

The transliteration system of the Gə'əz script: A personal memory

by Richard PANKHURST¹

When the University College of Addis Ababa was set up early in the post-Liberation period, Prof. Wolf Leslau came from California, and gave a series of lectures on the Amharic language, in which he argued that there should be a standard system of transliteration, with each Amharic letter having a single English/European equivalent. He showed examples, but I do not believe he proposed any specific system.

When the Institute of Ethiopian Studies was established a few years later (1963), three of us, Stanisław Chojnacki, (the Institute's Chief Librarian), Stephen Wright, an English scholar regarded as an expert in Amharic, and myself, as Institute Director, all agreed that the Institute should have its standard transliteration, particularly for the Library.

Stephen Wright was an expert on Amharic, as well as a former Librarian at the Bodleian Library of Oxford University. He had translated several Amharic texts into English and had been transferred from the National Library of Ethiopia to the Institute as Head of the Amharic Section. Throughout his life he had been collecting books about Ethiopia and had published an important pioneering bibliography of books produced in the country, and later arranged for his personal collection to be divided between the Institute and the National Library. The Institute acquired his collection of books published in Ethiopia and the National Library received his books about the country published abroad.

Stephen Wright favoured the system he explains in the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* Vol. II, No.1, 1964². We had little choice because Stephen Wright was 100 per cent committed to his system, and was threatening to resign if we did not agree to it - and we were acutely short of staff, with piles of books awaiting catalogue cards.

I appointed a committee under the chairmanship of the principal opponent of Stephen Wright's system of transliteration, who was Prof. Rubenson. He argued that the first-form occurred so often that it was inconvenient to base it on a diacritical mark (the *umlaut* [ä]), and advocated instead the system he uses in *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* (London 1976). He had considerable support for this view – partly because people were reluctant to spend hours arguing with him.

¹ Professor, Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES), Addis Ababa University. - As the last one surviving from the main actors in the story, Stanisław Chojnacki, Stephen Wright, Sven Rubenson and myself, I herewith present what I recall from it. I write entirely from memory without access to any records.

² Stephen Wright: „The Transliteration of Amharic“, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* Vol. II, No.1, 1964, p. 1-10.

Stephen Wright remained adamant – and was supported by the Ethiopian librarians, most of whom, admittedly, at that time were not in fact academically qualified to decide on the issue. Those were the days before the Ethiopian linguists Abraham Demoz and Hailu Fulas joined the University.

Rubenson had no librarians to give us – and we could not afford to wait much longer – with many other library problems to face, and Stephen Wright continuing to agitate. So, rightly or wrongly, Chojnacki agreed to support the Stephen Wright system which continued to be used at the Institute for the next half century.

Annex

The Stephen Wright System (from Wright 1964:5-6)

- ሀ, ሐ, ኀ** Since in Amharic all these three are now pronounced the same (and are vulgarly interchangeable) they are represented indifferently as h. In Ge'ez, however, where there are morphological distinctions, and in Tegrañña, which retains differences of pronunciation, the accepted ḥ for ሐ and ḥ for ኀ may be used.
- ለ** l.
- መ** m. The substitution of ሞ for ኝ before ስ is regarded as a normal phenomenon, and where it occurs will be transliterated m. (ሞኝ is rendered mt; an interpolated p is unjustified, even if it is sometimes heard: Tekempt for ጥቅምት, as used by the *Ethiopian Herald*, and similar solecisms, are to be deplored.
- ሰ, ሠ** Both, as s; except that when a distinction is desirable to differentiate between two Ge'ez words ሠ may be rendered ś.
- ረ** r.
- ሻ** š; pronounced like English *sh*, German *sch*, French *ch*.
- ቀ** q, which is more familiar than k. The Tegrañña ቅ is rendered q̇.
- ቦ** b. ሸ v.
- ተ** t.
- ቸ** č; pronounced like English *ch*, German *tsh*.
- ነ** n.
- ኘ** ñ; for the palatalized n the *tilde* is more familiar than the *haček* used with c, s, and z.
- ዐ, አ** Not represented when occurring (as is most usual, at least in Amharic) at the beginning of a word; otherwise both are represented by an apostrophe ('). When it is necessary to differentiate, አ is the "smooth breathing" ('), ዐ the "rough breathing" (').
- ከ** k.
- ኸ** In the first ("ge'ez") form, h; in the other forms (which rarely occur), x (to be pronounced approximately like the Scotch or German *ch*).

ወ	w. ወ as the second vowel of a diphthong is equally represented by w.
ዘ	z.
ዠ	ž; pronounced like s in <i>pleasure</i> or the French j.
የ	y. ዩ as the second vowel of a diphthong is equally represented by y.
ደ	d. The sign ደ, occasionally used for the Galleña "cerebral d", is represented by ð.
ጀ	j. Linguists frequently prefer ĵ for this sound – for which, as a palatalized voiced dental, ð would be more logical – as indeed would ĵ than ċ; in his <i>Semitic Languages of Ethiopia</i> Ullendorff does actually use ĵ and ð. The sounds of g add j are admittedly closely related (not least in English); in Ethiopian languages one may cite the alternative pronunciations and spellings of, <i>inter alia</i> , Amba Alagi (or - ji), Nagran (Najran). Since the letter j is available, however, it seems only reasonable to employ it, and avoid a diacritical mark.
ገ	g.
ጠ	ṭ.
ጨ	ç; palatalized ṭ, forming an "explosive" <i>ch</i> sound.
ጸ	p.
ጸ. ፀ	Both are represented by ṣ, since nowadays they are identical in sound, and usually interchangeable. When a distinction is desirable to differentiate between two Ge'ez words, ፀ may be rendered z.
ፈ	f.
ጥ	p.

The "u-containing gutturals" (ቁ, ገዐ, ከዐ, ገዐ) should ideally be represented by q^w, h^w, k^w, g^w, but the use of a small w in this position may not always be typographically possible; but a full-size w (qw, hw, kw, gw) will be adequate. (Nowadays certain forms of these letters are frequently used in place of the ordinary second and seventh forms of the basic letter; this will be discussed in the section on vocalization which follows.)

The series of letters ሷ, ሸ, ሹ, etc. are regarded for purposes of transliteration as though they were written ልዎ, ሸዎ, ሹዎ, etc. (i. e. lwa, mwa, swa etc.)

Note [by ed.]: This transliteration system became the basis for any future discussions on the transliteration of Ethio-Semitic languages, and was the one adopted by the Institute of Ethiopian Studies. Later several minor changes occurred – even if Wright preferred the *j* [for ጀ], the *ĵ* became also widely used, especially in philological context (such as in the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*). For the spirantized *k* [ḥ], one rather uses now *ḥ* in Ethio-Semitic languages than the *x* (different from what linguists do). Wright opted for the following seven vowels:

1 st [ḥ]	2 nd [ḥ̣]	3 rd [ḥ̣̣]	4 th [ḥ̣̣̣]	5 th [ḥ̣̣̣̣]	6 th [ḥ̣̣̣̣̣]	7 th [ḥ̣̣̣̣̣̣]
'ä	'u	'i	'a	'é	'e	'o

Miscellaneous Articles

This system is still widely practiced in the *Annales d'Éthiopie*, which, however, also allows its authors to use any other system they may prefer. The established practice of the *Institute of Ethiopian Studies*, the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* and most éthiopianists working on philological questions differs slightly, now using the *ä* for the 6th order (despite the fact that in international linguistic practice this sign stands for the *ä* and therefore often leads to misunderstandings among non-Ethiopianists):

1 st [ħ]	2 nd [ħ̣]	3 rd [ħ̣̣]	4 th [ħ̣̣̣]	5 th [ħ̣̣̣̣]	6 th [ħ̣̣̣̣̣]	7 th [ħ̣̣̣̣̣̣]
'ä	'u	'i	'a	'e	'ə	'o

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Global Migration Futures: Developing Scenarios for the Horn of Africa and Yemen – Reflections on the Occasion of a Workshop in Nairobi¹

by Ayla BONFIGLIO, Hein DE HAAS & Simona VEZZOLI²

On April 25-26, 2012, the International Migration Institute (IMI), in collaboration with the Regional Migration Secretariat (RMMS), held a workshop in Nairobi to promote discussions on possible long-term developments in the Horn of Africa and Yemen and to create scenarios for future international migration to, from and within this region in 2030. The workshop is an extension of IMI's Global Migration Futures (GMF) project, which explores possible political, economic, social and technological and environmental changes and their potential effect on international migration. With this workshop, the research team investigated the patterns and drivers of contemporary movement in the Horn of Africa and Yemen, potential future developments of migration, as well as the scale and scope of various protection and assistance mechanisms required for the near and mid-term future.

The GMF project uses the scenario methodology, an innovative approach conventionally used in the business sector that is gaining recognition as a complementary research method. Unlike projections, scenarios are not forecasts of *likely* futures; rather, they are robust narrative representations of *possible* futures within which researchers and policymakers can explore *possible* migration outcomes. By exploring 'potential' futures, the scenario methodology is not solely reliant on data availability and can better address the

¹ The report *Global Migration Futures: Using scenarios to explore future migration in the Horn of Africa and Yemen* provides a more detailed description of the Global Migration Futures project, the scenario methodology and the scenarios on the future of migration in the Horn of Africa and Yemen; see [www.imi.ox.ac.uk/publications].

² Researchers at the International Migration Institute (IMI)'s Global Migration Futures (GMF) project, Nairobi / IMI, University of Oxford, Great Britain.