EMBELLISHED WITH GOLD:
THE ETHIOPIAN 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 (Gǝʿǝz). 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. 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

* Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the First International Symposium on Syriac – Geez, May 27-30, 2013, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, at the workshop 'A Fruitful Bough': Joseph traditions in and outside the Bible, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel, Jan. 13, 2014, and at the Canadian Society of Syriac Studies (CSSS), Toronto, Canada, April 2, 2014. I am grateful to these audiences for their insightful comments. I would also like to thank a number of people who contributed to this paper in various ways, by sharing their own work, commenting on drafts, making manuscripts available, etc.: Dexter Brown, Leah Comeau, Stephen Davis, Simcha Gross, Dimitri Gutas, Kristian Heal, Ljubica Jovanović, George Kiraz, Ralph Lee, Frédéric Manns, Adam McCollum, Geoffrey Moseley, Yonatan Moss, James Nati, Columba Stewart, Hany Takla, Lucas Van Rompay, and Joseph Witztum. This paper has grown out of a larger project dedicated to editing and translating Ethiopic exegetical works on Genesis. Note the following abbreviations: EAE = Encyclopaedia Aethiopica, ed. S. Uhlig (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003-); GEDSH = Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage, ed. S. P. Brock, A. M. Butts, G. A. Kiraz, and L. Van Rompay (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2011).

1 Throughout this paper, 'Ethiopic' refers to the Gǝʿǝz 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 Isho’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 Mḥarka Dǝngal and the Andamta 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.\(^5\)

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\(^5\) 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 *mēmrē*, or metrical homily. The East-Syriac poet Narsai (d. ca. 500) composed a large number of *mēmrē*, more than eighty of which survive, on a wide range of topics, including many on Old Testament passages. Narsai’s West-Syriac contemporary Jacob of Serug (d. 521) also composed a large number of *mēmrē* (some 380 survive), many of which deal with the Old Testament. 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.

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
commentary and question-and-answer. 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. The first five *mēmrē* (out of eleven) treat the Old Testament. Around the same time, Isho’ bar Nun (d. 828) wrote his *Selected Questions*, which comments on the entire biblical text, again in the genre of question-and-answer. Slightly later, Isho’dad of Merv (fl. ca. 850) completed a large commentary on the Bible (both Old and New Testament). This represents the most expansive form of East-Syriac biblical exegesis. An important source for Isho’dad’s commentary is the anonymous commentary on Genesis-Exodus 9:32 preserved in ms. (olim) Diyarbakir 22.

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THE ETHIOPIC RECEPTION OF SYRIAC BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

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 ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Ṭayyib al-ʿIrāqī.14 Among his many works, Ibn al-Ṭayyib wrote The Paradise of Christianity (Firdaws al-nasrāniyya). 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 Ishoʿdad 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’ (ʾorit) attributed to John Chrysostom (d. 407).17 The incipit reads:18


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 national, 1912), 18. Part of the beginning of this commentary is also preserved in ms. EMML 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
“May God, the Lord of Israel, be blessed! In the name of God, the Father and Live-Giver, we begin to write the interpretation (tǝrgʷame) 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. In other Ethiopic translations of Ibn al-Ṭayyib, the author is occasionally called by the moniker ‘John Chrysostom of the East’ (የከሆንስ፡አፈ፡ወርቅ፡ምሥራቃዊ፡), 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 ‘Ǝsraʾel (or Fälaša). It should, however, be noted that the borders between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Betä ‘Ǝsraʾel were at times porous, with texts crossing between the two communities. Thus, the commentary preserved in this

Ge’ez Document Reporting Controversy Concerning the Bible Commentaries of Ibn at-Ṭayyib,” Rassegna di Studi Etioci 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.


22 To take just one example, Jacob of Serug’s ‘Homily on the death of Aaron’ formed the basis for the Motâ ‘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 ‘Ǝsraʾel (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 ‘Isra’el.\textsuperscript{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 Maharka Dangal, which is discussed in the next section of this paper.

To illustrate the relationship between Syriac biblical exegesis, Ibn al-Ṭayyib’s \textit{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:

\begin{verbatim}
ወዘይመርህ፡ላዕለ፡ተትሕቶቱ፡ዮሴፍ፡ውእ të፡ተኀፅነ፡ምስለ፡አእማተ፡አቡሁ፡ዘለፋ፡ወቦላ።ወውዴትኒ፡እኪት፡ዘኮነ፡ያመጽእ፡ዮሴፍ፡ኀበ፡አቡሁ፡በእንተ፡ኣኀዊሁ፡እስመ፡እሙንቱ፡ኮኑ፡የሐምይዎ፡ለአቡሆሙ፡ወኢያፈቅርዎ፡አው፡እስመ፡እሙንቱ፡ኮኑ፡ይትጌበሩ፡ውስተ፡ተኖልዎ፡ዘየዓሉ
\end{verbatim}

“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 wicked\textsuperscript{30} in shepherding.

sanbat’. Une homélie éthiopienne attribuée à Jacques de Saroug,” \textit{OS} 8 [1963], 343-394). See also n. 83 and 87 below.

\textsuperscript{23} There is nothing to suggest that the manuscript itself originally belonged to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and only secondarily came to the Betä ‘Isra’el, as Cowley seems to imply (“Ge’ez Document,” 6 n. 10). See n. 18 above.

\textsuperscript{24} Perhaps read \textit{አሸገር}.

\textsuperscript{25} Ms. \textit{ዘኢየዓሉ}.

\textsuperscript{26} Ms. \textit{ቀሚሶ}.

\textsuperscript{27} There is a space of ca. 4 letters before this word.

\textsuperscript{28} Ms. \textit{ከአንዲት}. This is emended to \textit{ከሸገር} based on the reading \textit{ከሸገር} in the Ethiopic Commentary by Maharka Dangal (ms. EMML 2101, f. 93v, col. 3, ln. 29). This commentary is discussed in more detail below.

\textsuperscript{29} Perhaps read \textit{ርፍአታተ}, i.e., in construct.

\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{32} Others 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-Tayyib’s The Paradise of Christianity as found in ms. Vatican Arab. 37 and edited by Sanders:\textsuperscript{33}

“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.
Indeed, others would only wear two pieces that they patch together. Others say that it was a cloak, and it had stripes of red, yellow, and other (colors).”

As can be seen from this example, the Ethiopic translation of Ibn al-Ṭayyib closely follows its Arabic source.\textsuperscript{41} It is, in fact, a very literal, source-oriented translation in which almost every feature of the Arabic text is reproduced in Ethiopic. At times, this results in a rough, if not unintelligible, Ethiopic text.\textsuperscript{42}

The Arabic commentary of Ibn al-Ṭayyib is, in turn, based on Ishoʿdad of Merv’s commentary in Syriac, which reads as follows:\textsuperscript{43}

“It seems that the humility of Joseph (is) from the fact that he was reared with children of maid-servants. Again, concerning the fact that they hated him, etc., (is that) ‘and Joseph brought news...’. The

\textsuperscript{41} This is true throughout the commentary, as noted already by Cowley (\textit{Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation}, 114).

\textsuperscript{42} For instance, the Ethiopic preposition with pronominal suffix ዮ፡ in የአሁ şek፡ in የአሁን-

\textsuperscript{43} Cited according to Vosté and Van den Eynde, \textit{Išoʾdad de Merv}, 199.15-200.9.
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, 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. 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.
Ibn al-Ṭayyib incorporates each of these traditions from Ishoʿdad of Merv into his commentary. In most of the cases, Ibn al-Ṭayyib even retains the order of presentation found in Ishoʿdad 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 Ishoʿdad 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 Ishoʿdad 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. EMML 1839 (ff. 1r-48v) contains a commentary attributed to John Chrysostom, which, however, is actually a translation of Ibn al-Ṭayyib. The *incipit* reads: 48

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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 Ishoʿdad of Merv’s commentary or one like it.


48 The text can also be found in Haile, *Project Numbers 1501-2000*, 342; Cowley, *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation*, 119.
"The first part (of the interpretation) of John Chrysostom, which the honored priest Äbba Faśšahä Gäbrä ʾƎgziʾäbḥer Wäld Śännay (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. EMML 1839, f. 1r, col. 1, lns. 17-16)

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 Faśšahä Gäbrä ʾƎgziʾäbḥer Wäld Śännay, or ‘father of joy, servant of God, good son’, which is an Ethiopic translation of the Arabic name of Abū al-Faraj (ʿAbd Allāh) Ibn al-Ṭayyib.49 Thus, unlike ms. Bibl. Nat. Éth. d’Abbadie 28, ms. EMML 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 ተስእሎታተ፡, respectively) that cover the Old Testament.50

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

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49 In contrast to the incipit, the desinit only refers to ‘John Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantine’ (ዮሐንስ፡አፈ፡ወርቅ።ሊቀ፡ጳጳሳት፡ዘቍስጥንጥንያ።) (ms. EMML 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.
“Question: On account of what reason did the brothers of Joseph sell him? It is their causing harm...” (ms. EMML 1839, f. 32r, col. 1, Ins. 23-25)

This is a translation of a question-and-answer in the second part of Ibn al-Ṭayyib’s The Paradise of Christianity, which begins as follows:

والله في بيع يوسف شر أخوه...

“The cause of the selling of Joseph (was) the malice of his brothers...” (ms. Vatican Arab. 36, f. 72r, ln. 15-16)

The same question also appears in the Scholion of Theodoros bar Koni with slightly different wording:51

...واﻟﻌﻠﻪ ﰲ ﺑﻴﻊ ﻳﻮﺳﻒ ﺷﺮ اﺧﻮﺗﻪ...

“What is the reason for the selling of Joseph? First, (it is) the envy and evilness of his brothers...”

In this question-and-answer, the Ethiopic of ms. EMML 1839 is a translation of the second part of the commentary of Ibn al-Ṭayyib, as is preserved in ms. Vatican Arab. 36. Ibn al-Ṭayyib, in turn, draws from Theodoros bar Koni’s Scholion, in fact incorporating multiple questions from Syriac into one in Arabic. Since this question-and-answer does not deal with the garment that Jacob made for Joseph, further attention will not be devoted to it here. Suffice it to say, however, that this question-and-answer illustrates the transmission of Syriac exegetical material – in this case, from Theodoros bar Koni’s Scholion – into Ethiopic via Arabic – again, via Ibn al-Ṭayyib.52

In other places, Ibn al-Ṭayyib addresses questions that reflect exegetical material found in Ishoʿ bar Nun’s Selected Questions as well as in the running commentary of Ishoʿdad of Merv. The first question, for instance, in Ibn al-Ṭayyib’s The Paradise of Christianity addresses why God created darkness before light.53 This question is found in the question-

51 Cited according to Scher, Theodorus bar Kōnī, 138.13.
53 The Arabic reads: ... ﻓﻲ ﺑﻌﻠﺔ اﻟﻨﺎذرة اﻟﻤﻨﻬﺎجا ﻓﺎذم اﻟﻠﻪ ﺗﺤليل اﻟﻠامعة ﻋﻠی الشور: ‘... On the cause according to which God created darkness before light’ (ms. Vatican Arab. 36, f. 1r, ln. 7). The
and-answer works of both Ishoʿ bar Nun and Theodoros bar Koni, and similar exegetical material is found in the running commentary of Ishoʿdad of Merv. 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.

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. EMML 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. Thus, by removing the name of the dogmatically suspect Ibn al-Ṭayyib, the commentaries could be more readily incorporated into the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. This argument can be substantiated by a note transmitted in ms. EMML 7122, which is quoted here in full:  

Ethiopic translation reads: እብርሃን።  "Question from the octateuch: On account of what reason did God create darkness before light?" (ms. EMML 1839, f. 1r, col. 1, ins. 19-23).

54 For Ishoʿ 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, *Theodorus bar Kōnī*, 35.7-36.7. For Ishoʿdad of Merv, see Vosté and Van den Eynde, *Išoʿdad de Merv*, 15.2-16.26. For a comparison of the Syriac exegetical sources on this question, see Clarke, Selected Questions, 44-54.


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
“We will tell a little of the story that we heard: there was a great controversy in Ethiopia among the clergy and monks concerning the interpretation of the book, which ʾÄbufäräǰ ʾǝb nä Ṭäyyǝb established. O my master, your servant, ʿAmdä Ḥäwar yat sought all of the books of the Nestorian ʾÄbufäräǰ, the scribe of the house of the Catholicos Ḥǝsen the muslim.

This ʾÄbufäräǰ was a seeker of wisdom from Jews and Christians, and most of his interpretation agrees with the Jews 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:  ብርጓሜ፡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-Ţayyib 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’,\textsuperscript{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),’\textsuperscript{66} mother of God (\textit{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, Yaḥyā Ībna Ādī,\textsuperscript{67} and Ībna Kābār\textsuperscript{68} interpreted, as well as the book of Ībna Āhāl\textsuperscript{69} and Ībna Zārāʾī\textsuperscript{70} and the book of Ḥāwī,\textsuperscript{71} all of these that the church has accepted. O my master, what is Ābufārāğ, the denier of the godhead and slanderer of incarnation? Leave Nestorius to go to his own land!” (ms. EMML 7122, f. 51r, col. 1, ln. 47f. 51v, col. 1, ln. 5)

This note relates a dispute concerning the exegetical works (\textit{tǝrg’mame}) of one Abufārāğ Ībna Tāyyāb, who is of course Abū al-Faraj (‘Abd Allāh) Ibn al-Ṭayyib. The author of the note alleges that the interpretation of Ibn al-Ṭayyib the ‘Nestorian’ (\textit{naṣṭǝrosawi}) 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 Ethiopian tradition.

\textbf{Mḥarka Dongal and the Andōmta 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

\begin{itemize}
\item [\textsuperscript{65}] This is Ibn al-Ṭayyib’s \textit{The Paradise of Christianity (Firdaws al-naṣrāniyya)}. \item [\textsuperscript{66}] This word has been erased in the ms. \item [\textsuperscript{67}] This is Yahyā b. ‘Adī (d. 974); for whom, see A. M. Butts, “Yahyā b. ‘Adī,” \textit{GEDSH}, 429-430 and Graf, \textit{Geschichte}, 2:233-249. \item [\textsuperscript{68}] This is Ibn Kabar (d. 1324); for whom, see Graf, \textit{Geschichte}, 2:438-445. \item [\textsuperscript{69}] As already suggested by Cowley (“Ge’ez Document,” 9 n. 34), this is probably Ibn al-‘Assal (d. 1260); for whom, see Graf, \textit{Geschichte}, 2:387-403. \item [\textsuperscript{70}] This is Abū ‘Alī ‘Īsā b. Isḥāq b. Zur’a (d. 1008); for whom, see Graf, \textit{Geschichte}, 2:252-256. \item [\textsuperscript{71}] This is a reference to the \textit{Pandektēs} of Nikon; for which, see Graf, \textit{Geschichte}, 2:64-66.
\end{itemize}
Pentateuch by Maharka Dangal, which is found in ms. EMML 2101 (ff. 63r-148v). This can be illustrated by looking at Maharka Dangal's discussion of the garment that Jacob made for Joseph:

“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 ʾIyawbǝr. Others say that the garment was like ʾälbäradin. The Nabateans call ʾälbäradin by the name ʾhâmya.”

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’Abbadi 28, which is a

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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 200112500 (Collegeville: Monastic Manuscript Microfilm Library, 1982), 195-196. This commentary also remains unedited.

73 Perhaps read ማምስ (accusative).

74 Ms. ያምለ፡.

75 I.e., Eliezer (see Genesis 15:2).

76 A pseudo-plural of Arabic burd ‘garment’.
translation of Ibn al-Tayyib’s *The Paradise of Christianity*. Many of these are in fact verbatim quotations. Thus, this passage illustrates the dependence of Mǝhǝrka Dǝngǝl’s Ethiopic commentary on the commentary of Ibn al-Tayyib and so ultimately on Isho’dad of Merv. One additional exegetical tradition should be noted here: the association of Joseph’s garment with ‘workmanship of gold’ (ግብረ፡ወርቅ፡). This exegetical tradition will be important for the discussion of the Ethiopic *History of Joseph* in the last section of this paper.

The commentaries of Ibn al-Tayyib, in their Ethiopic translation, were also an important source for the Andǝmta commentary tradition, as has been shown by Cowley. The Andǝmta commentary tradition is not written in Ethiopic (Gǝʿǝz), but in the modern language of Amharic, and it represents in many ways the culmination of Ethiopian biblical exegesis. The complexity of the relationship between the Andǝmta commentary tradition and Syriac exegetical sources can be illustrated by the following passage on Joseph’s garment:

> "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."

Thus, the Andǝmta commentary mentions four colors as well as gold. As noted above, Isho’dad of Merv relays that the garment had four colors in the Greek tradition:

> "The Greek (reads): a mix7(colored) tunic, that is, one that has a piece of red and a piece of black, green, and blue."

In *The Paradise of Christianity*, however, Ibn al-Tayyib is not so specific, stating only:

> "Others say that it was a cloak, and it had stripes of red, yellow, and other (colors)."

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78 Cited according to Alehegne, *Ethiopian Commentary*, 294.
79 Cited according to Vosté and Van den Eynde, *Išo’dad de Merv*, 200.7–9.
80 Cited according to Sanders, *Commentaire sur la Genèse*, 90.2.
The Ethiopian translation of Ibn al-Ṭayyib is even less specific:

“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 Mǝhǝrka Dǝngǝl, which is dependent on the Ethiopic translation of Ibn al-Ṭayyib, states:

“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. EMML 2101, f. 94r, col. 1, lns. 5-10)

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

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81 Probably read כֶּהֲנוֹת, i.e., in construct.
Syriac mēmra attributed to Jacob of Serug. Many of these are translations from Arabic, and some may in fact ultimately go back to Syriac originals. 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. 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. EMML 1939, which is a fourteenth- or fifteenth-century manuscript from the Monastery of Ḥayq Ešṭifanos (Ambassal, Wollo). This manuscript contains a wide assortment of texts:

- ff. 2r-23r: Martyrdom (ሐምዕ፡) of Claudius (ሐመራ፡)
- ff. 24r-48v: History and Vita (ከንታል፡ወገድል፡) of Äbba Lätešun (뇨፡አትጹን፡)
- ff. 49r-59v: Miracles of Theodoros (ታውድሮስ፡, ትዎድሮስ፡, etc.) of Äwkidäs (አውኪደስ defStyleAttr)
- ff. 60r-67r: Homily (ድርሳን፡) of Ephrem (ኤፋም፡) on the Transfiguration
- ff. 67v-83r: Homily (ድርሳን፡) of Cyriacus of Behnesa (ህርያቆስ፡ኤጲስ፡ቆጶስ፡ዘሀገረ፡ብህንሳ፡) on the Assumption
- ff. 84r-86v: Commandments (ትእዛዝ፡) of Anthony (እንጦንስ፡)
- ff. 86v-101v: Debate of Äbba Pawli with Satan (ቃል፡ዘደረሰ፡ቅዱስ፡አባ፡ጳውሊ፡በእንተ፡ተዋሥኦታ፡ምስለ፡ሰይጣን፡)


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.


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

ff. 114r-123v: Homily of Jacob of Serug on the Death of Aaron ...

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

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

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. 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.” 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, 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. This was followed by Denis, who noted that the Ethiopic text probably went back to a Syriac work perhaps via Arabic. 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.

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:

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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).
“Jacob their father loved Joseph more than all of his sons. He made for him a tunic of sleeves and dressed him (in it). When his brothers saw that their father loved Joseph more than them, they were filled with great jealousy against Joseph, and they hated him harshly.”

"Jacob loved Joseph with a great love, greater than his brothers. Out of abundance of his love toward him, he made him a garment with painted sleeves. When his brothers saw that their father Jacob loved Joseph more than them, jealousy entered them, and they hated him with a great hatred.” (ms. Cairo, Coptic Patriarchate 721, f. 46v, Ins. 6-10)

95 Cited according to Weinberg, Geschichte Josefs, 2.8-12.

96 The Arabic version exists in a number of manuscripts; for which, see Graf, Geschichte, 1:205-206; 2:486; Haelewyck, Clavis Apocryphorum Veteris Testamenti, 80 (CAVT 113). Given the lack of a critical edition of the Arabic text (see, however, n. 94 above), the present paper has relied on ms. Cairo, Coptic Patriarchate 721, ff. 46r-116v (1642). Collations have also been made with two other manuscripts from this collection, ms. Cairo, Coptic Patriarchate 89, ff. 171r-272r (1672/1673) and ms. Cairo, Coptic Patriarchate 722, ff. 171r-200v (17th/18th cent.), as well as with the Garshuni versions found in ms. Cambridge Add. 2886, ff. 29v-72r and ms. Mingana Syr. 177, ff. 1-63. Unless otherwise noted, the text is reproduced exactly as in ms. Cairo, Coptic Patriarchate 721 (though without vowels), leaving Middle Arabic features intact.

97 Ms. روا, which is perhaps due to haplography with the following اخوثه. Alternatively, this could be a Middle Arabic spelling. The Arabic manuscripts attest minor variants here: ms. Cairo, Coptic Patriarchate 89 reads روا; Coptic Patriarchate 722 reads روا 'they saw him'.

23
“Jacob their father loved Joseph greatly with a love greater than his brothers. He made for him a garment whose sleeves were of gold. When his brothers saw that their father Jacob while loving Joseph had exalted him over all of them, jealousy seized them, and they hated Joseph.” (ms. EMML 1939, f. 124r, col. 2, ins. 15-23)

Given the questions over the relationships of these texts, it is first necessary to show that the Ethiopic is indeed a translation of the Arabic. This can be confirmed by a number of agreements in the Arabic and Ethiopic versions against the Syriac. The Syriac version, for instance, reads that Jacob loved Joseph more than ‘all of his sons’ (نَباَخَن ىَََُوُْدََماَوُْ), whereas the Arabic and Ethiopic versions both have ‘his brothers’ (اَخْوَأَثنىَهُ، اَهْيَبُْوَِْ). Similarly, the Syriac text states that Joseph not only made a garment for Joseph, but also ‘dressed him (in it)’ (اَخْوَأَثنىَهُ، اَهْيَبُْوَِْ); this was not translated into Arabic and thus does not appear in Ethiopic. Toward the end of the passage, the Syriac reads that ‘their father’ (اَخْوَأَثنىَهُ، اَهْيَبُْوَِْ) loved Joseph, whereas the Arabic and Ethiopic both have ‘their father Jacob’ (اَخْوَأَثنىَهُ، اَهْيَبُْوَِْ). Finally, at the end of the passage, the Syriac states that Joseph’s brothers ‘were filled with great jealousy’ (اَخْوَأَثنىَهُ، اَهْيَبُْوَِْ). In contrast, in both the Arabic and Ethiopic, the argument structure is reversed: a noun ‘jealousy’ is the subject of a verb and ‘them’ is the direct object (دَخْلُهُمَّ بَالْحَسَّد، اَهْيَبُْوَِْ). These examples definitively show that the Ethiopic is a translation of the Arabic.

This should, thus, put to rest any confusion over the Vorlage for the Ethiopic History of Joseph. Unfortunately, Isaac’s ambivalence regarding potential Vorlagen for the Ethiopic History of Joseph along with his claim that it represents “a Jewish work of the late Second temple period” has misled later researchers. In a recent book, for instance, Jovanović treats the Ethiopic History of Joseph as a “representative of Hellenistic midrashic tradition.”

98 Isaac translates نَباَخَن ىَََُوُْدََماَوُْ as ‘their father Jacob loved’ (“The Ethiopic History of Joseph,” 45). This translation, however, ignores نَباَخَن ىَََُوُْدََماَوُْ: ‘while, when’. In addition, it is a questionable rendering of the imperfective اَخْوَأَثنىَهُ، اَهْيَبُْوَِْ; one would expect اَخْوَأَثنىَهُ، اَهْيَبُْوَِْ for ‘he loved’ reflecting Arabic قَد اَحْبَبَ ‘he had loved’.

99 There is one variant in the Ethiopic that seems to agree with the Syriac against the Arabic. At the very beginning of the passage, the Syriac reads ‘Jacob their father’ (نَباَخَن ىَََُوُْدََماَوُْ) loved Joseph; the Arabic here has only Jacob (نَباَخَن ىَََُوُْدََماَوُْ); and the Ethiopic has ‘Jacob their father’ (اَخْوَأَثنىَهُ، اَهْيَبُْوَِْ) seeming to agree with the Syriac against the Arabic. The Garshûnî mss., however, have ‘our father, Jacob’ (اَخْوَأَثنىَهُ، اَهْيَبُْوَِْ) providing a plausible Vorlage for the Ethiopic translation of ‘their father’.

100 L. Jovanović, Joseph of genesis as hellenistic scientist (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), 120.
The Ethiopic Reception of Syriac Biblical Exegesis

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.\(^{\text{101}}\)

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 (لا كثير ازدهاره من سلاطين). The Ethiopic, however, has a different construction with a finite verb ‘he made it/him greater’ followed by a prepositional phrase (አምነ፡ኵሎሙ፡). With the Arabic Vorlage in mind, the Ethiopic could potentially mean ‘he made it (i.e., his love) greater than all of them’.\(^{\text{102}}\) 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 katara ‘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’ (لا كثير ازدهاره من سلاطين). 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’ (لا كثير ازدهاره من سلاطين). The Arabic History of Joseph, in contrast, reads ‘a garment painted on its sleeves’ (توية مصور الكمن).\(^{\text{103}}\) Thus,

\(^{\text{101}}\) 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.

\(^{\text{102}}\) 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.

\(^{\text{103}}\) The Arabic manuscripts attest variants here: mss. Cairo, Coptic Patriarchate 89 and 722 read simply ‘a painted garment’ with no mention of sleeves (توية مصور); ms. Mingana Syr. 177 reads ‘a garment strung with pearls’ (توية مصور); 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’ (አንስ፡አንስ፡ኩርቅ፡ወርቅ፡). 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’ (ንንረ፡るのは፡ወርቅ፡መንፋ፡ድርአ፡ዐሥቅ።). As noted above, however, a similar exegetical tradition is found in the Ethiopic Commentary by Mahanka Dǝngǝl:

“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 Iyawbǝr.” (ms. EMML 2101, f. 94r, col. 1, ln. 5-10)

The commentary of Mahanka Dǝngǝl, 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 ካብራpearls’ (አስመ፡አስመ፡መንፋ፡ቈስፋ፡ውርቅ፡ወርቅ፡) with ምለስማ (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.

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

...እለ፡ይለብሱ፡ዲባጋተ፡ዘወርቅ፡ወየዐንቁ፡በዝጋናተ፡ዘወርቅ፡ወይቀንቱ፡
ቅናታተ፡ዘወርቅ፡ይትቄጸሉ፡አክሊላተ;br:ወወርቅ፡... 
“...(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
Kǝbrä Nǝgäšt:107

...ወአልበሶ፡ዲባጋተ;br:ዘወርቅ፡ወቅናተ;br:ዘወርቅ;br:ወአክሊለ፡ዲበ;br:ርእሱ;br:ወሕልቀተ;br:ውስተ;br:አጽባዕቱ;br:ወአልበሶ;br:አልባሰ;br:ክብር;br:ዘየሀይድ;br:አዕይንተ;br:...
“...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
Mahǝrka Dǝngǝl? Or is its source to be found in another exegetical
tradition?

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

ምህም ይታወቅ ዘንድ ፬ት ኅብር ፭ኛ ወሱዘቦ 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.”

106 Cited according to Bezold, Kebrä Nagast, 8.a.23-26.
107 Cited according to Bezold, Kebrä Nagast, 33.a.7-12.
108 Cited according to Alehegne, Ethiopian Commentary, 294.
The Andǝmta commentary could have received this tradition from the Ethiopic History of Joseph, the commentary by Mahǝrka Dǝngǝl, or their common source (if such exists). Regardless, the Andǝmta commentary clearly contains a tradition that is found in Isho’dad of Merv (ultimately from the Hexapla), that is, the four colors, as well as a tradition that is otherwise found only in the Ethiopic History of Joseph and the commentary by Mahǝrka Dǝngǝl, 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. 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. EMML 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 Isho’dad of Merv. The Ethiopic translations of Ibn al-Ṭayyib’s The Paradise of Christianity were important sources for the Ethiopic Commentary by Mahǝrka Dǝngǝl, which is preserved in ms. EMML 2101. Departing from the method of the earlier translators, Mahǝrka Dǝngǝl 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 Ethiopian 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 Ethiopian 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 Mḥarka Dǝngǝl’s commentary.

The Andǝmta 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 Andǝmta 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 Mḥarka Dǝngǝl, 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 Ethiopian reception of Syriac biblical exegesis.