

# The Ethiopians in Jerusalem\*

By Otto Meinardus

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\* In 1960, my study on THE COPTS IN JERUSALEM was published by the Commission on Oecumenical Affairs of the See of Alexandria, Cairo. Since that time, new developments concerning the relationship of the Copts and the Ethiopians in the Holy City have taken place. Overtures were made to King Hussein, the Hashemite Monarch of Jordan, by both the Ethiopians and the Copts to gain his interest and his favour. Conferences and discussions were conducted to settle "once and for all times" the question concerning the property claims and rights of the sister churches in the Holy Land.

By now, it should have become apparent to both parties concerned that the issue of the property rights can never be settled by reference to firmans and legal documents. I repeat, therefore, what I said to the Orthodox Copts, that in view of the complex situation, His Majesty Haile Selassie I could come to an agreement with His Holiness Anba Kirillus VI, if both parties were imbued with the spirit of Christian charity. Recourse to legal documents and action will not help either party.

Why should the peace of the See of St. Mark be disturbed by such questions as passages, keys and chapels? It is the author's sincere prayer that the day will soon dawn, when in the words of the Psalmist we shall say, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."

The purpose of the following paper was to compile the historical evidence of the existence of the Ethiopian Community in the Holy City in particular and in Palestine in general. I have employed for this study the principal works which have been published in this respect and I want to acknowledge my sincere indebtedness to the following authors and scholars who have dealt with this thorny problem. One of the first essays written by a Western scholar was published by Hugo Duensing entitled "Die Abyssinier in Jerusalem" in the *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina Vereins* (1916), XXXIX. Most valuable source and documentary material was collected and published by Enrico Cerulli in *Etiopi in Palestina*, 2 vols. Rome, 1947. Alexander Devine published a very thorough account in his small book *Abyssinia, Her History and Claims to the Holy Places in Jerusalem. The Correspondence respecting the Abyssinians in Jerusalem (1850-1867) presented to the House of Lords by the Command of Her Majesty* (London 1868) was recently reprinted by the Kokeba Tzebah Press in Asmara. Moreover, Sylvia Pankhurst devoted one chapter to the Ethiopians in the Holy City in her volume *Ethiopia: A Cultural History*, London 1955. Fortunately, I have been able to use the two documentary collections which were compiled by Anba Philippus, the Bishop of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Jerusalem, entitled *The Rights of the Abyssinian Orthodox Church in the Holy Places* (1959, 1963).



Paradise – 5. The Church of the Sepulchre of the Blessed Virgin Mary – 6. The Grotto of David on Mount Sion. – V. The Ethiopian Sites outside of Jerusalem: 1. The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem – 2. The Monastery of the Holy Trinity at the River Jordan – 3. The Ethiopian Property at Bethany.

## I. THE VISIT OF THE QUEEN OF SHEBA TO SOLOMON IN JERUSALEM

According to a tradition, widely accepted by the Ethiopians, Ethiopian history commences with the founding of the city of Aksum, which occurred within a century of the Flood. This tradition points to the fact that this city, even at a very early date, had a special significance for the Ethiopians. Some time later, the city of Aksum, which was also the home of 'Angabo, gained fame, because here 'Angabo defeated the dragon Wainaba. 'Angabo and his descendents reigned for two hundred years, during which period Makeda or the Queen of Sheba, also known as the Queen of 'Azeb, the South, visited King Solomon.<sup>1</sup>

Reference to this visit is made by St. Matthew who quotes the words of Jesus Christ Who said: "The Queen of the South shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon".<sup>2</sup> The Queen of the South was Makeba who was known for her beauty and her superb stature. Her understanding and intelligence, which God had given her, were such that she went to Jerusalem to profit by the wisdom of Solomon, and to see the great temple which Solomon was building. After having been told about the splendour and the wealth of King Solomon, the queen, casting aside all fear, announced to her people her intention to visit King Solomon. Thereupon, the people out of veneration for their noble and wise queen, decided to join her. A caravan, consisting of 797 camels and countless mules and asses, consequently set out for Jerusalem.

When the queen arrived in Jerusalem, Solomon welcomed her and paid her great honours and respect. Solomon and Makeda engaged in long and frequent conversations which led her to abandon the worship of the sun, and to accept the faith in the one true God. Makeda spent six months in Jerusalem, and when Solomon heard that the queen was about to depart, he conceived the idea of marrying her, and he invited the queen to stay for some time in his palace, so that he might complete her instruction in wisdom. The queen accepted the invitation and finally Solomon invited her to a great farewell banquet at which occasion he caused dishes to be served which were seasoned with a great quantity of pepper and vinegar, such as would make the queen very thirsty. At the conclusion of the feast, Solomon invited the queen to sleep in his palace. At first, she hesitated, but at length, she consented on the condition that Solomon would swear not to rape her, for she was

<sup>1</sup> *Rossini, Conti*, "Liber Axumae", in *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* (Series alt.) VIII, Paris, 1910.

<sup>2</sup> St. Matthew 12:42.



a virgin. The king agreed, but required from her in return an oath that she would not take anything by force which was in his palace. Thus, two couches were placed on either side of the royal chamber, and then they retired to sleep. After a short while, the queen awoke and her lips, mouth and throat were parched owing to the peppery food, which she had eaten, and she was exceedingly thirsty. The king had ordered his servants to place a jar of water in the centre of the room, and when the queen saw it, she was filled with longing, and believing Solomon was asleep, she crept from her couch and drank of the water. Solomon, however, who had merely pretended to be asleep, thereupon leapt from his couch and seized her by the arm saying: "Thou hast broken the oath which thou didst swear that thou wouldst not take anything by force that is in my palace." The queen protested that the oath did not apply to water, but Solomon replied: "Is there anything that thou hast seen under the heavens that is of more value than water?" The queen admitted that she was wrong, but begged that she might drink. Solomon was thus released from his oath and he accomplished his desire and took the queen to his bed.

After his union with Makeda, Solomon had a dream in which he saw that the sun came down to the land of Judah and illumined it very brightly, and then it passed to Ethiopia over which it shone with still greater splendour; and a second time it came to the land of Judah, but the Jews hated it and strove to destroy it, and it departed to the lands of Rome and Ethiopia.

The following day, the queen departed to Ethiopia, after having been presented with a ring, rich gifts, and six thousand camels and wagons for traversing the desert, and a ship to sail on the sea. And when Makeda came to Bala Zadisareya, she brought forth a child, and she called his name Menelik.<sup>3</sup>

When this prince was twenty-two years of age, he expressed his desire to go to visit his father. The queen gave him the ring which she had received from Solomon, and sent him forth under the charge of Tamrin, the merchant. After the queen had decided to abolish the matriarchate, she requested Tamrin to ask Solomon to anoint Menelik king and to promulgate a law that from henceforth her son and his seed should be kings of the country. Then, the prince travelled to Jerusalem, and when he arrived at Gaza, the people

<sup>3</sup> *Budge, E. A. W., Queen of Sheba and her son Menyelek, London, 1922, 19-38.* Also, *Beschreibung der Rheyss Leonardi Rauwolffen der Artzney Doctorn und bestellten Medici zu Augspurg, in Reyssbuch des heyligen Lands, Frankfurt, 1584, 340-347.* It need hardly be said that the stories pertaining to the visits of the Queen of Sheba and her son Menelik to Jerusalem are entirely apocryphal. The date of these stories cannot be fixed with certainty, but the *Kebra Nagast*, the *Glory of the Kings*, which mentions these legends, was composed at the beginning of the 14th century. A colophon to the *Kebra Nagast* interestingly states that it is a translation from an Arabic version made in 1225 A. D. from a Coptic original. A. H. M. Jones and E. Monroe state that "the legend can be traced to the beginning of the second millennium A. D. The legend had, however, taken firm root by the middle of the 11th century and thus rendered the position of the usurping Zagwe Kings precarious". *Jones and Monroe, A. History of Ethiopia, Oxford, 1935, 20.*



believed that Solomon had come because of the resemblance of Menelik to his father. And they sent messengers to King Solomon in Jerusalem, and they reported that one had come to their land who resembled the king in every feature. And when Solomon heard whence the stranger had come, he rejoiced, and he summoned Menelik to Jerusalem, where Menelik presented to Solomon the ring. But the king said: "What need is there of the ring? Without a sign I know thee, that thou art my son."

Solomon tried to persuade Menelik to stay and to reign over Israel, for he was the first-born, but Menelik would not consent. Then Solomon anointed Menelik with the holy oil of kingship, and Zadok the highpriest expounded to him the Law of Israel. After some time, Menelik asked Solomon for a piece of the fringe of the covering of the Ark of the Covenant, so that the Ethiopians might adore it. This request was in compliance with a petition which Makeda had addressed to the King.

When Menelik was about to leave, Solomon gave to his son horses and chariots, camels, mules and wagons, in fact all what was necessary for the founding of Israel's new kingdom of Ethiopia. And the councillors of Israel prepared their eldest sons to accompany Menelik and to rule in Ethiopia. But just before Menelik and the young councillors were ready to depart, great sorrow befell the young nobles who were to leave their native country, for it was evident to them that they were going into perpetual exile. But their greatest sorrow was that they had to leave behind the Ark of the Covenant. Thereupon, Azariah, the son of the highpriest, thought of a plan, and binding the young nobles to silence, he collected sufficient money to have a raft built of the same measurements as the Ark of the Covenant. And the night before they departed, Azariah took the raft which was in the form of the Ark, and entered the Holy of Holies, and he took the Ark and put in its place the raft, and he covered it with the three coverings of the Ark so that none might see the change.

After the party had left Jerusalem, they travelled with great speed until they reached Gaza, where they halted, and a day later they arrived in Egypt. Here, Azariah and his fellow-conspirators revealed to Menelik how they had brought the Ark with them, and he made obeisance to it and prophesied before it, and he rejoiced greatly. And they went on their way and came to Ethiopia. And Menelik ruled in Ethiopia and his sons after him.

Meanwhile, Solomon had related to Zadok the dream which he had on the night in which he had slept with the Queen of Ethiopia. And Zadok, filled with fear, went into the Holy of Holies and took off the coverings from the Ark, and he beheld the raft which Azariah, his son, had caused to be built. And he wept bitterly and told King Solomon about it. When Solomon heard that the Ark had been stolen, he set out with horsemen to pursue Azariah and his party, but they were too far advanced on their way to Ethiopia to be overtaken. Disappointed and depressed, Solomon returned to Jerusalem and charged all his officers and councillors to keep secret the loss of the Ark of the Covenant.



## II. THE ETHIOPIANS IN JERUSALEM FROM THE 4th TO THE 17th CENTURY

The first historical reference to the Ethiopians in Jerusalem is contained in the *Letter of Paula and Eustochium to Marcella* (386 A. D.), which refers to the monks of the various nations who visit the Holy City. "Why need we mention the Armenians, the Persians, the nations of India and Ethiopia, and the neighbouring country of Egypt, abounding in monks, Pontus and Cappadocia, Coele-Syria, and Mesopotamia, and all the multitudes of the East."<sup>4</sup> This observation is substantiated by St. Jerome in his *Epistle to Laeta* (cvii) in which he speaks of the crowds of monks who come every day from India, Persia and Ethiopia.<sup>5</sup>

According to an Ethiopian tradition, 'Ella 'Asbeha, King of Ethiopia, commonly known as Kaleb (514-542 A. D.) withdrew from the world towards the end of his reign and became a monk in Jerusalem, after having arranged for his royal crown to be suspended near the Sepulchre of Christ. His son Gabra Maskael continued the Ethiopian interest in Jerusalem by sending his son Abba Moses, who was a monk, to the Holy City, where he founded a hospice, on the site of which a sanctuary was later dedicated in honour of Abba Moses.<sup>6</sup>

The Ethiopians are mentioned as residents in Jerusalem in the "Letter of Guarantee" attributed to the Caliph 'Umar which is dated in the 15th year of the Hira (637 A. D.). This covenant is said to have been made between the Caliph and Sophronius, the Greek Patriarch of Jerusalem.<sup>7</sup> "Let peace remain among them (the Christians) as regards their churches and monasteries, as well as all the other places of prayer belonging to them in Jerusalem and outside, that is to say, the 'Camama' or the Church of the Resurrection and the great Church of Bethlehem, where Jesus Christ was born. And, in order that the Georgians and Abyssinians depending on the Greek nation be well established, let all other nations that go there on pilgrimage, Latins, Copts, Syrians, Armenians, Nestorians, Jacobites and Maronites submit to the Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem."<sup>8</sup>

Gibbon, speaking of the period from 638 to 1099 A. D., refers to the many pilgrims from the East and the West, who continued to visit Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulchre, and mentions that the Greeks, Latins, Nestorians, Jaco-

<sup>4</sup> *Aubrey*, "Letter of Paula and Eustochium to Marcella", PPTS, I, 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Cavallera, S. J.*, *Saint Jérôme, sa vie et son oeuvre*. Louvain, 1922, II, 47.

<sup>6</sup> *Budge, E. A. W.*, *The History of Abyssinia*. London, 1928, I, 261. *King, A.*, *The Rites of Eastern Christendom*, Rome, 1947, I, 503. Another tradition states, that King Kaleb entered towards the end of his life the Monastery of St. Panteleemon near Aksum. The alleys of Kaleb and Gabra Maskal are shown in Aksum.

<sup>7</sup> The variety and the order of the Christian communities represented in Jerusalem according to this document, would suggest for its compilation a date during the Mameluke period.

<sup>8</sup> *Themelis, T. P.*, *Les Grecs aux Lieux Saints*. Jerusalem, 1921, 7.



bites, Copts and Abyssinians, Armenians and Georgians maintained their chapels, their clergy, and the poor of their respective communities.<sup>9</sup>

The interest of the Ethiopians in a permanent establishment in Jerusalem is evident from a letter which Qeddus Harbe (1150–1182) sent to a certain explorer and doctor, named Philip, expressing his wish for an Ethiopian sanctuary in the Holy City.<sup>10</sup> The fact that Ethiopian pilgrims visited Jerusalem throughout the 12th century is attested by Johann von Würzburg, who in 1165 visited the Holy Land and refers to the Ethiopians among other nations who even maintained a chapel in the city.<sup>11</sup> In 1187, Sultan Salah ad-Din granted exemption from taxes to the Greeks, Georgians, Copts and Ethiopians who came to Jerusalem. It is generally understood that by this ordinance the Sultan confirmed the privilege of the above mentioned communities to have certain sites in the Church of the Resurrection. Salah ad-Din assigned two rooms to the Ethiopians beneath the locality of the Catechumens. For the Liturgy they received the Church of the Invention of the Holy Cross and the rooms above it.<sup>12</sup>

It is beyond doubt that the Ethiopians were represented in Jerusalem at the beginning of the 13th century, at the time when Lalibela, one of the most venerated kings of the Zagwe Dynasty, made his pilgrimage to Jerusalem. In the *History of Lalibela* we are told that, after his marriage, the king visited all the holy places, where he was introduced to Byzantine architecture, and one tradition asserts that Lalibela brought five hundred workmen from Jerusalem and Alexandria to Ethiopia.<sup>13</sup> Sebastian Brandt as well as Abu Sameh confirm the presence of the Ethiopians in Jerusalem at the beginning of the 13th century. In fact, both writers relate, that when al-Malik al-Mu'azzim, the nephew of Salah ad-Din, heard of the capture of Damietta by the Franks (1219), he decided as a reprisal to destroy the fortifications of Jerusalem. The Church of the Resurrection was saved from the work of destruction, partly on account of the energetic intervention of the Christian communities, and partly because of the large number of Syrians, Ethiopians, Armenians, Georgians and other Eastern Christians, who had possessions in the holy places.<sup>14</sup> Burchard of Mount Zion, the Dominican friar who visited the Holy Land in 1230, refers to the Ethiopians who were among the nationals residing in Jerusalem.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Gibbon, *Edward*, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. London, n. d., IV, 184.

<sup>10</sup> King, A., op. cit., I, 506.

<sup>11</sup> Tobler, T., *Descriptiones Terrae Sanctae ex saeculo VIII, IX, XI, XII, et XV*. Leipzig, 1874, 189–190.

<sup>12</sup> Themelis, op. cit., 68, quoting P. Kerameus, *Analecta B*, 409.

<sup>13</sup> Perruchon, J., *Vie de Lalibela*. Paris, 1892. It is difficult to give an exact date for the reign of Lalibela. Since the Zagwe Dynasty came to an end in 1208, Lalibela must have made his pilgrimage before this date.

<sup>14</sup> Bergman, John, *Epitoma urbis Hierosolymae per Sebastianum Brant utriusque iuris doctorem subito collectum*, 1495, f. 105. *Historiens des Croisades: Hist. Orientaux*, Paris, 1906, V, 173–4.

<sup>15</sup> Burchard of Mount Zion, "A Description of the Holy Land", PPTS, XII, 104.



Interesting evidence of the presence of the Ethiopians in Jerusalem is furnished by the consecration of an Ethiopian monk as archbishop of Ethiopia. Anba Kirillus III (1235–1243) had appointed a Coptic archbishop for Jerusalem, and had thereby alienated himself from the Patriarch of Antioch, who retaliated by excommunicating the newly appointed Coptic archbishop. Thereupon, in 1238, Anba Ighnadius II, Patriarch of Antioch, consecrated an Ethiopian monk for the Ethiopian archbishopric, a privilege which until 1959 was retained by the Copts.<sup>16</sup>

The first document mentioning an Ethiopian community in Jerusalem is a letter by Yagbe 'a Seyon, known also as King Solomon (1285–1294), addressed to the Ethiopian community in Jerusalem.<sup>17</sup> During the month of Ramadan 689 A. H. (1290 A. D.), an Ethiopian mission arrived in Cairo with the above mentioned letter, requesting al-'Adil Sef ad-Din (1190–1218) to forward the letter and the gifts to Jerusalem.<sup>18</sup> This letter makes mention of the Ethiopian monks who have persevered to this day in the practice of the religious life, and who have borne with endurance the inconvenience of the heat and the cold. The letter, furthermore, mentions the gift of a veil of red silk and one hundred candles together with the king's belt, which was to be worn by one of the monks during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, but only on feast days. The letter concludes with a petition to have the receipt of the gifts acknowledged and with a request that the monks should remember him in their prayers.

The greatest of the Ethiopian Saints is St. Takla Haymanot, who, sometime in the 13th century, visited Jerusalem three times in the course of his pilgrimages to Egypt and the Holy Land.<sup>19</sup> St. Takla Haymanot is traditionally represented with wings and one leg. With regard to his wings, the Ethiopian tradition asserts that once, while paying a visit to the Monastery of Debra Damo, St. Takla Haymanot was suspended in mid-air, the Evil One having cut the rope, and the Saint would have been hurled down into the ravine below, had not six wings immediately unfurled themselves from under his garments and borne him aloft to the summit. Regarding his one leg, the story is told that St. Takla Haymanot remained in the crocodile infested waters of a small lake in Shoa, until one of his legs dropped off. The relic rests with the other remains of the Saint in the Monastery of Debra Libanos, where the faithful drink the healing water in which the Saint's leg is annually washed.<sup>20</sup> At the beginning of the 14th century we hear of the Donation of 'Amda Syon I, King of Ethiopia (1314–1344), to the Ethiopians in Jerusalem. The donation of the four *Books of the Kings*, which was given

<sup>16</sup> *Kawerau, P.*, Die Jakobitische Kirche im Zeitalter der Syrischen Renaissance. Berlin, 1955, 67.

<sup>17</sup> The Life of the Sultan Qala'un, Cod. Arab. 4869, Bibl. Nat. Paris.

<sup>18</sup> *Quatremère, E.*, Mémoires géographiques et historiques sur l'Égypte. Paris, 1811, II, 267–8.

<sup>19</sup> *Budge, E. A. W.*, The Life of Takla Haymanot, London, 1906, I, 185. Also Ethiop. Synax., 24 Nahasse, Budge IV, 1245.

<sup>20</sup> *Hyatt, H. M.*, The Church of Abyssinia. London, 1928, 259–260. St. Takla Haymanot is the only Ethiopian Saint who is commemorated by the Latin Church.



by 'Amda Syon I, as a vow to the Blessed Virgin Mary of Jerusalem, manifests the interest, which this King had in the Ethiopian community in the Holy City.<sup>21</sup> It is very likely that the reference to "the Virgin Mary of Jerusalem" refers to the Chapel of St. Mary of Golgotha, which was one of the chapels on Mount Calvary, and this, according to Niccolo di Poggibonsi (1346), was in the hands of the Ethiopians.<sup>22</sup>

The pilgrims of the 14th century substantiate the presence of the Ethiopians in Jerusalem. Ludolf von Suchem (1348) mentions among the other communions represented in Jerusalem the Nubians, who might be both Ethiopians and Copts,<sup>23</sup> and the anonymous pilgrim of Miltenberg (1350),<sup>24</sup> another anonymous pilgrim who visited Jerusalem in 1355,<sup>25</sup> and Philippe de Mezieres (1384),<sup>26</sup> also list the "Indiani", who are the Ethiopians, as one of the nations in the Holy City.

During the reign of David I (1382-1411), the second son of Newaya Krestos, a piece of the wood of the True Cross was brought to Ethiopia.<sup>27</sup>

In 1386, Johann von Bodmann visited the Holy Land and certifies that two Ethiopians lived permanently with the representatives of the other Christian communities in the Church of the Resurrection. By this time, the Muslim control over the holy places had been strictly enforced, for our pilgrim mentions that the church-door was rigorously watched, permitting no one to enter the Church, except to replace a monk who had left the church, or in the case of death of a representative.<sup>28</sup> The fact that Ethiopian monks resided in Jerusalem is also mentioned in a 14th century code (Latin L, III, 22) in the Escorial Library in Spain.<sup>29</sup>

According to the anonymous pilgrim of Loos (1419), the Church of the Resurrection was kept closed by the Muslims during the whole year, and six priests, a Greek, an Iberian (Georgian), a Latin, an Armenian, a Jacobite and an Ethiopian were locked in the Church. In those days, the Church was opened only when pilgrims came.<sup>30</sup> Felix Fabri (1484) reports, that the Church of the Resurrection was open only twice a year, from Good Friday to Easter Monday, and from the Vigil of the Feast of the Invention of the Cross until the Vespers following. The guardians of the respective commu-

<sup>21</sup> *Grebaut, S. and Tisserant, E.*, *Codices aethiopicis Vaticanis et Borgiani*, *Barberianus Orientalis*, 2, Rossinianus 865, I, Vatican City, 1935, 786. Also *Roupp, N.*, *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, XVI, 296-342.

<sup>22</sup> *Niccolo di Poggibonsi*, *A Voyage Beyond the Seas*, Jerusalem, 1945.

<sup>23</sup> *Ludolf von Suchem*, "Description of the Holy Land", PPTS, XII, 97.

<sup>24</sup> *Conrady, L.*, *Vier Rheinische Palaestina-Pilgerschriften des XIV, XV, und XVI Jahrhunderts*. Wiesbaden, 1882, 45.

<sup>25</sup> *Slisansky, Laurentius*, *Neue Reisebeschreibung nacher Jerusalem vndt dem H. Landte*. Leipzig, n. d., 84.

<sup>26</sup> *Molinier, A.*, "Description de deux manuscrits contenant la règle de Militia Passionis Christi de Philippe de Mezières", *Archives Orient. Latin*, I, 1884, 354.

<sup>27</sup> *Budge, E. A. W.*, *The History of Ethiopia*, London, 1928, I, 300.

<sup>28</sup> *Semler, A.*, "Die Pilgerreise des Johann von Bodmann nach der Karlsruher Handschrift", *Mitteilungen aus dem Germanischen Nationalmuseum*, 1910, 142.

<sup>29</sup> *Antolin, G.*, *Catalogo de los códices latinos de la Real Biblioteca del Escorial*. Madrid, 1913, III, 44-45.



nities remained locked in, until the arrival of the next year's pilgrims, and they were supplied with food which was handed in through holes in the door.<sup>31</sup>

In spite of these restrictions which were imposed upon the Christians by the Muslims, the Ethiopians in Jerusalem enjoyed certain privileges of which none of the other Christian communities could boast. Not only were they exempt from paying tribute to their Muslim masters, but also they had the right and the privilege to come with unfurled banners and crosses to the Holy City. Niccolo di Poggibonsi (1346) is one of the first Western pilgrims to notice that "those of Ethiopia pass into Egypt and into the Land of Promise without paying tribute to the Sultan and they can carry the cross uncovered through all Saracen lands, and also they enter the Holy Sepulchre without paying tribute, and no nation, save the Ethiopians enjoys this grace, and this is granted by the Sultan."<sup>32</sup> That this special status of the Ethiopians continued for a considerable time is shown in the reports of the 15th century pilgrims. Thus, the above mentioned anonymous pilgrim of Loos states that the Ethiopians, Jacobites and Syrians did not pay tribute to the Sultan in the Church of the Resurrection for the reason that through their country passes the river which in Latin is called Gion, and in the vulgar speech the Nile, which comes from the earthly paradise and passes by Cairo.<sup>33</sup> Apparently, the preferential treatment which the Ethiopians received from the Muslims was not mere convention. Because the Church of the Resurrection was closed at a certain period in 1423, when the Ethiopians wished to enter it, Yeshak or Isaac I (1414-1429) considered this action as an insult, and he retaliated by killing the Muslims in Ethiopia.<sup>34</sup> Some time later, a similar incident occurred. In 1481, the ambassador of Eskander or Alexander (1478-1494) arrived in Jerusalem with a permission from the Sultan Kaitbay in Cairo authorizing him and his suite to enter without payment the Church of the Resurrection for the Ceremony of the Holy Fire. The officer of the exchequer and the treasurer of the Government in Damascus, however, were not disposed to recognize the document and to allow them to enter the Church. The Ethiopians, however, insisted on their privilege, and it was necessary to deliver to them the keys of the Church of the Resurrection, and the ambassador entered the Church with all the other Christian nations without payment of tax or the usual gifts.<sup>35</sup>

Arnold von Harff (1496-99) observed the Ethiopians coming "from Ethiopia to Jerusalem or to the Sultan's country. They pay no tribute, and they go with banners unfurled to Jerusalem into the Temple of Christ without paying tribute, and no injury must be done to them, lest the river

<sup>30</sup> *Moravillé*, Un pèlerinage en Terre Sainte et au Sinai au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle, in Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes. LXVI, 1905. 83-84.

<sup>31</sup> "The Book of the Wanderings of the Brother Felix Fabri", PPTS, II, ii, 384-391.

<sup>32</sup> *Niccolo di Poggibonsi*, op. cit. 126.

<sup>33</sup> *Moravillé*, loc. cit.

<sup>34</sup> Nudjum, in *Gaudefroy-Demombynes*, Masalik al-absar, 32, n. 2.

<sup>35</sup> *Van Berchem*, CIA, Jérusalem, I, 395-6, according to Mudjir ad-Din, 657.



Nile should be stopped.<sup>36</sup> The story of the threat to stop the Nile is told and retold by numerous pilgrims. The Spanish pilgrim Pero Tafur (1435–1439) heard much the same story from de Conti, and Josse van Ghistele (1485) reports that Prester John had power to change the course of the Nile, which would ruin the land of Egypt, and that the Sultan, therefore, sent him gifts each year, further, that Prester John's subjects had many privileges in the Sultan's land, that they could enter the Church of the Holy Sepulchre without payment and could wear a cross openly round their necks or carry a cross in their hands.<sup>37</sup>

Throughout the 15th century, the Ethiopians continued their interest in the Holy City. In the *Ethiopian Synaxarium* we read about the intention of King Tewoderos or Theodore I (1411–1414), who was known for his religious life, to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The King, however, was dissuaded from accomplishing his plan by Murqus, the Abuna, who told him: "It is not thy portion," because he feared for the King's safety.<sup>38</sup>

King Zar'a Ya'qub or Constantine I (1434–1468) considered himself as the head of the Ethiopian Church for which he laid down rules for its guidance and maintenance. He was much concerned for the theological education of his clergy, and thus he sent to the monks of the Ethiopian community in Jerusalem the Ge'ez text of the Canons of the Apostles and the Councils which are recognized by the Ethiopian Church as Canon Law. In 1441, Zar'a Ya'qub commissioned two monks from the Ethiopian community in Jerusalem to attend the Council of Florence (1438–1445) which was called by Pope Eugene IV for the purpose of uniting the Greek and Eastern Orthodox Churches with the See of Rome.<sup>39</sup>

By the 14th and 15th century we hear of certain sites in the Church of the Resurrection and in Jerusalem in general which were definitely in the hands of the Ethiopians. One of the most prominent chapels on Golgotha was the Chapel of St. Mary of Golgotha which was in the hands of the Ethiopians, at least from the middle of the 14th century until the middle of the 16th century, if not even later. The Ethiopian sites in the Rotunda of the Church of the Resurrection were probably acquired at the same time. Poggibonsi (1346), who is the first European traveller to give the exact positions of the Ethiopians in Jerusalem, mentions an altar behind the Holy Sepulchre where the Indians and those of Ethiopia celebrated.<sup>40</sup> Later, the Ethiopians also acquired certain quarters for their monks in the Rotunda, and the pilgrims of the 15th to 17th century agree that these quarters were situated between the columns of the Rotunda, immediately on the left after entering the Church. To these sites, the Ethiopians added, about the middle of the 15th century, the Chapel of the Opprobrium in the Church of the Resurrection to their pro-

<sup>36</sup> Letts, M., *The Pilgrimage of Arnold von Harff*. London, 1946. 178.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. also *Francesco Suriano*, *Treatise on the Holy Land*. Jerusalem, 1949. 90. Joos van Ghistele, *T'voyage van Mynher Joos van Ghistele*, Ghent, 1542. 36.

<sup>38</sup> *Ethiopian Synaxarium*, *Patr. Orient.*, I, 696, and Budge IV, 1045.

<sup>39</sup> Ullendorff, *Edward*, *The Ethiopians*. London, 1960, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Poggibonsi, *op. cit.*, 22.



perties, which they retained until the first quarter of the 17th century. On Mount Sion, the Ethiopians possessed from the middle of the 15th century until the first quarter of the 16th century the Grotto of David, and in the Church of the Sepulchre of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Gethsemane, the altar dedicated to St. Joseph was, in the 15th and 16th century, in Ethiopian hands. In the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the Ethiopians possessed in the 14th and 15th century an altar in the northern apse of the basilica.

The fact, that during the 15th century some of the Ethiopian sites had fallen into decay is evident from a communication which an Ethiopian embassy presented to the Sultan in Cairo in 1443. After stating the concern of the Ethiopians about the excessive taxes levied upon the Christians in Egypt, the document concludes with a demand for an authorization to reconstruct the Ethiopian sites in Jerusalem.<sup>41</sup>

That the Ethiopians in Jerusalem maintained the privilege of exemption from taxes and gifts is also recorded in an interesting inscription on the left side of the door of the Church of the Resurrection, which is dated 9 Muharram, 919, *i. e.* March 18, 1513. Al-Malik al-Ashraf al-Ghuri, the Sultan of Egypt, had offered concessions to some Christian communities in Jerusalem, which included the Melkites, the Jacobites, the Georgians and the Ethiopians. These concessions stipulated that members belonging to the above mentioned communions were exempt from the payment of taxes on their arrival at and on their departure from the Port of Jaffa, the City of Gaza, as well as Ramlah of Lydda. Also, no tribute had to be paid for entering the Church of the Resurrection. At this time, the exemption was solicited by a certain Sophronios, a monk of the Melkite community in Jerusalem.<sup>42</sup>

Three years later, in 1516, an Ethiopian embassy arrived in Cairo to obtain authorization to visit Jerusalem and the Church of the Resurrection. The Ethiopians stayed for a period of three days, as guests of the Sultan, before they departed to the Holy City. This incident is described in detail by the historian Ibn Iyas.<sup>43</sup> In 1520, another expedition was sent to Jerusalem. Generally, the Ethiopian pilgrims departed from Ethiopia at Epiphany in order to be in Jerusalem for the celebrations of Holy Week and Easter. The caravan of 1520 entered the pages of history because of its misfortune. The pilgrims were savagely attacked by the Bedouins somewhere beyond Suachin, and the caravan consisting of 336 pilgrims was almost completely destroyed, except for fifteen monks who escaped and continued their pilgrimage. Thus, for several years the Ethiopian pilgrimages to the Holy Land were discontinued.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> *Sakhwi*, *Tibr masbuk*, 67-72.

<sup>42</sup> *Berchem*, *M. v.*, *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum*. II<sup>e</sup> Partie: Syrie du Sud. Tome I: Jérusalem ville, in *Mémoires de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire*, XLIII. Cairo, 1922. 348-398.

<sup>43</sup> *Wiet*, G., "Les relations égypto-abyssines sous les Sultans Mamlouks", *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte*, IV, 1938, 136-139.

<sup>44</sup> *Verdadeira Informacao das Terras do Preste João das Indias pelo Padre Francisco Alvares*. Lisbon, 1889. 163-4.



In 1514, Queen Helena of Ethiopia, much concerned about the continuing raids of the Muslims upon her country, and about the Muslim domination of the Holy Land, addressed letters to Pope Leo X and to Immanuel the Great, King of Portugal. In this correspondence, the Queen suggested that with the help of the Latin Church and the Kingdom of Portugal, the Ethiopians would be able to participate in the liberation of the Holy Land from the domination of the Muslims. It is interesting to note, that ten years later, in 1514, a similar appeal for a crusade against the Muslims was made by Lebne-Denghel, the son of Queen Helena, who addressed a letter to Pope Clement VII. These royal appeals are significant for us, because they reveal the concern and sense of responsibility of the Ethiopians for their own community in the Holy Places, as well as for a Christian Holy Land in general.<sup>45</sup>

Following the conquest of Jerusalem by the Turks, Sultan Selim I (1465–1521) issued the famous Firman of Safar 25, 923 A. H. (1517) in which he supported the rights of the Ethiopian Community and mentioned in detail their properties, rights and privileges. This firman is incorporated into a firman issued by Sulaiman the Magnificent (1520–1566), which is dated September 1555. The following is the text of the Firman of Sultan Selim I.

“In the name of the One Living Holy God. The Repairs to the Abyssinian Church in Jerusalem have begun in the year 1500 A.D. through the endeavour of Father Hinnis the Abyssinian and the costs of which came from the Emperor of Abyssinia and from certain Abyssinian Christians. The Abyssinians have in their custody and possession documents and firmans which establish the location of their waqfs, monasteries, shrines and churches inside the Church of the Resurrection and outside, also what the Abyssinians own, and which in particular belongs to them, also their worship privileges and that which is theirs in Jerusalem, that is:

The place where they hang seven lamps at the Unction Stone. A place to hang other seven lamps inside the fire chamber (*i. e.* the Tomb of Christ): the first being southern and the second northern. The three porches which belong to the Abyssinians and are situated south of the Church together with the glass lamps. The three northern porches. The room of double wood. The altar situated between the Sepulchre and to the east of the said Church. The door of benchwood which is placed above the pillar shrine (*i. e.* the Chapel of the Opprobrium) including what it contains of glass lamps and has a screen of double perforated wood. The aforementioned things belong in whole solely to them. No other community of the various Christian faiths in Jerusalem has any known legal connection therein.

The lower Abyssinian Church which is in the south and which adjoins the Church of the Resurrection and the door which opens south is also the property of the Abyssinians. The Monastery of the Sultan which is reached by the way of the Court-yard of the Church of the Resurrection together with what it comprises of buildings and dwellings is also theirs. The contents

<sup>45</sup> *Damiano da Goes, Fides Religio Moresque Aethiopum. Lovanio, 1544. 14, 38.*



of the large locked box of ecclesiastical robes is also theirs. The contents of the Upper Church which is in said Monastery of the Sultan, that is the numerous books are also for the Abyssinians. The Church of St. Helena which is situated in the neighbourhood of the Monastery of the Sultan is theirs.

Sultan Selim“

This firman was confirmed by the subsequent sultans, and particularly by Sultan Sulaiman the Magnificent (1520–1566) and Sultan Ahmad (1603–1617).<sup>46</sup> Throughout the following years, and in spite of the temporary union of the Church of Ethiopia with the See of Rome, the Ethiopians maintained their privileges in the Holy Land. Greffin Affagart, visiting the Holy Land in 1533–34, mentions the Ethiopians as the third nation represented in the Church of the Resurrection, and adds that they can enter and leave the Church without having to pay tribute, because in their land the river begins which keeps all of Egypt alive.<sup>47</sup> The relation of the waters of the Nile to the Ethiopian privileges in Jerusalem must have been of special interest to the Western pilgrims, for many of them have commented about this fact in their narratives.

Throughout the Middle Ages, the Ethiopians participated on the Eve of Easter in the Celebration of the Holy Fire.<sup>48</sup> Thus, *e. g.* Giovanni Francesco Alcarotti (1587) mentions a Greek Patriarch, an Armenian Bishop and an Ethiopian Bishop,<sup>49</sup> an observation which is basically substantiated by Aquilante Rocchetta (1599), who observed a Greek Prelate, an Armenian priest and an Ethiopian priest.<sup>50</sup> Francesco Manerba (1604) noticed the Greek Patriarch, but instead of an Armenian priest, he states the presence of two Ethiopian priests at the Ceremony.<sup>51</sup> Pietro della Valle (1606) lists a Greek Patriarch, an Ethiopian priest and another Oriental priest,<sup>52</sup> whereas Giovanni Paolo Pesenti (1612) speaks again of Greeks, Armenians and Ethiopians who participated in the Ceremony.<sup>53</sup> Antonio de Castillo (1626) is again more specific by referring to a Greek Patriarch, an Armenian Bishop and an Ethiopian Priest.<sup>54</sup> According to the testimony of Bernard Surius (1644) six patriarchs participated in the Ceremony of the Holy Fire, and they were the Greek, the Coptic, the Ethiopian, the Georgian, the Nestorian and the Armenian who locked themselves into the Chapel of the Holy

<sup>46</sup> For the text see *Abba Philippos*, The Rights of the Abyssinian Church in the Holy Places. Jerusalem, 1959, Document No. 2.

<sup>47</sup> *Chavanon*, Relation de Terre Sainte (1533–1534) par Greffin Affagart. Paris, 1903, 80.

<sup>48</sup> *Meinardus*, O., "The Ceremony of the Holy Fire in the Middle Ages and To-day", Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte, XVI (1962).

<sup>49</sup> *Alcarotti*, G. F., Del Viaggio in Terra Santa. Novara, 1596. II, 159.

<sup>50</sup> Peregrinazione di Terra Santa. Palermo, 1630, IV, 226.

<sup>51</sup> Biblioteca Bio-Bibliografica di Terra Santa. Ed. Golubovic, N. S. I, 10–11.

<sup>52</sup> Viaggi di Pietro della Valle il Pellegrino. Roma, 1664. II, 555.

<sup>53</sup> Pellegrinaggio di Gerusalemme. Bergamo, 1615. II, 101.

<sup>54</sup> El devote peregrino de Tierra Santa. Madrid, 1656. 247.



Sepulchre. After the appearance of the Holy Fire, they distributed the Fire to the people.<sup>55</sup>

That the Ethiopians played an important rôle in the Ceremony of the Holy Fire is also attested by two documents which were recently published. The first document authorized on the 19th day of Du'l-Higga 947 A. H. (1540 A. D.) mentions that "during the holidays of the Christian Community in Jerusalem, the Christian denominations used to assemble inside the (Church of the) Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem at the time when the Fire which they claim to be the light, came out of the place within the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The first to enter the place where the Fire comes out was the Chief of the Abyssinians, the second was the Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox, the third was the Chief of the Armenians, the fourth was the Chief of the Georgians, the fifth was the Chief of the Assyrians, and the sixth was the Chief of the Copts."<sup>56</sup> The second document issued on the 4th of Gumada 'l-Ula 963 A. H. (1555 A. D.) states that "the first to enter the place from which the Fire comes out would be the Chief of the Abyssinians, after him would come the Patriarch, the third would be the Armenian Convent (*sic*), the fourth the Chief of the Georgians, the fifth the Chief of the Assyrians and the sixth would be the Chief of the Copts . . . These agreed that they would light from the altar (?) collectively and leave together without disturbing one another in any manner or for whatever reason."<sup>57</sup>

By the beginning of the 17th century, the Ethiopians were still established in the Holy City. They had maintained almost all of their possessions with the exception, as it would seem, of the Grotto of David on Mount Sion, and the Chapel of St. Mary of Golgotha. But from a numerical point of view, the Ethiopian community had begun to dwindle, which was mainly due to pressure and persecution by the Turks. Franzesco Manerba (1604), who had served as guardian of the Holy Land, reports, that, during the time of his office, only two Ethiopians resided in the Holy City,<sup>58</sup> and Henry de Beauvau (1605) mentions that the Ethiopian Chapel of Abraham was guarded only by an Ethiopian woman.<sup>59</sup> That this numerical paucity was not merely passing is evident from the report of George Sandys (1610), who states that the Ethiopian community was composed of only one priest and a few Ethiopian laymen. Apparently, this Ethiopian priests officiated for the Ethiopians as well as for the Copts.<sup>60</sup> The Copts, therefore, may have been without a priest during this period. Pietro della Valle (1616) substantiates Sandys' observation when he speaks about one Ethiopian monk.<sup>61</sup> At the time of Yves de Lille's pilgrimage (1625), the Ethiopian quarters appeared to him

<sup>55</sup> Den God Turuchtigen Pilgrim. Anversa, 1705. I, 582.

<sup>56</sup> *Philippos*, The Rights of the Abyssinian Orthodox Church in the Holy Places. Documentary Manuscripts Part II. Jerusalem 1962. 5.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 8.

<sup>58</sup> Biblioteca Bio-Bibliografica di Terra Santa. N. S. I. 10.

<sup>59</sup> *De Beauvau*, Relation journalière du Voyage du Levant. Nancy, 1619. 132.

<sup>60</sup> *Sandys, G.*, A Relation of the Turkish Empire, of Aegypt, of the Holy Land, of the remote parts of Italy, and Islands adjoining. London, 1627. 171.



deserted except for one poor Ethiopian priest who maintained the property rights of his nation. This paucity was, without question, due to the persecution and the extortions of the Turks which is also mentioned by Yves de Lille.<sup>62</sup>

It is without doubt, that this limited representation was due to the general penury of the Ethiopians in Jerusalem, and it is understandable that other communities, realizing the disproportion of the number of the sites in relation to the numerical strength of the Ethiopians, began to be interested in certain places. The absence of the Ethiopians from some of their sites in the Church of the Resurrection led to a succession of claims by the other communities.

In 1632, the Ethiopian "community" was visited by an Ethiopian notable, Saga Krestos, who already soon after his arrival in the Holy Land became deeply involved in the property questions of his nation. It is interesting to note, that Saga Krestos stayed at the Ethiopian quarters next to the Chapel of Abraham. His visit, however, only complicated an already complex and difficult situation, for Saga Krestos strongly sympathized with the Latins, the Armenians and the Copts, and eventually even decided to embrace Catholicism. There is evidence to believe that the Armenians had proceeded to claim the protection of the Ethiopians. Saga Krestos, on the other hand, expressed his interest in transferring this privilege from the Armenians to the Latins.<sup>63</sup> In addition to this misfortune, we hear of another defection. Eugène Roger (1632) reports that in the year of the visit of Saga Krestos, the hegoumenos of the Ethiopian community, a certain Rais Hanna, also became a Catholic.<sup>64</sup>

The poverty of the Ethiopians was inducive to all kinds of violations by the Armenians, and it appears, that the Armenians persisted in their efforts until they had gained possession of the Ethiopian properties. Later, as we shall see, the properties of the Ethiopians passed into the hands of the Greeks.

The relationship between the Greeks and the Armenians was greatly estranged on account of certain rights and privileges (*e. g.* the question of priority in the ceremonies in the Church of the Resurrection) which both communities claimed in Jerusalem. At first, the Qadi in Jerusalem decided in favour of the Armenians; whereupon, the Greeks approached the Sultan Murad IV (1623–1640), who in 1634 reversed the decision of the Qadi and granted to the Greeks priority not only with reference to the Armenians, but over all the Christian communities.<sup>65</sup> This decision was confirmed by the Firman of Sultan Muhammad IV (1648–1687), who in 1654 restated the

<sup>61</sup> Viaggi di Pietro della Valle il Pellegrino con minuto ragguaglio di tutte le cose notabili cosservate in essi. Rome, 1664. 555.

<sup>62</sup> Yves de Lille, "Itinéraire", in *Etudes Franciscaines*, XXIX, 257. Paris, 1933, 215.

<sup>63</sup> Cerulli, Enrico, *Etiopi in Palestina*. Rome, 1947. II, 106–111.

<sup>64</sup> Roger, E., *La Terre Sainte ou description topographique très particulière des Saints Lieux*. Paris, 1664. 405–6.

<sup>65</sup> Cerulli, E., *op. cit.*, II, 97.



priority of the Greeks over all other Christian communities in the Holy Land. In addition, he granted to the Greeks the right to be installed in those places in Jerusalem which had belonged either to the Ethiopians or the Georgians.<sup>66</sup>

By 1655, the Ethiopian position in the Holy Land had become so precarious that the Greeks were able to acquire all the Ethiopian sites. From the procès verbal of 1655 (Coptic recension) we learn that the Armenians, who had gained the Ethiopian possessions, handed over to the Greeks the following sites: The Chapel of Abraham, the Chapel of the Opprobrium, the Chapel of the Prison of Jesus, the Dair as-Sultan, and the Ethiopian Chapel in the Rotunda. Interestingly enough, the procès verbal makes reference to two Ethiopian priests, one Hanna, who is said to have been a hermit in the Church of the Resurrection, and another monk, Yusuf as-Suriani.<sup>67</sup> When Michel Nau (1668) visited the Church of the Resurrection, he observed only one poor Ethiopian,<sup>68</sup> and Henry Maundrell (1697) clearly states that only the Latins, Greeks, Armenians and Copts keep their footing well.<sup>69</sup>

The paucity of the Ethiopians in the Holy Land during this period is also reflected by the numerous imperial decrees (firmans), which were issued in the 17th and 18th century for the purpose of settling the property claims and disputes between the Greek Orthodox and Armenian communities with reference to the Ethiopian sites. The history of the claims and counter-claims is well stated in the famous Firman of Sultan Mahmoud I (1730-1754) of 1739. This document mentions that ever since 1067 A. H. or 1656 A. D. the Armenians attempted, by means of submitting a forged document, to seize the Ethiopian sites, which according to this firman belong to the Greek Orthodox, the 'controller of all this property'. As a result, the Armenians were to refrain from opposition and the Greek Orthodox were entrusted with the custody over the Ethiopians including the control of their property.

An additional royal decree was issued in 1108 A. H. or 1696 A. D. repeating that the Armenians had done wrong and caused confusion by presenting forged documents. Again it was stated that the Greek Orthodox were to be entrusted with the hold and control of all the property belonging to the Georgians, Abyssinians, Assyrians, Copts and Serbians.

A further document was issued in 1109 A. H. or 1697 A. D., which required all those who come annually from all parts of the world during the pilgrimage season for the Appearance of the Holy Fire, and who belong to the Armenian, Georgian, Abyssinian, Coptic and other Christian communities, with the necessity of consulting the Greek Orthodox Patriarchs.

Upon his ascension to the throne in 1730, Mahmoud I considered the Ethiopians "as followers of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch", for that matter,

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>68</sup> *Nau, M.*, *Voyage nouveau de la Terre sainte*. Paris, 1679. 173.

<sup>69</sup> *Maundrell, H.*, *A journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem at Easter A. D. 1697*. Oxford, 1740. 70.



he shall continue to hold and control all the endowments of the Abyssinians, "who are subordinate to the Greek Orthodox Community".<sup>70</sup>

Just as important as the Firman of Sultan Mahmud I is the Firman of Sultan Mahmud II of 1228 A.H. or 1805 A.D. which also refers to the Ethiopians in Jerusalem, though under the administration of the Armenians. It is their (the Armenians) right to control over the property of the Abyssinian, Coptic and Assyrian communities in accordance with their traditions, for the "Abyssinian, Coptic and Assyrian communities are, as they have been for a long time, under the supervision and responsibility of the Armenian community", a claim which is challenged by the Greeks. These documents are important in so far as the respective claims are still upheld. With regard to the Ethiopian properties, these firmans provide no detailed information.<sup>71</sup>

### III. THE ETHIOPIANS IN JERUSALEM FROM THE 17th TO THE 20th CENTURY

The history of the Ethiopian community in Jerusalem from the 17th to the 20th century is intimately connected with the problem of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the Dair as-Sultan.

This site, which occupies the roof of the Chapel of St. Helena, the Chapel of the Four Bodiless Living Creatures and the Chapel of the Angel, as well as the passage leading from the roof of the Chapel of St. Helena through the aforementioned chapels to the parvis of the Church of the Resurrection, is claimed by both Ethiopians and Copts alike. The study of the records of the Dair as-Sultan over the past three hundred years is one of the many unpleasant encounters which reflect the arguments, violations and misunderstandings of the Christian communities in the Holy City. In this case, the Copts and the Ethiopians have argued and fought for this site.

The roof of the Chapel of St. Helena (Dair as-Sultan) was once in the hands of the Augustinian Canons who established themselves there during the Latin Kingdom (1100-1241). The site was used by the Canons as refectory. The arches over the windows of the ruined walls still show the remains of the Latin refectory.<sup>1</sup>

On the eviction of the Ethiopians from their sites in the Church of the Resurrection in 1671, they retreated to the roof of the Chapel of St. Helena.<sup>2</sup> There is little doubt, however, that even prior to that date, Ethiopians inhabited the roof of the Chapel of St. Helena. One of the first references by a pilgrim to an Ethiopian habitation of the Dair as-Sultan is found in

<sup>70</sup> *Philippos*, *The Rights of the Abyssinian Orthodox Church in the Holy Places. Documentary Manuscripts. Part II.* Jerusalem 1962. 78.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>1</sup> *Jeffery, George*, *A Brief Description of the Holy Sepulchre.* Cambridge, 1919. 113.

<sup>2</sup> *Luke, H. Ch.*, "Christian Communities in the Holy Sepulchre", in *Ashbee*, *Jerusalem 1920-1922.* London, 1924. 54.



the Chronicle of Francesco Verniore (1631–1647) in which he refers to a place in front of the square (*parvis*) of the Church of the Resurrection, where there are a few low and dark rooms in which the Ethiopians sleep on the bare ground.<sup>3</sup>

Jean Doubdan (1651) confirms the observation of Verniore, when he describes the lodgings of the Armenians and the Ethiopians as being situated on the east side of the *parvis*.<sup>4</sup> At the time of Doubdan's visit, the Armenians had taken over the Ethiopian sites. This fact also agrees with the testimony of the *procès verbal* of 1655 which lists the Ethiopian sites which had been turned over to the Greeks by the Armenians. In this document, the *Dair as-Sultan* is called the Monastery of the Ethiopians which one reaches from the *parvis* of the Church of the Resurrection.<sup>5</sup>

There is little doubt, that, during the second half of the 17th century, the Ethiopians were greatly impoverished. This is also substantiated by a title-deed of August 22, 1688, in which it is stated that certain repairs at the *Dair as-Sultan* were carried out by the administrator of the Coptic *waqfs* in Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> Whereas most of the Orthodox communities suffered severely from poverty, so much so that they even had to abandon their ancient sites in the Church of the Resurrection, the Greeks not only retained their holdings, but even gained certain privileges, as it is stated in the *Firman* of Mustafa II (1695–1703) of 1697. This document explicitly states that the Greeks have priority in all ceremonies in the holy places and that they are the legal patrons not only over the Ethiopians and the Georgians, but also over the Syrians, the Copts and the Serbians.<sup>7</sup>

During the first two decades of the 18th century, Ethiopian monks still resided in Jerusalem, for this is the testimony of A. Morison (1704)<sup>8</sup> and Charles de St. Maure (1721).<sup>9</sup> Charles Thompson (1731)<sup>10</sup> and Elzeario Horn (1725–1744),<sup>11</sup> on the other hand, omit the Ethiopians in their lists of the Christian communities in Jerusalem. Apparently, the Ethiopians had temporarily deserted the monastery, for Horn states that their site had passed into the hands of the Greeks.<sup>12</sup> Thompson even mentions, that, whereas previously there were many nations represented in the Church of the Resurrection, at the time of his pilgrimage only three communities remained, namely, the

<sup>3</sup> Golubovich, G., "Croniche ovvero Annali di Terra Santa", in Biblioteca Bibliografica della Terra Santa. N. S. I. 40.

<sup>4</sup> Doubdan, J., *Le Voyage de la Terre Sainte*. Paris, 1666. I, 48.

<sup>5</sup> Cerulli, E., *Etiopi in Palestina*. Rome, 1947. II, 124.

<sup>6</sup> Timoteos, *Translation and Documents bearing on the Rights of the Copts over the Sultan's Monastery*. Cairo, n. d. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Cerulli, op. cit., II, 176–185.

<sup>8</sup> Morison, A. (1704) in *Themelis, Les Grecs aux Lieux Saints*. Jerusalem, 1921. 55.

<sup>9</sup> St. Maure, Charles de, *A Journey through Greece, Aegypt, Palestine, etc.* London, 1727. 109.

<sup>10</sup> Thompson, *The Travels*. Reading, 1744. III, 128.

<sup>11</sup> Golubovich, G., *Iconographia locorum et monumentorum veterum Terrae Sanctae*. Rome, 1902, 41.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*



Latins, Greeks and Armenians, "all the rest having forsaken their apartments, not being able to bear the excessive rents and extortions imposed upon them by their landlords".<sup>13</sup>

By 1760, some Ethiopians had returned to the Holy City, for Johann Mariti refers to their existence,<sup>14</sup> and in a report by the Custody of the Holy Land to the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith it is stated that Ethiopian pilgrims occasionally pray at the altars of the Armenians and the Copts, since they have no priest in Jerusalem.<sup>15</sup>

The 19th century saw the return of the Ethiopians to the roof of the Chapel of St. Helena. François-René de Chateaubriand (1806) erroneously speaks of a Coptic monk and an Ethiopian bishop<sup>16</sup> which he believed to have seen. Doubtless, this must have been a mistake, for the Ethiopians did not have a bishop in Jerusalem in the 19th century. A more comprehensive picture of the Ethiopians in Jerusalem is presented by Ulrich Seetzen (1806), who speaks of the Dair as-Sultan as inhabited by ten Ethiopian monks and three nuns, as well as by several Coptic married priests.<sup>17</sup> This report is important in so far as it clearly states that by the beginning of the 19th century, monks of both "nations" inhabited the Dair as-Sultan. Augustin Scholz (1820) also observed the Ethiopians in the monastery "behind the Church of the Resurrection." In addition, Scholz testified that the Ethiopians possessed a considerable collection of Ethiopian MSS. Some of these MSS. were of historical nature, the majority, however, were translations of the Holy Scriptures and Patristics.<sup>18</sup>

Until 1820, the Ethiopians were in charge of the keys to the Dair as-Sultan. In October of that year, however, the Ethiopians were expelled from the monastery, and, although their furniture was handed over to them, the key to the monastery was given to a certain Mu'allim Habib, who was a Copt.<sup>19</sup> Shortly afterwards, the Ethiopians must have returned to the Dair as-Sultan. By 1822, the Ethiopians are reported "to have shared the Monastery of the Copts, and saying their Mass in the churches of the Copts and Armenians, by whom they were for the most part supported."<sup>20</sup> After this temporary withdrawal of the Ethiopians, they returned in greater numbers than before. William Jowett (1823-1824) relates that during his visit, about twenty Ethiopians lived in the Dair as-Sultan, who were daily fed by the Armenians who gave them their food as charity. The Ethiopian community included

<sup>13</sup> *Thompson*, loc. cit.

<sup>14</sup> *Mariti, J.*, Reisen durch die Insel Cypern, durch Syrien und durch Palästina. Altenburg, 1777. 378.

<sup>15</sup> *Golubovich, G.*, Biblioteca Bio-Bibliografica della Terra Santa. N. S. II, 178.

<sup>16</sup> *Chateaubriand, de*, Itinéraire de Paris à Jerusalem. Tours, 1891. 251.

<sup>17</sup> *Seetzen, U.*, Reisen durch Syrien, Palästina, Phönizien, etc. Berlin, 1854. II, 20.

<sup>18</sup> *Scholz, M. A.*, Reise in die Gegend zwischen Alexandrien und Parätonium, die Libysche Wüste, Siwa, Egypten, Palästina und Syrien in den Jahren 1820 und 1821. Leipzig. 1822, 275.

<sup>19</sup> *Timoteos*, op. cit., 10.

<sup>20</sup> "Christian Researches in the Mediterranean (1822)", in Goodrich-Freer, Inner Jerusalem. London, 1904. 122.



both monks and nuns.<sup>21</sup> Jowett also mentions the library of the Ethiopians which he examined, and from which he purchased "the whole of the Ethiopic New Testament in two manuscript volumes".<sup>22</sup> Though the number of the Ethiopians had increased, their economic status still remained pitiful. This is evident from several "conversions" of Ethiopian monks to the Greeks and the Armenians. These "conversions" had arisen from the hope of improving their economic condition a little.<sup>23</sup> Ernst Döbel (1834) observed that the Ethiopians in union with the Copts possessed a small chapel on the western side of the Holy Sepulchre.<sup>24</sup> It is more, likely, however, that the Ethiopians attended the celebrations of the Divine Liturgy of the Copts in the Chapel of the Blessed Virgin Mary behind the Holy Sepulchre.

In 1837, the Ethiopians in Jerusalem fell victims to the plague and all perished. Thereupon, at the instigation of the Coptic Patriarch in Cairo and of the Armenians in Jerusalem, the Turks burnt all the Ethiopian books and documents. It is interesting to note, that the Copts deny that such documents ever existed, on the grounds that neither the authorities in Jerusalem nor in Constantinople had any knowledge of such documents. Consul Finn reports, moreover, that the Copts took the keys of the two churches and of the Ethiopian convent, and though they permitted the Ethiopians to reside in the dilapidated ruin of their ancient convent, they locked them up every night.<sup>25</sup> Two years later, Dr. Tattam (1839) noticed one Ethiopian priest who lived with the Copts,<sup>26</sup> and by 1842, the Copts and the Ethiopians joined in the Ceremony of the Holy Fire,<sup>27</sup> though the Ethiopians participated in this Ceremony probably informally. That the Ethiopians had definitely returned to the Dair as-Sultan is also stated by George Williams (1842), who noticed that "the Monastery of the Sultan was presided over by a married priest – a singular anomaly – and it is inhabited by a few Copts and a few Abyssinians".<sup>28</sup>

By the middle of the 19th century, the Ethiopians were subjected to serious pressure from the Muslims, the Armenians, and the Copts. At this time, the British Consul in Jerusalem was James Finn, who is described as an extremely honourable man, who had made it his labour of love to endeavour to protect the Ethiopian community in Jerusalem and to establish justice in the Holy Places.<sup>29</sup> In a letter to Viscount Palmerston (November 30, 1850), Consul Finn states that the Ethiopian priests appealed to him "for protection from the insults of the Mahometans, who annoyed them for wearing white

<sup>21</sup> Jowett, W., *Christian Researches in Syria and the Holy Land in 1823 and 1824* in furtherance of the objects of the Church Missionary Society. London, 1826. II, 212.

<sup>22</sup> Jowett, op. cit., III, 217.

<sup>24</sup> Döbel, E., *Wanderungen im Morgenlande*. Berterode, 1863. 266.

<sup>25</sup> Consul Finn to Viscount Palmerston, Dec. 9, 1850.

<sup>26</sup> Platt, *Journal of a Tour through Egypt, the Peninsula of Sinai, and the Holy Land 1838, 1839*. London, 1841, II. 331.

<sup>27</sup> Bartlett, *Walks about the City and Environs of Jerusalem*. London, 1842. 182.

<sup>28</sup> Williams, G., *The Holy City*. London, 1849. II, 567.

<sup>29</sup> Pankhurst, Sylvia, *Ethiopia. A Cultural History*. Woodford Green, 1955. 490.



turbans". After some time, however, they adopted the dark coloured turbans which were worn generally in Jerusalem. Moreover, since 1848, the Ethiopians had been treated by the Armenians like slaves, or rather like beasts. Bishop Gobat declared that it was the practice of the Armenians to beat the Ethiopians, or chain an iron collar round their necks with a screw to tighten the collar.<sup>30</sup>

In October 1850, the Armenians endeavoured to take from the Ethiopians their church and their monastery. For some years, the Armenians had the possession of the key to the little church<sup>31</sup> which is attached to the Ethiopian monastery, and only occasionally had they admitted the Ethiopians for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy.<sup>32</sup> On October 11, 1850, the Ethiopians recovered the key from the Armenians. Apparently, Samuel Gobat, the Anglican Bishop at Jerusalem, had advised them to seize the key by a stratagem from the Armenians. It is not easy to reconstruct these events which were to have such far-reaching consequences. Whereas Finn records that the Ethiopians recovered the key of the church immediately after the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, while the Coptic deacon was looking in another direction, a title deed of 1850 explicitly states, that the key which had been in the possession of the Copts, was forcibly taken from their hands.<sup>33</sup> At any rate, the object aimed at with the seizure of the key was not only the recovery of the key itself, but also to throw upon the Copts and the Armenians the task of proving their right to regain it. On the arrival of the new Armenian Patriarch in Jerusalem (November 1850), it was agreed that the church was to be kept for both the Copts and the Ethiopians, though the Copts were to have possession of the key. The practice of locking up the Ethiopians was abolished. Moreover, the Armenians continued the daily feeding of a certain number of Ethiopians.

Throughout these turbulent days, the Ethiopians continued to reside on the roof of the Chapel of St. Helena,<sup>34</sup> being assisted by Bishop Gobat and Consul Finn, who provided legal counsel in their struggle against the Armenians and the Copts. In 1850, Bishop Gobat received letters from Ras Ali, the Minister of the Ethiopian Emperor, and Dejjamatch Oobey, and several influential priests, asking him to take their monastery in Jerusalem and the pilgrims under his protection and jurisdiction, and to select one of the pilgrims, whom he considered most suitable for it, to appoint him head of the monastery and to be responsible to him alone.

Several suggestions were made to solve the problem of the key. At one time, the Armenians had suggested to Bishop Gobat, that the key should, for the time being, be deposited every night with some party not concerned in

<sup>30</sup> Consul Finn to Viscount Palmerston, December 9, 1850.

<sup>31</sup> This is the Church of the Four Bodiless Living Creatures.

<sup>32</sup> The details of these ecclesiastical intrigues are to be found in the Correspondence respecting Abyssinians in Jerusalem (1850-1867) presented to the House of Lords by the Command of Her Majesty. London, 1868.

<sup>33</sup> *Timoteos*, op. cit., 18.

<sup>34</sup> *Schulz*, E. W., *Reise in das gelobte Land im Jahre 1851*. Mühlheim, 1853. 222.



the dispute, such as the Pasha or the Prussian Consul. Bishop Gobat proposed to the Pasha, that the Ethiopians should keep the key of the church door, leading from the Dair as-Sultan; while the Armenians were to keep the key of the other door, by which the passage was entered from the Church of the Resurrection.

On June 29, 1852, Bishop Gobat appealed to the Earl of Malmesbury requesting him to authorize him to "superintend and protect" the Ethiopians in Jerusalem, whether pilgrims or resident monks. It is interesting to note, that Chévalier Bunsen of the Royal Prussian Legation in London, who forwarded the letter, felt that the Ethiopian claims seemed just and would contribute essentially in promoting the authority of the bishopric of Jerusalem in which both Prussia and England took an equally great interest.<sup>35</sup>

That Consul Finn was particularly interested and anxious to use his good offices in favour of the Ethiopians is also evident from a letter which he dispatched to the Earl of Malmesbury on August 17, 1852. "I shall very willingly attend to those instructions in favour of the poor and oppressed people, but I fear it will often require delicate management in using those friendly offices, since they have powerful enemies in the rich Armenian community and the vindictive Copts, and are themselves of very hot temperament."

Copts and Ethiopians, however, continued to live together on the roof of the Chapel of St. Helena. Louis Enault (1853) speaks of twenty Ethiopians who lived in the same monastery as the Copts;<sup>36</sup> and Edward Robinson (1852) refers to the Coptic and Ethiopian Monastery Dair as-Sultan, which is now a partial ruin, its arches are round without distinctive features.<sup>37</sup> F. N. Lorenzen (1858) clearly stated that the monastery behind the Church of the Resurrection was used by the Ethiopians, where they offer hospitality to their compatriots.<sup>38</sup>

In June 1858, a party of distinguished Ethiopian visitors headed by an Ethiopian Councillor of State, named Michael (or Gabre Yesus), and a military commander, paid a visit to the Holy Places. In a letter to the Earl of Malmesbury of June 21, 1858, Consul Finn states that the distinguished party resided in the Coptic Monastery since the adjoining Ethiopian Monastery was in too ruined a condition for their reception. Consul Finn impressed the Ethiopian dignitaries with his efficiency and concern for the Ethiopians in Jerusalem. The British Consul had established one of the Ethiopians as President over the other monks, and was now waiting to have this "appointment" confirmed.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Chevalier Bunsen to the Earl of Malmesbury, July 5, 1852.

<sup>36</sup> *Enault, L.*, *La Terre Sainte: Voyage des Quarantes Pèlerins de 1853*. Paris, 1854. 150, 151, 166.

<sup>37</sup> *Robinson, E.*, *Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai, and Arabia Petraea*. London, 1854. III, 198-199.

<sup>38</sup> *Lorenzen, F. N.*, *Jerusalem*. Kiel, 1859. 178.

<sup>39</sup> Consul Finn to the Earl of Malmesbury, June 21, 1858.



In May 1859, the Ethiopians were thrown into extreme terror by a report that the Russians seemed to be interested in some of their sites. A report had reached the Ethiopian community in Jerusalem that the Grand Duke of Russia, Constantine, was about to purchase the Ethiopian monastery from the Copts and to eject the inhabitants from it.<sup>40</sup> The projected purchase, however, was never carried out.

In spite of minor disagreements which occasionally occurred between the Copts and the Ethiopians, relative peace prevailed for three years, until March 1862, when a dispute took place on a Sunday morning during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy in the church which was used by the Ethiopians and the Copts alike. The dispute had begun over the old question of the property of the keys, which were now kept in duplicate, but which were being rendered useless to the Ethiopians as the Copts had taken off the old locks and replaced them by new ones.<sup>41</sup>

On hearing of the disturbance, the Pasha immediately repaired to the place with a battalion of infantry, whom he stationed at the principal gates, namely, in the open square before the Church of the Resurrection, into which he had summoned the Ethiopian "president", and he then placed a guard at the small upper gate of the monastery. The large force had orders to prevent the exit of the Ethiopians.<sup>42</sup> Upon the intervention of Consul Finn, the Ethiopian hegoumenos was released, and though the Pasha tried to force the Ethiopians to surrender the key, they still retained it. At this time, Consul Finn concluded that the time had come to grant to the Ethiopians a document which stated that they were "foreigners of the Turkish rule".<sup>43</sup>

It is informative to read the heartbreaking appeals of Consul Finn to the Foreign Office of Her Majesty's Government, for Finn was convinced that only resolute action on the part of the British Government could redress these wrongs.<sup>44</sup> The British Government, however, temporarily refrained from taking a definite decision; Finn was advised and authorized, in case of need, to use his good offices for the protection of any Ethiopians who might chance to be in Jerusalem, as being members of a Christian Church in spiritual communion with the established Church of England,<sup>45</sup> yet, he was urged to observe "caution and prudence" in his conduct.<sup>46</sup> The Foreign Office continued to maintain a more or less non-committal attitude, being mainly concerned in employing the Ottoman Empire as a bulwark against Russia.

<sup>40</sup> Consul Finn to the Earl of Malmesbury, May 27, 1859.

<sup>41</sup> *Nolde*, "Consultation concerning the Rights of the Abyssinian Community in Palestine", MS., 5. Also Consul Finn to Sir H. Bulwer, March 11, 1862.

<sup>42</sup> Consul Finn to Sir H. Bulwer, March 11, 1862.

<sup>43</sup> It should be remembered that the Turkish Government regarded the Ethiopians as belonging to their nation. The Ethiopians, however, refused to accept Turkish authority on the ground that they were not Turkish subjects, and that they were under British protection in Palestine.

<sup>44</sup> *Pankhurst*, op. cit., 501.

<sup>45</sup> The Earl of Malmesbury to Consul Finn, July 10, 1852.

<sup>46</sup> Earl Russell to Consul Finn, May 29, 1862.



In 1862, Consul Finn, who had spent at least ten years in Jerusalem trying to find a solution for the Ethiopians by which they could maintain their sites, was transferred from the Holy City to the Dardanelles.<sup>47</sup> Thus, as E. Sylvia Pankhurst so pointedly observes, "Ethiopia's religious community in the Holy City was to be sacrificed to strengthen the British sword of Caesar against the Tsar".<sup>48</sup>

Finn's successor, Consul Noel Temple Moore, was more careful and less committal than his predecessor with regard to his concern for the Ethiopian community.

On June 13, 1863, Bishop Gobat addressed a letter to the Ethiopian Emperor Theodore in which he stated: "Your Majesty will be grieved to hear of all the wrong that is done to your subjects, the Abyssinian priests and pilgrims in Jerusalem. The Copts and the Armenians have already taken the Chapel belonging to your Majesty, and now they want to take the whole convent by force".<sup>49</sup> In September 1863, the long standing dispute between the Coptic and the Ethiopian community respecting the proprietorship of the monastery broke out afresh. Consul Moore in his letter to Sir H. Bulwer<sup>50</sup> stated that the Dair as-Sultan had hitherto been in the possession of the Ethiopians, whilst the chapel<sup>51</sup> was common to both parties. And while the Copts laid their case before the Turkish authorities, the Ethiopians addressed themselves to Consul Moore. Moore's efforts to use his good offices in favour of the Ethiopians were met, however, by the Turkish Governor of Jerusalem with the inquiry as to whether there existed in the Consulate any firman or vizirial letter instructing the Governor of Jerusalem to recognize the British protection of the Ethiopians. Moore had to reply in the negative, whereupon the Governor pointed out that in his own general instructions the Ethiopians were designated as Turkish subjects. Moore, recently appointed and purposely keeping aloof, felt himself unable "to form an opinion as to the justice of the verdict by the Governor of Jerusalem."

At the same time, a number of Ethiopians had left the Holy City for Ethiopia where, subsequently, they reported and complained of the injustice which they had experienced. "Mr. Steiger, of the Scottish Mission, relates that when the head of the mission to Jerusalem reached home, he told the King all that had happened in Jerusalem in connection with the expulsion of the Ethiopians from their convent. He reported that the Coptic priests had endeavoured, with the aid of the Turkish Government, to appropriate the Ethiopian Convent to themselves; that the Ethiopian monks, of course, opposed this deed of wrong, upon which scenes of violence ensued, and bloodshed was only prevented by the interference of the English Bishop. The Bishop himself wrote to the King, informing him that he had repeatedly

<sup>47</sup> Pankhurst, S., *Eritrea on the Eve*. Lalibela House. 33.

<sup>48</sup> Pankhurst, S., *Ethiopia: A Cultural History*. 501.

<sup>49</sup> Gobat, S., *Evangelischer Bischof in Jerusalem*. Basel, 1884. 443. Also Goodrich-Freer, A., *Inner Jerusalem*. London, 1904. 122.

<sup>50</sup> Consul Moore to Sir H. Bulwer, September 28, 1863.

<sup>51</sup> This chapel is the Chapel of the Four Bodiless Living Creatures.



begged the assistance of the English Consul in trying to secure the rights of the Ethiopians, but that the Consul had declared such a measure impossible, as he had not received any instructions from his Government to protect the Ethiopians. This surprised and irritated the King the more, as Mr. Finn, the former English Consul, had previously assured him that he was commissioned by his Government to protect the Ethiopians<sup>52</sup>.

Reaction to the non-committal attitude of Consul Moore to the Ethiopians in Jerusalem was soon to have serious consequences. In a letter of Earl Russell to Consul Moore we read of the first acts of retaliation in Ethiopia. "The attention of H. M. Government has been drawn to a statement that one of the causes of the ill-treatment of British subjects has arisen out of your (Moore) not having afforded to Abyssinians in Jerusalem that protection which was given them by your predecessor"<sup>53</sup>. The Emperor Theodore of Ethiopia had retaliated by seizing and imprisoning Captain Cameron, the British Consul at Gondar.<sup>53</sup>

Consul Moore's attitude towards the Ethiopians in Jerusalem caused considerable feeling of uneasiness among British diplomats. In a letter to Consul General Eldridge of Beirut, Earl Russell confides that Consul Moore had failed to afford to the Ethiopians in the Holy City the good offices ordered by H. M. Government to be given to them. In reality, however, the orders of the British Government were so ambiguous, that neither Consul Finn nor Consul Moore pleased the Foreign Office.

Consul Finn was accused of having expressed too much concern for the Ethiopians, and thus he was instructed to use "caution and prudence". Consul Moore, on the other hand, was accused of not having carried out the instructions of H. M. Government " . . . he offered no remonstrance to objections raised by the Turkish Governor to this interference, nor to the assertion of the Pasha that the Ethiopians were Turkish subjects". Earl Russell continues his description of the case to Eldridge by saying, "that Mr. Moore's predecessor had rendered good offices to the Ethiopians, as members of a Christian Church in spiritual communion with the Church of England, and Mr. Moore should equally have remonstrated against the language of the Pasha and the acts of the Turkish authorities, but if a British agent submit, without protest at the right time, to whatever may be said to him by a foreign authority, and thus leave the instructions of his Government to be dealt with in a different spirit to that in which they were framed, such an agent becomes practically of little use"<sup>54</sup>.

Consul Eldridge investigated with much diligence the whole problem and reported to the Earl of Clarendon that Consul Finn "had repeatedly represented, both to the Foreign Office and to H. M. Embassy, that, in order to afford to the Abyssinians any efficient protection against their powerful enemies and oppressors, it would be necessary to procure their recognition by

<sup>52</sup> Earl Russell to Consul Moore, September 27, 1865.

<sup>53</sup> *Pankhurst*, op. cit., 503.

<sup>54</sup> Earl Russell to Consul General Eldridge, September 27, 1865.



the Porte as foreigners, and as under British protection: foretelling, what has since occurred, that, unless this could be done, they would be deprived of their property in Jerusalem in favour of the Copts, with whom the Turkish authorities persisted in treating them as identical, and obstinately denying the right of the English Consul to intervene in their affairs . . . When in 1863 Mr. Moore succeeded Mr. Finn, the quarrel between the rival sects concerning the ownership of the Ethiopian Monastery seemed to have reached its culminating point. Mr. Moore attempted to use his good offices on behalf of the Ethiopians with a view of protecting them from spoliation and assisting in bringing about an amicable adjustment of the dispute, but, on being met with the old objection that the Ethiopians are Rayahs, and that he had no right to interfere, he did not consider himself justified in risking a compromise of his position by trying to sustain by official correspondence a right which he could not substantiate . . . In regard to the alleged influence of Mr. Moore's conduct upon the treatment of British subjects in Abyssinia, I am more inclined to attribute any blame there may be to the injudicious zeal of his predecessor, who from his dispatch of the 21st of June 1858 appears to have informed some Ethiopians of distinction who visited Jerusalem that their fellow-countrymen were in this country, under Her Majesty's gracious protection, and to have addressed a letter to the King of Ethiopia to the same effect<sup>55</sup>

Practically speaking, Eldridge's report led the British to abandon their concern for the Ethiopians in Jerusalem. The British paid heavily for their conduct in the Holy City, and it is interesting to note the various ecclesiastical attempts suggested and actually carried out to obtain the release of the British prisoners from Theodore, the King of Ethiopia.

The most noteworthy attempt was that made by the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople<sup>56</sup> and the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem. The letters of the Armenian Patriarchs requesting the release of the British captives in Ethiopia were transmitted to the Ethiopian King by Sehak, the Armenian archbishop. In his letter to the King, the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem offered assurances of protection and assistance to the Ethiopian residents and pilgrims visiting Jerusalem.<sup>57</sup>

Another plan, suggested by a learned Greek Professor at the Greek Monastery and College of the Holy Cross, was to get in touch with the Coptic Patriarch at Cairo and the Greek Patriarch at Alexandria requesting them to intercede with Theodore, and, at the same time, to have the British Government treat with the King.

Professor Benjamin's suggestion was to offer, by way of ransom, to supply the Ethiopians in their monastery with food to the same amount as the Armenians do, who, being relieved of this obligation, might be induced to

<sup>55</sup> Consul General Eldridge to the Earl of Clarendon, January 20, 1866.

<sup>56</sup> Cf., Boghos, Patriarch of the Armenians to Theodore, King of Abyssinia, February 13, 1867. Consul Moore to Lord Stanley, April 3, 1867, and April 13, 1867. The Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem to King Theodore, March 30, 1867.

<sup>57</sup> It is important for us to note the zeal of the Armenians in this affair.



give up part of the space they have in the Church of the Resurrection for a chapel of the Ethiopians. The Armenians supplied the Ethiopians daily with two large casseroles (tureen) of soup and seventy-five small loaves of bread at the cost of about PT 40 or Fr. 10 per diem, a custom, which had begun 160 years ago, when the Ethiopians were starving, and when, to obtain the allowance of food, they had given up to the Armenians all that space in the Church of the Resurrection, which is now occupied by their monastery.<sup>58</sup>

The Reverend William W. Mallet's report about the Ethiopians in Jerusalem is most instructive. In a memorandum of July 22, 1867, Mallet describes the misery of the Ethiopians. At that time, Fr. Salib was the Ethiopian hegoumenos, and the monastery consisted only of miserable huts and caves adjoining the ruins of the hospice of the Knights of the Order of St. John of Malta. The Ethiopian community had shrunk to seventy-one members, of whom only four were priests. For the past four years they had not been able to celebrate the Divine Liturgy, having been deprived of their place of worship. Mallet observed the poor Ethiopians wandering about the vast courts and passages of the church, as if broken-hearted, reciting their prayers and reading their Bibles against the stone-walls.<sup>59</sup>

In 1868, the British Government published a "White Paper" on the "Correspondence respecting the Abyssinians in Jerusalem", in which the Dair as-Sultan and the Chapel of the Four Bodiless Living Creatures are assigned to the Ethiopians, and the Chapel of the Angel to the Copts.<sup>60</sup>

Apparently, the Ethiopians continued to use the Chapel of the Four Bodiless Living Creatures. Burton (1871) states that on the other side of the enclosure of the Great Court of the Church of the Resurrection . . . there is one (chapel) for the Armenians and the Ethiopians, dedicated to St. John.<sup>61</sup> The attachment of the name of St. John to this chapel was probably suggested by the account of the Four Bodiless Living Creatures in the Apocalypse 4:7.

In 1879, the frictions between the Copts and the Ethiopians broke out anew, and the Copts accused the Ethiopians of causing scandals on the premises of the Dair as-Sultan.<sup>62</sup> In 1890, the Copts attempted to demolish the north wall of the Dair as-Sultan, so as to open a direct entry to the neighbouring Dair Mar Antunius. The first attempt did not succeed on account of the Greek Patriarch in Jerusalem.<sup>63</sup> Then, in 1891, with the permission of the Government, the Copts enlarged the gate to the Dair as-Sultan.

<sup>58</sup> Memorandum respecting the Abyssinians at Jerusalem, by the Rev. Willam W. Mallet. July 22, 1867.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Devine, A., Abyssinia, Her History and Claims to the Holy Places of Jerusalem. London, 1926, 23.

<sup>61</sup> Burton, J., The Inner Life of Syria, Palestine, and the Holy Land. London, 1876, II, 66.

<sup>62</sup> Timoteos, op. cit., 22-23.

<sup>63</sup> Nolde, "Consultation concerning the Rights of the Abyssinian Community in Palestine", 6.



On November 22, 1891, a report was sent by the Executive Council of Jerusalem to the Ministry of Justice and Religion at Constantinople, stating that the Copts requested the expulsion of the Ethiopians from the Dair as-Sultan, since they had committed new scandals in the monastery.<sup>64</sup> The Ethiopians, however, did not obey the request, for a letter by Anba Basilius II, Coptic Archbishop of Jerusalem, to Anba Kirillus V, Patriarch of Alexandria, in 1895, states, that the Ethiopians in Jerusalem had complained to the Emperor Menelik (1889–1913), because they had been evicted from the Dair as-Sultan. The letter states, that the Ethiopians continued to occupy the monastery, and that they rebelled and used every means available to them to annoy the Copts, even though the Copts treated them very nicely by giving them food, drink and clothing as well as pocket-money. When the Copts repaired some of the old buildings, the Ethiopians intervened and opposed this, and when the Copts enlarged the doors, the workers were hit by stones thrown by the Ethiopians.

In 1896, H. E. Lioneff, the Russian Ambassador at Constantinople, accompanied by an Ethiopian delegate and the Grand Vizier, requested a new inquiry into the matter of the possession of the keys, which at that time were in the hands of the Copts.<sup>65</sup>

In 1901, F. V. Verdy du Vernois published in Berlin a scientific monograph on *The Question of the Holy Places*. In this study we read that "the Abyssinian Convent is situated above the Chapel of St. Helena, standing out on the Eastern side of Mount Calvary. They (the Ethiopians) have a special chapel, from which one gets into the Holy Sepulchre through a passage in front of the Church. The Chapel of St. Helena belonged to them, but they gave it up to the Armenians a long time ago."

On May 13, 1902, Anba Mattaus, the Abuna of Ethiopia, Anba Yuannis, the Archbishop of Bahairah-Minufiyah, and Anba Murqus, the Archbishop of Esna and Luxor, submitted a report to Anba Kirillus V, Patriarch of Alexandria, with regard to the property question of the Dair as-Sultan. The three Archbishops had travelled to Jerusalem in an endeavour to arrange the affair in a way which would ensure the brotherly relations between the Coptic and the Ethiopian Churches.<sup>66</sup> Mr. Carletti, the Italian Consul in Jerusalem, presented a letter from the Emperor of Ethiopia to the Archbishops with the request that the keys be given to the Ethiopians.<sup>67</sup>

In 1904, however, the Emperor Menelik broke off relations with the Coptic Patriarch, claiming the Dair as-Sultan on the ground that it was given to the Ethiopians by St. Helena. At that time, the Turks promised to see that the monastery should be given to the Ethiopians, and the Russians were also favourable, but the *status quo* was supported by the British, and, in the end, Turkey was compelled to do nothing in this matter.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>64</sup> *Timoteos*, op. cit., 24–26.

<sup>65</sup> *Timoteos*, op. cit., 6.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *King, A.*, *The Rites of Eastern Christendom*. Rome, 1947, I, 537.



During these turbulent years, Anba Timuthaus, the Coptic Archbishop of Jerusalem, resided for most of his time in Jaffa. Goodrich-Freer, writing in 1904, mentioned, that the Coptic bishop lived in Jaffa, possibly, because the Copts possessed but scanty accommodation in Jerusalem.

In 1905, the Ethiopian Menelik Commission to Jerusalem approached the various heads of the Christian communities in Jerusalem with a request to state their judgement on the ownership of the Dair as-Sultan. The following statements are excerpts of the testimonies which were received by the Imperial Commission.

H. B. Yoachim Toymayan, Patriarchal Vicar of the Armenian Catholics, stated that the Dair as-Sultan belonged to the Ethiopians (August 23, 1905). "I have also seen that the Abyssinians always celebrate their religious offices in their two chapels, one of St. Michael, and the other of the Forty Martyrs,<sup>69</sup> which are situated in the passage by which one descends from the Monastery of the Sultan to the atrium of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre."<sup>70</sup> Mgr. G. al-Mu'allam, Chorepiscopus of Jerusalem and Patriarchal Vicar of the Maronite Church stated categorically, that the Monastery of the Sultan is the property of the Ethiopians (August 25, 1905).<sup>71</sup> H. B. Damianos, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, stated that the Ethiopians had dwelt in the Monastery of the Sultan from time immemorial, and that the monastery is known to the Greeks to be the property of the Ethiopians. Moreover, the Greek Patriarch mentioned, that a Coptic priest lived among the Ethiopians, and that the religious services in the two chapels have been interrupted (September 7, 1905).<sup>72</sup> H. B. Elias, Syrian Archbishop of Jerusalem, wrote that the Ethiopians had dwelt in this monastery since remote times (September 14, 1905).<sup>73</sup> H. B. Artian, the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem, testified, that the Ethiopians had dwelt from time immemorial in the Monastery called Dair as-Sultan, although the key of this monastery was in the hands of the Copts for the last forty years. The Capitulary Vicar and Administrator of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Aloisius Piccardo, stated, that, on the evidence of the elders of the Latin community, the Monastery of the Ethiopians has been *ab antiquo* at the disposal of, and, in consequence, in the possession of the Ethiopians.<sup>74</sup>

On a petition submitted by the Ethiopian Delegation at Constantinople, an Imperial Decree was issued to reconsider the question of the Monastery of the Sultan, in order to win the good will of the Ethiopians towards the Ottoman Government. On December 27, 1907, the High Council in Jerusalem, in reply to a memorandum by the Grand Vizier, stated among other things: "Although the Abyssinians took on some occasions the key of the Sultan's Monastery, yet, as a result of the protests of the Copts, a searching

<sup>69</sup> This can be only the Church of the Four Bodiless Living Creatures.

<sup>70</sup> *Nolde*, op. cit., 8.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.



inquiry into the matter was started by the Government in 1218 A. H., which proved that the Copts were the rightful owners of the said monastery." The dispute was consequently settled on this basis, and the key of the new lock was delivered to the Copts and is still in their hands. Several years ago, the Copts wanted to repair the monastery and widen the gate, but the Abyssinians meanwhile treated the Coptic Archbishop disrespectfully with the result, that the Copts have since prevented the Abyssinians from saying their prayers in the upper-chapel in the Sultan's Monastery, and, for the last seventeen years, the Abyssinians have never been allowed to enter the chapel. The High Council went on to say that the firmans referred to in the petition of the Ethiopian Delegation stated only that the Abyssinians, the Georgians, and the Serbians are under the jurisdiction of the Greek Patriarch, that in the firmans in connection with the *status quo*, however, no allusion is made to the Abyssinians, and that the *status quo* of the said monastery is based on a firman issued in this respect and has been carried out ever since, as is confirmed by official documents.<sup>75</sup> On April 6, 1908, Elias Awad Bey, Murqus Hanna Bey and Sidarus Bisharah Bey submitted the report on their findings which was based on an investigation undertaken in Jerusalem. This report, among other things, confirmed that the Sublime Porte recognized the Coptic ownership of the Dair as-Sultan, and that the Ethiopians had attacked the Copts on more than one occasion, and that, thereupon, the Copts had discontinued to celebrate the Divine Liturgy in the Chapel of the Angel. The report also included the demand of the Ethiopians, that the keys be delivered to the Greek Patriarchate. This, however, was considered to be merely a trick to obtain the possession of the same. According to this report, the Copts had agreed to offer to the Ethiopians 240 square metres in order to build a church, and to accord to them the right to celebrate in the Church of the Four Bodiless Living Creatures, but the Ethiopians had refused to accept this offer.<sup>76</sup>

In 1924, Ras Tafari attempted to obtain the possession of the Sultan's Monastery, but failed.<sup>77</sup> On May 4, 1924, the Maglis al-Milli, which is the Coptic Community Council, and Ras Tafari met in conference in Cairo, and Murqus Simaika Pasha impressed upon those present the views that the Dair as-Sultan belonged to the Copts, and that the Copts were in possession of legal documents to substantiate their claim, and furthermore, that the Courts at Constantinople had proven the Coptic ownership of the Dair as-Sultan. In June 1924, the Maglis al-Milli asked for a meeting of the General Assembly of the Copts, at which the Copts reaffirmed their decision not to grant any rights to the Ethiopians with regard to the property-question of the Monastery of the Sultan.

On March 20, 1925, Baron B. Nolde, formerly Professor of Jurisprudence at the University of Petrograd and late Member of the Permanent Court of

<sup>75</sup> *Timoteos*, op. cit., 31.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *King*, op. cit., I., 537.



Arbitration at The Hague, submitted his report regarding the question of the property-rights of the Dair as-Sultan. Nolde points out, that the decisive answer to the problem hinges on the concept of the *status quo ante*. What was the *status quo ante* which has been so often invoked in the disputes? A clarification of this point must be the basis of the juridical discussion of such a subject. Nolde holds, that the *status quo* sanctioned by the Turkish firmans, International treaties, and "time immemorial" is the genuine *status quo*, and not the surprising retrograde decision of 1862. Thus Nolde quotes the Firman of Sultan Mahmud II (1808–1839) which aimed at a settlement of a dispute between the Greeks and the Armenians, and which expressly laid down that in future no litigation must occur among the various Christian communities, each of which was to keep its own convents and possessions. Moreover, the firman in question explicitly mentions the Ethiopians and admits their right to ownership, at the moment of promulgation in the following paragraph:

"There exists a Church called Carmana (The Holy Sepulchre) and another called Bethlehem. Such places remain the property of those to whom they have been allotted in far back ages, and according to a document dated the year 15 A. H. and signed by the Great Umar al-Khattab, nobody can make opposition to the religious ceremonies, celebrated in their respective churches by the various communities (Georgians, Copts, Abyssinians, Syrians, Armenians, Jacobites, Maronites)."

This principle, laid down in the firman of Mahmud II in 1834 was confirmed by that of Abdul Megid (1839–1861) in 1841. The Turks, as well as the French and the Russians accepted these firmans as the only juridical bases on which any legal decision could be founded. Nolde concludes, that the Ethiopian ownership of the Dair as-Sultan was anterior to the firmans of 1834 and 1841, and that this ownership was absolute, and included the use of the chapels adjoining the above mentioned monastery and of course the possession of the keys.<sup>78</sup>

In 1933, A. Z. Aescoly published the second inventory of Ethiopian manuscripts at Dair as-Sultan.<sup>79</sup> Comparing the number of Ethiopian residents between the years 1900, the year in which Enno Littmann gathered the material for his first inventory, and 1933, it is interesting to notice the considerable increase of monks and nuns during the first part of the 20th century. Whereas in 1900, there were 55 monks and priests and 18 nuns in the Holy City, this number increased by 1933 to 71 monks and priests and 33 nuns. Of the total Ethiopian congregation of 92 monks and nuns, 23 monks resided at the Dair as-Sultan, 8 monks at the Monastery of St. Takla Haymanot, 20 monks at the Monastery of the Garden of Paradise, 8 monks at the River Jordan. From the statistics of Aescoly it appears that all 33 nuns lived in the Monastery of the Garden of Paradise.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Devine, A., op. cit., 43–44.

<sup>79</sup> The first inventory was published by Enno Littmann, "Aus den abessinischen Klöstern in Jerusalem", Zeitschrift für Assyriologie. XVI (1902), 102–124, 364–388.

<sup>80</sup> Aescoly, A. Z. "La Colonie Ethiopienne à Jérusalem", Aethiopica (1935) 1, 44–49, 88–95, 20–26.



In April 1939, the Copts wished to carry out certain repairs at the Dair as-Sultan, but the Government refused to grant permission for this on the grounds that the right to carry out repairs was disputed by another community. However, in accordance with the established practice, the Government would undertake the necessary maintenance without prejudice to any existing rights or claims which might be associated with the building. In June 1945, the Ethiopians were warned by the Office of the District Commissioner in Jerusalem, about their having carried out some work of redecoration in the chapel situated on the western side of the roof of St. Helena's chapel. (This is the Ethiopian chapel of the Saviour). It was pointed out, that this action constituted a contravention of the *status quo* in that neither the one nor the other community was allowed to do anything which might prejudice their mutual claims and rights to the monastery.

In 1950, the Ethiopians removed two blocks of wood from one of the cells in the Dair as-Sultan, but the Department of Public Works replaced them in their original position so as not to violate the *status quo*. Again in 1952, the Ethiopians were reprimanded by the Government for violating the *status quo* by opening certain doors of the Dair as-Sultan for their Easter celebrations, and for appointing a caretaker for the monastery.

On February 17, 1959, Anba Philippus, the Ethiopian Bishop of Jerusalem, requested the Governor of Jerusalem to restore to them the state of property-rights which they had enjoyed when the *status quo* Imperial Decree of 1834 was published.

In February 1961, the Jordanian Minister of the Interior decided to announce that the Dair as-Sultan belonged to the Ethiopians, and not to the Copts. Moreover, Abuna Butrus al-Baramusi, a Coptic monk who had resided in the Dair as-Sultan for the purpose of safeguarding the property-rights of the Copts, was to be expelled from the monastery. The Jordanian Government stipulated that the Copts were permitted to pass through the Dair-as-Sultan to the Church of the Resurrection twice a year, namely on Easter and on the Feast of the Invention of the Holy Cross.

The following is the text of the decision issued by the Ministry of the Interior, the District Commissioner's Office, Jerusalem on Ramadan 7th, 1380 A. H., February 22, 1961.

"According to the decision of the esteemed council of Ministers in its session of February 12, 1961 to accept and approve the agreement of His Excellency the Minister of the Interior on the recommendations pertinent to the dispute over the ownership of Dair as-Sultan in Jerusalem between the Abyssinian and Coptic communities, I submit herewith the recommendations regarding this matter for their immediate implementation by the above mentioned communities with the knowledge that this decision is considered final and binding on both parties, who are to carry it out and conform to it in accordance with the rules of Article 3 of the Edict of the Holy Land - Palestine, July 25, 1924, and Article 2 of Regulation No. 28 (1950), and the Royal Decree issued on July 19, 1950:

1. The keys of the north gate shall be retained by the Orthodox Copts and they shall have permission to use it as a gateway to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre across the roof of the convent only during the holidays which are recognized as



- allowing them such a passage, and these are, the Feast of the Cross and Easter (Holy Saturday) on condition that each time the Government supervises this operation on a fixed time and under no circumstances may the Copts use it.
2. The removal of the Coptic monk who stays with the Abyssinians at Dair as-Sultan.
  3. The Declaration of the ownership of the Abyssinian community to Dair as-Sultan in its known borders which is presently occupied by them, together with the interior churches which are located on the pathway to the court of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, i. e. the Church of the Angel Michael and the Church of the Four Animals.
  4. The transfer of the key of the south gate of Dair as-Sultan from the Copts to the Abyssinians or its retention by the Government to facilitate the first recommendation mentioned above.
  5. The transfer of the key of the Church of the Angel Michael, the door of which is located on the eastern side of the public square outside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, from the Copts to the Abyssinians.
  6. Should the Copts refuse to comply with this matter, the locks of the north gate, the south gate, and the west gate which is the gate of the Church of the Angel Michael, would be substituted by other locks by the Government and their keys would be given to the Abyssinians; however, the right of passage to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre given to the Copts only on the recognized holidays would continue as mentioned in the first clause above.
  7. As for the dome of St. Helena's Church which is located in the centre of the yard of Dair as-Sultan and around which the Abyssinian procession takes place, it is a possession of the Armenians in their capacity as the proprietors of the Church of St. Helena and they have the right to repair and improve it from the interior, i. e. from the Church of St. Helena. As for the exterior, where the dome seems to be in the centre of the yard of Dair as-Sultan, the Government would carry out any checks and repairs that may become necessary.

Respectfully

Ihsan Hashem

Governor of Jerusalem"

When Anba Basilius IV, the Coptic Archbishop of Jerusalem, refused to carry out the decisions of the Jordanian Government, the Minister of the Interior gave orders to the Director of the General Security to carry out the decisions, if necessary, by force, and Anba Basilius IV was chased from the Coptic Patriarchate in such a manner that he was unable to get hold of his personal belongings. This action gave rise to a protest which the Archbishop submitted to the Jordanian Government in which he stated the ill-treatment which he and his Coptic priests had encountered.

The time of the decision of the Jordanian Government, which may have been related to the expected visit of H. M. Haile Selassie I to the Holy City, caused serious repercussions. The Jordanian Army requisitioned the Dair as-Sultan and removed all the locks of the doors and replaced them by new locks, the keys of which were given to the Ethiopians. Later, the Ethiopians, satisfied by the decision and action of the Jordanian Government, took over the Dair as-Sultan and prepared the Chapel of the Four Bodiless Living Creatures in view of the forthcoming visit of the Emperor.



On March 6, 1961, Anba Kirillus VI, Pope of Alexandria, addressed a personal message to H. M. Haile Selassie in which he described the developments which had taken place and in which he requested that the *status quo* of the Dair as-Sultan be preserved so as to insure the unity between the two churches. His Holiness also sent a letter to Anba Basilius, the Patriarch-Catholicus of the Church of Ethiopia in Addis Ababa.

In addition, Anba Kirillus VI sent a message of protest to King Hussein of Jordan pointing out the action taken by the Jordanian Government and demanding the restoration of the monastery to the Copts. On March 8, 1961, it was decided to ban the annual pilgrimage of the Copts to Jerusalem in protest against the requisitioning of the Dair as-Sultan by the Jordanian Government and its handing over of the same to the Ethiopian monks in Jerusalem. Moreover, it was decided in Cairo to send two bishops to Amman to confer with King Hussein and to ask him to return the Dair as-Sultan to the Copts.

In the meantime, the Dair as-Sultan issue was brought to the attention of the U.A.R. Government, and Anba Athanasius, the Archbishop of Beni Suef, and Anba Yuhannis, the Archbishop of Gizah, called on al-Sayed Ali Sabri, Minister for Presidential Affairs, to hand him a note giving details of the documents held by the Coptic Patriarchate proving that the Dair as-Sultan was owned by the Copts. Al-Sayed Ali Sabri placed the matter before President Gamal Abd al-Nasser. Furthermore, Istafan Bassili, member of the Coptic Maglis al-Milli, called on al-Sayed al-Dardiri Ismail, the Acting Secretary of the Arab League, with a request for the Arab League to use its good offices with the Jordanian authorities so that the ownership of the Dair as-Sultan may be restored to the Coptic Orthodox Church.

In the discussions, the Copts argued mainly on the basis of two legal documents, a title-deed of August 22, 1687 which was sealed by the official seal of the local Sharia Judge, Sheikh Ahmad Hatem, and a document issued by the local authorities on May 18, 1863. Both documents state that the Dair as-Sultan belonged to the Copts.

At its meeting on March 11, 1961, the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church expressed its gratitude to the President of the United Arab Republic for his intervention in the issue. At the same time, the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church decided to bring the question before the National Assembly, and a delegation, headed by Anba Yuhannis, Archbishop of Gizah, called on al-Sayed Anwar al-Sadat, Speaker of the Assembly, and on al-Sayed Kamal Eddin Hussein, Controller General of the National Union in the Southern Region of the U.A.R.

Dair as-Sultan had become a political issue between the United Arab Republic on the one hand, and Ethiopia and Jordan on the other hand. On March 18, 1961, H. M. Haile Selassie addressed a note to His Holiness Anba Kirillus VI in which the Emperor stated that he considered the Dair as-Sultan issue closed. A similar statement was received by the Patriarch-Catholicus of the Church of Ethiopia.



On March 21, 1961, the Coptic Orthodox delegation, consisting of Anba Yuhannis, Archbishop of Gizah, Anba Baniamin, Archbishop of Minufiyah, Anba Antunius, Archbishop of Sohag, and Iskandar Damian, Dimitri Rizk and Istafan Bassili, left Cairo for Amman to present the Coptic Orthodox documents to King Hussein.

Upon the presentation of the Coptic documents, the Governor of Jerusalem signed a letter on April 1, 1961 in regard to the suspension of the previous decision. It should be noted, that this letter, unlike the previous decision, does not rely on a decision from the Council of Ministers. The text of the letter reads as follows:

I refer to my letter to you under the same number dated February 22, 1961 regarding the decision of the esteemed Council of Ministers of February 12, 1961 in connection with the declaration of ownership of Dair as-Sultan and its possessions to the Abyssinian denomination. I wish to submit herewith the decision taken in this matter by the Government of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for your information and compliance.

It has been decided that action relating to the decision of the esteemed Council of Ministers referred to above be held in abeyance at the present time. This means that the situation pertinent to this convent be restored to the status quo ante until the completion of the study of the documents submitted by the Coptic community, copies of which would be furnished to the Abyssinians for their study, refutation and answer. The Abyssinian denomination is requested, therefore, to refrain from using the keys in their possession except to the extent they used them prior to the above mentioned decision and in accordance with the rules which will be issued by the Governor in conformity with the status quo, with the knowledge that any usage of the keys contrary to these conditions would entail their return to and retention by the Government until such a time when the final decision is issued.

While submitting this decision to you, I am confident that you will do your best to cooperate with the authorities concerned to keep a friendly atmosphere over the relations among both communities. Further, you shall find the Government, as usual in its relations with you, cordial and responsive to that which conforms to the general welfare based upon the principles of justice and equality.

Respectfully  
Ihsan Hashem

On April 2, 1961, the Orthodox Palm Sunday, Archbishop Basilius IV telephoned from Amman to His Holiness Anba Kirillus VI, informing him that the keys to the Dair as-Sultan had been restored to the Copts, and that a Palm Sunday procession, in which a number of Coptic Bishops participated, used the Dair as-Sultan to go to the Church of the Resurrection for the Palm Sunday celebrations. Bahgat al-Talhouni, the Jordanian Prime Minister, had reversed his decision, and the Copts regained the rights for the Dair as-Sultan.

Thereupon, Anba Kirillus VI delegated a Coptic Orthodox mission to express thanks to President Gamal Abd al-Nasser for the restoration of the ownership of the Dair as-Sultan to the Coptic Church. Members of the delegation, which called at the Republican Palace to express the Patriarch's



gratitude, included Yussef Saad, Archbishop Michael Abd al-Masih, and Yussef Girgis. Moreover, Anba Kirillus VI decided that Coptic Orthodox pilgrims could now attend the annual Easter celebrations in the Holy Land, and that special chartered flights would leave Cairo for Jerusalem during the Holy Week.

Anba Philippus, the Ethiopian Bishop of Jerusalem was called back to Addis Ababa, and the Patriarch-Catholicus of the Church of Ethiopia decided that the Easter celebrations for the Ethiopians in Jerusalem would be cancelled.

On February 10, 1961, Anba Basilius, Patriarch-Catholicus of the Church of Ethiopia, arrived in Cairo on his way to Jerusalem. The Ethiopian Patriarch called on the Pope of Alexandria, and the meeting, which lasted two hours, was attended by many members of the clergy.<sup>81</sup>

Due to the death of Her Imperial Majesty, Empress Menen, however, Anba Basilius was compelled to interrupt his journey and to return to Ethiopia.

In July 1962, the Copts and the Ethiopians received letters from King Hussain advising them that the Jordanian Government would re-examine the questions pertaining to the property-rights of the Dair as-Sultan. In view of this, al-Sayed Muhammad Abdul Khalek Hassuna, the Secretary of the Arab League, offered his services to mediate in the dispute between the Coptic and the Ethiopian Church, safeguarding, however, the interests of the Copts in Jerusalem. On July 16, 1962, a mission representing the Coptic Church, consisting of Mitri Rizk and Istafan Bassili, went to Jerusalem to enter into discussions with Dr. Hazem Nussaibah, the Jordanian Foreign Minister. On July 24, 1962, the issue of the Dair as-Sultan was discussed at the meeting of the Palestine Experts Conference in Beirut, where it was presented by al-Sayed Muhammad Abdul Khalek Hassuna.<sup>82</sup>

In August 1962, it was suggested by the Governor of Jerusalem, that a compromise ought to be reached, and that the Ethiopians should obtain the Church of the Four Bodiless Living Creatures, and that the Copts should obtain the Church of St. Michael. Moreover, it was suggested, that the Copts should have the right to pass through the Dair as-Sultan at least twice a year, *i. e.* on Easter and on the Feast of the Invention of the Cross. However, both parties did not accept the suggestion.

*(Teile IV und V im nächsten Heft.)*

<sup>81</sup> Al-Ahram, March 7, 1961 – April 5, 1961. Egyptian Gazette, March 8, 1961 – April 4, 1961. La Bourse Egyptienne, March 8, 1961 – April 4, 1961. Also, Le Progrès Egyptien and Le Journal d'Egypte, same dates. The London TIMES, April 4, 1961.

<sup>82</sup> Egyptian Gazette, July 16, 1962.