

Book Reviews & Review Articles

Saheed A. Adejumobi: *The History of Ethiopia*. Westport, Connecticut – London: Greenwood Press, 2007. 219 pages.

Saheed A. Adejumobi, assistant professor at Seattle University, U.S., is among the very few African, but non-Ethiopian authors who have written a major work on Ethiopia, and certainly the first who has authored a whole book on the general history of Ethiopia. The book is part of a series titled as *Greenwood Histories of the Modern Nations* by Greenwood Press, on “selected nations whose political, economic, and social affairs mark them as among the most important in the waning years of the twentieth century”.

The book contains seven chapters, which cover the history of Ethiopia from ancient times to 2004. There is also a pretty good selection of biographies on “notable people” in the history of Ethiopia, unfortunately full of mistakes. For example Empress T’aytu is in the section of names with “B” (Bet’ul) instead of “T”, or Aster Aweqe is “a native of Gandor”. The beginning of the book with Chapter 1 seems promising; it deals with the intellectual and cultural background, putting Ethiopia in a wider context, discussing Ethiopianism and modern black internationalism. Unfortunately the following chapters are not at the same level, although there are excellent passages, like one on the history of Ethiopian art (pp 14-19), on Afro-Marxism (Chapter 6), and especially the introduction of Chapter 3 about the “Janus-faced ‘gift’ of modernity”.

Nevertheless, the book is bleeding from many wounds. First of all there is the general mistake which is haunting Ethiopian studies as a bad spirit for a long time now; Saheed A. Adejumobi overemphasizes the importance of the Christian Amhara culture while he writes almost nothing which is based on local oral traditions, making dozens of ethnic groups appear as non-existent. The author does not understand the logic of Ethiopian names and titles, citing Bahru Zewde as “Zewde” (p. 157) or naming Emperor Tewodros’s general as “Dejazmatch”, taking it for his name (p. 26.). The text is full of outdated historical views like “Ethiopian legends, archeological discoveries, and various historical tracts leave little doubt that Ethiopia was in fact the motherland of the Queen of Sheba” (p. 11), continuing on the next page with the statement that “The offspring of Solomon and Sheba, Menelik I, was the founder of the Aksumite civilization” (p. 12).

On the other hand, important historical places or events are left without any mention. The author did not find the Kingdom of Da’amot or the battle of Shimba Kure important enough to mention them, while rock musicians like Bob Geldof became important historical personalities (p. 143). There is almost nothing about *Lij* Iyasu.

In some parts the text is politically incorrect even, like on page 8 where the author starts to discuss the Oromo topic, but suddenly uses the “Galla” term,

or employs the term “Falasha” as equivalent to the correct self-denomination “Beta Isra’el”. At least on one occasion the author crossed the border from non-fiction to fiction; discussing the importance of the Periplus of the Erythrean Sea he writes, that “The text described the totems of lions along with ceremonial umbrellas as having important political symbols”. Yet, there is no such description in the Periplus!

All in all, although the efforts of the author were great to write a good general history of Ethiopia this book is definitely not for Ethiopianists, nor for those who just want a book on Ethiopian history in their book collection. There are already much better publications for both.

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Merse’a Hazen Wolde Qirqos: *Yebayagnaw Kifil Zemen Mebacha: Yeżemen Tarik Tizitaye Kaybutena Kesembaut, 1896-1922*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Addis Ababa University Press, 1999 E.C. (‘Early Twentieth Century Ethiopian History Based on Eyewitness and Reported Accounts’), 455 pages. In Amharic.

Review Article

In a newly, though belatedly and posthumously, published book, *Blatta* Merse’a Hazen Wolde Qirqos eloquently narrates how Ethiopia entered the 20th century by decisively repulsing external enemies, but, at the same time, by tragically embroiled in an endless internal power struggle among royalties and regions. We learn from *Blatta*’s extremely well documented and well-referenced book that there were, at the beginning of the 20th century, primarily two contending forces for power. I characterize these forces as Shoa and Wollo forces and their respective allies and supporters in various regions of the empire. The deadly clashes between the two centers of power set the stage for the country to plunge or to be pushed into the twentieth century unprepared or with haphazard plans or tentativeness.

While Shoa insists on the indivisibility of the monarchy and *Tewabedo* Christianity, Wollo pushes for religious tolerance where Christians and Muslims live and work cooperatively and peacefully within the country. While *Ras* Teferi represented Shoa, *Lij* Iyasu was the brain behind the Wollo model of governance. Shoa prevailed after tragic and destructive civil war. *Ras* Tafari assumed the throne as Emperor Hayle Selassie and ruled as an absolute monarch for almost 50 years. In 1974, the monarchy abruptly and effectively ended with him. *Lij* Iyasu, the legitimate heir to Emperor Menelik II, was vanished and later murdered. His remains have yet to be found. In post-

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