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by Alessandro Bausi in cooperation with

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Alessandro Bausi

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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.

Taddesse was born in Addis Abäba on August 4, 1935 to *mämhər* Tamrat Gäbräyyäs and *wäyzäro* Bərhane Mulunäh, a family of generations of intellectuals of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Naturally, Taddesse started his education in a traditional church school. In time, he was ordained a deacon and served for several years in that capacity at Saint Mary's church attached to the patriarchate in Addis Abäba.

Soon thereafter he enrolled at the Holy Trinity School where he was my junior by a few years. Taddesse was always keen to learn more than he was offered. The rule of our boarding school at that time was that lights be out at 10:00 pm. His roommates remember that he always kept candles by his bed side, so that he could light them and continue reading and studying after the electric lights were turned off.

At one point, his father, as Taddesse told me, pulled him out of the school and sent him to Däbrä Libanos "to be educated". For his father, one was close to illiterate if one did not know Gə^cəz well and was not capable of composing poems (*qəne*) in its different types as defined by tradition. But the obedient son's heart was with modern education. The only choice he had, he said, was to satisfy his father and then come back to his Addis Abäba school as soon as possible. So, drawing on his deacon's familiarity with the language and liturgical literature, he worked to master Gə^cəz and compose the required poems, and was able to return within a year.

Equipped with intelligence, this eagerness to know more and to know it quickly, Taddesse completed both his elementary and secondary schooling with distinction in less than six years. He then went to Haile Selassie I University to do his undergraduate studies and in 1962 he received his B.A. in history. Members of his class remember him with admiration for his ability and integrity. "Whenever we were given an assignment", said one with whom I spoke recently, "the professor usually selected Taddesse's paper to be read to the class".

Taddesse then won a British Council scholarship and went to London to work on his Ph.D. between 1965 and 1968 in African and Middle Eastern History at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) of the University of London. His work "Some Notes on the Fifteenth Century Stephanite 'Heresy' in the Ethiopian Church", was, as Taddesse writes in its introduction, initially just a paper written for a post-graduate seminar. It was published at the suggestion of his advisor, Professor Roland Oliver, and Professor Edward Ullendorff, established scholars who recognized its importance before Taddesse did. As far as I know, nothing so precise, so succinct and so clear has ever been written on this remarkable monastic movement.

Colleagues and students at Haile Selassie I University (HSIU; now Addis Ababa University) remember Taddesse as a demanding teacher. "He was treating us as graduate students at Oxford", reminisced one of his students, fighting back his tears and still complaining as I interviewed him.

The *Därg* era (1974–91) was a time of trial for many who believed in freedom of speech, especially at the university. Taddesse's devotion to his field and family allowed him little time for other activities, and he hardly ever engaged in political discussions. Nevertheless, under the *Därg*, even the apolitical Taddesse had reasons to worry that he would be accused of being insufficiently patriotic in his interaction with scholars from "imperialist countries" who the government could claim were coming to Ethiopia not for scholarship but with ulterior motives in mind.

The birth of Taddesse's Church and State in Ethiopia 1270-1520 has its own interesting history. As Sven Rubenson once told me, it was a result of a conspiracy plotted by the senior faculty - Professors Sergew Hable Sellasie, Taddesse Tamrat, Merid Woldaregay and Sven Rubenson - of the History Department to attack and conquer Ethiopian history from its inception to the colonial era of the 19th century. Sergew, who studied Aksum's relation to the Greco-Roman world for his Ph.D., took the first of the four eras. Taddesse, who was well-anchored in Gə^cəz and its indigenous hagiographical sources, was assigned the period commencing from where Sergew (Beziehungen Athiopiens zur griechisch-römischen Welt) and Carlo Conti Rossini (Storia d'Etiopia) left off (1270) to the eve of the rise and revolt of *Imam* Ahmad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Gāzī or Grañ Mähammäd in 1527. Merid, who studied the invasion of the forces of Imam Ahmad, the Jesuit era in Ethiopia and the migration of the Oromo to central Ethiopia, was assigned the period from 1527 to the Zämänä mäsafənt "Era of the Princes' which began ca 1769. The last part, which was mostly 19th century, became the lot of Sven, who studied what foreigners - explorers, missionaries and spies - have written on Ethiopia.

This concerted academic campaign produced a resounding victory: Sergew gave us *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History*, publishing it privately in 1972 in Addis Abäba. Oxford University Press grabbed Taddesse's *Church and State in Ethiopia* 1270–1520 and published it in 1972. Heinemann (London) published Sven's *Survival of Ethiopian Independence* in 1976. Only Merid's study has not yet seen the light of publication.

Since its appearance in 1972, Church and State in Ethiopia 1270–1520 has dominated the field of Ethiopian Studies for several reasons: it is a history of the medieval Ethiopian church and state that is based on internal sources and as such it provides a guide to Ethiopian hagiographical literature. Of the many gädlat ("acts") of Ethiopian saints that Taddesse inspected at various monasteries during the course of his research, at least 19 were yet not published when he wrote his book.

When he went to a monastery, he was a scholar in its library and he was also a *däbtära* with its clergy during services. This was because Taddesse was at home in the two traditions of scholarship, and the result was ex-

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traordinary access to and appreciation for these primary resources. His personal life and pioneering work have helped students of the current generation appreciate traditional education and have inspired them to study local sources written by local writers in a local language.

Locally, Taddesse's *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270–1520* has its critics. These include traditionalists who would have preferred that Taddesse show patriotism by upholding the glorious history of Ethiopia as told orally and in the legendary sources. In particular, they are dismayed that the book did not reaffirm the widespread belief that when Yəkunno Amlak ascended to the throne he restored the Solomonic dynasty as narrated in the *Kəbrä nägäśt* ("Glory of Kings"). Other critics include certain Oromo clan members who have expressed their disappointment that the stories of their ancestors are not addressed in the book. Taddesse's replies were predictable: Legends have value but do not have a place in historical accounts, and that he did not find it necessary to delve into the ethnic identity of the people who played roles in church or state during the period he covered by his book.

Professor Taddesse's scholarship won him international admiration and recognition, leading to invitations by famous institutions to join their faculty as a visiting professor. In 1973, he taught at the University of California, in Los Angeles; in 1973–75 at Bucknell University, in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania; and in 1992–93 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The awards he received are most impressive. They include the prestigious commemorative Medal of Honor at the Collège de France in 1985 and Honorary Fellow at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London in 1992. In 2008, the Institute of Ethiopian Studies of the Addis Ababa University voted unanimously to name its Manuscript Department after Taddesse Tamrat.

Taddesse and his wife Almaz moved to the United States in 2000 to join the families of their children, Hiwote, Hillina and Hilal, whom Taddesse fondly called the three H. Sadly, by then both wife and husband were in poor health. In July 2012, after 45 years of marriage, Almaz passed away. Now, less than a year later, Taddesse has joined her.

Bibliography of Taddesse Tamrat*

The production of Taddesse Tamrat extends beyond the scholarly field. Articles on magazines and newspapers could not be considered here. Some unpublished papers, mimeographed or limitedly distributed publications, mainly preserved at the library of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa, are to be found listed in HANS WILHELM LOCKOT, *Bibliographia Aethiopica*, II:

^{*} Compilation by ALESSANDRO BAUSI, Universität Hamburg.

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