NOTICE OF ORDINARY MEETING

The next meeting of the Society will be held in the Museum Education Building, North Terrace, Adelaide at -

8.00 p.m. on Monday 28 July, 1975

AGENDA

1. Apologies

2. Confirmation of minutes of meeting held Monday 23 June, 1975. (Copies of these minutes are attached)

3. Papers & Journals
   The following papers and Journals will be tabled at the meeting.
   Anthropological Society of Queensland Newsletter No. 70 May 75.
   Anthropological Society of Queensland Newsletter No. 71 June 75
   Anthropological Society of Victoria Newsletter No. 127
   Anthropological Society of Victoria Annual Report
   Anthropological Society of N.S.W. Newsletter No. 1975/4
   Anthropological Society of W.A. Vol.12 No. 5
   S.A. Field Naturalists Vol.49 No. 4
   Uni. of California, Publications in Anthropology, Volume 9.

4. Business

5. Speaker for July Meeting

   MR. R. ELLIS, Curator of Relics, S.A. Museum, will give an address to the Society entitled.

   FUNERAL PRACTICES AND BELIEFS AMONG THE
   ADNJAMATHANHA - FLINDERS RANGES S.A.

6. August Meeting

   The August meeting will be held Monday 25 August, 1975.

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ETHIOPIA PAST & PRESENT

LAND OF MYSTERY & INTRIGUE

Abyssinia, the Queen of Sheba, Prester John, The Lion of Judah, Italian invasion, Haile Selassie and more recent references to famines, civil war and government disturbances build up a vogue picture of courtesy and treachery, barrenness and fertility, and above all, of violence.

Ethiopia is an area of 1,240,600 Square Kms, occupying the greater part of the Horn of Africa with a population of approximately 25 million. Its capital, Addis Ababa, is on the same latitude as Freetown, Colombo and Panama.

The most outstanding physical feature is a massive complex of mountains and valleys running generally in a North-South direction and split in the south by a segment of the great Rift Valley which opens into the Danakil Depression in the North Eastern part of the country. This depression is up to 300' below sea level, is reputed to be the hottest place on earth, and apart from some desert grasses, supports no vegetation, and no permanent human life.

The highlands cover two-thirds of Ethiopia, are generally 5 - 10,000 ft. above sea level and occasionally range to 15,000 ft. North of Addis Ababa they are generally higher than in the south, and are split and cut by myriads of valleys, (often up to a mile deep), streams and rivers. These make direct transportation virtually impossible, but are a potential source of hydro-electric power in the future. Many of the mountains are flat topped, called ambas, and have been used as places of refuge, prisons and monastery sites for many centuries and now provide some of the only easily cultivable land in the area.

South of Addis Ababa they are still rugged, but less so, and are split by the Rift Valley, along which there are numerous lakes, none of which as yet, are used for anything more than extremely localised irrigation.

The Highlands have a wide range of vegetation varying from dense tropical forest to Afro-alpine to savanna bushland, with a monsoon rainfall generally in the region of 30 - 50' per year, and are very pleasant climatically due to the altitude. The other important effect of the altitude is the almost complete absence of malaria.

In the South-East is the Somali Plateau, a flat, extremely arid and rocky land, inhabited by small numbers of nomadic Somali. It is an area which has been in dispute since the border was drawn in 1902 because the inhabitants are culturally and ethnically more akin to Sumalie than Ethiopia. This dispute will probably assume much more serious proportions in the near future because of the discovery of commercial quantities of oil and gas in the area.
To the North the Highlands descend abruptly into a narrow strip of desert which separates them from the Red Sea, while in the North-West and West they descend to the deserts of the Sudan. In the South, the descent is much more gradual and this is the only easily overcome geographical barrier in the land.

Historically Ethiopia is third only to Japan and Iran in being able to trace its historical descent continuously into antiquity.

Around 1100 B.C. there occurred an invasion of Semitic peoples from Southern Arabia. These peoples had a much better social organisation than the indigenous Hamites and the result was that they pushed south, intermarried, and imposed their culture, language and literature. This mixture forms the basis of the present day Amharic/Tigre speaking people and these people are therefore predominantly racially Hamites, with a mainly Semitic culture.

By 500 B.C. the ancient culture of Axum was well established. The Queen of Sheba, according to Ethiopian legend, came from Axum and her liaison with King Solomon produced King Menelik, the first of the dynastic Lions of Judah, of which Haile Selassie is, according the the Ethiopians anyway, a direct descendant.

Modern day excavations in Axum suggest there may be some basic truth in this legend as far as the Queen of Sheba having come from there, though I base my knowledge on reports from the sites themselves, rather than any direct archeological evidence.

The world famous Stele of Axum are gigantic single blocks of carved stone moved by an unknown method from a quarry 10 Kms from the town.

The largest still standing has a 9' square base, is 90' tall, and weighs over 500 tons. There are several larger ones which were levelled in the 9th Century when Diana a Logan Queen (possibly Muslim), from the Highlands to the East, razed the town. There are numerous smaller ones still standing. The site occupies over an acre and is honeycombed with tombs beneath the stelae, most of which have been looted at some previous time.

Axum had control of the Red Sea Ports up until the muslim invasions of the 7th - 9th Centuries and had trading ties with the Eastern Roman civilisation, as far East as Ceylon and as far west as the Niger River.

In the 4th Century A.D. Frumentius, a captured Roman christian, converted King Ezana to christianity and since then christianity has been the state religion of Ethiopia, making it the oldest continuously Christian country in the world. Frumentius himself was consecrated as the first Bishop at Alexandria, a city which supplied the Bishop in charge until Haile Selassie made the position a Government appointment at the beginning of his reign.
After Axum fell, the capital of Ethiopia eventually moved to Lalibela, now a small town famous for richly decorated churches hewn out of solid rock, and remained there until the mid-13th Century when it moved to Gonder. In fact to suggest it was constant in either of these towns is not strictly correct, as the capital was considered as being where the King was, and he was most commonly at the head of a large army, somewhere in the mountains, defending his territory against Muslim invasions or attempting to subjugate allegedly loyal tribes.

The Ethiopians regained brief control of the Red Sea ports in the 10th Century, but apart from then access was denied to them until relatively modern times.

As the Muslims pushed from the North the Amharas moved south, bringing them into conflict with the Galla and we have the picture of a small Christian Kingdom land—locked in the mountains of the high plateau, facing virtually continuous threat of invasion by the Muslims from the North and East and the Galla to the South with a desert to the West.

In the 16th Century, the Amharas faced two major invasive forces, the Muslims under Mohamed Gran who virtually over- ran the whole of the high plateau, razing monasteries and carrying off most of their accumulated treasures and manuscripts and the Gallas from the south who also over-ran most of the highlands.

Since the 12th Century there had been, in Europe a slowly awakening interest in Abyssinia, partly because of the legends of the extraordinary wealth of Prester John, because of its strategic position in the continuing fight against Islamic invasions. However only a few missionaries penetrated to it until the invasion of the 16th Century caused the then King, Leban Dangel, to enlist the aid of the Portuguese, and in 1541 400 men, under Vaso da Gama’s son landed at Massawa and fought their way through to Lake Tana where they united with Claudius, who had succeeded Leban Dangel, and routed the Muslims.

The Portuguese then attempted to convert the Copts to Roman Catholicism but were very soon summarily expelled, the last contact with missionary influence Ethiopian had until the early 20th Century.

In the ensuing centuries, the Kings of Ethiopia were primarily occupied with internal squabbles and attempting to control Galla incursions until in the late 19th Century, the twin threats of invasion from both Italy and Egypt, caused the people to once again unite under Theodore II. Egypt was routed in 1876 and the Italian incursions from Eritrea were repelled at Adwa in 1890. The Italians marched south from Entrea in 1935, and entered Addis Ababa in May, 1936, being repulsed in 1941 after which Entrea became a U.N. mandate until 1962 when it formally joined Ethiopia, the first time since the 10th Century.
THE AMHARA

The Amhara are basically agriculturalists and number about 25% of the total population and area just South of Axum. They are basically Hamitic racially with a Semetic culture and have provided the political consciousness of the country for many centuries -in fact all rulers since 1270 with one exception, in the late 19th century have been Amhara.

They are a proud and warlike race, generally of moderate height, of medium to light skin colouration and with fine features and slight build.

They believe they have the undeniable right to rule and it is this race which has adhered to Christianity through the centuries and is responsible for the storehouse of historical and religious documents which are the major source of information on past customs etc., today.

Their language, Amharic, is now the official language of the country, is taught in all Government schools and is probably spoken by about half of the population. It is derived from Ge-ez which arose when the Arabians invaded in 1100 B.C. and their Semetic language was modified by that of the indigenous Hamites. Ge-ez is still the language of the church, both for documents and services, but is not spoken anymore. Only children attending church schools ever learn it and they are the only ones who can understand Church services.

The Amhara have a well developed social stratification and are responsible for the land tenure system which has been a continual source of friction in modern times.

The land system has at its head the Emperor, then the province Governor, then the village head-man, or Chika Shum and then the tenants, or peasants who pay taxes to all three, either in produce, labour or money, as well as to the Church, if they happen to be Christians.

It is interesting to note that the Emperor owned outright about 20% of the total land area and no distinction is made between this land and private land on which tax is collected and this tax is the probable source of his vast riches which were in Switzerland until he was deposed early this year by the Army Generals.

The Coptic church is closest in ideas to the modern day Greek Orthodox Church, and had as its head a bishop appointed from Alexandria, until Haile Selassie deposed him in the 1920's. The Church is very powerful, and very strictly adhered to, and even today, it is a state crime to attempt to convert Coptic Christians to a more orthodox faith - one source of friction between modern day missionaries and the Government.
Under Church teaching, at birth, every individual is provided with two angels, one to look after them during the day, the other at night. This life is transient and of little or not value, apart from servicing as a bridge to the better world beyond.

"man is defined as a rebel in Paradise, partly by his aggressive nature and partly because of curiosity of intellect" and must not question any of the teachings.

There are two methods by which crossing the bridge, are made easier; one is by extensive praying, which is much more valuable on a Church holiday, of which there are 150 a year, including 33 for the Virgin Mary alone, and the other is by fasting. There are 250 fast days per year and meat is forbidden on them, nothing is eaten until mid afternoon at the earliest and preferably not until dark.

The combination of the two above, which are slowly being relaxed by modern-day Amharas has posed tremendous problems for the country as it comes into the 20th Century.

The other teaching is that the crossing is easier if one is not interested in worldly riches, so business and Amharic working for more than a subsistence existence are actively discouraged.

There are about 17 - 18000 churches in Ethiopia today, and each church may contain up to 300 priests who, apart from the small amount of cultivation they do themselves in traditional church lands, are totally dependent on the people for sustenance, money, clothing, etc, a further drain on the already overburdened peasant.

THE TIGRE

The Tigre are very similar in all respects, apart from language, to the Amharas and are divided into two groups, the Southern and Northern which live in Tigré and Eritrea respectively. The Southern Tigre reside around the area of the ancient kingdom of Axum and speak Tigrirryan which is also derived from Ge-ez, and have a very primitive literature.

The Northern Tigre are most commonly Muslim and were probably converted from Christianity during the invasions. They speak Tigré, which has no written element, and are usually illiterate, apart from those few who are in business and speak Arabic.

Cushites or (Hamites)

Ethiopia is probably the point of origin of the Cushitic races.
GALLA

The Galla are the largest single group in Ethiopia comprising 40% of the population; they mainly live in the Central, Southern and South Western areas.

Formerly Nomads, most are now settled agriculturalists. They have often adopted the religion of the area in which they settled, and large groups are muslims and coptic Christians, approx 1 million have been converted by modern missionaries and the remainder, about 50% are still basically animists.

They are more negroid in physical appearance than the Amharas and various groups of them fill all positions in modern Ethiopian Society, from high Government officials to the Nomads of the South West.

DANAKIL

The Danakil are another Hamitic people who inhabit the Danakil depression. They are generally Islamic and physically are almost indistinguishable from their neighbours. They are a very fierce and warlike race and are loosely organised into tribes and clans. The northern Danakil are semi-nomads with no permanent settlements, who harvest salt in the summer months and venture to the coastal areas during the winter when they engage in very primitive agriculture.

The Souther Danakil have a permanent population at Aussa on the Awash River to which the nomads amongst them return when climatic problems cause their retreat from the Depression.

The Danakil are notable for an unfortunate social custom that requires the presentation by husbands-to-be of a pair of testicles obtained from some-one - preferably a Christian or animist although in emergency a pair from a neighbouring tribe will do - to the bride's parents before marriage can occur. The Ethiopian Government is trying to stamp this practice out, as well as induce the Danakil to move into permanent settlements but as most Government officials are Christian, there have been a few problems.

This area was closed to foreigners while I was there and I heard expressed on more than one occasion the thought that the Government was using the famine to rid themselves of an age-old problem.

The Falasha - called the Black Jews are the last group I will mention. They practise a primitive form of Judaism but do not know any Hebrew. They are indistinguishable from the other peoples amongst whom they live, apart from their religion. They have no land ownership at all and are very good craftsmen which on the Ethiopian social scale is equivalent to an agricultural worker as the lowest rung. They number about 30,000.
ETHIOPIA TODAY

Ethiopia is today a land of marked contrasts. For the time being I am going to ignore the effect the recent deposition of Haile Selassie may have had.

Addis Ababa is a large city with a central modern business area and many "show piece" buildings including the Bank, the O.A.U. building and a huge hospital, which if it was staffed by every nurse and doctor in Ethiopia at present, could only run at about 50% capacity. Around this area is a vast slum, in the west African sense of that word, with shanty buildings, and a few others of more substantial nature, open sewers, mostly no running water or power, little employment and teeming with people.

Asmara in the north, the second largest city, was dominated by the Italians for 40 years and shows the effects there-of with wide streets, no significant slums and much more employment and business.

There are ten third largest cities in Ethiopia, none of which is larger than an average to large Adelaide suburb and the rest of the population, some 90-95% lead the subsistence agricultural and nomadic life of centuries past, basically unaffected by changes in Government except in taxes. They live in isolated compound or small villages.

Haile Selassie instituted many reforms during his rule including the abolition of slavery - 1924 - and re affirmed in 1946, forcing the head of the Church to be Ethiopian rather than Alexandria-appointed so at least some control was gained over it. Compulsory education, although only 7% of the adult population are literate; the setting up of a regular army and civil service, the latter two with the University students forming a small but increasingly restless middle class, whose activities culminated in his overthrow.

The economy is very poorly based with agriculture accounting for 65% of the gross Domestic Product and 87% of the work force. Manufacturing comprises 7%, mainly of shoes, clothing and such like, wholesale and retail trade 7%, transport 4%, public administration and defence 4.4% and housing 3.5%. There is no significant contribution from health, education, electricity, domestic services, real estate, mining or quarrying. Coffee from the south, provides 65% of exports from wild bushes. As at 1965 the average per capita income was $127 per year - about $42.00 Aust. Wages in 1974 were $1.50 per day.

Transport is very low with no all-weather road systems, but significant improvements are being made at the rate of about 12% per year in the construction of such roads. At present the result is that during the monsoon internal transport is almost totally non-existent, apart from man and donkeys, as the internal airports are all dirt strips and are unusable.
In Tigre, which is the area where I worked, the people were medium statured, light skinned, inherently reserved, and inherently beligerent. The basic housing unit is a round stone or Eucalyptus igerent. There are generally up to about seven of these all contained Tukul. There are generally up to about seven of these all contained Tukul. There are generally up to about seven of these all contained Tukul. These are generally up to about seven of these all contained Tukul. The inside a compound fence with one narrow entrance and exit. The Tukul is about 15'-20' diameter.

The interior of these have two or three 2' high x 2' wide packed mud "seats" which also serve as beds for the entire family. Livestock, generally cattle, sheep, goats or hens, are herded inside the Tukul itself at night, there to joint the large numbers of vicious fleas, lice and bed bugs already in residence, as protection from Shiftas (bandits) and wild animals mainly hyenas. Cooking is done on the floor by means of a brazier and food is served on an Endura basket. The bread is made from a local grain called Tef and is up to 2' in diameter and 1/2" thick with the physical appearance of grey sponge rubber. Approximately 1/2 a dozen sheets of Endura are put into a basket and water is poured over it. Drinks are usually Tulla - a dirty brown faecal-appearing-smelling and tasting liquid which is brewed from Bikon (another grain) and Bisho (a green plant) for about one week, and Tij, a delicious fermented honey drink, similar in taste to mead but without the sickly sweetness of the latter.

Apart from ploughing and repairs, the chores are the women's province and in particular carrying water, often over long distances in heavy earthenware pots, which is very time-consuming. The water is never safe, and even in Addis, must be boiled to insure removal of disease bugs. It often looks more like mud.

Clothing is light cotton, locally woven garments, called Shammas over dresses of variable age and number. A similar garment called Egetabab over baggy trousers and shirt for the men. Marriages are arranged, the women marry at 12 - 18 after payment of a small bridal price, and the parents of both parties traditionally give a large present - the most prized being a rifle - when blood stained sheets are produced the following morning.

Divorce is easy and polygamous marriage not uncommon, particularly amongst Muslim elements, although this has now been banned by the Government. Prostitution is a way of life, and any woman who loses her husband will turn to it, as well as women whose husbands are away for a while or who are offered enough money by a prospective customer. The full-time prostitutes wear a gold ring around their neck, signifying their position to all those who are interested.

Health is very poor, by our standards, with a life expectancy of 30 - 35 years, rampant T.B. - about 95% of the population infected - and venereal disease is very common although there is no congenital syphilis. Including the foreign missionaries there is still only one doctor per 70,000 people and one nurse for 50,000 so the position is unlikely to change soon. Over 50% of children born fail to reach 5 years, partly because of disease and partly because they are solely breast-fed until they are at least 2 years old, which means only by retard mental and physical development of the children, but has the advantage of ensuring some mild birth control.
The Chika - Shum a Government appointed local tenant farmer, has control over the compounds in his area, and is responsible for collecting taxes and mediating in the not infrequent disputes.

Most grains are grown although Tef is common, and ploughing is by a single-furrow plough, generally drawn by one or two oxen; the ground is very rocky but no attempt is ever made to clear it.

The recent deposition of Selassie would have made absolutely no difference to these people, except that their taxes may now go into general Government revenue, and so speed up the development of the country.