
**‘ZäSutuel Qəne’: an Earliest Genre of Gəəz Poetic Tradition in Ethiopia.
Mnemohistorical Comparative Perspective**

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Abstract

This study is part of an ongoing broader interdisciplinary research. It is mainly inspired by the latest paradigmatic and theoretical positions in cultural memory studies. The aim of the study is to explore, locate and describe the earliest genre form of the widely popular poetic tradition that is unique to Ethiopia, ‘Qəne’, from a mnemohistorical comparative vantage point. The study adopted a blend of two methodological approaches, namely ‘*multi-level interdiscursive network analysis*’ which is popular in cultural memory studies, and the ‘*Historical-Comparative (H-C) approach*’ developed by Neumann in 2007 for similar research contexts in the social sciences, to address the comparative interest of the study. Hence, the study identified that ‘ZäSutuel Qəne [poetry], ሀሱቲኤል ቅኔ’ is *not only* the earliest of all Gəəz Qəne poetic traditions known so far in Ethiopia, but unique in its form, especially its earliest version. This poetic form is named after its originator, a religious scholar called ZäSutuel (by his Christian name), or Andrim or Dəhrim (by his Common name). The study also found out that this ancient poetic practice had passed through three developmental stages that could be chronologically and syntagmatically differentiated. The earliest form of ‘ZäSutuel Qəne’ is the shortest of all, having ‘*single-tonal*’ unique feature when it is read or said. This earliest generic form of Qəne is followed by the ‘*prosodic*’ type of ‘ጉጉ ቅኔ, Gut Qəne’ which is relatively longer, but does not state a complete thought. Finally evolved the ‘ጌማዊ ቅኔ *hymnal qəne*’ version, which is almost similar to the Yaredian hymnal qəne poetic forms that are handed down to the current generation through the church. All the three Qəne poems presented and analyzed in the study belong to the first ‘*single-tonal*’ type and they do have huge mnemonic significance towards understanding the societal context they are representing.

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1. Introduction

To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul.

Simone Weil, *the Need for Roots*

The historical root of every domain of cultural civilization in Ethiopian is highly intertwined with the philosophies, teachings, and practices of the two historically dominant religions that coexisted in the nation for ages, the Orthodox *Tāwahədo* and Islam religions. This is partly due to the fact that “traditionally, the church and the mosque were the institutions that provide education long before the introduction of modern schools in Ethiopia”, (Gadgil 1993:13-14). Ayele’s next account for instance pinpoint the practical leading role that the Orthodox *Tāwahədo* church played for the establishment of indigenous education system in the nation:

In the ancient Ethiopian education system, by the time a child was seven year old, he would have read *the songs of David (Psalms)* seven times. At eight, he would have started the [*Dəggʷa*] (Verse) Studies, followed by *Tsomä* [*Dəggʷa*] (Advanced Verse). At the age of 12, he would have completed his first level schooling and graduated or been promoted to the second level of learning. At the second level, the student would choose from among the five major fields of study: ቅኔ [*Qəne*], ቅዳሴ [*Qədase*], ዋዜማ [*Wazema*], ትርጉም [*Təragum*], and ሰዋሰዉ [*Səwasəwu*] (Ayele 1997:108).

Among the above mentioned ‘five major fields’ of studies that have been delivered by the Orthodox *Tāwahədo* church, *Qəne* poetry is the particular interest of current study. Regarding the specific time when *Qəne* teaching was started, evidences indicate that independent schools were established to it around the 14th century. The schools are often called ‘ቅኔ ጉባኤ ቤተኛ፣ *Qəne Gubae Betočə*. The three earliest prestigious *Qəne* schools in Ethiopia that are still functional include: *Wadəla* in Lasta, *Gonəğ* and *wašāra* in Goğgam provinces (See: Simachew and Meseret: 2015).

At this point however, it should be noted that the time during which *Qəne* schools were established could not be taken as the earliest period at which *Qəne* poetry was started. Because, logically, establishment of any school calls for prior fulfillment of various preconditions, such as: preexistence of well established *Qəne* poetic tradition in which specific genre forms or tropes are already differentiated, availability of well trained *Qəne* teachers, presence of

teaching materials, and others. In line with this, the typical problem that this study intends to address is stated hereunder.

1.1. Statement of the problem

Some of the key questions that remained unresolved about the unique *Qəne* poetic tradition in Ethiopia include: where, when, and by whom (by which group) it was started? This implies that the earliest root of the *Qəne* genres we knew today could not exactly be located. In other words, their evolutionary development could not be traced. This further implies that the mnemonic role that these earliest *Qəne* poetic traditions potentially have could not be exploited.

In light of theories in cultural memory, this ‘oblivion of memory’ on the origin of *Qəne* could emanate from multitude of factors such as remoteness of the time, language barrier, intentional manipulation of the origin of *Qəne* by different groups, or ‘politics of memory’, absence of comprehensive interdisciplinary study, and others.

Some scholars who attempted to study the history of *Qəne* such as Ephrem (2009:11), Marye (2006:78), and others also argue that the traditional convention and working principle that has been implemented in *Qəne* schools as guiding ‘doctrine’ of *Qəne* composition: “የቅኔ ቋንቋ የለውም” [*Qəne* has no a dried version like meat] had its own contribution for the lack of evidence about the earliest *Qəne* traditions. Based on this traditional convention, every student is expected to produce his own brand-new *Qəne*, but not to recite or document others’. The rationale behind this tradition is of course “to bring to light the unsaid, the unheard, the unseen, the unknown, and the unexpected of the subject matter” (Mennasemay 2014:3). However, the darkest side of this tradition is that though the Ethiopian Orthodox Tāwahādo Church (EOTC) has long established writing system that could be traced as far back as the classical period, *Qəne* was discouraged to be written due to this tradition. This entails huge historical evidence that could have been preserved about the past Ethiopia through the oldest *Qəne* poetic tradition is forgotten, for it solely relied on oral means of transmission.

On top of these, evidences also show that the disciplinary-based traditional approach of historiography that has been predominantly applied by past researchers had its own contribution for the absence of evidence on the earliest root of *Qəne*, and its associated mnemonic value. In line with this, based on his survey study on past literary research attempts in Ethiopia, Yonas noted

that “while literary research in many parts of the world today, is increasingly becoming an interdisciplinary undertaking”, past literary research endeavors in Ethiopia were predominantly discipline-based and focusing on the formal aspects of the targeted literature (Yonas 2001:36).

One of the showcases complementing his observation is the stylistics-oriented study carried out on Gəəz *Qəne* by a researcher called Isaias, which is purely formal and discipline-based in its approach. His study attempted to identify the various forms of Gəəz *Qəne* poetic compositions that have been produced by Ethiopians and Eritreans in the past. However, Isaias himself recommended that Gəəz *Qəne* productions that are amassed for centuries in Ethiopia and Eritrea are unexplored treasure-troves of information about the cultural past of the two countries: “the literature of Gəəz, especially Gəəz Poetry should be critically studied, not only because it reflects the popular culture [but also reveals] a great deal [about] the social changes taking place in the dynamic cultural mold of the society” (Isaias 2018:3).

Yonas also recommended for future researchers in the area that: “the mode of representation in literature and its function in and for society should each be given its due consideration in literary studies” (Yonas 2001:36). He also added that “literary scholarship and research would yield better if it is targeted to producing a literary history” by carrying out “serious examination of the social and intellectual climates(s)” (ibid).

Hence, as part of an effort towards addressing the above stated untapped research gaps, inspired by the latest theoretical perspectives and approaches in cultural memory studies, this study assumes that apart from their aesthetic values, the oldest Gəəz *Qəne* poetic traditions in Ethiopia could also be used as relievable sources of mnemonic media to explore the cultural history and identity of societies they are representing. Thus, help the later generations’ inherent need of remembering their past and to be rooted. With these presumptions, this particular study set out to address the following objectives.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The general objective of the study is to explore, locate and describe the earliest genre form (s) of the widely popular Gəəz *Qəne* poetic tradition in Ethiopia from mnemohistorical comparative vantage point.

Specifically, the study is targeted to explore or identify the earliest genre form of Geez *Qəne* poetic tradition in Ethiopia; to locate the specific temporal context of earliest genre form(s) of Geez *Qəne* to be identified; and describe their mnemonic significance.

2. Review of Related Literature

It would be appropriate to begin this review part of the study by briefly looking into how the term *Qəne* is conceived in the literature.

The notion of *Qəne* has been defined and conceptualized differently by different scholars. In light of the main theoretical orientation of the study, ‘cultural memory’, while the definitions of *Qəne* by some of the scholars are primarily related to its material dimension (text) of cultural representation, others dominantly reflect its mental and social dimensions of values. This entails the multi-faceted social role that *Qəne* poetry has within the society it is representing.

Kidanewold’s (1948: 798) definition of *Qəne* for instance, tends to emphasize the social function of *Qəne*. According to him, *Qəne*, is a kind of “መብረሻ (funeral poem), ግጥም (poem), ቅንብና (musical action), ቁዘማ (sympathizing) and የልቅሶ ዜማ (funeral chant)”. Still, Admassu’s (1963:9) and Afework’s (1997:25-26) conception of *Qəne* pronounce its social value. For them, *Qəne*: የሰው ልጅ አምላኩን ለማመስገን ሲል የሚያቀርበው አዲስ ምስጋና ነው is a new composition produced by humans to praise or thank their God. Furthermore, according to Yiheyis (1960:8) *Qəne* is ታሪካዊ የኾነ ስሜትን መግለጫ ነው (a tool to express historical feeling).

On the other hand, Birhanu’s (1987) and Kebede’s (1992) definitions on *Qəne* emphasize its mental dimension. For Birhanu, *Qəne*: “የፍልስፍናዊ አስተሳሰብ መግለጫ ነው” (ብርሃኑ 1987:6) [is an expression of philosophical thinking]. Kebede (1992:3) also describe *Qəne* as [a language-based calculative mental gymnastics]. To use his own words: “የቋንቋ ስሌት የኾነ የአንጎል ጅምርስቲክ”.

More comprehensive definition of *Qəne* is forwarded by Marye (2006), Alemayehu (1959) and Simachew and Meseret (2015). Drawing from Admasu, Marye for instance define *Qəne* as: “እንደ ሰው ስለ አንድ ነገር/ድርጊት ያገኘውን ዕውቀት ወይም ምስጢር ምሳሌ መስሎ፣ ምስጢር ወስኖ፣ ቃላት መጥኖ፣ በአዲስ ግጥም የሚያቀርብበት ድንገተኛ ድርሰት ነው።” (ማርቆ 2006:11) a new spontaneous poetic composition through which a person presents his newly explored

knowledge or secret using symbolic, and metrical expressions definition of *Qəne* especially articulate what makes *Qəne* unique from the other genre forms of poetry (translated by the researcher).

The above definition of Marye mentions one of the unique characteristic features of *Qəne*- spontaneity of its production. Similarly, the next two definitions also articulate the other unique feature of *Qəne*- its double entendre meaning.

Alemayehu’s (1959: 9) definition especially articulates what makes *Qəne* unique from the other genre forms of poetry: ኸለትና ከዚያ በላይ ትርጉም ኖሮት በማጣመር ጥልቅ ምስጢርን የምንገልጥበት የአነጋግር ስልት ነው (a speaking style having two or more meanings embedded in it in combination, and used to explain deep secrets).

Furthermore, Simachew and Meseret (2015) define *Qəne* as: “አንድ ቅኔ፣ ቅኔ ለመባል፣ አዲስ መሆን አለበት፣ ሰምና ወርቅ ያለው መሆን አለበት፣ ቤት ያለው መሆን አለበት፣ የፍልስፍና ሀሳብ ያለው መሆን አለበት፣ ወስጠ ተሳሳቢውን የጠበቀና ሙያ ያለው መሆን አለበት” (ሰማቸው እና መሰረት 2015፣ 10-11). For any composition of *Qəne* to be considered as *Qəne*, it should be new; must have ‘wax and gold’ meanings embedded in it; and should have rhyming scheme, philosophical allusion, structural conformity, and purpose (Translated by the researcher).

Generally, the multiplicity of meanings or definitions offered to *Qəne* implies the multi-faceted social function it has. It also implies that there is no single agreed-upon definition on *Qəne* among scholars.

Similarly, no consensus has been reached among scholars concerning its origin. In this regard, while the most overriding position held among many religious scholars credit St. Yared (505-571 AD) as its originator, there are also scholars and institutions having different positions on the subject. The next account of Habtemariam (2013 E.C) stated in his book, ‘ጥንታዊ የኢትዮጵያ ትምህርት *Ancient Ethiopian education*’ highlights two of the perspectives held among scholars on the origin of *Qəne*:

“የቅኔው ደራሲ ቅዱስ ያሬድ እንደሆነ ሊቃውንቱ በብዛት ይስማማሉ፤ ነገር ግን ከያሬድ ቀጥሎ እገሌ ተብሎ የተማረና የታወቀ የቅኔ ደራሲ ባለመኖሩ አንድም ባለመጠቀሱ ከብዙ ዘመን በኋላ እየተነሡ ልዩ ልዩ ሊቃውንት ራሳቸው እንደደረሱ የሚገመቱ አሉ” (ሀብተማርያም 2021፣243). Many scholars agree that the originator of *Qəne* is *St. Yared*; however since there was no one who studied *Qəne* and known to be a composer next to him; and no one is

mentioned in this respect, different scholars who rose many years later came to be considered as the beginners of Qəne (Translated by the researcher).

At the institutional level, each of the three prestigious *Qəne* schools mentioned above claim that they are the originators of *Qəne*: “የዋሽራ፣ የዋድላ፣ እና የጎንጅ አብያተ ጉባኤ ቅኔን የፈጠርነዉ እኛ ነን እያሉ ይከራከራሉ።” *Wašāra*, *Wadāla*, and *Gonəḅ* schools of *Qəne* argue among each other claiming “we are the creators of *Qəne*” (Simachew & Meseret 2015:16) (Translated by the researcher).

In connection to this, each of the *Qəne* schools has different claim as to who started *Qəne* for the first time. The *Wašāra* School scholars argue that *Qəne* was started by a prophetic religious father named ‘ድህሪም *Dəhrim*’. On the other hand, ‘ዮሐንስ ዘገብሎን *Yohanəs ZäGäbəlön*’ and ‘ተዋናይ *Təwanäy*’ are credited to be beginners of *Qəne* by the *Wadāla* and *Gonəḅ* groups of scholars respectively, (ibid).

Drawing from the *Wašāra* School perspective, the scholars Simachew and Meseret (2015) wrote that “ቅኔ የተጀመረው ድህሪም የተባለ የአገዉ ምድር ወይም የደጋ ዳሞት ተወላጅ ሲሆን ዘመነ-ም በአንበሳ ወድም ዘመነ መንግስት ነዉ (882-902 ዓ.ም)” (ስማቸው እና መሠረት 2015፣ 17)። *Qəne* was started by a person called *Dəhrim* who was the citizen of *Agəw Mədər* or *Dəga Damot* during the time of King *Anbäsa Wudəm* (882-902 E.C) (Translated by the researcher).

The position of Simachew and Asrat (2015) in this respect, tends to align with that of the *Wašāra* School of thought, though their explanation has contradicting elements in it: “ቅኔን ነቢያት ይጀምሩትም ቅዱስ ያሬድም ይጀምረው ደልዳላ አገሩ ጎጃም ነው። መነሻዉም ዋሽራ ነዉ።” Whether *Qəne* is started by the prophets, or St. Yared, its true place of origin is Goḅgam. Its source is *Wašāra* (ibid: 68) (translated by the researcher).

In line with this, Admasu (1963) argue that *Təwanäy* is the first *Qəne* teacher of *Gonəḅ* School and the 20th generation student of *Wašāra* School where *ZäSutuel* is believed to be the first teacher (አድማሱ 1963፣230). With a little variation, *Wäldə Rufael* also wrote that *Yohanəs ZäGäbəlön*’ is the 19th generation student of *ZäSutuel*, while *Təwanäy* is the 24th (Wolde Rufael 2000:137).

The third perspective held among scholars regarding the origin of *Qəne* is related to the following account of Adamassu (1963):

“የኢትዮጵያ ታሪክና ሃይማኖት ጎልቶ የሚታወቀው ከንግሥተ ሳባ ማክዳና ከልጇ ከቀዳማዊ ምኒልክ ዘመን መንግሥት ማለትም ከዛሬ ሶስት ሺህ ዘመን በፊት ጀምሮ ነው። ይህ ዘመን ሃይማኖተ ኦሪት፣ ሥርዓተ ኦሪት፣ መምህራን ኦሪትና ታቦተ ጽዮን ወደ ኢትዮጵያ የገቡበት ዘመን በመሆኑ የኢትዮጵያ ሥርዓተ መንግስትና ነገረ አምልኮ የማይነቃነቅ መሠረቱን የጣለበት ወቅት ነው። ቅኔም ከዚህ ዘመን ጀምሮ በኢትዮጵያ ተጀምሯል” (አድማሱ 1963፣ ii). Ethiopian history and religion is well known starting from Queen of Sheba or Makida and her son Menlike I, i.e., since three thousand years ago. This period was the time when the religion and system of Pentateuch, its teachers, and the Ark of the Covenant (Zion) entered into Ethiopia. As a result, it was the time that the Ethiopian systems of government and religious belief system established their unshakable base. *Qəne* as well was started during this period (translated by the researcher).

However, drawing on particularly the *social-framework*, *genre* and *mimesis* theories of cultural memory, individuals who are regarded as originators of *Qəne*, such as St. Yared, *Yohanəs ZäGäbälon*, *Təwanäy* and *Dəhrim* or *ZäSutuel* could not solely take the credit of beginning *Qəne*. Rather, any composer of *Qəne* is supposed to rely on the genre schemata already established around socio-cultural temporal context he/she lived. Likewise, based on the imitation or *mimesis* theory, as would be discussed in detail in the next section, a writer or composer of any literary product including *Qəne* is expected to prefigure various phenomena that happened around the socio-cultural context he lived.

At this juncture, one can notice the crucial role that *genre* and *mimesis* theories of cultural memory have to explore the evolutionary developments that such old literary traditions as *Qəne* have passed through; and thus exploit their mnemonic value.

Hence, inspired by these scientific presumptions, after the rigorous reviewing effort on the extant literature related to the subject, four important temporal contexts during which visible genre schemata variations or developments occurred could be differentiated along the historical timeline of *Qəne* poetic tradition in Ethiopia. The first is the Pre-Yaredian Period (before the 6th century) during which single-tonal type of *Qəne* was composed as verified by the current study. The second period was the Yaredian Period (around the 6th century) during which Gut and lyrical types *Qəne* genres evolved: ስለ ቤቱ አገጣጠም ግን በዚያን ጊዜ ብዙ ጥንቃቄ ያልነበረበት እንደ ጉት ያለ እንደነበር ይታመናል (Habtemariam 2021:242) For proper care was not given for the rhyming

scheme by then, the type of *Qəne* was something like *Gut* (translated by the researcher). Thirdly comes the time of King *Eskənədar* (14th century) during which various forms of *Qəne* were identified and officially made to be used for church services (Sirgew, cited in Habtemariam 2021:242). Finally, it is widely agreed among scholars that the Gondarian period (16th century) is time when *Qəne* poetry has got its modern form that is being used today.

3. Theoretical Framework

It is already highlighted in the preceding sections that this research is a kind of cultural memory oriented interdisciplinary study. Hence, its typical theoretical framework is highly grounded to latest perspectives in the emergent field of cultural memory studies. The next section briefly discusses the key theories that have practical relevance for the study.

3.1. Cultural semiotics

Theory of cultural semiotics is originally the contribution of cultural anthropology discipline. This theory which is later adopted by cultural memory studies is one of the key relevant theories of the current study. Especially, its theories related to the three dimensions of ‘*memory culture*’, namely, material, mental, and social have practical significance for the current study. To support this claim with an evidence, one of the modern cultural memory theorists, Erll contend that “the three dimensions of culture postulated by cultural semiotics are dynamically interrelated, i.e., users of ‘signs’ (social dimension) are dependent on ‘codes’ (mental dimension) if they want to understand ‘texts’ (material dimension)” (Erll 2011:102). She also added, “In a specific cultural formation, codes manifest themselves in social interaction as well as in media and other artifacts; and at the same time, it is here that culture is continually created as new” (ibid).

The implications of the above stated premises to the current study is that such cultural forms of expressions as ‘*Qəne*’ poetry (as material dimensions of culture or texts) are legitimate mnemonic sources of evidence (or signs) representing at the same time both the social and mental (code) dimensions of the cultural context they belong to. The next discussions further strengthen this argument.

3.2. Intersection points of literature and memory

According to one of the modern theorists in the area, Erll, role of literature in the production of cultural memory “rests on its similarities and differences to

processes of remembering and forgetting", (Erll 2011:145). Based on this guiding premise, three intersection points are identified by Erll between literature and memory. These include: '*condensation*', '*narration*', and '*genre pattern*'.

'*Condensation*', according to her refers to "the compression of several complex ideas, feelings or images into a single, fused or composite object" (ibid). Erll also added that the process of '*condensation*' demands selection of important experiences from "the abundance of events, processes, persons, and media of the past" (ibid). Her justification is that as compared to the abundant information in the past "it is only possible to remember very few elements" (ibid).

In light of this theory, as a poetic form of expression, '*Qəne*' is relatively a more condensed form of expression as compared to other genre forms of literature. Hence, based on this specific parameter, more mnemonic value could be assumed from '*Qəne*' than the other forms indigenous literary traditions.

As to the second parameter, '*narration*', what makes literature and memory similar according to Erll is that "every conscious remembering of past events and experience— individual and collective— is accompanied by strategies which are also fundamental for literary narrative" (ibid). This entails that the mnemonic role that the target literature '*Qəne*' can play is highly linked to the narrative strategies it employs.

Finally, pertaining to the third parameter, '*genre pattern*', Erll's argument is that "genres are conventionalized formats we use to encode events and experience; and repertoires of genre conventions are themselves contents of memory" (Erll, 2011:147-149). She also added that genres "belong to the body of cultural knowledge which individuals acquire through socialization and enculturation" (ibid). In practice, "we automatically draw on genre schemata (retained in our semantic memory) when we read literary texts – so that, for example, we expect death at the end of a tragedy, and a wedding at the end of a comedy" (ibid).

In short, according to Erll, genre schemata could be regarded as it has a mediatory role between literature and memory: "because literature is the site on which genre patterns manifest themselves most visibly (and in a socially sanctioned way), it is of pivotal importance for the circulation of memory

genres. Literature takes up existing patterns, shapes and transforms them, and feeds them back into memory culture” (ibid).

Most importantly, genres schemata according to Erll could be used as “a method of dealing with challenges that is faced by a memory culture. In uncommon, difficult, or dangerous circumstances it is especially traditional and strongly conventionalized genres which writers draw upon in order to provide familiar and meaningful patterns of representation for experiences that would otherwise be hard to interpret”, (ibid).

In relation to the specific focus area of the current study, the above explanations imply *Qəne* genre forms and their associated genre schemata developed across different societal temporal contexts are very useful not only as tools of historical imagination, but also as markers to differentiate the evolutionary development of the overall *Qəne* poetic tradition across generations.

On the other hand, in connection to the other key concept related to memory, ‘identity’, Edward Said pointed out that “literature is a source of identity in a contextual and systemic way. You read literature...in order to keep up with the best that was thought and known, and also to see yourself, your people, society, and tradition in their best lights. In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates “us” from “them”, almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity” (cited in Tötösy de Zepetnek 1998).

3.3. ‘Literary text and mnemonic context: Mimesis’

The other ground-breaking theoretical perspective that has practical relevance to the current study is the one theorized by the famous social anthropologist Ricoeur in his book entitled: ‘Time and narrative’. His theory of ‘time and narrative’ generally pronounces the mnemonic significance of literature as a form of narrative: ‘*time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence*’ (Ricoeur 1983:52).

To elaborate the above explanation further, according to Ricoeur, literary or poetic composition and its associated memory production follows a mimetic cycle having three stages, namely, *prefiguration (mimesis₁)*, ‘*configuration (mimesis₂)*’, and ‘*collective refiguration (mimesis₃)*’. In the first stage, *mimesis₁*, he argues that “whatever the innovative force of poetic composition

within the field of our temporal experience may be, the composition of the plot is grounded in a *preunderstanding* of the world of action, its meaningful structures, its symbolic resources, and its temporal character” (ibid.:54).

Regarding the second stage, ‘mimesis₂’, Ricoeur also contends that “it has an intermediary position because it has a mediating function. This mediating function derives from the dynamic character of the configuring operation that has led us to prefer the term *emplotment* to that of plot and ordering to that of system,” (ibid: 65).

Finally, with regard to the third stage of mimesis, ‘*configuration*’, Ricoeur’s argument is that it “marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader; the intersection, therefore, of the world configured by the poem and the world wherein real action occurs and unfolds its specific temporality”, (ibid, p.71). In short, Ricoeur postulated that: ‘the destiny of a *prefigured* time becomes a *refigured* time through the mediation of a *configured* time’ (ibid: 54).

To sum up, the modern view and state-of-the-art in cultural memory-oriented literary studies is briefly stated by Erll & Rigney as follows: “we see literature as having three roles to play in the production of cultural memory. These include: 1) literature as a medium of remembrance; 2) literature as an object of remembrance; and 3) literature as a medium for observing the production of cultural memory” (Erll & Rigney 2006:112).

Hence, in relation to the current study, it could be assumed that the old ‘*Qəne*’ poetic tradition in Ethiopia could at least serve three pivotal roles in the production of cultural memory.

4. Research Method

4.1. Research Design

This study inherently relies on text-based qualitative data, analysis procedure, and interpretation scheme. Hence, typically qualitative research design was applied during the study. More specifically, the study could be labeled as an exploratory-descriptive qualitative research. Because, as clearly stated in its objective, the study has the purpose of first exploring the earliest genre form/s of *Qəne* practiced in the past, and then, describing its/their mnemonic significance. In short, as outlined by Neuman, the research attempted to: “locate new data that contradict past data, create a set of categories or classify

types, clarify a sequence of steps or stages, document a casual process of mechanism, and report on the background or context of a situation” (Neuman 2007:16).

4.2. Sources of Data, Instrument, and Sampling Technique

This study could simply be referred to as a mnemohistorical research by borrowing Assmann’s term: “unlike history proper, mnemohistory is concerned not with the past as such, but only with the past as it is remembered. It surveys the story-lines of tradition, the webs of intertextuality, the diachronic continuities and discontinuities of reading the past”, (Cited in Tamm 2013:464). The implication of Assmann’s above conception of mnemohistory for the current study is twofold. First, it entails the comparative nature of the current study. Secondly, it implies the multiplicity of data sources that the study inherently depends on.

In line with this, Neuman outlined four types of sources that could generally be used in such mnemohistorical research contexts as the current one. These include primary sources, secondary sources, running records, and recollections. (See Neuman 2007: 312-314). Based on his further elaboration on each of these sources of data, while *primary sources* refer to “the letters, diaries, newspapers, movies, novels, articles of clothing, photographs, and so forth of those who lived in the past and have survived to the present, *secondary sources* represent “writings of specialist historians who have spent years studying primary sources”. On the other hand, “*running records* consist of files or existing statistical documents maintained by organizations”, while *recollections* refer to “the words or writings of individuals about their past lives or experiences based on memory. These can be in the form of memoirs, autobiographies, or interview” (ibid)

In practice, data sources used by the study were chronicles, historical books, religious writings, proverbs, and mythic tales. In connection to this, document analysis was primarily used as an instrument of data collection; and purposive sampling technique was applied to select relevant documents for the study. ‘Document’ in the context of this research refers to any kind of relevant oral or written text.

4.3. Analysis Technique

The complexity this particular study that is associated with its mnemonic and comparison interests also presuppose the need to apply appropriate data

collection and analysis procedures. Hence, the latest model of '*multi-level interdiscursive analysis*' technique which is widely popular in cultural memory studies, and recommended for similar research contexts as the current one, was adopted by the study: "Instead of playing off a conception of literature as a symbol system against a conception of literature as a social system, culturally oriented literary studies should proceed from the basis of a complex 'multi-level model' (cf. Schmidt 2000:339) and analyze literature both as a social and a symbol system." (Nünning 2005:36).

On the other hand, for such studies as the current one having comparison interests, it is difficult to get well-proven, ready-made models to be adopted from past research attempts in the field of cultural memory studies. The underlying reason as stated by Kansteiner is that "most studies on memory focus on the representation of specific events within particular chronological, geographical, and media settings without reflecting on the audiences of the representations in question. As a result, the wealth of new insights into past and present historical cultures cannot be linked conclusively to specific social collectives and their historical consciousness" (Kansteiner, 2002:179).

Hence, in order to meet the comparison interest of the study, the typical 'Historical-Comparative (H-C)' qualitative data collection and analysis technique introduced by Neuman in his research methodology book published in 2007, was additionally adopted by the study. The first reason that makes the H-C technique ideal for this study is that it 'can blend' among exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory types of studies (Neuman 2007:21). Thus, suits to the exploratory-descriptive purposes of the study.

Secondly, according Neuman, the "H-C research technique puts historical time and/or cross-cultural variation at the center of research-that is, the type of research that treats what is studied as part of the flow of history and situated in a cultural context" (Neuman 2007:305). Hence, this typical characteristic feature of H-C approach best fits to the comparison interest of the study.

5. Data Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation

As stated towards the end of the literature review section, drawing on especially genre and mimesis theories in cultural memory studies (which is the main theoretical orientation of the current study), four important temporal contexts along the historical timeline of *Qəne* could be identified as key periods during which visible genre related evolutionary developments took

place. This section presents relevant data gathered and subsequent analyses and interpretations procedures followed to locate the earliest Pre-Yaredian (before 6th century) *Qəne* form identified by the study. Besides, this section portrays the mnemonic significance that this earliest genre of *Qəne* has.

The two most important sources of data about this unique genre form identified were mainly two books, namely the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tāwahədo* church (E.O.T.C) millennium magazine, and a book called “*Angarä Məsale ZäGəəz, አንጋሪ ምሳሌ ዘግአዝ*” written by Afework Tarekegn.

The next explanation quoted from one of the famous modern language scholars, the late Yohannes Admassu, was the most important account of past research attempts that triggered the main argument of the study-the existence of generically unique *Qəne* poetry before the Yaredian period (around the 6th century); which is often regarded as the earliest bench mark on the subject. Drawing from the *Wasära* school perspective, Yohannes wrote “ቅኔ የተጀመረው በአገው ምድር ነው። ጀመረውም ዘሱትኤል የተባለ ምሁር ነው። ዘሱትኤል ተብሎ በላኔ መጻሕፍት በሆነው በሱትኤል አዘራ ስያሜ የሚጠራውም ከሱትኤል አዘራ ጋር ተመጣጣኝ በሆነው ዕውቀቱና በሊቅነቱ ነው እንጅ የተጻውኦ ስሙ ወይም የመጠሪያ ስሙ አንድሪም [ድህሪም] ነው ይላሉ።”(ዮሐንስ 1959፣5). *Qəne* was started in *Agəw Mədər*. The originator is a scholar called *ZäSutu’el*. They say that the reason for his being called by the name-sake of the biblical book-worm, ‘*ZäSutuel Ezra*’, is because of the fact that he was as genius as him, and had equivalent knowledge; but his real name is Endrim [*Dəhrim*] (Translated by the researcher).

Yohannes also added that: “ዘሱትኤል ኦሪታዊ ነበር፣ ከኦሪት ያመጣል ይጠቅሳል፣ የነበረው ከኢትዮጵያ ክርስትና ከመግባቱ በፊት ይሁን ወይም በኋላ እንደሆነ በትክክል አልታወቀም። ምናልባት ኦሪታዊ ስለነበረ ቅድመ ክርስትና ይኖር ነበር የሚል ግምት ያስከትላል፣ ይህ ደግሞ ኦሪታዊም ቢሆን ከክርስትናው ደርሶ እንደሆነስ? የሚል ጥያቄን ማስከተሉ የማይቀር ነው”(ዮሐንስ 1959፣5). *ZäSutuel*’s belief tended to Pentateuch (the Old Testament), for he often quotes and mentions from it. Whether he lived before or after the time of the introduction of Christianity in Ethiopia is not clear. Perhaps his devotion to Pentateuch can cause a presumption as he lived during Pre-Christ period. However, this in turn can inflict a question ‘what if his life reached to the time of Christ?’ (Translated by the researcher).

One of the propositions made by Yohannes as stated above- his presumption as *ZäSutuel* lived during the Pre-Christ period is scientifically sound, particularly, based on the mimesis theories of *prefiguration* and *configuration*.

However, Yohannes did not seem to be confident on his presumption as highlighted towards the end of his above explanation.

On the other hand, as it is already highlighted in the introductory section, in their recently published book titled “ማዕድ-ት፣ መጽሐፈ ኦዋጅ ወአገባብ”, Simachew and Meseret wrote quoting the *Wasäara* group of scholars that *Qəne* was started by *Dəhrim* who is nicknamed by the then society around him as ‘እዝራ ሱቱኤል *Ezra Sutuel*’ because of his prophetic and intelligent personality as that of the biblical Ezra (See: Simachew and Meseret 2015).

Thus, one can see that the *Wasäara* group has a slight difference from Yohannes’ account particularly on the naming of the originator of *Qəne*. Besides, unlike the other groups, the *Wasäara* group believes that the time during which ‘*Dəhrim*’ lived is around the year 900 E.C., as stated in the same book: “የቅኔ ፍንጭ ከ340 አመታት በላይ ማለትም ከ560 እስከ 900 ዓ/ም ድረስ ወይም ከዐዲ ገብረ መስቀል ዘመነ መንግስት እስከ ዐዲ አንበሳ ወድም (882 እስከ 902) ዘመነ መንግስት ድረስ ባለው ጊዜ ውስጥ ቆይቶ እንደገና በአዲስ መልክ የተደረሰው በድህረም (ዕዝራ ሱቱኤል) በ900 ዓ/ም ነው።” (ሰማቸው እና መሰረት 2015፣ 23-24) The oldest *Qəne* tradition that had existed for more than 340 years from 560-900 E.C, or from the time of King Gebremeskel to King *Anbessa Wudim* (882-902 E.C), was reinitiated and composed by *Dəhrim* (*Ezra Sutuel*) (translated by the researcher).

However, simply from the above account of the *Wasäara* group of scholars one can see that *Dəhrim* could not be taken as the originator of *Qəne* rather as its perpetuator. The other contradictory claim of this group is related to the genealogy of scholars who are believed by the same group as disciples of *Dəhrim*. As stated in the same book, ‘ማዕድ-ት... *Maədot*...’ on pages 24-25, the fourth generation of scholar next to *Dəhrim* is named as ‘ዕዝራ ቀዳማዊ’ [*Ezra* the first]. What makes this claim illogical is that, if the beginner of *Qəne* according to their own account is *Dəhrim* who is also called ‘እዝራ ሱቱኤል *Ezra Sutuel*’ the fourth generation of scholar who came to be called with the same name ‘እዝራ *Ezra*’ could not be suffixed with the expression ቀዳማዊ [the first] rather with ‘ካልኦይ [the second]’, based on the common tradition of naming in Ethiopia in general, and of the tradition of *Qəne* schools in particular.

On the other hand, in contrasting the three versions of accounts on the origin of *Qəne* quoted above, while the second version of the account claims the ethnic origin or identity of *ZäSutuel* is ‘*Agäw*’, the first scholar, Yohannes and

the writers of the book ‘*ማዕድት... Maädot...*’ refrained from saying that his ethnic origin is ‘*Agäw*’. Yohannes rather stated that *Qəne* was started in ‘*Agäw Mədər*’ which literally means ‘the land of *Agäws*’. Drawing on theories of cultural memory, these accounts could be interpreted as ‘politics of memory’ or as attempts of sustaining one’s own cultural history and identity while suppressing the others’.

If all of the above stated accounts on the origin of *Qəne* poetry are further contrasted with the position held by the EOTC (Ethiopian Orthodox *Täwahädo* Church) as stated in its magazine, one can infer that the church does not seem to accept ethnic and place related identity claims about ZäSutuel:

“በኢትዮጵያ ቅኔን የጀመረ ዘሱትኤል ከሆነ ልናውቅ የምንችለው ዘሱትኤል ከቅዱስ ያሬድ በፊት መነሳቱንና መኖሩን ብቻ ነው” (ዮሐንስ 1959፣ በወልደ ሩፋኤል 2000፣ 136 እንደተጠቀሰው). If ZäSutuel is the one who started *Qəne*, the only thing we knew is that he existed (lived) before the time of St. Yared (translated by the researcher).

On the other hand, the above statement can be interpreted as the church acknowledges that there was a famous scholar by the same name that lived before the 6th century. This can further be proved from the page (137) that outlined famous *Qəne* scholars that the church recognized in the same source book, for the outline puts ZäSutuel on the first place (as the beginner of *Qəne*). This interpretation could further be supported by the following evidence:

“የዘሱትኤል ቅኔ ብዙ ነበር ግን ከዘመን ብዛት ተዘንግቷል ወይም በቃል እንጅ በጽሁፍ ስላልተያዘ ለትውልድ ሊተላለፍ አልቻለም” (ወልደ ሩፋኤል 2000 :163). *Qəne* poems produced by Zesutuel are believed to be many. However, in connection to the remoteness of the time he lived, and the fact that his poems were not composed in written form rather transmitted orally, most of his *Qəne* poems are forgotten; and couldn’t be passed down to the next generation (translated by the researcher).

In addition to its material mnemonic function on the existence of an earliest form of poetic tradition composed by such scholars as ZäSutuel, the above explanation also emphasizes the significance of writing in sustaining memories of the past, and mentions one of the reasons why memories of the past are forgotten. On the other hand, the next typical sample evidences of oral compositions that are believed to be composed by the ZäSutuel himself could be important not only to trace the historical root of *Qəne* poetry, but also

the remotest cultural memories and identities that are reflected or embedded in the poems. Moreover, these evidences also enhance the credibility of the above arguments made by the EOTC, Yohannes, and others.

The following two couplet *Qəne* poems, as Wolde Rufael asserts, are the unforgotten remnant poems composed by *Zesutuel* himself: “የዘሱቱኤል ከሚባሉት ውስጥ የሚከተሉት ቀጠፋዎች ብቻ ቀርበዋል”. Only two of the poems that are believed to be composed by *ZäSutuel* are presented next (translated by the researcher).

(1) ማእከል አራዊት ንኬልሕ ወአልቦ ዘይሰምኑን፤

No one listen us, if we scream in the midst of wild beasts

እስመ አራዊት ይበዝኑ እምኔን።

Since the wild beasts out-number us

Source: Wolde Rufael 2000: 136 (Translated by the researcher).

To begin with the formal aspect of the analysis on this ancient poetic expression, if it were not separated to show the rhyming pattern between the two lines, it is a very short poem that can be sung or said in ‘*single tone*’. This argument on the couplet would be more visible if we look the Amharic translation version of the poem stated in the same source⁴.

Semantically, the poem has double layered meaning which is the unique characteristic feature of *Qəne poetry in general*. Still, at the general level, one can also notice from the above couplet that it has a kind of ‘*proverbial*’ function, for it has a broader or universal truth value. The other important interpretation that could be made out of the poem drawing on our knowledge of interpreting *Qəne* is that the main intention or the ‘gold’ (as it is often called in the *Qəne tradition*) of the poem is embedded with unusually two messages that are related to identity. The first meaning is that the narrator considered the group he is representing as civilized while considering the others as ‘beasts’ or uncivilized, so that what is said or taught by his group could not be understood by the others. Secondly, the couplet implies that the speaker had a bitter feeling about his group (*Agäw*) for it is suppressed by another hegemonic group as can be interpreted from the expression ‘*out-number us*’.

The other Gəəz *Qəne* or poem composed by *ZäSutuel* as claimed by the same source, Wolde Rufael, is the following.

4. በአራዊት መካከል ብንጮኽ የሚሰማን የለም፣ አራዊቱ ከእኛ ይበዛሉና።

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| (2). መኑ ጠቢብ ወመለበው ከመ እግዚአብሔር አገው። | Who is wise and insightful as the <i>Agəw</i> -God |
|--------------------------------------|---|

Source: Wolde Rufael 2000: 136. (Translated by the researcher)

Formally, this poem is similarly short as the first one, and could be sung in a ‘single-tone’. The other important point we can make especially in relation to the main theoretical orientation of the study is that if the lexical elements this poetic expression are closely interpreted, it prefigures another embedded socially constructed saying labeling the ethnic group of people commonly called, the ‘*Agəw*’. In other words, the composition of this poetic reflection inherently presupposes the narrator’s pre-constructed memory about the ethnic group ‘*Agəw*’ he symbolized as God.

The Amharic language translated version of this poem stated in the same source could make this interpretation more visible⁵. The other supportive evidence for the above interpretation is a semantically related couplet composed in Amharic language quoted from the same, EOTC magazine:

- | | |
|---|---|
| (3). አገው ልቡ ዘጠኝ፣ ስምንቱን አኑር በአንዱ አጫወተኝ። | <i>Agəw</i> ’s heart is nine, he talked to me with one, hiding the other eight. |
|---|---|

Source: Wolde Rufael 2000: 136. (Translated by the researcher)

Wolde Rufael’s interpretation on the above Amharic *Qəne* reads: “በዚህ አነጻጽር መሠረት አገው ሲባል እንደ እግዚአብሔር ልቡ የማይታወቅ ወይም ልቡ-ሰፊ ነገር አላፊ መሆኑን ነው” (ወልደ ሩፋኤል 2000፣136). Based on this proverb, ‘*Agəw*’, like God, is said to have an unpredictable heart, or tolerant manner that ignores aggression” (Translated by the researcher).

Thus, it could be assumed that *Zesutuel’s Gəəz Qəne (poem 2)*, if it were not exactly a response to this particular Amharic poem (*poem 3*), imitated or prefigured the meaning in it. The relation between the two poetic texts could further be explained using Link’s hypothesis that declares “due to their interdiscursive structure, literary texts potentially evoke the entire discursive universe of a given epoch”; and his conceptualization of “the literary text as an ‘interdiscursive play with language’”. To put it differently, according to Link, literature “performs a synthesizing function in the context of society as a

5. “እንደ እግዚአብሔር አገው ያለ ብልህና አስተዋይ ማን ነው። (የኢትዮጵያ ኦርቶዶክስ ተዋሕዶ ቤተ ክርስቲያን 2000፣ 1፡163).

whole, because “by way of connotation, it tends to reintegrate all discourses of a culture” (Link (1988), cited in Nunning 2005, p.40).

On the other hand, no one can deny that this familiar poetic expression among today’s Amharic speaking society has also a negative connotation which is socially constructed by the same group against the *Agəw* people. This further implies that if *ZäSutuel’s Gəəz Qəne* (poem 2) prefigured the Amharic poem (poem 3) that has a pre-constructed social meaning embedded in it, one can predict that *ZäSutuel’s* ethnic identity is from the *Agəw’s* group. This interpretation further implies that Amharic was spoken as far back as the time *ZäSutuel* lived, and the two ethnic groups co-existed together since then. Furthermore, the main message that is intended to transmit by the first *Qəne* composed by *ZäSutuel* (poem1) could also be related with these interpretations.

Above all, the following additional account stated in the same source book (EOTC magazine) about *ZäSutuel* and the *Qəne* poetic tradition in his time, is the most important evidence to the main arguments of this study:

“ዘሱቱኤል ቅኔ በመጀመሪያ በአንድ ንባብ ነበር በኋላ ሊቃውንቱ ጉት አደረጉት፣ ቆይቶም ራሱ ዘሱቱኤል በዜማ ማስተማር ጀመረ ይባላል” (ወልደ ሩፋኤል 2000፣136). *ZäSutu’el Qəne*, initially was something to be read (sung) in one tone, later on it came to be made *ጉት (Guit)* by the then scholars. Then after, *ZäSutu’el* himself began to teach *Qəne* through songs (*ዜማ, zema*) (Translated by the researcher).

The first implication of the above statement is that *ZäSutuel* was not only a teacher of religion but also of *Qəne* poetry. Most importantly, from the above evidence three important points can be interpreted. Firstly, from the expression saying ‘ዘሱቱኤል ቅኔ’ (*ZäSutuel Qəne*) and its following expressions, one can infer that there was an earliest version or generic form of *Gəəz* poetry or *Qəne* called *ZäSutuel* named after a person. The main characteristic feature of this classical form is that it can be read or said in one tone. In other words, it was “single-tonal”. Based on this evidence, one can conclude that the “single-tonal” form of *Qəne* that was practiced during the time of *ZäSutuel* is the earliest form as compared to the popular *Qəne* genres we knew in the later periods; because, this classical form of *Qəne* tradition was later on transformed into other forms during and after the time of St. Yared or the sixth century.

The second point the above extract entails is that earlier *Gəəz* poetic traditions practiced before and around the time of St. Yared have chronologically passed through three different forms. The earliest of all was the shortest single-tonal type of *ZäSutuel Qəne*; followed by the prosodic (ኅ-ት-ቅኔ, *Gut Qəne*) type which is relatively lengthy but not complete with its idea. Lastly came the 'ኬማዊ ቅኔ' (*lyrical or hymnal*) version after *ZäSutuel* himself started to teach *Gəəz* poetry in songs or musical forms. This implies that even during the time of *ZäSutuel*, *Qəne* poetry has passed through three developmental stages.

The above interpretation has another implication. Many scholars attribute the origin of the religious hymn or 'Zema' practiced in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to St. Yared. However, the above interpretation implies that St. Yared's *Zema* or hymnal composition could prefigure some of its features from the hymnal or lyrical *ZäSutuel Qəne genre* that had been taught by *ZäSutuel* himself in songs.

The following couplet and its background story collected from another source are also key relevant evidences for the presence of an earlier *Qəne* poetic tradition before the time of St. Yared.

- (4). በአንድ ወርቀ ወዘኢአዐዙ፣ /ወርቅ የያዙትም ያልያዙትም/
 who took gold and who didn't,
 ክልዔሆሙ ጎቡረ ተክዙ። /ሁለቱም በአንድነት አዘኑ።
 both regret similarly.

Source: Afework 2008:14 (translated by the researcher).

The above couplet is collected from a book called '*Angarä Məsale Zä Gəəz, አንጋረ ምሳሌ ዘግእዝ*' written by an author called Afework Tarekegn in 2008. The couplet is a good example of Pre-Yaredian poetic form of representation, as can be learned from the next background information explaining its context of production.

According to Afework, the above couplet was composed during the time of አጌ ካሌብ King Kaleb (507-535 E.C). The message in it prefigures an event that happened when this ancient King of Ethiopia and his soldiers were returning from their military campaign outside Ethiopia. The causal reason for the production of this proverbial poetic saying according to Afework is that while the King and his soldiers are traveling across a dessert on their way back to home, at a certain place, the King told each of his soldiers to pick up and hold certain amount of soil from that place. However, while some of them picked some amount to show their loyalty to the King, others refused in contempt of

why they should carry a soil while they are traveling such a long distance in a harsh desert area. After some days of their travel the King and his soldiers crossed the red sea and reached their territory. At that point, the King told his soldiers that what they picked up is not soil but gold. By this time, both groups of soldiers, i.e, those who picked up some and those who picked none, were similarly sad or regretful. While the reason for those who took some is their not picking up more, for those who picked none, is their total missing of the opportunity. As a result of that momentous event, this poem came to be said and remembered by the people then after. (Afework 2008:13-14). In line with this, Afework argues that the origin of the popular Amharic proverb ‘የዘገነኖ አዘነ ያልዘገነኖ አዘነ’ [Those who picked some regret as those who didn’t] is without doubt this *Gəəz* poem’.

To come to the point, drawing on genre schemata theory the original *Gəəz couplet* is typologically similar to the single-tonal type of *ZäSutuel Qəne* already identified above. Moreover, from the mental dimension of *culture it represents*, the way the poem produced and its message clearly portray the wisdom of the society it represents- how they were experimenting on their own kind to arrive at such knowledge of universal truth related to the discipline of human psychology. That is to say, drawing on Assman’s definitions of knowledge and memory, the significance of the above classical couplet is beyond cultural memory: “whereas knowledge has a universalist perspective, a tendency towards generalization and standardization, memory, even cultural memory, is local, egocentric, and specific to a group and its values,(Cited in Erll and Nünning 2008:117) .

In applying intertextual semiotic analysis, one can also interpret and see that the poem also means “*human wants and needs are unlimited*”, and that is universally true. In today’s modern era, this typical saying is even part of a basic principle in the field of economics which explains consumer behavior: “*human wants and needs are unlimited, but resources are limited*”; thus, the essence of the discipline of economics is to compromise these gaps. This intertextual interpretation further entails that cultural forms of expressions produced in particular societal temporal context could have huge potential of being used as universal guiding principles of life. Thus, due emphasis has to be given in exploring them through interdisciplinary approaches.

The other important lesson that can be excavated from especially from the earliest poetic evidences produced by both *ዘሱቲኤል (ZäSutuel)* and *አፄ ካሌብ (King Kaleb)*, is that how much poetic forms of expressions are powerful in

mediating cultural memories across generations that are remote apart to the extent of more than 1500 years.

Finally, the arguments and generalizations made so far could be summarized by drawing on the mimesis theory. As thoroughly discussed in the literature review section this theory clearly postulates the complex relationship existing between literature and cultural memory. Accordingly, even St. Yared's hymnal compositions of *Qəne* are supposed to *prefigure* a pre-existing poetic tradition that had been practiced by his predecessors. To put it differently, “the musical composition of Dəgg^uwa by St. Yared would not have been possible, if it did not rely on the already existing tradition” (Alemayehu 1967, cited in Ayele 1997:128).

Conclusion

The study identified ‘ZäSutuel *Qəne* [poetry], ዘሱተኤል ቅኔ’ is *not only* the earliest of all *Gəəz Qəne* poetic traditions known so far in Ethiopia, but also unique in its generic form, especially its earliest version. In addition to its unique features and older age, this ancient poetic practice is found to have passed through three developmental stages that could be chronologically and syntagmatically differentiated. While the earliest form-‘ዘሱተኤል ቅኔ’ (‘ZäSutuel *Qəne*’) is the shortest of all having ‘*single-tonal*’ unique feature when it is read or said; this earliest version is followed by the ‘*prosodic*’ (ጉጉ ቅኔ, Gut *Qəne*) type which is relatively lengthy, but does not state a complete thought, and finally came the ‘ኪግዳ ቅኔ’ (lyrical or hymnal) version.

The study also identified that ZäSutuel was not only a poet but teacher of poetic hymnal songs. The other general insight contributed by the study is that though any of the *Qəne* poetic literary traditions are important mnemonic sources or media, especially the ‘*single-tonal*’ short version ‘ZäSutu’el *Qəne*’ that has ‘*proverbial*’ quality seems to be ideal in remembering the remotest cultural context of the society they are produced in. This could be linked with its short proverbial quality, and its associated ‘*universal truth value*’ and meaning often anticipated in it. Generally, the study is supposed to have multiple material, intellectual, mnemonic contributions and implications to future poetic literary and cultural memory research and scholarship towards understanding the past historical and cultural contexts in Ethiopia better.

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