Introduction
A Short History of Ethiopian–German Relations from Biblical Dreams to the Modern State

Wolbert G.C. SMIDT

Even if Ethiopia seems to be far from the daily life routine of Germans, still this country is known to surprisingly many Germans. Members of the older generation often remember it as Abyssinia (the old name of the Habesh highlands, or 'Habyssinia', as it used to be called) and often would be able to refer to Emperor Haylé Sellasé I, a popular figure in Germany already at a quite early stage of his career. Some also remember that Haylé Sellasé I was the first head of state to pay West Germany an official visit in 1954, thus unmistakably marking the end of its international isolation. Younger generation, however, are more likely to recall the famines that triggered responses from many German NGOs, and various notices of war.

There are many chapters to the history of German–Ethiopian relations. Some of them have already been recounted in other places, in numerous publications; others have thus far remained untold. It almost appears to be an inexhaustible subject matter. No matter what topic or which period of modern history and cultural history of Germany one touches on, some at least minor connections to Ethiopia can without fail be detected behind and within it – which makes it a pleasure for the researcher to dig. Why is that the case? It is not easy to answer this question. In a nutshell we could say that Ethiopia – and especially the Christian highlands – always seemed only just similar enough to Germany culturally, so that many familiar traditions, dreams, and projects of Europe could be discerned in it. On the other hand, the country was at the same time remote enough that it appeared to constitute a radically different, an opposite world. It was thus spellbindingly exotic.

It was probably this mixture of emotional and cultural proximity and distance, which attracted European visitors at different times. Ethiopia appears in medieval legends and narratives in different ways: There are already allusions to it in Wolfram's Parzival; the story of a powerful Oriental Christian ruler called 'Prester John' (often identified with the Ethiopian rulers) was told the first time by a German chronicler, and even the popular Biblical legend of the Three Holy Kings who adored

Fig. 1: The geographical concept of the world in the Old Testament, with Ethiopia figuring prominently as a Biblical country ('Mohrenland' as it is called in the Lutheran Bible translation)

Fig. 2: Example from the iconographic tradition depicting one of the Three Holy Kings as a black African, who was associated in tradition with Ethiopia, around 1515/20, Suabia

Jesus was linked to Ethiopia in some traditions, as one of the kings was believed to represent 'Aethiopia'. Moreover, despite the geographic distance across the Red Sea, the Mediterranean, or the Sudanese Nile route, Ethiopia is one of the few non-European countries which had since the Middle Ages regularly been sending emissaries to Europe. Their purpose was the forging of alliances between the Christian kings of the world, and the recruitment of European craftspeople to Ethiopia. Initially, these relations were entertained chiefly with southern European kingdoms, such as Spain, Portugal, and some Italian areas, but as early as the seventeenth century there were direct links with Germans as well.

Fig. 3: The traditional Ethiopian scholar *aleqa* Tayyé as Amharic language lecturer at Berlin University (1905–08)

This came about in the following way: In the sixteenth century, scholars of the reformation began to take an interest in Ethiopia. There was little information, but it was known that an old Semitic language was being spoken in the country and that it was part of the oldest Christian areas of the world. A German , Potken, had an Ethiopian Geᶜez manuscript printed in the sixteenth century, and orientalists engaged with Geᶜez alongside Hebrew and Arabic. The reason for this involvement was the hope to have rediscovered in Geᶜez an old biblical language: the language of Chaldean, which the Bible sees as one of the most ancient languages, and for which Orientalists of that time had been looking everywhere. Linked to it was the assumption that the wisdom of the biblical forefathers since Adam may have been preserved in Chaldean. In addition, the

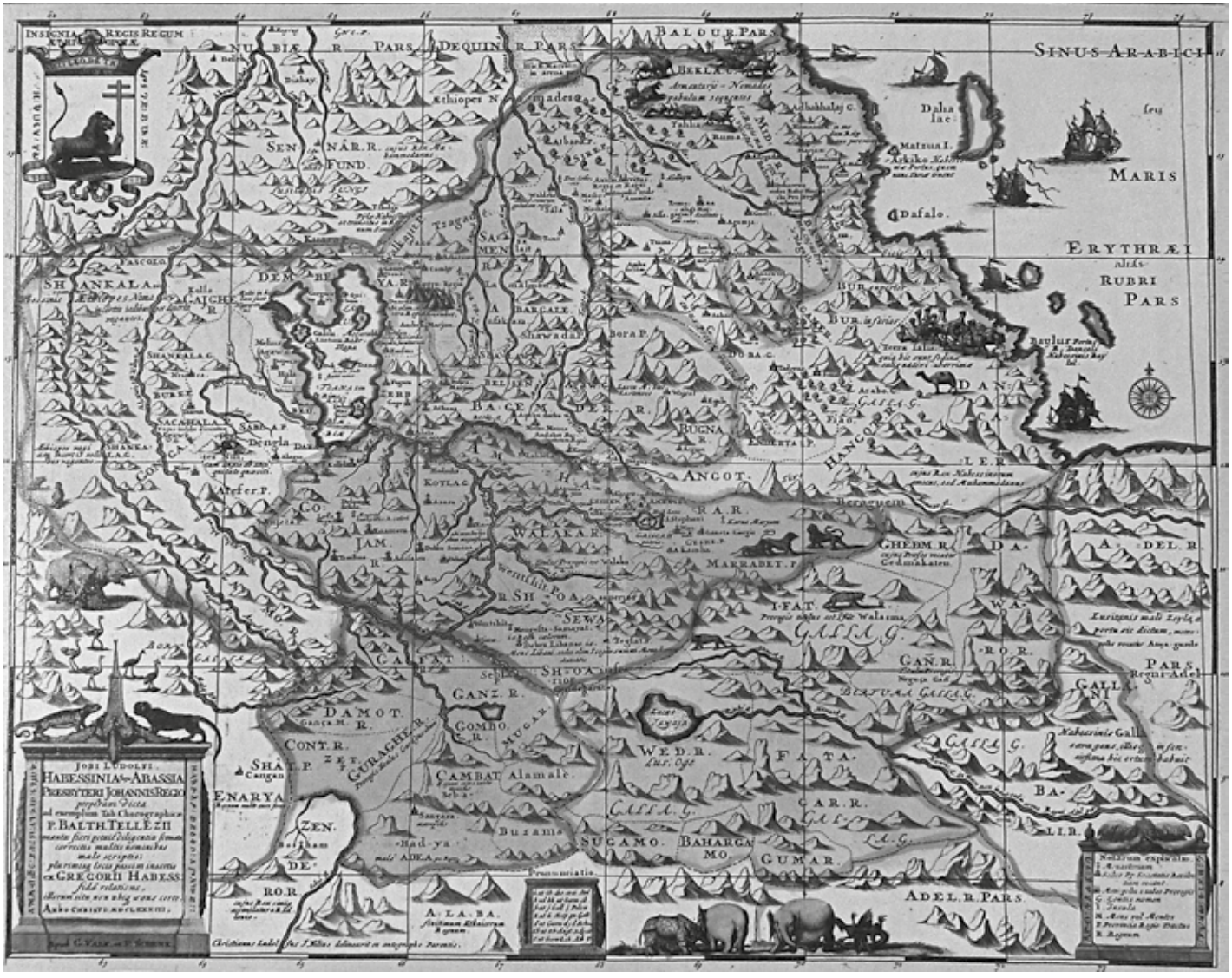

Fig. 4: Map of Ethiopia and its neighbors by Hiob Ludolf, with an Ethiopian inscription, based on the information given by Abba Gorgoryos and on the published information of Tellez, drawn by Christian Ludolf and published in Amsterdam 1683

German reformation movement, which was primarily directed against the supremacy of the pope and the ignorance of the Bible's teachings among both priestry and the population, also took interest into Ethiopia, being another country, which did not recognize the pope.

Around the middle of the seventeenth century, the engagement with Ethiopia turned scientific: In 1652, the Duke of Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg hosted the Ethiopian scholar Abba Gorgoryos from Mekane Sillasé in Amhara at Friedenstein Castle in Gotha, thus enabling him to work together with the young scholar Hiob Ludolf. Important and comprehensive works on the ethnography, the language and the history of the region originated here. They are marked by an astonishing degree of precision, and founded Ethiopian Studies as a scientific field. To be mentioned are especially Ludolf's *Historia Aethiopica* of 1681 and his pioneering works on Amharic and Geᶜez.

Ludolf was also an influential teacher. Among his most important students were Johann Heinrich Michaelis in Halle, and Johann Michael Wansleben. The Duke funded a scientific expedition of the latter in 1663, which, however, never reached Ethiopia – but he had at least been quite successful in collecting Ethiopian manuscripts in Egypt (today kept in Italy and Paris). In another attempt the Duke, helped by Ludolf, tried to organize an alliance of Christian kingdoms, including Ethiopia, against the Turks, who had invaded the neighbouring Austrian Empire. But the idea of a political alliance came much too early. All attempts of establishing a direct contact through the help of Dutch seafarers stayed fruitless. Christian Ethiopia, however, had started to attract the public's interest. In the context of a new philosophical-anthropological discourse in the 18th century, led by the anthropologist and philosopher Immanuel Kant, Ludolf's works were crucial for the preservation of a positive image of Ethiopia, in contrast to all other regions of Africa.

Throughout the centuries that were to follow, Ethiopians visited Germany again and again – in the capacity of missionary students (since 1866), of students (since 1877), travellers, workers, assistants of German scholars, as university teachers (already since 1907), diplomats, émigrés (first after the Italian invasion of Ethiopia), and with rising frequency as merchants.

Of some special interest are the quite early German research expeditions, which reached the region already from the 1820s. The first were the prominent natural scientists Ehrenberg and Hemprich in 1825 in the coastal region of Massawa. Eduard Rüppell then carried out meteorological, zoological and ethnographical studies in 1830 to 1834. The most remarkable chapter of research history of that time was certainly the one of the south German Wilhelm Schimper, who arrived in 1837 in Tigray and finally settled there. First he worked as a botanist, describing numerous endemic plants the first time, but then decided to enter into the services of the ruler of Tigray and Simén, *dejjazmach* Wubé. Schimper was nominated by him governor of Ïntïcc'o (called 'Antitschau' in German sources) and started an agricultural reform. He also authored important reports on Ethiopia, which give us insights into the culture and the political situation. He and his assistant, the painter Eduard Zander, later entered into the services of *atse* Tewodros II. Together with Schimper, he also built the palace and church of Deresge Maryam in Simén for Wubé. Later, after Wubé's defeat in 1855, Tewodros II held his coronation ceremony in this church. The Deutsche Afrika-Expedition of 1861–62, led by Theodor von Heuglin from Württemberg and the Swiss Werner Munzinger, was mainly carried out in Bogos in today's Eritrea, in northern Ethiopia, Kunama and Sudanese areas, and was followed by the publication of detailed ethnographic and cartographic material in Gotha. Gotha thus again became a centre of research on Ethiopia. This was followed by an expedition led by the Duke Ernst II of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha himself, who arrived in the borderlands of Ethiopia, Mensa and Bogos, in spring 1862. His expedition was accompanied by a painter, the bestseller author Gerstäcker, and scholars such as Alfred Brehm, who published its scientific results.

Over time, Ethiopia has awakened the interest of very diverse groups within the German-speaking area – of philologists, linguists and cultural scientists (since the sixteenth century), pietistic missionaries (since the 1830s), crafts people (who followed the missionaries), German emigrants and refugees of all kinds (as early as the 1840s, ranging from Jewish refugees to Nazi war criminals gone into hiding after World War II), diplomats and emissaries (from 1862), geographers and archaeologists, the earliest specialists in the field of development cooperation

(as early as around 1906), policy advisors (from around 1908), artists and writers (among them Karl May with a rather wild and implausible adventure tale from the Emirate of Harer), journalists of all political orientations, ranging from ultraconservative-monarchist to revolutionary-communist, non-governmental organisations, and representatives of the official German political class and the development cooperation.

Today, Ethiopia takes up the first place in the list of those African countries targeted by development measures of the German government. Here again, the history of development cooperation goes back further than in other African countries: Since the 1840s, German craftspeople have been employed at the courts of northern Ethiopian noblemen, where they built

Fig. 5: Detail of the same map, with reference to Abba Gorgoryos, on whose information much of the information on the map relies, with an Ethiopian inscription

Fig. 6: The Meqdela hills, with Tenta in the foreground, based on a sketch by the Austrian researcher Theodor von Heuglin of 20 March 1862, etching published in 1867, Topographic Department of the War Office, London, kept in the Forschungsbibliothek Gotha (code: 54$112477143)

churches and palaces, and later roads, worked as armourers, agricultural reformers, and wagon builders. The Protestant craftsmen's mission was part of this tradition as well. It was established at the court of the King of Kings Tewodros II in 1855, and consisted of German craftsmen who were to serve the King and simultaneously preach religious reform. The Protestant Churches of Ethiopia and Eritrea have their origins here. A special feature of this mission consists of young Ethiopian students coming to Germany from as early on as 1866, where they themselves were being trained as missionaries. When the last German missionaries were forced to leave the country in 1882, they carried the mission forth.

Since the 1840s, the Oromo Mission constituted another branch of the same mission: Among German missionaries there existed the dream to

Fig. 7: Mesqel celebration in Mensa^{c}, depicted by the painter Robert Kretschmar during the expedition of Ernst II, duke of Saxony-Coburg and Gotha, of 1862

turn the entire country of 'Ormania' Protestant (the name was an invention of Germans, and encompassed all countries of the Oromo peoples, most of which were annexed by Ethiopia in the late nineteenth century). A small number of Oromo were invited to Germany to receive an education. One of them, called Christian Ludwig Paulus Rufo by the Germans, embarked upon the significant task of translating the Bible into Oromo; today there are among the Oromo peoples several million Protestants.

German scholarly interest in Ethiopia, first by natural scientists, then by linguists and ethnographers, reinitiated Ethiopian Studies in the 19th century. Augustus Dillmann (1823–1894) created the most important Ge^{c}ez dictionary, followed by a grammar. With his publications of the years 1847 to 1894 he was practically the re-founder of Ethiopian Studies in Europe. Franz Praetorius (1847–1927) at a very young age acquired an impressing command of Tigrinnya, publishing later further linguistic works on Ethiosemitic and Cushitic languages, which are still important today. The Orientalist Enno Littmann during his 1905/06 Princeton Expedition recorded Tigré traditions and songs, continued later for two years in Straßburg together with Naffa' *wad* 'Etman, and thus laid new grounds for Tigré Studies. Additionally his archaeological and philological studies during the Deutsche Aksum-Expedition were the first serious undertaking in this field. Also outsiders of the academic sphere contributed importantly, with Friedrich and Otto Bieber to be mentioned especially: Without their contributions, our knowledge of the oral traditions of the ancient Kefa kingdom, which had been annexed by Ethiopia in the late 19th century, would be poor. The Semitist Eugen Mittwoch in Berlin – closely collaborating with Ethiopian scholars like *aleqa* Tayyé (Amharic lecturer in Berlin in 1907) and *blattén géta* Hïruy

Fig. 8: Statue of Ernst II, duke of Saxony-Coburg and Gotha, Ducal Museum Gotha

Welde-Sïllase (who stayed in Berlin in 1923) – and the Africanist August Klingenheben in Hamburg initiated Ethiopian Studies at their chairs. Both universities have kept these research traditions until today – the chair in Hamburg finally becoming the only purely Ethiopianist chair of Europe under Ernst Hammerschmidt.

The relations between Germany and Ethiopia during the Nazi era constitute a peculiar chapter in the history of German–Ethiopian relations, and one that thus far has received little attention in academic essays. Here, however, it shall not be neglected, precisely because it has been ignored so readily in the past. These relations have not been researched yet, but they appear to hold a lot of material for surprises. In fact, some Nazi groups held sympathy for Ethiopia, tied to theories of 'Hamitic harbingers of culture' with Aryan roots that are claimed to have marked Ethiopia, a harbour of ancient culture (a claim which faded away after the 1936 Mussolini conquest of Ethiopia). Perhaps not irrelevant for such ideas was the fact that the founder of 'Orgesch', a predecessor of the Nazi organisation SA, had once himself been an advisor to King Mïnilïk II. One episode, involving a special emissary of the Ethiopian Emperor to Hitler, is achieved a great success, is particularly surprising. His aim was to secure German military assistance, when the armies of Mussolini were already marching on the borders of Ethiopia. Hitler granted the necessary funds and it was even possible to smuggle German weapons to Ethiopia via Djibouti. The chutzpah was remarkable: This special emissary was introduced to Hitler as the son of an Ethiopian princess and a 'German harbinger of culture', thus instrumentalising the Nazis' ideology; in fact, however, he happened to be the son of a Jewish refugee from the Jewish Quarter in Krakow, who had been hired in Ethiopia as a weapons manufacturer. This illustrates the way the Ethiopians put the sympathy they received from the Nazis to use in a skilful and well-targeted fashion.

After Ethiopian Studies had already started to flourish in philology, linguistics, archaeology, epigraphy in the early 20th century, the second half of the century witnessed a further rise of scholarly interest in the region. The second half of the articles in this book is devoted to these research undertakings: By now both Ethiopian Studies and Social An-

Fig. 9: Ethiopia on a map of 1867, depicting the route of the researcher Heuglin between Gonder and Meqdela of 1862, and the planned route of the British expedition army under Napier's command

thropology get increasingly institutionalized, which open a totally new chapter of research, as more systematic research becomes possible. This institutionalisation also helped to increase quickly the number of persons involved in research, in Europe as in Ethiopia and its neighbouring countries – many of whom are mentioned in the articles in this volume. Philology in Ethiopian Studies witnesses a great rise in the second half of the 20th century, with systematic cataloguing and highly professional, critical editions of Ethiopian manuscripts. The rise of Social Anthropology

Fig. 10: The Somali teacher Mahammad Nuur (?) in Germany before becoming language assistant at Hamburg University, in 1912 working on contractual basis for an ethnographic exhibition

also allows a quick rise of new researches in the field, allowing insights, which were totally unthinkable before. Virtually all great discussions and 'turms' in Social Anthropology also take place among researchers active in Northeastern Africa, and particularly in Ethiopia.

In recent years, one culmination (and certainly not the only one) was the creation of the five-volumes *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* at Hamburg University (published 2003–2014), with over 400 scholars participating, and with well over 4000 articles on biographies of historical personalities, on languages, regions and ancient and modern settlements, ethnic groups and clans, religious traditions and cultural phenomena, historical events, Ethiopian manuscripts, ancient inscriptions, on churches, mosques and other religious centres etc. By now, again a new chapter has just been opened, of which we do not know the outcome yet, even if first directions and results become more and more visible: First with the foundation of Addis Ababa University, in the last decade followed by the foundation of thirty-two new universities in Ethiopia alone, and several dozen private and public-private universities in Somalia and Djibouti, research is increasingly carried out by local researchers, which give a totally new impetus and inputs to it, and new perspectives.

Nowadays German–Ethiopian relations are probably even more complex and multi-faceted than they used to be: There is a considerably larger degree of migration – incidentally taking place in both directions –, and there are countless personal and official relations between varied organisations and the two states. The latest official state visit was paid by President Joachim Gauck to Ethiopia in 2014. To name but a few examples: After the war the German Graf von der Recke established the export of coffee from Ethiopia; the establishment of the School of Fine

Fig. 11: Scene from field research: The influential German social anthropologist Adolf E. Jensen during an interview, in the foreground Aike Berinas, chief of the eastern Hamar, Camp Dunamer near Bako

Arts was supported by Germans, among them the well-known artist Karl-Heinz Hansen-Bahia; the GDR helped setting the Medical College in Gonder; during the great famine of the 1980s, the organisation 'Menschen für Menschen' gained special recognition, whose founder Karlheinz Böhm or 'Mister Karl', as he is known in Ethiopia, became an honorary citizen of the country; the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH has recently been very successful with the implementation of cobbled streets, which are highly popular among Ethiopians; the Ethiopian emigrant and professional historian *Lij* Asfa-Wossen Asserate, a member of the ruling dynasty has become famous in Germany with his best-selling book on 'Manners' and other books remarkable for the fine cultural observations; and in recent years several Ethiopian universities and institutes have installed German presidents and directors, whose task it is to assist the numerous new universities of Ethiopia in their rapid development and link them with the international academic world. Thus, there will continue to be more told, as well as untold, tales.

Photo credits

Fig. 1: The geographical concept of the world in the Old Testament, with Ethiopia figuring prominently as a Biblical country (Mohrenland as it is called in the Lutheran Bible translation), from Theodor Menke: Bibelatlas in Acht Blättern, Gotha: Perthes 1868, map. no. 1 (detail)

Fig. 2: Example from the iconographic tradition depicting one of the Three Holy Kings as a black African, who was associated in tradition with Ethiopia, around 1515/20, Suabia, kept in the Weimarer Schloss (Inv. Nr. G 72)

Fig. 3: The traditional Ethiopian scholar *aleqa* Tayyé as Amharic language lecturer at Berlin University (1905–08), from Edward Ullendorff 1972: pl. 1

Fig. 4: Map of Ethiopia and its neighbors by Hiob Ludolf, with an Ethiopian inscription, based on the information given by Abba Gorgoryos and on the published information of Tellez, drawn by Christian Ludolf and published in Amsterdam 1683, Deutsche Fotothek, Sächsische Landesbibliothek, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden (code: A 939)

Fig. 5: Detail of the same map, with reference to Abba Gorgoryos, on whose information much of the information on the map relies, with an Ethiopian inscription

Fig. 6: The Meqdela hills, with Tenta in the foreground, based on a sketch by the Austrian researcher Theodor von Heuglin of 20 March 1862, etching published in 1867, Topographic Department of the War Office, London, kept in the Forschungsbibliothek Gotha (code: 54$112477143)

Fig. 7: Mesqel celebration in Mensa[2], depicted by the painter Robert Kretschmar during the expedition of Ernst II, duke of Saxony-Coburg and Gotha, of 1862, from: Reise des Herzogs Ernst von Sachsen-Coburg-Gotha nach Aegypten und den Ländern der Habab, Mensa und Bogos, Leipzig 1864, fig. no. 19

Fig. 8: Statue of Ernst II, duke of Saxony-Coburg and Gotha, Ducal Museum Gotha, photo by the author

Fig. 9: Ethiopia on a map of 1867, depicting the route of the researcher Heuglin between Gonder and Meqdela of 1862, and the planned route of the British expedition army under Napier's command, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Perthes Map Collection (code: 54$111952484)

Fig. 10: The Somali teacher Mahammad Nuur (?) in Germany before becoming language assistant at Hamburg University, in 1912 working on contractual basis for an ethnographic exhibition; postcard from the collection of Clemens Radauer, Vienna

Fig. 11: Scene from field research: The influential German social anthropologist Adolf E. Jensen during an interview, in the foreground Aike Berinas, chief of the eastern Hamar, Camp Dunamer near Bako, photo by Elisabeth Pauli 1950/52, courtesy of the Frobenius Institute (code: 23-Pa017-33)