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BAIRU TAFLA

Review

RICHARD PANKHURST, *The Ethiopians*

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Reviews

Auflistung von Rezensionen zu den einzelnen Monographien, durch die Fülle an sog. "grauer Literatur" und die sehr ausführlichen Informationen über äußere Daten (wie Karten, Tafeln, Publikationsform etc.).

Es empfiehlt sich jedenfalls dringend, das Inhaltsverzeichnis sorgfältig zu studieren, denn a) verbirgt sich dort eine ganze Reihe an wissenswerten Einzelheiten und b) befinden sich dort Untergliederungen – zwar nicht verborgen – m. E. dennoch eher willkürlich an dieser Stelle (z. B. "Section 40–56").

Mit diesem über 800 Seiten starken, zweispaltigen Werk hat LOCKOT ein unverzichtbares Nachschlagewerk geschaffen, das für jeden Suchenden eine unerschöpfliche Fundgrube sein wird. Den beiden Revisoren ist für ihr mühevolleres Unternehmen und ihre Beharrlichkeit, ohne welche LOCKOTs monumentales Werk nicht hätte erscheinen können, aufrichtig Anerkennung auszusprechen und zu danken. Die o. a. Monita sollten dies keineswegs schmälern.

Veronika Six

RICHARD PANKHURST, *The Ethiopians* = Parker Shipton (Ed.), *The Peoples of Africa*. Vol. 4, Oxford/UK, and Malden, Massachusetts, USA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1998. xx + 299 pages; 6 maps; 1 table; 25 plates. ISBN 0-631-18468-6. Price: £ 45.00.

This work, dedicated by a grandfather to a grandson, is published as a monograph in a new Oxford series which, according to its editor, is intended to describe "the African peoples from their origins to the present day," focusing on the "culture, society and history," on the basis of "archaeological, historical and anthropological evidence."¹ The purpose of the series, adds the editor, "is to offer a comprehensive and up-to-date picture of the African peoples, in books which are at once scholarly and accessible."

This is of course a formidable task whose success inevitably reflects the dexterity and scholarly stature of the author. At least in the case of Ethiopia, the span of time to be dealt with and the amount of historical material to prune is so vast and so complex that one can hardly take it for granted that a meaningful, scholarly and readable work as the present one can easily be achieved within the covers of less than 300 pages. The sponsors of the series, however, luckily saw to it that the task of summing up Ethiopian history be entrusted to a man who

¹ Cited from an editorial note in the title page.

has devoted all his life to Ethiopian studies and who has already produced an astounding amount of scholarly work.

The first thing that strikes one when looking at this beautiful volume (of course if the reader is familiar with Ethiopian studies) is its title. If the series is about peoples, there is nothing more appropriate than the title it bears. But there has been another book with the same name on the same subject and under the auspices of the same publishing house, albeit by a different author, a somewhat perplexing coincidence! I suppose there is an explanation, if not a justification, for this curiosity.

Like its predecessor and namesake published some four decades ago by another prominent scholar, the monograph under review provides a bird's-eye view of Ethiopia's past with a slight difference in the length of time covered, and precisely in this slight difference seems to lie the explanation. The question of updating such a work in the light of new discoveries and fresh interpretations has probably been the reason for publishing the present work, for ULLENDORFF declined some ten years ago to revise his famous monograph *The Ethiopians*, first published in 1960 and redone in 1965 and 1973 respectively. In the preface to the last reprint of 1989, its author clearly stated his decision to no longer change the content of his book:

“There is much in recent work on Ethiopian archaeology, history, anthropology, geography, or studies on fauna and flora that I can admire but in which I cannot claim independent judgement. This book remains essentially a general introduction for the non-specialist reader.”²

The Oxford University Press was obviously of a different opinion and, hence, they dropped its reissuance and reverted all rights to the author (cf. p. vii) who subsequently had the work reprinted in Germany. Yet, the former publisher apparently found the catchword rather useful and decided to baptize the next creation under the same name.

Be it as it may, Ethiopian studies is at any rate enriched by the addition of one more valuable work. Divided into twelve chapters, the book under review follows more or less the traditional, political, chronological order when surveying the whole span of the historical panorama — from the pre-history to the demise of the Marxist regime in 1991. The palaeontological and archaeological findings of the recent decades as well as the political developments of the country after 1974 are well represented in the book. The major historical events and epochs

² EDWARD ULLENDORFF, *The Ethiopians: an Introduction to Country and People* (Oxford, 3rd edition, 1973; repr. Stuttgart 1990) p. xiii.

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(Aksum and Christianity, the Zagwe and the Solomonic Dynasties, the Muslim and Oromo wars, Gondär, etc.) are highlighted as headings and subheadings of the chapters; but there are also sub-subheadings which do not feature in the table of contents. Yet the narrative is fluent, the presentation logical and the description quite vivid.

In most cases, the different theories, legends and interpretations pertaining to a particular era, event or person are briefly considered in a very objective (at least for the ancient period) and scholarly manner. Even the wild theories of some scientists on the origin of wheat and barley (cf. p. 5) from Egypt (in spite of the more favourable climatic conditions of Ethiopia) are included, probably for fairness' sake. There are only a few exceptions to this consistency as, for example, in the case of the origin and length of period of the Zagwe Dynasty (cf. pp. 45 f.) where the version of Conti Rossini is apparently adopted as an unchallengeable historical fact.

The novice, having been introduced to the question of Eritrea in the mid-20th century, may also miss the account of the Ethiopian-Eritrean Federation whose background has concisely been described (cf. pp. 260 f.). Its establishment and abolition are also mentioned on pages 261 and 265 respectively, but the course of its existence is tossed aside perhaps as insignificant, although it is well known that it was the anomalies and blunders of that particular period that instigated the disastrous war that depleted human and material resources alike.

Somewhat perplexing is the closing paragraph of the book which consists of a single sentence of value judgement and thereby begs the question that the advent of the new regime initiated "a new chapter in Ethiopia's age-old history." Did not the revolution do the same or even more radically in 1974? How different is really the present regime from the ones which preceded it? This is of course a matter of opinion, and the author is no doubt entitled to his own. The work is in any case an excellent review of Ethiopian studies, for which the author ought to be congratulated once again.

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