such as the British in Cyprus and the Austrians in Bosnia-Herzegovina), similar practices were followed.

Everything was lining up nicely to prepare for an Italian confrontation with France.

Part 3. War in Sight

In July 1888 the Earl of Lytton⁴²⁸ reported to Salisbury that M. Goblet⁴²⁹ was 'much preoccupied and exercised' about the recent Franco-Italian arguments regarding taxes levied on non-Italian nationals by the government of Massawa. Goblet said that the Italian government had originally disclaimed all ideas of conquest or permanent annexation of Massawa, claiming only a temporary occupation for strictly commercial purposes. In theory, Massawa remained subject to Ottoman or Egyptian law, so arbitrary 'imposts' were contrary to the Treaty rights, as recognized by the Ottomans, of foreign

⁴²⁶ Antonio Baldissera (1838-1917), soldier; Governor of Eritrea, November 1887-1889.

⁴²⁷ 28th June 1888, Crispi - Menabrea, *ibid.*, p.27.

⁴²⁸ Robert Bulwer-Lytton, HM Ambassador at Paris 1887-1891.

⁴²⁹ Rene Goblet, Prime Minister of France 1886-87, Foreign Minister April 1888-1889.

powers. Goblet said that Crispi had assured him that General Menabrea would furnish explanations, but that none had been forthcoming.⁴³⁰ Crucially, Goblet said that he was quite ready to recognize the Italian annexation of Massawa, *should such an event be openly declared and ratified*, but that for a power in *temporary* occupation to impose heavy imposts in defiance of pre-existing Treaty rights was ‘a very high-handed and aggressive proceeding’.⁴³¹

Some days later the matter had escalated; French citizens were having their property forcibly seized and sold as the result of non-payment of imposts, while Greek citizens⁴³² under French protection were also being harrassed for non-payment of taxes. The Italian actions, said Goblet, were ‘altogether illogical and unprecedented’: the French had respected Italian rights to their capitulations in Tunis - where the largest foreign presence was Italian⁴³³ - even after the permanent assumption of power by France in 1881, yet in Massawa, where the Italian occupation was supposed to be only ‘of a temporary and

⁴³⁰ Menabrea informed Crispi that he had repeatedly shown Goblet his (Crispi’s) correspondence on the matter; Menabrea- Crispi, 16 July 1888, DDI 2/XXI, p.91.

⁴³¹ Letter of 13 July 1888, Lytton to Salisbury, R/20/A/1172.

⁴³² By 1880 Greeks were also one of the largest and most significant groups in Abyssinia - as in other areas of the Middle East they had become a ‘middleman minority’, but this time aided by a history of good relations with their Abyssinian hosts and the sharing of a common religion. A Greek community was established in Gondar during the 18th century, and before the Mahdiya they were trading with Abyssinia from bases in Sudan, such as Kassala and Gedarif, while other Greeks had settled in Harrar via French Djibouti. In 1863, during the run-up to the Napier expedition, the British Consul to Abyssinia even suggested appointing a Greek merchant as British Vice-Consul at Massawa (Arnold, *Magdala*, p.68); Natsoulas T., ‘The Greeks as an alien minority at the outset of Ethiopia’s economic development, 1880-1910’, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 1989:13:1:pp.219-43, and ‘The Hellenic Presence in Ethiopia. A Study of a European Minority in Africa (1740-1936)’, *Abba Salama* VIII (1977). And see Miran, *Red Sea*, pp.112-21 & passim; Fisher, *Middle East*, pp.243-44, 270 & 300-01, and Natsoulis & Natsoulas, *Rimbaud*, p.53, as well as Appendix 3.) However, since they had no representation, they had to rely on French protection. Here in Massawa, in 1888, 23 of them were refusing to pay a ‘House tax’, so found their eating houses and drink ships closed in forfeiture; Sir Julian Pauncefote, under-secretary of state for foreign affairs-Salisbury, 20 July 1888, IOR/20/A/1172. Regarding the onerous taxes levied on the Greeks, M. Dragounis, the Greek prime Minister, said that Greece could only submit to the superior force of a Great Power, but that the business would “add another item to the score against Italy”; cited in letter of 19 July 1888 from Sir Edmund Monson, envoy to Greece, to Salisbury, IOR/20/A/1172.

⁴³³ See Chapter 1.

exclusively commercial character, the Italians had arbitrarily disregarded the capitulations and, in spite of protests, had stated that they did so by right of conquest'.⁴³⁴

Crispi responded to British enquiries into the matter by asking what the situation was in British-occupied Cyprus (probably a rhetorical question, since Salisbury's views on the matter were well-known; he was not in favour of capitulations),⁴³⁵ stating that all capitulations were redundant when Ottoman territory was occupied by a Christian Power. Goblet was not slow in pointing out to Salisbury that, where the Italians were still benefitting from capitulations in Tunis, there should be some reciprocity shown to the French, and those under their aegis, in Massawa.⁴³⁶

It was from here onwards that the Italians were able to muddy the water regarding sovereignty.

On 23 July 1888 one Edward Wingfield of the Colonial Office advised the Foreign Office, in response to Crispi's enquiry about capitulations in British-run Cyprus, that British taxes applied across the board with no capitulations allowed, and that the British authorities had received 'no complaints on the subject from the Cypriot population'.⁴³⁷ Crispi, no doubt aware of Salisbury's views on the subject of capitulations, was able to

⁴³⁴ Lytton- Salisbury, 19 July, IOR/20/A/1172.

⁴³⁵ Cyprus was ceded by the Porte to Britain in the Cyprus Convention of 1878, in return for British protection against Russian aggression in Asiatic Turkey; Blake, *Disraeli*, pp. 644-45; Palmer, *Dictionary*, p. 98.

Salisbury's view was that 'We had always held the view that the capitulations were a system wholly inconsistent with Christian government... I reminded His Excellency (the French ambassador) that in the case of Tunis we have taken this view as against ourselves'; letter of 23 July 1888, Salisbury to Lytton, IOR/20/A/1172. Baring, though not always seeing eye-to-eye with Salisbury (see, for instance, Baring's letter to Alfred Lyall of 25 January 1876, where he writes that "Salisbury's notion of a compromise (is for) all the concession to be on one side. So there is nothing for it but a big fight..."; quoted in Owen, *Lord Cromer*, p. 83) was also opposed to capitulations, on the basis that that interfered with unfettered control of territories arrogated to, or by, Britain. In 1904 he stated, with knowing simplicity and more than a touch of exaggeration, that "The only reason why the British flag is flying (in Khartoum)... is to avoid the capitulations"; Owen, *Lord Cromer*, pp. 178 & 303.

⁴³⁶ Salisbury-Lytton, 23 July 1888, in IOR/20/A/1172.

⁴³⁷ Memorandum from Wingfield to Foreign Office of 23 July, in IOR/20/A/1172.

point out that the Porte had been offered the opportunity to militarily occupy their Red Sea ports in 1884 as a part of the international response to the Mahdist threat from Sudan, but had declined to do so, and that the Egyptians had offered no resistance to the Italian occupation of Massawa in February 1885, which had been so benevolent as to allow the Egyptian and Italian flags to fly side-by-side for weeks thereafter - the implication being that there was no effective difference between temporary occupation and outright conquest given the exigent circumstances of the time.⁴³⁸ Crispi had already laid the moral ground for his defence and promotion of Italian expansion in the Red Sea, using the argument that Italian blood had been spilt in the process of advancing civilization in the Dark Continent, with the result that the Italian Chamber had, despite deep-seated reservations among the Italian population in general about the wisdom of being there at all, voted 302 to 40 in favour of staying in Massawa.⁴³⁹

Salisbury was trying to stay out of the matter as much as possible. On 20 July 1888, Catalani told Crispi that the French and Greeks had been trying to induce Salisbury to support their view on the matter of capitulations (if true an odd thing to do, given his

⁴³⁸ See Chapter 1 for Gladstone and Granville's opinion, expressed in notes dated 3 November and 20 December 1884 that, should pressure on the Turks to occupy their possessions in the Red Sea not be successful, the Italians should be allowed to move in. Baring reported to Salisbury in November 1888 that the Egyptians had indeed done nothing to oppose the Italian occupation, and that the Italian and Egyptian flags had flown side-by-side from 5 February, when the Italians moved in, to 6 December 1885; Baring-Salisbury, 8 November 1888, IOR/20/A/1172.

⁴³⁹ In a summary of Italian colonial policy, Crispi had orated to the Chamber that "the idea of exploring... Africa was put forward by illustrious men of science, who lost their lives in the expedition (i.e. the Giulietti mission, massacred in May 1881 - Caulk, *Between*, p. 44), and after such a sacrifice it would have been impossible to leave their blood unavenged... We first occupied Assab; our predecessors took Massawa; it would not be logical to give one up and keep the other... the right of possession results from military occupation... Someone asks what we are doing in Massawa and what advantages may be expected in return for such danger and expense? I reply, that... the profit is not to be reckoned in francs and centimes. Great nations are compelled to affirm their position in every part of the world by propagating civilization. (In comparison to England) we... are only beginning today, and we must work with all our might in the open contest with races as bold as they are powerful". Extract of speech sent by Savile to Salisbury, 16 May 1888, in IOR/20/A/1172. See also Menabrea-Crispi, 16 July 1888, DDI 2/XXI, p.91.

avowed opposition to them), but that he had been 'evasive' and unwilling to 'attribute any importance to their requests'.⁴⁴⁰

This was probably what Crispi had been waiting for.⁴⁴¹ Now, he proceeded at full throttle to stir up a hornets' nest. On 23 July he told Menabrea that Italy no longer recognized M. Mercinier as a valid diplomat,⁴⁴² despite the fact that the French government had by this time (according to Menabrea) explicitly told Mercinier not to offer any resistance to Italian actions.⁴⁴³ The Italian government mouthpiece, the paper *La Riforma*, reported that

The hostility of the Greeks at Massawa has been inspired by the French government... we can only regret that we find an adversary in France...⁴⁴⁴

Kennedy reported to Salisbury that '... the (assumed indolent) attitude of France has caused much irritation here' (i.e. in Rome) because the French ambassador, M. Geroud, had failed to deliver a Note to anyone in the Italian government regarding the matter; the fact that no minister had been in to receive his note cut no ice with the Italians.⁴⁴⁵ In retaliation for this imagined French slight, the Italians at Massawa closed the Post Office

⁴⁴⁰ Catalani-Crispi, DDI 2/XXI, p.97; see also FO45/636, Catalani-Rome, 8 January 1889.

⁴⁴¹ Crispi sent a circular to Catalani, Launay (in Berlin) and Nigra (in Vienna) announcing that he had had confirmation that both Britain and Austria "agreed with the Italian point of view"; 23 July 1888, DDI 2/XXI, p.100.

⁴⁴² DDI 2/XXI, p.102.

⁴⁴³ Menabrea-Crispi, 17 July 1888, DDI 2/XXI, p.93.

⁴⁴⁴ As reported by Kennedy to Salisbury, 25 July 1888, IOR/20/A/1172. It is notable that attempts by the Greeks to discuss the matter with the Italian representative in Athens, Count Fe d'Ostiane, were hampered by the latter's apparent imbecility - 'I had a conversation with (d'Ostiane) in the presence of M. de Below, the German Charge d'Affaires... (d'Ostiane) labours under the disadvantage of being absolutely incapable of expressing himself intelligibly on any subject whatever, as M. de Below and I... found ourselves mutually obliged to confirm that, of the Count's explanation only an infinitesimal portion (bore) any meaning to our ears, and that (it is fortunate for all concerned that further discussion of the matter) is to take place mainly in Rome'; Monson- Salisbury, 19 July 1888, IOR/20/A/1172.

⁴⁴⁵ Kennedy- Salisbury, 25 July 1888, in IOR/20/A/1172.

to the French for sending encrypted telegrams, an action interpreted to Salisbury by the French ambassador in London as ‘a gratuitous discourtesy’, ‘high-handed and imperious’, likely to cause a serious breach in Franco-Italian relations, and proof that Crispi was ‘trying to pick a quarrel’ with France; an opinion that Salisbury tried to damp down by reassuring the ambassador that such actions could best be ‘attributed to the excitable condition of Crispi himself’.⁴⁴⁶ On being questioned about this by Kennedy, Crispi ‘declined to admit discourtesy to France and (attributed such difficulties) to the persistently hostile attitude of the French Consul (at Massawa) for the past 3 years’, a man whose predecessor had been evicted from Massawa for spying and intriguing against the Italians, and who had been advising all foreigners to resist payment of all taxes, by force if necessary.⁴⁴⁷

Surprisingly perhaps, Goblet still believed at this stage that Crispi’s actions were due to no more than his usual jealousy of France. The French had already had a mild dispute with Italy as to whether or not the occupation of Massawa contravened Article 34 of the

⁴⁴⁶ Salisbury- Kennedy, 28 July 1888, IOR/20/A/1172. Salisbury had expressed doubts to Catalani about the “vigour” with which the Italians were abolishing capitulations and requested that they show more tolerance to the French in Massawa, but this seemed to have no effect; Catalani-Crispi, 28 & 29 July 1888, DDI 2/XXI, pp.111 & 114.

⁴⁴⁷ ‘Italian colonial policy... has so far been disastrous for Italy in all respects (but) the country actively approves Crispi’s (actions in the matter) and great indignation is expressed against France’; Kennedy-Salisbury, 30 July 1888, IOR/20/A/1172. Crispi informed Catalani that he had received a ‘violently-worded note’ from the French regarding Massawa, but that, naturally, he had not risen to the challenge but had instead responded “with a calm demeanour”; DDI, 2/XXI, 1 August 1888.

The upsurge of Italian hostility to the Greeks seems curious in light of the historically close relations between the two countries during the previous hundred or so years. Italians had been conspicuous in their support for Greek struggles against Ottoman oppression during the 18th and 19th centuries, since many Italians regarded the Italians and Greeks as having a common and ancient cultural heritage to which Ottoman hegemony was inimical, while on another level the resistance of the Greeks mirrored Italian efforts to throw off the tyranny of the Bourbons and Habsburgs - see Salice. ‘The Greek Mirror’, pp. 491-507, and Pecout., ‘Philhellenism’, pp.405-27. A portion of the reason lies in Salice’s explanation that, by the end of the century Crispi, in common with other Italian socialists and nationalists, had wearied of the notion of such cultural and political solidarity, seeing it as somewhat passé in the context of late 19th century Power politics and as a distraction from more pressing domestic issues (Salice, *ibid.*, pp.406 & 416-17). There was also the fact that the Greeks held or aspired to holding territories currently belonging to the Turks, such as Crete, which the Italians also wanted in order to start resurrecting their Neo-Roman Empire. However, as we shall see, other reasons emerged.

1878 Treaty of Berlin (i.e. whether or not it caused damage to the fabric of the Ottoman Empire), but as yet they did not seem to perceive the growing seriousness of the situation. Goblet opined that all Europe could see that France had always acted with great benevolence towards Italy, that Crispi was driving the matter and that, knowing this, no-one would take the matter seriously. Furthermore, everyone could see that the Italian position lacked logic. Their argument was that since Tunis was not annexed but merely occupied, the continuance of capitulations there was to be expected, but as Massawa had been annexed to the Italian state it was now subject to the rules of Christian governance, which did not countenance capitulations. This hardly indicated a balanced view on the part of Crispi, since Crispi himself was never consistent about whether or not Massawa had been conquered or simply occupied.⁴⁴⁸ Shortly after this, Goblet comforted himself by telling M. Herbette, the French ambassador at Berlin, that he (Goblet) had discussed the matter with M. de Schoen, the German ambassador to Paris. The latter had remained non-committal as he was not apprised of the details of the case, but responded with sympathy to Goblet's narration of how the Italians were obstructing French movements in and out of Massawa and discomfiting other nationals there who came under French protection. de Schoen opined that Italian actions could well be due to their belief that France was about to annex Tunis, a belief encouraged by the presence in Paris of the dissolute Taieb Bay, the Regent of Tunis, who was showing no signs of returning to Tunis but was believed to be quite prepared to sell his inheritance in return for a reasonable price. de Schoen was assured that Taieb was there purely for his health, and not for any ulterior motive.⁴⁴⁹ Herbette shortly after reassured Goblet that Count

⁴⁴⁸ Goblet -Gerard (French Charge d'Affairs, Rome), 28 July 1888, in DDF I/VII, pp. 197-99.

⁴⁴⁹ Goblet -Herbette, 31 July 1888, *ibid.*

Berchem, of the German Foreign Office, had told him that, though Germany could see no reason for capitulations to continue under a Christian administration, everyone knew that Crispi was always a little hasty in his decisions and that he was too ready to '*faire grand*'.⁴⁵⁰

So Goblet was able to carry on whistling in the dark a little longer, unaware that a storm was about to break over his head.

The situation escalates

By this time the Turks, heretofore fairly torpid where the Red Sea was concerned, were becoming interested in the matter. Kennedy reported a conversation between Crispi and Photiades Pasha,⁴⁵¹ the Turkish ambassador to Rome, which demonstrated the lengths to which the Italians would go to exploit the confusion over ownership on the Red Sea coast. Crispi advised Photiades that a note regarding sovereign rights over the Red Sea had been circulated by the Porte to the Powers after the occupation of Massawa in 1885, but that the content of the note warranted an interpretation of Italian sovereign rights over Massawa, and that the Sultan had recognized those rights by agreeing to the Convention drafted in October 1885,⁴⁵² particularly in article X, which - Crispi said - abrogated

⁴⁵⁰ Herbette -Goblet, 31 July 1888, *ibid*.

⁴⁵¹ Photiades was Greek.

⁴⁵² This referred to the Drummond-Wolff Convention of October 24 1885, which effectively divided authority over Egypt between Britain and the Porte and, after a very anfractuous journey, provided the basis of what became the Constantinople - or Suez Canal - Convention of October 1888. However, the Drummond-Wolff convention was not accepted as binding by any of the other Powers and was challenged by France and Russia particularly, thereafter falling into desuetude; see F.A.K. Yasamee, *Ottoman Diplomacy: Abdulhamid II and the Great Powers, 1878-1888* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1996), pp. 141-152; Hornick M.P., 'The Mission of Sir Henry Drummond-Wolff to Constantinople, 1885-1887', *English Historical Review* 4:4 (1940); Hallberg, *Suez Canal*, pp. 278-91; Lowe, *Reluctant*, pp.112-14; Owen, *Lord Cromer*, pp.251-19; and Roberts, *Salisbury*, pp.343-44 & 436-38 for the complete story of the Drummond-Wolff negotiations and the series of failed negotiations, conventions and treaties that eventually came together in the Constantinople convention.

Ottoman authority over their Red Sea possessions.⁴⁵³ Photiades denied that the Sultan, as Caliph of all Islam, had abrogated his rights over Moslem subjects anywhere; Crispi's repost was that the Italian situation in Massawa was directly analogous to that of the French in Tunis - though with typical disingenuousness he simultaneously denied any connection between the separate questions of Massawa and Tunis.⁴⁵⁴

Photiades responded that the Italian position in Massawa should be not like that of France in Tunis (which was a permanent occupation and, as such, had been opposed by the Porte, to no avail) but should be more like that of Britain in Egypt, which - significantly - had the approval of the Sultan. The British government always recognised the rights of the Sultan as Suzerain of Egypt (he said), even though her troops were stationed there in 'temporary' occupation, and that the terms of the British occupation recognized this right. Photiades said to Kennedy that, furthermore, Italian intransigence was weakening their position with the Porte, especially since the French were ever alert for any opportunity to undermine the Italians and persuade the Sultan of their designs on Albania and Tripoli. Italian assertion of their rights over that of the Porte would "pain the Sultan", both because it would weaken his prestige with his subjects and because he had TWICE been assured by the Italians that their occupation was only temporary, and that his rights would be respected at all times. The Sultan had been told that, firstly, the Italians had been forced into Massawa⁴⁵⁵ and that no Ottoman rights would be violated; and secondly, that Robilant had assured him (when?) that, unlike with Assab, no territorial acquisition was intended. Now Crispi was talking about 'right of Conquest',

⁴⁵³ It does no such thing. See text of Convention of October 1888 in Hallberg, *Suez Canal*, Appendix D, pp. 407-11.

⁴⁵⁴ 'Sr. Crispi refuses to admit any connection between the two questions'; Kennedy- Salisbury, 4 August 1888, IOR/20/A/1172.

⁴⁵⁵ See Chapter 1

which hardly sounded either temporary or mindful of Ottoman rights, and also sounded like the juridical basis for claiming that Italy's right to abrogate capitulations differentiated Massawa's status from that of Tunis.⁴⁵⁶ This 'painful usurpation' of the Sultan's rights meant that he might not now sign the impending Suez Canal Convention, which was of vital interest to all the major Powers.⁴⁵⁷ The Porte hotly refuted Crispi's arguments, especially those referring to Article 34 of the Treaty of Berlin and Article X of the Suez Canal Convention, saying that Article 34 referred just as much to Massawa as to elsewhere in the Ottoman domains, and that they objected '... vivement contre l'interpretation abusive et erronee donnee par (Crispi) a l'article X (of the Suez Canal Convention)'.⁴⁵⁸

At this, the Germans declared their interest in the matter, and in a way that left no doubt as to the seriousness with which the Massawa incident, and its potential impact upon the imminent Suez Canal Convention, was now being viewed in Berlin. On 2 August 1888 Salisbury, obviously responding to an earlier communication from Athens to London, contacted Munson, saying the Greeks were mistaken in thinking that Britain

⁴⁵⁶ It was probably no coincidence that a year before Major Hunter had reported to Portal in Cairo that the Turks had opened a newly-constructed fortress at Warner Point, opposite Perim, probably as a reassertion of the Porte's authority over that stretch of the Red Sea; Portal-Salisbury, 23 August 1887, IOR/20/A/1171 (a significant event, since the Turks had tried and failed on numerous occasions to stamp their authority on the coasts of Arabia during the preceding years, usually by trying to build a naval presence but then finding that they couldn't afford it; Anscombe, *Ottoman*, pp. 16-20 & 74-80). Commander Forsyth, of HMS *Griffon*, reported later that the fort was only small and built to defend the local Turks from the Yemeni Arabs (IO L/PS/9/56, Political resident, Aden - Chief Secretary Bombay, 8 October 1887), but nevertheless it was a site that could be developed into a major strategic asset.

Further, the Italians had stated unequivocally in July 1888 that they considered Massawa an Italian possession and that taxes would be "scrupulously extracted" from the Greeks, even though they knew that "the Greek government relied on capitulations"; Monson-Salisbury, 19 July 1888, IOR/20/A/1172.

⁴⁵⁷ Report, dated 31 July 1888, from Kennedy to Salisbury, IOR/20/A/1172 The Constantinople/Suez Canal convention effectively guaranteed freedom of movement to all commercial shipping through the Suez Canal and Red Sea, and thus was of very great moment to all concerned, not least Germany, whose development of possessions in East Africa depended in large part upon her merchant fleet's ability to pass unhindered through the Red Sea.

⁴⁵⁸ Goblet - French representative, London, 14 August 1888, DDF I/VII.

had no interest in the matter since over 200 British Indian subjects resided in Massawa, subjects who (as we have seen) had expressed their great unhappiness at their treatment by the Italians. Monson responded by saying that the Greeks had hotly rejected the German view that they were causing trouble by supporting the French position, though by now they accepted that Britain's views were based not on indifference to the plight of the Greeks but upon her opposition to all capitulations as witnessed 'to our prejudice' in Tunis.⁴⁵⁹

The Germans were more direct a few days later, when Mr. Scott, of the diplomatic staff in Berlin, reported to Salisbury that

...Count Bismarck told me... he is very anxious that you (pressure the French to drop the Massawa issue). He has told the French Charge d'Affaires very frankly that (it is) not worth the risk... I am struck by the certainty with which His Excellency spoke of (French isolation and helplessness),⁴⁶⁰ his evident desire that she should be made to feel this, and the complacency with which he viewed the diversion of Sr. Crispi's foreign activity into that direction.⁴⁶¹

M. Raindre, the French *Charge d'Affaires* to Berlin, reported Bismarck's conversation with himself on the matter to Goblet on 3 August. Bismarck had said that everyone knew

⁴⁵⁹ Cables of 2 August 1888, Salisbury to Monson and Monson to Salisbury, and 3 August 1888, Monson to Salisbury, IOR/20/A/1172.

⁴⁶⁰ Bismarck had no fear of an isolated France because he was sure that Russia would not, in the case of war, come to her aid without a binding treaty. '... I certainly do not believe that, if France took the offensive, she would receive Russian support... if France attacks us - we should be entirely forsaken by God, if we were unable to cope with her'; Bismarck - Hatzfeldt, 8 August 1887, GDD I, p. 313.

⁴⁶¹ Scott- Salisbury, 5 August 1888, IOR/20/A/1172.

of the accord between Italy and Germany and that Germany would be obliged to defend her in the event of conflict. He urged the French to try and restore good relations with Italy, because the Massawa affair was essentially secondary and minor. The Italians, he said, had the irritability and accumulated resentment (*amas de griefs*) of a young Power, and even though it was clear that France had always been benevolent to Italy, Crispi was hell-bent upon seeing hostility everywhere. In short, Bismarck said, it was best just to roll with the punches on this occasion rather than face the very real possibility of this minor inconvenience turning into something far worse.⁴⁶²

Salisbury was clearly very discomfited by this development. As he wrote to Lytton,

Both at Berlin and here I have been strongly pressured by the German government to advise France to (drop the matter). In the view of the German government no important French interest is at stake, and the quarrel between France and Italy would be (a serious matter) for Europe... the German Government has (informed) the French... that, if a state of war arose between France and Italy, Germany would be forced to take the Italian side. (I said) I thought I might warn the French government (as I was mistaken) in the opinion I expressed with regard to the attitude of Germany. I have grown now to believe that Germany is taking the side of Italy somewhat earnestly in the matter, as the affair no longer has the

⁴⁶² Raindre - Goblet, 3 August 1888, DDF I/VII. My vernacular.

narrow local significance which I at first attached to it.⁴⁶³

Goblet was taken aback to a point of despair by Crispi's attitude and words

Il m'est impossible de comprendre le griefs que le
Government italien peut avoir amasses contre nous.⁴⁶⁴

The Austrians held themselves as aloof from the matter as they decently could, though manifestly they believed that Crispi's behaviour was, as usual, unduly rebarbative, and their tacit sympathy was clearly with France.⁴⁶⁵ It seems that Salisbury was right, however, to take the ominous German response seriously; every indication was that they intended to act upon their threats should their ally find herself at war with France. An article in *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* of 8 July 1888 bore

evident marks of official inspiration. It prefers against France the

⁴⁶³ Salisbury-Lytton, 7 July 1888, IOR/20/A/1172. Mr. Egerton, diplomatic attaché to Paris, told Salisbury that he had relayed to Goblet Salisbury's view that "the affair was no longer of the purely local significance ... previously attached to it". Goblet had responded that the Germans were seeing the whole matter "through Italian glasses", but, given the continental line-up, that was hardly surprising; Egerton- Salisbury, 15 August 1888, IOR/20/A/1172. On 16 August 1888 the Porte sent a Circular round the Powers objecting to the Italian actions in Massawa, but M. de Radowitz, the German ambassador to the Porte, managed to get it "toned down"; Sir William White (HM Ambassador to the Porte) - Salisbury, IOR/20/A/1172.

⁴⁶⁴ Goblet - Reindre, 4 August 1888, DDF I/VII.

⁴⁶⁵ 'Count Kalnoky remains aloof from French appeals as from Italian representations... (naturally enough) in view of the peculiar relations between Austria and Italy... Kalnoky's belief is that Crispi has (behaved) with little tact. The Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs appears disinclined to be bound by any of the traditions of diplomacy'; Mr. Phipps, diplomatic staff in Vienna, to Salisbury, 9 & 11 July 1888, IOR/20/A/1172. However, the Austrians were not seeking to dislodge the Italian position in Africa – 'Vienna recognized Italy's need for a military victory. It was possible to fulfill this need and at the same time satisfy (Crispi's) revolutionary past... by encouraging Italy to seek her outlet in Africa. What was to be avoided was anti-Austrian irredentism... itself a part of the revolutionary drive of the Risorgimento. Crispi's radical past could be harmonized with the conservative nature of the Triple Alliance through war'; Thayer, 'Risorgimento', p. 95.

serious charge of having wantonly provoked the controversy in order to seek a quarrel with Italy and to lose no opportunity of disturbing confidence in the maintenance of European peace.⁴⁶⁶

Given that the rabidly revanchist Boulanger had taken power in France in March 1888 (and kept it until April 1889), and - like a French Crispi - lost no time in asserting France's rights over any issue where he perceived French prestige or interest to be at stake, the need felt by Germany to be assertive in defence of her Italian ally - despite Bismarck's obvious sympathy for the French on this occasion - can be fully understood.⁴⁶⁷

Salisbury's Dilemma.

In addition to all this, Britain's relations with the Porte at this time were somewhat ticklish. Though still bound to actively support the Ottomans, events in the Arabian peninsula had put Britain in a potentially oppositional stance to the Porte in the Red Sea. From 1882, various Arab tribes in Yemen and Hadramut had been asking the British at Aden for protection from all-comers, including the Turks.⁴⁶⁸ While things were quiet, this did not cause any great problem in Anglo-Turkish relations, probably because the Turks either never found out or because they had more pressing matters with which to contend -

⁴⁶⁶ Scott (Berlin)- Salisbury, 8 July 1888, IOR/20/A/1172.

⁴⁶⁷ As Roberts observed, 'Lytton was sending highly alarming despatches from Paris, and war rumours abounded', and he quotes Salisbury as saying that "If Boulanger has anything in him, things may become serious at any moment"; Roberts, *Salisbury*, p. 487.

⁴⁶⁸ IO L/SP/9/55, Blair - Bombay, 19 December 1885. Local tribes around Aden had, since the British annexation of 1839, sought British protection; see Chapter 1, note 172, above.

usually a lack of finances. As the Annual Report of the Council of Foreign Bondholders noted in its 7th General Report of 1879:

... the Porte has not yet learned the bitter lesson taught by adversity,
but still lives from hand to mouth, laying violent hands on the securities
solemnly pledged to its creditors (and) raising more loans at usurious
rates (which just compounds the problems).⁴⁶⁹

For instance, in December 1880 the Ottoman Finance Minister estimated an expenditure of 20 million francs against an income of 16 million, accounted for partly by a plague of locusts but in the main by a perennial difficulty in collecting taxes, and with ‘... no idea how the deficit will be met’.⁴⁷⁰ Parlous for decades, Ottoman finances, facing increased strain with the approach of the Crimean war, had forced the Porte to take out its first official foreign loan in 1854. Inefficient and corrupt use of this and succeeding loans led to the Empire becoming bankrupt in 1875. In 1881, after the measure had been approved at the Berlin Congress of 1878, Sultan Abdul Hamid II issued the *Muharrem* decree, which led to the establishment of the OPDA (Ottoman Public Debt Authority), a consortium of foreign Powers who supplied auditors from Britain, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria and France.⁴⁷¹ It made scarcely any difference to the situation: White reported to Salisbury in October 1885 that, ‘Dining with the Sultan he told me... that he is

⁴⁶⁹ Quoted in G. Conte & G. Sabatini, ‘The Ottoman External Debt and its features under European Financial Control (1881-1914)’, *Journal of European Economic History*, 43: 3 (2014), pp.69-96 (p.71).

⁴⁷⁰ CAB37/4/80, ‘Turkish Financial Difficulties’, 4 December 1880.

⁴⁷¹ M. Birdal, *The Political Economy of Ottoman Public Debt: Insolvency and European Financial Control in the Late Nineteenth Century* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), p.6; Yasamee, *Abdulhamid*, pp. 9, 45-6 & 49-50.

very anxious about Servia(*sic*) and Greece and (begged Salisbury) to intervene with Greece to prevent (proceedings) which were not only dangerous to the Empire but a great burden and expense'⁴⁷², the pressure from Greece being an ever-present concern that exacerbated the financial situation.⁴⁷³

To make things worse, by 1884 many parts of the Yemen were in open revolt against the Turks, partly in response to the Mahdiya.⁴⁷⁴ Despite initial rebel success, by late 1885 the Turks had regained control of the insurgent areas; this in itself did not 'greatly concern us at Aden *unless it should lead to the annexation of the coastline also*',⁴⁷⁵ which might mean that Aden could find itself faced, not with friendly Arab tribes seeking alliance with Britain but with a potentially hostile Turkish presence (as we have seen, the turbulence in the Red Sea had already led to the Turks reinforcing Warren Point, a potential threat to Aden, earlier in 1885); it thus behoved the British to continue their support of the Arabs, but not in such a way as would turn the Turks against them or drive them closer to irremediable insolvency.⁴⁷⁶ The last thing Britain wanted was to find herself having to overtly support the Italians against the Turks and, as a possible result, have her covert support of the Yemeni Arabs exposed. This could conceivably have been the straw that broke the Porte's back, bringing the (supposedly) tottering Empire finally

⁴⁷² SP A/41, White - Salisbury, 20 October 1885.

⁴⁷³ The accession of Thessaly to Greece in 1881 had not sated but inflamed Greek irredentism so that the more the Greeks got from Turkey, the more they wanted; J.S. Koliopoulos, 'Greece and the Balkans: A Historical Perspective', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 2: 3 (September 2002), pp.25-38 (p.27).

⁴⁷⁴ The insurgents were led by Imam Sharfudan, who called himself the "Lieutenant of the Mahdi", forcing the Turks to bring in 17 regiments - all to no avail, as 'the insurgents were not amenable to negotiations and wanted to fight the Turks', and were making their own ordnance; IO L/PS/9/55, Blair - Chief Secretary, Bombay, 29 August & 6 September 1884. The situation was exacerbated because supplies of grain from Berbera to Yemen were reduced, due to the Egyptian withdrawal (Blair - Bombay, 3 October 1884).

⁴⁷⁵ IO L/SP/9/55, Blair - Chief Secretary Bombay, 19 December 1885. My italics.

⁴⁷⁶ '... it certainly seems desirable to preserve the independence of the tribes on the Arabian littoral of the Gulf of Aden'; Blair, *ibid.* And see note 170 above.

crashing down, and leaving the Balkans and Constantinople - and, by extension, the Habsburg territories - exposed to a victorious Russian advance.

Salisbury was thus in an unenviable position, having to support Crispi despite his deplorable and provocative actions, and even though those very actions were likely to provoke a Boulangist attack on Italy, thus obliging Britain to take up arms against France and triggering a Russian attack on Austria - all this at a time when one of the periodic French “invasion scares” was in full flight in Britain, and which Salisbury would have been anxious to defuse and not inflame.⁴⁷⁷ As Salisbury cabled to Phipps at Vienna on 13 August 1888

The (Austrian) Charge d’Affaires (says) Count Kalnocky thought it likely that France and Russia would (object to an Italian protectorate over Massawa), and although he deprecated the Italian tone... it was the object of (Britain and Austria) to support Crispi. I have accordingly authorized (support) of (Austria) in this matter.⁴⁷⁸

It is interesting that Salisbury specifically referred to Austria, rather than Germany, as the (albeit unwilling) partner of Italy in this matter, since the Austrians were clearly

⁴⁷⁷ For the invasion scare, see Brackenbury Memorandum of 8 June 1888 (CAB37/21/15), the Hamilton Memorandum of 19 June 1888 (CAB37/21/17) and the Salisbury Memoranda of 29 June 1888 (CAB37/21/18) and 6 November 1888 (CAB37/22/32).

⁴⁷⁸ Salisbury- Phipps, 13 August 1888, IOR/20/A/1172. It was doubly unfortunate for Salisbury that he was no fan of the Greeks - though once, like most enlightened Englishmen, a supporter of Greek independence during the Era of Disraelian Turcophilia, by 1888 he saw them in a different light; ‘Now... that European statesmen are labouring to extinguish every cause of (war), the policy of Greece is to threaten... to kindle a European war, unless she is bought off. She is the blackmailer of Europe’; Salisbury to Monson, November 1889, quoted in Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 647. It must have raised his ire to find himself having to support Crispi while deploring his actions (especially as it affected Indian subjects) while secretly sympathizing with France, and thus (albeit covertly) supporting the cause of the Greeks who, for all he knew, may have deliberately precipitated the crisis in the first place.

ambivalent about, and thus less strident, on the matter than the Germans, which would make dealing with the French easier. Indeed, the Austrians did their part in getting the Porte to withdraw the threatened Circular and, though they did not succeed in getting the Sultan to withdraw it, possibly they softened him up enough to allow the Germans, as detailed above, to get it “toned down”. Kalnocky in fact suggested that Britain use her influence on the Porte to dissuade the Sultan from sending the circular since it was felt that British influence carried more weight in Constantinople than did the Austrian, though the Austrians had at least as much interest in defusing the matter as Britain - a war with Russia was the last thing Austria wanted, especially as their allies the Italians were as likely to join in on the side of Russia as they were to remain loyal to the Triple Alliance (as indeed they did in 1915), and would in either case be a hindrance to Austrian security.⁴⁷⁹

The French and Greeks could find no support whichever way they turned. On 1 August 1888, Fe d’Ostiane informed Crispi that the Greeks had been informed that three of the Great Powers (presumably Germany, Austria and Britain) had given their support

⁴⁷⁹ Salisbury- White, 14 August 1888, IOR/20/A/1172. Later, on 31 August, the Austrians made a direct approach to the Porte over the Circular, requesting its withdrawal; Salisbury-Phipps, 31 August 1888, IOR/20/A/1172.

Austria was by this time not taken very seriously as a significant Power in matters appertaining to the Red Sea or the eastern Mediterranean. ‘... when asked by Malet whether Austria... or Germany (decided) questions of policy (in the Near East), (Bismarck) replied that all minor questions were left to Austria... but when (peace) was seriously threatened, he “took the reins into his own hands...”’; Malet to Salisbury, 22 September 1885, quoted in Smith, *Embassy*, p.19. White remarked that ‘It is surprising to hear the low opinion the Turks... have of Austria... Nothing can be more striking... than the entire disappearance of Austrian influence with the Turks. Twelve months ago, it was an important factor (but now) Austria is... mistrusted even more than we are... and she is less feared’; White to Iddesleigh, 20 November 1886 and 27 December 1886, quoted in Smith, *ibid.*, pp.65-66. Salisbury himself had by this time come to regard the Austrians as a negligible presence in the Near East, stating that ‘... it was impossible to include the Austrian ambassador to Constantinople in discussions of Near Eastern affairs, as he was so insignificant’; Herbert Bismarck - German Foreign Office, 24 August 1887, in GDD I, p. 318.

to the Italian position regarding Massawa.⁴⁸⁰ Support from Russia might have been expected for both countries, but none was forthcoming as the Russians, pre-occupied with events in Finland, were non-committal regarding the rights and wrongs of the situation and would wait to see how the Turks responded. Regarding whether or not Article 10 of the Suez Canal Convention meant that the Porte had, as the Italians speciously tried to make out, abrogated its right to sovereignty over their lands in the Red Sea, Giers professed ignorance, but commented that, even if the Turks had given up, their vassals the Egyptians had not.⁴⁸¹ Clearly, the Russians were no keener to get embroiled in such a futile but potentially explosive argument than anyone else, especially if it meant risking a confrontation with Austria and Germany. In addition to this, they were not interested in supporting the Greeks, as by this time they were actively trying to undermine the Greek Orthodox church's monopoly over Orthodox subjects in the Balkans - particularly Bulgaria - and elsewhere.

By the end of the first week of August it was clear that the French were not going to make any progress. On 2 August Catalani reported to Crispi that Salisbury had, after his half-hearted objections at Italian heavy-handedness, agreed to concur with their views,⁴⁸²

⁴⁸⁰ Fe - Crispi, 1 August 1888, *L'Italia* I/VII, p.53. See also Catalani - Crispi, 25 & 28 July 1888 from London, *ibid.*, pp. 48 & 50, and Nigra - Crispi, 31 July 1888 from Vienna, *ibid.*, p. 52.

⁴⁸¹ *'Alla mia osservazione che l'art. X ... implicava la rinuncia della Turchia ai suoi pretesi diritti di sovranità sulla costa occidentale del Mar Rosso il Signor de Giers rispose ignorare che la Turchia abbia espressamente rinunciato... sovranità... "come non ha rinunciato all'Egitto"'*; Marochetti (Italian Ambassador at St. Petersburg) - Crispi, 12 August 1888, *ibid.*, p.73. See also d'Ormesson (French Charge d'Affaires to St. Petersburg) - Goblet, 7 August 1888, in DDF I/VII, p.213.

Launay reported to Crispi on 5 August that the Germans had expressed a dim view of an Italian wish to annex Zeila since the Porte still clearly regarded this as an Egyptian possession, and any such impulsive action might only result in Italy driving the Turks into the arms of France and Russia; 5 August, DDI 2/XXI, p.134.

⁴⁸² Catalani-Crispi, DDI 2/XXI, p.125

and on the same day Crispi was able to tell his ambassadors that Greece had also given in.⁴⁸³

By the end of August things had calmed down. Bismarck had moderated his stance and prevailed on Crispi to refrain from any further provocation of the Porte over Massawa,⁴⁸⁴ and cooler Italian heads than Crispi's were working to repair the damage done to Anglo-Italian relations. Robilant informed Crispi that

... I shall try as hard as I can to see that... our relations with England are put back on that special level of trust and intimacy which the common interest of the two countries demands... (Catalani) told me... that the present state of relations between France and Italy kept (Salisbury) in a continual state of alarm and anxiety (and that) if things went on like this they would end in a war... He (said) he had no wish to be dragged into (war) with France for a trifling issue such as the capitulations at Massawa. It appears to me... that if there was a change in Lord Salisbury's attitude to us this dates from the last days of July.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸³ Crispi-Catalani, Launay, Marochetti & Nigra, DDI 2/XXI, p.126.

⁴⁸⁴ '(Bismarck has) succeeded in calming the Italian Prime Minister and (induced) him to abstain from... any further notes (on Massawa) as well as to refrain from all further military expeditions into (Abyssinia)'; Scott- Salisbury, 24 August 1888, IOR/20/A/1172. Given the history of Italian activity in Abyssinia, Bismarck's word obviously carried less weight with Crispi than was thought in some quarters.

⁴⁸⁵ Robilant- Crispi 17 September 1888; AMEI, seria politica 29/1448/70, in Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, pp. 377-78. Salisbury also noted that the French allowed capitulations in Tunis because it was not annexed, and because it continued to be administered by Moslems. Thus it followed that it was not in Italian interests to press for either the annexation of Massawa or the cessation of capitulations there, as such actions could cause the French to annex Tunis, which action would cause Italy and HMG much vexation. Salisbury-Egerton, 18 August 1888, IOR/20/A/1172.

By September 1888 the French had conceded defeat.⁴⁸⁶ Opinion in Vienna and Berlin appeared to blame the French for the furore though, given their alliance with Italy, such opinion was only to be expected.⁴⁸⁷ It is likely that the vehemence of the Italian reaction to this minor matter was spurred on not only by her constant aspiration to be taken seriously as a Mediterranean Power, but also by the heightened friction with France that resulted from a combination of Crispi's incessant hostility (and Boulanger's response) and the series of political and commercial disputes that kept both countries on the verge of war from 1887 onwards.⁴⁸⁸

Duggan's view that Crispi was intent on war with France must also be taken into account, as it is the single best explanation for Crispi's unaccountably hostile actions over the matter. However, it is unlikely that these factors alone caused such a vitriolic reaction from the Italians. Another factor, not referred to in the dispute but certainly exercising the Italians, was the appearance of the Russians on the Red Sea coast.

⁴⁸⁶ 'M. Goblet (considered) the matter closed by the formal protest of the Porte'; IOR/20/A/1172, Salisbury- Paget, 12 September 1888.

⁴⁸⁷ In the letter quoted above, Salisbury recorded that 'Count Kalnoky... feels the Italians wouldn't have raised the capitulation question if France hadn't provoked the Greeks into doing so, with the intention not of protecting Franco-Greek interests but of causing trouble for Italy, and it is this which caused so much bitterness'. Scott in Berlin conveyed the German view that 'the French government had notoriously been doing everything in its power to create difficulties for Italy in every quarter', (though as noted above, Bismarck clearly did not adhere to this view) with the result that, in trying to weaken the Triple Alliance by undermining Italy, they had strengthened Italian resolve to adhere to their Alliance allies; IOR/20/A/1172, Scott- Salisbury, 28 August 1888. However, this may all have been part of what Kennedy had described as France's anxiety to provoke Italy and/or Germany into revealing the contents of the Italo-German military convention.

⁴⁸⁸ 'Nowhere was this bitter hostility reflected more clearly than at Constantinople where the Italian ambassador, Blanc (who had been one of the few Italians to support Crispi in his endeavours to spark war with France - see note 409, above) was highly sensitive to any indication of a forward movement (by) France, and eager to sound a loud general alarm... in *May 1888* (my italics), Blanc repeated his allegations about France and Russia to the British ambassador... at Constantinople, Blanc consulted White and Radowitz (the German Ambassador), who thought him guilty of "Great exaggerations"... at Rome, Kennedy expressed his relief that (Blanc would never become foreign minister); at St. Petersburg, Morier... accused him of wishing to plunge Europe into a war; and... Salisbury thought it better not to repeat (Blanc's) observations to Kalnoky...'. However, Blanc's wild accusations served a purpose for Britain; White, in Constantinople, who was forever trying not to ruffle the feathers of the Porte or attract the hostility of France and Russia, observed to Salisbury that 'They are now directing all their shafts against Blanc...'; Smith, *Embassy*, pp.119-20.

Conclusion: Italy and the Orthodox Conspiracy

The arrival in dribs and drabs of Russians on the African Red Sea coast had been noted by all concerned parties since the 1860's. Mostly they were - apart from a few missionaries accredited by the Russian church - a motley collection of adventurers and fantasists such as Aschinov,⁴⁸⁹ regarded with bemusement (by the Abyssinians),⁴⁹⁰ irritation (by the French) or hardly at all (by the British). Only the Italians - or at least Crispi - regarded them at all seriously, and on reflection it is easy to see why.

The Aschinov affair had attracted hostile attention from the Italians, which did not surprise the Russians, who had been aware of Italian hostility for some years.⁴⁹¹ One of the Russians who strove to establish a meaningful link between the churches of Russia and Abyssinia was Porphyry Uspensky, a cleric whose mission (in a life cut short in

⁴⁸⁹ The Russian (or Cossack) Aschinov, characterized by the Italians as a '... man of small intelligence', led a small group of Russians, '... some of whom were crooks and the rest sorry rustics urged on by dreams of gold' to the abandoned Egyptian fort of Sagallo, in French territory near Djibouti, in January 1889. Their intention was to venture from "New Moscow" (Sagallo) into Abyssinia and help reunite the Coptic church of that country with the Orthodox church of Russia. Ragged and half-starved, they were evicted forcibly from Sagallo by the French in February 1889; C. Jesman, *The Russians in Ethiopia: An Essay in Futility* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), pp.9-37 & 97-110. Aschinov was not taken at all seriously by the Russian authorities, and the French action at Sagallo (which caused fatalities among the Russian group) caused no waves between Paris and Moscow; Caulk, *Between*, pp. 183-34. See Appendix 5 for the full story of Aschinov, and of other Russian attempts to penetrate Abyssinia, and the resultant friction with Italy.

⁴⁹⁰ Ironically, given the strong links between the Greeks and Russians, the stirring of Russian interest in establishing religious links with the Abyssinian church was part of a wider plan to undermine Greek dominance of the Orthodox church in the East and replace it with that of Russia, since many Russian clerics had become dissatisfied with the Greek hegemony over the church east of the Balkans; Caulk, *Jaws*, p.183; Rollins P.J., *Russia's Ethiopian Adventure, 1886-1905* (New York: Syracuse, 1967 - Ph.D Thesis), pp.432-36. Even more ironically, the Abyssinian church did not regard itself as having anything in common with the Russian church and did not seek or encourage such links as the Russians mistakenly thought would be welcomed (Caulk, op.cit., pp.182-86). The Abyssinian church was Coptic, and actively resisted coming under the influence or protection of the Russian church during the nineteenth century; Afifi M., 'The State and the Church in Nineteenth century Egypt', *Die Welts des Islams*, 39: 3 (1999), pp.273-88. Interestingly, Tewodoros had sent a plenipotentiary to Russia in 1862 as part of an attempt to generate European interest in Abyssinia. As far as is known, the Russians did not respond, which may be why Yohannes refused to meet with Aschinov in 1886; Rollins, 'Imperial Russia', p.435; Crummey, 'Initiatives', pp.433-44.

⁴⁹¹ 'Crispi... makes no secret of his hatred of Russia and of his intense desire to hinder her approach to (the Mediterranean)'; FO45/576, Kennedy - Salisbury, 2 October 1887.

1885) was to 'reunite' the 'Black Christians' of Abyssinia with the Mother church of Russia. In his view, the Catholic Italians were the enemy of the Orthodox Abyssinians and, therefore, of these hopes, and his views outlived him to become part of the tapestry of Russian hopes - openly feared and hindered by Italy - for expansion and glory in Africa. As one Russian newspaper wrote,

For some time we have had no news from Aschinov's expedition (but) we are certain no calamity befell them since if it were so, the Italian press would have crowed victory.⁴⁹²

So, by 1888 there was already a good deal of animosity between Russia and Italy. What made it worse was the good relations that existed before, during and after it (despite the Sagallo incident) between the French and Russians, not only in Europe but in Africa. In 1897 the Italian *Charge d'Affairs* in St. Petersburg intercepted a letter from another Russian adventurer in Abyssinia, Count Nikolai Leontiev, stating that

The French have a firm foothold in Ethiopia. We are trying to

⁴⁹² *Petersburskie Vedomosti*, 18 November 1889, quoted in Jesman, *Russians*, pp.98-9. It must be remembered that the Italians had opposed Russian expansion into the Balkans, generally since 1861 but particularly after 1878, when fears of Russian domination over an enormous Bulgaria loomed large in their psyche. In 1887 Crispi ordered all Italian diplomats to thwart Russian attempts to dislodge Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg from the Bulgarian throne, a position in which he was supported by Bismarck. Later, in 1889, he attempted to form an anti-Russian alliance with Rumanian, Bulgaria and Serbia as an impediment to an evolving Franco-Russian *rapprochement*. When, in 1887 *Svet*, a semi-official organ of the Russian church, praised the martial qualities of the Abyssinians and suggested that they could be trained to a pitch of perfection by Russia, Crispi alerted all Italians in the Red Sea to look out for a Russian fleet. Then Aschinov arrived; Jesman, *ibid.*, pp. 99-100. See also Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, pp. 51-53, and Duggan, *Francesco Crispi*, pp.498-505 & *passim*. Uspensky's thoughts heavily influenced French missionaries to Abyssinia; Jesman, *op.cit.*, pp. 135-6.

help them. Our influence is constantly growing there... The Italians... have not learned the lesson we administered them. I am preparing them some jolly surprises (which will) give the Italians a good dose of admirable lessons.⁴⁹³

Though this letter was written well after the Massawa incident, it did not come out of the blue but reflected a situation and collection of attitudes, *ad hoc* alliances and rivalries that had become well-established by 1888. By then, thanks to Crispi's intemperate behaviour, Italy had practically alienated all of her friends. She had come perilously close to war with France and continued at intervals to do so, alarming her German ally with the threat of a pan-European war.⁴⁹⁴ She had vexed Austria with her irredentism⁴⁹⁵ and wearied Britain with her fumbling attempts at Empire-building and her manifest inability to carry her own weight as a strategic partner in the Mediterranean alliance. The appearance of the Russians in what Crispi regarded as Italian turf probably tipped him over the edge.

Russia was, of course, growing ever closer to France, which country had wrought terrible destruction, especially in the South, to the Italian economy as a result of a ruinous tariff war. France was also suspected by Crispi of plotting with Austria to reinstate the

⁴⁹³ Quoted in Jesman, *Russian*, pp.114-15.

⁴⁹⁴ Both Britain and Germany were worried about Italy in terms of a sudden outbreak of war with France, though each country was affected differently by the possibility. '... disquiet felt in London at Crispi's (Francophobia during 1888)' made Bismarck '... eager to ensure British support for the Italians (and for the Alliance as a whole should war break out); but it was precisely this prospect of being dragged into a war against France on behalf of Crispi's ambitions which reinforced (the British desire to keep relations with both Germany and Italy on an uncommitted basis)'; Kennedy, *Anglo-German*, p.197.

⁴⁹⁵ Bismarck was keen to renew the Triple Alliance of February 1887 since it would reassure Italy of British and German support and '... persuade the Austrians to look somewhat less suspiciously upon their Italian allies'; Kennedy, *ibid.*, p.189; However, by summer of 1888 Austria was suspicious of both Italy and Germany, since both Powers seemed to be more concerned with '... discussing the internal affairs of Austria' and 'condemning the pro-Slav and clerical policies of the Taaffe government' than with trying to address the problems of Italian irredentism, which by this time were becoming '... quite a serious problem in Austro-Italian relations'; Bridge, *Sadowa*, pp.177-78.

Papal territories to the Vatican, which would bisect the fledgling Italian state and undo all the hard (and largely unsuccessful) work of unifying North and South. The fact that Crispi had escalated the tariff war (which had its origins in the Depretis years) cut no ice with him, as did the fact that only *he* saw a Franco-Papal-Austrian conspiracy where none existed. And, by a strange irony of history, France was officially the Guardian of the Greeks (amongst others) in Massawa.

Crispi affected to look down upon the Greeks, but in fact he was in all likelihood riven with jealousy of them. After all, they had freed themselves from Ottoman tyranny decades before Italy became a nation-state, and had taken Greek lands back from the Turks while Italy remained impotent in the face of continued Austrian possession of ethnic Italian territories.⁴⁹⁶ Whatever its faults, Greece had a united identity and a coherent polity. And it was prosperous;⁴⁹⁷ Greek merchants ruled the Mediterranean. Greeks held considerable sway in the Ottoman Empire, and had a fast friendship with mighty Russia. The Italian economy, struggling with strictures beyond its control as well as with trying to support a small but unsustainable Empire, lurched from one crisis to another. The country itself barely held together, and nobody took it seriously. Added to this, Russia was, like Greece, an Orthodox country. As (so it was incorrectly believed) was Abyssinia, a country which stubbornly refused to show any signs of acting as the

⁴⁹⁶ In the four decades until 1897, Greece saw its territory grow by 35% after the integration of the Ionian Islands (1864) and Thessaly and Epirus (1881). Her population had doubled (from about 1.1 million in 1862 to around 2.5 million in 1896); Dritsas, op.cit., p30.

⁴⁹⁷ In the 30 years to 1897, Greek commerce increased in value from over 83 million to nearly 200 million drachma, and its exports and associated revenues increased six-fold; during 1873-96 the Greek economy developed while those of the rest of Europe were in recession; Dritsas, *ibid.*, pp.30-31. See also, *inter alia*, Cohen & Federico, *Italian Economy*; Crafts N.F.R., 'Economic Growth in France and Britain, 1830-1910: A Review of the Evidence', *Journal of Economic History*, 44: 1 (March 1984), pp.49-67; Fieldhouse, *Economics*, pp.11-37; Kennedy, *Anglo-German*, pp.41-50 & 291-305; Mathias P., *The First Industrial Nation: An Economic History of Britain, 1700-1914* (London: Methuen & Co., 1969), pp.395-404, and Schulze M-S., 'The Machine-Building Industry and Austria's Great Depression after 1873', *Economic History Review*, 50: 2 (May 1997), pp.282-304, for comparative figures and developments in other parts of Europe.

Protectorate that Italy so longed for it to be.⁴⁹⁸ Crispi probably perceived an unholy, multifaceted alliance, France and Greece uniting to ruin the already-parlous Italian economy, and the three Orthodox nations conspiring to eject the Italians from the Red Sea, with the Russians poised to arrive in hordes to replace them.⁴⁹⁹ No wonder, then, that Crispi's pent-up rage, combined with his desire for a *cassus belli* against France, exploded when prodded a little too far by the miniscule issue of taxes unpaid by a handful of Greek shopkeepers in Massawa.

Crispi was not a man governed by logic or foresight. The fact that there was no Orthodox Abyssinian-Greek-Russian conspiracy on the one hand and no Austrian-French-Papal conspiracy on the other (and, crucially, no *evidence* for either) made no difference to his actions. The Massawa crisis brought Europe closer to a 'War-in-sight',⁵⁰⁰ situation than has heretofore been recognized. Not surprisingly, it frayed Salisbury's nerves,⁵⁰¹ and brought the end of the Anglo-Italian friendship one, very sizeable, step closer.

⁴⁹⁸ See Caulk, *Jaws*, pp. 153-211; also C. Giglio, 'Article 17 of the Treaty of Ucciali', *Journal of African History*, 6: 2 (1965), pp. 221-231; S. Rubenson, 'The Protectorate Paragraph of the Wichale Treaty', *Journal of African History*, 5: 2 (1964), pp. 234-83; and S. Rubenson, 'Professor Giglio, Antonelli and Article XVII of the Treaty of Wichale', *Journal of African History*, 7: 3 (1966), pp.445-457.

⁴⁹⁹ A rumour in March 1888 of a "rapprochement" between Russia and Greece caused a stir in Rome; FO45/601, Kennedy - Salisbury, 29 March 1888. Thus, it is not unreasonable to suppose, as Jesman suggests, that 'All through 1887 and 1888 Crispi was haunted by visions of Cossacks arriving in Ethiopia and establishing a firm Russian foothold there'; Jesman, *Russian*, p. 101.

⁵⁰⁰ Otte, *Foreign Office*, p.96; the term is used in reference to the 1874 crisis over the Suez Canal share purchase, but can equally well be used here.

⁵⁰¹ In the aftermath of the crisis Kennedy was told by Brin - 'one of the most astute members of (Crispi's government)' - that the recent arrival of a British squadron at Genoa had provoked 'an immense impression in Italy, which still (believes England would protect her) from French attack'. Kennedy responded by saying that he 'knew nothing (of these naval movements apart from reports in the newspapers) but that *Italy had best not count on the assistance of Britain for the defence of her coasts*'; CAB37/22/46, 'Italian views on the Attitude of Great Britain in the Event of a Franco-Italian War', Kennedy - Salisbury, 12 December 1888 (my italics). Given the terms of the Mediterranean agreements, this was a significant indication that Britain no longer felt able to regard Italy as a significant asset or ally. It also indicated that Salisbury had not forgotten Crispi's attempt to strong-arm him into displaying aggressive intent to France when, with misgivings but the best of intentions, he sent the Channel Fleet to Genoa in January 1888.

Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Slavery, Massawa, Spheres of Influence and Trade - an Italian Perspective

Introduction

As we have seen, opinion from all angles in the Red Sea was generally anti-Italian. Their ongoing friction with France, which reverberated throughout Europe; their ambivalent attitude and disruptive, untrustworthy behaviour towards their British allies; their abrasive attitude toward, and violent conflicts with, Abyssinia; their harsh victimization of the minority nationals who depended upon the diplomatic protection of other Powers, and their divisive behaviour and contemptuous attitude towards the Turkish and Egyptian suzerains of the territories they had arrogated to themselves, all meant that Italy was a Power with no fast friends in the Red Sea but a plethora of foes. They were even suspected of deliberately introducing Rinderpest to Abyssinia in 1885, in order to devastate opposition, though there is no direct evidence that this was the case.⁵⁰²

⁵⁰² “Ethiopian tradition” had it that the Italians deliberately innoculated their own cattle with the deadly disease, and that “Italian armies marched down the Nile with rinderpest in their baggage”. It seems likely that the Italians *did* introduce the disease into the Horn of Africa sometime between 1885 and 1887 - from where it spread across Africa within two years, causing widespread famine - but inadvertently, by bringing infected cattle from India (where the disease was endemic) into Somalia. Given that, as we saw in Chapter 1, the British berated the Italians for using too much local cattle and thereby threatening Aden’s supply of fresh meat, it would seem highly unlikely that the Italians would deliberately devastate Abyssinian cattle, since they relied on it for their own sustenance. True to form, the French blamed the British for the outbreak: Rowe J.A. & Hodnebo K., ‘Rinderpest in the Sudan 1888-1890: The Mystery of the Missing Panzootic’, *Sudanica Africa*, Vol.5 (1994), pp.149-78, and Weiss H., “Dying Cattle”: Some Remarks on the Impact of Cattle Epizootics in the Central Sudan during the Nineteenth century’, *African Economic History* No.26 (1998); pp.173-99. See also Ofcansky T.P., ‘The 1889-1897 Rinderpest Epidemic and the Rise of British and German Colonialism in Eastern and Southern Africa’, *Journal of African Studies* Vol 8:1 (1981), pp.31-39, for the effects of the disease and its indirect assistance to the colonizing Powers. However, it is worth noting that famine in Sudan and Abyssinia during the 1887-1897 period was caused as much by a shortage of grain as of cattle, though this was because cattle were needed to irrigate and plough the fields (Ahmad A.H., ‘Peasant Conditions in Gojjam During the Great Famine, 1888-1892’, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* Vol.20 (November 1987); pp.1-18) and because rinderpest was followed by a locust

However, there were good, sometimes complex, reasons for some of their actions, at least from their point of view. We have seen some of these reasons in Chapter 2; in Chapter 3, we will examine the local situation of the Italians in their nascent African Empire; and how their growing predicament as an isolated, poor and weak Power led to their further estranging their British allies; the erosion of their influence over the natives of the region, and the increasingly desperate state of their financial ability to maintain even the semblance of an Empire in Africa. We will conclude with a brief examination of the theories of the causation of Empires in the late nineteenth century, and how these might relate to Italy's activities in this area.

Part 1. Slavery: the Universal Curse

'Slavery had always existed in the... Muslim and Ethiopian worlds... the original impetus of Mehemet Ali's government... had been the vast and unsatisfied demand for slaves in Egypt itself and throughout the Ottoman Empire...'.⁵⁰³

The first Italian foothold on the Red Sea, Assab, was of very little use. Isolated and reachable only by boat, none of the traditional trade routes went near it,⁵⁰⁴ and it proved impossible to open up new routes to make it commercially viable - those attempting to open new caravan routes to Assab from south-eastern Tigray during the early 1880s were

plague - see Theobald, *Mahdiya*, p.173. Kitchener, the great critic of Italian morals, played a large part in this shortage - see below, pp..

⁵⁰³ d'Avray, *Lords*, pp.141-42. Mehemet's comment to his commander in the Sudan during the conquest was "You are aware that the end of all our effort is to produce negroes"; and see Chapter 1.

⁵⁰⁴ The trade routes of this region had been established for millennia and were chiefly governed by factors such as accessibility for camels and water supply, as well as shifting patterns of trade and power; see G. Dahl & A. Hjort-Af-Ornas, 'Precolonial Beja: A Periphery at the Crossroads', *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 15:4: 2006, pp. un-numbered.

killed by the Afars,⁵⁰⁵ so its main function, apart from its original purpose as a coaling station, eventually became that of a penal colony.⁵⁰⁶ Massawa was a much better prospect - developed since the sixteenth century for trade first by the Ottomans and, later, as a key site for Egyptian expansion, it was part of the ages-old trade-route connecting it with Keren, Kassala and Suakin,⁵⁰⁷ and well-prepared by 1885 for becoming the focus of Italian attempts to expand trade into the Abyssinian and Sudanese hinterlands.⁵⁰⁸

But it lay in lands inhabited by the Habab tribe who, like their neighbours the Hadendowa, the Halenga and the Beni-Amer, were nomadic Muslims and traditional slave-traders. Not only that, but the Habab were highly sympathetic to the Mahdists, so that Harrison Smith, sent by Baring in 1886 to observe matters in Massawa, observed that the Habab were being duplicitous, and that the Italians played a dangerous game in negotiating with them for a potential alliance, since all their potential trade routes would run through their lands.⁵⁰⁹ Yet the Italians were in a precarious position; their finances were uncertain and their military presence minute;⁵¹⁰ if they alienated the Habab they

⁵⁰⁵ Caulk, *Jaws*, p.24. The Afars are co-terminous with the Danakil. The Sultanates of Tajourra, Raheita and Aussa were Afar territories; J. Stokes, *Encyclopedia of the Peoples of Africa and the Middle East*, (New York: Facts on File, 2009), pp.7-8.

⁵⁰⁶ d'Avray, op.cit., p. 171. d'Avray points out (p.32) that all the caravan routes 'made a great circle round the Sahel: they all lay on rivers...' Assab was nowhere near a river.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., p.16.

⁵⁰⁸ 'Massawa was a hub in a trading network for ivory, gold, pearls, slaves, ostrich feathers and civet. Caravan trade reached not only the Ethiopian highlands but across Sudan towards western Africa. Via boat, goods crossed... to India, Arabia and the Middle East'; Jonas, *Adwa*, p.36. '(By 1883) the population had probably doubled in number. It was planned to be, and became, the focal point for the increase in trade which developed during (the Khedival years) and the... well-equipped jumping-off place for (ambitious trading projects in all directions)...'; d'Avray, op.cit., p.77. It was also the only feasible access to the Red Sea trade routes for land-locked Abyssinia, and the potential conduit for British trade from the Red Sea to the Abyssinian interior; Arnold, *Magdala*, pp.21-25 & passim.

⁵⁰⁹ d'Avray, *Lords*, pp.113 & 116.

⁵¹⁰ As noted in Chapter 1, the chaotic nature of Italy's political and economic background boded ill for expensive foreign adventures. The Italian economy, partly from the costs of the *Risorgimento* but also due to factors such as, *inter alia*, the North-South imbalance, a chaotic banking system, poor internal transport, lack of natural resources (particularly coal - the essential fuel during the Age of Steam, it existed in Italy only in small quantities of poor quality, and was very expensive to import; British imported coal cost twice as much as it cost in Britain) and dependence on exports for revenue, was running on a massive deficit

could bring the wrath of the Mahdists down on their heads, but if they became too friendly with them they could attract the hostile attentions of the Abyssinians.

For instance, on 7 October 1885 the Italians signed a treaty of protection with the Habab (for the protection of the Habab, not of the Italians). Ras Alula reacted with fury to this. On 28 October 1885 Colonel Saletta, the Italian commander in Massawa, anxiously replied to Alula's outburst by saying that he thought the Habab leader was a friend of the Abyssinians, and that 'I believe I proved to you my friendship to Ethiopia which is Christian like Italy', after which the Italians stopped supplying food to the Habab. Harrison Smith⁵¹¹ reported in January 1886 that the result of this was that '... though there (still exists) a feeling of friendship between (the Italians and the Habab), there is no longer any active commercial intercourse.' The Habab themselves were caught between the Abyssinians on one side and the Mahdists on the other, so that Harrison Smith reported that their leader had sent presents of obeisance to Alula, 'accompanied by a request that he would not punish (the Habab) for joining the Mahdist cause (because their chief) still professes allegiance to Abyssinia, but is prevented from openly declaring it by the proximity... of the rebel tribes of Eastern Sudan'.⁵¹² Not surprisingly, the treaty was allowed to lapse.

throughout the 1880s: Cohen & Federico, *Growth*, pp. 54-55 & 70-86; Mack Smith, *Italy*, pp. 148-70. See also Clementi F. Gallegati M. & Gallegati M., 'Growth and Cycles of the Italian Economy since 1861: The New Evidence', *Italian Economic Journal* 1: 1 (March 2015), Malanima P. & Zamagni V., '150 years of the Italian economy, 1861-2011', *Italian Economic Journal* 1: 1 (March 2015); pp. 1-20 and Varta M. 'Italian export capacity in the long term perspective (1861-2009): a tortuous path to stay in place', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 15:1(January 2010); pp. 133-56). In addition, the foothold in Massawa was not big enough to accommodate a large enough military force to cope with pressures on their presence there - '... the Italians controlled less than four square miles – a fifth of the area of Manhattan' with, at first, a force of less than a thousand men (Jonas, *Adwa*, pp.39-40).

⁵¹¹ Agent sent by Baring to Massawa in 1886 to report on situation in Italian areas; d'Avray, *Lords*, p.113.

⁵¹² d'Avray, op.cit., pp.111-17.

This gave the Italians some respite from Abyssinian hostility, leading to the brief ‘honeymoon’ period (see Chapter 2), but then exposed them to attack from dissident Habab, who by February 1886 were driving the Italians out of their more isolated outposts and raiding right up to the walls of Massawa. Harrison Smith, in May 1886, opined that

It is unlikely that the (Moslem) sheiks of the coast tribes will sever themselves from Abyssinia to join the Italians, but even should they do so, the Italians would not be in a position to (defend them) against the Abyssinians, except at an enormous cost in life and money quite incommensurate with the value of the object sought.⁵¹³

The Hadendowa, too, could be difficult - during the 1840s, when the Turks controlled Kassala, they ‘did not... pay tribute and *it was considered inadvisable by the authorities... to make a punitive expedition against them*’; diverting the waters upon which they depended eventually brought them to pay taxes, but it was a laborious and time-consuming exercise.⁵¹⁴ They were a ‘plucky and determined tribe’ who adopted the Mahdist cause early on and, led by Osman Digna and armed only with spears and swords,

⁵¹³ Harrison Smith to Baring, 20th May 1886; d’Avray, *Lords*, p.117. Portal states that most of Eritrea was ‘given over to murder and brigandage (which) almost put a stop to all trade’, and that the lands around the Italian positions were ‘infested by wandering bands of brigands and evil-disposed Arab tribes’; G. H. Portal, *My Mission to Abyssinia* (London: E. Arnold, 1892), pp.28-34. Reid (in *Frontiers*, pp.77-79) claims that the Italians encouraged such a state of affairs, ‘winking’ at it as ‘war by other means’ against the Abyssinians, ‘as it was clearly in their interests to encourage such lawlessness, particularly in respect to caravans carrying firearms to Yohannes’. It is very far from clear that this is the case; such brigandage threatened their communications with the outside World and had the potential to bring the wrath of Yohannes down upon their heads if they were perceived as being part of its cause. Such Clausewitzian strategy was beyond their means, and not worth the risks.

⁵¹⁴ My italics. Fleming G.J., ‘Kassala’, *Sudan Notes and Records* Vol.5, No.2 (1922); pp. 65-77. See also Dahl & Hjort-af-Ornas, ‘Precolonial Beja’, pp. un-numbered.

twice annihilated well-equipped Egyptian-Sudanese forces near Suakin in October and November 1883.⁵¹⁵ Lest it be thought that these victories were due mainly to Anglo-Egyptian parsimony, note that in 1834, at the height of Egyptian power under Mehmet Ali, an Egyptian army under Khurshid Pasha (Governor-General of Sudan since 1833) which tried to penetrate the area was annihilated by the Hadendowa (the Habab, in contrast, became gradually and peacefully Islamized by the Egyptians from the 1820s onwards in order to facilitate their traffic with Massawa).⁵¹⁶ The Hadendowa were at odds with the Halenga, another fractious Arabic tribe in the region and friendly with the Beni-Amer but not 'particularly friendly with (the Hadendowa, to whom they seem never) to have submitted', causing further headaches in administering the region.⁵¹⁷ Then, in 1887, the Shoans occupied Harrar, and between 1887 and 1889 Menelik was preoccupied with both this and intra-Abyssinian power struggles between the Negus Negast and his vassals; both factors tended to distract him from drawing closer to the Italians and thus making them potentially more isolated than before.⁵¹⁸

In addition to this, there were periodic intimations that the Abyssinians and Mahdists might at some point come to an anti-European understanding, or even a formal alliance. Though this was a threat to Britain as well, it would have been particularly hazardous for

⁵¹⁵ M. Shibeika, *British Policy in the Sudan 1882-1902*, (Oxford: University Press, 1952), pp.182-87; In the November attack, a mere 150 Hadendowa attacked a British-led Egyptian force of 500 men and routed them. Capt. Montcrieff, R.N., the British Consul at Suakin, was among those killed. Next day, 5th November, Hicks Pasha and his force were annihilated; Theobald, *Mahdiya*, pp. 65-66.

⁵¹⁶ Abir M., 'The Origins of the Egyptian -Ethiopian Border Problems in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of African History*, 8: 3 (1967), pp.443-61.

⁵¹⁷ Fleming, op.cit., pp.65-67. See Appendix 5 for a more detailed examination of the racial mix of the Horn.

⁵¹⁸ R.A. Caulk, 'The Occupation of Harrar: January 1887', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 9: 2 (July 1971), pp. 1-20. For a masterful description of the complexities of ethnic, racial, tribal and feudal loyalties and political conflicts in this region, especially Abyssinia, see Reid, *Frontiers*, particularly pp. 66-112.

the Italians, who did not have the hinterland of Egypt and Sudan to fall back on.⁵¹⁹ This threat became acute after the death of Yohannes in battle against the Mahdists in March 1889. Though Menelik, with whom the Italians were still on good terms, became the new *Negus Negast*, the power-base of Abyssinia subsequently shifted South from the Tigray of Yohannes to Menelik's Shoa, leaving the Italians relatively isolated from his immediate support and thus more exposed to the Mahdists and their unpredictable allies.⁵²⁰

Thus, overall the Italians faced a delicate balancing act, surrounded by usually pro-Mahdist Moslem tribes, any one of which might at any moment bring the wrath of the Abyssinians or Mahdists down upon their outnumbered heads, and among whom slavery was a quotidian norm. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that slavery was, to them, a secondary consideration; '... to pursue (its abolition) was (as Saletta remarked) "sufficiently delicate for it not to be raised inopportunely at this stage" - a stage when (the Habab, particularly) might, if pressed on unpleasant topics, seek other allies.'⁵²¹

This did not encompass the entire Italian view of slavery, however; as in other European countries, it faced passionate Italian opposition. One of the side-effects of the

⁵¹⁹ There is evidence that the Mahdists and Abyssinians were making diplomatic contacts with each other with a view to forming an alliance against the European Powers as early as September 1888 (Caulk, 'Yohannes IV', p.31), despite being at war during 1887-89, particularly after Kitchener's series of victories and after Adowa in 1896; see also G.N. Sanderson, 'Contributions from African Sources to the History of European Competition in the Upper Valley of the Nile', *The Journal of African History*, 3: 1 (1962), pp. 69-90, and Holt, *Mahdiya*, pp. 196-98 & 208-10. See also Reid, op.cit., pp. 58-60, for an account of the relatively relaxed relations between Moslems and Christians in Sudan-Abyssinia during the decades preceding the Mahdiya; though attitudes had hardened by then, it is still possible that channels of communication were open enough to facilitate meaningful dialogue between the two sides, especially as the Abyssinians felt that the Western Powers were showing no interest in supporting their Christian brothers against the Moslem hordes surrounding them and, in the case of Italy, were actively conniving with them to undermine Abyssinian power and prestige (Reid, op.cit., pp. 78-81).

⁵²⁰ Caulk, in 'Yohannes IV', p.23, points out that the shift in the locus of power south from Tigray to Shoa opened the field for Italian expansion in Eritrea and towards Sudan, but this supposed advantage cannot be taken as outweighing the increased danger of a Mahdist expansion into a Northern Abyssinia weakened by years of famine and war, and which would have engulfed the Italians.

⁵²¹ d'Avray, op.cit., p.142.

deep schism between Church and State in Italy (see Chapter 1) was that the Vatican removed its *Propaganda Fide* organization (the church organ responsible for proselytisation abroad) to France in 1884, thus depriving the Italian State of any formal church support for efforts to colonise Africa. However, a group of Catholic intellectuals, dissatisfied with this lack of church support for efforts to bring enlightenment to Africa, formed the *Associazione nazionale* in March 1887, which was designed expressly to co-operate with the State in, *inter alia*, christianising Africa.⁵²² One of its main platforms was a strident opposition to slavery in the Red Sea, a position it shared with some secular Italians in Eritrea, and resulted in vigorous and positive efforts to free slaves (often Muslim Oromo who, from 1887, were settled in Assab, the nucleus for freed slaves, before being sent back to their communities to proselytize Christianity).⁵²³ These efforts at emancipation were far from perfect; Italian missionaries frequently failed to understand the complexities of Eritrean and other Abyssinian society and were often accused of institutional and racist bias against indigenous catholic Africans and Jews,⁵²⁴

⁵²² Full title *Associazione nazionale per soccorrere i Missionari cattolici italiani all'Estero* (National Association for the Protection of Catholic Italian Missionaries Abroad). This organisation was also involved in addressing issues such as the severe socio-economic disparities within Italy itself and was not exclusively concerned with Africa; Dirar U., 'Church-State relations in colonial Eritrea: missionaries and the development of colonial strategies (1869-1911)', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, Vol.8:3; pp. 391-410. However, Italian church activity in Africa predated by decades the *Associazione nazionale*. As early as 1837 the young monk, later Chevalier, Sapeto (of *Esploratore* fame - see Chapter 1), had ventured into Abyssinia as a missionary, and in 1846 Cardinal Massaia began missionary work in South-Western Abyssinia (Sbacchi A., 'The Archives of the Consolata Mission and the Formation of the Italian Empire, 1913-1943', *History in Africa* Vol.25 (1998); pp.319-40), as a result of which Pope Gregory XVI created the Apostolic Vicariate of Central Africa, aimed not only at proselytizing and support of European nationals but also at opposing slavery. From 1872 the Verona Fathers, authorized by *Propaganda Fide*, took over the work of the Central African Vicariate, which covered south and central Sudan as well as Uganda, Ethiopia and Egypt; Ewald J., 'The Archives of the Verona Fathers', *History in Africa* Vol.7 (1980); pp. 343-46.

⁵²³ For the historical background to the Oromo (a.k.a. Galla), see Stokes, *Encyclopedia*, pp. 515-17, and Appendix 5. For their resistance to all outside oppressors, including the Christian Abyssinians, see Birru L., 'Abyssinian Colonialism as the Genesis of the crisis in the Horn: Oromo resistance (1855-1913)', *Northeast African Studies*, vol.2/3: number 3/1(1980-81/1981), pp. 93-98.

⁵²⁴ See R. Gray, *Black Christians and White Missionaries* (Newhaven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1990), cited in Dirar, *ibid.*, p.400.

while after 1894 an agreement between the Italian Government and the Vatican led to *Propaganda Fide* becoming involved in missionary activities in Italian Africa, to the detriment of Franco-Italian relations.⁵²⁵ But the very existence, however flawed, of such efforts and organizations indicates that the Italians, quite as much as the British, were far from indifferent to slavery.

Furthermore, Gordon had appointed Romolo Gessi as Governor of Bahr-al-Ghazal in large part because of his fervent opposition to slavery.⁵²⁶ And there is direct evidence that other Italians on the spot were keen to join the crusade against slavery.

But in the context of the place and time, it was a hopeless task. As *Tenente* (Lieutenant) Pavoni (appointed Italian envoy to the Habab in July 1891, who fervently opposed slavery) pointed out, the chief problem was the absence of European supervision of the coasts. For instance, the British had, north of Ras Kasar, set up a Corps of Police; but it was supervised by Egyptian officials, who were usually relatives of the very same local chiefs responsible for the slave trade -

Everyone... was in it, from the Egyptian Resident downwards.

They were all so badly paid, they had to get a living as best they could... the officials of the Suakin region, including the Resident, took part in raids on tribes dependent on the Italian Government (and) from Trinkitat to Ras Kasar, the surveillance... is almost nil (since it) almost completely lacks a European element...

The measures taken by the British have (resulted in the slavers using)

⁵²⁵ One result of which was the expulsion from Eritrea in 1895 of all French Lazarist Fathers by Italian Capuchins, which didn't help Franco-Italian relations; Dirar, *op.cit.*, p.399.

⁵²⁶ Theobald, *Mahdiya*, p .23.

our coastline... both because it is more extensive (and) less capable of being supervised... and because by reason of the vast terrain... they are less easily surprised...⁵²⁷

So it seems that the British criticisms of the Italian lack of interest in stopping the slave trade were somewhat misplaced, to say the least, as their own actions seem to have facilitated it in areas under Italian control which were impossible to police.

British criticism of Italian indifference to slavery smacks, on further examination, of hypocrisy. The Italians weren't alone in having such inadequate resources on the ground that they had to rely on local agents who were inimical to their best efforts to extinguish slavery. The French had identical experiences, during their efforts to pacify and colonise North Africa during the latter decades of the nineteenth century.⁵²⁸ And the British, who regarded themselves as the moral arbiters in matters such as the crusade against slavery, what did they do? We have seen that London refused to pay any part of Egypt's expenses in pacifying Sudan or suppressing the Mahdia. Instead, they contented themselves that

⁵²⁷ On a similar occasion (in 1892), Pavoni tried to arrest a group of Rashaida for slaving, but 'no sooner... had they got word of my tour... than they took off... in a great hurry'; pursuing them, he found their boats on the coast, but failed to stop the slavers from escaping, lamenting that though '... such flagrant contraventions should not go unpunished... I had no means of stopping (them) from sailing...'; *ibid*, pp. 215-19.

⁵²⁸ The French, like the British and Italians, had their share of people earnestly trying to stop the slave trade. In April 1886, Hunter reported to Aden that M. Lagarde, the Commandant of Obokh, had made himself 'extremely unpopular with the Danakil who... attempted his life because he objected to the (slave trade) at Tajourra', and that 'This co-operation... deserves acknowledgment on the part of (HMG)'; IO L/PS/9/56, Hunter - Political Resident, Aden, 19 April 1886. The White Father Charles Guérin, appointed Bishop of the Sahara in 1901, together with the ascetic missionary Charles Foucauld, railed against slavery, but to no avail - 'It is through an order of General Risbourg, confirmed by Colonel Billet, that slavery is allowed to continue'; letter from Guérin to Foucauld, quoted in F. Fleming, *The Sword and the Cross* (London: Faber & Faber, 2004), p. 147. As with the other colonial powers, 'They had limited forces, long supply lines, and as to slavery, had to accept Tuareg and Moor institutions France had long condemned'; M.A. Klein, 'Slavery and French Rule in the Sahara', *Slavery and Abolition* Vol.19:2 (1998); pp. 73-90 (p.74).

the appointment of a handful of Europeans, either directly or via Cairo, as governors of the vastness of Egypt and Sudan would solve the issue.⁵²⁹ The Europeans involved in administering these areas, in all of which slavery had existed since time immemorial and was an integral part of the social system as well as the economy,⁵³⁰ had to rely on local personnel to administer the alien rules imposed upon them. And what views did the British men-on-the-spot have of these local subordinates? Gordon

... arrived at the policy of employing any European he could
(find) after he (formed the) opinion that no reforms or progress...
especially in the suppression of the slave trade, could be effected
with Turkish, Egyptian, or Sudanese officials.⁵³¹

The irreducible fact was that ‘... slavery was an institution permitted by Islam, and appointment of (Christians) to suppress (it) aroused the religious resentment of the populace generally’, while such measures ‘... diminished the prestige of the Egyptian officials and of the khedival government in the eyes of the Sudanese, while at the same

⁵²⁹ Khedive Ismail was keen to appear modern and keenly opposed to slavery in European eyes, leading to the conclusion of the Anglo-Egyptian Slave-Trade Convention of August 1877, which effectively committed him, and Egypt, to the total banning of the slave trade in Egypt (with immediate effect, together with the banning of the holding of domestic slaves within six years) and in Sudan (by 1889). To facilitate this aim he appointed Europeans (many of whom were dedicated to anti-slavery) to important Government positions, e.g., Gordon as Governor of Equatoria in 1873, Werner Munziger (a Swiss) as Governor of Keren and Massawa in 1875 and Emin Pasha - real name Eduard Schnitzer, a German - to succeed Gordon in Equatoria in 1878, after Gordon was made Governor-General of all Sudan in February 1877. When Gordon took over Sudan an Austrian (Rudolph Slatin) was appointed Inspector of taxes in 1879, a German (Giegler) became Inspector of telegraphs, and two Italians - Romolo Gessi and Giacomo Messadaglia - were appointed by Gordon to govern Bahr al-Ghazal and Darfur respectively during the late 1870s; Holt, *Mahdist State*, pp. 29-32; Theobald, *Mahdiya*, pp.21-24. See also Caulk, *Jaws*, pp.17-19, and Hochschild, *Leopold*, pp. 96-98; Baer G., ‘Slavery in Nineteenth century Egypt’, *Journal of African History*, Vol.8:3 (1967); pp. 417-41.

⁵³⁰ See Sharkey H.J., ‘Luxury, Status, and the Importance of Slavery in the Nineteenth and early-Twentieth Century Northern Sudan’, *Northeast African Studies*, Vol.1: Number 2-3, 1994 (New Series); pp.187-206.

⁵³¹ Shibeika, *Sudan*, p.33.

time it aroused the jealousy of the Egyptians and their dislike of an onerous policy backed by (European and British) public opinion'.⁵³² Furthermore, 'The Egyptians did not regard the primitive black (of Sudan) as a human being at all... Even under British rule there (were) appalling cases of cruelty and tyranny (by Egyptian officials) temporarily free from British supervision'.⁵³³ To quote Moore-Harrell: '... despite specific orders from Cairo to stop the slave trade (in Sudan), Musa Hamdi Pasha (Governor-General of Sudan, 1862-65)... encouraged and supported it. He even provided slave traders with regular army troops for their raids, to the profit of all concerned'.⁵³⁴ And, as Theobald points out, 'Service in the Sudan was hated, and was regarded as a punishment (by Egyptian officials); consequently, only the worst types of officials were to be found there'.⁵³⁵ Baring opined that

It is a mighty difficult thing to govern a Moslem country without the force necessary to give weight to (Europeans)... There is no capable Moslem... If they are not allowed to govern according to their own rude methods... they cannot govern at all.⁵³⁶

⁵³² Holt, *Mahdist State*, pp. 26-27. As Alpers points out, this symbiosis between slavery and local economy was not confined to Sudan, but affected the whole of Africa. As one Somali of the Benadir coast commented as late as 1903, 'We can do nothing without our slaves'; see E.A. Alpers, 'Muqdisho in the Nineteenth Century: A Regional Perspective', *Journal of African History*, 24: 4 (1983), pp. 441-459 (p. 452).

⁵³³ Logan R.W., 'The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, a Problem in International Relations', *The Journal of Negro History* Vol.16:4 (October 1931), pp. 371-81 (p.372).

⁵³⁴ A. Moore-Harrell, 'Decline in European Trade in the Sudan from the mid-Nineteenth Century', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 39: 3 (July 2003), pp. 65-80, (pp. 70-71).

⁵³⁵ *Mahdiya*, p.26.

⁵³⁶ Baring to Salisbury, 11th December 1891, quoted in Marlowe, *Cromer in Egypt*, p. 155. Baring had an exalted idea of what the British Empire could have been, comparing the success of the Roman Empire with the failings of the British by pointing out that the Romans practised a kind of inclusivity of subject peoples that was absent from all modern European Empires; he was aware that without a respect for subject peoples the Empire would be unable to fulfil its self-appointed moral objectives, such as the abolition of slavery; Chamberlain M.E., 'Lord Cromer's "Ancient and Modern Imperialism": A Proconsular View of Empire',

Sir Alfred Milner⁵³⁷ stated that ‘... the native ruling class (of Egypt, and thus by extension of Sudan) was vicious and incapable’, guilty of ‘...a disregard not only of every economic but of every moral principle’, and lacking either ‘moral fibre’ or ‘... the capacity to keep things straight’. Anyone who demurred in even the slightest regard from this view, such as Sir Francis Wingate, was pilloried as an imbecile.⁵³⁸

Yet the British contented themselves with allowing territories under their control to be run by these Moslem⁵³⁹ degenerates who would, quite obviously, carry on with their ancient traditions unless stopped by force of arms - which Britain would not, and Egypt could not, finance. Why did the British expect the Italians - who had far less resources - to be any better?

There is now plenty of evidence that the British, for all their moral posturings, were no better than any other European colonial power when it came to the issue of slavery or

Journal of British Studies Vol.12:1 (November 1972); pp. 11-85. See also C.A. Hagerman, *Muse of Empire? Classical Education, the Classical Tradition and British Attitudes to Empire, 1757-1902* (University of Toronto, 2005 - PhD Thesis).

⁵³⁷ Sir Alfred Milner (1854-1925), *inter alia*, Under-Secretary, for Finance in Egypt 1889-92; quoted in Cain P.J., ‘Character and imperialism: The british(sic) financial administration of Egypt, 1878-1914’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol.34:2; pp. 177-200 (pp. 183, 185 & 186).

⁵³⁸ Sir Francis Reginald Wingate (1861-1953), D.M.I (Egypt) 1889-1899, Governor-General of Sudan 1899-1916. Though frequently more far-sighted than his contemporaries regarding the future course of political developments in Egypt and Sudan, Wingate frequently clashed with his superiors such as Sir Eldon Gorst, who succeeded Cromer as Governor of Egypt in 1907 and who wrote articles such as ‘The Oriental Character’ (*Anglo-Saxon Review: A Quarterly Miscellany*:2: (June 1899)), extolling the intrinsic superiority of Christian civilization and British Character over that of The Oriental: Pugh R.J.M., *Wingate Pasha: The Life of Sir Francis Reginald Wingate 1861-1953* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books, Ltd., 2011), pp.107 & passim. Such views were general at the time: Mr. De Lisle, (MP, Leicestershire) opined that ‘... men who have experience of the dark races (as have I)... (know) that they are incapable of self-government...’; *Hansard*, 3, HC, 4 February 1887, v.310 cc.656-735.

⁵³⁹ Baring may have been dismayed to find that it was not only Muslims who profited from the slave trade; as M. Afifi notes (in ‘The State and Church in Nineteenth Century Egypt’, *Die Welt des Islams*, 39: 3 (1999), pp.273-88, (p.285)), ‘... the rulers of Ethiopia would send complaints to the administration in Egypt against some Copts in Aswan for their role in the slave trade’. Hunter despairingly noted, regarding the Egyptian presence on the Somali coast in 1884, that ‘There is not even the excuse that the slave trade has been stopped for it flourishes amazingly... effective interference has been impossible as the Egyptian territories are (too vast to police). To pretend that Egypt has done aught but overawe the tribes for the purposes of extortion is absurd. What use is either life or property when it is all at the mercy of a Pasha?’; Hunter - Secretary of State for India, 4 August 1884, IO L/PS/9/55.

the welfare of their subjects.⁵⁴⁰ It was Kitchener who, in 1890, circumvented the official Anglo-Egyptian policy of allowing grain to be imported through Suakin to the famine-stricken tribes of Northern Sudan⁵⁴¹, and enforced a blockade of food supplies to the interior, on the grounds that such import would spread cholera from the Arabian peninsula to Sudan. Though this had the desired effect of breaking up a Mahdist camp in Hadendowa territory and causing the Hadendowa ‘... to see the necessity of keeping on good terms with the Government’, one wonders what effect it must have had on those innocent parties not involved in the fighting. Such action is reminiscent of Stalin’s deliberate enforcement of famine in Ukraine during the early 1930s,⁵⁴² and hardly invokes the image of an Empire superior in moral tone to those of its neighbours.⁵⁴³ And, to cap it all, slavery continued in Sudan under the noses, and with the connivance, of the Anglo-Egyptian administration well into the twentieth century.⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴⁰ Weiss H., ‘The Illegal Trade in Slaves from German North Cameroon to British North Nigeria’, *African Economic History*, Vol.28 (2000); pp.141-97; Morton F., ‘Slave Trading in the Western Transvaal after the Sand River Convention’, *African Economic History*, Vol. 20 (1992); pp.99-118; Goodridge R.A., ‘The Issue of Slavery in the Establishment of British Rule in North Cameroon to 1927’, *African Economic History*, Vol.22 (1994); pp. 19-36; and Christelow A., ‘Slavery in Kano, 1913-1914: Evidence from the Judicial records’, *African Economic History*, Vol.14 (1985); pp. 57-74.

⁵⁴¹ Government policy was that food should be imported to tribes who were not wholly committed to the Mahdists in an attempt to erode support for the Mahdia.

⁵⁴² See, *inter alia*, Oleskiw S., *The agony of a nation: the great man-made famine in Ukraine, 1932-33* (London: The National Committee to Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Artificial Famine in Ukraine 1932-1933; 1983); and Stark R., ‘Holodomor, Famine in Ukraine, 1932-1933: A Crime against Humanity or Genocide?’, *Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies*, 10: 1 (January 2010), pp.20-30.

⁵⁴³ Holt, *Mahdist State*, pp.171-72: quote from Kitchener’s minute of September 21, 1890. See also Serels S., ‘Famines of War: The Red Sea Grain Market and Famine in Eritrean Sudan, 1889-1891’, *Northeast African Studies*, Vol.12:1 (2012); pp.73-94. Serels also opines that the infected cattle, blamed on the Italians, may have come from Jeddah, not India.

⁵⁴⁴ ‘The new Anglo-Egyptian rulers of (twentieth century) Sudan formally undertook the abolition of the slave trade... However... The downfall of the Mahdist state... left its successor with the problem of reconciling (abolition) with a chronic shortage of labour. The (authorities) decried slavery... but simultaneously upheld and even enforced the continuation of domestic slavery’; Spaulding J., ‘The Business of Slavery in the Central Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, 1910-1930’, *African Economic History* Vol.17 (1988); pp. 23-44 (p.26). See also Hargey T., ‘Festina Lente: Slavery Policy and Practice in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan’, *Slavery and Abolition* Vol.19:2 (1998); pp. 250-72. It seems that this use of indigeneous, or other handy local, forces in the absence of an adequate Imperial presence is a constant in history: Roadnight R. (in ‘ “Sleeping with the Enemy”: Britain, Japanese troops and the Netherlands East Indies, 1945-46’, *History* Vol.87 (2002): 286; pp.245-68) describes the use of Japanese POWs by the British as

Part 2. Spheres of Influence; an impossible situation

The Great Powers generally, in their dealings with each other regarding the division and imposition of influence upon newly-acquired territory in “uncivilized” areas of the globe, tended to apply the Westphalian model of procedure - that is, they attempted to carve up areas under their control into tidy, well-defined areas that mimicked the orderly division of the nation-states from which they came.⁵⁴⁵ While this model of behaviour may have been fine for areas in Europe where recognized nationalities were sedentary and settled into fairly well-defined areas (such as Italy and Greece), it was wildly inappropriate for areas such as Northern Sudan and its surrounding territories, where much of the population lived nomadic lifestyles, regarded themselves as members of clans or tribes rather than of nations, and had no concept of, or use for, strictly delineated national borders. It was this insistence among the European occupiers of the Red Sea littoral and its hinterlands that rigid borders should be recognized, delineated and enforced, that caused them so much trouble when it came to exacting tribute, taxes or recognition of sovereignty from the itinerant and distinctly un-Westphalian-minded inhabitants of the region. It also disrupted well-established trade routes across the whole

police to guard against their erstwhile native allies, while after the Torch landings of 1943 Ernie Pyle, the US reporter, tried but failed to alert the home front to the allied use of pro-Nazi Vichy police against the indigenous Arabs in Tunisia; Tobin J., *Ernie Pyle's War: America's Eye-Witness to World War 2* (Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 1996), p.70.

⁵⁴⁵ The ‘Westphalian Model’ is commonly thought to have derived from the peace of Westphalia of 1648, from which, following the end of the Thirty Years War, the nation-states of modern Europe ultimately sprang, and may be said to be ‘... an account of the presumed basic units of the international system and the patterns of behaviour they exhibit (wherein) the emphasis is likely to fall upon the idea of the existence of territorial states and (a resultant) balance of power (implying an existence and presumption of) sovereignty, equality and non-intervention (among such states, leading to a) collective effort... to create or impose an international system and to regulate membership of that system’; P.M.R. Stirk, ‘The Westphalian model and sovereign equality’, *Review of International Studies*, 38: (2012), pp. 641-60 (p.641). See also A. Osiander, ‘Sovereignty, International Relations and the Westphalian Myth’, *International Organization*, 55 (2011), pp.251-878, and R. Jackson, *The Global Covenant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 385 & 398.

of the Horn from the Indian Ocean to the Nile, upon which the autochthonous inhabitants had depended for generations, whether nomadic or not.⁵⁴⁶

There were, thus, sound reasons for urgent Italian requests to be allowed to control the coast as far North as Ras Kasar, rather than just up to Kitchener's suggestion of Ras Harb, since the lands of the Habab extended from the Massawa district up to Ras Kasar. Any attempted enforcement of Ras Harb as the Northern limit of Italian sovereignty would have bisected the territory of the Habab and other tribes, and make it impossible for the Italians to gain any traction with them.

The advance of the Mahdists and the reluctance of the British to move very far out of Suakin meant that tribes friendly to the Anglo-Egyptians who had not initially fallen under the Mahdist spell had, by September 1884, become discouraged by lack of British support and come to terms with Osman Digna, so that by January 1886, as Baring reported to Salisbury, 'All of the coast north and south of Suakin is in possession of hostile tribes, except Agig.'⁵⁴⁷ The tribes concerned - including the Beni-Amer, the Hadendowa and, especially, the Habab - inhabited the lands up to Ras Kasar. After the defeat at Dogali in January 1887, which severely damaged Italian prestige among the tribes, the Italians became fearful that Suakin would usurp their authority over the Habab. As Gene wrote to Robilant,

(information received) confirms... firstly that (Suakin) confirms

⁵⁴⁶ A rich trade in goods as diverse as livestock, pelts, coffee, gold, copper, salt, ivory and honey existed from early times all across the Horn, but with the imposition of colonial, "Westphalian" borders east of the Nile '...colonial governments (saw such heretofore legitimate traders as) nothing but 'outlaws' or 'porchers'(sic)... It was one of the contentious issues in Anglo-Ethiopian relations (and) throughout the successive administrations of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan... indigenous cross-border trade which was out of government control was regulated and suppressed'; Kurimoto, 'Trade Relations', pp.61-63.

⁵⁴⁷ Baring to Salisbury, 24th January 1886; d'Avray, *Lords*, p.114.

continued relations with Abyssinia (and secondly that) they are making every effort to attract within their orbit (the tribes nearest Suakin and Massawa... (the Sheikh of the Habab is seeking to) ingratiate himself with... Kitchener... The policy of (Suakin) is... logical and consistent with (its) interests, but unfortunately dangerous and opposed to ours...

With the roads into Abyssinia closed to our commerce, there remains only the passage (via) the Habab... If (the) Habab should fall under the influence of (Suakin) that road would be totally closed to us (and leave) Massawa... isolated and shut off from all communication.⁵⁴⁸

It was thus essential that the coast up to Ras Kasar come under Italian jurisdiction, since if Baring's plans to re-establish Anglo-Egyptian authority over the coastal regions down to Ras Harb succeeded,⁵⁴⁹ the Habab would likely reject all Italian authority and leave Massawa isolated.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁸ Gene to Robilant, 7 February 1887; *ibid.*, pp.120-121. The Italians, in their dealings with the Habab and their numerous intra-tribal sub-divisions, were hopelessly out of their depth. For instance, in 1887 General Saletta elected to pay a "generous stipend" of 50 Maria Theresa dollars per month to Ficak Bumnet, whom Saletta had recognized as the head of the Ad-Temeriam (a clan of the Habab), in order to keep open the Lebca Road, a main route to Massawa that ran between the Habab to the north and the Ad-Temeriam to the south, and a strategic artery in the event of any campaign against the Abyssinians. Unfortunately for Saletta, he was the only one who recognized Ficak as the clan head; none of the clan did. Later, General Baldiserra recognized Mohamed Sucar, the real head of the clan, as the clan leader; however, he declined to pay Sucar a stipend, though he allowed that of Ficak to continue, to the detriment of Italian finances and credibility. Later, unable to agree on how best to handle the Habab, the Italians fell to squabbling among themselves; d'Avray, *op.cit.*, pp. 23 & 200-03.

⁵⁴⁹ Letter of 6 May, 1887, from De Martino, the Italian Consul-General in Cairo, to Depretis; d'Avray, *op.cit.*, p.135.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.102-21. On 17 January 1887, Robilant wrote to De Martino, that '... to place the Italian frontier a little to the north of Ras Harb... leaves outside our sphere of influence the whole of the tribe of the Habab, and cannot be considered as practical or serious (since it would lead to) tribes, today discontented,

Trade and Finance – the destruction of a dream.

Despite the grandiose dreams of Carlo De Amezaga and his confederates that a great cornucopia of wealth would result from the Italian acquisition of Assab, as we have seen it proved useless for the purposes of trade.⁵⁵¹ And Massawa too, also turned out to face enormous problems in terms of how the Italians could exploit its great promise. Its trade with the interior was, as we have seen, severely hampered by the complexities of local tribal and strategic factors. To make matters worse, the money spent on maintaining Massawa far outstripped its income, not least because of the profligacy of the Italian authorities.

Capitano Boari, appointed to examine the issue of appropriate tribute, pointed out how little the ‘spendthrift’ Italian government was getting for its expenditure –

A holy man... previously received 285 francs; he now gets from us 550... without ever having rendered any service... From the Egyptians, (the Habab leader) received 70 Dollars monthly; the... 500 Dollars a month which General Saletta (allotted) in 1887, was given in expectation (of services rendered but not delivered)... (Other chiefs) had had nothing from the Egyptians; now (we) pay them 4,200 francs a year... (other tribesmen) had paid 5,818 to the

tomorrow riotous, and (ultimately) docile instruments in the hands of either the Dervishes or the Abyssinians’ (Ibid., p.122). As d’Avray points out (p.121), ‘The hand of Kitchener indeed hung heavy over the hopes and fears of the Italians’.

⁵⁵¹ The Italian paper *Opinione* conceded that the Suez Canal had been a ‘great disappointment’ for Italian trade. ‘Trade with Asia has proved to be a great delusion (re) silk and rice (as Italian produce has consistently been undercut in price and quality by competing imports from Africa and the Far East)... All Italy has gained is the minute and questionable possession of Assab’; 23 May 1882, in FO45/454.

Egyptians; now (we) pay them 4,200 francs...⁵⁵²

In 1889, a Mr. Hogg, of the British Consular service on the Somali coast, conducted a tour of Italian possessions on the Red Sea coast. Treated to an '... exceedingly kind and cordial reception... by General Baldissera' on his arrival at Massawa, he proceeded to note the financials of each post he visited. Assab 'does little or no export trade... it costs 90,000 francs p.a. and the revenue is about 1,000'; at Massawa 'There is not much trade... Italian goods cannot compete due to the expense of import from Europe... Total expenses 20 million francs, revenue 1.2 million', on top of which the naval expenses of Massawa were 4 million francs p.a., while the chief of the Habab gets 6,000 francs p.a., 'others less'.⁵⁵³

Clearly, Italian finances on the Red Sea were parlous and irresponsibly run. It speaks volumes that they only managed to build one short stretch of railway in all the time they occupied Eritrea until 1896 - a 27km. long stretch from Massawa to Sahati. In an age when the Napier expedition of 1867⁵⁵⁴ had displayed the potential of the railway as a strategic tool, and all the other Great Powers colonizing Africa were planning continent-

⁵⁵² Ibid., pp.191-93 - many more such examples are given by d'Avray. A franc was roughly the equivalent of 1/25 of a pound sterling; G. Anderson, *Hansard*, 3, HC, 29 March 1881, v.260 cc.558-78.

⁵⁵³ IO L/PS/9/57, Hogg - Secretary of State for India, 11 February 1889. In 1884, Hunter had reported that no vessels had entered Assab for two years, and that the only trade done there was providing stores to Italian ships when they visited; IO L/PS/9/55, Hunter - Secretary of State for India (London), 2 June 1884. As Moore-Harrell ('Decline', p.70) pointed out, Sudan produced the finest cotton in the world, so how could overpriced, inferior Italian fabrics compete as imports to Africa, and this at a time when textile production remained the mainstay of Italian industry (Mrázková, 'Colonial', p.197)? To give some idea of comparative figures, in 1846-48 Sudan exported goods valued at 41,684 sterling to Tripoli, 59,440-worth in 1862 and, in 1873, 73000-worth in Ostrich and Ivory products alone; figures reached a peak of between 125,000 and 4 million in 1875, collapsing after the start of the Mahdiya in 1884; C.W. Newbury, 'North African and Western Sudan Trade in the Nineteenth Century: A Re-Evaluation', *Journal of African Studies*, 7: 2 (1966), pp.233-46.

⁵⁵⁴ Pakenham, *Scramble*, pp.470-71. See also N. Rodgers, 'The Abyssinian Expedition of 1867-1868: Disraeli's imperialism or James Murray's war?', *The Historical Journal*, 27: 1 (1984), pp.129-149, and R.A. Caulk, 'Firearms and Princely Power in Ethiopia in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of African History*, 12: 4 (1972), pp. 614-17.

wide railways to facilitate trade and Imperialism, Italy remained too poor to pay for more than this one tiny stretch of rail. Intelligent use of such an innovation would, probably more than any other, have enabled the Italians to more effectively control their Eritrean territories, given their shortage of manpower and resources, had they been able to afford it; but the money was never forthcoming, from either government or business interests.⁵⁵⁵

This was a contributory reason as to why Italian attempts to exact tribute from those tribes in their sphere of influence failed, and the same could be said of their attempts to stop slavery - there simply weren't enough Italians available to do the job, so it got delegated to tribal entities who had no interest in anything but lining their own pockets. In itself, it was fairly normal procedure for Imperial powers to delegate such activities to local potentates. As Miran points out, the Italians were inspired by French attitudes to Islam in their African colonies - Italian approaches to African Imperialism sought to construct legitimacy and authority by co-opting Muslim leaders and Islamic institutions. This 'pact' was articulated by, *inter alia*, payment of monthly stipends to Muslim community leaders and functionaries.⁵⁵⁶ However, this system didn't work for the Italians because of the nature of the 'functionaries' they enlisted. The leaders of the Habab - and of the Rashaida, an Arabic tribe⁵⁵⁷ - pillaged their own people and every other clan and

⁵⁵⁵ Though railways were built elsewhere in Italian Africa between 1888 and 1940, they only totalled 1,556 kms., of which nearly half was the Djibouti - Addis Ababa line, built by the French. The other Powers constructed 71,000 kms. in the same period; S. Maggi, 'The Railways of Italian Africa: Economic, Social and Strategic Features', *Journal of Transport History*, 18: 1 (March 1997), pp.54-71, and Ram, *Anglo-Ethiopian*, pp.160-223. However, it is worth noting that railways were expensive; the Napier expedition cost 9 million pounds, nearly twice the cost of the estimated 5 million (Blake, *Disraeli*, pp.495-96), which might explain why a cash-strapped Italy didn't build more.

⁵⁵⁶ Miran J., 'Endowing Property and Edifying Power in the Red Sea Ports: Waqf, Arab Migrant Entrepreneurs, and Urban Authority in Massawa, 1860s-1880s', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 42:2:2009: pp.151-78.

⁵⁵⁷ The Rashaida came from Arabia with Napier in 1867 and stayed on (see note 15, above). They were '... a nuisance, and disturbers of the lives of all the tribes from (Suakin) southwards', frequently fighting the Hadendowa and the Habab and being responsible for much of the slave-trading that the Italians were powerless to stop; d'Avray, *Lords*, pp.212-20. And see Appendix 5.

tribe that they could overpower, ostensibly to pay tribute to the Italians but in fact to enrich themselves.⁵⁵⁸ When the Italians tried to collect their dues, they usually failed - for instance, an attempt in the late 1880s to make the Rashaida pay at least some of the tribute due them foundered when, on being approached by *Capitano* Noe, they ran off to the North, leaving a small group to take their animals and mingle unidentifiably with the Habab.⁵⁵⁹ The Italians tried, but failed, to get the elusive and nomadic tribes to settle in one place and become agriculturalists (and thus more easily taxable), but failed.⁵⁶⁰

Whether or not the Italians were unusually bad at picking the right people to represent them, or (more likely) were simply too understaffed to stamp their authority where it was needed,⁵⁶¹ the results of their policy were abysmal and ruinously expensive.

Thus, the Italian propensity towards skewing customs duties in their favour, and their ferocity in trying to exact every last penny from those, such as the Indian and Greek traders of Massawa, who couldn't run away, though undoubtedly misguided and overly rapacious, can at least be understood a little more, while the keenness of native tribes to flee from the Italian to the Anglo-Egyptian sphere can be interpreted as an action - at least in part - to escape, not just the Italians themselves, but also those whom they fruitlessly employed to collect their dues.

⁵⁵⁸ For instance, for a detailed account of how the Habab chieftains gained and allotted money, see d'Avray, *Lords*, p.233.

⁵⁵⁹ The Rashaida had, after quarrelling violently with the Habab and the Hadendowa during the 1870s, settled near Tokar following the Mahdist occupation and offered their submission to Usman Digna, but after quarrelling with the Mahdists too they raided them, stole a thousand of their camels, and fled to Massawa, where they sought Italian protection and offered submission to General Orero. Thus, not only did they not pay tribute due, but they risked bringing the Mahdists down on the Italians; *ibid.*, pp. 212 -13.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.169-70.

⁵⁶¹ This situation did not suddenly appear with the Italians; it had existed from time immemorial. '... neither Ethiopian or Muslim ever accepted that the Habab were independent. Nevertheless, they (behaved as if they were, and) neither of the putative suzerains found it easy to enforce his claim; nor to extract the tribute (demanded). The (Habab) knew that by a mixture of procrastination, of lying, of fast moving... out of sight of the tax-gatherer, it was not difficult to wear down the tribute collectors...'; d'Avray, *ibid.*, pp.30-31. The difference was that neither the Turks nor the Abyssinians depended solely on the Habab, whereas the Italians effectively did. See Appendix 5 for a brief description of the Peoples of the Horn.

Theories of Empire: Why did the Italians bother?

We saw in the introduction some of the theories behind the creation of European empires in the nineteenth century. How do they measure up as explanations for Italy's attempts at Imperialism? The Marxist view can be dispensed with immediately - Italy had no capital to export (unless one counts Labour as Capital, and with nowhere in North East Africa for Labour to go and nothing for it to do had it gone there, the question becomes redundant; what export of Labour there was from Italy went to North America, Australia and other parts of Europe). It is worth noting, however, that during the latter part of the nineteenth century

... it seems undeniable that growing competition for established markets... coupled with the (prolonged) downturn in the value of exports during the last thirty years of the century, stimulated most industrialized countries to look for new markets elsewhere, (generating) greater interest than ever before in (the) little known regions of Africa and Asia (whose) economic possibilities were commonly overestimated precisely because they were impossible to calculate.⁵⁶²

As Oliver and Sanderson no doubt correctly note, 'Without this development of economically motivated interest (in Africa during the Great Depression), the full-blooded scramble of the 1880s and 1890s is indeed hardly conceivable'.⁵⁶³ In Britain the export of capital was lower during the 1875-1894 period than it had been for the preceding (1855-

⁵⁶² Fieldhouse, *Economics*, p. 35.

⁵⁶³ G.N. Sanderson, *The European Partition of Africa: Origins and Dynamics*, in Oliver & Sanderson, *Cambridge*, pp. 96-153 (p. 105).

1875) or succeeding (1894-1914) periods;⁵⁶⁴ for Italy, already far behind almost every other European country in economic development, the situation during the Great Depression (1875-1896) was far worse. Indeed, 'Italy was barely a minor contributor to (technological progress during the nineteenth century, and her economic) performance was poor, ranking eleventh out of the fifteen more advanced countries in 1890-92...' ⁵⁶⁵ And certainly Italy was probably the most prone of all the Great Powers to over-estimate the potential wealth to be found in Africa, probably because her hopes were the most desperate. But this does not alter the fact that Italy, with no capital to export, cannot be shoe-horned into the Marxist model, even if Britain can.

Nor can Seeley's idea cannot be applied to Italy because the integration that characterized Britain in no way resembled the situation, perpetually verging on chaos and disintegration, that prevailed in Italy throughout our period. Those involved in Italian enterprise in the Red Sea cannot be said to represent Schumpeter's atavistic Upper Classes, except insofar as they appeared as officers in the army and navy, as that class in Italy was mainly concerned, where it expressed any atavism at all, with hostility to either France or Austria. Italians in the Red Sea who could conceivably be designated as Upper Class, such as Antonelli and Sapeto, were more concerned with the possibilities of trading than with conquest. Those, such as Maffei and Mancini, who came from the Upper echelons but who stayed at home, showed *au fond* only a half-hearted and lukewarm interest in Imperialism, and when they tried, in the early years, to partake in the activity - such as when Gladstone invited them to join in the occupation of Egypt - fumbled it.

⁵⁶⁴ Mathias, *First*, pp. 399-400

⁵⁶⁵ Cohen & Federico, *Growth*, p.51. Only in silk reeling did Italy lead the world, and then only because her two main competitors, China and Japan, were even more economically backward than she was (ibid, p.51).

It is eminently possible that Schumpeter's thesis (along with a lot of accompanying Marxist ideology) can, in fact, be turned on its head. As Fieldhouse puts it,

Colonies provided (at a time of dangerously explosive international crises) a safety valve not, as Ferry said in 1890, for surplus manufacturers, but for the enterprise and bellicosity of the jingoists and traditional fighting castes. Frenchmen could regain the self-respect lost at Sedan by fighting in (Africa and Indo-China), far from the Germans and with little but their own lives at stake. Italy, too weak to compete in Europe, could strike impressive postures in North Africa.... Politically ambitious soldiers (*Kitchener? Gordon?*) could be kept far from the centres of power...⁵⁶⁶

There is, however, a case to be made for Hobson's, and Robinson and Gallagher's, ideas. The shipping magnates of Liguria and arms manufacturers, and those who provided the means for implementing colonization, such as the Pirelli company, did have a vested interest in colonial expansion in the Red Sea and did their best to get it going, as did 'men-on-the-spot' such as the Bienenfeld-Rolphs. And, once the men-on-the-spot started to make an impact (such as by importing contraband munitions, thus incurring the wrath of the French and British) the Italian government found itself having to take an interest.

⁵⁶⁶ Fieldhouse, *Economics*, p.67. My parentheses and italics. For Cain and Hopkins' theory, see the previous three paragraphs.

Allied to these theories is what Fieldhouse terms the “Peripheral Explanation of Imperialism”; that is, that Imperialism of the type indulged in by all the Powers of Europe was not the fruit of carefully-thought-out strategies emanating from the metropolitan hubs of Empire, but resulted from *ad hoc* events at the extremities of European colonization - in other words, ‘... the tendency of existing European possessions to expand into their environment... *irrespective of the needs or wishes of the imperial power*’.⁵⁶⁷

This was partly due to the fact that actions on the fringes of Empire were, in general terms, not initiated by politicians at the metropolitan hub of Empire but by individuals or commercial undertakings. As Porter remarks, ‘Even when the flow of information was speeded by... telegraphs,’⁵⁶⁸ the fundamental bureaucratic problem remained the continuous adjustment of (local conditions, which were dealt with by) the men on the spot, principally the Governors, Proconsuls and Viceroys who operated at the key point of interaction between directives from London and pressures generated by conditions on the periphery’.⁵⁶⁹ In the British Empire, ‘(during) the nineteenth century (London) preferred... to devolve (administrative) responsibility upon private concerns (including the partition of Africa had been, wherever possible, left to private companies’.⁵⁷⁰ As Fieldhouse notes, this process was not exclusively British; ‘... German East Africa (originated) from) a small group of German colonial enthusiasts who (upon their own

⁵⁶⁷ D.K. Fieldhouse, p. 80. What Salisbury referred to as ‘Informal Empire’ - see, *inter alia*, Roberts, *Salisbury*, pp.528-29, and D. McLean, ‘Finance and “Informal Empire” before the First World War’, *Economic History Review* (Second Series) XXIX:1976; pp. 291-305.

⁵⁶⁸ For instance, the laying of the Red Sea cable in 1870 brought Whitehall into much faster communication than had been possible before; Roberts, *Salisbury*, p. 138. See also P.M. Kennedy, ‘Imperial Cable Communications and Strategy 1870-1914’, *English Historical Review* 86: 341 (October 1971), pp. 728-752.

⁵⁶⁹ P. Burroughs, *Imperial Institutions and the Government of Empire*, in Porter, *Oxford*, pp.170-97 (p.176).

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.352.

initiative promoted trade) with African chiefs in an area regarded by (Britain) as within the dominions of... Zanzibar'.⁵⁷¹

However, France found that, as the result of a punitive expedition to curb piracy, it had acquired a nascent and unwanted colony when it occupied Algeria in the 1830s, to the dismay of many who wished to '... hasten in every way the moment that would free France from a burden which she could not and would not support', though 'To the government's dismay, its North African territory continued to expand', in this case mainly because of the French army's atavistic urge to push ever deeper into 'hostile' territory.⁵⁷²

Similarly, the Perak war of 1857, brought on in the Malay Peninsula by ambitious local officials, unwontedly extended the British frontier in the tropics - 'Lord Caernarvon accepted it reluctantly as the unwelcome fruit of the activities of men-on-the-spot'.⁵⁷³

As Kennedy asserts, 'The blunt fact was that Imperial expansion... was not simply a force which could be turned on and off by statesmen at the turn of a tap. Neither Bismarck nor Salisbury ... were personally enthusiastic about the ownership of various Pacific islands (but) other, politically important groups were...'.⁵⁷⁴ In some cases - Russia, for instance - trade most definitely followed the flag as a matter of government policy.⁵⁷⁵ But in most cases, as Hyam observed, things happened because 'there is a small but vital gap between what a really ambitious officer on the spot could do and what his metropolitan masters dared to veto', which led to '“The Proconsular Phenomenon”,

⁵⁷¹ Fieldhouse, *Economic*, p.375.

⁵⁷² Fleming, *Sword*, pp. 4 -7. What would now be termed 'Mission Creep'.

⁵⁷³ B. Knox, 'The Earl of Caernarvon, empire(sic), and imperialism(sic), 1855-90', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 26: 2 (1998); pp. 48-66.

⁵⁷⁴ Kennedy, *Anglo-German*, p.198.

⁵⁷⁵ Kochan L. *The Making of Modern Russia* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962 - Pelican edition 1977), p.177-78.

whereby the man on the spot felt himself less of a subordinate in a great empire than a ruler of an empire of his own'.⁵⁷⁶

Most of the time, this suited the government at the metropolitan hub. Salisbury believed that '... the maximum amount of leeway should be accorded to the man on the spot'.⁵⁷⁷ But sometimes it meant that 'Britain's leaders... were "pulled in" (by) the ambitious aggressiveness of certain "men on the spot"',⁵⁷⁸ since, almost by definition, frontier territories 'attracted adventurers, idealists and the very impoverished...'.⁵⁷⁹ Acts of individual initiative could result from any number of reasons or events - '... frontier insecurity... the need for more customs-revenues from nearby ports... the ambitions or ideals of individual administrators, soldiers, missionaries... temporarily employed there... most colonial officials came to see local problems with local rather than metropolitan eyes, responding chameleon-like to the sub-imperialism of the frontier, *whatever the established policy of the imperial government*'.⁵⁸⁰

Most of the evidence from Africa during 1870-90 points to the men-on-the-spot being the primary engines of change, and this fact was widely recognised even at the time. In March 1884, the German Carl Peters founded the *Gesellschaft für deutsche Kolonisation* (GfdK) in order to fund the establishment of German colonies in Africa. For the next twelve years or so he tried, usually without government sanction, to establish German

⁵⁷⁶ Cited in J. Beynon, 'Overlords of Empire? British "Proconsular Imperialism" in Comparative Perspective', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 19: 2 (1991); pp.164-202.

⁵⁷⁷ Roberts, *Salisbury*, p.213. As Beaver confirms, '...matters were still very much in the hands of the people on the spot'; Beaver, *Under*, p.217.

⁵⁷⁸ For example Cecil John Rhodes (1853 - 1902), who made a fortune in diamonds and gold in South Africa during 1870-87, and went on to found the British South Africa Company in 1889 before becoming Premier of Cape Colony during 1890 -96. Before being unseated after his promotion of the failed Jameson Raid, he had formulated plans for a Cape-to-Cairo railway and ideas for a worldwide expansion of the British Empire; see Pakenham, *Scramble*, pp. 354-56 & 375-92, and K. Narizny, *The Political Economy of Grand Strategy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2007) p. 193.

⁵⁷⁹ Ben-Ghiat & Fuller, *Italian Colonialism*, p.5.

⁵⁸⁰ Fieldhouse, *Economics*, pp.80-81; my italics. See also Gallagher & Robinson, *Imperialism*, and Darwin, *Territorial*, pp.614-642; :

colonies, first in Portuguese Angola, then in East Africa near Zanzibar. Though instrumental in founding German East Africa, his career was later mired in disgrace and by 1897 he was ignominiously found guilty of murder and dismissed from German service. It is not true, as Pakenham would have it, that ‘... Bismarck stood four-square behind (Peters)’.⁵⁸¹ It is true, however, that Peters, while he appeared to be succeeding in his aims, was used by Bismarck as a counterweight to British attempts to stop German expansion in East Africa.⁵⁸² Similarly, the activities of the Denhardt brothers led to a German protectorate being established over Witu and Lamu, this time with the backing of German warships.⁵⁸³ Peters, the Denhardts and others acted purely as individuals, though it is significant that, during the period of success in the late 1880s they, particularly Peters, received the hearty approbation of the German parliament and people. Had Peters not made fatal mistakes he no doubt would have been held up as a paragon of German Imperialism; as it was, his fall from grace led to his being disowned.⁵⁸⁴ Less well-known, probably because of their failure, a group of German adventurers from the German East Africa Society⁵⁸⁵ attempted, between March and October 1886, to establish a German presence on the Mijjertain coast (between Berbera and Marsheikh, i.e. the tip of the Horn); though they initially succeeded in agreeing a trade deal with the local Sultan,

⁵⁸¹ Pakenham, *Scramble*, p. 284. See also C.M. Peter, ‘Imperialism and Export of Capital: A Survey of Foreign Private Investments in Tanzania During the German Colonial Period’, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, XXV: 3-4 (1990), pp. 197-212.

⁵⁸² In 1884 he received three Royal Charters giving official German backing to treaties concluded by him with local Chieftains in the mainland opposite Zanzibar, and by the end of 1885 had received another eight - a classic case of the flag following trade. E. de Groot, ‘Great Britain and Germany in Zanzibar: Consul Holmwood’s Papers, 1886-1887’, *Journal of Modern History*, 25: 2 (June 1953), pp. 120-138 (p.121).

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 122-23; Cecil, *Marquis III*, pp.227-31.

⁵⁸⁴ See H.P. Meritt, ‘Bismarck and the German Interest in East Africa, 1884-1885’, *The Historical Journal*, 21: 1 (March 1978), pp.97-116; M. Reuss, ‘The Disgrace and Fall of Carl Peters: Morality, Politics and Staatsrason in the Time of Wilhelm II’, *Central European History*, 14: 2 (June 1981), pp.110-41.

⁵⁸⁵ The Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Gesellschaft, or DOAG, set up in 1885 and run as a quasi-government agency for East Africa until 1888, when a local revolt led to the government taking over its functions; Reuss, *ibid.*, p.114.

attempts to impose sovereign rights failed ignominiously (despite the arrival of a German warship) and nearly got them all killed, forcing them to return home.⁵⁸⁶

Sir William Mackinnon's private attempts to use his huge maritime interests to further British interests in East Africa, including his support of a British attack on the maritime slave trade in 1872, an attempt to lease the mainland territories of the Sultan of Zanzibar in 1877-78 and the founding of the ill-fated Imperial British East Africa Company in 1884 are well-documented.⁵⁸⁷ Similarly with Rhodes and Goldie for Britain in Southern and West Africa, and Thomson and Etienne for France in French West Africa.⁵⁸⁸ (Mackinnon was, as we shall see, involved later with Italian attempts to establish a presence on the Benadir coast).

Perhaps most amusing of all was the instance of a French official who bought a stretch of Red Sea coast from local Sultans in an area that came under the British sphere of influence. The French official admitted that the purchase, and associated Treaty with the Sultans, had been made on his own initiative and had not yet been ratified by the French government, but that such ratification was "of little consequence" as the French had had a Treaty with local Chieftains since 1862. It was of even less consequence than he realized, for it turned out that he had bought the land not from its owners, but from a group of natives from Zeila who had dressed up as Sultans and who were known to be

⁵⁸⁶ L/PS/9/55, Hunter - Political Resident, Aden, letters dated 27 March, 4 April and 1 June 1886; C.W.H. Sealy, Somali Coast Agency & Consulate, Memorandum, 13 September 1886, and Political Resident, Aden - Council at Bombay, 4 October 1886. Hatzfeldt, when questioned about the matter, denied all knowledge, probably truthfully. The Somalis of the Mijjertain coast were extremely dangerous for outsiders to trifle with and were adept at manipulating would-be colonists or commercial adventurers, if they didn't kill them first; N.W.S. Smith, 'The Machinations of the Majerteen Sultans: Somali pirates of the late nineteenth century?', *Journal of East African Studies*, 9: 1 (2015), pp.20-34.

⁵⁸⁷ See, *inter alia*, J.F. Munro, 'Shipping Subsidies and Railway Guarantees: William Mackinnon, Eastern Africa and the Indian Ocean, 1860-93', *Journal of African History*, 28: 2 (1987), pp.209-30, and Pakenham, *Scramble*, pp.342-43 &427-29.

⁵⁸⁸ See, *inter alia*, A.E. Atmore, *Africa on the Eve of Partition*, pp. 10-95 (p.50), and Sanderson, *Partition*, p.102 & passim, in Oliver & Sanderson, *Cambridge*.

‘... the least reputable representatives of their class (what the French called “Portefoix”, or coolies) in town’.⁵⁸⁹

The point of all these examples is that none of them were instigated with Metropolitan government sanction, or sometimes even knowledge. Salisbury was insouciant about such activities, provided they didn’t bring Britain into conflict with other Powers. For instance, Dufferin reported to Salisbury in March 1890, when commenting on the Italian gunboat shelling the Mahdists near Suakin, that

Of course, it is possible that the Italian officers *on the spot* may be occasionally disposed to adopt a *more forward policy than is intended or authorized (by Rome)*, as we sometimes find to be the case with (the Russians) on the Indian frontier...⁵⁹⁰

and again, in July 1890, that

I have no doubt that the Italian authorities *on the spot* are doing everything they can to extend Italian influence among the Arab tribes (around) Keren (and elsewhere), *for this is the invariable inclination of all frontier authorities when placed in contact with uncivilized tribes*.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁹ IO L/PS/9/55, Captain S. King, Agent & Vice-Consul, Zeila - Hogg, Political Resident, Aden (undated, but probably c. January - September 1885). The “French Official” may have been the Governor of Obokh.

⁵⁹⁰ Dufferin to Salisbury, 6th March 1890, IOR/20/A/1173. My italics.

⁵⁹¹ Dufferin to Salisbury, 22nd July 1890, IOR/20/A/1173. My italics.

Baring held similar views:

I... greatly doubt if the local authorities at Massowah are kept under effective control from Rome or Rome informed of all that goes on. But the Italian government will belie all experience of all other nations if... they do not extend their territory in the direction where their real... interests are presumed to lie...⁵⁹²

However, there is evidence that Italian activity of this sort *did* come to acquire government support, direction and encouragement, albeit of a covert sort, from some time after 1882.

Part 3 - Italy and Zanzibar: Trade follows the Flag

Firstly, there is the circumstantial evidence. In Spring 1882 the Italians fluffed the chance to join Britain in the occupation of Egypt, a move which, if taken up, would have effectively given them *Carte Blanche* to do, within reason, whatever they wanted in the Red Sea littoral and hinterland, provided they kept away from the Nile. Yet how different the situation was a mere five years later, when the Anglo-French decision in April 1887 to blockade the Red Sea coast from Suakin to Massawa was followed only a few days after by the Italian announcement that Italy was going to join the blockade and effectively take it over from Massawa to Ras Kasar (i.e. half the distance of the coast under

⁵⁹² FO170/432/219, Baring-Salisbury, 15th March 1890, in Lowe, *Reluctant II*, pp.68-69.

blockade), when the British, especially Kitchener, felt it should go no farther North than Ras Harb.

This announcement was very similar - too similar to be a coincidence - to an event that occurred around a year later on the Benadir coast (what later became Italian Somaliland), where the Italians were also trying to establish a foothold, and where concrete evidence for their Imperial intentions manifested itself from their first stirrings of interest in the region.

In the 1870s and 1880's Sir William MacKinnon was, as we have seen, active in promoting British interests in eastern Africa. In 1878 he nearly concluded an agreement with the Sultan of Zanzibar to lease 500,000 square miles of territory he believed belonged to the Sultan, an area which would have stretched to the Great Lakes and the borders of the Congo basin.

The extent of the Sultan's actual possessions was a matter of debate. He '... claimed a doubtful sovereignty over the mainland opposite... The strip of territory (which he actually ruled) on the mainland of Africa, though it extended along some 6,000 miles of coast, did not average more than ten miles in width.'⁵⁹³ Furthermore, 'The coastline and interior... were the home of Somali tribes whose deference to Zanzibari sovereignty outside of the ports was perfunctory and whose hostility to European intruders was well-known'.⁵⁹⁴ Mackinnon's plan was therefore built on sand, but only fell through because Salisbury refused to give him official backing.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹³ Cecil, *Marquis III*, pp. 227-28; J.F. Gjerse, 'The Scramble for East Africa: British Motives Reconsidered, 1884-95', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 43: 5 (2015), pp. 831-860 (p. 836).

⁵⁹⁴ J.S. Galbraith, 'Italy, the British East Africa Company and the Benadir Coast, 1888-1893', *Journal of Modern History*, 42: 4 (December 1970), pp. 549-563 (p.551).

⁵⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.550.

One of the main reasons for this was German activity in the Sultan's putative domains. Bismarck was not overly keen on having Germany accumulate East African possessions, but he was prepared to back those German interests that did want to develop commerce in these reputedly rich areas. Salisbury did not wish to antagonize Bismarck since he still needed German backing against France over Egypt, so agreements over spheres of interest were settled upon during the 1880s, and finally formalized in the Heligoland Treaty of 1890.⁵⁹⁶

The eventual result was a division of the Sultan's vast but largely imaginary mainland possessions between British and German spheres of influence, divided by a line running west from between the coastal ports of Mombasa and Pangani. '... the guiding principle of this demarcation was a partition of the caravan routes to Uganda; the route reaching the coast at Mombasa was placed on the English, that terminating at Pangani on the German, side.'⁵⁹⁷ The southern half went to Germany and the northern to Britain.

The British presence was embodied in Mackinnon's British East Africa Company, which in May 1887 was granted a concession by the Sultan over a portion of his domain on the mainland and, crucially, over Kismayu and the coast around it.

Crucially, because since 1884 the Italians had been intent upon gaining a foothold in the Sultan's territories. On 2 December 1884, Negri, the Italian delegate at the Berlin Conference, wrote to Mancini in Rome that he had heard that the brave explorer Cecchi had departed for the Congo via the East African coast, and that he believed that Cecchi had a great opportunity and duty to serve Italy by exploring the Somali coast, especially

⁵⁹⁶ Lowe, *Reluctant I*, pp.121-22. Of course, Bismarck was also in need of Salisbury's support over the Triple Alliance via the Mediterranean Agreements, but Salisbury was so focused on Egypt and Sudan that Bismarck was able to use bluster to get his way over East Africa; de Groot, *Zanzibar*, p. 136.

⁵⁹⁷ FO 84/2258 TNA. Sir Percy Anderson, Memorandum, 13 September 1892.

the mouth and course of the Juba river. The expedition would show whether or not the Juba was navigable; if it was, Negri hoped that others would follow Cecchi, as the river's mouth would be *a good site for a colony*. Negri concluded by saying that, if that particular location was not ideal, then maybe others better suited might be located in the vicinity.⁵⁹⁸

There is no pussyfooting about here in the pretence that only a trading post is sought; clearly, at least some Italians - specifically those in government - were already intent upon establishing a colony in Africa. In fact, during 1883 the idea had been mooted of Italy gaining a foothold in New Guinea, though it was rapidly recognized that the likelihood of either Granville or the government of Queensland allowing this to happen was pretty remote, and the idea was quietly dropped.⁵⁹⁹ The Berlin Conference can't be blamed, as it was by Lowe and Marzari, for these Imperial dreams. That had only just got going (it commenced on 15 November, a bare two weeks before Negri's letter, and didn't wind up until 26 February 1885). And Negri's letter was not an isolated instance of vainglorious wool-gathering. A week later, Mancini replied to Negri, saying that his letter had been of particular interest and had already attracted the attention of the government, and would be given more mature consideration.⁶⁰⁰

This mature consideration resulted in Brin,⁶⁰¹ the Minister for the Navy, sending instructions to the commander of the Italian warship *Garibaldi*, which was about to start the second leg of a round-the-world cruise, to divert to Zanzibar on the East African leg

⁵⁹⁸ Negri - Mancini, 2 December 1884, in *L'Italia in Africa*, Volume II, *Oceano Indiano* Tomo II (II/II), p.3.

⁵⁹⁹ Mancini - Nigra (London), 5 July 1883, DDI 2/XV, p. 602.

⁶⁰⁰ Mancini - Negri, 8 December 1884, *ibid*.

⁶⁰¹ Benedetto Brin (1833 - 1898), Naval Minister 1876-78, 1884-91 and 1896-98; Minister for Foreign Affairs under Giolitti, 1892-93.

of the journey, assess the political situation there, and to cultivate the friendship of Sultan Barghash,⁶⁰² who was under the protection of the British⁶⁰³ and whose forces controlled large amounts of the adjacent African coast. It was essential, Brin wrote, to get *precise information* regarding the extent of the Sultan's effective domain, the nature of the reputedly excellent anchorage at Kismayu to the North, and also, if possible, to find out whether the Juba was navigable and its mouth a good site for a colonial settlement, since it was only 10 miles away from Kismayu.⁶⁰⁴

The results of the *Garibaldi*'s visit must have been encouraging, for by 2 April 1885 Mancini had confirmed to Brin that Cecchi was to proceed directly to the Juba on the *Agostino Barbarigo*, with 4,000 thalers to try and obtain cession of territory to Italy from the Sultan.⁶⁰⁵

Italian ambitions might have been crushed in East Africa since Britain, France (which was interested in pushing east from the Congo basin into the lands beyond the Great Lakes)⁶⁰⁶ and Germany, in jostling for position, threatened to push them out altogether. Zanzibar was the hub of a network of caravan trade routes to the Lakes and elsewhere

⁶⁰² Sayyid Barghash bin Said Al-Busaid (1830-1888), Sultan of Zanzibar 1870- March 1888

⁶⁰³ Britain had concluded anti-slavery treaties with Zanzibar in 1845 and 1873 and used it as the base for its anti-slavery naval operations in the Indian Ocean (Pakenham, op.cit., p.282).

⁶⁰⁴ Brin - Commander *Garibaldi*, (undated, but referred to in a letter from Mancini to Brin dated 31 December 1884 as already having been sent to the *Garibaldi*, which by 9 January 1885 was involved, with the *Amerigo Vespucci*, in Red Sea operations preparing for the occupation of Massawa; so in all likelihood it must have been sent on or not long after 8 December - see Mancini-Negri, December 8, above), in *Oceano Indiano* II/II, pp. 4-8.

⁶⁰⁵ Mancini - Brin, 14 & 15 March 1885, Brin - Commandante del *Barbarigo* (undated, March 1885) and Cecchi - Mancini, 2 April 1885.

A letter, dated 28 February 1885, from the Vice-Consul at Massawa to Mancini related that the Cecchi expedition was no longer a secret as 'all the world is talking about nothing else', which might explain why Mancini's to Cecchi of 30 March 1885 instructs him to restrict his activities to ascertaining the possibility of the Juba serving as a purely commercial post. However, by 2 April Cecchi had been authorized to obtain territory if possible from the Sultan, so clearly the Italians had the bit between their teeth. All letters in *Oceano Indiano* II/II, pp. 10-14.

⁶⁰⁶ Pakenham, *Scramble*, pp. 252-53, 283 & 287-89; Roberts, *Railway*, pp.407-10, and Kanya-Forstner, *Anglo-French*, pp.639-44.

inland from the Indian Ocean,⁶⁰⁷ and the Lakes were believed to be rich in resources, as well as having friendly natives and a healthy regional climate, especially in the highlands around mounts Kenya and Kilimanjaro.⁶⁰⁸ It was also on the strategic sea route from India to Southern Africa, and thus of great importance to Britain.⁶⁰⁹ The likelihood of Italy being able to get in between the Powers and take a slice of the strategically and economically important Benadir coast seemed distant.

Cecchi cabled Mancini in a state of great excitement on 29 April 1885, saying that the Germans had occupied a large slice of the Sultan's territory, that the Sultan was very angry about it and appealing to Britain for support but not expecting much help from that quarter, and that consequently *he was manifesting a desire for the friendship of Italy*. When Cecchi raised with the Sultan the notion of an Italian occupation of Juba in return for Italian help, the Sultan was evasive, and Cecchi asked Mancini to try and ascertain what views Britain had on the matter, pending a decision from the Sultan.⁶¹⁰

For all of the next month Mancini tergiversated, asking Cecchi to clarify exactly how much territory the Sultan actually owned, how useable the Juba would be, and telling Cecchi to settle for a commercial treaty if matters remained cloudy - for all the world as if he was stalling, waiting for events to overtake any decision he might have to make.⁶¹¹ One can almost sense Cecchi's frustration at Mancini's dithering.⁶¹²

⁶⁰⁷ 'If you play the flute at Zanzibar, everybody as far as the lakes dances'; an Arab proverb, quoted in de Groot, *Zanzibar*, p.121.

⁶⁰⁸ Pakenham, *Scramble*, pp. 282 - 84.

⁶⁰⁹ It was also important to Britain's position in the Arabian peninsula, as most of the grain supplied for the Hadramaut and Oman came from the Benadir coast; Alpers, 'Muqdisho', p. 449.

⁶¹⁰ Cecchi - Mancini, 29 April 1885, *Oceano Indiano* II/II, p.20. My italics.

⁶¹¹ See, for instance, Mancini - Cecchi, 6, 9 & 21 May 1885, *ibid*.

⁶¹² '*Superate molto difficoltà. Accordi trattato commercio bene avviati. Onde conchiudere urge assolutamente inviare subito telegramma reale sultano accreditandoci. Ulteriore ritardo comprometterebbe esito*' - 'Progress very difficult. Agree that commercial treaty good to start with. In order to conclude matters absolutely urgent to send immediately a royal telegram (*i.e. one authorized by the*

However, for once the Italians were in luck. Sir John Kirk,⁶¹³ the British Consul in Zanzibar, aware that the untrammelled ambitions of Britain and Germany might lead to the dissection of the Sultan's domain, the anti-slavery policy of which he had been assiduously and successfully cultivating for years,⁶¹⁴ assisted Cecchi to negotiate a commercial treaty with the Sultan, which was signed on 28 May 1885. Kirk was unaware of Cecchi's ulterior motives.⁶¹⁵

It was some while before the Italians succeeded in obtaining formal cession of any part of the Benadir coast. Between Cecchi's success of May 1885 and October 1888 they tried flattery and bluster on the Sultan to gain a territorial concession, but succeeded only in alienating him and annoying both British and German governments.⁶¹⁶ But once again, luck was with them. MacKinnon remained the face of British interests in the region, and in May 1887 the Sultan granted a concession to the British East Africa Company which gave it control over his territory in the British sphere between the Umba river in the south

King of Italy) to Sultan accrediting me. Further delay will compromise outcome'; Cecchi - Mancini, 23 May 1885, *ibid.* Mancini confirmed, in a letter dated 25 May 1885, that such a telegram had been sent.
⁶¹³ Sir John Kirk (1832-1922) joined Livingstone's expedition to central Africa during 1858-64 and in 1870 was appointed acting British Consul to Zanzibar, becoming full Consul in 1881. He was instrumental in consolidating Britain's influence with the Sultan, and of helping to stabilize and expand Zanzibar's economic and political position in the face of mounting pressure from colonizing Powers; C. Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade: the Suppression of the African Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Frank Cass, 1968), pp. 264-68.

⁶¹⁴ 'In 1873, Great Britain (in its war on the slave trade)... had compelled the Sultan to a treaty under which all sea-borne traffic in slaves was forbidden in his ports... the task of saving the treaty from becoming a dead letter (due to local opposition) devolved upon (Kirk)... an enthusiast in the cause... in his ceaseless pursuit of (this objective) he inevitably achieved a dominating control over the Sultan's government'; Cecil, *Marquis III*, p.228.

⁶¹⁵ Galbraith, *Benadir*, p. 551. Two days before, Mancini had cabled Cecchi confirming that it would be a good idea to try and gain the confidence and friendship of the Sultan, and thereby extract some form of territorial concession, subject to the approval of the Italian government; Mancini - Cecchi, 26 May 1885, *Oceano Indiano* II/II, p.23. One can only guess how relieved Cecchi must have been that Mancini had finally committed to a decision. Cecchi, had offered Barghash an equal division of revenues from Kismayu in return for a cession of the port; Barghash had asked Cecchi for a formal request for this arrangement, but Cecchi never made it as he suspected that it would be turned down (Galbraith, *op.cit.*, p.551).

⁶¹⁶ Galbraith, *op.cit.*, pp. 551-56.

and the port of Kipini in the North, with an option to lease Kismayu and the coast to about 60 miles north of it.

By a happy chance Catalani, in London, and Mackinnon struck up a friendship which gave the Italians a sort of entrée into affairs from which they had previously been excluded, and between August 1888 and September 1889 Mackinnon managed to negotiate a deal whereby Kismayu and the navigation rights to the Juba river were shared jointly between Mackinnon's company and the Kingdom of Italy, while the Italians were granted control of the northern ports of the Benadir coast.⁶¹⁷

This all stemmed from the Italian government's approval of Cecchi's expedition in December 1884 - proof positive that from this date the Italian government was directly involved in colonial activity. Thereafter, not only did Mancini take positive steps to send Cecchi there and have an Italian ship diverted to reconnoitre the area, but he acceded to Cecchi's request to have the King of Italy send a telegram accrediting him as the Italian representative to Zanzibar. Even though by the time Cecchi received his Royal telegram Massawa had been occupied for three months, the Imperial process indisputably started in December 1884, three months before the Occupation of Massawa and possibly even before that occupation had been approved, or maybe even thought of.

Why, then, was Mancini so nervous? Possibly it was because he was afraid of offending Britain. Many Italians, including Mancini, clearly believed (or allowed themselves to believe) that Britain had wanted them to take Massawa. And, in taking both Assab and Massawa, they had been able to take advantage of the divisions of power in the Red Sea in order to enable their actions. But in Zanzibar, which was effectively a

⁶¹⁷ For the full story of the anfractuous route by which the Italians managed to gain control of the Benadir Coast see Galbraith, *op. cit.*, pp. 551-60.

British protectorate, the story was different. There was no such confusion of power there, so that the Italians might find themselves in conflict not just with Britain but with a newly-arrived Germany too, whose presence had been sanctioned by Britain - could they afford to alienate both their major allies? Then again, there was the possibility that the Egyptians or Turks might yet take Massawa back by force, or that it might fall to the Mahdists, or even the Abyssinians. What if they were evicted from Massawa by any of the above and from Benadir by Britain or Germany? And even if they managed to hold on to both places, could they afford it in financial and material terms? They had elected not to join Britain in Egypt in 1882 because of the cost - their financial situation was no better now.

Nevertheless, they went ahead. They tried to keep the Benadir operation secret, as they had tried to keep Operation *Messina* secret and as they had succeeded in so doing with the Massawa operation. Though their men-on-the-spot in the Red Sea undoubtedly took advantage of the opportunities that resulted, the Italian decision to press on with colonizing activity in Benadir came entirely from the government. It is not too much of a stretch, then, to make the tentative assumption that, behind all the Italian men-on-the-spot activity in the Red Sea and its hinterland, there was the guiding and authorizing hand of the Italian government.

Certainly the situation became much more high-profile in Benadir, as it did in the Red Sea, once Crispi came to power and embarked upon his naked and ambitious plans for expansion in Africa. He planned to move in from the Benadir coast inland towards the Great Lakes, by which route he could link up with Abyssinia. If Abyssinia became the hoped-for client state, the Italians had the prospect of having an unbroken belt of territory

from the Benadir coast and up through Abyssinia to the Red Sea, thus giving them control of practically the whole of the Horn of Africa and its contiguous territories.⁶¹⁸

Typically, the Italians managed to antagonize everyone in pursuit of their aims. Barghash, initially approached by Cecchi in 1885, had acceded to a commercial arrangement but not a territorial one of the type sought by the Italians. In May 1888 Cecchi tried again with the new Sultan, Khalifa.⁶¹⁹ He also refused the territorial concession. At this the Italians manufactured an 'insult' by the Sultan to the King of Italy, and Crispi demanded the unconditional cession of Kismayu as reparation; a demand, Crispi proclaimed, *that was supported by Britain*.⁶²⁰

At this, Salisbury intervened. Catalani reported to Crispi in June 1888 that Salisbury - ever a master of understatement - was 'uneasy' about Italian activity in Zanzibar, embodied in the arrival of two Italian warships, because he did not understand what the Italians were up to, and felt that their activity was aggravating the 'great agitation' becoming apparent in the Sultanate. Worse than this, Salisbury said, was a rumour that Britain was covertly helping Italy in her unsettling endeavours. This, Salisbury emphasized, was, as Catalani and Crispi very well knew, totally unfounded. Salisbury did not (he assured Catalani) mind in the least if the Italians wanted to establish a presence there, but would they please not turn the country upside down in so doing? Turmoil would only further undermine the Sultan's prestige with his people, which had already suffered because of British and German intrusions, cause problems for the substantial

⁶¹⁸ Galbraith, *Benadir*, p. 551. This was no idle pipe-dream; during the whole of the nineteenth century, there was a thriving trade in slaves and ivory facilitated by the Zanzibari trade routes of the Benadir coast. Most of the ivory came through southern Abyssinia while the slaves went on to create a robust East African agricultural economy based on plantation slavery; Alpers, 'Muqdisho', pp.448-450. If the Italians had managed to establish a hegemony over this economically thriving nexus, their dreams of wealth based upon control of Abyssinia might well have come true.

⁶¹⁹ Khalilfa bin Said Al-Busaid (1852-90), Sultan March 1888 – February 1890.

⁶²⁰ Galbraith, *Benadir*, p.552. My italics.

number of Europeans already there (mainly missionaries), and give opportunity for the French to profit from any disarray. Catalani assured Salisbury that he was in Crispi's prayers, and that Crispi would do everything within his power to oblige him.⁶²¹

Catalani's patently false assurances were futile. A result was that Britain sent naval reinforcements to Zanzibar to bolster the Sultan. In July 1888, Filonardi,⁶²² the acting Italian agent in Zanzibar, reported to Crispi that the arrival of the Italian warships had done little more for Italy than provoke rumours among Zanzibar's expatriate population about Italian intentions, while the British had sent four warships, whose purpose was obvious - to support the Sultan with a vengeance (*oltranza*) and keep the Italians in line - and which made the possibility of establishing any Italian-Zanzibari *rapprochement* difficult.⁶²³ Both Salisbury and Bismarck told Italy that Zanzibar was under their joint protection, and that they would not allow Italy to use force against the Sultan. Crispi huffed and puffed, but not even the presence of his warships made any impact upon the Anglo-German front.⁶²⁴

⁶²¹ Catalani - Crispi, 5 June 1888, *Oceano Indiano* II/II, pp. 86-87. The matter raised very little attention in Britain. The Earl of Rosebery asked Salisbury for information regarding the 'unfortunate difficulty' of the argument between the Italian Consul and the Sultan. Salisbury replied that he knew little more than one could read in the papers, that the Italians were demanding the promised cession of Kismayu as compensation for the insult to the Italian King, and that the Sultan denied either insulting the King or ever promising to cede Kismayu to the Italians. At that the matter rested; *Hansard*, HL, 3, 7 June 1888, v.326 cc.1314-15.

⁶²² Vincenzo Filonardi (1853-1916), soldier and Italian Consul at Zanzibar from 1890, and characterised by Herbert Bismarck as "a dirty little jew grocer" about whom "one could not believe a word he said" (although he was an officer of the Italian army - another example of the esteem in which the Italians were held by the Germans); Galbraith, *Benadir*, p.551.

⁶²³ Filonardi-Crispi, 18 July 1888, DDI 2/XXII, p.91.

⁶²⁴ Ten days after Filonardi's communication of 18 July (above), Cecchi (who had been away) cabled Crispi saying that the British agent was co-operating with the Italians over getting Kismayu ceded to Italy, but his assumption, upon whatever it was based, was clearly false (Cecchi-Crispi, 28 July 1888, DDI 2/XXII, p.109). Only the intercession of Mackinnon, as a result of Catalani's requests to him to help dig Italy out of an impossible diplomatic muddle worthy of a Gilbert and Sullivan Operetta, led eventually to the Benadir ports being signed over to the British East Africa Company, and thereafter to Italy, in 1893; Galbraith, *op.cit.*, pp. 556-563.

However, a grand opportunity for the Italians to establish a firm position there came two months later. For several years they had observed what appeared to be severe friction between the British and Germans in their East African protectorates, which in itself might conceivably have led to Britain asking for Italian assistance.⁶²⁵ Then, in August 1888, a rebellion of the coastal population erupted in the German sphere.⁶²⁶

Cecchi saw this as a golden opportunity for Italian advancement. Clearly no lover of Britain, he wrote to Crispi that the Italian position vis-à-vis the Sultan would be greatly improved (especially with the presence of the two Italian warships to intimidate him) if Italy could get a tacit understanding with Germany and impede British activity wherever possible, as the British, however much they pleaded neutrality, always obstinately supported the Sultan. Although, of course, an open collision with Britain was to be avoided, the more difficulty Britain experienced, the greater the chance of Italian advancement. In all the confusion, it should be possible for Italy to send an expeditionary force, under cover of a scientific or commercial venture, to form alliances with local Chieftains outside of the Sultan's control and thus obtain a foothold. There were, he wrote, three essential conditions for the success of such a venture: firstly, the ability to forestall any British sleight-of-hand (*colpo di mano*) which might threaten Italian

⁶²⁵ Roberts, in *Salisbury*, makes much of Anglo-German friction in various parts of the globe, such as Fiji and New Guinea (pp. 523-25) and de Groot, in *Zanzibar*, describes Anglo-German friction in East Africa in great detail. This latter, however, was not as serious as might have appeared from the outside; most of the friction resulted from the hostility of Arendt, the German Consul-General in East Africa, for his British opposite number, F.W. Holmwood. Anglo-German trading companies were successfully set up during the 1880-90 period, and the division of spheres was more or less settled in autumn 1886, when Peters spent time with Mackinnon at his Scottish estate at Balinakill and the two of them laid the basis for the Anglo-German Agreements of that year. The alacrity with which both Powers teamed up to defeat the 1888 rebellion indicates that what differences existed were largely superficial; see Peter, *Tanzania*, pp. 208-09, and Gjerse, *Reconsidered*, pp. 837-38..

⁶²⁶ 'In East Africa (resistance to German colonialism) was (early, long drawn out and fierce). Three successive revolts (the Bushiri uprising of August 1888-November 1890, the Hehe war of 1891-98 and the Maji-Maji insurrection of 1905-06) led to heavy German losses...'; R. Cornevin, *The Germans in Africa before 1918*, in Gann & Duignan, *Colonialism*, pp.383-419 (p.405).

prospects of success; secondly, to ensure a method of covering any Italian actions with a character sufficiently deceitful (*doppio carattere*) to allow them to deal with any diplomatic difficulties that might arise from their actions; and, thirdly, to undertake any invasive actions in a place or places where no significant third party interests were involved, such as Isola di Pemba.⁶²⁷

Nothing came of Cecchi's proposals, except to provoke the comments that "Italy is playing a strange game at Zanzibar" (Kirk) and that the Italian manoeuvres were 'quite unaccountable' (Salisbury).⁶²⁸ However, Crispi was clearly emboldened by Cecchi's ideas. In December 1888 the Italians, despite British warnings against such action, joined in the Anglo-German blockade of the region '... to underscore her presence as an East African power...'⁶²⁹

This move was almost identical to the Italians unilaterally announcing their intention to blockade the Sudanese coast between Massawa and Ras Kasar a year earlier. The hesitancy of the early years, of a nervous Mancini and of a government uncertain of its ability to really be a Great Power, had gone. They were attuned to the world and actions of the established Great Powers and, though they were usually unsuccessful in their endeavours, this no longer stopped them from trying their luck.

The events in Zanzibar in August 1888 coincided with those of the Massawa Crisis. Was there any connection? Were the Italians deliberately using one crisis to cover their actions in the other? It seems unlikely, if only because, while the unfolding of events in Massawa were probably the result of Crispi's urge to provoke war with France, the native

⁶²⁷ Cecchi - Crispi, 19 August 1888, in *Oceano Indiano* II/II, p. 125. Pemba island is part of the Zanzibar archipelago, defined as comprising Zanzibar, Pemba, Lamu and Mafia (Gjerso, *Scramble*, p. 837).

⁶²⁸ Both quoted in Galbraith, *Benadir*, p.554.

⁶²⁹ Galbraith, *ibid.*, p.557.

rebellion in the coastal regions of the Zanzibar Sultanate was sudden, and quite beyond the gift of the Italians to control. While the Italians were guiding events in Massawa, in Zanzibar they were reacting to them, and Cecchi's suggestions to Crispi were not taken up, probably because everything there happened too suddenly; only in December did Crispi invite himself to join the blockade of Zanzibar as an unwanted guest of the British and Germans.

However, Cecchi's proposals of August 1888 were of a piece with what went before, and were merely a continuation of the policy which he had been given to implement from December 1884. The hand of Italian Imperialism was clear from the start in Zanzibar. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that, in the Red Sea and Sudan, Crispi merely amplified the Imperialism started by Mancini at Zanzibar in 1884. The change in behaviour from Mancini's nervous fumbings to Crispi's strident bluster was a change only in emphasis, not practice. Would there really have been two different policies for the two parts of Africa in which Italy had interests? Even if there had been, would the prospect of linking up their meagre possessions in Benadir and the Red Sea, to create a vast Empire engulfing most of North-East Africa, not have inevitably created a single policy?

Of course, the Russians also had a deliberate policy of territorial expansion, not only in Central Asia but in Africa too. While the early efforts of those such as Aschinov were not officially supported, Leontiev's later ones were, at least semi-officially by the Orthodox church, which had been heavily influenced by Uspensky's thoughts and which was very keen to support expansion wherever the Russians could find a foothold,

especially in an area like the Horn where there was (apparently) a ready-made Christian ally to support their efforts.⁶³⁰

The difference was that the Russians made no secret of their ambitions, or the means by which they meant to achieve them. The Italians, however, seem on examination also to have had a concerted Imperial policy, directed from Rome, but one which at the time was hidden under the dissimulation of being the result of the random, wild activities of their men-on-the-spot rather than the fruit of a declared Imperial policy.

The net result of this, from the British point of view, was to make them appear untrustworthy. Rivalry with France and Germany in Africa and elsewhere, and (particularly) with Russia in the East was, to a great extent for Britain, a visible given, a known quantity (not for nothing was it called “The Great Game”); with Italy, it was too often a case of her saying one thing and doing another, and at the expense of the alliance that she claimed to value so highly.

Conclusion: Sympathy for the Devil - How the Italians Couldn't Win.

For over a thousand years, from the end of the Roman Empire to the fall of Napoleon, Italy was at best a colourful patchwork of little Ruritaniae, at worst a plaything of Emperors. Still only a quasi-nation-state by 1861, suddenly, with no warning or preparation, she woke up one morning in 1870 and found she was a Great Power. *Pace* Kingsley Amis, Greatness was thrust upon her before she could get out of the way.

Goaded from within and without by imagined memories of Ancient Rome, with no more resources than an Ottoman Balkan province and riven by internal strife that

⁶³⁰ See Chapter 2 for details of Russian plans for expansion in Africa, and Jesman, *Russians*, pp.61-126..

threatened to tear her apart, she was expected to behave like a Great Power but mocked when she tried to be one. With only toeholds on the Red Sea and Benadir coasts, she did her small best to keep up with the Imperial Joneses.

Yet disaster beset her every step. In her frantic efforts to befriend Britain, her only friend in the region, she found that her diplomatic activities, meant to draw her close to Britain, instead just made her distrusted. Lack of any kind of relevant experience or - for want of a better term - a sensible business plan led to her hopelessly mismanaging attempts to run her slender possessions at anything even approaching a profit, making her the object of hatred when she tried to make up the loss by pressurizing captive inhabitants into paying too much tax. Snobbery and nepotism in her incompetently-led army led to one military disaster after another, and at the hands of mere black natives at that, making her wonder if she really was a nation of Men, or of curs.⁶³¹ Grandiose predictions of the wealth that would stream into her poverty-stricken homeland from the imagined cornucopia of the Red Sea proved illusory, and commercial projects based upon those illusions crumbled into dust.

No matter what she did was wrong. She was criticised for not really trying to stop the slave-trade in areas she tried to control when, in fact, she was doing the best she could, but was hampered by the policies of Britain, which merely displaced the activities of slavers in Anglo-Egyptian territories into her own. She was blamed for not trying hard

⁶³¹ Defeats at the hands of the Abyssinians led Italians to wonder if they suffered from a fundamental lack of aggressiveness necessary to a Great Power, whether they were *au fond* “half-hearted and sluggish” and guilty of “indolence and passivity”, so that some at least began to idolize the heroic Abyssinians who were their polar opposites and threw their inadequacies into sharp relief; S.C. Bruner, ‘Conflicting obituaries: the Abyssinian ‘outlaw’ Debeb as treacherous bandit and romantic hero in late nineteenth-century Italian imagination’, *Modern Italy*, 19: 4 (2014), pp. 415-19 (p. 411). For an examination of the inversions of logic and other intellectual acrobatics required for the Italians to justify their Imperial activities, especially in the face of repeated defeats and reverses, see M. Coburn, ‘“The Argument is Reversible”: Tropological Revision in the Colonial Debate after the Battle at Dogali’, *Italian Studies*, 69: 3 (November 2014), pp. 340-56.

enough to fight the Mahdists; when she sent ships to shell them from the Red Sea, she was damned for upsetting the locals.

Clearly, Italy was no longer a favoured ally at any level of British society.⁶³² Yet Gladstone and Granville had given her the impression that she could act more or less as she liked in the Red Sea, and Salisbury in his turn was often impenetrable to the point of inscrutability on the matter. The result was that she often angered British statesmen without meaning to.

Certainly, her behaviour was oftentimes not that of a loyal ally, particularly in the Red Sea, where the activities of her men-on-the-spot ran directly at variance with her expressed policy of supporting Britain (probably the result of covert direction from Rome). Italians such as De Amezaga, the Bienenfeld-Rolphs and Cecchi were demonstrably anti-British. Pro-British diplomats such as Catalani and Maffei sometimes spoke as friends of Britain but acted otherwise.

⁶³² *Punch* magazine pilloried the Italians in terms worthy of a Bismarck: 'Italy! ... Rome unhealthy... may (it) be seen without contracting its fever... Genoa - and may the view wash away the recollection of Italian uncleanness.... Naples - and may it not become necessary, owing to epidemics, to die there...Mosquitoes at Venice... and dirty Italians!' J.A. Hammerton (ed), *Mr. Punch on the Continent*, (London: The Educational Book Co. Ltd. - undated, but probably published around 1890-1900), pp.98, 188 & 190. Mr. Punch excoriates all Europe in this book, but the Italians seem to be apostrophised particularly as dirty and dishonourable; again, it is curious that references to epidemics, especially cholera, are prominent, but were not in 1885 deemed worthy of a conference in the European country most prone to it.

However, there was a long cultural antecedent, predating the political events of the 1880s, underlying British contempt for, and distrust of, Italians. From at least 1764, with the publication of Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, Roman Catholics in general, and the Italians in particular, had been figured as the villains, fools and ne'er-do-wells of British Theatre and Literature, a situation exacerbated by association with the perpetual "Irish problem" (see, for instance, Farquhar's *The Beaux' Stratagem* of 1707 for the Irishman-as-idiot, Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* of 1820 for Roman Catholic barbarity and Collins' *The Woman in White* of 1859 for the Italian as either buffoon or Incarnation of Evil) and the ability to foster negative transnational stereotypes created during the nineteenth century by increased levels of European literacy (see Kaelble, *Industrialisation*), and the subsequent rapid expansion of Europe's publishing industry; K. Bollen & R. Ingelbien, 'An Intertext that Counts? Dracula, the Woman in White, and Victorian Imaginations of the Foreign Other', *English Studies*, 90: 4 (August 2009), pp.403-20; and N. Whelehan, 'Revolting Peasants: Southern Italy, Ireland and Cartoons in Comparative Perspective, 1860-1882', *International Review of Social History*, 60: 1 (April 2015), pp.1-35.

But wasn't this true of all countries? The Italians were not contractually bound to be pro-British to the point of abnegating the interests of their own country. Catalani and Maffei were pro-British when they could be, but were first and foremost servants of their own country and bound to put Italian interests before those of Britain. And for every Cecchi, Bienenfeld-Rolph and De Amezaga, there was a Kitchener, a Gordon and a Tenterden. Much of the friction between the two countries dated from Crispi's appearance. It is conspicuous from India Office records, which were often stuffed with anti-Italian documents during 1887-1891, that complaints against them practically stopped literally overnight in February 1891, when Crispi fell and was replaced by di Rudini, whose priority was to rescue Italy from her ruinous and futile Empire-building.

Unfortunately, by then, most of the damage had been done. Italy was, after the Massawa crisis, no longer regarded at any level as a trustworthy or useful ally of Britain. The inevitable result of this was that she no longer tried to behave like one.

CONCLUSION

Britain's view of the Italians had changed out of all recognition between 1861 and 1888.

As with the Greeks, the exalted fantasies of the intelligensia did not survive contact with reality. In 1864 British ships escorted Garibaldi to Italy. By 1885 the Italians were granted permission to lay telegraph cables from Italy to Assab via Perim, but not from Massawa to Suez, so little were they trusted.⁶³³ By 1890 the situation was so bad that the Mahdists were regarded as being preferable to the Italians in Sudan. Salisbury wrote to Baring that

(If the Mahdists) were to vanish, what would happen to the valley of the Nile?... (the Italians) profit by the troubles of others... (they) would be happy to be master of the (Nile Valley), to which (they told you) the title of Egypt has lapsed... we must reconsider our... friendships as far as Egypt is concerned... Italy is the most formidable enemy that Egypt has... to fear. If that is so the Dervishes are rendering us a service in keeping Italy out...⁶³⁴

⁶³³ FO45/540, Nigra-Foreign Office (London), 26 February 1885 and FO45/541, Lumley-Nigra, 12 November 1885. This resulted in Catalani complaining to the Foreign Office that, because of a lack of direct communications from Massawa to Suez, Italian officers in Cairo invited to observe manoeuvres in India were unable to find out whether they were supposed to go to Suez or Aden to meet their ship for Bombay. The Italians were coolly informed that arrangements had already been made for the officers to embark at Suez, so no fuss was necessary; FO45/541, Salisbury-Catalani, 27 November 1885.

⁶³⁴ Salisbury to Baring 21st November 1890, in Lowe, *Reluctant II*, pp.69-70. Baring concurred with this view; '... I have no hesitation in saying that I should prefer to see the Dervishes in possession of Kassala and Khartoum rather than that those places be held by the Italians... since so long as the Dervishes hold (those places) the (Anglo-Egyptian authorities)... can choose (their) time for a forward movement. But if once the Italians are in possession the case is very different'. Baring to Salisbury, 15th March 1890, in Lowe, *ibid.*, pp.68-69. See also Sanderson, *England*, pp.94-98.

To an extent, one can see why this was the case. The Italians had, despite promises to the contrary, effectively annexed Assab in 1882, knowing that this would disturb a Britain grappling with the situation in Egypt. In 1883 they had made noises about establishing a colony in New Guinea, and in 1884 had moved to colonise the Benadir coast, at the expense of Britain's influence and at a time when the Germans were challenging Britain's authority there. In 1885 they occupied Massawa, knowing that such a move could be implemented with impunity due to the inextricable tangle of authority in the Red Sea, and despite the problems that it would cause Britain, Egypt and the Porte. And from the beginning of the Mahdiya they had flouted rules, agreed both by themselves and the other Powers regarding the import of dangerous contraband, as if the Mahdists didn't exist. Admittedly, the picture painted in the Red Sea of them at this time was composed by British officials with a pronounced anti-Italian attitude, who seemed to discount, in the face of Italian behaviour, the actions of the French, who were also perfectly willing to bend the rules when it suited them. But the view from London was increasingly coherent with that in the Red Sea.⁶³⁵ Whatever assurances Maffei, Catalani *et al* gave during these years, Italian actions made them worthless.

Why, then, the mismatch between Italian words and actions towards their British allies? Clearly, as mentioned in Chapter 3, the Italians were first and foremost an independent country, and thus most likely - especially in an era of Imperial growth promising to rescue Italy from the mire of poverty - to look to their own interests before

⁶³⁵ An exception proving the rule was Colonel Slade, British military attaché to Rome. Dufferin reported to Salisbury a conversation, wherein Slade was 'persistently friendly towards Italy (and believed that) Crispi would be the last person... to take steps unfriendly towards England', while he '...believed all (Italian) declarations about (Kitchener being hostile to Italy)' (IOR/20/A/1173, Dufferin-Salisbury, 12 November 1890). But even Slade later changed his mind, when he came to realize that 'The military necessities of the (Italian) occupation of Kassala were all a myth...'; see Dufferin to Salisbury, 8th November, in F.O. 78/4325/192, quoted in Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, pp.59 & 426.

anything else. In their right and entitlement to do this, Gladstone and Salisbury were both in perfect agreement, and no doubt they expected, and were prepared to indulge, a certain amount of turbulence every so often. However, the consistency of Italian perfidy seems almost conspiratorial. There can only really be two reasons for this.

Firstly, the concerted Italian plan to build an Empire come what may. In an era when European countries were jostling for position in Africa, conflicts were inevitable. Italy thus found herself in a dilemma; how to compete successfully for power in Africa without alienating the British. The fact of the matter is that they couldn't. Conflict was going to arise, especially with someone as heedless of the consequences as Crispi running the country. The best that could be done by the Catalanis and Robilants was to try and smooth the path and hope things would all come right.

But they never did. Between the Massawa crisis in 1888 and the fall of Crispi in 1891, the Italian drive to gain territory in Sudan - particularly Kassala, which the British regarded as essential to their strategic interests - alienated Britain to such an extent that it became impossible for the Italians to regain British trust. By 1890, as evidenced by Salisbury's letter to Baring noted above, they had effectively turned themselves into an enemy. Things improved temporarily while di Rudini⁶³⁶ was in power, but by then most of the damage was done, and after Crispi returned to power in 1893 Anglo-Italian friction and hostility resumed its previous level.

Secondly, it seems likely that the Italians made a fundamental error about the relationship between Wealth and Empire. As we have seen, they were convinced that gaining an Empire would make them rich. However, it is possible that they had inverted

⁶³⁶ Antonio Starabba, Marchese di Rudini (1839 -1908), Italian Premier February 1891 - May 1892. Succeeded by Giuseppe Giolitti, Premier May 1892 - December 1893, when Crispi returned to power.

things. They may have assumed that Britain, France and Germany became wealthy because of their Empires. In truth, they were already wealthy due to their success in creating integrated economies which allowed the growth of industrial and financial strength sufficient to underwrite expansion overseas. The Italians had attempted, with a shambolic economy and a state perpetually on the edge of disintegration, to generate wealth via trade in the Red Sea, and it hadn't worked. They probably assumed, then, that making an Empire would do the trick. In other words, they inverted the Marxist model; not having capital to export, they tried to make Trade follow the Flag. And if it cost them their friendship with Britain, then so be it.

The irony of the situation is that, if Britain and Italy had not developed such a mutual distrust by 1891, they might have been able to come to a satisfactory accommodation over their respective rights and claims, especially in the Sudan. We have seen that Baring and Salisbury agreed that it was better to have the Mahdists than the Italians in the Sudan. But Robilant, in his letters to Gene, had expressed the desirability of an alliance with the Mahdists which would have actually aligned British and Italian interests.⁶³⁷ An Italian understanding with the Mahdists would have at once secured the Western flank of the Italians, bolstered their standing with the tribes, and helped to keep the Mahdists *in situ*, where the British wanted them anyway. Such a move, if made in concert with Britain, would have made both parties the winners, by reinforcing the standing of both British and Italian prestige with the tribes; by making the tribes feel more secure knowing that the Italians, backed by their British allies, could exert pressure against both the Mahdists and the Abyssinians in their interests; and, by showing a united front to both Mahdists and

⁶³⁷ Letter quoted in d'Avray, *Lords*, p.123

Abyssinians, making life easier for both parties and removing issues of fractured loyalty among the tribes who effectively controlled the lands between Abyssinia and Sudan.

But it never happened, and was doomed to remain nothing more than Robilant's pipe-dream. Instead, Anglo-Italian relations continued to deteriorate to the point at which, by 1896, Anglo-Italian interests did not coincide on any significant level.

APPENDIX 1. Britain and the Continent Powers: British military power, Anglo-French relations and the Chimera of the Franco-Russian Threat.

Following the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, Britain's ability to wage war in Europe appeared to decline until her military power was thought to be negligible, both at home and on the continent. As Morris pointed out, by 1870 '... the general impression among foreign officers is that we literally have no army at all.'⁶³⁸

This was a periodic cause for alarm among the British electorate, whenever an "invasion alarm" swept the country, as it did every few years, and usually stimulated by fear of a French invasion. However, there were two factors to consider; the actual strength and nature of the British forces, and actual relations with France as opposed to the hysterical version whipped up by the press whenever circulation started to drop.

Regarding the first factor, it is worth noting that the smallness of Britain's land forces was nothing new and was more usual than not. When involved in operations in Europe, the British army always fought as part of a coalition, as in the wars of the Spanish and Austrian successions (1701-14 and 1740-48 respectively) and the Seven Years war (1756-63). At the end of the eighteenth century 'His Sardinian majesty could boast an army equal in size to that of George 1.'⁶³⁹ One of the reasons for this was the long-standing British political, economic and social aversion to a large standing army; by 1793, after ten years of reduction in military capacity following the American wars and only a few months before war broke out with revolutionary France, Pitt had reduced the

⁶³⁸ J. Morris, *Pax Britannica: The Climax of an Empire* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968 – 1979 Penguin edition), p.409.

⁶³⁹ R. Holmes, *Redcoat: The British Soldier in the Age of Horse and Musket* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), p.13.

military establishment to a mere 13,000 as, in any future continental war, 'Pitt (supposed) that (Britain's) role in Europe would be that of paymaster' to Britain's allies (Austria, Prussia, Sardinia, Hesse-Cassel, Spain and Naples)... The dislike of the standing army made Englishmen distrust expansion of the armed forces (while) the idea of conscription... was beyond imagination'⁶⁴⁰

This could lead to occasional embarrassment, as in the Crimean war, 1854-56. There, Britain had struggled to raise a task-force worthy of the name, and at the height of the conflict could field only a quarter of the numbers sent by France.⁶⁴¹ And, in an age when the European Powers were consolidating into nation-states, industrializing fast and using conscription without scruple, it meant that traditional British methods of intervening in European wars had become impractical and obsolete. By 1880, developments in the military effectiveness of all the major continental powers, and the implied cost in terms of both money and manpower, had made it politically and financially impossible for Britain to countenance the idea of military intervention in any major European war. Following the Prussian victory over Austria in 1866, the major European powers introduced conscription, following the Prussian model, which enabled them to field armies of up to a million men. In 1869, though the British military establishment (including Yeomanry, Volunteers and other reservists, and troops stationed abroad)

⁶⁴⁰ J.S. Watson, *The Reign of George III 1760-1815* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960), pp.362-65. Resistance to conscription was a fixed feature of the British political psyche, lasting even through the dark years of the World Wars; see F.M. Leventhal, *The Last Dissenter: H.N. Brailsford and his World* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), p.135; C.L. Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940* (London: Methuen & Co., 1955), pp.640 & 651; L.C.B. Seaman, *Post-Victorian Britain 1902-1951* (London: Methuen & Co., 1966), p. 93; and A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965 - 1977 edition), pp. 52-55.

⁶⁴¹ C. Barnett, *Britain and her Army* (London: Cassell & Co., 1970), pp.281-312. See also C. Hibbert, *The Destruction of Lord Raglan: A Tragedy of the Crimean War 1854-55* (London: Longmans, 1961), and Sweetman J., 'Military Transport in the Crimean War 1854-56', *English Historical Review*, Vol.88: 746 (January 1973), pp.81-91.

totaled a theoretical 300,000, the regular military establishment in Britain was 89,000, with conscription a political impossibility.⁶⁴²

Thus, there might have been good grounds for a British fear of invasion from the continent, especially from France. However, the second factor is the reality of Anglo-French relations from 1815 onwards.

Throughout the nineteenth century, fears persisted that France could still resume her role as the ancient and traditional enemy of England, especially when combined with concerns about waxing French and waning British naval power, such as during 1859 and 1888-89.⁶⁴³ France was 'The arch-enemy... the chief hope of the Jacobite plotters', whose rivalry with Britain frequently threw the country 'into a panic' over possible invasion.⁶⁴⁴ 'There was widespread agreement that France was Britain's natural adversary... Indeed, some British politicians welcomed the French Revolution... because it did lasting damage to French military potential (a factor of which was) a long-retained latent fear of a Jacobite revival with French bayonets at its back.'⁶⁴⁵ In 1880 the Duke of Cambridge gave an appreciation of British military strength which showed that the Home

⁶⁴² (Shannon, *Crisis*, pp. 83-86). Lowe (*Reluctant I*, p.104) gives a figure of 280,000, with 100,000 of these tied up abroad, leaving about 180,000 at home, of which half were reservists - what Kennedy referred to as "Sunday Soldiers", who would have been an unknown quantity in the event of a full-scale mobilization (P. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London: Allen Lane, 1976) p.294). Bourne takes a divergent view, saying that 'Great Britain was by no means a contemptible power on land' and pointing out that Britain maintained an active army of between 123,000 in 1819 and 187,000 in 1880, with active and reserve forces of well over half a million during the Crimean War (Bourne, *Victorian*, pp.5-7). But even he admits that, after 1870, all the Continental Powers outstripped Britain; by the end of the Boer war British active and reserve forces, though numbering by then about a million, were outnumbered by Austria (with 2 million), France (3 million) and Germany (4 million), either under arms or ready to become so at short notice.

⁶⁴³ Lowe, *Reluctant I*, p.5; Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, pp.172-78. Dissenting voices, such as that of Lord George Hamilton (First Lord of the Admiralty, 1886-92), tended to get lost in the hysteria; CAB37/22/44, 10 November 1888. See also W. Beaver, *Under Every Leaf: How Britain played the Greater Game from Afghanistan to Africa* (London: Biteback, 2012), p.209.

⁶⁴⁴, B. Williams, *The Whig Supremacy 1714-1760* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), pp.166-68 & 351 passim.

⁶⁴⁵ Holmes, *Redcoat*, pp.49-58.

establishment was effectively at less than half its paper strength, ‘... a matter of grave concern’⁶⁴⁶ Successive cabinet notes continued to highlight this concern throughout the decade, especially at times of heightened international tensions. During the Fashoda crisis, notwithstanding French naval weakness as mentioned above, Sir Garnet Wolseley, then Adjutant-General, opined that ‘... so long as the Navy was as weak as it was... and the condition of our coast defences... unsatisfactory’ he dared not affirm that the army was sufficiently prepared to guarantee the safety of London from invasion.⁶⁴⁷

Brackenbury (an astute observer), in a Memorandum of 8 June 1888, wrote that estimates ‘...that France might land... 150,000 men (on British shores) within three weeks of our losing command of the Channel is within the mark, and is correct in every detail’.⁶⁴⁸

However, the truth was considerably less gloomy. Throughout the nineteenth century, following the defeat of Napoleon, British relations with France⁶⁴⁹ steadily improved until, in 1904, the *Entente Cordiale* - a term probably first used by Palmerston in 1830 to characterize the growing convergence of British and French interests in Europe⁶⁵⁰ - formalized the Anglo-French alignment, whereby France finally recognized British predominance over Egypt in return for a British acknowledgement of France’s special

⁶⁴⁶ CAB37/3/41, Memorandum, Strength of the British Army, 30/7/1880.

⁶⁴⁷ *Hansard*, 11 May 1888, quoted in Lady Gwendolen Cecil, *Life of Robert, Marquis of Salisbury* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., 1931. 4 vols), Vol IV, pp.183-84.

⁶⁴⁸ CAB37/21/15. See also CAB37/22/32, Salisbury Memorandum, 6 November 1888, for a similarly doom-laden view.

⁶⁴⁹ Active Anglo-French co-operation was evident as early as the 1840s. See D. McLean, ‘The Greek Revolution and the Anglo-French Entente 1843-34’, *English Historical Review* 96: 379 (Jan 1983), pp.117-29; R. Golicz, ‘Napoleon III, Lord Palmerston and the Entente Cordial’, *History Today* 50:12 (December 2000), pp 10-18; A.B. Cunningham, ‘Peel, Aberdeen and the Entente Cordiale’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 30 (November 1957), pp 189-206; C.I. Hamilton, ‘Anglo-French Sea Power and the Declaration of Paris’, *International History Review* 4: 2 (1982), pp.166-90; and D. Brown, ‘Palmerston and Anglo-French Relations, 1846-1865’, *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 17: 4 (2006), pp.675-692.

⁶⁵⁰ Bourne, op.cit., pp.29-30. Though, when the French started work on the Suez Canal in 1859, Palmerston was suspicious, ‘as he was inclined to distrust French motives in most situations. To his mind... (the Canal) might threaten the route to, and hence the security of, India’: Byrne, ‘Foreign Policy’, p.386. And see Marlowe, *Cromer*, pp. 7-8.

position in Morocco.⁶⁵¹ There were occasional problems; both countries were burgeoning Imperial powers throughout the century, and sometimes came into conflict over territorial disputes, especially in Africa. The British occupation of Egypt in 1882 had infuriated France, and led to a prolonged French effort ‘... to winkle the British out of Egypt by getting in from the Congo at the Sudanese back door’,⁶⁵² culminating in their coming to the brink of war at Fashoda in 1898.⁶⁵³ However, as Taylor says, the fact of Britain and France being Imperial powers ‘... did not necessarily make them enemies; it often made them partners.’ It was generally when France was contemplating expansion in Europe that tensions between the two countries arose; when she was quiescent in Europe, relations were generally harmonious.⁶⁵⁴

However, another of the factors that caused anxiety in Britain was the spectre of a Franco-Russian alliance that would put a stranglehold on British access to the far east via the Mediterranean.

⁶⁵¹ Shannon, *Crisis*, pp. 342-43; Ensor, *England*, pp. 366-69; Pakenham, *Scramble*, pp. 694-97; A.J.P. Taylor, ‘British Policy in Morocco, 1886-1902’, *English Historical Review* 66:260: July 1951: pp. 342-74.

⁶⁵² Shannon, *Heroic*, p.528.

⁶⁵³ Where, as Lord Dufferin said in 1901, “France tried to drag a cobweb across our path in the valley of the Nile” - quoted in R.F. Ball, ‘Education in Egypt’, *The Nineteenth Century and After* 52: 307 (September 1902), pp. 412-20. See also Barthorp, *Blood Red*, pp.171-73; M.E. Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa* (Burnt Hill; Longman, 1974), pp.83-85; A.S. Kanya-Forstner, *The Conquest of the Western Sudan: A Study in French Military Imperialism* (Cambridge: University Press, 1969), pp.244-48; V.G. Kiernan, *European Empires from Conquest to Collapse, 1815-1960* (London: Fontana, 1982), p.79; Pakenham, *Scramble*, pp.456-533 & pp.535-54. As Bismarck put it, “Egypt... is like the spinal cord of the Empire, which connects the backbone with the brain”; quoted in W.L. Langer, *European Alliances and Alignments, 1871-1890* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931- 2nd edition, 1966), p.256.

⁶⁵⁴ Minor disputes over places such as Pacific islands were dwarfed by co-operation in Syria, China and Mexico; Taylor, *Struggle*, pp. 284-85. Fashoda was less a crisis than the final recognition of the delineation of Anglo-French spheres of influence in Africa.

Between 1830 and 1912 France effectively conquered most of North Africa apart from Egypt, occupying Algeria in 1830-31, Tunisia in 1880-81 and Morocco in 1912,⁶⁵⁵ giving her, with the naval base at Toulon, the potential to block British access to Egypt and the Suez canal. As long as the Turks remained friendly and maintained control of the Levant and the approaches to the Black Sea, the Russians alone could not seriously threaten British supremacy in the Mediterranean. However, the growing alignment of French and Russian interests, culminating in the Franco-Russian alliance of 1891, raised the spectre of a situation in which Britain could be simultaneously menaced by invasion from France while having her main route to India cut off by a strong French naval presence in the Mediterranean, with the possibility of a loss of Turkish control of the Black Sea straits to Russia, and a direct Russian threat of overland invasion of India from central Asia through Afghanistan.⁶⁵⁶

But, again, the spectre of an invincible Franco-Russian naval pincer movement crushing the Royal Navy was largely chimerical. In 1895 the British Military Attache in Paris “pointed with relief to the French failure to collect in nine months enough transport (for) 15,000 men to Madagascar, (which) seemed to rule out any possibility of a French

⁶⁵⁵ Ayubi N.N., *Over-Stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), pp. 88-89.

⁶⁵⁶ Bourne, *Foreign Policy*, pp.123-78; Lowe, *Salisbury*, pp.54-90; Lowe, *Reluctant*, (vol.1), pp.8-9; Taylor, *Struggle*, pp.334-36 & 338-39. ‘A Russian threat (to India) had materialized ... by the time of Salisbury’s first spell as Secretary of State for India (July 1866-March 1867, by which time) the Russian conquest of central Asia was well under way... Revolt against British rule in India in 1857 had encouraged Russian hopes that even a manifest capacity to move against India would threaten the British position there sufficiently to deter any renewed attack on Russia through the Straits and the Black Sea’; D. Gillard, ‘Salisbury’, in K.M. Wilson (ed), *British Foreign Secretaries and Foreign Policy: From Crimean to First World War* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), pp.125-26.

invasion”⁶⁵⁷. As Kennedy notes, “The French Navy, impressive on paper, suffered from constant political interference and strategical controversy...”⁶⁵⁸.

The Russian Navy was in an even worse condition. “...The ships (built) in Russian naval yards were (obsolescent in design) and fitted with guns and armour that were already outdated. The sailors, recruited... largely from the (rural, uneducated and untrained) peasant class and limited to six months sea-going training a year... possessed none of the mechanical aptitude of the (industrialized Western) bluejackets; and since the departure of sail, science had become as important as seamanship”.⁶⁵⁹ Further, “Even if the two powers had fought jointly against Britain, the situation would have been far brighter (than imagined in Britain at the time)... the ‘enemy’ had virtually no experience of combined fleet operations, language and signalling difficulties were great, and neither dared to concentrate more resources on their navies while the attitudes of Austria, Italy and especially Germany were so problematical”.⁶⁶⁰ These shortcomings were graphically illustrated during the Fashoda crisis of 1898, when the French navy was revealed to be impotent in the face of British power,⁶⁶¹ while in 1904-05 the catastrophe that befell the Russian Navy against the Japanese at Port Arthur and Tsu-Shima showed how useless that service would have been against the Royal Navy.⁶⁶²

⁶⁵⁷ Quoted in Kiernan V.G., *European Empires from Conquest to Collapse, 1815-1960* (London: Fontana, 1982) p.127), while of those 15000 men, over 6000 died from disease (Cobban A., *A History of Modern France, 3 vols.* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1965) vol. 3, p.93).

⁶⁵⁸ Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, p.179.

⁶⁵⁹ Hough R., *The Fleet that had to Die* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1958), p.20); see also Grove E., ‘Tsushima - A Decisive Victory: The Great Naval Battle 100 Years On’, *RUSI Journal*, 150:2 (April 2005); pp.54-59, and the Australian Association for Maritime History ‘British Assistance to the Japanese Navy during the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-5’, *The Great Circle*, Vol 2:1 (April 1980); pp.44-54.

⁶⁶⁰ Kennedy, *Rise and Fall*, pp.179-80.

⁶⁶¹ Kennedy, *ibid.*, p.179.

⁶⁶² for the whole tragi-comic story of the Russian naval campaign against Japan, see the complete text of Hough, *The Fleet*

Nevertheless, such threats were taken extremely seriously at the time, sometimes leaving Britain with one last weapon in her armoury, one empty, but well-developed over time - that of bluff.

Grenville says that 'Bluff played no part in the conduct of Salisbury's diplomacy'⁶⁶³ but, as Roberts points out, 'He was one of the first people to appreciate quite the extent to which militarily the British Empire was a gigantic bluff'.⁶⁶⁴ He had observed under Disraeli that 'Russian troops almost certainly would have entered Constantinople (prior to the 1878 Treaty of Berlin) but for British threats, even though (they) contained a large element of bluff.'⁶⁶⁵ Sometimes the bluff was called - 'British impotence in the face of (Russian action in Poland in 1861 and the Prussian attack on Denmark in 1864 indicated) the extent to which British objectives had been achieved in the past by prestige and... a good deal of bluff. (Such rebuffs) to British prestige (were) obvious and disconcerting...'⁶⁶⁶ And, as Sir Charles Dilke pointed out in 1878, Britain had then found herself in danger of going to war 'merely for the establishment of... "prestige", a word only existing in the French language', and, furthermore, a word derived from the Latin verb *Praestigiare*, which means 'to deceive by juggling tricks.'⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶³ J.A.S. Grenville, *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy: The Close of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Athlone Press, 1964), p.17.

⁶⁶⁴ Roberts, *Salisbury*, p.178.

⁶⁶⁵ quoted in R. Blake, *Disraeli* (London: Methuen & Co., 1966 (1969 University Paperbacks edition)), p.651.

⁶⁶⁶ M. Byrne, 'Foreign Policy 1815-1870', in M. Scott-Baumann (ed), *Years of Expansion: Britain 1815-1914* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), p.189.

⁶⁶⁷ quoted in J.M. Roberts, *Europe 1880-1945* (London: Longman, 1967 - 2nd ed., 1989), p. 93.

APPENDIX 2. The Russian Bear and India.

After her defeat in the Crimea, Russia had turned her expansionist attentions eastwards. Between 1856 and 1884, Russia absorbed much of the previously independent territories that had lain between Russia and British India (Tashkent and Bokhara by 1866, Khiva in 1873 and Merv in 1884), placing her in a potentially advantageous position should she wish to invade India⁶⁶⁸. Simultaneously, Russian influence and prestige had, despite her defeat in the Crimea, grown in the East at the expense of Britain, so that there was by the mid-1880s ‘...the production of intrigues and rebellions among the natives of India...disaffection towards the English Raj, and the crumbling away of our resources before Russia has struck a blow against our frontier’.⁶⁶⁹

Though the British military presence in India was nearly doubled between 1884 and 1894 - from 40,000 to 70,000⁶⁷⁰ - the worry remained, despite British military intelligence to the contrary⁶⁷¹, that a concerted Russian advance would be unstoppable.⁶⁷²

⁶⁶⁸ Lowe, *Reluctant*, (vol.1), pp.75-76.

⁶⁶⁹ Lord Salisbury, House of Lords 10/03/1884, in Greaves R.L., *Persia and the Defence of India 1884-1892* (London: Athlone Press, 1959), p.67.

⁶⁷⁰ Lowe, *op.cit.*, p.92.

⁶⁷¹ Beaver W., *Under Every Leaf: How Britain Played the Greater Game from Afghanistan to Africa* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2012), pp.161-96.

⁶⁷² What Salisbury (according to Roberts) referred to as “Mervousness” (though Langer accredits the quote to the Duke of Argyll – W.L. Langer, *European Alliances and Alignments, 1871-1890* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966 - 2nd. edition, p.310). Like Lord Charles Canning (Earl Canning, Governor-General and Viceroy of India 1855-62) thirty years before, who reflected that any Russian attack on India would have to cross 500 miles of barren terrain infested with hostile Afghans, ‘... Salisbury never believed a direct Russian invasion of India via Afghanistan was likely, not least because (of the logistical problems) of (moving) heavy equipment... over passes sometimes 15000 feet above sea level’. From the 1860s, when he refused ‘to look on those (invasion) alarms... seriously’, through to the 1880’s - in 1886 he opined that any Russian attempt to take Kandahar “will only incur a hot version of the retreat from Moscow” - Salisbury publicly maintained a distain for the idea of a serious Russian threat to India. Roberts, *Salisbury*, pp. 84, 145, 213 & 400; for Canning, see Macris J.R. & Kelly S. (eds), *Imperial Crossroads: The Great Powers and the Persian Gulf* (Naval Institute Press: Annapolis, 2012), p.35, and Woodward, *Age*, pp. 417 & 423-25. Lord Ripon (Viceroy of India 1880-84) echoed the views of Lord Hartington (Secretary for War December 1882-June 1885) that Russia was no threat to India - ‘I have no dislike and no fear of Russia... I (cannot believe) that (the Russians) can seriously (wish) to acquire a vast territory like India (which is

Russian bellicosity did not help - 'British concerns were highlighted when Ronald Thomson, the British Charge d'affaires in Tehran, obtained (Russian plans, drawn up by Dmitri Miliutin, the Russian war minister) for Persia and Afghanistan (which) began with a condemnation of Britain, the "Despot of the Seas," and called for an "advance towards the enemy" that would show "the patience of Russia is exhausted," and that she is "ready to... stretch her hand towards India."⁶⁷³ Combined with fears that Russian activity in the Balkans, such as that demonstrated during the Bulgarian crises of 1878-79 and 1885-86,⁶⁷⁴ would destabilize Turkey and even lead to her losing control of the Black Sea

unusually distant from her frontiers) and I have full confidence in Britain's ability to defend it (despite) Jingoism bluster...'; CAB37/5/17, 'The Russian Advance in Central Asia', 2/9/1881 -25/11/1881. However, Salisbury was not always so flippant in private, especially as regards British and Russian influence in Kabul - see, for instance, Duthie J.L., 'Some further insights into the workings of mid-Victorian Imperialism: Lord Salisbury, the Forward Group and Anglo-Afghan relations, 1874-1878', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 8:3:1980: pp.181-207. For an overview of British strategic preparation for a Russian assault on India, see Adler G.J., 'The Key to India? Britain and the Herat Problem, 1830-63', (Parts I & II) *Middle East Studies* 10:2: May 1974: pp.186-209, & 10:3: October 1974: pp 287-384; Johnson R.A., 'Russians at the gate of India?' Planning the defense of India 1885-1900', *Journal of Military History* 67:3: July 2003: pp.697-743; Morrison A., 'Twin Imperial Disasters: The Invasions of Khiva and Afghanistan in the Russian and British official mind, 1839-42', *Modern Asian Studies* 48:January 2014: pp. 253-300; and Yapp M.A., 'British Perceptions of the Russian Threat to India', *Modern Asian Studies* 21: 4 (1987): pp. 646-65.

The Foreign Office tended, like Salisbury in public, to take a dismissive view of Russia's capabilities during the early part of the 1860-80 period. Sir Andrew Buchanan, ambassador to St. Petersburg to 1871, maintained that financial constraints, as evidenced by her sale of Alaska in 1867 and the reduction in naval spending made it impossible for Russia to expand towards India and thus threaten British interests there (Buchanan to Stanley, 3 April 1867). His successor Lord Augustus Loftus held a similar view, opining that '(The Russians) have a wholesome fear of English power in those quarters' (Loftus to Granville, 16 October 1872), while Sir Henry Elliot (ambassador at Constantinople 1863-77) held that the Russians would '(draw) in their horns... nine times out of ten when firmly met' (Elliot to Russell, 27 November 1878). However, this did not stop the Russians expanding anyway; after they occupied Khiva in 1873 Loftus changed his mind, and as the years wore on into the 1880s the Foreign Office took the Russian threat ever more seriously, as did Salisbury, despite his flippancy over "Mervousness", in his private moments; Otte, *Foreign Office*, pp.45, 77, 78 & 126.

⁶⁷³ Thomson to Salisbury, 26th April 1876, quoted in Macris & Kelly, *Crossroads*, p.39. See also Langer, *European Alliances*, pp.309-18, for a detailed exposition of Russian strategy regarding Afghanistan and India following the Merv and Pendjeh incidents. However, such sabre-rattling was often empty; diplomatic communications usually showed that cool heads dominated real communications between governments. Giers (the Russian foreign minister) made it clear that Russia had no objection to a British presence in Afghanistan, to her occupation of Kandahar or even of her occupation of Herat, provided that Britain extend a reciprocal recognition of Russian rights elsewhere in Persia and Afghanistan; CAB37/10/29, Memorandum on 'The Central Asian Question', 4 April 1883.

⁶⁷⁴ Bourne, *Foreign Policy*, pp.145-46.

straits, such concerns dominated a great part of British strategic policy-making between 1860 and 1890.

APPENDIX 3. The Greco-Russian Symbiosis and its effect upon European stability and British political opinion.

As Dakin says, by the nineteenth century, for both Greece and Italy “freedom” was *a priori* simply a matter of throwing off a foreign yoke.⁶⁷⁵ However, Greece’s achievement of freedom in 1831 became, like Italy’s in 1870, the catalyst for a revival of Imperial dreams. The *Megali Idea* of a new Hellenic Empire incorporating all the lands of the Byzantine Empire, and with the pinnacle of its achievement being the seizure of Constantinople, was born with the national uprising in 1821.⁶⁷⁶ Once independence was achieved, Greek irredentists⁶⁷⁷ proved tireless in their efforts to wrest Byzantium from the hands of the Turks.⁶⁷⁸ The Italians, of course, had had similar experiences of tyranny but, although theoretically a Power, did not represent a threat to the stability of Europe in the same way as the Greeks.

⁶⁷⁵ Dakin, op. cit., p.44.

⁶⁷⁶ Finefrock M.M., ‘Ataturk, Lloyd George and the Megali Idea: Cause and Consequence of the Greek Plan to Seize Constantinople from the Allies, June-August 1922’, *The Journal of Modern History* Vol. 52:No. 1: On Demand Supplement (March 1980); pp. D1047-D1066.

⁶⁷⁷ Defined as ‘... the national drive to free from Turkish rule all those whom the Greeks claimed to be their brethren...’: Koliopoulos J.S., ‘Greece and the Balkans: A Historical Perspective’, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 2: 3 (September 2003); pp. 25-38 (quote from p.27). However, as Koliopoulos continues, the methods by which the Greeks tried to wrest Greek territory from the Ottomans itself darkened their cause in the eyes of the world: ‘Irredentism provided the necessary ideology to justify raids across the (Turkish) frontier which as a rule were plundering raids... This ‘patriotic’ lawlessness... undermined reforming and modernizing efforts in the region, and exercised a regressive influence on... the emerging nation-state... liberation wars became... self-defeating ventures and gave patriotism a suspect and sinister outlook.’

Further, there were, as with the later claims of the Italians to a Neo-Roman Empire, inherent contradictions to the *Idea* - ‘If Greece was the legitimate heir (to the Byzantine Empire, which nobody could define precisely) then it had to expand in all directions... On what basis were these claims to be advanced? Linguistic, religious or the vague notion of ‘national feelings’? (What if groups claiming to be Greek constituted a minority?’: Andreopoulos, op.cit., p.951.

⁶⁷⁸ ‘Greece’s successful struggle (against) Turkey (showed) that an Ancient nation could be resurrected (and, in the case of Orthodox Greece) gave rise to... “muscular Christianity”’, Leoussi a. & Aberbach D., ‘Hellenism and Jewish Nationalism: ambivalence and its ancient roots’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 25: 5 (2002); pp. 755-77 (quote from p.755). However, ‘What made this nationalism tremendously appealing was its vagueness, its invocation of (mystical notions - Byzantium) and its presentation as the panacea for all the evils and shortcomings that beset the Greek state’; Andreopoulos, op.cit., p.952.

Firstly, the Greeks had fought a long and ferocious campaign against the Turks and beaten them in full-scale war (albeit with substantial allied help).⁶⁷⁹ Secondly, many of the Greek territories that remained within the Ottoman Empire, such as Cyprus and Crete, were easily accessible from the Greek mainland, and by the 1840s the Greeks had built up a formidable maritime presence which enabled them to access such territories and ferment unrest.⁶⁸⁰ Thirdly, there were large Greek communities spread liberally around all the territories of the Ottoman Empire, constituting what might be regarded as a “fifth column” for the *Megali Idea*.⁶⁸¹ And fourthly, the Greeks were plainly prepared to act as

⁶⁷⁹ ‘The Greeks, disorganized and prone to infighting, often came near to complete defeat’ (Frary, ‘Russian Consuls’, p.48), and ‘According to Anglo-Hellenic legend, it was the (Anglo-French naval action at) Navarino which saved the revolution from extinction... Yet in fact it was Russian land power... against Turkey in 1828-29... which ensured that a self-standing Greek polity finally emerged’; Holland R., ‘Patterns of Anglo-Hellenism: A ‘Colonial’ Connection?’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 36: 3 (September 2003); pp.383-396 (quote from p.385).

⁶⁸⁰ ‘Greek merchantmen (were capable and well-armed even before independence)... ships of forty guns were not unknown, and Greek trade with the Levant grew apace’; Barratt, op.cit., p.109.

Greeks had for centuries played a large part in commercial, cultural and political life throughout the Ottoman Empire. By the nineteenth century they were pre-eminent in many areas - ‘After (the Napoleonic Wars) the shipping trade of the Eastern Mediterranean, and especially that from the Levant to Italy, fell into the hands of Greek merchants because their freights were cheaper... (Chios, a Greek island off the Anatolian coast) was said to have been the most autonomous of the Ottoman territories and... became the most commercial of all Greek communities’; Chapman S., *Merchant Enterprise in Britain from the Industrial Revolution to World War I* (Cambridge: University Press, 2008), pp.153-54. ‘From (the start of the Napoleonic Wars) Greeks were already participating on a large scale in the international trade of Izmir... often co-ordinating their efforts with their kinsmen abroad (and) predominating in all areas of trade...’; Gondicas D. & Issani C.(eds), *Ottoman Greeks in the Age of Nationalism* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1999) p.18. They also dominated Ottoman finances in Constantinople and elsewhere, at a time when the Turks were both unwilling and unable to control it themselves; I.P. Inoglou, ‘Ethnic minority groups in international banking: Greek Diaspora bankers of Constantinople and Ottoman state finances, c.1840-81’, *Financial History Review*, 9: (2002), pp.125-46. And in Massawa ‘Greek-owned cafes dominated... even after the consolidation of Italian rule...’ (Jonas, *Adwa*, p.29). In 1884 Sir Charles Dilke noted that ‘...the Greeks of Soudan are not European Greeks and have been there for generations. There are a great many of them... and they don’t want to leave’; *Hansard*, HC 3, 14 February 1884, v284 cc 896-979.

An interesting vignette from 1892 illustrates the ubiquity of the Greeks in the Ottoman territories. In January of that year an English traveller, Walter Harris, tried to go from Aden into Yemen. Knowing the difficulty of such an enterprise, he disguised himself as a Greek merchant since “... Englishmen are regarded with greater suspicion (in Ottoman territories) than other foreign travellers”, while a Greek would raise no suspicions. His disguise failed and he was bundled back into Aden by the Turks. He received no sympathy from Salisbury: FO78/4414, Clare-Ford (HMG Ambassador to Constantinople) - Salisbury, 16 May 1892. See also J. Canton, ‘Imperial Eyes: Imperial Spies - British Travel and Espionage in Southern Arabia, 1891-1946’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 37: 4 (December 2009), pp.537-554.

⁶⁸¹ Since the absorption of South-Eastern Europe and the Levant into the Ottoman Empire after 1453, the Orthodox Church, based in Constantinople, became the social, spiritual and ideological centre of all the

a cat's paw for Russian mischief-making in the Ottoman regions. Whether or not the Russians wanted them to act in such a way depended on the whims of the Czar at any given time. Catherine II, after about 1790, made her "Great Project" the destruction of the Ottoman Empire, hence the Orlov expedition and similar ventures; Alexander I followed suit sporadically during 1806-12, and Nicholas I flirted with it during 1844-54 (though the rest of the time these monarchs perceived the value of a stable Porte).⁶⁸² As Sir Henry Elliot observed in 1867, the Russians used 'every kind of intriguing Greek, of all classes and characters', to stir up discontent in the Ottoman Empire.⁶⁸³

From the abortive Orlov Expedition of 1769⁶⁸⁴ there had been strong ties between Russia and the Greeks, reinforced by the frequent state of war between Russia and

Christian subjects of the Porte. Inevitably, given its location, the character of the Great Church became overwhelmingly Greek, maintaining the propagation of Christianity via the Greek language and liturgy, which frequently caused resentment in Ottoman non-Greek Christian areas, such as Bulgaria. However, in the nineteenth century this made the Church an ideal vehicle with which to propagate the intellectual and ideological ideas aimed at the political application of the *Megali Idea*. This programme politicized diverse and physically isolated Greek communities, not just in Greater Greece, but in all the areas where Greeks had settled and prospered (Ottoman Europe 2.25 million, Turkey 1.35 million, and Asia Minor and elsewhere 1.2 million. These figures, compiled - in greater detail than given here - by Synvet and quoted in Andreopoulos, op.cit., p.952, apply to 1878 and mean that there were less than one-third the number of Greeks in their Kingdom than there were in the non-liberated territories. However, Andreopoulos recommends these figures be treated "with some caution").

Ironically, the liberal reforms of the Ottoman *Tanzimat* period (1839-76) made the situation worse for the Porte and more fertile for the propagants of the *Megali Idea* by allowing a resurgence of Hellenic identity among the Sultan's Greek subjects, so that by the 1880s the *Idea* was presenting a real threat to the very fabric of the Ottoman Empire: see Finkel, *Osman*, pp. 440-48; Kassiotis I.K., 'From the "Refledging" to the "Illumination of the Nation": Aspects of Political Ideology in the Great Church under Ottoman Domination', *Balkan Studies* Vol. 40: 1 (January 1999), pp.41-55; Kitromilides P.M., 'The Dialectic of Intolerance: Ideological Divisions and Ethnic Conflict', *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, 6: 4 (Winter 1979), pp. 5-30, and 'Greek Irredentism in Asia Minor and Cyprus', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.26: 1 (January 1990), pp.3-17; Kofos E., 'Patriarch Joachim III (1878-1884) and the Irredentist Policy of the Greek State', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Vol.4: 2 (October 1886), pp.107-20.

⁶⁸² Rollins, 'Imperial Russia', pp. 432-51.

⁶⁸³ Elliot to Stanley, 20 October 1868; Otte, *Foreign Office*, p.45.

⁶⁸⁴ Count Alexsei Orlov, brother of a lover of Catherine II (1762-96), headed an expedition to the Peloponnese in order to inspire, with grandiose promises of Russian support, a mass uprising against the Turks. Orlov, amazed by the timidity of the Greeks (who were themselves dismayed with Orlov's small and poorly-equipped force), was about as successful as Bonnie Prince Charlie in his efforts to raise the country against the Hanoverians, and saw similar results; Frary, 'Russian', pp.21-22; Kostantassas D.J., 'Christian Elites of the Peloponnese and the Ottoman State, 1715-1821', *European History Quarterly*, 43: 4 (2013), pp.628-56 (p.635).

Turkey from the early eighteenth century onwards.⁶⁸⁵ The Balkan (i.e. effectively Greek) Orthodox church had turned away from the Latin church of the West and, looking East, naturally aligned itself with the Russian church. This religious commonality gave the Russians the perfect moral platform from which to destabilize the Ottomans and to interfere in European affairs when it suited them.⁶⁸⁶ If it was ‘... hard, even in Peter’s time, to separate religious sympathy from pure opportunism where other Orthodox peoples... were concerned’, it was always easy for the Russians to find ‘... a convenient and permanent excuse for aggressive intervention ‘on behalf of Orthodox citizens of the Porte’’.⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸⁵ ‘Russia’s frequent wars against the (Turks - 1711, 1737-39, 1768-74, 1787-92, 1806-12) not only accelerated (Ottoman) decline but also contributed to Greek resistance...’; Prousis, op.cit., p.263. Under Peter the Great (1696-1725), the emergence of Orthodox Russia as a major European Power had a decisive and lasting effect on Balkan affairs, exposing Ottoman military weakness, facilitating the commercial expansion of the Greek diaspora in the Levant (see – below), putting her at the helm of the Orthodox world and providing moral legitimacy for a renaissance of Greek cultural and political aspirations. Peter, like his successors, exploited Orthodoxy as it suited him, but this only led to a strengthening of Russian ties with the Balkan peoples, whatever the motives behind their actions; Frary, op.cit., pp.29-23; Kostantassas, op.cit., pp. 628-56 .

⁶⁸⁶ Greco-Russian cross-pollination began long before Peter. ‘From 1453 (until the Philhellenism of the nineteenth century) the Greeks, as a contemporary reality, meant little to the (English, French or Germans). But for the Russians Greece never became merely a name... without connection with an actual and changing world’, since the Russians could credibly trace significant contact with Greece back to the days of Byzantium. Sophia Paleologus, niece of the last Byzantine Emperor, married Ivan III of Muscovy. Theophanes the Greek, a fourteenth century fresco painter who trained Andrej Rublev (c.1360-1420), one of the earliest and greatest Russian Icon painters, and Maksim Grek, a sixteenth century divine (a sort of Greek Thomas Aquinas) both chose to leave Greece for Russia rather than the Latin West (though regarded as the first intellectual in Rus’ when he arrived there at the beginning of the sixteenth century, Grek - originally Mikhail Trivolis, of Greek and Italian extraction - was persecuted and imprisoned, and only canonized after his death; a fact that Russian Hellenists were not keen to reveal; Likhachev D.S., ‘On the Russian Intelligensia’, *Russian Social Science Review* 36: 2 (March 1995), pp.83-95). Contacts such as these ensured an early and lasting devotion among Russians for Greece; ‘It was to Greece that Catherine turned her gaze, dreaming Imperial Byzantine dreams for her grandson Constantine’. Among the Orthodox Christians of the Ottoman domains, “... the Catholic Church of Rome, not the unbelieving Turk, was the principal enemy” and was widely believed to have been responsible for the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453; this belief, combined with the reforms of the *Tanzimat* era, allowed the churches of Russia and the Balkans full rein to integrate with and embrace each other; Barratt, ‘Notice’, pp.60-62.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid., pp.61-63. The Treaty of Kutchuk-Kainardji, 1774, gave the Czar or Czarina ‘... the right of making representations on behalf of the Greek Christians of Turkey and of “speaking in favour of the Rumanian principalities”, which furnished pretexts for constant interference in the internal affairs of the Ottoman dominions’; Miller W., ‘Europe and the Ottoman Power before the Nineteenth Century’, *English Historical Review*, 16: 63 (July 1901), pp. 452-71 (p. 456).

Then there were strong commercial ties between Russia and Greece which long predated Greek independence. Since 1453 Greeks had spread throughout Russia; the largest influx came during the reign of Catherine II, much of it from the Ionian Islands,⁶⁸⁸ and most of the immigrant Greeks settled around the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. By the mid-nineteenth century Greek maritime trade and industry was well-developed in the Mediterranean, especially since much of it enjoyed the protection of the Russian flag.⁶⁸⁹ Much of the Russian export trade went through the ports of the Black Sea, making the Greeks who lived there (and controlled most of the trade) very rich.⁶⁹⁰ And these Russo-Greeks remained devoted to their *Patria*; in the century prior to 1821 the intellectual revival known as the Greek Enlightenment, or *Diáfotismos* (the brains behind the muscle of the *Megali Idea*) was diffused throughout the Greek-speaking world by ideas, books, papers and journals of the sort already popular in the West. And they were spread by the merchants of the diaspora.⁶⁹¹

Finally, Philhellenism among the Russian intelligentsia achieved a level almost of fanaticism, based not upon faux-nostalgic, woolly idealism as in the West, but upon direct, constant and close contact. Throughout the Ottoman Balkans and Mediterranean, employment of Greeks at consular posts had become a special Russian tradition. Talented Greeks were trained in Russia and returned to the Balkans as accredited Russian

⁶⁸⁸ The Ionian Islands were a Russo-Turkish protectorate during 1797-1815; Barratt, 'Notice', p.109, and Minoglou I.P. & Louri H, 'Diaspora Entrepreneurial Networks in the Black Sea and Greece, 1870-1917', *Journal of European Economic History*, 26: 1 (Spring 1997), pp.69-104 (p.76).

⁶⁸⁹ Barratt, op.cit., p.109.

⁶⁹⁰ Especially Odessa and the Sea of Azov ; Minoglou & Louri, op.cit., pp.74-77. See also Harlaftis G., 'Economic and Social Development of the Port Cities of the Sea of Azov and the Greeks in the Long Nineteenth Century: An Introduction', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 22: 1 (2010), pp.239-40, and 'Trade and Shipping in the Nineteenth-Century Sea of Azov', pp.241-51.

⁶⁹¹ '... the greatest financial contribution to contemporary Greek letters was by diaspora merchants (and) "... the pathways of Greek commerce" were also "the transport routes of the Greek books"', while the revolution of 1821 was set in motion by the activity of the *Filiki Etairia* (Society of Friends), established in 1814 in Odessa by three Greek diaspora merchants; Kostantasas, op.cit., pp.628-29.

officials, from where they provided nuanced insights into local matters not available to Western outsiders, reinforced Russian Philhellenism by tending to accentuate the Greek view of affairs, and combined pride in their ancestry with loyalty to their Russian masters.⁶⁹² After the achievement of independence the Greek body politic developed, in addition to Russophile elements, pro-British and pro-French factions, but Russian influence remained supreme, resulting in Greek conspiracies to unseat the Monarch (Otto of Bavaria 1835-62, who tried unsuccessfully to harmonise the three main factions) - conspiracies which eventually succeeded.⁶⁹³

In terms of the British attitude to Greek aspirations, support for the Greek revolt - less so in Europe but particularly in Britain - wilted quickly from its initial blaze of enthusiasm in 1821. There were numerous reasons for this. In Britain, general opinion was divided on whether the Greeks were *au fond* every bit as bad as their Turkish oppressors in their conduct of war;⁶⁹⁴ commercial interests were unsure whether a free

⁶⁹² 'Promoting Russian interests and ambitions proved satisfying to these Greeks, who spoke in the name of the tsar... As prominent representatives of Orthodox Christianity, Russian consuls'... Orthodox sentiments were extremely important in a society where religion (was a primary factor)... Common Orthodoxy meant common culture, and (the Russian) practice of employing Greeks reinforced the image of Russia as the ultimate liberator and the great benefactor'; Frary, 'Russian Consuls', p.47.

Following independence in 1832 a large number of Ottoman Greeks left the Empire to settle in the new Greece; however, they often found it a dispiriting experience, towns such as Istanbul, Thessalonika and Izmir being much more sophisticated than Athens, and many subsequently returned to their Ottoman homes; Finkel, *Osman*, p.487. Interestingly, despite the close ties between Russia and Greece, a conversation between Lord Derby and M. Gennadius (the Greek Charge d'Affairs) showed that the Greeks, following the Treaty of San Stephano of March 1887, viewed with apprehension the extension of Balkan Slav power at the expense of Greece, and would, given the choice, have preferred to be ruled by the Turks than Slavs of any race; *Hansard*, 3, HL, 29 July 1878, v242 cc 527-612.

⁶⁹³ Otto was deposed by a military coup backed by strong public support; he was succeeded by George I (1863-1913), who spent much of his reign walking a tightrope between not antagonizing the Powers and not getting drawn by the Russians into a war against Turkey. See Marangou-Drygianniaki S., 'Orthodoxy and Russian Policy towards Greece in the 19th century: the Philorthodox Society's Conspiracy (1830-1840)', *Balkan Studies*, 41: 1 (January 2000), pp.27-42; and Markopoulos G.J., 'King George I and the Expansion of Greece, 1875-1881', *Balkan Studies*, 9: 1 (January 1968), pp.21-40.

⁶⁹⁴ 'During the first year of the war the nature of the fighting... tended to retard the growth of Philhellenism in England. (It was) not an organized war by one... government against another, but... outbursts... under

Greece would open up new markets for British exports or instead just potentiate an already substantial Greek maritime commercial competition;⁶⁹⁵ while political opinion tended toward the view that a newly-independent Greece was likely to see Ottoman power attenuated and replaced with Russian influence, with a resultant destabilization of the European balance of power.⁶⁹⁶ European support for the insurrection was particularly strong in those countries, such as Germany⁶⁹⁷ and Poland,⁶⁹⁸ that had recent experience of oppression by domestic or foreign tyrants, and in France, where Philhellenism was at least the equal of that anywhere else in Europe;⁶⁹⁹ but all grew weary of the issue by the

various *Klephts* (bandit chieftains in the mountainous regions of Greece, who became symbols of Greek resistance only because of their opposition to the Turks) against... isolated Turkish (civilians or isolated garrisons, so that, according to the usually pro-Greek *Morning Chronicle*) "It is mostly unarmed persons who are sacrificed... the (Turk) and the Greek vie with each other in cruelty"': Penn V., 'Philhellenism in England', *Slavonic and East European Review*, January 1935: 14; pp 363-71 (p.365). '... In April (1821), Liberals in London and Paris had been regaled by the news of the massacres of all Turks on (the islands of Spetzai, Psara and Ydra)' while the wholesale massacre of Turks in the Morea region horrified the world; Barratt G.R., 'Notice sur L'insurrection des Grecs contre L'Empire Ottoman: A Russian View of the Greek War of Independence', *Balkan Studies*, January 1973: 14; pp.47-115 (p. 111). Even the great Scottish Historian and Philhellene George Finlay, whose devotion to all things Greek was lifelong, was not immune during these years to becoming, at least for a time, a 'mishellene': see Potter L., 'British Philhellenism and the Historiography of Greece: A Case Study of George Finlay (1799-1875)', *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique*, 1 (2004); pp.183-206.

⁶⁹⁵ As Barratt remarks, 'It is unquestionably true... that English commerce had felt the impact of Greek competition both in Constantinople and in the Levant generally since 1812 - true also that many English(men felt) that 'a fleet the less in Europe (is) a victory the more for Great Britain''; Barratt, op.cit., p.112.

⁶⁹⁶ Penn, op.cit., pp.367-68. Under Wellington (Prime Minister January 1828-November 1830), "Britain's Greek policy merely drifted... but before long (he) was not only publicly regretting Navarino, he was also talking in menacing terms about Britains' obligations to her 'ancient ally', Turkey... 'All I want' (he wrote in October 1829) 'is to get out of the Greek affair without loss of honour and without inconvenient risk to the safety of the Ionian Islands'... (He) was resigned to the prospect of (an) autonomous Greek state, but both he (and) the philhellene Earl of Aberdeen (Foreign Secretary June 1828-November 1830)... believed it would fall under Russian influence and (thus) wished to restrict its boundaries as much as possible"; Bourne, *Foreign Policy*, pp.22-23.

⁶⁹⁷ See Foster C., 'Summing up 'German Philhellenism'', *Publications of the English Goethe Society*, 83: 3 (2013), pp. 208-13, and Penn, 'Europe', p.638.

⁶⁹⁸ Mavroudis E., 'Philhellenism in Poland during the Greek Revolution 1821-1828', *Balkan Studies*, 32: 1 (January, 1991); pp.19-21.

⁶⁹⁹ '... in France the claims of Greece to the gratitude of the cultured were more prominent. There the papers and magazines are evidence of the increasing interest in the study of classical Greek and the presence of Greek scholars, such as Korais, enlarged the scope for these studies to include modern Greece... French travelers and literateurs... published accounts of the country, translated its songs and legends; and after the outbreak of war French poets, historians and dramatists popularized her cause'; Penn, op.cit., pp.638 & 648. French support for Greece had later, practical, ramifications - see below.

end and, in Penn's words, greeted the end of having to support the insurgents with "a sigh of relief".⁷⁰⁰

All except the Russians, whose enthusiastic Philhellenism was consistent from the eighteenth century onwards, and whose ardent support for the Greeks was, as we have seen, to have totally unforeseen consequences for the actors in the Red Sea drama of the 1880s.⁷⁰¹

All these factors made a powerful, independent Greece an unpalatable prospect from the British government's standpoint. Finlay himself remarked that Liverpool's ministry responded to the Greek revolt 'with more aversion than any other Christian government in Europe'.⁷⁰² It was ironic, then, that grudging British assistance in creating the free Greek state encouraged just what all British statesmen wanted to avoid - stimulation of the *Megali Idea*.

⁷⁰⁰ A Philhellene Corps, made up of hundreds of men from almost every European country, was founded in Greece in 1822, and further contingents from various countries followed them. But all were regarded by the Greeks as a nuisance. There was no regular Greek army for them to join, only bands of brigands less interested in the liberation of Greece than in opportunities for pillage. Neither the *Klephts* - who wanted little more than an extension of customary law, a weak army and a decentralized, ineffective executive which would leave intact their local power and prerogatives - nor the Greek government welcomed the presence of foreigners who might challenge their authority or introduce an element of idealism into the struggle. Soon the volunteers were ragged and starving, with no support offered by the Greeks, money sent out for their sustenance mysteriously "disappearing", and supplies sent to them from Europe deliberately withheld by the Greek government. By 1826 Wellington, passing through Germany, '... found that there was no (longer any feeling for the Greeks), since they were considered to have (behaved) with great cruelty towards those who had gone to their assistance'. There was a revival of interest after the fall of Missolonghi and Byron's death in 1826, but overall the legacy of the effort to aid Greece among those who risked everything to do so was one of great bitterness and disillusion; Penn, op.cit., pp.644-58. For the special place of Brigandage in Greek nationalist activity, see Andreopoulos G., 'State and Irredentism: Some Reflexions on the Case of Greece', *The Historical Journal*, Vol.24: 4 (1981), pp.949-59; Prousis T., 'The Greeks of Russia and the Greek Awakening, 1774-1821', *Balkan Studies*, 28: 2 (January 1987), pp.259-80; and Tzanelli R., 'Haunted by the "Enemy" Within: Brigandage, Vlachian/Albanian Greekness, Turkish "Contamination", and Narratives of Greek Nationhood in the Dilessi/Marathon Affair (1870)', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Vol. 20: 1 (May 2002); pp.47-74.

⁷⁰¹ See, for instance, Frary L.J., 'Russian Consuls and the Greek War of Independence (1821-1831)', *Mediterranean Historical Review*, Vol. 28: No. 1: pp. 46-65; Frary L.J., *Russia and the Making of Modern Greek Identity, 1821-44* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), pp. 18-22; and particularly Bitis A., 'The Russian Army's Use of Balkan Irregulars during the 1828-1829 Russo-Turkish War', *Jahrbucher fur Geschichte Osteuropas*, 50: 4 (2002); pp. 537-57.

⁷⁰² Holland, op.cit., p.385.

The London Treaty of 7 May 1832 produced an independent Greece, after ineffectual efforts to keep it as an autonomous region of the Ottoman Empire had failed.⁷⁰³ Britain had been especially keen to keep Greece as part of the Ottoman domains, as it feared that an independent Greece would fall under the sway of Russia; when independence proved inevitable, Britain ensured that the new kingdom was kept as small as possible. However, this did not satisfy the Greeks. Much of Greece proper was excluded from the new kingdom.⁷⁰⁴ As Tzanelli says, that, and the fact that the Powers had taken it upon themselves to decide who would be King, meant that... (Greece) was deemed by... Patriots to have become

‘... a plaything kingdom... an arena for the diplomatic struggles of its protectors... Inevitably, many Greeks began to dream of a bigger and truly independent state, which would include... the “unredeemed” territories (including) the umbilical cord of Byzantium, Constantinople’.⁷⁰⁵

⁷⁰³ Wellington’s trip through Germany in 1826 (see note 14 above) had been part of a journey to St. Petersburg, aimed at reaching an accommodation with Russia, by which Greece would become an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire rather than a fully independent country. The other Powers were reluctant to become involved, but ultimately France acceded to a treaty, signed in London on 6 July 1827, with Britain and Russia that pledged action against the Turks if a ceasefire with the Greeks was not concluded rapidly. Events ran out of control, resulting in the defeat of the Turks and Egyptians at sea by Anglo-French naval action at Navarino and on land, six months later, by the Russians. After this there was no question of Greece remaining part of the Ottoman domain, and eventually the London treaty finally established the Greek kingdom: Woodward, *Age*, pp.206-11; Bourne, *Foreign Policy*, pp.20-25 (and see note 12 above); Hionidis P., ‘The Drawbacks of Philhellenism in Mid-Victorian Britain: The Case of the Philhellenic Committee of 1863’, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 30: 2 (October 2012): pp.191-213.

⁷⁰⁴ The frontier of the kingdom ran East-West between the gulfs of Volo and Arta and included only the southernmost part of mainland Greece (Attica) and the Peloponnese; all of Thessaly, Epirus and Macedonia remained Ottoman; Woodward, *Age*, p.210; Holland, *op.cit.*, pp.385-86.

⁷⁰⁵ Tzanelli, *op.cit.*, p.48.

For the next fifty years the Greeks pursued the *Megali Idea* by all means possible, and the British, by and large, resisted their efforts. This accounts for the frosty relations and frictions between both countries between 1832 and 1888 (despite Anglo-Italian ups-and-downs, there were no “Don Pacificos” with Italy) and the fact that Anglo-Philhellenism never really recovered from the disillusionments of the 1821-28 period.⁷⁰⁶

But Reid also touches upon a more metaphysical reason for Anglo-Greek coolness. British and European Classical preference, from the Renaissance up to the mid-Victorian period, was for Greek rather than Roman language and culture; Britain, in the essentially pre-Imperial Age (i.e. before about 1880), identified with the (perceived) liberal values of democratic Athens and its representatives, such as Socrates and Plato. Gladstone, no great believer in Imperialism, was an enthusiast for the Greek Classics. But after about 1880 Britain was on course to become the major Imperial Power in the world. Cromer,

⁷⁰⁶ ‘The incompatible policies of Greece and Britain towards Turkey led, in 1850, to the blockade of the Greek ports by the British fleet, and during the Crimean war, to the occupation of Athens by French and British troops... Above all... the ideological stance behind British responses to events in (Europe) explains the limited appeal of the Greek cause to the British public... developments in the Greek kingdom failed to cause any public excitement in the way that the Polish revolution of 1863 or Garibaldi’s visit to England in 1864 managed to do; there were no large meetings in London, no public demonstrations... and no fund raising... One reason for this... is that the natural agents of the Greek cause in Britain, the Greeks who resided in the country, were (very poor agitators). They had different priorities... from those of Italian and Polish refugees who advocated (their national struggles)... their commercial success required and implied a degree of respectability, and a reputation incompatible with public exposure on controversial issues... they did not touch upon... subjects that could throw into relief the divergent approaches of the Greek and British governments on the Eastern Question’; Hionidis, ‘Drawbacks’, pp.207-08.

Friction between Britain and Greece was a constant throughout the rest of the century. Even Gladstone, with his ‘... somewhat misconceived Philhellenic reputation’ reacted, when Palmerston ceded the Ionian Islands to Greece in 1863, more in a spirit of damaging Turkey than aiding Greece (see Shannon, *Heroic*, p.190, and Magnus, *Gladstone*, p.156), while a further blockade of the coast of Eastern Greece and the Gulf of Corinth was deemed necessary in 1886-7 to stop yet another Greek attack on Turkey; Lord Rosebery, *Hansard*, 10 May 1886 v305 cc 546-50, and see Langer, *European*, p.365.

Despite the political situation, Greece maintained very close commercial ties to Britain. Most of its currants - her major export, accounting for 62% of all exports in 1893 - went to Britain, and most of her industrial imports came from there; Dritsas M., ‘Monetary Modernisation in Greece: Bimetallism or the Gold Standard (1833-1920)’, *Journal of European Economic History*, 28: 1 (Spring 1999), pp.9-48 (p.21).

self-educated in both Greek and Roman classics, made favourable comparison between the British and Roman Empires, both pre-eminent in their time, largely because the Romans better assimilated their subject populations than had the Greeks, much as he wished for a British assimilation of Indian and Egyptian subjects to Victoria's Empire; and because he regarded the Classical Greeks as being unfitted for Imperial rule due to their contamination by liberal/democratic ideals (while the real Greeks he encountered in Egypt he distained as 'low-class' usurers or liquor salesmen).⁷⁰⁷ The same could be said about other representatives of British Imperialism, such as Curzon, Milner and Gorst, among whom comparing England and Rome was '... an exercise which was *a la mode* in the nineteenth century but which ceased abruptly in 1914'.⁷⁰⁸

⁷⁰⁷ . Reid D.M., 'Cromer and the Classics: Imperialism, Nationalism and the Greco-Roman Past in Modern Egypt', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 32: 1 (January 1996), pp. 1-29.

⁷⁰⁸ Hopkins, 'Africa', p.368.

APPENDIX 4. Background to Egypt

Muhammed (or Mehemet) Ali (d.1849), an Albanian serving in the Turkish forces sent by the Sultan to drive the French out of Egypt after their defeat by Nelson in 1798, took power in Egypt in 1805 and over the next 15 years made her into something resembling a modern state on the European model, introducing education, roads, manufacturing and, above all, cotton(which created much of Egypt's subsequent wealth.⁷⁰⁹ 'There was no field that his ambition and genius did not touch'⁷¹⁰ As Pasha of Egypt, he began the conquest of Sudan in 1820, in search of vast riches - since Classical times it had been believed that Sudan held bottomless reserves of gold and minerals⁷¹¹ - enough natives to furnish him with an army loyal to himself, and the potential to dominate the Red Sea (and thus the Holy Places of Hejaz, the control of which would allow him to rival the Sultan as the primary power in Islam). Though the promise of the Sudan proved a mirage - few black Sudanese survived the journey North to Egypt and gold deposits proved disappointing⁷¹² - Ali's power grew until by 1830 he held Syria and threatened to topple the Porte. Concern about his seemingly unstoppable rise to power was what led Britain to annex Aden in 1839 and neutralise Egyptian control of the Red Sea. In 1840 Palmerston formulated the Quadruple Alliance of Britain, Austria, Prussia and Russia, which came into being to defend the Ottoman Empire against Egyptian power, to force Ali to return Syria to the Sultan, and to pay him tribute as a vassal. In return he received the hereditary

⁷⁰⁹ Ward et al., *Cambridge Modern History*, p.429.

⁷¹⁰ A.B. Theobald, *The Mahdiya: A History of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, 1881-1899* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1951), p.6.

⁷¹¹ A. Moore-Harell, 'Decline in European Trade in the Sudan from the mid-Nineteenth century', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 39: 3 (July 2003), pp.65-80

⁷¹² M. Shibeika, *British Policy in the Sudan 1882-1902* (Oxford: University Press, 1952), pp. 9-10.

right to govern Egypt, which right remained with his descendants until 1952. Many regard him as the Father of Modern Egypt.⁷¹³

Muhammed Ali was succeeded by Abbas (1849-54), and Sa'id (1854-63), who continued Ali's efforts to modernize Egypt, liberalizing the economy, encouraging foreign investment and making possible the building of the Suez Canal. Ismail (1863-80) continued Ali and Sa'id's work, making great strides in modernizing Egypt (e.g. during his reign the number of state schools rose from 197 to 4,817) and drawing in vast amounts of foreign investment. 'Isma'il... was bringing back to Egypt a vigour... largely lost since the death of Mehemet Ali (and) achieved the logical extension to the Empire building of Egypt in the Sudan (started by Mehemet Ali in the 1820s)... (His) ambitions encompassed the bringing of Ethiopia itself into the Egyptian Empire'; so much so that Verdi's *Aida* (an Italian opera celebrating an ancient Egyptian victory over the invading Abyssinians) was commissioned by Isma'il, and first performed in Cairo on 24th December 1871.⁷¹⁴ 'Isma'il modeled his vision of Egypt on the European powers... he rebuilt Cairo on the model of Paris...' ⁷¹⁵ Such was his success in these early years that he obtained the title Khedive from the Sultan, which meant that he was effectively transformed from a Viceroy to an independent Monarch, and was entitled to complete independence in all internal administrative, judicial and legislative affairs.⁷¹⁶ Only his financial profligacy, combined with his being further weakened by having to support the

⁷¹³ J.C. Anene & G. Brown (eds), *Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1966), pp. 164-72; Fisher, *Middle East*, pp.279-86; C.W. Hallberg, *The Suez Canal: Its History and Diplomatic Importance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931 - Octagon ed., 1973), pp.69-100.

⁷¹⁴ d'Avray *Lords*, p. 67.

⁷¹⁵ Jonas, *Battle*, pp. 34-35

⁷¹⁶ However, it is interesting that judicial independence brought its own problems - the Egyptian legal code was based on the *Code Napoleon*, and by the turn of the next century French was dying out as a medium of education in the Egyptian schools set up by Isma'il - see Ball, *Education*, p. 416

Turks against the Russians in 1877 (30,000 Egyptian troops fought for Turkey against the Russians during 1877-78)⁷¹⁷ and then his defeat by the Abyssinians at Gura in 1879, led to his undoing in 1880.⁷¹⁸

However, there was much dismay in Britain at the embroiling of Britain in Egyptian affairs - Randolph Churchill opined that “the British people had been systematically deceived into thinking that Arabi had led a military rebellion. Yet it was clear that ‘he was the leader of a nation, the exponent of a nation’s woes, and that the (rebellion) was the desperate struggle of a race.’⁷¹⁹ Baring expressed similar sentiments in response to questions asked by Granville and Northbrook; in a memorandum written on 18 September 1882, he wrote that he was “strongly opposed to the establishment of a Protectorate”, since “(Whatever Urabi’s faults) I do not see what the Egyptians, considered as a nation, have done to forfeit their rights to self-government... there is nothing in the area of fiscal reform that can’t be done by the Egyptians themselves.”⁷²⁰ But, as Ensor says (in *England*, pp. 84-85), “The Gladstone Cabinet had followed events without understanding them. They had never wanted to occupy Egypt”, but were now embedded there for the foreseeable future. Hopkins points out that, long before 1882 Egypt was regarded as being crucial to the British position as an Imperial power, and a forward policy was regarded as essential because the route to India could not be guaranteed by an unjust and, above all, incompetent khedive. Once occupation had taken

⁷¹⁷ Langer, *European Alliances*, p.263.

⁷¹⁸ Anene & Brown, *Africa*, 172-74; Finkel, *Osman*, pp. 413-446; Fisher, *Middle East*, pp. 286-90; Hallberg, *Suez Canal*, pp.114-58; E. Rogan, *The Arabs: A History* (London: Penguin, 2009) pp. 75-133.

⁷¹⁹ Quoted in Brendon, *Decline*, p.168.

⁷²⁰ Quoted in R. Owen, *Lord Cromer: Victorian Imperialist, Edwardian Proconsul*, (Oxford: Clarendon), p.177.

place, however, it became essential to win over both the Great Powers and the Great British Public to a policy which left Gladstone standing, intellectually speaking, on his head, as the strategy of “rescue and retire” turned inevitably into one of rescue and reside.⁷²¹ As Lady Gwendolen Cecil commented, ‘Never was the opposition between intention and action more complete than when, within two years of the Midlothian crusade for peace, its preacher became involved in such a record of blood-stained adventure’.⁷²²

The impossibility of pulling out of a place once it had been occupied was well recognized - Major Hunter, Consul-General of the Somali Coast, noted in 1884 that the occupation of the trading port of Berbera would be possible with ‘... a hundred native infantry... but I fear that if we require such a show of force now, it may be difficult hereafter to withdraw.... and we might be committed to a policy of continuous occupation, (which is) beyond the scope of the intentions of government’.⁷²³

⁷²¹ A.G. Hopkins, ‘The Victorians in Africa: A Reconsideration of the Occupation of Egypt, 1882’, *Journal of African History* 27 (1986); pp. 363-91, and see also Porter, *Oxford*, pp.653-64.

⁷²² Cecil, *Marquis*, III, p.92.

⁷²³ IO L/PS/55, Hunter - Chief Secretary, Bombay, 9 August 1884.

APPENDIX 5. Britain, Russia, Abyssinia and the peoples of the Horn.

Abyssinia had existed as an independent region from medieval times, and (apart from a few pockets of territory held by the Egyptians along the Red Sea coast and in the North-West, and periodic but unsuccessful invasions by Arabic and Portuguese expeditions)⁷²⁴ had never been colonized by an outside power. For generations, the ‘fury of Islam’ swept all before it in the Middle East and Red Sea, but ‘The highlands of Ethiopia remained independent, isolated and Christian’⁷²⁵, while Menelik II himself wrote that “Ethiopia... has been for fourteen centuries a Christian land in a sea of pagans”.⁷²⁶ It is worth noting however that, during 1521-43, most of Ethiopia was overrun by Moslem conquerors, and the Christian Kingdom was only saved by the intervention of a Portuguese expeditionary force.⁷²⁷

The key to the survival of an independent Christian Abyssinia was due in no small part to the centrality of Christianity to all aspects of life there: ‘The Ethiopian Church is not simply a colourful adjunct to Ethiopian life, it is an essential part of it. In the countryside, the church permeates all facets of human existence to an extent unknown in Europe since medieval times’.⁷²⁸ However, the very success of this defensive strategy put the Abyssinians at a disadvantage when it came to dealing with Europeans intent on exploring, exploiting or colonizing North-East Africa, due, *inter alia*, to ‘.... internal

⁷²⁴ See H.G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994 (2002 edition),) pp. 1-30.

⁷²⁵ C.V. Wedgwood, *The Spoils of Time: A History of the World from Earliest Times to the Sixteenth Century* (London: Collins, 1984 - Phoenix edition, 2000), p.207; J.C. Anene & G.N. Brown, *Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Ibadan: University Press & London: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd., 1966), pp.87-89.

⁷²⁶ circular letter to all chief Monarchs of Europe, quoted in d’Avray, *Lords*, p.29.

⁷²⁷ Anene & Brown, *Africa*, pp.87-88

⁷²⁸ P.B. Henze, *Ethiopian Journeys* (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1977), p.34; see also d’Avray, *Lords*, pp. 47-8.

social and cultural opposition (to relations with outsiders); the lack of (access) to the sea: the lack of manipulable material interests: and Ethiopian ignorance of Europe... As a result, Ethiopian diplomacy found itself heavily dependent on the very foreigners with whom it sought to establish relations... The Ethiopians appreciated the dangers of their dependence and generally maintained a posture of coolness and suspicion, which some observers (interpreted) as disinterest...', which could explain the difficulty experienced by both Abyssinians and Europeans trying to establish diplomatic and commercial links with each other during the nineteenth century.⁷²⁹ As Portal⁷³⁰, who was there, observed, 'For centuries the Abyssinians had kept their religion intact, when (all around them) had succumbed to Islam... (but) in the course of their long struggle, Abyssinia has become cut off from the rest of the world...', which did not make for ease of communications when they began to be opened up.⁷³¹

Until the twentieth century, Abyssinia never achieved the cohesion and political unity that typified the "Nation-State" of contemporary Europe. It remained a collection of feudatory kingdoms, each ruled by a separate potentate, or *Negus* (King) but theoretically united under the *Negus Negast* (King of Kings). One reason for this was that Abyssinia's '... borders were spheres of raids and counter-raids, rather than lines of demarcation. This created a situation in which (borderlands) served as a basis for centrifugal elements', leading individual regions and kingdoms to pull away from the centre rather than

⁷²⁹ D. Crummey, 'Initiatives and Objectives in Ethio-European relations 1827-1862', *Journal of African History* 15:3 (1974); pp. 433-44 (quotes from pp. 434-46). See also Crummey's 'Tewdros as Reformer and Moderniser', *Journal of African History* 10:3 (1969); pp. 457-69.

⁷³⁰ Sir Gerald Herbert Portal (1858-1894), Secretary to Baring at Cairo 1882-1888, Consul-General to Zanzibar and East Africa 1889-92. During October-December 1887 he led an unsuccessful mission to Abyssinia to try and establish a peace treaty between Italy and Abyssinia.

⁷³¹ G.H. Portal, *My Mission to Abyssinia* (London: E. Arnold, 1892), p.81.

gravitate towards it.⁷³² It was roughly analogous to the Holy Roman Empire, theoretically united under one Emperor but in fact a group of autonomous kingdoms often at odds with one another. The principal Kingdoms, or Provinces, of Abyssinia included Bogos, to the North of Massawa (occupied in large part by the Egyptians, who Yohannes never quite managed to evict and who held on to Massawa until 1885); Tigray; Gojjam, in central Abyssinia; and Shoa, the most southerly of the main kingdoms of Abyssinia proper and the home and power-base of Menelik II (King of Shoa 1865-89 and Negus 1889-1913). There were many other regions such as Ogaden (to the East, bordering Somalia) Sidamo and Kaffa (in the south, near Uganda), and Wollega (bordering Sudan in the South-West) which were only notionally part of Abyssinia, frequently being inhabited by tribes that owned no allegiance to any Negus and who allied with, or fought against, the Abyssinian potentates of the nearby kingdoms as they pleased or found themselves forced to do. The campaign against the Italians during the 1887-1896 period helped to attenuate underlying disunities, but did not entirely eradicate them; 'resentments in the north would linger (after Adowa); Tigray was unhappy to be ruled by a Shoan (Menelik)...'⁷³³

By 1880 the Negus Negast was Yohannes IV (Emperor 1872-89), formerly governor of the Northern province of Tigray. During 1875-76 Yohannes ousted the incumbent Egyptians from much of Ethiopia, though they remained in control of Keren (which

⁷³² Erlich, 'Alula', p.267. For how this situation still has resonance for contemporary North-East Africa, see also R. Reid, 'The Challenge of the Past: The Quest for Historical Legitimacy in Independent Eritrea', *History in Africa* Vol.28 (2001); pp.239-72, and J. Sorensen, who points out that '... Italian colonization... unified Eritrea, transforming the area's social and economic character and defining it as a distinct unit in 1889'; 'History and Identity in the Horn of Africa', *Dialectical Anthropology* Vol.17:3 (1992); pp.272-52 (p.231).

⁷³³ Jonas, *Battle*, pp. 9-57 & 319-320; Oliver & Sanderson, *Cambridge*, pp. 36 & 645-665; Caulk, *Between*, pp.13-34 & passim.

dominated the caravan routes between Massawa and Sudan)⁷³⁴ and most of the seaboard, where they obstructed the external trade of Ethiopia via the Red Sea.⁷³⁵ In 1865 Menelik II became King of Shoa, to the South of Tigray, and set himself up as a rival to Yohannes.⁷³⁶ Though neither Britain nor France had shown much interest in any kind of relations with Abyssinia before 1880, during the 1860-70s Menelik sought diplomatic and economic links with both France and Britain, and a military alliance against Yohannes with Egypt, but without success in either enterprise.⁷³⁷ Meanwhile, Yohannes consolidated his power from the North and East into Central Ethiopia, hemming Menelik into Shoa.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Britain approached Abyssinia with a view to opening up a new market for British trade, appointing a Consul in 1848 and concluding a commercial treaty. However, the Abyssinians, as a Christian power surrounded by Moslems, were more interested in a military alliance, two Christian powers versus Islam, not realizing that such an approach had no appeal to Britain, which had good trading and political relations with most of the Moslem countries surrounding Abyssinia. By 1868 Lord Stanley, the British Foreign Secretary, was able to say in the House of Commons that “We can do without Abyssinia and (they) must learn to do without us”.⁷³⁸

⁷³⁴ Caulk, *Jaws*, p.16.

⁷³⁵ Oliver & Sanderson, *Cambridge*, p.643.

⁷³⁶ Ibid., pp.644-47.

⁷³⁷ Caulk, *Jaws*, pp.14-18.

⁷³⁸ Ram, *Anglo-Ethiopian*, pp.1-2 & 15; French interest was, at this time, largely confined to missionary activities, though as time passed the French presence displaced that of the British - ‘... until the mid-nineteenth century Arabic (was the main language employed by the Abyssinians to communicate with foreigners, but)... Later, especially during Menelik’s time, (French replaced Arabic as the *lingua franca* of diplomacy). English did not become popular in Ethiopia until the beginning of (the twentieth century)’; K.V. Ram, ‘Diplomatic Practices of Ethiopia in the Nineteenth Century’, *Transafrican Journal of History* Vol.15 (1986); p.127-43. The dismissive attitude of the British towards the Abyssinians led to difficulties later on when French influence became paramount in Abyssinia and Britain, Italy and Egypt all needed Abyssinian help during the Mahdiya (so that by 1896 Sir John Ardagh, the D.M.I., could say that “All the Europeans in Abyssinia with the exception of a few Russians and Italian prisoners, are now Frenchmen”;

Then the Mahdiya came along.

The Mahdiya: Britain calls on Abyssinia.

Meanwhile, Gladstone was becoming concerned not only about the deepening entanglement of Britain in Egypt following the occupation of 1882,⁷³⁹ but also, with the sudden rise of the Mahdiya, about being sucked into, and being unable to get out of, the Sudan. The massacre of Hicks Pasha's expedition in November 1883 made it clear that, as things stood, Anglo-Egyptian forces could not hold the Sudan and that '...the whole bloated apparatus of Egyptian Empire would have to be... withdrawn'.⁷⁴⁰

The Mahdi (al-Mahdi Muhammed Ibn Abdullah) was a Messianic figure 'claiming divine guidance (in restoring) right government to the Muslim community at a time of great social crisis'.⁷⁴¹ Led by the Mahdi in Darfur (West Sudan) and Usman Digma in Kordofan (East Sudan), the Mahdists achieved a series of victories over the Egyptians from 1881 to 1885, notably the defeat and massacre of the Hicks expedition of November 1883⁷⁴² and the fall of Khartoum and the death of Gordon in January 1885. Usman Digna gained several victories over Anglo-Egyptian forces based in Suakin - which was only

quoted in A. Marsden, 'Salisbury and the Italians in 1896', *The Journal of Modern History* Vol.40:1 (March 1968); pp.91-117 (p.99).

⁷³⁹ Granville's circular to the Powers of 3rd January 1883 stated that "... (HMG) are desirous of withdrawing... as soon as the state of (Egypt)... will admit of it" (quoted in Theobald, *Mahdiya*, p.50). However, as Langer pointed out, the British issued at least 66 such declarations between 1882 to 1922, each one sincere and each impossible to carry out; Langer, *European Alliances*, p.281.

⁷⁴⁰ Shannon, *Gladstone*, p.326. And see Appendix 4.

⁷⁴¹ Owen, *Cromer*, p.188

⁷⁴² For the full story of the Hicks disaster, see Theobald, *Mahdiya*, pp.48-66

saved from falling to him by the arrival of British reinforcements - and took Tokar in 1884, where he became Emir.⁷⁴³

As Shibeika says, ‘(three important characteristics) of the Sudanese... which were not (even slightly) changed by sixty years of Egyptian (rule were that they were) more susceptible to the appeal of the saint than to that of the learned man in matters of religion; (that for a Sudanese) to be accused of cowardice (would) cause him to sink very low in his society; (and that) the Sudanese loathed nothing more than the payment of taxes (as almost nothing was repaid to him in the form of social services or even protection), the more so when it was so excessive, as it really was under the Turco-Egyptian administration, and when the methods of exaction were so cruel.., as those used by the bash-buzuks’.⁷⁴⁴ ‘The (Egyptian conquest of 1874) led to resistance (from the Sudanese population), who found ... they had exchanged a light and intermittent suzerainty of the Fur sultan for the detested encroachment of a tax-collecting bureaucracy. To the (nomads of Sudan), the Mahdi’s call (to) ‘Kill Turks and stop paying taxes’ (transformed these) easy-going Muslims into the unlikely shock-troops of a puritan revolution’.⁷⁴⁵ General Dormer was moved to mentioned the conspicuous “bravery of Soudanese regiments” in the Mahdist campaign (‘The Situation at Suakin’, 7 December 1888’, CAB37/22/43). This explains the phenomenal success of the Mahdiya.⁷⁴⁶

⁷⁴³ d’Avray, *Lords*, pp. 93 & 100. Classic examples, if any were needed, of the problems that could arise from a division of power, and the refusal of an interested party to take responsibility for its actions, or lack of them, or to adequately finance its already bankrupt client state; Holt, *Mahdist*, pp. 47-65 & 73-94; Ram, *Anglo-Ethiopian*, pp. 48-49. On the financial situation regarding Egyptian efforts to defend its Red Sea territories against the Abyssinians prior to the Mahdia, see Ram, *ibid.*, pp. 46-47; for the same issues following the Hicks disaster, including the threat to Egypt itself, see Owen, *op.cit.*, pp.187-88 & 202-210

⁷⁴⁴ M. Shibeika, *British Policy in the Sudan 1882-1902*, (Oxford: University Press, 1952), pp.7-8.

⁷⁴⁵ Oliver & Sanderson, *Cambridge*, p. 611.

⁷⁴⁶ For an interesting analysis of the views of subject peoples of the Ottoman Empire to both Turks and Egyptians, and the way in which, in places such as Sudan, the two became blurred into one, see U.W. Haarman, ‘Ideology, History, Identity and Alterity: The Arab Image of the Turks from Abbasids to Modern

Its devastating effect on the Egyptian presence in Sudan meant that Britain needed Abyssinian help. Admiral Hewitt⁷⁴⁷ was dispatched to Abyssinia to conclude a treaty with Yohannes by which the Abyssinians would assist the Anglo-Egyptian effort to make an orderly withdrawal from Sudan. The Hewitt Treaty was concluded in June 1884, and was the only treaty ever signed by Yohannes IV with foreign powers.⁷⁴⁸ It provided, *inter alia*, that Yohannes would apply pressure to the Mahdists to facilitate the withdrawal of Egyptian troops from imperilled positions.⁷⁴⁹ Britain, in return, recognized the Abyssinian claim to Bogos (a region in North-West Abyssinia bordering on Sudan and prior to 1882 largely occupied by the Egyptians), and promised to ensure that Massawa was open to Abyssinia for trade; the Abyssinians also understood it to mean that, although Massawa should remain an Egyptian possession, it would allow them to occupy it in the event of an Egyptian withdrawal, thus giving them an outlet to the Red Sea.⁷⁵⁰

However, the Abyssinian “understanding” of who should possess Massawa, in the event of an Egyptian evacuation, was put to the test a mere six months after the Hewitt Treaty came into effect and before its pro-Egyptian terms had been completed. On 5 February 1885, the Italians occupied Massawa.

Egypt’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 20:2 (May 1988): pp. 175-96. The peoples of Southern Sudan and Western Ethiopia used the term “Turuk” to mean ‘foreigners of a lighter skin’, and is a legacy of Turco-Egyptian rule, the word ‘Turuk’ being derived from the word ‘Turk’; E. Kurimoto, ‘Trade Relations between Western Ethiopia and the Nile Valley during the Nineteenth century’, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 28: 1 (June 1995), pp.53-68.

⁷⁴⁷).

⁷⁴⁸.

⁷⁴⁹ The last remaining Egyptian garrison was evacuated from Dungkala on June 18th 1885 by Sir Redvers Buller; Serels, *Starvation*, p.13.

⁷⁵⁰ Jonas, *Battle*, pp. 34-39; Ram, *Anglo-Ethiopian*, p.49. See also R. Caulk,, ‘Yohannes IV, the Mahdists, and the colonial partition of north-east Africa’, *Transafrican Journal of History* 1: 2 (July 1971); pp. 23ff.

The Russian Connection

Though Russians had been probing and appearing in or around Africa since the 1400s, the first Russians to appear in the vicinity of Abyssinia were (apart from a merchant in the sixteenth century, one Athanasius Nikitin, who visited the Somali coast in the 1570s) explorers such as E.P. Kovalevski, who led an expedition to Sudan in search of gold during 1847-48, and N.N. Mikluko-Maklay, who made a reconnaissance of the Red Sea coast in 1869.

In 1886 Nikolai Ivanovich Aschinov, a Cossack who had been involved in an unsuccessful attempt during 1883 to turn parts of the Black Sea coast into a Cossack enclave, led an expedition into Abyssinia, arriving in Asmara in January 1886. He had gone there (financed by British agents, who paid him to smuggle arms into Afghanistan but whom he double-crossed) as, having gone to Constantinople after fleeing the Black Sea debacle in 1884, he had met with Circassians recently arrived from Egypt, who told him of a fabulous kingdom in Abyssinia, inhabited by ancient Christians who would welcome fellow Christians from Russia. He was received by Ras Alula in Asmara but refused an audience with Yohannes, since he was not an accredited representative of the Russian authorities or church. He returned to Russia but was unable to obtain official sanction for a return to Abyssinia since, due to his activities, the Italians, French and British had begun making “enquiries” about Russian intentions in the area,⁷⁵¹ and Giers, the Russian foreign minister, did not want to upset them further. Nothing daunted, he returned again in 1889, this time leading the first “serious” expedition, a small (150) group of Cossacks, with whom he attempted to establish a colony (“New Moscow”) at Sagallo, in the Bay of Tajourra. One of this party was a Russian Archimandrite, Vasili

⁷⁵¹ P.R. Rollins, ‘Imperial Russia’s African Colony’, *The Russian Review*, 27: 4 (October 1968), pp.432-51.

Ivanovich Paisii, who wished to establish links with the Ethiopian church on behalf of the Russian Holy Synod. These half-starved, ragged unfortunates who were evicted by the French a few weeks after their arrival, in mid-February 1889.

The Italians had encountered Aschinov before. As a representative of several Italian (and one Russian) exploratory and commercial enterprises, he had visited Massawa from Egypt in 1885 and quarreled with the Italian governor over the eviction of the Egyptians, before departing to stay with Alula, the avowed foe of the Italians. They had thus been concerned for months about the Aschinov enterprise, and reports about the impending expedition had caused great alarm in Rome, including a formal protest to the Austrians, to whom belonged the *Amphitrite*, the ship taking the expedition to Tajourra⁷⁵²;

The Peoples of the Horn: Some brief notes.

There seemed to be some confusion in the ethnic origins of some of these peoples - not surprisingly, as their ethnicity is highly complex. For instance, the umbrella term *Beja* incorporates numerous tribes, mainly of autochthonous *Funj* extraction, including the Bisharin, Abdada (not to be confused with the Habab), Hadendowa and Beni-Amer (both identified as *Funj* peoples, though there is evidence that the Beni-Amer are a hybrid of Arabic and Funj stock). Fleming defines them all as Arabic settlers from the Arabian Peninsula; according to him, the Halenga came from Southern Arabia in the AD 1300s, while the Hadendowa came from the Hedjaz, date unknown. However, more specialized

⁷⁵² C. Jesman C., *The Russians in Ethiopia: A Study in Futility* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), pp.10-22.

research has shown that his conclusions were sometimes inaccurate. While the Rashayida Arabs were Arabic-speaking Bedu of the Arabian peninsula whose first appearance in North-East Africa is well-documented as part of the Napier expedition of 1867⁷⁵³, the Halenga presence in Sudan/Eritrea goes as far back as AD 700, when they fled Arabia during the Khalifate of Abdul Malik Ibn Marwan, AD 685-705.⁷⁵⁴ While the origins of the Habab are shrouded in mystery (they are thought to have arrived in Africa sometime between AD 1200-1500 from Akilli Kazai - location unknown - “at the Muslim conquest”⁷⁵⁵, the Beni-Amer claim to have been a Funj people who originated in the coastal region of the Red Sea, though other authorities say they came from Arabia “a thousand years ago”; they are likely a cross between Arabic and African ethnicities⁷⁵⁶ The migration, and resultant interbreeding, of Arabs to the Funj domains of Sudan appears to have occurred during the 16-18th centuries, during the peak period of the Funj Sultanate of Sennar⁷⁵⁷. Most importantly of all, however, the Hadendowa were most definitely not an Arabic people. The famous “Fuzzie-Wuzzy” of Kipling’s eponymous poem, they were a Funj people, the only natives to ever break a British Square (Osman

⁷⁵³ see W.C. Young, ‘The Rashayida Arabs vs. the State: The Impact of European Colonisation on a Small-Scale Society in Sudan and Eritrea’, *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 9: 2 (Fall 2008), pp. un-numbered.

⁷⁵⁴ Sheikh Jaafar Ali, Nazir of the Halenga, ‘Notes on the Halenga Tribe’, *Sudan Notes and Records*, 8 (1925); pp. 180-184.

⁷⁵⁵ O.G. S. Crawford, ‘The Habab Tribe’, *Sudan Notes and Records*, 36: 2 (December 1955); pp.183-87.

⁷⁵⁶ Anon, ‘The Beni-Amer Country’, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography*, 14: 8 (August 1892); pp. 546-550, and Stokes, op.cit., p.234

⁷⁵⁷ P.M. Holt, ‘Egypt, the Funj and Darfur’, in J.D. Fage & R.Oliver, *Cambridge History of Africa*, vol.4 (Cambridge: University Press, 1975), pp. 14-57, and G. Talhami, ‘The Muslim African Experience’, *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 4: 1/2 The Islamic Alternative (Spring 1982), pp. 17-33. For the definition and origins of the Funj, see P.M. Holt, ‘Funj Origins: A Critique and New Evidence’, *Journal of African History*, 4 : 1 (1963), pp.39-55, and J. Spaulding, ‘The Funj: A Reconsideration’, *Journal of African History*, 13: 1 (1972), pp.39-53; for information on the Beja, see Hjort-af-Ornas, op.cit., and A.L. Palmisano, ‘Ethnicity: The Beja as Representation’, *Ethizitat und Gesellschaft*, Occasional papers no.29 (Berlin: Verlag das arabische Buch, 1991

Digna was a Hadendowa) and, after Omdurman, the recipient of the British army's deepest respect -

'So 'ere's to you, Fuzzy-Wuzzy, at your 'ome in the Soudan: You're a pore Benighted 'eathen but a first-class fightin' man...'

APPENDIX 6. Italy: Social, Economic and Political Background

The Italy of 1887 was still far from being a properly united Kingdom. Though the country had been theoretically united into a Nation-State in 1870, in practice it was riven by strong economic and political undercurrents and tensions. As Makki says, the Italian state of 1870 had no precedent for a single administration later than ancient Rome.⁷⁵⁸

‘To begin with, only about two per cent of the population spoke Italian. The great majority spoke dialects... unintelligible outside their local area. ‘Italian’ itself was simply the local dialect of Tuscany... The King usually spoke Piedmontese’.⁷⁵⁹ Further, the mass

⁷⁵⁸ F. Makki, ‘Imperial Fantasies, Colonial Realities: Contesting Power and Culture in Italian Eritrea’, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 107 (2008); pp. 735-54, (p.740).

⁷⁵⁹ M. Robson, *Italy: Liberalism to Fascism 1870-1945* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992), p.16. ‘In most of Italy Italian, like Latin, was a dead language, used occasionally for literary purposes by the intellectual elite’; Clark, *Modern Italy*, pp. 34-35. See also F. Barbagallo, ‘Italy: the idea and the reality of the nation’, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 6:3 (2001), pp. 388-401, for a propagation (derived from historians such as Candeloro, Bonelli and Romanelli) of this idea, and Makki (op.cit., p.741) for a description of this idea that puts flesh on its bones - apart from the 2.5 % of Italians who spoke Italian, the rest talked in idioms “so varied that the (Italian) schoolmasters sent... to Sicily in the 1860s were mistaken for Englishmen”, and Italian soldiers could not understand their officers. However, Hearder makes the point that Italian was the written and often spoken *lingua franca* of the intelligentsia, especially in the North, and had been for centuries, while the 98% of the Italian population that apparently didn’t speak Italian actually spoke dialects of it (much as the inhabitants of, say, Yorkshire and Scotland spoke dialects of English), while Bismarck, despite his rude comments, went to great lengths to make an ally of Italy; H. Hearder, ‘Whose Identity? Italy and the Italians’, *History Today* Vol.44:11(November 1994), pp.37-44.

In support of Hearder’s view, Crankshaw notes that Bismarck’s desire to have Italy in the German camp during the 1880s was nothing new; during the early 1860s, he had sought to have Italy as an ally against Austria in the coming Austro-Prussian war, in order to have Austria weakened by having to fight on two fronts; E. Crankshaw, *The Fall of the House of Habsburg* (London: Longmans, 1963 (Sphere ed. 1970)), p.217, while Charmley states that Bismarck had encouraged France to take Tunis in 1881, not just because it would distract them from Franco-German issues, but because it would infuriate the Italians and drive them into the German camp, where he wanted them (J. Charmley, *Splendid Isolation? Britain and the Balance of Power 1874-1914* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1999), p.182). However, this interpretation of German aims is open to question. As Langer points out, the value of Italy to German interests was debatable to say the least, as Bismarck had no respect for either Italian strength or her trustworthiness as an ally - ‘In the Tunis question... it is (clear) that he worked almost exclusively with France in view. He had too low an opinion of the Italians to care very much what they did or where they stood (and supported France because he) desired to (compensate her) for the losses of 1870-71... He was convinced that the Italians were pursuing a double-edged policy, that they were thoroughly unreliable, and that any agreement made with them would be (met) only if it suited their interests’ (Langer, *European Alliances*, pp.225-26).

However, it is undeniable that both the French and Germans were envious of Italian success in expanding their presence abroad via “indirect colonialism” (i.e., emigration supported by the maintenance of Italian cultural pride and identity in countries such as America) and sought (largely unsuccessfully) to emulate them - see M.I. Choate, ‘From territorial to ethnographic colonies and back again: the politics of

of the Italian population had played little part in the *Risorgimento*. Northern Italy had been won for the new state by Piedmont (heavily assisted by foreign military and diplomatic aid),⁷⁶⁰ while the South had been conquered by Garibaldi's Red Shirts (mainly students, intellectuals and independent craftsmen). 'No more than ten (of the Thousand) were from Piedmont, and they (i.e. the Thousand) included foreigners and a large number of lawyers, doctors, pharmacists, engineers and landowners. Few of them were ordinary folk'.⁷⁶¹ No-one in power consulted or involved the great majority in the destiny of the new country, and the victory of 1870 did nothing to encourage the masses to participate in the political life of the new state. In 1870 over 70% of Italy was illiterate. Between 1870 and 1882 the entitlement to vote went only to men who were over 25, literate, and able to pay 40 lire per annum in taxes. This meant that the parliamentary electorate stood at 500 in 1870 and 622,000 in 1880, i.e. about 2% of the total population.⁷⁶² 'Therefore it was scarcely surprising that the majority of Italians found it difficult to identify with the

Italian expansionism, 1890-1912', *Modern Italy* 8:1 (2003), pp.65-75, and C. Dewhurst, 'Colonising Italians: Italian Imperialism and Agricultural "Colonies" in Australia, 1881-1914', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol.44:1 (2016); pp. 23-47.

⁷⁶⁰ Robson, op.cit., p.16; R. Bosworth., *Italy, the Least of the Great Powers: Italian Foreign Policy before the First World War* (Cambridge: University Press, 1979), p.1.

⁷⁶¹; U. Eco, *The Prague Cemetery* (Milan: Bompieri, 2010 (2012 Vintage edn)) p. 135; Robson, op.cit, p.16. Oreste Baratieri, later Commander of the Italian forces at Adowa, was among them; d'Avray, *Lords*, p. 219.

⁷⁶² Clark, *Modern Italy*, pp.64-65; Robson, *Italy*, p.16. Illiteracy declined throughout Europe during the 19th Century, but national variations were marked. In England, Scandinavia and Germany rates of illiteracy had sunk, throughout the second half of the century, to minimal levels; however, by 1900 it still ran at about 50% in Italy, despite efforts to alleviate matters (for instance, free primary education was introduced under Depretis, but little finance was provided to pay for it, while truancy rates were as high as 80% in the South where children were needed to work - Robson, *Italy*, pp.22-23). In Italy, during 1880-1920, regional disparities in education became much worse, i.e. during industrialization, while the deprivation of the already poverty-stricken areas of Mezzogiorno, Sardinia and Sicily became both relatively and actually worse than before 1880; H. Kaelble, *Industrialisation and Social Inequality in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Heidelberg: Berg, 1986; Trans., Leamington Spa), pp.26-30 & 88-98. See also D. Cooper, 'Gladstone Part I: From Tory to Liberal', in Scott-Baumann, *Years*, pp. 263-65 & 353-55; A.W. Ward, G.W. Prothero & S. Leathes, *The Cambridge Modern History: Vol. XII, The Latest Age* (Cambridge: University Press, 1910), pp. 57-59; and D. Read, *Edwardian England 1901-1915: Society and Politics* (London: Harrap, 1972), pp. 58, 70, 81 & 156-60, for comparable developments in English education.

new state and throw off the legacy of... internal division and localism'.⁷⁶³ The Italian historian Luigi Blanchi summed up the situation: 'The patriotism of the Italians is like that of the ancient Greeks, and is the love of a single town, not of a country; it is the feeling of a tribe, not of a nation'.⁷⁶⁴

Then there was the North-South divide. The South, including Sardinia and Sicily, was (with the exception of Naples) underdeveloped and bereft of industrialization, and stricken with poverty, lawlessness and violence, with land degraded by deforestation, erosion and the neglect of absentee landlords.⁷⁶⁵ 'Not surprisingly, the peasants of Southern Italy... were in a constant state of ferment and revolt in the nineteenth century'.⁷⁶⁶ The North, on the other hand, was, relative to the South, prosperous and industrializing fast, particularly in Milan, Turin and the Alpine valleys. It regarded itself as much more sophisticated than the South; the chaos and desolation of the South 'contributed greatly to the North Italian belief that Southerners were a separate and inferior race'.⁷⁶⁷

⁷⁶³ Robson, *Italy*, p.16. Full universal male suffrage was not achieved by Italy until 1913; E. Dal Lago, "'States of Rebellion": Civil War, Rural Unrest, and the Agrarian Question in the American South and the Italian Mezzogiorno, 1861-1865', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 47: 2 (April 2005), pp. 403-432 (p. 406).

⁷⁶⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, p.16.

⁷⁶⁵ Joll, *Europe*, p.8.

⁷⁶⁶ The conventional view is that legislative attempts to improve matters during the 1870-80s by re-allocating land from the aristocracy and haute bourgeoisie to landless and small-holding peasants failed, since their inability to meet subsequent tax demands led to the land being re-distributed back to its previous owners. Clark, *Modern Italy*, pp.16-17 & 69-80. However, more recent research has shown that the picture of feckless and rapacious southern landlords versus hapless peasants was not as simple as previously thought. While, undoubtedly, there were landlords who regarded their status and possessions as 'a source of power and... not as a productive asset', there was also an increased incidence of land reclamation and a great surge of citrus and vine cultivation in Sicily and Southern Italy during the 1850-80 period, with peasants and landowners providing labour and capital by mutual agreement; see J. Cohen & G. Federico, *The Growth of the Italian Economy, 1820-1960* (Cambridge: University Press, 2001), pp.30-45.

⁷⁶⁷ Clarke, *op.cit.*, pp.69-70. These problems continue to bedevil Italy to this day - see C. Triglia, 'North and South in the Current Crisis', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* Vol.19:4 (August 2014); pp.404-11. It did not help that 'The Piedmontese (prior to 1870) profited from Turin being the seat of government; they also possessed the unconcealed favour of the King.'; Mack Smith, *Italy*, p.65.

The South had its own resentments against the North as well - 'After 1860 regional resentment of Piedmont served (to fuel)... resistance to central authority... (an anarchist leader, Francesco Merlino, noted in 1889) that the popularity of anarchism... was mainly due to) regional hatred for Piedmont. The government, he wrote, treated (the South) like a conquered province. It and Sicily were Italy's two Irelands'.⁷⁶⁸

There is a colourful example of southern Italian contempt for the North in the Foreign Office papers from 1882. In Messina, on the 600th anniversary of the Sicilian Vespers, a crowd of 15,000, stirred up by a demagogue called Bensaja, rioted and pulled down the Italian flag; shouting "Viva Garibaldi" and "Abasso il Giuccio" ("Down with the Donkey" - i.e. the King, Umberto I), scooped up "an old man who was exceedingly drunk" and paraded him about as a surrogate King. No-one was hurt and the good-humoured riot fizzled peacefully out, though the event in turn ignited a rather less good-humoured commotion in Palermo.⁷⁶⁹ Geopolitically, too, Italy was far from a unified entity.⁷⁷⁰ Notwithstanding the entrenched localism inherent in the Italian polity and the exclusion of the vast majority of the population from parliamentary activity, the creation of a proto-Italian state in 1861 - at this stage really only an extension of Cavour's Piedmont-Sardinia⁷⁷¹ - had not included the Papal States, or those parts of Northern Italy (Venetia, Trieste and Tyrol) still occupied by Austria.⁷⁷²

⁷⁶⁸ J.A. Thayer, 'Risorgimento Achievement and Post-Risorgimento Problems', in A.W. Salomone (ed.), *Italy from Risorgimento to Fascism: An Enquiry into the Origins of the Totalitarian State* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1970), pp. 93-94.

⁷⁶⁹ FO45/636, Paget - Granville, 21 March 1882. And see note 112 above.

⁷⁷⁰ For a comprehensive background to Italian nation-building see Barbagallo, 'Idea and Reality', pp. 338-401.

⁷⁷¹ C. Duggan, 'Nation-building in 19th-century Italy: The case of Francesco Crispi', *History Today* Vol.52: 2 (February 2002), pp.9-15; Mack Smith, *Italy*, pp. 61-69.

⁷⁷² Taylor, *Struggle*, pp.99-100.

After the liberation of Rome in 1870, and the subsequent acquisition of the Papal territories, the Papacy became a major problem to the Italian state. Angered by the loss of its territories to the Italian state, it refused to allow Catholics to take part in Italian parliamentary elections, thus putting many Italians in a moral dilemma, as well as worrying the Italian authorities that either the Pope was intriguing against the Italian state with other Catholic Powers (i.e. France and Austria), or that those same Catholic Powers might intervene to restore Rome to the Pope.⁷⁷³ This led to ‘a permanent state of tension’ between the Vatican and the Italian government which was unresolved by 1896.⁷⁷⁴ Even the defeats of Italian arms in Abyssinia were used by the Papacy to try and undermine the Italian State. Following the battle of Amba Alage (December 1895), the Vatican censured clergy who made patriotic comments about Italians who had “died for their country”, because such remarks were seen as validating the Italian state and, by implication, sanctioning the seizure of the Papal territories. In March 1896 the Vatican rejoiced at the defeat of the ‘Satanic’ Italian armies which, at Adowa, paid ‘... the wages of a divine vendetta’.⁷⁷⁵ Four months after Adowa, the Vatican publicly equated Italian attempts to grab land in Africa with the theft of territory from the Papacy, and accused the Italian government of being riddled with freemasons who wanted to crush Africa’s only Christian state. It also launched a campaign, independent of the efforts of the Italian

⁷⁷³ Papal edicts in 1871, 1874, 1881 and 1886 effectively barred Italian Catholics from either voting in or standing as candidates in parliamentary elections. Clark, *Modern Italy*, pp.84-85; Joll, *Europe*, p.7; Lowe & Marzari, *Italian*, p.12.

⁷⁷⁴ Lowe & Marzari *ibid.*, p.11-12. See also S.W. Halperin, ‘Italian Anticlericalism, 1871-1914’, *The Journal of Modern History* 19:1(May 1947); pp.18-34.

⁷⁷⁵ Bosworth, *Least*, p.24

government, to obtain the release of Italian POWs by using its connections with the Coptic church in Abyssinia.⁷⁷⁶

Anger went both ways in Italy - anti-Papal feelings ran high amongst large sections of the general populace, especially the radicals, as evidenced by anti-Papal riots during July 1881 during which stones were thrown at the coffin of Pope Pius IX. Threats to blow up the Vatican led Pope Leo XIII to seriously plan leaving Rome and going into exile.⁷⁷⁷ There was a brief truce between church and state when they joined in mourning the loss of Italian lives and prestige at Dogali in January 1887,⁷⁷⁸ but it didn't last. Then were political factors and movements that transcended regionalism. Republican sentiment and activity remained strong throughout Italy, as those who saw themselves as the successors of Mazzini⁷⁷⁹ sought to bring down the Monarchy, while Garibaldi⁷⁸⁰ remained active as the idol and sometime leader of the Radicals who themselves had split from, and moved to the Left of, the Republicans.⁷⁸¹ Add to this volatile mix a strong dose of Anarchism,

⁷⁷⁶ For the full story of this curious episode in Italo-Papal relations, see R. Jonas, *The Battle of Adowa: African Victory in the Age of Empire* (Harvard: Belknap Press, 2011), pp. 307-10, and Langer, *European Alliances*, pp. 231-247, for a particularly good analysis of the effects of the Italo-Papal schism upon Italy's internal political situation, and her relations with the rest of Europe subsequent to it.

⁷⁷⁷ Langer, *European Alliances*, pp. 231-32. However, some observers suspected that these riots, especially those aimed at the coffin of Pius IX, had been engineered by the Papacy to discredit the Italian state, as the coffin-moving had been done at night, under conditions of great secrecy, and any riot resulting must have been due to a deliberate leak; FO45/430, Paget - Granville, July 13 1881.

⁷⁷⁸ A. Triulzi, 'Adwa: From Monument to Document', *Modern Italy*, 8: 1 (2008), pp.95-108 (p.102), and R. Battaglia, *La Prima Guerra d'Africa*, (Torino: Einaudi, 1958) p.242.

⁷⁷⁹ Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-72), foremost republican of the *Risorgimento*.

⁷⁸⁰ Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-82), early follower of Mazzini and military and political adventurer central to the success of the *Risorgimento*.

⁷⁸¹ Clark, *Modern Italy*, pp.78-81. 'Left' and 'Right' in Italian politics at this time were fluid distinctions; in terms of foreign policy during and after the *Risorgimento*, the Right ('Destra') were advocates of the old liberalism who placed good relations with France at a premium. The Left ('Sinistra') condemned the Right's allegiance to France but could not align itself with any other country and thus tended towards isolationism. The advent of the Third republic in France threw these distinctions into disarray (the Destra had predicated its pro-French stance upon the assumption that France was a Monarchy), and account for the opportunistic nature - or 'Machiavellianism' - that appeared to characterise Italian relations with other countries and which led to Italy being regarded with great mistrust by the Powers in the years following 1870; I. Scott, 'The making of the Triple Alliance in 1882', *East European Quarterly*, XII: 4 (Winter 1978), pp.399-423 (pp.400-01). And see below, p. 37 and note 147.

which flourished throughout Italy after Bakunin's appearance in Naples in 1865 and was reinforced by the transient successes of the Paris Commune of 1871 and the Spanish Republican Revolution of 1873,⁷⁸² and all the components were present for an explosion which had the potential to destroy the young state (as indeed, not dissimilar tensions sundered the United States in 1862).⁷⁸³ As d'Azeglio said, the *Risorgimento* had made Italy, but it had not made Italians.⁷⁸⁴

Depretis was almost single-handedly responsible for holding the country together until his death in August 1887. The Depretis method of government by incorporating all shades of opinion into a moderate consensus⁷⁸⁵ became known as *Trasformismo*. Prior to the Depretis years, national politics had been dominated by Northern Italians. However, much as Tito, a Croat, ensured the stability of a united Yugoslavia by ensuring the presence of Serbs in important government positions after 1945,⁷⁸⁶ Depretis sought to draw the South into the reality of a united Italy by appointing Southerners to government

⁷⁸² Ibid., pp.73-75.

⁷⁸³ For a study of the remarkable similarities between Italy and the United States in this respect, see Dal Lago, 'States', pp. 403-432.

⁷⁸⁴ Massimo Taparelli, Marquis d'Azeglio (1796-1866), artist, writer and Prime Minister of Piedmont, 1849-52. A curious comment from a man who did not favour the incorporation of the South or the Papal States in a united Italy; Mack Smith, *Italy*, p.32.

⁷⁸⁵ Not unlike that of Lord Liverpool, who had 'learned how to deal with men; his tact and patience, his own modesty and common sense kept his party together' (E.L. Woodward, *The Age of Reform 1815-1870* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1938), p.51) and who in 1812, following the assassination of Perceval, 'came back as the indispensable co-ordinator of a cabinet of national effort'; Watson, *Reign*, p.500. Liverpool, like Depretis, had also to take "extremists" such as Sidmouth into the government.

Apropos Liverpool, Donovan & Newell point out that *Trasformismo*/Transformism was nothing new, or unique to Italy, but was rather a function of the development of the industrialising, post-Napoleonic European Liberal state and can be defined as '... the *rapprochement* of democratic liberals with conservative liberals as more radical forces appeared on the left', and that a comparative analysis of Mediterranean politics was identified by Kurth as being common, in "transformismal" terms, to Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece. They also identify the transformation process as being traceable in a British context to the troubled reign of James II and the 'Glorious Revolution'; M. Donovan & J.L. Newell, 'Centrism in Italian Politics', *Modern Italy*, 13: 4 (2008), pp. 381-397 (pp. 385-87).

⁷⁸⁶ See, for example, T. Butcher, *The Trigger: Hunting the Assassin who Brought the World to War* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2014), pp.114-22, and M. Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia: The Third Balkan War* (New York: Penguin, 1992 - 3rd ed. 1996), pp.13 & 249.

posts;⁷⁸⁷ so much so that *trasformismo* changed the social basis of the Italian leadership from the traditional Northerners to those of the South,⁷⁸⁸ and in doing so sowed the seeds of its own destruction. This was because *trasformismo*, by its nature a mechanism of compromise and avoidance of extremes, did not ultimately sit well with Italy's image of herself as a Great Power. In reality, *trasformismo* functioned by a form of cronyism; 'during (his) years of opposition, Depretis had become accustomed to seek allies indiscriminately, and to promise too much to too many. His chief strength lay in Southern Italy, where political life had always been unhealthy, where men had learned their politics in the school of conspiracy...'⁷⁸⁹ so that he became used to using graft to get the people he wanted, and putting them where he wanted them. Political appointments went to those who toed the line; '... elections were fixed... deputies corrupt... the issues of political debate were few, became fewer'⁷⁹⁰ so that by 1887 Depretis had 'created an electoral machine which... hardly ever failed to register the desired result',⁷⁹¹ but which was perceived by many as being bereft of any higher principle. By the time of his death, Italy was ripe for a more adventurous leader.

⁷⁸⁷ Mack Smith, *Italy*, pp. 109-10. However, a purely "party-based" analysis of Italian politics ignores the importance of the Monarchy as a stabilizing focus for all non-Republican factions within the cauldron of Italian domestic politics. As Brice points out, '...If we take the four fundamental... characteristics proposed by La Palombara and Weiner to define a political party, it would be difficult to find an Italian (party) before (1900) which met these criteria, and... there was no liberal 'Party' in the proper sense of the term... The difficult relationship between the Italian ruling class and the concept of the political party (is typified by Crispi, a) supporter of pluralism, an admirer of the English system, and heir to the liberal-democratic tradition (but) reluctant to (countenance) parties which could be written off as municipal or corporate idiosyncrasies, and in that sense *overshadowed by the confidence in the State and the national-popular monarchy that unified the country's parties*'; C. Brice, 'Monarchy and Nation in Italy at the End of the Nineteenth Century: A Unique form of Politicization?', *European History Quarterly*, 43: 1 (2013), pp. 53-72 (pp.56-57). My italics.

⁷⁸⁸ Lowe & Marzari, op.cit, p.10. For an excellent examination of the North-South dichotomy regarding all aspects of the Italian polity, see Chabod, *Statecraft*, pp.147-72.

⁷⁸⁹ Mack Smith, op.cit, pp.109-110.

⁷⁹⁰ Clark, *Modern Italy*, pp. 63-64.

⁷⁹¹ Mack Smith, op.cit., p.110. But see notes 134 & 137 above regarding the difficulties inherent in handling the Chamber.

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iv) Dissertations

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