

**Ethiopic Historiographical Texts: Editing and Translating and
Textual and Historical Analysis**

International Workshop

**Within the framework of the DFG Project no. 445841073, "The
Chronicle of King Śarḍa Dəngəl (r.1563—1597): A Critical
Edition with Annotated English Translation"**

29–30 June 2023

Universität Hamburg, Hiob Ludolf Centre for Ethiopian and
Eritrean Studies, Alsterterrasse 1, 20354 Hamburg

Venue: Mittelweg 177, Universität Hamburg

Organizer: Solomon Gebreyes Beyene

Historiography is one of the well-established Gə‘əz literary genres, represented by interchangeable keywords, Tārik (ታሪክ: ‘history’) and Zenā (ዜና: ‘news, narrative, story, announcement’). The royal chronicles called Zenā mawā’əl (‘Book of Chronicles’) are amongst the most important Gə‘əz historiographical texts, which were written for most of the kings from the fourteenth century onwards, except for a few kings in between until the twentieth century. Until the nineteenth century, these official chronicles were written in Gə‘əz, later substituted by Amharic. Most of the chronicles appear to have been composed already during the reign of the king by a royal chronicler in charge of this task, who took part in the king’s campaigns and the daily life of the royal wandering court as an eyewitness. The production of Gə‘əz historiographical texts in the Christian kingdom of

Ethiopia was not limited to the court for recording the deeds of the kings only, but it also encompassed recording the memories of monasteries, local communities, shorter historiographical texts transmitted as additional notes, and in exceptional cases of ethnic groups. The corpus of Gə‘əz historiographical texts includes also a number of texts translated from (Copto-) Arabic, which belong to the genre of universal history (or universal chronicles) dealing with the history of nations, religious figures, and kings outside the domain of the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia.

These groups of historiographical texts have been subjected to a variety of scientific studies over the past centuries, from editing and translating them into various languages to analysing and interpreting the data they contain. Yet, there remain several gaps. Thus, in the last decades, the earlier editions were re-evaluated from the modern text criticism perspective. Hence, some royal chronicles have been re-edited by applying new approaches and methods. However, there are still some texts that require re-edition, as new, important witnesses may have emerged, or they may have been insufficiently studied in terms of their functions, forms, and usefulness for reconstructing the past. Furthermore, comparative studies of these different groups of historical texts have not been conducted yet. Finally, there are still unedited historical texts that should also be edited to make them available to historians in the future.

The workshop attempts to address the existing gaps by providing a comprehensive look at the methods and approaches used to critically edit historiographical texts, the forms and languages used in them, a comparative analysis of such texts, and the purpose and function of writing them, as well as their use for historical research.

Programme

Thursday, 29 June		
Time		Title/Speaker
9:00–9:30	Registration	
9:30–10:00	Opening	Alessandro Bausi, Solomon Gebreyes Beyene, Hamburg
	Chair: Alessandro Bausi	
10:00–10:30	Keynote speech	Compilation in Ethiopian Historiography - Preferred Genre or Coincidence of the Manuscript Tradition (Manfred Kropp, Mainz)
10:30–11:00	Coffee break	
	Chair: Aaron Butts, Hamburg	
11:00–11:30		Reconstructing the History of the Episcopate of Alexandria: Questions of Method and Evaluation of Textual Variants (Alberto Camplani, Rome)
11:30–12:00		The Chronicle of John of Nikiu: Source-Based Edition and Translation (Daria Elagina, Hamburg)
12:00–12:30		The Translation of the Tārika Walda 'Amid and its Influence on Ethiopic Chronological Historiography (Carsten Hoffmann, Hamburg)
12:30–14:00	Lunch (in situ)	
	Chair: Denis Nosnitsin, Hamburg	
14:00–14:30		Edition of the Chronicle of King Śarḍa Dəngəl (r.1563–1597): A Preliminary Result (Solomon Gebreyes Beyene, Hamburg)
14:30–15:00		Towards a New Edition and Translation of the Maṣḥafa 'Aksum (Michael Ian Hensley, Washington)
15:00–15:30		Ṗāwlos' Annales: Events, Time, and Space in Ethiopia Through the Eyes of a Monk (ca. 1531-1578 CE) (Martina Ambu, Amélie Chekroun, Bertrand Hirsch, Paris)
15:30–16:00	Coffee break	
	Chair: Alessandro Gori, Copenhagen	
16:00–16:30		New Insights into <i>Zenāhu laGällā</i> (Bertrand Hirsch, Paris)
16:30–17:00		Who Wrote the History of Aksum's Institutions and for Whom? (Anaïs Wion, Paris)
19:00 onwards	Dinner (Brodersen Restaurant; for speakers and moderators)	

Friday, 30 June		
Time		Title/Speaker
		Chair: Anaïs Wion
9:00–9:30		Towards Writing the National History of Ethiopia: A Royal Historiography 19 th C (Derese Ayenachew Woldetsadik, Villa I Tatti, Florence)
9:30–10:00		Chronicling the Battle of 'Əmbābo (1882): Textual Edition and Historical Analysis (Hewan Simon Marye, Hamburg)
10:00–10:30		Understanding, Editing, Translating, and Annotating Historiographic Works of the Late Gondarine Period: The Case of Tārik Zamədra Gondar ('The History of the Land of Gondar') (Sisay Sahile Beyene, Gondar)
10:30–11:00	Coffee break	
		Chair: Wolbert Smidt, Jena
11:00–11:30		Echoes of History in the Dəgg ^{wā} -type Antiphons for King Dāwit (r. 1382–1413) of Ethiopia (Jonas Karlsson, Hamburg)
11:30–12:00		Historical Writings in Manuscripts from Eastern Təgrāy: Additional Notes and more (Denis Nosnitsin, Hamburg)
12:00–12:30		Which Materials for Which Historiography? Personal Research Archives for a New Look at Modern Historiography (Emmie Le Galès, Paris)
12:30–14:00	Lunch (in situ)	
		Chair: Sophia Dege-Müller, Hamburg
14:00–14:30		Remains of the Oral Transmission of Historiographical Narratives in Nineteenth-Century Ethiopia: The Youth Years of Rās Walda Śəllāse of Təgrāy, as Recorded by Arnauld d'Abbadie (Éloi Ficquet, Paris)
14:30–15:00		The Overlooked Text Category of Local Historiographical Texts And "Oral Chronicles" of Təgrāy Villages - Insights Into Local Views of History (Wolbert Smidt, Jena)
15:00–15:30	Coffee break	
15:30–16:00		Final discussion

Abstracts and Contributors

Manfred Kropp (Universität Mainz)

Compilation in Ethiopian Historiography – Preferred Genre or Coincidence of the Manuscript Tradition

The preserved and hitherto known Ethiopian historiography on the Ethiopian kings is divided into two main areas. Firstly, texts of the official court historiography, and secondly, texts in the context of the *Tārika Nagašt*, known in research as the “short chronicle”. For both, the phenomenon of compilation plays an important role, whether in relation to the nature of the text or the peculiarity of its transmission. The majority of these manuscripts are compilations or rather multi-text libraries.

With regard to the tradition of court historiography, two periods can be distinguished. The period from Yəkunno ’Amlāk to Śarḏa Dəngəl, with the dramatic caesura of the Grāññ wars, and the period from Yoḥannəs I to the end of the Gondarine kingship. From Yoḥannəs I onwards, official court annals are preserved. The copies that have come down to us are mostly copies commissioned by European travellers.

About the period up to Śarḏa Dəngəl, only pieces about ’Amda Şəyon, Zar’a Yā’qob, Ba’əda Māryām and ’Əskəndər have survived for over 15 monarchs. They aren’t but reports of selected deeds of the monarch in question (’Amda Şəyon) or a summary account of the governmental activity of a monarch from various points of view; these even repeated with changing perspectives, probably of the same author (Zar’a Yā’qob).

The compilation of the *Dağğāzmāč* Ḥaylu arises from similar motivations as the earlier compilation around the chronicle of King Śarḏa Dəngəl, especially in the Oxford 29 manuscript.

In addition to the official court historiography, a “voice of the opposition” existed in the form of the “short chronicle”. Created from various materials, they were probably “working papers” of court councillors and court judges. They are based on entries in *Tārik* columns of calendar tables.

Alberto Camplani (Università di Roma La Sapienza)

Reconstructing the History of the Episcopate of Alexandria: Questions of Method and Evaluation of Textual Variants.

The provisional editions that Alessandro Bausi and Alberto Camplani have proposed respectively of the Ethiopic and Latin versions of the first part of the *History of the Episcopate of Alexandria*, originally written in Greek, have certainly not resolved all the problems relating to the general reconstruction of this history. In addition to a careful evaluation of the variants between these two versions, with particular attention to the introduction written by Guarimpotus to his Latin translation of the *Martyrdom of Peter of Alexandria*, an in-depth comparison still needs to be made between the Latin text of the *Historia Athanasii* (with other short passages preserved in the Codex veronensis LX[58]) and the Greek text of Sozomen's *Ecclesiastical History* as well as the *Martyrdom of the Holy Notaries*. Only in this way can a hypothetical reconstruction of the contents of this history be proposed to the academic world, in the perspective of a complete translation into a modern language with historical commentary.

Daria Elagina (HLCEES, Universität Hamburg)

The Chronicle of John of Nikiu: Source-Based Edition and Translation

The *Chronicle of John of Nikiu*, a historiographical text and a crucial source for the Late Antique period preserved exclusively in Ethiopic, attracts the vivid interest of philologists and historians without a profound knowledge of the Ethiopic language. Consequently, a broad scholarly community should rely on various translations of the edited text of the *Chronicle of John of Nikiu*. However, the only available complete edition (Zotenberg 1883) and two complete translations (Zotenberg 1883; Charles 1916), though being great scholarly achievements, do not represent the text of the *Chronicle of John of Nikiu* as a historical source in full due to some widespread editorial and translation practices. This situation highlights the need to reconsider or at least discuss some practices in editing and translating Ethiopic historiographical texts and propose new strategies on the theoretical and representational levels. In this talk, I want to discuss the concept of a “source-based edition” and a “source-based translation” in regard to the *Chronicle of John of Nikiu* taking into consideration such phenomena as editorial (over)corrections, paratextual elements,

intertextuality, as well as neutralization of synonyms in translation, translation of ambiguous terms, and others. All these elements are crucial in representing a historiographical text as a historical source and in making it available for a broader scholarly community. Though being a case study, the talk aims to address the problem of editing and translating Ethiopic historiographical texts in general.

Carsten Hoffmann (HLCEES, Universität Hamburg)

The Translation of the Tārika Walda 'Amid and its Influence on Ethiopic Chronological Historiography

The Tārika Walda 'Amid is a universal history, written by the Egyptian Christian author Ğirġis al-Makīn Ibn al-'Amīd. It was translated twice into Ethiopic. The first translation was carried out during the reign of King Zar'a Yā'qob but contains the pre-Islamic history only. The second translation was done under the reign of King Ləbna Dəngəl comprising all parts of the Arabic Vorlage. In my presentation, I want to give evidence for two distinct translations and for their exact date, which is a major result of my dissertation. In addition, I want to give some remarks on the method of Ibn al-'Amīd, the style of his chronicle, and the influence of its translations on later Ethiopic historiographical writing.

Solomon Gebreyes Beyene (HLCEES, Universität Hamburg)

Edition of the Chronicle of King Śarḏa Dəngəl (r.1563–1597): a Preliminary result

The Chronicle of King Śarḏa Dəngəl is one of the best Gə'əz historiographic works of Ethiopia, written during the king's reign by a contemporary royal chronicler who attended the king's campaigns and the daily royal banquet of the royal mobile court. This chronicle, unique both for the abundance of historical data it contains and for its preserved literary quality, is an indispensable primary source for the study of Ethiopia and Horn of Africa history as well as for understanding medieval world literature. It was edited and published in 1907 by Carlo Conti Rossini based on three

manuscripts and translated into French. In fact, five other manuscripts were not included in this earlier edition.

The new edition of the chronicle, as part of a project funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG Projektnummer 445841073) for 3 years (2021-2023), is prepared based on eight manuscripts, that is, the three manuscripts used by Conti Rossini, plus the five manuscripts, to produce a text closer to the original and translate it into English accompanied with annotations. As of January 2021, the project has undergone a variety of activities (manually collating eight manuscripts, studying the textual tradition, establishing the critical text) to reconstruct the new updated re-edited Gə‘əz text of the chronicle and achieved some important progress in a new edition. The editing work is still in progress, but this presentation will address some major results of the editing of the chronicle focusing mainly on the textual tradition of the text, manually collating and identifying the conjunctive errors of the manuscripts and a *stemma codicum*, and the established critical text.

Michael Ian Hensley (The Catholic University of America)

Towards a New Edition and Translation of the Maṣḥafa `Aksum

Although once described as “one of the most important achievements of Ethiopian historiography,” the *Maṣḥafa `Aksum* (henceforth MA), a composite work that features material from the medieval period up to the nineteenth century, has hardly received the attention that it deserves. Since Conti Rossini’s critical edition and translation of the MA in 1910, only a number of studies have appeared, the most prominent of which are two separate articles on memory, archaeology, and textual stratigraphy in the MA (Hirsch and Fauvelle-Aymar (2001) and Wion (2009)). While both of these studies effectively situated the MA in its appropriate historical and literary context, they also highlighted the pressing need for further research, especially regarding the text’s function and relationship to related literature (especially the *Kəbra Nagašt.*) My own interest in the MA is connected to my dissertation project, which will investigate the reception and memory of the Aksumite Empire in the medieval period and beyond. Until recently I have relied on Conti Rossini’s critical edition for my initial research. However, it has become increasingly apparent that an updated edition that incorporates newer approaches in textual and historiographical studies will be needed. Therefore, I am presently undertaking preliminary work for a new edition of the MA that integrates new witnesses alongside an English translation and commentary that discusses the

text's stratigraphy, development as a composite work, and function and purpose. In particular, I intend to emphasize the dynamic nature of the MA that allowed subsequent generations to repurpose and reshape it for different uses.

Martina Ambu, Amélie Chekroun, Bertrand Hirsch, Université Paris 1 - Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris

Āwlos' Annales: Events, Time, and Space in Ethiopia Through the Eyes of a Monk (ca. 1531–1578 CE)

In the pages of the manuscript BnF Éthiopien 160 dating back to 1552/1553 CE (Zotenberg 1877), a monk named Āwlos records toponyms, anthroponyms, natural phenomena, and political major, national, and local events that occur from 1531 to 1578 in several regions of Ethiopia, including mentions of the war led by *Imām Aḥmad* and its consequences. To these reportages under the form of *Annales*, to whom he is contemporary (and, in some cases, eyewitness), Āwlos adds, using the 1st singular person, numerous details on his life, activity, and trips throughout the Christian territory, under Ləbna Dəngəl's (1508–1540), Galāwdewos's (1540–1559), Minās's (1559–1563), Śarḍa Dəngəl's (1563–1597) reigns.

In 1918, Carlo Conti Rossini published the so-called “Autobiography of Āwlos” and delivered to the larger public its first edition and translation, with a short comment. Our contribution aims to deliver a new edition and translation of this text, as well as to analyze further several aspects that deserve to be examined and never were until present. The forms and contents of Āwlos' *Annales* need to be considered and compared to other documentary sources from the sixteenth century. With a closer look at the ensemble of texts included in the codex, we will consider the typology of Āwlos' narration and will delve into the socio-spatial and political context in which he lived, with the double historical approach on Christians and Muslims of Ethiopia in the sixteenth century.

Bertrand Hirsch (Université Paris 1 - Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris)

New insights into Zenāhu laGällā

The *Zenāhu laGällā* ('History of the Oromo'), one of the masterpieces of Ethiopian historiography, has been written by 'Abbā Bāḥrəy, a great sixteenth-century scholar. We know, since the works of

Getatchew Haile, that he was also the author of almost all the texts contained in the British Library's manuscript Or. 534, in particular the *Mazmura Krəstos* ('Psalms of Christ'), a poetic tour de force which also contains some biographical information. In the light of these texts and of an in-depth study of *Zenāhu laGällā* and its manuscript tradition, I propose two new perspectives on the reading of it: first, a history of the reception of this text, both in Ethiopia and abroad; second, it is not, as is too often asserted, a condemnation of the Oromo, a mere reflection of the negative prejudices about them in the Christian society of the time, but a narrative written by someone familiar with Oromo culture who uses that society's own categories to write its history and to evaluate, in turn, the nature of Christian society. In this sense, it appears as a real *hapax* in Ethiopian historiography. In conclusion, we ask the question: where does Bāḥrəy get his knowledge of Oromo culture and history?

Anais Wion (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS))

Who wrote the history of Aksum's institutions and for whom?

While working on the *Book of 'Aksum* in order to better understand both the history of the Ethiopian administration and the history of Təgrāy during the Medieval and pre-Modern periods, I became gradually aware of the very formal composition of the *Book of 'Aksum* and the necessity of understanding this corpus as a compilation that has been formalised gradually between the 15th and the seventeenth centuries. In addition, and despite the diverse natures of each of its components (land charters and fiscal documents, lists of kings, lists of dignitaries, lists of precious objects, the ritual of the unction of the kings, historical texts...) the *Book of 'Aksum* intends to write the history of the city, its institutions, and its inhabitants, which is a quite uncommon object in Ethiopian historiography. Knowing the long-term relationship between the royal power and 'Aksum, whose interests were served by this compilation? The comparison between the manuscripts of the *Book of 'Aksum* and the analysis of their variances can help solve this question in order to better understand the many negotiations between various actors as well as the reassignment and modification of the value of the documents composing the *Book of 'Aksum*.

Derese Ayenachew Woldetsadik (Villa I Tatti, The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies)

Towards writing the national history of Ethiopia: A Royal Historiography of the nineteenth century

The Amharic translations of the medieval and post-sixteenth century Gə‘əz chronicles were widely carried out at the ʿƏnṭoṭo palace to engrave a national history under the direction of *ṣahāfe tə ʿəzāz* Gabra Śəllāse. He was in charge of collecting chronicles and legal documents and ensuring their Amharic translations and their dissemination. It was conceived on the eve of the victory of ʿAdwā in 1896. These translations had two destinations. Firstly, they were used to create the historical awareness of the élites to assemble under the ideology of *Shebanization*, the promised land paradigm of Ethiopia. It devised unprecedented unity against the colonial ambition of Italy in the 1890s. Secondly, they demonstrated Ethiopian writing cultures for centuries. It was an antithesis of the civilising discourses of colonial Europe. King Mənilək II’s (1889–1913) friend, Casimir Mondon-Vidailhet (1893–1898) collected these Amharic translations of the Gə‘əz chronicles and Arabic accounts to open “Abyssinian courses” at the École des Langues Orientales in 1898. Besides, the history of Lālibalā, the Futūḥ al-Habaša, the history of the “Gällā”, the regional chronicles, etc., were produced to Mondon-Vidahlet by the order of Mənilək II. Since 2017, I have been studying the importance of these collections in reconstructing royal historiography in Ethiopia. They served widely to write popular history in Ethiopia. These popular historians dominated the historiography of Ethiopia in favour of the royal narratives as part of the reconstruction of the national history of the country. This paper intends to investigate how the chronicles used at “ʿƏnṭoṭo royal historiography school” to rebuild Ethiopian nationhood in Ethiopia and to propagate it into France against the colonial ambition of Europe in Ecole des Langues Orientales (ELO).

Hewan Semon Marye (HLCEES, Universität Hamburg)

Chronicling the Battle of ʿƏmbābo (1882): Textual edition and Historical analysis

The text under investigation is the “Histoire de la Bataille d’Embabo” (1882) found in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) with the shelfmark Éthiopien 634 (Griaule 326). It is also found at the BnF in d’Abbadie 254, pp. 343–350. The battle of ʿƏmbābo (June 1882) was held between two provincial kings of the time: King Mənilək II of Śawā and King Takla Hāymānot of

Goḡḡām. The text reveals aspects of the territorial ambitions of the kings mentioned, their diplomatic measures as well as the tradition of wars and campaigns of the time.

Griaule 326 was written by an unidentified author to Mr. Griaule, head of the Dakar-Djibouti expedition. This expedition is important in so far as it is the context in which this manuscript appears. It is, all in all, 18 pages and is written in clear Amharic. It presents a day-by-day account of the weeks leading to and following the battle as the author seemingly travelled with the Šawā camp to and from ʾĪmbābo. Though the text is known and mentioned by some authors in their works about the battle (c.f. R. A. Caulk's "Territorial competition and the Battle of Embabo, 1882", p. 81, footnote 67), it remains untranslated, unedited, and lacks historical and textual commentary.

Here are some questions that will be addressed in this study: are the two texts written by identical writers? Who commissioned these writings or who is the text recorded for? Are there other manuscript sources about this battle? Is it possible to locate a copy of either manuscript in Ethiopia? Is this manuscript in line with other chronicles of the same time?

Sisay Sahile Beyene (University of Gondar)

Understanding, editing, translating, and annotating historiographic works of the late Gondarine period: the case of Tārik Zamədra Gondar ('The History of the Land of Gondar')

Tārik Zamədra Gondar is a historiographic text composed between the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century with four witnesses. Although the Gondarine period is known for several historiographic, liturgical, and administrative records written in Gəʿəz, the *Tārik Zamədra Gondar* has a unique feature as it is composed in Amharic, a language that used to be a *lingua franca* of the period until it became a language of literature in the mid-nineteenth century. However, texts written in the later language seem to have been neglected by scholars who focused on working on historiographic works of the Gondarine period. Only a few selected Amharic texts were examined and translated into a foreign language. This research focused on important points that are learned while working on several witnesses of the *Tārik Zamədra Gondar* that focuses on understanding the content of the context of the text Plus, phonological, morphological, lexical peculiarities that emanates from the Amharic dialect reflected in the text will be addressed in addition to the critical edition. Other points such as the sources of the text composition, translation, and annotation of the text are addressed accordingly.

Jonas Karlsson (HLCEES, Universität Hamburg)

Echoes of history in the Dəgg^{wā}-type antiphons for King Dāwit (r. 1382–1413) of Ethiopia

In this paper, a previously unknown set of *Dəgg^{wā}*-type antiphons for the commemoration of King Dāwit of Ethiopia (r. 1382–1413) will be presented and contextualised. The antiphons, which so far are only attested in a single witness—the sixteenth-century manuscript Dabra Bərḥān Šəllāse, EMMML 1894—were probably written explicitly for the commemoration of the king, as they seem to refer to events during his reign, albeit in the poetic style typical for the genre. The question of the dating of the antiphons remains uncertain, as are the reasons for their sparse attestation in manuscripts.

This paper explores the portrait of King Dāwit that emerges from the set of *Dəgg^{wā}*-type antiphons and tries to place it within the context of other liturgical texts commemorating the king, including a brief mention in the *Sənkəssār* and a series of *ʿƏgziʿabəḥer naqša* hymns ascribed to King Zarʿa Yāʿqob, one of King Dāwit’s sons. While certain overlaps can be discerned in formulae and epithets, there are simultaneously clear differences in which themes are highlighted – notably, the religious achievements of King Dāwit, including the arrival of the True Cross in Ethiopia during his reign, are absent from the *Dəgg^{wā}*-type antiphons.

Building on the analysis of the set of *Dəgg^{wā}*-type antiphons for King Dāwit, the paper concludes with a more general discussion of the potential of *Dəgg^{wā}*-type antiphons to deliver information about the history of Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Denis Nosnitsin (HLCEES, Universität Hamburg)

Historical writings in manuscripts from eastern Təgrāy: additional notes and more

It is well known that despite the large number of texts produced within the Ethiopian-Eritrean written culture, only a small portion deals with history and may be assigned to the genre of historiography. On the one hand, these are famous royal chronicles that have been extensively used by scholars elaborating on the history of the Ethiopian monarchy. On the other hand, there are less known smaller writings of various minor genres, bearing historical information of different kinds.

They sometimes appear as added texts or marginal notes. Containing interesting information, these texts frequently present problems of interpretation, and the data they contain may be difficult to verify. However, these texts are the only voices of the local historians that show the way history was dealt with. The presentation aims at surveying various samples of small historical writings that were collected mostly in northern Ethiopia between 2005 and 2015.

Emmie Le Galès (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS))

Which materials for which historiography? Personal research archives for a new look at modern historiography

What materials are used in Ethiopia to make the history of historiography? This question raises the problem of the marginal writings of research, those that inform us about the very process of elaborating historical knowledge: drafts, correspondence, meeting minutes, and colophons. This paper will present, for the contemporary period, the hitherto little explored corpus of Ethiopian historians' personal archives, in particular, Marsə'e Həzan Walda Qirqos and Kabbada Tasammā collections. Traces of intense historical activity are to be found in their archives, particularly in the 1940s and 1950s. This shows a real dynamism in Ethiopian historiography. These archives thus allow us to question key notions of historical science in a new way: authorship, sources, and the question of practices. They also allow us to broaden our definition of the historiographical genre: the notion of *māstāwašā*, a form widely used by historians of the contemporary period and yet not categorised as a historical genre, will thus be the subject of development in the contribution. As many of these contemporary historians wrote historical texts about the Šawā region, I will use the example of unpublished texts on the *History of Šawā*, which is the topic of my thesis. It will be shown how a royal chronicle from the late nineteenth century was rewritten several times during the twentieth century and how these rewritings can illustrate important historiographical innovations of the contemporary period.

Éloi Ficquet (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris (EHESS))

Remains of the oral transmission of historiographical narratives in nineteenth-century Ethiopia: The youth years of rās Walda Śəllāse of Tጌgrāy, as recorded by Arnauld d'Abbadie

During his ten-year stay in Ethiopia in the 1840s, the young French traveller Arnauld d'Abbadie assisted his brother Antoine in collecting manuscripts and geographical information. He was actively involved in the power plays, political rivalries, and armed struggles between regional chiefs. He was not only an observer but also an actor in the competition between regional powers. It was in this context that he recorded historical accounts of a biographical nature, focusing on the adventures, victories, and defeats of important rulers in various territories. These stories were transmitted to him orally in the Amharic language. He transcribed them mainly in French, with numerous inclusions of Amharic words and phrases, which are traces of the original oral source. He also wrote sarcastic poems or songs in Amharic. These materials have remained unpublished, and I have begun to publish them in samples, in preparation for a complete edition. These notes represent an exceptional vestige of how historical knowledge was transmitted orally. The comparison with the episodes preserved in the written historiography relating to the same period and the same characters makes it possible to confirm several events, as well as shows divergences that question the multiplicity of points of view and versions constituting the historicity of the facts. The oral account provides narrative and explanatory details that highlight the allusive character of written sources, which leads to questioning their composition and use. This paper will focus on the editing of the long narrative of the youth years of Rās Walda Śəllāse of 'Āndartā, in Tጌgrāy, at the end of the eighteenth century. In order to edit and translate this text and compare it with other historical sources, I have chosen to divide it into chapters and episodes. I will explain what motivated the choice of this method, and I will ask to what extent it can be applied to the exploitation of other sources, in order to facilitate their reading and analysis, often stifled by the compactness of the text and the paratext. I will also question some passages that offer new insights into the in-depth reading of the written sources of this period, in particular the historiographical compilation edited by Weld-Blundell (1922) and completed by Kropp (1989).

Wolbert Smidt (Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena)

*The overlooked text category of local historiographical texts and “oral chronicles” of Təgrāy villages
– insights into local views of history*

Historiographical traditions of the Ethiopian highlands are impressively manifold – while high-level texts such as royal chronicles, controlled by the leader(s) of the state structures, and hagiographies are well studied, there is a multitude of local historiographical traditions that usually escape attention. One reason for this is that locally produced historiographical texts are very short, used mainly in an oral context as mnemonic devices, and kept within closed circles such as locally leading families, church notables, and elders. Due to this, such texts are usually not easily accessible for researchers coming from “outside”, be it from Ethiopian cities or from abroad. Another reason is the seemingly low quality of such text, both in terms of style and content, which has the effect that those not belonging to the insiders’ group would not easily appreciate their relevance. But it is precisely the fact that these texts are produced in very local contexts, usually by elders linked with the church or active as priests, and traditionally charged with local memory keeping, which makes these texts interesting and important for any study of historiographical traditions and identity creation of the populations of the Ethiopian Semitic speaking sphere. These texts can be seen as interfaces between orality and the sphere of writing and are condensed versions of what is passed on orally about historical origins and events, including legends, linked with a specific location and area. They serve as mnemonic devices in the sense that they are extremely short, condensed “containers” of key words, key concepts, and a line of narration, based on which a historiographical narrator would be able to refer to memorized oral texts. Such orally transmitted traditions are usually much more detailed than what is found in writing. In addition, these short texts underline the importance of the observation, that in a local context, elders who inherited oral narrations of the past, see themselves as guardians of historical – and this also means cultural – knowledge. The often complex oral narrations are a constituent element of identity formation in relation to the possession of specific sites and land, and in this case, they are elements of a quasi-judicial system of rights and land ownership. Due to the socio-political importance of such oral texts, condensed in the form of very short written chronicles or genealogies of two to several dozens of pages, one can speak here of the existence of an “oral historiography” in the technical sense of a systematic record-keeping endeavour, for which the short-written texts discussed here are witnesses.