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**Personalia**

*In memoriam Paolo Marrassini (1942–2013)*

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## Personalia

### Academic News

#### Simon Hopkins awarded with the British Academy “Edward Ullendorff Medal”

The “Edward Ullendorff Medal” of the British Academy “for scholarly distinction and achievements in the field of Semitic Languages and Ethiopian Studies”, newly established thanks to the generous support of Edward Ullendorff’s widow, Dina, to mark the former’s long association with the Academy (he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1965), “which he valued greatly”, was awarded for the first time in 2012 to Simon Hopkins, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (s. journal and website of the British Academy: *British Academy Review* 21, 2013, p. 47; [http://www.britac.ac.uk/prizes/Ullendorff\\_Medal\\_2012.cfm](http://www.britac.ac.uk/prizes/Ullendorff_Medal_2012.cfm)). The medal was awarded on 8 November 2012, on the occasion of the annual ceremony to award prizes and medals to Hopkins, a pupil of Ullendorff’s, “one of the most respected scholars in the field of Semitic Philology”, who “has made ground-breaking contributions to the research of an impressively wide range of Semitic languages and texts”. Among Hopkins’ most important contributions his researches on Arabic papyrology, medieval Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic philology, and Aramaic dialectology, with special focus on the languages spoken by the Jewish communities of Iran and Iraq must be mentioned.

#### In memoriam Paolo Marrassini (1942–2013)

ALESSANDRO BAUSI, Universität Hamburg

Prof. Paolo Marrassini passed away on 10 January 2013. He was almost 71 years old. In the last years of his life, he suffered from a progressive disease that hardly diminished his energy and undefatigable determination. He retired from active service at the university in 2009, but gave courses till 2011. He leaves his wife Maria Antonia, a daughter, and a son.

The son of Dante, a cartographer employed at the Istituto Geografico Militare, Florence, from whom he might have inherited a singular taste for meticulousness and details, his mother Clara Bosi was an appreciated primary school

teacher. After attending the gymnasium and classical high school, Marrassini entered the University of Florence in 1961, first enrolling at the Faculty of Law, then moving to the Faculty of Arts in 1962, where he studied linguistics and Semitic philology. The most brilliant pupil of the eminent Semitist Pelio Fronzaroli (in turn a pupil of Giacomo Devoto for historical linguistics and Sabatino Moscati for Semitic studies, and the promoter himself of an excellent Italian school of Semitic Studies of its own, that through Moscati and Giorgio Levi della Vida went back, in the end, to Ignazio Guidi), Marrassini got his M.A. degree in 1967, with a thesis on the lexicon of military architecture in 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C. Semitic, that was later developed into his first monograph (1971).

After teaching in school some years, Marrassini was research assistant in Semitic Philology at the University of Florence in 1971–82. After his initial and never forgotten interest in Assyriology (among his long-time acquaintances was Jean Bottéro), linguistic paleontology, and Near East archaeology (he also took part in the archaeological excavations conducted by the palethnologist Salvatore Maria Puglisi in Malatya, Turkey), Marrassini turned to Ethiopian Studies only in his full thirties, already as a mature scholar. He first attended the seminars at the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, held in 1974–1978 by Stefan Strelcyn under the auspices of Enrico Cerulli. The latter also supported his two-year stay in 1975–76 in Manchester, where Strelcyn lectured at the time, as well as Marrassini's first impressive publication in Ethiopian Studies, i.e. the critical edition with introduction and annotated translation of the *Gädlä Yoḥannäs Məsraqawi* (1981). In this work he introduced two profound innovations, i.e. the application of a modern philological method to Ethiopic text editions (“neo-lachmannian” approach, also noted by theoreticians of textual criticism, such as Gianfranco Contini), which Marrassini maintained and explicitly defended all through his career, and the appreciation of the hagiographical literature in its proper sense. Marrassini extended this latter approach to historical texts, at the example of the so-called “chronicle” of ʿAmdä Šəyon, and other case studies.

Appointed professor for Hebrew (1977–78) and Semitic Philology (1978–82) at the University of Pisa, Marrassini became Associate Professor in 1983 for Ethiopic language and literature at the University of Florence, also teaching Semitic Philology for one year (1983–84). In 1990, under the auspices of Lanfranco Ricci, he became Full Professor for Gəʿəz language and literature at the Istituto Universitario Orientale of Naples succeeding Luigi Fusella. He remained at the Orientale in 1990–93, chairing the academic programme for Oriental languages and civilizations (1991–93), also teaching Coptic (1990–91) and Semitic linguistics (1991–93).

In 1994 Marrassini was called to the Chair of Ancient Ethiopic language and literature at the University of Florence. He still taught Gəʿəz language and liter-

ature at Naples in 1994–95, where he also remained – for the rest of his life – an active member of the Ph.D. programme in African Studies, promoted and coordinated for many years by his colleague and dear friend Alessandro Triulzi. In Florence, Marrassini was President of the academic programme for Humanities (1996–98), and eventually Dean of the Faculty of Arts for two terms (1998–2004). After Fronzaroli's becoming emeritus in 2003, he assumed the Chair of Semitic Philology, in which he remained until his retirement in 2009.

Marrassini did a lot to promote studies in Ethiopic philology in Ethiopia, where he taught one semester within the framework of Italian university cooperation in 1999. He considered this task one of the most urgent duties for a scholar in Ethiopian Studies, and was consequently among the initiators and tireless supporters of the graduate programmes in Philology at Addis Ababa University. He was Adjunct Professor at that University since the launch of the M.A. and Ph.D. programmes respectively in 2004 and 2007 and until after his retirement, teaching several courses and tutoring dozens of students. In 2008 he was also Guest Professor for Ethiopian Studies at the University of Hamburg.

Marrassini was a member of several scientific associations. Their range testifies to the wide spectrum of his interests. They include the Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente (Rome), of which he was a member of the Scientific Council for several years, the Associazione Italiana per lo Studio del Giudaismo, the Association pour l'Étude de la Littérature Apocryphe Chrétienne, the Associazione per lo Studio della Santità, dei Culti e dell'Agiografia, and the Società Italiana di Glottologia. He was also among the founders and director of the Center for Theoretical and Historical Linguistics: Italian, European and Oriental Languages, at the University of Florence.

Since 2003 Marrassini was the Italian representative in the International Organizing Committee of the International Conferences of Ethiopian Studies. Unfortunately he could not succeed, due to scarcity of funds and lacking institutional support, as well as to his incoercible uneasiness in accepting compromises and entering into negotiations, in organizing the planned 16<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, to be held in Italy; the conference instead took place in Trondheim, Norway, in 2007. Marrassini was also the editor-in-chief since 2010, succeeding Ricci, of the revived *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, editing the issues new ser. 3 and 4 (the latter in print). He was also member of several editorial boards, including the journals *Africa* (Rome) and *Aethiopica* (1998–2000), as well as co-editor of the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*.

Matched by few others of his generation, Marrassini had a scholarly career and achievements that fully ranged from ancient Semitic and Assyriology to Ethiopian Studies, from comparative and historical linguistics to philology as text criticism and hagiography, from manuscript cataloguing to religious stud-

ies, from Old and New Testament Apocrypha to the history of Oriental Studies. He substantially contributed to Semitic lexicography and linguistics, being able to approach subjects of general interest, with a special attention to South Semitic classification; to the critical edition of Ethiopic hagiographic and historical texts, where he definitely introduced new methods of editing and of looking at the sources; to the field of Apocrypha, in Ethiopic as well as in other languages; to manuscript studies, with his catalogues of Ethiopic manuscripts, among which the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence; to several crucial questions in Christian Ethiopian history and culture, such as the so-called Syriac and Jewish influences, and others.

Initiated to Ethiopian Studies in the strict sense, in the end, by Strelcyn, *auspice* Cerulli, yet against an extremely solid background in Semitic Studies, and Humanities in the wider sense – he always considered the intellectual legacy of several great linguists and philologists teaching at the University of Florence in the 1960s and '70s, and the environment they created, that he commemorated in some of his last contributions, a fundamental component of his academic education – Marrassini was only in a very partial sense a representative of a national school of Ethiopian Studies, rather the founder of an approach of its own.

Marrassini was a passionate, engaged, curious, and sensitive man, a meticulous scientific investigator with vast perspectives and a broad cultural horizon, an incomparable, devoted and generous teacher, and a profound methodological innovator in all the fields he dealt with. He was friend of such scholars as Jean Bottéro, Maxime Rodinson, David Cohen, Gherardo Gnoli, Franco Cardini, Tadesse Tamrat, and many others. Not a few of his pupils have undertaken an academic career, among them Riccardo Contini, Gianfranco Fiaccadori, Gianfrancesco Lusini, Pierluigi Piovanelli, Delio Vania Proverbio, Alessandro Gori, Alessio Agostini, and the author of this obituary.

### Publications of Paolo Marrassini

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#### 1973

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1976

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1981

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- *Gadla Yohannes Mesraqawi. Vita di Yohannes l'Orientale. Edizione critica con introduzione e traduzione annotata* = Quaderni di Semitistica 10, Firenze: Istituto di Linguistica e di Lingue Orientali. Università di Firenze [Reviewed by: MANFRED KROPP: *Oriens Christianus* 67, 1983, pp. 225–226; ROGER W. COWLEY: *BSOAS* 47, 1984, pp. 357–359; ERNST HAMMERSCHMIDT: *Orientalia* n.s. 59, 1990, pp. 91–95].
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### 1983

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### 1984

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### 1986

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### 1987

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- “Su un nuovo codice del *Gadla Yohannes Mesraqāwi*”, *RSE* 31, 1987 [1988], pp. 247–251.
- “Alcune osservazioni, suggerite dalla precedente ‘Replica’ di F.A. Dombrowski”, *ibid.*, pp. 269–271; cp. FRANZ AMADEUS DOMBROWSKI, “A rejoinder regarding Paolo Marassini’s review of F.A. Dombrowski, Tānāsee 106: Eine Chronik der Herrscher Äthiopiens in *RSE* 30 (1984–1986) 199–201”, *ibid.* 31, 1987 [1988], pp. 266–269 [cp. 1987].
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### In memoriam Taddesse Tamrat (1935–2013)

GETATCHEW HAILE, The Hill Museum & Manuscript Library,  
St. John’s University, Collegeville, MN

On May 23, 2013, Professor Taddesse Tamrat who, ever since the appearance in 1972 of his *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270–1520*, had dominated the field of Ethiopian Studies, died after a long illness. His highly acclaimed book is a true classic, and no doubt through it his dominance of the field will continue. His untimely death is a tragic loss. We mourn his passing and we also mourn what his loss means for scholarship, as we will never enjoy the promised fruits of his proven potential. Indeed, his illness was such that he did not have the energy and the time even to finish translating his seminal book into Amharic for the benefit of the many Ethiopians who do not know English.