

ISTITUTO PER L'ORIENTE "C.A. NALLINO"
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI NAPOLI "L'ORIENTALE"

RASSEGNA DI STUDI ETIOPICI

Vol. 4

3^a Serie

(LI)



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– All correspondence should be addressed to:

Redazione Rassegna di Studi Etiopici
Dipartimento Asia, Africa e Mediterraneo
Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”
Piazza S. Domenico Maggiore 12 – 80134 Napoli, Italy
e-mail: redazione@unior.it
Segretario di redazione – Editorial Secretary: MASSIMO VILLA

Direttore Responsabile – Director: GIANFRANCESCO LUSINI

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Ai lettori

Questo quarto volume della “3^a Serie” della *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici* (cinquantunesimo dalla fondazione della rivista) costituisce il risultato del costante impegno che alcuni accademici italiani, in servizio presso l'Orientale di Napoli, stanno approfondendo allo scopo di rilanciare gli studi ‘classici’ sulle culture dell'Eritrea e dell'Etiopia. In tempi in cui è irreversibilmente entrata in crisi la nozione stessa di studi orientali e africani, al crocevia dei quali va collocata anche l'etiopistica come scienza storica, l'apertura verso le più recenti tendenze della ricerca, e insieme la riaffermazione del ruolo cardinale di alcune discipline – dall'archeologia alla storia dell'arte, dalla filologia alla linguistica – sono i due pilastri che concorrono a sostenere questa nuova fase della vita della *Rassegna*, a quasi ottant'anni dalla sua creazione. Ora che molti Paesi, dal Nord America all'Estremo Oriente, stanno mostrando un'attenzione crescente per le culture dell'Eritrea e dell'Etiopia, il gruppo di lavoro che cura la pubblicazione di questo periodico coltiva l'ambizione di proporre alla comunità internazionale degli studiosi un luogo per lo scambio di idee ed esperienze, senza alcun interesse per gli steccati nazionali.

Il saggio d'apertura fornisce un esempio di come la documentazione etnologica di prassi artigianali di antica tradizione, ancora coltivate nel Tigray orientale, associata al confronto fra i prodotti moderni e i ritrovamenti archeologici, possa indicare nuove e interessanti prospettive di conoscenza storica (Michela Gaudiello). L'applicazione dei principi della critica del testo a un'opera della letteratura agiografica in gə'əz, il cruciale *Gädlä Filāpos* di Däbrä Libanos, è la premessa per uno studio di storia della tradizione finalizzato alla prossima riedizione della fonte in base a un più ampio repertorio di testimoni manoscritti (*Abba Petros Solomon*). L'edizione e traduzione del trattato cosmologico trasmesso dal ms. BnF Éth. Abb. 109 è occasione per riconsiderare un filone di ricerche meritevole di attenzione, quello della diffusione nell'Etiopia medievale e moderna di idee filosofico-scientifiche di provenienza mediterranea. A tematiche squisitamente antropologiche ci porta lo studio del ruolo che il ‘matrimonio forzoso’ e il ‘rapimento’ svolgono in una società tradizionale come quella dei Bashada, in precario equilibrio fra violenza di genere e risposte politiche alle richieste di rispetto dei diritti fondamentali della persona (Susanne Eppler).

Infine, piace menzionare che l'anno accademico si è aperto all'Orientale con un evento scientifico organizzato dagli stessi studiosi che attendono alle uscite annuali della *Rassegna*, ovvero le due *Giornate di studi eritrei ed etiopici in memoria di Carlo Conti Rossini (1872-1949)*, celebratesi il 16 e 17 ottobre 2019. Una ventina di ricercatori provenienti da tutta Europa hanno contribuito al colloquio con comunicazioni di ampio respiro, che vedranno la luce nel prossimo numero di questa rivista. Con tale iniziativa si è inteso promuovere l'inizio di una riflessione profonda sulle prospettive della ricerca italiana ed europea, a partire da una esame critico e privo di reticenze sull'impostazione culturale dello studioso italiano che più di ogni altro ha dato un impulso decisivo alla nascita dell'etiopistica internazionale. Qui, basti sottolineare che la consapevolezza, espressa da più relatori, dei limiti e dei meriti insiti nelle ricerche imbastite dal fondatore di questa rivista costituisce la base più solida per il progresso dei nostri studi. Al conseguente approfondimento della ricerca e al riconoscimento dell'esistenza stessa di più scuole di etiopistica nel panorama scientifico internazionale i redattori della *RSE* intendono contribuire anche garantendo la continuazione di questo periodico.

Il Direttore

To the readers

This fourth volume of the “3^a Serie” of the *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici* (the fifty-first since the establishment of the journal) is the result of the ongoing effort by a group of Italian academics, who work at the University of Naples “L’Orientale”, to relaunch the ‘traditional’ approaches to Eritrean and Ethiopian cultures. At a time when the very notion of Oriental and African studies has been irreversibly challenged, the field of Ethiopistics, which has always been situated at the crossroads of these academic traditions, has had to open up to new research trends, while also reaffirming the value of disciplines such as archaeology, art history, textual criticism, and linguistics. Almost eight years after its creation, the *Rassegna* provides a platform for those working within these two theoretical and historical frameworks. Now that numerous countries, from North America to the Far East, are paying an increasing attention to the Eritrean and Ethiopian cultures, the working group entrusted with editing this journal nurtures the ambition to provide the international scientific community with a forum where ideas and experiences can be exchanged across disciplinary and national boundaries.

The opening essay gives an example of how an ethnological study of ancient handcraft practices, which are still in use in Eastern Tigray, can provide new and interesting historical perspectives by comparing the contemporary production of artefacts with archaeological research (Michela Gaudiello). The application of textual criticism to a work that belongs to the corpus of hagiographic literature in Gəʿəz, the *Gädlä Filəpos* of Däbrä Libanos, serves as a basis for a study of the history of the tradition, with the aim of a new edition of this important source that treasures a wider number of handwritten witnesses (Abba Petros Solomon). The edition and translation of a cosmological treatise transmitted by ms. BnF Éth. Abb. 109 draws attention to a question that is worthy of further consideration, that of the transmission of philosophical and scientific ideas from the Mediterranean to mediaeval and modern Ethiopia (Carsten Hoffmann – Klaus Geus). Finally, an anthropological analysis of the causes and consequences of ‘forced marriage’ and ‘abduction’ in a traditional society such as that of the Bashada, serves as an avenue for considering the unsteady balance between gender violence and respect of the fundamental rights of the individual (Susanne Eppler).

It is worth mentioning that the academic year of the University of Naples “L’Orientale” opened with a scientific event organized by the same scholars involved in the yearly publication of the *Rassegna*, namely the two *Giornate di studi eritrei ed etiopici in memoria di Carlo Conti Rossini (1872-1949)*, held on the 16 and 17 October 2019. About twenty researchers from all over Europe contributed to the colloquium through wide-ranging papers that will be published in the next issue of this journal. The aim of the initiative was to promote the beginning of a profound reflection on the perspectives of Italian and European research, starting from a critical and unhesitant examination of the cultural approach of the Italian scholar who primarily gave a decisive impulse to the birth of an international field of Ethiopistics. Here, suffices it to stress that the awareness, expressed by several speakers, of limits and merits inherent in the researches carried out by the founder of this journal provides the most solid basis for the progress of our studies. The editors of the *Rassegna* intend to foster and contribute to a deeper understanding of the historiography of the discipline by recognizing that in the contemporary context several schools of Ethiopian studies exist and by assuming responsibility for the continued publication of this journal.

The Director

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Cover image: Museo Archeologico e d'Arte della Maremma (Grosseto), Ms. inv. 191, *Four Gospels*, the Evangelist Luke, detail of the stool, f. 97v (photo CaNaMEI 2019).

Marie-Laure Derat, *L'énigme d'une dynastie sainte et usurpatrice dans le royaume chrétien d'Éthiopie, XI^e-XIII^e siècle* (Hagiologia 14). Brepols, Turnhout 2018, 330 pp. ISBN 978-2-5035-7908-5

One of the most puzzling and fascinating of the Ethiopian history, the period of the Zag^we rulers, which as known predates the so-called Solomonic restoration in 1270, keeps raising even today manifold questions and calling for synthesis efforts. The narrative of the Zag^we dynasty, indelibly associated with king Lalibäla and the homonymous complex of monolithic churches (Wärwär, Amhara), is rife with polarizations and peculiar paradoxes: a dynasty, governed through an unclear matrilineal principle of power transmission, which embodied a temporary Cushitic «revanche» against the predominant Semitic leadership, and moved the geopolitical core of the kingdom from the North, where the ancient city of Aksum lies, to the newly-founded capital city in the South. Is this traditional historiography truly supported by the documentary evidence? And how to account for the simultaneous yet contradictory representation of the dynasty, perceived both as saint and illegitimate? These are some of the themes and primary questions addressed by the author of the volume, Marie-Laure Derat, at the end of a painstaking reassessment of the sources and a years-long investigation in Ethiopia.

The book is divided into four chapters, preceded by an «Introduction» and followed by a «Conclusion» and supplementary materials. The purpose and the approach of the book are clearly delineated by the A. in the «Introduction» (pp. 11–28): «Enquêter sur les Zāg^wē c'est donc tenter de briser cette opposition entre sainteté et usurpation en introduisant une perspective diachronique, en s'efforçant de dissocier histoire et mémoire, ou plutôt de comprendre comment l'histoire et la mémoire des Zāg^wē se sont réciproquement alimentées» (pp. 16–17). Three are the main issues in the focus of the A.'s attention: 1. The question of the pre-eminence of the contemporary sources, the sole ones serviceable to reconstruct a history of the Zag^we unbiased by the later historiography; 2. The question of the sanctity of the Zag^we kings, functional to a political theology which is in close conformity with the Byzantine Caesaropapist management of power; and 3. The «ancrage géographique» of the Zag^we, i.e. the assumed centrality of Lasta in view of a rethinking of the core-periphery relationship in the kingdom.

The first issue is extensively treated in Chapter I ('Traces écrites sur les rois Zāg^{wē}', pp. 29–86). By deliberately using only the contemporary written sources (land grants, inscriptions, exogenous Arabic compilations) and criticizing or rejecting the later documentation (hagiographical dossiers and king lists) as unreliable, the A. proposes a historical framework that is fatally more discontinuous than the one generally known, yet at the same time finally able to unhinge the above mentioned historiographical polarizations. This radical change in approaching the sources is one of the most appreciated methodological merits of the book, fully resulting from the caveat that later sources not uncommonly look back at past events to bring forth a retrospective construction which fits precise political expectations. The Ethiopic literature offers a variety of examples of this mechanism: well-known mementos are the genesis of *Kəbrä nāgāst*, the emergence of the contradictory hagiographies crediting either Täklä Haymanot or Iyäsus Mo'a as Yəkunno Am-lak's ally in his struggle for the throne, and latterly the role of *Gädlä Abrəha wä'Aṣbəḥa* in the rivalry between the Goḡgamite monasteries of Märtula Maryam and Dima Giyorgis. Needless to say, the work of the philologist is in this view of essential importance to disentangle how the cultural élites and more in general the peoples have been representing their own past through their written heritage. Among the contemporary native sources, a decisive impetus to the scholarly investigation is given by the newly found *g^walt*-grant emanated by king Tāntāwədəm in favor of the church of Betä Mäsqäl Qəfrəya. The document, a late copy of a land grant deemed as authentic by the A. (edition and French translation are appended at the end of the book, pp. 261–71), has an official shelf mark, Ethio-SPaRe UM-035, not indicated by the A. It is preserved in a 17th-century land charter kept in 'Ura Qirqos, close to the border with Eritrea, where also an exceptional processional cross mentioning Tāntāwədəm is found. On the ground of the Arabic sources, a new relevant document is represented by an epistle freshly brought to light by Kurt J. Werthmuller (p. 82). The epistle was sent soon after 1235 by patriarch Cyril III ibn Laqlaq to an Ethiopian ruler whose name is transmitted as Askar Mu'izz (one of Lalibäla's successors?), where اسكر might perhaps conceal the not uncommon element Asgäd via misinterpretation of > as < in the Arabic tradition. The identification of this king, of crucial pre-eminence to set up the chronological framework of the Zag^{wē} line, remains lamentably beyond reach at the present day.

Chapter II ('L'émergence d'une nouvelle formation politique : le royaume du Beg^wenā', pp. 87–145) turns back to the time span following the Aksumite decline and investigates the historical background from which a new royal line emerged in the 12th century, self-designating as *ḥaḍani* (lit. «tutor, guardian»), a title suggestive of a different origin than Aksum, yet reclaiming at the same time the old Aksumite heritage. The 7th–9th-cent. shift in power from Aksum towards still unidentified centers (Ġarma/Ġarmi, Ku^cbar/Ka^cbar, Ġanbayta in the Arabic sources) is correlated with the scenario alluded to by the archeological data pool, which evidences a growing concentration of religious foundations in Eastern Təgray during the period considered, such as Dəgum, Bäraqit, Gazen, Däbrä Sālam Mika^ʿel, Abrəha wä^ʿAṣbəḥa, Mika^ʿel Amba, Wəqro Qirqos, and others. To the numerous sites mentioned by the A., one must further include that of Mifsas Baḥri, long since reported yet only recently excavated (on the site, see Gaudiello, M., Yule P. A., *Mifsas Baḥri: a Late Aksumite Frontier Community in the Mountains of Southern Tigray. Survey, Excavation and Analysis, 2013–16*, British Archaeological Reports International Series 2839, BAR Publishing, Oxford 2017). The importance of Mifsas Baḥri to mapping the territorial range of the Christianization process in the Late-Aksumite age cannot be underestimated, as it documents the existence of a 7th-century church located about 60 km south of the southernmost Aksumite site heretofore recorded. Furthermore, a late literary trace of this new – possibly multipolar – political geography marked by an eastward transfer of political weight might echo in the neglected passage of the *Gädlä Iyäsus Mo^ʿa* (a text in many respects void of reliability) which claims that the church of Däbrä Əgzi^ʾabəḥer on the Lake Ḥayq was founded when the political power shifted from Aksum to the Eastern region (ወፊሊስት ፡ መንግሥት ፡ እምኣኩስም ፡ ኀበ ፡ ብሔረ ፡ ምሥራቅ, Kur, S., *Actes de Iyäsus Mo^ʿa, abbé du Convent de St-Etienne de Ḥayq*, CSCO 259, Script. Aeth. 49, Louvain 1965, 18–19). In synthesis, the evidence assembled and examined by the A., although scanty, hints at an expansionary phase in the North-Eastern fringes of the Highlands (figuratively embodied by the predication of the Nine Saints) in the period of time elapsing between the decline of Aksum and the emergence of the Zag^we: an expansionary phase which was most likely slowed down by fierce anti-Christian reactions (as traumatically exemplified by the enigmatic 10th-cent. queen of the Banū

l-Hamuwīya), but that seems difficult to reconcile with the traditional vulgate of a long-lasting decadence.

Chapter III ('Le roi Lālibālā et la monarchie éthiopienne au tournant du XII^e et du XIII^e siècle', pp. 147–94) places strong emphasis on the most authoritative ruler of the royal house (fl. before 1205, dead after 1225) and the homonymous complex of rock-hewn churches, originally known as Roḥa or Wārwär. The A. casts doubt upon the traditional thesis of the construction of Lalibāla as a *translatio Hierosolymae* in Ethiopia due to the impossibility to make pilgrimages to the Holy Land in the aftermath of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's conquest of Jerusalem (1187). Such a rethinking would be corroborated by the strictly local impact of the construction of the complex and by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's policy, much more favorable towards the Eastern Christian communities than towards the Latins (p. 148): it would be the access, not the prohibition, to the Holy Land to inspire the Ethiopian pilgrims to reduplicate some of the holy sites in their own homeland. Equally important, in this process of deconstructing the traditional historiography, is to observe that, as indeed admitted by a growing consensus, it cannot be assessed with certainty whether the sole Lalibāla had the entire complex built or he rather kept carrying on a building program on a pre-existing site (p. 164).

In Chapter IV ('Saints et usurpateurs, deux historiographies divergentes', pp. 195–256) the traditions on the fall of the dynasty and the *Lives* of the saintly kings are examined and the conflict between the two overlapping representations, the derogatory one and the celebrative one, is finally resolved. They are – the A. claims – two opposing versions of the same story, one being the narrative of the victors, i.e. the élites linked to Yəkunno Amlak's house, and the other originating from the centuries-long reply of the partisans, who composed at various times the *Lives* of the Zag^we saintly kings, firstly those of Lalibāla, and Yəmrəḥannā Krəstos, and later those of Nā'ak^wəto Lā'ab, Mäsqäl Kəbra, and Ḥarbay. Concerning the *Life* of Yəmrəḥannā Krəstos, the copies recorded by the A. must be supplemented, obviously with overlaps, with those listed by Gianfranco Fiaccadori (Between Hagiography and History: the Zag^we Dynasty and King Yəmrəḥannā Krəstos, in Nosnitsin, D., ed., *Veneration of Saints in Christian Ethiopia*, Supplement to Aethiopica 3, Wiesbaden 2015, 31–32), not all of which properly verified. Moreover, and more significantly, no mention is made in the chapter to the *Life* of Yəṭbarāk, son of Lalibāla and last king of the Za-

g^{we}. His *Life*, judged as “a curious composition” with “numerous anachronisms and contradictory traditions” (Taddesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270–1527*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1972, 63 n. 4), would be extant in multiple copies (cp. Kinefe Rigb Zelleke, Bibliography of the Ethiopic Hagiographical Traditions, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 13 (2), 1975, 97 nr. 175), one being kept in the church of Yemreḥanna Krestos according to Ewa Balicka-Witakowska and Michael Gervers (Balicka-Witakowska, E., Gervers, M., The Paintings of Yəmrəhannä Krəstos. A Report, *Africana Bulletin*, 49, 2001, 9–47). The analysis of this text might be of great interest in view of the fact that king Yəṭbaräk, an elusive figure of the Ethiopian history (his name is “systematically suppressed in the official hagiographical traditions”, as stated by Taddesse Tamrat 1966, p. 68 n. 1, and not by chance he is esoterically styled *əlmäknun* “the hidden one”), emblematically embodies his family’s ambiguous fate: killed in the courtyard of the church of Qirqos, where he had sought shelter crying for the saintly patron’s help, he would well be in the possession of the right credentials to be acclaimed as a martyr king like the most venerated Gälawdewos and Iyasu I, if his murderer was not Yəkunno Amlak from Amḥara during the latter’s legitimate struggle for the throne.

In all the pages of the volume one can perceive the A.’s unceasing efforts to deconstruct or at least to cast a healthy shadow of suspicion upon the distorting mirror of the traditional account, a veritable historiographical fiction forged between the 14th and the 18th centuries and largely adopted also by the «historiographie savante», primarily by Carlo Conti Rossini,¹ not without cultural bias and following ideological patters. Some examples will be illustrative: Conti Rossini’s reconstruction of the 1270 seizure of power is indeed sourced on very few historical elements, i.e. two feudal deeds accommodat-

¹ Whose approach was criticized by other scholars as well, such as Paolo Marrassini, *Il Gadla Yemreḥanna Krestos: introduzione, testo critico, traduzione* (Supplemento n. 85 agli Annali), Istituto Universitario Orientale, Napoli 1995, 8 n. 47: «In genere, tutti i lavori del Conti Rossini sugli Zague [...] sono fra le sue cose peggiori dal punto di vista dell’interpretazione storica, ed il suo positivismo piuttosto schematico lo porta a cercare spiegazioni concrete e troppo semplici (propaganda, interesse dinastico, invidie personali ecc.) per fenomeni che spesso invece derivano da concezioni e strutture regali e familiari assai complesse».

ed in the Däbrä Libanos of Šəmāzana Gospel book. These, if properly re-examined, merely reassert the king's feudal authority against a local *šeyyum*, in continuity with king Lalibäla's earlier regulations, and seem rather far apart from being an epoch-making watershed of the Ethiopian history. Again, the A. rejects the traditional ethnicist view of the cultural irreducibility of the Zag^we house to the Semitic identity of their subjects: the non-Semitic royal names, e.g. those of Lalibäla and his ancestors Morara and Assəda, might indeed evoke a possible Agaw linguistical identity (see, for instance the connection, not treated by the A., between the name Lalibäla, explained in his *Life* as "the bee has known his grace", and the Agaw word for "bee", cp. Xamtanga *läla*, see Appleyard, D., *A Comparative Dictionary of the Agaw Languages*, Cushitic Language Studies 24, Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, Köln 2006, 30), but this does not touch the substance of the problem, that is, as already maintained by Paolo Marrassini, that the ethnic differences between "Cushitic" and "Semitic" are indeed labels void of effectiveness (p. 245) and in no way lay the basis for a Semitic revenge. Lastly, the A. also observes that the peculiar succession rule of the Zag^we line, a horizontal system in which the throne passed laterally from brother to brother or from uncle to nephew, does not necessarily presupposes a matrilineal structure, as interpreted by a number of scholars, and must be rather filtered through the lens of a general misrepresentation of the genealogical system by later hagiographers. As the A. keenly notices, after Dawit's death (1412) sons and nephews succeeded to the throne through apparently obscure passages, yet no scholar has so far pointed out a matrilineal principle for the Solomonic house (p. 252).

In the «Conclusion» (pp. 257–59) the A. goes even further back, to the so-called dark age which followed the decline of Aksum (7th–10th cent). On the basis of the examined native sources, the A. wonders whether the Aksumite decline, traditionally ascribed to the Islamization of the Red Sea shore and the loss of the commercial primacy, is also partially related to specific internal factors, in particular to the epochal socio-economic transformation impressed by the long wave of the 'second Christianization' and the propagation of monastic centers in vast non-urban areas of the Highlands. Documents such as Tāntāwədəm's donation act might be reflective – the A. suggests – of the progressive rooting of a new economic organization, in which, through a system of land grants, tax deductions and corvées, most of

the produced wealth was allocated in the hands of ecclesiastic foundations, a state of affairs which would last for the next millennium. It is with these very stimulating reflections that the A. invites the reader to a new fascinating historical inquiry further backwards in time (p. 259).

The volume is closed by a useful apparatus of «Annexes» which include the edition and French translation of king Ṭāntāwəḍəm's donation grant (pp. 261–71) and sections greatly appreciated by a less specialistic audience, among which a glossary of Ethiopic terms and place names, notes on the Ethiopian Christian calendar and chronology, and a useful set of maps (Cartes 1–8).

Few typos, which do not undermine the value of the volume, are the following: on p. 70 ls 2–3 «le 65^e Christodule» and «le 66^e Cyrille II» are in reality «le 66^e Christodule» and «le 67^e Cyrille II» respectively; on p. 80 the A. states twice that *bā*^ʾ written with no pointing (properly the *i*^ʿ*ḡām*) merges with *nūn*, *yā*^ʾ, *tā*^ʾ, and *ṭā*^ʾ, which is inaccurate since the last letter (ṭ) is clearly distinguished by the others and rather merges with *ṣā*^ʾ (ṣ); on p. 85 the A. claims that «on considère que la traduction des Évangiles du grec en ge'ez est intervenue au VI^e siècle», most probably a misprint for «IV^e siècle»; the Gə'əz word for “lion” is *anbāsa* (or, according to the transcription system adopted by the A., *anbasā*), not «anbās»; on p. 138 the A. writes «L'Agame est la région où est implanté le monastère de Dabra Damo», the latter most likely being a typo for Gunda Gunde, for the well-known monastery of Däbrä Dammo lies in Gulo Mäḵāda; the same ethnonym is written in three different ways on p. 243 (Zagwa), p. 245 (Zagwā), and p. 247 (Zāg^wā). Regardless of these minor typos and some occasional misprints (e.g., p. 152 n. 12 and p. 172 *madīnat al-malik*, i.e. “capital city, royal city”, not *madīnāt al-malik*, p. 208 «Yārēd» and «Morārā», not «Yarēd» and «Morara», and few others), it can be confidently stated that this book will remain for much time to come an indispensable reading for all scholars interested in the Ethiopian medieval history.

Massimo Villa