

Linguistic phenomena from the *Aksumite Collection* (CAe 1047)

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The long series of fruitful workshops and conferences on Afro-Asiatic linguistics, vividly evoked by Fabrizio Angelo Pennacchiotti in a recent contribution, was also the occasion for me to deliver a paper ('Ancient Features of Ancient Ethiopic', 2005) that was a minor version of a longer contribution published in the journal *Aethiopica* (2005), but condensed in its essential elements for the proceedings of the Ragusa–Ibla conference. This paper substantially updates those attempts and provide an assessment of the fertility of that research direction.

Keywords: Aksumite texts; Archaisms; Ethiopian Semitic; Gəʿəz (Ethiopic).

1. Introduction¹

In a recent retrospective contribution, Fabrizio Angelo Pennacchiotti (2022) has looked at the Italian meetings of Hamito-Semitic linguistics as an important series of events in the international panorama of Semitic and Afro-Asiatic linguistics that has marked the field since the end of the 1970s. To these

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events I have also modestly contributed, co-organising and co-editing with Mauro Tosco the proceedings of the Naples meeting of 1996 (Bausi and Tosco 1997). To a subsequent meeting I could only present in absentia (Bausi 2006a), on a topic on which I eventually expanded my contribution in an article for the journal *Aethiopica*, published in 2005 (Bausi 2005a). The topic of my presentation revolved around the necessity to reflect—to say it shortly—on the impact that the explosion of research on Ethiopian (and Eritrean) manuscripts implied for the linguistic understanding of Gəʿəz (Ethiopic) and whether it was not finally the case to resume the analysis connecting the growing documentation from early manuscripts with the study of the earliest layers of the language as attested in Gəʿəz inscriptions, in order to see if there was any broadly consistent new evidence emerging. The interest for the early stage of literary Gəʿəz was stimulated by suggestions already during my university years,² but the main events that triggered and made my interest explode was twofold:

1. the first was the unexpected evidence of translation from Greek that I collected while editing canonical texts, like the *Epistle 70* of Cyprian of Carthage, which definitely appeared to be translated on a Greek model; this edition was followed by the study of the collection of the *Acts of Martyrs*, particularly at the example of the *Acts of Phileas*, which likely appeared to be a text translated upon a Greek model;³
2. the further evidence was the discovery of an entire new manuscript (what I eventually called the *Aksumite Collection*, CAe 1047) in 1999, almost completely preserved, containing an astonishing series of texts, all of which appeared to be of great importance for the history of Ethiopian literature, but in the end also for the linguistics of Gəʿəz.⁴ Yet, the interest towards publishing new texts necessarily prevailed in the agenda, even though so many interesting texts still need to be carefully edited, and those contributions from 2005 and 2006 have remained the only ones of explicitly linguistic character. The publications of texts, however, have always included linguistic

² I presented reports on the language of Aksumite texts during the regular courses of Ethiopian philology at the University of Florence in the 1980s, held by the never forgotten Paolo Marrassini, and the topic has remained a *fil rouge* throughout my research since then.

³ See Bausi (1998; 2002). The study of the collection has been carried out especially by Antonella Brita, who collected an impressive number of additional manuscripts, and in the last years also by Massimo Villa.

⁴ For all details on reconstruction of the research on this manuscript with due acknowledgments to other scholars involved, see Bausi, Brita *et al.* (2020). Moreover, the discovery of the Gəʿəz versions of some of the texts has largely impacted some sectors of the studies on Ancient Christianity, far beyond Ethiopian and Eritrean studies. For the last outcomes, with impact on the study of Christian Egypt, see for example Bagnall (2021); Ghica and Schram (2022); and for the history of Christian liturgy, see Bradshaw (2023). My last published contribution on the topic, with a few updates, is the edition and translation of the mystagogical treatise entitled ‘On the One Judge’ (CAe 6260), see Bausi (2021a).

as well as palaeographical and orthographical observations, either in the introduction or in the critical apparatus or in the commentary to the translation. This contribution intends to give a more systematic assessment of the scattered evidence collected so far in different papers.

2. Premise and context

The panorama of studies in the field of Gəʿəz early stage and evidence presents a variegated situation that is important to know. First, the interests towards manuscripts and texts and ancient manuscripts have not always entailed a corresponding attitude and awareness of linguistic phenomena. One case in point is that of the so-called ʾAbbā Garimā manuscripts. The great interest raised by the late antique dating assigned to two of the three manuscripts in particular has not yet triggered any new studies and appreciation of the manuscripts from the linguistic point of view, even starting from the available text editions (Mark, Matthew and John; Zuurmond 1989 and 2001, Wechsler 2005). Conversely, art historians have produced comprehensive studies on the art-historical aspects of those remarkable manuscripts, and studies of detail also exist on codicological and palaeographical features, even though some details might need to be revised (McKenzie *et al.* 2017, Kim 2022). Other studies have included linguistic observations, but they have not sufficiently conceptualised the meaning of and the task of editing a work and a text—like in the case of major apocryphal and biblical texts—that are separated by centuries from their supposed archetypes, with consequences both on the *form* and the *substance* of the readings adopted.⁵

In my 2005 study I had considered a number of features of epigraphic Gəʿəz starting from a paper by Abraham Johannes Drewes (1991), but I had compared them with previous observations by Enno Littmann (1913: 76-82), and—most importantly—I had tried to bridge and integrate them with fresh observations from studies on manuscript evidence from published texts as well as from a still largely unpublished documentation, also referring to the *Aksumite Collection*, yet without providing the positive evidence and references to the single attestations. Leaving aside well-known phenomena⁶ of

⁵ See Bausi (2016a; 2022a). Among recent text editions which do provide linguistic elements, even though they do not thoroughly discuss what to do with them, see for example Niccum (2014); Tedros Abraha (2014).

⁶ So-called laryngeals (or gutturals) *h/h/h̄* and *ʾ/ʿ*, and sibilants *s/ś*, and *š/š̄(d)*. It might be interesting to measure the degree of etymological orthography observed in ancient manuscripts, but certainly this is not the most interesting aspect of the study of Gəʿəz archaisms, since we do have exchanges in manuscripts since the earliest attestations in the ʾAbbā Garimā manuscripts. For an exercise in this direction with large atomisation of the evidence, see Bulakh (2014); Nosnitsin and Bulakh (2014); and also the drastic categorization carried out by Aaron Butts, who distinguishes a phonology of its own, characterised by such neutralisations, for ‘later Gəʿəz,’ see Butts (2019).

orthographic merging in manuscripts since the earliest attestations, even though to a varying degree, a number of epigraphic features appeared particularly interesting due to their continuity with features of certainly later manuscripts, of which I provided further examples. For some exclusively epigraphic phenomena we have now at our disposal quite a number of additional fresh studies, even though the appearance at short distance of important works, some of which posthumous, has not facilitated the assessment of the evidence, which still needs a new comprehensive consideration.⁷

With the exception of one phenomenon which I will mention, the linguistic features I present here from the *Aksumite Collection* are evenly distributed among the texts and are consistent with the hypothesis that we have to do with a genuine and consistent body of texts characterised by phenomena which are not due to the idiosyncrasy of a copyist. For one phenomenon at least (-a against -e forms in prepositions, conjunctions, and in the plural form of the relative pronoun) we have clear evidence that what can be considered a formal variance and a phenomenon of *patina* in the light of the subsequent tradition, in fact belongs to the *fonds*, as far as this manuscript is concerned, because there is no systematic attitude towards a normalisation in one sense or another: therefore, that there are variant forms can only be due to the transmission and the preservation of the text, as it was in a model ancestor.⁸

3. Linguistic phenomena from the *Aksumite Collection*

The features with which I dealt and which I would like to refresh and update here in the light of the documentation of the *Aksumite Collection*, are those listed here below. Yet, they definitely do not exhaust all peculiar features of the *Aksumite Collection*; syntax, in particular—a huge topic—cannot be dealt with for obvious reasons of space.⁹ The same applies to the lexicon: even though there are not a few cases of

⁷ To mention the most important contributions, see Bulakh (2013); Marrassini (2014); Drewes (2019), particularly important for the glossary that provides an essential guide to the interpretation of the inscriptions; Robin (2022); also Breyer (2021), albeit essentially a second-hand work. Important, though of little relevance to linguistic aspects, are the contributions by Hatke (2013); Derat (2018a); Hatke (2020; 2022a; 2022b). Also note the linguistic annotation and encoding carried out by Maria Bulakh and funded by the European Union Seventh Framework Programme IDEAS (FP7/2007–2013), European Research Council, grant agreement no. 338756, project ‘TraCES – From Translation to Creation: Changes in Ethiopic Style and Lexicon from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages’, led by Alessandro Bausi and based at the Hiob Ludolf Center for Ethiopian and Eritrean Studies at UHH (2014–2020); the annotation is now hosted by the Bm project: <https://betamasaheft.eu/manuscripts/RIE> immediately followed by the RIÉ number (e.g. <https://betamasaheft.eu/manuscripts/RIE232>).

⁸ For the concept of *patina* I refer to the definition in Trovato (2017: 229–235).

⁹ The phenomenon of neutralization of the opposition of nominative and accusative endings, and absolute and construct case, is a very frequent one, at times also favoured by the palaeographic neutralization of some oppositions (ሰ/ስ *sa/s(ə)*, ሐ/ሐ *ha/h(ə)*, ቀ/ቅ *qa/q(ə)*, ተ/ት *ta/t(ə)*, ጠ/ጥ *ta/t(ə)*, just to mention the most common ones; see also Erho and Henry (2019: 180); Butts (2020:

unattested lexemes and expressions, this aspect definitely deserves a contribution of its own.¹⁰ The main intention of this contribution is to provide a partial update collecting a series of sparse observations disseminated in several contributions and editions which is useful to present here together and more systematically.¹¹ For the reference, I will use the manuscript leaves, from which, for all texts which are published, it will also be possible to consult the exact passages.¹²

1. Assimilation of the nasals *m* and *n* to a following consonant: not only *m* before *b* but also *n* before labials, dentals and velars, with examples from manuscript evidence of *mb* > *bb*, and *m̄p* > *p̄p*.¹³ This is one of the phenomena that has been confirmed by further epigraphic as well as manuscript evidence: the two unvocalised metal inscriptions mentioning King Ḥafilā (Afilas) have examples of

504–506); I have mentioned the phenomenon on several occasions, see for example Bausi (2011: 44–45; 2012: 50); see in particular the apparatus to the edition of the treatise *On the One Judge*, Bausi (2021a). On these neutralizations see also Villa (2019: 190–203), who has attempted a detailed categorization. This appears to be a distinct phenomenon from what some have called the ‘partial vocalization,’ which appears to be extremely frequent in manuscripts and texts of predominantly practical and liturgical use, and where, I suggest and suspect, the writing as *aide mémoire* might have played a role (see the thorough analysis on *Daggwā* ancient fragments carried out by Karlsson 2022: 225–229); the same probably happens for the marginal readings in MS Ḥabbā Garimā II (or ‘B’ according to the new siglum attributed), which also exhibit the same phenomenon of apparent ‘partial vocalisation,’ see Kim (2022: 22, § 3.4.2. ‘Liturgical rubrics in unvocalized consonantal script’). Related to palaeographic neutralization or not, is the form of the enclitic particle ḥ-*ssa*, always in the form ḥ-*ss(a)*, see Bausi (2011: 25, n. 20).

¹⁰ I will quote only two examples: ḥḥ-ḥ: ḥḥ-ḥ: ḥḥbura ḥḥrit, ‘consubstantial,’ with ḥḥ-ḥ: ḥḥrit (also in the alternative *hapax* form ḥḥḥ-ḥ: ḥḥryat) usually in the meaning of ‘ownership, possession,’ but here also ‘substance,’ that is, Greek οὐσία, see Bausi (2013: 36); ḥḥ-ḥ: ḥḥḥḥ: nḥḥus ‘ālam, a calque after the Greek μικρὸς κόσμος (ḥḥ-ḥ: nḥḥus ‘small’ and ḥḥḥḥ: ‘ālam ‘world’), in all likelihood, a calque after the Greek μικρόκοσμος, see Bausi (2021a: 220–221, 234–235). For the case of ḥḥḥḥ-ḥ: gabgāb ‘corvée’= Greek πάρεργον, see Bausi, Harrower *et al.* (2020: 40–44).

¹¹ I leave out the exceptional morphological phenomena with the appearance of the pronouns *hʿt* (RIÉ 192.A.3, A.4–5, B.3–4), *hm* (RIÉ 192.B.5–6), *hmnt* (RIÉ 192.A.9), which were also interpreted as dialectal forms and compared with modern Ethiopian Semitic (Təgrē) forms, and the negative particle *dʿ* (RIÉ 192.A.7–8, 10–11, 11, and B.4), because they are essentially concentrated in one inscription (RIÉ 192) in South Arabian script, where the presumption of a redundant morphological marking or even the imitation of South Arabian cannot be excluded (see Frantsouzoff 2017: 333; Drewes 2019: 259, who both exclude a dialectal variance); moreover, these phenomena have no parallel in manuscript evidence.

¹² Note that the following texts from the *Aksumite Collection* are edited: ff. 5ra–13va: *History of the Episcopate of Alexandria* (CAe 5064), Bausi and Camplani 2016; ff. 16vb–29va: *Apostolic Tradition* (CAe 6240), Bausi 2011; ff. 39ra–40va: a *List of Apostles and disciples* (CAe 6241), Bausi 2012; ff. 41ra–46ra: a *Baptismal ritual* (CAe 6254), Bausi 2020a; ff. 69vb–73va: *Council and the names of the fathers of Nicaea* (CAe 6256), Bausi 2013; ff. 78va–79vb: the *Epistle of Constantine to the Alexandrians* (CAe 6258) and ff. 79vb–80ra: the *Epistle of Constantine on Arius* (CAe 6259), Bausi 2016b; ff. 88ra–100rb: the treatise *On the One Judge* (CAe 6260), Bausi 2021a; ff. 160va–162va: the *Canonical answers of Peter of Alexandria* (CAe 2693), Bausi 2006b, with ff. indicated there as 117va–119va, according to a previous preliminary reconstruction and pagination.

¹³ See Bausi (2005a: 158). Frantsouzoff (2017: 333) thinks that ‘it can be explained as an imitation of the late Sabaic epigraphic style, in which the same phenomenon is well attested, like the use of the negative particle,’ but what counts here is the consistency of the attestation in epigraphic as well as in manuscript evidence; see also Bulakh (2013: 205), who rightly delimits the phenomenon in manuscripts to labials and dentals, that is *mb* > *bb* and *nt* > *tt*.

mgšt (*ma(g)gəšt*) for *mangəšt* (I.4 and II.4) and probably also *l-ʾbr* (*la-ʾa(b)bāri*) for *la-ʾanbāri* (I.3; Nebes 2017; Bausi 2018, 290–291). The *Aksumite Collection* has a number of examples: striking is ቃቡ: *Qā(b)bu* for **Qāmbu*, corresponding to Greek *KAMBYΣ(ΣΟΥ)* (f. 72v; Bausi 2013, 40); see also (f. 12vb) ወለጢኖስ: *Wala(t)ṭinos* for *Walanṭinos*; ወለጢኖዊያን: *Wali(t)ṭināwiyāna* for *Walintināwiyāna*; but cf. also (f. 152va) ዋሌንጢኒያኖስ: *Walēṭiniyānos*; (f. 110vb) በአተ: *baʾə(t)ta* for በአንተ: *baʾənta*; (f. 117ra) ወህየቴ: *wahəya(t)te* for ወህየንቴ: *wahəyante*; (ff. 39vb, 42ra, this latter four times, 70rb, 84vb) ህየቴ: *həya(t)te* for ህየንቴ: *həyante*.

- Missing passage of first to fourth order in syllables closed by laryngeals (with some exceptional passage to fourth order and even loss of laryngeal in final position occur only in some inscriptions: RIÉ 188.5, 189.4, and 187.4, 189.6);¹⁴ for this phenomenon, for which Littmann himself had recalled examples also from manuscripts, I provided a number of further attestations from published texts.¹⁵ Other examples provides the *Aksumite Collection*: (ff. 88ra, 88rb, 88vb) ዘለዕለ: *zalaʿla* for ዘለዕለ: *zalaʿla*; (f. 88rb) እምበዕዳን: *ʾambaʿədān* for እምበዕዳን: *ʾambāʿədān*; (f. 88va) ወለበዕዳንሂ: *walabaʿədānəhi* for ወለበዕዳንሂ: *walabāʿədānəhi*; (f. 88va) ወበሕተቴ: *wabaḥtitu* for ወበሕተቴ: *wabāḥtitu*; (f. 88vb) ይንሥእ: *yənsāʿ* for ይንሥእ: *yənsāʿ* (unless here a conjecture has to be posed, as detailed in the apparatus; Bausi 2021a: 226, § 7.6); (ff. 124va, 129vb, 131ra) ሠረዕነ: *saraʿna* for ሠረዕነ: *sarāʿna*. Yet, this phenomenon must also be contrasted with the observation that there are opposite cases where in the same context the passage from first to fourth order is realised in closed syllables, particularly ending in *-r*: see for example in the *Aksumite Collection*: (f. 4rb) ይግባሩ: *yəgbāru*; (f. 63rb) ኢይግባር: *ʾiyəgbār*; (ff. 9ra, 15vb): ይግባር: *yəgbār*; (f. 44va) ወይግባር: *wayəgbār*; (ff. 64ra, 100rb) ይንባር: *yənbār*; (f. 114ra) ይንባሩ: *yənbāru*; but also in other cases which rather point to a general uncertainty, even though not so widespread: (f. 15rb) ይልጻቁ: *yəḥṣāqu*; (f. 37vb) ይትዐባይ: *yəṭʿabbāy*.
- Within the context of investigation of archaic features of *Gəʿəz* as they can be gleaned through the analysis of manuscript evidence, a new phenomenon (related to the latter), albeit not largely widespread, has been clearly identified and highlighted by Aaron Butts. The phenomenon is a

¹⁴ I do not deal with the implications of the change in the vowel system and its shift from a quantitative to a qualitative opposition through an intermediate stage, which all predate the earliest manuscript attestations, as long as the phenomena described still imply an opposition between the phonological value of the first and fourth orders, either *a* vs *ā* or *ä* vs *ā* or *ä* vs *ɑ*; on the topic see the thorough contribution with also practical indications on particularly controversial cases, by Bulakh (2016). This phenomenon along with others related to what I am presenting here, was also thoroughly discussed by Butts (2020: 495–497)—and I definitely agree, against Bausi (2005a: 154), that a transcription *ʾayyətmawwā*(?), not *ʾaytmawwā*(?), is more correct; and see further for other essential points raised in his important contribution. For epigraphic evidence see now also Bulakh (2013: 207).

¹⁵ See Bausi (2005a: 154, and n. 17). See possible parallel evidence in ancient *Dəggwā* fragments in Karlsson (2022: 225–226).

- ‘secondary opening,’ operating in transforming **baħr* not into ባሕር: *bāħr* as in standard Gə‘əz, but into ባሕር: *baħar*, with the insertion of an anaptyctic vowel *a* inserted after the laryngeal.¹⁶ The phenomenon, peculiar to the phoneme *ħ*, does not seem to be prominent in the *Aksumite Collection*, but there is at least one case where it appears to surface: (f. 96vb) መሐፈደ: *maħafada* for the expected ማሐፈደ: *māħfada* (actually, for the expected *māħfad*; Bausi 2021a: 246, § 57.1).
4. Preservation of ə-vowel in the personal prefixes of first-laryngeal verbs (yə-, tə-, nə-, instead of ya- etc.), which, however, is not attested in inscriptions,¹⁷ confirming the hypothesis that archaic features in terms of historical reconstruction can be unevenly distributed in epigraphic and manuscript attestation: from the *Aksumite Collection* here a few from the many examples available, with የሐ- *yaħa-* instead of the expected ይሐ- *yəħa-*: (f. 61rb) ይሐውሩ: *yəħawwəru*; (f. 76va) ይሐሊ: *yəħalli*; (f. 81rb) ዘይሐምም: *zayəħamməm*; (ff. 84ra, twice, and 84rb, twice) ይሐምም: *yəħamməm*; (f. 84rb) ወዘሊይሐምም: *waza‘iyəħamməm*, ኢይሐምም: *‘iyəħamməm*; (f. 91vb) ወይሐየ: *wayəħayyu*; (f. 98rb) ዘይሐግግ: *zayəħaggag*; (f. 104ra) ይሐትቱ: *yəħattətu*; (f. 104vb) ይሐውሩ: *yəħawwəru*; (f. 109va) ይሐውር: *yəħawwər*.¹⁸
 5. Prefix with vowel *a* instead of *ā* in the subjunctive of the causative stem of the verb (one example in inscriptions RIÉ 189.46: የጽንዕ: *yaṣnəʿ*, against regular occurrences with *ā* in the imperfect: RIÉ 189.18, ያገብሉ: *yāgabbəʿ*, 189.20 ያማስኑ: *yāmāssənu*, 189.20–21 ያጸድፍዎ: *yāṣaddəfəwo*). No better hypothesis than that exposed Franz Praetorius on the original form of the causative (marked by the feature *a*) has been provided so far.¹⁹ The *Aksumite Collection* provides quite a few additional examples: (f. 121ra) የውግዙ: *yawgəzu*; (f. 131rb) የውስቡ: *yawsəbu*; (f. 132rb) የሥግሩ: *yaśgəru*; (f. 135rb) የግብሉ: *yagbəʿ*.
 6. Related to the latter is a phenomenon that is hardly mentioned in any grammatical description of Gə‘əz, but quite important and widespread in ancient manuscripts, which I had mentioned without providing specific details, namely, the prefix with vocal *a* instead of *ā* in the causative reflexive

¹⁶ Note that the transcription system used by Butts 2020 is different (ባሕር: *baħr* and ባሕር: *bāħär*), but in order not to introduce one more system of transcription, I stay with the system I consistently use in this paper. The phenomenon appears to be typical of MS EMM 6907, the well-known Gospel of King Lālibālā; on the colophon of this manuscript, see now Bausi (2022b: 134). For some further evidence for the ‘secondary opening,’ also in contexts with laryngeals others than *ħ*, see possible parallel evidence in ancient *Dəggwā* fragments in Karlsson (2022: 226).

¹⁷ See on the contrary RIÉ 187.13–14, where *ya‘alu* is subjunctive of *wa‘ala*, from **yə‘alu*, with no comment by Drewes (2019).

¹⁸ See also Villa (2019: 203–204, and for the same phenomenon in nouns, 206–207). The feature is also present in the wooden inscriptions from Lālibālā of the *Homily on Transfiguration* by Anastasius the Sinaite, see Gigar Tesfaye and Pirenne (1984: 109, D.8): ይሐቢ: *yə‘abbi* for የሐቢ: *ya‘abbi*; on the inscriptions see also Bausi (2019: 71).

¹⁹ See Bausi (2005a: 155, n. 19). Also note that even Abraham Johannes Drewes accepts that the system in epigraphic Gə‘əz must have consisted of an opposition between an imperfect *yāqattal* and a subjunctive *yaqtal* form, but he considers the latter as the outcome of the loss of a glottal stop; see Drewes (2019: 240–241), ad RIÉ 189.46.

(ast) form, both in imperfect and subjunctive, again in closed syllable.²⁰ See the following examples from the Aksumite Collection: ነስተ- *nasta-* (for ናስተ- *nāsta-*): (f. 16va) ወነስተአኪ: *wanastaʾakki*; (f. 47ra) ወነስተበቀዕከ: *wanastabaqqʾakka*; (f. 47rb) ነስተበቀዕዕ: *nastabaqqʾə*; የስተ- *yasta-* (for ያስተ- *yāsta-*): (f. 4rb) የስተዳልዉ: *yastadālləwu*; (f. 11rb) የስተራትዕ: *yastarāttə*; (f. 12va) የስተጎፍሮሙ: *yastahāffəromu*; (f. 23rb) ኢየስተርከብ: *ʾiyastarkəb*; (f. 25va) ዘኢየስተአኪዮ: *zaʾiyastaʾakkiyo*; (f. 36vb) የስተሐቅፋ: *yastahaqqəru*; (f. 37ra-b) ዘኢየስተሐቅሮ: *zaʾiyastahaqqəro*; (f. 43rb) የስተታሉ: *yastatāllu*; (f. 66va) የስተጋብእ: *yastagābbə*; (f. 79ra) የስተነፍስ: *yastanaffəs*; (f. 86ra) የስተዓርይዎ: *yastəʾārrəyəwo*; (f. 88vb) ዘየስተርኢሂ: *zayastarəʾihi*, ኢየስተሬኢዮ: *ʾiyastareʾiyu*, ዘየስተርኢ: *zayastarəʾi* (twice); (f. 89rb) የስተርኢ: *yastarəʾi*, ኢየስተርኢ: *ʾiyastarəʾi*; and I could continue. Note that this feature is also attested in one of the most ancient Pauline manuscript, Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, B. 20 inf. (*Pentaglotton*).²¹

7. Alternations of the type *-uw/-əw-* and *-iy/-əy-*, noted in inscriptions and manuscripts.²² The Aksumite Collection has quite a number of examples of *-iy-* instead of the expected *-əy-*: (f. 2vb) እምሂዮ: *ʾəmhiya* for እምህዮ: *ʾəmhəya*; (f. 27va) ለሂዮ: *lahiya* for ለህዮ: *lahəya*; (f. 25va) ዘኢየስተአኪዮ: *zaʾiyastaʾakkiyo* for ዘኢየስተአኪዮ: *zaʾiyastaʾakkəyo*; (f. 64ra) በሂዮ: *bahiya* for በህዮ: *bahəya*; (f. 88vb) ኢየስተሬኢዮ: *ʾiyastareʾiyu* for ኢየስተሬኢዮ: *ʾiyastareʾəyu*; (ff. 103vb, 139va, 159va) ቢዮ: *biya* for ብዮ: *bəya*; (f. 136vb) ተጠሚቂዮ: *taṭamiqiya waʾaṭmiqiya* for ተጠሚቅዮ: *taṭamiqəya waʾaṭmiqəya*; (f. 137va) ሃይማኖትዮ: *haymānotiya* for ሃይማኖትዮ: *haymānotəya*; (f. 144vb) በመንፈሲዮ: *bamanfasiya* for በመንፈስዮ: *bamanfasəya*; (f. 146rb) ሥርዐቲዮ: *śarʾatiya* for ሥርዐትዮ: *śarʾatəya*. The attestation in manuscripts of this alternation is important to support the interpretation of the epigraphic attestation in the inscription of Ham (RIÉ 232.10) of ስቲዮ: *satiya* for the expected *sat(ə)ya*, invoked by Maria Bulakh as ‘evidence for the preservation of the vowel *ə* after the second consonant in the verbs of the inactive type’ (or better said, of the *gabra* type, since inactive is certainly not a semantic category fitting with the relevant

²⁰ See Waltisberg (2001); Waltisberg (2002); it is the form IV in the terminology of Dillmann (1865).

²¹ See Bausi (2016a: 76–77, n. 92), with reference to Tedros Abraha (2004: 29), with the example of የስተርኢዮሙ: *yastarəʾəyomu* for ያስተርኢዮሙ: *yāstarəʾəyomu*; the examples provided by Tedros Abreha, in fact, concern many more phenomena, included some of those given here, such as the missing passage of first to fourth order in syllables closed by laryngeals. Other examples of የስተ- *yasta-* I had noted in the apparatus to the editions of texts from the *Sinodos* (CAe 2317), most of them from MS EMMML 7030, which, however, has a marked attitude to confuse first and fourth order; see Bausi (1995), text, 98 (§ 48.12); 109 (§§ 65.25, 65.29); 114 (§ 77.10), only occurrence from MS EMMML 6955; 272 (§ 69.15); 290 (§ 19.2); 293 (§ 30.6).

²² See Bausi (2005a: 158, n. 27); see also Villa (2019: 207–208); Butts (2020: 507, n. 43). Note that there is no occurrence in the Aksumite Collection of spellings እየሱስ: *ʾIyasus* for ኢየሱስ: *ʾIyasus*, as in MS ʾAbbā Garimā I.

verbs in Gəʿəz). She assumes that the spelling ሰቲዮ: represents *satiya* and that ‘it is much easier to imagine the shift *əy > iy* than insertion *y > iy*’.²³

8. Endings in *-e*, instead of *-a*, in prepositions and conjunctions (for which manuscript evidence was early compared with the epigraphic attestations).²⁴ Just as an example, in the *Aksumite Collection* we have: (f. 1ra) ውስቲ: *waste*; (f. 2vb) ኃቤ: *hābe*; (f. 5va) አሜ: *ʾame*; (f. 37ra) መንገሌ: *mangale*; (f. 65rb) እምኃቤ: *ʾəmhābe*, ዘእንበሌ: *zaʾənbale*, በኃቤ: *baḥābe*, ለሌ: *lale*; (f. 65vb) እስኪ: *ʾəske*, ሶቤ: *sobe*; (f. 66rb) ላዕሌ: *lāʿle*; (f. 66vb) ምስሌ: *məsle*; (f. 120vb) ተሐቲ: *taḥte* (along with the latter, also evidence of missing passage of first to fourth order); (f. 42ra, four times) ህዮቲ: *həya(t)te* (with assimilation *nt > tt*). It is important to note, however, that objectively, the *-e* forms in the plural of the relative pronoun (namely እሌ: *ʾalle* for እለ: for *ʾalla*), which also appear in inscriptions, are much less frequent, even though a systematic investigation has revealed their presence in a number of ancient manuscripts, including MS Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, B. 20 inf. II (*Tetraglotton*).²⁵ We can discuss on the actual origin and explanation of such forms,²⁶ but there is an essential point which emerges from the documentation of the *Aksumite Collection* that is of great and even more important general significance. One single text, the extremely difficult and obscure mystagogical treatise *On the One Judge*, of which neither recension nor *Vorlage* in any other language is known, and one of the longest texts in the *Aksumite Collection* (ff. 88ra–100rb), exhibits a special feature which helps better understand the manuscript transmission of the collection but also provides some information of the kind of variation implied by these *-e* endings (Bausi 2021a, 217, n. 6). An analysis of the distribution of the phenomenon in the single texts of the manuscript of the *Aksumite Collection* reveals that the *-e* forms are well present in all texts, with varying frequency, with the sole exception of the treatise *On the One Judge*. In this treatise the *-e* forms never appear. The codex is undoubtedly written by a single hand, has consistent palaeographic features throughout, and does not exhibit any discontinuity that points to a separate redaction of this text. Therefore, either presence or absence of *-e* forms are not due to a copyist’s initiative or to dialectal or idiosyncratic

²³ See Bulakh (2016: 129). She adds that ‘[v]acillation between *əy* and *iy* is known both in Classical Geez and in Epigraphic Geez’ and that ‘[a]dmittedly, the direction of the shift is usually *əy > iy*, but cf. Zuurmond (2001: 426) on the spelling ሂዮ instead of ህዮ “there.”’ Actually, ሂዮ: instead of ህዮ: is an example of *əy > iy*, and I wonder whether she meant the other way around, that is, the direction of the shift is usually *iy > əy*. For the dating to the tenth century of the inscription of Ham, see Bausi (2021b).

²⁴ See details in Bausi (2005a: 156) (epigraphic attestations are RIÉ 188.1 and 189.2 and 189.4); Bausi and Gori (2006: 96); Bausi (2013: 40, n. 21).

²⁵ See Niccum (2014: 71); Bausi (2016a: 76–77, with n. 92); Villa (2019: 204–206); Bausi (2022a: 114).

²⁶ See Bausi (2005b); Bulakh (2009: 402, n. 19); Lusini (2004: 70–72, and 2009: 11–13), for a different point of view; and from **-ay*, according to Butts (2020: 507, n. 43).

attitude, namely, what is usually indicated as the *patina* added to the *fonds* of the transmitted text. To be more clear: the phenomenon is a typical feature of *form* and not of *substance* (the *-e* forms do not appear to have any special function as opposed to the *-a* forms). We can only determine that this formal variation is inherited (that is, *fonds*) in the manuscript of the *Aksumite Collection*, whereas it is always possible and likely that its special formal appearance is due to a phenomenon of *patina*, by definition affecting the pure form of the transmitted text, in an ancestor (or one of the ancestors or even one of the immediate exemplars) of this manuscript or possibly also in the archetype of the text. In any case, the two formal aspects (with presence or absence of *-e* forms) cannot be attributed to the *patina* of the copyist, since the copying process did not involve any automatic adaptation and homogenisation. This conclusion is extremely important because it undoubtedly demonstrates the existence of what—in the absence of a more adequate explanation—we can call *different scribal schools*, who applied *different linguistic standards* that are still *faithfully mirrored* in this unique manuscript. This essentially linguistic analysis has extremely important text-critical consequences on the reading of a passage in the treatise (§ 13): ቃል፡ ነቢያት፡ በእንተ፡ ዘተነግረ፡ ምስሌ፡ *qāl nabiyāt ba’anta zatanagra māsle*, ‘The word of the prophets on the above said *with*,’ with unmarked construct state in *qāl nabiyāt*, for the expected *qāla nabiyāt*, and with a form ምስሌ፡ *māsle* (for ምስሌ፡ *māsla*, ‘with’) that would be the only *-e* form attested in the text. The passage so interpreted does not give any meaning. Much more likely and in keeping with the *usus scribendi* of the treatise, which has no other *-e* forms, we have to pose a conjecture ምሳሌ፡ *mā<ssā>le* ‘similitude,’ which provides a meaning perfectly fitting in the context: ‘The word of the prophets on the above said <similitude>.’²⁷ This demonstrates the existence, at least for this phenomenon if not for others, of several linguistic layers transmitted in the different texts attested in the manuscript. In this specific context, these elements are a strong evidence for the necessity of the conjecture *mā<ssā>le* against the transmitted *māsle*, which, even independently from palaeographical aspects (easy confusion between ሳ *sā* and ስ *sā*), would be completely incompatible with the *patina* of the text, which never has *-e* forms.

²⁷ Bausi (2021a: 230 and 231); note—as remarked—that this is the reciprocal case of what noted for the *Book of Enoch* by Stuckenbruck and Erho (2022: 423), where the right reading ምሳሌ፡ *māssāle* (Greek παραβολή) is attested by a single manuscript, against ምስሌ፡ *māsle* of the vast majority: which reading, I guess, implies the normalization (*māsle* > *māsle*) of a misunderstood ምሳሌ፡ *māssāle* (ምሳሌ፡ *māssāle* > ምስሌ፡ *māsle* > ምስሌ፡ *māsle*): which appears to be a quite clear and convincing case of normalization of the *fonds* by the *patina* of the copyist. Further details on this phenomenon, with further evidence from a fragmentary witness of the *Aksumite Collection* I have presented in a contribution still in print, see Bausi (forthcoming).

9. Spelling of the type ዝዮቆን: *zayāqon* ‘deacon,’ instead of the regular ዲዮቆን: *diyāqon*.²⁸ This is the *only spelling* attested in the *Aksumite Collection* and appears tens of times. Due to the absolutely clear attestation, I give here only one example of the term and of a compound with this term: (f. 135vb) ወዝዮቆናት: ወሂጵዝዮቆናት: *wazayāqonāt wahiḥōzayāqonāt*, ‘and deacons and subdeacons.’ Let’s remark that the lack of attention towards ancient forms has as a consequence that it does not clearly appear that ዝዮቆን: *zayāqon* is by far the oldest attested form, both in documentary and literary texts, and it should be taken as the earliest Gə‘əz form. The form occurs in documents datable to the twelfth/thirteenth century,²⁹ as well as in the earliest literary occurrence of the term, in 1 Timothy 3:8, in one of the most ancient witness of the Pauline Epistles, that is MS Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Or. 70, f. 183ra, ll. 18–19: ወዝዮቆናት: ከማሁ: ንጹሐነ: እለ: አሐዱ: ቃሎም: *wazayāqonātāni kamāhu nəṣuḥana ʾalla ʾahadu qālomū*.
10. Metathesis of root consonants in the verb እኅዘ: *ʾahaza*, so that we have an imperfect ይኅእዝ: *yəḥəʾəz* (instead of የእኅዝ: *yaʾahəz*, etc.) and a subjunctive የኅእዝ: *yaḥaʾaz* (instead of ይእኅዝ: *yəʾəhəz* or የእኅዝ: *yaʾahəz*, a form that would require an explanation that I cannot attempt here), but there is no epigraphic comparison possible.³⁰ This, again, is a phenomenon that has no consideration in current dictionaries and grammars, even though it cannot be considered a minor one, since it is attested in MS ʾAbbā Garimā I and MS EMMML 6907 (Zuurmond 1989, Part II, 27, 46, 54, and 307). The *Aksumite Collection* documents this phenomenon extensively for the imperfect: (f. 7va) ይኅእዙ:; *yəḥəʾəzu*; (f. 43vb) ይኅእዙ: *yəḥəʾəzo*; (ff. 44rb, 46va, 46vb, 47rb, 47va, 47vb, 48rb, 48va, 49ra, 49rb, 49vb, 50ra, 50vb, 51ra) ትኅእዝ: *təḥəʾəz*; (ff. 47rb, twice, 47va, twice, 47vb, 48ra, 48rb, 48vb, thrice, 49rb, 49va, 49vb, 50rb, twice, 50va, 51ra) ይኅእዝ: *yəḥəʾəz*; and once also (f. 109rb) ተኅእዝ: *taḥaʾazi*.
11. Irregular verbal pattern of the imperfect of the *t*-stem: the imperfect *t*-stem does not always follow the Gə‘əz pattern (*yət1a22a3*), but also a slightly different one (*yət1a2(2)a3*), with assimilation of *t* before first-radical sibilants or dentals, or not.³¹ Note that in some cases one could surmise a possible palaeographic ambiguity which could explain the irregularity (particularly in the case of

²⁸ See Bausi (2005a: 159–160). See also Villa (2019: 208–210, and 2021: 214), who rightly quotes additional attestations also from documentary texts like the *Golden Gospel* of Dabra Libānos, for which, however, see also doc. no. 7, not only doc. no. 6.

²⁹ See Conti Rossini (1901: 189); Derat (2018b: 50, 52, doc. no. 6; 57, 58, doc. no. 7); and see already Bausi (2007: 82, n. 5), with supplementary references to documentary texts like Kropp (2005: 133).

³⁰ See Bausi (2005a: 162). Only note that Dillmann (1865: 766) gives a singular first person imperfect እኅዝ: *ʾahəz*.

³¹ See Bausi (2005a: 162), where I suggested the hypothesis of a Tigrinism: the imperfect of the *t*-stem in Təgrāñña has the pattern: *yət1a22a3* (with loss of *-t*, or even an internal passive, according to the hypotheses). See possible parallel evidence in ancient Dəggwā fragments in Karlsson (2022: 226).

ሐ/ሐ ሐa/ሐ and ሰ/ሰ sa/s), but there are quite a number of cases which are absolutely clear; here is a selection of the occurrences: (f. 2va) ይትሕጉል: *yəthəggʷal*; (f. 4ra) ይሰደዱ: *yəssəddadu*; (f. 4rb) ይትእዘዝ: *yətʷəzzaz*; (f. 4vb) ዘይትክሀሎን: *zayətkəhalon*; (f. 8rb) ይትንሠት: *yətnəśśat*; (ff. 8rb, 11rb) ይትገባእ: *yəthəbbā*; (f. 8rb) ትትክላእ: *tətkəllā*; (f. 9ra) ይሥዩሙ: *yəśśəyyamu*; (f. 9rb) ትትክላእ: *tətkəllā*; (f. 10rb) ዘይሰዩሙ: *zayəssəyyamu*; (ff. 12ra, 14vb, 41ra) ይጥመቅ: *yəṭṭəmmaq*; (f. 16ra) ይትእመኑ: *yətʷəmmānu*; (ff. 21vb, 44ra, twice) ዘይጥመቅ: *zayəṭṭəmmaq*; (f. 23rb) ዘይትውሀብ: *zayətwəhab*; (f. 27ra) ወይትርእይ: *wayətrəʷay*; (f. 27rb) ዘትትዕወቅ: *zatətʷəwəwəq*; (f. 28ra) ይትዕወቅ: *yətʷəwəwəq*; (ff. 41ra, 41rb, 43va, twice) ይጥመቁ: *yəṭṭəmmaqu*; (f. 42rb) ይጥመቅ: ዘይትቅበእ: *yəṭṭəmmaq zayəṭqəbba*³² (with missing passage of first to fourth order); (f. 45va) ይትብሀል: *yətbəhal*; (f. 47va) ይትፍቀድ: *yəṭፍəqqad*; (f. 65va) ወይሰባሕ: *wayəssəbbāh*; (f. 66va) ዘይትርከብ: *zayətrəkkab*; (ff. 83rb, 110ra, 159rb) ይትውለድ: *yətwəllad*; (f. 83rb) ዘይትውለድ: *zayətwəllad*; (f. 85vb) ዘይትግሐሥ: *zayətgəḥaśu*; (f. 92rb) ይትርዕይ: *yətrəʷay*; (f. 94va) ይትሕጉሉ: *yəthəggʷalu*; (f. 100rb) ንትእመን: *nətʷəmmān*; (f. 107vb) ይትሰግዕ: *yətsəmmā*³² (with missing assimilation *ts > ss*); (f. 139rb) ንትሕነጽ: *nəthənnas*; (f. 144vb) ዘይትክሠት: *zayətkəśśat*; (f. 146ra) ወኢትጥብብ: *waʷitəṭṭəbbab*; (f. 147va) ይትሕነጽ: *yəthənnas*; (f. 148vb) ትትብሀል: *tətbəhal*; ይትግሀድ: *yətgəhad*; (f. 157rb) ይትክፈል: ወኢይትክፈል: *yətkəffal waʷiyətkəffal*; (f. 159rb) ይትውለድ: *yətwəllad*; (f. 159vb) ኢይትገደግ: *ʷiyəṭḥəddag*.

12. Irregular gerund forms: there are occurrences of Təgrəñña-like gerund forms based on a (nominative) pattern *1a2i3(ə)*- instead of an (accusative) pattern *1a2i3a-*, as regularly in Gəʿəz: (f. 26va) ተግሐሥኮ: *tagəḥis(ə)ka* for ተግሐሥኮ: *tagəḥisaka*; (f. 27ra) ተንሣእኮ: *tənsiʷ(ə)ka* for ተንሣእኮ: *tənsiʷaka*; (f. 99rb) ሐዊርክሙ: *ḥawir(ə)kəmu* for ሐዊርክሙ: *ḥawirakkəmu*.³² There are, however, also possible examples of irregular Amharic-like gerund forms based on a pattern (with vowel *ə*) *1a2ə3-* instead of a pattern *1a2i3a-*: (f. 94vb) ተናግሮ: *tanāgəro* for ተናግሮ: *tanāgiro*; (f. 96va) ኦብሶ: *ʷabbəso* for ኦብሶ: *ʷabbiso*. This phenomenon in particular requires further study.

4. Conclusions

In my 2005 (and 2006a) contributions I had suggested some conclusions, which I feel can be retained here with some minor modifications. I will summarize the main observations in only three points:³³

1. Aside from a few morphological features concentrated in the inscription RIÉ 192, which have no parallel in manuscripts, there is a number of archaisms which are common to inscriptions and

³² Correct in the commentary my definition of this form as ‘Amharic-like’ to ‘Təgrəñña-like’ in Bausi (2021a: 253, § 71.7); correct also, one more polar error, ‘forme di gerundio accusativo’ into ‘forme di gerundio nominativo’ in Bausi (2011: 25, n. 20).

³³ See Bausi (2005a: 163–167), with some more details which I will omit here.

ancient manuscripts.³⁴ These features, however, cannot be placed along a purely diachronic development, because there is a clear mismatch between their attestation and their place in a plausible linguistic historical reconstruction of the development of Gəʿəz. So, while the only epigraphic instance of personal prefix form in first-laryngeal verb has vowel *a* (definitely, a secondary development, *-əLa-* > *-aLa-*), ancient manuscripts frequently exhibit *ə*-prefixes, which is a retention and an archaism. Prepositions and conjunctions with *-e* instead of *-a* forms appear in fourth-century inscriptions as well as in a much later inscription (whatever its actual dating is) like the inscription of Ham (RIÉ 232, probably tenth century), but not in sixth-century inscriptions. Yet, the *Aksumite Collection* adds the essential information that even within one single pre-thirteenth-century manuscript we have different texts with quite different features, that is texts with frequent *e*-forms (including the relative pronoun ʾalle) and texts which have no such case, like the treatise *On the One Judge*. This can only be explained with the coexistence of parallel scribal (or even literary) traditions since Aksumite times, with different linguistic standards, determined either by the prevalence of dialectal features as a consequence of the lack of a unique scribal standard or by coexistence of a variety of standards, or even by an intentional opposition to new standards or reaction to declining standards.³⁵ The fact that these forms coexist in one single manuscript demonstrates that they are a relatively ancient phenomenon, even though we cannot say how ancient: definitely the feature belongs at the latest to the ancestor(s) of the manuscript of the *Aksumite Collection*.³⁶

³⁴ See Butts (2020: 507, n. 43), for ለአዲስ: ʾahzāb instead of አዲስ: ʾahzāb (only in RIÉ 189, while Littmann 1913 read it also in DAE 10.23, reading not confirmed in RIÉ 188).

³⁵ See the keen remarks by Marcel Cohen, *apud* Grébaut (1931–1934: 27), who had given a right picture of the spectrum of possible hypotheses: ‘Certains des faits signalés sont nettement archaïques; d’autres sont aberrants, d’autres sembleraient marquer des tendances plus récentes que le guèze classique: peut-être les documents anciens examinés ont-ils une teinte dialectale dont la tradition est perdue; peut-être aussi y a-t-il eu, postérieurement, dans le guèze classique, réaction archaïsante contre certains innovations.’

³⁶ An especially promising area of research is also that of the rendering of the labial occlusives *b, p, ɸ, f*, in front of Greek *π, β, φ*, where variations may be explained by the existence of different scribal traditions; see Bausi (2002 26: n. 92); Grébaut (1935 § 13, *A propos de la transcription de la lettre π*); on the glottalized *ɸ* consider also the remarks by Martinet (1953: 69–70); Conti Rossini (1938: 194, n. 3); Voigt (1989: 634–638); concerning the hypothesis that Gəʿəz *səfnəg* ‘sponge’ (I wonder whether pronounced *sfnəg*), from Greek σπόγγος was adapted to Gəʿəz at an age when *p* and *ɸ* were not yet available (Weninger 2005: 469–471), this is possible, but also the Greek form σφόγγος, probably a popular variant, is attested (see Chantraine 1980: 1040a, s.v. σπόγγος), particularly in Greek papyri (see Gignac 1976: 87); see also Bausi (2013: 38–40), concerning the sign *ϣ*, which in the *Aksumite Collection* appears in correspondence of Greek *φ* and *ψ*; see also Villa (2019: 210–212). On Grecisms in the *Aksumite Collection* see also Voicu (2015).

2. Some archaic features have some convergence and parallels in other Ethiopian Semitic languages which we assume replaced Gəʿəz as spoken languages, Təgrəññā and Amharic in particular. This could explain, for example, the epigraphic *a*-prefix in the subjunctive of the causative and in the prefix forms of the *ast*-stem, since *a*-prefixes appear in the imperfect and subjunctive of the causative stem in Təgrəññā.³⁷ One of the often evoked possible morphological Tigrinisms in epigraphy, the gerund *ḥarifu*, instead of expected *ḥarifo*, in the inscription of Ham (RIÉ 232.4),³⁸ appears now alongside a quite significative series of other irregular gerunds from the *Aksumite Collection*, some of which follow the Təgrəññā pattern (1a2i3(ə)- instead of 1a2i3a-). Other possible Tigrinism is the metathesis of the first and second radical consonants of the verb ʾaḥaza in the prefix conjugation forms, with many examples of metathetical imperfects from the *Aksumite Collection*. A comparison with Təgrəññā ሐዘ: ḥazä seems more than obvious. Possible Tigrinism are also the forms of *t*-stem imperfect with pattern *yət1ə2(2)a3*, to be compared with the corresponding *yə1ə22a3* Tigrinya pattern, possibly as outcome of interference or as a compromise form. Also for the spelling *zəyāqon* instead of *diyāqon* the hypothesis of a Tigrinism remains, but the form must be further studied, because it essentially appears as an archaism; the oldest manuscript of the Pauline Epistles has the form *zəyāqon*: nonetheless, we have *diyāqon* in all printed editions, which is a later flattening of the linguistic form.
3. In front of the bulk of evidence with which ancient manuscripts, here in particular the *Aksumite Collection*, confront us, there are various attitudes. Some substantially remain with the position assumed by Edward Ullendorff (1955: 14), who notoriously got rid of the problem stating that all changes which ‘can be noticed between the early inscriptions and early Bible translations, on one hand, and the literary period of the late Middle Ages, on the other, are all almost exclusively in the sphere of phonetics’. For them, the problem is solved by just noting that, as is well known, there are a few irregular phenomena, which do not deserve special attention.³⁹ In fact, this is quite

³⁷ Correct in Bausi (2005a: 166): ‘such as *a*-prefixes in the subjunctive of the causative stem in Tigrinya’ into ‘such as *a*-prefixes in the imperfect and subjunctive of the causative stem in Tigrinya.’

³⁸ See Kapeliuk (1997: 494–495); for further details on the passage, see Bausi (2021b: 6–8). Another evoked Tigrinism in epigraphy would be the monogram RIÉ 442, ḡ, interpreted as the third person masculine copula ʾəyyu, see Drewes (1991: 390, and 2019: 457), where the copula ḡ is suggested also for other monograms, for example RIÉ 390.

³⁹ This is for example the attitude prevailing in Tropper (2002); and also in Tropper (2021), which is disappointing in the absolute poorness of diachronic data, in consideration of the research carried out in the last twenty years, which have profoundly changed the state of the art; see also the review by Waltisberg (2022), and his right remark on col. 344 that ‘sound rules should not be based on rare orthographic peculiarities’ (but correct his reference to Theodor Nöldeke’s famous ‘Das fehlte noch, dass wir auf elende Schreibfehler grammatische Regeln bauten!’), which, contrary to what stated, is from 1899,

problematic, since, for the language of texts which go back to Aksumite period, it is exactly a better understanding of the material, philological, and—last but not least—linguistic context of transmission that provide us the tools to make a correct evaluation of the evidence and carry out a much better informed linguistic and text-critical analysis.⁴⁰ The texts dating back to the Aksumite period underwent a very long process of manuscript tradition so that since the fourteenth century only sporadic *e*-forms and *ə*-prefix in first-laryngeal verbs are extant, and not much more. One standard prevailed on the others. When it rarely happens that we can make detailed comparisons between pre-thirteenth and later manuscript witnesses of the same texts, we definitely observe the process of standardization, flattening and smoothening which the texts underwent. We do not know much of how this standardization process took place, but it can have been a systematic and institutional action to impose a standard on others, and delete, replace, or update all texts with the linguistic standard that would definitely prevail. As a consequence, we read now Gəʿəz texts in a form that is quite distant from that in which they might have first been written and transmitted for some centuries.⁴¹ Conversely, linguists who want to make the right use of the medieval evidence must also be able to read and see it against its hypothetical previous stages (either materially attested or not) that is, as a result of a process of gradual and substantial standardization. This means that the medieval evidence of ancient texts is extremely slippery and potentially highly misleading when used to reconstruct earlier phases, if the whole spectrum of archaic phenomena is not considered.

As one realizes, we come close to a domain where the interrelationship between philology and linguistics is vital. But in the end, it cannot be otherwise for a language like Gəʿəz which has grown up as a language of translated texts and has survived as an essentially literary and liturgical language.

see Nöldeke 1899: 91); now also, quite to the point, Bulakh (2023); also in Weninger (2011) the problem is only hinted at, but not taken into account to the extent it would deserve; in Butts (2019: 118) the problem is clearly stated, but lack of space prevents from a detailed presentation of features; Bulakh and Kogan (2013) and Bulakh (2013) have at least given a specific presentation of the epigraphic evidence, yet without connecting it systematically to the manuscript evidence.

⁴⁰ As rightly noted by Erho and Henry (2019: 180); see also Butts (2020: 502-503), the analysis of medieval and later manuscript evidence in the light of palaeographic and orthographic—and I definitely add: linguistic—archaic features is essential; note also the common trivialization of the particle ከሙ: *kəma* to ከሙ: *kama* (see Erho and Henry 2019, 187, yet uncertain).

⁴¹ This process might have to do with the dynamics of the literary history (see Bausi 2020b) or even with the changing institutional relationship of the Ethiopian Church with the Egyptian Patriarchate of Alexandria (see Ambu 2022).

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