



Aethiopica 5 (2002)

International Journal of Ethiopian and
Eritrean Studies

SHIFERAW BEKELE

Review

UOLDELUL CHELATI DIRAR and GIANNI DORE, *Carte Coloniali: I documenti italiani del Fondo Ellero*

Aethiopica 5 (2002), 260–263

ISSN: 1430–1938

Published by

Universität Hamburg

Asien Afrika Institut, Abteilung Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

Hiob Ludolf Zentrum für Äthiopistik

Reviews

have disappeared altogether. One can only express one's gratitude to the sense of duty and obligation to scholarship that d'Avray displayed in publishing them. The sources brought together supplement the archival materials available in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ASMAI). The Habab are one of the few small ethnic groups on whose history and ethnography a considerable amount has already been written.* This book will be a very useful addition to this body of literature.

Shiferaw Bekele

UOLDELUL CHELATI DIRAR and GIANNI DORE, *Carte Coloniali: I documenti italiani del Fondo Ellero*. Torino: L'Harmattan Italia, 2000. 165 pp. + index. Price: LIT 31.000. ISBN: 88-87605-47-5.

Recently one notices a vigorous trend in the search for new sources on the history of Ethiopia and the Horn among the younger generations of European historians. The search requires establishing a good relationship with the descendants of the historical personalities who have left behind records. It involves winning their confidence. Or one has to have a personal connection of some kind with the family. Notable achievements have already been recorded.

Bairu Tafla's success in getting access to the papers of Alfred Ilg and in bringing to light hundreds of letters is nothing short of a *tour de force*. The book is a subject of another review in this journal. Paolo Borruso published the diary of his father (a functionary in Italian East Africa, 1937-1941) together with some extremely useful and original photographs (*Il mito infranto: La fine del "sogno africano" negli appunti e nelle immagini di Massimo Borruso, funzionario coloniale in Ethiopia, 1937-46*, Mandauria-Bari-Roma, 1997). He wrote an erudite introduction to the book in which he challenged some of the established views in Italian colonial historiography. Federica Guazzini discovered the existence of a large body of correspondence of Peleo Bacci, a colonial official in Eritrea at the turn of the 20th cen-

* Over the last two centuries, the Habab have attracted the attention of travelers, colonial functionaries and scholars who have given accounts of varying size and value (Munzinger, Sapeto, Baratieri, Visconti Terzi, Conti Rossini, Pollera and Crawford). Marco Lenci, the latest scholar to be interested in the Habab, has taken up the study of their history very seriously. He has already produced two useful and stimulating essays, "A margine dello "scandalo Livraghi". Crisi al vertice degli Habab (1890-1896)", *Studi Piacentini*, No. 19, 1996, pp. 127-142); and "Gli Habab d'Eritrea e il governatorato di Ferdinando Martini: dalla defezione alla sottomissione", *Africa*, LIV, 3, 1999, pp. 349-378. It appears that he has also directed a graduate student who has worked on an aspect of their history.

tury and used the material to weave a fascinating social history of colonial society in Asmara, the first of its kind for the Italian colonies of Eritrea and Somalia (Frammenti di realita coloniale nell'epistolario eritreo di Peleo Bacci, *Studi Piacentini*, 28, 2000, pp. 97–144).

The book under review falls into the same category. In many ways this is the biggest cache of sources to date. Giovanni Ellero was a highly educated colonial functionary-cum-scholar who came into Italian East Africa in 1937. Side by side with his official duties, he carried out extensive research. The result was some very useful publications and a large corpus of papers (correspondence, memoranda, reports and research notes). His promising scholarly career came to a premature end in 1942. His papers survived him. His family eventually decided to hand them over to the custody of the Department of History of the University of Bologna where they were deposited as *Fondo Ellero*. Irma Taddia of the same university was involved in the whole thing from the very beginning and after the deposition of the papers she put together, and coordinated, a team of scholars to work on them. They were Uoldelul Chelati Dirar, Gianni Dore, Alessandro Gori and Gianfrancesco Lusini. Several publications have already come out of the project.

Together with G. Dore, Taddia published essays (1993) introducing the Collection and Ellero to the wider community of scholars involved in Ethiopian and Eritrean studies. Gianfrancesco Lusini edited and reprinted Ellero's very useful but very rare articles making them accessible to a wider readership (GIOVANNI ELLERO, *Antropologia e storia d'Etiopia: Note sullo Scire, l'Enderta, i Tecruri e il Uolcait*, Udine, 1995, a cura di Gianfrancesco Lusini). Then, the team decided to prepare a catalogue to serve the users of the *Fondo*. They divided the material into two sections for the purpose. Each section was planned to constitute a volume. Uoldelul, Gori and Taddia catalogued all the letters written by Tigrean notables and Eritreans to colonial authorities and published them under the title, *Lettere Tigrine. I documenti etiopici del fondo Ellero* (Udine, 1997). This analytic catalogue presented 287 letters, most of them written in Amharic.

The second volume, edited by Uoldelul and Dore, is the book under review. It brings together a catalogue of no less than 361 documents – letters and dispatches, memoranda and reports, drafts of articles and maps. Almost all the documents were produced by colonial functionaries or, when they were done by the “natives”, they were written in Italian (p. 29). These documents constitute an important source for the reconstruction of the activities of colonial functionaries in the colony of Eritrea. They shed light on colonial administration. They also give readers insight into the personality and character of the scholar cum colonial functionary. (p. 27) They also contain valuable material on tributes, on the nature of ecclesiastical administration of the Ethiopian Church, on vari-

ous ethnic groups and on the anti-Italian Resistance movement in Welqayt. Indeed, there is no doubt that they are very useful for the history of Eritrea and Ethiopia. One can only welcome the efforts of the editors to put them into a systematic catalogue to help researchers.

Each catalogue is numbered and given a title that summarizes the subject of the document. Then it gives the date it was written, who wrote it and to whom it was addressed as well as the page numbers. A description of the manner in which it was produced – type-written or handwritten – follows. Then in italics a summary of the contents is given in two or three lines. Finally cross-reference is given to documents dealing with the same theme. The catalogue closes with an indication of the file and the title of the file. The summary of the content is so well done that the researcher knows exactly what to expect from each source. Hence, each catalogue gives the researcher just about everything that they need to identify the document that interests them and to locate it in the *Fondo Ellero*. One can even order copies of specific documents by modern electronic means. All of these save time and energy for the hard-pressed and fund-hungry scholar. One can only express one's gratitude to the editors who took out time from their busy schedule to prepare it. Therefore, this is a book that is worth being kept on one's shelves.

The book is equipped with two indices – an index of place names and another one of proper names. Between them the two tools help the reader to identify the material that interests him by short hand means rather than ploughing through the entire book. Nevertheless, they are not fully helpful because (economic and social) institutions are not included in this. For instance, if one wants to refer to all the sources dealing with tributes including *gult*, the reader will have to work his way through each entry. And this takes time.

The editors would have made the life of the researcher even easier if they had included a table or an index by subject – in other words, if they had also used the old system of classification by subject. For instance, there are lots of materials on Welqayt and on its churches and monasteries. It is true that many of them are listed consecutively. Yet, it would have made the book much more user friendly if all the pages had been listed against tributes. It is the same with monasteries and convents, with tributes and land, and with many other issues to which the documents seem to come back again and again.

Because the number of documents we are concerned with is not excessively big, the above shortcoming may not be regarded as a serious handicap. What is a very serious problem is, however, the question of, what I would like to call for want of a better term, logistics of research. It is very difficult even for well-endowed (or well-heeled) researchers coming from the richer countries of the North to find the funds to travel all the way to Bologna just to consult a couple of documents. It becomes near to impossible for re-

searchers of the Horn to make their way to the library of the Department of History of Bologna University.

At the end of the day, therefore, the best way to help research is to publish at least *select documents* preferably with annotations from the papers that were catalogued in Volumes One and Two. Short of publication, one can put them on CD-ROM because the relatively cheap electronics technology will definitely make them accessible to a much wider community of scholars. So even if we are grateful to the team of scholars for the work they have accomplished so far, we cannot but point out that the greater challenge lies ahead of them.

Shiferaw Bekele

ABERRA JEMBERE, *An Introduction to the Legal History of Ethiopia 1434–1974*. Münster: LIT Verlag 2000. 336 S. Preis: US\$ 29,95/Eur 20,90. ISBN: 3–8258–4776–4.

Das hier besprochene Werk ist sozusagen der erste Versuch, die äthiopische Rechtsgeschichte systematisch darzustellen. Der bekannte Jurist Aberra Jembere, der an der Law Faculty in Addis Ababa unterrichtet, hat sich dieser Aufgabe unterzogen. Die vorliegende besprochene Ausgabe ist eine überarbeitete Fassung einer juristischen Dissertation an der Erasmus Universität Rotterdam. Die Zeitspanne, die der Autor behandelt, reicht von 1434 bis 1974, d.h. die Phasen¹ vor der wichtigen Kodifikation, der Fetha Nagast, werden also nicht behandelt. Das Gleiche gilt für die äthiopische Revolution und ihre Einwirkung auf das Recht seit 1974. Es ist zutreffend, wenn der Autor darauf hinweist, daß ein solches Werk bisher gefehlt hat, wenn sich auch der Rezensent dadurch geschmeichelt fühlen darf, daß er von einem bekannten äthiopischen Historiker als Urheber der Erforschung der äthiopischen Rechtsgeschichte bezeichnet wurde. BAIRU TAFLA: The Dispensation of Justice in Traditional Ethiopia. An Appraisal of Legal Historiography, in: *Rechtsentstehung und Rechtskultur*, Hrsg. LOTHAR PHILIPPS und ROLAND WITTMANN, 1991, S. 91ff.

Teil eins des Buches befaßt sich mit den Quellen des äthiopischen Rechtes. Dadurch gleicht der Aufbau dem vor einigen Jahrzehnten geschriebenen und sehr verdienstvollen und noch benutzbaren Werk von Vanderlinden. Der zweite Teil befaßt sich mit der Anwendung geschriebenen und ungeschriebenen Rechtes auf dem Gebiet des Bodenrechtes. Teil drei leitet dann

¹ Siehe HABTE MARIAM ASSEFA, Die vorsätzlichen Tötungsdelikte ...