

h3ologie

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Akten der Ersten Internationalen  
Littmann-Konferenz  
2. bis 5. Mai 2002 in München

Herausgegeben von  
Walter Raunig und Steffen Wenig

2005

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden



## Philology and the Reconstruction of the Ethiopian Past<sup>1</sup>

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The article by Carlo Conti Rossini, *Appunti ed osservazioni sui re Zāguē e Takla Hāymānot*, published more than one hundred years ago (Conti Rossini 1895), can be rightly regarded as the first example of a systematic application of the philological method to the reconstruction of the Ethiopian past. In that essay the comparative presentation of the sources, accompanied by their scrupulous criticism, allowed the Italian scholar to determine some crucial dates of the medieval Ethiopian history. The analysis of the literary traditions had a twofold result: on the one hand, the reconstruction of the events which brought about the consolidation of the Zāg<sup>w</sup>ē dynasty (1137); on the other, the refutation of the narrative about the so-called Solomonic “re-establishment” (1270), for centuries imposed as the “true story” by the ecclesiastic milieu of Dabra Libānos of Šawā. In the first case, he clearly showed that the exploitation of the literary sources in Ge’ez could balance the deficiencies of the Arabic chronicles, by offering to the scholarly attention previously underestimated Ethiopic documents. Borrowing an expression from the text criticism one could apply here the motto *recentiores, non deteriores*, or, in other words: a later source is not inevitably less valid. In the second case, the contents of these traditions proved to be acceptable as a basis for further research only after a preliminary examination and comparison of the sources, in order to separate the documentary core from the later narrative inventions. This positivistic methodology presented in the 1895 essay was later improved by the same Conti Rossini,<sup>2</sup> chiefly thanks to the experience of his stay in Eritrea (1899-1903).<sup>3</sup> Yet, the premises were given, namely the necessity to regard Ethiopic literary traditions always as texts for political and religious propaganda, though sometimes built up by using sources and pieces of information useful to the modern historiographical purposes. Other components of this scientific work – namely, comparative linguistics, epigraphy or paleography – were involved in the general definition of philology as the historical science aimed at the criticism of the sources.

1 This paper was written during a semester spent at the University of Hamburg (October 2001 - March 2002), funded by the “Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung”, under the direction of Prof. Siegbert Uhlig, to whom I like to express my gratitude.

2 See, for instance, the second essay on the fall of the Zāg<sup>w</sup>ē dynasty: Conti Rossini 1922.

3 Scanty material for the intellectual biography of the Italian scholar can be found in a few articles by Lanfranco Ricci (1971-72; 1982; 1987; cp. 1986: 160-162). See also the documented commemorations by Enrico Cerulli (1949) and Martino Moreno (1950).



After more than a century of research, the methodological sensitiveness of the scholars in the field of Ethiopian studies is augmented. Today, the XIX<sup>th</sup> century meaning of philology necessarily includes text criticism: the importance of this exercise for the scientific reconstruction of the literary texts in Ge'ez, rather underestimated in the years of Conti Rossini, is now obvious.<sup>4</sup> Progressively, "young" disciplines like codicology and diplomatics (Lusini 1998: 5-16) are contributing to the knowledge of the ways how the written learning was passed over in Ethiopia since the Antiquity till nowadays. In the sphere of these developments the exploitation of the Ethiopic texts for the historiographical research never failed. Rather, today the need to take into account all the chances given by the constellation of disciplines composing the philology *lato sensu* – namely the criticism of the sources starting from their material consistency up to the analysis of their ideological construction – has become stronger than ever. Today, I want to present one more example of application of this approach to a highly meaningful episode of the Ethiopian history: the foundation of the cathedral in Aksum, taken in its relationships with the contemporary political frame. Particularly, I will examine the sources in order to verify the hypothesis that in these events a role was played by the king Kālēb/Ella Aṣbeḥā and to determine which consequences this initiative had in the formation of the ideology and the symbolics of the Ethiopian kingship.

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The Ge'ez hagiographic traditions commemorating the first steps of the Christian mission into the Kingdom of Aksum still present a serious dilemma to the scholars. For a long period the value of the medieval lucubrations around Libānos, the *Ṣādqān* and the "Nine Saints" as historical sources has been substantially admitted. Recently, a considerable scepticism has made its way (Marrassini 1981: 197 and 203; 1999a: 159), due to the big chronological distance between the years when such homiletic-hagiographic texts were written (XIV<sup>th</sup>-XV<sup>th</sup> c.) and the age they assume to refer to (V<sup>th</sup>-VII<sup>th</sup> c.): the matter, which – to tell the truth – has been known to the scholars since the very beginning (Conti Rossini 1928: 161). Moreover, the fact that the first generation of interpreters falsely reconstructed unlikely "Syriac" influences upon the first phase of the history of Ethiopian Christianity, relying mostly upon these Ge'ez traditions, contributed to the reappraisal of their value (Marrassini 1990; 1999b), as if the sources were partially responsible for the misinterpretation. That things are not exactly so can be easily proved. One can not leave out, for instance, the existence of archaeological confirmations to certain traditions, as a clear sign that such narratives must have a historical ground. Let's take, for instance, the *Gadla Libānos*, in which it is told that king Gabra Masqal's wife founded a church in Faqādā (Conti Rossini 1903:

4 Except a few isolated resistances of cultural and personal character, like those exhibited in Ricci 1997. For a survey see Marrassini 1987.

32): near the actual Foqād the remnants of an Aksumite temple alleged that certain traditions they made on the ruins appearing mysterious in order to interpret the written sources like the order to interpret the pre-ages.<sup>7</sup> Though this can also taken into account.

First, the supposed Aksumite saints requires missionaries coming from Aksum simply postponed, and it back to different times, where there exists an unbroken written down inside the chain that the perception "origins" are often present in chronographical texts.<sup>8</sup> The nastic genealogies,<sup>9</sup> in spite up the documentary gap time by silence or by inserting the medieval times is in reliability of the hagiographic some cases already provided several centuries a

5 On the site see Godet 19

6 Described in Conti Rossini 25) and 24.

7 As in the case, for instance, in Eritrea. One can see the example "the angāreb of San Dainelli - Marinelli 1912.

8 On this special literature see 1982; 1983; 1988; 1989. see Haile 2000.

9 Getatchew Haile 1982-83.

10 Among the more recent see

11 Starting from the meaning of *Mark*: Getatchew Haile sense one can interpret by order of king Lalibala



32): near the actual Foqādā, in Dahānē ('Agāmē)<sup>5</sup> among ruins of important buildings, the remnants of an Aksumite church stand out.<sup>6</sup> Sometimes the possibility has been alleged that certain traditions were invented to justify the presence of archaeological ruins appearing mysterious to the eyes of the local people, as the result of the impression they made on the "naïve" Ethiopian minds. This kind of explanations treats the written sources like the oral traditions, which different communities elaborated in order to interpret the presence on their territory of ancient ruins of undetermined past ages.<sup>7</sup> Though this can sometimes be true, yet in our case other elements should be also taken into account.

First, the supposed *a posteriori* attribution of certain ruins to the age of the Aksumite saints requires in any case the existence of the traditions related to the missionaries coming from *Rom*, i.e. the Byzantine Empire. In other words, the problem is simply postponed, and the origins of the legend, recorded by many sources dating back to different times, would continue to ask for an explanation. Second, in Ethiopia there exists an unbroken tradition of recording historical memories, gathered and written down inside churches and monasteries (Lusini 2001a). It is on this cultural chain that the perception of the past – and of its distance – relies, and the Aksumite "origins" are often present in the XIV<sup>th</sup>-XV<sup>th</sup> c. Ethiopian literature, particularly in the chronographical texts.<sup>8</sup> The royal lists (Conti Rossini 1909), for instance, and the monastic genealogies,<sup>9</sup> in spite of their obvious deficiencies, express the need of filling up the documentary gaps, which the learned men were forced to remedy time after time by silence or by invention. Third, the Aksumite literary heritage transmitted to the medieval times is in no way negligible<sup>10</sup> and the radical scepticism toward the reliability of the hagiografic traditions doesn't take into account the possibility, in some cases already proved, that certain texts could have been written again or updated several centuries after their first draft.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, the iconological study of the

5 On the site see Godet 1977: 37 and 47 (without registration of the Christian ruins).

6 Described in Conti Rossini 1925: 484-489 (29. Le rovine di Dahané); Bausi 1999: 18 (note 25) and 24.

7 As in the case, for instance, of the Arātu ruins, Māy Awālid valley, in the 'Ansabā basin (Karan, Eritrea). One can see there a monumental podium with stairs, called by the local people "the angāreb of Samaraččon", with reference to the traditional genealogies; Piva 1907; Dainelli - Marinelli 1912: 525-527; Godet 1980-82: 81-82.

8 On this special literature see particularly the works of Otto Neugebauer: 1979; 1979a; 1981; 1982; 1983; 1988; 1989. For a recent edition of one of the most important texts see Getatchew Haile 2000.

9 Getatchew Haile 1982-83; 1992; Lusini, forthcoming.

10 Among the more recent studies see Bausi 1998, and Voicu 1998: 19-23.

11 Starting from the meaningful case of the Old Testament: see now Knibb 1999. The *Acts of Mark*: Getatchew Haile 1981. The *Ancoratus* of Epiphanius: Proverbio 1997. In the same sense one can interpret the text coincidences between the dedicatory inscription engraved by order of king Lālibalā (about 1186-1225) on the *manbara tābot* of the Golgotā church, in

(continued...)



illustrated cycles of the medieval Ethiopian manuscripts, with their proved connection to the early Byzantine patterns, not unknown in the V<sup>th</sup>-VII<sup>th</sup> c. Aksum, is another sign of the capability of the Ethiopian tradition to transmit ancient elements for centuries.<sup>12</sup>

In one case at least the evidences lead to contradict the more radical manifestations of scepticism. This is the case with a monastic centre and the related documents, both considered ancient by the ecclesiastical tradition and actually tracing back to a period preceding the XIV<sup>th</sup>-XV<sup>th</sup> c. Among the land charters gathered in the *Golden Gospel* of Dabra Libānos, no. 7<sup>13</sup> contains the text of a land grant, donated (*wababku*) by king Lālibalā (about 1186-1225) to the Eritrean monastery (*laMaṛā' za'Abām*). The text is dated 1225 and there is little doubt about its authenticity. The title *baḏāni Lālibalā*, imitating that of the Aksumite inscription of Dān'ēl (VIII<sup>th</sup>/IX<sup>th</sup> c.), the royal formula *be'esi 'āzāl za'iyetmawwā 'laḏar*, reproducing the one used by the kings of Aksum, the technical verb *aksamku* describing the deed's promulgation (cp. the words *zentu kesum* below in the same text), with a possible etymological reference to the name of the city of Aksum itself<sup>14</sup> – all these elements let one believe the document and its datation true. Consequently, it testifies not only that Dabra Libānos already existed in the XII<sup>th</sup>/XIII<sup>th</sup> c., but also that the high prestige of the convent was acknowledged by the king. Thanks to these elements, one can admit that the Ge'ez texts related to the appearance of Christianity in Ethiopia were drawn up using oral or written sources which, among the inventions of the literary genre, had preserved the memory of ancient facts. The identification of those facts remains the responsibility of the researchers.

If manuscripts of hagiographic texts older than XIV<sup>th</sup> c. are not known this is owed to the simple fact that the final composition of the *gadhāt* is recent. In fact, thanks also to the recovery of the traditions pivoting on the Aksumite saints, an official version of the events related to the Christianization of Ethiopia was imposed in the XIV<sup>th</sup>-XV<sup>th</sup> c., serving the political and religious ambitions of the kings. The result was, in a way, an attempt of philological reconstruction, based on the *Kebra nagašt* and having as a

11 (...continued)

the capital of the Zāg<sup>wē</sup> kingdom (Gigar Tesfaye 1984), and the homily *Ba'enta sanbatāt*, written by the Ethiopian metropolitane or by another authoritative clergyman in the first half of XIV c. (Lusini 1993: 130-175). The list of the corresponding passages is the following: Lusini 1993: 132, ll. 13-15 = Gigar Tesfaye 1984: 115 (side 1, ll. 1-2); Lusini 1993: 144, ll. 19-20 = Gigar Tesfaye 1984: 115 (side 2, ll. 3-4); Lusini 1993: 154, li. 14 - 156, li. 6 = Gigar Tesfaye 1984: 115 (side 2, li. 12) - 116 (side 2, li. 16). Since the two texts cannot be interdependent, one must admit that they separately exploited an ancient source, like a canonical collection similar to the *Sēnodos*, apparently already existing in the Aksumite age; see Lusini 2001: 556-557.

12 For some case studies see Fiaccadori 1993 and 1995, and the analysis in Balicka-Witakowska 1997.

13 Conti Rossini 1901: 189-192; see also Bausi 1997: 13-23.

14 Ricci 1994: 188-190; for a different hypothesis see Müller 1998.

target the establishment of a mon eschatological destiny. The origins of these political and religious traditions between the 1270 turning point provoked the composition of documents describing the decisive events (Conti Rossini 1899: 216).

An emblematic case is the tradition of the rulers whom the tradition identifies as the founders of the Kingdom of Aksum. The personalities of the same Kālēb/Ella Aṣbeḥā, son of about 525, imposed the Christianization (Brakmann 1994: 81-96) of origin, ruling over South of Ḥimyar, Yūsuf As'ar Yarar, two kingdoms (Conti Rossini 1901: 189-192) the re-elaboration of ancient traditions.

A passage in the *Maṣṣā'ir* church<sup>15</sup> to Abrehā and Aṣbeḥā known tradition claims: *la'abgura 'ityoṣyā* – both main sanctuaries of the Eritrean church (Krencker 1906: 3; Lenski 1991: 100) dral traces back to an old tradition on the basis of different inscriptions (VI<sup>th</sup> c. has to be considered) between the pro-Byzantine and the trade routes along the Red Sea by the ideological and religious entities, both claiming to be the picture, and provides a view of Aksum. Its foundation was

15 Conti Rossini 1909-10: 3.

16 Krencker 1913: 136-140; Hay 1991: 209; Phillips 1991: 100; dral of Maryam Ṣeyon).



target the establishment of a fundamental thesis: the political alliance and the common eschatological destiny of the Byzantine emperor and the Aksumite king. The origins of these political and religious beliefs are ancient, but it was in the years between the 1270 turning point and the reign of Zar'a Yā'qob (1434-1468) that they provoked the composition of such texts as the *Fekkārē Iyasus* and the *Rā'eya Šenutē*, describing the decisive role to be played by the Ethiopian king at the end of times (Conti Rossini 1899: 216; Fiaccadori 1992: 80-81).

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An emblematic case is the story of Abrehā and Aṣbeḥā, the mythical couple of brothers whom the tradition – refreshing the memory of the IV<sup>th</sup> c. Kings 'Ēzānā and Sā'ezānā – claims credit for having promoted the introduction of Christianity into the Kingdom of Aksum. The origins of the legend, starting from the association of two personalities of the same age, have been reconstructed since long time. Aṣbeḥā is Kālēb/Ella Aṣbeḥā, son and successor of Tāzēnā at the end of V<sup>th</sup> c., the king who, about 525, imposed the political authority of Aksum on both sides of the Red Sea (Brakmann 1994: 81-96). Abrehā is the name of the Christian leader, of Ethiopian origin, ruling over South Arabia a few years after Kālēb's victory on the king of Ḥimyar, Yūsuf As'ar Yaṭ'ar, called *Du Nuwās*, and the temporary unification of the two kingdoms (Conti Rossini 1928: 259). In this case, too, the myth seems to contain the re-elaboration of ancient facts transmitted in some way up to XIV<sup>th</sup>-XV<sup>th</sup> c.

A passage in the *Maṣḥafa Aksum* ascribes the foundation of the Māryām Ṣeyon church<sup>15</sup> to Abrehā and Aṣbeḥā, an element which deserves our attention. As a well-known tradition claims, Aksum is the “mother of the Ethiopian towns” (*'emmon la'abgura 'ityoḥyā*) – both because of its antiquity and because of the presence of the main sanctuary of the Ethiopian Christianity in it, the *gabaza 'aksum* (Littmann - Krencker 1906: 3; Lensi 1937). The archaeological evidence confirms that the cathedral traces back to an old date,<sup>16</sup> probably to the years of Kālēb, as one can suppose on the basis of different indications. First, the historical situation of the first half of the VI<sup>th</sup> c. has to be considered. It was dominated by the economic and political conflict between the pro-Byzantine Ethiopia and the pro-Sassanian Yemen for the control of the trade routes along and around the Red Sea (Harmatta 1974; Loundine 1974), and by the ideological and religious confrontation between the two monotheistic communities, both claiming to be the *Verus Israël*. The annexation of Ḥimyar completes the picture, and provides a valid context for the construction of a big Christian Temple in Aksum. Its foundation would then be tied to the military victory of the Ethiopian

15 Conti Rossini 1909-10: 3 (text) and 3 (transl.)

16 Krencker 1913: 136-140; Monneret de Villard 1938: 21-31; Contenson 1963: 3-14; Munro-Hay 1991: 209; Phillipson 1997: 114-116; Munro-Hay 2002: 308-315 (History of the Cathedral of Maryam Ṣeyon).



Christianity, that is to the historical defeat of the Yemenite Judaism. A piece of evidence in support of this idea is the inscription Kālēb wrote in order to commemorate an expedition against the Ag<sup>w</sup>ēzāt, namely the passage reading (ll. 36-38): WGBZH / ḤNŠK WQDSK BḤYL 'GZ' BHR W'R'YN 'GZ' B/ḤR QDSH WNBK DB Z MNBR, "I build its *gabaz* and I consecrated it by the Lord's strength. Lord revealed me its holiness and I sat down on this throne". The temptation is strong to recognize in this passage a reference to the *gabaza 'aksum*, i.e. to the cathedral: this would be a contemporary evidence of its construction, tracing back straight to the first half of the VI<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>17</sup> The emphasis the text gives to the motif of the holiness descending from God and investing the building through the king appears symbolic of a religious belief in which an essential role is played by the Temple. As a confirmation, it can also be considered that, from this time on, the word *gabaz* appears as an element in royal names such as Ella gabaz,<sup>18</sup> or Zagabaz[a Aksum], successor of Kālēb, and Terdā' gabaz,<sup>19</sup> the mythical princess whom the tradition ascribes a political role in the times preceding the consolidation of the Zāg<sup>w</sup>ē dynasty. Though the occasion for the writing of the Kālēb's text is provided by an expedition against the Ag<sup>w</sup>ēzāt, the inscription contains an explicit reference to the victory on Ḥimyar in the passage immediately preceding the celebration of the new cathedral (ll. 34-35): W'T WHBN SM 'BY KM 'DB' ḤMR WFNWK Ḥ / YN SLBN ZSMR MSL 'ḤZBY WTKLK MQDS BḤMR, "He gave me a big name in order I fought against ḤMR. I sent ḤYN SLBN ZSMR with my army and I founded a sanctuary in ḤMR" (Drewes 1978: 27-32; Munro-Hay 1991: 230). It is a little surprise that there is no reference to the name of Māryām Ṣeyon or to the medieval image of the church, tied to the later myth of the transfer of the Ark. In fact, in the course of the centuries the symbolism of the cathedral certainly underwent remarkable changes, not less than its external appearance, even if in both eras – the Aksumite and the medieval – its role as sanctuary of the *Verus Israël* appears central.

As far as the onomastics is concerned, it has been observed that the names of the Christian Aksumite kings can provide useful data for the historical reconstruction, confirming the picture already drawn. After 'Ēzānā and up to Kālēb, names like Ouazebas, Eon,<sup>20</sup> MHDYS,<sup>21</sup> Ebana, Nezoal (Nezana), Ousas (Ousana, Ousanas) and Tāzēnā don't exhibit meaningful changes in comparison with the pre-Christian tradition. Starting from Kālēb (about 510-530), instead, a model inspired by the Old Testa-

ment appears,<sup>22</sup> reflected (ca.) and Iōēl (600 ca.), certain.<sup>23</sup> Apparently, the ment and at the same time and military strategy. In rival and the unification logical display based on the foundation of the ne this sense another ewid Ḥimyarites, ch. 48 (= fir said to have brought n house<sup>24</sup> with him. The aristocracy actually took seems to contain a refi brought forward by the the transfer of the Ark, Bayna Leḥekem's arrival ite families.

As a part of the sar Ḥimyar the Ethiopian re ics against the people g ticed by external observ 1993: 27). These "Judaic uted to old and obscur More likely, we are det conflict can give rise to case in the form of a c founding myth of the I nagašt,<sup>28</sup> receives an etries, according to whi

17 Schneider 1974: 770-777 = Bernard et al. 1991: no. 191.

18 Munro-Hay 1991: 89, 93, 187 and 194, who suggests the identification of Ella Gabaz with W'ZB; yet, see Lusini 2001a: 553, who assumes the sequence: Kālēb (about 510-530), Ella Gabaz (about 530-534), W'ZB/Gabra Masqal, son of Kālēb (about 534-548).

19 Conti Rossini 1921-23: 374-375 (8. Sul nome proprio di donna Terdā' gabaz).

20 The reading Nōe is in contrast with the direction of the writing; the suggestion traces back to Littmann 1913a: 55, followed by Hahn 2001: 125.

21 The interpretation of this name as Matthia is in contrast with the documentary evidence; the suggestion is in Hahn 2001: 127.

22 Marrassini 1994: 206; 1

23 See Joshua 15,13-19 (K (Ḥataz), Nehemia 11,9

24 Moberg 1924: 56a, II. I

25 Ullendorff 1956; 1968 1973.

26 Smith 1981; 1992: 95-1 Ethiopia and Eritrea

27 According to the print 1964; 1964 a; 1965; 19

28 In fact, the oral traditi from the one exploited



ment appears,<sup>22</sup> reflected in the names of Israēl (550 ca.), Gersem (580 ca.) Ḥataz (590 ca.) and Iōēl (600 ca.), whose relationship with episodes of the history of Israel is certain.<sup>23</sup> Apparently, the establishment of the Christian faith, rooted in the Old Testament and at the same time strongly anti-Judaic, arose from the anti-Ḥimyarite political and military strategy. In other words, the dissolution of the economic and religious rival and the unification of the two kingdoms supported the elaboration of an ideological display based upon the transfer of the holiness and symbolically expressed by the foundation of the new Temple of the *Verus Israēl*, i.e. the cathedral of Aksum. In this sense another evidence is instructive, namely a passage from the *Book of the Ḥimyarites*, ch. 48 (= fragm. xxvii<sup>v</sup>), in which Kālēb, after his victory on Du Nuwās, is said to have brought many prisoners and fifty princes of the South-Arabian royal house<sup>24</sup> with him. The chance that this transfer of members of the Yemenite Jewish aristocracy actually took place should not be ruled out, and in any case the Syriac text seems to contain a reference to a strategy of political and religious integration brought forward by the Aksumite king. The *Kebrā nagašt*, too, after all, talking about the transfer of the Ark, makes use of a similar literary device, when it narrates of Bayna Leḥekem's arrival in Ethiopia – together with the first-borns of the main Israelite families.

As a part of the same process, in the years following the military conflict with Ḥimyar the Ethiopian religious culture, though keeping a constant "Christian" polemic against the people guilty of deicide, acquired an ever stronger Judaic mark, noticed by external observers at least from the XI<sup>th</sup> c. (Taddesse Tamrat 1972: 209; Lusini 1993: 27). These "Judaic" features of the Ethiopian Christianity have been often attributed to old and obscure religious contacts with Jewish communities or missions.<sup>25</sup> More likely, we are dealing with a phenomenon described in sociology: an external conflict can give rise to new manifestations of ethnicity inside a community,<sup>26</sup> in our case in the form of a conscious *imitatio Veteris Testamenti*.<sup>27</sup> In this context, the founding myth of the Ethiopian kingship, related in its official form by the *Kebrā nagašt*,<sup>28</sup> receives an explanation more plausible than the commonly accepted theories, according to which the story would express unlikely collective memories of

22 Marrassini 1994: 206; 1995: 8; Hahn 2001: 124-128; Hahn - Kropp 2000.

23 See Joshua 15,13-19 (Kālēb), Genesis 35,10 (Israēl), Exodus 2,22 (Gersem), 1Chronicles 4,13 (Ḥataz), Nehemia 11,9 (Iōēl).

24 Moberg 1924: 56a, ll. 17-18 (text), p. CXLII (translation); Shahīd 1963.

25 Ullendorff 1956; 1968: 73-115; Hammerschmidt 1965; Pawlikowski 1971-72; Isaac 1972; 1973.

26 Smith 1981; 1992: 95-101. An application of these principles to the state building process in Ethiopia and Erythrea is in Clapham 2000.

27 According to the principles effectively applied in the articles by Maxime Rodinson: 1963; 1964; 1964 a; 1965; 1972. See also Marrassini 1987b, and Lusini 1993: 27-31.

28 In fact, the oral tradition transmitted ancient and important versions of the legend, different from the one exploited in the *Kebrā nagašt*; see Littmann 1904: 13-40.



Ethiopian past dominated by indefinite Jewish (Solomon) and South-Arabian (the Queen of Sheba) presences. Accordingly, the capital city of the Ethiopian State received the religious attributes of a "New Jerusalem", among which the central place was occupied by the foundation of the cathedral, intentionally imitating the church of the Holy Sepulchre, or inspired by the plan of a Constantinian basilica (Heldman 1993; 1992: 227). Probably the model lying under the simultaneous celebration of both the capital and its king derives from the contacts between Aksum and Byzantium, as the same is characteristic for a complex of traditions connected to the Roman emperors (Cerulli 1974; Marrassini 1983). In fact, the VI<sup>th</sup>-VII<sup>th</sup> conflicts with Persians and Arabs about the defence and the consolidation of the eastern borders of the Empire provided an occasion for the development of two interrelated images: Constantinople as the "New Zion" and the emperor as an earthly figure of the heavenly βασιλεὺς, both destined to last for several centuries (Patlagean 1994: 459-461; 1998). The "Byzantine" model allowed the Ethiopian king to face the more severe criticism pronounced against his earthly functions (Lusini 2001a), as those exhibited in the *Shepherd* of Hermas<sup>29</sup> or in the *Antichrist* of Hyppolitus<sup>30</sup>, so that he could begin to claim for himself the immanent role of defender of the faith (Marrassini 1993: 22-39) and the eschatological function of guide of all the Christians till the end of times (Lusini 1999b). Apparently, the *terminus ante quem* of this sacralization of the highest Ethiopian authority seems to be provided by the two inscriptions of the *haḍāni* Dān'ēl, the lord of Aksum who, in the VIII<sup>th</sup> or IX<sup>th</sup> c., defined himself as a member of a monastery near the capital (*walda dabra ferēm*).<sup>31</sup> The most ancient evidence of the fulfilled process is in Abū Ṣāliḥ, the Arab writer of Armenian origin who, reporting the information obtained by travellers between the end of the XII<sup>th</sup> c. and the beginning of the XIII<sup>th</sup> c., retold the legend of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba and celebrated Ethiopia not only as the land pretending to own the Ark of the Covenant, but also because this Country was ruled by kings devoted to religious life (Evetts 1969: 284-288; Marrassini 1994: 206).

29 Abbadie 1860; Dillmann 1861; Beylot 1988; Raineri 1993; Piovaneli 1994: 329-330; 1993: 197-199; Lusini 1999a; 2001c. Greek Text: Körtner - Leutzsch 1998: 105-497.

30 Greek Text: Norelli 1987. Ethiopic version: Caquot 1965; Beylot 1991.

31 Littmann 1913b: nos. 12 and 13 = Bernand et al. 1991: nos. 193 I-II; Fiaccadori 1996: 327-328 (II. Dabra Ferēm).

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## A "Missing" Letter Queen Victoria's

Richard Pankhurst

Emperor Téwodros of Ethiopia, despoiled by the British Government, despatched an envoy Hormuzd Rassam to London in 1869. Theodore (London, 1869). Thirty-four of them were in Amharic letters are preserved in the Department, and are included in *Tewodros and His Contem*. "missing" letters deserve so

The first of these letters preserved in the India Office apparently on 4 February. The letter had been "sent to his [Tewodros] after it had been transitively done", as the original surfaced in the years that followed the British looting of Maqḍala. The articles, appear to have paid

The second letter missing (1994: 186) was written two days after the discovery of the sight something of a mystery. The National Library in Addis Ababa separated from the King's collection in Addis Ababa was not until 1990" (Rubenson 1994: 292).

How this letter became missing is a matter of conjecture, though discussed below.

The question as to how the letter came to be in the British Library can, however, be answered in London in 1956 by I

1 On the looting of Maqḍala.