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## Personalia

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## Personalia

### In memoriam Rita Pankhurst (1927–2019)

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After having collaborated with Rita Pankhurst for three decades at the Society of Friends of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (SOFIES) of Addis Ababa University and many other cultural activities, we realize how much her dedication and drive are sorely missed. Her commitment to the institute's growth was extraordinary. Even in her last days, she worried about the new library's furnishings: she had an almost obsessive wish for it to be fitted out with up-to-date and reader-friendly furniture. Keenly aware of the difficulties in ensuring the continuous acquisition of new books and periodicals—the very life's blood of any serious research library—she was continually on the lookout for potential external support to help the cash-strapped institution. Despite her intense involvement in university-related activity, Rita always found the time to pursue voluntary work, engage in research, and visit art exhibitions. A highly cultured person, she had a refined sense of appreciation of visual art, classical music, and literary works. It was always a pleasure—and intellectually enriching—to spend time with her, particularly at her home on a Sunday afternoon when invited for tea.

Rita Eldon was born on 5 July 1927, in the medieval university town of Iasi in Romania into an upper-class Jewish family. She grew up in ease and comfort. Her family emigrated to the United Kingdom in 1938 due to the increasingly darkening clouds over Europe. There she attended the old Perse School for Girls in Cambridge, one of the leading independent schools in the country. She gained entry to University of Oxford (Lady Margaret Hall) where she studied French and Russian and was awarded her master's degree in 1948. Wishing to polish her Russian and immerse herself in French, in 1949 she applied to the *École nationale des langues orientales vivantes* (currently, *Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales*, also known as *Langues O'*) in Paris, where she obtained an advanced diploma in Slavic languages. Returning to London to embark on her professional career, she landed a job as a librarian at Chatham House, the famous London think tank, also known as the Royal Institute of International Af-

fairs. She worked there until 1956, whereupon she decided to move to Ethiopia, a country she had never been to before.

The reason for this was her having met Richard Pankhurst who persuaded her to join him (and his mother) in Ethiopia, where they had moved to in July 1956. She joined them after a few months and they were married a year later. The Ethiopian National Library, popularly also called Wämäzäkär, employed her as a librarian. There she had the opportunity to become acquainted with some of the country's leading artistic and literary figures, such as the poet/playwright Käbbädä Mika'el (her boss) and Allä Fälägä Sälam (a renowned painter). Her husband's old friend, Afäwärk Täkle, was emerging at that time as a leading artist and was also based there. An initiative of hers—that calls for serious research by social and political historians—was the introduction of panel discussions involving those young intellectuals recently returned from abroad after completing their education. Some of the ideas aired in these lectures created a stir in town. Further to which, her mother-in-law Sylvia Pankhurst's Ethiopian wartime friends introduced her into Addis Abäba's elite society, even the royal family. One day, she received a call from the palace informing her that the emperor would like to talk to her. She went with some excitement. He asked her advice regarding the systematization of his library, a very impressive collection by any standard. She readily gave advice, she told me years ago. She had been especially close to the sovereign's granddaughter, Princess Hirut Dästa.

The couple were soon blessed with two children—Helen and Alula. In spite of her heavy workload and the demanding duties of motherhood, she enrolled on a correspondence training course at the UK Library Association. Completing those studies in 1964, she obtained a degree and an associateship. In the same year, the newly founded Haile Selassie I University (formerly University College of Addis Ababa) invited her to head its library, later to be named the John F. Kennedy Memorial Library. She worked there for more than ten years and in that time built up an efficient university-standard library. As a student in the early 1970s in the same institution, I recall very distinctly, how good the services were and how the collection was up-to-date. Only radical students were continuously annoyed with her—due to the leftist books the library purchased from the United States and the United Kingdom. When the library staff discovered the budding revolutionaries were smuggling the books out rather than borrowing them, the administration decided to make them all materials for 'on the spot' reading. The radicals had dubbed their theft 'liberation' believing that stealing books was a noble act as long as the goal was to serve the revolution—a convoluted thinking Rita would not have taken kindly to. The

militants construed her action as a typical imperialist ruse to prevent them from mastering the hallowed philosophy of Marx and his followers, even though some knew the head librarian's name, Pankhurst, made her a relative of a famed polemicist; a correspondent with none other than their demi-god, Lenin.<sup>1</sup>

The 1960s were very active and happy years for the Pankhursts. Their two children—Helen and Alula—were growing up. They were immersed in work and in various civic and cultural activities. Richard published many of his important titles. Their circle, made up of the leading literary, artistic, and intellectual figures of the country, were very prolific, producing books, plays, and poetry as well as staging exciting exhibitions of paintings. Some of these activities were reported in the *Ethiopia Observer*. Rita took part in editing this very useful periodical. Some of their friends (Afāwārk, Māngəštu, and Gäbrä Krəstos) received the highest award of the time, the Haile Selassie I Prize award, and the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES), which had been under the stewardship of Richard Pankhurst throughout, was also given an institutional award. Indeed, the 1960s and early 1970s were heady days. But, like all good things, they were not to last.

The Revolution of 1974 was a landmark in the life of Rita and her family as it was to be for almost all their friends and acquaintances. Many saw terrible days after the revolution branded them counter-revolutionaries; some managed to adjust and live through the turmoil more or less unscathed. The Pankhursts would have liked to have lived through all the storm; but it was impossible. I recall that the tempest reached the IES where some of the employees started to attack Professor Chojnacki and Richard as 'imperialists'. The Polish scholar finally left in 1976. As did the Pankhursts. Their house, given by the emperor to Sylvia as a token of friendship, became the headquarters of the twenty-fourth *käftäña*, an administrative unit of the municipality; one of the rooms was turned into a jail room. Employees of the *käftäña*, people who came to the office for one reason or another, and prisoners trampled on the beautiful garden, once so fondly nurtured by Rita, perhaps not with the intent to destroy it, but simply because nobody cared for it. In the course of the next few years, the nice house was disfigured, the inside wall defaced, and the fixed appliances damaged by neglect.

<sup>1</sup> Sylvia Pankhurst engaged in correspondence, and even in polemics, with Lenin over several years. The correspondence was well-known in radical student circles at the university in those days. In the eyes of the militants, it was a mark of 'high stature' to be known by Lenin—and to be 'criticized' by him. It was also the ultimate testimony to the leftist credentials of Sylvia Pankhurst.

Back in London after so many years (they said they were in ‘exile’ from Ethiopia), Rita had to settle her family and restart life anew. She got a job as head of the library services of the City of London Polytechnic (currently the London Metropolitan University) that year and remained in her post for over eleven years. Not long after her employment (1977), she played a key role in the acquisition of the valuable Fawcett Library for the polytechnic. This collection, named after noted suffragette, Millicent Fawcett (1847–1929), is a major repository of records and publications on women’s suffrage campaigns going back to the nineteenth century. Together with Richard, her interest in Ethiopian studies was always alive. Believing that the historical study of Ethiopian arts had gone a considerable distance, she took the initiative (together with Richard) to organize an international conference on Ethiopian arts held in London in October 1986. It launched a valuable series of conferences that have now reached their tenth and that brought together scholars from Ethiopia and abroad engaged in research on all aspects of Ethiopian arts. The proceedings have been very useful platforms for research reports in the field. She herself contributed to many of the congresses.

The Provisional Military Administrative Council in Ethiopia realized that mistakes were committed in the early years of the revolution, which drove off expatriate staff from the country, some of whom were great friends of Ethiopia. The revolutionary fervour had also subsided over the years. Eventually the couple returned in 1987 and regained ownership of their house. Richard settled as a researcher in the Institute of Ethiopian Studies and Rita took up library consultancies, editing work (books and other publications), and voluntary service to charities. They revived the Society of Friends of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, a group that had been formed in the 1960s and had hibernated after the revolution, in which Rita played a leading role. She served as the chair of the United World Colleges committee for Ethiopia and as a board member of the Ethiopian Gemini Trust. The former is, according to its website, ‘a global education movement’ that works to bring together students from around the world in colleges in selected countries. The Ethiopian Gemini Trust was a remarkable NGO working for children, youth, and mothers in the most deprived parts of Addis Abäba. In addition to all this, she was always actively involved in women’s rights issues.

Rita’s passion for the country was always boundless and she and her husband continued to champion Ethiopia’s causes. One of these was the question of the repatriation of artefacts unjustly taken out of the country. The focus was on the items looted from Mäqdäla and other places during the British expedition of 1867/1868, found in private possession or in insti-

tutions in the United Kingdom, and the Aksum obelisk taken by Fascist Italy and erected in the centre of Rome. This campaign, and in particular the return of the obelisk, was an abiding and continuous concern in their lives. After years of struggle, they succeeded in getting back a good number of artefacts taken from Ethiopia by the British expedition. The initiative for the return of the obelisk eventually became a national movement supported by the Ethiopian government. The monument was finally returned in 2005.

Rita was a constant presence at the international conferences of Ethiopian studies where she presented her own papers. In fact, she had an impressive number of essays to her name read at various international and national colloquia. She covered several topics even if her focus was understandably on library-related themes and on women's issues. Reflecting her professional bias, she was particularly good at providing research tools such as bibliographies. The Institute of Ethiopian Studies and the Society of Friends of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies celebrated the lifetime achievements of Rita and Richard by devoting a special issue of its flagship publication, the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* (40/1–2, 2007).

Over time, the Pankhursts stayed more and more at home. Once in a while, I joined Ian Campbell, the historian of Graziani's massacres and a good friend of the family, when he made his weekly late Sunday afternoon visits. I always saw a serene Rita, who played her role of a matriarch very well, following where the children (Alula and Helen) were and making sure that all the four grandchildren, spread out in universities in the United Kingdom and the United States, were doing fine. She followed developments in Ethiopian studies with great interest and enquired about the situation of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies. She worked on the second volume of *Ethiopian reminiscences*, a witty memoir she had started with Richard. I recall that, in her last years, friends—both Ethiopians and foreigners—suggested to her that London would be a better place if only for the presence of excellent medical and other facilities suitable for old age. She was firmly committed to her wish to live to the end of her life and be buried in the soil of her adopted country. She passed away on 30 May 2019 at the age of (almost) 92 at her home and her funeral took place on 4 July at the Trinity Cathedral where Sylvia and Richard were also laid to rest. One can say that she lived life to the full.

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For a comprehensive list of published and unpublished contributions, see the list Rita Pankhurst herself compiled, 'Bibliography of Published Writings', in *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 40/1–2 (2007, pub. 2010 = Heran

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## In memoriam Rochus Zuurmond (1930–2020)

SIEGBERT UHLIG, Universität Hamburg (Emeritus)

Wer Rochus Zuurmond begegnete, traf einen charmanten, fröhlichen, weltmännischen, umfassend gebildeten, an Gott und der Welt interessierten, gesellschaftlich engagierten und gelegentlich streitlustigen Zeitgenossen.

Am 5. Dezember 1930 wurde er geboren, am 22. Februar 2020 starb er im Alter von 89 Jahren.

Typisch für seine Weltoffenheit war, dass er zunächst Mathematik und Ingenieurwissenschaften studierte, um sich dann der Theologie zu widmen, dass er Studentenkaplan und Mitarbeiter am interkirchlichen IKON-Radio war, aber auch intensiv Textmassen äthiopischer Handschriften und ihre Details in Beziehung setzte.

Im Alter von fast 60 Jahren wurde er 1988 in Utrecht im Fach Theologie promoviert mit einer Einführung in die äthiopischen synoptischen Evangelien und der Edition des Markusevangeliums (*Novum Testamentum Aethiopicum: The Synoptic Gospels*, I: *General Introduction*; II: *Edition of the Gospel of Mark*, Äthiopistische Forschungen, 27 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH, 1989)). Dem folgte später die Textausgabe des Matthäusevangeliums (*Novum Testamentum Aethiopicum: The Synoptic Gospels*, III: *The Gospel of Matthew*, Äthiopistische Forschungen, 55 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2001)), Arbeiten, die er auch technisch für den Druck vorbereitete (in den 1980er Jahren noch relativ kompliziert).

Ernst Hammerschmidt, Rochus Zuurmond und ich diskutierten über eine Subreihe für die Äthiopistischen Forschungen mit dem Ergebnis, dass