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**Review**

UOLDELUL CHELATI DIRAR – ALESSANDRO GORI – IRMA TADDIA, *Lettere tigrine. I documenti etiopici del Fondo Ellero*

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## Reviews

artist. It is imagination that counts, not a 'correct description' of social or political problems.

The fact that such 'realist' elements appear very frequently in the novels as well as in the work of critics may indeed attest to the legitimate and deeply felt concerns of Ethiopian authors, intellectuals, and the reading public about the problems of Ethiopian society. Against this specific background, common human problems as treated in works of fiction, such as the nature of love, friendship, life's eternal dilemmas, or questions of meaning come out even starker. But that background cannot be the main concern of fiction.

There are no comments in the book on Ethiopian literature after 1991, when a historic change of regime occurred. While it is indeed too brief a period to be dealt with in this book published in 1995, many questions arise as to the state of literature in Ethiopia now. The emergence of a more free private press in Addis Ababa after 1991 (though not without its problems) suggests that much more is possible in terms of writing and publishing in other – e.g. literary fields – as well, but few novels and other literary works have come out to catch the limelight. It must be recalled that in the *Derg* period many authors – despite censorship – were encouraged to write, and literary work was frequently read on national radio. The Ethiopian book-publishing scene today is still much dominated by the publication of translations of second-rate foreign 'best-sellers'. It is not known whether this is because of market demand or of policy in the (semi-state) publishing houses, but this trend may endanger the further growth of the Ethiopian literary tradition.

Jon G. Abbink

UOLDELUL CHELATI DIRAR, ALESSANDRO GORI, IRMA TADDIA, *Lettere tigrine. I documenti etiopici del Fondo Ellero*. Vol I. Torino: Editrice L'Harmattan Italia, 1997. 207 pp. Price: LIT 29.000.

The idea of letting "Ethiopians Speak", the title of Leslau's pioneering series of linguistic monographs, found impressive expression in Sven Rubenson's on-going series *Acta Aethiopica*, which features *inter alia* the politically most important diplomatic letters of the Ethiopian state. Subject-wise *Lettere tigrine* may in comparison seem no more than "small beer". The work under review, which comprises notes on 287 letters in the Ellero archives of the University of Bologna, is nevertheless of major interest for the history of northern Ethiopia,

and Eritrea. Covering over three formative decades, from before the Battle of Adwa, in 1896, to after Mussolini's entry into the European war, in 1940, the volume provides intriguing glimpses into many of the preoccupations of the inhabitants of Təgre, Eritrea (mainly Akkälä Guzay) and Wag – or, more precisely, into such preoccupations as the writers of the letters thought fit to inform Italian officials in Eritrea.

The compilers have used the term *Lettere tigrine* in their title, because that is how the letters were originally classified in the Italian archives. The vast majority of these epistles are, however, written in Amharic, and students of Təgrena may be disappointed to learn that less than a dozen are in that language.

The largest number of letters comprise requests for *laissez-passer* assistance in Eritrea; requests for rifles, pistols, and ammunition; and help in apprehending “Galla” and other escaped slaves (communications on this latter issue date back to as early as 1906, but the problem seems to have become more important from around 1915 or 1916 onwards). Several letters likewise refer to the payment of tribute; matrimonial disputes; quarrels among the clergy, and the appointment of clerics to office; thefts of cattle, their authors' claimed need of financial assistance, as well as craving for medicines and liquors, shoes and clothes; watches, binoculars, dogs, and religious books; also help in church-building. Beneficial as all such assistance undoubtedly was, it can scarcely be denied that it also formed part of what Emperor Haylä Səllasé described in his *Autobiography* as Italy's efforts at political penetration – the old story of *timeo Daneos et dona ferentes* – the requests are therefore also of some interest for students of Italian expansion in Africa. Other letters, as might be expected, comprise marriage invitations, and, of particular interest to the twentieth century political historian, correspondence on the submission of the enigmatic Mäsfen Rädä of Wälqayt, a sometime “rebel” against Italian rule.

*Lettere Tigrine* is excellently edited, with reproductions of twenty-six of the original letters, useful biographical notes on the authors and addressees of all the letters, and a glossary of the Ethiopian terms employed in the texts. There are also reproductions of thirty-six noblemen's seals. That of Fitawrari Libän is of particular interest in that, unlike those of two other chiefs bearing the same rank, ‘Ali and Häbtä Giyorgis (see *Ethiopia Observer*, 1973, XV, 143, 146), it embodied a representation of an *awraris*, i.e. rhinoceros, an allusion to the title's linguistic origin.

We eagerly await the publication of the next volume of this important work, and hope that others may follow UOLDELUL, GORI, and TADDIA in the publication of other such-like documents.

Richard Pankhurst

The authors of the above monograph wish to draw the attention to the following list of errata.

ERRATA CORRIGE

p. 29 - Righe 4<sup>a</sup> e 5<sup>a</sup>

[1914 giugno 12]

corrispettivo secondo il  
calendario gregoriano

pp. 29 - 30 (dalla terzultima riga di p. 29)

č, corrisponde sempre al suono della c affricata palatale sorda italiana (come in cesta), anche davanti a u, o ed a

š, corrisponde sempre al suono di sc fricativa palatale sorda italiana (come in scena), anche davanti a u, o, ed a

ğ, corrisponde sempre al suono della g affricata palatale sonora italiana (come in gelato), anche davanti a u, o ed a

ñ, corrisponde sempre al suono nasale palatale italiano gn (come in gnomo)

Le lettere contraddistinte da un punto collocato sotto la loro forma rappresentano le consonanti «enfatiche» che non hanno un corrispondente in italiano. Queste consonanti sono scientificamente definibili «glottalizzate» o «eiettive»: nella loro pronuncia infatti la corrente d'aria proveniente dai polmoni è bloccata dalla chiusura della glottide, mentre l'aria soprastante è spinta fuori attraverso un'occlusione formata dai vari organi interessanti.

š, suono affricato dentale sordo enfatico

č, suono occlusivo dentale sordo enfatico

č, suono affricato palatale sordo enfatico

q, suono occlusivo velare sordo enfatico

p, suono occlusivo labiale sordo enfatico

Nella resa grafica dei vocaboli e dei termini tigrini o ge'ez abbiamo tenuto conto anche delle consonanti laringali (scomparse in amarico e quindi confuse nella grafia):

č, fricativa faringale sonora

h, fricativa faringale sorda

h, fricativa velare sorda

p. 111

documento n. 210 - Autorizzazione a compiere acquisti con berr

p. 174

Maru Ḥmnatu, (interprete), 244, 245