

**CLUSTER OF EXCELLENCE** UNDERSTANDING WRITTEN ARTEFACTS

HIOB LUDOLF CENTRE FOR ETHIOPIAN AND ERITREAN STUDIES



AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN IN HAMBURG

HIOB LUDOLF CENTRE SUMMER SCHOOL IN ETHIOPIAN AND ERITREAN MANUSCRIPT STUDIES 2020

**AMHARIC MANUSCRIPT TRADITION** 

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## Amharic, *lingua franca* of Ethiopia

- Ethio-Semitic language family, southern subgroup
- Language of a large ethnic group
- Language of cross-cultural communication, an African *lingua* franca
- Language of the royal court (*lassāna naguś*)
- "Learned language" of instruction in the traditional church education system

## Amharic written tradition

- Application of Ethiopic written system to Amharic
- Amharic as the second written language in the pre-modern time
- Language development stages:
  - Old Amharic: ca. before 18th cent.
  - Early modern Amharic: ca. 18th to late 19th cent.
  - Contemporary Amharic
- Texts attested starting from ca. 16th cent.
- Amharic modern literature starts only in 1908, Afawarq Gabra Iyasus, Ləbb wallad tārik.

## Early evidence: texts in Old Amharic

- The language of ca. 14 texts written before the 18<sup>th</sup> cent.
- Fluid orthography
- Palaeographic features: archaic shapes of some Amharic letters ( for f, for f, etc.)
- Some words that are missing from the modern Amharic
- Consistent use of some Gə<sup>ç</sup>əz words, *ənbala* for *yāla* ("without"), *tafaśḥa* for *dass ala, tadassata* ("rejoice")

## Early evidence: texts in Old Amharic

- Some phonetic and morphological peculiarities
  - characters for <u>h</u>, h, <u>h</u>, <sup>c</sup> and <sup>2</sup> still kept in many words, ሐንድ vs.
    አንድ; ሐየ vs. አየ, ሄት vs. የት, በባዕ vs. በባ
  - plural marker -ačč(i) vs. later standard -očč
  - post-pronominal -t: የተሐየኝ፡ ይኽት
  - suffix 3 pers. plur. -(*w*) āččo vs. later -āččaw
  - lack of the particle -m- in negated verbs: አይኖራቸው, አልነሳ

The earliest known Amharic texts

- Portions of Gə<sup>ç</sup>əz-Amharic grammar (sawāsəw), 16thcent. additions in Ms. BnF Ethiopien 160
- Praising poems for Abāla Krestos in Ms. EMML no. 1943, late 16th-/early 17th-cent. additions, Dabra Hayq <sup>9</sup>∃sţifānos
- "Royal songs" in Ms. Oxford, late 16th/early 17th cent., BodL Or. 29 = Bruce 88
- "Tract about Mary who anointed Jesus' feet", Jerusalem, Ethiopian Patriarchate, Ms. JE 9, an added text in the Four Gospel book, reportedly 16<sup>th</sup> cent. (?)

#### Sawāsəw in Old Amharic, 16th cent. (?)

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Ms. Bibliothèque nationale de France Éthiopien 160, first half of the 16th cent. (?), fol. 10r

The manuscript of *mamhər* Pāwlos, see C. Conti Rossini, "L'autobiografia di Pawlos, monaco abissino del secolo XVI", *Atti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, Rendiconti, Classe di scienze morale, storiche e filologiche* Serie quinta, 27 (1918), 279–96.

@ Bibliothèque nationale de France

## Beginning of the "Royal Songs", early 17th cent.

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Ms. Bodleian Library, Or. 29 = Bruce 88, 1610 -1632, f. 35r, three column layout

© Bodleian Library

## Amharic pre-modern literature

- Translations of Ga<sup>
   </sup> Ga<sup>
   </sup> az works
- Catechisms, "explanations of faith" of various types
- Theological treatises
- *Sawāsəw*: lexica and grammar treatises
- Andemta-commentaries
- Narratives developed from biblical stories

## Early Amharic poetry

- "Royal songs" and praising poems (mawaddəs)
- "Condemnation of Glory" poems (margama kəbr)
- Minor poems on various matters
  - Religious matters
  - Historical events
  - Everyday life etc.
- *Məśtira səgeyāt* "Mystery of the Rosary", praises to St. Mary

## Amharic pre-modern literature

- Computus and calendar texts
- Magic-medical texts (recipes, prayers)
- Historiography
- Documentary writing
- Epistolography

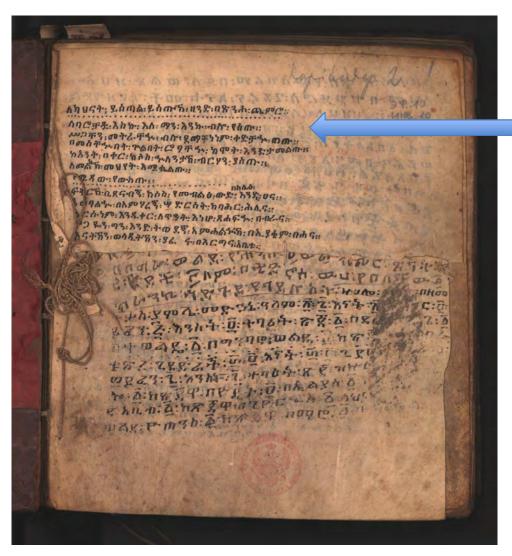
## Amharic pre-modern literature

- Not equivalent to the Amharic oral literature
- Related to Gə<sup>ç</sup>əz literature, but not ist vernacular variant
- Strong residue of oral culture
- Fluid textual traditions
- Small number of witnesses in many cases
- Auxiliary character
- Not always appears as continuous texts
- Some works clearly adressed to "commoners"
- Didactic overtones

### Amharic manuscripts

- Non-pretentious appearence, small size
- Inferior materials
- Frequently inferior handwriting
- Nearly no ornamentation
- Many Amharic manuscripts in private possession
- Wide geographical dispersion of Amharic texts
- Circulation: marginalia, paratexts, added texts, texts in Gə<sup>c</sup>əz collections, Amharic collections

#### Amharic poems as marginal notes



Ms. St. Petersburg, Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Ms. Ef. 10/Koriander 2, *Wəddāse Amlāk* "Praises of God", 32 x 1 cm, mid-17th/mid-18th cent., fol. 1r

See Bulakh – Nosnitsin (forthcoming)

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## An Amharic text on guard leaves



(https://gundagunde.digitalscholarship.utsc.utoronto.ca/)

Ms. Gunda Gunde 114/C3-IV-214, *Arganona wəddāse* "Harp of Praise", 17.5 x 18 cm, 18th cent., and Amharic treatise *Anqasa hāymānot* "Gate of the Faith" on fols 1v-1r, ed.

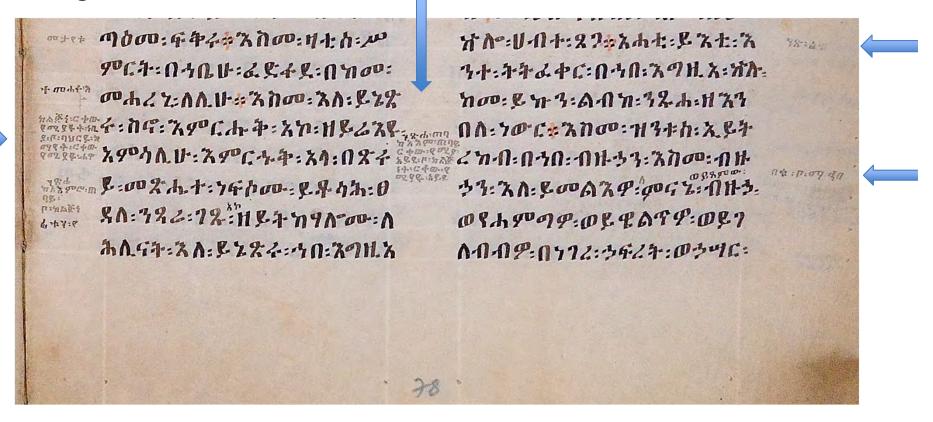
See Getatchew Haile 1983

## Amharic texts added in the guard quires



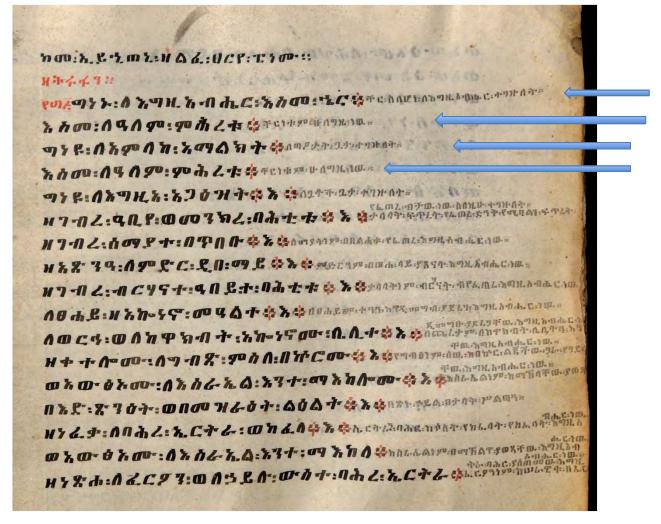
Ms. Māy Ba<sup>?</sup>ātti Arbā<sup>°</sup>əttu ∃nsəsā, MBAE-001, *Wəddāse Amlāk* "Praises of God", 19.4 x 16.5 cm, 18th cent., *Margama kəbr* "Condemnation of glory" poem added on fols 1r-3v.

# Amharic glosses and commentaries as paratext in the margins



Ms. Dabra Dāmmo, DD-036, Collection of monastic texts, 25 x 21 cm, ca. 1650-1750, fol. 78r

## Amharic translation of the Psalter



Ms. Rubākusā Qəddus Giyorgis, RQG-015, *Psalter* with Amharic translation (?), 33.2 x 29 cm, 18th cent., fol. 163r

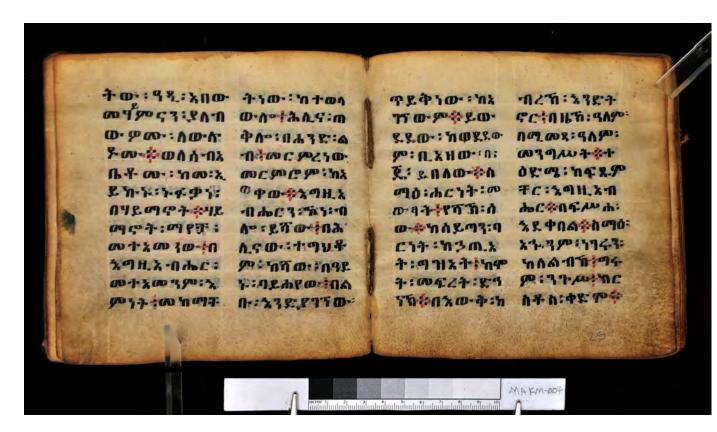
# An Amharic work in a collection of $Ga^{c}az$ poems and prayers





Ms. Sotā Dabra Salām SDM-019, *Məśtira səgeyāt* and other texts (*malkə*<sup>?</sup>āt, prayers, hymns), 7 x 7.7 cm, 18th cent., fols 2v-3r

## An Amharic work in a Gə<sup>ç</sup>əz miscellany



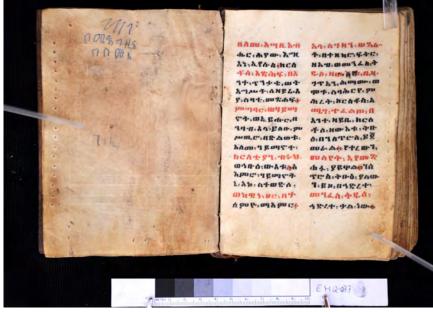
Dating: "no later than the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Cowley)

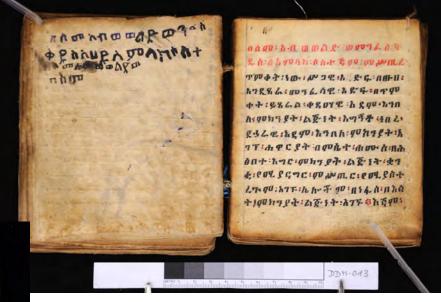
Second half of the 17th/18th cent. (?); not very professional but careful scribe, possibly imitating the Gondarine script

Ms. Māy Anbasā Kidana Məḥrat, MAKM-004, Miscellany in Gə<sup>ç</sup>əz and Amharic, 15.5 x 15.5 cm, here fols 24v-25r, treatise *Təmhərta hāymānot* "The teaching of the faith"

#### Amharic single text manuscripts

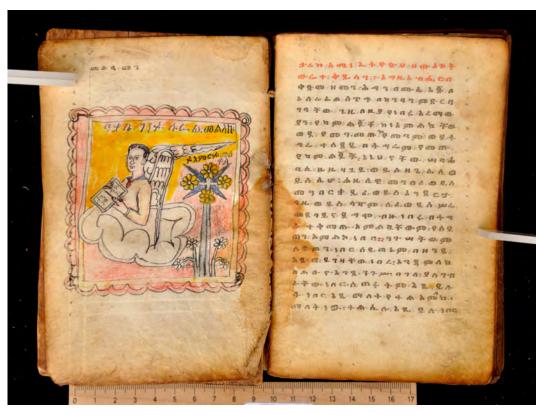
Ms. Dānderā Mikā<sup>9</sup>el, DDM-013, *Amməstu a<sup>ç</sup>māda məstir* "Five pillars of mystery", 14 x 12 cm, 19th cent.





Ms. ∃ndā Māryām Qorrār, EMQ-077, *Amməstu a<sup>c</sup>māda məsțir* "Five pillars of mystery", 15.3 x 11 cm, late 19th/ early 20th cent.

## **Collections of Amharic text**





Ms. Rubākusā Giyorgis, RQG-034, *Sawāsəw* and historiographic texts, 14x8 cm, fols 76v-77r, "A History of Aḥmad Grāňň"

Ms. Mədra Rubā Śəllāse, MR-035, Collection of historiographic texts, 17 x 11 cm, 1855-1904, fol. 3r, "History of faith of Ethiopia which is the tradition of the saints"

## Thank you for your attention!