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Review

BERTRAND HIRSCH – MANFRED KROPP (eds., éds., Hrsg.), *Saints, Biographies and History in Africa – Saints, biographies et histoire en Afrique – Heilige, Biographien und Geschichte in Afrika*

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BERTRAND HIRSCH – MANFRED KROPP (eds., édés., Hrsg.), *Saints, Biographies and History in Africa – Saints, biographies et histoire en Afrique – Heilige, Biographien und Geschichte in Afrika*. Nordostafrikanisch/Westasiatische Studien 5. Frankfurt a.M., Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang, Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften 2003. 355 S. ISBN 3–631–36498–9. Preis € 56,50.

Since the 1990's, biographical studies on religious protagonists in Africa have increasingly attracted the interest of scholars in different disciplines. Researchers working in the overlapping fields of history and philology have particularly devoted themselves to this topic. A conference held in October, 1997, by the two well-known *éthiopisants* Bertrand Hirsch and Manfred Kropp, resulted in the publication of twenty articles about saints, their biographies and history in Ethiopia and other parts of Africa.

Due to factors such as the geographical diversity of the contributions, the languages in which they are written, the different backgrounds of the authors, and the religious milieu on which they are reporting, some statistical data must be listed here at the beginning. Fifteen of the articles deal with Ethiopia, two deal with the interlacustrine region of East Africa, and three deal with West Africa. The obvious regional focus on the north-eastern part of the continent demands and therefore justifies its review in an Ethiopian studies journal.

Nine of the contributions are written in English, seven are written in French, and four in German. With regard to religion, eleven articles deal with Christianity, seven deal with Islam, one deals with both of these world religions, and one deals with a traditional "indigenous" religion. All contributions share a basically diachronic perspective. However, it has to be stated that when the reviewer was confronted with such a spectrum of heterogeneous themes, he was inevitably biased by his own professional interests and specialization of knowledge. Nevertheless, as a matter of scholarly fairness, all contributions to this volume have been given due attention. Here is now a brief summary of each of the anthology contributions.

The first article, written by Abdussamad H. Ahmad, presents a descriptive account on the role of saintly *shaykhs* in Buré, in the Gojjam region of Ethiopia, from 1900 to 1935. Muslims in this area, although in an underprivileged position, usually lived on friendly terms with their Christian neighbours. Basic information was derived from personal communications; i.e., the anthropological method of interviewing local informants. On the other hand, perhaps too much emphasis is placed on secondary literature, such as the book "Islam in Ethiopia" by J.S. Trimingham, published in 1952.

Ahmed Hassen Omer discusses in his article *Shaykh Sayyid Bushra* (1756-1855), another Muslim saint in Ethiopia who played an active part in the politics of his society, the Argobba in north-eastern Shäwa. Besides an analysis on written sources, Omer also makes extensive use of oral traditions. However, his apodictic statement on what is “holiness” (p. 14) is problematic.

The city of Harär, in eastern Ethiopia, has been attributed the honorary name “City of the Saints” (*madinat al-awliya*), and is outstanding in this qualification in Muslim Africa. As a Haräri scholar, Ahmed Zekaria draws one’s attention to the impressive number of shrines seen from his emic perspective. He is aiming towards a critical differentiation according to criteria such as the types of saints, the phenomenological characteristics of the shrines, and the multifaceted social functions of the cults. Although the literary sources he was able to consult appear to be considerable, he nevertheless states that the study on Harär saints and shrines is still in its infancy.

The article by Verena Böll on “holy women” in Ethiopia is the only contribution to this volume which depicts examples of both Muslim and Christian saints, thereby including both world religions in her work. Böll notes that despite their early appearance and prominent role in history – for example women such as Makeda, the legendary Queen of Sheba, St. Mary and other holy female protagonists in the Bible, women of the “first” Muslim *Hidjra*, Eleni, the wife of emperor Zar’a Ya’qob, Bati Del Wämbära, the wife of Ahmad Grann, and the holy nuns of Däbrä Libanos - it is without doubt that the roles and importance of female hagiologies have been neglected thus far. This is also true concerning women protagonists in possession cults (*Zar* practices), and women as goddesses and worshippers in indigenous folk religions of southern Ethiopia. An emphasis on this kind of gender issues is therefore greatly appreciated.

The article by Ian Campbell on the historiography of medieval Shäwa elaborates on the use of hagiographical sources. It starts with a detailed background analysis of the geography and past of the region, going as far back as the 14th century. His review of hitherto existing works is complemented by data of field research, with a thorough checking of itineraries and historical place names. This method provided a comprehensive overview of the geographical sites pinpointing churches and other sacral places associated with Gädlä Täklä Haymanot, as well as other relevant saints of the area. Through the systematic comparative criticism of source materials, Campbell’s approach creates a solid basis of information.

The study by Sevir B. Chernetsov, on “The Book of Narration of Wäy-zero Bafäna Wäldä Mika’el”, the first wife of Menilek II, is by far the longest contribution to this volume. It contains an original text of twenty pages in Ge’ez, twenty pages of annotated translation, and ten pages of comments

and illuminative interpretations. Unquestionably, it is an extremely valuable contribution to the biography of a prominent female personality in Ethiopian history of the 19th century; however, she cannot be attributed as a saint. The story of Bafāna Wāldä Mikaʾel is embedded in a wide range of crucial political data of her period. It is outstanding in the fact that it marks a change in the literary tradition of Christian Ethiopia, namely, the end of the use of Geʿez in secular writings.

Jean-Pierre Chrétien focuses on the interactive relationships between biographies and power in the monarchic history of Burundi. King Mwezi, who died in 1908, ruled in the manner of a “divine king”, whose existence symbolically represented the people of his whole state. He is remembered as a hero – also in accordance to the tradition that “toute histoire royale est une épiphanie” (p.111). On the other hand, the biography of the Burundian dignitary Macono (who invited the German colonialists to occupy the country) presents him as a deeply negative “antihéros”. Obviously, this dichotomy has played an important role in the political processes of decolonization in the 1960’s up to the present time. Socio-political biographies of this type are considered to be of essential value for the stability and well-being of the tradition-oriented inhabitants of Burundi.

The contribution of Marie-Laure Derat returns to the central theme of our volume: the religious history and hagiologies of Ethiopia. Derat depicts models of holiness and monastic ideology in Däbrä Libanos, which was allegedly founded by Täklä Haymanot at the end of the 13th century. Her sources reveal that the basic models associated with saints changed considerably over time by reacting to specific political conditions. Hagiologies were apparently influenced and altered depending on the either constructive or conflicting state of relations between the clerical institutions and the secular authorities.

Girma Fisseha discusses examples of so-called donor figures, i.e., the paintings presented to churches so as to ensure memory of a military victory or birth of a child, or to ask forgiveness for the soul of a sinner. This tradition started in the 13th century and has henceforth proved to be an important source of ethnography and cultural history through the pictorial representation of clothes, weaponry, etc.

As Friedrich Heyer points out in his article, Ethiopian Christianity abounds in folk tales based on miracles, and hagiographic details which reflect biblical models in numerous facets. This purely descriptive account does not include interpretations or critical comments.

The methodological approach is essential in Bertrand Hirsch’s contribution on Iyäsus Moʾa (1214-92), an important monk and founder of monasteries in the territory of the Amhara people. Hirsch’s view on the inseparable connection of hagiology and history can best be summed up by the following

quotation (p. 169): “Ainsi, si les historiens apparaissent comme les continuateurs, involontaires, des hagiographes, c’est peut-être qu’ils n’ont pas compris que les hagiographes étaient, à leur manière, des historiens”. Hirsch’s statement that embarking to find out the ways in which historical myths are transformed into political strategies certainly provides a fascinating and promising perspective of research into Ethiopian history.

Hussein Ahmed contributes to the history of Islamisation of the region of Wällo. *Shaykh* Bushra was a protagonist in this process during the 19th century, and initiated important reforms in this region. Ahmed found and collected songs in honour of this saint, and documented the enduring legacy of his shrine at Gata, where direct descendants of Bushra’s male line have assumed the guardianship of the sanctuary.

Presenting a comparative analysis of the biography of Iyäsus Mo’a, an Ethiopian saint of the 13th century (cf. above), Manfred Kropp evidences his advanced methodological expertise with criticism and interpretation of Ethiopian source materials. His analysis reveals that the respective text does not originate from a homogeneous source, but rather was constituted from various archival fragments from the monastery of Hayq, whose collection was enlarged by oral tradition at different time periods. Kropp’s analysis also sheds light on the strategy of monastic institutions to interpret particular verbal sequences for the sake of their own political and economic advantages.

The article by Annegret Marx is based on an exposition of motives from the life of Jesus Christ in Ethiopian churches. Thirty-nine of the pictures from this display are presented in the appendix of the present volume. They contain an overview of events as documented in the New Testament, from St. Mary’s Annunciation to Pentecost.

Henri Medard carried out the research for his study among the Baganda, the dominating ethnic group of Uganda. Protestant and Roman Catholic missions started establishment there in the 1870’s, but the European missionaries and their African proselytes were soon confronted with violent persecutions by tradition-oriented political adversaries. The Christian martyrs, particularly the Catholics, achieved a prominent place in the structure and history of the local clans, and even evolved as a central element of national ideology in Uganda. Followers of all Christian confessions, as well as Muslims and “pagans”, take part in the annual feasts celebrated in memoriam and in honour of these martyrs of the 1880’s. Information in this field on the attitude of modern anti-government movements, such as the *Lord’s Resistance Army*, remains a desideratum.

Using a basis of Ethiopian and Portuguese sources, the historian Richard Pankhurst contributes to the reconstruction of the life-story of Zä-Krestos in north-western Ethiopia. This man had proclaimed himself as a new Messiah,

and was executed on the orders of the country's first Roman Catholic emperor, Zä-Dengel, in 1604. However, the millenaristic movement initiated and spearheaded by Zä-Krestos was not fully eradicated, and its ideas and expectations survived in northern Shäwa and southern Wällo for centuries.

There is hardly a person in Ethiopia to which so much hagiographic concern is dedicated to, as to the Christian saint Täklä Haymanot (1214-1313). In this volume, Hervé Pennec analyses the role Täklä Haymanot played in the writings of the Jesuits, and particularly in the works of Pedro Paez and Manoel d'Almeida. Täklä Haymanot's hagiology has been re-interpreted, and at times obviously altered by European theologians, in order to support certain views of the Roman Catholic Church in their positions regarding controversy with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

The last three articles of this anthology are devoted to saints in Muslim western Africa. A growing interest in hagiographic materials resumes the thread of the tradition of Ahmad Baba in Timbuktu (Mali) in the 17th century, and reaches its climax with Uthman b. Fodie, the founder of the Fulani Empire of Sokoto, in the early 19th century. By the military and missionary endeavours of this state, Islam became the predominant religion in Ilorin, on the northern periphery of Yorubaland in Nigeria.

Stefan Reichmuth's research is dedicated to Shehu Alimi (died 1823), who played a decisive part in the foundation of Muslim Ilorin and is venerated as a kind of patron saint there. The author was successful in discovering original Arabic texts, (and in particular litanies, which report on the life of Shehu Alimi and other saints), and was able to analyse their socio-religious roles in their respective urban milieus by employing Max Weber's sociological theories.

The Japanese scholar Shinzo Sakai embarks on a comparative study of Muslim saints among the Marka in the middle Niger region of Mali. His data are based on extensive hagiographic collections, mainly having foundation in oral traditions of the 19th century. These collections include information about famous personalities such as Sheku Ahmadu, the founder of the Fulbe state of Massina, the djihadist *Al-Hadjdj* Umar Tall, the kings of the Bambara, as well as legends from the town of Dia. Sakai points out that these oral traditions were not mainly aimed at preserving "authentic" reports about the lives of the allegedly "heroic" personalities, but rather at solidifying the ethnic and social identity of the Marka.

Bernard Salvaing was able to secure a corpus of documents written in Fulfulde (Peul) and Arabic about Muslim saints in Fouta-Djalon (Guinea). These materials were complemented by a collection of oral traditions. Salvaing then compiled an inventory of both types of sources and a statistic evaluation of data (including diagrams) that deals with the live stories, the spiritual power (*baraka*), and the miracles of the respective saints. This ap-

proach of comparative contextualization is exemplified with the accounts on the life and deeds of *Al-Hadjdj* Companya, who is regarded as a prototype of a holy person in Fouta-Djalon.

Although it has taken six years for these papers from the conference “Saints, Biographies and History in Africa” to be published, the proceedings combined in the present anthology are by no means outdated. By their very nature, the results of such historical and philological research usually do not demand a high degree of topicality. As the editors announced in their preface, their general perspective – apart from the comparative approach – is oriented towards the tradition of “histoire de longue durée”, as according to Fernand Braudel. The question of why the editors did not shoulder the burden of a full standardization regarding formal criteria (such as modes of transcription and separate bibliographies) could also be raised. This book deals largely with data concerning *curricula vitae*; however, an appendix of brief biographical data of the authors is missing. Most readers of an anthology referring to different parts of Africa would consider a map showing the places of the case studies a *desideratum*. And naturally, the quality of the articles differs – some are merely descriptive, whereas others imply methodological considerations and theoretical reflections – but all of them contribute knowledge to the complex field of African hagiology, and challenge the demand of further investigations.

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PIERRE SCHNEIDER, *L'Éthiopie et l'Inde. Interférences et confusions aux extrémités du monde antique (VIII^e siècle avant J.C.–VI^e siècle après J.C.)*. Collection de l'École française de Rome 335. Rome, 2004. 566 p. Prix: € 63,-. ISBN: 2-7283-0337-1.

Il n'est pas rare qu'au cours d'une enquête menée dans les textes issus du monde gréco-romain, l'on soit confronté à l'épineux problème des multiples Indes touchant les côtes africaines ou son opposé – et à la fois complément –, une Éthiopie aux frontières indécises. L'un des exemples les plus connus pour les éthiopiens figure dans l'*Histoire ecclésiastique* de Rufin d'Aquilée qui, décrivant la christianisation d'Aksum par Frumentius évoque l'Inde ultérieure. L'interprétation de ces textes impliquant la compréhension de la conception géographique du monde gréco-romain demande de longues recherches parfois bien éloignées du sujet qui nous intéresse. C'est donc avec soulagement et gratitude que nous accueillons l'ouvrage de Pierre Schneider, désormais un outil indispensable pour