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CONFLICTS AND COMPROMISES OVER THE NILE WATER BETWEEN  
STATES OF THE RIVER SOURCE AND ESTUARY: A HISTORICAL  
STUDY THROUGH THE EGYPTIAN-ETHIOPIAN RELATIONS (1820-  
1935)

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**ABSTRACT**

The polarity significance of fresh water has increased to express the concerns of the Arab world in general at present and its aspirations for the future with the beginning of the 21 centuries. In the fifties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the countries suffering from water shortage was too few, but today they increased up to 26 countries worldwide. As of the year 2000, water in the Middle East became a strategic commodity that exceeds oil and food. The problem of water in the Arab countries is not just of a quantitative shortage in the supply of fresh water in the face of the growth of the population and the increase in their needs for the purposes of agriculture, industry and drinking, but there are political, economic and legal dimensions, especially in countries where rivers pass that do not control their sources and projects other Arab and African parties. We chose the location of the problem of this water in the Nile, and reviewed the most important compromises that took place between Egypt, the estuary and the source countries of Abyssinia (currently Ethiopia) and the rest of the Nile basin countries from the modern era until the beginning of the Italian-Ethiopian war in 1935. In order to explore from international treaties and agreements, all water disputes are between the source and estuary parties, i.e., between countries competing for a fair share of water.

**INTRODUCTION**

The problem of international conflict and the relationship of such conflict over water, has received a great attention lately at the level of countries. The problem of water has imposed itself as one of the most important main issues that carry hope for future cooperation, or warn of conflicts and wars regarding it, as well

as fear of the role of powers of foreign affairs and the reality of the role it plays in the relations within the regional system. It was necessary to investigate the beginnings of the conflict, the conflict and the projects of violations and compromises from the period of Muhammad Ali Pasha until the beginning of the Italian-Ethiopian war and Italian control over it (1820-1935).

The research was divided into an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion. The first topic studied the geographical and geostrategic importance of the Nile and the extent of its impact on Egypt and its distinguished geographical location in the north of the African continent, considering it an estuary country. The second topic discussed the beginnings of the conflict and compromises over the Nile since (1820-1882) from the era of Muhammad Ali Pasha until the British occupation of Egypt in 1882. The third and final topic analyzed the water relations between the river source and river estuary countries (Egypt and Ethiopia), and the most important international Nile agreements in addition to the Tana reservoir project until 1935. The conclusion set the most prominent findings of the research, and the research relied on a large group of sources related to the topic of research, which can be referenced in the list of sources.

### ***The Geographical and Geostrategic Importance of The Nile***

The Nile has acquired a special significance for Egypt, as it was and still the backbone of life and its existence is associated with its name. The Greek historian "Herodotus" mentioned that Egypt is the gift of the Nile, that Egypt is the gift of the Nile geographically and the gift of the Egyptians civilly. On its banks, there was one of the most important, oldest and most ancient civilizations in the world, the civilization of the Nile. (Taia, 2007). The Nile is one of the longest rivers in the world, with a length of (6825 km<sup>2</sup>), (Claire, 2002) and it extends from Victoria Lake in south-central Africa to its mouth in the Mediterranean Sea with an area estimated at (3.1 million km<sup>2</sup>), and thus it is the second largest river in terms of the basin area (Arcunp, 1999). The Nile originates from three independent sources: the Ethiopian plateau, the tropical plateau, and the Bahr al-Ghazal basin in southwestern Sudan. The Ethiopian sources are among the most important sources of the Nile for Egypt, despite their names, which supply the main Nile at Aswan with about (85%) of the average annual revenue (Al-Zawka, 2000). From its source to its estuary, the Nile crosses over nine African countries: (Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire), Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt). Thus, the Nile is one of the types of successive rivers, i.e. whose course penetrates the territories of two or more states in succession, so that there is a source state, an estuary state, and the states of the middle river course (Salama, n.d).

The water of the Ethiopian plateau gathers in a number of main tributaries that increase the flow of the Nile to the Mediterranean Sea. The Blue Nile originates from the south of Lake Tana, which is a reservoir for the water of the tributaries close to the western edge of the Ethiopian plateau. It was called blue because of its dark sediments, and it is one of the most important tributaries of the Nile in relation to Egypt, which supplies it with about (56%) of its water (Murehead, 1966). As for the second tributary, it is represented by the Atbara River, which

stems from the Ethiopian highlands, northeast of Tana Lake. The Atbara River and the Blue Nile share in achieving two important things for the mouth of the first, which is the provision of natural revenue that ensures the need for agriculture in Egypt, and the second is the addition of sediments and the renewal of soil vitality continuously (Jadarab, 2000). The third tributary is represented by the Sobat River resulting from the confluence of the two tributaries Begur and Yaro, which flows into the Nile to give it an impetus to continue its flow towards the north towards Khartoum, the capital of Sudan. (Sharaf, 1994) The lost areas of swamps and dams in the Bahr al-Jabal and Bahr al-Ghazal basins, in addition to the fact that its water reaches Egypt after the arrival of the water of the Blue Nile about a month and a half (Jawdah, 1985) As for the last tributary flowing with the flood water from the north of the Ethiopian plateau to the Nile, it is the Atbara River, an estimated distance of (310) from the coupling of the White and Blue Niles at Khartoum. The annual average water discharge is about (1108 billion m<sup>3</sup>) at the city of Atbara from the Nile (Taia, 2007).

To contemplate the geographical and geological characteristics of the Nile basin, which provided Egypt throughout history with the flood water and the silt that formed the delta and its fertile lands, in addition to the cultural and political weight of Egypt, which greatly affected making Egypt one of the important Nile Basin countries. Egypt's strategic location allows it a middle position among the countries of the world, and its geographical location represents the direct entrance to the African continent from the north, especially with the extension of the Nile course from its mouth in the north in Egypt to its extended sources (Moainis, 1989).

### ***The Beginnings of The Conflict and Compromises Over the Water of The Nile (1820-1882)***

The conflict and the dispute over the water of the Nile was an ancient conflict, but it did not take an international dimension as it is now at the present time. If we trace the historical roots of the conflict between Ethiopia, the source state, and Egypt, the estuary state, we will find that it dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the advent of modern European colonialism, when the colonial leaders of the West at that time invited the King of Abyssinia to divert the course of the Nile, where they intended to invade Egypt from the south. Moreover, the Ethiopians even threatened to block the Nile and not reach Egypt before Muhammad Ali Pasha (1805-1849) took over the rule of Egypt (Arabic world file, 1980). This situation continued until Muhammad Ali Pasha took over the power in Egypt, when he made many changes represented in the implementation of military projects in the region at the expense of the Ottoman Empire. The ambition of Muhammad Ali Pasha began to appear towards the Horn of Africa, when the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839) appointed Ibrahim Pasha, son of Muhammad Ali, to the power of his grandfather in July of 1820 as a reward for his services in the Hijaz and Yemen after his victory over the Wahhabi movement in addition to overthrowing Diriyah in 1819 (ibid, 1989). When the power of his grandfather was organized in the province of Habash, Ibrahim Pasha became known as the governor of his grandfather and the army, and since that time he became the governor of Egypt, a kind of sovereignty over the province of Habash under the Ottoman subordination (Haraz, 1974).

The state of Abyssinia witnessed during the period of its Egyptian rule (1820-1840) an important turning point. After extending his control over Sudan in 1820, Muhammad Ali Pasha tried to gain military control over Suakin and Massawa, the two most important ports on the Red Sea. In addition, he seized of key ports in Yemen located on the Red Sea and placed garrisons there. Britain was able to control over Aden in 1839, and thus he was able to spread his influence on the Asian coast of the Red Sea (Abadtha, 1976). A large number of historians agree that the motives of Muhammad Ali Pasha to control Sudan were not only the search for gold in the Benishangul area, and the search for men to join the army, but that the main reason was the discovery of the sources of the Nile and securing them in order to preserve Egypt security to secure the sources of the Nile against any threat by the Ethiopian side to prevent the Nile water from Egypt (Ibrahim, 1964). In that regard, a foreign passerby mentioned that Muhammad Ali Pasha aspired to plan to conquer Ethiopia to be the master of the entire Nile from its mouth to its source (Washington, 1822). The rulers of Ethiopia looked with suspicion and unease at the issue of the extension of Egyptian influence towards Sudan and its annexation of parts that Ethiopia claimed its ownership, especially the common borders with Ethiopia from the north and west and its adjacent states of trees to the north and Gendar to the west, as well as their knowledge of the intention of Muhammad Ali Pasha to bring their country to it.

This led to tense relations between Egypt and Ethiopia, and anxiety and unrest prevailed on the borders of the Egyptian administration in Sudan with Ethiopia (Al-Jamal, 1959), to the extent that the King of Ethiopia sent a threatening message to Muhammad Ali Pasha in which he said: The means of punishing the Egyptians is in our hands. This threat was intended to prevent the Nile from Egypt. Despite all of the foregoing, the campaign against Sudan did not go beyond conquering Dongola, Berber, Shendi, Sennar, and Kordofan, especially after Muhammad Ali Pasha received warnings from the British General Consul in Egypt not to cross the Ethiopian borders, on the part of Sudan to conquer Ethiopia (Hajjar, 1976). Muhammad Ali Pasha saw that the wisdom now requires him, in these circumstances, to strengthen his relations with the owners of the central authority in Ethiopia, to the extent that he sent to them messengers laden with gifts, expressing to them the sincerity of his intentions and his desire to achieve peace, and to exchange good relations with Ethiopia (Haraz, 1976). However, this attempt failed, along with his attempts to annex the areas along the coast of the African Red Sea, from the Pasha border in the north to Ras Gradfu in the south, including Ethiopia, to the possession of the regime of Muhammad Ali Pasha (ibid, 75). It is shown that Muhammad Ali Pasha did not want to open a front on Egypt from the south, as he was facing pressure from the Ottoman Empire and European countries during the thirties of the nineteenth century. So, he tried to secure Egypt southern borders by strengthening his relations with Ethiopia.

When Abbas I (1849-1854) took over the rule of Egypt, he found it difficult for the state of Egypt to supervise Massawa and Suakin and to consolidate Egyptian-Ottoman sovereignty along the coast of the African Red Sea to Cape Gradfor, especially after the forces and resources of Egypt were exhausted due to its exit from a long struggle with the Sublime Porte and European countries

(France, Britain, Russia, Prussia, Austria). It was necessary for Egypt to restore its activity and improve its conditions with the Ottoman Empire, so he returned the ports of Suakin and Massawa to it, citing the distance between these two ports and the government center in Khartoum and Cairo, as well as his lack of desire for any friction between the Egyptian authorities and the Ethiopian authorities (Abdul-sayyaed, 2003). This intensified the Ethiopian attacks on the lands of Sudan, despite the desire and keenness of Abbas I to maintain calm between the two countries (Al-Jaali, 1979). Muhammad Said Pasha (1854-1863) assumed the rule of Egypt at a time when the Kassa Emperor of Ethiopia (1855-1868) was working to unify Ethiopia under his rule, and this was already done for him on February 7, 1855, and he was crowned Emperor of Ethiopia in the name of Theodore II (Haraz, 1960). Theodore II greedily intended to inflict a crushing defeat on the Egyptians in Sudan by diverting the Nile water to another stream to destroy Egypt and subjugate the Sennar district (Stanely, n.d). However, he initially wanted to unify Ethiopia and establish good relations with Egypt at the beginning of his reign, as it was not reasonable to open a new and strong front. This matter coincided with Saeed Pasha's desire to follow the path of peaceful negotiations instead of waging war (Yahya, 1959). However, the Ethiopian raids continued on the Sudanese border, and news spread from Cairo, confirming Tudor's intention to launch a major attack on the eastern border of Sudan. This was one of the reasons that made Muhammad Saeed Pasha think of visiting Sudan to put an end to these problems, either peacefully or militarily, to ensure the stability of matters and trade routes (Cromer, 1960). However, the Ottoman Empire prevented him from that and advised him to send the Coptic Patriarch (Cyril IV) of high rank to Ethiopia, so that he might succeed in mediating and restoring good relations between the two countries (Sami, 1936). The patriarch agreed to carry out this political mission, and his acceptance stemmed from his position as the head of two churches representing two parts of the Bishopric of Alexandria, to prevent the shedding of water between the two countries, and to work for the establishment of security and the prosperity of trade in them. The patriarch traveled after Muhammad Saeed had provided him with precious gifts for the Ethiopian Emperor Theodore II, and he was keen to keep this mission secret to ensure its success. Thus, he would not misunderstand that Egypt could not fight Theodore II, who welcomed the arrival of the patriarch to the borders of his town in December of 1856. A second coronation ceremony was held for him by the patriarch (Sharobim, 1900). Muhammad Saeed was wary of the consequences of the failure of his patriarch's mission. He prepared for war in case he failed in his mission by preparing to travel to Sudan to personally supervise military affairs, pretending that the purpose of his trip was to stand on the state of the Sudanese country, and he accompanied him during his trip a number of foreigners among them were Ferdinand de Lesseps and a number of other nobles, as well as a huge force of the Egyptian army (Sami, 1936). As soon as this news reached Theodore, Emperor of Abyssinia, he ordered the patriarch imprisoned in his residence and placed him under strict supervision (Rofaila, 2000).

On the other hand, the French consul tried to push Muhammad Said Pasha to war, and to stir up unrest between the two countries by assuring Said Pasha that both the patriarch and Emperor Tudor had agreed to invade Egypt, and the cops of Egypt would provide them with all assistance. The reason for the consul of

France to do this was because France did not recognize Tudor Emperor and supports the ruler of Tigray and wants him to take the throne of Ethiopia in his place (Sharobim, 1900). These circumstances led to the deterioration of the situation and only the intervention of the British Consul to calm the emperor's revolution, who informed him of France's intention to provoke war between the two countries. (Rofaila, 2000). At the same time, the Patriarch was able to send from his prison someone to inform Muhammad Saeed Pasha of the success of his political mission, had it not been for his presence and the army with him. Muhammad Saeed had told him that he did not intend to fight Ethiopia, justifying the reason for his trip that it was the solution to the problems in Sudan. Indeed, Muhammad Saeed returned to Cairo directly, when Theodore II learned of his return to Egypt, he replied to the Patriarch personally and apologized to him personally (Sabri, 2012).

After the end of the patriarch's mission in Ethiopia, he returned to his country, accompanied by an Ethiopian delegation, carrying precious gifts and a message to Muhammad Saeed Pasha whose content was peace and love. Muhammad Saeed welcomed the Ethiopian delegation and handed them a letter to the emperor emphasizing his desire to support peace and trade between the two countries and presented him with gifts, which he sent with his representative to convey to the emperor the sincerity of his feelings towards him (Surial, n.d). Subsequently, it became clear to us that despite the desire of both the Egyptian and Ethiopian rulers to achieve peace between the two countries, their actions contradicted that. The situation remained as it was throughout the rule of Muhammad Said Pasha, which was represented by tense relations between the two countries and the exchange of envoys between the two parties, which remained to no avail.

Ismail Pasha, at the beginning of his rule in Egypt (1863-1879), maintained peace with Ethiopia and asked the ruler of Sudan to avoid friction with them and work to consolidate security and peace along the border between the two countries as an attempt not to provoke political problems with Theodore II (Al-Bashir, 1980). However, the truth is that Ismail Pasha was seeking to expand whenever internal and external circumstances allowed him to do so. Since that time, his eyes have looked to the Suakin port, which is important because it is the only outlet for the Al-Taka region on the Red Sea, and the largest storage center for grains from Upper Egypt, as well as the speed of communication with Sudan (Al-Jamal, 1959) besides the port of Massawa, which was through its location Strategically, Egypt can control the roads to Ethiopia. Therefore, Ismail Pasha decided to annex these two ports and impose Egyptian sovereignty over them. He sent to the Sublime Porte a memorandum stating the reasons for the annexation to control the tribes living between Massawa and Ethiopia that are trying to be independent from the Ottoman local administration. (Ahmed, 1966) In addition, he made clear to some ambassadors of countries in Astana his desire to eliminate the slave trade in the region, which can only be achieved by adding Massawa and Suakin to the Egyptian administration, and this was explained to the British Foreign Minister, Lord (John Russell John) during his visit to Egypt. The mediation of that ambassador in Astana had a great effect in completing the annexation of Suakin and Massawa to Egypt, due to Britain's fear of France

gaining a foothold anywhere along the African coast of the Red Sea (Al-Ayobi, n.d).

Indeed, the Sublime Porte issued its decision to annex Suakin and Massawa to the Egyptian administration in Sudan in May 1865, and it became possible to seize the Boghoud and Al-Zandaqli regions, which were subject to Ethiopia (Al-Sarwachi, 1988). During this era, Ethiopia went through a period of chaos and conflict between local leaders to gain access to the throne after the suicide of Emperor Theodore II. What is taken of Khedive Ismail is that he did not take advantage of this period of chaos to achieve expansion at the expense of Ethiopia, as he chose to remain neutral, hoping to increase the weakness of Ethiopia, and thus achieve his ambitions. Events later proved the short-sightedness of the Khedive, as soon as John IV (1872-1889) took over the rule upon Ethiopia and became aware of the Egyptian danger on its borders (Al-Mashaikhi, 1977). The deterioration of the situation between the two sides continued until the end of Khedive Ismail's rule. The last years of Ismail Pasha's rule witnessed a peak of deterioration in political relations until the European countries isolated Ismail from ruling Egypt in June of 1879, and the end of Ismail's rule became Ethiopia threatening Egypt after it was Egypt threatens it (Haraz, 1974).

With the accession of Khedive Tawfiq to the rule of Egypt (1879-1882), European interference in Egypt's internal affairs increased at the hands of political representatives and consuls on the one hand, and international moneylenders and their policies on the other. This was followed by the dependence of the Khedive Tawfiq government on supporting that international guardianship, and the internal situation in Egypt deteriorated after the Urabi Revolution in September of 1881, and the outbreak of the Mahdist Revolution in Sudan in August of the same year, which led to European intervention. The result of that weakness was that the Egyptian government was exhausted in Sudan, so it worked on the issue of solving its border problems with Ethiopia and consolidating peace between the two countries. Negotiations had already begun, so their progress was slow, because of the revolutions inside Egypt and Sudan, and there was no improvement in Egyptian-Ethiopian relations (44). After Britain's success in interfering in Egypt's internal affairs, this gave it a kind of international guardianship, especially after it succeeded in isolating Khedive Ismail, taking over from Khedive Tawfiq at September 1882 (Al-Sarwachi, 1988).

### ***Water Relations Between the Nile Countries***

#### ***A - Nile Water Agreements***

In order to secure the water of the Nile, especially with Italy and Ethiopia, Britain entered into treaties with several parties and it was emphasized in those treaties that none of the Upper Nile countries had the right to interfere in the flow of the Nile, especially if the intervention would harm Egypt. The water relations between the Nile countries were organized on the basis of a set of agreements and protocols, which included the mutual obligations between the

contracting parties, which we will address according to their chronological order as follows:

**1. The 1891 Protocol:** it was signed by Britain, representing Egypt and Sudan, on April 15, 1891, from the Italian capital, Rome. It signed a protocol with Italy on Ethiopia and Eritrea to define its areas of influence in the basin countries located in East Africa to the outskirts of the Red Sea. (Hamdan, 2007). The third item of this protocol included Italy not to construct works on the Atbara River that would impede the flow of the Nile, as well as the issue of regulating the exploitation of water (Al-Rubaie, 2001). Accordingly, we can say that the essence of that protocol is the commitment of its parties not to establish or implement any water projects on the Ethiopian-Sudanese Atbara River Basin, without prior consultation with Egypt.

**2. The 1902 Agreement:** On the fifteenth of May 1902 an agreement was signed between Britain and Ethiopia to demarcate the borders between them and the Sudan. This agreement stipulated several issues: the most important of them is to secure the flow of the Nile water to Egypt from the Ethiopian sources, as the Emperor of Ethiopia, Menelik II (1889-1913), pledged to the British Consul that he would not issue instructions related to the work of any project on the Blue Nile, Tana Lake, or the Sobat River that would obstruct the flow of its water to the Nile Unless the Government of Britain and the Government of the Sudan agree to that ( El-Buhaiyri, 2016). In order to ensure the continuity of that agreement, it stipulated in its preface that it must be adhered to by the two parties, their heirs and their successors (Ghaith,1998). Apparently, this agreement expressly provided for regulating the exploitation of the water of the Blue Nile, Lake Tana and Sobat River, and the necessity of prior notification before embarking on any projects by Ethiopia that would affect the flow of water.

**3. The 1906 Agreement:** This agreement was signed in London on May 9, 1906 between Britain on behalf of Egypt, the Congo and the Free State (a Belgian colony), France, Italy and Belgium. This agreement, in its fourth clause, confirmed that these countries should work together to secure the entry of the water of the Blue and White Niles and their tributaries, and also pledge not to carry out any work on them that would decrease the amount of water heading towards the main Nile unless this is done in agreement with the government Sudanese (El-Buhaiyri, 2016).

**4. The 1906 Agreement:** On December 13, 1906, Britain, France and Italy signed an agreement regarding their common interests in Ethiopia under the cover of preserving its integrity. The fourth item of this agreement has referred to the issue of water, as it stipulates the necessity of consultation between these countries in the event of problems in Ethiopia in order to preserve the interests of Britain and Egypt in the Nile Basin, especially with regard to regulating the water of this river and its tributaries. (Abdul-Al-Atta, 1985).

**5. The 1925 Agreement:** It is a set of letters exchanged between Britain and Italy in 1925 regarding the concessions related to the establishment of a reservoir on Lake Tana. The first letter was from the British Ambassador in Rome to the Italian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister on the fourteenth of December 1925, which was aimed at obtaining a concession to build a reservoir on Lake Tana in order to store water for use in irrigation projects in return for recognition Britain with Italian economic influence in western Abyssinia (Taie,



1964). Britain achieved this when Italy announced its commitment to avoid harming the interests of both Egypt and Sudan in the Nile, and not to carry out any work on the main water of the Blue and White Niles and their tributaries that might affect the Nile quickly to Egypt and Sudan. (Taha, 2005)

**6. The 1929 Agreement:** This agreement is one of the most important agreements related to the Nile that Egypt signed, as it is the first official agreement regarding the water reaching Egypt and Sudan. An agreement was reached between the Egyptian government and Britain regarding its provisions on May 7, 1929 in the form of two exchanged letters between the Egyptian Prime Minister at the time (Mohamed Mahmoud Pasha, 1878-1941), and the British High Commissioner in Cairo Lloyd George (Lloyd, 863). It was agreed that no measures should be taken on the Nile and its tributaries or on the lakes in which the river originates without prior agreement with Egypt and the countries under British administration, which lead to a reduction in the amount of water dividing to Egypt, or reduce its level in any way that harms the interests of Egypt, and the necessity of recognizing Egypt natural and historical right to the Nile (Al-Rubaie, 2001). The most important thing that this agreement included also the legal recognition of Egypt which acquired historical share and ensuring the flow of water for the needs of agriculture, and that Egypt would have a fair share of every emergency increase on the river resources in case of undertaking new projects over the Nile or its tributaries in the future. It obligated the East African countries not to establish any facilities on tropical lakes without consulting with Egypt and Sudan (Taei, 2009).

### ***B- The Tana Reservoir Project and Its Impact on Egypt***

Ethiopia is the first of the basin countries that demanded a review of the Nile agreements, and it was and still ranges between threats and reservations about the issue of shared water (Aidan, 2016). Through our follow-up to the Ethiopian positions regarding the water of the Nile, it became clear that Ethiopia is looking at Egypt and Sudan with great caution. The idea emerged that Ethiopia was always a source of threat to Egypt via the Nile. After Italy took control of Ethiopia in 1935, Britain began to develop this inherited idea to ensure that Egypt would support it in its stances against Italy. The Egyptian public opinion was affected by this, and there became an issue for the Egyptians that Ethiopia could prevent the flow of the Nile to Egypt (Hurst & Phillips, 1939). At that time, Britain became in control of the entire Nile from its sources to its estuary, with the exception of Ethiopia, by virtue of its occupation of Egypt and its work to maximize its gains through that occupation. It has always been keen to keep the sources of the Ethiopian Nile safe from falling into foreign hands that might be hostile to it and thus causing damage to its position in Egypt and Sudan, in addition to agricultural damage to the population of these countries (Turki, 2012). The project to build the Tana reservoir preoccupied the Egyptian government and the Egyptian public opinion, and Britain was behind the establishment of that project, which was very interested in it for purely political reasons. The most important one is to preserve its influence and interests in Ethiopia and protect it from the Ethiopian sources of the Nile from the ambitions of other countries (Taha, 2005). Britain had sent several missions to Addis Ababa since 1902 to negotiate with Ethiopia its pledge not to build any works across the Blue Nile, Lake Tana or the Sobat River that would impede the flow

of the Nile without the consent of the British government and the government of Sudan (Annan, 1935). This was followed by Egypt sending a mission specialized in irrigation and surveying matters to study the area of Lake Tana and the Blue Nile. Britain also sent another mission in the same year headed by Debus (d. Puis) to study Lake Tana as it is the most suitable place for storing the water needed for the development of irrigation project in Sudan. He decided the possibility of establishing that reservoir and its ability to store a quantity of water up to three billion cubic meters (Swain, 1997).

It is worth noting that Britain encouraged the completion of this project, especially after the great response shown by the Emperor of Ethiopia, Menelik II, after his pledge to grant the right to build the Tana reservoir to the British government and not to pump it to others. In the establishment of a reservoir based on the tripartite treaty that was previously held between them in 1906, which stipulated defining the borders between the colonies belonging to each of the member states in the Horn of Africa (ibid). However, the death of Emperor Menelik II of Ethiopia in 1913 and the increase of German influence in Ethiopia made Britain need to confirm the privileges it had obtained in 1902 from the new Ethiopian ruler at the time, especially when another factor emerged represented by the outbreak of the First World War (1914- 1918) where Britain entered the war against Germany (Assayed, 1981). As a result, Britain entered into negotiations with the new Ethiopian government at the time, and was able to obtain its consent to send a mission to carry out its work in the Tana region. (Abda, 1958) However, the turmoil that occurred in Ethiopia following the death of Emperor Menelik II in 1913 and the outbreak of power struggle, and the outbreak of civil wars everywhere in Ethiopia, temporarily halted those negotiations (Al-Sharqawi, 1959).

Those disturbances led to the mission's return to Egypt without completing its work, and the British government did not implement any step to implement that project. After the end of the First World War in 1918, British interest in the project renewed, especially after the emergence of Italian competition over the region, being among the victorious Entente countries in the region, which aspires to find a foothold in Africa and obtain German colonies in the region (Tuwarish, 2013). Attempts by Egypt and Britain continued to send technical missions to Ethiopia to study the Tana Reservoir project, including the Graham and Black mission in 1920, which continued its work in Ethiopia until 1924, when that mission estimated the cost of the project at about two and a half million Egyptian pounds (Fleifel, 1998). Negotiations continued between Ethiopia and Britain until Ethiopia announced its violation of the 1902 treaty with Britain, and declared that it was free to build the reservoir and grant its concession to whomever it wanted, and protested to the League of Nations in June of 1926 against that agreement affecting its sovereignty (Abdul-Ghani, 2011). In this context, Ethiopia hastened to send a representative to the United States of America to negotiate with the White Engineering Company to study the project. It seems that their choice of this American company is that the United States of America has no ambitions in Ethiopia, in addition to their desire to get rid of British penetration in the region. These negotiations stirred up British public opinion, calling it treason. The Egyptian public opinion also attacked those negotiations with the American company, and demanded that his

government intervene immediately to stop it. Accordingly, Egypt moved to secure its position with the government of Sudan in agreement with Britain, where the effect of that was signed an agreement in 1929 to share the Nile, in which the government of Sudan pledged not to build any works on the Nile or its tributaries or on the lakes flowing from it in Sudan to another country under British control which could pose a threat to Egypt water interests.

In light of this agreement, in January 1930, Ethiopia held a conference to discuss the reservoir project, in which it invited a representative of the government of Sudan. It was agreed between the government of Sudan and the Egyptian government to send one of the irrigation officials in Sudan to attend the conference, who was assigned at the request of the Ethiopian government to establish a road from Sudan to Tana instead of the Addis Ababa-Tana Road to save the expenses related to the transportation of raw materials needed to implement the project (Ghali, 1991). In 1931, the American Engineering Company published a report that included the cost of the project and the proposed road, estimated at about two and a half million pounds over five years, and since Ethiopia did not want to implement the project at its own expense due to its poor financial means, Egypt decided to bear the expenses of the entire project, and the American company White requested from The British government guarantees the payment of project expenses (ibid). As Ethiopia desired to achieve more gains, it called for another conference in February 1933 to consider the issue of leasing water in excess of its need after the establishment of the Tana Reservoir. The Egyptian government accepted the invitation and demanded to postpone the implementation of the project on the pretext of the need to conduct more studies, as well as due to the occurrence of the global financial crisis (1929-1933). Britain feared that this postponement might lead to Ethiopia retracting its approval to implement the project or to be strict in its demands (Abdul-Ghani, 2011).

After the American company finished preparing its report, Ethiopia called for another conference to be held in April of 1935, while Egypt demanded to postpone the conference to study the company report. However, the situation in the region quickly deteriorated as a result of Italy stalking of Ethiopia and preparing it to invade it. As a result, Britain demanded from Ethiopia to postpone the Tana Conference, at a time when the latter was eager to sign the Tana Reservoir Project due to its need for money. Believing that such an agreement generates interests for many countries in Ethiopia, including Egypt, Sudan and the United States of America, to which the American company, the owner of the project, is affiliated to White company. Despite the company completion of the additional survey and its submission of the report, the conference was not held again and the British government kept postponing it so as not to take the decision to build it. In fact, that situation remained as it was until 1935 when Britain took advantage of the deteriorating situation between Italy and Ethiopia. The conference was postponed on the pretext that Italy might consider this as support by Britain and Egypt against Ethiopia (Al-Buhairi, 1997). From the foregoing, it becomes clear to us that Britain was not willing to build the reservoir, which was located outside its sphere of influence, and followed all means to postpone its implementation, although it had shown its

interest in it in order to preserve its interests in Egypt and Sudan and protect the sources of the Nile in Ethiopia and international ambitions

## CONCLUSION

The research reached a number of results:

1. The Egyptian-Ethiopian relations, from the time of Muhammad Pasha in 1805 until Ethiopia came under Italian control in 1935, were characterized by some bickering, represented by Muhammad Ali Pasha's ambition to reach the sources of the Nile, in addition to the increasing ambitions of European countries in the region, which naturally reflected in Egypt and Ethiopia entered into negotiations and agreements regarding the water of the Nile.
2. Although Egypt entered into agreements and treaties with Ethiopia on the water of the Nile, Britain did not, in fact, want to establish any projects on this river, especially the Tana reservoir project, which Britain demanded in the matter of its implementation being outside the region its influence.
3. Through these water projects, Britain monitored the position and reactions of other European countries, particularly France and Italy, as an attempt to distance the influence of foreign countries and continued to delay the construction of the Tana reservoir project until the outbreak of the Italian-Ethiopian war in 1935.

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