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Review

ABDULKADER SALEH MOHAMMAD, *The Sabo of Eritrea: Ethnic Identity
and National Consciousness*

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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.

ABDULKADER SALEH MOHAMMAD, *The Saho of Eritrea: Ethnic Identity and National Consciousness*, African Politics/Politiques Africaines, 5 (Zürich–Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2013). 384 pp., annex. Price: € 44.90. ISBN: 978-3-643-90332-7.

At first sight Abdulkader's book on the Eritrean Saho is a very classical, almost British monograph. In eight main chapters the author discusses the discrepancies of ethnicity and nationalism, the Saho's socio-cultural background as well as their subsistence economy, political organisation and customary law, past and present. But as well as filling an ethnographic lacuna in the Horn of Africa's complex and confusing mosaic of peoples and cultures, the book is a history of political marginalization from the past to the present and a call for comprehensive research and further academic writing on all those ethnic groups in Eritrea whose relations with authority and statehood are still not stable.

In Abdulkader's text the Saho emerge as an exemplary social community in southern Eritrea, claiming common kinship, language and lifestyle. At the same time they are made from the outside, through ongoing interference and domination. Once, their cattle's extensive grazing-grounds spread from the highland towns of ʿAddi Qayyāḥ and Sānʿafe down to the coastal desert. Saho supplied agricultural and animal products to Massawa's market and protected the risky, but profitable caravan trade into the region's mountainous hinterland, thus complementing a pastoralist subsistence economy with cash-income. Their remarkable herds as well as their economic dependence on vast lands, however, also made them a vulnerable group. Saho feared and fought the raiding Təgrayan feudal lords and *šəfta*-bandits; they competed with neighbouring Təgrəñña-speaking-peasants over land and quarrelled with Massawa's *nāʿib*, the Ottoman-installed governor and tax-collector. They suffered from the Italian colonisers' re-distribution of apparently empty land in Eritrea's southern highlands, from Ḥaylā Šəllase I's inherent mistrust of Islam, nomadic pastoralism and segmentary lineage organisation as well as from the succeeding *Därg* regime, who believed in agro-industry, command economy and sedentarism to cement political stability and boost the development of a modern nation.

In this light the Saho appear as local pastoralists struggling to survive in continuous regional power struggles, but they are also presented as political actors, who self-confidently claimed their role in history as well as in the present. By permanently fending off foreign domination—disguised as Orthodox supremacy and imposed by the Təgrayan lords, the modern Ethiopian state and the rival Təgrəñña-speaking peasantry in the now Eritrean highlands—the Saho developed their own ethnic identity and a determined political motiva-

tion. Saho fought as Italian *askari* against Mənilək II, they engaged in unions and emerging parties and were, later, among the founding members of the militant opposition against Ethiopian rule. Subsequently Abdulkader describes the Saho as natural, but finally betrayed protagonists of Eritrea's independence. Eritrea's land and administrative reforms under the rule of Isayas Afewerki as well as its mandatory and open-ended national service all led to further marginalisation and impoverishment of Eritrea's pastoralists and therefore appear as a mere continuity of the region's authoritarian traditions of power. From a Saho perspective the new rulers seem not too different from the old ones—a political assessment and cultural view that might be shared by other marginalised groups in Eritrea.

Thus Abdulkader's book is not neutral and never claims to be. He openly takes sides and tries to rehabilitate 'his own people'; at the same time he is too much of a sociologist to romanticise in an exaggerated manner. An undeniable strength is the narration of Eritrean history from an alternative, complementary and often enough competing perspective. To this end, poetry as well as personal life-stories are considered and discussed. Admittedly some parts of the book are a bit dry and, possibly, only of interest to committed experts; the book's explicit political bias, however, provides flavour and provokes further discussion. In Abdulkader's view the region's ruling elites use political ideology to 'consolidate their authority'; they 'employ mobilizing strategies to manipulate the population according to their own perception of nationalism, in which national identity is explicitly or implicitly linked to the dominant ethnic identity' (pp. 65–66). In other words the dominance of the Təgrəñña language and culture replaces previous ideologies of Amhara and Ethiopian supremacy and marginalises others, especially non-Christian and non-sedentary groups.

What might be true ideologically, should not result in playing one ethnic group—and its participants—off against another. Abdulkader remains somewhat vague on this necessary distinction and misses a chance to link his rather pragmatic concept of ethnicity with concrete ethnographic data on the one hand, and more recent academic debate on the other. For him, theoretical concepts have little more to offer than primordialism (Alemseged Abbay) and instrumentalism (Abner Cohen). The Saho—as well as other ethnic groups—exist, because they have done so in past and present. But does his criticism of the diverse and patchy groups of Təgrəñña-speakers (Wolbert Smidt), accusing them of intrinsic and irreducible primordialism help to explain the region's complexity? Does it help to understand dynamics and fault lines of ethnicity and nationalism in the region if the Saho are considered to be purer nationalists than Eritrean Təgrəñña-speakers? Does the book's political statement explain why the relationship between the Saho in Southern Eritrea and the neighbouring Irob across the Ethiopian border is hardly discussed?

Reviews

Eritrea's decline into agony and dictatorship certainly provides many reasons for anger; the marginalization of the Saho, the Kunama, the 'Afar and others has to be stated and documented. Thus, Abdulkader Saleh Mohammad has set an important milestone. However, in one way or another, Eritrea's social destruction affects all, both Saho and Təgrəñña. Reconciliation and social reconstruction should be considered as pre-eminent themes in a future yet to come. Could 'Ethnic Federalism' as propagated and implemented by Ethiopia offer a suitable path towards this end, as the book implicitly suggests? Whatever the future may hold, we should not easily surrender our conceptual debate on ethnicity to the pragmatic needs of policy-making and power struggle.

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JULIA PFITZNER, *'Unser Kalender funktioniert nicht mehr!' Ernährungssicherung und Anpassung im Zeichen des Klimawandels: Ein Fallbeispiel von Agro-Pastoralisten in Südäthiopien*, Entwicklungsforschung. Beiträge zu interdisziplinären Studien in Ländern des Südens, 10 (Berlin: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2011). 194 S. Preis: € 29,00. ISBN: 978-3-86573-619-2.

Gelegentlich erscheint eine besonders gelungene Diplomarbeit in Buchform. Die vorliegende Arbeit stammt aus dem Geographischen Institut der Universität Bonn. Die Reihe, in der sie erschienen ist, ist der Entwicklungsforschung gewidmet.

Der Kalender, von dem hier die Rede ist, ist der der Ñaṇatom (Nyangatom), einer Ateker-Gruppe (Ost-Niloten) am rechten Ufer des Omo in Südäthiopien. Wie andere Niloten auch, ermitteln die Ñaṇatom nicht die Länge des Sonnenjahres (was z.B. durch astronomische Beobachtungen oder das Zählen von Tagen möglich wäre). Sie haben einfach einen Zyklus von 12 Mond-Monaten. Wenn der durch die Verschiebung um jährlich 11 Tage gegenüber dem Sonnenjahr nicht mehr zu den Jahreszeiten passt, wird einfach ein Monat eingefügt. Die Monate waren mit bestimmten jahreszyklischen agro-pastoralen Aktivitäten verknüpft. Durch Veränderung der Regenfallmuster oder besser gesagt, deren Auflösung, weil die Unregelmäßigkeit von Wetterereignissen zugenommen hat, fällt der Kalender als Prognoseinstrument für Regenfälle und als Anhaltspunkt für die Planung von Feldbestellung und Fernweide-Auftrieb weitgehend fort.

Die Ñaṇatom reagieren vielfach, indem sie ihr agro-pastorales System aufgeben, weil der Regenfeldbau zu riskant wird. Sie spezialisieren sich statt dessen auf flussnahes Überschwemmungs-Land, wo sie *flood recession culti-*