



Three Groups of Ethiopic Manuscripts in the Light of Galatians 6:14

Fikremariam Bazezew*
Daniel Assefa†

Abstract

The translation of biblical Books from Greek into classical Ethiopic or Ge'ez took place a few centuries after the emergence of Christianity, between the 5th and the 7th centuries. Now, philological studies have been done on several books, especially during the 19th and the 20th centuries. The present article is part of the studies leading to a critical edition of the Ge'ez version. The data collection and especially the process of collation have shown that the Ethiopic versions reflect differences that reflect perhaps different approaches of translation. While some manuscripts propose a text which is more literal, others seem to reflect a more dynamic text. While there are several examples for this phenomenon, this article will focus on one particular verse, namely Galatians 6:14. The examination of more than 16 manuscripts has shown three significant variants on this verse leading to three types of manuscripts, labeled for the sake of convenience A, B and C. The analysis explains the causes of the variants, taking into consideration the Greek original and the principles of textual criticism.

Keywords: *Critical Edition, Textual Criticism, Galatians in Ge'ez, Groups of Manuscripts, Conflation.*

Introduction

This article deals with the Ethiopic version of Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, originally extant in Greek, (Bruce, 1982) like all the other texts of the New Testament. The oldest Ge'ez witnesses of the text here to be studied go back to the first millennium, during the Empire of Axum, more precisely between the 5th and the 7th century A. D. (Hable-Selassie, 1972). Unfortunately, no manuscript of the Epistle to the Galatians in Ge'ez from the first millennium has survived. have survived, mainly due to a number of civil wars and

*Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Linguistics and Philology in Ethiopian Philology, College of Humanities, Language Studies, Journalism and Communication, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia. Email: kebede.ethiopia@yahoo.com

†Assistant Professor, Department of Linguistics and Philology, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.

foreign aggression that resulted in the burning and looting of church books and relics at different centuries, mainly in the Christian-dominant regions of the country (Sellassie, 1966) One has therefore to rely on later manuscripts from the second millennium. Those of the 15th century onward as the earliest attested manuscripts (Zuurmond & Niccum, 2013). Therefore, the aim of this study was to compare and contrast the different *Ge'ez* manuscripts of the Epistle to Galatians and compare them with the attested Greek version of this Epistle.

Critical editions of most of the Ethiopic New Testament texts have been prepared by different scholars. However, this is not the case for the Epistle to the Galatians. This paper is part of a doctoral dissertation focused on philological research on the Epistle to the Galatians, followed by a critical edition and an annotated translation, dated from 15th to 20th centuries. One observes a remarkable difference between manuscripts on Galatians 6:14. Twelve Ethiopic manuscripts read “To me the world is dead, and I am dead in the world”. Now these manuscripts do not use the word “crucified” whereas the Greek and several English translations have “through which (whom) the world has been crucified to me”. One finds the term “crucified” in the other 4 manuscripts. Yet, two out of these four manuscripts comprise the readings of the 12 manuscripts mentioned above as well as the term “crucified”. How can we explain the differences between these Ethiopic manuscripts? Is it possible to trace the cause of the differences? Which manuscripts reflect older versions? This article will address these questions by following the next phases. First, a table of the variants on Galatians 6:14, including the words of the whole verse and the date of the manuscripts will be given. Second, the options for the genesis of the difference will be discussed. Third, the most plausible and probable hypothesis will be chosen. Fourth, a comparison with earliest literature will be made to see whether our hypothesis can be supported by some ancient witnesses.

Table of Variants

The following table enables us to observe synoptically the differences and the similarities of the 16 manuscripts above mentioned.

A = EMIP00755_ChalakotSilasie 14, 19th century, EMIP00942_MaqalaMikael165, 17th century EMIP01071_AddisAlem29, EMIP01090_AddisAlem 48, 18th century, EMIP00944_MaqalaMikael167, 16th century, EMIP01080_AddisAlem38, 19th century, EMIP01106_AddisAlem64 late 19th early 20th century, EMIP0745_ChelekotSilasie004, late 18th /early 19th century, EMIP02750_UNESCO 1.5, 18th century, EMIP02772_UNESCO1_27, Eighteenth century, EMIPMM00301_UNESCO_01_PatriarchsLibrary_017, in 1957, EMIP01845_KiddusGiyorgis, 18th century.

B = EMIP03039_UNESCO10_28, 17th century; EMIP0854_ChelekotSilasie115, late 18th /early 19th century;

C= EMIPMM00049_DabraDaga Church of StStephen_Reel2, 16th century, EMIP02820_UNESCO02_027, 15th century.

Group	Citations
A	<p>ወብኅብይ ሰ ምዕት ዓለምወኣነ ሂ ምዕት በኅብ ዓለም</p> <p>(The world is dead to me and I am dead in the world)</p>
A	<p>ወብኅብይ ሰ ምዕት ዓለምወኣነ ሂ ምዕት በኅብ ዓለም</p> <p>(The world is dead to me and I am dead in the world)</p>
A	<p>ወብኅብይ ሰ ምዕት ዓለምወኣነ ሂ ምዕት በኅብ ዓለም</p> <p>(The world is dead to me and I am dead in the world)</p>
A	<p>ወብኅብይ ሰ ምዕት ዓለምወኣነ ሂ ምዕት በኅብ ዓለም</p> <p>(The world is dead to me and I am dead in the world)</p>
A	<p>ወብኅብይ ሰ ምዕት ዓለምወኣነ ሂ ምዕት በኅብ ዓለም</p> <p>(The world is dead to me and I am dead in the world)</p>
A	<p>ወብኅብይ ሰ ምዕት ዓለምወኣነ ሂ ምዕት በኅብ ዓለም</p> <p>(The world is dead to me and I am dead in the world)</p>
A	<p>ወብኅብይ ሰ ምዕት ዓለምወኣነ ሂ ምዕት በኅብ ዓለም</p> <p>(The world is dead to me and I am dead in the world)</p>
A	<p>ወብኅብይ ሰ ምዕት ዓለምወኣነ ሂ ምዕት በኅብ ዓለም</p> <p>(The world is dead to me and I am dead in the world)</p>
A	<p>ወብኅብይ ሰ ምዕት ዓለምወኣነ ሂ ምዕት በኅብ ዓለም</p> <p>(The world is dead to me and I am dead in the world)</p>
A	<p>ወብኅብይ ሰ ምዕት ዓለምወኣነ ሂ ምዕት በኅብ ዓለም</p> <p>(The world is dead to me and I am dead in the world)</p>
A	<p>ወብኅብይ ሰ ምዕት ዓለምወኣነ ሂ ምዕት በኅብ ዓለም</p> <p>(The world is dead to me and I am dead in the world)</p>
A	<p>ወብኅብይ ሰ ምዕት ዓለምወኣነ ሂ ምዕት በኅብ ዓለም</p> <p>(The world is dead to me and I am dead in the world)</p>
A	<p>ወብኅብይ ሰ ምዕት ዓለምወኣነ ሂ ምዕት በኅብ ዓለም</p> <p>(The world is dead to me and I am dead in the world)</p>
B	<p>ዘበእንተአሁተሰቅለ ሊተ ዓለምወኣነ ሂ ካዕበ ተሰቀልኩእምግለም</p> <p>(World has been crucified to me, and I to the world).</p>
B	<p>ዘበእንተአሁተሰቅለ ሊተ ዓለምወኣነ ሂ ካዕበ ተሰቀልኩእምግለም</p> <p>(World has been crucified to me, and I to the world).</p>
C	<p>ዘበእንተአሁተሰቅለ ሊተ ዓለምወኣነ ሂ ተሰቀልኩለዓለምበእንተአያ ሰስ ክርስቶስ: :</p> <p>ወብኅብይ ሰ ምዕት ዓለምወኣነ ሂ ምዕት በኅብ ዓለም</p> <p>(The world has been crucified to me, and I to the world the world is dead to me and I am dead in the world)</p>
C	<p>ዘበእንተአሁተሰቅለ ሊተ ዓለምወኣነ ሂ ተሰቀልኩለዓለምበእንተአያ ሰስ ክርስቶስ: :</p> <p>ወብኅብይ ሰ ምዕት ዓለምወኣነ ሂ ምዕት በኅብ ዓለም</p> <p>(The world has been crucified to me, and I to the world the world is dead to me and I am dead in the world)</p>

Text-critical Reflections

From an observation of the table above, one can identify three groups of manuscripts. We are not dealing here with polygenetic errors or innovations. The expression “common error” would not be appropriate either. It is better to speak in terms of innovation. The first group, which we may call A, has twelve Manuscripts, the second, labelled B, has two and the third, labelled C, has also two manuscripts. The verse of Galatians 6: 14 plays a key role in the identifications of the groups of the manuscripts.

Group A has መኅበዩ ሰ ምዕት ዓለምወኣነ ሂ ምዕት በኅበ ዓለም [To me the world is dead, and I am dead in the world].

Group B has ዘበእንጉሉሁተሰቅለ ሊተ ዓለምወኣነ ሂ ካዕበ ተሰቀልኩ-እምንለም [About him the world crucified for me again I am crucified from the world]. This seems to be a literal translation from the Greek or from a version which is very close to the Greek. The Greek manuscripts say in fact εμοί κόσμος εσταύρωται, καγώ τω κόσμω; “by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

Group C reads ዘበእንጉሉሁተሰቅለ ሊተ ዓለምወኣነ ሂ ተሰቀልኩ-ለዓለምበእንተ ኣየ ሰሰ ክርስቶስ: : መኅበዩ ሰ ምዕት ዓለምወኣነ ሂ ምዕት በኅበ ዓለም [About him the world crucified for me and I am crucified for the world about Jesus Christ; to me the world is dead, and I am dead in the world]

The Māhəbara Hāwāriat Edition and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahədo Church or EOTC editions follow group A. Most Manuscripts, including the EOTC that has published twice Various authors 2008 and Various authors 2014 a Ge’ez Bible, follow this reading. Besides all canonical biblical verses used for church services are like the first of group Manuscripts. One finds the adoption of the manuscripts group A also in the Ethiopic *Andəmta* tradition. The reading of Group A does not follow the form of the Greek version. Yet, this is just a question of appearance. In other words, the Ethiopian witnesses that chose the word “dead” instead of “crucified” proposed a translation inspired by the meaning. They did not opt for a literal translation but adopted a dynamic one that expresses the meaning.

A text-critical analysis should answer the following questions. What is the relationship between these 16 manuscripts? Can we explain the cause of some readings based on internal text-critical discussion? Now, based on the table above, one gets the first remark leading to addressing the previous questions. A manuscript of Group A has more affinities to other manuscripts of the same group than manuscripts of Group B or C. The author of this article has verified this statement based on other readings in other parts of the Epistle to the Galatians. All this is recorded on other tables and included in the doctoral dissertation from which this article is derived and to be submitted in 2023.

The other remark may be focused on the relationship between groups. Among the three groups, A and B are short. C is in fact a conflation of A and B. The scribe or scribes responsible for the reading of C should have in front of their eyes the readings of A and B.

The concern for keeping both traditions has probably led a scribe to merge the readings of A and B. One should of course not exclude the possibility of a scribe who is unaware of the Greek or unable to read the text in that language.

Another interesting question here would be to suggest the place of manuscripts in terms of date. From the above discussion we may say that Group C is more recent compared to A and B. Yet, which one to choose between A and B when it comes to temporal precedence? Which reading is more ancient? Is it more plausible to imagine a shift from the reading of Group A in Galatians 6:14 to a reading of B or the other way round? Let us remember here that the reading of Group B is close to the Greek as far as the form is concerned. If the reading of B was older, it is difficult to suggest a shift from B to A. A scribe would not easily abandon the reading, which is formally close to the Greek, and introduce a new reading where the word “crucified” would disappear.

On the other hand, it is more plausible to consider a shift from a reading of A to a reading of B at a time when Ethiopian scribes try to retouch their versions in the light of other versions close to the Greek. The period of Abuna Salama the translator (14th century) could be one period where such changes could take place. One could also consider a later period where some revisions of the biblical text took place.

Some Patristic Witnesses of Galatians 6:14

Patristic sources can offer some insights in textual criticism by letting the researcher discover which type of manuscripts and which variants are reflected behind the ancient translations. One may affirm that the text used by the Church Fathers is close to the Greek versions of the New Testament. However, the way some Church Fathers interpreted and understood Galatians 6:14 is like the readings of Group A in the Ethiopic Version. In other words, ancient Ethiopian understanding and translation also reflect an ancient understanding of some most ancient commentaries. This, of course, does not mean that all ancient commentaries support the option of A, or that there are no patristic commentaries that reflect the other readings.

John Chrysostom

In his commentary, John Chrysostom uses the expression “through which the world has been crucified unto me, and I unto the world”.

What he here calls the world is not the heaven nor the earth, but the affairs of life, the praise of men, retinues, glory, wealth, and all such things as have a show of splendor. To me these things are dead. Such a one it behooves a Christian to be, and always to use this language. Nor was he content with the former putting to death, but added another, saying, “and I unto the world,” thus implying a double putting to death, and saying, they are dead to me, and I to them, neither can they captivate and overcome me, for they are dead once for all, nor can I desire them, for I too am dead to them. Nothing can be more blessed than this putting to death, for it is the foundation of the blessed life”.

When we come to the interpretation of Galatians 6:14, we realize that for John Chrysostom, “to be crucified” is equivalent to “be dead”. From this perspective, the reading of Group A is close to the exegesis of John Chrysostom. (Edwards & Oden, 2014).

Jerome

Similarly, Jerome gives a similar explanation.

Gal 6.14. But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. He is able to “glory only in the cross of Christ” who takes it up and follows the Savior (Mt 16.24) who has crucified his own flesh with its lusts and desires; (Gal 5.24) who has died to the world and does not contemplate the things that are seen, but what are unseen; (2 Cor 4.18) who sees that the world has been crucified and its form is passing. (1 Cor 7.31) Now the “world” that is “crucified” to the just man is that one of which the Savior says, “I have overcome the world,” (Jn 16.33) and, “Do not love the world,” (1 Jn 2.15) and, “You have not received the spirit of the world.” (1 Cor 2.12) The “world has been crucified” to that man for whom the world is dead; and the consummation of the “world” comes to him and he is made worthy of the “new heaven and the new earth,” (Rv 21.2) and the new covenant. (Lk 22.20) He sings a “new song” (Rv 5.9) and receives a “new name written on a stone, which no one knows except the one who receives it.” (Rv 2.17) It is asked how Paul now says, “But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,” when in a different passage he “glories” about other things, as for example when he says, “through your glory which I have in Christ Jesus”; (1 Cor 15.31) and again, “I will gladly glory in my weaknesses, that the virtue of Christ may indwell me”; (2 Cor 12.9) and in another passage, “But it would be better for me to die than for anyone to deprive my glory”; (1 Cor 9.15) and the other things which are written in this way. But one should know that all this glorying, when it is related to the cross, is the glory of the cross, and anything worthy that is done in respect to the virtues is done for the sake of the Lord’s passion. (Edwards & Oden, 2014).

Augustine

Augustine has interpreted Galatians 16:14 as follows.

...through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world (Gal. 6: 14). When he says the world has been crucified to me he means ‘it does not hold me’, and when he says I to the world he means ‘I do not hold it’ in other words, ‘the world is not able to harm me, nor do I desire anything from the world’. But the one who boasts in the cross of Christ does not want to be pleasing in the flesh, since he is not afraid of persecutions from carnal people such as Christ endured earlier in order to be crucified and thus offer an example to those following in his footsteps” (Plumer, 2003).

Here Augustine is interpreting the clause “through whom the world has been crucified to me” as meaning that there is a detachment between the world and Saint Paul or that the world does not harm him. Similarly, the clause “I am crucified to the world” would mean that Saint Paul is not attached to the world or is free in as much as worldly desire is concerned. Again, we see how the word “crucified” is explained and not taken in a literal sense.

The traditional Ethiopian Andāmta Commentary

And when we come to the *Andāmta* Commentary produced by the EOTC, the clause “the world is crucified to me” means that the world is like dead for me, in the sense that I do not love the world or I do not want to be enslaved by the deeds of the world; 1 John 1:15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him in this context the world means carnal deeds or the manners of the flesh, and I am dead with regard to these desires of the flesh. This matches with what Jesus Christ said to His disciples ዘያፈቅር አባሁ ወእም እምየ አይደሉ ሊተ ወአይክል ይፀመኒ ወዘያፈቅር ወልደ ወላቶ እምየ አይደሉ ሊተ ወአይክል ይፀመኒ ዘአያጥቦ ወዘአጎ ሥእ መቀለ ሞቱ ወዘአተለወኒ ድጎሬየ አይደሉ ሊተ [37 He that loveth his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and follows after me, is not worthy of me. Matt.10; 36-38] According to these verses, the cross is not the cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified but rather the passion that Jesus Christ underwent. In other words, the cross is a metaphor for the suffering of Christ. Thus, to carry the cross means to leave this carnal world and to follow the passion of Christ, an interpretation which confirms the reading of the Ethiopian witnesses attested in Group A.

As we know, for EOTC, the Geez expression “Mänkosä” Καλόγερος (he or she adopted a monastic life) means he or she died. To be a monk means to be dead with regard to the world or to stop being worried about worldly things or to discontinue behaving in worldly manners. So the Epistles of Galatians is one of the most prominent model of the life of monks in Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church. EOTC, in the spirit of the Epistle of Galatians, appreciates the righteous people who follow the example of Saint Paul as recorded in *gädllä kidusan*, in conformity with the following quotation from the Gospels.

“ወይቤሎ ጳጥሮስ ናሁኔ ንሕኔ ጎድግኑ ከሎ ወተላፍከ ምንተ እንጋ ንረከብ፡ ወይቤሎ ምእማኔ እብከሙ አልቦ ሙህ ዘየ ጎድግ ቤቶ ወአዝማየሁ ወአጎዊሁ ወቤሲቶ ወላደ በእንተ ማግሥተ እግዚአብሔር፡ ዘአይትዕሰይ ምእተ ምክዕ ቤተ በገብንቱ ዓለም ወበዓለ ምክን ዘይመጸእ ሕይወተ ዘለዓለም”

“Peter said we have left all and followed you, so what shall we get, and Jesus Christ said to them truly there is no anyone left his house, parents, brothers, his wives, children for the sake of the kingdom of God, the person who left this all will get many much more this world and will get life everlasting.” Luk.18፤ 28-30

“እለ በተአምኖ ተጋደሉ ወጥኡ ነ ገሥተ ወአደምቡ ፍና ቂሆሙ ዕብ11፤ 33

Through faith they have straggled, and they have won kings, and they have gained their path “ሁናየ ገደለ ተጋደልኩ በደርየ ኒ ፈጸምኩ ወሃይምኸትየ ኒ ዐቀብኩ”

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished my sprint, and I have kept my faith” 2. Timo.4፤ 7

Conclusion

This article has shown the need of text-critical reflection due to the existence of different readings in the Ethiopic manuscripts of the Epistle to the Galatians. Assuming that the Ethiopic version is based on the Greek original, it was necessary to compare the different Ethiopian witnesses and explore the various possibilities to explain the current situation with three different readings extant in 16 manuscripts. Accordingly, the data collection based on these 16 manuscripts has shown that one group of manuscripts, namely group A, probably reflects the version which is closest to the first translation of the Epistle at the Axumite period (5th-7th Century CE). It is noteworthy that this version is recognized as more authentic by the Ethiopian scholars of the 20th and 21st Centuries. In other words, our philological inquiry based on the principle of the shorter reading is confirmed by the modern *textus receptus*.

The second group of manuscripts, namely group B, reflects a new translation probably caused by the initiative of Abuna Selama Mätärgum (the Translator 14th Century), or by a comparison with later manuscripts reproducing the Greek readings. One may suppose here a revision through a version that is close to the Greek, directly or through another version like the Arabic.

The third group, that is Group C, is a conflation of the readings of Group A and group B. Scribes who wanted to preserve both versions seem to have been responsible for the merging of the two readings. The result of this investigation leads to further research on other verses of the Epistle to the Galatians, in view of confirming the above given statement. The research will either confirm the thesis statement or nuance it based on a comprehensive assessment of other significant variants of the whole Epistle.

References

- Bruce, F. F. (1982). *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians: A commentary on the Greek text*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.
- Edwards, M. J., & Oden, T. C. (2014). *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*. InterVarsity Press.
- Everett, G. H. (2013). Study Notes on the Holy Scriptures. In: E-Sword Software.
- Hable-Selassie, S. (1972). *Ancient and medieval Ethiopian history to 1270*. na.
- Plumer, E. (2003). *Augustine's Commentary on Galatians: introduction, text, translation, and notes*. OUP Oxford.
- Sellassie, S. H. (1966). Church and State in the Ak-sumite Period. Proceedings of the 3rd Internafional conference of the Ethiopian Studies,

Zuurmond, R., & Niccum, C. (2013). The Ethiopic Version of the New Testament. In *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research* (pp. 231-252). Brill.

Bibliography

Bauer, W. (2010). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*. University of Chicago Press.

Holladay, C. R. (2005). *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament: Interpreting the Message and Meaning of Jesus Christ (Expanded CD-ROM Version)*.

Erho, T. M., & Stuckenbruck, L. T. (2013). A manuscript history of Ethiopic Enoch. *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*, 23(2), 87-133.

Dunn, J. D. (1993). *The theology of Paul's letter to the Galatians*. Cambridge University Press.

Epp, E. J. (2005). New Testament Textual Criticism Past, Present, and Future: Reflections on the Alands' Text of the New Testament. In *Perspectives on New Testament Textual Criticism* (pp. 285-307). Brill.

Ladd, G. E. (1967). *The New Testament and Criticism*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.

Emerson, M. Y. (2013). Arbitrary Allegory, Typical Typology, or Intertextual Interpretation? Paul's Use of the Pentateuch in Galatians 4: 21–31. *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 43(1), 14-22.

Martyn, J. L. (1997). *Galatians*, The Anchor Bible.

Edwards, M. J., & Oden, T. C. (Eds.). (2014). *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*. InterVarsity Press.

Marshall, I. H. (Ed.). (2006). *New Testament interpretation: essays on principles and methods*. Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Mihăilă, A. (2018). The Septuagint and the Masoretic Text in the Orthodox Church (es). *Review of Ecumenical Studies Sibiu*, 10(1), 30-60.

Moo, D. J. (2013). *Galatians (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*. Baker Academic.

Nosnitsin, D. (2012). Ethiopian manuscripts and ethiopian manuscript studies. a brief overview and evaluation. *Gazette du livre médiéval*, 58(1), 1-16.

Platt, T. P. (Ed.). (1830). *Novum Testamentum Domini Nostri et Servatoris Jesu Christi Aethiopice*. impressit Ricardus Watts.

Chrysostom, S. J. (1889). *Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*. Lulu. com.

Malaty, T. Y. (1991). *The epistle of St. Paul the apostle to the Galatians*. St. Mark and Pope Peter Church.

Abraha, T. (2004). The Ethiopic version of the letter to the Hebrews. *The Ethiopic version of the letter to the Hebrews*, 1-224.