

Great war intrigues in the Horn of Africa

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Introduction

On 3rd of January 1916 the British Consul-General in Ethiopia sent a telegram to the Foreign Office in London.¹ Despatched at the height of the First World war the telegram revealed German plans to encourage Ethiopia to attack a British ally – Italy.

Wilfred Gilbert Thesiger (Britain's Consul-General and Minister Plenipotentiary in Addis Ababa, 1909 - 1919) informed London that: the "...German Minister is urging the Abyssinians to seize Eritrea promising that, if they will attack the Italians now, Germany will allow them to hold the colony as part of Abyssinia but if, on the other hand, they do not take immediate offensive measures, then they must be prepared to see the Italian colony pass eventually under German control."

The Ethiopian government was tempted. Eritrea, its pathway to the sea, would have been an enormous prize, and widely seen as highly desirable, if only to put a stop to the perennial Italian interference in internal northern Ethiopian politics. The Emperor Menelik had failed to advance into the colony after his victory at Adua in 1896, but Eritrea was still regarded as Ethiopian. The then British Minister in Addis Ababa, Doughty-Wylie, wrote in September 1914 that he believed that if France and Britain had declared war on Italy, Ethiopia would have moved against the Italian colony of Eritrea to oust the Italians. Italy appeared to believe this was likely and built up its armed forces in the colony to 18,000.²

In the end no Ethiopian attack took place and the country remained neutral during the war. At the same time the episode underlines the complex relationship between the First World War combatants as they strove to use this theatre to pursue the global conflict. None had sufficient forces to engage in full-scale battles; rather they turned to covert means. The exploits of Colonel T. E. Lawrence on the Arabian Peninsula are well known.³ Less widely understood is that Germany had similar aims on the western side of the Red Sea. It deployed men like Leo Frobenius and Frederick Solomon Hall in an attempt to involve Ethiopia in the war. Berlin would have loved to set the Horn of Africa alight, drawing Italian, British and French troops away from the major battlefields. Forces on

¹ Thesiger to London, National Archive FO 371/2593

² Doughty-Wylie. Addis Ababa Intelligence Report for August 1914. 6 September 1914. FO/1881

³ There are intriguing, but quite unproven, suggestions that T. E. Lawrence even had a hand in events in Ethiopia. Richard Greenfield wrote: "Some writers go so far as to suggest that then the famous Colonel T. E. Lawrence came secretly to Ethiopia and was involved in the production of propaganda against Iyasu at the instigation of the British Government." Richard Greenfield, *Ethiopia: a new political history*, Frederick A. Praeger, New York, 1965, p. 138. Greenfield quotes Byron de Prorok 'and others.' De Prorok writes that he went to visit Iyasu in a 'mountain fastness' near Harar, where the prince was held in a 'wood and iron cage.' Byron de Prorok, *Dead men do tell tales*, George G. Harrap & Co. London, 1953, p. 152 – 163. De Prorok claims he saw Iyasu: "Lidj Yassou was lolling against a pile of silk cushions, surrounded by ten or twelve naked women who were offering him champagne and drugs." A Greek ("Zaphir") described to de Prorok how he a member of the British Intelligence Service "was closeted" with the British Minister in Addis Ababa just prior to Iyasu's overthrow. "My friend Zaphir's description of the man's abilities fitted remarkably with that of the author of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and *Revolt in the Desert* – Lawrence of Arabia." p. 162

both sides of the Red Sea were therefore mobilised, with consequences that continue until the present day.⁴

“War by revolution”

Germany had spent many years cultivating the Orient. Kaiser Wilhelm II had an almost obsessive interest in the Middle East, Islam and Turkey.⁵ The Kaiser visited Constantinople in June 1889 and made a second visit in October and November 1898. Relations became so close that rumours were even circulated suggesting that the Kaiser had converted to Islam – a story which had no basis in fact. The aim was practical: to woo Turkey away from its alliance with Russia and extend German interests in the region. Railways were proposed to link Germany to Turkey and then on to the Persian Gulf, with plans for an extension to Mecca.

German military missions were despatched to Turkey to reform and strengthen the sultan’s army. At the same time anti-British propaganda was spread across the Middle East, all the way to India’s north-west frontier. By 1914 the Kaiser saw an Islamic revolt against British rule as an important part in his strategy in the coming conflict. A German historian went so far as to describe the Kaiser as having become an “emperor as revolutionary.” This was not far from the truth. On 30 July 1914 the Kaiser clearly explained how subversion fitted into his plans for war against Britain. He scribbled on a diplomatic despatch from Russia: “Our consuls in Turkey and India, agents, etc. must inflame the whole Mohammedan world with wild revolt against this hateful, lying conscienceless people of hagglers; for if we are to be bled to death, at least England shall lose India.”⁶ These aims were clearly understood in London. British fears that such a revolt might come about inspired John Buchan’s 1916 novel, *Greenmantle*.

As we shall see, the “revolutionary emperor” was to set about attempting to employ this strategy in the Middle East and Horn of Africa; but he was not alone. The British had similar war aims and they too were setting about to undermine their opponents by covert action. The reason was straightforward: not only was this another arena in which to confront the Germans and their allies, it was of critical importance to London. This was certainly the British view. The official history of the First World War in this region, published in 1928, concentrated on the situation in Egypt, which was described as being one of “particular complexity.”⁷ Britain occupied the territory, but it was nominally part

⁴ It is remarkable how little attention this has received in the general literature on Africa and the First World War. There is hardly a reference to the Horn of Africa in any of the following: Justin Cornfield, *The First War in Africa: a bibliography*, The Edwin Mellen Press, New York, 2008; Melvin E. Page (ed.), *Africa and the First World War*, MacMillan Press, Houndsmill, 1987 and Hew Strachan, *The First World War in Africa*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004. The exception to this is Edward Paice’s *Tip and Run: the untold tragedy of the Great War in Africa*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 2007. Paice outlines the issue (p. 212 – 223) but notes that “...remarkably little is known about Lij Iyasu...” the heir to the Ethiopian throne. p.218.

⁵ Donald M. McKale, *War by Revolution: Germany and Great Britain in the Middle East in the Era of World War I*, Kent State University Press, Kent, 1998, p. 7 ff. develops a detailed analysis of both German and British intentions before and during the war.

⁶ Fritz Fischer, *Germany’s Aims in the First World War*, Norton, New York, 1975, p. 121 and Kroger, Martin, *Revolution als Programme. Ziele und Realitat deutscher Orientpolitik im Ersten Weltkrieg*. In Michalka, Wolfgang, ed. *Der Erste Weltkrieg. Wirkung, Wahrnehmung Analyse*. Piper, Munich, 1994. Quoted in McKale, Donald M, op cit. p. 48

⁷ Sir George MacMunn and Cyril Falls, *History of the Great War based on official documents: Military operations, Egypt & Palestine, Vol. 1*, HMSO, 1928, p. 7

of the Ottoman empire. "In theory...Egypt was still a province of the Turkish Empire; in practice she was save in certain minor matters, independent of Turkey...her importance in the great war was immeasurable, mainly, though not entirely owing to the Suez Canal. The Canal was, indeed, in the popular German phrase, the 'jugular vein' of the British Empire. Half-way between England and India, on the route which was to be taken by troops from that country and later from Australia and New Zealand, on that followed by the bulk of the trade between Europe on the one side and Asia and Australia on the other, it was the most vital focal point upon the communications of the world."

At the outbreak of the war the situation was clear. Both the Allied Powers and the Central Powers saw the region as important to their war aims and would do all they could to attack each other. On the other hand both alliances were fully committed to confronting each other on the main battlefields. Despite the Suez canal being a vital prize neither had the men or materiel to devote to a separate venture. They had to work through informal alliances and by unorthodox means. Both would scheme and plot to undermine each other wherever possible. This meant, for the Germans, mobilising the Turks and providing them with all the assistance that Berlin could spare – short of a major deployment of troops. For Britain it meant bringing forces from India and the rest of the Empire. At the time both sides sought local rulers with whom they could work.

The defence of the Suez canal was the first priority for the British. Two Indian infantry divisions and a cavalry brigade were ordered to go to Egypt as soon as war broke out.⁸ British intelligence reported that Turkish forces were being moved into position and believed that "ere long 100,000 [Turkish] troops might be available in Syria and Palestine for action against the Canal." On 30 October 1914 war was declared between Turkey and Britain. The first, minor, attack came from irregular forces allied to the Turks.⁹ Bedouin confronted Indian troops who had little trouble in beating them off. But the British had discovered that their own allies – Egyptian Coastguards – were not particularly trustworthy and only too willing to go over to the enemy. The action, though not significant in itself, presaged what was to follow.

By early 1915 it was apparent that a major Turkish attack on the Canal was imminent. It came on 1st February – lasting until 10th February. The Indian troops, supported by British naval forces in the Canal repulsed the attack, with the loss of 2,000 Turkish soldiers.¹⁰ British losses totalled 163. The Turks had used an Arab, rather than a Turkish division in the first assault, and the German commander with the forces (Colonel Kress von Kressenstein) believed this was among the reasons for the failure. "The deep-seated, age-old hatred between Turk and Arab had been underestimated and it had been thought that a Holy War would unite the two races. The Arab soldiers proved unreliable and went over, sometimes in formed bodies, to the enemy." Both alliances were learning that local allies could prove less than reliable.

⁸ Sir George MacMunn and Cyril Falls, *History of the Great War based on official documents: Military operations, Egypt & Palestine* Vol. 1, HMSO, 1928, p. 13 - 14

⁹ "A patrol of 20 men of the Bikanir Camel Corps, under Captain A. J. H. Chope, was attacked at Bir en Nuss, 20 miles east of Qantara, by 200 Bedouin, who approached it under a white flag. The party extricated itself creditably, though with casualties amounting to more than half its numbers.

Unfortunately this affair proved that the loyalty of the camel troopers of the Egyptian Coastguards, several of whom accompanied the Bikanirs as guides, was extremely doubtful, since they allowed themselves to be made prisoners in a manner virtually amounting to desertion." Ibid. p. 20

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 50 - 51

The initial attack on the Suez canal had failed, but this did not end the threat. The Turkish army maintained troops and outposts in the Sinai peninsula and attempted to carry out raids on the canal. These culminated in a campaign in April 1916 by German and Turkish troops led by Colonel von Kressenstein.¹¹ Some 16,000 soldiers were deployed against the Allied positions, culminating in the battle of Romani in August, in which the German and Turkish forces lost almost half their troops, killed, wounded or captured.

Egypt was also threatened from the west and in early 1916 there was an attack by some 5,000 Sanussi tribesmen.¹² South African forces, in England en route to France, were diverted to suppress the Sanussi, which they did by the end of March 1916. Recent research by John Slight has produced a more nuanced and complex view of the Sanussi, but as he concludes: "If the Ottomans, and to a lesser extent the Germans, had not applied pressure on the Sanussiyya to attack Egypt, the order would probably not have done so independently, and would have continued to focus on its ongoing jihad against the Italians."¹³

While Egypt required guarding, the war in the region was concentrated on other fronts. On 25 April 1915 the Gallipoli campaign opened and all eyes turned northwards. Gallipoli proved to be a terrible mistake for Britain and its allies and it was by no means the only one. By the summer of 1916 British efforts in the Middle East were what has been described as an "abject failure."¹⁴ Gallipoli had been a major reverse. So had the attack on Baghdad, while attempts to break the Turkish lines in Gaza had been unsuccessful.

Just as events seemed grim – from London's perspective – they took a much more auspicious turn. On 10 June 1916 Sharif Hussein, guardian of the holy city of Mecca, fired a shot from a window in his palace at the Turkish headquarters nearby. This marked the start of the Arab revolt against the Ottoman empire. Negotiation between the British and Hussein and his family had been going on in secret since 1914. It was the execution of close allies of Sharif Hussein in Damascus and Beirut by the Ottoman government, and information that a 4,000 strong German force was going to march through the western region of what is today Saudi Arabia, en route to Yemen, that convinced the Sharif that he was about to be overthrown.¹⁵ Lawrence was delighted. Two years of promises and plots had come to fruition. "This revolt," he wrote home, "will be the biggest thing in the Near East since 1550."

It is not the purpose of this article to rehearse the progress of the Arab Revolt, with the capture of the port of Aqaba in July 1917 and the ultimate fall of Damascus in September 1918, and accusations of British duplicity. What is clear is that the British had managed to mobilise irregular forces on the Arabian Peninsula to considerable effect, tying down thousands of Turkish troops and resulting in a serious defeat for the Ottomans and their German allies.

¹¹ Anthony Bruce, *The Last Crusade: The Palestine campaign in the First World War*, John Murray, London, 2002, p.38, ff.

¹² Edward Paice, op cit. p.215

¹³ John Slight, *British Understandings of the Sanussiyya Sufi Order's Jihad against Egypt, 1915–17*, *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, Vol 103, No. 2, 2014, p. 233-242

¹⁴ Michael Korda, *Hero: the life and legend of Lawrence of Arabia*, JR books, London, 2011, p. 290

¹⁵ Michael Korda, *Hero: the life and legend of Lawrence of Arabia*, JR books, London, 2011, p. 291

If Britain was stirring up revolt to the east of the Red Sea, Germany was pursuing much the same strategy to the west. Berlin was intent on doing all it could to undermine London's grip on Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia. The Kaiser's aim of "wild revolt" was given force in a memo from the Imperial Colonial Office (or *Reichskolonialamt*) dated 29 December 1915.¹⁶ "It is clear that the necessary requirements to instigate an insurgence are to be found in Sudan and also in the areas of Somalia that belong to British East Africa and in British Somalia. Such an uprising could, after initial success, take on a greater magnitude in Sudan and in any case could force the British to mobilise disproportionately large masses of troops to enter the area in order to suppress it. . . . If the insurgence of the Mohammedan tribes on the north, west and south borders of Abyssinia is successful the . . . English will be forced to deploy considerable number of troops, which would mean both that the Egyptian troops would be weakened and the pressure on the German East African troops would be relieved." The memo declared that May or June 1916 were the months the German high command had for a mind for a "comprehensive attack."

The first attempt to links Germany and Ethiopia had actually been initiated by Addis Ababa. In 1905 the Emperor Menelik sent an emissary to Germany asking for one million veterans, disguised as settlers, to be sent to Ethiopia.¹⁷ Nothing came of the approach, but when the First World War erupted the German Imperial government recalled Menelik's request. Attempts were made to get Ethiopia to join the German-Ottoman alliance. Communicating these aims was no easy task since the German Legation in Addis Ababa was almost cut off from the outside world. Britain, France and Italy blocked most access by post and telecommunications, and prevented travel by couriers.¹⁸

The isolation of the Germans in Ethiopia did not prevent the General Staff from having the most wide-ranging ambitions in the region. Their aims were: "To force the enemy to commit large forces in defending their colonies on the Horn of Africa, thus weakening their European front and relieving the German forces fighting in German East Africa."¹⁹ This called for "insurrection" in Sudan with the aim of toppling British rule. Ambitious as this objective was it was modest compared with German aims in Ethiopia. "The colonial Italian and French possessions on the shore of the Red Sea were difficult even impossible to defend without [the] commitment of large forces: chances were that an Ethiopian blow against the shores of the Red Sea and Suez Canal would either succeed at once, or that Italy and France would voluntarily withdraw in view of the critical situation of the European front, where all men and rifles were badly needed after the initial military successes of the Central powers." In Berlin's view the "double threat" of internal

¹⁶ Edward Paice, op cit. p. 214

¹⁷ Heinrich Scholler, *German World War I aims in Ethiopia – the Frobenius-Hall Mission*, Proceedings of the fifth international conference of Ethiopian Studies, Nice, 19 – 22 December 1977, Edited by Joseph Tubiana, A. A. Balkema, Rotterdam, 1980, p. 303

¹⁸ When the Frobenius and Hall mission to Ethiopia was halted by the Italians in Eritrea in March 1915 the mail that Leo Frobenius was carrying was eventually delivered to the German legation in Addis Ababa through Italian channels.

After this Bairu Tafla suggests that the German government managed to continue to communicate with the Legation in 'vaguely known ways.' Bairu Tafla, *Ethiopia and Germany: Cultural, Political and Economic Relations, 1871 – 1936*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1981, p. 133

¹⁹ Heinrich Scholler, *German World War I aims in Ethiopia – the Frobenius-Hall Mission*, Proceedings of the fifth international conference of Ethiopian Studies, Nice, 19 – 22 December 1977, Edited by Joseph Tubiana, A. A. Balkema, Rotterdam, 1980, p. 310

insurrection in Sudan and an Ethiopian offensive would pave the way for a successful attack on the Suez Canal by Turkish forces “supported by a German expeditionary force.”²⁰ The loss of the Canal would be a decisive blow against Britain and its allies, from which it would be unable to recover.

In order to try to achieve these aims the German government attempted to send couriers to Addis Ababa. The first, led by the explorer and archaeologist Leo Frobenius, who was a personal friend of the Kaiser. The ‘Fourth German Inner-Africa Research Expedition’, consisting of five Europeans, thirteen Turks and Arabs, set off in early 1915.²¹ It included Frederick Solomon Hall, the son of a German missionary and an Ethiopian mother, whose family had connections with Ethiopia stretching back many years.²² After a journey via Constantinople and Palestine the expedition finally set forth on a dhow for the Eritrean port of Massawa. It was a difficult voyage and their vessel was halted by French and British warships on several occasions. Finally, after 42 days, Massawa was reached on 15 February.²³ Frobenius reported to Berlin, but within 8 days a cable had arrived in London describing five German “agents” who had landed at the port. The Italians decided not to allow them to proceed, since Rome presumed that their aim would be to “agitate against us in Abyssinia.” The Italians proposed that the British remove the Germans from Massawa. In the end Frobenius was allowed to visit Asmara, but he was under constant surveillance and was not allowed to proceed to Addis Ababa. Finally, after a month, the Germans were granted permission to leave Eritrea under a safe conduct agreement guaranteed by France and Britain. Travelling via Jaffa in Palestine they proceeded to Naples and Rome before arriving back in Berlin.

The Frobenius mission had been a failure, but it was not the last attempt to reach Addis Ababa. In June 1915 Salomon Hall set off again, carrying secret documents and disguised as an Arab. Unfortunately for Hall he failed to disguise his feet. Sharp-eyed Eritrean police spotted his corns – the result of wearing shoes rather than sandals – and he was uncovered. Hall and his colleagues were imprisoned first in Eritrea, and then on an Italian island in the Mediterranean, until the end of the war, four years later.²⁴ Hall managed to destroy most of the documents he was carrying, but copies in the German archive give a clear picture of what they contained. Although Hall was intercepted the documents did reach Addis Ababa by October 1915 (by means that are not clear) and a reply sent to Berlin, arriving in March 1916.²⁵

The German envoy to Ethiopia, Frederick Wilhelm von Syburg received instructions to do everything possible to convince the Ethiopian government to enter the war. Bairu

²⁰ Britain perceived that a threat existed from Darfur and sent a military force to suppress a jihad declared by Sultan Ali Dinar. But recent research suggests there is no evidence of German involvement in Darfur. John Slight, *British Perceptions and Responses to Sultan Ali Dinar of Darfur, 1915-16*, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 2010, Vol 38, No. 2, p. 237 — 260

²¹ Rocío Da Riva, *Lawrence of Arabia's forerunner. The bizarre enterprise of Leo Frobenius, aka Abdul Kerim Pasha, in Arabia and Eritrea (1914-1915)*, *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, Vol. 99 (2009), pp. 29-111. Edward Paice, op cit. p.220

²² Toby Berger Holtz, *The Hall Family and Ethiopia: A Century of Involvement*, *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, ed. by Svein Ege, Harald, Aspen, Birhanu Teferra and Shiferaw Bekele, Trondheim 2009. Edward Paice, op cit. p. 220

²³ Rocío Da Riva, op cit. p. 76

²⁴ Toby Berger Holtz, op. cit. p. 98. Hall settled in Dire Daw a after the war, where he traded in coffee and married an Englishwoman.

²⁵ Edward Paice, op cit. p. 220

Tafla writes that Syburg was to encourage the Ethiopians to invade "...British, Italian and French colonies in northeast Africa".²⁶ This was presumably Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti and British and Italian Somalilands. These instructions were very much in line with the documents carried by the failed mission by Solomon Hall. The message for the Ethiopian government boasted of the "great victories" Germany had scored against the allies, and suggested that now was the time to act.²⁷ "The hands of the Allies are tied in desperately fighting off the progress of the German armies. Italy, England and France, pretending to be friends of Ethiopia, are insidious [sic.] false friends, who have tried to subdue Ethiopia in the past, and who have robbed Ethiopia of her borderlands. Now the time has come for Ethiopia to regain the coast of the Red Sea driving the Italians home, to restore the Empire to its ancient size, but also to bring under her control the railway and the Port of Djibouti, by which the French still are trying to strangle her connections with world trade. Germany commits herself to recognize any territory which Ethiopia may conquer or occupy in military action against the Allied powers as being her rightful and permanent property and part of the Ethiopian Empire after the war."

Von Syburg was given another instruction: to try to contact the Sayyid, Muhammad Abd Allah al-Hassan (the 'Mad Mullah'), and to encourage him to revolt against the British.²⁸ The Sayyid, born in 1856 in what is today Somaliland, mobilised Somali clans in a 20 year long religious war against Christian forces in the Horn, including the British, French and Ethiopians. The Emperor Menelik and British troops had been attempting to crush his Dervish soldiers since the late 1890's.²⁹ In March 1914 forty of his troops had attacked the capital of British Somaliland, Berbera, causing total panic. India and local Somali soldiers were sent to attack his strongholds in November 1914 and February 1915, but were unable to crush the 6,000 troops the Sayiid had at his command. The British instituted a policy of containment, with some success. His territory remained limited to a collection of forts in the Ogaden and his fortified capital, with the strength of his Dervish army gradually declining from 6,000 fighting men in 1913 to fewer than a thousand in 1919. Despite this, the Sayyid remained a constant threat until his final defeat in 1920 or early 1921.³⁰

German attempts to exploit this revolt did not proceed well. A German technician was sent to repair the Sayyid's guns.³¹ A mechanic, Frits Kersten, arrived in Ethiopia in 1914 and was despatched to work with the Sayyid, only to fall out with him. Kersten attempted to escape from Harar, but after walking through the desert ran out of provisions and died of hunger, thirst and fatigue. Initial German attempts at stirring up revolt in the Horn had paid few dividends. But Berlin had one further potential ally – the heir to the Ethiopian throne. It is this question that we will return to in the next section.

Germany and Britain were not alone in having ambitions in the region. Both Italy and France had important interests in the Horn. For the French their colony of Djibouti was a source of troops, with a Somali Battalion being raised and some 2,000 soldiers sent to

²⁶ Bairu Tafla, op. cit. p. 133

²⁷ Heinrich Scholler, op. cit. p. 312

²⁸ Heinrich Scholler, op. cit. p. 312, Bairu Tafla, op. cit. p. 133

²⁹ Edward Paice, op cit. p. 217

³⁰ Roy Irons, *Churchill and the Mad Mullah of Somaliland, Betrayal and Redemption, 1899 – 1921*, Pen & Sword Military, Barnsley, 2013, p. 209. Abdi Sheik-Abdi, *Divine Madness*, Mohammed Abdulle Hassan, 1856 – 1920, Zed Press, London, 1993, p. 173

³¹ Bairu Tafla, op. cit. p. 132

fight in Europe.³² They fought with distinction, participating in a number of battles, including Verdun. Around 500 were killed. The railway from Djibouti port to Addis Ababa, initiated with Emperor Menelik, was completed in 1917, cementing ties between the two countries. Before the war, Djibouti was particularly important for the arms trade and most arms for Ethiopia were imported through the port prior to 1914, especially during 1913-1914 according the British Minister in Addis, Thesiger.³³

For Italy the Horn of Africa was even more significant. Rome saw the region as integral to its aims of expanding their African empire. The country's interest in the Horn dated from 1869, when a shipping firm from Genoa purchased a strip of land at the port of Assab, to take advantage of the benefits of transport via the Suez canal.³⁴ The Ethiopian Emperor Yohannis objected, but could do little about it. Gradually the port was transformed into the colony of Eritrea. Sometimes there were clashes with the Ethiopians (as in the battle of Dogali in 1887 and, most famously, at the battle of Adua in 1896). At other times there was co-operation, with Italy providing weapons to Emperor Menelik who used them for his extensive conquests.³⁵ The Italian colony of Eritrea grew, and was not without its benefits, supplying troops before and during the First World War.³⁶

In 1906, in preparation for the eventual death of Menelik, Britain, France and Italy concluded a treaty spelling out their interests in Ethiopia (without consulting the government in Addis Ababa which made it would not have accepted the provisions of the agreement.)³⁷ Britain wished to control the source of the Blue Nile in Lake Tana, while France wanted the inviolability of its railway from Djibouti to the Ethiopian capital guaranteed. The Italians had far more ambitious aims. When the First World War broke out the Italians attempted to undermine the Ethiopian government by delivering weapons to a warlord in Tigray, but the central authorities soon stamped this out.³⁸ The Italians were seeking the North, South and East of Ethiopia as an Italian sphere of influence. These plans were incorporated into place in the Treaty of London of 26 April 1915, in terms of which Italy joined the First World War on the side of France and Britain.³⁹ These consolidated the Italian demands made in 1906, but went much further. Rome hoped to gain vast tracts of the Horn including control over most of Ethiopia, Djibouti and Somalia. In the end most of these plans were frustrated. As Robert Hess puts it: "...the ambitious colonial programme came to naught."⁴⁰

³² Laurent Jolly, *Le tirailleur Somali: le métier des armes instrumentalisé (début XX^e siècle - fin des années 60)*, Thesis, Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour, 2013

³³ Thesiger: Memorandum 16 March 1916. FO371/ 2595

³⁴ George Baer, *The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts 1967, p. 1

³⁵ Ibid. p. 2

³⁶ Tekeste Nagash, *Italian Colonialism in Eritrea, 1882 – 1941*, Studia Historica Upsaliensia, Uppsala, 1987, p. 48. Italy first sent Eritrean troops, or askaris, to Libya in 1912. The Eritrean army was re-organised in October 1915 into 15 battalions with nine sent to Libya. A total of 7,350 troops were under arms.

³⁷ Ibid. p. 6

³⁸ Bairu Tafla, op. cit. p. 132

³⁹ Robert L. Hess, *Italy and Africa: Colonial Ambitions in the First World War*, Journal of African History, Vol. 4, No 1, 1963, p. 105 - 126

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 126. By the end of the war Britain and France were not weak, as they had been in 1915 while Italy's position was undermined by her failure to declare war on Germany until late in the war – August 1916.

Lij Iyasu and the Ethiopian throne

Ethiopia was by no means a bystander as the great powers wrestled to control the region. As an independent, un-colonised nation, it ran its own affairs, despite pressure from abroad. Yet the war could hardly have come at a more difficult moment. Emperor Menelik II had ruled since 1889 but was in failing health. On 11 June 1908 he suffered a stroke and the following year, summoning his ministers the aging emperor informed them that his grandson and only male descendent, Lij Iyasu, would succeed him.⁴¹ The emperor suffered a further massive stroke on 27 October 1909, which effectively incapacitated him. Lij Iyasu took Menelik's place at palace feasts and began travelling around the capital under the imperial red parasol, even though he was not formally crowned.⁴²

On 10 April 1911 the sixteen year old Iyasu took the opportunity of the death of the regent, Ras Tesemma, to claim personal rule. It was a premature development; the prince was immature. Harold Marcus wrote: "The youth was hardly ready to govern: during his adolescence, he had mostly abandoned the classrooms of the gibbi (Menelik's palace) for the capital's bars and brothels. Undoubtedly bright, he was, however ignorant about the running of an increasingly complex administration. He had a short attention span, and lacked political common sense, if not a grand vision. His *idée fixe* was a society in which religious and ethnic affiliation did not matter, a goal which contradicted the political situation in the empire. His insensitivity to this fundamental reality was left unchallenged by his advisers, a congeries of amusing but sycophantic courtiers."⁴³ Keen to engage with the whole of the Empire, Iyasu and his entourage spent much of their time away from the capital, visiting the countryside.⁴⁴

Iyasu attempted to strengthen his position by importing weapons from the Austrian empire. His grandfather, Menelik, had signed a treaty between the two empires in March 1905, days after a similar treaty had been signed with Germany.⁴⁵ Under Iyasu these ties were strengthened, with the exchange of gifts and letters, leading to the conclusion of a deal for 120 cannon, which was concluded and paid for on 27 July 1914.⁴⁶ It was an inauspicious date: the following day Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia and the First World War commenced. Yet as Rudolf Agstner makes clear, the sale of weaponry to Ethiopia cannot be interpreted as an attempt to open a second front against Italy. At the time Italy was an Austrian ally and only declared war on their neighbour in May 1915.⁴⁷ Some – but not all – the cannon arrived in Ethiopia, although they were already obsolete. What the deal does suggest is that Iyasu was keen to strengthen his military and look beyond the foreign powers with the greatest influence in the Horn of Africa: Britain, France and Italy.

⁴¹ Haggai Erlich, *From Wello to Harer: Lij Iyasu, the Ottomans, and the Somali Sayyid*, in in Eloi Ficquet and Wolbert G. C. Smidt, op cit. p.135

⁴² Harold G. Marcus, *A history of Ethiopia*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1994, p. 113

⁴³ Ibid. p. 113

⁴⁴ More recent studies have attempted to provide a more complex and sympathetic view of the prince. See, in particular, Eloi Ficquet and Wolbert G. C. Smidt (eds.) *The Life and Times of Lij Iyasu of Ethiopia: New Insights* Lit Verlag, Berlin, 2014

⁴⁵ Rudolf Agstner, *Lij Iyasu, the Austro-Hungarian Consul in Addis Abeba and the Cannon Deal of 1914*, in Eloi Ficquet and Wolbert G. C. Smidt, op cit. p 115

⁴⁶ Rudolf Agstner op. cit. p. 127

⁴⁷ Rudolf Agstner op. cit. p. 127

Iyasu also went out of his way to widen his domestic relationships. He wished to encompass more than just the Christian highlanders who had been the traditional rulers of Ethiopia. Much time and effort was spent travelling outside the capital and making links with groups that had been peripheral to the Empire: the Somalis and the Afar. These ties were cemented by marriage, with Iyasu taking Afar wives.⁴⁸ The relationships were deeply worrying for the Ethiopian elite. The Orthodox church questioned Iyasu's faith, while the Shewan Amhara nobility, in power under Menelik, were concerned by Iyasu's attempts to replace them with Tigrayans, Oromos, and others and the threat this posed to their positions and privileges.

Religion hung over Iyasu throughout his brief reign. The prince was born a Christian and educated as such by Menelik, but his father came from a line of imams and was said to be able to trace his ancestry back to the Prophet Mohammed himself.⁴⁹ Iyasu's father, Muhammad Ali, an Oromo, was baptised a Christian and took the name Mikael and made a Ras in 1878 after his submission to Emperor Yohannis IV. Menelik made considerable efforts to highlight Iyasu's Christianity. Instructions were issued for photographs to be taken showing the prince in the presence of priests and reading from the Book of Psalms.⁵⁰ Despite this, Iyasu's religious identity was a live question. Haggai Erlich provides this summary of the issue: "Young, inexperienced and ambitious, he worked to build new coalitions in defiance of the already entrenched 'Shewan nobility' created by his grandfather. Seeking new local allies, mostly in Ethiopia's periphery, Iyasu also flirted with Islam, as if returning to the faith of his ancestors."⁵¹ This attitude prevailed until the outbreak of World War One, but then, suggests Erlich, the young prince's religious orientation changed. The Ottoman's proclaimed jihad against Britain, France and Russia; and Iyasu "...mixing caution with miscalculation, gambled on an Ottoman victory. In preparing for it, he worked to build an alliance with the Somali Sayyid and Islamic holy warrior, Muhammad bin 'Abdallah Hasan, hoping to have the Somalis included in his future empire. Iyasu apparently visualised a new order emerging after the war, under him, centred on Harer and stretching over the entire Horn of Africa, a wing of a renewed, Ottoman-orientated Land of Islam."⁵²

It was an extraordinary project, which would have not only changed the orientation of Ethiopia from Christianity to Islam, but vastly expanded the country's influence, sweeping aside the interests of Allied powers. There is certainly evidence that Britain was deeply concerned about Iyasu's apparent conversion. Wilfred Thesiger reported to London in June 1915 that "every week" there was fresh evidence of the prince's sympathy with Islam. "I am coming to the opinion that the heir of the throne of Solomon is at heart a Moslem [sic.] and is entertaining dreams of one day putting himself at the head of the Mohammedan Abyssinians, who considerably outnumber the Abyssinian Christians, and proclaim a Moslem kingdom, which will stretch far beyond

⁴⁸ Aramis Houmed Soule, *Lij Iyasu and the Afar*, in Eloi Ficquet and Wolbert G. C. Smidt, op cit. p 165 - 178

⁴⁹ Eloi Ficquet, *Understanding Lij Iyasu from his Forefathers: The Mammedoch Imam-s of Wella*, in Eloi Ficquet and Wolbert G. C. Smidt, op cit. p. 5

⁵⁰ Estelle Sohler, *Portraits of an Ethiopian prince, Lij Iyasu*, in Eloi Ficquet and Wolbert G. C. Smidt, op cit. p53

⁵¹ Haggai Erlich, op cit, p. 135 Others point to evidence that Iyasu had no intention of converting to Islam. See, for example, Richard Pankhurst, *The Reign of Lij Iyasu – as Avedis Terzian Saw it*, in Eloi Ficquet and Wolbert G. C. Smidt, op cit. p 91 – 100

⁵² Haggai Erlich, op cit, p. 136

the frontiers of his present empire... This intention is being probably strengthened by the conviction of an ultimate Turco-German victory.”⁵³

The scene was set for a showdown. On the one hand were the Allied Powers, including Britain, France and Italy. They looked on nervously as Iyasu changed the direction of the Ethiopian Empire. They had allies among the Ethiopian clergy and nobility, who were also increasingly concerned at the potential impact of Iyasu's actions. The Allied Powers were attempting to maintain the security of Egypt and the Suez Canal, as well as drain troops away from Germany and the Ottomans. Germany had already despatched several missions in an attempt to win Ethiopia to their cause. Their hand was strengthened by Iyasu's concern to win over the Muslims of the region. This brought about the possibility of an important new alliance between Iyasu and the Sayyid and it is to this relationship that we now turn.

Erlich, drawing on Turkish, Italian and British archives, described what took place.⁵⁴ The key figure appears to be the Ottoman envoy to Ethiopia, Ahmad Manzar, who took up his office in April 1913, moving his residence to the centre of Islamic influence in the country, Harar. There he formed a close alliance with Abdallah al-Sadiq, the 'Ras al-muslimin', or head of the local Muslim community. Al-Sadiq had long been in touch with Sayyid and was a close ally of Iyasu, who regarded Al-Sadiq as a guide in his relations with the Muslim population. He had also twice visited Constantinople as an agent of the Emperor Menelik as well as been deported from India by the British.⁵⁵ Erlich suggests that the relationship between these four men – Ethiopian ruler, Ottoman consul, Harar leader and the Somali warlord – was critical. After the outbreak of the First World War it would, he says: "...develop into an axis around which the Islamic-Christian struggle over the future of Ethiopia and Somalia revolved.”⁵⁶

From Harar the Ottomans pursued a three pronged strategy to take control of the Horn: winning Iyasu to their cause; arming the Sayyid and finally encouraging an Ethiopian invasion of surrounding Allied possessions of Somalia, Sudan and Egypt. These aims were – as we have seen – in line with those of their German allies and they came close to success. Iyasu himself left Addis Ababa in June 1915 and spent the next nine months touring the Wello, eastern Shewa and the fringes of the Ogaden, consorting with his three key associates, Manzhar, Abdallah al-Sadiq and the Sayyid. According to Thesiger, before leaving Addis Ababa he visited the various legations to try and discover what either side in the European conflict might offer for Ethiopian support.⁵⁷

Manzhar reported to his Ottoman masters that Iyasu had sent an imperial letter to the Sayiid, with 10,000 cartridges, "...advising the Mullah to push on against the Italians and British.”⁵⁸ Manzhar predicted that Iyasu "supports us whole-heartedly" and would soon commit Ethiopia to the Ottoman cause. Further weapons and ammunition were sent from the Ethiopian ruler to Sayiid. The British believed that Iyasu had sent the Sayyid a Turkish flag to be used "when the Turkish troops land" in British Somaliland and "join

⁵³ Haggai Erlich, op cit, p. 139

⁵⁴ Haggai Erlich, op cit

⁵⁵ Harold G. Marcus: *Life and Times of Menelik II, Ethiopia 1844-1913*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1975, p.266-7.

⁵⁶ Haggai Erlich, op cit, p. 136

⁵⁷ Thesiger to Grey. 14 April 1915, FO371/2228

⁵⁸ Haggai Erlich, op cit, p. 139

hands with him and march on Berbera.”⁵⁹ By early 1916 Iyasu appeared to have ended any previous indecision and decided to throw in his lot with the Ottoman and German cause. He would have been reinforced in this view by the Turkish successes in 1916 in Gallipoli and in Mesopotamia.

In May 1916 Manzhar was instructed by Istanbul to promise Iyasu that if he entered the war on the side of the Central Powers he would be allowed to hold any territory he captured after the war ended. “If they want a document” Manzhar was told by his superiors, “you can satisfy them by saying ‘whatever territories Ethiopians can take from the British, the Italians and the French, who captured these areas from the Ottomans in the past, we will support them even in peacetime to keep their conquest.’ This suits the Ottomans, too.”⁶⁰

In September 1916 Iyasu travelled to Jijiga in the Ogaden for a rally of Somali chiefs from the Ogaden region and from British Somaliland. Giving them arms and money, he performed Islamic rituals and was reported to have declared that he was a devout Muslim.⁶¹ While the latter assertion is likely to be an exaggeration, he certainly told the assembled Somalis that he had been ordered by the Ottoman Caliph to liberate the entire coastline from the Eritrean port of Massawa to the British Somali port of Berbera, adding that the Caliph had granted him sovereignty over these territories and he hoped to occupy them shortly. Erlich concludes: “All the evidence we examined supports the assumption that Iyasu was returning to Islam, expecting an Ottoman victory and a military alliance with the *Sayyid’s* movement. His steps can not be interpreted other than leading towards a new Ethiopia, centred on Harar as the capital of an Islamic, African empire, allied with Istanbul and under his rule.”⁶²

Whether or not, Iyasu visualized this as an Islamic empire is debatable. He always protested his Christianity, and built as many churches as mosques, even in Harar. One of his closest advisers, the Syrian, Hasib Ydlibi, in his diary for April 1916 quoted Iyasu as telling him: “I have not changed my faith. I would never think of doing so. It is perhaps true that when I am in the country of my Muslim subjects, I might favour them, but I do the same to the Oromos when I am in their country. They are all my subjects and I believe that they are each entitled to every mark of favour in equal shares, be they Christian, Muslim or even heathen. All those who are not Christian have been persecuted in the past, but I intend they should all be treated alike. I would like to make my country a happy family...So long as I do not ask any of my subjects to change their faith they can have no ground for complaint. In time, I hope they will be able to grasp and understand my policy, and then they will thank me. I aim to unite my people regardless of religion.” Ydlibi adds that Iyasu also said “As regards the legations, they too are wrong. I am of no party; I wish to keep quite neutral and in peace. I would like to remain on friendly terms with them all.”⁶³

Equally, it is not difficult to see why Iyasu came to the decision to support the German/Ottoman cause at this point. As outlined above, the Allied cause had suffered serious reversals in the Middle East and the attack on Gallipoli had gone catastrophically

⁵⁹ Haggai Erlich, op cit, p. 140

⁶⁰ Haggai Erlich, op cit, p. 141

⁶¹ Haggai Erlich, op cit, p. 145

⁶² Haggai Erlich, op cit, p. 146

⁶³ May Ydlibi: *With Ethiopian Rulers, A Biography of Hasib Ydlibi* (ed. Bahru Zewde), Addis Ababa University press. Addis Ababa, 2006. p250-51

wrong. Britain and her allies appeared weak and the German and Ottoman cause looked as if it might triumph. It also fitted in with his own vision of the changes required within the Ethiopian empire, and the need to resolve the problems that Addis Ababa had with the peripheral peoples of the empire. In May Iyasu explained to the Italian Minister in Addis Ababa, Giuseppe Colli di Fellizano, that he needed to: “pacify his Ogaden and Danakil Moslem subjects...without having to recourse to force...and once this was done he would then turn his attention to internal reform.”⁶⁴ Equally, Iyasu was concerned to break the power of the Shewan nobility and replaced them at the centre of power by an alliance, consisting of Oromos (notably his father, Michael, whom he had appointed Negus of the North) Tigrayans, Afars and Somalis, but also including non-Shewan Amharas.

Yet just as the Kaiser’s “war by revolution” in the region seemed likely to succeed it suffered a fatal blow. In June 1916 Sharif Hussein fired the shot that opened the Arab Revolt. The Arab army, supported by the British, won swift victories. Mecca surrendered on June 12 followed by Jeddah on 16th. In late July, Arab forces overran two more Red Sea ports, Rabegh and Yanbu and in late September Ottoman troops at Ta’if, in the mountains southeast of Mecca, were captured together with the Governor. The Hashemites had captured the main towns in the area, together with 6,000 prisoners. Michael Asher, biographer of T. E. Lawrence, concludes that the Arabs had achieved much more than a military victory: “...they had scored a brilliant propaganda success: Turco-German dreams of a Jihad or Holy War were dead.”⁶⁵

The British immediately set about capitalising on these initial successes. London had been assured by its officials in Somaliland that most Somali tribes were loyal to Britain and did not support the Sayyid. The governor, Sir Geoffrey Archer, had told the Foreign Office in July 1916 that: “the general loyalty of our Somali tribes may be counted on at present ...The mistake he (Lij Yasu) and our enemies in Abyssinia make is that they believe the Mullah, Mahomed Abdulla Hassan, is held in veneration and respect by the Somali tribes.”⁶⁶ To underline the strength of the British position across the region Sir Geoffrey decided in July 1916 to organise a trip to Egypt of a group of Somali elders. The objective was to show the Somalis just how powerful the Allies really were. During the voyage it was pointed out that there was plenty of Allied shipping, but no German vessels in the Red Sea. Once they arrived at the Suez Canal, the Somalis were taken to various prisoner of war camps, of which one at Kantara made the greatest impact. As the British officer reported it “created the profoundest impression...it showed clearly how futile had been the attempt of a Muslim Power (i.e. Turkey) to question the British supremacy, and also the price paid for making that attempt.”⁶⁷

Nevertheless, the links of Iyasu with the Sayyid continued to worry London, and the Somaliland authorities. There were anti-British pamphlets circulating in Harar in August 1916; and Turkish propaganda leaflets distributed in Somali areas in 1916 which declared: “be it known that the Abyssinian Government are not with our enemies and they are not in the war against the Government of Islam. They are friends and advisers of the Ottoman Government. The interests of Islam in this country concord with the

⁶⁴ Quoted in Thesiger to Grey, 24 May 1916. FO371/2593

⁶⁵ Michael Asher, *Lawrence: The uncrowned King of Arabia*, Viking, London, 1998. p. 162

⁶⁶ Patrick Kitaburaza Kakwenzire, *British Somaliland Colonial Rule in British Somali Protectorate, 1905-1939, Vol. 1 of 2*, PhD, University of London, 1976, p. 261

⁶⁷ Quoted in Patrick Kitaburaza Kakwenzire, op cit., p. 274

Government of Abyssinian.”⁶⁸ A few days earlier, Thesiger was reporting to London that Iyasu had conceived the idea of making the Sayyid King of the Ogaden under Addis Ababa sovereignty.⁶⁹ In August 1916, 17 camel loads of rifles were sent from Harar to the Sayyid, and the British Vice-Consul in Harar, Major Dodds was reporting on rumours that the supplies being sent to Jijiga were intended to be for the Sayyid to attack Hargeisa, the capital of British Somaliland.⁷⁰

Conclusion

By September 1916 matters were coming to a head. There was an abortive attempt by a number of leading nobles and ministers to persuade the head of the Orthodox church in Addis Ababa, Abun Matewos, to excommunicate Iyasu in late August. Reports then began to circulate that Iyasu had presented an Ethiopian flag with a Red Crescent and a quotation from the Koran to Somali troops in Dire Dawa. Iyasu, himself, over-confident in the strength of his position as emperor, even if uncrowned, dismissed warnings that his opponents in Addis Ababa were about to take action.⁷¹

The outspoken concerns of the British, Italian and French Ministers over Iyasu’s policies provided support, direct or indirect, to Iyasu’s opponents.⁷² On September 12 the Tripartite powers sent a formal message to the Foreign Minister complaining that Iyasu was supporting rebellion in Somaliland and demanded an immediate explanation.⁷³ Thesiger and Colli, who had made clear their lack of sympathy for Iyasu, were informed in advance of the proclamation issued on September 27.⁷⁴ This time Abun Matewos did agree to the demands of the conspirators, excommunicating Iyasu and releasing people from their oath of allegiance.⁷⁵ Menelik’s daughter, Zawditu was proclaimed empress and Ras Tefari, whom Iyasu had attempted to isolate, was declared heir to the throne.⁷⁶

This came as an immense relief to the Allies. As Thesiger informed the Foreign Office: “the Government is now in the hands of those who are friendly to our cause.”⁷⁷ Iyasu attempted to respond by marching on Addis Ababa, but his forces were defeated at Meiso, half way between Harar and the capital. His father, Negus Michael led an army south from Dessie but was also defeated at Sagale, fifty miles north of Addis Ababa, after a bloody day long-battle. Michael himself was captured and paraded in chains through the streets of Addis Ababa. Iyasu evaded capture until 1921, when he was finally

⁶⁸ Colli (Italian Minister in Addis Ababa) to Minister, 9 June 1916, ASMAI 37/11.

⁶⁹ Thesiger to Grey, 1 June 1916. FO371/2594

⁷⁰ Dodds to Law, 19 August 1916. FO371/2594.

⁷¹ May Ydlibi: *With Ethiopian Rulers, A biography of Hasin Ydlibi*. Addis Ababa University press, Addis Ababa, 2006, p256; see also Bahru Zewde: *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855-1974*. James Currey, London 1991. p127

⁷² Bahru Zewde: op cit, p.127. See also: Richard Pankhurst, *The Reign of Lij Iyasu – as Avedis Terzian Saw it*, in Eloi Ficquet and Wolbert G. C. Smidt, op cit. p 96 for Terzian’s (uncorroborated) assertion that Thesiger offered Abun Matewos one hundred thousand Maria Theresa dollars to release the conspirators from their oath of allegiance.

⁷³ Thesiger to Grey, 14 September 1916, FO 371/2595; Colli to Minister 21 September 1916, ASMAI 37/11

⁷⁴ Thesiger to Grey, 27 September 1916, FO371/2595

⁷⁵ The church was, in fact, divided. There were two Abuna, Matewos in Addis Ababa, and Petros in Axum who was earlier supported by Negus Michael in a theological controversy with Abun Matewos. Marcus: *Life and Times of Menelik II*, op. cit. p.267

⁷⁶ Haggai Erlich, *Islam and Christianity in the Horn of Africa*, Lynne Rienner publishers, Boulder, 2010, p. 81 - 82

⁷⁷ Quoted in Patrick Kitaburaza Kakwenzire, op cit., p. 282

imprisoned, but posed no further threat to any of his key opponents: the new Empress Zewditu, the Regent and Crown Prince, Ras Tefari (crowned Haile Selassie in 1930) or the Allies.⁷⁸

The attempt to set Ethiopia on a new course as part of Kaiser Wilhelm's dream of inflaming 'the whole Mohammedan world with wild revolt' had come to nought. There had been no landing of German and Turkish troops. Yet it had been a close run thing. If the Arab Revolt had not taken hold on the opposite side of the Red Sea and Iyasu had not played his cards quite so poorly; if German and Turkish supplies of arms and ammunition could have been delivered to the Sayyid in quantities, the outcome might have been rather different.

The implications for the region would also have been very substantial. An Ethiopian invasion of Eritrea, and possibly Djibouti and Sudan as well, might have had considerable repercussions for the Italians, French and British. Troops would have had to be re-deployed to secure the vital route between Europe and the East via the Suez Canal. But this is the realm of speculation. Ethiopia remained in Christian hands and the Canal remained open, while the Arab Revolt undermined the Ottoman's hold on the Middle East. From the perspectives of London, Paris and Rome this was an entirely satisfactory outcome – a sense of relief which must have been shared in Addis Ababa.

⁷⁸ Shiferaw Bekele argues persuasively that this was not a putsch. See Shiferaw Bekele, *Dire Dawa, Harer and Jigjiga in the weeks before and after the overthrow of Iyasu on 27 September 1916*, in Eloi Ficquet and Wolbert G. C. Smidt, op cit. p. 161

