

Ethiopic Literature in Medieval Ethiopia

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Abstract

Ge'ez literature has aged about two millennia. Started by Saint Yared before 1500 years ago, Ethiopic literature is the prominent feature of Ethiopian literature. Before the expansion of Christianity, the habit of writing on stones and other hard materials was introduced in Ethiopia. After the introduction and 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 unlike the Ancient period, was peculiar feature of the time. Among many others, hagiography which records saintly lives, acts and the honor shown to saints is major literary genre. The period's literature is chiefly rich in hagiographies. Hagiographies are well composed and arranged in a range of literariness. Hagiographic narratives have a sense controller story, when they are seen with regard to aspects of novel, they are inspirational. Ethiopian hagiographies can exert substantial impact on the country's literary thinking. Although hagiography is a compilation of facts for believers, it is rich in literary features since it qualifies the fictional elements and techniques.

Key Words: Hagiographic literature; Ge'ez literature; Medieval manuscripts; Christian literature

1. INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia is a country of ancient civilization and has 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) 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), and (Adamu and Belaynesh, 1970). Therefore, *“a vast body of literary works in Ge’ez grew up from 5th 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).

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). 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 hagiographies, *Tä’ammərat* (books of miracle), *Dərsanat* (homilies), *Mälkä’* (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. The present article attempts to uncover some facts and conceptual framework about Ge’ez literature.

2. 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. 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. 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 Ya’eqob 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).

2.1 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 Ge’ez literature reaches its climax ever in the history of Ethiopian literature. The following excerpt concerning Ethiopian Medieval literature is

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

taken from Getatchew Haile's article, 'Ge'ez Literature' published in 'Encyclopedia Aethiopica' (2005).

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 writings (hagiographic) had been expanded" (Bausi, 2007). 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).

2.2 "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 (*hagiography*) 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), for that matter says, "Literary productions of this period are not translations but in 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).

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). 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 hagiography 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).

2.3 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), 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, Hohata bərhan* and *Matshafa Mastir*. The third author of this period was Atse Zara Ya’eqob (r. 1438-68), 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 Səllase*, the *Mashafe Behrey, Ta’aqabo Mastir, Tomara Tesbe’et, Kehdota Saytan* and *Darsana malaahit*.

Taddese Tamerat (1970) 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 Həmamət, 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 *Mashaḫa 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 *Mäwasat* 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 *Mäzmurä Krestos*, the *Mälke'a Gabriel* and the *Saälämä 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 *Mäshafä Hawi* were all translated during this period, to which the translator from Arabic of the *Mäsehafä Fälasfa Təbiban* 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*, *Fekkare Malakot*, and *Haymanote Abaw*. *Fetha Negest* is among the prominent literary products of the time (Adamu Belaynesh 1970).

3. HAGIOGRAPHIC LITERATURE

Hagiographies are works that celebrate the lives and acts of saints. The Ge'ez counterpart for such writings is 'Hagiography' 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 'Hagiography' 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." Hagiographies were with high quantity started to be written (together with translation) in the Medieval historical period of Ethiopia. Aleqa Kidanewold Kifle (1953) in his astonishing dictionary book *Mätsəhafä Säwasäw wegäss wemezgäbä Qalat Hadis* defines the term Hagiography 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 Hagiography as:

Hagiography literary means 'contending, [spiritual] struggle; it correspond to Greek but comprises also the meaning of (Bios) 'Vita; biography [of a holy person] Hagiography is the most power genre of Ethiopian hagiography, which is, in turn, one of the most important constituents of Ga'az literature. Hagiography 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 Hagiography 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 ባባባ- *hagiography* derived from the verb ባባባ- *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 (Hagiography), Miracles (Ta'ammer), Homilies (Dərsan), 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

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literary development". Hence, most of the indigenous hagiographies were begun to write in the medieval period by indigenous hagiographers. Tadesse Tamrat (1970) continues, "hagiographies consisted of the acts of the martyrs (*Hagiographyä sämäetat*), acts of the saints (*Hagiographyä sadqan*) and the deeds of the Holy Angels (*Därsanä Mälaäkt*); 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 Hagiographyat (hagiographies) as source for the study of Ethiopian history (1982). 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). 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) 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 Ethiopic 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 puts part to the flourishing of Geez literature Nosnitsin (2005). As to Kinefe Rigb Zeleke (1975), 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 Hagiographyat exist; he adds most of the Hagiographyat 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).

3.1 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), 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 Hagiography of a saint was usually written by a monk from the saint’s own monastery, ... hagiography were usually composed many years and even decades or centuries after death of their saintly protagonists”*. There was no single standard form for a Hagiography, yet every Hagiography begins with an introduction and ends with the formalized conclusion. Some Hagiographies are divided into chapters. In many cases the hagiography is followed by miracles of the saint (tä’ammər) and mälkə’ in his honor. Hagiographies 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 Hagiography 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.

4. 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 centre 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), astonishingly 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 various genres of Ethiopic literature are well composed and arranged in a range of literary features, and are rich in literariness. Some narratives have a sense controller story. 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 ancient forms of literature.

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