

# AETHIOPICA

International Journal  
of Ethiopian and Eritrean Studies



Conference report

April 1–4, 2009 in Berlin  
“Tigre, Aksum and more”  
The III<sup>rd</sup> International Enno Littmann Conference

Renewed interest in Enno Littmann’s work, one of the renowned German scholars of Oriental studies, resulted in the 1<sup>st</sup> International Enno Littmann Conference 2002 in Munich (Germany),<sup>1</sup> followed in 2006 by the 2<sup>nd</sup> in Aksum (Ethiopia).<sup>2</sup> One year earlier than originally envisaged, on 1–4 April 2009, the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference honouring Enno Littmann (1875–1958) was held at the Freie Universität Berlin, organized by Rainer Voigt (Seminar für Semitistik und Arabistik). Following the opening speech and further addresses of welcome, Asfa-Wossen Asserate emphasised the importance of German scholars, their research tradition and influence on Ethiopian and Eritrean studies in the presence of respective éthiopisants from

<sup>1</sup> WALTER RAUNIG – STEFFEN WENIG (eds.), *Afrikas Horn: Akten der Ersten Internationalen Littmann Konferenz 2. bis 5. Mai 2002 in München* = Meroitica 22, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> STEFFEN WENIG – WOLBERT SMIDT (eds.), *Akten der 2. Internationalen Littmann-Konferenz 7. bis 11. Januar 2006 in Aksum*, in preparation.

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around the world, representatives of numerous embassies and the *Auswärtige Amt* (The German Federal Foreign Office). In doing so, he accentuated the imminent challenges for this specific branch of study in Europe in general and in Germany in particular.

The four-day conference covered around 50 papers dealing with Littmann's areas of interest such as history, archaeology, languages and literatures of Ethiopia and Eritrea, Semitic inscriptions, Arabic, as well as related contemporary research. Perhaps best known are Littmann's achievements and meticulous documentation efforts as leader of the German Aksum Expedition (*Deutsche Aksum-Expedition – DAE*) which was carried out in 1905, his membership in the "Princeton University Expedition" in Eritrea (1905–1906), and his doctoral thesis "Das Verbum der Tigre-Sprache in Abessinien". Littmann himself, however, was not exclusively of note; e.g. *Bauforscher* (architectural historian) and member of the *DAE* Daniel Krencker was likewise honoured with a special series of lectures.

The papers started off with sensational news on archaeological findings in Wəqro in northern Ethiopia (Təgray), presenting an Old South Arabian temple with appendant Sabaeen inscriptions. Those hitherto most southern monuments of its kind are throwing a stark and sophisticated light on this era of Ethiopian history whose cultural-historical tie to the ancient kingdom of Sheba becomes more evident by referring to kings so far unknown. In addition, the assumption could be substantiated that the temple of Yəḥa, close to Aksum, was of supra-regional significance.

Also to be mentioned is the paper given in German by a scholar from the University of ar-Riyad (Saudi Arabia), delivering some new insights on the history of Dadan in the north-west of the Arabian Peninsula. Hence, the discovery of the latest inscriptions enables more detailed historical review of the empire mentioned in the Old Testament.

Another highlight of the first day of the conference was a visit to the Berlin Phonogramm-Archives, where audio material collected during the *DAE* is kept. After this acoustical journey through time, a reception was held giving the opportunity to continuing exchange of thoughts and further interlocutions.

On the following days, less explored sites and texts of the pre-Aksumite- and Aksumite period were brought into focus. In this regard, new aspects

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on the inscriptions of the king ʿEzana and alike in-depth studies providing unknown functions of apparently unspectacular objects in metalworking were delivered. Just as much of interest was the illustration of an approach using accounts on ghosts as a means for detecting hidden archaeological sites. Furthermore, attention was also directed to Semitic Studies, particularly to Ancient North Arabian epigraphy.

For the first time in the conference series, a Təgre panel was carried out discussing the third largest (according to the number of speakers) Ethio-Semitic language. The papers of this specific panel were delivered by two speakers from Eritrea, two scholars from the hosting university as well as from colleagues from France and Poland. Those six speakers covered aspects of Təgre literature, linguistics, culture and customary law issues. Quite surprising and surely pleasing in this context was the notice from Austria that those manuscripts and sources which were the basis for Littmann’s comprehensive trilingual dictionary (Təgre–German–English) “Wörterbuch der Tigre-Sprache” co-authored with Maria Höfner in 1962 have been retrieved and might be accessible to the academic circle. Təgre specialists are assuming instructive records as to the language and culture within the Littmann’s bequest covering his and Sundström’s Təgre documents.

Referring to ongoing research in the fields of linguistic and (research) history several fellow scholars from Universities in Addis Abāba (Ethiopia), Mäqälā (Ethiopia), Asmära (Eritrea) and Cairo (Egypt) submitted illustrative presentations. Littmann’s work on classical and popular Arabic literature was appreciated in the final section focusing on his life and impact in Cairo, thereby referring to the numerous publications such as the most prominent one ‘Tales of a Thousand and One Nights’ (Leipzig 1921–1928). The 4<sup>th</sup> International Enno Littmann Conference is expected to be held in Cairo in the common cycle, presumably in about 4 years.

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