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## Review

JAMES DE LORENZI, *Guardians of the Tradition: History and Historical Writings in Ethiopia and Eritrea*

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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 ‘19<sup>th</sup> 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

AÉ	<i>Annales d’Éthiopie</i> , 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 ( <i>ibid.</i> , 2011f.); 76ff. ed. by A. BAUSI ( <i>ibid.</i> , 2012ff.).
AION	<i>Annali dell’Università degli studi di Napoli ‘L’Orientale’</i> , Napoli: Università di Napoli ‘L’Orientale’ (former Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli), 1929ff.
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1903ff.
EAe	S. UHLIG, ed., <i>Encyclopaedia Aethiopica</i> , 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, <i>Supplementa, Addenda et Corrigenda, Maps, Index</i> (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2014).
EI <sup>2</sup>	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , I–XII (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960–2005).
EMML	Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, Addis Ababa.
JES	<i>Journal of Ethiopian Studies</i> , Addis Ababa 1963ff.
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i> , Manchester 1956ff.
NEASt	<i>Northeast African Studies</i> , East Lansing, MI 1979ff.
OrChr	<i>Oriens Christianus</i> , Leipzig–Roma–Wiesbaden 1901ff.
PICES 9	A.A. GROMYKO, ed., 1988, <i>Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Ethiopian Studies, Moscow, 26–29 August 1986</i> , I–VI (Moscow: Nauka Publishers, Central Department of Oriental Literature, 1988).
RSE	<i>Rassegna di Studi Etiopici</i> , Roma, 1941–1981, Roma–Napoli 1983ff.
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i> , Leipzig–Wiesbaden–Stuttgart 1847ff.

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Protestants in the Ethiopian highlands and in the historical evolution of the EOTC.

Full of factual mistakes, based on over-interpretations and on opinions rather than historical analysis, this book is very far from scientific, but curiously, it has enjoyed welcome remarks and complaisant reviews.<sup>1</sup> Such a book is usually not reviewed in a scientific journal, but, because it was advertised, some comment seems appropriate, in order to inform those who are interested in the EOTC and its history.

Stéphane Ancel, Paris

JAMES DE LORENZI, *Guardians of the Tradition: History and Historical Writings in Ethiopia and Eritrea*, Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2015), 232 pp., 12 ills. Price: £ 70.00. ISBN: 978-15-804-6519-9.

James De Lorenzi is a remarkable scholar who has worked for many years on the modern history, mainly the intellectual history, of the Horn of Africa. His latest, and most interesting book deals with the work of Ethiopian and Eritrean intellectuals, examined in terms of tradition and cultural change. This topic has been analyzed by a great number of scholars, but is rarely treated in such a sweeping geographical-historical framework. Ethiopia and Eritrea are usually separate research themes; investigation into both areas is therefore the first merit of this volume, and this should be underlined here.

The historical background deals with the nineteenth-twentieth century, a period extremely relevant because of the encounter with foreign cultures and the challenges posed by colonialism. Three authors are examined in detail and their work is compared to the historical and cultural works of previous Ethiopian–Eritrean writers confronted with changes in the literary milieu and with new cultural developments.

The first chapter, ‘The Inherited Tradition’, deals with classical Ethiopian historiography and so-called vernacular historiography, ‘intended to preserve, refine, and transmit received knowledge—the historical truths that our fathers have told’ (see p. 28). The author tries to answer many questions and his sophisticated analysis is mainly focused on the different interpretations of the past. It is very well documented and, at the same time, a synthetic narrative presentation.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.earlyafricanchristianity.com/blog/post.php?s=2014-07-11-ethiopian-christianity>; <http://www.ibtimes.com/ethiopia-first-christian-nation-1110400>.

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The following chapters, 2, 3 and 4, are focused respectively on very well-known writers and historians such as Gäbrä Krestos Täklä Haymanot (1892–1932), Gäbrä Mika’él Germu (1900–1969), Heruy Wälđä Sellasé (1878–1938).

The first intellectual is an interesting figure; born in Eritrea and son of an orthodox priest, he was educated at the Swedish mission in Asmära, worked in the first printing press in the entire Horn, and moved to Addis Abäba in the early 1920s. Gäbrä Krestos Täklä Haymanot is compared with the main historical writers of the first decades of the twentieth century. In this light De Lorenzi examines his important manuscript, *Short History of the World in Amharic* (Addis Ababa 1924), that covers more than two millennia. De Lorenzi describes this work as extremely innovative, unconventional, not focused on dynastic history, but mainly concentrating on foreign actors and global processes of change: a kind of popular history, which does not address the intellectual élite, but is rather a contribution to the Ethiopian people’s emancipation. As the author maintains, Gäbrä Krestos as a historian was quite unlike the court historians and church scholars who preceded him; he established a new professional role. As a cosmopolitan writer, he changed early-twentieth century historiography, exemplifying a new culture, reforms and modernization. As a result of the European invasion and Muslim-Christian confrontation, the period was full of contradictions and new developments. Having outlined the biographical details, the author examines ‘New Varieties of History’ (pp. 49–66), which is the most interesting part of this chapter, discussing among other things, the innovative role of Gäbre-Heywät Baykädañ, one of the best known writers of the period.

Chapter 3 ‘Gäbrä Mika’él Germu and the History of Colonialism’ deals with another less known author who only recently received the attention of scholars. Although most of his manuscripts have never been published, they are catalogued at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies in Addis Abäba. Born in Colonial Eritrea, he first received a Church education, and later attended a colonial school, becoming quite close to religious organizations and the missions.

De Lorenzi focuses his presentation mainly on the Amharic manuscript ‘History of Italy and Ethiopia’, describing a long story of European imperialism in the Horn, up to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. Particularly interesting for the author are the pages concentrating on early Italian colonialism in Eritrea, discussing collaboration, resistance and the dynamics of domination in the highlands. The manuscript is autobiographical and, at the same time, it is an historical narrative based on a large variety of sources: oral memories collected by elders, written documents such as Church manuscripts, and both European and local sources. The description of the foreign intervention is quite critical, similar to what other Eritrean intellectuals had

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already expressed in their works, the most famous among them being Gäbrä-Egziabhér Gila-Maryam. The best known intellectual maintaining pro-Italian politics was Afawärq Gäbrä-Iyäsus. During the 1930s and later, Gäbrä Mika'él published in many journals, and, as De Lorenzi maintains, he 'was clearly a new kind of colonial species: a native intermediary – a critical player in the day-to-day operation of the colonial state' (p. 72). During his life Gäbrä Mika'él produced at least five important works and a great number of shorter studies. He was also a great collector of documents, as I personally discovered in Asmära in the 1990s when I had the chance to visit his family on several occasions, while conserving other manuscripts. The son was very helpful and allowed me to copy a great number of documents which I deposited at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies in Addis Abäba.

Chapter 4, 'Heruy Wäldä Sellasé and the New Queen of Sheba' deals with this important author who inaugurated a new literary genre, i.e. travel literature, visiting many countries in Africa, Europe, America and Asia. In 1923 he accompanied Mänän Asfaw, the wife of Crown Prince Täfäri Mäkonnen and the future Empress, to the Middle East, visiting Palestine and reporting his journey in an official account, *The Journey of le'ult wäyzäro Mänän to Jerusalem and Egypt* (published in 1915 (EC) by Täfäri Mäkonnen Press, Addis Abäba). A New Queen of Sheba, the founding mother of the Ethiopian nation, as the author defines her. Other travels reinforced knowledge of Ethiopia abroad and were important in furthering national prestige. At the same time they contributed to a better understanding of the world abroad: together with *ras* Täfäri he visited Europe in 1924, attended a diplomatic mission in Japan in 1931, and travelled to Greece, Syria and Egypt in 1932.

Born into a humble family, Heruy was chosen by Emperor Mənilək and attended school, receiving a basic education that enabled him to work later on as a civil servant. He was also the director of the government press, encouraging a greater diffusion of Amharic books particularly in the field of education. In 1930, during the beginning of Emperor Haylä Šəllase's reign, he was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs but continued to be a prolific writer of prose, novels, poems, fiction and journalistic articles. A real innovator, he was an important figure in modern Ethiopian literature, a modernizer, introducing many innovations into the country, and opening Ethiopia to the western world. Many details of his literary production and innovations are mentioned in the volume under review: 'It's not Easy Being Modern' (pp. 102–110) and 'Living History' (pp. 110–115), describe foreign countries and comparing them with Ethiopia's historical traditions and contemporary changes. According to De Lorenzi 'the connection between travelography and the ideology of imperial power' (p. 112) that Heruy asserted in all his works in a sort of creative history must certainly deserves to be mentioned. Moreover, 'Travel

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writing allowed him to reconcile past and present, the ancient and the modern, the sacred and the profane' (p. 114). This remarkable intellectual spent a creative life between writing and serving the monarchy. During ኃይል ሳይላሰ's exile in Great Britain in 1936, and following the Italian conquest, Heruy joined the Emperor and assisted him. He died in Bath in 1938.

Chapter 5 'The Triumph of Historicism?' closes the volume; here the author poses many questions about the intersection of modernity and local 'vernacular' narratives in a changing Ethiopia, during the last decades of the twentieth century. De Lorenzi gives some insights into the contribution that these three writers offered to contemporary academic historiography which has developed according to new methodologies and new sources. Particularly during the 1970s–1990s, the Department of History, Addis Ababa University, was a relevant institution, collaborating in international research and, at the same time, contributing to a national historiography. Ethiopia and Eritrea were a part of this story, taking different positions and, at the beginning of this century, taking very different paths. This volume explores 'the changing nature of history in the Horn of Africa' and the 'non-Western effort to describe and understand the past' (pp. 137–138). An ongoing debate, a stimulating topic.

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WOLBERT G.C. SMIDT, *Photos as Historical Witnesses: The First Ethiopians in Germany and the First Germans in Ethiopia, the History of a Complex Relationship*. With an Introduction by Richard Pankhurst, Afrika Visuell, 2 (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2015). 132 pp. Price: € 29.90. ISBN: 978-3-643-10195-2.

German *ethiopisants* like to emphasize the time-depth of the scholarly relations between their country and Ethiopia particularly with reference to the pioneering relationship between Hiob Ludolf and Abba Gorgorios in the second half of the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> Portraits of this two men, presented in the first chapter of the book under review, seem to have been indispen-

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. E. Hammerschmidt, 'A Brief History of German Contributions to the Study of Ethiopia', *AÉ*, 6 (1965), 255–277; E. Haberland, *Three Hundred Years of Ethiopian-German Academic Collaboration*, Sonderschriften des Frobenius Instituts, 2 (Frankfurt a.M.: Frobenius Institut, 1986); U. Braukämper, 'Der Beitrag der deutschen Ethnologie zur Äthiopien-Forschung', in P.O. Scholz, ed., *Von Hiob Ludolf bis Enrico Cerulli, Halle/S. 3.–5. Oktober 1996*, Bibliotheca nubica et aethiopica, 8 (Warszawa–Wiesbaden: Zakład Graficny, 2001), 159–170; cf. also Bairu Tafla, *Ethiopia and Germany: Cultural, Political and Economic Relations, 1871–1936*, ÄthFor, 5 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1981).