

This authoritative and comprehensive work will be an invaluable resource for researchers of African history, China-Africa relations, and Chinese overseas studies. The most impressive strength of the book is the author's consultation of remarkably diverse sources (see 31–50) — British and French colonial archives, African national archives, Chinese historical records, government and company archives from mainland China and Taiwan, journalistic reports from Africa and China as well as newspapers operated by Chinese migrants in Africa, and personal memoirs of Chinese migrants and diplomats. Some country or regional experts may want more coherent details about the Chinese diaspora in a particular country, and readers will find certain discussions slightly repetitive (for instance, Taiwan's Operation Vanguard in the 1960s and the problems and challenges faced by Chinese businesses in Africa). Yet this three-volume work is informative and compelling on the whole. Of course, it will be much more beneficial for international scholars if an English translation can be available in the near future.²

doi:10.1017/S0021853723000464

Archives and Late Nineteenth Century Ethiopia

Colonial Powers and Ethiopian Frontiers 1880–1884: Acta Aethiopica volume IV

Edited by Sven Rubenson, Amsalu Aklilu, Shiferaw Bekele, and Samuel Rubenson. Lund University Press: Lund, 2021. Pp. 281. \$37.73, hardcover (ISBN: 9789198469967); ebook (ISBN: 9789198469974).

Jacob Wiebel 

University of Durham

(Received 14 November 2022; accepted 22 June 2023)

Keywords: Northeast Africa; Ethiopia; historical geography; sources; methods; kingdoms and states

Acta Aethiopica has established a well-deserved reputation as an indispensable resource for any serious student of nineteenth-century Ethiopian history. Among historians of Africa more widely, this extraordinary and accessible collection of sources remains insufficiently known. It would be to the detriment of our profession if the publication of this fourth volume in the series did not attract a much wider readership. The book not only offers compelling insights into African responses to the establishment of European colonial rule in the late nineteenth century, but also provides rich materials for any historians teaching on the subject.

The *Acta Aethiopica* series was brought into being through the painstaking editorial work of Sven Rubenson and Amsalu Aklilu, who over decades sought out and collected original documents from nineteenth-century Ethiopia in the archives of almost a dozen countries. Each volume in the series reproduces many of these sources, wherever possible through high-quality copies of the original, which are presented alongside first-rate translations and brief contextualising annotations. The primary focus remains on the correspondence of Ethiopian rulers and notables, but the

²A group of Chinese scholars led by Professor Tian Ze at Hohai University are currently applying for a grant for the publication of an English version of the book.

volumes also cover a range of other concerns, particularly those pertaining to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Concise introductions provide an excellent overview of the documents included and explain the choices made in selecting, translating, and presenting them. While introductions and notes are written for expert readers and do presuppose a solid foundation of contextual knowledge, they are equally helpful to non-experts, especially if read alongside the secondary literature on the period.

This fourth volume in the series — *Colonial Powers and Ethiopian Frontiers 1880–1884* — meets the high bar set by its predecessors' quality and reputation. This has been achieved despite the deaths of both lead editors before this book was completed, thanks to the excellent work of Samuel Rubenson and Shiferaw Bekele, who capably took up the mantle of their predecessors and brought this ambitious project to completion. The volume presents 198 documents collected from archives in Ethiopia, Egypt, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Russia, Israel/Palestine, Greece, and Sweden. A majority were written in Amharic, almost a third in Arabic, and some in European languages, notably French but also English and Swedish. Collectively, these documents illustrate the growing influence of European interests in the region and highlight the diversity and complexity of local responses to it. It is noteworthy that, as the series works its way through the nineteenth century, the quantity of the documents it presents increases dramatically: whereas the first volume covered the 54 years from 1800 to the eve of Emperor Tewodros II's reign, and Volumes II and III presented documents taken from a span of 14 and 11 years, respectively, this latest iteration reproduces a comparable number of sources from just the first half of the eventful 1880s. A fifth volume, covering the remainder of the 1880s, is planned.

As with previous works in the series, the book's focus is primarily on official documents of Ethiopian rulers and notables. As the title indicates, the expanding economic and political presence of imperial European powers in the region looms large in the sources reproduced here. Many documents are addressed to Europeans, while others demonstrate Ethiopian officials' concerns about — and responses to — Europeans' growing presence in the region. Distinctive in this volume is the inclusion of many letters by officials of Afar and of the Red Sea littoral, which often highlighted the French and Italian influence and interest in a region that Europeans saw as a gateway to the interior. The emperor Yohannes IV wrote a plurality of the correspondence reproduced in the volume; second by quantity are letters — and two treaties — from the court of his eventual successor, Minilik, then the King of Shewa. Among these is a letter from his wife, *Weyzero* Taytu, to Queen Margherita of Italy — a rare female voice in the volume, and one that sheds unique light on the diplomatic role that women and feminine virtues could play.

Yet it is not only for the political histories of rival imperial projects that this volume merits close attention; much is also revealed about other themes. Religious concerns feature prominently. Three examples indicate the range of these: a letter in Swedish by the early Protestant convert Onesimus Nesib to the missionary Johannes Neander, regarding concerns about the trade in Oromo slaves that he witnessed; a stinging rebuke to Swedish Protestant missionaries by Ras Alula, echoed by an even more hostile assessment by Yohannes IV; and a warm letter from the same emperor to the Ethiopian monastic community in Jerusalem.

The introduction and the notes provide concise and helpful guidance to the documents, augmented by an overview and explanation of the seals used in the included correspondence. While some sources presented here have been published elsewhere before, it is the sheer range and the value of having them all bound together in a single volume — including originals, translations, and explanatory notes — that puts *Acta Aethiopica* in a category of its own.

Colonial Powers and Ethiopian Frontiers represents the entirely successful continuation of an important project. Like its predecessors, it will be welcomed and closely studied by researchers, teachers, and students of Ethiopian history. But in highlighting local responses to nascent European colonial ventures in Africa, it also appeals to a much wider audience, and it merits a place in a wide range of syllabi.

In recent decades, narratives about late-nineteenth-century Ethiopia have been central to regional politics of identity and representation. If there is a common danger in such accounts, it is a tendency

to obscure the complexity and interconnectedness of the region's political, religious, and ethnic histories. Through the primary sources it presents, *Colonial Powers and the Ethiopian Frontiers 1880-1884* provides a timely antidote to any such ideological streamlining of the past. More generally, the book is a great advert for a genre — the well-contextualised collection of essential primary documents — that deserves to be expanded.

doi:10.1017/S0021853723000543

Deconconstructing Colonial Population Anxiety

Population Politics in the Tropics: Demography, Health and Transimperialism in Colonial Angola

By Samuël Coghe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. 317. \$99.99, hardcover (ISBN: 9781108837866); e-book (ISBN: 9781108943307).

Sarah Walters 

London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

(Received 13 December 2022; accepted 18 June 2023)

Keywords: Southern Africa; Angola; demography; colonialism; transnationalism; disease; fertility

In the same year that *Population Politics* was published, the world's human population reached 8 billion people, engendering public debate about the role of population growth in the climate emergency, global security, and future geopolitics. Africa is at the forefront of these discussions, with some of the highest fertility rates in the world and some of the most vulnerable populations to climate change. Samuël Coghe's masterful study of population politics in Angola between 1890 and 1945 is a grounding reminder of the long history of population anxiety in the region. As population 'science' gained disciplinary and institutional ground in the twentieth century, population policies were increasingly presented as objective, unprejudiced, and ultimately benevolent, even if unpopular and harmful in the short-term. Coghe's book challenges this notion of objectivity by showing how population knowledge in Angola arose in the context of colonial concerns regarding the domestic supply and retention of labour, which conditioned the production and circulation of demographic data. Coghe frames this study as a transimperial history, showing how population anxieties and proposed solutions were fuelled and informed by interimperial exchange and comparison, and exposes their racist, gendered, and political underpinnings.

In Chapter One, Coghe considers why the sleeping sickness epidemic of the 1890s triggered fears of population decline in Angola, driven by the scale of the epidemic and a confluence of wider factors. The expansion of colonial control over the hinterland of Luanda during this time — and its potential economic importance — raised concerns about the ongoing supply of labour. Meanwhile the importance of Angolan productivity to Portugal's geopolitical and economic future had expanded throughout the nineteenth century following Brazilian independence in 1822 and the end of the Portuguese slave trade by mid-century. A mounting metropolitan lobby for a healthy colonial labour force and the disciplinary rise of tropical medicine also contributed to the high profile of the epidemic and the connected population fears.