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Personalia

Sven Rubenson has turned ninety

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Personalia

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“In spite of illness, in spite even of the archenemy sorrow, one can remain alive ... if one is unafraid of change, insatiable in intellectual curiosity, interested in big things, and happy in small ways.”

(Edith Wharton, 1862–1937)

A ninety-year struggle seems to have hardly depressed the Swedish Ethiopisant who, though frail in body and yet still keen in mind, celebrated his birthday in October 2011 surrounded by his five children and their partners as well as his sixteen grandchildren. Only Britta was absent, “a wonderful wife”,² as he put it in an interview which MediaETHIOPIA launched in honour of his 80th birthday. A quiet and hardworking lady, she was always by his side for more than 63 years and of all things her passing away in 2010 still agonises his mind.

Sven was born in Färingtofta, Sweden on 21 October 1921. When he was eight months old, his family moved to the United States for economic reasons and his father became a farmer and businessman in North Dakota. Life was hard there, as he once told the present writer many years ago, implying probably that he not only had to go to school but also help on the farm. By the time the family returned to Sweden for the same reason in 1931, Sven had spent his first ten years in the United States and that explains his mastery of the English language which became his primary medium of preaching, teaching and writing in Ethiopia.

How life in Sweden treated him in the next 15 years is unknown, though it is not difficult to imagine the life of a family with ten children in a continent more or less dilapidated by a six-year war.

After World War II, Sven once again had to go abroad, this time as a teacher and preacher. The Swedish Evangelical Mission assigned him to establish a mission station in Adwa, where Samuel Gobat and Carl Wilhelm Isenberg were frustrated a hundred years earlier. He was not expected to go

¹ This note of appreciation was intended to appear in AETHIOPICA 14 (2011) at about the same time as his celebration; but it was delayed by unexpected problems on the side of the writer.

² www.mediaethiopia.com/interviews.

from village to village or from house to house and spread the Gospel. That had already been forbidden by an Ethiopian decree in 1944. His assignment was primarily to build a school and of course teach young boys and girls when the rooms became accessible. Without a doubt Sven had talent to execute his job; he was very energetic and hardworking; only he had not yet mastered the missionary wisdom of working with great patience and attracting people through conviction. Soon he ran into conflict with some young people who consequently tried to stone him. The mission administration transferred him to Addis Abäba to direct a well-established school.

He subsequently learnt the Amharic language as well as the culture of the country. He read a great deal on Ethiopia's past and contacted knowledgeable elderly Ethiopians to learn more. All the time he jotted down new information and collected documents. A few years later he went back to Sweden to study at the University of Lund. Naturally his dissertation dealt with an aspect of 19th-century Ethiopia which he further pursued upon return to his adopted country, where he became more of an academic than a missionary, as some of his colleagues later stated in a book³ to him with the words: "To Professor Sven Rubenson, missionary and scholar, in deep appreciation – for his dedication to Ethiopian studies".

As soon as he graduated in 1954, he returned to Ethiopia. This time he was appointed to supervise the construction of the Evangelical college at Däbrä Zäyt which was sponsored by three different Scandinavian Lutheran missions. He eventually became the director. He also took a part time job at the University College of Addis Ababa to teach Ethiopian history. How the Protestant missionary convinced the Canadian Jesuits who at the time ran the highest institution of learning is amazing, but a department of history was established for the first time integrating Ethiopian history in the late 1950s, and he became its head. Sven remained attached to this department until the mid-1970s when he was offered a position by the University of Lund. His academic field of specialization remained modern Ethiopian history, which he taught both in Addis Abäba and Lund; he attended almost all the International Conferences of Ethiopian Studies, the seventh of which he sponsored and organized in Lund in 1982. He also published several books and numerous articles on various aspects of Ethiopian history. Perhaps his best work is the one on the question of the centuries-long Ethiopian independence which was once admired as an impeccable work on foreign

³ GETACHEW HAILE et al. (eds.), *The Missionary Factor in Ethiopia – Papers from a Symposium on the Impact of European Missions on Ethiopian Society, Lund University, August 1996* = Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity 110, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 1998.

relations by an academic reviewer: “On the subject of foreign relations in the first three-quarters of the 19th century, exhaustively treated in the bulk of the book (pp. 29–334), it will probably prove nearly definitive, and it certainly will become the principal reference work for a very long time to come. It is marvelously indexed and abundantly supplied with good maps.”⁴

It has been difficult to compile all of his contributions. But it has been possible to select the outstanding ones in the following list:

A Partial List of Sven Rubenson’s Publications

N.b.: His publications in Swedish as well as his contributions in semi-academic magazines and the numerous reviews are excluded for want of time to compile them with accuracy.

Analytical Books

- 1951 with A.G. STJARNE, *An Outline History of Ethiopia*, Addis Ababa, by the author.
- 1964 *Wichalé XVII – the Attempt to Establish a Protectorate over Ethiopia* = Haile Sellassie I University Department of History: Historical Studies 1, Addis Ababa: Haile Sellassie I University.
- 1966 *King of Kings, Tewodros of Ethiopia* = Haile Sellassie I University Department of History: Historical Studies 2, Addis Ababa: Haile Sellassie I University Press – Nairobi: Oxford University Press.
- 1976 *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* = Lund Studies in International History 7, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.

Editions and Translations

- 1984 *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, University of Lund, 26–29 April 1982*, Addis Abeba: Institute of Ethiopian Studies – Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies – East Lansing, MI: African Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1984 [= *PICES* 7].
- 1987 *Acta Aethiopica*, I: *Correspondence and Treaties 1800–1854*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press – Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press [in collaboration with several colleagues].
- 1994 *Acta Aethiopica*, II: *Tewodros and his Contemporaries 1855–1868*, Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press – Lund: Lund University Press [in collaboration with several colleagues].
- 2000 *Acta Aethiopica*, III: *Internal Rivalries and Foreign Threats 1869–1879*, Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press – New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers [in collaboration with several colleagues].

Articles Published in Academic Journals, Conference Proceedings and Collective Works

- 1961 “Some Aspects of the Survival of Ethiopian Independence in the Period of the Scramble for Africa”, *University College Review of Addis Ababa* 1, pp. 8–24.

⁴ *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 10/2, 1977, pp. 295f.

- 1963 “The Battle of Adwa”, *Tārik* 2, pp. 30–31.
- 1964 “The Protectorate Paragraph of the Wichalé Treaty”, *JAH* 5/2, pp. 243–283.
- 1965 “The Lion of the Tribe of Judah: Christian Symbol and/or Imperial Title”, *JES* 3/2, pp. 75–85.
- 1966 “Professor Giglio, Antonelli, Article 17 of the Treaty of Wichalé”, *JAH* 7, pp. 445–457.
- 1967 “Modern Ethiopia”, in: J.C. ANENE – G.N. BROWN (eds.), *Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries: A Handbook for Teachers*, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, pp. 216–233.
- 1968 “Ethiopia in 19th Century”, in: P.J.M. MCEWAN (ed.), *Readings in African History*, II: *Nineteenth Century Africa*, London – Ibadan et al.: Oxford University Press, pp. 349–367.
- “Aspects of the Survival of Ethiopian Independence”, *ibid.*, pp. 349–362.
- 1969 “The Adwa Peace Treaty of 1884”, in: R. PANKHURST – S. CHOJNACKI (eds.), *Proceedings of the Third International Conference of Ethiopian Studies [3–7 April]*, Addis Ababa 1966, I, Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies – Haile Sellassie I University, pp. 225–236.
- 1970 “Adwa 1896 – the Resounding Protest”, in: R.I. ROTBERG – A.A. MAZRUI (eds.), *Protest and Power in Black Africa*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 113–142.
- “Ethiopian Historical Studies in Addis Ababa”, *Rural Africana* 11, pp. 7–11.
- 1976 “Ethiopia and the Horn”, in: J.E. FLINT (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa*, V: *From c. 1790 to c. 1870*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 51–98.
- 1979 “The Genesis of the Ethio-Somali Conflict”, in: R.L. HESS (ed.), *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies. Session B, April 13–16, 1978*, Chicago, IL: Office of Publication Services, University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, pp. 641–661.
- 1984 “Shaykh Kasa Haylu” in: *PICES* 7, pp. 279–284.
- 1986 “Sweden and the Italo–Ethiopian War”, in: D. ECKAUTE-BARDERY – M. PERRET (éds.), *La guerre d’Ethiopie et l’opinion mondiale*, Paris: Publications Langues’O, pp. 85–112.
- 1988 አንድም ፣ ቦታ ፣ እንዳይዙ ፣ እንዳይነኩ (Andəm bota andayəzu andaynäku, ‘The King of Italy shall not seize or touch a single (of Ethiopian soil)’, in: TADDESE BEYENE – TADDESE TAMRAT – R. PANKHURST (eds.), *The Centenary of Dogali: Proceedings of the International Symposium, Addis Ababa – Asmara, January 24–25, 1987*, Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies – Addis Ababa University, pp. 261–266.
- “Voices from the Zemene Mesafint”, in: A.A. GROMYKO (ed.), *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Ethiopian Studies, Moscow, 26–29 August 1986*, I, Moscow: Nauka Publishers – Central Department of Oriental Literature, pp. 35–43.
- 1989 “The Last Unsolved Problem of Africa: in Fifty Years’ Perspective”, in: *PICES* 8, II, pp. 401–412.
- 1991 “Conflict and Environmental Stress in Ethiopian History: Looking for Correlations”, *JES* 24, pp. 71–96.
- 1998 “Ethiopia and Imerina (Madagascar) on Trial 1895–1896”, in: ABDUSSAMAD H. AHMAD – R. PANKHURST (eds.), *Adwa: Victory Centenary Conference, 26 February–2 March 1996*, Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies – Addis Ababa University, pp. 319–337.
- 2005 “How the Missionary was Converted – a Personal Account”, in: VERENA BÖLL et al. (eds.), *Ethiopia and the Missions – Historical and Anthropological Insights*, Münster: LIT Verlag, pp. 221–224.

Short Entries

- 1977 “Ali Alula” [p. 48], “Ali Gwangu” [pp. 48–49], “Antonelli, P[ietro]” [pp. 50–51], “Iyasu II” [pp. 90–91], “Manan Liben-Amdie” [p. 103], “Negusé Walda Mikael” [p. 118], “Plowden, W[alter] C[hichele]” [p. 103], “Salama” [pp. 124–125], “Takla-Giorgis” [p. 133], “Tewodros II” [pp. 138–139], in: K. IRVINE (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia Africana – Dictionary of African Biography*, I: *Ethiopia – Ghana*, New York: Reference Pub.
- 2003 “Alämayyāhu Tewodros” [pp. 189–190], “Ali Alula” [p. 199], “Ali Musa” [p. 202], “Ali Umar” [p. 203], “Arägawī Säbagadis” [p. 310], “Attəgäb” [p. 395], “Badamma Yaläw” [p. 429], “Bərru Goššu” [p. 542], [with BAIRU TAFLA] “Bərru Petros” [p. 544], “Coffin, William” [pp. 765–766], in: *EAE* I.
- 2005 “Dīnī Muḥammad Burhān”, in *EAE* II, p. 165.

**In memoriam Alessandro de Maigret
(1943–2011)**

ALESSIO AGOSTINI, Sapienza Università di Roma

Alessandro de Maigret (born in Perugia, Italy, 14 August 1943) was among the archaeologists who contributed the most to the unveiling of Pre-Islamic history in Southern Arabia. This sad loss, at only 67 years of age, deprives us of a scholar who, without a doubt, could have still contributed greatly with more discoveries and historical reconstructions. He died on 14 February 2011 near Perugia after a long and courageous battle with his illness, the first symptoms of which were revealed just a few days before leaving on an archaeological mission to Yemen.

De Maigret arrived in Yemen for the first time in 1980, after his studies at the University “La Sapienza” of Rome, where he had been member of the Italian Archaeological Mission to Syria, which was digging at Ebla and Tell Afis (direction of P. Matthiae). After a period in London, where he expanded his knowledge of theoretical archaeology at the University College, he became aware of the great potential Yemen had for an archaeologist: the country was, in fact, still marginal within ancient Near Eastern studies. Since 1980 he had been an associate professor of Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology at the Istituto Universitario Orientale of Naples, the position he kept as full professor from 1990 until his retirement in 2010. With the support of Sabatino Moscati and under the sponsorship of the *Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente* of Rome directed by G. Gnoli (IsIAO, at that time IsMEO), he set up the first exploratory mission to Yemen. From the beginning the first results were very encouraging: prospections of Ḥawlān at-Ṭiyāl region on the Highland,