



Aethiopica 23 (2020)

International Journal of Ethiopian and
Eritrean Studies

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Review

GETACHEW HAILE, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Church's Tradition
on the Holy Cross*

Aethiopica 23 (2020), 281–285

ISSN: 1430-1938

Edited in the Asien-Afrika-Institut
Hiob-Ludolf-Zentrum für Äthiopistik
der Universität Hamburg
Abteilung für Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

by Alessandro Bausi

in cooperation with

Bairu Tafla, Ludwig Gerhardt, Susanne Hummel,
Alexander Meckelburg, and Siegbert Uhlig

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tation of the text. The commentary is concerned with the significance of Jubilees in its original Jewish context, and there is a good deal of interaction with—and often quite critical comment on—the views of other scholars. No aspect of the text seems to have been left out of account, and those who use this very illuminating commentary will learn much.

Looking back at the totality of VanderKam's work on Jubilees, whether one agrees or not with the various scholarly decisions he has taken, there can be no question but that he has made an enormous and long-lasting contribution to the study of this book.

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GETATCHEW HAILE, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Church's Tradition on the Holy Cross*, Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity, 10 (Leiden–Boston, MA: Brill, 2018). 285 pp. Price: €162.00, \$187.00. ISBN: 978-90-04-34868-4.

This book by Getatchew Haile is a compendium of texts relating to the Cross in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church tradition. It results from a long-term engagement of the scholar with manuscripts and hymnographic collections, and appears to be related (or its logical continuation perhaps) to most of Getatchew Haile's previous works. The primary purpose of this work, as stated by the author, is 'to compile in one volume previously unpublished literary texts relating to the Holy Cross' (p. ix) and the book serves this purpose admirably well.

'Two leading hymns of this volume' (p. ix), according to the author, are *Səbhata masqal* ('Glorification of the Cross')¹ and *Məšṭira masqal* ('Mystery of the Cross').² Getatchew Haile attributes (as 'most likely') the authorship of *Səbhata masqal* (pp. 218–235) to renowned ʾAbbā Bāḥrəy (active in 1593), although 'the hymn does not carry the name of its author' (p. 218). The argument for this attribution is that ʾAbbā Bāḥrəy 'wrote other works in MS BL Or. 534' (ibid.). Indeed, all arguments in favour of ʾAbbā Bāḥrəy's authorship of many of the works in MS BL Or. 534 seem to be very convincing and this manuscript may be quite a pearl for researchers in

¹ Attested in MS London, British Library, Or. 534, fols 4r–6r (sixteenth century; henceforth BL Or. 534), and in MS Collegeville, MN, Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library (= EMLL), 6993, fols 85v–88v (eighteenth century).

² Attested in MS EMLL 5835, fols 39r–41v (eighteenth century).

this field. Considering the correspondence of the date of the manuscript production and the period of activity of ʾAbbā Bāhrəy, it is worth investigating whether MS BL Or. 534 may be an autograph of ʾAbbā Bāhrəy's work, which would be a sensation and therefore in need of critical evaluation. However, the presence of a collection of texts quite likely composed by a certain author in one book does not permit one to attribute the entire content of a manuscript to that one author. Furthermore, based on two codicological observations, one must remain reluctant in accepting attribution of the *Səbhata masqal* to ʾAbbā Bāhrəy at this point, until other arguments are provided. The first is the position of the *Səbhata masqal* in MS BL Or. 534, its *mise en livre*: there are two blank folia, fol. 3v and fol. 6v, one that precedes and the other that follows the *Səbhata masqal*, visually singling it out. The second observation comes from Getatchew Haile himself, namely that the *Səbhata masqal* is attested in MS EMMML 6993 as well, but this time as part of a different collection of texts (a quick comparison of MSS BL Or. 534 and EMMML 6993 shows no similarity in terms of the content, aside from this text). In fact, two other hymns to the Cross from MS EMMML 6993 have been edited in this volume (pp. 52–67 and 68–101). Regardless of whether attribution of the *Səbhata masqal* to ʾAbbā Bāhrəy is proven or not, the present edition with English translation of this beautiful, presumably rare hymn (only two known witnesses) is a serious contribution to scholarship. The second hymn, *Məštira masqal* (pp. 236–249) seems to be attested by a *codex unicus*. The decision to include these two hymns in Chapter 3 'Homilies on the Holy Cross by Ancient Fathers' appears misleading.

The book is extremely rich in terms of its newly edited material, but the book's structure is quite unbalanced: 101 pages in Chapter 1; 3.5 pages in Chapter 2; 143 pages in Chapter 3; 14 pages in Chapter 4.

Chapter 1, titled 'Introduction', familiarizes us with the position of the Cross in Ethiopia. New discovery and excavation of an Aksumite town in the site Beta Samāʿti bring new evidence into play and one anticipates a fresh archaeologically-based hypothesis regarding the conversion from polytheism to Christianity.³

Nonetheless a few remarks have to be made on the general part: the references in footnote 5 (p. 1) do not justify the statement that 'the canon law

³ See M. J. Harrower, I. A. Dumitru, C. Perlingieri, S. Nathan, Kifle Zerue, J. L. Lamont, A. Bausi, J. L. Swerida, J. L. Bongers, Helina S. Woldekiros, L. A. Poolman, C. M. Pohl, S. A. Brandt, and E. A. Peterson, 'Beta Samati: discovery and excavation of an Aksumite town', *Antiquity*, 93/372 (2019), 1534–1552.

demands that blessing should be with a cross'. Furthermore, the statement that the celebration of the finding of the Cross was 'moved to 17 Mäskäräm (September 24) from 10 Mäggäbit (March 16)' is erroneous: obviously, 17 Maskaram corresponds to 27 September, a day when many churches celebrate the finding of the Cross by St Helena; 27 September as a day of celebration of this event is traceable back to the fourth century. Today in Ethiopia 17 Maskaram (27 September) is a national holiday, while 10 Mäggäbit (16 March) is less known, but still celebrated at a church level, commemorating events of various stories related to the Cross. First of all, the entry of the *Synaxary* advised by the Church narrates that the Cross, after being found by Empress Helena, was captured by the Persians in 614 and recovered by Emperor Heraclius in 630 or 631, and then removed to Constantinople.⁴ Another tradition (known to this author orally) claims that the Cross was found on 17 Maskaram but the time taken to dig it out meant it was actually unearthed on 10 Mäggäbit. Another narrative, included in the compendium under review (pp. 162–171) on an 'anonymous homily on the Finding of the True Cross for 10 Mäggäbit' by St Helena is celebrated in the church, leading to a monthly celebration of the Cross each month on its tenth day (Masqala ʾIyasus, 'Cross of Jesus').

The first chapter contains several newly edited excerpts in Gəʿəz or Amharic with English translation:

- a story that a piece of the True Cross was sent to Emperor Dāwit (r.1382–1411) to Ethiopia (pp. 4–14) from MS EMMML 5538 (twentieth century), which introduces the Ethiopic context.

- a story of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ (commentary on Matt. 27:1–28:7) from 'the Gəʿəz adaptation Coptic-Arabic Gospel Catena' (pp. 15–41), based on MSS EMMML 2797, 2068, and 2088. As we learn from the catalogue, all three manuscripts are from a particular period (seventeenth–eighteenth century), and all were photographed in ʾAmbässal, while two are from the monastery of Ḥayq ʾĒstifānos and one from a private library, which suggests it stems from a single initiative. Getatchew Haile provides some arguments for an earlier date: sixteenth century and even 'any time during the Yakunno Amlak dynasty and not earlier' (p. 17). The book under review does not tell us, whether there are other witnesses of this adaptation or not, and no *stemma codicum* is presented.

- the legend of the wood of the Cross (pp. 42–44), known from two manuscripts, MS EMMML 7656 (uncatalogued) and MS EMMML 2063 (ʾAmbässal, fifteenth century).

⁴ http://www.stmichaeleoc.org/The_Ethiopian_Synaxarium.pdf.

– commentary on Matt. 12:42 (pp. 44–45), where the commentator interprets the Queen of the South as the queen from the *Kəbra nagašt* ('Glory of the kings'), who was healed by the wood which later became a cross of crucifixion.

– the finding of the Holy Cross by Queen Helen from the historian Giyorgis Walda ʿAmid (pp. 46–51) as attested in MS EMMML 192 (twentieth century, ʿAddis ʿAbabā). Here no additional information or references are provided, only the text in Gəʿəz and its English translation.

– a list of the sufferings of Christ (pp. 52–53), misleadingly included under the *malkəʾ* (lit. 'image') genre of poetry, found nowhere else than in Ethiopic literature, characterized by five lined stanzas.

Almost at the end of the first chapter, two complete *malkəʾ*-hymns are included. The text of *Malkəʾa masqal* ('Image of the Cross', pp. 53–67) is attested in at least nineteen manuscripts, five of which were chosen for the present edition. The edition of *Malkəʾa ḥəməmə* ('Image of suffering', pp. 68–94), written presumably by Walda ʿAmlāk in the eighteenth century, is based on five manuscripts. Both times the above-mentioned MS EMMML 6993 containing the *Səbhata masqal* was selected, meaning that at least once both *malkəʾ*s are attested as part of one collection, while the rest of the manuscripts vary. The face-to-face English translation helps to understand the beauty of the poem, as well as rendition of words.

The chapter ends with two hymns to Jesus, which the author does not discuss, continuing to distinguish them through numeration: the first hymn (pp. 94–96) with Latin letters (while each stanza of *malkəʾ*-hymn is numbered with Arabic numbers); the second hymn (pp. 96–101) is numbered with Latin numbers. Both hymns do not exhibit main characteristics of *malkəʾ*-hymns: the number of stanzas is uneven, and the parts of the body do not figure anymore.

The content of Chapter 2 (pp. 102–105) corresponds to its title: three samples from the hagiographic literature.

Chapter 3 includes the edition of seven homilies (pp. 106–187) all attested in MS EMMML 1763 (fourteenth century, monastery of Ḥayq ʿƏstifānos), which Getatchew Haile suggests are a copy 'from a manuscript of the Aksumite era' (p. 106), each time collated with other available witnesses. Six of the seven homilies appear to be edited for the first time.

Next, an excerpt from Saint John Chrysostom's *Homily on the Fig Tree*, a widespread text, found in every lectionary of the Passion Week, edited by Delio Vania Proverbio, whereas Getatchew Haile included a version (pp. 188–193) published locally, which 'differs, at some crucial points, from the one edited by Proverbio' (p. 188). However, the reader is supposed to figure out the difference on his own, having two editions at hand.

The last contribution in Chapter 3, not yet discussed here, is a text in Amharic, accompanied with English translation (pp. 194–217), which narrates an earlier part of the St Helena legend—her life before she became a queen and found the Cross. The edition is based on MS EMMML 7007, while ‘the second recension’ of the same story was edited by Getatchew Haile in 2015. Regarding the difference between two versions, Getatchew Haile writes, ‘Ideally, one should collate the two versions. But the difference in composition between the two is wide enough not to allow collation’ (p. 194). He suggests that these two recensions of the same story are ‘two Amharic reproductions probably by two different students of a story they heard or read in Gəʼəz at a certain point in time’ (ibid.).

Chapter 4 (pp. 250–263) contains what its title announces, that is, short hymns on the Cross. The attribution of the authorship of several hymns to King Zarʼa Yāʼqob or to ʼAbbā Giyorgis of Gāsəḥḥā is based on hypothesis about various collections, proposed by Getatchew Haile in a contribution of 1983, in which the manuscripts containing them are also discussed.

The title ‘From the *Saʼatat* (Horologium) of *Abba* Giyorgis’ (pp. 258–260) seems to be misleading, as among the listed manuscripts containing this hymn, one of the three manuscripts, MS EMMML 3997, contains various hymns but not the *Horologium*.

The book under review contains extremely rich material stimulating interest for various perspectives: theologians, philologists, linguists, manuscriptologists, historians, liturgists, and anthropologists alike. Those interested in Ethiopia and in Christian writings of different genres in general will find this book extremely interesting. Those who can read *fidal* or Latin may be inspired to further research, finding answers to old questions, foundations for new questions or simply have a beautiful source for meditation or prayer.

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