



## Aethiopia 17 (2014)

International Journal of Ethiopian and  
Eritrean Studies

---

BAIRU TAFLA, Universität Hamburg

### Review

SASCHA A. KIENZLE, *Ursachen für den eritreisch-äthiopischen Grenzkonflikt: Eine historisch-politische Analyse*

Aethiopia 17 (2014), 278–279

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

## Bibliographical abbreviations used in this volume

- AE* *Annales d'Éthiopie*, Paris 1955ff.
- ÄthFor Äthiopistische Forschungen, 1–35, ed. by E. HAMMERSCHMIDT, 36–40, ed. by S. UHLIG, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner (1–34), 1977–1992; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz (35–40), 1994–1995.
- AethFor Aethiopistische Forschungen, 41–73, ed. by S. UHLIG, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998–2011; 74–75, ed. by A. BAUSI and S. UHLIG, *ibid.*, 2011f.; 76ff. ed. by A. BAUSI, *ibid.*, 2012ff.
- AION* *Annali dell'Università degli studi di Napoli "L'Orientale"*, Napoli: Università di Napoli "L'Orientale" (former Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli), 1929ff.
- BSOAS* *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, London 1917ff.
- CSCO* *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, 1903ff.
- EAE* S. UHLIG (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, I: A–C, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003; II: D–Ha, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005; III: He–N, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007; (in cooperation with A. BAUSI), IV: O–X, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010; A. BAUSI (ed. in cooperation with S. UHLIG), V: Y–Z, *Supplementa, Addenda et Corrigenda, Maps, Index*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014.
- EFAH Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Orient-Abteilung, Epigraphische Forschungen auf der Arabischen Halbinsel, herausgegeben im Auftrag des Instituts von NORBERT NEBES.
- EMML Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, Addis Ababa.
- IJAHS* *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Boston, MA – New York 1968ff.
- JAH* *The Journal of African History*, Cambridge 1960ff.
- JES* *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Addis Ababa 1963ff.
- JSS* *Journal of Semitic Studies*, Manchester 1956ff.
- NEASt* *Northeast African Studies*, East Lansing, MI 1979ff.
- OrChr* *Oriens Christianus*, Leipzig – Roma – Wiesbaden 1901ff.
- OrChrP* *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, Roma 1935ff.
- PICES* 15 S. UHLIG – M. BULAKH – D. NOSNITSIN – T. RAVE (eds.) 2005, *Proceedings of the XV<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Hamburg July 20–25, 2003* = AethFor 65, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- PICES* 16 H. ASPEN – BIRHANU TEFERRA – SHIFERAW BEKELE – S. EGE (eds.) 2010, *Research in Ethiopian Studies: Selected papers of the 16<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Trondheim July 2007* = AethFor 72, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- PO* *Patrologia Orientalis*, 1903ff.
- RIÉ* É. BERNAND – A. J. DREWES – R. SCHNEIDER 1991, *Recueil des inscriptions de l'Éthiopie des périodes pré-axoumite et axoumite*, I: *Les documents*, II: *Les planches*, Paris: [Académie des inscriptions et belle-lettres] Diffusion de Boccard.
- RSE* *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, Roma 1941–1981, Roma – Napoli 1983ff.
- SAe* *Scriptores Aethiopici*.
- ZDMG* *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, Leipzig – Wiesbaden – Stuttgart 1847ff.

## Reviews

pretation objective and the sources are well selected. Only the arrangement of the bibliography at the end of the book appears somewhat surprising, as works published in series are treated inconsistently. Subtitles of books and journals are also sometimes included and at other times ignored. But that can be a cause for criticism only if one is in quest of a utopian perfection.

Bairu Tafla, Universität Hamburg

SASCHA A. KIENZLE, *Ursachen für den eritreisch-äthiopischen Grenzkonflikt: Eine historisch-politische Analyse*, Tönning – Lübeck – Marburg: Der Andere Verlag, 2010. Paperback, 146 pages, 5 maps. Price: € 25.90. ISBN: 978-3-86247-081-5.

In 1998–2000 the cruelest and most pointless war raged between Eritrea and Ethiopia and caused immense human and material loss on both sides; as a result the basis of their economies was weakened for many years to come. The book opens with these facts and gives a brief description of the numerous international publications launched to explain the various aspects of the disastrous event.

Precisely that seems to have also been the intention of the author of this monograph who apparently is just entering the field of African studies. Kienzle writes: “The aim of this work is to examine the various factors which effected the warlike outbreak of the Eritrean-Ethiopian border conflict” (p. 15). But no passage explains clearly the *raison d’être* of the book under review, particularly in which manner the work differs from other books on the causes of the conflict. Apparently the author has read practically all of them and compiled them at the end of his monograph under the title “Literatur- und Quellenverzeichnis” (pp. 137–146). He also acknowledges their views and factual findings in 530 footnotes. Unfortunately his effort hardly included a critical evaluation of his sources. His casual remarks in that direction merely reflect his unfairness in judgement or even laxity in his research. For instance, he complains that he was denied access to the Research and Documentation Centre (RDC) in Asmara despite a letter of recommendation from the German embassy (cf. p. 19). But nowhere is there mention of his attempt to accede any of the documentation centres in Addis Abäba. As far as I know RDC recognizes visiting researchers bearing recommendation letters from academic institutions. As to the written support of a diplomatic body, it should logically be presented to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs first, with the hope of redirection of the application to RDC.

If so many books and articles the author lists have been published on the same subject, why is it necessary to produce such a monograph? The answer is not clearly given in this work. By implication, however, the author is dissatisfied with the explanations the publications carry regarding the causes of the war and possibly prompted him to undertake the writing of the monograph. Unlike the alleged approach of his forerunners, he assumes (p. 21) that one should necessarily practise the historical procedure in order to present the correct view. He claims that in order to track down the causes of the Eritrean–Ethiopian border conflict, one must first extract the relevant factors from descriptive historical accounts. They must then be analysed from the point of view of the discipline itself (i.e. history) as well as “the interest of the high level of national state” (p. 21). He prefers, though, the method common in of political science for the analysis (*ibid.*), not the historical one. The first 86 pages of the work are, therefore, devoted to the brief survey of the relations between the two countries and their political experience in the last four hundred or so years. Toward the end of each narrated historical event at least one specific point is scored as a factor, which could have possibly contributed toward retarding their relations.

The historical aspect can indeed be enlightening if studied in depth, but more interesting and relevant to the topic are of course the political and economic developments of the recent past (say, the last 70 years) which are lightly discussed in the book (pp. 87–125). Quite a few factors are given as contributions to the conflict. Among the basic problems raised in this section are: the inheritance of undemarcated boundaries in spite of the long Italian colonial rule in Eritrea, the repeated breaking of promises and signed agreements which led to mutual mistrust, and the tradition of solving political problems by force instead of negotiations. Practically all of the presumed factors are given in the sources the author has used. Even the whimsical suggestion of ending the conflict by Eritrea ceding a port to Ethiopia in exchange for access to the Täckäze River to irrigate the semidesert western part (cf. pp. 126–129) is but an old proposal of an individual writer, “Woldegabriel, Berhane”. We can thus conclude that the contribution of this book to our knowledge is de facto a review of almost all the works published on the so-called border-conflict rather than an originality in historical narrative or political analysis.

Bairu Tafla, Universität Hamburg