



Aethiopia 14 (2011)

International Journal of Ethiopian and
Eritrean Studies

ANDREU MARTÍNEZ D'ALÒS-MONER, Universität Hamburg

Review

MAURO FORNO, *Tra Africa e Occidente. Il cardinal Massaja e la missione cattolica in Etiopia nella coscienza e nella politica europee*

Aethiopia 14 (2011), 288–292

ISSN: 1430–1938

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

by Alessandro Bausi

in cooperation with

Bairu Tafla, Ulrich Braukämper, Ludwig Gerhardt,
Hilke Meyer-Bahlburg and Siegbert Uhlig

Reviews

als Verbündete der Harari auf. Die Gurage, die heute eine nennenswerte Ethnie im Harariner Raum bilden, spielten damals noch keine Rolle.

Mit einem Vertreter der jüngeren, säkular gebildeten Generation bin ich erst in Deutschland durch die Zusammenarbeit mit Abdurahman Garad in Verbindung gekommen. Aber auch er hatte in seiner Jugend noch den *kabir gār* besucht, um dann auf eine weltliche Schule zu wechseln und in Addis Abäba und Deutschland zu studieren. Er sprach und schrieb arabisch, hatte aber auch Schwierigkeiten mit dem alten Harari. Da er sich nach seiner Rückkehr eine Staatsstelle erhoffte – und zeitweilig auch erhielt –, war seine Stellung zu beiden Regimen (er erlebte den Umbruch von 1991 in Deutschland) positiv. Er war gegen jedes Liebäugeln mit Somalia und vertrat die Integration Harärs in den äthiopischen Staat. Für private Notizen schrieb er das Harari mit dem äthiopischen und nicht mit dem arabischen Alphabet. Für die Oromo benutzte er allerdings noch das Wort Argatta und bat mich erst nach 1991, das Wort in den von uns gemeinsam herausgegebenen Texten in Oromo zu ändern.

Meine hier wiedergegebenen Eindrücke wurden nicht durch systematische Studien gewonnen, da meine Interessen anderweitig ausgerichtet waren, sie wurden eher nebenbei aufgeschnappt. Deshalb mag manches, was Desplat berichtet, auch schon für meine Zeit gegolten haben, etwa was eine skeptische Haltung zu den Schreinbesuchen betrifft. Ich habe es nur nicht bemerkt. Desplat war sehr viel länger in Harär als ich, hat innerhalb der Stadtmauer gewohnt und hatte mit mehr Informanten Kontakt, die er gezielt befragen konnte. Trotzdem mag es von Interesse sein, welchen Eindruck auf mich die Stadt und ihre Bevölkerung vor vierzig Jahren gemacht haben, vielleicht gerade wegen dessen, was man mir als Fremdem nicht erzählt hat.

Ewald Wagner, Universität Gießen

MAURO FORNO, *Tra Africa e Occidente. Il cardinal Massaja e la missione cattolica in Etiopia nella coscienza e nella politica europee*, Urbino: Il Mulino, 2009, 431 pp., an appendix (with six documents), a chronology, bibliography and index. Price: € 31.–. ISBN: 978–88–15–13349–6.

The figure of Guglielmo Massaja, the Capuchin missionary who lived for over three decades in Ethiopia during the second half of the 19th century, has long been the object of significant attention. As the book under review informs the reader up to 1967 about 2,150 titles had been written focusing on him (p. 14). In 1984 the re-edition of his memories appeared and in 1990 the Franciscan Order organized a workshop dedicated to their fellow mission-

ary.¹ Yet, most of the secondary literature produced until that date was tainted by ideological bias and failed to provide a satisfactory insight into the missionary's life, the historical context and his legacy. Recently, the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the birth of Massaja was the opportunity for renewed debate and discussion on this figure that resulted in two collective volumes, which included some valuable contributions.² Joining the momentum is Prof. Mauro Forno's study, which analyzes the political and missionary implications of Cardinal Massaja's work in Ethiopia and Europe. Although with this work the figure of Massaja has been far from exhausted, the book under review is bound to become a reference work for those interested in the Piedmontese missionary and for scholars of Ethiopian history and the early stages of the European colonization of Africa.

Mauro Forno is not new to historical writing and his study reflects the work of a mature historian and a skilled writer. A professor of political history at the University of Turin, he has authored at least five major monographs on Italian contemporary history, with particular focus on Catholic movements and the relationship between the press and politics, including under the Fascist regime. The author's acquaintance with Italian contemporary political history is well reflected in the present study, which is also his first important contribution on Ethiopian history. Therefore, the book, as the author states in the introduction, is centred on the diplomatic activities of Massaja in Europe and on his ideas, policies and strategies concerning the two main religious constituencies of the Horn of Africa, Christian Orthodoxy and Islam (pp. 17 and 19).

The work is structured in six chapters, which, following a chronological order, scrutinize the long-lived career of the Piedmontese missionary. The succession of two chapters with a similar title (chapter three: "Tra cristiani e musulmani" and chapter four: "Islam e Cristianesimo") might lead one to think that at least in some instances the choice of titles was rather poorly thought out. All in all, however, the thematic-temporal framework is satis-

¹ G. MASSAJA, *Memorie storiche del Vicariato Apostolico dei Galla, 1845–1880*, ed. by A. ROSSO, 6 vols. = *Collectanea Archivi Vaticani 10–15*, Città del Vaticano: Archivio Vaticano, 1984; The proceedings of the congress were published as *Atti del Convegno sul Card. G. Massaja all'Antoniano di Roma 24 febbraio 1990: Guglielmo Massaja, vicario apostolico dei Galla (Etiopia)*, Roma: Curia Generale OFM Cap. – Istituto Francese di Spiritualità, 1990.

² W. BLOCK (ed.), *Guglielmo Massaja 1809–2009. Missionario Cappuccino e Vicario apostolico in Etiopia: Atti del Convegno celebrato nel Collegio Internazionale di San Lorenzo da Brindisi (Roma, 9–10 giugno 2009)*, Roma: Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, 2009; P. MAGISTRI (ed.), *Guglielmo Massaja 1809–2009: All'Africa attraverso l'Africa*, Roma: Società Geografica Italiana, 2009.

factory and allows the author to focus on the changing vicissitudes of Massaja's travels and work. Furthermore, the chapters are subdivided in sub-chapters (a minimum of four and a maximum of nine) that convey rhythm to the narrative and indeed help the reader grasp the oftentimes complicated meanders of Massaja's movements and thoughts. In addition, the book includes an appendix with a few diplomatic-related documents, an extensive chronology of the friar's career and an index of proper names. The layout of the book, the impeccable editing and the choice of fonts reveal the fine editorship that is already a trademark of the Italian publishing industry and, specifically, of such publishing houses as the Bolognese Il Mulino.

As far as content is concerned, chapter one ("Nell'Europa della Restaurazione") sketches the historical and spiritual context in which Massaja was born and grew up. The political and religious tensions of the period and the life in Italy before unification are neatly outlined. Particularly insightful are the passages dedicated to Massaja's intellectual background (§ 2. Il rapporto con la politica and pp. 51, 53), of capital importance to understanding the shortcomings and virtues that this figure displayed during his missionary career in Africa. Chapter two ("La scelta missionaria") outlines the framework that led to the foundation of the Capuchin mission to the Oromo under the pontificate of Gregory XVI. An inaccuracy, however, needs to be noted here, namely the attribution to *nəguś Śārśä Dəngəl* (1563–1597), who is also wrongly presented as the immediate predecessor of *Susənyos* (1607–1632), of an overtly pro-Catholic policy (p. 95), which was actually the responsibility of two rulers not mentioned by the author, *Zädəngəl* and *Ya'əqob* (ruling intermittently from 1597 to 1607). In the next chapter ("Tra cristiani e musulmani") the narrative approaches the challenges faced by Massaja in establishing his mission at a particularly delicate, yet crucial, moment for Ethiopia, with the emergence of a centralizing power in the hands of *Tewodros II*. The chapter also explores the first diplomatic mission of the Capuchin friar (§ 8. Un possibile ruolo per l'Italia), who was approached by the small Kingdom of Sardinia with a view to establishing a treaty of friendship with Christian Ethiopia. Of note is the analysis of Massaja's strategy with the Orthodox Church and the local people (§ 9. L'approccio di Massaja alla tradizione cristiana in Africa orientale), which is presented as contradictory at times but also one that reveals an open minded and down to earth personality. Chapter four ("Islam e Cristianesimo") approaches Massaja's particular "Crusade" against Islam and his ambivalent position towards colonialism. Noteworthy are the passages dedicated to Massaja's diplomatic steps (§ 3. L'azione diplomatica and § 7. Nuovi tentativi diplomatici) and the concluding remarks on the friar's utopian quest for a primitive, more spiritual form of Catholicism (§ 9. Il bilancio di una pro-

spettiva). The fifth chapter (“Travagli e fine di un lungo apostolato”) dwells further on the political implications of Massaja’s activities. There the author convincingly nuances the well established image in historiography that has the Capuchin friar as an agent of Italian colonialism and instead presents him, once again, as a man imbued with the prejudices of his time, including a racist attitude towards Africans, but also capable of remarkable adaptation to the local African context and of open views (pp. 247, 252);³ the hypothesis is then raised of Massaja being indeed a forerunner of such a father of modern inculturation missioning as Daniel Comboni (§ 2. Quindici anni prima di Daniele Comboni). After all, a man who at the end of his career lived for over three decades in Africa in rather demanding conditions, who had travelled more than 6,000 kms, and had faced relentless opposition in Europe and Ethiopia, could not have been that misled. Finally, in the last section of the book (6: “I riconoscimenti pontifici”) the narrative addresses the last stages of Massaja’s life and events after his death, in particular his rise as a hero of the Church under Leo XIII and the failed processes for his beatification.

The shortcomings of the work are few and do not diminish the merit of the whole enterprise. However, for the sake of scrutiny they ought to be mentioned. Beyond those already pointed out above, it can be argued that the study could have benefited from an apparatus of illustrations, beginning with some pictures of the main political figures Massaja interacted with and proceeding to a comprehensive map showing the friar’s movements and presence in Ethiopia. Yet, probably here editorial policies had the upper hand. Moreover, the monumental memories authored by Massaja, the famous twelve-volume *I miei trentacinque anni di missione*, which constitutes the chief source for Forno’s study, although briefly reviewed in chapter six (§ 2. Le memorie massajane) could have been dealt with at greater length; in particular, the fascinating process by which the friar put together such a mass of memories, anecdotes and ideas seems to merit a more extensive exploration. Last but not least, as the author himself acknowledges in the opening pages, important facets of the Capuchin friar have been left untapped; these concern specifically Massaja’s work on Ethiopian soil but besides the friar’s interactions with the powerful little is said about his daily life, his informants and aides. Yet, for the sake of fairness, the selective approach taken by the author was, given the complexity of the figure, more

³ The image of Massaja as a champion of colonialism had been already convincingly rebuked in S. TEDESCHI, “Guglielmo Massaja e il colonialismo italiano”, *Rivista di studi politici internazionali* 57/3, 227, 1990, pp. 433–442.

Reviews

than justified and indeed the work becomes a perfect jumping off point from which other scholars can attempt to fill those gaps.

In a nutshell, Prof. Forno's work is a thorough piece of historiography. It is a well researched and well written study on one of the most fascinating figures that emerged from within the Catholic world in the 19th century. It provides a comprehensive insight into the deeds and mind of a man who mediated and moved across different worlds and who in so doing participated – willing or unwillingly – in shaping their future. The analysis of the diplomatic missions led by our figure in Europe and Ethiopia and the description of how his mind evolved in parallel to the changes affecting his native Europe and his host Ethiopia are the best parts of the work. Whilst some passages betray the admiration and liking of the author for his subject, the overall narrative is balanced and the historian has successfully escaped the traps of both hagiographic discourse and anti-clerical historiography. Neither a demon nor a saint, after Prof. Forno's study, Massaja, the missionary, the diplomat, the traveller, the observer and the religious leader, has gained in complexity. In addition Ethiopian Studies has also gained a reference work and the fact of it being written in *la bella lingua toscana* should not deter the scholar and the wider public from going through its pages and learning from it.

Andreu Martínez d'Alòs-Moner, Universität Hamburg

ALKE DOHRMANN – DIRK BUSTORF – NICOLE POISSONNIER (Hg.), *Schweifgebiete. Festschrift für Ulrich Braukämper* = Ethnologie Band 37, Berlin: LIT-Verlag, 2010. XII + 346 S., broschiert. Preis: € 34.90. ISBN: 978-3-643-10209-6.

Die Ethnologie hat sich in den letzten drei Jahrzehnten in immer mehr thematische und regionale Unterfelder differenziert, die von jeweils eigenen Spezialisten bestellt werden. Eine solche Vielfalt ist erst einmal nichts Schlechtes. Zu einem Sack voller Murmeln gerät sie aber, wenn das produzierte Wissen nicht mehr miteinander vernetzt wird. Mit der Bologna-Reform der Universitäten befinden wir uns auf dem besten Weg dorthin. Es droht die Zerfaserung der Ethnologie in voneinander mehr oder weniger isolierte "Regional Studies", die kaum mehr über den eigenen Tellerrand schauen. Dass Ulrich Braukämper, der Jubilar der zu besprechenden Festschrift, jemals von einem solchen Trend erfasst werden wird, steht wohl nicht zu befürchten. Braukämper ist noch ein echter Ethnologe mit breiten Sachkenntnissen und interdisziplinärer Einstellung, der den gesamten Su-