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In Search of Zärʾa Yaʿəqob: Introduction

Abstract: This introduction aims to contextualise the contributions to this edited volume by providing an overview of the *Ḥatäta Zär'a Yaʿəqob* 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 Yaʿəqob* 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.

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1 Introduction

The *Ḫatäta Zärʾa Yaʿəqob*[1] (the "Inquiry"[2] or "Examination" of Zärʾa Yaʿəqob) is an enigmatic and controversial work. An autobiography composed in the Gəʿəz 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 *Ḫatäta* 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 *Ḫatäta* has also been read as the ramblings of a lonely Italian friar living in Ethiopia over two centuries after its supposed completion[9]—even as a cover for "his bitter religious scepticism

1 This volume employs the field-standard method of transcription of Gəʿəz 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 Gəʿəz root *ḫtt* signifies "to search, inquire, question, ask, interrogate a witness, investigate, explore, examine" (Leslau 2001 [1989], p. 21). Sections of the *Andəmta* tradition of biblical exegesis often begin by announcing a *ḫatäta* 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 *ḫatäta* 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 *Ḥatäta 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 Zärʾa Yaʿəqob 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 *Ḥatäta Zärʾa Yaʿəqob* and the *Ḥatäta 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 *Ḥatäta Wäldä Ḥəywät*, the general focus throughout is on the *Ḥatäta Zärʾa Yaʿəqob*, and for the sake of convenience, we will often refer to "the *Ḥatäta*" in the singular, meaning the *Ḥatäta Zärʾa Yaʿəqob* 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 Variously spelled both in his own letters and in secondary literature as da Urbino, d'Urbino, and d'Urbin. 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 Gəʿəz 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 *Ḥatätas* 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 *Ḥatätas* 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 Gəʿəz 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 *Ḥatätas*, 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 *Ḥatäta.*[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 *Ḥatäta* 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 Abb234[19]. 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 Gəʿəz. He further elaborates the now familiar argument that Giusto da Urbino did not know Gəʿəz 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 *Ḥatäta* 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 *Ḥatäta* and its purported relation to the Gəʿəz 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 *Ḥatäta*, 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 the examine parallels between the *Ḥatäta* 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 Səmeʿon and the "autobiography" of Abba Pawlos, arguing that the *Ḥatäta* 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 *Ḥatäta Wäldä Ḥəywät*]".

The philological-historical theme continues with Ralph Lee's reflections on his recent translation of the *Ḥatäta*s 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 *Ḥatäta Zär'a Yaʿəqob* 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 *Ḥatäta Zär'a Yaʿəqob* 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 Zär'a Yaʿəqob. His answer begins by examining passages in the two *Ḥatäta*s 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 *Ḥatäta*s, 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 *Ḥatäta*s. A closing section shows how the methodological lessons learned from these mediaeval examples can be applied to the case of Zär'a Yaʿəqob 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 *Ḥatäta* in the context of seventeenth-century Ethiopia, Eyasu Berento seeks to demonstrate deep continuities with earlier forms of thought from the Gəʿəz 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 *Ḥatäta*s 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 *Ḥatäta*.

Neelam Srivastava focuses her essay on a troubled episode in the reception history of the *Ḥatäta Zär'a Yaʿəqob*, 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 *Ḥatäta* 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 *Ḥatäta* 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 *Ḥatäta* 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 Zärʾa Yaʿqob'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 *Ḥatäta* mirrors that of al-Ghazālī's *Deliverer From Error* and the imagery of the cave in the *Ḥatäta* evokes not only the *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* of Ibn Ṭufayl but the Quran itself.

Developing ideas initially proposed in his Amharic language *Ethiopian Philosophy: An Analysis of Ḥatäta Zär'a Yaʿəqob and Wäldä Həywat*, Brooh Asmare argues that scholars have failed to consider the significance of Ethiopian cultural history in understanding the *Ḥatäta*, in particular what he takes to be its central theme: asceticism. Brooh Asmare suggests that the *Ḥatäta*s can be seen as the product of a dialogue between Zärʾa Yaʿqob'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 *Ḥatäta*s in debates internal to Ethiopian Orthodoxy.

Binyam Mekonnen offers another perspective on the *Ḥatäta* from within the tradition of Gəʿəz literature, focusing his contribution on the fifteenth-century heretical sect known as the Däqiqä Ǝsṭifanos—comprised of rebels against the emperor (not the philosopher) Zär'a Yaʿəqob. Building on Maimire Mennasemay's study of the Däqiqä Ǝsṭifanos, Binyam Mekonnen argues that their writings offer philosophical precursors of ideas developed in the *Ḥatäta Zär'a Yaʿəqob*, 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 *Ḥatäta Zär'a Yaʿəqob.*

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 *Ḥatäta*s of Zär'a Yaʿəqob and Wäldä Ḥəywät. Turning to more modern issues, the paper illustrates the role of the *Ḥatäta* in the discourse on African philosophy since the seventies, arguing that the debates about the *Ḥatäta* provide a vivid example of narrative-formation in the history of philosophy in Africa. Graness then considers the *Ḥatäta* 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 *Ḥatäta*s' 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 Yaʿəqob'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 Zärʾa Yaʿəqob* Manuscripts

The *Ḥatäta Zärʾa Yaʿəqob* was purportedly discovered in 1852 in the region of Bägemdər, 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 Zärʾa Yaʿəqob*; 1853 in the case of the *Ḥatäta Wäldä Ḥəywät*). Giusto da Urbino sent the first manuscript of the *Ḥatäta Zärʾa Yaʿəqob*

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 *Ḥatäta Zärʾa Yaʿəqob.* The other manuscript, *Manuscrit BnF Éthiopien Abbadie 215*, which reached Paris in 1856, contains both the *Ḥatäta Zärʾa Yaʿəqob* and the *Ḥatäta 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, lilting 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 Amarhän 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 *Ḥatäta 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'Urbin (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 *Ḥatäta*, 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 *Hatäta* from the not uncommon *unica*, Wion calls the *Ḥatäta* 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 *Hatäta*s and in Ethiopian literature more generally.

3 Historical Context

3.1 Linguistic and Religious Background

The *Ḥatäta*s are written in Gəʿəz, 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. Gəʿəz 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 Gəʿəz, the imperial court, and the Orthodox church, which served as the primary locus for education in the Christian highlands, Gəʿəz 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 Zärʾa Yaʿəqob'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 Arabia[30] and to the enigmatic Betä Ǝsrael 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 Gəʿəz, 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) Gəʿəz,[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 *Ḥatäta Zärʾa Yaʿəqob* would have known both Gəʿəz and one or

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

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

31 According to some older theories the Betä ʾƎsrael 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 *Ḥatäta* was composed in 1667,[33] the sixty-eighth year of Zärʾa Yaʿəqob'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 *Ḥatäta* 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 *Ḥatäta* 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 Ḥəywät 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 Zärʾa Yaʿəqob, the information about him is all internal to the text. Throughout this introduction, I refer to the persona "Zärʾa Yaʿəqob" as portrayed by the texts, without, however, taking a stand on whether he was in fact a person or a literary creation.

Zärʾa Yaʿəqob'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 Susənyos 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 Susənyos came to admire their pious, eloquent leader Pedro Páez. Recognising the usefulness of close relations with Europe, Susənyos 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, Susənyos 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, Susənyos 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 Ǝlfons mentioned in Chapter 3 of the *Ḫatäta*), 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 Zärʾa Yaʿəqob

According to the narrative of the *Ḫatäta*, Zärʾa Yaʿəqob 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 Gəʿəz, 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 *Säwasəw* (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 Zärʾa Yaʿəqob 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 "färanǧ" [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 Zärʾa Yaʿəqob 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 Zärʾa Yaʿəqob'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 *fəranǧ* 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 *Ḫatäta.* 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 *fəranǧ*, see Littmann (1916b, pp. 236–243).

47 Abb215 2r.

48 Both *agusṭinos liq əmur* (Augustine) and *qəddus tomas äkinawi* (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 Zärʾa Yaʿəqob, 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 Yoḥannəs, for inciting "the people to rise up for our faith, kill the king and expel the *fərangǧ*"[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, Zärʾa Yaʿəqob 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 Zärʾa Yaʿəqob 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, Zärʾa Yaʿəqob 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 Bägemdər, receiving alms from those who mistook him for an orthodox monk or *däbtära.* He came to a village near the town of Ǝnfraz 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 Mikaʾel) and Mətəkku (Wäldä Ḫəywät), 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 Bäṣägga Habtä Ǝgziʾäbḥer.[57]

By this time, Fasilädäs had turned against the Jesuits and expelled them and their followers to Fəremona. When the Jesuits left the country, Zärʾa Yaʿəqob was induced to return to Aksum by relatives, raising the attention of his erstwhile enemy Wäldä Yohannəs, who denounced Zärʾa Yaʿəqob as a Catholic missionary to the governor of Ǝnfraz. 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 Zärʾa Yaʿəqob as divine punishment for "the sins of our people"—but Zärʾa Yaʿəqob and his family survived, feeding the hungry and afflicted through the difficult period. A year later, on his deathbed, Häbtu asked Zärʾa Yaʿəqob to "be a father to his children", Wäldä Mikaʾel and Wäldä Ḫəywät. 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].

Zärʾa Yaʿəqob's own son grows up and is married, and in 1667, the year of the death of Fasilädäs, Zärʾa Yaʿəqob gathers his ideas together in what would become the *Ḫatäta* at the urging of Wäldä Ḫəywät: "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 Zärʾa Yaʿəqob* in five major historical phases.

5.2 Discovery to Catalogue (1854 – 1859)

The *Ḥatäta Zärʾa Yaʿəqob* 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 Bägemdər, where he composed a number of linguistic works, including a Gəʿəz-French-Amharic dictionary, a Gəʿəz-Latin dictionary, a Gəʿəz grammar, and a Gəʿəz 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 Gəʿəz.

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 fatis*, 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 *Ḫatäta Zärʾa Yaʿəqob* for the first time. By February 1853, he has recovered the full text of the *Ḫatäta Zärʾa Yaʿəqob* 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 *Ḥatäta 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 *Ḥatäta 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 *Ḥatäta*s 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 *Ḥatäta* 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 Yaʿəqob'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 *Ḥatäta*,[71] and Turayev suggesting an analogy with the English deist Herbert of Cherbury[72]—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 *Ḥatäta:* "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 1927[77]) and in 1913, he was still something of an amateur orientalist.[78] Section 143 of the article consisted of some notes on the *Ḫatäta Zärʾa Yaʿəqob*, 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 *Ḫatäta Zärʾa Yaʿəqob* 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]

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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 Zärʾa Yaʿəqob'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, Zärʾa Yaʿəqob.

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 *Ḥatäta* everywhere. Take for example the very name Zärʾa Yaʿəqob: "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 *Ḥatatā*; *Zar'a Yā'qob* can be translated as 'seed of Jacob [*Iacopo*]'".[82] The root *zrʾ*/*zrʿ* in Gəʿəz, as in other Semitic languages, denotes "to sow, scatter seeds", with Zärʾa Yaʿəqob signifying "the seed of Jacob". Further, as Wion has more recently argued[83] in the first letter mentioning the *Ḥatäta*, Giusto referred to the text as *Mäshafä Yaʿəqob* (the Book of Jacob), and it was only later that the author-narrator was named Zärʾa Yaʿəqob, 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 Gəʿəz was high enough to compose such a work (a point of contention for many subsequent commentators[84]) and asking why, given the late date of the discovery of the manuscripts, there is no record whatsoever of the *Ḥatäta* for almost two centuries between the death of Zärʾa Yaʿəqob 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 *Ḥatäta:*

> 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 *Ḥatäta*—"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 *éthiopisant* and authority of East Africa, an article intitled *L'Etiopia 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 *Ḥatäta.*

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]

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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 *Ḥatäta* 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 *Éthiopisants* 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 *Ḥatäta*, 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 *Ḥatäta Zärʾa Yaʿəqob* 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 Gəʿəz] 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 *Ḥatäta*s

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" (*singolarità*) of the *Ḥatäta* 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 *Ḥatäta* 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 Gəʿəz – itself the basis of a later Amharic translation – and the *Ḫatäta.* This study appeared to convince many more.[98] The idea of a more rigorous philological comparison of two Gəʿəz 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 Gəʿəz translation.

Mittwoch's demonstration promised to bring to bear the quasi-deductive methods of philological and textual criticism on the *Ḫatäta* 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 Zärʾa Yaʿəqob:

> right at the beginning of the *Ḫatäta* in the autobiography of Zar a Jä'qöb enters his own birthday as the date of his birth. Zar a Jä'qöb 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 Gəʿəz) 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 Gəʿəz 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 *Ḥatäta.* Mittwoch extensively quotes one "*äläqa* Desta of Harrar", identified by Dawit Worku Kidane[105] as Dästa Täkläwäld, the author of a 1956 Amharic dictionary. According to Mittwoch, *äläqa* Dästa had made the accusation—to recur in later stages of the debate—that Westerners who deny the Ethiopian authorship of the *Ḥatäta* 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 *Ḥatäta*, 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 Zämänfäs Qəddus Abrəha produced the first Ethiopian edition of the text, with an accompanying Amharic translation.[107] Zämänfäs Qəddus Abrəha was ac-

102 Sumner (1976a).
103 Belcher in Zara Yaqob, 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 Zä-Mänfas 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 *Ḥatäta*s 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 *Ḥatäta*s—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 *Ḥatäta Zärʾa Yaʿəqob.* He went on to criticise one of Conti Rossini's core arguments, namely, the testimony of *Abba* Täklä 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 Täklä 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 *Ḥatäta* 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 *Ḥatäta*s 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 *Ḫatäta Zärʾa Yaʿəqob* would have been destroyed or kept out of church. On this view, it is the survival of the *Ḫatäta* 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 *Ḫatäta* 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 *Ḫatäta.* 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 Solomonic books and to have them committed to memory in Gəʿəz 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 *Ḫatäta* could not be composed by Giusto da Urbino. The Gəʿəz, he argues, is exceptionally "pure" and free from foreign influence, so that it could only have been composed by a *zärafi* 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 Gəʿəz stopped being a spoken language in roughly the twelfth or thirteenth century. Non-standard word orders in Gəʿəz *qəne* of this period (and Alemayehu Moges quotes *qəne* from seventeenth-century Gondär, almost the exact time and place of the composition of the *Ḫatäta*) 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 *Ḫatäta* as the work of an Ethiopian philosopher. His argument can be split into two parts: first, demonstrating that the author of the *Ḫatäta* could have been Ethiopian and second, showing that Giusto da Urbino could not possibly have been the author of the *Ḫatäta.*

In an effort to substantiate the first point, Sumner examined early philosophy in Gəʿəz, 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 Zärʾa Yaʿəqob 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 *Ḫatäta* in their criticism of established religious norms, such as the veneration of angels:

ለመልአክ፡ ኢናኩብሮ፡	we do not honour the angel
ለእመ፡ አብቆለ፡ ክንፈ፡ መጠነ፡ ነዊኅ፡ ቆመ·	for birds and flies too are covered in wings
ለዖፍ፡ ወለትንንያ፡ እስመ፡ ክንፍ፡ ቦመ·፡	we do not honour man for his white hair
ጸዓት፡ ሲበት፡ እስመ፡ ሀለዋመ፡	because trees and stones too

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

ለዕፀው፡ ወአእቦን፡ ኵሉ·ሙ· ። are covered in white hair[118]

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 Gəʿəz was good enough to compose the *Ḫatäta*, 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 *Ḫatäta Zärʾa Yaʿəqob* and the *Ḫatäta Wäldä Ḫəywät.*

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 Yacob* conference held in Oxford in 2022), who nevertheless remarked that the *Ḫatäta Wäldä Ḫəywät* 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 Gəʿəz translation of the *Soirées*, but Marrassini, unlike all previous scholars, had access to the Gəʿəz 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 *Ḥatäta* have been overstated but also that "the lexicon of the Geez translation of the *Soirées* is totally different from that of the *Ḥatatā*". 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 *Ḥatatā* 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 *Ḥatäta*, titled "L'histoire d'un vrai faux traité philosophique (*Ḥatatā Zar'a Yā'eqob* et *Ḥatatā 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 (*Ḥatatā Zar'a Yā'eqob* and *Ḥatatā 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 *Ḥatäta*, 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 *Ḥatäta* 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 *Ḥatäta*s he had discovered earlier. Indeed, Wion notes this possibility:

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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 Gəʿəz and outlined his philosophical interests, Wion draws a number of parallels between Giusto da Urbino's time in Ethiopia and the narrative of the *Ḥatäta.* Comparing Giusto's letters to d'Abbadie with Chapter 11 of the *Ḥatäta*, 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፡ ፃማየ፡ [*fəre ṣamayä*], which can be found twice in the *Ḥatatā Zarʾa Yāʿeqob* 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 *Ḥatäta?*

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 *Ḥatäta* 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 *Ḥatäta zä-Zär' a Yaʿəqob*, at this time [...] It has been over forty years since I stopped using it as a text for the Gəʿəz classes I taught for over ten years [...] The reason I am returning to this subject is because the more I read the *Ḥatäta*, 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 *Ḥatäta* 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 Gəʿəz. Getatchew Haile further elaborates the now familiar argument that Giusto da Urbino "knew Gəʿəz 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 *Ḫatäta* 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 *Ḫatäta* is the work of an Ethiopian *däbtära* 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 *Ḫatäta* 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 Gəʿəz, 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 Gəʿəz 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 *Ḥatäta*, from both philosophers and historians of ideas. In particular, an *Aeon* article, "The African Enlightenment" by Dag Herbjørnsrud, has served to bring the *Ḥatäta* 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 *Ḥatäta* to reframe the intellectual history of the Enlightenment by presenting Zärʾa Yaʿəqob as a precursor to—even the inventor of—the major ideas of the European Enlightenment.

More recently still, a new translation of the two *Ḥatäta*s 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 *Ḥatäta*s in a global history of ideas. Lee's translation is more philosophically neutral than Sumner's, and is careful not to "load" Gəʿəz 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 bias[146] 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 Gəʿəz 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 Geʿez, 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 Gəʿəz 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 *Ḥatätas* 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 *Ḥatätas*, though with quite different cultural-political underpinnings.

In his book *The Ethics of Zärʾa Yaʿəqob: 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 *Ḥatäta* 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 Zärʾa Yaʿəqob without acknowledging the authorship controversy.

Daniel Kibret, a deacon in the Orthodox church and popular public intellectual, authored a book entitled *Yälelläwən fälasəf fälläga ənna leločč* (roughly, "The Search for a Non-Existent Philosopher and Others", published in 2011 E.C., 2017), introducing the notion of the *Ḥatäta* as a forgery to Amharic reading audiences. His argument that the *Ḥatäta Zärʾa Yaʿəqob* 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 Zarʾa Yaʿəqob'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 philosophy[157] 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 Betälәhem, 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 Zärʾa Yaʿәqob*

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 *Ḥatäta Zärʾa Yaʿəqob* and the *Ḥatäta Wäldä Ḥəywät?*

For many commentators, the significance of the *Ḥatäta* 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 *Ḥatäta* 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 *Ḥatäta* must be "authentic", in some sense or other of that term, in order to be valuable.

But what if the significance of the *Ḥatäta* 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 *Ḥatäta*, 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 *Ḥatäta* 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 *Ḥatäta* 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 *Ḥatäta*, 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 Zärʾa Yaʿəqob? 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 *Ḥatäta* is a poignant expression of Zärʾa Yaʿəqob'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 *Ḥatäta* 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 Gəʿəz 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 *Ḥatäta* did a remarkable job of forging a new conceptual vocabulary in Gəʿəz. 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 Gəʿəz language (see Appendix II in

165 Abb215 12r.

166 Here I would suggest that the term *ləbbuna* and its cognates as used in the *Ḥatäta*, with its semantic ambiguity between "heart" and "mind" (see the entry for *ləbbuna* in the Gəʿəz 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 *Ḥatäta* to world philosophy, a great "untranslatable" in Cassin's (2014 [2004]) sense.

this volume for a preliminary Gəʿəz philosophical lexicon). In this sense, the *Ḥatäta* 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 *Ḥatäta* is a seventeenth-century or a nineteenth-century work, it is a hybrid Ethiopian-European text.

If it was composed by Zärʾa Yaʿəqob in the seventeenth century, it is the product not only of the aforementioned dialogue between Jesuit and Gəʿəz 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 *Ǝčč̣äge* Ǝnbaqom 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 *Ḥatäta* 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 *Ḥatäta Zärʾa Yaʿəqob* 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 Gəʿəz 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.

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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 *Ḥatäta* 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 *Ḥatäta* 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 *Ḥatäta* 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 *Ḥatäta*, 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 *Ḥatäta* 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).