

**ዝክረ ሊቅ ጳድቅ ለዓለም ይሄሉ።**  
 ("The memory of a true teacher lives forever.")

Professor Sergew Hable Selassie and I were both enrolled at the Holy Trinity School in Addis Ababa in the 1940s. We entered school at the beginning of *Addis Zemen* or "New Era," a time when the age or background of an applicant did not matter for admittance. Fortunately for a student body of such different ages, the school had two tracks, one for deacons and another for priests (and even monks). The section for deacons was divided into two groups, the first for the younger (actually for the shorter) students and the second for the older (taller) ones. Although Sergew was taller, and certainly older than I, he was placed with the first group. Despite the fact that Sergew and I did not share the same circle of friends, I remember him well from our shared time at the school.

Sergew was a serious student; I hardly ever saw him fighting for a place at the playground, as many of us did. I never saw him at the bicycle rental station at Arat Kilo where many of us went to rent bikes for fun. Oh yes, speaking of bicycles, I recall that as I was once riding from Arat Kilo to Piazza, I saw Sergew near Ras Mekonnen Bridge. When I waved to him, he shouted and asked me to give him a ride. I should not have tried to show off at this highly gari-trafficked avenue, but I did. We both fell on the bridge and got hit by one of the garis. I do not remember how badly Sergew was hurt, but I still carry my scar.

As one of the better students, Sergew was elected to go to Greece in 1944 before graduation; I stayed until graduation in 1951.

I next met Sergew in Germany, probably in 1959, when he was in Bonn coming from Athens, and I in Göttingen (and later Tübingen), coming from Cairo. The fact that both of us were interested in Ethiopian studies -- he in history and I in Semitic philology -- gave us the opportunity to discuss themes by correspondence. Although he ultimately specialized in ancient Ethiopia, especially in Ethiopia's relations with the Byzantine Empire, he was keenly interested in the activities of foreign missionaries in Ethiopia. We also met at the annual conference of our Ethiopian Students Association in Central Europe. His seriousness and the high ethical standards he observed were a reproach to us who, as youngsters, wanted to have fun, enjoying German beer and more at such an occasion. I never even saw Sergew dancing; I doubt if his lips ever touched cigarettes. His preferred pastime was chess, which I too liked. However, I did not like the fact that I never beat him, not even once.

Sergew was a very generous man, with a good heart toward the needy. And unlike many of us, he always had money in his pocket. As generous as he was, Sergew never spent a cent unnecessarily. His words **አዩ፤ ሂጂ ያላት ገንዘብ** "Oh! money, doomed to be gone" is a household expression among us who heard him use it then. The story is as follows. If there was a slot machine on the premises, Professor Amsalu Aklilu never kept the change he received when paying the bill at a restaurant or bar. For him, this bit of gambling was the norm, not the exception. One day, a group of us, including Drs. Sergew, Eguale Gebre Yohannes, Amsalu and I, had lunch together in a restaurant in Bonn. Just before we left, Amsalu got up and went to the slot machine with his change, perhaps 20 cents worth. Sergew watched him play with wonderment, and when Amsalu lost his money, Sergew pronounced his famous words with the deepest regret.

Sergew and I became friends when we finally returned from our long stay abroad. He suggested to me that I join him at the National Library, where, if I remember correctly, he worked part-time. I was pleased to hear that its director His Excellency Ato Kebede Mikael was interested in me, of course at Sergew's recommendation. However, I accepted a position at Haile Selassie I University, which brought the two of us to the same building and same floor, even if regrettably it did not bring us closer professionally.

Sergew's book, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270*, may be reedited but I doubt if it will ever be replaced. He studied and recorded in it pieces of information on Ancient and Medieval Ethiopia from every conceivable source in the ancient and modern major languages. Whenever Sergew went to any university city for any reason, he did not leave it before going through its library's card catalogues to search for new sources on Ethiopia. I once witnessed his persistence when we were together in Copenhagen. The result of this relentless pursuit of knowledge and unlimited love for Ethiopia is his *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History*, which I keep on my working table for daily reference.

Professor Sergew's other lasting contribution is his high achievement as Director of the Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library (EMML), a joint project of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library of Saint John's University, in Collegeville, Minnesota. As a product of the traditional school, Sergew knew how to persuade the monks to let the project microfilm their manuscripts. His team traveled to many parts of the country to collect these manuscripts. Back in Addis Ababa, Sergew studied the texts, had them microfilmed and then returned them to the monasteries in good or even better condition. One can only imagine the knowledge of Ethiopian literature and history he amassed from investigating the over seven thousand manuscripts microfilmed under his directorship. Furthermore, to his and his team's credit, not a single manuscript was reported lost despite the transportation of so many manuscripts from far and near.

As both the manuscripts on microfilm (EMML) and *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History* are contributions widely used by Ethiopicists throughout the world, Professor Sergew Hable Selassie will always be important to us and to generations to come. To rephrase the Psalmists' words, "The memory of a true teacher lives forever."

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