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## Reviews

SIEGBERT UHLIG (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*. Volume 3: *He–N*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007. XXVIII + 1211 pp., 340 figs., 112 maps. Price: € 78,-. ISBN 978–3–447–05607–6.

This is the third volume of the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, a collective work which can be confidently classified as the most important systematic work in the field of Ethiopian studies ever undertaken, bringing these studies on the same level, as far as basic tools are concerned, of Biblical Studies, Assyriology, Egyptology, Islamic studies, Coptic studies and others. The only instrument Ethiopian studies still need is a systematic bibliography – although the annual bibliography published in “Aethiopica” already renders good services in this field. Even without taking into account the collection of the *Äthiopistische Forschungen*, it can be said that the Hamburg group has the greatest merits as far as the foundations of Ethiopian studies are concerned.

The present writer does not feel competent to review a volume of more than 1200 pages, covering different epochs and areas, and tens and tens of personages and places. So, he feels obliged to concentrate himself to some very limited items, without sparing some criticism, which must be seen in the general, highly positive perspective hinted at above. In particular, as every item shows a bibliography which is forcibly selective, every additional suggestion in bibliography has to be seen not as a criticism of what has been printed, but as a complement for further utilization by the reader.

In the list of the abbreviations, the non-appearance of many of them (e.g., those regarding the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, gives the impression of an exaggerate “ethiopicity” of the entire work, whereas one of the most interesting aspects of Ethiopian studies lies precisely in the cultural interrelation between Ethiopia and the “external”, i.e. Biblical, Classical, Christian Oriental, Islamic, etc. world). Viceversa, some useless, not to say dangerous, works continue to be quoted, like Huntingford’s edition of ‘Amdä Şəyon’s Chronicle (“HuntAmS”), even in presence of two much better editions (Kropp and Marrassini). From a different point of view, it must be said in general that it has not been a good idea at the beginning that of giving *in extenso*, in the various items in the body of the volumes, the christian name(s) of the authors, all the more when the editor is not indicated, but only the place of edition.

The item *Hermas* is correct, but, after the publication of Gianfrancesco Lusini’s article (2001), it fails to indicate the editions/translations of M.B. Durante Mangoni, L.H. Marques, and A. Carlini.

In the excellent and clear item *Himyar* on p. 33, the Ethiopians killed in South Arabia at the beginning of the Nağrān war were probably 280 in number, not 300, s. the Syriac sources: clearly 300 for the killed is a *lectio facillior*.

On pp. 34f., the detail of Kaleb building “a number of churches (a detail also found in the Vita of Archbishop Gregentius of Zafār)” is misleading, because it suggests a special connection between the activities of these two personages. The building of churches is a very elementary *tópos*. Understandably, there is plenty of church builders in Ethiopian history.

The entry on *Kaleb* can be taken as a good representative of the high scholarly value of this volume, and at the same time of its shortcomings: excellent historical outline, almost exhaustive bibliography – but exaggerate insistence on secondary or even useless details. No wonder that with these criteria the present volume has assumed such gigantic proportions.

On (Ethiopian) *divine Kingship*, by Ulrich Braukämper, maybe something more could have been expected. The quotation (p. 403a) of Gianfranco Fiacadori’s “Sembrouthes ‘gran re’ ...”, in *La Parola del Passato* 2004 seems to be gratuitous, and only motivated by the title, as this essay does not bring new elements for Ethiopian kingship. Instead, one would desire at least a quotation of André Caquot, Enrico Cerulli, and Paolo Marrassini. Two interesting aspects could also have been developed: the coming of kingship from a foreign country (not from heaven), so widespread motif in African traditions, and so radically different from Near eastern traditions. This in turn agrees with most African legends of serpent/dragon killing, frequently connected with kingship, the problem of the female kingship, and of the royal succession, in parts of north-eastern Africa. Nor would it seem out of the scope of the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* to bring more selected references to the amount of bibliography on kingship in the Classical world, in the Near East, and in Africa (some indications on pp. 402f.).

The lemma *Judaism* (pp. 303–08). by Frederic C. Gamst, is surely correct in its general approach (J. as an internal Ethiopian development, without any direct intervention of Jews from abroad), but does not make clear the various stages of the historical derivation. Instead of offering the 9<sup>th</sup> essay of American sociology, it would have been better to clearly indicate the chief lines of the ideological movement in Ethiopia: firstly, the tendency, common to all the early Christian communities to be considered the “new Israel”, the “new chosen people”; secondly, the imitation of the OT, from which every element derives; thirdly, the religious reformation by Zar’a Ya’qob (quoted by G., but in a not perfectly linear context). All these elements are indicated in the brilliant articles by M. Rodinson, rightly quoted by G. Other elements can be mentioned, like the problem of the doubtful

“Egyptian origin” of the Ethiopian Judaism: this origin is rightly denied by G., but it should be stated that the arguments used so far only concern a derivation from the *Jewish Elephantine colony*. To criticize the theory of an origin of Jewish elements from it does not mean to eliminate every possibility of an Egyptian *later* arrival, exactly in the way in which also christianity arrived (so, mainly with the development of the sea trade), and possibly earlier (the translation of the LXX was done in Alexandria in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.). In fact, one is struck by the lack of material (archaeological and philological) evidence of the presence of Jews in Ethiopia in ancient times. This could be only an argument *e silentio*, were it not for the sharp contrast with South Arabia, where material witnesses of this kind, instead, have been revealed in the past, but also copiously in recent years. For this Jewish presence in South Arabia G. rightly quotes the article by Christian J. Robin in *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 1980. It can be concluded that Ethiopian Judaism has no proof for its positive existence in ancient times, except for some vague possibility at more or less the same time of the *diaspora*, or even before. But it can have received significant stimuli from South Arabia.

The item *Islam* (Hussein Ahmed and Alessandro Gori), plus *History of Islam in Ethiopia* (Hussein Ahmed) and *History of Islam in Eritrea* (Jonathan Miran), on pp. 198–212, surely represent one of the *pièces de résistance* of the entire volume. But above all it is the special position of the woman that ought to be inserted among the chief characteristics of Islam in Ethiopia (cp. Gudit, Badit in the Shoa Sultanate, Ma’ati-Layla, the queens of Aksum, Wag and Bali, Ga’əwa of the same Turkish-Abyssinian war).

The items *Kəbrä Nəgäšt* (Marrassini) – *Makəd(d)a / The Queen of Sheba in ancient tradition/The Queen of Sheba in Ethiopian tradition* (different from *Kəbrä Nəgäšt?*)/*The Queen of Sheba in western culture* (Fiaccadori)/*Makədda in art* (Ewa Balicka-Witakowska) undoubtedly give an ample panorama of the main issues of this complex problem; and yet, something unsatisfactory remains, probably just because of the decision to cut this problem into different pieces, a decision which in my opinion is not fully justified: *Kəbrä Nəgäšt*, *Makəd(d)a*, *Queen of Sheba in ancient tradition*, *in Ethiopian tradition*, *in western culture*, and *in art*, are in the end almost the same thing – or at least they raise the same problems. Anyway, the uncertain definition of the subjects assigned to the different authors has brought some important works not to be mentioned in the relevant items and in their basic bibliography; viceversa, some useless bibliographical indications have been inserted occupying a precious space. Except for some omissions, the bibliography of all the items seems to be good, but of course it is the result of a selection. So, given the importance of these items for a proper understanding of one of the most

important Ethiopian traditions, it could perhaps be useful for the readers to be presented not just by another supplementary selection, but to dispose of a more or less complete bibliography.<sup>1</sup> Clearly to know what really Solomon did, or who historically he was, is not very important in our context, but a minimum of “historical background” is not completely useless, since one frequently speaks of the historicity of the Biblical account, of the Arabian queens, of the Sabaeans in the north of Arabia, and so on. From the historical point of view the passage, which immediately after speaks of the idolatry of Solomon due to his frequentation of the pagan women of his harem, should be inserted in the problem of the ethnic identity typical of the period of Esdra and Nehemiah. For the OT passages and the personage of Solomon in the Bible, there are several useful works. Much more interesting for the Ethiopian culture is the formation of the extra- and post-biblical legend about Solomon, based on the Talmud and the Midrashim.

The personage of the Queen of Sheba is of course intertwined with that of Solomon, and so the relevant bibliography should be consulted. As for the name of the queen, the lucubrations of Guidi (quoted on p. 675*a*), not better than his proposal about the name “Menelik”, should be left for good aside.

On the “Sabaeans” connection of the Queen, the *EAE* item rightly stresses the absence of “queens” from South Arabia proper. Here it can be added that the only mention of a *mlkt* is an inscription of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C., and here she is only the wife of the king; from this point of view, the old hypothesis of Wendell Phillips (*Qataban and Sheba*, New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1955) that the biblical queen was the wife of a Sabaeans king should at least be mentioned.

The progressive shifting from “Saba” to the “South” and Africa already appears in Matthew 12:42 = Luke 11:31; in the *KN* Ch. 21 it is specified that the “Queen of the South” is the “Queen of Ethiopia”, but already in Josephus VIII, 6:5–6 she is called “queen of Egypt and Ethiopia”, with a location which is already more in Africa than in Asia, maybe because of the importance of the traditions about Meroe and the Candace.

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<sup>1</sup> Extensive additional bibliographical references by the reviewer will be published on the “Aethiopia” website.