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Review

BAHRU ZEWDE, *A Short History of Ethiopia and the Horn*

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Reviews

Der Band ist außerordentlich informativ. Der wissenschaftliche Ertrag der Papiere ist wegen seiner materialintensiven Darstellung vielleicht noch höher zu bewerten, als es mitunter während der Konferenz selbst den Anschein hatte, wo sich gelegentlich — durchaus verständlich — die tagespolitische Bewertung stärker in den Mittelpunkt drängte, als dies einem historisch-wissenschaftlichen Diskurs üblicherweise dienlich sein dürfte.

Der Band, der Tagungspapiere in englischer, französischer und italienischer Sprache aufgenommen hat, wurde schon zwei Jahre nach Ende der Konferenz veröffentlicht. Er gibt mit vielen Detailangaben, Zahlenübersichten, Tabellen, Abbildungen und der Auseinandersetzung mit Primär- und Sekundärquellen einen wichtigen Einblick in dieses außerordentlich wichtige Ereignis an der Wende des 19. zum 20. Jahrhundert, das lange, bevor dies sichtbar wurde, das Ende der Kolonialzeit in Afrika vorschattete, als ein Volk trotz feudaler Strukturen und mittels einer Armee, die den Europäern in Ausrüstung und Kriegführung hoffnungslos unterlegen war, seine über viele Jahrhunderte bewährte Unabhängigkeit verteidigte.

Siegbert Uhlig

BAHRU ZEWDE (compiler), *A Short History of Ethiopia and the Horn*. Addis Ababa: Department of History, Addis Ababa University, 1998. 244 pages, 46 illustrations, 8 maps, paperback, 25,- Birr.

In view of some recent radical changes in the academic interpretation of Ethiopian history, in particular at the University of Addis Ababa, the first textbook on this subject to be produced by the University itself may give rise to a certain amount of anticipation and curiosity. It is a 244-page volume, produced in a comparatively simple printing technique, with 46 illustrations and 8 fairly small maps.

As in the case of former — but not printed — material for the students of the history department, the method of collective authorship has been chosen. Basing his work on the results of a workshop which took place in 1995 and treated former student materials with detailed criticism, BAHRU ZEWDE has rewritten those texts and partly amplified them. The conclusive chapter on the rise and fall of the *Derg* was composed by the compiler himself. The book has already aroused the attention of the public in Addis Ababa outside the university campus of Sədäst Kilo. Because of its relatively low price and its handbook character it could become the work from which the upcoming generation will mainly draw their knowledge of history.

In 17 chapters the authors provide a summary of the history of the Ethiopian region which extends from methodical explanations (Chapter 1), elaborations on geography and palaeoanthropology, the formation of class and state structures, distribution of land and religion (Chapters 2 to 5) to the chronological depiction of the mainly political, but also economical developments of the region from the ancient world up to modern times (1991) (Chapters 6 to 17). Each chapter ends with a concise list of most important works on the topic, and almost each chapter is followed by extracts from sources (in English or Amharic). At the end there is an eight-page index with around 500 personal names, place names, indications of individual events (such as famines or Ethio-US Treaty of 1953) and some names of institutions. The index is detailed and therefore very useful. The fields of knowledge and eras touched upon in this book are presented concisely and cover a vast wealth of facts reflecting the richness of Ethiopian history. The authors document the whole range of Ethiopian historical studies briefly, precisely and yet in extraordinary detail.

The volume will provide many students with basic patterns of knowledge and interpretation of history, therefore it is perhaps useful to discuss two aspects, which could be seen as partly problematic. First, naming always tends to be a problem in “multicultural” contexts — as in Ethiopia. The current burning discussion on the status of the individual ethnic groups in Ethiopia, however, is not always taken into consideration in this respect — often the Amharic version of peoples’ or settlement’s names is used; criticisms, resulting from current ethnically motivated tensions, could have easily been avoided by stating that these choices were only for the sake of simplicity, to be easily understood by everyone, but wouldn’t mean any prejudgement. For example, the authors have refrained from using place names in modern Oromo spelling (‘Bali’ instead of ‘Baalee’, p. 63); the town of ‘Adaama’ is not mentioned under its official name (p. 163: ‘Nazareth’). Similarly, the ‘Anywa’ are designated with the name ‘Anuak’, which is unpopular with them (p. 123). The problem, however, is not ignored; e.g. the presently largely preferred terms ‘Berta’ (p. 122) instead of ‘Beni Shangul’, and ‘Tegray’ instead of ‘Tegre’ (p. 63) are used, but not consistently (map p. 118: ‘Tegre’ instead of ‘Tegray’, ‘Arqiqo’ instead of ‘Hergigo’, ‘Naqamte’ instead of ‘Leqemt’).

There are also some other minor, unproblematic formal inconsistencies which can easily happen, as in the (abridged) transliteration¹. Additionally it can be mentioned here that in a few cases, presumably due to the pressure of having to

¹ E.g.: p. 202 Qaññaw, p. 203 Qagnaw, p.192 Mogadishu, p. 193 Moqadishu, p. 146 Gagn, p. 79f Grañ.

get the work finished [seemingly unavoidable in any book!], there are minor gaps in acknowledgements² and some few cases of conceptual unclarity³. The — extremely helpful — explanatory source texts are not always printed in the original language, once even in the translation of a translation, which proves to be problematic as far as methodology is concerned⁴.

The second aspect concerns the geo-political scope of the book, which is somehow unclear. This is apparent in the maps. The first (p. 9 “Physical map of Ethiopia and the Horn”) shows present-day Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibuti; Somalia, part of the “Horn”, is missing. The 19th century maps show Ethiopia’s borders as they were in the period before 1991/93, including Eritrea (p. 118, 159), although these borders were not established⁵ until the early 20th century, and Eritrea with its modern borders has only become part of Ethiopia in 1952 (respectively 1962). In all five political maps borders of the periods concerned are missing, although these are of vital importance to understand the political scene at that time. It is interesting to note that the title of the book itself seems to reflect some open discussions concerning its scope. One can get the impression that the book was originally intended to be entitled “A Short History of Ethiopia” only, but later “and the Horn” was added in smaller letters⁶. The reason is clear — the perspective was to include more than the present state of Ethiopia if it was to be portrayed in a true historical sense. Thus “the Horn” was added, but the book remained mainly a history of Ethiopia, and partly of Eritrea.

Eritrea’s role in Ethiopian history appears in a contradictory way. On page 201 it is stated that “Eritrea ... was part of the Ethiopian empire before ... 1890”, in contradiction to Aṣe Yoḥannəs’ letter of 1881 (p. 145), in which he

² Not all sources of the very informative illustrations are stated: p. 135 Portray of Aṣe Tewedros (Illus. 12.1), p. 142 bird’s eye view of the countryside around ‘Adwa (Illus. 12.4), p. 154 a very interesting picture of Mənilək’s Army on the march (Illus. 13.1).

³ The “modern Homo Sapiens” is incorrectly described as “very similar to today’s humans” (p. 15); but from the biological point of view he is identical.

⁴ Cf. the text “The Battle of Shembra Kure”, p. 88f, an Amharic translation from the French version of the Arabic original.

⁵ The establishment of borders is described at the end of the chapter “The Post-Adwa Equilibrium” (p. 143f); for the sake of completeness it might be added here that Eritrea’s borders were not only stipulated in the contract of 1900, but further in 1906 and 1908. See: HABTU GHEBRE-AB, *Ethiopia and Eritrea. A Documentary Study*. Trenton 1993.

⁶ Not to be blamed of speculation I can e.g. refer to a minor grammatical error, which may show, that at least in some texts the word “Ethiopia” has been replaced by “Ethiopia and the Horn” only later (p. 96: “Ethiopia and the Horn *has* hosted considerable advances in the arts ...” instead of “*have*”).

complains that certain territories, including important ones in today's Eritrea, were situated outside his jurisdiction. In fact, the development of Ethiopian territories was very dynamic sometimes, as is excellently shown in several chapters, as in the ones on the Southern states and on Mənilək's expansion. In other parts of the book (such as on p. 201), however, continuity is presupposed where it exists to a limited extent only. This is apparent in several details, e.g. in the use of the name "Ethiopia" itself, which changed its scope considerably throughout history. It is suggested that Aksum was identical with antique "Ethiopia": "The term [Ethiopia] thus came to have the regional focus [in the 4th century] that it has kept to this day." (p. 44) A source gives another impression, however: in the ancient "Inscription of Adulis" (p. 68f ⁷) the king writes, that he subjected "all the peoples who adjoin my land" to his sovereignty, i.e. in the west "as far as the land of Ethiopia". The information that at that time the Greek term "Aithiopia" was used for the area south of Egypt and north of Aksum, called "Kush" by the Egyptians, would certainly be helpful here⁸.

Set apart this criticism, one should praise the helpful work done. Many of this book's chapters are impressing examples of the high art of modern historiography. As an example one might cite the large chapter on the period between the Aḥmad Grañ wars and the expulsion of the Jesuits in the 16th to 17th centuries (p. 73–95). It is highly instructive as, for example, it clearly contradicts the doubtful thesis that these wars were religious conflicts; the authors underline that, on the contrary, "control of trade routes underlay that struggle" (p. 75) (the pattern of the former idea is comparable to the modern belief that conflicts were mainly motivated ethnically, which is neither true).

Another text providing a most worthwhile overview on a totally different historical period is the last chapter (p. 218–236), which describes the years between the revolutionary movements of 1974 and the fall of the Mängəstu regime in 1991. Tackling this period is courageous, it being so recent, but this work demonstrates successfully that even such recent history can receive a well-balanced treatment. Therefore the text will provide a good tool for students to understand the dynamics of those times.

The introductory remarks on how historiography, i.e. history, has been made (p. 4), following some fundamental remarks on the sources (p. 2–3), will be of

⁷ Without mention of date; possibly by King Sembruthes in the early 5th century. See ENNO LITTMANN, *Deutsche Aksum-Expedition*, Vol 1: *Reisebericht der Expedition. Topographie und Geschichte Aksums*, Berlin 1913, p. 42f.

⁸ See INGE HOFMANN, Bemerkungen zum Ende des meroitischen Reiches, In: VERONIKA SIX et al: *Afrikanische Sprachen und Kulturen — Ein Querschnitt*, Hamburg 1971, pp. 342–352.

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crucial importance for the student. The comments on the ideological usability of historiography can sensitize the student to see how important it is to deal with contradictions between different sources, all of them being results of different points of view — in both senses of the term: in respect to what had been conceived to be true and what had been perceived to be true.

On the whole it is a book, which, with its impressive wealth of data and other materials in such a restricted space, is suitable to make the student aware of the great diversity of Ethiopian history. It gives a new response to the interest traditionally enjoyed by history in Ethiopia.

Wolbert G.C. Smidt

FRIEDRICH HEYER, *Die Heiligen der Äthiopischen Erde = OIKONOMIA. Quellen und Studien zur orthodoxen Theologie* begründet von FAIRY V. LILIENFELD, herausgegeben von KARL CHRISTIAN FELMY und HEINZ OHME 37. Erlangen, 1998 (Auslieferung: Lehrstuhl für Geschichte und Theologie des christlichen Ostens, Kochstr.6 D-91054 Erlangen). 240 S. Abb. Preis: ca. DM 30,-.

Durch das ganze Buch hindurch ist die Freude des 90-jährigen Autors am Erzählen deutlich zu spüren, der dem Leser das im Volksglauben verankerte Vertrauen der äthiopischen Christen, das diese dem jeweiligen Heiligen entgegenbringen, vermitteln möchte. In der Einführung (S. 9–22) geht der Verf. zunächst auf die Art der in Äthiopien praktizierten Heiligenverehrung ein, wie er es selbst auf vielen seiner Reisen beobachten konnte. Außerdem gibt er einen kurzen Einblick in die Literaturgattung der Hagiographie: die *Gädl* genannte Vita einer Person mit den Topoi, wie *Kidan*, *Tä'amər* und *Mälk'ə*, die erforderlich sind, um sich von einer weltlichen Biographie abzugrenzen.

Der Hauptteil des Bandes (S. 23–231) besteht in der Nacherzählung der Heiligenviten, denen in der Literatur des äthiopisch-orthodoxen Christentums eine eminente Rolle zukommt. Der Verf. präsentiert die ausgewählten Heiligen [aufgrund einer wohl noch nicht endgültig abgeschlossenen Zählung scheint die äthiopisch-orthodoxe Kirche ca. 201 Heilige zu zählen (S. 13)] nach einer zeitlichen Gliederung. Die Viten der dem Kreis der Stephaniten und Mika'eliten angehörenden Mönche klammert der Verf. aber mit Rücksicht auf die offizielle äthiopisch-orthodoxe Kirche aus (S. 14). Seine Quellen sind die bekannten Texteditionen, womit BORIS TURAIEV 1902 nach dem Studium der d'Abbadie-