

LITERATURE IN THE 15TH CENTURY ETHIOPIA: KING AND AUTHORZARA YAQOBAND THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEDIEVAL ETHIOPIAN LITERATURE

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Abstract

The article uncovers the literary activity in the 15th century Ethiopia. The general purpose of the study is surveying literary development in the period of Emperor Zara Yaqob, and specifically pays focus on the personal efforts and contributions of the King himself in the growth of literature in his reign. It also intends to endorse whether these texts are qualify in literary features. Almost no researches were 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: MatsehafäBerhan; MatsehafäMilad; EgziabherNagsä; SebhatäFequr; MatsehafäSellassie; MatsehafäBahrey; Tä'aqeboMestir; TomaräTesebe'it; KehedatäSäytan; DarsanäMalaekt; Ra'eyäTa'amer; Melke'aGubae, and MangadäSamay. 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 very important to study social, economic, historical, religious, and the political history of Ethiopia in addition to their literary values. It is recommended that interested researchers shall explore this untouched field which is rich for literary and any kind of study.

1. Introduction

Ethiopia, one of the classical countries that have their own alphabet and writing system, is a country rich 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)¹ 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”.

Ethiopians had a habit of writing on stones and other hard materials even before the introduction of Christianity in the country. After Christianity flourished, 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 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 (Gorgorios, 1974 E.C), (Harden, 1926), and (Adamu and Belaynesh, 1970). Therefore, “a vast body of literary works in Ge’ez grew up from fifth century A.D onwards” (Adamu and Belaynesh, 1970). 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). 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 century” (Bender, 1976). 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”.

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 outstanding (Taddese, 1970). Additionally, as Taddese (1970) states, "the large collection of hagiographical traditions was those about medieval Ethiopian saints who actually lived between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries.

¹ Unless it is expressed and of the Amharic texts, all the dates presented in this paper are in Gregorian calendar.

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. 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 examples (Harden 1926). From classical times till the late 19th century, most Ethiopian literatures were composed of Ethiopian Christian literature.

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 investigate 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 significances. 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 significant part on the study of medieval Ethiopia, specially 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. The secondary sources, on the other hand, are written documents that are going to be utilized as a source, particularly materials served to explore the King's literary role, for review of previous researches, and conceptual framework. Qualitative way of data analysis is applied. Some techniques of the modern novel are applied to analyze the raw data; consequently, textual analysis through descriptive research method is employed.

2. The Works of Zara Yaqob

King Zara Yaqob was highly acknowledged in many ways. During his reign, the country entertains several experiences both politically and religiously. Zara Yaqob was confronted with local governors and kingdoms to keep his territorial expansion and secure unification of the

country. He centralized and strengthening his imperial power by having influential government administrators, brought extensive neighboring lands under his authority. Zara Yaqob was much known as a religious reformer; a progressive reformer of both church and state. The King introduced many reformatations and innovations in daily living and beliefs. Substantially he had completed the Christianization of Ethiopia, and united himself with the church and the monastic leadership. Religious controversies on the cause of the Estiphanites and the controversy between the Bete Ewostatewos and the Bete Tekla-Haymanot were the other face of his reign. On the other hand, the period of King Zara Yaqob was recognized for the highest point of external relations. Zara Yaqob also sent several diplomatic missions into Europe and India in both an attempt to create alliances against the rising Middle Eastern Islamic powers and to bring skilled workers and artisans into his country.

Literary activity, the major focus of this article, was significant identification of the period. King Zara Yaqob himself was part and contemporaneous of “The Golden Age” of Ethiopian literature. The “Golden Age” of Ethiopian Literature, which witnessed great literary renaissance, was a period of huge literary production. The Emperor has contributed much tangible elements to the development of Ethiopic literature. Literature, to a large extent, was flourished in the reign of Zara Yaqob which was the time of great discussions and of searching for knowledge concerning Christianity. The zealous personality of Zara Yaqob is reflected in much of his engagement in literature that was produced at his time and by the king himself being an author. Zara Yaqob had authored various prosaic works, hymns and editions. He is believed to have drafted several religious texts; such as, *Matsehafa Berhan* (Book of light); *Matsehafa Milad* (Book of nativity); *Egziabher Nagsa* (God has reigned); *Sebhata Fequr* (Praise to beloved); *Matsehafa Sellase* (Book of Trinity); *Matsehafa Bahrey* (Book of essence); *Ta’aqebo Mestir*; *Tomara Tesebe’it* (Epistle of Incarnation); *Khedata Saytan*; *Darsana Malaekt* (Homily of Angels); *Ra’eya Ta’amer* (Revelation of miracle); *Melke’a Gubae*; *Mengeda Samay* (A way to Heaven), and some others. In addition to the above listed works, Zara Yaqob notably had the collection of the miracles of the Virgin Mary, the *Ta’ammera Maryam* expanded by adding others composed locally. Most of these books were composed in defense of Zara Yaqob’s theological and Christological positions. The purpose of these books was to reinforce the authority of the sovereign and to combat the current tendency towards heresy and pagan practices.

2.1 Prosaic Literatures

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:

ድርሳንዘይሰመይመጽሐፈብርሃንዘይትነብብቀዳሚትሰንበትሰመይናሁለዝንቱድር
ሰንመጽሐፈብርሃንዘይሜህርአምልኮቶለእግዚአብሔርብርሃን...
ድርሳንይሰመይመጽሐፈብርሃንዘበትርጓሜሁመጽሐፈክርስቶስብሂል።

Zara Yaqob made his book of 121 subjects that concern both church and state. The book is divided into 15 parts (dérسانat), 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 MāshafāBirhan. 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 MāshafāBirhan, 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.

...ይቀጥቅጥበቅድሜክሙዲያብሎስሃአራቄ።
ይፈኑለክሙሚካኤልሃኪያሁእምኑኃሰማይአውዳቄ።
ወለላሳዑይግሮከመፀበለመርቄ።
በእንተማርያምለአቃቤክሙእግዚእይኩንጸሐቄ።
በድንግልናክልኤምሥለሥጋሃዘኮነንዳቄ።
ወኪያሆሙሰመሰርያንወመናፍቃንእለትብሉንህንምክረፈጣሪአዋቄ።
ሰገለወጣዎተወወገርተእለረሰይክሙፈራቄ።
ወእለትረስዩካዕበአራተወወንጌለስላቀአእምሮመጻሕፍትበኢጥያቄ።
እግዚአብሔርአብከዋክብተወዝናማተኖላቄ።
ወእግዚአብሔርወልድምሥለአቡሁዓራቄ።
ወእግዚአብሔርመንፈስቅዱስመኃይምናነሰዋቄ።
ዘይትኖለውቅዱሳነከመኢያሃብቆቄህብቃቄ።
ይሬሲክሙበአእማይእሳትአጣቄ።
ወለእለሰኢመጽኑወኢሰምኑእምቃለዝንቱመጽሐፍበሀኬትወበኑፋቄ።
በከመይቤሉሐዋርያትኃጥአመጽደቄ።
ይትኔለቆለፈሪሃእግዚአብሔርዓቢየኃጉለእምሰይጣንመድቀቄ።
ለእመኢሐረውስተመካነትምህርትክዊኖረኃቄ።
ወዘሰያፈቅርሰሚዓመጻህፍትዕድወአንስትለለአሐዱአሐዱበጥያቄ።
ይእቀበእግዚአብሔርበበዓቱወበበፀአቱእምእኩይድቃቄ።

The above extract taken from MäshafäBirhanis 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. አራቁ- አውዳቁ፤ ሞርቁ- ጸሐቁ፤ በጥያቁ- ድቃቁ፤ indicates the rhyming scheme. Having an end rhyme, the text offers literary value of the work. The main contents of MäsahafaBirhanare: 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 MäshafäBirhan, which incorporates many points on theology of the Trinity and the Incarnation, is micro filmed, and preserved in the IES².

2. Mätshafä Milad

The MätshafäMilad which literally means ‘Book of Nativity’, explains about the incarnation of Lord Jesus Christ. A major part of his MäshafäMiladis a reaction on the Jews (BeteAyhud) 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 (BeteAyhud). On the other hand, it also contains reactions against the heretic teachings of ‘DäqiqäEstifanos’ (disciples of Estifanos). The MätshafäMilad could be taken as a reformist work which again hints at theological controversies of the time.

MätshafäMilad, ‘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, Däsk. MäshafäMiladis micro filmed and preserved in the IES library.

3. Egzi’abher Nägsä

This one is a collection of salutation hymns. This large collection of hymns, Egzi’abherNägsä, 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 (Sénkéssar). 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’abherNägsä collection is the one attributed to Abba Giyorgis of Gasécca. The second type is our focus, the work of AseZäraYaqob. 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 issues of Trinitarian theology. The third type of the Egzi’abherNägsä collection is of ArkäSellus.³

The Egzi’abherNägsähymns represent a particular genre of the Ethiopian liturgical literature. The Egzi’abherNägsä 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. The Egzi’abherNägsähymns are sung during the feasts. Since it is a hymn, its poetic value is

² Institute of Ethiopian Studies library (Addis Ababa University)

³ Getatchew Haile (1983)

great. The Egzi'abher Nägsä hymn is presented in the form of short poems. It has great literary beauty and aesthetical value.

4. Mätshafä Bahrey

As it is stated inside, Mätshafä Bahrey was written at the eighth year of his reign. It is a kind of prayer book, which is prayed for patient with oil. It is micro filmed, and preserved in the IES library. 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 Bahrey "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 Sälötä Bahréy, 'Prayer of the Pearl or Essence', and Sälötä Zäyt, 'Prayer of the Oil'.

The author of the book 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.

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.

6. Mätshafä Tomar

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'ethe 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. Tomara Tesbet, which is written by Emperor Zara Yaqob, is a treatise on the theology of the Trinity, about magicians and honors of the Apostles.

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 *SebhatäFequr* is hence a communal prayer for the time of tribulation.

Upnext 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: *Astamehrola Egziabher* (a liturgical prayer offered to God); Wednesday: *Mehellabarek-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: *Tamahezannayom-* (a rhyming liturgical hymn to God).; Sunday: for hymns are presented here for honoring the Lord and Saints. The text of the Prayer of *SebhatäFequr* 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 *SébhatäFéqur*. 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.

8. Metsehafä Sellassie

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. *Metsehafä Sellassie* 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.

9. 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.

2.2 Hymns

The Emperor has written many hymns. Some of them are explained above; like that of *SebhatäFequr* and *Egziabher Nagsa*. 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፤⁴
ጽጉዮ፡ሥን፡ወልብስ።
መንበረጥብብውእቱአትሮንስመንፈስ።
መንስኤረሲዓንጥቅመአድማስ፤
በከመይቤነቢይሰሎሞንንጉሥ።

(2) ሰላም፡እብል፡ለዳዊት፡መሲሕ፡
ከሙ፡ጽጌ፡ሮማን፡ቀይሕ፡
በደመመከሎትልብሱነዙ፡
ይመስልአዕይንቲሁከከበጽባህ፡
ከሙአንበሳበሐቅልጣህሩመፍርህ፡

(3) ሰላምለአዕይንቲሁብርሃነቃልምሉአ።
ከከበጽባህይመስል፡እምደመና፡መጸውዘወጽአ።
በመዋዕሊሁ፡መስቀለ፡በግዕመጽአ።
ዳዊትሞአ፡እመራደ፡ፀሩ፡ኢብአ፤
ኅሠሥክዎ፡አንሰ፡ፀሐይ፡ተሐጥአ።

(4) መዋግደ፡ዕልዋን፡ይሰብር፤
ወአርእስቲሆሙ፡ይመትር።
ዳዊትንጉሥጽጌሃይማኖቱጥቀመንክር።
መልአ፡ከላሄ፡በሊባ፡ወባሕር።
ኅይለ፡ኃይማኖቱ፡ይኩነን፡ወልታ፡ሥሙር።

(5) ሰበክህደወዓሊሁ፡
ለወልደማርያምፈጣሪሁ፤
ዳዊት፡በከዮ፡ለእግዚአብሔር፡መሲሁ።
አርአዮቶማርያምእንዘይነብርምንባረ።
እስመለዘሐረገብርርእሶምረቱ።

(6) በቀለመወርቅሶበአሥዓለማርያምሃድንግለ፡
ኬንያሁረስአወዳሃበአዝሐለ።
ወአመጸለዮአርአዮምብአለ።

⁴ The Hymn is directly adopted from Getatchewhaile’s article, “Documents on the history of AtseDawit (1382-1413)”. Journal of Ethiopian Studies. Vol. XVI. IES.AAU. 1983. Addis Ababa. (M. Editor ShiferawBekele)

ዳዊትዘኮነበወይነፍቅራስኩረ።
እስመለርእሱሰብእኢነሥአክብረ።
ዘኅረዮብፀ-ዕወልዑልዘሰምረ።

(7) በእንተሥጋነወደምከለዳዊትመሐሮ፤
እግዚአአእምሮ።
ኢትዝክር፡ሎቱአበሰሰዘገብሮ።
በእንተዝንቱቁርባንኅበማርያምአንብሮ።
ወበኪዳነተማኅፀንበልብሰትዕቁሮ።

Translation:⁵

- 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.

⁵ The translation is directly adopted from Getatchewhaile’s article, “Documents on the history of AtseDawit (1382-1413)”. Journal of Ethiopian Studies. Vol. XVI. IES.AAU. 1983. Addis Ababa. (M. Editor ShiferawBekele)

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.
 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--ይመቅር--መንክር--ወባሕር--ሥሙር፤
- Stanza (3) ምሉአ--ዘወጽአ--መጽአ--ኢብአ--ተሐጥአ፤
- Stanza (4) መሲሕ--ቀይሕ--ነተጎ--ነተጎ--ጽባህ--መፍርህ፤
- Stanza (5) ወዳሊሁ--ፈጣሪሁ--መሲሁ--ምንባረ--ምረቱ፤
- Stanza (6) ድንግለ--አዝሐለ--ምብአለ--ስኩረ--ክብረ--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.

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.

ከሙ፡ጽ፡ጎ፡ሮማን፡ቀይሕ፡
 Who is as red as the pomegranates flower.
ይመስል አዕይን ተሁከከበ ጽባህ፡
 His eyes resemble (like) the morning star;

ከሙኦንበሳብሐቅልጣህሩሙፍረህ:

And his roar is **as** frightening **as** a lion in the field.

ከከበጽባህይሙስል:እምደሙና:ሙጸውዘውጽአ::

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, **ከሙ(as)**, and **ይሙስል(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 *Sébhataféqur*, *Egziabher Nagsa*, *Mälkéa Félsäta*⁶ and others are hymn books which are ascribed to *Ase Zära Yaqob*. Most books of *Zara Yaqob* are found in *Ankobar* (Medhanealem and Mikael), *Asagert* (Abbo Gadama) - near *Dabra Berhan*, *Angolala* and *Terra* (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.⁷

3. Conclusion

Contributing magnificent works of literature in the 15th century, King *Zara Yaqob* has played a significant role in the development of Medieval Ethiopian literature. Ethiopia, thanks to its Church, has possessed a 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 pays an 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, in time of Emperor *Zara Yaqob* in particular, Ge'ez literature has highly flourished and reached on the highest point of development. The Emperor himself was a writer of many literatures and had a positive impact on the development of Ethiopian literature. The Emperor was reputedly a renowned author having lots of contribution to Ethiopian literature. The magnificent rise of literature in his days is directly or indirectly connected with the biography and personality of the Emperor who produced many hymns and other books with religious thematic preoccupations. Most of the works of the King deal with ecclesiastical matters, provoke reforms in the Church, and as a defense of his religious beliefs aiming to react back to heretic teachings and religious controversies. The time of Emperor *Zara Yaqob* marked a dramatic Christian expansion and a turning point in religious nationalism. The king, who designed many religious policies, travelled to Northern Ethiopia to attend serious religious and literary training. He had a great role in the expansion of Christianity; the king took strong measures to resolve religious

⁶Melke'a Félsäta, as Getatchew Haile Said, is a hymn which is ascribed to Aste *Zara Yaqob*.

⁷Aklilä Birhan Wolde Kirkos, (1953) described that *Mängeda Sämai* has been published in Rome.

controversies, heretic problems, and pagan practices. The King was hugely noted in his strong stand on 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 King's role is not only delimited in the Church but also a base of Ethiopian educational tradition. King 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 well, have strong notion in the study of Ethiopia literature. The King also had enormous impact for books to be translated into Ethiopic from different 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 Zara Yaqob since the King himself and his elites were keen to respond back their beliefs in written form. This act plays role for the King's crucial achievement in the literary circumstance in the fifteenth century.

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- አክሊለ-ብርሃን ወ/ዲርቆስ (ሊቀጠብ-ብት)። (1945)። ሞርሀልቡና። አዲስአበባ። ሞርሀጥብብ ጎርጎርዮስ፣ (አባ)። (1974)። የኢትዮጵያ ኦርቶዶክስ ተዋህዶቤተክርስቲያን ታሪክ። አዲስአበባ። ትንሳኤ ዘጉባኤ።