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Review

GIOVANNI ELLERO, *Antropologia e storia d'Etiopia. Note sullo Scirè, l'Endertà, i Tacruri e il Uolcàit*

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GIOVANNI ELLERO, *Antropologia e storia dell'Etiopia. Note sullo Scirè, l'Endertà, i Tacruri e il Uolcait*. Prefazione by G. FIACCADORI, Introduzione by the editor, GIANFRANCO LUSINI. Udine: Campanotto editore, 1995. 149pp. Index, Table of illustrations. LIT. 28.000.

This volume includes a collection of various essays by the Italian social scientist and colonial civil servant GIANFRANCO ELLERO previously published in Italian periodicals in the 1930's and 1940's.

GIOVANNI ELLERO is a relatively little known name among the most famous Italian scholars on Ethiopia; because of his death at the age of 32 during the colonial war he couldn't publish the results of his fieldwork in the Italian colony. A large amount of his valuable research work remains unpublished and has been recently deposited at the History Department of the University of Bologna. The ELLERO unpublished notes as well as the published essays under review are of great interest to scholars. The collection edited by GIANFRANCO LUSINI includes six articles dealing with Ellero's work in Tegray during the years 1936–1940, mainly in the regions of Scirè, Walqäyt and Endertà. Four works have been published by ELLERO himself, two by CONTI ROSSINI after Ellero's death. The first article "I conventi dello Scirè e le loro leggende" is a detailed account of the major monastic institutions from a historical perspective, based both on written documents and oral material. The second "Una regione etiopica: lo Scirè" is a valuable source of details on the geographical milieu and includes historical documents on the religious organisation of the area from a comparative perspective. ELLERO's "Note sull'Endertà" is mainly based on a collection of oral documents and explores the relevance of the monasteries according to oral tradition. Other two articles deal respectively with "I Tacruri in Eritrea" and "Importanza della tradizione orale per l'etiopistica"; this latter is a methodological essay which is particularly remarkable considering the period in which it was written, i.e. the 1930's. The most relevant study among ELLERO's published works is the last one "Il Uolcait" published by CONTI ROSSINI in 1948. The notes on the area are conserved in two unpublished manuscripts now at the History Department in Bologna and CONTI ROSSINI published only a part of ELLERO's valuable work on this region. Very few people studied the area both during colonialism and later, therefore ELLERO's notes deserve attention. A close analysis of the main districts, the social organisation, the religious setting, the historical background of monastic institutions is provided, as well as solid documentation on oral tradition. The work on Walqäyt can be considered as the most important of ELLERO's

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contributions to the field of Ethiopian studies. I hope to develop the knowledge of this region through an accurate edition of ELLERO's unpublished notes I am trying to put together and publish this year¹. In the meantime, this publication reminds us of the importance of ELLERO's work which has been undervalued so far in the field of Ethiopian studies. This volume is therefore very welcome and it preludes to further investigation.

Irma Taddia

JEDREJ, M.C., *Ingessana. The Religious Institutions of a People of the Sudan-Ethiopia Borderland. = Studies of Religion in Africa. Supplements to the Journal of Religion in Africa, XIII.* Leiden, New York, Köln: E. J. Brill, 1995. 136 pp. Price: Nlg 80,00 / US\$ 51.75.

M.C. JEDREJ's monograph on the religion of the Ingessana in southern Funj (Blue Nile Province of the Sudan) is based on field research carried out during the time of his lectureship at Khartoum University from 1969 to 1973 and another sojourn in 1985. There was thus a considerable gap between the collection of data and their publication due to further stays in Ethiopia and West African countries, which have, however, widened the author's horizon for his analysis of socio-religious phenomena in the Sudan-Ethiopia borderland.

Linguistically, the Ingessana belong to the Eastern Sudanic group of the Chari-Nile branch of the Nilo-Saharan family. In former ethnological classifications (e.g. by VINIGI GROTTANELLI) they were listed among the so-called pre-Nilotes, a cluster of ethnic groups along the north-western escarpment of the Ethiopian highlands which were characterised by a variety of 'archaic' cultural features (the raising of pigs, etc.). It has to be pointed out that this particular classification has been questioned for a number of reasons which are outside the focus of this study and have therefore not been considered here. The diffusionist concept of a belt of culturally more or less related "paleo-nigrific" peoples in the Sudanic zone between the upper Niger region and the Ethiopian highlands is even more to be doubted in the light of the

¹ In the meantime, the first volume of ELLERO's notes has appeared in print: UOLDELUL CHELATI DIRAR, ALESSANDRO GORI and IRMA TADDIA, *Lettere Tigrine. I documenti etiopici del Fondo Ellero.* Torino 1997. See also a review of the monograph on page 242.