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**Review**

TEODROS KIROS, *Zara Yacob. A Seventeenth Century Rationalist: Philosopher of the Rationality of the Heart*

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## Reviews

Aufwand wäre angesichts der Materialfülle und des ohnehin übervollen Bandes wohl doch unvertretbar groß gewesen.

Dem Hamburger Team ist Dank und Anerkennung zu zollen für die Mühen und Entbehrungen, die sie für diesen stattlichen und sauber edierten Band auf sich genommen haben, einen Band, der von einer gelungenen Konferenz beredtes Zeugnis ablegt.<sup>3</sup>

Stefan Weninger, Philipps-Universität Marburg

TEODROS KIROS, *Zara Yacob. A Seventeenth Century Rationalist: Philosopher of the Rationality of the Heart*. Lawrenceville, NJ – Asmara: The Red Sea Press, 2005. X + 156 pp. Price: € 42,30. ISBN: 1-56902-213-5 (Paperback)

The Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris owns several Ethiopian manuscripts, among others manuscript 215 and 234 of the collection of Antoine d'Abbadie. D'Abbadie received them in the 19<sup>th</sup> century from the Italian priest Giusto d'Urbino. Manuscript 215 contains two philosophical *Treatises* which claim to belong to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. As the *Treatises* say, the first of them is written by the Ethiopian Zär'a Ya'eqob (this text is also found in manuscript 234), the other by his disciple Wäldä Həywät. The origin of the two writings is controversial. Their authenticity was challenged in 1920 by Carlo Conti Rossini and in 1934 by Eugen Mittwoch. Both argued that these texts were the work of Giusto d'Urbino and that Zär'a Ya'eqob and Wäldä Həywät had never existed; they denied the Ethiopian origin of the *Treatises*. Conti Rossini drew attention, for example, to the similarity between the name of Zär'a Ya'eqob and Giusto d'Urbino's baptismal name. Mittwoch noted the identity of the birthdates of Zär'a Ya'eqob and Giusto d'Urbino. He compared the *Treatises* with an Amharic translation of the *Soirées de Carthage*. Mittwoch argued that this translation was probably made by Giusto d'Urbino and that there were essential coincidences between the *Treatises* on the one hand and this translation on the other. Conti Rossini's and Mittwoch's conclusions were admitted by famous scholars, for example by Enno Littmann, who had published in 1904 a critical edition and a Latin translation of the *Treatises*, and, after hesitating, by Edward Ullendorff. On the other hand, scholars like Amsalu Aklilu, Alemayehu Moges, and Claude Sumner affirmed that the *Treatises* were authentic. Today the opinions about the authenticity of the *Treatises* are still divided. The reviewer does not want to participate in this debate, but after

<sup>3</sup> Für die 16. ICES sind ein Auswahlband und eine umfassende Internetpublikation geplant.

studying Sumner's<sup>1</sup> arguments he is convinced that the authenticity of the *Treatises* is more probable than their non-authenticity. He accepts Sumner's negative conclusion (Giusto d'Urbino is not the author of the *Treatises*, neither is his scribe) as well as his positive conclusion (the authors of the *Treatises* are Zär'a Ya'eqob and Wäldä Həywät).

Teodros Kiros' book is an original interpretation of the *Treatise (Hatäta)* of Zär'a Ya'eqob.<sup>2</sup> The main thesis of his book is the following: "At the center of Zara Yacob's originality lies the hitherto unrecognized place of the human heart in philosophical activity. No philosopher before or after him (Pascal, the writer, excepted) had attached such a firm significance to the function of the human heart" (p. 69). It will be discussed how far this assertion is correct.

The book is divided into seven chapters: Classical Ethiopian philosophy and the modernity of Zär'a Ya'eqob (I); Ethiopia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (II); Zär'a Ya'eqob: Philosopher of the heart (III); Wäldä Həywät's transformation of Zär'a Ya'eqob's philosophy (IV); Zär'a Ya'eqob and the problematic of African philosophy (V); Zär'a Ya'eqob's place in the history of philosophy (VI); Conclusion: The rationality of the heart (VII). An appendix contains only three long quotations of Sumner in order to defend that the author of the *Treatise* is none other than Zär'a Ya'eqob (p. 147).

In the first chapter it is affirmed that Ethiopian philosophy has two dominant traditions, (a) classical Ethiopian philosophy, and (b) the philosophy of Zär'a Ya'eqob (and Wäldä Həywät), and that both traditions have essential differences. According to the author, classical Ethiopian philosophy consists of three writings: *The Physiologue*, *The Book of the Philosophers*, and *The Life and Maxims of Skendes*. Since these works are translated from non-Ethiopian texts one should give reasons why they can be called "Ethiopian". The most important reason is that this translations are not literally; the translators "adopt, modify, add, subtract" (p. 2), and at least these modifications can be called "Ethiopian". Teodros Kiros names the main features of these Ethiopian translations using numerous quotations. He distinguishes the philosophy of Zär'a Ya'eqob from this tradition. This is appropriate since the *Treatise* uses philosophical arguments and rational critique to an extent which can not be found in the other texts at all. According to the *Treatise*, for example, religion must not contradict human rationality; even every religious sentence has to be provable.

The second chapter focuses on the Jesuits' perception of Ethiopia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. At that time theological disputes and quarrels took place be-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. CLAUDE SUMNER, *Ethiopian Philosophy*, Vol. II, Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press, 1976, pp. 61–352.

<sup>2</sup> A complete English translation of the *Treatise* was presented by Sumner, *ibid.*, pp. 3–26 [This translation has been published previously in 1971].

tween Jesuit missionaries and traditional Ethiopian theologians and some of these quarrels are mentioned in the *Treatise*.

The most extensive chapter of the book is chapter III (unfortunately, it ends at p. 79 with an incomplete sentence). First, the author compares Zär'a Ya'eqob and Descartes (1596–1650). He emphasizes that for the Ethiopian philosopher, in contrast to his French contemporary, faith in God is a fundamental human obligation (p. 47). This is true, but nevertheless Zär'a Ya'eqob tries to prove the existence of God; he does not simply assume that God exists. Teodros Kiros discusses selected aspects of the *Treatise*, as the rule of knowledge, the importance of faith, and human nature. He comes to the already quoted main conclusion of his book. This conclusion consists of two assertions:

- (i) At the center of Zär'a Ya'eqob's originality lies the place of the heart in philosophical activity.
- (ii) No philosopher before or after Zär'a Ya'eqob (Pascal excepted) had attached such a firm significance to the function of the heart.

The author tries to demonstrate the first assertion at pp. 69–79. His arguments seem to be valid since in the *Treatise* the intellectual function of the human heart is explicitly mentioned as for example in the following phrases: “Indeed he who investigates with the pure intelligence set by the creator in the heart of each man ..., will discover the truth” (*Treatise*, ed. Sumner, p. 9), “God indeed has illuminated the heart of man with understanding by which he can see the good and evil, recognize the licit and illicit, distinguish truth from error” (*ibid.*, p. 10). So, according to Zär'a Ya'eqob, rationality is an activity of the heart. This rationality has to do with wisdom, honesty, authenticity, carefulness, morality. Teodros Kiros explains in this connection how important prayer is for Zär'a Ya'eqob. Zär'a Ya'eqob uses prayer not only as a stylistic mean; it is part of his philosophical activity, of the rationality of the heart. But, is he really the first (and even the only) who attaches such a firm significance to the intellectual function of the heart (assertion (ii))? Unfortunately, Teodros Kiros gives no argument for that. He should examine or at least mention other philosophers who recognize the rationality of the heart as well, for instance Empedocles (circa 485–425 BC), Augustine (354–430), Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), and Meister Eckhart (1260–1327). Even in Old Egyptian and, sometimes, in Old Chinese thinking heart has intellectual functions. Teodros Kiros is right to underline the importance of prayer in the *Treatise*, but philosophizing through prayers is well known in the history of philosophy. Anselm of Canterbury and John Duns Scotus (circa 1265–1308), for example, embed philosophical arguments of high logical level within prayers. Therefore, the main thesis of the book seems to be valid with respect to assertion (i), but it is not proved, and almost certainly not true, with respect to assertion (ii).

## Reviews

Teodros Kiros emphasizes that Zär'a Ya'eqob's philosophy has no national consciousness, and is freed from tradition and locality (cf. pp. 130-1). He discusses the question of what place Zär'a Ya'eqob has in the history of philosophy by comparing him for instance with Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), and he shows that the *Treatise* is part of the "world-enlightenment" and belongs to the rationalist tradition (p. 115).

The merit and the value of Teodros Kiros' book is the explanation of the character of the philosophy of the *Treatise*. The author argues that Enlightenment was not only housed in Europe, but also in Africa, even though the opinions about the authenticity of the *Treatise* are still divided.

Andrej Krause, Universität Halle-Wittenberg

ABBEBE KIFLEYESUS, *Tradition and Transformation: The Argobba of Ethiopia* = Aethiopistische Forschungen 66. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006. 295 S. Preis: € 98,-. ISBN: 3-447-05341-0

Von den rund 70 ethnischen Gruppen Äthiopiens sind die Argobba eine der kleinsten und am wenigsten bekannten. Umso erfreulicher ist es, dass sie Gegenstand einer ethnologischen Untersuchung wurden, die von dem einheimischen Forscher Abbebe Kifleyesus durchgeführt und in einer renommierten Reihe veröffentlicht wurde.

Bei den Argobba handelt es sich um eine Population von ca. 30.000 Menschen, die umgeben von Amhara, Oromo und °Afar am Abfall des äthiopischen Hochlandes im Südosten von Wällo und im Nordosten von Šäwa – vor allem in der Region Yefat – leben. Ungeachtet ihrer geringen Zahl können sie auf eine bemerkenswerte geschichtliche Bedeutung zurückblicken und sind auch für Linguisten von großem Interesse. Die vorliegende Studie stellt klar, dass Argobba nicht als ein Dialekt des Amharischen zu klassifizieren ist, sondern eine mit ihm eng verwandte eigenständige Sprache mit der Möglichkeit gegenseitiger Verständigung darstellt. Aufgrund der in große historische Tiefe zurückgehenden Islamisierung sind Elemente des Arabischen eingegangen, und das Vokabularium hat außerdem Lehnwörter von den benachbarten Gruppen der Oromo und °Afar (Adal) aufgenommen. Für die Bewahrung ihrer Identität als eine ethnische Einheit ist die Sprache für die Argobba jedoch ganz offensichtlich von untergeordnetem Interesse; es sind kulturelle Elemente, die bis in die Gegenwart ihre Eigenheit garantierten und – wie im Falle der Harari – vermutlich auch weiterhin einem völligen Verlust ihrer Ethnizität entgegenstehen. Unberücksichtigt blieb in dieser Studie das Problem der historischen und ethnisch-kulturellen Beziehungen der Argobba von Šäwa/Wällo mit denen von Bisidimo südlich der Stadt Harär. Der Versuch, es zu lösen, hätte in der Tat einen beträchtlichen zusätzlichen Forschungs-