



Assessing Textual Variants in the Ethiopic *Vita* of Saint Mark the Evangelist

Andualem Ermias GebreMariam^{[a],*}

^[a] Associate Professor, Department of Philology, Holy Trinity University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

* Corresponding author.

Received 11 January 2026; accepted 19 February 2026

Published online 26 February 2026

Abstract

The *Vita* of Saint Mark the Evangelist, transmitted through an Ethiopic translation, represents a vital link between the Alexandrian hagiographical tradition and the literary heritage of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tāwahədo Church. Although the text has long been used in ecclesiastical contexts, its complex manuscript tradition and internal textual variations have not been examined in depth. This study offers a critical investigation of the principal Ethiopic witnesses of the *Vita*, with special attention to the *Medium Recension*. This version occupies an intermediary position between the shorter and longer textual forms known from extant Mss. The article identifies and classifies significant textual variants in wording, syntax, and structure. These variants reveal not only the linguistic evolution of the *Vita* within the Gəʿəz literary milieu but also the theological and interpretive choices made by successive copyists. The Medium Recension emerges as a pivotal textual stage, preserving archaisms and unique readings that illuminate the transition from the early Ethiopic translation to later expanded forms. At the same time, evidence of editorial harmonization suggests that scribes sought to adapt the narrative to contemporary doctrinal and liturgical expectations. By situating the Ethiopic *Vita* of Saint Mark the Evangelist within a wider context of the Ethiopic tradition, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how hagiographical texts were transmitted, localized, and reinterpreted across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Finally, the analysis underscores the need for a comprehensive critical edition of the *Vita*, one that accounts for dynamic interplay between textual

translation and scribal intervention within the Ethiopic manuscript tradition.

Key words: The Ethiopic *Vita* of Saint Mark; Textual variants; Gəʿəz Manuscript tradition; Scribal intervention; Hagiographic tradition

GebreMariam, A. E. (2026). Assessing Textual Variants in the Ethiopic *Vita* of Saint Mark the Evangelist. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 32(1), 10-17. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/13977> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/13977>

1. INTRODUCTION

Born in Cyrene¹ around the first century CE, St. Mark the Evangelist occupies a significant place in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tāwahədo Church (EOTC) tradition apart from the Biblical narratives.² His *Vita* holds a distinguished place within the hagiographical collection of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tāwahədo Church. As one of the foundational narratives linking Ethiopia to the Alexandrian Christian heritage, the *Vita* not only commemorates the apostolic authority of Saint Mark, the traditional founder of the

¹ It refers to one of the Five Western Cities (Pentapolis) of North Africa, specifically the present day Libya. His Gəʿəz *Vita* attests this as: "ወ-እቱኪ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ማርቆስ፡ ቀደመ፡ ወበጽሐመ፡ ቀሪኔ፡ ሀገረ፡ ጳጌጠጳሊስ፡ እስመ፡ ወ-እቱ፡ ብሔረ፡ ፍጥረቱ። Now St Mark came first to and reached Cyrene, a city in Pentapolis, for it was his native land" (Budge 1899, 257; 1901, 309; Lusini 2009, 31/37); cf. Getatchew Haile 1981, 124/129).

² St Mark was a close companion of Barnabas, Paul, and Peter. Despite moments of tension with Paul (Acts 13:13; 15:36-41), later reconciliations portray him as a valued collaborator (Col. 4:10-11; 2 Tim. 4:11). Peter likewise regarded him as a spiritual son (1Pet. 5:13), and his household provided a central gathering place for the early Christian community. These interwoven Biblical and Ethiopic traditions highlight Mark's importance not only as an Evangelist but also as a foundational figure in the spread of Christianity (Andualem Ermias 2025, p.52a).

Church of Alexandria, but also reflects the theological and literary processes through which the Alexandrian Christian tradition was indigenized within the Ethiopian context (Lusini 2002, p.14; Marrassini, 2014, pp.47-48). Transmitted in Ethiopic (*Gəʿəz*) translation, the text exemplifies a rich linguistic adaptation, doctrinal reinterpretation, and scribal innovation. Nevertheless, despite its importance in liturgical and devotional life, the *Vita* seems to have remained least studied in the Ethiopic hagiographical tradition from the textual variants perspective (Zuurmond, 1989, p.22; Andualem Ermias, 2021, p.5).

Scholars on the Ethiopic hagiography seem to have tended to concentrate on major collections, such as the *Gädlä Sämʿatat*, the *Miracles of Mary*, and *Gädlä Qəddusan* (Cowley, 1900, p.63; Kaplan, 1984, p.213; Nosnitsin, 2012, p.10). The studies have indicated the theological and linguistic richness of Ethiopian Christian literature but have left the medium *recension* of the *Vita* of Saint Mark the Evangelist unexamined, despite studies undertaken by Andualem Ermias (2021 and 2025). Some scattered references in catalogues and Ms description attest to its transmission across several codices preserved in Ethiopian monastic libraries and European collections (Wright, 1877, pp.45-46; Conti Rossini, 1903, p.29). The absence of a critical study of its textual variants has limited our understanding of how this work evolved across regions and centuries, and how it participated in the broader development of the *Gəʿəz* literary tradition. Moreover, the existence of multiple textual *recensions*, distinguished by differences in length and vocabulary, points to a complex history of transmission that merits systematic investigation (Heldman, 1993, pp.155-156).

This academic article seeks to address that scholarly gap by undertaking a comparative analysis of the principal Ethiopic Mss of the *Vita* of Saint Mark, with particular attention to the Medium *Recension*. This *recension* appears to occupy an intermediary position between the shorter and longer versions, sharing similarities with both while also exhibiting unique readings that suggest a transitional stage of textual development (Lusini, 2002, p.18). By focusing on this form of the text, the study aims to reconstruct aspects of its evolution and to identify the linguistic and literary adjustments that accompanied its transmission.

The significance of this study extends beyond the textual history of a single hagiographical composition. By tracing the layers of transmission and adaptation within the *Vita* of Saint Mark the Evangelist, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of translation, appropriation, and continuity in the Ethiopic literary tradition (Marrassini, 2014, pp.49-50; Nosnitsin, 2012, pp.28-29). The findings shed light on how the Ethiopian scribes negotiated inherited narratives, balancing fidelity to their Alexandrian sources with the need for doctrinal coherence and cultural resonance.

Building upon the author's earlier studies of the *Vita of Saint Mark the Evangelist*, the present article provides a systematic typology of textual variants demonstrating its intermediary role in the transmission history of the text and clarifying its broader significance for Ethiopic philology and hagiographical studies.

2. THE *VITA* OF ST. MARK THE EVANGELIST

The *Vita* of St. Mark the Evangelist is thought to have been composed in Greek and later translated into *Gəʿəz* in the fourth³ century CE, following the Christianization of the Aksumite kingdom. The text was transmitted to Ethiopia as part of a broader cultural, ecclesiastical, and political project. The extant witnesses of the *Vita* reveal three distinct *recensions*: (1) a **short recension**⁴, marked by its concise narrative; (2) a **medium recension**, which exhibits the features of both the short and the long; and (3) a **long recension**, distinguished by extensive interpretation. The second one, the focus of this study, appears to occupy a transitional position in the text's transmission history (Lusini, 2002, p.18; Nosnitsin, 2012, p.24; Andualem Ermias, 2025, p.8a).

The *Medium recension* combines textual variants and linguistic characters with editorial and scribal refinement. By analyzing this *recension* closely, the present study aims to indicate the scribal innovations underlying its development. Hence, particular attention is given to lexical and syntactic variants. Textual variations offer insight into evolving scribal preferences for clarity, rhetorical sophistication, and doctrinal emphasis (Zuurmond, 1989, pp.33-34; Marrassini, 2014, p.52). Together, these features suggest that Ethiopian scribes not only transmitted but also continuously reinterpreted the *Vita*, reshaping it to address the theological sensibilities of their audiences. The Metadata of the Mss are displayed in the Table 1.

Table 1
The Metadata of the Mss

| Sig la | Location | Code number | Quire/Folio | Year (Cent.) | Material |
|--------|--------------------------------|-------------|-------------|------------------|-----------|
| A | Institute of Ethiopian Studies | IES-2160 | 9/85 | 19 th | Parchment |
| B | Mänbärä Ləʿul St Mark Church | EMML 87 | 8/75 | 20 th | Parchment |

³ It was the period when Aksum reached the height of its glory as the main military partner of the Byzantine Empire; South Arabia had started to be under the Aksumite control (Bausi 2014, 39; Sergew Hable Selassie 1972, 92-95)

⁴ Unlike the medium and the long *recension*, this text is preserved in three different multiple-text Mss: (1) the *Gəʿəz Synaxarium (Sənsar, ስንክሳር)*, in the entry for St Mark on Miyaziya 30 (08 May); (2) the *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles (Gädlä Ḥawarəyat, ገድለ ሐዋርያት)*; and (3) the *Acts of the Saints (Gädlä Qəddusan, ገድለ ቅዱሳን)*.

| Sig la | Location | Code number | Quire/Folio | Year (Cent.) | Material |
|--------|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|------------------|-----------|
| C | Mänbärä Šäba'ot Holy Trinity | EMML 1208 | 4/66 | 19 th | Paper |
| D | Däbrä Šähay St Mark Church | UNESCO 6/38 | 7/53 | 19 th | Parchment |
| E | 'Addi 'Abun Täklä Haymanot | AATH-072 | 11/72 | 19 th | Parchment |
| F | 'Addi 'Abun Täklä Haymanot | AATH-071 | 15/136 | 20 th | Parchment |
| G | Sälla Dəngay St Mark Church | 008 | 6/63 | 20 th | Paper |

Note: Sig la: The code given to each Ms by the researcher.

3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This study employs an interdisciplinary methodology that integrates **textual criticism, comparative philology, and linguistic analysis**. The textual base is derived from collations of key Mss housed in major collections, including the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) and several monastic libraries. Each Ms is examined for orthographic consistency, syntactic patterning, and distinctive readings that may clarify its genealogical relationship to other witnesses. The comparative philological component draws upon textual variants, such as additions, omissions, transpositions, metathesis, and others, which indicate the scribal interventions. Rather than aiming merely to reconstruct a hypothetical archetype, this approach seeks to interpret the *Vita* as a living textual tradition, shaped by centuries of scribal engagement and theological reflection. Hence, this methodological framework lays the groundwork for a comprehensive critical edition of the *Vita* of Saint Mark

Table 2
Additions

| Sec.2 | Reconstructed Text | Addition |
|-------|--|---|
| [70] | ወበውሉጥ፡ ልሳን፡ ዘይቤ፡ in a distinct language that says... | ወበውሉጥ፡ ልሳን፡ ይብሉ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ ፀባዖት፡ ፍጹም፡ ምሉዕ፡ ሰማያተ፡ ወምድረ፡ ቅድሳተ፡ ስብሐቲክ፡ ዘይቤ፡ in a distinct language, they say Holy, Holy, Holy, the winner God, Whose holy glory is perfectly full through Heaven and Earth, that says... (D: f.12v _a) |
| [74] | ወውእቱ፡ ርስተ፡ ጻድቃን፡ ፍሡሓን፡ በከመ፡ ተብህለ፡ And it is the inheritance of the glad righteous as is said ... | ወውእቱ፡ ርስተ፡ ጻድቃን፡ ፍሡሓን፡ በከመ፡ ጽሑፍ፡ ቃለ፡ ትፍሥሕት፡ ውስተ፡ አብያቲሆመ፡ ለጻድቃን፡ ወያሥተ፡ ፊሥሆመ፡ ለግብጻውያን፡ ወዝንቱ፡ ይውሳዝ፡ ውስተ፡ ብሔረ፡ ግብጽ፡ በከመ፡ ተብህለ፡ And it is the inheritance of the glad righteous, and it make the Egyptians glad, and it flows in the city of Egypt as is said ... (B: f.23r _a) |
| [78] | በቁለ፡ ፀበለ፡ ሥጋሁ፡ ኢይምሰልከኬ፡ ዕፀ፡ His body's sweat sprung up; do not think as if it is a tree | በቁለ፡ ፀበለ፡ ሥጋሁ፡ ወይቤሉ፡ ካዕበ፡ ዘሐፀበት፡ አባሎ፡ እግዝእትነ፡ ማርያም፡ አመ፡ ቦአት፡ ቅሳስቋመ፡ በቁለ፡ ፀበለ፡ ሥጋሁ፡ ኢይምሰልከኬ፡ ዕፀ፡ His body's sweat sprung up, and they again say She was Our Lady Mary that washed His Body when she entered Q ^w sq ^w am (and) His body's sweat sprung up; do not think as if it is a tree (A: f.31v _a) |
| [94] | ለእግዚአብሔር፡ ለዓለም፡ ወትእምርተ፡ ትንግኤ፡ ሙታንኒ፡ to God forever and the sighn of the resurrection of the dead ... | ለእግዚአብሔር፡ ለዓለም፡ ወዝ፡ ኩሉ፡ ይከውን፡ ላዕለ፡ ምድረ፡ ግብጽ፡ ወበእንተ፡ ኢትዮጵያ፡ ይቤ፡ ዳዊት፡ ነቢይ፡ ኢትዮጵያ፡ ታበጽሕ፡ እደዊሃ፡ ኅበ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ ወትእምርተ፡ ትንግኤ፡ ሙታንኒ፡ the Prophet David says “Ethiopia stretches out her hands unto God” (C:f.29r, G:f.23v _a). |
| [123] | አአኩተክ፡ ኢየሱስ፡ ክርስቶስ፡ እስከለክ፡ I thank you Jesus Christ, (and) I beseech You | አአኩተክ፡ ኢየሱስ፡ ክርስቶስ፡ እስመ፡ ኢገደፍከኒ፡ እምቅድመ፡ ገጽክ፡ ወረሰይከኒ፡ ውስተ፡ ማኅደሮመ፡ ወማኅበሮመ፡ ለቅዱሳኒክ፡ አ፡ እግዚእየ፡ ኢየሱስ፡ ክርስቶስ፡ እስከለክ፡ I thank you Jesus Christ I beseech You (D: f.23r _a). |

Note: It, the section, refers to the paragraph number in the critical text.

the Evangelist carried out by Andualem Ermias (2021, pp.132-137).

4. DISCUSSION

The results of a collation can serve multiple scholarly purposes, ranging from establishing a critical edition to tracing the transmission history of a text. One particularly important application is the identification of innovations or deviations present in the various witnesses of a manuscript tradition, which can shed light on scribal practices, regional textual tendencies, or the evolution of the text over time (Macé et al., 2015, p.336). In light of this, a set of textual variants, like addition, omission, transposition, banalization, dittography etc., from the *Vita of St. Mark the Evangelist* is carefully examined below, with the aim of highlighting both the nature and significance of these divergences within the broader manuscript tradition.

4.1 Addition

Scribes do not merely copy *Mss* mechanically; they often approach their work with intellectual care and cultural responsibility. They incorporate additional texts, such as clarifying comments, brief explanations, or contextual notes, to help readers better understand difficult or obscure passages (Parker, 2008, p.94). These additions could reflect the scribe's desire to preserve valuable information, respond to contemporary theological concerns, or adapt the *Mss* to the needs of a specific community. Marginal notes or glosses might even be absorbed into the main body of the text, blurring the line between the original work and later interpretation (Metzger and Ehrman, 2005, pp.264-265). The bold texts in the second column in the Table 2 are typical examples of such additions.

4.2 Omission

During the copying process, scribes occasionally omit portions of a text, and such omissions can reveal both human error and conscious editorial judgment. A scribe might unintentionally skip lines because similar words or endings appear in close proximity, a common visual mistake known as **homoioteleuton** (Parker, 2008, p.96). In other instances, omissions can be deliberate: certain passages may be viewed as historically or theologically

problematic, outdated, or unnecessary for the intended audience. Practical concerns, such as limited space or the desire to produce a more concise version for liturgical use, could also influence a scribe's decision to leave texts out (Metzger and Ehrman, 2005, p.251). The texts recorded in bold in the second column or written in the third column of the Table 3 are found omitted in the respective witnesses.

Table 3
Omission

| Sec. | Reconstructed text | Omitted text 3 |
|------|---|---|
| [14] | ይምጸእ፡ ሰላምክሙ፡ ላዕሌሃ፡ ወእመሰ፡ ኢይደልዋ፡ ለይእቲ፡ ቤት፡ ይግባእ፡ ሰላምክሙ፡ ላዕሌክሙ። May your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy to the house, may your peace back upon you. | ወእመሰ፡ ኢይደልዋ፡ ለይእቲ፡ ቤት፡ ይግባእ፡ ሰላምክሙ፡ upon it, but if it is not worthy to the house, may your peace back (B: f. 5ra). |
| [37] | ለእለ፡ ኅደግሙ፡ ኃጢአት፡ ይትኅደግ፡ ሎሙ፡ ወለእለ፡ ኢኅደግሙ፡ ኃጢአት፡ ኢይትኅደግ፡ ሎሙ። ወበሰሙን፡ ዕለት... Whoever sins you remit, they are remitted to them, and whoever sins you retain, they are retained. And on the 8th day, ... | ወለእለ፡ ኢኅደግሙ፡ ኃጢአት፡ ኢይትኅደግ፡ ሎሙ። and whoever sins you retain, they are retained (G: f. 9vb). |
| [38] | ዘእንበለ፡ ሜሮን፡ እስመ፡ ኸሎሙ፡ እለ፡ ተሐትሙ፡ በፀበለ፡ ክርስቶስ፡ ዘውእቱ፡ ሜሮን፡ እስመ፡ ኸሎሙ... Without Myron, for all are sealed by the sweat of Christ that is Myron, for all are ... | እስመ፡ ኸሎሙ፡ እለ፡ ተሐትሙ፡ በፀበለ፡ ክርስቶስ፡ ዘውእቱ፡ ሜሮን፡ for all are sealed by the sweat of Christ that is Myron (F: f. 38va) |
| [79] | ወየሐውር፡ ብሐረ፡ ሮሜ፡ ወሶበ፡ ዐደወ፡ እምብሐረ፡ ሮሜ፡ ኅሠሠ፡ ቅድመ፡ ኅበ፡ ፭፡ አህጉር። He used to go to the city of Rome, and when he crossed from the city of Rome, he first explored into the Five Cities. | ወሶበ፡ ዐደወ፡ እምብሐረ፡ ሮሜ and when he crossed from the city of Rome (E: f. 33ra). |
| [96] | ወለእመቦ፡ ብእሲ፡ ዘኢየሁዳ፡ ሰሙን፡ ሕማማት፡ ለይዱም፡ እምድኅረ፡ በዓለ፡ ፶፡ አኮ፡ ውእቱ፡ ዘይከውኖ፡ ከመ፡ ሰሙን፡ ሕማማት፡ አላ፡ አርአያ። And if there is someone who does not know the Passion Week, let him fast after the feast of the 50, but it doesn't become like the Passion Week for him, rather it is an exemplar. | ለይዱም፡ እምድኅረ፡ በዓለ፡ ፶፡ አኮ፡ ውእቱ፡ ዘይከውኖ፡ ከመ፡ ሰሙን፡ ሕማማት፡ let him fast after the feast of the 50, but it doesn't become like the Passion Week (A: F.55ra). |

Note: Each omission seems either Homoeoarchon: omitting part of a text between two words beginning with the same words or letters, like **ላዕሌሃ**: and **ላዕሌክሙ**: in [14], or Homoeoteleuton: omitting part of a text between two words ending with similar words, such as **ሎሙ**: **ሎሙ**: in [37], and **ሜሮን**: ... **ሜሮን**: in [38].

4.3 Transposition

In the process of copying Ms, scribes sometimes reorder words, phrases or sometimes passages, a practice known as transposition. This could occur accidentally, as the scribe's eye skipped lines or sections, but it was often a deliberate choice. Scribes might rearrange texts to

enhance clarity, improve narrative flow, or adapt the text to fit historical or theological contexts. In some cases, transposition served to harmonize different textual traditions or correct what the scribe perceives as a disorganized structure (Parker, 2008, p.57). Look at the instances displayed in the third column of the Table 4.

Table 4
Transposition

| Sec. | Reconstructed text | Transposed words/Phrases |
|-------|---|---|
| [64] | ገጹ፡ ይመስል፡ ከመ፡ ገጹ፡ አንበሳ , his face looks like a face of lion | ይመስል፡ ገጹ፡ ከመ፡ ገጹ፡ አንበሳ , his face looks like a face of lion (A: f. 26vb). |
| [71] | ምሉዓን፡ አእይንት፡ እሙንቱ , they are full of eyes | ምሉዓን፡ እሙንቱ፡ አእይንተ , they are full of eyes (B:f. 22va). |
| [96] | ማርቆስ፡ ወንጌላዊ፡ ርእሰ፡ ሊቃነ፡ ጳጳሳት , Mark the Evangelist, the head of the archbishops | ርእሰ፡ ሊቃነ፡ ጳጳሳት፡ ማርቆስ፡ ወንጌላዊ , the head of the archbishops, Mark the Evangelist (D:f. 15vc). |
| [122] | አእኩቶ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ማርቆስ፡ ለእግዚአብሔር , St. Mark thanked God | ቅዱስ፡ ማርቆስ፡ አእኩቶ፡ ለእግዚአብሔር , St. Mark thanked God (E: f. 42ra). |
| [144] | ኦ፡ ኤጲስ፡ ቆጶሳት፡ ተዐቀቡ፡ እምስሐተተ፡ ሐሳብ , O Episcopates, take heed from erroneous thought. | ተዐቀቡ፡ ኦ፡ ኤጲስ፡ ቆጶሳት፡ እምስሐተተ፡ ሐሳብ , take heed, O Episcopates, from erroneous thought (C: f. 47vb). |

4.4 Banalization

When copying Ms, scribes often engage in banalization, substituting words with a more familiar one, as a means of

rendering the text more comprehensible to contemporary readers. This practice involves simplifying archaic or

complex language, clarifying ambiguous references, and regularizing unusual expressions. By doing so, scribes aim to reduce potential misunderstandings and ensure that the text remains intelligible and meaningful for readers, even if such modifications may slightly alter the original style (Parker, 2008, pp.61-62). In the Table 5, the texts in the third column are examples of banalization.

Table 5
Banalization

| Sec. | Reconstructed text | Banalization |
|-------|----------------------------------|---|
| [14] | ይምጻእ፡ ሰላምክሙ፡ May your peace come | ይግባእ፡ ሰላምክሙ፡ May your peace enter (F:f. 8rb). |
| [53] | ዘወለደሙ፡ whom he begot them | እለ፡ ወለደሙ፡ whom he begot them (D: f. 9vb). |
| [72] | ዘማዕከሎሙ፡ among them | ዘማዕከሎሆሙ፡ among them (C: f. 22rb). |
| [80] | ተፈቅረ፡ be beloved | ተፈቅደ፡ be liked (A: f. 33ra). |
| [105] | ወእምድኅረዝ፡ and from thence forward | ወእምዝ፡ and thereafter (D: f. 18va). |

4.5 Dittography

Scribes may produce **dittography**, the unintentional repetition of letters, words, or phrases, while copying *Mss*, often as a result of lack of attention or momentary visual confusion (Parker, 2008, p.74). Such errors frequently occur when a scribe's eye unintentionally returns to an earlier portion of the text, leading to the duplication of content (Metzger and Ehrman, 2005, pp.251-252). The texts in the third column in the Table 6 are typical examples of such scribal errors.

Table 6
Dittography

| Sec. | Reconstructed text | Dittography |
|-------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| [1] | እግዚአብሔር፡ the Lord | እግዚአብሔርአብሔር (sic) (B: f. 1rb). |
| [26] | እፌንወክሙ፡ I shall send you | እፌንወክወክሙ፡ (sic) (C: f. 9rb). |
| [55] | ጵንፍልያ፡ Pamphylia | ጵንፍልፍልያ (sic) (B: f. 17vb). |
| [135] | አይሁድ፡ the Jewish | አይሁይሁድ (sic) (A: f. 54vb). |
| [170] | መልእክተክሙ፡ your message | መልእክተክተክሙ፡ (sic) (F: f. 86ra). |

4.6 Metathesis

During the process of copying *Mss*, scribes may commit **metathesis**, the unintentional transposition of letters or syllables, often due to momentary gaps in attention or the influence of phonetic or visual patterns (Parker, 2008, p.77). Such errors typically occur when a scribe's perception of the text leads to elements being unintentionally reordered, thereby altering the original

wording (Metzger and Ehrman, 2005, pp.253-254). The words recorded in the third column of the Table 7 are instances found in the *Mss* mentioned after each word.

Table 7
Metathesis

| Sec. | Reconstructed text | Metathesis |
|-------|------------------------------|--|
| [50] | ዘተሰምዩ፡ that is named | ዘተሰይመ፡ that is ordained (A: f. 21va) |
| [59] | ይሰየም፡ let him be named | ይሰመይ፡ let him be ordained (B: f. 19vb) |
| [113] | አጽሐብዎ፡ they made him worried | አብጽሕዎ፡ they reached him (G: f.29vb) |
| [130] | አብዐለ፡ he feasted | አብልዐ፡ he fed (D:f. 26rb) |
| [179] | ሐመር፡ ship | መሐር፡ you forgive (A: f. 71va) |

4.7 Polarization

When copying *Mss*, scribes may engage in **polarization**, **writing the antonyms of** certain words or phrases, perhaps, as a means of clarifying meaning or emphasizing distinctions within the text. This often involves modifying or substituting terms or expressions to reflect what the scribe perceives as more accurate, logical, or rhetorically effective. Though such interventions highlight the interpretive role of the scribe; it may lead to the opposite meaning of an expression (Parker, 2008, p.69). Look at the typical examples displayed in the third column of the Table 8.

Table 8
Polarization

| Sec. | Reconstructed text | Polarization |
|-------|--|--|
| [14] | ዘእንበለ፡ አግእን፡ except the shoes | ወኢአግእን፡ and neither shoes (B: f. 5rb) |
| [14] | ዘእንበለ፡ በትር፡ ባሕቲታ፡ except a stick alone | ወኢበትረ፡ and neither a stick (C: f. 5rb) |
| [190] | እምቅድመ፡ ትጻእ፡ before you get out | እምቅድመ፡ ትባእ፡ before you get in (G: f. 54vb) |

4.8 Fission

Fission, the division of a single word or phrase into two separate elements, may arise from the scribe's attempt to interpret ambiguous or densely written text. In many historical *Mss*, word boundaries are unclear or absent, making it difficult to distinguish where one word ends and another begins. As a result, scribes occasionally introduce breaks based on their own linguistic awareness, familiarity with contemporary usage (Metzger and Ehrman, 2005, pp.254-255). The words written separately in the third column of the following table are typical examples taken from the extant *Mss* mentioned immediately after each phrase.

Table 9
Fission

| Sec. | Reconstructed text | Fission |
|-------|------------------------------|---|
| [30] | አብረክሊስ, Acts of the Apostles | አብረ: ክሊስ, Acts of the Apostles (A: f. 13rb) |
| [58] | ናቡከደነሹር, Nebuchadnezzar | ናቡከደነ: ሹር, Nebuchadnezzar (C: f. 19ra) |
| [90] | አርቲመትሪዳስ, Archimandrite | አርቲ: መርዳስ, Archimandrite (B: f. 29rb) |
| [128] | ለፌልጥርግኖስ, the name of April | ለፌልጥር: ግኖስ, a name of month. April (G: f. 35va) |

4.9 Fusion

When navigating *Mss*, scribes can produce **fusion**, the merging of two distinct words into a single form due to unclear spacing, faded ink, or continuous script. In such contexts, the scribe’s linguistic knowledge played a crucial role: words that frequently appeared together or sounded natural in everyday speech could easily be written as one unit (Parker, 2008, p.85). On such occasions, fusion may have resulted from the scribe’s desire to streamline the text, adapt it to contemporary linguistic norms, or from fatigue or rapid copying (Metzger and Ehrman, 2005, pp.256-257). Look the words written appropriately or separately in the second column but erroneously merged in the third one, in the Table 10.

Table 11
Diffraction

| Sec. | Reconstructed text | Diffraction |
|-------|--------------------|--|
| [41] | [አንጣቆስጤ:] | አንጣቆስጤ: p.inətaqosəṭé (A: f.17rb); አንጣቆስቴ: p.änəṭäqosəṭi (C: f. 14ra); አንጣቆስቴ: p.änəṭäqosəṭé (D; f. 7vb); አንጣቆስጤ: p.änəṭäqosəṭé (E: f. 14rb). |
| [55] | [ዘከመ: ሀለወ:] | ዘከመ: ሀለወ: and as lived; (A: f. 23va); ዘከመ: ሀለወ: as he lives (B: f.17vb; G: f. 14ra); ዘከመ: ሀለወ: (sic), if they live (C: f.17va); ዘከመ: ሀለወ: if they live (D: f.10ra); ዘከመ: ሀለወ: and as they live (E: f. 19vb; F: f. 27rb). |
| [139] | [ለቅንጥርያንስ] | ለቅንጥርያንስ: Läqəntəryanəs (A: f.56va); ለንቅጥርያንስ: Länqətrəyanəs (B: f. 48rb; G: f. 39ra); ለቅንጥርያንስ: Läqəntəryansəs (C: f.46va); ለንቅጥርያንስ: Länqətrəyanəs (E: f. 48rb); ለንቅጥርያንስ: Länqətrəyanosəs (F; f. 68vb). |

4.11 Anagrammatism and Haplography

Scribes may commit **anagrammatism**, the accidental rearrangement of letters within a word, resulting in a form that departs from the original. This often occurs when they rely on partial visual cues or memory rather than closely examining each letter of the source text. The scribe’s linguistic habits or regional conventions may influence the reordering of letters, producing a form that feels more familiar but is textually inaccurate (Metzger and Ehrman, 2005, pp.260-261).

On the other hand, during the process of copying *Mss*, scribes may omit a sequence of letters or syllables that ought to be written twice, a practice known as **haplography**. This phenomenon occurs when the scribe’s eye subconsciously jumps from one occurrence of a repeated pattern to another, a visual slip often associated

Table 10
Fusion

| Sec. | Reconstructed text | Fusion |
|-------|---------------------------------|--|
| [21] | ሐቤ: ምእት, centurion | ሀቤምእት (sic), centurion (F: f. 11va) |
| [34] | ለ መ ል ከ : ጼ ዴ ቅ , Melchizedek | ለመልከጼዴቅ (sic) Melchizedek (C: f. 11va) |
| [88] | አፈ: ወርቅ, Chrysostom | አፈወርቅ (sic), Chrysostom (A: f. 36ra) |
| [123] | አ: ግርቆስ: ኅሩይያ, O Mark my chosen | አኅሩይያ (sic), O my chosen (F: f. 59vb) |
| [128] | ወዘ: ውእቱ, and this is | ወዘውእቱ (sic), and this is (F: f. 59vb) |

4.10 Diffractions

Diffraction may occur when scribes change the structure of a word or phrase in a way that alters its original shape, perhaps due to misreading, mishearing, or misunderstanding the source text. This phenomenon can also arise when scribes work with *Mss* that are damaged, unclear, or written in unfamiliar orthographic styles (Parker, 2008, p.88). In such circumstances, scribes may rely on memory or linguistic intuition, leading them to reconstruct words in ways that seem plausible but deviate from the original. Furthermore, visual fatigue and regional language influence can contribute to diffraction (Metzger and Ehrman, 2005, pp.258-259). The words and phrases written in the third column of the Table 11 are found diffracted in the respective witnesses.

with fast-paced copying. Such errors are commonly observed in manuscript traditions and are considered typical examples of unintentional scribal mistakes (Parker, 2008, p.91). The phrase and the word displayed in the third and fourth columns in the Table 12 are typical examples of anagrammatism and haplography respectively.

Table 12
Anagrammatism and Haplography

| Sec. | Reconstructed text | Anagrammatism | Haplography |
|-------|----------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| [187] | ላዕለዝ: ቃል: , upon this word | ላዕለ: ዝቃል: (sic), upon this word (B: f.28rb; G: f. 22va; F: f 42vb) | |
| [184] | ቆስ ጥንጥንያ: Constantinople | | ቆስ ጥንያ: Constan (sic) (C: f. 58vb) |

5. CONCLUSION

This study ultimately demonstrates that the Ethiopic *Vita* of Saint Mark the Evangelist is a testament to the intellectual vitality of Ethiopian scribal culture, where fidelity to tradition was balanced with interpretive adaptation in the dynamic processes of textual transmission. Through a detailed collation of the principal witnesses, particularly those belonging to the Medium Recension, the analysis has shown how scribal practices shaped the text over time. The examination of textual variants, including additions, omissions, transpositions, metatheses, dittographies, and instances of banalization, demonstrate that the transmission of the *Vita* was highly intervened by scribal innovations. The text stands out as a crucial stage in this evolution, functioning as an intermediary between earlier and later textual forms. Through its careful balancing of fidelity and creativity, the text reveals the agency of scribes who were not merely copyists but interpreters, individuals deeply engaged with the linguistic, theological, and stylistic dimensions of the text. Beyond its textual details, the findings of this study offer broader insights into Ethiopic hagiography and Ms culture. The diversity of readings among the *Vita*'s witnesses illustrates that textual transmission in Ethiopia was not static but a process that integrated translation, adaptation, and interpretation. The evidence of scribal harmonization and interpretive expansion supports the view that Ethiopian scriptoria were vibrant centers of scholarship and creativity rather than mere custodians of inherited texts. This article underscores the importance of producing a critical edition of the *Vita* of Saint Mark the Evangelist based on systematic collation and contextual analysis. Such an edition would not only stabilize the text for future scholarly engagement but also illuminate the broader historical and theological networks that shaped its development. The *Vita* should thus be recognized not simply as a hagiographical account but as a literary and cultural artifact. Through the insight of textual criticism, the Medium Recension emerges as a mirror reflecting the creative vitality of Gə'əz literary tradition.

REFERENCES

- Andualem Ermias. (2023). Tradition on Saint Mark the Evangelist in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. *International Journal of Humanities, Art and Social Studies*, 8(1), 29-38.
- Bausi, A. (2014). Copying, writing, translating: Ethiopia as a manuscript culture. In J. B. Quenzer, D. Bondarev, & J.-U. Sobisch (Eds.), *Manuscript cultures: Mapping the field*(pp. 37-77). De Gruyter.
- Budge, E. A. W. (1911). *The miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the life of Ḥannā (Saint Anne), and the miraculous lives of the saints and martyrs*(Vol. 2). Henry Frowde.
- Conti Rossini, C. (1903). *Catalogo dei manoscritti etiopici della Biblioteca Vaticana*. Tipografia Vaticana.

- Cowley, R. W. (1900). *Ethiopic legends of the saints*. Clarendon Press.
- Getatchew Haile. (1981). A new Ethiopic version of the Acts of St. Mark (EMML 1763, ff. 224r-227r). In G. Goldenberg (Ed.), *Ethiopian studies: Proceedings of the sixth International Conference, Tel-Aviv, 14-17 April 1980*(pp. 163-179). A. A. Balkema.
- Heldman, M. E. (1993). *African Zion: The sacred art of Ethiopia*. Yale University Press.
- Kaplan, S. (1984). The monastic holy man and the Christianization of early Solomonic Ethiopia. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 15(3), 200-225. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006685X00161>
- Lusini, G. (2002). Letteratura agiografica etiopica: problemi e prospettive. *Aethiopica*, 5, 7-25. <https://doi.org/10.15460/aethiopica.5.1.362>
- Lusini, G. (2009). *Gli Atti apocrifi di Marco*. Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale".
- Marrasini, P. (2014). Appunti di agiografia etiopica. *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, 4, 43-65.
- Metzger, B. M., & Ehrman, B. D. (2005). *The text of the New Testament: Its transmission, corruption, and restoration*(4th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Nosnitsin, D. (2012). Church and tradition in Ethiopian manuscript culture. *Aethiopica*, 15, 7-35. <https://doi.org/10.15460/aethiopica.15.1.635>
- Parker, D. C. (2008). *An introduction to the New Testament manuscripts and their texts*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sergew Hable-Selassie. (1972). *Ancient and medieval Ethiopian history to 1270*. United Printers.
- The acts of St. Mark (Gädlä Qəddus Marəqos)*. (n.d.). (Unpublished manuscript, Institute of Ethiopian Study [A]).
- The acts of St. Mark (Gädlä Qəddus Marəqos)*. (n.d.). (Unpublished manuscript, Mänbärä Lə'ul St Mark Church [B]).
- The acts of St. Mark (Gädlä Qəddus Marəqos)*. (n.d.). (Unpublished manuscript, Mänbärä Šääba'ot Holy Trinity Cathedral, Addis Ababa [C]).
- The story of Mark (Zena Marəqos)*. (n.d.). (Unpublished manuscript, Däbrä Šäähay St Mark Church, East Goğgam [D]).
- The acts of St. Mark (Gädlä Qəddus Marəqos)*. (n.d.). (Unpublished manuscript, 'Addi Abun Täklä Haymanot, Təgray-Adwa [E]).
- The acts of St. Mark (Gädlä Qəddus Marəqos)*. (n.d.). (Unpublished manuscript, 'Addi Abun Täklä Haymanot, Təgray-Adwa [F]).
- The acts of St. Mark (Gädlä Qəddus Marəqos)*. (n.d.). (Unpublished manuscript, Däbrä Ḥəruyan Sälla Dəngay St Mark Church, Tägülät-North Šäwa [G]).
- Wright, W. (1877). *Catalogue of the Ethiopic manuscripts in the British Museum*. British Museum.
- Zuurmond, R. (1989). *Novum Testamentum Aethiopice: The Synoptic Gospels*. Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.

ABBREVIATIONS

EMML = Ethiopian Manuscript and Microfilm Library

F = folio

CE = Common Era

IES = Institute of Ethiopian studies

Ms/s = Manuscript/s

UNESCO = United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural
Organization