BAIRU TAFLA

Personalia

In memoriam Sergew Hable Selassie (Sərgəw Hablä Šellase) (1929–2003)
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We regret to announce the death of the Ethiopian historian, Dr. Sergew Hable Sellassie, and we express herewith our deepest condolence to his family. He died of illness at the age of 74 in Munich in January 2003. His funeral took place in the same city in accordance with the rites of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the presence of the Ethiopian community in Bavaria as well as relations and friends from other parts of central Europe. He is said to have been survived by his divorced wife, five grown-up children and three grandchildren.

Sergew was perhaps the only Ethiopian scholar in the 20th century who specialised in antiquities. But he was also very well at home in other aspects and periods of Ethiopian history. He devoted all his life to teaching and research within and outside his native country. The areas of political and cultural history as well as biographical studies are obviously predominant in his publications, most of which are impeccable in their substantiation and interpretation. His linguistic talent must have been a great asset in his research work, as he could access local and foreign sources in Greek, Latin, German, English, French and Italian in addition to his mother tongue (Amharic) and the classical language (Gǝǝz) with which he was acquainted already in his childhood.

Born of Märıgeta Hablä Sellase Zäwde and Wäyzäro Zäwditu Dästa in Addis Abäba on 17 June 1929, he received a thorough church education at home as well as at the Holy Trinity School in the same city before he enrolled in 1949 in the centre of theological learning in Corinth, Greece. Four years later he was admitted to the University of Athens from where he graduated with a Bachelor of Divinity in 1957. He subsequently studied history at the University of Bonn (Federal Republic of Germany) where he attained the degree of Dr.phil. in 1960.

Returning to Ethiopia, he lectured on and researched about ancient Ethiopian history for more than eighteen years at the Department of History of the Haile Selassie I (later Addis Abäba) University. He was the first
Ethiopian academic to hold the chair in the field of history which was earlier (and to some extent until much later) in the hands of foreigners.

It was while serving here that he participated from its very inception in the Ethiopian Mss. Microfilm Library project, better known by its acronym: EMML. He became a member of the pioneering committee in 1971 and subsequently became director of the project as well as in charge of procurement, selection and initial cataloguing of the manuscripts. Anyone who has done some research in Ethiopia understands how tough accessing manuscripts can be. Four years later in fact Sergew was charged with the responsibility of the actual microfilming (cf. the foreword and introduction of volumes 1–6 of the EMML Catalogue). By the time he resigned from the project in 1978 to work abroad, his team had successfully filmed over 7,000 manuscripts from the collections of various churches, the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, the National Library and individuals in Addis Ababa, Sawa, and Wollo. The well-done ten or so volume catalogue by Dr. William F. Mcomber and Dr. Getatchew Haile, which encompasses the identification and descriptions of most of these works, is today a valuable guide to students of Ethiopian studies.

Sergew attended as many of the international conferences related to his field of specialisation as he could such as the international conference of Ethiopian studies and the international conference of Sudanese studies, each time contributing a paper (see a list of his publications below). He also attended the Second Vatican Council at the order of Emperor Haile Selassie I in the early 1960s (cf. F. Heyer, Die Kirche Äthiopiens: Eine Bestandsaufnahme. Berlin & New York, 1971, pp. V and 219).

Another aspect of his activity worth mentioning is that he worked in other institutions of higher learning as a guest lecturer and/or researcher. In 1967–68, he was fellow in the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London. In 1972 and in 1983–84 he won the Fulbright Visiting Fellowship at Harvard University in Boston, and at Princeton University, New Jersey, respectively. In 1979–80, he worked in the University of Heidelberg (West Germany) as a visiting professor. In 1980–81, he worked as a cataloguer of Ethiopian manuscripts at Leiden University, the Netherlands. In 1988–90, he was the editor, co-ordinator and contributor to the first church lexicon in Amharic under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture in Addis Ababa.

Time did not allow us to compile a complete list of his works. We could not even check the accuracy of all those mentioned in his curriculum vitae kindly provided by his brother, Ato Sebhat who works with the United Nations, or those mentioned in footnotes of the works of other people. Luckily quite a few have been included in Wilhelm Lockot’s Bibliographia
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Aethiopica (Äthiopistische Forschungen 9 and 41) while some others could be located in our institute’s library. The following list should in any case be regarded as merely partial and tentative:

I. Books

Beziehungen Aethiopiens zur griechisch-roemischen Welt (Bonn 1964).
Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270 (Addis Abäba 1972).
Yase Menilek Yäheywät Tarik [“Biography of Emperor Menilek”] (Munich 2000).

II. Articles


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III. Edited/Co-Edited and Contributed to

In memoriam Harold Golden Marcus (–2003)

We regret to note here the passing away of another distinguished historian of Ethiopia, Dr. Harold G. Marcus, and we express herewith our condolence to his wife, Cressida, his daughter, Emma Rose Drabik, and all his close relations and friends. He is said to have died of “cardiac arrest following complications from an ongoing heart condition,” at the age of 66 on 15 January 2003. Harold Marcus is well known to all students of Ethiopian history not only through his numerous and impeccable works, but also through his frequent participation in conferences and symposia as well as through his lively class and public lectures. In so far as we do not, however, possess reliable records on his life, we take the liberty to quote extensively from the germane obituary promptly issued to the “H-Africa LISTSERV” by Prof. Melpage of Michigan State University and edited by Prof. Jim McCann of Boston University, which will be followed by a short list of his publications compiled at random from some bibliographical works and footnotes.

“A graduate of Clark University, he [Harold] received his Ph.D. from Boston University in 1964 after studies with the anthropologist and historian, Daniel McCall. His dissertation research took him for the first time to Ethiopia, which became the focus of his academic interests for the rest of his life. He also studied and wrote more widely on African history, and on the development and decline of colonialism in Africa and worldwide.