



Aethiopia 19 (2016)

International Journal of Ethiopian and
Eritrean Studies

BAIRU TAFLA, Universität Hamburg

Review

ANDREU MARTINEZ D'ALÒS-MONER, *Envoys of a Human God: The Jesuit
Mission to Christian Ethiopia, 1557–1632*

Aethiopia 19 (2016), 286–288

ISSN: 2194–4024

Edited in the Asien-Afrika-Institut
Hiob Ludolf Zentrum für Äthiopistik
der Universität Hamburg
Abteilung für Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

by Alessandro Bausi

in cooperation with

Bairu Tafla, Ulrich Braukämper, Ludwig Gerhardt,
Hilke Meyer-Bahlburg and Siegbert Uhlig

Editorial

The present issue of AETHIOPICA, like the preceding one, is partly monographic, with a section containing the proceedings of the Panel on Islamic Literature in Ethiopia: New Perspectives of Research, from the '19th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies', held in Warsaw, Poland, on 24–28 August 2015.

Starting from this issue, the annual bibliography on Ethiopian Semitic and Cushitic linguistics held from its inception in 1998 for eighteen years by Rainer Voigt is handed over, on Voigt's own will, to a pool of younger scholars, with the substantial support of the AETHIOPICA editorial team. I would like on this occasion to express the deep gratitude of the editorial board of AETHIOPICA and of all scholars in Ethiopian Semitic and Cushitic linguistics to Rainer Voigt for his fundamental and valuable contribution.

Bibliographical abbreviations used in this volume

- AE* *Annales d'Éthiopie*, Paris 1955ff.
ÄthFor Äthiopistische Forschungen, 1–35, ed. by E. HAMMERSCHMIDT, 36–40, ed. by S. UHLIG (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner (1–34), 1977–1992; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz (35–40), 1994–1995).
AethFor Aethiopistische Forschungen, 41–73, ed. by S. UHLIG (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998–2011); 74–75, ed. by A. BAUSI and S. UHLIG (*ibid.*, 2011f.); 76ff. ed. by A. BAUSI (*ibid.*, 2012ff.).
AION *Annali dell'Università degli studi di Napoli 'L'Orientale'*, Napoli: Università di Napoli 'L'Orientale' (former Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli), 1929ff.
CSCO Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1903ff.
EAE S. UHLIG, ed., *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, I: A–C; II: D–Ha; III: He–N; in cooperation with A. BAUSI, eds, IV: O–X (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010); A. BAUSI in cooperation with S. UHLIG, eds, V: Y–Z, *Supplementa, Addenda et Corrigenda, Maps, Index* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2014).
EI² *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, I–XII (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960–2005).
EMML Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, Addis Ababa.
JES *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Addis Ababa 1963ff.
JSS *Journal of Semitic Studies*, Manchester 1956ff.
NEASt *Northeast African Studies*, East Lansing, MI 1979ff.
OrChr *Oriens Christianus*, Leipzig–Roma–Wiesbaden 1901ff.
PICES 9 A.A. GROMYKO, ed., 1988, *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Ethiopian Studies, Moscow, 26–29 August 1986*, I–VI (Moscow: Nauka Publishers, Central Department of Oriental Literature, 1988).
RSE *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, Roma, 1941–1981, Roma–Napoli 1983ff.
ZDMG *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, Leipzig–Wiesbaden–Stuttgart 1847ff.

Reviews

Catholic mission arrives in Ethiopia. According to the editor, this must have been the Jesuit mission lead by Pero Paez in 1603. Since Mälkä'a Krəstos was an adolescent at that time, this may mean that he was born soon after 1590. Other events reported in the *Gädl* are connected respectively with King Susənyos and his successor Fasilädäs, although neither of these kings is explicitly mentioned in the text. The editor concludes that the death of the saint might have taken place after 1690, the year of the death of queen Säblä Wängel for whom he celebrated the funerals.

Msgr Raineri's attempt to extract precise chronological data is courageous. However we must admit that, while it is clear from many details in the text—correctly pointed out by its editor—that Mälkä'a Krəstos lived in the sixteenth–seventeenth century, these might not be sufficient for reconstructing the precise years of the saint's birth and death. The more so, if we consider that, on the one hand, the church education of the saint (used as one of the arguments to establish his year of birth) is often treated in Ethiopic hagiographic texts more as a *tópos* than as a real fact; on the other hand, the fact that queen Säblä Wängel—one of the arguments used to establish the year of his death—was a spiritual daughter of the saint is never mentioned in the sources known so far. The general impression is that the editor relies too much on hagiographical details for reconstructing the history of the saint.

In publishing the *Gädla Mälkä'a Krəstos*, Raineri once more makes an important contribution to our knowledge of the extremely rich Ethiopian hagiographic tradition, still partially unknown. This text abounds in place names, hagiographic themes, and biblical quotations, excellently identified by the editor.

Antonella Brita, Universität Hamburg

ANDREU MARTINEZ D'ALÒS-MONER, *Envoys of a Human God: The Jesuit Mission to Christian Ethiopia, 1557–1632*, Jesuit Studies: Modernity through the Prism of Jesuit History, 2 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2015). xxxiii, 419 pp. Price: € 146.00 ISBN: 978-90-04-28914-7 (hardback).

In the centuries following the rise and expansion of Islam and the decline and downfall of Aksumite power, Christian Ethiopia's contact with Europe and to some extent with the Middle East waned. The sporadic attempts which were made to revive relations during and after the Crusades were undertaken by individuals or by small groups of Ethiopian monks in Jerusalem and Egypt as well as by European explorers and adventurers, primarily from the Italian states, central Europe and the Iberian peninsula.

The first formal diplomatic and religious contacts took place in the sixteenth century following the arrival of the Portuguese diplomatic mission of 1520–1526 and the Iberian Jesuits in 1557. The latter managed to establish themselves in the country, but had to struggle for survival as, on the one hand, the resistance of the Ethiopian Orthodox church was very strong and, on the other, they lacked additional missionaries from their own headquarters in Portugal and/or Goa for a long time. As a result the mission and its converts suffered from persecution until they were finally expelled from the country.

The historical factors that contributed to their failure are numerous, as are the written sources concerning their activities. The work under review is one of the latest. This well-documented Ethiopian contact with the Iberian Peninsula in the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries has long been the subject of study. Several scholars have examined this contact and each has interpreted the events from a different perspective. The author of the book under review has appreciated the various works, and, looking at the footnotes and the bibliography one may assume he read them all. In his introduction (cf. xix–xxi), he mentions that he was impressed by some of their interpretations, particularly those of Merid Wolde Aregay, Herve Pennec, Leonardo Cohen, Tewelde Beiene: ‘My work has profited enormously from past and ongoing research on the Jesuit mission in Ethiopia’ (p. xxi). But he claims that some historical gaps remained, and decided to take up that aspect in his doctoral dissertation from which this book developed.

In his own right the author is a respectable scholar who has worked hard in the archives of Italy, Spain and Portugal. He also worked for several years in the research department of Ethiopian studies of the University of Hamburg. He was also part of an archaeological expedition to Ethiopia where he traced the architectural contribution, routes and settlements of the Jesuits and took photographs of various ruins. His experience in research and publication is briefly described in the book under review.

The structure of the book is nonetheless somewhat unusual, though the text is well readable. It is divided into three parts comprising nine chapters, eight of which encompass numerous subsection-headings. The last chapter (chapter 9) consists of the ‘Conclusions’. The book opens with a long and interesting introduction which, unlike ‘Conclusions’, is not called a ‘chapter’. The book is also unnecessarily overloaded with footnotes (more than 1200 of them), most of which refer to secondary sources. A bit of proofreading or editing might also have enhanced the linguistic quality of the work: E.g. ‘printed and binded’ (chapter 2, fn. 60); ‘National and Provincial Rulers in Christian Ethiopia’ (p. 347). With the exception of the period known as ‘Zämäna Mäsafänt’ (1769–1855) we know only ‘provincial governors’.

Reviews

The book is otherwise enriched by informative and useful materials: table of contents, a glossary, pictures, charts, appendices (five of them), three figures, five maps and 22 plates, etc. as well as a comprehensive bibliography as well as an index. Herewith I congratulate the author on his valuable contribution to Ethiopian studies.

Bairu Tafla, Universität Hamburg

ABBA ABRAHAM BURUK WOLDEGABER and MARIO ALEXIS PORTELLA, *Abyssinian Christianity, the First Christian Nation? The History and the Identity of the Ethiopian and Eritrean Christians* (Florence: Brendan Pringle, 2012). xiv, 343 pp., ill. Price: € 30.00. ISBN: 978-0-615-65297-9.

The title of this book is quite attractive and readers might have expected an honest overview of the history of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tāwāḥədo Church (EOTC) from the fourth century till today. Unfortunately, this work fails to present a comprehensive picture of EOTC history. Mainly based on secondary sources and on a few Catholic documents, this book manifests important methodological deficiencies, over-interpreting information from secondary sources, while failing to place the events it describes in their historical and social contexts. Rather, it proposes a re-interpretation of EOTC history according to an obsolete ethno-centric and 'Catholic' point of view.

The first part of the book is devoted to early times of the EOTC, from the time of the Aksumite kingdom to the Middle Ages. The first aim of this part is not to expose historical facts in a comprehensive way but to prove that Ethiopian Christianity preceded Armenian Christianity. The authors expose the weaknesses of the Armenian claims to be the first Christian Kingdom (pp. xi–xii) without presenting weaknesses in the Ethiopian case, despite the fact that it would have been intellectually honest to do so. Furthermore, the analysis is full of errors and mistakes. The authors for example explain (on page ix, see also footnote 16) that Frumentius went to Alexandria in 305, when all previous studies have dated this event to the tenure of bishop Athanasius of Alexandria, meaning between 328 and 335. The authors also claim that the people of Aksum (here called 'Abyssinians' – *sic!*) were already Christian before the arrival of Frumentius; according to the authors, this is thanks to the 'Ethiopian' Eunuch of queen Candace (pp. ix–x, 16–24), despite the refutation of this opinion by all previous scientific studies. The rest of this part is a mix of various information presented without any historical context: liturgical music is explained through the (legendary) figure of Yared without