

Geez Qene Translated into English

Introduction

It has now been about ten or more years since the late Professor Pankhurst approached me with a plea to work on an Amharic book: Metshafe Tizita by Haleqa Lemma Hailu (መጽሐፈ ትዝታ ዘኣለቃ ለማ ሃይለ), a fascinating narrative spanning a unique Ethiopian history from Tewodros, to Yohannes, to Menelik, to Eyassu, to Zewditu, and up and including the era of Haileselassie, and translate it into English. I had to tell the professor I did not have the time to do it.

Towards the end of the book, however, I came across a whole section of collection of Geez Qene with Amharic translation, and I offered that I could translate these into English and suggested that the rest of the book, if given for translation by teachers, and or, students to the English Department of Addis Ababa University, I could help in editing the final work.

With that, I applied myself to the translation of the Geez Qene. The result is the work that follows. Unfortunately, the rest of the book, which really deserves translation into English, for the wealth of insight it offers into the culture and history of the era it spans, still remains in Amharic, waiting for a translator.

I sent the translation to Professor Pankhurst, and that only made him to entreat me to please translate the rest of the book. I wish I had the time to do it. I was in a period of my life when, having lost my dear wife, I was raising my children as a single parent and working full time, and I had to decline the plea, because I knew full well I could not devote the time needed to do such a monumental task.

Qene, as explained in my previous writing on Amharic Qene: <http://www.meskot.com/qene.htm> , is a complex sentence, statement, or poem encapsulating two or more ideas, one as wax, and another as gold, meaning: one of a transparent and obvious content, and another with a hidden implication. And Geez Qene, as explained by Yikunnoamlak Mezgebu, a young and rising star in AAU Language Department is:

“...poetry recited and chanted in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. It is a part and an offspring of the long-standing literary tradition of the ancient Ethiopian language, designed to explain scripture through daily life. Qenie can be defined as a tool that Ethiopian biblical exegetes developed over a long period of time through their quest to explain sacred writings orally. Qenie taps from rich oral language traditions in Geez, Amharic and Tigrinya and uses them in the making of Geez poetry, implying intricate layers of translation among and within the languages. Most poems underpin one or another form of oral literature that the language refined over time.”

With that brief introduction, I hereby offer the attached rendition of the collection of Geez Qene of Metshafe Tizita. Even though it was completed more than ten years ago, I did not publish it, nor shared it widely, except with a few close friends and colleagues. I hope this can be used for the enjoyment of the art of Geez Qene and for educational purposes.

G. E. Gorfu, Oct. 2017