



# Aethiopia 17 (2014)

International Journal of Ethiopian and  
Eritrean Studies

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**Review**

SUSANNE EPPLE, *The Bashada of Southern Ethiopia: A Study of Age,  
Gender and Social Discourse*

Aethiopia 17 (2014), 293–295

ISSN: 2194–4024

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

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## 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.

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## Reviews

Next to the reference list, a glossary of Maale terms, a complete list of interviews, a list of oral stories narrated in the book, furthermore lists of maps, figures, and photographs follow; however, no index is included. The book closes with field notes on a funeral ceremony.

This kind of closure is somewhat representative for the whole publication, even though it seems unconnected and of disputable value to the rest of the book, as it shows the very personal tone with an emphasis on very detailed and personal depictions, and systematizes, objectivizes, academic sounding analysis. A feature which is on one hand likable, informative and revealing can on the other hand leave the impression of naivety and being over concerned with personal experiences, therefore lessening the impression of being valuable information. For a Ph.D. thesis this may be convenient, but for a publication it may have been rewarding to revise and restructure the data once again, e.g. leave the long list of interviews in the appendix etc. aside and include a well-structured index instead. Furthermore a more analytic, academic sounding outline and writing style should have been developed. The reference list should have been revised as well, as there are many mistakes found, especially if compared to the references given in the text. This step would surely have up-graded the rich and thoroughly researched findings.

In any case, the publication is a very important contribution to anthropological gender studies in Ethiopia and moreover to anthropological studies on the Maale in general, as it fills a gap in research, which was long overdue.

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SUSANNE EPPLE, *The Bashada of Southern Ethiopia: A Study of Age, Gender and Social Discourse* = Mainzer Beiträge zur Afrikaforschung 25, Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2010. 291 pp. with b/w photographs. Price: € 39.80. ISBN: 978-3-89645-825-4.

The present publication obviously follows the tradition of the renowned anthropology department situated at the Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz with its focus on the many ethnic groups of Southern Ethiopia. The research focuses on the Bashada,<sup>1</sup> and, the main attention of the publication is given to the age set formation of this group. Different to former anthropological researches, the author demonstrates the implications the naming

<sup>1</sup> The Bashada are an ethnic group of Southern Ethiopia, who are speaking a southern Omotic language and are neighbours to the Hamar, the Banna and the Kara.

of a certain age group has on the political structure or the ritualistic background of the ethnic group, and also its implications on daily interactions.

The *Introduction*, which could have been called Chapter 1 as well, consists of a literature review, focusing mainly on anthropological literature on age set formation and comparing different East-African ethnic groups.

Chapter 2 shortly describes the personal situation of the author while conducting the research in the field, introduces the research methodologies that are used, and reflects the influence of the personal role on the findings. It furthermore lists the main informants with their photographs and some sentences about their life history and social role.

In Chapter 3 the territorial and social organization, the history and origin, as well as the organization of the nuclear family of the Bashada is described and explained, with an emphasis on the emic perspective (which means not only anthropological literature about comparable social structures is cited).

Chapter 4 goes deeper into the analysis of the social structures and the age system, analyzing the different spheres of children, adolescents, initiates and adults. It also describes the relations in the core families and provides the reader with an impression on the various positions individuals can take in the broader community.

The *Conclusion* summarizes the content of the publication by focusing on the different age stages and the expectations Bashada society has on the members of each stage.

Next to the reference list, a glossary of Bashada terms and an index are also included. The index is very helpful and very well structured.

The publication follows a straight anthropological approach and methodological line. Given this framework, each and every finding is grounded in anthropological tradition and, to a more or lesser extent, backed up by literature. The overall tone of the publication is less personal and more academic and objective,<sup>2</sup> even though light is shed on the personal involvement and background (which is common in all recent anthropological researches). At the same time the main informants are personally introduced and even photographed.

The concentration on the emic perspective, especially visible in the main body of the work (Chapters 3 and 4), substantiated by some chosen literary examples, mainly focusing on neighbouring communities,<sup>3</sup> creates a clear

<sup>2</sup> Compare: S. THUBAUVILLE, *Die Wandernde ist eine Kub: Lebenswege von Frauen in Maale, Südäthiopien* = Mainzer Beiträge zur Afrikaforschung 22, Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Especially by Jane Lydall and Ivo Strecker, the two main teachers of Susanne Epple.

focus and a comprehensible argumentation. It sometimes lacks, however, the richness of data, which could have been created by comparison with other researches and which has, for example, been achieved in the introduction. On the other hand, in this way the connection between every day and ritual life can be shown and the interconnectedness of those two realms becomes clear through the emic perception. By giving concrete examples, either by using the Bashadas' language to exemplify or by using examples from the families closest to the researcher, the author is always able to explain the larger social structures in a detailed and specified way.

This detailed approach about describing and explaining many special features of Bashada culture offers a lot of interesting and valuable material for other researchers. From my point of view, the publication offers, for example very interesting contributions to the research about body-modifications in Ethiopia, especially in the context of their interconnection to the age set formation.<sup>4</sup>

I, however, missed the focus on gender, which was promised in the title. Gender is included in the publication by dealing with women in the same way as with men. Often the passage about women is, however, even shorter than the passage about men, as women's rituals and social structures seem to be more informal in Bashada than men's are and thus there is less that can be described. Even though this point is completely understandable, and gives reason enough to write less about women, it is disappointing for the reader, especially as the title suggests that it contains more information in this regard and could give important hints about gendered social structures in Bashada and in general.

In general the study is very well researched, very well written, and very well theoretically grounded. Its detailed description of structures, its many and rich examples, and its deep analysis of the interconnection of day to day life, political and social life, as well as ritual life are extremely valuable for further researches. There are amazingly few mistakes in the English text and the index is a very useful tool to work with. I can only congratulate the author to this fine work of anthropological research.

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<sup>4</sup> See: A.M. MÜLLER, "Body Modification", in: *E Ae* V, pp. 278b–283a.