

# Amhara

also known as “Amara”

Data source: eHRAF

Secondary source

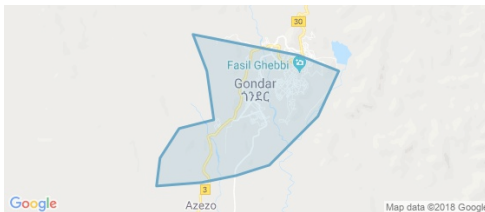
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*\* Secondary Source entry, prepared from a literature review by a Ph.D. RA*

Entry tags: Religion, Christian Traditions, Orthodox/Eastern Christian, Ethiopian Orthodox

The Amhara have historically dominated Ethiopia through military, government, and religious activity. Amharic was the official language of Ethiopia until the 1990's, and the Amhara people constitute just under one-third of Ethiopia's population. Amhara society is deeply rooted in Christianity, and "the Amhara themselves often employ the term 'Amhara' synonymously with 'Ethiopian Orthodox (Monophysite) Christian,' although their own, more precise expression for this religion is 'Tewahedo' (Orthodox)" (Messing and Skoggard, 1998). The religious group is thus considered to be coterminous with the society throughout this entry. This entry focuses on the Gondar District of Ethiopia, ca. 1953.



Date Range: 1930 CE - 1960 CE

Region: Gondar District

Region tags: Africa, Eastern Africa, Ethiopia

Gondar District, Ethiopia ca. 1953.

## Status of Participants:

✓ Elite    ✓ Religious Specialists    ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

## Sources

Print sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1: Divale, W. 2004. Codebook of Variables for the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample. *World Cultures: The Journal of Cross-Cultural and Comparative Research*.
- Source 2: Murdock and Wilson, 1972. Settlement Patterns and Community Organization: Cross-Cultural Codes 3. *Ethnology*, 11(3), 254-259.

Online sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=mp05-020>
- Source 1 Description: Messing, S. D. & Bender, M. L. (1985). Highland Plateau Amhara Of Ethiopia. *Ethnography Series*. New Haven, Conn.: Human Relations Area Files.
- Source 2 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=mp05-000>
- Source 2 Description: Messing, S. D. & Skoggard, I. A. (1998). *Culture Summary: Amhara*. New Haven, Conn.: HRAF.
- Source 3 URL: <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=mp05-011>

– Source 3 Description: Levine, D. N. (1965). *Wax & Gold: Tradition And Innovation In Ethiopian Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

## General Variables

### Membership/Group Interactions

Are other religious groups in cultural contact with target religion:

– Yes

Notes: "Nevertheless, the influence of Islam, probably by slow diffusion, has been considerable on Ethiopian Christianity through the centuries" (Messing and Bender, 1985:284). "... a number of ancient spirit cosmologies have contributed to and survived in Amhara healing practices: Ancient Egyptian, Greek, Hebrew, Arab, Christian, and African. In fact, the syncretism has been so complex, and has been developing for so many centuries, that it would be impossible to trace all the roots with any degree of valid certainty" (Messing and Bender, 1985:349).

↳ Is the cultural contact neutral:

– Yes

Notes: "Religious tolerance, decreed by the last emperor, permitted such ethnoreligious minorities as the Muslims to reside wherever they please. In the past they were restricted to a section of the town, usually the part between the floodplain and the big market" (Messing and Bender, 1985:134).

↳ Is there violent conflict (with groups outside the sample region):

– Yes

Notes: SCCS Variable 1650 indicates that "external warfare seems to occur almost constantly and at any time of the year", additionally SCCS Variable 1654 indicates that the society is "inferred to be unpacified because warfare frequency is greater than or equal to 3" (Ember and Ember, 1992; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Does the religious group have a general process/system for assigning religious affiliation:

– Yes

Notes: "Membership in the Monophysite Church is automatic for all Amhara except a small percentage who are Muslim. This membership is symbolized by the ceremony of baptism, performed for male infants on the fortieth day and for females on the eightieth. At that time the child receives a special Christian name in addition to his regular family name" (Levine, 1965:259).

↳ Assigned at birth (membership is default for this society):

– Yes

Notes: "Membership in the Monophysite Church is automatic for all Amhara except a small percentage who are Muslim. This membership is symbolized by the ceremony of baptism, performed for male infants on the fortieth day and for females on the eightieth. At that time the child receives a special Christian name in addition to his regular family name" (Levine,

1965:259).

↳ Assigned by personal choice:

– No

Notes: (Levine, 1965:259)

↳ Assigned by class:

– No

Notes: (Levine, 1965:259)

↳ Assigned at a specific age:

– Yes

Notes: "Membership in the Monophysite Church is automatic for all Amhara except a small percentage who are Muslim. This membership is symbolized by the ceremony of baptism, performed for male infants on the fortieth day and for females on the eightieth. At that time the child receives a special Christian name in addition to his regular family name" (Levine, 1965:259).

↳ Assigned by gender:

– No

Notes: (Levine, 1965:259)

↳ Assigned by participation in a particular ritual:

– No

Notes: Membership is not assigned, but symbolized by baptism. "Membership in the Monophysite Church is automatic for all Amhara except a small percentage who are Muslim. This membership is symbolized by the ceremony of baptism, performed for male infants on the fortieth day and for females on the eightieth. At that time the child receives a special Christian name in addition to his regular family name" (Levine, 1965:259).

Does the religious group actively proselytize and recruit new members:

– I don't know

Does the religion have official political support

Answer 'yes' also in cases where the religious and political spheres are not distinguished from one another, but the religious group's activities are tied up with, and supported by, the functioning of the society at large.

– Yes

Notes: SCCS Variable 1745, Religio-political overlap, indicates that "officials at the level of maximal political authority are at the same time religious specialists" (Lang, 1998; Retrieved from Divale, 2004). "The Emperor was officially 'Defender of the Faith'. His connection with the church follows Old

Testament patterns during the reigns of David and Solomon. The tabot (ark), which Emperor Minilik I supposedly spirited away from the 'Holy of Holies' in Jerusalem to its secret place at Aksum, was regarded as guarding the liberty of the country to this day. Church and State were thus intimately connected, and when Mussolini threatened Ethiopia, the Emperor and his chieftains swore to defend the tabot with their lives. After liberation, the Orthodox church was reaffirmed as the State church, though weakened in its temporal powers (especially feudal land tenure). When the last link with Alexandria was severed, the Ethiopian church became fully the established state church" (Messing and Bender, 1985:138).

↳ Are the priests paid by polity:

– I don't know

↳ Is religious infrastructure paid for by the polity:

– Yes

Notes: "...the life of Gondar is still dominated by its clergy. Nine church schools in Gondar are supported by government funds" (Levine, 1965:46).

↳ Are political officials equivalent to religious officials:

– Yes

Notes: SCCS Variable 1745, Religio-political overlap, indicates that "officials at the level of maximal political authority are at the same time religious specialists" (Lang, 1998; Retrieved from Divale, 2004). "Unlike other cities in Ethiopia, Gondar is partly governed by a town council of clergymen. The city is divided into districts marked by the location of the churches, and the town council consists of the heads of these churches—some of whose positions are so important that they are assigned directly by the Emperor. This council is convened to handle disputes over land and other matters, and to communicate the mayor's proclamations to the people. An accusation signed for a plaintiff by a priest carries much weight in the local courts" (Levine, 1965:46).

↳ Is religious observance enforced by the polity:

– I don't know

↳ Polity legal code is roughly coterminous with religious code:

– Yes

Notes: "As a consequence of the religiosity of the people, the rules of the church have the force of law, unchallenged especially in the rural areas. Even the more modernized administration and new legislation has made little change in the close inter-relation of church and state functions at the grassroots level" (Messing and Bender, 1985:155).

↳ Polity provides preferential economic treatment (e.g. tax, exemption)

– Yes

Notes: "Once he has become a monk, an Ethiopian is a legal nonentity. This frees him from all tax obligations and any debts he may have incurred, for which advantage many have become

monks for other than spiritual motives" (Levine, 1965:170).

Is there a conception of apostasy in the religious group:

– I don't know

## Size and Structure

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (estimated population, numerical):

– Estimated population, numeric: 21780

Notes: The population of Gondar was estimated to be 22,000 (Messing and Bender, 1985:18). Because almost all Amhara are of the same faith, I estimate 99% of the population to adhere to the religious group.

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (% of sample region population, numerical):

– Estimated population, percentage of sample region: 99

Notes: "The importance of the Orthodox Church of Ethiopia on the life of every Amhara, of all classes, rural or urban, can hardly be exaggerated. To the Amhara, 'Amhara' is synonymous with Ethiopian Christian, and the liturgical language used in the church, Giiz, with 'language of the free'. The term used for their religion is twahdo, often shortened to towado, meaning 'union'" (Messing and Bender, 1985:155). Because the majority of the population is of the Ethiopian Christian faith, I use the estimate of 99%.

Are there recognized leaders in the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: "The number of clergy attached to an old-established local church often includes, besides the gebez priest, seven other priests of varying seniority, twelve deacons, a head deacon, a chamberlain, at least a dozen debtera, several aged monks, and elderly widows who have taken vows as nuns" (Messing and Bender, 1985:157).



Is there a hierarchy among these leaders:

Hierarchy need not be formally institutionalized if it is widely recognized and accepted.

– Yes

Notes: See Messing and Bender, 1985, pages 156-158 for more details on the religious hierarchy.



Are religious leaders chosen:

– Yes

Notes: "Each parish church functions autonomously under the direction of a head ( alaqa ) chosen by the local clergy. (Heads of the most important churches have traditionally been appointed by the emperor.)" (Levine, 1965:261).

↳ Other leaders in the religious group choose that leader:

– Yes

Notes: "Each parish church functions autonomously under the direction of a head ( alaqā ) chosen by the local clergy. (Heads of the most important churches have traditionally been appointed by the emperor.)" (Levine, 1965:261).

↳ A political leader chooses the leader:

– Yes

Notes: "Each parish church functions autonomously under the direction of a head ( alaqā ) chosen by the local clergy. (Heads of the most important churches have traditionally been appointed by the emperor.)" (Levine, 1965:261).

## Architecture, Geography

Is monumental religious architecture present:

– No

Notes: According to Murdock and Wilson, 1972, "there are no structures in the community that are appreciably larger or more impressive than the usual residential dwellings" (column 6, also SCCS variable 66).

Are there different types of religious monumental architecture:

– No

Notes: According to Murdock and Wilson, 1972, "there are no structures in the community that are appreciably larger or more impressive than the usual residential dwellings" (column 6, also SCCS variable 66).

Are there specific sites dedicated to sacred practice or considered sacred:

– Yes

Notes: Church buildings are present, and are a center of worship (Messing and Bender, 1985:156).

↳ Are sacred site oriented to environmental features:

"Environmental features" refers to features in the landscape, mountains, rivers, cardinal directions etc...

– No

## Beliefs

### Burial and Afterlife

Is a spirit-body distinction present:

Answer "no" only if personhood (or consciousness) is extinguished with death of the physical body.

Answering yes does not necessarily imply the existence of Cartesian mind/body dualism, merely that some element of personhood (or consciousness) survives the death of the body.

– Yes

Notes: The soul is believed to survive the death of the body (Levine, 1965:65).

↳ Spirit-mind is conceived of as having qualitatively different powers or properties than other body parts:

– I don't know

Belief in afterlife:

– Yes

Notes: In the heavenly realm there are two regions located on either side of God's dwelling-place. To the right is an area where good souls repair for an eternity of ease after being judged shortly after the death of their bodies....To the left is the place where wicked souls are taken by the devil to be scorched eternally in the fire of Gehenna, also called Si'ol (again a fusion of concepts which are distinct for the learned)" (Levine, 1965:65).

↳ Is the spatial location of the afterlife specified or described by the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: See questions below for more details.

↳ Afterlife in vaguely defined "above" space:

– Yes

Notes: In the heavenly realm there are two regions located on either side of God's dwelling-place. To the right is an area where good souls repair for an eternity of ease after being judged shortly after the death of their bodies....To the left is the place where wicked souls are taken by the devil to be scorched eternally in the fire of Gehenna, also called Si'ol (again a fusion of concepts which are distinct for the learned)" (Levine, 1965:65).

Reincarnation in this world:

– No

Notes: No evidence for a belief in reincarnation was found in any of the principal ethnographic sources. Additionally, the soul is believed to go to an afterlife.

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses:

– Yes

Notes: "If the deceased was a priest or monk, the arms are tied across the chest in the sign of the cross. For a lay person they are tied across the middle of the body. Eyes and mouth are closed. The corpse is tied in a mat. No permanent gravestones are set in the churchyard where most members of the congregation are buried (poor non-members are buried in the bush). In the case of a "great man", the grave is sometimes marked for some years, and the skull and bones later sent to a sacred monastery

for storage under a cave-ledge. In a few years the place of burial is usually obliterated by the rains, unless rocks have been gradually piled on it as a memorial" (Messing and Bender, 1985:177).

↳ Interment:

– Yes

Notes: "If the deceased was a priest or monk, the arms are tied across the chest in the sign of the cross. For a lay person they are tied across the middle of the body. Eyes and mouth are closed. The corpse is tied in a mat. No permanent gravestones are set in the churchyard where most members of the congregation are buried (poor non-members are buried in the bush)" (Messing and Bender, 1985:177).

↳ Cannibalism:

– No

Notes: No evidence for the presence of cannibalism was found in the principal ethnographic sources.

↳ Exposure to elements (e.g. air drying):

– No

Notes: No evidence for the presence of exposing corpses to the elements was found in the principal ethnographic sources.

↳ Feeding to animals:

– No

Notes: No evidence for the presence of feeding corpses to animals was found in the principal ethnographic sources.

Are co-sacrifices present in tomb/burial:

– No

Notes: No evidence for co-sacrifices was found in any of the principal ethnographic sources.

Are grave goods present:

– No

Notes: No evidence for the presence of grave goods was found in the principal ethnographic sources.

Are formal burials present:

– Yes

Notes: Yes, see Messing and Bender, 1985, page 177, and 232-234 for more details.

↳ In cemetery:



– Yes

Notes: Cemetery in churchyard (Messing and Bender, 1985:177).

## Supernatural Beings

Are supernatural beings present:

– Yes

Notes: "The Amhara is constantly aware of a number of supernatural beings other than Egziabher [God] who affect his life for better or for worse" (Levine, 1965:68).

↳ A supreme high god is present:

– Yes

Notes: SCCS Variable 238 indicates that a high god is present, active, and specifically supportive of human morality (Ethnographic Atlas column 34, Murdock, 1967; retrieved from Divale, 2004).

↳ The supreme high god is anthropomorphic:

– Yes

↳ The supreme high god is a sky deity:

– Yes

Notes: (Levine, 1965:65)

↳ The supreme high god is chthonic (of the underworld):

– No

Notes: (Levine, 1965:65)

↳ The supreme high god has another type of loyalty-connection to elites:

– Yes [specify]: Emperor is "Defender of the Faith"

Notes: "The Emperor was officially 'Defender of the Faith'. His connection with the church follows Old Testament patterns during the reigns of David and Solomon. The tabot (ark), which Emperor Minilik I supposedly spirited away from the 'Holy of Holies' in Jerusalem to its secret place at Aksum, was regarded as guarding the liberty of the country to this day. Church and State were thus intimately connected, and when Mussolini threatened Ethiopia, the Emperor and his chieftains swore to defend the tabot with their lives. After liberation, the Orthodox church was reaffirmed as the State church, though weakened in its temporal powers (especially feudal land tenure). When the last link with Alexandria was severed, the Ethiopian church became fully the established state church" (Messing and Bender, 1985:138).

↳ The supreme high god has knowledge of this world:

– Yes

Notes: "God is the creator of the world. He is, as the name Egziabher signifies, Lord of the earth; and He is Lord of the seas, Lord of the King of Kings, and Lord of the angels. He is eternal and possesses knowledge without limit" (Levine, 1965:67).

↳ The supreme god's knowledge is restricted to particular domain of human affairs:

– No

Notes: "He [God] is eternal and possesses knowledge without limit" (Levine, 1965:67).

↳ The supreme high god's knowledge is restricted to (a) specific area(s) within the sample region:

– No

Notes: "He [God] is eternal and possesses knowledge without limit" (Levine, 1965:67).

↳ The supreme high god's knowledge is unrestricted within the sample region:

– Yes

Notes: "He [God] is eternal and possesses knowledge without limit" (Levine, 1965:67).

↳ The supreme high god's knowledge is unrestricted outside of sample region:

– Yes

Notes: "He [God] is eternal and possesses knowledge without limit" (Levine, 1965:67).

↳ The supreme high god can see you everywhere normally visible (in public):

– Yes

Notes: "The Amhara peasant has a keen awareness that wherever one goes, God is there. 'If you say no one is looking,' goes an Amharic saying, 'still God will see you.' This consciousness of God's presence is reflected in the habit of referring to God scores of times every day" (Levine, 1965:67).

↳ The supreme high god can see you everywhere (in the dark, at home):

– Yes

Notes: "The Amhara peasant has a keen awareness that wherever one goes, God is there. 'If you say no one is looking,' goes an Amharic saying, 'still God will see you.' This consciousness of God's presence is reflected in the habit of

referring to God scores of times every day" (Levine, 1965:67).

↳ The supreme high god knows what will happen to you, what you will do (future sight):

– Yes

Notes: "It is probably the attribute of God's omnipotence, however, that appears most vivid to the Amhara mind. Everything that happens reflects His active will" (Levine, 1965:67).

↳ The supreme high god has deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

Notes: "He [God] is ever active, bringing births and deaths, prosperity and hunger, leading one traveler to safety and another to disaster. He controls the homeliest details of everyday life. One boy, troubled that he was not selling his goods in the market, confessed that God must be angry with him about something" (Levine, 1965:67).

↳ The supreme high god can punish:

– Yes

Notes: "He [God] is ever active, bringing births and deaths, prosperity and hunger, leading one traveler to safety and another to disaster. He controls the homeliest details of everyday life. One boy, troubled that he was not selling his goods in the market, confessed that God must be angry with him about something" (Levine, 1965:67).

↳ The supreme high god has indirect causal efficacy in the world:

"Indirect causal efficacy" refers to not being seen as consciously, directly and actively intervening in the human world, but their overall well being or general attitude has effects on, e.g., quality of harvest, success in war, health, etc.

– Yes

Notes: "The thunder expresses His anger, a flood the visitation of His wrath upon the sinful" (Levine, 1965:67). "Nature is simply the passive agent of God's rewards and punishments; for example, the man who fails to keep the Orthodox fasts will find that his crops are ruined" (Levine, 1965:66).

↳ The supreme high god possesses hunger:

– I don't know

↳ Is it permissible to worship supernatural beings other than the high god:

– Yes

Notes: "The saints and the tabot which represent them are the objects of much veneration and prayer. They figure so prominently in the Amhara's outlook that at times they appear to be on a par with Egziabher [God] himself" (Levine, 1965:69).

↳ The supreme high god communicates with the living:  
– I don't know

↳ Previously human spirits are present:  
– I don't know

↳ Non-human supernatural beings are present:  
– Yes

Notes: See Levine, 1965:68 for a list of specific supernatural beings.

↳ These supernatural beings can be seen:  
– I don't know

↳ These supernatural beings can be physically felt:  
– I don't know

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have knowledge of this world:  
– I don't know

↳ Non-human supernatural beings have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:  
– Yes

Notes: "Abnormalities of the human body are attributed to the effect of the supernatural. In the case of a new-born child, abnormality of body is attributed to an evil spirit, especially a male zar who has magically possessed the mother, and who is jealous of the human husband whom he regards as his rival" (Messing and Bender, 1985:286).

↳ These supernatural beings can reward:  
– I don't know

↳ These supernatural beings can punish:  
– Yes

Notes: "Abnormalities of the human body are attributed to the effect of the supernatural. In the case of a new-born child, abnormality of body is attributed to an evil spirit, especially a male zar who has magically possessed the mother, and who is jealous of the human husband whom he regards as his rival" (Messing and Bender, 1985:286).

↳ These supernatural beings exhibit positive emotion:

– Yes

Notes: Benevolent spirits, including saints/angels, are known as protective spirits and exhibit positive emotion (Levine, 1965:68). Additionally, some zar spirits are benevolent and exhibit positive emotion (Messing and Bender, 1985:300).

↳ These supernatural beings exhibit negative emotion:

– Yes

Notes: Malevolent spirits, and the devil specifically, exhibit negative emotion (Levine, 1965:69).

↳ These supernatural beings possess hunger:

– I don't know

↳ Mixed human-divine beings are present:

– Yes

Notes: "The idolization of saintly individuals has been an important part of Amhara religious experience" (Levine, 1965:271). The principal ethnographic sources do not provide substantial details on these mixed human-divine beings.

## Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present:

This refers to surveillance by supernatural beings of humans' behaviour and/or thought particularly as it relates to social norms or potential norm violations.

– Yes

Notes: "It is probably the attribute of God's omnipotence, however, that appears most vivid to the Amhara mind. Everything that happens reflects His active will. The thunder expresses His anger, a flood the visitation of His wrath upon the sinful" (Levine, 1965:67). Supernatural monitoring is clearly present, and God is concerned with the morality of humans. However, further details on the nature and specific aspects of supernatural monitoring are not available in the principal ethnographic sources.

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment:

– Yes

Notes: See questions below for more details on supernatural punishment.

↳ Is the cause or agent of supernatural punishment known:

– Yes

Notes: God is not the only agent of supernatural punishment, but the most prominent. The overwhelming majority of examples of supernatural punishment are caused by god.

↳ Done only by high god:

– No

Notes: God is not the only agent of supernatural punishment, but the most prominent. The overwhelming majority of examples of supernatural punishment are caused by god.

↳ Is the reason for supernatural punishment known:

– Yes

Notes: "Nature is simply the passive agent of God's rewards and punishments; for example, the man who fails to keep the Orthodox fasts will find that his crops are ruined" (Levine, 1965:66).

↳ Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence:

– Yes

Notes: "Nature is simply the passive agent of God's rewards and punishments; for example, the man who fails to keep the Orthodox fasts will find that his crops are ruined" (Levine, 1965:66).

↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in the afterlife:

– Yes

Notes: "In the heavenly realm there are two regions located on either side of God's dwelling-place. To the right is an area where good souls repair for an eternity of ease after being judged shortly after the death of their bodies...To the left is the place where wicked souls are taken by the devil to be scorched eternally in the fire of Gehenna, also called Si'ol (again a fusion of concepts which are distinct for the learned). This treatment of the damned is made worse by alternate dippings in icy water, though some believe that the wicked souls get a respite from their tortures on weekends" (Levine, 1965:65).

↳ Supernatural punishments in the afterlife are highly emphasized by the religious group:

– I don't know

↳ Punishment in the afterlife consists of extreme sensory displeasure:

– Yes

Notes: "In the heavenly realm there are two regions located on either side of God's dwelling-place. To the right is an area where good souls repair for an eternity of ease after being judged shortly after the death of their bodies...To the left is the place where wicked souls are taken by the devil to be scorched eternally in the fire of Gehenna, also called Si'ol (again a fusion of concepts which are distinct for the learned). This treatment of the damned is made worse by alternate dippings in icy water, though some believe that the wicked souls get a respite from their tortures on weekends" (Levine, 1965:65).

↳ Punishment in the afterlife consists of reincarnation as an inferior life form:

– No

Notes: No evidence for a belief in reincarnation was found in any of the principal ethnographic sources.

↳ Punishment in the afterlife consists of reincarnation in an inferior realm:

– No

Notes: No evidence for a belief in reincarnation was found in any of the principal ethnographic sources.

↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in this lifetime:

– Yes

↳ Supernatural punishments in this life are highly emphasized by the religious group:

– I don't know

↳ Punishment in this life consists of crop failure or bad weather:

– Yes

Notes: "It is probably the attribute of God's omnipotence, however, that appears most vivid to the Amhara mind. Everything that happens reflects His active will. The thunder expresses His anger, a flood the visitation of His wrath upon the sinful" (Levine, 1965:67).

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards:

– Yes

Notes: "This conception of deity [God] is at heart that of the early Old Testament, a powerful Lord who punishes, rewards, and avenges" (Levine, 1965:68).

↳ Is the cause/purpose of supernatural rewards known:

– Yes

Notes: In the ethnographic examples, God was the only agent of supernatural reward.

↳ Done only by high god:

– Yes

Notes: In the ethnographic examples, God was the only agent of supernatural reward.

↳ Done to enforce group norms:

– Yes

Notes: (Levine, 1965:65)

↳ Supernatural rewards are bestowed out in the afterlife:

– Yes

Notes: "In the heavenly realm there are two regions located on either side of God's dwelling-place. To the right is an area where good souls repair for an eternity of ease after being judged shortly after the death of their bodies" (Levine, 1965:65).

↳ Supernatural rewards in the afterlife are highly emphasized by the religious group:

– I don't know

↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of eternal happiness:

– Yes

Notes: "In the heavenly realm there are two regions located on either side of God's dwelling-place. To the right is an area where good souls repair for an eternity of ease after being judged shortly after the death of their bodies" (Levine, 1965:65).

↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of reincarnation as a superior life form:

– No

Notes: No evidence for a belief in reincarnation was found in any of the principal ethnographic sources.

↳ Reward in the afterlife consists of reincarnation in a superior realm:

– No

Notes: No evidence for a belief in reincarnation was found in any of the principal ethnographic sources.

↳ Supernatural rewards are bestowed out in this lifetime:

– I don't know

## Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present:

– Yes

Notes: "Tewodros (St. Theodor), regarded as the founder of the Ethiopian monastery of Debre Maryam. The name is also used as a synonym for another Messiah, who, according to a fourteenth century Ethiopian book *fkkar yysus* (lit. interpretations of Jesus) will some day come from the east, conquer the world, and usher in a long period of peace and prosperity, preceding the final catastrophe" (Messing and Bender, 1985:350).

↳ Is the messiah's whereabouts or time of coming known?



– Yes

Notes: "...will some day come from the east..." (Messing and Bender, 1985:350).

↳ Alive, identified:

– No

Notes: (Messing and Bender, 1985:350).

↳ Coming in this lifetime:

– I don't know

↳ Coming on specified date:

– No

Notes: "...will some day come from the east..." (Messing and Bender, 1985:350).

↳ Coming in unspecified time in near future:

– I don't know

↳ Coming in unspecified time in distant future:

– Yes

Notes: "...will some day come from the east..." (Messing and Bender, 1985:350).

↳ Coming has already passed:

– No

Notes: "...will some day come from the east..." (Messing and Bender, 1985:350).

↳ One in a line of many past and future messiahs:

– I don't know

↳ Is the messiah's purpose known:

– Yes

Notes: The messiah will come to "...conquer the world, and usher in a long period of peace and prosperity..." (Messing and Bender, 1985:350).

↳ Other purpose:

– Yes [specify]: "conquer the world, and usher in a long period of peace and prosperity"

Notes: (Messing and Bender, 1985:350)

Is an eschatology present:

– Yes

Notes: "When the eighth millennium arrives, moreover (A.D. 2508), God will bring about a major upheaval, either destroying the world completely or, as others believe, turning it upside down" (Levine, 1965:66).

↳ Eschaton in this lifetime:

– No

Notes: (Levine, 1965:66)

↳ Eschaton at specified time in future:

– Yes

Notes: "When the eighth millennium arrives, moreover (A.D. 2508), God will bring about a major upheaval, either destroying the world completely or, as others believe, turning it upside down" (Levine, 1965:66).

↳ Eschaton at unspecified time in near future:

– No

Notes: Time is specified (Levine, 1965:66).

↳ Eschaton at unspecified time in distant future:

– No

Notes: Time is specified (Levine, 1965:66).

↳ Will anyone survive the eschaton:

– No

Notes: "When the eighth millennium arrives, moreover (A.D. 2508), God will bring about a major upheaval, either destroying the world completely or, as others believe, turning it upside down. According to the latter view, all those who live at that time will perish, while those who died first in the world's history will return to life, to a time of renewal, when a little grain will go a long way and the milk of one cow will nourish a multitude" (Levine, 1965:66).

## Norms and Moral Realism

Are general social norms prescribed by the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: See Messing and Bender, 1985:284 for more details.

Is there a conventional vs. moral distinction in the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: Amhara legal philosophy, guarded by the church, and expressed therefore in Giiz terminology, analyzes the universe as follows: Natural Law - t'bayawi hgg...Man-made Law - (similar to common law) - sbawi hgg...Moral Law (particularly Orthodox law) - ybahriy hgg (natural law)" (Messing and Bender, 1985:284).

↳ What is the nature of this distinction:

– Strongly present and highlighted

Notes: Amhara legal philosophy, guarded by the church, and expressed therefore in Giiz terminology, analyzes the universe as follows: Natural Law - t'bayawi hgg...Man-made Law - (similar to common law) - sbawi hgg...Moral Law (particularly Orthodox law) - ybahriy hgg (natural law)" (Messing and Bender, 1985:284).

↳ Are specifically moral norms prescribed by the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: "A formal, written law code was superimposed on the earlier unwritten one in the 13th century, when the church extended its ecclesiastical code to cover also the temporal judicial behavior of lords as well as commoners in all phases of life. This is referred to as ybahry hgg (lit. of-moral code), regarded as including 'moral law' (i.e. church law)" (Messing and Bender, 1985:143).

↳ Specifically moral norms are implicitly linked to vague metaphysical concepts:

– Yes

Notes: "This code, called the ftha ngst (Law of the Kings) was basically derived from the Roman Canon Law of Constantine, formulated at the Coptic Synod in Egypt in the ninth and tenth centuries, then translated in 1239 by Al-Safi Abu Al-Fada'il into the Arabic language which the Copts of Egypt had by that time adopted for their own worship also. The code was a blend of Canons of the Coptic church councils, the Justinian Code, and the Bible" (Messing and Bender, 1985:143).

↳ Specifically moral norms are linked in some way to an anthropomorphic being:

– Yes

Notes: "The Amhara's ideal of Christian piety does, however, include certain good works which should be carried out in order to gain God's favor—giving alms to the indigent, visiting the sick or the prisoner, and aiding the wayfarer (who is referred to as a "guest of God"). But such injunctions play a slight part in the Amhara's rhetoric of social morality when compared to his extensive code of "shames," or nawr . Stealing and breaking the fasts are among the very worst nawr . Other nawr include murder without good reason or by a shameful means like poison; adultery; insulting or not showing proper respect toward others; failing to observe the conventions concerning engagement and marriage; failing to revenge offenses; and gossiping about others and thereby stirring up trouble. Though the sense of being shamed before God provides some measure of internal self-control in these matters..." (Levine, 1965:82).

↳ Moral norms apply to:

– All individuals within society

Notes: See Messing and Bender, 1985:143.

## Practices

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### Membership Costs and Practices

Does membership in this religious group require castration:

– No

Notes: No evidence for the presence of castration is given in any of the principal ethnographic sources.

Does membership in this religious group require fasting:

– Yes

Notes: "Certain obligations are incumbent upon every member of the church. Foremost among these is the requirement of fasting, which begins for children of both sexes at about the age of seven and introduces a considerable element of constraint into the lives of the Amhara" (Levine, 1965:259).

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of adults:

"Adults" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition of a human who is 18-years-old or older and who is legally responsible for his/her actions, then please specify that difference in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Notes: No evidence for the presence of human sacrifice is given in any of the principal ethnographic sources.

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of children:

"Children" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition, please specify that different in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Notes: No evidence for the presence of human sacrifice is given in any of the principal ethnographic sources.

Does membership in this religious group require self-sacrifice (suicide):

– No

Notes: No evidence for the presence of human sacrifice is given in any of the principal ethnographic sources.

Does membership in this religious group require participation in small-scale rituals (private, household):

– No

Notes: "The rituals demanded by the church are so manifold, and so sacred, that responsibility for them is given to the clergy, and the laymen are left free to a large extent" (Levine, 1965:259).

Specific to this answer:

Status of Participants: ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

Are extra-ritual in-group markers present:

E.g. special changes to appearance such as circumcision, tattoos, scarification, etc.

– Yes

Notes: "Christian Amhara wear a blue neck cord (METEB), to distinguish themselves from Muslims" (Messing and Skoggard, 1998).

↳ Tattoos/scarification:

– Yes

Notes: SCCS Variable 1694 (General Scarification: Males) indicates that tattooing and cicatrization is present among males. SCCS Variable 1695 (General Scarification: Females) indicates that tattooing and cicatrization is present among females. (Ludvico and Kurland, 1995; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

↳ Circumcision:

– Yes

Notes: Circumcision is present but not required. "Another Old Testament survival, which is considered more customary than religious, is circumcision. Boys are circumcised about a week after birth, but not usually on Wednesday or Friday fast days. In some regions, but reputedly not in Gojjam, girl babies undergo clitoridectomy, performed by a woman in a strictly female gathering, so that the girl will not become a "selfish" wife, and will be happy in marriage. After these operations, the babies may be blessed by a priest. However, when an adult person becomes Christian, circumcision or clitoridectomy are not performed, since they are not required" (Messing and Bender, 1985:175).

↳ Hair:

– I don't know

↳ Ornaments:

– Yes

Notes: "Christian Amhara wear a blue neck cord (METEB), to distinguish themselves from Muslims" (Messing and Skoggard, 1998).

↳ Archaic ritual language:

– I don't know

## Society and Institutions

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## Levels of Social Complexity

The society to which the religious group belongs is best characterized as (please choose one):

This question refers to the wider society in which the religious group is located.

– A state

Notes: The Amhara have three levels of jurisdictional hierarchy beyond the local level, which is indicative of a state society (Ethnographic Atlas column 33, Murdock, 1967; retrieved from Divale, 2004).

## Education

Does the religious group provide formal education to its adherents:

– Yes

Notes: See Messing and Bender, 1985, pages 160-162.



Is such education open to both males and females:

– No

Notes: "Church students are usually boys ten years or over (never girls)..." (Messing and Bender, 1985:160).

Is formal education available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: Government schools are available in Gondar (Levine, 1965:46).



Is extra-religious education open to both males and females:

– I don't know

## Public Works

Does the religious group in question provide public food storage:

– No

Notes: SCCS Variable 20 indicates that food is stored in individual households (Murdock and Morrow, 1970; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Is public food storage provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– No

Notes: SCCS Variable 20 indicates that food is stored in individual households (Murdock and Morrow,

1970; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

## Taxation

Does the religious group in question levy taxes or tithes:

– Yes

Notes: Local priests collect dues on church lands, and the village headman (chiqa shum) assists in this task, which reflects the interwoven nature of the church and government (Messing and Bender, 1985:130).

Are taxes levied on the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: The government (which can be considered as coterminous with the church) taxes land, caravan trails, markets, etc. (Messing and Bender, 1985:130-131). For a more detailed description of government taxes, see Messing and Bender, 1985, pages 138-140.

## Enforcement

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized judges:

– Yes

Notes: "The feudal chief of the province, imitating the king, would 'sit in judgment' in Solomonic grandeur, usually twice a week, under a broad, shade-giving sycamore, in front of his 'palace'. The latter could range from a spacious tent to a stone house of round design in the ancient style (or a Portuguese-type castle of the seventeenth century). Surrounded by courtiers and would-be courtiers, he would also appoint smaller judges (danya), to hear more routine cases brought in from the countryside by the chiqa shum officials" (Messing and Bender, 1985:132). For more information on judicial officials, see Messing and Bender, pages 147-149.

Do the group's adherents interact with an institutionalized judicial system provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Does the religious group in question enforce institutionalized punishment:

– I don't know

Notes: "Two factors are noteworthy in the traditional method of investigating crimes. One is the use of the supernatural in tracing the criminal's trail; the other is participation of the church once the suspect is caught. While modern instructions from the central government tried to suppress the former, neither factor has lost much of its power over the attitudes and beliefs of nearly all rural Amhara, even towns-people" (Messing and bender, 1985:150).

Does the religious group in question have a formal legal code:

– Yes

Notes: "A formal, written law code was superimposed on the earlier unwritten one in the 13th century, when the church extended its ecclesiastical code to cover also the temporal judicial behavior of lords as well as commoners in all phases of life. This is referred to as ybahry hgg (lit. of-moral code), regarded as including 'moral law' (i.e. church law)...The Code consists of 51 chapters, of which 22 deal with church rules and 29 with civil and criminal law..." (Messing and Bender, 1985:143).

## Warfare

Does religious group in question possess an institutionalized military:

– Yes

Notes: "Until the diminution of feudal privileges during recent decades, the chiqa shum was also responsible for providing the military-feudal chiefs and their troops with provisions when they were on march, making it unnecessary for them to depend on supply lines. Now that army troops receive regular salaries, he still has to play host to travelling officials for their personal needs, since there are no rural hotels. They do not pay him except by promises of future favors" (Messing and Bender, 1985:30).

↳ Does the religious group in question have the power to conscript:

– I don't know

↳ Does the religious group in question maintain a full-time military corps (e.g. Swiss Guard):

– I don't know

↳ Does the religious group in question maintain a standing army:

– I don't know

Are the group's adherents protected by or subject to an institutionalized military provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– I don't know

## Calendar

Does the religious group in question possess a formal calendar:

– Yes

Notes: "The calendar of Ethiopia is based on the Julian calendar of Rome, but the year begins about September 11th, following the ancient Egyptian usage. The year has twelve months of 30 days each, plus five or six intercalary days at the end (the extra day once every four years)" (Messing and Bender, 1985).

## Food Production



Does the religious group in question provide food for themselves:

– Yes

Notes: The religious group is coterminous with the society in the case of the Amhara. The Amhara are primarily intensive agriculturalists and rely on irrigation, terrace farming, and the plow. Animal husbandry provides a secondary source of subsistence, and fishing makes an additional supplementary source of food. Source of information from Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock, 1962-1971), retrieved from Divale, 2004; Variables 203-207, 232.



Please characterize the forms/level of food production [choose all that apply]:

– Fishing

– Pastoralism

– Small-scale agriculture / horticultural gardens or orchards

– Large-scale agriculture (e.g., monocropping, organized irrigation systems)

Notes: The religious group is coterminous with the society in the case of the Amhara. The Amhara are primarily intensive agriculturalists and rely on irrigation, terrace farming, and the plow. Animal husbandry provides a secondary source of subsistence, and fishing makes an additional supplementary source of food. Source of information from Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock, 1962-1971), retrieved from Divale, 2004; Variables 203-207, 232.