



Aethiopia 12 (2009)

International Journal of Ethiopian and
Eritrean Studies

ALESSANDRO BAUSI, Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”

Review of

JOB LUDOLF alias HIOB Leutholf, *Histoire de l’Éthiopie. Brève description du royaume des Abyssins vulgairement appelé à tort du Prêtre Jean publiée en 1681*. Livre - I. *Des dispositions naturelles du pays et de ses habitants*

Aethiopia 12 (2009), 258–260

ISSN: 1430–1938

Published by

Universität Hamburg

Asien Afrika Institut, Abteilung Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

Hiob Ludolf Zentrum für Äthiopistik

Reviews

JOB LUDOLF alias HIJOB LEUTHOLF, *Histoire de l'Éthiopie. Brève description du royaume des Abyssins vulgairement appelé à tort du Prêtre Jean publiée en 1681*. Livre - I. *Des dispositions naturelles du pays et de ses habitants*. Traduction intégrale du latin par un groupe de spécialistes sous la direction de JOSEPH TUBIANA – professeur honoraire à l'Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, INALCO (Collection “Aux Abyssinies”. Bibliothèque Peiresc 17), Apt: L'Archange Minotaure, 2008. Pp. 144 (including 9 plates). Price: € 33,50. ISBN-13: 978-2-35463-019-5

Obviously, there is little to say on the work, i.e., the rightly famous *Historia Aethiopica*, Francofurti ad Moenum 1681 (hereafter *HAe*) by the great scholar Job Ludolf (1624–1704), a milestone in Ethiopian Studies and a masterpiece in historiography. The merit of having attracted fresh attention on this pillar of knowledge, erudition and patient research on ancient and contemporary sources (one might remember Rochus Zuurmond's words, *Novum Testamentum Aethiopicum: The Synoptic Gospels*, Äthiopistische Forschungen 27, Stuttgart 1989, I, p. xiv: “Working at the present edition I have consulted their [Ludolf's and August Dillmann's] oeuvre almost every day”), is probably the great merit of this almost integral French translation (hereafter *HÉth*), promoted by Joseph Tubiana, and conducted by three Latinists of the University of Bordeaux and two Ethiopianists of the INALCO. The declared aim of the translation (the *Nouvelle histoire d'Abyssinie ...*, Paris 1684, being in fact an abridged version of the Latin original) is that of making accessible the work to those who are not familiar with the special Latin language of the 17th cent. scholars (“latin tardif qui n'a pas beaucoup été étudié et donc difficile à comprendre”). For the moment, book first (out of four) is presented in a very beautiful volume, corresponding to 90 pages (tables included, very nicely reprinted here), out of the total 336 of the whole *HAe* (the substantial *Commentarius* was published later in 1691, with 677 pages, tables included).

Somehow useful and pleasant as it might be, the *HÉth* raises, however, some perplexities. Unless the volume is addressed to curious cultivated people (what does not seem to be the editors' intention, who state, p. 9: “Le développement actuel des études éthiopiennes a rendu nécessaire une traduction française sérieuse”), professional Ethiopianists shall still make recourse to the *HAe* for a number of reasons. Honestly, Ludolf's Latin does not seem to pose particular problems, and good command of Latin, and also

of Greek, still remains essential for “normal” Ethiopianists: not only because no deep understanding of Ethiopic (Gəʿəz) is possible without the usage of August Dillmann’s (Latin!) *Lexicon linguae Aethiopicæ*, Lipsiae 1865, but esp. because the most important literary language of Ethiopia, i.e., Gəʿəz, is based upon translations from the Greek and its study is consequently strictly related to Classical and Biblical Studies: an average scholar should be able to check directly *Vorlage* and parallels of Ethiopic texts. Moreover, the study of ancient and medieval Ethiopia is continuously interlaced with sources in Latin: even more, all that has to do with premodern Ethiopia belongs in a tradition of studies where the knowledge of Latin (and Greek) is essential, as it is for all Christian Oriental Studies; not to say that Latin has been used as the normal scientific language for centuries, till the translation volumes in the CSCO series at the beginning of the 20th cent.: Enno Littmann’s, Carlo Conti Rossini’s, Ignazio Guidi’s Latin risks to be even worse than Ludolf’s.

Unfortunately, the editorial care of the volume is far from perfection and sometimes not really satisfactory. P. 19: the Italics of Ludolf’s *HAE* text, a normal old-fashioned way to render emphasis, is curiously considered a calque of the *rubra* of the Ethiopic mss. – P. 23: the dates of Nicolao Godinho, author of the *De Abassinorum rebus ...*, Lugduni 1615, are 1561–1616, not: “1633–1712”. – P. 24: the work by Johannes Isaac Pontanus, *Originum Francicarum libri VI*, Hardervici 1616, is quoted as: “De Originum Francicarum libri VI”, probably by influence of Ludolf’s paraphrastic title: “de Francorum Orig.” (also in *HAE* I,1,5, n. 1: “de Francorum origine”); more correctly on p. 32, n. 6: “Originum Francicarum”, where “Originum Francicarum libri” would have been better. – P. 31, n. 1: as in many other occurrences, very short explicative notes are sometimes inserted in square brackets in the footnotes, in this case concerning the traditional etymology of Abyssinia (from Arabic *habāša*): “[étymologie contestée par Conti Rossini]”. One may wonder whether these insertions make sense: on one hand, they are insufficient (the nude reference to “Conti Rossini” is too concise, and very different hypotheses have been advanced even after him); on the other hand, their absence may ingenerate the idea that the relevant thesis of *HAE* on the matter is still valid, whereas the importance of the work, albeit still authoritative in many subjects, is that of a “classic” which should be critically and historically evaluated, and cautiously used. Some concise paragraphs with short essential bibliography and few words illustrating the “state of the art” on various topics would have been much more useful than some scattered dishomogeneous glosses. – Pp. 31 ff.: there is no consistency in the transcription of ʾ (ʾalef) and ʿ (ʿayn). – *Ibid.*: there are several erroneous readings of Gəʿəz words, as well as erroneous transcriptions: e.g., p. 31: ብሔር ፣ አግዛዚ, instead of ብሔረ ፣ አግዛዚ; p. 39, no. 25: ቁይታ inst. of ቁይታ; p. 40, no. 9: “[nafās mawca]” inst. of “[nafās mawčā]”; p. 52, no. 29, l. 1 of the poem: ድጎረ ፣ ጎረፈ. inst. of ድጎረ ፣ ጎረፈ; p. 75: (cp. *HAE* I,8,31) የዐውደ inst. of የዐውደ; (32) ደተፋ inst. of ደተፋ; ከሉሎሎ inst. of ከሉሎሎ (the same error occurs many other times); (33) ደትጋዐ inst. of ደትጋዐ; (34) ከሉ inst. of ከሉ; በትእዛዝ inst. of በትእዛዝ; (36) ወእንዝ inst. of ወእንዝ; ጎበፈ inst. of ጎበፈ; (39) ቢዛዋ inst. of ቢዛዋ; ምንገላ inst. of ምንገላ; (41) አፍላጋት inst. of አፍላጋት: one could continue, but this short list can give an idea. – P. 32, n. 8: “Stephanus de Ur-

Reviews

bibus [auteur grec] dans son livre περι πόλεων” (!): from the translation it appears that “Stephanus de Urbibus” is considered the name of an author, while “*De urbibus*” is the translation of the Greek (thus, correctly) “περι πόλεων”, cp. *H Ae* I,1,6, n. (n): “Stephanus in libro περι πόλεων”; but here, as in other cases, the Greek has not been written in the modern scholarly way (seemingly, not even understood): cp. p. 32, n. 10: “αξομίτης” (!), by misunderstanding of *H Ae* I,1,9, n. (p): “αξουμίτης”.

To summarize, despite some shortcomings, one has to appreciate the courageous initiative of making such a classic in Ethiopian Studies like the *H Ae* more accessible. It is only to be hoped that a more satisfactory editorial care will be applied in the following chapters.

Alessandro Bausi, Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”

RENATE WÜRSCH (Hrsg.), *Die orientalischen Handschriften der Burgerbibliothek Bern*. Katalog unter Verwendung der Vorarbeiten von SVEN BRETTFELD, GLEN DUDBRIDGE, ANDREAS KAPLONY, SUISHÛ TOMOKO KLOPFENSTEIN-ARII, HEIKE MOSER, GUDRUN SCHUBERT und VERONIKA SIX (Burgerbibliothek Bern. Bibliothèque de la Bourgeoisie de Berne), Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007. Pp. XXXVI–198 + 1+15 plates (24 B/W and 1+6 col. figs.). Price: € 64,-. ISBN–10: 3–447–05493–X; ISBN–13: 978–3–447–05493–5

Il volume contiene il catalogo ordinato in 79 numeri progressivi, pari a complessive 84 unità, dei mss. orientali conservati presso la Burgerbibliothek Bern, che con la Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek raccoglie dal 1951 l’eredità della precedente Stadtbibliothek. I mss. orientali, in particolare, sono formalmente parte della storica collezione Bongarsiana-Codices, istituita a partire dall’originario fondo che dall’erudito e diplomatico francese Jacques Bongars (1554–1612) prende il nome, e che annovera oggi 650 segnature per un totale di 1050 mss. I mss. orientali – esclusi gli ebraici, per i quali cfr. Olivia Franz-Klauser, *Die hebräischen Handschriften: Verzeichnis mit Einleitung*, Bern 1999 = *Judaica*, 55/4 (1999), pp. 247–71 – comprendono 29 mss. arabi (nrr. 1–29), 15 turchi e 10 persiani (nrr. 30–54), 1 siriano (nr. 55), 15 etiopici (nrr. 56–70), una stampa cinese a caratteri fissi (nr. 71), 2 mss. giapponesi (nr. 72), 4 mss. su foglie di palma (nrr. 73–74), e 4 mss. vergati da orientalisti europei non altrimenti catalogabili.

Ammirevole per chiarezza di impostazione e sobrietà tipografica, precisione delle descrizioni – affidate a specialisti di ciascuna area linguistico-culturale – e ricchezza degli indici, il catalogo è stato curato da Renate Würsch, che ha coordinato il lavoro e scritto anche la utile introduzione