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Review

GETATCHEW HAILE, *Ethiopian Studies in Honour of Amha Asfaw*

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GETATCHEW HAILE, *Ethiopian Studies in Honour of Amha Asfaw* (New York, NY: n.pub., 2017). xviii, 476 pp. Price: \$45.00. ISBN: 978-0-9706663-8-3.

The volume under review is a personal homage paid by the author, one of the most renowned and prolific scholars in Ethiopian studies, to his long-time friend Amha Asfaw (b.1947), poet, writer, mathematician and competent connoisseur of Amharic. The author has collected a set of thirteen unpublished articles written over a period of ten years. The contributions cover an ample variety of topics and most of them are, or include, text editions based on first-hand data. A considerable part of the textual evidence used by the author stems from the manuscripts photographed by the Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library (EMML) project and still partly uncatalogued.

The volume opens with a Preface, followed by a short biography of Amha Asfaw and an introduction to Amha's poetic and philosophical *opera omnia*, entitled *Qunna le-Simie Metteria* (pp. v–xvii).

In 'An Eighteenth-century Amharic Poetic Prose on the Life of Christ' (pp. 1–8) the author edits and translates a rhymed text transmitted in an unspecified *Gəbrä həməmat* manuscript dated to the time of King Iyo'as (r 1755–1769). The text is in Amharic, yet with a strong linguistic influence from Gə'əz.

'On the Authorship of Ethiopian Anaphoras' (pp. 9–38) addresses the issue of the composition of some of the anaphoras recited in the Ethiopian liturgy. On the basis of the style and contents of the texts, the author claims that those traditionally attributed to Athanasius, John Son of Thunder, the Three Hundred and Eighteen, Epiphanius of Cyprus, and John Chrysostom were indeed penned by a native scholar, and, more precisely by *Abba* Giyorgis of Sägla (or Gasəçça).

'The Architectural Design of Ancient Churches: According to A Miracle of the Twenty-Four Elders of Heaven' (pp. 39–50) presents the text of a fifteenth-century miracle performed by the Twenty-Four Elders. The miracle includes a vision in which a monk is shown a *säqäla*, meaning a basilica-plan church. The text seems to be an indirect witness to the presence of this type of ecclesiastical structure in Ethiopia before the rise of the circular type.

A long-debated question concerning authorship is discussed in the essay 'The Discourse of Wärqe Commonly Known as *Ḥatäta zä-Zär'a Ya'əqob*' (pp. 51–72). In the paper it is argued that this philosophical treatise, traditionally believed to be a forgery made by the Capuchin Father Giusto Da

Urbino, was written under the influence of the Catholic missionaries by an Ethiopian *däbtära* who lived at the time of King Susänyos (r 1607–1632).

New evidence of the well-known phenomenon of double-recension texts, one hailing from an Aksumite Greek-based translation and the other from a later Arabic-based translation, is dealt with in the article ‘Treatise by Athanasius of Alexandria on the Incarnation’ (pp. 73–82). The two Ethiopic versions of Athanasius’s *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, the one transmitted in the fourteenth-century homiliary Collegetown, MN, Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library (= EMMML), 1763 (a well-known repository of ancient literary material), and the other in the *Haymanotä abäw*, are here edited and translated. The article continues a particular research trend, namely the exploration of the contents of MS EMMML 1763, which has been the focus of the author’s attention for nearly four decades.

‘An Amharic Study on the Liturgy and Symbolism of the Ethiopian Church’ (pp. 83–140) gives the edition and translation of two Amharic texts. The former is an anonymous twentieth-century commentary on the fourteen anaphoras, the latter a compilation of symbolic interpretations of parts of the church and of liturgical paraphernalia.

Exegesis is also the subject of the article ‘An “Old” Amharic Commentary on the Genealogy of Christ’ (pp. 141–172). The commentary, inserted as a prefatory note in an eighteenth-century Four Gospels manuscript, is rife with linguistic archaisms and expands the corpus of Old Amharic texts with one additional document.

‘Two Amharic Versions of One Essay in Defense of the *Täwahädo* Faith’ (pp. 173–224) presents two related documents concerning the question of the controversy on Christ’s unction, which saw the rise of three opposing doctrines in the seventeenth century. These sources prove to be remarkable for they provide new data on the theological dispute, and for other reasons pointed out with clarity by the author (p. 177).

‘Lamentation of the Soul (*Säqoqawä Näfs*)’ (pp. 225–256) offers the first edition and translation of the *Säqoqawä näfs*, an elaborate and deeply felt hymn composed in Gəʿəz in the distinctive ‘wax-and-gold’ style.

A traditional feature of the Ethiopian Church, the veneration of *tabots* is the subject of the apologetic text published in the article ‘A Text in Defense of *Tabots* and Icons in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church’ (pp. 257–268).

‘Some Notes on Priest Yared and His Contributions’ (pp. 269–320) gives a penetrating discussion of the dossier around the saintly initiator of Ethiopian hymnody. According to the reconstruction proposed by the author, the original *gädl* on Yared would have been pushed into abeyance by King Zär’a Yaʿeqob (r 1434–1468) and his royal clergy, yet some echoes survived

in the later *Acta Sancti Yārēd* (properly a *dārsan*) published by Conti Rossini. The article also sketches the development of the *Dəgg^wa*, which tradition claims to be a Yaredian heritage, starting from MS EMMML 7078. In this regard, a more in-depth presentation of this very old and still uncatalogued *arbaʿat*-chant book from Lalibāla would have been desirable.

‘A Page from the History of Dābra Libanos of Šāwa’ (pp. 321–410) illustrates a lengthy and rich document on the history and rule of the renowned Šāwan monastery. The text, partially translated into Russian by Boris Turaiev on the basis of MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Éthiopien d’Abbadie 108, has hitherto remained barely accessible to scholars. It is found in two additional manuscripts, MSS EMMML 6776 and EMMML 7346. The latter, although declared a *descriptus* of the former (‘there are clear indications that B was copied from A’, p. 327, yet such indications are not clarified), has, nevertheless, been collated and used in the edition. Indeed, a (non-contaminated) copy of a surviving witness is text-critically useless, since it can offer no better reading than its ancestor.

Finally, ‘The Ethiopian Vision of Baruk’ (pp. 411–476) provides a new edition and translation of the *Apocalypse of Baruch* (Baruch 5). The present edition is a useful tool for the understanding of this local composition and is based on five witnesses, with additional yet non-systematic references to Joseph Halévy’s 1902 *editio princeps* based on one unspecified manuscript. Regrettably, a clear statement on the editorial approach is missing. In this respect the author declares, perhaps overcautiously, that ‘the attempt to establish the original text will not succeed because most [witnesses] are corrupt to varying degrees’ (p. 411).

Despite some typos and inconsistencies in the transcriptions and the bibliographies, this sincere and affectionate *Festschrift* will be very inspiring to scholars in Amharic and Gəʿəz literature and in a number of other related fields. It is also a tangible memento of how promising the impressive amount of EMMML material—still far from being exhaustively investigated—can be for scholarly research in the years to come.

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