

BOUTROS GHALI (1846-1910)

A Coptic statesman. He was born in Kiman-al-'Arus, a village in the province of Bani Suef. His father, the steward of the estate of [Prince Mustafa Fadil](#), brother of Khedive Isma'il, first sent him to the patriarchal school, which had recently been founded in Cairo by CYRIL IV (1854-1861).

He then studied Arabic, Turkish, Persian, English, and French. Endowed with a remarkable memory, [Boutros](#) had shown great flexibility in his personality. He did not seem personally to have suffered from the discrimination then rampant in favor of non- Egyptians, such as Turks and Circassians. On completing his studies, he became a teacher at the patriarchal school, headed by [YA'QUB NAKHLAH RUFAYLAH](#), who was later to publish a history of the Copts. In the meantime, [Boutros](#) also attended classes at the School of Languages founded by Rifa'ah al-Tahtawi. He began working at the Ministry of Justice, where he was rapidly promoted to chief interpreter; he was barely twenty-eight years old.

The post was of great importance, as the department was then concerned with establishing a modern judicial infrastructure in Egypt. This entailed, as a first step, the translation and annotation of the laws in force in Europe. He thus collaborated with Qadri Pasha, the great jurist of the time, in setting up the national courts, designated then as "native courts" to distinguish them from the mixed courts that had been established a few years earlier. Many manuscripts written and annotated by [Boutros Ghali](#) testify to the leading role he played in the judicial renaissance of Egypt.

The debts incurred by Khedive Isma'il became the pretext for foreign intervention. A commission of three delegates, English, French, and Egyptian, was formed, the Egyptian being Riyaz Pasha. His assistant was [Boutros Ghali](#). The *Report on the Land Tax* was presented to the

commission by [Boutros](#) on 18 February 1880; it is a thorough study of the property system in Egypt, and remains an important document for the economic and financial history of Egypt. In 1881, Boutros Ghali was appointed undersecretary of state for justice, a position that he occupied for twelve years. During his tenure, the reorganization of the judicial system progressed.

[Provincial](#) courts, district courts, and a court of appeal were established. Justice became secularized.

In 1893 he became minister of finance, and in 1895 he was appointed minister of foreign affairs, an office that he held for fifteen years until his death. The main lines of his policy remained unchanged: to [preserve](#) the legitimate authority of the khedive in face of the BRITISH OCCUPATION; to reduce the impact of the unavoidable clashes between the one and the other; and, at the same time, to modernize the country by endowing it with a liberal parliamentary regime, in order to remove the pretext for occupation.

The Anglo-Egyptian military campaign ended with the defeat of the Sudanese and the signing, on 19 January 1899, of an agreement between Egypt and England establishing a condominium or joint authority over the territory. [Boutros](#) was criticized over this issue, but it had the unanimous approval of the members of the cabinet. Egypt could not ignore the disproportion of forces while its own territory was under foreign occupation. It was probably the best that could be done in the circumstances.

At least, it assured the future by preventing England from assuming total sovereignty over the Sudan. Khedive 'Abbas II came to power in January 1892, and he soon found himself at odds with the British. It became necessary to reduce friction between legitimate authority and the power of the occupying force, and, at the same time, to protect the ruler against the threat of dethronement. In the pursuit of these aims, [Boutros](#) Ghali

showed much resourcefulness, but he sometimes became involved in initiatives that were acutely criticized, even though their final purpose was clearly to [preserve](#) the dynasty.

In 1906, as acting minister of justice in the absence of the minister abroad, he was called upon to preside over the court-appointed to judge the Dinshaway case. On a shooting trip in 1906, a group of British officers had accidentally shot the wife of a local official at Dinshaway. During the attempted escape, two British officers and several Egyptians were wounded or killed. Four of the Egyptians were hanged and four sentenced to life imprisonment. The rest were flogged and given prison terms, as well (King, 1984, pp. 260-61). [Boutros](#) Ghali labored very hard to reduce the number of the accused and the harshness of the sentences, but Egyptian public opinion bitterly reproached him for having accepted the leadership over this court.

In November 1908, [Boutros](#) Ghali was appointed president of the Council of Ministers, despite British objections. His first move was to try to transform the prerogatives of the Consultative Assembly and turn it into a true parliament, before which the ministers would be responsible. However, the nationalist press, which had been unleashed against him at the time, drove him in 1909 to reinstate the 1881 law of Sherif Pasha that put restrictions on the press.

With the agreement of the British, he submitted to the assembly the proposal for a forty-year extension of the Suez Canal Company concession. The prestige of the assembly would thus be enhanced by having the opportunity to discuss the proposal. The refusal of the proposal by the assembly would bring about a final decision without running the risk of a political crisis. The proposal was, in fact, rejected by the assembly three months later.

On 21 February 1910, a month after submitting the proposal to the assembly, [Boutros](#) was assassinated by a nationalist. His death sparked

serious quarrels between [Copts](#) and Muslims, lasting throughout the years before World War I. Concord and a national consensus were reached only when the Wafd party came to power.

[Boutros](#) Ghali took an active interest in Coptic affairs. He cooperated in establishing the first COMMUNITY COUNCIL in 1874. In 1883, he obtained a khedivial [decree](#) detailing the organization and the competence of the council. He had many conflicts with the clergy and Patriarch CYRIL V (1874-1927) concerning lay participation in the administration of the church properties.

DORIS BEHRENS-ABUSEIF

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