

# The entry word in Ethiopian names

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This article is an attempt to explain the nature of Ethiopian names so that the problem of their cataloguing may be minimized at an early stage.<sup>1</sup>

Although the *Civil Code of the Empire of Ethiopia* (Ethiopia Ministry of Pensions, 1960) says clearly, 'Every individual has a family name, one or more first names and a patronymic', Ethiopia does not yet have a national usage for surnames. The following elements normally form part of an Ethiopian name:

1. Personal name.
2. Father's personal name or given name.
3. Attributes and titles.

A personal name is given at birth, and is used throughout life. A family name, or surname, is generally unknown in Ethiopia, and there are very few Ethiopians who have followed the *Civil Code* and adopted surnames. There are some noble families who sometimes retain names of illustrious grandfathers as a kind of surname. In general, however, a personal name is always followed by the father's personal or given name. For example:

<i>Personal name</i>	<i>Father's personal name</i>
Ermias	Kebreab

Ethiopians may have multiple names, and a given or personal name may consist of two or more elements. For example:

<i>Personal name</i>	<i>Father's personal name</i>
Habte Sellassie	Wolde Mariam

Sometimes the personal name and the father's name may not be sufficient to identify a person. No one seems to follow the *Civil Code*, which states that every individual 'be designated in administrative documents by his family name followed by his first names and by his patronymic'. In fact, government organizations such as the Ministry of Pensions, the Extension Department of the Haile Sellassie I University, etc., add the grandfather's personal name as well. For example:

<i>Personal name</i>	<i>Father's personal name</i>	<i>Grandfather's personal name</i>
Habte Sellassie	Wolde Mariam	Tekle Hawariat

Examples of names which occur as the first element in a two-word personal name are:

Berekete	(e.g. Berekete Ab)
Gebre	(e.g. Gebre Sellassie)

Kifle	(e.g. Kifle Mariam)
Sine	(e.g. Sine Giorgis)

Examples of names which occur as the second element in a two-word personal name are:

Gabriel	(e.g. Haile Gabriel)
Mikael	(e.g. Tesfa Mikael)
Rufael	(e.g. Wolde Rufael)
Work	(e.g. Zenebe Work)

The two elements may be written as one word: Bereketeab, Tesfamikael. Abbreviation of the second or first element in a two-word name (e.g. W. Berhan for Wolde Berhan) sometimes occurs, though not frequently.

Most personal names have some religious significance. For example:

Ab	means	Father (God)
Egziabhier	means	God
Giorgis	means	George (Saint)
Haimanot	means	Faith
Kristos	means	Chris
Merkel	means	Holy Cross
Sellassie	means	Holy Trinity

For anyone who is familiar with the history of Ethiopia, this is not surprising: Christianity was introduced into Ethiopia during the fourth century AD by Frumentius and adopted by King Ezana of Axum. The influence of Christianity is, therefore, reflected in all aspects of the country's social and cultural traditions, including personal or given names.

The third element of an Ethiopian name consists of attributes and titles, which may be indications of royalty, nobility, official titles, honorary titles, religious titles or forms of address. For example:

#### *Forms of address:*

Ato	Mr
Woizerit	Miss
Woizero	Mrs

#### *Religious titles:*

Debtera	Music conductor
Kes	Priest
Melake Selam	Angel of peace

#### *Secular titles (including military):*

Bitwoded
Miktle Yeasir Aleka
Shaleka-Basha

Ato Solomon G. Kristos of the Haile Sellassie I University Library has pointed out that it is essential that authors'

names be romanized and that the peculiar variance in form of entry explained, so as to make Ethiopian literature bibliographically manageable by non-Ethiopians. The Institute of Ethiopian Studies, in its publications and library catalogue, has adopted the transliteration scheme introduced by Stephen Wright in the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* (1964). Other schemes, including that of the Library of Congress, exist. This situation leads to an inconsistency which bibliographers and cataloguers have to resolve through the use of cross-references. As most Ethiopian authors writing in other languages have established romanized names in spellings different from the Wright scheme and the other schemes, cross-references from the established forms must be used.

How do the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR) treat Ethiopian names? There is no special section and Ethiopian cataloguers are disappointed that the AACR provides special rules for names in certain languages such as Arabic, Burmese, Indie, Sikh, Indonesian, Thai, etc., but not Ethiopian. Ethiopian names deserve special rules because of their unique nature, and because of the problems that arise in identifying the form of heading.

AACR provides a general rule, 'Enter under the elements or combination of elements of the name by which the person is best known as determined from reference sources'. However, Ethiopian names in most reference sources are incorrectly treated, as though they were English names: and this treatment is inconsistent. Cataloguers, therefore, cannot expect much guidance from reference sources as far as Ethiopian names are concerned. However, let us try to establish certain basic guidelines by which the entry word in Ethiopian names can be determined. This should be in line with the rationalization of cataloguing rules made by Seymour Lubetzky and the Paris Statement of Principles.

Ethiopian names could be treated in the same way as early Indic names used by authors who flourished prior to the middle of the 19th century (AACR 56). Entry is under the first word of the name in both cases:

Isvara Kaula (Indian)  
Mengistu Lemma (Ethiopian)

The whole heading should always be in this order (i.e. personal name followed by father's name). Since the name is considered to be in the direct order, no punctuation is required. Titles and attributes present no special problems, as AACR could be applied without much difficulty. For example, an Ethiopian orthodox priest, bishop or patriarch could be entered under his Ethiopian name in religion, followed by his title (in italics). Instead of adding the title in English, vernacular words should be used consistently. For example:

Dimetros Gebre Mariam, *Melake Selam*  
Lukas Tewolde, *Abuna*

Similarly, titles of nobility, honour, etc., in the vernacular may be added to the name of the nobleman, etc., when required to distinguish persons with identical names. For example:

Asrata Kassa, *Ras*  
Bulcha Gutema, *Bitwoded*

Titles of royalty present no problems at all. The given name is followed by the appropriate title. For example:

Menelik II, *Atse*  
Mikael, *Negus*

Monarchs usually adopt coronation names when crowned emperors: cross-reference from the old name may, therefore, be necessary.

The entry word for married women deserves special attention. According to the *Civil Code of the Empire of Ethiopia*, 'a married woman shall retain her personal family name. She may, while her marriage lasts, be designated or designate herself by the name of her husband.' In practice, however, Ethiopian women, unlike the majority of other women in the world, do not change their names after marriage. Entry is simply under the given name followed by the father's personal name irrespective of marital status.

The discussion on rules for cataloguing personal names at the International Conference on Cataloguing Principles, Paris 1961, resulted in the decision to choose the entry word as much as possible by agreed usage in the country of which the author is a citizen. The Ethiopian national bibliography produced by the Institute of Ethiopian Studies of the Haile Sellassie I University in its arrangement reflects the basic principles of the Paris Conference and the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, 1967. Ato Solomon G. Kristos of the Haile Sellassie I University also compiled *A decade of Ethiopian language publications* (1971) in which authors' names are given in a transliterated form: arrangement was under the author's given or personal name followed by the father's given name.

Thus, although there is no official cataloguing rule for Ethiopian names in Ethiopia and the rule for the entry word is not yet established, it is safe to assume that librarians in Ethiopia silently agree to the adoption of the given name or first element of the given name as entry word.

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## Note

- 1 Ethiopians sometimes have church names as well; and children may not be fully named until they are older. Many Moslem Ethiopians give their children Arabic names or names derived from Arabic words.

## References

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