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

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AMHARIC MANUSCRIPT TRADITION
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 (*ləssāna nəguš*)
- “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, *Lēbb wallad tārik*.
Early evidence: texts in Old Amharic

- The language of ca. 14 texts written before the 18\textsuperscript{th} cent.
- Fluid orthography
- Palaeographic features: archaic shapes of some Amharic letters (\& for የ, ደ for ደ, etc.)
- Some words that are missing from the modern Amharic
- Consistent use of some ጥ 이용자 words, ውንባላ for ያላ (“without”), ይታፋ for ዳስ ሰላ, ብገለፋ (“rejoice”)
Early evidence: texts in Old Amharic

- Some phonetic and morphological peculiarities
  - characters for ḥ, h, ḫ, ġ and ñ still kept in many words, ከንድ vs. ከንድ; ከፋ vs. ከፋ, ከት vs. ከት, ከም ላስ vs. ከም
  - plural marker -ačč(i) vs. later standard -očč
  - post-pronominal -t: ይፈተኝ ይኽት
  - suffix 3 pers. plur. -(w) āččo vs. later -āččaw
  - lack of the particle -m- in negated verbs: ከምኣት, ከኣን
The earliest known Amharic texts

- Portions of Gǝˁǝz-Amharic grammar (*sawāsǝw*), 16th-cent. additions in Ms. BnF Ethiopien 160

- Praising poems for Abāla Krǝstos in Ms. EMML no. 1943, late 16th-/early 17th-cent. additions, Dabra Ḥayq ʾEstifanos

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

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

The manuscript of *mamḥәr* 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.

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

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Amharic pre-modern literature

- Translations of Gəˁəz works
- Catechisms, “explanations of faith” of various types
- Theological treatises
- Sawāsəw: lexica and grammar treatises
- Andəmta-commentaries
- Narratives developed from biblical stories
Early Amharic poetry

- “Royal songs” and praising poems (*mawaddēs*)

- “Condemnation of Glory” poems (*margama ḱēbr*)

- Minor poems on various matters
  - Religious matters
  - Historical events
  - Everyday life etc.

- *Məştira 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 ḋәˁәz 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 addressed to “commoners”
- Didactic overtones
Amharic manuscripts

- Non-pretentious appearance, 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 Gәˁәz collections, Amharic collections
Amharic poems as marginal notes

Ms. St. Petersburg, Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Ms. Ef. 10/Koriander 2, Ṭeṭṭāse Amlāk “Praises of God”, 32 x 31 cm, mid-17th/mid-18th cent., fol. 1r

See Bulakh – Nosnitsin (forthcoming)

© Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, St Petersburg
An Amharic text on guard leaves

Ms. Gunda Gunde 114/C3-IV-214, Arganona weddāse “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

(https://gundagunde.digitalscholarship.utsc.utoronto.ca/)
Amharic texts added in the guard quires

Ms. Māy Baʾātti Arbāʾettu Ḫnsēsā, MBAE-001, Ṯəddāse Amlāk “Praises of God”, 19.4 x 16.5 cm, 18th cent., Margama kābr “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 Gəˁəz poems and prayers

Ms. Sotā Dabra Salām SDM-019, Məştira səgeyāt and other texts (malkəʔāt, prayers, hymns), 7 x 7.7 cm, 18th cent., fols 2v-3r
An Amharic work in a Gəˁəz miscellany

Ms. Mäy Anbasä Kidana Mehrat, MAKM-004, Miscellany in Gəˁəz and Amharic, 15.5 x 15.5 cm, here fols 24v-25r, treatise Təmhɛrta hāymānoť “The teaching of the faith”

Dating: “no later than the 17th century (Cowley)

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

Ms. Dānderā Mikä’el, DDM-013, Ammǝstu aⁿmāda mǝșṭir “Five pillars of mystery”, 14 x 12 cm, 19th cent.

Ms. Ǝndā Märyām Qorrār, EMQ-077, Ammǝstu aⁿmāda mǝșṭir “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. Mǝdra Rubā Śǝllǝse, 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!