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Review

TSEHAI BERHANE-SELASSIE, *Ethiopian Warriorhood: Defence,
Land & Society 1800–1941*

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these transfers involve Muslim ideas and narratives passing over to Christian discourses, such as that which probably took place in Damietta in 1219/1220, Lewy's reconstruction regrettably presents a rather weak case.

Despite its many shortcomings, the lasting merit of Lewy's book is to have drawn attention to the ways in which the interest in the African Christian kingdoms of Nubia and Ethiopia among medieval Muslims and Christian Europeans was informed by their eschatological expectations. It is to be hoped that it will inspire further studies in this fascinating, interdisciplinary field.

Lutz Greisiger, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg

TSEHAI BERHANE-SELASSIE, *Ethiopian Warriorhood: Defence, Land & Society 1800–1941*, Eastern Africa Series (Rochester, NY: James Currey, 2018). xxvi, 309 pp., 3 maps, 13 photographs, 2 illus., 2 tables. Price: \$99.00. ISBN: 978-184701-191-6.

The book begins with an explanation of the choice of its theme which had obviously been neglected or misunderstood hitherto by national and international writers alike. The published studies concentrated on 'the prominent state structure and the place of the monarchs in defence, administration, and legislative and judicial systems' (cf. pp. 1–2). There is however at least one significant institution for whose exclusion from research the foreign and national writers might be held responsible. Still worse is that some of them mention it in their works scoffing at it with extraneous appellations such as 'a horde', 'näftäñña', 'militia', 'citizen soldiery', feudal or provincial 'levies', and 'melange' (cf. pp. 8–9).¹

The misunderstood institution is named *čäwa*, a Gə'əz and/or Amharic term which is complex in its meaning and obscure in its historical origin.² The whole book is devoted to the institution's history, encompassing the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth, though its unique name

¹ As far as European writers are concerned, they must have compared the style of the *čäwa* to the strict regimentation of their own armies. But Ethiopian writers are more than likely to have valued the military achievements of the *čäwa* against the Turks in 1578, the Egyptians in 1875–1876, and the Italians in 1895–1896.

² At this point, the author refers only to a Gə'əz–Amharic dictionary although other historical sources are available, such as Bairu Tafla, ed., *Ašma Giyorgis and His Work: History of the Gällā and the Kingdom of Šawā*, Äthiopistische Forschungen, 18 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH, 1987).

does not appear as such in the main title of the work, preference being given to the three basic components of traditional Ethiopian culture attached as the subtitle of the book, that is, defence, land, and society. The term ‘warriorhood’ presumably represents in this context the conceptual term *čäwa*, the history of which constitutes the subject of the work.

The *čäwa* were an autonomous group of warriors subgrouped according to their ranks who trained themselves from childhood in riding, sports, military skills, and so on. Upon adulthood and completion of their training, they ‘bore personal responsibility for defending land and society in Ethiopia’ (p. xix). In peacetime, they cared for their families and the community as a whole and were alert to possible dangers against their home territory — all at their own cost. Merely a share in communal land was at their disposal. In time of war, they were ready to defend their country at large whenever mobilized by the central government.

‘Land’ in this context refers not only to the territorial homes of the *čäwa*, but also to the independent country in general. Every time the country was threatened by an external force, the *čäwa* were called up by the monarch or the central government and the warriors were always ready to confront the enemy. This was the case, for instance, when Italy tried to invade Ethiopia in the 1890s. Even in the 1930’s, when the second Italian invasion began, the *čäwa* were ready to fight the invaders, although their military role had already been replaced by the modern imperial army, organized and trained in the 1920’s. They subsequently organized themselves as guerrilla fighters after the emperor went into exile and elected their leaders after the fashion of the society’s tradition (cf. Chapter 9).

The book (composed of ten chapters) is well written and extensively footnoted. Chapter 1 describes various aspects of the *čäwa*’s history, belief, culture, and social structure. Each of the subsequent chapters deals with one or two of the major components of the warriors’ life and activities. The Conclusion elucidates the difference in policy and application of the Ethiopian regimes and forms a valuable addition. A Bibliography and an Index also provide access to the long text.

In many cases the interpretations are convincing. Nonetheless, a few points surface which may have been better discussed or documented. For instance, little explanation is given as to why the study focuses on the specific period 1800–1941, while this is necessary for the scope of any historical study to be defined. 1941 is understandable as it marks the end of fascist Italian rule in Ethiopia, the return of the emperor to his throne, and the end of the *čäwa*’s last significant military activity. Less comprehensible is the use of 1800 as a period marker, as the records show no significant event occurred to the whole or greater part of the country. Incidentally the focus

of the book is southern Ethiopia, more specifically, the area from Šäwa to Sidamo, with only a few references to the northern provinces. The choice is quite acceptable here as, up to the present, historical studies of southern Ethiopia have been insufficient.

Further obscurity lies in the relation between the monarchy and the *čäwa* prior to the restructuring of the latter toward the end of the nineteenth century. The book depicts differences in concept and practice between the two regarding communal land (cf. Chapter 3). Is it possible that the monarch emerged from the *čäwa* originally and, after achieving power, went on to claim more and more rights which had belonged to the *čäwa* as a whole? Perhaps the next edition may tell us more!

The author, an Ethiopian by birth and Oxonian by erudition, has lectured for decades in various universities in Africa, Europe, and the United States and has produced and/or edited numerous academic works in different fields. After approximately fifty years of research, she has now opened a new aspect of Ethiopian history by publishing this multifaceted work. She should indeed be congratulated for her splendid contribution to Ethiopian studies.

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SILVIA BRUZZI, *Islam and Gender in Colonial Northeast Africa: Sitti 'Alawiyya, the Uncrowned Queen*, Islam in Africa, 21 (Leiden–Boston, MA: Brill, 2018). 252 pp. Price: €105.00. ISBN: 978-90-04-34800-4.

In 1919, Carlo Alfonso Nallino, one of the most illustrious Italian orientalists, wrote that, with the sole exception of Məşəwwa^c and Kärän, Islam in Eritrea was the result of a recent expansion and that, among other things, it did not involve the more cultured sectors of the society.¹ What he found much more interesting was Libyan Islam, which he paid greater attention to, especially as he was encouraged by the Italian government, which frequently asked for his advice. Unaware that the Horn of Africa was the first African region to be touched by Islam, Nallino and the leaders of Italian Orientalism seemed convinced that beneath the equator there really was an

¹ C. A. Nallino, 'Trattamento degli indigeni e loro partecipazione all'amministrazione coloniale. Ordinamento politico-amministrativo', in Ministero delle Colonie, *Relazione della VII sezione della Commissione del Dopo-Guerra (Quistioni coloniali)* (Roma: Tipografia della Camera dei Deputati, 1919), 111–124, especially p. 111.