John Marenbon

Chapter 4
Zär'a Yaʿəqob, Mediaeval Philosophy, Forgery, and Authenticity

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

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1 Aquinas' Cosmological Arguments and the *Ḥatätas*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7 Marenbon (2015, pp. 140–142).

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

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

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

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

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

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

2 Forgery and Inauthenticity

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

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

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

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

inauthenticity in mediaeval philosophy can help to gauge how to approach the question of authenticity in connection with the *Ḥatäta*s.[11]

3 Inauthenticity in Mediaeval Philosophy

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

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

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

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

Pseudo-Dionysius was by no means the only mediaeval author to appropriate a famous name. The habit was particularly widespread in seventh- and eighth-century Ireland. There was an Irish Augustine, author of a very unAugustinian treatise, *De mirabilibus sacrae scriptuare* ("On the Miracles in the Bible") that aims to give naturalistic explanations for all the miracles in scripture (*Patrologia Latina* 35, 2149–2200). The (probably Irish) Virgilius Maro Grammaticus was author of a fantastical grammar, full of imaginary rules for non-existent forms of Latin and citations, some from genuine authors, others from the likes of Balapsidus, Lugenicus, Gabritius, and Galbungus (author, we are told, of *de laudibus indefunctorum*).[13] Meanwhile, the *Cosmographia* of Aethicus Ister[14] is, supposedly, the work of Jerome but summarising the writing of a pagan, Scythian philosopher.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Abelard was a super-star logician in early twelfth-century Paris, when logic had something of the glamour of football or rap today. By 1115, in his mid-30s, he had become Master of the leading Cathedral School of the time, at Notre Dame of Paris. He lodged with a canon of the Cathedral who was guardian for his highly educated niece, Heloise. Abelard became Heloise's tutor, soon her lover, and finally her husband and father of her child, though the marriage was secret because it was thought, especially by Heloise, that it would hinder his career. Perhaps because he thought that Abelard was about to repudiate his niece, Fulbert hired thugs to castrate Abelard. His reaction was to become a monk at St. Denis and to force Heloise to become a nun. This happened in 1117.[18]

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

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

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

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

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

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

19 Fessler (1806, p. 352).

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

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

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

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

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

21 Gilson (1938).

22 Dronke (1976).

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

24 Luscombe (2013, p. xxviii).

25 Mews (2014, p. 825).

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

5 Some Methodological Lessons

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

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

26 Könsgen (1974).

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

28 Schnell (2022).

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

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

The parallel with the case of the *Ḥatäta*s is all too obvious. The deafness in the historiography of philosophy, until recently, to the voices of Africa has been even more profound than that towards women's voices, and no scholar now wants to be accused of robbing African philosophy of two of its distinctive, early voices by regarding Zär'a Ya'əqob and Wäldä Ḥəywät as the creations of a nineteenth-century Italian. It is hard not to think that Anaïs Wion's scrupulously scholarly and powerfully argued advocacy of the sceptical view[30] would not be more central to the debate were it not for this fear.

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

29 Mews (1999, p. 116).

30 Wion (2013a, 2013b).

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

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

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

31 Cf. Marenbon (2000, pp. 27–29).

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

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

34 Luscombe (2013, pp. xxix–xxx).

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

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

This lesson applies also to the *Ḥatätas*. Suppose that Giusto da Urbino either wrote them or, at least, substantially changed and reformed existing material. Certainly, he wished to deceive, but he did not want just to do that. He was clearly interested in the ideas given to Zär'a Yaʿəqob and Wäldä Ḥəywät, and some details—such as the identity of his birthday and name with Zär'a Yaʿəqob's[37]—suggest a self-identification with the figure of the seventeenth-century Ethiopian thinker. If the *Ḥatätas are* texts of nineteenth-century philosophy, then they are among the most fascinating literary-philosophical constructs of the time. Moreover, they have a claim to be considered as Ethiopian philosophy: they are written in an Ethiopian language by someone who spent over a decade there and, during this period, immersed himself in the culture he found. Giusto da Urbino's appropriation of an Ethiopian voice might be described as colonial, an instance of Europeans taking over for themselves what belonged to another people and culture. But it could also be seen as the reverse. In order to speak, to say what he wishes, Giusto da Urbino, the European, has to borrow the voice of an African.

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

36 von Moss (2003).

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

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