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Review

HIRUIE ERMIAAS, *The Book of Mystery: Māshafä Məšṭir of Abba Giyorgis of
Gaśəčča 1364–1424; Ethiopia's Most Iconic Theological, Exegetical, Historical,
and Philosophical Treatise*

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citations and allusions, which gives an idea of the care the editor has given to this aspect (vol. III, pp. 409–414 [621–626]); and an index of numerals (vol. III, p. 419 [631]).

The editor also once more reminds—quite rightly, in this reviewer’s opinion—that the goal of his edition has been the reconstruction of the primary Gəʿəz text (vol. III, p. 236 [448]: ‘Anche se è stato dichiarato in precedenza, credo che valga la pena ricordare che l’obiettivo a cui ha mirato la mia edizione, è la ricostruzione del testo gəʿəz più vicino alla versione primigenia, confrontandolo con la tradizione manoscritta araba, con un’attenzione particolare ai testimoni arabi più antichi’). Yet, he concludes by stating that this is done according to the universal principles of textual criticism (‘È un’operazione svolta in base ai principi universali della critica testuale’). The problem here is that such ‘universal principles’ are not the same for all editors and therefore not even universal, and that, as is well known, there are debates on what these principles actually are. Important are also the editor’s remarks on the existence of (at least) two Amharic versions of the *Maṣḥafa Sāwiros*, one in an unpublished manuscript and another one in print in a recent Gəʿəz–Amharic edition of the *Maṣḥafa Sāwiros*.²

Let us conclude by repeating that this work, all in all, is truly a remarkable enterprise and achievement: one of the most notable of the last decades of editorial activity on Gəʿəz texts. In over 650 pages of edition and annotated commentary, the editor has succeeded in making available a quite long critically edited Gəʿəz text, carried out with the intention of attaining the primary authorial Ethiopic version of the *Kitāb al-īdāh* of Severus of Ašmūnāyn and has systematically considered the evidence of the Arabic *Vorlage*. All scholars in Gəʿəz textual criticism will be grateful to Tedros Abraha for this excellent effort.

Alessandro Bausi, Sapienza Università di Roma

HIRUIE ERMIAŠ, *The Book of Mystery: Māshafä Məštir of Abba Giyorgis of Gaśəčča 1364–1424; Ethiopia’s Most Iconic Theological, Exegetical, Historical, and Philosophical Treatise*, annotated translation (Hamburg: Negarit Publisher, 2024). xii, 407 pp. Price: \$25.00. ISBN: 978-9-99-905269-6.

The publication of an English translation from Gəʿəz of the *Book of Mystery* of Abba Giyorgis is extremely welcome. The Ethiopian Orthodox Tāwahədo expression of Christianity has been theologizing in its own language since at least the fifth century CE, and although it was under the ecclesial authority of the Coptic

² ሃፍጣም ክፍለ-ገጽ ላይ የተጻፈው ስራ (Maṣḥafa sāwiros zaʿāsmunāyn) (n.p.: Yəmrā māttamiyā bet, 2014 EC = 2021 CE). The editor announces a forthcoming review of this edition.

Church, it developed its own approach to biblical interpretation and theological reflection over many centuries, drawing on literature transmitted to Ethiopia from Greek, and from Syriac via Arabic. Many of these works have significant Ethiopian reflection added to them in commentary and other types of work. The text under consideration is an important original composition, which the cover of this translation describes as ‘Ethiopia’s most iconic theological, exegetical, historical, and philosophical treatise’, and that is in no way an understatement. Western scholarship on the work, which started in the nineteenth century, has praised its masterful composition, its complexity, and its comprehensive connection with all parts of the Gə‘əz literature.¹ This English translation is therefore one of the most important translations of works from the Ethiopian tradition, fully acknowledged in the forward by the distinguished professor of Ethiopian Studies, Alessandro Bausi. The book will be of interest to scholars in Ethiopian Studies and to theologians interested in Ethiopian Christianity, and more broadly non-Chalcedonian Christianity.

This work, considered by some as the *Summa* of Ethiopian Christian theology, takes the form mostly of a ‘heresiology’, with the theological arguments framed as responses to false teaching. It is the most important work of the significant Ethiopian theologian *Abba* Giyorgis of Gaśəčča (1364–1424). The text is presented as statements of known false teachers, such as Sabellius, Apollinarius, Arius, Nestorius, Origen, Eutyches, etc. as well as addressing specific issues, including the Council of Chalcedon, and it includes only one Ethiopian false teacher, Bitu, in chapter 10, ‘Reading of *Däbrä-Zäyt*’. Giyorgis’ refutations are detailed and sophisticated, and among other things he affirms strongly the Ethiopian narratives of the nation’s conversion and the outlook of the *Käbrä Nägäšt*, which asserts the translation of the Old Testament into Gə‘əz before the birth of Christ.

This translation includes a short introduction, followed by thirty chapters, divided as in the Ethiopic original, as sets of homiletic treatises for reading on important feasts of the church calendar. There is a short bibliography and a well-prepared index which includes key names and theological issues addressed in the text. The titles are either transliterations or translations of the original titles, meaning that the specific content of the chapters is not always very clear, and a brief introductory paragraph outlining the theological content of each chapter would have been a welcome addition. The feasts are listed here, with an additional brief summary of the content of each chapter: Advent (on the Trinity, refutation of numerous writers condemned for their views on the origin and nature

¹ ‘Məštir: Mäšhafä Məštir’, *EAE*, III (2007), 941b–944a (A. Bausi) in S. Uhlig, ed., *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, I: A–C; II: D–Ha; III: He–N; ed., in cooperation with A. Bausi, IV: O–X; A. Bausi, ed., in cooperation with S. Uhlig, V: Y–Z, *Supplementa, Addenda et Corrigenda, Maps, Index* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2014).

of the Trinity including, Sebelius, Apollinaris, Arius, Nestorius, Photinus, Origen, the Antidicomarians, Eutychus, Mani and others); *Bərhan* (the week of Advent, on the Trinity, refutation of Apollinaris); *Nolawi* (the shepherd, on the Trinity, refutation of Arius); *Genna* (or *Gännä*, for the eve of the Nativity, on the Trinity, refutation of Nestorius); Nativity (on the Trinity, refutation of Photinus); Epiphany (on the Trinity, refutation of Origen); Cana of Galilee (on the Trinity, refutation of those who say that the divine Word was changed into flesh and blood); The Third Day of Epiphany (on the Holy Spirit, refutation of those who say the Holy Spirit is after the baptism of Christ); the Day of Simon (a reflection on the words of Simon at seeing Christ); *Däbrä-Zäyt* (the Mount of Olives hence the Sermon on the Mount, on the nature of Christ, refutation of those saying that he came in separation from the Father including the only Ethiopian false teacher explicitly named, Bitu who ‘denied the coming of the Father [...]’); Conception (refutation of the Antidicomarians who deny the perpetual virginity of Mary); *Hosa’anna* (Palm Sunday, and a reflection on the significance of Palm Sunday in revealing the nature of Christ); the Last Supper (reflection on Jesus washing the disciples’ feet); Good Friday (Morning: on the humanity of Christ, refutation of Eutychus, the Third Hour: refutation of Severus of India and Theodosius of Alexandria and their views on the will of Christ, the Sixth Hour: refutation of Apollinaris and his view of Christ being distinct from the Father, the Ninth Hour: against Eutychus and his view that Christ’s flesh came down from heaven, Evening: refutation of Manichaeus, Night: refutation of Arius); Easter (Sunday: refutation of Leo of Constantinople and his view on the subordination of Christ’s humanity, Monday: refutation of Chalcedon, Tuesday: refutation of those denying the crucifixion, Wednesday: refutation of those denying that a baby receives the spirit of life from its parents, Thursday: refutation of Origen and the subordination of the Son, Friday: refutation of those denying the descent of power on the church, and the changing of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ); the First Sabbath (refutation of those who boast in the glory of pleasure and forsake the Law); *Agbə’otä Gəbr* (the first Sunday after Easter, refutation of those who say that the soul dies with the body); Ascension (refutation of Fabianos who said that the divinity and humanity of Christ are two persons); Festivity of Paraclete (refutation of Macedonius and his denial of the Holy Spirit); *Däbrä Tabor* (refutation of those who, like the Sadducees, deny the resurrection of the dead).

The translator, Hiruie Ermias, is a monk of the Ethiopian Orthodox Täwəḥədo tradition. His academic training at the University of Hamburg combined with his monastic-scholarly training in the Ethiopian Church makes him uniquely qualified to be faithful to the tradition, allowing the tradition to have its own voice, whilst providing a translation that offers this important work for the scrutiny of those who do not read Gə’əz. The translation is clear and precise and is well annotated with biblical citations and allusions and other important clarifications,

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allowing these Ethiopian Orthodox Tāwahədo theological reflections to be critically appraised by scholars from outside the tradition for the first time in such a comprehensive way.

The short introduction gives only a very brief introduction to the author *Abba Giyorgis*. For the wider audience to which this book will be of interest a rather more extensive introduction to this important theologian and his contribution to Ethiopian Orthodox thought would have been a welcome addition.

Ralph Lee, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies

CLAIRE BOSC-TIESSÉ and MARIE-LAURE DERAT, eds, *Lalibela: site rupestre chrétien d'Éthiopie*, Sites et cités d'Afrique (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Midi, 2019). 210 pp. Price: €35.00, ISBN: 978-2-8107-0663-1.

This compact and well-illustrated volume focuses on a well-known group of Ethiopian monuments: the rock-hewn complex of Lalibäla. Its introduction—presumably written by the editors even if this is not explicitly stated—provides a helpful overview of earlier work on this site and illustrates the editor's role as co-directors of the project Sustainable Lalibela that has been focusing on Lalibäla's monuments and its environs since 2008. After a brief review of current scholarship, Bosc-Tiessé and Derat outline the project's disciplinary framework and its key objectives. They underscore that their research has not focused exclusively on establishing a chronology for Lalibäla's early development, but also on understanding the role it played in subsequent centuries as a place of pilgrimage, a political arena, and a centre of literary and artistic production. Bosc-Tiessé and Derat tell us that their objective has been to investigate the *longue durée* and regional significance of Lalibäla by examining its archives and those of nearby sites; other textual data (such as inscriptions); imagery; and archaeological data. In their own words, this volume offers 'a synthesis of studies' and publications produced by the team working on this project between 2005 and 2014 (p. 17).

The volume is divided into three main chapters that include several unnumbered subchapters and subsections authored by different contributors. Chapter 1 focuses principally on the hewn structures of Lalibäla and on its material vestiges and surroundings. Its first subchapter introduces the reader to the site and its principal features. The authors note that the identification of some sites, such as Betä Marqorewos and the monument known as Betä Ləhem, are problematic, but at this stage no hypothesis are put forward about their chronology and possible function. The second summarizes the team's cartographic work. After a brief review of the pre-existing data, it highlights some of the complexities involved in mapping a site which is crisscrossed by a network of tunnels and trenches and where the monuments are located at different levels.