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In memoriam Ryszard Kapuściński (4 March 1932–23 January 2007)

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Alain Rouaud

calendriers éthiopien et grégorien, Rotterdam, Balkema, 1988, qui apporte aux éthiopiens l'outil de travail fiable qu'ils attendaient depuis longtemps.

Le laboratoire est fermé en 1985 lorsque J.T. part à la retraite. Mais celui-ci poursuit ses recherches personnelles ou collectives, en s'appuyant sur deux associations très vivantes: l'aresae et PMCT. Créée en 1968, l'aresae (*Association française pour le développement de la Recherche scientifique en Afrique de l'Est*) dont J.T. restera le président jusqu'en 1998, organise des conférences et édite, chaque trimestre, une feuille d'informations scientifiques et bibliographiques, les *Nouvelles de l'aresae*. PMCT (*Pour Mieux Connaître le Tchad*) fondée en 1992 a des activités analogues. Ensemble, ces associations sont à l'origine de la publication d'une cinquantaine de livres.

Un livre d'hommages a été consacré à J.T. (Alain Rouaud, [dir.]. *Les orientalistes sont des aventuriers. Guirlande offerte à Joseph Tubiana par ses élèves et ses amis*. Saint-Maur, Sépia, 1999) qui contient une bibliographie de ses travaux, complète jusqu'en 1999 (p. 291–301). Il faut naturellement y ajouter son travail sur "Le grand mythe des Kemant" contenu dans le même volume (p. 69–85). Des travaux rédigés postérieurement, dont l'aresae publiera prochainement la liste, on retiendra outre quelques articles, des traductions, des présentations ou préfaces et des rééditions parmi lesquelles les contributions à l'archéologie éthiopienne de Henri de Contenson (*Antiquités éthiopiennes. D'Axoum à Haoulti*. Saint-Maur, Sépia, 2006). Au moment de sa mort, J.T. travaillait avec François Enguehard sur une nouvelle traduction française, complète, de l'*Historia Aethiopica* (1681) de Ludolf et en avait achevé le premier tome.

**In memoriam Ryszard Kapuściński
(4 March 1932–23 January 2007)**

HANNA RUBINKOWSKA, Warsaw University

During the 50 years of his acute observations of the world, Ryszard Kapuściński gained the reputation of one of the most outstanding reporters of the 20th century. All the obituaries and articles, published after his death in the Polish newspapers and periodicals, presented the reporter as an extremely talented writer and a wise man, filled with undeniable charm. They stressed that Kapuściński had set new standards for journalistic writing and had created a new literary form, which emerged from journalism and evolved well beyond it, towards a more artistic and fictional area. As stressed almost everywhere where Kapuściński's name was mentioned, he

was witness to 27 revolutions and coup d'états all around the world. He also met and made friends with almost all the best known leading politicians of the second half of the 20th cent. from Africa, Asia, South and Central America. His articles and books presented many parts of the world to thousands, hence he strongly participated in creating an image of those peoples, lands, cultures and administrations which he described. This happened not only in his homeland, Poland, but also in other countries, as his books have been translated into 30 languages. According to Kapuściński's own words, he felt that his duty was to serve as an interpreter. However, not from one language to another, but from one culture to another. He visited and wrote about different parts of Africa (a collection of essays from his African trips, "The Shadow of the Sun"¹, being the most complete presentation of the author's vision of the continent), South and Central America, India, Iran, the Soviet Union etc. Towards the end of his life, Kapuściński abandoned the journalistic style completely and published books which contained his thoughts regarding basic questions dealing not only with the contemporary world.²

In most of the memoirs devoted to Kapuściński, his "article essay", a term used on several occasions, "The Emperor: Downfall of an Autocrat" was regarded to be the best among his works.³ Kapuściński wrote the book after his two visits to Ethiopia, soon after the Mängəstu Həylä Maryam revolution of 1974 and Həylä Şəllase I's death in 1975. The book, presenting the Emperor Həylä Şəllase and his court, strongly influenced the perception of the Ethiopian Emperor and his entourage by the outside world. At the same time "The Emperor", soon translated into many languages, brought international fame to Kapuściński.

All the Polish newspapers, both from the right and left wing, reacted to his death praising him highly. The only differences in this picture of Kapuściński in the media, could be observed as being due to the newspapers' political affiliation. He was presented as a declared lefty or, on the contrary, as an active opponent to the Polish state before 1989. Unfortunately, this choir of pure enthusiasm can not be joined by historians of Ethiopia. I believe that the influence of Kapuściński's most famous book (i.e. "The Emperor") on the general perception of the last Emperor of Ethiopia needs further reflection. The book, which is clearly defined by the author as a "journalist's report", and obviously providing much more fic-

¹ First Polish edition: *Heban*, Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1998.

² *Podróże z Herodotem* ("Travels with Herodotus"), Kraków: Znak, 2004, series of *Lapidaria*, Warszawa: Czytelnik.

³ First Polish edition: *Cesarz*, Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1978.

tion to the reader, than a factual report, resulted in a deeply rooted picture of Ḥaylā Śəllase as a dangerous and ridiculous satrap.⁴ This picture, repeated in a number of articles commemorating Kapuściński, is one of the best remembered visions created by Kapuściński. Without doubt, this unfair picture creates a large disadvantage for the general knowledge of 20th century Ethiopian history.

It is a pity that this outstanding personality in the world of journalism and literature, Ryszard Kapuściński, did not provide the European reader with a more balanced picture of another outstanding personality, one of the greatest Ethiopian rulers of all time. Nevertheless, one should trust in Kapuściński's good will in his attempts to interpret for the European reader the distant and, to our understanding, alien cultures. What is well beyond any doubt is that his exceptional literary skills allowed a huge number of readers all around the world to be exposed and, hopefully, become interested in "others": those human beings who live thousands of miles away. Most of the new students who come to the Department of African Languages and Cultures at the Warsaw University every year, have been attracted to Africa thanks to the works of Ryszard Kapuściński. This example can serve as proof of Kapuściński's role in promoting a positive picture of different cultures. This must be regarded as one of his most essential achievements.

⁴ HAROLD MARCUS published a very detailed and critical review of Ryszard Kapuściński's book: "Ignorance and Prejudice in Reviewing Books on Africa" in: *History in Africa*, 17, 1990, 373–378.