als Verbündete der Harari auf. Die Gurage, die heute eine nennenswerte Ethnie im Harariner Raum bilden, spielten damals noch keine Rolle.


Meine hier wiedergegebenen Eindrücke wurden nicht durch systematische Studien gewonnen, da meine Interessen anderweitig ausgerichtet waren, sie wurden eher nebenbei aufgeschnappt. Deshalb mag manches, was Desplat berichtet, auch schon für meine Zeit gegolten haben, etwa was eine skeptische Haltung zu den Schreinbesuchen betrifft. Ich habe es nur nicht bemerkt. Desplat war sehr viel länger in Harâr als ich, hat innerhalb der Stadtmauer gewohnt und hatte mit mehr Informanten Kontakt, die er gezielt befragen konnte. Trotzdem mag es von Interesse sein, welchen Eindruck auf mich die Stadt und ihre Bevölkerung vor vierzig Jahren gemacht haben, vielleicht gerade wegen dessen, was man mir als Fremdem nicht erzählt hat.

Ewald Wagner, Universität Gießen


The figure of Guglielmo Massaja, the Capuchin missionary who lived for over three decades in Ethiopia during the second half of the 19th century, has long been the object of significant attention. As the book under review informs the reader up to 1967 about 2,150 titles had been written focusing on him (p. 14). In 1984 the re-edition of his memories appeared and in 1990 the Franciscan Order organized a workshop dedicated to their fellow mission-
Reviews

ary.¹ Yet, most of the secondary literature produced until that date was taint-
ed by ideological bias and failed to provide a satisfactory insight into the mis-
ionary’s life, the historical context and his legacy. Recently, the commemora-
tion of the 200th anniversary of the birth of Massaja was the opportunity for
renewed debate and discussion on this figure that resulted in two collective
volumes, which included some valuable contributions.² Joining the momen-
tum is Prof. Mauro Forno’s study, which analyzes the political and mission-
ary implications of Cardinal Massaja’s work in Ethiopia and Europe.
Although with this work the figure of Massaja has been far from exhausted, the
book under review is bound to become a reference work for those interested
in the Piedmontese missionary and for scholars of Ethiopian history and the
early stages of the European colonization of Africa.

Mauro Forno is not new to historical writing and his study reflects the
work of a mature historian and a skilled writer. A professor of political
history at the University of Turin, he has authored at least five major mon-
ographs on Italian contemporary history, with particular focus on Catholic
movements and the relationship between the press and politics, including
under the Fascist regime. The author’s acquaintance with Italian contempo-
rary political history is well reflected in the present study, which is also his
first important contribution on Ethiopian history. Therefore, the book, as
the author states in the introduction, is centred on the diplomatic activities
of Massaja in Europe and on his ideas, policies and strategies concerning the
two main religious constituencies of the Horn of Africa, Christian Ortho-
doxy and Islam (pp. 17 and 19).

The work is structured in six chapters, which, following a chronological
order, scrutinize the long-lived career of the Piedmontese missionary. The
succession of two chapters with a similar title (chapter three: “Tra cristiani e
musulmani” and chapter four: “Islam e Cristianesimo”) might lead one to
think that at least in some instances the choice of titles was rather poorly
thought out. All in all, however, the thematic-temporal framework is satis-

¹ G. Massaja, Memorie storiche del Vicariato Apostolico dei Galla, 1845–1880, ed. by
Vaticano, 1984; The proceedings of the congress were published as Atti del Convegno
sul Card. G. Massaja all’Antonianum di Roma 24 febbraio 1990: Guglielmo Massaja,
vicario apostolico dei Galla (Etiopia), Roma: Curia Generale OFM Cap. – Istituto
apostolico in Etiopia: Atti del Convegno celebrato nel Collegio Internazionale di San
Lorenzo da Brindisi (Roma, 9–10 giugno 2009), Roma: Ministero per i Beni e le Attivi-
tà Culturali, 2009; P. Magistri (ed.), Guglielmo Massaja 1809–2009: All’Africa attra-
factory and allows the author to focus on the changing vicissitudes of Massaja’s travels and work. Furthermore, the chapters are subdivided in subchapters (a minimum of four and a maximum of nine) that convey rhythm to the narrative and indeed help the reader grasp the oftentimes complicated meanders of Massaja’s movements and thoughts. In addition, the book includes an appendix with a few diplomatic-related documents, an extensive chronology of the friar’s career and an index of proper names. The layout of the book, the impeccable editing and the choice of fonts reveal the fine editorship that is already a trademark of the Italian publishing industry and, specifically, of such publishing houses as the Bolognese Il Mulino.

As far as content is concerned, chapter one (“Nell’Europa della Restaurazione”) sketches the historical and spiritual context in which Massaja was born and grew up. The political and religious tensions of the period and the life in Italy before unification are neatly outlined. Particularly insightful are the passages dedicated to Massaja’s intellectual background (§ 2. Il rapporto con la politica and pp. 51, 53), of capital importance to understanding the shortcomings and virtues that this figure displayed during his missionary career in Africa. Chapter two (“La scelta missionaria”) outlines the framework that led to the foundation of the Capuchin mission to the Oromo under the pontificate of Gregory XVI. An inaccuracy, however, needs to be noted here, namely the attribution to nãguş Šäršä Đôngol (1563–1597), who is also wrongly presented as the immediate predecessor of Susànyos (1607–1632), of an overtly pro-Catholic policy (p. 95), which was actually the responsibility of two rulers not mentioned by the author, Zãdôngol and Ya’sqób (ruling intermittently from 1597 to 1607). In the next chapter (“Tra cristiani e musulmani”) the narrative approaches the challenges faced by Massaja in establishing his mission at a particularly delicate, yet crucial, moment for Ethiopia, with the emergence of a centralizing power in the hands of Tewodros II. The chapter also explores the first diplomatic mission of the Capuchin friar (§ 8. Un possibile ruolo per l’Italia), who was approached by the small Kingdom of Sardinia with a view to establishing a treaty of friendship with Christian Ethiopia. Of note is the analysis of Massaja’s strategy with the Orthodox Church and the local people (§ 9. L’approccio di Massaja alla tradizione cristiana in Africa orientale), which is presented as contradictory at times but also one that reveals an open-minded and down to earth personality. Chapter four (“Islam e Cristianesimo”) approaches Massaja’s particular “Crusade” against Islam and his ambivalent position towards colonialism. Noteworthy are the passages dedicated to Massaja’s diplomatic steps (§ 3. L’azione diplomatica and § 7. Nuovi tentativi diplomatici) and the concluding remarks on the friar’s utopian quest for a primitive, more spiritual form of Catholicism (§ 9. Il bilancio di una pro-
spettiva). The fifth chapter ("Travagli e fine di un lungo apostolato") dwells further on the political implications of Massaja’s activities. There the author convincingly nuances the well established image in historiography that has the Capuchin friar as an agent of Italian colonialism and instead presents him, once again, as a man imbued with the prejudices of his time, including a racist attitude towards Africans, but also capable of remarkable adaptation to the local African context and of open views (pp. 247, 252);3 the hypothesis is then raised of Massaja being indeed a forerunner of such a father of modern inculturation missioning as Daniel Comboni (§ 2. Quindici anni prima di Daniele Comboni). After all, a man who at the end of his career lived for over three decades in Africa in rather demanding conditions, who had travelled more than 6,000 kms, and had faced relentless opposition in Europe and Ethiopia, could not have been that misled. Finally, in the last section of the book (6: "I riconoscimenti pontifici") the narrative addresses the last stages of Massaja’s life and events after his death, in particular his rise as a hero of the Church under Leo XIII and the failed processes for his beatification.

The shortcomings of the work are few and do not diminish the merit of the whole enterprise. However, for the sake of scrutiny they ought to be mentioned. Beyond those already pointed out above, it can be argued that the study could have benefited from an apparatus of illustrations, beginning with some pictures of the main political figures Massaja interacted with and proceeding to a comprehensive map showing the friar’s movements and presence in Ethiopia. Yet, probably here editorial policies had the upper hand. Moreover, the monumental memories authored by Massaja, the famous twelve-volume I miei trentacinque anni di missione, which constitutes the chief source for Forno’s study, although briefly reviewed in chapter six (§ 2. Le memorie massajane) could have been dealt with at greater length; in particular, the fascinating process by which the friar put together such a mass of memories, anecdotes and ideas seems to merit a more extensive exploration. Last but not least, as the author himself acknowledges in the opening pages, important facets of the Capuchin friar have been left untapped; these concern specifically Massaja’s work on Ethiopian soil but besides the friar’s interactions with the powerful little is said about his daily life, his informants and aides. Yet, for the sake of fairness, the selective approach taken by the author was, given the complexity of the figure, more

3 The image of Massaja as a champion of colonialism had been already convincingly rebuked in S. Tedeschi, "Guglielmo Massaja e il colonialismo italiano", Rivista di studi politici internazionali 57/3, 227, 1990, pp. 433–442.
than justified and indeed the work becomes a perfect jumping off point from which other scholars can attempt to fill those gaps.

In a nutshell, Prof. Forno’s work is a thorough piece of historiography. It is a well researched and well written study on one of the most fascinating figures that emerged from within the Catholic world in the 19th century. It provides a comprehensive insight into the deeds and mind of a man who mediated and moved across different worlds and who in so doing participated – willing or unwillingly – in shaping their future. The analysis of the diplomatic missions led by our figure in Europe and Ethiopia and the description of how his mind evolved in parallel to the changes affecting his native Europe and his host Ethiopia are the best parts of the work. Whilst some passages betray the admiration and liking of the author for his subject, the overall narrative is balanced and the historian has successfully escaped the traps of both hagiographic discourse and anti-clerical historiography. Neither a demon nor a saint, after Prof. Forno’s study, Massaja, the missionary, the diplomat, the traveller, the observer and the religious leader, has gained in complexity. In addition Ethiopian Studies has also gained a reference work and the fact of it being written in la bella lingua toscana should not deter the scholar and the wider public from going through its pages and learning from it.

Andreu Martínez d’Alòs-Moner, Universität Hamburg