

## **400 years anniversary of Hiob Ludolf (1624-1704)**

### **Pionner of Ethiopian Studies in the West**

Ludolf's Geez Lexicon and Grammar

The following paper was presented in Gotha from September 27–29, during the annual conference organized by Orbis Aethiopicus in collaboration with the Transcultural Studies Research College at the University of Erfurt. This year's conference was dedicated to the 400th anniversary of Hiob Ludolf, the pioneer of Ethiopian Studies in the Western world. I was privileged to participate in this historic event, thanks to the support of the Goethe-Institut, which covered my travel and accommodation expenses. On this occasion, I was also honored to present on Ludolf's *Geez Lexicon* and Grammar, comparing them with Ethiopian approaches to the study of the language.

In the 17th century, Hiob Ludolf, a German scholar, published a Ge'ez-Latin lexicon and a Ge'ez grammar in Latin, establishing him as the pioneer of Ethiopic studies in the West. His works also include a *History of Ethiopia* and an Amharic-Latin lexicon. Ludolf was taught by Abba Gorgoryos, an Ethiopian scholar, which added depth to his understanding of the language and culture. It is particularly interesting to compare Ludolf's *Ge'ez Grammar* with traditional Ethiopian grammars and lexicons. Both the similarities and differences in structure and content merit attention. Moreover, investigating the reasons behind these differences can be illuminating. The historical and literary context, the intended purpose, and the target audience of both the lexicon and the grammar are all factors that should be carefully considered.

This research primarily focuses on the Ge'ez Grammar written in Latin by Job Ludolf, with brief observations on his Ge'ez-Latin Lexicon. Both works are considered milestones in the study of Ge'ez (or Classical Ethiopic) in the Western world. Their significance as pioneering contributions and standard research tools endured for over 150 years, until August Dillmann published his own Ge'ez-Latin Lexicon and Ge'ez Grammar in German. What is Job Ludolf's legacy in the study of the Ge'ez language? The influence of Ludolf's *Ge'ez-Latin Lexicon* can be traced to the 20th-century *Ge'ez-Amharic Dictionary* by Kidane Wold Kefle, via Dillmann and Aleqa Kefle Giorgis (19th century). A similar influence might be found between Ludolf's *Ge'ez Grammar* and traditional Ethiopian works of grammar and lexicography.

When it comes to lexicography, it is important to highlight the distinctive Ethiopian alphabetical order, which is based on the final syllable of words—an ordering system quite different from those used by Ludolf, Dillmann, and Kidane Wold Kefle. This practice is not only ancient but continues to appear in modern and recent publications.

Regarding grammar, one might also ask whether traces of traditional Ethiopian grammars can be found in Ludolf's work, given his training by Abba Gorgoryos, the Ethiopian scholar who worked closely with him. Could insights be gleaned from their epistolary correspondence? And what accounts for the major differences in terminology, approach, and structure between Ludolf's grammar and traditional Ethiopian grammars? This study will explore these questions by comparing Ludolf's *Ge'ez Grammar* with traditional Ethiopian grammatical works.

The Goethe Institute has taken the initiative, among other efforts, to organize programs commemorating the fourth centenary of the birth of Hiob Ludolf. As part of these celebrations, workshops were held at the Institute to explore the significance of Ludolf's *Grammar of Ge'ez* and *Ge'ez-Latin Lexicon*.

When comparing the structure, content, and terminology of Ludolf's grammar with those of traditional Ethiopian grammars, several key differences emerge. It was also demonstrated how the alphabetical order in Ludolf's *Ge'ez-Latin Lexicon* diverges from that of many traditional Ethiopian grammars and dictionaries, particularly in the treatment of verbs. In Ludolf's lexicon, words are listed according to the first letter, while traditional Ethiopian lexicons follow a system based on the last letter of each word. This difference in alphabetical order plays a significant role: in the traditional Ethiopian system, searching for the last letter of a word instead of the first helps facilitate the grouping of verbs and nouns that rhyme. This approach is particularly useful for scholars and students, as it provides a repertoire for improvisation in poetry, whether in educational settings, liturgical ceremonies, or social events.

It is important to note, however, Ludolf's influence on the *Ge'ez-Amharic Dictionary* of August Dillmann, which, in contrast to traditional grammars and lexicons, reflects a different approach and structure.

When comparing Ludolf's *Syntax of Ge'ez* with traditional Ethiopian grammars of Ge'ez, it is interesting to examine the terminology used, particularly with respect to the term አገብ ("agebabi"), which is used to refer to syntax. The primary meaning of this term is "what must be" (cf. Teklemariam Semharay). According to Ignazio Guidi, አገብ is the highest level of literary (or grammatical) studies, specifically concerning syntax (Guidi, 503). Outside the realm of grammar, however, the term has other meanings, such as "convenience," "debt," "dignity," and "decency" (Guidi, 741-742).

Another noteworthy term in traditional Ethiopian syntax is **Mushazer**, which does not appear in Ludolf's or other Western grammars of Ge'ez. According to Guidi (80), **Mushazer** originally referred to an element used in welding metals. However, in the context of language, it also signifies "circumlocution." For Kessate Berhan (133), the term refers to a continuous reading or a connected adjective. According to Desta Teklelworld (818), **Mushazer** is a noun used to describe a form of the *Qene* (a type of Ethiopian poetry).

In his section on Syntax, Ludolf (128ff) addresses several key syntactic issues, including the relationship between two consecutive verbs, the combination of a verb with a proper noun or non-construct noun, the agreement (or lack thereof) between verbs and subjects in terms of number (singular vs. plural), pleonasm of verbs, and hendiadys. These topics offer valuable insights, especially when compared with the syntactic concerns raised by traditional Ethiopian grammarians.

### **The Legacy of Hiob Ludolf**

Ludolf's legacy can be seen in his *Ge'ez-Latin Lexicon*, which influenced the lexicon of August Dillmann and, indirectly, the *Ge'ez-Amharic Dictionary* of Kidane Wold Kifle.

However, just as Dillmann's *Lexicon* has its own peculiarities—such as additional entries, references, and explanations—Kidane Wold Kifle's dictionary also exhibits distinctive features in its selection of literary references and explanations, with a particular focus on the Ethiopian context. Two noteworthy aspects characterize Kidane Wold Kifle's *Dictionary*.

First, the alphabetical order differs from that of Ludolf and Dillmann. While Ludolf and Dillmann use the more familiar “Ha, La, Ha, Ma...” system, Kidane Wold Kifle follows a unique ordering: “A, Bu, Gi, Da, He, Wə, Zo...”

Second, the grammatical presentation of a given word in the dictionary also diverges from Western lexicons. In Ludolf’s and Dillmann’s *Lexica*, verbs are typically listed in the third-person masculine singular form of the perfect tense, a convention shared with Hebrew and Arabic lexicons. In contrast, Kidane Wold Kifle presents the infinitive form of a verb first, followed by the perfect, imperfect, and jussive forms, along with cognates from languages like Arabic, Hebrew, and other Semitic languages.

There is much to learn from the contribution of Hiob Ludolf. His immense achievements would have been unimaginable without the mutual respect between Ludolf and Abba Gorgoryos, as well as Ludolf’s extraordinary motivation and remarkable focus. While we admire Ludolf’s passion, curiosity, and creativity, it also raises an important question: do we need similar partnerships for meaningful and substantial progress in the study of Ge’ez literature? Acknowledging the specific context of Ethiopia and Africa is crucial for all modern scholarly work. Can we, from the example of these two scholars, learn the importance of not borrowing concepts uncritically, but rather subjecting them to careful assessment and analysis?

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