The Foundation of Modern Ethiopian Historiography in Europe in the 17th Century and its Enduring Legacies

Shiferaw Bekele
Emeritus Professor
Addis Ababa University

Hiob Ludolf (1624-1704) is widely regarded as the founder of modern Ethiopian Studies, which scholars qualify by using the expression "in Europe". It is meant to suggest that, long before the emergence of Ethiopian Studies in Europe, Ethiopia had been home to its own written languages (such as Ge'ez and Amharic) and to Arabic, which in turn were used by national scholars to develop a study of the history and languages of the country as well as to produce theological and philosophical literature. Another way of separating the two streams of knowledge is by using the word "modern" for the one that was developed in Europe to indicate that the methodology and theoretical apparatus it deploys evolved in the west over the last few centuries. I will follow this methodology and apply the term "modern historiography" for the new approach that Ludolf introduced.

The rise of Ethiopian Studies took place in 17th century Europe. In the first half of the century, a very devastating war was fought in central Europe, particularly in Germany, that lasted thirty years essentially between Catholics and Protestants. The war and its aftermath kept the antagonism between the followers of the two denominations at a very high pitch long after the end of the armed clashes. To what extent Hiob Ludolf, a protestant, was affected by these wars is not very clear but the fact remains that he displayed strong negative emotions towards the Catholic Church even if we see that in hiswritings he draws heavily from the book of Tellez as well as from the published correspondence of the Jesuit missionaries in Ethiopia. But the Protestant-Catholic antipathy was not the only conflict that paused a serious threat to the very existence of Europe.

Starting from the 16th century, the Ottoman empire had knocked on the gates of Central Europe, particularly on the Austrian empire, repeatedly until the siege of Vienna in 1683. As an emerging powerful empire, the Turkish state had tried to subvert the various kingdoms in central Europe over and above outright invasion. Hence, the issue of how to resist, and finally overcome, this expansive and expanding state preoccupied European diplomats, statesmen and scholars of the humanities for a very long time. In this endeavor, the idea of forging an alliance with the far-off Christian Empire of Ethiopia with a view to a two-pronged attack on the Muslim Caliphate was a highly sought after desideratum. It was also one of the drivers in the scholarly career of Hiob Ludolf.

On the other hand, that was an era that saw the steady rise of Europe as a world power, when its ships plied not only the Atlantic Ocean but also the remote waters of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. The Dutch had established their possessions over the islands that they called Dutch East Indies (later Indonesia). The far-flung Portuguese maritime empire, with its successful beginnings

in the 15th century, when it installed itself on the western and eastern shores of the African continent, went on to build, in the subsequent centuries, its territories along the western littoral of the Indian subcontinent while installing its trading centers in areas as far away as Eastern China. The British and the French too were highly competitive rivals whose energetic race to expand their empires took them into the Far East and the Pacific Ocean. All this is in addition to their vast possessions on the American continent.

Thus, wealth started to pour into Europe from the rest of the world leading to a steady growth in prosperity. Education expanded in the old continent, and universities were founded everywhere. Among the many new areas of teaching and research that were introduced in the old and new universities of the various kingdoms, princedoms and dukedoms (republics were not yet common forms of state organization), the novel field of oriental studies was one of them. This was a cluster of disciplines that focused on the study of languages, history, cultures and later archaeology of the peoples and polities of the Arab world as well as those of India, China and the other countries of Asia. The various governments were ready to provide funding for the research because the demand for people with knowledge of oriental languages and states was steadily growing. Some of the oldest and most prestigious universities of Europe opened departments of oriental studies in the 16th and 17th centuries. Hebrew and Arabic occupied the prime of place among the languages of the Near East. A focus on these two tongues brought the researcher into contact with their close kin, Ge'ez, which was, like them, a written Semitic language that boasted of literature that went back to the first millennium AD. When Ludolf was growing of age in the early 1640s, there were a number of institutions across western Europe, which had developed reputation as centers of excellence in the study of oriental languages and cultures.

1. **Hiob Ludolf**:

It was within this context that Hiob Ludolf was born on 24 June 1624 in the town of Erfurt in Germany to a very wealthy merchant family. The house in which he was born still stands in the city, which protects it as a heritage site. When he completed his secondary education, Ludolf joined the University of Erfurt in 1639. He studied oriental languages such as Ge'ez, Hebrew, Syriac and Arabic, and also read medicine and law. He obtained a degree in law in 1645, but he decided to focus on language studies, particularly on textual studies, in his future scholarly career. For this purpose, he traveled to one of the prestigious schools for oriental studies at that time, the University of Leiden, where he deepened his knowledge of the Semitic languages and also took courses in several other European and oriental languages. In line with the tradition of the era for well-funded young scholars, he traveled to a number of European universities (for instance, Oxford in England, the Sorbonne in Paris) where he deepened his knowledge of philological studies. In 1648, he was employed by the Swedish ambassador in Paris, who soon (1649) sent him to Rome to look for some documents for the queen of Sweden in the archives of the Vatican. He was never able to locate the documents. Nevertheless, he took advantage of his stay in the Eternal City to further enrich his knowledge of Ethiopian languages and history by establishing contact with four Ethiopian priests, who were staying in the Vatican at the time. Catholics, the monks came fleeing the anti-Catholic persecution launched by Emperor Fasil (1632-

1667). One of them, Abba Gorgoryos, became his teacher and friend, while another father, Antonio de Andrade (an Ethio-Portuguese), served as an interpreter – at least initially. Since, the young scholar had already acquired a knowledge of Ge'ez, the opportunity enabled him to further refine his mastery of the language and also to learn Amharic. In the words of Professor Uhlig, who had studied Ludolf's works, "Their regular meetings between March and May 1649 formed the basis for Ludolf's subsequent research into Ethio-Semitic languages as well as Ethiopian history, culture, literature and Christianity."

Thereupon, he returned to Paris, where he worked for two more years. In the meantime, he maintained regular contact with Gorgoryos by writing to the latter in Ge'ez. This was indeed a remarkable achievement. The latter also responded in the same tongue elaborating on issues raised by the young German on historical or cultural or linguistic issues. In 1651, Ludolf went back to Gotha, where Ernst I, the Duke of Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg, employed him because he had an interest in establishing contact with the Ethiopian empire with the ultimate purpose of establishing an alliance against the Ottoman empire. The duke instructed Ludolf to invite his friend to visit him to acquire a better understanding of the country and offered to fund the travel and stay of Gorgoryos in Gotha. In June 1652, the Ethiopian monk arrived in Gotha, where he stayed in the palace of the ruler and worked closely with the young scholar for a little over three months, up to September of the same year. The two had extensive discussions on Ethiopia's history, languages, political structure, natural environment and the like. Ludolf took extensive notes of their conversations in these three months, which he later used in his various publications, all the time profusely acknowledging his informant. In September 1652, Gorgorgyos returned to Rome. On his part, Ludolf did not stay long in the service of Ernst I because he was appointed to a significant government position as a counsellor and he went to another city. Side by side with his government duties, the young German scholar also engaged in research for a doctorate degree in jurisprudence, which he obtained in 1658. Thereupon, he gave his services to various German ducal courts on political, diplomatic and financial matters.

Side by side with his high government duties, he continued to do research into Ethiopian texts, Amharic and Ethiopic, and to seek ways of establishing contact with Ethiopia. He started to publish the results of his studies as of the 1660s. In 1661, he brought out *Confessio fidei Claudii regis Aethiopicae*. This was the letter of King Gelawdewos (1540-1559), which he translated into Latin and annotated, thus publishing an early work in textual edition. In 1663, he sent one of his disciples and assistants, Michael Wansleben, to Egypt with the objective of proceeding from there to Ethiopia. The mission failed because the man could not travel further to the Christian kingdom due to a new war that the Ottomans had gotten into. Finally, in 1676, he retired from political and administrative responsibilities, and moved to Frankfurt on the Main to devote his remaining life to research and publication. He lived there until his death on 8 April 1704. It was in this city that he published his major works such as *Historia Aethiopica* (1681), *ad suam Historiam Aethiopicam antehac editam Commentarius* (1691). In the words of Professor Uhlig, "Due to the groundbreaking importance of his writings, they were soon translated from the original Latin into the major European languages of the time." (p.603). The famous historian, the late Richard Pankhurst, summarizes the views of the most prominent scholars in Ethiopian Studies on Ludolf:

The importance of Ludolf's scholarly achievement needs scarcely be emphasized. August Dillmann (1828-1894), the next notable Ethiopicist, wrote of Ludolf's "immortal services," while Ignazio Guidi (1844-1935) declared that one must "greatly admire" the contribution of this "father of Ethiopian studies," and Edward Ullendorff in our own day has described him as "the most illustrious name in Ethiopic scholarship," and his History as a "monumental work."

Indeed, the more one studies Ludolf, the more one realizes that he was a great man of learning. I argue in this paper that he left behind a profound legacy on Ethiopian identity and a deep impact on the country's historiography that few, if any, scholars could equal.

2. **Abba Gorgoryos**:

His collaborator, Abba Gorgoryos, had, as to be expected, an entirely different trajectory. Abba Gorgoryos was from the then famous church of Mäkanä Selassie (now only in ruins) in the medieval province of central Ethiopia called Bétä Amhara. In today's toponym, his area is very close to the town of Were-Ilu in the province (or, in current parlance, "zone") of Southern Wollo. When was he born? It is not possible to be precise. Nevertheless, the statement that he would be 52 years old, when he departed from Gotha on 6 September 1652, takes us to 1600 as his most probable year of birth. In one of his letters to Ludolf, Abba Gorgoryos claimed that he belonged to the Amhara nobility by birth and that he had access to the royal court. In his own words, "I often spoke with the emperor [Susenyos, 1607-1632], the mekwanent and the mighty ones." When he reached of age, he was sent to school(s) of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Even if there was no hard evidence to certify his advanced education, his interactions with the German savant abundantly show that he was very well educated within the Ethiopian Church. He seems to have occupied a high position within the hierarchy of the national institution. It is not possible to date his conversion to the Catholic faith. Following his acceptance of the new denomination, he was appointed by the patriarch Mendez as his personal secretary, a reflection of his competence and previous stature. When the royal court decided to go back to its former religious affiliation in 1632, the new king proclaimed a series of edicts that made life extremely difficult for the Jesuit missionaries and their Ethiopian companions to continue to live in the country. Together with some of his compatriots and Jesuits, he fled to Goa in India where he stayed only for close to two years. Then, he decided to try again to live in Ethiopia. But this attempt did not bear any fruit. This time, however, he and his small group decided to go to Rome via Egypt.

In Rome, there was already an old-established guesthouse and church for Ethiopian pilgrims called the Collegium Aethiopicum together with the church of Santo Stefano dei Mori (or Santo Stefano degli Abissini). It was there that he met Ludolf, as I pointed out above, in the spring of 1649. His encounter with the young German intellectual would be a turning point in the careers of the two men of learning. The Ethiopian (as he liked to refer to himself) would go to Gotha in 1652 where he would stay for three months. After his return from Germany, he planned yet another travel to Ethiopia. The duke was willing to cover his expenses. He left Italy in 1654, reached Egypt but he could not proceed further into Ethiopia. He was obliged to go back to Rome. We do not have any information on how he lived in Rome and what he did in the next four years.

All we know is that in 1658, he made yet another attempt, again with the financial support of Ernst I. Unfortunately, his boat capsized as a result of a storm near a small port called Alexandretta, not far from the better-known Syrian port of Aleppo. The words of the scholar who studied Ludolf's works in depth, Siegbert Uhlig, can serve as an epitaph to this extraordinary Ethiopian intellectual: "When calling Ludolf the 'Father of Ethiopian Studies,' one has to remember that his works on Ethiopian culture would not have been possible without Gorgoryos and his knowledge of the Orbis Aethiopicus that Ludolf 350 years ago laid the foundation of Ethiopian studies as a scholarly discipline."

3. The Oeuvre of Hiob Ludolf:

The following is a list of the important works of Ludolf that cover Ethiopian topics. I have left out his other works that deal with non-Ethiopian subjects.

1661, Lexicon Aethiopico-Latinum

1661 and 1702, Grammatica aethiopica (London, and Frankfort)

1661, Confessio fidei Claudii regis Aethiopicae

1676, Sciagraphia historiae Aethiopicae

1681 *Historia Aethiopica, sive Brevis et succinta descriptio regni*

Habessinorum, quod vulgò malè Presbyteri Iohannis vocatur,

vol. 1–4

1691 *Ad suam Historiam Aethiopicam antehac editam commentarius in quo multa breviter dicta fusius narrantur: contraria*

refelluntur: atque hac occasione praeter res Aethiopicas multa

autorum, quaedam etiam S. Scripturae loca declarantur …, (in brief: Commentarius)

1693, *Appendix ad Historiam Aethiopicam*,

1693, *Relatio Nova de hodierno Habeßiniae statu …*,

1698, Grammatica linguae Amharicae

1698, Lexicon Amharico-Latinum

1699 *Herrn Hiob Ludolffs, Weyland Hochfürstlichen Sächsischen*

Geheimbden Raths, Allgemeine Schau-Bühne der Welt, Oder

Beschreibung der vornehmsten Welt-Geschichte, So sich vom

Anfang dieses Siebenzehenden Jahr-Hunderts Biß zum Ende

desselben, In allen Theilen des Erd-Kreisses, zumahlen in der

Christenheit, Sonderlich in unserm Vatterland Dem Römischen

Reiche, Nach und nach begeben.

1701, Psalterium Davidis Aethiopice et Latine.

1701, Allgemeine Schaubuhne der Welt, oder: Beschreibung der vornehmsten Welt-Geschicte.

1983 *Hiob Ludolfs, Theologia Aethiopica",* ed. by Siegbert Uhlig, 2

vols (Äthiopistische Forschungen 14), Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner.

The objective of this presentation is not to review the whole range of the writings of this great scholar, a task beyond the capacities of a specialist of one subject area. It is rather to focus on his contributions to the birth of a modern Ethiopian historiography. For this purpose, I concentrate on his book *A New History of Ethiopia being a full and accurate description of the Kingdom of Abyssinia, vulgarly, though erroneously called the Empire of the Prester John of the Indies* (London, 1682), which is a translation of the original Latin, *Historia Aethiopica, sive Brevis et succinta descriptio regni Habessinorum, quod vulgò malè Presbyteri Iohannis vocatur* (1681). The reason for this decision is simple: The fact that it was translated into English and French shortly after its publication in Latin made it accessible for well over two centuries to generations of Europeans (and then Ethiopians), who wished to know about the history of the country. This raised very much "its impact factor," to use the jargon of present-day academia. His other historical works, for instance the *Commentarius* (1691), had very limited impact because of the language factor.

4. **A New History of Ethiopia:**

This book can be defined in present day social science parlance as an area studies book that gives a comprehensive account of the country under study. It is made up of four parts. Each part, called Book, covers a major aspect of Ethiopia. The First Book deals with the geography, the resources and the terrestrial and aquatic animals of the realm, while Book II focuses on the structure and history of the polity; Book III moves on to describe the nature of Ethiopian Christianity, its history, its ecclesiastical organization and its contemporary conflict with the Catholic Church while the last part, Book IV, is concerned with social, cultural and commercial issues. Now, of course, all the chapters can be considered historical, for obvious reasons. Given the fact that the work is no less than 343 years old, it comes as very surprising that only Book I

can be considered as fully outdated. The remaining three parts can be (and should be) read by Ethiopianists with profit. Richard Pankhurst correctly summarizes the views of scholars in the field, when he writes,

> ***The History*** *will indeed remain for ever a major landmark of European scholarship on Ethiopia. Though some sections, among them those on botany and zoology, have been rendered obsolete by subsequent research, others still contain valuable information, including much not readily available elsewhere. The scholarship is combined with humour, and can be read with both profit and amusement.*

I cannot agree more because this work lays down the foundations of modern Ethiopian historiography, its methodology and sources. Yet, it is interesting to note that historical studies, as such, did not follow its appearance for a long time. The next serious book of history was published by the traveller, James Bruce, a century later in 1790. Yet, the historical section of the multi-volume work of the Scot, even if well-written and even if it was based solidly on Ethiopian chronicles, cannot be said to come near the analysis and narrative of the German scholar. The German critically examined the secondary literature of the day and the primary sources, raised different issues for reconstruction and for analysis, and carefully documented his narrative. But, Bruce's narrative is just that – narrative. Be that as it may, his work occupies an important place in the growth of Ethiopian historiography. In the 19th century, it was a must read for travellers, explorers, scholars and diplomats who had their eyes on Ethiopia. In the middle of the century, August Dillmann, the German orientalist, who is credited with starting the second phase of Ethiopian Studies in Europe, published a monograph on the history of Aksum. Then we have to go several decades into the future, to the 1920s, to find only three major historical works – as opposed to travel accounts that invariably offer a brief history of the Christian kingdom as a background to their description of the country they explored - that cover the whole of Ethiopia. The formidable Italian erudite, Carlo Conti Rossini published his major work, *Storia d'Etiopia*, in 1928 (and several other minor works that reconstructed the past), the British textual savant, Sir Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge, who brought out in 1929 his *History of Ethiopia, Nubia and Abyssinia*, and the French missionary, J. B. Coulbeaux whose *Histoire politique et religieuse de l'Abyssinie* saw the light of day in 1929. While Conti Rossini's major work was a masterful reconstruction of the late antique past of Aksum, the latter two were simple rehashes of the royal chronicles with no (or very little) critical examination of the sources. It is very difficult to say that historiography had moved forward with the publication of these two works. In short, the field has displayed a slow progress since the appearance of the *History* of Ludolf. Ethiopianist historiography seriously takes off as a discipline at the beginning of the 1960s, which saw the opening of the Department of History in the then Haile Selassie I University, and which also witnessed a number of young researchers taking up Ethiopian themes for their doctoral dissertations for universities mainly in London but also in Paris and the US.

It would be interesting to look at some of the insights that the *History* of Ludolf offers that have not as yet been followed up by other historians in a sustained manner. I will limit myself to two examples. He raises the question of state revenue. How much revenue does the kingdom collect? "As for revenues, of the King, they are not paid in ready money, but in the natural Productions

of the Countries, the most equal sort of Tributes." (p.205) He then describes how this tribute was paid – in grains, in livestock, in gold (if the area produces alluvial gold), in home-made textiles, in horses and mules, and the like. He gives some estimates of what the treasury collected from the various provinces. The royal household owned also its own farmlands. He then concludes that "Most certainly the Revenues of this Empire seem to be very small…" (p.206) Perhaps due to the shortage of sources, he writes precious little on this topic; yet by raising the issue of revenues he has touched upon a critical factor. Unfortunately, this topic has not been the subject of much research. Historians have usually contented themselves with providing a small section or a chapter for revenues. Therefore, we do not know how much this "small revenue" affected the strength of the state all through the centuries. And without this knowledge, our understanding of the kingdom's politics would always be limited and partial.

The published sources from which he drew much (such as the views of Tellez, the Jesuit writer), and also the oral tradition that he collected from Gorgoryos, led him to the conclusion that the line of rulers before the advent of the Zagwes to power were members of the Solomonic dynasty. He concluded from this that the accession of Yekuno-Amlak to the throne in 1270 marked the restoration of the old House to its previous power and glory. (pp. 171ff.) This interpretation makes sense because the narrative of restoration of the Solomonic dynasty, which was written down in the Kebre Negest, developed at a time not far removed from the Zagwe period, must have had some kernel of truth; otherwise, contemporaries would not have accepted it. In any case, there are very hard tell-tale evidences that have come down from the pre-Zagwe era, which support the claim that the dynasty that ruled Ethiopia immediately before the Zagwes considered itself a descendant of the union of Solomon and Saba. Those who wrote the history of Ethiopia after Ludolf, such as Bruce, also accepted the tradition of restoration until the emergence of Conti Rossini, who killed it in his impactful *Storia d'Etiopia*, by dismissing it as a fiction (*romanzo*). The succeeding highly successful contemporary medievalists relegated the tradition to "the so-called restoration of the Solomonic dynasty," the favourite expression of Taddesse Tamrat, perhaps the leading figure in the study of the period.

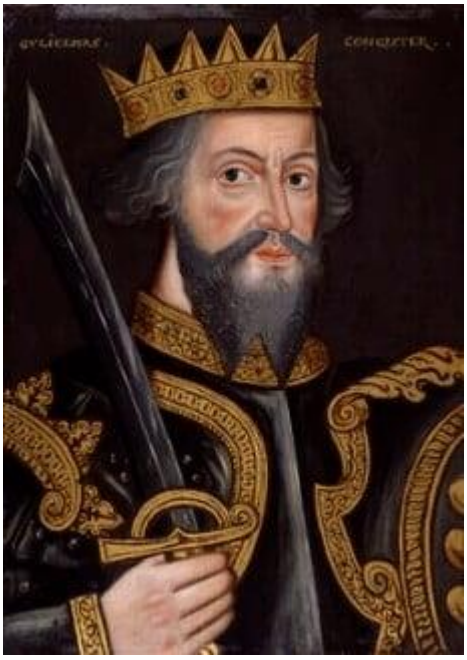
5. Looking at Ethiopian history and society through a European lens:

It can easily be imagined that a particularly difficult challenge for a European scholar who set out on a study of a far-off kingdom such as Ethiopia in the middle of the 17th century, when transportation was so hazardous, and communication so little and intermittent. Double checking of the evidence at hand, triangulating oral information, and

above all getting a visual representation of the men and their objects were practically impossible. Hence, there was a big danger of looking at the country and its people through the European lens. To his credit, Ludolf was aware of this problem particularly due to the fact that a considerable amount was written on the basis of pure fantasy, and drawings and paintings were

made on unadulterated imagination. He repeatedly cautions his readers against this kind of writing or visual evidence. Let us take one of them:

The drawing was meant to be taken as a genuine portrait of "the Grand Negus, the Prester John, Emperor of the Abyssinians". But a close look clearly reveals that the depiction was actually a plagiarism of a famous portrait of the Norman king, William the Conqueror (c. 1028 – 1087), who invaded and ruled England from 1066 to 1087. Ludolf took this picture (it is inserted before page 1 of the *Commentarius*) and exposed it for what it was - a fake drawing.



Indeed, Ludolf was very well aware of the problem of producing authentic visual evidence. Nevertheless, he was not able to escape the trap, as I will show below. We start with the culture of feeding the king. One of the exotic cultural traits for Europeans was the habit that the king was not expected to eat with his own hands and that he was fed by servants. Ludolf apparently "commissioned" an artist to depict the tradition and the drawing is reproduced between pages 206 and 207 of his *New History*. See below. It will be interesting to examine this depiction at some length. The table before the king and the dishes are not obviously Ethiopian artefacts. There is no injera to be seen. Obviously, the artist does not have any clue about Ethiopian meals and their arrangement and the accompanying utensils. When we turn to the ruler, we realize that his head gear and his robes make him a Middle Eastern potentate. Only the servant can pass as an Ethiopian servitor. It is very difficult to castigate the artist when there was no model or authentic visual representation in front of him.

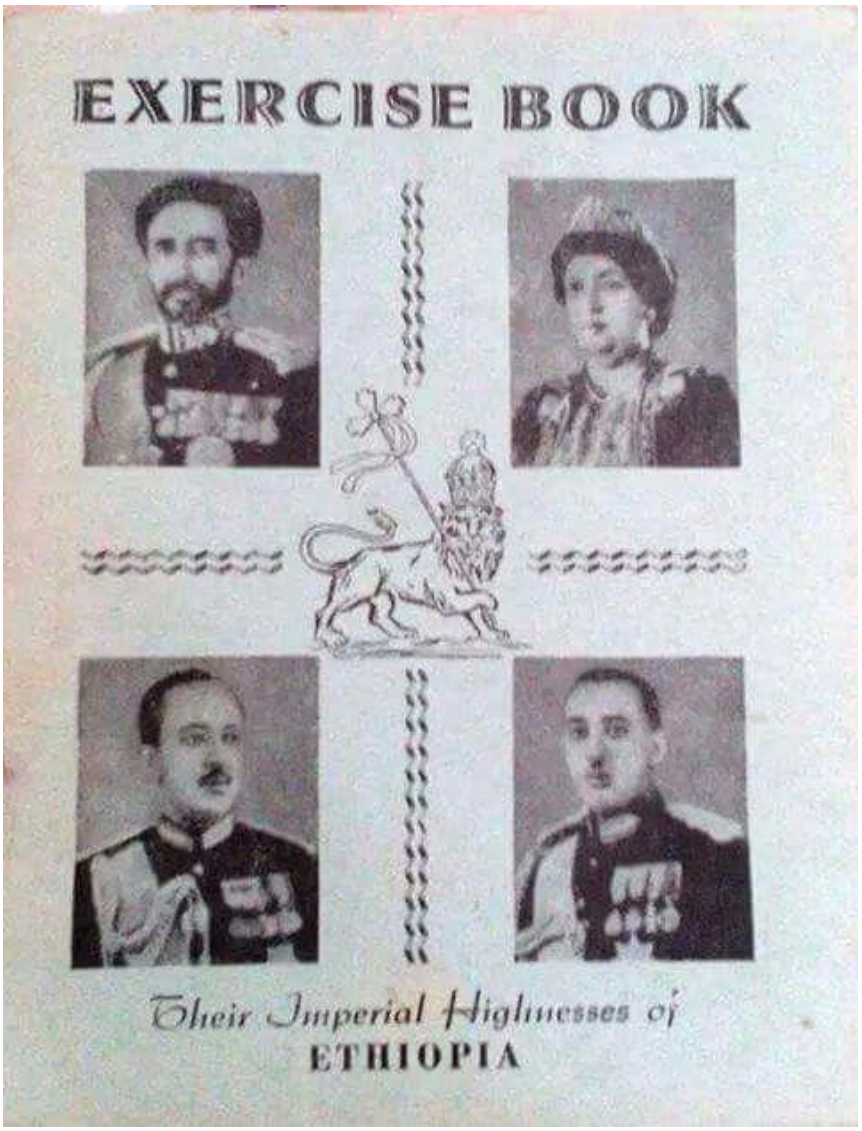
There was no way scholars could avoid a European lens when they studied remote non-European societies in the 17th century. It was the same with Ludolf. This comes out very well in his design of the Lion of Judah, which ironically came to be owned by the Ethiopian state and used profusely in the last part of the 19th and in much of the 20th century. The history of the national coat of arms has been studied by three historians – Sven Rubenson, Richard Pankhurst and Ian Campbell. They have demonstrated that the concept and design of the conquering lion of Judah goes back to the 17th century in the shape that we know it today. This design was produced for the 1683 map, which was included in the book that was published in that same year – *The History of Ethiopia*.

Fig. 1. Coat of arms, 17th century. From Job Ludolphus, *A New History of Ethiopia*.

The British historian, Ian Campbell, traces the trajectory of its entrance into the country and eventual acceptance by the monarchy. It suffices to summarize the narrative here. The first time the image was perhaps introduced in 1752 when the Czeck Catholic missionary, Prutky, who was in Gondar at the time designed a form of the lion for a seal. The idea did not spread quickly. In 1805, the British traveler, Henry Salt was given a medallion by a Tigreyan lord on which there is the drawing of the lion that was clearly inspired by the same composition. In the heyday of the Zemene Mesafint, some of the regional lords ordered seals to be made that contained a lion in the middle. But it was from the reign of Tewodros onwards that the Lion of Judah acquires a definite place in the center of the circular seal. Nevertheless, the motto does not appear on his seal as well as on that of Yohannes. It was Menilek's seal that was used from 1870 to 1878 that is surrounded by the slogan. Secondly, the Menilek lion looks clearly like the Ludolf lion unlike the seals of the lords of the Zemene Mesafint and unlike those of Tewodros and Yohannes. Hence, I would like to submit it to some analysis and investigation.

The first point is, what I would like to call, the definitive giveaway: The Cross of Lorraine. This cross, as we know, is associated with the Catholic church going back into the medieval Hungarian kingdom and to the duchy of Lorraine. Central European republics put it on their banner even today. What is not so far highlighted is the fact that Jesuit missionaries of the 17th century, particularly those in China and some in Latin America, used it as their favorite cross. What is very close to us is the fact that it constituted the central element in the emblem of Monsignor Massaja, the Catholic bishop and missionary, who operated in Ethiopia for the last time from 1868 to 1878. One strongly suspects that there was the hand of Massja and/or his subordinate missionaries in the choice – and making - of this design. The designer must have the book of Ludolf in front of him because he reproduces the cross of Lorraine, in spite of its clear association with the Catholic church. The name of the sovereign is also mis-spelt, another giveaway because Massaja misspells it in the same way did in a copy of the letter of Menilek of 1868, written to him. The seal served up to 1878, when the ruler's status was reduced from that of *Neguse Negest* (king of kings) to that of *negus* (king). In order to reflect the new political reality, a new seal was made that, in the process, corrected the name of the monarch the standard spelling. Secondly, the lion was made to carry another cross. This cross can be accepted by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. On it were tied the national pennons (another addition), making the drawing clearly look like an indigenous composition. Yet, the shape of the lion remained remarkably consistent with Ludolf's design.

As Cambell shows, the use of the emblem spread fast In a very short while, particularly, during the reign of Haile Selassie, appearing as letter head of many government organizations, and in many other contexts (monuments, reliefs, medals, military and police insignias, currency notes, etc.) becoming ubiquitous. Even children and teenagers within the school system would have to stare at it every day of their school year because the cover of notebooks carried the picture of the imperial family and the escutcheon. Some schools produced it on student IDs. Rastafarians went one step further and declared that the emblem stood for Emperor Haile Selassie. Whenever they referred to the sovereign in their rituals or on other occasions, they called him "Lion of Judah" as if it was his proper name.


EXERCISE BOOK
Their Imperial Highnesses of
ETHIOPIA


የተማሪ ፡
የመታወቂያ ፡ ወረቀት ፡፡
TAFARI MAKONNEN SCHOOL
STUDENT
IDENTITY CARD

An interesting development is that the official narrative about the royal coat of arms insisted the Lion of Judah was an ancient symbol. Students in the schools in the imperial era were taught that this was a venerable ancient emblem of Ethiopia.

A closer look at the genesis of the coat-of-arms gives us an insight into often overlooked medieval developments that came to exercise an impact on later day Ethiopia via the writings of Jesuit missionaries of the 16th and 17th centuries and with the scholarly endorsement of Hiob Ludolf. It is well-known in European history that heraldry was introduced towards the middle of the 12th century in the continent. This period coincided with the emergence in Europe of the legend of the Prester John. The story about this legendary king spread throughout Europe. At the beginning of the 15th century, we see in England that Henry IV included a coat of arms that he attributed to the Prester John when he built the Great Cloister of the Cathedral of Canterbury in the years 1418-1414. Could this be the first attribution of a coat of arms to a mythical emperor that later came to be identified with Ethiopia? Then we see a similar coat of arms in France. In the same century, the Prester was made more and more an Ethiopian king. Thus, what initially commenced as an attribution to the Prester John was unconsciously transferred to that of Ethiopia. What was done in a haphazard manner eventually found a concrete artistic expression in the book of Ludolf, which eventually found its way into, and ended up being owned by, the national royal house, a clear manifestation of an invention and ownership of tradition. Nevertheless, the royal emblem was not the only legacy of the legend of the Prester John of the Indies.

6. Framing Ethiopia as an empire:

Framing a subject of study is a very important methodological step in social science research. In this particular case, already in the late medieval period, the empire of the Prester John of the Indies was imaginatively described, which served, in many ways, to describe and explain Ethiopia. The realm of this mythic ruler was a very vast territory; it was made up of many kingdoms. The suzerain was therefore called king of kings. The specific number of kingdoms within the realm of the Prester John was first given in the fake letter of 1165 written to the Byzantine emperor, he claims that "Seventy-two kings are tributaries to us." (https://blackcentraleurope.com/sources/1000-1500/a-letter-from-prester-john-ca-1165-1170/)
When at first the Portuguese delegation, which counted among its members Alvares, arrived in Ethiopia, they came to see a vast empire of many kingdoms ruled by a powerful, absolute sovereign, which they addressed in their language as emperor. Then the missionaries were sent with a clear orientation that they were going to a big realm, made up of many kingdoms, and ruled by a very wealthy and absolute emperor. The problem was that, neither the Ge'ez nor the Amharic language, has a term exactly equivalent to emperor. Therefore, they persuaded the kings (Gelawdewos, 1540-1559, Sertse Dengel, 1563-1597 and finally, Susenyos, 1607-1632) to call themselves Negusa Nagast in the letters they wrote to the Pope or to the kings of Spain, which they translated as "emperor". (p.156). Yet, Ethiopian monarchs, since the early medieval era up to the reign of Sarsa Dengel (1563-1594), carried the title of *negus*, The first attempt to include it within the Ethiopian reality was made in the chronicle of Susenyos, 1607-1632. In the early chapters of the chronicle, the chronicler was very hesitant because he called the sovereign

sometimes king of kings but, more often, he referred to the monarch as king. But, as time passed, the ruler was consistently called negusa nagast. Thus, the title was almost contemporary to Ludolf himself. Yet, his writing shows uncertainty:

> *…most certain it is, that the Name of the King of the Habessines is no more in the Ethiopic Language than Negus, King; But in the Titles which both he himself, and all the Habessines use, he is call'd Negusa Nagast Zaitjopia; king of the Kings of Ethiopia, in Reference to some Rulers of Provinces, and Viceroys that are under him, who are also dignified with the Title of Negus or Negash. [pp.153-154, the latter page wrongly written as 104]*

This description lacks clarity; on the one hand, Ludolf recognizes that the sovereign carries the title "King of Kings" and, on the other hand, he states that the ruler was called "Negus". Yet, he reaffirms it in another place in his book, when he writes that "For because the Governors and Vice-Roys of Provinces assum'd to themselves the Titles of *Negus*, and *Nagashi*, therefore the Ethiopic Kings took an occasion to give themselves the Title of *Negusa Nagast*, or *King of Kings*." (p.233). As if to reaffirm the fact that the sovereign deserved to be addressed as King of Kings, he writes again that "as this King by *Tellez* is called in the *Portugal* Language, O Emperador *Abexim*, Emperor of the *Abessines*: which his Title seems to Intimate, in regard a King of Kings may not unproperly be call'd an Emperor." (p.154, but wrongly written as 104) The fact is that it was most probably the insistence of the Jesuits that Negusa Nagast was adopted and that it had nothing to do with the number of kings under him as there were no vassal kings under Susenyos.

The titulature took root in the Ethiopian soil very quickly. All the subsequent chronicles called the monarch king of kings; in fact, even during the Zamana Masafent (1786-1853), when the monarchs were very weak and did not exercise any executive power worth mentioning, continued to use the title. Ethiopians at some point in this process came to believe that this title was an ancient one. In a communique he wrote to the nobility in 1906 to announce that his grandson, Iyasu, would be his successor, Menilek gave a brief historical outline of the country in which he declared that Ethiopian monarchs bore the title of "King of Kings" since antiquity. The contribution of Ludolf was to give the naming a scholarly legitimacy as an ancient title, which led historians to take its longevity for granted.

The main justification for the use of negusa nagast, as we have seen above, was the existence of so many kingdoms in the realm of Ethiopia. How many kingdoms did Ethiopia have? Who was the first who started to write about kingdoms within the empire? In the analysis of two Ethiopicist historians, Pennec and Toubkis,

At the top, the Jesuits discerned an "emperor" (*emperador*), ruling a collection of "kingdoms" (*reynos*). A viceroy (*vissorey*) ruled each kingdom. Kingdoms were made up of provinces (*provincias*), with a governor (*governador*) in charge of each one. Despite this precision, however, such descriptions often revealed a real difficulty in understanding the original political organization of a space. Thus Pero Paes wrote that the lands of Prester John were divided into "twenty-five kingdoms (*reynos*) and eighteen provinces (*provincias*)," which he listed. (p.8)

Then the authors proceed to quote from Paez himself, one of the leading and influential Jesuit missionaries, who listed the kingdoms:

> *Beginning at the Red Sea, the first kingdom (reyno) is called Tigrê, then comes Dancâli, Angôt, Dobâ Seltân, Motâ, Auçâ, Amharâ, Olacâ, Xâoa, Ifât, Guedên, Ganh, Doarô, Fatagâr, Oye, Bâli, Hadeâ, Alamalê, Oxelô, Ganz, Bete ramorâ, Guraguê, Cuerâ, Buzanâ, Sufgamô, Bahargamô, Cambât, Boxâ, Gumâr, Zenyerô, Nareâ, Conch, Damôt, Gojâm, Begmêder, Dambiâ. Thus the kingdoms (reynos), even though some of them perhaps do not merit this appelation. The provinces (provincias) are: Gandanchô, Arench, Orgâr, Çemen, Çalamt, Borâ, Abargalê, Salaoâ, Çagadê, Oalcaît, Maçagâ. (pp. 8-9)*

It is quite clear that Paes would have gotten the correct information about the provinces if he had sought it. His aim was to glorify the country in which he was operating and thus to enhance the scale of their missionary operations in the eyes of their superiors and their future readers. In the background of his mind, there was the paradigm he inherited from the literature regarding the Prester John, who supposedly ruled 72 kingdoms. Ludolf, who, one would expect, should have corrected this view, was rather concerned about the number of the kingdoms under the sovereign. He writes that "That the King of *Ethiopia* formerly had several Tributary kings under them, we have already declared. Mathew the Armenian reckn'd them up, tho untruly, to the number of Fifty, tho most erroneously. Nor did they write with more Truth, who tell us of Fifty or Forty;..." (p.234) He then writes that "*Gregory* named thirty to me." (p.13) He accepts these and lists them "...the first ...is the Kingdom of Tigra", while the second is "the Kingdom of Amhara". The list goes on: Angot, Bagembder, Bali, Bizamo, Bugna, Cambata, Cont, Damot, Dawaro, Dembeja, Enarea, Fatagar, Gafat, etc. (p.13) Thus, Ludolf gave scholarly endorsement to the use of the term kingdom for the provinces. Yet, Ethiopian sources such as chronicles and hagiographies of the medieval era never referred to the Amhara kingdom or to the kingdom of Tegray to give just the two prominent examples. Both Amhara and Tegre were divided into several provinces with their respective governors.

7. Brief analysis of the state structure:

Ludolf worked out the structure of the state from top downwards. He also divided the various state institutions into "civil and military" and the legal system into "civil cases" and "criminal cases". (p. 161) These terms did not exist either in Amharic or in Ge'ez. He writes that the sovereign enjoyed "absolute" powers, a term that never existed in the two state languages. He lists the royal jurisdictions which gave the king absolute powers. He shows that the monarch sat on top of the pyramid; immediately below him were found two officials – the *bitwadad* of the left and the *bitwadad* of the right, who had equal powers and prerogatives. "They were the Chief

Ministers of State, and manag'd all Affairs." (p.212) The notion of "Chief Minister" was alien to the Ethiopian political structure; the term had no equivalent either in Ge'ez or in Amharic. Quite correctly, Ludolf writes that the significance of the two dignitaries slowly declined and they were replaced by the lord who carried the title of "ras" (a military officer), who occupied the position of "chief minister". "Next to him, there are two Comptrollers of the State," writes the German scholar (p.213) These were "the *Belattenot Gueta* …Master of the Officers, whose jurisdiction reaches all Inferior Vice-Roys, Prefects, Governors of Provinces, and Judges. The other is called *Dakaka Belattenot Gueta* who controls the Household Servants, the Grooms and such like…" (p.213)

This structure, highly pyramidal, does not reflect the actual situation of the kingdom because there was no one official between the provincial governors and the monarch. They were answerable to the sovereign, who had the power to appoint or demote them. In short, Ludolf interpreted his data through a European lens, and saw Ethiopian state institutions (and built a pyramidal structure) in terms of the European states that emerged in Europe after the end of the Feudal Age. There, monarchies organized strong states by over coming centrifugal forces and by centralizing the disbursed authority of government. Hence, terms like centralization, centrifugal and centripetal forces, absolute power in time found their way into Ethiopian historiography and became dominant.

Moreover, Ludolf divides the institutions into civil and military (p.161), a situation that did not exist in Ethiopia because institutions did not have single specialization; they were rather composite institutions, which went to war in times of conflict, while, in times of peace, they carried out their duties as departments of the court. The judge was no exception; nor the royal servants. All would go to fight when wars were declared even if in peace time they had no military functions. That is why the term "civil" did not have any application in this situation. It should not come as a surprise that there was no Amharic nor Ge'ez equivalent for "civil".

This may be so, but in subsequent centuries right down to our day, scholars or travellers had written on this topic talking of "civil" and military institutions. The power of paradigms is so strong on the human mind that Ethiopian scholars of the previous generation, who should have known better, wrote about "civil" institutions and "civil functionaries". For instance, the famous medievalist Taddesse Tamrat writes that

> *Being at the pinnacle of the military and administrative organization, the royal Court was a perfect model of the whole empire…. It seems possible to consider the Christian Court during the period under review as consisting of two major sections: (a) a large number of civil, clerical, and military functionaries permanently attached to the Court, and (b) a floating population occasionally coming to Court for sundry reasons. (pp.103-104)*

The dichotomy between civil and military was also introduced by (none other than) Mahte Selassie Wolde Meskel in his great collection of documents, *Zekere Neger*. His aim was to introduce all the principal titles to his readers. He divided them into three. In the first category were listed the titles of the "Mesafint" (i.e. to those who had royal blood); in the second, those of the "military" and in the third, the "civilian" titles. Interestingly, he used the Amharic word Selam

for “civil” but he put the English word in bracket so that the reader would not be confused. (pp.641-649) The latter two categories are all familiar from travellers’ accounts. What could raise eyebrows would perhaps be the name of the Ethiopian author, who knew how the system worked (because he was in it) before the Italian Occupation, before, in other words, the state institutions were modernized. He should have known that all the title holders he listed under “civil”, together with the men of their respective departments, were deployed in the northern front during the invasion just like in times of yore. My explanation is that the paradigm of civil-military dichotomy that came with modernization was so powerful that people simply fell to it.

Can it be said that it was Ludolf who directly influenced all the subsequent writers who wrote on the topic? My argument here is that, as a pioneering historian, it could be said that he was the one who started it all even if he might not have a direct influence on subsequent scholars.

8. Conclusion:

As all eminent Ethiopian and foreign scholars have attested, Hiob Ludolf was indeed a great scholar who laid down the foundations of Ethiopian studies by engaging in r or philological studies, by publishing dictionaries and by reconstructing the past of the country. Ethiopian Studies could therefore be said to have become a subject of university studies by the18th century. Clearly, this could be a source of pride. Yet, there was a price that was paid for it. Because it emanated from oriental studies, semitic research rose to be dominant for over two centuries and became the face of this field of knowledge. Since the middle of the 19th, growing numbers of ethnographers came into the country, who looked at communities, which did not belong to the Semitic category. Despite these developments, semitic studies persisted to be seen as the dominant feature of Ethiopian studies. And this created grievance that research into the history, languages and cultures of the communities outside of the Semitic north were marginalized at a time when, in the 20th century, the latter research flourished very much.

On the other hand, one can ask how much Ethiopian historiography developed after the end of the 17th century. The 18th century did not see any serious publication on the history of Ethiopia except that of James Bruce. In the 19th century, historical works appeared; but investigation of the past by professional historians was not as well-developed as research in philology. The 20th century saw the coming of age of historiography as well as historical archaeology, which enriched by new evidence the study of the past of the country. Yet, a lot remains to be done.