

# OSA Newsletter 6

*January 2006*

*The Oromo Studies Association*

*Two Decades of Service and Scholarship*

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## **A message from OSA president: A hundred and five years later**

As an introduction to Martial De Salviac's French Academy Prize winner book, **The Oromo: an ancient people, great African nation**, published in 1901 in French, therefore in France, E. Christophe, Bishop of Cahors, addressing the author wrote: "you came after them, my Reverend Father, you have taken advantage of their work and have completed them, during your residence with the Oromo, physiological and psychological observations, abstractions of their habits, customs and laws, transcriptions of their war and religious songs, their percepts of morale and their apologues that came down through the centuries by oral tradition: nothing has escaped you".

Bishop Christophe is absolutely right. This book indeed contains breath-taking details of all walks of Oromo life in its 400 thick volume, including historical accounts of the centuries preceding Menelik, as recounted by others, and also the general mood following Menelik's occupation. This latest expansion of knowledge on the Oromo, a translation from French to English a hundred and five years later, by Ayalew Kanno, is great news.

The book has five parts each subdivided to chapters. It starts with graphic details of the Oromo physiology with a style that quickly validates the book as a prestigious award winner.

De Salviac, writes about the Oromo, a people he considers "the most beautiful of Africa" and "the hardest workers without contradiction" (page 18) with intimate passion, but as a scientific and accurate observer. Considerable detail is dedicated to the Oromo eccentricity (page 19): "the Oromo race has good and serious qualities, they are sedentary; they are gifted with incontestable agricultural aptitude. ... the Abyssinian domination is fatal to them, they

(Abyssinians) have shackled their happy disposition and accentuated their voices. This sane population, full of life, has conserved still, in spite of fifteen years of servitude, a bit of their hard working and sedentary habits; we come across big huts well maintained ... the Oromo peasants, one feels, love their land."

The book also shades some light on the genesis of Oromo environmental destruction we witness today - page 20: "... the Amhara devastate the forests by pulling from it the laths for their houses and make camp fires or firewood for their dwellings. ... Also Michel calls them the great destructors of trees, others accuse them of exercising their barbarity against the forests for the sole pleasure of ravaging. ..., no enemy would come to break the branches or fell the trees which the Oromo love so much that they plant them near the dwellings ... a garden without boundary".

The book also gives rare views of Oromo aristocracy. Page 45: "But the real Negus at the time was an Oromo who, in his triumph, was not anxious about Bonaparte or Europe."

Part 2 is entirely dedicated to fundamental Oromo beliefs – page 145: "Put side by side the Hebrew Yawah, the Wei of ancient Chinese, the Iowa of the Corianians of Birmanie, the Ewah of the Swahili, the Wata of ancient France, the Waaqa of the Oromo, and acknowledge all that these names offer, at the first glance of the eye, an authentic diploma of antiquity ...."

More importantly, we are rewarded by a thrill of no less enormity pages after pages – for example, page 160 reads "We have proven it: the Oromo abhor idolatry. Even more, they have not raised any temple to Waaqa, nor to awulia: they repudiate all anthropomorphic representation of the Divinity. Their temple, that is the universe with the arch studded with stars; their altar, the surface of the earth,

their sacrifices are always innocent, even the ones which we see to sanctify the cradle of humanity, that is to say the first fruits of the fields and the primes of the herd. .... On page 177: The effective center of religion, pole of Oromo soul, link of the whole race and rallying of the scattered tribes, the Abba Mudda, or Spiritual Father, is not empowered with any civil or coercive authority.”

Part 3 discusses governance, social and family life. Page 219: “... Rose up before day break....prepared for the oratorical combat, he mounted a horse with his spear, his shield and his whip that must play a great role in his speech. He spoke standing, the left arm extended, leaning on his spear and supporting his picturesquely draped toga; in his right hand he held high the whip and punctuated in the air his phrases turn by persuasive turn, ironic or enthusiastic.”

Part 4 is about Oromo warriors and wars. Page 346: “He, son of Oromo, did not know what it is to retreat. His vassals pressed him to return to his province and, upon his refusal, frightened by such an audacity, crossed over to the enemy, the old man of battle. Not having more than a handful of men, he dared to prepare for combat. They pleaded with him to strike in retreat: ‘I would die, he responded, rather than flee from an enemy without having to fight him.’ So much courage assured him the glory, but not the victory.”

Part 5, discussing origins, the author ends his superb work with a wish, in page 379”, “May the Oromo nation embrace the ardent and fecund faith of Gaul and never feel the deadly chills.”

And I shall end mine here with a quote from page 233. ”No! Liberty will not die under the knee of the colossus, nor religion under the teeth of the monster (Menelik). The ordeal prepares the triumph, and one will see the Sons of the sky (Oromos) reunite the

continents and the islands under the scepter of the ‘Prince of Peace’”.

The substance of the book is enthralling; piteous that it waited so long for a translation, out of reach to most Oromo scholars. The translation of this book brings to our attention a great deal of yet inaccessible knowledge about the Oromo, and it is of great contribution to Oromo scholarship. The translator, Ayalew Kanno, deserves our appreciation. He has dedicated the book to “pioneers of Oromo Studies”. He has also donated large portions the proceeds from sale of this book to OSA after recovering his out-of-pocket expenses, for which we are even more grateful.

Nagaan,  
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OSA President

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To purchase the above book (**the Oromo: an ancient people, great African nation**), please contact:

Ayalew Kanno  
615 North Harrison Rd.  
East Lansing, MI 48823  
Email: [kannoa@msu.edu](mailto:kannoa@msu.edu)

The price is \$20.00. Please add \$5.00 within North America and \$10 for other parts of the world to cover shipping and handling.



## OSA 2006 Annual Conference

The 2006 OSA annual conference has been announced to take place in Minneapolis, Minnesota on July 29, and July 30 2006 under a general theme of “**OSA: Two Decades of Service and Scholarship.**” There will a number of feature presentations and lectures by a keynote speaker and also by respected scholars invited for this occasion. Several esteemed scholars have agreed to participate.

**Submission of Papers:** For submission of papers and due days please refer to OSA Newsletter 6. Deadline for abstract submittal has been extended by one month – to February 15 2006.

Please, refer to the web site <http://www.romostudies.org/> for further information on venues, logistics, and other related information



## Ad hoc committee updates

Dr. Bahiru Dhuguma’s Fund-raising project is going well with about 60% goal achieved. **Please send your contribution to OSA treasurer.**

Dr. Misgana’s Membership project is also near achieving its goal. So far, the team has recruited about 20 new members. This is a truly remarkable achievement.

Dr. Asafa Jalata’s Unity project has shown good progress. We have been assured there will be tangible accomplishment before OSA 2006.

The OSA in Oromia project has also shown some concrete progress. I will submit a more detailed plan on expanding OSA in Oromia at OSA 2006. For now suffice to say that considerable progress has been accomplished in this regard.



Update from other committees including the voluntary projects’ teams will be included in next OSA newsletter:

In the meantime, please send your manuscripts of 2005 OSA annual conference to Dr. Gobana Huluqa, [hulukgo@auburn.edu](mailto:hulukgo@auburn.edu) as soon as possible. We prefer Microsoft Word. Please make sure you include the version and name of the software you used and provide your email, telephone, and mailing addresses.



## ♣ Special Call to Oromo Women Scholars

The number of Oromo women attendants at OSA conferences has slightly risen over the years. This is certainly good news. However, the number of Oromo women panelists has been dwindling, and if I recall correctly, there was none at OSA 2005. I have been made aware of this alarming situation by Adde Qabbane and Dr. Caltu. I want to thank both for bringing this to our attention. OSA without the Oromo women is only half OSA. This serious matter is the Oromo man’s business as much as it is the

Oromo woman's. I call upon all Oromos to encourage Oromo women scholars to participate in the growth and shaping of Oromo scholarship by fully participating in OSA activities. You may also drop me names and emails of those who you believe should be invited to OSA 2006.



### Other Updates

Please email your views and opinions to OSA president:

[abeyene@rohan.sdsu.edu](mailto:abeyene@rohan.sdsu.edu)

for inclusion in this section of the newsletter. Texts may be edited for space and format consistency.



**Note:** Thank you to all who so generously contributed to **OSA fundraising project**. Because of your support, we now have achieved about 60% of our target. We hope we will receive more from those who have not committed yet.

**Donations and membership dues:** Those who want to pay OSA dues, join as new members, or want to donate to OSA, please send your pledge to:

OSA

P. O. Box 7508

Silver Spring, MD 20907

Please note that all contributions are tax deductible.



Please, visit our web site:

<http://www.oromostudies.org>

for further information on OSA 2006 conference venues, logistics, and other related information.

