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Review

CLAIRE BOSC-TIESSE – ANAÏS WION, *Peintures sacrées d'Éthiopie: Collection de la Mission Dakar-Djibouti*

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Reviews

Last but not least, an appreciation for the words M.W. writes in the last six lines of his Foreword (pp. VII–VIII). They break that “scientific mould” according to which a scholar, in dealing with texts such as the present one must be “neutral” or at least “reasonably aloof”.

While expressing my sincere congratulations to M.W. for this masterly work, it is my hope that a similar edition of the gospel of Luke will be available in the near future.

Tedros Abraha, Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome

CLAIRE BOSCH-TIESSÉ – ANAÏS WION, *Peintures sacrées d'Éthiopie: Collection de la Mission Dakar–Djibouti*, St-Maur-des-Fossés: Éditions Sépia, 2005; 132 pp.; black and white and colour illustrations, photographs, drawings, maps, graphics. € 40,–. ISBN: 2–8428–0091–5.

In 1931–33 the French expedition to Africa, known as the Mission Dakar–Djibouti and directed by the ethnologist Marcel Griaule, worked extensively in Ethiopia. Its members collected a large amount of Ethiopian artefacts which found their way to the Trocadéro Ethnographic Museum in Paris (from 1937 the Musée de l'Homme) and were displayed directly after the return of the expedition. However they were never systematically published and only part of them joined the museum's permanent exhibition. Gratitude is therefore owed to the two French scholars who in the work under notice have presented the whole collection to a wide audience.

The book is conceived as a catalogue with commentaries, in which the described objects are presented in the context of general history and the history of art. In the introduction (pp. 8–18) the reader finds a short review of Ethiopian history, with a focus on the 17th and 18th centuries, the period from which most of the collected objects originate. It is followed by the history of the Mission and objectives concerning the gathering of the artefacts.

The first chapter, “Images de dévotion” (pp. 19–63) is introduced by an exposé clarifying the position of images in the spiritual life of Ethiopians, particularly of St. Mary who is the most often depicted figure in Ethiopia. The artefacts described in this part of book are paintings on wood of various forms and sizes and executed in different techniques. Dated to the 15th–18th centuries, they represent various painting styles, although the majority belongs to the so-called first and second Gondarene School. The same chapter presents, somewhat unconnected with paintings on wood, a magic scroll, the only such item of 500 brought by the expedition which is not deposited in the Bibliothèque nationale. It contains the texts and carefully drawn charms asso-

ciated with figures renowned for their wisdom in the ancient world: Solomon, Sirach, Aristotle and Alexander the Great.

The second chapter, “La mise en scène des images sur les murs des sanctuaires” (pp. 65–98) is devoted to the most far-reaching enterprise of the Mission – the acquisition of church murals. Taken down from the walls they were intended to be replaced by copies executed by the French painter Gaston-Louis Roux. The task was successfully accomplished only in the case of the Abba Antonios church and 60 m² of paintings dating to the 17th century found their way to the Musée de l’Homme. All were restored and mounted on wooden frames but only the best preserved fragments were permanently displayed. The others, deposited in the museum’s storage facility, are presented in the book reviewed here for the first time. After a short history of the church and its murals, the authors reconstruct the original setting of the paintings on four walls of the sanctuary. Remarks on the iconography of the depicted scenes and figures and on their role in the celebration of the liturgy are complemented by a valuable account of a microspectrometric analysis of the pigments.

The other set of paintings in which the Mission showed an interest belonged to the church of Qaha Iyäsus. Its history, as related in the book, relies on written sources and on oral tradition recently recorded by the authors from the nonagenarian head of the church. In distinction to Antonios, the paintings of Qaha Iyäsus had been created in the 18th century, most probably during the reign of Queen Məntəwwab. Although the negotiations concerning their purchase seemed to be successful, the Mission brought to France only two pieces. It is not clear what happened to the other murals. As to the copies painted by Roux they were reported to have been destroyed in 1959. Two more fragments of the 18th century Gondarene wall paintings acquired by the Mission originate from the Däbrä Giyorgis church in Məṣa.

The last piece of the collection is a canvas painting from the 20th century depicting the martyrdom of John Prodromos. Although the figures are supplied with inscriptions in accordance with Ethiopian tradition and a couple of details testify that the artist was familiar with Ethiopian daily life, it is difficult to believe that the painting was executed by a native artist. The stylistic features, range of colours, iconography and even technique point rather to a foreigner.

In the last chapter, “Aux marges du sacré” (pp. 101–109) the authors present two different art media, the fragments of Dutch 17th century tiles discovered by the Mission in the ruins of the Däbrä Q^wəsq^wam church near Gondär, one of the most important foundations of Queen Məntəwwab, and a painted schema of an ideal sanctuary programme developing from the 17th century and executed especially for the Mission by a priest and traditional

painter by the name of Kasa. Unfortunately, instead of the pigments prepared in traditional way, he used colours brought by the Mission, depriving the work of its full documentary value.

Two glossaries (pp. 131–132) one of Ethiopian words appearing in the book, the second of terms relating to art history and religion, are added at the end together with a short bibliography (pp. 123–129).

All this extensive and varying material is skilfully and pedagogically handled. The authors move among different art media, which they first introduce by attention-catching titles and then treat with relevant, updated accounts of the state of research. Sometimes the authors draw upon their previously published papers (pp. 50, 67, 88–89, 101–105) but it must be considered an advantage to have all the material on the collection assembled in one work. The book is also to be praised for the way in which it maintains a balance between a popular approach to the subject, dispensing with cumbersome apparatus, and solid scholarship. Finally, it is not without importance that this work about artefacts is artistically presented. Carefully thought out and beautifully printed, it contains large quantity of well-reproduced colour illustrations, while its layout and design are models of good taste and accuracy. While the volume is of primary interest to Ethiopianists and art historians, it contains much, which laymen can read with enjoyment. For them it opens up a field which is all too little known.

Some matters invite remarks nevertheless.

The first printing house in Ethiopia was not that founded by Täfäri Mäkwännän in 1921–22 (p. 12) but St. Lazare in Däre Dawa established in 1908, followed by *Yä-Ityopya mäbatämiya*, active from 1911.

The location of paintings on wood in Ethiopian churches seems to be a more complex problem than the authors' judge (p. 38 sq). It is true that at present almost every church is cluttered up with devotional prints, predominantly gathered around the main entry to the sanctuary, while paintings on wood appear there very seldom, being more often kept in the church treasuries and occasionally displayed. Exceptions are made for pictures considered miraculous and those which represent the patrons of the church. These are exhibited for the faithful or carried in the processions only on the occasion of church festivals. This custom is the reason why the "discovery" of Ethiopian painting by scholars was not made until relatively recently.

In connection with the iconographical description of the Qaha Iyäsus diptych (pp. 44 sq) the authors bring forward the hypothesis that two female figures added to the Arrest of Christ and Flagellation are not the anonymous donors (who in fact often do appear in Ethiopian paintings) but the two holy women who followed Christ during the Passion; what is more, their presence, like that of St. Mary in the other Passion's scenes, was meant

to put in focus “le rôle des femmes comme témoins dans l’accomplissement des Écritures”. This explanation sounds rather far-fetched. Certainly the evangelists Matthew and John report two women being present at the Crucifixion and at the Christ’s grave, but the others speak of three or more (Luke). However, no gospel mentions them going to Gethsemane or witnessing Christ’s punishment. As for St. Mary, she is simply part of the iconographical scheme of the Crucifixion, Lamentation and Ascension, which had been created in the early Christian period. Laboured also seems to be the interpretation of the 18th-century *K^wər^oatä Rə^oəsu* triptych in terms of a political message or an allusion to the particular political situation during Queen Məntəwwab’s time (pp. 50–51). In the case of a much damaged triptych with scenes of the Passion and Resurrection (pp. 52–53) it is difficult to find a reason for what is an obvious disorder of the scenes, but the proposed solution (the place of the Entombment at the bottom of the panel due to the connection of the subject with the earth and the Anastasis at the top due to the connection with heaven) is not satisfactory in light of material available for comparison. It should also be mentioned that the origin and dating of the royal *palladium* *K^wər^oatä Rə^oəsu* still poses the questions. It is true that its last owner, the Portuguese historian Luis Reis Santos, wanted to believe that the painting was executed by the Portuguese painter Lazaro Andrade. However, stylistic analysis does not confirm such an attribution. The experts at Christie’s auction house ascribed the work to Adriaen Ysenbrandt (1490–1551).

The Ethiopian iconography of the Arrest of Christ in the 18th-century version, appearing on wood panels (pp. 52, 54) and canvas murals (pp. 90–91) needs further explanation. The scene conflates the Gospels’ version of the events in Gethsemane with the apocryphal story on the Roman *vexilla* which bowed to Christ when he was being led to Pilate. In the Ethiopian version of the miracle the standards are changed to lances which, although held by the strongest soldiers on the orders of the governor, bent down to pay honour to Jesus.

In the triptych called “de Paul” (pp. 48–49), the middle scene on the right wing is a Pietà (cf. for instance the Pietà panel IES 7132) rather than a Descent from the Cross, which in Ethiopian painting follows different iconographical schemata (cf. Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, in Proceedings of the First International Conference on the History of Ethiopian Art, London 1989). Also the half-open eyes of Christ in the central panel are not exclusively found in representations of the *K^wər^oatä Rə^oəsu* scene but are typical of the Crucifixion formula depicting Christ in agony on the Cross (in distinction to the *Christus triumphans* represented with open eyes and the dead Christ represented with his eyes closed). It should be added that

the painting of St. Mary from Santa Maria Maggiore (*Salus Populi Romani*) is not “une version italienne de la Vierge Byzantine Hodegetria” but an early Christian work, which was repainted many times, most recently at the end of the 13th century. The motif of the angels which appear in its Ethiopian versions is not the creation of the 15th-century painter Fəre Şəyon but originates from Coptic iconography and was adopted in Ethiopia at least hundred years before his time.

The accessibility of the paintings for the Ethiopian faithful, discussed by the authors (p. 69), is a complex problem. The ritual of covering and uncovering the holy images is not included in the celebration of the mass and the Ethiopian liturgy does not provide any rule on this matter. It seems that each church follows its own custom. In some of them all paintings may be screened by hangings, in others only few or none are. It is not laid down which subjects should be veiled, but customarily they are St. Mary in her guise as Queen of Heaven and the Crucifixion, probably in connection with the apocryphal story of the painting of the crucified Christ complaining about his nudity. Displaying the pictures to a congregation for educational purposes, as the authors point out, seems to be less important, because Ethiopian faithful seldom approach the decorated parts of the church. However, on the occasion of the greatest church festivals all paintings, even those placed high on the drum, are usually uncovered. We may also find that murals kept covered during many years are suddenly revealed, while others, which were hitherto visible, become screened. A tendency to cover more and more of the paintings may be noted during the last twenty years, especially in churches often visited by the tourists.

When the authors indicate the eucharistic nature of the scene depicting the Sts. Antony and Paul sharing bread and shown on the eastern wall of the sanctuary they are certainly correct, but the term ‘prefiguration’ used in this context must be a mistake (p. 79); it is strictly connected with the typological interpretation of the Old and New Testaments and cannot be applied to an extra-biblical event, and certainly not to one which took place after the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper.

The Ms BL Or. 520 from Qaha Iyäsus (p. 85) contains the Gospel of John and the Miracles of Mary not the *Miracles of Jesus*. It is also important to remember that the symbols of Four Evangelists which in the 18th century accompany the Trinity (p. 94) belong primarily to the imagery of the *Maiestas Domini*, which appears in Ethiopian art long before the Ancient of the Days and the early depictions of the Trinity.

On scheme-painting of the priest Kasa, in the scene inscribed “How the bread and the chalice descended from heaven” (p. 115), the painter does not depict, as the authors state, an unusual Annunciation which includes Jesus

bringing the Eucharistic elements to St. Mary, but the apocryphal story about her childhood recounting how living and spinning the veil in the Temple she was fed by an angel.

To the reading of the inscriptions the followings remarks can be added: p. 45, the caption for the Ascension should be: *sə'älä 'ərgät*; p. 61, the caption which is visible in the right upper corner reads: *kahəmat zä-täwäkkäfəwə* – “the priests who received her”; p. 117, *bä-šərha šəyon* should be translated as “in the Sion Room” (meaning “the upper room”, cf. Acts 1:13).

Some further comments may be offered.

Firstly, in order to give the readers a better overview of literature on the subjects considered in the book, one might expect to find some more relevant works in the bibliography. For instance in connection with Ethiopian history a reference is given only to the *History of Modern Ethiopia* by Bahru Zawde, while there is nothing on ancient times or, even more regrettable, on the Gondarene period. Also missing is *La pittura etiopica durante il medioevo e sotto la dinastia di Gondar*, Milano 1964 by J. Leroy, richly illustrated and translated into many languages, although the authors frequently call upon his very useful distinction between the first and second Gondarene styles. It would also have been in place to mention the rare and important paper by F. Weihs “Some Technical Details Concerning Ethiopian Icons” published in: *Religiöse Kunst Äthiopiens*, Stuttgart 1973, and the papers of D. Spencer on miraculous Ethiopian icons in the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, nrs. 10:2 (1972) and 12:2 (1974).

It is somewhat disappointing that not one example of the woodcuts which according to the authors served as the *Vorlagen* for several paintings mentioned in the book is reproduced; most of them are old and rare prints to which access is difficult even for scholars.

Drawings of damaged and unclear paintings would have been of great help, especially those to which the authors refer in the text (e.g. pp. 54, 55) while the addition of inscription of the *abba* Antonios paintings, not completely legible on the illustrations, (pp. 70–85) would give other scholars an opportunity for further research on the material.

The long lists of inscriptions copied from the painter Kasa's scheme and translated by the authors can only be useful for a small group of researchers. In a book designed for the larger public they should be supplied with short comments and possibly bibliographical references, particularly as far as episodes from the *vitae* of lesser known saints and apocryphal stories are concerned. Also an explanation to the effect that the work called *Aksimarios* (p. 96) in Ethiopia is the *Hexaemeron* by Pseudo-Epiphanius would be welcome.

Reviews

Finally, lack of consistency in transliteration of Ethiopian names and terms may be confusing, particularly for the general public not accustomed to the language, onomastics and geography of the country.

Notwithstanding all the remarks and comments above, it is emphasized, that the work was read by the reviewer with deep interest and pleasure. There is little doubt, that this book enriches our knowledge not only of the fascinating story of the Mission Dakar–Djibouti collection, but also of Ethiopian art over the last three hundred years.

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WOLDE-SELASSIE ABBUTE, *Gumuz and Highland Resettlers. Differing Strategies of Livelihood and Ethnic Reaction in Metekel, Northwestern Ethiopia* = Göttinger Studien zur Ethnologie 12. Münster: LIT-Verlag, 2002. pp. 320 text and bibliography, 321–45 appendices. Price: € 35,90. ISBN: 3–8258–7819–8.

Resettlement for Abyssinian rulers has always been an important means of their population policy. By resettling colonists from the central regions to the frontiers around the uncontrolled “periphery” and neighbouring territories the realm of highland culture(s) was constantly expanded. While resettlement relieved the central regions of surplus population and land conflicts, the resettlers served to safeguard the country. In the modern era, resettlement became a way of providing a new base of livelihood to victims of famine and drought. During the reign of the Provisional Military Council (“Därg”) the resettlement or migration of masses of “highlanders” of different ethnic origins into remote lowland regions was organized. The study of the persevering anthropological field researcher, Wolde-Selassie Abbute, focuses on the fate of state-sponsored resettlement in the Beles Valley in the northwestern lowlands of Ethiopia, which was started in the 1980s.

The book deals with the clash of two civilizations, and with the encounter of two nearly incompatible attitudes towards the natural environment. Wolde-Selassie Abbute describes this encounter on the basis of a deep analysis of the livelihood strategies and modes of encroachment on the natural resources of the two population segments in the Metekel zone in northwestern Ethiopia – with the indigenous Gumuz, on the one side, and the “highland resettlers” (Agaw, Amhara from Wällo, Shoa and Gojjam, Hadiyya, Kambaata, Oromo, Tigraway), on the other. Furthermore, the author characterizes the interethnic relations between all groups involved. In short, the study ex-