Basics of Ancient Ethiopic: A Complete Grammar, Workbook, and Lexicon

Archie T. Wright. Basics of Ancient Ethiopic: A Complete Grammar, Workbook, and Lexicon. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2022. 352 pp. $59.99. Softcover. ISBN: 9780310539049.

Basics of Ancient Ethiopic is the latest instalment in Zondervan's Language Basics series, which also includes various Biblical Hebrew resources, as well as Akkadian, Latin, and Biblical Aramaic. Approved instructors can have access to the TextbookPlus+ Instructor Resources on the Zondervan webpage (https://zondervanacademic.com/instructor-resources), which for now includes the Answer Key. *Basics of Ancient Ethiopic* contains 38 chapters, beginning with the alphabet, working its way through nouns and verb-forms, and concluding with the syntax. Each chapter ends with lexicon words to remember and exercises highlighting the grammar component tackled in the chapter as well as lexicon words in context. At the end of the book is the full lexicon, black and white images of Ge'ez manuscripts, an example of an advanced reading exercise, and a bibliography. The book is authored by Archie T. Wright, currently at London School of Theology, and it has a short foreword by Loren T. Stuckenbruck. The volume was conceived amidst an understandable frustration with some of the aspects of the classic introductions to Ancient Ethiopic.

The intended audience of the workbook are students with some background in one or more Semitic languages and those with "special interest in biblical and related studies" (xvii). Students in theological graduate programs will benefit from this volume since it does not, like other Ancient Ethiopic grammars, assume an interest in Semitic linguistics, but rather, an urge to get to the reading of actual texts quickly. The language is accessible and shies away from overly technical explanations. However, it would be difficult for students without any previous knowledge of Semitic languages to approach Ancient Ethiopic from this volume, since the author dispenses with introductory descriptions of Semitic languages in general, the root system, etc. I suspect that students coming to Ancient Ethiopic without any Semitic language are perhaps few and far between, but nevertheless, those coming from, *Koine* Greek, for example, would need an introduction to the structure of Semitic languages before using the workbook.

Unlike the classic workbook in this field, Thomas O. Lambdin's *Introduction to Classical Ethiopic* (Scholars Press, 1978), Wright aims to shift students from reading texts in transliteration to reading texts in Ethiopic script as quickly as possible. One of the major drawbacks of Lambdin is the insistence on only using texts in transliteration, which leads to students finishing the very thorough grammar and exercises only then to realize they are unable to actually read any Ge'ez texts. It is commendable and a true improvement that *Basics of Ancient Ethiopic* increases the accessibility of Ge'ez texts from the start. The grammar is fairly comprehensive and covers many aspects of Ge'ez. It focuses primarily on verb and noun morphology, with syntax confined to a short chapter at the very end. By the end of the workbook, students will be well-equipped to tackle reading Ge'ez texts on their own or advancing to some of the more technical grammars or workbooks. Towards the end of the book, the author includes images of manuscripts without any transliteration or translation (314-325). This offers tremendous training for students to transition into reading not only Ge'ez texts but reading such texts directly from manuscripts, as opposed to the curated letter forms of printed books. The answer key provides suggestions for translations, and one can only imagine the glee when students are able to leap from the workbook's pages and use their new knowledge to translate "real" texts.

Basics of Ancient Ethiopic relies heavily on readers making significant efforts to memorize the alphabet, lexicon, and conjugations (2-3). Each chapter has a short lexicon with new words, as well as translation exercises (from Ge'ez to English). Memorization as a learning tool is not uncommon in most textbooks teaching ancient Semitic languages, and it does have its merits if deployed in a meaningful way. Instructors not keen on memorization as the primary pedagogical tool can still use this workbook, but they should supplement the translation exercises with more activities, reverse translations, etc. The strength of the workbook lies in its accessible language and its move towards reading text from the beginning, and there is significant room for creative instructors to supplement the learnings in each chapter. Whereas Lambdin has 51 chapters (with various subdivisions), Wright's workbook has 38 chapters, making it perhaps more manageable to cover the basic grammar in one academic semester.

The answer key for *Basics* is behind a verified instructor account at Zondervan. That means that Zondervan must verify that a user is an instructor before they can access it—a process that generally takes two business days. It is unclear whether users can gain access as a self-learner, but the current setup seems to unnecessarily prohibit students from having access to the key. As with many workbooks, the further along the students are in the process of learning, the more obvious it is whether a student misuses the key or not. This is an issue of the Zondervan platform itself and not the workbook. The key is a simple PDF with possible translations to the exercises at the end of each chapter. As Wright also remarks, it is important to note that the translations of the texts represent just one option out of many translation choices (key).

The brief lexicon included at the end covers words that appear in the workbook, but it does so only in Ethiopic script and in English translation. That is to say, it does not include transliterations. The small lexicons at the end of each chapter do not have transliterations either. While the goal of the grammar is to teach students to use the script as soon as possible, including transliterations in the lexicon at the end of the book might serve to remember unfamiliar words better.

On the very final page (330), the volume includes a bibliography that is remarkably short. Certainly, it does not contain all the works cited in the body or introduction of the workbook. Its purpose might be to include a bibliography for further exploration (rather than a works cited), but oddly it includes neither a work like Josef Tropper's *Altäthiopisch: Grammatik des Ge'ez mit Übungstexten und Glossar* (Ugarit Verlag, 2002), nor Rebecca Hasselbach-Andee's recent translation and reworking of Tropper. Similarly, other recent works are omitted—my suspicion is that works cited in the foreword have not been included in the final bibliography. Students might be better served by a more comprehensive or thematic bibliography which includes more resources for further study as well as chrestomathies for useful for intermediate level reading.

In summary, I recommend this workbook for purchase. It is an excellent addition to resources already available and will serve to make Ancient Ethiopic—and its varied literature—more approachable to students and teachers alike. Any theological library will benefit from having at least a small collection of resources dedicated to the study of Ethiopic Christianity. *Basics of Ancient Ethiopic: A Complete Grammar, Workbook, and Lexicon* is an excellent tool for setting students on the path to being able to read and translate Ge'ez texts for themselves.

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Sigrid K. Kjær
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