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DEUTSCHE BRIEFE VON ÄTHIOPIERN AUS DER PROTESTANTISCHEN
MISSION: VON DER REICHSEINIGUNG UNTER YOHANNIS IV. BIS
ZUR GROSSEN HUNGERSNOT (1879 BIS 1889)

1. Einleitung

Die in der letzten Nummer der *Orientalia Parthenopea*¹ vorgestellte Briefesammlung aus dem Kontext der protestantischen Mission in Äthiopien, deren Schreiber alle der protestantischen St. Chrischona-Pilgermission verbunden waren, findet hier ihre Fortsetzung. Alle Briefe sind von Äthiopiern verfasst, in manchen Fällen im Original auf Deutsch (insbesondere die Briefe des Mika'él Arägawi), und ansonsten auf Amharisch, wobei in der fast immer nur die deutsche Übersetzung erhalten geblieben ist - die äthiopischen Originale sind fast alle verschollen. Die deutsche Sprache scheint ein Grund zu sein, warum diese wichtige historische Quelle bisher in der internationalen Äthiopistik nicht beachtet worden ist - neben der Tatsache, dass die Briefe in weitgehend unbekanntem Missionsrundschriften dokumentiert sind, die nur in einer schweizer Sammlung erhalten geblieben sind. Vereinzelt wurden Briefe auch in den deutschsprachigen Erinnerungen Martin Flads² von 1922 veröffentlicht bzw. sind teilweise noch in Privathand; es gibt in englischen Missionsschriften auch noch englische Übersetzungen, die hier nicht berücksichtigt werden. Die deutschen

¹ W. Smidt, «Deutsche Briefe von Äthiopiern aus der Protestantischen Mission: Vom Fall des Téwodros bis zur Unterwerfung des Königs Minilik (1869 bis 1878)», *Orientalia Parthenopea* VIII (2008), pp. 9-56.

² J.M. Flad, *60 Jahre in der Mission unter den Falaschas in Abessinien: Selbstbiographie des Missionars*, Gießen – Basel, Brunnen-Verlag, 1922.

Abstract

This is an annotated collection of letters and documents (including fragments) written by Ethiopians between the years 1879 and 1889, during the period in which the Ethiopian king of kings Yohannis IV had reached the peak of his power, until he fell at the battle of Metemma, fighting against the Mahdists. All the letters were written by adherents of the Protestant mission who were associated with the St Chrischona Pilgrim Mission in Switzerland, with the exception of three documents authored by king Minilik of Shäwa. This publication exclusively presents texts, which are preserved in the collections of St Chrischona and of the family of the missionary Martin Flad. Most of them are contained in a small periodical of the mission (substituting the former circular letters), of which only one complete collection exists, and in the 1922 memoirs of Flad. The letters of the most prominent among the Ethiopian evangelists, Mika'él Arägawí, were originally written in German, same as those of Gobbaw Dästa (the later well-known royal official kántiba Gäbru), while all the others were translated from Amharic into German. The Amharic originals, however, seem to be lost. Some letters are known only as fragments, others contain lengthy and most detailed reports, which give us a deep insight in that period of political and religious change. The reports were mainly written by Ethiopian evangelists living among the Bétä Isra'él, but a few also in the context of a short-lived Oromo mission in Gojjam and of an initially quite successful Oromo mission in southern Shäwa, supported by king Minilik. Given the general lack of original Ethiopian sources of the 19th century, these documents are precious witnesses of a period of consolidation of Ethiopia, during which the Ethiopian rulers prepared first steps of expansion to the southwest and south (the Guduru Oromo in Gojjam, the kingdom of Käfa, and the Oromo south of Shäwa), until in 1885 Ethiopia was heavily challenged by the Italian colonial expansion in the north and soon thereafter by the Mahdist incursions in the west. The letters show that foreign-sponsored Amharic books were more and more widespread, which caused rising religious debates among Christians and among the Bétä Isra'él; these texts show an ambiguous Ethiopian leadership between the rejection of and the need for European influences, and witness the terrors of war and the beginning of the great famine.

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