

Kitabu

The bi-monthly newsletter of the African School Mobile Library
"African Studies by bicycle"

Issue 4: November 2020.

Dear Reader, welcome to Kitabu.

Give Thanks For Donkeys

The story is told of a Sunday ride on a donkey, when an awaited man entered an awaiting city: and the people were happy to see him. There is another story to be told of a man and a donkey – plus a trailer cart - and the people meeting them with equal happiness. The only difference is that in the latter, most of the happy ones are children. As Ethiopia, one of the first countries in the world to adopt Christianity as its national belief, celebrates the mother of the awaited man, in the Festival of Mary of Zion, lets take our time to recognise the animal of the two stories and the blessings that they bring.

I'm always amazed and find myself smiling, at the Extension Services of African libraries. In north-east Kenya, they use camels. In parts of Ethiopia, donkeys are the carrier of books. So in time to come, the growing child can read of St. Yared, who I think of as the first genius of Ethiopia. To read of his vision, which generated the drum, the harp, the bells and the flute: the songs for all and the choreography of the priests. And read of contemporary pioneers also, such as singer/songwriter Teddy Afro.

Imagine, each of the animals, can carry four hundred books, for hours through the heat and terrain. I would like to think that in time to come, when they can no longer carry part of a library on their backs, that in their rest, they are treated with the interaction they deserve.

And the world is rallying round, supporting the libraries ferried by the brown and grey carriers. Organisations such as Ethiopia Reads, Link Ethiopia, Save The Children and UKLA – United Kingdom Literacy Association – are funding the four legged libraries. Individuals also, such as Yohannes Gebregiorgis, an Ethiopian, long-time resident in America, who worked as a librarian at the San Francisco Children's Library. His donkey library – featured on the BBC – has a covered cart, which opens up to reveal the books: and stools on which to sit and read.

In parts of Ethiopia, where there are no libraries or there is distance to the nearest one, they await the fortnightly advent, of the one who brings books on a donkey. Rather than palm leaves, smiles and grins pave the way to where the man and donkey stop. And the little ones gather round him, as the older ones gathered round the one of the Sunday entrance. Thirsting, the children look forward to the coming of Johannes, as the others did on that famous Sunday. The children of Awassa, look forward to seeing Yohannes, as the people of Jerusalem, anticipated the entrance of Jesus. Let the thirst be quenched: give thanks for donkeys.

Sources

BBC - Ethiopia Reads - Link Ethiopia - Save The Children - UKLA

The main challenge I face is the landscape. It takes me three hours to get to the furthest of the villages. I have to stay in the village overnight. It is very hard, especially for a woman, but I do it because it is my job. Although the journey is challenging I know that I am doing it for the benefit of my community.

Birtukan, Librarian.

Without the donkey library I would not have learned the alphabet or how to read. If the books were brought here I would not be so good in my education or get high grades.

Tilanesh, aged 10.

If we are interested in changing the world, then we have to read.

Mezrasha Kibret, EBCEF (Ethiopian Books for Children and Educational Project) Manager, Awassa.

Children could imagine everything from books – connections to other cultures, to other people, to other children and to the universe at large. It gives them hope, it gives them pleasure...

Yohannes Gebregiorgis

Amongst the books in the Ethiopian section of the ASML are...

SPEECHES - Haile Selassie: 1957-1959

ETHIOPIAN WARRIORHOOD - Tsehai Berhane-Selassie

THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX TAWAHIDO Church - Ephraim Issac

STEPHANITES: Their Movement and Contendings – Teweldeberhan Mezgebe -

KING OF KINGS: The Triumph and Tragedy of Emperor Haile Selassie I Of Ethiopia
Asa-Wossen Asserate

A HISTORY OF MODERN ETHIOPIA: 1855-1991 - Bahru Zewde

FOUNDATIONS OF AN AFRICAN CIVILISATION:

Aksum and the Northern Horn 1000 BC - AD 1300 – David W Phillipson

DICTIONARY OF ETHIOPIAN CHRISTIANITY – Paulos Milkias

A SOCIAL HISTORY OF ETHIOPIA – Richard Pankhurst

OPERATION SOLOMON: The Daring Rescue of the Ethiopian Jews – Stephen Spector

Inspired by the ASML, **ZAKI EL-SALAH** has founded the **Black Liberation Library (BLM)** in **Edinburgh**. A mobile bicycle library, it will be featured in a Kitabu extra, later this month.

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