

Editorial

The creation of a new journal is always a great challenge. A preparatory committee had been set up at the College of Social Sciences and Languages (CSSL) in mid-2010, and then an interdisciplinary editorial committee composed of researchers in social sciences and humanities from all over Mekelle University was formed. This committee presented the results of their work in December 2010 during a national workshop at Mekelle University, describing and discussing the choices undertaken: The creation of a peer-reviewed Journal with a strong focus on local and regional cultures of northeastern Africa, closely linked with the international community of researchers, making research on northeastern Africa locally and internationally known (see the documentation in this Journal). After that the long work on the submitted articles, from all fields of social sciences and humanities, started – and now we can proudly present the results.

We invite researchers from all academic institutions active in the region, be they from the region or from abroad, to participate in this Journal. The number of young researchers coming up in northeastern Africa is steadily increasing, and this Journal aims at providing a new forum for these researchers to present their research results. Unfortunately, it has virtually become a tradition in social sciences and humanities to publish research results and academic discussions on this region far outside the reach of northeastern African researchers – in most diverse languages, from English, Italian, French, German, Russian, Polish to Japanese etc. In the same time, during the last twenty years new academic institutions have been created all over the Horn of Africa, with an especially dramatic increase of the number of new universities in Ethiopia. This Journal wishes to contribute to a change, which is felt by many to be very necessary: Research results should be made more accessible in the region, where they were originally produced. We therefore welcome contributions by researchers interested to make their research known in northeastern Africa – there are still too many important research results, which are only known within restricted academic circles outside the region. This Journal may contribute to change that trend. In addition, extra issues of this Journal will provide the possibility to present collections of papers on a specific topic, or peer-reviewed proceedings of workshops of a strictly academic standard, or bulky research material, which cannot be published in the form of a classical, short article.

The Journal does not plan to focus on one main topic per regular issue, but due to existing trends in scholarship each issue may show some specific preferences. This first issue is already an example for that: The study of ancient regional history is currently marked by an exciting dynamics of projects, discoveries and debates, which is reflected by several articles in this issue.

A lot has to be done in social, cultural and historical research: Texts contributing to ongoing debates such as discussion papers will be as welcome as texts which present important sources, from ancient inscriptions to ethnological observations of cultural phenomena. This Journal is especially interested in promoting exchange between researchers in northeastern Africa. The primary aim is to make both accomplished and ongoing research known to the scholarly community. All too often one and the same research is carried out several times, due to the ignorance of previous research undertaken – often only documented in the form of unpublished reports, or in languages unknown to other researchers. Another aim is to facilitate the networking between researchers: During the last few years we could observe a steady rise of interest into northeastern Africa and – different from before – specifically into Tigray, due to its rich heritage and to open research questions many of which fascinate scholars since long. Research institutions with interest in northeastern Africa could thus link themselves more easily with local partners – and vice versa. For these two reasons we invite researchers from northeastern Africa and others working in these regions to submit abstracts of their ongoing research for publication in our abstracts section. This can also greatly contribute to a common understanding of which research questions are currently discussed in the international and local communities of scholars and which ones not (yet).

This Journal appears in the moment when one more new state achieves its independence in northeastern Africa, the Republic of South Sudan (RSS). This will create new dynamics – as we hope: positive ones – and also interesting challenges for research in our wider region. We therefore also hope for contributions from upcoming scholars from the RSS.

The name “Ityopis”

The choice of a name usually results out of discussions of many alternatives – and this was also the case here. The name ITYOPIS symbolically expresses the idea of the Journal on several levels. It is both very local and encompasses wide regions. What is its meaning? Ityopis (ኢትዮጵያ) is a legendary king’s name vividly remembered in many oral traditions in the northern highlands, especially in Aksum, and also appears in ancient manuscripts. Oral and written history tells that Ityopis, the “son of Cush”, was the first to settle in Aksum – making him the funder of one of the ancient civilisations of northeastern Africa. One still finds elders referring to their origin from this ancient king, while others, in contrast, rather refer to an origin from the “Isra’élawiyān”, the “sons of Sém” – stories which may reflect an ancient memory of the multiple origins of the people. The term is also important in the Ethiopian written literature: Ityopis first appears in the 15th century manuscript *Metshafe Aksum* (“Book of Aksum”) in the context of the founding myth of Aksum. Interestingly, the term also shows an aspect of the ancient foreign relations of the region: There was a legendary figure in ancient Greek tradition, Aithiops –

derived from the term Aithiopia –, which has to be seen in connection with the Ethiopian myth, Ityopis being linguistically derived from Aithiops. The Greeks called the countries south of Egypt Aithiopia (Αἰθιοπία), the ‘land of the dark-skinned people’ (αιθ- meaning ‘burnt’, ὄψ meaning ‘face’), and this is how the term “Cush” is rendered in the Greek versions of the Bible. Some researchers hypothesize that the Greek term has been styled after an older local, Semitic, term for ‘incense’, sounding similar and being re-interpreted by the Greek travellers. Much more can be told – but this shall be reserved to an article, which we hope to be able to publish in this Journal.

To summarize, the name ITYOPIS stands for the Journal’s interest into oral traditions as a crucial element of culture, and in the same time for the interest into the manuscript tradition – which both influenced each other. The name is pre-Christian and thus can be regarded as religiously neutral. Due to its very local link to Aksum it stands for our special interest in regional history (ancient and modern) and local cultures – while the name is also very wide in its meaning, encompassing all of northeastern Africa in its widest sense: In fact the geographic term Aithiopia did historically not mean a specific country but the vast regions and countries south of Egypt. Thus, the Journal’s name does not specifically refer to the country Ethiopia but to the wider region, which has always been marked by the existence of several states, from the ancient Christian Sudanese kingdoms in the north to the medieval Muslim sultanates in the southwest, all strongly interlinked through cultural, economic and political relations. Also the foreign relations of the region, on which this journal would likewise welcome contributions, are symbolized by this term, which is itself the result of a vivid exchange between culturally strongly interlinked regions which are, however, far from each other. In addition, the name stands for an ancient history of migration, and thus reflects well the idea that northeastern Africa shall be understood as a network of interconnections, be they cultural, historical or political, be it in reference to ancient times or to today.

Technical and other standards

We have elaborated a transliteration standard for the Ge’ez [Gǝǝz] script, which is easy to use also for those who do not have special signs and rare diacritica in their font collections. The chosen system is also close to the usual, but non-standardized writing patterns of Ethiopian or Eritrean terms in Latin letters – while remaining linguistically exact in contrast to the often arbitrary way of writing when people occasionally use the Latin script. The system follows quite closely the example already set by Rubenson’s eminent collection of original documents, the *Acta Aethiopica*. However, we do not aim at an over-standardisation, as each authors belong to their own tradition. For example the style used at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) and by the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* is a well-established system, which may be used. Also in the case of bibliographies and references we decided to leave some freedom to the

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authors, as long as the chosen standard remains exact. However, we generally demand standardized bibliographies at the end of each article.

Shortly after the appearance of this first issue, the Journal will also go online. Articles can be submitted online, and in the future also articles published in previous issues will be accessible in the internet. This will assure that articles published in this Journal can be read more widely also by those who do not have access to hardcopies.

Acknowledgements

Many people have to be thanked for contributing to the creation of this Journal. Above we thank all the authors who were ready to share their research results with us – and the numerous anonymous reviewers who put much energy into the discussion of every single article, providing new perspectives and additional information. The Journal could not exist without the tireless efforts of the layout and language editors, who spent many extra hours to make the articles presentable. Also nothing would have been possible without the great support by the University Management – and particularly by Gebreyesus Teklu, the Dean of the College of Social Sciences and Languages (CSSL) –, and of course the partnership with other institutions in Mekelle University which deal with social sciences and humanities, namely the Institute of Palaeoenvironment and Heritage Conservation (IPHC) and the College of Business and Economics (CBE). Last, but not least, those who helped on the technical side deserve our deep gratitude and admiration. Problems caused by several computer crashes, due to unusual fonts and a complex layout, could only be solved with their help. In addition, they contributed decisively to the design of the Journal as it appears now, and created the logo.

The Editors-in-Chief