

## Gotha's Relations to Ethiopia

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Some citizens of Ethiopia connote the word 'Gotha' with the rise of their country to becoming a strong and educated African nation, thus the name of this former residence city and capital of Thuringia to them is charged very positively. The reason for the enormous popularity of Gotha on the African continent leads us back to the year 1640, the year in which Duke Ernest I. of Saxony founded the new dukedom of Saxe-Gotha with Gotha as its capital and residential city. He takes over a completely ruined country, and therefore strives to bring the best scientists, pedagogues, and state dignitaries to his city. Within a small number of years he manages to transform his territory into the exemplary 'German ducal state', which Veit Ludwig von Seckendorf, an expert in constitutional law, described in his notable textbook. The reforms he initiated had an influence on all areas of life, but especially on education, economy, medicine, fire safety and the rearrangement of the political system. They were to serve as an example for the founding of many later states.

The prudent leader of Gotha acknowledged the importance of the protestant religion from early on, in the first years of his regency, and employs the 'Ernestinisches Bibelwerk' at a national level towards its advancement. Being a model protestant state, his country not only supports the church within its own borders, but also in other German states, as well as in Russia. But it is the discovery of new cultures, especially in Africa, that most captivates the Duke's interest.

In 1651 Hiob Ludolph (1624–1702), a scientist born in Erfurt, visits Gotha and describes to the Duke his encounter with the Ethiopian clergyman Abba Gorgoryos in Rome. The Duke is enthralled by the account, and asks Ludolph to bring the foreign clergyman to Gotha.

Hiob Ludolph now takes up a position as a civil servant, and the Ethiopian Abba Gorgoryos arrives at Gotha in the year 1652. Along with Hiob Ludolph he establishes the Gotha Religious Colloquies, they go through the library's old writings and together they compile a dictionary. Through their works, both pay invaluable services to the fields of Ethiopian studies and Semitic linguistics.



Fig. 1: Torso portrait of Ernst II, Duke of Saxony-Coburg and Gotha, who visited the borderlands of Mensa' and Bogos in 1862, Ducal Museum of Gotha

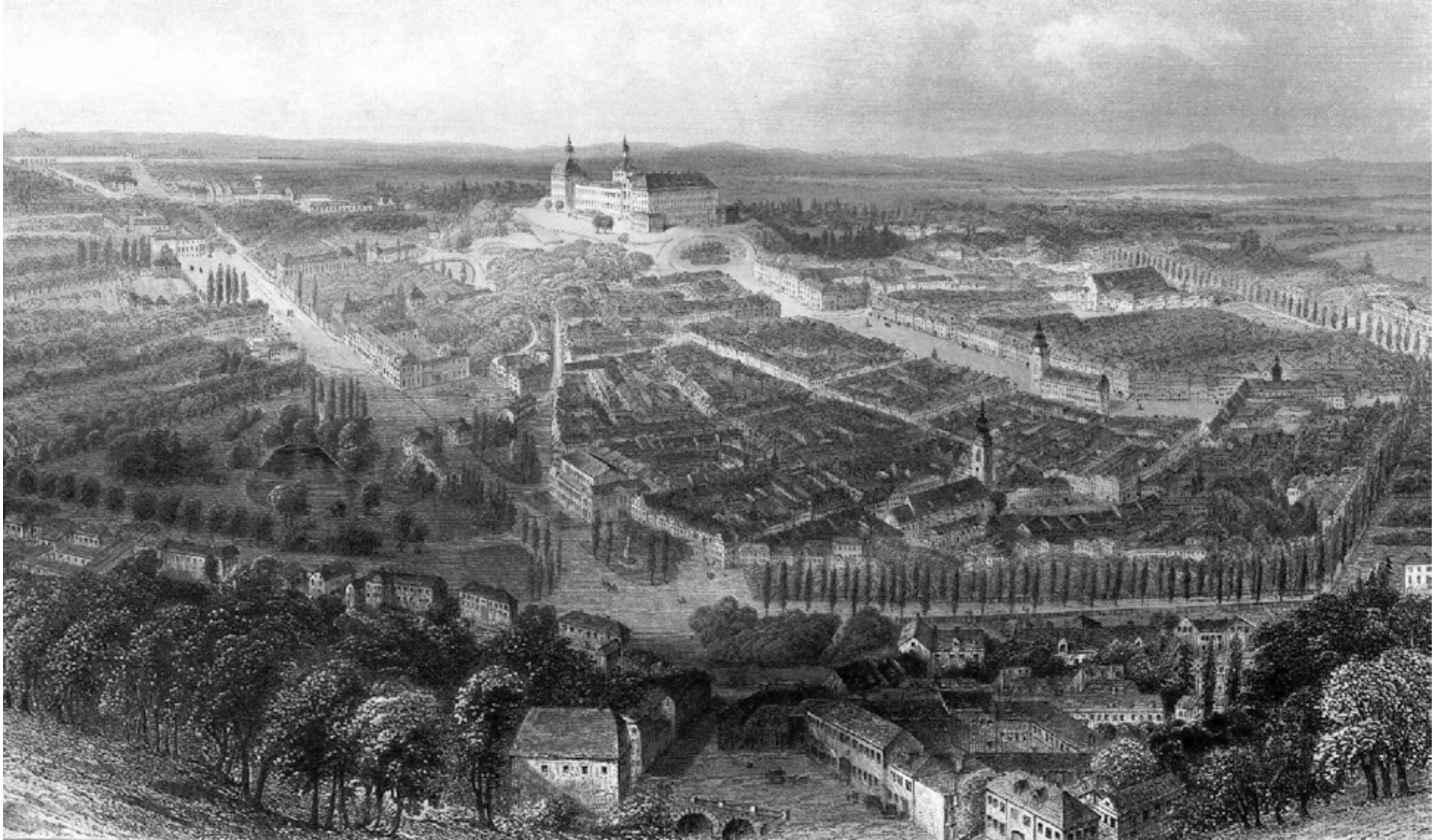


Fig. 2: City view of Gotha in 1850



In 1653, Hiob Ludolph receives the Duke's permission to make the purchase of a house below the castle hill, located directly by the market of Gotha. He regularly invites students and foreign scientists to this hospitable house, and takes up employment as the princes' tutor at court the same year.

On 2 June 1659 he begins to provide accommodation for the student Johann Michael Wansleben at his house. It is Wansleben who, one year later, leaves Gotha for London, taking two books by Ludolph with him, since no publisher could be found for them in Germany. The 'Lexicon Aethiopica-Latinum' (Ludolf 1661) and 'Grammatica Aethiopica', written by Ludolph and Abba Gorgoryos, are published in the English capital in 1661. After their having gone to print, however, it turned out that they were full of transcription errors, and it takes until

1699 for a new edition of this dictionary of the Ethiopian language – for centuries the most popular of its kind – to be published at Frankfurt am Main (Ludolf 1699).

In the year 1661, the scholar Jeremias Wittich from Gotha writes in a travel report that in Gotha there exists an inn 'ad insigne Aethiopsis', an inn with the sign of the moor. It remains unclear to this day how the figure, which was not made from local sandstone, found its way to Gotha.

At the behest of Duke Ernest I. of Saxe-Gotha, Ludolph's student Michael Wansleben sets off on an expedition to Africa in 1663. The report he wrote for the Duke regarding this journey is still extant today. He seems to not quite have reached Ethiopia, but to have made it only to the southern tip of Egypt.



Fig. 3: North view of castle Friedenstein in the winter



Fig. 4: Monument of Duke Ernst der Fromme

Ludolph's studies and his research continue. In 1698 the 'Lexicon Amharico-Latinum' and the 'Grammaticae induae Amharicae' are published in Frankfurt am Main, both of them again being a collaboration between Hiob Ludolph and Abba Gorgoryos, based on their research undertaken in Gotha. Ludolph has by now established himself as a scientist, and further extends his house below the castle hill in 1669/70. Above the front door, the following quote from the Bible remains: 'For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.' When Duke Ernest I of Saxe-Gotha passes away, Hiob Ludolph loses his great patron, but since he himself worked as the new regent's tutor, he is able to continue his work seamlessly.

Little is known about Hiob Ludolph's personal life. In 1661, he married Emilia Maria Dimpler (1639–1676). The parish register contains information on the births of his children: his daughter Susanna Magdalena was born on 5 July 1669, and his son Johann Jacob on 3 January 1671. His son Justus, born on 14 May 1673, dies nine days later. Further strong blows of fate are not spared Hiob Ludolph: on 6 August 1674, he loses another child, aged only six weeks. The death of his wife is recorded for the year 1676, at a time when he was journeying to Berlin as the Duke's delegate. The precise date of her death has not yet been confirmed, however. Her sudden departure from life induces Ludolph to leave Gotha in the year 1677 and to sell the house at castle hill to the ducal treasury. His deceased wife's hometown, Frankfurt am Main, becomes his new place of residence. In 1682 he marries Anna Katharina Müller (1642–1685), and in 1694, after her death, he marries Maria Catharina von Lersner (1642–1695).

The connection between the scientist, who is now internationally renowned, and Gotha stays intact until his death in 1704. In 1681 already he is able – based on his research – to publish the 'Historia Aethiopica', which is to constitute an indispensable source of knowledge for the study of medieval Ethiopia up until the twenty-first century. In the following years, several regents encourage the scholar, who has a command of the Ethiopian language, to undertake diplomatic missions. In 1691, 1698, and 1701 further books by Hiob Ludolph are published in Frankfurt am Main. His burying place can to this day be visited in the east entrance to St. Catherine's Church in Frankfurt.

Throughout the eighteenth century, owing to the research in the ducal library, the century-old connections to the African continent retain a constant presence. The inn 'Zum Mohren', built in 1664, is embellished with a rococo gable, topped by the sand stone figurine of the moor. The building having been torn down, this figure is on display at the City Hall of Gotha since 2007, the same building that Hiob Ludolph and Abba Gorgoryos had already visited in their time.

Duke Ernest II of Saxe-Gotha, who was to be revered by posterity as the 'Astronomer on the Throne', was known for his research in the natural sciences and his endorsement thereof. He backs the 'Grand Lodge', establishing it from 1784 on in Gotha, and receives the title 'Prince of Abyssinia', to commemorate the love of his great-grandfather to Ethiopia.

Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1751–1840), an influential natural scientist born in Gotha, decidedly opposes the then dominant opinion among scientists according to which the black race constitutes a form of humanity inferior to the European race. It is for this reason that he purchases an Ethiopian skull in 1791 and demonstrates the same developmental stages of humanity at its example. Blumenbach is the founding father of scientific zoology and anthropology.

In Gotha, the nineteenth century is the age of cartographers and publishers. Based in Gotha, the publishing house Justus Perthes, founded in 1785 and later to become famous around the world, documents all facets of the current worldview and endorses the discovery of the last unknown landscapes on the planet. As early as 1822, the historian Johann Georg August Galletti (1750–1828) publishes his 'General Geographical Dictionary' and compiles his book 'General Survey of the World or Encyclopaedia for Geography, Statistics, and History of States', in which he proffers concrete descriptions of the Ethiopian landscape, its people, language and religion.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, German researchers begin to follow in the footsteps of Hiob Ludolph, and in 1849 the German explorer Georg Schimper reaches the Ethiopian city of Adwa. Theodor Heuglin emulates his journey in 1859. Both document their explorations in the first geographical journal worldwide, 'Petermanns geografische Mitteilungen', which is being exported into the whole world from Gotha.



Fig. 5: Courtyard of the castle Friedenstein



Fig. 6: Monument of August Petermann: one of the most famous geographers and cartographers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century





Fig. 7: Publication by the traveller Theodor von Heuglin (1824–1876) on Ethiopia and the Sudan, published in 1857 in Gotha, following which he was nominated leader of the German Africa Expedition of 1861/62 to Northeast Africa

‘Journeys and Discoveries in Northern and Central Africa’ by Heinrich Barth, too, is first published in Gotha in 1857/58. The scientist August Petermann from Gotha commissions explorers with precise assignments for the exploration of Africa, and especially of Ethiopia. Reports about newly made discoveries in Ethiopia were regularly published in this internationally acclaimed journal up until 1894.

The most spectacular expedition begins in the spring of 1862: accompanied by his wife Alexandrine, Duke Ernest II of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, the hero of a movement pushing for a German unified, federal state, embarks upon a journey to Ethiopia. The zoologist Alfred Brehm, the writer Friedrich Gerstäcker, Duke Hermann of Hohenlohe, Prince Eduard of Leiningen, Mr and Mrs von Reuter, Dr Hassen-

stein, the painter Robert Kretschmer, and a staff of servants ten strong moreover accompany him.

August Petermann probably instigated this journey, since it was he who in 1864 published the first account of this journey in his ‘Petermann Geografische Mitteilungen’. Duke Ernest II was the first reigning German head of state who paid the African continent an official visit. Alfred Brehm, too, publishes material concerning this voyage, and in 1910 even Paul von Ebart dedicated a publication to the Duchesses journey.

It is worth noting that in 1897 the French began the construction of a railway line leading from Addis Ababa to Djibouti on the Red Sea via Direh Dawa. This railway line traverses a large viaduct, which crosses the Gotha-Shet (i.e., the Gotha River). Several postcards document this.

For the twentieth century, so far, no relations are documented between Gotha and Ethiopia. An exception may be Bothmann, a famous manufacturer of carousels, who also exported their pendulum rides and carousels to Eritrea, as an advertising brochure revealed.



Fig. 8: The Ethiopian delegation of Adwa during the yearly “Barock-Fest” of Gotha, with lord mayor Kreuch on the microphone, August 2014

Since 2005, policymakers in Gotha dedicated themselves to a revival of their relations to Ethiopia with renewed strength, after Germany had achieved reunification and overcome the results of forty years of separation. Both in 2005 and in 2006, the respective ambassadors of Ethiopia travel to Gotha for a visit, and since 2011 *Lij Asfa-Wossen Asserate*, a member of the royal family, is a regular visitor to Gotha, Germany's town with the longest history of relations to Ethiopia. In 2013 he hosts a conference entitled 'Orbis Aethiopicus', in order to revive the relations between Gotha and Ethiopia.

In 2012, Almaz and Karl-Heinz Böhm were awarded the prize 'Der Friedenstein' in Gotha, honouring their commitment to Ethiopia since 1982. Through their aid organisation 'Menschen für Menschen', both of them have made lasting contributions to the wellbeing of the Ethiopian people.

In 2013, Germany's best-known animal documentary filmmaker Andreas Kieling, who hails from Gotha, travelled to Ethiopia in order to produce a documentary on the African wolf, to be aired on the German television channel ZDF in 2014.

On 19 December 2013 a letter from the mayor of Adwa arrived in Gotha, asking the councillor of Gotha for permission to initiate friendly relations to the city. Ato Kiday, the mayor of Adwa, the head of economic development of the Tigray (state) region, Ato Seifu, and Ato Kassa, an employee of the Ethiopian foreign ministry, paid Gotha a first visit between 27 August and 1 September 2014.

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