

KING COMMITTED LITERATURE IN ETHIOPIA: THE POSITION OF KING ZARA YAQOB IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ETHIOPIAN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

The general purpose of the study is surveying literary development in the period of King Zara Yaqob, and specifically pays focus on the personal efforts and contributions of the King himself in the growth of literature in his reign. The paper again explores the Medieval Age Ethiopian literature which is, due to the period's flourished literature, termed as "the Golden Age" of Ethiopian literature. It was also intended to endorse whether these texts are qualify in literary features. Almost nil researches are conducted on Zara Yaqob and his literary contribution, this fact is taken as inspirational point to do the study. Qualitative research method is applied, for the study is done on a text. The Emperor has collected men of letter and scholars in the court yard and highly encouraged them to have a huge engagement in literary activities. These scholars, like Abba Giorgis of Gassecca, wrote numerous books which are religious but have great literary value and qualities. The King has written more than ten books; most of them have religious thematic preoccupation but also have secular subjects. These are: Matsehafä-Berhan; Matsehafä-Milad; Egziabher-Nagsä; Sebhatä-Fegur; Matsehafä-Sellassie; Matsehafä-Bahrey; Tä'agebo-Mestir; Tomarä-Tesebe'it; Kehedatä-Säytan; Darsanä-Malaekt; Ra'eyä-Ta'amer; Melke'a-Gubae, and Mangadä-Samay. These texts are investigated out in content and literary value. In addition, he has produced hymns which are prepared in poetic form, and the lines are rhymed as rhyme is the most familiar element of poetry; the hymns are constructed in end rhyme. In his hymns, figurative speeches especially simile and metaphor are well applied. The researcher has long realized potential value of the literary productions in the period of Zara Yaqob as source for the study of Ethiopian literature and history. The works are important to study social, economic, historical, religious, and the political history of Ethiopia in addition to their literary values.

KEYWORDS

King Zara Yaqob, Homily, Hymn, 'Golden Age', Ethiopic Literatures

1. INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia, one of the classical countries that have their own alphabet and writing system, is a country reach in its literary history. Using this indigenous alphabet, Ethiopians have developed their own writing traditions and produced many works of literature, which has dated back to hundreds of years. Accordingly, Ethiopia is a country with plenty of classical magnificently enlightened manuscripts and literature, art, architecture, and music as well. Molvaer (1996)² said

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² Unless it is expressed, and of Amharic texts, all the dates presented in this article are in Gregorian calendar.

that “Ethiopia has a centuries-long tradition of written literature. Inscriptions in stone go back to pre-Christian times, after Christianity, books started to be written”³.

Ethiopians had a habit of writing on stones and other hard materials even before the introduction of Christianity in the country. After Christianity flourish, the attention was turned to write on soft materials especially for religious purpose. “In the 3rd and 4th centuries a variety of hand writing materials like stone, metal, clay and wood were used. Introduction of soft writing material was related to the coming of the nine saints to Ethiopia in the 6th c.”⁴. When the writing on soft materials like vellum was introduced; most writings of that period were translations, from Greek, Syria, Arab, and the like Christian nations. Prominent literary figures of the time in translating texts into Ge’ez were the Nine Saints and Abba Salama I. These people have laid the cornerstone for Ethiopian writing by translating and editing religious manuscripts.⁵ Therefore, “a vast body of literary works in Ge’ez grew up from 5th c. A.D onwards”⁶. After some centuries of growth, there was a decline, and few new books were produced until the middle ages. Renewed literary activity from the 14th c. occurred after Ge’ez was no longer in use as a spoken language⁷.

Ethiopian Christian Literature has reached on its climax in the medieval historical period of Ethiopia. The medieval age was important for the significant output of Ge’ez literature, and due to this reason the period was termed as `Golden Age of Ethiopian literature`. The medieval period, that is “the period of the highest development of Ge’ez literature, was between the 14th and 19th c.”⁸. For Adamu and Belaynesh (1970), on the other hand, it was “a period of cultural renaissance followed upon the restoration of the Solomonic dynasty about 1270, and the fourteenth century was the beginning of what has been termed as the “Golden Age” of Ethiopian Literature”⁹.

Most prominent writers of the age were King Zara Yaqob and Abba Giorgis of Gassecca. Therefore the king was among the major literary figures of the period. The literary and artistic achievements of medieval Ethiopia were indeed outstanding¹⁰. Additionally, Taddese (1970) states, “the large collection of hagiographical traditions was those about medieval Ethiopian saints who actually lived between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. These three centuries saw the revival... and led to an intensive literary development”¹¹. Hence, most of the indigenous hagiographies were begun to write in the medieval period by indigenous hagiographers.

³ Molvear, R.K. (1996). *Black Lions*. Leiden: Leiden University Press.

⁴ Sergew Hable Sellassie. (1981). *Bookmaking in Ethiopia*. London: Oxford University Press.

⁵ Adamu and Belaynesh. (1970). The Role of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church in Literature and Art. In Taddesse, and Sergew (Eds.). *The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama of History and Spiritual Life*. (pp.45-49). Addis Ababa: B.S.P.E.;

ጎርጎርዮስ፣ (አባ)። (1974)። የኢትዮጵያ ኦርቶዶክስ ተዋህዶ ቤተክርስቲያን ታሪክ። አዲስ አበባ፡- ትንሳኤ ዘጉባኤ።;

Harden J.M. (1926). *An introduction to Ethiopic Christian Literature*. London: Garland.

⁶ Adamu and Belaynesh. (1970). The Role of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church in Literature and Art. In Taddesse, and Sergew (Eds.). *The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama of History and Spiritual Life*. (pp.45-49). Addis Ababa: B.S.P.E.

⁷ Molvear, R.K. (1996). *Black Lions*. Leiden: Leiden University Press.

⁸ Bender, M.L., Hailu F., and Roger C. (1976). *Two Ethio Semetic Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁹ Adamu and Belaynesh. (1970). The Role of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church in Literature and Art. In Taddesse, and Sergew (Eds.). *The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama of History and Spiritual Life*. (pp.45-49). Addis Ababa: B.S.P.E.

¹⁰ TaddesseTamrat.(1970). *Hagiographies and the Reconstruction of Medieval Ethiopian History*. A. Ababa: H.S.I.

¹¹ TaddesseTamrat.(1970). *Hagiographies and the Reconstruction of Medieval Ethiopian History*. A. Ababa: H.S.I.

King Zara Yaqob, who was very prolific writer of the medieval time, contributes many books. Some of his writings unlike many of his contemporaries raise non-religious issues. Irrespective of spiritual thematic preoccupations, Ge'ez texts also cover a range of secular subjects, such as of astrology, philosophy, medicine, history, law, mathematics, and royal chronicles. Additionally, some other non-Christian works were written; the writings of Zara Yaqob are examples¹². From classical times till the late 19th century, most Ethiopian literatures were composed of Ethiopian Christian literature. These Christian literatures which are belong to the Ethiopian church are *Gädlät* (hagiographies), *Tä'ammərat* (miracle books), *Dərsanat* (homilies), *Mälkä'* (a type of poetry), and others, that are mostly written to honor and respect the saints of the church. Likewise, the Ethiopian form of poetry (*qiné*) and *Zena Mewael* (chronicle of royal kings) was another dimension of earliest literary forms.

Ethiopia has an overwhelming literary profile that dates back 1500 years. The translation and indigenous Ethiopic scriptures and literary productions have been produced for centuries. As far as the fact is this, the literature is not yet studied well. Some Ge'ez texts and hagiographies have been studied by philologists, but when we turn our face to the stream of literature, it is almost not studied. For this reason, the researcher is motivated to study this Ethiopic literature on the literary perspective. King Zara Yaqob is among high-ranking Ethiopian men of pen who put their invincible hands for the development of Ethiopian literature. However, there is again no impactful research done over Zara Yaqob and his part in the lens of literature. Therefore, the present paper, taking the fact as inspirational point, has planned to investigate and put a survey of Ethiopic literature, and most importantly finds out the literary contributions and king-committed endeavor that Zara Yaqob pay for the growth of Ethiopian literature. It attempts to explore the literary values and thematic preoccupations of his books. On the other hand, expatriate scholars who tried to study Ge'ez literature, have doubts on the qualities, literariness, and tradition. For that reason, the whole content of the research is believed to render enough reply against.

The general objective of this study is to explore the contributions of King Zara Yaqob for the development of Ethiopian literature. Specifically, it intends to literarily analyze the works, to reveal literary values of the King, and to make the literary influence of King Zara Yaqob vivid for researchers. The study has much valuable significance. It pronounces the role of the king in the field of literature, and adds value about the deeds of Zara Yaqob. The paper serves as an input for researchers who want to study on the same area, like medieval history, medieval literature, and the history and works of Zara Yaqob. It puts a significant impact on the study of medieval Ethiopia; the socio-political and religious developments of the country during the period.

Primary and secondary data sources are used in this research. Primary sources of data are the first hand texts written by the king, which are intended to be subject of the research. The secondary sources, on the other hand, are written documents that are going to be utilized as a source, particularly materials, which enable to explore his literary role; for review of previous researches and conceptual framework. Descriptive (qualitative) way of data analysis is applied. The researcher carried out textual analysis. In analyzing the data, elements and techniques of modern novel are used as main approaches of analysis. The role of King Zara Yaqob to the development of Ethiopic literature is explored. Source language of the narratives is Ge'ez, and therefore original texts are taken. The researcher, consequently, will employ textual analysis through descriptive research method.

¹² Harden J.M. (1926). *An introduction to Ethiopic Christian Literature*. London: Garland.

2. THE WORKS OF KING ZARA YAQOB

2.1 Prosaic Literatures

2.1.1 Mätshafä Birhan

The *Mätshafä Birhan* is most reputable among the works of the Emperor. The book mostly covers theological affairs, though there are ample of historical, social and political references. *Mätshafä Birhan* which literally means ‘The Book of Light,’ is an exclusive source on political and social life in Ethiopia in the 15thC. It holds a wealth of new historical facts and social phenomena worth knowing. The Emperor’s tendency to observe Saturday as the Lord’s Day is reflected in the book. The *Mätshafä Birhan* is a large sized work written by Atse Zära Yaqob, which is composed to take action in the reorganization of the Ethiopian Church. The author of the book, Zara Yaqob, called his collection of treatises *Mätshafä Birhan* ‘Book of Light’, whose meaning is ‘Book of Christ’, for Christ is ‘Light’, because he guides Christians to the Orthodox faith’, as it is presented in the book and excerpted below. Here under is a description on how the book got this name:

ድርሳን ዘይሰመይ መጽሐፈ ብርሃን ዘይትነበብ በቀዳሚት ሰንበት ሰመይናሁ ለዝንቱ ድርሳን መጽሐፈ ብርሃን ዘይሚህር አምልኮቶ ለእግዚአብሔር ብርሃን... ድርሳን ይሰመይ መጽሐፈ ብርሃን ዘበትርጓሜሁ መጽሐፈ ክርስቶስ ብሂል።

Zara Yaqob made his book of 121 subjects that concern both church and state. The book is divided into 15 parts (*dérsanat*), with the last one for Passion Week subdivided into six for the six passion days: Monday to Saturday. The treatises are lessons as well as lesson-plans for Biblical and Apocryphal readings. Through this process, the Emperor was obviously attempting to bring uniformity of service to all the churches under his territory. The King has feared divisions in the Church, with a propagation of churches having their own liturgy. So does, he stress building a uniform system for the Church to be governed in. The relationship between and the unity of Church and State described abundantly clear in the *Mäshafä Birhan*. In the work, the country is depicted as a theocracy ruled by a king elected by God from the royal family of the Orthodox Christian faith.

Finished writing *Mäshafä Birhan*, Zara Yaqob added a notice at the back side of the book. The purpose of the notice is to give advice to the readers, writers, listeners, translators... to accept as true what is written in the book. It also includes swear words for those who do not accept what is written in the book as true. The notice is written in the form of a poem containing rhyme and stanza.

...ይቀጥቅጥ በቅድሚኸሙ ዲያብሎስሃ አራቄ።
ይፈኑ ለክሙ ሚካኤል ሃኪያሁ እምኑኃ ሰማይ አውዳቄ።
ወለላሳው ይግሮ ከመፀበለ መርቄ።
በእንተ ማርያም ለኢቃቤክሙ እግዚእ ይኩን ጸሐቄ።
በድንግልና ክልኤ ምሥለ ሥጋሃ ዘኮነ ነዳቄ።
ወኪያሆሙ ሰመሰርያን ወመናፍቃን እለትብሉንህነ ምክረ ፈጣሪ አዋቄ።
ሰገለወጣዖተ ወወገርተ እለረሰይክሙ ፈራቄ።
ወእለትረሰዩካዕ በኦሪተ ወወንጌለ ስላቀ አእምሮ መጻሕፍት በኢጥያቄ።
እግዚአብሔር አብ ከዋክብተ ወዝናማተ ኅላቄ።
ወእግዚአብሔር ወልድ ምሥለ አቡሁ ዓራቄ።

ወእግዚአብሔር መንፈስቅዱስ መኃይምናነ ሰዋቄ።
 ዘይትኖለውቅዱሳነከመኢሆነቆቁህብቃቄ።
 ይሬሲከሙ በአእማደ እሳት አጣቄ።
 ወለእለሰኢመጽኡወኢሰምኡእምቃለ ዝንቱ መጽሐፍ በሀኬት ወበኑፋቄ።
 በከመ ይቤሉ ሐዋርያት ኃጥአ መጽደቄ።
 ይትኔለቆለፈሪሃእግዚአብሔር ዓቢየ ኃጥለ እምሰይጣን መድቀቄ።
 ለእመኢሁረውስተመካነትምህርት ከዊኖ ረኃቄ።
 ወዘሰያፈቅር ሰሚዓ መጻህፍት ዕድ ወአንስት ለለአሐዱ አሐዱ በጥያቄ።
 ይእቀቦ እግዚአብሔር በበዓቱ ወበበፀአቱ እምእኩ ይድቃቄ።

The above extract taken from *Mäshafä Birhan* is obviously prepared in the form of poem. It has an end rhyming scheme. Though presented in similar pattern of rhyming, the excerpt is made in poetic form, and shows that the King has poetic skill. አራቄ አውዳቄ፤መርቄ-ዳሐቄ፤በጥያቄ-ድቃቄ indicates the rhyming scheme. Having an end rhyme, the text offers literary value of the work. The main contents of *Metsehafä Birhan* are: worship, the Old and New Testaments, about Good Conduct/Manner, about Holy Virgin Mary, about the Feasts, about the two Sabbaths, about the heretics and idolaters. The *Mäshafä Birhan*, which incorporates many points on theology of the Trinity and the Incarnation, is micro filmed, and preserved in the IES¹³.

2.1.2 Mätsehafä Milad

The *Metsehafä Milad* which literally means ‘Book of Nativity’, explains about the incarnation of Lord Jesus Christ. A major part of his *Mäshafä Milad* is a reaction on the Jews (*Bete Ayhud*) who denied the incarnation of the Word of God in the person of Jesus Christ. The general preoccupation of this book is offering a teaching and response to the Ethiopian Jews (*Bete Ayhud*). On the other hand, it also contains reactions against the heretic teachings of ‘*Deqiqa Estifa*’ (disciples of Estifanos). The *Mätshafä Milad* could be taken as a reformist work which again hints at theological controversies of the time.

Mätshafä Milad, ‘The Book of Nativity’ speaks about the birth of Christ. It was being read every month without interruption, on the 29th date of each month as per Ethiopian calendar. This book was distributed to different churches and monasteries. It tells that every Christian should believe in the Birth of our Lord and leave the idols like most known of the time, *Dask*. *Mäshafä Milad* is micro filmed and preserved in the IES.

2.1.3 Egzi’abher Nägsä

This one is a collection of salutation hymns. This large collection of hymns, *Egzi’abher Nägsä*, is written to honor the Trinity, Saints, and Virgin Mary. The hymns are supposed to be read on the respective commemoration days of the saints as established by the Ethiopian church calendar (*Sénkessar*). There are at least three major collections bearing this title. They have only some features in common; one should not attempt to distinguish them solely by the way they begin or end. The first type of the *Egzi’abher Nägsä* collection is the one attributed to *Abba Giyorgis of Gasécca*. The second type is our focus, the work of *Ase Zära Yaqob*. The authorship of the Emperor appears probable since the hymns are extensive investment issues of the devotion of the Virgin Mary and praise both the Sabbath and Sunday (Christian Sabbath); a lot is said on the

¹³ Institute of Ethiopian Studies (Addis Ababa University)

issues of Trinitarian theology. The third type of the *Egzi'abher Nägsä* collection is of *Arke Sellus*.¹⁴

The *Egzi'abher Nägsä* hymns represent a particular genre of the Ethiopian liturgical literature. The *Egzi'abher Nägsä* hymns usually consist short lines with pattern, most of the time rhyme, not necessarily all rhyming. Hymns are composed of five rhyming metrical lines; some of the lines may consist of a pair of rhyming phrases. They have different introductions but similar contents. NZ and MF must have been competing works; they are well represented in the manuscript collections outside Ethiopia, whereas the NG collection is by far less well known. The *Egzi'abher Nägsä* hymns are sung during the feasts. Since it is a hymn, its poetic value is great. The *Egzi'abher Nägsä* hymn is presented in the form of short poems. It has great literary beauty and aesthetical value.

2.1.4 Mätshafä Bahrey

As it is stated inside, *Matsehafä Baherey* was written at the eighth year of his reign. It is a kind of prayer book, which be prayed for patient with oil. It is micro filmed, and preserved in the IES. It may be literally translated as 'The Book of the Pearl', or equivalently 'The Book of the Essence'. As described before, it is a ritual for the anointing of the sick, compiled by Zara Yaqob. According to its author, *Mätshafä Baherey* "has been ordained by our holy fathers the Apostles, (and) given to us, Christians, for (our) healing from bodily and spiritual sickness and for the remission of (our) sin, with the confession of sins to priests". It is also called *Sälotä Bahréy*, 'Prayer of the Pearl or Essence', and *Sälotä Zäyt*, 'Prayer of the Oil'.

The author of the books gives an explanation about the why of the title. He "called this book Bahrey because it is the word of the divinity and the salvation of the soul and body takes place through it". The Emperor most probably composed it to reinforce his all-out campaign to root out the practice of seeking help from fortune-tellers and diviners (Magicians) rather than priests. This and the Emperor's other works attacking magical practices, lends credence to the suspected reason for its composition. The rarity of its surviving copies, compared to those of other service books, indicates, however, that the Emperor's intention of eradicating pagan practices through it was not successful. It is definitely known that the King disliked and took strict measurement over magic use and magicians, and this book well propagates his stand against.

2.1.5 Ra'eya Ta'ammer

Another theological book authored by Zara Yaqob is the *Ra'eya Ta'ammer*. It is composed of four tracts designed to be read before the prescribed reading from the miracles of Mary, just as the Gospel of John addresses the divinity of Jesus. We found four tracts in the *Ra'eya Ta'ammer*. The subject matter of the first tract is about the dual virginity of Mary. She is described as virgin in mind and virgin in body. The second tract is about almsgiving. Zara Yaqob, as it is well known, has written on almsgiving on several occasions in several places. In the third tract, he attempts to demonstrate how the Eighty One canonical scriptures agree among each other. The final tract holds a treatise on Christian baptism. The author of these four tracts is believed to be Zara Yaqob, but some argue that his scholars may compile them under his order.

¹⁴Getatchew Haile (1983)

2.1.6 MätshafäTomar

Mätshafä Tomar is about the dogmatic teachings of the church; particularly, it focuses on the observance of Sabbath, which was a big issue in the time. In the *Tomarä Tesebe'et* he encourages Christians to use proper names found in the Bible to name their children. *Tomara (Matsahafä) Tesbiet*, which word for word means 'The Book of the Incarnation', is written based on the teachings of the Apostles about idolaters and magicians. It also tells about sorcerers and magicians rather than the Mystery of incarnation as its name indicates. *TomaraTesbet*, which is written by Emperor Zara Yaqob, is a treatise on the theology of the Trinity, about magicians and honors of the Apostles.

2.1.7 Sebhatä Fequr

This book is one of the homilies written by Zara Yaqob himself. This is a prayer composed by King Zara Yaqob that Christians may pray when in pain. Literally it means "The praise of Beloved". It is the rogation, a communal prayer for the days of the week, i.e. each day has given a prayer deserved to them. The prayer is chanted in church in the night times as a liturgical prayer of the church; a horology of the Night Hours. The *Sebhatä Fequr* is hence a communal prayer for the time of tribulation.

Up next presents the prayers classified as per the days of the week; Monday prayer- *Ba'enta Sellseka* (a liturgical prayer devoted to our Lord Jesus Christ); Tuesday: *Astamehro laEgziabher* (a liturgical prayer offered to God); Wednesday: *Mehella barek-ba-edeka* (a liturgical hymn to our Lord Jesus Christ with refrain); Thursday: Litanical hymn to God called, *Maheley la Egziabher*; Friday: *Mehellana-* (a rhyming liturgical praise to our Lord Jesus Christ); Saturday: *Tamah ezanna yom-* (a rhyming liturgical hymn to God).; Sunday: for hymns are presented here for honoring the Lord and Saints. The text of the Prayer of *SebhataFequr* is occasionally supplied with musical notation. It is a hymn, has musical notations; its poetic value it too significant. On the other hand, *Betse't Anti*, literally to mean 'Blessed you are' is a Marian hymn forming part of the *Sébhatä Féqur*. It is made up of around 70 stanzas, composed using Biblical quotations, and sayings. The book is used, in the Ethiopian Church, in the times of calamity; sometimes used throughout the liturgical calendar.

2.1.8 Metsehafä Sellassie (kehedete seytan?)

This work is both a homily and prayer book arranged for the days of the week; it is a combination of *kehedetä Seytan*. It seems also that a practice of known or open names was developed in his court to counter the practice of secret names. It is prepared as reaction against heretic teachings of Saballianism. *MetsehafäSellassie* holds lessons against a renunciation of magical and superstition practices. In short, this book seems to have started as a prayer book of Zara Yaqob to fight off the spell which he believed has been cast on him by evil men. The book contains miracles of each days of the week, Monday up to Saturday.

3. THE TWO HOMILIES

Even though there written many homilies during the reign of Zara Yaqob, most of them are unidentified and unknown. These two homilies of king Zara Yaqob could actually be called treatises dealing with the theology of the Trinity, composed to refute “heresies”. The first homily is written in honor of John the evangelist, and the second one is to be read on the first Sunday of each of the twelve months and on the Sunday of *Pagumen* in honor of Sabbath of Saturday. These two homilies, which are found in *Mitak Amanuel* (Shewa), are deal with different issues and are entirely unrelated. The first, which is written in honor of John the Evangelist, seem to be prepared on the reaction of heresies. It accounts areas of theological controversy between King Zara Yaqob’s side (the Church) and some small minorities, probably Jewish minority who couldn’t come to agreement. It presents notes about the Trinity. The second homily is, written, on the other side, in honor of Sabbath. The homily is dedicated to Saturday too, observing it as holy day.

4. HYMNS

The Emperor has written many hymns. Some of them are explained above; like that of *SebhataFequr* and *EgziabherNagsa*. The following hymn is taken from Getatchew Haile’s article that he published on *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*. The researcher told that he has taken the source from the *Nägs (Nägeh)* hymns that Zara Yaqob composed for the commemoration of, his father Emperor Dawit. Here bellow is presented all the seven hymns of the king.

- (1) ሰላም፡እብል፡ለዳዊት፡ሐዲስ፤¹⁵
 ጽጉዮ፡ሥን፡ወልብስ፡፡
 መንበረ ጥበብ ውኃቱ ኢትሮጎስ መንፈስ፡፡
 መንስኤ ረሲዓን ጥቅመ ኢድማስ፤
 በከመ ይቤ ነቢይ ሰሎሞን ንጉሥ፡፡
- (2) ሰላም፡እብል፡ለዳዊት፡መሲሕ፡፡
ከመ፡ጽጌ፡ሮማን፡ቀይሕ፡፡
 በደመ መከሎት ልብሱ ነዙጎ፡፡
ይመስል አዕይንቲሁ ኮከበ ጽባህ፡፡
ከመ አንበሳ በሐቅል ጣህሩ መፍርህ፡፡
- (3) ሰላም ለአዕይንቲሁ ብርሃነ ቃል ምሉአ፡፡
 ኮከበ ጽባህ ይመስል፡እምደመና፡መጸው ዘወጽአ፡፡
 በመዋዕሊሁ፡መስቀለ፡በግዕመጽአ፡፡
 ዳዊትሞአ፡እመራደ፡ፀሩ፡ኢብአ፤
 ጎሠሥከዎ፡አንሰ፡ፀሐይ፡ተሐጥአ፡፡
- (4) መዋግደ፡ዕልዋን፡ይሰብር፤
 ወአርእስቲሆሙ፡ይመትር፡፡
 ዳዊት ንጉሥ ጽጌ ሃይማኖቱ ጥቀ መንክር፡፡
 መልአ፡ኮላሄ፡በሊባ፡ወባሕር፡፡
 ጎይለ፡ሃይማኖቱ፡ይኩነ፡ወልታ፡ሥሙር፡፡
- (5) ሶበ ክህደ ወዓሊሁ፡፡
 ለወልደ ማርያም ፈጣሪሁ፤
 ዳዊት፡በከዮ፡ለእግዚአብሔር፡መሲሁ፡፡
 አርአዮቶ ማርያም እንዘ ይነብር ምንባረ፡፡
 እስመ ለዘሐረጉብርርእሶምረቱ፡፡
- (6) በቀለመወርቅ ሶበ ኢሥጋለ ማርያምሃ ድንግለ፡፡
 ኬንዶሁ ረስአ ወዳሃቦ አዝሐለ፡፡

¹⁵ Getatchew Haile. (1983). *Documents on the history of Atse Dawit (1382-1413)*.Journal of Ethiopian Studies. Vol. XVI. (Editor Shiferaw Bekele) IES.AAU. Addis Ababa. The Hymn is adopted from this article of Getatchew Haile.

ወአመጸለየ አርአዮም ብአለ።
ዳዊትዘኮነበወይነፍቅራ ስኩረ።
እስመለርአሱሰብእኢነሥ አኩብረ።
ዘኅረዮ ብፁዕ ወልዑል ዘሰምረ።
(7) በእንተ ሥጋነ ወደምከ ለዳዊት መሐሮ፤
እግዚአ ኣእምሮ።
ኢትዝክር፡ሎቱአበሳዘገብሮ።
በእንተ ዝንቱ ቁርባን ኅበማርያም አንብሮ።
ወበኪዳነ ተማኅፀነ በልብሳት ዕቁሮ።

Translation:¹⁶

- 1) *I say, "Hail," to the new Dawit of blossoming beauty and garment
He is a seat of wisdom, a throne of the spirit.
He is a winnowing fork of the wicked. A rampart of adamant,
As the Prophet, King Solomon, said.*
- 2) *"Hail," I say to Dawit, the anointed,
Who is as red as the pomegranates flower.
His garment is drenched with the blood of the godhead.
His eyes resemble the morning star;
And his roar is as frightening as a lion in the field.*
- 3) *Hail to his eyes filled with the light of the word.
He resembles the morning star that has come out of the clouds of autumn.
During his days the cross of the Lamb came (to Ethiopia)
Dawit was victorious, (but) he never came back from the campaign against his enemy;
I personally looked for him; the sun was missing.*
- 4) *He breaks the waves of the 'elewan (= "heretics", "rebels", apparently, "rebellious
Moslems")
and cuts off their heads.
King Dawit, the flower of his faith is exceedingly wonderful.
It has filled every (place), south and north.
May the power of his faith be a proven shield for us.*
- 5) *When his retained denied
The Son of Mary, his creator,
Dawit wept, (he) the anointed of God [or "to the Messiah of God"]
Mary showed him, while he was seated on the throne
That the head of the servant who had defected was cut off.*
- 6) *When he had (the image of) the virgin Mary adorned with gilt,
the artist thoughtlessly adulterated its gold.
When he prayed, however, (God) revealed to him the material.
Dawit was intoxicated with the wine of her love;
he did not take for himself glory (from) men.
Blessed is he whom (God) has chosen and with whom the Most High is pleased.*
- 7) *For the sake of your body and blood, be merciful to Dawit,
O Lord of knowledge
Remember not (against) him the transgressions that he committed.*

¹⁶ The translation is directly adopted from Getatchew Haile. Getatchew Haile. (1983). *Documents on the history of Atse Dawit (1382-1413)*. Journal of Ethiopian Studies. Vol. XVI. (Editor Shiferaw Bekele) IES.AAU. Addis Ababa.

*For the sake of his oblation, place him where Mary is.
We take refuge with her covenant that she may cover him with her garment.*

Since it is written to commemorate the death of his father Emperor Dawit I, the hymns are taken as Elegy poem of lament. The hymns are prepared in poetic shape. All the lines in each stanza, except stanza five and six are rhymed. They have stanzas with end rhyme. Rhyme is the most familiar element of poetry. It is defined as the matching of final vowel or consonant sounds in two or more words. Based on the positional occurrence of rhyme we have two types: end rhyme and internal rhyme. In internal rhyme the corresponding sounds occur within lines whereas end rhyme occurs when the corresponding sounds lay at the end of lines. Therefore, these hymns are constructed in end rhyme.

- Stanza (1) ሐዲስ--ወልብስ--መንፈስ--አድማስ--ንጉሥ፤
- Stanza (2) ይሰብር--ይመትር--መንክር--ወባሕር--ሥመር፤
- Stanza (3) ምሉእ--ዘወጽእ--መጽእ--ኢብእ--ተሐጥእ፤
- Stanza (4) መሲሕ--ቀይሕ--ነዙጎ--ነዙጎ--ጸባህ--መፍርህ፤
- Stanza (5) ወዳሊሁ--ፈጣሪሁ--መሲሁ--ምንባረ--ምረቁ፤
- Stanza (6) ድንግለ--አዝሐለ--ምብአለ--ስኩረ--ከብረ--ዘሰምረ፤
- Stanza (7) መሐሮ--አእምሮ--አንብሮ--ትዕቁሮ--ትዕቁሮ፤

Of the seven, five stanzas are containing five lines each, but stanza three and six have six lines. The hymns are presented in pentameter, which has five feet measure, and hexameter, which has six feet measure. Stanza (4) Stanza (6) hexameter others are pentameter.

5. FIGURATIVE LANGUAGES

In the above hymn, figurative speeches especially simile and metaphor are well applied. The author compares his father with inanimate things and powerful animals, like flower and lion. Metaphor and simile are especially important for poetry, particularly to add aesthetic value. Simile is the likening of one thing to another usually using the word “like” and “as”. Let’s examine these figurative speeches having excerpt here below.

ከመ፡ጸ፡ጌ፡ሮማን፡ቀይሕ፡
Who is as red as the pomegranates flower.
ይመስልአዕይንቲሁኮከበጽባህ፡
His eyes resemble(like) the morning star;
ከመአንበሳበሐቆልጣህሩመፍርህ፡
And his roar is as frightening as a lion in the field.
ኮከበጽባህይመስል፡አምደመፍ፡መጸውዘወጽኦ፡፡
He resembles the morning star that has come out of the clouds of autumn.

In Stanza 2, line 2, 4& 5, we find comparative words, ከመ (as), and ይመስል (resemble/like), to comparatively present the addressee with that of flower and lion. In stanza 3, line 2, again is another comparative presentation which compares the addressee as he resembles the morning star that has come out of the clouds of autumn. Other hymns like *Sébbatä féqur*, *Egziabher Nagsa*, *Mälkéa Félsäta*¹⁷ and others are hymn books which are ascribed to Ase Zära Yaqob. Most books of

¹⁷ Melke’a Felsata, as Getatchew Haile Said, is a hymn which is ascribed to Aste Zara Yaqob.

Zara Yaqob are found in Ankobar (Medhanealem and Mikael), Asagert (Abbo Gadam)- near Dabra Berhan, Angolala (Mikael, Dabra Bagge); Dannaba (Aygabber Mikael), and other monasteries and churches. *Mätshafä Berhan, Mätshafä Milad, Mängädä Semay, and Mälke'a Guba'e* has been published by expatriates abroad.¹⁸

6. CONCLUSION

Although Ge'ez literature started to be studied around the end of 17th c.¹⁹, the amount of researches conducted during the past three centuries was not as such considerable. Ge'ez literature cannot find quantitatively enough and qualitatively sustainable studies. Ge'ez literature could have considerable wealth both in the context of Ethiopian and world literature²⁰. Ethiopia, thanks to its Church, has possessed wealthy store of literatures with great degrees of authenticity dating back to thousands of years. The study of different genres of Ge'ez literature might exhibit various literary devices employed in the texts that help for their understanding and looking further to see the influence of this literature over the Amharic one. There are many indigenous and non-indigenous genres of Ge'ez literature that need detail studies in their own right. This area of study is almost untouched and therefore waiting for interested and knowledgeable researchers about Ge'ez language and literature.

The study pay effortful attempt to see the growth of literature during the period of King Zara Yaqob (1434-1468), and discloses the personal endeavor of the king in literature. During the medieval period in general, particularly in time of King Zara Yaqob, Ge'ez literature has highly flourished and reached on highest point of development. The Emperor himself was writer of many literatures and had constructive impact on the development of Ethiopian literature. He was reputedly renowned author having lots of contribution to the country's literature. The magnificent rise of literature in his days is directly or indirectly connected with the personality of the King who has produced many hymns and books of various thematic preoccupations. Most of the works of the King deal with ecclesiastical matters provoke reforms in the Church, and as defense of his religious beliefs aiming to react back heretic teachings and religious controversies. The time Zara Yaqob marked a dramatic Christian expansion and turning point in religious nationalism. The king, who designed many religious policies, travelled to Northern Ethiopia to attend serious religious and literary training. Had great role in the expansion of Christianity; the king took strong measurement to resolve religious controversies, heretic problems, and pagan practices. The King was hugely noted in his strong stand of Mariology.

Many books were composed and translated in this period, which are so helpful to study literature, linguistics, history, culture, politics, medicine, astrology and other conditions of the time. The works were produced by monastic elites of the Ethiopian Church under the order of Emperor Zara Yaqob and his personal writings. The writings of Zara Yaqob are praiseworthy for their attempt to impose new cultural, religious and social directions. The Emperor's role is not only delimited in the Church but also a base of Ethiopian educational tradition. Emperor Zara Yaqob contributes much for the growth of Ethiopic literature and their influence is vital for today's literary arena. The compositions of Zara Yaqob, yet undiscovered, have strong notion in the study and progress

¹⁸ ሊቀ ጠቡብት አክሊለ ብርሃን ወልደ ቂርቆስ መንገደ ሰማይ በሮም አገር መታተሙን ገልጹዋል። አክሊለ ብርሃን ወ/ቂርቆስ (ሊቀ ጠቡብት)። (1945)። መርሀ ልቡና። አዲስ አበባ። መርሀ ጥበብ

¹⁹ እምሳሌ አክሊለ። (1976)። *አጭር የኢትዮጵያ ሥነጽሑፍ ታሪክ*። አ.አ.ዩ- ያልታተመ።

²⁰ Gezahegn Getachew. (2000). *The malke: Its major features and source*. Unpublished M.A. thesis, A.A.U

of Ethiopia literature. The King also had enormous impact for books to be translated into Ethiopic from Arabic and various foreign languages. Disagreements in the interpretation of scriptures and religious controversies were the main reasons for the growth of Ethiopian Christian literature during the period of Emperor Zara Yaqob since the King himself and his elites were keen to respond back their beliefs in written form. This is primary rational for the King's crucial achievement in the literary circumstance of the 15th century.