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HERUY'S YA-HEYWAT TARIK AND MAHTAMA-SELLASE'S CHE BALAW: TWO PERCEPTIONS OF A BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY

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I

Explicitly or implicitly, biographies have dominated Ethiopian historiography. Until very recently, Ethiopian history has been almost exclusively the history of the elite. As such, the reconstruction of historical events has revolved around the careers of prominent individuals. The chronicles, which go back to the fourteenth century, illustrate this to a very high degree. They were conceived to document the reigns of kings and most of them adhered strictly to this rule, giving the reader a detailed and faithfully chronological account—often day by day—of the deeds of the protagonist.

This is not of course to say that other, non-biographical, information is not to be found in these documents. On the contrary, inasmuch as the chronicler takes it as his sacred duty to record whatever had taken place during the reign of a king, he is bound to give us a lot of useful information on such, strictly speaking, non-political issues as famine, pestilence, earthquakes, trade, and—invariably—religious affairs. But such information remains essentially incidental to the main objective, which is to document the life and career of the king. Interestingly such digressions from the main story are often prefaced by the phrase, “*bazihem zaman*” (“During this reign”, i.e., incidentally).

The biographical approach has continued to exercise its influence on more recent and professional historical reconstructions as well. This is particularly true of the history of the nineteenth century, but it is not altogether absent in the twentieth century. One can cite in this regard Sven Rubenson's *King of Kings Tewodros of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 1966), Zewde Gabre-Sellassie's *Yohannes IV of Ethiopia: A Political Biography* (Oxford, 1975), Kofi Darkwah's *Shewa, Menilek and the Ethiopian Empire, 1813-1889* (London, 1975), Haggai Erlich's *Ethiopia and Eritrea during the Scramble for Africa. A Political Biography of Ras Alula, 1875-1897* (East Lansing, 1982), Harold Marcus' *The Life and Times of Menilek II. Ethiopia, 1844-1913* (Oxford, 1975), and the trilogy on Emperor Hayla-Sellase I that Marcus is currently undertaking. Another historian one can cite in this connection is Bairu Tafla, who devoted the earlier part of his career to writing biographical sketches of some important personalities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries on the basis of oral information, as well as written sources. These pieces appeared in the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies (JES)*, initially under the more modest category of “Source Material,” but eventually as a full-fledged article.¹

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Bairu was not the only one to produce biographical articles in the *JES*. A cumulative index of the journal's 25 volumes (1963-1992) lists 27 pieces, of which only six are obituaries.² The proceedings of International Conferences of Ethiopian Studies also show an abiding interest in biographical investigation. About a dozen papers in the first 11 of these conferences are reported to have been written on a biographical topic of one kind or another, the majority of them in the last five conferences.³ This may not be impressive in comparison with the *JES* figures, but one should bear in mind that while the journal catered mainly to history and linguistics, the conferences customarily accommodated almost any paper on Ethiopia.

Biographical studies have also preoccupied student researchers at the Department of History of Addis Ababa University (formerly Haile Sellassie I University). Following is a breakdown of the seven major categories of senior essays written from 1963 to 1992:⁴

Biography	-	39
Church	-	29
Education	-	52
Ethno-history	-	46
Land Tenure	-	25
Political history	-	58
Urban history	-	60

It is of interest to note that a good number of the biographical essays belong to the 1970s, thus showing that it is a genre very much in decline. Conversely, the essays on land tenure and urban history belong to the 1980s. This shift towards social and economic issues is even more dramatically illustrated in the M.A. theses produced in the Department. Of the 32 M.A. theses produced so far, not one deals with a biographical study. On the other hand, if there is indeed one theme that has attracted a number of graduate students, it is urban history—seven of them deal with it or an aspect of it. Indeed, the batch that graduated in 1988 was specifically assigned to write on urban history topics.

II

Perhaps few undertakings are as daunting as that of conceiving and executing a biographical dictionary. And few biographical dictionaries could even remotely aspire to reach the level of perfection, or even completeness, that can be attempted in other genres of historical writing. Aspiring to combine the fields of biography and lexicography, a biographical dictionary, however, attains neither the richness of the former nor the exhaustiveness of the latter. Famous historical personalities are necessarily treated in rather sketchy fashion. Moreover, because it is virtually impossible to get a full list of historical personalities, there are bound to be omissions, sometimes significant ones. The inherent ambitiousness of a biographical dictionary is

somewhat inadvertently admitted in this definition of the scope of one biographical dictionary, which “takes as its job to present in a single volume biographical information on important, celebrated, or notorious figures from the last five thousand years, beginning with Menes, king of Egypt c. 3100 B.C., and continuing through some 30,000 more.”⁵

Other biographical dictionaries have been cast on a more modest scale. They have preferred to limit their scope to national bounds, to involve tens or hundreds of contributors, and to come out in several volumes rather than one. A good example of this—perhaps a model of a biographical dictionary—is the British *The Dictionary of National Biography* (*DNB*). Initially conceived as a universal encyclopedia in the style of the Webster version cited above, the authors were intimidated by the vastness of the scope and wisely abandoned their initial objective in favor of a national biographical dictionary.

The statistical account that introduces the *DNB* gives us some interesting information about the manner in which the project was executed. It is reported that it took 653 contributors “eighteen years of unremitting labour” to produce the volumes.⁶ The total number of entries come to 29,120, of which 27,195 are “full substantive articles, and 1,925 are briefer subsidiary articles.” It is the editors’ conviction that “the names include all men and women of British or Irish race who have achieved any reasonable measure of distinction [as malefactors or benefactors] in any walk of life.”⁷ A statistical table gives a breakdown of the entries by century (end of fifth to nineteenth) and alphabetically. Interestingly enough, the most popular initial is “B” and, perhaps not surprisingly, the highest number of entries are for the nineteenth century.⁸

The entry format of the *DNB* generally conforms to the following pattern: name, first name, dates (with question marks or *circa* when in doubt), occupation, career details, references, and initials of the contributor. With the exception of the last two items, this format is more or less followed by the Webster dictionary as well. The editors of the *DNB* also give us in the introduction an insight into the procedure adopted in the compilation of the dictionary: the editors compiled a comprehensive and alphabetical list of personalities deemed worthy of inclusion; they then distributed the names among the contributors to write the entries. The volumes, which are arranged in an alphabetical order, came out over a period of 18 years.

If the *DNB* represents perhaps the best of the genre, we have on the other end of the spectrum what came out in 1970 as the *Dictionary of African Biography* (*DAB*), with a second revised edition the following year. The volume was dedicated to the Ethiopian Emperor Hayla Sellase I, who sponsored the whole enterprise along with eight other heads of African states. The “Honourable General Editor” assures us that “verified records show that he [Hayla Sellase] is the 225th active successor of Solomonic dynasty.”⁹ The *DAB* is said to have “aims which are common to those of the O.A.U.” and is motivated by the conviction that “Africa will one day become the fourth Great Power and will take its place alongside the United States, the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China.” We are told emphatically that there are

no entries on South Africa, Rhodesia, and the Portuguese colonies because “[w]e...abhor and detest those regimes in Africa and we will never do anything to assist them by promoting their citizens in our pages.”¹⁰ That surgically leaves out even those Africans who struggled and were struggling against colonial rule and apartheid.

The *DAB* was more in the nature of a Who’s Who than a biographical dictionary. From the foreword to the second edition we come to understand that the information on the personalities entered was apparently gathered by sending questionnaires to selected individuals. Apparently, the questionnaire was meant only for ordinary mortals, as not even ministers, let alone heads of state, are cited in the dictionary. If one goes by nationality, Nigerians were visibly in the ascendancy, particularly in the first edition. The second edition became more representative, with a good number of Ethiopian academics and civil servants entering the distinguished list.

Coming to Ethiopian biographical dictionaries, other than the two that we are going to discuss in greater detail below, one can cite three works. The first of these is a work belonging to the Heruy generation and apparently inspired by the works of that erudite scholar-statesman.¹¹ The work is written in an unabashedly panegyric style, the author assuring us from the outset that “to talk evil of men is like talking evil of God, as Man has been created in His image.”¹² The author starts his panegyric odyssey some 70 pages into the book with an entry on Addis Ababa and its founder, Menilek II, and then goes in descending order through Zawditu and Tafari to a select group of the nobility. The most interesting and informative part of the book is perhaps where the author lists, in verse, his colleagues in the civil service, with those in Dire Dawa in eastern Ethiopia chosen for special citation. The book is illustrated by photos of the chief personalities cited, notably the ministers.

In 1952 a sort of Who’s Who of the history of Eritrea was published.¹³ Although designed to be a biographical dictionary of Eritrea, of necessity it has entries on a number of personalities whose careers were of importance to Ethiopian history in general. One can cite the entries on Emperors Yohannes and Menilek, the intellectuals Afawarq Gabra-Iyyasus and *Alaqa* Tayya, and the many personalities in the history of Tegray, not to mention the many Europeans, Italians and others, travelers, and missionaries whose careers were of greater significance to the broader history of Ethiopia than to that of Eritrea *per se*. This is a well-organized biographical dictionary, combining in large measure accuracy and erudition. By virtue perhaps of the greater ease of obtaining information, the balance of representation is clearly tilted towards Italians rather than Eritreans.

In the early 1970s the Institute of Ethiopian Studies of Addis Ababa University embarked on compiling a *Dictionary of Ethiopian Biography*. Volume I, covering the period from early times to 1270 came out in 1975, the editors—Belaynesh Mikael, Stanislas Chojnacki, and Richard Pankhurst—having decided from the outset to divide the different volumes chronologically rather than alphabetically. This was expected to be the first of a series covering the entire span of Ethiopian history. The project became yet another casualty

of the Ethiopian Revolution, the departure of the editors from the country forcing its discontinuance. It was resuscitated in the 1980s and much of the work on Volume II, covering the period from 1270 to 1632, appears to have been completed. Delving as it does into the remote recesses of Ethiopian history, Volume I emphasizes the perilous nature of such an undertaking. A number of the entries on Aksumite and Zagwe kings are of a rather tentative nature; in many instances, their names, let alone their dates, are not precisely known. Some 21 scholars are listed as having contributed to the volume, with Belaynesh Michael clearly in the forefront. Most of the entries conveniently provide a bibliography at their end.

Such then is the setting within which we can profitably evaluate the achievements of our two authors. We shall preface our discussion with short biographical sketches of the biographers. We shall then proceed to weigh the two works on the basis of their scope, general organization, entry format, attention to chronology, comprehensiveness, and balance.

III

Blatten-Geta Heruy Walda-Sellase was born in 1878 in Manz (northern Shawa).¹⁴ After going through the initial stages of church education, he joined the famous school of Entotto Raguel in the northern outskirts of Addis Ababa. There he studied under the reputed Gondare teacher, Mamher Walda-Giyorgis, who was actually the one who gave his star pupil the name Heruy (meaning "precious"), his name at birth having been Gabra-Masqal. In Raguel, Heruy also secured the patronage of *Tsahafe Te'ezaz* Gabra-Sellase Walda-Aragay, Menilek's chronicler and the *alaga* of the church. While securely anchored in traditional church education, Heruy cast his eyes further afield and developed the foreign contacts that were to give him his unique blend of the traditional and the modern. Thus, he learned English at the Swedish mission school in Addis Ababa and picked up some French while assigned to work with a French veterinary team. He also traveled widely, being a member of an Ethiopian delegation to the coronation of George V in 1911, joining another mission to England and the United States in 1919 to congratulate the Allies on their victory in the World War I, visiting Jerusalem in 1920 and 1923, accompanying *Ras* Tafari (the future Hayla Sellase) on his historic tour of Europe in 1924, and finally making a memorable trip to Japan in 1931.

Heruy was a prolific writer, having to his credit over twenty books on history, biography, travel, and didactic literature. He was also a dedicated public servant, rising from the post of secretary of the Municipality of Addis Ababa in 1914/15 to that of Ethiopian foreign minister in 1931. When the Italians occupied Ethiopia in 1936, he accompanied Hayla Sellase into exile. He reportedly taught Ge'ez at the London School of Oriental Studies (later SOAS). He died in Bath on 19 September 1938. The bereaved emperor, who was very much attached to Heruy, was moved into making one of the most touching speeches of his career.¹⁵

Blatten-Geta Mahtama-Sellase Walda-Masqal was born in Addis Ababa in October 1904. His father rose to become *tsahafe te'ezaz*, imperial scribe, and the son seems to have inherited the reverence for traditional values and historical documents from the father. He was educated first at Menilek II school and then in Cairo and France, where he studied agronomy. On his return, one of his major achievements was the establishment of the Ambo agricultural school in western Shawa. During the Italian occupation, he was incarcerated with his father and other notables on the island of Asinara. After liberation, he assumed various government posts, notably as director-general, vice-minister, and minister of agriculture from 1947 to 1958. Later he became successively minister of finance, minister of state at the ministry of education, minister of public works and communications, and finally imperial counselor after 1966. When the Darg came to power in 1974, he became one of the earliest victims of its massive detentions. He fell ill while in prison and died in October 1978.

Like Heruy, Mahtama-Sellase was a prolific and indefatigable writer. Two of his works (*Tebaba Garahet* and *Behela Garahet*) were apparently direct results of his agricultural training. He also wrote books on Amharic *qene* and a highly popular book of fables, *Enqelf Lamene* ("Why Bother to Sleep"). But his monumental work remains the corpus of government documents from ca. 1900 to 1935 which he published in 1969/70 as *Zekra Nagar* ("Recollection of Things Past"). This has been a veritable gold mine for the study of social, institutional, and economic history of the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁶

IV

Nearly half a century separates the two works under investigation. Heruy's *Ya-Heywat Tarik* was written in 1915 EC=1922/23. Its title has two additional elements, one showing the author's touch of modernity and the other his concern for posterity. The two elements are the alternative title "Biographie," written in French, and the sub-title "Bahuala Zaman Laminasu Lejjoch Mastawaqya" ("A Guide to Future Generations"). Heruy tells us in his preface that he was inspired to compile the biographical dictionary by the strong tradition of biographical writing in Europe.

The book tries to cover the whole span of Ethiopian history in its lean 100 pages. But the author has no illusion of having been comprehensive. He is clearly aware of its inadequacy, particularly its poor chronology and some inadvertent omissions that he might have made. He hopes to produce a better edition of the book in five years' time, if he lives that long, failing which he has no doubt that "his successors, the children of Ethiopia, will produce a much-expanded version of the book." Although quite a few of the entries are illustrated with photographs, the author apologizes for the fact that he has not been able to furnish them for all.

Mahtama-Sellase Walda-Masqal's *Che Balaw* (*Horse Name*) came out in 1961 EC=1968/69.¹⁷ The author states that he was requested to prepare the volume by the Institute of Ethiopian Studies and actually annexes the

questionnaire given him for the purpose. But the director of the Institute at the time, Richard Pankhurst, has no clear recollection of this. In many of the entries, the author appears to have faithfully followed the questionnaire in eliciting information, mostly from relatives of the personalities selected for inclusion in the biographical dictionary. He puts the blame for any omissions on those who refused to give information about their distinguished relatives. He also divulges the news that although the work was necessarily confined to those with horse-names, he had submitted a manuscript on the life histories of 468 other persons: members of the nobility whose horse-names were not known, women, and priests.¹⁸

V

Perhaps the most obvious difference between the two works is their scope. Heruy ambitiously tries to range as far as Queen Sheba. Although he has a number of entries on medieval and Gondarine kings, his selection could only have been capricious. The Shewan kings get more than their fair share of representation, a state of affairs which is later repeated in his unpublished "History of Ethiopia."¹⁹ On this side of the temporal spectrum, Heruy has entries on a number of his own contemporaries, quite a few of them still alive at the time of writing. Partly because his work did not have the inherent constraint of Mahtama-Sellase's (i.e., being confined to horse-names) and partly because of the author's own clerical and intellectual orientations, the work has a fair proportion of lay as well as ecclesiastical intellectuals. Even more interestingly, he has 18 entries on women, understandably almost all within the nobility.

Mahtama-Sellase more modestly confines his scope to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The earliest entry is apparently *Bahra Nagash* Gurada Zaray (b. 1900 EC=1907/08 in Asmara), followed by *Dajjazmach* Garmame Walda-Hawaryat (b. 1901 EC=1908/09), one of Menilek's senior advisors. Although their dates of birth are not given, the following also possibly belong to this earlier group: *Dajjazmach* Haylu Habal of Tsazzaga, Eritrea (d. 1867 EC=1874/75), *Dajjazmach* Walda-Mikael Godessa (d. 1872=1879/80), the Gurage paternal grandfather of Emperor Hayla Sellase, and *Dajjazmach* Walda-Gabriel (Abba Saytan), another senior advisor of Menilek. Unlike *Ya-Heywat Tarik*, *Che Balaw* scrupulously limits itself to the dead. The last entry in this respect is *Balambaras* Taffasa Adafres of Shawa (d. 22 Tahsas 1961=31 December 1968); his death thus coincided with the Ethiopian year of the book's publication, anticipated only by a few months by those of *Fitawrari* Hayla-Mikael Zawde, grandson of Menilek's redoubtable general, *Ras* Gobana Dachi, and *Nebura-Ed* Gezew Abarra.

As noted above, *Che Balaw*'s scope is restricted to the warrior class. It is indeed something of a surprise to find intellectuals like Gabra-Heywat Baykadañ, *Kantiba* Gabru Dasta, and *Alaqa* Tayya with horse-names. On the other hand, as is to be expected, women are not represented at all. Also deliberately omitted are the emperors. Although, as the author himself shows

in the introduction, horse-names are most commonly associated with kings, the author felt that they were treated with sufficient detail elsewhere and thus had entries only for regional kings such as *Negus* Mikael of Wallo, Takla-Haymanot of Gojjam, and Walda-Giyorgis of Gondar.

VI

In terms of general organization, *Che Balaw* demonstrates a higher degree of elaborateness than *Ya-Heywat Tarik*. Heruy plunges into his biographical entries after a brief two-page preface, and the book closes with the last entry. Mahtama-Sellase, on the other hand, introduces his work not only with a preface where he discusses the genesis of the study but also with an introductory essay on horse-names. Even more usefully, he furnishes alphabetically-arranged name and horse-name indexes at the end, along with the questionnaire he says was provided him by the Institute of Ethiopian Studies. On the other hand, Heruy has the edge on illustrations by providing photos of a number of his entries, some of them page-long. Others are more modestly reproduced, the size apparently depending on the relative importance of the personage.

One point that emerges from Mahtama-Sellase's horse-name index is the frequency of multiple adoption of the same horse-name, with ten of them adopted by more than five individuals; "Yelaq" ("Let him Excel") and "Gaset" ("Chastise") were the most popular, with respectively fifteen and eleven adoptions. It is of interest that the author has been unable in one case to furnish a horse-name. The case in question is *Dajjazmach* Hadga Ambas Balwat of Eritrea, who is said to have earned his rank by facilitating *Ras* Makonnen's trip on his return from his Italian journey in 1890. In lieu of a horse-name, he is described with the somewhat compensatory epithet of "Ya-Wandoch Geta" ("the Lord of Men").

When we come to the individual entries, there are some significant differences as well. The subject of the entry is centered in Heruy while Mahtama-Sellase adopts the more common format of a biographical dictionary by placing it underlined at the beginning of the paragraph. One encounters also greater detail in Mahtama-Sellase than in Heruy. Although both make efforts to give us full names, Mahtama-Sellase succeeds in doing so to a much higher degree than Heruy. Indeed, the latter has a second name for only 61 (out of 248), while the former misses out on only 28 (of 303), the latter no mean accomplishment given the inherent trend of the ranks commonly attached to Ethiopian names to surrogate somewhat surreptitiously second names. Indeed the way the two authors enter the ranks seems to bear this observation out: Heruy prefixes it to the name (after the centered entry), whereas Mahtama-Sellase gives it parenthetically after the full name.

This is then followed in the case of *Che Balaw* with the horse-name. What is intriguing is that, although he had no such objective, Heruy too gives the horse-names for quite a few personalities; 48 out of the total 248 entries have horse-names—an indication of the importance the designation had in

biographical writing. The next item is often the place of origin of the subject, invariably in the case of Mahtama-Sellase, more sparingly in that of Heruy. The latter tends to prefer to establish context through parentage ("son/daughter of so-and-so"), a pattern to which Mahtama-Sellase is not averse either. But his preferred designation remains "native of Shawa," "native of Wallo," and so on, sometimes going into even more specific details such as "native of Manz in Shawa."

A more fundamental difference emerges with chronology. Mahtama-Sellase is almost painstaking in giving dates (quite often with day and month) of birth at the beginning of the entry and of death at the end. In quite a few instances, he goes even further and furnishes the place of burial as well as of death. Heruy betrays on the other hand an almost total disdain for dates, even for years of coronation, a failing which in all fairness to him he admits in his preface. Probably because the records were readily at hand, however, he often gives precise dates for ministerial and other civil service appointments. His entries generally terminate with undated statements of the death of the subject or his contemporary status.²⁰

The essence of an entry in a biographical dictionary lies above all in the substantive discussion of the career of the subject. Here, the premium should be on judicious selection of essential details and the striking of a balance between the various entries. It is very difficult to say that our two authors have managed to conform to this standard. Entry details tend to reflect more personal knowledge or the available information rather than the relative historical importance of the subjects. One can thus cite as unduly long Heruy's entry on *Fitawrari* Gabra-Maryam and Mahtama-Sellase's entries on *Afa-Negus* Masfen Gamach, *Dajjazmach* Makonnen Tawand Balay, *Fitawrari* Hayla-Mikael Zawde and Asfaw Darge. Conversely, Mahtama-Sellase's entries on the Shawan patriot *Lej* Hayla-Mariam Mamo and Iyyasu's "prime minister" *Bitwaddad* Hayla-Giyorgis are too short. But imbalance reaches its highest level in Heruy's entry on his son Faqada-Sellase and Mahtama-Sellase's on his father, *Tsahafe Te'ezaz* Walda-Masqal. The latter in particular, covering over three pages, is easily the longest entry in the whole book. The reader is regaled with such minute details as the height, the weight, the complexion, and even the quality of voice of the person.

Heruy's entry on his son illustrates another characteristic of the two biographical dictionaries, more strikingly of Heruy's—that is, a penchant for the anecdotal. The centerpiece of this particular entry is the son's strivings as a child to emulate the overseas voyages of his father. Similar anecdotes adorn the entries on *Ato* Walda-Gabr'el, *Ras* Tasamma's uncle, and *Ato* Fasika, grandson of *Dajjach* Garmame. These anecdotal bits are not altogether without interest. For instance, the details on *Ras* Berru Walda-Gabr'el—his delight in giving lavish banquets, the claims that he had never condescended to taste *talla* (local beer) and tripe—have a certain value of their own.

Yet some entries entirely miss vital historical events associated with the personalities. Thus neither Heruy's nor Mahtama-Sellase's entry on *Tadla* Gwalu of *Gojjam* has anything on the one important detail that has made him

famous, or notorious, in the history books—his rebellion against Emperor Tewodros. And, as Fusella points out with regard to Heruy, one learns of *Echage* Walda-Giyorgis's involvement in the plot to depose Iyyasu in 1916 in the entry under *Abuna* Mattewos (although the *echage*, rather than the *abun*, was clearly the protagonist) and of Zawditu's marriages to *Dajjach* Webe and *Ras* Gugsa Wale in the entries for her successive husbands rather than under Zawditu herself.²¹

Similarly, perhaps by design than by oversight, Mahtama-Sellase fails to associate *Ras* Wale's detention with the political crisis of 1910 which led to the removal of his sister Empress Taytu from power. Nor does he try to initiate the reader into the power struggles with first Taytu and then Tafari, in which the war minister *Fitawrari* Habta-Giyorgis was involved. When treating *Dajjach* Balcha, too, he makes a spectacular leap from his Adwa heroics to his second confrontation with the Italians in 1936, safely skirting his humbling by Tafari in 1928.

In general, Heruy writes about his personalities with a greater degree of freedom than Mahtama-Sellase, who tends either to be too deferential or to avoid controversial phases in the biographee's careers. In a way this is a reflection of their times. Heruy wrote at a time of vibrant intellectual life in Ethiopia presided over by a young progressive prince, Tafari. Mahtama-Sellase was writing in a climate marked by deference, nay reverence, for Hayla Sellase and the aristocracy. Heruy even takes liberties to address some of his subjects in the third person singular rather than the customary polite form. This is, for instance the case, with his intellectual colleagues, *Fitawrari* (later *Bajerond*) Takla-Hawaryat, *Naggadras* Gabra-Heywat, Gabra-Egziabher François, though, interestingly enough, not with *Alaqa* Tayya and *Kantiba* Gabru.

Indeed, a perceptibly intellectual bias is what probably most distinguishes *Ya-Heywat Tarik* from *Che Balaw*. Mahtama-Sellase has only five entries on intellectuals. In a way, even that is something of an achievement, for few would associate the horse-name of the warrior with the intellectual, who is supposed to have only his pen as his weapon! Yet, the author does give horse-names and in some cases fairly long entries for Gabra-Heywat, *Kantiba* Gabru, *Alaqa* Tayya, Gabra-Egziabher François, and *Naggadras* Zawga. With Heruy, on the other hand, intellectuals abound. This is partly due to the author's own inclinations and partly because he does not have the inherent constraints of his successor. Out of a total of 248 entries, 66 are dedicated to intellectuals, 45 clerical and 21 secular. This is without counting the students whom the author graciously includes in his dictionary. It is probably not too far of the mark to state that the single most important contribution of Heruy's work to Ethiopian historiography is the profile it gives of the luminaries of traditional church education, with some of whom the author was intimately familiar.

Unlike Heruy, who does not always bother to give places of origin of his subjects, *Che Balaw* lends itself to regional breakdown. As indicated above,

each name is followed, after rank and horse-name, by place of origin. A count of these references gives us the following interesting regional breakdown:

Shawa	186
Wallo	35
Bagemder/Semen	26
Tegre	23
Mixed	14
Gojjam	9
Eritrea	8
Other	2

It is worth pointing out that both Shawa and Wallo are used in the broader twentieth-century meaning rather than in their earlier restricted connotation. Shawa thus includes Gurage and Oromo, while Wallo encompasses Yajju, Wag, Saqota, Lasta, and Sayent. Occasionally the author also gives, particularly in the case of the two regions just cited, further sub-regional origins, such as Manz, Bulga, Marhabete, Yajju, or Lasta. The breakdown shows incontrovertibly the Shawan bias of the dictionary. This is explicable both by the predominant role played by the Shawan elite in the modern political order and the author's own origins and connections.

Although he too was a Shawan, Heruy's selection strikes one as regionally more representative. Quite a number of the traditional *liqawent* actually hail from Gojjam and Gondar. Heruy also has entries on some of the rulers of the southern peoples, such as Abba Jifar of Jimma and Kumsa (*alias* Gabra-Egziabher) Moroda of Naqamte, although he mistakenly enters Kumsa as Gabra-Egziabher's father. Equally interesting are his entries on Menilek's senior blacksmith, Habta-Wald Walda-Hanna, and a couple of slaves.

VII

Discussion of the limitations of these two works is merely meant to help us arrive at a critical evaluation rather than to detract from the remarkable achievements of these two industrious scholars. Without the advantage of the advanced organizational skills of modern higher education, they have managed to produce works of reference which have proved handy companions for students of Ethiopian history. In particular, the full name reference as well as the details of chronology and family relationships which *Che Balaw* almost invariably offers has been of considerable help, and at times indispensable, in historical research. While *Ya-Heywat Tarik* often lacks these details, it partially compensates for it by the relative freedom and detachment with which it portrays its characters.

In the end, the two works complement one another. We do not know how much, if at all, Mahtama-Sellase was inspired by Heruy. But, if only unconsciously, the former seems to have responded to the latter's fervent hope in his preface that his successors, "the children of Ethiopia," will improve on

his own preliminary effort. For, while necessarily limited in scope, *Che Balaw* nonetheless generally amplifies the entries that it does share with *Ya-Heywat Tarik*. And, when all is said and done, these two works have yet to be superseded. As indicated above, *The Dictionary of Ethiopian Biography* project undertaken by the Institute of Ethiopian Studies has yet to come out of the ancient recesses of Ethiopian history. It is only when that project is completed that one can contemplate treating these two important works as relics of a bygone historiography rather than the valuable reference works that they are today.

Notes

1. "Three Portraits: Ato Asma Giyorgis, Ras Gobana Daci and Sahafe Tezaz Gabra Sellase," *JES*, 5 (July 1967), 133-50; "Two Ethiopian Biographies," *JES*, 6 (January 1968); "Four Ethiopian Biographies: Dajjazmac Garmame, Dajjazmac Gabra-Egzi'abeher Moroda, Dajjazmac Balca and Kantiba Gabru Dasta," *JES*, 7 (July 1969), 1-31.
2. Sushma Gupta and Shiferaw Bekele, "A Cumulative Index of the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* Vols. I-XXV, 1963-1992," *JES*, 27 (June 1994).
3. Shushma Gupta and Tadesse Tamrat, "The International Conference of Ethiopian Studies 1959-1991: Bibliography and Index, I-IX and XI," *JES*, 27 (June 1994). Cf. Rita Pankhurst, "International Conferences of Ethiopian Studies I-VI, 1959-1980: Author and Subject Bibliography," Appendix in Sven Rubenson, *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Addis Ababa, 1984).
4. List available in the Department of History, AAU.
5. *Webster's New Biographical Dictionary* (Springfield, Mass., 1983), vii.
6. *Dictionary of National Biography* (21 vols.: Oxford, 1921-46), 1: lxi, lxxi.
7. *Dictionary of National Biography*, lxi. The efforts made to include malefactors reminds me of my own difficult experience when trying to write a biography of the Oromo ruler of southwestern Wallaga, *Dajjazmach* Jote Tulu, for my senior essay. Jote had attained great notoriety as a harsh ruler. His preferred mode of punishing a rebel or wrongdoer was tying a huge stone around his waist and throwing him down into the Qambari river. He also reportedly hanged seven of his brothers-in-law for rebelling against him. Informants could thus not understand why on earth I would bother to record the life history of such a cruel person: Bahru Zewde, "Dejazmach Jote Tulu (1855-1918)" (Haile Sellassie I University, History, 1970), 32.
8. *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1: lxxvi.
9. *Dictionary of African Biography*, comp. Ernest Kay, (1st ed.: London 1970), x.
10. *Ibid.*, xvi, xiii
11. Makbeb Dasta, *Yato Masanbat Balenjarenat Tarikna YaMesgana Getem* (Addis Ababa, 1926 EC).
12. *Ibid.*, 6.
13. Giuseppe Puglisi, *Chi è dell' Eritrea 1952. Dizionario Biografico* (Asmara, 1952).
14. Both Heruy and Mahtama-Sellase had as their ultimate title that of *blatten-geta*, a title reserved to men who had distinguished themselves in traditional education.
15. See, among others, Lamma Walda-Maryam, "Ya-Blaten Geta Heruy Walda-Sellase Heywat Tarik 1871-1931" (B.A. thesis, HSIU, 1963 EC); Salvatore Tedeschi, "La carrière et les idées de Heruy Wäldä-Sellasié (1878-1938)" in *Trois essais sur la littérature éthiopienne* (Paris, 1984); Asfa-Wossen Asserate, *Die Geschichte von Sawā (Äthiopien), 1700-1865* (Wiesbaden, 1980).
16. Obituary prepared by his family in 1992, fourteen years after his death, that is, after the fall of the Darg, when it became safe to write such an obituary.
17. Almost simultaneously it came out as "Source Material" in *JES*, 7 (July 1969), with an English introduction by Bairu Tafla.
18. pp. 2-4. There seems to be no trace of this useful manuscript.

19. The manuscript was in press when the Italians invaded Ethiopia. A good portion of the galleys was later retrieved and are found in a bound volume at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies. Asfa-Wossen Asserate's study cited above has brought to light the section of the manuscript dealing with Shewan history.

20. It is of some interest that a significant number of the personalities died from the 1918 flu epidemic, which goes to show the heavy toll that the epidemic must have taken of the population, particularly in Addis Ababa.

21. Fusella, 15.