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Dissertation abstract

*Re-imagining Empire: Ethiopian Political Culture under Yohannis IV
(1872–89)*

Dissertation in the Department of History, School of Oriental and African Studies,
University of London (Faculty of Arts and Humanities), defended on March 7, 2006 to
obtain a Ph.D. in History

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this region as it was the case throughout the country. The corollaries of these intra- and inter-group movements and relations are that strong assimilation and integration have been developed. In terms of language, too, most of the ethnic groups are trilingual, Oromiffa being the *lingua franca* in southern Mätäkkäl. Yet, there are intra- as well as inter-ethnic conflicts arising from various factors. Interestingly the communities have developed conflict resolution mechanisms which helped them to solve conflicts. Traditional community courts played a very significant role in keeping group as well as ethnic solidarity.

The research work aims at making a significant contribution in revealing the history and cultures of the frontier communities, their assimilation, forms of rule and incorporation. The research will contribute to the understanding of the peoples and cultures of the Ethiopian-Sudan borderlands, to aggression and the domination of minorities, to inter-ethnic relations, to conflicts and their resolutions in Ethiopia in particular and in Africa in general. The study is organised into six chapters including introduction and conclusions. There are appendices which include two letters, 13 maps and five pictures.

IZABELA ORLOWSKA, *Re-imagining Empire: Ethiopian Political Culture under Yohannis IV (1872–89)*, Dissertation in the Department of History, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London (Faculty of Arts and Humanities), defended on March 7, 2006 to obtain a Ph.D. in History.

This thesis is concerned with the question of how the Ethiopian monarchy reconstructed and reinvented itself after more than a century of decline. It examines the internal dynamics of this process, by utilising primary source materials in indigenous Ethiopian languages. The main sources used are chronicles commemorating the reign of Yohannis IV, the second of the monarchs who presided over the period widely regarded as marking the beginning of modern Ethiopian history. Chapter 1 outlines the main social and political themes essential for an understanding of Ethiopia in the late-nineteenth century. It deals with the origins of the national ideology, church-state relations, patron-client relations, the economic basis of society and land tenure. I then sketch the historical debate surrounding the period that provides the immediate context for the monarchy of Yohannis IV. Chapter 2 examines the rise to power of Yohannis and analyses this process by addressing understandings of authority, leadership and the role of charisma in the Ethiopian context. Chapter 3 examines how Solomonic genealogy and the religious symbols embedded in the glorious past of the monar-

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chy were mobilised by Yohannis to further his project of imperial reconstruction. Particular attention is paid to his coronation ceremony in 1872, as an example of the mobilization of imperial ideology, here expressed through the pageantry of political ritual. Chapters 4 and 5 look at the functioning of the Ethiopian political scene. Here oral sources supplement documentary material in order to identify new mechanisms and institutions that characterised the political culture of late 19th-century Ethiopia. Using historical narrative, reconstructed by tracing the lives and careers of prominent individuals on the political scene, I explain the dynamics of the centrifugal and centripetal forces that characterised centre-periphery relations. Chapter 6 examines the revived structure of the empire based on the concept of the king of kings and his relationship with his subordinate regional rulers. The nature of their relationship is explained by analysing ritualised political ceremonies, such as the act of submission, that express the hierarchy of authority and power.