

Book Reviews

Ian Campbell: *The Plot To Kill Graziani. The Attempted Assassination of Mussolini's Viceroy.* Addis Ababa University Press, 2010. 492 pages.

On 19 February 1937 an attempted assassination of Graziani, the Viceroy of Ethiopia, occurred in Addis Ababa. Although the attempt failed, this event, known as “Yekatit 12” according to the Ethiopian calendar, is still considered as one of the most important acts of the Ethiopian resistance. However, the historical background, the event itself, and its aftermath have not been the theme of historical research until now.

Ian Campbell’s book is not only essential for any student of the Italian occupation in Ethiopia, but exciting from the first page to the last. As Bahru Zewde states on the back cover, it deals with “a historical event so full of drama and involving so many colourful personalities...”. Indeed, reading Campbell’s book is like watching an action movie or at least reading its screenplay. The events’ descriptions are extremely detailed, not only day by day but very often by minutes or even by seconds (p. 222). This strength of the book is mainly due to the wide use of written sources (both primary and secondary), but the extraordinary value of the research also lies in the extensive use of oral information. According to the “Preface and Acknowledgements” (pp. xxvi–xxxi) the data collection and the writing of the book took 15 years, and during this time the author was lucky enough to meet eyewitnesses of the events or their descendants. The use of new sources revealed many surprising details which were heretofore unknown, for example the detailed role of Simi’on Adefris, the taxi driver in Addis Ababa who helped the assailants to escape from Addis Ababa after the attempt, or the involvement of Emperor Haile Selassie and his circle in exile, who supported and urged the action (pp. 134 – 148).

The book is much more than just a dry description of Yekatit 12. Campbell’s investigations extend far before and after the failed assassination, including also events occurring contemporaneously alongside it, giving rich information about the main and side characters. Apart from the text, the attached photographs (many of them courtesy of the author) and maps make the work excellent. The “Epilogue” (pp. 427–442) increases the “screenplay feeling” in a very good sense offering data about the lives of many characters after the Italian occupation. The research also extends to the aftermath of Yekatit 12, which is especially interesting in light of the fact that the two assailants, Moges Asgedom and Abriha Deboch, were of Eritrean origin, and both of them were employed by the Italian Fascist administration (p. 77). This is a book for everyone: for historians, for students, for readers looking for exciting books... and for film producers.

There are only a very few shortcomings of the book (the reviewer almost feels ashamed to mention them). One of them is when Campbell gives the estimates of the number of Ethiopian victims of the Italian massacre after Yekatit 12. The author fails to give references, and one of the numbers seems to be incorrect (supposedly Alberto Sbacchi's data, who writes 600, and not 6000; p. 273). Another minor mistake is the subtitle of the book: from a precise historical point of view Graziani was Viceroy of the Italian king and not of Mussolini.

The book was published by Addis Ababa University Press. This means a low price and bad quality illustrations, but also that it has limited availability (best to try the AAU bookshop inside Siddist Kilo campus – be persistent, the staff will often say that they don't have this or that book...).

SZÉLINGER Balázs¹

Dereje Feyissa – Markus Virgil Hoehne: *Borders and Borderlands as Resources in the Horn of Africa*. Woodbridge: James Currey & Kampala: Fontain Publishers, 2010, 205 pages.

This book, edited by two young scholars from Ethiopia and Germany, is a very valuable effort for the better understanding of the significance of borders in the Horn of Africa. Borders, especially colonial ones, are often condemned as constraints in social sciences. The new anthropological approach of the contributors to this volume may therefore seem somewhat surprising; without denying the harmful effects of political borders, they claim that borders may be resources for the benefit of the neighboring people.

The 11 chapters cover almost all state borders in the greater Horn (Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Puntland, Somaliland and Sudan). The missing chapter on the Ethiopian-Somalian border is hardly understandable, however. (South Sudan did not exist as an independent state at the time of the publication.) One strength of the book is that, in keeping with the aim of its editors, it tries to depoliticize the subject (an almost impossible task indeed), and bring it back to the ground of the local people. As Günther Schlee states in the Preface: “In addition to engaging in politics – and that is what social scientists do when they become public intellectuals and give TV interviews – we should care about keeping alive a perspective in social science that abstains from value judgements and tries to describe the forces on the ground in their actual interplay. The realities described are not always beautiful, and that is why social scientists who abstain from such judgments and try to model the

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