

Some Notes on the Oldest Illustrated Ethiopic Manuscript: “The Gospels of ገ bba G rima”

Dessie Keleb*

I. List of abbreviations and symbols

Abbreviations:

GGMS- a Gospel (manuscript) found in the monastery of ገ bba G rima, dated back to the 6th century A.D.

GCT-a Gospel of contemporary time (published in the 19th century)

GPT-a Gospel of present time (published and is used by the Ethiopian Orthodox T wa ገdo Church during service.).

Imp.-imperative

Juss.-jussive

Fm.-feminine

Msc.-masculine

Pl.-plural

Sing.-singular

Symbols or signs:

*-archaic or proto form.

>-changes into

<-comes from

∅-zero pronunciation

II. List of illustration

-Some of the illuminated pages

III. Style of Transliteration

The transliteration applied in this paper is as follows:

a) The seven orders:

ሀ=h , ሁ=hu, ሂ=hi, ሃ=ha, ሄ=he, ህ=hi/hø, ሆ=ho

b) Letters:

አ=ʔ	የ= y	ቀ= k'
በ=b	ከ= k	ረ= r
ገ=g	ለ= l	ሰ= s
ደ=d	መ= m	ተ= t
ሀ=h	ነ= n	አ= p'
ወ=w	ሄ= s'	ጥ= p
ዘ=z	ሀ=	Variant and/or Additional Letters:
ሐ=	ዐ= ሻ	ሽ= ህ , ሾ= ሄ , ቸ= ሸ , ቻ= ሺ ,
ኀ= x	ፈ= f	ኸ= ሸ , ጬ= ሸ , ቋ= q ^w , ኀ= x ^w ,

If the accent falls on the first syllable, the second should not necessarily be transliterated.

*Dessie Keleb is lecturer of Philology in the Department of Linguistics and Philology, Addis Ababa University.

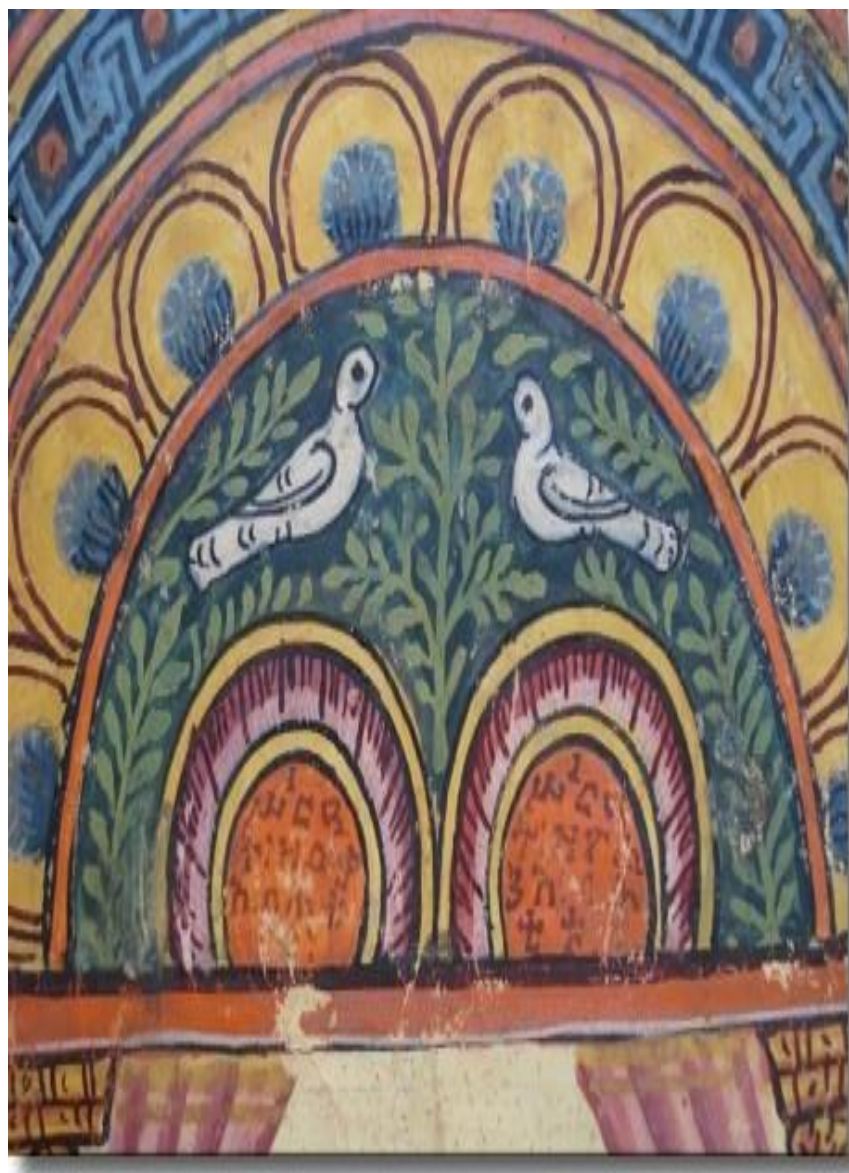


Fig1. The first illuminated page of the Gospel of ረ bba G rima.

1. Introduction

The Ethiopic Bible manuscripts have a long history. Dillmann¹ writes emphatically of the Ethiopic Bible that it was 'the foundation of all Abyssinian literature and the standard to which all other writers conformed their style of writing.'² But the values of Ethiopic Bible manuscripts have not been studied well, using Philological and linguistic tools of study. Besides the main body of the text, the information that the marginalia hold are not well examined for historical and linguistic reconstructions. This is not to deny that Ge'ez manuscripts have been studied well by many scholars; however, a thorough research on the values of the manuscripts or the Bible in the same way has not yet been done. Therefore, very little has been achieved from a diachronic viewpoint. Scholars used to claim that there were no manuscripts that came down to us from the Axumite period. That is why they conclude that the Axumite period is only the period of inscription.

The main objective of this paper is to introduce the oldest illustrated Ethiopic manuscript that dates back to around the 6th c and to show its significance. In the paper, I will introduce the philological and historical value of the Ethiopic Bible in general and of the GGMS in particular. The paper includes some philological and paleographic evidences which show that the text is copied or written during the glorious period of Axum (third to seventh century A.D.), which further confirms the findings of the carbon dating to which it was subjected recently.

2. ? bba G rima and His Monastery

? bba G rima **Monastery** is an Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church monastery, located some 5 kilometers east of Adwa,³ in the Mañk lawi-Zone of the Tigray Region of northern Ethiopia. The monastery of ? bba G rima was founded in the sixth century A.D by one of the Nine Saints, ? bba G rima or Isaac. Among its treasures are found Gospels which are dated to the period from the fourth to seventh centuries. The king gave some land grants to the monastery, which is recorded in the marginalia of the same manuscripts.

According to the tradition of the Ethiopian church, the founder of the monastery, ? bba G rima (or Issac), was a Byzantine royal with healing powers who was summoned to Axum by ? bba P nt' lewon, one of the Nine Saints.⁴ The Ethiopian *Synaxarum* [XVIII.June] gives a brief profile of the life of ? bba G rima as follows.

¹August Dillman is a great German Ethiopicist scholar. Among many other works, he has published a Grammar of Ge'ez in 1857.

²J. M. Harden, *An Introduction to Ethiopic Christian Literature* (The Diocesan Press, 1926), p.23.

³Adwa (also spelled Adowa, Aduwa, or Adua [d wa]) is a commercial town in northern Ethiopia, and is the battle field where the Ethiopians defeated the Italian invaders in 1896.

⁴These saints came to Ethiopia at the end of the 5th century. They came from the Greco-Roman world especially from Syria fleeing the dangerous disturbance following the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD). They chose Ethiopia because they had heard it was a free Christian country which strongly opposed the Arian heresy. The Nine Saints, according to the records and evidence of the Church, are: bba lef, bba rg wi, bba Likanos, bba s'ei, bba G rima, bba Guba, bba Y imata, bba P' nt lewon, bba S' hima. Among these saints, the three, most often mentioned, are bba rg wi, bba G rima and bba P' nt lewon. The Nine Saints spread Christianity by founding monasteries in Ethiopia. They translated the Bible into Ge'ez.

And on this day [XVIII. June] also is celebrated the commemoration of the blessed saint ʔ bba G rima. The father of this saint was Emperor of Rome, and his name was M sfʔyanos; the name of his mother was S fʔn gʔya, and she was barren. And having besought our holy lady, the Virgin Mary, the God bearer, she gave her this son; and she called his name "Isaac". When he had grown up she taught him the Books of the church, and then Isaac was appointed deacon. And the men of Rome having made him emperor, he sat and judged justly and righteously for seven years. And when saint ʔ bba P nt lewon/ Pantaleon of the cell heard [of him], he sent to him, saying, "O my son Isaac, let the dead bury their dead, and do you come and seek the kingdom of my Lord Jesus Christ"; and ʔ bba G rima, having heard him, forsook the kingdom, and went forth by night. Then the angel saint Gabriel appeared, and he carried him on his shining wing, and at third hour brought him into the hand of ʔ bba P nt lewon. Now the length of the road was a journey of ten months and four days. The king of Ethiopia at that time was Alameda. When ʔ bba P nt lewon saw Saint Isaac he embraced him, and kissed him, and then he arrayed him in the grab of the monk; and the saint fasted and prayed so strenuously that his flesh congealed on his bones. Then he went to a place [in] M d ra(?) and he lived there for three and twenty years, working countless miracles and wonders, and casting out devils, and healing the sick. One day he sowed wheat at dawn, and reaped it in the evening and some of it he offered as an offering; and on the following day he took the remainder up to the threshing floor, and he trod out the sheaves of wheat, and obtained there from seventy seven measures of grain. And he also planted a vine shoot on a rock, and it took root, and put forth leaves and bore fruit immediately. And once when he was writing a letter, and the sun was about to set, he adjured the sun to stand still and it did so until he had finished his letter. And the spittle which he spat out remaineth unto this day, and is a means for healing the sick; and once when a reed fell from his hand, it took root that very day. One day certain calumniators went to ʔ bba P nt lewon and said, "The priest Isaac consecrated the offering after he had eaten." And ʔ bba P nt lewon having gone to him caught him on the road, and he said unto him, "Wait, man, so that I may tell thee a secret." And Saint Isaac said unto him, "Let men shut me in, and remove the stones from us "; and they turned aside for a distance of five stadia. And ʔ bba P nt lewon said unto him, "O my son Isaac, thou hast terrified me," and thereupon he was called ʔ bba G rima. And having finished his good course, our Redeemer appeared unto him, and promised him that [He would forgive the sins of] him that should call upon his name, and celebrate his commemoration. And straightway he was caught up in a shining cloud and disappeared. Salutation to ʔ bba G rima.⁵

King G br M sk' I built for ʔ bba G rima a monastery near Adwa, where he lived for 20 more years performing miracles and healing the sick. According to the marginalia of the GGMS, King G br M sk' I also gave a land grant to the church and built some other churches near the monastery. On a hill above the monastery is a spring where ʔ bba G rima is said to have spat and started a life form. Today it is called ʔ mba Mʔrak'.

⁵Budge Wallis., *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church* Vol. IV (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), pp. 1009-1010.

The monastery was attacked twice during its history, once by Queen Gudit in the 10th century and a second time in the 1530s by Imam Ahmed Gragn. The site of the monastery is one of the locales of the battle of Adwa. It is surrounded by rugged cliffs which are covered with cactus and shrubs. The roofs of the monastery are painted green, and the window frames and doors are painted green, red and yellow. The monastery consists of three churches, about fifteen square (or circular) cells in which the monks live and a notable treasury. The entrance to the treasury is a stone portal with steps, and inside the round building is a glass cabinet as wide as the room. They contain an extensive collection of crowns, helmets, crosses, chalices, manuscripts and other treasures donated by various emperors and religious figures of Ethiopia dating all the way back to the monastery's founder, Gbr M sk' l, whose silver cross with gold inlays is seated side by side with the crown of Z r Ya k'ob (lived 1399–1468). There are also other items such as a pair of cow horns embedded in the wall, and leather Bible satchels for the monks to preach in nearby villages.⁶

By far the most precious treasures though are the illuminated Gospels of bba G rima⁷ which are kept in a glass case. According to the tradition of the Ethiopian Church, bba G rima himself wrote the gospels on 350 folios on thick goat's vellum in the Geez language and illuminated the first 12 pages in both volumes. Expatriate scholars and scientists have previously agreed that the gospels were written centuries after his death, probably by priests in the tenth century. However, recent radiocarbon dating, carried out at Oxford University has suggested a date between AD 330 and AD 650. This means that they could possibly have been copied by him or in his life time. If so, they are the earliest surviving Christian illuminated manuscripts in Ethiopia.



Fig 2. Painting of bba G rima, illuminated in the Gospel of bba G rima

⁶ Richard K.P. Pankhurst, *History of Ethiopian Towns: From the Middle Ages to the Early Nineteenth Century* vol. 1 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982), p. 192.

⁷The Gospels are Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke and St. John. But scholars usually refer to them in general as "Gospels of bba G rima" simply to show the historical value of the manuscripts and bba G rima's possible role in copying or writing them. The four Gospels were first written by the four Gospelers. Here, what I want to say is that they were copied (or translated) by bba G rima.

As some local and foreign researchers state, the question when, by whom and from what languages the Bible was translated into Ge'ez is still a matter of some debate though the assumption that it was from Greek is widely accepted. Many suggest that the Old and New Testaments or at least some portions were translated at the same time into Ethiopic. I would like to say that Jewish and Old Testament influences and reflections must have penetrated deeply into Ethiopia before the Christian era.

Ethiopian tradition has claimed that the Old Testament was translated from Hebrew to Ge'ez; venerable church scholars [Lik'awint] like ʔ bba Giyorgis supported the view that the Old Testament was translated from Hebrew to Geez long before the Birth of Christ. Kidan W ld Kflie (Kidān W ld 1948 : 17), quoting M s' f Mst'ir (The Book of Mystery) writes:

... መጻሕፍትን ዘበሉይ ተዐልዋ ምዕራባይስጢ ንበ ግዕዝ በመዋዕሊሃ ለንግሥተ አክብ ንተ ሐወገድ ለሰሎሞን ወበ ንተዝ ኮነ ጽሩዮ ፍካሬሆሙ ለመጻሕፍተ ነቢያት ዘውስተ ብሔ ረ አግዳዚ ስመ በሕገ አይሁድ ነበሩ ምቅድመ ልደተ ክርስቶስ ወ መሰኔ አዕለውዎ ምድሃረ ልደተ ክርስቶስ ሜጡ ሲቃልዮን ቃለ ጽዱቅ ወሰተ ስምዐ ሐሰት። ወክመሰ ተዐልዋ መጻሕፍተ ነቢያት ምዕራባይስጢ ንበ ግዕዝ አሉሃ ብሂል አምላክ አደናይ ብሂል ግዚ ። ጸባሕት ብሂል ዘክይላት ወመክብበ መጻሕፍተኻክ ዘሐዲስ ለምድርኒ ኢትዮጵያ ተዐልዋ ምርማይስጢ ንበ ግዕዝ ምቅድመ ያስተርኢ ሃይማኖተ ንስጥርስ ወ ምቅድመ ይትፈጠር ሃይማኖተ ልዮን ወ ምቅድመ ይትጋብሉ ማ በረ ከላላት ዘው ቶሙ አዲስ ቆጵላት ዘኤልቂዶን። ወበ ንተዝ ኮነ ፍካሬ መጻሕፍተሃ ለብሔረ አግዳዚ ዘበሉይ ወዘሐዲስኒ ንጡፈ ከመ ወርቅ ወፍተነ ከመ ብሩር።

... And the books of the old Testament they were translated from Hebrew into Ge'ez in the day of the Queen of the South West, visited Solomon. Hence, the rendering of the prophetic books extent form Hebrew into Ge'ez or Ethiopic /Ge'ez/, which is the land of ʔ g Sazi was faithful as the population was of the Jewish religion before the Birth of Christ. However, in the translation after the Birth of Christ the crucifiers distorted the true word in to testimony of falsehood. As the books of the prophets were translated from Hebrew into Geez.... the books of the New Testament were translated form Romayst' (Greek?) in to Ge'ez for the land of Ethiopia, before the doctrine of Nestorians appeared (431 AD) and before the doctrine of Leo was created (451 AD) and before the gathering of the episcopacies in Chalcedon. There fore, the translation of the Ethiopic Bible is like a pure gold and silver, tasted with fire.⁸

⁸Kidan w ld K flie, M s' f s was w w m z g b k'alat dis (Addis Ababa: Artsitic Printing Press, 1948 E.C.) p.17.

Kidan W ld Kfle quoted ? bba Giyorgis to refute him. Also he opposes the G dl Q wstos account which supports the view of ? bba Giyorgis. Kidan W ld Kfle argues that the translation of the whole Bible was from the Greek language. Examples that he mentioned are as follows: the use of the *yas* after proper nouns. The names of places: The place name of Kush >?ityop'p'ya; Ms'raym> Gbs'; yam sufn >ba ir q yy† ; ba ire k'yat> ba r ?etra; fleshtin >?ilofli; S za >gaza ; ?mora >g mora; s'or> t'yros ;l banon> libanos; yafo >?iyyope; ? rram >sorya ;babil >babilon; edek'eln> t'egros; ? rram> n raym ;ma?k l ?flag > mesop't'amiya.

After the introduction of Christianity in the country, the main duty of the church fathers was the translation of the Ethiopic Bible. For purposes of service and for evangelization and Christianization, the significance of the Bible was unquestionable. Therefore, among the main parts of the Bible, the Gospels must have been the first to be translated.⁹

However, the question of from where the Ethiopic Bible was translated still remains. Many scholars believe that the Ethiopic Bible was translated from Greek. This view is still the dominant one. The Ethiopian church tradition, however still insists that the Old Testament was translated from the Hebrew language. This tradition is so widespread that I would like to suggest that it should to be taken into account very seriously. Though the Ethiopian tradition regards ? bune Selama I as the translator of the Ethiopic Bible, the identity of the ancient translators of the Ethiopic Bible remains hypothetical.

One can be sure that the translation of the Bible into the Ethiopic language was encouraged by the Nine Saints. The main outcome of the coming of the Nine Saints, who came from the Greco-Roman world was consolidation of Christianity. That is why they founded monasteries and monastic life in the country. Taddese Tamrat writes as follows: "No doubt the first thing these Syrian saints set out to do was to translate the Bible and other religious books into Ethiopic which was already in use as a written language. Their literary activities further enhanced its development and facilitated the teaching of the Christian religion in the country."¹⁰

The tradition of the Ethiopian church maintains that the ? bba G rima Gospels were writtewn by ? bba G rima himself. The tradition that the *Synaxarium* expounds is very interesting:

ወአሐተ ዕለተ ንዝ ይጽሕፍ፡ መጽሐፈ መስየ ወቀርብ ፀሐይ ለፀረ ብ ኣዘዞ ለፀሐይ ይቁም በመካኑ ስክ ይፌጽም ጽሕፈተ ወንበ ወ ረቀሂ ምራቕ ሀሎ ስክ ዮም ኣዊኖ ፈውሰ ለሕመማን፡፡

And once when he was writing the book and the sun was about to set in, he adjured the sun to stand still and it did so until he had finished his writing. And the spittle¹¹ which he spat out remained unto this day and is a means for healing the sick," and once when a reed fell from his hand, it took root that very day. (Ethiopian Synaxarium, June XVII)

⁹This time is suggested by some scholars. However, this view must be examined very carefully for it did not consider the earlier history of the Church.

¹⁰Taddesse Tammrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270-1527* (Oxford : Clarendon Press,1972), p.24.

¹¹ The site where he spat is today called ‘ mba m rak’ ’.

I would like to argue that this tradition was a distant reflection of a certain achievement of the Saint in the work of translation or of copying. And this view is strengthened when we see that, among all the Nine Saints, he is the one credited with the copying or making of the Gospels.

The time of the writing of GGMS (the ʔ bba G rima Gospels) is not mentioned. But there are other marginalia that somewhat help us to guess the time when it was copied. The marginalia give land grants and mention the building of churches by king G br M sk' l. It also mentions gifts which the king made to the monastery: “አኑ ገብረ መስቀል ወሀብኩ አዳ ወሾ¹⁴ ወቤተ-ፎርቆስ::’ G b n m sk l gave ? do, w šo and Bet qiyrqos.’

The Nine Saints also played an important role during G br M esq l’s reign. At this time, the composition of the church *Zema* by Saint Yared was encouraged by G br M sk' l. Saint Yared praised ʔ bba G rima in his hymn called *Degua*. Saint Yared also mentions the miracles performed by G rima. These can also be related to the miracles reported by the *Synaxarium* combined with his accomplishment of writing or copying of the Gospels within a day.

3. The Discovery of “the Gospels of ʔ bba G rima”



Fig 3. One of the illuminated pages of the Gospel of ʔ bba G rima

¹² Sergew Hable Sillassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270* (Addis Ababa: United Printers, 1972), p.18.

¹³ Generally, in Ethiopian medieval and Gonderine churches gospel manuscripts contain land grants and other state and church information. Ethiopian kings and regional lords wrote important decrees and land grants in the marginalia of the gospels. This is because the gospels are highly respected in the Church. When a priest read the word of God from the gospels, the faithful should stand up to listen to the reader and deacons use light and umbrella. Some time gold or silver plated gospels are found in the Church and books cannot be put on the gospels.

¹⁴ The presence of ʔ in the manuscript shows the palatalization of the sibilant or the presence of the palatal ʔ in the Axumite era. Or it may be that the first folio of the manuscript was added some time later.

Scholars have visited, over the years, the monastery of bba Gerima and its oldest illustrated Gospels. They have described the Gospels. But they didn't date the Gospel to the Axumite period. The assumption that it was produced in the tenth century was widely accepted. Recently, a group of young researchers started to look into these codices. Some of the researchers were art historians who focused on the illustration of the manuscripts. Since the 1960s they studied these manuscripts. They divided them into three: Gerima I, Gerima II and Gerima III. They tried to compare it with Syrian and Byzantine art. They decided to apply radiocarbon dating system in order to establish its age. But these researchers did not apply linguistic, paleographic and historical methods to date and analyze the manuscripts. It is true that, since then, carbon dating has been applied. But philologists have made it clear that they are not persuaded by the precision of carbon dating method. Thus, there is still a need to do an analysis of paleographic and linguistic evidence to arrive at a more reliable dating of these manuscripts.

When I embarked on my research for an MA thesis, I decided to examine these codices by applying linguistic and paleographic methods. And I arrived at a number of conclusions before the claim of other researchers.

I presented some of these findings on the Third International Symposium of Ethiopian philology (2008) and on the Seventeenth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies (2009), Addis Ababa. I also included the findings in my MA thesis, which I presented to the Department of Linguistics and Philology in 2008.

The following points are some of the evidence that I identified and used to date the manuscripts:

4. Linguistic and paleographic Evidence of the Gospel

4.1. Linguistic (Historical) Evidence¹⁵

Languages having missing or changing previous consonant orders, vowels, pronouns, stress, and phonological, morphological and syntactic features can be traced back to older forms, through manuscripts having earlier characteristics. In the oldest Gospels (GGMS), some of the linguistic features can be reconstructed as follows:

Phonological and Morphological features:

Place name /as adjective:

GGMSS	>	GCPT/GPPT
አስቆሮጣዊ: [ʔ s k'ro t'awi] askoroti	>	አስቆሮ ዊ: [ʔ s k'orotawi] ጣ>
አርማተያስ: [ʔ rmatiyas] arimathea	>	አርማተያስ: : [ʔ rmatyas] ቲ > ት
ጌቴሴማን : [geteseman] gethsemane	>	ጌቴሴማኒ: [getesemani] ን > ኒ
ቀራንዮስ: [k' ranyus] a place of a skull	>	ቀራንዮ: [k' ranyus] ዩ +ስ > ዮ
መግደላዊ : [m gd lawi] magdalene	>	መግደላዊት: [m gd lawi] ለ > ላ፤ ተት
ቀፈርናሎም: [k' f rna om] capernaum	>	ቅፍርናሎም: [k'f rnahom] ቀ > ቅ፤ ፈ > ፍ
ግሙራ:- [gimura] tyre	>	ፈጽሞ: [gimura] ግ > ገ፤ ሙ > ሞ
አያሪሶ: [ʔiy ri o] jericho	>	አያሪሶ: > [iy riho] ዮ > ያ፤ ሐ > ከ
ግዛንም: [gihann m] hell	>	ግዛንም: [gih nn m] ገ > ግ
ገሌላዊ: [g lelawi]	>	ገሌላዊ: [g lelawi] ሌ > ለ, ሰ > ላ

¹⁵ Historical linguistics studies the archaic forms of a language. The goal of historical linguists is clearly stated by Trask as follows: "Historical linguists have often enjoyed great success in reconstructing ancestral phonological systems and vocabularies. Naturally, we would also like to be able to reconstruct as much as possible ancestral grammatical systems." Trask, R.L., *Historical Linguistics* (London: Arnold, 1996), p.48.

ጳንጥያዊ፡[p'an t'yawi] pontius	>	ጳንጤናዊ፡[p'an t'yawi]
ቀርናዊ፡[k' rnawi]	>	ቀሬናዊ፡[k' renawi]
ጎለጎ ፡[gol gota] golgota	>	ጎልጎ ፡[golgota]
ስሊሐም፡[sli m]	>	ስሊሐም፡[s li om]
ኒነዌ፡[nin we] nineveh	>	ነነዌ፡[ninawe]
ሰርያ ፡ [s rya]	>	ሰርያ ፡[sorya][]
የሩሳሌም ፡[ʔy rusalem]	>	ኢየሩሳሌም ፡[ʔy rusalem]

Proper nouns:

ግዚአ፡ ብሔር ¹⁶ ፡ [ʔegzi bher]God	>	ግዚአብሔር ፡ [ʔegzi bher]
--	---	-----------------------

*Here, the change is simply sound change, which is natural.

ራኩል፡ [rakil]Rachel	>	ራሐል፡ [ra el]
ለብዴዎስ፡ [l bdewos]	>	ልብዴዎስ፡ [lebdewos]
ልፊዮስ፡ [ʔelfiyos]	>	ልፍዮስ፡ [ʔelfiyos]
የዕቆብ፡ [y ʕe k'ob] Jacob	>	ያዕቆብ፡ [yaʕe k'ob]
ኖስ፡ ¹⁷ [no] neo	>	ኖ ፡[nox]
በርቦን፡ [b rb n]	>	በርባን፡[b rban]
ሬሚያስ፡ [ʔaremiyas]Jermih	>	ኤርምያስ፡ [ʔaremiyas]
ማሪቆስ፡ [mar k'os]Mark	>	ማርቆስ፡ [marq k'os]
ብዔልዜቡል፡ [bʕelzebul]	>	ቡዔልዜቡል፡ [buʕelzebul]
ዳንኤል ፡ [danʔiel]Daniel	>	ዳንኤል፡ [danʔiel]danʔiel]
በራካዩ [b rakiyu]	>	በራካዩ [b rakyu]

Unchanged Proper nouns:

ኤልያስ ፡ [ʔelyas] Elijah	=	ኤልያስ፡ [ʔelyas]
ዮሐንስ ፡ [yo nnes]John	=	ዮሐንስ፡ [yo nnes]
ዳዊት፡ [dawit]David	=	ዳዊት፡ [dawit]
ስምዖን፡ [smʕon]Semon	=	ስምዖን፡[smʕon]
ኤልሳቤጥ/ት፡ [ʔelsabet/ tʔ]Elsabeth	=	ኤልሳቤጥት፡ [ʔelsabet]
ዘካርያስ፡ [z kkaryas]Zechari	=	ዘካርያስ፡ [zekkaryas]
ገብርኤል፡ [g brʔiel]Gabreil	=	ገብርኤል፡ [g brʔiel]

The semi vowels **ይ** and **ወ** show changes according to the accent of the speakers of the languages. The semi vowels and the other letters that have the character of the vowels: **ሐ:ሀ** ፡ **አ:ዐ** are characterized by the following changes in words

¹⁶The two dots in the word **ግዚአ፡ብሔር** indicate that the word is the result of two terms having different meaning .And this word is a compound word combined by ፡ The word **ግዚአ** meant lord while the word **ብሔር?** meant country, universe (in a broader sense). Hence, the meaning is the lord of the universe. **ብሔር?** as a country and a source is pointed in the Anaphora of Diyosk'oros saying 'where is the "land" of the wisdom?'. Currently the word nation is also coined and used in Amharic by the same word **ብሔር**.

¹⁷The change from **ኖ** into **ሐ** is uncommon in Ge'ez, but because of the loss of the sound of the gutturals, now there are many changes in the gutturals.

Infinitive	ምሂር፡፡ ሙ>ም
	ለአከ፡፡ ልአከ
Perfective	በሀለ > ብሀለ ፈረሀ > ፈርሀ
Imperfective	ተለዐለ > ተልዕለ
	ተመሀረ>ተምሀረ
Loss in the mid	ክሀለ > ይክል

All the changes that we see above were not present in the oldest manuscripts and were pronounced as consonants, not as a kind of semi vowels; but, sometimes, they take the sound of the semi vowels in a half manner, as የ, ው, የ, ይ...Examples:

Imperfect	ይገንይ፡፡ > ይገኒ፡፡
Noun	ገኒይ፡ > ገንይ/ዩ፡
Gerund	ሰተ.ዮ፡ > ሰትዮ፡
	ወድቆ፡ > ወዲቆ፡
Prepositions	ንቤ፡ > ደቤ፡
Number	ሰከሪያን > ሰከርያን ፣ አብያት፡ > አቢያት፡
possession.	አምላክየ፡ > አምላከየ፡
Definite article	ወርቁ፡ > the Gold
Adverbs	በሐቱ፡ > ባሕቱ፡
Imperative/jussive	በልዮ፡፡ > በሊዮ፡፡
Verb to have	ቢየ፡፡ > ብየ፡፡
	በሐር፡ > ባሕር፡

The features of the Geez texts are clearly expressed by Paolo Marrassini:¹⁸

Radicals, except the gutturals and the semi vowels, are changed into the sixth / the fourth / or into the fifth or the first orders, according to the position of the gutturals and the semi vowels. As a result, they influenced the general structure of the language; if it is compared from the period of Axum. Laryngeals and pharyngeals are physiologically connected with the vowel of tone “a”, and this is why in post Axumite Ge’ez, a well known rule is working ,according to which every “ ” (first order) becomes “a” (4th order) if its syllable is closed by a laryngeal; of course this rule doesn’t occur in Axumite, because laryngeals, connected with vocalic tone, have nothing to do with vocalic length (the only distinguishing the አ and ዐ at that epoch). But this rule is operating in the fragmentary Ge’ez inscriptions of Axum, so that the passage from vocalic quantity to vocalic quality in Ethiopic can be dated at least to the first part of the 6th c. A.D.(Paolo Marrassin’s unpublished note)

¹⁸ Paolo Marrassini is a professor of Philology at Addis Ababa and Florence Universities.

Even though there are some variations on Ge'ez and its forms that give ambiguous meaning, sometimes they are compromised with the style of pronunciations: high level, low level, acute, grave accent and extra short.

Some of the sounds of the words in the Axumite period are inserted and pronounced as follows: In the middle radical, > a. Eg: *ሰከር > ሰካር. In the soundless, > a.

Eg: (ፈራሂ > ፈራ(gemi)ሂ. In the second radical, > ፋ or ^W and its impact in noun, adjective, phonology, syntax, word formation and morphology was very common. Eg: መደልወ > *መደልዋን :: In the second radical, because of / ፋ > (morphology). Eg: * ቦን > ብን :: In the 3rd radical,

because of ሕ, ፋ > ^W i (መጸብሕ > *መጸቢሕያን ::). Because of ወ, ሐወ ረ (ሐረ) > ይሐውር:: (Now, የሐውር). y + > e. Eg. ዜነወ (ዘየን) > ይዜነ (ይዘይን) :: zen we . However, በአወአ > ይበውአ and በየአ > ይበይ are kept. Function of ኤ is to make compound nouns and prepositions. :: First radical, because of :

1. > ፋ.

2. > ፋ/ ^W መአተ = ም ት; ከለሐ > ትኤልሕ ከልሐ:: ፀ= + > 0 = ፋ/ ^W =ሐረ(now) (ሐወረ) = ሐር (Now ሐር)::0= + w > e ጠበ(ሰወበ) > ጠቤ :: i= + y > e (Now ሰበ) ዲበ(ደየበ[የ]) (in Tigrinya, it means "to climb") ዲቤ :: (Now, ዲቤ). In some Word, like the imperfect of ፀአለ = ይዲ ል :: > seems to be geminated, although the pronunciation can not be known now with certainty. And on the basis of those changes one can be sure that Ge'ez (or Ethiopic) remained the spoken language until the end of the Aksumite Empire.

4.2. Paleographical Evidence

Paleography is the study of changing styles of calligraphy in ancient and medieval texts. According to Uhlig, there are five main periods in Ethiopian paleography. These main periods are:

The period of inscription during which we have many inscriptions written in Ge'ez and the Greek language, the second period covers the period from 1330 to 1450. This period is called the transitional period. The third period, from 1450 to 1550 is called the period of circular writing system. The next is from 1550 to 1650. It is characterized by thin and slender writing system. The last one is the Gonderian period writing system. This is characterized by the gul (thick or bold) and the r qiq (thin) script.¹⁹

Some of the letters have undergone changes in the successive periods. But, there are some letters that do not always change. So changes are not always the features of letters in each period.

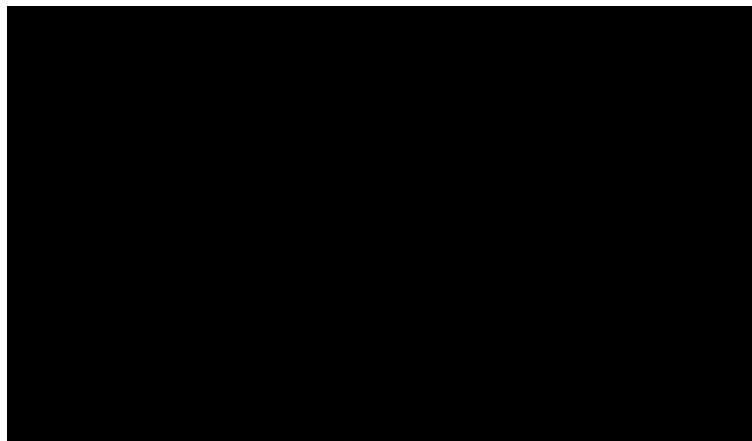
¹⁹ Uhlig, Siegbert. *Introduction to Ethiopian paleography* (Stuttgrat: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990), p.10.

GGMS holds forms of letters, which are different from modern form. The paleography of GGMS and the present one is compared as follows:

GCPT/GPPT < GGMS (Axumite systems of writing)

- <The serif at the end of the horizontal line is attached either at the middle or hung below.
- <The right leg is shorter than the left.
- ሐ <The circle is attached directly to the whole body of the right leg.
- አ <The left leg is occasionally shorter than the right leg.
- ከ <The right leg is shorter than the left.
- በ <The left leg is occasionally bent.
- ቢ < The right leg is shortened.
- ቤ < The right leg is shortened.
- ቦ < The left leg is a little bit bent above the vowel marker. The right leg is shortened (a little bit).
- ገ <It is very similar with number 7. It is bent at the top and thick. Occasionally is like the sign of > but with longer leg and curved circle.
- ደ <Has no right leg. Has a shortened leg. It gives us the graphic picture of fish.
- ዲ <The vowel marker is attached at the top of the right leg.
- ዲ < Has no left leg. Has a shortened leg.
- ዳ < Has no leg but bent on the line. Also has a dot at the right and left sides.
- ዴ < Has no leg but bent on the line. Has a dot at the right and left sides.
- ድ < Has a short corner in the vowel sign rather than a curve.
- ሀ < It is very difficult to find ሀ because of the pronunciation ህ as ሀ.
- ሁ < The left leg is bent at the top. Some times, the left leg is a little bit like a curve.
- ሂ <Has the circle attached directly to the body of the letter.
- ሃ < Has the break low on the left side. The bottom is also more pointed in some linear forms²⁰.
- ወ:
- ወ < The vowel sign is near to the top of the letter up ward.
- ዐ <The leg is afforded to the main body (a very smooth) and leg is left to be used only to vowel marker.
- ዑ < The circle is occasionally attached directly to the bottom of the letter.
- ዒ < The vowel marker is placed on the left down.
- ሐ <Has the right leg shortened.
- ሐ < Has the right leg is shortened.
- ሐ < The vowel marker is like the present vowel marker of ሐ in the sixth order.
- ሐ < The entire letter is slanted to the right.
- ሐ <The vowel sign has a sharp corner instead of a curve.
- ሐ < The circle is attached directly to the top of the letter with out a connecting

20



Donald M. Davies, The Dating of Ethiopic manuscripts *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* Vol. 46, No. 4, The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 294.

The vowel marker is attached with the mid point of the lower part of the right circle.

ፆ <the vowel marker is attached to the outer part of the circle of the left.

The vowel marker of the body is bent towards the right.

ፇ <Has a short leg.

ፈ <Has the bottom line turned to the left.

ፅ <The vowel sign is thick and turned left wards.

ፉ < Has thickening of the top line.

ፊ <The vowel sign is attached with the main body.

ፋ < Is like a curve, but line in the below is straight.

ፈ < Ticking of the top line.

ፇ <Has the right leg shortened.

< Sloping to the left of the bottom part of the stem.

ፈ < Has oval shape. Is like number 4(of Ge'ez) or a triangular form.

ፆ <The vowel marker is in the mid.

ፇ < Is found between the 1st order and the 7th order.

ፈ <The upper line is longer than the lower.

ፆ <Is like the upper body of ፇ but with longer leg sloping leftward.

ፈ <It is like ፈ.

ፇ < The right leg is shortened.

ፆ < Has the stem curved to the left.

ፆ < The circle is attached directly to the top of the letter without making a curve or half moon.

In conclusion, this shape of letters leads us to conclude that manuscripts of Axumite period show different paleographical features from the paleography of latter times²¹

21

MODERN FORM	INSCRIPTIONS	A.G. MSS	12th to 14th CENT.	15th and 16th CENT.	MODERN FORM	INSCRIPTIONS	A.G. MSS	12th to 14th CENT.	15th and 16th CENT.
ፈ	Ham.	ፆ ፆ			ፆ	Ez. ¹ Ham.	ፆ		
ፆ	Ez. ¹	ፆ ፆ	ፆ		ፆ		ፆ	ፆ	ፆ
ፆ				ፆ	ፆ		ፆ	ፆ	ፆ
ፆ		ፆ	ፆ		ፆ	Ez. ¹	ፆ	ፆ	
ፆ	Ez. ²	ፆ	ፆ		ፆ		ፆ		
ፆ	Ez. ³ Ham.	ፆ ፆ	ፆ		ፆ		ፆ	ፆ	
ፆ	Ham.	ፆ ፆ			ፆ	Ez. ¹	ፆ	ፆ	ፆ
ፆ	Ez. ¹	ፆ	ፆ		ፆ	Ez. ¹	ፆ	ፆ	ፆ
ፆ		ፆ			ፆ	Ez. ¹	ፆ	ፆ	ፆ
ፆ	Ham.	ፆ			ፆ	Ez. ¹	ፆ	ፆ	ፆ
ፆ	Ez. ¹	ፆ			ፆ		ፆ	ፆ	ፆ

Ibid., p. 295.



Fig 4. One of the illuminated pages of the Gospel of 7bba G rima that shows the paleography of the period.

5. Significance of the Gospel (Ms.) for Exegesis

In philological analysis, readings must be chosen each time not on the ground of the majority of the manuscripts, but of the majority of their families. This is the modern method accepted by most philologists. When we see Ethiopic manuscripts, they lead a researcher to go further. This is because we have many copies.²² As a result, we may find variants in manuscripts. However, there is no problem in the Ethiopic Bible manuscripts. That is why variants quoted from ancient texts are used and indicated in the exegesis. Examples taken from the Gospel of Luke (GGIM) are the following:

Luke 9:55 : ወተመደጦ ገሠጸው (ግዚ.) ‘But He turned, and rebuked them, - - -’ The word ግዚ. (Lord) is not present in the English Bible. Here in the exegesis tradition, we find the statement [“as Elijah did”] so the full statement will be “But He turned, and rebuked them, as Elijah did”. (GGMS).

Luke 3:35 : ወመጽኦ ቃል ምዑስተ ደመና ዘይብል ዝንቲ ው ቱ ወልደየ ዘኣፈቅር ወሎቲ ስምዕዎ ‘And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, this is My beloved Son hear him. ’> ወምጽኦ ቃል ምዑስተ ደመና ዘይብል ዝንቲ ው ቱ ወልደየ ዘኣፈቅር ወሎቲ ስምዕዎ ወሎቲ ዘኅርይኩ» ‘And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying ,’ This is My beloved Son: hear Him’ +whom I chose.’

²²It is obvious that Biblical words are words of God. That is why most Ethiopicists are very careful. They do not interpret church books using the method of Erasmus; rather they prefer to see them according to the tradition and they choose the Best Codex. Therefore, I would also like to put them simply as they are. I prefer to preserve the tradition. “Banal mistakes” are mistakes that do not show any problem and cannot help us to classify manuscripts into families. “Conjunctive error” is a technical term in philology which leads us to classify manuscripts according to the variants. Some copyists may not know the language very well or may be influenced by some other reasons. But, I did not observe a basic difference (that leads to controversies) in the manuscripts of the Ethiopic Bible. However, the values that they have are not studied very well. The Ethiopic Bible manuscripts are very significant to know the history of the Bible and Bible study. Here, I should say that the hagiographies, homilies ...are also very significant to know the history of the country and the spiritual life of the saints for they are daughters of the Holy Bible.

Luke 10:1: ወ ምዝ ጎረዮ ግዚ [ነ] ካልዓነ ሰብአ ‘After these things the Lord [our Lord] appointed other persons also’ > ወ ምዝ ጎረዮ ግዚ ነ ካልዓነ ሰብ[ዐ] ‘After these things the Lord(our) appointed (chose) other [seventy men].’¹⁰

6. Conclusion

In this study, I have tried to present philological and paleographical analysis of the features of the ʔ bba Gerima Gospels in a systematic way. Many scholars and researchers have tried to analyze the Ethiopic manuscript, each focusing on a different part of the Bible and the hagiography. However, none of them has tried to give detailed linguistic, paleographic and philological analysis of the manuscripts in order to date the manuscript and show their values. I did not find conjunctive errors in the Ethiopic gospels, rather I found the witness of the oldest manuscripts to the present gospel manuscript that the church uses and observed their significance in philological and linguistic studies.

The paleographic and linguistic evidence that I have brought out in this article firmly establish the dating of the GGMS in the glorious era of Axum- i.e. 4thc-7thc. Therefore, it can be assumed that the gospels were translated and/or copied most probably in the 6thc.

I hope this article has demonstrated that paleographic and linguistic evidence has great value in dating manuscripts. Being close to Ge’ez, and the study of the Biblical manuscripts, I was motivated to deal with this part of philological and historical study from the analytic point of view. In the study, I have tried to introduce the oldest Ethiopic manuscripts showing the changes and the variations in the manuscripts as well as to give some illustrations. But it cannot be said that I have exhausted the subject, for it needs much more research and needs a longer period of time.

²³Church scholars quote ancient texts for the purpose of Bible commentary. Words or phrases mentioned above are very important for the exegesis. This shows the intelligence of Church scholars who use such ancient texts in the end mta. And also tells us that the sources of the tradition are reliable. These examples, therefore, criticize the movement or the view of the so called t d d so (Reformation), in Ethiopia.