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by Alessandro Bausi
in cooperation with
Bairu Tafla, Ludwig Gerhardt,
Susanne Hummel and Alexander Meckelburg

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Vignette:

Gold coin of King Aphilas, early third century CE, as drawn by A. Luegmeyer after the coin in Rennau collection. Weight 2.48 grams, diameter 17 mm.

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The journal focuses on philology, linguistics, archaeology, history, cultural anthropology, religion, philosophy, literature, and manuscript studies with a regional emphasis on Eritrea, Ethiopia, the Horn of Africa, and related areas. The editors welcome contributions on relevant academic topics as well as on recent research in the respective field. Each issue of **AETHIOPICA** contains reviews of books which form a substantial section of the journal.

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Editorial

The present issue of AETHIOPICA is the twenty-fifth since the journal's founding in 1998. It is also the thirteenth issue I have worked on as editor-in-chief, one more than that of founder Siegbert Uhlig. The present time, however, does not lend itself to celebrations of any sort. The global political crisis and the situation in the Horn of Africa are having a deep impact on the scholarly community, which appears divided and radicalized on opposite or increasingly diverging positions as never before. The growing influence of diaspora communities is at times marked by waves of resurgent nationalism. The challenge posed by main-stream policy in countries of established scholarly traditions gives less and less space to small fields—as is the case of Ethiopian and Eritrean studies. The consequent lack of resources triggers the fragmentation of the scholarly scene. New balances based on mutual legitimation and acknowledgement of a common scholarly method are not obvious. The consequence of this complex situation, which reflects global changes, is that scholarly and academic freedom can be put at risk. Of all priorities envisaged in the mission of AETHIOPICA, preservation of academic freedom along with scholarly quality has been, is, and will remain the top priority of the journal.

I regret that in the past, and still now, the lack of available qualified authors has prevented AETHIOPICA from duly commemorating distinct colleagues and researchers recently passed away who were more than deserving of an obituary. I would like to remember at least some of them here, by name, as a very modest tribute to their work and memory: Johannes Launhardt (1929–2019), Mesfin Wolde Mariam (1930–2020), Steffen Wenig (1934–2022), Girma Fisseha (1941–2020).

To end on a positive note, three colleagues active in Ethiopian and Eritrean studies have received important awards this year, and we would like to mention them here: Samantha Kelly (Professor of Medieval History at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, also on our International Editorial Board), has won the Choice Outstanding Academic Title 2020, and the African Studies Review Prize for the Best Africa-focused Anthology or Edited Collection 2021, for her *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Leiden–Boston, MA: Brill, 2020); Verena Krebs (Junior-Professorin für Mittelalterliche Kulturräume at Ruhr-Universität Bochum) has received the Dan David Prize for her *Medieval Ethiopian Kingship, Craft, and Diplomacy with Latin Europe* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021); and Massimo Zaccaria (Professore Associato in Storia e Istituzioni dell'Africa at Università degli Studi di Pavia) has received the Giorgio Maria Sangiorgi award of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei 'per la Storia ed Etnologia dell'Africa'. To all of them—the warmest congratulations from AETHIOPICA!

REVIEWS

ZEMENFES TSIĞHE, SALEH MAHMUD IDRIS, YONAS MESFUN ASFAHA, SENAI WOLDEAB ANDEMARIAM, REDIET KIFLE TADDESE, GHEBREBRHAN OGUBAZGHI, eds, *International Conference on Eritrean Studies, 20–22 July 2016: Proceedings, I: Literature, Linguistics, Philology, History, Discourse Analysis, Education, Sociocultural Issues, Gender, Law, Regional Dynamics, and Tigrinya Literature; II: Earth Sciences and Hazards, Agriculture, Environment, Archeology and Heritage, Business and Economic Development, Health and Demography, and Technology* (Asmara: National Higher Education and Research Institute, 2018). I: xv, 1–687 pp.; II: xv, 691–1182 pp., maps, illus. Price: I: \$35.90; II: \$25.90. ISBN: 978-99948-2-000-9.

These proceedings, the outcome of the 2016 International Conference on Eritrean Studies, represent a milestone in Eritrean studies. Eritrea gained its formal independence from Ethiopia in 1993. After starting to recover from the long war of independence, the small country soon became embroiled in another devastating border conflict with Ethiopia. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the overall situation in Eritrea in the twenty-first century has been anything but conducive to the development of education and research. Therefore a call for papers for the International Conference on Eritrean Studies: The Way Forward in July 2015 came as a welcome surprise. The conference was held on 20–22 July 2016 in Asmara, sponsored by national and international institutions and accompanied by vivid coverage in the local mass media. Over 240 abstracts from 26 countries were received by the organizing committee; after selection, over 140 papers were presented at the conference, in 41 sessions (I, pp. xiii–xiv).

Prepared by a group of editors, the two-volume proceedings were edited and printed in Asmara within the quite reasonable time of two years. The volumes accommodate fifty-three papers distributed over seventeen ‘thematic areas’. Despite the impressive size of the volumes (altogether c.1200 pages), the number fifty-three is only slightly more than one third of all the papers presented, and as such is a little disappointing. Fortunately, an Appendix (I, pp. 670–687) lists alphabetically by author all talks given at the conference, with the participant’s name, institution, and email, so that anyone interested can trace the presenter’s work and publications. The distribution of the papers in the volumes is as follows. Volume I: two papers on literature, four papers on linguistics, two on philology, four on history, two on discourse analysis, eight on education, two on gender, three on law, two on regional dynamics, one on Təgrɛññā literature. Volume II: three papers on earth science and

hazards, three on agriculture, four on environment, four on archaeology and heritage, four on business and economic development, three on health and demography, two on technology.¹ Both volumes are prefaced by an identical ‘Note from the Executive Director’ (p. xi) and a Foreword (pp. xiii–xv). More than half of the published papers were penned by Eritrean authors; no contribution is marked as having the status of ‘key note’.

Papers on contemporary issues (education, developmental studies, natural sciences) prevailed at the conference and they dominate in the proceedings. This preference appears not to be incidental but reflects a deliberate policy pursued by the Eritrean convenors and editors. Their choice is understandable in view of the contemporary situation of Eritrea as it struggles with economic and social difficulties and seeks to take advantage of each opportunity for exchange between experts, looking for solutions. No one can claim that such an orientation of the proceedings and the conference is ‘wrong’. However, most readers, especially those who have an overview over the corresponding topics in Ethiopian studies, will like to know whether the bias is temporary or it is indicative of the strategic direction of Eritrean studies, where developmental and ‘hard science’ studies will continue to predominate over anything else. In my opinion, the proceedings—but in the first line the conference—could have profited from inclusion of a few more contributions in the humanities, dedicated, for instance, to various aspects of medieval history, local written culture and written sources, art history, ethno-history, and the like, that would give expression to the richness of the local civilization. Exceptionally, pre-medieval archaeology is well represented under ‘Archaeology and Heritage’ (II, pp. 881–962); but no paper on palaeo-anthropology is included, and medieval architecture is completely absent, with only one paper presented at the conference (Jean-François Breton) that did not appear in the proceedings.² Təgrəññā literature is the subject of two papers only, by Akeder Ahmedin (in Təgrəññā) and by Tej N. Dhar, placed in two different sections. Somewhat unexpectedly, one paper under ‘Philology’ (Stanislau Paulau) deals with Amharic literature (see below). ‘History’ (I, pp. 159–237) is somewhat under-represented, with only four papers. The main goal of a few contributions was obviously to promote a political agenda or to change the existing image of Eritrea in the world. Their value for research and scholarship is questionable.

¹ The programme of the conference, which can still occasionally be found on the Internet, lists only 130 presentations while the aforementioned Appendix enumerates 147 presentations. The difference of seventeen papers is significant but is not explained anywhere in the proceedings.

² Later probably published as J.-F. Breton, ‘The Restoration of Kidane Mehret Church in Sen’afe’, *Sociology Study*, 6/11 (2016), 713–720.

The present author feels himself personally competent to comment on only a few papers. Concerning the contribution by Alessandro Bausi and Gianfrancesco Lusini ('The philological study of the Eritrean manuscripts in Gə'əz: Methods and practices', I, pp. 125–141) one can only agree that the written heritage of Eritrea is known insufficiently.³ The field research by the aforementioned authors in the early 1990s represents the so far unmatched attempt to capture the condition and composition of the local manuscript collections. Except for the publications emanating from that field research, few written sources were recorded over the last thirty–forty years in Eritrea that might later be used in studies. The manuscript culture of Eritrea represents a continuum with the adjacent Ethiopian area. It is hardly possible, at the current stage of research, to distinguish manuscripts that were produced in the territory covered by today's Eritrea

³ As an addition to the list of nine hagiographical sources from the Fondo Carlo Conti Rossini of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei discussed in Bausi and Lusini's contribution, I would like to mention *Gadla šādəqān za-Baraknāhā*, 'Acts of the Righteous of Baraknāhā', known primarily from MS Rome, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Biblioteca dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana, Fondo Carlo Conti Rossini 78 (see S. Strelcyn, *Catalogue des manuscrits éthiopiens de l'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei: Fonds Conti Rossini et Fonds Caetani* 209, 375, 376, 377, 378, *Indici e Sussidi Bibliografici della Biblioteca*, 9 (Roma: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1976), 203–204). The *Acts of the Righteous of Baraknāhā* are a very interesting hagiographic source that may predate the hagiography dedicated to abbots and monastery founders. After a partial edition (C. Conti Rossini, *Ricordi di un soggiorno in Eritrea*, II (Asmara: Tipografia della Missione Svedese, 1903), 9–22), more Ethiopic witnesses have come to light (mostly from Təgrāy, northern Ethiopia). Today they would allow a more comprehensive philological elaboration (of both the *Acts of the Righteous of Baraknāhā* and the *malkə*'-hymn for them), possibly even without recourse to the manuscripts in Eritrea. In addition to those mentioned in A. Brita, 'Šadəqan', in S. Uhlig, ed., in cooperation with A. Bausi, *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, IV: O–X (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 446a–447b, a few more nineteenth-/twentieth-century manuscripts have recently been digitized by the project Ethio-SPaRe: Cultural Heritage of Christian Ethiopia. Salvation, Preservation, Research (funded by the European Research Council, Starting Grant 240720, 2009–2015). These are MSS Tansəhe Kidāna Məhrat, TKMG-035, *Acts of the Righteous of Baraknāhā*; Māy Šā'adā Šəllāse, MSAE-026, *Acts and Malkə*' (dated 1965 EC, reportedly copied from a manuscript at Maṭarā, Eritrea); Dabra Sāhəl Qəddus Mikā'el Bet Maḳā', DSM-017, *Acts and Malkə*'; and Dabra Mā'šo Qəddus Yoḥannəs, MY-026, *Acts*, and MY-027, *Malkə*'. For further information on these manuscripts, see the website of Ethio-SPaRe (<https://www.aai.uni-hamburg.de/en/ethiostudies/research/ethiospare.html>) and the database of the ongoing long-term project Beta mašāḥəft: Schriftkultur des christlichen Äthiopiens und Eritreas: Eine multimediale Forschungsumgebung, funded within the framework of the Academies' Programme under survey of the Akademie der Wissenschaften in Hamburg (<https://betamascheft.eu>).

from those stemming from the neighbouring part of Ethiopia, unless the origin is explicitly stated in the text.⁴

The contribution of Paulau ('Interconfessional dialogue and traditional litigation in the early 20th century Eritrea: A Historical witness of an unpublished manuscript (EMML 1074)', I, pp. 143–155) raises a number of interesting issues and shows how much Ethiopia and Eritrea share in terms of a common historical and cultural heritage. The presence of the missionaries was deeply frustrating for the clerics of the Orthodox Church but, as commonly assumed, at the same time stimulated the creation of Amharic texts as early as the seventeenth century. However, Amharic written sources describing the polemics between the Orthodox Church and the missionaries known so far are not numerous, despite the fact that the influence of the missions grew in the late nineteenth and twentieth century. The reasons for this are not quite clear. Perhaps we should remember that the Ethiopian rulers of that period were increasingly interested in missionaries and all missions worked with the official approval of the local authorities. Another possible reason may be that those polemical texts exist but remain out of our reach, hidden in recent private manuscripts of Ethiopian Doctors of the Church that rarely become an object of study. In any case, a comprehensive analysis of all Ethiopic or Amharic accounts about religious polemics is a desideratum.

The contribution of a group of authors (Alfredo Castiglioni, Angelo Castiglioni, Yohannes Gebreyesus, Serena Massa, Andrea Manzo, Caterina Giostra, and Susanna Bortolotto, 'Archaeological research at Adulis: The Eritrean–Italian joint project 2011–2015', II, pp. 895–915) discusses the archaeological research at the site of the ancient harbour of Adulis, the only place in Eritrea where a joint archaeological project has been conducted to date.⁵

Many other contributions printed in the proceedings that contain a wealth of information on the social and economic life of Eritrea do not fall within the competence of the reviewer. The diversity of the topics, however, itself highlights one more issue. The prefatory part of the proceedings lacks any overview of 'Eritrean studies' as a whole; there is no explanation as to what Eritrean stud-

⁴ We cannot be sure of the Eritrean origin of a given manuscript even if we know that its commissioner lived in the territory covered by contemporary Eritrea, since the scribe could have lived either in Eritrea or in Təgrāy. A number of such manuscripts were recorded by the project Ethio-SPaRe, for instance those donated by the nineteenth-century *Bāḥar naḡāsi* Tawalda Madḥən of Ḥamāsen (Eritrea): MSS Gulo Maḳadā, 'Urā Qirqos, UM-029, *Miracles of Mary*; UM-013, Four Gospels; and UM-022, *Homiliary for the Feasts of St Michael* (digitized by the Ethio-SPaRe project, accessible though the websites mentioned in the footnote above).

⁵ Carried out in 2019–2021 in the framework of the project Valorizzazione del patrimonio culturale eritreo—il sito archeologico di Adulis (VITAE), AID 10277, under the aegis of Agenzia italiana per la cooperazione allo sviluppo (AICS).

ies is, and in what respects it differs from or overlaps with Ethiopian studies. The lack of a proper discussion on this subject prevents the reader from understanding the true importance of the proceedings and the conference itself, in both the national and international context. To the best of my knowledge, the term ‘Eritrean studies’ was in circulation at least as early as the 1980s, appearing in the names of organizations and in the titles of periodicals.⁶ Indeed, an earlier International Conference of Eritrean Studies (called the first one), bearing the title *Independent Eritrea: Lessons and Prospects*, was held on 22–26 July 2001 in Asmara on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of Eritrea’s independence.⁷ This significant event goes unmentioned in the proceedings under review. The reasons for this have not been explained; the reader might wrongly get the impression that the 2016 conference is the first of its kind, and indeed it has been presented as such in some Eritrean media. In any case, the volumes contain no discussion that might help to understand the history and scope of Eritrean studies. Such a discussion might have turned out to be complex and required some research on the part of the editors, yet it would seem to be essential for making Eritrean studies more sustainable and more visibly profiled on the international level.⁸ This task remains for future conferences of Eritrean studies, which, as we all hope, will be convened regularly—and for their respective proceedings.

Denis Nosnitsin, Universität Hamburg

⁶ They are, for instance, *Journal of Eritrean Studies* issued in 1986–1989, a semi-annual publication of the Research and Information Centre of Eritrea (RICE), an organization that was involved in the struggle for the Eritrean cause; *Eritrean Studies Association Newsletter* and *Eritrean Studies Review* (1996–2007) of the Eritrean Studies Association. Another *Journal of Eritrean Studies*, of the College of Arts and Social Sciences (University of Asmara), was launched in 2002.

⁷ See Bairu Tafla and V. Six, ‘July 22–26, 2001 in Asmara (Eritrea): International Conference of Eritrean Studies’, *Aethiopia*, 5 (2002), 299–300. In the following few years, the proceedings were sometimes cited as forthcoming, under the projected title *Independent Eritrea: Lessons and Prospects, Proceedings of the First International Conference of Eritrean Studies*, but the publication never materialized. A slight difference in the title of the 2016 conference is noticeable (*Conference on Eritrean Studies*) but the proceedings do not give any clue if it is significant or not.

⁸ It is still possible to find remnants of a discussion about the scope and perspectives of Eritrean studies that took place in the course of the preparation for the 2001 conference (<http://www.dehai.org>). Besides, the concept and scope of Eritrean studies, as understood by some Western scholars in the first decade of the twenty-first century, were briefly discussed in the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopia*, the major reference work for the Horn of Africa (see S. Uhlig, ‘Ethiopian studies’, in S. Uhlig, ed., *Encyclopaedia Aethiopia*, II: *D–Ha* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005), 433a–438b, esp. 434a).