



Aethiopia 10 (2007)

International Journal of Ethiopian and
Eritrean Studies

LEONARDO COHEN SHABOT

Dissertation abstract

The Jesuits in Ethiopia: Missionary Methods and Local Responses to Catholicism (1555–1632)

Dissertation im Fachbereich Sozialwissenschaften, verteidigt 25. Mai 2005 zur Erlangung des Titels eines Dr. phil.

Aethiopia 10 (2007), 301–302

ISSN: 1430–1938

Published by

Universität Hamburg

Asien Afrika Institut, Abteilung Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

Hiob Ludolf Zentrum für Äthiopistik

Dissertation abstract

Gedanken eine ziellose Evolution lauert, die seinem Gedanken des *einen* Ziels der menschlichen Gattung widerspricht: Der Entwicklung einer einheitlich vernünftigen, bürgerlichen Gesellschaft, die sich allgemein gültigen, gleichen Gesetzen unterwirft. Herder hat dagegen die Grundgedanken moderner ethnologischer Beschäftigung mit den sozialen Systemen anderer Völker schon vorformuliert. Die Gegensätze zwischen beiden Theorien prägten bis tief in die Moderne die Diskurse in der Ethnologie und internationalen Politik.

LEONARDO COHEN SHABOT, *The Jesuits in Ethiopia: Missionary Methods and Local Responses to Catholicism (1555–1632)*, Dissertation in the Department of General History, University of Haifa, defended on November 2005 to obtain a Ph.D. in History.

The present study examines processes of the spread of religion and religious conversion within the framework of the intricate relationship existing between Catholic Christianity and Ethiopian Christianity in Ethiopia during the 16th century and the first half of the 17th century.

The study at hand bases itself on two kinds of primary sources: (a) Portuguese and Jesuit sources which include letters and tractates, and (b) Ethiopian sources which include royal chronicles, theological works and hagiographic texts. The study investigates a chapter in the history of Ethiopia; its originality lies mainly in its attempt to understand the type of missionary activity employed in Ethiopia, and also to understand the reaction of the various strata of Ethiopian society to the Catholic evangelization. Therefore this study deals with the religious history of 16th- and 17th-century Ethiopia. Indeed, past studies have dealt with the subject of the adoption of Catholicism by Ethiopian royalty in the broad historical context. However, while previous explanations focused mainly on the political significance of adopting the new religion and the ensuing war of cultures between the missionaries and the Ethiopians, the present work investigates in detail the methods by which the missionaries sought to spread Catholicism and Ethiopian society's response.

This work sheds light on the Jesuit preference for spreading Catholicism from top to bottom. The missionaries tried to overtake the Ethiopian ecclesiastical hierarchy, sever the traditional connection with the Alexandrian Coptic Church and replace it with a connection with the Roman Catholic Church. The Jesuits believed gaining control over positions of power and key positions were the right formula for success.

Still, acting as a new force in the Ethiopian arena, the Catholic religion did more than play a mere political part. The present work reveals other

Dissertation abstracts

aspects of the encounter and conflict between the two Christian Churches, the Ethiopian and the Catholic. The Jesuits tried to develop an Ethiopian Catholic culture, and to that end they preached their sermons, held debates, argued with Ethiopian clergy, and translated texts into GēYēz and Amharic.

The study concludes that the main cause of failure of Catholicism in Ethiopia was the Jesuit missionaries' attempt to create a religious system which would be homogeneous in terms of creed and theology as well as in terms of rituals. As in the case of Catholic Reformation in Europe, the Jesuits wished to sacrifice the local religious expressions for the benefit of a uniform homogeneous religion.

SIMONE TARSITANI, *I rituali musicali dello zikri a Harar, Etiopia*, Dissertation in the Dipartimento di Studi Glottoantropologici e Discipline Musicali, Università di Roma "La Sapienza", defended on 5 May 2006 to obtain a Ph.D. in Storia e analisi delle culture musicali.

The thesis "I rituali musicali dello *zikri* a Harar, Etiopia" illustrates historical and cultural background, ritual context and musical analysis of *zikri* rituals in Harar, Eastern Ethiopia.

Zikri is the Harari equivalent to *dhikr*, but in Harar the term refers not only to the various forms of ritual recitation and their ceremonial context, but also to the individual devotional songs performed during the *zikri* rituals. Among the ceremonial traditions developed by Ethiopian Muslims, *zikri* is quite a significant one, developed in the city that has been for centuries the main centre of Islam in East Africa.

This ethnomusicological work is based on extensive fieldwork carried out in Harar between 2000 and 2004. The overall material collected (part of which is stored at the Archivi di Etnomusicologia of Accademia di Santa Cecilia) amounts to approximately 140 hours of audio recordings, 100 hours of digital video, photos and digitized written documents.

The first volume of the thesis is articulated in three chapters followed by a chapter of concluding reflections. The first chapter defines the subject in the frame of Islamic doctrine and its ritual tradition, describing the repertoire of religious hymns – named *zikri* – and the liturgical texts commonly adopted in Harari religious practice. In the second chapter, after a review of the history of Islam in Harar and considerations on the importance of the cult of saints in the region, the most important gathering places and the major ritual occasions are illustrated. The core of this study consists in the systematic analysis of the religious songs displayed in the third chapter. A selected sample of texts, melodies and rhythmic accompaniments is de-