

Translations in Late Antique Ethiopia*

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The linguistic history of the «historical Ethiopian» area—corresponding to the present-day region occupied by the highlands of the two independent states of Eritrea and Ethiopia—is marked since the earliest documented linguistic phase by phenomena of multilingualism. If place names and substratum phenomena tell of the early presence of non-Semitic speakers (Agaw-Cushitic speakers in particular) along with early Semitic settlers from the first millennium BCE at the latest,¹ still in the subsequent South-Arabian phase (eighth/seventh to fourth century BCE) the *c.*200 Sabaean inscriptions attest to a twofold linguistic stratum: (1) a regular Sabaean linguistic layer with monumental inscriptions, along with (2) a second layer, with monumental as well as non-monumental and cursive Sabaean inscriptions characterised by some peculiar features. These latter

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¹ See now the clear synthesis by APPELYARD 2015; particularly on the modern languages, see also CRASS - MEYER 2009 and 2011.

features betray phenomena which accord with the historical development of the phonology of Ethiopian Semitic, to which Gəʿəz belongs. Since some precise linguistic features of Ethiopian Semitic—most clearly, the absence of any mark of determinate and indeterminate noun—definitely keep it apart from South Arabian and prevent any hypothesis of derivation of Ethiopian Semitic from South Arabian, Ethiopian Semitic is supposed to have been already spoken at the time of the South-Arabian inscriptions. These latter, therefore, as appears in the case of the second type of Sabaean inscriptions, have interfered with a local Ethiopian Semitic language that already existed.²

From the second/third century CE—no more precise date can be given—the earliest Gəʿəz³ (Ancient Ethiopic, Classical Ethiopic, or Old Ethiopic, or simply Ethiopic) epigraphic documents are attested. They can be definitely placed in strict connection with the emergence of the kingdom of Aksum (from the first century CE) and Gəʿəz can be rightly styled as the language originated and used in this kingdom and in the cultural production issued by Aksumites.⁴ As already said, these early Gəʿəz documents cannot be explained on the basis of a steadfast linguistic evolution from the South Arabian—documented by inscriptions—and must be considered as the outcome of the evolution of a different and independent South-Semitic branch of its own. The history of Ethiopian Semitic and of Ethiopian Semites, in their long co-presence and parallel interaction with the South-Arabian civilization and language, is well testified by the late usage of the South Arabian script along with a proper Ethiopian script of its own (known as *fidal* in the later tradition) starting from the royal inscriptions of King ʿEzānā (mid-fourth century CE). This Ethiopian script is then attested in a vocalized form already in the fourth century and with the addition of several series of consonan-

² For the whole question, roughly summarised here, and its implication for the issue of «Ethiopian origins», see MARRASSINI 1985; AVANZINI 1987; both resumed in LUSINI 1999; precise data are provided in concise form by W.W. MÜLLER, *Sabaic inscriptions in Ethiopia and Eritrea*, in *EAE*, III (2007), pp. 156a-158b, who clearly lists the Sabaean inscriptions of the first group (18 inscriptions, *RIÉ* nos 20-24, 26-30, 39, 41, 53, 55-58, 61) and those of the second group (160 inscriptions, *RIÉ* nos 1-13, the only royal ones, and nos 14-19, 25, 31-38, 40, 42-2, 54, 60, 62-179; *RIÉ* no. 59 is also a South Arabian inscription, but too fragmentary to be attributed to any of the groups). See now also KROPP 2011; BREYER 2012.

³ The exact name of the language has been debated with some reasons by BULAKH 2016, who rightly suggests that the name of the language might be *Gəʿz*, not *Gəʿəz*; only for reasons of established usage I will keep on using Gəʿəz in the present contribution.

⁴ See A. AVANZINI, *Gəʿəz inscriptions in Ethiopia/Eritrea in antiquity*, in *EAE*, III (2007), pp. 159b-162a; see also A. FRANTSOZOFF, *Gəʿəz inscriptions in South Arabia*, *ibid.*, pp. 162a-163a; G. FIACCADORI, *Gəʿəz inscriptions in Ethiopia/Eritrea in medieval and modern times*, pp. 163a-165. See also, of quite unequal value, contributions by BREYER 2011; 2013; 2014; 2015; HOFFMANN 2014; ROBIN 2015; YOHANNES GEBRE SELASSIE 2015. The most comprehensive bibliography is listed in *RIÉ*, with supplements to date in MARRASSINI 2014.

tal signs is the same script still used for Amharic, Təgrəñña, and other modern Ethiopian and Eritrean languages.⁵

Besides the Semitic South Arabian and early Gəʿəz inscriptions, however, on the Red Sea coastal regions of present-day Eritrea there is early evidence of the use of Greek, attested both by direct and indirect witnesses: the Greek *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* (mid-first century CE) styles Zoskalēs, the ruler of a coastal region corresponding to present-day Eritrea, as «expert in Greek letters» (§ 5, Ζωσκάλης, ἀκριβῆς μὲν τοῦ βίου καὶ τοῦ πλείονος ἐξεχόμενος, γενναῖος δὲ περὶ τὰ λοιπὰ καὶ γραμματῶν Ἑλληνικῶν ἔμπειρος, «Zōskalēs, a stickler about his possessions and always holding out for getting more, but in other respects a fine person and well versed in reading and writing Greek»⁶). All in all, a series of less than twenty Greek inscriptions issued by Ethiopians in Late Antiquity, both from within and outside the borders of the Aksumite kingdom, are materially preserved. A special case, as is well known, is that of the *Monumentum Adulitanum*, a document consisting of two separate inscriptions copied by Cosmas Indicopleustes c.520 CE in his *Topographia christiana*, the first issued by Ptolemy III Euergetes (264-241 BCE), and the latter inscription (unfortunately acephalous) issued by an Aksumite unknown king. The whole *Monumentum*—which is only preserved by this literary transcription—was regarded since the eighteenth century as a peculiar case of «Hellenism», that is of use of Greek in a provincial area.⁷

Against this background that eminently relies on epigraphy, there is absolutely neither information nor evidence concerning any practice of literary

⁵ See S. FRANTSOUZOFF, *Script, Ethiopic*, in *E Ae*, IV (2010), pp. 580b-585a; R. VOIGT, *Transcription systems*, in *E Ae*, V (2014), pp. 533b-537b; see also A. BAUSI - D. NOSNITSIN, *Palaeography*, in *COMSt* 2015, pp. 287-291.

⁶ See CASSON 1989, pp. 2-3; see also G. FIACCADORI, *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, in *E Ae*, IV (2010), pp. 133a-134b.

⁷ See G. FIACCADORI, *Greek inscriptions in Ethiopia/Eritrea*, in *E Ae*, III (2007), pp. 158a-159b; Id., *Monumentum Adulitanum, ibid.*, pp. 1010a-1012b; MARRASSINI 2014, pp. 196-203. Fascinating, but a bit misleading is the popularising presentation by BOWERSOCK 2013, on which see PHILLIPSON 2014 and GAJDA 2016. For the role in the definition of Hellenism played by the *Monumentum Adulitanum*, see CANFORA 1995, pp. 15-18. The discussion on Aksumite Hellenism (wrongly considered a very ephemeral episode, in my opinion, by FAUVELLE-AYMAR 2009, according to whom, p. 144, «le grec n'est plus assez bien lu au début du VI^e siècle pour pouvoir se passer des services de Cosmas, et le grec des monnaies contemporaines ou plus tardives est souvent approximatif», what is contradicted by the translation from the Greek of authors from the second half of the fifth century, for example, in the *Aksumite Collection*, for which see below) has focused on the much disputed inscription of King Sembrouthēs (*RIÉ* no. 275), on which see FIACCADORI 2003; Id., *Sembrouthes*, in *E Ae*, IV (2010), pp. 610b-611a; MARRASSINI 2014, pp. 194-196, no. II; LUSINI 2016, p. 159; the authenticity of the inscription has been recently contested by KASANTSCHIS 2012. For Hellenism in Ancient and Late Antique Ethiopia see also WEISCHER 1971; LUSINI 1988; SOLDATI 2015; 2016; VOICU 2015. For a corresponding Hellenizing archaeological context, see MANZO 2012.

translations in the pre-Christian/pagan period.⁸ There is however the well-attested evidence of practice of multilingual inscriptions. In fact, some royal Aksumite inscriptions occur in a bilingual combination Gəʿəz-Greek, with a set consisting of three separate, perfectly parallel inscriptions, where the Greek version in Greek script is accompanied by two versions in Gəʿəz, a first one in Sabaeen script (and obviously in consonantal script) with only superficial elements of Sabaeization, and a second one in Ethiopian (*fidal*) script. This production of multilingual epigraphic documents—not without parallels in the Ancient World⁹—issued by the royal authority, presupposes a refined process of translation which definitely posits an institutionally organized and controlled practice and setting. For King ʿEzānā in particular, we have an entire series of multilingual inscriptions: two sets of three inscriptions each, concerning an expedition against the Bəgā from the pagan period,¹⁰ and one set composed of two plus one inscriptions, concerning an expedition against the Nobā, apparently after ʿEzānā’s conversion to Christianity.¹¹ Aside from

⁸ For an overview of the historical context and Aksumite history and culture, see PHILLIPSON 2012; ROBIN 2012; MARRASSINI 2014; PIOVANELLI 2014. Still of some importance for the collection of sources remains the contribution by SERGEW HABLE SELASSIE 1972; and the classic monograph is CONTI ROSSINI 1928. For its continuation in early medieval times, see TADDESSE TAMRAT 1972; DERAT 2003; MUNRO-HAY 2005a.

⁹ See some of the well-known cases listed, particularly from the Iranian world, in RUBIN 2002, p. 149.

¹⁰ The relevant inscriptions are the so-called «pseudo-trilingual inscriptions» (listed as *RIĒ* nos 185, I and II, 185 bis, I and II, and 270 and 270 bis), including two sets of three parallel texts each, respectively in Gəʿəz in South Arabian script, in Gəʿəz in Ethiopian non-vocalized script, and in Greek language and script: all in all, the six entries *RIĒ* nos 185 I, II, 185 bis I, II, 270 and 270 bis include six inscriptions (see details, translation and commentary in MARRASSINI 2014, pp. 212-224, nos VI and VII).

¹¹ The third set is more controversial, also due to the fragmentary state of preservation, but likely as well: it consists of the inscriptions *RIĒ* no. 189, Gəʿəz in Ethiopian vocalized script, and of the two inscriptions, *RIĒ* nos 271, in Greek, and 190, in Gəʿəz in South Arabian script (see details, translation and commentary in MARRASSINI 2014, pp. 230-243, nos IX, X and XI). The problem here lies in the fact that while the Christian, Trinitarian character of the Greek inscription of ʿEzānā (*RIĒ* no. 275) is certain (on this see also BLACK 2008, unfortunately marked by many trivial errors) and the same can be said of the parallel one in South Arabian script (*RIĒ* no. 190), where the name of the Christian God is clearly mentioned (ʿIḡziʿabḥer), the Gəʿəz one (*RIĒ* no. 189), also connected with an expedition against the Nobā, mentions a «Lord of Heaven» instead. Among those who have addressed the question recently, RUBIN 2012, in the end, falls within the traditional hypothesis of attributing the differences between the Greek and pseudo-Sabaeen inscription on the one side, and the Gəʿəz inscription on the other, to a varying degree of manifestation of Christian faith, completely explicit in the Greek inscription, not openly declared in the Gəʿəz one. As yet, against this established interpretation, MARRASSINI 2013 (with an English tentative translation of *RIĒ* no. 190, similarly also MARRASSINI 2014, pp. 49-52) has suggested that *RIĒ* no. 189 might attest to a pre-Christian phase of the religious history of Aksum, marked by the cult of a «Lord of Heaven» to be probably identified with the well-known Semitic deity ʿAttār. This religious phase, still within the reign of ʿEzānā is therefore quite distinct from the monotheistic evolution towards Judaism that takes place in the

speculation,¹² however, there is a total lack of clues that might provide hints at a possible interpretation of the *Sitz im Leben* of the multilingual inscription, and the process of production and translation remains highly obscure.

To strictly compare with the epigraphic production is the issue of coins in a threefold series in gold, silver, and copper, where two languages were used—Gə‘əz and Greek—with Greek reserved exclusively for golden issues of higher prestige.¹³

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The very earliest evidence of longer translations of literary character is attested first with the Christianization of the country in the fourth century CE¹⁴ and with the substantial body of literature that the process of conversion and Christianization implied and required for the Christian practice. In keeping with the epigraphic evidence that points to the use of Greek along with Ethiopic—there is no trace of later use of Greek after the Aksumite period—there is a general consensus that this phase of early translations of Christian texts is to be placed in the period from the fourth to the sixth centuries.

Since the country’s Christianisation the diffusion and transmission of a literary *corpus* translated from Greek was in all likelihood committed to manuscripts. This corpus was instrumental to Christian practice and besides biblical and parabolic texts (Apocrypha) it certainly included patristic writings concerning theology, liturgy, hagiography, and homiletic and monastic works.¹⁵ Additionally,

same period on the opposite shore of the Red Sea, on which see now the most extensive and detailed contribution by ROBIN 2015.

¹² A possible speculation concerns the very likely existence of a royal chancery and/or archive at Aksum, as the title of «guardian of the Law, that is secretary of Aksum» (*‘aqqābe ḥəgg zawə’ətu šəḥāfe ‘Aksum*, with smaller variants in the textual tradition) bestowed upon Frumentius/’Abbā Salāmā, the first bishop of Aksum, would make guess; see details in G. FIACCADORI, *Medieval and modern archives in Ethiopia and Eritrea*, in *EAE*, V (2014), pp. 245a-248a, p. 245a; and ID., *Sälama (Käsate Bərhan)*, in *EAE*, IV (2010), pp. 484b-488a, pp. 485b-486a; BAUSI 2008, p. 553, n. 151; on Frumentius/Salāmā see also MARRASSINI 2014, pp. 53 ff.

¹³ On Aksumite coinage, see at least MUNRO-HAY 1984; MUNRO-HAY - JUEL-JENSEN 1995; W. HAHN, *Coinage*, in *EAE*, I (2003), pp. 666b-670b; BAUSI 2005a; the most recent contributions are listed in the just appeared monograph by HAHN - WEST 2016.

¹⁴ See the still important book by BRAKMANN 1994; MUNRO-HAY 1997; MARRASSINI 2014, pp. 36-76.

¹⁵ See the updates to the current traditional canon (represented for example by GUIDI 1932, pp. 11-21), in BAUSI 2012; 2016f; 2017. Comprehensive, but not updated is MARRASSINI 2001; see also LUSINI 2011. Still useful as a general and articulated repertory, particularly rich in liturgical texts, BRAKMANN 1994, pp. 144-174; for additional contributions on liturgical texts, see BAUSI 2011; FRITSCH 2015; 2016.

the presence of historical texts is a recently ascertained fact.¹⁶ This Aksumite corpus survived in the course of time through complex processes of transmission. Some parts survived through direct copying, while other texts came down to us only in a much reshaped form due to partial re-translations from Arabic into Ethiopic, with Arabic translations being documented starting from the thirteenth century.¹⁷

Interestingly and decisively, probably from the tenth century onwards at the latest, if not earlier, the copyists did not already speak the language of the texts that they were copying and Gə'əz remained for the following centuries the written language, of education and religious practice, deeds and record keeping, and literature.

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The analysis of this process is complicated to great extent by two limiting factors: (1) the harsh tyranny of material sources and evidence; (2) the continuous and unceasing reworking of the manuscript and literary tradition in the course of time.

The literary and textual production that has been transmitted to us started in a period from which almost no artefacts bearing textual evidence—except the aforementioned epigraphs and coins—survive. This Aksumite production of translation survives only in later copies which are undated up to the thirteenth century at the earliest. Texts translated or composed in Aksumite times were thus preserved in written form through copied manuscripts and read in the following centuries, and to some extent still are.¹⁸ The apogee of the Aksumite king-

¹⁶ See BAUSI - CAMPLANI 2013; now BAUSI - CAMPLANI 2016, with complete references to previous contributions on texts transmitted in the so-called *Aksumite Collection*, one of the most ancient Ethiopian codices known so far and probably the most ancient non-biblical Ethiopian manuscript. This manuscript is a strong piece of evidence for the importance of relationships between Egypt and Aksumite Ethiopia under the religious, literary, and cultural respect. It also definitely proves that canonical and liturgical texts were translated in Late Antiquity from Greek into Gə'əz. The language of the newly discovered texts is a slavish rendering of the Greek original and as such it is a valuable source for Aksumite Ethiopic. While some features point to dialectal (probably Təgrəñña) peculiarities that can be due to the copyists or redactors—less likely to the translator(s)—others are certainly due to the copyist. Some sections of the collection were reused and included in later Ethiopic works which were translated again, but from an Arabic model, such as the *Sinodos*. The complex and unexpected «philological» processes attested in the *Aksumite Collection* textual tradition call for new methods of analysing and interpreting the Ethiopian literary tradition.

¹⁷ For this complex process, and its severe consequences, see BAUSI 2005b, pp. 167-169; 2014; 2016f, *passim*; ID., *The Aksumite Collection. Ethiopic multiple text manuscripts*, in *COMSt* 2015, pp. 367-372; LUSINI 2011.

¹⁸ For a general look at the Ethiopian manuscript culture, see A. BAUSI, *Ethiopic manuscripts*, in *COMSt* 2015, pp. 46-49; E. BALICKA-WITAKOWSKA - A. BAUSI - C. BOSCH-TIESSÉ - D. NOSNITSIN, *Codicology of Ethiopic manuscripts*, *ibid.*, pp. 154-174. Given the flourishing of contributions in the last years, for the not few last updates see BAUSI 2016f, p. 45, n. 6.

dom is placed from c. fourth to seventh century CE, whereas at the middle of the latter century coins were no more issued and there is an apparent decline of material culture, although the kingdom of Aksum nominally still existed. Yet, as already said, the earliest dated manuscripts—still all in all extremely few single items—do not antedate the thirteenth century.¹⁹

An absolutely notable exception are two Four-Gospel manuscripts from the ʾAbbā Garimā monastery, in the northern highlands of Təgrāy, not far from ʿAdwā, which have been dated by carbon-14 to Late Antiquity (c. fifth to seventh centuries). They are preserved within two distinct bound codices that contain three Four-Gospel manuscripts (the older two plus a more recent one), along with a few further smaller fragments from other later manuscripts.²⁰ Moreover, notwithstanding the progress in the study of Gəʿəz palaeography, there is still no way of attributing a certain manuscript on palaeographical ground to an even approximate date between the fifth/sixth centuries (date of the ʾAbbā Garimā Four-Gospel manuscripts) and the date of the earliest dated manuscripts (thirteenth century).²¹

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Apart from the material gap between the Late Antique phase evidenced by the scanty presence of ancient manuscripts, the earliest survived and available manuscripts also reveal the effects of continuous revisions and rearrangements of older texts over the course of time: the literary heritage and knowledge was continuously reorganized through the changing format and arrangement of the manuscripts. In fact, the manuscripts we have for some genres can be considered sort of «corpus organizers», since they contain miscellaneous content that is the result of the long transmission, organizational, and re-distributional processes within a corpus that at a certain point was understood to be consistent, but actually included texts of very different origin in time and place, provenance, language of the *Vorlage*, and languages involved in the whole transmission process. For this last aspect in particular, Greek- as well as Arabic-based texts (the latter being translated into Gəʿəz starting from the twelfth/thirteenth century at

¹⁹ For fresh new evidence of a paper manuscript with Ethiopic texts from the Egyptian monastery of St Antony dated by carbon-14 to 1185-1255 CE (68.2%), 1160-1265 CE (95.4%), see MAXIMOUS - BLID - BUTTS 2016.

²⁰ See now the wonderful monograph by MCKENZIE - WATSON 2016, focusing on art-historical aspects, with an almost exhaustive literature on the three ʾAbbā Garimā manuscripts, virtual reconstruction of the canon tables, and most of all with a magnificent series of colour plates and pictures.

²¹ See the most rich documentation on Ethiopian palaeography, UHLIG 1988; 1990; and a synthesis by A. BAUSI - D. NOSNITSIN, *Palaeography*, in *COMSt* 2015, pp. 287-291. The new dating of the ʾAbbā Garimā manuscripts, however, requires a complete and fresh rethinking of Ethiopian palaeography; also on this, see BAUSI 2016f, *passim*.

the latest, yet probably even earlier²²) came to be mixed within the same manuscripts at the time of the earliest preserved manuscripts accessible to us.²³

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During the obscure and scarcely documented period between the Aksumite (fourth to seventh centuries and beyond) and post-Aksumite ages, written culture was probably affected by traumatic events with a consequent loss of whole *corpora* of texts. Besides material factors, it is time to advance again the hypothesis that this was probably due to changes in linguistic standards.²⁴ That is, translated texts, particularly very literal translations or versions which were already based upon non-standard variants of language, had become virtually unintelligible even to the educated clergy. The combined effects of linguistic change on the one hand, decline in literary culture, and long textual transmission by copying, led to extensive textual corruption. In consequence, ancient Aksumite translations were either superficially revised or even transformed by complex and unexpected processes, or even abandoned and totally replaced with newer ones. A by-effect of this process is the emergence of a literary phase that shows a deep discontinuity with the traditional teaching transmitted in ecclesiastical schools up to the present: clergy educated in a present-day environment have no understanding of some ancient texts, the language of which would appear unclear and incorrect. This process of transmission strongly contributes to mark the Aksumite literature as a «classical literature» of a remote past, deeply rooted in the late antique context.

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Notwithstanding the uncertainties caused by the aforementioned two factors, we can reasonably conclude as follows:

(1) all ancient translations into Gəʿəz in Aksumite times were undertaken on the basis of Greek models. In the case of the Bible this can be easily proven on the basis of clear linguistic features: textual correspondence with the LXX version of the Old Testament against the Hebrew text; presence of loanwords; syntactic

²² See MAXIMOUS - BLID - BUTTS 2016.

²³ For the example of hagiography, see BRITA 2015; BAUSI 2016c. For the concept of such manuscripts as «corpus organizers», see BAUSI 2010.

²⁴ «Linguistic standard» is here a concept that includes all interrelated questions of language (phonology, morphology, syntax), as well as orthography and palaeography. It is impossible here to deal in detail with all issues; for a first attempt at a comprehensive discussion of several distinct, yet strictly interrelated aspects, and their unavoidable consequences on editorial choices, see BAUSI 2016f.

structures that correspond to those of the Greek text; in some cases also «mirror-type» translations are attested;²⁵

(2) there is no appreciable trace of any interference with an alternative linguistic model in the oldest Aksumite translations: either Hebrew, Aramaic, or Syriac, as it was once surmised. Hypotheses of interference with Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac models were advanced in consideration of the textual contents of the earliest Aksumite translations, where along with the Bible (Old and New Testament), major Apocrypha played a major role: typically, the *Book of Enoch*, the discovery of Aramaic fragments of which prompted new hypotheses of a possible non-Greek *Vorlage* for the Ethiopic version. The complete absence of any possible role either for Hebrew and Aramaic as well as for Syriac has been gradually confirmed by the data provided by the increasing number of available critical editions of Gə'əz texts belonging in the most ancient phase of the textual tradition and based upon the oldest attainable manuscripts;²⁶

(3) there are Hebraisms in a later recension of the Old Testament, which can be explained with revisions undertaken in medieval times (c.1500) on the basis of a Masoretic Hebrew text; although the circumstances of this revision are not

²⁵ See in general for the editions of the Bible, VAN ESBROECK 1998, pp. 451–464 (*La Bible éthiopienne*); S. WENINGER, *Gə'əz Bible editions*, in *EAE*, I (2003), pp. 569a-571b. For an outline of the history of research, but from an outdated position, see ULLENDORFF 1968. For the Old Testament, see KNIBB 1999, and for the New Testament ZUURMOND 1989. More in general, see S. UHLIG, *Bible: Time and context*, in *EAE*, I (2003), pp. 563a-564a; and for a concise presentation of the question of the *Vorlage* of the Ethiopian Bible and some major Apocrypha as well, see R. ZUURMOND, *Bible Vorlage: Greek, ibid.*, pp. 564a-565a; and M.A. KNIBB, *Bible Vorlage: Syriac, Hebrew, Coptic, Arabic, ibid.*, p. 565a-b. For some of the most important contributions on the long-debated question of the *Vorlage*, see DILLMANN 1877; RECKENDORF 1887; GILDEMEISTER 1894; CONTI ROSSINI 1895; PRÄTORIUS 1897; CHARLES 1898; HEIDER 1902; BAUMSTARK 1930; GEHMAN 1931; ULLENDORFF 1960; 1980; 1987; BOTTE 1960; RAHLFS 1965; CERULLI 1967; ALTHEIM - STIEHL 1969; HOFMANN 1969; LÖFGREN 1969; RICCI 1971; MILES 1971; 1985; RODINSON 1972; PIOVANELLI 1987; KNIBB 1988; 2000; ZUURMOND 1992; MARRASSINI 1999; MIKRE-SELLASSIE 2000; HEIDE 2015. A more detailed evaluation of select recent and less recent editions of biblical texts can be found in BAUSI 2016f.

²⁶ See POLOTSKY 1964; MARRASSINI 1999, which are the fundamental contributions on the question. Responsible for some confusion, probably even beyond the intention of the author, is WITAKOWSKI 1990, that has mixed elements of Syrian «origin» and «provenance»; see also ID., *Syrian influences in Ethiopia*, in *EAE*, IV (2010), pp. 782b-785b. For recent contributions, also on the role of the purported role of the «Nine Saints» in the Christianization of Ethiopia, once, and definitely no more, believed to be «Syrian», see MUNRO-HAY 2005b; A. BRITA, *Nine Saints*, in *EAE*, III (2007), pp. 1188b-1191a; EAD. 2010; 2012; 2013; 2015; TEDROS ABRAHA 2009; PÉRÈS 2010; LEE 2011; 2014; 2016; COLIN - DERAT - ROBIN 2017; BUTTS 2014, particularly important for the role ascribed to the intermediation of Arabic versions; SUERMANN 2014; 2016; HAINTHALER 2016. Particularly useful and reliable for an overview is the last contribution by MARRASSINI 2014, pp. 103-108 (*La Siria e il siriano*). An interesting case study of the recent genesis of a related hagiographical cycle is presented by HUMMEL 2016.

yet clear, these features appear exclusively in more recent manuscripts and secondary textual layers (that is, one cannot invoke here the principle of *recentiores, non deteriores*) and are certainly due to a relatively recent development;²⁷

(4) the same can be said for traces of Syriac textual features: these have been recognised in some texts, including biblical texts (so-called «*vulgata* recension» of the Old Testament, starting from the fourteenth century). As yet, these readings go back to revisions undertaken in the medieval period through Arabic versions based upon Syriac models; therefore there is no clearly documented case of direct interference between Syriac and Ethiopic. All this notwithstanding, the idea and hypothesis of a sort of «ancient sisterhood» between Ethiopian (Gəʾəz) and Syriac literatures and Christianities keeps on being attractive and still stimulates researches which ambiguously wave between legitimate literary studies (tracing of and search for common motives among late antique and medieval literatures of the Christian Orient) and attempts at shortcut conclusions of preferential affinity and strict relationship, without a reliable philological background. All in all, the interference with Syriac Christianity is possibly documented by very few loanwords, while other assumed Syriac loanwords are better explained, according to Hans Jakob Polotsky, as loanwords from Jewish Aramaic;

(5) a similar ambiguity concerns the purported presence of ancient Hebraic or Jewish elements in Ethiopian Christianity and specifically in its linguistic and literary layer. If the presence of a few Aramaic loanwords, probably from Jewish Aramaic, is well established and can be given for certain, the context of their origin and presence is still highly unclear and very much disputed. Recent hypothesis of an ancient presence of Jewish communities in Ethiopia or in the kingdom of Aksum, however, are supported by no historical evidence at all and should be taken with all caution.²⁸

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²⁷ See above the titles listed for the Bible.

²⁸ See for the long debated question the exemplarily clear presentation by MARRASSINI 1987b; a useful update is provided by F.C. GAMST, *Judaism, in EAe*, III (2007), pp. 303b-308a, particularly important for ruling out any hypothesis of an ancient origin of the Falasha (Beta ʾĪsrāʾel). A selection of contributions on the issue is reprinted in BAUSI 2012, pp. 121-186, in a section dedicated to the Judaic component of Ethiopian Christianity (ULLENDORFF 1956, RODINSON 1964a; 1964b) and a bibliography is found on pp. lii-liv, from the most recent titles of which I would only quote here KAPLAN 2000; see also TUBACH 2015; 2016, for the question of Jewish Aramaic loanwords. As an example of an ongoing stream of literature indebted to Edward Ullendorff, which permeates the bibliography without providing any reliable new contribution, see SCHATTFNER-RIESER 2012. On the *Kābra nagast*, see BAUSI 2012, pp. lvi-lix, 253-328, and further updates now in BAUSI 2016e. A large, useful, well readable and balanced presentation of the evidence, with priority rightly assigned to Maxime Rodinson's hypotheses, is MUNRO-HAY 2006, pp. 13-68 (*Judaism in Ethiopia*), and pp. 69-130 (*The Ethiopian Tabot, its Function and Symbolism*).

If the question concerning the translations in Coptic Egypt is therefore that of determining the nature of the Greek-Egyptian (Coptic) contact, which developed into a Coptic-Arabic one later on, in Ethiopia we have evidence of direct translations from Greek into Gəʿəz, at a time when Greek had already been for quite a long time (several centuries, if we trust the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* that Greek was mastered already in the first century CE) an established language of prestige, used in royal inscriptions as well as for legends of coins destined to international circulation. From this point of view, there is nothing surprising in the subsequent work of translation from Greek into Gəʿəz, all the more since there is no evidence that besides Greek other model languages were used. The extent to which Greek was used and practised as a non-literary language, instead, is still a matter of discussion and most of all of speculation, since practically nothing is known about the context and actors of the translations.

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While in the course of time in Egypt Coptic was first flanked and then superseded by Arabic, Christian Ethiopia maintained always during its history its own language. The impact of the Coptic-Arabic literature in Ethiopia was strong, but it was a literary phenomenon and took place through the merging of different layers depending from different linguistic models (*Vorlagen*), both at a textual level, obviously involving linguistic aspects; and at a manuscript level, with the juxtaposition of materials of different origin and the creation of new types of manuscripts.²⁹ In fact, this happened without any real substitution of a language with another, being already Gəʿəz not a spoken, but a literary language. It can be easily surmised that the obvious factor responsible for this difference is the existence of a polity—an Ethiopian Christian monarchy—that supported a deeply rooted national Church, while both of them made use of the same national literary language (Gəʿəz). These conditions provided for the continuation of the Ethiopian linguistic late antique heritage, and to some extent of the literary body too, into the medieval period and beyond. Conversely we can also guess that a most powerful factor for the deep rooting of the national Church of Ethiopia might have been the language of expression (Gəʿəz) as well as the body of literature, early translated and transmitted in that language.

²⁹ Typical is the case of hagiographic collections, see BAUSI 2017: there are two precise features which appear to characterize hagiographic short texts in multiple-text manuscripts which belong to the more ancient and archaic layer of the Ethiopian literary heritage: (a) a Greek-Coptic form of the name in the commemoration date, that is usually placed within the text at its beginning; and (b) a sort of double title, placed both at the beginning and at the end of the text. This element might definitely be a point to be carefully examined having in mind what happens in the Coptic tradition, for which see the fundamental contributions by BUZI 2005; 2011; 2016.

The coming of a new wave of translations carried out upon different models in medieval times,³⁰ however, had also its consequences upon Gəʿəz.³¹ While in the Coptic tradition the linguistic passage determined a sort of massive filter that occasioned a substantial refurbishing of the literary tradition, this was not the case in the Ethiopian literary tradition, where, for texts already translated in the earlier Aksumite period, the process was at times more capillary, at the level of slighter linguistic revision, or at times radical, with the consequence of adopting new translations which completely replaced the existing ones, yet substantially within the same language.³²

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In comparison with Coptic Christianity, it is clearly evident that aside from the production of royal inscriptions, which remain the only original Aksumite texts attested by contemporary artefacts known to date, there is absolutely no evidence of any literary activity in Ethiopia consisting in the original production of Greek works. Greek models were definitely used, but there is no evidence of a parallel local production. All the more difficult is to establish any real link between the literary production of translations and any precise ideological orientation. What however seems to emerge clearly—as is to be expected for historical and contextual reasons, namely the dependence of the diocese of Aksum from Alexandria starting from the appointment of the first bishop of Aksum, Frumentius, by Athanasius—is that the relationship with Egyptian Christianity definitely dominated Aksumite Christianity and also determined its later developments. Moreover, the more we discover the ancient, Aksumite background of Gəʿəz texts belonging to an ancient layer, albeit attested by later manuscripts and in a modified form starting from medieval times, the more they appear to be directly related to the Egyptian (Alexandrian) Christian institutions.

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³⁰ For a general overview see BAUSI 2014; 2016c (with a large list of texts translated from Arabic and relevant contributions); 2016d. On medieval translations in Ethiopian literature see at least CONTI ROSSINI 1912; 1922; CHAÎNE 1922; KĀMIL 1942; CERULLI 1943; 1943-1947; 1968; VAN LANTSCHOOT 1960; DORESE 1962; SAUGET 1974; FIACCADORI 1993; PROVERBIO 1998; HELDMAN 2007; KAPLAN 2008; LUCCHESI 2009; WELLNHOFER 2014.

³¹ The question of linguistic changes in Gəʿəz remains a crucial one. For the peculiar features of epigraphic Gəʿəz see BAUSI 2005b; BULAKH 2013; 2014. For further contributions, see BAUSI 2017. For the language of post-Aksumite Gəʿəz see in particular, KROPP 1986; MARRASSINI 1987a, pp. 122-123; VOIGT 1991; COLIN 1993; WENINGER 2001 (with extensive bibliography); 2014; 2015; for possible traces of copticisms still apparent in a text translated from Arabic, ZANETTI 2015a, pp. 105-107; 2015b, pp. 228-229.

³² For some examples of this process, see BAUSI 2006a; 2006b, pp. 52-54

It is practically impossible to single out any trace of pagan survival in the ancient Aksumite translations: there is nothing from the pagan substratum that has been incorporated into the early Gə'əz Christian literary tradition, although one probable trace of the passage from paganism to Christianity can be perceived in the name itself of the Christian Only God, namely 'Ēgzi'abher, «God, Lord», but literally «the Lord ('əgzi') of the Region (bəher)». In fact, the second term is also known as the alternative name of a pagan divinity (Bəher, or Mədr) of the very peculiar Aksumite pre-Christian pantheon.³³ As yet, in two passages of only one biblical book, the *Wisdom of Sirach* or *Ecclesiasticus* (31,8 and 37,21), the name of the Aksumite and well known Semitic deity 'Astār is used as a name of God: a fact that is commonly interpreted as a relic of paganism in Aksumite times.³⁴

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In the immediate aftermath of the discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices, and not by accident first thanks to suggestions by Jean Doresse, who spent several years in Ethiopia,³⁵ some interest arose for the possible presence of a «gnostic literature» and a «gnostic stream» in Christian Ethiopia. In fact, in the course of time this affinity has appeared to be more a sort of attitude of some Ethiopian texts,

³³ The term *Bəher* («region, land», as a common noun) as a name of the divinity occurs together with *Mədr* («earth, land», as a common noun) in one inscription (*RIÉ* no. 188); and *Bhr* alternates with *Mdr* in the Gə'əz versions of one of the two sets of the pseudo-trilingual Aksumite inscriptions of King 'Ezānā (*RIÉ* no. 185, with *Bhr* in the version in South Arabian script and *Mdr* in that in Ethiopian script); see all details in MARRASSINI 2014, pp. 43-47. Moreover, the still distinct writing 'Ēgzi'a Bəher is the regular spelling in the most ancient manuscripts.

³⁴ See DILLMANN 1894, p. 117, «Deinde in Cp. 31,8. 37,21 pro እግዚአብሔር : ['Ēgzi'abher], quod consulto imprimendum curavi, vocem አሰታር : ['Astār] antiquitus traditam esse, e variis codicum lectionibus pro certo colligi potest. Astar autem Abessinibus, priusquam ad sacra Christiana transierunt, divino honore cultum esse ex inscriptione Axumitica nunc satis constat. Sequitur, eo tempore, quo Ecclesiasticus in Geez sermonem translatus est, paganismi vestigia nondum ita superata fuisse, ut illicitum videretur fortunam seu fatum hujus dei nomine nuncupare». There is unfortunately nothing on possible textual variants which could provide an alternative explanation of the readings in the two verses, in the recent contribution by DANIEL ASSEFA 2015. The date of 678 CE for the accomplishment of the translation, presented for long as certain on the basis of a *subscriptio* in some manuscripts, must be interpreted in a different way and attests in fact only the much later accomplishment of a medieval exemplar, as demonstrated by RAHLFS 1965, pp. 679-681, and as was also surmised even by DILLMANN 1894, p. 114, «Sententiam Zotenbergi, qui huic anno annum mundi 7170 (vel Christi 1678) substituendum esse censet, equidem non approbaverim; facilius crediderim, anno 678 Ecclesiasticum in Geez verum esse. At in codice Musei Brit. Orient. 494 (in Wrightii cat. p. 17) legitur: ዘተጽሕፈት ሰጅጃዎህጃዎህጃዎህጃዎህጃ ፡ i.e. anno mundi 6970 (Christi 1478), quam lectionem si quis potiore habuerit, illo anno aut archetypum quorundam recentiorum apographorum exaratum, aut priscam versionem ex auctoritate libri Graeci reflectam esse existimaverit». See also MARRASSINI 2014, pp. 45-46.

³⁵ See DORESSE 1970; 1971; 1972. Jean Doresse (1917-2007) worked as a consultant for the Ethiopian government in the years 1953-1955 and still in 1961-1963.

where secret revelations and allusive speeches abound, than any really gnostic literature in the narrow and historical sense of the term, as in fact Doresse himself repeatedly pointed out. All this notwithstanding, there has been a certain flourishing of speculation on the purported vocation of Ethiopian literature for exoteric and really gnostic themes and forms.³⁶ As yet, even in the cases of a most blatant heterodox aspect—for example, in texts of the *Apocalypse of Peter* dossier containing clear allusion to the *apokatástasis* doctrine³⁷—this appears to be of a very late character and based upon an Arabic model, not to say that parallels and examples can be found in other literatures as well. With this, we can also conclude that there is not at present any convincing evidence for any Gəʿəz translation based directly on a Coptic text,³⁸ and even less for the late survival in Ethiopia of authentic gnostic motives.

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Due to the aforementioned conditions of material preservation of manuscripts from Antiquity and Late Antiquity, nothing can be said on the libraries hosting manuscripts in Aksumite times. The often underlined presence of an archive at Aksum is based upon indirect sources, which presuppose the function of secretary for Frumentius, who is credited with the early Christianization of Aksum as well as with the first appointment to the bishopric of Aksum.³⁹ The survival of some protocol forms from the epigraphic documents to the earliest attested feudal deeds is also an important evidence for the continuity of an early established practice.⁴⁰ The existence and nature of real *scriptoria*, however, is a completely different matter, unless—as it has been usually posited, unwittingly or not—with

³⁶ See FIACCADORI 1992, pp. xi («una lunga appendice (“Tommaso in Etiopia”) rileva sistematicamente le presenze di Gnostici e Manichei, Ariani, Fantasiasti e Nestoriani nel regno di Aksum dal III al VI secolo; e verifica la possibilità d’una sopravvivenza delle rispettive dottrine “nelle diverse *haereses* dell’Etiopia medievale”»), and 79-89 (v. *Tommaso in Etiopia*), who has collected with incredible erudition a large array of evidence from many medieval texts; see in particular p. 84, «Tutto ciò [...] induce a ravvisare in questi [elementi] una rielaborazione, a tratti “ortodossa”, d’idee e dottrine penetrate e diffuse in Abissinia da età ben più remota. Meno probabile, e francamente angusta, una recente analisi dei dati quali autonomo frutto di prestiti “letterari” o d’un processo evolutivo interno alla tradizione indigena del basso Medioevo». The «gnostic hypothesis» featured also in the literature by CERULLI 1968; in the same vein see also some contributions by LUSINI 1996; 2000; 2003. On all this, see the definitive and well-grounded refutation by PIOVANELLI 2004, pp. 202-205.

³⁷ See BAUSI 2016g for an exhaustive bibliography.

³⁸ See for example ZANETTI 1993; 1994; 2009. Further references in BAUSI 2002, p. 15, n. 54.

³⁹ See above.

⁴⁰ See BAUSI 2013, pp. 173-174, for the opening formula of inscription *RIÉ* no. 192, by King WʿZB, son of King Kāleb.

scriptorium is only meant the place of production of manuscripts, either containing original texts or new translations or copies, without assuming any particularly organized form of production.⁴¹ Whatever they have to be understood, however, places of preservation of most ancient manuscripts appear to be concentrated in the northern regions of Təgrāy, and to some extent also in the highlands of the Lake Ṭānā region. Unfortunately, the earliest examples of inventories bring us to not earlier than the end of the thirteenth century. The same is true for the most ancient *subscriptions* attesting to translations.⁴² These inventories, however, are extremely useful, and allow us to establish clearly demarcating *termini ante* and *post quos* for some translations. To what extent this might resemble a more ancient, late antique and Aksumite practice, is impossible to say.

The movement of manuscripts was also a common practice, to which some recent contributions have attracted due attention.⁴³ But what we know, as usual, is limited to later periods and we can only guess by analogy what could have been the situation in previous ones. As yet, the movement of books for copying appear to have been a relative accepted practice, whereas the donation of books, particularly by charismatic figures, could have had a peculiar meaning and not rarely be meant as a strong advice to take into account a precise text or work and points of view.

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To conclude, an extremely promising field of research appears to be the study of the presence of Ethiopians in Egypt as the most likely way of understanding how translations from Arabic—or even Coptic?—into Gəʿəz were executed. The evidence that has recently emerged⁴⁴ confirms that at a previously undocumented early stage the presence of Ethiopian monks in Egyptian monasteries could not have been disjoined from the carrying out of a specific literary activity.

⁴¹ See for a first orientation, BALICKA-WITAKOWSKA - BAUSI - BOSC-TIESSÉ - NOSNITSIN, *Codicology of Ethiopic manuscripts*, in *COMSt* 2015, pp. 154, 169-170; see also BAUSI 2004, pp. 14-15; BOSC-TIESSÉ 2011; 2014; DERAT 2012; very balanced, reasonable and useful conclusions in the comprehensive dissertation by WINSLOW 2015, pp. 264-273; see also LUSINI 2004; 2015; NOSNITSIN 2013a; 2013b, with contributions by various authors, see in particular PISANI 2013. See also the important explorations and discoveries by ERHO 2013a; 2013b; 2015; 2016; ERHO - STUCKENBRUCK 2013.

⁴² See for the most ancient inventory in the monastery of Dabra Ḥayq ʾĒstifānos, dated to 1292 CE, SERGEW HABLE SELLASIE 1992; on the case of the inventories of the same monastery, see also BOSC-TIESSÉ 2011; further references in BAUSI 2008, pp. 546-547.

⁴³ See ANCEL - NOSNITSIN 2014; ANCEL 2016. For an interesting evidence on (forbidding) borrowing manuscripts for copying, see BRITA 2014.

⁴⁴ See MAXIMOUS - BLID - BUTTS 2016. For the Ethiopian presence in Egypt in general, see fundamentally CERULLI 1943-1947. Further contributions are quoted in BAUSI 2016c.

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