

Conference Reports

focus further to the north and presented a paper titled “*Azmari, Ch'era wat'a* or ‘Artists’ – Itinerant Singers in Tigray”.

The last session treated subjects related to the art of *azmari* in the music industry. Woube Kassaye (Addis Ababa) gave an “Analysis of *Amarigna*, *Tigrigna* and *Oromigna* – *Azmari*-Songs Released in Albums” in which he compared commercially published *azmari* albums in three different languages. The paper “*Azmari* Recorded: The Vinyl Memory” by Wolfgang Bender (Hildesheim) focused on the publication of *azmari* music on an older medium. And the presentation of Andreas Wetter (Berlin) entitled “The Significance of the research on Cassette Production” attempted to offer a methodological framework for the description and analysis of Ethiopia music and in particular *azmari* music which was published on cassettes.

The program of the conference was not limited to the presentation of scientific results. An important point was the inclusion of *azmari* as active participants. The two *azmari* Dejen Manchilot (Tel Aviv) and Indris Hassen (Addis Ababa) took part in the discussions that followed the individual presentations. And they ensured, with a lively concert on the first evening, that the conference didn't remain merely an academic event. The second evening was reserved for a film panel of two ethnographic films on *azmari*: “*Kids Got a Song to Sing*” by Itsushi Kawase (Manchester) and “*Tizita - Two Azmari Portraits*” by Adrian Hofer (Zürich). Both films provided intimate views into the daily life of young *azmari* in Gondar and Birbuax. A second film by Itsushi Kawase dedicated to the role of *azmari* performances in *Zar* ceremonies in Gondar, “*When Spirits Ride Their Horses*”, was shown at the end of the conference.

In conclusion, all participants experienced the conference as a very positive and productive meeting. It was felt that this conference was only the beginning of an intensified research effort on *azmari* and that similar meetings should continue these cooperative efforts in the future. The papers of the conference are currently being prepared for publication.

Andreas WETTER¹¹

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Workshop “On the History and Culture of the Horn of Africa” at Mekelle University, 17-18 March 2011

A two-day workshop entitled “On the History and Culture of the Horn of Africa” took place at Mekelle University on 17 and 18 March 2011, in which scholars from the Free University Berlin and Mekelle University participated¹².

¹¹ Senior Researcher, Humboldt-Universität Berlin, member of the organisation committee.

¹² Following an invitation by the Research and Community Service Council of the College of Social Sciences and Languages (CSSL), which organized the workshop in collaboration with the Department of History and Cultural Studies (DHCS).

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The workshop opened on 17 March with a meeting between the interdisciplinary delegation of the Free University Berlin and important representatives of Mekelle University¹³. The then-president of Mekelle University, Mitiku Haile, and the dean of the College of Social Sciences and Languages, Gebreyesus Teklu Bahta, invited the delegation into the Senate Hall for a discussion of potential fields of cooperation – e.g. comparable research initiatives within the two universities which aim at an institutionalisation of Horn of Africa Studies (e.g. establishment of institutes and research centres) and at an interregional cooperation in this field of studies.

After this meeting, the first paper presentations followed in a first block, moderated by Hatem Elliesie (Free University Berlin). This part of the day was opened by the paper entitled “Language, Script and Society in the Axumite Kingdom” by Rainer Voigt (Free University Berlin). In his paper he discussed the origin of the Ancient Ethiopic script, and he suggested an influence by ancient Indian writing systems. This was followed by a lively discussion. Also received with great interest was the following paper by Monika Schuol (Free University Berlin), who discussed the role of Sokotra island in international trade. She suggested that the island did not serve as an important crossroad, referring both to ancient texts (*Periplus Maris Erythraei* and Plinius’s *Naturalis Historia* etc.) and to her own research on the natural geographic situation of Sokotra in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean.

On the second day Ayele Bekerie (Mekelle University) continued the discussion on the origin of the Ethiopic script and presented his hypothesis of an influence of the Ethiopic script on the Armenian script. Especially the Edessa variety of the Armenian alphabet shows a stunning similarity to the ancient Ethiopian syllabary, which can be explained through historical contact between the two Churches in Jerusalem. In addition he suggested that some numerals of the Ethiopian numeric writing system cannot “only” be explained by Greek influence but should be explained in another way.

Following this, Hagos Abrha (Mekelle University) and Bogdan Burtea (Free University Berlin) presented their papers. Hagos Abrha presented his research on the hagiographic text *Gädlä Yäm’ata*, for which he had found and used numerous manuscripts. In preparation of a critical edition, he undertook a stemmatic reconstruction of the manuscripts. Bogdan Burtea in turn presented insights into traditional Ethiopian medicine and magic, using the manuscript *Oriental 11390* of the British Library as an example. He referred to parallels between Ethiopian concepts and Jewish medical-magic traditions and underlined that empirical and magical healing practices coexisted side by side.

¹³ In addition to the paper presenters mentioned in this report, the delegation comprised Prof. Dr. Klaus Geus and Dr. Peter Nadig, ancient historians at the Friedrich-Meinecke-Institut of the Free University Berlin, and the junior researchers Carsten Hoffmann and Zeus Wellnhofer, Seminar of Semitic Languages of the Free University Berlin.

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The workshop ended with two papers by upcoming young scholars: Dejene Hailemariam (Mekelle University) presented a paper on the colonial activities of Italy in the Horn of Africa and their consequences for Ethiopian-Eritrean relations today. Wubit Engdayehu (Mekelle University) gave an overview of the colonial history of Somalia and the colonial influence on Ethiopian-Somali relations.

Carsten HOFFMANN – Zeus WELLNHOFER¹⁴

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¹⁴ Junior researchers at the Free University Berlin (Freie Universität Berlin), Germany. A German version of this report is available online on the webpage of *Aethiopia, International Journal of Ethiopian and Eritrean Studies* (Hamburg University, <http://journals.sub.uni-hamburg.de/aethiopia/pages/view/conferencereports>).