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# AETHIOPICA

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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.

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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## 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!

## Personalia

### Academic News

#### **Aaron Michael Butts, new Professor of Semitic Studies with a focus on Ethiopian and Eritrean studies at Universität Hamburg, with the project BeInf—Beyond Influence: The Connected Histories of Ethiopic and Syriac Christianity**

On 1 September 2022, the BeInf project commenced at the Hiob Ludolf Centre for Ethiopian and Eritrean Studies at Universität Hamburg. The project is supported by a Consolidator Grant from the European Research Council (ERC) for almost €2 million over five years. The Principal Investigator of BeInf is Aaron Michael Butts, who was recently appointed as W3 Professor für Semitistik, insbesondere Äthiopistik (full professor for Semitic studies, in particular Ethiopian and Eritrean studies) at Universität Hamburg. Butts directs a team of scholars who are interrogating the connected histories of Ethiopic and Syriac Christianity through a multidisciplinary approach that brings together methods traditionally disconnected, including art history, linguistics, manuscript studies, philology, textual studies, and history.

BeInf takes as its impetus a long-standing debate in the field of Ethiopian and Eritrean studies about so-called Syriac influences on Ethiopic Christianity. This debate has its origins with Ignazio Guidi and Carlo Conti Rossini, who argued that Syriac Christians exerted significant influence on Ethiopic Christianity during Late Antiquity as foreign missionaries who fled the Chalcedonian empire for Aksum, where they, inter alia, introduced monasticism, translated the Bible into Ethiopic, and more broadly brought about a ‘second-christianization’ of Aksum.<sup>1</sup> The association of the foreign missionaries with Syriac-speaking areas was based on a series of arguments, all of which have been challenged in subse-

<sup>1</sup> I. Guidi, *Le traduzioni degli Evangelii in arabo e in etiopico. Memoria del socio Ignazio Guidi*, letta nella seduta del 18 marzo 1888, Estratto dagli Atti della R. Accademia dei Lincei, Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche, Memorie, Serie IV, 4 (Roma: Tipografia della R. Accademia dei Lincei, 1888), 33–34 with n. 1; I. Guidi, *Storia della letteratura etiopica* (Roma: Istituto per l’Oriente, 1932), 13–15; C. Conti Rossini, *Storia d’Etiopia, Parte prima: Dalle origini all’avvento della dinastia salomonide*, Africa Italiana, 3 (Bergamo: Istituto italiano d’arti grafiche, 1928), esp. 155–165.

quent scholarship.<sup>2</sup> It is this long-standing debate that serves as the catalyst for BeInf. On the content level, BeInf seeks to establish the type and extent of contact and connection between Ethiopic and Syriac Christianity. On the conceptual level, BeInf aims to develop a methodological and theoretical framework that moves beyond influence as an analytical category.

BeInf plans to accomplish these tasks through a series of five discrete, but complementary case studies. The first is a contact-linguistic analysis of Aramaic loanwords in Ethiopic with particular emphasis on establishing which, if any, can be shown to be definitively Syriac. The second case study deals with the Naḡrān episode, in which the sixth-century Aksumite ruler Kaleb intervened on behalf of (Syriac) Christians who were being persecuted in the Arabian Peninsula. In particular, BeInf will focus on the narrow question of what the Naḡrān episode might add to the study of the connected histories of Ethiopic and Syriac Christianity. The gospel manuscripts from ʿĪnda Abba Gārīma stand at the centre of the third case study, which locates their illumination programmes within a broader eastern Mediterranean context, including but not limited to the Syriac Rabbula Gospels. Building upon the foundational work of Antonella Brita, who has convincingly shown that the hagiographies of the Nine Saints are medieval or later,<sup>3</sup> the fourth case study explores what function these texts served in the

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. H. J. Polotsky, ‘Aramaic, Syriac, and Ge‘ez’, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 9 (1964), 1–10 (reprinted in A. Bausi, ed., *Languages and Cultures of Eastern Christianity: Ethiopian, The Worlds of Eastern Christianity*, 300–1500, 4 (Farnham–Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 187–196); P. Marrassini, ‘Some Considerations on the Problem of the “Syriac Influences” on Aksumite Ethiopia’, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 23 (1990), 35–46; P. Marrassini, ‘Ancora sul problema degli influssi siriaci in età aksumita’, in L. Cagni, ed., *Biblica et semitica: Studi in memoria di Francesco Vattioni*, Istituto Universitario Orientale, Dipartimento di Studi Asiatici, Series Minor, 59 (Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1999), 325–337 (translated in Bausi, op. cit., 209–219); W. Witakowski, ‘Syrian Influences in Ethiopian Culture’, *Orientalia Suecana*, 38–39 (1989–1990), 191–202 (reprinted in Bausi, op. cit., 197–208); M. Heide, ‘Zur Vorlage und Bedeutung der äthiopischen Bibelübersetzung’, in M. Sigismund, M. Karrer, and U. Schmid, eds, *Studien zum Text der Apokalypse*, Arbeiten zur Neutestamentlichen Textforschung Herausgegeben im Auftrag des Instituts für Neutestamentliche Textforschung der Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität Münster/Westfalen, 47 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 289–313.

<sup>3</sup> A. Brita, *I racconti tradizionali sulla «Seconda Cristianizzazione» dell’Etiopia. Il ciclo agiografico dei Nove Santi*, Studi Africanistici, Serie Etiopica, 7 (Napoli: Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”, Dipartimento di Studi e Ricerche su Africa e Paesi Arabi, 2010).



times and places in which they were written and promulgated. The fifth and final case study concentrates on the Ethiopic reception of Syriac texts via Arabic.<sup>4</sup>

The BeInf project hopes to make significant, long-lasting contributions to the field of Ethiopian and Eritrean studies, both in content and in concept, while also serving as a paradigm-shifting model for other projects in the humanities addressing connected histories with all their nuance, complexity, and texture through a multidisciplinary approach.

<sup>4</sup> For preliminary results, see A. M. Butts, 'From Syriac to Arabic to Ethiopic: *Loci* of Change in Transmission', in R. B. Finazzi, F. Forte, C. Milani, and M. Moriggi, eds, *Circolazione di testi e superamento delle barriere linguistiche e culturali nelle tradizioni orientali*, *Orientalia Ambrosiana*, 7 (Milano: Biblioteca Ambrosiana–Centro Ambrosiano, 2020), 21–57, with additional references.