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Review

DONALD N. LEVINE, *Interpreting Ethiopia: Observations of Five Decades*

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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

started as an evangelical missionary endeavour continues to be a success in the relations between the two countries. A special chapter is devoted to the relations of the German Democratic Republic with Ethiopia. There are pictures showing a statue of Karl Marx opposite the Faculty of Humanities of Addis Ababa University; other photos show examples of industrial aid. The last panel entitled 'Ethiopia – Germany today' is illustrated by a photo showing President Roman Herzog surrounded by high clergy officials at Aksum in 1996.

The book, for which Richard Pankhurst as a leading authority of Ethiopian history provides an introduction, is presented in three languages, German, English and Amharic. There are appendices listing the German diplomatic representatives in Ethiopia, a chronological table of events from 1855 onwards, a report on the Rosen mission of 1905, diplomatic notes and a bibliography of primary and secondary literature.

Although the chronological data of the photos could not always be precisely identified, the book is a useful collection of photographic 'historical witnesses'. Unfortunately, a technical detail for which the publishing house must take responsibility, the reproduction of the photo materials is far from satisfactory. Moreover, the layout is well below standard, with parts of the text often incomplete at the right edge. This publication urgently calls for an improved reprint.

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DONALD N. LEVINE, *Interpreting Ethiopia: Observations of Five Decades* (Los Angeles, CA: Tsehai Publishers, 2014). 498 pp. Price: US-\$ 39.95. ISBN: 978-1-59907-096-4.

Donald Levine, who died in 2015, had one of the longest relationships to Ethiopia and Ethiopian studies of any social scientist. With a new PhD degree in sociology in hand, in 1958 Levine began intensive research in Ethiopia which resulted in the single most discussed and debated work about Ethiopian society and culture, *Wax & Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture* (1965). He was still writing about Ethiopia and its peoples as late as 2014, building on, correcting, and updating the same subjects that interested him many years earlier. His five decade-long love affair with Ethiopia was cruelly interrupted, first by the ire of Emperor Ḥaylā Śəllase I and then by the rule of the Marxist-Leninist 'Därg', but he returned to write about that country's intellectual and political problems with renewed vigor after the fall of that regime in 1991.

Donald Levine was a sociologist formed in the crucible of University of Chicago social science. He was imbued with the spirit of the classical sociologists, Freud and psychoanalysis, the influence of anthropologists Robert Redfield and Ruth Benedict, and involvement with the Committee for the Comparative Study of New Nations that flourished at his university in those days. His driving interest, manifest in his first book and his last papers, was the nature of Amhara culture and history and how it influenced the character of the whole of Ethiopia and its approach to ‘modernization’. His deep concern about the unity and political coherence of Ethiopia and its peoples led to his second book, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society* (1974). Furthermore, as Andrew DeCort stresses in the Foreword to this volume, Levine’s work was motivated by ethical concerns, and ‘the pursuit of peace, justice, and freedom’. This is manifest in his reports on Ethiopian politics through the decades and in his pleadings on behalf of interethnic understanding and unity among Ethiopia’s peoples.

The 37 papers collected in this volume reflect these interests as they developed over the years. The earliest one dates from 1959; and the last from 2014. They are almost all short works such as conference presentations, *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* essays, political pieces, and occasional talks.

Part I, *Ethos and Worldview*: Most of the papers in this section date from his earliest research and contain some material that overlaps with *Wax & Gold*. Inspired by Redfield, Benedict, and then-current ideas in anthropology and the sociology of change, Levine depicted what he felt to be the most significant elements of ‘traditional’ Amhara ‘worldview’, from that of the peasants to the worlds of the church, the court, and the students in Addis Abäba. The last piece in this section, from 2014, is ‘Greater Ethiopia Reconsidered’.

Part II, *Higher Education and Literature*: Donald Levine’s interest in Ethiopia began with his friendship with educated Ethiopians in Chicago and a vital part of his research as well as his deep personal involvement with the country came from his continuing close relationships with young men, largely Amhara and Tigre (‘Abyssinians’). The works in this section relate to that interest and to his involvement with the developing university in Addis Abäba. (His opportunity to teach there in the early 1960s was forbidden by the emperor.) Chapter 1, a sort of Introduction, was originally directed to Ethiopian students in North America in 1961.

Part III, *History*: This section offers a miscellany of works from Levine’s ‘second act’, 1996 to 2011. They are not necessarily about history and most are very short. The longest one by far, ‘Oromo Narratives’, consists of ideas and speculations about Oromo political culture and various current debates among Oromos as to their future within the Ethiopian state.

Part IV, *Politics*: This section contains the author's deeply felt accounts of and reports on political matters, from the days of Ḥaylā Śəllase and the coup attempt of 1960 (which he witnessed up close in Addis Abāba), through the *Dārg* years (his testimony to the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs), and to his disappointment with the Meles regime and his hopes for the future. Much of Levine's writing, especially in this section, has a strong moralistic tone and contains pleas for understanding and appreciation for diversity in a multiethnic society.

Part V, *Comparative and Global*: These are mostly late papers reflecting his continuing interest in 'modernization' and the comparison of the manner in which Ethiopia and Japan have approached this world-altering process. After a relatively long theoretical piece, 'Ambiguity and Modernity', there are two interesting ones that compare Ethiopia and Japan, 'Ethiopia and Japan in Comparative Civilizational Perspective' and 'Masculinity and Warriorhood in Ethiopia and Japan'. (Levine had become involved in Japanese martial arts in his later years.)

The next to the last paper deals with Levine's great passion: the national character and unity of Ethiopia. In 'Ethiopian Nationhood in a Global Era', from 2011, Levine first argues, as he had in the past, that Ethiopia met all the criteria for 'nationhood' hundreds of years before the social historians grant this honour to France, Reformation England, or the Netherlands. He supports this claim with reference to the *Kəbrä Nəgəšt* as the national epic and official doctrine, the basis and legitimation for a 'nation', with its official church and common symbols. He follows this with a brief consideration of the strengthening of Ethiopian nationhood in the twentieth century under the two emperors, until 1974. Then he turns to the current era, in which numerous fashionable sociologists deny the validity of the nation-state as an object for study; they contend that this 'social formation' is obsolescent in the 'global age'. And, of course, Levine is disdainful of those who would deny the significance of 'historic Ethiopia' and 'then brazenly claim that the Ethiopian nation-state was an invention of late nineteenth century imperialism'. In an interesting move, the author then discusses the vast Ethiopian diaspora, and of the many ways Ethiopians in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere managed 'to keep in touch with one another and reproduce their home customs'. He cites not only Ethiopian restaurants and food stores but churches, voluntary associations, musical performance and cultural events, celebrations, and continuing involvement with the homeland. He ends with a brief discussion (and listing) of various electronic resources (in cyberspace) developed by and for Ethiopians in the diaspora. Don Levine, like the Amhara peasants and their educated youth, had come a long way since 1958.

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