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Vignette:

Gold coin of King Aphilas, early third century CE, as drawn by A. Luegmeyer after the coin in Rennau collection. Weight 2.48 grams, diameter 17 mm.

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The journal focuses on philology, linguistics, archaeology, history, cultural anthropology, religion, philosophy, literature, and manuscript studies with a regional emphasis on Eritrea, Ethiopia, the Horn of Africa, and related areas. The editors welcome contributions on relevant academic topics as well as on recent research in the respective field. Each issue of AETHIOPICA contains reviews of books which form a substantial section of the journal.

AETHIOPICA is published mainly in English. Articles in French, German, and Italian are also accepted for publication. An English summary for all articles in any language is provided.

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Table of Contents

Editorial	6
Articles	
STÉPHANE ANCEL, <i>Yohannās IV and the Patriarchate of Alexandria: Obtaining Four Coptic Bishops while Ceding Nothing on Jerusalem Issue (1876–1882)</i>	7
MICHAEL KLEINER, <i>Disputed Translations from The Life and Struggles of Our Mother Walatta Petros (2015) Reconsidered: Some Notes on Gə'əz Philology</i>	36
SOPHIA DEGE-MÜLLER, JACOPO GNISCI, and VITAGRAZIA PISANI, <i>A Handlist of Illustrated Early Solomonian Manuscripts in German Public Collections</i>	59
HAGOS ABRHA, <i>The Gə'əz Manuscripts Collection from the Monastery of Däbrä Şəyon (Abunä Abrəham, Təgray, Ethiopia)</i>	99
MARIA BULAKH and YOHANNES GEBRE SELASSIE, <i>New Readings and Interpretations on the Inscribed Stele from Hənzat (HS1)</i>	125
SOLOMON GEBREYES, <i>The Confession of King Gälawdewos (r.1540–1559): A Sixteenth-Century Ethiopia Monophysite Document against Jesuit Proselytism</i>	160
MARIA BULAKH, MAGDALENA KRZYŻANOWSKA, and FRANCESCA PANINI, <i>Bibliography of Ethiopian Semitic, Cushitic, and Omotic Linguistics XXV: 2021</i>	182
Miscellaneous	
AARON BUTTS, SIMCHA GROSS, and MICHAEL HENSLEY, <i>Once Again on 'bk wdm in Ethiopian Sabaic</i>	193
ALESSANDRO BAUSI, <i>I manoscritti etiopici della Biblioteca Statale di Montevergine a Mercogliano, Avellino</i>	201
MICHAEL WALTISBERG, <i>Nachträge zur Edition einer syrischen ṭablītō in Aethiopica 24 (Bausi und Desreumaux 2021)</i>	215
ALAIN DESREUMAUX, <i>Le texte syriaque de la ṭablītō éthiopienne : une réponse aux remarques du Pr. Dr. Michael Waltisberg</i>	220
Personalia	
Academic News	223

Table of Contents

Review Article

- BITANIA ZE'AMANUEL and PETER UNSETH, *Amharic Folkloric Oral Traditions: Collections for Insiders and for Outsiders* 226

Reviews

- ZEMENFES TSGICHE ET AL., eds, *International Conference on Eritrean Studies, 20–22 July 2016: Proceedings, I–II* (DENIS NOSNITSIN) 241
- INGVILD SÆLID GILHUS, ALEXANDROS TSAKOS, and MARTA CAMILLA WRIGHT, eds, *The Archangel Michael in Africa: History, Cult, and Persona* (SOPHIA DEGE-MÜLLER) 246
- MERON T. GEBREANANAYE, LOGAN WILLIAMS, and FRANCIS WATSON, eds, *Beyond Canon: Early Christianity and the Ethiopic Textual Tradition* (CALUM SAMUELSON) 250
- ABRAHAM JOHANNES DREWES, eds MANFRED KROPP and HARRY STROOMER, *Recueil des inscriptions de l'Éthiopie des périodes pré-axoumite et axoumite, III: Traductions et commentaires, B: Les inscriptions sémitiques* (ALESSIO AGOSTINI) 253
- MICHAEL LAUSBERG, *Geschichte und Kultur Äthiopiens* (SIEGBERT UHLIG) 257
- MARIE-LAURE DERAT, *L'énigme d'une dynastie sainte et usurpatrice dans le royaume chrétien d'Éthiopie du XI^e au XIII^e siècle* (NAFISA VALIEVA) 258
- VERENA KREBS, *Medieval Ethiopian Kingship, Craft, and Diplomacy with Latin Europe* (SAMANTHA KELLY) 261
- SHIFERAW BEKELE, UOLDELUL CHELATI DIRAR, ALESSANDRO VOLTERRA, and MASSIMO ZACCARIA, eds, *The First World War from Tripoli to Addis Ababa (1911–1924)* (NICOLA CAMILLERI) 264
- MELAKU GEBOYE DESTA, DEREJE FEYISSA DORI, and MAMO ESMELEALEM MIHRETU, eds, *Ethiopia in the Wake of Political Reforms* (SARAH HOWARD) 266
- ANNEGRET MARX, *When Images Travel to Ethiopia ... Impact of the Evangelium Arabicum printed 1590 in Rome on a 17th Century Ethiopian Gospel: Documentation and Synoptic Presentation of their Images* (JACOPO GNISCI) 269
- JOSEF TROPPEL and REBECCA HASSELBACH-ANDEE, *Classical Ethiopic: A Grammar of Ge'ez, Including Sample Texts and a Glossary* (MAIJA PRIESS) 272

Table of Contents

DERIB ADO, ALMAZ WASSE GELAGAY, and JANNE BONDI JOHANNESSEN, eds, <i>Grammatical and Sociolinguistic Aspects of Ethiopian Languages</i> (MARIA BULAKH)	273
MARLENE GUSS-KOSICKA, <i>Die Verbalsysteme des Amharischen und Tigrinischen: Eine vergleichende Analyse</i> (MAGDALENA KRZYŻANOWSKA)	279
Dissertation Abstracts	
HAGOS ABRHA ABAY, <i>Critical Edition (with translation) and Textual Analysis of Gädlä Yəmṣatta</i>	284
CARSTEN HOFFMANN, <i>Das geographische Traktat in der Weltgeschichte des Wäldä `Amid – Text, Übersetzung und Kommentar</i>	286
SISAY SAHILE BEYENE, <i>A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Treatise: Tārik Zamədra Gondar (The History of the Land of Gondar)</i>	288
LEAH MASCIA, <i>The Transition from Traditional Cults to the Affirmation of Christian Beliefs in the City of Oxyrhynchus</i>	292
JONAS KARLSSON, <i>The Diachronic Development of the Dəggwā: A Study of Texts and Manuscripts of Selected Ethiopic Antiphon Collections</i>	295

Editorial

The present issue of AETHIOPICA is the twenty-fifth since the journal's founding in 1998. It is also the thirteenth issue I have worked on as editor-in-chief, one more than that of founder Siegbert Uhlig. The present time, however, does not lend itself to celebrations of any sort. The global political crisis and the situation in the Horn of Africa are having a deep impact on the scholarly community, which appears divided and radicalized on opposite or increasingly diverging positions as never before. The growing influence of diaspora communities is at times marked by waves of resurgent nationalism. The challenge posed by main-stream policy in countries of established scholarly traditions gives less and less space to small fields—as is the case of Ethiopian and Eritrean studies. The consequent lack of resources triggers the fragmentation of the scholarly scene. New balances based on mutual legitimation and acknowledgement of a common scholarly method are not obvious. The consequence of this complex situation, which reflects global changes, is that scholarly and academic freedom can be put at risk. Of all priorities envisaged in the mission of AETHIOPICA, preservation of academic freedom along with scholarly quality has been, is, and will remain the top priority of the journal.

I regret that in the past, and still now, the lack of available qualified authors has prevented AETHIOPICA from duly commemorating distinct colleagues and researchers recently passed away who were more than deserving of an obituary. I would like to remember at least some of them here, by name, as a very modest tribute to their work and memory: Johannes Launhardt (1929–2019), Mesfin Wolde Mariam (1930–2020), Steffen Wenig (1934–2022), Girma Fisseha (1941–2020).

To end on a positive note, three colleagues active in Ethiopian and Eritrean studies have received important awards this year, and we would like to mention them here: Samantha Kelly (Professor of Medieval History at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, also on our International Editorial Board), has won the Choice Outstanding Academic Title 2020, and the African Studies Review Prize for the Best Africa-focused Anthology or Edited Collection 2021, for her *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Leiden–Boston, MA: Brill, 2020); Verena Krebs (Junior-Professorin für Mittelalterliche Kulturräume at Ruhr-Universität Bochum) has received the Dan David Prize for her *Medieval Ethiopian Kingship, Craft, and Diplomacy with Latin Europe* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021); and Massimo Zaccaria (Professore Associato in Storia e Istituzioni dell'Africa at Università degli Studi di Pavia) has received the Giorgio Maria Sangiorgi award of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei 'per la Storia ed Etnologia dell'Africa'. To all of them—the warmest congratulations from AETHIOPICA!

Review Article

Amharic Folkloric Oral Traditions: Collections for Insiders and for Outsiders

BITANIA ZE'AMANUEL, Dallas International University,
PETER UNSETH, Dallas International University and SIL International

DANIEL ABERRA, *የዐማርኛ ምሳሌያዊ አባባሎች የዐማርኛ ምሳሌያዊ ብሔሎች የዐማርኛ ምሳሌያዊ ንግግሮች የዐማርኛ ተረትና ምሳሌዎች* (*Yä 'amarāñña məsaleyawi abbabbaločč yä 'amarāñña məsaleyawi bəhiločč yä 'amarāñña məsaleyawi nəgəggəročč yä 'amarāñña tärätənnə məsalewočč*, 'Amharic Proverbs: Amharic proverbs, Amharic parables, Amharic myths'), 2nd edn (n.p.: n.pub., 2012 EC = 2019/2020 CE). 639 pp. Price: \$30.00. ISBN: 978-1-69786-007-8.

FISSEHA G. DEMOZE † and WILLIAM H. ARMSTRONG, *Ethiopian Amharic Proverbs. የኢትዮጵያ (አማርኛ) ምሳሌያዊ አነጋገሮች* (*Yä 'ityoḗya (amarāñña) məsaleyawi annägäročč*) (Washington DC: n.pub., 2019). 115 pp. Price: \$13.00. ISBN: 978-1-08300-159-7.

DANIEL ABERRA, *የዐማርኛ ዕንቁቅልሽ* (*Yä 'amarāñña 'ənqoqalläš*, 'Riddles in Amharic') (n.p.: n.pub., 2012 EC = 2019/2020 CE). 109 pp. Price: \$10.00. ISBN: 978-1-68904-539-1.

This review examines three recent books of Amharic folklore oral traditions, two collections of proverbs, and one collection of riddles. 'Oral tradition', in this context, refers to the folklore concept that includes such genres as proverbs, riddles, and stories.¹ This is different from the use of the phrase 'oral tradition' used by some historians.²

Each of these three books is noteworthy for multiple reasons. The first is noteworthy for its size, by far the largest and most complete collection of Am-

¹ Tadesse Jaleta Jirata 2012; Aregga Hailemichael 2006.

² Meckelburg et al. 2018.

haric proverbs. The second is the only available book of Amharic proverbs translated into English. The third is noteworthy as the largest collection of Amharic riddles, and the only one in print. All three are privately published, available for sale on the Internet.³

Linguists (including one of the reviewers) study phonetic or grammatical minutiae, but speakers of the languages often do not understand or appreciate their writings. Rather, speakers of languages appreciate the work of those who compile their oral traditions. Books like these, by Ethiopian authors, can be appreciated by both scholars and ordinary speakers.

Proverbs have always been an important part of Ethiopian cultures, used to give advice, to rebuke, to reconcile, to illustrate, and so on. Amharic proverbs are often poetic, metaphoric, and frequently deliberately obscure, all factors which make them treasured by Amharic speakers. They have long been collected and published by both native speakers such as Mogäs ‘Equbä Giyorgis and foreigners such as Joseph Baeteman.⁴ Daniel Aberra has studied these and cites fifteen sources related to Amharic proverbs written by Europeans and over fifty by Ethiopians. This review article examines the two most recent books of Amharic proverbs and the most recent publication of Amharic riddles.

Daniel Aberra, የዐማርኛ ምሳሌያዊ አባባሎች የዐማርኛ ምሳሌያዊ ብሔሎች የዐማርኛ ምሳሌያዊ ንግግሮች የዐማርኛ ተረትና ምሳሌዎች

Daniel Aberra’s 629-page collection of Amharic proverbs is by far the largest collection of Amharic proverbs ever published. The book says it contains over twenty thousand proverbs, collected, among others, from previous published collections, social media, and friends, all alphabetized by *fidäl* order, illustrated on page 4 of the book.

This volume contains not only a collection of proverbs, it also contains a scholarly introduction to analysing proverbs. The book begins with a 25-page introduction to the study of Amharic proverbs. It gives a definition of ‘proverb’ and lists several categories of proverbs by structure, such as personification in speaking, question-and-answer, and alliteration. This, together with the book by Däbbäbä Ḥaylägiyorgis ሄገገዳ and articles by Tekletsadik Belachew and Jeylan Wolyie Hussein,⁵ shows clearly that Ethiopian proverb scholars have progressed far beyond merely compiling lists of proverbs.

³ One website mistakenly labels Daniel Aberra’s books as ‘Afrikaans edition’.

⁴ Mogäs ‘Equbä Giyorgis 1966/1967; Baeteman 1929.

⁵ Däbbäbä Ḥaylägiyorgis ሄገገዳ 2006/2007; Tekletsadik Belachew 2021; Jeylan W. Hussein 2004.

In addition to compiling thousands of proverbs—which is a major contribution to Amharic proverb studies—he also listed seven (non-exclusive) categories of proverbs with examples. The categories included full sentences, personification of animals speaking (e.g. **ዋ ትላለች አሞራ**, ‘*Wa’ tälalläč amora*, “‘*Wa*”, said the vulture’ (p. 430)), question-and-answer proverbs (e.g. **ወጥን ማን ያውቃል? ቀላዋጭ ።**, *Wätännä man yawəqal? Qälawaččə*, ‘Who knows *wät* (stew)? An uninvited guest’ (p. 429)), recently created proverbs (**ወይ በባሌ ወይ በቦሌ ።**, *Wäy bābale wäy bābole*, ‘Either by Bale or by Bole’ (p. 12)), and **አራዳ** (*arada*) proverbs (‘When I am saying, “What?” to her, she falls asleep’ (p. 12)).

This collection includes a feature that is too rarely found in collections of proverbs in any part of the world: it also lists variants of proverbs. For example, the following four variants are found in sequence on page 197. The meaning is ‘They asked a mule, “Who is your father?”, S/he said, “My mother/uncle is a horse”’, a proverb found in several Ethiopian languages (the father of a mule is always a donkey, an animal that is mocked in many proverbs).⁶

- | | | | | | |
|----------------------|---------------|--------------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1) በቅሎ አባትሽ | ማነው | ቢሏት | እናቴ | ፈረስ | አለች ። |
| <i>bäqlo abbatəš</i> | <i>mannäw</i> | <i>bil^wat</i> | <i>ənnate</i> | <i>färäs</i> | <i>aläč</i> |
| mule | father-your | who? | ask-her | mother-my | horse she-said |
| 2) በቅሎ አባትኽ | ማነው | ቢሉት | እናቴ | ፈረስ | ነች ። |
| <i>bäqlo abbatək</i> | <i>mannäw</i> | <i>bilut</i> | <i>ənnate</i> | <i>färäs</i> | <i>näč</i> |
| mule | father-your | who? | ask-him | mother-my | horse she-is |
| 3) በቅሎ አባትኽ | ማነው | ቢሉት | ፈረስ አጎቴ | አለ | ። |
| <i>bäqlo abbatək</i> | <i>mannäw</i> | <i>bilut</i> | <i>färäs agote</i> | <i>alä</i> | |
| mule | father-your | who? | ask-him | horse uncle-my | he-said |
| 4) በቅሎ አባትኽ | ማነው | ቢሉት | እናቴ | ፈረስ ነች | አለ ። |
| <i>bäqlo abbatək</i> | <i>mannäw</i> | <i>bilut</i> | <i>ənnate</i> | <i>färäs näč</i> | <i>alä</i> |
| mule | father-your | who? | ask-him | mother-my | horse is he-said |

Most variants are in pairs together, but there is one proverb cited with seven variants (p. 510). Not all of the variants are found in immediate sequence, such as the following pair found on two consecutive pages, separated by over thirty

⁶ Unseth 2020, 25, 26.

entries, both of whose meaning is the same: ‘When Hyena attacks (at night), people cultivate (during day)’.

ጅብ ታኩተኩተ ሰው ከተከተተ # (p. 579)

ǧəb tak^wätäkk^wätä, säw kätäkättätä

hyena when-attacks people harvest

ጅብ ካኩተኩተ ሰው ከተከተተ # (p. 580)

ǧəb kak^wätäkk^wätä, säw kätäkättätä

hyena if-attacks people harvest

The inclusion of proverb variants makes it difficult to count the exact number of different proverbs, but we estimate that the book contains at least seventeen thousand unique proverbs.

A useful feature of this book is that it includes proverbs that are used by different age groups, the older and the younger. Many Amharic proverbs have very old roots, a large number traceable to Gə‘əz. For example, both the following Gə‘əz proverb and the Amharic proverb can be translated as ‘Let the eye fast, let the tongue/mouth fast, let the ear fast’.

Gə‘əz:

ይጸም ዐይን ፤ ይጸም ልሳን ፤ እዚንኒ ይጸም #⁷

yəṣum ‘ayn, yəṣum ləssan, əzinəni yəṣum

let-it-fast eye let-it-fast tongue ear-too let-it-fast

Amharic:

ዐይን ይጸም ፤ አፍ ይጸም ፤ ጅሮም ይጸም # (p. 315)

‘ayn yəṣum, af yəṣum, ḡoromm yəṣum

eye let-it-fast mouth let-it-fast ear-too let-it-fast

This is related to the Oriental and the European form of the proverb, ‘Not see, not speak, not hear’, a proverb often associated with three wise monkeys.⁸

⁷ Afäwäraq Taräqāñ 2015/2016, 79.

⁸ The proverb is found in English with the added mention of ‘evil’, ‘See no evil, speak no evil, hear no evil’ (Mieder 1987, 164).

Similarly, the following Gə'əz and Amharic proverbs have the same meaning: 'They dreamed a dream, but there is nothing that they gained'. These two proverbs, Gə'əz and Amharic, both have the same meaning.

Gə'əz:

ሐለሙ ሐለሙ ወአልቦ ዘረከበ #⁹
ḥalämu ḥälmä wä'albo zäräkäbä
 dreamed dream but-not gained

Amharic:

ሐለም ሐለሙ ፤ ያገኙት ነገር ግን የለም # (p. 37)
ḥäläm allämu yagännñut nägär gən yälläm
 dream dreamed found thing but is-none

The author cites a category of 'recent' (*zämänännña*) proverbs. These proverbs have been created relatively recently and refer to recent situations:

ወይ በባሌ ወይ በቦሌ # (p. 12)
wäy bäbale wäy böbole
 or by-Bale or by-Bole

'Either by Bale or by Bole.'

This proverb is from the era of the *Därg*, when many were trying to leave Ethiopia. Some fled without government permission, going through the south-eastern province of Bale into Kenya; others with government permission, left via the Bole International Airport in Addis Abäba. The proverb means to do something with or without permission, one way or the other.

The book includes both ancient and modern Amharic proverbs. Also, some of the proverbs included in this book are modified proverbs that are purposely changed in a way sometimes called modern (*arada*) language, used by some millennials. These differ from ancient proverbs because they are used sarcastically, and they are often humorous, for example:

⁹ Afäwärq Taräqän 2015/2016, 6.

ለሆዳም በሬ ቫት ተክፈለ ። (p. 42)

lāhodam bäre VAT takäffälä

for-gluttonous ox VAT was-paid

‘For the gluttonous ox, VAT was paid.’

This is a humorous adaptation of the traditional proverb,

ለሆዳም በሬ ጭድ ያዝለታል ። (p. 42)

lāhodam bäre çəd yazällätal

for-gluttonous ox hay he-provides

‘For the gluttonous ox, he (God) provides hay.’

The following is another example of a recent proverb found in this book:

አይሱዙና የጋሪ ፈረስ አንዴ ከወደቀ አይነሣም ። (p. 12)

aysuzunna yägari färäs ande käwäddäqä ayännäsšam

Isuzu-and cart horse alike if-fall not-rise

‘An Isuzu truck and a cart horse are alike, if they fall they do not rise.’

With such a rich collection of proverbs, the book makes it easy to find many examples of poetically crafted proverbs. To appreciate these, it may be best to listen to these, not just read with the eyes.

In the following, for instance, the three consonants of the first and final words are reordered:

ክፉን እስከ ክንፉ ። (p. 416)

kəfun askä kəñfu

evil-object far-as wing-his

‘Destroy an evil person completely [to the very edge]’ (lit. ‘the evil [one] to the wing’).

Poetry can also be heard in the proverb below in the use of two very similar consonants: the root consonants of the verbs in the two halves of the proverb differ by the feature of labialization (lip rounding) on the consonant, *kʷ* and *k*.

ጅብ ካከተከተ ሰው ከተከተተ ። (p. 580)

ǰəb kakʷätäkkʷätä säw kätäkättätä

hyena if-attacks person[s] harvest

‘When hyena attacks (at night), people cultivate (during day).’

The following proverb has been difficult to translate. The proverb has two possible meanings: one is the simple surface meaning; the other is a deeper meaning. Both of the words in the following proverb are built with *-b-*, then *-la-*, ending with *-w*.

የበላው አብላላው ። (p. 487)

yäbällaw ablallaw

one-who-ate enjoyed-it

‘The one who ate it enjoyed it’ (also metaphorically: ‘the one who ate it studied/solved the problem’).

This huge collection of traditional proverbs also enables the study of traditional values expressed in proverbs. The collection allows scholars to study the values associated with various persons, such as **ዕውር**, ‘blind person’, **ቁስ**, ‘priest’, **አባት**, ‘father’, and **እናት**, ‘mother’, **አሮጊት**, ‘old woman’. Proverbs about priests are often cynical, for instance

ቁስና አሞራ በበላበት ይሮካል ። (p. 16)

qesanna amora bäbällabbät yəçokäl

priest-and vulture by-ate speak

‘Priest and vulture speak by what they eat.’

In contrast, proverbs about God are overwhelmingly positive, for instance

እግዚአብሔር መካር ነው ፤ መጻሕፍትን ሰጥቶናልና ። (p. 365)

Ēgziʾabher mäkar näw; mäṣahəfətn säṭtonalənnä

God counsellor is books for-he-has-given-us

‘God is a counsellor, for he has given us books.’

Some proverbs whose origin is from the Bible are used in Amharic. For example

ለሚያምን ሁሉ ይቻላል ። (p. 44)

lämmiyamən hullu yäččalal

for-who-believe all possible

‘For one who believes everything is possible’ (Matthew 9:23).

Having such a large collection of proverbs is useful and interesting for many Amharic speakers. But it is also useful for scholars. The collection allows scholars to do such research as examining the frequency of grammatical structures in proverbs or studying all the proverbs that begin with selected words (including examples with a prefix), such as አሀያ, ‘donkey’, ለማኝ, ‘beggar’, ውኃ, ‘water’. For example, there are 101 pages (about 3,400 proverbs, 15 per cent of the collection!) that begin with የ-, almost all relative clauses or genitives, for example

የልጅ ሞት ፤ የእግር እሳት ። (p. 453)

yäləğ mot yä`əgər əsat

of-child death of-foot fire

‘The death of a child [is like the agony of] fire on the feet.’

For multiple reasons, this book will be a standard for many years for those who study Amharic proverbs.

Fisseha G. Demoze † and William H. Armstrong, *Ethiopian Amharic Proverbs. የኢትዮጵያ (አግርኛ) ምላሴያዊ አነጋገሮች. Ye-it`yop`ya (amar`ñña) m`sa-leyawi anegagerroc`*

This proverb collection was prepared by an Amharic speaker and an English speaker combining their skills. These two authors began working together on Amharic proverbs fifty years ago, when Fisseha G. Demoze was teaching Amharic to William H. Armstrong of the Peace Corps. At the time, they made a pamphlet of Amharic proverbs translated into English, but now, decades later, they have prepared this book of 441 numbered proverbs, translated into English. This collection also differs from the larger one in that it contains only traditional proverbs, not recent ones or twisted ones.

The system for transliterating the Amharic words is original, presented briefly on page vi, quite different from any system we have seen, as shown in the following:

እውነተኛ ሰው ፥ ምላስ የለውም ። (p. 11, no. 43)

`wnetegña sew, m`las yellow`m (as written in the book)

əwənnätäñña säw, məlas yälləwəm (as in the style of this journal)

honest person, tongue does-not-have

‘An honest person has no tongue.’

In this book, each proverb is written in traditional *fidäl*, then transliterated using Roman letters. Following this is a fairly literal translation of the proverb into grammatical English. This is the basic pattern found in many proverb collections around the world. However, this book adds something valuable: almost every translation is followed by an explanation of the proverb. Sometimes this tells the circumstances when a proverb might be used. For example, የባለቤት ሰነፍ ትብቱን ያዋርዳል ።, *yäbaläbet sänäf betun yawarrədal*, is translated as ‘The lazy owner disgraces his own house’, which is followed by ‘Used of those who criticize or find fault with their own country or family’ (p. 25, no. 96).

Other explanations offer the deeper meaning of a proverb. For example, proverb 123 (p. 33) is given as

ላየኛው ከንፈር ለክርክር ታችኛው ከንፈር ለምስክር ።

layäññaw känfär läkərəkkər, taččəññaw känfär läməsäkkər

the-above lip for-argument the-lower lip for-testimony

It is translated as ‘The upper lip is for argument; the lower lip is for testimony’, which is explained as, ‘Here “the upper lip” is used as an equivalent of “from the neck up” which describes statements that are not true but only used as an argument. “The lower lip” is the equivalent of “from the heart”’. Such explanations are vital to understand proverbs, which by their very nature are often obscure.

Proverb scholars criticize some proverb collections because each proverb is given only one explanation. In actual fact, many proverbs can actually be used in different circumstances, giving different meanings, what proverb scholars call ‘polyvalency’. For example, proverb 98

የፊት ወዳጅህን በምን ቀበርከው?

በሻሻ ት የኋላው እንዳይሻሻ ። (p. 25)

yäfit wadağhən bämən qäbbärkäw?

Bašaš yah'alaw əndayšäš

earlier friend-your how? bury-him

by-cloth later-one so-not-leave

This proverb has two very different possible explanations. It begins with a question, then the answer involves a piece of cloth. One explanation speaks of a

respectful parting, but the second speaks of mocking and deceit. The honourable parting is explained as, ‘How did you bury your former friend? I buried him (with great respect), wrapped in a cloth, so that my new friend would not think badly of me and leave me’. The second meaning has the opposite connotation, mocking the dead friend, ‘How did you fool or get rid of your former friend? I gave him a lot of meaningless statements (cheap cloth) to get rid of him without losing my present friend’ (pp. 25–26, number 98). Similarly, proverb 175 is also explained with two different meanings. Such explanations distinguish this book from proverb collections that are only lists of proverbs.

Daniel Aberra, የዐግርኛ ስገቆቅልሽ

This is the only book of riddles of any language of Ethiopia for sale internationally, available online. The book contains 1193 numbered riddles. The riddles are arranged alphabetically in *fidäl* order. At the end of each consonant’s section, the answers are provided for the numbered riddles. As he did in his collection of proverbs, the author begins with an introduction to the topic, citing nine previous publications by Ethiopians on Amharic riddles.

Riddles have always been an integral part among Amhara society, and across Ethiopia. The European scholar Eugen Mittwoch correctly noted that Ethiopians are ‘very fond of riddles’.¹⁰ One hundred years ago and earlier, riddles were frequently played by both children and adults when they gather together at nighttime with their families or in daytime with their friends. Riddles are still told by many in Ethiopia.¹¹ Riddles were (and are) played by children significantly more than adults. Since most of the children in the countryside came from farmer families, they had the duty of being a shepherd. Therefore, children from different households went out to the field to tend the herds, and they stayed a large part of the whole day out in the area. It was at times such as this that children played games such as riddles.

Many people from Europe and North America do not appreciate or understand riddling customs from Ethiopia. Consequently, there has been little scholarly literature about riddles in Ethiopia. As is often the case, Wolf Leslau was a pioneer, having collected riddles in three languages and published articles.¹² Most scholarly study of riddles in the area is recent and by Ethiopian scholars, for instance Dejene Gemechu, Fitsum Abate, and Tadesse Jaleta Jirata.¹³ The majority of the scholarly work on riddles in Ethiopia has been on riddles of

¹⁰ Mittwoch 1942, 262.

¹¹ Tadesse Jaleta Jirata 2012; Dejene Gemechu 2014.

¹² Leslau 1965; Leslau 1967–1968; Leslau 1982–1983.

¹³ Dejene Gemechu 2014; Fitsum Abate 2014; Tadesse Jaleta Jirata 2012.

Oromo or Gurage languages. Ronny Meyer's work deserves mention as not merely a collection of riddles, but also a comparison of riddles among languages in the Gurage region.¹⁴

For many Westerners, it may seem odd that nearly all Amharic riddles are not questions. They are usually indicative sentences, or sentence fragments, often with relative clauses, such as the following traditional-style riddle:

ቤቷን ዘግታ የምታጨበጭብ ብ # (p. 41, no. 437)

bet^wan zägta yämmättačäbbäčəb

her-house closing she-claps

'She is the one who locks her house and claps' (answer: 'Šəro', dry flour of chickpeas (*garbanzos*)).¹⁵

A number of the riddles are poetic.¹⁶

ውሃ ፈረኝ ፀሐይ ደፋሪ # (p. 72, no. 906)

wəha färi, däḥay däffari

water fearful sun courageous

'Fears the water, brave for the sun' (answer: 'Salt').

Even this modern one is poetic, using near rhyme, an example of what linguists call 'feature rhyme', such as the following which contains three sequences of a velar stop followed by a vowel and final *-qur*, *-kär*, *-kər*:

ኪለት ሽንቁርኝ ሞተር የሚያሽከረክር # (p. 15, no. 7)

kulätt šänqur, motär yämiyaškäräkkər

two shaft motor which-makes-spin

'Two stalks, what makes a motor spin' (answer: 'Electrical plug').

Many of the riddles refer to very traditional objects, such as an ox yoke, *ənğära*, a thatched roof.

¹⁴ Meyer 2005.

¹⁵ Šəro stew is a common meal in Ethiopia.

¹⁶ Shashetu Bayu Tizazu and Kamil Nuredin Awol have begun the analysis of poetic structure riddles in an Ethiopian Semitic language, studying Čaha riddles (Shashetu Bayu Tizazu and Kamil Nuredin Awol 2019). Daniel Aberra's book of Amharic riddles provides rich data for scholars to study the forms of Amharic riddles.

One of the riddles in this book is the ancient riddle that was ascribed to the sphinx of Egypt,¹⁷ but we cannot know how long it has been told in Ethiopia.¹⁸

ጠዋት በአራት ፣ ከሰዓት በኹለት ፣ ማታ በሦስት እግሩ የሚኼድ ። (p. 88)

tāwat bā'arat, kāsā'at bākūlāt, mata bāsost agaru yāmmiked

morning on-four afternoon on-two evening on-three legs
which-goes

‘That which goes on four in the morning, in the afternoon on two, on three legs in the evening’ (answer: ‘A person’; a person crawls on four in childhood, walks on two as an adult, walks with a stick in old age).

But riddling is not merely a historic activity, it is still a current creative activity; shown by some riddles that are clearly contemporary:

በዙ ቀዳዳዎች አሉት ግን ውኃ መያዝ ይችላል ። (p. 41, no. 446)

bəzu qādadawoč allut gən wəha mäyaz yəčəlal

many holes it-has but water to-hold is-able

‘It has many holes, but it is able to hold much water’ (answer: ‘A sponge’).

At the end of the book is an original feature that the author has created, an index with all of the answers. Each answer is given with the identity number of the riddle(s) for that answer, for instance **እንጀራ** (*əngära*) 63 and 275, with separate entries for **እንጀራ አባት** (‘*əngära* father’, i.e. step father) 751, and **እንጀራ እናት** (‘*əngära* mother’, i.e. step mother) 627. This index allows teachers, preachers, parents, and speakers to easily find a riddle that has a particular word for an answer. The answers that were used for the highest number of riddles are **እሳት** (‘fire’) 15, **ዐይነ ምድር** (‘faeces’) 13, **ንብ** (‘bee’) 11, **ዶሮ** (‘chicken’) 10, **መርፌ** (‘needle’) 9, **ምላሽ** (‘tongue’) 9, **ፀሓይ** (‘sun’) 9, **ውሃ** (‘water’) 8, **ጥላ** (‘shadow/shade’) 8, **በቅሎ** (‘mule’) 8, **በቆሎ** (‘maize/corn’) 8, **እንሰራ** (‘water pot’) 8. This ingenious index greatly adds to the usefulness and joy of the book.

¹⁷ Davies 2014.

¹⁸ Archibald C. Jordan has found this same basic riddle in southern parts of Africa. It is impossible to determine whether it originated independently in more than one place, or whether it was created only once and was then borrowed by multiple groups (Jordan 1958, 102).

This volume of riddles is a guide for others in the study of riddles in Ethiopia. First, it shows how to collect and arrange a large number of riddles, each one numbered. Secondly, it shows how numbering each riddle can be a key to linking riddles and their answers. Third, the index shows how to arrange a searchable list of the answers to the riddles, based on their numbers. Fourth, it can inspire writers from other languages to collect and publish their riddles. This book sets a high standard for collections of riddles from other languages of Ethiopia and languages from those countries around it.

Proverbs and riddles have always been, and still are, a crucial part in the life of Ethiopians. They serve as a means where society can learn about new things, appreciate good habits and denounce bad norms. Proverbs are part of people's everyday life, used in every kind of conversation. Likewise, riddles have a considerable place in the culture of Ethiopians, especially in traditional settings. They are used to teach children about different things, and they are an enjoyable game children play in groups. Both proverbs and riddles reflect identity, value, history, culture, and worldview of the native people for their own community as well as for the foreigners. They serve as a mirror for the younger generation who are on the verge of losing their identity due to modernization and globalization.

As folklorists develop, test, and compare theories, they look for data. The authors of these three books have provided a large amount of organized data. For example, Daniel Aberra's book of proverbs lists over seventy proverbs that begin with ንጉሥ ('king'). Scholars can test the familiarity of these proverbs today. Similarly, Endalew Assefa has categorized some traditional Amharic proverbs as showing a low view of women;¹⁹ some of these proverbs could be tested to see if these traditional proverbs and the values they reflect are known by young people and still in use today.

The collection of riddles also contributes a new method for arranging riddles and their answers in a way that facilitates study and analysis. These books can be profitably read by Amharic speakers, proverb and riddle scholars, and folklorists.

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¹⁹ Endalew Assefa 2015.

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Summary

The two books of Amharic proverbs and the book of Amharic riddles under review document Amharic oral traditions far beyond what others have done previously. They all build on previous scholarship. In addition, each one adds new examples to what has been published before. But it is also important to note that each book has added significant new methodological contributions to their field. They will be valued by those who use and enjoy Amharic oral traditions in their lives. They will also be valued by scholars who study these Amharic oral traditions. In addition, these books can serve as inspirations and models for speakers of other languages, in the Horn and beyond.