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Bahru Zewde

Global Contours

History, as the recounting of past events and deeds, is probably as old as humanity itself. But it was the Greeks Herodotus and Thucydides who introduced the organized and written historical narrative. In Asia, Chinese historians of the Han dynasty developed a similar tradition of writing organized and analytical history. And it was only in the nineteenth century that history established itself as an academic discipline, first in European universities and research centers and subsequently in other continents, notably the United States. This “professionalization” of history is commonly associated with the German historian Leopold von Ranke. The archives, as the repository of state records, emerged as the major basis of historical research. The historical journal, even more than the monograph or the book, became the trademark of this new profession. Predominantly narrative in form and political in content, this new historiography has remained the paradigm of historical research and writing.

Over the years, beginning in the nineteenth and picking up pace and depth in the twentieth, this paradigm has come to face serious challenges.¹ The first major challenge came from Marxist historiography and the *Annales* school pioneered by the French historians Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch. The new historiography highlighted two major limitations of the Rankean tradition: its focus on political history and the narrative (as opposed to analytical) mode of its exposition. Instead, it was proposed that historians should deal with the totality of the past human experience, or at the very least broaden historical investigation to include social and economic history. The preferred mode of exposition became analysis of structures rather than a narrative of events.

This new historiography, which evolved over time, with different elements of it emerging at different times, has had the effect of deepening historical research by directing historians to such new avenues as local history, gender history, environmental history, and the history of ideas, to name only some of them. At the same time, it has brought about a shift in perspective, of looking at the historical experience from below rather than from above, from the point of view of the subject rather than the sovereign, the soldier rather than the general. It has also prompted historians into new sources, such as oral sources, as opposed to the archival documents that had assumed almost canonical importance in Rankean historiography. Finally, this new approach has meant historians linking up with other disciplines, such as social anthropology, economics, sociology and psychology.

Much more unsettling has been the more recent critique of the Rankean paradigm, what has come to be known as the “postmodernist” challenge. This has questioned the fundamentals of modern historiography, its claim to scientific status.² This scepticism could be said to have emanated from the global tribulations of the first half of the twentieth century that shattered the faith in the linear progression of mankind, from low to high and from bad to good. Considering history, as was indeed the case in former times, as a form of literature, it cast doubt on the possibility of attaining historical truth. Nor was this spirit of scepticism unprecedented. It could be said to have had its antecedents in the nihilism of Nietzsche and the

existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre, both of whom had questioned in different ways the humanistic and rationalistic assumptions of the Enlightenment.

The post-modernist critique of standard historiography might have had, as Giggers asserts, the effect of blurring the distinction between history and fiction, between “honest scholarship and propaganda”.³ Criticism has also been directed against the post-modernists that they have been more adept at writing about history than writing it. On the positive side, however, it has had a salutary effect in pointing both the scientific limits of historical investigation and the literary potentials of historical narrative. The focus and scope of history has accordingly changed in recent years, from politics to culture (“in the broad sense of everyday life”⁴) and from what is known as metahistory (the grand historical narrative, or even philosophy of history) to microhistory (the lives of commoners in localized settings). Moreover, in as much as the *total* historical truth can not be known, historians, as Burke suggests,⁵ could profitably employ some literary techniques to fill the gap between their research findings and what could have actually happened. After all, the best literary historians had always combined factual investigation and creative imagination.

Continental Setting

African historiography, denoting the history of Africans rather than of Europeans in Africa (as had been the case in the colonial period), has had a much shorter life span than the global trends discussed above. It coincided with the decolonization process in the 1950s and 1960s. Two institutions pioneered this new process whereby Africans were able to appropriate their history. They were the School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) in London and the Department of History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The two leading spirits of this new history, Roland Oliver at SOAS and Jan Vansina at Madison, have recently published reminiscences of their struggle to establish African history in British and American academic institutions.⁶ The two centers that they led played a pivotal role in the training of the African and Africanist historians who were to deepen and broaden African historiography in subsequent decades. Of the two, SOAS could be said to have had the edge not only in training African historians but also in initiating and sustaining the *Journal of African History*, a publication that could be said to have set the standards for historical writing on Africa.⁷ Central to what in effect became a historiographic revolution was the development of the methodology for the employment of oral sources to reconstruct the history of non-literate societies, a methodology that has been superbly synthesized in the works of Jan Vansina.⁸

Coupled with the need of the newly independent African states to appropriate and redefine their past, the developments outlined above fostered the growth of centers of African historical studies in the continent itself. Two such centers attained particular fame and significance in sub-Saharan Africa (excluding South Africa) - what came to be known as the Ibadan and Dar-es-Salaam schools of historiography, based at the Universities of Ibadan and Dar-es-Salaam, respectively. The leading figures in the former were the Nigerian historians K.O. Dike and Jacob Ade Ajayi, while among the luminaries of the latter were the British historian Terence Ranger (followed by his compatriots John Iliffe and John Lonsdale) and the late West Indian historian Walter Rodney. Ibadan became not only the training ground for a number of historians who subsequently spread out to other Nigerian universities like Lagos, Ife and Zaria, but also charted what could be described as the Nigerian nationalist historiography. An allied development was the founding of the Historical Society of Nigeria and two media for the dissemination of historical research - the Ibadan History series and the

Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria. Ibadan established the historiographic norm until it came to be challenged by what had started as its offshoot, the Ahmadu Bello University based in Zaria. The latter not only came to emphasize the Islamic tradition of Northern Nigeria but also introduced a Marxist perspective into the study of Nigerian history.⁹

The Marxist or class view of history became the trademark of the Dar es Salaam school. The socialist experiment of the Nyerere era —encapsulated in Ujamaa— had its academic counterpart on The Hill, as the main campus of the University of Dar-es-Salaam was known. The Hill evolved as a sort of grand rendez-vous of African Marxists.¹⁰ Two of the members of that school, Arnold Temu and Bonaventure Swai, in fact helped to carry the Marxist torch to Zaria in Nigeria, thus helping to bring about the differentiation described above. The celebrated specimen of these endeavours was Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Terence Ranger charted a more nationalist path with the study of African resistance to colonial rule.

All this is not to say that African historical studies were confined to Nigeria and Tanzania. Significant, if not so dramatic, advances were made in places like Ghana (led by Adu Boahen), Kenya (Bethwell Ogot), and Uganda (Samwiri Karugire and Matthias Kiwanuka), to mention the more important ones. Likewise, there has been a steady growth of African historiography in Francophone Africa. One could cite the names of Cheikh Anta Diop, Abdoulaye Bathily and Mamadou Diouf in Senegal; Ki Zerbo in Burkina Faso; Alpha Konare in Mali and Wamba Dia Wamba in Zaire/Congo. A serious drawback has been the relative absence of interaction between the two traditions of historiography, the Anglophone and the Francophone. The UNESCO African history project had the salutary effect of bringing historians of both traditions together. The two research-facilitating organizations, CODESRIA and OSSREA,¹¹ have also tried in various ways to resolve this chronic problem. The latter, which had a regional mandate, brought together in Swaziland in 1989 historians of Eastern and Southern Africa to discuss the state of historical training and research. The workshop was organized under the auspices of the recently formed Association of Historians of Eastern and Southern Africa. But that association could hardly get off the ground. In 1994, CODESRIA hosted a meeting of historians in Bamako (Mali) with the twin task of discussing the unfolding democratization process and resuscitating the moribund continental association of historians and its journal, *Africa Zamani*. While the journal has been revived somewhat, the establishment of an active continental historical association still remains an agenda for the future.¹²

Even more disturbing than the difficulties of creating a common forum for African historians has been the crisis that national historiographies have been undergoing in the last two decades. This is a reflection of the general crisis of African universities, which in turn is only a ramification of the continent's general political and economic crisis. Like their colleagues from other disciplines, many African historians have been forced either to seek alternative employment at home or to join the ever-growing African Diaspora abroad. A slightly less disturbing variation on this intellectual haemorrhage —because the academics are retained within the continent— has been the ("academic labour") migration of a number of historians from the rest of the continent to southern Africa.

Political Context

Before we try to assess the status of Ethiopian historiography within the global and continental parameters delineated above, we need to consider another, and admittedly the most determining, context, namely the political. For the political regime has almost invariably exercised considerable influence over the nature and course of historiography. Ethiopia has not been an exception in this regard.

The twentieth century began in Ethiopia with Emperor Menilek at the height of his power and glory. He presided over an empire that had expanded more than twofold by military might and enjoyed the grudging respect of the European powers following his victory over the Italians at Adwa in 1896. Although his campaigns of territorial expansion had been at times marked by brutal subjugation and economic exploitation of the southern peoples, the emperor on the whole exercised a benevolent influence when it came to matters of the intellect and of opening the country to new ideas. He opened the first government school in the country. He patronized a number of the early intellectuals, such as *Hakim Wårqenäh*, Afäwårq Gäbrä-Iyyäsus, and Täklä-Hawaryat Täklä-Maryam. He reportedly commissioned *Aläqa Tayyā* to write what was hoped to be a definitive history of Ethiopia, although that work did not apparently see the light of day.¹³

His successor, *Lej Iyyasu*, was fairly open-minded. His problem, however, was his youth, which distracted him from constant and sustained application to the affairs of state, let alone the promotion of intellectual endeavours. It was under the “regency” of *Ras Täfäri* (1916-1930) that intellectual activity, including historical investigation, flourished. The period saw the publication of a number of books, notably by one of his most devoted functionaries, Heruy Wäldä-Selläsé, as well as the relatively free discussion of national, including historical, issues. This relative autonomy was to shrink once the young prince attained his ultimate objective of political ascendancy. Nevertheless, his post-1941 reign was marked by the expansion of education, including at the secondary and tertiary levels, and the introduction of a history syllabus. At the Haile Sellasie I University, successor of the University College of Addis Ababa founded in 1950, the Department of History was formally established in 1963/4. At about the same time, the other important venue of historical research, the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, was opened, with the emperor going to the extent even of donating his personal collection of books to launch its library.

Beneath this apparent benevolent and personal interest lay, however, a more restrictive political culture. That culture was delineated by Solomonic legitimacy and Šāwan hegemony, cultural as well as political. The story of the Queen of Sheba, which no self-respecting historian could take seriously, was a cardinal element of that legitimacy. Ethiopian history could only be the story of the Semitic north, with the peoples of the south as objects rather than subjects of history.

The changes of 1974 and 1991 targeted successively these two pillars of the pre-1974 order: the first dismantled the legitimacy; the second broke the hegemony. At the same time, however, these changes brought their own constricting environments. The first tried to fit all thought and activity under the straitjacket of doctrinaire Marxism. The History graduate programme, for example, is only now succeeding in liberating itself fully from that straitjacket. Initially, the revolutionary regime tended to view the entire pre-revolutionary past as “reactionary” and hence not worthy of investigation. As time progressed, however, it opted for selective appropriation of the past (rejecting Haylä-Selläsé and adopting Téwodros and Menilek, for instance). In this as in so much of its schooling, the Därg took its cue from the Ethiopian student movement, which had become virulently anti-Haylä-Selläsé. The struggle

with the insurgent forces in northern Ethiopia, which attained particular ferocity in the 1980s, forced it to realize the value of history for its own legitimacy. The historians' worry now became not so much harassment or neglect as it was too much attention.

The post-1991 order has brought new challenges to the historical profession. The first obvious salutary effect has been the opening up of the revolutionary period for post-mortem analysis, just as the 1974 revolution had opened up the former emperor's reign to historical investigation. The general political liberalization has also broadened the margin for free investigation and free dissemination of historical views. Conversely, the deification of ethnicity has presented a constant nuisance to the day-to-day activity of teaching and research. The hostility that has been injected into government-university relationship since that fateful clash of 1993 has also had its negative impact on academic life, the historians' included. While the government has not subjected historians to any particular harassment, just as it has not given them any special encouragement, they have to contend regularly with the accusations of ethno-nationalist political groupings, who find the historian's honest findings incompatible with their own politically-loaded rendering of the past.

The Pioneers

A distinctive feature of the Ethiopian past, vis-a-vis much of the rest of Africa, has been the presence of an indigenous tradition of history writing from at least the fourteenth century to the twentieth. This has been essentially of two kinds: the chronicles covering the reigns of individual kings and the accounts of longer time-spans known as *tarikā nāgāst* ("history of kings"). I have already discussed the merits and demerits of chronicles as works of historical reconstruction.¹⁴ Suffice here to say that, on the positive side, one can cite their factual detail and their strong chronological framework, even if it would require considerable labour to convert their relative chronology to an absolute one. On the negative side are their decidedly political and religious bias, their predilection for supernatural explanation of historical phenomena, and their aversion to quantification.

Although there were some very rare refreshing departures from this norm, notably by the monk Bahrey in the sixteenth century, it was only in the early twentieth century that a group of intellectuals who began to break new ground emerged. I have discussed elsewhere and in more detail this group, whose strivings covered the whole gamut of social justice, administrative reform and economic analysis as well as historical reconstruction.¹⁵ These pioneers of what we can call modern historiography, as distinct from the chronicle tradition, could be roughly divided into two on the basis of the degree of their departure from that tradition. The first tried to synthesize the old tradition and new methods while the second demonstrated a more thorough rejection of the old. As so often is the case, the more critical and methodologically sound proved the less productive.

To the critical group belong Gäbrä-Heywät Baykādañ and Tamrat Ammanuél. In his short but powerful piece, "As'é Menilek-na Ityop'a", Gäbrä-Heywät castigates the chroniclers and offers an alternative methodology in concise and elegant language.¹⁶ Rejecting the biblical version for the genesis of humanity, he pushes human history back to at least 150,000 years. Nor does he attach much importance to the traditional recourse to the story of the Queen of Sheba to explain the origins of the Ethiopian state.¹⁷ But, ironically (in view of his Bétä Israel origin), it is Tamrat Ammanuél who gives us the most strident rejection of that legend.¹⁸ A third intellectual who had some affinity to this group—in critical detachment rather than meagreness of output for he has produced a major work, *YäGalla Tarik*—is

As'mä-Giyorgis. His Catholic background, rather than any methodological sophistication, prompts him into a denunciation of Orthodox historiography that borders on the virulent.¹⁹

In other respects, though, As'mé is much nearer to the second group of early twentieth century historians, represented above all by *Aläqa* Tayyā Gäbrä-Maryam and Heruy Wäldä-Sellasé. Industrious application, rather than critical distance, was the hallmark of this group. Tayyā's major published work, *YäIt'op'ya Hezb Tarik*,²⁰ is based on an uneasy combination of the scriptures, some classical and modern historical sources as well as oral tradition. Nonetheless, with some degree of charitableness, it could be described as the first attempt at ethno-history.²¹ But Heruy was undoubtedly the most prolific of the whole lot, having to his credit at least four major works of historical import. *It'op'ya-na Mätämma* is a fairly sober and balanced account of the reign of Empeor Yohannes, quite in contrast to the vituperation with which his contemporary, Afäwärq Gäbrä-Iyyäsus, treats that emperor. *YaHeywät Tarik* is a biographical dictionary that has served as a handy companion to historical research on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²² Finally, *Wazäma* ("Eve") was designed to be a prelude to the much more elaborate *YäIt'op'ya Tarik* ("History of Ethiopia") that has come down to us only in galley proofs and in incomplete form, its publication having been interrupted by the Italian invasion of 1935-36. In the last-mentioned work, its essentially Shäwa-centric character notwithstanding, Heruy attains rare heights of objectivity and methodological sophistication in his discussion of the troubled relationship between Emperor Yohannes and his insubordinate vassal, *Negus* Menilek.²³

Of interest is also the varied manner in which these early intellectuals treated the three emperors - Téwodros, Yohannes and Menilek. The first gets enthusiastic admiration from Gäbrä-Heywät,²⁴ understanding from Tayyā,²⁵ and disrespect and harsh judgement from Heruy.²⁶ Afäwärq's vituperative tirade on Yohannes is balanced by the sympathetic assessment of Heruy, not to speak of the succinct corrective of Gabra-Heywat that "in order to praise Menilek, it is not necessary to condemn Yohannes".²⁷ Finally, Menilek evokes widely divergent portrayals. Afäwärq is fulsome in his adulation.²⁸ Atsmé characterized him the greatest emperor since Yekunno Amlak.²⁹ Täklä-Hawaryat, who exhibits exceptional originality in highlighting the role of maid servants and pack animals in the Ethiopian victory at Adwa, strives to understand the predicament of the emperor and his own patron, *Ras* Mäkonnen.³⁰ Gäbrä-Heywät's critique of the reign of Menilek remains latent rather than patent.³¹ The most unremitting denunciation of the emperor came from the Eritrean Gäbrä-Egziabhér Gila-Maryam, who could never forgive the emperor for his abandonment of his native region to the Italians. Menilek, he stated with passion, should not aspire for a higher title than that of "King of Kings of half of Ethiopia".³²

Transition

The above fascinating experiment in modern history-writing ended with the Italian Occupation. As in other spheres of intellectual activity, the immediate post-Liberation years were to have little of the excitement of the pre-War days. But exigency soon brought into the limelight a historian who served as a bridge between the pioneers and the professional historians and yet continued to make public impact into the 1980s. That historian was the late Täklä-S'adeq Mäkurya, who had his schooling in the era of the Pioneers and yet could present a paper at the 10th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, held in Paris in 1988. Over those years, he has published some eight historical works, a record that excels that of the prolific Heruy Wäldä-Sellasé and dwarfs that of the professional historians who came after

him. Although the two have similarities, Täklä-S'adeq, unlike his predecessor, has managed to maintain a safe distance from the affairs of state, being preferred mostly for ambassadorial posts before the Revolution and living in virtual or actual retirement afterwards.³³ While the posts he occupied inside the country (ranging from a non-demanding position in the Ministry of Education to heading the National Library and the Antiquities Administration) were congenial to his scholarly pursuits, his ambassadorial designations gave him the spare time to do the writing.

Pragmatism has characterized most of his works. The exigency referred to above —the critical need felt in the 1940s for an Ethiopian history textbook³⁴ —was the occasion for his debut into historical writing with the publication of the book with which his name has been readily associated in the public imagination, *YäIt'op'ya Tarik Kā'As'é Téwodros eskä Qādamawi Haylä-Sellāsé*. This was reportedly accomplished in a matter of two weeks,³⁵ presumably on the basis of notes he had already taken. But he himself gradually became aware of the limitations of that work, which was more popular than scholarly. The trilogy with which he capped his career —pursuing the theme of Ethiopian unity under the successive reigns of Téwodros, Yohannes and Menilek— was meant to flesh out the earlier sketchy narrative.³⁶ But, in addition to the scholarly craving for perfection, there was the more practical objective of demonstrating the strong foundations of Ethiopian unity in the face of the secessionist movement in Eritrea. As such, the enterprise enjoyed government support and encouragement.³⁷ Similarly, his grand tome, *YäGrāñ Wārāra*, was meant to be a response to the threat of Somali irredentism.³⁸

Like his precursor, Heruy, a Shāwan bias permeates most of his works. Yet, there has been a noticeable refinement in both his research and presentation over the years. Writing history backwards, as it were, he was able to deal with the whole span of Ethiopian history, even if the cut-off points were generally the traditional reigns of kings —from Lebnā Dengel to Téwodros and from Yekunno-Amlak to Lebnā Dengel.³⁹ In his preface to the Lebnā-Dengel-Téwodros period, the author clearly makes a conscious effort to distance himself from the chroniclers, whom he criticizes for their adulatory tone when writing about monarchs, their anonymity, their preference for the Ge'ez medium, and their not so helpful chronology. He also gives a survey of Ethiopic manuscripts found in European libraries as well as highlighting the principal foreign authors on Ethiopia.⁴⁰ In the trilogy on Ethiopian unity, Täklä-S'adeq pushes his method a notch higher by introducing footnotes to authenticate his statements, annexing the letters of the emperors (with acknowledgement of the sources), and attaching a bibliography and biographical sketches of the major personalities.

A major source of Täklä-S'adeq's success and popularity, as compared to the professional historians, has been his use of the Amharic medium. He was not of course the first to do this. The pioneers have already started it in the first half of the twentieth century, eschewing the Ge'ez language that was preferred by the chroniclers until the nineteenth century.⁴¹ Nor was he alone in his own time. Yilma Déréssa, for long the imperial finance minister, had spared some time from his onerous ministerial responsibilities to write a book on sixteenth century Ethiopia.⁴² But Täklä-S'adeq had a much bigger audience than either his predecessors or his contemporaries. Thus, while the professionals talked to themselves or communed with their foreign colleagues, he was the only major writer who catered to a public that felt more at home in Amharic than in English.

Professional Historiography

Professional historiography denotes the pursuit of historical studies as a full-time occupation, almost invariably in an academic setting. It encompasses both training and research. Its lynchpin is the critical evaluation and analysis of sources, which are the bases of historical reconstruction. It also involves the discussion of historical findings through seminars and conferences and the dissemination of the results through historical journals. In that sense, professional historiography in Ethiopia is barely four decades old, lagging behind Europe by about a century. The two major centres where that historiography developed have been the Institute of Ethiopian Studies and the Department of History of Addis Ababa University (formerly Haile Sellassie I University). The main venues for the discussion of historical issues, as well as other sectors of Ethiopian studies, have been the International Conferences of Ethiopian Studies (started in 1959 but held regularly only since 1982) and the not so annual seminars of the Department of History. Up to 1974, the Interdisciplinary Seminar of the Faculties of Arts and Education was another important forum where historical research findings were tested before they saw the light of day. The major vehicle for the dissemination of research has been the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, supplemented by conference and seminar proceedings as well as the publication of books and monographs.

The foundations for the development of professional historiography were laid in the early 1960s. In 1963, the Institute of Ethiopian Studies was established. It had a broad mandate of promoting research and publication in the humanities and cultural studies as well as the preservation of the country's heritage. The *Journal*, which, except for a hiatus from 1975 to 1980, has continued to come out fairly regularly up to the present, has also reflected this broad mandate, although history and linguistics have predominated. In addition to its first director, Richard Pankhurst, whose prolific publication record remains unmatched, a core of Ethiopian historians came to be based at the Institute: Aleme Eshete, Bairu Tafla, Kinefe Regb Zeleke and Tsehay Berhane Sellassie. With the exception of the first, whose research interests ranged far and wide (to include feudalism and Bolshevism, among other things), biography and textual analysis emerged as a prevalent historiographical concern.⁴³ To their credit, they (particularly the first two) were able to conduct a good deal of research that came to be published, mainly in the *Journal*. On the debit side was that they could not integrate their research with teaching as they did not always have academic home base outside the Institute, which has remained a research rather than a training unit. Another person who made an imprint outside the teaching framework was Zewde Gabre-Sellassie.⁴⁴

The integration of teaching and research was to be the hallmark of the Department of History, which was to emerge, in Donald Crummey's words as "the institutional home of Ethiopian historiography".⁴⁵ Two persons played a pivotal role in the early development of the department: Karl Berentzen for European and World history and Sven Rubenson for Ethiopian. While Berentzen departed from the scene in the early 1970s, to be duly replaced by David Chapple, Rubenson's association with the department has endured to the present, albeit from the distance after 1974. In the second half of the 1960s, historical research joined the mainstream of the emerging Africanist historiography with the advent of Mordechai Abir, Richard Caulk, Donald Crummey and Taddesse Tamrat after completing their doctoral studies at SOAS. The team was reinforced with the return of Merid Wolde Aregay from the same institution in 1972 and the final delivery from incarceration of Bahru Zewde in 1981. What then have been the main developments that historical research has witnessed in the four decades or so under review? We shall try to examine the issue under the following rubrics:

framework, focus, scope, themes, and dissemination. I shall also try to assess developments in the related fields of archaeology and art history.

Framework

Historical research in the department has been conducted at two levels: faculty and student. The former has depended on the availability of research time, the latter has been relatively more steady and consistent. Both were seriously affected by the upheavals of the mid-1970s. While faculty research has tended to see the light of day in one form or another - conference and seminar proceedings, journal articles and books - student research results remain predominantly unpublished - a state of affairs that has forced a good deal of quality research to remain unknown and unappreciated. Until 1980, student research consisted of the BA dissertation (or Senior Essay as it is more popularly known) that students were required to submit in their final undergraduate year. The launching of the department's MA programme in 1979 and of its PhD programme in 1990 has considerably upgraded that research.

The Senior Essay had its heyday in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when a crop of high-quality dissertations that visibly advanced the frontiers of historical knowledge was written. Contributing to that state of affairs was the Ethiopian University Service, whereby students combined one year of teaching or other national service in the provinces with doing the basic research for their dissertations. The Senior Essay suffered a dramatic decline after 1974 and it began to recover some of its early glory only in the early 1980s. Although the standard of the students' language has declined noticeably, they have continued to apply themselves to their research topics with an industry and ingenuity that sometimes amazes even their teachers. For the students, too, the exercise has had the effect of revealing, even if somewhat belatedly (because it is their final year in the University), the fascination of historical research. Of late, it has become practically impossible to keep up with the steady outflow of dissertations, a number of which are still of considerable interest. Even more taxing has been the intimidating increase of the number of students (in the region of one hundred or more) allocated to the history programme, which has rendered the supervision of the dissertations a difficult proposition. In the last academic year, the department for the first time in its history had to forego the rite of defence.

The MA programme, which had started with the limited objective of training the department's own junior staff, has now broadened to include staff of other higher educational institutions as well as secondary school history teachers sponsored by the Ministry of Education. A waning of enthusiasm among potential candidates in recent years has now been reversed by the lower entrance requirement introduced by the University, entitling all BA holders to apply. Enthusiasm for the PhD programme has yet to pick up, however. Although the programme has been designed in such a way as to give candidates exposure in foreign (European or American) academic environments for a period of six to twelve months, potential candidates, including the department's own staff, have tended to prefer going abroad for their third degree.

It is appropriate to mention here the department's foreign (primarily American) linkages that have made this external PhD training possible. The outgoing chairman of the department, Tekalign Wolde Mariam, was trained at Boston under Jim McCann. But the two major centers of training have been at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (Abudssamad Haji Ahmad, Shumet Sishagne, and Daniel Ayana,) under Donald Crummey and at Michigan State University (Tesemma Ta'a, Guluma Gameda, Benti Getahun, and

Ezekiel Gebissa) under Harold Marcus.⁴⁶ The fact that it has unfortunately become common for students not to return after completing their PhD studies has had serious negative implications for the growth of the department. This does not necessarily mean that they would not continue to engage in historical research abroad, as the record of two former staff members of the department —Gebru Tareke and Mohammed Hasan⁴⁷— has shown. But the challenges and opportunities —both collective and individual— are greater at home.

Geographical Focus

A perceptible shift in focus has been an outstanding feature of historical research. The time when the non-literate societies of the south were considered as having no history because of the absence of written records is long gone. Parallel with developments in other parts of Africa, a critical use of oral sources has made possible a reconstruction of their past and hence liberation from the northern (or Semitic) fixation that had characterized Ethiopian studies for long. The greatest single beneficiary of this shift of focus have been the Oromo, who since the late 1960s have been the subject of investigation at both the undergraduate and graduate level.⁴⁸ Statistical evaluation would most probably prove that the Wälläga region in particular has been the area of greatest interest. Although not to the same degree as the Oromo, studies have been made of the Afar, the Harari, the Guragé, the Sidama and the Omotic peoples. Sustained application to the study of the even more marginalized peoples of Ethiopia has been shown by Gebre Selassie successive investigation of the Wayto and the Fuga.⁴⁹

It is worth emphasizing here that this shift of focus has been dictated by historiographical rather than political considerations. It started in the imperial era, which was politically associated with “Semitic” domination. And it continued and could even be said to have flourished under the Därg. And yet, with the ascendancy of ethno-nationalist discourse after 1991, it has become common to hear Ethiopian historians castigated for their neglect of the south. Nothing is more perturbing than such accusations to senior members of the department, who have invested so much precisely on the study of the south. True, the fact that most of these studies have not been published may partly explain such accusations. But the fact that even those who are aware of their existence, albeit in unpublished form, resort to such accusations makes one sometimes suspect other motives.

Temporal Scope

The first Ethiopian members of the department specialized in the medieval and early modern periods of Ethiopian history. This was probably because their expatriate teacher, Sven Rubenson, was concentrating on what was then regarded as the modern period, i.e. the nineteenth century, and the only Ethiopian teacher at the time, Sergew Hable Sellassie, was already established in ancient Ethiopian history. Whatever the circumstances, the choice had been a decisive one for Ethiopian historiography. For both Tadesse Tamrat and Merid Wolde Aregay have set the standard in professional historiography as far as their respective periods are concerned, medieval and early modern, respectively. Not only have their PhD theses (one published as *Church and State*, the other unpublished) have been the basic reference works, but they have also explored new avenues of research that have broadened our understanding of those two periods —ethnic interaction in the case of Tadesse,⁵⁰ millenarianism, society

and technology and land tenure in that of Merid.⁵¹ The path charted by Taddesse has been followed by Ahmed Hasan and Belete Bizuneh.⁵²

Since the 1970s, there has been a perceptible shift to the modern period, more specifically the twentieth century; the attraction of even the nineteenth century, once the great favourite of historians, has diminished. The only effort to reverse this trend is Shiferaw Bekele's growing interest in the *Zāmānā Māsafent* and the remarkable re-interpretation of that period that he has achieved through a careful reading of Ethiopian documents.⁵³ As a matter of fact, this shift from ancient and medieval to modern Ethiopian history has brought with it the danger of imbalance in temporal focus, with hardly any junior staff member choosing to specialize in ancient and medieval Ethiopian history. There is in short what I have called elsewhere "a disturbing concentration of modernists" in the department.⁵⁴ This is partly because of the contemporary relevance of recent historical issues. Partly, however, it is explicable by the greater availability of source material, both written and oral. The further one goes in historical investigation, the more tentative the sources tend to be.

While historians of the department have been shying away from the remote past, they have been cautiously pushing the temporal limits of investigation further forward. The political changes of the last quarter century have contributed to this move. The end of imperial rule opened much of the twentieth century to historical investigation. Even then, initially, studies were concentrated on the early twentieth century. It was gradually that the frontiers were pushed to 1974. Throughout the Därg period, departmental research, both student and faculty, stuck to that temporal limit with rigorous orthodoxy, as reflected in the much commented-upon terminal year for the first edition of *A History of Modern Ethiopia*.⁵⁵

Since the demise of the Därg, the frontiers have once again been pushed to 1991. And the revolutionary period, for long the terrain only of political analysts and journalists, has now been opened for sober historical assessment. In one of the graduate courses, successive batches of students have been writing useful papers on various aspects of the revolutionary period: the Endalkachāw cabinet, the shift in *Mā'ison* strategy from opposition to critical support of the Därg, the struggle between EPRP and TPLF, the slogan of the "Provisional Popular Government", and the emergence of Māngestu's dictatorship. Even then, such an exercise in historical reconstruction has not been without its problems, as passions have not yet completely cooled down and the historical records for the period are far from readily available. So that when some expatriate colleagues tell Ethiopian historians that contemporary history can be written (i.e. dealing with post-1991 developments), the latter can only wince.

Themes

As already indicated, a major development of recent historiography has been the change of emphasis from political history to economic and to some extent social history. However, the economic history that has been written has not been what one might call "pure" economic history —not that that would be necessarily more desirable— but more of exploring the interrelationship between economics and politics.⁵⁶ This political-economic approach, as it were, has been reflected in the greater emphasis that has been given to land and agrarian issues. This emphasis was articulated at the second departmental seminar held in 1983 in Debre Zeit. In what sounded like a manifesto, the paper presented to lead the discussion on the research agenda declared: "There is nothing more solid than land and there is nothing more concrete than food".⁵⁷ Since then, a number of dissertations at both the BA and MA levels have been written under the general rubric of land tenure, although their utility

has been diminished by the absence of any clear methodological guidelines and their scant relation to the production process. A major collaborative research project on the history of Ethiopian land tenure was undertaken in the 1980s with the University of Illinois. The major outcome of the project is the recently published seminal work by Donald Crummey.⁵⁸ The project helped to strengthen the department's infrastructure and to facilitate the doctoral training of two of its members. While it did not at the time have a direct impact on departmental research on land tenure, the published outcome is expected to have a bearing on the future course of research in this sphere.⁵⁹ The result of another collaborative venture was the CODESRIA-sponsored multi-disciplinary study of the economic history of the imperial period, which was edited by Shiferaw Bekele.⁶⁰ A focus on the issue of famine, which had rarely been treated from a historical angle, has been achieved in the BA and PhD theses of Adhana Haile.⁶¹ The summation of this political-economic approach is Tekalign Wolde Mariam's PhD thesis,⁶² whose publication is eagerly awaited.

Urban history has been another important theme of research, a result again of departmental research priorities. This has been at both the faculty and student levels. Writings by faculty—covering Gondär, Adwa, Näqämté, and Dire Dawa—have appeared in the ICES proceedings.⁶³ It is worthy of note in this regard that the department dedicated its fourth seminar to urban history.⁶⁴ An even more sustained application to urban history has been evident at the level of graduate research. The 1988 trio, as one might call them, all wrote on three different towns: Bahr Dar, Jijjiga and Šašāmāné.⁶⁵ Subsequent dissertations have dealt with Adama (Nazareth), Dessie, Dire Dawa, Gondär, Mäqāle, Yergalām and its environs as well as the Kestané (Guragé) community and Arada inside Addis Ababa.⁶⁶ A rough statistical profile of the senior essays submitted to the department up to 1992 shows that studies of towns—around 20%—constituted the single largest group. Such a corpus of data, although admittedly of a descriptive nature, would nonetheless invite a fresh synthesis to understand the process of urbanization in Ethiopia. At the micro-level, a number of senior essays have been written on the *sāfārs* of Addis Ababa and Bahru's piece on the early *sāfārs* of Addis Ababa was partly in the nature of a synthesis of these dissertations.⁶⁷ The two other major competitors have been schools and churches. The latter might be regarded as a sort of relapse to the religious history that was supposed to have been superseded. But the studies have had a lot more to do with such political and economic issues as land than with religious affairs as such. Nor would such a "relapse" be totally incomprehensible given the importance that religion has come to assume in people's lives of late.

In the realm of religious studies, one of the major achievements of the department has been the fostering of Islamic history. Although there have been a few student dissertations on Muslim shrines and other aspects of Islam, this development has centered largely on the scholarship of Hussein Ahmed. After an initial attraction to textual analysis of the classical type, he made his debut with a critique of the predominantly Christian bias of Ethiopian studies.⁶⁸ His PhD thesis, which centered on the evolution of Islam in Wällo, is now in the final stages of publication.⁶⁹ Intellectual history, in the sense of the history of intellectuals rather than the history of ideas, has been the long-time pre-occupation of Bahru Zewde. His decade-long study of the early twentieth century intellectuals is finally going to see the light of day.⁷⁰ But the story would not be complete unless it is extended to the intellectuals who have had such a palpable impact on Ethiopian political life—for better or for worse—in the second half of the century. That remains an agenda for the future.

Archaeology and Art History

While historical research in the department has thus explored divergent themes and registered considerable success, it has had an unimpressive record - to put it mildly - in the two spheres of archaeology and art history. To be fair to the department, it has not been for lack of trying, especially with regard to archaeology, which has come to be regarded as a vital instrument to revitalize the study of the country's ancient and medieval history. The effort to establish an archaeological unit that would serve as an embryo for a full-blown department reads like a saga in futility. That saga goes back to the 1960s when some of the courses that are now part of the undergraduate programme were introduced and the casts of pre-historic creatures that now remain as mocking reminders of that futility were acquired, largely through the efforts of the late Richard Wilding. Were it not for the intervention of the French archaeologists, Francis Anfray and Roger Schneider, even running those courses would have been in jeopardy after Wilding's departure in the 1970s. Circumstances conspired to frustrate the department's measures to train Ethiopian archaeologists. Alemseged Abbay vanished in the American wilderness.⁷¹ Ayele Tarekegn became a casualty of the senseless sacking of university staff in 1993.⁷² The strivings of the department in the archaeological sphere now rests solely on the shoulders of one person, Kassaye Begashaw, who has been a full-time member of the department since 1996.

At the moment, with sponsorship from the Italian-University collaboration project, the department finds itself on the threshold of introducing an MA programme in archaeology. But the wait on that threshold has made the proverbial *däjj t'enat* of the imperial court mere child's play. Although it is quite some time since the proposal secured the approval of the Council of Graduate Studies, implementation has been delayed for reasons that are far from clear to members of the department. In the meantime, prospective funding is being lost or diverted. The crucial need to broaden the horizons of ancient and medieval Ethiopian history through archaeological research —the major rationale behind the formulation of an archaeological training programme in the first place— also remains unaddressed.

By contrast, it is only recently that the department turned its attention seriously to the development of art history. Although, studies of Ethiopian art have a fairly long history and scholars engaged in those studies have even started holding their own separate conferences since the 1980s, that tradition has had two serious shortcomings. First, it has had an almost incorrigible fixation on classical Christian art, or, to put it graphically, icons and crosses. Ray Silvermann and Neal Sobania have recently challenged that fixation in a convincing manner.⁷³ But their critique has not had the desired salutary effect largely because it has remained a critique from outside. A successful effort to broaden the conference mandate to include crafts and photography as well as the performing arts was made at the fourth conference in Trieste in 1996. But that does not seem to have had a lasting impact, either.

Secondly, the *historical* element in Ethiopian art history has been rather on the slender side. What we have had so far could be more properly described as art critique or art appreciation rather than art history. In short artistic developments have rarely been placed in their proper historical context. It is to help rectify this defect that the department has now turned its attention to developing a course or courses in art history. One of its junior members, Abebaw Ayalew, is being directed into doing his MA dissertation in the field of art history. A close working relationship with the Fine Arts school, which has now been integrated with the University, is also being explored. But it will be some time until the desired impact is made on an area that has been so far largely the domain of foreign scholars.

Dissemination

The dissemination of its research findings has been the Achilles' heel of the department. Although a good deal of staff research has seen the light of day through seminar and conference proceedings as well as periodical articles, almost all student research remains unpublished. This has meant that the many good quality BA and MA theses are known only to the enterprising and persevering. The exception to this sorry state of affairs is the case of two former graduates who published Amharic versions of their dissertations.⁷⁴ The idea of launching a publication project (particularly with regard to the MA theses) was raised at various times and different levels of the University administration. But nothing has materialized so far. Even with staff research, because of the limited nature of the circulation of proceedings and periodicals, their work has been known only to their colleagues, expatriate and national. It is only through the publication of books that they could reach the wider public. And, when it comes to that, the department can count only four to its credit so far: *Church and State in Ethiopia*, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, *A Short History of Ethiopia and the Horn*,⁷⁵ and *Economic History of Ethiopia* edited by Shiferaw Bekele.

Popular and Alternative History

This curious amalgam of impressive scholarship and diffident publication has put the department at a disadvantage vis-a-vis practitioners of what I have called here popular and alternative history, who are not assailed by the same kind of diffidence in going public. In as much as the ground covered happens to coincide with historical research proper, it is difficult to ignore these practitioners. So a few words to relate their versions and assertions to the findings of professional historiography are in order. All the more so in as much as they have come in some cases to affect the teaching-learning process in a negative fashion.

In a way, the popular rendering of history has already been anticipated by the works of Täklä-Tsadeq Mäkurya. But those that have followed in his trail have not always matched either his erudition or his scholarly bent. The person who has come nearest to him in output and has perhaps surpassed him in methodology is Lapiso G. Dilebo. In fact, Lapiso could be said to be sitting astride the professional and the popular. Like Täklä-Tsadeq, he has written most of his works in Amharic, which thus has meant that he has a wider readership than the department's historians. Between 1982 and 1999 he produced four volumes that are presented as a sequence ("Book One" to "Book Four") but are not exactly sequential.⁷⁶ As a matter of fact, in view of the repetitions that abound, the four volumes could easily have been reduced to two. The author is remarkably conversant with many of the available historical sources, both primary and secondary. He paints on the broad canvas of Ethiopian history with bold strokes that alternately demonstrate flashes of inspiration and bouts of recklessness. Eclectic and didactic, he also has a penchant for bombast. Yet, the analytical frame of his reconstruction provides a rare historical insight. A major asset of his works—and one that clearly sets him apart from the other popular historians—is the legitimate place that they give to the history of the southern peoples of Ethiopia.

At a lower level than him are two writers—Belai Giday and P'awlos Ñoñño—who have been trying to write history from differing perspectives. The former's works—both in the study of currency and banking and that of Ethiopian civilization—tend to be anchored on the Aksumite era of Ethiopian history.⁷⁷ His book on Aksumite coins is a misnomer since that subject is dispatched in about five pages. His major work ("Ethiopian civilization") perpetuates the traditional interpretation of Ethiopian history both in the central place it gives

to the story of Queen of Sheba, who is said to have had her capital in Aksum (!), and its total absorption in the Semitic north.

P'awlos Ñoñño has done a relatively more respectable job. His choice of more recent periods (nineteenth and twentieth centuries) has also made his task less onerous. Of his three works,⁷⁸ the one on the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935-36 is the most disappointing and that on Menilek perhaps the most useful. With candour that could have been disarming had it not been damaging, the author tells us that he has not used Ethiopian sources for the first work because they are invariably biased.⁷⁹ He thus ends up using mostly Italian sources. Adducing the valid argument that "one photograph can explain better than one thousand words", he reproduces photographs to surfeit without however bothering to tell the reader his sources. Some of the photos, however, are rare, though the captions sometimes strike one as rather capricious.

His book on Menilek was written with the central objective of showing that Menilek was not merely interested in purchasing arms and expanding his realm but also in introducing many of the modern institutions in the country. The great attraction of the work is undoubtedly the large corpus of original documents (decrees and letters) that embellish it. Rather frustratingly, the author has not thought it fit to tell us where and how he got these original documents. Likewise, the reader is left in the dark as to the sources of the many photographs, some of them of rare quality (like that on p. 435 showing Menilek and T'aytu relaxing with members of their nobility in what appears to be their *elḥeñ*). The documents become a veritable cascade as the author goes on to depict Menilek the modernizer, the narrative often assuming the character of a series of letters. The author's third and posthumously published work is a sympathetic account of the reign of Téwodros intended to correct what the author considered was the standard portrayal of the emperor as cruel. The photos here are not as of good quality as in "Menilek" nor are the original documents (of which nonetheless there are quite a few in both Amharic and Arabic) as copious. A common failing of all the works is the absence of general context within which the particular stories are told.

Running counter to these popular renditions and creating a more serious challenge to professional historiography are the contentions of tracts reflecting an explicit political agenda. These often represent a complete negation of almost all that has been achieved by professional historiography. The lead in this direction was taken by pro-EPLF writers (I deliberately avoid the use of the term historian for there were none amongst them who would qualify for that description). I would not dwell on them here as has been handled competently already.⁸⁰ In retrospect, all that effort by an array of EPLF sympathizers to invent a separate Eritrean history strikes one as patently misplaced. At the end of the day, the destiny of Eritrea was determined and will continue to be determined not so much by history as by the hard facts of economics and politics. In that sense, the nonchalance with which Ethiopian and Ethiopianist historians treated those inventions was perhaps not as irresponsible as it might have appeared. But, in view of the fact that the same line of inventing history is being followed by some members of the Oromo nationalist camp, it is I think incumbent on historians to set the record straight before another tragedy is unleashed in the name of history on this hapless country of ours.

Space does not permit a full treatment of the subject. In the context of this piece, I would like to draw attention to some of the blatant assertions of two authors who have come to represent the trend: Asafa Jalata⁸¹ and the Sisai-Holcomb duo.⁸² It is quite obvious from a reading of these writers that they are either unaware of the many studies of the Oromo done by

members and students of the department or deliberately ignore them because they find them incompatible with their political agenda. Whatever the explanation, it is painful to come across such a blatant untruth as the claim that Oromo scholars are “discouraged or prohibited” from writing in Ethiopia and that Oromo studies is “flourishing” in Kenya while it is “non-existent” in Ethiopia.⁸³ While one would sympathize with the efforts to rectify the historiographical injustice that had been perpetrated on the southern peoples of Ethiopia (the Oromo included), it is difficult to see how this can be achieved by ignoring the works of historians in the past three decades. Rectification could be attained by a sober and systematic reconstruction of the history of the southern peoples and not by swinging to the other end of the pendulum and replacing the old mythology by a new one.

The fundamental premise of these two works is that two entities known as Oromia and Ethiopia existed in virtual independence until Menilek conquered the former in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The duo assert confidently that “Oromia and Abyssinia shared a long border for centuries”.⁸⁴ Asafa goes one step further and reproduces a map by the nineteenth century German missionary, Krapf, showing a region called “Ormonia” which is presumed to be a corruption of “Oromia”. Rather inconveniently, this entity is located south of Kāfa and Wālayta, an area that is not commonly associated with Oromo settlement. No honest historian who knows his sources could vouch for the existence of a pan-Oromo territorial entity called Oromia before the twentieth century. To argue that such an entity has now become a formal designation of the Oromo-inhabited areas or even that an independent Oromia will be born in the future is one thing. To project that into the past is quite another.

Related to this argument is the claim that it was the villainous Menilek —once again— who destroyed the *gada* system. While it is true that the incorporation of the nineteenth century has resulted in the denigration of Oromo culture and identity, to extend it into a universal destruction of the *gada* is a case of overkill. Studies by serious historians, including the leading historian of the Oromo, Mohammed Hasan, have shown that, in the case for instance of the Gibe region, the system collapsed through internal stresses rather than external pressure.

Even greater distortions are committed when the authors push the theory of Ethiopian dependency. Ethiopian independence was achieved, we are told at one point, not through any particular “bravery” of the Ethiopians but because of the alliance with European powers, with whom they shared a common religion, and the exploitation of the rivalry of the tripartite powers —Britain, France and Italy.⁸⁵ Presumably because Menilek managed to acquire firearms while the Oromo rulers did not or did so only to a limited extent, Ethiopia (“formerly Abyssinia”) is supposed to have annexed the Oromo territories with the help of European powers.⁸⁶ In fact, so the argument goes, the European powers went even further: they sent their representatives to set up Ethiopian government institutions. So much so that “a European or foreign-born adviser would have indeed been found in the next room or behind the door in every office of the bureaucracy”.⁸⁷ To give the characterization a graphic character, the “number of foreigners” in Pankhurst's *Economic History* is conveniently —if quite dishonestly— transformed into “Foreign Employees in Ethiopia”.⁸⁸ Even the prominent role that Ethiopia played in the founding of the OAU is described as “a premier example of Ethiopia's role in regard to acting as a foil for the implementation of Washington's policies”.⁸⁹ In sum, setting out to demonstrate the invention of Ethiopia, Holcomb and Sisai only succeed in inventing history.

Prospects

The above survey has hopefully shown the progress that Ethiopian historiography has registered in the last century. The Department of History of Addis Ababa University, which has played a pre-eminent role in this development, has done a commendable job in shifting the geographical focus of historical investigation from the north to the south. This has been made possible through a fresh appreciation and scientific exploitation of oral sources. It has also succeeded to a remarkable degree in integrating research with the learning process, with all its programmes (undergraduate and graduate) geared ultimately to the generation of fresh historical knowledge. The informal national network of history teachers, who do not easily forget the skills of historical investigation or lose their professional integrity, is by and large a product of the department.

While much has been achieved, there is hardly room for complacency, however. The historian's profession is still confronted with considerable challenges —challenges that sometimes assume a daunting character. The responsibility of meeting these challenges rests partly on the department. One of these challenges is the exploration of new themes of research, such as environmental history and social history. The department has already taken a commendable step with regard to the latter by directing one of its junior members to the study of social history. Although the department dedicated its 8th departmental seminar (held in Zway in 1998) to gender history, that burgeoning branch of historical studies is yet to feature prominently in the department's research agenda.⁹⁰ Not only has gender to be studied but even more vigorous efforts have to be exerted to change the oppressively male profile of the department.⁹¹ There is also a need to adopt new methodologies that could help link up historical research with research in other disciplines, notably social anthropology. The integration of Ethiopian historiography into the African mainstream, a perennial concern, is still far from achieved to a satisfactory degree. While it is difficult to ask historians to sacrifice narrative, nonetheless the virtue of analysis in sharpening and deepening narrative has to be appreciated. Above all, if the department wishes to make the impact that it wishes and deserves, it has to take seriously the issue of dissemination of research.

All the above are internal challenges that the department could try to meet. More daunting are what one could call the external challenges. The lack of understanding, not to say obstruction, which the MA programme in archaeology has met from higher authorities is a good case in point. The issue of National Archives, for long a major handicap of historical research, now seems to be resolved, albeit in a manner not altogether satisfactory to the department. But, whatever the inherent imperfections of the legislation that set up the institution, it is a major step and department members have to do their best to strengthen it.

Most disturbing is the progressive deterioration of conditions in Addis Ababa University. This has had many dimensions and ramifications. The University appears to have had the worst of both worlds, lacking in autonomy and deprived of resources. When an institution fails to provide either meaningful remuneration or a conducive environment, it cannot expect to retain its staff. When academic leaders are appointed and dismissed at whim, they cannot be expected to demonstrate courage or vision. The unplanned influx of students (with one hundred or more in the senior year) has made the normal conduct of teaching a well-nigh impossible task. It is indicative of the acuteness of the malaise that, in this day and age of the Internet, it has not infrequently become difficult to find even a decent blackboard to write on. In short, while private colleges are mushrooming and regional “universities” are being trumpeted, the one truly national higher education institution that the country has is being allowed to decay.

Whatever its imperfections, the imperial regime gave the nation a university that has withstood the vicissitudes of time and the vagaries of state policies. It was able to survive even the darkest days of Därg rule. One could only hope that the present generation of Ethiopia's rulers would not preside over the dissolution of that institution. For that eventuality would mean, among other things, the end of Ethiopian academic historiography as we have known it.

NOTES

* The Ethiopian, as distinct from Ethiopianist, focus of this paper is explained by the fact that it has been produced as part of a three-level retrospective for the Fourteenth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies. Two other papers (by Donald Crummey and Tekeste Negash) are expected to deal with the Ethiopianist dimension and Eritrean historiography, respectively. Although I have been grappling for long with most of the issues discussed in this paper, it assumed this form largely during a refreshing sojourn in Trondheim (Norway) in August 2000. I am grateful to Harald Aspen of the Department of Social Anthropology at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology for hosting me there in connection with the seminar on "Development in Africa: Research Challenges". My visit to Norway, in connection with the 19th International Congress of Historical Sciences held in Oslo, was sponsored by NORAD through the good offices of the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Addis Ababa. To them too I express my gratitude. I am grateful to Donald Crummey and colleagues in the Department of History for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

¹ For lucid exposition of the Rankean paradigm and its critics, the reader is referred to: Peter Burke, "Overture: the New History, its Past and its Future," in *idem.*, ed. *New Perspectives in Historical Writing* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 1-23, and Georg Giggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover and London, 1997), particularly the Introduction. For yet another broad survey of historiographical trends, see Geoffrey Barraclough, *Main Trends in History* (New York and London, 1991).

² One of the leading lights of post-modernism in history has been the American Hayden White, who has articulated his views through two influential works: *Metahistory: The Historical Narrative in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore, 1973), and *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London, 1978). See in particular his chapter in the latter anthology entitled "The Burden of History". For a summary of his views, as well as an enthusiastic endorsement, see Keith Jenkins, *On "What is History?": From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White* (London and New York, 1995).

³ Giggers, p. 13

⁴ Giggers, p. 14.

⁵ Burke, pp. 238ff.

⁶ Roland Oliver, *In the Realms of Gold. Pioneering in African History* (Madison, 1997); Jan Vansina, *Living with Africa* (Madison, 1994).

⁷ One should note here the central place that journals have occupied in the growth of historiographical traditions, from the Rankean *Historische Zeitschrift* to the *Annales* that revolutionized historical writing in the twentieth century. The American equivalent of the SOAS-based *JAH* has been the *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, based at the African Studies Center of Boston University, while the French *Cahiers d'études africaines* has performed a parallel function for the francophone Africanist community.

⁸ See his two works written over a gap of some twenty-five years reflecting progressive refinement of the methodology: *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology* (Chicago, 1961) and *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison, 1985).

⁹ An overview of these developments is to be found in Paul E. Lovejoy's "The Ibadan school of historiography and its critics," in Toyin Falola, ed., *African Historiography: Essays in honour of Jacob Ade Ajayi* (London and Lagos, 1993), pp. 195-202.

¹⁰ One of them, Issa Schviji, has recently brought this atmosphere to life through a collection of his lectures: *Intellectuals at the Hill. Essays and Talks 1969-1993* (Dar es Salaam, 1993).

¹¹ The acronyms for, respectively, Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa and the Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa, two organizations (one continental, the other regional) that have played such a vital role in the promotion of social science research by African scholars.

¹² One should also note here the highly successful CODESRIA-sponsored network of the early 1990s that brought together historians and political scientists from different countries of Africa as well as from the Diaspora to do in-depth studies of the military and militarism in Africa. Edited by Eboe Hutchful and Abdulahi Bathily, the studies have now been published as *The Military and Militarism in Africa* (Dakar, 1998).

¹³ This was not the same as the book with which Tayyā's name has most commonly been associated: *YāIt'op'ya Hezb Tarik*. There has been some speculation that Heruy's book *YāIt'op'ya Tarik* (discussed below) might actually have been written by Tayyā. I discuss the points for and against this allegation in my forthcoming book, *Pioneers of Change*, but was unable to reach any definite conclusion.

¹⁴ Bahru Zewde, "Ethiopian Historiography: Retrospect and Prospect," in Richard Pankhurst and Taddese Beyene, eds., *Silver Jubilee Anniversary of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies. Proceedings of the Symposium: Addis Ababa, November 24-26, 1988* (Addis Ababa, 1990), p. 89.

¹⁵ Bahru Zewde, *Pioneers of Change: The Reforming Intellectuals of Early Twentieth Century Ethiopia* (to be co-published by James Currey Publishers and Addis Ababa University Press); forthcoming.

¹⁶ In *Berhan Yehun* (Asmara,), pp. 336-337.

¹⁷ *Māngest-na YāHezb Astādādār* (Addis Ababa,), pp. 16-29.

¹⁸ Tamrat Ammanuél, "Selā It'op'ya Dārasyān," *Maison des Etudes Ethiopiennes, Bulletin No. 11* (Addis Ababa, 1997), p. 34.

¹⁹ As'mé, *YāGalla Tarik* (IES Ms.), p. 15. My references here are to the unpublished manuscript, which has now been translated and annotated by Bairu Tafla: *Asma Giyorgis and His Work. History of the Gallā and the Kingdom of Šawā* (Stuttgart, 1987).

²⁰ The latest edition of that book has been published, with an English translation, by Grover Hudson and Tekeste Negash, eds., *YāIt'op'ya Hezb Tarik. History of the People of Ethiopia* (Uppsala, 1987).

²¹ Tadesse Tamrat has used it skilfully to reconstruct the Gafat past: "Ethnic Interaction and Integration in Ethiopian History: The Case of the Gafat," *JES*, XXI (1988), pp. 121-154.

²² For a comparative evaluation, see Bahru Zewde, "Two Perceptions of a Biographical Dictionary: Heruy's *YaHeywat Tarik* and Mahtama-Sellase's *Che Balaw*," *History in Africa*.

²³ *YäIt'yo'ya Tarik* (copy available at IES Library), pp. 60, 67, 78, 85-89.

²⁴ "Menilek", p. 343.

²⁵ Tayyā Papers, National Library of Ethiopia, Ms. Of 1919/20.

²⁶ *Wazéma*, p. 51.

²⁷ Gäbrä-Heywät, "Menilek", p. 338.

²⁸ His opening salvo sets the tone of his ingratiating biography of the emperor: *Dagmawi Menilek* (Rome, 1901), pp. 1-2.

²⁹ *YäGalla Tarik*, Ms, II, p. 190.

³⁰ Unpublished Autobiography, pp. 91, 94, 116.

³¹ Note his prevarication when he broaches the subject in "Menilek", pp. 342-343.

³² See Tekeste Negash, in *No Medicine for the Bite of a White Snake: Notes on Nationalism and Resistance in Eritrea, 1890-1940* (Uppsala, 1986), p. 11.

³³ A modest account of his career is to be found in a BA thesis recently submitted to the Department of History of Addis Ababa University: Aynalem Getachew, "Life and Historical Writings of Tekle Ṣadik Mekuria" (AAU: History, 2000). Fortunately, the student was able to interview the subject of her study. It is hoped that his children would publish the manuscript of his own reminiscences in the not too distant future.

³⁴ As a consequence of the dominant British presence in Ethiopia in the 1940s, European history and textbooks had come to dominate the schools. The standard history textbooks for long were *The Old World* and *The March of Times*, which recounted the history of the West and the exploits of Western historical heroes.

³⁵ Aynalem, p. 33.

³⁶ So the author says in the preface to the first volume of the trilogy: *As'ē Tēwodros-na YäIt'yo'ya Andennät* (Addis Ababa, 1981 EC), p. 27.

³⁷ The author reveals (*Tēwodros*, p. 28) that he got government funding which made it possible for him to conduct a four-month research in European archives.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ These were published, respectively, in 1944 EC and 1951 EC.

⁴⁰ pp. 18-27, 34.

⁴¹ Of course chroniclers too had started abandoning Ge'ez for Amharic, starting with Tēwodros's chronicler, Zänāb, and ending with Menilek's, Gäbrä-Sellasé, the last of the royal chroniclers.

⁴² *YäItyo'pya Tarik Bā'Asrasedestāñaw Keflā Zāmān* (Addis Ababa, 1959 EC). This deals mainly with the wars of Ahmad Grañ; the demographic movement of the Oromo, which occurred in the same century and which one would have thought would be of closer interest to the author, is dealt with only briefly towards the end.

⁴³ Richard Pankhurst shares his reminiscences of these early years in "I.E.S. Foundation and the First Decade: A Personal View by Dr. Richard Pankhurst, the Founding Director," *Silver Jubilee Anniversary of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies* (Addis Ababa, 1990), pp. 11-26.

⁴⁴ His main contribution to Ethiopian historiography was the published version of his PhD thesis: *Yohannes IV of Ethiopia. A Political Biography* (Oxford, 1975). After a long hiatus during the Därg era, he has now emerged onto public life and has been making an impact both in the academic and popular milieu.

⁴⁵ "Society, State and Nationality in the Recent Historiography of Ethiopia," *Journal of African History*, 31 (1990), p. 105.

⁴⁶ The list does not include those currently undergoing training: Abebe Fisseha and Wudu Tafete in Illinois and Getnet Bekele, Tibebe Eshete, Solomon Addis and Getahun Mesfin in Michigan—all former students of the department.

⁴⁷ Their PhD theses, which they both completed while on study leave from the department, have now been published and in different ways set a respectable standard of historical scholarship: Gebru Tareke, *Ethiopia: Power and Protest. Peasant Revolts in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1991); Mohammed Hasan, *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570-1860* (Cambridge, 1990).

⁴⁸ The list is headed by Tesemma Ta'a, "The Oromo of Wollega: A Historical Survey to 1910", MA thesis (1980); Daniel Ayana, "Protestant Missions in Wollega: A Study of the Activities of the Missions and the Local Converts 1898-1935," MA thesis (1984); Guluma Gameda, "Gomma and Limmu: the Process of State Formation among the Oromo in the Gibe region, c. 1795-1889," MA thesis (1984); and Tekalign Wolde Mariam, "Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Kingdom of Jimma (ca. 1800-1935)," MA thesis (1984). The first three continued the geographical focus into their PhD theses, although Daniel and Guluma handled more recent political-economic themes.

⁴⁹ "The Wayto of Lake Tana: An Ethno-History," MA thesis (1984); "A Historical Survey of the Fuga Low-Caste Occupational Communities of South-Central Ethiopia," PhD thesis (2000).

⁵⁰ "Processes of Ethnic Interaction and Integration in Ethiopian History: The Case of the Agaw," *Journal of African History*, 29 (1988), pp. 5-18; "Ethnic Interaction and Integration in Ethiopian History: The Case of the Gafat," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, XXI (1988), pp. 121-154.

⁵¹ "Millenarian Traditions and Peasant Movements in Ethiopia, 1500-1855," in Sven Rubenson, ed., *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Addis Ababa, Uppsala and East Lansing, 1984), pp. 257-262; "Society and Technology in Ethiopia, 1500-1800," *JES*, XVII (1984), pp. 127-147; "Land Tenure and Agricultural Productivity 1500-1850," *Proceedings of the Third Annual Seminar of the Department of History* (Addis Ababa, 1986), pp. 115-129.

⁵² Ahmed Hasan, "A Historical Survey of Ethnic Relations in Yefat and Temmuga, Northeastern Shewa (1889-1974)," MA thesis (1994); Belete Bizuneh, "Inter-Ethnic Relations in Borana: A Historical Survey to 1943," MA thesis (1999).

⁵³ See his "The State in the *Zamana Masafent* (1786-1853): An Essay in Interpretation," in Taddese Beyene *et al*, *Kasa and Kasa. Papers on the Lives, Times and Images of Tewodros II and Yohannes IV (1855-1889)* (Addis Ababa, 1990), pp. 25-68; and "Reflections on the Power Elite of the Wārä Séh Masfenate (1786-1853)," *Annales d'Ethiopie*, Vol. 15 (1990), pp. 157-179.

⁵⁴ Bahru, "Retrospect and Prospect", p. 94.

⁵⁵ An exception to this rule is Shumet Sishagne, who pushed his study of the Eritrean liberation front into the early 1980s: "Power Struggle in the Eritrean Secessionist Movement," MA thesis (1984).

⁵⁶ See, for example, Abdussamad H. Ahmad's MA thesis, "Trade and Politics in Gojjam 1882-1935" (1980), carried through into his PhD thesis, "Gojjam: Trade, Early Merchant Capital and the World Economy 1901-1935" (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1986); Shiferaw Bekele's MA thesis, "The Railway, Trade and Politics: A Historical Survey, 1896-1935" (1982); and Bahru Zewde, "Economic Origins of the Absolutist State in Ethiopia (1916-1935)," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, XVII (1984), pp. 1-29; *idem.*, "The Fumbling Debut of British Capital in Ethiopia: A Contrastive Study of the Abyssinian Corporation and the Ethiopian Motor Transport Company," in Sven Rubenson, ed., *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Addis Ababa, Uppsala and East Lansing: 1984), pp. 331-339; *idem.*, "Concessions and Concession-Hunters in Post-Adwa Ethiopia: The Case of Arnold Holz," *Africa*, XLV, 3(1990), pp. 365-383.

⁵⁷ *Proceedings of the Third Annual Seminar of the Department of History* (Addis Ababa, 1986), p. 166.

⁵⁸ See the details in Crummey, "Society, State and Nationality," p. 106.

⁵⁹ *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia. From the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Urbana and Chicago, 2000).

⁶⁰ Shiferaw Bekele, ed., *An Economic History of Ethiopia. Volume 1: The Imperial Era 1941-1974* (Dakar, 1995).

⁶¹ Respectively, "Peasant Response to Famine in Ethiopia, 1975-1985," BA thesis (published in revised form in the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, XXI (1988)) and History of Selected Famines in Peasant Societies in Tigray and Wallo, Ethiopia (1914-1974)" (1996).

⁶² "A City and Its Hinterlands: The Political Economy of Land Tenure, Agriculture and Food Supply for Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (1887-1974) (Boston University, 1995).

⁶³ As noted in Bahru Zewde, *et al*, "From Lund to Addis Ababa: A Decade of Ethiopian Studies (1982-1991)," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, XXVII, 1 (1994), p. 9. Examples are: Merid Wolde Aregay, "Gondar and Adwa: A Tale of Two Cities," in Taddese Beyene, ed., *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, II (Addis Ababa, 1989), pp. 57-66; Shiferaw Bekele, "The People of Dire Dawa. Towards a Social History (1902-1936) (10th) and Tesemma Ta'a, "The Process of Urbanization in Welega, Western

Ethiopia: The Case of Neqemte" (10th), later published as "The Process of Urbanization in Wollega, Western Ethiopia: The Case of Nekemte", *JES*, XXVI, 1 (June 1993). Bahru's study of Gondar, which had also appeared at the 10th, was later published as "Gondar in the Early Twentieth Century: A Preliminary Investigation of a 1930-31 Census," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, XXI (1988), pp. 57-81.

⁶⁴ The papers eventually came out as *Proceedings of the Fourth Seminar of the Department of History* (Addis Ababa, 1989).

⁶⁵ Seltene Seyoum, "A History of Bahr Dar Town, 1936-1974"; Tibebe Eshete, "A History of Jijjiga Town 1891 to 1984"; Benti Getahun, "A History of Shashemene from its Foundation to 1974".

⁶⁶ One can thus cite the following MA theses: Ababu Aligaz, "A History of Yirgalem Town and Its Environs from 1933-1974" (1995); Abdu Mohammed, "A History of Dase Town 1941-1991" (1997); Getahun Mesfin, "Dire Dawa, 1941-1974: An Institutional History" (1997); Gutema Imana, "A History of Adama (Nazret) Town from Its Foundation up to 1974" (1996); Medhane Taddesse, "Salt, Trade and Urbanization: The Story of Meqeale Town, 1872-1935" (1995); Shimelis Bonsa, "Migration, Urbanization and Urban Labour Undertakings. The Case of the Kistane of Addis Ababa, c. 1900-1974" (1997); Solomon Addis, "A History of the City of Gondar 1934-1966 E.C." (1994); and Zewdu Temtime, "A Social History of Arada c. 1890-1935: A Survey" (1995).

⁶⁷ Bahru Zewde, "Early Safars of Addis Ababa: Patterns of Evolution," in Ahmed Zekaria, Bahru Zewde and Taddese Beyene, eds., *Proceedings of the International Symposium on the Centenary of Addis Ababa* (Addis Ababa, 1987), pp. 43-56.

⁶⁸ This was eventually published as "The Historiography of Islam in Ethiopia," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 3:1 (1992), pp. 15-46. Other works of his include: "Islam and Islamic Discourse in Ethiopia," in Harold Marcus, ed., *New Trends in Ethiopian Studies. Papers of the 12th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. I (Lawrenceville, 1994), pp. 775-801; "The Life and Career of Shaykh Talha b. Jafar (c. 1853-1936)," *JES*, XXII (1983), pp. 13-30.

⁶⁹ *Islam in Nineteenth Century Wallo, Ethiopia. Revival, Reform and Reaction*; expected publication date October 2000.

⁷⁰ A preview of his findings and conclusions - as well as some projections for future research - are to be found in Bahru Zewde, "The Concept of Japanization in the Intellectual History of Ethiopia," *Proceedings of the Fifth Seminar of the Department of History* (Addis Ababa, 1990), pp. 1-17; *idem.*, "The Ethiopian Intelligentsia and Italo-Ethiopian War 1935-1941," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*; *idem.*, "The Intellectual and the State in Twentieth Century Ethiopia," in Harold Marcus, ed., *New Trends in Ethiopian Studies. Papers of the Twelfth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. I (Lawrenceville, 1994).

⁷¹ He has now re-emerged onto academia, but with a book not exactly related to archaeology: *Identity Jilted or Re-imagining Identity: The Divergent Paths of the Eritrean and Tigrayan Nationalist Struggles* (Lawrenceville, 2000).

⁷² Ayele has since successfully completed his PhD dissertation at the University of Cambridge "The Mortuary Practices of Axumite Ethiopia with Particular Reference to the Gudit Stelae

Field (GSF) Site", 1997) and is currently a post-doctoral fellow at the Univesity College, London.

⁷³ Raymond A. Silverman, *Ethiopia: Traditions of Creativity* (East Lansing, 1999).

⁷⁴ Worku Nida, *Jäbdu. YäGuragé Bahel-na Tarik* (Addis Ababa, 1983 EC) and Tabor Wami, *Abba Bora 1897-1958* (Addis Ababa, 1986 EC). The former is the story of the Gurage Muslim revivalist movement led by Hasān Enjamo while the latter revolves around a biography of the famous patriot leader *Däjjazmach* Gärasu Duki.

⁷⁵ This is the culmination of years of effort by the department to prepare a viable textbook for freshmen taking the introductory course on Ethiopian history. It was compiled from individual contributions by various members of the department.

⁷⁶ *YäIt'iyop'ya Räjjem YäHezb-na YäMāngest Tarik* (Addis Ababa, 1982); *YäIt'iyop'ya YäGābbbar Ser'at-na Jemer Kapitalism* (Addis Ababa, 1983); *YäIt'iyop'ya YäMākāra Ser'at-na YäErtera Teyyaqé* (Addis Ababa, 1985); *YäIt'iyopyawināt Tarikawi Māsārātoč-na Masāriyawoch* (Addis Ababa, 1999).

⁷⁷ His two main works are: *Axumite Coins. Money and Banking in Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, n.d.) and *Ethiopian Civilization* (Addis Ababa, 1992). Recently, he seems to have found it fit to cap his career with an autobiography that is interlaced with landmarks in Ethiopian (more strictly Tegrean) history: *It'iyop'ya Hagārē-na Tezetayé* (Addis Ababa, 1992 EC).

⁷⁸ In chronological order: *YäIt'iyop'ya-na YäIt'alya T'orenāt* (Addis Ababa, 1980 EC); *Dagmawi At'ē Menilek* (Addis Ababa, 1984 EC); and *Até Téwodros* (Addis Ababa, 1985 EC).

⁷⁹ He actually cites two works in his bibliography: Kābbādā Tāsāmma's *YäTarik Mastawāša* and Mogās Keflē's *YäMussolini Mest'ir*.

⁸⁰ Tekeste Negash, "Historians and Eritrean History: A Review Article," in *idem.*, *No Medicine for the Bite of a White Snake: Notes on Nationalism and Resistance in Eritrea, 1890-1940* (Uppsala, 1986). Alemseged Abbay, in the work cited above, highlights the contradictions between popular and political memory.

⁸¹ *Oromia and Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868-1992* (Boulder and London, 1993); "The Struggle for Knowledge: The Case of Emergent Oromo Studies," *African Studies Review*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (September 1996), pp. 95-123.

⁸² Bonnie Holcomb and Sisai Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia. The Making of a Dependent Colonial State of Northeast Africa* (Trenton, 1990). For a review article comparing this with my own *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, see Ivo Strecker, "Glories and Agonies of the Ethiopian Past," *Social Anthropology* (1994), 2, 3, pp. 303-312.

⁸³ Asafa, "Struggle for Knowledge," p. 106.

⁸⁴ Holcomb and Sisai, p. 282.

⁸⁵ Asafa, *Oromia and Ethiopia*, p. 7.

⁸⁶ Asafa, "Struggle for Knowledge," p. 95.

⁸⁷ Holcomb and Sisai, p. 15.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁹⁰ The possibilities in this sphere have been clearly demonstrated by an excellent senior essay submitted in June 2000 describing and analyzing the lives of three prostitutes: Betelhem Tekola, "Narratives of Three Prostitutes in Addis Ababa". This is reminiscent of Tekalign Wolde Mariam's essay based on three slave narratives: "Three Ex-Slave Narratives from Southwest Ethiopia" (1980).

⁹¹ The first female historian, Tsehay Berhane Sellassie, was attached to the IES and later moved on to study social anthropology in Oxford. A female graduate recruited with great enthusiasm into the department in the early 1990s, she left it for unknown reasons after barely two years. All efforts by senior members of the department to restrain her were in vain.