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Early 20th Century Europe in the eyes of an Ethiopian envoy

Some observations on a recently published Amharic travel diary

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In 1911 a group of Ethiopian dignitaries set out to London to take part in the coronation of George V. On their way back they visited France and Italy. One of the members of the delegation, Ḥeruy Wälädä Śellase (1878-1939), who was later to become foreign minister of Ethiopia, kept a diary throughout the journey in which he wrote his observations. This unique document has only been published recently, in 2016/2017. It can be viewed as a mirror image of European accounts of travels in Africa which appeared at the early 20th Century. The diary allows the reader to observe Europe through African eyes, which is further emphasized by the fact that the narrative was not written in any of the colonial languages but in an African language, namely Amharic.