

Sonderdruck aus/Offprint from

AETHIOPICA

International Journal
of Ethiopian and Eritrean Studies

Edited in the Asien-Afrika-Institut
Hiob-Ludolf-Zentrum für Äthiopistik
der Universität Hamburg
Abteilung für Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

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25 (2022)

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

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.

AETHIOPICA. INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHIOPIAN AND ERITREAN STUDIES is an internationally refereed academic journal, edited at the Hiob Ludolf Centre for Ethiopian Studies and at the Department of African and Ethiopian Studies of the Asien-Afrika-Institut at Hamburg Universität, Alsterterrasse 1, 20354 Hamburg, Germany, Tel: +49 40-42838-7730/8380; email: *aethiopica.aai@uni-hamburg.de*.

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.

AETHIOPICA is published mainly in English. Articles in French, German, and Italian are also accepted for publication. An English summary for all articles in any language is provided.

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Publication of this journal is partially supported by the project Beta maṣāḥaft: Die Schriftkultur des christlichen Äthiopiens und Eritreas: eine multimediale Forschungsumgebung, funded by The Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities through a project of the Academy of Hamburg, and includes immediate Open Access.

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Printing and binding by Memminger MedienCentrum, Memmingen

Printed on permanent/durable paper

Printed in Germany

<https://www.harrassowitz-verlag.de/>

ISSN 1430-1938

eISSN 2194-4024

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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!

unfolds a different story about twelfth/thirteenth century kingdom, with many questions and hypotheses on Roḥā-Lālibalā's precise role (pp. 182–190). The end of the chapter reflects on the passage from royal figure to the figure of a saint (pp. 190–194), showing the connection between King Zar'a Yā'qob's and King Lālibalā's cult in the church of Golgotā.

Chapter 4 (pp. 195–256) discusses the emergence of two different historiographies, one narrated by the authors of the Zāg^we kings and the other narrated by the authors of the anti-Zāg^we party. The author reflects on the context of the two main discourses, placing them in the course of time in the context of rewriting the past with its various stages—an ongoing scholarly process since the sixteenth century.

The book under review already proved to contain a number of working hypotheses which led researchers in various directions. It can be particularly stimulating for those who work in such domains as Ethiopian studies, medieval Africa, Horn of Africa, church history, as well as for any historian due to its methodological approach. Any scholar can appreciate it as a piece of good and clear academic writing.

Nafisa Valieva, Collège de France

VERENA KREBS, *Medieval Ethiopian Kingship, Craft, and Diplomacy with Latin Europe* (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland AG–Palgrave Macmillan, 2021). 308 pp. Price: €93.59. ISBN: 978-3-030-64933-3.

In this monograph, Verena Krebs examines the diplomatic contact between the Christian Ethiopian kings (*nägāst*) and various Latin European powers between about 1400 and 1526. These contacts have often been approached from the side of the European powers, whose motives, including military alliance and religious union, are attested in a wide variety of sources. Yet it was the *nägāst* who initiated the first successful diplomatic contacts, and who continued to land their envoys in Europe over a long period in which European powers tried but failed to reciprocate. Krebs thus orients her study around a deeply relevant question: what exactly did the *nägāst* want? It is a complex question to investigate, for until the sixteenth century there are precious few Ethiopian sources that speak directly to this diplomacy. The prevailing interpretation—that the *nägāst* sought military alliance and weaponry—Krebs finds unsupported by evidence and Eurocentric in its assumptions of Ethiopian weakness and need for 'superior' European technology. She thus sifts through a raft of European sources and several Egyptian accounts, as well as what Ethiopian textual and material evidence can reveal of the contacts themselves and of their context, to look again.

Her answer is set out most comprehensively in Chapter 5 (concisely recapitulated in the four-page Chapter 6). Condensing evidence proffered in her analysis of diplomatic exchanges in Chapters 2 through 4, she argues that ‘instead of seeking assistance from an allegedly technologically superior Europe to aid Solomonic warfare, the *nägäšt* sent out their missions to acquire religious treasures and construction-related manpower’ (p. 189). One challenge for this thesis is that in the early sixteenth century Ethiopian rulers (the queen regent Əleni and Ləbnä Dəngəl) did express an interest in allying with European powers and/or in acquiring European weaponry. Those rulers also penned the first Ethiopian royal diplomatic letters to European destinations that survive, and thus the earliest evidence from the Solomonic royal court itself of the nature of its diplomatic overtures. Krebs tackles this issue head-on, arguing (pp. 203–206) that these rulers’ interest in European firepower and openness to military alliance were a novelty of the early sixteenth century, with no implications for earlier priorities of the *nägäšt*. Furthermore, even Əleni (to judge by the gifts sent back by the king of Portugal) and Ləbnä Dəngəl (whose own letters make this clear) remained keenly interested in the acquisition of western European goods and artisans: this was a continuous priority from circa 1400 through the 1520s.

Krebs then proposes *why* the Solomonic rulers were particularly interested in western European artisans and religious treasures: namely, to build and endow the many royal churches founded in this period. Krebs thus highlights the religious-political landscape within the Solomonic realm, rather than its relations with its neighbours, as the major impetus for the kings’ diplomatic outreach, especially regarding the *nägäšt*’s strategy of anchoring their territorial influence through patronage of ecclesiastical institutions. Krebs takes pains to emphasize that western European goods, and the artisans who could produce them, were not desired because they were superior, a Eurocentric view associated with the ‘military thesis’. Many contemporary rulers sought foreign goods (and Christian Ethiopian rulers sought foreign goods from many places beyond western Europe) because their foreignness itself was prestigious: acquiring them was not a ‘passive capitulation to the supposedly greater achievements of a foreign other, but demonstrated a ruler’s power and reach’ (p. 214).

Finally, and still in Chapter 5, Krebs proposes a more specifically Christian Ethiopian significance for this royal programme of ecclesiastically oriented acquisition, construction, and adornment: its echoes of the biblical King Solomon and its reinforcement of royal Solomonic ideology. It is not only that Solomon himself, in the biblical account, sought foreign as well as domestic workers to help build his temple. Rather, Krebs identifies parallels between the biblical description of the Temple of Solomon and royal Ethiopian ecclesiastical foundations of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century (unfortunately now destroyed, but approachable through earlier written accounts and some archeologi-

cal surveys), including their ‘ashlar’ masonry construction, wooden interiors, and adornment with silver or gold plating and encrusted jewels.

The preceding three chapters, as mentioned, explore the Solomonic missions to Latin Europe from which the evidence for acquisitive motives synthesized in Chapter 5 is culled. This evidence is richest for the missions sent by Dawit II to Venice (1402), by Yəshaq to Valencia (1427–1429), by Zär’a Ya‘qob to Naples (1450), and by Ləbnä Dəngəl to Portugal and the Pope (1526). These chapters also explore other kinds of contact: diplomatic efforts initiated by Latin powers, such as Alfonso of Aragon’s effort to enlist passing Ethiopian pilgrims as envoys back to Ethiopia in 1430, and Pope Calixtus’s effort to do the same in 1456; travels undertaken for private purposes in both directions, such as the Venetian merchant voyage to Ethiopia she identifies circa 1400 and the passage of Ethiopian pilgrims through Italy and Switzerland in the later 1410s; and the Ethiopian delegation to the Council of Florence in 1441, which had no official authorization and thus, as Krebs observes, ‘necessarily reveals little about Solomonic agency [...] and even less about Ethiopian royal interests towards Europe’ in this period (p. 78). As a whole, then, these chapters also serve a broader purpose of articulating the context of Solomonic initiatives. Particularly, one can see how the Solomonic rulers became and remained interested in Latin European goods and artifacts, as European merchants and adventurers arrived in Ethiopia, as Ethiopian pilgrims explored holy sites and their relics, as Latin rulers sent or attempted to send unsolicited gifts to the *nägäšt*. Some of this contextual evidence is invoked again in Chapter 5, where it is less relevant as proof of the *nägäšt*’s own acquisitive efforts; it is also not needed there, as the evidence from Solomonic missions is substantial.

It seems possible that acquisition for the building and adornment of Ethiopian churches and monasteries was not the only motive of Solomonic diplomacy (regarding fabrics and wares, the furnishing of the royal *kätäma* and royal clothing, both known to be resplendent and feature imported items, might also have played a role) or the only issue treated in that diplomacy. If nothing else, during their sometimes long stays at Latin European courts, Ethiopian envoys had to discuss and at least appear interested in the issues of concern to their hosts, and there is one example from this period (Zär’a Ya‘qob’s 1443 letter to the Mamluk ruler of Egypt, on which Krebs has written elsewhere) that illustrates how a *nəguś* deployed foreign fears or hopes for his own ends. Given the lacunary and interpretively challenging nature of the sources, some aspects of Ethiopian–European exchanges may remain elusive. Krebs has made a compelling, original, and well-argued case for the motive explicated here. She is not the first to notice the *nägäšt*’s interests in acquiring goods and artisans, but she is the first to treat it comprehensively across this period as the primary if not indeed sole engine of Solomonic diplomacy toward Latin Europe, and to offer a fascinating

and contextually based theory as to why. Finally, her focus on the Solomonic perspective in Ethiopia's wider relations, and her interrogation of the legacies of scholarship born in earlier eras, are interventions of relevance beyond this study's immediate subject. Any future reflection on these matters will have to take this book into account.

Addendum: Between the time of this review's submission in August 2021 and its publication, Krebs's work has been honoured with a 2022 Dan David Prize for 'outstanding early and mid-career scholars and practitioners in the historical disciplines' from the Dan David Foundation of Tel Aviv.

Samantha Kelly, Rutgers University

SHIFERAW BEKELE, UOLDELUL CHELATI DIRAR, ALESSANDRO VOLTERRA, and MASSIMO ZACCARIA, eds, *The First World War from Tripoli to Addis Ababa (1911–1924)*, Contemporary Horn of Africa, 6 (Addis Ababa: Centre français des études éthiopiennes, 2019). 375 pp., illus. Price: €25.50. ISBN: 978-2-875-87070-4.

As is well known, the recent centenary of World War I gave a decisive impulse to new interpretations of and gazes on the Great War, which has been increasingly regarded as a truly global event, also due to widespread global historical and postcolonial trends. The latter has also made the African continent the focus of a great deal more attention regarding historical scholarships, clearly evidenced by the sharp rise in publications focusing on World War I and (colonial) Africa from varying perspectives. One of which is the interesting book discussed here, that was the outcome of The First World War from Tripoli to Mogadishu (1911–1924) conference held at Addis Ababa University in 2016, organized by the editors of the volume, all of whom are esteemed names in the fields of the Horn of Africa and Italian colonial history.

The editors open the book with a very rich and informative Introduction summarizing the state of the art in many fields and explaining the main questions the book addresses. Of particular relevance is the motivation of regional focus and time frame, no doubt to the surprise of the military history and First World War specialist. While this obviously subscribes to a by now well-established scholarship taking into consideration both the aftermath of the war as well as the long preparation to it, the opting for such different geographic region as the proper object of investigation is a challenging choice demanding the explication of its motivation—one which is, in fact, provided convincingly. With the inten-