

The Role of Catholic Missionaries in the Development of Afan Oromo Written Literature, 1839-1935

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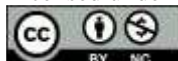
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Abstract: Catholic Missionaries played significant roles in transforming Afan Oromo from oral to written literature. However, these developments and contributions were not well treated in Oromo studies. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to identify and trace the roles the Catholic Missionaries played in the development of written Oromo literature from 1839-1935. For the study, narrative based descriptive research designs and qualitative research approach were employed. Data were collected from both available literature which were produced by the Catholic missionaries and oral sources. Oral sources were obtained from informants who were identified by *darbaa dabarsaa* (snowball method). The collected data were interpreted and analyzed qualitatively based on historical research method. The analysis of the data shows that the scriptures they translated, the Afan Oromo schools they established among the Oromo and Oromo grammars and dictionaries they produced significantly contributed to the development of written Oromo literature. As a result of these efforts, they should have earned a prominent position in the history of written Oromo literature.

Keywords: *Afan* Oromo; Catechism; Marseille; Missionaries; Scripture

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1. Introduction

The catholic missionaries were among those who contributed to the transformation Afan Oromo to written literature. These contributions were the result of the expectation that the missionaries had to speak the mother tongue of the community among whom they were assigned to work. They worked under threatening pressures of the government ongoing which were because of their centuries' long poor relation with Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity and the consecutive policies of Ethiopian government in homogenization.

The purpose of the study is to identify and trace the role played by the Catholic Missionaries in the development of written Oromo literature from 1839-1935. The paper argues that unlike the Protestant Missionaries who worked on *Afan* Oromo literature being outside the Oromo, the Catholic Missionaries insisted and continued their works being among the Oromo with all the risks to be endured. This helped them to open schools that used to teach in *Afan* Oromo and conducted linguistic studies that covered significant parts of the Oromo territories.

Following numerous and arduous attempts, the Catholic Missionaries succeeded in establishing successful contacts with the Oromo at their homeland in 1839. They first encountered challenges and persecutions as a result of Ethiopia's poor relations with Europe, which had been under strict observation since the latter part of the 1800s. After the bad relationship was somewhat improved, they were able to maintain contact with the Oromo people (Alberto and Martinez, 2003). The attempts of a few local Lords¹ to build relationships with the missionaries in order to obtain weapons was what led to the improvement. After this time, a sizable influx of Protestant and Catholic missionaries started to arrive in Ethiopia (Ayale, 2017). Nearly every missionary who arrived in Ethiopia intended to convert the Oromo people (Aren, 1978)

When Catholic missionaries arrived in Ethiopia, they immersed themselves in language study. It was believed that in order to reduce cultural misunderstandings and the gap between the missionaries and their potential converts, they needed to overcome the language barrier. Additionally, they taught the converts in the local tongues, with the idea that their proficiency in these languages would help them comprehend God's Word. In addition to translating and distributing scriptures, they established mission schools and studied the local tongues. The use of local languages also became mandatory with the urgent need for indigenous evangelists, clergy, catechists, translators and other clerks (Pawlikova-Vilhanova, 2011).

In their missionary and linguistic works, societies of large geographical area with large population on favorable location were prioritized (Pawlikova-Vilhanova, 2011). For these reasons, they considered the Oromo to be one among their favorite east African nations. The Oromo inhabited the territories between Tigray in the North, Kenya in the south, and Somalia in the east and Sudan in the west. According to Etefa (2016), they are currently the largest ethnic group in the Horn of Africa. Thus, the Catholic and Protestant missionaries were greatly interested in them because of their number, the large area they occupied, and their location. When they describe Afan Oromo as "harmonious, flexible, and having great plasticity, it seems that, after Arabic, the one that the majority of people in the Dark Continent rely on" (De Salviac, 1901: 13) further bolstered their willingness to acquire and employ Afan Oromo in their missionary endeavors. Consequently, the Catholic missionaries recognized early on the importance of literacy in Afan Oromo for successful and effective evangelization. To establish Afan Oromo as the language of scripture and literacy, they undertook multiple attempts. After learning Afan Oromo, they attempted to write it down and started instructing the others (Tolessa, 2019). Studies in this field, however, have largely ignored the contributions made by Catholics. The majority of studies on *Afan* Oromo literacy have extremely disregarded the Catholic Missionaries' input in favor of portraying Protestant missionaries as the only

¹Some of these regional lords were *Dejach* Wube Hailemariam and Nuguse Haile Michael of Semen and King Sahile Sillasié of Shewa. See Sevn, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* (London: Heinemann, 1976).

contributors. Thus, this paper explores and reconstructs the roles the Catholic missionaries played in the development of written Oromo literature.

2. Research Methods

2.1. Research Design and Approach

Both descriptive based narrative research designs were employed as descriptive based narrative design is a flexible, exploratory approach to qualitative research and narrative design is the best fit approach in the study of historical themes. The method used for the study was qualitative research approach believing that the method is the relevant approach to collect and analyze non-numerical data and helpful to understand experiences, concepts, and opinions. According to Bruce (2001), gathering pertinent texts, images, audio files, surveys, interviews, and field notes is made possible by this method. These are the best tools for historical research. Additionally, rather than requiring participants to select from predetermined answers, the approach allowed them to answer in their own words. It also evokes responses that are meaningful and culturally salient to the participant and even explanatory in nature.

The study utilized materials written in *Afan Oromo* by the Catholics and secondary sources about the efforts of the Catholic missionaries to study *Afan Oromo* within the study periods. Appropriate data were collected through a review of related literature and manuscripts. Documents which were mainly written in English and Amharic on the Catholic Missionaries' relations with the Oromo were carefully examined used. The gaps that were not narrowed by both categories of the documents were filled by interviews from oral information and tradition. Interviews based on oral history filled in the gaps left by the documents' two categories combined. The Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency, Addis Ababa University Institute of Ethiopian Studies, and Catholic institutions designated for this purpose were visited in order to gather relevant secondary and archival data for the written texts. For oral information and tradition, informants who had rich knowledge on the issues were carefully identified through *darbaa dabarsaa* (snowball) method and interviewed.

2.2. Description of the Study Area

The study focuses on the Oromo inhabited areas where the Catholic Missionaries conducted linguistic studies of *Afan Oromo*, and opened missionary centers and schools. The present-day sites of Horroo-Guduruu Wallaggaa, East Wallaggaa, Finfinnee and its Environs and East Harargee were among these areas. Consequently, the study focused on these areas and investigated what the Catholic Missionaries did in relation to *Afan Oromo* (Alberto, 2013).

The study takes the year 1839 as the beginning landmark as it was when d'Hericourt published his *Afan Oromo* studies in Shewa in the journal of his *Voyage in Abyssinia*. In addition, it was the time when the Catholic Missionaries and the Oromo began making meaningful contacts. The year 1935 marks the end period of the study as it was when Italy invaded Ethiopia and diverted Missionary works from religious engagements to colonial activities.

2.3. Data Sources and Types

To produce this manuscript, data were collected from secondary and primary sources beginning from the year 2000. The sources were materials written in *Afan Oromo* by the Catholics, travelers' accounts, secondary literature and oral data. Materials written in *Afan Oromo* by the Catholics help to learn and understand the type of materials they produced, the quality of the works, the way they represented Oromo sounds and the type of the script they used. Travelers' accounts, especially by the Catholic Missionaries, provide how the missionaries approached the study, the challenges they encountered, the schools they established and the success they achieved in relation to Oromo missions. The study also benefitted from secondary literature and oral data to comprehend and give a historical picture to the study. In order to understand and provide a historical context for the research, secondary literature and oral data were also beneficial.

2.4. Method of Data Analysis

The data gathered from Diversey sources were thoroughly examined, analyzed and synthesized qualitatively. In the study, the researcher relied on materials produced by Catholic missionaries in *Afan Oromo* during the period under study. The obtained data were critically examined, compared, contrasted and crosschecked against one another, and the researcher found that most of them were complements to each other. In the course of analysis, the grand narrative was used based on chronology as it helps to understand and explain the changes the Catholic Missionaries brought to the development of written Oromoo literature.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. The Roles of Catholic Evangelizers and their Converts in the Studies of *Afan Oromo*

The advent of Catholic Missionaries to Ethiopia is traced back to 1557 when the first Jesuit missionary arrived in Ethiopia (Ayale, 2017). However, their meaningful efforts in the Oromo literacy started in 1839. Almost all the Catholic Missionaries who came to the Oromo made mastery of *Afan Oromo* their compulsory believing that it would help them to win over large number of Oromo converts. This made *Afan Oromo* one of the most beneficiaries from the missionaries' strategy of "Transforming Africa by the Africans" (Tolessa, 2019). "Transforming Africa by the Africans" using local languages effectively and actively was the strategy advocated in the conversion of 'non-believers' (Pawlikova-Vilhanova, 2011: 254). It was this conviction that brought *Afan Oromo* to the focus of Catholic Missionaries endeavors.

3.2. Catholic Missionaries' Linguistic Studies of *Afan Oromo*

As the best way to start their missionary activities, the Catholic missionaries gave more priority to linguistic studies of *Afan Oromo* than to the translation of scriptures. They believed that it was the mastery of the linguistic proficiency that could facilitate translation projects. They thought that becoming proficient in a language could help with translation work. Fr. Luigi Mountuori, a Lazarist Catholic missionary who traveled to Ethiopia with Msgr. Giustino Jacob, announced in a letter to Propaganda Fide in 1839 that he intended to study *Afan Oromo* from Oromo in Gondar because of this (Crummey, 1967). He justified his plan that mastery of *Afan Oromo* would help him to proclaim God's kingdom among the Oromo. However, he entered into religious disagreement with *Abba Salama* (Ethiopian Orthodox Bishop) and was forced to discontinue his plan in 1842. Persisting to the plan Montuorim came back to Shawa in 1845 to work among the Oromo under the protection of King *Sahila Sillasie* (Grandfather of Emperor Menilek II). He again remained unsuccessful and abandoned the mission in 1848 (Poole, 1995). This affected the early attempts of the Catholic Missionaries to promote *Afan Oromo* to written language.

Similarly, Rochet d'Hericourt, another French Catholic Lazarist and envoy of Louis Philippe to *Sahla Sillasie*, took the study of *Afan Oromo* as the best mechanism to master the entire Africa in the evangelization process. On his arrival in Shewa in 1839, Hericourt did not waste time to start the study of *Afan Oromo*. In his study, he collected about seven hundred Oromo words and he categorized them into pronouns, common nouns, possessive pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, and location phrases. He explained the functions of each word categories in French. The transcription employed the Latin alphabet for the letters, excluding the geminate and long Oromo sounds. The collection was published on the final thirty-three pages of his travelogue, *Travels in Abyssinia* (d'Hericourt, 1841). Here are the specimens:

| | |
|------------------------|----------------|
| Brouillard. | Hourri. |
| Buffle. | Gafarssa. |
| Café. | Kaha. |
| Café en grain. | Bouna. |
| Caillou. | Báltchi. |
| Canard. | Dahie. |
| Caractère. | Amala. |
| Ceinture. | Sabbata. |
| Cendre. | Dara ramatchi. |
| Cerf. | Bessonou. |

Rochet d'Hericourt, (1841), *Voyage Dans Royaume De Chowa. Paris: Imperimerie Bouchard-Huzard*, p.401.

Another group of French scientific mission who were sent to Ethiopia by King Louis Philippe in 1839 made the study of *Afan Oromo* parts of their projects in Ethiopia. They gathered roughly one thousand Oromo terminologies from different Oromo inhabited areas. There were four hundred verbs and six hundred nouns in the collections. The piece was included in their *Voyage en Abyssinie* in 1845, published in sixteen pages (Lefebvre, 1945).

Among the members of this scientific mission, Antoine D'Abbadie was the most remembered in Oromo studies. Unlike other members of his group who remained in Shewa, D'Abbadie crossed *Abay* River (Blue Nile) in 1843 and continued to study the Oromo south to *Abay* River (D'Abbadie, 2007; Hassen, 2007). He undertook linguistic, ethnographic and geographic studies. He collected locally written books and manuscripts (Hassen, 2007). He committed his life to studying geography, linguistics, and ethnography. He gathered manuscripts and books written in the area (Hassen, 2007). One of his collections is a letter dated 1840 that was written to Dajjazmach Gosh of Gojjam in the *Afan Oromo*. The letter was written in an as-yet-undeciphered new orthography. The correspondence, along with its simultaneous Arabic and English translations, was released in volume seven of the *Bulletin of the French Geographical Society*, 1841 (Rubenson, 1987). But as Hassen (2007) notes, his writings stimulated researchers in Europe across a range of disciplines, leading numerous visitors to Ethiopia to concentrate on the study of the Oromo. Nevertheless, with the founding of the Apostolic Vicariate [Oromo] in France on April 12, 1846, Catholic efforts in *Afan Oromo* studies made significant strides. On May 12, 1846, the Vicariate nominated Guglielmo Massai, the first Oromo Vicar Apostolic (known among the Oromo as *Abbaa Massaja*). *Abba Massaja* overcame every obstacle he faced en route to reach the Oromo in 1852, having been nominated for over six years.² *Abba Massaja* has been actively engaged in *Afan Oromo* studies since his arrival, concurrently with the creation of Catholic centres. He founded Catholic centres in *Limmuu Saqaa* in 1854, *Geeraa* in 1859, *Asandaaboo* of *Guduruu*, and *Lagamaraa* in *Wallaggaa* in 1852 and 1855 (Alberto, 2013). He taught and converted many Oromo children while studying *Afan Oromo* in these centres. *Rafael* and *Stephen*, two of the converted Oromo boys, were chosen as standout students and travelled with *Massaja* to *Marseilles* to attend *St. Michael Oromo College* (Alberto, 2013). These initiatives helped to elevate *Afan Oromo* to the status of a literary language.

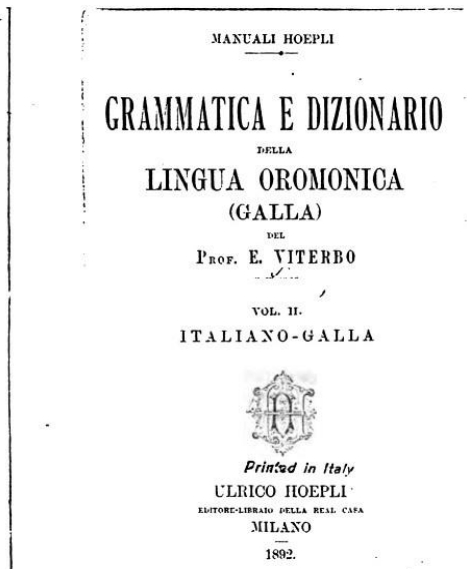
² The difficulty was that Missionaries were seen as infiltrators of the country's sovereignty since their bloody war of seventh century with Ethiopian Orthodox Christians at Gondar. Foreigners' passage to Oromo country was also seen as competition over territorial occupation as the Abyssinians did have future plan to occupy the Oromo. See Holcomb and Ibssa (1990), *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa* (Trenton: New Jersey: Red Sea Press).

The Catholic Missionaries also undertook the translation of scriptures into *Afan Oromo* (IES MS 5453). A translation of the catechism in Afan Oromo, titled *Katakisimoo: Barsiisaa Nama Kirstaana Biyya Oromoo Jedheeti (Catechism: The Christian Learning in Oromo)*, was published in Paris in 1853, a year after the arrival of Abba Massaja in Asandaaboo. The author of the translation was actually Abbaa Jacobis (Jacobis, 1853) and not Abbaa Massaja (Jacobis, 1853). The book's title implies that it was written to teach the Oromo people about Catholic Christianity. The book was written in Latin scripts and contained 35 pages. The book's introduction gives brief description in English on the pronunciation of Oromo sounds. The Oromo sounds that are not present in Latin sounds are represented by the author using diacritical marks on or beneath the letters. The way he represented the geminated and long sounds of Afan Oromo did not make it difficult for native Oromo speakers to read them accurately, even though he was unaware of their existence. This was one of the earliest attempted translations being among the Oromo and pulled *Afan Oromo* to literary language.

In addition to the Afan Oromo catechism they published in 1853, Abba Massaja also published an *Afan Oromo-Amharic Grammar* in 1867 (Massaja, 1867). According to the inside cover of the book, he was Abba Massaja who wrote the grammar. The Paris-based Imperial Printing Press was in charge of the publication. Compared to the catechism, this grammar was written in a slightly more complex manner. It appears that the grammar was the result of a comparison of Afan Oromo, Amharic, and Italian. However, although Afan Oromo and Amharic were the subject of the study, explanation in Italian dominated the book. The writer did not use the same alphabet for writing Afan Oromo and Amharic. He used Latin for Afan Oromo and Geeze for Amharic, but he did not explain why. The way the grammar was put together makes us think that the goal of this work was to give the white missionaries who would be working among the Oromo a foundational understanding of Afan Oromo. Nevertheless, the names of their Oromo assistants, without whom they could not have arranged such literary works, were absent from both the catechism and the grammar (Jacobis, 1853).

Since Abba Jacob's translation in 1853, Catholics have translated the catechism multiple times, albeit with a few changes. Father Massaj is credited with translating the Afan Oromo catechism's second version in 1867. The third version was translated by Mgr. Cahagne who made it first available at the Carcassonne Bonnafus printer in 1880 (Cagahgne, 1880). There are forty-one pages in it. It starts out with a six-page introduction, just like Abba Jacobi. The author instructs the reader on how to read Oromo in the opening section. The remaining portions teach Christian life principles, how to confess sin, and how to pray. Nonetheless, the translation of this catechism is not more than modification of Mgr. Massaja's translation in 1867 (Massaja, 1867).

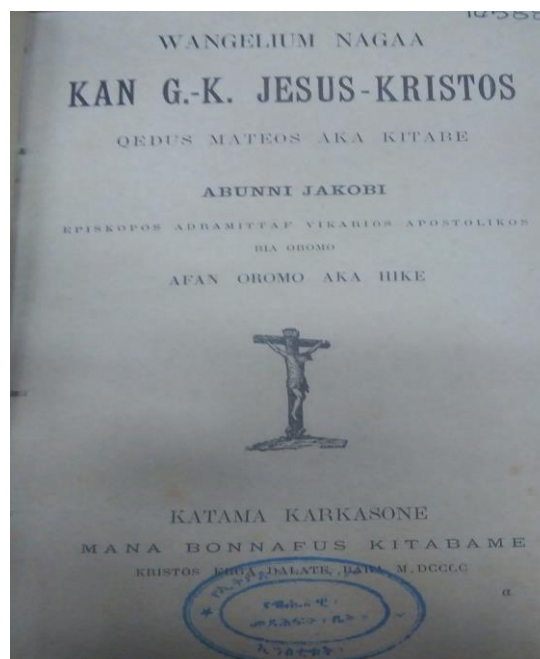
Another Catholics by the name Ettore Veterbo published a grammar entitled *Grammatica Della Lingua Oromonica in Ermann* in 1887 (Viterbo, 1892). He was an Italian linguist and missionary. The grammar comprises 397 pages, with a significant portion allotted to explanations in Italian. The first 100 pages were devoted to Oromo grammar, with Oromo-Italian and Italo-Oromo dictionaries appearing on pages 103-266 and 267-397, respectively. The remaining pages were devoted to kaficho, Yem, and grammar from other southern countries. In his grammar, Viterbo said that the goal of his bilingual vocabulary (Italian-Oromo and Oromo-Italian) was to make two-way translations easier for the benefit of both Italian and Oromo speakers. Oromo words, phrases, and sentences were written in Latin in the book:



Ettore Viterbo (1892), *Grammatica Della Lingua Oromonica in Ermanno*. Milano:Ulrico Hoepli.

Similar to this, a German missionary and linguist, Franz Praetorius, published *Zur Grammatica der [Oromo]Sprache* in 1893 at Berlin. Praetorius used Geez script to write the Oromo words, phrases, and sentences that he used as examples in his 310 pages of German Oromo grammar.

The translation of Catholic missionaries into Afan Oromo was the Gospel of St. Mathew in 1900 (Jacobi, 1900). The printing house of Bonnafus released the translation in 1900. It is said that it was translated by an Oromo Catholic convert by the name of Hailu. However, once more, the title pages of the translation bear the name Abbaa Jacob. Abba Jacob repeatedly appeared as author of the books translated by the Catholics even on the books after his death. However, the reason why he was used as author of several books without his contribution was not stated. The book contains one to twenty-seven chapters of the Gospel and 133 pages. Interpretations of the idioms in Gospel were given in Footnotes. See the title page of the book:



Abunni Jakobi (1900), *Wangelium: Kan G.K. Jesus- Kristos, Qedus Mateos Akka Kitabe: Karkasone*

Another portion of the scripture they translated in the same year was *Raga Motuma Waqa: Kristosittif Lafarra Motuma Ufi Aka Dabe* means *Kingdom of God, Established on Earth* (Jacobi, 1900). The book states the translator was Abunni Jacob. In the 1920s, however, the works of Catholic Missionaries became more of linguistic than scriptures. The purpose was to make Afan Oromo ready for Biblical use. This was not, in fact, the only piece produced during this time. Based on this, André Jarosseau published Afan Oromo grammar the *Notions Grammaticales sur la Langue [Oromo]* at Dirre-Dhowaa Printing Press in 1922. Significant number of manuscripts in Afan Oromo had been produced which were published volumes during the Italian occupation as Italy planned to use Afan Oromo as one of the primary languages in her colonial policy of East Africa.

Nevertheless, the books have problems with accurately representation of Oromo sounds, which created difficult not only to non-native students but also to the native speakers themselves. Otherwise, the translators of the book had a concept of Oromo words that are long or geminated as they tried to indicate in their publications. For long and germinative Oromo sounds, the translators tried to use diacritical symbols. However, in the diacritical representations, the translator did not set the rules of the transliteration system which again created difficulty to determine which symbol is used for stressed and which for long sounds.

3.3. The Role of Catholic Schools in the Development of Written Oromo Literature

Almost in all Catholic Missionary Stations established among the Oromo, there were schools (Tolessa, 2019; Informants: Balcha Deenta, Gammada Tucho, Kuma Eda'e and Rashid Buba) as they regarded education as an essential part of their missionary activities. The relationship between school and church was close. Schooling was useful way of converting people. The school teachers and the "catechists" were almost the same and their duty was dual. In the morning and in the evening, they led Christian sermon (Informants: Ejeta Tolasa, Tasgara Hirpho, Mahd Mude and Kuma). At day for several hours, they conducted school for the pupils. This was because they believed that conversion should be made by the native clergies in a local language. The schools were made to use local languages actively and effectively (Carpenter, 1960). This gave rise to the development of written Oromo literature. The publication of text materials in Afan Oromo made the teaching- learning process highly attractive (Tolessa, 2019).

It was with this strategy that the Catholics operated their missionary activities among the Oromo. Almost at all Catholic centers among the Oromo, there were elementary schools although many of them were rudimentary (Informants: Ejeta Tolasa, Tasgara Hirpho, Mahd and Banja). The Oromo who earned the opportunity to join these missionary schools became eager pupils and proved their hunger for education. The coincidence of the Oromo thirsty of education and the Catholic Missionary's desire to spread gospel among them increased the focuses of major Catholic Missionary institutions on the Oromo. However, among them the French Capuchin Mission continued to be much influential (De Salviac, 2005).

The French Capuchin Mission took over the Oromo mission on January 8, 1863 (De Salviac, 2005). Then after, they began aggressively working on it and established additional Catholic mission centers all of which were escorted with rudimentary elementary schools. These were stations of Liche Fikir Gibbii and Finfinnee, all of which were in Shawa. The stations in Hararge were St. Francis' Station in Bilaaluu, St. Joseph's Station in Laaftoo Karaa Miillee, St. Peter's Station in Surree, St. Michael's Station in Awalle (Alberto, 2013).

Among these schools, it was St. Michael [Oromo] College at Marseille that contributed significantly to the development of written Oromo literature. The college was established in France in April 1866. The influential person for the establishment of the school was Abba Massaja. Abba Massaja worked hard for the realization of the establishment of a college as he was in a critical need to get the place where Oromo children could be taught and became evangelists. He closely worked with the French capuchin mission and realized the establishment of the school in April 1866 (De Salviac, 1901).

The primary objective of the school, at that time, was to educate seminary students who intended to become priests for the children of the wider community around the centers and for the growing Christian communities among the Oromo. At St. Michael College, Massaja educated and Christianised Oromo students who were redeemed from slavery. Even though they intended to teach roughly twenty-five Oromo pupils at the biggining, the students were unable to withstand the harsh European climate. Consequently, the school was forced to teach only nineteen students, ten of whom completed their education in the first two years. The graduates were expected to translate scriptures into Afan Oromo while undertaking missionary works among the Oromo. Thus, the establishment of the college was a major contributor to the study of Afan Oromo. They were the same students who later worked on Oromo literature and helped the catholic masters in teaching Afan Oromo. However, the college was closed on 10 June 1870 due to the susceptibility of the Oromo children to European harsh climate, the death of some of them, and the necessity to establish an indigenous college among the Oromo (De Salviac, 1901).

Following the closing of Marseille St. Michael Oromo College, the French Capuchin Mission established another Oromo College at Piazza in Addis Ababa in 1973. The college was supposed to be a continuation of St. Michael Oromo College. The surviving students from the college of Marseille joined with the newly recruited Oromo children at the school and carried out missionary works at the station in Afan Oromo. Joseph, Francis, Johannes and Paulus, who were among the students from St. Michael Oromo College, were made responsible to conduct the work of recruitments and evangelism in addition to preaching in Afan Oromo (Alberto, 2003; Mahoney and Smidt, 2003).

The college redeemed many Oromo children from slavery to become literate through their education. Many of them were educated and were able to read, write and preach in Afan Oromo. The college educated these Oromo children and given the opportunity to read, write, and preach in Afan Oromo. In addition, they worked as authors and foreign assistants (informants: Imiru Gebre, Balcha Denta, Rashid Buba, and Ahmad Mohammed). They also played significant roles in the production and translation of Oromo literature. As a result, the station became a hub for the production of religious texts and linguistic studies in Afan Oromo, as well as for the literacy of Oromo children. One of the college's instructors, Fr. Tuarin, oversaw the preparation of religious texts in the Oromo language for use in the church and in teaching (Ficquet, 2003).

The station ran smoothly until the Liche Agreement forced the school's closure in 1878. Fr. Massaja was the first victim. Massaja was banished from Ethiopia following thirty years of evangelical activities and Oromo language study (Beyene, 2003). The mission of the Birbirsaa mission station and Oromo college was subsequently abandoned. All Catholics were banished from the nation, and their educated Oromo converts were offered the choice to become Orthodox Christians or leave the country. In light of this, some of the Oromo who had been converted from Catholicism to Orthodoxy, while others went to Harar with other European immigrants (Alberto, 2013). Even ten pupils went on to become Catholic priests. The students and the teachers of all the Catholic schools insistently worked on Oromo literacy in order to make the mission closest to the Oromo (Alberto, 1998).

The Catholic Church did not, however, give up on its mission to reach the Oromo in response to the decree expelling the Catholics. Mgr took over as chairman. Following Massaja's resignation on October 3, 1879, Tuarin Cahagne became the second Vicar Apostolic [Oromo] and in 1881 he proposed an alternative route into Oromo territory. He made the decision to go through Zeila and re-establish his own headquarters in Harar. The selection of Harar was predicated on the notion that the region was then occupied by the Egyptians and outside of Emperor Yohannis IV's domain (Alberto, 1998).

The Catholics faced difficulties in their endeavour, even though they believed that the Egyptian occupation of Harar was the best course of action for greater success. As part of their efforts to convert the Oromo to Islam, the Egyptians drove out the Catholics and opposed their attempts to Christianize the region (sources: Mahd, Ibrahim, Rashid, Kuma, and Musa). Twelve Oromo boys who were in training were among the Catholic missionaries that the Sultan of the Islamic State of Harar

expelled in 1886 (Eshete, IES, MS 2336). Along with limiting Oromo education opportunities and efforts to transfer Afan Oromo from oral to written form, the expulsion of Catholics from the area also hindered the growth of the Catholic faith.

The total expulsion of the missionaries' activities was lessened because of the surrounding Oromo. The Oromo preferred the missionaries to the Egyptian sultans as the missionaries were eager to learn *Afan Oromo* and made exclusive efforts to communicate in it. Because of this, the Oromos and their leaders greeted them warmly and provided them with a home until they were conquered by expansionist forces of Emperor Menilek II in 1887. Following Menilek's takeover of Harar, issues with the Italian design created an additional barrier to the work of Catholic missionaries, as the Catholics were thought to be Italian spies operating in Ethiopia (sources: Mahd, Ibrahim, Rashid, Kuma, and Musa).

The Catholic missionaries persisted in their efforts to evangelize the Oromo and translate books into Afan Oromo in spite of these difficulties and roadblocks. They persisted in seizing every chance to spread their religion and teach the Oromo the fundamentals of literacy. They continued to study and impart knowledge in Afan Oromo without ever stopping. André Jarosseau, who enlisted in the Oromo missionaries in 1882, is one such example. It was said that he was extremely worried about how his vicariate was progressing. Because he thought that schools were the most efficient way to try to convert the unbelievers, his desire to establish schools among the Oromo and his thorough study of Afan Oromo helped the development of Afan Oromo into written literature (Alberto, 2013; Informants: Mahd, Ibrahim, Tasgara, Werkenesh, Banja and Moses). He was convinced that one of the best ways to try to convert the unbelievers is through schools, which is why he wanted to start schools among the Oromo and studied Afan Oromo in great detail. Upon his resignation as vicar apostolic among the Oromo, there were 13,870 in the vicarate (Alberto, 2013).

Together with Msgr Taurin Cahagne, Msgr Jarosseau expanded missionary work and established different centers of education between October 1897 and March 1898. They erected the first minor Seminary at Laftoo Karaa Millee in Hararge and founded a new mission station of Minne located in Arsi. The first batch of students for the minor Seminary was recruited from the Catholic School of Harar and other mission schools in the Vicariate. These seminaries were well-functioning until Ras Taferi contention for power against *Liji Iyasu* between 1915 and 1916 during which all Catholic stations in the country were closed down (Informants: Rashid, Musa, Mahd, and Ibrahim). He also founded other modern school in Dirre Dhowaa in 1901. Most of the pioneer students were Muslim in origin. In 1904 Mgr Jarosseau founded a major Seminar in Harar. By 1918, the major Seminary had a good number of local priests. In 1930, the number of the diocesan priests of Harar ordained by Jarosseau reached fifteen. In 1934, the total number of diocesans was twenty-nine (Alberto, 2013). Msgr. Jarosseau was able to re-establish the Minor Seminary at Dobba in 1925 which was later shifted to Harar. Until Ras Taferi's power struggle against Liji Iyas in 1915–1916, when all Catholic stations nationwide were closed, these seminaries operated effectively (informants: Rashid, Musa, Mahd, and Ibrahim). The Italians overtook the schools and used to teaching in Afan Oromo to collect support for their colonial policy. Thus, the centers of St. Michael's Station in Awalle, St. Peter's Station in Surree, St. Joseph's Station in Laaftoo Karaa Miillee, St. Francis' Station in Bilaaluu, and the Dirree Dhowaa station- all had *Afan Oromo* literacy schools (Alberto, 2013).

Nonetheless, a large number of educated Oromos were also produced by Catholic efforts to educate the natives, primarily for the purpose of easier conversion; some of these individuals went on to be ordained as priests. Eleven Oromo children were ordained to the priesthood between 1852 and 1899. The following Oromo graduates of the Catholic Church: Abbaa Hailu Michael, Abbaa Fissaha, Abbaa Yohannes, Abbaa Paulos, Abbaa Yaicob, Abbaa Matewos, Abbaa Luqas, Abbaa Sahla, Abbaa Tekle Tsion, Abbaa Gebre Mikael, and Abbaa Elias (Alberto, 20). The most challenging task, though, is determining the ethnic origin of the natives who received their education from Catholic schools because it was common practice for Catholics to destroy any evidence of their African converts, including their names. They have deliberately removed even the hint that reveals their family identity.

In particular, they never left convert whose names were Oromo. Instead, they soon gave them names that were distinctly Catholic. As a result, it has proven challenging to trace down or distinguish converted natives from their European counterparts by name unless the numerous sources they interacted with are mentioned.

3.4. Catholic Printing Presses and the Development of Written Oromo Literature

In 1901, Catholic missionaries established a printing house in Harar with the goal of providing the Oromo people with more published materials in Afan Oromo. It was the fifth printing press in Ethiopia. Marie Bernard transferred it from Harar to Dirre-Dhowaa in 1908. The main reason was to support the Oromo mission both in material and finance (IES MS 1116; IES MS 1404/09; Informants: Rashid, Musa, Mahd, and Ibrahim). However, the press was transferred to Dirre Dhowaa under the directorship of Fr. Marie Bernard in 1908 (Gupta, 1994). The transfer was for better facilities in railway and roads. The primary goal of starting a printing press was to provide materials written in Afan to the native converts living in the Catholic centres of Harar, Dobba, Laftoo Karaa Millee, Laftoo Goobbaa, and Ciroo (Gupta, 1994).

The pressing press facilitated information dissemination much easier than the earlier efforts of writing by hand. Numerous pedagogical, liturgical, catechetical, and devotional books have been published by it for use in religious activities in the Apostolic Vicariate of the Oromo nation. The printing press made it possible to distribute religious texts and standardized educational curricula over long distances more quickly than in the past. Growth made it easier for education to spread and improve, which in turn produced a populace that could read and write (Tolessa, 2019; informants: Rashid, Musa, Mahd, and Ibrahim).

The invention of the printing press was crucial to the growth of written Afan Oromo. It made the arduous process of getting their writings published in Europe easier for the missionaries. With a printing press at their disposal, missionaries were able to publish their writings with ease. Because Afan Oromo was the missionary's primary focus, it proved to be the most useful language. Since 1907, nearly all writings in Afan Oromo produced by Catholic missionaries have been printed. It was acknowledged that the press produced grammars, dictionaries, and religious texts in Afan Oromo (Tolessa, 2019). Among them is the *Dizionario della Lingua [Oromo]*, which is frequently cited as the best work.

In the meantime, the printing press was challenged as Marie Bernard went to France in 1914 to serve his country in the First World War. Yet, by substituting Father Leopold attempts were made to sustain the continuity of the printing press center. This made the printing press to function well until it was overtaken by the Italian administration in 1936 for the production of materials for the colonial administration of Italian occupation.

4. Conclusions

The challenges the Catholic faced in their Oromo missionaries were tough. However, by withstanding, they were said to have laid a solid foundation for written Oromo literature as their works focused on producing outstanding linguists and best translators. They did this by spending precious hours preparing grammars, vocabularies, and dictionaries in Afan Oromo. They embarked on collecting Oromo words, studying grammar and undertaking translations parallel to the establishment of educational centers in their stations. For these, Catholic studies of Afan Oromo were more significant in the study of grammar and dictionaries than scripture translations. The Catholics held the view that it is linguistic work than scriptures' translation that aided the missionaries in learning the local language. It also believed that linguistic works help the converts in how to read and write the language to promote the Christian messages with greater precision. Above all, their role in studying and converting Afan Oromo into written language was remarkably high.

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List of Informants

| No. | Name | Age | Place and date of interview | Remarks |
|-----|------------------|-----|---|--|
| 1 | Ahmad Mohammed | 72 | Ijaajjii (West Shawa), 2 May, 2016 G.C | He was well known informant in relation to Oromo literacy. |
| 2 | Balcha Danta | 97 | Dambi Dollo, 12/01/2001 G.C | He had well enriched knowledge on the issues as Demb Dollo is one of the areas which had earliest contacts with the Catholics and also as he was one of the <i>Afan Oromo</i> journalists during Italian occupation of Ethiopia. |
| 3 | Banja Ruda | 99 | Dabbasoo (West Wallagga), March 20, 2017 | He has contacts with the catholic missionaries and enriched knowledge on the history of the Catholics among the Oromo. |
| 4 | Ejeta Tolessa | 77 | Naqamtee, March 5, 2008; January 13, 2017 | He has enriched knowledge on religious history of the Oromo |
| 5 | Gammada Tucho | 76 | Naqamtee, August 10, 2008; February 13, 2016 | He was Emperor Haile Sillasié's colonel and did a lot of investigation in relation to catholic religious controversies and developed good knowledge on the Catholic history among the Oromo |
| 6 | Imiru Gebre | 93 | Naqamtee, September 14, 2009 and February 14, 2017 | He was one Catholic students during Italian occupation of Ethiopia and narrator of Catholic history among the Oromo |
| 7 | Ibrahin Haji Ali | 65 | Addis Ababa, August 26, 2008; October 26, 2016 and January 19, 2017 | He was one the Oromo referred to by many scholars as encyclopedia of Oromo history; especially in reference to the development of written <i>Afan Oromo</i> . |
| 7 | Kuma Eda'e | 65 | Dukam, April 22, 2008 | He was one of the early journalists of <i>Afan Oromo</i> Radio who conducted a lot of interviews on Oromo literacy. |
| 8 | Mahd Hamd | 60 | Addis Ababa, August 27, /2008 | He had collected several documents on Oromo literacy and even wrote several books in <i>Afan Oromo</i> . He was one the best knowledgeable informants on the history of Oromo literacy. |
| 9 | Musa Ahmad | 77 | Dirre-Dhowaa, July 18, 2008 | He had well accumulated knowledge on the activities of |

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|----|-------------------|----|--|---|
| 10 | Rashid Buba | 90 | Dirre-Dhowaa, July 18, 2008; December 15, 2017 | Catholic missionaries in Harar. He had well accumulated knowledge on the activities of Catholic missionaries in Harar |
| 11 | Tasgera Hirpho | 60 | Finfine;17 January 2008 | He has amicable knowledge on the relationships between missionaries' religious activities and Oromo literacies. |
| 12 | Werkenesh Badhane | 98 | Naqamtee, February 6, 2008 | She was active participant in administrative activities of Wallaggaa during emperor Haile Silasie's reign, and as a result she was the best narrator on the issues she encountered in relation to Oromo literacy. |
