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Review

AZMZÂDE SADIK EL-MÜEYYED, *The Ethiopia Book of Travels*,
ed., tr., GIYAS MÜEYYED GÖKKENT and FAMILY

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Reviews

maps, that must be regarded with great care. Some have been redone from those in my own 2013 PhD dissertation, but with the addition of many errors. For example, on the map on p. 71, the locations of most toponyms are wrong: Lalibäla is positioned in the Səmen; a region named ‘Gondor’ appears even though Gondär was not established until a century later and this region was then called Dämbəya; Däbrä Bərhan is located very close to the south of Lake Ṭana, as is the Šäwa region; the Təgray is indicated west of the Täkkäze river ... As for the maps created for the book, they are fanciful: for example, the map on p. 25 presents the territory of the ‘kingdom of Aksum’ in 500 CE which encompasses all of southern Arabia and a large part of the Sudan, as far as the current Egyptian border to the north, as well as present-day Eritrea, Djibouti, Somaliland, and most of Ethiopia! And finally, the numerous diagrams illustrating the main battles have been based on the descriptions in the sources, taken literally the numerical data of the different army corps mentioned by ‘Arab Faqīh, even though it is more often than not the classic literary procedure of over- or under-valuing the forces involved.

In conclusion, I can only warn the reader that this book cannot be a reference for those wishing to know more of the history of the Horn of Africa, and more precisely on the ‘conquest of Ethiopia’ of the 1530s–1540s.

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AZMZÂDE SADIK EL-MÜEYYED, *The Ethiopia Book of Travels*, ed., tr., GIYAS MÜEYYED GÖKKENT and FAMILY (n. p.: Published by G M GökKent, 2021). xxi, 307 pp. Price: \$34.99. ISBN: 978-1-73712-989-9.

This is an English edition of the 1906 Turkish book *Habeş Seyahatnamesi* by Şādiq bāšā al-Mu’ayyad al-Azm (Turkish: Azmzâde Sadık el-Müeyyed). It is basically a diary of the 1904 voyage to Ethiopia of an envoy of the Ottoman sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd II to Emperor Mənilək II. The story of an attempt to strengthen relations between two independent eastern empires, one Islamic the other Christian.

In 1904 both the sultan and the emperor were in their prime. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd had celebrated his twenty-eighth year as an all-powerful ruler of a vast empire, stretching from Libya to the Balkans. He had managed to revive Islamic tradition as an ideology behind his authority, blending it with cautious modernization of education and transportation. The Sultan sought to solidify his indirect control over Arabia by constructing the railway to Ḥiğāz (inaugurated 1908) and was fretting over Italian imperialist designs on Tripolitania. Promoting relations with Ethiopia could serve his interests well.

Mənilək II was also in his prime. Still in good health, ruling over his newly expanded independent Christian empire, he celebrated the eight years since Ethiopia defeated the Italians at ‘Adwa. Mənilək effectively controlled the political establishment he had created and gained the respect of European ambassadors at his court.

The scope of his actual relations between Istanbul and Addis Abāba was modest, largely revolving around Jerusalem. As early as 1884 Emperor Yoħannəs IV obtained permission from the Ottomans to build the church of Kidanā Məhrāt and the monastery of Däbrä Gännät (completed in 1893) in the holy city. Mənilək was more energetic. In 1889 he sent a letter to ‘Abd al-Ĥamīd telling him of his granting freedom of religion in Ethiopia and asking for the key to the ancient Ethiopian monastery of Dayr as-Sulṭān, which the Copts had taken back in 1838. The sultan avoided the key issue but authorized the Ethiopian purchase of more land elsewhere in the city. Consequently, the next decades saw the construction of a dozen Ethiopian buildings in Jerusalem, *Ras Mäk^wännən* and Empress Ṭayṭu overseeing the enterprise.

In 1904 the sultan sent his aide-de-camp, lieutenant general, diplomat, and intellectual, Şādiq bāšā al-Mu’ayyad al-Aẓm, to Ethiopia to submit a report. The envoy was a member of a leading Damascene family of both Arab and Turkish origin, a true representative of Ottoman identity and culture of pre-nationalist times, who had long been involved in Ottoman diplomacy in North Africa.¹ Back in Istanbul Şādiq bāšā al-Mu’ayyad al-Aẓm produced the 1906 book, in Turkish *Habeş Seyahatnamesi*. The present 2021 volume was prepared in English by his family descendants and contains notes and further details of his life.

Al-Aẓm’s lively description of Mənilək’s Ethiopia of the time, conveyed largely two points. One concerned the African empire’s military might. The book contained detailed passages on the Ethiopian war with the Italians (1895–1896), which culminated in the victory of ‘Adwa (pp. 268–294). The other even more emphatic, talked of the positive relations between Christians and Muslims in the country. This was no doubt al-Aẓm’s main message to his sultan. He described relevant historic chapters in a mostly positive way (see mainly pp. 160–166), at times ignoring any contrary aspects. For further emphasis, al-Aẓm returned to the initial episode of the Prophet and the Nāgaşi, talking only of cordial neighbourliness (pp. 177–182). He met with Mənilək (13 June 1904, pp. 215–217), told him the old story, and heard the emperor’s promise to always be tolerant of Muslims. Mənilək also promised him the emperor would permit the building of a mosque in the capital, to be named after ‘Abd al-Ĥamīd.

¹ For this and for al-Aẓm’s role, see Mostafa Minawi, *The Ottoman Scramble for Africa: Empire and Diplomacy in the Sahara and the Hijaz* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016).

In fact little came from al-Azm mission. In May 1905 another Ethiopian mission to ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd failed to obtain the keys to Dayr as-Sultān. Mənilək, for his part, shelved the promise to build a mosque in Addis Abāba (the first was to be built by Mussolini’s Italy). By 1908 Mənilək’s health began to fail and also, weakened by the ‘Young Turks’ revolutionaries, ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd was deposed the year after.

Al-Azm himself, continued his career under ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd (after this mission he was appointed imperial commissioner to Bulgaria) and died in 1910. His effort to improve relations between the two empires barely succeeded, but his book had some impact on the emerging Arab world. In 1908, in Cairo, two of his cousins, Ḥaqqī and Rafīq al-Azm, published an Arabic translation. Titled *Riḥlat al-Ḥabašah* which came to be arguably the best source of information on Ethiopia for the Arab public at least until the 1935 Fascist invasion of the country. However, the following episode attests to the persistence of the cultural barrier between the Ethiopian and the Arab-Islamic worlds. In 2001 the Arab Institute for Research and Publishing (*AIRP*) in Beirut, issued a new edition of the book in Abu Dhabi. The publishers renamed the edition ‘A Voyage to Ethiopia, 1896’. They unfortunately—certainly not due to ill intentions—did not account for the difference between the Ethiopian and European calendar. Misled by the dating of Ethiopian letters quoted by the al-Azm (see p. 304), they added the year 1896 to the book’s name and its chapter headings, as if these were the original dates. This new edition is quite popular in the Middle East today, but gives a misleading picture of Mənilək’s Ethiopia during the tumultuous year of the battle of ‘Adwa. Hopefully the new English edition of the 1906 book about the 1904 ‘voyage to Ethiopia’ (*Riḥlat al-Ḥabašah*) will help improve mutual awareness.

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JÜRGEN KLEIN, *Christlich-Muslimische Beziehungen in Äthiopien. Interreligiöse Situation – Konflikträume – Verstehenszugänge*, Beiträge zur Missionswissenschaft / Interkulturellen Theologie, 51 (Berlin–Münster: LIT Verlag, 2021). 514 pp. Price: €44.90 ISBN: 978-3-643-14852-0.

Relations between Christians and Muslims in Ethiopia have not always been harmonious; there have been countless conflicts since the first encounter between the religions. Jürgen Klein’s book addresses these challenging relations from three main perspectives: Ethiopian history, national religious institutions, and Amharic literature. It is originally a doctoral thesis from the Theological College Wuppertal/Bethel in Religious Studies and Intercultural Theology, written in German.