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Conference report

15. – 16. 1. 1999 in Bologna (Italy): International Workshop: ‘Rim’ Land in
Historical Ethiopia

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stand what she had provocatively questioned in her opening address, “Is oral literature really relevant for today’s Africa?”.

During the conference, a number of live performances by South African traditional musical bands and recitations of praise poetry, video shows and other entertaining events made the conference attractive and lively. The conference was attended not only by students and scholars of African oral literature but of African history, anthropology, religion, linguistics and politics as well. Conference participants strongly emphasized the need for an interdisciplinary approach in the study of African oral literature. Furthermore, the use of modern technology in collecting and recording the various genres of African oral literature with the help of audio and video tapes, computer-assisted analysis methods and the like was also widely discussed. The Ethiopian aspect was represented in the panel “Orality and Contemporaneity” by a paper with the title: “Social Change and Local Politics: The Peasants of Gojjam (Northwest Ethiopia) and their reflections on Contemporary Issues in Amharic Oral Poetry”. Finally, there was a general meeting that led to the founding of an International Society for Oral Literature in Africa (ISOLA) and the election of a General Council, consisting of six members, namely Graham Furniss, SOAS, University of London, Austin Bukenya, Makerere University, Jeff Opland, Charterhouse and University of London, Russell Kaschula, University of Cape Town, Anne-Marie Dauphin-Tinturier, LLACAN, Paris, and Paul Eguchi, National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka. The Meeting unanimously elected Dr. Graham Furniss as the first President of the newly-founded Society. It was also decided that the next (i.e. the 4th) International Conference on Oral Literature in Africa will be held in Uganda by the year 2000.

Getie Gelaye

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The two-day workshop was organized by Professor Dr. Irma Taddia of the Università degli Studi di Bologna - Dipartimento di Discipline Storiche at Piazza S. Giovanni in Monte 2, and all sessions were held in the spacious Aula del Priore in the same historic building of the department conveniently situated right behind the Collegio Erasmus building where most of the guests were accommodated. The participants came from various universities and institutions of higher learning in Eritrea, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Sweden and the United States.

The papers presented and the lively discussions that followed each presentation demonstrated clearly that many of the conceptual terms in the cultural,

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economic and political history of Ethiopia and Eritrea are far from being fully defined and described in spite of the fact that researchers have considered them important now for over a hundred years. Some of them (particularly those pertaining to land tenure) have almost been forgotten while others are poorly described in the lexicons and monographs hitherto published. One of the major reasons for such an ill success is that researchers and writers have not given sufficient attention to the fact that the terms vary in meaning, use and certain essential elements of content from region to region. A typical example is the term *rim* whose shades of meaning encompass such aspects as temporary possession of plots of agricultural land, a patch of church land rented to a clergyman, private ownership of land, clerical holdings of land as a remuneration for service, as well as inalienable rights not necessarily attached to land depending where it is applied: Šäwa, Goğgam, Bägemädär, Təgray or Erətra. The regions of Wällo and Səmen remained by chance undocumented in this connection. The workshop has at any rate shown clearly that there is a need for a thorough study of conceptual terms in the context of historical periods and regional applications.

The proceedings of the workshop will be published in volume 3 of the El-lero collection (Torino, L'Harmattan-Italia) this year.

Bairu Tafla