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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this article is to present the stylistic and thematic analysis of Geez poetry, in a way that examines the profound and complex meaning that it carries.

Research Methodology: The article methodology consisted of qualitative research methodology and a purposive sampling was used in field work. Secondary data was also obtained from books and scholarly journals and duly acknowledged. Idiomatic and literal translation methods were used, with special emphasis on meaning rather than form. The translation from Geez to English was conducted by the researcher and content analysis was used to analyze the data.

Findings: The poems revealed a rich, valuable aesthetics and dynamic changes taking place in the cultural mold of the Geez speaking society. It has also revealed that a huge amount of Geez oral poetry still remains unrecorded. It has also shown that Geez oral poetry is not being learned by the young generation and this could lead to a loss in cultural practices embodied in it.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: The article will contribute to the preservation, documentation and research endeavors being undertaken by researchers, educators as well as policy makers involved in areas related to the study of the classical language of Geez. This is because none of Geez poetry has been composed, written or recorded in any parchments or books by the churches at all. Hence, it is only too obvious that a massive amount of poetic wisdom has been lost that future generations could have benefited from.

Key words: *Geez, Qenie, Oral Poetry, Language, Literature*

1.0 Introduction

Geez is a classical language of Eritrea and Ethiopia. It is widely believed to have been spoken in the region until the fall of Axumite kingdom around the 10th Century AD. At the moment, it remains confined only to church services in the Eritrean and Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Christianity. A vast amount of literature has been written in *Geez* language, at the heart of which is *Geez Qenie* – vis-a-vi *Geez* Oral Poetry. *Geez* Oral Poetry has been composed in Eritrea and Ethiopia for hundreds of years. While *Geez* Poetry is oral, the rules for its composition are written and learned. The rules for the form, meter, rhyming patterns, rhythm, diction, phrases, lines, stanzas, figures of speech and so on are all fixed and written formulas. Therefore, students of *Geez* poetry are expected to master the rules of the composition before they are recognized and graduate as poets in the language. However, the end products, i.e. the poems themselves are simply oral and left for memorizing minds to savor. On every Sunday services and on countless of other religious or cultural festivals, *Geez* Poetry is composed to highlight the occasions.

There have been attempts by various researchers to save some of the oral poetry. The University of Addis Ababa is reported to have researched around important schools of *Geez* poetry and recorded thousands of oral *Geez* poems. But, most of these oral poems have not yet been published. Alemayehu Moghes, a former *Geez* language instructor at the University writes:

We have, with the help of ‘Survey of Language Use and Language Teaching in Eastern Africa’ gone in the summer of 1968 to *Washera* [an Orthodox Tewahdo Monastery in Etiopia] and collected 24,733 oral *Geez* poems. However, they haven’t been published yet, owing financial shortages.... Moghes (1987, pp, 5)

As a result of it remaining oral, *Geez* oral poetry did not receive the attention that the rest of *Geez* literature, especially that of Manuscript cultures have received. Currently many researchers in Eritrea, Ethiopia, and in several European research institutes are researching and documenting vigorously the rich written literature of *Geez* from old times, which for the most part is in the form of parchments. However, while most of the materials that are being rescued, documented and researched are works of literature, one cannot fail but notice that the primary focus of all this research seems to be directed toward the linguistic originality of the script of *Geez* language rather than the literary aesthetics and *Geez* tradition contained in those works. This, plus the relatively late introduction of *Geez* Poetry teaching in *Geez* literature (which is arguably about two thousand years old) seems to be the reason why the profusely rich *Geez* oral literature in general and *Geez* oral Poetry (*Qenie*) in particular have yet to be receive significant attention in the study of *Geez* literature. Another reason for the lack of enthusiasm in researching the imaginative aspect of *Geez* is the popular notion that *Geez* literary materials are merely religious and that no real secular stories could be found in them. Steven Kaplan writes:

The primary concern of hagiographic texts is by definition the saintly hero. Events were likely to have been invented or suppressed in an attempt to further his reputation. Since most saints were the male leaders of monastic communities, the hagiographic texts offer comparatively little

information on female children, the way they were seen to differ from males, or the manner in which their early lives and education differed. Indeed, even in their depiction of male children, the young seldom speak except to utter words of precocious wisdom. (Kaplan, 1997).

But the fact remains that Geez literary materials and even the church hagiographies are full of secular stories and historical documents. In those ancient materials of Geez literature, one can find a vast richness of socio-economic accounts of the times when Geez was the language of the state as well as the language of the people, especially those of the very vibrant civilizations of Axum and Adulis. Fekade Azeze writes:

Axum is world famous for its stelae which date probably from the third or fourth century A.D. It also had coins made of silver, bronze and gold minted with the engravings of the kings. The author of the *Periplus* reported that its Port Adulis 'was established by law' and had imports 'among others sheets of soft copper, small axes, a little wine from Italy, gold and silver plate for the king, made after the fashion of the country, military cloaks, Indian iron, steel, and cotton-cloth.' (Azeze, 1988).

There is no doubt that Geez was and still is widely considered to be the sacred language of Eritrean as well as Ethiopian Christian society. Be that as it may, the Geez literature, especially that of Geez Poetry has a huge reserve of profound and complex works of figurative language and narration that studying it is of paramount importance. The literature of Geez, especially Geez Poetry should be critically studied, not only because it reflects the popular culture but also because it may reveal a great deal of the social changes taking place in the dynamic cultural mold of the society. Theodore Huebener writes:

Geez, the sacred language, has a rich body of literature, consisting largely of religious and philosophical writings, as well as chronicles, poems, and songs. It has preserved its integrity throughout the centuries mainly because of its strong resistance to change. It has always resisted the acceptance of loan words from other languages. (Huebener, 1969).

A huge amount of grammar and poetic structure manuals were produced originally in Geez. These include teachings and techniques of *Qenie* (poetry) and *Sewasew* (grammar). *Geez Qenie* demonstrates lyrical poetry in a complex manner for it is composed with utmost skill and command of the language that it bemuses even speakers of the language. As a result, not all speakers of Geez can produce it. For someone to be a poet in *Geez Qenie* completely, they have to study the art for up to seven years and to become a poetry teacher, they need to stay in a *Qenie* School for up to seven years of additional time. What goes in to the making of *Qenie* composition is the reason it takes a high level of mastery and a great deal of time to master. *Geez Qenie* is divided in to more than 16 types, each of them with different forms and usage, as well as lyrical notes.

The subject matter of *Geez Qenie* is also diverse. Some of them are for happiness, others are for sorrow, some are practiced during fasting seasons, such as the lent season, others during happy and festive moments, some are short and highly charged with figurative words, and others are long and still full of aesthetics. Their themes are wide ranging: from family matters to higher political criticisms, from praises of God and saints to gossip and pun among

Otherwise, it is a two-lined lyrical poem. *Ezl Gubae Qana* also puts a middle phrase, making it look as if it is different from *Geez Gubae Qana*. The additional middle phrase is put not because of the rule but by the choice of the poet. Its initial phrase consists of *high* and *slant* from 2 – 7 letters each, and *low* of 1 – 6 letters. The succeeding four words all follow the *Geez Gubae Qana* formula. When a middle phrase comes in, it consists of *low* and *slant* morphemes having 4 – 5 letters each, *low* between 3 – 5 letters. The rhyming pattern is like that of *Geez Gubae Qana*. Example of an *Ezl Gubae Qana* (by Gelanesh Hadis)

ነዳያን አብ ወመንፈስቅዱስ ይቤሉ
እንበለ ስጋ ወዐልነ ጊዜ ልደተ ወልድ ኩሉ።

Poor Father and his Holy Spirit say,
We spent without meet every Christmas day

Theme: The above poem was composed in a way that conveys double meaning. The first meaning suggests that The Holy Father and The Holy Spirit in the Christian faith were without The Son, who, according to The Bible, “took human flesh from St. Mary” when He was born, hence “Christmas Day”. The second meaning suggests that a certain financially poor father is down in spirit for not being able to always afford to buy any meat to celebrate Christmas as is the custom in the Orthodox *Tewahdo* Christian community.

3. *Ezl Gubaie Qana with a phrase:*

Form: This type of *Gubae Qana* is different from *Ezl Gubae Qana* because it has a phrase right in the middle of the first line, otherwise, it is has similar features and sound. The following is an example of an *Ezl Gubae Qana* with a phrase (by anonymous)

ረከብ ቶማስ መምህረ ሕግ በግዕድ የሐንስ ሰይፈ. Teacher of law, Thomas, found a sword, John’s sheep.

ዘመነ ተፈጥሮ አጽባቦት እስመ በሠላሳ ዝተርፈ። Age of creation, finger, by thirty, was reduced to this.

Theme: Though the poem draws its metaphor from the story of Thomas’s hesitation in *The Bible*, the hidden message is for today’s youth. As the Apostle Thomas had His fingers burnt in that anecdote when “he put them inside Jesus’ wound to prove that it was indeed Him”, to days’ youth are lacking in faith that their life expectancy is getting cut short around thirty years of age.

4. *Mibezhu*

Form: This type of Geez poetry consists of three rhyming lines like the poem called *Zeamlachie*. Its only difference is in the number of its phrases and its *Manderderias* (middle phrases). The first and the third lines are usually longer than the second line because they contain two phrases each, while the second line contains only one phrase. In total, *Meebezhu* has, eight phrases in all of its three lines. Its initial phrase follows that of *Geez Gbae Qana*. Even the rest of the phrases can follow the pattern of either initial or final phrasing of *Geez Gubae Qanna*. The rhyming pattern of *Mibezhu* is *high* and *slant* morphemes 2 – 7 each (5 is not accepted), *low* morpheme of 1 – 6 (4 is not accepted), *flat* morpheme of 1 – 6 (4 is not accepted). The receiver for the *high*, *slant* and *low* morphemes is all in all constructed of letters ranging from 4 – 5. The receiver for *low*, all in all, consisting of 5 letters each (4 is not accepted). The phraseology of the initial and final phrase follows *Geez Gubae Qana*’s rhyming pattern. The following is an example of a *Meebezhu* (by Tecele of Washera).

ሐሜተ ክልኤቱ አሐው ዘኢፈርሐ ወልድ በልዕ በተከብቶ Not heeding his brother's, Son ate alone,
ስጋ ጥዑም እንዘ የዐጹ ጥጥቶ delicious meat, by locking his door,
ወፍሉጠ ሞት ኮነ ባሕቲቶ ዘበልዕ እስመ ይመውት ባሕቲቶ and died alone, for who eats alone dies alone.

Theme: At first glance this poem seems to be about three “brothers”, of whom one is criticized as having excessive selfishness and that he is isolated in death as he isolated himself in life. The details show that he had eaten meat alone and by closing his door, not wanting to share with his “brothers”. The implicit message; however, is about Trinity, i.e. The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit, from among whom, The son, is the only one, who, takes a human flesh, and “closing his door”, signifies that He was born of a virgin, without any sexual intercourse.

5. *Waziema*

Form: There are three types of *Waziema*, but the most frequently used one is the one that has five lines, which is also called the long *Waziema*. The other two are known as *Short* and *Medium Waziemas*, depending on their length. This type of lyrical poem is usually composed on the eve of important days in the Orthodox Tewahdo church to commemorate different Saints or God. Its initial two lines are framed after that of the *Geez Gubae Qana* formula, i.e.; 4 – 5 lettered *high* and *low* morphemes (*flat* morpheme is not accepted). The following two lines (3 and 4) don't have middle phrase, otherwise, they are also like *Gubae Qana*. The 5th line has a rhyming pattern of *high*, *low*, and *slant*, morphemes with 6 letters each, while *low* morpheme of from 4 – 5 letters. The following is an example of a *Waziema*. (By Merigieta Giedie)

አቀምዎ ማእከሎም ለሊቀ ካህናት ልምላሜ ወማሕሌታውያን አድባር Chanting Mountains,
put the highpriest greenery in their midst.
ርእሰ ደብር እስመ ይቤልዎ ዝናማት ማኅበር The league of rains called him chief of monks,
ወእንስሳሁ ለአርጎ። ልምላሜያቲሀ ለምድር and the product of the land, cattle of Aaron's,
ኅበ ደብር ዐርጎ በርእየተ ሣዕር climbed mountains in search of grass,
ተለዉ አጣሊ አውግር followed by escarpment goats.

Theme: This poem is written in celebration of the greenery in the rainy season. It has been portrayed as the focal point of all attention and high value. It is placed high above the mountains that the rains themselves see it as the reigning supremely in the land. So too, attracted by the greenery, the cattle and the goats ascended the mountains. This is a very colorful and pictorial celebration of nature at its best; another testimony of the fact that Gees Poetry is not merely religious composition.

6 *Selasie*

Form: This type of lyrical Gees poem is especially composed at festive events, on important days in the commemoration of saints as well as that of God by the Orthodox Church poets. It is also composed on weddings of deacons. It has six rhyming lines. The lines it consists are: an initial *Selasie* phrase, a supporting phrase, two *Gubae Qana* lines, *Menderderia* line, the

fifth line (which is for the most part similar to the fourth line of a *Waziema* poem), and a sixth line, which is absolutely similar to the ending line of a *Waziema* poem. *Selasie* is the poem, which is learned after a student has completed *Meweds* Poem. Its initial phrase has one *high* and one *slant* morpheme of 2 – 4 letters, (*low* morpheme is not accepted), and the receiving phrase has between 4 – 5 letters. The *manderderia* phrase is composed of 6 lettered words in which a *slant* morpheme is not accepted while *high*, *flat* and *low* are accepted. Its supporting phrase is composed of *high* and *slant* of 6 – 7 letters each, *low* and *flat* 5 – 6 letters each. The receivers of *high* and *slant* morphemes have 4 letters each. The receiver of *low* has four morphemes of 4 – 5 letters each and the receivers of *flat* morpheme have 5 morphemes each. When a supporting line is short, it has the futures of a *Gubae Qana*'s initial phrasal pattern. But the words in middle phrases have 5 letters each. The following line follows a *Gubae Qana* pattern. The fifth line consists of *high*, *low*, *slant* of 6 letters each, and *flat* has 4 – 5 letters. The sixth line is absolutely similar to that of *Waziema*'s rhyming pattern. The following is an example of *Selasie* poem. (By Merigheta Berhane)

ይቀውም ወይነብር ለዐለመ ዐለም ዘለአለም። ከህነተ ኢሳይያስ ሊቅ ዘመሴ ወመልክ ጼዴቅ ማህደረ፤ The priesthood of
Isaias, the elite of Moses and Melke Tsedeq's home, Stands and sits forever and ever,
ዲብ ኩክሕ መርዐተ ዚአሁ አኮኑ ሐደረ፤ For he laid his bride's base on a rock,
ወበቃለ ኪዳን ዐምደ አምጣነ ተተክለ ምድረ፤ With a pillar of a covenant he was rooted deep,
ወአመ ለክልኤ አስተግመረ፤ And as he made two ways unite,
ፈጣሬ ከብካብ ንጹሕ ወመርዓ ሕቡረ፤ The creator of weddings and marriages together,
ተአምረ ወመንከረ ገብረ፤ did an incredible miracle.

Theme: This poem was composed, on the researcher's own wedding by a close friend in 2009. Because the friend is a well-meaning fellow, it is mostly highly characterized by a flattering tribute. However, because he is a seasoned poet in the Geez Verse and Geez Literature, he was still able to maneuver and throw some figurative jibes in a very cheeky and abstract manner. This is demonstrated in the second line, in which the bridegroom: vis-à-vis, the researcher is said to have "his bride's base on a rock." There are two ways of looking at this detail: one is the representation in *The Bible*, of faith as "Rock", and the representation of church as "Bride", in which case he is simply praising the groom for laying his faith on a strong base. The second one is the fact that the bride is from the town of *Adi Keih*, which is one of the rockiest of places in the Southern Zone of Eritrea. So it could be argued that the composer had attempted to throw a pun at the groom and express his dismay for, against all expectations, choosing a woman from a place outside of his original region; which happens to be the same locality as the composer himself, and cleverly hinting that the groom was too stubborn to stand up to resistance from some members of his family who may not have been initially impressed with the union.

7. *Zeamlachie*

Form: This type of lyrical Geez Poetry is composed of three lines. The first line is exactly like that of *Geez Gubae Qana*'s; except that it is not followed by a phrase. *Zeamlachie* is frequently used during lent season among prayers and hymns prepared for that particular

fasting period. Its middle phrase is composed of *low* morpheme of 3+3 letters. There is usually a middle phrase, called *Manderderia* in *Zeamlachie*, *waziema*, *Selasie*, *Zeyezie*, *Sahleke*, *Meweds* and *Ettane Mogher* types of Geez Poems. According to their types, they come under the names of *Short*, *Medium* and *Long Manderderia*. An initial *Short Manderderia* consists of *low* morpheme of 1 – 3 letters. *Medium Manderderia* comes only as a middle phrase. *Long Manderderia* has *slant* morphemes consisting of 2 – 4 letters and *low* morphemes of 1 – 3 letters. The following is an example of a *Zeamlachie* poem (By anonymous).

ኦ ጠቢብ ለፍቅር ዐለም ፍርሆ	O wise man beware the world's love,
ዓለም እመ ቀርቦተክ ወትብለክ ኣሆ	When the world is close to you and says yes,
እስመ ትክሕደክ ሰልሰ እስከነ ይነቁ ደርሆ	Before cock-crow will deny you thrice

Theme: This poem portrays a cynical view of the world because it is basically advising the listener (Geez *Qenie* being oral poetry), who is considered a wise man, to heed the dangers that are present when life is good, because it could be tempting and there might be a sting in the tail later on. Everything that appears to be rosy at the start might bring difficulty somewhere down the road, and is looming so dangerously close that he won't even notice when it strikes.

8. **Meweds:** This type of Geez lyrical poetry is the last one that students learn to rehearse and compose. The rest types of poems can be mastered by listening to other poets composing them during church services. When a student reaches at this level, i.e., *meweds*, he or she is supposed to be well versed in Geez poetry. So *meweds* is the icing on the cake, so to say, in the Geez school of Poetry. In *meweds*, one can deal with worldly as well as religious matters. The rhyming pattern of *Meweds* has as its initial phrase and its receiver a *Gubae Qana* formula. Its *manderderia* constitutes of morphemes which have 6 letters each. In order to avoid confusion with *zeyzie*, however, it can be composed with 5 letters for each morpheme. The following line follows the *Gubae Qana* or *Meebezhu's* formula. The third line is as *Gubae Qana*, with 4 morphemes of 4 – 6 letters each. The fourth line follows a *Meezezhu* formula. The fifth line follows the initial and final phrasal pattern of *Gubae Qana* formula. The sixth line follows a *Meebezhu* formula and the seventh takes a *Gubae Qana* final rhyming formula. And if the poet decides to write a longer *meweds*, the lines follow that of a *Meebezhu* formula with a *Gubae Qana* final phrasal patterns. That way more lines could be added. The following is an example of a *meweds* poem (by Alemayehu Moghes):

ኩሉ ይትነሳእ በላዕለ ድኩም	Everyone rises on the weak
ወላዕለ ንኡስ ዐቢይ ለረኪብ ብዙኅ ኅ'ሠሣ	and the big on the small, for extortion's sake
ሚስጢር ዝንቱ ይጠየቅ ከመ ለዐለም መልበሳ	The secret has to be known, for it engulfs the world
ለመሊዐ ከርሥ ይበልዖ	To fill its stomach,
ዐቢይ ዓሣ ለንኡስ ዓሣ	the big fish eats the one the small,
ወተኩላ ሌሊት ኣድገ መረብ	The wolf eats wild asses at night
ይንዑ ሰርክ ከመ ኣርዌ ምድር ለእንስሳ	as a beast attacks the prey when the sun's curtain is shut

ወግብራተ አርዌ ላዕለ ሰብእ ለእመ ነግሣ	Human beings turn on each other with such act
በላዕለ ነዳይ ይጥሕር ባዕል ከመ አንበሳ	The rich roars on the poor as a lion
እምነ ገጸ ምድር ያጠፍኦ። እንበለ አሐቲ፣ አበሳ	and makes him disappear without a reason
ለትሕትና ነዳይ ሠናይት ያረከሳ	Tarnishing the poor's humility down
ለግብረ አርዌ ግብረ ዚአሁ እንዘ ይዌድሳ ወይቄድሳ፣	he pays great tribute to his of animalistic action.

Theme: The above *meweds* is a clear example that Geez poems are not merely about religious affairs and that they also deal with human behavior as well. It is a criticism of the human tendency to suppress the poor and the weak among us. The simile it uses is the resemblance to wild beasts. By appealing in to a deep human morality and psyche, and criticizing moral deficiencies, therefore, it aspires to alleviate injustice in the society.

9. Geez Etanemoger:

Form: This type of Geez poetry is composed right at the end of mass on every Sunday church service during fasting time; such as Lent and other declared fasting seasons in the Orthodox calendar. It is preceded by another poem, called *Geez Kibr y'etee*. It has seven lines and all except the first line rhyme together. This type of Geez poem is sung by another deacon or a clergy man, while the composer delivers the verses to him. The first four lines are called *Etane Moger*, while the remaining three lines are called *Asere Negus* or *Asere Negasi*. In these three lines the composer can discuss about a king or politics, about the country, about the times etc. *Geez Ettane Mogher's* first line has four phrases, of which the first two follow the *Gubae Qana* formula. The following line follows *Ezl Gubae Qana* long phrase. The third line follows *Geez Kibr Yeetee's* first line and the fourth line is a *manderderia*. The second part of *Geez Ettan Mogher*, the *Asere Negus*, has only three lines. The first phrase is like that of *Ezl Gubae Qana* and has a long middle phrase. Its rhyming phrase is like that of the initial or final line of *Geez Kibr yeetee*. The second line is like that of Long *Gubae Qana*. The third line's initial phrase, as a *manderderia's* initial phrase has high and slant from 2 – 4 morphemes, low from 1 – 3, flat is not accepted. The next phrase, just like *manderderia*, has *high*, *low* and *flat* with 6 letters each. More than 6 letters are not accepted. The rhyming line has *high*, *low*, *flat* and *slant*, each with 4 letters each. The following is an example of *Etane Mogher* by Tecele of Washera.

እግዚአ ውላጤ ክረምት ዐመተ ሁከት ዘኮነት	Why has summer, the God of change, in a troubled year
ደመና ለምንት ዘአግመረ	carried clouds?
አመ ተአዘዘት ትቅዳሕ ማየ አስተፍሰሐ ፍጡረ	She was ordered to pour nature's water of joy
ወይኦቲ በእጽልሞ ገጽ ዘትትመየጥ ድሕረ	And she turns back with a darkened face
ቅኑየ ሐጋይ ይብሰት በጥያቄ ምክረ ቃለ ነብይ እንተ አእመረ	As for drought, the servant of winter, knowing well the prophet's wise words
ለእግዚአ ተግሳጽ ክረምት መግቱ እስከነ ሕልፈተ ገብረ	Making sure that summer's wrath runs for ever,
ውኦቱ እስመ ውስተ ቤት ተሰወረ።	has hidden himself at home.

Theme: The above poem is a celebration of the rainy season. It tells how much strong and threatening the rainy season could be. By giving human attributes to drought, the sky, and the different seasons, it shows us the dramatic cycle of summer season and the majestic influence it has in bringing about changes on drought and on winter.

10 *Ezl Etane Moger*

Form: *Ezl Etane Moger*, like *Geez Etane moger*, is divided in to two parts: *Etane Moger* and *Asere Negus*. *Ezl Etane Moger* is longer than *Geez Etane Moger* because it has eleven lines. The first six are called *Etane Moger*, while the remaining five are called *Asere Negus*, in which the composer is at a liberty to discuss non religious issues such as politics, economy, social affairs, etc. The first line is just like *Gubae Qana*, except for the phrases. The second line's initial phrase is like that of *Gubae Qana* and its rhyming end is high, low, flat and slant, with 4 – 5 letters each. The third line's initial phrase is like *Geez Kibr Yeetee's* rhyming end but its rhyming end is like *Gubae Qana's* rhyming end. The fourth line is a supporting phrase (though some poets use that of *Meebezhu's*). The fifth line is like *Ezl Gubae Qana*. It may or may not take a phrase. It is also made of only flat morphemes of 3 letters each. The sixth line is *Manderderia*. The *Asere Negus* part has five lines. It is important that it rhymes with the *Ettane Mogher* part. However, depending on the poet's decision, its theme may or may not concur with that of the *Ettane Mogher's*. The *Asere Negus's* first line is like *Ezl Gubae Qana* with a phrase. The second line is also like *Ezl Gubae Qana*. If it adds a phrase, it takes flat morphemes of 3 letters each. After this, from the fourth line up to the ending line, the rule is similar to that of *Selasie's*. The following is an example of an *Etane Mogher* by *Teclé of Washera*.

እግዚአብሔር ጸውዖ እምእለ ገሊላ አንስተ	God summoned women from Galilee
ወእምነ ሰማይ ቀፀበ መላእክተ	and angels from heaven,
በሌሊተ አሑድ ለትንሣኤሁ ከመ ይኸንዎ ሰማዕተ	to witness His resurrection on Sunday night,
አመኒ በጊዜ ሞተ	or when He died,
ሠጠቀ ኮክሐ እብናዌ ወመቃብረ ከሠተ	Annihilating the rock and opening the grave,
ከመ እምርእሱ ያሴሰል ሐሜተ	to cleanse Himself of blame.
ብርተ ሊባኖስ ጽኑዕ ኢያሱ እንበለ ያትሉ ወዐልተ	Joshua, the iron-man of Lebanon with
	out leading laborers,
ያመዘብር ነግሀ ባሕተቶ ዘአፅራሪሁ ዐረፍተ	was annihilating his enemies' backyard,
ጥቅመ ኢያሪኮስ ዘነሠተ	and destroyed the gates of Jericho.
ያደ ነዋ ሰብዐተ ዕለተ	There he toured seven days,
ወበጻዕር ቀተለ ነገሥተ	and with valor killed kings.

Theme: The above poem starts off with Biblical reference of Jesus and the people in the story around the times He was “buried and resurrected” as well as the angels narrated in The Bible. It tells how He had to convince angels as well as human beings that He was the real God and hence consolidate His position on earth as well as in Heaven. Then it proceeds to tell about the story of Joshua, from *The Old Testament* and how He was able to defeat the kings alone in seven days. There are critics who interpret this to the Six Days’ Arab – Israeli war. However, there is no easy indication that it is actually what the poem implies in the *Asere Negus* for the simple reason that the composer mentions seven days and not six days.

10. Long Kulkmu

Form: This type of poetry has thirteen lines, making it the longest of the Geez poems in general. Its melody much more resembles that of *Meweds*, except that it is longer. This type of poem is composed during the lent and other fasting seasons in the Orthodox Tewahdo Church's calendar. Long kulukmu is composed of a nine line rhymes of Meweds plus one line of the seventh line of Meweds. The next lines follow meweds' second line or a Lealem's third line. Its eighth line also resembles zeyzie's fourth line. The first 9 lines of Long Kulukmu are similar to the 9 lines of Meweds. The only difference is that Long Kulukmu adds one more rhyming word. This additional rhyming word is added starting from the seventh line. Therefore Kulukmu is Meweds plus more rhyming lines. The eighth line of Long Kulukmu resembles that of Zeyezie's forth line. The following is an example of a Long Kulkmu by Alemayehu Moghes

በረድ ወማይ አፅራረ በለስ	Rain and hail, pear's enemies
ለጎላፌ ከረምት ወይን ፈጥቱ አልባሲሁ	Robbed, the clothes off grape, passenger of summer
አምጣነ አካሉ አበቀ እምብዝህን ቀረት ደዌሁ	As his body had been tormented from winter's cold
ወበላዕለ ደብር አመ ወድቀ	And when he fell on the mountain,
ተሰብረ በዘመነ ከርም ሐመልማል እዴሁ	his green hand was broken in the summer season
ወተወውራ አዕይንቲሁ።	his eyes also were blinded
እንዘ ዕራቁ ይበኪ። ዕፅ ቆድሮስ እኑሁ	while tree, his brother was crying and nude,
ነፋሳትሂ ሕዝበ ከርም አስተወፀቡ ኪያሁ	and winds, people of summer, by him astonished
እንዘ ይብሉ ኢተሰምዎ ወኢተርእዩ አምሳሊሁ	They said, this is unheard of or unseen
ለንጉሠ ነገሥት ወይን ስሙዐ ዓለም ዜናሁ	of the king of kings, grape, who has world renown
አምጣነ አልቦ ዘእምቅድሜሁ። ወአልቦ ዘእምድኅሬሁ	as there was no one before him, or after him,
ፍሉጥ ቆጽለ። ዘመነ መንግሥት ከማሁ	And the famous leaf of regime's time,
አምጣነ አልቦ ዘእምቅድሜሁ። ወአልቦ ዘእምድኅሬሁ	for there was no one before him,
	nor one after him.

Theme: The above poem is a demonstration of the power of the rainy season, especially one accompanied with strong torrents of wind and hail. It describes how hail and rain destroy the trees on a mountain. What makes the strength overwhelming is the fact that even grape, which is revered by human beings as being a highly valued plant also gets the wrath of summer, in a way suggesting the blood of Jesus. But most importantly, the poem is a metaphorical account of the Ethiopian Revolution of 1966 that removed Emperor Haile Selasie of Ethiopia from power. It presents the term of power for any government, for that matter, in a pitiful manner, as its end in a violent way is not very kind and as flowery as when the person was in power.

11. Hatsir Kulkmu

Form: This type of Geez poetry has two lines. The first line is written in the style of any *Gubae Qana* type of poem. If it had the second line first, it would exactly be another type of

Geez poem, called *Short Waziema*. The following is an example of a Hatsir Kulkmu by Alemayehu Moghes

<p>ሰሎሜ ወዮሴፍ ውስተ ምድረ ግብጽ ቀሉ ሰባ ማየ እንዘ ይጸውሩ ማየ ግብጽ ሰአሉ፣</p>	<p>Salomé and Joseph were despised in Egypt, For, while they were carrying water, they begged for Egypt's water.</p>
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Theme: On the surface of it, this poem laments the suffering of Salomé and Joseph in the land of Egypt. It narrates how they were thirsty, while they were in possession of great importance to the world, according to *The Old Testament*. However, the message of the poem had a deeper meaning to anyone in general, who has been denied and made to beg for something that he or she rightfully deserved.

12. **Geez kibr Yeetee:**

Form: This type of poetry has four lines, the second and third of which are written in exactly the same rule as the first and second lines of *Gubae Qana* type of Geez poetry. *Geez Kibr Y'eeiti* is composed during fasting times and is sung by the composer himself, followed by *Ezl Etane Mogher*, which he leads another singer to put the verses in to a measured song. The second and the third lines of *Geez Kibr Yeetee* are pure *Gubae Qana* lines. The first and the fourth lines are also the same and resemble that of *Meebezhoo's*. They are only different from *Meebezhoo's* in that *Meebezhoo's* morphemes have high an slant from 4 – 5 letters, while *Geez Kibr Yeette's* have 4 letters each. *Geez Kibr Yeetee's* first and final lines' base and receiver's initial lines take a *Gubae Qana's* formula. The rhyming pattern is high and slant from 2 – 7 (5 is not accepted). If it is *low*, it goes from 1-6 letters (4 is not accepted). The receivers of high and slant take 4 letters each, *low's* receiver takes *high, low, slant* and *flat*, each from 4 – 5 letters. And the receiver of flat takes *high, low, flat* and *slant*, with 5 letters each. The following is an example of Geez Kibr Yeetee by anonymous.

<p>መፈውሰ ነፍስ ወይነ ለምንት ኢትሴሲ ዘታፈቅሪ ነፍስየ ቤተ መያሲ ትጊሲ ወእንዘ ታነብቢ ዘልፈ ምዕዳነ ዳዊት ነጋሲ እምእኩይ ግብር ለምንት ኢትትገጋሲ</p>	<p>Drink, while it soothes the soul, why doesn't it serve as food? And my soul that loves ale, While always reading the wise advice of King David, Why don't you stay away from evil deed?</p>
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Theme: This poem is a rebuke to drunkards and alcoholics because, on top of being regular drunks, they are being depicted here as doing bad deeds, driven by liquor. It gives drink its due: the fact that drink does, indeed sooth the spirit of people, but, consumed in excess, has the negative effect of leading its drinkers astray. Even though it contains some mention of religious context from *The Book of Psalm*, it qualifies well enough for being a totally secular and social poetry in its content.

13. **Ezl Kibr Yeetee**

Form: This type of poetry has four lines, in which the first and the last lines are written by the formula of *Ezl Guba'e Qana, with a Phrase* type of Geez poem, while the second and the third lines are written in the same formula as a *Guba'e Qana* that doesn't have a phrase. *Ezl Kibr Yeeti* is composed on Sundays and during important holidays in commemoration of life of saints in the Orthodox Church's calendar. Since the song is considered a merry song, it is

practiced on days other than fasting times. It is sung by the composer himself. The following is an example of *Ezli Kibr Yeetee* by Alemayehu Moghes.

ተሉ ይረከብ ፍዳ እዴሁ በውስተ ዓለም ፀውድ All get what they deserve, in the courtyard world,
አመ ይጸንሉ ትዕግሥተ ለተገፍጾቱ ነገድ When they meet patience, victim of their tribal cruelty,
ከመ በአዳም በየን ፍትህ ሞተ ሰብእ ወልድ As, death sentence, Son, was carried on Adam,
አምጣነ ፍትህ ሞት ፈትሉ ላዕሌሁ ደቂቅ አዳም አይሁድ For sons of Adam, Jews, him condemned.

Theme: This poem depicts the world as a “courtyard”, where everyone would ultimately be judged according to their deeds. The prosecutor, according to this poem is the innocent and patient people that he or she might have been hurting or marginalizing in a tribal or racist treatment. By condemning their “patient” *God*, in the *Crucifixion Day*, the poem says, human beings brought about their own death. The implication here is that when human beings break loose from God’s rule, they are the ones that pay the price.

14. **Sahleke** –This type of Geez poem is composed of four lines. The first two lines of *Zey’zie* type of Geez poem are also called Sahleke because they are written in exactly the same formula as the first two lines of Sahleke. It is composed on historical moments, which call for people to seek guidance from above, explaining the name “sahleke”, meaning “Thy mercy”. The following is an example of a Sahleke by Alemayehu moghes.

ጉባኤ አእመረ ወኢያእመረ Conference knew and never knew
በገድለ ሐዋርያ ጳውሎስ ልደተ ወልደአብ ፍቅረ In the Gospel of Paul, birth of Son of God, Love
ወምንታዌ ባሕርይ በተዋሕዶ And the identity of Spirit in unison
ዘዘወልድ እንበለ ውላጤ ከርሆ እም ኅደረ Son’s, dwelling in Mother’s womb, with no alteration.

Theme: The above poem was composed on the occasion of the Oriental Church ArchBishopal Conference that Addis Ababa hosted in 1982. It sums up the spirit of the conference, which mainly focused on the different beliefs that existed concerning the birth of *Christ*. The poem says that the conference was wise in some of the points and missed on other points and that there was some division about the matter among the representatives.

15. **Zey’ezie**

Form: This type of Geez lyrical poem has five lines. Sometimes it becomes six lines by repeating the fourth line once again as it is put in a song. It can be composed at any time of the year. However, as its name (“of now”), implies, it is best used to express the situation in the context it is composed in, i.e. the situation in the country, in the community, in church, etc. While Zeyezie’s first line’s initial phrase has a Gubae Qana formula, the following phrase has morphemes of 5 letters each, with 6 also acceptable and starts with Waziema’s initial phrase. The next one is almost completely Gubae Qana, except that it doesn’t have a phrase. On top of the second line, a supporting phrase, which has the traits of initial phrases of a Waziema’s, can be added (depending on the poet’s wishes). The next phrase is a supporting one. The third line has an initial phrase like that of a Gubae Qana and a final phrase like that of a Meebezhu’s. The fourth line’s initial phrase is exactly like that of a Gubae Qana, while its final phrase has morphemes of 6 letters each (5 is also acceptable). The fifth line, from the beginning to the end has a Gubae Qana formula and doesn’t have a middle phrase. The sixth

line is a repetition of the fourth line. The following is an example of a Zey'zie by Alemayehu Moghes.

መርዓዊ ዕውር አስተናጽሐ: ነውረ መልከው ጽልመተ እማእከለ ዓይኑ ዓለም	Bridegroom,
እስመ ወሃቦ ዓቢዩ እግዚእ መጽሐተ ደብረመድሃኒት ለርእይ አዳም	the blind, cleansed the blame of his dark deeds, amid the world, his eye, As Abiye Egzi'e gave
ከመ ይህንጻ ዳግመ ለዓይነ ዕውራን ዓረፍተ ጥቅም	him a magazine of <i>Debre Medhanit</i> so he an see Adam,
በዕንቁ ባሕርይ ጸሐይ ዘኢይጸልም	When judgment awaits the blind of worldly guilt,
እንዘ መሰረታ ብርሃን ወዓውደ መርሃባ ሰላም።	With sun, the bead that doesn't go dark, For its base is light and peace its courtyard.

Theme: The above poem deals with how a bride groom goes to the church of *Debre Medhanit* and is confronted face to face with his sin because the abbot of the church explains to him what his sins were. The groom is symbolized as “blind” because he didn’t have a clue about the sins that he inherited from *Adam*, before he came to the church. Such would be the case for people who are unaware of their guilt as they die according to the poem, as clarified to the groom in the “sunny” way of preaching so that he was able to be satisfied and find peace afterwards.

Conclusion and Recommendation

One of the great examples of oral Geez tradition is Geez poetry. This rich and quite complex cultural heritage is only mastered by very few speakers of the language, who study the art for up to seven years. Their usage of figurative speech is so high that so much history and analysis of the past is to be extracted by studying them. However, the oral poems remain intangible as intangible can be because they are not recorded in any books or manuscripts by the churches where they are composed. Even though there are still speakers of Geez, who specialize in the art of oral lyrical poetry and remember many oral poems from notable poets of ancient times, not much is recorded or published in written form. Therefore, there is a great probability that the tradition will be forgotten and much needed history and lessons from the past will disappear in obscurity. The trend is particularly worrying because Geez oral poetry is not as vibrant as it used to be and the monasteries in Eritrea and Ethiopia are not producing as many poets as they used to in the old times. Throughout its history, Geez poetry has not been meant to be recorded or written down in any form of books or parchments, but to be rehearsed and for the moment. No serious attempts have been made by the monasteries or churches, which are usually custodians of the tradition to record it in writing. Therefore, there is a great need for researching, recording and preserving the rich history and culture while the art and the knowledge of the language is still in the memory of the shrinking number of its custodians. As the oral tradition of Geez poetry is becoming increasingly endangered because students are not learning the language and the art as they used to do in the past, the continuity of oral Geez poetry is in a worrying situation. Hence concerted efforts and steps must be taken to record and study it as a cultural heritage. Oral Geez poets in churches and monasteries need to be encouraged to develop a practice of recording the composed poems in written or electronic forms.

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