



Aethiopia 16 (2013)

International Journal of Ethiopian and
Eritrean Studies

BAIRU TAFLA, Universität Hamburg

Review

ITYOPIS ኢትዮጵያ – *Northeast African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, Vol. 1

Aethiopia 16 (2013), 244–247

ISSN: 2194–4024

Edited in the Asien-Afrika-Institut
Hiob Ludolf Zentrum für Äthiopistik
der Universität Hamburg
Abteilung für Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

by Alessandro Bausi

in cooperation with

Bairu Tafla, Ulrich Braukämper, Ludwig Gerhardt,
Hilke Meyer-Bahlburg and Siegbert Uhlig

Reviews

ans today is the [...]. On p. 89 it is stated that Hizkiyas Finas died in Alexandria, Egypt, but on p. 90 the place of his death is Italy.

Most of these points are minor flaws and do not diminish the academic value of the book. They do, however, contradict the editors' preface in the online version that "the papers published in the book went through an extensive editing process" and are "more carefully edited" (Ege et al. 2009: xix).

The International Conferences of Ethiopian Studies (ICES) in general, and the 16th Conference in particular, are quite unique in African studies because they comprise a high number of diverse disciplines ranging from philology to development studies. The common ground of all the contributions in the proceedings, or the feature that defines this conference, is clearly the political and geographic region, i.e. Ethiopia or the Horn of Africa. This has become clearer over the years as the number of disciplines has increased considerably since the start of these conferences in 1959. In this sense, the ICES can be regarded as a good example of 'area studies'. As far as I know, there is no other comparable multidisciplinary scientific tradition related to another specific region in Africa. So the real value of a volume like the present one for anyone doing research in the region is that it offers the opportunity to look beyond one's area of research and read and learn about studies from other disciplines which may be geographically located close to the area of one's own research.

References

- DIMMENDAAL, G.J. 2008, "Language Ecology and Linguistic Diversity on the African Continent", in: *Language and Linguistics Compass* 2/5, pp. 840–858.
- EGE, S. – H. ASPEN – BIRHANU TEFERRA – SHIFERAW BEKELE (eds.) 2009, "Preface", in: *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, I, Trondheim: Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Department of Social Anthropology [online version: <http://portal.svt.ntnu.no/sites/ices16/default.aspx>], pp. xix–xxiii.
- TOSCO, M. 1998, "People who are not the Language they Speak": On Language Shift without Language Decay in East Africa", in: M. BREZINGER (ed.), *Endangered Languages in Africa*, Köln: Köppe, pp. 119–142.

Andreas Wetter, Berlin

ITYOPIS ኢትዮጵያ – *Northeast African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, Vol. 1, Mekelle University, Tigray, Ethiopia, 2011. 207 pp. Price: ETB 30.00/US-\$ 15.00. ISSN: 2223–7178.

A part of the relatively new institution of higher learning in the capital city of Tigray, northern Ethiopia, recently realized the importance of founding an academic organ which could promote the scientific work of its members and

enhance its international relations. A committee appointed for the purpose recommended in December 2010 (cf. p. 5) “The creation of a peer-reviewed Journal with a strong focus on local and regional cultures of northeastern Africa, closely linked with the international community of researchers, making research on northeastern Africa locally and internationally known”. The first volume now under review appeared in print in the following year; but it seems that the second issue did not see the light of day in 2012. The evaluation of the technical consistency and the application of the editorial policy set down for the journal would have been helpful for the reader.

The editorial (pp. 5–8) describes the story of the journal’s inception and launching and the meaning of its name. Then follow seven articles of fair size (covering two-third of the total space of the volume) each of which is accompanied by an abstract or resumé. The remaining space is devoted to several short articles, book reviews and a review article, brief conference reports, and “Papers of the Ityopis Workshop of 17 December 2010”. It is doubtful if the last one can stand by itself as an established category, unless of course the editorial committee or faculty decides to launch a similar workshop annually.

The main articles are well-written, and some of them are illustrated. Four of the seven articles deal directly or otherwise with the ancient Meroitic and Aksumite periods while the rest concern aspects of later eras. Claude Rilly deals with “Recent Research on Meroitic, the Ancient Language of Sudan” (pp. 9–23). He surveys the recent researches related to the old, now extinct, language of Kush on the basis of archaeological findings and comparative linguistic studies of the still spoken languages such as Nara, Nubian, Tama and Nyimang as well as northeastern Sudanic. Tekle Hagos’ article deals with the “Preliminary Result of a Survey of the Archaeological Site of Sib^ˆat, ^ˆAdwa, Ethiopia” (pp. 24–34). It describes an archaeological site near mount Sib^ˆat (about 14 km north of ^ˆAdwa town) and the findings of experts from Addis Ababa University. The author assumes that the strategic location of the site as well as the excavation findings – pottery pieces, coins, a cross and other objects – may indicate that it was an important religious and possibly military centre during the Aksumite period. Yohannes Gebre Selassie forwards “Plague as a Possible Factor for the Decline and Collapse of the Aksumite Empire: a New Interpretation” (pp. 35–60). Although the subtitle of the article implies the discovery of ‘A New Interpretation’, he admits that he did not discover new evidence; he merely wanted to suggest to scholars of the Aksumite history that factors other than those so far considered could have contributed to the decline and fall of Aksum: “Environment degradation, famine, plague, locust infestation, migration and social conflict” (p. 55).

Hagos Abrha deals with the “Philological Analysis of the Manuscripts of Gädlä Yäm^ˆata” (pp. 61–75). He discovered ten manuscripts of the hagio-

graphy of one of the Nine Saints of the late Aksumite period from Wağirat and Gär^calta (southeastern Təgray). The author assumes that the manuscripts may not be older than the 19th century, though they certainly were based on an earlier manuscript. The author comments on the nature of the manuscripts and the variations of their structure and writing, but could not find out their ‘Vorlage’. Fesseha Berhe’s article “Studies on the Biography of *Blatta* Hayle Maryam Redda (1909–1995)” (pp. 76–101) describes the life of a very active Təgrayan who started as a patriotic fighter against the Italian invasion, cooperated with the Italians, became a rebel after the defeat of the Italians, joined a Təgrayan rebellion against the government of Emperor Həylä Şəllase I, suffered imprisonment for 28 years, commanded a militia contingent under the *Därg* who eventually suspected him of connections with the anti-*Därg* movement and kept him in house confinement, and finally allied with the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). The article is divided in nine sections that are based on the changing life events of the biography. The sources are reminiscences of those collected between 2000 and 2010 as well as written sources, most of which are secondary. Judging from the sources the author used, this article seems to be the first extensive study of the *Blatta*; if so, it is not clear why the author used the word ‘studies’ in the title of the article.

Wolbert G.C. Smidt’s contribution is a presentation of a “Preliminary Report on an Ethnohistorical Research among the Ch’aré People, a Hidden Ethnic Splinter Group in Western Tigray” (pp. 102–125). The author alleges that the different ethnic groups in western Təgray and Səmen have not been well researched; only travellers of the 19th century and colonial officials of the 1930s mentioned them. The article concludes that a preliminary research of 2008 by the author himself showed that at least the Çare related to the Gumuz. Finally, Hubert Cochet deals with “A New Perspective on Animal Traction in Ethiopian Agriculture” (pp. 126–142). The author claims that he researched in various rural areas and established that “animal traction” has changed with different results. The article examines the reasons behind the recurrent famines of Ethiopia and concludes that they have little to do with the development of the means of ploughing.

The so-called “Miscellaneous Articles” (pp. 143–165) are a rehash of well-known essays or conference papers with the exception of Norbert Nebes’ contribution on the inscription on a pot found in Färäs May, Təgray. There are only one review and one review article in the next category. The interesting point in this case is that, unlike most academic journals in English, an Amharic book is discussed. This is a welcome initiative.

An obvious weakness of this publication is that there is hardly any information regarding the contributors and editors. Judging from the names, one can assume that they are Ethiopians and Europeans or rather Westerners, and

Reviews

it appears that most of them are faculty members of the same institution. But this is almost an irrelevant factor. Any hint to the fields of specialization or academic status as well as experience of the contributors in particular would have given the reader confidence in the credibility of their contributions. Most of the authors, the six board members and of course the two executive editors are presumably faculty members of the same university. But there is also an International Editorial Board comprising 13 scholars from around ten countries: Canada, Djibouti, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Israel, Japan, Kenya, Great Britain and the United States. There is no explanation on what basis the named scholars have been chosen nor is it stated why academics of northern and eastern Europe – all of whom were at one time or another involved in ‘northeastern Africa’ – are not included in the board. Above all Italy should have been represented, as it has consistently pursued the study of ‘northeastern Africa’ in the last 150 years and quite a few of its scholars in various fields are still actively engaged in the research. These problems can easily be rectified in the future. The most important thing is the continuous publication of the journal which is a welcome addition to Ethiopian Studies.

Bairu Tafla, Universität Hamburg

Rassegna di Studi Etiopici. Nuova Serie, Vol III. 2011. Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”. iv + 278 pp. Price: € 70.00. ISSN: 0390-0096.

This is a renewed publication of the renowned journal *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici* (RSE), founded by Carlo Conti Rossini in Rome in 1941, whose publication was interrupted in 2003, to be brought to life again in 2011 as Volume III of New Series. Until the appearance of *Aethiopica* in 1998, it was the only scientific journal devoted exclusively to Ethiopian and Eritrean subjects, regularly published outside of Ethiopia. Its reputation was immense and I still remember how proud I was at the beginning of my academic career in the early 1970s when I was asked by the editor to contribute a paper to the journal. I would like to express here my most sincere wishes for the success of this enterprise. This time a group of scholars from several Italian Universities joined forces to revive the *Rassegna* and the “Orientale” in Naples became now, most suitably, the seat of the publication. Unfortunately the editors recently lost one of their most active members and a great Ethiopianist, the much regretted Paolo Marrassini, who was meant to be head of this publication. The volume under review still contains one of his articles, probably one of his recent articles, if not the last one, written on a subject which was very close to his heart, namely the origin of the Semitic peoples.