

Review

Ge'ez Literature and Medieval Ethiopian Hagiographies in the course of Ethiopian Literature

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Accepted 7 August 2019

The main objective of this paper is to survey out Ge'ez literature specifically studying Ethiopian hagiographies to see what influence they put to modern Ethiopian literature. Ethiopian literature has aged about two millennia. Ge'ez literature, started by Saint Yared before 1500 years ago, is the prominent feature of Ethiopian literature. Before the introduction and expansion of Christianity, the habit of writing on stones and other hard materials was introduced in Ethiopia. After the maturity of Christianity, the attention was turned to write on soft materials like parchment. St. Yared, The Nine Saints and St. Salama were major literary figures of the Ancient Period. The literature reached at its highest point of development during the medieval historical period. A number of great figures with their magnificently enlightened works were raised in the period. The era is termed as the "Golden Age" of Ethiopian literature for the quality and quantity of works and writers. Indigenous works, in addition to translation, was peculiar feature of the period. Among many others, hagiography which records saintly lives, acts and the honor shown to saints is major literary genre. Having inspirational sense controller stories, hagiographies are well composed and arranged in a range of literariness. In the early stages of modern Ethiopian literature, Ethiopian didactic prose fictions were observed highly influenced by the tradition of hagiographic writing. Ethiopian hagiographies can exert substantial impact on the country's literary thinking. Although hagiography is a compilation of facts to believers, it is rich in literary features since it qualifies aspects of novel and literary techniques.

Key Words: Hagiography, Ge'ez literature, literariness, Medieval Ethiopian literature, Golden Age of Ethiopian literature

Cite This Article As: Dawit G (2019). Ge'ez Literature and Medieval Ethiopian Hagiographies in the course of Ethiopian Literature. Inter. J. Eng. Lit. Cult. 7(5): 121-129

INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia is a country of ancient civilization and thousands of years of literary history with its own alphabet, numerals, calendar, writings and so on. Stone inscriptions, book of the Old Testament, the earliest New Testament, hagiographies, royal chronicles and various religious manuscripts are found written in Ethiopic language. The country is one of the classical countries those that have their own alphabet and writing system.

Using this indigenous alphabet, Ethiopians have developed their own writing tradition 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 (1996:45) said 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*". The church of Ethiopia, in its various

monasteries and churches, is the storehouse of a huge anthology of important old manuscripts, various ancient documents and knowledge.

Before the arrival and flourishing of Christianity, Ethiopians had a habit of writing on stones and other hard materials. After the introduction of Christianity the attention was turned to write on soft materials especially for religious purpose. *"In the 3rd and 4th century 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 century"* (Sergew, 1981). When the writing on soft materials like vellum was introduced, most writings of that period were translations, from Greek, Syria, Arab, and like. In this time the prominent literary figures in translating texts into Ge'ez were the Nine Saints, a group of learned monks who came from Christian countries outside Ethiopia, Abba Salama I and Abba Salama II. These people have laid the cornerstone for Ethiopian Christian manuscripts by translating and editing religious Scriptures (Gorgorios, 1974 E.C), (Harden, 1926:124), and (Adamu and Belaynesh, 1970). Therefore, *"a vast body of literary works is Ge'ez grew up from 5th century A.D onwards"* (Adamu and Belaynesh, 1970:98). 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 century occurred after Ge'ez was no longer in use as a spoken language Molvaer (1996:94).

Christian literature has reached its climax in the medieval historical period of Ethiopia. The period was important for the significant output of Ge'ez literature. The Medieval period was termed as 'Golden Age of Ethiopian literature'. The period was *"the period of the highest development of Ge'ez literature was between the 14th and 19th century"* (Bender, 1976:213). 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 14th century was the beginning of what has been termed the 'Golden Age' of Ethiopian Literature"*. Prolific writers such as King Zara Yaqob and Abba Giorgis of Gasecca were major literary figures of the period and were the products of monastic schools of the 15th century. The literary and artistic achievements of medieval Ethiopia were indeed outstanding (Taddese, 1970).

The church of Ethiopia, in its churches and monasteries is the storehouse of Ethiopic literature, and contributes a lot to the development of the national literary tradition and art. Ethiopian men of letters, in almost all cases, also were men of the Church, and the vast collections of manuscripts are still preserved in the Ethiopian monasteries and churches (Bender, 1976, Adamu and Belaynesh, 1970). From classical times till the late 19th century, most of Ethiopian literatures were composed of Christian literature. These literatures which are belonged

to the Ethiopian church are *Gädlat* (hagiographies), *Tä'ammërat* (miracle books), *Dërsanat* (homilies), *Mälkə'* (a type of poetry), *Qine* (an Ethiopian form oral poetic performance) and others, that are mostly produces to honor and respect the saints of the church. The writers of such books were scholars of the Ethiopian church. Likewise, *Zena Mewael* (chronicle) of royal kings was another dimension of the earliest writing tradition. When we take the *Gädl*, *Dërsan*, and *Tä'ammër* spiritual books of the Ethiopian church, we can notice that they are written in the form of a fiction whose aim is to enhance believer's devotion towards the Christian world.

The present article attempts to uncover some facts and conceptual framework about Ge'ez literature and hagiography. Discounting literary recordings on inscriptions, Ge'ez literature counted around 1500 years. Hagiography, which celebrates the lives and acts of saints, is prominent genre of Ge'ez literature among many other genres. Hagiographies were with high quantity started to be written (together with translation) in the Medieval historical period of Ethiopia. Many indigenous and expatriate (Ethiopian by choice/acclulturated) church scholars play huge role in the literary production.

GE'EZ LITERATURE

Ethiopian written literature up to mid-19th c was predominantly Ge'ez Christian literature. Based on the question of originality this literature can be classified in to three categories. The first are translations from other languages, Second, neither translation nor original i.e. adaptations, and third, entirely indigenous.

In the 3rd and 4th century a variety of hand writing materials like stone, metal, clay and wood were used (Sergew 1981). According to Bender (1976), Ge'ez has a number of ancient inscriptions written on stone by Aksum kings in the 4th century A.D, and manuscripts that are part of ancient and medieval literature. Introduction of soft writing material were related to the coming of the nine saints to Ethiopia in the second half of the 6th century. It is believed that in order to translate the holy Bible into Ethiopic, the saints required a reliable and abundant writing material, and they started manufacturing of parchment/vellum (Sergew 1981). During that time manuscripts are written which are *"the oldest Ethiopian manuscripts ever found are the Gospels I, II and III (Gospel of Gärima) from Enda Abba Gärima monastery"* (Uhlig and Bausi, 2007).

The language of the literary works, *"till it was replaced by Amharic during the second half of the 19th c. being the main medium for writing and documentation, was classical Ge'ez, and a vast body of literary works have been accumulated in it starting from the 5th/4th c. A.D onwards"* (Appleyard 1998). Ge'ez is still the language of

the liturgy, long after it ceased to be a vernacular language. It was only during the second half of the 19th century that was replaced as the main medium for writing and documentation outside the church (Appleyard 1998). For Getachew (2005), When in the first half of the fourth century Christianity reached¹ the country, the latter was ready to receive its teaching in writing which marked the beginning and subsequent fortunes of Ge'ez literature. As to him again this situation is one of the most peculiar features of Ethiopian civilization.

Translation of the Holy Scriptures is among the major literary achievement of Ge'ez literature. For Adamu and Belaynesh (1970), this great undertaking, in the earliest period of Geez literature, was the work of a group of learned Syrian monks known as the Nine Saints who came to Ethiopia in the 5th century. The reign of the Emperor Zara Yaqob (1434-1468) was notable for the development of literary activity. Kings Zara Yaqob and Na'od were particularly noted for their considerable scholarship, and they were the authors of a number of important original compositions in the Ethiopic language. Many translations from Arabic, and numerous original Ge'ez works dated from that period (Taddese Tamerat, 1970).

In Geez language, many classical works were recorded even writings that are lost from the rest of the world, the complete texts of book of Enoch, Jubilees, *Ezra Sutu'el* and ascension of Isaiah are found only in Ge'ez manuscripts of the Ethiopian Church (Gezahegn, 2000). Geez literature also attempts to incorporate secular writings:

"In Ge'ez, quite a good number of indigenous original manuscripts have been written. These include many historical, theological, philosophical and political works. In addition to this, some other non-Christian works were written; the writings of Zara Yaqob are examples" (Harden 1926:19). Most Ge'ez literature is religious but some texts also cover a range of secular subjects among which are astrology, philosophy, medicine, history, law, mathematics, and royal chronicles (Bender, 1976:30).

Ge'ez Literature in the Medieval Ethiopia

Broadly, Ethiopian Medieval Period extends from late 13th to early 19th century. In this period of time Ethiopic literature was promoted highly. It was a period which

¹ Christianity arrived in Ethiopia not in the 4th c but in the 1st c (34 A.D). In the 4th c, in the reign of Ezana, it became state religion.

Ge'ez literature reaches its climax ever in the history of Ethiopian literature. The following excerpt concerning Ethiopian Medieval literature is taken from Getachew Haile's article, 'Ge'ez Literature' published in 'Encyclopedia Aethiopia' (2005:235).

The clergy were ready to import the Arabic Christian literature of the Copts and to translate it into Ethiopia. They also began to compose original works in the same language. The chronicle of Atse Amda Seyon I must have been written in this period. The years 1340-1500 mark the evident interest of local (Ethiopian) scholars in writing on topics that the imported literature did not deal with satisfactorily. He described the years from 1500 to 1632 as the period of national crisis. Despite Gragn's devastating war and the destructive migration of the Oromo in progress then, the doctors of the church were active in translating works from the Christian Arabic of the Coptic Church. The part of period from 1632 to 1770 is marked by the continuation of the tradition of chronicling the emperors' deeds and by an increase in the number of Mälke' texts. During the last period of Geez literature, the Gondar allergy developed a new collection of hymns for the saints, the Ziq. The Ziq has its own musical notation. Although the service with Qene hymns had become tradition centuries earlier, it certainly reached its peak during the last period of Ge'ez literature.

Hagiographies are highly pronounced in the medieval Ethiopia, "especially after the 13th century such kind of hagiographic writings had been expanded" (Bausi, 2007:89). The thriving of hagiographic works are the known features in medieval Ethiopia. Hagiographies which are writings that narrate and celebrate the lives of men and women saints encompass one of the major literary genres in Ethiopic literature of the Middle Ages. Hundreds of hagiographical texts both local and translated ones survive from this long period, a vast body of potential source material for the history and culture of the Medieval Ethiopian Orthodox church in particular and the country's as a whole. The period's literature is chiefly "rich in hagiographies", and hagiographical traditions and royal chronicles were flourished in this Medieval Ages" (Adamu and Belaynesh, 1970:98).

"The Golden Age"

The period when the great author and king Zara Yaqob, the renowned writer Abba Giorgis of Gasecca, and many others live is commonly termed as the 'golden age' of Ethiopian literature. Accounts of the Acts (*gädl*) of

Ethiopian Saints also commenced to flourish from the 14th century, and continued until the 15th and 16th century. The period is also distinguished by a large body of hagiographical writings and a long tradition of secular history writing in the form of numerous royal chronicles, which are together such a valuable source of mediaeval history.

Amsalu Aklilu (1976 E.C), in his unpublished work states, in the 14th century, books started to be written—mostly religious in translation. The texts were translated by the initiation of the monk Abune Selama. As to other indications, numbers of indigenous works were produced, in addition to the translated and adapted ones. Bausi (2007:88), for that matter says, “Literary productions of this period are not translations but in much amount indigenous works written by Ethiopians much amount indigenous works written by Ethiopians”.

The ‘golden age’ and classical period of Ethiopic literature extends from the beginning of the 14th century to the 16th and 17th centuries. From the end of the 13th century a new expansion is found in literature.

Since it was a period of translation of several religious books into geez, and several gadlat and dersanat were written, the medieval time was referred as ‘Golden period of geez literature’. Among the gadlat written during the period were, Gadla Gabra Manfes Kedus, Takla Haymanot, Aragawi, Penteleon, Philipos, Anorewos and kings of zagwe including Maskal kebra. Among the prominent writers, Zara Yaqob from kings and Abba Giorgis of Gasicha from monks were notable (Mengistu and Asaminew, 2000:132).

Ullendorf (1973) describes the 14th C as an epoch of literary renaissance because religious literature began to revive with the revival of what is known as the Solomonic line. Harden (1926) refers to the 15th century as the “Golden Age” of Ge’ez literature. Ullendorf joins him by describing the period as “the culminating point in the development of Ge’ez literary activity” (1973:69). These statements were not substantiated with literary analysis of the texts.

The great 13th c Ethiopian saint Takla Haymanot’s gadl was written in this same period i.e. Zara Yaqob (15th C). The writing of the gadl was initiated by monks of Dabra Libanos who contributed a lot for the development of Ethiopian Literature Generally. The era of Zara Ya’eqob is, more than ever, is an age in which Ethiopian Literature was flourished and highly expanded. Literature was flourished and highly expanded in this specific period of the medieval Ethiopia (Bausi, 2007:93).

Prominent Figures and Works

In the given period great writers like Abba Giyorgis of Gasecca and Atse Zara Yaqob (1434-1468) were appeared being very high-flying, with their profound literary works, other writers and translators were also there. Abba Bahrey, Enbaqom, Arka Sellus, Abuna Salama ‘the translator’, and some other were distinguished literary scholar in the medieval time Ethiopian literature. For Getachew (2005:98), in the years 1340-1500, three authors are worth remembering.

The first is Retua Haymanot of an anonymous scholar who has believed to be flourished in the late 14th century (ca 1375). A collection of feasts is ascribed to him and bears his name. The second author is Abba Giyorgis of Gasæcca (d. 1476), to whom a no of important works are ascribed, including among others, *Arganona Maryam, Egzi’abher Nagsa, Mashfa’ Sa’atat, Hoheta berhan* and *Matshafa Mastir*. The third author of this period was *Atse Zara Yaqob* (r. 1434-68), who was not only the head of state, but also was the de facto head of the church and its principal theologian works coming from his time suggest that he had a scriptorium in his palace where books were composed, translated, and copied in large numbers and distributed to the important monasteries. Zara Ya’eqob notably had the collection of the miracles of the Virgin Mary, *Ta’ammara Maryam*, expanded by adding others composed locally. He had probably his scholars at the royal campus produced the following highly interesting works:

Mashafa Barhan, Mashafa Milad, Egziabher nagsa, Sebhata Fequr, Matshaqa Sellase, the Mashafe Behrey, Ta’aqabo Mastir, Tomara Tesbe’et, Kehdota Saytan and Darsana malaahit.

Taddese Tamerat (1970:231) states the following inspirational explanation about the above ‘*liqawents*’ (Scholars, writers) and scholarly kings.

Zar’a Ya’eqob and Na’od were particularly noted for their considerable scholarship, and they were the authors of a number of important original compositions in the Ethiopic language. Prolific writers such as King Zar’a Ya’eqob and Abba Giorgis of Gascha were products of the great monastic schools of the fifteenth century. The literary and artistic achievements of mediaeval Ethiopia were indeed outstanding. Many translations from Arabic, and numerous original Ge’ez works date from that period.

Adamu and Belaynesh (1970), give support to the idea that the reign of the Emperor Zar’a Ya’eqob (1434-1468) was notable for the development of literary activity. The

king himself was a zealous reformer and wrote several important works. The church had then Abuna Salama 'the translator' (1348-88) who translated several books like, the *Gebra Həmammat*, *testaments of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*, ascribed to Athanasius, *several lives of Saints (Gadl)*, *a homily by Jacob of Serug* and another by *Cyril of Jerusalem, Fileksyos, Laha Maryam and Mashafa Genzat*.

During the period 1500 to 1632, an age of crisis as to Getachew, while the Christian Empire was invaded by Gragn, three scholars *Enbaqom, Arka Sellus* and *Bahrey* made names in the field of Ge'ez literature. A number of books were indigenously written and translated during this period, by the above named scholars and others. In addition to the books he helped to be translated into Ge'ez, such as the other two monastic books, the *Mar Yishaq*, and the *Arägawi Mänfasawi*, Enbaqom wrote a book entitled *Anqasä Amin*.

The *Māwasat* and the *Me'eraf* hymns are contributions of this Arka Sellus must have flourished during this period. This veracious poet is remembered in the church as the author of the five-line hymns to the saints found in the Sankassar. His work, titled by his abbreviated name, 'Arke', has become a model of hymn composition.

Another important author was Abba Bahrey. His works show that he was a liq, an erudite, with a vast knowledge of the literature and a writer of great talent the *Māzmurä Krestos*, the *Mälke'a Gabriel* and the *Saälamä Qeddusan*, are the works of this monk. Abba Bahrey is well known and highly acclaimed among modern scholars as the author of the Chronicle *Zenahu lä Galla*. The book is about the social structure of the Oromo and the manner of their migration. The allusions to many sources found in the chronicles of Gälawdewos (r.1540-59), Minas (r. 1559-63) and Särsä Dengel (r.1563-971), perhaps made in part by Bahrey, and of Susanyos (r. 1607-32), made by *Takla Səllase* and *Məhərka Dəngəl*, reveal the high level of the Literary life of the country at that time.

Haymanotä Abäw, the *Talmid* and the *Māshafä Hawi* were all translated during this period, to which the translator from Arabic of the *Māsehafä Fālasfa Tābiban* most probably also belongs. Enbaqom and a certain Salik of Dabra Libanos must have had a hand in the translation of these works. Zara Yaqob (the philosopher) contributes *Hatata Zara Yaqob* which is accepted by modern scholars with skepticism, and is, thus, by any criteria part of Ge'ez literature. A series of important literary works was inspired at this period like *Confessions of the Emperor Claudius (1540-59)*, *Sawana Nafs*, *Fekkarə Malakot*, and *Haymanote Abaw. Fetha Negest* is among the prominent literary products of the time (Adamu Belaynesh 1970:94).

Periodizing Ge'ez Literature

Taddesse (1972:235), divides Geez literature into two main periods: the first, called the 'Aksumite period', from the end of the 5th c. to the end of the 7th c.; the second, from the Solomonic Dynasty, from the end of the 13th c. until the 18th c.; which incorporates two sections, from King Amda Seyon until the beginning of 15th c, and from Zara Yacob (1434-68) to the 19th c.

Almost similar with Taddesse, A known specialist in Ge'ez literature, Getachew (2005), classifies this literature according to the periods associated with the ruling dynasties. It is presented depending on chronological sequence, so, the categories are:

The Aksumite Age (Greek period): It extended from 330-900, and was around the time of the introduction of Christianity. From the literary point of view, this phase can be characterized as the Greek one, because it was the time when most of the Christian East, including the Coptic Church, used Greek as its main written language. In the time, literatures of the Copt church were translated in to Geez. This included, as him, *Wuddase Maryam*, the *Fisalogos*, *Qerellos*, *the ascension of Isaiah*, and *the books of Enoch* and *Jubilees*.and others. The literary is believed to have been firmly founded as Ethiopian by saint Yared and priest who flourished during the reign of GäbräMäsqäl. Some Christian Arabic lit from Alexandria seems to have reached Ethiopia during the Zagwe dynasty (ca 900-1270) the KebränNägäst is an example.

The Arabic Period: Most of the literature, both translation and original works, was produced during this period, under the so-called Solomonic Dynasty, with its two houses, the house of Amhara (1270-1560) Followed by the house of Gondär (1560-1770). Many Arabic Christian literatures of the Copts were translated into Ethiopic. They also began to compose original works in the same language. The period was from 1270 to 1770.

Harden (1926), studied Ge'ez literature classifying into five periods. These are:

The First (Aksumite) period: This period begins soon after the introduction of Christianity. It lasted for three centuries and comprises important personalities such as the Nine Saints, Yared and King Kaleb.

Age of Arabic translation: When the Islamic-Christian conflict calmed down and Egypt surrendered to the Arabs, a new hagiographic tradition was creaped up. From that time on nearly all the Ethiopic translations were made from the Arabic binding.

A period of contention (AmdaTSION): The third stage is the period of persecution, which signifies the time of

contention between church and state. The mainspring of the contention was King AmdaT'sion's marriage to his step-sister and the church's strong protest against this 'adultery'. To this period belong the leading protester, Basalota Michael and other saints, such as Filipos of DabraLibanos and Ewestatewos.

The Golden Age: Fourthly comes the 'Golden age of Ethiopian literature'. It is known for its king committed unforgettable literary works.

The period of Franka: The period of Franka /Portuguese/, the last period, is known for its saints such as WalataPetros, who founded an order of the nuns in the history of the church.

On the other hand, Demeke (1990) claims that indigenous and foreign scholars, who wrote about Ethiopian history and language, classify the language and literary period of the country into four:

1. Aksumite or Ezanian age (to the 8th c)
2. The dark age (9th - 13th c)
3. The age of AmdaSe'yon and Zara Yaqob (13th – 16th c)
4. The last age (16th – the end of Geez)

HAGIOGRAPHY (GÄDL, ገጽ) DEFINED

Hagiographies are works that celebrate the lives and acts of saints. The Ge'ez counterpart for such writings is 'Gädl' which, according to its root meaning, has the signification of 'conflict or struggle'. Ferec (1985), defines hagiography from its root as "the Latin word 'acta' is synonymous both with the Ge'ez 'Gädl' and the Greek 'Hagios'. 'Hagios' in Greek means 'holy' while 'graphein' means 'to write'. When they are put together they mean book which deals with "saints, their lives and the honor shown to them."

Aleqa Kidanewold Kifle (1953) in his astonishing dictionary book *Mätsehafä Säwasäw wegess wemezgäbä Qalat Hadis* defines the term Gädl as: "Struggle, challenge, contending, fighting, victory, confrontation or combat till the final award, facing multitude trouble... on the other hand, it is a book that speaks out about spiritual news, tell, history, saintly fight and their rewards from God²". Kaplan (2005), a renowned scholar for his series of studies that revolved around hagiographies, defined Gädl as:

² ገጽ ግልጽ ፈተና፣ ውጊያ፣ ሰልፍ፣ ድል፣ አክሊል እስኪገኝ ድረስ የሚደክሙት ድካም፣ የሚሠሩት ሥራ፣ የሚቀበሉት መከራ... መንፈሳዊ ዜና፣ ወግ፣ ታሪክ፣ የቅዱሳንን መከራና ፀጋ ተጋደሏቸውን የሚናገር መጽሐፍ።

Gädl literary means 'contending, [spiritual] struggle; it correspond to Greek but comprises also the meaning of (Bios) 'Vita; biography [of a holy person] Gädl is the most power genre of Ethiopian hagiography, which is, in turn, one of the most important constituents of Ga'az literature. Gädl is the most popular genre of Ethiopians. Ge'ez hagiography, which has different categories in turn, is one of the most important constituents of geez literature.

Therefore, the hagiography or Gädl refers that it is a contending, challenge fighting and struggle of saints through their life at earth. Thus, hagiography is writing that speaks about the deeds of saints and martyrs. The equivalent Ge'ez word for hagiography is ገጽ- *gädl* derived from the verb ገጽገጽ- *Tägädälä*, which means 'to contend'.

On the other hand, Nosnitsin (2005) gives a definition for hagiography as it incorporates other types of Ethiopic literatures. As to him:

Hagiography is a term describing literary products related to the veneration of the saints. In Ethiopian context, hagiography encompasses a number of genres, or different types of texts: vita, or acts (Gädl), Miracles (Ta'ammer), Homilies (Därsan), hymns and hymnological composition of different kinds, accounts about the translation of velics, and a number of smaller texts like monastic genealogies, prayers and inscriptions.

Hagiographies that provide historical, social, political, and other information as well as inspirational stories and legends, and which are the concerned areas of this study, were the notable literary products of medieval time. Hagiographies, among the various genres of Ge'ez literature, are one of the most prominent works, in the history of Ethiopian literature.

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". Hence, most of the indigenous hagiographies were begun to write in the medieval period by indigenous hagiographers. Taddesse Tamrat (1970) continues, "hagiographies consisted of the acts of the martyrs (*Gädlä sämæetat*), acts of the saints (*Gädlä sadqan*) and the deeds of the Holy Angels (*Därsanä Mäläækt*); all of these constituted similar compositions of hagiographical tradition". Head (1999), not being far from the above definitions, provides his own statements to define hagiography which says:

The term hagiography has come to refer to the full range of Christian literature which concerns the saints. The scope of that literature has been breathtakingly wide over the course of two millennia of Christian history, including such genres as lives of the saints, collections of miracle stories, accounts of the discovery or movement of relics, bulls of canonization, inquests held into the life of a candidate for canonization, liturgical books, sermons, visions, and the like.

Kaplan believes that specialists in the Ethiopian literature and history have long realized potential value of Gädlat (hagiographies) as source for the study of Ethiopian history (1982:97). Their value, as a contribution to the reconstruction of the political and the ecclesiastical history of Ethiopia is inversely proportional to the distance in time of the saint whom they intend to celebrate (Ibid). Hagiographies can provide information about the social, economic, historical, religious, anthropological and other conditions of the society (Marrassini, 1982:76). Marrassini adds that “hagiography is one of the most imperative sources for the study of alimentary diet of the various groups, practice of medicine and various illness, family life, trade, distribution of wealth, social relations in cities and villages, demography, handcraft, distribution of churches, history of monasticism and so on” (Ibid). For that matter Guidi (1896, as cited in Bausi, 2007:191) says, “Gadles or the biography of Ethiopian monks and saints, are very important to study the political history of Ethiopia in addition to their literary value”. Therefore, according to Bausi (2007), “a certain saint’s gadl indirectly touches the country’s contemporary social, political and economic situations”.

For Kinefe Regb Zeleke (1975), it is widely recognized that the hagiographical traditions are considered as an important source of the study of the history of the Ethiopian literature and for the history of the doctrine and institutions of the Ethiopian church. Moreover, he continues, “they contain a great deal of materials related to the social, political, and even military history of the country”. Most of the Ethiopian hagiographies were created after the 13th century, which is after the restoration of the Solomonic Dynasty (Tadesse, 1972).

The intensive growth of Ethiopian Hagiographies must have started in the period of the late 14th – early 15th century, and in the subsequent century most of the important Ethiopian hagiographic works were composed. This growth was closely linked to the development of the Ethiopian monasticism, on the one hand to the increased role and local veneration of Ethiopian holy men, on the other. Likewise, writing tradition of hagiography was importantly part to the flourishing of Geez literature Nosnitsin (2005).

As to Kinefe Rigb Zeleke (1975:73), Ethiopian

hagiographies are goes beyond 200 in number, for a preliminary bibliography lists. However, Kaplan (2005) has doubt about the numbers given above that many more as yet uncatalogued Gädlat exist; he adds most of the Gädlat remain unpublished, and hence generalizations regarding these works must be made with caution.

They deal with the saints who lived as far back as the early 4th century. These works, including the translations, show the literary competence of Ethiopian writers, across the ages. Despite the existence of a considerable body of scholarly literature, virtually all the studies have focused concerning many aspects of Ethiopian culture, political, ecclesiastical, and to a lesser extent, economic spheres (Kaplan, 1997:49).

Categories of Hagiographies

The hagiographic literature of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church can be divided in to two major categories (Kaplan, 1982, Tadesse 1972): first, accounts of Martyrs of the early Christian church (Gädla Säma’etat), and the second one is the lives of the local saints.

Some of the translations were made from Greek in the Aksumite period, many more from Arabic in later periods. The most interesting of local hagiographies are those about saints who lived between the 13th and 16th centuries. They recount the lives of kings, and monastic leaders who played an important role in the Ethiopian history and religious life (Kaplan, 1982).

Cerulli (1973, as cited in Nosnitsin, 2005) distinguishes five “hagiographic cycles”, based on common elements and subjects shared by the vitas. These are:

1. The Cycle of “five dissident monks”; those who participated in the controversy with Atse Amda Tseyon I;
2. The Cycle of the kings of the Zagwe Dynasty;
3. The Cycle of the Nine saints;
4. The Cycle of the Founders; Iyasus Moa and Takla Haymanot
5. The Cycle of the South; *Gäbra Mänfäs Qædus* and Yohannæs ‘the Oriental’.

According to their nature of writing and content, Kaplan (1986:81), has generally classified the Ethiopian hagiographies into three categories. First, the hagiographies which are more or less biographical in character and which have much historical significance; second, those which have importance to translation, and finally, those which are written many years after the event occurred.

The Scribes of Hagiographies

Names of the authors of most Geez literatures remain unknown. A major problem in the study of the history of Geez literature is the identification of the authors of the works composed locally and of the translators of the imported ones. Ethiopian men of letters attach little importance to recording in titles and colophons their names of the dates of their works. As to Nosnitsin (2005:342), Ethiopian hagiographers based their accounts on generally similar ideas about what elements the life of a holy man- male or female should include. Thus, biographies of Ethiopian saints contain many similar elements.

Kaplan (2005), in relation to this, suggests that *“the Gädl of a saint was usually written by a monk from the saint’s own monastery, ... gädl were usually composed many years and even decades or centuries after death of their saintly protagonists”*. There was no single standard form for a Gädl, yet every Gädl begins with an introduction and ends with the formalized conclusion. Some Gädlat are divided into chapters. In many cases the gädl is followed by miracles of the saint (tä’ammər) and mälkə’ in his honor. gädlat greatly differ in their language and style; they range from brief and simple works to extensive and elaborate compositions (Kaplan, 2005).

The hagiographers had the Bible as the primary source of literary material and ideas; besides, they relied extensively upon other hagiography, apocryphal and monastic literature, liturgical texts and oral traditions Nosnitsin (2005). Episodes and stories related in the Gädl of some oriental and the most known Ethiopian saints were widely known and vividly remembered; they circulated in the form of oral legends and exercised a strong influence, reacting as far as the works of the modern Ethiopian writers (Kaplan, 2005).

The hagiographers have been written their works, as said above, after many years the protagonist saint rests. This perhaps elevates the imagination power of these hagiographers. Exaggeration concerning the lives of the respective saint is a common feature of every hagiographer. For their different reasons, the writers forget to post their names on the text they wrote. One of the reasons to do this perhaps aims at to be courtesy, to keep them from boasting oneself since it is the most ignored action in the tradition of the church.

CONCLUSION

The Ethiopian Church must deserve an appraisal for it preserves the physical and mental flow of its literature. The church has been the store house of literature and the center of intellectuality for ages. The hagiographers, scribes, men of letters almost as a whole have been

sourced under its roof. Even mostly renowned and influential modern writers have made their origin in the ‘Ethiopic’ schools of the church. Hayatt (1928:271) appraises the church for this quality confirming that *“no one country is there under the sun, like Abyssinia, that literature became under the control and authority of the church”*. Amare Mammo (1968) declares about the nature of creative writings that they are constructed in two different ways. “The first one is a kind of writing that makes its base on a true story. The rest, on the other side, is solely fictional, ideal, commonly considered as work of creativity.” This general definition of Amare provokes me to classify Ethiopic hagiographies into the first side. These are true stories produced in the form of fictional writing. The rationale that enables to conclude that ‘it is fictional’ is the literary standards that the gädls possessed.

The hagiographies are well composed and arranged in a range of literary features; and are rich in literariness. Hagiographic narratives have a sense controller story. When seen with regard to the various aspects of a plot, they are inspirational. They are constructed keeping the Gustav Freytag’s triangular model for plot structure. Characters, real persons in the real world, are portrayed in direct and indirect way of characterization. The good and evil personalities of characters are depicted appropriately in the gädls. In respect to setting, the temporal and spatial situations of the events are described. The hagiographer offers the reader very detailed information about the social strata of the characters. With regard to narrative technique, most of the time the story is told from the third person point of view. The author’s underlying meaning or intended lessons is conveyed in the narrative

Figures of speech, one component in story’s style, shine across hagiography texts. The scribes use different forms of expressions through figures of speech like simile, metaphor, hyperbole, and symbols that are departed from normal language in order to create fantastic literary effect and beauty. Literary techniques are employed in the hagiographic texts. Authors give clues to indicate the outcome of the story, through the technique of foreshadowing. Through description, Authors of hagiography also show the elevation of the imagination power employed in the narrative. Using sentimental language, the events, situations, characters, the environment, and the atmosphere are described well. Flash back and dialogue add value for the literariness of the narratives.

The hagiography acquires the literary standard, and it can be said Ethiopian hagiographies have exerted substantial impacts on the country’s literary thinking. Consequently, based on the literary aesthetic and beauty that these *gädls* own, when evaluated according to the literary elements and techniques, it can be reached at conclusion that Ethiopians had been the habit of literary

thinking and skill centuries ago. The *Gädl*, though it is a compilation of facts, especially for believers, it is a literary work and could be treated as a “religious novel” since qualifies the literary elements and techniques. Most of the early Amharic didactic fictions are influenced by classical Ethiopic hagiographic texts. In the history of European literature, spiritual literatures, especially the Bible, is believed to be the base of their modern novel (Hammond, G., 1983). As to several Ethiopian and expatriate scholars, Ge’ez literature is believed to be the base of Amharic literature. These scholars assume that religious literature which is predominantly in Ge’ez is the source of modern Amharic literature. The study of different genres of Ge’ez literature might exhibit various literary devices employed in the texts that help to see the influence of this literature over the Amharic one. Therefore, it is in one way or another believed that Amharic fiction writers have introduced some techniques of the traditional literature.

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አምሳሉ አክሊሉ። (1976)። አጭር የኢትዮጵያ ሥነ ጽሑፍ ታሪክ። አ.አ.ዩ-ያልታተሙ

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

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