



# DACB News Link

For Friends of the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*

Issue No. 4, January 2005

## The DACB and the Frumentius Lectures

Ethiopia holds a unique place in African Christianity as its Christian and written history dates back to the fourth century. This is no doubt one of the reasons why Jonathan Bonk chose Ethiopia as an ideal country in which to launch the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* (DACB) project.

In March 1999, Bonk visited the eight Christian theological colleges serving the Ethiopian Orthodox, Catholic, Pentecostal, Menonite, Kale Heywet, Mekane Yesus, and Full Gospel communities in Addis Ababa and suggested a return visit and lecture series for the following year. Peter Cotterell, then principal of the Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology (EGST), further developed the idea that an annual lectureship be launched by EGST and be named the "Frumentius Lectures" in memory of the Syrian missionary who brought the gospel to the Axumite court in the fourth century. Subsequently



Andrew Walls, keynote speaker at the first Frumentius Lectures, February 2000

the lecture series has been held annually, inviting world-class scholars and incorporating the vision of the DACB and the academic scholarship of EGST. The DACB project underwrote the travel expenses for both the 2000 and 2001 Frumentius lecturers, thereby intertwining the DACB with the Frumentius Lectures from the inception of both ventures in Ethiopia.

To date, four lectureships have been held:

Andrew F. Walls, from the University of Edinburgh, addressed the subject "Africa: Indigenously Christian – The Significance of Ethiopia" in the February 2000 inauguration of the Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology Frumentius Lectures. The official start-up of the DACB in Ethiopia was launched at the same time by Bonk, with Paul and Lila Balisky, Debelu Birri, and Tesfaye Yacob forming the committee for Ethiopia.

In February 2001, Kwame Bediako, director

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## The Ancient Christian Church in the DACB

Late in 1999, Jonathan Bonk informed me that OMSC intended to sponsor a project entitled the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* (DACB). Subsequently I was given an initial listing of some 1,400 noteworthy African subjects compiled for the dictionary. I was invited to review this list, to add other names pertinent to a consideration of earlier North African and Alexandrian figures, and to prepare stories from among that greater potential pool.

My initial response was to search through the major existing dictionaries of the early

Christian church and, as a result, I was able to enlarge the initial 50 names of ancient African Christians to nearly 400. For all of these, I provided an index of major reference works (mostly in English, though some of them had been translated from Italian or German) where some information on these specific persons could be found to aid future DACB researchers.

With that base in hand, I began to submit entries related to the less well-known or more poorly documented names, so as to leave for principal scholars within the large-

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From the Project Director

## Translating the Message



When originally conceived in 1995, the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* was to be a non-proprietary memory base, freely available and accessible to as wide a potential African readership as possible. This meant, above all, that biographies should be rendered in the lingua franca most commonly employed in African universities, seminaries, theological colleges, and other centers of research and instruction: English, French, Portuguese, Swahili, and Arabic.

So far, most of the stories appearing in the database are in English, with only thirty-seven available in French. This imbalance is the inevitable result of our office's location, here in English-speaking New Haven. Our connections throughout English-speaking Africa are extensive, with most of the 100 participating institutions now formally committed to the project located in English-speaking Africa. But the balance is gradually beginning to shift, thanks to diligent local initiatives in two of Africa's most populous French-speaking nations, DR Congo and Madagascar.

As I write, negotiations are under way with a Kenyan academic, proficient in Swahili, who has agreed to spend the first eight months of 2005 translating the dictionary into Swahili. We plan to introduce him to you in our next newsletter. The quality of his work having been vouched for by several independent Swahili language specialists, we are confident that dictionary users in Africa will be well satisfied with the result.

This month, I will be in Egypt, exploring ways of making the entire database available in Arabic for the estimated nine million Christians in Africa for whom Arabic is the primary language of worship and instruction. These brothers and sisters—

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## Meet the 2004 - 2005 Project Luke Fellows



Fohle Lygunda li-M is from the Democratic Republic of the Congo where he is now the executive director of the *Centre Missionnaire au Coeur d'Afrique* (Missionary Center in the Heart of Africa), headquartered in Kinshasa. He and I were chatting about Paul Carlson, a missionary doctor in the Belgian Congo, whose story Fohle is writing. In 1964, Fohle's father, accused of being a spy for the whites, was arrested and tortured by the rebels in the

same area where Carlson was murdered. The next day, as Fohle's father was about to be shot, an officer suddenly announced an end to that day's executions. That night the officer secretly came to the jail and freed Fohle's father who had saved the officer's life years before. Later that night, father, mother, and one-year-old Fohle escaped in a dugout canoe.

Fohle's family became committed Christians after their escape. Fleeing eastern Congo, they started a new life in northwestern Congo, grateful to God for protection. Fohle became a Christian in the Congo Covenant Church where he served as a pastor and a teacher for fourteen years. He married Marceline, a member of another displaced tribe, and they have five children. Marceline is a faithful prayer warrior. A charismatic leader, Fohle has a vision for training Christian leaders in a cross-cultural and interdenominational setting to evangelize unreached people groups through-

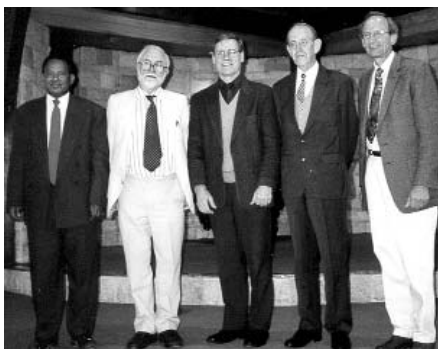
out Central Africa.

Alfred Keyas Sheunda is from Mumias district in western Kenya. He was born and raised in a Christian family and studied in Anglican-sponsored schools all his life. Instead of studying to become a registered nurse—a job which provided financial security—Alfred chose to enroll in seminary. Afterwards he worked as an Anglican pastor and as the diocesan youth director in his native district bordering Uganda, a region hard hit by the AIDS epidemic. Seven hundred people die everyday in Kenya alone from the virus. Alfred tells of visiting villages where only young children and very old people now live because the entire adult population has been wiped out. In addition, many children are born infected with the virus and do not live beyond the age of five.

In 2002, Alfred decided to become a missionary and to work far from home, in a semi-desert Islamic region. His passion as a missionary is palpable even as he describes the arid, harsh environment where he and his family now live, in an area where food and water are often scarce. In spite of hardships, he and his family have grown strong in their faith because they have seen God's power at work in many lives. Alfred speaks with joy about his wife, Florence, and two children, Karen Rebecca Mbakaya, four, and Will Ebenezer Wesa, two-and-a-half.



### Frumentius Lectures (continued from page 1)



of the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology, Ghana, spoke on the theme "The Universality of the Gospel and the Challenge of Mother-Tongue Theology." Jonathan Bonk again promoted the DACB project.

Richard Bauckham, from the University of St. Andrews, presented lectures on the topic "Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World," in February 2002. The lectures were later published as a book by the same title (Paternoster and Baker Book House, 2003).

John Stott, Anglican scholar and renowned author, delivered the Frumentius Lectures entitled "God's Word for God's World" in November 2003. That year prizes were awarded by the Ethiopian DACB committee members to two individuals, Dirshaye Menberu and Tesfaye Gabisso, for the outstanding biographies they contributed to the DACB.

For the March 2005 Frumentius Lectures, Mikre-Sellassie Gebre Ammanuel, Bible translator for the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, will speak on the topic "The Septuagint and the Early

Translation of the Bible into Ethiopic/Ge'ez."

It has become a tradition that during the annual Frumentius Lectures time is set aside to highlight the DACB and to recognize what has been done during the previous year in collecting the stories of leading Ethiopian Christians from various church traditions for inclusion in the DACB.

—Paul and Lila Balisky  
DACB Advisory Council members

### Translating the Message (continued from page 1)

occupying the troubled Muslim-Christian demographic intersections across Africa—endure not only political, social, and economic marginalization in their own lands, but isolation from their spiritual kith and kin on the same continent. It is our hope that the availability of an Arabic-language *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* will reassure this beleaguered minority that, far from being forgotten, they are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses from whose stories they can derive encouragement and instruction. In turn, their stories will inform and inspire Christians elsewhere, becoming part of the ongoing story of African Christian faith that traces its roots to the first century, when the baby Jesus was welcomed and protected in Egypt.

Finally will come the Portuguese translation, but this is a story for another time. Normally, credible translation of any kind is

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# DACB Story: Hakalla Amale, c. 1905-1991, Ethiopia

Hakalla Amale was the first woman to be converted in the Kambatta Hadiya area. She is remembered for her strength in enduring persecution in the early days of the church.

She was born in Kaburbaya, Ballessa, Hosanna Shoa, Ethiopia, to Amale Kassamo (father) and Faysse Lamonko (mother) and spoke the Hadiya language. She became the third wife of Ato Jate Malegu who kidnapped her and forced her to marry him. His first two wives had given him only daughters and he trusted that Hakalla would give him sons. In fact, she bore him three sons.

Hakalla first heard the Gospel from her uncle's son, Shigute Dadda, and came to faith in Christ at the age of eighteen, the same year she gave birth to her first son. She learned to read the Bible—a very rare achievement even for men at that time. Her family on both sides tried to force her husband to divorce her because of her faith, but he refused because she had given him a son. Hakalla was beaten with hippopotamus leather and forced to chew that same leather as a sign that she would deny the faith. But she would not deny Christ. In the late evenings, her brother and Shigute visited her to pray and strengthen her faith.

While Hakalla was pregnant with her second son, the persecution increased. The village elders came to her home, forced her outside, and demanded that she deny Christ, threatening to curse her if she refused. On that particular day she was preparing a traditional medicine which people believed made labor and delivery easier. In their presence, she drank the medicine in the name of Christ. The men then cursed her. Hakalla was willing to die rather than deny Christ. Later that day, she gave birth to a healthy second son and the people saw that the power of Christ had overcome the



curse. Hakalla was ordered not to communicate with her neighbors at all. In spite of this the number of believers kept growing. When her relative, Ato Aba Gole, became a believer, his conversion eased the persecution. Later, her husband believed. Hakalla witnessed in her own village and often walked or traveled by horseback to distant villages to witness and preach.

Hakalla is known for her strong witness in her family which led her husband, children, and grandchildren to Christ. She was the first woman to serve when the Dubancho church was established. A strong advocate

of women's literacy, Hakalla traveled to Lemu, Kambatta, Shone, Sike, and Wolayta, and visited many congregations even as far away as Ambo and Addis Ababa to teach women to read. She was a strong support when the women's group was organized and she was invited to join the Women's General Assembly at the national level to give her testimony. She was also the only woman with strong enough faith and determination to be allowed to enter prisons. She served Christian prisoners by traveling long distances to take them fresh food. She was also a model of hospitality and entertained many Christian guests and students, as well as some of her persecutors. Even in old age she led the women's prayer group in the local church. She wrote a song: "Lord Jesus, my heart is longing to be with you" (*"Wedante Yesus hoi libey yinafkal"*).

In her eighty-fifth year, she told her children one day that she felt ill. Two days later she passed away.

—Belaynesh Dindamo

*Belaynesh Dindamo works in the Kale Heywet Church Women's Office in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. For sources, see [www.DACB.org](http://www.DACB.org).*

## Ancient Church *(continued from page 1)*

er field of patrologists, especially those within the African academic community itself, the major figures in Ancient Christianity such as Clement, Origen of Alexandria, Tertullian, Cyprian of Carthage, and Augustine of Hippo.

Among the much less well-known figures, I initially began to work through the first and second century, beginning with early Christians responsible not only for bringing Christianity to Africa but also for the emergence of Christian understandings, variant and unintegrated though these forms of understanding may have been, relative to the whole world into which Christian missions extended. Here I undertook work on New Testament personalities such as Mark the Evangelist, Simon of Cyrene, and Apollos from Alexandria. Beyond this base, I turned my efforts to the minor names of the second century—be they ultimately declaimed as "gnostic" or "catholic," "heretic" or "orthodox"—such as Valentinus, Basilides, Barnabas and Ambrosius. And thus I started, though all along hoping for colleagues to join in the greater task of providing coverage through the years to the enormous disruptions along the southern Mediterranean coast which brought an end to the ancient Christian church, after which remnants were driven southward up the Nile or across the Sahara.

For the present, however, I appear to be working alone. I am now nearly through the third century almost to the point of the so-called "Constantinian victory." Here and there I have crossed that threshold to write of those who held one or the other of the principal early bishoprics at Alexandria and at Carthage and to follow the trail of those whose Christianity was marked by martyrdom

over the first three centuries of Christian life. A standing invitation therefore goes forth with this brief statement of progress for others to join in these tasks of bringing to fruition the valiant but oft-neglected stories of early African Christianity.

—Clyde Curry Smith

*The author, Dr. Clyde Curry Smith, is professor emeritus of Ancient History and Religion at the University of Wisconsin, River Falls.*

Note: The DACB Ancient Christian Church index contains, for the moment, thirty-two stories on the following figures:

Agrippa Castor, 2nd c.	Leonides, 2nd c.
Ambrosius, 2nd/3rd c.	Mark the Evangelist, 1st c.
Ammonius, 3rd c.	Monica, d. 387
Apelles, 2nd c.	Origen, 185-255
Augustine, 354-430	Orosius, Paulus, 5th c.
"Barnabas," 1st/2nd c.	Pachomius, 292-346
Basilides, 2nd c.	Pantaenus, 2nd c.
Carpocrates, 2nd c.	Philo Judaeus, c. 20 BC-c. 50 AD
Clement of Alexandria, 150-220	Pierius, 3rd c.
Cyprian, 200-258	Shenoute, d. 466
Desert People, 250-500	Simon, 1st c.
Epiphanes, 2nd c.	Tertullian, c. 160-240
Felicitas and Perpetua, d. 203	Theodotos, 2nd c.
Isidore, 2nd c.	Trypho, 2nd/3rd c.
Julius Cassianus, 2nd c.	Valentinus, 2nd c.
Lactantius, c. 240-c. 320	Victor of Vita, 5th c.

# News from *DACB* Regions

## Nigeria

The year 2004 was busy for the *DACB* in Nigeria. In August regional coordinator Protus Otitodirichukwu Kemdirim taught a seminar on writing *DACB* stories at the University of Port Harcourt. Several students produced excellent stories, which the coordinator edited before sending them to the New Haven office. In September, Kemdirim represented *DACB* Project Director Jonathan Bonk at the annual Whelan Symposium in Owerri, Nigeria, where he presented a paper entitled "Project Luke and *DACB*: The Hospitality of African Christian Leaders." In November, Kemdirim attended a *DACB* workshop in Lagos organized by Christ Command and Gospel Ministries. Later in November, he held an OMSC-sponsored training workshop for *DACB* liaison coordinators and writers at the University of Port Harcourt. Participants were drawn from six Nigerian universities, three Catholic seminaries, two Protestant (Anglican and Methodist) seminaries, and other institutions. The purpose of the workshop was to raise the quality of the stories and the number of participating institutions in Nigeria.

## Ghana

*DACB* office coordinator Kehinde Olabimtan, who has worked tirelessly to promote the dictionary in the region and to spur liaison coordinators to produce viable stories, is stepping down in order to finish his dissertation. His successor, Rev. Philip Laryea, is on the academic staff of the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre.

Nine individuals participated in the Seventh Working Session of the *DACB* held at Pentecost University College, Sowutuom, Accra, on June 24, 2004. The participants critiqued both the content and format of several revised stories which sparked lively discussions. In his report on the session, Olabimtan observed that, although story quality has improved, the biographies still do not adhere to the documentation standards recommended in the "Addendum to the Guidelines for Researchers." He drew the attention of the participants to the *Instructional Manual for Researchers and Writers*, the manual recently published by the New Haven office using an original document drafted by Olabimtan.

Your questions and suggestions are welcome!

Write to us at [DACB@OMSC.org](mailto:DACB@OMSC.org)

or use the address below.

### How you can support the *DACB*

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4. Become a Participating Institution, a Non-African Participating Institution, or an Affiliated Research Institution.
5. Support the *DACB* financially.
6. Give us your feedback and recommendations by letter or e-mail on ways to improve the *DACB*.



## South Africa

Philippe Denis, liaison coordinator at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, has inspired several students to write stories for the *DACB* or to adapt excerpts from their dissertations for the purposes of the dictionary. Fifteen stories, of which twelve were acceptable according to *DACB* standards, recently arrived in the New Haven office. This is a large harvest!



Abraham Lieta, one of the doctoral students submitting stories.

## Ethiopia

A rich crop of stories has begun to come in from the Ethiopian chapter of the *DACB* thanks to the work of Paul and Lila Balisky, *DACB* advisory council members and liaison coordinators. They report that "*DACB* Ethiopia" has been given a home at the



Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology, where Dirshaye Menberu will write stories for the dictionary this year. Menberu, the doctoral student who last year won an award for the story she wrote for the

*DACB*, has also been appointed liaison coordinator for EGST this year. The Baliskys are retiring.

## Translating the Message *(continued from page 2)*

prohibitively expensive. But since the dictionary is a project driven by passion, rather than by money, we believe that individuals and institutions in Angola and Mozambique will rise to the challenge of ensuring that their own stories and the story of Christianity elsewhere in Africa are available to Portuguese-speaking Africans. Stay tuned!

### *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*

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