Preface
to first impression

By 1974, the year in which Ethiopia saw Emperor Haile Selassie I deposed and a new revolutionary government installed, a younger generation of scholars had become engaged in the study of the peoples and history of the country. It was already a thoroughly 'post-colonial' period in the development of African history and social anthropology, although recent advances in these subjects had not yet been brought fully into the world of 'Ethiopianist' scholarship. The anticipation of social reform and political change so widespread in Ethiopia in the early 1970s invited, then, a rethinking of older approaches. A new awareness of the part that humbler peoples could play in history began to shape the work of both Ethiopian and foreign researchers. Historians were asking questions which took them from the royal chronicles and capitals which had been the locus of their predecessors' enquiry into the exploration of local sources and even face-to-face enquiries in 'the field'. Anthropologists were, at the same time, sensing a need to extend the context of their understanding of remote 'tribal' peoples, and finding this more appropriately in the recent development of the imperial Ethiopian state than in the aeons of speculative 'culture history'.

Against this background, the present book took shape. Donald Donham first planned an informal workshop for a number of those who had recently carried out field research in Ethiopia, and this was held under the auspices of the Cambridge African Studies Centre in July 1979, at Clare Hall. He then organized a follow-up conference at Monterey, California, in March 1982, entitled 'Society and History of Imperial Ethiopia: The South, c. 1880–1974'. Substantial funding was provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities (U.S.A.), supplemented by the Hewlett Fund at the Center for International Studies and by the African Studies Center, both of Stanford University. An editorial committee of Donald Donham, Wendy James and Peter Garretson drew up guidelines for revision of the papers in order that a number could be composed into an integrated book. It was intended that this book should open up a fresh perspective on Ethiopian society, by drawing upon the lives, memories and opinions of those lesser-known people of the southern provinces who had most recently 'become Ethiopians'.

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The present volume is the outcome of our efforts, and we offer it as a new view, a picture of 'another Ethiopia' which may be unfamiliar to many readers. It corresponds neither to the well-known image of the grand old kingdom of the Lion of Judah, nor to that of its remoter regions as a separate kaleidoscope of 'tribes'; nor does it assume an easy process of the mutual blending of cultures. We bring into focus for the first time the story of the political interaction between the expanding imperial state on the one hand, and the peoples of its new southern frontiers on the other. The events of this story have shaped the present-day society of places and peoples throughout the regions south of the old Abyssinian kingdom, and indeed far beyond the borders of the modern state.

The first chapter sets the scene with an overview of the social dynamics of the highland polity, and its transformation into a modern empire. Succeeding chapters offer a series of original case studies, each locally placed within the southern peripheral regions, and each analysing an aspect of that locality in the light of its relationship with the imperial centre over time. In the order in which we present them, the chapters introduce and develop a number of common themes: in particular, transformations in patterns of leadership and authority; changes in the fabric of ethnic and personal identity along with the re-working of kinship and marriage ties; and the all-pervasive consequences of the extension of economic demand through tribute and trade, which in the Ethiopian case led, rather than followed, the expansion of imperial rule. The cases have been deliberately selected as a geographical series, from the inner periphery of the highlands west of Addis Abeba through the southwest to the remote southern boundaries of the modern state and beyond, into the Sudan.

By concentrating on a part of the empire, we do not wish to preach academic or political balkanization. On the contrary, we hope to have demonstrated something of the general nature of interconnections between the Ethiopian centre and the various parts which make up the whole. From a grassroots perspective, these have often been exploitative; but to reveal the interconnections at least reminds us of the rôle of the provinces and frontier regions in the making of a remarkable nation. Without the contributions of Ethiopia's southern peoples, whose sweat and blood go unrecorded in 'Ethiopianist' annals, the Battle of Adwa in 1896 might not have been won and Menilek II might not have gone on to build his empire. Ethiopia might never have played the part it did in the modern political arena, nor might it have become, as it did, an international symbol of African statehood and civilization. If this is an ambiguous legacy (as in much historical 'progress'), then at least the following papers accept the ambiguity and attempt to avoid political simplifications.

Peter Garretson's historical vision played an important part in the formulation of this book, and as he was unable to continue his part in the editorial work because of ill health, we are glad to acknowledge his contribution here. We also wish to express our debt to all those who participated in the project by preparing papers, contributing to discussion at
our meetings, writing to us, helping to revise and edit drafts, and of course typing, retyping and word-processing. We are indebted to the care and skill of Stella Seddon for the preparation of the Index. Friends and family have given freely of their time in providing help throughout, and here we would like to give special thanks to Nancy Donham.

We have leaned quite heavily on the facilities of both the Department of Anthropology at Stanford and the Institute of Social Anthropology at Oxford. Sandy Robertson in Cambridge has kept an avuncular eye on the project from the start and we are grateful for his help and encouragement.

Also, we wish to acknowledge our obligation to colleagues and friends in Ethiopia, for their support in various ways over the years, support without which little of this work could have been done. We have benefited also from their advice and criticism. Almost all of the contributors to this book have enjoyed association with Addis Abeba University and with the fine research tradition of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies and the Department of History in particular. We offer this book in the spirit of the same research tradition.

Finally, we are glad to announce that a number of further papers from our project are to appear in the Journal of Northeast African Studies, published by the African Studies Center at Michigan State University.

May 1985

W. J.
Preface

to first paperback impression

The present volume of essays by anthropologists and historians traces the story of the intimate connection between the Ethiopian political centre and its outlying provinces and border regions over the period of approximately a century, from the 1880s up to 1974. During that period, the Ethiopian ‘centre’ consisted of a newly consolidated monarchy, which in the context of European imperial claims to large swathes of territory in North East Africa, extended its own geographical reach and a kind of imperial control over the peoples of its southern and western hinterlands. This spatial extension, together with a growing need for military defence of the new Ethiopia in the face of European expansionism, led to heavy impositions by the imperial state upon local economies and communities across the country.

In 1974, the last emperor, Haile Selassie I, was overthrown and replaced, not by democracy, but by an increasingly authoritarian form of state socialism. The country was eventually led by Haile Mariam Mengistu, generally seen as a brutal dictator, whose regime itself was replaced in 1991 after a period of resistance by several armed regional movements. Shortly after this, as the outcome of a long-running and deeply founded regional struggle, Eritrea achieved independent statehood. The new Ethiopian government, with strong Western backing, has pursued a policy of the devolution of powers to all its constituent regions, conceptualized and redefined spatially as a series of local nationalities or ethnic groups. Over the decades of struggle and civil war in the country since the end of the imperial era, many Ethiopians have left their country and formed new communities in the diaspora, these often supporting material improvements in their particular home areas along with a rising pride in local culture and heritage.

Relationships between the Ethiopian centre and its peripheries have thus changed more than once in substance, and in spatial format, since 1974. The present volume, although first published in 1986, is therefore a matter of past history in many ways as it does not take the story beyond 1974. However, the essays here were completed at a time when it was already clear that the geopolitical space of Ethiopia was changing for good, under the projects of state socialism. An element of hindsight at that time gave a sharper edge to our analysis of the conditions under which local peoples lived during the former imperial rule,
and in a way *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia* already called out for a sequel when it first appeared. Its methods and approach were also seen to mark a number of innovative departures, and these invited further working out in the new conditions. To anthropologists, *Southern Marches* demonstrated a range of ways in which the interpretation of local case materials must proceed in relation to an understanding of wider historical contexts. For Ethiopia – unlike most of the rest of Africa – that context was provided by the re-consolidation and expansion of an indigenous empire, associated with a cultural core – Orthodox Christian, and Amharic- or Tigrinya-speaking. From the turn of the twentieth century onward, power was exerted from a hierarchy of administrative centres dominated by the newly established city of Addis Ababa. Analysed against this background, the social and cultural patterns of particular Ethiopian peoples can be seen, in many ways, as responses to or engagements with this wider arena.

To historians of Ethiopia, on the other hand, *Southern Marches* marked other turns. Ethiopian history, like a good deal of historical writing, had been focused on metanarratives of the nation – in the case of Ethiopia, the preservation of its independence against all colonial odds. Emperors’ lives, their battles and foreign intrigues, from Tewodros to Yohannes to Menilek to Haile Selassie, furnished a seemingly natural way to shape stories and to distinguish periods. *Southern Marches*, in contrast, looked at the project of state-making from the point of view of the southern peripheries. There, the darker side of history came into focus – the assertion of cultural superiority by the Orthodox Christian core, the serfdom and slavery, and the extraction of resources in demand by the world market. Like much other work at the time, *Southern Marches* demonstrated the value of a history ‘from below’ expanded by new sources such as local memory, oral history, and the indirect evidence contained in sedimented custom.

The socialist regime of Mengistu planned, and implemented, dramatic projects of land reform, agricultural development through planned settlements, and political modernization across the county. The government of that time mobilized record numbers of people for military purposes, and responded to periods of famine and insecurity by the mass transportation of people from one place to another. The human geography of the country was overhauled further as the effects of civil war, and involvement in the struggles of neighbouring countries, spread over the land. The overthrow of Mengistu’s regime in 1991 was followed by the new government’s policy of transforming the standing of peripheral regions and peoples within the state. This has led to a round of fresh enquiries about the nature of the new regions, and the welfare of their peoples. The methods of locating anthropological analysis in widening spatial frameworks, and approaching history from the grassroots up, have been widely accepted as appropriate to these topics. As editors of the present volume, we were finally encouraged to put together a new set of studies, some by contributors represented here who had managed to follow through what had been the fate and experience of regions they already knew, and others by younger scholars from a range of countries (including Ethiopia) who had embarked on research either during the socialist period, or after it, during the new government headed by Meles Zenawi.

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from 1991. The result is now published as Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism and After (edited by Wendy James, Donald L. Donham, Eisei Kurimoto and Alessandro Triulzi, Oxford/Athens OH/Addis Ababa, James Currey Publishers/Ohio University Press/Addis Ababa University Press, 2002). We are glad to announce this new publication as the long-anticipated sequel to the present volume. Southern Marches was very well received, but the original hardback edition has now been out of print for many years. As it provides such a clear starting point for the changes which have taken place in the post-imperial era, to which Remapping Ethiopia is devoted, we are pleased that James Currey, Ohio, and Addis Ababa University Press have undertaken to issue the present paperback edition as a companion. We would like to thank all three sets of publishers, along with our original publishers at Cambridge University Press, who have made it possible for readers to have easy access to both volumes and thus to be able to trace continuities and transformations of regional experience from the old Ethiopia to the new.

Assistance with publication costs was given by Emory University, Atlanta, and by the Istituto Universitario Orientale of Naples. We would like to express our gratitude for this help, which has been applied to the production costs of the paperback impression and in support of the locally-available edition being brought out by Addis Ababa University Press.

DLD, WJ