



Aethiopia 19 (2016)

International Journal of Ethiopian and
Eritrean Studies

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Review

IVO STRECKER, *Berimba's Resistance. The Life and Times of a Great
Hamar Spokesman. As told by his son Aike Berinas*

Aethiopia 19 (2016), 298–300

ISSN: 2194–4024

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

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Editorial

The present issue of AETHIOPICA, like the preceding one, is partly monographic, with a section containing the proceedings of the Panel on Islamic Literature in Ethiopia: New Perspectives of Research, from the '19th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies', held in Warsaw, Poland, on 24–28 August 2015.

Starting from this issue, the annual bibliography on Ethiopian Semitic and Cushitic linguistics held from its inception in 1998 for eighteen years by Rainer Voigt is handed over, on Voigt's own will, to a pool of younger scholars, with the substantial support of the AETHIOPICA editorial team. I would like on this occasion to express the deep gratitude of the editorial board of AETHIOPICA and of all scholars in Ethiopian Semitic and Cushitic linguistics to Rainer Voigt for his fundamental and valuable contribution.

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.
CSCO Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1903ff.
EAE S. UHLIG, ed., *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, I: A–C; II: D–Ha; III: He–N; in cooperation with A. BAUSI, eds, IV: O–X (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010); A. BAUSI in cooperation with S. UHLIG, eds, V: Y–Z, *Supplementa, Addenda et Corrigenda, Maps, Index* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2014).
EI² *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, I–XII (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960–2005).
EMML Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, Addis Ababa.
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.
PICES 9 A.A. GROMYKO, ed., 1988, *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Ethiopian Studies, Moscow, 26–29 August 1986*, I–VI (Moscow: Nauka Publishers, Central Department of Oriental Literature, 1988).
RSE *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, Roma, 1941–1981, Roma–Napoli 1983ff.
ZDMG *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, Leipzig–Wiesbaden–Stuttgart 1847ff.

IVO STRECKER, *Berimba's Resistance. The Life and Times of a Great Hamar Spokesman. As told by his son Aike Berinas*, The Hamar of Southern Ethiopia, 4 (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2013). 246 pp., 10 maps. Price: € 29.90. ISBN: 978-3-643-90343-3.

The present book tells the story of the life of Berimba (c.1875–1952), an important elected spokesman of the Hamar, an egalitarian ethnic group in the southwestern region of South Omo in today's Ethiopia.

The events are presented in chronological order and start when Berimba is chosen as spokesman and thus inherits the role of his father, who had also been an important spokesman, negotiating with neighbouring ethnic groups in cases of conflict. The events end with the murder of Berimba and some of its consequences.

Thus the book reviews an important phase of Ethiopian history, from the end of the nineteenth century until the middle of the twentieth century. The main subjects of the story are the conquest of southern Ethiopia by the troops of Emperor Mənilək II, the Italian occupation from 1936 to 1941, and a part of the reign of Emperor Ḥaylā Śəllase I.

The narrative of Berimba's life was given by his son Aike Berinas, called Baldambe, who was the main informant and a friend of the editor Ivo Strecker. Baldambe became well known through the publication *Baldambe Explains* (Lydall and Strecker 1979). In the book, Baldambe repeatedly indicates that, as a boy or young man, he had witnessed some of the events he reports. For other events he explains that they were only told to him, either because he was not yet born or because he was living in a different region.

The book is divided into five parts—'Nemesis', 'Conquest', 'Exile, Return and Revenge', 'Italian Occupation and its Aftermath' and 'Death of Berimba'—each of which is subdivided into several short chapters, 51 in all (pp. 15–136).

While the first two parts are each only five pages long and serve as a kind of preface by describing the mythological and historical setting, the following three parts (31, 47) give a comprehensive picture of the extremely difficult conditions under which the Hamar (and their neighbours) had to come to terms with their occupiers, and how they lost their sovereignty.

The longest part (IV) is concerned with the time of the Italian occupation. It shows how, on the one hand, Berimba tried to negotiate with the Italians and to establish relatively peaceful conditions, so that the Hamar could live their lives more or less undisturbed. For example he helped the Italians to make a map of the region by guiding them through the land. On the other hand he helped the Amhara in the region (who were considered as guests) to escape south and even hid some Amhara friends in inaccessible areas. In so

doing he risked his own life, and was lucky to survive; he was later honoured with the Amhara military title *qāññazmač*. Despite promises of peace by the Italians, Berimba remained cautious and, for example, warned the neighbouring *Ñaṇatom* (Bume) to stay in their region and not to cross the Omo River: 'No, don't come over here. These foreigners are quite unpredictable. My country, the country of the Hamar is in grave danger' (p. 80). It seems that his real wish had been to stay neutral. He felt responsible for his land and the people and also retained his pride. Although Berimba was very careful, he still got into trouble, due to the rivalries between different Italian leaders. After the Italians had been defeated by the British, Amhara rule was re-established ('Your father Haile Selassie', p. 100) and the borders defined.

The above is only a limited number of examples from the close-packed description given in the narrative.

In the copious appendix, written by Ivo Strecker and Tsega-ab Kassa, the narrative is elaborated in endnotes (80 pp.) which annotate and comment the narrative. Additionally ten maps show the region—terrain, places and ethnic groups—in which Berimba moved. It ranges down to the east side of Lake Turkana, today part of Kenya. This is followed by a short glossary, a bibliography and an index. The whole book is preceded by acknowledgements, thanking all who contributed to the book in one way or another. Awoke, the second son of Baldambe, gets a special mention. As a member of the Ethiopian parliament he represents the region South Omo and continues the tradition of his forefathers as spokesman in a new way.

A special feature is found in the introduction (p. 9): a photograph from 1951 shows Berimba next to the German anthropologist Adolf E. Jensen. The picture on the front page of the book however is a little confusing, since it shows Berimba's son Baldambe, who told the story to the editor, and not Berimba himself. The second title 'As told by his son Aike Berinas' is not mentioned here. Only a short note inside the book indicates who is seen on the picture.

The publication shows that, next to and independent of written history, important persons exercise a strong influence over the course of time and make a significant impact beyond their local and regional horizon. The one-sidedness or at least problematic nature of historical accounts that depend only on written material becomes clear. Thus 'Berimba's Resistance' is an important contribution to the history of Ethiopia, showing how the formerly independent ethnic groups in southern Ethiopia have been incorporated into the Ethiopian empire.

In the 14 pages of his introduction Ivo Strecker explains among other things why he published the narrative he recorded in 1975 only now. He wanted to protect Baldambe, because he feared that some of the information

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might have been dangerous for the narrator. And in fact the text published now only covers the early period of Baldambe's narrative, describing the political and diplomatic activities of his father Berimba.

The book is a continuation of the series *The Hamar of Southern Ethiopia* by Jean Lydall and Ivo Strecker, of which the first three volumes *Work Journal*, *Baldambe Explains* and *Conversations in Dambaiti* were all published in 1979.¹ *Berimba's Resistance* is an important part of the oral tradition and history of the Hamar.

gulphano yessa ko kaié, nagaia ko dé, yir sia d'á! (*May all sickness leave you, let all be well, let all badness disappear!*) (p. xi)

Alke Dohrmann, Hamburg

CHIKAGE OBA-SMIDT, *The Oral Chronicle of the Boorana in Southern Ethiopia: Modes of Construction and Preservation of History among People without Writing*, translated by Roger Prior and James Watt, *Northeast African History, Orality and Heritage*, 4 (Zürich: LIT-Verlag, 2016). 775 pp. Price: € 79.90. ISBN: 978-3-643-90521-5.

At first glance the use of the term 'chronicle' to describe the oral traditions of the Boorana section of the Oromo people seems to be a daring choice. We are in fact speaking about narratives that were orally transmitted in the context of a society having neither dynasties nor a bureaucracy. Yet, the text that Oba-Smidt collected from 11 local experts in *argaa-dhagetti*—'things that were seen' – 'things that were heard' (p. 624)—provides a systematic, organized and structured account of events in chronological sequence starting from the fifteenth century, and providing insights on earlier periods (pp. 13–14, 635–638). Comparison of the versions provided by the different experts reveals the consistency of the narrative (pp. 14, 738) in a fashion that Oba-Smidt describes in terms of 'coherence with a degree of incoherence' (p. 744). The book is constructed with the purpose of explaining how this achievement was possible in the non-literate society of the Boorana, and of describing the mechanisms underlying the production, memorization and transmission of this historical narrative.

¹ I. Strecker and J. Lydall, *Work Journal*, *Arbeiten aus dem Institut für Völkerkunde der Universität zu Göttingen*, 12; *Baldambe Explains*, *Arbeiten aus dem Institut für Völkerkunde der Universität zu Göttingen*, 13; *Conversations in Dambaiti*, *Arbeiten aus dem Institut für Völkerkunde der Universität zu Göttingen*, 14 (Hohenschäftlarn: Klaus Renner Verlag, 1979).