

In Search of Zär'a Ya'əqob

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On the History, Philosophy, and Authorship of the
Ḥatäta Zär'a Ya'əqob and the Ḥatäta Wäldä Ḥəywät

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Jonathan Egid

In Search of Zär'a Ya'əqob: Introduction

Abstract: This introduction aims to contextualise the contributions to this edited volume by providing an overview of the *Ḥatäta Zär'a Ya'əqob* and its companion text, the *Ḥatäta Wäldä Həywät*: the manuscripts which contain them, the narrative of the texts themselves, the historical context of their setting, the circumstances of their composition and discovery, and the controversy over their authorship. I begin with a description of the manuscripts themselves and the context of their “discovery” in the middle of the nineteenth century as part of Catholic missionary activity in the Horn of Africa. I then turn to the historical background of the setting of the *Ḥatätas* in the Ethiopian Empire of the seventeenth century, in particular the political and religious conflict that forms its essential narrative context and provokes its philosophical reflections: the invasion of the Ethiopian Empire by the Adal Sultanate, the conversion of Emperor Susənyos to Catholicism and the resulting civil war, the accession of Fasilädäs, and the restoration of Orthodoxy. I examine how these political events shaped the life of the protagonist of the *Ḥatäta Zär'a Ya'əqob* and influenced the general problematic of his philosophy. The second part of the introduction turns to the reception history of the text. I divide this history into five periods: Discovery to Catalogue (1854–1859); Catalogue to Edition (1859–1904); Edition to Refutation (1904–1920); Refutation to Rehabilitation (1920–1976); and Limbo (1976–present), each of which traces the development of original arguments on the authorship question and outlines the cultural politics in the background of these arguments. I then reflect on the state of the debate in contemporary Ethiopia and Euro-American academia. A final section concludes the introduction by briefly considering the philosophical significance of the *Ḥatätas* and the debate concerning their authorship.

Note: I would like to thank Alessandro Bausi, Lea Cantor, Sara Marzagora, and Anaïs Wion for helpful and often incredibly detailed feedback on earlier drafts of this chapter. Lea Cantor in particular provided characteristically insightful comments pertaining to French and Italian sources. This chapter also uses a number of her translations.

1 Introduction

The *Ḥatāta Zār’a Ya’əqob*¹ (the “Inquiry”² or “Examination” of Zār’a Ya’əqob) is an enigmatic and controversial work. An autobiography composed in the Gə’əz language and set in the highlands of Ethiopia during the early seventeenth century, it bears witness to pivotal events in Ethiopian history and develops a philosophical system of considerable depth—expressed in prose of great power and beauty. It has been called the “jewel of Ethiopian literature”,³ and it served to demonstrate, in the words of Claude Sumner, that “modern philosophy, in the sense of a personal rationalistic critical investigation, began in Ethiopia with Zera Yacob at the same time as in England and in France”.⁴ However it has also been condemned as a forgery, an elaborate mystification successful in deceiving generations of European and Ethiopian scholars.

It has been claimed that the *Ḥatāta* is evidence of an “African Enlightenment” anticipating Kant, Locke and Hume,⁵ that it is the foundation stone of African philosophy,⁶ the earliest autobiography in sub-Saharan Africa, a witness to a specifically Ethiopian modernity,⁷ or a response to the ravages of religious conflict in seventeenth-century Ethiopia.⁸ On the other hand, the *Ḥatāta* has also been read as the ramblings of a lonely Italian friar living in Ethiopia over two centuries after its supposed completion⁹—even as a cover for “his bitter religious scepticism

1 This volume employs the field-standard method of transcription of Gə’əz terms outlined in the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, Volume III (Uhlig, Yiman, Crummey, Goldenberg, Marrassini, Aregay, and Wagner 2003), although some very common names like Addis Ababa or Haile Selassie retain their standard English forms. Quotations always retain original methods of transcription. Ethiopian naming conventions involve a personal name followed by a patronymic and do not include a family name. We always refer to Ethiopian scholars using both names, e.g., Getatchew Haile.

2 The Gə’əz root *ḥtt* signifies “to search, inquire, question, ask, interrogate a witness, investigate, explore, examine” (Leslau 2001 [1989], p. 21). Sections of the *Andämta* tradition of biblical exegesis often begin by announcing a *ḥatāta* or inquiry into some particular topic, which Cowley (1971) suggests signifies an investigation into the meaning of words, but which Ralph Lee (in correspondence) argues can involve any topic where more detail is required, translating *ḥatāta* in this context as “deep inquiry”.

3 Sumner (2004, p. 173), perhaps drawing on Conti Rossini’s (1920, p. 223; cf. 1935, p. 172) phrasing.

4 Sumner (1986, p. 42).

5 Herbjørnsrud (2017).

6 See, e.g., Sumner (1974a), Teodros Kiros (2005), and Mbongo (2005).

7 Jeffers (2017, p. 130).

8 Dawit Worku Kidane (2012).

9 Wion (2013a and 2013b).

[...] the feelings of his ulcerated heart",¹⁰ put in the mouth of a literary alter ego in the form of an imaginary Ethiopian philosopher.

This volume is an attempt to set the study of this fascinating text and its companion treatise, the *Ḥatāta Wäldä Ḥəywät*,¹¹ on new ground. There has been an explosion of interest in these texts outside of scholarly circles in the past five or so years, with Zär'a Ya'əqob featuring in popular essays,¹² podcast series,¹³ YouTube videos, and introductions to philosophy for children.¹⁴ As the works begin to attract new readers and a new translation promises to bring the original texts to wider audiences still,¹⁵ it is more important than ever to present a clear account of the most up-to-date scholarship on these texts and the ways they are being investigated by contemporary philosophers, philologists, and historians.

This is especially so due to the fact that the study of these texts is unusually controversial and emotive for a work of seventeenth-century philosophy. Most of the attention devoted to the *Ḥatāta Zär'a Ya'əqob* and the *Ḥatāta Wäldä Ḥəywät* over the past century has been on the question of their authorship, of whether they were composed, as is claimed in the texts, by a seventeenth-century Ethiopian scholar from Aksum and his disciple, respectively; or whether they were in fact composed over two centuries later by the Capuchin missionary Giusto da Urbino.¹⁶ In the century-long debate over what I will term "the authorship question", claims about the "authenticity" or otherwise of these texts have always taken on a political valence. Considering that key scholarship pertaining to the dispute was published during the invasion of Ethiopia by Fascist Italy, during the 1974 revolution that overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie, but also, more recently, amid attempts to decolonise and diversify philosophy in our present day, the significance of these political stakes and motivations cannot be underestimated.

The editors of this volume believe that serious engagement with the authorship question is required to put the study of these texts on a stable footing. Nevertheless, although the authorship question is approached, at least obliquely, in many of the contributions to this volume, authorship is not the sole locus of discussion.

¹⁰ Conti Rossini (1935, p. 172).

¹¹ Although much material in both Sections 1 and 2 of this volume pertains to the *Ḥatāta Wäldä Ḥəywät*, the general focus throughout is on the *Ḥatāta Zär'a Ya'əqob*, and for the sake of convenience, we will often refer to "the *Ḥatāta*" in the singular, meaning the *Ḥatāta Zär'a Ya'əqob* only.

¹² Egid (2023b), Herbjørnsrud (2017).

¹³ Adamson and Jeffers (2018a and 2018b).

¹⁴ De Botton (2018).

¹⁵ Zara Yaqob, Walda Heywat, Lee, Mehari Worku, and Belcher (2023).

¹⁶ Various spelled both in his own letters and in secondary literature as da Urbino, d'Urbino, and d'Urbini. We opt for the standard Italian form of da Urbino, as used in the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, Volume IV (cf. Uhlig and Bausi 2010, pp. 1043–1045).

The near-exclusive focus on this question over the last one hundred years has obscured scholarly interest in the philosophical and literary qualities of the texts, and their potentially significant implications not only for the history of philosophy in a global purview but also for Gə'əz literature and transnational intellectual history of the seventeenth century. This book aims to begin the process of filling this gap by providing sustained examination of the philosophical ideas contained in the texts.

There has long been a need to bring together a wide range of scholars to discuss these texts. The first reason is linguistic: the scholarship conducted on the *Ḥatātas* over the last one hundred years has spanned a number of languages, with important contributions made in French, Russian, Latin, Italian, German, and Amharic as well as English and Norwegian more recently. This required an effort to assemble a multilingual group of scholars conversant with these various bodies of work. Further, there was a major need to put scholars from Europe and North America into dialogue with developments in Ethiopian academia. For too long, the discussion of the texts proceeded independently in Anglo-European and Ethiopian intellectual circles, hindering the study of the *Ḥatātas* in both.

The second reason is that philosophical and philological-historical discussions about the texts have until now remained largely divorced from one another. The arguments made in the authorship debate are often rather technical and concern details of seventeenth- and nineteenth-century Ethiopian history that are not widely known to philosophers. Conversely, the detailed arguments in the authorship debate often miss the philosophical wood for the philological trees. Neither a historical, philological, or philosophical study of the texts can get very far without a dialogue among all three disciplines. Thus, the contributors and editors have a wide range of backgrounds and areas of expertise, from late antique and mediaeval philosophy to Ethiopian church literature and Gə'əz philology, African literature and colonial knowledge production.

The present volume serves in part as the proceedings for the *In Search of Zera Yacob* conference that took place at Worcester College, Oxford in late April 2022 in collaboration with Philiminality Oxford, a student-run platform for cross-cultural and interdisciplinary philosophy.¹⁷ The intention of the conference was first and foremost to examine the ideas, language, and history of the *Ḥatātas*, by putting scholars from across the world, and across disciplinary boundaries, into dialogue on these fascinating and neglected texts. That conference was over three years in

¹⁷ The lead organisers of the conference were two of the editors of the present volume, Jonathan Egid and Lea Cantor. Justin Holder and Johann Go were also local organisers at the University of Oxford.

the making, with delays caused by the Coronavirus pandemic, the 2020–2022 Tigray War, and the untimely death of the great Professor Getatchew Haile, who had been due to present his influential paper on the *Ḥatāta*.¹⁸

This introduction provides some background information on the discovery of the texts and their historical context, as well as an overview of the authorship controversy. The rest of the volume is comprised of two parts: Section 1 of the volume gathers papers with a primarily historical focus, while Section 2 brings together philosophically oriented discussions.

In his seminal paper from 2017, Getatchew Haile begins by reflecting on his growing unease with the scholarly consensus concerning the identity of the author of the *Ḥatāta* and by proposing to reopen the philological case for authenticity. His argument against the work being a simple forgery is complex. First, he rejects two widely held assumptions about the relation of the two manuscripts, both of which are kept at the Bibliothèque nationale de France ('BnF'): that the Littmann edition is preferable to that of Turayev and then that Abb215 is a better manuscript to work from than Abb234¹⁹. He argues that of these two manuscripts sent to Paris by Giusto da Urbino, neither is a faithful original or faithfully copied from an original. This postulation of a lost original leads Getatchew Haile to suggest a tentative reconstruction of the *Vorlage* from which the two versions were taken. He suggests that a series of copying errors reveals that one copyist, likely to have been Giusto da Urbino, introduced errors owing to his imperfect grasp of Gə'əz. He further elaborates the now familiar argument that Giusto da Urbino did not know Gə'əz well enough to use it without the help of an editor or co-author, and that therefore if Giusto da Urbino is to be suspected of anything, it is of having changed the message of the author, not of hiding his own identity. The major upshot of this postulated "original text", for Getatchew Haile, is that until it or an authentic copy is located, the pure contents of the original *Ḥatāta* and the identity of its author may remain a mystery. On this view, the extant manuscripts cannot give us an entirely accurate understanding of the author's philosophy. This presents an intriguing new possibility: that of a hybrid or mixed authorship of the texts, predating Giusto da Urbino's "discovery" but presenting modifications by him and his Ethiopian collaborators.

Anaïs Wion's contribution to this volume expands on her seminal papers "The History of a Genuine Fake Philosophical Treatise",²⁰ presenting an account of the genre and literary form of the *Ḥatāta* and its purported relation to the Gə'əz tra-

¹⁸ This 2017 paper is reproduced in this volume as Chapter 1 with the kind permission of Getatchew Haile's family.

¹⁹ I return to the history of these manuscripts in Section 3.1 below.

²⁰ Wion (2013a and 2013b). See also Mbodj-Pouye and Wion (2013).

dition. Beginning with the “autarchic” logic and intellectual autonomy of the texts, Wion examines the only text quoted in the *Ḥatāta*, namely, the Bible, in particular the psalms of David. Turning to the question of the “I” as another”, Wion presents an analysis of the role played by the colophons, composed supposedly by Wäldä Ḥəywät as they appear in the two BnF manuscripts. She examines the similarities and differences between the two texts and two manuscripts, noting discrepancies with the same discerning eye for detail that characterised her earlier work. Wion then goes on to examine parallels between the *Ḥatāta* and other forms of first-personal writing in early modern Ethiopia, such as personal addresses from emperors to their subjects in royal chronicles and quasi-biographical texts such as the *Miracles of Mary* of Səme’on and the “autobiography” of Abba Pawlos, arguing that the *Ḥatāta* constitutes a radical departure from these earlier models. Wion concludes by noting the “extreme originality” of the text in a seventeenth-century context, and posing a fascinating question about the production of the text in a context of limited literacy and the high valorisation of orality. Indeed, in what seems the greatest departure from her earlier works, Wion intriguingly suggests “an interesting possibility of co-authorship in the case of this second text [i.e., the *Ḥatāta Wäldä Ḥəywät*]”.

The philological-historical theme continues with Ralph Lee’s reflections on his recent translation of the *Ḥatātas* into English. He considers the task in relation to the 1976 translation by Claude Sumner,²¹ explaining and justifying the points of departure from the earlier work. In particular he focuses on the peculiar use of biblical quotation in the *Ḥatāta Zār’a Ya’əqob* and lists new discoveries of quotations and allusions to the various parts of the Ethiopian biblical canon that Sumner had not noticed, as well as to other religious works. He concludes by offering some reflections on the authorship debate from a linguistic perspective, arguing that there is nothing in the text that precludes a seventeenth-century authorship and that in light of this, we should take the authorship of the *Ḥatāta Zār’a Ya’əqob* at the word of its eponymous protagonist.

John Marenbon begins to steer the topics towards the history of philosophy, opening by asking what help a historian of mediaeval Latin philosophy can give to understanding the problems surrounding *Zār’a Ya’əqob*. His answer begins by examining passages in the two *Ḥatātas* where a cosmological-type argument is proposed, and asking how these cosmological arguments compare with those put forward by mediaeval philosophers. Although the results cast no direct light on the controversy about the authenticity of the *Ḥatātas*, they help to bring out the complexity of the issues involved, and suggest ways of thinking about how

²¹ Sumner (1976a).

such complexities should be treated. The second part of Marenbon's essay considers the more general question of whether philosophy can be forged, before using a selection of mediaeval examples—in particular drawing upon Marenbon's research on the historiography of the dispute over the love letters of Abelard and Heloise—a dispute that presents some striking parallels with that over the *Ḥatātas*. A closing section shows how the methodological lessons learned from these mediaeval examples can be applied to the case of Zār'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Ḥəywät.

The seventeenth-century context is also the subject of Eyasu Berento's contribution to the volume. Taking up the "exceptionality" of the *Ḥatāta* in the context of seventeenth-century Ethiopia, Eyasu Berento seeks to demonstrate deep continuities with earlier forms of thought from the Gə'əz tradition, thereby demonstrating its "situatedness" in Ethiopian Orthodox church learning, even as its critique of this tradition remains "exceptional". This dialectic between the exceptionality and situatedness is joined by an argument that the *Ḥatātas* are not the only exemplars of philosophical writing in Ethiopia and should be seen as gateways to the rich tradition of philosophical wisdom in Ethiopian intellectual history. Finally, Eyasu Berento also suggests the intriguing possibility of new evidence for the existence of a seventeenth-century heretic in the same time and place as the setting of the *Ḥatāta*.

Neelam Srivastava focuses her essay on a troubled episode in the reception history of the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'əqob*, discussing the influence of Italian racial theories on Carlo Conti Rossini's (in)famous refutation of Ethiopian authorship. Srivastava argues that the history of the text's reception by Conti Rossini can be traced back to the origins of the Italian colonial enterprise in the Horn of Africa and its discursive justifications for conquest that rested on the appropriation of knowledge about Ethiopia and the surrounding region. The chapter discusses how Conti Rossini brings an orientalist and racialising interpretation of societal and cultural evolution that posits a "stagist" view of history onto the Ethiopian past, and which led him to reject the *Ḥatāta* as a work of Ethiopian philosophy in part because it did not fit his Eurocentric view of intellectual progress.

Beginning the second section on Philosophy is Peter Adamson's essay, which situates the *Ḥatāta* in its regional and theological context by providing an account of Ethiopian philosophy as a part of Eastern Orthodox Philosophy. The latter category is rather underutilised in the history and historiography of philosophy but demonstrates its usefulness by accounting for some of the key ideas of not only the *Ḥatāta* but also earlier works of Ethiopian philosophy like the *Book of Wise Philosophers* and the *Maxims of Skendes*. Adamson examines the centrally important issue of *ləbbuna* ("reason, intelligence, understanding"), suggesting that we might see Zār'a Ya'əqob's account of *ləbbuna* as one of many philosophical responses

to a long tradition of inter-religious disputation in the Orthodox-Islamic world, in which reason is appealed to as an impersonal mediator between competing religious claims. Adamson also suggest intriguing parallels with Islamic thought: the semi-autobiographical form of the *Ḥatāta* mirrors that of al-Ghazālī's *Deliverer From Error* and the imagery of the cave in the *Ḥatāta* evokes not only the *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* of Ibn Ṭufayl but the Quran itself.

Developing ideas initially proposed in his Amharic language *Ethiopian Philosophy: An Analysis of Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'eqob and Wäldä Həywät*, Brooh Asmare argues that scholars have failed to consider the significance of Ethiopian cultural history in understanding the *Ḥatāta*, in particular what he takes to be its central theme: asceticism. Brooh Asmare suggests that the *Ḥatātas* can be seen as the product of a dialogue between Zār'a Ya'qob's critical philosophy and the established ascetic culture of mediaeval Ethiopia as represented by the figures of the "Nine Saints" who brought Christianity to Aksum. He offers a speculative, quasi-Nietzschean genealogy of these two opposed trends in Ethiopian intellectual life. His essay presents a case for the deep rootedness of the intellectual and moral problematics of the *Ḥatātas* in debates internal to Ethiopian Orthodoxy.

Binyam Mekonnen offers another perspective on the *Ḥatāta* from within the tradition of Gə'əz literature, focusing his contribution on the fifteenth-century heretical sect known as the Däqīqä Ḥatātas—comprised of rebels against the emperor (not the philosopher) Zār'a Ya'eqob. Building on Maimire Mennasemay's study of the Däqīqä Ḥatātas, Binyam Mekonnen argues that their writings offer philosophical precursors of ideas developed in the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'eqob*, such as reflections on the nature and limits of state coercion; the relation of individual belief to established religion; and the role of reason in religious critique. Binyam Mekonnen argues that the study of Ethiopian philosophy needs to be grounded in these precursors of modernity and that therefore historians of philosophy need to expand their notion of the foundations of Ethiopian philosophy beyond the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'eqob*.

Anke Graness' contribution zooms out from the Ethiopian locale to questions of more general interest for the history and historiography of philosophy, exploring broad questions of authorship and canon-formation. Graness begins by examining the notion of authorship in African philosophy, in particular in ancient Egyptian writings and in oral traditions, drawing parallels with the debate on authorship and authenticity of the *Ḥatātas* of Zār'a Ya'eqob and Wäldä Həywät. Turning to more modern issues, the paper illustrates the role of the *Ḥatāta* in the discourse on African philosophy since the seventies, arguing that the debates about the *Ḥatāta* provide a vivid example of narrative-formation in the history of philosophy in Africa. Graness then considers the *Ḥatāta* in a comparative light, examining what it means when the authenticity of a foundational text is suddenly

called into question. In doing so, she highlights the significance and political valence of debates about authorship and authenticity in the context of reconstructing philosophical traditions in formerly colonised and still philosophically marginalised regions of the world.

Fasil Merawi considers the relevance of the *Ḥatäta* to contemporary African philosophy, making the provocative argument that not only is the *Ḥatäta* a forgery, but even if it were not, it could not serve as a foundation for Ethiopian philosophy. The focus on the *Ḥatäta* as the origin and centrepiece of Ethiopian philosophy, Fasil Merawi claims, is borne of a “Eurocentric discourse involved in the search for an Other that thinks like the European man”, and it is precisely the similarities with European thought, Fasil Merawi argues, that lead many commentators to hold up the *Ḥatäta* as an exemplar of philosophical thought in Africa. Fasil Merawi instead suggests, in a Hountondjian vein, that “Ethiopian philosophy is still in the making”²²—that it is a project for philosophers not to discover, but to create.

In the final essay, Henry Straughan and Michael O'Connor return us to the core philosophical topics raised by the *Ḥatäta* itself, tracing the interaction between reason and grace, and the role of discursive argumentation versus immediate intuition in the text. They examine the *Ḥatätas'* discussion of the epistemic significance of disagreement and distrust of testimony; the argument for the existence of God; the theodical response to the problem of evil; and the practical ethics. The authors intriguingly suggest that Zär'a Ya'əqob's central method of argument is abductive, resting on something like a principle of sufficient reason—opening up fruitful avenues for comparative work with early modern European philosophy.

2 Description of the *Ḥatäta Zär'a Ya'əqob* Manuscripts

The *Ḥatäta Zär'a Ya'əqob* was purportedly discovered in 1852 in the region of Bägemdär, Northern Ethiopia, by a Capuchin friar named Giusto da Urbino. The latter also discovered the *Ḥatäta Wäldä Ḥəywät* in the following year and allegedly recovered the full text in 1854.²³ Two manuscripts are kept in the d'Abbadie collec-

²² Cf. Hountondji (1983 [1976]).

²³ There is as yet no definitive record of the texts being mentioned in either Ethiopian or European sources before 1852/1853 (1852 in the case of the *Ḥatäta Zär'a Ya'əqob*; 1853 in the case of the *Ḥatäta Wäldä Ḥəywät*). Giusto da Urbino sent the first manuscript of the *Ḥatäta Zär'a Ya'əqob*

tion of Ethiopian manuscripts at the Bibliothèque nationale de France. The first of these, *Manuscrit BnF Éthiopien Abbadie 234*, copied in Giusto da Urbino's hand, possibly from a manuscript discovered first in 1852, contains only the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'əqob*. The other manuscript, *Manuscrit BnF Éthiopien Abbadie 215*, which reached Paris in 1856, contains both the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'əqob* and the *Ḥatāta Wäldä Ḥəywät* and is almost twice as long. Both manuscripts date from the mid-nineteenth century and were copied, according to the Giusto-d'Abbadie correspondence,²⁴ from older, perhaps original manuscripts.

The BnF 234 is written on paper in a distinctive hand, liling to the right, with a few smudged scribal errors and biblical quotations marked in Latin characters on the margins of the page. It was most likely copied out by Giusto da Urbino. BnF 215 is a codex more typical of the Ethiopian manuscript tradition, written on vellum and bound using rope to tie the quires to sturdy wooden boards. It is composed in a neater and more attractive hand, likely by a local *däbtära*.²⁵ The latter was possibly one of those named by Täklä Haymanot (an Ethiopian convert to Catholicism who frequented the same circles as Giusto da Urbino) as Amārḥän and Goššu,²⁶ although Wion identifies him as one *äläqa* Tayä Gäbrä Maryam.²⁷ Both texts are *codices unici*, so that no other copies exist, and no earlier version is attested.²⁸ They have been kept at the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris since the d'Abbadie collection was bequeathed to the French State, on the death of its owner, along with the rest of his two hundred Ethiopian manuscripts. Prior to this, the two manuscripts had been stored in the private collection of d'Abbadie since their arrival in Europe in the late 1850s.

(Abb234) to Paris in early 1853. The second manuscript (Abb215), which also contained the *Ḥatāta Wäldä Ḥəywät*, reached Paris years later, in 1856.

²⁴ These letters are available at the BnF (NAF 23851 and NAF 23852 *Lettres et documents sur les missions chez les peuples gallas* (1845–1895)). BnF NAF 23852 contains correspondence with missionaries, including Juste d'Urbain (fol. 3–128v), but I have here largely relied on Wion's (2013a and 2013b) and Trozzi's (1986) detailed notes on the correspondence.

²⁵ An unordained scholar versed in the teachings of the church who may take on work as a scribe or musician or partake in magical rituals.

²⁶ These names are mentioned for the first time in Conti Rossini's (1916, p. 497) preliminary account of Täklä Haymanot's accusations against Giusto da Urbino.

²⁷ Wion (2013b).

²⁸ As Wion (2013a) notes, *unica* are not unknown in Ethiopian literature. The *Royal Chronicle of Susənyos*, a near-contemporary work to the *Ḥatāta*, exists only through a single manuscript copy acquired in Gondär in 1770 by James Bruce and kept at the Bodleian Library. To distinguish the unusualness of the *Ḥatāta* from the not uncommon *unica*, Wion calls the *Ḥatāta* a *hapax*—a term usually reserved for lexemes—representing a genre (the autobiography) unknown to Ethiopian literature. See Wion's essay in this volume (Chapter 2) for a more detailed discussion of first-person writing in the *Ḥatātas* and in Ethiopian literature more generally.

3 Historical Context

3.1 Linguistic and Religious Background

The *Ḥatātas* are written in Gə'əz, an Ethiopian Semitic language spoken in northern Ethiopia from antiquity until approximately the tenth/thirteenth century but attested in inscriptions since the second/third century CE. Since the first millennium BCE, however, writing in South Arabian language and script is attested by a small corpus of inscriptions also on the African shore of the Red Sea. Gə'əz was the language of the Aksumite empire (usually dated from the first to the seventh century CE), and when the kingdom converted to Christianity in the fourth century, it became the liturgical language of the Ethiopian Orthodox church. Owing to the particularly close relations between Gə'əz, the imperial court, and the Orthodox church, which served as the primary locus for education in the Christian highlands, Gə'əz not only formed a key part of Orthodox education; it also became the language of the vast majority of Ethiopian Christian literature.²⁹

Since it constitutes a fundamental part of the philosophical and theological motivations of Zār'a Ya'əqob's system, it is worth briefly noting Ethiopia's unique religious milieu: it is famously one of the world's oldest Christian polities but is also home to the oldest Muslim community outside Arabia³⁰ and to the enigmatic Betä ʿIsrael community of "Ethiopian Jews".³¹

Much as with Latin in early modern Europe, intellectual life in the Ethiopian Empire was in the seventeenth century diglossic between Gə'əz, the ancient classical language of literature and the church, and the spoken vernaculars. The many languages spoken in the Ethiopian Empire included a number of Cushitic languages, including Oromo, Somali, and Agaw, and a wide range of other Ethiopian Semitic languages closely related to (but not, as was once thought, descended from) Gə'əz,³² such as Gurage, Harari, Tigrinya, and Amharic. The latter was the language of the court, and by far the most prominent spoken language at the time. The author(s) of the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'əqob* would have known both Gə'əz and one or

29 Excellent surveys of this literature include Getatchew Haile (2005a) and Bausi (2020). See Leslau (1951) for a summary of Betä ʿIsrael literature in Gə'əz.

30 Mohammed's earliest followers were sheltered by the Najashi (*nagāsi*) of Aksum when forced to flee Mecca by the Quraysh.

31 According to some older theories the Betä ʿIsrael community predates both the Christian and Islamic presence. According to more recent research (cf. Kaplan 1992 and Quirin 2010 [1992]) it is in fact a much later phenomenon.

32 Rather, it shares with the others an origin in an as yet unattested Afroasiatic language.

more of the vernaculars, including almost certainly Amharic, the everyday language spoken at court and today the *lingua franca* of the Ethiopian state, but probably also another local language, which in the case of a scholar from Aksum would have been Tigrinya.

3.2 Composition of the text

According to the text, the *Ḥatāta* was composed in 1667,³³ the sixty-eighth year of Zār'a Ya'āqob's life. The composition seems to be the result of his student Wäldä Ḥəywät urging him to recall and set to writing the philosophical system that he had developed during his time in the cave. The *Ḥatāta* was thus written over forty years after the ideas were initially conceived, allowing for the possibility that the form in which they were expressed and even the content may have changed substantially. The text is framed by two *nəstit* (lit. "morsel") from Wäldä Ḥəywät, who seems to have served as the first editor of the text.³⁴

In the Name of God, who alone is righteous, I, Walda Heywat, shall write down the life story, wisdom, and philosophical inquiry of Zara Yaqob, which he himself composed.³⁵

May God bless us with the same blessings as those of my father, Habtu, and with the same blessings as those of my teacher, Zara Yaqob. Now I am [also] very old [and near death]. [As the Psalmist says,] "I was a young man and I have grown old, yet I have never seen a righteous person rejected, nor their children lack food, but they live amidst blessings forever". I, Walda Heywat, who is called Metekku, added this short piece to my teacher's book, so that you may know the beautiful end of his life. Regarding my wisdom, which God gave me to understand and that Zara Yaqob taught me for fifty-nine years, I also have written a book, one of knowledge and advice for all Ethiopia's children. May God give them understanding and wisdom and love, and may he bless them forever and ever.³⁶

33 The Ethiopian calendar is seven or eight years "earlier" (or rather "later": May 2023 in the Gregorian calendar is 2015 in the Ethiopian calendar) than the Gregorian calendar owing to a different calculation of the date of the Annunciation. We will always cite dates in the Gregorian calendar unless clearly signposted.

34 This is not clear from Sumner's English translation, which begins as follows: "In the name of God who alone is just. I shall describe the life, the wisdom and the investigation of Zara Yacob (...)" (Sumner 1976a, p. 3).

35 Abb215, 1r. In this introduction, the translation of the *Ḥatāta* employed is that of Ralph Lee et al. (see Zara Yaqob, Walda Heywat, Lee, Mehari Worku, and Belcher 2023). Names are transliterated differently in this text so as to avoid the use of diacritics.

36 Abb215, 30v.

Judging from these last comments, Wäldä Həywät was an old man when he completed his own, subsequent *Ḥatäta*, though we do not have any reliable dates for his lifespan. As there exist no other contemporary sources attesting to the life of Zār'a Ya'əqob, the information about him is all internal to the text. Throughout this introduction, I refer to the persona “Zār'a Ya'əqob” as portrayed by the texts, without, however, taking a stand on whether he was in fact a person or a literary creation.

Zār'a Ya'əqob's times were tumultuous,³⁷ marked by civil war, religious strife, and the challenges of a rapidly globalising world. In what follows I provide a brief general overview of the historical situation of the Ethiopian Empire in the seventeenth century, narrate the causes and consequences of the conversion of Emperor Susənyos I in 1622, and discuss the impact of these developments on the narrative of the *Ḥatäta*.

3.3 Ethiopian-Adal War

The sixteenth century saw an extended conflict between the Ethiopian Empire and the Sultanate of Adal, located to the east of the empire in modern day Afar, Djibouti, and northwestern Somalia. The Adal were supported by the Ottoman Empire and were the first to bring gunpowder-based weapons to the highland plateau that forms a natural defensive wall around the core of the Ethiopian Empire. Under Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ġāzī (better known in Ethiopia as Ahmad Grañ or “Ahmed the left-handed”), traditionally localised cross-border raids became ever more daring incursions and then a full-scale invasion known in Arabic sources as the *Futuḥ al-Habaš*, “the conquest of Abyssinia”. Adal armies pushed further into the Ethiopian empire than ever before, defeating the Ethiopian Emperor Dawit II in battle on multiple occasions.³⁸ In Ethiopian sources, the period is remembered as one of intense hardship; and the figure of Grañ was long invoked as a figure of barbarism and destruction, and accused of burning villages, looting monastery libraries, and massacring priests and monks.

As the armies of Adal pushed ever further across the broad plateau, Emperors Ləbnä Dəngəl and Gälawdewos sent calls for aid to Christian Europe. Europeans seem to have viewed these Emperors as isolated Christian princes locked in a heroic struggle with the forces of Islam, drawing on the mediaeval myth of Prester

³⁷ For the sake of convenience, I will use the doubly capitalised “Ethiopian Empire” to refer to the polity ruling the Ethiopian highlands over most of the past millennium.

³⁸ Arabfaqih (2005). See also more recently Chekroun (2023).

John, the Nestorian king in the east who would one day join his Christian brothers in reclaiming Jerusalem.³⁹ In 1541, the call was answered by the King of Portugal, and a military expedition led by Cristóvão da Gama, son of Vasco da Gama, landed at the port of Massawa to fight against the Sultanate. The Portuguese were at least as interested in making an ally in the vicinity of the Indian Ocean as in liberating the kingdom of Prester John. Ethiopian-Portuguese and Somali-Turkish armies faced off on three occasions: on the first, Portuguese firepower won an inspiring victory; at the battle of Wofl (1543), da Gama was killed; and at the battle of Wäyna Däga (1543), a Portuguese musketeer charged the Adal ranks and shot al-Ġāzī, scattering the forces of the Sultanate and stemming the tide that had threatened to drown the Empire.⁴⁰

3.4 Susānyos and the Portuguese

Following this victory, missionaries replaced musketeers in the steady intercontinental traffic between Europe and the Horn of Africa, including some of the earliest Jesuit missions. Jesuits were initially allowed to preach only to non-Orthodox parts of Ethiopian society, but having integrated themselves into the imperial court, the young Emperor Susānyos came to admire their pious, eloquent leader Pedro Páez. Recognising the usefulness of close relations with Europe, Susānyos reversed earlier restrictions on the movement of foreigners and granted the Jesuits land to build churches and monasteries along the coast of Lake Tana, where the ruins of large castles and elaborate churches in a distinctive Ethiopian Indian style are still visible today. According to Jesuit sources, Susānyos privately accepted Catholicism early in his reign but was persuaded by an apprehensive Páez not to announce his faith publicly. In his letters to the Pope and the King of Portugal, he made no mention of his conversion, even when requesting further military assistance.⁴¹

By 1622, Susānyos decided that he could wait no longer to be formally received into the Catholic church, declaring his new faith publicly through an imperial edict and making Catholicism the official religion of the Empire. It was in this crucial

³⁹ For this fascinating phenomenon and its relation to early Ethiopian-Portuguese relations, see Salvadore (2017).

⁴⁰ Although in a later battle, in 1559, Emperor Gälawdewos—the author of a theological treatise defending the Orthodox religion against Catholic missionaries (see, e.g., Ullendorff 1987)—was killed by the armies of Emir Nūr, the nephew of al-Ġāzī.

⁴¹ Excellent recent studies on the Jesuit missions to Ethiopia include Cohen (2009) and d'Alós-Moner (2015).

moment that the diplomatic and ecumenical Páez died, to be replaced two years later by Alfonso Mendes (almost certainly the *Æfons* mentioned in Chapter 3 of the *Ḥatāta*), a man described by subsequent historians as “rigid, uncompromising, narrow-minded, and intolerant”.⁴² Páez had been pivotal in preventing a rupture between the imperial court, which had largely converted to Catholicism, and the Orthodox church that played such a huge part in everyday Ethiopian life; but Mendes insisted on demanding acts of public conversion and the rebaptism of ordained priests, and on banning practises such as fasting, circumcision, and the Saturday Sabbath, which lay at the heart of Ethiopia’s distinctive Christianity. A brutal civil war erupted that would leave tens of thousands dead and cast a long shadow over future Ethiopian-European relations.

The civil war would eventually come to an end in 1632, with Susənyos abdicating the throne in favour of his son Fasilädäs. The calamitous end to the first period of sustained European-Ethiopian political interaction led to the establishment of new connections with Muslim rulers such as the Ottoman Sultan and the Grand Mughal.⁴³

4 Summary of the Narrative: The Life of Zär'a Ya'eqob

According to the narrative of the *Ḥatāta*, Zär'a Ya'eqob was born in on 28 August 1599 to a family of poor farmers near Aksum in Tigray.⁴⁴ He was sent to receive a traditional church education which began, then as now, with the memorisation of John 1, then the Psalms, and eventually the rest of the Bible, followed by study of Gə'əz, poetry, and the interpretation of scripture. He was successful at this first stage of education and was selected for further studies, being sent this time to “study the chanting of *Zema*”,⁴⁵ the sacred music of the Ethiopian Orthodox church. He left after three months on account of being mocked by his fellow students and went to a teacher of *Qəne* poetry and *Sāwasəw* (the Ethiopian tradition

⁴² According to Budge (1970, p. 390). Mendes (see especially Mendes 1692) also left an account of his time in Abyssinia, primarily in his memoirs, but also in some fascinating letters sent back to the Portuguese court, including a letter describing a debate between himself and a Viennese Jew which unsurprisingly resulted in his victory, and the expulsion of the unfortunate Jew. See Cohen and Kaplan (2003).

⁴³ Uhlig (2005, p. 501).

⁴⁴ For the remainder of the section, I report the life of Zär'a Ya'eqob as recounted in the text itself.

⁴⁵ Abb215 1v.

of grammatical studies). He was happier at this new school and remained there for four years.

Next, he graduated to the highest level of traditional Ethiopian education: the interpretation of scripture. It was here that he first encountered foreign ideas, as he “studied the [Holy] books, how the “*fāranġ*” [lit. “Franks”]⁴⁶ interpret them and also how the teachers of our country interpret them”,⁴⁷ that is, when he was party to debates between Catholic and Orthodox scholars, likely the Portuguese Jesuits patronised by Emperor Susənyos and Ethiopian scholars. It is unclear where exactly Zār’a Ya’əqob studied and whether he encountered these ideas from face-to-face discussions with Europeans or Ethiopian Christians, or how much access he had to Catholic religious literature, though it is possible that some works of Augustine and Aquinas were in circulation and accessible to him.⁴⁸ If these discussions took place, as implied, in person, he is likely to have studied and taught either at the court (at this point in no fixed location) or in a major urban area. One important site of Jesuit scholarship and manuscript dissemination was Fəremona,⁴⁹ less than a day’s walk from Zār’a Ya’əqob’s hometown of Aksum. In either case, his encounters with these new ideas would seem to have had a significant impact on the development of his distinctive and independent direction of thought: “often their interpre-

46 Although the term *fāranġ* is certainly a corruption of the term “Frank” used widely in the Eastern Orthodox world to refer to Catholic Europeans, it can be very difficult to know how best to translate the term in the context of the *Ḥatāta*. Lee (in Zara Yaqob, Walda Heywat, Lee, Mehari Worku, and Belcher 2023) translates the term as “foreigners” or “Europeans”, but in some contexts, ‘Catholic’ seems apt. On the question of the various translations of *fāranġ*, see Littmann (1916b), pp. 236–243.

47 Abb215 2r.

48 Both *agustiños liq əmur* (Augustine) and *qəddus tomas əkinawi* (Aquinas) are mentioned in the *Magseph Assetat* of Antonio Fernandez, along with a number of other Jesuit theologians. We also know from Páez’ *História da Etiópia* that the *Orationes* of Cicero and modern works such as the *Relazioni Universali del Mondo* by Giovanni Botero were in the mission’s book collections in Ethiopia. More intriguing still is a letter from Mendes to the mission headquarters, in which he writes: “Your Majesty asked on September 28, to which I respond, if the library of the Father Francisco Soares [sic] has the books that were necessary for me, and for my associates [...] Thus if the Mesa da Consciência [e Ordens] would give us the entire library of the father Francisco Soares, we would take those books suited to us, and those remaining we would substitute for other ecclesiastics such as missals, breviaries, rituals, etc.” (quoted in translation from the Portuguese in Windmuller-Luna 2015). This reveals that the library of the greatest late scholastic philosopher was sent to seventeenth-century Ethiopia! It is, however, highly likely that many of the texts did not arrive, having disappeared along the way, in particular at the Portuguese mission in Goa.

49 Windmuller-Luna (2015).

tation was not in harmony with my reason, so I just kept silent and hid all the thoughts in my heart".⁵⁰

After ten years learning the interpretation of scripture, he returned to Aksum for four years. It was during this period that Emperor Susənyos announced his conversion to Catholicism and unleashed a persecution on recalcitrant Orthodox Ethiopians that would turn into a civil war. This new state of affairs did not suit the free-minded Zär'a Ya'əqob, who in a climate of inflamed religious tensions found his sceptical attitude unappreciated:

while teaching and expounding the books [for my students], I said, "the foreigners[, the European Catholics,] say these things, and the Copts[, the Egyptian Orthodox Christians,] say these other things". I did not say, "this interpretation is good" or "that interpretation is bad". Rather, I said, "all of these interpretations are good if we ourselves are good".

They all hated me for this, since to the Copts[, the Egyptian Orthodox Christians,] I seemed like a foreigner[, a European Catholic,] and to the foreigners, I seemed like a Copt.⁵¹

Sometime in the 1620s, he was denounced to the Emperor by a courtier, Wäldä Yo-ħannəs, for inciting "the people to rise up for our faith, kill the king and expel the *fərang*⁵² and was forced to flee Aksum by night, making for the south with nothing but a psalter and "three measures of gold".⁵³ Fleeing for his life, Zär'a Ya'əqob crossed the Tigrayan plateau, passing through the Sämen mountains towards Lake Tana. It was here that he came across "a beautiful cave at the foot of a deep valley [...] and I said to myself 'I shall live here unnoticed'".⁵⁴ It was whilst living in this cave that Zär'a Ya'əqob came up with his philosophical system, which he presents as a series of meditations and reflections on a topic provoked by his readings of the psalms and the folly and hatred of men that had forced him to flee for his life.

Here he remained for two years, foraging or begging for food, praying and meditating on the psalter. These meditations form the basis of an original and penetrating philosophical vision, grounded in human reason as much as divine providence, an "ideal theory" of harmony between reason and God, and a "non-ideal" theory of the moral and cognitive failings of man.

When Fasilädäs rose to the throne and restored Orthodox Christianity as the religion of the Empire, Zär'a Ya'əqob descended his cave and travelled south

⁵⁰ Windmuller-Luna (2015).

⁵¹ Abb215 2v

⁵² Abb215 3r.

⁵³ Abb215 3r.

⁵⁴ Abb215 3r.

through “the lands of the Amhara”⁵⁵ to Bägemdär, receiving alms from those who mistook him for an orthodox monk or *däbtära*. He came to a village near the town of Īnfraz to the northeast of Lake Tana, where he was employed as a scribe by a wealthy merchant named Häbtu. He earned a small wage copying books and became part of the household of Häbtu, teaching his sons Täsämma (Wäldä Mikä’el) and Mötäkku (Wäldä Həywät), and asked Häbtu for one of his servants as a wife. The marriage was happy—“I believe no other marriage was as strong in love and blessed by God as ours is”⁵⁶—and in 1638, they had a son named Bəšägga Habtä Ēgzi’äbḥer.⁵⁷

By this time, Fasilädäs had turned against the Jesuits and expelled them and their followers to Färemona. When the Jesuits left the country, Zär’a Ya’əqob was induced to return to Aksum by relatives, raising the attention of his erstwhile enemy Wäldä Yohannəs, who denounced Zär’a Ya’əqob as a Catholic missionary to the governor of Īnfraz. However, Wäldä Yoḥannəs, who had since been appointed governor of Dämbiya, was murdered by his subjects, and the accusation appears to have been ignored.⁵⁸

In 1642, a famine swept Ethiopia—a fact interpreted by Zär’a Ya’əqob as divine punishment for “the sins of our people”—but Zär’a Ya’əqob and his family survived, feeding the hungry and afflicted through the difficult period. A year later, on his deathbed, Häbtu asked Zär’a Ya’əqob to “be a father to his children”, Wäldä Mikä’el and Wäldä Həywät. The latter “Metekku [that is, Walda Heywat,] had also learned to write [and work] as a scribe and had mastered grammar and the scriptures. So, he bonded with me in knowledge and great love. He knew all my secrets, [my beliefs,] and there was nothing that I hid from him”⁵⁹.

Zär’a Ya’əqob’s own son grows up and is married, and in 1667, the year of the death of Fasilädäs, Zär’a Ya’əqob gathers his ideas together in what would become the *Ḥatäta* at the urging of Wäldä Həywät: “After he wrote this book, Zara Yaqob lived in virtuous old age for twenty-five more years, loving God our creator, and glorifying him day and night. Meanwhile, he became very honoured [by everyone around him]. Zara Yacob, who is [also called] Warqe, lived until he was ninety-three years old, never falling ill. He died with great hope in God our creator”.⁶⁰

55 Abb215 25v.

56 Abb215 25r.

57 Abb215 25r.

58 Abb215 26r.

59 Abb215 28v.

60 Abb215 30r–30v.

5 Reception History

5.1 Overview

Over the next one hundred years from its nineteenth-century “discovery”, the *Ḥatäta* became a source of scholarly fascination in Europe, Ethiopia, and the wider world, first as a work of philosophy, then as a scholarly forgery, and since then as everything from the initiator of modern philosophy to the thinly-veiled autobiography of a lonely Italian friar. In this section, I outline the reception history of the *Ḥatäta Zär'a Ya'äqob* in five major historical phases.

5.2 Discovery to Catalogue (1854–1859)

The *Ḥatäta Zär'a Ya'äqob* was discovered by the Capuchin friar Giusto da Urbino, a member of the mission to convert Oromo peoples of southern Ethiopia led by Guglielmo Massaia (who would later become the famous Cardinal Massaia). Giusto da Urbino was born on 30 August 1814 in Matraia and lived in East Africa between 1846 and 1855. He was an unconventional missionary, showing more interest in linguistic study than evangelising. After three years in the northern parts of the Ethiopian Empire, Giusto split from the mission, refusing to join the mission as its members departed for the lands of the Oromo. Even after the offer of a bishopric from Massaia, he insisted on remaining in the northern province of Bägemdär, where he composed a number of linguistic works, including a Gə'əz-French-Amharic dictionary, a Gə'əz-Latin dictionary, a Gə'əz grammar, and a Gə'əz translation of a missionary text known as the *Soirées de Carthage*.⁶¹

Besides his linguistic works, Giusto da Urbino appears to have harboured literary and philosophical ambitions.⁶² In his unpublished correspondence with

⁶¹ The main detailed primary sources on Giusto da Urbino are the memoirs of Cardinal Massaia, the rediscovered correspondence between Giusto and Antoine d'Abbadie in the BnF (which is discussed at length by Wion 2013a and 2013b as well as by Trozzi 1986), and the correspondence between Giusto and his close friend Costantino Nascimbeni. Francesco Tarducci published a biography of Giusto da Urbino based especially on Massaia's memoirs and Giusto's correspondence with Nascimbeni (as well as interviews with people who knew him through the Nascimbeni household) in 1899.

⁶² This is apparent from his correspondence with both his close friend Costantino Nascimbeni (discussed extensively in Tarducci 1899) and his patron Antoine d'Abbadie (discussed especially by Trozzi 1986, Wion 2013a, and Wion 2013b).

his patron Antonie d’Abbadie, we read that he had hoped to be employed by d’Abbadie as an editor of his Ethiopian collection: “I had hoped that you would bring me into your house when I had grown old and that you would appoint me as reader and keeper of your Ethiopian books, as scribe and translator of them. But you, today, by your silence, have shattered my hopes”.⁶³

The Giusto-d’Abbadie correspondence is a fascinating resource that has been employed by a number of scholars in the authorship debate. Spanning a period of almost a decade, between 1846 and Giusto’s death in Khartoum in 1856, the letters cover and detail the political events of the day as well as Giusto’s efforts at discovering Ethiopian manuscripts and sending them to France. They are also entirely one-sided in that d’Abbadie’s side of the correspondence does not survive, and indeed, the texts are remarkable for the unusual tone of their communication—with Giusto berating d’Abbadie for failing to support him in his dire material circumstances and bragging about his mastery of Gə‘əz.

From 1853/1854, his letters to d’Abbadie reveal his hopes of writing an original literary or philosophical work that would serve as a personal testament of his life and thought:

I was born to write rather than to teach the spoken word. My Ethiopic writings will undoubtedly have their effects, but it will be too late.⁶⁴

And again:

May my wishes reach the heart of some philosopher (σοφος in its first and true sense) and may he have mercy on me, I who am a true philosopher (σοφω instead of σοφος). [...] When one cannot say everything, it is better to keep quiet. However, if it is *in factis*, I will conscientiously write my life or History of my Thought (the materials are ready) and after my death we will see if it is me who should blush at my current spiritual misery today or if it is others.⁶⁵

In 1852, he discovers the *Ḥatāta Zār’a Ya’əqob* for the first time. By February 1853, he has recovered the full text of the *Ḥatāta Zār’a Ya’əqob* and copied it for his patron Antoine d’Abbadie, one of the great scientist explorers of nineteenth-century

⁶³ Letter from 1 March 1852 to Antonie d’Abbadie, NAF 23852, fol. 17–18. In May 1854, Giusto had already declared that “I could give birth to a novel, nothing more” (NAF 23852, fol. 55–56). Translated by Cantor, Egid, and Wion in Wion (2013a; 2013b).

⁶⁴ Letter from January 1854, NAF 23852, fol. 49–50. Translated by Cantor, Egid, and Wion in Wion (2013a).

⁶⁵ Letter from September 1853, NAF 23852, fol. 41–42. Translated by Cantor, Egid, and Wion in Wion (2013a).

France. D'Abbadie had returned from Ethiopia five years earlier with the largest collection of manuscripts ever taken out of Ethiopia, and he maintained a network of missionaries and Ethiopian scholars to continue the work of acquisition. Wion (2013a and 2013b) has argued that d'Abbadie's aim was to compile the first truly scientific catalogue of Ethiopian works to serve as the basis for a new scholarly discipline of *Études Éthiopiennes* on the model of Egyptology or Assyriology from earlier in the nineteenth century and that he was actively searching for rare or unusual texts.

In the letter of 10 February 1853, Giusto mentions the *Ḥatāta Wäldä Ḥəywät* for the first time and says a *däbtära* from Däbrä Tabor has told him he has seen a copy and that he has promised Giusto that he would give him a copy of it for one thaler. In Easter 1854, Giusto recovers another manuscript, this one also containing the *Ḥatāta Wäldä Ḥəywät*, but he is expelled from the country in 1855 as part of Emperor Tewodros' and *Abunä Sälama's* anti-Catholic persecutions. The text is sent to Europe in 1856, where it sat in d'Abbadie's collection until catalogued in 1859.⁶⁶

5.3 Catalogue to Edition (1859–1904)

There is little information on the fate of the *Ḥatātas* between the d'Abbadie catalogue and the first edition in 1904. When d'Abbadie died in 1897, his collection of Ethiopian manuscripts was bequeathed to the *Académie des Sciences*, and in 1902, it was deposited in the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*.⁶⁷

5.4 Edition to Refutation (1904–1920)

Although largely overlooked by d'Abbadie himself, the *Éthiopisants* of Europe who flocked to the *Bibliothèque nationale* to consult this unprecedented collection were struck by this unique text. Within only a few years the text was translated into Latin and Russian and became the object of significant attention in scholarly circles. In 1903, a French-trained Russian orientalist named Boris Turayev gave a talk at the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences on “two Abyssinian freethinkers”, soon to be followed by an edition and Russian translation of the *Ḥatāta* in 1904.⁶⁸ At the

⁶⁶ d'Abbadie (1859, pp. 212–213 and 223–224).

⁶⁷ Wion (2013b).

⁶⁸ Turayev (1904).

same time that Turayev was working on his edition in St. Petersburg, Zär'a Ya'ə-qob's name was becoming known in the academic centres of Western Europe through the work of a German philologist, Enno Littmann—the intellectual driving force behind the 1906 Deutsche Aksum-Expedition—who created an edition and Latin translation of the text in 1904,⁶⁹ adding a short philosophical exposition entitled *Ein einsamer Denker in Abessinien*, “a lonely Abyssinian thinker”, just over a decade later.⁷⁰

Turayev and Littmann themselves certainly took the work seriously as a philosophical treatise and did not at this stage call its authenticity into question. Although both saw outside influences at work in the text—Littmann discerning the influence of Arabic sources on the language of the *Ḥatāta*,⁷¹ and Turayev suggesting an analogy with the English deist Herbert of Cherbury⁷²—both accepted it as an Ethiopian work. The text received a good deal of attention and admiration as it was disseminated across Europe,⁷³ including from the German philologists Theodor Nöldeke and Carl Anton Baumstark, the latter of whom said of the *Ḥatāta*: “this book is entitled to a place of honour in the midst of the most important confessions of world literature on account of its simple strength, its deep, serene and sure sincerity”.⁷⁴

5.5 Carlo Conti Rossini

Just as the work began to garner broader interest, in July 1913 a short article on the manuscripts in d'Abbadie's collection appeared in the journal of the *Société Asiatique* in Paris (*Journal Asiatique*), analysing each of the manuscripts in meticulous detail: copying errors, damaged parchment, and illegible characters as well as broader observations about style and historical context.⁷⁵ Its author, Carlo Conti Rossini, is considered one of the most important Ethiopianists of the twentieth cen-

69 Littmann (1904). Cf. also Littmann's German translation of the text, published in 1916 (Littmann 1916a).

70 Littmann (1916a).

71 Littmann (1904).

72 Turayev (1903).

73 See, for example, Nöldeke (1905), Bezold (1907), and Wey (1906).

74 Baumstark (1911, p. 58).

75 In effect, it was the third cataloguing of the same collection in a relatively short period of time. The reasons for this very unusual recataloguing (most catalogues, even over a hundred years old, have not been revised) seems to have been that both Carlo Conti Rossini and Marius Chaîne believed that in the light of the present state of the art, d'Abbadie's catalogue was largely unsatisfactory. They worked in parallel, unaware of each other's efforts.

tury, with contributions spanning linguistics and the philology, history, ethnography, and geography of the entire Horn of Africa over five decades.⁷⁶ He worked as a representative of the Italian State Treasury (becoming its director general in 1915, a position he held until 1927⁷⁷) and in 1913, he was still something of an amateur orientalist.⁷⁸ Section 143 of the article consisted of some notes on the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'əqob*, which did not question the text's authorship.⁷⁹

A second article appeared in 1916, in which Conti Rossini made a preliminary—if tentative—case for the view that the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'əqob* might be a forgery.⁸⁰ By 1920, however, Conti Rossini was no longer satisfied merely to raise doubts and probe the text's authorship; he now set out to demonstrate that the text could not possibly have been composed by an Ethiopian in the seventeenth century. Conti Rossini's new and radical hypothesis was that its true author was none other than its supposed discoverer, Giusto da Urbino.

Conti Rossini's suspicions were initially raised by the testimony of *Abba* Täklä Haymanot, an Ethiopian convert to Catholicism, who attached himself to the Catholic missions in Ethiopia and whom Conti Rossini met some years after the end of the missions. According to Täklä Haymanot (as per Conti Rossini's report), Giusto had secretly (from the point of view of the Catholic missions) collaborated with a *däbtära* named Amarhän and an older priest named Goššu to “copy” a text promoting “freemasonry” and other heresies. Täklä Haymanot, a man for whom the phrase “the zeal of the convert” seems to have been invented, accused Giusto da Urbino of being the true author of the text and of imputing his own heretical notions to a fictitious authority so as to escape the notice of ecclesiastic authorities.⁸¹

76 For Conti Rossini's enduring influence on the field of Ethiopian Studies, as well as a nuanced discussion of the entanglements of his scholarship with colonial ideology and administration from the beginning of his career, see recently Camilleri and Fusari (2022).

77 Camilleri and Fusari (2022, p. 205).

78 Conti Rossini began teaching at the University of Rome in 1920. For his academic training and scientific activities prior to this time, see Camilleri and Fusari (2022, pp. 203–205).

79 Conti Rossini (1913, p. 23) merely remarked upon the notable gap between the time of composition (i. e., the mid-seventeenth century) and the time to which the manuscripts date (i. e., the mid-nineteenth century), which he took to speak to the great acclaim which Zār'a Ya'əqob's ideas continued to find two centuries after the time of composition.

80 Among other things, Conti Rossini here observed (1916, pp. 497–498, including n. 3) the parallel between Giusto da Urbino's baptismal name (Iacopo) and that of the alleged author of the text, Zār'a Ya'əqob.

81 Note that we have independent and much earlier evidence (dating to 1856–1857, the year following Giusto da Urbino's death) suggesting that two Catholic missionaries, Giustino de Jacobis and Walda Gabriel, had levelled serious accusations of heresy against Giusto da Urbino. The evidence consists, *inter alia*, of letters for the attention of the Propaganda Fide signed by Giustino de Jacobis and a report by Giuseppe Sapeto (reproduced in Trozzi 1986, Appendix IV and Sumner 1976a, pp.

Conti Rossini saw evidence for Giusto da Urbino's authorship of the *Ḥatāta* everywhere. Take for example the very name Zār'a Ya'əqob: "Father Giusto's very name at his Christening, which I already indicated had been Iacopo, finds a match in the name of the author of the *Ḥatātā*; *Zar'a Yā'qob* can be translated as 'seed of Jacob [*Iacopo*]'".⁸² The root *zr'/zr'* in Gə'əz, as in other Semitic languages, denotes "to sow, scatter seeds", with Zār'a Ya'əqob signifying "the seed of Jacob". Further, as Wion has more recently argued⁸³ in the first letter mentioning the *Ḥatātā*, Giusto referred to the text as *Māshafä Ya'əqob* (the Book of Jacob), and it was only later that the author-narrator was named Zār'a Ya'əqob, withdrawing (on Wion's view) his own name in favour of the classical formation of Ethiopian Christian names, composed of a noun associated with a saint's name or a divine principle in the genitive.

Conti Rossini pressed on, noting that Giusto da Urbino's level of Gə'əz was high enough to compose such a work (a point of contention for many subsequent commentators⁸⁴) and asking why, given the late date of the discovery of the manuscripts, there is no record whatsoever of the *Ḥatāta* for almost two centuries between the death of Zār'a Ya'əqob and the discovery of the text by Giusto. Surely such an unusual and controversial text would be remembered; even if not discussed and adored, at least banned and reviled. But as far as the record goes, there was neither. There is nothing but a suspicious silence between the supposed composition and the supposed discovery.

Any remaining doubts are overcome on reflection by the same point that had struck Turayev, Littmann, and Conti Rossini alike: the apparently utter singularity of the text. There was, the argument went, simply nothing else remotely like it in the as-yet discovered canon of Ethiopian literature. Littmann tried to account for this singularity by identifying external influences, but Conti Rossini was the first to suggest that the text had to come from outside the Ethiopian tradition entirely. Ethiopian culture, Conti Rossini claimed, was deeply authoritarian and dogmatic, without any space for the kind of free, critical thought that was essential for the rationalistic philosophy contained in the *Ḥatāta*:

Ideas like those of *Zar'a Yā'qob* are not of the sort which one would have expected in Ethiopia, where blind faith and the Byzantinism of interpretations of Scripture seemed to place an

189–196). Sapeto in fact defended Giusto da Urbino against allegations that he had undermined Catholicism, been partial to Protestantism, and even subscribed to atheism.

⁸² Conti Rossini (1920, p. 219; cf. 1916, pp. 497–498, n. 3). Translated by Cantor (unpublished).
⁸³ Wion (2013b).

⁸⁴ Taken up by, *inter alia*, Alemayehu Moges (1961 E.C., 1969), Sumner (1976a), Wion (2013a; 2013b), and Getatchew Haile (2017; reproduced as Chapter 1 of this volume).

insurmountable barrier against free thinking—whose blossoming there we could scarcely even imagine.⁸⁵

Philosophy of the sort expressed in the *Ḥatāta*—“real” philosophy—was supposedly impossible in Ethiopia. On the contrary, if the work is a forgery, it becomes easy to see why the text appears to reference Enlightenment ideas or to mirror Descartes: the true author of the text would have read the relevant authors in nineteenth-century Europe.⁸⁶

Before becoming renowned as a Semitic linguist and historian, Conti Rossini served as a colonial administrator in Italian Eritrea at the beginning of the century.⁸⁷ Many years later, in the thirties, he published, in his status as the pre-eminent *éthiopianist* and authority of East Africa, an article intitled *L'Etioṗia è incapace di progresso civile*, “Ethiopia is incapable of civil progress”,⁸⁸ arguing in terms that reflect a generalised prejudice towards sub-Saharan Africa at the time to the effect that Ethiopia was incapable of cultural evolution and civilisational progress and that it therefore could, indeed *should*, be colonised by a “civilising” European power. As evidence for his argument, he enlisted his debunking of the *Ḥatāta*.

This formed part of a coordinated programme of imperial fascist propaganda in the arts, sciences, and humanities on the eve of war, in which many intellectuals enthusiastically participated, and found expression also in attempts to delegitimise Ethiopia's standing in international organisations such as the League of Nations. In 1936, the Italians occupied Addis Ababa, Haile Selassie fled the capital, and Ethiopia suffered a brutal five-year occupation. In 1937, midway between the conquest of Ethiopia and the beginning of the Second World War, Conti Rossini received the Mussolini award from the Accademia Nazionale delle Scienze for his services to “history and moral sciences”.⁸⁹

85 Conti Rossini (1920, p. 214). Translated by Cantor (unpublished).

86 This assessment would later be echoed by other scholars. For instance, in endorsing Conti Rossini's arguments, Ricci (1964, p. 227) would claim that “a Rousseau-type faith” (*una fede di sapore rousseauiano*), and strong secular and “theistic” inclinations in the *Ḥatāta* speak against an Ethiopian seventeenth-century authorship.

87 See his *Ricordi di un soggiorno in Eritrea* (1903). Camilleri and Fusari (2022, p. 204) note that when he arrived in Eritrea in 1899, he was already a renowned Ethiopianist.

88 Conti Rossini (1935).

89 For scholarship on the connections between the Italian academy and fascism, see Maiocchi (2015), Gregor (2005), and De Lorenzi (2015, 2018). For further bibliography on the topic, which also provides references to the Italian Orientalists—such as Giorgio Levi della Vida—who consistently opposed fascism and were persecuted for their stand, see Bausi (2016).

5.6 Refutation to Rehabilitation (1920–1976)

After the publication of Conti Rossini's third paper in 1920, Europe's *Éthiopiants* almost unanimously came to accept his argument that the work was a forgery.⁹⁰ The first to turn was the editor and translator of the *Ḥatāta*, Turayev.⁹¹ Next, the other *doyen* of Ethiopian studies in Italy, Enrico Cerulli—who had a long career in the Italian colonial administration in East Africa, starting in 1920—argued in a 1926 essay on Amharic literature that he agreed with Conti Rossini's findings.⁹² This turning of the tide gathered momentum in the thirties,⁹³ with a series of esteemed authors coming out in favour of Conti Rossini's arguments. In 1930, Littmann recanted his old views in the face of what he viewed as a decisive proof from Conti Rossini.⁹⁴ The third of the major Italian Ethiopianists was next. In 1932, Ignazio Guidi, in his study of Ethiopian literature, bizarrely placed the text in with seventeenth-century literature even as he identified the work as a fake.⁹⁵

In 1921, the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'āqob* was translated into English for the first time by the American biblical scholar Moses Bailey in a volume entitled *The Moslem World*, noting in his brief introduction that “there is hardly another text in Ethiopic [an alternative term for Gə'əz] of equal fascination”.⁹⁶

For a long time, the Russian scholar Ignaty Kračkovskij, a student of Turayev in St. Petersburg, was the final holdout in European philology against the forgery thesis. In his 1924 paper, Kračkovskij tried to demonstrate that the two *Ḥatātas*

⁹⁰ Harden (1926) did not take into account the article by Conti Rossini in his *Introduction to Ethiopian Christian Literature*; he was still convinced that he was dealing with an authentic text.

⁹¹ Turayev (1920).

⁹² Cerulli (1926). In the same year that he wrote this essay, he became an advisor at the Italian Legation of Addis Ababa (a role he held until 1932), having already acted as a civil servant for six years in the Italian colonial administration in Somalia (1920–1926). He then became a senior director at the Ministry of the Colonies in Rome (1932–1937) before ascending to the second highest post in the colony as vice governor general of Africa Orientale Italiana (1937–1939). Soon after the Second World War, Cerulli was listed as a suspected war criminal by the United Nations War Crimes Commission but ultimately escaped prosecution. See De Lorenzi (2018) and Mallette (2010).

⁹³ In 1933, Cerulli again endorsed Conti Rossini's attribution of authorship to Giusto da Urbino in the context of an entry on the Capuchin friar for the *Enciclopedia italiana* (Cerulli 1933; cf. 1968 [1956], p. 180). He repeated the by now familiar trope that the supposed “singularity” (*singularità*) of the *Ḥatāta* in the Ethiopian context (notably in its displaying signs of scepticism rather than an allegiance to traditional religious thought) speaks against an Ethiopian authorship.

⁹⁴ Littmann (1930).

⁹⁵ Guidi (1932). Note that Conti Rossini, whose case against the authenticity of the *Ḥatāta* Guidi now accepted, had attended the latter's courses in Oriental Studies at the University of Rome in the late nineteenth century (cf. Camilleri and Fusari 2022, p. 203).

⁹⁶ Bailey (1921).

could not have had the same author given their profound differences in style and content and that thus Giusto da Urbino could not be the author of either text. However, even he eventually became convinced of a Giusto da Urbino authorship after reading an influential paper written by Eugen Mittwoch.⁹⁷

In 1934, Mittwoch provided a detailed philological demonstration based on parallels between the *Soirées de Carthage*, a work of missionary propaganda at least partly translated by Giusto da Urbino into Gə'əz – itself the basis of a later Amharic translation – and the *Ḥatāta*. This study appeared to convince many more.⁹⁸ The idea of a more rigorous philological comparison of two Gə'əz works supposedly written by Giusto had been proposed by Conti Rossini, but his preliminary attempts at such a proof were limited to unpersuasive speculations about similarities in content, as he did not have access to Giusto's Gə'əz translation.

Mittwoch's demonstration promised to bring to bear the quasi-deductive methods of philological and textual criticism on the *Ḥatāta* in order to establish that its author and the translator of the *Soirées de Carthage* were one and the same. Mittwoch noted a number of common grammatical and syntactical characteristics: the frequent and unorthodox use of the subject placed before the verb, especially in adverbial sentences,⁹⁹ and the recurrent use of unusual terms. However, Mittwoch's promise to provide an irrefutable philological demonstration was undermined by his contravening of a basic philological principle: he conducted an analysis with the aim of finding a single author across two works, where in one case (the *Soirées de Carthage*), the supposed author was in fact only a translator. Mittwoch's points could still lend a certain degree of supporting evidence, but the case was certainly not demonstrated beyond all doubt.¹⁰⁰

Another striking argument concerns an apparent parallel in the birth dates of Giusto and Zär'a Ya'eqob:

right at the beginning of the *Ḥatāta* in the autobiography of Zar a Jä'qōb enters his own birthday as the date of his birth. Zar a Jä'qōb gives the 25th Nahase as the day of his birth. Converted from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian calendar, this date corresponds to August 30, the birthday of Jacopo Curtopassi, later Father Giusto d'Urbino!¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ As Trozzi (1986, pp. 7–9, n. 8) has observed.

⁹⁸ Mittwoch (1934). Mittwoch was only able to consult the Amharic (rather than the Gə'əz) translation.

⁹⁹ Mittwoch (1934).

¹⁰⁰ It is worth noting that the Amharic version of the *Soirées de Carthage* may not have been translated by Giusto (see Wion 2013b). Marrassini (unpublished) and Kropp (unpublished) have both since accessed the Gə'əz translation.

¹⁰¹ Mittwoch (1934, p. 6); my translation.

This argument has subsequently been examined by Sumner,¹⁰² Belcher,¹⁰³ and Kropp,¹⁰⁴ the former of which attempts to dissolve the tension by arguing that the dates do not in fact line up, Belcher by pointing to the statistical possibility of the coincidence, and Kropp by associating the date with the saints days for “Jacob” in the Ethiopian synaxarion.

Mittwoch’s paper was also the first to display dialogue between European and Ethiopian scholars on the topic of the authenticity of the *Ḥatāta*. Mittwoch extensively quotes one “*ālāqa* Desta of Harrar”, identified by Dawit Worku Kidane¹⁰⁵ as Dästa Täkläwäld, the author of a 1956 Amharic dictionary. According to Mittwoch, *ālāqa* Dästa had made the accusation—to recur in later stages of the debate—that Westerners who deny the Ethiopian authorship of the *Ḥatāta* do not think it possible for Ethiopians to produce philosophy and are thus motivated by racism.

Two years after Mittwoch’s paper, Father Jean Simon published a paper in the journal *Orientalia*, which summarised the debate for a Francophone audience, in particular the arguments of Mittwoch, which Simon considered to be conclusive. Nevertheless, he corrected some points in Conti Rossini’s and Mittwoch’s arguments, focusing especially on the parallels with the *Soirées*, and urged Mittwoch to return to the work:

I sincerely hope that Mr. Mittwoch, who is particularly qualified for this work, will agree to undertake to edit this Ge’ez version of the *Soirées* himself and to produce a new philological comparison, this time using this text. Such a demonstration would undoubtedly be all the more convincing.¹⁰⁶

5.7 Amsalu Aklilu

Whilst the European scholarly community began to solidify a consensus around the inauthenticity of the *Ḥatāta*, publications in and about Ethiopia generally accepted their authenticity. A 1945 article by Murad Kamel in the *Ethiopian Herald* provided a summary of the text and brought it to a wider audience, and a decade later Zāmānfās Qəddus Abrəha produced the first Ethiopian edition of the text, with an accompanying Amharic translation.¹⁰⁷ Zāmānfās Qəddus Abrəha was ac-

¹⁰² Sumner (1976a).

¹⁰³ Belcher in Zara Yaḡob, Walda Heywat, Lee, Mehari Worku, and Belcher (2023).

¹⁰⁴ Kropp (unpublished).

¹⁰⁵ Dawit Worku Kidane (2012).

¹⁰⁶ Simon (1936, p. 99). Translated by Egid and Cantor (unpublished).

¹⁰⁷ Zā-Mānfās Qəddus Abrəha (1955).

cused of making the Amharic edition in order to promote Protestantism in Ethiopia, presenting the text as a critique of the Orthodox and Catholic churches and promoting an indigenous approximation of Protestantism.¹⁰⁸

Back in 1950s Europe, some Ethiophiles like Sylvia Pankhurst presented the text as authentic, without discussion.¹⁰⁹ Other European scholars, however, also began to present arguments against the forgery thesis. In 1951, Carmelo da Sessàno pointed out that the d'Abbadie correspondence itself offers overlooked (and as yet unpublished) evidence for the discovery of the two *Ḥatātas* by Giusto da Urbino, heretofore ignored by scholars.¹¹⁰ He also objected to the supposition that Giusto da Urbino might have relinquished his commitment to Catholicism or that he could ever have agreed with the “deist” thought of the *Ḥatātas*—works he thought amounted to apostasy.

The first Ethiopian scholar to advance their own arguments in favour of authenticity was Amsalu Aklilu in 1961. He began by suggesting an interpretative principle of charity: that we should believe what Giusto da Urbino says about the discovery of the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'əqob*. He went on to criticise one of Conti Rossini's core arguments, namely, the testimony of *Abba Tāklä Haymanot*.¹¹¹ Amsalu Aklilu remarked that, in a small and necessarily rather insular community of missionaries and converts, Giusto's unorthodox views would have been well-known, and quite probably resented by new converts “often more royalist than the king”.¹¹² From here, it would be a small step for Tāklä Haymanot to accuse Giusto of forgery. Amsalu Aklilu notes that in Conti Rossini's recounting of the story, the accusation is presented in the form of a rumour: “[t]here are some who, having seen [it], say that this book was not that of Uorché, but that it had in fact been written by him, and that it had been fictitiously attributed to Uorché”.¹¹³

108 A point suggested by Ricci (1964) and Getatchew Haile (2017) and made very forcefully by Daniel Kibret (2011 E.C.; 2017).

109 See Pankhurst's *Ethiopia. A Cultural History* (1955, pp. 359–365).

110 Carmelo da Sessàno (1951), who was followed by Trozzi (1988, p. 218; cf. 1986, pp. 42–43, with n. 120). See Wion (2013a; 2013b) for discussion of this part of the d'Abbadie correspondence, which she, however, argues does not speak in favour of authenticity.

111 See Ricci (1964, p. 240) for the complaint that Amsalu Aklilu ignored one of Conti Rossini's other main arguments: namely, that the content of the *Ḥatāta* depends on that of the *Soirées de Carthage*. Note, however, that Ricci ended up appealing to a suspect Eurocentric prejudice, traceable to Conti Rossini (1920), to the effect that the *Ḥatātas* could not possibly be Ethiopian in origin due to their distinctly rationalist character.

112 The reference is in fact from Kračkovskij (1924), who makes broadly the same point.

113 Conti Rossini (1920, p. 218; cf. 1916, pp. 497–498). Translated by Cantor (unpublished).

Amsalu Aklilu's second important argument seeks to explain the two-century long disappearance of the text from the historical record. According to Amsalu Aklilu, because "religion was a strictly guarded subject and the owners of philosophical works were churchmen",¹¹⁴ freethinking, heretical works critical of established religion like the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'āqob* would have been destroyed or kept out of church. On this view, it is the survival of the *Ḥatāta* and not its disappearance that is remarkable and that requires explanation.¹¹⁵

5.8 Alemayehu Moges

If Amsalu Aklilu's contribution was to provide the first sustained critique of the sceptical argument, Alemayehu Moges was the first to adduce philological arguments in favour of authenticity.¹¹⁶ His arguments provide a new perspective on the questions, offering the first sustained examination of the *Ḥatāta* from the vantage point of a scholar trained both in the traditional Ethiopian church curriculum as well as in European philology.

His first argument lies in the specific form of biblical quotation employed in the *Ḥatāta*. The Book of Psalms is always quoted verbatim, and always from those parts of the psalter that are typically committed to memory in Ethiopian church schools. Books attributed to Solomon, the second most widely read and copied texts in the Ethiopian church, are also quoted verbatim, but sometimes not quite so exactly. The Gospels, however, are only ever paraphrased, or quoted according to their general content, never word for word. Alemayehu Moges' argument is that this is exactly what we would expect from an Ethiopian scholar. While for an Ethiopian scholar to privilege the psalms and Solomonian books and to have them committed to memory in Gə'əz is unremarkable, it would be unthinkable for a Catholic missionary.

Second, Alemayehu Moges argues that the high level of linguistic sophistication displayed suggests that the *Ḥatāta* could not be composed by Giusto da Urbino. The Gə'əz, he argues, is exceptionally "pure" and free from foreign influence, so that it could only have been composed by a *zārafi* or master of *qəne* poetic composition. This point seems to be supported by the other masters of *qəne* quoted by

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Sumner (1976, p. 86).

¹¹⁵ d'Abbadie (1859), and Turayev (1903) both note that the local clergy and *däbterat* would not approve of such a work, and Nöldeke (1905) observes that it is surprising that the work has survived at all given the animosity of religious authorities towards its ideas.

¹¹⁶ Alemayehu Moges (1961 E.C., 1969).

Sumner.¹¹⁷ Alemayehu Moges also seeks to refute Mittwoch's suggestion that an unusual word order betrays a foreign authorship, by enumerating a number of examples of *qəne* poetry with precisely the same subject-before-verb structure in adverbial sentences, and by arguing that the position of the subject, adjective, object, and genitive noun has been irrelevant to *qəne* poetry since Gə'əz stopped being a spoken language in roughly the twelfth or thirteenth century. Non-standard word orders in Gə'əz *qəne* of this period (and Alemayehu Moges quotes *qəne* from seventeenth-century Gondär, almost the exact time and place of the composition of the *Ḥatäta*) betray the influence of an Amharic or Tigrinya mother tongue, not of an Indo-European language mother tongue.

5.9 Claude Sumner

Claude Sumner was a Canadian Jesuit who taught in the Philosophy Department at Addis Ababa (then Haile Selassie) University for over five decades from 1953 and was the first to provide an overall history of the authenticity debate as well as a significant intervention of his own, aimed at rehabilitating conclusively the *Ḥatäta* as the work of an Ethiopian philosopher. His argument can be split into two parts: first, demonstrating that the author of the *Ḥatäta* could have been Ethiopian and second, showing that Giusto da Urbino could not possibly have been the author of the *Ḥatäta*.

In an effort to substantiate the first point, Sumner examined early philosophy in Gə'əz, such as *the Book of Wise Philosophers*, arguing that there was a pre-seventeenth-century tradition of philosophical thinking in Ethiopia. Sumner further argued, *contra* Conti Rossini, that even beyond these translated philosophical works, traditional Ethiopian culture did offer critical and self-reflective tools of its own that could have served as fertile ground for the emergence of a Zär'a Ya'eqob style philosopher, in the form of the sceptical, at times cynical, and even blasphemous *qəne* poetry. Indeed, Sumner cites poems which, though less systematic, are just as biting as the *Ḥatäta* in their criticism of established religious norms, such as the veneration of angels:

ለሙሉአክ: ሊናኩብር:

ለእሙ: ኣብቆለ: ክንፈ.: ሙጠነ: ነዊጎ: ቆሙ

ለጾፍ: ወለትጎንያ: እስሙ: ክንፍ: ቦሙ:

ጸዓት: ሲቦት: እስሙ: ሀለዋሙ:

we do not honour the angel

for birds and flies too are covered in wings

we do not honour man for his white hair

because trees and stones too

117 Sumner (1976a, n. 145) cites “Ato Aleka Desseta Tekle Wold” and “Abba Gubana”.

ለዕፀው፡ ወአለቦን፡ ተሰሎሙ ።

are covered in white hair¹¹⁸

In the second part of his exposition, Sumner turned to arguments to the effect that the author of the text could not have been Giusto da Urbino. In addition to pushing back against the claim that Giusto's Gə'əz was good enough to compose the *Ḥatāta*, which Sumner calls the “jewel of Ethiopian literature”,¹¹⁹ Sumner employs a method that at the time was at the very cutting edge of philological technique: a comparative statistical analysis of word frequency and sentence length across the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'əqob* and the *Ḥatāta Wäldä Ḥəywät*.

His results showed that the first text was full of longer, more elaborate sentences and the latter of shorter and more direct ones as well as that the texts employed very different vocabularies and patterns of linguistic usage to each other and also to that of authors from later periods. Sumner appealed to these discrepancies between sentence length and word usage in an effort to demonstrate that the texts had different authors, making it unlikely (on his view) that Giusto da Urbino had forged both documents with a quite different style for each.¹²⁰

5.10 Paolo Marrassini

In an important and newly discovered paper presented at a conference in Addis Ababa in 1992, the Italian Ethiopianist Paolo Marrassini takes up the question from a new angle. He begins by reflecting on how Conti Rossini arrived at his suspicions about authorship, and brings to the fore the assumptions behind Conti Rossini's argument:

there is no doubt that the real, and not clearly confessed, background of Conti Rossini's theory, as well as that of those who followed and still follow him, is much more general, and it is the belief that such a work cannot have arisen in seventeenth-century Ethiopia, because its contents would be far more complex than those allowed by the average cultural level of this country in that period (and, for that matter, in the following centuries as well).¹²¹

Marrassini goes on to argue that “we must get away as quickly as possible from the argument of ‘historical impossibility’, an argument that is very dangerous, and in-

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Sumner (1976a, p. 100).

¹¹⁹ Sumner (2004, p. 173).

¹²⁰ This point was independently made by Ralph Lee (at the *In Search of Zera Jacob* conference held in Oxford in 2022), who nevertheless remarked that the *Ḥatāta Wäldä Ḥəywät* was much more difficult to translate than the former owing to a “convoluted” sentence structure.

¹²¹ Marrassini (unpublished).

trinsically contradictory. Instead, we must look for other more objective kinds of proofs”—suggesting that philological arguments, whilst not totally value-neutral, offer the most objective means of resolution. To this end, he analyses some of the philological arguments from Littmann, Conti Rossini, Mittwoch, Simon, and Sumner. Again, the focus is on Giusto's Gə'əz translation of the *Soirées*, but Marrassini, unlike all previous scholars, had access to the Gə'əz translation in the manuscript kept in the Vatican Library, and he revisits earlier arguments in light of this. He argues not only that the supposed doctrinal parallels between the *Soirées* and the *Ḥatāta* have been overstated but also that “the lexicon of the Geez translation of the *Soirées* is totally different from that of the *Ḥatāta*”. He argues that on topics such as polygamy and the critique of slavery, it is only the subjects of investigation that are the same in the two texts—the answers are very different. He concludes that “there is no obvious similarity between the Geez version of the *Soirées de Carthage* and the *Ḥatāta* neither in content nor in form”.¹²²

5.11 Anaïs Wion

The first in Anaïs Wion's projected four-part series of papers on the *Ḥatāta*, titled “L'histoire d'un vrai faux traité philosophique (*Ḥatātā Zar'a Yā'eqob* et *Ḥatātā Walda Ḥeywat*). Épisode 1 : Le temps de la découverte. De l'entrée en collection à l'édition scientifique (1852–1904)” (“The History of a Genuine Fake Philosophical Treatise (*Ḥatātā Zar'a Yā'eqob* and *Ḥatātā Walda Ḥeywat*). Episode 1: The Time of Discovery. From Being Part of a Collection to Becoming a Scholarly Publication (1852–1904)”), was published in 2013 and proposed a striking elaboration of the sceptical argument.¹²³ Wion was the first to consult the Giusto da Urbino-d'Abbadie correspondence in detail,¹²⁴ and her analysis demonstrates that Giusto was certainly interested and both intellectually and linguistically capable of elaborating philosophical ideas and the story of his life in a literary work.

Numerous passages in the correspondence draw on Giusto's philosophical notions that parallel those expressed in the *Ḥatāta*, as well as invoking an intense desire to think through problems for himself without religious or political traditions and authorities:

¹²² Marrassini (unpublished).

¹²³ Wion (2013a).

¹²⁴ Although Trozzi (1986) deserves special mention as one of the few scholars to have engaged at length with the d'Abbadie correspondence prior to Wion's seminal study.

If I know anything, I owe it only to God and to myself. Nobody instructed me or had me instructed. All that has been done is to prevent or delay the development of my mind. I believe that my views about God and his providence are quite right, and I am proud that I received them from no one. I have been my own teacher.¹²⁵

Though this is not uncommon posture for the self-conceived independent thinker—we see the same affectation in Bacon and Descartes at the birth of modern European philosophy, and of such varied later figures as Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Simone Weil—it serves to answer some of the questions about why an Italian missionary would expend such prodigious energies on writing a work of philosophy in a foreign language that had not been used as a medium of daily speech for centuries: he had grand philosophical and literary ambitions of his own and desired to communicate them to an audience (whether to the distant world of European scholarship, as Wion suggests, or to the local world of Ethiopian scholars) in whatever way he could. Wion argues that he knew that his own works would have received scant attention (evidenced by the sad, reproachful tone of his letters to d'Abbadie), and so he attempted to smuggle his own thoughts into d'Abbadie's collection, influencing the emerging field of *études éthiopiennes* by other means.

Wion also notes convergences in language, imagery, and ideas between the *Ḥatāta* and the Giusto da Urbino-d'Abbadie correspondence:

The loneliness which I find myself in here has forced me to examine or rather to hypothesize whether there is a way to be happy with God and the Universe. [...] I didn't want to examine first whether or not there is a God. I have too much interest in believing that there is a God and a providence. [...] With this foundation laid down as a proven principle, I have had to make many long examinations and strange hypotheses to attune this God and this Providence with the present order of the Universe, and in order to be satisfied with it. All the old stories, while seeking to attune this order with this providence, in fact only made my discord grow stronger. I rejected everything, not as false or dubious, but because it did not satisfy me. I thought I saw another agreement that satisfied me, and according to this agreement I will make my profession of faith, which will be too long to be added here, even in abridged form. You will have it sooner or later.¹²⁶

As striking as the parallels are—and they are striking (loneliness, the disdain for organised religion, doubt leading to renewed faith in a quasi-deistic God, the importance of naturalness and family life)—the similarities could just as easily have been an effect of reading the manuscript of the *Ḥatātas* he had discovered earlier. Indeed, Wion notes this possibility:

125 Quoted in Wion (2013b). Translated by Cantor, Egid, and Wion in Wion (2013b).

126 Letter from September 1854, NAF 23852, fol. 65–66; quoted in Wion (2013b). Translated by Cantor, Egid, and Wion in Wion (2013b).

there remains one flaw in this demonstration relying on the convergence between Giusto's letters and the *Ḥatatā*... it is that the “discovery” of the *Ḥatatā* predates the letters of a philosophical nature—with the exception of a single missive of March 1852, as we have seen. It is therefore still possible to suppose that the Ge'ez texts of the *Ḥatatā* were at the root of Giusto da Urbino's deist thought, and not the other way around!¹²⁷

Having provided an account of Giusto da Urbino's life, established his proficiency in Gə'əz and outlined his philosophical interests, Wion draws a number of parallels between Giusto da Urbino's time in Ethiopia and the narrative of the *Ḥatāta*. Comparing Giusto's letters to d'Abbadie with Chapter 11 of the *Ḥatāta*, she notes that both sought patronage that would “free [themselves] from the enslaving guardianship of the Church and to develop a professional skill that could be exchanged for money like any other craft activity”.¹²⁸ She goes on to argue that “[t]he same Ge'ez terms are used in Giusto's letter and in the text of the *Ḥatatā*, in particular the expression ‘fruits of my labour’, ፍሬ፡ ጻማየ፡ [*fəre šamayä*], which can be found twice in the *Ḥatatā Zar'a Yā'eqob* and once in the *Ḥatatā Walda Ḥeywat*, in all cases linked to the idea of securing one's own subsistence”.¹²⁹ While the accumulation of evidence is persuasive, it is still unclear which way round the influence goes: is this evidence of a Giusto da Urbino authorship or evidence that Giusto was influenced by the language of the *Ḥatāta*?

Finally, Wion conducts a detailed and formally original philological analysis of the difference between the two manuscripts, examining the alterations made between Abb234 and Abb215. Her conclusions are:

It seems quite obvious that these are variants made by an author who has a real concern for the text, and not simple changes made by a scrupulous copyist with an appreciation for beautiful language. Thus certain passages are quite simply added. Some of them are of a logical bent; for example, at the end of the first paragraph, the argument “because the order of God is more powerful than the order of men” serves to consolidate the demonstration that remained somewhat suspended in the declarative mode.¹³⁰

Her proposal is that this level of care for fundamentally aesthetic and clarificatory points suggests that this editor was unusually invested in making the text seem like

127 Wion (2013b). Translated by Cantor, Egid, and Wion in Wion (2013b). Future research might further probe Giusto's correspondence with Costantino Nascimbeni in connection with these themes, supplementing Wion's arguments that rely primarily on the d'Abbadie correspondence. Relevant themes and motifs that appear rather late in the d'Abbadie correspondence make an earlier appearance in the Nascimbeni correspondence—long before the fateful years of 1852/1853.

128 Wion (2013b). Translated by Cantor, Egid and Wion in Wion (2013b).

129 Wion (2013b). Translated by Cantor, Egid and Wion in Wion (2013b).

130 Wion (2013b). Translated by Cantor, Egid and Wion in Wion (2013b).

the best possible work, literarily and philosophically. This attention to polishing a text would, according to Wion, be unusual for an Ethiopian scribe attempting simply to transmit the meaning of a text, but easy to explain if in the second manuscript Giusto da Urbino is essentially returning to an earlier draft of his own work rather than modifying the text of another author. In the “second episode” of her study, Wion also provides the first summary of the cultural-political dynamics of the debate itself, dividing the controversy into the age of discovery, the age of debunking, and the age of experts.¹³¹ A projected third and fourth episodes were planned to bring the study up to date, but by the time of the Oxford In Search of Zera Yacob conference in 2022, these had not been completed. The third part of her study, which explores the possibility that the *Ḥatāta* was written in the seventeenth century, is published for the first time in this volume.¹³²

I strongly recommend that interested readers consult both Sumner’s work and Wion’s previously published articles independently and in their entirety as the most substantial and summative studies dedicated to the authorship question from opposing sides of the debate. Whilst Sumner’s books have long been out of print, Wion’s series of articles is available online in both French and English.¹³³

5.12 Getatchew Haile

Getatchew Haile’s recent paper (reproduced as Chapter 1 in this volume) begins with a personal anecdote:

It might seem strange to take up the *Ḥatāta zä-Zär’ a Ya’əqob*, at this time [...] It has been over forty years since I stopped using it as a text for the Gə’əz classes I taught for over ten years [...] The reason I am returning to this subject is because the more I read the *Ḥatāta*, the more I become uncertain about the identity, including the nationality, of its author.¹³⁴

He goes on to note that whilst almost all scholarship on the *Ḥatāta* has proceeded from the Littmann edition, in many ways, the Turayev version is preferable. Likewise, he argues that of the two manuscripts, Abb234 and Abb215 (in Getatchew Haile text (A) and (B) respectively), Abb234 is certainly closer to a posited “original”

¹³¹ Wion (2013b).

¹³² See Chapter 2 in this volume by Wion, which is based on a draft written in 2013 that was to form the next part of her “Investigating an Investigation” series of essays.

¹³³ See Mbodj and Wion (2013) and Wion (2013a, 2013b), all available in English translation since 2021.

¹³⁴ Getatchew Haile (2017, pp. 51–52; p. 52 in this volume).

text. He argues that of the two manuscripts sent to Paris by Giusto da Urbino, “neither is faithfully copied from the original”.¹³⁵ This postulation of a lost original exists in both Amsalu Alkilu and Alemeyahu Moges but is fleshed out here in much greater detail, indeed suggesting a tentative reconstruction of the *Vorlage* from which the two editions were taken. He begins by arguing that copying errors reveal that neither copy is original and that the copyist, who is likely to have been Giusto da Urbino, introduced errors due to his less-than-perfect understanding of Gə'əz. Getatchew Haile further elaborates the now familiar argument that Giusto da Urbino “knew Gə'əz but not well enough to use it without the help of an editor or co-author”.¹³⁶ Therefore “if da Urbino is to be suspected of anything, it is of having changed the message of the author, not for hiding his own identity”.¹³⁷ The major upshot of this postulated “original text” for Getatchew Haile is that “[u]ntil it or an authentic copy is located, the pure contents of the original *Ḥatāta* and the identity of its author may remain a mystery”,¹³⁸ meaning that “these two manuscripts cannot give us an accurate understanding of the author’s philosophy”.¹³⁹

The culmination of the argument is intriguing and suggests a major new avenue of research:

I am now firmly inclined to believe that the original *Ḥatāta* is the work of an Ethiopian *dābtāra* who lived, as he claimed, during the era of the Catholics (reign of Emperor Susənyos, 1607–1632). I also believe that the original was tampered with by da Urbino (in A) and the Ethiopian Catholics his mission converted (in B). As da Urbino’s friend and convert to the Catholic faith, Abba Täklä Haymanot, noted, da Urbino was taken by the philosophy the text contained, which the Abba calls “a heretical work”.¹⁴⁰

He later adds:

These passages and changes support the conclusion that the *Ḥatāta* in B as well as in A are copies of a treatise written by three authors who lived centuries—two centuries—apart, the original author [...] and the two revisionists in the 1850s.¹⁴¹

135 Getatchew Haile (2017, p. 54; p. 54 in this volume).

136 Getatchew Haile (2017, pp. 58–59; p. 57 in this volume).

137 Getatchew Haile (2017, p. 58; p. 57 in this volume).

138 Getatchew Haile (2017, p. 57; p. 56 in this volume).

139 Getatchew Haile (2017, p. 54; p. 54 in this volume). Although Getatchew Haile himself cannot help drawing speculative historical comparisons on the basis of the philosophy, namely, with Aquinas (2017, pp. 65–66 and 69; pp. 62–64 in this volume) and Anselm (2017, p. 69; p. 64 in this volume).

140 Getatchew Haile (2017, p. 57; p. 56 in this volume).

141 Getatchew Haile (2017, p. 62; p. 59 in this volume).

Unfortunately, although Getatchew Haile does cite Wion's series of papers, there is little to no engagement with her work. This is a great shame, because Wion has good answers to the two questions that Getatchew Haile poses at the end of his essay:

1. Why was da Urbino interested in writing his discourse in Gə'əz, if he was indeed the author of the *Ḥatäta*?
2. We all agree that A was copied by da Urbino, editing the text for publication with a title he created for it. Why would he choose to edit his own original?¹⁴²

Wion, as we have seen, suggests answers to these questions. She provides an account of Giusto da Urbino's interest in writing the *Ḥatäta* in terms of both his personal psychology and the institutional arrangements that supported this interest and his reasons for wanting to edit the earlier version of this work, indeed providing an account of these edits and his reasons for it.¹⁴³ In fact, it seems there may be an as yet unexplored synthesis of their work: many of Wion's most insightful points about Giusto's personality, thought, and experiences in Ethiopia could fit the possibility that he was an editor or secondary author of the text rather than the sole creator of the entire text, which would itself make his creation of such an involved work slightly less incredible.

In this light, Wion's arguments might show how Giusto saw something of himself in the text and bent an existing work to his own needs rather than creating a work from scratch. The multiple-author or "editorial" thesis opens up a wider scope for what might count as evidence going forward: a possible text prefiguring the *Ḥatäta* in significant respects might lend support to the idea that Giusto reworked earlier materials. Such an approach would have to focus much more than has been common thus far on the contribution of Ethiopian scholars who taught Giusto Gə'əz and who would have assisted him in the production of the manuscripts. This would point to the fact that even if it is a nineteenth-century synthesis, it is one deeply rooted in the traditional learning of the Ethiopian church and its manuscript tradition.

¹⁴² See Getatchew Haile (2017, p. 62; p. 62 in this volume).

¹⁴³ See Wion (2013b).

6 The Controversy Today

6.1 In Europe and America

Recent years have seen a resurgence of interest in the *Ḥatāta*, from both philosophers and historians of ideas. In particular, an *Aeon* article, “The African Enlightenment” by Dag Herbjørnsrud, has served to bring the *Ḥatāta* to a much wider audience, arguing that “the highest ideals of Locke, Hume and Kant were first proposed more than a century earlier by an Ethiopian in a cave”.¹⁴⁴ This piece does not acknowledge the debate about authorship but uses the *Ḥatāta* to reframe the intellectual history of the Enlightenment by presenting Zār'a Ya'əqob as a precursor to—even the inventor of—the major ideas of the European Enlightenment.

More recently still, a new translation of the two *Ḥatātas* has been published by Ralph Lee, with the assistance of Mehari Worku, Wendy Belcher, and Jeremy R. Brown and a preface by Herbjørnsrud that expands on the latter's earlier analysis to try and include the *Ḥatātas* in a global history of ideas. Lee's translation is more philosophically neutral than Sumner's, and is careful not to “load” Gə'əz terms. For example, he refrains from always translating *ləbbuna*, as Sumner had done, with the philosophically pregnant “reason”, preferring instead to opt for the more quotidian “intelligence” or “understanding”. Lee's translation also notes a number of passages where Sumner missed particular biblical allusions,¹⁴⁵ many of these noticed by Mehari Worku, who received a traditional church education before his studies in American higher education.

In her introduction to the translation, Belcher claims to have definitively resolved the authorship question and demands a “legal” standard of proof from those who argue for a Giusto da Urbino authorship. Belcher interprets the authorship debate as a fairly straightforward case of racist scholarship on the part of Conti Rossini and subsequent thinkers, noting Conti Rossini's fascist beliefs and implying that European scholars who share his verdict on authorship are motivated by similar politics. These racist allegations against the authenticity of the text, she argues, were countered by “anti-racist” responses from Sumner and the Ethiopian scholars of the sixties and onwards, the latter of which fully convince the translation team. Belcher helpfully compiles a series of quotations from Littmann,

¹⁴⁴ Herbjørnsrud (2017).

¹⁴⁵ These allusions are discussed at length in Lee's contribution to this volume (Chapter 3).

Conti Rossini, and Mittwoch that plausibly evince Eurocentric bias¹⁴⁶ and also presents some original arguments in favour of authenticity.

For example, Belcher suggests that Täklä Haymanot's testimony is suspect, that Conti Rossini might have altered it, and that it is not terribly reliable even if unaltered. The by-now-familiar arguments about Giusto da Urbino's level of Gə'əz are raised again, and Belcher then proposes the argument that, as Ralph Lee lived in Ethiopia for many years, "no matter how good Giusto da Urbino became in a few years, it is impossible that Lee is not better".¹⁴⁷ Belcher considers this "a profound proof", continuing that "if Lee, one of the best European scholars of Ge'ez, could not do what Mehari Worku could do, how could Giusto da Urbino?".¹⁴⁸ But Lee is translating a work, not attempting to forge one, and by all accounts, Giusto da Urbino was an incredibly talented linguist who (like Lee) worked closely with Ethiopian scholars with a lifetime of experience of Gə'əz composition.

A third argument is that "regarding the potential coincidence of names, the premise is wrong. Giusto da Urbino did not consider his first name to be Jacopo". Whilst it is true, as Sumner's archival research has shown,¹⁴⁹ that Giusto da Urbino's baptismal name was in fact "Giovanni Iacopo",¹⁵⁰ Kropp's aforementioned paper notes that already in 1853, Giusto da Urbino was signing *qəne* poems under the name "Yakob" and used variations on this name as one of many pseudonyms to refer to himself.¹⁵¹ The authorial, rather than any baptismal, name is what is really at issue. The remainder of the argument for a seventeenth-century authorship relies on Sumner's and Getatchew Haile's work as well as their rejection of the Conti Rossini-Mittwoch philological case.

Despite these interventions from literary scholars and historians of ideas, it does not seem that the post-Conti Rossini consensus of treating the works as forgeries has changed significantly among philologists (save for those involved with the Lee-Belcher-Mehari Worku-Brown translation). It is to be hoped that philologists take up the case once more.

146 Belcher in Zara Yaqob, Walda Heywat, Lee, Mehari Worku, and Belcher (2023, pp. 18–21).

147 Belcher in Zara Yaqob, Walda Heywat, Lee, Mehari Worku, and Belcher (2023, p. 33).

148 Belcher in Zara Yaqob, Walda Heywat, Lee, Mehari Worku, and Belcher (2023, p. 34).

149 Sumner (1976a, p. 201).

150 Belcher in Zara Yaqob, Walda Heywat, Lee, Mehari Worku, and Belcher (2023, p. 27). For "Giovanni Iacopo", see also, e.g., Trozzi (1988, p. 214).

151 Tarducci (1899, p. 39) also reports that Giusto himself signed a letter from 24 January 1845 to his friend Costantino Nascimbeni as *Iacopo* Cortopassi. Like Conti Rossini after him, Tarducci misspells the surname as 'Curtopassi', the correct form being Cortopassi.

6.2 In Ethiopia

Reflection on the authorship and significance of the *Ḥatātas* continues on quite different lines in the universities, theological seminaries, and public-intellectual venues of Ethiopia. Just as in Europe, commentators are divided on the authorship of the *Ḥatātas*, though with quite different cultural-political underpinnings.

In his book *The Ethics of Zār'a Ya'āqob: A Reply to the Historical and Religious Violence in the Seventeenth Century Ethiopia* (2012), Father Dawit Worku Kidane notes the authorship debate without delving into its intricacies himself, preferring to examine the philosophical content of the *Ḥatāta* and leaving the philological analysis to philologists and historians. There are also a number of scholars, including Teodros Kiros,¹⁵² Teshome Abera,¹⁵³ Abel Cherinet,¹⁵⁴ and Nsame Mbongo,¹⁵⁵ who, like Herbjørnsrud, engage with the philosophy of Zār'a Ya'āqob without acknowledging the authorship controversy.

Daniel Kibret, a deacon in the Orthodox church and popular public intellectual, authored a book entitled *Yālellāwən fālasəf fəllāga ənna leločč* (roughly, “The Search for a Non-Existent Philosopher and Others”, published in 2011 E.C., 2017), introducing the notion of the *Ḥatāta* as a forgery to Amharic reading audiences. His argument that the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'āqob* is a forgery by Giusto da Urbino relies to a very significant extent on the arguments of Conti Rossini, supplemented by his own personal knowledge of the Ethiopian Orthodox education system and literary tradition. Daniel Kibret claims that the aim of the treatise is religious propaganda, used in the nineteenth century to weaken faith in Orthodoxy and in the twenty-first century as part of a reformist “*taḥaddəso*” [lit. “renewal”] agenda promoted by modernisers against traditional practises of the Orthodox church, in particular concerning the question of monasticism—one of the major points of Zār'a Ya'āqob's critique. Daniel Kibret's remark that there are no mentions of the work between the seventeenth century and Giusto da Urbino's discovery works as an argument *ex silentio* as he is trained in the traditional Orthodox education system and is thus intimately aware of the religious literature of the period, as well as the oral traditions of the church; he is thus well placed to know if the text had been mentioned anywhere in church literature.

A very different approach can be found in the work of Fasil Merawi. After initially considering both texts to be authentic, Fasil Merawi now accepts the arguments of Wion and other sceptics—accessed initially, as for many in Ethiopia,

152 Teodros Kiros (2005).

153 Teshome Abera (2016).

154 Cherinet (2004).

155 Mbongo (2005).

via Daniel Kibret's book—and therefore rejects an Ethiopian authorship of the *Ḥatäta*, reversing his earlier writings on the subject.¹⁵⁶ This leads him to reject Sumner's attempt to search for the nature of Ethiopian philosophy in the past, instead taking up Hountondji's approach to the question of African philosophy¹⁵⁷ anew. Ethiopian philosophy, Fasil Merawi argues, is still very much in the making. Ethiopian philosophy is not a historical object to be uncovered in the depths of the past, either through the discovery and translation of ancient texts, or through the reconstruction of systems of thought via ethnophilosophy. It is an ongoing, barely-begun mission of constituting a system of thought adequate to the concerns of contemporary Ethiopia, in much the same way that philosophy is everywhere and always an attempt to respond theoretically to the problems of a particular time and place.

What then, are the prospects for a resolution of the authorship question once and for all? The most obvious possibility is the discovery of further manuscripts. All that would be required for a conclusive refutation of the Giusto da Urbino authorship hypothesis is a copy of the *Ḥatäta* that predates the mid-nineteenth century. In fact, even an unambiguous reference to the text in an earlier work would suffice to show that the text and its ideas must have existed in some form prior to Giusto's stint in the Ethiopian highlands. Of course, on the other side, it might be possible to find further evidence for a Giusto da Urbino authorship, too—might drafts of the *Ḥatäta* dating to the early 1850s be sitting in Betälähem, Cairo, or Khartoum, the stopping points of Giusto's journey? Even d'Abbadie's answers to Giusto and a fuller correspondence might shed vital clues.

In the absence of such discoveries, it seems unlikely that the question could receive a final answer. The recent date of both manuscripts makes chemical analyses redundant, and over the last one hundred years most philological avenues seem to have been explored. The question, then, must be how to proceed in the case of an uncertain authorship—how do we read, how do we teach a text that might have been composed by a seventeenth-century Ethiopian, by a nineteenth-century Italian, or a textual intermingling of the two over centuries?

7 The Significance of the *Ḥatäta Zär'a Ya'äqob*

Given the difficulty of knowing how to approach a philosophical text of uncertain provenance, and the seeming impossibility of resolving the dispute definitively, it is

¹⁵⁶ Fasil Merawi (2017).

¹⁵⁷ See Hountondji's famous declaration that "African Philosophy" is still in the making in *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* (1983 [1976], p. 53).

perhaps worth reflecting on the stakes of it all: why exactly have scholars been so interested in these works? What is the significance of the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'eqob* and the *Ḥatāta Wäldä Ḥəywät*?

For many commentators, the significance of the *Ḥatāta* is to be found in its originality. We have seen that according to Sumner the originality of the text demonstrates that “modern philosophy, in the sense of a personal rationalistic critical investigation, began in Ethiopia with Zara Yacob at the same time as in England and in France”.¹⁵⁸ This interpretation would quite radically revise our traditional account of the history of modern philosophy and the development of African philosophy as well as changing our understanding of seventeenth-century Ethiopian intellectual life. Herbjørnsrud (2017) has suggested that the *Ḥatāta* anticipates the Enlightenment, and Belcher builds on this exclusion as a motivation for producing the new edition.

How we are to understand the meaning of the text for the history of philosophy and the history of Ethiopian literature depends quite fundamentally—though not entirely—on the answer to the authorship dispute. In particular, the question of whether it corroborates the idea of an “African Enlightenment” and Sumner’s claim that “modern philosophy [...] began in Ethiopia with Zara Yacob” will depend quite significantly on whether the text is a far-sighted seventeenth-century anticipation of Enlightenment themes or a belated nineteenth-century rehashing of them by Giusto da Urbino. This is why a Giusto da Urbino authorship would be so profoundly disappointing for many—it is not so much that it would alter our understanding of the text itself but rather that it would appear to undermine broader projects of reshaping the philosophical canon and certain strategies for “decolonising” philosophy.

On this point, both sides seem to agree: if the text were found to be a forgery, it would lose much of its interest. In the period of consensus following Conti Rossini’s third paper, the text came to be quite literally written out of the history of Ethiopian literature and of philosophy, considered a “mere forgery”, worth little more than a footnote.¹⁵⁹ Both broadly share the conviction that the *Ḥatāta* must be “authentic”, in some sense or other of that term, in order to be valuable.

But what if the significance of the *Ḥatāta* is not undermined by its being a forgery or by our not being able to decide which it is? After all, it is not as if following the discovery that Homer was not simply one single author, we stopped reading

¹⁵⁸ Sumner (2004, p. 42).

¹⁵⁹ If the work is a forgery, it is undoubtedly one of the most remarkable forgeries ever composed, written in a language that had not been used as a primary means of communication for centuries – with enough poise, elegance, and attention to historical detail to have fooled not only generations of European experts, but also Ethiopian scholars.

Homer. And if Shakespeare was shown not to be the bard of Stratford but some Elizabethan contemporary, would we stop enjoying productions of *Hamlet*? In these two cases, we care for the texts for their intrinsic merits and their significance for a subsequent tradition. Even in the case of *The Poems of Ossian*, which were demonstrated conclusively to have been a fake, invented by their supposed discoverer James Macpherson, the poems are still enjoyed by many, having been constantly reproduced, re-edited, and reprinted throughout the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries.¹⁶⁰ In order to see whether the same might be true of the *Ḥatāta*, let us consider the major contributions of the text, regardless of who wrote it.¹⁶¹

The first and most obvious from the perspective of a philosopher should surely be the ideas. If we find that the *Ḥatāta* expresses interesting, original, thought-provoking ideas, coherent arguments or ethical insights, does it matter who wrote them? Analytically-trained philosophers often invoke the notion of the “genetic fallacy”, in which an argument is illegitimately dismissed on the grounds of its origins—a fallacy because the truth value of arguments does not depend on its context of production.¹⁶² Whether or not an argument is valid, sound, or true does not depend on who made it or when. Similar conclusions are reached by philosophers of a “continental” persuasion who invoke the “death of the author” to dissipate worries around authorial intent.¹⁶³ If the *Ḥatāta* contains an interesting solution to the problem of religious disagreement, a useful account of human rationality, or a logically consistent form of cosmological argument, why should any of this depend on the identity of its author?¹⁶⁴

The same goes for the literary qualities of the text. If the narrative framing of the story is compelling or moving, why would any of this change depending on its

160 See further Egid (2023a and 2023b).

161 For an overview of anonymity, pseudonymity, and forgery in the history of philosophy with special reference to the *Ḥatāta*, see Egid (2023b).

162 Excepting obvious cases such as indexicals—“it is raining now”, “I am in London”—or perspectival facts—“it looks like a rabbit to me”, “I like pistachio ice cream”.

163 See Eyasu Berento’s contribution to this volume (Chapter 5). The classic treatment is Barthes (1967).

164 It might be argued that authorship and authorial intent are more important to a philosophical text than to other literary works. If we think that we should not impute views to thinkers who we think definitely did not intend to make x or y claim, or that, following Skinner (1969, p. 48), the “understanding of texts [...] presupposes the grasp both of what they were intended to mean, and how this meaning was intended to be taken”, then it seems that the exegetical work and philosophical reconstruction will be affected by what stance we take on the authorship issue. Whether this is indeed the case or not is perhaps one of the most interesting questions for historians of philosophy posed by this text.

authorship? If some particular line is beautiful, is it any less beautiful for having been composed by Giusto da Urbino rather than Zār'a Ya'əqob? Let us consider an example:

All men are equal in the presence of God; and all are intelligent, since they are his creatures; he did not assign one people for life, another for death, one for mercy, another for judgement.¹⁶⁵

This line from Chapter 6 of the *Ḥatāta* is a poignant expression of Zār'a Ya'əqob's interpretation of the ethics of universal equality. It is perfectly possible to find it moving or blasé, profound or naïve regardless of its author. It might be interesting to know whether this was the expression of a European in Ethiopia, or an Ethiopian in his own land, but it is hard to see how this would affect the central message the line is attempting to express. Its central argument about the fundamental equality of humanity is identical in both scenarios.

Might we then do better to focus on the words on the page rather than the identity of the hand that wrote them? Focusing on the words themselves points us to the fact that the text is in an important sense Ethiopian by virtue of having been written in an Ethiopian language, no matter who wrote it. Just as the *Heart of Darkness* is a work of English literature by virtue of having been composed in English by the Polish-born Conrad, the *Ḥatāta* is a work of Ethiopian literature, even if composed by Giusto da Urbino.

Philosophical texts in any language involve the creative reworking of familiar terms and the adoption of foreign terms which function as a dual process of enrichment: philosophy at large benefits from the creation of new concepts and Gə'əz benefits from the enriching of its own lexicon by means of the conceptual stretching and modification that philosophy affords commonplace words.¹⁶⁶ Whoever wrote the *Ḥatāta* did a remarkable job of forging a new conceptual vocabulary in Gə'əz. Using some pre-existing resources from earlier works such as the Bible and the *Book of Wise Philosophers*—the creation of a philosophical vocabulary does not occur *ex nihilo*—the author nevertheless constructs a highly original interrelation of the conceptual resources of the Gə'əz language (see Appendix II in

165 Abb215 12r.

166 Here I would suggest that the term *labbuna* and its cognates as used in the *Ḥatāta*, with its semantic ambiguity between “heart” and “mind” (see the entry for *labbuna* in the Gə'əz philosophical lexicon in Appendix II) that suggests a unity of the affective and cognitive aspects of thought (reminiscent of the classical Chinese philosophical concept of *xīn* 心, often translated as the heart-mind) is a major conceptual contribution of the *Ḥatāta* to world philosophy, a great “untranslatable” in Cassin's (2014 [2004]) sense.

this volume for a preliminary Gə'əz philosophical lexicon). In this sense, the *Ḥatāta* is a deeply Ethiopian work even if composed by Giusto da Urbino and his Ethiopian interlocutors in the 1850s.¹⁶⁷ And this points us to an interesting and little remarked upon fact that can allow us to draw some final conclusions on the authorship debate. Whether or not the *Ḥatāta* is a seventeenth-century or a nineteenth-century work, it is a hybrid Ethiopian-European text.

If it was composed by Zär'a Ya'əqob in the seventeenth century, it is the product not only of the aforementioned dialogue between Jesuit and Gə'əz philosophical and theological traditions as well as Islam and Judaism but also of the religious polemics of previous centuries such as the *Anqäsä Amin* of ʿĀḥḥäge ʿEnbaqom and the *Confessio* of Gälawdewos as well as of the growing interest in other local ethnocultural groups exemplified by the *Zenahu läGalla* (“History of the Oromo”) of Abba Baḥrəy. We might propose a kind of “proof of possibility” for a seventeenth-century authorship by building up a picture of this discursive context, showing how the various ideas, arguments, and conceptual vocabulary of the *Ḥatāta* were built up out of these preceding debates and texts. In light of Conti Rossini’s politically and ideologically motivated attempts to reject the very possibility of Ethiopian authorship, it is easy to understand why some commentators insist on the solely Ethiopian character of the text. But crucially, such claims do not reflect the vibrant and multicultural intellectual context described by the *Ḥatāta Zär'a Ya'əqob* itself and apparent in the hybridity of Ethiopian cultural production of the Gondarine period more generally.

If, on the other hand, the work was composed in the nineteenth century, it is indisputably the product once again of the merging of Ethiopian and European learning—this time of a nineteenth-century Italian scholar who had immersed himself deeply in Ethiopian literary practises. We know that Giusto da Urbino lived in a centre of traditional scholarship and collaborated with the Ethiopian scholars from whom he learnt the Gə'əz language and some of the intricacies of traditional Ethiopian education and that he knew the language well enough not only to compose dictionaries and grammar books but also short original compositions of his own.¹⁶⁸ If the text is a forgery, it becomes the evidence of a quite incredible act of cultural immersion,¹⁶⁹ sufficient to have deceived European and Ethiopian scholars for decades.

¹⁶⁷ For a similar point, see also Marenbon’s essay in this volume (Chapter 4).

¹⁶⁸ See, e.g., Wion (2013a and 2013b, *passim*).

¹⁶⁹ Comparable perhaps to the *Thembavani* or “Garland of Unfading Honey-Sweet Verses” of the Jesuit Costanzo Beschi, who composed this classic of Tamil poetry in the eighteenth century. It is still considered one of the major works of Tamil literature, regardless of the origins of its author.

Finally, the significance of the study of the *Ḥatāta* might also lie in examining the authorship debate as an object of historical research in its own right.¹⁷⁰ The debate over the past century exemplifies many of the most salient trends in the writing of the history of philosophy and of the relation of scholarship on African thought to the shifting cultural politics of the last one hundred years. Tracing the ways in which the philological arguments follow the ebbs and flows of cultural politics through the colonial and decolonial periods into the present day might give us reason to reflect not only on the political uses of scholarship, but to consider what it is we value in a philosophical text.

This volume is an occasion to address the very history of the debate, examining the role of colonial knowledge production in shaping the controversy, and the history of Ethiopian studies at large. We need to address the controversy with an eye to its troubled history, if we are ever to get over it. For if the *Ḥatāta* is to receive the attention it deserves, we need to work through the authorship question to the best of our ability, understand the arguments and their underlying politics, and read it and teach it accordingly.

The *Ḥatāta* is not only an important text for the history of philosophy if we can add it to reading lists and syllabi as an example of seventeenth-century African thought. The *Ḥatāta*, I suggest, should not be included as the token work of African philosophy in a philosophical canon, an exotic sideshow to a central narrative taking place elsewhere, but rather should be used to interrogate critically the formation of such canons themselves. This would involve examining the criteria for inclusion and exclusion in such questions by means of the questions raised by the authorship debate.¹⁷¹

Whoever the author, the *Ḥatāta* is a most remarkable document: a profound work of philosophy and an anguished reflection on political and religious conflict, an account of spiritual struggle and a compelling narrative of a life in thought. Regardless of the author, and regardless of the broader cultural significance of the work, it is, like all true classics of philosophy, a text that demands careful study and repays that effort with beauty and insight. These insights have too often been obscured by the controversies surrounding the text, inhibiting any real discussion of its intrinsic significance. This book is an attempt to initiate such a discussion anew.

170 For lessons that might be drawn from relevantly comparable authorship controversies in Mediaeval Philosophy, see John Marenbon's contribution to this volume (Chapter 4).

171 Aspects of this task are undertaken by Anke Graness in her contribution to this volume (Chapter 10).



Section 1 **History**

Getatchew Haile

Chapter 1

The Discourse of Wārqe Commonly Known as Ḥatāta zä-Zär'a Ya'əqob

Abstract: Getatchew Haile begins by reflecting on his growing unease with the scholarly consensus concerning the identity of the author of the *Ḥatāta* and proposing to reopen the philological case for authenticity. His argument against the work being a simple forgery is complex. First, he rejects two widely held assumptions about the relation of the two manuscripts: that the Littmann edition is preferable to the Turayev and then that Abb215 is a better manuscript from which to work than Abb234. He argues that of these two manuscripts sent to Paris by Giusto da Urbino, neither is a faithful original or faithfully copied from an original. This postulation of a lost original leads to Getatchew Haile suggesting a tentative reconstruction of the *Vorlage* from which the two versions were taken. He suggests that a series of copying errors reveal that one copyist, likely to have been Giusto da Urbino, introduced errors owing to his imperfect grasp of Gə'əz. He further elaborates the now-familiar argument that Giusto da Urbino did not know Gə'əz well enough to use it without the help of an editor or co-author and that therefore if da Urbino is to be suspected of anything, it is of having changed the message of the author, not of hiding his own identity. The major upshot of this postulated “original text” is that until it or an authentic copy is located, the pure contents of the original *Ḥatāta* and the identity of its author may remain a mystery, meaning that the extant manuscripts cannot give us an entirely accurate understanding of the author’s philosophy. We are thus presented with an intriguing new possibility: that of a hybrid or mixed authorship of the texts, predating Giusto da Urbino’s “discovery” but modified by him and his Ethiopian collaborators.

Editors’ note: This paper was originally published in Getatchew Haile’s *Ethiopian Studies in Honour of Amha Asfaw* in 2017. He was due to present an updated version of this paper at the “In Search of Zera Yacob” conference prior to his passing away in 2021. The editors would like to thank Rebecca Haile for her kind permission to reproduce her father’s paper and Father Columba Stewart of the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library for facilitating this contact.

Introduction

It might seem strange to take up the *Ḥatāta zä-Zär'a Ya'əqob* or “Treatise of the ‘Aksumite’ Zär'a Ya'əqob” at this time. After all, it has been over 100 years since the distinguished Enno Littmann edited and published the text¹ as a rare philosophical treatise by an Ethiopian, and almost as many years since the equally distinguished Conti Rossini subsequently convinced the scholarly world that the treatise was a hoax by an Italian Jesuit missionary monk² who was pretending to be an Ethiopian.³ It has been over forty years since I stopped using it as a text for the Gə'əz classes I taught for over ten years, during which time I advised Alemayehu Moges on his often quoted BA dissertation on the subject.⁴ And I do not have any new sources that might shed new light on a subject that has been exhaustively discussed by those who supported the findings of Conti Rossini, including Eugen Mittwoch⁵ and those who insisted that Zär'a Ya'əqob was an Abyssinian thinker no matter how much of a loner, *einsamer*,⁶ he may have been.⁷

The reason I am returning to this subject is because the more I read the *Ḥatāta*, the more I become uncertain about the identity, including the nationality, of its author. Unlike other Ethiopian scholars of the traditional school, the author starts his investigation by questioning the existence of a supernatural being (*həllawə*). He writes, “[o]n one of the days, [after my prayer] I thought and said, ‘Who am I praying to? Is there a God who hears me?’” His point of departure is his belief that the things he could see, living and non-living, existed because they were created (*fəṭur*) by a creator (*fäṭari*). Starting with man, he theorised that man did not create himself because in order to create himself, he must first exist. Using this logic, he concluded that there must be an uncreated creator (*fäṭari*). This ability or attribute is what qualifies this being as a god (*amlak*) or God (*ገgzi'abher*). He posited worship as the relationship between the created and the creator and maintained that man should express to God his indebtedness for creating him by worshipping him. He defined worship as *səgdät* (repeated prostration

1 Littmann (1904).

2 Editors' note: Giusto da Urbino, the friar suspected of forging the text, was a Capuchin (Franciscan) missionary – not a Jesuit.

3 Conti Rossini (1920, pp. 213–223).

4 See Alemayehu Moges (1961 E.C., 1969).

5 Mittwoch (1934).

6 Littmann (1916a).

7 Sumner (1976a, 1981 [1978]); Sumner (1994, pp. 230–288); Dawit Worku Kidane (2012); and Luam Tesfalidet (2007).

to the ground before the invisible creator), *šälot* (prayer, begging the Creator), *səbḥat* (glorifying Him), and *a'ək'əto* or *akk'ätet* (thanksgiving), which each person could perform on his own. He dismissed the existing religious traditions, *šər'atat* and *ḥəggägat*, which recommend, among other things, communal worship, as having been designed by men to control others.

Many scholars have examined the extent to which the author of the *Ḥatāta* was an independent thinker among the *liqawənt*, “doctors of the Church”, who hardly doubted the existence of God—at least not in the open—and who are dedicated to upholding the Ethiopian Orthodox Church traditions. These scholars have focused adamantly on the identity of the author of the treatise and on the text as presented by Enno Littmann, even after Boris Turaiev [Turayev] subsequently produced a better edition.⁸ At this time, I am inspired to reexamine the text by Luam Tesfalidet's thorough examination of the arguments regarding the author's identity in her 2007 MA thesis: *Rezeptions-geschichte der Ḥatāta Zär'a Ya'əqobs und Wäldä Ḥəywät*.⁹

The Story of Wārqe

To begin from the beginning, the *Ḥatāta* is its author's autobiography, the autobiography of a scholar who claims to hail from an undisclosed place in the neighbourhood of Aksum. One of the two known manuscripts calls it a *gädl*, “hagiography”. He was called Wārqe at birth (on 25 Nāḥe [Nāḥäse], 1592 = 28 August 1600), and Zär'a Ya'əqob at Christian baptism. He studied the Holy Scriptures first from the Catholics (*Franḡ* or *Franḡi*) and then from “the teachers of our country”. It should be remembered that the Jesuits had the upper hand in Ethiopia when Wārqe came back from school and took a teaching position “in Aksum”.

The trouble that triggered Wārqe's philosophical investigation brewed when he began teaching. He said his friends hated him because there was no love of friends in the country and because envy has consumed them since I was by far better than them in education and love of friends. I used to agree with all people, with the *Franḡi* as well as with the Egyptians.¹⁰ When I interpreted the Scriptures, I said, “The *Franḡi* say such and such, and the Egyptians say such and such”. I did not say, “This one is good, but the other one is bad”. I rather said, “All this is good, if we are good”. Therefore, all hated me because to the Egyptians I looked a *Franḡi*, and to the *Franḡi* I looked an Egyptian.

⁸ Turaiev (1904).

⁹ Luam Tesfalidet (2007).

¹⁰ By “Egyptians”, he means either the Copts or Ethiopian teachers, who are often referred to as “Copts”.

In fact, one of the Aksumite clergymen went twice to Emperor Susənyos (1607–1632), who was by then a devout proselyte Catholic, to accuse him of being anti-Catholic. The author's first appearance before the king went in his favour. But the second time, fearing possible negative consequences, he fled before the messenger arrived to summon him. Going to Shoa, he crossed the River Tākkāze. For two years, until the king's death, he hid himself in a cave. This period of solitude, we are told, was when Wārqe developed his theological philosophy. With nothing to do after having prayed with his Psalter, *Dawit*, he spent his days in speculations and thoughts.

As I read these passages today, my thesis is that the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'əqob* is a historical novel—rather than a pure and truthful autobiography—in which the true identity of some people and localities are changed or not revealed.

The Sources (MS d'Abbadie 215 and MS d'Abbadie 234)

There are only two known Gə'əz copies of the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'əqob*, both housed at the Paris National Library. These are identified as MS d'Abbadie 215 and MS d'Abbadie 234. They were catalogued by Antoine d'Abbadie¹¹ and later by Conti Rossini.¹² In my opinion, as I explain below, neither is faithfully copied from the original. As versions rather than copies of the original text, these two manuscripts cannot give us an accurate understanding of the author's philosophy. Nevertheless, any serious study of the philosopher's views must give equal attention to both manuscripts.¹³ It would be a mistake to ignore either, as Enno Littmann and Claude Sumner did, under the mistaken assumption that one (MS d'Abbadie 234) is a copy of the other (MS d'Abbadie 215)—which it is not.¹⁴

These two manuscripts were sent to the famous French explorer, Antoine d'Abbadie, from Dābrā Tabor in February 1853¹⁵ by a Jesuit Missionary¹⁶ called Fa-

11 d'Abbadie (1859, p. 212).

12 Conti Rossini (1913, pp. 23–24).

13 The librarians are very cooperative people. Mittwoch has also published them as photocopies.

14 Sumner (1976a; 1981 [1978]); Sumner (1994 [1985], pp. 230–288).

15 Editors' note: In fact, only the first of the two manuscripts (MS d'Abbadie 234) was sent to Antoine d'Abbadie around this early date; the second manuscript (MS d'Abbadie 215) reached Paris only in 1856. See also Jonathan Egid's Introduction and Anaïs Wion's essay (Chapter 2) in this volume.

16 Editors' note: As noted above, Giusto da Urbino was in fact a Capuchin missionary.

ther Giusto da Urbino (“P. Juste d’Urbino”).¹⁷ This means that Antoine d’Abbadie, who criss-crossed Ethiopia toward the end of the *Zāmānā Māsafānt*—the era of the unruly provincial sovereigns—and subsequently brought to Paris the largest collection of Ethiopian manuscripts in Europe, did not obtain any copy of *Ḥatāta zā-Zār'a Ya'əqob* while he was in Ethiopia. Other European explorers, colonialists, and manuscript collectors had a similar experience—they did not encounter these manuscripts or their copies during their time in Ethiopia.

As a result, the studies conducted on the philosophical treatise of Zār'a Ya'əqob were based on these two manuscripts and these two manuscripts only. Initially the focus was on MS d’Abbadie 215, beginning with its publication by Littmann. Later, some attention was given to MS d’Abbadie 234 when Boris Turaiev collated it in an edition that made d’Abbadie 215 the base.

For the sake of convenience, I will designate MS d’Abbadie 234 with A and MS d’Abbadie 215 with B. Labelling MS d’Abbadie 234 with A gives prominence to the copy that Littmann did not even bother to review. But this is important because a cursory comparison of the two copies reveals immediately that d’Abbadie 234 (A) is not a copy of d’Abbadie 215 (B) and that A is possibly closer to the original copy than B. I believe, therefore, that Littmann and later Turaiev, should have made A the basis of their edition. Most, if not all, of the copying errors in B that Littmann corrected, depending on context and his knowledge of the Gə'əz grammar, are correctly copied in A (though A, of course, has its own errors). For example, A has ተሰጦይኩ፣ which Littmann corrected to B’s ተሰጦኩ (B, fol. 1v); A has ቧ, which he corrected to B’s ጀ (B, fol. 28v).

These scholars assumed that B was original because it was copied by an Ethiopian copyist—who did not reveal his name—and on parchment, while A was an attempt by Giusto da Urbino to prepare on paper the text in B for publication. As Turaiev and Mittwoch found out later, this was not what happened. True, Giusto da Urbino’s hand and his marginal notes obviously support half of the assumption. That is, that he prepared the text for publication is believable. However, he did not prepare it from B or from the manuscript that the copyist of B used as his exemplar but rather from another manuscript copied by a certain Wäldä Yosef for Wäldä Gäyorgis. In other words, there were two manuscripts, each containing a slightly different version of the *Ḥatāta*. MS A was copied from one of them and MS B from the other.

17 Conti Rossini (1913, p. 24). The details have been exhaustively presented by Luam Tesfalidet in her (2007) MA thesis. See also the important information on the history of the text in Mbodj-Pouye and Wion (2013) and Wion (2013a, 2013b). These online sources were provided to me by Professor Manfred Kropp.

Why were there two sources—one from which A was prepared and another from which B was copied—about a single work, and where are these two original sources now? Also, where is the original from which they were bifurcated? Until it or an authentic copy is located, the pure contents of the original *Ḥatāta* and the identity of its author may remain a mystery. For now, however, by comparing the two versions, we can surmise that Giusto da Urbino had access to both versions and how the original came to be bifurcated.

Whether or not this could be the case here, it is common knowledge in textual studies that when a shorter and a longer version of a text are found, the shorter version—in this case A—is closer to the original than the longer one—in this case B. This is because some copyists of a later date often feel obliged to add elucidations to expressions they think are obscure in their exemplar. They also tend to change archaic forms of words and taboo phrases to fit the language and ethics of their time. These acts of reworking a text may be called *Modernisation*. This problem is very much evidenced in our copies of the *Ḥatāta*. The language in B has been modernised, and the attack on Christianity has been narrowed down to focus on the faith and the faithful of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

Taking into account what I have written so far about the original versions of this text and the impact of modernisation, I am now firmly inclined to believe that the original *Ḥatāta* is the work of an Ethiopian *dābtāra* who lived, as he claimed, during the era of the Catholics (reign of Emperor Susānyos, 1607–1632). I also believe that the original was tampered with by Giusto da Urbino (in A) and the Ethiopian Catholics his mission converted (in B). As Giusto da Urbino's friend and convert to the Catholic faith, *Abba Tāklä Haymanot*, noted, Giusto da Urbino was taken by the philosophy the text contained, which the *Abba* calls “a heretical work”. This means Giusto da Urbino was not responsible for the production of any of the exemplars. First, the story of manuscript B, the longer text: its introduction indicates that its source was a manuscript prepared by Wäldä Ḥəyiwät, the disciple of Zär'a Ya'əqob, who had also written a book similar to the one written by his teacher. Giusto da Urbino gave this longer version to an Ethiopian copyist to produce copy B for him. As Mittwoch noticed, Giusto da Urbino corrected the copying errors in B against this longer version. At least one important mistake betrays the copyist's (or the moderniser's) ignorance of Ethiopian history: as shall be explained, he was unaware that there was before his time an Ethiopian king called Fasilädäs. So he changed *wä-nägsä wäldu Fasilädäs* “And his son, Fasilädäs, was crowned” to *wä-nägsä Wäldä Fasilädäs* “And Wäldä Fasilädäs was crowned”. This ignorance cannot be Wäldä Ḥəyiwät's, who lived when Fasilädäs was crowned.

A's story is shorter but quite interesting. As noted above, Giusto da Urbino himself copied A from a manuscript that a certain Wäldä Yosef copied for Wäldä Gäyorgis. In general, Giusto da Urbino was a careful copyist. Only one dif-

ference between A (Giusto da Urbino's copy) and B may have a valuable story to tell: at a certain point in time, A had "Monday, Təqəmt 10, 1631" (fol. 25r) where B had "Monday, Təqəmt 11, 1631" (fol. 24v). B is correct: Təqəmt 11, 1631, is Monday. For Monday to fall on Təqəmt 10, the year would have to be 1851, or two years before Giusto da Urbino sent the two manuscripts to Paris in 1853.¹⁸ This shows that Giusto da Urbino changed the year, as he was, apparently, unable to see that Monday and Təqəmt 11 could come together in the year he prepared A. The copy shows that he tried to change the author's *Sänuu* "Monday" to perhaps *Šäluu* "Tuesday", which would fall on Təqəmt 11. So, if Giusto da Urbino is to be suspected of anything, it is of having changed the message of the author, not of hiding his own identity. This change points to the conclusion that the text in A is not Giusto da Urbino's original composition.

Giusto da Urbino knew Gə'əz but not well enough to use it without the help of an editor or co-author. He is responsible for the translation of an exchange between a Jesuit priest and a Muslim Mufti in Carthage (Tunisia) from French into Gə'əz. The Gə'əz text has not been found, but its Amharic version was published by Mittwoch.¹⁹ It is the similarity of the description of Islam in it and in the *Ḥatāta* that led Mittwoch to support Conti Rossini's position. But, as Luam Tesfaldet has argued, the author's knowledge of Islam could have come from any source, not necessarily from the *Die amharische Version der Soirées de Carthage*. However, it is fair to add one more note of support to Mittwoch's observations: it is striking that the rare word, *bəher*, in the meaning of "section", "paragraph", of a text, appears in both works, once in the *Ḥatāta* and several times in *Die amharische Version der Soirées de Carthage*. Still, if this addition is Giusto da Urbino's, I see it as a part of his tampering of Zär'a Ya'əqob's *Ḥatāta* and not as evidence that he authored the original.

The Arguments in Support of Wārqe's (Zär'a Ya'əqob's) Authorship

As we now know it from these two versions, the *Ḥatāta* is a creation or a rework of someone perhaps wishing to undermine the Christian faith of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. At present, it is a text much favoured by Catholic and Protestant teach-

¹⁸ Editors' note: As noted above, only one manuscript (MS d'Abbadie 234, which Getatchew Haile here calls "MS A") was sent to Paris in 1853.

¹⁹ Mittwoch (1934). Editors' note: The Gə'əz text is today known and is discussed in Simon (1936), Marrassini (unpublished), and Kropp (unpublished).

ers. If the copies we have contain the original speculations of the author, which are highly critical of Ethiopian Christianity, we can suspect that he was a *däbtära* who converted to Catholicism. If the author's views are, on the other hand, not accurately reproduced, then he was likely a real independent thinker whose work was tampered with by Giusto da Urbino and his group of Catholic *däbtäras*. At least two points support the latter thesis:

1. Although the *Ḥatäta* at hand rejects all established religions—Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—its general criticism of Christian religions is clearly diverted to focus on the Christianity the author inherited from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. This is done by changing, for example, “haymanot” (“faith” or “religion”, a remnant in A of the original essay) to “haymanotänä” (“our faith”, as changed to in B) or “säb” (“people”, as seen in A) to “säb’a bəḥeränä” (“people of our country”, as in B). Here are the examples:

- a. A “When I realised that religion is a prostitute or a lie I was saddened”.
B “When I realised that my religion is a prostitute or a lie I was saddened” (fol. 13v).
- b. A “In this era people destroyed the love (taught by) the Gospel”.
B “In this era people of our country destroyed the love (taught by) the Gospel” (fol. 13v).
- c. A “I realised that (my son) was doing wrong with his body by spilling semen for the pleasure he gets from it”.
B “I realised that (my son) was doing wrong, not knowing the sin that signals to the need for sex” (fol. 28v).

2. The author of the present *Ḥatäta* was impressed by the knowledgeability of the *Franḡi* teachers (AB, fol. 19r). He was encouraged by Emperor Susənyos to abandon his vacillation in favour of decidedly advocating the Emperor's and his *Franḡi*'s position. The treatise witnesses that its author's sympathy ultimately did go to the Catholics, condemning with the harshest of words Ethiopian Orthodox Christians and Emperor Fasilädäs, who is highly regarded by the Church for restoring Orthodoxy to its former place (A, fol. 26rv; B, fol. 26v–27r).

- a. (Emperor Susənyos) said to me, “You are an educated person; you should love the Catholics, for they are very learned people”. I said to him, “I agree”. Because I was afraid and because the Catholics were truly a learned people.

b. About Emperor Fasilädäs, the *Ḥatāta* declares that “the king started his reign with a sound policy and wisdom. But he did not stay firm in goodness, and became a violent monarch. He stayed firm in his violence and shedding of blood. And the Catholics, who did him favours and built him castles and beautiful houses and made his kingdom good in all deeds of wisdom, he hated and persecuted. He paid them bad in lieu of good. He became a criminal. He killed countless people without due process of law. He increased adultery. He executed the women with whom he fornicated. He would dispatch his criminal army to plunder villages and houses of the poor. For God has given to this wicked people a wicked king. Because of the sin of the king and the people, the scourge of famine took place. Then there was pestilence”.

c. The historical records testify regarding the untold number of lives lost resisting the imposition of the Catholic faith. The country's army was ordered to wage war on the Church and the faithful. *Tabots*, including the one in the church of Aksum Şəyon, had to flee and hide. *Abunä Səm'on*, the Metropolitan of the nation, was killed. As stated in the *Ḥatāta*, Emperor Fasilädäs was willing to tolerate the offenders, but they lured his brother Prince Gälawdewos to overthrow him. Indeed, there was the inevitable retaliation, including the execution of the plotters, when the plot was discovered. But see how the *Ḥatāta* exaggerates the reaction: “First, those who accepted the faith of King (Susənyos) and *Abunä Alfonso* persecuted their brethren who did not. Later (when the Orthodox faith was restored), those who were persecuted took revenge on their enemies as much as seven times worse and murdered many”.

These passages and changes support the conclusion that the *Ḥatāta* in B as well as in A are copies of a treatise written by three authors who lived centuries—two centuries—apart, the original author who lived during the reigns of Susənyos (1607–1632) and his son Fasilädäs (1632–1667) and the two revisionists in the 1850s. Giusto da Urbino had access to both copies. He copied the shorter one (A) and had the longer one (B) copied for him by an Ethiopian. Giusto da Urbino has proofread B, correcting it with his hand against the version that the Ethiopian copyist copied. But the text in B and its exemplar might contain the compromised philosophical views of the author. It is, unfortunately, the published version of this copy (by Littmann) that is widely known and quoted in the West and in Ethiopia. The edition and translation by Turaiev, even though he has collated the version in A, did not make a marked difference on the studies made after Turaiev.²⁰

Emperor Fasilädäs is commonly known as Fasil, not as Fasilädäs, which is the name of a martyr saint of the Diocletian persecution. This is all B's copyist knows. For him, there must be someone, an Ethiopian king, by the name of ወልደ፡ ፋሲለደስ (Wäldä Fasilädäs), just as there are people with such compound names, e.g., ወልደ፡ ማካኤል፡ (Wäldä Mika'el), ወልደ፡ ጸድቅ፡ (Wäldä Şadəq), etc. I believe that is why B (föf. 22v) has ወነግሠ፡ ወልደ፡ ፋሲለደስ፡ “And Wäldä Fasilädäs became king”, where A has the correct expression ወነግሠ፡ ወልዱ፡ ፋሲለደስ፡ “And his [Susənyos'] son, Fasilä-

²⁰ See, for example, Sumner (1976a) and Dawit Worku Kidane (2012, pp. 363–385).

däs, became king”. This mistake could not have been made by the original author of the *Ḥatäta* or his disciple, who copied it together with his own essay. They knew there was no king called Wäldä Fasilädäs in their time.

As I said, A is much closer to the *Vorlage* than B. The examples given above support this conclusion. I give, in addition, a few expressions from A and B to illustrate that those of the former are older and closer to their *Vorlage* than the latter.

Tab. 1: Variations between manuscripts A (Abb234) and B (Abb215).

A.	B.
<p>እምጃአብዕልተ፡ ሀገር፡ “From the 4 wealthy people of the village”.</p>	<p>እምአብዕልተ፡ ሀገር፡ (fol. 3r) “From the wealthy people of the village”.</p>
<p>ሴዋ፡ ሸዋ፡ “(The province of) Sewa”.</p>	<p>ሸዋ፡ (fol. 3r) “(The province of) Šäwa [Shoa]”.</p>

The first example is most telling and a decisive proof that Giusto da Urbino is not the author of the *Ḥatäta*. The *Vorlage* must be the Gə‘əz for “From the 1 [= one] of wealthy people of the village”. Both copyists—that of A being Giusto da Urbino—were faced with the problem of understanding the symbol for the number 1 [= one]. In older texts, including definitely in the *Vorlage*, the symbol for number 1 (ጁ) looks like the modern symbol for number 4 (፩). The copyist of A, since he is a copyist, copied it as ፩, as he assumed it to be, while that of B could not see a clear ጁ but one that is closer to ፩, which did not make sense in the context for someone who is more than a copyist. As a compromise, he chose not to copy it at all because dropping it all together made to him more sense than copying it as ፩ (4). Giusto da Urbino would have written it as ጁ, if the *Ḥatäta* was his composition because it is ጁ. What the author had written was, most probably,

እምጁአብዕልተ፡ ሀገር፡ “From one of the wealthy people of the village”.

The second example does not require much explanation. Sewa is older than Šäwa [Shoa].

ወለተ፡ ጴጥርስ፡ (Wälättä Peṭros) is mentioned in the *Ḥatäta* as the name of the daughter-in-law of Habtu, the nobleman who gave safe haven to the fugitive author. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has a saint who has the same name. This saint attained sainthood for fighting the imposition of Catholicism on the Orthodox Christian nation by Emperor Susənyos, her brother-in-law. I cannot see why Giusto da Urbino would create a figure in his fictitious composition and give her the

name of a saint who fought the *Franği* that the *Ḥatāta* admires, if he was, indeed, the author of the *Ḥatāta*.

There are several examples in A that show weaknesses in the author's knowledge of the Gə'əz language. The errors are rectified in B. But we cannot conclude from this, as Conti Rossini and Mittwoch did, that this happened because the author of the *Ḥatāta* was Giusto da Urbino, whose knowledge of Ethiopian culture, including its languages, is praised by one scholar and rejected by another. These mistakes can be made by anyone, including any Ethiopian, for whom Gə'əz is foreign as much as it was for Giusto da Urbino. No one claims Gə'əz as his mother tongue. They can be the mistakes of an Ethiopian author who, like Wārqe, was intelligent but not a highly educated scholar. Wārqe's knowledge of Ethiopic literature did not go much beyond the Psalter and the New Testament. He himself has told us that when he fled, he took with him only his money and the Book of Psalms of David (A, f. 4r; B, fol. 3r). His only other book of the Old Testament was Ecclesiastes (A, fol. 8r; B, fol. 7r). He quotes even Isaiah indirectly from the Gospel (A, fol. 27r; B, fol. 27v). He could not quote the Torah correctly, although he criticises Moses severely: *ወመሥሐስ፡ ይቤ፡ ከመ፡ ጥሉ፡ ፋካቤ፡ ርኩስ፡ ወኣቲ።* (*wä-Muse-ssa yäbe kämä kwəllu rukabe rəkus wə'ətu.*) "But Moses says that every (sexual) intercourse is impure" (A, fol. 9v; B, fol. 8v). Moses, a married man, cannot issue such a sweeping condemnation of carnal intimacy.

Here are at least four more problems that those who speculate that Father Giusto da Urbino was the author of the *Ḥatāta zä-Zär'a Ya'əqob* must resolve:

1. Why was Giusto da Urbino interested in writing his discourse in Gə'əz, if he was indeed the author of the *Ḥatāta*? It was certainly not to teach Ethiopians, because he shipped both copies out of Ethiopia. It was certainly not to teach the Catholics in Europe, because the *Ḥatāta* does not contain any philosophical concept not known or theological issues not discussed in nineteenth-century Europe. The central part of Zär'a Ya'əqob's contribution is this reasoning:

I cannot say, "I created myself" because I did not exist when I was created. And if I say, "my parents created me", a creator for my parents and their parents has to be posited, until one arrives at the first who were not born like us but who came into this world in a different way, without a begetter. If they, too, were born, from where did the origin of their birth begin? I do not know other than to say "a Being that is not created, but lives forever, [...] created them out of nothing" (A, 6r; B, 4v–5r).

It is not clear why the Jesuit Claude Sumner, who wrote a great deal on the philosophy of Zār'a Ya'əqob, never compared the thoughts of Zār'a Ya'əqob with the cause and effect of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), the most favoured teacher by the Jesuits: “Aquinas applies the principle of causality when showing that in a series of essentially subordinate causes one cannot proceed in infinity, but must rather come to a first cause that is independent of all other causes and responsible for the causality of the entire series”.²¹

2. We all agree that A was copied by Giusto da Urbino, editing the text for publication with a title he created for it. Why would he choose to edit his own original? That would make Giusto da Urbino at one time the author and at another time the editor of his own text. It makes more sense to accept the claim that he has found a heretical text that, I might add, he tampered with.
3. The *Ḥatāta* was composed by someone who knew the Ethiopic Psalter well. That would point to someone who was a member of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church faithful, likely a *Dawit Dägami däbtära*, “a cleric, who recites daily the Psalms of David”—someone who knows the individual psalms by heart because it is his daily prayer book. It cannot be Giusto da Urbino who must have his Catholic prayer book. It is impossible to think of any reason for anyone to be obsessed with so many psalm verses, unless the Psalter is his daily prayer book.
4. Would Giusto da Urbino have written about the stars in the way the text does if he were hoping to pass as a traditional Ethiopian? Traditional scholars maintain that God created big and small stars. They arrived at this belief, accepting Paul’s statement in 1Co 15:41: “Indeed, one star differs [yähēyyas “is better than”, or “is superior to”] from another star in glory”. But our philosopher says, ወመነ፡ የአምር፡ ጉልቆም፡ ለከዋኩብት፤ ወርሕቆቶም፡ ወዕብዮም፡ እን ዘ፡ ይመስሉነ፡ ደቁቁ፡ ባእንተ፡ ርሕቆቶም፡፡ (wä-männu yä’ mmär ḥwəḥqomu lä-käwakəbt wä-rəḥqätomu wä-‘əbäyomu ənzä yämässəlunä däqiqä bä’ətä rəḥqätomu) “Who knows the number of the stars, their distance, and their magnitude, which look to us miniscule because of their remoteness?” (A, fol. 21v; B, fol. 22r).
5. The author of the *Ḥatāta* says that he has no opinion regarding the issue whether or not observing the Sabbath (Saturday) as a rest day is one of God’s commandments. I suspect he raised this issue because it was an issue in his time, as a criticism of the Portuguese Catholics against the Ethiopian Church for observing it, so much so that Emperor Gälawdewos (1540–1559)

²¹ Bonansea (1967, p. 551). Editors’ note: See Marenbon in this volume (Chapter 4) for a detailed discussion of this passage with close reference to Aquinas.

had to defend the practice in his letter known as *Confessio fidei Claudii Regis Aethiopiae*.²²

Then, who was the author of the treatise that Father Giusto da Urbino gave the title መጽሐፈ፡ ሐተታ፡ ዘዘርአ፡ ያዕቆብ፡ *Mäṣḥafä Ḥatāta zä-Zär'a Ya'əqob*, “A Book of Inquiry of Zär'a Ya'əqob”? I believe that the treatise was composed by an Ethiopian who lived during the Third Persecution of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.²³ I suspect he had gone to his grave hiding his identity and origins, perhaps to protect his relatives from the shame his heresy might have inflicted upon them. Every name he mentioned, other than those of the monarchs, could be fictitious. He could be a son of one of the noble families that had close ties to the palace at Dänqāz, in Dämbiya, Səmen. The style of his recording of dates of events in detail and with accuracy shows that he was in the company of the royal chroniclers whose recording compares with his and contrasts with that of the monks who wrote *gädlat* and *tä'ammarat*. For the purpose of this study, I will accept his claim that his name was Wārqe/Zär'a Ya'əqob.

Zär'a Ya'əqob's enemy, whom he called Wäldä Yoḥannəs, was also a member of the *kahnatä däbtära* who served at the palace. If both men lived in Aksum, it does not seem likely that he would make the long journey from Aksum to Dänqāz to accuse Zär'a Ya'əqob before the king. In fact, he could appear before the king, as he did, the next day after he was summoned only because he was living not far from the palace. Also, it is useful to note that Wäldä Yoḥannəs was ultimately appointed head over the monasteries in Dämbiya. He most likely was a palace baläm^wal “courtier” as well as a native of Dämbiya, as such particular appointments traditionally were given to natives. So, most likely, it was because they both hailed from and lived in the same region, not very far from Dänqāz, that Wäldä Yoḥannəs spotted the philosopher in Ənfraz, where he was hiding the second and final time.

Zär'a Ya'əqob says he was born in one of the regions of Aksum and that he fled from Aksum to go to Sewa (Šäwa), crossing the River Täkkäze, when his enemy, Wäldä Yoḥannəs, accused him before the king in Dänqāz (in Səmen) of being anti-Catholic. But some of these claims are questionable. First, he violated the local tradition by not revealing his birth village, if he was, indeed, from the neighbourhood of Aksum. This omission is striking from a man who provides the dates of events with perfect accuracy. Second, Aksum and Sewa are far apart, so he

²² See the letter's reprint in Ullendorff (1990, pp. 64–67).

²³ The First Persecution was that of Gudit and Esato which caused the fall of the Aksumite Dynasty, and the Second was the revolt of Iman Ahmad Graññ [Grañ] in the sixteenth century.

would have had to cover a long distance when he fled. However, he does not mention a single locality along the road to Sewa. This leads me to suspect that he did not make the long journey but only said so to hide his movement from one region of Dämbiya to another. Indeed, there would have been little reason for him to flee that far just to avoid his enemies, especially as he was no longer teaching. He said he remained in a cave until the king died.

In this claim, Zär'a Ya'əqob's creativity failed him, as the king would not have continued to seek his head, if he had indeed stopped doing the thing to which the king objected. If he did leave his province for Sewa/Shoa, his province must have been Səmen; and the river he crossed was likely the River 'Abbay (Blue Nile), not the Täkkäze.

Did Zär'a Ya'əqob arrive at all of the philosophical views and other observations in the *Ḥatäta* on his own? That does not seem to be likely. One cannot avoid the plausible assumption that he was influenced by the Jesuits as he was in his theological thinking. He was educated by them and his way of proving God's existence, the core of his philosophy, reflects St. Thomas Aquinas' (1225–1274) reasoning of cause and effect and the scholastic thinking of St. Anselm (1033–1109) who “was the most luminous and penetrating intellectual between St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. He differed from most of his predecessors in preferring to defend the faith by intellectual reasoning instead of employing arguments built on Scriptural and other written authorities”.²⁴

Also, the knowledge that stars appear small because of their distance from us is not philosophical knowledge that could be arrived at through sheer speculation but actually information unearthed by astronomers. Zär'a Ya'əqob must have heard it from his European (Catholic) teachers whom he calls—to the surprise of Giusto da Urbino—*Franḡ*, combining “*Franc(s)*”, which he heard from them and “*Färänḡi*”, which he heard from his native teachers. It should be remembered that he learned the Scriptures first from the *Färänḡi* and later from “the teachers of our country” (A, fol. 2r; B, fol. 2r).

Conclusion

The Jesuits worked hard to convert Ethiopians to Catholicism and had some significant successes. They succeeded in converting Emperors Zädəngəl (1603–1604) and

²⁴ Gasper (1974 [1957], p. 61). It would have been a fruitful and educational discussion if Sumner has not ignored bringing in the arguments of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Anselm of Canterbury for the existence of God. Editors' note: John Marenbon's chapter in this volume (Chapter 4) undertakes a comparison with the former.

Susənyos (1607–1632) as well as many priests and monks, including the leadership of Däbrä Libanos. They influenced the thinking of many who then questioned the traditions of their Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Accordingly, it makes more sense to suspect the influence of Catholic teaching on the thinking of Zär'a Ya'əqob than to ascribe his *Ḥatāta* to Giusto da Urbino.

Anais Wion

Chapter 2

Questioning Standards in Ethiopic Classical Writings through Two Distinctive Features of the *Ḥatātas*: Autarchic Logic and First-Person Writing

Abstract: This chapter explores two distinctive features of the *Ḥatāta Zār’a Ya’əqob* and the *Ḥatāta Wäldä Ḥəywät*. First, there is the fact that both texts are stand-alone pieces and solely quote biblical texts, in keeping with the internal logic of their self-sufficient mode of thought. I then explore the highly complex use of the first person singular in the *Ḥatāta*, notably in the paratextual sections, including the *incipit*, *explicit*, and colophons. A brief overview of the use of the first person singular in Ethiopian literature as well as of extremely rare and *ad hoc* instances of the autobiographical genre evince the norms from which the *Ḥatātas* would deviate were they were to be considered as authentically Ethiopian texts dating to the seventeenth century.

Books are written by men who can write
falsehoods. [...]
I cannot tell you that all men and all books are
false, but I say that they may be false.
እሰመ፡ ለመጻሕፍትኒ፡ ጻሐፍዎም፡ ሰብእ፡ አይከሉ፡ ይጽሐፉ፡
ሐሰተ። [...]
ኢይብለከ፡ ከሉም፡ ሰብእ፡ ወከሉም፡ ማጻሕፍት፡ ይሐሰዱ፡
ዘልፈ፡ አላ፡ ዕብለከ፡ ይከሉ፡ የሐሰዱ።
Extract from the *Ḥatāta Wäldä Ḥəywät*,
Chapter 2

The following reflections emerge from a general research project I am conducting on the conditions of written production in Ethiopia. It seems to me that the question of literacy in Ethiopian Christian culture—often singled out as an African exception despite the normality of monotheistic civilisations that put the book at the heart of their cult practices—deserves to be analysed and not simply taken as a fact. Since the beginning of the 2000s, I have been working on pragmatic documents, as well as on the links between writing as a vector of history and oral tradition, iconographic sources, landscape, and even rites. My research on the *Ḥatāta Zār’a Ya’əqob* and the *Ḥatāta Wäldä Ḥəywät*, two philosophical texts written in

Gə'əz¹ whose alleged authors are Ethiopian thinkers from the seventeenth century, started in 2010. It was originally rooted in my interest in the status of written texts in Ethiopia. The first set of three articles, published in 2013, were dedicated to the history of the changing status of these texts throughout the twentieth century in the context of their reception by various academic communities.² Allegedly “discovered” and produced by an Italian monk, Giusto da Urbino, the two known manuscripts of the *Ḥatāta* entered the prestigious collection of the French scholar Antoine d'Abbadie in the 1850s. They were edited and translated at the beginning of the twentieth century, but as early as 1920, they were widely considered to be forgeries. Nonetheless, they were not erased from the map of Ethiopian literature and played a major role during the 1960s and later on in the emergence of African philosophy.

To further study the *Ḥatātas*, I now want to address their status within the scope of Ethiopic literature. Neither of these two texts neatly fits into existing genres. The *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'əqob* (the *Treatise of Zār'a Ya'əqob*) is a biographical narrative that underpins philosophical introspection of a deistic nature. The *Ḥatāta Wäldä Ḥəywät*, the treatise of Zār'a Ya'əqob's disciple, pursues the philosophical enterprise of developing free thinking and then offers a manual on how to live sanely and think without dogma, as a development and implementation of the master's precepts.

The following analysis is based on a draft written in 2013 that was to form the next part of my “Investigating an Investigation”. It aimed to explore the possibility that the *Ḥatātas* were written in the seventeenth century. In 2018, I resumed this research focusing on the question of first-person writing in Ethiopic literature at the invitation of Violaine Tisseaud and Pauline Monginot for a conference (REAF, Paris, June 2018). Then, in April/May 2022, the conference organised at Oxford by Jonathan Egid and Lea Cantor presented an opportunity to return to my research on the *Ḥatātas*. Although what I presented there was focused on the academic history of the text during the second half of the twentieth century, I chose to

1 Although Christian Ethiopia has had a written culture since antiquity, its relationship to the written word has remained formal and restricted down to the contemporary period. We find a multilingual context in which there coexisted a ritualised written language (Gə'əz), mastered by Church scholars and some members of the elite; a *lingua franca*, Amharic, the language of the royal court; and numerous vernacular languages. Gə'əz remained the only written language until the pre-modern period, and Amharic very progressively gained the right to be written down, while other languages have only very recently begun to take a written form. This multilingualism therefore also gives rise to a context of diglossia.

2 M'bodj-Pouye and Wion (2013); Wion (2013a); Wion (2013b). Originally published in French, these three articles were translated into English with the kind and precious help of Lea Cantor and Jonathan Egid in September 2021 and are now available in both languages.

rework my original historical research for this chapter, incorporating new insights and ideas born during the very stimulating exchanges and debates in Oxford, for which I warmly thank the organisers and participants. I was virtually the only historian present at the Oxford conference and certainly the only specialist of Ethiopian history, as historians have not paid much attention to the *Ḥatātas*. This can be explained by the fact that the authenticity of the texts was debunked in 1920 by Carlo Conti Rossini, who argued that these texts were fake and therefore not worthy of attention.³ To my surprise, I discovered that many philosophers do not take into consideration the context of production and of the reception of philosophical texts. As long as texts have entered the philosophical corpus, they can be studied for their ideas and contents, without a real need to link them to their original context of production. While I can understand the basis for these arguments, I remain, as a historian, quite sure that the context of production actually matters. One of the important factors of the non-debate that underlies the canonisation—to use the term proposed by Anke Graneß during the Oxford conference in April/May 2022 (and in Chapter 10 in this volume)—of the *Ḥatātas* is the total decontextualisation of these texts. The arguments used to analyse the question of authorship as well as the analytical frameworks applied to the texts are never philological and codicological (contextualisation of the media) nor historical (contextualisation of the narrative elements).⁴ Certainly arguing that the *Ḥatātas* were written by two Ethiopian thinkers of the seventeenth century has political implications, and the search for Ethiopian voices to be heard in the concert of world philosophers is legitimate. However, from a different direction, it might also be noted that Giusto da Urbino, being an Italian monk from a very poor immigrant family, constrained by his hierarchy and bound by Catholic dogma, was too marginal and subaltern a voice within his own time. Even if he was a European white male participating in a missionary and colonising process, and in this regard a “dominant voice”, he also came from a low economic background, and belonged to a recently emigrated foreign family in Italy. Amongst his Catholic peers as well as in his correspondence with the rich and famous Antoine d’Abbadie, he was definitely a nobody. He should have been forgotten. Nevertheless, he made himself heard through the creative and scholarly medium of philosophical and autobiographical thought written in Gəʼəz, a language he resolved to pick up. He expressed what he considered to be personal and original thoughts (even if they were inherited from

³ Conti Rossini (1920).

⁴ See Presbey (1999) for the negative effects of the decontextualisation of sources in relation to the understanding of marginalised voices.

his student lectures on Thomistic philosophy⁵) while at the same time showcasing his excellent skills in Gə'əz to Antoine d'Abbadie, the addressee of these works, and taking pride in them. While Antoine d'Abbadie was the main recipient of his works, it seems that Giusto da Urbino also wrote the *Ḥatātas* for a larger audience. He spent five years in Betäləhem—where he learned Gə'əz, produced various texts, started a family, and worked closely with local intellectuals and clerics. But what he wanted to express to his Ethiopian friends in Betäləhem and what part these friends played in the writing of these treatises remain difficult to determine. In addition, what did he want to prove to his former Ethiopian Catholic co-religionists, with whom he refused to participate in the mission of evangelisation? We know that a fellow contemporary Ethiopian Catholic monk, Täklä Haymanot, was aware of these texts and despised them. Knowledge of the *Ḥatātas* did reach the ears of the Catholic community in Ethiopia, and this might have played a part in Massaia's decision not to try and convince Giusto da Urbino to participate in the evangelisation of the Käfa region: such a freethinker would have been a source of insubordination. Whoever the author(s) of the *Ḥatātas* are, whether Giusto da Urbino in the mid-nineteenth century or Zär'a Ya'əqob followed by Wäldä Ḥəywät in the late seventeenth century, it is in any case a very personal voice that is expressed here.

I will lay out this third part of my investigation along two complementary lines. I will first investigate the intellectual autonomy of the *Ḥatātas*. Indeed, they almost exclusively quote biblical texts and emerge from a contextual vacuum. At any rate, the Bible is not the primary authority on which the *Ḥatātas* rely, as the author of each text (Giusto or his pen-names, Zär'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Ḥəywät) actually is the thinker and the sole responsible voice behind what is being said. I will then question the conditions and possibilities of self-writing in Ethiopian Christian culture, a topic that is rarely addressed but is crucial for analysing an autobiography. I will first examine the use of the pronoun “I” in both *Ḥatātas* and then widen the lens to explore other apposite considerations.

1 Autarchic Logic and Intellectual Autonomy

Upon reading these texts, one is immediately struck by their great intellectual autonomy. They do not invoke any external references apart from biblical texts—

5 See John Marenbon's discussion in this volume of the hypothesis of a Thomistic background of the *Ḥatātas* (Chapter 4).

sometimes literally but very often only allusively.⁶ The *Ḥatāta Wäldä Ḥəywät* explains clearly the reason why it does not refer to other texts in a plea for autonomy:

Do not believe what is written in books until you have examined it and found it to be right. For the books are written by men who can write falsehoods. If you examine these books, you will soon find in them a shameful wisdom that does not suit the reason that God has given us and with which we seek the truth. I cannot say that all men and all books are false, but I say that they may be false. Therefore, you do not know whether they tell the truth or not, unless you examine carefully what is said or written. Only then will you know lucidly what you must accept and you will understand the work of God. Enquiry is the door through which we gain access to wisdom. Reason is the key that God has given us to open this door, to enter the great hall of His mysteries and to share in the treasures of wisdom. We should therefore examine everything that men teach us and that they have written in books. If we find them to be true, let us receive them gladly; let us reject falsehood without mercy and guard against falsity. It does not come from the Lord, the God of truth, but from the error and deceit of men.⁷

Here, the author urges his readers to be critical of the written word.⁸ A few lines earlier, he admits that this warning also applies to his own writing, with an address full of candour: “O my brother, you who read my book here, know that I have written it in great fear of God, who preserves me absolutely from falsehood”. In Chapter 7,⁹ he again denies that he has been writing in a biased manner, explaining at length that this book is the fruit of a “long period of investigation [...]”; it is therefore not possible that what I write is false”. This *verbatim* quotation from the text allows us to appreciate Wäldä Ḥəywät’s prose in its repetitive aspect; and a form of iterative logic proves the postulate through a closed circle reasoning. The first treatise is constructed in the same way, since, when retiring in a cave for some years, Zär’a Ya’əqob grounds his philosophy by sole appeal to the book of the Psalms of David.

The two *Ḥatātas* are texts that claim to be purely the result of personal reflection in the search for “truth”. This truth is moral: it is a matter of defining what is

6 The recent Lee, Belcher, and Mehari Worku edition (Zara Yaqob, Walda Heywat, Lee, Mehari Worku, and Belcher 2023), a draft of which was provided to the participants of the Oxford conference in April/May 2022, offers a better understanding of these references than the first edition by Littmann (1904).

7 Translation of BnF Ethiopien Abbadie 215 (Abb215), fol. 33r, after Sumner (1991, pp. 465–466).

8 See also *Ḥatāta Wäldä Ḥəywät*, Chapter 5: “Books are written by men who can write falsehoods” (Sumner 1991, p. 470).

9 This is Chapter 6 in Ralph Lee’s and Mehari Worku’s translation (Zara Yaqob, Walda Heywat, Lee, Mehari Worku, and Belcher 2023), but in the present analysis, I have stuck to the original chaptering of the *Ḥatātas*.

good, licit, acceptable by God and by the “order of creation”, which is the ultimate principle of this philosophy. It is also ontological: what is? It is not a matter of questioning the existence of God but rather of understanding why and how human beings were created, with what material and with what spiritual parts. The first text, that of Zär’a Ya’əqob, is explicitly based on biographical experience. The second text, that of the disciple Wäldä Həywät, builds on the first text but hardly ever quotes it either in theorising about its teachings or in putting its insights into practice—drawing on biblical quotations. The only reference to knowledge shared by all Christians makes it difficult to situate the text’s author(s) in a definite time period and in a specific cultural context. Zär’a Ya’əqob does not only express his desire to develop autonomous thought with the Psalter as his only point of reference; he is also at the crossroads of two teachings, Catholic and Orthodox Ethiopian. This situation of encounter and the relativistic shock caused by it are common to both Giusto da Urbino and Zär’a Ya’əqob, making it difficult to distinguish the two cases and uncover the context of production on the basis of the text itself. Both the seventeenth-century character and the nineteenth-century monk are sincere in expressing the doubts that their hybrid culture and cross-cultural approach to Christian dogmas and texts have occasioned.

2 The Psalter of David at the Centre of the *Ḥatätas*

While the very notion of revealed religion is repeatedly undermined by the *Ḥatätas*, the fact remains that biblical writings are its inescapable point of reference, especially the Psalms of David or *Dawit*. The *Ḥatätas* are unperturbed by this contradiction. Thus, according to Ralph Lee’s calculation in his contribution to this volume¹⁰, nearly sixty quotations from the Psalms pepper the *Ḥatäta Zär’a Ya’əqob* (and less than twenty are derived from other biblical texts), which is internally legitimised by the fact that Zär’a Ya’əqob retreats into a cave to meditate with the Psalter alone. In the *Ḥatäta Wäldä Həywät*, the quotations are more heterogeneous; we find “only” some thirty quotations from the Psalter and some sixty instances of other biblical quotations.¹¹

A highly prized book, the *Dawit* marked the arrival into the world of letters in Ethiopia. This was a book through which one learned to read and write and which private individuals owned. The possession of books was very rare, even among

¹⁰ See Chapter 3 in this volume.

¹¹ See again Chapter 3 in this volume for specific references.

priests, monks, or clerics (*däbtära*). Giusto da Urbino possessed a copy of the Psalter amongst his collection of Ethiopic texts, which he did not send to Antoine d'Abbadie.¹² The Psalter was also a key book for Orthodox Christians, the mastery of which enabled one to acquire a linguistic and cultural foundation and to familiarise oneself with those features of language common to all scholars. The role that Giusto gave the Psalter in the making of the *Ḥatätas* is significant since, in the Latin note that accompanies manuscript BnF Ethiopien Abbadie 234 (Abb234), he specifies that the soldier who sold him the “original” of the *Ḥatäta Zär'a Ya'əqob* called it “David’s Psalter”. And indeed, manuscript 234—the first manuscript, which contains only the *Ḥatäta Zär'a Ya'əqob*—opens with a quotation from a psalm and not with a doxology (as is customary), a point to which I shall return. We can see how the “scholastic” side of this work is directly linked to Giusto’s efforts of assimilation of the language and culture. In a way somewhat reminiscent of the method used in the *Ḥatäta Wäldä Ḥəywät*, Giusto combines theoretical learning with practical application: as he studies the Ethiopian Bible and the Gə’əz language, he integrates quotations from its manuscripts into his own text, beginning with the Psalter and then extending his interest to a bigger corpus. In May 1852, he wrote in a letter to d'Abbadie (ms. BnF NAF 23852, fol. 21–22) that he was working on the project of editing the Psalter in Gə’əz for the Ethiopian market, and for this he had to collate various manuscripts in order to establish the best text. Indeed, the manuscripts he acquired, both for d'Abbadie and for himself, were in some cases full of annotations gesturing at his interest in studying the Gə’əz Bible and in comparing it with the Catholic one.¹³

Of course, Giusto da Urbino worked in an environment in which he could access the entirety of the Scriptures, as presumably the library of the rich church of Betäləhem, an important centre of knowledge, was accessible to him. Moreover, if one accepts the principle of collective writing, references may be provided by his Ethiopian colleagues. Ralph Lee and Mehari Worku have noticed that some quotations of the *Ḥatäta Wäldä Ḥəywät* imply a good knowledge of liturgical texts, such as the *Təmhərtä Ḥəbu'at*, the *Mästəbqwə'* or the hymns for Good Friday. Thus there is definitely an interesting possibility of co-authorship in the case of this second text.

What is most surprising is the absence of other references. Zär'a Ya'əqob is supposed to be a scholar well versed in both the Ethiopian and Catholic faiths, yet neither a single apocryphal or patristic text providing the foundations of East-

¹² This is the first book noted down in the list of his library written in manuscript BnF Ethiopien Abbadie 196, fol. 153v.

¹³ Wion (2013a, §31).

ern theology nor any texts from the Catholic corpus are used in the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'aqob*. By way of comparison, the *Life* of the woman saint Wälättä Petros, who lived in the seventeenth century and possibly also underwent a doctrinal and spiritual journey, cites the *Nägärä Abäw*, the *Həṇṣä Mänākosat*, the *Book of Enoch*, the *Arägawi Mänfäsawi*, the *Miracles of Mary*, the *Mäṣḥäfä Ḥawi*, the *Haymanotä Äbäw*, as well as numerous prayers, hymns and liturgical texts, and many biblical quotations. Books were at the heart of crucial dogmatic issues in this period of confrontation between the influential Jesuits Catholics and the Orthodox Ethiopian Church. The nun Wälättä Petros opposed the Catholic policy of the King and his court and defended the rights of women as well as a pro-orthodox struggle. An episode from Wälättä Petros' hagiography depicts her as taking refuge with her women-companions and her books, of which only the *Haymanotä Äbäw* is specifically mentioned, in the middle of a dry river.¹⁴ When the king's soldiers come to seize her, the water quickly flows back into the riverbed, but the saint, her people, and her library are protected from the flood, and the river flows on either side of them without "erasing a single letter" from her books. This precision is all the more significant if one considers that the patristic collection of the *Haymanotä Äbäw* was at the heart of the theological debate that opposed the Catholics, the monks of Däbrä Libanos, and the monks of the Eustatean movement at the court of King Susənyos (1607–1632) during the councils of the early seventeenth century.¹⁵ Some monks were indeed accused of modifying passages from the *Haymanotä Äbäw* in order better to defend their theological positions. Does this passage from the *Life of Wälättä Petros* make reference to these accusations, which had important political consequences? This is a possibility. This comparison shows that what is missing in the *Ḥatātas* is the possibility of making the texts resonate in a definite way with the historical context in which the events described are supposed to take place. Both *Ḥatātas* are isolated texts, based on some—often peculiar—readings of the Bible alone.

Of course, this kind of autarchic philosophy is entirely consistent with the books' heuristic principle that knowledge only comes from a direct examination of the world. While such an absence of external references is in itself surprising, compared with what the norm was for a classical Ethiopian scholarly text, it is on the other hand fully justified by the bias which the works themselves present. The autonomy of the texts is, moreover, one of the key bases for their posthumous success, for it is what allowed them to function as an entity with their own logic, their

¹⁴ Ricci (1970, p. 42); see also Belcher and Kleiner (2015, p. 152).

¹⁵ Paez in Paez, Boavida, Pennec, and Ramos (2011, pp. 315–317); see also Wion (2017, pp. 496–499).

own dynamics, avoiding contradictions and anachronisms. The texts can exist whatever the context they describe. The Bible is not the sole authority on which the *Ḥatātas* rely; indeed, the more prominent authority is that of self-inquiry.

3 Troubled Self-Identities in the *Ḥatātas*: “I” Is Another

I hope the reader will forgive my borrowing one of Arthur Rimbaud’s famous sayings in order to introduce this part of my essay.¹⁶ This is not because the French poet lived in Ethiopia some thirty years after Giusto da Urbino but because this sentence expresses as clearly as poetry can the difficulty of being oneself and how the act of writing can put words on the caesura one can feel between various parts of one’s being.

Nonetheless, I am not going to probe Giusto da Urbino’s psychology; instead, I will propose a formal analysis of the *Treatises* and explore the literary genres from which they draw. One of the characteristic features of these texts is their recurrent use of the first person, the assertion of the author as narrator and as responsible for the ideas expressed in the texts. The first text, the *Ḥatāta Zār’a Ya’əqob*, is an autobiography, which allows its author to explain the birth and development of his theosophy. The second text, the work of the disciple, obeys the injunction in the first text to continue to think for oneself and develops the doctrine in a more general way, while retaining the use of the first person singular as an authority figure. Let us therefore examine the use of the first person in the *Ḥatātas* before embarking on a comparative analysis with the few Ethiopian texts that also make use of the first person.

To this end, we need to go back to the manuscript texts. Let us recall that manuscript BnF Éthiopien Abbadie 234 (Abb234) is a copy made by Giusto da Urbino himself on a small paper notebook and that he sent it by post to Antoine d’Abbadie in February 1853. At that time, Giusto da Urbino said that he had only found the *Ḥatāta Zār’a Ya’əqob* and was looking for the *Ḥatāta Wäldä Ḥəywät*, mentioned in the first text. The BnF Éthiopien Abbadie 215 (Abb215) is a manuscript on parchment, copied by an Ethiopian scribe, containing both texts, and sent to Antoine d’Abbadie in 1856 with the entirety of Giusto Urbino’s library. This manuscript is said to have been acquired in 1854. But while Giusto da Urbino proudly

¹⁶ “Je est un autre” is extracted from a letter which Arthur Rimbaud, aged 17, wrote to Paul Demeny in May 1871. This very famous letter is entitled “Lettre du voyant” and announces the revolutionary aesthetic of the young poet.

announced that he bought it after many efforts, my previous codicological investigation has shown that he actually had it copied by *däbtera* Gäbrä Maryam from Betäləhem, from whom he had previously commissioned other codices.¹⁷

From the very opening of *Ḥatäta Zär'a Ya'əqob*, the reader is invited to hear about an autobiographical case:

~~Book of Inquiry (Mäṣḥafä Ḥatäta) by Zär'a Ya'əqob~~¹⁸

In the name of God who alone is righteous. I shall write down the life (*gädl*) of Zär'a Ya'əqob which he himself composed (*zä-däräsä laliḥu*) with his wisdom and examination (*ḥatätahu*) saying:

"Come and listen you who fear God! I may tell what He did for my soul (*näfsä-yä*)" ^{lps. 651}.

And I begin.

In the name of God, the creator of all, the origin and the end, the possessor of all, the source of all life and all wisdom. ~~I begin to write~~ **I write** some of the things that have happened to me in my long life. May my soul be glorified by God. May the humble hear and rejoice ^{lps. 331}. For I have searched for (*ḥäsäškəwo*) God and he has answered me. And now come close to him and he will enlighten you. Let not your face be afraid. Glorify with me the greatness of god and let us exalt his name together.

Manuscript 234 (Abb234) opens with a title, *Mäṣḥafä Ḥatäta Zär'a Ya'əqob*, written in the upper margin. This paratextual element is rather uncommon in Ethiopian written culture. The title of a work is seldom inscribed in an isolated place in manuscripts, either in the margin, the binding elements, or the flyleaves. Titles are sometimes mentioned in the *incipit*, the *explicit*, or the colophon. But most of the time, literary works are designated by customary titles without the need to explain them. Manuscript 234 (Abb234) is thus of a markedly European character, and whatever one thinks about the authorship of the text, its title was unquestionably a creation and an embellishment introduced by Giusto da Urbino, for nowhere in the body of the text does it appear in this form. In his correspondence with Antoine d'Abbadie,¹⁹ Giusto hesitated for a long time over what title to settle on: he called it "*Book of Ya'əqob*" or "*Ḥatäta of Ya'əqob*" before having the first copy of it made; he then called it "*Ḥatäta of Zär'a Ya'əqob*" at the time he produced Manuscript 234 (Abb234); finally, when copying 215 (Abb215), he also added

¹⁷ Wion (2013a, §20).

¹⁸ I am using editing conventions to account for the variances between the two known copies, borrowing the methods of textual genetic: struck through are the words present in 234 and absent from 215; in bold are the additions of 215.

¹⁹ See the edition of these letters, contained in the manuscript Paris BnF NAF 23852, fol. 3–128v, in Wion (2012).

“*Nägärä Zär’a Ya’əqob*”, the word *nägärä* (discourse, affair, thing) being more common in the formation of Ethiopian titles than the term *Hatäta*.²⁰

As we can see from the extract above, the introduction of the copy of 215 presents a more conventional form than the original one from codex 234. For a start, the title no longer appears. Second, a doxology, an invocation to God, opens the text. Finally, it is immediately followed by an announcement of the work as the *gädl* of Zär’a Ya’əqob, his *Life* in the hagiographic sense of the term, literally his “struggle”. The title that is announced here in the *incipit* thus fulfils two injunctions of “normality”: firstly, it is placed where it is expected; secondly, it is conventionally formulated as a *gädl*, announcing the life story of an exemplary man in terms that cohere with Ethiopic terminology and literary genres.

If one examines the introduction of Manuscript 215 (Abb215) and its additions, it appears that the first person singular refers to two different persons. On the one hand, there is the person who is already present in the copy of 234 and who says:

~~I begin to write~~ **I write** some of the things that have happened to me in my long life. May my soul be glorified by God. May the humble hear and rejoice ^{Ps. 33:1}. For I have searched for (*ḥasäškəwo*) God and he has answered me.

This “I” refers to Zär’a Ya’əqob himself. But Manuscript 215 (Abb215) adds: “I shall write down the life (*gädl*) of Zär’a Ya’əqob which he himself composed [...] And I begin”.

This first person is obviously no longer Zär’a Ya’əqob but the one who is writing down the story of Zär’a Ya’əqob. The polysemy of the term *šähäfä*, to write, in Gə’əz does not allow one to differentiate the act of copying (act of the scribe) from that of writing (act of the author). But the phrase “**I shall write down the life (*gädl*) of Zär’a Ya’əqob which he himself composed (*zä-däräsä*)**” sheds light on this point. The text was indeed composed by Zär’a Ya’əqob, while in Manuscript 215 (Abb215), the second “I” expresses the voice of a copyist. It is rare, if not altogether unheard of, in Ethiopic literature to find a copyist appearing in the body of a text, especially where it is specified that the copyist is not the author!

This intrusion of the voice of the copyist gives rise to another strange phenomenon, that of a double doxology. Hence a very simple doxology, “**In the name of God who alone is righteous**”, introduces the copyist’s sentence and is thus added to the original doxology, which itself was unusually preceded by a biblical

²⁰ The most famous is the *Nägärä Maryam* (*Discourse of Mary*), narrating the life of the Virgin Mary, but there is also the *Nägärä Haymanot* (*Discourse of Faith*), written in the second half of the nineteenth century to defend *karra* doctrinal positions, or the *Nägärä Muse* (*Discourse of Moses*), a Gə’əz translation of an apocryphal text presenting a dialogue between God and Moses.

quotation: “In the name of God, the creator of all, the origin and the end, the possessor of all, the source of all life and all wisdom”. We might note, first of all, that neither of these two doxologies is Trinitarian, that the God they celebrate is not presented under the three hypostases ordinarily attributed to the God of Christians. There is no Father, Son, or Holy Spirit, and indeed at no point in the text is this fundamental feature of Christianity mentioned. The God of the *Ḥatāta Zār’a Ya’əqob* is a God who possesses equity and truth (*ṣādāq*), and he is also a creator-God (*fāṭari*). These attributes accorded to God echo the two fundamental notions of the *Treatises*: first, truth, which is to be sought and is also a mode of operation, and second, the perfect order of creation, as the *a priori* framework of all thought.

Building on the foregoing analysis of this introduction, let us see how the text of the *Ḥatāta Zār’a Ya’əqob* is resolved, again with an eye to the modifications introduced by the evolution of the author’s project between the copy of 234 (Abb234) and the copy of 215 (Abb215). We begin with Chapter 15, dividing its long conclusive part into two sections along the classic textual marker that is the word “amen”:

So that those who come after me may know what I wanted, I write this which I hide in my heart until I die. If indeed after my death there is ~~someone intelligent~~, **an intelligent man with a spirit of enquiry (*ḥātati*)**, I beg him to add his thoughts to my thoughts.

~~In the same way, everyone, if possible, may gradually come to knowledge.~~ **Behold, I have begun my investigation (*ḥātityä*) as it has never been investigated (*zä-itäḥätätä*) before. And you may complete what I have begun. Let the people of my country acquire wisdom with the help of God and come to the knowledge of the truth.** Lest they believe in falsehood, trust in depravity, and go from vanity to vanity. Let them understand ~~the wisdom of the Creator and trust in his mercy and justice and pray to him with a pure heart in their torments~~ **the truth** and love their brothers ~~as themselves~~ and cease to argue in vain about their faith as they have done so far.

If there be any wise man who understands ~~as I do~~ **these and higher things, and teaches and writes them**, may God grant him what his heart [desires], and may He fulfill his desires for him, and may He fill him without measure with good things as He has filled me. And may He give him joy and happiness on earth as he has made me joyful and happy to this day.

And whoever criticizes me ~~and because of~~ my book, ~~and does not understand it or make good use of it~~, may God reward him according to his merit.

Amen.

The first part of Chapter 15 is written by Zār’a Ya’əqob and closes off his entire text. The copy of 215 (Abb215) does not contain changes that affect the nature of the text itself, but it does present authorial changes. The most important one, “**Behold, I have begun my investigation (*ḥātityä*) as it has never been investigated (*zä-itäḥätätä*) before. And you may complete what I have begun**”, has a

double function. On the one hand, it emphasises the term “investigation” or *ḥatāta*, which in Manuscript 234 (Abb234) was mentioned in the title. Yet we have seen that this title disappears in Manuscript 215 (Abb215). In this codex, *ḥatāta* is now used in a convenient place, as this paragraph plays the role of the *explicit*, where one would expect to find the designation of the text. Above all, this sentence makes more apparent, through its injunctive dimension, the appeal to the reader which was already in the making in the version of 234, albeit in a much more indirect way. Suddenly the reader is apostrophised: “you” can, you *must*, even, complete this work and thus prove that every man, with God’s help, is his own master. With the exception of this appeal, the “intelligent man” is referred to in the third person. He is both the reader and the active legatee of this work. The author gives him his blessing and then threatens him with divine punishment if he does not try to understand the book, before closing with the word “amen”.

At this point, a second conclusion is added, this time written by Wäldä Ḥəywät, Zär’a Ya’əqob’s disciple. This text concludes the biographical story of Zär’a Ya’əqob, narrating in detail his old age, his death, the death of his wife, and the destiny of their children. Then Wäldä Ḥəywät announces his own book:

Zär’a Ya’əqob who is Wārqe ~~wrote finished this book~~ at the age of 68, when ~~the king (nəgus)~~ Fasilädäs died and Yohannes reigned. And after he wrote ~~this this book~~, Zär’a Ya’əqob lived 25 years in a beautiful old age, loving God our creator, praising Him day and night, and was **extremely** respected. He saw his children and his children’s children. And his son Häbtu begat 5 boys and 4 girls from his wife Mädhānit. Zär’a Ya’əqob who is Wārqe lived to be 93 years old without illness. He died with a very great hope in God our creator. And after one year, his wife also died and she was buried near him. May God receive their souls in peace for ever and ever. [...]

May God bless by the blessing of Häbtu my father and by the blessing of my master (*māherəyā*) Zär’a Ya’əqob for I am very old. I have lived and grown old without ever having seen a righteous person abandoned or his descendants lacking grain. May he remain in this blessing for ever and ever.

And I, Wäldä Ḥəywät, ~~who am called~~ **who is called** Mətəkku,²¹ have added ~~here~~ these few things **to the book of my master in order to show his happy end**. And as for my wisdom which God gave me and which²² Zär’a Ya’əqob taught me for 59 years, behold, I too have writ-

²¹ It is Chapter 14 of the *Ḥatāta Zär’a Ya’əqob* that introduces us to the young Mətəkku, whose baptismal name is Wäldä Ḥəywät, the second son of Häbtu. He is gifted in school and becomes Zär’a Ya’əqob’s disciple. According to the last sentence of Chapter 14, it was at his repeated request that Zär’a Ya’əqob wrote his book.

²² Beginning from here (folio 30v), Abb215 completes the original copy: all the lines have been used but a less skilful copyist than Gäbrä Maryam, most likely Giusto da Urbino, uses the lower margin to write the end of the text. The next two folios are missing from the quire. Thus, most probably the text originally ended on the next folio but was modified.

ten in my turn²³ a book to show and instruct the sons of Ethiopia. May God give them reason (*labbuna*) **and wisdom** and love and bless them for ever and ever, amen.

~~May God bless with the blessing of Zär'a Ya'əqob his servant Wäldä Giyorgis who caused this book to be written so that God's blessing may be with him forever as well as with the scribe Wäldä Yosef, for ever and ever, so be it.~~

This book is finished.

There is little difference between the two copies, apart from a few authorial changes. The most important one, “I ~~have~~ added these few things **to my master's book so that its happy ending may be shown**”, aims to improve the internal coherence of the text by explaining the logic behind the introduction of this second voice within the book. The only significant difference lies in the copy colophon of Manuscript 234 (Abb234), which mentions the name of a lambda scribe, Wäldä Yosef (Son of Joseph), who would have copied the book for an equally ordinary patron named Wäldä Giyorgis (Son of George). This type of colophon providing information on the conditions of the copy of a manuscript is common. Why was it removed from the copy of 215 (Abb215)? Primarily for the sake of lending an impression of authenticity, this colophon documents the original copy made by Giusto da Urbino and sent to Antoine d'Abbadie, which became Abb234. Abb215 has another origin, so it should not have this copy's colophon. The impression of genuineness is perfect.²⁴

According to the only copy of Abb215, the next book, the *Ḥatäta Wäldä Ḥəywät*, begins like this:

In the name of God, creator of all, commander of all, guardian of all and administrator of all, who is and who will be before all time and forever, the only perfect essence, whose greatness is infinite.

I am writing the book of wisdom and enquiry and philosophy (*fəlsəfənnä*) and advice which was written (*zä-däräsä*) by a great teacher (*māmḥər*) of our country whose name is Wäldä Ḥəywät. May the blessing of his God and the knowledge of the secrets of our blessed Creator and the observance of His righteous laws be with all the children of Ethiopia from now and forever. Amen.

You have heard what was said by the elders: “Give the wise man a chance and he will increase his knowledge”. In the same way I thought to write down what God has taught me dur-

²³ In ms. 234, this is where we find the footnote which invokes the Latin note in which Giusto explains to d'Abbadie how he acquired this text (see Wion 2013a, §15).

²⁴ It is a well-known fact in the history of forgeries that a sequel might be forged to accompany a prior forged text, often with the intention of providing some information that might authenticate the first. See for instance Simon Worrall's investigation on Mark Hofmann forgeries concerning the history of the Mormon Church (Worrall 2002).

ing my long life and what I have examined with the righteousness of my mind, so that this book may serve as a guide to advise and teach knowledge to our children who will come after us, as a reason for investigation on the part of the wise, for understanding the works of God and widening their wisdom. I do not write what I have heard on the lips of men unless I have examined it and recognized its value.

There is again a hiatus here between an “I” which is that of a scribe writing the book of Wäldä Həywät and then a first person singular which is Wäldä Həywät himself. As at the beginning of the book of Zär’a Ya’əqob, we have a replication of the first person between a scribe and the author. However, we are no longer in the register of autobiography but of a didactic work.

4 The “I” in Ethiopian Literature

We shall now compare the surprising uses of the first person in the *Ḥatātas* with the broader corpus of Ethiopic texts. An overview of the place of the first person singular in Gə’əz literature in mediaeval and modern times can serve as a touchstone for better understanding the particular status of the *Treatises*, based entirely on reflective and singular speech.

It is necessary to consider, first, the erasure of individuals in Ethiopian literary and artistic production before the mid-nineteenth century. The history of men and women are blurred, their faces are distant, their individual, intimate voices almost inaudible. This is not peculiar to Ethiopian Christian society; it is a common feature of mediaeval Christian cultures. The works of Gourevich (1982), Zimmerman (2001), and Compagnon (2008) have documented this fact and shown the consequences that it had for the disappearance of creators and artists behind their work. A text will commonly be attributed to a pseudepigraphic author, if possible an ancient and famous father from the first century of Christianity. In the Ethiopian case, many homilies were signed under the pen-name of Rətu’a Haymanot, which means “The Orthodox”.²⁵ The occurrence of the “I” has nonetheless existed in specific contexts and is linked to literary genres.

4.1 Address and Direct Speech in Deeds and Correspondences

When an authority figure addresses his or her people, he or she uses direct speech and the first person singular. This is the case in the various deeds issued by sov-

²⁵ Ambu (2021, pp. 200–203) and Getatchew Haile (2010, pp. 382–383).

ereigns, whose performative dimension requires a speech act such as “I have attributed...”, “I have given...”, “I have instituted...”. This is how the legal act that transforms the status of a land and the privileges of people is expressed and legitimated. This is probably the textual genre in which the expression of the first person is most frequently found, and this person is almost systematically, in the Ethiopian context and until the eighteenth century, the sovereign.²⁶

Other documents written in direct speech are the correspondences that give voice to their senders. But these documents were very rarely preserved in Ethiopian documentation. For example, a letter sent by a religious leader, the *‘aqqabe sä‘at*, to monks in a distant convent calls them to order.²⁷ The few letters that have come down to us are often inserted in narrative texts that encompass them, such as King Ya‘əqob’s (1597–1603, 1604–1607) letter to the soldiers *q^wərban* who wanted to overthrow him, which was copied into the chronicle of his successor, King Susənyos (1607–1632), and in which he apostrophises the rebellious soldiers.²⁸

Another form of direct communication, probably initiated by the ruler Zär’a Ya‘əqob (1434–1468), is that of homilies or *därsan*, which he sometimes wrote in the first person singular—especially when he had strict orders to announce, such as: “Listen and pay attention! In the name of our Redeemer Jesus Christ, I, Zara Yä‘əqob, command you [...]: the men should stand on one side and the women on the other [when attending church service]”.²⁹ They would be read in churches in order to convey the message he wished to communicate as directly as possible.

These expressions of direct speech were often comminatory and issued by political or religious authority figures.

4.2 The Autopsy or Testimony of Eyewitnesses

There is also the “I” of the eyewitness who appears from time to time in the course of a narrative. This is particularly common in royal chronicles. Thus, the first ver-

26 Wion (2019).

27 Derat (2006).

28 The letter from the king to the soldiers goes like this: “But it is absurd that I should renounce the kingship which I have received from the Lord [...] and not from men. Would it not be a shame if I were to renounce the royal crown at the behest of men, without war or battle, and if I were to renounce the dignity of the office I have received from our Lord when no one terrifies or frightens me?” (Pereira 1900, Volume II, Chapter 26, p. 59).

29 Derat (2005, p. 52).

sion of the chronicle of King Zär'a Ya'əqob (1434–1468) and that of his son, Bā'ədä Maryam (1468–1478), written in the second half of the fifteenth century, sees its author revealing himself at the turn of certain pages, even if, given the highly critical nature of his text towards the sovereign, he only hints at his identity. The author of the revised version of these two chronicles also writes in the first person but without revealing his identity.³⁰ These are, to my knowledge, the first two Ethiopian texts which assume the figure of the author as a witness of what he puts down in writing.³¹ The use of the first person singular became the norm among authors of narratives concerning the king from the time of the *Chronicle* of Śāršä Dəngəl (1567–1597) down to the contemporary period. The life narrative of rulers was indeed produced by direct and officially sanctioned witnesses, since they wrote under the status of *šāhāfe tə'əzaz* (“writers of [the king’s] orders”). They made their role as witness and as author apparent. This kind of biography derived its legitimacy from the recognition of the status of the author, who could then appear in the story he wrote in order to justify the authenticity of his account. He was the author of the text and the source of authenticity of some of the facts he narrated, but he could never talk about himself and even less assert a personal vision of things. The “I” of the *šāhāfe tə'əzaz* was solely at the service of the king.

4.3 The Authorial “I”

The authorial “I”—i. e., the fact that the author of a text uses the first person singular—seldom appears in the vast Ethiopic literary corpus.³² Although these are exceptions, a few Ethiopian authors do sign their works. For instance, a prolific author with close ties to fifteenth-century centres of power, Giyorgis of Säglä, signed only his major work, the *Mäšhäfä Məštir*. He did so by mentioning in the colophon that he was “the translator” of the texts he compiled and their interpreter, on

³⁰ The use of the first person singular in the chronicles of Zär'a Ya'əqob and Bā'ədä Maryam has been studied by Hirsch (2013).

³¹ With formulas such as “I don’t know” (Perruchon 1893, p. 5), “I have not been a witness” (Perruchon 1893, p. 12), “I have not met anyone” (Perruchon 1893, p. 13), “I do not know their names” (Perruchon 1893, p. 14), “I have not measured it” (Perruchon 1893, p. 26), “as I said before”, (Perruchon 1893, pp. 28 and 73), “I have just told” (Perruchon 1893, p. 86), etc.

³² According to Getatchew Haile (2005a, p. 736): “A major problem in the study of the history of Ge’ez literature is the identification of the authors of the works composed locally and of the translators of the imported ones. Ethiopian men of letters attach little importance to recording in titles and colophons their names and the dates of their works. In most cases, the latter must be assessed by circumstantial evidence found in chronicles and in the works themselves”.

the basis of which he created a theological analysis.³³ But his numerous other works are attributed to him mostly by external sources.

Closer to our *Ḥatātas* and to their polemical and critical facet is the *Anqāsā Amin* (*Gate of Faith*), written by ʿInbaqom, a sixteenth-century intellectual.³⁴ A foreigner hailing from Iraq or from Yemen and a Muslim convert, he spoke Arabic and thus became a close associate of the Coptic metropolitan bishop. He later assumed the prestigious position of *əččage*, i. e., head of the Däbrä Libanos monastic network, and was the only foreigner ever to fill this prestigious position. He wrote a treatise entitled *Anqāsā Amin*, in which he depicted himself and described his conversion to Christianity.³⁵ This text is very original in its formal construction since it is a long harangue addressed to *Imam Aḥmad*, the leader of the Muslims who led the jihad in Ethiopia in the first half of the sixteenth century; its purpose is to make Aḥmad aware of the weaknesses of Islam. The few biographical details ʿInbaqom discloses serve to establish his legitimacy in expounding the Qurʾān and pointing out its errors. Indeed, one passage begins with the phrase “Know, Imam, that I too was once, like you, a zealot of the law of the Muslims”. Then he narrates how, in reading the Qurʾān, he began to be interested in Christianity.³⁶ But he does not, strictly speaking, recount his life. This would be done after his death in a very conventional way, in a long hagiography written by one of his successors at the head of the monastic network of Däbrä Libanos, consistent with the norm according to which the life of an exemplary man should be written by his disciples.³⁷

The first person singular in Ethiopic written documents can thus have various statuses. Direct speech shows the author’s “I” in a letter, a speech or a sermon, or in the performative speech of a legal act. In a more distanced discourse, the authorial “I” shows the author declaring his identity in order to make clear the position from which he is speaking and thus, if necessary, legitimises his words and even identifies his readership. This “I” of the author can be geared towards autobiographical elements or, more often in the Ethiopian case, towards the marks of his autopsy—namely, the fact that he was present and can attest to what he saw.

33 Bausi (2007a, pp. 941–944 [here 942]).

34 See further Peter Adamson’s essay in this volume (Chapter 7).

35 van Donzel (1969).

36 van Donzel (1969, pp. 183–184).

37 Ricci (1954).

5 Restricted Use of the Biographical Genre in Ethiopia

Putting aside for a moment the question of autobiography, what about the biographical genre? Kings and saints were the only persons who could benefit from having their life written down. Royal chronicles, which developed from the fifteenth century onwards and took on their annalistic form at the end of the sixteenth century, were entirely devoted to narrating the acts of the sovereign and his relatives. Hagiographies, i. e., the lives of holy men and women, were also governed by very strict formal rules. They were written posthumously, usually by the second generation of disciples, before the memory of those who knew the holy man or woman while still alive could fade away. But this could also happen much later depending on the needs monastic communities had for recognition and legitimacy.³⁸ Hagiographies were written with a view to constructing a collective identity around the figure of a founder. Where the name of the author is known, which is very rare, it is most often disclosed in order to establish a spiritual and genealogical link between the founding saint and the monastery in which the writer lived.

Although they depict individual lives, royal chronicles and hagiographies were highly controlled genres, exercising a social function and allowing for little individual expression. Hagiographers and royal chroniclers wrote primarily with a view to portraying the Christian order and political power. The lives of kings, queens, and the powerful of this world as well as those of holy monks and women are exemplary and give little access to intimacy and personal thought.

At any rate, the fact that written sources reveal little or nothing about individual lives, emotions, or even personal history does not mean that individuals did not have space to express publicly private opinions or feelings. This type of expression was probably oralised, notably in poetic jousts that are still highly prized today, in the Gə'əz language in the ecclesiastical context in what are known as *qəne* as well as in Amharic or Tigriña in popular contexts. Both Gə'əz *qəne* as well as popular and vernacular songs mastered the art of double meaning, often called “wax and gold”, gold being the real meaning hidden behind the wax—that is, the first and obvious meaning. Unfortunately the few existing collections of *qəne* mainly preserve poems with a political, satirical, or critical dimension, or commemorate fa-

³⁸ See the edifying example of the hagiography of Šāršā Petros of Däbrä Wärq, a monk of the mediaeval period whose *Life* was written at the beginning of the twentieth century in order to tackle contemporary issues, as Susanne Hummel's thesis has masterfully demonstrated (Hummel 2020).

mous events or characters; few poems express emotions or original stances. Individual voices are still difficult to hear. While these poems are indeed a form of freedom of speech, they remain bounded by strong formal constraints.

The anthropologist Donald Levine concludes his book *Wax and Gold* with the following question: “Is Ethiopian Christian society individualistic, and what kind of individualism is it?”. In a passage dedicated to individual expression, he says that family upbringing and schooling in the 1960s served primarily to inhibit individual development, and that the real stage for self-expression may be found in countless trials.³⁹ This hypothesis is quite interesting and should be developed, since in Christian Ethiopia, for minor infractions, anybody could be asked to act as a judge or a lawyer, and defence speeches in the open-air were numerous and attracted people. This is where each person could speak for himself or herself and narrated his/her life, feelings, problems, and opinions with great creativity and eloquence.

More recently, the ethno-musicological work of Katell Morand has also addressed the question of the expression of intimacy in song, and the creation of both personal and collective memory.⁴⁰ Songs are seen as a way of shaping the past. They create a discourse on the past both for personal use (in order to remember) and for the use of the community (for the creation of a collective memory). But some songs are created and sung in solitude, even if they do have a social role. This paradox has been studied by Morand and says a lot about how complex the expression of emotions in Ethiopian society really is. Prior to her work, Fekade Azeze and then Getie Gelaye⁴¹ collected numerous poems and songs produced by peasant communities in the highlands, but did not produce the kind of analysis carried out by Morand on the expression of feelings and intimacy.⁴²

6 Attempts at Autobiography in Christian Ethiopia

So, were there moments in Christian Ethiopia when biography and first-person writing, namely, autobiography, met? Which Ethiopians wrote their own lives?

³⁹ Levine (1965, pp. 266–271).

⁴⁰ Morand (2013 and 2015).

⁴¹ “The only way for [poor farmers from East-Goğgam] to express their grievances, protests and feelings of bitter sorrows was through *engurguro* (lamentations), *qārarto* (war songs) and *fukkāra* (heroic recitals)” in Getie Gelaye (1999, p. 187).

⁴² Fekade Azeze (1998); Getie Gelaye (1999, p. 187); and Getie Gelaye (2001).

Let us now look at two unusual texts, both written in the sixteenth century and both containing large autobiographical sections. These are the only two pre-twentieth century Ethiopian texts known to date with overtly autobiographical aspects. Questioning deviations from the norm is one way of measuring the norm; it is therefore worth having a closer look at these two exceptions.

6.1 The Protean Genre of the Miracles of Mary and the Autobiography of the Aristocrat Səme'ón (ca. 1520–1530)

Probably written between 1520 and 1530, a small corpus of texts makes a strong claim to writing a first-person story.⁴³ Its author, Səme'ón, was an aristocrat with landed property, the son of the most powerful man in the kingdom at that time, the *'aqqabe sā'at* Nəgädä Iyäsus, the right-hand man to the King Ləbnä Dəngəl (1508–1540). Səme'ón writes about and describes himself. He dramatises his material wealth, the celebrations he put on at the inauguration of the church of Həgärä Maryam which he had built, as well as the precious objects he possessed which were stolen from him, including an icon painted by the famous Venetian painter Brancalione. All the texts written by him or under his direction are permeated by praise of luxury, as well as by the notion that while he possessed much, he also redistributed much, feeding into the social contract of giving and charity. To justify the originality of his form of expression, of which he is well aware, he pretends to borrow from a known literary genre, that of the miracles of Mary. This allows him to write narrative texts freely on the pretext of recounting the miraculous intervention of the Virgin Mary.

The very significant popularity of miracles in Ethiopia coalesced with the great creativity the various authors and composers displayed while writing about them. The miraculous narrative provides a framework within which the narration of very different events can be set. Səme'ón was not the first to employ this procedure to write a text seeking to narrate a real event and find an audience. Indeed, the miracles of Mary could be read aloud during the celebration of mass or, more often, at the end of it, in the open-air outside the church. Miracles were thus a real mode of communication. King Zär'a Ya'əqob (1434–1468) had stories of his battles (in which he was victorious, of course) or denunciations of his opponents inserted into manuscripts of the *Miracles of Mary* (e.g., the Stephanite monks—disciples of Əšṭifanos—who were accused of refusing to venerate the Virgin).⁴⁴ But

⁴³ Getatchew Haile (2005b).

⁴⁴ Derat (2002, pp. 49–50).

this was for the sake of nation-wide and official state communication. By contrast, Səme'ön wrote for his own pleasure. What is more, he wanted his existence to be recorded in writing, although he knew that he was breaking a real social ban. That is why he appealed to his readers/listeners—so as to win their approval:

I have written this, (about) my acquiring wealth, creating a household, owning people and animals, and building a church, together with giving commemoration banquets and celebrating the feast of dedication. Let this not be (a cause) for contempt. I did not write (this) to boast but to give thanks to God for giving me a gift, and to praise the miracle of Mary. In the name of God and in the name of her Son, I shall write of her many miracles which have been wrought in [my church] Hägarä Märyām.

Why do not the people of Ethiopia write their history (*zēnā*) (without which) their story (*nagara*) becomes unimportant and ephemeral? The ancient people used to write: Josiah had it written down how he celebrated the Pasch by slaughtering oxen, sheep, and goats and by preparing much food.⁴⁵

Səme'ön takes the step of criticising the social and cultural norm that enjoins one to remain modest and invisible, and he defends his act of bravery, namely, his speaking out. Hence we learn from this that writing one's autobiography was, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, very unusual and potentially culturally blameworthy.

6.2 The Autobiographical and Historical Notes of the Monk Ɔawlos (from 1531 to 1586)

Nonetheless, in the same period, a second man began to write about his own life, attesting to a further transgression of the aforementioned rule. Manuscript BnF Éthiopian 160 was written by Ɔawlos, a monk and historian. It contains autograph material on his life between 1531 and 1586, a period of forty-five years. This manuscript is a small codex typical of a personal study manuscript that indicates Ɔawlos' great erudition and intellectual curiosity. It presents various features related to the measurement of time: elements of chronology and computations (Christian moving feasts, various eras and calendars of Arab, Jewish, and Christian culture, ...); various historical lists, e.g., of Roman emperors, Ethiopian kings, biblical kings, and Ethiopic monastic genealogies; as well as elements of astronomy, geography, and meteorology. The manuscript was progressively copied during Ɔawlos' tribulations and his gradual ascent to knowledge. It reflects a kind of opening up to the world

⁴⁵ Getatchew Haile (2005b, pp. 59–60).

that took place in the sixteenth century, as some of this knowledge was newly acquired by Ethiopian intellectuals. Ʀawlos is therefore a true pioneer of “scientific” history in the sense that he sought to account for, rationalise, and globalise history. His approach remains Christian, very much dependent on the Bible, but he integrates all the novelties available at the time. He also innovates in writing about himself, even if, unlike in the case of Səmeʻon, this was not supposed to be publicised.

The “autobiography of Pāwlos”, to use the title coined by Carlo Conti Rossini, is in fact a long sequence of factual mentions ginned up year after year, whose style follows the codes of annalistic history.⁴⁶ This text contains only a few autobiographical references. During the first years of the period, we follow the peregrinations of the monk Ʀawlos in Tigray. He acts as a witness and describes his journey as the troubles befalling the region force him to move from one monastery to another. As for its autobiographical features, Ʀawlos first writes a sequence of autobiographical notes on fol. 9v, covering the years from his ordination as a monk in 1531–1532 to 1550. During these eighteen years, he first stayed in the monastery of Samuʻel (Halleluya) for eleven years; he then made an attempt to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, but to no avail. He remained in Halleluya for two more years and then went to Aksum to receive the blessing of the Coptic metropolitan bishop who had just arrived from Egypt. He then passed through a famous monastery, Däbrä Damo, and stayed in Bera for seven years. The marginal notes resume later, on folios 68 to 86, and then mostly address the political and military history of the kingdom, from the outbreak of the war led by *Imam* Aḥmad in the 1530s up to 1586. He uses the margins at the rate of one page per year. Mentions of his own life become sparse and anecdotal. We learn that in 1556–1557, he left Tigray for Ayda, in Angot. There he met a member of the royal family, *abeto* Laʻkä Maryam, King Ləbnä Dəngəl’s cousin. Ʀawlos exchanged two manuscripts (a Psalter and a hagiography of saint Sebastian) for a slave. This is a sign of his privileged status, as not all monks were supposed to own slaves. This is one of the features he shares in common with Səmeʻon: social and material wealth here went hand in hand with slave ownership. Ʀawlos also notes on two occasions that he lost his possessions: his clothes in a fire and six heads of cattle in a raid. His own story is by no means the main subject of the text, which is instead focused on the history of the Christian kingdom. Indeed, the real topics of this text are the war with the Muslims, the arrival of the Turks, the Europeans, and the Oromo, the appointments of Ethiopian dignitaries to positions of power and subsequent conflicts, as well as the internal affairs of Christian royal power.

46 Conti Rossini (1918).

The period of succession after the death of King Gälawdewos in 1559 was complex, and in fact the entire reign of Minas (1559–1563) and the beginning of the reign of Śārşä Dəngəl (1563–1597) were marred by conflicts arising from the need to place a pretender on the throne. Ʋawlos describes in detail the quarrels of succession, particularly in the years 1561–1564. He makes a note of the details as he goes along and does not hesitate to modify them at times—cf. especially folio 67v. His network is clearly that of *abeto* Hamalmal, a grandson of King Na'od and cousin of King Ləbna Dəngəl, who was not in favour of the enthronement of King Śārşä Dəngəl (1563–1597).⁴⁷ Ʋawlos is therefore a historian of himself, but above all one of political events, with a very personal and critical point of view. Amusingly, the authenticity of this “autobiography” has never been debated, most probably because it gives away so many contextual elements.

To conclude this overview of the expression of oneself in pre-Modern Christian Ethiopia, it is worth noticing that the diversity of self-expression in Ethiopian literature is real, but was seldom expressed. This brings out the sheer originality of the *Ĥatätas*' scriptural choices, with their strong and intricate affirmation of the “I” of various authors and copyists, their “self-biographic” aspects—above all because of the affirmative role of the individual and critical thought they promote. If these texts are a genuine creation from seventeenth-century Ethiopia, we can at least take the measure of how much they deviated from formal norms of written practices and from social rules. Another question that I did not really explore here concerns the impact of tools of communication on thought. In other words, in a culture of *restricted literacy* and very high valorisation of orality, how could texts such as the *Ĥatätas* have been produced?

⁴⁷ What is surprising is that Hamalmal's mother, Romana Wärq, daughter of King Na'od, was married to Səme'on's brother. Hamalmal thus had a half-brother who was also a nephew of Səme'on, with whom he plotted to put a king other than Śārşä Dəngəl on the throne.

Ralph Lee

Chapter 3

Reflections on Translating the *Ḥatätas* and Their Use of Scripture

Abstract: Following the translation of the *Ḥatätas* into English, this paper explores some insights into the texts gleaned through the work of translation. These include a discussion on the orthodoxy and heterodoxy of the works, but they primarily relate to the use of the Bible in the forming of arguments in the works. Whilst the works stand mostly outside Orthodox tradition, with no trinitarian language to describe the human relationship to the divine and no reference to a Christian understanding of salvation, the authors make extensive use of the Bible, primarily the Psalms, which are used both to form questions and to explore answers to complex questions about the place of evil in the world and to understand conflict among different religious groups. At the same time, the texts articulate strong criticism of parts of the Bible, especially parts that describe miraculous events.

Background

The drive for a new translation of the *Ḥatätas* came from Dr Wendy Belcher in Princeton, on the understanding that the works are important, that in the past their appraisal had suffered from some serious shortfalls, and that the existing English translation by Sumner¹ was no longer in print or easily available. Furthermore, while Sumner's seminal work on Ethiopian philosophy is important, it was felt that there was significant scope to improve the translation, especially in making it accessible to students who are less familiar with Ethiopia and its cultural and religious traditions. Important also is Getatchew Haile's translation of the *Ḥatätas* into Amharic, which serves the Ethiopian audience very well but does not make it available to those without knowledge of Ethiopian languages.

The goal was to produce a translation that would be accessible to those with no knowledge of Gə'əz, that would help students connect with the tradition and its context, and that would also point to important details, including an appraisal of quotations and allusions and notes of the differences between the two manuscript

1 Sumner (1976a).

versions of the first *Ḥatāta*.² Working in partnership with Wendy Belcher and with Mehari Worku, who has been trained within Ethiopia's traditional church education system, the translation was to be clear at points where the original had been a challenge to interpret, offering alternatives where necessary, and to provide historical, cultural, and linguistic notes to help the reader. The detailed issues that arose in the translation and the sources used are addressed separately in the new translation,³ but it is important to note that the translation was made from Littmann's critical edition of the text, with some reference also made to his Latin translation to clarify some points.⁴ A detailed evaluation of the *Ḥatātas*, their ideas, and sources is a task for other contributions to this volume.

Credit must be given to Sumner for the first translation: a new translator can easily point to the deficiencies of the first! Any criticism of that translation should only be taken as expressing a wish to improve the understanding of the text, and to grapple with some of the more complex arguments and concepts. One important area of improvement is the significantly increased number of identified quotations and allusions to biblical books, and to some other Ethiopian works. There remain some passages about which I am uncertain in this respect, but the footnotes should go some of the way in clarifying the issues in play.

The purpose of this chapter is primarily to offer some reflection on the authorship of the *Ḥatātas* based on a detailed reading of the texts and their style, followed by some important observations about the religious groups to which the texts refer. The major part of my discussion then relates to biblical quotations in the *Ḥatātas* and to how the author(s) use(s) the biblical text.

Basic Observations about the Texts

The two works, that of Zār'a Ya'əqob and that of Wäldä Ḥəywät, are thematically distinct, and from translating the works it seems clear that they are written by two different authors, with significant differences in style and structure. For instance, the second work uses more sophisticated language and a wider range of biblical quotations.⁵ The second author does appear to know the first work well and develops ideas established in the first. This seems consistent with their relation being

2 Here, reference was made to images of d'Abbadie 215 and d'Abbadie 234 at the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

3 Zara Yaqob, Walda Heywat, Lee, Mehari Worku, and Belcher (2023).

4 Littmann (1904).

5 See the lists below.

that of a teacher and their student, as stated in the text, although there are perhaps other possibilities.

The question of authorship may ultimately remain open, but reflecting on the content of both *Ḥatātas*, I would make the following broad observations.

First, the works fit well into the Ethiopian context, showing important, unique, aspects that offer a challenge to the established Orthodox Christian outlook, albeit from the standpoint of someone thoroughly knowledgeable about that tradition, drawing on it in central ways.

Second, the works are consistent with the outlook of a traditional scholar who knows the Bible intimately, and who knows what the broader audience would know well, especially the Ethiopian Psalter, which comprises the Psalms, but also biblical Canticles and some liturgical works such as the anaphoras, or the hymns of St. Yared. Some of the use of language and style fits traditional approaches to biblical interpretation. The author is certainly sceptical about religion, a surprising position for a traditional scholar still working within the Church, but they nevertheless show signs of engaging with that remarkable traditional scholarship.

Third, the texts lack Orthodox Christological and Trinitarian language, making them distinct from many Classical Ethiopian Christian works.

Fourth, biblical quotations are consistent with the text versions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, although the Psalms show little variation over many centuries of copying.⁶ There are some variations between the text as it is quoted and text versions from that time, but these are minor and predominantly arise from the author adapting the text to fit the flow of the particular works at issue.

Finally, unclear in Sumner's work was the fact that there are three different groups of Christians that Zār'a Ya'əqob discusses in the first *Ḥatāta*, and understanding this is important in grasping some of the arguments and the author's attitude towards Christian religion: firstly, there are the *fəranǧ* or 'foreigners', who in the context may often be identified as European Catholics who we know challenged Ethiopian Christianity in the seventeenth century; secondly, there are the *gəbsawyan* (Copts) or Egyptian Christians, who were led by the *Abunas* appointed by the Patriarch in Alexandria;⁷ and thirdly, there is a group that should not be conflated with the Copts, that is, Ethiopian scholars. It is important for understanding the arguments in the text that although there was a close relationship between

⁶ Assefa, Delamarter, Jost, Lee, and Niccum (2020).

⁷ See Ayele Taklahaymanot (1988). Metropolitan bishops were appointed from Alexandria until Ethiopia's autocephaly in 1959 CE.

Coptic and Ethiopic Christianity because of the appointment of Bishops from Alexandria, the Ethiopians were very independent. Many of the Egyptian *Abunas* did not learn Ethiopian languages, did not travel much, and so were disconnected from a broad understanding of Christianity in Ethiopia.⁸

Biblical Quotations in the *Hatätas*

The biblical quotations cited in Sumner’s (1976a) edition are just those that were identified by Enno Littmann in his 1904 translation.⁹ Compared to the 49 quotations identified in Littmann’s Latin edition, those in the new translation number 155. The majority of quotations are from the Psalms, with a few also from Biblical Canticles included in the widely copied and read Psalter, which would have been familiar to a wide audience in Ethiopia. It remains likely that there are further quotations and allusions that could be identified.

In early Christian tradition, the way that the text of the Bible is used needs some explanation for those unfamiliar with the tradition. In line with ancient practice,¹⁰ a quotation or allusion may refer to parts of the text that are not contained within the quotation but which point to a longer passage. In Ethiopia, where texts are normally transmitted and interpreted through extensive memorisation, a quotation may be considered an *aide-mémoire* for the listener, seeking to remind the listener of the content of the whole text, perhaps especially with shorter texts like the Psalms or Canticles.

In the *Hatätas*, some Psalms are quoted only once—some with only very brief quotations, others more extensively—with the spread of quotations differing between the two works. Significantly, Psalms 73, 116, and 119 are used repeatedly; a student of the *Hatätas* should thus seek to be familiar with the whole content of these Psalms in particular. Regarding their content, Psalm 73 seeks relief from oppressors, Psalm 116 is one of thanksgiving for recovery from illness, and Psalm 119, famously long, speaks of the glories of God’s Law. Within the Ethiopian tradition, Psalms 73 and 116 are understood to refer to “the remnant”, speaking about the Israelites in exile in Babylon but also about the Church, which is understood to be in a spiritual exile until the return of Christ.¹¹ A study of the Ethiopian commentary on these Psalms would be insightful in understanding their use in the *Hatätas*.

8 Ayele Taklahaymanot (1988).

9 Littmann (1904).

10 Mosser (2005).

11 Anonymous (1998 E.C.): መዝሙረ ዳዊት ንብሉ ከነትርጓሜው.

In a passage from Chapter 5 of the translation (Chapter 3 in the original chapter divisions), Zār'a Ya'əqob begins an argument by quoting Psalm 73:11, “How can God know [about human depravity]? Is there knowledge in the Most High?”. In summary, this Psalm is the prayer of someone who nearly fell from faith because of envy of the lawless and the ways that people follow the council of the wicked. The Psalmist starts by lamenting that because the lawless may thrive without punishment, keeping a pure heart is vanity; but when he enters God's sanctuary, either literally or figuratively through prayer and meditation, he sees and understands the fate of the wicked and lawless. Despite the Psalmist becoming like a “beast”, God protected and saved him and guided him with His council; he concludes that clinging on to God is profitable. Zār'a Ya'əqob asks the very same question, having seen the religious conflict in his nation, and the broad message of the Psalm summarises his position. Other quotations add to the perspective that a person needs revelation from God to be satisfied with life:

I turned over in my mind, “if God is the guardian of humanity, how has their human nature been ruined in this way?” I wondered, (Psalm 73:11) *How can God know [about human depravity]? Is there knowledge in the Most High?* And if there is such knowledge, why does God keep silent on human depravity, when they defile his name or act wickedly in his holy name?

Because Zār'a Ya'əqob uses only portions of the Psalm in the text, the insertion in the above quotation in square brackets is necessary—this statement makes little sense without it, and the insertion is a summary of the verses that precede this one in the Psalm. If, however, the quotation assumes knowledge of the whole Psalm, it makes very good sense. Zār'a Ya'əqob then adds strength to his argument with a quotation from Psalm 51:6, “I turned this over in my mind many times, but I did not understand it at all. I prayed, ‘O my lord and creator—who created me intelligent—(Psa 51:6) make me understand and tell me your hidden wisdom!’”. This quotation serves his purpose well, as it emphasises the rational outlook of the *Ḥatāta* whilst also emphasising that this intelligence was given to him by God. Then Psalm 13:3 points to how close to failing to be faithful to God Zār'a Ya'əqob sees himself, (Psa 13:3): “Give light to my eyes, so that I don't sleep the sleep of death”, and then Psalm 119:73, “Your hands made me and formed me, make me understand and I will learn your commandments”, appealing to God's revelation in his commandments. Returning to Psalm 73:2, “Because, as for me, my feet almost stumbled, and my steps almost slipped”, and Psalm 73:16, “[And I thought how to understand this and] this was wearisome for me”, he then adds his own reflection, “As I prayed, this and similar [thoughts] continued [to turn over in my mind]”.

Psalm 73 reflects complicated emotions and thoughts from its author. Initially, it is the “wicked”, those living outside God’s Law, who ask this question as to whether God has knowledge of the evil done in the world—those who are living lives outside God’s law. Later, however, in verses 15 and 16, the Psalmist himself comes close to asking the same question. So, Zär’a Ya’əqob associates himself with those questioning whether God does know about evil in the world but uses the Psalm as a way out of his struggle. Hence, Psalm 13:3 and 119:73. In the end, Zär’a Ya’əqob finds solace in Psalm 94:9, “Later, I pondered [something else] that David had said, “Does he who planted the ear not hear?”. This is tantamount to what Psalm 73 describes as entering the sanctuary, here expressed in the listening ear of God. Ethiopian Orthodox and other Christian thought makes a strong connection between the sanctuary of God and the person in whom His Spirit dwells—so listening to God is a way of entering the sanctuary. Psalm 94 has a similar outlook but rather more belligerently asks God to rise up against the proud and wicked.

In reading these Psalms, Zär’a Ya’əqob places himself sometimes with the Psalmist and sometimes with the “wicked” identified in the Psalm. The form of argument, and the way Zär’a Ya’əqob understands his position, are strongly connected with the understanding of the Psalm, and constitute a profound and overtly Christian way of using the text.

Zär’a Ya’əqob repeatedly poses his own questions, and then he “wonders” by quoting the Psalm, indicating that the Psalm is the authoritative source of meditation on the problems of the world and approaches to finding rational answers. This approach is very much in line with the way the Psalms are used in the Ethiopian tradition¹² and also in many other Orthodox traditions.

In the first *Ḥatāta*, Zär’a Ya’əqob has a peculiar and very personal view of religion. The divisions that he observes between Christians seem to be a major cause of his trouble, but this does not actually drive him away from religion but rather to develop ideas to resolve the problems he identifies. Human depravity, as described in Psalm 73, is not to be understood as symptomatic of simply lacking religion or a specifically Christian faith, but Zär’a Ya’əqob see the conflict that religion—perhaps especially different Christian expressions thereof—produces, as the very essence of depravity. Zär’a Ya’əqob does not actually frame his own question about God’s knowledge of evil in this case, but rather seeks the overall form of the Psalm both to ask and answer the question that he poses.

Psalm 73 is particularly interesting in this respect, since according to it wisdom is found only in the presence of God, in his sanctuary. We must ask the question, therefore, whether this is the direction of Zär’a Ya’əqob’s thought in quoting this

¹² See forthcoming research by Kidist Bahiru.

Psalm and whether within the framework of Ethiopian Orthodox Christian thought, we are to understand that human beings are themselves a sanctuary for God.

Seeing God, the Creator, as the source of wisdom is a broad pattern in the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'əqob*. Consider the following illustrations:

- Psalm 34 is used to acknowledge God's response to his prayer for wisdom; God is heard granting the request.
- Psalms 51, 13, 119: Zār'a Ya'əqob uses the Psalmist's prayer for understanding that comes from God.
- Psalm 94:9 is invoked so as to ponder rhetorically whether or not God can hear.
- Psalm 139:2 is used to frame Zār'a Ya'əqob prayer in response to gaining an understanding that God will listen.
- Psalm 119 is used to request understanding, construed as coming from the Creator, and not from human beings.
- Psalm 119:70, 71 is used to explain why people lie about matters of religion and to understand the positive experience of suffering with a view to learning God's wisdom.
- Psalm 36:9 is used to indicate how God illuminates the mind.
- Psalms 140:3, 119:3 point to a falling away from truth, understood as lawlessness that is contrary to the Gospel.
- Psalm 116:11 tells the author that people are liars, and so human doctrine is not the source of truth; rather, God is.

These quotations indicate the positive view that Zār'a Ya'əqob has of the Psalms, but in contrast to Leviticus, with its rules and regulations, he takes it as an example of a text that is nonsense!

The treatise attributed to Wäldä Ḥəywät follows a similar pattern. In this second treatise, there is a markedly different approach to the use of scripture, which for the translator is a primary reason for affirming that there are two authors behind these works.

At the start of the second treatise the author states, "All truth and wisdom are from God, and without God all wisdom is drowned". This is a paraphrase of Psalm 107:27, used to reaffirm that wisdom is divinely inspired. The author opens the treatise with:

I only write what appears true to me after inquiring into it and understanding it. [I do so] in God's presence, whom I implore with much prayer and pleading to reveal the truth to me and give me understanding of the mystery of how he created human beings as understanding beings and placed them among the other creatures who live in this world.

Here, we see affirmed the Judaeo-Christian view that human beings are the pinnacle of creation, and that it is understanding in the light of God's revelation that brings understanding. Nevertheless, the author repeats the theme of religious diversity being a problem, and that religions cannot all be true, and that the source of the problem is that generations of humans blindly and unreflectively receive religious ideas from their ancestors. He seeks to teach the reader to scrutinise everything that is found in books and human tradition.

The starting point is, however, to believe in God, the creator of all things and the guardian of all things. Note that there is no sense of this creator being distant once he has created things. This insight, *Wäldä Həywät* asserts, is found in all good human teaching and is of universal value.

In the *Ḥatāta Wäldä Həywät*, the author deploys an argument according to which discernment is needed in receiving religion from one's ancestors. The diversity of religion encountered encompasses: Alexandrian religion, that is, Coptic Orthodox Christianity; Roman religion, namely, Roman Catholic Christianity; Moses' religion, that is, Judaism; and Mohammed's religion, i.e., Islam. The author further mentions Indian religion as well as Himyarite and Sabean religions! It is hard to understand what these last three qualifiers pick out. First, the Portuguese Catholics would have come from the Synod of Diamper (1599 CE) to Ethiopia and perhaps would have talked about Indian Christianity (which they had condemned at that Synod); but "Indian" is perhaps more likely a reference to Hinduism. The references to the religion of the Himyarites and the Sabaeans are even more obscure, as the kingdoms of these groups would have ceased to exist long before the composition of this treatise. We do know that in the sixth century CE, under the leadership of King Kaleb, the Ethiopians overthrew a Jewish ruler in Himyar and restored a Christian king; this receives a brief mention in the Ethiopian national epic, *Kəbrä Nəgäst*.¹³ The mention of the religion of the Sabaeans is not at all clear in this context, unless it is a reference to pre-Christian religion in Ethiopia, about which almost nothing is known.¹⁴ It is noteworthy that a further category invoked in the first treatise—that of the Ethiopian Christians and their scholars—is not mentioned here, although *Zār'a Ya'əqob* is identified as belonging to this tradition of scholarship.

References to the Psalms suggest a close, dynamic relationship between God and believers. Thus, the pronouncement "As a father teaches his children, so God teaches us", his creatures, alludes to Psalm 103:13.¹⁵ Furthermore, the argu-

¹³ Budge (2004 [1922], p. 196); see also Moberg (1924), Shahid (1976), Shahid (1971), and Bowersock (2010).

¹⁴ Phillipson (2012).

¹⁵ The text could also be translated "as a Father has compassion on his children, so God has compassion on us"—the *Gə'əz* words "teaching" and "having compassion" being synonyms.

ments imply that we know very little of God’s wisdom and his design; indeed, humility requires that human beings acknowledge the incompleteness of our knowledge. Hence, “We should not say to God, ‘Why did you do this or do that?’ Just as the thing formed does not say to the potter [who formed it], ‘why did you make me like this?’”, quoting Romans 9:20–21, which is itself based on Isaiah 29:16.

Chapter 9 again develops arguments using the Psalms, somewhat like the first *Ḥatāta*: “If someone says, ‘In what way is God merciful and compassionate?’—he punishes us and is angry with his creatures!” This way of questioning God is common throughout the biblical literature, but Psalm 103:8, quoted here, is a good example of this questioning.

Wäldä Ḥəywät then develops the idea that God has constrained human beings by setting boundaries on behaviour, and therefore suffering comes as a result of God’s anger but arises when human beings step outside the prescribed limits.

So, when punishment comes on us we should humble ourselves with a repentant heart and turn back to our creator with our whole will. We should praise him constantly, because “his name is praised and glorified through all that he brings on us. All his judgements are righteous, and he is just and fair in all he does for us, and there is no injustice in him”.

This last statement is taken from Daniel 3:26–27, illustrating the significantly greater diversity of biblical sources used in this second treatise. Nevertheless, this quotation would still be found in the same psalter that the first author treasured so much, in the form of the biblical canticles found in all psalters. The canticles are taken from diverse sources, but are understood to be models of prayer in the same way that many psalms are.

In Chapter 10, we find what may be an allusion to Enochic material, mentioning the fallen angels, although the allusion suggests that some believe that a physical body is a punishment for angels who sinned, an idea alien to Enoch.

In response to his questioning, Wäldä Ḥəywät imagines his own psalm, which quotes from other psalms, but is here combined with his own thoughts into a psalm-like composition:

I give thanks to you, O Lord¹⁶ my King,
and I always glorify my God.
I trust in you,
and I bow down to your holy good will.
You are my God and my Lord!
As servants’ eyes [look] towards their master’s hand [for mercy],

16 Psalm 9:1 (9:1 LXX).

so my eyes always [look] towards you.¹⁷
 Do to me as you please because your will is righteous forever.
 Bowing to your sovereignty,
 I only ask and entreat you¹⁸ with all my heart
 not to lengthen the days of my testing or make them a burden.
 That way, the foolishness of the many,
 who worship you when you are gracious to them
 but curse you when you test them, will not fall upon my soul.
 Give strength to my soul,¹⁹
 and establish her firmly, so that she will never shake.
 I won't say to you, "Don't test me!"
 Rather make me fight for what is right²⁰ and to be patient,
 when it pleases you to test your understanding creature as she deserves it.
 Secure me so that I will not stumble or ever deny you,
 and make me glorify you always
 [Both] when you are gracious to me with your blessing
 and when you test me according to your holy good will.
 Because you are my Lord and my God,
 from before the world and for ever.

Following this, in Chapter 12, prayer is identified as a key quality of human existence, and so not to pray is a loss to humans, as it brings a closeness to God in a manner that is similar to the broad idea of *theōsis* or “participating in the divine nature” of the Byzantine tradition.²¹ Wäldä Həywät’s version of this idea of divine union avoids completely what would be crucial in the Christian tradition—the idea that union with God is through the person of Jesus Christ:

Moreover, prayer joins and unites our spirit with our creator. It glorifies him, and affirms to us that he is the creator of all, the almighty/all-embracing, and the fountain of all riches and all grace. However, we are but creatures: we are poor, we are pitiful, and we are devoid of all goodness; we are weak, and we have no help except from God alone.

Overall, the *Ḥatāta Zār’a Ya’əqob* seems to use scripture in a different way to the *Ḥatāta Wäldä Həywät*, using quotations to back up arguments and illustrate points rather than as a basis for forming arguments.

17 Psalm 123:2 (122:2 LXX).

18 A phrase frequently used in the liturgy, for instance, in the genre of መስተብቅዕ (Mästäbq’ə’).

19 Psalm 30:8 (29:8 LXX) in the Ethiopic version but replacing ለእይወትዮ: (“to my life”) with ለነፍስዮ (“to my soul”), although both have the same essential meaning. Here, the LXX is quite different, reading “you furnished my beauty with power” (NETS).

20 Literally, እትጋደል (“I struggle”).

21 Russell (2004; 2009).

Below is a list of quotations and clear allusions I have identified in the order that they appear in the text. Note that the numbers given here are those of the Hebrew Bible, commonly used in Bibles printed in the West, and in brackets is the number from the Septuagint (LXX), commonly used in Orthodox and other Eastern Churches. Numbers in the Ethiopian Bible sometimes differ slightly.

Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'əqob

Psalms:

2:4 (LXX 2:4)	5:4 (LXX 5:4)
9:16 (LXX 8:16)	109:1 (108:28 LXX)
9:16 (LXX 8:16)	109:28 (108:28 LXX)
12:3 (11:3 LXX)	109:8 (108:7 LXX)
13:3 (LXX 12:3)	111:7 (LXX 110:7)
25:7 (LXX 24:7)	116:1 (LXX 115:1)
28:3 (27:3 LXX)	116:11 (LXX 115:11)
31:1 (30:1 LXX)	116:11 (LXX 115:11)
31:18 (30: 18 LXX)	118:17 (LXX 117:17)
31:3 (30:4 LXX)	119:3 (LXX 118:3)
34:5, 4 3 (LXX 33:5, 4 3)	119:70 (LXX 118:70)
35:1 (34:1 LXX)	119:71 (LXX 118:71)
36:9 (LXX 35:9)	119:71 (LXX 118:71)
37:23 (36:23 LXX)	119:73 (LXX 118:73)
37:19 (36:19 LXX)	119:116 (118:116 LXX)
37:25–26 (36:25–26 LXX)	119:134 (118:134 LXX)
40:11 (39:11 LXX)	128:4 (127:5 LXX)
41:2 (40:3 LXX)	138:6 (LXX 137:6)
51:6 (LXX 50:6)	139: 2, 5, 3 (LXX 138: 2, 5, 3)
51:8 (50:10 LXX, but sometimes 50:8 in Ethiopic Bibles)	140:3 (LXX 139:3)
51:8 (50:8 LXX)	141:5 (LXX 140:5)
53:4 (52:5 LXX)	143:8 (142:8 LXX)
55:2 (54:2 LXX)	143:8 (142:8 LXX)
61:8 (60:8 LXX)	145:17 (LXX 144:17)
66:16 (LXX 65:16)	147:20 (LXX 146:20)
73:11 (LXX 72:11)	
73:13 (LXX 72:13)	
73:16 (LXX 72:16)	
73:2 (LXX 72:2)	
84:10 (83:10 LXX)	

86:16–17 (85:16–17 LXX)

94:9 (LXX 93:9)

97:11 (96:12 LXX)

Other Old Testament:

Genesis 2:24

Leviticus 15:19–30

Leviticus 19:18

Ecclesiastes 1:13

Isaiah 29:13

Intertestamental Books:

Wisdom of Solomon 3:5–6, 11:23–24

New Testament:

Matthew 7:12, 15:8–9, 19:6, 25:39

Mark 7:6–7, 10:8, 12:31

Luke 23:2

Romans 3:17–18, 8:5

1 John 2:9–11

Hatäta Wäldä Həywät

Psalms:

7:16 (7:16 LXX)

8:5–6 (8:5–6 LXX)

25:7 (Psalm 24:7 LXX)

30:8 (29:8 LXX)

32:9 (31:11 LXX)

32:9 (33:9 LXX)

34:12 (33:13 LXX), 1 Peter 3:10

37:8 (36:8 LXX)

39:6 (38:6 LXX)

41:1 (40:1 LXX)

43:1 (42:1 LXX)

49:12 (48:12 LXX)

55:22 (54:22 LXX; LXX versions have τὴν μέριμνά σου, “your cares”)

55:22 (54:23 LXX)

62:9 (61:9 LXX)

72:14 (71:14 LXX)

92:5 (Psalms 91:5 LXX)

103:8 (102:8 LXX)

107:27 (106:27 LXX; this is the second time the author has used this verse)

109:17 (108:176 LXX)

123:2 (122:2 LXX)

127:3 (126:3)

128:2 (127:2 LXX)

128:2 (127:2 LXX)

140:11 (139:12 LXX)

140:3 (139:3 LXX)

140:5 (139:6(5) LXX), 2 Corinthians 6:3.

143:3 (142:3 LXX): *ḥṣṣ: ṣṣṣṣṣṣ: ṣṣṣṣṣṣ* (like one long dead)

Other Old Testament:

Genesis 1:28, 2:18, 2:24, 3:19, 9:2, 38:9–10

Exodus 20:12

Deuteronomy 5:16

1 Samuel 2:9

Proverbs 9:8 (9:9 LXX), 9:9, 16:32 (16:33 LXX), 22:1

Ecclesiastes 1:4, 3:1–8, 7:1

Isaiah 22:12, 26:12, 26:13

Daniel 3:26–27

Micah 7:5

Malachi 4:2

Intertestamental Books:

Jubilees 41:4–5

New Testament:

Matthew 5:15, 5:43, 7:7, 7:12, 15:4

Mark 7:10, 10:8, 10:9, 12:31

Luke 6:31, 8:16, 10:19, 11:9, 18:20, 19:18

John 2:8, 13:34

Romans 1:26, 9:20–21, 12:18, 13:9

1 Corinthians 15:32

2 Corinthians 3:3

Galatians 5:14

Ephesians 4:26, 4:29, 6:2, 6:13

1 Thessalonians 5:21

2 Thessalonians 3:10

1 Timothy 1:9, 6:5

2 Timothy 3:16

1 Peter 1:7, 3:9

James 1:15, 3:8

1 John 3:18, 4:8

John Marenbon

Chapter 4

Zār'a Ya'əqob, Mediaeval Philosophy, Forgery, and Authenticity

Abstract: I was asked to contribute to this collection as an expert in mediaeval philosophy. But what help can a mere historian of mediaeval Latin philosophy give to understanding the problems surrounding Zār'a Ya'əqob? This question should be regarded as the informal subtitle for my chapter, and the following pages are an attempt to answer it. The most obvious answer to the first question is linked to passages in the two *Ḥatātas* where a cosmological-type argument is proposed. How do these cosmological arguments compare with those put forward by mediaeval philosophers? The first part of this chapter (Section 1) undertakes this comparison: the results cast no direct light on the controversy about the authenticity of the *Ḥatātas*, but they help to limn the complexity of the issues involved. Mediaeval comparisons may help to show how such complexities should be treated. The second part begins (Section 2) by looking at the general questions of whether philosophy can be forged and what is the relationship between forgery and inauthenticity and then, using a selection of mediaeval examples (Section 3), especially the historiography of the dispute over the love letters of Abelard and Heloise—a dispute that presents some striking parallels with that over the *Ḥatātas*—investigates the complexity of the issues involved (Section 4). The final section (Section 5) shows how the methodological lessons learned from these mediaeval examples can be applied to the cases of Zār'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Ḥəyiwät.

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1 Aquinas' Cosmological Arguments and the *Ḥatātas*

The passage seen by some as a cosmological argument comes in Chapter 6 of Zār'a Ya'əqob's *Ḥatāta*.¹ Zār'a Ya'əqob argues that he could not have created himself, since he did not exist before he was created. If his parents created him and their parents them, then finally we shall have to posit a mother and father who were not created by their parents but in another way, and so we reach an uncreated being who already existed and created them out of nothing. In its shape, this has some resemblance to the type of argument, going back in its basic form to Aristotle, given a succinct formulation in the First and Second Ways set out in Aquinas.

1 HZY 6: "I thought, 'In reality who is it who gave me ears to hear, and who created me as intelligent? How did I myself come into this world. Where did I come from? For, I didn't exist prior to the world, I don't know [the time] when my life and my intellect began. But who created me? Did I create myself with my own hands? But I didn't exist when I was created [so how could I create myself?]. If I say that my father and my mother created me, then my parents' creator and their parents' creator must still be searched for, until arriving at the first ones who were not conceived like us, but who came into this world in another way, without parents. For if they were conceived, I don't know where their genealogy begins unless I say, 'there is one being who created them out of nothing, one who was not created, but rather already existed and will exist forever; Lord of all, the Almighty, who has no beginning or end, immutable, whose years are innumerable'. I said, 'Therefore, there is a creator, because if there were no creator, then the creation would not have existed. Because we exist and are not creators but rather are created, we have to say that there is a creator who fashioned us. Further, this creator who fashioned *us* with the faculties of reason and speech cannot himself be without these faculties of reason and speech, because from the abundance of his reason he created us with the faculty of reason. He understands all things, because he created all things, and he sustains all things". Translations are taken from Zara Yaqob, Walda Heywat, Lee, Mehari Worku, and Belcher (2023). There is a detailed discussion of this argument in Dawit Worku Kidane (2012, pp. 212–220).

nas' *Summa Theologiae* (I, q. 2, a. 3).² The Second Way is based on efficient causes, while the First Way is based on movement.³ At the centre of both arguments is the idea that an infinite regress, of causers or movers, is impossible. "If there were a process to infinity in efficient causes", says Aquinas, "there would not be a first efficient cause, and so there will not be a last effect, nor intermediate efficient causes—which is clearly false". Zär'a Ya'əqob, it could be said, indicates implicitly such an argument when he says that the chain of parents and children cannot be continued indefinitely.

There is, however, a very important difference, already noted by Dawit Worku Kidane.⁴ Aquinas thought that an infinite chronological regress of parents and children (or, as he says, fathers and sons) is possible.⁵ Only in the case of essentially ordered causal chains, where the first cause is entirely responsible for the causality of the following causes (as when a locomotive pulls the front carriage of a train, and the front carriage the next one) is infinite regress impossible. But the causal chain of father and sons is not an essential but an accidental one.⁶ Indeed, Aristotle, for Aquinas and his contemporaries the supreme representative of the human ability for rational thought, founded his whole scientific system on the view that the world is eternal and that humans and other species have been reproducing for ever. Aquinas rejected this view, but purely as a matter of faith. As he explains

2 See especially Aristotle (*Physics* VIII, 4–6). A more complex version of what becomes the First Way is expounded in Aquinas' earlier *Summa contra Gentiles* (I, 13), and a different version of the argument from causes, the Second Way, in *De ente et essentia* (4). For a detailed discussion of the Five Ways, with references to Aquinas' often longer discussions of the same themes in other works, see Wippel (2000, pp. 442–500).

3 Here, for purposes of comparison, is the Second Way (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3): "The second way is from considering efficient cause. For we find in these sense-perceptible things <around us> that there is an order of efficient causes. Yet it is not found, nor is it possible, that something should be the efficient cause of itself, because if so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. But it is not possible to proceed to infinity in efficient causes, because in all ordered efficient causes the first is the cause of the intermediate, and the intermediate is the cause of the last cause, whether there are many intermediate causes or just one. If the cause is taken away, so is the effect. Therefore, if there were not something first in efficient causes, there would be neither a last nor an intermediate. But if there were a process to infinity in efficient causes, there would not be a first efficient cause, and so there will not be a last effect, nor intermediate efficient causes—which is clearly false. Therefore it is necessary to posit a first efficient cause, which everyone calls 'God'". All translations from Latin are my own.

4 Dawit Worku Kidane (2012, p. 216).

5 See *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 46, a.2 ad 7. The distinction is explained well in Kenny (1969, pp. 41–42).

6 For an excellent explanation of the special character of essential chains of causes, see Cohoe (2013).

in *De aeternitate mundi* (“On the Eternity of the World”), he did not think it could be rationally refuted. True, there was another argument, devised by the sixth-century Greek Christian thinker, John Philoponus, according to which it is impossible that the world could have existed for an infinite time.⁷ This argument, rejected by Aquinas but accepted by some thirteenth-century thinkers, would entail that a chronological infinite series, as of parents and children, would not be possible. But the argument depends on showing that traversing an infinite time involves producing an actual, as opposed to merely potential, infinity. There are not even the vestiges of such an argument in Zār’a Ya’əqob’s *Ḥatāta*.

In Chapter 3 of the *Ḥatāta* of Wäldä Ḥəywät, there is the following argument:

All that we see in this world is the same, it is [all] fleeting and created. Without a creator, how is it possible for a created creature to exist? For all creation is limited and weak and has no power whatsoever to create [anything] out of that which does not exist. So, there must be one being who existed before all creation, without beginning or end, ‘who created all that exists’ out of that which does not exist, whether tangible or intangible, ‘visible or invisible’. (HWH 3)

Although, as it stands, this argument seems very loose, read charitably, it could be seen to follow, in abbreviated form, the same lines as Aquinas’ Third Way.⁸ Aquinas starts from an Aristotelian view of possibility and necessity, which reduces modality to time. According to it, what does not exist necessarily must not-exist at some time. Aquinas then reasons (fallaciously) that if, for every thing, there is some time at which it does not exist, then there will be a time at which nothing exists. But since nothing can come from nothing, if there was a time when there was nothing, then there would be nothing now. Since that is not the case, we

⁷ Marenbon (2015, pp. 140–142).

⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3: “The third way is taken from the possible and the necessary. It is as follows. We find in things some for which it is possible to exist and not to exist, since some are found to be generated and corrupted and in consequence possible to exist and not to exist. It is impossible for all that are such to exist always, because what is possible not to exist, does not exist at some time. If, therefore, all things are possible not to exist, at some time no thing at all existed. But if this is true, then even now nothing would exist, because what exists does not begin to exist except through something that exists. If then there was nothing existent, it was impossible that something should begin to exist, and so nothing would exist now—which is clearly false. Therefore not all existents are possible ones, but it is necessary that there exists something among things that is necessary. Every necessary thing either has the cause of its existence from elsewhere, or not. It is not possible to proceed to infinity in necessary things that have a cause of their necessity, just as it is not possible in efficient causes, as has been proved. Therefore it is necessary to posit something necessary that exists through itself, not having the cause of its necessity from elsewhere but which is the cause of the necessity of other things: which all say is God”.

can be sure that something exists that is necessary in the Aristotelian sense of existing at all times. Aquinas then introduces another sense of necessity, which goes back to Avicenna. Things that are necessary in the Aristotelian sense may have their necessity caused by another—they exist for ever, but that eternal existence is dependent on something else. But, just as with motion and efficient causes, there cannot be an infinite regress among causes of necessity, and so there must be some thing which is necessary in itself and which has no cause of necessity from elsewhere but is the cause of the necessity of all other things.⁹

Wäldä Həywät's argument begins with two premises. The first is that everything we see in the world is fleeting—that is to say, it does not exist at all times; it is possible, not necessary, in Aquinas' Aristotelian terms. The second premise is that everything we see is created. This second point does not beg the question by assuming a creator: it only need imply that each thing comes to be as the result of something else. If we take as an unspoken step the idea, made explicit by Aquinas, that in a universe made up of merely possible, fleeting things there must be a time when nothing exists, and put that together with the idea that all the sorts of things we know in the universe come from other things and could not originate from nothing, it follows that there must be some thing that exists for all time, "without beginning and end" in Wäldä Həywät's words, and so is necessary in Aquinas' Aristotelian sense. So far, then, Wäldä Həywät is not too distant from Aquinas. But rather than add at this stage the no infinite regress argument, and so establish a single first cause, which is necessary in itself, Wäldä Həywät insists on the Christian doctrinal point that the eternal thing creates all else from nothing—a conclusion that does not follow from his premises.

The organisers were right to ask a medievalist to look at these arguments, because, if they stem from a tradition, it is likely to be the mediaeval Latin one, whether the two texts in question were written in the seventeenth century by Ethiopians who had come into contact with Portuguese missionaries or were written by a nineteenth-century Franciscan with seminary training. For this reason, the likelihood that mediaeval arguments of the sort used by Aquinas (and quite possibly Aquinas' versions of them, given the popularity of the *Summa Theologiae* from 1500 onwards) are at the basis of the passage in the two *Ḥatätas* does not help to solve the problem of authenticity. If Zär'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Həywät were real seventeenth-century figures they could have had access to theological ideas from Portuguese priests, who would probably have read some Aquinas. If

⁹ The Third Way has been the subject of great interpretative controversy, however, and not everyone will accept this account of it. For a detailed discussion, see Wipfel (2000) and his references to other treatments (p. 466, n. 64).

Giusto da Urbino was the author, he could have known these arguments directly from Aquinas (who in the nineteenth century had to be accepted as a central authority, even by Franciscans) or from a textbook, and he may have tried to make the theological teaching he knew deliberately loose in argument so that it would seem more authentic.

2 Forgery and Inauthenticity

Reference to the Middle Ages can, however, help to tackle the problem about authorship indirectly, by suggesting more sophisticated approaches to the questions about forgery and authenticity generated by the *Ḥatātas*. Before turning to the mediaeval material, a little conceptual ground clearing is needed. The question about the authorship of the *Ḥatātas* is often cast as one about forgery. But perhaps that is a loose use of language.

Forgeries are fabrications: they are made to deceive. But for something to be a forgery in the strict sense, it needs not only to be made to deceive but to be made *only* so as to deceive. Suppose I pay for a passport to be made for me in the name, not of John Marenbon, but John Smith. That is a forgery in the strict sense. I have paid only so that my passport successfully deceives the authority and I can slip in and out of the country under my new identity. Imagine now a talented artist disenchanted with contemporary styles and methods, who paints a Vermeer—that is to say, a picture in the style of Vermeer of a subject that Vermeer never painted—and then claims that it is by Vermeer, and sells it as such (giving the proceeds to charity) to the National Gallery, where it is hailed as a lost masterpiece. Is this painter a forger or an original artist working in an unusual way? They have engaged in fabrication, without doubt, but their aim was not wholly or mainly to deceive. Indeed, had the painter been able to ensure the excellence of the painting were recognised without engaging in deceit, they would have done so. This “Vermeer” is thus inauthentic but not strictly a forgery.

Even if Giusto da Urbino wrote both *Ḥatātas* with no original Ethiopian material as a basis or starting point, though inauthentic, they would not strictly speaking be forgeries. It is, indeed, hard to find any examples of philosophical works that were forged in the strict sense, but inauthenticity is a widespread phenomenon in the field, especially during the long Middle Ages.¹⁰ Looking at the varieties of

¹⁰ Here is an interesting exception that helps to prove the rule. In the early 1970s, a US scholar called Michael Morrisroe published transcripts of two newly-discovered letters by David Hume—letters that, unlike most by him, provide important information about his philosophical development. The new information was used by historians, though some raised doubts, since Morrisroe

inauthenticity in mediaeval philosophy can help to gauge how to approach the question of authenticity in connection with the *Ḥatātas*.¹¹

3 Inauthenticity in Mediaeval Philosophy

In the late fifth or early sixth century a Syrian monk, who had thoroughly absorbed Proclus' Platonism and rethought it in accord with the monotheistic Christian universe, issued the densely worked texts in which he expounded his system as if they were the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite, the learned Athenian judge converted by St. Paul's preaching, according to the Acts of the Apostles. The writer did indeed intend to deceive. He succeeded, taking in most of his readers until Lorenzo Valla in the fifteenth century. And it is important to realise that the texts were written 400 or more years after they claim to have been: the history of ancient philosophy would have to be completely rewritten if this sort of thinking dated from the first century CE—indeed, it is the obvious incongruity of this thinking with the intellectual climate of that time that today puts the “pseudo-” prefix beyond all doubt. Yet here the parallel with the painter of the pseudo-Vermeer is very clear. It is not just that the author's motive was not gain or self-aggrandisement, but to give the truths he had worked out the backing of an authority, whose very identity would express how the author took and sublimated paganism into Christian teaching. Also, there was nothing Dionysian for the Syrian monk to forge. The thinking was all his own, based closely on, though owing a great deal to, his near contemporary, the pagan philosopher Proclus; only the name and the context the name brought with it were stolen.¹²

was unable to identify the location of the original manuscripts. But, as Felix Waldmann has shown (2020) on the basis of linguistic and biographical discrepancies, the letters are not genuine. Probably Morrisroe, who gave up academe for the law and was later a suspect in a medical insurance case, forged them, though it remains possible that he was the victim of a hoax. Note that this is an example on the edge of philosophy. Morrisroe had to invent biographical information, not philosophical arguments.

¹¹ A large collection of discussions of every type of mediaeval forgery and inauthentic/pseudonymous work is found in (*Fälschungen* 1988). Two important essays there on the nature and types of mediaeval fabrications explore some themes similar to those raised in this chapter: Umberto Eco, “Tipologia della falsificazione”, I, pp. 69–82, and Horst Fuhrmann, I, “Von der Wahrheit der Fälscher”, pp. 83–98.

¹² For a brief account of the unmasking of the inauthenticity and a nuanced explanation of the issues in their historical context, see Corrigan and Harrington (2007). Stang (2012) builds an interpretation of pseudo-Dionysius' thought on the author's choice of pseudonym.

Pseudo-Dionysius was by no means the only mediaeval author to appropriate a famous name. The habit was particularly widespread in seventh- and eighth-century Ireland. There was an Irish Augustine, author of a very unAugustinian treatise, *De mirabilibus sacrae scripturae* (“On the Miracles in the Bible”) that aims to give naturalistic explanations for all the miracles in scripture (*Patrologia Latina* 35, 2149–2200). The (probably Irish) Virgilius Maro Grammaticus was author of a fantastical grammar, full of imaginary rules for non-existent forms of Latin and citations, some from genuine authors, others from the likes of Balapsidus, Lugenicus, Gabritius, and Galbungus (author, we are told, of *de laudibus indefunctorum*).¹³ Meanwhile, the *Cosmographia* of Aethicus Ister¹⁴ is, supposedly, the work of Jerome but summarising the writing of a pagan, Scythian philosopher.

Such appropriations were not limited to early mediaeval Ireland. There was, for example, a widely read textbook from the early thirteenth century called *De disciplina scholarium* whose author identifies himself as Boethius, the famous late ancient philosopher, and even refers to various famous works of Boethius’ as his own.¹⁵

In some or perhaps all these cases (except for pseudo-Dionysius), there may have been something light-hearted about such appropriations—perhaps the writers do not really expect them to be taken seriously. But this is by no means always the case. Consider the *Institutio Traiani*, the letter on political philosophy which John of Salisbury supposedly quotes and summarises in his mid-twelfth century *Policraticus*.¹⁶ John assigns ideas of his own to Plutarch not primarily to lend them authority, but in order for them to come from a pagan. This deliberate misattribution frees him from the need to bring Christian revelation to bear on these ideas.

The *Institutio Traiani* is, in an important respect, closer to the case of the *Ḥatātas* than the other examples given so far. There is no doubt that pseudo-Dionysius is not Dionysius, that the Irish Augustine, Virgil, and Jerome are not the figures from the ancient world they claim to be, and that the *De disciplina scholarium* was not written by Boethius. These examples suggest possible ways of thinking about the *Ḥatātas* if it is decided that Giusto da Urbino wrote them. But did he? The issue is still not settled—and the same is true about the *Institutio Traiani*. Some scholars believe that John of Salisbury really did discover an otherwise un-

13 Virgilius Maro Grammaticus and Löfstedt (2003); cf. Law (1995).

14 Aethicus Ister in Aethicus Ister and Herren (2011).

15 Pseudo-Boethius in Pseudo-Boethius and Weijers (1976).

16 The material supposedly belonging to the *Institutio* is cited or paraphrased especially in *Policraticus* V, 1–4, but also in the remaining part of Book V, and in Books VI–VIII (John of Salisbury in John of Salisbury and Webb 1909). The material is collected together in Kloft and Kerner (1992).

known ancient text that claimed, rightly or wrongly, to be a translation of what Plutarch addressed to the Emperor Trajan.¹⁷

4 A Case Study in the Historiography of Inauthenticity: The Letters of Abelard and Heloise

John of Salisbury's teacher, Peter Abelard, provides a case study particularly useful in helping scholars to approach questions about the authenticity of the *Ḥatātas*. Like the *Ḥatātas*, the genuineness of the two collections of personal letters that have been attributed to Abelard and Heloise remains disputed. The longevity of this problem—it has been discussed for over two centuries—allows for historiographical reflection on it, from which lessons can be learned, for scholars working not just on Abelard and Heloise but also on writing like the *Ḥatātas*, which share similar problems of authenticity.

Abelard was a super-star logician in early twelfth-century Paris, when logic had something of the glamour of football or rap today. By 1115, in his mid-30s, he had become Master of the leading Cathedral School of the time, at Notre Dame of Paris. He lodged with a canon of the Cathedral who was guardian for his highly educated niece, Heloise. Abelard became Heloise's tutor, soon her lover, and finally her husband and father of her child, though the marriage was secret because it was thought, especially by Heloise, that it would hinder his career. Perhaps because he thought that Abelard was about to repudiate his niece, Fulbert hired thugs to castrate Abelard. His reaction was to become a monk at St. Denis and to force Heloise to become a nun. This happened in 1117.¹⁸

Abelard's misadventures continued and, after a period of living, hermit-like, in the wilderness, teaching the devoted students who still followed him, and founding an Oratory he called the Paraclete, he became Abbot of a remote monastery in Brittany, where he took his task of reforming the debauched monks so seriously that they tried to kill him, and he had to go into hiding. It was at this point that he wrote a letter known as the *Historia calamitatum*, "The Story of My Disasters", designed to console the friend to whom it was addressed in his adversities by show-

¹⁷ For a balanced introduction to the problem, see Kerner (1988) (and cf. von Moos 1988). Neither writer believes that a definitive answer can yet be given about whether John wrote the *Institution* himself.

¹⁸ For a short account of Abelard's life, based on the documentary evidence, see Marenbon (2013, pp. 14–20); for a detailed study, see Clanchy (1997).

ing that Abelard's were far worse. Heloise, to whom with her nuns Abelard had transferred the Paraclete, saw this letter and wrote to Abelard, beginning an epistolary exchange. Heloise's first two letters adapt, in an entirely novel way, to human love, the theological idea being elaborated at the time of absolutely unselfish love for God. She professes a completely self-abnegating love, no weaker now, after more than ten years as a nun, than when they lived together and expresses it in some of the most eloquent and memorable Latin prose ever written. Abelard's replies, trying to guide Heloise away from her passion for him and to the love of God, sound to the modern reader wooden by comparison. None the less, Heloise capitulates at the beginning of Letter VI, at least to the extent of agreeing to be silent about her feelings, although she cannot suppress them, and she sets out, rather, on a path where Abelard and she can cooperate intellectually, with him providing a history of female monasticism and a rule for her nuns, about which she issues detailed instructions. Or so the story told by the letters themselves goes. But are these letters genuine?

Letters I to V and the beginning of VI constitute the famous personal correspondence or love letters (for simplicity, they will here be called the "love letters"), read eagerly by Petrarch, the central item in the seventeenth-century first printed edition of "the works of Peter Abelard, philosopher and theologian, abbot of St. Rhuys, and of his wife Heloise, the first abbess of the Paraclete"—the work that guaranteed both of them fame until now. Yet even at the start of the nineteenth century, Ignaz Fessler raised doubts,¹⁹ and from then until the end of the twentieth century scholars have been divided about the letters' authenticity.²⁰

The claim made by the opponents of authenticity (the "sceptics") was not usually, however, that the correspondence was the work of a third party, but the reverse. Rather than being an exchange of letters, between Abelard and Heloise, the whole correspondence was the work of a single author, a literary fiction written by Abelard. The main argument for the sceptical view was based on the supposed character of thought in mediaeval Christian Europe. No one, the sceptics said, could genuinely have held the views that Heloise professes, exalting the romantic love of a human above that of God, openly confessing that she is a hypocrite, a nun leading an externally chaste and virtuous life, but cherishing a sexual passion for which she refuses to repent. But a mediaeval author—an educated, male cleric such as Abelard—might well, it was argued, have attributed these ideas to a woman as part of an exemplary story of conversion from sinful, carnal

¹⁹ Fessler (1806, p. 352).

²⁰ For a history of the controversy up to 1972, see von Moos (1974). A more succinct account (up to the mid-90s) is given in Marenbon (1997, pp. 82–93).

love to love of God. Indeed, some critics went so far as to say that for any mediaeval reader the lovers Abelard and Heloise as depicted in the *Historia* and the letters would have been contemptible, comic figures until, explicitly in the case of Abelard, implicitly in that of Heloise, they embraced Christian values. A romantic reading of the letter collection was, they thought, hopelessly anachronistic. But others strongly disagreed. Étienne Gilson, for instance, a devout but broad-minded Catholic layman, found the couple's human love, as evinced by a reading of the letters as an authentic correspondence, in harmony with Christian ideas,²¹ while Peter Dronke argued that mediaeval writers and readers were ready to admire romantic love that went against Christian teaching and found evidence that they had done so in the particular case of Abelard and Heloise.²²

The interpretative dispute continued and, in the late twentieth century, a few scholars began to take the sceptical view further, and to argue that the whole correspondence was a forgery, incorporating a few genuine elements. In the 1980s, Hubert Silvestre advanced a particularly ingenious theory, starting from the fact that no manuscript of the Latin correspondence predates the translation of it into French in the 1260s by Jean de Meun, author of the *Roman de la Rose*. Jean de Meun, Silvestre contended, was responsible not just for the translation, but for the original—an epistolary novel using the figures of Abelard, whose romance had already become legend, in order to urge the case that clergymen should be allowed concubines.²³

Yet by the turn of the millennium the authenticity debate, after two centuries, suddenly ceased. Although no new evidence or powerful arguments had been found, specialists began to portray it as something belonging to the past, to the extent that David Luscombe's new critical edition of the correspondence dismisses the whole question in a paragraph.²⁴ The leading Abelard specialist, Constant Mews, even while contesting many of Luscombe's particular contentions, could remark with complete justice: "Luscombe's argument that the famous letters from the early 1130s are authentic is now scarcely contested (unlike the situation in the early 1990s)".²⁵

In another way, however, the debate continues, but with a fresh, unexpected twist. In 1974, Ewald Könsgen edited a fifteenth-century collection of letters, some of them highly abbreviated, which he believed was based on twelfth-century

21 Gilson (1938).

22 Dronke (1976).

23 The idea that the whole collection was fabricated by someone other than Abelard or Heloise was first developed in Benton (1975). Silvestre's fullest exposition of his views is in Silvestre (1988).

24 Luscombe (2013, p. xxviii).

25 Mews (2014, p. 825).

originals. The letters seem to be an exchange between lovers, a male master and a female pupil, and Könsgen entitled his volume *Epistolae duorum amantium*, but at his publisher's urging, he added the catchy sub-title "*Briefe Abaelards and Heloises?*"—but he explained in his introduction that there was no reason to attribute these anonymous letters to the couple and offered good reasons, indeed, to localise them elsewhere.²⁶ Twenty five years later, however, a leading Abelardian, Constant Mews, decided to remove the question mark and identified the *Epistolae duorum amantium* as an exchange between Abelard and Heloise, supporting his position with a number of arguments, which have been rejected by some historians, but accepted by others.²⁷ Specialists are now even more divided over the *Epistolae duorum amantium* than they used to be over the personal correspondence, with those who reject Abelard and Heloise as the authors split as to whether they were written in the twelfth century or much later. A recent study even holds that the letters may have been written, not by Abelard and Heloise themselves, but with them in mind in order to ridicule them and their like.²⁸

5 Some Methodological Lessons

What lessons can be drawn from this long and continuing saga about the letters of (or not of) Abelard and Heloise, which can help to illuminate questions about the authenticity of the *Ḥatātas*? There are two that emerge from looking at the historiography, and a third that emerges as it were by deficit.

The first lesson is that although (with an important qualification—see below) truth is there to be reached about who wrote what (Did Heloise write the letters attributed to her? Did Abelard and Heloise write the *Epistolae duorum amantium*? And, similarly, did Zār'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Ḥəywät write the *Ḥatātas*?), it is unlikely that there will ever be certainty or near certainty about it. The historiography of the dispute over the Abelard and Heloise correspondence shows how, in these sorts of cases, as the questions are more fully discussed and more evidence is gathered, there is anything but a rational progress to a consensus. True, there is now and has been for twenty years widespread agreement among specialists that

²⁶ Könsgen (1974).

²⁷ The *Epistolae duorum amantium* are edited, with translation and discussion, supporting their authenticity, in Mews (1999). In Newman (2016) there is a new translation and further discussion in favour of authenticity, along with a full and detailed review of the controversy. In Marenbon (2008), I give arguments against authenticity, with references to the various contributions to the controversy up until then; Mews (2014) gives a critique of its and other sceptical arguments.

²⁸ Schnell (2022).

the famous exchange, set off by the *Historia calamitatum*, was written by Abelard and Heloise. But, although the arguments for that view are strong, there is no indication that the opponents of authenticity considered that their counter-arguments had been defeated, and certainly no breakthrough that might have settled the issue beyond reasonable doubt. And at the very moment when this controversy, inexplicably, died down, a fresh area of dispute, over the *Epistolae duorum amantium*, put scholars at loggerheads and shows no signs of moving towards a resolution.

It is tempting to explain the sceptics' retreat into silence and even perhaps the new-found willingness of many scholars to treat the *Epistolae duorum amantium* as an exchange between Abelard and Heloise (a position everyone had previously rejected) as the effects of feminism and the move, throughout the academic world, to bring women out of the historical shadows. When a collected volume of essays on the letters is called *Listening to Heloise. The voice of a twelfth-century woman* (Wheeler 2000), it is easy to see how a sceptical position can be seen as an attempt to deny a woman's voice and perhaps women's voices more generally. This is exactly the strategy used by Barbara Newman (1992), who represents those who have denied the authenticity of the love letters as repressing Heloise's and the female voice and backs up her position by showing that the sceptics she cites, all of them male, were prejudiced against women. Similarly, Mews writes that "to argue [...] that the correspondence is a literary dialogue invented by Abelard to instruct Heloise in the religious life, is to silence the voice of Heloise".²⁹

The parallel with the case of the *Ḥatātas* is all too obvious. The deafness in the historiography of philosophy, until recently, to the voices of Africa has been even more profound than that towards women's voices, and no scholar now wants to be accused of robbing African philosophy of two of its distinctive, early voices by regarding Zār'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Ḥəywät as the creations of a nineteenth-century Italian. It is hard not to think that Anaïs Wion's scrupulously scholarly and powerfully argued advocacy of the sceptical view³⁰ would not be more central to the debate were it not for this fear.

Yet, in both parallel cases, the position is, in fact, more complex. Feminist approaches to the Abelard-Heloise correspondence were common at least from the 1980s onwards, when scepticism (even that either Abelard or Heloise were the authors) was the dominant view. Yet scholars then found ways, perhaps rather intellectually unconvincing ones, of combining a feminist reading with a sceptical

²⁹ Mews (1999, p. 116).

³⁰ Wion (2013a, 2013b).

stance.³¹ Anti-scepticism may suit those who wish for mediaeval women's voices to be heard, but it need not be adopted by them. In the case of Zār'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Həywät, there are already some scholars who are beginning to question whether insisting on the authenticity of the *Ḥatātas* is really a good way of giving Ethiopian philosophy its voice.³² A possibility—it is no more than that—that specialists in the field might like to consider is that the *Ḥatātas* have been enthusiastically accepted as founding documents of Ethiopian philosophy precisely because, as works written or at least shaped by a nineteenth-century Italian, they correspond to a European idea of what philosophy of an undeveloped, homely kind should look like. On this view, the *Ḥatātas* stop historians from the challenging but necessary task of reconsidering and expanding their idea of philosophy in order to accommodate a range of other Gə'əz material, such as *The Book of the Wise Philosophers*.³³

The second lesson from the case of Abelard and Heloise is that questions of authenticity are not only subject to often irresolvable doubt; they are usually also intrinsically vague, so that a black and white answer is misleading. Even the supporters of the *Epistolae duorum amantium's* authenticity do not think that they have Abelard's and Heloise's correspondence itself: all sides admit that what we have is a transcript, with much omitted. With regard to the love letters, although their authenticity has for the last two decades been widely accepted, it is usually importantly qualified by the recognition that the letters, as preserved, have been deliberately moulded into a coherent collection, about the foundation of the Paraclete, perhaps by Abelard and Heloise working together, perhaps by Heloise herself.³⁴ They tell, with sympathy, a story of human love but also a story of conversion. Maybe scholarship on the *Ḥatātas* will in the future manage to reconcile the presence of literary features a forger would have found it hard to reproduce with the various signs that he was not being honest about his discovery by adopting a half-way solution, according to which Giusto da Urbino adapted existing texts.³⁵

The third lesson from the case of Abelard and Heloise and from that of the other cases of inauthentic mediaeval works discussed above has not usually

31 Cf. Marenbon (2000, pp. 27–29).

32 Cf. Fasil Merawi and Setargew Kenaw (2020). See also Fasil Merawi's essay in this volume (Chapter 11).

33 See further the essays by Wion (Chapter 2), Adamson (Chapter 7), and Binyam Mekonnen (Chapter 9) in this volume—all of which discuss a range of other Gə'əz materials (adopting different views on the question of authorship).

34 Luscombe (2013, pp. xxix–xxx).

35 See further Getatchew Haile's 2017 essay, reproduced as Chapter 1 in this volume.

been drawn, probably because of the negative judgement usually associated with forgeries (for which reason the distinction was made above between forgery and inauthenticity). A work is often as valuable for being inauthentic as if it had been authentic—or indeed more valuable. The *Epistola Traiani* is an obvious example. If it is a real, ancient text, it is no more than a minor addition to the stock of ancient political thought. If John of Salisbury fabricated it, then he emerges as a writer capable of playing the difficult imaginative game of reconstructing, from within the framework of his own Christian thinking, how a pagan would discuss politics and society. When the *Epistolae duorum amantium* are regarded, as by Peter von Moos,³⁶ as (the traces of) a proto-epistolary novel, they become a far more sophisticated text than if they are a real exchange between Abelard and Heloise. Similarly, if Silvestre's hypothesis that Jean de Meun did not merely translate but actually *composed* the love letters were true (which seems, however, most unlikely), the text would be an even more extraordinary literary and philosophical achievement than his continuation of the *Roman de la Rose*.

This lesson applies also to the *Ḥatātas*. Suppose that Giusto da Urbino either wrote them or, at least, substantially changed and reformed existing material. Certainly, he wished to deceive, but he did not want just to do that. He was clearly interested in the ideas given to Zār'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Ḥəywät, and some details—such as the identity of his birthday and name with Zār'a Ya'əqob's³⁷—suggest a self-identification with the figure of the seventeenth-century Ethiopian thinker. If the *Ḥatātas* are texts of nineteenth-century philosophy, then they are among the most fascinating literary-philosophical constructs of the time. Moreover, they have a claim to be considered as Ethiopian philosophy: they are written in an Ethiopian language by someone who spent over a decade there and, during this period, immersed himself in the culture he found. Giusto da Urbino's appropriation of an Ethiopian voice might be described as colonial, an instance of Europeans taking over for themselves what belonged to another people and culture. But it could also be seen as the reverse. In order to speak, to say what he wishes, Giusto da Urbino, the European, has to borrow the voice of an African.

These three lessons are speculative to some degree, but they illustrate a point that also emerges from the first part of this paper. Historians of mediaeval Western philosophy can help to discuss, if not to solve, the problems surrounding the *Ḥatātas* because they are not, as they might appear to many, specialists in an arcane, narrow field. Chronologically, they span at least the millennium from 500—1500,

³⁶ von Moos (2003).

³⁷ Wion (2013b). Wion also suggests that there may also be biographical convergence between Giusto da Urbino and (the in her view fictional creation) Zār'a Ya'əqob, with regard to a wife/concubine and to the places where they spent time.

although a more generous conception of the long Middle Ages would make the period stretch from 200—1700 and in some places later, about 60% of the whole chronological range; and, geographically, these historians question the very meaning of “Western”, since their field stretches to near the borders of China and to India and can easily embrace Ethiopia. For this reason, it is no surprise that mediaeval philosophy provides the most probable ultimate source for the two cosmological arguments in the *Ḥatātas*, whether they were put down in their present form in the seventeenth century or the nineteenth; nor that mediaeval philosophy, with its rich historiography on problems of interpretation, should furnish parallels that, by showing how questions of authenticity are rarely black and white, might help specialists on the *Ḥatātas* to escape from the cul-de-sac of debate about who wrote them.

Eyasu Berento Assefa

Chapter 5

Zär'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Həywät: Exceptionality and Situatedness of the *Ḥatätas* in the Ethiopian Intellectual Tradition

Abstract: As its title suggests, this paper will assess the nature of the Ethiopian written intellectual tradition, the controversy over the authenticity of the *Ḥatäta Zär'a Ya'əqob* and the *Ḥatäta Wäldä Həywät*, and their philosophical significance both for Ethiopian and African philosophy and for the history of ideas in general. An examination of external religious and historical sources, as well as an assessment of the relevant scholarly literature combined with in-depth analysis of the content of the *Ḥatätas* (in the original Gə'əz version as well as in their Amharic and English translations), reveal both the exceptionality and situatedness of the *Ḥatätas* in the Ethiopian intellectual tradition. Drawing on the meticulous work of Claude Sumner, I argue for the authenticity of the *Ḥatätas*, showing that they can be securely attributed to seventeenth-century Ethiopian authors. Although firmly anchored in the socio-cultural context and educational background of seventeenth-century Ethiopia, these authors are also freethinkers, offering critical and distinctive reflections on the religious, political, and socio-economic realities of their time. Regardless of the texts' exceptionality and the possibility of some European influence therein, one cannot deprive them of the Ethiopian soil in which they are rooted. Furthermore, the *Ḥatätas* are by no means the sole exemplars of philosophical writing in Ethiopia; they are rather gateways to the rich tradition of philosophical wisdom to be found in Ethiopian intellectual history. Apart from their contemporary interest in relation to ethics, epistemology, metaphysics, and social and political philosophy, they are pathways to the study of hidden voices found in the non-Western world.

1 Introduction

On the basis of the enthusiastic reaction to the totality of the Ethiopian “philosophical” experience I believe it would be unfair to deprive the modern audience from the richness of Ethiopia’s wisdom, as it would be to limit oneself to the expression of Ethiopia’s original approach to rationalism.¹

What does Sumner mean by “Ethiopia’s original approach to rationalism”? To address questions like these with seemingly descriptive answers, one must, on the one hand, engage in and interrogate broad approaches in the study of the history of ideas and philosophy; but on the other hand, one must also pay attention to the specificities of the intellectual tradition under scrutiny. Careful analysis of human history and thought reveals untapped social, cultural, scientific, and philosophical documents and traditions where rigorous attempts yield discoveries of both commonalities and exceptionalities among human lived experiences.² Building on the insights and findings of earlier scholars, I propose to rethink, re-examine, and reclaim the ontological foundations, epistemic resources, axiological precepts, and methodological approaches and contributions to be found in Ethiopian philosophy.

Contemporary study in African philosophy (after colonialism) is marked by an aspiration for decolonisation (that is, decolonising the mind from the colonial legacy) and a soul-searching process to reveal hidden wisdom in the alcoves of different lived experiences, traditions, as well as formal and informal education of indigenous peoples.³ As part of such a soul-searching process, Ethiopian philosophy has been a vital source of inspiration for scholars studying non-Western history of philosophy, particularly African philosophy. Among other things, the production of Gə‘əz manuscripts preserved for thousands of years has given scholars the privilege of accessing a written African literature—a rather rare case of extant original texts from pre-colonial Africa. The two original *Ḥatātas* and three translated texts considered here have attracted the attention of many scholars, in large part thanks to the Canadian scholar Claude Sumner.

As part of research in Ethiopian philosophy, this study is aimed at situating the two *Ḥatātas* in the history of ideas and the intellectual tradition of Ethiopia. Understanding the underlying characteristics of Ethiopian philosophy and intellectual history allows us to better determine the place of the *Ḥatātas*, to deal with issues of authenticity, and to ascertain the contemporary significance of the texts. In part,

1 Sumner (1985, p. 10).

2 Benedict (2019).

3 Wiredu (2004); Bekele Gutema (2004); and Eyasu Berento (2021).

this study of the two *Ḥatätas* is an invitation (to those interested in learning from Ethiopian wisdom⁴) and a call for further investigation of Ethiopian philosophy as part of the broader project of African philosophy and non-Western approaches to knowledge, truth, aesthetics and ethics, as well as political and social philosophy.

Beginning from the question, “what is the nature of Ethiopia’s intellectual milieu such that it could form the foundations for philosophical treatises like the *Ḥatätas*?”, we need to ask what the place of the *Ḥatätas* is in the history of philosophy in general and in African philosophy and Ethiopian Studies in particular. More specifically, what philosophical contents (metaphysico-ontological, epistemological, axiological-normative, social-political, etc.) can be extracted from them? How can we characterise their methodological approach and contextualise and integrate them into the study of the humanities and philosophy in particular?⁵ How can we approach the texts in a way that transcends controversies as to whether they are forgeries or authentic and moves beyond the cultural politics of the dispute and the politicisation of knowledge more broadly?

By approaching and addressing these and related questions, one can more readily demarcate the nature of the interaction between Ethiopian philosophy and philosophy in Ethiopia, and begin to grasp the totality of philosophical phenomena in the intellectual milieu of Ethiopia. Since Sumner’s voluminous contribution to Ethiopian philosophy, there has been a relative lack of interest in the *Ḥatätas* and in identifying areas of priority within the remit of scholarship on contemporary Ethiopian philosophy. Hence, it is necessary to reopen and revisit the project of Ethiopian philosophy with a different approach.

Let me focus on three alternatives (which are however not exhaustive) for approaching the aforementioned questions.

First, “Is the author dead?” Answering in the affirmative gives us the right to ignore the controversy as to the identity of the authors of the *Ḥatätas*, and enables us to focus more centrally on the texts’ contents. This approach is congenial to scholars who come both from philosophical and non-philosophical backgrounds, and indeed to students from the tradition of Tewahedo Church education. We need not commit ourselves to Roland Barthes’ theory of literary criticism that marginalises the place of the author in a literary work. Declaring that “[t]he Author is Dead”, Barthes argues that: “[w]e know now that a text does not consist of a line of words releasing a single “theological” meaning (the “message” of the Author-God), but is a space of many dimensions, in which are wedded and contested various

4 For “it would be unfair to deprive the [contemporary] audience from the richness of Ethiopia’s wisdom” (Sumner 1985, p. 10; cf. the epigraph above).

5 This question is enriched by Yirga Gelaw’s (2017a) insightful article.

kinds of writing, no one of which is original”.⁶ Should we therefore forget about the issue of searching for the authors of the *Ḥatātas*, and focus on their contents and the intellectual milieu out of which they grew? Or, alternatively, is the continued search for the implicit intentions of the authors in question to initiate and sustain a discourse, that of the philosophical project on Ethiopian soil, in the way Foucault argued in his “What is an Author?”⁷ In either case, we need to gain clarity on the intellectual climate that brought the *Ḥatātas* into fruition, whether or not we take the authenticity dispute seriously.

Second, we need to ask whether the texts reveal continuity or change within the Ethiopian intellectual tradition, and indeed the extent to which they are informed by, or depart from, existing ideas concerning their place of origin and their intellectual background.

Third, one might engage in comparisons with “Western philosophy” and ask, for example, whether the texts are likely to be the outcome of the “Western mind” (as in Conti Rossini’s Eurocentric position).

The first approach has been largely ignored so far; the second has been underexplored, with the exception of Sumner’s classic contribution; and at least some versions of the third turn on questionable premises. Without totally denying the import of some versions of the third position, this study intentionally prefers the first and the second approaches, with the inevitable generalisations and risks of simplification they entail. This is not only because of their ambitiousness, but also because of the sheer complexity involved in tackling relevant issues in the history of ideas and philosophy in Ethiopia and the broader history of philosophy and intellectual history as such.

2 The Ethiopian Intellectual Tradition

In approaching and engaging with texts like the *Ḥatātas*, one should first acquaint oneself with their intellectual background.⁸

The vast literature on Ethiopian Studies has thus far focused on historical analysis of mainstream political events, with a focus on prominent actors. The scholarly climate is bent on emphasising events and personalities and is fraught

⁶ Barthes (1967).

⁷ Foucault in Foucault and Faubion (1998 [1969]).

⁸ I take an “intellectual tradition” to encompass a wide range of complex phenomena: the written and the oral, popular wisdom and personal reflections, the mythical and rational; the ethical, social, cultural, religious, and political; as well as systematically integrated wisdom and frameworks of knowledge.

with political motivations and partisan orientations that perpetrate epistemic violence against the Ethiopian intellectual tradition and popular wisdom.⁹ Recent developments and contemporary scholarship in Ethiopian Studies have also focused on linguistic, religious, and cultural phenomena in particular contexts that are exposed to the methodological pitfalls of “scientism” and emotional positioning of the researcher.

With a few exceptions,¹⁰ the history of ideas in Ethiopia remains an overlooked area of scholarship. Sumner's efforts deserve special acknowledgement in this regard. The history of ideas in Ethiopia calls for rigorous efforts to discern the patterns, the “*logos*”, underlying the seemingly unstructured, “superstitious”, and conventional common-sense expressions (which Donald Levine calls a “medley of expressions”¹¹) as well as the praxis, the continuity within change, the foundational systemic structure underlying diverse modes of expression.

The problem might seem to lie in the difficulty of finding sufficient and relevant data. Yet Ethiopia has provided scholars with ample resources, in the form of both a rich oral tradition (that of storytelling, parables and riddles, as well as proverbs, but also the *qəne* poetic culture of creativity, symbolism, and imagery) and written literature (the huge Gə'əz corpus but also overlooked Arabic texts in Ethiopia,¹² original works and translations of philosophical texts, and so on). Sumner's series on Oromo Wisdom Literature and Levine's *Wax and Gold*¹³ are exemplary studies of oral literature in Ethiopia. The so-called “Dark Ages” in Europe is a time that typifies the “Golden Age” of the Orthodox Christian tradition, the peak of the-ocentric literary production but also rationalistic worldviews. It was the era, in written literature, in which numerous texts were produced not only for exclusively religious apologetics but also for the sake of astrology, medicine, philosophy, law, and related areas of inquiry.¹⁴

The Orthodox Christian tradition is known for its intercultural expositions, explorations, and knowledge production predicated on contextualising and translating from foreign wisdom and producing original texts. This is also true of the spe-

9 Yirga Gelaw Woldeyes (2017b) and Maimire Mennasemay (1997).

10 Here, I have in mind the exemplary work of Messay Kebede (2008), Richard Pankhurst (1990), and Yirga Gelaw Woldeyes (2017a and 2017b).

11 Levine (1972 [1965]).

12 To enrich the outcomes of studies on the history of ideas in written literature in Ethiopia, one needs to survey the philosophical elements in Arabic literature in Ethiopia.

13 Levine (1972 [1965]).

14 Äbära Ğämäbäre (2006) and Getatchew Haile (2017 = Chapter 1 in this volume).

cific Gə'əz corpus in Ethiopia.¹⁵ One of the problems raised by the study of the history of ideas in Ethiopia lies in figuring out the central ideas that persist over time and the individuals who had an enduring influence on subsequent generations. Certain salient issues reverberate across the cultural and historical lineages of Ethiopia. These include the idea of justice, of creationist metaphysics (rooted in Christianity, Islam, and Indigenous religious views), eternal reconciliation (with its political, social, and ecological implications), the notion of a personalist world¹⁶ (unlike the Cartesian subjective turn and Bacon's world of things to be studied and subjugated from afar, wherein "knowledge is power"), and concepts in ethics—including virtuousness, wisdom or sagacity, courage—and the political question of "Reason of State".¹⁷

The search for a history of ideas in Ethiopia can benefit from demarcating what Levine characterises as "high culture", as distinct from "low culture".¹⁸ This can help us better appreciate the uniqueness of Ethiopian modernity¹⁹ and its place in human history.

What are the basic characteristic features of the history of ideas in Ethiopia? Its mystical aspects, to which I return below, along with its contributions to what we might call the circle of "being, living, and knowing" are its central pillars: "being" refers, for example, to what it is to be, including what it is to be human—in accordance with the dictates of nature and mystical truths (construed as the outcome of God's benevolent revelation and accessible first through his creation, second through consciousness and the contemplative mind, and finally in Himself, through the Words of God (Scriptures) as well as practical and spiritual communion with the Absolute); "living" refers, for instance, to what it is to live a virtuous life; and "knowing" tracks, *inter alia*, empiricist, rationalist, and revelatory positions. It is sometimes suggested that the Ethiopian worldview is one of theocentrism, wherein the living spirits of the dead are invited "to awaken the slumbering spirit of the living"²⁰ and the eternal spirit from above is called upon to

15 When one speaks of original works in Gə'əz literature, one is of course not confined to making claims about the two *Ḥatātas*. Besides common names like St. Yared, *abba* Baḥrəy, *abba* Mika'el (translator of *The Book of the Wise Philosophers* in the sixteenth century – cf. Chapter 7 in this volume, by Peter Adamson), there are the *Dāqiqā Ḥatātas* (cf. Chapter 9 in this volume, by Binyam Mekonnen), Emperor Zār'a Ya'əqob, Liqū Atsqu (d'Abbadie's famous counsellor), the *dābtāras* that accompanied Giusto Da Urbino in the nineteenth century, as well as later thinkers like Gebrehiwot Baykedagn.

16 Sumner (1978).

17 Yirga Gelaw Woldeyes (2017a, p. 269) and Haile Gebrial Dagne (2007).

18 Levine (2006).

19 Bahru Zewde (2013 [2002]) and Pankhurst (1990).

20 Pelikan (1984).

attend to the human world, revealing the truth and endowing human life with rectitude. From this perspective, the Ethiopian history of ideas is not purely secular and rational; it is also of a practical, collaborative, and religious nature, accommodating the mystical conviction that man longs to receive God's grace and that God longs to share His Holy Spirit with human beings. These characteristics suggest that the Ethiopian worldview emphasises the adoration of holistic beauty and cosmic integrity rather than the subjectivity of the individual. Sumner concludes that the Ethiopian worldview is a personalist one that characterises man as a part of nature. "The Western world is one of things, the Ethiopian world is one of persons".²¹

3 Philosophy in Ethiopia and Ethiopian Philosophy

Philosophy always presupposes and grounds its reflexive and reflective discourse in and on the actuality of a lived historico-cultural and political milieu—a specific horizon.²²

Analysing the place of philosophy in Ethiopia on the one hand and the place of Ethiopian philosophy in the global history of philosophy on the other can give us a clear picture of the nature of philosophy in the Ethiopian intellectual tradition. The broader cultural basis of philosophical ideas will be the primary object of scrutiny here; for "[a]ll philosophies are embedded in the culture from which they emerge and are considered to constitute a form of self-consciousness of their culture".²³

"Philosophy in Ethiopia" here is therefore intended to characterise the reception of foreign wisdom or philosophical culture in the Ethiopian context through translation and intercultural dialogue, as well as exercises in systematic interpre-

21 Sumner (1978, p. 62). A thorough explanation of the Ethiopian worldview is beyond the scope of my discussion. Let me note a central feature, however: The Ethiopians did not see nature from the outside point of view. There is rather a strong link with natural phenomena, and man as an agent of history shapes the course of nature's movements by responding to its voices. Hence, a natural phenomenon is either to be assisted, valued intrinsically, or imitated; and through language and naming the Semitic Ethiopian evokes the social potential of individuals and groups and their place as active agents in the course of nature (Sumner 1978, pp. 9–12). The cultural rituals and instances of storytelling where animals and plants are the main characters suggest a conception of nature as a dwelling place of ancestral spirit. It is found among many Ethiopians, and reflects a strong attachment between nature and man (Horne, Mousseau, and Sosnoff 2011).

22 Tsenay Serequeberhan (1994, p. 2).

23 Bekele Gutema (2015, p. 140).

tation. Ethiopians are known in their own tradition for systematic adaptation of foreign texts in the service of religious, legal, and social functions.²⁴ The production of texts in the parchment *brana* manuscripts reflects an age-old practice that started with the translation of the Bible and has continued to the present day.²⁵ Through such a long period of literary production, the history of ideas and philosophy in Ethiopia is one characterised by hybridity and conceptual cross-fertilisation. According to Bekele Gutema, “the idea of our own pure culture not influenced by other cultures is a fiction [...]. The purity of a given culture or philosophy is fictitious so long as cultures have cross-cultural overlapping”.²⁶ The Gəʼəz language was a medium for this kind of intertextual dialogue. Though often erroneously identified as a language and textual tradition of a solely religious character, Gəʼəz literature in fact also provides us with rich philosophical resources. As Maija Priess puts it:

Although for many Gəʼəz might have been considered an ancient “dead” language useful only for the study of the ancient literature, within the Ethiopian Orthodox Tāwahədo Church this is far from true. Gəʼəz is still the liturgical language of the church, moreover in many monasteries highly trained monks converse on matters of theology and philosophy using the Gəʼəz language. The language is taught using the centuries old methods, in what the distinguished Ethiopicist, Richard Pankhurst, has described as “one of the oldest continuous systems of learning in the world”.²⁷

While there is no agreed definition of Ethiopian philosophy, it is clear that it blends the spiritual and the secular, the oral and the written, as well as features of individualist reflection and collective thinking, and thereby challenges mainstream conceptualisations of philosophy as the outcome solely of individuals’ reflections. Ethiopian philosophy is comprised of the thought of individual Ethiopian sages or philosophers and the shared wisdom of culturally diverse communities that have passed the test of time and often cut across received geographical boun-

²⁴ See Levine (1974), Sumner (1985), and Messay Kebede (1999) on the art of translation of foreign texts. Levine calls the Ethiopian response to foreign influence a “creative incorporation”, which is not “passive and literal borrowing” (1974, pp. 64–65). This form of contextual adaptation is not specific to literature, but is also apparent in religion, art, and architecture (Levine 1974, pp. 65–68). Sumner agrees with Levine that “Ethiopians never translate literally: they adapt, modify and, subtract. A translation therefore bears a typical Ethiopian stamp: although the nucleus of what is translated is foreign to Ethiopia the way it is assimilated, and transformed into an indigenous reality is typically Ethiopian” (1985, p. 51).

²⁵ Four pioneering translations were produced in the sixth century: the Holy Bible, the *Fisalḡʷos*, The *Book of Qerālos*, and the *Book of Hermits*.

²⁶ Bekele Gutema (2005, p. 207).

²⁷ Priess (2015, p. v).

daries. It encompasses efforts to understand nature, to account for the meaning of life, and to settle social problems as well as negotiate social relations and interactions. It informs the folk wisdom that society transfers from generation to generation but also underpins the mental map that guides theory and practice in both the public and private spheres. As Sumner remarks: “Ethiopia therefore harbours both types of philosophy: oral and written, traditional and radical, sapiential and critical, popular and personal. It is the land of diverse expressions of philosophy and the birthplace of modern thought”.²⁸

We might distinguish between strict and broad senses of “philosophy” in Ethiopia.²⁹ The broad construal lies in extracting philosophical content from the practical aspects of society and its cultural artefacts, including parables, storytelling, oral literature, religious practices and rituals, folk wisdom, Gə'əz *qəne*,³⁰ contextually adapted texts, and the like. In this broader sense, philosophy can be understood as “an integral part of social and political life: not as the isolated speculations of remarkable individuals, but as both an effect and a cause of the character of the various communities in which different systems flourished”.³¹ This broad conception of philosophical wisdom³² helps us discern the philosophical content and patterns of order in the comprehensive life forms and social activities of Ethiopian society. Levine has proposed that “[t]he scholar’s job is of course to transcend such medley of impressions and to discern the patterns of order through which such details are bound together in a living whole”.³³

An obvious question this raises is *who* these Ethiopian philosophers or sages are. These were men and women of great intellectual ability who were familiar with high culture—namely, *Täbiban* (Sages). The latter enjoyed the highest position in society and took an interest in the nature of the universe, human nature, and social realities. The sixteenth-century Gə'əz translator of the *Book of the Wise Philosophers*, *abba* Mika'el gave the following invitation to philosophy:

Behold: these men collected in it [have to say] many good recommendations and counsels and anecdotes as sweet as salt. [...] Their philosophy pleases the heart of man and strengthens his conscience. Philosophers recall in this book the clear and well inspired actions from the wisdom and history of learned persons. It searches for light and is itself the light of the heart. [...]

²⁸ Sumner (1998, p. 333).

²⁹ See, for example, the distinction in Sumner (1976a).

³⁰ My unpublished article on the Philosophy of *qəne*, presented at two conferences (Bahir Dar University and Wollo University), tackles a new approach to the *qəne* tradition of the Church from a philosophical perspective.

³¹ Russell (1945, p. ix).

³² Cf. Teodros Kiros (2015) and Sumner (1985).

³³ Levine (1972 [1965], pp. ix–x).

*Its excellence surpasses gold and silver and precious stones and all nature. For nothing in the world resembles it. It is the paradise of happiness, carried in your chest, conceived in your heart and adjusted to your conscience. [... And] as you read this book, you will develop your conscience, soften your conduct, sweeten your tongue, improve your manners and strengthen your speech.*³⁴

4 The Two *Ḥatātas*: Situatedness and Exceptionality

The long debate over the authenticity of the authorship of the treatises of Zara Yacob has now been skillfully put to rest [by Sumner], and it is no longer doubted that Zara Yacob, and not Padre Urbino as Conti Rossini claimed, who [sic] created the literary figure of Zara Yacob.³⁵

Situated in a broader Ethiopian intellectual tradition, the *Ḥatātas* bear the general characteristics of Ethiopian philosophy. By restricting himself to written philosophical texts in Ethiopia, Sumner arrived at the conclusion that “[w]ithout the latter developments of Ethiopian philosophy, the *Fisalḡ^wos* is deprived of its significance; without the *Fisalḡ^wos*, [written] Ethiopian philosophy is deprived of roots”.³⁶ Historically, they are germinations of seventeenth-century Ethiopian political, socio-cultural, and economic turmoil. The central issues they tackle and the concerns driving their inception have historical roots in the real lived experiences of Ethiopians. Focusing on the content and general contexts of the texts, one can easily identify the basic elements of ideas central to Ethiopian philosophy, discussed above. While the authorship controversy is still ongoing, major scholars of Ethiopian philosophy and philology are in agreement that the *Ḥatātas* are the offspring of the Ethiopian mind. Sumner (1976a, 1986) and Getatchew Haile (2017) have defended their originality as the product of seventeenth-century Ethiopian freethinkers,³⁷ and argued that the *Ḥatātas* are works of two separate minds, the teacher and his disciple, with common objectives.

The *Ḥatātas* are situated in the historical, religious, cultural, and educational milieus of the Ethiopian intellectual tradition. They reflect the issues Ethiopian faced at the time on account of the prevalence of blind faith and the problem of religious and cultural difference. The methods they adopt (*Andämta*, ‘*interpeta-*

³⁴ Quoted in Sumner (1985, p. 63).

³⁵ Teodros Kiros (1996).

³⁶ Sumner (1985, p. 9).

³⁷ Though Getatchew Haile (2017, reproduced as Chapter 1 in this volume) considers these original materials to have been significantly altered in the nineteenth century.

tion'; *Ḥatäta*, 'discourse') mirror the educational backgrounds of seventeenth-century Ethiopian thinkers. And the particular combination of metaphysical, epistemological, and axiological sensibilities found in the texts all bear the flavour of a distinctly Ethiopian worldview.

My own stance as far as the authorship dispute goes is close to that of Getatchew Haile, Sumner, and Teodros Kiros. While offering a detailed and systematic review of the authorship debate is beyond the scope of this study,³⁸ in what follows, I will provide some relevant points of consideration in the debate drawing on both internal and external evidence, building on the work of previous scholars.

Based on my preliminary review of historical documents (both primary sources—namely, the *Royal Chronicle of Susənyos*—and secondary sources), I have found some corollaries between a historical man from Tigray (the birthplace of Zär'a Ya'əqob) who was a “troublemaker” and the identity of Zär'a Ya'əqob in the autobiography of the first *Ḥatäta*. According to the sources, there was a person who named himself Ya'əqob, was accused of being a “man of falsity”, and was identified as a gossip (*wäräña*). His influence, “deception” or “trickery” of the people and the possibility of gaining followers probably upset church scholars and the king. Based on the report about this man, the king (Susənyos) proceeded to punish him.³⁹

38 I have presented my arguments in favour of authenticity in my previous paper presented at a conference at Bahir Dar University in 2018; the Amharic version of that paper appeared in the conference proceedings (Eyasu Berento, unpublished). I argue that besides an internal, contents-based analysis of the texts that reveals features peculiar to Ethiopian authors, we can uncover exterior evidence that confirms the possibility that the texts were indeed products of seventeenth-century Ethiopian authors. First, according to historical records (based on the *Royal Chronicle of Susənyos*), the road through which Zär'a Ya'əqob came to Īnfraz is the one the then King Susənyos took to travel from Gondär to Aksum. The journey of the king is aimed at punishing the so-called “man of falsity and betrayal” (a line that recalls Zär'a Ya'əqob's resentment of false accusations made by Wäldä Yohannes) (Alämu Hayäle 2005 E.C., 2012, p. 91). According to other historical documents, there was a story of a man who was a traitor, who was against the established religious faith and who was supposed to have influenced the people to stray from their faith, and his name was Ya'əqob (Fəs'um Wälädä Marəyam 2009 E.C., pp. 160–161 and 209; Alämayähu Abäbä 2005 E.C., 2012, p. 175; and Täkälä S'adiqämäkuriya (2000 E.C. [1936 E.C.], p. 132). According to these sources, we can trace the historical man with a similar name (Ya'əqob) and possible reasons why he was accused by those who took themselves to be loyal to the established faith (since Ya'əqob is characterised as *ḥäsawe mäsih*, that is, a man of falsity) and rebellious (against the king). These kinds of facts are clearly in the background of the treatise of Zär'a Ya'əqob.

39 “At that time, a certain enemy of mine, a priest from Aksum and a friend of the king, went [to bring a charge against me] [...] This betrayer went to the king and said this about me: ‘Truly this man misleads the people and tells them we should rise for the sake of our faith, kill the king and expel the *Frang*’. He also said many other similar words against me” (*Ḥatäta Zär'a Ya'əqob* in

These parallelisms could not be mere coincidences. So, adopting the positions of earlier scholars and supposing these external historical facts to be relevant to the question of Zār'a Ya'əqob's existence, I take it that the texts are attributable to the time in which they purport to have been written (the seventeenth century), to the space in which they are set (Ethiopia, which no one doubts), and to the authors to which they are ascribed (i. e., Ethiopians by birth: Zār'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Həywät). If one is interested in the issue of authenticity, this additional evidence cannot be easily dismissed, even if it is not mentioned in existing debates. Getatchew Haile's⁴⁰ calendar-based analysis is eye-opening after Sumner's study and is worthy of consideration. Sumner's classic approach, combining internal and external analysis and dedicating more than 260 pages in a book of a large size (including notably statistical differences in uses of words and syntactic arrangement of sentences between the two *Ḥatätas*, which proved that they are the outcome of two separate minds) makes an undeniably strong case. Other Ethiopian scholars, like Alemayehu Moges and Amsalu Akilu, have also contributed to rehabilitating the authenticity thesis.

Attempts to alienate the *Ḥatätas* from their time and intellectual environment, to deprive them of their Ethiopian authors in the name of forgery are open to the charge that they are themselves a forgery. Such a forgery would imply a concealment of the nature of Ethiopian history of ideas and a denial of the intellectual property of Zār'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Həywät. They exhibit exceptionality in offering complete, personal accounts on controversial issues (religious, political, and social) in the public sphere. They present strong criticisms of central issues in the society of their day (like fasting, patriarchal hegemony, monasticism, religious commitment, sexuality, and marriage). They position themselves against the tradition of Orthodoxy and Islamic polygamy and open the way for multiculturalism; they advocate the revolutionary potential of critical examination over blind preservation of the wisdom and faith of one's forefathers.

Sumner 1985, p. 231). There is a parallel story in the *Royal Chronicle of Susānyos*: “there was a report from Tigray that an unknown man, who is a gossip and a fake prophet (*wärāña, ḥāsawe māsih*), named himself Ya'əqob [who deceives the people]. Upon hearing the report, the king moved to Tigray crossing Tākkāze [the big river, the route Zār'a Ya'əqob followed on his journey to ʾInfraz] to Shire, stayed there for a while and visited the House of Mary, stayed at Aksum, was crowned there like his predecessors [since it was the tradition that any new king/queen should have their legitimacy approved by the pope of Aksum, head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church]” (Alāmu Hayəle 2005 E.C., 2012, pp. 95 and 91; my translation). See further Tākolä S'adiqəmākuriya (2000 E.C. [1936 E.C.], p. 132); Alāmayāhu Abābā (2005 E.C., 2012, p. 175); Alāmu Hayəle (2005 E.C., 2012, p. 85); and Fəs'um Wälədä Marəyam (2009 E.C., pp. 160–161 and 209).

⁴⁰ Getatchew Haile (2006 E.C., 2014).

Questioning the status quo of religious, cultural, and social realities is rather exceptional in the vast collections of Gə'əz literature. However, this is a feature that the two *Ḥatätas* share with fifteenth-century critics, their predecessors known as the *Däqiqä Əstifanos*, seemingly religious critics who were not on good terms with the then Ethiopian king, Zär'a Ya'əqob, and who were violently tortured and imprisoned due to their open opposition to him.⁴¹ Apart from the *Ḥatätas* and the Hagiographies of the *Däqiqä Əstifanos*, as far as I know, no other text openly challenges the established norms and principles of the religious traditions, social customs, and thought of their time. But this exceptionality notwithstanding, we cannot deprive these texts of their strong foundation in Ethiopian soil, sharing basic elements with Ethiopian history of ideas. Their exceptionality reveals originality as another aspect of the Ethiopian literary tradition, and indeed an original philosophical approach to rationalism.⁴² As Sumner remarks:

Zara Yaeqob's thought claims to be original, and for the written literature of the 17th century Ethiopia that we know, it certainly is. But the images are not original. The offshoots are personal adventures into free space, but the stem is deeply rooted in Ethiopian soil⁴³

The two *Ḥatätas* also invoke the theme of man's responsibility to reconcile the earthly and the heavenly worlds—a motif which would remain prominent in Ethiopian philosophy down to the contemporary period.⁴⁴

Connecting the dots, Zär'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Həywät are seventeenth-century Ethiopian philosophers, freethinkers, and critics who wrote original philosophical works. The two treatises complement one another, the first being more abstract and the second tending to be more practical. Both stress the enlightenment and rationalism of individuals on the basis of an examined search for the truth rather than a reliance on mere faith. Questions related to being, existence,

41 See relatedly Binyam Mekonnen's essay (Chapter 9) in this volume.

42 Teodros Kiros, for instance, claims that: "at the center of Zara Yacob's originality lies the hitherto unrecognised place of the human heart in philosophical activity. No philosopher before or after him (Pascal, the writer, excepted) had attached such a firm significance to the function of the human heart" (Teodros Kiros quoted in Krause 2008, p. 274). While this conclusion might be open to debate, it remains that Zär'a Ya'əqob's approach is distinctive in the history of philosophy.

43 Sumner (1978, p. 61).

44 The authors of the *Ḥatätas* anticipate the twentieth-century Ethiopian philosopher, Əgälä Gäbərə Yohānəs (2003), who claims that, metaphysically, man is positioned between the earthly and heavenly worlds. As a partaker in the earthly world man is subject to the laws of nature, but is also endowed with the freedom of heavenly bodies. Such similarities of thought are not the product of direct influence (for Əgälä never quotes Zär'a Ya'əqob or Wäldä Həywät) but are rather the outcome of similar educational backgrounds and schooling.

peace-making, multiculturalism, gender equality, good governance, public rationality, and social transformation are central to these treaties.

For example, in experiencing uneasiness at the “civil wars in his time” among fellow citizens, Wäldä Həywät comments that: “Mutual love embellishes man’s entire life; it makes all our afflictions easier to bear; it adds flavour and sweetness to our whole life; it makes this world the kingdom of heaven”.⁴⁵ He is unequivocal in his direct attack on identity-based conflicts and violent responses to religious differences:

Do not think that the doctrine of the fools who say the following is good: “The word ‘fellow man’ is confined only to relatives, or our neighbours, or friends, or members of the same faith”. Do not say the same as they do; for all men are our fellow men whether they are good or evil, Christians, [Muslims,] Jews, pagans: all are equal to us and our brothers, because we all are the sons of one father and creator;⁴⁶

For Wäldä Həywät and Zär’a Ya’əqob, despite differences in faith, knowledge, and culture, human beings are by nature essentially similar and have the same genesis, forming a brotherhood. Conflicts based on differences in religion or culture are artificial, contingent, and based on fallible beliefs. Therefore, no one should rely on them for the sake of defining man.

As a final remark about the general nature of the texts, the very employment of the method of the *Ḥatāta* (‘discourse, examination, search for the truth, inquiry’) and *Andamta* (‘interpretation, hermeneutics’) is specific to the Ethiopian intellectual tradition in which the authors are prime participants. This suggests situatedness in adopting the methods of the intellectual tradition that produced Zär’a Ya’əqob but also a refusal to accept this same tradition on the basis of criticism of its basic tenets by the tradition’s own lights. Zär’a Ya’əqob is an immanent critic rather than a foreign and external spectator who merely ridicules the society in question in a way that is divorced from its values, conventions, and norms.

5 Rereading the *Ḥatātas*

Now that we have situated the *Ḥatātas* in their intellectual milieu and the history of ideas in Ethiopia—without disregarding their possible exceptionality and

⁴⁵ Translated by Sumner (1985, p. 268). An alternative translation in Zara Yaqob, Walda Heywat, Lee, Mehari Worku, and Belcher (2023, p. 133) runs as follows: “Mutual love improves all human life. It relieves our suffering, it seasons and sweetens our whole life as it transforms this world into the kingdom of heaven”.

⁴⁶ Translated by Sumner (1985, p. 267).

uniqueness—we are in a position to revisit their content afresh with an eye to the authorship dispute. According to Sumner (1976a), these debates had at the time of writing been limited to external rather than internal sources.

In terms of content there is a chain between metaphysical, epistemological, and axiological questions. Metaphysically, three things are dealt with, namely: Nature, God, and Man. Accordingly man is situated between the worlds of the earthly (nature) and the heavenly (God), buttressing his ontological attachment to the two worlds.⁴⁷ Epistemologically, the sources of human knowledge are mediated through empiricism, rationalism, and special forms of revealed truth. Such knowledge enables human beings to understand human nature, the laws of nature, and the will of God. These metaphysical and epistemological bases guide man towards axiological rectitude. For example, the ethical responsibility of man to be good emanates from the consciousness of the mind that the soul is immortal. The notion of moral responsibility in the realm of ethics and social and political philosophy emanates from the inalienable rights of other human beings. And aesthetically God has placed man amidst this beautiful universe, which is the “best possible world”.⁴⁸

In terms of human nature, we learn that man is not evil and endowed with free will, and that from such freedom originates one's moral responsibility.⁴⁹ Truth is the outcome of scrutiny of pure intelligence by the rational mind.⁵⁰ Human beings are students of nature and ultimate truth is to be grasped by discerning its laws. Reflections around the place of women, the idea of cooperation

47 Eḡälä Gäbərə Yohānəs (2003).

48 Sumner (1985, pp. 256 and 261).

49 Sumner (1985, p. 235).

50 Sumner (1985, p. 236). This position of Zär'a Ya'əqob is adopted from books written in (and/or translated into) Gə'əz in the fifteenth century to serve as guidance of monastery life in Ethiopia. According to the epistemological positions of the school system that produced Zär'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Həywät, man is endowed with empirical knowledge, rational contemplation of the mind (or the heart, as per the original Ethiopian position to rationalism, on which see Teodros Kiros 2005) and hits on the truth if he lives according to the will of God. This is clearly put in the *Arägawi Mänfäsawi* (Täsəfa Gäbərəsəläse 1982), the third Book of the three Books on Monastery Life (the *Books of Hermits, Mäs'ahəfətä Mänäkosat*): human beings are endowed with the capacity and privilege of knowing hidden truths, including the Trinity, the heavenly world (p. 59). Similar verses are found in the assertions of *Mar Yəshäq*, specifically the first book in the series (1982, p. 102). According to the teaching of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, true knowledge is revealed truth that can be acquired through the senses on the basis of attentive observation and examination of nature, through reason and through mysticism (being and knowing that requires the help of God and results in union with God). Unlike restricted epistemological positions of rationalism and empiricism, such holistic and comprehensive approaches to human knowledge have metaphysical, epistemological, as well as ethical elements. And we can trace a direct lineage between this position and the thought of Zär'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Həywät.

and responsibility toward others, and the natural equality of men are also found in the texts.⁵¹ The society envisioned in the mind of the authors of the *Ḥatātas* is one that manifests equality, liberty, fraternity, and familyhood within a just and peaceful social order.

The texts' arguments for the immortality of the soul and eternal justice in the afterlife⁵² implicate metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical aspects in human life. Wäldä Ḥəywät concludes that our reason tells us that we have an immortal soul and that moral responsibility is one of its consequences. We are given the light of reason to discriminate between goodness and badness.⁵³ We also learn that "the will of God is known by this short statement from our reason that tells us: Worship God your creator and love all men as yourself".⁵⁴

Wäldä Ḥəywät's metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical positions reveal a direct influence from, and emulation of, his teacher. Consider, for example, his argument for the existence of a perfect God⁵⁵; his characterisation of human nature: "by human nature, understand thereby the soul of man, his spiritual essence, the fine nature that thinks and knows"⁵⁶; and his view is that the soul of man is immortal, which is the basis and reason for our moral responsibility. This world is the best possible world, which is the work of a perfect God and each creature befits its place in the cosmos, which is endowed with holistic integrity and beauty (Sumner 1985, pp. 256 and 261⁵⁷). In terms of the possibility of knowledge, Wäldä Ḥəywät is an advocate of the mysticism of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, whereby knowledge is the outcome of the collaboration between the sense organs, the rational mind, and God's help: "I believe nothing except what God demonstrated to me by the light of my reason [...] for he himself gave me the light of reason"⁵⁸

51 Sumner (1985, p. 239).

52 Sumner (1985, p. 241).

53 See further Ḥgälä Gäbərə Yohānəs (1983) and Sumner (1985, p. 259).

54 Translated by Sumner (1985, p. 242). Reading these lines in the *Ḥatātas*, one easily discerns Zär'a Ya'əqob's educational background and the influence of the teaching of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church that emphasises the two pillars of the Ten Commandments (Fear of God and Love of One's Fellow Men).

55 Sumner (1985, p. 256).

56 Translated by Sumner (1985, p. 257).

57 "We should admire and praise the creator in all his work [...] and thank him because he created us and placed us among these beautiful and admirable creatures, and made us superior to them; he gave us the reason and science of which he has not endowed the other creatures..." (Sumner 1985, p. 261).

58 "*The light of reason*" is a direct translation of the concept of *bərhanā ləbbuna* (that has both epistemologically illuminating elements and ethically guiding implications that protect men from straying from the way of God). Herein lies a distinctly Ethiopian approach to rationality,

that I may discriminate between good and evil, true and false”.⁵⁹ In his aspiration to offer up original insights rather than simply repeating his teacher’s views, Wäldä Həywät places greater emphasis on practical issues like sexuality, the ethics of aid, education, the standards of a hygienic life, multiculturalism, and ethics of work. God is the source of all wisdom and science,⁶⁰ but man is endowed with the ability to share in God’s grace through his observance of God’s will and active attendance to the laws of nature (as opposed to adhering to fallible human laws). On the problem of evil, Wäldä Həywät offers a vivid argument that recalls the arguments of Leibniz, Hick, and Irenaeus,⁶¹ according to which evil is a therapy of God.⁶²

6 Contributions

One final question that warrants comment is what contemporary significance might be extracted from the *Ḥatātas*.

The texts play contextual roles in historical and literary studies pertaining to Ethiopia and Africa but also have a broader significance in terms of the representation of non-Western voices in human civilisation.

If we can arrive at a consensus as to their authenticity, Zär'a Ya'əqob's autobiography and Wäldä Həywät's reflections on it will provide historians of seventeenth-century Ethiopia with primary sources and precious eyewitness accounts. Moreover, as has often been remarked, these texts can serve as a basis for debunking prejudiced claims about the non-existence of African philosophy due to the absence of a literary tradition and written philosophical treatises. Hence they can enrich Africa's soul-searching process within the remit of indigenous philosophy. The texts, crucially, represent some of the unheard voices of the Global South.

Uncovering and reclaiming classical indigenous philosophy along with its foundational tradition can help us enrich contemporary discussions⁶³; indeed,

which Wäldä Həywät picks up from his immediate teacher and from the long tradition underpinning his educational background.

⁵⁹ Translated by Sumner (1985, p. 259).

⁶⁰ Sumner (1985, p. 255).

⁶¹ For connections to Leibniz, Hick, and Irenaeus, see further Henry Straughan's and Michael O'Connor's essay (Chapter 12) in this volume.

⁶² Eyasu Berento (2019); Sumner (1985, p. 263). According to Wäldä Həywät, “after God created the world, He does not forsake his creation, but he takes care of it and guides it according to the necessity of each creature and leads all according to the way he created them” (translated by Sumner 1985, p. 256).

⁶³ Pelikan (1984).

the texts' central tenets, theses, and methods provide the contemporary scholar of Ethiopian intellectual history and philosophy with valuable conceptual resources. In-depth critical study of the texts is already yielding contributions to debates in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, social philosophy, and philosophy of education, and has the potential to enrich the study of the humanities from broader and varied perspectives. On a more practical level, the ideas and objectives envisioned in the *Ḥatātas* can yield important lessons about equality, justice, and public rationality.

7 Conclusion: On the Way Forward

The study of the history of ideas in Ethiopia has not so far sufficiently brought out its philosophical components. Such an analysis requires a holistic approach to the materials at hand, honing pedagogical and methodological aspects of the age-old Ethiopian intellectual tradition—attending to both oral and written forms of philosophising, formal and informal aspects of knowledge production, spanning collective wisdom and private speculation. Analysis of both internal and external evidence in relation to the two *Ḥatātas* speaks to their simultaneous situatedness and exceptionality, features which are consistent with a seventeenth-century authorship. Ethiopian philosophy as it appears in the *Ḥatātas* can play a pivotal role in bridging folk wisdom and personal reflection, the oral and the written, the religious and the secular, the abstract and the practical, continuity and change. The chain of reasoning tying together metaphysical, epistemological, and axiological issues also enriches our contemporary longing for social justice, social harmony, and cosmic integrity.

Situating the texts in their proper place within Ethiopian and African philosophy can help develop African self-esteem in the academy, combat epistemic “self-colonisation”, and reawaken the true spirit of African philosophy in dealing with its existential problems.

Going forward, we need to resume Sumner’s project in Ethiopian Studies from the point of view of the history of ideas, in a way that best fits contemporary and future human aspirations. In doing so, we must ask the questions: “what is the nature of Ethiopian philosophy and philosophy in Ethiopia, and how can we clearly situate the two *Ḥatātas* in the intellectual tradition of Ethiopia and in the broader history of ideas?”.

Neelam Srivastava

Chapter 6

Debating the *Ḥatāta*: Carlo Conti Rossini and Italian Racial Theories

Abstract: This chapter approaches the debate around the authorship of the seventeenth-century Ethiopian text *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'əqob* by discussing the influence of Italian racial theories on Carlo Conti Rossini, the Italian Ethiopianist who wrote an influential refutation of its attribution to the Ethiopian Zār'a Ya'əqob. The history of the text's reception by Conti Rossini can be traced back to the origins of the Italian colonial enterprise in the Horn of Africa and its discursive justifications for conquest, which rested on the appropriation of knowledge about Ethiopia and surrounding region. Conti Rossini's claim that the text was a forgery by Giusto da Urbino, the nineteenth-century Italian Capuchin friar who purportedly "discovered" the text, is arguably underpinned by a European civilisational worldview that he projected onto his understanding of Ethiopian literature and philosophy. Conti Rossini worked as a civil servant in the new Italian colony of Eritrea before taking up an academic post in Rome as Chair of History and Languages of Abyssinia in 1919. His understanding of Ethiopian society and culture became more explicitly racist after the advent of fascism and Italy's military invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. His refutation of the authenticity of the *Ḥatāta* is prior to this period, however, and drew on his immense knowledge of Ethiopia and its languages. This chapter discusses how Conti Rossini brings an orientalist and racialising interpretation of societal and cultural evolution that posits a "stagist" view of history onto the Ethiopian past. He thus considered it to be improbable for the *Ḥatāta* to be a work of Ethiopian philosophy because it did not fit his Eurocentric view of intellectual progress. This position by itself does not disprove his argument about the text's authorship, but it does suggest that his interpretation is profoundly influenced by the racial paradigms he uncritically applies to his reading.

This chapter examines some aspects of Italy's epistemological, political, and cultural relationship with Ethiopia in the twentieth century and how these can be brought to bear on a discussion around the authorship of the seventeenth-century Ethiopian philosophical text *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'əqob*, with especial reference to the figure of Carlo Conti Rossini, the Italian Ethiopianist who wrote an influential ref-

utation of its attribution to the Ethiopian thinker Zär'a Ya'əqob.¹ As Jonathan Egid remarks in his introduction to this volume, “Conti Rossini was the first to suggest that the text had to come from outside the Ethiopian tradition entirely”.² The *Ḥatāta Zär'a Ya'əqob* has been considered a foundational text of early modern African philosophy; for some, it offers conclusive evidence that its critical and rationalistic discussion of man's relationship to God has clear parallels to similar investigations around religious belief that were taking place at the same time within European Enlightenment thought. This chapter argues that because of the racial ideas he held, which drew in part on Giuseppe Sergi's theory of Eurafrikanism, Conti Rossini simply could not entertain the possibility that an Ethiopian of the seventeenth century might be the author of such a “forward-thinking” text.³ I contextualise Conti Rossini's position within the various racial theories around Ethiopians that emerged in Italy in the early colonial period and then developed into a fully-fledged racist policy after Mussolini's proclamation of the Italian Empire under fascism.

It might be helpful to clarify that I am not an Ethiopianist, and I am not familiar with the language in which the text is written. The following considerations will focus on the ideological, epistemological, and paradigmatic assumptions that were likely to underpin the approach of Conti Rossini, Italy's most famous scholar of Ethiopian history, to the authenticity of what he calls a “heretical” text. As Aïssatou Mbodj and Anaïs Wion remark,

as much as a study of the text itself, therefore, it is a matter of analysing the mechanisms at work in the production of an academic discourse, be it in history, philology, philosophy or in the context of research policy. All of these discourses construct a vision of the world in which this text plays a role, either through its existence or through the denial of its existence.⁴

The history and indeed understanding of the text's reception by Conti Rossini, a prominent twentieth-century Orientalist and Ethiopianist, can be traced to the origins of the Italian colonial enterprise in the Horn of Africa and its racist and ideological justifications, that were based on the appropriation of knowledge about Ethiopia and ethnic and linguistic classifications of its peoples on the part of Ital-

1 I would like to thank Lea Cantor and Jonathan Egid for all their help, patience, and feedback on this chapter and for involving me in this wonderful project on the *Ḥatāta*.

2 Egid, p. 24 in this volume.

3 By contrast, recent scholarship by Matteo Salvatore on the seventeenth-century Ethiopian traveller to Europe Şägga Krəstos has investigated the reciprocal and active exchanges between early modern Ethiopia and European society, recuperating and emphasising the role of African cultural agency in African European relations of the time (cf. Salvatore 2021).

4 Translated by Cantor, Egid, and Wion in Mbodj and Wion (2013).

ian anthropologists and linguists. In other words, Conti Rossini's argument that the text was actually a forgery by Giusto da Urbino, the twentieth-century Italian Capuchin friar who purportedly "discovered" the text, can be seen to rest, at least in part, on his European civilisational worldview, which he projected onto his understanding of Ethiopian literature and philosophy. But in order to understand the reasoning that led to his interpretation of the text in this way, we need to take a step back and examine the history of Italy's colonial involvement in East Africa.

As Marco Demichelis observes, official Italian interest in the region was preceded by missionary interest comprised of Italian clergy, with Catholic missions headed by the Apostolic Nuncio Massaia in the 1840s.⁵ The Catholic Church's attempts to establish a relationship with Ethiopia, and thus *de facto* political control over its Ethiopian rulers, dated back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and were linked to its being a Christian empire. Giusto da Urbino, the discoverer of the *Hatäta* manuscripts, was part of this mission that had intended to penetrate the territory of the Oromo people and to convert the local population to Catholicism. This kind of missionary penetration was formally, though perhaps not epistemologically, distinct from the geographical and political ambitions that Italy began to project toward the Horn of Africa immediately after the country's unification in 1861. Ignazio Antinori led the first major Italian geographical exploration of the Horn of Africa in 1876, and later became the founder of the Società Geografica Italiana (Italian Geographical Society). Arguably, Antinori's trip was not a "colonial" mission, though it laid the basis for colonial ventures later on.⁶ Following on from these early geographical explorations of the region, the Italian presence in the Horn of Africa after unification developed rapidly into full-blown colonisation, with the foundation of Eritrea in 1890 (known as the *colonia primogenita*, the first-born colony).

The Italian case presents some unique and distinct characteristics compared to the far more established liberal empires of Britain and France, which were based on a stronger and older sense of national unity. Italy, as a rather belated newcomer on the imperialist stage, had achieved national unification only in 1861. Barely twenty years after 1861, Italy had already begun to put in place an expansionist policy in East Africa, partly supported by Britain, which felt it needed a junior partner in extending its sphere of influence in this part of Africa.⁷ These "African wars" sat uneasily with the fresh memory of the Risorgimento and with the values of national self-determination associated with this central event

5 Demichelis (2012, p. 107).

6 See Demichelis (2012, p. 107).

7 Labanca (2002, pp. 62–64).

of Italian history. Italy's first colony was named Eritrea, after the Greek name for the Red Sea, on which it bordered. Soon afterwards, the Italian government began outlining grandiose plans to conquer or at least subdue the Ethiopian empire, the only state in Africa that had not been taken over by a European power in the 1885 scramble for Africa. Italy's Prime Minister at the time, Francesco Crispi, and the imperialist lobby in the Italian parliament vastly underestimated the military strength of Emperor Menelik II, ruler of late nineteenth-century Ethiopia, and consequently decided to confront the Ethiopian army in open battle. On March 1, 1896, the Italian army suffered a major and humiliating defeat at the hands of the Ethiopians at Adwa. Italian soldiers spoke of a real "butchery" on the battlefield, and about 5,000 Italian soldiers died. The defeat of Adwa forced Crispi to resign, and it also signalled the end of Italy's participation in the scramble for Africa. Adwa was the first time a European army lost a military battle against an African nation; subsequently, popular opposition to empire became widespread within Italy and was a prime cause for the halt on imperial expansion until the conquest of Libya in 1911.

Adwa became symbolic of a much greater defeat; Italy, in losing to an African opponent, had failed to prove to the rest of the world that it was an international state actor that could pursue a colonial policy of prestige and that it could compete with other European nations in spreading the "civilising mission" to Africa. The battle of Adwa later became an important pretext in fascist propaganda for the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, since it was viewed as a "stain" on the honour of the nation that needed to be avenged.

With the start of the 1930s, Mussolini began to plan his invasion of the sovereign state of Ethiopia. In the meantime, Italy had continued its colonialist expansion with the invasion of Libya in 1911. Soon after coming to power in 1922, Mussolini made Italy's "imperialist" identity a cornerstone of his policy through a massive use of propaganda. In the years that followed, Italy's Ministry for the Colony actively multiplied its propagandist efforts in favour of colonialism by instituting a series of exhibitions, demonstrations, and cultural events focusing on Africa. Rather belatedly, Italy was catching up with the diffuse "culture of imperialism" that had proved so effective in promoting support and knowledge of the colonies, and specifically of Africa, within the liberal empires of Britain and France.⁸ Fascist imperialism, especially in Ethiopia, was supported by the Italian masses, but the consensus was also sustained by a massive use of propaganda by the regime which infiltrated nearly every major newspaper, periodical, magazine, and child-

⁸ Labanca (2002, p. 154).

ren's publication in Italy.⁹ The Ministry of Press and Propaganda was consolidated in the year of the invasion of Ethiopia, and centralised the entire political culture of the country: from books to information, from tourism to show business.¹⁰ Historians agree that the period of the invasion coincided with the highest support Mussolini ever enjoyed.

As the Italian colonial project evolved, so did Italian colonial “science”. At the turn of the twentieth century, Italian racial and anthropological theories that posited a common origin for the so-called Mediterranean race (including Italians) and the inhabitants of the Horn of Africa began to spread their influence over colonial administrators and scholars such as Conti Rossini. In this period, the Italian anthropologist Giuseppe Sergi developed the notion of Eurafrikanism, which placed the origins of European civilisation in Africa.¹¹ Departing from the mainstream tradition of European Orientalism, influentially represented by the Sanskritist William Jones, which considered Asia as the cradle of European cultures and languages and identified Aryanism as the common wellspring, Sergi sought to rethink the “geography of the history of civilization” by challenging Aryan narratives of origin.¹² He believed that the *Homo Eurafrikanus* was a distinct human species that had then diversified into the African, the Mediterranean and the Nordic “types”. Sergi's theory of the *Homo Eurafrikanus* built on the anthropologist Aldobrandino Mochi's definition of Hamites—namely, African populations descended from ancient Semitic peoples that had migrated to North and East Africa in earlier times, and which he distinguished from the “Black” African peoples. Mochi considered the indigenous population of the Horn of Africa “to be almost exclusively Hamitic, *therefore* being able to reach a high level of civilization”.¹³ Mochi and Sergi both believed that the cultures of ancient Egypt and Ethiopia, which Europeans of the time considered more sophisticated and developed than the rest of the African continent, could be explained through their Semitic origins.

Fabrizio De Donno argues that Sergi's “challenge” to the dominant Aryanist theory was deeply connected to the emergence of an Italian strand of Orientalism that in its turn developed apace with Italy's colonial presence in the Horn of Africa:

9 Mingardo (1998, p. 24).

10 Mingardo (1998, p. 30).

11 De Donno (2019, p. 202).

12 De Donno (2019, p. 202).

13 Mochi quoted in Sòrgoni (2003, p. 66).

From the 1910s, Oriental Studies were given a new impulse by the Italian government in the context of colonial expansionism [...] Italian Orientalism and colonialism [were] seen as instruments leading to a more central role in Europe for Italy.¹⁴

Hence, Eurafricanism was touted as Italian Orientalism's answer to the Northern European Orientalist emphasis on Aryanism and its claims that the origins of Western civilisation lay in Asia.

Barbara Sòrgoni remarks on the specifically political uses to which Sergi's Eurafrican hypothesis of the ancient kinship between the East Africans and the Mediterraneans was put: "the analogical thought behind it contended that, just as the Africans needed the Hamites in the past to progress, so they now needed the Europeans for the same purpose".¹⁵ Thus, the reasoning went, Italians were better fitted to govern East Africa precisely because there seemed to exist an ancient relationship between the two peoples, though of course Eritreans and Ethiopians were seen as far less advanced than their European rulers. This imagined racial connection would subsequently be refuted by fascist racist policies that aimed to establish a complete state of apartheid after the conquest of Ethiopia in 1936.

Like many other Italian anthropologists, Mochi considered Ethiopians to have somatic traits that made it possible to classify them as "superior barbarians".¹⁶ He saw them as being the products of racial mixture, but of essentially Semitic descent: "una estesa gamma etnica che va dal bassissimo tipo negro all'altro tipo semitico" ["an extensive ethnic scale that goes from the lowest n**** type to the high Semitic type"].¹⁷ But in the run-up to 1935, Italian fascism was hard at work, with the help of scholars and colonial officers, to "blacken" Ethiopians and the other East Africans under their rule in order to portray them as racially inferior and thus to lend further justification to their conquest.

As De Donno and Sòrgoni have demonstrated, Sergi's Eurafrican theory exerted an enduring influence on Carlo Conti Rossini and the intellectual approach that informed his scholarship on Ethiopia; arguably, it would also shape his interpretation of the *Ḥatāta*. Conti Rossini was an Ethiopianist and an Orientalist who worked as a civil servant and colonial administrator in the new Italian colony of Eritrea from 1899 to 1903. There is an important connection between Conti Rossini's experience of colonial governance and his scholarship on Ethiopia.¹⁸ Conti

¹⁴ De Donno (2019, p. 207).

¹⁵ Sòrgoni (2003, p. 67).

¹⁶ Sòrgoni (2003, p. 69).

¹⁷ Mochi quoted in Forgacs (2014, p. 98).

¹⁸ Camilleri and Fusari (2022).

Rossini defined himself as a historian-philologist,¹⁹ given his ability to cross disciplinary boundaries. Nicola Camilleri and Valentina Fusari regard him as a “scholar-functionary”, a term that underlines the central nexus between colonialism and the organisation of knowledge about the conquered territory. He was a major scholar of Eritrean customary laws. As Camilleri says,

his work contributed to the official construction of ethno-anthropological discourse in and about the Italian colonies in the Horn of Africa, describing and defining the “constitutive unities of the new territories, through the creation of national and administrative borders, and then classifying the subdued peoples and the resources of the land”.²⁰

Camilleri quotes Conti Rossini himself on the importance of knowledge of Ethiopians for colonial governance, following a classic imperialist paradigm: “To facilitate the ‘knowledge of the Ethiopian’ [la conoscenza dell’Etiopie] (Conti Rossini 1937, p. V) was thus functional for the ‘young and fortunate pioneers of the new Italian power’ (Conti Rossini 1937, p. VII) to shape the perceptions of the newly arrived colonizers towards their colonial subjects”.²¹

Conti Rossini first arrived in the new colony of Eritrea in the founding period of the colonial civil administration, between the end of 1898 and March of 1903. Gianni Dore’s short biography of him presents the figure of a rigorous and severe scholar whose knowledge of and passion for Ethiopia was ill reconciled with his colonial duties.²² Conti Rossini found the newly established city of Asmara, at the time a small town with dark alleys and few modern buildings, lamentable both for its urban shortcomings and moral shortcomings.²³ While living there, he was attacked by an Eritrean as he walked through the market late at night, and he complained extensively to the colonial administration about the fact that his attacker had not been charged with assault. He was not an easy man to get along with, and apparently many people were glad to see him leave to return to Italy. As the governor of the Eritrean colony, Ferdinando Martini remarked in 1903 in a letter:

Conti Rossini is leaving Asmara. We are separating after almost four years, with regret. As a functionary he is valuable for his acumen, his hard work, and his erudition; but as a man he

19 Dore (2014, p. 338).

20 Camilleri and Fusari (2022, p. 207); my translation.

21 My translation: “Facilitare ‘la conoscenza dell’Etiopie’ (Conti Rossini 1937, V) era quindi funzionale ‘pe’ giovani, fortunati artieri della nuova potenza italiana’ (Conti Rossini 1937, VII) a veicolare la percezione dei nuovi arrivati verso i sudditi coloniali” (Camilleri and Fusari 2022, p. 209).

22 Dore (2014).

23 Dore (2014, p. 323).

is touchy and quick to anger. And so, he was very much disliked by some people of the Colony, which he knows in its history, customs, and languages probably better than any other European who lives here. It will be difficult for me to replace him with another employee who is as honest, hard-working, and cultured as he is. But if he had remained longer, he would have created further serious problems for me here.²⁴

This perspective on Conti Rossini's difficult personal character contrasts with the largely unchallenged dominance he has enjoyed in the field of Ethiopian studies to this day. Dore's account of his prickly personality as it emerges from the letters of Martini serves to debunk, somewhat, the aura and authority that he holds as a scholar, but it also highlights how his experience of colonial administration impacted on his formation. What is striking about Martini's assessment of him is how deeply Conti Rossini was invested in Italy's colonial project, both at a material and intellectual level. As the Africanist Terence Ranger remarks,

the most far-reaching inventions of tradition in colonial Africa took place when the Europeans believed themselves to be respecting age-old African custom. What were called customary law, customary land-rights, customary political structure, and so on, were in fact all invented by colonial codification.²⁵

In other words, Conti Rossini was responsible for "fixing" Eritrean customary law in written statutes, and contributed to the colonial construction of putatively "pre-colonial" and thus "traditional" categories.²⁶

On his return to Italy from Eritrea, Conti Rossini continued to develop his scholarly career, publishing a huge body of work on Eritrea and Ethiopia and consolidating his reputation as a foremost Ethiopianist. But he also continued his colonial career: from 1913 to 1915, he was General Secretary for Civil and Political Affairs in Italian Tripolitania. He became a renowned academic, holding the chair of History and Languages of Abyssinia at the University of Rome "La Sapienza" from 1919 until his death in 1949, and he became a member of Italy's most important scholarly association, the Accademia Reale dei Lincei, the equivalent of the British Academy or the Royal Societies in Britain. He founded the prominent journal, the

²⁴ Martini quoted in Dore (2014, p. 325). My translation: "Parte da Asmara il Conti Rossini. Mi separo da lui dopo quasi 4 anni senza rammarico. Il funzionario è prezioso per acume, per operosità, per dottrina; ma l'uomo è ombroso e suscettibile. Così s'era acquistato antipatie nella Colonia, che conosce nella sua storia, nei suoi costumi e linguaggi come non uno forse degli Europei che vi dimorano. Mi sarà difficile sostituirlo con altro impiegato così retto, così operoso, così colto: ma la sua permanenza mi avrebbe cagionato qui altre e gravi difficoltà".

²⁵ Ranger (2012, p. 250).

²⁶ Camilleri and Fusari (2022, p. 17).

Rassegna di Studi Etiopici, in 1941, which is still published to this day. In the opening editorial of the journal's first issue, he reiterated that "Italy remained faithful to her civilizing mission in East Africa", thus underscoring how deeply compromised his Ethiopianist scholarship was by colonial discourse.²⁷ As Camilleri and Fusari note, the interconnection between politics and science helps us to understand better Conti Rossini's work in its historical context, a context that "pursued the civilization of African subjects perpetrating crimes and acts of violence such as the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935".²⁸

As mentioned earlier, Conti Rossini's entire scholarship on Ethiopia was deeply shaped by Sergi's Eurafrikan hypothesis. As De Donno demonstrates, already in a 1913 article on Italian Eritrea, he had expressed his racial theory that Eritreans were autochthonous Hamites, whose descendants then gradually migrated north and west all the way to Europe.²⁹ In this same article, he also argued that the indigenous Hamites of the Horn of Africa had mixed with other racial groups and had thus not been able to lift themselves out of a "savage or semi-savage state".³⁰ Conti Rossini sought to use academic knowledge for the exercise of political power in the region: in this piece, "he calls on Italian Orientalism to study 'the indigenous in order to know how to rule them'".³¹ Conti Rossini, by embracing Sergi's theory of Eurafrikanism, proved that an African race had the potential to produce a sophisticated civilisation and confirmed the kinship between Italy and the Horn of Africa. As De Donno remarks, "[i]n this way, Sergi's anti-Orientalist criticism of Aryanism becomes part of a new Orientalist discourse on East Africa through the work of Conti Rossini".³² But he was also shaping his scholarly thought to better serve the aims of empire.

Conti Rossini's reading of Ethiopian society and culture became more explicitly and ideologically racist after the advent of fascism and even more so after the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. Crucially, his racial thinking seemed to evolve in parallel with that of the regime from 1936 onwards, when fascist Italy rejected the Eurafrikan theory of origins and began to embrace Aryanisation in a bid to "whiten" Italian racial identity and thus to govern Ethiopia via racial segregation. By 1939, the only citizen of Italian East Africa who could be legally considered Italian was the "metropolitan citizen of Aryan race".³³ Conti Rossini's com-

27 Conti Rossini quoted in Camilleri and Fusari (2022, p. 210).

28 Camilleri and Fusari (2022, pp. 222–223); my translation.

29 De Donno (2019, p. 210).

30 Conti Rossini quoted in De Donno (2019, p. 211).

31 Conti Rossini quoted in De Donno (2019, p. 212).

32 De Donno (2019, p. 213).

33 De Donno (2019, p. 321).

promised position is most clearly articulated in an article he published in September 1935, which appeared in an influential and highly prestigious cultural journal, *La Nuova Antologia*, to which major Italian intellectuals and writers often contributed pieces. This journal became instrumental in providing cultural capital and social authority for the fascist project. Conti Rossini's article was entitled "L'Etioopia è incapace di progresso civile" or "Ethiopia is incapable of civilised progress", and it was written as a "scholarly" justification for the invasion of Ethiopia that would take place only a month later. In it, we see the further fascistisation of his thought compared to his earlier work, which had supported Sergi's Eurafrican theory of a common racial origin for Italians and East Africans.

His argument rehearsed a series of standard racialising interpretations of Ethiopian inferiority. For a long time, European scholars had elevated Ethiopia above other African countries for having an ancient written tradition related to religion that distinguished it from other cultures of sub-Saharan Africa. But Conti Rossini sought to downplay even this supposed index of "progress" by saying that Ethiopian writing had remained static and virtually unchanged since the fourth century. Throughout the whole piece, Conti Rossini paints a picture of Ethiopia in terms of lack, whose culture is derivative and incapable of autonomous evolution, and dependent on foreign influence in order to progress. He briefly mentions the *Hatäta*, arguing that

the only philosophical text that was the gem of Abyssinian literature [...] was demonstrated by myself to be a falsification by an Italian monk, who through an Ethiopian form vented his feelings exacerbated by the isolation of his mission and his bitter religious scepticism.³⁴

He is scathing about the *qəne*, Ethiopian poetry, denouncing it as nebulous and deliberately obscure. Conti Rossini identifies two reasons for Ethiopia's supposed inability to achieve cultural progress. The first, he says, is ethnic, and here he is reprising the ideological process initiated by fascism of "blackening" the ethnic perception of Ethiopians in order to give a racial justification to Italy's civilising mission. He says that despite speaking Semitic languages, Abyssinians are not Semitic but "undoubtedly of Cushitic race. Now, no branch of this race, from the origins of the world up to this day, has been able to elaborate a satisfactory level of civilisation on their own".³⁵

The second reason behind Ethiopia's supposed backwardness is historical. Conti Rossini dwells much on the Ethiopians' supposed "savagery" and barbarism, which he links to their pursuit of war and banditry through the ages, again to un-

³⁴ Conti Rossini (1935, p. 172); my translation.

³⁵ Conti Rossini (1935, p. 174).

derscore the need for Italian intervention to bring civilisation to the country. He mentions atrocities committed by Ethiopian troops during various wars of conquest and the persistence of slavery even under Haile Selassie's modernising regime. Italian fascism set up a prodigious propaganda machine that justified the invasion on the basis that Ethiopia was barbaric and still practised slavery, and Conti Rossini lent his "expert opinion" to support this ideological aim. Even the fact that Ethiopians were Christians was not enough to redeem them in the eyes of the new Italian colonisers; according to Conti Rossini, this was corrupt Christianity, because marriage was not always blessed by the priest, and Ethiopians followed the practice of "temporary marriage" or *dāmoz*. He concludes the 1935 article with an explicit justification for the invasion:

We are given to believe that only a constant, wise, substantial external intervention could durably correct and eliminate contrary factors, extract the good qualities from the Abyssinian population, currently weighed down by the negative ones, and to obtain from the country what civilisation in the rest of the world has a right to demand.³⁶

Given the heightened political atmosphere and the fact that Italy's fascist government was actively calling on academics and scientists to provide a "scientific" and rational basis for the invasion, it is not surprising that Conti Rossini showed his ideological cards in such an explicit way. In his speech of 8 March 1934 at the National Council for Research (CNR) plenary assembly, the CNR president Guglielmo Marconi had invited Italian science to mobilise with the aim of building an empire. As Roberto Maiocchi writes, "The most responsive scientists to the regime's call were those who had already had some experience in the colonies and were now taking the new climate as a good chance to spread the public recognition of their work".³⁷ Maiocchi cites the example of Professor Edoardo Zavattari, an expert in the biology of the colonies, especially Libya, and a supporter of Mussolini's theories of race. He stressed the primary importance of scientific research for achieving the colonial conquest: "Once the occupation and the military operations are through, the colonial conquest is an exclusively scientific and mainly biological problem".³⁸ Zavattari believed that a "conquered country" had to be cognitively mapped and thoroughly researched in order for the military occupation to be ultimately successful. "Every country's history of colonial endeavours is painfully full of tragic examples where the wrong assessment of an apparently minor biological factor led to massive disasters". He was convinced that "colonial conquest is an ex-

³⁶ Conti Rossini (1935, p. 177); my translation.

³⁷ Maiocchi (2015, p. 127).

³⁸ Zavattari quoted in Maiocchi (2015, p. 128).

quisitely, exclusively scientific problem and, as such, it must be assigned to the experience and competence of technicians and scientists”.³⁹ Scientists and scholars were expected to follow hot on the heels of military officials in order to complete the full colonisation of the occupied territory; without them, there was a real risk of failure. Italian Orientalism had played a significant role in the discursive shaping of the East African subject since its inception, showing “how philology, race, and religion were used to study the Italian colonial subjects”.⁴⁰ Now, these theories had decisively borne their fruit in colonial policy. This was the prevailing climate in which scientific debates around the language, history, peoples, and territory of Ethiopia in 1935 need to be placed.

Conti Rossini and the *Ḥatāta*

Given the steadfastly colonial views held by so many of his peers at the time, which were due to the political pressures of Mussolini’s regime, one might ask whether Conti Rossini’s explicitly racialising account of Ethiopian history could be interpreted as more of a contingent and strategic stance than a long-held belief. But as I discuss below, I would answer in the negative; Conti Rossini’s views predate the febrile jingoism of Italy’s last colonial war to conquer Ethiopia.

In fact, Conti Rossini’s refutation of the authenticity of the *Ḥatāta* predates the 1930s. His influential article on the *Ḥatāta* was actually published in 1920, and it had been preceded by another one in 1916 that cast doubt on its Ethiopian authorship. Both articles were undeniably based on his immense knowledge of Ethiopia and its languages, and on his careful reading of Giusto da Urbino’s work and letters. However, if we take a closer look, the 1920 article reveals striking connections with his later propaganda piece published in the *Nuova Antologia* and unveils a clearly orientalist interpretation of Ethiopia’s societal and cultural evolution.

At the beginning of the 1920 piece, he says:

Ideas like those of Zar’a Yā’qob are not of the sort which one would have expected in Ethiopia, where blind faith and the Byzantinism of interpretations of Scripture seemed to place an insurmountable barrier against free thinking, whose blossoming there we could scarcely even imagine.⁴¹

³⁹ Zavattari quoted in Maiocchi (2015, p. 128).

⁴⁰ De Donno (2019, p. 207).

⁴¹ Conti Rossini (1920, p. 213). Translated by Cantor (unpublished).

He thus considered it to be improbable for the *Ḥatāta* to be a work of Ethiopian philosophy because it did not fit with his teleological view that human abstract thought progressed along a linear temporal axis. This position was clearly based on a Eurocentric model of philosophical development that he applied uncritically to the text; arguably, it has become invisible in his thinking due to Conti Rossini's huge influence in the field of Ethiopian studies. This position does not in itself disprove his contention that the text was a forgery, though it is certainly evident that his interpretation is profoundly shaped by the paradigmatic preconceptions he applies to his reading of it. In other words, it is perhaps time to "provincialise" Conti Rossini and situate his work in a more historical dimension than has hitherto been done, shaped as it was by the political and cultural forces that were characteristic of his epoch and of colonialist preconceptions about race and human development.

In his 1920 essay, he argues that the *Ḥatāta* was a forgery produced by the Italian monk Giusto da Urbino:

Characteristic of Father Giusto were his enthusiastic attachment to Abyssinia and his fervent love for the Ethiopian language. "Abyssinia is better than Europe; Begemder is worth more than Italy", he wrote on 17 February 1850 from Gondar. And on 26 October he wrote from Ifāg: "Abyssinia is superior to Italy in barbarism and in humanity, in despotism and in freedom".⁴²

In actual fact, Father Giusto was articulating an opposing position to that of Conti Rossini towards Ethiopia: where the latter ascribed only savagery and despotism to Ethiopia, Father Giusto also ascribed humanity and freedom to it.

These statements may have played a role in helping to persuade Conti Rossini that Father Giusto was the actual author of the manuscript. Namely, that he was so enamoured of Ethiopia that he chose to express himself in its literary form and language to convey his innermost feelings of dissatisfaction with the monastic order to which he was attached and with the institutionalised religious system of which he was a member. This is the first reason that Conti Rossini gives for his conviction that Father Giusto was the real author of the manuscript. The second reason Conti Rossini believed that the text was by Father Giusto was that he relied on witnesses and informants in Ethiopia who told him that the text had actually been written by the Italian missionary. In the article, Conti Rossini cited the testimony of the Catholic Abyssinian priest Täklä Haymanot, who argued that the *Ḥatāta* had in fact been written by Father Giusto and that it had been fictitiously attributed to Uorché [Wärqē] (another name for Zār'a Ya'āqob):

⁴² Conti Rossini (1920, pp. 215–216). Translated by Cantor (unpublished).

Indeed he [i. e., Father Giusto] was very learned, he knew the commentary of the Scriptures and the philosophical doctrine; moreover, he had learned the Amharic language and the Ethiopic one in a short time, to the point of composing religious hymns.⁴³

The third reason Conti Rossini gives for believing the text to be a forgery rests on the historian Dipesh Chakrabarty's idea that the colonising force has always written the history of the colonised peoples, almost as if history is not perceived to exist before the arrival of colonialism.⁴⁴ This notion of history as a European discipline that needs to be decolonised is relevant to understanding how Conti Rossini reached his conclusion that the text was a nineteenth-century Italian forgery. In his book *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Chakrabarty examines how the developmental narrative has been imposed upon the historical interpretation of India. He remarks that applying Western historiographical models to India's past is an imperialist act in and of itself; this resonates with Zavattari's idea that scientists and scholars had to complete the work of colonisation begun by military conquest. This position is complicit, in disturbing ways, with the preconceptions and presuppositions of development studies, namely, that third-world countries are supposedly following the developmental schema of European nations. Chakrabarty engages with the ways in which we study concepts of "political modernity" when applied to the Global South, which includes many formerly colonised territories. He observes that it is impossible to speak of these concepts without invoking the intellectual and theological traditions of Europe. The social sciences and humanities as they developed in Europe posited the existence of a "universal and secular vision of the human". Chakrabarty argues that social scientists and historians tend to engage exclusively with a Western intellectual and historiographical tradition without attempting to historicise their thought, and without placing it within a specifically *European* context. Chakrabarty believes it is imperative to "provincialise Europe", which means questioning the epistemological and philosophical universals that subtend contemporary academic practice and theory. He argues that if we pay closer attention to the histories of non-European regions, then two notions are being challenged: firstly, the idea of historicism, namely, that to understand the past of a region or a nation, it has to be seen both as a unity and in its historical development. The second notion that is challenged is the idea of European universalism, an invisible positioning that runs throughout much of Western thought, although he also concedes that the very idea of a "Western" or "European" intellectual tradition (supposedly stretching back, uninterrupted, to pre-Socratic philosophy) is a problematic "fabri-

⁴³ Quoted in Conti Rossini (1920, p. 218). Translated by Cantor (unpublished).

⁴⁴ Chakrabarty (2000).

cation” originating in “relatively recent European history”.⁴⁵ Instead, he proposes “provincialising Europe” as a way of furthering anticolonial thinking: “the Europe that modern imperialism and (third-world) nationalism have, by their collaborative venture and violence, made universal”.⁴⁶

Chakrabarty critiques the dominant “version of a stagist theory of history—ranging from simple evolutionary schemas to sophisticated understandings of ‘uneven development’”.⁴⁷ He thus questions the use of Western modes of historical writing to retrieve and record India’s past, premised as they are on Western historical notions of time, linearity, and progress. Instead, he argues, we need to focus more on retrieving pre-colonial or pre-modern modes of recording the past, as this can help decolonise how historians write about the past.

These kinds of retrieval projects, such as the one outlined by Chakrabarty in relation to India, involve rethinking a new approach to temporality. They can offer significant insights when studying the evolution of thought in other non-European contexts such as Ethiopia. Questioning the Western temporal schemas used in conceptualising and making sense of the past makes it possible to consider the hypothesis that the *Ḥatāta* was a visionary text written by a seventeenth-century Ethiopian philosopher. It is relevant to think about Chakrabarty’s call to decolonise and provincialise Indian history, because in many ways Ethiopian studies in Italy in Conti Rossini’s time were premised along this Orientalist model of philology rather than the anthropological approach adopted for the study of other African regions. As Marco Demichelis has argued,

Italian Orientalism and European Orientalism in general have inserted Ethiopian studies not so much within an anthropological context, but rather one that is more anchored to history and philology, utilizing the same method of analysis as that applied to the Near and Middle East.⁴⁸

As can be seen from his comment, there is a hierarchy of scholarly approaches to Africa; philology is implicitly premised on a higher consideration of cultures such as Ethiopia that possess a written tradition and a literary-historical past that goes

⁴⁵ Chakrabarty (2000, p. 5). Lucy Allais persuasively argues that the very idea of “Western Philosophy” is problematic in the context of debates around decolonising African philosophy, since leaving it unchallenged “cedes too much conceptual ground as property of the West” (2016, p. 544). I thank Lea Cantor for this excellent gloss on Chakrabarty’s claims and for pointing me to Allais’ text.

⁴⁶ Chakrabarty (2000, p. 20).

⁴⁷ Chakrabarty (2000, p. 9).

⁴⁸ Demichelis (2012, p. 111); my translation.

back centuries. Anthropology, by contrast, has been used to analyse societies and countries primarily based on oral cultures and non-state-based political traditions.

One activist intellectual who was a dedicated and committed lover of Ethiopia and who spent the latter half of her life defending and supporting the country against the ideological and material attacks of Italy, was Sylvia Pankhurst. Her 1955 book *Ethiopia: A Cultural History*, was destined for a popular audience. She dedicates an entire chapter to the *Ḥatāta*, but there is no trace in her book of any awareness that this was a forgery. Pankhurst's writings on Ethiopia were all devoted to restoring and enhancing its civilisational image in the context of hostile Italian propaganda around the time of the invasion in 1935. The broadsheet she began producing in May 1936 to support Ethiopia, *New Times and Ethiopia News*, carried frequent articles about the significance of the Ethiopian cultural tradition, highlighting its long history, its development of an autonomous thought, and its embrace of progress through Haile Selassie's concerted efforts to make Ethiopia into a modern country. In an opposite move to Conti Rossini's, she finds the *Ḥatāta* a shining example of Ethiopia's cultural originality and global significance due to the forward-thinking ideas contained in Zār'a Ya'əqob's thought. For example, she remarks: "It has been said of him [Zara Yacob] that at the time of the Thirty Years War he uttered thoughts which did not become current in Europe till the rationalist period in the eighteenth century".⁴⁹ In another passage, we read:

The Darwinian theory had not yet been formulated; the Ethiopian sage had not Darwin's scientific training, nor had the studies of successive generations, on the basis of which Darwin formulated his theory of evolution, yet been achieved in any part of the world. The Ethiopian sage could therefore proceed no further in that field of meditation than the opinion: "After all, there must be a Creator, for if there were no Creator there were no creatures".⁵⁰

Towards the end of the chapter on the *Ḥatāta*, Pankhurst advances an explanation of why this text left no traces of its reception or dissemination at the time of its writing. She explains that Zār'a Ya'əqob

did not disclose to their neighbours that his belief was somewhat different from his own. Had he done so in that disturbed and distracted period when Ethiopia was torn by religious factions, some at least of them would, he feared, have persecuted him. Zara Yacob was a forerunner of the modern thinkers who declare the essential unity of all religions. He tested the value of a person's religious faith by its effect on his conduct towards his neighbour; if it inspired him to show brotherly love for his fellows and tolerance of their opinions then

⁴⁹ Pankhurst (1955, p. 359).

⁵⁰ Pankhurst (1955, p. 361).

his religion was beneficial; it was injurious if it impelled him to hatred and persecution of the adherents of other faiths.⁵¹

Pankhurst's position is of course inconclusive, but it is worth considering alongside Conti Rossini's much more well-known pronouncement on the text. Pankhurst's belief in the cultural autonomy and self-development of Ethiopia was based on her activism in favour of the country and her close connections to many Ethiopians, including the members of Haile Selassie's royal family. She came to know Ethiopia even better when she moved there permanently in 1956, on the invitation of the emperor Haile Selassie. During the period of the invasion, her broadsheet firmly proclaimed Ethiopia's superior civilisation in contrast with Italy's violent barbarism in invading an independent sovereign state that was a member of the League of Nations.

The debate around civilisation gains particular prominence in a letter by an anonymous "Ethiopian Student" entitled "My Country" (16 Jan. 1937), originally published in *Giustizia e Libertà*, the anti-fascist weekly of the Italian political activist Carlo Rosselli, and then re-published in Pankhurst's broadsheet *New Times and Ethiopia News*. In this essay, the student declares Ethiopian solidarity with the Republican Brigades in Civil War-era Spain. But he also refutes the suggestion that it is more worthy to sustain the Spanish than the Ethiopian cause, because Ethiopia is perceived as a backward, feudal country, whereas "In Spain, on the contrary, they are fighting for us". The student refutes this passionately—"We shall not be unjust to Spain, by being just to Ethiopia". He then embarks on a discussion of the meaning of "civilisation"; is it really true, he asks, "that Africa, and more especially Ethiopia, has nothing to offer civilization?" He argues that on the contrary, Ethiopia is "a civilization, independent, of long standing, capable of evolving".⁵² His analysis of Italy is perceptive, as he recognises that it is a relatively new "modern nation", whose progress only began in the late nineteenth century.⁵³ He then proceeds to give a new definition of civilisation, which is premised on what seems to be a neo-humanist mode of reasoning emerging out of anticolonial discourse, though he claims to derive it from the "great modern thinkers of Europe": "Civilization is consciousness of the universality of the human race".⁵⁴ In relation to this notion of civilisation, he also gives a definition of barbarism: "The barbarians are those peoples who only believe in the irrational power of their own particular

⁵¹ Pankhurst (1955, p. 365).

⁵² An Ethiopian Student (1937, p. 1).

⁵³ An Ethiopian Student (1937, p. 3).

⁵⁴ An Ethiopian Student (1937, p. 3).

race. The civilised are the people who believe in universal principles".⁵⁵ This conclusion seems eminently applicable to fascist Italy and the Racial Laws it began to enact in 1937, precisely in the year the Ethiopian Student's article was published in *New Times and Ethiopia News*.

Conclusion

Conti Rossini's colonial historicism denied any organic evolution to Ethiopian culture and thus laid the foundation for his argument that the *Ḥatāta* was a forgery. To what extent this hypothesis is actually the product of his own biases will never be known, but some conclusions may be drawn. Outside of the field of Ethiopian studies in which his interpretation became influential, in the field of anticolonial activism, Sylvia Pankhurst sought to prove the opposite; that indeed Zär'a Ya'əqob was a prime example of a civilisation that was much superior to fascist Italy and thus deserved its freedom from colonial rule. Contextualising the *Ḥatāta* within a history of anticolonial struggle around Ethiopia also allows us to predate slightly the recuperation of this text within the history of decolonisation, to the late 1930s and 1950s, before the advent of Third-Worldism in the 1960s. In fact, it could be said that Father Giusto da Urbino himself is a forerunner of the antiracist Italian strand of thought that sought to elevate Ethiopia: he valued this old Ethiopian text so much for its intellectual value that he made an effort to transcribe it and preserve it for future generations.

55 An Ethiopian Student (1937, p. 3).



Section 2 **Philosophy**

Peter Adamson

Chapter 7

The Place of Ethiopian Philosophy in the History of Philosophy

Abstract: This chapter situates the *Ḥatāta* of Zār'a Ya'āqob—and Ethiopian philosophy more generally—within the larger context of Eastern Christian philosophy. It identifies several recurring themes and features of philosophy in Eastern Christian literature across linguistic and confessional boundaries. These include the production of translations, especially of originally Greek sources; a penchant for “popular” philosophical material, often encouraging an ascetic way of life; and the deployment of philosophy in the apologetic context of interreligious debate. It concludes by arguing that the rationalism of the *Ḥatāta* is therefore no obstacle to situating it within Ethiopian philosophy.

A pragmatically necessary, though often lamented, task for historians of philosophy is the division of their subject into chronological and cultural parts. Even such familiar designations as “mediaeval philosophy” have given rise to objections or debates about periodisation. In the case just mentioned, some scholars have proposed the idea of a “long middle ages” that might include much of late antiquity and all of the “Renaissance”.¹ It is also an open question whether “mediaeval philosophy” is an apt category for thinkers outside of Latin Christendom. Such discussions, salutary though they may be, often seem to proceed on the basis of an unspoken, and it seems to me mistaken, assumption: that there is just one best way to categorise a given author. Brief reflection should show that this assumption is questionable. Consider, say, Christine de Pizan: to classify her as a late mediaeval philosopher, or a Renaissance philosopher, or for that matter, a feminist or Italian-French philosopher, would be to express alternative, illuminating perspectives on her works. This holds true at larger scale, too. To take a very different example, the African-American leftist thinkers active around the time of World War Two may legitimately be placed under the heading of socialist, American, or Africana philosophy.

¹ A vocal proponent of this view is John Marenbon, as in his two unpublished papers “When was Medieval Philosophy?” (2011) and “Shallow Periodization and the Long Middle Ages” (2018), both available online.

In this paper, I want to apply this point to a still more extensive block within the history of philosophy: Ethiopian philosophy up to the time of Zär'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Həywat. It seems to have a degree of unity, thanks not just to geography but also linguistic, cultural, and religious factors. So, one could simply think of “Ethiopian philosophy” as an autonomous part of the history of philosophy and study it in its own terms. But if we wish to place it within some larger classificatory scheme, where would it go? An obvious approach, and one I have adopted elsewhere together with Chike Jeffers, is to treat Ethiopian philosophy as part of the still larger story of African (or rather *Africana*) philosophy.² I remain convinced that this approach is a valid one. Clearly, an explanation is needed as to why, say, Hubert Harrison (he was one of those African-American socialists) and the *Ḥatāta* ascribed to Zär'a Ya'əqob should be studied within a single historiographical enterprise. Such an explanation can be given. It might take its start from the observation that early modern Ethiopia was faced by the incursion of the Portuguese, an early example of the European colonialism that later created the conditions that produced the thought of a man like Harrison.

Here, though, I want to explore an alternative context for understanding Ethiopian philosophy, which I will call “Eastern Christian philosophy”. What I mean by this is philosophy that emerged in the numerous cultures in and around the Eastern Roman empire. We might date its start roughly around the fall of the Western empire, and take as early examples the production of philosophical works emanating from the context of the Platonist school of Alexandria. This would include commentators who wrote in Greek, like Philoponus (d. 570s) and Simplicius (d. 560). But we should also think of Sergius of Resh'ayna, whose works brought the Alexandrian project into the Syriac language, and of David the Invincible, who did the same for Armenian at around the same time.³ One reason to begin from the sixth century is that it marks the split between Eastern Christian philosophy and its Western counterpart. In this period, Boethius (d. 524/525) was doing more or less the same kind of work as Sergius and David but in Latin. Thereafter, Latin “mediaeval philosophy” developed under very different conditions from the traditions in the East. One notable difference was that thinkers of Latin Christendom were only distantly confronted by the political, religious, and intellectual challenge of Islam, whereas thinkers living further East dealt with Muslims more directly, and often lived among them.

2 Adamson and Jeffers (forthcoming, Chapters 7–9).

3 For early Syriac philosophy, see Brock (1993), Hugonnard-Roche (2004), Watt (2010), Villey (2014), and Arzhanov (2019). For David, see Calzolari and Barnes (2009); for Armenia more generally, see Thomson (1987).

Furthermore, after the time of Boethius, Latin mediaeval thinkers (with occasional exceptions, like John Scotus Eriugena, d. after 870) ceased reacting directly to Greek philosophy, whereas in Eastern Christianity command of Greek remained common. This was most obviously the case in Byzantium, where philosophers in Constantinople like Michael Psellos (d. after 1081) and Anna Komnene (d. ca. 1153) saw themselves as simply carrying on the tradition of ancient thought, and in the same language: Attic Greek. Scholars of Christian populations, often working within a monastic context, undertook the translation of Greek texts into their own language, or the language of their patrons. Thus, we find such texts being rendered into the languages of Eastern Christianity: Syriac, Georgian, Armenian, Arabic, Coptic, and of course Gəʿəz. This phenomenon of translation is the first of several shared features between Ethiopian philosophy and other Eastern Christian traditions, commonalities that I will sketch in what follows. By way of conclusion, I will propose that placing Ethiopian philosophy within the wider context of Eastern Christian philosophy may help us understand Zär'a Ya'ə-qob's *Ḥatäta*.

1 Translation

In the five volumes by Claude Sumner (1974–1978) that remain fundamental to the study of Ethiopian philosophy, all the texts studied apart from writings ascribed to Zär'a Ya'ə-qob and Wäldä Ḥəywat are translations into Gəʿəz. Sumner covers the *Physiologus*, a symbolic bestiary based on Greek, and two works that were originally Greek but rendered from Arabic versions, *The Life and Maxims of Secundus* and the *Book of the Wise Philosophers*. I will have more to say below about the fact that these three texts may all be considered “popular” philosophical works. For now, let us reflect on the more basic fact that they are, indeed, translations. While it has been taken as a “defect” of Ethiopian literature that it is “for the most part a literature of translations”,⁴ this very feature allows us to connect Ethiopian philosophy to philosophy in other Eastern Christian cultures. This is especially so given that Sumner’s influential collection of texts only barely scratches the surface of the translations made from Greek and Arabic into Ethiopic.⁵ While the majority of texts translated in Ethiopia are religious in character, Sumner’s selection certainly does not exhaust the works that are of evident philosophical in-

4 Harden (1926, p. 20).

5 A number of studies on this topic have been produced in recent years by Alessandro Bausi (e.g., Bausi 2014; 2018; 2020).

terest. Consider for instance the short treatise called *On the One Judge* which is included in the recently unearthed “Aksumite collection” of Gəʿəz translations from late antique models.⁶ This is a work of philosophical theology, which draws on the Platonist tradition—as when it says that god makes visible things as images of invisible models, or describes the soul as immaterial and intellective in nature—and which stresses the power of human reason to discern the nature of God and His relation to the created world.

As for translations elsewhere in the Eastern Christian world, I have already mentioned the fact that philosophy was received in the Caucasus in late antiquity, thanks to David the Invincible. He wrote commentaries on Aristotle’s logic that are extant in both Greek and Armenian. We are told that he also translated Plato, and there are indeed some extant translations of Plato into Armenian though it is disputed whether they come from the time of David or from the eleventh century.⁷ Later on and in the same region of the world, the Georgian philosopher Ioane Petritsi got in on the act.⁸ His dates are unclear, as he may have lived in the late eleventh or late twelfth century. Especially if the earlier dating is correct, his project could reflect a wave of enthusiasm for Neoplatonism that rippled through Constantinople in the eleventh century, as we can see from the work of Psellos and his student John Italos (d. 1082). That project was to translate and comment upon the *Elements of Theology*, a work by the pagan philosopher Proclus (d. 485), which sets out Platonism as a deductive system on the model of Euclid’s *Elements*.

As remarkable as these developments are, they pale in comparison to the efforts devoted to translating Greek philosophy into Syriac and Arabic. It is right to put stress here on the Syriac translations, since these preceded those into Arabic and thus gave the Graeco-Arabic translators an intellectual and philological “head start” in their undertaking.⁹ Syriac is after all a Semitic language, like Arabic (and Gəʿəz), so translating from Greek into Syriac could be seen as a significant step towards an Arabic version. In fact we know that some translators produced a Syriac version from Greek (the hard part), with this version then being rendered into Arabic (the easy part). This is a practice we can connect to the circle of Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq (d. 873), a specialist in the translation of Galen whose son, Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn (d. 911), focused on philosophy, especially Aristotle. They were Christians of Syrian extraction but active in Iraq. The same goes for the translators gathered around the Muslim philosopher al-Kindī (d. after 870), who at the behest of the

6 Bausi (2021).

7 My thanks to Michael Papazian for information on this. See also Calzolari and Barnes (2009, pp. 18–19).

8 Gigineishvili (2007); Alexidze (2009); and Nutsubidze, Horn, Ostrovsky, and Grigorii (2014).

9 On the translation movement, a good place to begin is Gutas (1998). See also D’Ancona (2005).

elite of ‘Abbāsid society rendered into Arabic works by Aristotle, Plotinus, Proclus, and others.

The reputation of Christians as experts in philosophy continued into the tenth century, when a group of thinkers known in modern scholarship as the “Baghdad school” dominated the study of Aristotelianism in Arabic.¹⁰ There is a telling remark from the historian al-Mas‘ūdī, reflecting on what he sees as a stagnation in philosophical culture in the tenth century: “in those days, I do not know of anyone to whom one could have recourse for [philosophical instruction], apart from one Christian in Baghdad, known as Abū Zakariyyā Ibn ‘Adī”.¹¹ Usually referred to by scholars as Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī (d. 974), he was yet another translator (from Syriac, not directly from Greek) and commentator who devoted himself to Aristotle but, as we will see below, also wrote Christian apologetics. The modern-day reader is apt to be perplexed by al-Mas‘ūdī’s judgement, firstly because the tenth century was in fact quite a vibrant time for philosophy and secondly because Ibn ‘Adī’s own colleague al-Fārābī (d. 951), a Muslim thinker also associated with the Baghdad school, has gone down in history as one of the great Aristotelian thinkers not just of his own time but of Islamic history as a whole.

Still, the remark goes to show that in wider Muslim society there was a strong association made between Greek philosophy (which even went by the word *falsafa*, obviously derived from Greek) and Christianity. The same story is told by a more hostile engagement with the Baghdad school, more specifically Abū Bishr Mattā (d. 940), the putative founder of that school and the teacher of both Ibn ‘Adī and al-Fārābī. He was humiliated when he got involved in a public dispute with the grammarian al-Sīrāfī (d. 979).¹² It becomes clear in a report of this debate that al-Sīrāfī joined polemic against the study of logic with polemic against Abū Bishr’s faith. For example, he mockingly noted that expertise in logic had not stopped Abū Bishr from believing in the contradictory idea that God is both one and three. Arguably, it was only with Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, d. 1037) that philosophy stopped being seen as a distinctively “Christian” activity, albeit one that Muslims could also pursue. This was entirely reasonable, since so many of the scholars who had been responsible for the initial reception of Greek thought in Arabic, both as translators and commentators, were Christians.

The foregoing should make clear how well the Ethiopian “literature of translations” fits into the broader picture of Eastern Christian philosophy. In all these Eastern cultures, except of course in Byzantium, where translation was not need-

¹⁰ On them, see Endress and Ferrari (2016).

¹¹ Urvoy (2008, p. 63).

¹² Margouliath (1905); Endress (1977); and Adamson and Key (2015).

ed, Greek philosophy was being ushered into local languages, often languages that were used also for liturgical purposes and for the writing and reading of theology. Indeed, it is worth mentioning that Patristic literature was also chosen for translation: a good example is the Pseudo-Dionysius, whose writings appeared in both Syriac and Armenian. Monastic culture provided an institutional context for the continued study of Greek language and literature, hence the connection between translators and monasteries. An example would be George of the Arabs at Qenneshrin, who dealt with Aristotelian logic but also wrote scholia on homilies of the Cappadocian church father Gregory Nazianzus.¹³ The same was true in Ethiopia: the Gə'əz version of the *Physiologus* was probably made by a monk.¹⁴ So, the historical association between Christianity and Greek translations, including translations of highly rationalist philosophical texts, was by no means incidental.

2 “Popular” Philosophy and Asceticism

At this stage, you may have the following worry: while the Ethiopian translations fit nicely into the wider picture of Eastern Christianity, does not that same picture show them at a disadvantage? In all these other languages I have mentioned, translations were made of Aristotle’s logical writings, while advanced treatises like Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* or the *Elements* of Proclus were rendered into Arabic and Georgian and interpreted in these languages. By contrast, the texts studied by Sumner look rather undemanding. They seem to be examples of what is sometimes called “popular” philosophy. In fact such works would, by the standards of most philosophers nowadays, not count as philosophy at all. They offer few if any arguments, and to some extent consist of lists of “wise sayings”, the sort of material you might see on an inspirational coffee cup, not on the whiteboard in a philosophy seminar room. This description applies most straightforwardly to the *Book of the Wise Philosophers*, which compounds our disquiet by ascribing the sagacious quotations to famous Greek figures who did not in fact say them.

The Life and Maxims of Secundus meanwhile consists of two parts. First, a narrative about a scholar named Secundus who secretly seduces his own mother to test the thesis that “all women are whores”, which drives her to suicide when she discovers what she has done, prompting Secundus to take a vow of silence. He holds to this vow even in the face of death-threats from a king. But he does agree to supply this king with a set of written philosophical definitions (“What

¹³ Miller (1993).

¹⁴ Sumner (1985, p. 17).

is the universe?”, “What is the ocean?”, and so on). Here, then, it is the title character who plays the role of the sage dispensing wisdom to a non-specialist audience, represented by the king.

The second part of the text reads like a catechism. Here is an example, just to give a flavour:

What is the human (*ti anthropos*)? Fleshly mind (*nous*), spirited (*pneumatikon*) vessel, sensing (*aisthetikon*) receptacle, toiling soul (*epiponos psyche*), brief dwelling, image of time (*phantasma khronou*), instrument (*organon*) of bones, searcher after life, fortune’s plaything, fleeting good, expense of life, fugitive from life (*phugas biou*), deserter from light, claimed by earth, eternal corpse.¹⁵

As this example shows, the definitions are clearly based on a long philosophical tradition. Here, for instance, we have technical terms familiar from Greek psychology like *psyche*, *nous*, *aisthesis*, and *pneuma*, and we may detect an echo of Empedocles’ statement that he was an “exile” or “fugitive” from the gods (*phugas theothēn*).¹⁶ The very way the definitions are introduced (*ti X?* or *ti esti X?* meaning “what is X?”) also recalls the Platonic Socrates and his search for definitions. Still, the answers are not even close to being a definition by Aristotelian standards, and look more like they may be intended for edifying memorisation by the amateur reader or listener. Something similar might be said for the bestiary in the *Physiologus*, albeit that its intentions are more overtly religious. Indeed this work has been summarised as “an allegorical compilation of pseudo-science in which the descriptions or natures of animals, birds, stones, and fantastic beasts are used to illustrate points of Christian doctrine”.¹⁷

If this sort of thing is not really to your taste, then you are probably not a mediaeval Eastern Christian. While calling such works “popular” may sound condescending, it is accurate at least in the sense that they were indeed widely disseminated and read. The tale of Secundus, for example, was translated from Greek into Syriac, Armenian, Arabic, Latin, Old French, and of course Gəʾəz. The Latin version was then the basis for further translations into Spanish, French, German, and even Icelandic! The *Physiologus* existed in a similar range of languages, and it was also still read in the original Greek in Byzantium.¹⁸ As for the *Book of the Wise Philos-*

¹⁵ My translation from the original Greek, edited in Perry (1964, p. 82). The most recent edition is Heide (2014).

¹⁶ Diels and Kranz (1974 [1903], fr. 115, line 7).

¹⁷ Mermier (2004, p. 20).

¹⁸ For instance, it was a source for the *Chronicle* of Michael Glycas, written around 1170, as mentioned by Treadgold (2013, p. 406). For the multilingual reception, see now Macé and Gippert (2021) as well as Muradyan (2005). The version from Ethiopia was already studied in Hommel (1877).

ophers, Sumner showed that the Gəʿəz version is based on a translation by someone we have already met: the Galen expert and leading light of the Greek-Arabic scientific translation movement, Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq. All of this shows that the choice to render “popular” works into Gəʿəz was not distinctive or disappointingly unambitious relative to the other literary traditions discussed above. To the contrary, it puts these works squarely within the broader picture of translation movements that existed across the diversity of Eastern Christianity in these centuries. (And, to anticipate what I will argue later concerning the *Ḥatāta* of Zārʿa Yaʿaqob, the second *Ḥatāta* ascribed to Wäldä Ḥəywat fits very nicely with the Eastern Christian penchant for “popular philosophy”, given how much of it is given over to aphoristic ethical advice.)

Furthermore, it is not really true to say that these works are philosophically undemanding. While they may not ask the reader to follow complex argumentation, they demand a great deal when it comes to philosophy as a “way of life” by encouraging a regime of strict asceticism. Here, it is worth recalling that the Greek word *philosophia* often referred to a virtuous or abstemious way of living in antiquity throughout the Byzantine era. Thus the *Fountain of Knowledge* of John of Damascus (d. 749) offers a set of definitions of philosophy that includes the Platonic idea of imitating God and also the etymologically-inspired observation that “philosophy” means love of wisdom, but wisdom is God, so that philosophy is love of God.¹⁹ The same attitude was expressed centuries later by Psellos when he equates his mother’s ascetic approach to life with her “philosophy”.²⁰

These attitudes were also found in other language traditions of Eastern Christianity. Stories about heroically ascetic Christians, especially the “desert fathers”, were a popular genre disseminated in many languages: Latin, Syriac, Armenian, Coptic, Georgian, Ethiopic, Arabic, Slavonic, and Sogdian.²¹ Thus the seventh-century Syriac author Isaac of Nineveh told his readers to imitate the discipline of the philosophers, referring to one who “had so mastered the will of the body that he did not deviate from his vow of silence, even under threat of the sword”.²² Isaac was, of course, thinking of Secundus. One might argue that such endorsements of rigorous asceticism were not a typical feature of Eastern Christian philosophy in particular but were found in mediaeval culture more generally. And certainly,

19 See §3 of the translation in Chase (1958). Similar lists of definitions appear elsewhere in the Eastern traditions, as in the Armenian author David the Invincible, as noted by Arevšatyan (1981, p. 38). For the Graeco-Arabic tradition, see Hein (1985).

20 See the translation in Kaldellis (2006, §22a).

21 Young, Aures, and Louth (2004, p. 374).

22 Brock (1984, article II, 10). For more on asceticism in the Syrian tradition, see Vööbus (1958) and Griffith (1998). My thanks to Peter Tarras for the references.

there were ascetic tendencies across the full range of Abrahamic confessions. But there were also important differences. The monastic ideal of chastity, for instance, was not typically admired by Muslims. A good testimony of this fact is a short treatise by the Christian Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī defending the practice and value of chastity, evidently against arguments put against him by Muslim opponents, for instance that a widespread adoption of chastity would lead to depopulation.²³ Tellingly, Ibn ‘Adī replied to this that only a small scholarly and spiritual elite would ever adopt this form of asceticism.

The Gə‘əz works discussed by Sumner clearly reflect the same ascetic ethos. The text that bears this out most obviously is the tale of Secundus, whose narrative portion may look to us like simple misogynist sensationalism but was intended as a sincere reflection on the dangers of sexuality and perhaps of deception. The Gə‘əz version is less sensationalist than the original, because it has been expurgated so that Secundus does not actually have intercourse with his mother but only lies next to her for the night. But the general point remains crystal clear. A fear of women is confirmed in the list of definitions offered by the second part of the work: “woman (*gune*)” is defined in terms of desire and worry as well as a viper, a storm, a war, a burden and a “necessary evil (*anangkaion kakon*)”.²⁴ This is repellent material, no matter how much historical perspective we try to take. But it does need to be understood within the monastic culture in which such works were written, copied, and translated. It was natural that in such a culture, asceticism regarding material luxury would also be a leitmotif. This is well illustrated by Secundus’ “definitions” of wealth and poverty: wealth too is a burden, and something subject to fortune, whereas poverty is a “much hated good (*misoumenon agathon*) and mother of health”, as well as the “discoverer of wisdom”.²⁵

Underscoring the link between asceticism and philosophy, a figure who appears as a kind of ascetic hero in much “popular philosophy” is Socrates. Gnomological collections in Arabic give him extensive attention, with an early example being al-Kindī’s list of the *Sayings of Socrates*. It was, of course, based on material made available through the efforts of his Christian translator colleagues.²⁶ Thanks in part to a conflation between Socrates and Diogenes the Cynic, one that we find also in the *Book of the Wise Philosophers*, Socrates appears in multiple languages

23 Griffith (2006 and 2008) and Druart (2008). For the late ancient background for this issue, see Brown (1989) and Hunt (2012).

24 Perry (1964, p. 84).

25 Perry (1964, p. 88).

26 Adamson (2007). For Socrates in Arabic, see Alon (1991, 1995) and Wakelnig (2019). For Arabic wisdom literature more generally, see Gutas (1981).

as a homeless and destitute, yet happy and virtuous, sage.²⁷ In the latter collection of sayings, we find alongside such various pagan philosophers some anonymous monks who have also learned to take asceticism to heart: be “grateful for a handful of food”, they say, “and always ready to die”.²⁸

Ascetic literature was likewise a fundamental feature of pre-modern Ethiopian literature, which is unsurprising because so much of that literature was produced in a monastic context.²⁹ Ascetic ideas are often, for example, woven into hagiographies of late mediaeval figures like Täklä Haymanot and Samu’el of Wäldäba.³⁰ As in other Christian contexts going back to late antiquity, asceticism often had a political significance: Secundus’ initial defiance to the king is exemplary in this regard. For a real-life example of the same phenomenon from Ethiopia, we might think of the Stephanite movement, whose members shunned contact with the outside world.³¹ Its founder Ḥṣṭifanos (d. 1444) famously refused to prostrate himself before the emperor Zär’a Ya’əqob.³²

Everything we have seen so far—translation, an interest in wisdom literature, and an ascetic ethical stance—comes together in a later work of the Ethiopian tradition: the *Gate of Faith* by Ḥnbaqom.³³ Originally a Muslim and probably from Yemen, Ḥnbaqom came to Ethiopia in 1489 CE and translated several Christian works from Arabic into Gə’əz.³⁴ He fully embraces the relentless asceticism of the earlier texts, saying that Christians are distinguished by their abandonment of this world for the sake of prayer and fasting. Drawing in part on quotations ascribed to pagan sages in previous Gə’əz literature, he quotes Plato, Aristotle, and other Greek figures to confirm Christian doctrine. As I have pointed out elsewhere, there is a remarkable parallel between Ḥnbaqom’s Plato and al-Kindī’s Socrates:

The philosopher Plato said: the first cause is the benevolence moved by pity for all things; the second cause is the idea that is creative of all things; and the third cause is the spirit that makes that life which is the life of all things.³⁵

27 On the confusion between Socrates and Diogenes, see Strohmaier (1974).

28 Sumner (1974a, pp. 138–139).

29 Cerulli (1959); Tadesse Tamrat (1970); Kaplan (1981; 1984); Bausi (2007b). See also Brooh Asmare’s essay (Chapter 8) in this volume.

30 The former is preserved in several versions, on which see Derat (1998). For a translation, see Budge (1906). For the hagiography of Samu’el of Wäldäba, see Colin (2013).

31 Getatchew Haile (1983).

32 See further Binyam Mekonnen’s essay (Chapter 9) in this volume.

33 van Donzel (1969).

34 On Ḥnbaqom, see also Anaïs Wion’s essay (Chapter 2) in this volume.

35 van Donzel (1969, p. 249); my translation from the French.

Socrates used to say: nature is the handmaiden for the soul, soul is the handmaiden for the intellect, and the intellect that of the Creator, because the first thing created by the Creator was the form of the intellect.³⁶

Here, we see both texts fathering the Neoplatonic triad of principles onto much earlier Greek thinkers, with Ἐnbaqom gladly taking the opportunity to see “Plato” as having already anticipated the dogma of the Trinity. But none of this constitutes the main purpose of the *Gate of Faith*. It is, rather, a work of interreligious polemic, in which the author draws on his knowledge of Islam to attack his former faith. In this too, Ἐnbaqom is typical of the Eastern Christian philosophical tradition, as we will see next.

3 Interreligious Debate

We should not simply take for granted the interest that Eastern Christian scholars took in philosophy. In fact the pagan intellectual legacy was often held at a distance. John of Damascus, followed by later Byzantine authors, called it the “outside (*exo*)” philosophy, in contrast to the proper wisdom of the true faith. But, if not usually to the same extent as Psellos and Italos in Constantinople, Christians around the East found something to value about the outside philosophers.³⁷ They accepted that these thinkers had achieved personal virtue, with Socrates being a notable example, as we have seen. Like exegetes in the Latin tradition from Augustine to the Victorines and the scholastics, they also found philosophical tools useful for interpreting the Bible.³⁸ Logic especially was also seen as an important tool for maintaining consistency and providing proper explanations within theology, which is why Aristotelian logic is surveyed among other philosophical topics in John of Damascus’ *Philosophical Chapters*. Even during the so-called “dark ages” of Byzantium, scholars continued to produce at least basic textbooks in Greek on logic,³⁹ and logic was a mainstay of the Syriac tradition. This helps to explain why one of the Syriac translators, a bishop trained at Qenneshrin named George of the Arabs, said, “let no man find fault with philosophy, but with those who make use of it wrongly!”⁴⁰

³⁶ Translation from Adamson and Pormann (2012, *Sayings of Socrates* §27). I mention the parallel and provide further discussion of Ἐnbaqom in Adamson (2022, Chapter 4).

³⁷ See, e.g., Brock (1984, article V).

³⁸ For Syrian examples in the context of the *Hexameron*, see Ten Napel (1983) and Wilks (2008).

³⁹ Roueché (1974).

⁴⁰ Miller (1993, p. 314).

While George was here thinking of the positive use of philosophy to establish morals and doctrine, Christians also frequently “made use” of Hellenic ideas in the context just seen in the case of Ἐნβαጻጻ: apologetics. Again, this is a major genre in literature from Ethiopia, since the Christians there often wrote in the context of defending their faith or attempting to convert those outside that faith. Following the early period of Christianisation, which gave rise to the translation movement mentioned above, there was a long period of rivalry with Islam,⁴¹ and closer to the time of our Zār’a Ya’əqob, with Catholics. Again, hagiographies are often important in this context, not just because the holy figures celebrated represent the best of what this religion had to offer but also because they were often involved in efforts at conversion.

As far as I know, there is no Ethiopian writer who uses Hellenic philosophy as explicitly in the service of apologetics as what we see in an author like Ibn ‘Adī. His aforementioned defence of chastity also falls under this heading, and he also wrote a number of further treatises defending his preferred (Miaphysite) account of the person of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity.⁴² On the latter point, he made use of a formula taken from the Aristotelian commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias to say that God is threefold because He is “intellect, intellecting, and intellected (*‘aql, ‘āqil, ma‘qūl*)”. He also composed a counter-refutation against a refutation of the Trinity penned by someone we have met numerous times, al-Kindī. The latter’s close collaboration with Christian translators did not stop him from polemicising against their beliefs. Aristotelian logic is fundamental to this exchange, with al-Kindī organising his anti-Trinitarian argument in accordance with the logical predicables, and Ibn ‘Adī responding by suggesting that al-Kindī failed to understand both Aristotle and the Christian dogma he was attacking.⁴³

There would be much more to say about the history of interreligious polemic in the Eastern Christian cultures, but for present purposes, it may suffice to observe that this was a natural context to deploy rationalist, and hence philosophical argument. After all, it is no good appealing to interpretations (however contentious) of one’s own Scriptural texts when arguing with an interlocutor who does not accept the legitimacy of those texts. Actually, things are not quite that simple. The aforementioned Ἐνβαጻጻ does discuss the Qur’ān, trying for example to show that the mysterious unjoined letters at the start of some chapters indicate the name of Christ. We see something similar in earlier authors, for example the pat-

⁴¹ On Christian–Muslim relations in Ethiopia, see, e.g., Trimmingham (1952); Cuoq (1981); Ahmed (2009); and Anaïs Wion in this volume (Chapter 2).

⁴² See Périer (1920).

⁴³ Adamson (2020). For the background to the debate, see Schöck (2012; 2014).

riarch Timothy in debate with the caliph al-Mahdī. In that clash between two community leaders, both parties had tried to support their own religion by citing the revelatory texts of their opponent.⁴⁴ Still, generally speaking it was a good tactic to show that one's opponents were being downright incoherent, thus setting rational proof or at least consistency as the measure of tenable religious doctrine. One could use philosophy at least to defend the cogency of one's own religion, as when Christians used such ideas as the Porphyrian theory of individuation to explain the difference between the Persons of the Trinity.⁴⁵

Here, we return to the point made above, that other Eastern Christians had in common with Ethiopian Christians that they either lived within a majority Muslim population or at least had constant dealings with them.⁴⁶ John Meyendorff once wrote that “there was an abyss between the two religions which no amount of polemics, no dialectical argument, no effort at diplomacy, was able to bridge”.⁴⁷ But this was not going to stop some intellectuals from trying. Occasionally, they even suggested that reason could be used to choose the right religious doctrines from a “neutral” perspective, just as it could be used to settle disputes between people already born into different faiths. Thus, to mention one last time the great translator Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, he wrote a treatise on what makes people adopt one religion over another. Sidney Griffith has said of this text, “For Ḥunayn philosophy was a realm of discourse in which Jews, Christians and Muslims could all share”.⁴⁸ While Christian scholars would routinely admit that some aspects of God transcend our understanding, they also thought that rational argument could establish the viability and even the necessity of Christian truth. In short, they accepted the invitation supposedly issued by the Muslim caliph al-Ma'mūn, “let everyone speak who has the wisdom to demonstrate the truth of his religion”.⁴⁹

44 Mingana (1928); Heimgartner (2011).

45 For this example, see Noble and Trieger (2011, p. 381).

46 For examples, see Griffith (1992); Goddard (2000); El Cheikh (2004); Grypeou, Swanson, and Thomas (2006); Keating (2006); Tamcke (2007); and Rassi (2021).

47 Meyendorff (1964, p. 129).

48 In Tamcke (2007, p. 91).

49 Goddard (2000, p. 53).

4 Eastern Christian Philosophy and the *Ḥatāta* of Zār'a Ya'əqob

Now, Zār'a Ya'əqob does not just fit neatly into the pattern described above. The treatise ascribed to him is neither a translation nor a work of popular philosophy but an intellectually demanding and self-consciously original work that embeds philosophical reflection within an autobiographical narrative. Yet the *Ḥatāta* makes a good deal of sense as a *critical reaction* to the historical context and traditional concerns just surveyed. This is most obviously the case when we consider the author's attitude towards asceticism. His attitude may seem to be one of simple rejection, since the text includes several passages that inveigh against the practice of voluntary chastity (Chapters 9, 12, and 19), passages that indeed echo the sorts of argument that Ibn 'Adī was concerned to rebut in his defence of chastity. At one point, Zār'a Ya'əqob even disparages the “ascetic monastic life” (Chapter 9). Of course, this would already make sense as a backlash against the monastic culture that was, as we have seen, important in religious, scholarly, and philosophical literature across Eastern Christianity and in Ethiopia in particular.

But in fact the text's lesson concerning asceticism is more nuanced than this. While it is forthright in rejecting sexual abstinence, it is also structured around a withdrawal from human society: the retreat from the cave, where Zār'a Ya'əqob makes his philosophical breakthrough. The image may bring Plato's *Republic* to mind for philosophical readers, but here the philosopher gains insight by going *into* the cave, not *out of* it. Closer to the mark would be the obvious Islamic precedent: Muḥammad received his first prophetic revelation while meditating in a cave. That story was probably already repurposed in *Ḥayy ibn Yaqqān*, an earlier philosophical narrative by the twelfth century Muslim author Ibn Ṭufayl. Here, the title character's journey of philosophical discovery culminates in a retreat to a cave, where Ḥayy enjoys mystical insights. But for a Christian readership, Zār'a Ya'əqob's retreat would probably recall the example of the late ancient “desert fathers”, albeit that their escape from society was voluntary, whereas Zār'a Ya'əqob's is forced upon him by political circumstance. It may thus be taken as a partial ratification of the age-old Christian ideal of ascetic withdrawal when we read our hero comparing the cave to the “kingdom of heaven” (Chapter 4) and saying “how much more have I understood while living alone in a cave than I understood when I lived with scholars?” (Chapter 15).⁵⁰

50 Abb215 19v. Translated by Zara Yaqob, Walda Heywat, Lee, Mehari Worku, and Belcher (2023, p. 92).

This same quotation brings us to another striking theme of the work, one that may display another reaction to the long tradition of Eastern Christian thought. This is Zār'a Ya'əqob's insistence on "thinking for himself", using his reason or intelligence (*labbuna*) to reach a fuller understanding of God and of morality (especially in Chapter 7, though this is a running theme). This fits rather well with the idea discussed in the previous section of the present paper, whereby rational argument was used to buttress and test religious doctrine. Many an Eastern Christian scholar could have proclaimed, like Zār'a Ya'əqob, to be rejecting scriptural interpretations on the grounds that they are "not in harmony with reason" (Chapter 2). To this, one may object that Zār'a Ya'əqob differs from the earlier Christian authors in two respects. First, he *begins* from reason and uses it to confirm or reject religious ideas, rather than beginning with a received dogma and using reason to defend it. Second, he arrives at a far more radical stance than anyone mentioned so far, by apparently departing from organised religion altogether (Chapter 23). Again, this could be read as a rebuke to the more sectarian tendencies of apologetic writings in Gə'əz.

This aspect of the work is, as far as I know, unparalleled in previous Eastern Christian philosophy. Indeed, it raises the question of whether Zār'a Ya'əqob can be described as "Christian" at all; but I will not wade into the difficult question of how to interpret this aspect of the text. Instead, I want to focus on the first point and deny that Zār'a Ya'əqob is in fact radically different from what had come before in "beginning from reason". This feature of the *Ḥatāta* has sometimes been taken as a basis for comparing its ideas to those of the Enlightenment, and thus for doubting the work's authenticity: for instance, Conti Rossini (who was, not incidentally, an expert on Ethiopian hagiography) suggested that such a work could not have been produced by Ethiopian culture, with its devotion to "blind faith".⁵¹ But in fact plenty of pre-modern thinkers in the Near East and Africa were adamantly opposed to blind faith. There was even an Arabic word for it: *taqlīd*, which may be translated as "uncritical belief". It was often considered an intellectual sin, at least for members of the scholarly class.⁵² Since Muslim and Christian theologians accused one another (and philosophers) of engaging in *taqlīd*, it was all the more important to show that one's beliefs were in accordance with reason. The sort of debate mentioned above, between Ibn 'Adī and al-Kindī, perfectly illustrates this point.

⁵¹ Conti Rossini (1920, p. 214).

⁵² I discuss *taqlīd* at length in Adamson (2022), especially Chapter 1; in Chapter 4 of the book, I briefly suggest its relevance as background for understanding Zār'a Ya'əqob.

In fact, if I had to name one text that is highly reminiscent of the *Ḥatāta*, it would not be a work of the enlightenment or post-enlightenment period. It would not even be a work by a Christian. I have in mind the *Deliverer from Error* of al-Ghazālī (d. 1111).⁵³ Most famous in Western societies as a critic of the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, d. 1037), al-Ghazālī is revered to this day as a great theologian and religious teacher of Islam. Which makes it all the more salutary to notice that his *Deliverer from Error* is starkly opposed to blind faith. Like the *Ḥatāta*, it fuses autobiography with philosophical reflection. Al-Ghazālī tells of how, as a young man, he sought to break free of the bonds of *taqlīd*. In order to do so he relied upon his own judgement, for example, by satisfying himself of the genuineness of Muḥammad’s prophecy. In a particularly striking parallel with Zār’a Ya’aqob (see Chapters 7–8), al-Ghazālī critically observes that adherents of different religions usually just adopt their family’s faith without question, with Jews assuming the doctrines of Judaism, Christians those of Christianity, and so on.

Of course, I do not intend here to suggest that the author of the *Ḥatāta* was influenced by al-Ghazālī. My point is rather that both of them were reacting to the same cultural phenomena I discussed in Section 4. Al-Ghazālī and Zār’a Ya’aqob were faced with cultures of intra-and inter-religious debate.⁵⁴ Both thus emphasised the need to avoid blind faith and elected to depend on the god-given light of reasoning, albeit without moving outside a scriptural frame of reference (hence the extensive use of the Psalms in the *Ḥatāta*). So, for all his irreverence and independence of mind, Zār’a Ya’aqob was being neither innovative nor accurate when he boasted towards the end of his treatise (Chapter 23) that he had inquired into things never explored before.

⁵³ Translated in McCarthy (1980); Arabic edition in Jabre (1959).

⁵⁴ For al-Ghazālī, the intra-religious debate pitted Sunni Islam against the Ismā’īlis, whom he attacks in the *Deliverer from Error*; for Zār’a Ya’aqob, the clash is of course between the Ethiopian Church, the “Copts” (Egyptian Church), and the Catholics of Europe.

Brooh Asmare

Chapter 8

The Dialogue between Zār'a Ya'qob and the Nine Saints

Abstract: Since the publication of Carlo Conti Rossini's "Lo Hatatā Zar'a Yā'qob e il Padre Giusto da Urbino" in 1920, the controversy over the authorship of the *Ḥatātas* has become a topic of debate among Ethiopian as well as Western scholars. These scholars present their arguments from different perspectives, for instance by invoking an eyewitness account (Conti Rossini 1920), calendrical considerations (Getatchew Haile 2006 E.C., 2014), philological considerations (Amsalu Aklilu 1961; Alemayehu Moges 1961 E.C., 1969), and a Colonial Thesis (Daniel Kibret 2011 E.C., 2017; Fasil Merawi and Setargew Kenaw 2020). The findings of their research, however, have gone in diametrically opposed directions. While the perspectives of Conti Rossini and Daniel Kibret favour Giusto da Urbino as the true author of the *Ḥatātas*, the arguments of Amsalu Aklilu and Getatchew Haile favour Zār'a Ya'qob. Both perspectives, however, fail to consider the importance of the cultural history of Ethiopia in providing hints for the ongoing debate on the problem of the authorship of the *Ḥatātas*. This approach is of crucial importance to understanding whether or not the central theme of the *Ḥatātas* has a cultural foundation in Ethiopia. This paper argues that the central theme with which both Zār'a Ya'qob and Wäldä Ḥəyiwät were obsessively concerned—and which they repeatedly and fiercely criticised—is asceticism, which they understood to be the basis of many religious, social, cultural, and economic problems in Ethiopian society. Moreover, identifying this central theme of the *Ḥatātas* will help us trace the genealogy of the authorship problem. The result of this cultural genealogy reveals the *Ḥatātas* to be the product of the dialectic between the inquisitive mind of Zār'a Ya'qob and the established ascetic culture of the country. This, in turn, has implications for the problem of authorship.

Introduction

Scholars who are engaged in the study of the *Ḥatātas* usually concentrate either on the issue of authorship or on analysing the overall content of the works. This chap-

ter adopts a different approach, investigating a central theme of the *Ḥatātas*, that of asceticism, with an eye to its place within the cultural history of Ethiopia.

Indeed, among the different social and religious issues raised by Zār'a Ya'qob and Wäldä Ḥəywät in both *Ḥatātas*, asceticism is of paramount importance and grounds all the others.¹ Asceticism, understood as an ethical path towards achieving a higher Christianity, has traditionally been revered following the arrival of the Nine Saints in Ethiopia. However, it is severely criticised in the *Ḥatātas*, such that we can argue that the *Ḥatātas* were in fact written as a rejection of the established ascetic culture. The primary concern of this chapter is thus to investigate the dialectic between the Nine Saints and Zār'a Ya'qob on the concept of asceticism, between the ideal of Lalibela and the ideal of Aksum, between *gädlät* (hagiographies) and the *Ḥatātas*, between sixth- and seventeenth-century Ethiopia. With regards to the authorship question, its objective is to show that the *Ḥatātas* have deep cultural foundations in Ethiopian asceticism.²

Asceticism arrived in Ethiopia during the late Aksumite period, when Aksum radiated great power in the Red Sea area. This leads us to raise an interesting question: what kind of interaction arose between the new ascetic teachings and the established secular power of Aksum? This chapter probes this interaction, examining the clash between the new asceticism and the established worldly order and how seventeenth-century Ethiopian philosophy responded to it. In interrogating the birth and development of the theme of asceticism that is so central to mediaeval Ethiopia, this chapter can also be taken as a touchstone for a philosophical interpretation of some important dynamics of Ethiopian history.

The Foundational Principle of Social Criticism in the *Ḥatātas*

Philosophy involves critical reflection upon the established thought of a society. My aim here is to identify whether and how Zār'a Ya'qob was engaged in such critical reflection with regards to the Ethiopia of his day. Some such aspects of the social life of his day include: monastic life, mysticism, fasting, celibacy, adultery, unequal-

1 Unless otherwise specified, all translations of the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'əqob* (“HZY”) and of the *Ḥatāta Wäldä Ḥəywät* (“HWH”) are taken from Zara Yaqob, Walda Heywat, Lee, Mehari Worku, and Belcher (2023), with page numbers referring to that translation.

2 I develop this argument in greater detail in my monograph, *Ethiopian Philosophy: An Analysis of the Hatata Zarayaqob and Wolde Hiwot (Yä'itayop'aya Fəlasəfəna: Yäzär'ə'aya'əqobəna Yäwäladä Ḥəywät Ḥätätawoç tənətane)*, published in Amharic in 2018 (2011 E.C.).

ity between men and women, the marginalisation of women during their menstrual period, the undermining of physical labour and material prosperity, and slavery. These were some of the features of society which, according to Zär'a Ya'qob, stood against the laws of nature. All these social problems were prevalent in northern Ethiopian society during the time of Zär'a Ya'qob. The examination of these existential predicaments in Ethiopian society reflects the cultural foundation of the *Ḥatä-tas*. The foundational principle of all these social criticisms is the idea that nature is good, and everything against nature is bad. It is through this ethical principle that Zär'a Ya'qob passes normative judgments upon human actions and societal conventions.

By “nature”, he means everything created by God, including the physical and animal world, the human body and reason. Hence, when Zär'a Ya'qob says that nature is good, he means that this world is a good place to live in prosperity and cheerfulness. To have a spiritual life, therefore, we must not go against our bodily desires, against material gain, against what reason dictates to us and against the laws of nature. This position of Zär'a Ya'qob is thus at odds with the ascetic virtues of poverty, humility, and chastity.

Zär'a Ya'qob's Trinity

It is in Zär'a Ya'qob's trinity of God, Nature, and Reason that we find the metaphysical foundation of his criticism of Ethiopian asceticism. Let us briefly see how he lays his metaphysical foundation.

There are three metaphysical concepts that we find uninterrupted from the beginning to the end of the *Ḥatäta*: God, Nature, and Reason. For Zär'a Ya'qob, there is no one that God chooses, no one to whom he speaks privately, and no one to whom he reveals himself personally. God is equally revealed to anyone who wants to achieve understanding and engage in inquiry. This position of Zär'a Ya'qob leads to an important question: how can we know the will and character of God if he does not send a messenger? Zär'a Ya'qob's answer is very simple and straightforward: nature is God's messenger!

By arguing that God does not send a messenger to reveal his will but rather reveals himself through nature, Zär'a Ya'qob is declaring two things.

First, he is breaking down the old bridge of faith, constructed by the prophets for millennia between God and human beings. It is here that we find Zär'a Ya'qob's epistemological effort to build a new bridge between God and human beings through the intellect, not through faith. This new bridge and the method of constructing it are Zär'a Ya'qob's proposal of a new metaphysical foundation for Ethiopian society. Zär'a Ya'qob argues that the organising principles of society should be

rationally extracted from nature, not from scripture. Hence, human culture and the laws of society should always be in harmony with the laws of nature. He takes nature, not scripture, as the ultimate source of authority for truth and ethics. In other words, Zär'a Ya'qob takes the laws of nature as criteria for measuring ethical, cultural and religious teachings and deeds. It is here that he finds the religious teachings of asceticism in absolute opposition to the laws of nature.

Second, Zär'a Ya'qob conceives of nature as a creation incarnated with God's will. For him, nature is something that we should not undermine or objectify. Rather, we should take the laws of nature seriously and pay special attention to what nature dictates. In what might fairly be called a "pantheist" approach, Zär'a Ya'qob exalts nature to the level of Divinity. Indeed, the abstract God reveals himself neither through scripture nor messengers, but only through nature. For Zär'a Ya'qob, the true "Ark" of God is not the Ark of the Covenant but nature. And the laws of nature, whether moral or physical, are at the same time the laws of God. Unlike Jesus who said: "He who has seen Me has seen the Father", Zär'a Ya'qob says "He who has seen Nature has seen God". He makes nature a slumbering spirit (making nature a visible spirit, and spirit an invisible nature), just as the nineteenth-century German Idealist Schelling does.³

Some scholars, such as Claude Sumner (1978) and Teodros Kiros (2005), have endeavoured to show the methodological similarity between Descartes and Zär'a Ya'qob. But in content, the ideas of Zär'a Ya'qob are much more similar to those of the German Idealists.⁴ Unfolding the inherent relationship between spirit, nature, and reason was the aim of both Zär'a Ya'qob and the German Idealists.

Grounding his philosophical foundation on nature is significant in four ways. First, it satisfies his search for *Universal Truth and Ethics*, since nature is universal. Second, it helps him hold a neutral position between the competing positions in the religious controversies of his age. Third, it forces him to articulate clearly the root cause of contemporary Ethiopian social problems, namely, asceticism, as the arch-enemy of nature. Fourth, it enables him to resolve the metaphysical antagonism that exists between spiritual life and worldly life, soul and body. From this articulation he proposed the idea of a "Reconciled Life" that he embodied in his practical life. The idea of *Metaphysical Reconciliation* holds a central place in Ethiopian philosophy, for it survives Zär'a Ya'qob, remaining an important theme to the present.

³ See Copleston (1963, p. 109).

⁴ Henry Straughan's and Michael O'Connor's essay in this volume (Chapter 12) similarly questions the relevance of comparisons between Zär'a Ya'qob and Descartes. However, they take a different route than I do here, arguing for parallels between Zär'a Ya'qob and Leibniz (rather than the German idealists).

Both Zär'a Ya'qob and Wäldä Həywät express the idea that most Ethiopian social problems emanate from the metaphysical antagonism between God and nature, spirit and matter, soul and body, spiritual life and worldly life—oppositions exacerbated by asceticism. This is the reason why both Zär'a Ya'qob and Wäldä Həywät became very harsh in their criticism of asceticism and ascetics. Let us consider some relevant passages from their respective *Ḥatätas*.

In the *Ḥatäta Zär'a Ya'qob*:

The ascetic monastic life rejects the creator's wisdom, because it prevents conceiving children [and giving birth to them,] and thus destroys the human race.⁵

Also, those who believe that giving up their possessions makes them perfect are drawn toward seeking possessions because of their usefulness. After they give up their possessions, they seek them out again, just as many monks have done in our country [...] Therefore, the monk who disparages the institution of marriage will be ensnared by adultery, other sins of the flesh which are not natural, or evil suffering⁶

Unlike in the other short chapters, Wäldä Həywät allocates more space in Chapter 24 of his *Ḥatäta* to discuss “the uselessness of monastic life”, saying: “Do not be like those fools who declare that marriage is impure; do not praise those who become monks at an early age, for monastic life destroys the order of the creator and opposes the creation of our nature”.⁷ In a striking metaphor, he compares monastic life to the life of a dry withering tree that cannot reproduce.

Why Are the *Ḥatätas* Concerned with Asceticism?

There are two reasons why the *Ḥatätas* are so focused on asceticism. First, as we have seen above, Zär'a Ya'qob finds the religious teaching of asceticism to be in absolute opposition to the laws of nature. For a philosopher who considers the laws of nature as the ultimate standard of measuring truth and ethics, it is not surprising that he gets very angry about religious teachings that oppose nature. Asceticism opposes everything Zär'a Ya'qob considers natural (marriage, nutrition, family life, material gain, women's physiological nature, sensual pleasure). In short, Zär'a Ya'qob finds asceticism to be the arch-enemy of nature.

Second, Zär'a Ya'qob felt the innermost cultural pain of asceticism. In their respective *Ḥatätas*, both Zär'a Ya'qob and Wäldä Həywät mention some of the eco-

5 HZY, p. 76.

6 HZY, p. 84.

7 Sumner (1976a, p. 48).

conomic, social, and political problems caused by asceticism, such as: undermining the value of material prosperity, which discourages hard work and encourages poverty (HZY, Chapters 16 and 19); abandoning family life, becoming a monk at an early age, which encourages chastity and leads women/men to adultery, and leaving parents without support (HZY, Chapter 9, and HWH, Chapter 24); suppressing bodily desires (HZY, Chapters 8 and 9, and HWY, Chapter 24); corrupting political leaders and the wealthy classes with the hypocritical character of ascetics (HZY, Chapters 9 and 12).

Both Zär'a Ya'qob and Wäldä Həywät express their opposition to ascetic culture in strong terms. In their criticism of monastic life they use harsh language that we do not see in their other criticisms. In general, both Zär'a Ya'qob and Wäldä Həywät are aware of the cultural expression of ascetic (anti-natural) teachings in political, economic, and social life. Although Zär'a Ya'qob and Wäldä Həywät do not discuss asceticism within the historical context of the country, the cultural pain of Ethiopian asceticism has a deep historical foundation.

The Coming of the Nine Saints

Religious asceticism, as an ethical path to achieving a higher Christianity, is traditionally understood to have been introduced to Ethiopia during the late fifth century by the Nine Saints who came from the Levant, with their worldview being warmly welcomed by the then Aksumite Emperors. Moreover, in a very short period, the Emperors started making the Nine Saints their political advisors.⁸ After mastering the Gə'əz language, they were sent beyond the city of Aksum to evangelise the Aksumites with the ascetic interpretation of Christianity.

This royal patronage of the Nine Saints had four effects. First, in quantitative terms, it gave asceticism an *expansive power* in the region within a short period of time. Second, it exerted a *penetrative power* on the psyche of the people, such that it became a source of culture and led to the development of an anti-natural, life-negating, and resentment-filled worldview. Third, it made missionary work peaceful. Unlike in Mediterranean Christianity, both Christianity and Christian asceticism had expanded from the top-down in Aksum, i. e., from the Palace to the people. Fourth, it eventually inspired the Nine Saints to come up with the idea of a political project of creating “The Holy Nation” through ascetic teachings, which also continued further to the south in the second monastic movement during the Zag^we and Solomonic periods—propelled by prominent ascetic figures, such

⁸ Sergew Hable Hableselassie (1972, p. 117).

as Täklä Haymanot (the famous thirteenth-century monastic leader, not to be confused with Conti Rossini's eyewitness) and Iyäsus Mo'a.

The permission that the Nine Saints obtained from the emperors to evangelise the Empire with their ascetic version of Christianity is perhaps the first opportunity asceticism has had anywhere else in the world to change an entire nation into an ascetic society. This might have inspired the Nine Saints to have a vision of making the entire nation a "Holy ascetic nation".

From Däbrä Damo to Lalibela

The scaling up of the ascetic mission from religion to state level is clearly shown in the way monasteries were built, the places where the latter were erected, and the parties that participated in it. During the sixth century, monasteries such as Däbrä Damo were built in remote and inaccessible areas, so as not to be contaminated by centres of worldly life. Moreover, these monasteries were built by the ascetics themselves, and conceived of as an architectural extension of the human body.

Following the successful creation of their "Holy ascetic nation", monasteries started being built near cities, giving rise to the construction of the rock-hewn churches and monasteries at Lalibela, the "Ethiopian Jerusalem". A "psycho-architectural" analysis of the churches of Lalibela versus the obelisks of Aksum can help bring into focus the radical cultural transformation which Ethiopia underwent over these eight centuries. The obelisks of Aksum stretch outward into the sky, starting at Mahrem, the god of war. They effectively proclaim, "I the victorious and the lord of the world". This signifies the self-confidence, heroism, superiority, and worldly pride of the Aksumites. The Lalibela churches on the other hand are constructed beneath the surface of the earth, with the cross placed on the top, bowing down to the earth and proclaiming "I the sinner and the unworthy".⁹

Moreover, the direct participation of Emperor Lalibela in the construction of the rock-hewn monasteries, unlike the Aksumite emperors, whose role was limited to encouraging the ascetics' construction of monasteries, signifies a major development in the ascetic mission. This development was further strengthened with the ascetic and mystic literary contributions of Emperor Zär'a Ya'qob (1434–1468) during the Solomonic period. Emperor Zär'a Ya'qob's claim to power and glory seems opposed to ascetic virtues. His heroism, however, is not motivated by secular virtues. Rather, his heroism was founded on the political version of self-denial sacri-

9 Dañačaw Äsäfa (2002 E.C., 2010).

ficing for the protection and consolidation of the ascetic nation, in which his ascetic and mystic literatures were institutionalised.

The Political *Coup d'état* of Ethiopian Asceticism

By the second half of the sixth century, within just half a century, asceticism had grown from individual faith to the culture and worldview of an entire people. We can note two phenomena of that period as evidence for this conclusion.

First, having fallen under the influence of ascetic teachings, it was not long before the emperors started resigning their office to lead an ascetic life. This resignation of political office due to ascetic teaching was initiated by Emperor Ellä Amida II, who warmly welcomed the Nine Ascetics. This continued with successive emperors—Emperor Kaleb, Emperor Gäbrä Mäskäl, and Emperor Ellä Gäbäz—as well as with members of the nobility. Eventually the people began to follow the example of the nobility and the emperors. “From Emperor Kaleb to his grandson, Emperor Akla Wedem’s asceticism was widespread amongst the *mäsafənt* (noblemen by birth) and *mäkwanənt* (noblemen of service)”.¹⁰ The emperors’ resignation repeatedly caused political instability and resulted in their losing control of the South Arabian territory, which they did not attempt to regain.¹¹ Consequently, the greatness of the Aksumites started declining, and organised banditry started to emerge.¹² I call this historical phenomenon “the political *coup d'état* of Ethiopian asceticism”.

Abandoning office and family to lead an ascetic life and achieve a higher Christianity had become fashionable in Aksum starting from the second half of the sixth century. The long Ethiopian tradition that ensued of leaving one’s family to live an ascetic life would be severely criticised in both *Ḥatätas*.

No Aksumite emperor resigned to lead an ascetic life prior to the advent of the Nine Saints. This implies that a new way of viewing the self and the world began to prevail starting from the second half of the sixth century. The power of asceticism lies in its influential teachings of the new self and its new relationships to society and the world:

At the center of ascetical activity is a self who, through behavioral changes, seeks to become a different person, a new self; to become a different person in new relationships; and to become a different person in a new society that forms a new culture. As this new self emerges

¹⁰ Äman Bälay (2009, p. 103).

¹¹ Sergew Hable Hableselassie (1972, pp. 159–160).

¹² Äman Bälay (2009, p. 103).

(in relationship to itself, to others, to society, to the world) it masters the behaviors that enable it at once to deconstruct the old self and to construct the new.¹³

Consequently, following the expansion of asceticism, the Aksumites' long-established secular culture, virtues, and worldviews started to decline. When the Nine Saints ruined the temple of Mahrem, the Aksumites' god of war, and built new monasteries, they were deconstructing the old Aksumite self and replacing it with a new ascetic self along with a new relationship to the world. Accordingly, monasteries became a place where old, non-ascetic Aksumite selves were buried, and new ascetic selves were born. Returning to architecture, consider the transformation of values that the Aksumites underwent: from prizing urban obelisks expressing heroism to preferring remote monasteries expressing detachment from worldly life.

The *telos* of this process of creating new ascetic selves and subjects is the creation of an ascetic society. At this stage,

asceticism functions as a system of cultural formation, and integrating the new selves into a culture occurs at every level of human existence: consciously and unconsciously; voluntarily and involuntarily; somatic and mental; emotional and intellectual; religious and secular.¹⁴

This shows how asceticism developed gradually from an ethical principle of the individual person to a system of cultural formation at societal level.

The second consideration is the rise of the ascetic artistic genius St. Yared (496–571), who lived in Aksum during the missionary works of the Nine Saints and lived as an ascetic in his later life. Indeed, the ascetic teachings of the Nine Saints seduced not only the political leaders but also the Aksumite priests and deacons; St. Yared is a notable example. Asceticism was able to establish a strong cultural foundation in the second half of the sixth century in part because the new ascetic culture was able to create its own musical system through St. Yared. Put differently, the rise of Yared is one of the greatest achievements of asceticism in sixth-century Aksum.

As Friedrich Nietzsche argues in his *On the Genealogy of Morals*, all forms of art must take their creative impulses from the established culture: the artists always lean on the authority of some prior philosophy, morality, or religion. This suggests that an ascetic authority produces ascetic artistic impulses and ascetic artwork. Yared's musical scales—*Gə'əz*, *Ǝzəl*, and *Araray*—are melodies of sorrowfulness and consolation that produce emotions that forcefully propel a per-

¹³ Valantasis (1998 [1995], p. 547).

¹⁴ Valantasis (1998 [1995], p. 547).

son into deep condolences. The title of his composition, *dəgg^wa*, is itself derived from a *Gə'əz* word which means “songs of sadness”.¹⁵ Asceticism finds its source in disappointment with this world, and Yared’s music served the Aksumites as consolation to this disappointment. This musical consolation helped to put the Aksumites in an elongated ascetic hibernation until Zär’a Ya’qob broke with it in the seventeenth century.

After his death, a myth spread through Ethiopian society about the way Yared produced the musical tones that were a symbol of the pervasive ascetic culture in mediaeval Ethiopian society. By the same token, the same ascetic spirit is largely behind all other art and literary works of the mediaeval period, such as hagiographies (*gädlät*).

Asceticism: Aksum’s Consolation

When we say that “asceticism became culture”, this is not to say that asceticism became a mere element of culture alongside another; rather, it became “the fundamental operating ground, just like a computer operating system, on which the particular culture is overlaid and because of which culture can function”.¹⁶ It was in this ascetic system that the denial of the body and resentment of the world became the central organising principle of the Aksumites in politics, religion, literature, and art. Once asceticism became a culture and worldview in which monastic life would be just one element, it could function by itself—until another worldview, such as that of Zär’a Ya’qob, overwhelmed it.

In general, in sixth-century Aksum, a fundamental and pervasive change of values took place—from secular values to ascetic values. This change of values contributed to the Aksumites’ failure to hold on to their power in the Red Sea, which eventually led to the weakening of the Aksumites’ greatness more generally.¹⁷ Starting from the late seventh century, Aksum even stopped minting coins.

Many historians argue that the decline of the Aksumites’ power in the Red Sea area was due to the expansion of Muslim powers in the mid-seventh century. However, Aksum went through more than 100 years of ascetic life before it came into conflict with the Muslims. The decline of Aksum coincided not with the rise of Islam, but with the expansion of asceticism. As Henze argues:

¹⁵ Ashenafi Kebede (1971, p. 42).

¹⁶ Harpham (1987, p. xi).

¹⁷ Äman Bälay (2009, p. 103).

[T]he rise of Islam did not contribute immediately to the decline of the Aksumite Empire, but later when it gained strength. The period of Aksum's decline was a time of continual expansion of the Orthodox Church and consolidation of its doctrine, ritual and organizational structure.¹⁸

Between the arrival of the Nine Saints and the start of Islamic control of the Red Sea, Aksum underwent fundamental changes of values. Its leaders and warlords denounced the things of this world as futile and led ascetic lives in monasteries. The coronation ceremony took on a religious rather than secular orientation.¹⁹ Emperor Kaleb's military expedition to South Arabia was the last heroic expedition of the Aksumites. The ultimate dream of Emperor Gäbrä Mäskäl, son of Emperor Kaleb and close friend of Abba Arägawi—one of the Nine Saints—was to build a monastery in Jerusalem, not to regain his father's South Arabian territory.²⁰

In general, Aksum lost her ideals of heroism long before her confrontation with Islamic powers. The institutionalisation of the ascetic virtues and the change in the Aksumites' metaphysical relation to the world from a secular lifestyle to asceticism coincided with a decline in the valorisation of moral strength and heroism. The ancient Aksumites, however, did not seem to regret their expulsion from the Red Sea by the Muslims. The reason is that even though they had been expelled from the rich Red Sea trade route, they had found a way to live in this world without political domination or economic prosperity: that is, through asceticism. This is precisely because, as Friedrich Nietzsche says, asceticism is to will nothingness from this world.

In this context, asceticism is the spiritual wisdom of living in a state of poverty or of minimal dependence on natural resources. This wisdom, together with Yared's "songs of sadness", became a consolation to Aksum, cut off from its source of wealth.

For Zār'a Ya'qob, a culture born out of the metaphysical antagonism between soul and body is degenerative. A culture which is not balanced between spiritual life and worldly life is degenerative. A spiritual life which is not in harmony with the laws of nature is degenerative. A culture founded on a denial of the laws of nature is not only degenerative but also against the will of God. Zār'a Ya'qob mentions a long list of features of Ethiopian culture which are borne out against the laws of nature, such as monastic life, mysticism, fasting, celibacy, inequality between men and women, the marginalisation of women during their menstrual period, polygamy, slavery, and the undermining of handicraft and material gain. Ev-

¹⁸ Henze (2000, pp. 42–43 and 47).

¹⁹ Sergew Hable Habeselassie (1972, p. 163).

²⁰ Sergew Hable Habeselassie (1972, p. 163).

everything ascetic is against nature. So, for Zär'a Ya'qob, Ethiopian ascetic culture is fundamentally degenerative.

This cultural degeneration continued over generations without being articulated and challenged by Ethiopian intellectuals. One religious scholar with an inquisitive mind, in the seventeenth century, however, could not accept the established ascetic culture and turned his thought instead towards God and the world. Moreover, he rightly articulated the fundamental cause of the overall cultural degeneration of Ethiopian society: the metaphysical dualism and/or antagonism between soul and body, spiritual and worldly life, God and Nature, spirit and matter; in short, asceticism. He thus came up with an alternative worldview and way of life in which the dualism and antagonism was solved and reconciled. This scholar is Zär'a Ya'qob, and his *Ḥatāta* is the product of the dialogue between his inquisitive mind and the established ascetic culture of Ethiopian society.

Binyam Mekonnen

Chapter 9

Critique and Emancipation in the Religious Sphere? Revisiting Ethiopia's Modernity through the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos*

Abstract: The *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* offer an alternative source of Ethiopian philosophy that predates the *Ḥatätas* of Zär'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Ḥəywät, containing essential ideas regarding the relationship between the public and private spheres, the critical role of religion as a redemptive form of discourse, as well as a utopian imagination that radically interrogates existing human relations. Their texts reflect their efforts to revolt against dogmatism in fifteenth-century Ethiopia's religious thought and practice. They can thus be read as a revolutionary movement that problematises how Orthodox Christianity has been perceived in Ethiopia. This paper argues that the study of Ethiopian philosophy needs to be set against the background of these precursors of modernity and that there is a need to extend the foundations of modern Ethiopian philosophy beyond Zär'a Ya'əqob's *Ḥatäta*. While the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* have historically been associated with a kind of mediaeval "Geist", valuing religion as an ideological means and expressing life through metaphysical abstractions, a concerted social critique is disclosed within their writings in a revolutionary and systematic manner. Abba Ḥṣṭifanos and his followers exhibit a covert critical attitude wherein we can find historical and ahistorical potential for refuting the irrationality of authorities of mediaeval and modern societies. This chapter explores the historical and political significance of the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* movement and their philosophical relevance in redefining Ethiopian and African critical traditions. In doing so, it also brings out its bearing on the liberation discourses of religion in the contemporary world.

Introduction

The *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* were a group of individuals who introduced a religious, social, and political transformation to mediaeval Ethiopia. The group's founder, Abba Ḥṣṭifanos, attempted to challenge King Zär'a Ya'əqob's control of the state and the church by developing a critique of the conditions in which we can demarcate the public and the private spheres. Even though the idea of the public sphere in philosophy is often connected to a secular rational outlook underlying the proj-

ect of modernity, religion has been a powerful driving force in shaping public discourse and societal beliefs and practices worldwide. It has the potential to inspire individuals and groups to champion causes and to initiate socio-cultural and political changes that can have a considerable impact on a given community. Abba Ἔṣṭifanos and his disciples in fifteenth-century Ethiopia were the most influential figures to explore the interconnection of religion and politics in Ethiopia. Abba Ἔṣṭifanos is credited with initiating a kind of progressive religious and societal revival highlighting the need to explore critically the contemplative and social worth of religion. Getatchew Haile has argued that Abba Ἔṣṭifanos and his followers debunked the totalitarian politics of King Zär'a Ya'əqob and led the struggle for monastic reform in the mediaeval Ethiopian church.¹

In line with its revolutionary vision, the *Däqiqä Ἔṣṭifanos* movement was not merely critical of the conventional religious sphere of fifteenth-century Ethiopia: it also impinged upon the political space of King Zär'a Ya'əqob. The *Däqiqä Ἔṣṭifanos* movement was therefore considered a threat to the confined religious and political spheres.² Its opposition to the two major groups controlling the nation's highest power explains why the movement struggled to achieve monastic reformation. Its goal was to promote a redemptive outlook in Christianity, redefining the ascetic worth of spirituality as uninterested in any material end, and demarcating the political and religious spheres as a basis for accommodating secularism in an Ethiopian context. At the same time, the *Däqiqä Ἔṣṭifanos* displayed emancipatory and transformative ambitions with a religious foundation in seeking to enlighten individuals and society.

Despite its metaphysical content, the *Däqiqä Ἔṣṭifanos'* vision of monastic reformation is connected to the emancipatory project of the modern age. This group was obviously active before “the philosopher” Zär'a Ya'əqob. Yet most Ethiopian scholars and some foreign scholars have tended to view Zär'a Ya'əqob as the architect of modern Ethiopian philosophy and African philosophical traditions more broadly. I argue that the earlier *Däqiqä Ἔṣṭifanos* movement was pivotal in promoting socio-cultural and political change in the community. Its members served as the people's voice, particularly in addressing issues concerning social justice and objectives of secularisation of power. While I do not claim that the *Däqiqä Ἔṣṭifanos* offer a complete philosophical system, I argue that it was a valuable source of philosophical inspiration, opening the way for Ethiopian and African modernity projects. It presents a discourse of relevance to liberation philosophy, which we can understand as a redemptive form of religious critique.

1 Getatchew Haile (2016, p. 23).

2 See further Maimire Mennasemay (2010).

The *Däqiqä İstifanos* and the Religious Move: Historic-Political Relevance

In attempting to present the *Däqiqä İstifanos* as historical figures who sought to promote monastic reformation and foster critical perspectives on orthodox religion, two possible objections must be addressed. The first is that Abba İstifanos and his followers were simply representatives of some alien culture, reflecting a foreign strategy to destroy the indigenous religious values of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church—arguably foreshadowing the subsequent European religious reformation movement embodied by Martin Luther. The second objection instead grants that the *Däqiqä İstifanos* were Ethiopians who displayed critical attitudes to the religious thought and practices of their own particular religious community but claims that all they attempted to do was to re-evaluate religion in a localised context, rather than also initiating a socio-political critique of the state as a sacred entity in general.

Abba İstifanos' and his followers' critical attitude towards the fifteenth-century Ethiopian Church is rooted in their firm stance on the need for a metaphysical and socio-political transformation anchored in a religious liberation discourse. We know from the history of the Orthodox Church³ that the members of the *Däqiqä İstifanos* movement represented many “tribes”⁴ of Ethiopia and that they were driven by a resolve to challenge certain discourses and practices in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Religious interests over others marked the epoch in which the *Däqiqä İstifanos* movement emerged, locally and globally. Since we are broadly speaking about the mediaeval period, it is natural to suppose that religion informed the basic social structures of society. The *Däqiqä İstifanos* posed a challenge to these existing socio-political structures. The guardians of the existing system considered the revolutionary and visionary group a threatening movement seeking to bring about a paradigm shift in the religious and political spheres.

Given their challenge to the status quo, the *Däqiqä İstifanos* found themselves isolated, marginalised, and branded as heretics. Maimire Mennasemay (2010) believes that the identification of the *Däqiqä İstifanos* movement as a heresy resulted from a misinterpretation of the group's interest in accomplishing a critical and rational investigation of their own religion. As he puts it, their “heresy could be read as bearing within itself a Utopian, rational and political critique of Ethiopian

3 Getatchew Haile (2016, pp. 3–4).

4 My use of the term “tribe” refers to ethnic groups in the present day.

society mediated through a religious discourse”.⁵ These three basic attributes that Maimire Mennasemay uses to express the goals championed by the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* movement inform the depth of its aspirations for social transformation.

Members of the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* movement were seen as a threat to the Church hierarchy and State power in mediaeval Ethiopian history because they actively galvanised their followers, urging them to question structural domination and injustice. As for the *Ḥatäta Zär'a Ya'əqob*, some scholars have argued that the work is of foreign origin, although it is contextualised in an Ethiopian cultural horizon and its purported author borrows a familiar Ethiopian name. This claim has been made to refute the individualistic power of thinking found on African soil in that particular age. Similar characterisations might be made regarding the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* movement. To have a clear vision of the Ethiopian origin of the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos*, I think we need to understand the historical and political context behind the monastic reformation movement. The major religious questions raised by the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* movement were essentially related to the regime of King Zär'a Ya'əqob. Indeed, the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* movement was both historically and politically relevant. In the dominant history of the Ethiopian State and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the movement's members have been considered corruptors of true religion and of the unified state's ideological apparatus. Maimire Mennasemay (2010) and Tadesse Tamrat (1966) have suggested that the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* were known for their accusations against the great King of the time, underlining the fact that he acted as an absolute sovereign. King Zär'a Ya'əqob had an almost Hobbesian mindset in controlling all the powers of the state including the religious sphere.⁶

The *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* and the Critical Project: A Projection of Ethiopian Modernity?

In “A Critical Dialogue between Fifteenth and Twenty-first Century Ethiopia” (2010), Maimire Mennasemay attempts to show that the merging of practical and emancipatory interests in the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* movement bears socio-political relevance in revisiting modernity and modernisation within the Ethiopian context. He argues that mediaeval writings in Ethiopia are rich in both religious and secular ideas and that their interest extends beyond their exact time and place of origin. Building on this general proposal, my central argument is that the birth of

⁵ Maimire Mennasemay (2010, p. 6).

⁶ Tadesse Tamrat (1966, p. 112).

modern Ethiopian philosophy in texts of the *Däqiqä Ḥatäta*, which predates the *Ḥatäta* of Zär'a Ya'əqob, has an important contribution to make to the discussion of the nature of Ethiopian philosophy in two ways. First, they attest to a critical tradition of individuals in Ethiopia before Zär'a Ya'əqob “the philosopher”. Thus, if one considers an individual-based critical attitude to constitute one of the basic preconditions of philosophical thinking, we find candidates in the Ethiopian context prior to Zär'a Ya'əqob. Moreover, we find in the *Däqiqä Ḥatäta* an emancipatory attitude that builds on the claim that to know Christianity properly is to seek the truth and do what is just. The other contribution of the *Däqiqä Ḥatäta* movement lies in its subversive potential in terms of philosophical content, which it shares with the *Ḥatäta* of Zär'a Ya'əqob. The *Däqiqä Ḥatäta* and the *Ḥatäta* of Zär'a Ya'əqob represent a progressive attitude in religion and rational religious discourses. Thus far, attempts to make Zär'a Ya'əqob the father of modern Ethiopian and African philosophical traditions risk over-emphasising the difference between religion and philosophy and undermining the holistic nature of the education and literature of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity.

We must emphasise two significant caveats in attempting to present the *Däqiqä Ḥatäta* as part and parcel of the modern Ethiopian philosophical project. While I believe that both the *Däqiqä Ḥatäta* movement and the *Ḥatäta* of Zär'a Ya'əqob contain the critical ingredients needed for the attainment of a full-fledged philosophy, both outlooks should at the same time be read as critical reflections embedded in Ethiopian Orthodox Church teachings. In fact, the *Däqiqä Ḥatäta* movement offers profound socio-political critical insights that serve as a roadmap into modern Ethiopian and African philosophical projects. There is thus scope for reframing the modern Ethiopian philosophical project in a manner that goes beyond the received dominant discourse on the *Ḥatäta*. I believe that the *Däqiqä Ḥatäta* present a significant challenge to the by-now fossilised picture of Ethiopian and African philosophy championed by prominent figures such as Claude Sumner and Teodros Kiros.

Both Sumner and Teodros Kiros compare Zär'a Ya'əqob to René Descartes, arguing that there is a kind of novel approach to doing philosophy embodied by these two figures. Sumner argues that Zär'a Ya'əqob and Descartes are architects of modern philosophy in Africa and Europe, respectively.⁷ And he thinks both of them develop a methodic inquiry grounded in a religious foundation. Indeed, Sumner emphasises that the methodological tools of both Zär'a Ya'əqob and Descartes share an essential feature: searching for ultimate reality. In the same way, Teodros Kiros discusses the similarity between Zär'a Ya'əqob and Descartes

⁷ Sumner (1999a, pp. 176–177).

in terms of their supposedly “rationalist” methodology, wherein clear and distinct thoughts are sought after to ground higher-level reflection.⁸ However, he presents Zär’a Ya’əqob’s rationality as overcoming the Cartesian mind-body problem in that the heart is analysed as the seat of the soul.

My central claim is that works of the *Däqiqä Eṣṭifanos* as well as the *Ḥatäta*, rather than presenting a secular philosophy, open the possibility for the emergence of a socio-cultural and political critique which is nevertheless grounded in an absolute religious foundation. The reflections found in these works lack meaning without the necessary existence of God. Of course, the *Ḥatäta Zär’a Ya’əqob* has the historical advantage of presenting a wide range of discussions on how religion matters globally. The important point is that while it is true that Zär’a Ya’əqob’s critical insights are manifestations of a reflective tradition in Ethiopia and Africa, one might argue that Zär’a Ya’əqob’s critical attitude is itself part of the historical church tradition of Ethiopia that elicited the radical thought of the *Däqiqä Eṣṭifanos*, which is grounded on religion.⁹ Crucially, the *Däqiqä Eṣṭifanos* and the *Ḥatäta Zär’a Ya’əqob* can be taken as precursors of modern philosophical thinking in Ethiopia and Africa, demonstrating the cultural continuity of a critical attitude that arises from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church tradition.

One of the critical aspects of the *Däqiqä Eṣṭifanos* can be found in the idea of the separation of the church and the state, which we call secularism in modern times. In reflecting on the *Däqiqä Eṣṭifanos’* accusation against King Zär’a Ya’əqob that the latter lacked a secular worldview, Teweldeberhan Mezgebe writes:

[King] Zär’a Ya’əqob undertook religious reforms in his time. He had a plan to place churches and monasteries under his ultimate authority. He succeeded in putting the majority of monasteries of the country in his religious programme by using a new combination of economic advancement and legal force. However, the Stephanites [members of the *Däqiqä Eṣṭifanos* movement] kept on refusing the will of the king [...] This is the reason why the Stephanites were seen as a threat by the “orthodox” and by Zär’a Ya’əqob. Thus, he issued a proclamation to all nations in his dominion to persecute them. Furthermore, he defamed them in all his writing such as *Mäṣḥäfä Bərhan* and *Mäṣḥäfä Milad* and other works such as *Tä’ammärä Marəyam* and *Mahəletä Şəge*.¹⁰

Thus, the *Däqiqä Eṣṭifanos* seriously questioned the separation of the public and private spheres, criticising the bankruptcy to which the Ethiopian State and Church seemed prone in mediaeval times. This strand of the *Däqiqä Eṣṭifanos* suggests a unique treatment of the conception of secularism in the Ethiopian context.

8 Teodros Kiros (2022, pp. 108–109).

9 For this point, see also Eyasu Berento’s essay (Chapter 5) in this volume.

10 Teweldeberhan Mezgebe (2019, p. 28).

It considers the role of religion in both private and public spaces, and the re-adjustment of how the Emperor ought to be related to the church in a democratic way, as I further discuss below. The *Däqiqä İstifanos* believed that the King is the leader of the state with an honourable political status, but not different from others as a human figure.¹¹ As we look back on the history of Ethiopia from the thirteenth to the twentieth century, the country was an empire ruled by various monarchs who believed that they were the Elect of God and that their authority was absolute.¹² Most of the time, these emperors were harsh in their attempt to control the affairs of the empire, including the religious sphere. The *Däqiqä İstifanos* were challenging the manipulative interest of Emperor Zär'a Ya'eqob in this regard. Their efforts were driven by a rational vision, promoting a democratic boundary between the public and private spheres that rejects despotic rule and exploitative systems.

It is based on this democratic framework that the *Däqiqä İstifanos* negotiated modern notions of power, justice, and institutions. As Maimire Mennasemay argues, the *Däqiqä İstifanos* movement introduced the utopian vision of employing the power of reason in understanding the socio-political condition of the people of Ethiopia in the Middle Ages.¹³ One might take this as one of the alternative sources of the Ethiopian project of modernity, where we encounter a closely related understanding of the role of reason to that found in Immanuel Kant's *An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?*. According to Kant, enlightenment is the use of one's own reason to avoid self-incurred tutelage:

Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another. *Sapere Aude!* "Have [the] courage to use your own understanding!"—that is the motto of enlightenment.¹⁴

Kant says here that individuals are responsible for emerging from their intellectual immaturity by embracing the power of reason in their lives. The *Däqiqä İstifanos* had a similar account of how individuals can search for enlightenment, signifying the power of understanding based on one's own reason.

Regarding their critical examination of power, Maimire Mennasemay argues that the *Däqiqä İstifanos* were highly mature in connecting political and religious practices, the law, and institutional and educational themes. The *Däqiqä İstifanos*

¹¹ Getatchew Haile (2016, pp. 102–103).

¹² Crummey (1988, pp. 14–15).

¹³ Maimire Mennasemay (2010, p. 9).

¹⁴ Kant in Kant and Humphrey (1983, p. 41).

rebelled against the hierarchal image of power given by the monarchical regime that sees human beings as unequal. Maimire Mennasemay states:

Whereas laymen, nobles, priests and monks address the Emperor by using the respectful “You”, the Dekike Estifanos refuse to follow this practice and use the familiar “you” in addressing him; whereas others prostrate themselves before the Emperor, the Dekike Estifanos refuse to do so. When the Emperor demands that they, like everybody else, should use the respectful “You”, and that they should prostrate themselves before him, they respond that since they use the familiar “you” when they address God in their prayers, there is no justification for using the respectful “You” when they address a human being.¹⁵

It is important to note that such a move on the part of the *Däqiqä Estifanos* is motivated by their goal of liberation from the irrational hegemonic powers of both the political and religious spheres. It was not intended to disrespect authorities, but to remind them of their ultimate responsibilities and the grounds of their legitimacy. This attempt should be understood as a shift from an undemocratic and manipulative system of thinking to a genuinely human democratic treatment of the good life in earthly and Godly affairs.

The *Däqiqä Estifanos* and Emancipatory Religious Glorification

The groundbreaking revolutionary potential of the *Däqiqä Estifanos* appears in their religious critique vindicating the true goal of Orthodox Christianity. Abba Estifanos and his disciples introduced the notion of a redemptive will, peculiar to the dominant Ethiopian religion of the fifteenth century. Religious reformation was an essential driver in their struggle to challenge the union between Church and State and to reinstate the emancipatory truth of religion amid the Church’s teachings. Foregrounding human liberation as an objective in mediaeval Ethiopia, the *Däqiqä Estifanos* contributed to refuting systematically the politicisation of religion and the manipulation of the private sphere by the public one. The *Däqiqä Estifanos* raised three core points under the general idea of emancipatory religious glorification. These were: (1) an interest in revisiting the teachings of the Church from the perspective of the true sources of religion and the faith of believers; (2) a critique of society and religious discourses sustaining it; and (3) a critique of the lack of a secular boundary between Church and State. Accordingly, the *Däqiqä Estifanos* believed individuals should use religion and reformation efforts

¹⁵ Maimire Mennasemay (2010, p. 9).

to interrogate the manipulative socio-political order. As Maimire Mennasemay argues, this revolutionary group used religion as a weapon to enlighten their society and to achieve human liberation through religious discourses.¹⁶

Cornel West would probably agree that the *Däqiqä İstifanos*' theological engagement with liberation constituted a serious means of reassessing the doctrines and practices of the Church, and of reconstructing social history. According to West, critical leaders of emancipation-based religion have the role of "reexamin[ing] and reshap[ing] the traditional doctrines of the church, engag[ing] in more serious efforts of social theory, cultural criticism, and historical reconstruction".¹⁷ Prominent leaders in the *Däqiqä İstifanos* movement were responsible for transforming the religious and socio-cultural ideals of their time.

The *Däqiqä İstifanos* affirmed that human liberation is the central goal of religion. This is somewhat reminiscent of the contemporary revolutionary teaching of liberation theology. Most liberation theologians of our age think the goal of religion is to make life good through the words of God. They say that "religion has a primary role to play in human liberation, and that in the search for liberation, transmitting the Gospel's message of salvation cannot be separated from the creation of a better life, 'here' and 'now'".¹⁸ The relevance of the liberation discourse of the *Däqiqä İstifanos* is not confined to issues pertinent to mediaeval Ethiopian Orthodoxy; it also has a bearing on modern and postmodern societies wherein religion can be taken as a basis for social transformation.

Another question to which the *Däqiqä İstifanos*' emancipatory use of religion gives rise relates more broadly to the emancipatory potential of religion and religious discourses in modern times. The *Däqiqä İstifanos* were significant in marking an inflection point in Ethiopian history, raising a profound existential concern with challenging the biases of individuals within and outside the confines of the Church. Similarly, contemporary liberation theologians, such as Gustavo Gutiérrez,¹⁹ underline that religion is a powerful force for redemption and social justice, particularly within the framework of liberation theology. Religious beliefs and practices can empower individuals and communities to resist oppression and fight for justice by providing a sense of purpose and hope. Simply put, there must be an existential motive for using our religion and religious discourses to achieve daily liberation. The *Däqiqä İstifanos* movement made significant contributions in instilling such crucial ideas in Ethiopia, highlighting the power of existential critique within religious communities, and its impact on the totality of life.

¹⁶ Maimire Mennasemay (2010, p. 6).

¹⁷ West (1999, p. 397).

¹⁸ Levine (1988, p. 243).

¹⁹ Gutiérrez (1988, p. 24).

As mentioned earlier, some consider the *Däqiqä Ḥestifanos* to have been heretics in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. In fact, Abba Ḥestifanos and his followers publicly criticised the manipulative hold that the will of the Emperor maintained over the Church and his people through the lens of their religious stance, which aimed to alter the religious community profoundly. But rather than being heretics, the *Däqiqä Ḥestifanos* were mini-reformists of the teachings of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. The kind of reform they called for predates that of Martin Luther, the architect of the European Reformation; it is also situated in a distinctly Ethiopian context, which recognises individuality without glorifying individualism. As Maimire Mennasemay argues:

[...] the Dekike Estifanos are not individualists *avant la lettre*, for they value life in a community: “He who lives in a community fulfills the hope of God’s word” [...] [they] also claim that one should “follow one’s mind” and struggle until “one reaches one’s goals” or “summit”. When these apparently contradictory statements valorizing community life and individual autonomy are mediated through their challenges to the Monarch’s absolute power, their notions of “litigation”, mutual accountability and “not being an insult to Ethiopia”, one sees the emergence of something new: “individuality without individualism”.²⁰

The *Däqiqä Ḥestifanos* insisted that humans as a community are the centre of their faith and that an individual critical attitude is vital in reforming discourses and transforming society. From this, we may think that the *Däqiqä Ḥestifanos* were among the few to establish a solidarity-based reformation and transformation in the world. In contrast to philosophical currents which foreground the subject, a dominant approach in modern discourse, the *Däqiqä Ḥestifanos* noted that a unifying religious spirit is essential to kick-start a socio-cultural and political transformation. In this context, the individual has a social responsibility to foster the religious way of achieving his/her humanity, equality, and justice. Thus, the goal of such conscious and rational solidarity is to abolish all conditions of dehumanisation. The *Däqiqä Ḥestifanos* should be credited with having caused an indigenous revolution focusing more on a religious reformation and socio-political transformation.

As part of their monastic reformation efforts and the socio-political paradigm shift they sought to bring about, the *Däqiqä Ḥestifanos* denounced the excesses of the Church and state leaders of the time. They challenged the conventional prostration before the Icon of St. Mary, the King of the State, and the holy cross.²¹ They rejected such a practice, saying it is contrary to the true teaching of the Holy Scrip-

²⁰ Maimire Mennasemay (2010, p. 16).

²¹ Getatchew Haile (2016, pp. 29–31).

ture, which states: “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Luke 4:8). At the heart of the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos*’ refusal to prostrate themselves before the human subject lies a justified religious account of who should be worshipped, and who should be respected, in keeping with their emancipatory religious concerns.

In addition, the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos*’ understanding of the ascetic life was redemptive, dismantling the desire for a material end of life. They strongly criticised the monks’ existential situation in almost all monasteries of the fifteenth-century Ethiopian Church.²² Most monks of the time had no qualms about satisfying their material needs in the name of religion. But this ran counter to the convention established by the monastic fathers. An ascetic life, as Abba Ḥṣṭifanos stated, requires a revolution in the Church’s monastic centre of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which should promote the right way of living as Christian monks based on the laws of God.²³

Conclusion

This paper has dealt with the philosophical aspirations of the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* movement and showed that its members served as precursors of the project of modernity in Ethiopia. I have tried to situate the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos*, not as purely philosophical thinkers, but rather as religious men who sought to reform the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, drawing on the true teachings of the Holy Scriptures as well as the power of human reason in understanding the laws of God and revisiting the wrong deeds of the Church. I showed how the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos* offered some critical insights that are important for the emerging discourses of Ethiopian modernity in accomplishing religious reform and socio-cultural transformations.

To this end, I presented three basic themes at the heart of the project of the *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifanos*. The first is the historical and political revolution that Abba Ḥṣṭifanos and his followers attempted to achieve in the Ethiopian Church and the Ethiopian State. This is an important reminder that their ideas are of Ethiopian origin and highly connected to fifteenth-century Ethiopia’s historical and political developments. This speaks against the misconception that their attempts at reformation were motivated by foreign elements with an anti-Orthodox agenda. On the contrary, this movement speaks to the positive impact that religious leaders sought to have in mobilising the people against an oppressive system. The *Däqiqä Ḥṣṭifa-*

²² Getatchew Haile (2016, p. 32).

²³ Getatchew Haile (2016, p. 33).

nos unfairly lost what they truly deserved: the State and the Church of their time misquoted and tortured them, and the scholastic and religious thought of more modern times either ignored or abandoned their noble efforts. Much of the political history of mediaeval and modern Ethiopia reflects a failure to recognise the historical relevance of the revolutionary potential of the *Däqiqä Ḥestifanos*.

I also sought to highlight the philosophical contribution of the *Däqiqä Ḥestifanos* to modern and contemporary Ethiopia. While presenting this point, I critically assessed the basic features and objectives of their thought. The thought of the *Däqiqä Ḥestifanos* is not strictly philosophical, since it reflects a religiously-oriented reformation programme containing various philosophical ingredients. A religiously-inspired philosophy can occasion socio-political change because it can mobilise many people, provide a moral framework for understanding social and political issues, challenge power structures, and create a sense of community and solidarity. The critical approach in the Ethiopian context shows individuals' moral and social role in transforming the community. This approach is critical of "liberalism", which pits the individual against society. Moreover, in exploring how the *Däqiqä Ḥestifanos* movement could be among the foundation stones of an Ethiopian critical project, we have seen the distinctive ways in which it conceptualised secularism, power, equality, and democracy.

Finally, I drew attention to the redemptive undercurrent of the *Däqiqä Ḥestifanos* movement and its bearing on the theological liberation movements of our age. The movement's search for truth underscores the idea that Christians are responsible for choosing the true way through a proper understanding of the Holy Scriptures and the human power of thinking given by God. The *Däqiqä Ḥestifanos* rebelled against the Church and State primarily to achieve a religious liberation that arose from their own existential situation. What we find here is a determination to question unjustified social and religious conventions through the words and laws of God. The core questions that the *Däqiqä Ḥestifanos* developed about religion, such as the importance of the autonomy of the Church, the denial of worldly affairs, and the championing of a proper ascetic Christian life, were all predicated on the religious end of achieving the highest good. On this account, religion becomes a means of liberation. Like the *Däqiqä Ḥestifanos*, Zär'a Ya'əqob in the *Ḥatäta* suggests that the power of reason is a disposition and critical way of searching for the truth and challenging social beliefs and views, including religious knowledge and interpretations.

Anke Graness

Chapter 10

Authorship and Authenticity as Challenges for the Historiography of Philosophy in a Global Perspective

Abstract: The historiography of philosophy in non-European regions and in a global perspective faces very specific methodological challenges. One of these challenges is the question of authorship. This chapter discusses the issue of authorship with regard to ancient Egypt and to philosophy in oral traditions and draws conclusions with regard to the debate on authorship and authenticity of the *Ḥatātas* of Zār'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Ḥəywät . Moreover, the paper illustrates the role of the *Ḥatātas* in the discourse on African philosophy since the publication of an English translation by Claude Sumner in 1976 (Sumner 1976a). The case of the *Ḥatātas* and the discourses that developed around the manuscripts raise a number of interesting questions and problems. I argue that the debates about the *Ḥatātas* provide a vivid example of a process of forming a narrative of the history of philosophy in Africa. On a meta-level and in a comparative manner—particularly with regard to origin, transmission, and the various translations of one of the founding texts of European history of philosophy—Diogenes Laërtius' *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*—this chapter discusses the question of what it means when the authenticity of a foundational text is suddenly called into question. Moreover, it addresses the particular explosiveness of such debates in the context of reconstructing philosophical traditions in formerly colonised and still marginalised regions of the world.

The process of writing a history of philosophy is an exclusionary one; thinkers, concepts, and terms are included or excluded from the narrative depending on current evidence or definitions of philosophy, which may vary according to time and place. This process creates a certain canon of philosophical works and authors, which in turn shapes all further understanding of philosophy as a way of thinking and as an academic discipline. The French historian of philosophy, Lucien Braun, declares that what we actually call the history of philosophy is the selection and classification of texts in order to compile them into a new corpus—and, thus, a process of canon formation. He emphasises, “[i]t is true that this act is never inno-

cent [...]”.¹ The results of such compilations are constitutive realities which shape any subsequent readings. The “weight of this inertia”, as Braun calls it, becomes obvious if a text is assumed to be a philosophical text, not because the current evidence or understanding of philosophy would define it as such, but because the tradition accepts it as such.² The “weight of this inertia” determines all subsequent readings. Conversely, however, it also determines which texts, persons, and forms of expression are classified as non-philosophical, pre-philosophical, incapable of philosophy in their qualitative characteristics or irrelevant to the history of philosophy. Concepts, texts, and authors which are excluded from the grand narrative are therefore as crucial to a critical reading of the history of philosophy as the ones that are included. Ultimately, exclusion is the dominant motif of the history of philosophy and perhaps even of philosophy itself, particularly when philosophy is associated with a claim to truth. Presently, the history of philosophy is still used as the main evidence that philosophy is a specific, narrowly defined activity which cannot be practised by everyone.

In European philosophy, the attempt to record and trace the development of what has been called philosophy has been part of the process of philosophical work and debate since Greek antiquity. The first historian of philosophy is considered to be either Hippias of Elis (fifth century BCE), who is said to have compiled a collection of doxographical excerpts,³ or Diogenes Laërtius (c. third century CE), author of the work *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*. Interestingly, the eighteenth-century German historian of philosophy Christoph August Heumann (1681–1764) names a woman as the first historian of philosophy: Theano, author of the book *de Pythagora*.⁴

1 Braun (1990 [1973], p. 2). All translations from German into English are my own.

2 Braun (1990 [1973], p. 3).

3 See Patzer (1986) and Mejer (2000, p. 17).

4 Heumann (1715, p. 178). I want to emphasise here that the historiography of philosophy is not a European invention alone. In China, attempts to name and define philosophical schools can be found as early as the Pre-Qin Period (before 221 BCE; see the collected data on the website of the Reinhart-Koselleck-Project “Histories of Philosophy in a Global Perspective”, <https://www.uni-hildesheim.de/en/histories-of-philosophy/histories-of-philosophy/histories-of-philosophy-in-chinese/from-the-pre-qin-period-from-the-5th-century-bce-until-the-qing-dynasty-1644–1912> (last accessed on 31 March 2024). In India, the first doxographies, including the *Ṣaḍdarśanasamuccaya* by Aacharya Haribhadra Suri, can be traced back to the sixth/seventh century CE. Stories about the origin of philosophy, the succession of philosophers and works, and the development of schools can also be found in works by philosophers writing in Arabic in the Middle Ages, including Abū Nasr al-Fārābī (c. 872–950) and Ibn Ḥaldūn (also known as Ibn Khaldūn, 1332–1406).

Due to European expansion and colonialism, and as evidenced by many translations,⁵ European historiographies of philosophy have been particularly influential worldwide, especially since the end of the nineteenth/beginning of the twentieth century. But already since the end of the eighteenth century, narratives of the history of philosophy have been increasingly Eurocentric. This was not always the case: Until the turn of the nineteenth century, it was still common to include philosophies of non-European origins in historical narratives.⁶ There are many examples of this, such as Clement of Alexandria⁷ in late antiquity, Otto Heurnius (1600), Johannes Gerardus Vossius (1658), Hermann Conring (1651), Gottlieb Stolle (1718), Nikolaus Hieronymus Gundling (1706), or Johann Heinrich Ernesti (1807). Michael Hissmann, in his *Anleitung zur Kenntnis der auserlesenen Literatur in allen Teilen der Philosophie* (1778), explicitly raises the question “Whether the so-called barbarian peoples may be placed in the history of philosophy?” (§ 17) and concludes,

Indeed, in the religious systems of the so-called barbarians, as far as we can still trace them, we find the most intricate questions of speculative reason, about the world and its origin, about the divine and its relation to man, woven into them. Their thoughts about these objects are sometimes just as profound, intricate musings as are the speculations of the oldest Greek philosophers [...] Why then should not all these cultivated peoples of antiquity, of whose state and religious constitution we find news or fragments of news in reliable historians, be objects of the history of philosophy?⁸

5 The history of translation processes is also of special interest for the historiography of philosophy but has rarely been investigated so far. For example, German historiography of philosophy was particularly influential in Japan; see, among others, the translations of the following German histories of philosophy into Japanese: Kuno Fischer’s *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie* (10 Volumes, 1854–1904), translated in 1901; Wilhelm Windelband’s *Geschichte der Philosophie* (1892), translated several times: 1901, 1918, 1930, and 1933; Karl Vorländer’s *Geschichte der Philosophie* (1903), translated in 1929–1931; and Friedrich Ueberweg’s *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie* (1863–1866), translated in 1930–1932. Windelband’s *Geschichte der Philosophie* was also translated into Chinese in 1998. Impressive is the translation history of Bertrand Russell’s *History of Western Philosophy* (1945). The book was translated, among others, into Arabic (1977, 1983); Chinese (1963); Indonesian (2002); Japanese (1954–1956); Korean (1958, 1968); Russian (2001); and Turkish (1972). However, the most widely translated history of philosophy worldwide is still Diogenes Laërtius’ *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*. See “Editionen des Diogenes Laertios vom 15. Jahrhundert bis zum Jahr 2021 in verschiedenen europäischen und außereuropäischen Sprachen”, https://www.uni-hildesheim.de/media/koselleck/Geschichten_der_Philosophie/aaa_Diogenes/Diogenes_Alle_Editionen.pdf (last accessed on 31 March 2024).

6 Today, there are quite a number of studies on this issue, see, for example, Wimmer (1990), Schneider (1990), Park (2013), and most recently Cantor (2022).

7 See Clement of Alexandria: *Stromateis* (c.198 CE).

8 Hissmann (1778, pp. 31–32).

Accordingly, he lists “Egyptian Philosophy” (§ 24), “Chaldaean Philosophy” (§ 25), “Philosophy of the Persians” (§ 26), “Philosophy of the Indians” (§ 27), “Philosophy of the Chinese” (§ 28), “Philosophy of the Japanese” (§ 29), “Philosophy of the Phoenicians” (§ 30), and “Philosophy of the Celtic Peoples” (§ 31). However, *Kurtze Fragen aus der philosophischen Historie vom Anfang der Welt biß auf die Geburt Christi* (1731–1736) and *Historia critica philosophiae a mundi incunabulis ad nostram usque aetatem deducta* (1742–1744), both by Jakob Brucker (1696–1770), are the most frequently cited European histories of philosophy that include non-European traditions. Brucker mentions the Egyptians and the Ethiopians in addition to the Chaldaeans, Persians, Indians, and Arabs. But often (as in the case of Brucker), the entries on Egyptian or Ethiopian philosophy are very short, superficial and refer to knowledge from ancient or biblical sources.⁹

Only today, over 200 years later, the historiography of philosophy is becoming global again and working on comprehensive accounts of the history of philosophy in different regions of the world and the entanglement of philosophical traditions worldwide.¹⁰ But the historiography of philosophy in non-European regions and in a global perspective faces very specific methodological challenges. One of these challenges is the issue of authorship, which is also questioned in the case of the *Ḥatātas* of Zār’a Ya’aqob and Wäldä Ḥəywät, a debate that was the focus of the “In Search of Zera Yacob” conference in 2022 and that is also the subject of this anthology.

In the following, I would like to broaden the very specific discussion around the *Ḥatāta* and its author and embed it in the horizon of a historiography of philosophy of Africa and the challenges of a global historiography of philosophy (1). With regard to the reconstruction of philosophical traditions in Africa, but also of indigenous philosophies in North and South America, Australia or New Zealand, etc., the question of authorship is central. I will discuss this problem using the ex-

9 In his *Kurtze Fragen aus der philosophischen Historie* (1731–1736), Brucker does not have much to report about the Egyptians, since they were mostly priests and, thus, taught “nothing but idolatry and superstition” (Volume I, 1731, p. 176). With respect to Ethiopia, Brucker writes that little is known about the philosophy of the Ethiopians and one could assume that “there are no great treasures to be sought among them” (Volume I, 1731, p. 184). Nevertheless, he notes: “They were the first to teach what is meant by justice” (Volume I, 1731, p. 186). A similar view can be found a few years earlier already in Gottlieb Stolle’s *Historie der heydnischen Morale* (1714, p. 20). With regard to Ancient Egypt, it must be noted that for a long time, it was not a readable culture. Jean-François Champollion succeeded in deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphics only in 1822.

10 See, among others, the new “World philosophy” series at Routledge, Oxford University Press, or Blackwell as well as previous attempts to write a “world history of philosophy”. Cf. Jonardon Ganeri et al. (2011–2018): *The Oxford History of Philosophy* or the *Routledge History of World Philosophies* series. For a literature review on selected global histories of philosophy, see Herzl (2021).

ample of orally transmitted philosophies, but also ancient written traditions such as the ancient Egyptian wisdom literature. Moreover, the paper illustrates the role of the *Ḥatāta* in the discourse on African philosophy since the publication of an English translation by Claude Sumner in 1976. I argue that the debates about the *Ḥatāta* provide a vivid example of a process of forming a narrative of the history of philosophy in Africa, and I discuss the question of what it means when the authenticity of a now already foundational text of the still young historiography of African philosophy is suddenly called into question (2). In doing so, the paper addresses the particular explosiveness of such debates in the context of reconstructing philosophical traditions in formerly colonised and still marginalised regions of the world and draws some ethical consequences for future work (3).

1 Authorship and the History of Philosophy

The attribution of authorship is one of the fundamental requirements for the historiography of philosophy: Narratives of the history of philosophy are based (especially in the European tradition of histories of philosophy) on a succession of theories and concepts that can be attributed to an author. The author is regarded as the originator of a new idea or as someone who has contributed to the further development, completion or renewal of previously formulated ideas. The history of philosophy is thus usually told as a chronological order of thinkers who have contributed to the development and unfolding of concepts. Often such histories are told as narratives of progressive development or the unfolding of reason.

In attempts to write a global history of philosophy, the question of authorship is particularly problematic because the necessary expansion of the range of sources for the historical narrative, which in Europe has been purely text-centred, confronts us with contexts in which authorship can be established, if at all, only speculatively.¹¹ For example, precise authorship usually cannot be assigned in oral philosophical traditions nor for many ancient Egyptian manuscripts, some of them having an undoubted philosophical quality that Egyptologists and philoso-

¹¹ Nevertheless, the question of authorship is often disputed even in the case of written European classics. Well-known examples are some of Leibniz' letters and the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. Forged letters attributed to Leibniz have long preoccupied Leibniz scholars (Goldenbaum 2016), and it is assumed that Nietzsche's sister Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche's manipulation of her brother's legacy contributed to a misinterpretation of his idea of the will to power. The authorship of the foundational text of European philosophical historiography, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* by Diogenes Laërtius, is also unclear, as I will explain in more detail in the next section of this chapter.

phers have remarked upon.¹² Although the names of teachers are mentioned in ancient Egyptian manuscripts as authors of the corresponding teachings, for example *The Instructions of Ptahhotep*, Egyptologists argue those teachers are always fictional figures without reference to historical personalities.¹³ The question of authorship is thus largely unresolved, as is the nature of the audience or readership of such manuscripts. The Egyptologist Hans-Werner Fischer-Elfert comments on the question of authorship as follows:

For each teaching, there will have been an “original version” of some kind, which, as a result of the “open tradition” so typical of ancient Egyptian literary works and the lack of copyright, was then allowed to be subjected to textual changes more or less promptly, and was indeed subjected to them. [...] The texts are not the product of author collectives or writing offices, but of individual persons in the sense of *auctores*, who only had the misfortune not to be able to register a copyright on their texts.¹⁴

While in ancient Egypt we can at least draw on material resources (texts on papyrus or ostraca), the challenges are even greater in contexts with predominantly oral transmission of knowledge traditions. Here, it is particularly difficult to identify the author of a concept. For the reconstruction of philosophical concepts, sources such as proverbs, linguistic peculiarities, cosmologies, myths and the like are consulted. Reference is also made to other forms of expression of ideas, such as rituals or bodily practices like meditation, dance, martial arts or tattoos, or artistic or religious artefacts (pictures, sculptures, music, etc).¹⁵

Feminist historiography of philosophy also faces such challenges, because women, barred from education and/or publication in many places of the world and subject to sexist prejudice, were, if not constrained to impart knowledge only orally, often forced to publish anonymously or pseudonymously.¹⁶

Research in such contexts raises radical questions about the importance of the concept of authorship to the historiography of philosophy and whether authorship is one of the significant mechanisms that exclude Africa and other regions of the

¹² See among others Breasted (1901); Hornung (1992); Asante (2000); Junge (2003); Karenga (2004); Jeffers (2013); and Graness (2016).

¹³ Brunner (1991) and Assmann (2006 [1990]).

¹⁴ Fischer-Elfert (1997, p. 20).

¹⁵ Verney (2004, p. 138). For a detailed discussion of the challenges of oral philosophies for the historiography of philosophy see Graness (2022) and Graneß (2023).

¹⁶ Especially in recent years, many new publications have appeared that deal with the methodological problems of reconstructing a history of women philosophers and the consequences for the concept of philosophy. See, for example, Chouinard, McConaughey, Medeiros Ramos, and Noël (2021), here for example the contributions of Maddalena Bonelli (pp. 3–16) and Katharine R. O'Reilly (pp. 17–28).

world as well as women from philosophy's history. These questions are important, because in fact the scientisation of the concept of philosophy in the eighteenth century goes hand in hand with a turn towards authorship—and the exclusion of all non-European philosophical traditions from the narrative of the history of philosophy. Naming the originators of an idea or a theory and identifying sources became basic requirements. Here, the question of the origin of philosophy is narrowed to the question of the originality of the philosopher. The influence of speculation, religion, myth, or collective authorship is marginalised to create a continuous tradition whose unity is based on an uninterrupted series of nameable authors of philosophical texts. Unlike in a number of pre-nineteenth-century histories of philosophy, authorship became now the decisive criterion for inclusion in the history of philosophy.

In contrast, today researchers working on the reconstruction of indigenous philosophies emphasise the importance of collective authorship. Carl Mika, for example, writes in his discussion of Māori philosophy that philosophy for the Māori is not bound to a single thinker.¹⁷ He states: “For Maori, philosophy always simply manifests as a current concern, and we do not have to refer back to any individual writer”, and “[a]ny idea is not my own”.¹⁸ Mika brings to the fore a view that we encounter in many texts on indigenous philosophies in the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, and Africa, namely, that philosophical ideas originate in the community rather than individuals. Such an approach indicates the inextricable embeddedness of philosophers and their ideas in historical, social, political, linguistic, and religious contexts and emphasises that the production of ideas and concepts is conditioned by socialisation. Our thinking is indebted to both our ancestors and our fellow human beings, without whom we could not produce our ideas. Such an approach calls for humility about our own philosophical achievements and a more realistic assessment of the achievements of people who have been elevated to heroic status in the historiography of various disciplines, whose often countless collaborators go unmentioned, along with the contributions of women as mothers, wives, or muses. Feminist theories such as Black Feminism also emphasise the collective origin of concepts and practices.¹⁹ These approaches critically question the conditions under which knowledge is produced and criticise the image of the solitary thinker. In contrast, here it is underlined that philosophy is a collective practice, the result of a certain context and an ongoing conversation, a polylogue, between different agents.

¹⁷ Mika (2019, p. 25).

¹⁸ Mika (2019, p. 23).

¹⁹ Hill Collins (1991 [1990]).

What are the consequences of such debates for the historiography of philosophy? Is authorship indeed a crucial criterion for philosophy, or can a philosophical tradition or concept go unattributed into the history of philosophy? And how may such concepts be assigned a date in a chronological narrative of the history of philosophy? I think there is a great need to rethink the concept of authorship, especially in relation to the contexts mentioned above. A new openness to other approaches is urgently needed here, as well as further methodological investigations into how to deal with such material. Nevertheless, the question of authorship is not a trivial one and cannot easily be abandoned. There are at least three reasons for this: First, it plays a role in attempts to distinguish philosophy from religion, worldview, myth, folk wisdom, and literature—attempts that often succeed only insufficiently due to the overlaps of these forms of knowledge with philosophy. Such attempts nevertheless cannot be omitted if one does not want to dissolve philosophy into “thinking” in general.²⁰ Not every form of thinking is philosophy. That is, we can of course abandon attempts at demarcation, but then philosophy disappears into a more general history of ideas. Secondly, giving up the question of authorship leads to philosophy becoming an unhistorical matter, detached not only from the minds of concrete people, but also from contexts of origin. Even if there are certain “eternal” philosophical questions throughout the ages and in all places of this world, such as the question of the nature of the world, the nature of knowledge, or the nature of human beings, answers to these questions must be understood in their contexts of origin. And these contexts are not only regionally, culturally, and linguistically determined but also historically, socially, and politically contingent. What is lost in an approach that completely abandons authorship and seeks to advocate a communal philosophy are not only individual intellectual achievements but also intra-community criticism, differences, and divergent ideas. And thirdly, especially with regard to a history of women philosophers, the question of authorship remains of particular importance. A documentation of women’s contributions to philosophy and its history (as well as to literature, religion, and other knowledge traditions) can only succeed if authorship remains an important criterion.

Let us turn now to the debate on authorship with regard to the *Ḥatāta* of Zār’a Ya’aqob.

²⁰ Certainly, such a dissolution can be done, but as a philosopher I assume that philosophy is a form of knowledge distinct from other forms of knowledge. Here, then, distinctions remain important. For further discussion, see Graness (2023).

2 The *Ḥatāta* and Processes of Canon Formation in African Philosophy

From the perspective of a historian of philosophy, the case of the *Ḥatātas* and the discussion that arose around the manuscripts since Anaïs Wion again questioned the authenticity of the manuscripts in 2013²¹ raise a number of interesting questions. Most importantly, we are witnessing a process of canonisation, like the ones that took place centuries ago in the history of European philosophy, for example with respect to texts and authors from Roman and Greek antiquity. Let me illustrate this briefly with an example:

Today, we no longer question Thales' historicity or whether the few surviving remarks attributed to him are philosophy; rather, with a solidly established canon, we are accustomed to thinking of Thales as "the father of philosophy".²² A similar example is the *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* attributed to Diogenes Laërtius; discussion on the age and authorship of this text are conducted today by a few philologists at most. Philosophers tend to take book and author as given, a product of the third century CE, although almost nothing is known about the ancient doxographer Diogenes Laërtius, not even the dates of his life and death. On the basis of the manuscript attributed to him, a ten-book compilation of information about the lives and teachings of a number of ancient Greek, mostly male philosophers, it is assumed that he lived around the first half of the third century CE. Judging from some references in his manuscript, he is believed to be from Bithynia, an ancient region in northwestern Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Nevertheless, since the first translations of it into Latin in the fifteenth century,²³ the *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* has been of fundamental importance for European philosophy and the history of philosophy, even though it has always been controversial for its inaccuracies and the author's reliance on anecdotes rather than presentations of the philosophical concepts of its subjects. The provenance of this influential text is very uncertain: almost a thousand years separate the text's presumed origin in the third century CE and the oldest surviving copy of it, a twelfth-century manuscript.²⁴ Moreover, the text has been handed down in various manu-

21 Mbodj-Pouye and Wion (2013); see also Wion (2013a, 2013b, and 2015).

22 For more on this issue, see Braun (1990 [1973]) and Cantor (2022).

23 Diogenes Laertius, Traversari, and Marchese (1472): *Vitae et sententiae philosophorum*.

24 The oldest surviving manuscripts date from the twelfth century (*Neapolitanus Bourbonicus* III B 29, National Library of Napoli; *Laurentinus* 69.13, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana). This means that there are almost 1,000 years between the presumed origin of the text in the third century CE and the oldest manuscript still in existence today.

scripts that differ in content from one another.²⁵ On them, Diogenes Laërtius' name is either missing or was added later.²⁶ The German philologist Fritz Jürß suspects that the ten books were published posthumously in the last quarter of the third century CE and only rediscovered in the ninth century CE in Constantinople in a single copy he describes as an "already very corrupted text". As Jürß emphasises in his introduction to the text: "Few works of ancient literature have survived in such a damaged state as Diogenes Laërtius' history of philosophers".²⁷ Nevertheless, in contemporary philosophical discourse, neither Thales nor Diogenes Laërtius are considered dubious sources. Philosophy's historical narrative has recognised them as philosophers and historians whose works and ideas are the foundations of entire discourses. In such processes of canonisation, texts and authors are included or excluded through a narrative in which uncertainties are re-interpreted as certainties. There are no handwritten texts by Thales, Diogenes Laërtius, or Socrates, only second- or even third-hand reports. With regard to our knowledge of Greek antiquity, Braun emphasises:

What we know of Greek and Latin antiquity is the result of a slow and patient restoration and re-reading. It would be idle to try to evoke antiquity as it was in itself. It is precisely what scholars and philologists, what Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger and others have said about it, starting from fragments, texts and traces that themselves have a history.²⁸

The case is similar with regard to Buddhism and Daoism: it is almost impossible to know today whether Siddhartha Gautama and Lao Tzu were historical persons or not. Nevertheless, an extensive body of religious and philosophical texts about the teachings attributed to them has developed over the centuries. Given the philosophical content of the discourses based on these narratives, the question of their historicity is superfluous today. Thus, philosophy seems to be largely based on our reliance on inherited philosophical-historical narratives, which are further knitted, deepened, and legitimised by each individual work within the framework of these narratives.

25 A description of the linguistic differences, the corrections as well as the missing pages in the existing manuscripts can be found in Gercke (1902, pp. 407ff). These details, which are primarily of interest to philologists, are also significant from the perspective of the history of philosophy, especially when it comes to the origin and certainty of the transmission.

26 This can be verified on the accessible digitised early manuscripts in the respective libraries.
27 Diogenes Laertius and Jürß (1998, p. 30). The reception and translations of Diogenes' text have very interesting histories, but they cannot be detailed here. For a detailed analysis, see Kahle (2012).

28 Braun (1990 [1973], p. 9).

The debates surrounding the *Ḥatātas* today provide a vivid example from our present of the process of forming both Ethiopian and African narratives (which are closely related and can hardly be considered separately) of the history of philosophy: The *Ḥatātas* by Zār'a Ya'əqob and by Wäldä Ḥəywät have been the subject of a broad discourse in African philosophy in recent decades—since their rediscovery by Claude Sumner in the 1970s. Through Sumner's translation into English and his analysis of the two texts, to which he dedicated two volumes of his series on Ethiopian philosophy (Volume II, 1976, and Volume III, 1978),²⁹ the treatises, which might previously have been known only to specialists in Ethiopian studies, became accessible to a wider public and integrated into the debates on African philosophy. Today, they are considered masterpieces of pre-twentieth century African philosophy. This is not surprising for the following reasons: (1) they represent two of the rare examples of the written legacy of African philosophy and, moreover, (2) they fulfil established criteria of the dominant European understanding of philosophy, such as a rational reasoning and the critical examination of arguments. In addition, (3) the *Ḥatātas* address topics that are among the central ones in the history of European philosophy, such as the theodicy problem, the proof of God, the relationship between faith and knowledge or questions about ethical conduct. The second and third points are certainly not unproblematic, since here again a European conception of philosophy becomes the yardstick for evaluation, but in view of racist stereotypes about Africa, which outright denied Africans the capacity for rationality and logic, it is nevertheless an important argument. And last but not least, (4) thoughts can be found in this text that are reminiscent of Enlightenment ideas. On this basis, Claude Sumner could conclude: “Zār'a Ya'əqob is a real philosopher in the strictest sense of the word”.³⁰

Since both texts present important counter-examples to racist prejudices and, moreover, demonstrate the unfoundedness of the previous philosophical-historical ignorance towards the African continent, they were received with great enthusiasm by the community of academic African philosophers after their publication in English. The Kenyan philosopher Henry Odera Oruka, for example, underlined the importance of Sumner's work and wrote enthusiastically: “I can foresee no scholar of Ethiopian philosophy surpassing or ignoring Sumner's contributions in the next one hundred years”.³¹ In his book *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy: Horizon and Discourse* (1994), Tsenay Serequeberhan considers the text a good example of the emergence of philosophy from existential predicaments.

²⁹ See Sumner (1976a; 1978).

³⁰ Sumner (1976a, p. 61).

³¹ Odera Oruka (1997, p. 159).

Many Ethiopian philosophers, such as Teodros Kiros³² or Bekele Gutema³³—to name but two—regard the text as a breakthrough for original philosophical thought in Ethiopia. Reference is often made to parallels between the *Ḥatāta* of Zār'a Ya'əqob (1667) and René Descartes' *Discours de la méthode* (1637). The proximity of the dates of life (Descartes 1596–1650; Zār'a Ya'əqob 1599–1693), similar experiences of flight and persecution and, in particular, similarities in methodological approach exert a certain fascination here and have led to the *Ḥatāta* of Zār'a Ya'əqob being declared the beginning of an African modernity.³⁴ Already Claude Sumner indicated: “Modern Philosophy, in the sense of a personal rationalistic critical investigation, began in Ethiopia with Zara Yaqob at the same time as in England and in France”.³⁵ And Valentin Y. Mudimbe states in his outstanding book *The Invention of Africa* (1988):

The Treatise of Zār'a Ya'əqob [...] is a unique and important sign which suggests a critical outlook in the seventeenth-century Ethiopian culture, to the point that A. Baumstark has compared it to “the Confessions of a fellow African, St. Augustine” (in Sumner 1978, 5). The method of Zār'a Ya'əqob is definitely new: it posits the light of reason as a “discriminating criterion between what is of God and what is of men” and can be compared to Descartes's clear idea (1978, 70–71).³⁶

Kahsu Abrha Belew argues in a similar direction, considering Zār'a Ya'əqob not only as a contemporary and “Ethiopian Descartes” but also as a precursor of Kant.³⁷ And Andreas Eshete considers the *Ḥatāta* alongside the contributions of the *Dāqiqā Ḥatāta* and Gebrehiwot Baykedagn as precursors of modernity in Ethiopia.³⁸

Much has been published on Zār'a Ya'əqob in recent years. Based on the philosophical relevance of the *Ḥatāta*, a discourse has developed that discusses its significance for the history of African philosophy but also its role in solving current problems. For Sumner, the text was the basis for further reflection in subsequent works.³⁹ Teodros Kiros published some major works on Zār'a Ya'əqob.⁴⁰ For him,

32 Teodros Kiros (1996, 2001, and 2005).

33 Bekele Gutema (2001); see also Frysak and Bekele Gutema (2008).

34 Teodros Kiros (2001).

35 Sumner (1976a, p. 275).

36 Mudimbe (1988, p. 163).

37 Kahsu Abrha Belew (2020).

38 Andreas Eshete (2012, p. 21). See further Binyam Mekonnen's essay (Chapter 9) in this volume for a discussion of the *Dāqiqā Ḥatāta*.

39 Among others, see Sumner (1999a and 2004).

40 Teodros Kiros (1996, 1998, 2001, and 2005).

the text is not only of historical relevance but has the potential to contribute to a renewal of the social basis of justice and equality today.⁴¹ Teshome Abera explores how the ethical teachings of the treatises can be understood, with particular reference to the principle of harmony, which he argues to be central to the understanding of the *Ḥatāta*.⁴² Other works deal with its relevance for metaphysics and ethics.⁴³

Especially within the framework of the history of philosophy in Africa, the *Ḥatāta* today holds a central position, as is evident in seminal works on the issue (monographs as well as anthologies or encyclopaedias). The historiography of philosophy is still a very young discipline in Africa south of the Sahara. The first attempts to systematise the development of philosophy in this region date back to the 1970s and 1980s. Marcién Towa (1971), Paulin Hountondji (1983 [1976]), Henry Odera Oruka (1981), and Henry Olela (1981) tried to systematise philosophical schools and traditions on the African continent. More comprehensive works on the history of philosophy in Africa emerged in the 1990s and later.⁴⁴ However, these works are not yet an attempt to write a history of philosophy in the classical sense: Towa, Odera Oruka, Dismas Masolo, and Barry Hallen focus on the twentieth century; Théophile Obenga, Innocent Onyewuenyi, and Olela on the question of the beginning of philosophy in ancient Egypt; and Hountondji catches glimpses of various epochs and debates, from Anton Wilhelm Amo to Kwame Nkrumah, from Placide Tempels to the critique of ethnophilosophy. Only Maduakolam Osuagwu attempts to bridge the gap between ancient Egypt and the twentieth century. Sumner's studies on Ethiopian philosophy have to be placed in the context of these debates of the 1970s to the 1990s. They were particularly welcomed here, not least because they contributed to filling a gap between ancient Egyptian and nineteenth-/twentieth-century philosophy.

In recent years, the hypothesis of the beginning of African philosophy in ancient Egypt, as stated already in 1954 by Cheikh Anta Diop, has increasingly gained acceptance in African discourse—and beyond—not least because today research in this field is conducted on the basis of thorough studies of ancient Egyptian manuscripts.⁴⁵ This hypothesis is no longer only held by representatives of the so-called Afrocentric perspective, but also expressed in publications such as the *Oxford En-*

41 Teodros Kiros (2001).

42 Teshome Abera (2016).

43 Krause (2003); see also Dawit Worku Kidane (2012).

44 Cf. Obenga (1990); Masolo (1994); Onyewuenyi (1993); Osuagwu (1999a, 1999b); Hallen (2009 [2002]); and Wiredu (2004).

45 Obenga (1990); Karenga (2004); and Jeffers (2013). See also the podcast *History of Philosophy without any Gaps*, Africana Philosophy Series, by Adamson and Jeffers (2018c).

cyclopaedia of African Thought (2010)⁴⁶ and in various introductory works to the history of African philosophy published in recent years. These include Barry Hallen (2009 [2002]), Grégoire Biyogo (2006–2009), Hubert M. Ndjana (2009), and Maurice M. Makumba (2007) as well as Nsame Mbongo (2013) and the anthology *A Companion to African Philosophy* edited by Kwasi Wiredu (2004). These works usually also refer to Ethiopian philosophy, in particular the *Ḥatātas* of Zār'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Ḥəywät, as one of the cornerstones of the history of philosophy in Africa.⁴⁷

Furthermore, the *Ḥatāta* even shapes current attempts of a periodisation of the history of African philosophy. The Nigerian historian of philosophy Maduakolam Osuagwu has written what is perhaps the most comprehensive work on the history of African philosophy to date. It is also the first work that explicitly deals with the method of writing a history of philosophy for Africa. In his first volume of a multi-volume series on the history of African philosophy entitled *African historical reconstruction: A methodological option for African studies* (1999),⁴⁸ he distinguishes four periods in the history of African philosophy:

- Ancient history of African philosophy (or Egyptian period, from 3000 to 300 BCE).
- Mediaeval history of African philosophy:
 - the early Middle Ages or the Christian-Latin period of North African Catholic thinkers (the first six centuries CE)
 - the Arab-Islamic period (ninth to fifteenth centuries CE).
- Modern history of African philosophy and the Diaspora from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century CE (with special reference to Zār'a Ya'əqob and Anton Wilhelm Amo)
- Contemporary African Philosophy (the twentieth century CE).⁴⁹

Such a periodisation became generally accepted (with some variations) in subsequent works.⁵⁰

So far, Wion's study has had no impact on debates in African philosophy and historiography of philosophy, but the entire discourse can be called into question if it is proven that the *Ḥatātas*—as Wion argues—are neither from the seventeenth

⁴⁶ Irele and Jeyifo (2010).

⁴⁷ See, for example, Barry Hallen (2009 [2002], pp. 16 ff.); Hubert M. Ndjana (2009, pp. 39 ff.); Maurice M. Makumba (2007, pp. 84 ff.); and Wiredu's *Companion to African Philosophy* (2004), which contains two contributions on Zār'a Ya'əqob, one by Sumner and one by Teodros Kiros.

⁴⁸ Osuagwu (1999a).

⁴⁹ Osuagwu (1999a, p. 34 ff).

⁵⁰ Among many others, Kanu (2014); Makumba (2007); and Biyogo (2006–2009). A predecessor of such a periodisation is Obenga (1990, pp. 13 ff.).

century nor by Ethiopian authors. For this reason, I will return at this point to the question of authorship and authenticity.

What does one do when the authenticity of a foundational text is questionable? What is the epistemic status of a philosophical discourse if it is based on a document whose author and date are both uncertain?⁵¹ Dubious provenance and forged manuscripts are not new experiences in the historiography of philosophy. Especially after long centuries of discourse (see, for example, Diogenes Laërtius), the authenticity of the original text seems to play only a subordinate role. However, this is not yet the case with the *Ḥatātas*. For this reason, intensified research into the origin and authorship of the manuscripts is important.

However, cases of uncertain authorship become particularly explosive in the context of reconstructing philosophical traditions in formerly colonised and still marginalised regions of this world. Considering the difficulty of reconstructing the history of ideas in regions whose traditions were violently interrupted or even destroyed by colonialism, and whose inhabitants were flatly considered incapable of science and philosophy due to racist assumptions, brings many questions into sharp focus. Especially in places where oral transmission of tradition predominates, the discovery of forgeries in a tiny extant corpus is a more severe setback to reconnection with pre-colonial knowledge traditions than it is in traditions based on a broad corpus of established texts, concepts, and narratives. For the emerging historiography of African philosophy, the possible loss of the *Ḥatātas* of Zār'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Ḥəywät would be such a setback. In this respect, the question of authorship is still not secondary here, despite the existing corpus of works on those texts.

On the other hand—as Daniel Kibret as well as Fasil Merawi and Setargew Kenaw⁵² are pointing out—the debate about the authorship of the texts offers an important occasion to embark on a broader search for sources and manifestations of philosophy in Ethiopia, including all traditions of thought in this religiously and culturally diverse region. Hardly any other texts or ways of manifesting philosophical knowledge have been included in Ethiopian philosophical discourse so far. Among other things, greater emphasis could be placed on doctrines and movements such as the fifteenth-century *Däqiqä Ḥəstifanos* movement, on which very few studies have appeared so far.⁵³ For example, Maimire Mennasemay reads

51 For reflections on this and related issues, see also John Marenbon's essay (Chapter 4) in this volume.

52 Daniel Kibret (2011 E.C.; 2017) as well as Fasil Merawi and Setargew Kenaw (2020). See also Fasil Merawi's contribution to this volume (Chapter 11).

53 See again Chapter 9 in this volume.

the *Däqiqä İstifanos* teachings and movement as political philosophy.⁵⁴ Another example would be an exploration from a philosophical perspective of the hagiography of Mother Wälättä Petros (1592–1642),⁵⁵ a Christian nun who was canonised by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church for resisting the Catholicisation of Ethiopia. Resistance and asceticism can both be read philosophically. And as far as I know, there are no studies on the Islamic philosophical heritage in Ethiopia.⁵⁶

In summary, a proof that Zär'a Ya'əqob is neither the author of the *Ĥatäta* nor a historical figure but an invention of a European missionary of the nineteenth century (Giusto da Urbino)—a proof that has not yet been sufficiently provided⁵⁷—would indeed be a bitter loss for the historiography of philosophy in Africa and Ethiopia but also an opportunity for a new start in the study of ancient Ethiopian manuscripts from a philosophical perspective,⁵⁸ research that has hardly been advanced in recent decades, perhaps also due to the omnipresence of the *Ĥatätas* in the philosophical discourse. Moreover, even if the text may lose its relevance for the historiography of philosophy, it remains a text of philosophical interest.

3 Ethical Questions

Let me conclude by addressing a few ethical questions. I think the debate about the authenticity of the *Ĥatätas* must be critiqued from the point of view of the various interests involved. As Anthony Grafton points out in his book *Forgers and Critics* (1990), the history of European science suggests that the effort to uncover forgeries was often not “objective” but mostly concerned texts that contradicted the convictions or beliefs of the investigators. Grafton notes that commentators showed much less critical discernment once it came to writings that suited their opinions and desires. He concludes that a critique of authenticity is necessarily fallible in its conclusions. Its motives are often biased and unscientific. From this perspective, the debate over the authorship of the *Ĥatätas* must consider why European scholars repeatedly question the authenticity of these texts in particular. Or, perhaps, to

54 Maimire Mennasemay (2010).

55 See also Anaïs Wion's essay (Chapter 2) in this volume.

56 Although see Peter Adamson's essay (Chapter 7) in this volume, which discusses aspects of Islamic philosophy in the background of Eastern Christian cultures in and around Ethiopia.

57 See also the new translation of the text (Zara Yaqob, Walda Heywat, Lee, Mehari Worku, and Belcher 2023), which seems to suggest an Ethiopian origin of the text.

58 See Fasil Merawi's essay (Chapter 11) in this volume, which begins to pursue this route on the assumption that the text is a forgery.

put it more pointedly: Is this not a subliminal criticism of the ability of Ethiopian scholars to verify the authenticity of these texts? Is European science alone capable of impartial verification?

To avoid such reservations, an open and non-violent polylogue should be established that includes scholars from different disciplines and regions of the world, especially the place in which the text or other manifestations of philosophy under discussion originated. The “In Search of Zera Yacob” conference at Worcester College, University of Oxford, in April/May 2022 was an excellent start of such a polylogue, bringing European and Ethiopian scholars from different disciplines together. Particularly, the expertise of Ethiopian scholars cannot be ignored in such discussions. Representation—who is heard or ignored in the discourse—is of enormous relevance to a debate about knowledge traditions. Only in this way can methods, approaches, and perspectives be critiqued in terms of different epistemic frameworks. In an intercultural context, the problem of misinterpretations and false interpretations is particularly acute, because misinterpretations are always inherent in any attempt to understand a foreign context, since the interpretation of a foreign knowledge culture always takes place out of one’s own epistemic context and, moreover, often in a different language. For this very reason, an exchange with local knowledge experts is indispensable. But even an intercultural polylogue will not escape the colonial matrix. At least such a polylogue makes possible a critique of the conditions of knowledge production on which current science is based, and it opens up an opportunity to develop a new scientific practice with heuristic means to unveil rather than negate asymmetries in academia. Above all, a historiography of philosophy in a global perspective must be characterised by a sincere effort to recognise the equality of theoretical contributions from different regions and traditions of the world and to integrate them into an open research discourse—without a hierarchisation of knowledge traditions.

Fasil Merawi

Chapter 11

Examining the *Ḥatätas* as a Foundation of Ethiopian Philosophy

Abstract: The idea of a written Ethiopian philosophy that is founded on the *Ḥatätas* of Zär'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Ḥəywät is grounded on an illusory foundation. It is an intellectual exercise borne of a Eurocentric discourse that is involved in the search for an Other that can think like a European man. The picture of Ethiopian philosophy as being founded on the *Ḥatätas* is part of a larger effort to introduce an Ethiopian philosophical tradition that is made up of written philosophy, adapted philosophical wisdom, and societal wisdom and proverbs. Such an understanding of Ethiopian philosophy has not only failed to establish the authorship and philosophical worth of the *Ḥatätas*; it also does not explain the epistemic context within which such an exercise originated in the first place. In this chapter, it will be argued that Ethiopian philosophy is still in the making and that the idea of an Ethiopian philosophy that is founded on the *Ḥatätas* gives rise to three basic limitations. First, this idea emerged in a Eurocentric discourse, and its real purpose is to identify a form of subjectivity that participates in the European form of individual rationality. Second, proponents of the view that the *Ḥatätas* are authentic have not established that these works are philosophical in the strict sense: that is, primarily focused on critically examining metaphysical, epistemic, and axiological issues. Third, those who defend the authenticity of the *Ḥatätas* have failed to prove that the texts are authored by Ethiopians and not by Giusto da Urbino. As a result of this, most commentators on the *Ḥatätas* have accepted the validity of the *Ḥatätas* without properly explaining the striking similarities that are attested between the personalities of Zär'a Ya'əqob and Giusto da Urbino. This chapter concludes that Ethiopian philosophy is still searching for its identity and that it is not grounded on the *Ḥatätas*.

Introduction

The search for an Ethiopian philosophy has arisen as a response to the colonial prejudice according to which there is no rational form of criticism in non-Western societies. The need to establish the existence of Ethiopian philosophy has indeed largely been motivated by efforts to counter the Eurocentric bias that philosophy is a uniquely Western cultural product, supposedly unparalleled in other parts of

the world.¹ This has more generally driven the quest for non-Western philosophies that might fulfil all of the requirements of the Western canon of philosophy. Given that it is specifically implicated in the debate over the nature of rationality in the context of African philosophy, Ethiopian philosophy was appealed to as a way of refuting this colonial edifice and demonstrating that there is indeed a uniquely Ethiopian and African philosophy that is written by an individual and is able to exhibit a form of philosophical criticism that questions the validity of accepted wisdom and knowledge.

The quest for a philosophy of an “Other” that is able to participate in the European concept of subjectivity and autonomous rational inquiry thus lies at the heart of the standard picture of Ethiopian philosophy. It was most clearly developed by Claude Sumner, who argued that there are three major sources of Ethiopian philosophy: translations of foreign philosophy, original written philosophy, and oral wisdom.²

First, Sumner argued that there are texts that have a foreign origin but have been creatively adapted to the Ethiopian context and that the manner of adaptation makes them a part or aspect of Ethiopian philosophy, founded on an original synthesis of foreign sources. In the eyes of Sumner, a philosophical text does not necessarily have to originate within a given context in order to belong to a given philosophical tradition. On the contrary, what is important is the manner in which it is appropriated and synthesised within the societal wisdom of a particular tradition. This leads Sumner to contend that texts like *The Life and Maxims of Skendes* constitute one aspect of Ethiopian philosophy, since these foreign texts have been appropriated on Ethiopian soil.³

Second, Sumner also argued that there is a written philosophical culture in the Ethiopian context that finds expression in the ideas of Zär’a Ya’əqob and Wäldä Həywät. He used this to argue that there are written philosophical texts that are produced by an individual, and which originated in the context of a religious controversy in modern Ethiopia.⁴ For Sumner, the *Ḥatätas* of Zär’a Ya’əqob and Wäldä Həywät are so profound that the ideas that are developed in the texts demonstrate the existence of a rationalist philosophy that can be compared to the ideas of Western thinkers like Descartes.⁵ Sumner argued that the texts are uniquely Ethiopian but also participate in broader philosophical debates about the nature of knowledge, reality, and human values.

1 Masolo (1994).

2 Sumner (1996).

3 Sumner (1974b).

4 Fasil Merawi (2019).

5 Sumner (1978).

Third, Sumner argued that there is also an oral source in Ethiopian philosophy and that it is, among other things, found in Oromo wisdom and literature, wherein proverbs and maxims are used in order to disseminate philosophical teachings from one generation to the other.

By drawing on broader debates about Ethiopian philosophy, this chapter will attempt to question the standard picture of Ethiopian philosophy that is founded on what Sumner identifies as the second source of philosophy in Ethiopia: the *Ḥatātas* of Zār'a Ya'eqob and Wäldä Ḥəywät. The focus will be on how the interpretation of these texts as a foundation of a written Ethiopian philosophy produced by individual thinkers has three basic limitations.

First, it will be argued that the notion of Ethiopian philosophy originated from a Eurocentric discourse and that it is animated by attempts to identify a Black man able to participate in the Western conception of individual existence. This suggests that the whole idea of Ethiopian philosophy does not emerge as a unique indigenous philosophy but only makes sense from the vantage point of consolidating the European understanding of man.

Second, it will be argued that the ideas that are found within the *Ḥatātas* are not properly philosophical but rather need to be understood as attempts to reform the teachings of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. What is found in these texts is an attempt to reform the teachings of the church rather than a fully developed philosophy that has the power to interrogate the nature of the world through the use of rational categories.

Third, it will be argued that those who defend the authenticity of the *Ḥatātas* have failed to prove that the texts are authored by Ethiopians and not by Giusto da Urbino. As a result of this, most commentators on the *Ḥatātas* have accepted the validity of the *Ḥatātas* without properly explaining the striking similarities that are attested between the personalities of Zār'a Ya'eqob and Giusto da Urbino.

The Eurocentric Background of Ethiopian Philosophy

As proponents of African philosophy have long pointed out, dominant conceptions of philosophy are permeated with the Eurocentric bias that philosophy is a unique cultural product that is exclusively possessed by the Western world.⁶ According to the Eurocentric conception of philosophy, philosophy emerged in ancient Greece and is closely tied with the rationalist-instrumentalist form of thinking that sup-

⁶ Bodunrin (1981).

posedly developed on Western soil; Western society allegedly represents the highest form of civilisation, and the developmental path of the West is something that needs to be followed by others. Equally, it is assumed that other cultures and societies have no contribution to the development of a refined philosophical tradition.⁷ In such a context, non-Western societies are depicted as living in a state of superstition and underdevelopment.

In an effort to reject this kind of approach, various attempts have been made to demonstrate the existence of African philosophy, with two major goals in mind. The first was to counter the Eurocentric discourse that had relegated Africans and non-Western societies to a position of otherness. The second involved demonstrating the existence of rational modes of thought in non-Western cultures globally, each with their own specificities. This led to a presentation of African philosophy as a unique intellectual tradition grounded on, for example, a relational ethics that is not subsumed within the binary relationship between subject and object. This is the background against which the current idea of an Ethiopian philosophy needs to be understood.

The idea of an Ethiopian philosophy therefore did not emerge as an attempt to characterise ways of looking at and reflecting upon reality or to denote a rational form of criticism that tries to question accepted views of reality in general. The concept is not the product of a philosophical culture born out of wonder and the need to offer rational explanations of the mysteries that we encounter in the world. To the contrary, it is rooted in the attempt to demonstrate the existence of an African and an Ethiopian thinker that is able to think just like a Western man. What is presented in the name of Ethiopian philosophy is an attempt to identify a Black man that can think just like a Western man. It is an attempt to show that Ethiopians also have canons of thought that can be compared to the Western conception of philosophy. This is seen in the fact that whenever discussions of Ethiopian philosophy are conducted, the main focus is on generating a comparison with the ideas of Ethiopian thinkers on the one hand and Western ones on the other. The tendency is to frame Ethiopian philosophy either as radically distinctive from Western philosophy, or, at the opposite extreme, as being identical to it. In the latter case, the conception of the human subject that is read into the written sources of Ethiopian philosophy is the modern, Western European subject who exercises instrumental rationality in order to control and subdue the natural world around him.

As mentioned earlier, the main scholar to have popularised the idea of a written Ethiopian philosophy is Claude Sumner. Sumner is a thinker who was interest-

⁷ Sogolo (1990).

ed in finding the philosophy of other cultures comparable to the ideas of the greatest Western thinkers, like Kant and Descartes. He believed that within each and every philosophy, there is a universal element that makes it possible to engage in a comparison among different philosophical cultures.⁸ With regards to the written sources of Ethiopian philosophy, Sumner argued that there are two texts that are of greatest importance and that the ideas that are found within the texts are philosophical and the product of individual thinkers. For Sumner, the *Ḥatātas* are of a philosophical nature in virtue of the method of presentation they follow and the rigorous form of reasoning used to establish key arguments.⁹ Sumner did not consider the fact that the method of the *Ḥatātas* takes its cue from the *qone* tradition in Ethiopian culture—an artistic form of criticism that does not have the capacity to develop a critical inquiry into reality, since it is made up of poetic language that only posits imaginary possibilities. Sumner equated the nature of philosophy with the broadest sense of wisdom; and because of this, he did not demonstrate the existence of a rational tradition in Ethiopia.

Sumner recognises that the *Ḥatātas* of Zār'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Ḥəyiwät originated in the context of religious debate and controversy. He depicts Zār'a Ya'əqob as someone who was trying to develop a rational articulation of the situation with which he was dealing, since rather than approaching the truth of God from the point of view of faith and belief, he tried to develop a rational articulation of God's existence.¹⁰ In the *Ḥatāta*, Zār'a Ya'əqob says that “there is only one truth”.¹¹ This is taken by Sumner and others as a commitment to philosophical inquiry, which has the aim of discovering the truth through rational inquiry. It is also argued that Zār'a Ya'əqob introduced a system of ethics that is grounded on the relationship between the existence of God and the harmony exhibited in nature. For Odomaro Mubangizi, Sumner “demonstrated that the modern Western era of rationalism with Descartes has its equivalent in Ethiopia”.¹²

Sumner also presents Zār'a Ya'əqob as a rational thinker who had a religious upbringing, who was thus intimately familiar with the teachings of the Orthodox Christian tradition. This account of Zār'a Ya'əqob has been questioned by Daniel Kibret, on the grounds that Zār'a Ya'əqob, as he is portrayed in the *Ḥatāta*, is not someone who has an adequate grasp of the teachings of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.¹³ Additionally, Getatchew Haile has argued that the argument which

8 Sumner (1996).

9 See further Teodros Kiros (1996).

10 Sumner (1976a).

11 Zara Ya'qob, Walda Heywat, Lee, Mehari Worku, and Belcher (2023, p. 71).

12 Mubangizi (2019, p. 6).

13 See Daniel Kibret (2011 E.C., 2017).

Zär'a Ya'əqob uses to prove the existence of God suggests a heavy influence of Catholicism on his teachings, such that his arguments are not uniquely Ethiopian.¹⁴

In discussing the *Ḥatāta* of Zär'a Ya'əqob's disciple, Wäldä Ḥəywät, Sumner contends that this second text is more centrally devoted to social and moral questions.¹⁵ What Sumner does not address in detail is how similar the ideas and methods of Zär'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Ḥəywät are, especially in their common identification of the will of God as the basis for the intelligibility of the truth. His contributions laid the foundations for subsequent attempts by thinkers like Teodros Kiros, who went so far as to argue that the *Ḥatātas* are unique in overcoming the classical dichotomy between the mind and the body that was introduced by the Cartesian tradition. It was also the work of Sumner and Teodros Kiros that established the parallel between the *Ḥatāta* and Descartes' methodic doubt. It has thus been claimed that Zär'a Ya'əqob "is roughly contemporaneous with Descartes, and their methods are strikingly similar".¹⁶

In all such celebrations of the *Ḥatātas*, what is neglected is an analysis of the *Ḥatātas* within the context of the quest for a philosophy that is driven by the search for an "Other" that is able to participate in the European conception of the subject.

Is There a Philosophy in the *Ḥatātas*—And Are They Even Ethiopian?

Written sources of Ethiopian philosophy are identified by Sumner either as having a foreign origin but as having been adapted to Ethiopian soil, or as having been written by individual Ethiopian authors of a philosophical stature. Sumner argues that in such cases one is able to identify the existence of a philosophical culture that deals with issues around the nature of knowledge, reality, and social values. Sumner further argues that the philosophical nature of these texts should be approached from the point of view of the kind of method that is being utilised in them. The method that the *Ḥatāta* picks out consists of an analysis of fundamental "natural" truths, by which we can evaluate received, "human" truths. This method is even compared to the tools of analysis that are utilised by rationalist thinkers like Descartes in their quest to find a kind of knowledge that is firm and reliable in its nature, which might in turn serve as the foundation of all philosophical pur-

¹⁴ See Getatchew Haile (2017), reproduced as Chapter 1 of this volume.

¹⁵ Sumner (1976a).

¹⁶ Verharen (2006, p. 15).

suits.¹⁷ Still, it is worth noting that Zār'a Ya'əqob never questions all aspects of received wisdom and that his thinking still takes place under the religious belief that there is an overall harmony in the world that is grounded on the existence of a creator-God. In the eyes of Zār'a Ya'əqob, “the intelligence of every human being knows that everything that we see is created”.¹⁸ Comparing the ideas that are found in the *Ḥatātas* to the thought of Descartes is also problematic since within the *Ḥatātas*, we do not find an explicit and rigorous analysis that interrogates *all* possible aspects of human cognition.

One might be inclined to suggest that Zār'a Ya'əqob as he is presented to us in the *Ḥatātas* presents himself as someone so dissatisfied with the teachings of the major religions that he decides to embark on a rational pursuit of the truth. He is thus arguably depicted as a person who believes that there is only one truth, which becomes apparent to us through rational analysis. This picture still sits in tension with the fact that the nature of the individual is not discussed in a way that guarantees the autonomous nature of the subject in the *Ḥatātas*. The essence of individual existence is confined within “the Creator’s established order”.¹⁹ The subject and the individual that is given to us in the *Ḥatātas* is an agent that is subsumed under the will of God.

The ideas that are presented in the *Ḥatāta* of Zār'a Ya'əqob are indeed founded on the assumption that our intellect is given to us by God.²⁰ It is argued that the power to discover the nature of the world in which we are living is made possible by a God that is all-powerful and all-loving in its nature. The human subject is seen as a fragile and finite being that requires the will of God in order to lead a meaningful form of existence. In the *Ḥatāta* of Zār'a Ya'əqob, we find a cosmological argument whose aim is to prove the existence of God on the basis that there must be a being that is not itself created but which is responsible for the whole of creation. As the *Ḥatāta* puts it: “Because we exist and are not creators but rather are created, we have to say that there is a creator who fashioned us”.²¹ Zār'a Ya'əqob proceeds to argue that this is the God that gave us the power of rationality and that we come into a contact with such a God in the process of praying, which is identified as a rational undertaking.

One of the central elements that are presented as the unique qualities of Zār'a Ya'əqob's philosophy is the idea that Zār'a Ya'əqob's journey can be seen as an individual quest for the truth that is made possible through the power of rationality. In

17 Teshome Abera (2019).

18 Zara Yaqob, Walda Heywat, Lee, Mehari Worku, and Belcher (2023, p. 82).

19 Zara Yaqob, Walda Heywat, Lee, Mehari Worku, and Belcher (2023, p. 84).

20 Sumner (1976a).

21 Zara Yaqob, Walda Heywat, Lee, Mehari Worku, and Belcher (2023, p. 70).

order to strengthen such an assumption, it has been argued that Zär'a Ya'əqob was contemplating in a state of seclusion in a cave and that his whole philosophy is the result of such meditation.²² It has been suggested that he developed radical views on the relationship between the two sexes, the nature of fasting and monastic life, and also the injustice that is found in the world. What is lacking is an analysis that shows how Zär'a Ya'əqob was able to introduce a critically-oriented system of thought that concentrated on the classical questions of reality, knowledge, and human values. Instead, we find a system of thought that subsumes the existence of the individual under a divine force that presides over the whole of existence.

One argument that Sumner presents in order to demonstrate the philosophical nature of the *Ḥatātas* is the idea that the *Ḥatātas* deviate from the teachings that are found in the teachings of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.²³ But this argument can be questioned based on three major observations. First of all, as Daniel Kibret has shown,²⁴ there is a profound form of rational criticism that runs through the teachings of the church; even teachings that are considered radical are still debated and analysed within the tradition. And yet, no mention of the *Ḥatātas* is made in the teachings of the church, even though there are far more radical ideas that are discussed within the bounds of the church when compared to those of the *Ḥatātas*.

Secondly, it must also be recognised that the ideas that are used to prove the existence of God in the *Ḥatāta* suggest the presence of a foreign influence on the thoughts of the thinker. Getatchew Haile argues that the argument for the existence of God that is found in the *Ḥatātas* likely does not emerge from within the Ethiopian tradition but is probably influenced by the Catholic tradition,²⁵ building on the Aristotelian idea of the prime mover. Given that even Zär'a Ya'əqob in the *Ḥatātas* admits to being in contact with the Catholics, it is difficult to regard the argument for the existence of God that is presented in the text as a unique idea formulated by Zär'a Ya'əqob.

Finally, the question of the authorship of the *Ḥatātas* is not settled at all. The evidence shows that there are striking similarities between Zär'a Ya'əqob and Giusto da Urbino that cannot be ruled out: starting from the language and the modes of expression all the way up to details like the parallel dates of birth,

22 Teodros Kiros (1996).

23 Sumner (1976a).

24 Daniel Kibret (2011 E.C., 2017).

25 Getatchew Haile (2006 E.C., 2014); see also Getatchew Haile (2017), reproduced as Chapter 1 in this volume. For a discussion of the cosmological argument, see also John Marenbon's essay (Chapter 4)—which addresses in detail the possibility of a link to Aquinas—as well as Henry Straughan's and Michael O'Connor's essay (Chapter 12).

names, and their travels from Aksum to Gondär.²⁶ Because of this convincing evidence, it is the proponents of an Ethiopian authorship of the *Ḥatātas* who need to come up with evidence that shows that it is indeed Ethiopian authors who wrote the texts. All these limitations point towards the realisation that there is no mature concept of an Ethiopian philosophy and that Ethiopian philosophy is still looking for its own identity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is a need to question the idea of an Ethiopian philosophy that is founded on the *Ḥatātas* for three major reasons.

First, we must interrogate the epistemic context within which the idea of Ethiopian philosophy as an intellectual tradition originated in the first place. Such an analysis will show that it developed in a context where there was a search for an African philosophy that takes place through a written medium and through the agency of an individual thinker. The *Ḥatātas* were believed to fulfil the criterion and because of this, commentators failed to take note of their real philosophical worth and the validity of the ideas that are found in the texts was never the major object of attention. Instead, they sought to use the texts as a way of refuting the colonial prejudice that denied the existence of a philosophy in Africa. In doing so, they failed to see whether or not there is anything else that is worthy of importance in the Ethiopian tradition, thus reinscribing the old Eurocentrism.

Second, these commentators sought in their interpretations to demonstrate the existence of a Black man that emulates the Western concept of the subject. However there is no Cartesian subject in the core of the *Ḥatātas*. While the texts deal with diverse questions like the nature and the existence of God, the problem of evil, the relationship between men and women, the nature of social justice and the discovery of truth, still, these questions did not result in the development of a philosophical criticism since they all take place under a fundamentally religious outlook. Therefore what is found in the texts is an attempt at religious reformation rather than a mode of philosophical criticism.

It must finally be noted that those who defend the authenticity of the *Ḥatātas* have not yet convincingly shown that the texts are authored by Ethiopians. Yet it is crucial to ask whether or not the texts are written by a foreign writer. And even if it were shown that the texts were in fact written by Ethiopian authors, still the texts do not convincingly attest to a distinctively philosophical outlook.

²⁶ See especially Wion (2013a; 2013b) and Daniel Kibret (2011 E.C., 2017) in recent literature.

For all of these reasons, Ethiopian philosophy is still in the making, and there is a fundamental need to question received conceptions of it.

Henry Straughan and Michael O'Connor

Chapter 12

Revelation and Reason in the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'əqob*

Abstract: In this article, we seek to illuminate the philosophical method of the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'əqob*. In particular, we trace the interaction between reason and revelation and the role of discursive argumentation versus immediate intuition. We draw out Zār'a Ya'əqob's method by explicating and examining his discussion of the epistemic significance of disagreement and his distrust of testimony; his argument for the existence of God; his theodical response to the problem of evil; and his practical ethics. In doing so, we argue that Zār'a Ya'əqob's central method of argument is abductive or an inference to the best explanation rather than a deductive method of deriving metaphysical and ethical conclusions from first principles. Zār'a Ya'əqob is committed to all phenomena being explicable in terms of God's purposes and pursuit of perfection, and he uses abductive reasoning to uncover such divine teleology. He appears to be relatively uninterested, in the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'əqob*, in uncovering efficient causal mechanisms but rather seeks to know the purposes of various phenomena. We will also suggest that for Zār'a Ya'əqob discursive reason must be supplemented with intuitive revelation: discursive reason is necessary to criticise and free oneself from dogmatism and tradition, while intuitive revelation is required for wisdom. We further outline how Zār'a Ya'əqob's investigation into the teleological order of nature provides him with ethical guidance. We conclude by considering the role that final causation plays in Zār'a Ya'əqob's method and compare Zār'a Ya'əqob with his European contemporaries René Descartes and Gottfried W. Leibniz.

In this article, we seek to illuminate the philosophical method of the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'əqob* (henceforth “the *Treatise*” or “HZY”).¹ In particular, we trace the interac-

¹ We neither take a stance on nor address the authorship controversy surrounding the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'əqob*; rather, we will typically write *as if* the authoring of text happened in the way described in the text. We hope that an analysis of the philosophical method of the text is interesting, regardless of who in fact authored it. See Anaïs Wion's *The History of a Genuine Fake Philosophical Treatise (L'histoire d'un vrai faux traité philosophique)*, Mbodj-Pouye and Wion 2013; Wion 2013a; and Wion 2013b), and this volume's Introduction, for a summary of the history of the controversy. All translations of the *Ḥatāta Zār'a Ya'əqob* (“HZY”) and of the *Ḥatāta Wäldä Ḥəyiwät* (“HWH”) are

tion between the role of discursive argumentation versus immediate intuition or revelation and the abductive structure of Zär'a Ya'əqob's reasoning. Zär'a Ya'əqob is sure that testimony and tradition are not adequate sources of knowledge. The alternative source he identifies is the capacity for rational thought inherent in all of us. We suggest that abductive reasoning is central to Zär'a Ya'əqob's rational method, with Zär'a Ya'əqob applying something like a Principle of Sufficient Reason to investigate God's purposes in creating the world as he did. Furthermore, by uncovering the divine teleology, Zär'a Ya'əqob thinks we can discover how we ought to act. We also think that Zär'a Ya'əqob sees the truth-disclosing power of reason as something that does not depend on man alone. Instead, striking on the right explanation for a given phenomenon seems as much a matter of having the right reasons revealed by God as a matter of unaided argument.

We draw out Zär'a Ya'əqob's method by explicating and examining, in the following order, his discussion of disagreement and his distrust of testimony; his argument for the existence of God; his theodical response to the problem of evil; and his ethics. We close by considering some illuminating comparisons with Gottfried W. Leibniz, who we think may be a better companion than Descartes, to whom Zär'a Ya'əqob is often compared.² The text's fragmentary, allusive compression means that we must be careful with our conclusions, but we shall try to track Zär'a Ya'əqob's trains of thought and movements of style as best we can, re-tracing the jagged path between revelation and reason in his footsteps.

Abduction and Methodology

Our central claim is that Zär'a Ya'əqob's method is primarily abductive and teleological. An abductive argument, roughly speaking, is one in which the conclusion does not follow directly from the premises or, rather, where the argumentative weight does not lie in the deductive form.³ Rather, it involves framing two or more explanations for a phenomenon and then appealing to explanatory criteria in settling on the best explanation for that phenomenon. For example, one explanation for why the Earth goes round the sun is in terms of gravity. Another invokes

taken from Zara Ya'qob, Walda Heywat, Lee, Mehari Worku, and Belcher (2023), with page numbers referring to that translation.

² Brooh Asmare's essay in this volume (Chapter 8) similarly questions the relevance of comparisons between Zär'a Ya'qob and Descartes. However, he argues for parallels between Zär'a Ya'qob and the German idealists rather than Leibniz.

³ We say this because any abductive argument can be reconstructed as 1. Y, 2. X explains Y, 3. X is the best explanation for Y, 4. If X is the best explanation for fact Y, then X is the case, 5. Therefore, X.

the agency of angels. The latter explanation is a poor explanation because it posits the existence of undetected and possibly undetectable entities. Similarly, Zār'a Ya'əqob's method involves positing explanations and rejecting alternatives on the grounds that they are bad explanations or, in some cases, not really explanations at all.

Our claim, then, is that Zār'a Ya'əqob's method involves taking a fact, such as the existence of the world, and then developing an explanation that fits a set of explanatory criteria. What makes matters difficult is that his explanatory criteria are not made explicit. Still, we think it possible to extract three general principles that constrain which explanations are acceptable. The first basic principle is what we will call his *Principle of Creation*, according to which “everything that we see is created [...] no creature may be thought of as created without a Creator”.⁴ Zār'a Ya'əqob holds, and also claims “every human being knows”,⁵ that all phenomena we experience are created and have a creator. The latter part is important to stress, since Zār'a Ya'əqob conceives of creation as an agential and teleological process. In particular, he considers God to be the creator of all and considers God as acting purposively in creation. This leads to the second basic principle, which we call the *Principle of Divine Teleology*, according to which the reason why things are as they are is that God has made them so and that God acts as he does to achieve the greatest perfection. As illustration, consider Zār'a Ya'əqob's gloriously teleological description of the natural world:

I was marvelling at the beauty of God's creatures, each in its established order; the animals that eat plants and the animals that eat meat. They are drawn by their nature to preserve their life and to continue their kind. Moreover, the forest's trees and plants, which were created with great wisdom—grow shoots, bud, bloom, and produce fruit of their seed's kind without any mistakes. It's almost like they have a soul [...] This sun is the spring of light and the spring of the life of the world. The moon and the stars, which you yourself established, don't stray from their ordained paths [...] Everything is majestic and wonderful, and everything was created with wisdom.⁶

This *Principle of Divine Teleology* means that Zār'a Ya'əqob's method is teleological, in that Zār'a Ya'əqob is concerned with establishing the ends or “final causes” that God has in making matters the way that they are.

The combination of these first two principles evidently bears resemblance to the Principle of Sufficient Reason. This is the principle, according to Gottfried W.

4 HZY, p. 82.

5 HZY, p. 82.

6 HZY, p. 96.

Leibniz in the *Monadology*, “by virtue of which we consider that we can find no true or existent fact, no true assertion, without there being a sufficient reason why it is thus and not otherwise”.⁷ Zār’a Ya’əqob does not make reference to reasons in his Principle of Creation, but his principles secure reasons for the existence of everything in two senses. First, the principle of creation ensures that everything has a cause, i. e., its creator (or the activity of its creator). Second, Zār’a Ya’əqob’s agential and purposive conception of creation ensures that everything has a reason for its existence in the sense that it was created for a purpose (it has a final cause, in contrast to the efficient cause that is its creator or their creative activity). This is particularly clear when we consider Zār’a Ya’əqob’s claim that “everything was created with wisdom”. It is natural to think that a wise creator creates in accordance with reasons—for instance, in a well-designed machine (or a beautifully written poem), every part and aspect will serve a particular purpose and will be chosen over alternatives for a reason. Indeed, Leibniz himself claims to ground the Principle of Sufficient Reason on God’s wisdom, writing in an undated text that “[o]ne of my great principles is that nothing happens without reason. That is a principle of philosophy. Nevertheless, at bottom it is nothing but an affirmation of the divine wisdom”.⁸ While we will return to a comparison with Leibniz at the end, it is worth pointing out another similarity between Zār’a Ya’əqob and Leibniz: both think the truth of their fundamental principles, the Principle of Creation and the Principle of Sufficient of Reason respectively, is somehow self-evident and accepted, knowingly or not, by everyone. Leibniz claims that all reasoning is based on this “great principle” and rhetorically asks in a letter to Clarke “[h]as not everybody made use of this principle, upon a thousand occasions?”.⁹ Similarly, Zār’a Ya’əqob claims that “the intelligence of every human being knows that everything that we see is created”¹⁰ and appears to think this principle is too self-evident to stand in need of further justification.

Finally, Zār’a Ya’əqob does not just think God acts for the sake of ends but further that God’s purposes are accessible to us. Hence, the third, complementary principle is what we call the *Principle of Accessible and Comprehensible Explanation*, according to which these reasons are comprehensible and accessible to us, in the sense that if we think hard enough we can understand why what is the case is the case. Such a principle rules out appealing to our ignorance or the inscrutability of God’s purposes to “explain” phenomena. These principles, we suggest, form the basis of Zār’a Ya’əqob’s explanatory criteria. Beyond that, though,

⁷ Leibniz and Gerhardt (1875–1890, Volume VI; p. 612) = Leibniz and Loemker (1970 [1969], p. 646).

⁸ Bodemann (1895, Volume IV, I, p. 39) = Curley (1972, p. 96).

⁹ Letter 5, Secs. 127 = Leibniz, Clarke, and Alexander (1977 [1956], pp. 96–97).

¹⁰ HZY, p. 82.

as we shall see, Zār'a Ya'əqob's criteria for deciding between different explanations which conform with these principles are not entirely clear and tend to be specific to particular explanations.

Disagreement and Testimony

One of Zār'a Ya'əqob's central claims is that there exists an innate faculty of reason, which he usually suggests is given to us by God. As he writes in Chapter 5: “to the one who searches out, truth will quickly be revealed [...] the one who inquires with the pure reason which the Creator has put into the human heart, to perceive the creation's established order and laws, will find the truth”.¹¹ Zār'a Ya'əqob further claims that

If we were to see by this light of our intelligence what is our duty, it cannot deceive us, because our Creator gave us this light that we may be saved by it, and not destroyed [...] all that the light of our intelligence reveals to us is from the fountain of truth¹²

Pure reason cannot lead us into falsehood. Zār'a Ya'əqob makes clear that all of us have the relevant powers of reason, stating that God has “given intelligence to each and every human being, so that they might recognise truth and lies”.¹³ Together, these quotations strongly suggest the *Principle of Accessible and Comprehensible Explanation* outlined above. Zār'a Ya'əqob is confident that investigation will reveal to us the truth if we choose to investigate by using reason.

Despite this, Zār'a Ya'əqob notes that we all too often fall into falsehood. In Chapter 3, he writes at length about the ubiquity of real-world disagreement, focusing on the doctrinal disagreement between the Ethiopian Church and Roman Catholicism and the more fundamental tension between the teachings of religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. The first task facing Zār'a Ya'əqob, then, is to explain why people go wrong in deploying the faculty of reason before he can discuss how reason *ought* to be deployed.

Given that our faculty of reason is unfailingly truth-disclosing if deployed properly, any disagreement must be due to our failure to deploy the faculty of reason appropriately. A first problem in Zār'a Ya'əqob's eyes is that men are “weak and lazy” and are reluctant to investigate the truth, which can only be attained

¹¹ HZY, p. 75.

¹² HZY, p. 77.

¹³ HZY, p. 83.

with “great toil and patience”.¹⁴ A second problem is that many people falsely assume that they *already* possess knowledge. Speaking of the groups mentioned above—*fāranġ* (Catholics), Copts, Jews, and Mohammedans—he writes that “because they think they are knowledgeable, they don’t search to find out the truth”.¹⁵ Of course, this would be no problem if they did know all. But Zār’a Ya’əqob thinks that the existence of disagreement gives us good reason to think that they do not. He notes that “human beings don’t want to ask questions, and they rush to believe what they heard from their ancestors, without questioning”.¹⁶ He expands on why this is bad in the following passage:

Look, how many lies our people believe with unshakable faith! They don’t believe in all these because they investigated them and found them to be true, rather they believe in them because they heard about them from their ancestors. Why did [these people] lie, except to gain wealth and prestige?¹⁷

The argument here seems to be that peoples’ beliefs are primarily determined by their predecessors’ beliefs rather than by their own investigation of the truth. But what those predecessors said was determined primarily by the desire for wealth and honours. Since the desire for wealth and honours is not a truth-conducive factor, basing one’s beliefs on those of one’s predecessors is unlikely to be truth-conducive. It should be noted that this does not entail that the *fāranġ*, Copts, Jews, and Mohammedans are wrong about everything. Indeed, Zār’a Ya’əqob believes that there are some truths so self-evident that they cannot be denied. Thus, he writes in Chapter 6:

[W]hy do all human beings agree in saying that there is a God, the Creator of all? Because the intelligence of every human being knows that everything that we see is created, that no creature may be thought of as created without a Creator, and that if there is a Creator, he is truthful. Because of this, all human beings agree on this point.¹⁸

More generally, Zār’a Ya’əqob can allow that the *fāranġ*, Copts, Mohammedans, and Jews may each have got at some important truths, such as the existence of God. His claim is just that one cannot tell what they have got right by testimony alone, nor will they be right for the right reasons. The foundation of Zār’a Ya’əqob’s method, then, is distrust of testimony: It is reliance on testimony that drives us into false-

¹⁴ HZY, p. 73.

¹⁵ HZY, p. 72.

¹⁶ HZY, p. 73.

¹⁷ HZY, p. 74.

¹⁸ HZY, p. 82.

hood. Wisdom requires that we work things out by undertaking our own investigation, using our own intelligence. It is for this reason that residing in a cave is advantageous to Zār'a Ya'əqob's meditations: "through my escape and living in a cave, I found the occasion to make a perfect return to my creator; to think what I had never thought before, and to know the truth, which makes my soul rejoice with great joy".¹⁹ Only away from the distorting influence of others can one deploy reason without interference.

At the same time, Zār'a Ya'əqob seems to think that reason cannot work without God's aid. In Chapter 10, just after declaring that human beings "don't reveal anything to us but their own empty and worthless ideas. Their human nature is so puny, but with the intelligence our creator graciously bestowed on us, we can know his greatness", he implores God to "[g]ive me understanding of what I should know about you".²⁰ This imprecation ("give me understanding") may just be a rhetorical flourish, but it suggests that Zār'a Ya'əqob does not expect to understand creation on his own—he needs God-given help *in addition* to the use of reason. It is worth noting here Zār'a Ya'əqob's consistent use of the language of revelation and illumination: "to the one who searches out, truth will quickly be revealed".²¹ Notably, the claim that truth will be *quickly* revealed apparently contrasts with Zār'a Ya'əqob's claim that humans "desire to know creation's mysteries, but doing so is difficult. The truth won't be found without great toil and patience [...] human beings don't want to ask questions, and they rush to believe what they heard from their ancestors, without questioning".²² This contrast between the great toil and patience of questioning and the quickness of revelation suggests that the acquisition of knowledge involves an active moment of seeking, involving the critical, and laborious, use of discursive reason, which puts the seeker in receptive state for the passive moment of revelation, which is not dependent on the activity or power of the seeker.

The Existence of God

In Chapter 3 of the *Treatise*, Zār'a Ya'əqob's worry about the ubiquity of disagreement gives rise to the question: How can God allow confusion over the truth and evil to exist? Zār'a Ya'əqob's immediate response is to pray, in the hope that God

¹⁹ HZY, p. 91.

²⁰ HZY, p. 96.

²¹ HZY, p. 75.

²² HZY, p. 73.

will reveal to him why these epistemic and moral evils should exist. This is consistent with the picture outlined above, on which reason yields the correct explanation for phenomena in conjunction with grace, or revelation. In the process of praying, though, Zār'a Ya'əqob comes to doubt the existence of God: "Whom do I myself pray to? Is there a Lord who hears me? [...] Did I create myself with my own hands?"²³

In considering the existence of God, Zār'a Ya'əqob dwells on the issue of *creation*. As noted above, Zār'a Ya'əqob is committed to the Principle of Creation that "everything that we see is created [...] no creature may be thought of as created without a Creator". This is an *a priori* principle according to which any complete explanation for the existence of an entity must cite a creator. Furthermore, as we have encoded in the Principle of Divine Teleology, Zār'a Ya'əqob's is committed to there being teleological—or final causal—reasons for every fact, rather than just efficient causes. Since creators are agents who act for the sake of ends, each fact must be explicable in terms of the purposive activity of some agent—not only does everything have a creator, but furthermore "everything was created with wisdom".

With this background picture, Zār'a Ya'əqob first considers the possibility that he created himself but dismisses this because he did not exist when he was created (the unarticulated premise being that only existing beings can create). He then considers the further possibility that his parents created him:

If I say that my father and my mother created me then my parents' creator and their parents' creator must still be searched for, until arriving at the first ones who were not conceived like us, but who came into this world in another way, without parents. For if they were conceived, I don't know where their genealogy begins unless I say, "there is one being who created them out of nothing, one who was not created, but rather already existed and will exist forever, Lord of all the Almighty, who has no beginning or end, immutable, whose years are innumerable".²⁴

In this passage, Zār'a Ya'əqob begins by entertaining but not committing to the view that his father and mother created him by a process of "generation". In explaining *why* his parents are not the appropriate creators, Zār'a Ya'əqob cannot appeal to similar reasons as above: for, obviously, his parents *did* exist at the beginning of his life. Instead, Zār'a Ya'əqob is concerned that such an explanatory route leads to an infinite regress of generation, since one must ask who created one's parents, and then who created their parents etc. Zār'a Ya'əqob's reasons for reject-

23 HZY, p. 69.

24 HZY, p. 69.

ing such an infinite regress of explanation appear to be partly epistemic: he thinks that at some point we must posit the foundational existence of an uncreated thing because otherwise we “know nothing”.

It is not clear why we would “know nothing” on this picture. It is not obviously impossible that there could be an infinite chain of generation, so that there is no “first human”. We might construe the argument as based on an appeal to the explanatory inadequacy of infinite regress. Suppose the first human was created like humans solely by generation and that those who generated the first human also had generators, who themselves had generators, and so on *ad infinitum*. To avoid an infinite chain of generators, the thought goes, we must posit the existence of an ungenerated thing that brought into being all other things. The problem is not necessarily with the metaphysical possibility of regress. It is rather a problem at the level of explanation. An explanation that cites an infinite chain of generators is not a good explanation. Why this is so, however, is not made clear: in such a regress, each existent would itself be explained by a previous generator or creator. Nonetheless, there is something intuitively unsatisfactory about such an infinite regress as an explanation, especially if what we are searching for is the purpose or final cause of our existence.

We get further elaboration of the explanatory power of God’s existence in Chapter 6, in which Zār'a Ya'āqob declares:

Because when all human beings agree with each other on something, that thing seems like the truth. [That’s why God made it so that] all human beings cannot agree with lies, just as none of them can ever agree in their religious beliefs [which all have elements of falsehood introduced]. If only we would think [about this]: why do all human beings agree in saying that there is a God, the Creator of all? Because the intelligence of every human being knows that everything that we see is created, that no creature may be thought of as created without a Creator; and that if there is a Creator, he is truthful. Because of this, all human beings agree on this point.²⁵

Here, Zār'a Ya'āqob uses the fact that reason ineluctably leads us to God as an explanation for universal agreement on God’s existence. Zār'a Ya'āqob is not citing universal agreement on the existence of a creator God as testimonial support for his view that there is a creator-God. Given Zār'a Ya'āqob’s distrust of testimony, even universal agreement might not be taken to constitute strong testimonial evidence for God’s existence. Zār'a Ya'āqob’s claim, rather, seems to be that God’s existence is evident as soon as one starts thinking about creation because one realises that alternative explanations, such as those based on generation, cannot do the relevant explanatory work—they reveal nothing about our “origins”. Here, he uses

25 HZY, p. 82.

this to carry out further explanatory work: namely, to explain why there is such widespread agreement on God's existence, agreement that is especially odd given the ubiquity of disagreement in practically every other sphere of human endeavour and religious thought. Of course, the fact that the existence of God can explain universal agreement on the existence of God is no longer a point in favour of the view given the emergence of widespread disagreement over the existence of God.

Why, though, should we think that we are capable of grasping the reason why the world exists in the first place? Why should we think there is such a reason? Is it not possible that we really *do* know nothing of our origins? If God does not exist, then Zār'a Ya'əqob cannot cite God's goodness as a reason to think that the world is comprehensible to us. So, either Zār'a Ya'əqob is assuming that God does exist and guarantees our access to the divine teleology, which would make his argument circular, or he is pre-committed to the view that the world is comprehensible to us if we use reason. Hence, Zār'a Ya'əqob appears to have a foundational commitment to the view that there is a reason for everything and that these reasons are accessible and comprehensible to us. At the same time, though, Zār'a Ya'əqob does seem to believe that reason comes from God and that it is *due to* God's influence that the world is comprehensible. What we seem to have is a kind of overlapping justification: God's existence confirms reason, and reason confirms God's existence.

It is worth noting that even if Zār'a Ya'əqob's argument from the explanatory inadequacy of an infinite regress goes through, it does not guarantee that the creator looks very much like an Abrahamic God. Why should the uncreated, unworldly thing bear any resemblance to God as usually construed? Zār'a Ya'əqob's theology is not obviously distinctively Christian,²⁶ but he does have some relatively thick conception of what God looks like. At least some of the work is done by Zār'a Ya'əqob's agential and teleological conception of creation. He writes:

Because we exist and are not creators but rather are created, we have to say that there is a creator who fashioned us. Further, this creator who fashioned *us* with the faculties of reason and speech cannot himself be without these faculties of reason and speech, because from the abundance of his reason he created us with the faculty of reason.²⁷

Note that here, we are described as “not creators”. Assuming that “we” means “human beings”, this suggests that Zār'a Ya'əqob does not think of giving birth as creation (at least not in the relevant sense); otherwise, we would be the creators

²⁶ Firstly, Zār'a Ya'əqob rejects the authority of scripture *qua* scripture. Secondly, it is not clear what role, if any, the incarnated Christ has in Zār'a Ya'əqob's theology.

²⁷ HZY, p. 70.

of other humans (recall that Zār'a Ya'əqob never affirms that his parents created him, but only affirms the conditional that *if* he says that his parents created him, this would still be an inadequate explanation of his existence). The crucial idea is that there is a creator who “fashioned us”. Evidently, our parents did not fashion or design us. Rather, Zār'a Ya'əqob thinks that our creator must be a being that designed us, because creation is understood as an intelligent process of designing in accordance with reason. Hence, Zār'a Ya'əqob's conception of creation secures, at least, an intelligent and purposive God.

However, this line of thought serves to highlight the absence of justification for Zār'a Ya'əqob's teleological conception of creation. As above, one could justify such a conception by appealing to the existence of a wise God, but in this case such a conception is required to demonstrate the existence of a wise God. Nonetheless, we think this conception brings us to the core of his method. Zār'a Ya'əqob in effect applies a Principle of Sufficient Reason in assuming that there is a reason for everything, and that we are able to discover such reasons through the exercise of our intelligence, which we have called the Principle of Accessible and Comprehensible Explanation. Furthermore, once Zār'a Ya'əqob has satisfied himself regarding the existence of God, the application of this Principle of Sufficient Reason is straightforwardly governed by his theism. From this point, Zār'a Ya'əqob's philosophical method largely consists in taking facts about existence and asking why (a good and wise) God would have created the world thus. The question one asks is: What is the best explanation for why God created things this way?

Theodicy

Shortly after affirming the existence of God, Zār'a Ya'əqob addresses the presence of evil in the world. Here again we can see his abductive reasoning at work. He begins by assuming there is a reason for evil's existence in the divine scheme—that God must have had a purpose or end in creating a world with evil. His task then is to uncover a teleological explanation for evil. There are two components to his answer. The first is that man was created free: “God created human beings to be the owners of their own actions, to be what they want to be, whether good or evil”.²⁸ However, as is often remarked regarding theodicies that stress the role of human freedom, freedom alone does not seem able to account for the prevalence of evil and falsehood, since it seems God could have created humans free but nonetheless disposed towards good and capable of easily attaining wisdom. And even if

²⁸ HZY, p. 73.

one thinks that it is not possible for humans to be both free and *infallibly* good, it seems likely that freedom is compatible with there being less evil than there actually is. Hence, the second component of Zār'a Ya'əqob's answer is that God has created man not only free but also of such a nature that it is difficult for humans to uncover truth. Human nature includes the "weakness" and "laziness"²⁹ but also our carnality: the fact that "human beings chose fleshly pleasure, because they are fleshly beings. They seek to satisfy the desires of their flesh in every way that they can be found, whether good or evil".³⁰ Zār'a Ya'əqob gives the desire for "wealth or prestige" as an example of such desires which can lead us astray,³¹ and later suggests, in regard to his son, that the desire for sex can also lead people astray.³²

Having established that human nature causes evil, Zār'a Ya'əqob faces a further demand for explanation: why would God create man free and of such a nature that knowledge and virtue are difficult to attain? In his initial discussion, Zār'a Ya'əqob answers that "It is not God who created human beings as evil, rather it is God who gave them the choice to become whatever they want. Because God gave them this choice, human beings will be worthy of a reward if they are good or judgement if they are evil".³³ The idea here appears to be that both freedom *and* a carnal nature are necessary for humans to be able to *deserve* either reward or punishment, with the implicit idea being that there is something better about humans being able to *deserve rewards* rather than just receiving rewards. This idea is fleshed out further in Chapter 8, where Zār'a Ya'əqob makes explicit some of his key theodical assumptions. He writes that:

God could have created us as perfect and made us live in a blessed state on earth. But he did not want to create us as such. Rather, he created us prepared for perfection. He put us amidst this world's trials so that we could become perfect, and worthy of our Creator's reward after our death.³⁴

Here, Zār'a Ya'əqob claims that God *could* have created humans perfect. By this, we take him to mean that humans could have been created such that they neither commit nor suffer evil. Therefore, there must be a reason why God did not create us perfect. The idea is that God did not create us perfect because we can only de-

29 HZY, p. 74.

30 HZY, p. 74.

31 HZY, p. 74.

32 It seems reasonable to assume that other desires, such as for food or alcohol, are likewise carnal. It should be emphasised that for Zār'a Ya'əqob, these desires are not in themselves bad; rather, that they can lead people away from the search for truth (HZY, p. 74).

33 HZY, p. 74.

34 HZY, p. 88.

serve rewards for being virtuous if attaining virtue is an achievement, and for it to be an achievement, it must be difficult to attain. The underlying assumption must be that the world is more beautiful or perfect if there are humans who not only receive beatitude but further *deserve* beatitude.

To use the typology developed by John Hick in *Evil and the God of Love*, Zār'a Ya'əqob therefore embraces an Irenaean style of theodicy based on the value of ethical progress over an Augustinian one which “looks to the past, to a primal catastrophe in the fall of angels and/or men, for the explanation of the existence of evil in God’s universe”.³⁵ Zār'a Ya'əqob does not view evil as the result of an original transgression brought about by human freedom, nor does he see human suffering in general as the deserved punishment for original sin (though he does apparently think that, in the afterlife, the wicked will receive deserved punishment³⁶). Rather, he views the existence of evil as a necessary means for achieving a greater good: the existence of individuals who deserve reward. He claims that “God did not create us as perfect, but rather as understanding beings with the potential for perfection [so that] we may be perfected while we live in this world, and after, be worthy of the reward that our Creator in his wisdom has prepared for us”.³⁷ As Hick puts it, when describing Irenaeus’ theodicy, the “world exists to be an environment for man’s life, and its imperfections are integral to its fitness as a place of soul-making”.³⁸

Indeed, Wäldä Ḥəywät explicitly attributes this theodicy to Zār'a Ya'əqob in his interpretation of his master. In Chapter 11, “The Teaching of Zār'a Ya'əqob”, Wäldä Ḥəywät writes that according to Zār'a Ya'əqob’s doctrine

The temptations and troubles that happen to human beings in this world are to test them, so that they will be worthy of the reward that their creator will graciously grant them. In fact, no wages are due to anyone who does not work, and no one is worthy of reward who has not been faithful during a period of testing.³⁹

There is, however, a significant difference between Wäldä Ḥəywät and Zār'a Ya'əqob over the status of theodicy. While Zār'a Ya'əqob appears confident that he knows why God has created the world such that there is evil, Wäldä Ḥəywät is much more doubtful about man’s ability to know God’s reasons and seems to be of the view that though we should believe that God, given his wisdom and

³⁵ Hick (2007 [1966], p. 237).

³⁶ Cf. HZY, pp. 85–86.

³⁷ HZY, p. 88.

³⁸ Hick (2007 [1966], p. 237).

³⁹ HWH, p. 127.

his goodness, has a reason for allowing evil, we cannot understand that reason. He argues that it is not fitting to ask why God acted as he did, or why he created humans in the way he did,⁴⁰ writing that “[w]e should not say to God, ‘Why did you do this or do that?’ [nor] ‘why did you create me like this?’”⁴¹ Zär’a Ya’əqob, in contrast, believes not only that we can come to understand God’s reasons for acting as he did but also that it is vital that we do ask why God acted as he did, since understanding God’s reasons gives us ethical knowledge. For instance, by reflecting on evil, Zär’a Ya’əqob comes to understand that he can achieve virtue through the difficult exercise of his intelligence, and also comes to understand the ways in which human desires can distort the exercise of intelligence, thus achieving the kind of self-knowledge that is necessary for virtue.

Set in the broader context of Zär’a Ya’əqob’s method, the key point is that Zär’a Ya’əqob’s theodicy emerges from the thought that God must have a purpose in creating evil, and proceeds by an inference to the best explanation. Zär’a Ya’əqob takes it as given that evil exists, God exists, and that man is both free and yet feeble. He then reasons that the value of moral achievement is the best explanation for the existence of evil. We take this to be abductive, since the value of achievement is clearly not the only logically possible explanation for the existence of evil. There is, for instance, the alternative explanation mentioned by Wäldä Həywät in Chapter 10 of his *Treatise*, according to which this world is a prison house and punishment for the souls of wicked angels. Zär’a Ya’əqob instead takes the value of moral achievement to be the most natural explanation of evil.

Ethics

Zär’a Ya’əqob’s abductive method is most prominent in his ethics. For Zär’a Ya’əqob, everything was created by God for a reason, and by uncovering that reason, we discover how we should act.⁴² This teleological ethical vision is captured in the following lines:

[T]he forest’s trees and plants, which were created with great wisdom—grow shoots, bud, bloom, and produce fruit of their seed’s kind without any mistakes. It’s almost like they have a soul. Moreover, the mountains and valleys, the rivers and springs, all your works, glo-

⁴⁰ HWH, p. 122.

⁴¹ HWH, p. 122.

⁴² This kind of broadly teleological conception of Zär’a Ya’əqob’s ethics is also suggested by Dawit Worku Kidane (2012, pp. 105–107).

rify your name, O Lord [...] Everything is majestic and wonderful, and everything was created with wisdom.⁴³

In articulating his ethics, Zār'a Ya'əqob starts with facts that are evident from experience, for instance that there are an equal number of men and women, that women menstruate, that people desire sex, and then asks why this is the case, seeking the best teleological explanation for the phenomenon. When deciding between various explanations for a phenomenon, he leans heavily on the idea of “naturalness” because for him what is natural is what God wills. For instance, God created menstruation, and so it is wrong to treat it as impure; God created the desire for sex because he wants us to procreate, and so sexual abstinence is wrong; God created an equal number of men and women because he favours monogamy, and so polygamy is wrong.

Zār'a Ya'əqob wants to say certain practices are natural and so right, such as monogamous marriage, sex, and regular eating, while other practices, such as fasting, sexual abstinence, and slavery, are unnatural and wrong. This ethical stance encounters problems when considered in conjunction with his theodicy. While the non-human natural world moves entirely according to God's plan, humans are capable of acting in a way that is not in accordance with God's will. Since both natural and unnatural practices are undertaken by humans, who are after all God's creation, Zār'a Ya'əqob needs to show how to differentiate between the two. One can imagine a defender of asceticism and abstinence arguing that the best explanation for sexual desire is not that God wants us to procreate, but rather that God wants to test us and so contribute to our moral improvement. Hence, Zār'a Ya'əqob has to show why certain actual practices are natural and certain are not.

In Chapter 12, Zār'a Ya'əqob offers a criterion, suggesting those desires are natural which are universal and ineliminable. He claims that those who try to eliminate their natural human desires are in fact unable to do so: “those who believe that monastic celibacy is better than marriage are drawn toward marriage [...] Those who reject their possessions will become flatterers of kings and wealthy people in order to acquire possessions”.⁴⁴ The thought is that certain desires are inescapable, and so the best explanation for God implanting them in us is that they are good. Whether these desires are in fact universal and ineliminable is unclear: the desires for sex and material wealth are less obviously universal and ineliminable

43 HZY, p. 96.

44 HZY, p. 84.

than the desire for food. Perhaps Zär'a Ya'əqob does not need total universality and ineliminability to establish naturalness, just a sufficient degree.

Putting aside this question, other problems arise. Zär'a Ya'əqob suggests that drives such as the desire for wealth and the desire for sex are natural, and yet he also believes that following them can lead us into ignorance and wrongdoing. For instance, they can lead us into enslaving others or infidelity. Indeed, Zär'a Ya'əqob's theodicy requires the idea that our nature can lead us into wrongdoing. As he writes "human beings chose fleshly pleasure, because they are fleshly beings. They seek to satisfy the desires of their flesh in every way that they can be found, whether good or evil".⁴⁵ Hence, while trying to eliminate our natural desires is wrong, following our natural desires alone is not sufficient for goodness. Rather, we must have another way of distinguishing the right and wrong ways of following our natural desires. Zär'a Ya'əqob offers few arguments on this point. As an example: while criticising slavery, he says "the Creator of human beings [...] created us equal, as brothers and sisters [...] But Mohammed regarded weak human beings as the property of strong human beings and equated rational creation with irrational beasts".⁴⁶ The defender of slavery might, of course, respond that all men are not equal and that it is natural for the strong to dominate the weak; indeed, he might argue, mirroring Zär'a Ya'əqob, that this explains why slavery exists. Zär'a Ya'əqob appears to take the equality of men and the wrongness of slavery to be self-evident when one uses one's intelligence properly and so not in need of further justification or argument.

The thought might be something like this: when one's intelligence is not being distorted, what is natural (and so right) is known by a kind of immediate intuition. This connects with the significance of Zär'a Ya'əqob's philosophising alone away from society.⁴⁷ Once one escapes the corrupting influence of society (and the influence of one's own distorting desires for wealth and power) and seeks to discover God's will, the natural law is revealed. This fits in with the passage that we quoted at the start of this section. When in a proper state of contemplation, Zär'a Ya'əqob does not need to reason discursively about God's purposes in nature. Rather, his vision of the world is transformed such that he sees God's will and wisdom manifesting in the natural world. Perhaps it is likewise with slavery: when one uses one's intelligence properly, free from the distorting influence of doctrine, it is just clear that slavery is unnatural.

⁴⁵ HZY, p. 74.

⁴⁶ HZY, p. 79.

⁴⁷ Cf. HZY, p. 92.

Zār'a Ya'əqob might think, then, that arriving at the right explanation involves a kind of perceptual revelation. If one is in the right conditions, the reason for things appears; the world lights up and God's purpose is made evident. This is suggested by the metaphors of light Zār'a Ya'əqob deploys in, for example, a passage in Chapter 5:

[T]he creator put the light of intelligence in the human heart, that human beings may perceive good and evil [...] If we were to see by this light of our intelligence what is our duty, it cannot deceive us [...] And all that the light of our intelligence reveals to us is from the fountain of truth.⁴⁸

Hence, one must free oneself from reliance on testimony and tradition and sincerely seek to uncover God's purposes. The application of reason is necessary to critique, and so free oneself from, inherited dogmas. Once one opens oneself up, God will then illuminate one's intellect in response.⁴⁹ The work of explaining the world thus relies on both God's grace and reason's power.

Final Causation

Zār'a Ya'əqob's appeal to God's purposes in explaining natural phenomena suggests interesting comparisons with European philosophers writing in the same century. So far, the dominant trend in Anglophone literature on Zār'a Ya'əqob has been to compare the *Treatise* with René Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in part due to the similarity between Zār'a Ya'əqob's retreat to the cave and Descartes' exhortation to meditate in isolation.⁵⁰ For instance, Claude Sumner devotes a large portion of his article "The Significance of Zera Yacob's Philosophy" to comparing Zār'a Ya'əqob with Descartes, noting that he does this in part because "so many scholars have done so".⁵¹ Likewise, Teodros Kiros in "The Meditations of Zara Yaquob" seeks to draw close parallels between Descartes and Zār'a Ya'əqob, arguing that while "nothing could be as stark as the differences between the material lives" of Descartes and Zār'a Ya'əqob, they are philosophical "soul mate[s]":

Both were ardent believers in the power of Reason or intelligence as the final arbiter of human agonies. They were, each in his own way, staunch enemies of the dogmatics of the

⁴⁸ HZY, p. 77.

⁴⁹ HZY, p. 86.

⁵⁰ Adam and Tannery (1964–1976, Volume XII, pp. 17–18) = Cottingham, Stoothoff, Murdoch, and Kenny (1984–1991, Volume I, p. 12).

⁵¹ Sumner (1999a, p. 172).

church. For both of them the light of Reason should illuminate the dark regions of human thought. Neither of the two recognized teachers, priests or experts to represent the will of others by claiming to be the representatives of the will of God on earth. Finally, for Zera Yacob, God is revealed through Natural Reason; and for Descartes it is disclosed to intelligence.⁵²

Similarly, in his article “Claude Sumner’s Classical Ethiopian Philosophy”, Teodros Kiros argues that the closest parallel to “Zera Yacob’s method of inquiry” is “Descartes’ method as articulated in his *Discourse on Method*”.⁵³

Our discussion of Zär’a Ya’əqob’s method, however, reveals deep divergence with Descartes’ method. Consider Descartes’ claim in the *Fourth Meditation* that:

[S]ince I now know that my own nature is very weak and limited, whereas the nature of God is immense, incomprehensible and infinite, I also know without more ado that he is capable of countless things whose causes are beyond my knowledge. And for this reason alone I consider the customary search for final causes to be totally useless in physics; there is considerable rashness in thinking myself capable of investigating the purposes of God.⁵⁴

For Descartes, the search for final causes, central to Zär’a Ya’əqob’s ethics, epistemology, and theodicy, should be “entirely banish[ed] from our philosophy”.⁵⁵ For Zär’a Ya’əqob, it is our duty to investigate God’s purposes; for Descartes, such a project is “arrogant” and doomed to fail.⁵⁶ Descartes sought to overhaul philosophical methods based on final causes and replace them with a mechanistic philosophy based on efficient causes. He argues in Article 28 of the *Principles of Philosophy* that we should “never derive explanations from the purposes which God or nature may have had in view when creating them” and rather should appeal to God only insofar as we consider him “the efficient cause of all things”.⁵⁷ Zär’a Ya’əqob, on the other hand, takes the search for God’s purposes as the route to joy and wisdom, and as such the highest level of philosophy. Hence, we dissent from Teodros Kiros’ view that Zär’a Ya’əqob’s method of inquiry is similarly to Descartes’—in fact, they are fundamentally different.

52 Teodros Kiros (1998).

53 Teodros Kiros (1996, p. 44).

54 Adam and Tannery (1964–1976, Volume VII, p. 55) = Cottingham, Stoodhoff, Murdoch, and Kenny (1984–1991, Volume II, p. 39).

55 Adam and Tannery (1964–1976, Volume VIII, p. 15) = Cottingham, Stoodhoff, Murdoch, and Kenny (1984–1991, Volume I, p. 202).

56 Adam and Tannery (1964–1976, Volume VIII, p. 15) = Cottingham, Stoodhoff, Murdoch, and Kenny (1984–1991, Volume I, p. 202).

57 Adam and Tannery (1964–1976, Volume VIII, p. 15) = Cottingham, Stoodhoff, Murdoch, and Kenny (1984–1991, Volume I, p. 202).

Nonetheless, we suggest that another European contemporary of Zār'a Ya'əqob may provide fruitful comparison on the role of divine teleology in philosophical explanation: Leibniz. Leibniz, who extensively theorised the relationship between efficient and final causes, firmly rejected Descartes' banishment of final causes. Consider the following passage from Leibniz' critical notes on Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy*, in which Leibniz argues against Article 28 of the *Principles*:

As for the ends which God has proposed to himself, I am fully convinced both that they can be known and that it is of the highest value to investigate them; and that to disdain this inquiry is not without danger or suspicion. In general, whenever we see that anything is particularly useful, we may safely assert that one, among others, of the ends which God has proposed to himself in creating this thing is precisely that it render these services, since he both knew and planned this use of it.⁵⁸

This paragraph captures one of Zār'a Ya'əqob's core methodological principles: the value and efficacy of investigating divine teleology. We can see the parallels clearly in the two philosophers' treatments of the afterlife. Consider first Zār'a Ya'əqob's appeal to God's justice to demonstrate the existence of an afterlife:

Also, all righteousness is not fulfilled in this world. For, evil human beings achieve satisfaction from the good things of this world, while the gentle starve. There are evil human beings who are happy, and there are good human beings who are sad; there are vicious human beings who live lives of pleasure, while there are virtuous human beings who mourn. Therefore, after our death, another life and the perfection of justice is needed, where all human beings will be rewarded according to their actions.⁵⁹

The view here is that God pursues justice, and so the virtuous must be rewarded and the wicked punished. But in this life, many wicked are happy and many virtuous suffer. Hence, there must be an afterlife in which justice is realised. As a result, we should act virtuously now so as to achieve beatitude in the next life. Appeal to God's justice produces cosmological conclusions and practical dictates.

Leibniz likewise believes that God pursues justice, writing in the preface to the *Codex Iuris Gentium* (1693) that God's "power and providence make it so that [...] nothing is done rightly without reward, and no sin is without punishment".⁶⁰

However, Leibniz, like Zār'a Ya'əqob, notices and is disturbed by the obvious injustice of this life, writing in *Leibniz's Philosophical Dream* (ca. 1693) that we

58 Leibniz and Gerhardt (1875–1890, Volume IV, p. 360) = Leibniz and Loemker (1970 [1969], p. 387).

59 HZY, p. 86.

60 Leibniz and Gerhardt (1875–1890, Volume III, p. 389) = Strickland (2006, p. 152).

often see “injustice triumphant and innocence afflicted”.⁶¹ Hence, Leibniz concludes there must be an afterlife to rectify these injustices.⁶²

Furthermore, in the *Meditation on the Common Concept of Justice* (1702–1703), Leibniz draws from this cosmological thesis the practical conclusion that it is “imprudent not to be just”, since the afterlife ensures the virtuous are the happiest.⁶³

Both Leibniz and Zār’a Ya’əqob use divine teleology to produce physical and practical conclusions. God’s desire for justice allows us to derive the physical conclusion that there is an afterlife. The existence of the afterlife, in turn, gives us a practical imperative to act well now so as to attain blessedness in the next life and avoid damnation.⁶⁴

While Descartes rejects the attempt to derive conclusions about the world from God’s purposes, Leibniz and Zār’a Ya’əqob put divine teleology to prolific use in producing their cosmology and their ethics. Evidently, our discussion of the two thinkers is incomplete, but we want to suggest that Leibniz may provide a much more fruitful point of early modern comparison than Descartes.

61 Bodemann (1895, p. 111) = Lodge (2022, p. 2).

62 Leibniz and Gerhardt (1875–1890, Volume III, p. 389) = Strickland (2006, pp. 151–152).

63 Leibniz and Gerhardt (1875–1890, Volume III, p. 389) = Strickland (2006, p. 151).

64 It is worth noting that Descartes, in contrast, rejects the possibility of rational knowledge about the nature of the afterlife, writing to Elizabeth of Bohemia that “[a]s for the state of the soul after this life, I am not so well informed [...] Leaving aside what faith tells us, I agree that by natural reason alone we can make many gratifying guesses and have fine expectations, but we cannot have any certainty” (Adam and Tannery 1964–1976, Volume IV, p. 333 = Cottingham, Stoothoff, Murdoch, and Kenny 1984–1991, Volume III, p. 277).

Appendix I

Comparative Timeline by Lea Cantor and Jonathan Egid

Period	Global Philosophy	Ethiopia
Late antiquity	<p>Late second century: the Greek theologian and bishop Irenaeus (c. 130–202)—known for “Irenaeus theodicy”—authors his <i>Ad-versus Haereses</i>.</p> <p>Late third century: the Christian philosopher from Roman Africa, Augustine (354–430), authors his autobiography, the <i>Confessiones</i> (c. 396–400).</p> <p>Sixth century: Life of the Byzantine Greek philosopher John Philoponus (c. 490–570).</p>	<p>The period of the flourishing of the Aksumite Empire and the arrival of Christianity in Ethiopia.</p> <p>Translation of the Bible into Gə’əz.</p> <p>Fourth century: Gə’əz becomes the language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.</p>
Late ninth century	The Nestorian Christian physician and trailblazer of the Greek-Arabic scientific translation movement, Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq (808–873), composes “How to Grasp Religion”.	The decline of the Aksumite Empire culminates in the campaigns of the possibly apocryphal Queen Gudit, who destroys the churches and literature of the Empire.
Tenth century	Life of Ibn Sīnā (c. 970–1037).	The beginning of the “Zag”e dynasty”.
Late eleventh century	The Christian philosopher Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) writes his <i>Monologion</i> (1075–1076) and <i>Proslogion</i> (1077–1078).	
Late eleventh/early twelfth century	The Islamic Persian philosopher Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (c. 1056–1111) writes his intellectual autobiography, <i>Deliverer from Error</i> .	
Early twelfth century	The French philosopher Peter Abelard (1079–1142) allegedly exchanges love letters with his wife Héloïse (c. 1098–1164).	
Mid- to late twelfth century	The Islamic Andalusian author Ibn Ṭufayl (c. 1105–1185) writes his philosophical novel <i>Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān</i> .	Reign of King Gäbrä Mäsqäl Lalibäla, said to be the patron and constructor of the famous rock-hewn churches of Lalibela.

Note: Dates attested only in the *Ḥatātas* are written in italics.

Continued

Period	Global Philosophy	Ethiopia
Thirteenth century	The Christian Italian philosopher Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225 – 1274) authors the <i>Summa Theologiae</i> .	Yəkuno Amlak defeats Yətbaräk, the last Zagʷe king at the Battle of Ansata, ushering in the “restoration” of the Solomonic dynasty. Gəʼəz ceases to be spoken in Ethiopia as a living language outside the church.
Fifteenth century		1424: Abba Giyorgis of Sägla composes the <i>Book of Mysteries (Mäṣḥafä Məstir)</i> . Emergence of the heretical sect known as the <i>Däqiqä Ḥstifanos</i> (Stephanite movement), opposing Emperor Zärʼa Yaʼəqob.
Sixteenth century	The German theologian Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) authors the <i>Ninety-Five Theses</i> (1517), beginning the Protestant Reformation. The Jesuit Order, founded by Ignatius de Loyola, is given papal approval (1540). The Council of Trent (1545 – 1563) signals the beginning of the Counter-Reformation.	Oromo migrations begin, continuing throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The period of the second great translation movement into Gəʼəz, primarily from Christian Arab sources. 1510 – 1522: The <i>Mäṣḥafä Fälasfa Ṭäbiban (Book of the Wise Philosophers)</i> is translated by abba Mikaʼel. 1529: Beginning of the Ethiopian-Adal War with the Battle of Shimbra Kur. 1532: Ḥnbaqom begins composing the <i>Anqäṣä Amin</i> after the torching of Däbrä Libanos monastery by Adal troops. 1540: Ḥnbaqom composes the <i>Gate of Faith (Anqäṣä Amin)</i> . 1543: End of the Ethiopian-Adal War with the Battle of Wäyña Däga; death of Aḥmad ibn Ibrähim al-Gäzi. 1555: Beginning of Jesuit missionary activity in Ethiopia.

Continued

Period	Global Philosophy	Ethiopia
		<p>1557: The Ottoman Empire takes the port of Massawa, establishing the <i>Eyālet-i Ḥabeş</i>.</p> <p>1586: Abba Pawlos composes his codex.</p> <p>1541: Portuguese forces led by Cristóvão da Gama are sent to Ethiopia to assist in the war against Adal.</p> <p>1599/1600: <i>Birth of Zär'a Ya'āqob</i>. [In the <i>Ḥatāta</i>, Zär'a Ya'āqob's birth date is recorded as 25 Nahase 1592 E.C. See the introduction for a brief discussion of the birth date controversy and references to further sources.]</p>
Early seven-teenth century	<p>The English deist Herbert of Cherbury (1583–1648) authors <i>De Veritate</i> (1624) and his <i>Autobiography</i> (ending in 1624; published posthumously in 1764).</p> <p>The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) publishes <i>Leviathan or The Matter, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil</i> (1651) at the close of the English civil war (1642-1651).</p> <p>The French philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650) authors his <i>Discourse on the Method</i> (1637, published anonymously in French) and later his <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> (1641, first published in Latin; a French translation approved by him is published in 1647).</p>	<p>Composition of the <i>Mäqšäfet Hasetat</i> (<i>The Book of Errors</i>) by the Jesuit missionary António Fernandes in Gə'əz.</p> <p>1540: ʿInbaqom composes the <i>Gate of Faith</i> (<i>Anqäšä Amin</i>).</p> <p>1586: Abba Pawlos composes his codex.</p> <p>Life of Wälättä Peṭros (1592–1642).</p> <p>1608: Coronation of Susənyos.</p> <p>1622: Public conversion of Susənyos to Catholicism; death of Pedro Páez.</p> <p>1626: Beginning of the civil war between Catholics and Orthodox Christians.</p> <p>~1630: Zär'a Ya'āqob retreats to a cave, where he meditates while in exile.</p> <p>1632: End of the religious war; restoration of Orthodoxy. Coronation of Fasilädäs.</p>

Continued

Period	Global Philosophy	Ethiopia
		1636 Gondär is founded as the permanent capital of the Ethiopian Empire.
		1638: <i>Birth of Zär'a Ya'aqob's son.</i>
		1642: <i>Date of famine recounted in the Hatäta Zär'a Ya'aqob.</i>
Late seventeenth century	The French philosopher Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) authors the <i>Pensées de M. Pascal sur la religion et sur quelques autres sujets</i> (published posthumously in 1670). The English philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) anonymously authors <i>A Letter Concerning Toleration</i> (1689).	1667: <i>Supposed composition of the Hatäta.</i> 1692: <i>Death of Zär'a Ya'aqob.</i> Death of Fasilädäs.
Early eighteenth century	The German rationalist philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) authors, <i>inter alia</i> : the <i>Meditation on the Common Concept of Justice</i> (1702–1703), the <i>Theodicy</i> (1710), the <i>Monadology</i> (1714), and letters as part of his correspondence with Clarke (1715 f.).	
Mid-eighteenth century	The German historian of philosophy Jakob Brucker (1696–1770) authors his <i>Kurtze Fragen aus der philosophischen Historie</i> (1731–1736) and his <i>Historia critica philosophiae</i> (1742–1744)—in which he mentions Ethiopian philosophy. The Genevan philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) composes, <i>inter alia</i> , his <i>Discourse on Inequality</i> (1755) and his <i>Confessions</i> (c. 1765–1770).	
Late eighteenth century	Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) authors his <i>Idea for a Universal History With a Cosmopolitan Aim</i> (1784), <i>What Is Enlightenment?</i> (1784), and the <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> (1781, 1787).	Beginning of the <i>Zämänä Mäsafant</i> or the “era of judges”, an extended period of decentralised rule.
Early nineteenth century	1800: The German idealist Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775–1854)	

Continued

Period	Global Philosophy	Ethiopia
	authors the <i>System of Transcendental Idealism</i> .	
	30 August 1814: Birth of Giovanni Iacopo Cortopassi, also known as Giusto da Urbino, in Matraia (Province of Lucca, Tuscany).	
Mid-nine-teenth century		<p data-bbox="667 461 1020 543">September 1852: Giusto da Urbino allegedly discovers the <i>Ḥatäta Zär'a Ya'äqob</i> in Bägemdär, Northern Ethiopia.</p> <p data-bbox="667 578 1020 716">Early February 1853: Giusto da Urbino allegedly recovers the full text of the <i>Ḥatäta Zär'a Ya'äqob</i> and mentions the <i>Ḥatäta Wäldä Ḥaywät</i> in his correspondence.</p> <p data-bbox="667 751 1020 864">~ Late February 1853: Giusto da Urbino sends the first manuscript of the <i>Ḥatäta Zär'a Ya'äqob</i> (BnF Abb 234) to Antoine d'Abbadie in Paris.</p> <p data-bbox="667 899 1020 980">Easter 1854: Giusto da Urbino allegedly acquires a second manuscript containing both <i>Ḥatätas</i> (BnF Abb 215).</p> <p data-bbox="667 1015 1020 1067">1856: The manuscript containing both <i>Ḥatätas</i> (BnF Abb 215) reaches Paris.</p> <p data-bbox="667 1102 1020 1222">22 November 1856: Giusto da Urbino dies in the Catholic missions of Khartoum (Sudan), having been expelled from Ethiopia.</p>

Appendix II

Gə'əz Philosophical Wordlist by Jonathan Egid

Gə'əz Root	Derivates	Transliteration	English Translation from Leslau (2001 [1989])	Notes
ሀ-ለ-ወ			be	- In the sense of “to exist”
	ሀለዌ	<i>hälläwe</i>	substance, essence, being	- Used in both <i>Hatätas</i> to denote a “supreme being” in place of the more usual “God” (አግዚአብሔር) or “Lord” (አምላክ)
	ሀለዊ	<i>hällawi</i>	essential	
ሀ-ይ-መ-ነ			to be a believer, be faithful	- Root borrowed from Aramaic
	ሃይማኖት	<i>haymanot</i>	belief, faith, religion	- The term for “religion” when describing Judaism, Islam, and the religion of the Indians in the <i>Hatätas</i> - Both <i>Hatätas</i> use ሃይማኖት: ርትዕነት to denote Orthodoxy (i. e., “right faith”, a calque)
ለ-ቡ-ወ			comprehend, perceive, possess understanding, be wise, be skilled	- ለቡወ is likely a “denominative verb”, i. e., a verb derived not from a root but from a word, in this case ልቡ “heart” (see below)
	ልቡና	<i>läbbuna</i>	intelligence, understanding, reason	- Perhaps the central philosophical term in the <i>Hatätas</i> , denoting a universal faculty of understanding that allows humans to tell right from wrong, good from bad - Translated by Sumner primarily as “reason” and by Lee more often as “intelligence” or “understanding” - Often used in constructions such as ብርሃነ ልቡናነ (the light of our reason). Translated by Turayev as

Continued

Gə'əz Root	Derivates	Transliteration	English Translation from Leslau (2001 [1989])	Notes
				<i>cœm razyma</i> and Littmann as <i>lux intelligentiae</i> , perhaps suggesting the influence of Jesuit thought on the notion
ለባዊ		<i>läbbawi</i>		- Often used in the construct “intelligent creature” or “intelligent creation”
ልብ		<i>läbb</i>	heart, mind, intellect	- The noun at the origin of the denominative verb ለባዊ and cognates - Meaning both the “heart” anatomically and the location of the rationality or intelligence of human beings - This usage is common to many Semitic languages. See Fronzaroli (1964)
ሐ-ሉ-የ			consider, think	
	ሐሊና	<i>ħallina</i>	thought, consideration	- Used semi-frequently to denote both an individual thought or a faculty similar to <i>läbbuna</i>
ሐ-ሱ-ብ			to compute, reckon, estimate	
	ሐሳብ	<i>ħassab</i>	account, evaluation, calculation, theory	- This root seems to denote “thinking” in a more computational sense, applying to quantitative thought rather than general contemplation
	ሐሳብ ከዋክብት	<i>ħässabä kăwakəbt</i>	astrology (lit. account of the stars)	
ሐ-ተ-ተ			investigate, examine	
	ሐተታ	<i>ħatäta</i>	investigation, examination, inquiry	- As the title of the <i>Ĥatäta Zär'a Ya'əqob</i> it has been variously

Continued

Gə'əz Root	Derivates	Transliteration	English Translation from Leslau (2001 [1989])	Notes
				translated as “Inquiry” (Lee) and “Treatise” (Sumner) - <i>Andamta</i> exegesis often involves a <i>hatāta</i> or inquiry into some particular topic, which Cowley (1971) suggests signifies an investigation into the meaning of words, but which Lee (in correspondence) argues can involve any topic where more detail is required
ሠ-ኅ-የ			be beautiful, be good, be fine	
	ሠናይ	<i>śānnay</i>	beautiful, good, fine	- Shares similar semantic field to the Ancient Greek καλός with an ambiguity between beauty and goodness
ሠ-ረ-ዐ			set forth, set in order, arrange, institute, ordain	
	ሥርዐት	<i>śar'at</i>	order, law, precept	- “Order” in the sense of an inner arrangement and constitution of something - Often used in the construction ሥርዐተ ፍጥረት (“the order or precepts of creation”). Less frequently እገ ፈጣሪ (the laws of the creator)
ር-አ-የ			see, observe, look, contemplate, watch, perceive	- An important root, as ልቡና is often presented in terms of a visual analogy—we “see” what is right and wrong, true and false
	ርእየት	<i>rə'yät</i>	sight, appearance, image	

Continued

Gəʼəz Root	Derivates	Transliteration	English Translation from Leslau (2001 [1989])	Notes
ሰ-ነ-አ-ጠ			be at peace with agree, coincide, be of one mind	
	ሰንአዌ		harmony, agreement	- A centrally important term for both the critical and constructive aspects of the project in the <i>Ḥatāta Zār'a Yaʼəqob</i> , as it refers to the possibility both of agreement between human groups (as in ኢ.ጎደጎ ሰብአ ይሰነዓጢ በሐሰት Abb215 12v) but also of a “harmony” between the world and our rational faculties (ጠሀለጢ ዓዲ ብዙኃን ካልእን ግብራት ዘይሰነዓጢ ምስለ ልቡናን Abb215 16v)
Root un- known	ባሕሪ	<i>bahri</i>	pearl, precious stone, nature, essence	- Sometimes used to translate <i>hypostasis</i> (ὑπόστασις), in philosophical contexts as “substance” or “essence” or in theological contexts as “person” (as in the three persons of the Trinity)
ኑ-ፈ-ሰ			blow (wind)	
	ነፍስ	<i>nāfs</i>	soul, spirit, person, life, self	- As with many Semitic languages and indeed Greek (πνεῦμα), the soul is conceived of by analogy with breath
	መንፈስ	<i>mānfäs</i>	spirit, spiritual es- sence, spirit (angel or demon)	As in “Holy Spirit” (መንፈስ ቅዱስ)
አ-ም-ነ			to be true, to believe	
	አማኒት	<i>āmanit</i>	belief	- Also the feminine form of the adjective “believing”
	ምእመን	<i>mā'män</i>	believer	

Continued

Gəʼəz Root	Derivates	Transliteration	English Translation from Leslau (2001 [1989])	Notes
	እምነብ አልቦ	<i>amhābä albo</i>	<i>ex nihilo</i> (lit. from that which is not)	- Employed as part of the cosmological argument at Abb215 5r
አ-ሙረ			show, indicate, make a sign, refer	
	አእምረ	<i>a'marä</i>	know, learn, understand, comprehend, become aware	- The causative form of አሙረ is used to form አእምሮ “knowledge”, which is then subdivided as seen below
	አእምሮ፡ ጠባይዓዊ	<i>a'maro ṭäbay'ä-wi</i>	natural knowledge	
	አእምሮ፡ መንፈሳዊ	<i>a'maro mänfäsawi</i>	spiritual knowledge	
አ-ኩዩ			be evil, be wicked, be bad	
	አኩይ	<i>akkuy</i>	misfortune, evil thing, wickedness, vice	- Contrasted with both ሠናይ and ጻድቅ
Root unknown	ዓለም	<i>aläm</i>	world, universe, eternity, lifetime	- Can refer to this “world” as in God’s creation as a whole and also “world” in the sense of “worldly” pleasures or goods. Can also suggest temporal as well as spatial totality
	ለዓለም	<i>lä'aläm</i>	in eternity, forever	- ለዓለም ዓለም is the conclusion of the Lord’s prayer, in English “forever and ever”
Root unknown	ጊዜ	<i>gize</i>	time	- An unusual word of non-Semitic derivation, likely a loanword from a Cushitic language

Continued

Gəʼəz Root	Derivates	Transliteration	English Translation from Leslau (2001 [1989])	Notes
m-ŋ-ŋ			be wise, be prudent, be sage	
ጥቡብ	<i>ṭəbāb</i>		wisdom, knowledge, science, skill, cunning, ruse	- Contains both the positive associations of wisdom and knowledge but also elements of a clever deception; it is possible according to the text for there to be “detestable wisdom” (ጥቡብ ኢሱም)
ጠቢብ	<i>ṭābib</i>		wise, clever, scholar	- A title given to both philosophers and religious sages, as in the <i>Māṣḥafā fālasfa ṭābiban</i>
ጠባይፊ			natural disposition, nature	
ጸ-ደ-ቐ			be just, justified, righteous, true, be certain	
ጸደቕ	<i>ṣādāq</i>		just, true, righteous	- A term with an ambivalence between a moral (righteous) and epistemic (true) meaning
No root	ፈለፍ	<i>fālasfa</i>		- From the Greek φιλοσοφία via the Arabic فلسفة
ፈ-ጠ-ረ			create, fashion, fabricate, invent, inscribe magic letters, make incisions in the flesh	- Probably the most frequently occurring root in this list, with a variety of derivates with their own semi-technical meaning
ፈጣሪ	<i>fāṭari</i>		creator	- How God is often referred to in the text—seen by commentators such as Haile (2017 = Chapter 1 in this volume) as suggesting a deism

Continued

Gə'əz Root	Derivates	Transliteration	English Translation from Leslau (2001 [1989])	Notes
ፍጡር		<i>fətur</i>	creature	- All things, living and non-living, created by God
ፍጥረት		<i>fəträt</i>	creation, created thing, nature, char- acter, origin, kind, species	

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