



Aethiopia 12 (2009)

International Journal of Ethiopian and
Eritrean Studies

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Review of

*Steh auf und geh nach Süden/Arise and go toward the South. 2000 Jahre
Christentum in Äthiopien/2000 years of Christianity in Ethiopia*

Aethiopia 12 (2009), 280–281

ISSN: 1430–1938

Published by

Universität Hamburg

Asien Afrika Institut, Abteilung Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

Hiob Ludolf Zentrum für Äthiopistik

Steh auf und geh nach Süden/Arise and go toward the South. 2000 Jahre Christentum in Äthiopien/2000 years of Christianity in Ethiopia. Frankfurt am Main: Ikonen-Museum der Stadt Frankfurt, 2007, 368 pp. Price: € 28,-. ISBN 978-3-932942-28-0

In 1973, ten years after the exhibition at the Villa Hügel, entitled *Koptische Kunst: Christentum am Nil*, which displayed the arts of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church beside the arts of the Egyptian Orthodox Church and of the Christian kingdoms of ancient Nubia, a loan exhibition dedicated solely to Ethiopian religious art was held at the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen in Stuttgart. This exhibition, *Religiöse Kunst Äthiopiens/Religious Art of Ethiopia*, featured the arts of the Ethiopian Church borrowed from the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Haile Selassie I University (presently Addis Ababa University), Addis Ababa. The most recent major loan exhibition of Ethiopian religious art in Germany, displayed at the Ikonen-Museum der Stadt, one of the many municipal museums of Frankfurt am Main, was devoted primarily to Ethiopian crosses and icons from German collections. A small number of objects was borrowed from German institutions, such as the Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde of Munich and the Museum Haus der Völker und Kulturen at Sankt Augustin, but most of which came from collections; the nucleus of the exhibition came from what is simply designated as “private collection” in the catalogue. Whether some of these anonymous-loan objects are part of an anonymous collection of 150 icons recently installed on permanent loan in the museum is unclear.

The title of the exhibition, *Steh auf und geh nach Süden/Arise and go toward the south*, also the title of the accompanying bilingual exhibition catalogue (German and English, at times awkwardly translated), is a quotation from the Acts of the Apostles (8: 26): “The angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Start out and go south down from Jerusalem to Gaza, the desert road.’” According to popular Ethiopian belief, the Ethiopian official converted by the Apostle Philip (Acts 8: 26–40), returned home to Aksum where he converted Queen Candice or Kandake, the ruler of Ethiopia.¹ In fact, the Greek term “Ethiopian”, as in the Greek text of the Acts of the Apostles, was ap-

¹ Francisco Alvares, a member of the Portuguese embassy in highland Christian Ethiopia from 1520 to 1526, reported the commonly held belief – that the eunuch of Acts 8: 26–40 was an Ethiopian who, after his conversion, returned to Ethiopia and converted Queen Candice, who built “a very noble church” at Aksum (F. ALVARES, *The Prester John of the Indies. A True Relation of the Lands of the Prester John*, eds. G.F. BECKINGHAM – G.W.B. HUNTINGFORD, The Hakluyt Society, 2nd ser., No. 114 [Cambridge, 1961], 148–51). This belief continues to be the basis of pride amongst some Ethiopians who assert that Ethiopia was the first nation to become Christian.

plied to all persons who lived south of the First Cataract of the Nile. Furthermore, the term *Kandake* was the title of the queens of Meroë, the late capital of the Kingdom of Kush in the Upper Nile Valley.² The account in the Acts of the Apostles obviously bears no connection with the historical fact of the conversion of the Ethiopian King ʿEzana of Aksum and the establishment of Christianity as the state religion ca. A.D. 350. The title of the exhibition suggests that the catalogue (and exhibition) were designed for popular appeal rather than with scholarly focus, and the exhibition catalogue bears this out. Aside from Wolfgang Hahn’s exemplary discussion of Aksumite coins and King ʿEzana’s conversion to Christianity, the popular belief concerning the conversion of Aksum 2000 years ago is treated as historical fact. The importance of the exhibition catalogue is due to the color photographs of each of the 268 objects in the exhibition. The photographs are of excellent quality, although the quality of the objects themselves may be somewhat uneven, as if the majority of the objects came from a single anonymous private collection that was borrowed *in toto*.

The catalogue is divided into three separate parts: a series of essays by various authors; photographs; and a section of brief catalogue entries. The catalogue entries contain basic information, but little or no specific discussion or bibliographic references for individual pieces. Essays in the first section, “Icons from Ethiopia”, and “Images in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church”, address neither the question of the development of the devotional image or icon in the Ethiopian Church nor do they include discussions of distinctive iconographies of individual icons. The discussion of sculptural crosses and their forms in the essay entitled “The Cross in Ethiopia – Painted and Sculptural” requires the reader to refer back and forth to various photographs, an awkward arrangement. Other essays, which do not relate directly to the categories of object in the exhibition, suggest that the catalogue was intended to have a dual function – to explicate the objects in the exhibition and also to introduce the reader to a broader understanding of the cultural history of highland Christian Ethiopia. In which case, the essays should reflect the past two decades of scholarship, which would include eliminating such postulates as the Syriac origins of the Ethiopian Church or the presence of Jewish elements in Ethiopian Christianity; these have been proven untenable. Nonetheless, Merawi Tebege’s essay entitled “Faith that comes from the Heart”, Denis Nosnitsin’s essay on Ethiopian Gəʿəz literature as well as the beautiful color photographs of the exhibit’s remarkable processional crosses make this catalogue a worthwhile acquisition.

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² KARL-HEINZ PRIESE, *The Gold of Meroe*, New York – Mainz, 1993, 10, 44–45.