

EMBELLISHED WITH GOLD: THE ETHIOPIC RECEPTION OF SYRIAC BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

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The Solomonic Period of Ethiopian History (1270-1770 C.E.) saw a large number of translations from Arabic into Ethiopic (Gəʿəz).¹ In many cases, this Arabic literature itself had been translated from other languages. One particularly productive trajectory of transmission was from Syriac to Arabic to Ethiopic.² The present paper addresses one specific aspect of this transmission: the movement of Syriac biblical exegesis into Ethiopic via Arabic. It takes as its point of departure the Joseph narrative (Gen. 37, 39-50) and especially the exegetical *locus classicus* of the garment that

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¹ Throughout this paper, ‘Ethiopic’ refers to the Gəʿəz language whereas ‘Ethiopian’ references the broader cultural heritage.

² A preliminary survey of texts that moved from Syriac into Ethiopic via Arabic can be found in A. M. Butts, “Ethiopic Christianity, Syriac contacts with,” *GEDSH*, 148-153.

Jacob made for Joseph. The paper begins with an overview of Syriac biblical exegesis. It then turns to the Ethiopic translations of Ibn al-Ṭayyib's *The Paradise of Christianity*, which draws upon several different Syriac exegetical sources, including the *Scholion* by Theodoros bar Koni and the commentary of Išo'dad of Merv. Attention is then paid to Ethiopian biblical exegesis that is based on the Ethiopic translations of Ibn al-Ṭayyib, especially the Ethiopic commentary by Məhərka Dəngəl and the *Andəmta* commentary tradition. The paper concludes with a discussion of a text that has not previously featured in the secondary literature on the Ethiopic reception of Syriac biblical exegesis: the *History of Joseph*.

Syriac Biblical Exegesis on the Old Testament: The Foundation

Biblical exegesis on the Old Testament has a long history within the Syriac tradition.³ Already in the fourth century, Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373) wrote a Commentary (*puššāqā*) on Genesis as well as an Explanation (*turgāmā*) of Exodus.⁴ In addition, numerous exegetical passages are found in Ephrem's poetic works, especially *madrāšē*, or metrical hymns.⁵

³ For a general overview, see R. B. ter Haar Romeny, "Exegesis, Old Testament," *GEDSH*, 156-160. More details can be found in L. Van Rompay, "The Christian Syriac Tradition of Interpretation," in *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament. The History of Its Interpretation*, Vol. 1. *From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (Until 1300)*, Part 1. *Antiquity*, ed. M. Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 612-641; idem, "Development of Biblical Interpretation in the Syriac Churches of the Middle Ages," in *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament. The History of Its Interpretation*, Vol. 2. *From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. M. Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 559-577.

⁴ The Syriac is edited in R.-M. Tonneau, *Sancti Ephraem Syri. In Genesim et in Exodum Commentarii* (CSCO 152-153; Louvain: Peeters, 1955). An English translation is available in E. G. Mathews and J. P. Amar, *St. Ephrem the Syrian. Selected Prose Works* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1994) and a Dutch translation in A. G. P. Janson and L. Van Rompay, *Efrem de Syrier: Uitleg van het Boek Genesis* (Christelijke Bronnen 5; Kampen: Kok, 1993). It should be noted that the Commentaries on the Pentateuch that are preserved in Armenian and attributed to Ephrem are not in fact by him; these are edited with an English translation in Edward G. Mathews, Jr., *The Armenian commentary on Genesis attributed to Ephrem the Syrian* (CSCO 572-573; Louvain: Peeters, 1998); idem, *The Armenian commentaries on Exodus-Deuteronomy attributed to Ephrem the Syrian* (CSCO 587-588; Louvain: Peeters, 2001).

⁵ For publication details of Ephrem's poetic works, see S. P. Brock, "A brief guide to the main editions and translations of the works of Saint Ephrem," in *Saint Éphrem. Un poète pour notre temps* (Antélias: CERO, 2007), 281-338 (reprinted as S. P. Brock, "In

Following the translations of Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428) into Syriac, the fifth and sixth centuries witnessed two prolific Syriac exegetes who wrote primarily in the genre of *mēm̄rā*, or metrical homily. The East-Syriac poet Narsai (d. ca. 500) composed a large number of *mēm̄rē*, more than eighty of which survive, on a wide range of topics, including many on Old Testament passages.⁶ Narsai's West-Syriac contemporary Jacob of Serug (d. 521) also composed a large number of *mēm̄rē* (some 380 survive), many of which deal with the Old Testament.⁷ In addition, there are a large number of anonymous Syriac exegetical works from this period, including dramatic retellings of the Bible both in verse and prose.⁸

Moving to the medieval period, the East-Syriac exegetical tradition reached a climax in the eighth and ninth centuries. The exegetical literature from this period can be divided into two genres: running

Search of St Ephrem," *Христианский Восток* NS 6 [2013], 13-77). For the differences in Ephrem's exegetical approach to the Old Testament in his poetic works versus his prose commentaries, see Van Rompay, "Syriac Tradition of Interpretation," 626-627.

⁶ For Narsai's *mēm̄rē*, see the overview in S. P. Brock, "A guide to Narsai's homilies," *Hugoye* 12.1 (2009), 21-40. The Syriac texts of many of his *mēm̄rē* are available in A. Mingana, *Narsai doctoris Syri homiliae et carmina* (Leiden: Brill, 1905) as well as in a facsimile edition published by the Patriarchal Press (San Francisco, 1970). In addition, critical editions of *mēm̄rē* on the Old Testament can be found in J. Frishman, "The ways and means of the divine economy. An edition, translation and study of six biblical homilies by Narsai" (Ph.D. Diss., Leiden University, 1992) and Ph. Gignoux, *Homélies de Narsai sur la création* (PO 34.3-4; Turnhout: Brepols, 1968).

⁷ The Syriac texts of many of Jacob's *mēm̄rē* are edited in P. Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis* (5 vols.; Paris-Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1905-10) (reprinted with an additional volume in 2006 by Gorgias Press). A bilingual series (Syriac with English translation) of individual homilies, entitled *The Metrical Homilies of Mar Jacob of Sarug* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2008-), is in the process of publication. Critical editions of *mēm̄rē* on the Old Testament can be found in Khalil Alwan, *Jacques de Saroug, Quatre homélies métriques sur la Création* (CSCO 508-509; Louvain: Peeters, 1989); B. Sony, *L'Homélie de Jacques de Saroug sur l'Hexameron* (2 vols.; Rome: self-published, 2000); W. Strothmann, *Jakob von Sarug, der Prophet Hosea* (GOFS 5; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1973). For the manuscript attestation of Jacob's *mēm̄rē*, see A. Vööbus, *Handschriftliche Überlieferung der Memre-Dichtung des Ja'qob von Serug* (4 vols.; CSCO 344-345, 421-422; Louvain: Peeters, 1973-1980).

⁸ For references, see Van Rompay, "Syriac Tradition of Interpretation," 640 n. 56. For an insightful study of several of the anonymous Syriac sources on the Joseph narrative, see K. Heal, "Tradition and Transformation: Genesis 37 and 39 in Early Syriac Sources" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Birmingham, 2008).

commentary and question-and-answer.⁹ In 792/3, Theodoros bar Koni wrote his *Scholion*, which is a series of questions and answers covering the entire sphere of the East-Syriac intellectual heritage.¹⁰ The first five *mēm̄rē* (out of eleven) treat the Old Testament. Around the same time, Ishoʿ bar Nun (d. 828) wrote his *Selected Questions*, which comments on the entire biblical text, again in the genre of question-and-answer.¹¹ Slightly later, Ishoʿdad of Merv (fl. ca. 850) completed a large commentary on the Bible (both Old and New Testament).¹² This represents the most expansive form of East-Syriac biblical exegesis. An important source for Ishoʿdad's commentary is the anonymous commentary on Genesis-Exodus 9:32 preserved in ms. (olim) Diyarbakır 22.¹³

⁹ For the latter genre, see B. ter Haar Romeny, "Question-and-Answer Collections in Syriac literature," in *Erotapokriseis. Early Christian Question-and-Answer Literature in Context*, ed. A. Volgers and C. Zamagni (Louvain: Peeters, 2004), 145-163.

¹⁰ The *Scholion* exists in two recensions. The Siirt recension was edited in A. Scher, *Theodorus bar Kōnī. Liber Scholiorum* (CSCO 55, 69; Louvain: Peeters, 1910-1912) with a French translation in R. Hespel and R. Draguet(†), *Théodore bar Koni. Livre des scholies (recension de Séert)* (CSCO 431-432; Louvain: Peeters, 1981). The additions in the Urmia recension were edited with a French translation in R. Hespel, *Théodore bar Koni. Livre des scolies (recension d'Urmiah)* (CSCO 447-448; Louvain: Peeters, 1983). In addition, the section on the 'Pauline' epistles from the Urmia recension was edited independently with a German translation in L. Brade, *Untersuchungen zum Scholienbuch des Theodoros bar Konai* (GOFS 8; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1975). For the date of the *Scholion*, see S. Griffith, "Chapter ten of the *Scholion*: Theodore bar Kōnī's Apology for Christianity," *OCP* 47 (1981), 158-188 at 161-164.

¹¹ A facsimile edition of the portion dealing with the Pentateuch, along with an English translation and study, can be found in E. G. Clarke, *The Selected Questions of Ishoʿ bar Nūn on the Pentateuch* (Studia Post-Biblica 5; Leiden: Brill, 1962). See also C. Molenberg, "The Interpreter interpreted. Išoʿ bar Nun's Selected Questions on the Old Testament" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Groningen, 1990).

¹² The Old Testament portion of this commentary is edited with a French translation in J.-M. Vosté and C. Van den Eynde, *Išoʿdad de Merv. Commentaire de l'Ancien Testament*, I (CSCO 126; Louvain: Peeters, 1950); C. Van den Eynde, *Išoʿdad de Merv. Commentaire de l'Ancien Testament*, I, II-VI (CSCO 156, 176, 179, 229-230, 303-304, 328-29, 433-34; Louvain: Peeters, 1950-1981).

¹³ This is edited with a French translation in L. Van Rompay, *Le commentaire sur Genèse-Exode 9,32 du manuscrit (olim) Diyarbakır 22* (CSCO 483-484; Louvain: Peeters, 1986).

Ibn al-Ṭayyib's *The Paradise of Christianity*: A Bridge between Syriac and Ethiopic

East-Syriac biblical exegesis, which culminated in the eighth and ninth centuries, was transmitted into Arabic by Ibn al-Ṭayyib (d. 1043), whose full name was Abū al-Faraj ‘Abd Allāh Ibn al-Ṭayyib al-‘Irāqī.¹⁴ Among his many works, Ibn al-Ṭayyib wrote *The Paradise of Christianity* (*Firdaws al-naṣrāniyya*). This is a commentary on the entire Bible in two parts. One part, which is preserved in ms. Vatican Arab. 37, presents a running commentary on most of the Bible. Only the Genesis portion of this part of the commentary has been edited.¹⁵ The primary source for this part of the commentary is Isho‘dad of Merv’s commentary in Syriac. The second part of Ibn al-Ṭayyib’s commentary, which is preserved in ms. Vatican Arab. 36, is a series of questions and answers on the entire Bible.¹⁶ This part remains entirely unedited. One of its sources is the Syriac question-and-answer collection by Theodoros bar Koni. Ibn al-Ṭayyib’s *The Paradise of Christianity* provided the primary bridge by which East-Syriac biblical exegesis was transmitted into Ethiopic.

Both parts of Ibn al-Ṭayyib’s *The Paradise of Christianity* were translated into Ethiopic. The first 84 folios of ms. Bibl. Nat. Éth. d’Abbadie 28 (ff. 2r-86v) contain a commentary on the ‘octateuch’ (‘orit) attributed to John Chrysostom (d. 407).¹⁷ The *incipit* reads:¹⁸

¹⁴ For this author, see A. M. Butts, “Ibn al-Ṭayyib,” *GEDSH*, 206-207; Julian Faultless, “Ibn al-Ṭayyib,” in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographic History. Volume 2 (900-1050)*, ed. David Thomas and Alex Mallett, with Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala, Johannes Pahlitzsch, Mark Swanson, Herman Teule, and John Tolan (History of Christian-Muslim Relations 14; Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2010), 667-697; G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur* (Studi e testi 118, 133, 146, 147, 172; Vatican: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1944-1952), 1:1.152-155; 2:160-77.

¹⁵ It is edited with a French translation in J. C. J. Sanders, *Commentaire sur la Genèse* (CSCO 274-275; Louvain: Peeters, 1967). See also the study in P. Féghali, “Ibn al-Ṭayyib et son commentaire sur la Genèse,” *ParOr* 16 (1990-1991), 149-62.

¹⁶ Faultless’s characterization of this commentary as ‘containing the remaining materials’ and ‘the New Testament and all miscellaneous material’ (“Ibn al-Ṭayyib,” 681-683) is not accurate. A more careful description can, however, already be found in Graf, *Geschichte*, 163.

¹⁷ For the manuscript, see M. Chaîne, *Catalogue des manuscrits éthiopiens de la collection Antoine d’Abbadie* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1912), 18. Part of the beginning of this commentary is also preserved in ms. EMM 7410, ff. 128v-129r.

¹⁸ The text can also be found in Roger W. Cowley, *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation. A Study in Exegetical Tradition and Hermeneutics* (University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 38; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 433. Cowley claims that the *incipit* of the manuscript has been erased and altered (Roger W. Cowley, “A

ይትባረክ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ አምላክ፡ እስራኤል[፡] በስሙ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ አብ፡
ወማኅየዋ፡ ንወጥን፡ ጽሑፈ፡ ትርጓሜ፡ ኦሪት፡ ዘጸሐፋ፡ ዮሐንስ፡ አፈ፡ ወርቅ።

“May God, the Lord of Israel, be blessed! In the name of God, the Father and Live-Giver, we begin to write the interpretation (*targ^wame*) on the octateuch, which John Chrysostom wrote.” (ms. Bibl. Nat. Éth. d’Abbadie 28, f. 2r, ln. 1-2)

This commentary is not, however, by John Chrysostom, but rather it is an Ethiopic translation of the first part of the commentary of Ibn al-Ṭayyib, as is preserved in ms. Vatican Arab. 37.¹⁹ In other Ethiopic translations of Ibn al-Ṭayyib, the author is occasionally called by the moniker ‘John Chrysostom of the East’ (ዮሐንስ፡ አፈ፡ ወርቅ፡ ምሥራቃዊ፡),²⁰ in ms. Bibl. Nat. Éth. d’Abbadie 28, however, he is simply John Chrysostom. Thus, this commentary is left without any connection to its original author, Ibn al-Ṭayyib.

As the introductory formulae of the *incipit* make clear, ms. Bibl. Nat. Éth. d’Abbadie 28 comes from the Betä ’Īsra’el (or Fälaša).²¹ It should, however, be noted that the borders between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Betä ’Īsra’el were at times porous, with texts crossing between the two communities.²² Thus, the commentary preserved in this

Ge’ez Document Reporting Controversy Concerning the Bible Commentaries of Ibn aṭ-Taiyib,” *Rassegna di Studi Etiocici* 30 [1984-1986], 5-13 at n. 10). This does not, however, seem to be the case based on an inspection of the manuscript itself. Some of the ink from the verso has certainly bled through to the recto, but there is no evidence of erasure or alteration. Several notes have, however, been erased on f. 1v, but they do not belong to the *incipit*.

¹⁹ Mersha Alehegne, *The Ethiopian Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Critical Edition and Translation* (Äthiopistische Forschungen 73; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 3; Roger W. Cowley, *The Traditional Interpretation of the Apocalypse of St John in the Ethiopian Church* (University of Cambridge Oriental Publications 33; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 36; idem, “Ge’ez Document,” 5 with n. 3; idem, *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation*, 114.

²⁰ See, e.g., ms. London, Brit. Libr. Orient 732, f. 206r (see W. Wright, *Catalogue of the Ethiopian Manuscripts in the British Museum Acquired Since the Year 1847* [London: British Museum, 1877], 201).

²¹ For the Betä ’Īsra’el, see Steven Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia. From Earliest Times to the Twentieth Century* (New York – London: New York University Press, 1992).

²² To take just one example, Jacob of Serug’s ‘Homily on the death of Aaron’ formed the basis for the *Motä ’Aron* ‘Death of Aaron’, an Ethiopic text that is found in the literary tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as well as in that of the Betä ’Īsra’el (for a French translation of this text, see M. Wurmbrand, “Le ‘Dersâna

manuscript could have had its origins in Ethiopic Christianity, even if it now only exists in a manuscript from the Betä 'Īsra'el.²³ In fact, it is certain that this commentary was also transmitted within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, since it is an important source for the Ethiopic Commentary by Məhərka Dəngəl, which is discussed in the next section of this paper.

To illustrate the relationship between Syriac biblical exegesis, Ibn al-Ṭayyib's *The Paradise of Christianity*, and the Ethiopic commentary found in ms. Bibl. Nat. Éth. d'Abbadie 28, it is useful to look at a sample passage. The section from ms. Bibl. Nat. Éth. d'Abbadie 28 dealing with the Joseph narrative reads as follows:

**ወዘይመርህ፡ ላዕለ፡ ተትሕቶቱ፡ ዮሴፍ²⁴፡ ውእቱ፡ ተጎፅነ፡ ምስለ፡ አእማተ፡
አቡሁ፡ ዘለፋ፡ ወቦላ፡ ወውዴትኒ፡ እኪት፡ ዘኮነ፡ ያመጽእ፡ ዮሴፍ፡ ጎበ፡ አቡሁ፡
በእንተ፡ አጎዲሁ፡ እስመ፡ እሙንቱ፡ ኮኑ፡ የሐምይዎ፡ ለአቡሆሙ፡
ወኢያፈቅርዎ፡ አው፡ እስመ፡ እሙንቱ፡ ኮኑ፡ ይትገብሩ፡ ውስተ፡ ተኖልዎ፡
ዘየዓሉ²⁵፡ ወኮነ፡ ያዕቆብ፡ ያፈቅሮ፡ ለዮሴፍ፡ እንበይነ፡ አስተሐምሞቱ፡
ወትሩፋቲሁ፡ ወአእምሮቱ፡ እስመ፡ ውእቱ፡ ኮነ፡ ይተሉ፡ ግዕዞ²⁶፡ ወውእቱ፡
²⁷ዘዐሠቀ፡ ያዕቆብ፡ በዮሴፍ፡ ቦቱ፡ ይፈክር፡ ጎበ፡ ቀሚሱ²⁸፡ ዘቦቱ፡ አክማመ፡
ዘእኑም፡ ምስሌሁ፡ ወዘንተ፡ ኢኮነ፡ ይለብሱ፡ ዘእንበለ፡ ለክብር፡ ወእመ፡ አኮ፡ እለ፡
ተርፉ፡ ኢኮኑ፡ ይለብሱ፡ ዘእንበለ፡ ግማዳት፡ ዘይከይድዎ፡ ወቦ፡ እ፡ ዓፅፍ፡ ወባቲ፡
ርፍአታት²⁹፡ ቀይሕ፡ ወካልዐኒህ።**

“That which shows the humility (of) Joseph is (that) he was reared with the maid-servants of his father, Zilpah and Bilhah. The evil accusation that Joseph was bringing to his father concerning his brothers was that they were slandering their father and not loving him, or that they were doing that which is wicked³⁰ in shepherding.

sanbat'. Une homélie éthiopienne attribuée à Jacques de Saroug," OS 8 [1963], 343-394). See also n. 83 and 87 below.

²³ There is nothing to suggest that the manuscript itself originally belonged to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and only secondarily came to the Betä 'Īsra'el, as Cowley seems to imply ("Ge'ez Document," 6 n. 10). See n. 18 above.

²⁴ Perhaps read ለዮሴፍ፡ .

²⁵ Ms. ዘኢየዓሉ፡ .

²⁶ Ms. አኮ፡ . This is emended to ግዕዞ፡ based on the reading ግዕዞ፡ ዘኢአሁ፡ , which is found in the Ethiopic Commentary by Məhərka Dəngəl (ms. EMM 2101, f. 93v, col. 3, ln. 29). This commentary is discussed in more detail below.

²⁷ There is a space of ca. 4 letters before this word.

²⁸ Ms. ቀሚሱ፡ . Alternatively, emend to፡ ቀሚሱ፡ .

²⁹ Perhaps read ርፍአታተ፡ , i.e., in construct.

³⁰ The ms. reads: 'that which is not wicked'.

Jacob loved Joseph on account of his zeal, his virtues, and his knowledge, because he was following his (or: His) way of life.³¹ That which Jacob wove for Joseph, one interprets as his tunic that had woven sleeves with it. He was not wearing this except for honor. Others would only wear pieces that they would trample.³² Oth(ers say that it was a) cloak, and it had stripes (*lit.* sewings) of red and other (colors).” (ms. Bibl. Nat. Éth. d’Abbadie 28, f. 34r, col. 1, ln. 2-19)

This is a literal translation of Ibn al-Ṭayyib’s *The Paradise of Christianity* as found in ms. Vatican Arab. 37 and edited by Sanders:³³

والدليل على تواضع يوسف انه رُبي مع اما ابيه³⁴ ذلنا وبلها وخبر السوا الذي كان يرقيه³⁵
يوسف الى ابيه عن اخوته احم كانوا يثلبون اباهم لم يحبه او لآحم كانوا يستعملون في الرعى³⁶
ما لا يحل وكان يعقوب يحب يوسف لتألهه وفضله وعلمه لانه³⁷ كان مخدمه وهو الذي اختص³⁸
يعقوب ليوسف به يعني به القميص ذو الاكمام المنسوجة معه وهذا ما كان يلبسه الا الاجل³⁸
والا فالباقون ما كانوا يلبسون الا قطيعين³⁹ يلفقوهما⁴⁰ وقوم قالوا انما الحلة وفيها تخطيطات حمر
وصفر وغيرها

“A proof of the humility of Joseph is that he was reared with the maid-servants of his father, Zilpah and Bilhah. The message of blame that Joseph told to his father concerning his brothers was that they were slandering their father (saying that) he did not love him, or because they were doing that which is not permissible in shepherding. Jacob loved Joseph on account of his godliness, his virtue, and his knowledge, because he was his (or: His) servant. That thing by which Jacob gave distinction to Joseph was a tunic that had woven sleeves with it. Only a noble would wear this.

³¹ Translating the emendation ܩܕܝܫ (see n. 26).

³² The text seems to be corrupt here. Note that the Commentary by Məhərka Dəngəl reads ܡܥܬܝܪܝܢ ܕܥܘܒܝܗܘܢ: ‘that covered their shame’ (ms. EMM 2101, f. 94r, col. 1, ln. 4).

³³ Cited according to Sanders, *Commentaire sur la Genèse*, 89.12-90.2. The edition of Sanders has, however, been collated with ms. Vatican Arab. 37, because it contains numerous misreadings.

³⁴ Corrected in the ms. from اما بيه (haplography).

³⁵ Sanders reads يرقيه.

³⁶ Sanders reads المرعى.

³⁷ Sanders reads لان.

³⁸ Ms. الاجلا (*sic*).

³⁹ A pseudo-Syriac passive participle, i.e., ‘two pieces (*lit.* things that have been cut)’. Sanders reads قطعتين, which would be better Classical Arabic.

⁴⁰ Sanders reads يلفقوهما.

Greek says more clearly, ‘Joseph brought down an evil insult to their father’, according to what is in the *Hexapla*. According to the *Commentary on Genesis* by the interpreter (i.e., Theodore of Mopsuestia), ‘Joseph brought (their) evil mocking against Jacob their father’, i.e., they possessed a foul opinion against their father, since he was with Joseph in a foul way, and because of this, he loved him. For, if, as the Syriac says, ‘he brought their news, etc.’, that is, what they were doing in the pasture,⁴⁴ then his brothers would not be culpable for hating him, because he would have been an inciter. ‘Because (he was a) son of old age (to him)’ is (that) he was near to him, comforting, and supporting his old age, as is fitting for true sons. Again, he loved him more, because he was the firstborn of Rachel. Again, because he was wise, prudent, and godly in his way of life, as those facts afterwards demonstrated. The (words) [‘of the tunic] of sleeves’ is a long garment with which its sleeves are sown, which they call *zqirtā* (‘sewn’), because in that land they sew and stitch pieces together. Only the nobles would wear this garment of sleeves. A demonstration (of this) is the tunic of our Lord.⁴⁵ The Hebrew (reads): (a tunic) with images. The Greek (reads): a mix-(colored) tunic, that is, one that has a piece of red and a piece of black, green, and blue.”

Almost every one of the exegetical traditions concerning Joseph in Ibn al-Ṭayyib’s *The Paradise of Christianity* is found in this passage from Isho’dad of Merv:

- the upbringing of Joseph with maid-servants as a proof of his humility
- Joseph bringing a report of his brothers’ slandering their father
- the alternative tradition of Joseph bringing a report of his brothers’ activities in shepherding
- Jacob loving Joseph on account of his godliness, his virtue, and his knowledge
- Joseph serving his father
- the description of Joseph’s tunic as with sleeves
- the association of Joseph’s tunic with nobility

⁴⁴ Or: ‘in shepherding’, as understood by Ibn al-Ṭayyib.

⁴⁵ See John 19:23.

- the alternative tradition (from the *Hexapla*) that Joseph's tunic had multiple colors

Ibn al-Ṭayyib incorporates each of these traditions from Isho'dad of Merv into his commentary.⁴⁶ In most of the cases, Ibn al-Ṭayyib even retains the order of presentation found in Isho'dad of Merv. Part of Ibn al-Ṭayyib's authorial process includes the deletion of exegetical traditions, such as the reading of the Hebrew text regarding Joseph's garment. In addition, Ibn al-Ṭayyib does not always retain the association of exegetical traditions with particular sources, such as the references to the interpreter Theodore of Mopsuestia and the Hexaplaric reading regarding Joseph's garment. In the passage under consideration, then, Ibn al-Ṭayyib's commentary is little more than an Arabic abridgment of the material in Isho'dad of Merv. It should be noted that this is the case throughout the running commentary part of Ibn al-Ṭayyib's *The Paradise of Christianity*. Thus, the Ethiopic passage from ms. Bibl. Nat. Éth. d'Abbadie 28 covering the Joseph narrative illustrates the transmission of Syriac biblical exegesis – in this case, that of Isho'dad of Merv – into Ethiopic via Arabic – in this case, via Ibn al-Ṭayyib.

The question-and-answer part of the commentary of Ibn al-Ṭayyib, as is preserved in ms. Vatican Arab. 36, is also found in Ethiopic translation. Ms. EMMML 1839 (ff. 1r-48v) contains a commentary attributed to John Chrysostom, which, however, is actually a translation of Ibn al-Ṭayyib.⁴⁷ The *incipit* reads:⁴⁸

⁴⁶ It should be noted that many of these exegetical traditions are found already in the anonymous commentary on Genesis-Exodus 9:32 preserved in ms. (olim) Diyarbakır 22 (Van Rompay, *Le commentaire sur Genèse-Exode 9,32*, 1:108.12-109.8 [Syriac], 2:138.19-140.2 [French translation]). Several are not, however, found in the Diyarbakır commentary: 1. Joseph bringing a report of his brothers' activities in shepherding; 2. Jacob loving Joseph on account of his godliness, his virtue, and his knowledge; 3. the association of Joseph's tunic with nobility. This shows that Ibn al-Ṭayyib could not have drawn solely from the Diyarbakır commentary, but that he must have had access to Isho'dad of Merv's commentary or one like it.

⁴⁷ Cowley, *Traditional Interpretation*, 36; idem, "Ge'ez Document," 5 with n. 3; idem, *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation*, 119-122. For the manuscript, see Getatchew Haile (with William F. Macomber), *A Catalogue of Ethiopian Manuscripts Microfilmed for the Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, Addis Ababa and for the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library, Collegeville*, Vol. 5. *Project Numbers 1501-2000* (Collegeville: Monastic Manuscript Microfilm Library, 1981), 342-343. This commentary also remains unedited.

⁴⁸ The text can also be found in Haile, *Project Numbers 1501-2000*, 342; Cowley, *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation*, 119.

ክፍል፡ ቀዳማይ፡ ዘዮሐንስ፡ አፈ፡ ወርቅ፡ ዘእስተጋብኦ፡ ቀሲስ፡ ክቡር፡ አባ፡
 ፍሥሐ፡ ገብረ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ ወልድ፡ ሠናይ፡ ይምሐር፡ እግዚአብሔር፡
 አሜን። ወገንቱ፡ መጽሐፍ፡ ያዜክር፡ ብዙኃ፡ ተስእሎታተ፡ ወቃላተ፡
 ወፍካርያተ፡ ዕሙቃተ። እመጽሐፈ፡ ኦሪት፡ ወነቢያት፡ ወነገሥት። ወእምኢዮብ፡
 ጻድቅ፡ ወእመጽሐፈ፡ ሰሎሞን፡ ጠቢብ። ወፍካሬ፡ መዝሙር፡ ዳዊት፡ ወወንጌል፡
 ወእመልእክተ፡ ጳውሎስ፡ ወእምሐዋርያ፡ ወእመጽሐፈ፡ ግብሮሙ፡ ለሐዋርያት።

“The first part (of the interpretation) of John Chrysostom, which the honored priest Äbba Fəśśəḥä Gäbrä ’Ēgzi’äbḥer Wäld Šännay (may God have mercy on him, amen) compiled. This book records many questions and answers (*lit.* words) and profound interpretations, from the book of the octateuch, the prophets, the kings, from Job the righteous, from the book of the wise Solomon, and the interpretation of the psalms of David and the gospel(s), from the letters of Paul, from the apostles, and from the book of the act(s) of the apostles.” (ms. EMMML 1839, f. 1r, col. 1, lns. 1-16)

Like ms. Bibl. Nat. Éth. d’Abbadie 28, this commentary is attributed to John Chrysostom (ዮሐንስ፡ አፈ፡ ወርቅ፡) without an adjective ‘eastern’ (ምሥራቃዊ፡). The commentary is, however, said to have been compiled by one Äbba Fəśśəḥä Gäbrä ’Ēgzi’äbḥer Wäld Šännay, or ‘father of joy, servant of God, good son’, which is an Ethiopic translation of the Arabic name of Abū al-Faraj (‘Abd Allāh) Ibn al-Ṭayyib.⁴⁹ Thus, unlike ms. Bibl. Nat. Éth. d’Abbadie 28, ms. EMMML 1839 preserves the name – albeit in translation – of its original author. After the brief introduction quoted above, the commentary proceeds to a series of questions and answers (ሐተታ፡ and ፍካሬ፡, respectively) that cover the Old Testament.⁵⁰

Ms. EMMML 1839 contains only one question-and-answer on the Joseph narrative, which begins as follows:

⁴⁹ In contrast to the *incipit*, the *desinit* only refers to ‘John Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantine’ (ዮሐንስ፡ አፈ፡ ወርቅ፡ ሊቀ፡ ጳጳሳት፡ ዘቀስጥንጥንያ።) (ms. EMMML 1839, f. 48v, col. 3, ln. 9-10; see also Cowley, *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation*, 119).

⁵⁰ See the overview in Cowley, *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation*, 120-121.

and-answer works of both Isho' bar Nun and Theodoros bar Koni, and similar exegetical material is found in the running commentary of Isho'dad of Merv.⁵⁴ To ascertain more broadly how the question-and-answer portion of Ibn al-Ṭayyib's *The Paradise of Christianity* appropriates Syriac sources beyond Theodoros bar Koni, further study is necessary.⁵⁵

It is interesting to note that neither of the Ethiopic commentaries that are translations of Ibn al-Ṭayyib is directly associated with the Arabic name of their author: ms. Bibl. Nat. Éth. d'Abbadie 28 is attributed to John Chrysostom, and ms. EMMML 1839 is also attributed to John Chrysostom but with mention of a 'compiler' whose name is an Ethiopic translation of Ibn al-Ṭayyib's name. The reason for this distance seems obvious: Ibn al-Ṭayyib was a member of the Church of the East, whereas the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was dogmatically aligned with the Syriac Orthodox Church.⁵⁶ Thus, by removing the name of the dogmatically suspect Ibn al-Ṭayyib, the commentaries could be more readily incorporated into the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.⁵⁷ This argument can be substantiated by a note transmitted in ms. EMMML 7122, which is quoted here in full:⁵⁸

Ethiopic translation reads: **ሐተታ፡ እምኦሪት፡ በእንተ፡ ምንት፡ ምክንያት፡ ለዘ፡ በእንቲኦ፡ አቅደሙ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ ፈጠረ፡ ጽልሙት፡ እምብርሃን።** "Question from the octateuch: On account of what reason did God create darkness before light?" (ms. EMMML 1839, f. 1r, col. 1, lns. 19-23).

⁵⁴ For Isho' bar Nun, see f. 1v of ms. Cambridge, Add. 2017, which is available in a facsimile edition in Clarke, *Selected Questions*, 1962. For Theodoros bar Koni, see Scher, *Theodoros bar Kōnī*, 35.7-36.7. For Isho'dad of Merv, see Vosté and Van den Eynde, *Išo'dad de Merv*, 15.2-16.26. For a comparison of the Syriac exegetical sources on this question, see Clarke, *Selected Questions*, 44-54.

⁵⁵ For preliminary remarks, see Cowley, *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation*, 121-122.

⁵⁶ For the terminology employed here, see S. P. Brock, "The 'Nestorian' Church: A Lamentable Misnomer," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 78:3 (1996), 23-35.

⁵⁷ It should be noted that there were already difficulties with the reception of Ibn al-Ṭayyib in Coptic Egypt. Ibn al-Ṭayyib's *Commentary on the Gospels*, for instance, exists in two recensions, an original and another revised for the Coptic Orthodox Church (see Faultless, "Ibn al-Ṭayyib," 677 and with more detail Julian Faultless, "The Two Recensions of the Prologue to John in Ibn al-Ṭayyib's *Commentary on the Gospels*," in *Christians at the Heart of Islamic Rule. Church Life and Scholarship in 'Abbasid Iraq*, ed. D. Thomas [History of Christian-Muslim Relations 1; Leiden: Brill, 2003], 177-198). It was the latter that was translated into Ethiopic. For Ibn al-Ṭayyib in Egypt, see Otto Meinardus, "The Nestorians in Egypt," *OC* 51 (1967), 112-129, at 121-122.

⁵⁸ A study and English translation of this note along with a facsimile of the manuscript can be found in Cowley, "Ge'ez Document." The Ethiopic text of the note is

ንዜኑ፡ ንስቲተ፡ ዜና፡ ዘሰማዕን፡ እስመ፡ ኮነ፡ ኃዕዝ፡ ዐቢይ፡ በኢትዮጵያ⁵⁹፡
 ማዕከለ፡ ካህናት፡ ወመነኮሳት፡ በእንተ፡ ትርጓሜ፡ መጽሐፍ፡ ዘሠርዖ፡ አቡፈረጅ፡
 እብነ፡ ጠይብ፡ ኦእግዚእየ፡ ገብርክሙ፡ ዓምደ፡ ሐዋርያት፡ ኃሠሠ፡ ኩሎ፡
 መጻሕፍቲሁ፡ ለአቡፈረጅ፡ ንስጥሮሳዊ፡ ጸሐፊ፡ ቤቱ፡ ለዠትሊቅ፡ ሕሴን፡
 ተንባላታዊ፡ ወኮነ፡ ዝንቱ፡ አቡፈረጅ፡ ኃሣሜ፡ ጥበብ፡ እምአይሁድ፡
 ወክርስቲያን፡ ወመብዝህተ፡ ትርጓሜሁ፡ የሐብር፡ ምስለ፡ አይሁድ⁶⁰፡ ውስተ፡
 ትርጓሜ፡ መጽሐፈ፡ ነቢያት፡ ዘተርጎሞ፡ በሱስ፡ አይሁዳዊ፡ ውእቱ፡ ዘእማሰነ፡
 ልቦሙ፡ ለአይሁድ፡ ወይእዜኒ፡ ኦእግዚእየ፡ ኩሎ፡ ዘረከብክሙ፡ ቃለ፡ ነኪረ፡
 ውስተ፡ መጽሐፉ፡ ዘይሰመይ፡ ገነተ፡ ወኩሎ፡ ትርጓሜ፡ በእንተ፡ ዘሩባቤል፡
 ወይሁዳ፡ ወኅርቃኖስ፡ አጥፍእዎ፡ ኢኮነ፡ ትርጓሜሁ፡ ሠናየ፡ እስመ፡ ኩሎ፡ ነገሩ፡
 ጉሥዓተ፡ ልቡ፡ ወበዝየኒ፡ ያነውርዎ፡ ካህናት፡ በብዙህ፡ ያታ፡ ወአልቦ፡ ረባሕ፡
 ወኢምንትኒ፡ ቀዳሚ፡ እስመ፡ ኢይቤ፡ በመጽሐፉ፡ [ማርያም፡]⁶¹ ወላዲተ፡
 እግዚአብሔር፡ እመሰ፡ ትፈቅዱ፡ ኦእግዚእየ፡ ትርጓሜ፡ መጻሕፍት፡ ዘብሉይ፡
 ወዘሐዲስ፡ አነ፡ እፈኑ፡ ለክሙ፡ መጻሕፍተ፡ ዘተርጎሞ፡ ዮሐንስ፡ አፈ፡ ወርቅ፡
 ወይህያ፡ እብነ፡ ዓዲ፡ ወእብነ፡ ከበር፡ ወመጽሐፈ፡ እብነ፡ አሀል፡ ወእብነ፡ ዘርአ፡
 ወመጽሐፈ፡ ሐዊ፡ እሉ፡ ኩሎሙ፡ ዘተወክፈቶሙ፡ ቤተ፡ ክርስቲያን፡ ኦእግዚእየ፡
 ምንትኑ፡ አቡፈረጅ፡ ከሐዲ፡ መለኮት፡ ወጸራፈ፡ ላዕለ፡ ትስብእት፡ ጎድግዎ፡
 ለንስጡር፡ ይሐር፡ ብሔር።

“We will tell a little of the story that we heard: there was a great controversy in Ethiopia⁶² among the clergy and monks concerning the interpretation of the book, which ‘Ābufārāj ‘əbnä Ṭäyyəb established. O my master, your servant, ‘Amdä Ḥäwaryat sought all of the books of the Nestorian ‘Ābufārāj, the scribe of the house of the Catholicos Ḥäsen the muslim.⁶³ This ‘Ābufārāj was a seeker of wisdom from Jews and Christians, and most of his interpretation agrees with the Jews⁶⁴ in the interpretation of the book of the prophets, which Bäsus the Jew interpreted, the one who corrupted the heart of the Jews. Now, o my master, everything that you found,

reproduced here in full, since the facsimile is difficult to read; the digital image available from the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library (Collegeville, MN) is far superior in this regard.

⁵⁹ The ms. has been changed here.

⁶⁰ The manuscript is changed to read: ትርጓሜ፡ አይሁድ፡ .

⁶¹ There is a blank space of approximately four characters here in the ms. with traces suggesting that something has been erased. Cowley already proposed ማርያም፡ (“Ge‘ez Document,” 9 n. 29).

⁶² The ms. has been changed here.

⁶³ The text seems to be mistaken here as Ibn al-Ṭayyib was secretary to Catholicos Yūḥannā b. Nāzūk (r. 1012-1022) and then Catholicos Eliya I (r. 1028-1049).

⁶⁴ The manuscript is changed to read: ‘the interpretation of the Jews’.

the foreign word(s) in his book, which is called ‘Paradise’,⁶⁵ and all of the interpretation(s) about Zerubbabel, Judah, and Hyrcanus, destroy it! His interpretation was not good, because all of his word(s) are the spewing of his heart. Here, the clergy blame him (or: it) in many ways, and there is absolutely no benefit in him (or: it), primarily because he does not say in his books ‘(Mary),⁶⁶ mother of God (*i.e.*, theotokos)’. If you want, o my master, interpretation of the books of the Old and New (Testament), I myself will send to you books, which John Chrysostom, Yəhya ʿĒbnā ʿAdī,⁶⁷ and ʿĒbnā Kābār⁶⁸ interpreted, as well as the book of ʿĒbnā ʿĀhāl⁶⁹ and ʿĒbnā Zārʿā⁷⁰ and the book of Hāwi,⁷¹ all of these that the church has accepted. O my master, what is ʿĀbufārāj, the denier of the godhead and slanderer of incarnation? Leave Nestorius to go to his own land!” (ms. EMMML 7122, f. 51r, col. 1, ln. 4-f. 51v, col. 1, ln. 5)

This note relates a dispute concerning the exegetical works (*targʷame*) of one Abufārāj ʿĒbnā Ṭāyyəb, who is of course Abū al-Faraj (ʿAbd Allāh) Ibn al-Ṭayyib. The author of the note alleges that the interpretation of Ibn al-Ṭayyib the ‘Nestorian’ (*nəstərosawi*) is aligned with that of the Jews and that it should thus be destroyed. In place of Ibn al-Ṭayyib, the author recommends reading other exegetical works, including notably enough those of John Chrysostom. This note, thus, provides a possible background to the transmission of Ibn al-Ṭayyib’s exegetical works under the name of John Chrysostom in the Ethiopic tradition.

Məhərka Dəngəl and the Andəmta Commentary Tradition: Ethiopian Biblical Exegesis Based on Ibn al-Ṭayyib

The commentaries of Ibn al-Ṭayyib in their Ethiopic translations were influential sources for Ethiopian biblical exegesis. They, for instance, served as one of the primary sources for the Ethiopic Commentary on the

⁶⁵ This is Ibn al-Ṭayyib’s *The Paradise of Christianity* (*Firdaws al-naṣrāniyya*).

⁶⁶ This word has been erased in the ms.

⁶⁷ This is Yaḥyā b. ʿAdī (d. 974); for whom, see A. M. Butts, “Yaḥyā b. ʿAdī,” *GEDSH*, 429-430 and Graf, *Geschichte*, 2:233-249.

⁶⁸ This is Ibn Kabar (d. 1324); for whom, see Graf, *Geschichte*, 2:438-445.

⁶⁹ As already suggested by Cowley (“Geʿez Document,” 9 n. 34), this is probably Ibn al-ʿAssal (d. 1260); for whom, see Graf, *Geschichte*, 2:387-403.

⁷⁰ This is Abū ʿAlī ʿĪsā b. Ishāq b. Zurʿa (d. 1008); for whom, see Graf, *Geschichte*, 2:252-256.

⁷¹ This is a reference to the *Pandektēs* of Nikon; for which, see Graf, *Geschichte*, 2:64-66.

Pentateuch by Məhərka Dəngəl, which is found in ms. EMMML 2101 (ff. 63r-148v).⁷² This can be illustrated by looking at Məhərka Dəngəl's discussion of the garment that Jacob made for Joseph:

ወዓዲ፡ ጸልእዎ፡ በእንተ፡ ዘአግበረ፡ ሎቱ፡ ቀሚሰ⁷³፡ ዘኅብረ፡ አስቅ፡ ዘቦቱ፡
አክማመ፡ ዘአኑም፡ ኩለንታሁ፡ ዘአልቦ፡ ርፍአተ፡ ወዝንቱኒ፡ ልብሰ፡ ክብር፡
ወእቱ፡ ወውእቱኒ፡ ገብረ፡ ሎቱ፡ እንበይነ፡ አፍቅሮቱ፡ ኪያሁ፡ ወአኃዊሁሰ፡
ኢይለብሱ፡ ዘእንበለ፡ ግማዳት፡ ዘይከድን፡ ኃፍረቶሙ፡ ወእንበይነዝ፡ ቀንኡ⁷⁴፡
ቦቱ፡ ዓዲ፡ ወቦ፡ እለ፡ ይቤሉ፡ ይእቲ፡ ልብሰ፡ ዓጽፍ፡ ዘግብርት፡ በቀይሕ፡
ወበካልአን፡ ኅብራት፡ ዘቦ፡ ላዕሌሃ፡ ግብረ፡ ወርቅ፡ ዘተገበሩ፡ ባቲ፡ ገባርያነ፡
ወርቅ፡ ወግብረ፡ ወርቅኒ፡ ይትአመር፡ እምነ፡ አውቃፍ፡ ወእነግ፡ ዘተውህባ፡ ላቲ፡
ለርብቃ፡ እምነ፡ አብርሃም፡ በእደ፡ ኢያውብር፡ ገብሩ፡ ወቦ፡ እለ፡ ይቤሉ፡ ይእቲ፡
ልብሰ፡ ኮነት፡ አምሳለ፡ አልበራዲን፡ ወለአልበራዲንኒ፡ ይሰምይዎ፡ ሰብአ፡ ነብጥ፡
ሐምያ፡።

“They (viz. Joseph’s brothers) hated him (viz. Joseph) on account of the tunic of diverse colors, which he (viz. Jacob) had made for him, that had entirely woven sleeves without a seam. This was a garment of nobility, and he made (it) for him out of his love for him. His brothers were only wearing pieces that covered their shame. On account of this, they abhorred him still. Others say that the garment was a cloak made with red and other colors that had on it workmanship of gold, with which the goldsmiths had worked. The workmanship of gold is shown by the necklaces and earrings that were given to Rebecca by Abraham through his servant ‘Iyawbər.⁷⁵ Others say that the garment was like ‘*älbäradin*.⁷⁶ The Nabateans call ‘*älbäradin* by the name *hämya*.” (ms. EMMML 2101, f. 93v, col. 3, ln. 30-f. 94r, col. 1, ln. 18)

This passage is rich with exegetical traditions. Of particular interest to this study is that each of the underlined words derives from the Ethiopic commentary in ms. Bibl. Nat. Éth. d’Abbadie 28, which is a

⁷² Alehegne, *Ethiopian Commentary*, 6; Cowley, *Traditional Interpretation*, 38; idem, “Ge’ez Document,” 5 with n. 5; idem, *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation*, 114-115. For this ms., see Getatchew Haile and William F. Macomber, *A Catalogue of Ethiopian Manuscripts Microfilmed for the Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, Addis Ababa and for the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library, Collegeville*, Vol. 6. *Project Numbers 2001-2500* (Collegeville: Monastic Manuscript Microfilm Library, 1982), 195-196. This commentary also remains unedited.

⁷³ Perhaps read ቀሚሰ (accusative).

⁷⁴ Ms. ቅንኡ፡፡

⁷⁵ I.e., Eliezer (see Genesis 15:2).

⁷⁶ A pseudo-plural of Arabic *burd* ‘garment’.

The Ethiopic translation of Ibn al-Ṭayyib is even less specific:

ወቦ፡ ጸ፡ ዓፅፍ፡ ወባቲ፡ ርፍአታት⁸¹፡ ቀይሕ፡ ወካልዐኒህ።

“Oth(ers say that it was a) cloak, and it had stripes (*lit.* sewings) of red and other (colors).” (ms. Bibl. Nat. Éth. d’Abbadie 28, f. 34r, ln. 19)

Similarly, the commentary by Məhərka Dəngəl, which is dependent on the Ethiopic translation of Ibn al-Ṭayyib, states:

ወቦ፡ ጸለ፡ ይቤሉ፡ ይእቲ፡ ልብስ፡ ዓጽፍ፡ ዘግብርት፡ በቀይሕ፡ ወበካልአን፡ ጎብራት፡ ዘቦ፡ ላዕሌሃ፡ ግብረ፡ ወርቅ፡ ዘተገበሩ፡ ባቲ፡ ገባርያን፡ ወርቅ።

“Others say that the garment was a cloak made with red and other colors that had on it workmanship of gold, with which the goldsmiths had worked.” (ms. EMMML 2101, f. 94r, col. 1, lns. 5-10)

The *Andəmta* commentary, thus, adopts the interpretation of multiple colors, but interestingly it is closer to the Syriac commentary of Ishoʿdad of Merv than it is to its Arabic adaptation in Ibn al-Ṭayyib or the Ethiopic translation thereof. How did the *Andəmta* commentary receive this tradition about four colors that is found in Ishoʿdad of Merv (and ultimately from the *Hexapla*) if not via the Ethiopic translation of Ibn al-Ṭayyib? Did it have access to Ishoʿdad of Merv through a different source? Or perhaps even to the *Hexapla* itself? A full study of the sources of the *Andəmta* commentary is necessary before such questions can be answered. Finally, it should be pointed out that the *Andəmta* commentary contains a tradition associating Joseph’s garment with gold. This tradition occurs in the commentary by Məhərka Dəngəl, as noted above, and it is also to be found in the Ethiopic *History of Joseph*, to which the paper now turns.

The Ethiopic *History of Joseph*: Another Bridge

While Ibn al-Ṭayyib’s *The Paradise of Christianity* provided one of the primary bridges by which Syriac biblical exegesis was transmitted into Ethiopic, it was not the only such bridge. A number of other Syriac exegetical works made their way into Ethiopic via Arabic. This includes, for instance, exegetical *mēmrē* by Jacob of Serug. Ethiopic manuscripts contain a number of homilies (Ethiopic *dersan* roughly equivalent to

⁸¹ Probably read **ርፍአታት**, i.e., in construct.

Syriac *mēm̄rā*) attributed to Jacob of Serug.⁸² Many of these are translations from Arabic, and some may in fact ultimately go back to Syriac originals.⁸³ In addition, anonymous exegetical homilies written in Syriac were translated into Arabic, and some of these then made their way into Ethiopic. This is, for instance, the case with the Syriac verse homily on Abraham and Sarah in Egypt, which entered Ethiopic via Arabic.⁸⁴ Another such anonymous Syriac exegetical work that made its way into Ethiopic via Arabic is the *History of Joseph*.

The Ethiopic *History of Joseph* is found in ms. EMMML 1939, which is a fourteenth- or fifteenth-century manuscript from the Monastery of Ḥayq Estīfanos (Ambassal, Wallo).⁸⁵ This manuscript contains a wide assortment of texts:

ff. 2r-23r: Martyrdom (ሰምዕ:) of Claudius (ገላውድዮስ:)

ff. 24r-48v: History and Vita (ዜና፡ ወገድል፡) of Äbba Läteṣun (አባ፡ ለትጹን፡)

ff. 49r-59v: Miracles of Theodoros (ታውድሮስ፡, ቴዎድሮስ፡, etc.) of Äwkiḏäs (አውኪደስ፡)

ff. 60r-67r: Homily (ድርሳን፡) of Ephrem (ኤፍሬም፡) on the Transfiguration

ff. 67v-83r: Homily (ድርሳን፡) of Cyriacus of Behnesa (ህርያቆስ፡ ኤጲስ፡ ቆጶስ፡ ዘሀገረ፡ ብህንሳ፡) on the Assumption

ff. 84r-86r: Commandments (ትእዛዝ፡) of Anthony (እንጦንስ፡)

ff. 86v-101v: Debate of Äbba Pawli with Satan (ቃል፡ ዘደረሰ፡ ቅዱስ፡ አባ፡ ጳውሊ፡ በእንተ፡ ተዋሥኦ፡ ምስለ፡ ሰይጣን፡)

⁸² Inventories are provided in S. Uhlig, “Därsan des Ya‘qob von Särug für den vierten Sonntag im Monat Taḥśās,” *Aethiopica* 2 (1999), 7-52 at 13-16 and W. Witakowski, “Jacob of Serug,” *EAE*, 262-263.

⁸³ Most of these Ethiopic texts along with their Arabic *Vorlagen* remain unedited. The edition of these texts is one of the many *desiderata* in the study of the transmission of Syriac (exegetical) literature into Ethiopic via Arabic. See n. 22 above.

⁸⁴ The Syriac and Arabic are edited with an English translation in S. P. Brock and S. Hopkins, “A verse homily on Abraham and Sarah in Egypt: Syriac original with early Arabic translation,” *Le Muséon* 105 (1992), 87-146. The Ethiopic version is edited with a French translation in A. Caquot, “Une homélie éthiopienne attribuée à Saint Mar Éphrem sur le séjour d’Abraham et Sara in Égypte,” in *Mélanges Antoine Guillaumont. Contributions à l’étude des christianismes orientaux* (Cahiers d’orientalism 20; Geneva: P. Cramer, 1988), 173-85.

⁸⁵ See Haile, *Project Numbers 1501-2000*, 429-433.

ff. 102r-113v: The Fifth Homily of John Climacus about people who are doing penance (ድርሳን፡ ጎምስ፡ ዘአቡነ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ዮሐንስ፡ በዐለ፡ መዓርግ፡ በእንተ፡ ሰብእ፡ እለ፡ ውስተ፡ ንስሐ⁸⁶፡)

ff. 114r-123v: Homily of Jacob of Serug on the Death of Aaron ... (ድርሳን፡ ዘደረስ፡ ብፁዕ፡ ወቅዱስ፡ አባ፡ ያዕቆብ፡ ዘስሩግ፡ በእንተ፡ ዕረፍቱ፡ ለአሮን፡ ካህን፡ ...) ⁸⁷

ff. 124r-162r: History of Joseph (ዜናሁ፡ ለዮሴፍ፡ ወልደ፡ ያዕቆብ፡ ...)

ff. 162r-168r: An untitled text dealing with the death of Joseph.⁸⁸

It should be noted that most, if not all, of these texts are translations from Arabic, and that two of them are attributed to well-known Syriac authors: Ephrem and Jacob of Serug. It is the second to last text in this manuscript, the *History of Joseph*, that is of concern in the remainder of this paper.

The Ethiopic *History of Joseph* is a dramatic prose retelling of the Joseph narrative, beginning with his dreams and ending with the arrival of Jacob into Egypt. In 1990, Isaac published a translation of the text with a provisional study, though unfortunately without an edition of the Ethiopic, in the *Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha*.⁸⁹ The journal that Isaac chose for his study gives insight into how he contextualized the text. According to Isaac, the Ethiopic *History of Joseph* derives ultimately from “a Jewish work of the late Second temple period.”⁹⁰ Thus, Isaac

⁸⁶ Ms. ንስሐ፡ .

⁸⁷ For this text, see n. 22 above.

⁸⁸ Haelewyck gives the title as *Mors Joseph* (J.-C. Haelewyck, *Clavis Apocryphorum Veteris Testamenti* [Turnhout: Brepols, 1998], 81 [CAVT 117]). An Arabic *Vorlage* to this text can be found in ms. Cairo, Coptic Patriarchate 272, which Graf already described as “der Tod Josephs, des Sohnes des Jakob Israel” (*Geschichte*, 2:205). The present author is currently preparing an edition and translation of the Ethiopic version of this text, along with its Arabic *Vorlage*. It remains unclear on what basis Haelewyck (*Clavis Apocryphorum Veteris Testamenti*, 81) differentiates this text (CAVT 117) from his *Dormitio Joseph filii Jacob* in Arabic (CAVT 116). Based on the French summary of the latter by Frédéric Manns (“Note sur la ‘Dormition de Joseph’,” *Henoch* 4 [1982], 38-40), they may well be the same text. Unfortunately, however, the Arabic ms. containing CAVT 116 seems to have been destroyed in a fire (personal communication from Hany Takla), and thus it may never be possible to determine whether or not CAVT 116 and CAVT 117 represent the same text.

⁸⁹ E. Isaac, “The Ethiopic *History of Joseph*,” *JSP* 6 (1990), 3-125. It should be noted that Isaac’s translation is rather infelicitous (for several examples, see n. 98 and 102 below), and thus it should be cited only with caution.

⁹⁰ Isaac, “The Ethiopic *History of Joseph*,” 44.

represented the Ethiopic *History of Joseph* as if a text like Jubilees or Enoch, which have their origins in Second Temple Judaism. Though he discussed possible connections to Syriac and Arabic at various points in his study,⁹¹ Isaac did not identify a potential *Vorlage* for the Ethiopic *History of Joseph*. In his *Clavis Apocryphorum Veteris Testamenti* (CAVT), Haelewyck established that the Ethiopic *History of Joseph* was a translation from Arabic.⁹² This was followed by Denis, who noted that the Ethiopic text probably went back to a Syriac work perhaps via Arabic.⁹³ It was, however, only with a recent study by Heal that the Ethiopic *History of Joseph* was connected, via an Arabic intermediary, with the Syriac *History of Joseph* that was edited more than a century ago by Weinberg and Link.⁹⁴

To illustrate the relationship between the Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions of the *History of Joseph*, it is useful to look at a brief passage in these three texts:

⁹¹ See especially Isaac, “The Ethiopic *History of Joseph*,” 39-44.

⁹² Haelewyck, *Clavis Apocryphorum Veteris Testamenti*, 80 (CAVT 113). He was preceded in this by Pierluigi Piovanelli (“Les aventures des apocryphes en Éthiopie,” *Apocrypha* 4 [1993], 197-224).

⁹³ Albert-Marie Denis, *Introduction à la littérature religieuse judéo-hellénistique*, Vol. 1. *Pseudépigraphes de l'Ancien Testament* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 346-347. Haelewyck does not mention a Syriac connection (*Clavis Apocryphorum Veteris Testamenti*, 80 [CAVT 113])

⁹⁴ Kristian Heal, “Identifying the Syriac *Vorlage* of the Ethiopic *History of Joseph*,” in *Malphono w-Rabo d-Malphone: Studies in Honor of Sebastian P. Brock*, ed. G. Kiraz (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2008), 205-210. See also Kristian Heal, *apud* Robert R. Phenix, *The sermons on Joseph of Balai of Qenneshrin: Rhetoric and interpretation in fifth-century Syriac literature* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 145 n. 20. The Syriac is edited in M. Weinberg, *Die Geschichte Josefs angeblich verfasst von Basilius dem Grossen aus Cäsarea* (Halle: Universität Halle-Wittenberg, 1893); S. W. Link, *Die Geschichte Josefs angeblich verfasst von Basilius dem Grossen aus Cäsarea* (Berlin: H. Itzkowski, 1895); an English translation is available in Kristian Heal, “The Syriac *History of Joseph*: A New Translation and Introduction,” in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*, ed. Richard Bauckham and James R. Davila (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmann, 2013), 1:85-120. Given these identifications, a joint project is now underway to produce comparative editions and translations of the Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions of the *History of Joseph*. The Syriac will be edited and translated by Kristian Heal, the Arabic by Joseph Witztum, and the Ethiopic by the present author. The results will be published with Brepols in their series *Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum* (CCSA).

midrashic tradition, which, it should be noted, has not yet been definitively established, the Ethiopic *History of Joseph* cannot simply be read as a straightforward representative of such a tradition. Rather, the Ethiopic *History of Joseph* is a translation of the Arabic *History of Joseph*, which itself is a translation of the Syriac *History of Joseph*. Thus, all studies of the *History of Joseph* should begin with the Syriac version of the text.¹⁰¹

While the Ethiopic version is clearly a translation of the Arabic, it does at times depart from its Arabic *Vorlage*. Toward the middle of this passage, for instance, both the Syriac and the Arabic versions read, ‘their father loved Joseph more than them’. In the Syriac and in the Arabic, ‘more than them’ is expressed by an adjective followed by a prepositional phrase (أكثر منهم, *akṭar minhum*). The Ethiopic, however, has a different construction with a finite verb ‘he made it/him greater’ followed by a prepositional phrase (ወአዕበዮ፡ እምነ፡ ኩሉሙ፡). With the Arabic *Vorlage* in mind, the Ethiopic could potentially mean ‘he made it (i.e., his love) greater than all of them’.¹⁰² Without the Arabic *Vorlage*, however, this is probably better understood as ‘he exalted him (i.e., Joseph) over all of them’. In this case, the Ethiopic translator seems to be playing with the Arabic root *kaṭara* ‘to be numerous, many’ and changing the Arabic relative formation ‘much, most’ into an Ethiopic verbal formation ‘to make the most, greatest’.

From the exegetical viewpoint, a more interesting example of the Ethiopic departing from its Arabic *Vorlage* can be found with the garment that Jacob made for Joseph. In the Syriac, this is said to be ‘a tunic of sleeves’ (ḥabṭa ḥabṭa). This is the same phrase that is found in the Syriac Old Testament at Gen. 37:3, which reads ‘and he made for him a tunic of sleeves’ (ḥabṭa ḥabṭa). The Arabic *History of Joseph*, in contrast, reads ‘a garment painted on its sleeves’ (توبا مصورا الكمين).¹⁰³ Thus,

¹⁰¹ Jovanović dismisses the Syriac version, stating “Christian texts, preserved within the Syriac Church, seem to reflect the same midrashic line regarding Joseph’s cup as the Ethiopic story but with less elaboration. Although they may be important for establishing the history of the transmission of this tradition, they are less likely to offer the insights into alternative midrashim” (*Joseph of genesis as hellenistic scientist*, 121-122). Such a statement considerably understates the relationship between the Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions of the *History of Joseph*.

¹⁰² The translation of Isaac reads, ‘Jacob loved Joseph much more than all of them’ (“The Ethiopic *History of Joseph*,” 45). This is, however, a very free translation at best.

¹⁰³ The Arabic manuscripts attest variants here: mss. Cairo, Coptic Patriarchate 89 and 722 read simply ‘a painted garment’ with no mention of sleeves (توبا مصورا and توبا مصور, respectively); ms. Mingana Syr. 177 reads ‘a garment strung with pearls’ (توبا مصورة); and ms. Cambridge Add. 2886 reads ‘a garment composed of

the Arabic departs from its Syriac *Vorlage*. Similarly, the Ethiopic *History of Joseph* does not simply translate the Arabic, but rather it adds its own exegetical tradition, reading ‘a garment whose sleeves were of gold’ (ልብስ፡ መዝራዕቱ፡ ዘወርቅ፡). Ethiopic has ‘sleeves’ like the Syriac and the Arabic (at least in one of the manuscripts), but it also introduces the fact that these sleeves were ‘of gold’ (ዘወርቅ፡). This does not agree with the Ethiopic Old Testament, which reads, ‘he made for him a garment of diverse colors’ (ገብረ፡ ሎቱ፡ ክዳነ፡ ዘገብረ፡ ዐሥቅ።).¹⁰⁴ As noted above, however, a similar exegetical tradition is found in the Ethiopic Commentary by Məhərka Dəngəl:

ወቦ፡ እለ፡ ይቤሉ፡ ይእቲ፡ ልብስ፡ ዓጽፍ፡ ዘግብርት፡ በቀይሕ፡ ወበካልአን፡
 ጎብራት፡ ዘቦ፡ ላዕሌሃ፡ ግብረ፡ ወርቅ፡ ዘተገበሩ፡ ባቲ፡ ገባርያነ፡ ወርቅ። ወግብረ፡
 ወርቅኒ፡ ይትአመር፡ እምነ፡ አውቃፍ፡ ወእነግ፡ ዘተውህባ፡ ላቲ፡ ለርብቃ፡ እምነ፡
 አብርሃም፡ በእደ፡ ኢያውብር፡ ገብሩ።

“Others say that the garment was a cloak made with red and other colors that had on it workmanship of gold, with which the goldsmiths had worked. The workmanship of gold is shown by the necklaces and earrings that were given to Rebecca by Abraham through his servant ‘iyawbər.” (ms. EMMML 2101, f. 94r, col. 1, ln. 5-10)

The commentary of Məhərka Dəngəl, thus, provides an exegetical parallel to the Ethiopic *History of Joseph* in associating Joseph’s garment with gold – interestingly, a tradition that is not found in the Arabic *Vorlage* to the Ethiopic *History of Joseph*. At the current stage of research, it is impossible to determine if one of these Ethiopic texts is dependent on the other or if they are each dependent on a hitherto unknown third source. It is, however, clear that these two texts share an exegetical tradition.

In connection with this exegetical tradition, it should be noted that clothes of gold seem to be a sign of prestige and even royalty in Ethiopic literature. This motif, for instance, appears several times in the *Kəbrä*

pearls’ (الاهل من حلاله) with حلاله for ماضوم (for this root, which means ‘composer’, see R. Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes* [2nd ed.; Leiden: Brill, 1927], 2:530). The readings of ms. Mingana Syr. 177 and ms. Cambridge Add. 2886 are clearly related; given the context with pearls, the former is most likely original, and the latter a corruption.

¹⁰⁴ Cited according to B. A. Edele, “A Critical Edition of Genesis in Ethiopic” (Ph.D. Diss., Duke University, 1995).

Nägäšt.¹⁰⁵ The servants of Abraham are, for instance, described in this text as follows:¹⁰⁶

...እለ፡ ይለብሱ፡ ዲባጋተ፡ ዘወርቅ፡ ወየዐንቁ፡ በዝጋናተ፡ ዘወርቅ፡ ወይቀንቱ፡
ቅናታተ፡ ዘወርቅ፡ ይትቁጸሉ፡ አክሊላተ፡ ዘወርቅ፡ ...

“(those) who were wearing fabrics of gold, were wearing necklaces of gold, were girded in belts of gold, and were crowned with crowns of gold...”

Similar phraseology is used to describe Solomon’s son later in the *Käbrä Nägäšt*:¹⁰⁷

...ወአልበሶ፡ ዲባጋተ፡ ዘወርቅ፡ ወቅናተ፡ ዘወርቅ፡ ወአክሊሊ፡ ዲበ፡ ርእሱ፡
ወሕልቀተ፡ ውስተ፡ አጽባዕቱ፡ ወአልበሶ፡ አልባሰ፡ ክብር፡ ዘየሀይድ፡ አዕይንተ፡
ወአንበሮ፡ ዲበ፡ መንበሩ፡ ...

“... he dressed him in fabrics of gold, a belt of gold, a crown on his head, and a ring on his finger, and he dressed him in clothes of honor, which captivated eyes, and he sat him on his throne ...”

In this case, there are clear royal connotations. Thus, there is evidence that clothes of gold were a sign of prestige in the Ethiopian context, which is of course not unexpected. Does the association of Joseph’s garment with gold, then, represent a native Ethiopian exegetical tradition in both the *Ethiopic History of Joseph* and the commentary by Mähärka Dängäl? Or is its source to be found in another exegetical tradition?

As mentioned above, the *Andämta Commentary* on Genesis also contains the exegetical tradition that associates Joseph’s garment with gold.¹⁰⁸

ይህም ይታወቅ ዘንድ ፬ት ኅብር ፮ኛ ወርቀዘቦ ያለው ልብስ አሠርቶለት ነበረ ።

“Regarding this, it is to be known that he had made for him a garment that had four colors (and) fifth(ly) with a gold stripe.”

¹⁰⁵ The text is edited in C. Bezold, *Kebra Nagast. Die Herrlichkeit der Könige* (Munich: G. Franz, 1909). The most thorough study continues to be David Allan Hubbard, “The Literary Sources of the Kebra Nagast” (Ph.D. Diss., University of St. Andrews, 1954).

¹⁰⁶ Cited according to Bezold, *Kebra Nagast*, 8.a.23-26.

¹⁰⁷ Cited according to Bezold, *Kebra Nagast*, 33.a.7-12.

¹⁰⁸ Cited according to Alehegne, *Ethiopian Commentary*, 294.

The Andəmta commentary could have received this tradition from the Ethiopic *History of Joseph*, the commentary by Məhərka Dəngəl, or their common source (if such exists). Regardless, the Andəmta commentary clearly contains a tradition that is found in Ishoʿdad of Merv (ultimately from the *Hexapla*), that is, the four colors,¹⁰⁹ as well as a tradition that is otherwise found only in the Ethiopic *History of Joseph* and the commentary by Məhərka Dəngəl, that is, the association with gold.

Returning to the Ethiopic *History of Joseph*, the tradition that associates Joseph's garment with gold represents a small addition of exegetical material in the movement of this text from Arabic to Ethiopic. This illustrates that the Ethiopic *History of Joseph* is not just a translation of the Arabic *History of Joseph*, but rather it is a translation of the Arabic text that at times contains additional exegetical traditions.¹¹⁰ This argument can be bolstered by many other similar cases that occur throughout the text. Thus, while the Arabic *History of Joseph* serves as the primary source for the Ethiopic *History of Joseph*, it is not its only source. Rather, the Ethiopic *History of Joseph* creatively combines its Arabic *Vorlage* with other exegetical traditions.

Conclusion

The transmission of Syriac biblical exegesis into Ethiopic via Arabic represents a multi-layered process. During the Solomonic Period (1270-1770), a number of Arabic texts were translated into Ethiopic, including exegetical works. This paper has looked at several examples. Ms. Bibl. Nat. Éth. d'Abbadie 28 contains an Ethiopic translation of the running commentary from Ibn al-Ṭayyib's *The Paradise of Christianity*, and ms. EMMML 1839 contains an Ethiopic translation of the question-and-answer part of this same work. Both of these Ethiopic commentaries are literal, source-oriented translations of Arabic texts. The Arabic sources for these Ethiopic commentaries are, in turn, based on Syriac exegetical works, especially the *Scholion* by Theodoros bar Koni and the commentary of Ishoʿdad of Merv. The Ethiopic translations of Ibn al-Ṭayyib's *The Paradise of Christianity* were important sources for the Ethiopic Commentary by Məhərka Dəngəl, which is preserved in ms. EMMML 2101. Departing from the method of the earlier translators, Məhərka Dəngəl supplemented the

¹⁰⁹ This was discussed above.

¹¹⁰ It should be pointed out that the differences between the Syriac and Arabic versions of this text are far greater than those between the Arabic and Ethiopic versions. One such development in the Arabic can be seen in n. 103 above.

Ethiopic translations of Ibn al-Ṭayyib with exegetical material from other sources, including perhaps native Ethiopian traditions.

The Ethiopic reception of Syriac biblical exegesis was not limited to biblical commentaries in the strict sense. Rather, a number of other Syriac works containing exegetical content, such as homilies and dramatic retellings of the Bible, also made their way into Ethiopic via Arabic. The Ethiopic *History of Joseph*, for instance, is an Ethiopic translation of an Arabic text, itself translated from Syriac. Though clearly a translation from Arabic, this text has in places incorporated other exegetical traditions, but not to the same extent as Məhərka Dəngəl's commentary.

The Andəmta commentary tradition represents the final layer, to date, in the Ethiopian reception of Syriac biblical exegesis. In its description of the garment that Jacob made for Joseph, the Andəmta commentary contains an exegetical tradition that is transmitted by Isho'dad of Merv from the *Hexapla*: the specification of four colors. In addition, it contains a tradition that associates Joseph's garment with gold, which is also found in the Ethiopic *History of Joseph* and the commentary of Məhərka Dəngəl, but interestingly not in the Arabic *Vorlage* to the Ethiopic *History of Joseph* and not in the Ethiopic translation of Ibn al-Ṭayyib. Thus, this tradition that associates Joseph's garment with gold illustrates the creativity involved in the Ethiopic reception of Syriac biblical exegesis.