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Review

IRMA TADDIA, *Etiopia 1800–1900: Le strategie del potere tra l’Africa e l’Italia*

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IRMA TADDIA, *Etiopia 1800–1900: Le strategie del potere tra l’Africa e l’Italia*, Temi di Storia (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2013). 176 pp., 16 illus. Price: €22.00. ISBN: 978-88-204-2177-9.

The long tradition of studies on Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa by Italian scholars is well known. This tradition results from Italy’s colonial domination of the region during the period of high imperialism and up to World War II. Various disciplines have profited from access to sources and information on the ground, and such concrete historical research is crucial to a better understanding of the political environment in which the Italians operated. The history of the region under colonial rule became an important topic in Italian research, even though the main focus was on political, military, and diplomatic history. These focal points were characteristic of scholarly output in Italy even after colonial rule, when Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa were investigated by a considerable number of former politicians and officials of the colonial era. Political history therefore long dominated the Italian historiography of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. The book reviewed here underlines this fact and offers a new perspective on Ethiopian political history between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. At the most general level, the author investigates the relations between society and political power, between individuals and institutions (p. 8). The originality of this perspective lies firstly in the fact that it uses and incorporates many studies on social history that, in recent years, have enriched our knowledge of Ethiopian history; and, secondly, in the fact that it pays close attention to African agencies and actors which have often been overlooked or marginalized in historiographical accounts (above all in Italy). The book is a successful attempt at writing a *new political history*, paying attention to social and cultural historical elements. Indeed, the author, Irma Taddia, Professor of African History and Institutions at Alma Mater Studiorum–Università di Bologna, is a distinguished Italian scholar with a worldwide reputation for her prolific research on the social, political, and oral history of the Horn of Africa before, during, and after Italian colonial rule.

As a matter of fact, given the angle from which the author looks at the transformation of the Ethiopian empire in the crucial period between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, one could claim that this is a book on Təgray. A focus on this area, located in northern Ethiopia and populated by Təgrəñña speakers, helps to understand the centralistic development of the Ethiopian monarchy, pursued differently by Tewodros II, Yoḥannəs IV, and Mənilək II, as a process with many internal conflicts. At the same time, it sheds light on the impact of European colonization and Western influences on the region and on Ethio-

pia as a whole, Təgray being closest to the new Colonia Eritrea, established by the Italians in 1890. But Irma Taddia does not want to pursue a micro-history of a fragment of the Ethiopian empire. Rather, she offers a particular perspective on the history of Ethiopia as a whole. While historiography has mostly looked at expansion in southern Ethiopia between 1875 and 1900, considered as an essential part of imperial state-building, Taddia's book centres on the north and underlines its role in the period under investigation. The story of the expansion in the south and of the disputes regarding the northern region of Təgray are two faces of the affirmation of the Solomonic monarchy. Southern and northern Ethiopia were interwoven (p. 71), as the participation of southern soldiers at the battle of ʿAdwa against the Italians shows. This very interesting *spatial* interpretation of Ethiopian history, which is a great strength of the book, surely deserves more attention in future research.

The northern region of Ethiopia, Təgray, became the borderland of the Italian colony Eritrea. Italy, planning to expand into the Horn of Africa, thus faced Ethiopia and its ongoing empire-building activities. The agreement on the colonial border in the Təgray region (1900) helped Mənilək II to thwart the ambitions of the governor of Təgray, Mängäša Yoḥannəs, who was seen as a potential enemy and as a destabilizing element by the Ethiopian monarchy. A politically strong Təgray represented too big a threat. Thus, the establishment of the colony Eritrea was, according to Irma Taddia, also a result of geopolitical and strategic factors at the regional level (p. 72): an agenda of complicity with the Kingdom of Italy that served to affirm the Šäwa dynasty as legitimate. In this sense, the defeat of the Italians at the Battle of ʿAdwa did not affect Mənilək's strategy who preferred to cede the northern part of the empire in order to strengthen his rule within his borders and, specifically, over Təgray.

With the exception of Chapter 1, which is a concise historical introduction to the topic, the book focuses on specific biographies. Not only are political figures closely investigated, like Mängäša Yoḥannəs, Mənilək II, and Mäk^wännən Wäldä Mikaʿel, but intellectuals too, namely Təgräñña-speaking intellectuals from Təgray, like *Blatta* Gäbrä Əgziʾabəḥer and *Käntiba* Gila Mikaʿel. Their positions vis-à-vis Italian colonial rule or the Ethiopian monarchy, their negotiations, and their opposition are described in personal memoirs and historical texts, which serve as important witnesses of Ethiopian/Eritrean authors and fundamental sources for historians today (these are listed in the useful bibliography). These sources and Italian sources (like the published diary of the colonial governor Ferdinando Martini) give a complex picture of the relations not only between the States as players of international politics, but also between individuals and the States. Chapter 3

is largely dedicated to this interwoven analysis of cultural and political dimensions. The result is a stimulating outline of Ethiopian intellectual history. New research on the intellectual history of Ethiopia at the crucial moment of encounter with the ‘West’ will find interesting clues here, shedding light on themes such as the behaviour of the Ethiopians/Eritreans towards the Italian colonial power, and on the impact of colonization on the intellectual and political role of Ethiopia in the world, among others.

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BORIS ADJEMIAN, *La fanfare du négus: Les Arméniens en Éthiopie (XIX^e–XX^e siècles)*, En temps & lieux, 47 (Paris: Éditions de l’École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2013). 351 pp., index, 3 maps, 30 figs. Price: €26.00. ISBN: 978-2-713-22415-7.

Après une Préface de Gérard Noiriel (pp. 13–15) et une Introduction de l’auteur (pp. 17–25), ce volume est constitué de neuf chapitres organisés en trois parties: la première partie porte sur la ‘Genèse d’une tradition politique éthiopienne. Essai d’histoire régressive’ (pp. 27–98, Chapitres I–III); la deuxième sur ‘L’amitié des rois. La logique en action d’une autobiographie collective’ (pp. 99–230, Chapitres IV–VI, précédés par un ‘Prélude à l’histoire d’une mémoire collective’); la troisième sur ‘La sédimentation de l’insaisissable. Configuration et usages d’un espace de l’entre-deux’ (pp. 231–295, Chapitres VII–IX); aux pp. 297–300 se trouve une brève Conclusion.

La première partie du titre du volume renvoie à un événement particulier qui a uni l’histoire des Arméniens à l’histoire éthiopienne en 1924, à savoir la création de la première fanfare nationale éthiopienne, formée de quarante orphelins arméniens que le *Ras* Täfäri avait fait venir, à cette fin, de Jérusalem. À cette époque, l’Éthiopie entre dans le concert des nations avec son admission à la Société des Nations et, comme l’écrit l’auteur, veut ‘montrer qu’[elle] fait désormais partie du monde moderne et civilisé’ (p. 33). L’armée et la musique ‘concourent à la mise en scène du pouvoir’ (p. 32) du *Ras* Täfäri (régent depuis 1916 et empereur, sous le nom de Ḥaylā Śəllase I, depuis 1930, en succédant à Mənilək II), qui veut donner l’image d’un État indépendant et d’un pays entré dans la modernité, entre autres par l’introduction d’éléments visibles aux yeux des Occidentaux en visite, tels qu’une musique et une fanfare nationales. Cette ‘métamorphose de l’image de l’Empire d’Éthiopie sur la scène internationale’ servait le programme des dirigeants qui visaient à ‘mieux affirmer leur souveraineté au milieu d’une Afrique sous domination coloniale’ (p. 29).