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## Notes on the Ethiopian *andämta* commentaries on Genesis

### 1 - On the new edition of the commentary of Genesis

The present article has been prompted by the publication of a new edition of the *andämta* commentary on Genesis: Mersha Alehegne, *The Ethiopian Commentary on the Book of Genesis: critical edition and translation*, Aethiopistische Forschungen 73, Wiesbaden, 2011. xix, 722 pp. Mersha Alehegne's (*siglum*: MA) volume, a doctoral thesis, follows an earlier publication<sup>1</sup> of the commentary of Genesis: መጻሕፍተ : ብሉይት : ፪ቱ : እሉ : እሙንቱ : ኦሪት : ዘፍጥረት (ዘልደት) : ኦሪት : ዘፀሐት : አንድምታ : ትርጓሜ # አዲስ አበባ ፲፱፻፺፱ ዓ.ም. [*Mäsaḥəftä bəluwat käl'ettu əllu əmmuntu Orit zä-fəṭrät (zä-lədät) Orit zä-šä'at andämta tərg'ame* "Two books of the Old [Testament], they are Genesis and Exodus with [their] *andämta* commentary"], Addis Ababa, 1999 A. M.<sup>2</sup>

MA's volume makes its entrance in the context of a recent widespread editorial activism which among other items includes the re-edition and fresh publication of many *andämta* texts. The commentaries of the whole of the New Testament commentaries have been re-edited more than once and for the first time in Təgrəñña as well<sup>3</sup>. The whole of the canonical books of the Old Testament commentaries have been published. While the *andämta* to Enoch has been published<sup>4</sup>,

1 The name of the editor is not given.

2 The other three books of the Pentateuch were published in the same year: መጻሕፍተ : ብሉይት : ፫ቱ # እሉ : እሙንቱ : ኦሪት : ዘሉዋውያን : ኦሪት : ዘኅጉልፉ : ኦሪት : ዘዳግም # አንድምታ : ትርጓሜ # አዲስ አበባ ፲፱፻፺፱ ዓ.ም. # [*Mäsaḥəftä bəluwat šälästu əllu əmmuntu Orit zä-Lewawəyan, Orit zä-h'wəṭ' Orit zä-dagəm andämta tərg'ame* "Three books of the Old [Testament], they are Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy [their] *andämta* commentary"], Addis Ababa, 1999 A. M. Under the title "the *andämta* texts and their current state of publication" (pp. 18-19), MA provides a list of published and unpublished material. The "Historical Books" registered (numbers 6-13) as unpublished, have been indeed published in the year 2000 A. M.: Joshua, Judges and Ruth in a volume, and in another one 1.2 Samuel and 1.2 Kings, under the title (of the Septuagint): *four books of the Kings*. Enoch (n. 19) has been published in 2003 (A. M.). Ben Sira (Book of Sirak) was re-published as *Mäsaḥəftä Šälonon wä-Sirak* in 1988 A. M., pp. 229-350. The first print with the same title goes back to 1917 A. M. The *andämta* of Jeremiah appeared in 1997 A. M.

3 For details cf. Tedros Abraha, "Una versione Tigrina (popolare?) degli *andämta* sui quattro Vangeli: un altro passo nelle edizioni degli *andämta* nell'ultimo ventennio", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 73 (2007), pp. 61-96.

4 መጽሐፈ : ሂደክ # "ወለመዋዕል : አርአየኒ : ዑርኤል : መልአክ" ከጥንት : አባቶቻችን : ሲወርድ : ሲዋረድ : የተቀበለነው : የአንድምታ : ትርጓሜ # አዲስ አበባ ፳፻፫ : ዓ.ም. # [*Mäṣḥafä Henok. "Wälämäwa'el ar'ayänni Ur'el mäl'ak" kätənt abbatočcačan siwärd siwärräd yä-*



the Apocalypse of Esdra, Maccabees and especially Kufale “Jubilees”, one of the most important books of the Ethiopian canon are still in the waiting list.

MA’s work consists of four parts: introduction (pp. 1-41); text-critical edition of the *andämta* of Genesis based on five manuscripts copied in contemporary times (pp. 43-382); “English translation of the text with commentaries made on concepts and terminologies in the footnote” (pp. 383-659); list of archaic terms, of manuscripts containing *andämta*, general bibliography (pp. 661-722). There are several instances of imprecision of various kinds. Iyasu II reigned in the Gondäri-ne kingdom from 1730 to 1755 and not from 1723-1755 (p. 8)<sup>5</sup>. The metropolitans during the tenure of Iyasu II are Kristodoulos († 1735) and Yoḥannēs III († 1761), thus the coupling of emperor Iyasu II with *abunä* Marqos (*sic*, p. 9), which would be Mark IV († 1716), seems to be inaccurate. At any rate, the definition of exegetical disciplines took place at the behest of Iyasu I (1682-1706)<sup>6</sup>. MA’s work is a doctoral dissertation which would have been presentable if his team of promoters had included or at least consulted experts of biblical sciences and of Ethiopian traditional exegesis. Unfortunately this was not the case, to the detriment of the Aethiopistische Forschungen series. As a result the part of the book which has some relevance for scientific purposes is the collated text only<sup>7</sup>. It is only on it that the present article will focus<sup>8</sup>. The English translations of the passages quoted in this article are my own.

*täqäbbälnāw yä-andämta tärǵame* “The book of Henok. ‘And for days he showed me the angel Urael’. The *andämta* commentary we received in the way it was handed down from our fathers from of old”], Addis Ababa, 2003 A. M.

5 MA’s date is the same as the one dealing with the entry Iyasu II in the *EA* 3, pp. 251-252.

6 *Yä-Ityoppäya*, p. 187.

7 While MA’s decision to collate some variants of the five witnesses has chosen is very welcome, *andämta* insiders know very well that the disparity of wording between the manuscripts is so wide that it is extremely difficult to set up a critical apparatus that hosts every variant that would enable to trace back the text of each witness. The contents of a group of manuscripts can be identical but the way they are transmitted, orality, divides them inexorably. It is like asking twenty pupils to refer the lessons they have heard during their academic classes. No doubt that there will be twenty formulations of the same material. Through which critical apparatus is it possible to retrieve the words of the master?

8 The rest of the book is riddled with many (too many) shortcomings and the English version has little to do with the original (e. g. chapter 30: the English versification and contents is totally different from the Gəʿəz). Taking into account the quantity of the material MA had to deal with, it can be conceded that spelling mistakes in the Ethiopic part are not as many as could have happened. Nonetheless it is true that there are several orthographic errors, such as ወእትትቀነይ : ሊት : በከመ “you shall not serve me like” for ወእትትቀነይ : ሊት : በከ “you shall not serve me without pay” in 29:15 (MA, p. 246); ማርያም “Mary” for ማርያን “sorcerers” in 47:22 (p. 361). MA has produced an inadequate and often abusive English translation from start to finish. Writing down a full list of the mistranslations would mean rewriting the work from scratch. I will give only a couple of examples: In 2:11.14 the names of the first and of the third rivers are ኤፌሶን and ፋርስ, in the text and in their *andämtas*. They become inexplicably Pison and Assyria (p. 406). ቶሪ (2:12) is not Syria (p. 406) but Greece (cf. KWKDict, p. 668). Jacob of Sarug in the text (p. 196) becomes “Jacob of Severus” in the translation (p. 514); 7:20 ዐሠርት : ወጎምስት : ምእት : ተለዐለ : መልልላትሙ : ማይ “the water rose above them fifteen hundred”. MA writes:



## 2 – The Gə‘əz text of Genesis in the *andəmtas*

Generally, what we have in the *andəmtas* is the *textus receptus*, namely the Gəʿəz text which reflects in broad lines the LXX tradition<sup>9</sup>. There are several elements that lead to this fundamental conclusion, first of all, the classification of the Old Testament books, which does not follow the Hebrew Bible, namely the collection into three scrolls, the first being the Pentateuch (five books), but the Greek one (*more ut apud Graecos*), ሰምንቱ ብሔረ ኦሪት “the eight parts of the Torah”, namely Octateuch, ranging from Genesis to Judges. The additions and omissions, mistranslations and misunderstanding of the Hebrew featuring in the LXX that have flowed into the Gəʿəz<sup>10</sup> are other reasons that place the Gəʿəz Bible within the fold of the LXX. Judges 5:16 is perhaps one of the most impressive examples of the kinship between the two textual traditions. It reads: ἵνα τί μοι κάθησαι ἀνὰ μέσον τῶν μοσφοθαίμ, rendered literally: ለምንት : ሊተ : ትነብር : ማእከለ : ሞስፌ-ተም<sup>11</sup>. “Why do you sit for me in the midst of Mosopetām?”. The TM says: מִן־הַמּוֹשְׁפֹתַי בֵּין־הַתְּבֻשִׁם הָאֵלֶּךְ “Why are you sitting down among the two saddle bags (fireplaces/ash heaps)?”. The issue at stake in this case is the entry מִן־הַתְּבֻשִׁים, a common masculine dual noun which occurs in Gen 49:14. It means: saddle bags, ash heaps (the entry). In texts subsequent to Dillmann’s edition we have חֲסֻסִּים “lips” corresponding to מִן־הַתְּבֻשִׁים, which looks like a “correction” of מִן־הַתְּבֻשִׁים “lips”. The *andəmtas* retrieve the older version and read: ወለምንት : ለከ : ትነብር : ውስተ : መስፌተም : ከመ : ታጽምዕ : ከመ : ይትፋጸዩ : እለ : ይነሥኡ : ከመ : ይነሥኡ : ከመ : ይኅልፉ : ውስተ : ዘርቢል ፣ “and why do you sit yourself inside Mäsəfetäm in order to listen that they wistle those who take to pass into what is

“the water rose more than twenty feet above the mountains”. This is the same translation of the Good New Bible, a popular version, which is notoriously useless for scientific research because of its brazen infidelity to the original versions. 33:18 reads: መበጽሐ : ያዕቆብ : ውስተ : ሲሎም : ሀገረ : ሳቲሞን : እንተ : ሀለወት : ውስተ : ምድረ : ከነሻን : እምድረ : መጽሕ : እምእፍላግ : ዘሶርያ : መበጽሐ : እንጻረ : ሀገር “and Jacob reached Selom city of Sāqimōn which is in the land of Canaan after he returned from the rivers of Syria and reached in front of the city”. This is close to LXX’s: καὶ ἦλθεν Ἰακωβ εἰς Σαλῆμ πόλιν Σικιμων ἥ ἐστὶν ἐν γῇ Χανααν ὅτε ἦλθεν ἐκ τῆς Μεσοποταμίας Συρίας καὶ παρενέβαλεν κατὰ πρόσωπον τῆς πόλεως. MA’s English “translation”: “And Jacob came to Shalom, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan-aram, and pitched his tent before the city (p. 575). No Gṣʿw manuscript has the Hebrew toponym Padan-aram (cf. O. J. Boyd, *The Octateuch in Ethiopic. According to the text of the Paris Codex, with the variants of five other manuscripts, Part I, Genesis*, Leyden 1909, p. 101); 49:13 ሳቡሎን : ሳኡኖ : ይጎድር : ከመ : መርሶ : አሕማር (MA, p. 373) “let Zabulon dwell in poverty like a haven for the boats”. MA’s version: Zebulon shall dwell at the haven of sea; and he shall be for a haven of ships (p. 651).

- 9 The LXX though is far from being the exclusive matrix of the Ethiopic Old Testament, at least during its historical evolution.
- 10 Passages of the G<sup>5</sup>az Bible that have affinities with the LXX have been registered in A. E. Brooke and N. McLean (eds.), *The Old Testament in Greek : according to the text of Codex Vaticanus, supplemented from other uncial manuscripts, with a critical apparatus containing the variants of the chief ancient authorities for the text of the Septuagint*, 3 vols., Cambridge 1906-1940. The first volume of this monumental work, hosts the Octateuch.
- 11 Dillmann, *Octateuchus aethiopicus*, p. 441.



in order to listen that they wistle those who take to pass into what is Ruben's". The obscurity of the text is worsened by the interpreters, who resort to an onomatopoeic "solution" to cut the Gordian knot: የምትሰፋ ሴት በቤት እንድትውል በቤት ትውል ዘንድ ለምን ቀረህ? ድል ነሥተው የሚመለሱ ሰዎች በሮቤል ዕጣ ውስጥ ሲአልፉ፤ አንድም ገድለው ማርከው ሲአገሩ ሲነድፉ ትሰማ ዘንድ ለምን ቀረህ? "why do you stay at home like a woman that sews stays at home all the day long? When victorious men pass through the lot of Ruben as they return. *Andām*: Why did you stay back to listen to men bellowing and bragging as they returned after they killed and brought captives with them"<sup>12</sup>. መስፊተም has been unduly related to the verb ሰፈየ "to sew", and its substantive መስፊ "needle".

#### i. The LXX

There are proper nouns in Genesis translated literally in imitation of the LXX which translated Hebrew names instead of transcribing them. The following are token examples.

4:16 ምድረ : ፋይድ : አንጻረ : ኤዶም "in the land of Fayd, opposite to Edom". This matches almost perfectly with the LXX: ἐν γῇ Ναιδ κατέναντι Εδεμ "in the land of Naid opposite to Edem"; rather than: ἰν τῇ γῇ Νωδ ὁ ἑσπέραιος "in the land of Nod, east of 'Eden'". Among MA's witnesses, there is no alternative to ፋይድ which is very likely a representation of the Geek Ναιδ. The letters ፋ and ና have been misread by copyists or changed purposely.

4:18 reads ጋይደድ, identical with LXX: Γαῖδα, whereas the Hebrew has ገገጥ.

35:18 ወልደ : ጳዕርየ Ὡδς ὀδύνης "son of my pain".

46:1 አዘቅተ : መሐላ φρέαρ τοῦ ὄρκου "the well of swearing". In the Hebrew Bible it is עַבְדָּה שֶׁבַע "the well of the seven". Manuscript C in MA (p. 352), as well as translations into spoken languages read ቤርሳቤሕ.

46:28 ቃቴርክስ καὶ Ἡρώων, for Hebrew Ἰψῶν.

46:34 ምድረ : ጌሰም : እንተ : ዓረብ ἐν γῇ Γεσεμ Ἀραβία "in the land of Gesem, that is, Arabia.

48:7 አመስጴጦም Ὡς ἐν Μεσομοταμίας τῆς Συρίας, for Hebrew Ἰῤῥῤ.

50:11 ላሕ : ዘግብጽ Πένθος Αἰγύπτου "mourning of Egypt", for ማግባባት.

#### ii. – Hebrew variants in the *andāmta* to Genesis

31:25 ዕብራይስጥ አብነት ግን ወላባ : ምስል : አኅዊሁ : ተክለ : ደብተራሁ : ውስተ : ደብረ : ገለዓድ : ይላል "the Hebrew variant says: 'But Laba with his brothers pitched his tent in mount Galaad' (MA, p. 261). This reading corresponds to the Hebrew text only partially.

12 መጻሕፍተ : ብሉያት : ሠለስቱ : እሱ : እሙንቱ : ኢያሱ : መሣፍንት : ሩት ። አዲስ አበባ : ሰኔ 2000 ዓ.ም. ። [*Māṣahāftā bəluwat šālāstu ʾallu ʾammuntu Iyyasu Māṣāfant Rut* "Three books of the Old [Testament], they are Joshua, Judges, Rut"], Addis Ababa, Sāne [June] 2000 A. M., p. 27.



32:2 መኸናይም ይላል ዕብራይስጡ ፪ ሠራዊት ማለት ነው ። “the Hebrew says *Mäkānaym* which means two armies” (manuscript C, in MA, p. 266). The toponym **מִצְרַיִם**, has been transcribed into Gəʿəz almost perfectly and the Hebrew dual has rendered correctly.

35:7 የዕብራይስጡ አብነት ኤል : ቤተል ይላል ። የአምላክ ማደሪያ አምላክ ብሎ ጠራው አለ ። “the Hebrew variant says *El Betel*. He named it: the dwelling place of God, God” (manuscripts BC, in MA, p. 285). ኤል ቤቴል reproduces faithfully **לְבֵית־אֱלֹהִים**. It is worth mentioning that this variant does not feature even in Boyd’s apparatus.

35:11 በዕብራይስጥ አብነት አነ : ውእቱ : እግዚአብሔር : አጋዜ : ነሱ : ዓለም “in the Hebrew variant: ‘I am the Lord holder of the whole world’ ” (manuscript C, in MA, p. 285). The Hebrew text reads **אֲנִי אֱלֹהִים** “I am God ‘the almighty’ ”. The gap between the two readings is plain to see. In this case not even the Septuagint is of help to trace back the origin of the Gəʿəz. It reads: *ἐγὼ ὁ θεός* “I am your God”.

41:5 ወኖመ : ወደገመ : ሐለመ ። ዕብራይስጡ አብነት ግን ነቅሐ : ካለ በኋላ ወዳግመ : ኖመ : ወሐለመ : ብሎ አስተካክሎ ይጽፋል ። “and he slept and repeated dreaming. Nevertheless the Hebrew variant, after saying ‘he woke up’, writes correctly ‘and again he slept and dreamt’ ” (manuscripts CD, in MA, p. 316). The Hebrew text reads: **וַיִּשָּׁן וַיִּדְרֹם** “and he slept and dreamt for the second time”. The Hebrew is the same as the LXX: *καὶ ἐνυπνιάσθη τὸ δεύτερον* “and he dreamt for the second time”.

### iii. Complexity of the Gəʿəz text

The composite nature of the Gəʿəz text is displayed in the presence of Hebrew and Greek readings, either side by side in the same passage, or in manuscript attestations of the same passage which report either version. Occasionally, the Gəʿəz has texts which cannot be referred to either versions.

47:31 ወሰገደ : እስራኤል : ላዕለ : ርእሰ : ዓራቱ “and Israel bowed upon the head of his bed” (MA, p. 363), identical to: **וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֶל־רֹאשׁ הַמִּטָּה** “and Israel bowed down upon the head of his staff”. The LXX reads: *καὶ προσεκύνησεν Ἰσραὴλ ἐπὶ τὸ ἄκρον τῆς ῥάβδου αὐτοῦ* “and Israel worshiped over the topmost of his staff”, which the Gəʿəz has taken over almost unanimously: ወሰገደ : እስራኤል : ላዕለ : ከተማ : በትሩ, “and Israel bowed upon the head of his staff”<sup>13</sup>.

49:2 ወተጋብኡ : ወመጽኡ : ደቂቁ : ለያዕቆብ : ወይቤሉሙ : ስምዕም : ስምዕም : ለአቡካሙ “and the children of Jacob came and he told them: ‘Listen, listen to your father’”. This reading, which runs throughout the whole of the Gəʿəz textual tradition<sup>14</sup>, differs from the Hebrew: **וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי יַעֲקֹב** “and the children of Jacob came”.

13 Cf. Dillmann, *Octateuchus aethiopicus*, p. 90.

14 With slight differences, like: ወተጋብኡ : ወመጽኡ : ደቂቁ : ለያዕቆብ : ወይቤሉሙ : ስምዕም : ለአቡካሙ, Dillmann, *Octateuchus aethiopicus*, p. 92.



“come together and listen sons of Jacob and hear to Israel your father”. The LXX: ἀνθροίσθητε καὶ ἀκούσατε υἱοὶ Ἰακώβ ἀκούσατε Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν “Come together and listen sons of Jacob and hear to Israel your father”.

50:2 አምግዝዎ : ወመዝመዝዎ ሸቱውን አስማምተው ቀቡት ማለት ነው። አንድም አብነት ጽዒጠ : እለ : ይጽዕጦ : ሐኒጠ : እለ : የሐንጦ : ይላል። ትርጓሜው አንድ ነው። (MA, p. 378) “they perfumed, cleaned him, it means that they composed harmoniously the perfumes and anointed him. *Andəm*, a variant says: ‘those who embalm, those who mummify’. Its meaning is identical”. The root ሐኒጠ *hänäṭä* “to mummify”, is a cognate of חנף, حنط. The Hebrew reads: וַיִּצְוֶה יוֹסֵף אֶת-רְבָבֵי-אֲשָׁרָה “And Joseph commanded the physicians in his service to embalm his father”. The LXX: καὶ προσέταξεν Ἰωσήφ τοῖς πασὶν αὐτοῦ τοῖς ἐνταφισταταῖς ἐνταφιάσαι τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐνεταφίασαν οἱ ἐνταφιασταὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ “And Joseph commanded his servants the embalmers to embalm his father; and the embalmers embalmed Israel”. The verb ἐνεταφιάζω means “to prepare for burial, bury” (Mt 26:12).

50:10 ዐውደ : እክል : ዘአጣታ<sup>15</sup> “floor of food threshing of Aṭata” for ጥፃፃ ገገጸ “threshing floor of Haatad”; LXX ὄλων Ἀταδ “threshing floor of Atad”. The form of the place name does not match with either the LXX or the TM.

## Conclusion

As the examples above show, *andəmta* commentators do make appeal to Greek, Hebrew, Syriac and Arabic as possible sources (of variants), or terms of reference<sup>16</sup>. It is unlikely that those Ethiopian interpreters have had easy access to all these languages<sup>17</sup>. The commentaries to Genesis do mention the Samaritan Penta-

15 Identical in Dillmann, *Octateuchus aethiopicus*, p. 94

16 The comment to 1:4 says that ጦብ *toḅ*, corresponds to Hebrew טוב “good” (MA, p. 49); 1:8 አዝረቅ, a transcription of Arabic أزرق “blue” (MA, p. 392). 11:29 says ሜልካ ማለት ንግሥት እቴጌ ማለት ነው “Melka means queen, empress” (MA, p. 130). It is a correct representation of ملكة. The word ጎርም *ḡərm*, a foreign entry, is associated to a philosopher who built big barns. It refers apparently to هرم *hərm* pyramid, cf. MA, apparatus of 41:49 (p. 323).

17 The level of the commentators’ familiarity with foreign languages is perceptible from some of the random interpretations, such as the name አውናን in 38:3, which according to the interpreter is related to vine tree (MA, p. 301), whereas the Hebrew נָאֵץ means “vigorous”. This is obviously a naïve, onomatopoeic explanation. Likewise the *balä’andəm* connects ኤር in 38:4 which in Hebrew (עָר) means “protector”, to אֵר “light”. ይሁዳ ማለት ተአማኒ ማለት ነው። (MA p. 249), “Judah means trustworthy”. In reality עֲדָרָה from עָדָר means to praise; ንፍታሊም ማለት ዘንባባ ማለት ነው።, (MA, cf. p. 251) “Nəftaleḡ means palm”. The root פתל indicates “twisting, being tortuous, subtle”. The Gəʾəz ending is different from the Hebrew יִלְחָץ and from the Greek Νεφθαλί. ዛብሎን ማለት መስተፋቅር ማለት ነው። (MA, cf. p. 252) “Zabəlon means love engendering witchcraft”. The root בָּלָא means “to exalt”. The comment to 38:30 says: ዘራ መልክ መልካም ማለት ነው። ዛራ ዓረብ መልክ መልካም ልጅ የወለደ እንደሆነ ዘሀራ ዘጎርያ እንዲል (MA, p. 306) “Zāra means pretty. Today if an Arab begets a beautiful child says: ‘Zāhara, Zāharaya’”. The interpretation is inaccurate, at least on two counts. First of all, searching for meaning from Arabic for a Hebrew text is not the first avenue to go through. In reality the Hebrew name פָּרָץ means “dawning, shining”. Secondly the Arabic term زهرة means “flower” and not “pretty”. The last example of (scientifically) preposterous exegesis is drawn from the long comment to 1:4:



teuch (introduced as *Oritā Samrawāyan*), the Septuagint (*Oritā Liqawənt*) and the Hebrew text<sup>18</sup>, however, it has still to be ascertained how far the ancient biblical versions, namely the Hebrew, Greek and Syriac texts were known in their original languages to the *andāmta* commentators. Perhaps it is more realistic to assume that the true, close or false variants evoked and the reference to foreign idioms and their use has reached the masters together with the Syro-Arabic commentaries.

### 3 - Hermeneutical principles of the the *andāmta* commentaries

Especially in the case of the *andāmta* of Genesis, which, like Matthew and John for the New Testament, appears to be the most scrutinized text of the Old Testament, the comments are not just paraphrases of the text nor simply homiletic in character. Among other aspects, the comments display a keen philological interest which often yields well founded results. For instance, one of the manuscripts (C) says that Cain means not only “wealth, belonging” but also “weapon” (MA, p. 81). In fact in 2Sam 21:16 the Hebrew term for “spear” is Cain. The variant of 5:2 (in manuscripts DE) says that the name Adam comes from the Hebrew “clay, pottery, red earth, red dust”, an interpretation which is perfectly in tune with the Hebrew text of Gen 2:7.

#### i. Treatment of the text

The *andāmtas* follow a sound and consistent exegetical method. They first give the Gəʿəz text to be commented either fully, or, in many manuscripts only partially, even though the remaining bits can be retrieved later on within the comment. The text is followed by at least one Amharic translation, but very often there is more than one rendering. The variety of Amharic translations, which at a first glance may give the impression of being a vain tautology, in reality indicates that the interpreters were aware of the difficulty of representing all the possible nuances of the text in a single translation only. After the Amharic translation occasionally, there are notes of textual criticism. The *textus receptus* may be accompanied by another text meant to emend it. The variants are introduced either by the technical formula *sil nāw* “it wants to say” or by the word *abənnāt* an Amharic word meaning “model, pattern”. It is important to remember that even a text perceived as liable of improvement is never dumped. It is a token of the respect and attach-

በዕርያ ቋንቋ እግዚአብሔር ማለት ጳጳሩን ሥነ ፍጥረት ፈጥሮ የሚገዛ አምላክ ማለት ነው ። “In the language of Syria, God means the Lord that has created the twenty two creatures and rules them”, (MA, p. 50). No need to state that Syriac here is totally misplaced. There are exceptions like alāqa Wäldä-Ab (XVIII century), a towering Shoan *andāmta* master, who apparently knew Arabic language and Arabic Christian literature, cf. Tedros Abraha, “Exegesis”, *EA* 2, Wiesbaden 2005, p. 473.

18 Cf. the variant in MA, p. 131.







like: “how did Noah measure the level of the waters?” (7:20, MA p. 106) or: “how did Joseph’s brothers make sure that he was indeed their brother?” (44:15, MA p. 349). In the quest for answers, extra biblical and apocryphal cross references are often the starting points to look after answers to enlighten the text. Quotations from Church Fathers, especially from Cyril of Alexandria, John Chrysostom and from the *Haymanotä Abäw* “Faith of the Fathers”, are first hand resources. The interpreters make a profitable use of stories of the holy (foreign and local) monks drawn from hagiographical literature as well as from the Synaxarion. In treating the text, the interpreter behaves like a seasoned midwife<sup>22</sup>. The passionate commitment to extract the secrets hidden in the book is clearly a matter of well established principles. There is an unmistakable hermeneutic template running throughout the *andämtä* to Genesis. The whole of the Old Testament is an *amsal* “a figure” of the New Testament.

Whenever possible, the interpreters try to explain the biblical data with Ethiopian “analogies”. The results of this procedure demonstrate its efficacy in conveying the message to interlocutors who lived miles away from the geographical and historical settings of the biblical accounts. Ethiopians are also aware that *omnis analogia claudicat* “every analogy limps” and thus declare ኩሉ ፡ ምሳሌ ፡ የጎፅፅ “every similarity is defective”.

### iii. Ancestry of the *andämtä* pattern of interpretation

#### a. The Bible

The terminology and the exegesis of the Early Church and of the Fathers of the Church that wanted to lay a bridge between the ineffable divine life and its operations vis-à-vis human capacity of understanding and explaining them, though discretely, is present in the Bible itself. The biblical authors have recurred to various terms in their effort to figure out the dialectics in the interaction between divine revelation and its reception by humans. In the Old Testament, the LXX uses τύπος in Ex 25:40, the Israelites were supposed to build a sanctuary according to the τύπος “model” that Moses has seen in the mountain. The term τύπος which Paul later on took on board (e. g. Rom 5:14; 1Cor 1:10.11), has a wide range of meanings: mark, image, statue, form, figure, pattern, mold, type, pattern, model, design. The New Testament (1Pt 3:21) makes use of the term ἀντίτυπος as well. It means: serving as a counterpart to, corresponding to. Speaking about the heavenly sanctuary, Hebrews 9:24 qualifies it as ἀντίτυπα τῶν ἀληθινῶν “a counter-copy of the true one”. In the Bible the renowned technical term “allegory” is a *hapax legomenon*, it appears only in Gal 4:24, and for that matter not as a substantive but in a verbal form: ἀλληγορούμενα, a present participle, passive, nominative

22 Tagräñña is a language spoken in northern regions of Ethiopia and Eritrea.

23 This is why I likened the Ethiopian exegetes’ procedure to Socrates’ maieutics, cf. Tedros, *Romani*, p. 660.



neuter plural, from ἀλληγορέω “to say something and to mean otherwise, to speak allegorically”.

b. The Alexandrian school<sup>24</sup>

No doubt that the matrix of the *andəmta*'s hermeneutic method, displayed with a staunch confidence, at times even with a disconcerting certainty is the Alexandrian school. The consistent interpretative line of the *andəmtas* reflects the hermeneutic platform of Clement of Alexandria and the principles of Origen who believed firmly that “the whole Scripture is the word of Christ”<sup>25</sup>. According to Origen the Old Testament and the New Testament whom he calls respectively “the Law and the Prophets” and “the Gospels and the Apostles” or only “the Apostles” are both the Revelation of Christ. In such a perspective, Origen identifies the treasure hidden in the field without distinction, either with Christ or with the Scriptures<sup>26</sup>. In fact, Origen and the Alexandrian School did not invent anything new if we consider that reading the Christ event in the light of the Old Testament is explicitly adopted by Jesus in Lk 24:27.44 and is widely used in various ways in the whole of the New Testament. Origen recalls the superiority of the New Testament on several occasions, for instance, comparing the two Economies to the time of sowing and of harvest; Moses as the pedagogue leading to Christ<sup>27</sup>. Origen, together with the whole of the Alexandrian tradition (Philo, Clement) underscores repeatedly the difficulty of seeping into the mysteries of Scripture. He is convinced that Scripture has intentionally shrouded itself with obscurity so that the interpreter may carry out his hermeneutic duty with utmost care and in order to avoid that the contents of Scripture, if too easily accessible, may fall into contempt. “Pearls should not be thrown before pigs” (Mt 7:6) is the guideline. The incessant catchphrase in *andəmtas* commentaries is ይህም ለጊዜው ተደርጓል ፤ ለኋላው ምሳሌ ነው “this was done for that time, [but] it was a figure for afterwards” (MA, p. 240) along with the pair አምሳል : መርገፍ *amsal mārgāf* “likeness”. The underlying concept of all of these formulations is that the relationship between the Old and New Testament is that between inception and fulfillment, promise and fulfillment, imperfection and perfection. Philo of Alexandria alongside allegory uses also the term ὑπόνοια. While in an allegory the wording points to a meaning different from the letter of the text, in the *hyponoia* the contents of a statement does not

24 For some introductory works on the Alexandrian school and on Origen in particular, cf. J. Danielou, *Origène: il Genio del Cristianesimo*, Roma 1991; H. De Lubac, *Esegesi medievale. I quattro sensi della Scrittura*, Milano 1986; M. Simonetti, *Lettera e/o allegoria. Un contributo alla storia dell'esegesi patristica*, *Studia ephemeridis augustinianum* 23, Roma 1985; idem, *Origene esegeta e la sua tradizione*, Brescia 2004.

25 *De Principiis* 1, Praef. 1. Cf. Origène, *Traité des Principes*, Introduction, texte critique de la version de Rufin, traduction par Henri Crouzel et Manlio Simonetti, Sources Chrétiennes 252, Paris 1978, p. 76.

26 Cf. comment to Mt 13:44 in *Patrologia Graeca* 13, col. 815.

27 Cf. E. Heine (trans.), *Origen. Commentary on the Gospel according to John. Books 13-32*, Washington 1984, here, book 13:307-308, pp. 132-133; book 13:325, pp. 137-138.



only differ from its literal meaning but the wording is purposely formulated in a mysterious or hazy way. In antiquity, a wide spectrum of terms was produced to try mediate between knowledge and ignorance of the divine: type, symbol, parable, mystery, tropology, anagogy, enigma<sup>28</sup>. Clement and Origen loved the notion that religious language should be formulated covertly. Behind such a position there was the belief that the sacred texts concealed two overlapping and opposing layers of meaning: a material and a spiritual one and that the latter was incomparably more important<sup>29</sup>. This did never imply contempt or outright rejection of “the letter” but the conviction that in Scripture there is progress and fulfillment. The allegorical reading of the Scriptures was resented by the Antiochene school, starting from Diodore of Tarsus († ca. 392), on to John Chrysostom who in his comment to Isaiah observes that we are not free to allegorize as much as we like but only those passages in which Scripture presents a symbol and then its explanation<sup>30</sup>. Their primary concern was to safeguard the historicity of the biblical records and perhaps their dislike for the allegorical exegesis stemmed from their awareness that it was of pagan origin.

c. Application of the allegorical interpretation in the *andämta* of Genesis ሐዋርያት ከአባቶቻቸው ከነቢያት ያላገኙትን አምላላ መርገፍ አያደርጉም (MA, p. 44) “the Apostles do not allegorize anything that they did not find [already allegorized] in their fathers the prophets”. It is a statement that looks like a search for apostolic and prophetic legitimacy of the method that they knew was susceptible to criticism<sup>31</sup>. The *andämta* masters claim that they are a ring of the long genealogical chain of mediators of the Word of God and of its interpreters. In the *andämta* of Genesis, a synchronic reading of the text from start to finish every player is interpreted first literally (historically) and then always located in a New Testament perspective. Thus, the Trinity, the sacrifice of the Cross, Mariology are introduced since the first verses of Genesis. People, animate and inanimate creatures, events, sayings and objects of the Old Testament are taken as *amsal mär-gälf/məssale* = *typoi* of the New Testament. This is such a persistent and pervasive structural paradigm which at times appears to be embarrassingly excessive. At least in one instance (comment to 38:30), the exegete qualifies the superimposition of interpretation as የምላሌ ምላሌ “allegory in the allegory”, namely, an escalation

28 Cf. C. Curti, J. Gribomont (*et alia*), *La terminologia esegetica nell'antichità: atti del primo seminario di antichità cristiane, Bari, 25 ottobre 1984, Quaderni di "Vetera Christianorum"* 20, Bari 1987. On the notion of “mystery” in Ethiopian tradition, cf. Tedros, *Romani*, pp. 674-679.

29 E. Heine (trans.), *Origen. Gospel of John*, book 10:18-20, pp. 259-260.

30 Cf. Jean Chrysostome, *Commentaire sur Isaïe*, Introduction, texte critique et notes J. Dumortier, traduction par A. Liefoghe, Sources Chrétiennes 304, Paris 1983, pp. 222-224.

31 The relationship of Ethiopians with exegetes and scholars in general is ambivalent የጠጣ ልጅ በዛፍ ... በአፍ ፡ ከትንባሆ ልምላሜ ከመናፍቅ ትርጓሜ “the tobacco plant never lacks verdure, nor a heretic his interpretation”. “Who can compete in tree climbing with the brood of a monkey and in speaking with the brood of a heretic?”, Habtämaryam Wärqənäh (*Liqā Sēltanat*), *Ṭəntawi Yä'ityoppēya Tēmbērt* [Ancient teaching of Ethiopia], Addis Ababa, 1963 (A. M.), p. 218.



of the allegory. The passage reads: **ሁለተኛ የምሳሌ ምሳሌ ። ትእማር የምኩራብ ፲ ምኩራብ የቤተክርስቲያን ምሳሌ** (MA, p. 306) “the second [interpretation] is an allegory of the allegory. Tə’amar is an allegory of the Synagogue and the Synagogue of the Church”. Allegorical interpretation is everywhere. Virtually every story is interpreted at least in a Christological way. Often Mary and the Church too enter the fray. Joseph leaving the jail to be conducted to the Pharaoh after the shaving of his hair and changing his clothes in 41:14 is read Christologically. Pharaoh is likened to Pilate; Joseph to Jesus; the prison to this world. Joseph is taken as a simile of the flesh before the unity [of body and soul in the Son]. At the age of thirty Joseph shaved his hair, took a bath, changed his clothes and stood before the Pharaoh. He is the *typos* of the Lord who, though pure of nature at thirty stood in front of Pilate (MA, p. 318). The analogy between Joseph and Jesus is pushed further. Both were narrated as dead: Joseph by his brethren in Canaan; Jesus by the Jews whereas were alive and ruling (MA, p. 327).

45:8 “It is not you that have sent me, but God has sent me”. Manuscript A says that this is a *typos* indicating that the death of the Son of God was not imposed on him by the Jews. It is rather a *typos* of the death of the Son of God by his own will and by the will of his Father. It is a *typos* of his words: “Nobody snatches [my life] from me but I offer it myself of my own accord” (Jn 10:17b-18a)<sup>32</sup>.

It is common practice in the *andəmtas* to expand the literal meaning and weight of the text, without repudiating the literal meaning. Having said this though, it must be also recognized that there is an enormous influence of the “theology of substitution” coming down from the *Epistle of Pseudo-Barnaba* (second century), often aired in anti-judaic polemics, a constant feature in *andəmta* commentary tradition and beyond. The trap along the path of the allegorical hermeneutic procedure is the risk of subtracting the text from its original setting and of emptying it of the purpose for which it was conceived. If initially one may be mesmerized by the intuition and audacity of the interpreters in their effort to perform a Christian transposition of Old Testament words and accounts, which is a legitimate operation (cf. Lk 24:27; Gal 4:24), the unbridled insistence on applying this method to every corner of the Old Testament can expose to ridicule the whole operation. For instance, the seven days of mourning for Jacob are interpreted as the *typos* of the *fəṯhat* “absolution” at the seventh day after death (MA, p. 380). No doubt that this far-fetched reading goes far beyond the intention of the original writer (or redactor) and the comprehension of his addressees of Gen 50:10. Similar objections can be raised to the vast array of interpretations applied to “Jacob’s ladder” in Gen 28:12 (MA, pp. 240-241). It is worth mentioning that R.W. Cowley, in the last book he wrote<sup>33</sup> before his premature death espoused the theory that “the *andəmta* commentary tradition stands in fundamental continuity with earlier

32 MA (p. 347 in the apparatus) refers wrongly to Jn 5:27.

33 Cowley, *Hermeneutics*, p. 375.



commentaries, especially<sup>34</sup> those of the 'Antiochene' tradition. This statement is followed by arguments that try to downgrade if not exclude the share of the allegorical interpretation. Cowley's latest position represents an inexplicable retreat from his previous evaluations<sup>35</sup>. This assessment and "the question of the direct use of Jewish sources in Ethiopian commentaries"<sup>36</sup> treated with much emphasis only to come to the conclusion that his comparisons "do not prove literary contact, and further consideration of it must also recognize the many real differences between the two traditions"<sup>37</sup> represent some of the few weaknesses of Cowley's otherwise superb job.

d. The role of (Nestorian) Syro-Arabic commentaries in the *andəmta* of Genesis<sup>38</sup>  
This paragraph wants to draw the attention to the many similarities both in hermeneutic outlook and in contents between the *andəmta* and the commentary on Genesis of Išū'dad of Merv (IX cent.), bishop of Ҳedatta and prolific writer in the Syriac language<sup>39</sup>. Following in the footsteps of Theodore of Mopsuestia, "the Interpreter" of the Nestorians, he sticks to the historical literal hermeneutics. He locates the people mentioned in the Old Testament in their immediate and natural historical context. On the other hand he can be seen as an innovator in the sense that he willingly ascribes to the prophecies of the Old Testament a messianic meaning and more than that, to his historical explanations of his texts he adds an allegorical reading. The Old Testament is considered as a foreshadowing of the

34 This "especially" will be dropped by Cowley's disciple K. S. Pedersen and she will claim that the Ethiopian traditional hermeneutics descends from the "Antiochene" exegesis. Introducing her work she states: "... the present study ... has confirmed most of Cowley's findings. In the matter of the *Antiochene connection*, it has proven beyond any doubt that he was right in seeing the Antiochene exegesis as fundamental to traditional Ethiopian Bible clarification". Cf. *Traditional Ethiopian Exegesis of the Book of Psalms*, AF 36, Wiesbaden, 1995, p. 293. This emphasis on the Antiochene track at the expense of the Alexandrian influence has been balanced by a good number of subsequent studies.

35 Cf. Cowley, *Apocalypse*, pp. 49-50.

36 Cowley, *Hermeneutics*, pp. 65-93.

37 *Ibidem*, pp. 75-76. The association of the *andəmtas* with rabbinic exegesis cannot be suggested unless historically proven. In the case of Genesis there is one explicit, even though generic reference to a presumed (but clearly unlikely) Jewish interpretation. It reads: አይዑድ አንድ ገጽ አንድ አንድ አካል ለማለት የሥላሴን ያንድነት የሦስትነት ምስጢር ለማፋለስ ሲሉ በጥንተ ፍጥረት ንግበር ያለውን እግዚአብሔር አብ ነው ንግበር የሚላቸው መለእክት ናቸው ብለው ይተረጉማሉ ። (MA, p. 171) "The Jews, to hold to one face and person and to unsettle the mystery of the Trinity and unity they interpret that the God who said: 'Let us make' is the Father and the addressees of: 'Let us make' are the angels".

38 R. Cowley has carried out an extensive comparative study between ራፍ፣።, Amharic commentaries with several other ancient Christian and Jewish commentaries of Genesis including texts in Greek, Syriac, Arabic. Cowley, *Hermeneutics*, dedicates a well documented chapter (pp. 113-140) on the issue of the sources of the theme of creation in Ethiopian literature, followed by an annotated translation of the *andəmta* of Gen 1:1-2:4a (pp. 144-227). ራፍ፣። texts of Gen 1:1-2:4a, are also commented upon (pp. 228-234). Cowley concludes his with a reflection on a few selected exegetical motifs (pp. 235-263).

39 Cf. A. Baumstark, *Geschichte der syrischen Literatur mit Ausschluß der christlich-palästinensischen Texte*, Bonn, 1922 (reprinted in 1968), p. 234.



New Economy. From his commentary to Genesis, it is clear that Iṣu'dad is a great compiler who assembles his material from Syrian (e.g. Ephrem, Narsai, Babai "the Persian") and Greek authors such as Origen, quoted three times, Lucian of Antioch, Basil the composer of nine homilies on the Hexameron. Iṣu'dad quotes "The Theologian", that is, Gregory of Nazianz. Apollinaris is quoted once in the commentary to Genesis to refute his trichotomist anthropology. The commentary on Genesis of Theodore of Mopsuestia, "the Interpreter" is quoted seventeen times. Homer, Hesiod, Aristotle, Diodore of Sicily, Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities* and *Jewish War*), Marcion, Mani are some of the non-Christian authors Iṣu'dad has used. Iṣu'dad knows Jubilees and the Hexapla as well<sup>40</sup>.

As there is consensus among scholars of Ethiopian studies that there is no hard evidence of direct translation from Syriac into Gə'əz, at least in the case of Genesis, the mediator is Abu-l-Farağ 'Abdallah ibn aṭ-Ṭaiyib who lived in Baghdad under the Caliphs al-Qadir (991-1031) and al-Qaim (1031-1075)<sup>41</sup>. There is a commentary on Genesis under his name which corresponds eighty percent to Iṣu'dad's commentary to Genesis<sup>42</sup>. The following few passages from Iṣu'dad's commentary are token examples which illustrate some of the similarities and differences between the *andəmta* commentaries and the Syro-Arabic material.

| Iṣu'dad's commentary   | <i>Andəmta</i> commentaries   |
|--|---|
| 1:2 It is the Blessed Basil [ <i>Hexameron</i> II, 6 (41C-44B)] and others who have interpreted these words as "the Holy Spirit", whereas "the Blessed Interpreter" and Mar Ephrem apply it to wind. <sup>43</sup> | As for that which he calls "wind of God", a scholar called Mäśafqan interpreted it saying: "it is the wind, which is the life of the waters and which purifies the waters". The <i>Tərgwame Orit</i> <sup>44</sup> has said that it is the <i>typos</i> of the riches Holy Spirit that are given to the believers in baptism. Basil explained it saying that it is the <i>typos</i> of the Holy Spirit which is given to the believers like Jeremiah in the bosom. Severus <sup>45</sup> though |

40 For these data, cf. Iṣu'dad, *Genesis*, pp. XV-XVIII.

41 The dates of his birth and of his death are unknown.

42 The information on the percentage is on p. II of the volume with the translation of Ibn aṭ-Ṭaiyib, *Genesis*.

43 Iṣu'dad, *Genesis*, p. 19. Ibn aṭ-Ṭaiyib reports this text word for word, Ibn aṭ-Ṭaiyib, *Genesis*, p. 7.

44 It is a Gə'əz commentary of Genesis (still unpublished) whose introduction corresponds perfectly to Ibn aṭ-Ṭaiyib's commentary of Genesis. The author is Məhərka Dəngəl who lived in the seventeenth cent., cf. Cowley, *Hermeneutics*, pp. 114-115.

45 The manuscripts collated by MA do not specify which Severus is here. MA in the text refers the quotation to Severus of Antioch and quotes the *Haymanotā Abāw* "Faith of the Fathers" section 9 (MA, p. 49). His English version reads: Severus [of Esmunain] ... (MA, p. 389). In reality the formula belongs to Severus of Ašmūnayn. It is very commonly used in the Gə'əz (unfortunately, still unpublished) version of the second and third treatises of his *Kitāb al-Īdāh* "the book of the exposition".



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|  | has interpreted it as the <i>typos</i> of the Holy Spirit who separated the blood of virginity from Our Lady. |
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“The Blessed Interpreter” in Gəʿəz, መሻፍታን *māṣafəqan* comes from the Arabized form مفسقان *mafṣqān* of the Syriac ܡܦܨܩܢ *nəṣīḥo mpaṣqono*, meaning “interpreter”<sup>46</sup>. መሻፍታን instead of መፍሻታን in the Gəʿəz version is a metathesis similar to that between the widespread ታዎሰሉስ for ቴዎሎስ<sup>47</sup>. As Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428) was later perceived as the harbinger of Nestorius, many scholars chose not to quote him by name but as “the interpreter”<sup>48</sup>.

| Iṣu‘dad’s commentary  | <i>Andāmta</i> commentaries  |
|---|--|
| 1:26 But only man is called “image”, because only in him there is a representation of the Persons of the Trinity and the unity of nature. As the Father is not born, Adam too who constitutes an image, is not born; as the Son is born, Set who constitutes an image, is born; and as the Holy Spirit proceeds, Eve, who constitutes an image, proceeds. Such is the leverage of the triple resemblance which is attached to that of those three. It is the same with regard to the soul: for, its substance is the image and representation of the Father; for the Word (mental) which begets continuously without pain, is | On a Friday, at dawn, the Lord said: “Let us create man in our likeness and in our appearance”. “Let us make” indicates the unity [of God]; “in our appearance” the trinity. <sup>50</sup> |

46 G. Graf, *Verzeichnis arabischer kirchlicher Termini*, CSCO 147, Subsidia 8, Louvain 1954, p. 82; M. Sokoloff, *A Syriac lexicon : a translation from the Latin : correction, expansion, and update of C. Brockelmann[s] Lexicon syriacum*, Winona Lake, Ind., 2009, p. 811.

47 Cf. ወንጌል : ቅዱስ : ንባብና : ትርጓሜው *Wāngel qəddus nəbab-ənna tərg’amew* [“The Holy Gospel: text and commentary”], Addis Ababa, <sup>3</sup>1966 A.M. In p. 401 we read: ታዎሰሉስ : ነባቤ : መለኮት : ማለት : ነው ። “*Ta’ogolos* means the one speaking [about] the divinity”. Kidanä Wäld Kəflē, registers ቴዎሎስ and explains it: ነባቤ : መለኮት ። ታዳሰሉና : ቴዎሎስ : አንድ : ስም : ናቸው ፤ ባለዜሞቹና : ባለሐዲሶች : ግን : ቴዎሎስን : ነዊሃ : እስኪት : ይሉታል ፤ የተሳሳተ ነው። “the one speaking [about] the divinity. *Ta’ologos* and *tewologos* are one word. Hymn and New Testament experts though say that *tewologos* means long testicles: it is wrong”, KWKDict, p. 893.

48 From Syriac literature we can mention the following witness: “Rabbulas montrait auparavant beaucoup d’amitié au célèbre Interprète et étudiait ses ouvrages”. The editor in a footnote observes: “Théodore de Mopsueste, auquel les Nestoriens donnent le titres d’Interprète des livres saints par excellence”, *Mar Barhadbsabba ‘Arbaya, évêque de Halwan (VIe siècle). Cause de la fondation des écoles*, texte syriaque publié et traduit par Mgr ADDAI SCHER, *Patrologia Orientalis* 4/4, Paris 1907, p. 380 [66]. Among the Arab writers: Al-Ṣafī Ibn al-ʿAssāl, *Kitāb al-Ṣaḥāʾih fī ḡawāb al-naṣāʾih* [The book of Truths in response to the Advices], Marqus Ġirġis (ed.), Cairo, 1926/7, p. 116.



the generation of the Son; and because of its spirituality that it possesses by nature, the Holy Spirit is represented by figure.

Moreover the name Adam, in Greek is written in four letters, thus designating the four extremities of which man is made up.<sup>49</sup>

#### Iṣu'dad's commentary

2:22 [The woman] was taken from a rib and not from anything else, neither from the earth nor from any other thing, [and that] was convenient. Of nothing else, neither from the earth so that those who have lost their way may not say that the one who molded Adam is different from he who [formed] Eve, or that it may not be believed that she differs from Adam by nature; not mainly from the lower part [of Adam], so that she may not be held by him as contemptible and a subject; not from the anterior part [of Adam], so that it may not be thought that [God] has given him an equal power; nor from the head [of Adam], so that [the woman] would not stand up and want to lord over man. But [God] has taken a rib from the right side so that it may be manifest that [the woman] is half of a living being, fully alive because they are girdled by two sides, with the aim of showing two things: the equality of nature and the need of man's help that the woman has. For the side is united and attached by two ribs, and as the right covers the ribs, thus the woman

#### *Andəmta* commentaries

... be that as it may, why didn't he raise up to his [Adam's] forehead nor lower himself up to his [feet] and create her [from either top or bottom]? Since women are proud from of old, had [God] created her from his [Adam's] forehead they would have become completely proud. Had he lowered himself up to his [Adam's] feet they would have been completely despised. Saying that she should live above the family and under her husband he created her from the middle of his side.<sup>52</sup>

49 Iṣu'dad, *Genesis*, p. 50-51. For a similar Trinitarian interpretation of the passage, cf. Ibn aṭ-Ṭayyib, *Genesis*, p. 17-18.

50 A passage from a much longer but somehow repetitive comment on 1:26, MA, p. 60. The comparison shows the common Trinitarian reading of Gen 1:26.



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| <p>[leans] on the protection that comes from the man. For this reason man has been ordered to love his wife as his own body. Likewise, [the woman] was not [taken] from anything, so that it may not be thought that perhaps [God] had repudiated his former creature. [She was] on the other hand [taken] from a rib, so that [the man and the woman] would love one another. It is clear that with this rib there was flesh, blood and nerves ... The one that was now conducted to me, was not conducted like the animals [were conducted to me] who are under my dominion, but in order to become one flesh only through the union with me.<sup>51</sup></p> |  |
|--|--|

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>32:28 “a man has seen God”. In the margin of the manuscripts there is an addition: Ḥenana said: “Israel is mighty because of God”<sup>53</sup></p> | <p>From now on your name will not be Jacob but Israel.<sup>54</sup></p> |
|---|---|

It is surprising that none of MA's witnesses elaborates on the meaning of the noun Israel in this key passage. In the *andəmta* it is common knowledge that Israel “means”: people of God, heart/conscience that contemplates God, he who perceives, and the one who is mighty because of his God<sup>55</sup>. Most of these interpretations of the noun Israel derive from Philo of Alexandria<sup>56</sup>.

It would be totally misleading to conclude that the Ethiopian interpreters have uncritically reproduced the above texts. They have learnt them and then made their own adjustments and brought in original contributions.

#### e. Anti-judaic rhetoric

In the *andəmtas* in general, and in those on Genesis, religious polemics is almost absent. This is an important aspect that distinguishes them from most of Ethiopi-

51 Iṣu'dad, *Genesis*, pp. 75-76. Ibn at-Ṭayyib, *Genesis*, p. 27.

52 Partial comment of 2:22, cf. MA, p. 71.

53 Iṣu'dad, *Genesis*, p. 210. Ibn at-Ṭayyib, *Genesis*, p. 82.

54 MA, p. 271.

55 Tedros Abraha, *Romani*, pp. 337-379.

56 Filone [d'Alessandria], *Tutti i Trattati del Commentario Allegorico alla Bibbia*, R. Radice (ed.), Milano 1984, pp. 1026-1271; M. Sheridan, “Jakob and Israel: A contribution to the History of an Interpretation”, in M. Löhrer und E. Salmann (heraus.), *Symbol, Gegenwart und theologische Bedeutung. Festschrift für Basil Studer*, (Studia Anselmiana 116, 1995), pp. 219-241.



an Christian religious works which are routinely engaged in fighting against old and more recent heresies. In the *andəmta* to Genesis heretics are occasionally mentioned (MA, p. 60): the retrieval of the identity of anonymous heretics would perhaps contribute to put the commentaries in their historical context. The exception to the absence of theological and religious controversies is Judaism which is apparently a privileged target of the *andəmta* commentators. As a matter of fact, anti-judaic polemics is a permanent aspect of a large part of Ethiopian Christian religious literature and not just of *andəmta* commentaries. As already mentioned the negative and if not hostile attitude towards Judaism springs from the underlying conviction that the Old Testament was only a preparation to the New Economy and that the latter has irretrievably superseded the Mosaic Law. Such an outlook was not invented by the *andəmta* teachers: it is already present in various parts of the New Testament itself and in early Christian writings. The already mentioned *Epistle of Pseudo-Barnabas* is an oft-evoked expression of the so-called Theology of Substitution. There have been radical positions which rejected out of hand the Old Testament as the God that it projected. It is the Marcionite heresy. The comment to 38:30 declares that “as Tamar remained without getting the lamb [the gift sent by Judah], likewise the house of Judah ended up confined to hope. Tamar is the *typos* of the synagogue” (MA, p. 306). The parallel to Jacob’s curse against Simon and Levi in 49:7 according to the interpreters is the exclusion of the Fəlaša and the Kayla, the Ethiopian Jews, from the right of inheriting land (MA, p. 371). Book erasure is mentioned as one the Jewish malpractices<sup>57</sup>. According to such an accusation Jews would have been responsible of manipulating the passages which, for instance referred to the Holy Trinity, to Jesus Christ “the Word/Son of God”, to Mary “the Mother of God”.

#### 4 – The *Sitz-im-Leben*, the language and the style of the *andəmta* of Genesis

i. The **background** of the *andəmta* is the rural, feudal area of the central and northern regions of Ethiopia. There is a special focus on Gondär, the capital of the Ethiopian kingdom established by Emperor Fasil (1632-1667)<sup>58</sup> around 1635. The glamour of the Gondärine court and the (deliberate) awe inspiring impression it made on its subjects is described in the comment in manuscript C, to 33:3: “and [Jacob] fell to the ground seven times until he arrived near his brother Esau”. The state of mind and attitude of Jacob, subjugated by apprehension because of his incoming encounter with his (enemy) brother Esau is compared to that of a little

57 Cf. MA, p. 123 apparatus 10.24.2; p. 127 apparatus 11.3.2. In virtually every Gəʿəz manuscript there is the threat of excommunication on anyone who would steal, deface, cancel or scrap it. It is an indication that the practice of book mishandling was not of Jewish making only.

58 Fasil’s father and predecessor in the throne, Susənyos (1607-1632) is one the historical figures that the commentaries mention explicitly (MA, p. 296).



known personage who was about to see the king. Here is the comment: “[Jacob’s prostration] is like the prostration of Bälāw. The emperor of Gondār appeared to him wearing frightening and shocking clothes of silk and gold thread, sitting on his throne, reclining on silk cushion, stretching his golden scepter, making his dignitaries line up to his right and left, making fire burn in front of him and a lion to be chained. [Bälāw] would fall down and rise, prostrate and lie down completely like a low ranking palace officer. After receiving orders, a lad would go and tell him: “[His Majesty] has told you: ‘Stand up!’”. Proceeding ahead a little [Bälāw] would repeat the same [gestures]. After receiving orders, a lad would go and tell him: “[His Majesty] has told you: ‘Stand up!’”. He gets close to the king in this way until he sit at the right. It is in this way that [Jacob] prostrated repeatedly, for seven times”<sup>59</sup>. The passage which seems to have been dictated on the spur of the moment, is replete with Amharic terms which are now obsolete. Another meaningful example which mirrors the Gondarine scenery is the comment to Gen 34:1 “Dina, daughter of Lia born to Jacob went out to watch the girls of that country”. Manuscripts BC say [that Dina went out]: የጎንደር ቅሬ ስነ በዓል ልታይ ትወጣ እንደ ነበር ። “like a Gondarine city-slicker who used to go out to watch feast celebrations”. As an aside, it is noteworthy that the commentator is far from being tender with Dina. A ቅሬ *qəre* is by definition “a dissolute woman (divorced or widowed) who lives alone, who sells her favors, dances, sings or works in an establishment where alcoholic drinks are sold; ... a badly brought up child, scamp, rogue, rascal, knave, city slicker”<sup>60</sup>. One can see the cultural prejudice with regard to rape. Women are never seen as victims of male sexual violence: when it takes place it is the woman who provoked it. Thus, according to the mind of the *andəmta* interpreter Dina was to bear the blame for her predicament. Manuscript C adds that she went out: ጋላ ሻንቅላ ካይላ ፈላሻ ተንባላት ዓረብ ለልደት ለጥቅምት ሥነ በዓል ለማየት እንዲወጡ ሁሉ ። “like the Galla, the Šanqəlla, the Kayla, the Fəlaša, the pagan Arabs who go out to watch the celebrations of the Epiphany”<sup>61</sup>. The comment is interesting in the sense that, beside highlighting again the guilt of the girl for associating “with the impure”, it indicates the ethnological and religious landscape of the Gondarine period. It is a microcosm made up of the Oromo population<sup>62</sup> which at that time followed their own traditional religions, Islam and some became Christians. The Šanqəlla were mainly non-Christians. The terms Kayla and Fəlaša denote the Ethiopians who adhered to Judaism, whereas the *tānbalat* (pagan) Arabs are the Muslims. The *andəmta* are an eyewitness that the long and colourful celebration of the Christian feast of the Epiphany attracted and united the whole of the Gon-

59 The text is in MA, p. 273. In his English version MA, p. 573, gives a footnote which states: “Ms C liken (sic) this with that of the bow made by Bälāw, an unknown rebel during the Gonderine period”. That is all.

60 TLK, p. 717.

61 The texts are in MA, p. 277. They have been left out from the English translation.

62 Galla is perceived as derogatory name by Ethiopian Oromos.



darine society which was otherwise used to live split according to ethnic and religious lines.

Thus, the *andämta* masters are unique interpreters not only of Sacred Scripture but also of their religious and socio-political setting with its rigid classification. Through anecdotes, proverbs and aphorisms, they masterfully portray among other things, Ethiopian anthropological, psychological makeup and value systems. The following are a few illustrative examples of the interpreters world view.

39:13-14 (manuscripts BD) ሰው ባርያ ሲገዛ ራሱ ቁርዳዳ አፈ ለምባዳ ምላሰ ድዳ እግረ ወድማዳ ፊት ጨምዳዳ ይገዛል (MA, p. 309). Potifar's wife<sup>63</sup> vented her rage at Joseph's refusal to please her in a barrage of insults: "When someone buys a slave he makes sure that his hair is kinky, his speech is stuttering, his tongue is mute, his foot is distorted and his face wrinkled".

16:4 (manuscript B) እመቤቷን ማክበር : ስትጠራርት አቤት : ስትልካት ወዴት ብላ መታዘዝን ተወች # (MA, p. 152) "she stopped obeying her mistress by refusing to say: "Here am I" when she called here, and "Where [should I go?]" when she would [want] to dispatch her. The two passages are eloquent icons depicting slave-master relationship in feudal Ethiopia.

18:6 (manuscript C) እንደ ትግሬ እንጀራ የሳሳ እንጀራ # (MA, p. 163) "it is thin like the pancake of the Tigreans". The lands inhabited by Təgrəñña speakers (present day State of Eritrea and the northern Ethiopian region of Təgray) are generally dry and not as fertile as many Amhara areas. The presumed and generalized perception of the thinness of Təgray bread derives from the poverty of the environment.

38:24 ሴቶች ሲፀንሱ ማህፀናቸው ይሰፋል ፅንሳቸው ይገፋል # በዚያን ጊዜ ከንፈራቸው ይራል ጡታቸው ይጠቁራል እንቅልፍ እንቅልፍ ይላቸዋል ደረታቸው ይቀላል (MA, p. 305). The query and the related answer is on how Tamar's pregnancy was discovered. The commentator says: "When women get pregnant, their womb widens and their pregnancy would push forward. At that time, their lips will be scorched, their breast becomes black; they will be inclined to sleep and their chest becomes light".

44:12 (manuscript B) አፈርሳታ የሚያወጣ ሰው እንዳያውቁበት ከወዳጁ እንዲጀምር እሱም እንዳያውቁበት ከታላቁ (MA, p. 341). "A person who organizes an *afärsata* begins from his friend so that the others would not out-smart him, likewise, he begun from the senior that the others may not know his mind". *Afärsata* was a communal inquest imposed on a community for the purpose of identifying and apprehending the perpetrators of a crime such as theft, arson or murder<sup>64</sup>. The practice was also known as *awäčäčäñ*. The folk of a rural village or area are kept sequestra-

63 On the elaboration of the Joseph story, cf. Ephraim Isaac, "The Ethiopic History of Joseph. Translation with Introduction and Notes", *Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha* (1990), pp. 3-125.

64 TLK, p. 1355.



ted in a field away from their homes until an informer comes forward to identify the guilty person<sup>65</sup>. The *andəmtas* commentators had a good insight in making use of the *afärsata* to illustrate the search procedure to retrieve Joseph's cup.

40:19 ንጉሥ የሰቀለውን : አንበሳ የሰበረውን የሚቀብረው የለምና (MA, p. 314) "Nobody buries someone that the king hung or who was torn apart by a lion". The images are employed to comment the hanging of Pharaoh's baker.

Sometimes the commentaries recur to crude language and imagery which perhaps in the mouth of peasants and shepherds and to the ears of their listeners would sound innocent. A couple of examples will be sufficient to have an idea of it. The comment to 12:17 says: "and [God] made Pharaoh suffer with great and evil pain, him and his household". God brought a severe disease on Pharaoh. If they ask: "What kind of disease?", [the answer is] his genitals became like a leaning place, a pillow and swelled, and brought a strong disease to his countrymen. God caused throughout the night men's genitals to swell like a pillow and the pregnant women who were not about to give birth to be overtaken by birth pangs and those who were seized by birth pangs not to deliver the child (MA, p. 135). The *andəmta* to 45:15 says: Joseph's brethren made sure that he was their brother because of his circumcision; he let them see his organ (MA, p. 349).

ii. **Orality.** In traditional Ethiopian education, science is communicated orally from memory. *Andəmta* training is no exception: the interpretation of religious texts is imparted orally and has to be learned by heart. The *andəmtas* have been committed to writing in manuscripts first, then they began to be published at the beginning of the twentieth century. As the number of students has been steadily dwindling, their publication will save them from extinction. However, in a manuscript or in a book, there is no way of representing the intonation<sup>66</sup>, which is an integral part of the structure of this literature and an important key, for instance, to mark the pauses. The *andəmtas* were born to be kept alive in a living memory and to be handed down orally. They were not supposed to be nailed down to writing which will inevitably kill the verve of the comments. As a matter of fact, the oft-intricate language of the *andəmtas* has a better chance of getting through when it is declaimed by an expert rather than when it is read in a book<sup>67</sup>. In the comment to Gen 28:2 we read ወደ ናትህ, written as it is normally pronounced, in the contracted form instead of ወደ : እናትህ (MA, p. 239). In 8:11, there is a very concise comment: a sentence without subject. It reads: ውኃው ደረቀ የምሥራች ስትል ። (MA, p. 109) "saying: 'The water has dried up! Good news' ". The subject is the dove with an olive branch which announced to Noah the end of the deluge. The comment to 35:1 (manuscript C) reads: እግዚአብሔር ካለበት መልአክ : መልአክ

65 TLK, p. 1276.

66 In some rare instances the scribes supply indications such as *annab* "read together", referring to two or more entries that have to be pronounced at one go.

67 For more on this aspect, cf. Tedros, *Romani*, pp. 659-661.



ካለበት እግዚአብሔር አይለይምና እንዲህ አለው (MA, p. 283) “where there is God [there is] an angel, from [a place] where there is an angel God does not separate [himself], thus God told him this”. The core issue here is identifying the meaning of ካለበት a homography, whose significance can be decided by doubling or loosening the **ለ**.

iii. The **style** of the *andəmtas*. The interpretation of religious text is the apex of traditional Ethiopian education. It presupposes absolute command of every aspect the Gəʿəz language, namely, morphology, syntax and especially poetry. There is an explicit quotation of a *qəne*<sup>68</sup>. It is an ironic comment to 42:13: **ሞተ : የሴፍ : አንዊሁ : ነገርዎ : ለዮሴፍ : እንዳለ : ባለቅኔ** (MA, p. 326) “as the *qəne* composer said: the death of Joseph, his brothers told to Joseph”. The vast majority of *andəmta* masters represented the most qualified intellectual elite in the traditional Ethiopian academic arena. The width of their knowledge’s horizon is palpable in several passages of the *andəmta* to Genesis as well. In the comment to 1:4 in a clear dismissal of the Manichean Weltanschauung state: **ወናይ አምላክ ብርሃንን ቢፈጥር እኩይ አምላክ ጨለማን ፈጠረ** “if the good god created light the evil god created darkness” (MA, p. 50).

The style of the *andəmtas* is chiefly colloquial, rhapsodic, designed to instruct while entertaining. Gəʿəz classes are offered in Amharic, thus the student catches two birds with one stone. The language of the *andəmtas* is a treasure in its own right, a resource which so far has not attracted sufficient attention of studies of Amharic language and literature. For people familiar with Amharic there is plenty to enjoy while reading: passionate attention to single words and ensuing elaboration, irony, puns, rhymed prose (close to Arabic **سجع**), subtle syllogisms, touching examples from daily life to draw analogies, are some of the stylistic features that fascinate the reader. Among the proverbs (popular sayings), we can remember the following: **መክፈልት ሲሹ : መቅሰፍት** 27:12 (MA, p. 232), “while craving after the *mäkfält*<sup>69</sup>, they got destruction”.

The Amharic of MA’s witnesses looks like “an updated” language. Traces of older Amharic are scanty. In its written attestations (manuscripts) one of the most common orthographic phenomena is abbreviation. The scarcity of writing material could be a plausible reason for the tachygraphies such as the well known **፳ኤል**

68 *Qəne* are piece of poetry composed *ad hoc* by traditional erudites known as “däbtara”, especially during liturgical celebrations. Their main peculiarity is polysemy contained in a term or expression, in a person or in an event lending them to various interpretations which in the technical jargon are described as “wax and gold”. The “wax” is the immediately perceptible meaning while the “gold” is the deeper, hidden sense.

69 The *mäkfält* is the fraternal light meal which takes place within the church compound after the Eucharistic celebration. “Share; food and drink the faithful bring the priests in the *däggä-sälam* during *täzkar*-memorial services, funerals or christenings”, TLK, p. 1461.



for “Israel”. The biblical passages to be commented upon are given in full only seldom, even if the missing parts can be retrieved later on in the comments.

Among the various devices employed (among other reasons, to help memory) in the *andəmtas* to Genesis, there are several “echo words” constructions. Some intriguing examples will be given hereafter. It is impossible to translate them into English without tarnishing their beauty, thus I have chosen to present only the text,

1:23: ከዚያውም የቀሩ አሉ

ወጥተው ወጥተው

በረው በረው የሄዱም አሉ ። (MA, p. 58).

4:12 ርዕደ : ወድንጉጽ : ኩን : ላዕለ : ምድር ፤ ዛሬም በዚህ መርገም እሱ በኩር ሁኗቸው ነፍስ የገደሉ ሰዎች ሁሉ ዕንጨት : ቋ : ቅጠል : ኮሽ : ወፍ : ብር : ባለ ቍጥር ሁሉ የገደለኝ እየመሰላቸው ሲርዱ ሲንቀጠቀጡ እንዲኖሩ ። (MA, p. 86).

34:29 (manuscripts BC) የቤት ዕቃውን ሰባራውን ሰንጣራውን ቍንቋራውን ። (MA, p. 281).

### Conclusion

From the considerations above it can be concluded that the interpreter is not a scholar dissociated from real life: on the contrary, he is in constant dialogue with a wide spectrum of interlocutors, from the farmer to the royal household.



## Abbreviations:

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| AF                                       | = | <i>Aethiopistische Forschungen.</i>   |
| A. M.                                    | = | Ethiopian Calendar (7/8 behind A.D.).   |
| CSCO                                     | = | <i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium.</i>   |
| Cowley, <i>Apocalypse</i>                | = | R. Cowley, <i>The Tradional Interpretation of the Apocalypse of St John in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church</i> , Cambridge, 1983.   |
| Cowley, <i>Hermeneutics</i>              | = | R. Cowley, <i>Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation. A Study in Exegetical Tradition and Hermeneutics</i> , Oriental Publication 38, Cambridge, 1988.   |
| Dillmann, <i>Octateuchus aethiopicus</i> | = | A. C. F. Dillmann, <i>Biblia Veteris Testamenti aethiopica, in quinque tomos distributa, ad librorum manuscriptorum fidem edidit et apparatu critico, Teil 1. Octateuchus aethiopicus</i> , Lipsiae, 1853.  |
| EA                                       | = | <i>Encyclopaedia Aethiopica</i> (S. Uhlig ed.) vols. 1,2,3, Wiesbaden, 2003/05/07; (S. Uhlig, A. Bausi eds.) v. 4, Wiesbaden, 2010.   |
| ed(s).                                   | = | editor(s).  |
| Ibn at-Ṭayyib, <i>Genesis</i>            | = | Ibn At-Taiyib, <i>Commentaire sur la Genèse</i> , édité par J.C.J. Sanders, CSCO 274 Scriptorum Arabici 24 (text), CSCO 275 Scriptorum Arabici (trans.), Louvain, 1967.   |
| Iṣu'dad, <i>Genesis</i>                  | = | C. van den Eynde (trans.), <i>Commentaire d'Išo'dad de Merv sur l'Ancien Testament. I Genèse</i> , CSCO 156 Scriptorum Syri 75, Louvain, 1955.  |
| KWKDict                                  | = | መጽሐፈ ሰዋስው፡ ወግስ፡ ወመዝገብ፡ ታላት፡ ሐዲስ [Mäṣḥafä säwasəw wägəs wämäzəgäbä qalat ḥaddis "A Book of Grammar and Verb, and a new Dictionary"], Addis Ababa, 1948 (A.M.).   |
| MA                                       | = | Mersha Alehegne, <i>The Ethiopian Commentary on the Book of Genesis: critical edition and translation</i> , AF 73, Wiesbaden, 2011.   |
| s. d.                                    | = | <i>sine data.</i>   |
| s. l.                                    | = | <i>sine loco.</i>   |
| Tedros, <i>Romani</i>                    | = | Tedros Abraha, <i>La Lettera ai Romani. Testo e Commentari della Versione Etiopica</i> , AF 57, Wiesbaden, 2001.  |
| TLK                                      | = | T. Leiper Kane, <i>Amharic-English Dictionary</i> , Wiesbaden, 1990.  |
| trans(s).                                | = | translator(s).  |
| <i>Yä-Ityoppäya</i>                      | = | Various authors, የኢትዮጵያ ኦርቶዶክስ ተዋሕዶ ቤተ ክርስቲያን አጭር ታሪክ ከልደተ ክርስቶስ እስከ ፳፻ ዓ.ም. (2000) [Yä-Ityoppäya Ortodoks Täwähädo Betä-Krəstiyan accər tarik kä-lədätä Krəstos əskä 2000 A. M. "A short History of the Ethiopian Orthodox Täwähädo Church from the Birth of Christ to 2000 A. M."], s. l. |