

Introduction

The Second International Enno Littmann Conference (ELK II) at Aksum was carried out at the end of one full year of events in Germany and Ethiopia dedicated to the jubilee of one hundred years diplomatic relations between Germany and Ethiopia. This Conference was symbolically devoted to the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the *Deutsche Aksum-Expedition* (DAI, German Aksum Expedition). On 6 January 2006 the participants of this Conference arrived in Aksum, and the closing session of the Conference took place on 12 January. These dates corresponded to the dates of travel of the Aksum expedition exactly one hundred years before: On 6 January 1906 the expedition had started their journey from Asmara, on 12 January they arrived in Aksum. This expedition had been dispatched from Germany shortly after the signing of the Treaty of Friendship between Ethiopia and Germany in 1905.

The conference was devoted to Regional History and Culture of the Horn of Africa, with the following sub-themes: The Aksumite civilisation (with focus on Aksumite architecture), local history of Tigray and documentation and preservation of Ethiopian heritage. Following the model of the first Enno Littmann Conference, which had taken place in Munich, this conference was devoted to a region on which he had worked and to the disciplines which he had influenced with his research and writing. The idea was that the ELK would be carried out alternately in Europe and in a country of the south in which or on which Littmann had worked. Following this principle it was decided to carry out the conference in Aksum in Ethiopia, the first venue of the conference outside Europe.

Littmann was one of the early pioneers of academic research on the Ethiopian region, especially on the ancient north. Comparing with the great regions which are discussed in world history, the ancient Ethiopian civilization was not as well-studied (and is still not) as a number of other ancient civilizations. North-eastern Africa, and particularly Ethiopia, is marked by a rich archaeological and cultural heritage, such as millenia-old historical monuments and historical architectural remains, ancient manuscripts, early inscriptions in several ancient languages, carvings in rocks, including early Christian rock-hewn churches in the remote mountains of Tigray and Lasta, indigenous artifacts and other tangible, but also intangible cultural and social heritage. Until the 20th century, this ancient region had virtually not entered into the general narratives of world history owing to a lack of deeper knowledge and research – while it fascinated specialized researchers over centuries. Among others, this lack of knowledge was due to the long absence of local or foreign archeological research and study. Many of the historical accounts written before the 20th century were providing rather casual information provided by travelers and several religious or diplomatic missions. Much knowledge about Aksum and Ethiopia came from diaries and travel narratives of individual writers,

often amateurs, rather than from established historians and other researchers. Nevertheless these reports played a crucial role in awaking interest in research and providing data about the past.

With an increase of frequency of various travelers and trained researchers arriving in Ethiopia, since the 19th century European scholars started, however, to engage in research that became the basis for the re-foundation of Ethiopian studies in Italy, Germany, France and other European countries. Scholars such as Littmann and Conti Rossini became pioneers in the early 20th century, after the German philologist Augustus Dillmann in the 19th century. For example, Conti Rossini documented the list of Aksumite kings and other culturally important documents and traditions regarding ancient and present-day Aksum and its surrounding areas. Numerous European scholars then worked over decades building up new knowledge following this model, in recent decades joined by a growing number of Ethiopian academics.

In the year 1906, following an invitation by Emperor Menilek II, the German emperor Wilhelm II sent an archeological mission to Ethiopia, funding it himself from his private budget. Enno Littmann became the leader of the German Aksum Expedition in December 1905. Together with his colleagues, they arrived in Aksum in January 1906, as mentioned above, and carried out extensive archeological, epigraphic and ethnographical studies in Aksum itself and other sites in Tigray and Eritrea. The German archeological mission produced voluminous reports and documents that became invaluable for our knowledge about the areas covered in their journey. Although about one hundred years have elapsed since their coming to northern Ethiopia, the research outcome is still very important to the study of history and culture of Tigray and Eritrea.

In order to honor these scholars and their accomplishments, institutions in both Ethiopia and Germany collaborated to commemorate the centenary of the German Aksum Expedition in Aksum and Mekelle (Tigray), initiating this international conference and two exhibitions: the 2006 events of Aksum culminated in this conference in which renown Ethiopianists and historians from Ethiopia, Germany, France, USA, Austria, Great Britain, Canada, Japan and others participated, presenting scholarly papers. The conference was mainly funded by the *Goethe-Institut Addis Ababa – Internationales*, with support offered by the cultural section of the *German Embassy Addis Ababa*, and organized by the archaeologist Steffen Wenig of Humboldt-University Berlin, the initiator of the *International Enno Littmann Conference Series*, together with Wolbert Smidt of Hamburg University in cooperation with Muluwork Kidanemariam of Sheba College in Mekelle. There was an important participation by Addis Ababa University and Mekelle University, especially the respective Departments of History.

Besides that, a selection from the 1906 photographs collection of the German Aksum Expedition, put together by the archaeologist Steffen Wenig after several years of research, were exhibited for the benefit of the population of Aksum. This photo exhibition – displaying historical photographs so far totally unknown in Ethiopia – was further shown for about one week at Sheba University College in Mekelle, initiated by Muluwork Kidanemariam. Another exhibition on the history of cultural and diplomatic relations between Germany and Ethiopia, set up by

Wolbert Smidt and funded by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was also shown at both events. On the occasion of the conference, the city administration of Aksum on its part named a street after Enno Littmann at May Shum, one of the ancient sites where research was carried out by the DAE one hundred years earlier.

We are most grateful to the funders of this volume: The *Goethe-Institut Addis Ababa* had kindly given a subsidy for the complex picture layout, while the layout itself was graciously supported by *Orbis Aethiopicus*. Personally, we wish to thank Steffen Wenig, the key-person in the organisation of the Enno Littmann Conferences, for his steady guidance and comments on the manuscript, express our gratitude to the layouter in Mekelle, Gebremichael Nguse, for his patience despite very low funding for this difficult work, involving special fonts and numerous comments and wishes by editors and paper presenters, and to Walter Raunig and *Lij Asfa-Wossen Asserate* for their support of the conference proceedings. The most crucial help was provided by *Mekelle University*: As one of the cooperating institutions who supported the organization of the 2006 centenary of the German Aksum expedition, Mekelle University has now taken the responsibility of publishing the proceedings of the papers presented in Aksum. *Mekelle University* as one of the leading institutions of higher education in Ethiopia has opened several academic centers related to historical and cultural studies of Ethiopia and this publication is part of the endeavor towards strengthening and widening these ongoing efforts.

We regret that this publication took such a long time to see the light. Some of the challenges we had to face are not so unusual in our field of research: Besides the constant struggle with a lack of funding, there was first the technical complexity of a number of articles, which included work on unusual diacritica and some other special fonts. Not to mention that quite a number of articles took several years until they were submitted by the authors, followed by long procedures of reviewing and editing. One of the challenges were the illustrations: Just to mention one example, one of our prominent authors had submitted the numerous illustrations of his article just before he succumbed to his disease, and thus could not provide detailed captions any more. Through the support offered by his son and several colleagues, his photos could finally be identified.

Last, but not least, we want especially to underline the great contribution of *dejjazmach* Zewde Gabre-Sellassie¹ to the discussions during and after the conference – his presence was of high value not only due to his knowledge, but also because it was his own father, the governor *dejjazmach* Gebre Sillasé Barya Gabir, who had hosted Enno Littmann and the German Aksum Expedition (DAE) in Aksum one hundred years before. Thus, he symbolically linked the DAE with the conference, bridging one hundred years. Without the support of *dejjazmach* Gebre Sillasé, Littmann's research would not have been possible. *Dejjazmach* Zewde Gabre-Sellassie's paper provides some insights into this history. To conclude, we want to again express our gratitude to the funders and supporting institutions, and

1 Note: This is the way he wrote his name himself, different from the transliteration used in this volume.

especially the paper presenters for an insightful conference and a rich volume of research papers, which resulted out of it. We dedicate this volume to the colleagues who have greatly contributed to the success of the conference, but are not among us any more: Martha Henze, Paul Henze, Hussein Ahmed, *dejjazmach* Zewde Gabre-Sellassie, and Donald Levine.

May the articles collected in this volume contribute to maintaining and upholding the spirit of the pioneering archaeological, epigraphical, philological, historical and ethnographical work carried out by the German Aksum Expedition in 1906.

Mekelle, in December 2016
Muluwork Kidanemariam, Wolbert Smidt