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መቅደም .....	ገጽ
የጽሑፉ ዓላማ .....	፳

## ምዕራፍ ፩

የብራና ጽሑፍና የግዕዝ ፊደላት ዕድገት .....	፩
፩.፩ የብራና ሥነ ጽሑፍ .....	፩
፩.፪ የብራና መጻሕፍት አስፈላጊነት .....	፭
፩.፫ የግዕዝ ፊደላት ዕድገት .....	፱

## ምዕራፍ ፪

ጥንታዊው የእጅ ሥነ ጽሑፍ ቅደም ተከተል .....	፲፩
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## ምዕራፍ ፫

የፊደላት ቅጥያዎች፣ ለውጦችና ሥርዓተ ነቀጥ ወነጥብ .....	፵፭
፫.፩ የፊደላት ቅጥያዎች (ዋየሎች) .....	፵፭
፫.፪ የፊደላት ለውጥ ወይም ውርርስ .....	፵፮
፫.፫ የፊደላት አገባብ(ኖኅያት) .....	፶
፫.፬ ሥርዓተ ነቀጥና ነጥብ .....	፶፩
፫.፭ በጥንታዊው የብራና መጻሕፍት የዳር ምልክቶች ላይ በሊቃውንት ጉባዔ የተሰጠ ተጨማሪ ትርጓሜ .....	፷፫

## ምዕራፍ ፬

በቁም ጽሕፈት የፊደላት ቅርጽ፣ ዓይነቶችና አቀማመጥ .....	፳፱
፬.፩ በቁም ጽሕፈት የፊደላት ቅርጽ .....	፳፱
፬.፪ የቁም ጽሕፈት ዓይነቶች .....	፳
፬.፫ የፊደላት አቀማመጥ .....	፳፪

## Post-face

This book is the result of a lifetime dedication to the conservation and the study of Ethiopian manuscripts. Its author, *liqā guba'é* Fekade Selassie Teferra, received both a religious and a modern education. Born and raised in the region of Mānagāša, in Šāwa, he studied the *bétalehém zéma* in Addis Alām during his early childhood. Then, he followed his *māmher* (professor) to Agawmeder where he learned *degg'a*. After that, he decided to study *qenē* in Dābrā Iyāsus, Gojjam, where he studied during two years with *māmher* Tsegé. Later he joined the famous *qenē* school of Wašāra where he stayed more than three years with *māmher* Mahbāl Fānté and got his *qenē* diploma; later he did advanced study of *qenē* in Dābrā Elyas with *māmher* W/Mika'él. In 1955 E.C. Fekade Selassie joined the *aq'aq'am bét* in Jarmarta, Agawmeder, with *māmher* Sarāgāla, with whom he stayed one year, proceeding then to Gondār to benefit from the teaching of the famous *māmher* Hénok from Ba'āta, who gave him his diploma. In 1957 E.C., Fekade Selassie Teferra, not even twenty years old, was thus already *māmher* of *qenē* and of *aq'aq'am*. Back in his hometown Addis Alām, he studied the interpretation of the New Testament with *māmher* Bākūrā. In 1959 E.C. Fekade Selassie went to Addis Abāba, to Bā'atā school, to conclude his studies with the *andāmta* of the New Testament. There, the administrator of Bā'atā strongly advised him to obtain his high school certificate and therefore he enrolled in a modern, or *zāmānawi*, secondary school studying together with much younger children. After eight years of study, from 1959 to 1966 E.C., he got his degree and he received his diploma from the hand of emperor Haylā Sellasé himself in April 1965 E.C. At the same time, he got his *andāmta* certificate.

It is during this busy period that he began working for the National Library and the EMLL project (Ethiopian Manuscripts Microfilm Library) at first with a part time contract. He was at first responsible for translating from Ge'ez into Amharic and dating the manuscripts. This famous microfilming program was set up jointly in April 1964 E.C. by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the American University of Saint Louis (Collegeville) and the Divinity School at Vanderbilt University. The microfilming of manuscripts of the churches and of the public and private libraries of Addis Abāba started at the beginning of 1967 E.C.<sup>97</sup> The microfilming of the manuscripts in rural areas followed, first in Šāwa, then mostly in Gondār and Gojjam.

What was Fekade Selassie's experience in the field of manuscripts when he began working for the EMLL? During his student years as a *qollo tamari*, he used to prepare parchment (*branna*) and manuscripts both for himself and for his masters. Already, when learning *zéma*, he copied out his own book of *māzmur*, *tsoma degg'a* and *me'eraf*, gathering these basic collections of hymns in the same codex. Later, in the *qenē bét*, a stage when the highest knowledge of Ge'ez is required, he copied out books of *ges* (vocabulary) and of *agāba* (grammar). At the *aq'aq'am bét*, he copied a book of *ziq*; in addition, he also copied one *māwasét zamaré* and a collection of *andāmta*.

The path that Fekade Selassie chose to follow here is not the most common: most students in traditional religious schools do not feel the need to copy themselves the books they are learning from. Ethiopian religious education values highly the knowledge of texts, but the ability

<sup>97</sup> See the preface of the first *Bulletin of Ethiopian Manuscripts, Trimester Publication of Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library* by the project director Sergew Hable Selassie, January 1974 G.C.



to write and to copy these texts was and still is considered most of the time as a simple technical skill performed not by "pure intellectuals" but by *däbtära*. The fact that a scribe is also, most of the time, a parchment maker who therefore engages in transforming the skin of a dead animal into a piece of writing material is surely one of the reasons why scribes in Ethiopia are not considered as being fully part of the Ethiopian intellectual elite but more as craftsmen. Of course, the boundary between these two literary practices can be crossed but still direction chosen by Fekade Selassie as a student was somehow extraordinary. This knowledge served him throughout his studies to finance his living in selling parchment. Studying in Gojjam while being of Shāwan origin was not always an easy matter, and this technical skill was a great help in strengthening his good relations with his teachers.

When he joined the EMML project, his interest in manuscripts naturally grew and he benefited from discussions with the different *liqawent* he met in Addis Ababa and in the rural churches and monasteries. Step-by-step his duties in the EMML project expanded and he was soon in charge of the relationships with the monasteries and churches. This responsibility led him up and down the Christian highlands to hold discussions with the religious institutions about their manuscript libraries and about which codices they chose to have microfilmed. Above all he had to persuade the people to send their manuscripts to Addis Ababa, for the process of microfilming took place in the buildings of the National Library and the EMML project never had a mobile unit. During the Derg period, when the project was nationalised, we can well imagine that the priests were not always very confident about sending their libraries to the capital city for microfilming, a process which the rural clergy and villagers often did not understand.

Fekade Selassie used both his official letters from the religious and lay authorities and his experience in *qenē* to convince the custodians of the monastic libraries to trust the EMML project and to allow him to carry off their precious volumes all the way to Addis and return them. Of course, some institutions did not send all their manuscripts to Addis, and some of them, such as Aksum Seyon, never agreed to have their manuscripts microfilmed at all. But all in all the results were successful and almost ten thousand volumes were microfilmed.

The idea of this book came into existence at the end of the 1980s, encouraged by professor Tadesse Tamrat, when it appeared clearly that the culture of manuscript preparation was dying and that there was a need to transmit it scientifically to the general public. The traditional way of learning how to make a manuscript, that is to say learning from actual parchment makers and scribes, was already declining with the growth of printing. Fekade Selassie then began to gather all the information he had collected throughout his life, and he received a grant from the Ford foundation in 1987 G.C. in order for him to do additional fieldwork. For various reasons, even after the text was finished and manually typed, the book was never actually published. Only in 2005 G.C. was the project exhumed. Thanks to the help of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) and the research program "Manuskriptkulturen in Asien und Afrika" (Hamburg University, Asien-Afrika Institut), the necessary funding to process and print the text was gathered. Tinsae Eskender's meticulous job of typing ensured that the book manuscript was prepared to the highest standards. The French Centre of Ethiopian Studies in Addis Ababa is the favourable and dynamic environment where all the processes of preparing the manuscript took place. This unique book is thus now a reality.

Unique? We should mention that Sergew Hable Selassie, the first project director of EMMML (until 1978 G.C.) had published as far back as 1981 a booklet entitled *Bookmaking in Ethiopia*. In thirty-five pages, the author presents the main topics about parchment making, preparation of pens and inks, bindings, the training of scribes and their work. Focused on technical processes, it was a first synthesis in English on this still-living Ethiopian tradition. But this booklet itself was indeed very much based on Fekade Selassie's experience and Sergew Hable Sellasié acknowledge him in his preface as the expert who provided crucial input to the book.

The present book greatly extends the scope of Sergew's *Bookmaking* and of other specific contributions related to the material aspects of manuscripts (see bibliography). First, because it is written and published in Amharic, it gives for the first time access to the terminology in use in the Amhara regions. There are always limits to translation and in order to understand wholly such a rich culture as the manuscript culture one has to approach it through its native language. Indeed, how can we properly appreciate such cultural things as technical procedures and specialised tools, aspects of the natural environment, as well as professional vocabulary or intellectual references if they are presented only in translation? Also, the primary audience of this book is not intended to be the academic and foreign world, but Ethiopians themselves, especially the younger generation and the clergy from rural areas.

The book deals with different topics related to what is known as codicology (the study of the codex in its materiality) and palaeography (the study of handwriting). These two disciplines consider the manuscript first of all as a physical object and have developed their own methods

which are now well known and developed in the field of Western manuscripts. By contrast, Oriental manuscripts have not been studied with the same care. If the efforts of François Deroche in the field of Arabic manuscripts<sup>98</sup> have dramatically extended our knowledge in this area, we have to admit that for Ethiopian manuscripts there is yet not such extended study. This is especially regrettable inasmuch as unlike European manuscripts, Oriental manuscripts are still being produced and used the cultures to which they belong.

Why is codicology essential? First, it embodies the necessary understanding that books comprise not only texts, but also a medium for these texts and this medium deserves to be studied. Just as an archaeologist studies material remains, the codicologist examines the materiality of a codex in order to understand how, when and where the manuscript was made. For what purpose? who was the patron of the codex? etc. Each manuscript is a unique object. Therefore historians need to know as much as possible, as precisely as possible, about the context in which it was produced and thereafter how it was preserved and transmitted. This can provide valuable hints on the material culture of those who produced the manuscripts. Of course, texts copied in manuscripts also take their place in a chain of transmission that itself has to be reconstructed and all data concerning the codices are precious to understand the history of a text. Therefore codicology is an auxiliary science of history and philology.

Through the book of Fekade Selassie, one can reach the men who produced the manuscripts, for the main character of this book is the scribe, the *qum sahafî*. How is he trained? What is his working day? The

<sup>98</sup> One of his last books is *Le livre manuscrit arabe*, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 2005. It is now being translated into Arabic and English.

book finishes with the short biography of some famous scribes of the twentieth century who transcend the anonymity of the mass of unknown scribes who have made the manuscript culture of Ethiopia.

To conclude with brief words on the structure of the book itself; The reader may be surprised to discover, for instance, that the chapters (*me'eraf*) have no title. This is not so surprising however, if one considers the way Ethiopian manuscripts are structured. They make use of only a very restricted number of paratextual elements: titles, subtitles, indexes, page numbers, annotations, tables of content ... These tools which all assist in the reading of a book, are not widely used in Ethiopian traditional literacy.

The present book is therefore a witness, almost an archaeological witness, of one peculiar way of thinking and writing.

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## የቃላት ትርጉም

### ሀ፣ ሐ፣ ገ

- ሀብተ ጽሕፈት ጽሕፈትን የማሳመር ዕድል
- ሐሩር ከገብስ፣ ከስንዴ፣ ከእንክርዳድና ከዳጉላ አንዱ የእህል ዘር ተቆልቶና አር ውሃ ሲጨመርበት የሚወጣው ፈላሽ
- ሐውልት ጽሑፍ ባረፈባቸው ዓምዶች መካከል ያልተጻፈበት ባዶ ብራና ከፊደላት ቁመት በላይ ያለና ያልተጻፈበት ቦታ
- ሐዋ የአንድ ብራና ቅጠል ግማሽ ከነታጣፊው
- ኅላፍ ውበት
- ኅብረ መልክዕ የአንድ መጽሐፍ በግርጌው በኩል (ከጽሑፉ በታች) ያለ ባዶ ብራና
- ጥጌ የፊደል ዓይነት (ቅርጽ)
- ጥፃ የልዩ ነጭ ድንጋይ (ሰፋጭ) ዱቄት