

# Treasures of Ethiopia and Eritrea in the Bodleian Library, Oxford



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David Appleyard, Sean M. Winslow, Steve Delamarter,  
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*Edited by Jacopo Gnisci*



MANAR AL-ATHAR, University of Oxford

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# Contents

<i>Preface and Acknowledgments</i>	ix
<i>Contributors</i>	xiii
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xiv
<i>Map</i>	1
1 HISTORY OF THE BODLEIAN COLLECTION	
<i>by Sebastian Brock</i>	3
The First Nucleus of the Collection	3
The Bruce Manuscripts	3
Later Acquisitions	5
The Juel-Jensen Collection	8
Classmarks/Shelfmarks	9
2 WHAT IS GE'EZ?	
<i>by David Appleyard</i>	11
The Ethiopic Script	12
Ge'ez Literature	15
3 MAKING MANUSCRIPTS	
<i>by Sean M. Winslow</i>	23
4 THE GOSPEL IN GE'EZ	
<i>by Jacopo Gnisci</i>	29
The Eusebian Apparatus	29
Textual and Material Features of MS Aeth. c. 14	30
Illustrating the Gospels	31
The Portraits of the Evangelists	34
A Work by Brancalone?	35
5 THE PSALTER IN GE'EZ	
<i>by Steve Delamarter and Jacopo Gnisci</i>	37
The Textual Uniformity of the Ethiopic Psalms	38
Psalm 151: The Exception to the Rule	39
Rubricating the Names of Mary and of God	40
The Strophe Counting System	43
Psalm 77 and the Middle Strophe of the Psalms	43
The Spiritual Meaning of the Hebrew Letters in Psalm 118	45

Is Ḥanna Among the Prophets?	45
Illustrating Psalters	47
The Illustrations in the Bodleian Psalter	48
<b>6 ENOCH IN GE'EZ</b>	
<i>by Siam Bhayro</i>	53
The Book of the Watchers (1 Enoch 1–36)	53
The Book of Parables (1 Enoch 37–71)	54
The Book of the Luminaries (1 Enoch 72–82)	54
The Book of Dreams (1 Enoch 83–90)	54
The Epistle of Enoch (1 Enoch 91–108)	56
Transmission and Translation of the Book of Enoch	56
The Book of Enoch and James Bruce	56
<b>7 HAGIOGRAPHY IN GE'EZ</b>	
<i>by Antonella Brita and Jacopo Gnisci</i>	59
The Bodleian's Hagiographic Collection	59
The Hagiographic Tradition in Ethiopia and Eritrea	59
Textual and Material Features of MS Aeth. d. 23	60
Manuscripts as Cross-Cultural Meeting Points	61
The Life of Zāmika'el Arägawi	62
The <i>kidan</i> of Zāmika'el Arägawi	65
Illustrating Hagiographic Manuscripts	65
Illustrating the Life of Zāmika'el Arägawi	66
<b>8 MARIAN LITERATURE IN GE'EZ</b>	
<i>by Jacopo Gnisci</i>	71
Marian Devotion in Ethiopia and Eritrea	71
The Harp of Mary	72
The Frontispiece Illustration of MS Aeth. e. 28	73
The Ground Hornbill Artist	74
A Regional Style of Painting?	77
<b>9 CHRONICLES IN GE'EZ</b>	
<i>by Girma Getahun</i>	79
The Study of the History of Ethiopia and Eritrea	79
Textual and Material Features of MS Bruce 88	80
The First Section	80
The Second Section	81
The Third Section	81
The Fourth Section	82
The Fifth Section	82
The Beginning of Zār'a Ya'əqob's Chronicle	85
The End of the Chronicle of 'Amdä Şəyon I	85

10	AMHARIC	
	<i>by Girma Getahun</i>	87
	Dating the Manuscript	87
	Copies of the Treatise	89
	Other Works in Amharic	89
	The <i>andəmta</i> Commentary Tradition	89
	The Content of MS Clarke Or. 39	90
	The Beginning of the Treatise	90
	Sayings about the Nature of the Trinity	92
	The End of the Treatise	93
11	OTHER LANGUAGES	
	<i>by Girma Getahun and David Appleyard</i>	95
	The First Part	95
	The Second Part	96
	The Third Part	96
	The Fourth Part	96
	The Fifth Part	99
	The Sixth Part	99
	The Seventh Part	99
	The Eighth Part	99
	The Importance of the Specimens	99
12	MAGIC SCROLLS	
	<i>by Dan Levene</i>	103
	Magical Texts in Other Traditions	104
	The Function of Ethiopic Magic Scrolls	104
	The Power of Words	106
	The Making of Magic Scrolls	107
	The Texts and Images of Magic Scrolls	109
	Bibliography	113
	Illustration Credits	124
	Indices	
	General Index	127
	Index of Manuscripts Cited	129



## Preface & Acknowledgments

The Bodleian Library in Oxford houses one of the most important collections of Ethiopic manuscripts in the world. The library acquired its first Ge'ez manuscript in 1636 and further expanded its collection in 1843, when it acquired 24 of the manuscripts that the explorer James Bruce had brought back from the trip he made to Ethiopia and Eritrea from 1769 to 1772. These included the first complete copies to reach the West of 1 Enoch, the earliest surviving collection of Chronicles, and two copies of the *Kəbrä nügäšt* (Glory of Kings). Scholars active in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries consulted and used many of these manuscripts for their editions and publications. The collection of the Bodleian Library thus has had a fundamental role in the development of the field of Ethiopian and Eritrean studies.

The Bodleian Library continued to expand its collection in the twentieth century, as described in detail in this volume's opening essay by Sebastian Brock. When the former University Medical Officer, Bent Juel-Jensen died in 2007, he bequeathed 45 manuscripts to the Bodleian, which further augmented the collection. While aiming to give a sense of the library's entire collection, this volume and the exhibition it accompanies include a focus on the Juel-Jensen collection, since these manuscripts – many of which are beautifully illustrated – have never been exhibited before and are little-known to scholars and the general public alike. In compiling this catalogue our aim has been to shed new light on the Bodleian collection, while also doing so in a way which is accessible to the interested public.

This introductory volume arose from the attention attracted to the collection as a result of events associated with the publication of *The Garima Gospels: Early Illuminated Gospel Books from Ethiopia* by Judith McKenzie, Francis Watson, et al., with photographs by Michael Gervers (Manar al-Athar, Oxford, 2016) and the enthusiasm of the UK Eritrean and Ethiopian communities for collaborating on the further study of the Bodleian's manuscripts.

A photo-exhibition of the Garima Gospels illuminated pages, "The Hidden Gospels of Abba Garima, Treasures of the Ethiopian Highlands," was held at the Ioannou Centre for Classical and Byzantine Studies, Oxford from 3 November 2016 to 28 July 2017, curated by Judith McKenzie, Miranda Williams, and Foteini Spingou, who also organized the associated colloquium. The colloquium, "Early Ethiopian and Other Eastern

Illuminated Gospel Books: Text and Image,” was held in Oxford on 5 November 2016. Speakers included Nikoloz Aleksidze, Emilio Bonfiglio, Jaś Elsner, Elizabeth Key Fowden, Garth Fowden, Michael Gervers, James Howard-Johnston, Elizabeth Jeffreys, Judith McKenzie, David Taylor, Ida Toth, Theo van Lint, Bryan Ward-Perkins, and Francis Watson. The exhibition and colloquium were sponsored by the Classics Faculty of the University of Oxford, the Oxford Centre for Byzantine Research, and the European Research Council Advanced Project *Monumental Art of the Christian and Early Islamic East* (Principal Investigator, Judith McKenzie).

The London-based Anglo-Ethiopian Society, along with the Ethiopian Heritage Fund, requested an additional event for their members who had not been able to come from London on 5 November. This event on 8 April 2017 included a display of some of the Bodleian’s manuscripts, “Bodleian Treasures, Early Ethiopian Bible Illumination,” which was prepared by Rahel Fronda (Subject Librarian – Hebrew and Judaica collections, Bodleian Libraries). The day before that event, Yemane Asfedai contacted us on behalf of some members of the Eritrean and Ethiopian communities in London wanting to explore the possibility of collaboration in order that the Bodleian’s Ge‘ez manuscripts might be further studied. Gillian Evison (Keeper of Oriental Collections, Bodleian Libraries) was enthusiastic about the idea.

Consequently, a workshop was organized at the Bodleian’s Weston Library on 5 July 2017, “Bodleian Treasures, Early Ethiopian Bible Illustration,” to view some of the Bodleian’s manuscripts, selected and prepared by Rahel Fronda. It was attended by representatives of the London and Oxford Ethiopian and Eritrean communities (Mai Musié, Yemane Asfedai, Dereje Debella, Girma Getahun) and, from Oxford, by Gillian Evison, Madeline Slaven (Head of Exhibitions, Bodleian Libraries), Miranda Williams (Manar al-Athar Senior Research Associate), and Judith McKenzie. As a result, it was decided to explore collaborative plans for an exhibition of the highlights of the Bodleian’s collection, along with a conference and related event for the general public.

This proposal was embraced with enthusiasm by Rahel Fronda, who prepared a successful application with the Classics Faculty to the Oxford University Press John Fell Oxford University Research Fund (with Neil McLynn, Classics, as the Principal Investigator), to cover the costs of the preparation of a catalogue of highlights of the Bodleian’s Ge‘ez collection to accompany the exhibition. Funding was also received from the Oxford Centre for Byzantine Research towards image costs. Rahel Fronda spent a great deal of time in late 2017 and early 2018 going through the Bodleian’s collection to make a selection of its most important and interesting manuscripts for possible inclusion in the exhibition and catalogue. She also began the process of selecting and contacting contributors to the catalogue.

In 2018, two associated events were held to widen awareness of Ge‘ez manuscripts and related culture. On 28 July, an “Ethiopia and Eritrea Discovery Day” was held in the Blackwell Hall of the Bodleian’s Weston Library, organized by the Bodleian Libraries, in collaboration with the Faculty of Classics, and the Pitt-Rivers Museum. It was attended by mem-

bers of the London and Oxford Eritrean and Ethiopian communities, as well as the wider public.

It was focused around a close-up viewing session of some of the Bodleian's mediaeval Ge'ez manuscripts and other activities (writing in Ge'ez, book binding, colouring, art, religious chants, the telling of the story of Solomon and Sheba, and handling modern Ge'ez manuscripts and writing equipment). The high attendance level (about a thousand people in the course of the day, many of whom had come from London) revealed the wide interest in the culture of Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the Bodleian's Ge'ez collection. As a result of that day, some community members volunteered to help co-curate the exhibition in Summer 2019 of the Bodleian's Ge'ez manuscripts, for which this volume has been prepared.

On 1 September 2018, a study-day style colloquium "Introducing Manuscripts from Ethiopia and Eritrea" was held at the Ioannou Centre for Classical and Byzantine Research, Oxford. At this event, a range of international expert speakers, and discussants from the local Eritrean and Ethiopian communities, introduced the topics to both specialists and a wider audience. Speakers and discussants included: Yosef Araya, Yemane Asfedai, Alessandro Bausi, Solomon Gebreyes Beyene, Philip Booth, Dereje Debella, Marie-Laure Derat, Eyob Derillo, Jacopo Gnisci, Elizabeth Jeffreys, Gianfrancesco Lusini, Judith McKenzie, Mai Musić, Tania Tribe, and Sean M. Winslow. The colloquium was sponsored by the Classics Faculty, the Bodleian Libraries, the Oxford Centre for Byzantine Research, the ERC Advanced Project *Monumental Art of the Christian and Early Islamic East*, Maison Française d'Oxford, and *Beta Masāheft: Manuscripts of Ethiopia and Eritrea*, funded by The Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities through the Academy of Hamburg.

This publication is part of a project with the Ethiopian and Eritrean communities from London, Oxfordshire, and south-east England. We have worked together over eighteen months to discover new ways to exhibit and interpret the Ge'ez collections preserved in the Bodleian Libraries.

Throughout the planning and delivery of the book, the display, and the public event programme, the Bodleian Library staff have learned a great deal about these manuscripts and texts and their continuing relevance for Eritrean and Ethiopian communities in the UK. We are extremely grateful for the enthusiasm, knowledge, and generosity which the Bodleian curatorial team has brought to every aspect of the project.

The publication team would like to acknowledge the partnership between the Bodleian Libraries, the Faculty of Classics, and the Oxford Centre for Byzantine Research, which has been supported by the John Fell Oxford University Press Research Fund and the Helen Hamlyn Trust. We are grateful for the expertise of members of the Anglo-Ethiopian Society and the Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Churches in London.

For their contributions to the events and activities on 28 July 2018 and the subsequent co-curation project, we would like to thank: Yemane Asfedai (Community Outreach Leader, London), Nicola Bird (Community Engagement Officer, Oxford University Museums), Vendi Jukić Buča (Research

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The catalogue has been edited by Jacopo Gnisci to whom the team are most grateful. Since April 2018, Bodleian curatorial assistance for the project has been provided by César Merchán-Hamann. This volume is a first step towards highlighting the Bodleian’s Ge’ez collection since it acquired Bent Juel-Jensen’s manuscripts, and it is hoped that it will lead to further study of the collection as well as its digitization.

Judith McKenzie

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# Abbreviations

## A NOTE ON THE TRANSLITERATION OF ETHIOPIAN NAMES

The spellings used here follow those adopted by the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* (eds. S. Uhlig and A. Bausi).

ca.	<i>circa</i> , about
cat.	catalogue number
ch.	Chapter
cm	centimetre(s)
d.	died
E Ae	<i>Encyclopaedia Aethiopica</i> , eds. S. Uhlig and A. Bausi, 5 vols. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003–2014.
ed(s).	editor(s)
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example
fasc(s).	fascicle(s)
fig(s).	figure(s)
fol(s).	folio(s)
Gn.	Genesis
Jn.	John
lit.	literally
Lk.	Luke
Mk.	Mark
MS(S)	manuscript(s)
Mt.	Matthew
n(n).	note(s)
no(s).	number(s)
Or.	Oriental
p(p).	page(s)
pl(s).	plate(s)
Ps.	Psalms
r.	reign
tr.	translator
vol(s).	volume(s)



ወገ፡ ከግዛ፡ ስብሐ፡



ወሰ፡ ሲቀ፡ ግድታ፡ ጸሊ፡ በክንገጥኦ፡

አሮገ፡ ከህገ፡ አፅር፡ ጸሎተኝ፡



ገገረ፡ ዘዐ  
ገፀገ፡



ግዳስተ፡ ጓበ፡ ጸተ፡ በህክተ፡ ወኦሎቶ፡ ለግዛ፡  
ዐ፡ ነሱ፡ ብሐ፡ ለክግዛ፡ ክብሐር፡ ስቡሐ፡ ዘተስብሐ፡  
ፊሊስ፡ ወመስተ፡ ጽዕነ፡ ወረወ፡ ወስተ፡ ብሐር፡  
ጊዳኤ፡ ወመስወ፡ ጊ፡ ነዘ፡ ለክፍ፡ ላኖ፡ ገ፡  
ወክቶ፡ ክፍሎከ፡ ህ፡ ክሱ፡ ብሐ፡  
ክፍሎከ፡ ክቡ፡ ህ፡ ወክሊ፡ ህሎ፡  
ክግዛ፡ ክብሐር፡ ጸቀ፡ ለቀ፡ ጥ፡ ፀብዐ፡ ወክግዛ፡ ክብ  
ሲ፡ ገለገህ፡ ለፊርዖን፡ ወስራ፡ ዩ፡ ገ፡ ወረወ፡ ወስተ፡  
ጸፊ፡ ጸፊ፡ ወመህተ፡ ጽዕነ፡ በመሥልስተ፡ ሆሐር፡

# 1 History of the Bodleian Collection

*Sebastian Brock*

The Bodleian Library's collection of Ethiopic manuscripts is for the most part made up of three constituent elements: 1) manuscripts brought back by James Bruce (1730–94) from his travels in Ethiopia; 2) manuscripts which can be traced back to the Napier expedition of 1867/68; and 3) manuscripts from the collection of Dr Bent Juel-Jensen (1922–2006), left to the Bodleian Library at his death (fig. 1.1). The first two groups of manuscripts are respectively described in the catalogues by Dillmann<sup>1</sup> and Ullendorff,<sup>2</sup> supplemented by that by Delamarter and Demeke Berhane.<sup>3</sup> The Juel-Jensen manuscripts await a proper catalogue.

## THE FIRST NUCLEUS OF THE COLLECTION

The first Ethiopic manuscript to reach the Bodleian's collection was one of the manuscripts presented in 1636 by Archbishop Laud (1573–1645) to the Library.<sup>4</sup> This was followed by three manuscripts belonging to the great Orientalist Edward Pococke (1604–92), a large number (420) of whose oriental manuscripts had been purchased by the University in 1692 from his widow for £800.<sup>5</sup> These manuscripts had received very brief and inadequate treatment in the catalogue of oriental manuscripts in the Bodleian compiled by the Hungarian John Uri,<sup>6</sup> before being fully described in 1848 by Dillmann in whose catalogue Pococke's manuscripts feature as nos. 9 (Psalter), 17 (Anaphoras), and 21 (Encomium of Heavenly and Earthly Beings), while Laud's manuscript is no. 19 (Harp of Mary, see pp. 72–73). Two further manuscripts (nos. 7 and 8) were evidently among the large number of oriental manuscripts purchased from Robert Huntington in 1693 for £700,<sup>7</sup> while one more (no. 20) was among the manuscripts purchased in 1809 from the traveller E. D. Clarke (1769–1822);<sup>8</sup> a further three of Clarke's manuscripts feature in Ullendorff's Catalogue (nos. 39, 75, 79).

## THE BRUCE MANUSCRIPTS

Twenty five of the remaining 28 manuscripts described by August Dillmann (1823–1894) were among those which had been brought back by James

1 Dillmann 1848.

2 Ullendorff 1951a.

3 Delamarter and Demeke Berhane 2007.

4 The volume is described as follows: "*Liber dictus Organon τῆς Dinghil seu B. Virginis, Aethiopice, cujus Auctor est Abu Georgius Doctor Aethiops*," donated by Laud in 1636, Bernard 1697: 47, no. 337.38; Macray 1984: 84, 88. An English translation of this work can be found in Budge 1922: 297–304.

5 Macray 1984: 161, with handwritten corrections in the Rare Books Reading Room; Bernard 1697: 274, nos. 5329–5331.2–4.

6 Uri 1787: 28.

7 Macray 1984: 161. In Ullendorff's *Conspectus of Shelfmarks* (1959: 29) these are designated Hunt. 626 and 625 (subsequently changed to MS Aeth. d. 13 and MS Aeth. d. 12). In the list of the Huntington manuscripts in Bernard (1697: 285), nos. 625 and 626 are Arabic; nor do they feature in the list of 35 manuscripts earlier donated by Huntington (Bernard 1697: 177–78). The only Ethiopic item (apart from a book) is an alphabet in Ethiopic, with names of the letters (Bernard 1697: 178, no. 3812.40), which does not quite correspond to Dillmann no. 34.1.

8 Macray 1984: 290; his manuscripts were purchased in 1809 for £1000. In Macray's index, s.n. Clarke, S., it is implied that Dillmann's no. 20 was instead given by Samuel Clarke (1624–1669), thirteen of whose manuscripts were purchased in 1670; the list of them in Bernard (1697: 181), however, contains no Ethiopic manuscripts, and Dillmann's no. 20 now rightly has the shelf mark E. D. Clarke or. 40.

FIG. 1.1 MS Aeth. d. 19, Miniature of Moses and Aaron above the beginning of the *Biblical Canticles*, fol. 126r.



FIG. 1.2 MS Bruce 88, Beginning of the *Chronicle of Emperor Na'od*, fol. 30r.

Bruce from his extensive travels in Ethiopia (1769–1771/2) which he much later described from memory in considerable detail in the five volumes of his *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* (1790), a work which subsequently went through a number of editions, often in an abbreviated form.<sup>9</sup> One of these manuscripts had been donated to the Bodleian Library by Bruce in 1788,<sup>10</sup> while the remainder had been purchased in 1843,<sup>11</sup> long after his death. Bruce had prepared himself for his travels by attaining to a certain proficiency in reading Classical Ethiopic (Ge'ez), making use of various works by Hiob Ludolf (1624–1704) who has been described as the founder of Ethiopian studies in Europe. A certain number of Bruce's manuscripts had been purchased by him in the course of his travels, but rather more had been specially commissioned by him; thanks to this latter group it is possible to specify his particular interests, for they fall into two clearly defined categories, biblical books and works of historical interest (fig. 1.2).

Among the latter is the famous *Kəbrä nägəst* (“The Glory of Kings”)<sup>12</sup> – recounting the legendary origins of the Christian Ethiopian rulers and focused around the Queen of Sheba – used to represent the advent of the Solomonic dynasty (1270–1974) as the restoration of a past royal line. Prominent in the former category was a book which forms part of the biblical canon in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, but whose presence is not to be found in the canon of any other Church, namely the Book of Enoch (see pp. 53–57).<sup>13</sup> A copy of the second of these two manuscripts was presented by Bruce to Louis XV on his way back to England (the manuscript is now

9 The second edition (1804–1805), by Alexander Murray is furnished with important notes. Bruce's *Travels* were also translated into both French and German. Murray 1808: 297–300 lists Bruce's manuscripts then still at Kinnaird, and in another appendix (Murray 1808: 362–63) gives details of prices paid by Bruce for the copying of manuscripts.

10 Dillmann 1848: no. 4.

11 Macray 1884: 344–45; the price paid (which also included 70 Arabic manuscripts) was £1000.

12 Dillmann 1848: nos. 26 and 27. For further bibliography on the historical manuscripts, see Wion 2009.

13 Dillmann 1848: nos. 4 and 5.

in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Éthiopien 49), while Dillmann no. 4 was the one manuscript donated by Bruce to the Bodleian on his return to England, no doubt with the hope that it would in due course be edited and translated.

This was a task that was undertaken only well after Bruce's death, by Richard Laurence (1760–1838), Regius Professor of Hebrew in Oxford from 1814 till 1820 (when he became Archbishop of Cassel). Laurence initially provided just an English translation (1821), and only quite a number of years later, the *editio princeps*.<sup>14</sup> He had earlier edited from a manuscript then in his possession<sup>15</sup> two further pseudepigraphical works, the Ascension of Isaiah,<sup>16</sup> a work known in full only in Ethiopic translation, and the Apocalypse of Esdras,<sup>17</sup> which is also known in Latin and Syriac. Finally, in connection with the manuscripts brought back by Bruce is a manuscript giving samples of text (taken from the Song of Songs) in eight different Ethiopic languages (see pp. 95–101).<sup>18</sup>

Notable among the small number of liturgical manuscripts in Dillmann's Catalogue are five quarto size volumes containing the Synaxarion, or calendar of saints for all the days of the year, the main saints being provided with brief biographical details and sometimes also sets of salutations (see p. 59).<sup>19</sup> Since the contents differ considerably from the sources used by Ludolf, Dillmann lists in full the saints commemorated on each day.<sup>20</sup> The Bodleian manuscripts were used in the earlier fascicles of the edition of the Ethiopian Synaxarion in the *Patrologia Orientalis*, but once more manuscripts had come to light and it was clear that the Bodleian manuscripts belonged to the later recension of the work (originally translated from Arabic), they were no longer featured in more recent fascicles.<sup>21</sup>

## LATER ACQUISITIONS

As indicated at the outset, the majority of the sixty-six further manuscripts described in the Catalogue by Edward Ullendorff (1920–2011) were amongst those which had been brought back from Ethiopia in the aftermath of the Napier Expedition, only subsequently reaching the Bodleian through purchase in a piecemeal fashion. As a result of a dispute with the British Government the Emperor Tewodros II (r. 1855–68) had imprisoned the British Consul, Captain Cameron, along with some other British subjects, and subsequently he had made things worse by also imprisoning the special envoy, Hormizd Rassam,<sup>22</sup> who had been dispatched by the British Government with a letter signed by Queen Victoria herself. When an ultimatum still failed to effect the release of the prisoners a military expedition, under Sir Robert Napier, was sent, and Magdala (*Mäqdäla*) – the Emperor's stronghold where he had also amassed a large collection of manuscripts for a new church – was successfully stormed. Some three hundred and fifty from these manuscripts were specially selected to go to the British Museum, while numerous others were acquired by various members of the expedition and found their way to England, eventually to be purchased by the Bodleian and other libraries or individuals.<sup>23</sup>

14 Laurence 1838.

15 Dillmann 1848: no. 7.

16 Laurence 1819.

17 Laurence 1820.

18 Dillmann 1848: no. 33.

19 Dillmann 1848: nos. 22–25.

20 Dillmann 1848: 37–68.

21 *Patrologia Orientalis* 1:5 (where it is one of three manuscripts used), 7:3, 9:4 and 15:5; later fascicles no longer cite it on the grounds that its variants were unimportant (26.1: 5, note 1), better manuscripts having in the meantime come to light. There is an English translation of the whole Ethiopian Synaxarion in Budge 1928.

22 A name well known to Mesopotamian archaeologists, since he had previously worked with Henry Layard during his excavations in northern Mesopotamia at Nimrud. Hormizd Rassam once owned Ullendorff no. 93 (a magic scroll); it was subsequently bequeathed to the Bodleian by A. H. Sayce in 1933.

23 Pankhurst 1973; Ancel and Nomsitsin 2014.



FIG. 1.3 MSS Aeth. e. 31,  
Aeth. f. 4, Aeth. f. 10,  
Three unfolded magic scrolls.

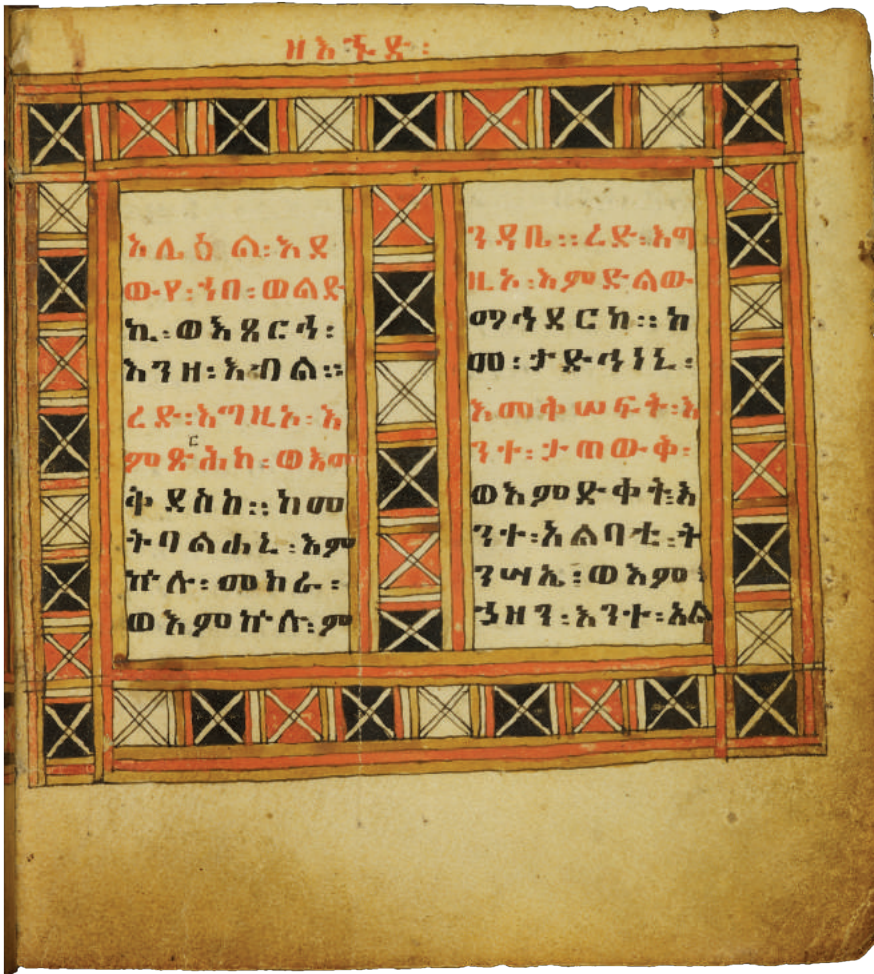


FIG. 1.4 MS Aeth. e. 28,  
Reading for the Sunday from  
the *Harṣ of Mary*, fol. 131r.

Among the other manuscripts in Ullendorff's Catalogue, there are three further manuscripts formerly belonging to E. D. Clarke (nos. 39, 75 and 79; see pp. 87–93), while no. 85, a theological work largely in Amharic, formerly belonged to the Indian Institute, to which it had been presented in 1885 by the Rev. S. C. Malan, best known for his translations from many different languages of the Christian Orient. Particularly intriguing is Ullendorff no. 100, consisting of tracings of Ethiopic fragments incorporated into bindings etc. of Armenian manuscripts in Etchmiadzin; these had been made by the noted Armenian scholar F. C. Conybeare in 1888, and were presented by him to the Bodleian in 1892; original scraps from some of the fragments seem to be incorporated in a folder (no. 101A).

Many of the manuscripts in Ullendorff's Catalogue serve to fill in gaps left by Bruce's limited choice of genres; thus liturgy is now better represented, while magic scrolls, sometimes more charitably described as "healing scrolls," now feature for the first time (fig. 1.3; see pp. 103–11). In the Preface to his Catalogue Ullendorff points to the presence of a rare Life (his no. 78) of a female saint named *Krəstos Šämra*, who probably lived in the fourteenth or fifteenth century; he added that "It is hoped to edit the *Gädlä Krəstos Šämra* at an early date."<sup>24</sup> This intention was soon fulfilled by E. Cerulli in the Ethiopic series of the *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*,<sup>25</sup>

24 Ullendorff 1951a: v.

25 Cerulli 1956.



FIG. 1.5 MS Aeth. e. 33, James son of Alphaeus and Thomas, fol. 104v.

based on the Oxford manuscript. *Krəstos Šämra* has much more recently been the subject of an interesting study from a feminist standpoint by an Ethiopian scholar.<sup>26</sup>

Fourteen further Ethiopian manuscripts were acquired subsequent to Ullendorff's Catalogue, but prior to the acquisition of the Juel-Jensen collection. These were in part donated and in part purchased; they are described by Delamarter and Demeke Berhane<sup>27</sup> in a catalogue where interest is focused more on codicology than on content. These include several manuscripts with musical notation, and a few are likely to have reached Britain in the aftermath of the Magdala expedition. Two manuscripts include some illuminations (nos. 1 and 9).<sup>28</sup> The illuminator of no. 9, containing the Harp of Mary (fig. 1.4), has been identified as the person who illustrated British Library (Or. 516) and, as will be seen below, some folios purchased by Bent Juel-Jensen (see pp. 74–77). Unlike the case in the earlier catalogues, a sample of the script of each manuscript is provided in the Plates.

### THE JUEL-JENSEN COLLECTION

The third main component of the Bodleian Library's Ethiopian manuscript collection consists primarily of the sizable collection of 45 manuscripts

26 Mecca 2006.

27 Delamarter and Demeke Berhane 2007: nos. 1–14.

28 For no. 9 (MS Aeth. e. 28), see Forbes 2002.

amassed by the medical doctor and book collector Bent Juul-Jensen (1922–2006) during the last three decades of his life, once he had fallen “hopelessly under the spell of the Ethiopian highlands.”<sup>29</sup>

His earliest acquisitions were made on a visit to Ethiopia in 1973,<sup>30</sup> when he was able to purchase in Lalibela “a nice Psalter and a *Dəggʷa*,” or Hymnal. He also acquired at that time four unbound folios from a saint’s Life, evidently illuminated by the same person as the artist of a manuscript in the British Library (Or. 516).<sup>31</sup>

The following year he took part in the Oxford University Expedition to Ethiopia, visiting the remote eastern region of Tigray. The members of the Expedition visited over twenty churches, and when it proved possible a brief inventory of the manuscripts belonging to each of the twenty churches was made; this was included in the subsequent account of the Expedition.<sup>32</sup> Included in more detail is a description of a Gospel manuscript dated 1366/63 or 1438/39 (depending on which era was intended) in the church of Maryam Mägdälawit, Amba Dära (see pp. 29–35).<sup>33</sup>

In their *Rock Hewn Churches* mention is also delightfully made of how a copy of Enoch was successfully commissioned by “the vellomaniac member of the expedition,” this involved the initial purchase of ten goatskins, while the payment for the final manuscript was 110 Ethiopian dollars.<sup>34</sup>

Three later acquisitions to his collection, made in 1984 and 1985, were the subject of a further article.<sup>35</sup> All three manuscripts are illuminated, and in two cases the illuminations are exceptionally old, dating from around the fifteenth century (fig. 1.5). One of these, a Psalter, has splendid portrayals of King David playing a harp, and of King Solomon (fig. 5.1). A later manuscript, of the seventeenth or eighteenth century, turned out to be one of the manuscripts belonging to Valerie Susan Lady Meux (1847–1910), a flamboyant and highly unconventional woman who also had an interest in collecting Egyptian antiquities (E. A. W. Budge compiled a catalogue for her collection).<sup>36</sup> The five illuminated manuscripts that she purchased came from among those brought to England after the Napier expedition.<sup>37</sup> Since money was no hindrance she arranged for Budge to produce facsimile editions of them. Juul-Jensen’s manuscript, which contains the Life of Hanna (Anna) the mother of Mary, is no. 4 of Lady Meux’s collection. A translation of the text was published by Budge in 1922.<sup>38</sup>

## CLASSMARKS/SHELFMARKS

Dillmann’s *Catalogus* does not give any shelfmarks or classmarks, though these have been added by hand in the copy of the catalogue in the David Reading Room of the Weston Library of the Bodleian. Ullendorff’s *Catalogue*, on the other hand, gives the shelf mark immediately alongside the Catalogue number, and he conveniently provides a Conspectus of Shelfmarks, with their corresponding Catalogue numbers in Dillmann’s *Catalogus* as well as in his own.<sup>39</sup> In a few cases these classmarks have subsequently been altered; this is the case with the two Huntington manuscripts, mentioned above.<sup>40</sup>

29 Juul-Jensen 1991: 20. In a hand-written note added at the end of an offprint describing his collection of books (Juul-Jensen 1966), he likewise says “I lost my heart to Ethiopia in 1973” (the much-annotated offprint in question, which was given to the late Professor Edward Ullendorff in 1975, has an added printed page with the title *A highly-personal affair: The Library of Bent Juul-Jensen*). A portrait of him can be found in Hahn and West 2017, which describes the collection of Aksumite coins donated by Juul-Jensen to the Ashmolean Museum.

30 Thomas 1990: 392. This whole number of *The Bodleian Library Record* is devoted to articles in his honour, commemorating his retirement as the University of Oxford’s Medical Officer.

31 Juul-Jensen 1977.

32 Juul-Jensen and Rowell 1975: 50–83, and photos 85–119. A catalogue of these, with 344 plates is to be found in Bodleian MS Facs. Or. d. 10.10\*.

33 Juul-Jensen and Rowell 1975: 73–82.

34 Juul-Jensen and Rowell 1975: 48; the copy was bequeathed to the Bodleian with his other manuscript (MS Aeth. d. 18); see Erho and Stuckenbruck 2013: 126.

35 Juul-Jensen 1987; see also Chojnacki 1990.

36 See the Virtual Egyptian Museum, [www.virtual-egyptian-museum.org/Collection/FullVisit](http://www.virtual-egyptian-museum.org/Collection/FullVisit) (accessed 01/01/2019).

37 Pankhurst 1973: 26–29. An account of how she came to buy the manuscripts, with their subsequent publication in facsimile editions, is given by Budge 1922: vii–xvi.

38 Budge 1922: 1–53, with a prefatory note on lxx.

39 Ullendorff 1951a: 29.

40 See note 7.

ዐ : ኃ : ጊ : ል : ።

እከመ፡በዙ፡ንገ፡እለ፡አንዙ፡ወ  
 መኑ፡ይግበሩ፡ወይምሀሩ፡በእ  
 ንተ፡ግብር፡ዘአምን፡በላዕሊ፡ነ፡  
 በከመ፡መሀሩ፡እለ፡ቀደመ፡  
 መላዮቶ፡ወተልእኩም፡በቃሉ፡  
 ወረቶዓረ፡ሊተረ፡እቶልም፡እም  
 ጥንቱ፡ወእመይቶ፡ለኩሉ፡በበ፡  
 መቶልዉ፡እጽሕፍ፡ለከ፡ዩዚዝ፡  
 ቲምፍሊ፡ለአንዙ፡ከመ፡ታእም  
 ር፡ጥዩቀ፡በእንተ፡ኩሉ፡ኃይለ፡  
 ነገር፡ቶምህርተ፡ዘተመሀርከ፡  
 ወከነ፡በመዋዕለ፡ሂሮደስ፡ንጉ  
 ሠ፡ይሀደ፡ሀሉ፡አሐደ፡ካህን፡  
 ዘከመ፡ዘካርዖስ፡በመዋዕለ፡ኦ  
 ብዮ፡ወብእሲቱረ፡እምአዋል  
 ደ፡አሮን፡ወስማ፡ኢልሳቤጥ፡  
 ወክልኢሆመ፡ጸድቃን፡እመን  
 ቱ፡በቅድመ፡እግዚአብሔር፡  
 ወዮሐውሩ፡በኩለ፡ቶእዘዙ፡  
 ። ወኩንንዮቲሀ፡ለእግዚአ  
 ብሔር፡ወንዩሐን፡እመንቱ፡ወ  
 አልዮመ፡ወሉደ፡እከመ፡መክን፡

ዘ : ሉ : ቃ : ስ : ።

ይከቲ፡ኢልሳቤጥ፡ወክልኢሆ  
 መ፡ልሂቃን፡እመንቱ፡ወኃለፊ፡  
 መዋዕሊሆመ፡ወእምዝ፡አመ  
 ደገብር፡ግብር፡ክህነተ፡በእብራ  
 ቲ፡ቅድመ፡እግዚአብሔር፡በከ  
 መ፡ይገብሩ፡ካህናት፡ወበጽሐ፡  
 ጊዜ፡የዩጥን፡ወዮአ፡ቤተ፡መቅደ  
 ሱ፡ለእግዚአብሔር፡ወኩሉመ፡  
 ሕዝብ፡ሀለዉ፡በመልኦመ፡ይ  
 ጼልዮ፡በክፍአ፡በጊዜ፡ሰዓተ፡  
 ዕጣን፡ወአስተርክዮ፡መልአክ፡  
 እግዚአብሔር፡በመንገለ፡የማን፡  
 ምሥዋዕ፡ዕጣን፡ወሶበ፡ርእዮ፡  
 ደንገ፡ዘካርዮስ፡ወፍርሀተ፡ወረ  
 ዓደ፡ወረደ፡ለዕሊሆ፡ወይቢሉ፡  
 መልአክ፡ኢትፍራህ፡ዘካርዮስ፡  
 ከከመ፡ተሰመዐ፡ጸሎትክ፡ወብእ  
 ሲተከረ፡ኢልሳቤጥ፡ቶወልደ፡በ  
 ከ፡ወልደ፡ወትሰመዮ፡ሰዋ፡ዮሐ  
 ንከ፡ወይከውነክ፡ቶፍሥሕተ፡ወሐ  
 ህተ፡ወብዙንን፡ይኮራሥሐ፡  
 በልደቱ፡እከመ፡ሀቢይ፡ይከውን፡



## 2 What is Ge'ez?

*David Appleyard*

The overwhelming majority of Christian manuscripts from Ethiopia and Eritrea is written in the Ge'ez language. Ge'ez, which is also called Classical Ethiopic or just Ethiopic is a member of the Semitic family of languages, the more commonly known members of which are Arabic and Hebrew. Ge'ez, which is not however especially closely related to either of these, is the oldest member of the Ethiopian Semitic group, which as the name suggests, is only found in Ethiopia and Eritrea, and which includes two of the major languages of the region, Amharic and Tigrinya. It is not known for certain when Semitic languages were introduced into the territories encompassed by future Ethiopia and Eritrea, but as the closest relatives of Ethiopian Semitic are some minority languages spoken in today's Eastern Yemen, neighbouring Oman and the island of Soqatra, remnants of the pre-Arabic language(s) of the region, it is likely that they came from the Asian side of the Red Sea, probably in the first half of the first millennium BC.

Ge'ez was the language of the city of Aksum in what is now northern Ethiopia. The Kingdom of Aksum, which took its name from its capital, was a powerful and influential state during the first seven centuries of the Christian era, once rated by several late antique authors, such as Rufinus of Aquileia, as an equal to Rome and Persia. Lying at a crossroads of trade and communication, Aksum grew as a centre with links not only with the Nile Valley, the Arabian Peninsula and the Red Sea, but also as far away as the Eastern Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean and India itself. Along with its position as a centre of trade came geopolitical influence outside Ethiopia when, for instance, in the second and third decades of the sixth century AD the Aksumite King Kaleb (r. ca. first half of the sixth century) intervened in Yemen at the request of the Byzantine Emperor Justin I (r. 518–27) in defence of Christians persecuted by the Jewish king of South Arabia. Aksum continued to have direct and later indirect control over the region until the arrival of the Sassanid Persians in ca. AD 570. The rise of Islam in the seventh century and its conquests saw an end to Aksumite influence in Arabia and, indeed, soon deprived the Ethiopian Christians of their control over the Red Sea coast.

FIG. 2.1 MS Aeth. c. 14, Beginning of the *Gospel of Luke*, fol. 62r.

Ge'ez had, however, by this time become established as the language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and it continues as such until today. It is worth remembering that though Ge'ez ceased to be a spoken language over a thousand years ago, its survival is due to its place in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Our knowledge of the language comes almost totally from the written, manuscript literature of the Church. The only exception is the relatively small handful of Aksumite inscriptions on stone and occasionally on metal – legends on Aksumite coins providing little more than names.<sup>1</sup>

## THE ETHIOPIC SCRIPT

Aksum's links with the outside world had significant effects on the Ge'ez language and later on Ge'ez literature. First of all, the Ethiopic (or Ge'ez) script in which the language is written derives from a script from South Arabia. The earliest examples of writing found in Northern Ethiopia and Eritrea are small inscriptions in South Arabian language and script dating to the first half of the first millennium BC. Contemporary with these is a larger number of mostly short inscriptions written in the South Arabian script, but in a language that shows a mixture of features exhibiting interference with an early form of a Semitic language close to Ge'ez, suggesting they were written by Ethiopians and not South Arabians. It is now thought that the number of South Arabian immigrants to the region was relatively small.

The South Arabian script and the earliest development of it that can be identified as Ge'ez are unvocalized, which is to say they only mark consonants like other Semitic scripts such as Arabic, Hebrew, and Syriac. Various systems for marking vowels were later developed for these, essentially to ensure the correct reading of religious texts. In Ethiopia, too, a system of vocalization was created, but this is fundamentally different from what we see in Arabic, Hebrew, or Syriac. There dots, dashes, and other strokes are inserted above and below the consonant letters, but in the Ge'ez script additions and/or alterations are made directly to the consonant base (fig. 2.1). This system closely resembles the way in which ancient Indian scripts, such as Brāhmī, work and it is more than likely that Indian influence lies behind what we find in Ge'ez. At first sight this may seem strange, but we should remember that Aksum had trading links with India and Indian inscriptions have been found on the island of Soqotra. Aksumite coins have also been discovered in India, as evidence of Aksum's wide-ranging contacts.

A further indication of a connection is that in both the Indian and the Ethiopian systems the base form of the letter is used to represent a consonant followed by an *a*-like vowel. So, in Ge'ez **ቤ** indicates *bä* and the addition of short lines and circles to this base marks other vowels: **ቡ** *bu*, **ቢ** *bi*, **ባ** *ba*, **ቤ** *be*, **ብ** *bə* or *b* alone, **ቦ** *bo*. Not all consonants follow exactly the same pattern of marking vowels; so, for example: **ሠ** *sä*, **ሡ** *su*, **ሢ** *si*, **ሣ** *sa*, **ሤ** *se*, **ሦ** *sə/s*, **ሷ** *so*, or **ቀ** *qä*, **ቁ** *qu*, **ቂ** *qi*, **ቃ** *qa*, **ቄ** *qe*, **ቅ** *qə/q*, **ቆ** *qo*. In addition to the combination of 26 consonant bases and seven vowels there are 20 further letters indicating what are called labiovelar consonant combinations,

<sup>1</sup> For additional bibliography about the history of the language, see Hudson 1997; S. Weninger 2005, "Ge'ez," EAe 2: 732–35.

namely  $q^w$ ,  $h^w$ ,  $k^w$  and  $g^w$  with vowels  $\ddot{a}$ ,  $i$ ,  $a$ ,  $e$  and  $\varepsilon$ ; so:  $\text{ቄ } q^w\ddot{a}$ ,  $\text{ቅ } q^wi$ ,  $\text{ቆ } q^wa$ ,  $\text{ቇ } q^we$ ,  $\text{ቈ } q^w\varepsilon$ . This produces a system of 202 letters. The Ge'ez script is therefore not properly speaking an alphabet, but a syllabary, in which each letter indicates a consonant plus a vowel or in the case of the sixth "vowel" letter also a consonant alone. Deciding whether to read ብ, for instance, as  $b\varepsilon$  or just  $b$  is for the most part a matter of following syllable structure rules. This is further complicated by the fact that double consonants are not indicated and so  $bb\varepsilon$  and  $b(\varepsilon)$  are not differentiated in the script;  $\text{ገብረ } gäbrä$  but  $\text{ይገብር } yägäbbär$ .

Another place where the Ge'ez script differs from other Semitic systems is that the direction of writing is from left to right, which is probably due to the influence of Greek, the *lingua franca* of the trading world to which Aksum belonged. Examples of the vocalized Ge'ez script appear from the middle of the fourth century AD, at first contemporary with the unvocalized version, but soon replacing it completely. The idea of indicating vowels may also be partly due to Greek influence, but the method is undoubtedly of Indian origin. After all, Greek inscriptions dating from the third century BC are attested in Eritrea (Adulis), and Greek was used in inscriptions by some Aksumite kings. Greek influence on the Ge'ez script is also to be seen in the creation of a special letter for the sound  $p$ , which did not exist in South Arabian; so:  $T p\ddot{a}$  was most likely modelled on Greek  $\pi$ . A letter for a different  $p$ , the so-called glottalized  $p$ , was also created but based on an existing letter:  $\text{አ } p\ddot{a}$ . This sound is not very common, but it does occur in the name for Ethiopia, itself a borrowing from Greek:  $\text{ኢትዮጵያ } (ityoph\ddot{y}a)$ . However, the clearest borrowings from Greek into the Ge'ez script are the numeral signs, taken from the Greek usage of the letters of the alphabet to indicate numbers; so, for instance: 1  $\text{አ } (\text{Greek } \Lambda)$ , 2  $\text{ቤ } (\text{Greek } \text{Β})$ , 3  $\text{Γ } (\text{Greek } \Gamma)$ , 4  $\text{ደ } (\text{Greek } \Delta)$ , 5  $\text{አ } (\text{Greek } \text{Ε})$  and so on (fig. 2.2).

Ethiopian manuscripts, increasingly from the eighteenth century onwards, show a free interchange of certain letters, such as the two s's ( $\text{ሰ}$  and  $\text{ሰ}$ ) and the three h's ( $\text{ሀ}$ ,  $\text{ሁ}$  and  $\text{ሂ}$ ). This is because in the reading tradition the respective letters are pronounced the same. Ge'ez had probably ceased to be an everyday spoken language by the tenth century, if not slightly earlier, and was replaced by one or more spoken varieties from which Tigrinya developed, spoken in the heartland of the ancient Kingdom of Aksum. The other modern Ethiopian Semitic languages are now believed to have developed out of other varieties or dialects akin to Ge'ez but not exactly the same as Ge'ez. In later manuscript production, once Ge'ez had ceased to be a vernacular language, the influence of the scribes' native speech may be seen in the confusion of these letters.

The Kingdom of Aksum declined rapidly from the early to mid-seventh century, possibly partly due to economic crisis, but the expansion of Islam must have also played a major role. According to Islamic tradition the king of Aksum was still in a position to give shelter and protection to the first Muslim immigrants in AD 615/6 during the so-called first *hijra*. By AD 702, however, the Dahlak islands off the Red Sea coast were already occupied by Muslims, and during the same century population movements in the Eritre-



an and North Ethiopian highlands further weakened the failing Kingdom of Aksum. From this time onwards Ge'ez increasingly became a written language only. Today, there is a single reading tradition of Ge'ez whatever the native tongue is of the reader and this follows the Amharic pronunciation of such letters as the two *s*'s and three *h*'s: ሰ and ሥ as *s*, ሀ, ሐ and ኀ as *h*, and so on. These and other letters that are not pronounced the same are not, however, confused in the oldest Ge'ez inscriptions or manuscripts, and the fact that they exist in the Ge'ez script, which had already reduced the number of letters of the South Arabian script, suggests that they once represented discrete sounds. This is why the usual academic transcription of Ge'ez employs different symbols: *s* and *ś*, *h*, *ḥ* and *ḥ̣*, and similarly *ʾ* and *ʿ* for ሐ and ፀ, respectively, now both read as a light glottal stop or brief pause between adjacent vowels, and so on.<sup>2</sup>

## GE'EZ LITERATURE

The adoption of Christianity as the state religion of Aksum around AD 340 provided the impetus for, and governed in large part the nature of, Ge'ez literature. Only a body of inscriptions survive from before that date, of which many are very brief, with the exception of the few great royal inscriptions. The most famous of these were left by King 'Ezana (r. ca. AD 330–365/70) and recount his military campaigns. One is particularly significant as it provides a corroboration of the adoption of Christianity. In his earlier inscriptions he invokes pre-Christian deities, but in this one he substitutes a single God, referred to variously as *əgzi'ā sāmay* ("Lord of heaven"), *əgzi'ā k'wəllu* ("Lord of all"), and *əgzi'ā bəher* ("Lord of the earth"), this last now being the standard term for "God" or "The Lord." Perhaps the caution in 'Ezana's inscription was meant to avoid antagonising his subjects who still followed pagan religious practices.

No other written literature from pre-Christian Ethiopia has survived, though it is more than likely that there were other documents written on perishable materials. From South Arabia come records of contracts written on the ribs of palm leaves, and a trading nation like Aksum must have had similar records. Surviving literature from Aksumite times is therefore all religious and Christian, comprising not just the text of the Bible but a range of patristic and liturgical materials. Later Ge'ez literature is likewise predominantly religious in nature, and includes works of theology and spirituality, lives of saints, and religious poetry. The major exceptions are royal chronicles and other histories.

Two things stand out about Ge'ez literature when compared, for instance, with Western European literatures. First of all, it is in large part a literature of translation. There are exceptions, of course, such as chronicles, some religious treatises and homilies, as well as various Lives of indigenous saints and religious poetry, all original Ethiopian compositions (see pp. 61–62, 72–73). The second feature of Ge'ez literature that stands out is that a great deal of it, including many translations, was composed after Ge'ez had ceased to be a spoken, vernacular language. It has often been

<sup>2</sup> For further discussion of the Ge'ez script and additional bibliography, see Uhlig 1990; Voigt 2017.

remarked that in this it resembles the use of Latin in mediaeval Christian Europe. Only the translation of the Bible, which seems to have been a lengthy, somewhat piecemeal process beginning with the Gospels (see p. 29), and some other translations of patristic literature made between the fourth and sixth or seventh centuries were made when Ge'ez was still a living, spoken language.

The production of this written literature will have greatly contributed to the fixing or standardization of the language, and it is this form of Ge'ez that has continued in later literature, aside from a few small influences in vocabulary and the confusion of some letters, as mentioned earlier, stemming from the influence of the spoken languages (Amharic and Tigrinya) of translators, authors, and scribes. Ge'ez literature can therefore be divided into two periods: the Early Period when Ge'ez was still a living language, and the Late Period, following the demise of Aksum and the subsequent rise of the Kingdom of Ethiopia further south.

During the Early Period the Kingdom of Aksum maintained close links with the Christian East, including the Coptic Church in Egypt, on which the Ethiopian Church depended, and the Syrian Church in the Levant. Greek was the main written language of the Christian East and it is from Greek that the earliest Ge'ez translations were made. The Ge'ez Bible text underwent some later revision, particularly in the fourteenth century, drawing on Christian Arabic versions, which were in turn either made from or influenced by Syriac translations. This explains why some scholars have seen Syriac features in the Ge'ez text as we now have it. Given the ties with the Coptic Church it is perhaps surprising that few Coptic influences have been detected. Of course, later translations that were made of texts from Coptic Egypt were done from Arabic and not Coptic.

Ethiopian tradition speaks of missionary monks, the so-called Nine Saints, coming from the Eastern Mediterranean world between the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century, bringing books with them, presumably written in Greek (fig. 2.3; see pp. 62–63). Amongst texts translated at this time is the great collection of homilies by various Church Fathers known under the name of *Qerellos*, after Saint Cyril of Alexandria, as well as the monastic rules of the Egyptian Abbot Pachomius (*Pak'əmis*), though the Rule of Pachomius is usually known in Ge'ez as *Šər'atä maḥbär* (“Rules of the Community”), and a handful of non-canonical works such as the Book of Enoch and Jubilees. The full text of the Book of Enoch (*Mäḥafä Henok*) is known only in the Ge'ez version, and was unknown in Europe until the traveller James Bruce brought back manuscripts (see pp. 56–57). Also ascribed to the Early Period is the composition of the Liturgy, known as the *Dəgg'ä*, and containing hymns and antiphons for the Divine Office, traditionally said to have been composed by the sixth century Saint Yared. This attribution is however disputed as no evidence about him dates from before the fifteenth century.

After the decline of Aksum as an urban centre and royal capital Ethiopia entered into a kind of Dark Ages for several centuries about which little is known aside from hints drawing on legends, such as that of Gudit or Āsato,



conflated with traditions of pagan uprisings against Christian Ethiopia and population movements in the Northern Highlands.

The centre of power in the country gradually moved further south. In the mid-twelfth century there emerged in the area of Lasta, some 120 miles south of Aksum, a dynasty later known as the Zag<sup>w</sup>e, the most famous member of which was King Lalibāla, after whom the locality with the largest number of rock-hewn churches is named. The Zag<sup>w</sup>e kings (fig. 8.6) were not of Aksumite descent, unlike the claims of the so-called Solomonic line which superseded them in 1270. These latter were promoted by the text known as the *Kəbrä nāgäšt* (“Glory of the Kings”), which a colophon in the text states was translated from Coptic into Arabic in the reign of King Lalibāla, but was not straightaway translated into Ge‘ez because the Zag<sup>w</sup>e

FIG. 2.3 MS Aeth. d. 23, Seven of the Nine Saints receiving their monastic garb from Pachomius, fol. 8r.



FIG. 2.4 MS Aeth. e. 28,  
The Beginning of the *Harp of Mary*,  
fol. 2r.

were not of Solomonic descent. The high standard of the Ge'ez has led to the suggestion that the *Kəbrä nügästä* is an original Ge'ez composition drawing on older sources, but most scholars prefer to continue to regard it as a translation from an Arabic original, now lost. The debate continues but what is certain is that the work did not make its appearance in Ethiopia until the early years of the Solomonic dynasty and in any case before 1321, when a local ruler of Āndārta in Northern Ethiopia, named as having commanded the composition of the text, fell from power.

As with the *Kəbrä nügästä* (if indeed it is a translation from Arabic), throughout the later period of Ge'ez literature Arabic and specifically Christian Arabic was the language from which translations were made. The metropolitan Abunä Sälama (1348–88), who was given the epithet *Mätärg'am* ("Translator"), brought to Ethiopia a quantity of service books and hagiographical works, which he either translated himself or had translated from Arabic into Ge'ez. Tradition credits him with translations of the Lectionary for Passion Week (*Gəbrä həmmamat*), several Lives of Saints, a variety of theological texts such as the Homilies by Jacob of Serug and Cyril of Jerusalem, the Testaments of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the *Filkəyos*, one of the most important texts of Ethiopian monastic literature, and the work known as the Lament of Mary (*Laha Maryam*).

Over the following century or so there was an explosion of Ge'ez literature, again mostly in the form of translations, including such important texts as the *Contendings of the Apostles* (*Gädlä ḥawaryat*), which is a collection of apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, the *Synaxarium* (*Ṣənkəssar*), a calendar of commemorations of saints and martyrs with brief accounts of their lives and deeds, the *Senodos*, which deals with various aspects of ecclesiastical practice, the *Didəsqəliä* (“Didascalía”) another pseudo-apostolic text, and the *Horologium* or *Book of Hours* (*Mäṣḥafä sä'atat*), comprising Psalms, biblical readings and hymns for use in the Church service at stated hours of the night and day. Later, a major work of Marian literature, the *Miracles of Mary* (*Tä'amməḥä Maryam*) was translated towards the end of the fourteenth century, in subsequent centuries leading to the production of some outstandingly beautiful illuminated manuscripts with illustrations to accompany each miracle story, the number of which rose by the eighteenth century to over 300.

Not all Ge'ez literature of this period however was in the form of translations. Original works were also composed. An unidentified author who wrote under the sobriquet “the orthodox” (*Rətu'a ḥaymanot*) and who flourished in the late fourteenth century composed a collection of homilies. Another author was Abba Giyorgis of Sägla (d. 1476), who composed a number of important works, most notably the *Arganonä Maryam* (“Harp of Mary;” fig. 2.4), part of the growing body of Marian literature. The most famous author of this period, however, was Emperor Zär'a Ya'əqob (r. 1434–68). Most of his compositions are in defence of his theological and Christological positions. His reign, like that of his father Dawit II (r. 1379/80–1413), saw an increase in theological division and controversy, in particular associated with the followers of Ewostəwos (the Eustatheans) and Ḥṣṭifanos (the Stephanites). Prominent in these controversies were questions of the observance of a Saturday Sabbath, the theology of the Trinity, the veneration of icons and the Cross, and the cult of the Virgin Mary.

Zär'a Ya'əqob, probably in conjunction with scholars in his entourage, produced at least ten polemical works, such as the *Ṭomarä təsbə't* (“Epistle of Humanity”), a collection of homilies designed to counter superstitious practices and magic, the *Mäṣḥafä milad* (“Book of the Nativity”), a homily, as its name suggests, on the Nativity of Christ, and the *Mäṣḥafä bərhan* (“Book of Light”), a voluminous collection of treatises advocating the reform of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. There was fear that the Church was becoming riven by diverse practices and lacked uniformity and theological rigour. Zär'a Ya'əqob proposed excessively strict measures whereby Christians were required by law, under pain of harsh punishment, to attend daily lessons at Church, to paint the sign of the Cross on their clothes and other possessions, and to bear the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost on their foreheads. Under Zär'a Ya'əqob more miracles were added to the collection of the *Miracles of Mary*, which was first translated under his father, Emperor Dawit II.

A new, non-religious genre which first appeared in the Late Period was historiographical writing in the form of royal chronicles, such as that of Em-

peror ‘Amdä Şəyon I (r. 1314–44). It is still under discussion whether this is contemporary with the events described, or whether it dates from the fifteenth century. There is a hagiography of the late twelfth- to early thirteenth-century King Lalibäla, but this certainly does not date from the period of his life. Even the histories of Emperor Zär’a Ya‘əqob and his son and successor Bā‘ədä Maryam I (r. 1468–78) and the surviving excerpts of the histories of his sons and successors seem to have been written after the respective individuals’ deaths, albeit not long after. The events of the sixteenth century, during which Ethiopia suffered a couple of catastrophic events that threatened the survival of the Christian kingdom, are recorded in several royal chronicles. So, from the sixteenth century we have the histories of Emperors Ləbnä Dəngəl (r. 1508–40), Gälawdewos (r. 1540–59), Minas (r. 1559–63), and Śārşä Dəngəl (r. 1563–97; see p. 82).

However, in spite of the upheavals of the time, first the devastating war or “*jihād*” of Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Ġāzī, known in Ethiopian tradition as Aḥmäd Grañ, followed by the migration of the Oromo people from the south into a large part of the Ethiopian Highlands, the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were a period of some productivity for Ge‘ez literature and saw the translation and creation of theological works, such as the *Haymanotä abäw* (“The Faith of the Fathers”) from an Arabic compilation of the writings of Church Fathers and Patriarchs (see p. 89). The translation from Arabic of the *Fəṯḥa nägäšt* (“Law of the Kings”), a law code dealing with both religious and secular questions, probably also dates to this period, though tradition credits Emperor Zär’a Ya‘əqob with its introduction. The same period also saw the composition of original works such as an account of the Oromo and their migration, known as the *Zenahu lägalla* (“History of the Galla”), Galla being an older, now disused term for the Oromo, written by Abba Baḥrəy. Baḥrəy was a writer of great talent and a monk of profound learning and knowledge who also composed several collections of hymns and religious poetry, of which we might mention the *Mäzmurä Krəstos* (“Psalms of Christ”), modelled on the Psalms of David, and the *Mälkä’ä Gäbrə’el* (“Image of Gabriel”).

The genre called *mälkä’*, literally “likeness” or “image,” is a type of religious poem praising different parts of the body of a saint and is now a necessary component in the liturgical commemoration of a saint. The genre seems to have started during the mid-fifteenth century, but only during the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did the composition of *mälkä’* poems increase to any great degree. So, the *Mälkä’ä Maryam* and the *Mälkä’ä Iyäsus*, commemorating Mary and Jesus respectively, are now part of the daily prayers of the clergy.

There also flourished at this time another type of poetry, the *qəne*, meaning something like “intonation,” the origins of which may go back to the early fifteenth century or before, though pious tradition ascribes their creation to the sixth-century Saint Yared. These were primarily improvised, oral compositions, though some collections of *qəne* were written down. They are used in the liturgy as hymns and have a rigid structure and must include a hidden meaning, called the *wärq* or “gold,” behind the surface meaning,



Fig. 2.5 MS Aeth. g. 7, A magic scroll and its protective case.

called the *säm* or “wax” in Amharic (*säm* in Ge‘ez), an allusion to the lost-wax process, as well as adhering to a fixed rhyme pattern. The oral composition of *qane* in Ge‘ez continues to this day amongst some clergy, though writing them down has virtually ceased, but an Amharic form of the genre now exists, which is often used to flatter people of power and authority.

There is one last genre of literature represented in this exhibition that needs to be mentioned. The belief that prayer can heal physical and mental sickness gave rise to a type of prayer which, for the want of a better word, may be called “magical.” Written examples of this type of prayer predate Christianity in the Eastern Mediterranean world, perhaps by many centuries (we need only think of ancient Egypt). In Ethiopia written magical prayers are used by Christians and Muslims alike, for whom sickness comes from supernatural forces which can be combatted and neutralized by the use of words of power, magical formulae, and magical names, such as the “secret” names of God and angels. Ethiopian tradition believes that Jesus Christ himself revealed these secret names to Mary and the Disciples. The Church sought to suppress this kind of literature even though certain parts of the clergy (the *däbtära* or non-ordained but more educated clerics) were responsible for its creation and perpetration.

Emperor Zär’a Ya‘eqob in particular strove to stamp it out, boasting in his work the *Ṭomarä təsbəʾt* that he destroyed numerous manuscripts containing such prayers, fearful that magic was being used by his enemies to destroy him. Most magical prayers are now found in the format of the magic scroll, called *kətab*, which the faithful may wear rolled up or suspend in their house (see pp. 104–11; figs. 1.3, 2.5). These scrolls or rolls combine often set prayers and formulae with talismanic images and drawings. Also known are manuscripts in codex form giving sample texts and drawings, a kind of pattern book for *däbtära*. Some manuscripts that often feature texts such as the *Ləfäfü šədq* (“Bandlet of Righteousness”), the *Mäftəhe šəray* (“Loosener of Spells”), and the *Ḥašurä mäsqäl* (“Rampart of the Cross”) can also be found in codex-form.<sup>3</sup>

3 For further references on Ge‘ez literature, see Getatchew Haile 2005, “Ge‘ez literature,” EAe 2: 736–41; Piovanelli 2013; Appleyard 2017; Bausi 2018.

Ἰωάννης ὁ ἁγίος

Ἰωάννης ὁ ἁγίος



# 3 Making Manuscripts

*Sean M. Winslow*

The Ethiopian scribal tradition is one of the last continuous manuscript traditions in the Christian world (a distinction shared with Syriac Christianity and, arguably, the UK Crown Office). The objects in this catalogue stand as the heirs of manuscript production imported from Classical Antiquity, transformed to fit the needs of early Christians, and then adapted to the climate and products of highland Ethiopia and Eritrea (fig. 3.1).<sup>1</sup>

The manuscripts here should be largely familiar in format and arrangement, a testament not only to the shared source of bookmaking among Christians, but also to the role of Ethiopian books as a bridge between the book crafts of the Christian and Islamic worlds. The relatively simple “Coptic” form of binding still in evidence in Ethiopian manuscripts became the basis of Islamic bookbinding, even as more robust (but more functionally-limited) methods of binding came to predominate elsewhere in the Mediterranean and Europe. Ethiopian and Eritrean scribal practices are a witness to our shared traditions and help us reconstruct the links between diverse Christian and Islamic practices of bookmaking, even as they serve their primary purpose, supplying a continuous need for liturgical and service books from Late Antiquity to the recent present.<sup>2</sup>

Why do scribes still produce books by hand? It is not to get rich: the average Ethiopian scribe, at least in the early years of the twenty-first century, does not seem to make a living out of bookmaking, but often is a priest-farmer (in rural areas) or employed in the Church hierarchy in some other capacity. Historically, literacy was restricted to the clergy and those with the money to hire private tutors, so any scribe would have had to attend a school intended to train members of the church. It should accordingly be little surprise that scribes are generally clergymen, whose work requires the books they produce and whose vocation is in line with poorly-remunerative work done for the cure of souls. Bookmaking is a necessity for churches, to be sure, but even in rural areas where it may bring in relatively scarce currency from outside the community, it is not a particularly remunerative task. Scribing is a time-consuming activity that is done only in natural light when the demands of religious celebration and farming allow, which means that some of the larger books may take six months or even a year to copy

1 For an overview of the manuscript tradition of Ethiopia and Eritrea, see Balicka-Witakowska et al. 2015.

2 Nosnitsin 2012; Bausi 2014; Bosc-Tiessé 2014.

FIG. 3.1 MS Aeth. c. 2, The Evangelist Luke holding a page and a pen, fol. 58v.



FIG. 3.2 Zälä'aläm using the parchment adze to scrape the hair side of the skin.

*opposite*

Fig. 3.3 *Liqā kahānat* Ajuḡu writing in his home in Gälawdeḡos.

in their entirety. The chief reward of the scribe is in the merit of the work, not in Birr:<sup>3</sup>

It was Our Father Gäbrämaryam who had it written: let God write his name on the golden pillar by a bejewelled pen in the Heavenly Jerusalem with all his (spiritual) sons for ever and ever. Amen. Mälka Şedeq wrote the Book of Numbers, Deuteronomy and Joshua, while I myself, Paḡwlos, wrote the other (books). If we added or omitted anything, either wittingly or not, forgive and bless us for ever and ever. Amen. And bless the makers of parchment, because they laboured much.<sup>4</sup>

The trope of the reward of the scribe being in heaven appears elsewhere: in the miracle of “the Virgin Mary and the Scribe Damianus,” the Virgin honours a scribe who writes her name in gold by writing his name on a golden pillar in heaven; in “the Two Scribes who were Brothers,” the Holy Mother saves sinful scribes from hell on account of them writing her miracles.<sup>5</sup>

All the manuscripts in this volume are on parchment, and parchment is the only historically-attested material in the Ethiopian tradition until the comparatively recent introduction of paper (other materials may have been used in the past). Goatskin is preferred for books, given its thickness and strength. Sheepskin is used less for books, but often preferred for scrolls and rolls, where its thinness is a benefit.

Hides are soaked in water to soften them and then stretched on a frame, where they are scraped to remove the remains of flesh and hair and the upper and lower layers of the skin (fig. 3.2), then left to dry under tension. After they are well and evenly cleaned on both sides, they are cut out of the frame, gathered into four (or more) sheets which are then folded to make a “quire.”

3 “Silver” (though now paper), the currency of Ethiopia.

4 Fifteenth-century colophon in Pistoia, Biblioteca Forteguerriana, Martini etiop. 5, fol. 195r; translation from Bausi 2014: 43.

5 Budge 1933: 59.





FIG. 3.4 *Māriḡeta Bərhanu* applying blind tooled decoration to a binding.

The surface is lightly treated with a piece of fine stone or ceramic to prepare it and then writing may begin.

Scribes write with their work braced against their knee (compare figs. 3.1 and 3.3), in the soft light of a door or window, or under the shade of a tree. Stroke by stroke, letters are formed following the same forms already in use for the Gospels of Ānda Abba Gärīma monastery – written perhaps 1500 years prior (see p. 29)<sup>6</sup> – using the delicately carved nib of a cane<sup>7</sup> pen with black ink made from soot, toasted barley, and acacia gum. The red ink, which marks out headings and the names of major saints, is made of ochres and red roots and flower petals (see pp. 40–41). Finer works may use reds imported from the Arab countries; some extravagant works write the name of Mary in gold, as in the story of “the Scribe Damianus.”

Scribes often write with two pens, switching pens when switching colours, but sometimes the process was done in separate steps, as can be seen in gaps

6 Ethiopic palaeography remains an inexact science; though there are small differences in style over time, they are hard to tell from differences in hand, and cataloguers often disagree by centuries in their dating. For an introduction to the subject in English, see Uhlig 1990.

7 Giant cane, *Arundo donax*.



FIG. 3.5 MS Aeth. d. 23,  
The manuscript's leather satchel  
used for storage or transportation.

in the text where the red ink should have been added. This is especially the case with the names of the patrons, which might not be written into the book until full payment has been received. Some books, when they change ownership, have the original owner's name scratched out and the new owner's name written in (see pp. 104–6).<sup>8</sup>

Most Ethiopian manuscripts are bound simply in wooden boards, often covered with red “Morocco” leather decorated with tooled patterns made up of concentric rectangles and crosses. These tools are applied hot to wet leather (fig. 3.4), shaping the leather and leaving a “blind” impression. More valuable books may be enclosed in a cloth chemise, which fits similarly to a book jacket protecting the leather, and many books are transported and stored in fitted leather book satchels, called *maḥdar*, which might be carried over the shoulder or hung from a peg in a church or house, and served a similar protective function to the acid-free boxes and shelves that the manuscripts in this volume are kept in when not on display.<sup>9</sup> A simple example encloses MS Aeth. d. 23 (fig. 3.5).

Why has the Ethiopian tradition survived, where so many others have passed? Simply put, for various historical, linguistic, and political reasons, the printing press came very late to Ethiopia, and it is only in the last few decades that the full complement of books required for churches became available in print. Until just after the year 2000, it was impossible to operate a church with all of the required books without at least some manuscripts. The availability of the full complement of church books, combined with changing economic incentives, has accelerated the marginalization and decline of scribal production, and the tradition seems likely to disappear entirely in coming decades. In the meantime, Ethiopian scribes have provided invaluable perspective on their own craft tradition and a range of comparative insight into the shared craft traditions of Christian and Muslim bookmaking.

<sup>8</sup> Winslow 2015.

<sup>9</sup> For more, see Hanscom 2016.

የካርታ



- ፩ በእንተ ሕብአብ ዘቀና።
- ፪ በእንተ ዘሰደ፡ እዋኑራብ።
- ፫ በእንተ ጌቶ ደዋክ።
- ፬ በእንተ አጥህሮ።
- ፭ በእንተ ሳሞራ ዊት።
- ፮ በእንተ ዎልደ ሰብአ፡ አጥፍቲዊ።
- ፯ በእንተ መፃጉዕ።
- ፰ በእንተ ኃዎክ፡ ኃብስት።
- ፶ በእንተ ዘክመ፡ ሉረ፡ ዲበ፡ ባሕሮ።
- ፲ በእንተ ኑኑኑ፡ በእስት።
- ፳ በእንተ ዕዉሮ።
- ፳፩ በእንተ አልዎዛሮ።
- ፳፪ በእንተ ሕንተ፡ ቀብኦቶ፡ በእግረኑ።
- ፳፫ በእንተ ዘክመ፡ ይቤ፡ ይህደ።
- ፳፬ በእንተ ዕዋራ።
- ፳፭ በእንተ ሕሊ መጸኑ፡ አረዊደ።
- ፳፮ በእንተ ዘክመ፡ ኃዎብ፡ አግረ፡ ራርዳ።
- ፳፯ በእንተ ጸራ ቀሊ ጦሕ።
- ፳፱ በእንተ አእለቶ፡ ሠግሁ፡ በእግረኑ።

# 4 The Gospel in Ge'ez

*Jacopo Gnisci*

MS AETH. C. 14

*Four Gospels, 130 fols., 2 columns, 20 lines to a column,  
33 × 28 × 10 cm, parchment.*

*Date: probably late fifteenth or early sixteenth century.*

The Gospels were one of the first texts to be translated from Greek into Ge'ez.<sup>1</sup> Beautifully illustrated Gospel manuscripts have been in use in Ethiopia and Eritrea since Late Antiquity. Two such Gospel books are currently kept in the monastery of ʾĪnda Abba Gärīma, which is situated near the modern town of ʾAdwa in north-eastern Ethiopia. Carbon-14 testing of parchment fragments taken from these two Gospels, known as Gärīma I and Gärīma III, indicate that they belong respectively to AD 530–660 and AD 330–650.<sup>2</sup> The two Gärīma Gospels thus provide us with exceptionally valuable evidence of the early history of Christian manuscript illumination. They predate much better-known and better-studied Gospel manuscripts, such as the Book of Kells, and could be just as old, if not older, than precious witnesses such as the Rossano Gospels and the Rabbula Gospels.<sup>3</sup>

## THE EUSEBIAN APPARATUS

The Gospels in Ge'ez are in the Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John order, which in Ethiopia and Eritrea, as in other Christian traditions, remains conventional to this day. The text of each Gospel is divided into chapters (Mt. 68, Mk. 48, Lk. 83, and Jn. 18), which are written in the upper or lower margins of the text and listed at the beginning of the relevant Gospel, as well as into Eusebian sections, which are written near the text margins and are listed at the beginning of the manuscript in a series of ten tables.

The purpose of these tables, devised by Eusebius of Caesarea and known as Canon Tables, is to illustrate the concordances and differences between the work of each Evangelist.<sup>4</sup> In Ge'ez Gospels the Canon Tables are usually distributed over seven or eight pages. They are preceded by a

1 Zuurmond and Niccum 2012, with further references.

2 McKenzie and Watson 2016, with bibliography.

3 For an overview of the early history of manuscript illumination, see Lowden 2007.

4 Nordenfalk 1938.

FIG. 4.1 MS Aeth. c. 14, Portrait of the Evangelist John and chapter list, fol. 61v.

letter, distributed over two or three pages and written by Eusebius to explain their function to a man named Carpianus, and are followed by a representation of a building, a *Tempietto*, which in the Ethiopic tradition symbolizes Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> The Ge'ez version of the letter to Carpianus and the Canon Tables is based, like the text of the Gospels, on Greek models.<sup>6</sup>

The divisions into chapters and the Eusebian apparatus are found already in *Gärima I* and *III*. The Canon Tables in these two manuscripts are set in the intercolumniation of elaborately painted arches surmounted by plant growths and a variety of birds including ground hornbills and helmeted guineafowls. The illuminations in these two manuscripts are stylistically and iconographically close to works produced in the Christian Orient, especially in the environs of Alexandria, between the fifth and the sixth centuries.

The Eusebian system continued to be used in Ethiopic Gospels during the *Zag'we* and early Solomonic periods. Gospel books in the monasteries of *Däbrä Libanos*, in the *Akkälä Guzay* district of Eritrea, in *Betä Mädhane 'Aläm* in *Lalibäla*, and a third Gospel book kept at *Ända Abba Gärima* attest to its use in the pre-Solomonic period. Far more numerous are the witnesses for the period following the rise of the Solomonic dynasty. Starting with a Gospel manuscript donated in AD 1280/81 to the church of *Däbrä Ḥayq Ḍṣṭifanos* by its abbot, *Iyäsus Mo'a*,<sup>7</sup> several dozen illuminated manuscripts survive from the period which stretches approximately from the rise of the Solomonic dynasty in 1270 to the invasion of Ethiopia led by *Grañ* in 1527.

#### TEXTUAL AND MATERIAL FEATURES OF MS AETH. C. 14

The Gospel book now in the Bodleian, MS Aeth. c. 14, belongs approximately to the end of this latter period, that is to a period between the end of the fifteenth and first decades of the sixteenth century. The manuscript, which deserves to be catalogued, is bound in stout wooden boards that were at some time covered in tooled leather and lined with a dyed piece of cloth, that is still preserved in the inner front cover.

At some point in time the initial three and last quires of the manuscript were detached from the rest of the textblock. The first quire (fols. 1–2), which now consists of two singletons remounted on a parchment strip, probably lacks several leaves. The last quire of the manuscript (fols. 124–30), with the ending of the Gospel of John, was added subsequently to the manuscript and is written in a later hand, possibly in the eighteenth or nineteenth century. This later quire contains a colophon which indicates that, at the time in which it was added, the manuscript was in the possession of a church dedicated to *Mika'el* in the town of *Zatta* (fol. 130va).

MS Aeth. c. 14 lacks the Epistle to Carpianus and the Canon Tables at its beginning. However, the structure of the first quire and the fact that the text of the Gospels is divided into Eusebian sections suggest that it perhaps originally included at least the tables. The text – arranged in two columns per page and written in a late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century hand – is

5 Bausi 2004; Gnisci 2018.

6 Bausi 2015; Zuurmond 1989: I, 19–20.

7 Getatchew Haile and Macomber 1981: 293–301, EMMML 1832.



FIG. 4.2 MS Aeth. c. 14, Beginning of the *Gospel of Mark*, fol. 36r.

also divided into chapters that are given in the upper margin or lower margin of the text and are listed at the beginning of each Gospel (figs. 2.2, 4.1).

Quotations from the Old Testament are marked, as in earlier Gospels, by small rounded brackets. Occasionally, readings have been added in the margins by a later hand. The opening lines of the Gospel of Matthew also include a blessing which starts to appear in manuscripts after the fifteenth century.<sup>8</sup> The stichometry, a line count, is given at the end of each Gospel (Mt. 2700, Mk. 1700, Lk. 2800, Jn. 2700).

### ILLUSTRATING THE GOSPELS

Cycles of illustrations are frequently attested in Ge'ez Gospel books from the late thirteenth to the mid-fifteenth centuries.<sup>9</sup> However, such cycles appear more sporadically in manuscripts of the second half of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, so it is perfectly possible that a manuscript such as MS Aeth. c. 14, which belongs to this latter period, never featured a prefatory cycle of illustrations.

The manuscript does, however, include portraits of the four Evangelists (figs. 2.2, 4.1, 4.5), a headpiece at the beginning of each Gospel (figs. 2.1, 4.2), and, occasionally, small decorative borders marking the passage

8 Zuurmond 1989: I, 23–24.

9 Monneret de Villard 1939; Heldman 1979; Balicka-Witakowska 1997; Fiacca-dori 2003; Gnisci 2017.



FIG. 4.3 MS Aeth. c. 14, Decorative element painted over a portion of text from the *Gospel of Matthew*, fol. 2v.

*opposite*

FIG. 4.4 MS Aeth. c. 2, Portrait of the Evangelist Mark holding a page and a pen, fol. 32v.

between text sections and placed either vertically on the inner margin or horizontally in the space left at the end of a paragraph (fig. 4.3). These decorative bands, which are very seldom found in Ethiopic Gospels, are crudely executed and often drawn over the writing, therefore it is likely that they were added after the manuscript was finished.

The headpieces, on the other hand, are probably an original feature of the manuscript, for the scribe left two lines of extra space at the top of the initial page of each Gospel for them to be inserted and they include decorative motifs attested prevalently in artworks from the turn of the second half of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries (figs. 2.2, 4.2).<sup>10</sup>

Related decorations, though painted in a more elegant style, can be seen in a manuscript of the Miracles of Mary kept at the church of Betä Golgota at Lalibäla and dedicated to Emperor Ləbnä Dəngəl (r. 1508–40)<sup>11</sup> and in a manuscript in the British Library (Or. 706) produced during the reign of ʾĪskəndər (r. 1478–94).<sup>12</sup> Similar patterns are also found on the back of some icons from the second half of the fifteenth century. One such icon is currently housed in the Institute of Ethiopian Studies in Addis Ababa.<sup>13</sup>

More unusual, instead, is the insertion beneath the headpieces, to the right of each text column, of flowers before Matthew, serpent-like animals

10 For an introduction to the Ethiopic tradition, Zanotti-Eman 1993; for an overview, see Agati 2009: 316–38.

11 Mercier and Lepage 2012: 288, fig. 10.8.

12 Wright 1877: 186–87, pl. 3.

13 Bosc-Tiessé and Mirabaud 2016: fig. 17.

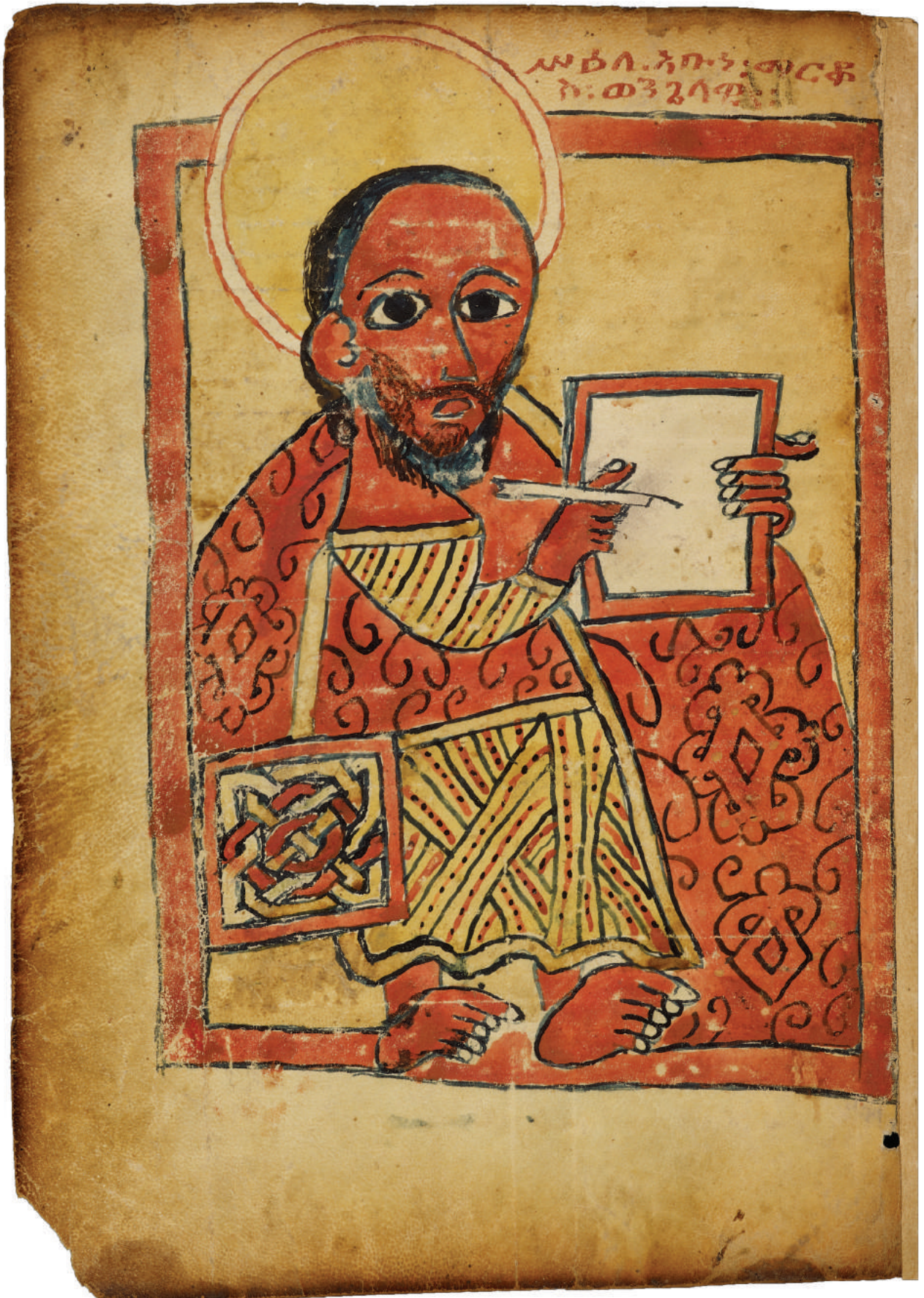




FIG. 4.5 MS Aeth. c. 14, Portrait of the Evangelist Mark and end of chapter list, fol. 36v.

before Mark, fish-like creatures before Luke, and birds before John. It is difficult to say whether, in representing plants together with earth, sea, and air creatures, the artist of MS Aeth. c. 14 wished to allude to the commentary tradition on Genesis developed by early Church Fathers such as Gregory of Nazianzus and to the artistic tradition of representing the different spheres of creation which has its roots in early Christian art.<sup>14</sup>

#### THE PORTRAITS OF THE EVANGELISTS

The Evangelist portraits in MS Aeth. c. 14 are placed on the verso of the page opposite the beginning of their Gospel as is conventional in illustrated Ethiopic Gospels and in other Christian traditions.<sup>15</sup> The portraits are unframed and take up about half of the page with the other half occupied by the end of the list of chapters.

Both solutions are unorthodox, since Evangelist portraits in Gə‘əz Gospel books of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries are typically full-page and framed, as shown by another Gospel book in the Bodleian (MS

14 For some examples, see Maguire 1987.

15 Friend 1927; M. E. Heldman 2010, “Evangelists in art,” EAe 2: 460-63; Gnisci 2018: 370–71, with additional references.

Aeth. c. 2; figs. 3.1, 4.4). Even in those examples where the portraits are not full-page, they are generally not associated to contemporary unrelated textual matter. The portrait of Mark in a Gospel book kept at the monastery of Abunä Gäbrä Krəstos,<sup>16</sup> in Təgray, is among the few examples that can be compared to the portraits in MS Aeth. c. 14. This lack of parallels leads to the question of whether the Evangelist portraits in MS Aeth. c. 14 were a slightly later, possibly unplanned, addition to the decorative programme of the manuscript.

#### A WORK BY BRANCALEONE?

MS Aeth. c. 14 was formerly in the collection of Bent Juul-Jensen who published a short study of it in the *Book Collector*.<sup>17</sup> In the article, Juul-Jensen suggests that the Evangelist portraits and headpieces found in the manuscript were the work of Nicolò Brancaleone, a Venetian artist who lived and worked in Ethiopia roughly between the 1480s and 1530s and became a prominent figure in the imperial court. This suggestion is put forward on the basis of alleged stylistic similarities with a Gospel book kept at Däbrä Wärq in the Goğgam region of Ethiopia, which, although unsigned, has also been attributed to Brancaleone on stylistic grounds.<sup>18</sup>

However, a closer analysis of the style and iconography of the two Gospels shows that the attribution of MS Aeth. c. 14 to Brancaleone cannot stand. The figures in the Däbrä Wärq manuscript are similar enough to works signed by Brancaleone – such as the book of miniatures kept at Wafä Iyäsus, Goğgam, or the icon in the collection of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (mus. no. 4191)<sup>19</sup> – to support an attribution to the Venetian artist. This cannot be said of Evangelist portraits in MS Aeth. c. 14. It is true that they exhibit some of the mannerisms visible in Brancaleone's work – such as the rendering of certain facial features, the upward gaze, the pose, the small hands, the sinuous folds of the clothing around the feet, or the coiled ends of the lower hem of the robes (fig. 4.1). Nevertheless, the folds of drapery lack the softness and shading visible in Brancaleone's work, the lines are not as light and elegant, and the figures are not as solid.

Clear evidence that the artist of MS Aeth. c. 14 was less skilled than Brancaleone in rendering the human figure is provided by his clumsy portrayal of Mark (fig. 4.5), who is shown seated in accordance with a long-standing Ethiopian tradition which favours him – as founder of the See of Alexandria – over the other Evangelists.<sup>20</sup> Uncertainties are especially evident in Mark's awkwardly painted arm. The absence of Canon Tables in MS Aeth. c. 14 and the Däbrä Wärq Gospels does not provide evidence of a connection between the two manuscripts, as Juul-Jensen argues, because both have probably lost their initial quires. Thus, considering that the figures in MS Aeth. c. 14 are clearly indebted in some way to Brancaleone's work, the most logical explanation is that the painter was a disciple or that he attempted to imitate the style of the Venetian artist. After all, there are numerous sixteenth-century works in Ethiopia and Eritrea which seem related to Brancaleone's style of painting but were evidently not painted by him.<sup>21</sup>

16 The manuscript, mentioned in Chojnacki 2009, awaits a more detailed study.

17 Juul-Jensen 1996.

18 Chojnacki 1983: 387, fig. 180, for a discussion and reproduction.

19 Chojnacki 1983: 385–98, figs. 175–76.

20 Heldman 1983: 568; McKenzie and Watson 2016: 67–82.

21 Chojnacki 1999; Mercier 2000a: 112–15.



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## 5 The Psalter in Ge'ez

*Steve Delamarter and Jacopo Gnisci*

MS AETH. D. 19

*151 Psalms, 15 Biblical Canticles, the Song of Songs,  
the Praise of Mary, and the Gate of Light,  
165 fols., various layouts, 1 column (1r–146v) and 2 columns (148r–165v),  
ca. 24 lines to a column, 29.5 × 22 × 10.5 cm, parchment.  
Date: probably late fifteenth or early sixteenth century.*

Religious communities are devoted to their sacred texts and the Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Churches are no exception. In each of their services they read aloud the ancient words of Moses and David, and of Paul and the Evangelists. These communities of faith have often been pressed and challenged. But they have always believed that these ancient words hold the truths that they need to sustain themselves in the present. And so, on the lecterns of the churches there sit the manuscripts that hold the words of life. In each service, the priests or the deacons approach the manuscripts, open their covers, and lift their voices aloud to read. In so doing, past meets present, and the “then and there” of the biblical writers meets the “here and now” of the living community of faith.

Book users are acutely aware of these two moments: the biblical past and their own present. They imagine that the book is the vehicle that enables them to touch the past and for the past to touch them; the book is the portal between the two, in which the barrier between past and present is rendered transparent. So fixed are they upon these two moments that they are usually oblivious to the third moment in this encounter, the moment of the book itself. Though books carry texts that originated in the ancient past, they bear witness first and foremost to their own moment, the moment of their production. They are a copy of an ancient text, made at a particular moment in time according to the tastes and customs of that moment.

Christianity became the state religion in Ethiopia in the fourth century and the first direct evidence of the Bible in Ethiopia is in the form of fifth- and sixth-century inscriptions containing biblical quotations including some

FIG. 5.1 MS Aeth. d. 19, King David playing a lyre, fol. 6v.

from the Book of Psalms. There is a long gap between those stone inscriptions and the oldest parchment manuscripts we have today.<sup>1</sup> The Bodleian and other libraries care for those which have survived from the fourteenth to the twentieth centuries. Each of these manuscripts bears witness to their own moment of production, to the customs and practices of book makers in their time. Together they present for us a collage of moments across seven centuries.

What is gained by becoming aware of these third moments? Aren't all copies of the Ethiopian Psalter, for instance, pretty much the same? What are their differences? And, what is to be learned from them? The Bodleian's collection of Psalters is the perfect place to get answers to these questions.

The Bodleian possesses twenty Ethiopic Psalters, though six are fragmentary. One is from the fifteenth century, one is from the sixteenth century, four are from the seventeenth century, five are from the eighteenth century, eight are from the nineteenth century, and one is from the twentieth century. It is no great wonder that the Bodleian has so many since the Psalter is, and always has been, the quintessential book of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. Perhaps thirty percent, or more, of all the books made in Christian Ethiopia and Eritrea were Psalters. Leiden University, for instance, has some 250 Ethiopian manuscripts and forty-one of them are Psalters. Unlike most books in Ethiopian Christian history, Psalters were owned not only by churches and monasteries, but also by many individuals in each community.

The most magnificent in the Bodleian collection is Aeth. d. 19 (fig. 5.1), recently bequeathed from the estate of Bent Juul-Jensen,<sup>2</sup> the University Medical Officer who specialized in tropical medicine and who spent time in Ethiopia. The details of this manuscript are extraordinary in many respects. Its size, materials, and workmanship all testify to its high social location—either in a royal or ecclesiastical setting. Its age gives us glimpses into times when many details of the Ethiopian Psalter were different from what they became after the sixteenth century.

## THE TEXTUAL UNIFORMITY OF THE ETHIOPIC PSALMS

It is true that the text of the Ethiopic Psalms is pretty much the same no matter what manuscript you were to pick up. However, it is only recently that we have learned just how uniform the text of these Psalters really is.

The Textual History of the Ethiopic Old Testament project (THEOT) recently performed a statistical analysis on the Ethiopic Psalms. It took forty-eight manuscripts and transcribed the same small passages from throughout the Psalms. These samples amounted to 7.5 percent of the book. The texts were aligned for statistical analysis and then processed to reveal the nature of the uniformity or variation of the text.<sup>3</sup>

To understand and appreciate these findings, it is necessary to report on what was found in the study of the remaining books of the Ethiopic Old Testament. In short, the text of the biblical manuscripts varies between eight and fourteen percent in each book of the Old Testament. That is to

1 See, M. E. Heldman 2010, "Psalter," EAe 4: 231–33, for additional bibliography.

2 On his acquisition of this manuscript, see Juul-Jensen 1987: 210–17.

3 The precise statistics vary from book to book. The first five reports of the THEOT project (on Deuteronomy, Ruth, Amos, Obadiah, and Haggai) are scheduled for publication in 2019 and 2020. Those will be followed shortly by reports on Psalms, and Song of Songs. A more detailed introduction to the project will be available in Daniel Assefa, S. Delamarter, G. Jost, R. Lee, and C. Niccum, "The Textual History of the Ethiopic Old Testament (THEOT) Project: Goals, Methods, and Initial Findings," forthcoming in *Textus* in 2019 or 2020.

say, the tradition is tremendously uniform, with between 86 and 92 percent uniformity, without variation. But it does have variation, and all of that variation takes place within this last margin, from 8 to 14 percent of the words.

In the Psalter, the level of variation is almost one order of magnitude smaller, between one and two percent, which is to say that all the words of all the Psalters were 98 to 99 percent identical. This finding is astonishing in one sense, but not surprising in another. How could it be so uniform? For centuries, the Psalter was memorized and chanted daily by a huge proportion of the population. When scribes copied a text from other books of the Old Testament, their work was governed by the text in the exemplar before them. This does not appear to have been the case with the Psalms, because everyone had them memorized and chanted them day in and day out. In other words, it was the chanting of the community that governed the copying of the book, not *vice versa*.

#### PSALM 151: THE EXCEPTION TO THE RULE

Psalms 151 represents a major exception to this rule of the uniformity of the Ethiopic text of the Psalms.<sup>4</sup> This Psalm is one that describes some of the exploits of the young David, particularly when he fought with the giant, Goliath. This Psalm is not present in Protestant bibles, but it was in the Greek and Syriac traditions and is even found in Hebrew in one of the Dead Sea Scrolls from Qumran cave eleven. In Ethiopia, this text was received from the Greek and then underwent some further developments. Between the fourteenth and twentieth centuries it is possible to identify four hotspots in the text of Psalm 151, places where new readings appeared.

The first is in verse four, “He himself sent his messenger *and he delivered me*.” The final phrase that requires four words in English is actually a single word in the Ge'ez text. Before the fifteenth century this word does not appear in the Ge'ez text. But after the sixteenth more and more manuscripts include the word as part of the text, until finally in the nineteenth century, nearly all contain the word.

The second hotspot is in verse six where a new word appears: “He cursed me by his *abominable* gods.” Before the seventeenth century, only one manuscript has this reading. By the nineteenth century almost 80 percent of manuscripts contain the word.

The third hotspot is in verse seven. This time the addition is not a single word; it is three lines:

*Then I picked up three stones from the brook  
and I slung one at his forehead  
when he fell down by the power of the Lord*

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, no manuscripts contain this long addition (fig. 5.2). In the late-sixteenth century and the early seventeenth century a very few manuscripts contain it, but by the end of the seventeenth nearly forty percent have it. By the twentieth century those that

4 A more detailed discussion will be available in S. Delamarter and C. Marvin (forthcoming). “Psalms 151-155: 12.6 Ethiopic.” In *Textual History of the Bible*, ed. A. Lange, see [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2452-4107\\_thb\\_COM\\_00000673](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2452-4107_thb_COM_00000673) (accessed on 14/02/2019).

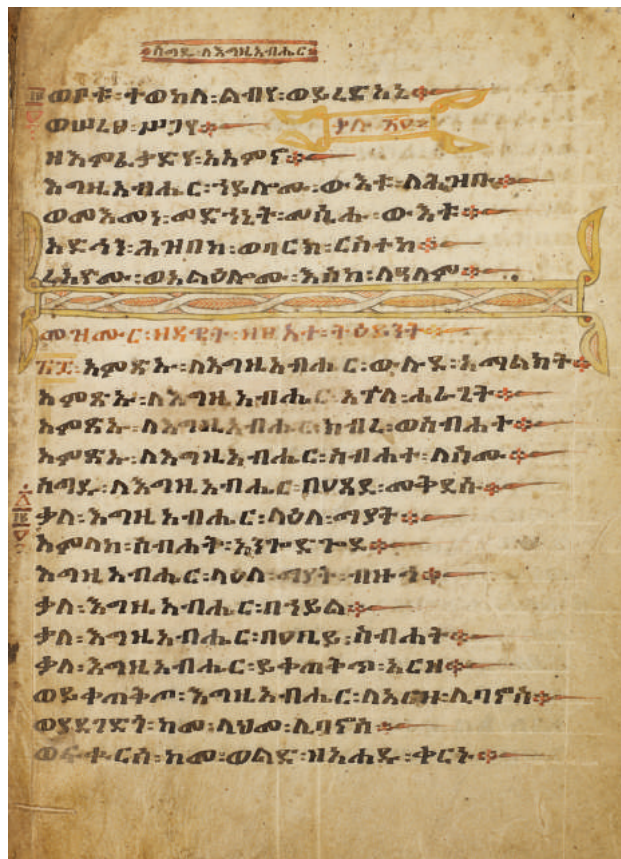
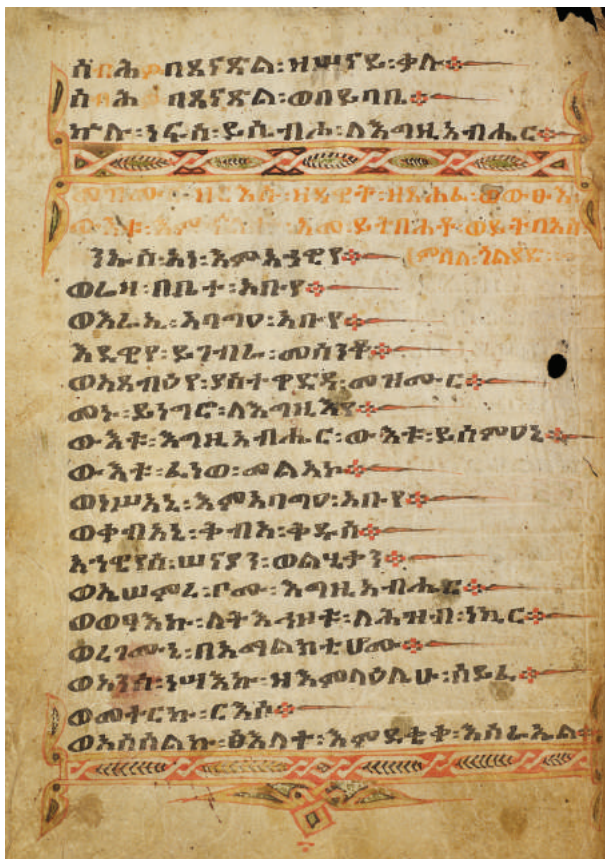


FIG. 5.2 MS Aeth. d. 19, Psalm 151 without any of the additions, fol. 125v.

FIG. 5.3 MS Aeth. d. 19, Psalm 28 without rubrication, fol. 26r.

contain it number nearly seventy percent. What started as commentary on the tradition eventually became the tradition!

Finally, a fourth hotspot is another one-word addition, “and cut off his head, *of Goliath.*” It appears in a very small number of manuscripts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but all of a sudden in the nineteenth century nearly forty percent contain the word, and by the twentieth century, ninety-four percent contain the word.

Thus, we see that in the past seven centuries the text of the 151st Psalm was alive and dynamic, growing in various places to bring theological clarity and more narrative detail to the text.

We do not know why Psalm 151 was allowed to grow and develop in Ethiopia while all the rest of the Psalter remains extraordinarily stable, but between them all the Bodleian Psalters help to document this growth of the tradition.

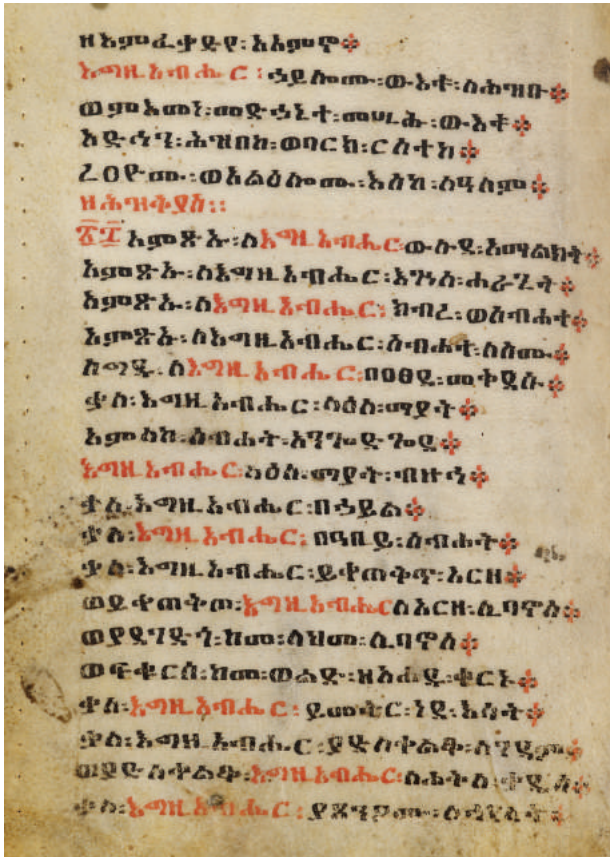
### RUBRICATING THE NAMES OF MARY AND OF GOD

To encounter the name of a person in a text is to call up the person themselves. Such an encounter called out to both scribe and reader to pause for a moment and reflect on the wonder of the One before them. In many manuscript cultures, it became common practice to memorialize these encounters by rubricating the names of the divine characters. Interestingly, there are patterns over time that may indicate different approaches within

*opposite*

FIG. 5.4 MS Aeth. e. 30, Psalm 28 with alternating rubrication of the name of God, fol. 18v.

FIG. 5.5 MS Aeth. e. 22, Psalm 28 with the name of God written in alternating red and black letters, fol. 20v.



the community. The contemplation and reverence of Mary was and is to this day a practice that is especially important to Orthodox Christian Ethiopians and Eritreans (see pp. 71–72). From the earliest to the latest Psalters, Mary’s name is systematically rubricated, no small task for the scribe, who was obliged to stop their work, put down their black pen and inkwell, and pick up another pen and inkwell of red, or else leave a blank space in the text for a second worker to complete the rubrication, every time they encountered her name.<sup>5</sup>

With the name of God, we have another practice. Before the seventeenth century, the word for God was never rubricated in Ge’ez Psalters. The practice arose only in the seventeenth century. At first only a few rubricated the word for God, but over time it was rubricated with increasing frequency. Interestingly, the study of a great number of Psalters shows that the practice was geographically differentiated: in the north of the country, in Tigray, for instance, the practice of rubricating the name of God caught on; but in the south, around Ankobär it never did catch on and in the Psalters from that region the name of God is not rubricated.<sup>6</sup>

Different practices regarding the rubrication of the name of God can be highlighted by looking at Psalm 28, a Psalm which mentions God eighteen times in twenty-four lines. For instance, the word for God is not rubricated in MS Aeth. d. 19 (fig. 5.3), it is rubricated systematically in MS Aeth. e. 30 (fig. 5.4), and it is written with alternating red and black letters in MS Aeth. e. 22 (fig. 5.5).

5 Two Ethiopian scholars produced some of the earliest works on Ethiopian scribal practices: Assefa Liban 1958; Sergew Hable Selassie 1981. For recent works with many pictures and illustrations see, Delamarter and Melaku Terefe 2009; Delamarter, Heldman, Brown, and Vulgan 2014.

6 These claims are based on the work carried out in the Social Lives of Ethiopian Psalters project led by Delmarter. Thus far, twenty-nine paratextual details and the details of secondary texts have been harvested from over 800 Psalters. All of the Psalters are assigned dates (by one means and another, and by one scholar and another); for about half of these we have information about the location of the Psalter when images were captured (and we assume that most Psalters will have been produced within thirty miles of their place of use). This makes possible a huge dataset that can be controlled both for chronological and geographic developments. Issues of methodology and initial finding have been presented to scholars in various national and international venues and in research visits in 2018 to the Hiob Ludolf Centre for Ethiopian Studies in Hamburg. The first findings should be published in 2020. To date, the most comprehensive description of Ethiopian book culture is to be found in Balicka-Witakowska et al. 2015.

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ከፊ: ሥርተፊ: አገረነ: ወሰተ: ፋናተ: ሰለጥ።



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በሰለጥ: አግዚኦ: በከፊ: አዘዝኦ።  
አሰፊ: ርአያ: አፅደኝተ: አድላኖተካ።  
ዘአሰተጸሎኩ: ቅጽፊ: ነተሎ: ሕዝብካ።  
ከፊ: ትክሥተ: ብርሃነ: ለአሕዛብ።  
ወክብረ: ለሕዝብካ: አሰራኪል።



ወጥልቁ: ቃለቲህ: ለመዝፊ: ጸደቅ።  
ለቀዳጫ: ሃቃሎ: ፲፱፡፲፱።  
ወሰካልኦ: ሃቃሎ: ፲፱፡፲፱።  
ወሰካልኦ: ሃቃሎ: ፲፱፡፲፱።  
ወመገራቱ: በዘ: ፲፱፡፲፱።  
ኃበ: ያብል: መርሐ፡ ሙ: መሀልተ: በደፊ: በህዮ: ያክ  
ወሰካልኦ: ነብያተሂ: ቃሎ:  
ወክሂ: ክበበ: ቃሎ: ለሃ ወሃ ወዘፊ: ር: ሃሃ: ህሃ: ጸ።

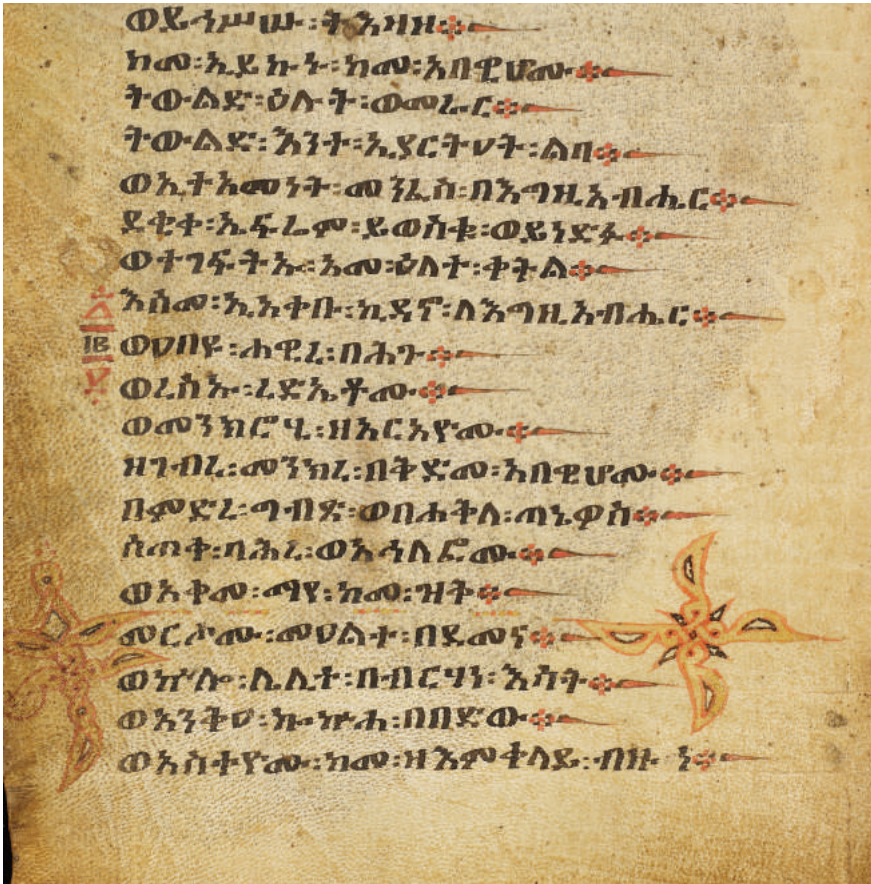


FIG. 5.7 MS Aeth. d. 19, Marking of the midpoint of the Psalms (detail), fol. 66v.

## THE STROPHE COUNTING SYSTEM

Scribes of the older Psalters engaged in a practice of counting and accounting for the number of strophes in each chapter and in each fifty chapters. In the oldest Psalters, there is a summary text in which the scribe presents the counts of the strophes “in the first fifty (Psalms), the strophes are 1,709; in the second fifty Psalms, the strophes are 1,734; in the third fifty (Psalms), the strophes are 1,798 [...]” (fig. 5.6). This practice of strophe counting slowly disappears after the sixteenth century and it was almost completely gone by the eighteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

## PSALM 77 AND THE MIDDLE STROPHE OF THE PSALMS

The next line of the above text from Aeth. d. 19 says, “and its midpoint is in (chapter) 77, where it says ‘and He led them by day with a cloud’” (fig. 5.6). Throughout the Ethiopian manuscript tradition, about half of all Psalters mark the midpoint of the Psalms with some sort of practice. Aeth. d. 19 marks it with ornamental cross-shaped elements in both the left and right margins (fig. 5.7). Other Psalters mark it by rubricating some or all of the line, or with a text that says, “the midpoint of *Dawit*” (i.e. the Psalms). Other Bodleian Psalters that mark the midpoint are MSS Aeth. e. 23, e. 30, e. 35, and f. 18.

*opposite*

FIG. 5.6 MS Aeth. d. 19, A strophe summary text at the conclusion of the *Song of Songs*, fol. 138r.

<sup>7</sup> See Dege-Müller 2015: 59–74.

ወተረጎሙ በአገሩ ላይ ተክሎ

120

አዎሐገድ፡ በሃገሩ ላይ፡ ወክብል፡ ሕያው፡ አኑ፡ ለሃገሩ

ወክብል፡ ከሰው፡ ሰብረ፡ ለሰው ጠባሕት

ወክብል፡ ከሰው፡ በቀሰ፡ ለፀረዮ

ወክብል፡ ከሰው፡ ለአሰኝት

ወክብል፡ ከሰው፡ ለአሰኝት

ወክብል፡ ከሰው፡ ለአሰኝት

ወክብል፡ ከሰው፡ ለአሰኝት

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ወክብል፡ ከሰው፡ ለአሰኝት

ወክብል፡ ከሰው፡ ለአሰኝት

ወክብል፡ ከሰው፡ ለአሰኝት

ወክብል፡ ከሰው፡ ለአሰኝት

## THE SPIRITUAL MEANING OF THE HEBREW LETTERS IN PSALM 118

The Hebrew text of Psalm 118 is based on an elaborate acrostic, laid out in 22 sections – exactly the number of letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each section has about ten strophes. In the first section every strophe begins with *aleph*, the first letter of the alphabet. In the second section every strophe begins with *bet*, the second letter of the alphabet. And so on throughout the entire alphabet.

When the Hebrew text was translated into Greek, the translators did not even attempt to replicate the same device as was in the Hebrew. But they did transliterate the name of each letter of the Hebrew alphabet into Greek characters and place those names at the head of each section.

When the Greek text was translated into Ge'ez, scribes and theologians thought long and hard about the significance of what was going on in the text. Though they were now one step removed from the original Hebrew, they knew that something interesting, if not mystical, was at work. They developed the notion that each of the letters had a spiritual meaning.

Before long, each scribe who was copying Psalm 118 had several options. They never varied the text of the Psalm itself, but they did have freedom in handling the heading or superscription of each section. At the very least, they too transliterated the name of the Hebrew letter into Ge'ez and put it at the head of each section, as we see in the Bodleian's MSS Poc. 3, Aeth. d. 4, Aeth. e. 2, Aeth. e. 22, Aeth. e. 23, Aeth. e. 25, Aeth. e. 33, Aeth. f. 2, Aeth. f. 18, Aeth. f. 21, and Aeth. f. 30. However, older Psalters often contain an elaborate heading for each section detailing the spiritual meaning of each letter. For instance, "*Bet* means the son pardoned the whole world," "*Gamel* means the Holy Spirit is revealed to us in his gifts," or "*Dalet* means the Holy Spirit descended at the Jordan." In most of these older headings, it is not self-evident why the letter means what it does, perhaps because the interpretation of the spiritual meaning was borrowed from yet another language, like Syriac. MSS Aeth. d. 19 and Aeth. e. 30 contain these headings.

Eventually, though, the Ethiopian interpretation of the spiritual meanings evolved into a set of simple puns based in their language: "*Bet* means God is wealthy (*ba'el*)," "*Gamel* means God is awesome (*gærum*)," and "*Dalet* means God is worthy (*dælæw*)." Aeth. e. 35 contains this version of the spiritual meanings.

## IS ḤANNA AMONG THE PROPHETS?

The second collection in Ethiopian Psalters is called the Songs of the Prophets, or, in the West, the Biblical Canticles. Each of these fifteen songs originates somewhere in Scripture; they were gathered together and placed side by side to form one work. The Ethiopian tradition is distinctive in containing the greatest number of these song texts.

Each song in the collection has a brief title, written in red ink, indicating the author of each song. The first three are by Moses (fig. 1.1). The fourth is by Hannah (*Hanna*), mother of Samuel, and this is the simple title that ap-

FIG. 5.8 MS Aeth. d. 19, The beginning of the *Song of Hannah*, fol. 130r.

17

ወትበልዕ:ሥጋሆሙ:በመጥጣሕትዮ።

እምደመ:ቅቱላን:ወዲውዋን።

እርእስተ:መለእክተ:ፀር።

ይትፊሥሐ:ከሎን:ሰማያት:ጎቡረ።

ወይሰግዲ:ሎቱ:ከሎሙ:መለእክተ:እግዚአብሔር።

ወይትፊሥሐ:ሕዝብ:ምስለ:ሕዘቢሆሙ።

ወይብሎ:ከሎሙ:ውሎደ:እግዚአብሔር:ጽድቅ:ውእቱ።

እስመ:ይትቤተል:ደመ:ደቲቀ።

ይትቤተል:ወይትፊደሎሙ:በቀለ:ለፀሩ።

ወይትቤቀሎሙ:ለጸላዕቱ።

ወያነጽሑ:እግዚአብሔር:ምድረ:ለሕዝቡ።

እሎቱ:ሐር:ከመ:ሳሙኤል:ነቢዩ::

ፀ እንዲ:ልብዮ:በእግዚአብሔር።

ወተለዓለ:ቀርጎዮ:በእምለኪዮ:ወመደኃጎዮ።

ወርጎበ:ክፉዮ:ዲበ:ጸለዕትዮ።

ወተፈሣሕኩ:በአድጎኖትኩ።

እስመ:አልቦ:ቅዱስ:ከመ:እግዚአብሔር።

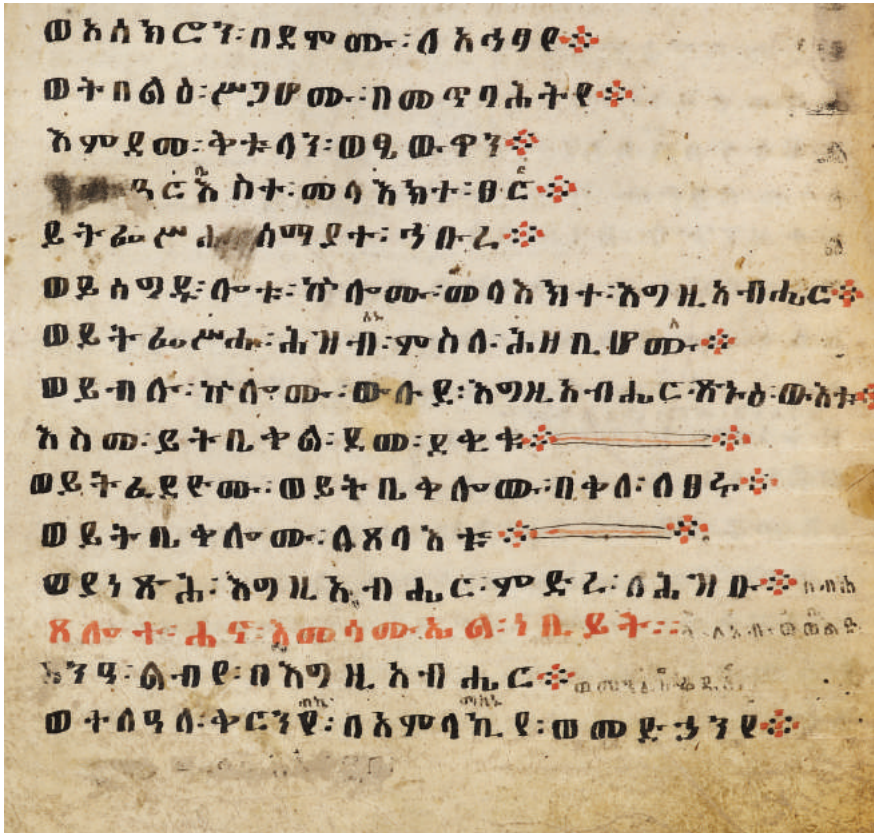


FIG. 5.10 MS Aeth. e. 2,  
The beginning of the *Song of Hannah*  
(detail), fol. 126v.

pears in the oldest Psalters, “Prayer of Ḥanna, mother of Samuel” (fig. 5.8). After the fifteenth century, it became common to add one word to this title: “Prayer of Ḥanna, mother of Samuel, the prophet” (fig. 5.9). The additional word is the masculine, singular form of the word prophet, so it clearly refers to Samuel. But in the seventeenth century a very subtle campaign begins in the tradition. It is accomplished by adding a single letter, the letter *t*, to the end of the Ge’ez word for prophet. It transforms the word from masculine singular to feminine singular, “prophetess” (fig. 5.10), thus identifying Ḥanna as a prophet. The Bodleian collection shows all three of these variations.

Judging by the manuscripts after the seventeenth century, this latter move to add the *t* was a controversial one. We find many, many cases where the final *t* was added to manuscripts that did not have it originally. And we find the opposite, the letter *t* erased by a secondary hand.

### ILLUSTRATING PSALTERS

One of the most striking features of the Bodleian Psalter is its colourful illuminations. In fact, among the earliest surviving illustrated Ge’ez Psalters – which belong to a period between the late fourteenth and first half of the fifteenth centuries – only about a dozen are decorated with comparable figurative and decorative elements.<sup>8</sup>

One such manuscript, that can be dated to the late fourteenth or fifteenth century on stylistic and palaeographic grounds, was discovered and photographed in a private collection in Ambassäl in the Amhara region of

*opposite*

FIG. 5.9 MS Aeth. d. 4,  
The beginning of the *Song of Hannah*,  
fol. 170r.

8 E.g. Conti Rossini 1927: 83–97; Balicka-Witakowska 1983; 1984–1986.



FIG. 5.11 MS Aeth. d. 19,  
Old Testament figures (detail), fol. 6r.

modern Ethiopia.<sup>9</sup> In the *Ambassäl Psalter*, borders filled with twists and interlace patterns – motifs attested in Coptic, Syriac, and, more occasionally, Greek and Latin manuscripts<sup>10</sup> – mark the beginning of most Psalms.<sup>11</sup> A full border, framing the entire text, is used every ten Psalms and at the beginning of the other texts included in the manuscript.

The sections resulting from this latter subdivision are preceded by one or two prefatory miniatures with iconic portraits of one or two standing figures. This results in a series of twenty-six illuminations that starts with David – since he is the author of most of the Psalms – continues with depictions of saints, bishops, and Old and New Testament figures, and ends with a representation of Mary in an orans position. The same subject is found at the end of a well-known Psalter in the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* in Paris.<sup>12</sup>

#### THE ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE BODLEIAN PSALTER

Similarly to the *Ambassäl Psalter*, most Psalms and hymns in the *Bodleian Psalter* are separated by narrow rectilinear borders that feature phytomorphic elements on the outside corners (figs. 5.2–5.3). However, the bands in the *Bodleian Psalter* contain a much wider variety of patterns, including lozenges with dot fillings, twists, false guilloches with linear fillings, and rhomboid and elongated hexagonal interlaces with pattée crosses inserted between the units. Moreover, the *Bodleian Psalter* does not have miniatures distributed between the Psalms.

9 Getatchew Haile and Macomber 1982: 126–28, EMMML 2064.

10 For some examples, see Frantz 1934.

11 Zanotti-Eman 1993: 63. It remains to be determined if this profusion of decorative elements, which is one of the most distinctive features of Psalter illumination, is related to their use.

12 Balicka-Witakowska 1983: 26.

The miniatures of the Bodleian Psalter differ from those in the *Ambassäl* manuscript in other respects: some take up a full page while others half or a quarter of it. Additionally, in several instances the figures are arranged into panels.

The first group of images is found at the beginning of the manuscript (fols. 4v–6v) and starts with a pair of double portraits – respectively showing Job and Samuel and Ezra and Ezekiel – set in two panels that are placed at the bottom of the last page of prefatory matter.

These are followed, after an empty page, by a cycle of three full-page miniatures. The first miniature is divided into four panels with depictions of Heman, Asaph, one of the Korahites, and possibly Ethan, though the effaced captions make this latter identification tentative. The second miniature features six double portraits of Old Testament figures, distributed in six panels, among whom are Daniel, Isaiah, Elijah, and Enoch (fig. 5.11).

Finally, the third page shows an enthroned David, identified as “King of Israel,” playing a ten-string instrument – which is mentioned in several Ethiopic Psalms<sup>13</sup> – that resembles an Ethiopian lyre (fig. 5.1). The king is depicted wearing the regalia of Ethiopian Emperors, including a headband crown and large earlobe ornaments. His attendants also bear objects of kingship: a parasol – which is also associated with David in the *Ambassäl* Psalter – a sword, and a flywhisk.

David and the other figures which appear on the first page of the prefatory cycle in the Bodleian Psalter can be associated with the texts that follow since in Ethiopia and Eritrea, as in other traditions, they are seen to be the authors of Psalms or Hymns. David is given a full page since he is considered as the author of the largest number of Psalms.

Portraits of David are included at the beginning of Ge'ez Psalters up to the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> Similar portraits – showing him as a shepherd or prophet king playing the harp or composing the Psalms – also feature in early illustrated Greek and Latin Psalters (for instance in the Golden Psalter of St. Gall in the *Stiftsbibliothek*, Cod. Sang. 22).<sup>15</sup> The Ethiopian illuminations are thus related to an old tradition, which is in turn related to the classical and early Christian practice of including the author's portrait at the beginning of his book.<sup>16</sup>

It is thus entirely possible that Ethiopic Psalters began to be decorated with a portrait of David during the Aksumite period. At least two considerations can be put forward to justify this hypothesis. First, the presence of Evangelist portraits in one of the *Gäräma* Gospels demonstrates that author portraits were included in Ge'ez manuscripts from a very early date onwards (see pp. 34–35). Second, the headdress and earlobe ornaments of David in the Bodleian Psalter are almost identical to the regalia worn by the rulers portrayed on Aksumite coins.<sup>17</sup>

The Bodleian Psalter also includes portraits of Moses and Aaron with his budding rod (fig. 1.1),<sup>18</sup> placed above the beginning of the Biblical Canticles, and a full-page miniature showing Sirach next to Solomon (fol. 138v). Also these sections of the manuscript, therefore, are decorated with figures that are associated to the texts that follow. Solomon – like David (fig. 5.1) – is

13 Ps. 32: 2; 91: 3; 143: 10; 150: 4.

14 For instance, see Balicka-Witakowska 1984–1986: 23; Barbieri and Fiaccadori 2009: cat. 100.

15 For some additional examples, see respectively Cutler 1984: figs. 78, 153, 172, 245–294; Henderson 1986.

16 As recently noted, for instance, by Parpulov 2010: 93. The classical study is the one by Friend 1927; see Gnisci 2018: 370–71, for additional bibliography.

17 Juel-Jensen 1989; for the collection of Aksumite coins in the Ashmolean Museum, see Hahn and West 2017.

18 Found also in the manuscript discussed by Balicka-Witakowska 1984–1986: 23.



represented like an Ethiopian ruler, with a headdress, large earlobe ornaments, and a spear.<sup>19</sup>

Much remains obscure about the forms and evolution of the dress and regalia of the Ethiopian court and its relationship with the customs of other courts, since these started to be codified in written form only during the sixteenth century (see p. 82). If certain items, such as the headband and earlobe ornaments – which appear also on Aksumite coins – are probably distinctly Ethiopian,<sup>20</sup> others may have been introduced at a later date. The parasol and flywhisk, for example, were also used by the Fatimid Caliphs and Ayyubid Sultans,<sup>21</sup> who in turn adopted them as symbols of kingship from the Sasanian Empire.<sup>22</sup>

In other words, it is difficult to determine whether use of Aksumite and foreign types of regalia by Solomonic emperors was grounded in traditions inherited from previous dynasties, such as the Zagwe.<sup>23</sup> One point seems clear, however: the decision to depict David and Solomon dressed in the regalia of Ethiopian emperors resonates with the Solomonic dynasty's claims to descent from King Solomon, which found an expression in the *Kəbrä nägäšt*.<sup>24</sup>

Nor is it not surprising to find Aksumite regalia in a manuscript belonging to the second half of the fifteenth or early sixteenth century. Artworks and churches from the early Solomonic period often feature elements that allude to Aksumite models,<sup>25</sup> and there is ample evidence suggesting that Solomonic emperors were keen to stress their ties to their Aksumite heritage. For instance, the Chronicle of Zär'a Ya'əqob tells us that the Emperor was crowned in Aksum in accordance with the customs of his ancestors (see pp. 81–82). About a century later, according to the Chronicle of Emperor Šäršä Dəngəl, when this sovereign was ritually questioned about his identity and lineage during his coronation rite, he proudly asserted that he was “the son of David, son of Solomon, son of ʾĒbnä Ḥakim (Mənilək I).”<sup>26</sup>

The last group of miniatures (fols. 146v–47v) begins with a half-page miniature showing Abraham in the act of embracing Isaac and Jacob. This image is followed by a series of double portraits of saints – including Clement and Philemon – and New Testament figures, including the Apostles, the Evangelists, and Joseph and Nicodemus, that are distributed over two pages (fig. 5.12).

All pairs of figures but one embrace each other as a display of ecclesiastical unity – a motif which may have been inspired by the Cretan icons that were being brought into the country at the turn of the fifteenth century.<sup>27</sup> The upper left panel of the second page shows Jesus kissing John on the mouth. This unusual subject, which may have been inspired by local practices, is attested in a small number of Ethiopian artworks dating to the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.<sup>28</sup> Also the style of the illuminations in the Bodleian Psalter suggests that it belongs to the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century. They are painted in a manner that is most closely related to the miniatures from a Gospel in a private collection.<sup>29</sup>

19 On Solomon in the Ethiopian tradition, see Witakowski and Balicka-Witakowska 2012.

20 Juel-Jensen 1989.

21 See Canard 1951: 368, who also mentions the presence of sword and spear bearers.

22 Al-Azmeh 2001, for the connection with the Sasanian Empire. The parasol and flywhisk were used as iconographical devices to signal kingship already in Achaemenid sculpture, see for example, Root 1979: 101–4.

23 For further discussion, see Bausi 2013. Certain customs of the Solomonic court, such as the concealment of the sovereign behind a curtain, also find parallels in the Islamic tradition, see Gnisci and Zarzeczny 2017: 143.

24 Piovaneli 2013. Rulers were depicted as Old Testament kings, or Old Testament kings as rulers, also in Byzantine and Western art, see for instance Brubaker 1999: 185–86.

25 Gnisci 2015.

26 R. Pankhurst 2003, “Coronations,” in EAe 1: 802–4.

27 Vassilaki 1990, for the motif of the embrace and an example of such an icon now in the Ashmolean Museum; Heldman 2005, with additional bibliography, for the presence of Cretan icons in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

28 Chojnacki 1990.

29 Gnisci and Zarzeczny 2017.

FIG. 5.12 MS Aeth. d. 19, Christ, John, the Archangel Michael, John the Baptist, and nine Apostles, fol. 147v.

በከመ፡እግዚአብሔር፡መሐራ፡  
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ት፡ወብዙሳ፡ምሕረት፡ወጸድቅ፡  
እጽሕፍ፡አንሰ፡መጽሐፈ፡ሄ  
ኖክ፡ነቢይ፡በረከቱ፡ወሀብተ፡  
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**ለዓለመ፡ዓለም፡አሚን፤**  
**ከፍል፡ፅ፡ቃለ፡በረከት፡ዘሄኖ**  
ክ፡ዘከመ፡ባረከ፡ኅሩያን፡ወጸ  
ድቃን፡እለ፡ሀለዉ፡ይኩኑ፡በዕ  
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ወሥሐ፡ወይቤ፡ሄኖክ፡በእስ፡  
ጸድቅ፡ዘእምኅን፡እግዚአብ  
ሔር፡እንዘ፡አዕይንቲሀ፡ከሠ  
ቃት፡ወይሬኢ፡ራእየ፡ቅዱስ፡ዘ  
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እክት፡ወሰማዕኩ፡እምኅቢሆ  
ሙ፡ከሉ፡ወአእመርኩ፡እን፡  
ዘእራኤ፡**ቀወአኑ፡ለዝ፡ትውል**  
ድ፡አላ፡ለዘይመጽእ፡ትውል  
ድ፡ርጉቃን፡በእንተ፡ኅሩያን፡  
እቤ፡ወአውላእኩ፡በእንቲአ  
ሆሙ፡ምስለ፡ዘይወፅእ፡ቅዱ  
**ስ፡ወዓቢይ፡እማኅደሩ፡ወእም**  
**ላክ፡ዓለም፡ወእምህየ፡ይክይድ፡**  
ዲባ፡ሲና፡ደብር፡ወያስተርኢ፡  
በቶዕይንቱ፡ወያስተርኢ፡በጽ  
ንዓ፡ኃይሉ፡እምሰማይ፡ወይ  
ፈርህ፡ከሉ፡ወያድለቀልቁ፡ት

**ጉሃን፡ፀወይነሥአሙ፡ፍርሃት፡**  
ወረዓድ፡ዓቢይ፡እስከ፡አጽናፈ፡  
**ምድር፡ፀወይደነግ፡አድባር፡**  
ነዋኃን፡ወይቲሐቱ፡አውግር፡  
**ነዋኃት፡ወይትመስው፡ከመ፡**  
መዓረ፡ግራ፡እምላህብ፡ወት  
**ሠጠም፡ምድር፡ወክሉ፡ዘውከ**  
ተ፡ምድር፡ይትኃጉል፡ወይከው  
ን፡ፍትሕ፡ላዕለ፡ከሉ፡ወላዕለ፡  
ጸድቃን፡ከሉሙ፡ለጸድቃንስ፡  
ከላሙ፡ይገብር፡ሎሙ፡ወየዓ  
ቅቦሙ፡ለኅሩያን፡ወይከውን፡  
ላህህል፡ላዕለሆሙ፡ወይከው  
ኑ፡ከሉሙ፡ዘእምላክ፡ወይሴ  
ርሐ፡ወይትባረከ፡ወይበርህ፡  
ሎሙ፡በርሃን፡እምላክ፡ወናሆ  
መጽአ፡በትእልፈት፡ቅዱሳን፡  
ከመ፡ይግበር፡ፍትሐ፡ላዕለ  
ሆሙ፡ወያኃጉሎሙ፡ለረሲ  
ዓን፡ወይትዋቀስ፡ከሉ፡ዘሥጋ፡  
በእንተ፡ከሉ፡ዘገብሩ፡ወረሰዩ፡  
ላዕለሆ፡ኃግአን፡ወረሲዓንቀ  
**ከፍል፡ፅ፡ጠየቁ፡ከሉ፡ዘውከተ**  
ከማይ፡ግብረ፡እፎ፡ኢይመይ  
ሙ፡ፍናዊሆሙ፡በርሃናት፡ሀው  
ከተ፡ሰማይ፡ከመ፡ከሉ፡ይሠርቅ፡  
ወየዓናብ፡ሥሩዕ፡ከሉ፡በበዘ  
መኑ፡ወኢይትዓደው፡እምት  
እዛዘመ፡ርእይዋ፡ለምድር፡  
ወለብዉ፡በእንተ፡ምግባር፡ዘ

**ይትገበር፡ላዕለሆ፡እምቀዳሚ፡**  
እስከ፡ተፍጸሚቱ፡ከመ፡ኢይ  
ትመየሙ፡ከሉ፡ግብሩ፡ለእምላ  
ክ፡እንዘ፡ያስተርኢ፡ርእይዎ፡  
**ለሐጋይ፡ወለከረምት፡ከመ፡ከ**  
ላ፡ምድር፡መዓልት፡ማየወይ  
መና፡ጠል፡ወዝናም፡የዓርፍ፡  
**ላዕለሆ፡ከፍል፡ር፡ጠየቁ፡ወር**  
ኢኩ፡ከመ፡ከሉ፡ዕፀው፡እፎ፡  
ያስተርኢይ፡ከመ፡ይቡስ፡ወከ  
ሉ፡አቀጽሊሆሙ፡ንጉፍት  
ዘእንበለ፡**፤ወፀዕ፡ፀው፡ዘኢይ**  
ትነገፍ፡እለ፡ይጸንሐ፡እምብ  
ሉይ፡እስከ፡ይመጽእ፡ሐዲስ፡  
እም፤**ወእም፤ከረምት፡ከ**  
**ፍል፡ፅ፡ወዳግሙ፡ጠየቁ፡መዋ**  
ዕለ፡ሐጋይ፡ከመ፡ከነ፡ፀሐይ፡ላ  
ዕለሆ፡በቅድሚሃቅወአንትሙ  
ስ፡ተኃሥሠ፡ምጽላል፡ወጽላ  
ሎተ፡በእንተ፡ዋዕየ፡ፀሐይ፡ወ  
ምድርኒ፡ትውዒ፡እሙቀተ፡ሐ  
ሩር፡ወአንትሙ፡ሐትከሉ፡ከ  
ይደታ፡ለምድር፡ወኢኩከሉ፡  
በእንተ፡ዋዕያቅከፍል፡ር፡ጠየቁ፡  
እፎ፡ዕፀው፡በሐመልማለ፡አቀጽ  
ል፡ይትክደን፡ወይፈርዩ፡ወለብዉ፡  
በእንተ፡ከሉ፡ወእእምሩ፡በከመ፡  
ግብረ፡ለከመ፡**እሎንተ፡ከሉ**  
ሙ፡ዘሐያው፡ለዓለምቀወምግ  
ባሩ፡ቅድሚሆ፡ለለዓመት፡ዘይ

## 6 Enoch in Ge'ez

*Siam Bhayro*

### MS BRUCE 74

*1 Enoch, Job, Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah,  
Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zachariah, Malachi, Proverbs,  
Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Daniel,  
ii + 147 fols. (fol. 103 repeated as 103a, 103b) + ii, 3 columns,  
30 lines to a column, 33.7 × 30.2 × 5.6 cm, parchment. Date: eighteenth century.*

The biblical book of Genesis contains, in the middle of its antediluvian genealogy, a mysterious reference to Enoch, who “walked with God, and he was not, for God took him” (Gn. 5:24). This enigmatic statement stimulated a number of speculative and imaginative texts in learned Jewish circles in Antiquity, with several Enochic corpora and traditions emerging in various contexts.<sup>1</sup>

The oldest of these Enochic corpora is known as 1 Enoch, or the Ethiopic Book of Enoch, as it is fully preserved in its Classical Ethiopic version (fig. 6.1). These labels differentiate it from two other works: 2 Enoch, or the Slavonic Apocalypse of Enoch – another ancient Jewish work that is now preserved in a few mediaeval Coptic fragments and in its later mediaeval Slavonic versions;<sup>2</sup> and 3 Enoch, or the Hebrew Apocalypse of Enoch – a late antique Jewish text that represents an example of the genre often labelled Merkabah mysticism.<sup>3</sup>

The Ethiopic Book of Enoch is itself a composite work that acquired its current form over the course of several centuries. Discussions about the various stages of evolution and transmission of Enoch compositions and traditions are still ongoing among scholars. The Ethiopic version includes the following distinct texts:<sup>4</sup>

#### THE BOOK OF THE WATCHERS (1 ENOCH 1–36)

A third-century BC composition, but with some sections that may date from before the Hellenistic period, the Book of the Watchers is concerned with

- 1 VanderKam 1995.
- 2 Orlov and Boccaccini 2012.
- 3 Alexander 1983.
- 4 Nickelsburg 2001; Nickelsburg and VanderKam 2011.

FIG. 6.1 MS Bruce 74, The Beginning of the *Book of Enoch*, fol. 7r.

the Watchers, that is the angels who descend to earth and take human wives (fig. 6.2). Its core section is an anonymous (i.e. non-Enochic) narrative that shifts the biblical flood story from a past event to a future act of judgment (1 Enoch 6–11). Enoch appears in the following sections, in which he is commissioned to be a prophet who announces the future judgment and is taken on fantastic cosmic journeys. The concept of the great eschatological day of judgment is central to the Book of Enoch.

#### THE BOOK OF PARABLES (1 ENOCH 37–71)

Also known as the Similitudes of Enoch, this section probably dates from the period of Roman domination in Judaea, either around the turn of the era, or perhaps a little after the destruction of the Jewish Temple by the Romans. It is only attested in its Ethiopic version, with no fragments extant in Aramaic or Greek. The Book of Parables describes another cosmic journey, following that of the Book of the Watchers, in which various meteorological and cosmological phenomena, in addition to the very throne room of God, are revealed. One important feature of the Book of Parables is its treatment of the notion of the “Son of Man,” which would also become an important concept in Christianity. Also called the “Anointed One,” the “Elect One,” and the “Righteous One,” this figure presides over the coming judgment.

#### THE BOOK OF THE LUMINARIES (1 ENOCH 72–82)

Also known as the Astronomical Book of Enoch, this third-century BC (or perhaps earlier) composition describes astronomical lore said to have been revealed by the angel Uriel to Enoch. The astronomical data appear to reflect the Babylonian tradition and could represent early evidence for the incorporation of Babylonian science into Jewish culture in an exilic context.<sup>5</sup> Extant in both Aramaic and Ethiopic, it appears that the Ethiopic version contains an abbreviated form of the Aramaic original, but, as no Greek witness has survived, we cannot tell for certain at which stage or why the text was shortened. One important feature of the Book of the Luminaries is its description of the 364-day solar year, which accords with the calendar favoured by the Dead Sea Scrolls sectarians.

#### THE BOOK OF DREAMS (1 ENOCH 83–90)

Dated to the second century BC, the Book of Dreams contains two visions that are revealed to Enoch, who, in turn, recounts them to his son, Methuselah. In the first dream (1 Enoch 83–84), Enoch sees the coming flood and is advised to pray so that a remnant is preserved. In the second dream (1 Enoch 85–90), Enoch sees the whole of human history from Adam and Eve until the end of the age. Often called the Animal Apocalypse, because the characters in the vision are animals, Israel is represented by sheep who are prone to going astray and often prey to wild animals. The eschatological scenario involves a final battle, which may allude to the Maccabean

5 Ben-Dov 2008.

FIG. 6.2 MS Bruce 74, A page showing, in the central column, the beginning of the *Book of the Watchers*, fol. 7v.

ክውን፤ ወክሉ፡ ምግባሩ፡ ይትቀ  
 ነዩ፡ ሎቱ፡ እይትመሃጦ፡ እላ፡ በ  
 ክሙ፡ ሠርዓ፡ እምላክ፡ ክሙዝ፡  
 ይትገበር፡ ክሉ፡ ፡ ወርእዩ፡ እር፡  
 አብሀርት፡ ወአፍላግ፡ ኅቡረ፡  
 ይፈጽሙ፡ ግብርሙ፡ ቀወአን  
 ሙከ፡ አተዓገሥክሙ፡ ወኢገ  
 በርክሙ፡ ትእዛዘ፡ እግዚእ፡ ፡ ኢ  
 ላ፡ ተዓደውክሙ፡ ወሐመይክ  
 ሙ፡ ዓቢዖተ፡ ወድሩካተ፡ ቃላ  
 ተ፡ በአፍ፡ ርኩስት፡ ዘዚእክሙ፡  
 ላዕለ፡ ስቦዩ፡ ዘአሁ፡ ይቡሳ፡ ኅ፡ ላብ  
 አትክውንክሙ፡ ስላምቀወ  
 በእንተዝ፡ አንትሙ፡ መዋዕ  
 ሊክሙ፡ ትረግሙ፡ ወዓመታ  
 ተ፡ ሕይወትክሙ፡ ታኃጉሉ፡  
 ወይበዝኅ፡ መርገም፡ ዘለዓለ  
 ም፡ ወእይክውንክሙ፡ ሣህል፡  
 በውእቱ፡ መዋዕል፡ ትሀቡ፡ ስላ  
 ሙ፡ ዘእክሙ፡ በርግመት፡ ዘለ  
 ዓለም፡ ለክሉ፡ ጸድቃን፡ ወኪ  
 ያክሙ፡ ይረግሙ፡ ኃጥአን፡ ዘ  
 ልፈ፡ ወለክሙ፡ ኅቡረ፡ ምስለ፡  
 ኃጥአን፡ ወለዓሩዮን፡ ስይክው  
 ኅ፡ በርግን፡ ወፍሥሐ፡ ወሰላም  
 ወእሙንቱ፡ ይወርስዋ፡ ስም  
 ድርቀወለክሙ፡ ስ፡ ረሲዓን፡ ይክ  
 ወኅክሙ፡ ርግመት፡ ወእሙሃ፡  
 ይትወሀበሙ፡ ለኅሩዮን፡ ጥበብ፡  
 ወክሉሙ፡ እሎንቱ፡ የሐይወ፡

ወእይደግሙ፡ አበሳ፡ ኢበረኪዕ፡  
 ወኢበትዕቢት፡ አላይገንዩ፡ ዘቦ  
 ሙ፡ ጥበብ፡ ወእይደግሙ፡ አበሳ፡  
 ወእይትኑን፡ ክሉ፡ መዋዕል፡  
 ሕይወቶሙ፡ ወእይመውቱ፡ በ  
 መቅሠፍት፡ ወኢበመዓት፡ አላ  
 ኅ፡ ልቁ፡ መዋዕል፡ ሕይወቶሙ፡  
 ይፈጽሙ፡ ወይልሕቅ፡ ሕይወ  
 ቶሙ፡ በሰላም፡ ወዓመታተ፡ ፍ  
 ሥሐሆሙ፡ ይበዝኅ፡ በኃሂት፡  
 ወበሰላም፡ ዘለዓለም፡ ወስተ፡  
 ክሉ፡ መዋዕል፡ ሕይወቶሙ፡ **ከ**  
**ጊም፤** ወክን፡ እምዘ፡ በዝኅ፡  
 ውሉድ፡ ስብእ፡ በእማንቱ፡ መዋ  
 ዕል፡ ተወልድዮሙ፡ ሠናደት፡ እ  
 ጥልድ፡ ወላህዮት፡ ወርእዩ፡ ኪሃሆ  
 ኅ፡ መላእክት፡ ውሉድ፡ ስማዮት፡  
 ወፈተውዎንቀወይቤሉ፡ በበይና  
 ቲሆሙ፡ ኅዕ፡ ኅኅረይ፡ ለን፡ አንስ  
 ተ፡ እምውሉድ፡ ስብእ፡ ወንለድ፡ ለ  
 ኅ፡ ውሉድ፡ ወይቤሉሙ፡ ስምዮ  
 ዘ፡ ዘውእቱ፡ መልእክሙ፡ እፈር  
 ህ፡ የጊ፡ አትፈቅዱ፡ ይትገበር፡ ዝ  
 ኅቱ፡ ግብር፡ ወኢክውን፡ እን፡ ሕ  
 ቲትየ፡ ፈጻይዮ፡ ለዛቲ፡ ኃጢአት፡  
 በባይቀወአውሥኡ፡ ሎቱ፡ ክሉ  
 ሙ፡ ወይቤሉ፡ መሐላ፡ ኅምሐል፡  
 ክልን፡ ወንትዋገዝ፡ በበይናቲን፡  
 ክሙ፡ እንሚጣ፡ ለዛቲ፡ ምክር፡  
 ወንግብራ፡ ለዛቲ፡ ምክር፡ ግብረ፡

አሜሃ፡ መሐሉ፡ ክሉሙ፡ ኅቡረ፡  
 ወአውገዙ፡ ክሉሙ፡ በበይናቲ  
 ሆሙ፡ ቦቱ፡ ወክን፡ ክሉሙ፡ ይ  
 ወወረዱ፡ ውስተ፡ አርዲስ፡ ዝው  
 እቱ፡ ድማሁ፡ ለደብረ፡ አርሞን፡ ወ  
 ጸውዕዎ፡ ለደብረ፡ አርሞን፡ እስ  
 ሙ፡ መሐሉ፡ ቦቱ፡ ወአውገዙ፡ በበ  
 ይናቲሆሙ፡ ወክን፡ ክሉሙ፡ ስማቲ  
 ሆሙ፡ ለመላእክቲሆሙ፡ ስም  
 ያዛ፡ ዘውእቱ፡ መልእክሙ፡ ኡራ  
 ኪበራ፡ ሚኡል፡ ስኪቤኡል፡ ጣ  
 ሚኡል፡ ራሙኡል፡ ዳንኡል፡ እዝ  
 ቁኡል፡ ስራቁዮል፡ አሳኡል፡ አር  
 ምርስ፡ በጥራኡል፡ አናንኢ፡ ዘቁ  
 ቤ፡ ስምሳዳኡል፡ ስርተኡል፡ ጡ  
 ርኡል፡ የምዮኡል፡ ስራዝዮል፡ እ  
 ሉ፡ እሙንቱ፡ ሐበይቶሙ፡ ለይሆመ  
 ላእክት፡ ወበዕዳን፡ ክሉ፡ ምስሌሆ  
 ሙ፡ **ክ፡ ጊ፡** ወንሥኡ፡ ሎሙ፡ አንስ  
 ቲዩ፡ ወኃረዩ፡ ክሉ፡ ለለርእስ፡ ሕሐ  
 ተ፡ አሐተ፡ ወወጠኑ፡ ይባኡ፡ ኅቤሆ  
 ኅ፡ ወተደመሩ፡ ምስሌሆን፡ ወመሀ  
 ርዎን፡ ሥራዮተ፡ ወስብዓታተ፡ ወመ  
 ቲረ፡ ስርው፡ ወፀው፡ እመርዎን፡  
 ወእማንቱ፡ ፀንሳ፡ ወወለዳረዓ  
 ይተ፡ ዓበይተ፡ ወቆምሙ፡ በበግ፡  
 በእመት፡ እሉ፡ በልዑ፡ ክሉ፡ ግማ፡  
 ስብእ፡ እስክ፡ ስእንዎሙ፡ ኪስዮተ፡  
 ስብእ፡ ወተመይጦ፡ ረዓይት፡ ለ  
 ዕሉሆሙ፡ ይብልዕዎሙ፡ ለስብ

Revolt. There is also an expansion of Jeremiah's seventy years into seventy weeks of years. These features have prompted comparisons between the biblical book of Daniel and the Animal Apocalypse. The link between the two dreams in the Book of Dreams appears to be covenantal, with the first relating to the Noahic covenant and the second to the Israelite covenant.

#### THE EPISTLE OF ENOCH (1 ENOCH 91–108)

A composite work, the Epistle of Enoch contains several sections that are apocalyptic and admonitory in nature, most of which were composed in the second century BC. The exception is the final chapter (1 Enoch 108), which contains a late first-century AD exhortation to keep God's law in the imminent eschaton and is thus only found in the Ethiopic tradition.

#### TRANSMISSION AND TRANSLATION OF THE BOOK OF ENOCH

The Ethiopic Book of Enoch was originally composed in Aramaic. Fragments of several copies of an ancient Aramaic version were discovered amongst the Dead Sea Scrolls. None of the extant fragments, however, preserve any portion of the Book of Parables. Instead, fragments of another Enochic text, the Book of Giants, were preserved.

The Aramaic text was translated into Greek sometime in the first or second centuries AD. It was probably at the Greek stage that the Book of Parables was incorporated into 1 Enoch. The fate of the Book of Giants in Greek remains unknown, but it certainly continued to be received in the east, as it manifests in Manichaean texts that made their way along the Silk Route and into China.<sup>6</sup>

The Greek version was translated into Ethiopic during the Aksumite period, between the fourth and sixth centuries AD. However, the oldest manuscripts date from the fifteenth century.<sup>7</sup> The Book of Enoch is one of several apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts that have been preserved in manuscripts from Ethiopia and Eritrea.<sup>8</sup>

The first English translation of 1 Enoch was published in 1821, whereas the first edition of the Ethiopic text appeared in 1838.<sup>9</sup> The notion that the Ethiopic text may have also been translated from Aramaic<sup>10</sup> has been met with scepticism by most scholars.<sup>11</sup>

#### THE BOOK OF ENOCH AND JAMES BRUCE

The Ethiopic Book of Enoch remains canonical in the Ethiopian and Eritrean churches to this day. Aside from quotations in Greek sources, however, it remained unknown to other forms of Christianity and Western scholarship until the Scottish explorer, James Bruce, brought some Ethiopic manuscripts back to Britain.

Bruce donated one copy of the Book of Enoch to Louis XV and another to Pope Clement XIV.<sup>12</sup> Two additional manuscripts of the Book of Enoch,

6 Goff, Stuckenbruck and Morano 2016.

7 Knibb 1999; Erho and Stuckenbruck 2013.

8 Piovaneli 1993.

9 Laurence 1838.

10 Knibb 1978.

11 Piovaneli 1988.

12 Boccaccini 2018.

including Bruce's own copy, are now in the Bodleian Library (MSS Bod. or. 531 and Bruce 74).<sup>13</sup>

Although many new manuscripts of the Ethiopic Book of Enoch have been discovered over the years,<sup>14</sup> MS Bruce 74 remains important as it has been used for every significant edition and translation of the text,<sup>15</sup> starting from the aforementioned one by Laurence, including those of Charles<sup>16</sup> and Knibb.<sup>17</sup>

In MS Bruce 74, the Book of Enoch is divided into sections and chapters. It also contains English titles, which may have been added by Bruce himself.

The texts that follow the Book of Enoch often feature an explicit invoking God's blessing on the scribe or patron of the manuscript. Unfortunately, the names in these explicits have been erased throughout the manuscript. This is particularly disappointing in respect of the explicit that follows the Book of Amos, which appears to have originally referred to an Emperor (fol. 91rb). As the name has been erased, we have thus been deprived of valuable information that would have helped us date the manuscript.

13 Dillmann 1848: 5–8.

14 Erho and Stuckenbruck 2013.

15 Erho and Stuckenbruck 2013: 118.

16 Charles 1906.

17 Knibb 1978.

ወፍብኑነ ጊብኑ፡ ለሮምዎ፡ እም  
 ደግረ፡ ነበረ ፡ ጳጳሳ፡ መዋዕለ፤  
 ወዜነዎሙ፡ ለአኃዊሆ፡ ወነገሮ  
 ሙ፡ ዘርእዮ፡ በአዕድን፡ ቴሆ፡ ወአ  
 ኃዊሆኑ፡ ስበ፡ ስምዑ፡ እምቃሉ፡  
 አፉሆ፡ ተፈ፡ ጸሐ፡ ሰበዮ፡ ፍ  
 ለሐቆ፡ ወተገዛሉ፡ በበደናቴሆ  
 ሙ፡ ገሐ፡ ር፡ ንሕዚ፡ ንበ፡ ደእቴ፡  
 ሀገር፡ ወነደ፡ አልባቢሆሙ፡ ለ  
 ኤሙንቱ፡ ቅዱሳን፡ በላህበ፡ ሃደ  
 ማኖተ፡ ዘክርስቶስ፡ ወወፅኦ  
 ፍጡነ፡ ምስሉ፡ ቀስቋስሙ፡

ወምስሉ፡ ገብቶሙ፡ ወምስሉ፡  
 ክህናቴሆሙ፡ ወገዮ፡ ቅድሳተ  
 ሆሙ፡ ወመጸገ፡ ፍቴሆሙ፡ ለ  
 ምስሉ፡ ገብቶሙ፡



ዘክሙ፡ ወእኩ፡ ገብቶሙ፡ ምስሉ፡ ገብቶሙ፡ ወበደ፡ ሀገረ፡ ኤክኩ፡ ምስ፡



# 7 Hagiography in Ge'ez

*Antonella Brita and Jacopo Gnisci*

MS AETH. D. 23

*The Lives of Zämika'el Arägawi and Gäbrä Krəstos,*

*70 fols., 2 columns, ca. 18 lines to a column, 25.5 × 23.4 × 5 cm, parchment.*

*Date: first half of the eighteenth century.*

The term hagiography is used to refer to a body of literature connected with the practices of veneration of saints. In Ethiopia and Eritrea, as in other Christian traditions, the hagiographic genre encompasses a wide range of works focusing primarily, but not exclusively, on the life of a holy person. Hagiographic works in Ge'ez may include: the Life (*gädl*), miracles (*tä'amməṣ*), homilies (*dərsan*), and hymns (*zema*) of a saint.<sup>1</sup>

## THE BODLEIAN'S HAGIOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

The Ethiopic collection of the Bodleian Library includes several hagiographic works. MS Aeth. c. 3, for instance, contains the Life and miracles of Täklä Haymanot, who is one of the most venerated saints in the Orthodox Churches of Ethiopia and Eritrea and is famous for having prayed for so long while standing that one of his legs fell off. MS Aeth. e. 4 contains the life of Krəstos Šämra, a female mystic saint who gave birth to eleven children before embracing the ascetic life. Among the manuscripts acquired by James Bruce, there is also a two-volume copy of the Synaxarion, a collection of commemorative readings of saints and martyrs arranged according to the liturgical year (MSS Bruce 82–83).

## THE HAGIOGRAPHIC TRADITION IN ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA

The hagiographic genre has a long tradition in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Hagiographies were in fact among the first works to be translated from Greek into Ge'ez during the Aksumite period (ca. fourth to seventh centuries AD), soon after the Christianization of the country. The aim of these translations

<sup>1</sup> For an overview, with further bibliography, see Kaplan 1984. For an example, see Marrassini 2003.

FIG. 7.1 MS Aeth. d. 23, The Nine Saints next to Aksum's cathedral (above), and eight of the Nine Saints in procession (below), fol. 12r.

was to provide the local Church with the necessary resources for the education of the local clergy and the spiritual edification of the congregation. Hagiographic works – including the acts of martyrs and saints and collections of homilies – were translated into Ge‘ez during the Aksumite period. The lives of these saints, many of whom are also celebrated by the Eastern and Western Churches, were to be read on the day of their commemoration.

However, our understanding of the history of this genre depends largely on later evidence, since all the hagiographic books from the Aksumite period have been lost and the earliest material is found in manuscripts from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The evidence that these provide suggests that the interest in hagiographic works grew after the rise to power of the Solomonic dynasty, in 1270, since numerous new texts were translated from Arabic into Ge‘ez.<sup>2</sup> This period also witnessed the creation and diffusion of a local hagiographic literature, influenced, at least initially, by the literary tradition of the genre.

#### TEXTUAL AND MATERIAL FEATURES OF MS AETH. D. 23

The manuscript contains two hagiographic texts: the Life of Zāmika’el Arägawi (fols. 5r–49r) and the Life of Gäbrä Krəstos (fols. 50r–67v). Zāmika’el Arägawi has been considered, from the sixteenth century onwards, as the most prominent figure among a group of holy men, known as the Nine Saints, who, according to local traditions, came from different areas of the Byzantine Empire and encouraged the spread of Christianity in the Kingdom of Aksum between the fifth and sixth centuries (fig. 7.1).<sup>3</sup> Gäbrä Krəstos (lit. “the servant of Christ”) is the Ethiopic name of the famous Byzantine saint Alexis whose Life was translated from Greek or Arabic into Ge‘ez.<sup>4</sup>

Additional archival notes, added subsequently, include two land purchases (fols. 1r, 49v). The most interesting of these notes concerns the construction of a church named after Zāmika’el Arägawi in the region of Bädawo to which the present manuscript was donated (fol. 26r). Additionally, this note states that the church was commissioned by a daughter of Queen Məntəwwab, *wäyzäro* Əḥətä Maryam, during the reign of Emperor Iyasu II (r. 1730–55). The note also states that two priests came to the church to bless it, bringing with them this manuscript which was written during the reign of Emperor Iyasu. This could be a further reference to the reign of Iyasu II or, more likely if one considers the style of the illuminations, to that of his homonymous predecessor, Iyasu I (r. 1682–1706). The latter additions to the manuscript also include a section of a hymn written on the guard leaves at the front and back of the manuscript (fols. 1r–4v, 67v–70v).

The quire structure of the manuscript is quite regular. It has a protective fascicle at the beginning (fasc. 1), consisting of two bifolia, followed by two blocks of quaternions (fasc. 1–2 and 4–8) separated by one quinion (fasc. 5). The manuscript is bound between two wooden boards covered with dark-brown finely-tooled leather. The volume is kept in its traditional leather

2 Bausi 2018: 73–74.

3 Brita 2010; 2013.

4 Cerulli 1969.

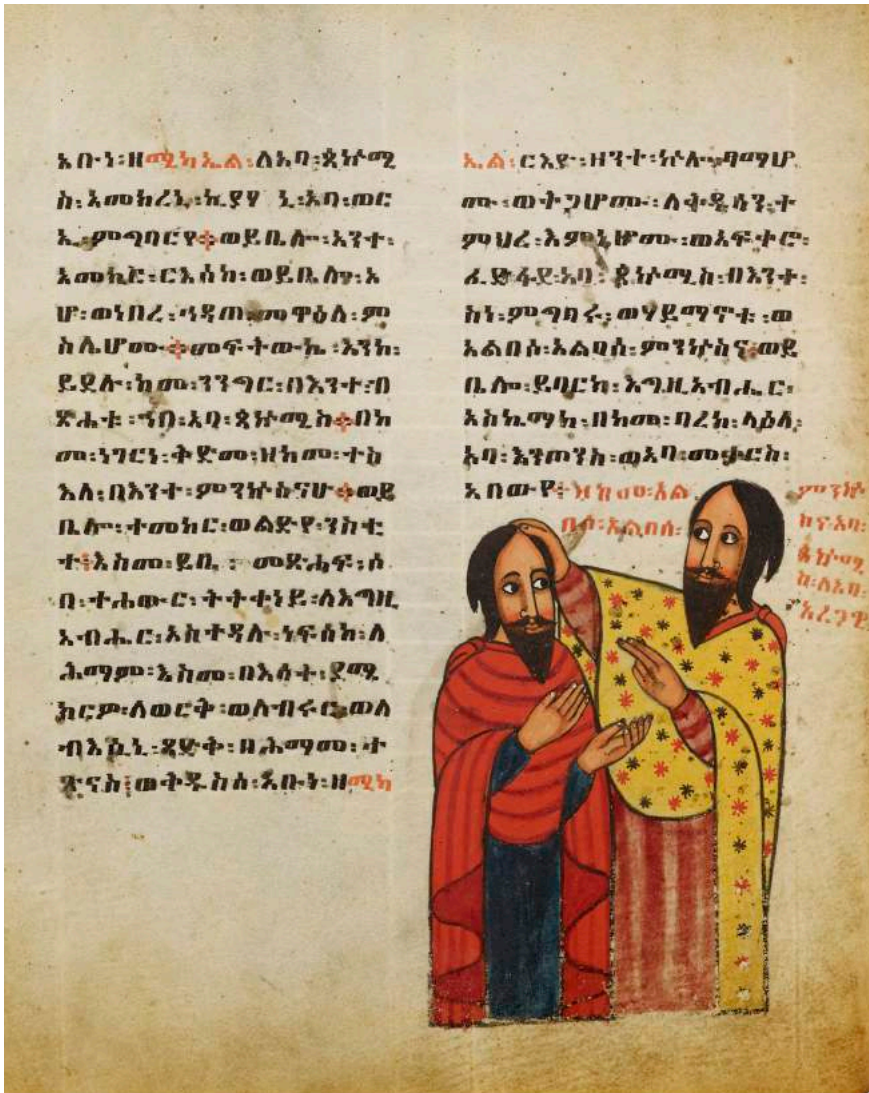


FIG. 7.2 MS Aeth. d. 23, Zāmika’el Arāgawi receiving his monastic garb from Pachomius, fol. 6v.

satchel, which in Ethiopia and Eritrea is used for storage and transportation (fig. 3.5).

MS Aeth. d. 23 was exported out of Ethiopia with a license in 1987 and sold at auction by Sotheby’s. It was purchased by a dealer, Mr Alan Thomas, who, that same year, sold it to Dr Bent Juel-Jensen.<sup>5</sup> Juel-Jensen argued that the manuscript had been copied in the monastery of Däbrä Dammo – traditionally considered as a foundation of Zāmika’el Arāgawi.<sup>6</sup> However, while it is true that the iconography of the miniatures of a now-destroyed copy of the Life of Zāmika’el Arāgawi kept in the monastery Däbrä Dammo is close to that of MS Aeth. d.23,<sup>7</sup> the Bodleian’s manuscript provides no definitive evidence in support of such a hypothesis.

MANUSCRIPTS AS CROSS-CULTURAL MEETING POINTS

It has been observed that foreign hagiographic traditions affected, on a textual and ideological level, the composition of local production of hagiographic texts.<sup>8</sup> This is also the case with the two works contained in MS Aeth.

5 Juel-Jensen 1991: 481.  
 6 Juel-Jensen 1993; Thomas 1990: 394.  
 7 Mercier 2000b.  
 8 Marrassini 2005.

d. 23. In fact, the coexistence of the Life of Zāmikaʾel Arägawi and Gäbrä Krəstos in the same manuscript is not fortuitous but testifies to the impact of the latter on the former. Such influence, discernible at a textual level, is also evident in the fact these two texts are often found in the same manuscript.<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, as noticed by Paolo Marrassini, “if two or more saints are present in the same manuscript, there must be some similarity felt between them by the tradition.”<sup>10</sup> The similarities between the Life of Zāmikaʾel Arägawi and the Life of Gäbrä Krəstos can be summarized as follows: both saints were born to a Roman (Byzantine) king<sup>11</sup>; both escape from marriage – Zāmikaʾel Arägawi refuses to marry despite the will of his parents,<sup>12</sup> Alexis gets married but leaves his wife<sup>13</sup> – and embrace the monastic life in a foreign country; and, finally, in the Geʿez translation Gäbrä Krəstos also goes by the Arabic name *ʿabd al-masih*,<sup>14</sup> which is also the name given to Zāmikaʾel Arägawi by his mother.<sup>15</sup>

### THE LIFE OF ZĀMIKAʾEL ARĀGAWI

MS Aeth. d. 23 is a multiple-text manuscript, but greater prominence is given to the life of Zāmikaʾel Arägawi, since it opens the manuscript and it is the only text that is accompanied by illustrations. Although a passage attributes its authorship to Saint Yared, there is no evidence to support this statement.<sup>16</sup> Zāmikaʾel Arägawi was born to a family related to the royal dynasty of Rom (Byzantium). He received a good education and was raised in the fear of God. When he reaches the marriageable age of 14 years, his parents find him a wife of royal blood whom he refuses to marry, choosing instead to move to Egypt where he asks Pachomius to initiate him into monkhood (fig. 7.2). From Pachomius he receives his monastic garb and the name Zāmikaʾel. His mother later follows his example, by becoming a nun and establishing a monastery in Təgray.

Zāmikaʾel is joined by seven of the Nine Saints in Egypt who also receive their monastic garb and name from Pachomius (fig. 2.3). They appoint Zāmikaʾel as their spiritual leader and move back to Rom together, where they convert many people to Christianity. After an unspecified amount of time, the archangel Gabriel carries Zāmikaʾel to Ethiopia on the back of his wings. The saint decides to stay in Ethiopia, and, with the other members of the Nine Saints, reaches Aksum on the fifth year of the reign of King ʿĪlla ʿAmida (fig. 7.1). Since the locals love and honour him, they start calling him the “elderly” (*arägawi*) to emphasize his wisdom.

Seven years later, the Nine Saints decide to part ways and Zāmikaʾel Arägawi, together with his mother and his disciple Matyas, embarks upon an adventurous journey during which he works many miracles (fig. 7.3). At the end of this journey, he reaches the foot of a mountain called Däbrä Dammo. Since the mountain’s steep flanks make climbing impossible, the saint begins to pray. As he does so a large snake appears in the sky and tries to dissuade him from living in such a forsaken place. Ignoring the snake’s advice, the saint orders it to lower its tail which he then uses to climb up the mountain (fig. 7.4).

9 See for example London, British Library, Or. 709; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, d’Abbadie 46; Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Comb.S.3; and Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, orient. oct. 1305; cfr. Marrassini 2005: 116–117.

10 Marrassini 2005: 112.

11 Guidi 1895: 57; Van den Oudernrijn 1939: 38; Cerulli 1969: *passim*.

12 Guidi 1895: 57; Van den Oudernrijn 1939: 38.

13 Cerulli 1969: pars 8–9.

14 Cerulli 1969: *passim*.

15 Guidi 1895: 57; Van den Oudernrijn 1939: 38.

16 On this point see Guidi 1896: 54, n. 2, who proposes an alternative reading of the passage; and Brita 2010: 57–62.



FIG. 7.3 MS Aeth. d. 23, Zāmika'el Arāgawi blessing a sick man with his hand cross, fol. 17v.

Zāmika'el Arāgawi starts living in a cave on Dābrā Dammo praying, fasting, celebrating the mass, and working miracles. One day, King Kaleb sends the saint a message asking for his spiritual help and prayer to aid his departure for the city of Najran (South Arabia) and his military expedition against the Jewish King Dū Nuwās responsible for the persecution and death of many Christians (fig. 7.5).

After a successful campaign, Kaleb decides to become a monk and his son and successor, Gäbrä Mäsqäl, builds a church at the top of Dābrā Dammo. This is accomplished by building a ramp to carry the building materials to the top of the mountain. The consecration of the church by the Bishop is followed by a celebration during which Zāmika'el Arāgawi performs the Divine Liturgy. The following day the saint has the ramp demolished and substituted with a rope which commemorates his ascent on the snake's tail. To this day, the monastic complex on Dābrā Dammo can be accessed only by using a rope.



FIG. 7.4 MS Aeth. d. 23,  
Zāmikaʾel Arägawi ascending  
Däbrä Dammo, fol. 22r.

## THE *KIDAN* OF ZÄMIKA'EL ARÄGAWI

As the fame of Zämika'el Arägawi spreads across the world, many people come to visit him to become monks, to plead for a miracle, or to ask for advice. One night the Lord appears to the holy man to give him the *kidan* (pact), that is the gift of eternal life in paradise and the promise of benevolence towards those who will commemorate him after his death (fig. 7.6). After his encounter with God, Zämika'el Arägawi talks to his disciples about his impending death and, after giving them the necessary spiritual advice, appoints his disciple Matyas as his successor. The next day, upon entering Arägawi's cave, Matyas discovers that his body has disappeared.

The *kidan* is one of the most significant episodes of the Life of Zämika'el Arägawi and a recurring feature in Ethiopic hagiographic literature.<sup>17</sup> In the *kidan*, Jesus appears to a saint pledging to benefit those faithful who will celebrate the saint's *täzkar* (commemoration), build churches in his name, or read, translate or commission a copy of a manuscript containing his Life, etc. This textual section is usually inserted in the narrative soon before the death of the holy man. From a hagiographic point of view, the *kidan* is connected with the liturgical use of the manuscript, since it implicitly conveys the idea that the Life of the saint is not a mere literary product but a work that should be used for purposes of veneration. The Life of Zämika'el Arägawi illustrates this clearly by describing how his disciples commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of his death.

The Life of Arägawi, as found in MS Aeth. d. 23, would have been read to the community of the faithful on the commemoration day of the saint. One should not be surprised by the lack of historical accuracy or by the fact that episodes of his daily life are missing or not exhaustive. In fact, the aim of these texts was to educate the community through the example given by the exceptional life of a holy man, rather than provide a historical narrative. For this reason, these texts also feature a great number of quotations from the Scriptures.

## ILLUSTRATING HAGIOGRAPHIC MANUSCRIPTS

Some of the earliest hagiographic manuscripts in Ge'ez are provided with illustrations. The earliest dated example contains the apocryphal lives of the Apostles and was probably copied for Zä'yäsus, an abbot of the monastery of Däbrä Ḥayq Ḍstifanos, between 1292 and 1297.<sup>18</sup> Each section of text in this manuscript, except for the one that deals with Saint Paul, is introduced by a frontispiece portrait of the relevant Apostle who is shown standing under an arch with a book in hand. There is also a prefatory folio, now probably misplaced (fol. 2), with three portraits of Old Testament prophets on each side.

Until the seventeenth century hagiographic manuscripts continued to feature iconic portraits which were generally placed at the beginning of a text section like the ones in the Zä'yäsus manuscript. However, from the late seventeenth century onwards, it became increasingly common to in-

17 Kur 1984.

18 Getatchew Haile and Macomber 1981: 237–39, EMMML 1767.



FIG. 7.5 MS Aeth. d. 23, King Kaleb sailing to South Arabia with Zämika'el Arägawi's blessing, fol. 28r.

clude narrative scenes that glorified a saint by illustrating his or her life and miracles. In most cases, the miniatures, framed or unframed and painted against the neutral parchment background, were also distributed throughout the text. This new approach to the illustration of manuscripts is well exemplified by the Bodleian's MS Aeth. d. 23.

ILLUSTRATING THE LIFE OF ZÄMIKA'EL ARÄGAWI

Members of the Nine Saints were rarely depicted prior to the seventeenth century. A fifteenth-century Book of Hours, kept at the monastery of Däbrä Q'äyäsä, features hieratic full-length standing portraits of four of the Nine Saints: Gärima, Şəḥma, Ɔäntälewön, and Liqanos.<sup>19</sup> The manuscript also contains portraits of two Desert Fathers, Pachomius and Shenute. Like the

19 Chojnacki 1983: 119.

ወወዘበ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ ከዳዊ፡ ከሙያ  
 ከዳዊ፡ ዓላማራተ፡ እሱ፡ ተቀረቦ፡ በ  
 ዘ ከሙ፡ ወዘበ፡ ከዳዊ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ ለዮሱ፡ ከ-ክርስቶስ፡ ከሙያ፡ ሕይወ፡ ለ-  
 ቱ፡ ከፊት፡ ለሱ፡ ተመወደ፡ ተረባባሪ፡ በእግዚአብሔር፡



impossible encounter between Pachomius and Arägawi described in the latter's Life, such imagery was used to legitimize local monastic traditions by associating them, through the Nine Saints, to key figures from the early monastic movement in Egypt.

Arägawi is not represented in the Däbrä Q<sup>w</sup>äyäsa manuscript. This is not surprising since depictions of the saint appear more frequently only after the mid-seventeenth century. One of the earliest known portraits of Arägawi is found among the sixteenth-century wall paintings of the church of Yäm'ata G<sup>w</sup>əḥ in Northern Ethiopia.<sup>20</sup> Local traditions attribute the foundation of this church to another member of the Nine Saints, Yäm'ata, who is painted in a more prominent and visible way than the other eight holy men. This is to be expected. In fact, although the visual evidence is too fragmentary to draw firm conclusions, it appears that the various monaster-

FIG. 7.6 MS Aeth. d. 23, Jesus giving the *kidan* to Zāmika'el Arägawi, fol. 31v.

20 Balicka-Witakowska 2003.



FIG. 7.7 MS Aeth. d. 23,  
King Kaleb building a church and  
vanquishing his enemies in South  
Arabia, fol. 28v.

ies associated with the Nine Saints placed greater emphasis, in art as much as in literature, on their founder.<sup>21</sup>

The thirty-three miniatures in MS Aeth. d. 23 function as a visual gloss of the text that would have enhanced the reader's understanding of the spiritual example set by Zāmika'el Arägawi. The miniatures, some taking up a full- to half-page, others just a column, illustrate and complement the text they accompany. This type of approach to the distribution of images in manuscripts, as noted above, became widespread in Ge'ez manuscripts after the second half of the seventeenth century and it was probably in this period that the cycle of illustrations that accompany the Life of Arägawi was created.

The style of the miniatures – which are painted in flat colours without modelling – is also typical of the second half of the seventeenth century and is known as the first Gondarine style.<sup>22</sup> The miniatures are stylistically very close to the earliest set of miniatures found in a seventeenth-century copy of the Miracles of Mary in the British Library (Or. 641),<sup>23</sup> in a manuscript documented in the Kidanä Məḥrät monastery,<sup>24</sup> and in an unpublished copy of the Life of Gärima (another member of the Nine Saints) kept in the Gärima monastery.<sup>25</sup> They are also close in style to the wall paintings of the monastery of Däbrä Sina Gorgora, on the northern shores of lake Ṭana, which feature a representation of the Nine Saints.<sup>26</sup>

It is evident that the miniatures of MS Aeth. d. 23 were added to the manuscript after it was written, for several pages of the Life of Arägawi have been left partly or entirely blank (fols. 7v, 25r, 27r, 45v). The most logical explanation for this is that the scribe was expecting these areas to be filled in later by the illuminator. This, in turn, suggests that he was copying the text from an illustrated manuscript. It is impossible to say with certainty why some of the pages were eventually left blank or unfinished (fig. 7.6).

The first miniature in MS Aeth. d. 23 shows Arägawi being ordained by Saint Pachomius (fig. 7.2). The episode, which could never have taken place, serves an ideological rather than historical purpose. It gives prestige and legitimacy to the Ethiopian monastic tradition by tracing the spiritual descent of its founders, the Nine Saints, from Pachomius.<sup>27</sup>

A few pages later, we see Arägawi miraculously reaching Aksum on the back of an angel, while the facing scene illustrates the arrival of the other eight saints in Aksum (fig. 7.1). The holy men, welcomed by Arägawi, carry the equipment for the liturgy including a chalice, thuribles, a book held in a case, and, most importantly, the altar tablet, held in the box on top of the head of the last figure in the procession. The scene and the objects appear to replicate a real-life liturgical procession in an idealized form. Thus, the artist of MS Aeth. d. 23, or the model which he followed, made sense of the past by drawing on contemporary experiences of worship and, in this respect, followed a long-standing tradition of Ethiopic manuscript illumination.<sup>28</sup> Among the various scenes, two of the most striking show Arägawi's miraculous ascent of Däbrä Dammo on the back of a snake (fig. 7.4)<sup>29</sup> and the South Arabian expedition of King Kaleb (fig. 7.7), in which the king and his men slay a number of enemies and build a church.

21 Brita 2013: 37.

22 On the development of this style of painting, see Annequin 1972; and Bosc-Tiessé 2008: 87–115.

23 Wright 1877: 48–49.

24 Nosnitsin 2013: 168, fig. 46.

25 Mercier 2000b: 172; see also Leroy 1973: 166, fig. 74.

26 Staude 1959: 199.

27 Brita 2010: 86–92.

28 Gnisci 2015.

29 A similar scene appears in the British Library's Or. 590 (fol. 64v).

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አዲስ-አዳ-ጊዮርጊስ

ሐዘን-አዳ-ጊዮርጊስ



# 8 Marian Literature in Ge'ez

*Jacopo Gnisci*

MS AETH. E. 28

*The Harp of Mary, Asmat Prayer,*

*145 fols., 2 columns, ca. 14–17 lines to a column, 16.4 × 15 × 6.7 cm, parchment.*

*Date: late seventeenth or early eighteenth century.*

Mary, the Mother of God, is the most venerated saint in Ethiopia and Eritrea. In both countries, the main cathedrals as well as many other churches are dedicated to her, and to this day many individuals are named after her. Ethiopic literature is rich in stories about her life and miracles.<sup>1</sup> There are also many hymns and homilies that praise her for her virtue and suffering as well as Mariological works that focus on her virginity and role in the Incarnation.<sup>2</sup>

## MARIAN DEVOTION IN ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA

Believers frequently invoke Mary's help since she is considered the most powerful intermediary between humanity and God. This is because of her covenant (*kidan*) with Jesus who promises to forgive the sins of anyone who commemorates her or does a pious deed in her name (see p. 65).<sup>3</sup> Ethiopic literature has many passages that exemplify her powerful intercessory role. Among these, one of the most remarkable is the story of a vicious cannibal who is saved from hell simply for having given a beggar a drink of water in her name.<sup>4</sup>

Marian texts were first translated from Greek into Ge'ez during the Christian Aksumite period, but most works were translated from Arabic from the fourteenth century onwards. Marian literature in Ge'ez was also enriched by local authors. In particular, the fifteenth-century Emperor Zär'a Ya'eqob (r. 1434–68) promoted devotion towards Mary by writing a series of Marian treatises and by instituting a series of 33 feasts in her honour.<sup>5</sup>

The collection of the Bodleian Library provides a good picture of the complexity and extent of the literature on Mary in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

1 Budge 1900; 1922; Cerulli 1943.

2 Getatchew Haile and D. Nosnitsin 2007, "Mariology," EAe 3: 808–11; Habtemichael Kidane 2007, "Hymns to the Virgin Mary," EAe 3: 817–19.

3 Budge 1922: lxx-lxxi, 54–60.

4 Budge 1900: 83–85.

5 Getatchew Haile 1992.

FIG. 8.1 MS Aeth. e. 28, Gäbrä Mämfäs Qəddus with Täklä Haymanot Abba Giyorgis, fol. 1v.



FIG. 8.2 MS Aeth. e. 33,  
The Virgin Mary, fol. 18v.

The Praise of Mary (*Wəddase Maryam*), a text typically associated with Ge'ez Psalters (see p. 37), also circulated in other manuscripts, such as MS Aeth. f. 15. Several of the library's manuscripts contain hymns to the Virgin Mary, including MSS Aeth. e. 17 and f. 3. Among the Pococke manuscripts (see p. 3), MS Poc. 6 contains, alongside other texts, the Anaphora of Mary, which is one of the prayers for the consecration of the Eucharist used by the Ethiopian and Eritrean Churches. Ge'ez manuscripts also often featured portraits of Mary or illustrations showing episodes inspired by her life and miracles. For instance, MS Aeth. e. 33 – an eighteenth-century Psalter with five miniatures inserted from an earlier manuscript, probably belonging to the fifteenth century – contains an iconic portrait of Mary (fig. 8.2).<sup>6</sup>

#### THE HARP OF MARY

Another influential Ethiopian theologian active during the fifteenth century, Giyorgis of Sägla, is traditionally credited with the authorship of several Marian works such as the Harp of Mary (*Arganonä Maryam*).<sup>7</sup> This text prais-

<sup>6</sup> For a preliminary description, see Juél-Jensen 1987: 220–24; the miniatures can be compared with those published in Heldman 1989.

<sup>7</sup> Colin 1987.



es Mary’s motherhood, addressing her with such epithets as “ship of gold” and “pillar of pearl.”<sup>8</sup> Giyorgis of Säglä, typifying the attitude of many Christian Ethiopians and Eritreans, also asks Mary to “incline thine ear to the voice of my petition, and hear it and be not impatient with me, but with a shining heart and a pure mind accept the word of my mouth.”<sup>9</sup>

Several of the Bodleian’s manuscripts contain the Harp of Mary, but the most striking example was purchased for the library by the Friends of the Bodleian in 2002.<sup>10</sup> It is a beautifully illustrated late seventeenth-century copy of the Harp of Mary with a frontispiece miniature (MS Aeth. e. 28; fig. 8.1). Here the text has been divided into readings for the days of the week (figs. 1.4, 2.4, 8.4). The beginning of each resulting section is marked by a frame filled with interlace patterns or other geometric motifs in black, red, and brown. Additionally, two sections are preceded by carpet pages created by following ruled lines. The first features a cross-like element with curlicue ends and triangles between each arm (fig. 8.3), whereas the second combines a chequered pattern with a lozenge pattern (fig. 8.5).

#### THE FRONTISPIECE ILLUSTRATION OF MS AETH. E. 28

The Bodleian’s manuscript also has a frontispiece portrait of the saint Gäbrä Mämfäs Qəddus in an orans pose (fig. 8.1). The Ethiopic tradition credits this hermit, who is one of the most popular saints among Christians in Ethiopian and Eritrea, with many miracles and a life which lasted for 562 years. According to his acts, the saint grew hair all over his body to cover his nakedness.<sup>11</sup> This is represented in Ms. Aeth. e. 28 by the hatching that covers his arms.

FIG. 8.3 MS Aeth. e. 28, Carpet page with cross, fol. 38v.

FIG. 8.4 MS Aeth. e. 28, Beginning of the reading for the fourth day of the week, fol. 39r.

8 Budge 1922: 297.

9 Budge 1922: 299.

10 Delamarter and Demeke Berhane 2007: 11-14, 66-72.

11 Marrassini 2003.



FIG. 8.5 MS Aeth. e. 28,  
Carpet page with geometric pattern,  
fol. 130v.

From the seventeenth century onwards Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus is often depicted wearing a scapular and flanked by some of the wild beasts he tamed. In this guise he appears for example in a group of drawings from the Bodleian's collection (MS Aeth. b. 2).<sup>12</sup> Instead, neither element appears in the Bodleian's manuscript of the Harp of Mary. The item on his chest, decorated with diagonal crosses alternately filled with black and white triangles, resembles a breastplate rather than a scapular, and he is flanked by two smaller figures holding swords pointing downwards rather than by beasts. The one to the left is identified by a caption as Täklä Haymanot, an Ethiopian saint who helped evangelize the province of Šäwa between the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The one to the right, identified as Abba Giyorgis, is probably the author of the Harp of Mary: Giyorgis of Sägla. It is unusual for the saints to be holding swords since, with the exception of Saint Paul, these are generally an attribute of angels or rulers (see figs. 5.1, 7.4).

#### THE GROUND HORNBILL ARTIST

One of the most interesting features of MS Aeth. e. 28 is the abstract and rigid style of its illustrations. These were painted at a time, the late seventeenth century, when artists working in the then capital, Gondär, had start-

<sup>12</sup> Partly described in Balicka-Witakowska 2004, though the level of detail of the drawings makes it unreasonable to suggest, as the author does, that they are "preparatory sketches;" Delamarter and Demeke Berhane 2007: 1–2, pl. 1.

ed to give greater emphasis to the narrative over the iconic in their work (e.g. figs. 7.1–7.7). The ever-changing poses and the vibrant dynamism of the figures painted in the Gondarine style, while not naturalistic, are in contrast with the rigid frontality and symmetry of the hieratic portraits of the three saints in MS Aeth. e. 28 (fig. 8.1).

Bent Juel-Jensen took an interest in this latter style of painting during his expedition to Ethiopia with the Oxford University Exploration Club in 1974.<sup>13</sup> In an article published in 1977, he attributed the miniatures from several manuscripts to an anonymous painter whom he dubbed the Ground Hornbill artist because of the appearance of this particular bird in several of his works. The first work that Juel-Jensen attributed to the Ground Hornbill artist is a copy of the Four Gospels now in the British Library (Or. 516).<sup>14</sup> The second is a manuscript, containing a text known as *Arägawi mänfäsawi*, kept at the monastery of Maryam Dibo.<sup>15</sup> The third is a group of four full-page miniatures that decorate a quire of two double leaves which he acquired during a journey to Ethiopia and is now in the collection of the Bodleian Library (MS Aeth. e. 34; fig. 8.6).<sup>16</sup>

More works were discovered by scholars after Juel-Jensen's article, some painted in a similar style, others probably painted by the Ground Hornbill artist himself. Among the works that can be attributed on stylistic grounds to the Ground Hornbill artist are: three concertina books, one in a private collection, one in the church of Betä Giyorgis in the town of Lalibäla, and one in Ašätän Maryam, situated about half a day's walk from Lalibäla;<sup>17</sup> a copy of the Life of King Yämṛəḥannä Krəstos, in a church that is dedicated to him and is also situated within walking distance from Lalibäla;<sup>18</sup> a loose folio in a private collection;<sup>19</sup> and two unpublished miniatures, probably taken from a concertina book, that are currently inserted in a nineteenth-century manuscript.

A manuscript in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (acc. no. 2006.99) has also been attributed to the Ground Hornbill artist on stylistic grounds. However, this suggestion seems questionable since the frontispiece miniature in this latter manuscript presents several differences from the works listed above. For instance, in the Metropolitan Museum's miniature the eyebrows are less vigorously curved, nearer to the eye, and longer than in all the other illuminations attributable to the Ground Hornbill artist. It is thus likely that the frontispiece miniature in the Metropolitan's manuscript was heavily retouched or that it is the work of an imitator of the Ground Hornbill artist.

With the exception of the Metropolitan Museum manuscript, all the other works mentioned above are close enough in terms of style and iconography to support the view that they were painted by the same artist. In several cases the scenes are almost identical. The Crucifixion miniature of MS Aeth. e. 34, for instance, is practically identical to the miniatures of the same subject in the above-mentioned concertina books from the churches of Ašätän Maryam and Betä Giyorgis. Small differences, such as the position of the sun or the garment patterns, do not alter the overall impression of similarity. Even the captions of the illustrations are written in a similar hand, though the placement and content of the text vary slightly in each case.

13 Juel-Jensen and Rowell 1975: 85.

14 Juel-Jensen 1977: 62; see also Heldman 1993: 247.

15 Juel-Jensen 1977: 74.

16 Juel-Jensen 1977: 63–64.

17 Heldman 1993: 247–248; Mercier and Lepage 2012: 296–299.

18 Bosc-Tiessé 2009: 124.

19 Mercier 2000a: 142–143.



FIG. 8.6 MS Aeth. e. 34,  
Five Zag'we kings, fol. 1v.

Another interesting aspect of the works decorated by the Ground Hornbill artist is that all the manuscripts listed above are palaeographically very similar. This has led some scholars to suggest that the scribe of the Bodleian's copy of the Harp of Mary, who identifies himself as Basälyos in the manuscript (fol. 116vb), was one and the same person as its illuminator.<sup>20</sup> However, since a scribe identifies himself as Maḥəṣäntä Mika'el in a partly erased Amharic note in the British Library's Gospels (fol. 2rb),<sup>21</sup> this hypothesis requires further study before being accepted.

#### A REGIONAL STYLE OF PAINTING?

While the Bodleian's copy of the Harp of Mary may not have been written by the same scribe (or scribes) of the British Library's Gospels, it is evident that these manuscripts have a number of features in common. Both are almost square in format. They are palaeographically similar, and feature numerous inscriptions mentioning their owners or donors.<sup>22</sup> Their illustrations are also extremely close in style to each other and to the works listed above.

This has led Juul-Jensen and other scholars to suggest that the Ground Hornbill artist was active in the historical region of Lasta, located in the North Wällo zone of Ethiopia. This conclusion rests on two observations. The first, is that most works attributed to the Ground Hornbill artist are found in churches in or around Lalibäla, which is situated in the heart of Lasta.

The second, is that kings of the Zag'we dynasty – who had their powerbase in the area around Lalibäla (see p. 17–18) – are portrayed in several of the miniatures attributed to him.<sup>23</sup> Zag'we kings appear, for example, in the concertina books from the churches of Aṣätän Maryam and Betä Giyorgis. They are also depicted on one of the pages of the Bodleian's MS Aeth. e. 34 (fig. 8.6), which features five Zag'we kings who ruled between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: Yämraḥännä Krəstos, Lalibäla, Nä'akk'əto Lä'ab, Ḥarbe, and Gäbrä Mäsqäl.

It is worth noting that the five Zag'we kings in the Bodleian's miniature are depicted holding a book instead of a sword, which is the usual attribute of kingship in Ethiopian and Eritrean art (see figs. 5.1, 7.4). This is probably due to the way in which these sovereigns are portrayed in their Vitae. In fact, their hagiographies, written over a century after their downfall, portray them as holy men who behaved more like priests than kings.

Further research is needed to establish whether the painting style of the Hornbill artist was truly regional, and, if it was, whether styles such as his were developed for political reasons as some are inclined to believe.<sup>24</sup> Since the fifteen quires of MS Aeth. e. 28 are irregular,<sup>25</sup> a close examination of the physical features of all the manuscripts associated to the Hornbill artist may reveal peculiar practices of assembly and shed further light on their production. Moreover, scientific analysis, such as multispectral imaging, may recover the erased information about the patrons who were involved in the commissioning of these manuscripts.

20 Mercier 2004: 78.

21 Wright 1877: 26–27.

22 Most of the names in MS Aeth. e. 28 have been erased, but the names of four women, identified as the owners or donors of the manuscript, are still visible in a note that was possibly added by a later hand (fol. 130rb).

23 Derat 2018.

24 Bosc-Tiessé 2009; Chojnacki 1983: 469–97.

25 The quire structure is described in detail in Delamarter and Demeke Berhane 2007: 66–72.

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 ድኤተ፡አግዚእነ፡አዳራስ፡ክርስቶስ፡  
 ኃይለ፡ወመዋእ፡ዘገብረ፡አግዚእብ  
 ሔር፡በእደዋሁ፡ለዓምድ፡ጽዮን፡ን  
 ገሠ፡አትዮጳፊ፡ወስመ፡መንግሥ  
 ቱ፡ግብረ፡መስቀል፡በዓሠርቱ፡ወስ  
 መንቱ፡ዓመተ፡መንግሥቱ፡አምዘ፡  
 ገግሠ፡ወዓመተ፡ምሕረትሂ፡ረዮ፡፲  
ወ፡፳፡ንጽሕፍኤ፡ዘገተ፡መጽሐፈ፡  
 እንዘ፡ንትአመን፡አበ፡ረዳኢ፡ወልድ፡  
 ናዘኤ፡ወመንፈስ፡ቅዲስ፡መራሐቅ  
 እንዘ፡ነጋሥሥ፡ረድኤተ፡አምቅድ  
 ከት፡ሥላሴ፡በከመ፡ይቤ፡ያዕቆብ፡  
 ሐዋርያ፡እመቤ፡ዘኅግእ፡ለግብብ፡  
 ለይስአል፡ኃበ፡ወሀብ፡አግዚእብ  
 ሔር፡ዘይሁብ፡ለኦሎ፡በስፉሕ፡  
 ወአይትዔየር፡ወንሕነኒ፡ንግሥ  
 ሥ፡ረድኤተ፡አምአብ፡ወወልድ፡  
 ወመንፈስ፡ቅዲስ፡ከመ፡ይረድአነ፡  
 ለዓለመ፡ዓለም፡አሜን፡  
 ወሆሚያ፡ንገሠ፡አትዮጳፊ፡ዘስመ፡  
 ዓምድ፡ጽዮን፡ከመ፡ዓለም፡ንገሠ፡  
 ዕልዋን፡ዕቡይ፡ወመምዕለይ፡ዘ  
 አዕባባ፡ርእሱ፡ከመ፡ዲያብሎስ፡  
 ዘተመክሐ፡ለዕለ፡ፈጣሪሁ፡ወይቤ፡  
 እክውን፡ከመ፡ልዑል፡ወከማሁ፡  
 አዕባባ፡ርእሱ፡ንገሠ፡ዕልዋን፡ዘ  
 ከመ፡ሰብረዲን፡ወተመክሐ፡ለዕ  
 ለ፡አግዚእ፡ዓምድ፡ጽዮን፡ወይቤ፡  
 እክውን፡ንገሠ፡ለኦሎ፡ምድረኢ  
 ትዮጳፊ፡ወእመልከመ፡ለክርስቲ  
 ያን፡በከመ፡ሐግዮ፡ወአመዘብር፡  
 አብያተ፡ክርስቲያናት፡ወዘንተ፡  
 ብሂሎ፡ተንሥአ፡ወሐረ፡ወበጽሐ፡  
 ኃበ፡ምድረ፡ክርስቲያን፡ወአውዓ

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 ወ፡ዕድ፡ወአንከተ፡ወአግብአመ፡  
 ወስተ፡ሕገ፡ወእምድ፡ኃረዝ፡ይቤ፡  
 እሠይም፡መኳንተ፡ለዕለ፡በሐ  
 ወርተ፡አትዮጳፊ፡ወከመ፡ይሠይ  
 ም፡ንገሠ፡ጽዮን፡ወሢመ፡መኳን  
 ተ፡ወመሐፍንተ፡ለዕለ፡ዓምተ፡አሐ  
 ድ፡መስፍነ፡ወለዕለ፡ወረብ፡አሐድ፡  
 መስፍነ፡ለዕለ፡ወጌ፡አሐድ፡መስ  
 ፍነ፡ወለዕለ፡አላማሌ፡አሐድ፡መስ  
 ፍነ፡ለዕለ፡ፈጣር፡አሐድ፡መስፍ  
 ነ፡ወለዕለ፡እንደገብጠን፡አሐድ፡  
 መስፍነ፡ለዕለ፡ኸሚ፡አሐድ፡መስ  
 ፍነ፡ወለዕለ፡መገር፡አሐድ፡መስ  
 ፍነ፡ለዕለ፡ግራርያ፡አሐድ፡መስፍ  
 ነ፡ወለዕለ፡ጽላልኸ፡አሐድ፡መስፍ  
 ነ፡ወለዕለ፡ከታታ፡አሐድ፡መስፍነ፡  
 ወለዕለ፡ወግዳ፡አሐድ፡መስፍነ፡  
 ዕለ፡ሰርማት፡አሐድ፡መስፍነ፡  
 ለዕለ፡ጽሕጋ፡አሐድ፡መስፍነ፡  
 ለዕለ፡ተገለጸ፡አሐድ፡መስፍነ፡  
 ለዕለ፡ምድረ፡ዜጋ፡አሐድ፡መስፍነ፡  
 ወለዕለ፡መንዝሕ፡አሐድ፡መስፍነ፡  
 ለዕለ፡አምሐራ፡ዳረላም፡አሐድ፡  
 ሐዓኔ፡ሰገራት፡አሐድ፡ወማእከለ፡  
 እንኃት፡አሐድ፡ዳረላም፡ዘቅዳ፡  
 አሐድ፡ወማእከለ፡ተዋዘት፡አሐድ፡  
 ማእከለ፡ባሕር፡አሐድ፡ወመከን  
 ነ፡እንደርታ፡አሐድ፡በጌምድር፡አ  
 ሐድ፡ወነጋሢ፡ጉዣም፡አሐድ፡ወ  
 ኢንደገ፡ኃበ፡ዘኢሢመ፡ውስተ፡ኮ  
 ሎ፡ምድረ፡አትዮጳፊ፡ኃበ፡ዘአይክ  
 ል፡በደሐ፡እስመ፡ኢይክል፡አግር፡  
 ይኩን፡ርእሱ፡ወምድር፡ሰማየ፡ወገ

ብር፡ለቀ፡ወውእቱሂ፡ዕልው፡ው  
 ሎድ፡አፍዖት፡ወዘርአ፡ቃግስት፡  
 ውሎድ፡ነኪር፡ዘእምሥር፡ዕይ  
 ጣን፡ሐለዮ፡መንበረ፡ዓዊት፡ወይ  
 ቤ፡አነ፡አነግሥ፡በጽዮን፡ወዕለ፡ት  
 ዕቢት፡ውስተ፡ልቡ፡ከመ፡ዲያብሎ  
 ከ፡አቡሁ፡ወይቤ፡አራሱ፡አብያተ፡  
 ክርስቲያናት፡ምስጋድ፡ለተንበለት፡  
 ወለንገሠ፡ክርስቲያንሂ፡አገብአ፡  
 ውስተ፡ሐግዮ፡ምስለ፡ሕዝቡ፡ወእ  
 ሠይም፡ከመ፡አሐዲ፡አመኳንት፡  
 ወለእመሰ፡አበዮ፡ገቢአ፡ውስተ፡ሐ  
 ግዮ፡አሜጥዎ፡ለኖሎተ፡እንከሳ፡አ  
 ለ፡ይብልሞ፡ወርጵሕ፡ከመ፡ይረ  
 ከይዎ፡ኖላዊ፡አግማል፡ወንግሥ  
 ተሂ፡ዣን፡መንገሣሃ፡ብእሲት፡ንገ  
 ሥ፡አገብር፡ለማኃረ፡ወለመርዓ  
 ዴሂ፡ሀገረ፡መንግሥቱ፡አራሱ፡ሀገረ፡  
 ዚአየ፡ወበሀየ፡አተክል፡ተክለ፡ጫ  
 ት፡አስመ፡ለውእቱ፡ተክል፡ያፈቅር  
 ሞ፡ተንበለት፡ወጋዳሂ፡ዘአውዕአ፡  
 ለንገሥ፡ወሀብ፡ለሠራዊቱ፡ከመ፡  
 ይትቃተሎ፡ሎቱ፡እንዘ፡ይትሜስል፡  
 ዕልው፡ገብር፡ከመ፡አግዚእ፡ከን  
 ቶ፡ሐለዮ፡ወከንቶ፡ነበበ፡ወዕብ፡  
 ምዓ፡ንገሥ፡ትዕይርቶ፡ለውእቱ፡ዓ  
 ለዊ፡ተምዓ፡ዓቢዮ፡ወአንገሥገሠ፡  
 በመዐት፡ወለእከ፡ኃቤሁ፡እንዘ፡ይ  
 ብል፡ዝንቱ፡ነገር፡ዘእስምዕ፡በእን  
 ቱአከ፡እመንኑ፡አው፡አልቆአው  
 ዐይክአ፡ቤተ፡ክርስቲያን፡ለአግዚ  
 አብሔር፡ቀተልከመአ፡ለክርስቲ  
 ያን፡ወዘተር፡ፈዳወውከ፡ወአግባ  
 እከመ፡ውስተ፡ሐግኤ፡ዘአከነ፡ከ  
 መ፡ሕገ፡ክርስቶስ፡አለ፡ከመ፡ሕገ፡  
 ዲያብሎስ፡አቡክ፡አተአምረኒ፡



# 9 Chronicles in Ge‘ez

*Girma Getahun*

MS BRUCE 88

*Royal Chronicles,*

*vi + 99 + iv fols., 3 columns, 25 lines (fols. 1r–4v), 37–39 lines (fols. 5r–37v, 40r–99v), and 29 lines (fol. 38) to a column, 30.4 × 28.5 × 3.9 cm, parchment.*

*Date: ca. 1592 to 1632.*

The tradition of writing royal chronicles in Ethiopia goes back to the early Solomonic period, the earliest substantial existing record is that of ‘Amdä Šəyon I (r. 1314–1344).<sup>1</sup> This tradition continued until the reign of Emperor Mənəlik II (r. 1889–1913). These chronicles – complemented by hagiographies, religious treatises, royal correspondences, and records of tax and land grants – form the main local literary sources to reconstruct a scholarly history of the country since the foundation of the Solomonic dynasty in 1270. Chronicles are an essential source of information about the history of Ethiopia and Eritrea up to the nineteenth century, whereas richer and more diverse literary sources are available for the period between the 1800s and the present.<sup>2</sup>

## THE STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA

MS Bruce 88 (fig. 9.1) was purchased in 1772 and brought to Europe by the Scottish traveller and writer James Bruce of Kinnaird along with other manuscripts, at the time of his travels across Ethiopia and Eritrea. On his way back to England Bruce presented a copy of the Book of Enoch to Louis XV (r. 1715–74).<sup>3</sup> However, the bulk of his collection, including MS Bruce 88, was purchased after his death by the Bodleian Library (see pp. 3–5).<sup>4</sup> Several of the manuscripts acquired by Bruce – including MSS Bruce 88, Bruce 89, Bruce 90, and Bruce 91 – contain information about the reigns of various Ethiopian rulers.<sup>5</sup>

MS Bruce 88 and the other manuscripts that Bruce brought to Europe thus became important indigenous literary sources for the study of the his-

1 Huntingford 1965.

2 For an overview, see S. Chernetsov and red. 2007, “Ethiopian historiography,” *E Ae* 3: 40–45; McCann 1979.

3 Laurence 1838: ix–xii.

4 Ullendorff 1953.

5 Kropp 1988: 51.

FIG. 9.1 MS Bruce 88, Beginning of the *Chronicle of Emperor ‘Amdä Šəyon I*, fol. 5r.

tory of Ethiopia and Eritrea. Earlier historical accounts had often ignored the valuable information provided by these chronicles. For instance, Hiob Ludolf (1624–1704) relied heavily on information provided by Abba Gorgoryos (d. 1658), an Ethiopian exile in Rome, for his work on the history of Ethiopia.<sup>6</sup> The acquisition of the Bruce manuscripts by the Bodleian Library marked the beginning of a new approach to the study of Ethiopian and Eritrean history. In fact, numerous scholars used his manuscripts for their editions and translations of Ethiopian chronicles,<sup>7</sup> laying the foundations for the development of a modern historiography on Ethiopia and Eritrea.

### TEXTUAL AND MATERIAL FEATURES OF MS BRUCE 88

The codex has copies of some early chronicles that cover the first three centuries of the Solomonic period, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. All the 99 folios of the codex have three columns to a page. Fol. 39 is blank, as blank are the flyleaves at the beginning (2 of paper and 4 of parchment) and end (2 of parchment and 2 of paper) of the manuscript.

Various hands can be distinguished within the manuscript. The first four folios, which appear to be relatively new, and of high quality, were copied for James Bruce. The remainder of the folios are considerably older and were copied between the end of the reign of Śārṣä Dəngəl (r. 1563–97) and the beginning of the reign of Susənyos (r. 1607–32), though there is some disagreement on the exact date of their composition.<sup>8</sup>

Though copied by several hands and at different times the calligraphy on the whole is very good. The script is legible and typographical errors are few and far between. In terms of the beauty of the script and the quality of the medium the best examples are to be found in folios 1r–4v, where the calligraphy, the spacing, and proportionality of the letters are of a high standard.

MS Bruce 88 features a number of royal chronicles of the Solomonic dynasty and an account of the victorious campaign of ‘Amdä Şəyon I. It lacks historical accounts of some of the predecessors and successors of Amdä Şəyon, minor emperors who ruled from 1270 to 1314 and from 1344 to 1434. However, these rulers are listed in a genealogical account found at the beginning of the manuscript and discussed below.

Dillmann’s catalogue gives a brief description of the contents, which it divides into five sections and which has been retained here for sake of clarity.<sup>9</sup>

### THE FIRST SECTION

The first section (fols. 1r–4v) contains a legendary genealogy of the kings of Ethiopia from Adam up to Emperor Yəkunno Amlak (r. 1270–1285), the first ruler of the Solomonic Dynasty (fig. 9.2). This section also has an excerpt from the Universal Chronicle by Ğirĝis al-Makīn (1206–73)<sup>10</sup> and a list of successors of Yəkunno Amlak up to the reign of Tāklä Haymanot II (r. 1769–77).

6 Ludolf 1684.

7 Wion 2009: 135–71.

8 Dillmann 1884, 76; Marrassini 1993, 7; Kropp 2001; Solomon Gebreyes Beyene 2016: 59–61.

9 Dillmann, 1848: 76–80, does not count fol. 39; an updated version of his description by D. Reule is available on <http://betamasaheft.eu/> (accessed on 15/02/2019).

10 U. Pietruschka 2005, “Giyorgis Wäldä ‘Amid,” *EAc* 2 :812–14.



FIG. 9.2 MS Bruce 88, Beginning of the first section with the genealogy of the kings of Ethiopia, fol. 1r.

THE SECOND SECTION

The second section (fols. 5r–15v) provides a history of Emperor ‘Amdä Şəyon I (fig. 9.1), a grandson of Yəkunno Amlak. ‘Amdä Şəyon I, whose throne name was Gäbrä Mäsqäl (lit. “servant of the Cross”), is considered to be one of the outstanding rulers of the Solomonic period. In ca. 1320 he crushed a rebel coalition in the northern part of his empire. Then, having consolidated his position, he launched a series of military campaigns, to the north up to the Red Sea, and to the south, where he faced and defeated a coalition of Muslim principalities.<sup>11</sup>

THE THIRD SECTION

The third section (fols. 16r–30v), gives an account of the history of several emperors, from Zär’a Ya‘əqob (r. 1434–68) up to Na‘od (r. 1494–1508; fig. 1.2). A large part of this section is devoted to Zär’a Ya‘əqob and his son and successor Bä’ədä Maryam I (r. 1468–78), two of the most outstand-

11 Marrassini 1993.

ing emperors of the fifteenth century, who not only expanded and consolidated their empire, but also played a prominent role in religious reforms and theological debates.<sup>12</sup> Zär'a Ya'eqob's contribution to the flourishing of Ge'ez literature was especially significant.<sup>13</sup> Their successors, Āskändər (r. 1478–94) and Na'od, both sons of Bā'odä Maryam I, are only mentioned briefly in the last folio of this section.

#### THE FOURTH SECTION

The fourth section (fols. 30v–38v) includes a heterogeneous collection of various court ceremonies and state institutions – allegedly established by 'Amdä Şəyon I<sup>14</sup> – followed by some miscellaneous items:

1. Arrangement of the royal banquet (*śər'atä gəbər*; fols. 30va–31rb)<sup>15</sup>
2. Duties, camping, and banqueting privileges of various departments of the royal court (fols. 31rb–32va)
3. Conventions of the court instituted by 'Amdä Şəyon I (fol. 32va–32vc)
4. Description of the rules and layout of the royal camp (fols. 32vc–33vc)
5. The arrangement of the royal cavalry as instituted by 'Amdä Şəyon I (fols. 33vc–34rb)
6. Brief note on the names of followers of Mənilək I (Ābnä Ĥakim) after his departure from Egypt (fol. 34rb–34vb)
7. List of names of some regions of the kingdom (fols. 34vb–35rc)
8. Amharic royal songs (fols. 36ra–37vc)
9. A record of lands assigned to the royal dynasty (*Āsrā'el*) (fol. 38ra–38vb)<sup>16</sup>

#### THE FIFTH SECTION

The fifth section is the largest part (fols. 40r–99v). It resumes the history of the emperors of the third section by providing the chronicles of several rulers from Ləbnä Dəngəl (r. 1508–40), the son and successor of Na'od, up to Śārşä Dəngəl. More specifically, this part provides information about:

1. Ləbnä Dəngəl (fols. 40rb–41vb)
2. The invasion of Grañ during the years 1529–43 (fols. 41vc–43rc)<sup>17</sup>
3. Gälawdewos (r. 1540–59), the second son of Ləbnä Dəngəl, (fols. 44ra–55vb) followed by a compendium to his Chronicle (56ra–57rc)
4. Minas (r. 1559–63), a brother of Gälawdewos (fols. 57va–61vc)
5. Śārşä Dəngəl (fols. 62ra–99vc)

12 Perruchon 1893; Tamrat 1972: 242–47; Ullendorff 1973: 65–68, 141–44.

13 Getatchew Haile 1992.

14 D. Nosnitsin 2010, "Śər'atä mängəšt," EAe 4: 632–34; Kropp 2011.

15 Kropp 1988; Derat 2001.

16 Kropp 2017.

17 S. Dege 2014, "Səddät: Mäşhafä səddät," EAe 5: 509–10.

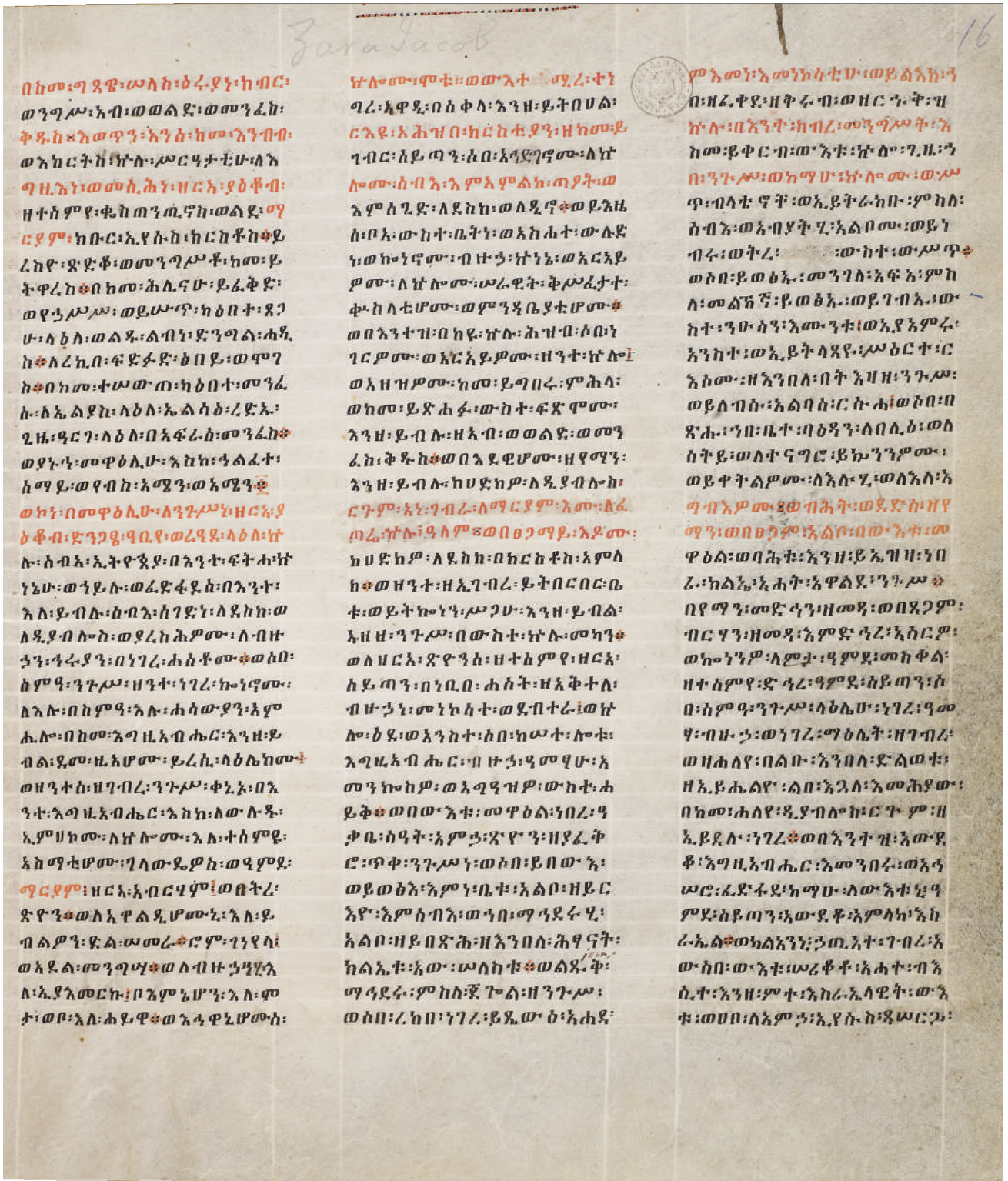


FIG. 9.3 MS Bruce 88, Beginning of the Chronicle of Emperor Zär'a Ya'eqob, fol. 16r.

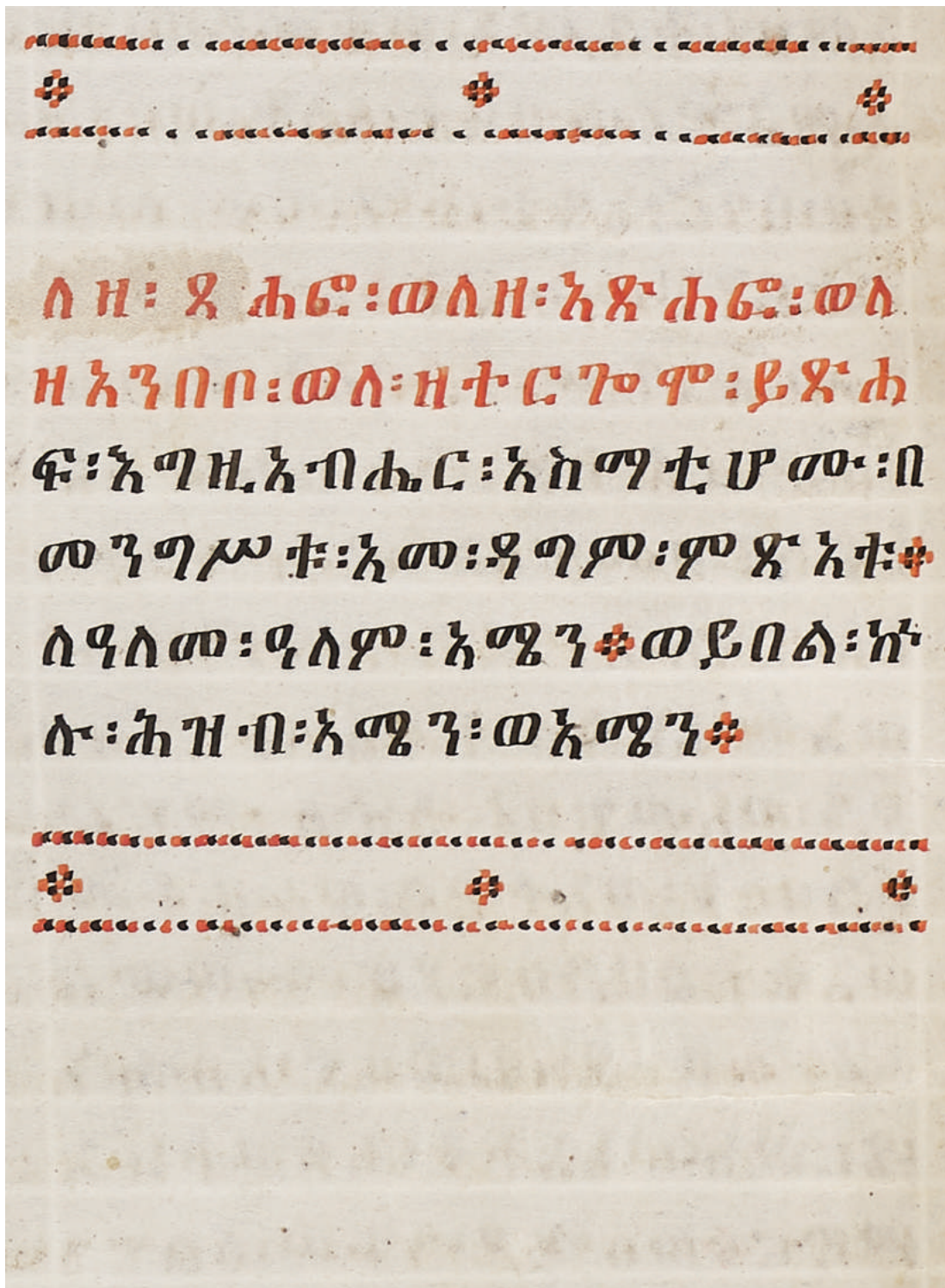


FIG. 9.4 MS Bruce 88, Ending of the *Chronicle of Emperor 'Amdā Šəyon I* (detail), fol. 15vc.

The accounts of the reigns of the emperors included in MS Bruce 88 follow a common format used in Ge'ez chronicles. Each chronicle begins with a prayer in the form of a praise to God and finishes with a blessing. The wording and length of these vary; some are elaborate while others are simple and short.

The introductions typically include some laudatory remarks about the emperor. Some chronicles also include information about the date of composition at their end. More specifically, the concluding remarks may include a reference to the year of completion of the chronicle together with a plea to the reader to overlook any linguistic or factual errors. The name of the author or copyist is rarely mentioned, though authors of subsequent chronicles sometimes provide such information. The two excerpts translated below give a sense of the introductory and ending matter that can be associated with the chronicles.

#### THE BEGINNING OF ZÄR'A YA'EQOB'S CHRONICLE

The first excerpt is translated from the introduction to the Chronicle of Emperor Zär'a Ya'eqob and features complimentary remarks about his rule (fol. 16ra; fig. 9.3):

In the name of the Three Persons, equal in glory and lordship, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. I intend to articulate and put in writing all the system of rule of our anointed lord Zär'a Ya'eqob, who was given the (throne) name Constantine. May the glorious Jesus Christ, the Son of (the Blessed Virgin) Mary, make the righteousness and kingdom of Zär'a Ya'eqob hereditary. [...] May God also extend his lifetime until the end of heaven and earth. Amen! Amen!

In Bruce 88 the first, third and fifth lines of text as well as the name of Mary are written in red ink. In the former case, the rubrication was used to mark and embellish the beginning of the text, whereas in the latter case it signals the devotion of the scribe towards the Virgin Mary. The names of the emperors in most sections of the manuscript are also rubricated.

#### THE END OF THE CHRONICLE OF 'AMDÄ ŞEYON I

The second excerpt, which is taken from the end of the Chronicle of 'Amdä Şeyon I (fol. 15vc), has the following plea to God (fig. 9.4):

May God commend to the kingdom of His second coming the names of the following: the person who wrote (the chronicle), the person who commissioned it, and any person who reads or translates it. For ever and ever. Amen! Moreover, all the people (who listen to it?) should say, Amen! Amen!

It is unclear if the person who wrote this plea should be identified with the person who is identified as Wäldä Haymanot in the lower margin of fol. 89r.

በሐመ፡አገ፡ወወላጽ፡  
 ወመን፡ፈክ፡ቅጽ፡ከ፡ፀኦ  
 ምላክ፡ሃይማኖት፡ሰ  
 ማደግከሐ፡አንደኛ፡ነው፡  
 በማን፡ታምናለኛ፡በእ  
 ግዚአብሔር፡እግዚአ  
 ብሔር፡ከንትነው፡ሰ  
 ከታ፡ነው፡ሐንደግም፡ነ  
 ወ፡ሐሐትነትና፡አንደኛ  
 ግ፡በምን፡ይቻላል፡ነፍ  
 በፀሐይ፡አሐት፡ገሐር፡  
 ፡ሐሐት፡ናቸው፡አ  
 ላይም፡ናቸው፡የፀሐ  
 ይ፡ሐሐት፡ንቱ፡አንደኛ፡  
 ላይ፡አገ፡በርሃኑ፡ው

ታቱ፡አንደኛ፡ነቱ፡ከ፡አንደኛ፡  
 ሐይ፡በልክንደ፡ሐሐት፡  
 ይ፡አልልም፡የእሳት፡ሐ  
 ትነቱ፡አንደኛ፡ነው፡አ  
 ለ፡በርሃኑ፡ውተከሐ፡  
 ደ፡ነቱ፡አንደኛ፡አሐት፡  
 ሐሐት፡አሐት፡አልልም፡  
 ሐር፡ሐሐትነቱ፡አንደኛ፡  
 ወ፡ሐ፡  
 ወደ፡አ  
 ር፡በል፡አንደኛ፡ሐሐት፡  
 አልልም፡የናፍክ፡ሐሐት፡  
 አንደኛ፡ነው፡አ፡አ  
 ለ፡አሐት፡  
 ሐ፡አንደኛ፡

# 10 Amharic

*Girma Getahun*

MS CLARKE OR. 39

*Treatise on the Christian Faith,*

*21 fols. (fols. 1–3 and 19–21 are new flyleaves), 2 columns,  
ca. 15–16 lines to a column, 13.1 × 12.5 × 1.3 cm, parchment.*

*Date: late sixteenth century.*

This small manuscript is a treatise on the Christian faith (fig. 10.1). It is an unusual manuscript of 15 folios (21 including flyleaves added at the front and back of the manuscript). The manuscript has a European leather binding, and the paper flyleaves were presumably added during the binding process. The text is laid out in two columns per page. The first eight folios have 15 lines of script per column, and the remainder of the folios have 16 lines per column. The handwriting is fairly good, legible, and neat, especially considering the small size of the letters of the script. In some places wear and tear have affected the parchment along the fringes. In other places (such as fols. 4r, 18r, and 18v), smudges and deletions have affected the readability of the text, making it partly or wholly unreadable. The names of theologians and early Church Fathers are written in red ink. These rubricated names may have been added by a different hand later in blank spaces left for the purpose during the writing of the text in black ink. In some places, these names are illegible; in others, they are abbreviated or completed with superscripted letters for lack of space.

## DATING THE MANUSCRIPT

It is difficult to tell where or when MS Clarke Or. 39 was written. It contains no introductory note, colophon, or a formulaic final remark that some Ge'ez manuscripts have, so it is not possible to establish the name of the author or the time and place in which it was written. Moreover, there is no record of ownership, except that it was purchased by the Bodleian in 1809 and that it belonged to E. D. Clarke before coming into the possession of

FIG. 10.1 MS Clarke Or. 39,  
Beginning of the Treatise, fol. 4r.

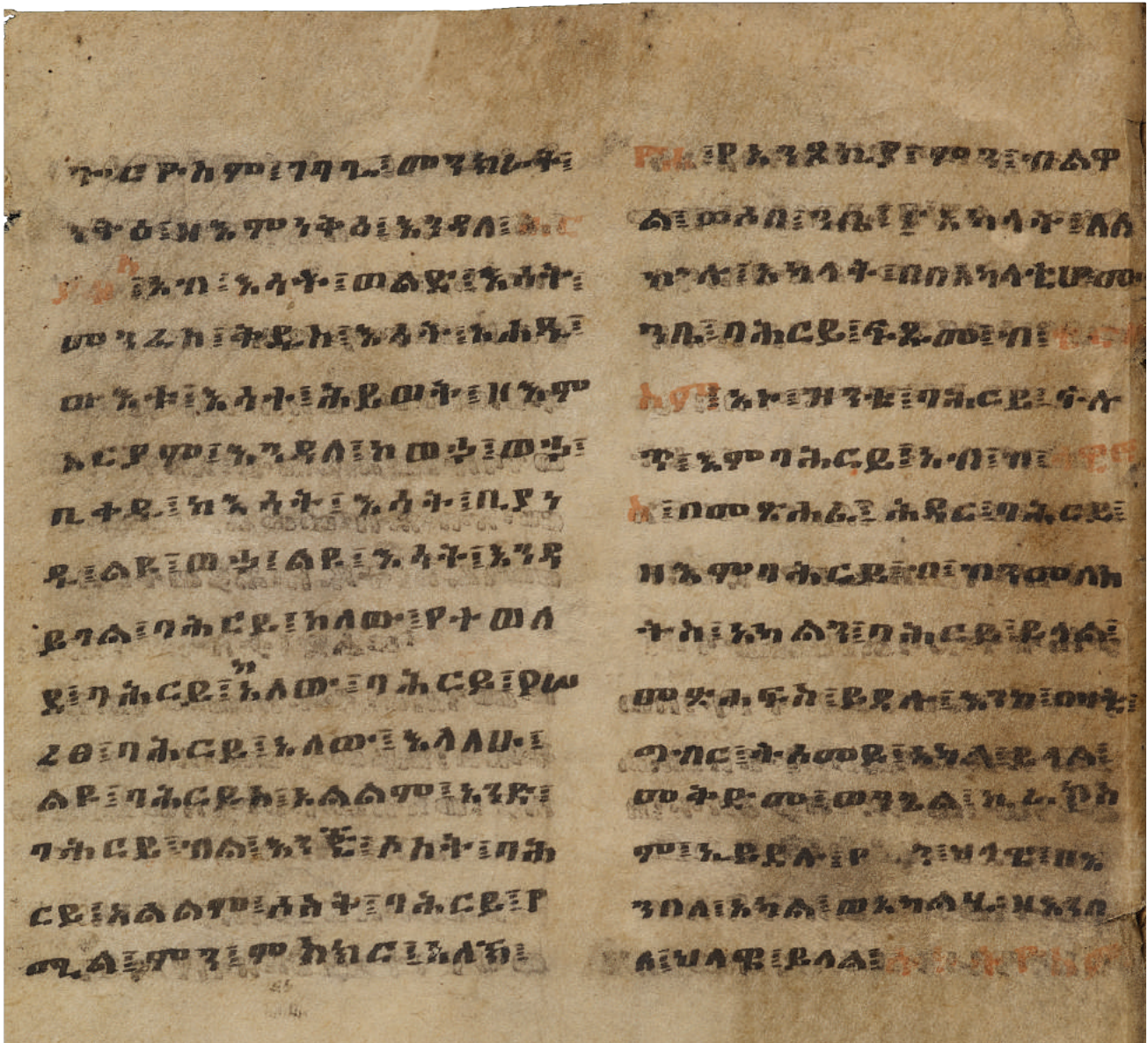


FIG. 10.2 MS Clarke Or. 39, Sayings on the nature of the Trinity, fol. 10v.

the library. Lacking such information, and with no carbon dating at hand, Ullendorff, who catalogued the manuscript, had to rely on its physical state, and on unsatisfactory “internal evidence” to estimate its age. In his estimation, based on an assessment of the palaeographic and linguistic evidence, the manuscript was probably written in the late sixteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

Admittedly, his estimate could be wide of the mark because of the remarkable consistency of the typography of the Ge‘ez alphabet over the millennia of its existence.<sup>2</sup> The shape and style of most of the letters of the Ge‘ez alphabet have shown little or no change.<sup>3</sup> This makes it of little help in determining the age of manuscripts written in Ge‘ez with accuracy. Likewise, the linguistic features of MS Clarke Or. 39 provide some clues but cannot on their own help to determine the age accurately.<sup>4</sup> The language of the manuscript is predominantly Amharic and there are few pre-nineteenth century literary sources in that language to compare it with (see pp. 82, 95). The

1 Ullendorff 1951a: 19–20; though see also remarks in Ullendorff 1951b: 214, n. 4.  
 2 For an overview of the matter, see Uhlig 1990.  
 3 S. A. Frantsouzoff 2010, “Script, Ethiopic,” E Ae 4: 580–85.  
 4 For some comparative remarks, see for instance, Cowley 1974; Getatchew Haile 1979; 1980.

subject matter of the text is also of little help. Since it is purely theological it has no references to local customs, idioms, identifiable personalities, events, or such other tell-tale elements which could be used to determine period and place of writing. Nevertheless, MS Clarke Or. 39 is of exceptional value.

#### COPIES OF THE TREATISE

Other copies of the treatise found in MS Clarke Or. 39 exist, including one in the Bodleian (MS Aeth. g. 2),<sup>5</sup> one in the British Library,<sup>6</sup> and one, bound together with other materials, in a manuscript kept at Däbrä Ḥayq Ḥṣṭifanos in Ethiopia.<sup>7</sup> These, however, appear to be copies from relatively more recent periods.

Two aspects make MS Clarke Or. 39 a rare example with respect to the collection of Ethiopic manuscripts in the Bodleian, and possibly with respect to collections in other European libraries. The first is its language. If Ullendorff's dating is to be accepted, then MS Clarke Or. 39 offers one of the few examples of written Amharic from the sixteenth century. The only earlier examples of written Amharic are a few fragments of soldiers' songs.<sup>8</sup>

Some Amharic texts on Christian theology and biblical commentaries may have been produced between the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries by the Jesuit missionaries, who were present at the time in Ethiopia, and by indigenous scholars who may have been obliged to produce works in response to the controversies caused by the Jesuits. Interestingly, as Ullendorff points out,<sup>9</sup> most of the content of MS Clarke Or. 39 after the introduction is based on a work known as *The Faith of the Fathers* (*Ḥaymanotä abäw*), that is a compilation of writings of early Church Fathers and later Patriarchs which acquired importance in connection with the religious debates between the Jesuit missionaries and the local clergy.<sup>10</sup>

#### OTHER WORKS IN AMHARIC

Until the nineteenth century most documentary records, especially on religious issues, were written in Ge'ez. Even records of land grants to individuals and churches and other notes that are commonly found in flyleaves and margins of scriptures or liturgical books were written in Ge'ez. Amharic documents, such as tax records, and personal and state correspondence, began to appear only in the nineteenth century. Considering the rarity of written Amharic records from the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the treatise in MS Clarke Or. 39 stands out as a unique source of material for scholars.

#### THE *ANDĀMTA* COMMENTARY TRADITION

The second point that makes MS Clarke Or. 39 significant is the presentation of its subject matter in the form of a series of questions and answers, that is, in the form of a catechism or oral interview. In doing so, it gives a glimpse into the *andāmta* commentary tradition, an enormous body of biblical exegesis and theology that was traditionally transmitted orally at church

5 Ullendorff 1951a: 21; Cowley 1988: 288.

6 Dillmann 1847: 22.

7 Getatchew Haile and Macomber 1981: 335, EMML 1837.

8 Guidi 1889: 53–66.

9 Ullendorff 1951a: 19.

10 A. Wion, and E. Fritsch 2005, "Haymanotä abäw," EAe 2: 1073–75.

schools in Ethiopia.<sup>11</sup> The study of the *andəmta* commentary on Ge‘ez scriptural and patristic texts was and is conducted in Amharic. Only students at the highest level of learning engage in the study of these commentaries.

Advanced studies within the traditional school system involve repeatedly reading well-known biblical commentaries of early theologians and Church Fathers until they are memorized. However, all the local traditions of scriptural interpretations were normally transmitted orally from generation to generation. A little piece of this vast oral tradition is recorded in MS Clarke Or. 39 and in other more recent manuscripts. Thus, the Bodleian manuscript gives a rare insight into a tradition of four centuries ago.

### THE CONTENT OF MS CLARKE OR. 39

The subject matter of the treatise in MS Clarke Or. 39 – namely the Mystery of the Holy Trinity, and the symbolism of the life, crucifixion, resurrection, and second coming of Christ – is by no means unique. Commentaries on these and all the rest of the cardinal mysteries are part of the curriculum of the traditional church education.

The language of the treatise is attuned to a conversation as it employs a series of concise and cryptic questions and answers given in continuous lines. The text reads like a shorthand note taken during a lecture, rather than a literary work which gives due attention to the articulation of the subject matter in a formally organized, and grammatically and stylistically sound language. The manuscript has no title. Consequently, reference to it is made by using words at the beginning of the text as its title, namely *Haymanot lämmyäkkäs* (lit. for the enquirer into [the Christian] faith).<sup>12</sup> From the above, it may be safe to say the manuscript was produced for personal use, like the other manuscripts of *andəmta* commentaries that Roger Cowley studied in the 1960s.<sup>13</sup>

The excerpts below have been translated from the first, middle, and last folios to give a general impression of the contents of the treatise, if not of its presentation and linguistic peculiarities. Unlike the source material, the translation below presents the questions and answers distinctly in separate lines.

### THE BEGINNING OF THE TREATISE

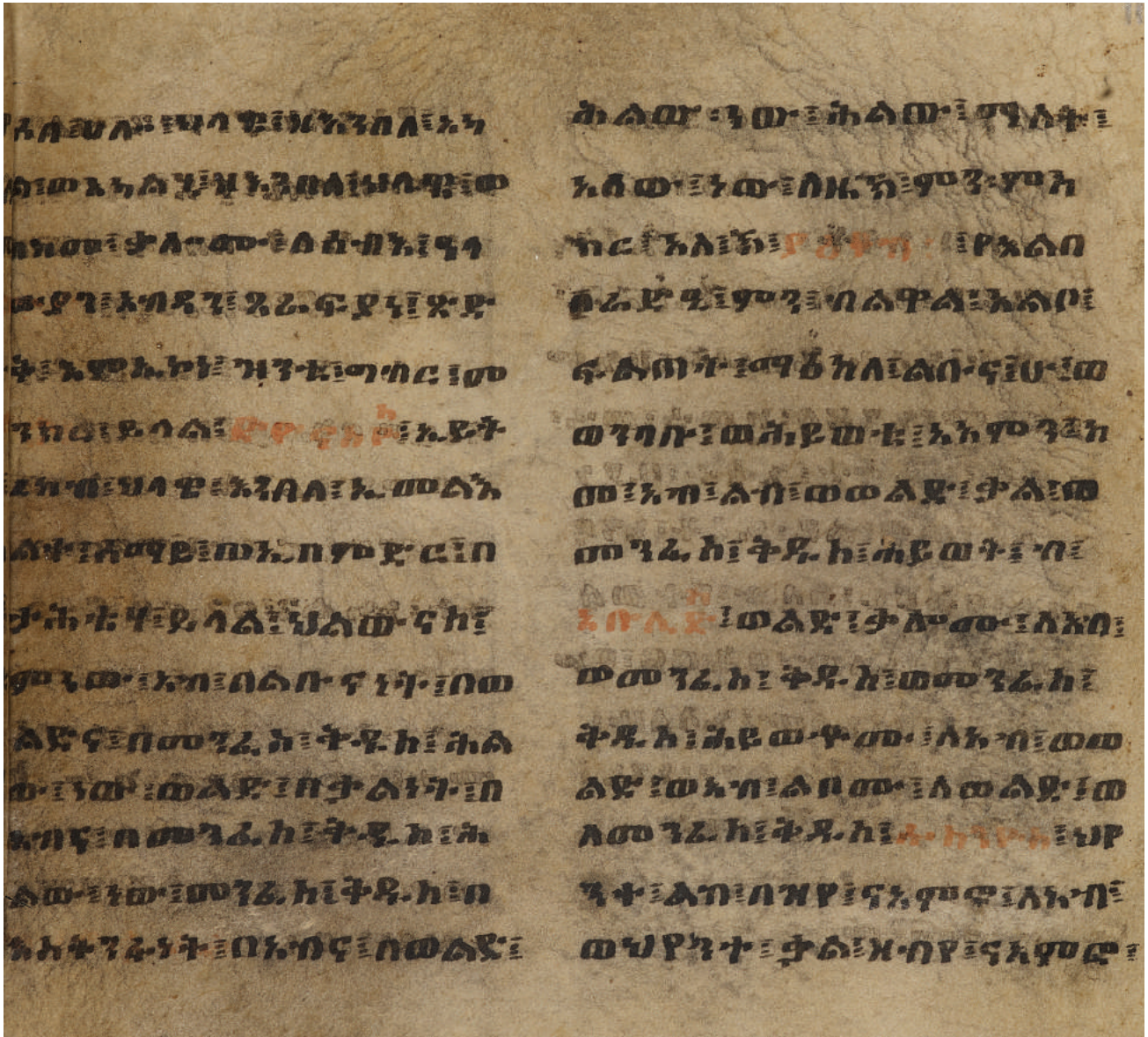
The text begins with an invocation to the Trinity. Invocations such as this are often found in Christian manuscripts in Ethiopian and Eritrea. This is followed by a series of questions and answers that outline a Trinitarian doctrine to the reader (fol. 4ra; fig. 10.1):

In the name of the Father, the Son and Holy Ghost, one Lord.  
Here is (a treatise) for the person who makes enquiries into (the Christian) faith.  
What (lit. who) do you believe in?  
(I believe) in God.

11 Cowley 1972.

12 Cowley 1988: 288.

13 He remarks that the manuscripts were “usually in private possession and unimpressive in appearance,” Cowley 1988: 3.



How many gods are there?  
 God is one and three at the same time. (Lit. God is three. He is also one.)  
 To be one and three (at the same time), how is it possible?  
 (Just like) the soul, the sun, fire and the sea (each of which) is one and a trinity at the same time.  
 How is the sun a trinity?  
 (By virtue of) its roundness, brightness, and hotness.  
 What about its oneness?  
 I can only say there is one sun, not three.  
 How is fire a trinity?  
 (By virtue of) its physicality, brightness, and hotness.  
 What about its oneness?  
 I can only say there is one fire, not three.

FIG. 10.3 MS Clarke Or. 39, Sayings by Dionysius the Areopagite, Jacob Baradaeus, and Hippolytus, fol. 11r.

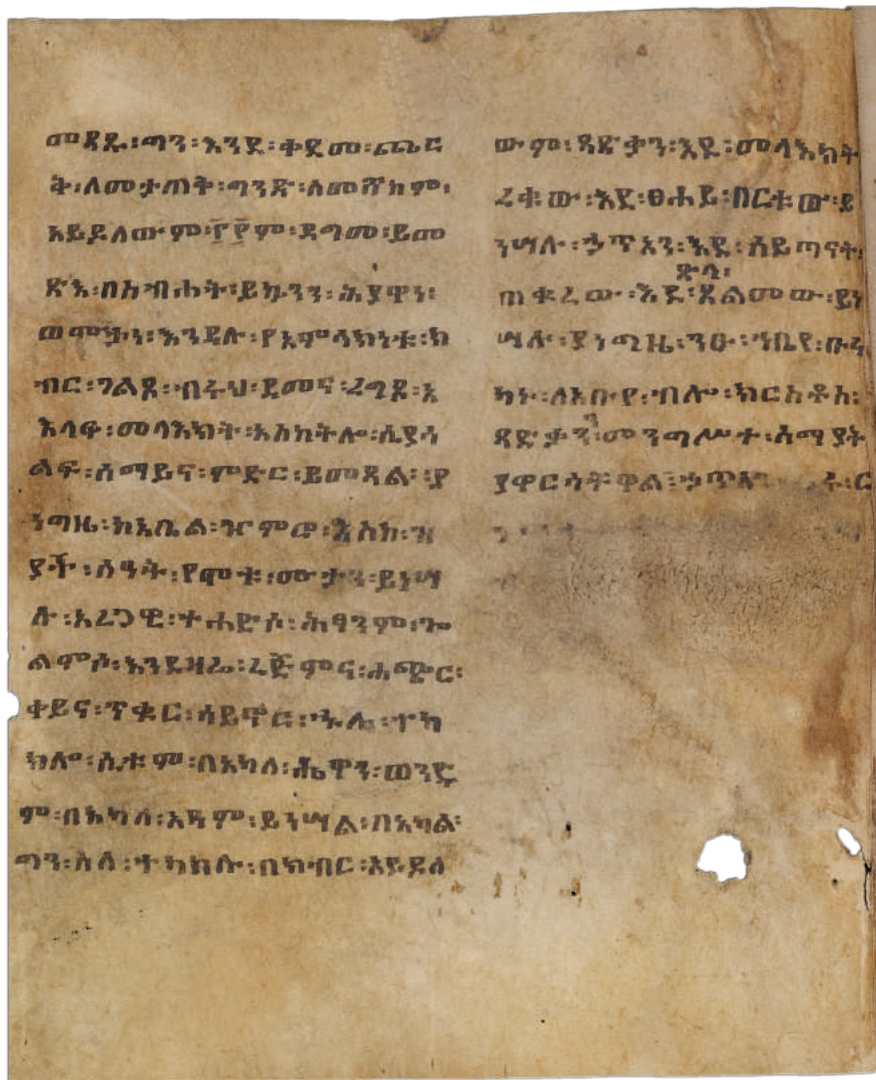


FIG. 10.4 MS Clarke Or. 39, End of the Treatise, fol. 18v.

### SAYINGS ABOUT THE NATURE OF THE TRINITY

After the introduction, the manuscript features a compilation of sayings of early Church Fathers and Patriarchs which continue to deal with the nature of the Trinity (fol. 10va; fig. 10.2):

[...] Likewise, [illegible name] says, ‘The Father is fire, the Son is fire, the Holy Spirit is fire. It is one fire of life from high heavens.’ If one draws water from (a body of) water, (or) if one lit fire (taking some cinder) from (another) fire, one would not claim (these to be) special water or special fire. Therefore, I say, that which was begotten of nature is nature, and that which is conceived of nature is nature. I would not say special nature, only one nature [...].

What evidence do you have for the assertion of three natures? (I recall) John of Antioch’s comment. He says, ‘When we speak of

three bodies one for each person (of the Holy Trinity), we are speaking of their perfect nature.’ Moreover, [illegible name] has said, ‘This nature is not different from the nature of the Father.’ [...]

The treatise then presents sayings by Dionysius the Areopagite, Jacob Baradaeus, and Hippolytus of Rome on the existence of God (Fol. 11r; fig. 10.3):

[...] Dionysius [the Areopagite] says existence is imperceptible without the sky above and the earth below.”

How does God exist? (lit. But what is existence?)

The Father, by virtue of being the (divine) mind, exists through the Son and the Holy Spirit. The son, by virtue of being the Word, exists through the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, by virtue of being the (breath of) life, exists through the Father and the Son [...]

What evidence do you have for this (assertion)?

(I recall) Jacob Baradaeus’ comment. He says, ‘There is no separation between His (divine) mind, his articulation and his (breath of) life. I believe that the Father is the (divine) mind, the Son is the Word, and the Holy Spirit is the (breath of) life.’ Hippolytus (of Rome) also says, ‘The Son is the Word for the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the (breath of) life for the Father and Son. The Father is the (divine) mind for the Son and the Holy Spirit.’ [...]

## THE END OF THE TREATISE

Finally the last excerpt, taken from the end of the treatise, deals with the Second Coming (fol. 18v; fig. 10.4):

[...] The 300 (fathers of the church?) say, ‘He will come again in splendour, and He judges over those who are alive and those who are long dead.’ Just like they said He will come revealing the glory of His divinity, treading on a bright cloud, having tens of thousands of angels in His retinue [...] Then all the dead will arise beginning from the time of Abel up to that moment. They all arise, the old ones rejuvenated, the young ones aged to adulthood, and all having equal status, there being no tall and short, white and black (people) like today. (They stand up) the women in the body of Eve, and the men in the body of Adam. However, their equal status in body does not mean they are also in honour. The righteous rise in ethereal state like the angels and shining like the sun. The sinners stand up blackened like Satan and darkened like the night. Then Christ will say, ‘those blessed by my Father, come to me.’ He will make Heaven their inheritance [...].



# 11 Other Languages

*Girma Getahun and David Appleyard*

## MS BRUCE 94

*The Song of Songs and word lists in various languages  
(Amharic, Oromiffa, Fälaša, two varieties of Agäw, and Gafat),  
v + 30 fols. (fols. 29–30 are new flyleaves), varied text layouts,  
ca. 24–26 lines to a column, 34 cm × 28.5 × 2.4 cm, parchment.*

*Date: 1770–71.*

Among the important manuscripts that James Bruce brought to Europe from Ethiopia is this codex containing a collection of specimens of some of the languages spoken in northern Ethiopia. It has 27 large folios in parchment. It is written in a fair hand in neat angular characters, though some letters appear rather large and inelegant. The specimens are original materials. They were produced specifically for Bruce. Unlike the other manuscripts he brought from Ethiopia, these specimens were not copied from other sources, though the Ge'ez text of the Song of Songs served as base text for the scriptural specimens.

### THE FIRST PART

The manuscript has eight parts which present sample vocabulary, and translations of the latter scriptural text. The first part in folios 1–4 presents the Song of Songs in Amharic, the language of the court and the lingua franca of the multi-ethnic population of the country (fig. 11.1). Despite the language serving as a lingua franca, it was not used as a literary language at the time. This makes the Amharic text the earliest known Bible text in this language. There is no known Amharic translation of parts or the whole of the Bible before Abu Rami's version 1810–18 which was then published in 1824 (the Gospels), 1829 (New Testament) and 1840 (the complete Bible).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ullendorff 1968: 62–72.

FIG. 11.1 MS Bruce 94, Beginning of the *Song of Songs* in Amharic, fol. 1r.

### THE SECOND PART

The second part, folios 5 and 6 is a vocabulary of Amharic and Oromiffa (also known as Oromo in English). The latter is the language spoken by the largest ethnic group in the country today. This section has six columns. In the first two a list of Amharic terms and their counterpart in Oromiffa are listed. The third was meant to give their equivalents in Šanqəlla, a pejorative and generic term used to refer to several ethnic groups, and the Nilo-Saharan languages they speak, along the western borderlands of the kingdom, mainly the Gumuz, Berta, and Beni Šangul. However, this section is left blank. The rest of the columns continue with the vocabulary of the same three languages, four and five giving words in Amharic and Oromiffa, and the sixth reserved for “Šanqəlla” left blank. No explanation is provided in the manuscript as to why the third and sixth columns were left blank.

### THE THIRD PART

The third part is Song of Songs in the “Fālaša” language. This is given in folios 7–9. The top margin of the first folio of the text has “*falasha*” written in Latin script. This pencilled “title” may have been added by Bruce to identify the language of the text. But in the Ethiopic script of the manuscript the name is consistently written as ፈላሻ (*fālaša*). The term is nowadays considered offensive, and the ethnic group refer to themselves as Betä ʿĪsrāʾel (literally, House or Clan of Israel). They are also called Ethiopian Jews. At the time of Bruce’s visit the Betä ʿĪsrāʾel spoke the languages of the communities among whom they lived. Around Gondär town and to the west of it, they spoke two Agäw varieties, Kayla and Qʷara, as well as Amharic. In regions to the north and east of Gondär, namely Wälqayət, Ṭägäde, Ṭällämt and Wag Həmra they spoke Tigrinya and two Agäw languages (Qəmant and ǰamtañña or Xamtanga).

The Betä ʿĪsrāʾel lived for many centuries in culturally compact and insular communities, but geographically scattered in a wide area of northern Ethiopia. Consequently, they had no common language of their own, but spoke a variety of closely related Agäw dialects. However, the bonds of their communities were maintained not only by their faith, but also by using the Geʿez language for their liturgy. In addition Amharic must have served as a common medium for internal communication between various linguistic groups. This being so, Bruce’s reference to the language as ፈላሻ or *falasha* is confusing. However, scholars who studied the vocabulary and sample text have established the language to be Qʷarəñña or Qʷara, one of two dialects of Qəmant which probably was more commonly spoken by the Betä ʿĪsrāʾel in and around Gondär.

### THE FOURTH PART

The fourth part, consisting of folios 10–13, is a glossary of five languages (fig. 11.2). Each page of the folios is divided into five columns under the fol-

FIG. 11.2 MS Bruce 94, Word list in Amharic, Fālaša, Gafat, Agäw, and Čirača-Agäw, fol. 10r.

አማራ	ሊብኸ	ጋራት	አገው	ጩራጫጫጫጫጫ
አግዚአብሔር	የደራ	አግዜርኸ	ድግጉ	የደረ
ዐሐይ	ኪራ	ጨበረ	አዊ	ኮራ
ጨረቃ	ሰርክ	ፀረቂት	አርፋ	አርገ
ኮከብ	ኸንግሩ	ኮከብ	ዘዋ	አግልወ
ነፋስ	ከምባ	ንፋስ	ንፋስ	ረጊደ
ዝናም	ሱዋ	ዝናብወ	አረ	ሱዋ
ሙብረቅ	ምርክ	ሙባርቁ	ምላጊ	ምርቃ
ደመና	ደመና	ቋደ	አውል	ድምና
ምድር	ቢያ	ኦረ	ብቲ	ዝዛ
ተራራ	ድባ	አሦብ	ዛጉ	ኮዝኝ
ብረት	ሻጋ	ብረቲ	ዘር	አቂና
ወርቅ	ወርካ	ሙወርቂ	ወርክ	ዊርቃ
ብር	አይማ	ብረኸ	ብር	አይምራ
ደንግደ	ክርኛ	ደንግደ	ካርኝ	ቅርኛ
አጎት	ሊያ	ጎት	ለግ	ሊያ
ጢስ	ተሒያ	ጢስ	ተሐኸ	ጢያ
ዛፍ	ካና	ሙባፋኸ	ጎትሲ	ሃጉ
ዱር	ከቢና	ድብረ	ካወን	ዘረሃ
ገደል	ጋጋ	ገደ	ዙወ	ኮዝ
ሜዳ	ውላጋ	አዳዳኸ	ውታረ	ኸዋ
ድንኳን	ድንኳን	ሙድንኳን	ድንኳን	ድኮግ
ሣር	ኸንካ	ዙለ	ኪዩ	ኸክ
ፍራ	ፍራ	ፍርኸ	ኩሮ	ፍር
ከበባ	ኸጋ	አብብኸ	አቢቢ	አደ



lowing headings: Amharic, Fälaša, Gafat, Agäw, and Čirača-Agäw. The first column lists Amharic terms (nouns, verbs and adjectives) and their equivalents are given in the parallel columns in the other four languages. Of these languages Gafat became extinct decades ago, and what Bruce called Fälaša is almost extinct.

#### THE FIFTH PART

The fifth part is the Song of Songs in the Gafat language. Folios 14–17 contain the version of the text presumably using the Amharic text as the base for the translation.

#### THE SIXTH PART

The sixth part in folios 18–20 presents the same text in Agäw, the language which is spoken in Agäw Mədər, in a region southwest of Lake Tana. This language is nowadays known as Awñi or Awngi, which distinguishes it from other Agäw languages spoken elsewhere: Bilen in Eritrea, Xamtanga in northern Wällo, Qəmant (and its dialects Q<sup>w</sup>ara and Kayla) in western Gondär. Of these, the last one is almost extinct along with its dialects. The remaining languages still have sizeable populations, especially Awñi whose current speakers are estimated to exceed 350,000.

#### THE SEVENTH PART

The seventh part consisting of folios 21–23 is the version of the Song of Songs in what Bruce called Čirača-Agäw, an unfamiliar name even in the nineteenth century. However, it clearly refers to the Agäw language spoken in what is now called Wag-Həmrä zone of the Amhara regional state, some 175 km due east of Gondär. The language is today called Xamtanga. It is also known by other names: Khamta, Khamir or simply Agäw. Having approximately 150,000 speakers it is presently the second largest Agäw language.

#### THE EIGHTH PART

The eighth and last part is the Song of Songs in Oromiffa which Bruce called *yägalla ləssan*, “Galla language,” a commonly used name until the 1970s, but which has been considered offensive since then (fig. 11.3). Folios 24–27 give this last specimen.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SPECIMENS

All the texts of the Song of Songs are presented in two columns in Ge‘ez script, and they present the first five chapters of the said Scripture. Taking the Gafat text as a representative sample, the first two to three lines of the chapters are written in red ink. The only exception is the first page where

FIG. 11.3 MS Bruce 94, Beginning of the *Song of Songs* in “Galla” (Oromiffa), fol. 24r.

the top two lines of the second column are also rubricated without being the beginning of a chapter. In addition two punctuation marks appear in red and black ink, the ubiquitous one being the nine dots which appear like a patterned cross at the end of verses. Only chapter numbers are given on the left margin. Otherwise the entire text is written continuously as one paragraph, without verse numbers and without line breaks.

James Bruce was a polyglot who spoke a number of European languages, besides having a knowledge of Latin and Greek. In addition he studied Ge'ez and Arabic before setting out to explore the source of the Blue Nile. This background in languages seemed to have served him well to take a keen interest in the various indigenous languages spoken in and around Gondär, and to collect specimens of them, rather like the plant specimens he brought back to Europe. Some of these languages were unknown in Europe at that time. This awareness must have informed his decision to collect samples of the languages along with descriptive accounts of the ethnic communities in order to make them available for scholarly studies in Europe.

Bruce's language specimens along with the most important manuscripts such as the Book of Enoch, the *Kəbrä nägäšt* and the chronicles of the emperors of the Solomonic dynasty helped to establish Ethiopian studies in Europe on a broad range of primary source materials.

The importance of some of these language specimens has not diminished over time. On the contrary their value may have appreciated. For one thing, none of these languages with the exception of Amharic, the lingua franca of the country, was a written language at that time. Texts in Amharic from the 1760s and earlier periods, such as pieces of medical texts, theological treaties, fragments of military praise-songs are rare. Therefore, Bruce's samples are perhaps the first written records for most of them, if not for Amharic.

Moreover, of the languages he recorded Gafat is extinct, and Q<sup>w</sup>arəñña (Bruce's Fälaša) is nearly extinct. In the case of Gafat Wolf Leslau, an authority in the Semitic languages of Ethiopia, tried to study the language from the last few speakers in the 1940s. However, he found out that even those people hardly knew the language.<sup>2</sup> As for Q<sup>w</sup>arəñña only a few aged Ethiopian Jews in Israel may be able to speak it at present. In view of the demise of the languages the value of the specimens is incontestable. In the case of the languages still in use, the specimens can still serve as source materials for comparative studies. However, the specimen in Xamtanga (Bruce's Čirača-Agäw) is said to be of limited value for linguistic analysis.<sup>3</sup>

One further consideration is that the non-Semitic languages here (Fälaša/Q<sup>w</sup>arəñña, Čirača-Agäw/Xamtanga, Agäw/Awñi and Galla/Oromiffa) all contain a small number of sounds and/or phonetic contrasts that are not represented in the Ge'ez script. These the scribe has either ignored or used the nearest equivalent at hand. In the later nineteenth century and subsequently adaptations of Ge'ez letters were used both in Fälaša/Q<sup>w</sup>arəñña and more especially for Oromiffa, but now Oromiffa is written in the Roman alphabet with digraphs or pairs of letters for such sounds.

<sup>2</sup> Leslau 1945.

<sup>3</sup> Appleyard 1987: 241, footnote 1.

There is no explanatory note attached to the specimens regarding the circumstances of their production and the methodology employed in selection of languages and the choice of words for the vocabulary. For example, we have no clues why Bruce preferred the Song of Songs instead of other biblical Scriptures to serve as base text for the translated specimens. Indeed he could have also chosen the base text from other secular written and oral literature. Similarly, one can raise several questions regarding the selection of a set of terms for the vocabulary. The choice of text from the Scriptures rather than from secular literary source is perhaps due to their accessibility in many languages and in the availability of vast scholarly studies based on the Scriptures. The choice of Song of Songs from all other Scriptures may have to do with its singularity for its more secular, romantic and lyrical qualities. However, such explanations are at best conjectural, at worst misleading. Be that as it may, scholars of Ethiopian studies are grateful to Bruce for these legacies.



## 12 Magic Scrolls

*Dan Levene*

The literature of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has been the subject of considerable research for well over a century. Its breadth and richness offer the student a wealth of approaches with which to engage. One of the fascinating aspects of this literature is the fact that it is still largely a living manuscript culture. The technology of printing that is less than a century old in Ethiopia is, however, beginning to register its impact (see pp. 23–27).<sup>1</sup>

The Ethiopian and Eritrean Churches' equivalent Christian and Jewish counterparts went through this revolution in the Late Mediaeval to the Early Modern periods. It was only then that the texts that were in use and demand emigrated from labour intensively produced hand crafted and inked manuscripts to mass produced ones, from the multiplicity of versions that are characteristic of manuscripts to the standard ones that are the essence of printing. A genre that is by no means unaffected by this revolution, as a fair amount of related esoteric texts have been some of the earliest to find their way into popular editions,<sup>2</sup> is the most popular of forms of amulet in Ethiopia and Eritrea: the magic scroll (fig. 12.1). The scroll is a reservoir of formulae whose provenance could go as far back as, and even earlier than, the time of the fifteenth-century Emperor Zār'a Ya'āqob. The so-called magic scroll is a forever shifting text that is arranged and rearranged, composed and recomposed for each individual owner's specific needs and available means. Unless it is to be standardized too, it will have to continue to survive as a hand inked object.

Magic scrolls and Ethiopic magical literature have been accorded some scholarly attention,<sup>3</sup> on which this review draws to offer something extra by using the Bodleian's collection to illustrate points of special interest. Scrolls are found in great numbers in Ethiopia and Eritrea, and consequently, all over the world. The collection in the Bodleian is but one of many that offer a fine selection for study.

1 Sushma 1994.

2 See Negwo 2015: 174 ff.

3 For a good background on the magic scrolls of Ethiopia see Mercier 1979; S. Chernestov 2007, "Magic Scrolls," *E Ae* 3: 642–43. A selection of publications worth consulting that deal more generally with Ethiopian magic and include materials regarding magic scrolls are Lifchitz 1940; Strelcyn 1955; Mercier 1997; B. Burtea 2007, "Magic literature, Christian magic literature," *E Ae* 3: 638–40; Getatchew Haile 2011. On the praxis of magic from the anthropological point of view, see Young 1975, though Mercier and Negwo cover aspects of this as well.

FIG. 12.1 MS Aeth. e. 31, Protective illustration at the top of a magic scroll.



MAGICAL TEXTS IN OTHER TRADITIONS

Magic scrolls are a type of amulet that is indigenous to Ethiopia and Eritrea, as well as to the Betä ʿIsraʿel.<sup>4</sup> In terms of form, there is no other magical incantation tradition that appears in scroll form in the way that the Ethiopian and Eritrean characteristically do. Jewish magical rotuli have been found in Genizah collections,<sup>5</sup> with examples preserved also in the Bodleian (MS Heb. a3.31), but these are different in everything except for the fact that they are incantations. The images within the Ethiopian scrolls are also clearly indigenous to Ethiopia. The resemblance to Greek magical papyri, Jewish incantation bowls, Syriac magical texts, and Mandaic texts ends beyond the obvious fact that they are magical illustrations or art.

There are also points in common with other traditions. For example, the lines with dots that are sometimes found in Ethiopic scrolls are attested in other traditions as are angels and their names. However, while there is a wealth of comparative material in the Semitic world – including Hebrew, Aramaic (Jewish and Gnostic), Syriac (Christian, Manichean and Gnostic), and Mandaic magic texts – the overlap in terms of motifs and formulae with Ethiopic magic scrolls are minimal, beyond the obvious use of angel names and other stock formulae which are often also found in liturgical contexts.<sup>6</sup>

As regards Coptic, Greek, and Latin magical textual materials, and even the much earlier Akkadian materials, it is possible to say with confidence that Ethiopian magical literature in general, and the scrolls in particular, are distinct and indigenous in structure, content, and form.<sup>7</sup>

THE FUNCTION OF ETHIOPIC MAGIC SCROLLS

Scrolls are believed to offer protection from any variety of ills and/or misfortunes that can befall a person. These amulets consist of incantations written in Geʿez and of illustrations (known as *ṭälsäm*; fig. 12.1) that together, presented on a leather scroll (figs. 1.3, 2.5),<sup>8</sup> combine to constitute this object’s potency, believed to stave off that which causes misfortune.

There are accounts that note that the length of a scroll, when commissioned, is made to correspond to the height of the individual it is made for.<sup>9</sup> This was clearly not always adhered to as the collections of scrolls made for individuals observed by this author show no standard in length. Additionally, such amulets are often pre-made and offered to clients whose names need only to be added for the scrolls to be “activated;” as is the case in MS Aeth. g. 4 (fig. 12.2).

4 The most obvious difference between them being the initial doxology. The Christian examples have “In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God” (በሰሙ: አብ: ወወልድ: ወመንፈስ: ቅዱስ: አሐዳ: አምላክ:), whereas the Betä ʿIsraʿel have “May God the Lord be blessed” (ይጎባረክ: አምላክ:).

5 Bohak 2011.

6 The idea of “Semitic magic” elaborated by Thompson 1908, is an old one and does deserve serious rethinking, but not in the form he originally coined over a century ago.

7 In the introduction to his volume on Aramaic incantation texts, Montgomery 1913: 9, states that Jewish magic “has come out of the crucible of the Graeco-Roman world.” In the century since this luminary wrote our knowledge has increased to such an extent that we are forced to consider the development of distinct magical traditions afresh. This is also the case with regards to Ethiopian magical texts and traditions.

8 Strictly speaking these are rotuli.

9 Mercier 1997: 46.





There are also cases in which we can observe the recycling of a scroll by the fact that the name of the original owner has clearly been scratched out and that of another added in its place. This can be seen for instance, in MS Aeth. e. 31 (fig. 12.3).

This type of amulet presents a world view found in other Christian, Jewish, Mediterranean, as well as Near and Middle Eastern cultures, that maintains the existence of a myriad of supernatural entities alongside humanity. These include angels, various types of demonic beings, spirits, and ghosts. It is the unfortunate interaction with these, through chance, careless behaviour, or the malign activities of others that determine any individual's state of being. Shared also is the premise that particular types of written or spoken formulae, as well as images, have the power to counteract such harmers who cause illness, failure, loss, disaster, persecution, and even death. These forces can return harmony to being where discord has taken root.

THE POWER OF WORDS

While most texts by the Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Churches are written for study, instruction and the order of daily and seasonal prayer, scrolls are produced for their spiritual quality. This means that while they may be read aloud by their owners or on their behalf, it is the actual materiality of the inked object, its temporal vocalization, and the presence of the images within that exercise the scroll's overall effect on the harmers that afflict or would do so. The scrolls are conceived of as objects whose power is derived, primarily, from the formulae within them and the holy names (*asmat*) they cite.

The principle of the belief in the ability of words and names to have an impact, to jostle divine forces, to curb harmers, and, in turn, the manifestation of diseases and other perceptible misfortunes that afflict humanity is, in and of itself, not unique to Ethiopia, or indeed, Christianity; it is the form and way in which these are combined that is. One may cite the various biblical creation narratives that tell of God generating the world via the agency of word and sound, to illustrate the principle that underpins this type of belief. Indeed, with regard to Christianity, the ability to affect the course of what we may

refer to as nature by invocation of the name of God is stated in Gospel literature.<sup>10</sup>

We see this ability exercised frequently by holy men and women who, having attained ascetic levels of perfection, are able to use invocation to remove demons, avert natural disaster, cure illness, and even raise the dead back to life (fig. 7.3). The use of such formulae and divine words without the agency of those elect who earned the dispensation to do so – such as monks and nuns who adhere to long years of ascetic monastic rule, or those endowed by virtue of special qualities or divine gift – is attested in various texts which we refer to as being for magical instruction. Texts such as the *Bandlet of Righteousness* (*Ləfəfä şədq*)<sup>11</sup> and the *Book of the Disciples* (*Məşhəfə ardəʿət*), tell of how such divine names came to be provided and the purposes for which they can be used.

In the case of the *Bandlet of Righteousness*, the list of divine names therein is said to have been given to Mary by Jesus. The following passage from the text illustrates how and for what they may be used:

Blessed is the man who hath read this prayer. Blessed is the man who hath washed himself in the water of prayer. Blessed is the man who hath heard this prayer with his ear. [...] Blessed is the man who shall bear (i.e. wear) this prayer. No unclean spirits shall draw nigh unto him. Nothing shall be able to disturb the body and the soul of the man who hath this prayer with him. Neither pain, nor weariness, nor hunger shall enter his house. And he shall be able to drive away even Satan, who shall not be able to draw nigh to his habitation. And the thief shall not be able to steal from him, and his foe shall not be able to overpower him; and he shall be able to exhaust the strength of every enemy of his. And his house and his children shall be blessed.<sup>12</sup>

## THE MAKING OF MAGIC SCROLLS

As far as it is known, the magic scrolls are not produced according to the instruction of any particular text, yet it is clear that they are thought to function in accordance with a principle akin to the one cited above. Observations suggest that the scribes exercise discretion in deciding the shape of a magic scroll, the type of formulae to include, and the way in which they are combined. They do so, presumably, to meet the needs of their clients. The name of the client appears within the scroll indicating the focus of that particular amulet's protective and healing forces.

In other words, the skill and job of the scroll scribe is one of prescription, of being able to produce the right scroll to deal with a complaint at the right price. There have been discussions as to what rules governed, and what skills and training were needed for, the making of scrolls. Looking at the material that is there for us to study, the variance amongst practitioners is evident. This also suggests the possibility that there are different routes

10 The literature on early Christian magical praxis is rich, but a useful summary can be found in Bailey 2007: 43–76.

11 The best-known editions of which are Budge 1929; Littmann 1904. See also B. Burtea 2007, “Lefafä şədq,” *EAc* 3: 542–43.

12 Budge 1929: 80–81.

FIG. 12.4 MS Aeth. g 4, Protective angel and invocation to the Trinity (detail).



to acquiring the knowledge, skill and, indeed, the reputation to practice the making of them. This is all the more probable with the rapid growth of literacy and publishing in Ethiopia that make the possibility of shortcuts into praxis and production more likely than it was not so long ago, when learning to write was mostly the domain of Ethiopia's traditional school systems.

These schools have a long history and are unique amongst Christian cultures. While this system's curriculum, whose exact provenance is not certain,<sup>13</sup> does include the study of Scripture, theology, and exegesis, poetry and philosophy, it probably did, at one time, also cover healing arts, astrology, and other disciplines that were established and recognized bodies of knowledge. These schools were not "priesthood training grounds" per se, they constituted, rather, the training ground of both state and Church administrators and cultural elites.

Medical healing knowledge and practice, of which amulet writing was always a part, has not survived as a formal part of the so-called traditional school training. Nevertheless, it is within its midst that it was disseminated and, more than likely, acquired its shape over time. This is suggested not only by the scribal skills and the literary and liturgical materials that magical healing draws upon, but also by anthropological studies, undertaken mainly in the twentieth century. These record that students acquiring such knowledge from their teacher may perform tasks as payment for their training. The accounts also suggest that knowledge was preserved – and possibly assembled, edited, and created – within this school system. However, magic was passed on as an informal and even hidden practice for a long period of time.

## THE TEXTS AND IMAGES OF MAGIC SCROLLS

Scroll texts typically consist of several sections that are joined together. Each section will most commonly start with an invocation of the Holy Trinity followed by a description of the purpose of that particular section. The literary structure and content of a scroll can be illustrated by looking at the beginning of MS Aeth. g. 4 – a scroll that is thought to have been made some time in the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup>

At the top of the scroll there appears a miniature depiction of an angel with wings spread and sword drawn (fig. 12.4). He is painted in black, brown and white pigments. He is framed above and below with ribbons that consist of a row of black diamond shapes, each framed in white and together laid, as it were, on a brown background.

Scrolls display a variety of images that include, for instance, demon traps – as in MS Aeth. f. 10 (fig. 12.5)<sup>15</sup> – and demon-subduing figures such as Sisinius,<sup>16</sup> who appears at the top of MS Aeth. f. 12.<sup>17</sup> The angel theme that we find in MS Aeth. g. 4 (fig. 12.4) is particularly common and is often accompanied, as it is in MS Aeth. f. 12, by a couple of words such as "protecting angel" or "the Archangel Michael."

MS Aeth. f. 4 starts with the usual invocation "In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God," that is distinguished, like other holy names in the text, by being inked in red (fig. 12.6).<sup>18</sup> Then follows the

13 For a description on the traditional school system see Pankhurst's chapter on "Traditional Schools of the Church" (1955: 232–83). For a description of the route of a student into magico-medical practice see, Young 1975.

14 Ullendorff 1951a: 25.

15 Ullendorff 1951a: 23.

16 For the story of Sisinius the demon slayer in the scrolls and its wider context see Burtea 2001: 70 ff.

17 Ullendorff 1951a: 24.

18 Ullendorff 1951a: 22–23.

FIG. 12.5 MS Aeth. f. 10, Depiction of a demon trap (detail).



FIG. 12.6 MS Aeth. f. 4, Rubricated invocation to the Trinity at the beginning of a magic scroll (detail).

customary “prayer concerning” as a preface to stating the purpose of that particular formula in the scroll. Note that the scroll refers to itself specifically as a “prayer.”

While scrolls are very commonly used, they do inhabit a grey area in terms of Church sanction. Their esoteric quality, and the fact that anyone can manufacture them, is viewed with some suspicion. One might add that, historically, this literature has been considered by scholars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as remnants of pagan practice.<sup>19</sup> Needless to say, the “prayers” within the scrolls have much in common with the liturgy of the Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Churches in terms of style, literary structure, and use of language. Furthermore, such scrolls are physically attested as material objects only in Christian and Betä Āsra’el cultural contexts.

After the invocation to the Trinity, the continuation of the text of MS Aeth. g. 4 states its purpose (fig. 12.4):

Prayer concerning the binding of demons, and *barya* (the epilepsy demon), the *buda* (a type of creature that is human by day and hyena by night and is associated with the evil eye), and the metalworker (often thought of also as *buda*),<sup>20</sup> the *zar* (a type of possessing spirit which needs the aid of a medium to placate),<sup>21</sup> and the eye that confuses the head and arrives suddenly as a shadow and a dream.

This is a good example of the kind of list that one finds in a scroll text. It illustrates rather vividly the language and taxonomy which this form of popular religious expression uses to communicate what is behind the endless forms of disease and misfortune that bedevil human existence. This terminology of devils, demons, and spirits may not be translatable into terms used by other cultures, which give linguistic form to the reasons of human plight in a different way. It does, however, make clear how frightening the horrible experiences caused by these entities were to the people who used this type of amulet.

Another type of formula used in scrolls is that which offers a story about its use in a mythical age as a testament to its provenance and efficacy. This type of literary device is called a *historiola*, as shown by two excerpts taken respectively from MS Aeth. f. 11<sup>22</sup> and MS Aeth. f. 4:

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God. Prayer for fear that God gave to Adam that his heart would not be fearful when he was banished from the Garden of Eden, from the holy mountain, when He said [... a list of divine names...]. By the names and by the words [...] fear of the night and of the day from your handmaiden Amāta Mika’el.

Prayer for fear that God gave to Adam so that his heart would not be fearful [...] a list of divine names ...] Protect from fear, *barya*, and *legion* your servant [...].

19 A typical example is Budge, see his chapter on Ethiopian amulets (1930: 177–199).

20 See Hagar Salomon 1999.

21 S. Kaplan 2010, “Possession cults, Zar,” EAe 4: 185–87.

22 Ullendorff 1951a: 23–24.

23 The text is not clear at this point, but no doubt would have conveyed something of the manner of “remove the fear [...]”



FIG. 12.7 MS Aeth. e. 31,  
An invocation to the Trinity followed  
by quotation from Jn. (detail).

Here we can see the use of a novel apocryphal tale that offers an account of the provenance of the powerful names cited on behalf of the client to allay his/her fear. Note the differences between the versions, which include, by the way, a different set of divine names. This level of variation in terms also of the length of formulae, word order, and even choice of words is characteristic of scrolls. The transmission of formulae in this genre is so loose that it is closer to oral transmission. This level of variance is prevalent even in the earliest of witnesses we have (ca. seventeenth century).

The scribes who compose scrolls were clearly aware of the variation, as there are no standard fixed versions out there. And so, they were not only compelled to choose what they believed to be the correct or potent versions, but it appears they also felt free to adjust and “correct” when they deemed it necessary to do so.

Another common type of formula that we find in scrolls is one in which a biblical verse is utilized. An example is MS Aeth. e. 31, in which the customary citation of the Trinitarian formula in red ink is followed by a quotation from Jn. 1:1–5 and by this appeal (fig. 12.7):

Likewise, may there not come near her evil spirits, and sorcerous people, and malicious demons, as they not approach the soul and body of your maidservant [...].

The well-known verse from John, which describes God’s shining light as a force that overcomes darkness, is inserted in MS Aeth. e. 31 to invoke His protective ability.

Quotations from the Psalms (see pp. 37–47) were also copied on magic scrolls. MS Aeth. f. 12, for example, uses the well know Psalm 121 (120 in the Ge‘ez version) that talks about the Lord as one’s protector. This is followed in MS Aeth. f. 12 by the words “Likewise protect from evil your maidservant Amätä Mika’el.”



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## 1 HISTORY OF THE BODLEIAN COLLECTION

- FIG. 1.1 MS Aeth. d. 19, Miniature of Moses and Aaron above the beginning of the *Biblical Canticles*, fol. 126r.  
 FIG. 1.2 MS Bruce 88, Beginning of the *Chronicle of Emperor Na'od*, fol. 30r.  
 FIG. 1.3 MSS Aeth. e. 31, Aeth. f. 4, Aeth. f. 10, Three unfolded magic scrolls.  
 FIG. 1.4 MS Aeth. e. 28, Reading for the Sunday from the *Harp of Mary*, fol. 131r.  
 FIG. 1.5 MS Aeth. e. 33, James son of Alphaeus and Thomas, fol. 104v.

## 2 WHAT IS GE'EZ?

- FIG. 2.1 MS Aeth. c. 14, Beginning of the *Gospel of Luke*, fol. 62r.  
 FIG. 2.2 MS Aeth. c. 14, Numbered chapters for Luke and his portrait, fol. 61v.  
 FIG. 2.3 MS Aeth. d. 23, Seven of the Nine Saints receiving their monastic garb from Pachomius, fol. 8r.  
 FIG. 2.4 MS Aeth. e. 28, The Beginning of the *Harp of Mary*, fol. 2r.  
 FIG. 2.5 MS Aeth. g. 7, A magic scroll and its protective case.

## 3 MAKING MANUSCRIPTS

- FIG. 3.1 MS Aeth. c. 2, The Evangelist Luke holding a page and a pen, fol. 58v.  
 FIG. 3.2 Zälä'aläm using the parchment adze to scrape the hair side of the skin.  
 FIG. 3.3 Liqä kahənat Ajuḡu writing in his home in Gälawdewos.  
 FIG. 3.4 Märiḡeta Birhanu applying blind tooled decoration to a binding.  
 FIG. 3.5 MS Aeth. d. 23, The manuscript's leather satchel used for storage or transportation.

## 4 THE GOSPEL IN GE'EZ

- FIG. 4.1 MS Aeth. c. 14, Portrait of the Evangelist John and chapter list, fol. 61v.  
 FIG. 4.2 MS Aeth. c. 14, Beginning of the Gospel of Mark, fol. 36r.  
 FIG. 4.3 MS Aeth. c. 14, Decorative element painted over a portion of text from Matthew, fol. 2v.  
 FIG. 4.4 MS Aeth. c. 2, Portrait of the Evangelist Mark holding a page and a pen, fol. 32v.  
 FIG. 4.5 MS Aeth. c. 14, Portrait of the Evangelist Mark and end of chapter list, fol. 36v.

## 5 THE PSALTER IN GE'EZ

- FIG. 5.1 MS Aeth. d. 19, King David playing a lyre, fol. 6v.  
 FIG. 5.2 MS Aeth. d. 19, Psalm 151 without any of the additions, fol. 125v.  
 FIG. 5.3 MS Aeth. d. 19, Psalm 28 without rubrication, fol. 26r.  
 FIG. 5.4 MS Aeth. e. 30, Psalm 28 with alternating rubrication of the name of God, fol. 18v.  
 FIG. 5.5 MS Aeth. e. 22, Psalm 28 with the name of God written in alternating red and black letters, fol. 20v.  
 FIG. 5.6 MS Aeth. d. 19, A strophe summary text at the conclusion of the *Song of Songs*, fol. 138r.  
 FIG. 5.7 MS Aeth. d. 19, Marking of the midpoint of the Psalms (detail), fol. 66v.  
 FIG. 5.8 MS Aeth. d. 19, The beginning of the *Song of Hannah*, fol. 130r.  
 FIG. 5.9 MS Aeth. d. 4, The beginning of the *Song of Hannah*, fol. 170r.  
 FIG. 5.10 MS Aeth. e. 2, The beginning of the *Song of Hannah* (detail), fol. 126v.  
 FIG. 5.11 MS Aeth. d. 19, Old Testament figures (detail), fol. 6r.  
 FIG. 5.12 MS Aeth. d. 19, Christ, John, the Archangel Michael, John the Baptist, and nine Apostles, fol. 147v.

## 6 ENOCH IN GE'EZ

- FIG. 6.1 MS Bruce 74, The Beginning of the *Book of Enoch*, fol. 7r.  
 FIG. 6.2 MS Bruce 74, A page showing, in the central column, the beginning of the *Book of the Watchers*, fol. 7v.

## 7 HAGIOGRAPHY IN GE'EZ

- FIG. 7.1 MS Aeth. d. 23, The Nine Saints next to Aksum's cathedral (above), and eight of the Nine Saints in procession (below), fol. 12r.  
 FIG. 7.2 MS Aeth. d. 23, Zāmika'el Arāgawi receiving his monastic garb from Pachomius, fol. 6v.  
 FIG. 7.3 MS Aeth. d. 23, Zāmika'el Arāgawi healing a sick man with his hand cross, fol. 17v.  
 FIG. 7.4 MS Aeth. d. 23, Zāmika'el Arāgawi ascending Dābrā Dammo, fol. 22r.  
 FIG. 7.5 MS Aeth. d. 23, King Kaleb sailing to South Arabia with Zāmika'el Arāgawi's blessing, fol. 28r.  
 FIG. 7.6 MS Aeth. d. 23, Jesus giving the *kidan* to Zāmika'el Arāgawi, fol. 31v.  
 FIG. 7.7 MS Aeth. d. 23, King Kaleb building a church and vanquishing his enemies in South Arabia, fol. 28v.

## 8 MARIAN LITERATURE IN GE'EZ

- FIG. 8.1 MS Aeth. e. 28, Gäbrä Mānfās Qəddus with Täklä Haymanot Abba Giyorgis, fol. 1v.  
 FIG. 8.2 MS Aeth. e. 33, The Virgin Mary, fol. 18v.  
 FIG. 8.3 MS Aeth. e. 28, Carpet page with cross, fol. 38v.  
 FIG. 8.4 MS Aeth. e. 28, Beginning of the reading for the fourth day of the week, fol. 39r.  
 FIG. 8.5 MS Aeth. e. 28, Carpet page with geometric pattern, fol. 130v.  
 FIG. 8.6 MS Aeth. e. 34, Five Zag<sup>w</sup>e kings, fol. 1v.

## 9 CHRONICLES IN GE'EZ

- FIG. 9.1 MS Bruce 88, Beginning of the *Chronicle of Emperor Amdä Šəyon I*, fol. 5r.  
 FIG. 9.2 MS Bruce 88, Beginning of the first section with the genealogy of the kings of Ethiopia, fol. 1r.  
 FIG. 9.3 MS Bruce 88, Beginning of the *Chronicle of Emperor Zär'a Yä 'əqob*, fol. 16r.  
 FIG. 9.4 MS Bruce 88, Ending of the *Chronicle of Emperor Amdä Šəyon I* (detail), fol. 15vc.

## 10 AMHARIC

FIG. 10.1 MS Clarke Or. 39, Beginning of the Treatise, fol. 4r.

FIG. 10.2 MS Clarke Or. 39, Sayings on the nature of the Trinity, fol. 10v.

FIG. 10.3 MS Clarke Or. 39, Sayings by Dionysius the Areopagite, Jacob Baradaeus, and Hippolytus, fol. 11r.

FIG. 10.4 MS Clarke Or. 39, End of the Treatise, fol. 18v.

## 11 OTHER LANGUAGES

FIG. 11.1 MS Bruce 94, Beginning of the *Song of Songs* in Amharic, fol. 1r.

FIG. 11.2 MS Bruce 94, Word list in Amharic, Fālaša, Gafat, Agäw, and Čirača-Agäw, fol. 10r.

FIG. 11.3 MS Bruce 94, Beginning of the *Song of Songs* in “Galla” (Oromiffa), fol. 24r.

## 12 MAGIC SCROLLS

FIG. 12.1 MS Aeth. e. 31, Protective illustration at the top of a magic scroll.

FIG. 12.2 MS Aeth. g. 4, A magic scroll with blank areas in which to add name client (detail).

FIG. 12.3 MS Aeth. e. 31, A magic scroll in which a new name has been added (detail).

FIG. 12.4 MS Aeth. g. 4, Protective angel and invocation to the Trinity (detail).

FIG. 12.5 MS Aeth. f. 10, Depiction of a demon trap (detail).

FIG. 12.6 MS Aeth. f. 4, Rubricated invocation to the Trinity at the beginning of a magic scroll (detail).

FIG. 12.7 MS Aeth. e. 31, An invocation to the Trinity followed by quotation from Jn. (detail).

# Indices

## GENERAL INDEX

- Aaron, *see* Moses
- Aksum, town 11–17, 51, 62, 69
- Aksumite, period 11–15, 80;  
literature 15–16, 37–38, 56,  
59–60, 71–72; material culture  
49–51; *see also* Nine Saints
- ʿAmdä Şəyon I, emperor 20, 79, 82;  
literature on 80–81, 85, figs. 9.1,  
9.4
- Amharic, language 7, 11, 15–16, 21,  
77, 82, 87–93, 95–96, 99–100
- Anaphoras 3, 72
- Arabia, southern 11–15, 63;  
depictions of 69, fig. 7.7
- Bäʿədə Maryam I, emperor:  
chronicle of 20, 81–82
- Bahṛəy, *abba* 20
- Bible 15–16, 37–38, 39, 95
- Bodleian Library, Oxford 3–9;  
*see also* Bruce, James; Clarke,  
Edward Daniel; Huntington,  
Robert; Juell-Jensen, Bent; Laud,  
William; manuscripts, Oxford,  
Bodleian Library; Napier  
expedition
- Book of the Disciples (*Mäşhafä  
ardəʾət*) 107
- Brancaleone, Nicolò 35
- Bruce, James 3–5, 7, 16, 56–57, 59,  
79–80, 95–96, 99–101
- chapter headings 29, 31
- Christ 15, 21, 65, 71, 85, 107;  
depictions of 51, figs. 5.12, 7.6;  
literature on 18–20, 90, 93
- Chronicles 15, 19–20, **79–85**, 100
- churches: Ašätän Maryam 75, 77;  
Betä Giyorgis 75, 77; Betä  
Golgota 32; Betä Mädhane  
ʿAläm 30; Däbrä Arägawi 60;  
Däbrä Dammo 61, 62–62, 69,  
fig. 7.4; Däbrä Ḥayq Ḥisifanos  
30, 65, 89; Däbrä Libanos of  
Ham 30; Däbrä Sina Gorgora  
69; Däbrä Wärq 35; Ānda Abba  
Gärima 26, 29–30, 69; Maryam  
Mägdälawit 9; Yəmʿata Gʷəḥ  
67; Yəmṛəḥannä Krəstos 75;  
Wafä Iyäsus 35
- Clarke, Edward Daniel 3, 7, 87–88
- Coptic: art 30, 48; Church 16;  
literature 16–17, 21, 53, 104;  
ties with Ethiopia 16, 35, 62, 67
- David, king 38–39; depictions of 9,  
48–49, fig. 5.1
- Dawit II, emperor 19,  
*Dəggʷa* (“Hymnal”) 9, 16
- Didəsqəliä* (“Didascalia”) 19
- ĀllaʿAmida, king 62
- Encomium of Heavenly and  
Earthly Beings 3
- Enoch 53–56; Book of (*Mäşhafä  
Henok*) 4–5, 9, 16, **53–57**, 79,  
100, figs. 6.1–6.2; depictions of  
49, fig. 5.11
- Āskəndər, emperor: chronicle of 82
- Eusebian apparatus 29–30, 35; *see  
also* Gospels
- Evangelist portraits 31–35, 49, 51  
figs. 2.2, 3.1, 4.1, 4.4–4.5, 5.12
- ʿEzana, king 15
- Fəṯṯa nəgəşt* (“Law of the Kings”) 20
- Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus, saint:  
depictions of 73–74, fig. 8.1
- Gäbrä Mäsqäl, king 63
- Gäbrä Mäsqäl, emperor; *see* Ḥarbe
- Gädlä Gäbrä Krəstos* (“Life of Gäbrä  
Krəstos”) 60–62
- Gädlä ḥawaryat* (“Contendings of the  
Apostles”) 19, 65
- Gädlä Krəstos Šämra* (“Life of  
Krəstos Šämra”) 7–8, 59
- Gädlä Zämikaʿel Arägawi* (“Life of  
Zämikaʿel Arägawi”) **60–65**;  
illustration of **66–69**, figs. 2.3,  
7.1–7.7
- Gälawdewos, emperor: chronicle  
of 20, 82
- Gəbrä ḥəməmat* (“Lectionary for  
Passion Week”) 18
- Geʿez (Ethiopic), language 11–15;  
literature 4, 7, **15–21**, 29, 38–47,  
53–56, 59–65, 71–73, 79–85,  
89, 103, 106–11; manuscripts  
**23–27**; script 12–15, 88; *see also*  
manuscripts, Ethiopic

- Giyorgis of Sägla 19, 72–73;  
depictions of 74, fig. 8.1; *see also*  
Harp of Mary
- Gondär, town 74, 96, 99, 100
- Gospels 9, **29–30**; illustration of  
**31–34**, figs. 2.1–2.2, 3.1, 4.1–4.5
- Ground Hornbill artist 8–9, **73–77**
- hagiographies **59–60**, 61–62;  
illustration of **65–66**; *see also*  
*Gädlä Krəstos Šämra; Gädlä*  
*Žämika'el Arägawi*
- Ḥanna, mother of Samuel 45–46
- Ḥarbe, king: depictions of 77, fig.  
8.6
- Harp of Mary (*Arganonä Maryam*) 3,  
19, **71–73**, 77, figs. 1.4, 2.4, 8.1,  
8.3–8.5; illustration of 8, **72–75**
- Haymanotä abäw* (“The Faith of the  
Fathers”) 20, 89
- Haymanot lämmiyäkkäs* 90–93
- headpieces (*haräg*) 31–32, 48, 73,  
figs. 1.1, 1.4, 2.1, 2.4, 4.2,  
5.2–5.3, 5.6, 5.8
- historiography, *see* Chronicles
- Huntington, Robert 3, 9
- Iyasu I, emperor 60
- Iyasu II, emperor 60
- Jesus, *see* Christ
- Juel-Jensen, Bent 3, 8–9, 35, 38, 61,  
75–77
- Kaleb, king 11, 63; depictions of  
69, figs. 7.5–7.6
- Kəbrä nägäst* (“The Glory of Kings”)  
4, 17–18, 51, 100
- kidan* (“pact”) 65, 71, fig. 7.6
- Lahä Maryam* (“Lament of Mary”)  
18
- Lalibäla, king 17, 20; depictions of  
77, fig. 8.6
- Laud, William, archbishop of  
Canterbury 3
- Ləbnä Dəngəl, emperor 32;  
chronicle of 20, 82
- Ləfäfä šədq* (“Bandlet of  
Righteousness”) 21, 107
- Louis XV, king 4, 56, 79
- Magdala (*Mäqdäla*) *see* Napier  
Expedition
- magic scrolls 7, 21, **103–11**, figs.  
1.3, 2.5, 12.1–12.7
- Mälkə'ä Gäbrə'el* (“Image of  
Gabriel”) 20
- manuscripts, Ethiopic: production  
of 9, 16–21, **23–27**, 35, 38–51,  
56–57, 61–62, 65–69, 77, 84–  
85, 89, 95, 101, 103; illustration  
of 8–9, 29–35, 47–51, 65–69,  
72–75; use of 20, 23, 37, 65
- Mary, saint 19, 26, 40–41, 71, 85;  
depictions of 48, 69, 72, fig. 8.2;  
literature on 3, 8–9, 17, 19–21,  
24, 32, **71–73**, 107
- Mäšhafä bərhan* (“Book of Light”) 19
- Mäšhafä milad* (“Book of the  
Nativity”) 19
- Mäšhafä sä'atat* (“Book of Hours”)  
19, 66
- Mäzmurä Krəstos* (“Psalms of  
Christ”) 20
- Mənilək I, king 51, 82
- Məntəwwab, queen 60
- Mīnas, emperor: chronicle of 20,  
82
- Miracles of Mary (*Tä'ammərä*  
*Maryam*) 19, 32, 69, 71–72
- Moses 37, 45; depictions of 49, fig.  
1.1
- Nä'akk'əto Lə'ab: depictions of 77,  
fig. 8.6
- Na'od, emperor: chronicle of  
81–82, fig. 1.2,
- Napier expedition 3, 5, 8–9
- Nine Saints 16, 60, 62; depictions  
of 66–69, figs. 2.3, 7.1; *see also*  
*Gädlä Žämika'el Arägawi*
- Pachomius 62; depictions of 66–67,  
69, figs. 2.3, 7.2; Rule of (*Šər'atä*  
*maḥbär*) 16
- patrons 57, 60, 65, 77, 104, 107
- Pococke, Edward 3, 72
- Psalms (*Mäzmurä Dawit*) 37–40,  
41–42, 45; *see also* Psalters
- Psalters 3, 9, **37–51**, 72, figs. 1.1,  
5.1–5.12; illustration of 9,  
**47–51**
- Qerällos* 16
- royal chronicles 15, 19–20, 51,  
**79–85**, 100, figs. 1.2, 9.1–9.4
- rubrication 26–27, **40–41**, 43,  
45, 85, 87, 100, 109, 111, figs.  
1.1–1.4, 2.1–2.4, 4.1–4.3, 4.5,  
5.2–5.6, 5.8–5.10, 6.1–7.7, 8.4,  
9.1–10.3, 11.1, 11.3, 12.2–12.7
- Sälama, metropolitan 18
- Šäršä Dəngəl, emperor 80;  
chronicle of 20, 51, 82
- Solomon, king: depictions of 9,  
49–51
- Solomonic, dynasty 4, 18–21, 30,  
51, 60, 79–80, 100
- Song of Songs (*Mähaləyä mähaləy*) 5,  
38, 95–101, figs. 5.6, 11.1–11.3
- stichometry 31, 43, fig. 5.6
- Susənyos, emperor 80
- Synaxarium (*Sənkəssar*) 5, 19, 59
- Täklä Haymanot, saint 59;  
depictions of 74, fig. 8.1
- Täklä Haymanot II, emperor 80
- Tewodros II, emperor 5
- Tigrinya, language 11, 13, 16, 96
- Tomarä təsbə'ət* (“Epistle of  
Humanity”) 19
- Virgin, the *see* Mary, saint
- Wəddase Maryam* (“Praise of Mary”)  
37, 72
- Yared, saint 16, 20, 62
- Yəkunno Amlak, emperor 80
- Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, king:  
depictions of 76, fig. 8.6
- Zag'we, dynasty 17, 51; depictions of  
77, fig. 8.6
- Žämika'el Arägawi, *see* *Gädlä*  
*Žämika'el Arägawi*
- Zär'a Ya'əqob, emperor 19–21, 71,  
103; chronicle of 51, 81–82, 85,  
fig. 9.3
- Ženahu lägalla* (“History of the  
Galla”) 20

## INDEX OF MANUSCRIPTS CITED

- Abunä Gäbrä Krəstos  
Gospels of Abunä Gäbrä Krəstos 35
- Ambassäl  
Ambassäl Psalter (EMML 2064) 47–48
- Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin  
orient. oct. 1305
- Däbrä Dammo  
Gädlä Zämika'el Arägawi of Däbrä Dammo 61
- Däbrä Ḥayq Ḥṣṭifanos  
apocryphal lives of the Apostles (EMML 1767) 65  
Gospels of Iyäsus Mo'a (EMML 1832) 30  
Treatise on the Christian Faith (EMML 1837) 89
- Däbrä Libanos of Ham  
Gospels of Däbrä Libanos 30
- Däbrä Q<sup>w</sup>äyāsa  
Book of Hours of Däbrä Q<sup>w</sup>äyāsa 66–67
- Däbrä Wärq  
Gospels of Däbrä Wärq 35
- Ḥnda Abba Gärīma  
Gädlä Gärīma 69  
Gärīma Gospels I 29–30  
Gärīma Gospels II 30  
Gärīma Gospels III 29–30, 49
- Lalibāla  
Gospels of Betä Mādḥane'Alām 30  
Miracles of Mary of Betä Golgota 32
- London British Library  
Add. MS 16,222, 89  
Or. 516, 8, 9, 75, 77  
Or. 590, 69  
Or. 641, 69  
Or. 706, 32  
Or. 709, 62
- Maryam Dibo  
Arägawi mänfāsawi of Maryam Dibo 75
- Maryam Mägdälawit  
Gospels of Maryam Mägdälawit 9
- Mäḳod'ä Kidanä Məḥrät  
Miracles of Mary (GMK-002) 69
- New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art  
acc. no. 2006.99, 75
- Oxford, Bodleian Library  
MS Aeth. b. 2, 8, 74  
MS Aeth. c. 2, 26, 34–35 figs. 3.1, 4.4  
MS Aeth. c. 3, 59  
MS Aeth. c. 14, 29–35, figs. 2.1–2.2, 4.1–4.3, 4.5  
MS Aeth. d. 4, 45, fig. 5.9  
MS Aeth. d. 5, 7  
MS Aeth. d. 12, 3  
MS Aeth. d. 13, 3, 5  
MS Aeth. d. 18, 9  
MS Aeth. d. 19, 9, 37–51, figs. 1.1, 5.1–5.3, 5.6–5.8, 5.11–5.12  
MS Aeth. d. 23, 59–69, 74–75, figs. 2.3, 7.1–7.7  
MS Aeth. e. 2, 45, fig. 5.10  
MS Aeth. e. 4, 7, 59  
MS Aeth. e. 17, 72  
MS Aeth. e. 22, 41, 45, fig. 5.5  
MS Aeth. e. 23, 43  
MS Aeth. e. 25, 45  
MS Aeth. e. 28, 8, fig. 1.4, fig. 2.4  
MS Aeth. e. 30, 41, 43, 45, fig. 5.4  
MS Aeth. e. 31, 106, 111, figs. 1.3, 12.1, 12.3, 12.7  
MS Aeth. e. 33, 45, 72, figs. 1.5, 8.2  
MS Aeth. e. 34, 8, 9, 75, 77, fig. 8.6  
MS Aeth. e. 35, 43, 45  
MS Aeth. f. 2, 45  
MS Aeth. f. 3, 72  
MS Aeth. f. 4, 109, 110, fig. 1.3  
MS Aeth. f. 10, 109, 110, figs. 1.3, 12.5  
MS Aeth. f. 11, 110  
MS Aeth. f. 12, 109, 111  
MS Aeth. f. 15, 72  
MS Aeth. f. 17, 5  
MS Aeth. f. 18, 43, 45  
MS Aeth. f. 21, 45  
MS Aeth. f. 30, 45  
MS Aeth. g. 2, 89  
MS Aeth. g. 4, 104, 109 figs. 12.2, 12.4  
MS Bodl. or. 531, 4–5, 57  
MS Bruce 74, 4, 53–57, figs. 6.1–6.2  
MS Bruce 82, 5, 59  
MS Bruce 83, 5, 59  
MS Bruce 84, 5  
MS Bruce 85, 5  
MS Bruce 87, 4  
MS Bruce 88, 79–85, figs. 1.2, 9.1–9.4  
MS Bruce 89, 79  
MS Bruce 90, 79  
MS Bruce 91, 79  
MS Bruce 93, 4  
MS Bruce 94, 5, 95–101, figs. 11.1–11.3  
MS Clarke or. 2, 3, 7  
MS Clarke or. 3, 3, 7  
MS Clarke or. 39, 3, 7, 86–93, fig. 10.1–10.4  
MS Clarke or. 40, 3  
MS Ind. Inst. Misc. 4, 7  
MS Laud. or. 204, 3

MS Poc. 3, 3, 45	Vatican, Vatican Apostolic Library
MS Poc. 6, 3, 72	Comb.S.3, 62
MS Poc. 8, 3	Wafä Iyäsus
Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France	Wafä Iyäsus picture book 35
MS Éthiopien 49 ( <i>olim</i> 32) 5	
MS Éthiopien d'Abbadie 46, 62	