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Chapter 2
Questioning Standards in Ethiopic Classical Writings through Two Distinctive Features of the *Ḥatätas*: Autarchic Logic and First-Person Writing

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

Books are written by men who can write
falsehoods. [...]
I cannot tell you that all men and all books are
false, but I say that they may be false.
እስመ፡ ለመጻሕፍትኒ፡ ጸሐፍዎሙ፡ ሰብእ፡ አይክሉ፡ ይጽሐፉ፡
ሐሰተ። [...]
ኢ.ይብለከ፡ ኵሎመ፡ ሰብእ፡ ወኵሎሙ፡ ማጻሕፍት፡ ይሐስዉ፡
ዘልፈ፡ አላ፡ ዕብለከ፡ ይክሉ፡ የሐስዉ።
Extract from the *Ḥatäta Wäldä Ḥəywät*,
Chapter 2

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

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Gəʿəz[1] whose alleged authors are Ethiopian thinkers from the seventeenth century, started in 2010. It was originally rooted in my interest in the status of written texts in Ethiopia. The first set of three articles, published in 2013, were dedicated to the history of the changing status of these texts throughout the twentieth century in the context of their reception by various academic communities.[2] Allegedly "discovered" and produced by an Italian monk, Giusto da Urbino, the two known manuscripts of the *Ḫatäta* entered the prestigious collection of the French scholar Antoine d'Abbadie in the 1850s. They were edited and translated at the beginning of the twentieth century, but as early as 1920, they were widely considered to be forgeries. Nonetheless, they were not erased from the map of Ethiopian literature and played a major role during the 1960s and later on in the emergence of African philosophy.

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

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

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

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

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

3 Conti Rossini (1920).

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

his student lectures on Thomistic philosophy[5]) while at the same time showcasing his excellent skills in Gəʿəz to Antoine d'Abbadie, the addressee of these works, and taking pride in them. While Antoine d'Abbadie was the main recipient of his works, it seems that Giusto da Urbino also wrote the *Ḫatätas* for a larger audience. He spent five years in Betälähem—where he learned Gəʿəz, produced various texts, started a family, and worked closely with local intellectuals and clerics. But what he wanted to express to his Ethiopian friends in Betälähem and what part these friends played in the writing of these treatises remain difficult to determine. In addition, what did he want to prove to his former Ethiopian Catholic co-religionists, with whom he refused to participate in the mission of evangelisation? We know that a fellow contemporary Ethiopian Catholic monk, Täklä Haymanot, was aware of these texts and despised them. Knowledge of the *Ḫatätas* did reach the ears of the Catholic community in Ethiopia, and this might have played a part in Massaia's decision not to try and convince Giusto da Urbino to participate in the evangelisation of the Käfa region: such a freethinker would have been a source of insubordination. Whoever the author(s) of the *Ḫatätas* are, whether Giusto da Urbino in the mid-nineteenth century or Zär'a Yaʿəqob followed by Wäldä Ḥəywät in the late seventeenth century, it is in any case a very personal voice that is expressed here.

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

1 Autarchic Logic and Intellectual Autonomy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8 See also *Ḫatäta Wäldä Ḫəywät*, Chapter 5: "Books are written by men who can write falsehoods" (Sumner 1991, p. 470).

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

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

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

While the very notion of revealed religion is repeatedly undermined by the *Ḥatätas*, the fact remains that biblical writings are its inescapable point of reference, especially the Psalms of David or *Dawit.* The *Ḥatätas* are unperturbed by this contradiction. Thus, according to Ralph Lee's calculation in his contribution to this volume[10], nearly sixty quotations from the Psalms pepper the *Ḥatäta Zär'a Yaʿəqob* (and less than twenty are derived from other biblical texts), which is internally legitimised by the fact that Zär'a Yaʿəqob retreats into a cave to meditate with the Psalter alone. In the *Ḥatäta Wäldä Ḥəywät*, the quotations are more heterogeneous; we find "only" some thirty quotations from the Psalter and some sixty instances of other biblical quotations.[11]

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

10 See Chapter 3 in this volume.

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

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

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

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

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

13 Wion (2013a, §31).

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

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

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

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

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

3 Troubled Self-Identities in the *Ḥatätas*: "I" Is Another

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

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

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

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

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

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

> ~~Book of Inquiry *(Mäṣḥafä Ḫatäta)* by Zär'a Yaʿəqob~~[18]
>
> **In the name of God who alone is righteous. I shall write down the life (*gädl*) of Zär'a Yaʿəqob which he himself composed (*zä-däräsä lalihu*) with his wisdom and examination (*ḫatätahu*) saying:**
>
> "Come and listen you who fear God! I may tell what He did for my soul (*näfsä-yä*)" [Ps. 65].
>
> **And I begin.**
>
> In the name of God, the creator of all, the origin and the end, the possessor of all, the source of all life and all wisdom. ~~I begin to write~~ **I write** some of the things that have happened to me in my long life. May my soul be glorified by God. May the humble hear and rejoice [Ps. 33]. For I have searched for (*ḫaśäśkəwo*) God and he has answered me. And now come close to him and he will enlighten you. Let not your face be afraid. Glorify with me the greatness of god and let us exalt his name together.

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

17 Wion (2013a, §20).

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

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

"*Nägärä Zär'a Yaʿəqob*", the word *nägärä* (discourse, affair, thing) being more common in the formation of Ethiopian titles than the term *Ḥatäta.*[20]

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

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

> ~~I begin to write~~ **I write** some of the things that have happened to me in my long life. May my soul be glorified by God. May the humble hear and rejoice [Ps. 33]. For I have searched for (*ḫaśäśkəwo*) God and he has answered me.

This "I" refers to Zär'a Yaʿəqob himself. But Manuscript 215 (Abb215) adds: "I shall write down the life (*gädl*) of Zär'a Yaʿəqob which he himself composed [...] And I begin".

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

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

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

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

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

> So that those who come after me may know what I wanted, I write this which I hide in my heart until I die. If indeed after my death there is ~~someone intelligent~~**, an intelligent man with a spirit of enquiry (*ḥätati*)**, I beg him to add his thoughts to my thoughts.
>
> ~~In the same way, everyone, if possible, may gradually come to knowledge.~~ **Behold, I have begun my investigation (*ḥätityä*) as it has never been investigated (*zä-itäḥätätä*) before. And you may complete what I have begun. Let the people of my country acquire wisdom with the help of God and come to the knowledge of the truth.** Lest they believe in falsehood, trust in depravity, and go from vanity to vanity. Let them understand ~~the wisdom of the Creator and trust in his mercy and justice and pray to him with a pure heart in their torments~~ **the truth** and love their brothers ~~as themselves~~ and cease to argue in vain about their faith as they have done so far.
>
> If there be any wise man who understands ~~as I do~~ **these and higher things, and teaches and writes them**, may God grant him what his heart [desires], and may He fulfill his desires for him, and may He fill him without measure with good things as He has filled me. And may He give him joy and happiness on earth as he has made me joyful and happy to this day.
>
> And whoever criticizes me ~~and~~ **because of** my book, ~~and does not understand it or make good use of it~~, may God reward him according to his merit.
>
> Amen.

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

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

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

> Zär'a Yaʿəqob who is Wärqe ~~wrote~~ **finished this book** at the age of 68, when ~~the king (*nəgus*)~~ Fasilädäs died and Yohannes reigned. And after he wrote ~~this~~ **this book**, Zär'a Yaʿəqob lived 25 years in a beautiful old age, loving God our creator, praising Him day and night, and was **extremely** respected. He saw his children and his children's children. And his son Häbtu begat 5 boys and 4 girls from his wife Mädhanit. Zär'a Yaʿəqob who is Wärqe lived to be 93 years old without illness. He died with a very great hope in God our creator. And after one year, his wife also died and she was buried near him. May God receive their souls in peace for ever and ever. [...]
>
> May God bless by the blessing of Häbtu my father and by the blessing of my master (*mämherəyä*) Zär'a Yaʿəqob for I am very old. I have lived and grown old without ever having seen a righteous person abandoned or his descendants lacking grain. May he remain in this blessing for ever and ever.
>
> And I, Wäldä Ḥəywät, ~~who am called~~ **who is called** Mətəkku,[21] have added ~~here~~ these few things **to the book of my master in order to show his happy end.** And as for my wisdom which God gave me and which[22] Zär'a Yaʿəqob taught me for 59 years, behold, I too have writ-

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

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

> ten in my turn[23] a book to show and instruct the sons of Ethiopia. May God give them reason (*ləbbuna*) **and wisdom** and love and bless them for ever and ever, amen.
>
> ~~May God bless with the blessing of Zär'a Ya'əqob his servant Wäldä Giyorgis who caused this book to be written so that God's blessing may be with him forever as well as with the scribe Wäldä Yosef, for ever and ever, so be it.~~
>
> **This book is finished.**

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

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

> In the name of God, creator of all, commander of all, guardian of all and administrator of all, who is and who will be before all time and forever, the only perfect essence, whose greatness is infinite.
>
> I am writing the book of wisdom and enquiry and philosophy (*fəlsəfənna*) and advice which was written (*zä-däräsä*) by a great teacher (*mämhər*) of our country whose name is Wäldä Ḥəywät. May the blessing of his God and the knowledge of the secrets of our blessed Creator and the observance of His righteous laws be with all the children of Ethiopia from now and forever. Amen.
>
> You have heard what was said by the elders: "Give the wise man a chance and he will increase his knowledge". In the same way I thought to write down what God has taught me dur-

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

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

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

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

4 The "I" in Ethiopian Literature

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

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

4.1 Address and Direct Speech in Deeds and Correspondences

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.2 The Autopsy or Testimony of Eyewitnesses

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

26 Wion (2019).

27 Derat (2006).

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

29 Derat (2005, p. 52).

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

4.3 The Authorial "I"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

35 van Donzel (1969).

36 van Donzel (1969, pp. 183–184).

37 Ricci (1954).

5 Restricted Use of the Biographical Genre in Ethiopia

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

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

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

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

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

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

More recently, the ethno-musicological work of Katell Morand has also addressed the question of the expression of intimacy in song, and the creation of both personal and collective memory.[40] Songs are seen as a way of shaping the past. They create a discourse on the past both for personal use (in order to remember) and for the use of the community (for the creation of a collective memory). But some songs are created and sung in solitude, even if they do have a social role. This paradox has been studied by Morand and says a lot about how complex the expression of emotions in Ethiopian society really is. Prior to her work, Fekade Azeze and then Getie Gelaye[41] collected numerous poems and songs produced by peasant communities in the highlands, but did not produce the kind of analysis carried out by Morand on the expression of feelings and intimacy.[42]

6 Attempts at Autobiography in Christian Ethiopia

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

39 Levine (1965, pp. 266–271).

40 Morand (2013 and 2015).

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

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

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

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

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

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

43 Getatchew Haile (2005b).

44 Derat (2002, pp. 49–50).

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

> I have written this, (about) my acquiring wealth, creating a household, owning people and animals, and building a church, together with giving commemoration banquets and celebrating the feast of dedication. Let this not be (a cause) for contempt. I did not write (this) to boast but to give thanks to God for giving me a gift, and to praise the miracle of Mary. In the name of God and in the name of her Son, I shall write of her many miracles which have been wrought in [my church] Hāgarā Māryām.
>
> Why do not the people of Ethiopia write their history (*zēnā*) (without which) their story (*nagara*) becomes unimportant and ephemeral? The ancient people used to write: Josiah had it written down how he celebrated the Pasch by slaughtering oxen, sheep, and goats and by preparing much food.[45]

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

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

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

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

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

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

46 Conti Rossini (1918).

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

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

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