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Location

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Title: The life and struggles of our mother Walatta Petros : a seventeenth-century African biography of an Ethiopian woman
a seventeenth-century African biography of an Ethiopian woman

Volume:

Issue:

Month/Year: 2015/

Article Title:

1-22, 43-48, 85-111, 119-128, 154-163, 266-272 (and tp, copyright)

Article Author:

Pages:

1-22, 43-48, 85-111, 119-128,

Notes paged

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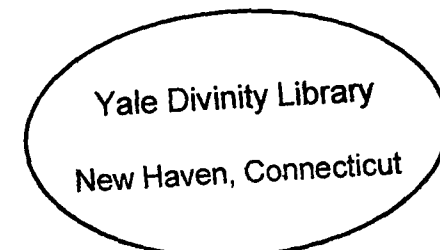
THE LIFE AND STRUGGLES OF OUR MOTHER WALATTA PETROS

A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY AFRICAN
BIOGRAPHY OF AN ETHIOPIAN WOMAN



TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY
WENDY LAURA BELCHER AND MICHAEL KLEINER

WRITTEN BY GALAWDEWOS



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
PRINCETON AND OXFORD

Copyright © 2015 by Princeton University Press
Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540
In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 6 Oxford Street,
Woodstock, Oxfordshire OX20 1TW

press.princeton.edu

Jacket image reprinted by kind permission of the photographer, Claire Bosc-Tiessé.
Portrait of Walatta Petros from a manuscript at Walatta Petros's monastery
on Lake Tana; MS D, folio 134v; photographed in 1997.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Gadla 'Emna Walata Pétros. English
The life and struggles of our mother Walatta Petros : a seventeenth-century African
biography of an Ethiopian woman / written by Gälawdewos ;
translated and edited by Wendy Laura Belcher and Michael Kleiner.
pages cm

English, translated from Ethiopic (Geez).

A "gädl" or hagiography, originally written by Gälawdewos thirty years after the
subject's death, in 1672-1673. Translated from multiple manuscripts and versions.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-691-16421-2 (hardcover : alk. paper) 1. Walata Pétros, Saint, 1592-1642. 2. Walata Pétros,
Saint, 1592-1642—Miracles. 3. Women saints—Biography. 4. Nuns—Ethiopia—Biography.
5. Ya'ityopya 'ortodoks tawahedo bēta kerestiyān—Biography. 6. Monasticism and religious orders
for women—Ethiopia—History—17th century. I. Belcher, Wendy Laura, translator, editor. II. Kleiner,
Michael, 1962- translator, editor. III. Gälawdewos, author. IV. Title.

BR1725.N42G33 2015

281.75092—dc23

2014038410

British Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available

This publication is made possible in part from the Barr Ferree Foundation Fund for
Publications, Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University. This fund and the US
Fulbright Scholar Program in large part funded this publication, including its images and the
field research on which it is based. Additional vital funding came from the Princeton Center for
African American Studies, Princeton Department of Comparative Literature, Princeton
University Committee on Research in the Humanities and Social Science, Princeton Council of
the Humanities, Princeton Center for the Study of Religion, and Princeton Program in Gender
and Sexuality Studies. The inception of the translation was a grant from the University of
California at Irvine International Center for Writing and Translation.

Parts of the introduction sections "The Text's Seventeenth-Century Historical Context" and "Ḥabāša
Royal Women's Anticolonial Role" were previously published in a much-extended form in Wendy
Laura Belcher, "Sisters Debating the Jesuits: The Role of African Women in Defeating Portuguese
Proto-Colonialism in Seventeenth-Century Abyssinia," *Northeast African Studies* 12 (Spring 2013).

This book has been composed in Linux Libertine O

Printed on acid-free paper. ∞

Printed in Canada

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

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Introduction to the Text

Wendy Laura Belcher

This volume introduces and translates the earliest known book-length biography about the life of an African woman: the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros*. It was written in 1672 in an African language by Africans for Africans about Africans—in particular, about a revered African religious leader who led a successful nonviolent movement against European protocolonialism in Ethiopia. This is the first time this remarkable text has appeared in English.

When the Jesuits tried to convert the Ḥabäša peoples of highland Ethiopia from their ancient form of Christianity to Roman Catholicism,¹ the seventeenth-century Ḥabäša woman Walatta Petros was among those who fought to retain African Christian beliefs, for which she was elevated to sainthood in the Ethiopian Orthodox Täwaḥədo Church. Thirty years after her death, her Ḥabäša disciples (many of whom were women) wrote a vivid and lively book in Gəʿəz (a classical African language) praising her as an adored daughter, the loving friend of women, a devoted reader, an itinerant preacher, and a radical leader. Walatta Petros must be considered one of the earliest activists against European protocolonialism and the subject of one of the earliest African biographies.

The original text is in a distinctive genre called a *gädl*, which is used to tell the inspirational story of a saint's life, often called a hagiography or hagiobiography (de Porcellet and Garay 2001, 19). This genre represents a vital archive of African literature that has gone almost entirely unexplored, even though it contains fascinating narratives about folk heroes and is a rich repository of indigenous thought. More than two hundred Ethiopian saints have a *gädl*, including at least six women. One of them was Walatta Petros, a noblewoman who lived from 1592 to 1642, and whose composite name means Spiritual Daughter of Saint Peter (and should never be shortened to Petros). The ገድለ፡ወለተ፡ጴጥሮስ (*Gädlä Wälättä Petros* [*Life-Struggles of Walatta Petros*]) is the extraordinary story of her life and her fierce determination to do what was right. Despite the importance of these hagiobiographies, only four other Ethiopian saints have had their *gädl* translated into English (Anonymous 1898; Täklä Şəyon 1906; Täwäldä Mädhən 2006). The Gəʿəz scholar and translator Getatchew Haile recently translated one of the most important: the *Gädlä Ḥstifanos*. The three other translations, done more than one hundred years ago by Sir E. A. Wallis Budge, are available only to the wealthy, as there are no electronic versions

¹ For an explanation of the term Ḥabäša, see Müller (2005). For an explanation of the choice to use it sometimes rather than “Ethiopians,” see Belcher (2012).

on the Internet: they exist only in art books that cost thousands of dollars each. Two of these four translations are short, and all of them are about men. Furthermore, there has been only one translation into English of the life of any black female saint (whether African or of African descent), the as yet unpublished but carefully researched work on Teresa Chicaba (Houchins and Fra-Molinero 2009), and that was written by Europeans, not Africans. Our translation represents the first accessible translation into English of an early modern African woman's life. And it is one of only a handful of authentic African accounts of early modern African thought.

Our aim in translating has been to produce a rigorous scholarly publication with a wide-ranging introduction; rich substantive notes; a comprehensive glossary of people, places, and concepts; and vivid illustrations from the original manuscripts. Since both literary scholars and historians will use the text, our translation does not take liberties with the text (variations from the original are noted). At the same time, we have translated with a careful eye for the needs of undergraduates and scholars who have no knowledge of Ethiopia or Gə'əz (see Kleiner's "Introduction to the Translation of the Text" for information on all aspects of the translation). In this way, we hope to bring the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros* into the global conversation, aiding its usefulness to religious, historical, literary, gender, and African studies. We believe that the publication of this translation should electrify medieval and early modern studies and meet the demand for early African-authored texts. Not only is the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros* the earliest known biography of an African woman, and an early account of resistance to European protocolonialism from an African perspective, it also features a rare look at African women's domestic lives and relationships with other women.

An Exemplary Woman, Not an Exception

Walatta Petros might seem to be unique. She was, after all, a literate seventeenth-century African noblewoman. She was an important leader, directing a successful movement against Europeans and overcoming local male leadership. Her Ethiopian disciples wrote a book about her. Yet closer examination reveals that Walatta Petros is not unique but rather an exemplary case.

Many are surprised to hear that Africans were writing any books several hundred years ago, much less books in an African language about an individual woman. The general public assumes that ancient, medieval, and early modern Africans did not create written texts, and even scholars may assume that the publication of Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* in 1958 represents the genesis of written African literature. Yet, Ethiopia and Eritrea are nations in East Africa whose African peoples the Ḥabäša have been reading and writing bound manuscripts in their literary language of Gə'əz since the fourth century CE. (To learn more, visit Sean Winslow's online exhibit "Ethiopic Manuscript Production" at larkvi.com/mss/eth/production.) Like Latin (whose vernacular form, so-called Vul-

gar Latin, evolved into the Romance languages Italian, French, Spanish, and so on), vernacular Gə'əz evolved into the modern language Təgrəñña, while written Gə'əz became a fossilized language that changed little from then on (Weninger 2011). The written form, dating to the first millennium, has been and still is the sacred language for liturgy and literature in the church. Ḥabäša boys and some Ḥabäša girls learned how to read in this language from the age of seven onward, therefore some Ḥabäša were literate and are depicted as reading and loving books in the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros*.

Many North Americans are also surprised to hear that Africans were Christians well before the 1600s, assuming that Christianity in Africa is always the result of Western missionary activity. Yet the Ḥabäša are among the oldest Christians in the world—King ʾEzana and his court converted in the 330s CE. The Ḥabäša practice a form of African Christianity that predates most forms of European Christianity and is variously called non-Chalcedonian, monophysite, Coptic, Oriental Orthodox, or Ethiopian Orthodox. Members themselves prefer the term *Täwəḥədo Church*, which we use. Their ancient form of African Christianity is distinctive, holding some beliefs dear that are considered heretical by the Roman Catholic Church, Protestant churches, and Eastern Orthodoxy.

Thousands of churches and hundreds of monasteries have maintained these traditions for the past fourteen hundred years, while their monks and learned men have translated Greek and Arabic texts into Gə'əz and also created an original literature of theological treatises, royal chronicles, and indigenous hagiobiographies. The hagiobiographies were a particularly important form because there is no formal process of canonization to become a saint in the *Täwəḥədo Church*; rather, the main requirements are posthumous miracles and that the saint's community write his or her hagiobiography. A marker of the strength of Western constructions of the world is that the scholar must explain that some black peoples were both literate and Christian before some Europeans.

Finally, many assume that Africa is the continent where women have perennially been the most abused and repressed. Yet, parts of Northeast Africa have long traditions of strong ruling queens, of legally independent and literate noblewomen, and of national reverence for female deities and saints. The Ḥabäša claim that their royal line has had women of such distinction that they are known worldwide, including the Queen of Sheba of the Old Testament and Queen Candace of the New Testament. During the early modern period, Ḥabäša queens and princesses were very powerful politically—acting independently of kings, ruling for young kings, owning vast lands, and being undeposable while alive (Lobo and Le Grand 1985, 92, 128, 212, 229; Barradas 1996, 96). For instance, Queen ʾEleni indirectly ruled the country for so long and so competently that when she died, people mourned her as both "father and mother of all," according to a sixteenth-century Portuguese visitor (Alvarez 1961, 434). In the eighteenth century, the powerful Queen Məntəwwab ruled as regent for her husband, her son, and her grandson (Bruce 1813b, 94–104). Säblä Wängel, wife of the sixteenth-century monarch Ləbnä Dəngəl, was also a leader of the nation after the death of her husband (Kleiner 2010). Evidence from

multiple sources in multiple languages demonstrates that early modern African women were present in the histories of their nations (Thornton 1998, 1991; Nast 2005), not absent, as the modern public tends to assume.

To summarize, Walatta Petros is not *sui generis* but an exemplar of the Ḥabäša's long tradition of powerful noblewomen, indigenous literature, and independent Christianity. Unfortunately, scholars of early modern African women continue to write against an absence—not that of the women themselves but the absence of readers' knowledge about Africa and the scarcity of scholarship about these women, which creates assumptions about the scarcity of the women themselves. This book does much to undermine those unfortunate assumptions.

The Text's Seventeenth-Century Historical Context

The *Gädlä Wälättä Petros* is written without a Western audience in mind. Its Ḥabäša authors assume a contemporary Ḥabäša readership; that is, those as knowledgeable about its events, people, places, books, time, and rituals as the authors are. For instance, it proceeds without explaining where places are or how far they are from one another. The name of the king appears with little more announcement than those of the humble maids, fishermen, and boat owners of Walatta Petros's community. Thus, it is essential to give a substantial historical background for the twenty-first-century reader.

The seventeenth-century encounter between the Portuguese and the Ḥabäša that forms the backdrop of the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros* is a fascinating moment in the history of colonial encounter.² As mentioned, the highland Ethiopian kingdom of Abyssinia, of the Ḥabäša people, had become Christian starting in the fourth century. In the 1520s and 1530s, they became concerned about Islamic incursions. A Muslim of the Afar people called Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Ġāzī (nicknamed “Grañ” by the Ḥabäša, meaning “left-handed” in Amharic) started a war against the Christian kingdoms of the Ethiopian highlands (Morin 2004, 41–43), beginning with the provinces of Fäṭāgar and Dāwaro, from which Walatta Petros's family came. This military leader led a campaign—burning down churches and monasteries, killing monks and priests, and cutting a swath through the Ḥabäša army—that nearly eradicated the Ḥabäša Empire. The Ḥabäša king Ləbnä Dəngəl sent ambassadors to Europe to ask for help in defending the Ḥabäša, and in 1541 they arrived. Cristóvão da Gama, the son of the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama, led an expedition from Goa, India, of four hundred Portuguese with muskets to repel the conquest. After the Ḥabäša and Portuguese successfully repelled the incursion, many of the Portuguese returned home, but some stayed to form a small community, intermarrying with the Ḥabäša.

Then, missionaries from the new Roman Catholic order of the Jesuits, founded just twenty years earlier to combat emergent Protestantism, arrived in Ethiopia in

1557 to endeavor to convert the Ḥabäša from their ancient form of Christianity to Roman Catholicism. The Jesuits' early methods were neither sophisticated nor successful—they declared the Ḥabäša heretics, demanded that they submit to Rome, and did little to persuade them (Pennec 2003, 373). The missionaries were barely tolerated by successive kings and did little beyond ministering to the tiny Catholic community descended from the intermarried families of the Portuguese soldiers.

Then, after fifty years of failure, the Portuguese sent a new group of Jesuits to the Ethiopian highlands in 1603, among whom was a Spanish priest named Pedro Páez. This man was a new sort of missionary, someone who learned the local language, engaged others in conversation, and was sympathetic to many of the tenets of the Tāwəḥədo Church. His extraordinary diplomacy, intellectual curiosity, and kind manner enabled him to gain influence among a range of nobles and high-ranking priests. Páez privately converted King Zä-Dəngəl within a few years of arriving. When that king was excommunicated from the Tāwəḥədo Church and killed for these actions, a new king seized the throne in 1607, Susənyos (regnal name Mälak Säggäd). Páez converted him and the new king's powerful brother Šə'əlä Krəstos (who had the title of *Ras*, meaning “duke”) as well, in 1612, reassuring them that conversion was only a matter of consolidating Christianity against the threat of Islam, not of abandoning the faith of their fathers.

King Susənyos may not have been much concerned about such an abandonment anyway. He was the extramarital son of a previous king (Täklä Šəllase [Ṭinno] 1892, ix) and had grown up among another ethnic group, the Oromo, life experiences that may have made him more open to a foreign faith (Marcus 2002, 39–40). Certainly, he converted with an eye toward controlling the powerful Tāwəḥədo Church and gaining European military assistance (Crummey 2000, 68, 72; Cohen 2009a, 29; Henze 2000, 96). After violently repressing his people's anti-Catholic uprising in 1617 and 1618, Susənyos forced the matter in 1621 by publicly professing Roman Catholicism and rejecting the Tāwəḥədo Church, and inviting more Portuguese Jesuits into the country. Over the following decade, the Jesuits established nine churches, translated the Latin liturgy and theological texts into Gə'əz, and engaged in open debates with local religious leaders over doctrine. Many of the male members of the royal court and high-ranking priests followed Susənyos in converting.

Nevertheless, a significant portion of the population, including many lower-level ecclesiastics, the people in the countryside, and women of the court, did not (Lobo 1971, 189). They rightly suspected that, despite promises to the contrary, they would soon be asked to abandon their most cherished rituals to embrace the Jesuitical version of Christianity. Unlike the high-ranking men, these women and peasants were more involved in the distinctive beliefs and practices of the Ḥabäša church—which touched every part of their daily lives. A few of the practices that the Jesuits later decried included the Ḥabäša's refusal to eat pork or rabbit (as proscribed in the Old Testament) and their celebration of the Sabbath on Saturday and Sunday. The people were horrified at the prospect of eating foods that disgusted them and losing their days of worship. And, to the Ḥabäša mind, the Portuguese

² Much of this section was previously published in an extended form in Belcher (2013).

priests were clearly barbarians, thinking nothing, for instance, of spitting in church (Castanhoso, Bermudez, and Correa 1902, 90). Many Ḥabäša refused to follow the king in converting to Roman Catholicism—which some called the “filthy faith of the Europeans.”

Then a fateful event occurred: Páez died. His successor, Afonso Mendes, was more aggressive, and the fears of the people were realized.³ In 1626, Mendes had the king issue an edict condemning many cherished Tāwahədo Church religious practices. For instance, the Ḥabäša baptize sons on the fortieth day after their birth and daughters on the eightieth day. Given infant mortality rates, many children died without baptism. The Jesuits insisted that all such children were in hell (Páez 1903, 63–64).

The king immediately began to face wholesale insurrection, with many taking up their weapons. In the countryside, some priests engaged the armed Portuguese military with nothing more than a portable sacred altar on their heads (Lobo and Le Grand 1985, 91). In his own immediate household, none of the women converted. His mother rebuked him (Páez 2011, 1:333–34), his wife left him due to his conversion (Mendes 1908, 333–34), his beloved niece gave land to shelter anti-Catholic resisters (Täklä Šəllase [Tṯinno] 1900, 78, 374n), and two of his daughters participated in anti-Catholic rebellions against him (Crummey 2000, 69). It seems he was dismayed at having to kill so many of his own people and disheartened by these domestic desertions: “it visibly appear’d that he broke his Heart with Grief, and Trouble, being in perpetual Anguish” (Tellez 1710, 243). Susənyos abandoned the effort to convert the country by force, rescinded his edict of conversion in 1632, and died three months later. His son Fasilädäs came to power and eradicated Roman Catholicism. By 1636, he was executing priests who had converted to Roman Catholicism (Beccari 1913, 110). By 1653, not a single Jesuit was left in Ethiopia: all had been banished or lynched (*ibid.*, 102; Tellez 1710, 264). Three hundred years later, the twentieth-century king Haile Selassie still prevented the Roman Catholic Church from establishing churches or congregations in highland Ethiopia.

Oddly, few scholars have commented on this annihilation of a European proto-colonial effort, its absolute failure. And a protocolonial effort it was. Although the Portuguese Jesuits did not engage in international trade, own private property in Ethiopia, or extract tribute, they traveled in and out of the country with soldiers, established a settlement, and lived in Ethiopia for almost a century. They were there due to Portuguese geopolitical interests in curtailing the Ottoman Empire, demanding that the Ḥabäša king submit himself to the European authority of the pope, and using superior military equipment to aid the king in forcing thousands to embrace a European system of very different beliefs and rituals from 1621 to 1632. After a decade of bloody conflict, however, the Portuguese were routed and Europeans did not attempt to colonize Ethiopia for the next two hundred and fifty years. In fact, Europeans never successfully colonized most of the nation afterward. This is the

backdrop of Walatta Petros’s movement against the Jesuits and Roman Catholicism in Ethiopia.

The Text and Ḥabäša Noblewomen’s Anticolonial Role

Two explanations have been offered for the Ḥabäša defeating the Portuguese effort in highland Ethiopia in the 1600s.⁴ European scholars tend to say that the Portuguese were culturally insensitive and enraged the populace. Ḥabäša scholars tend to say that rebellions among the Ḥabäša military ranks turned the tide. Both of these explanations are accurate. But the defeat must also be attributed in part to a group many assume had no power: women. Comparing the Portuguese and Ḥabäša sources from the seventeenth century (including the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros*) reveals that Ḥabäša noblewomen were partly, and perhaps largely, responsible for evicting the Portuguese and Roman Catholicism from Ethiopia. Comparing the primary sources from two earlier traditions enables us to recover the role of African women in resisting European colonial efforts and shaping their nation’s history.

In the seventeenth century, about a dozen now relatively unknown texts were written about the encounter in the first half of the century between the Portuguese and the Ḥabäša. Writing from the European perspective, five of the Portuguese Jesuits who lived in Ethiopia in the early 1600s—Manoel de Almeida (often Manuel de Almeida), Manoel Barradas, Jerónimo Lobo, Afonso Mendes, and Pedro Páez—wrote accounts of their experiences in Ethiopia. Perhaps because of the mission’s failure, none of the Portuguese Jesuits’ accounts were published in full in Portuguese until the twentieth century, in Camillo Beccari’s fifteen-volume series *Rerum aethiopicarum scriptores occidentales inediti a saeculo XVI ad XIX* (Lobo 1983, xxix). Only some of these texts have appeared in English. Some of the Jesuits also wrote letters and reports that have been preserved (Beccari 1910, 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914). Writing from the African perspective, various seventeenth-century Ḥabäša scholars also documented the encounter, writing royal chronicles that detail the lives of Ḥabäša kings who ruled during this period, and some hagiobiographies that detail the lives of Ḥabäša saints. None of these Gəʿəz texts are currently available in English. There are also the letters of the Roman Catholic Ḥabäša monk *Abba* Gorgoryos, who reported what he saw to the seventeenth-century German scholar Hiob Ludolf.⁵

The texts from this period display quite different perspectives on some of the Ḥabäša noblewomen—the Portuguese texts portray one of them negatively as *diabólica mulher* (diabolical woman), while the Gəʿəz texts portray them positively as *qəddusat* (female saints)—but they concur that these African women participated in defeating this European incursion. The Portuguese texts disparage Ḥabäša noble-

⁴ Much of this section was previously published in an extended form in Belcher (2013).

⁵ Some of his Gəʿəz letters to Ludolf were translated into German (Flemming 1890–91), and Michael Kleiner is working on translating them into English.

³ Some have debated the painting of Mendes as a hard-liner, including Merid Wolde Aregay (1998); Pennec (2003). For a discussion of this point, see Salvatore (2010, 194).

women for obstructing the Jesuits' efforts to convert the Ḥabäša to Roman Catholicism. The Gə'əz texts praise them for doing so. Comparing the two traditions reveals that the negative Portuguese representations of these Ḥabäša noblewomen were not just the result of misogyny, but were a vanquished foe's bitter depiction of a victorious enemy. Indeed, these early modern African women must be acknowledged as some of the earliest pioneers against European incursions in Africa.

Women appear rarely in the Portuguese accounts, but when they do, they are almost always resisting conversion to Roman Catholicism. Lobo and Mendes claim outright that the noblewomen surrounding the Ḥabäša king—in particular his senior wife, eldest daughter, a daughter-in-law, and a niece—are the reason for the failure of Roman Catholicism in Abyssinia (Lobo and Le Grand 1985, 73–74; Beccari 1903, 147). Part of the reason that Ḥabäša noblewomen were so powerful was that strict exogamous cultural laws meant that noblewomen (*wäyzazər* in Gə'əz) married outside the royal family; that is, they married men who were beneath them socially: “The *wäyzazər* are not submissive to anyone, not even to their husbands. Given that they do not marry and cannot marry men who are noble like them, only to those who are not, no matter how honored the men may be, their wives will always become their masters. And behind closed doors the men are treated as servants” (our translation) (Barradas 1906, 151–52; 1996, 64).

This asymmetrical power relationship probably contributed to noblewomen's strong sense of their own value and rights. Their literacy, unusual for any seventeenth-century person, would also have contributed to this confidence. Indeed, the Ḥabäša king expressed surprise that the noblewomen were not more interested in the foreign faith, given their literacy, saying, “he was amazed, that they, rising from such a noble lineage, gifted with clear minds and versed in books to such a degree, would endure themselves being inflicted upon by monks from the countryside and from the woods” (our translation) (Mendes 1908, 302).

In my article on the topic, “Sisters Debating the Jesuits” (Belcher 2013), I look more closely at the Portuguese texts' vivid portraits of six individual Ḥabäša noblewomen, five who resisted the Portuguese and one who appears to have supported them. Space does not allow that examination here, but the interested reader is urged to read the article for fascinating anecdotes about the Ḥabäša noblewomen of this period, whom nobody (including their fathers and husbands) could prevent from doing exactly as they liked.

One figure is worth spending a little time on, however: the king's niece. She is a discursively resistant figure in the Portuguese texts who has experiences quite similar to Walatta Petros. While remaining nameless in their texts, she takes up more space than perhaps any other woman, with the Portuguese describing her as well educated and the greatest heretic in the land (Beccari 1912, 185). Lobo wrote, years later, that they were never successful in converting this woman, but Thomas Barneto stated in 1627 that they were (1912, 185–89). They interpreted the encounter differently, as suggested by what Barneto himself recounts of the rhetorical indirection she used to avoid conversion.

In Lobo's account, the Jesuits met her husband when he asked them to come as Roman Catholic missionaries to his region (1983, 186). Unfortunately for the Portuguese, the king's niece was set against them: “a confirmed heretic, so blind and obstinate in her errors that she was unwilling to listen to any discussion of the Catholic faith or any true information concerning her heresies” (ibid.). Although “the greater part of our labours were expended with the king's niece,” she heard their preaching with “ill will and worse predisposition” (ibid., 187). In a brilliant rhetorical move, she horrified the locals by telling them that the Jesuits had mixed the blood of unclean animals (camels, dogs, and hares) into the bread of the Eucharist host, polluting the sacred ritual (Lobo and Le Grand 1985, 57). This constituted a dire problem for the Portuguese, because the local women in the entire region refused to convert on the grounds that the king's niece had not converted (Lobo 1971, 386n2). Soon the entire region was “infected with the same prejudices as she” and “they fled from us whenever we approach'd” (Lobo and Le Grand 1985, 57). Whole towns would go into mourning when the Portuguese drew near (Lobo 1983, 188–89).

Given her tremendous influence, the Portuguese made repeated attempts to change her mind (Lobo 1983, 187–89, 197; Lobo and Le Grand 1985, 57–58, 61). At first they hoped that she would “yield” to her husband and convert, but she did not. Then they spent three days attempting to gain an audience with her, but she would not grant it. Eventually, the Portuguese abandoned the effort and returned home: “We again attempted the conversion of the aforementioned lord's wife, whom we found as blind and stubborn as before. And since she refused to give up the battle in any of the many bouts we had with her, we had to return again to Fremona [the Jesuit base, in northern Ethiopia]” (Lobo 1983, 197). Not long after, the entire Portuguese effort in Abyssinia unraveled.

The Portuguese did not record their “battles” with this woman at length, but the original Lobo draft contains a fascinating scene, deleted from the later manuscript, in which the woman debates with the Portuguese priests, employing rhetoric in resisting them (1971, 387). Perhaps Lobo deleted the scene because it demonstrated a mere woman defeating a team of men from the most famous educational European institution of its time, the Society of Jesus. Although the king's niece appears in Lobo's text as a shadow, without a direct voice, there is no doubting her extraordinary role in the text. She resists conversion, convinces other women to resist conversion, and remains true to her faith despite the best efforts of the Portuguese. Indeed, her repression in Lobo's later text makes her stand out all the more because she is the only individual conversion attempt Lobo records. As the reader, one immediately wonders why the Portuguese are spending so much time with one person, and with a woman. Clearly, this woman is a symbol of much more.

Interestingly, several events in Walatta Petros's life parallel those of the king's niece. Both women were noblewomen and the wives of high-ranking officials who had converted to Roman Catholicism. Both women were subjected to intense, one-on-one efforts by the Portuguese to convert them. Like the king's niece, “our holy mother Walatta Petros argued with them, defeated them and embarrassed them.” It

is tempting to speculate that the hagiobiography and Lobo and Barneto's accounts are about the same woman. The names of their husbands are somewhat similar, appearing as "Miserat Christos" and "Melcha Christos" in the Portuguese sources (Beccari 1912, 185). But the king's niece lived in Šire, Təgray, and Walatta Petros never did. If they are not the same woman, the overlap in their stories suggests that the Portuguese accounts and the Ḥabäša hagiobiographies are both reporting on a much larger movement among Ḥabäša noblewomen during this period.

Despite the different valences of the Portuguese and Ḥabäša texts—the first condemning, the second praising noblewomen—the parallels between them are striking. In both, women are rhetorical warriors, striking at imperial and foreign power with the weapons of language. In the Portuguese texts this resistance is often depicted as sly sarcasm or sullen silence; in the Ḥabäša texts it is depicted as dialogic utterance. Indeed, in one of the other Ethiopian female saint hagiobiographies, the *Gädlä Faqartä Krastos*, women perform a theater of abusive speech and violent physical response that ends not even with the speaker's death, but with a command that the living eat the bodies of the condemnatory and all-powerful dead.

By reading early modern European and African written texts through each other, we come to a better understanding of this period and, in particular, the role of women in the failure of an early modern European protocolonial effort. The Ḥabäša texts suggest that women played an essential role in defeating Roman Catholicism in Ethiopia, but do not say so outright. The Portuguese texts do. The Ḥabäša texts communicate the scale of the rebellion against the Roman Catholics, and the tremendous cost to the Ḥabäša both at the national and familial level. The Portuguese texts are necessarily more focused on the costs to Europeans. Read together, both sets of texts suggest some important historical truths.

The Text's Religious Context

The *Gädlä Wälättä Petros* was written within the Tāwaḥədo Church tradition, which is both similar to and very different from other forms of Christianity. In this section, I describe the religious differences between Roman Catholicism and the Tāwaḥədo Church, particularly their views of human and divine nature; the religious controversies that arose within the Tāwaḥədo Church during this period, including Walatta Petros's monastery's affiliation with adherents of Qəbat teaching; the vital place that the Virgin Mary holds in the Tāwaḥədo Church; the practices of monasticism in the Tāwaḥədo Church, including female leadership; and the deployment of biblical passages in the text, including their alteration.

Tāwaḥədo Church Doctrine

Readers familiar with Roman Catholicism or Protestantism will notice that the Christianity of the text is markedly different. Walatta Petros and other Ḥabäša re-

fused to convert to Roman Catholicism for a number of reasons, but one of the most often stated is Christological. That is, the Ḥabäša viewed the nature of Christ differently. The Roman Catholics agreed with the Council of Chalcedon of 451 that Christ had "two natures," fully human and fully divine; the Tāwaḥədo Church disagreed with that council and insisted that Christ had "one nature," melding the human and the divine. Along with the Roman Catholics, the Eastern Orthodox, and, later, the Protestant churches, agreed with the two-nature doctrine; it is only the so-called Oriental Orthodox churches, or non-Chalcedonian churches of Egypt, Syria, Armenia, India, Ethiopia, and Eritrea, that disagreed. While this difference may seem small or even nonexistent—neither claimed that Christ was only divine or only human—the theological and political implications were significant. More recently, the non-Chalcedonian churches have decided that the difference is merely semantic, based in a misunderstanding of the Greek terms for "nature" (Ayele Takla Haymanot 1982). Language is powerful, however, and has shaped some distinctive aspects of the Tāwaḥədo Church, particularly its emphasis on indivisibility, which seems to have shaped, or emerged from, its view of human nature.

The Tāwaḥədo Church does not have a doctrine of original sin, and thus does not posit that all human beings are born in a state of sin. Rather, it has a doctrine of theosis, the transformation of human beings by grace. When saved, people are restored into Christ's image. Thus, all children are types of angels, and Ḥabäša and Africans who do bad things are rarely evil but are led to do evil acts by something outside of themselves: Satan. Walatta Petros's pagan jailor makes advances toward her not due to his own bad character but because "Satan entered into [his] heart." (The Europeans in the text are allowed no such excuse, however.) The text talks about the divinity of human beings, saying that the members of Walatta Petros's flock are "without any blemish." This doctrine means that human beings are not inevitably and wholly sinful but actually have the potential of becoming divine, like Mary (Wright 2002, 30). As a result, the ultimate goal of monks and nuns is to leave the human behind, in part by reducing the body's desires to nothing. This has partly to do with another doctrine that the body as well as the soul will be resurrected on Judgment Day, therefore "both the body and the soul have to be purified and saved" (ibid., 34).

At the same time, if humans are more divine, the divine is more human. When Jesus Christ appears to commission Walatta Petros to guide the community, she does not agree in awe. She fights him tooth and nail, insisting that she is nothing but "mud." Christ deigns to argue back, saying that mud mixed with straw is a strong building block. So, she comes to her main point. She knows her Bible well—she "was anxious that what had happened to Eve not happen to her." She does not want to be tricked, but perhaps she also does not want to be mistakenly held responsible, as a woman, if harm comes to her flock. Only then, having been defeated in argument, does Christ give her his solemn promise that no one in her community, nor anyone who ever calls upon her name, will perish—that is, be condemned to eternal damnation. Only then, having extracted a promise from the all-powerful,

does she agree to do as God says. Similarly, an earlier Ḥabäša female saint, Krəstos Šämra, also argues with God, trying to reconcile him with Satan so that human beings will stop suffering due to the war between the two (Filəppos 1956).

Although many Ḥabäša, like Walatta Petros, refused to convert to Roman Catholicism, and eventually the country followed suit and abandoned Catholicism, the Ḥabäša's debates with the Jesuits set the stage for divisive theological debates in Ethiopia in the seventeenth century. This internal conflict, starting right after the expulsion of the Jesuits, centered on whether Christ needed the Holy Spirit to anoint him. One side, called Uctionist (adherents of Qəbat teaching, whose followers were called Uctionists, Qəbatočč, əllä Ewostəwos, or Goğgamewočč), believed that he did need the Holy Spirit: "the Father is the anointer, the Son the anointed, and the Holy Spirit the ointment." The other side, called Unionist (adherents of Karra teaching, whose followers were called Unionists or Täwaḥədowočč), believed that he did not: "the Son is the anointer, the anointed, and the ointment" (Tedros Abraha 2010; Getatchew Haile 2007a). The Uctionists were associated with the monastic house of the fifteenth-century *Abunä* Ewostəwos and the monasteries of Goğgam (south of Lake Ṭana); the Unionists were associated with the monastic house of thirteenth-century *Abunä* Täklä Haymanot and the monasteries of Azäzo (near Gondär) and Däbrä Libanos. That is, although the Täwaḥədo Church had no orders, it did have "houses," loosely connected networks of monasteries (Kaplan 2014a).

The second half of the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros*, which relates what happened after the Jesuits were expelled, will be helpful to scholars trying to understand some of those shifts. In particular, the Ḥabäša monks and monasteries in the text suggest that Walatta Petros's community leaned toward Qəbat teaching. For instance, the high-ranking monk *Abba* Fätlä Šəllase appears in both Susənyos's chronicle and Walatta Petros's hagiobiography. In the hagiobiography, Fätlä Šəllase is a special mentor to Walatta Petros, as well as the "teacher of the entire world." He is the one who enables her to leave her husband's home to become a nun, who twice brokers peace between her and her husband, and who, much later, supports her when male priests attack her leadership on the grounds that she is a woman. Since Fätlä Šəllase is regularly associated in the hagiobiography with a pro-Catholic member of the court, Wälättä Giyorgis (whom Walatta Petros later converts back to Orthodoxy), we might assume that he was one of the priests who initially embraced Roman Catholicism. The hagiobiography speaks approvingly of him, however, so he must have abandoned any pro-Catholic position, if he had espoused any. Meanwhile, this same monk appears in Susənyos's royal chronicle, participating near southeastern Lake Ṭana in a famous debate about Christ's anointing, held before King Susənyos in 1622–23 CE. Fätlä Šəllase is the first of many monks arguing for the Qəbat side, which Susənyos then chose to support (also suggesting that Qəbat was aligned with Roman Catholicism). In the June 1655 public debate, held after Walatta Petros died, King Fasilädäs also chose the Qəbat side, but in the 1667 debate, Fasilädäs chose the opposing side. Likewise, his successor, King Yoḥannəs I, held public debates on the issue in 1668. The Qəbat side again lost, and did so permanently. It

seems that Walatta Petros's monastery still had its sympathies with the Qəbat side as of the 1672 writing of the hagiobiography, however. Further evidence is that an entry on Əḥətä Krəstos in the *Sənkəssar* (Synaxarium), the thirteenth-century compilation of saints' lives, states that she excommunicated two monks for being Unionist (Nollet 1930).

The Täwaḥədo Church is also distinctive in having great reverence for the Virgin Mary, Christ's mother, the "mother of salvation." Christ saved all humanity by dying on the cross, but Mary is present day to day, providing basic needs, comfort, and forgiveness. The pious recite the prayers in her honor, *Wəddase Maryam*, every day. In the *Tä'amərä Maryam* (Miracles of Mary), read during many church services and the subject of many sermons, Mary is so powerful that she is called "redeemer":

O Mother of God, our Lady and redeemer, pray for us! Thou hast become the habitation of glory. . . . O Mother of God, our Lady and our redeemer, pray thou for us, and lay peace and safety upon those who are in this thy house! O Mother of God, Bearer of Life, glorious one . . . O our Lady and deliverer, pray thou and make supplication on behalf of all the world; thou wast an earthly being and hast become a heavenly being through carrying the One. . . . O Mother of God . . . who existed before everything. . . . O Mother of God, . . . thou shalt fashion completely Him Who is set over everything, Who appointeth king[s], Who establisheth him that putteth his trust in Him, and giveth glory and grace. (Budge 1933b, 104–7)

Indeed, those Christians who do not believe in her power are thought to not attain heaven (Wright 2001, 47). The Jesuits thought that their own reverence for Mary was one reason they were at first successful in converting many Ḥabäša. This reverence opens up a space for female leadership. Mary is seen as having paid Eve's debt and thus having erased the sin of all women (Wright 2001, 42). Walatta Petros also has redeeming power; those who pray directly to her are delivered.

Täwaḥədo Church Monasticism

Those unfamiliar with monastic practices, or familiar with only European monastic traditions, will need some explanation of the life Walatta Petros sought to live as a nun. Since the beginning, the Täwaḥədo Church has been deeply connected to the Egyptian Orthodox Church and to its practices of monasticism and asceticism. Over the centuries, many praised the Ḥabäša for the depth of their commitment to such practices, in particular, to a life of abstaining from worldly pleasures. The Täwaḥədo Church believed (and still does today) that weakening the body reduced desire and thus led to purity. Even ordinary Christians in the Täwaḥədo Church abstained from animal products at least half of the days of the year, and monks and nuns ate once a day or every other day. They often engaged in other rigors, such as praying while standing in cold water, staying up all night in prayer, or living in caves. The body was as nothing to them.

Täwaḥədo Church monasticism had no orders and each monastery had its own rules and procedures. A monastery was not something inextricably tied to a par-

ticular monastic building or church edifice but something marked more by its practices of austerity, celibacy, education, and preaching the Gospel. Monks and nuns were not cloistered but lived near the monastery, at home, or as wanderers (Baradas 1996, 141; Alvares 1881). Some monks and nuns lived entirely on their own, as hermits in cells in the mountains or the wilderness, called *anchorite* (Greek, from “to go out”) monasticism. Others lived individually but in the same general area, called *idiorythmic* (Greek, from “each according to his rhythm”) monasticism. Others lived fully together, sharing meals and work, called *cenobitic* or *coenobitic* (Greek for “communal”) monasticism. Nuns moved among these forms, as did Walatta Petros, and the boundaries of the forms were themselves porous. Monks and nuns could live together in monasteries but the double monastery or dual community of monks and nuns living side by side was more typical of Ḥabäša monasticism. As the hagiobiography also explains, it was believed that in the original monasteries, men and women existed without desire for each other, even sleeping in the same bed and wearing each other’s clothes (Wright 2001, 10). Thus, the monastery was not a building behind a wall under lock and key, but more like a village surrounding a church in which each monk or nun had a thatched house of stone or wood and clay (figs. 4–5). They maintained themselves through charity and sometimes by farming the land.

Monks and nuns would join one of three types of holy institutions in the Täwaḥədo Church: *gädam*, *däbr*, or *maḥbär*. The term *gädam* was not used for a church or a wealthy, established monastery but for a more autonomous or less settled community of monks, and we have translated it throughout as “monastic settlement.” By contrast, a *däbr* was a substantial, established church that had at least three priests and, often, royal patronage, and that served as a center of education. It might or might not have a monastery attached, but since it is the most formal institution, we have always translated it as “monastery.” A *maḥbär*, which we always translate as “community,” was the type of institution that Walatta Petros established. People who devoted themselves to a life of spirituality in a *mənet*, or monastery, were sometimes called a *maḥbär*. But lay organizations with such a name also have a long history in Ethiopia and were often established by those who revered a particular saint (Marcus 2001). One did not need to be a monk or nun to belong to such an association or even start one. They often provided mutual assistance to members (such as rebuilding houses or caring for orphans) and met regularly at members’ homes. In the troubled times of Walatta Petros, when many local churches and monasteries had become tainted by the foreign faith, Walatta Petros may have borrowed from this particular form of *maḥbär* to establish communities for the Christians who followed her and wanted to live near her to worship in the true faith. Such a use was without precedent, but, as a woman, Walatta Petros could not set up churches (*betä krəstiyan*) or monasteries (*gädam* or *däbr*). Later, it seems Walatta Petros worked to establish her *maḥbär* as a *gädam* with formal monastic rules.

In Europe, few became monks or nuns, but in Ethiopia, it was a common way of life. Indeed, almost every elderly widow or widower took up the monastic life, as

did quite a few boys and girls. Many did not live in monasteries, but continued to live at home. Still, it was highly unusual for Walatta Petros, as a young, married woman, to want to become a nun and live in a monastery.

The positions and titles for nuns in the monastery were generally as follows: Ḥabäša nuns called each other *əḥət* (sister), but ordinary people called them *əmmahoy* (mother), and the nun in charge of the other nuns, the abbess, was called *əmmä mənet* (mother of the monastery). The *əmmä mənet* distributed work and made sure every nun did no more and no less than she should. The *Rules for the Monks* advised that younger nuns should serve older nuns (Wright 2001, 26); younger nuns were called *dəngəl* (virgin) while older nuns were called *mänäkosayt* (female monk). The daily work was done mostly by the young and able-bodied: planting, weeding, harvesting, collecting firewood, fetching water, grinding grain, baking bread, cooking stews, brewing beer, and so on. Class distinctions were not erased; nuns from well-off families had more possessions and sometimes played a larger role in monastic decision making (*ibid.*, 85).

Female leadership of men was rare. The title that Walatta Petros receives in the text suggests that her role as a female leader was uncommon enough to allow some confusion in terms. In the *gädl*, Christ gives Walatta Petros the title *liqä diyaqonawit* ([male] head [female] deaconess), probably based on the common title *liqä kahənat* ([male] head of the [male] priests). It is grammatically peculiar, however, so Conti Rossini amended it to *liqä diyaqonāt* ([male] head of the [male] deacons). In the caption of the relevant image in MS D, her title is *liqtä diyaqonawit* ([female] head [female] deaconess). Meanwhile, in a *Sənkəssar* entry, her role as the leader over men is clearly and unambiguously stated: *wä-astägabəʾat maḥbärä wä-konāt liqtä laʾlehomu* (she gathered a community and became the head over them [collective masculine]). This helps explain why the text also says that the people “surrounded her like bees gather around their king.”

Christ appointing the saint to a position in the church hierarchy is a common hagiobiographical topos; for instance, Tāklä Haymanot was appointed *liqä kahənat* (head of the priests). The grammatically problematic *liqä diyaqonawit* that appears in all the manuscripts may be Gälawdewos’s neologism for the feminine equivalent of *liqä kahənat*, since there was no such thing as a female head of the priests or deacons in the Täwaḥədo Church, and since the word for a female religious leader, *liqt*, is rare. Several commentators have remarked on this sentence in the *gädl*, pointing out that Walatta Petros is the only female saint known to be given this position, either on her deathbed or otherwise. The term *liqä diyaqonawit* or *liqtä diyaqonawitä* means that Walatta Petros was the head of all the female deaconesses but also perhaps of the male deacons. Just as the word “archdeaconess” in English does not make it clear whom the woman is in charge of, the *Gəʾəz* is also not clear. Since Walatta Petros was the head of her community, it is not clear why Christ would need to give her a special dispensation to be in charge of only the female deaconesses. Traditionally, there were women who were head deaconesses of the women and there were men who were head deacons of the men and women. Finally, the text makes explicit the claim that Walatta Petros was the head of all,

whether men or women: “She truly was worthy of this name [Walatta Petros, meaning Daughter-of-Saint-Peter] since the son of a king becomes a king and the son of a priest becomes a priest; and just as Peter became the head of the apostles, she likewise became the head of all [religious] teachers.”

When an individual decided to become a nun or monk, she or he marked this by shaving the head (being tonsured) and putting on the *qob*^o (monastic cap) as a signal of intention. The abbot who gave the *qob*^o to the individual had a special role in his or her spiritual life. During the novitiate, which lasted from a few weeks to several years (Chaillot 2002, 154; Wright 2001, 59), the main task was learning to deal with the difficulties of frequent fasting, prayer, and labor. In this *rād*^o (or first) level, the nun received the *qob*^o and tried out the life. She abstained from all sexual activity, attended church daily, and followed strict fasting laws. When the woman felt ready, she was initiated, a ceremony that gave her special power to resist temptation. This ceremony marked her passing from the things of this world, and thus the funeral rite was read over her. She received the mantle, sash, and belt, and became a full member of the community, passing into the *ardə*^t (or second) level. For forty days after this powerful ceremony, she was believed to be free from sin. Then began her life of *gädl* (struggle) to resist temptation, the most dangerous of which was thought to be the desire for sex, but also for sleep, food, and ease.

There were ten steps in the spiritual life, as described in the *Māṣahəftä Mānāko-sat* (Books of the Monks), each of which focused on a different set of spiritual practices, including the first step of “silence, understanding, and praise” and the second of “tears, subjection, and love” (Wright 2001, 96, 135–38). To achieve these qualities, a typical day for a nun would be to get up before 4:00 AM to pray alone, attend group morning prayer from 6:00 to 8:00 AM, spend another hour in prayer, do group work from 9:00 AM until 1:00 to 3:00 PM, do private work for an hour or two (while stopping to pray for ten to fifteen minutes at noon, 3:00 PM, and 5:00 PM), eat around 5:00 PM, visit with others in the evening, and sleep around 8:00 or 9:00 PM (Wright 2001, 101–2). Prayer usually included prostration (bowing, kneeling, or lying down). This routine was broken on the Sabbaths and feast days, or during illness.

The most important scholarly work done to date on Tāwahədo Church nuns is Marta Camilla Wright’s master’s thesis, *The Holy Gender, Becoming Male: The Life of Ethiopian Orthodox Nuns*, based on field research, and her related article (2001, 2002). These works provide detail on the life of contemporary Ethiopian nuns, as well as useful appendixes that translate the prayers and processes for consecrating nuns. Wright argues that the Tāwahədo Church, like the early Christian church, considers the female body impure and, therefore, that Həbāša nuns “abandon female characteristics in their search for a holy life,” becoming a third, sexless gender (2001, 9, 110). Nuns did so by rejecting the role of wife and mother, praying for the end of their menses, shaving their heads, wearing many layers of dirty clothes, and purifying their bodies of its desires and pollutants. Wright asserts that many women became nuns in order to escape gender role norms, in particular to avoid marriage (ibid., 22, 32). Some of these constraints followed them into the monastery, however, as women were considered impure during their menses. For seven

days, they stayed sixty feet away from any holy site and were not allowed to pray certain prayers (ibid., 66), which interrupted their spiritual progress. Wright’s informants felt that women were more likely to have become nuns before the eighteenth century, because after that “men started interfering and overtook the power of the women” (ibid., 21).

The Tāwahədo Church Bible

The *Gädlä Wälättä Petros* is lush with quotations from the Bible, inserted by Gälawdewos and his interlocutors from memory. Although some of these quotes may seem to have been corrupted, almost all are direct from the Gəʿəz Bible, which is based on the ancient Greek translation, or Septuagint, and thus is unlike the Bibles that modern Jews and Western Christians are used to reading. For example, in the anecdote about Samson in Judges 14, some may be startled to read that Samson found bees in the lion’s mouth, not its carcass, and that it is the jawbone of the ass that springs forth with water, not the ground. Yet this is the story as it appears in the Gəʿəz Bible.

At the same time, Gälawdewos does not have a fundamentalist approach to scripture. He deliberately adapts biblical quotes for his purposes, a practice that a Gəʿəz scholar calls “localizing the text.” In recounting the Samson anecdote, Gälawdewos inserts a second riddle, not found in the Bible and perhaps of his own invention, about the jawbone: “A drink in the time of thirst and a weapon for warfare.” In citing the famous story of sibling rivalry between Jacob and Esau, the sons of Isaac, in Genesis 25:28, Gälawdewos interprets the passage rather than reciting it. He writes, “Esau was beautiful in his appearance and Isaac loved him, while Jacob was ugly in his appearance and God loved him.” While the Bible passage indeed says that Isaac preferred Esau, it attributes this not to Esau’s good looks but to the animals he hunted and cooked for his father. Moreover, the verse does not contrast the preferences of Isaac and God, but of Isaac and his wife Rebecca: she is the one said to prefer Jacob, who stayed by her side. However, the Gəʿəz Bible does mention that Jacob was a “plain” man and that he had to put on an animal skin to fool his father into thinking he had Esau’s more masculine frame. The two men undoubtedly looked quite different, with Esau living his life outdoors hunting and Jacob staying indoors with his mother. Gälawdewos thus interprets the passage here, suggesting that God was not fooled by Esau’s beautiful masculinity. Since other parts of the Bible speak of how God looks at the pure heart, not the beautiful face, this interpretation is an example of Gälawdewos’s learnedness and skill. In another instance, after praising Walatta Petros’s willingness to do physical labor, he cites the first part of 1 Timothy 4:8, which mentions the benefits of physical labor. For rhetorical effect, he omits that the verse goes on to say that the benefits of spiritual labor are far greater. But he has not distorted the quote, only included the part that is useful to his story.

We took advantage of Ricci’s notes in the Italian translation, which identified many of the biblical references in the text. We checked all of them, however, sometimes changing them where we thought Ricci’s attribution was incorrect; more-

over, we added attributions he had missed. Ricci's translation does include a chart of biblical citations (Gälawdewos 1970, 145–46).

The Text's Authorship

Gəʿəz manuscripts rarely identify a named scribe, much less an author. The *Gädlä Wälättä Petros* is an exception, however. We learn on the first page that the person writing the story down is a monk named Gälawdewos: “I, the sinner and transgressor Galawdewos, will write a small part of the story . . . of our holy mother Saint Walatta Petros.”⁶ We learn nothing of his personal history, although he describes himself as a *ḥaddis täkl* (a new plant) in the monastic life and thus was probably a young man when he wrote down the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros* in 1672–73. He also seems to suggest that he is not well liked, comparing himself to a caustic but productive bee: “I am cruel in my deeds, stinging people with my tongue and causing much pain,” but ultimately producing “a story that is sweeter than honeycomb.” Since he wrote the text thirty years after Walatta Petros's death, and had only recently become a monk, it is safe to assume that he did not know her personally but is relating stories told to him by others. Indeed, he regularly says as much in the text.

So, is Gälawdewos merely the scribe (merely a transcriber of the story) or an author (the inventor of the text)? The answer is—both.

On the one hand, Gälawdewos is an author. Manuscripts were always written down or copied by *däbtära*, who are highly educated but nonordained clergy responsible for the creative processes of the church (Kaplan 2003c). Some are dancers or musicians, others are painters, still others are poets or authors. Ordained priests are required to study religious texts and learn to read Gəʿəz, but *däbtära* further undertake a long course of study in the creative arts, including poetry (*qəne*), dance (*aqqʷaqʷam*), hymns (*daggʷa*), liturgical music (*zema*), and written charms (*asmat*), as well as learning to write Gəʿəz and prepare plants for healing medicines. Such a long and complicated text as the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros*, with its profusion of biblical references, had to have been written by a trained *däbtära* who had memorized vast swaths of the Bible. Certainly, the obsessions of the “I” of the text are those of a *däbtära*: not only the effort to make appropriate mentions of scriptures along the way but the inclusion of so many miracles that involve books, either their being written or saved from thieves. Gälawdewos is definitely not a mere copyist but likely is the sole crafter of the elegant introduction and the inventor of much of its biblical intertextuality.

On the other hand, Gälawdewos is an amanuensis. That is, he did not invent the stories of the text but rather was assigned or commissioned by those in Walatta

Petros's community to write down the oral histories of others. (This oral quality makes the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros* atypical of Ḥabäša literature, a communal text, a kind of *testimonio*—defined as a literary historical genre in which an eyewitness narrates a collectivity's experience—based on eyewitness accounts but using literary techniques [Reyes and Curry Rodríguez 2012]). First and foremost among these community members was Qəddästä Krəstos, a young nun who “burned with love for Walatta Petros” and who urged Gälawdewos, saying, “Write, so that Walatta Petros's story may be known.” The story would never have been written down, Gälawdewos says, unless this “rejected” and “lowly” woman had not insisted that he “reveal this treasure that lay hidden in the field of the hearts of the older people.” Gälawdewos notes that while some of those who had known Walatta Petros personally were still living, it was Qəddästä Krəstos, “who is younger than them all,” who made the book come about.

Although Qəddästä Krəstos is mentioned first in the text, and alone, Gälawdewos writes at the end of the text, in the miracles part of the translation, that a bedridden monk named Mäzgäbä Haymanot had first urged him to write. The monk, who had grown up in Walatta Petros's community, told Gälawdewos that he saw in a vision that Gälawdewos would write down the story of Walatta Petros: “You write to the end an important book, elegantly worded and in beautiful handwriting.” Gälawdewos humbly responds that the elders of the community would have to request such. Apparently they did not, since seven years passed—during which Mäzgäbä Haymanot died and the matter was forgotten, Gälawdewos writes—before Qəddästä Krəstos went to the abbess of the community to demand that the task be undertaken. Thus, a woman was the subject of the text, a woman was the prompter of the text, and a woman authorized the writing of the text.

But Qəddästä Krəstos was also too young to have known Walatta Petros, and Mäzgäbä Haymanot had died by the time the text was written, so whose stories do we read about in the text? Given the detailed nature of the stories—in particular the use of specific proper names for dozens of people and places, and the historical facts corroborated by other accounts—it is impossible that most of the stories were created by those who had not lived through the events. In many places, the text actually states who the author of a particular story is: “Eheta Kristos and Ghirmana were witnesses and have told us.” After another story, the text states, “That man is still alive now. He has told us, and we have written it down.” After still another, the text reports that Lābasitā Krəstos told ʿĪḥətā Krəstos what she saw in a vision, suggesting that we know of it through ʿĪḥətā Krəstos. In another place, a long section of text is reported as direct speech from the monk Śəʿälā Krəstos, and after the story the text adds: “Silla Kristos told us all these things . . . He is alive right up to now, and his testimony is trustworthy; he does not lie.” In another case, authorship is inferred. After telling the story of a disciple traveling alone who escapes a snake, the text asks, “Who would have told us, and how would we have written down this miracle” if God had not protected the disciple, its author? Further, these are not the only places where the text switches from “I” to “we.” The text also has “we certainly have not written lies, nor have we used ingenious fables to acquaint you with the

⁶ Unfortunately, the Conti Rossini print edition (Gälawdewos 1912) and the Ricci translation (Gälawdewos 1970) did not have the author's name, since it had been erased from Abb. 88. The author's name does appear in all eleven of the other manuscripts.

story of our holy mother Walatta Petros's glory." These comments, as well as others like them, clarify that the text was a collection of eyewitness accounts rather than solely Gälawdewos's invention.

Finally, the illustrations in some manuscripts of the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros* confirm that the text was a community oral history. One in MS D depicts Gälawdewos in every part of the process: being told that he should write the gädl by a man (Mäzgäbä Haymanot) and then a woman (the nun Qəddəstā Krəstos), and then sitting with pen to parchment facing three men and two women (perhaps including the abbess Amätā Dəngəl) who are talking to him (plate 55). Another image in the same text "could be the nun Qəddəstā Krəstos who supported the *Gädl*'s writing, or one of the community's abbesses" (Bosc-Tiessé 2003, 413), or possibly Əḥətā Krəstos (plate 63). MS A has a similar image, with Gälawdewos writing while listening to Mäzgäbä Haymanot.

The *Gädlä Wälättä Petros* is, then, a written text that is a record of oral testimony. One question remains: If Gälawdewos is the author of many of the biblical allusions in the text, while individuals in the community are the authors of the anecdotes in the text, who is responsible for the arc of it, for suturing it into order? During this period, when scratch paper did not exist, an original text would have been composed orally and then written down. Did Gälawdewos collect all the tales and then write them down from memory? It seems unlikely that Gälawdewos, a relative newcomer, would somehow figure out the correct order since the text is organized largely chronologically. Or did one eyewitness tell most of the stories from beginning to end, with insertions by others? Someone took the time to organize the stories of multiple authors into a particular order.

The most likely such organizer would have been Walatta Petros's partner Əḥətā Krəstos, who became a nun with her and traveled everywhere with her in the early days, spent twenty-five years with her (1617–42), was appointed her successor, and lived six years after her. Most of the stories in the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros* are those that Əḥətā Krəstos would have witnessed herself; many of the early stories only she could have witnessed. The name that appears most often in the text, after the saint's name, is Əḥətā Krəstos, which appears twice as often as the name of Walatta Petros's husband Mälkä'a Krəstos. In two of the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros* manuscripts, poems to Əḥətā Krəstos appear at the end, indicating how closely aligned the two women were in life and death. Finally, many of the preoccupations of the text are not those of a male author. The concerns, themes, and characters of the text itself suggest the possibility of a female authorial organizer: the long, loving exchanges among female friends, the aggravation of lazy female servants, and the preparation rather than the growing of food. Near the beginning, the text claims that Walatta Petros was very beautiful, but then argues at length that physical beauty is unimportant, with a long disquisition on the biblical Rachel's barren beauty and Leah's fecund ugliness. It seems that Əḥətā Krəstos would be the most likely author of many of the tales and the arc of the text.

Indeed, without the male name Gälawdewos, we might have speculated that the literate Əḥətā Krəstos actually sat down and wrote out this tale. While women

could never be priests, they could sometimes be däbtära. Literacy was relatively high in highland Ethiopia due to the Täwähədo Church: all boys went to the first stage of church school, in which they learned to read and write Gə'əz characters. Girls from Ḥabäša noble families during this period went to school as well, as both the Portuguese accounts and the gädl itself confirm. One of the Jesuits wrote that nobles had live-in monks who taught their daughters "not just to read but also to understand Saint Paul and the Gospel" (Páez 2011, 1:222). While the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros* does not depict women writing, it does have multiple scenes of such women reading. Əḥətā Krəstos reads the Gospels to Walatta Petros when her friend is sick. Fälasitā Krəstos reads the Psalms of David to her at night and the Gospels during the day on her deathbed. When the king rescinds his conversion, Walatta Petros reads the message he sends her. Walatta Petros is in the habit of reading the Gospel of John every day and is depicted reading the *Tä'amärä Maryam* (Miracles of Mary) and *Mäṣḥafä Ḥawi* (Comprehensive Book). The *Gädlä Wälättä Petros* is not the first text at least coauthored by a Ḥabäša woman. According to some, Queen Əleni (1450s–1522) wrote two hymn collections in Gə'əz, the *Ḥoḥtā Bərhan* (Gate of Light) and the *ʿƏnzira Səbḥat* (Lyre of Praise) (Chernetsov 2005a).⁷

Əḥətā Krəstos could not have physically written the text: she died two decades before it was written down. Yet, the collecting and organizing of stories might have happened before they were written down in a manuscript. Although the text was written in 1672–73, its stories date much earlier. Since a gädl is essential to establishing a community and saint—and independence from neighboring monasteries—writing one would have been the desire of early members of Walatta Petros's communities, which dated to the mid-1620s.⁸ Additionally, as the scholar and Roman Catholic nun Sue Houchins (2007) points out, those in religious orders are usually on the lookout for and acutely aware of exemplary sisters among them and may begin to collect anecdotes and evidence long before any hagiobiography is written down. When considering the joint authorship of the gädl, such early collection must be kept in mind. No doubt, members of the community often told stories to one another, as well as to new members and children, about the exploits of their founder. Əḥətā Krəstos was there from the beginning, and constituted an important archive of information about Walatta Petros.

Whether Əḥətā Krəstos organized the tales in the text or her tales were organized by others after her death, the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros* was at least partially authored by Əḥətā Krəstos and the women who surrounded Walatta Petros. Although some men play important roles later in the text, in the early days of Walatta Petros's monastic life, it is mostly women who are named. Thus, the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros* represents an early modern written African text orally co-

⁷ For a dissenting view on their authorship, see Habtemichael Kidane (2005) and Pankhurst (2009).

⁸ As Kaplan points out, "The life of a saint was usually written by a monk from the saint's own monastery, who sought by writing the work to glorify the saint as well as his monastery" (1981, 110).

constructed by African women and can be considered an early example of African female authorship.

The Text's Genres

The text translated here, which we call the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros*, is actually a composite text including four different subgenres: *gädl* (the saint's life, or vita), *tä'amər* (the saint's miracles), *mälkä'* (a long poem praising the saint from head to toe), and *sälamta* (a short hymn praising the saint's virtues). The first two, *gädl* and *tä'amər*, almost always appear, and in this order, in a hagiobiography of an indigenous saint. The word *gädl* is used for the first part of the text, but also as an umbrella term for the composite text. The entire *gädl*, then, is a distinctive genre of indigenous Ḥabäša literature, which flourished from the fourteenth century through the next five centuries. It is the most common Gə'əz original genre.

A direct translation of the Gə'əz word *gädl* would be "[spiritual] struggle" or, as earlier scholars translated it, "contending." It might also be translated as "acts" (as in the biblical book of the Acts of the Apostles) or "vita" (as in biography). In all cases, a *gädl* was a biography of a holy person, something the Greeks called a "hagiography" (literally, writing about saints). Since the term hagiography has developed so many pejorative associations, however, scholars of the genre have begun to argue for the term *hagiobiography*, defined as "biographies written with the intention of representing life as 'more exemplary than real'" (de Porcellet and Garay 2001, 19). Since the *gädl* is its own distinctive genre, we have often used the term hagiography, but also use hagiobiography.

A full-length scholarly study of the *gädl* genre remains to be published, but the genre was inspired by the many hagiobiographies created in the early Christian Church, quite a few of which were translated into Gə'əz and with which Ḥabäša authors would have been very familiar (such as that of third-century Desert Father Saint Anthony) (Kaplan 2005c). For instance, parts of the *Sənkəssar*, the tales of other saints, are read during every liturgy in the Təwəḥədo Church, perhaps inspiring authors.

The *gädlät* (the plural form of *gädl*) about the lives of Ḥabäša saints appear in a variety of lengths—some are short and some are lengthy (more than 150 pages in a print edition). Many *gädlät* were composed long after the death of their subjects, some of whom may have even been mythical. Contrary to Greek hagiobiographies, Gə'əz hagiobiographies almost never feature martyrs; their saints are rarely victims, but almost always victorious. The *gädlät* are more generally the stories of monastic leaders, often evangelizers, who struggle with worldly authorities. This different emphasis may be because the Ḥabäša have so long been Christians and lived in a region where they were dominant and not persecuted.

A *gädl* follows a strict order. It tends to begin with a stylistically elevated introduction and then tells the story of the saint's life in chronological order. It almost always includes the miraculous circumstances of the saint's birth to pious parents,

a precocious childhood, the suffering he or she endured in pursuing a holy life, the saint's ordination and/or becoming a monk or nun, the miracles the saint performed while alive, the abandonment or avoidance of a traditional family life, and a description of the moment when Christ gives the saint a *kidan*, a covenant in which Christ promises to honor the prayers of anyone who calls upon the saint's name and to grant eternal life to all Christians who dedicate themselves to the saint, listen to the saint's *gädl*, and observe the commemoration of the saint's holy day. It ends with the saint's death and a call for blessings on those who wrote the text and paid for its costs. Nosnitsin (2013) argues that the *gädl* changed in the fifteenth century, becoming more story-driven, more likely to use fictional techniques.

The miracles, *tä'amər* (literally, "signs"), make up the next part of a saint's life. These are not the miracles that were performed while the saint was alive, but those that happened after the saint's death, when followers called upon the saint to intervene with God and grant their prayers. These posthumous miracles follow a typical arc: they start with a blessing formula, then someone has a problem and calls upon the saint, which results in divine intervention and a sudden improvement in the problem (Nosnitsin 2010e). These problems generally have to do with physical danger (whether from illness, animals, or attackers) or everyday life. The number of miracles in hagiobiographies varies widely. Indeed, the number of miracles in a particular saint's life can increase over time, as people continue to pray to the saint. Thus, Saint Täklä Haymanot has three cycles of twenty-two miracles each, and some manuscripts include additional miracles that he performed in a specific area (Nosnitsin 2010f). Some hagiobiographies do not have the section at all: Saint Kaleb, for instance, has no *tä'amər* section. The genre grew in popularity, probably due to the arrival of the *Tä'amərä Maryam* (Miracles of Mary) in the fourteenth century.

The *Tä'amərä Wälättä Petros* consists of the miracles that happened after the saint's death (mostly between 1642 and 1672). Walatta Petros's posthumous miracles often consist of food that multiplies; people saved from death by disease, storm, or wild animals; and the finding of lost objects. The main *Tä'amərä Wälättä Petros*, the miracles that appear in almost all the texts, has eleven subsections, each devoted to the miracles that happened to one person. While most of them experienced only one miracle, some experienced more than one, and thus some of the eleven subsections describe more than one miracle. This organization again suggests an oral component to the text, in which individuals reported what happened to them. The miracles are probably not in chronological order; none appears with any date. The *Tä'amərä Wälättä Petros* is perhaps distinctive in featuring several miracles about books: one about the writing of the *gädl* and two others about recovering lost books of the *Mälkä'a Wälättä Petros* poems.

A second set of the *Tä'amərä Wälättä Petros* exists in two of the manuscripts, but they are dated later and relate to miracles that took place later, during the consecutive reigns of Bäkäffa (r. 1721–30), Iyasu II (r. 1730–55), Iyo'as I (r. 1755–69), and Yoḥannəs II (r. 1769), and then later, Täklä Giyorgis I (r. 1779–1800) and King Tewodros II (r. 1855–68). In these miracles, Walatta Petros protects her monastery

be the case with MS A, so variations in reading direction may be due to when the manuscript was written. Work on line directions in Gəʼəz texts has been done by Stephen Delamarter (2010), but not on image order in Gəʼəz texts so far.

Second, the size of people in the images does not always indicate whether someone is a child or an adult, short or tall, but rather their rank and status. Walatta Petros generally appears larger than those around her, therefore, and servants are almost always depicted as small and childlike (plate 5).

Third, the two vertical marks on characters' cheeks in many of the images are not physical scars on their bodies but the sign of strong emotions—in particular, distress, fear, and grief (plate 9). In a moving image on the positive end of the affect spectrum, a healed child clasps his mother around her neck, hiding his face behind hers (plate 34).

Fourth, hand gestures and body postures constitute entire symbolic systems. While research has been done on such in Byzantine and medieval art (Bremmer and Roodenburg 1993; Kendon 2004), and some of these gestures appear in Ethiopian paintings as well, more research is needed. One ancient sign—in images from many regions and in some of the images in this translation—is a person depicted with one hand's index finger and middle finger extended, which is a gesture of enunciation signaling that the person is speaking (plate 1). Other hand gestures are religious. For instance, holding both hands palm open with arms extended and the eyes turned skyward is a posture of worship, called *orans* (in Latin, praying) in medieval European art (plates 1 and 2). Priests confer benediction by holding the right hand up with the first two fingers extended and the other two fingers folded down, sometimes with the thumb touching (plate 1). Forming the thumb, index, and middle finger into a point symbolizes the Trinity (plate 2). The arms crossed across the chest over the heart is not a sign of aggression or coldness, but a sign of one's Christian devotion by making the sign of the cross. In these illustrations, hand gesture rather than facial expression most often conveys emotion. Holding an index finger to one's chin is a sign of sorrow (plate 46). Cupping one's cheek with a hand is a sign that the person is feeling amazed or bewildered (plate 18). Holding the left hand to the forehead is a traditional Ethiopian gesture of pity and sorrow (plate 38). Two hands clasped to the cheek with the head tilted is a sign that the person is sleeping, even if they are standing up (plate 37). Other gestures clearly have meanings, although to us now uncertain: one hand clasping the shoulder perhaps means fear (plates 18 and 38).

Fifth, to distinguish gender, one must examine the face, not the clothing. Both men and women wear long gowns, but only men have facial hair and only women have neck rings (creased skin indicating a beautiful chubbiness) (plate 2).

Sixth, only the dead have halos. Thus, Walatta Petros has no halo when alive, but wears a halo when dead (plates 12 and 48).

Seventh, figures depicted lying down under portraits of Walatta Petros are not angels but the patrons of the manuscript, who are depicted as prostrate with devotion (plate 13).

Eighth, evil characters are depicted in profile with only one eye showing, while good people are never depicted in profile (plate 15). Many other images similarly depict symbolic meanings rather than simple realities—the sun is shown with a face (plate 57) and Walatta Petros sits on a cloud (plate 58).

Finally, note that the images were painted by scribes other than Gälawdewos and do not always exactly match the text. For instance, the captions in some manuscripts do not call ale *sāwa*, as the manuscript does, but *ṭalla*. In one case, the woman beside Walatta Petros is identified as ʿĪḥātā Krəstos, whereas the manuscript says it is Fälasitā Krəstos (plate 21).

Claire Bosc-Tiessé's articles address many other interesting aspects of the images in MS D.

The Biography of Walatta Petros

A summary of Walatta Petros's life story may give the reader a better sense of its arc. Below I have interwoven what we know about her life from her hagiobiography as well as other historical sources, which sometimes differ in their details.

According to multiple parts of her hagiobiography, Walatta Petros died in 1642 at the age of fifty, and thus was born in 1592. Her brothers were leading officials mentioned regularly in the royal chronicle of King Susənyos, part of a noble and powerful family with hereditary rights to vast lands to the south but outside the control of the Christian kingdom during her lifetime. At approximately the age of sixteen, Walatta Petros was married to a powerful man named Mälkə'a Krəstos, one of the king's most important counselors and military commanders. As a member of the court, her husband decided to convert to Roman Catholicism. Walatta Petros did not wish to convert to Roman Catholicism, however, and because all three of her children had died in infancy, leaving married life without its fruits, she decided to take up the life of a nun. When Mälkə'a Krəstos left home to repress the anti-Catholic rebellion started in 1617, Təwəḥədo Church bishops in the powerful monasteries on Lake Ṭana helped the twenty-three-year-old Walatta Petros to leave her husband and join them. After arriving at one of the monasteries on Lake Ṭana, she took a vow of celibacy and shaved her head. Walatta Petros then was persuaded to return to her husband, but when she learned that he had supported the killing of the head of the Təwəḥədo Church, she withdrew from him in disgust, abandoning his bed, all forms of adornment, and eating. Finally, her husband allowed her to leave him for good and fulfill her dream of entering the religious life.

Regarding her marriage, the hagiobiography lacks information that appears in other sources. Some *Sənkəssar* manuscripts have an entry about Walatta Petros for the day of her death, 17 Ḥədar. Most do not have it—the manuscripts Budge used for his English translation of the *Sənkəssar* mention Walatta Petros's name but do not include her story. However, the *Sənkəssar* entry about Walatta Petros in the two manuscripts we consulted (both from Ṭəgray) state that Mälkə'a Krəstos was her

second husband, even though the hagiobiography makes no mention of a first husband. That is, the entry states, “when she reached the capacity of women, one man took her as a wife, but he was killed unjustly by King Yaʿqob [r. 1597–1603, 1604–6]. Then, Mälkəʾa Krəstos took her as a wife and he had three children with her” (Anonymous 1800s, 1900s). Since she was born in 1592, and was only fourteen by the time King Yaʿqob died, she could not have been married to this unnamed man for long. As the *Ṣankəssar* entry was likely written within a year of her death, to be read upon her annual commemoration, and Gälawdewos wrote the *gädl* several decades later, it would seem Gälawdewos deliberately omitted this information. Since the first marriage did not result in children, perhaps Gälawdewos did not consider it important enough to mention.

The hagiobiography presents her second marriage in a different light than the European sources as well. While the Ethiopian sources state that Walatta Petros left her husband, the Jesuits claimed that it was the other way around, that her husband had “abandoned” her (Barradas 1996, 141). Since she was unable to give Mälkəʾa Krəstos heirs, all three children having died, it may be that her husband left her and she therefore became a nun. One of the Jesuits noted that divorces were readily allowed for various reasons, including “want of children” (Tellez 1710, 43). But perhaps the Portuguese author got the story wrong. Susənyosʾs wife also left him because of his conversion to Roman Catholicism, so Walatta Petros would not have been alone. Either way, all the sources—one Portuguese text and two Ḥabäša texts—record that Walatta Petros, the wife of Mälkəʾa Krəstos, became a nun, moving to Zäge Monastery on Lake Ṭana.

On leaving her husband’s home, Walatta Petros met another noblewoman who was resisting Roman Catholic conversion, ʿƏḥətä Krəstos, who became her lifelong partner and companion, the subject of many long anecdotes. At this point, Walatta Petros began her life as a radical itinerant preacher. Despising the king’s abandonment of Ethiopia’s faith to embrace foreign beliefs and rituals, Walatta Petros decided to speak up. She publicly rebuked all those who had converted—including the king, his counselors, and the high priests. She preached that the people should reject the faith of the foreigners and that priests should not call down blessings on the king during the Divine Liturgy. The latter was a direct attack on Susənyosʾs authority, implying that he was no longer the legitimate head of state. She became an enemy of the state and regularly had to flee persecution, with such high-ranking figures as the king’s brother and second-in-command *Ras Šəʿälä* Krəstos hunting her down. Enraged by her behavior, the king ordered that she appear before the entire court—all its princes, governors, officials, and scholars—a sign of what a threat she was considered. Walatta Petros stood before the court with “a determined heart and a strong faith” and was not terrified by their status, great number, or empty words. She was so fearless that her husband, Mälkəʾa Krəstos, had to beg the king to spare her life. He made this plea, the text states, because he still loved her.

Is it likely that her twice-abandoned husband defended her? Reading between the lines of the Portuguese texts suggests that Mälkəʾa Krəstos was conflicted about

his role in fighting the faithful. Several of the Portuguese texts denigrate Mälkəʾa Krəstos for strategic rather than deeply felt beliefs. One calls him “homem fraco, mas muito astuto e prudente” (a weak, but very cunning and prudent man [our translation]) (Täklä Šəllase [Tinno] 1900, 2:420n). They also complain that the king forgave him too many times; the reason is left unclear but likely was the failure to fulfill the king’s wishes. Perhaps Mälkəʾa Krəstos was caught between a king and a wife, trying to please both and pleasing neither. One of the Jesuits noted that “the Emperor’s own Brother Raz Sela Christos . . . [and] his own cousin Melca Christos, Lord Steward to the Emperor,” enjoyed the traditional church service and were glad to participate in dancing and the playing of instruments (Tellez 1710, 109). Men who thought nothing of swearing obedience to a foreign pope may have been more hesitant about forcing their wives to give up the practices that they themselves cherished. Even if the hagiobiography does not represent what really happened between two historical figures, it beautifully dramatizes the domestic conflicts that the king’s conversion engendered.

Walatta Petros’s fame skyrocketed after her confrontation with the king, and many of the faithful came long distances to join her religious community. Walatta Petros’s community kept moving, just one step ahead of the king’s spies and the “European soldiers.” Although it seems as if Walatta Petros was a nomad by nature, preferring to move frequently from place to place, perhaps this nature was fashioned by the years she spent escaping her husband and fleeing persecution. Between the king’s conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1621, and his rescinding that conversion in 1632, Walatta Petros traveled constantly in an area approximately 150 miles by 100 miles, from her husband’s home south of Lake Ṭana all the way north to Waldəbba and all the way west to the modern border with Sudan (map 2). While she was at Waldəbba, a monk prophesied that she would establish and lead seven religious communities.

Soon Walatta Petros was hauled before the court again to be killed, but Mälkəʾa Krəstos saved her life by suggesting that the king subject her to thought reform. The king agreed, and a team of Jesuits and Afonso Mendes himself, the leader of the Roman Catholic mission in Ethiopia, spent every Saturday with her, from the morning into the evening, working to convert her to Roman Catholicism. They were not successful. Every week the king would ask Mendes whether he had succeeded, and every week the Jesuit leader had to report that he had not. She resisted the blandishments of one of the most persuasive educational institutions ever invented. When all these efforts failed, the king made up his mind to kill her, but yet again Mälkəʾa Krəstos saved her life by suggesting another compromise: exile. So the king sent her to Žäbäy, a place on the edge of the known world, more than one hundred miles to the west, where she was kept in chains among the “pagans.” But her people eventually followed her there, and this foreign land became the first of the seven foretold communities. Her jailer tried to seduce and then kill her, but she prevailed. Eventually, struck by the force of her convictions, he became a devotee. By special dispensation, the king allowed her to return then, after three years in the wilderness.

When Walatta Petros returned to the Ethiopian highlands, she established her second and third communities. She encountered strong resistance from local male leaders, many of whom had converted to Roman Catholicism and challenged her authority, asking by what right she led and preached. She had been in conflict with male leadership throughout her life—with her husband, her brother, the king, the Jesuit patriarch, her jailer, the king's main advisors, and so on. The only male in her life with whom she did not have a conflict appears to have been her father, who doted on her. Later, the hagiobiography states that the male leaders were jealous “when they saw that all the world followed her.” They began saying, “Is there a verse in scripture that [states that] a woman, even though she is a woman, can become a religious leader and teacher? This is something that scripture forbids to a woman.” Nothing good, they argued, could come from women trying to be superior to men. As before, with her husband, a man came to Walatta Petros's defense. The great monk and scholar Fätlä Šəllase replied to her antagonists, “Did God not raise her up for our chastisement because we have become corrupt, so that God appointed her and gave our leadership role to her, while dismissing us? For this reason, you will not be able to make her quit.”

Not long after, in 1632, the king rescinded his edict commanding conversion to Roman Catholicism, and Walatta Petros was elevated by her people as a heroine. She spent the remaining twelve years of her life traveling and setting up her fourth through seventh communities. The events of this later part of her life take up more than half the book. She performs many miracles and saves her community from repeated threats, only growing in reputation. At one point, “many women of high rank, daughters of princesses, concubines of the king, wives of great lords” all worked with her on restoring a church, and she spent time visiting with the new king, Fasilädäs, an admirer of her dedication. When she became sick, she went to Rema Island and died there at the age of fifty, having spent twenty-six years as a nun. Upon her deathbed, Christ arrived to affirm his covenant with her and to establish her as archdeaconess. Finally, after her death, her community set up a monastery devoted to her at Q'äraša, on the eastern shore of Lake Tana. There, Eḥetä Krəstos became the abbess of her community until her death. Walatta Petros resisted converting to European forms of Christianity, and she and her sisters inspired a nation to do the same.

The Biography of Eḥetä Krəstos

Eḥetä Krəstos was Walatta Petros's lifelong companion, a noblewoman who left her husband and daughter to become a nun, and someone the community also considered elevating to sainthood. Such elevation required the writing of a *gädl*, and rumors of one devoted to Eḥetä Krəstos have long existed, with Kinefe-Rigb Zelleke saying a copy exists at Kämkä (1975). Selamawit Mecca did not find such a *gädl* there in March 2010, however, and one scholar commented long ago, “Quant au *gädl*, on ignore s'il existe” (As for [her] *gädl*, it is unclear if it exists) (Nollet 1930).

Some scholars continue to think it must exist somewhere, since her *mälkä'* appears in some manuscripts of Walatta Petros's hagiobiography, and some think it is unusual for such poems to exist without a *gädl* (although my research shows that Walatta Petros's *mälkä'* likely existed before the *gädl* and did not appear with the earliest *gädl*, which suggests it is quite possible for Eḥetä Krəstos to have a *mälkä'* but not a *gädl*). At least one *Sənkəssar*, Vatican Eth. No. 112, gives a short (one-thousand-word) biography of Eḥetä Krəstos's life, however, which includes some information corroborated by the *Gädlä Wälättä Peṭros*, along with other details that do not appear in it. We did not translate Eḥetä Krəstos's *mälkä'* nor the *Sənkəssar* entry about her, but summarize some of the entry's information here.

Eḥetä Krəstos was born sometime before 1601, became a nun in 1617, and died on 2 April 1649. Walatta Petros, while on her deathbed, had named Eḥetä Krəstos her successor in November 1642, and Eḥetä Krəstos led the community for six-and-a-half years after the death of her partner. According to the *Gädlä Wälättä Peṭros*, Eḥetä Krəstos met Walatta Petros in 1617 while living with her sister because her spiritual leader *Abba Šəge Haymanot* recommended that she meet and think about living with Walatta Petros.

According to the *Sənkəssar* entry,¹⁹ Eḥetä Krəstos came from an illustrious and noble family. She was married, gave birth to a daughter called Tərasya,²⁰ and later became a nun at the church in Fure called Däbrä Sina. The *Sənkəssar* states that she lived thirty-two years as a nun and twenty-seven years as a leader in the monastery,²¹ information the *Gädlä Wälättä Peṭros* does not contain. The two texts agree that the two women met in nearby Robit, then went to Däbrä 'Anqo, Šəyat, Zäge, Waldəbba, and Žäbäy. The *Sənkəssar*'s entry also has language very similar to that in the *Gädlä Wälättä Peṭros*, likewise saying that after they met, the two women “remained together, loving each other as soul and body and they parted never, not in times of trial and persecution, neither in times of rest, but only in death, as Our Lady Mary and Salome. There was no suspicion between them, nor cunning.” It agrees that Eḥetä Krəstos pleaded with Queen Amätä Krəstos and Mälkä'a Krəstos to be reunited with Walatta Petros in exile, “weeping and lamenting as a small child whose mother has abandoned it.”

There are some slight differences or additions. The Eḥetä Krəstos entry says that Eḥetä Krəstos helped a monk in Žäbäy who fell ill with fever, cleaned his bedclothes without repugnance (even though they stank of fever), washed his dead body with her own hands, and buried him. Her faithfulness was such that Satan “made war” against her and even threw her out of a church window during her prayers. Upon Walatta Petros's death, Eḥetä Krəstos was instituted the leader in her place, enduring many trials and even kicking out two heretics, Zä-Maryam and Akalä Krəstos, who asserted that Christ had not anointed the Holy Spirit (that is,

¹⁹ Unfortunately, Nollet consistently confused sixes with sevens in her translation, so we have checked it against a digital copy of Vatican Eth. No. 112 and corrected where necessary.

²⁰ Pace Zanetti (2005), who has “son.”

²¹ Nollet mistakenly translated ፳፯ as twenty-six.

they were Unionists, adherents of Karra teaching, and not adherents of Qəbat teaching). Then, when God wished her to rest from the labors of this world, he gave her three crowns: the crown of the persecuted, the crown of the disciples, and the crown of teachers. She then became violently ill and died on Wednesday Mäggabit 27,²² in the evening. All this is lacking in the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros*.

Conclusion

This volume contributes not only to the study of Ethiopian literature and women but also to the study of the history of resistance to European expansion. A vital task of the twenty-first century is to make earlier African texts available and understood, since their contents will revolutionize thinking in a number of disciplines, including history and literature. Bringing attention to these early texts will also do much to dismantle stereotypes of Africa as a continent without written literature before European contact, and to build representations of Africa as a continent of extraordinary intellectual effervescence.

²² Nollet again mistakenly translated ፳፯ as twenty-six.

Manuscripts of the Text and Earlier Translations

Wendy Laura Belcher

The renowned scholar Lanfranco Ricci published an Italian translation of the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros* in 1970 in the renowned Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium (CSCO) series of edited and translated Eastern Christian texts (Gälawdewos 1970). He based his translation on the Gə'əz print edition of 1912 in the same series, prepared by one of the most prominent Ethiopianists of the twentieth century, Carlo Conti Rossini (Gälawdewos 1912). Both books were based on a single manuscript from the Antoine d'Abbadie manuscript collection at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (hereafter called MS Abb. 88), which Conti Rossini had cataloged. Conti Rossini had prepared a Latin translation but, due to World War I, it was never published (Papi 1943; Conti Rossini 1946, 69n). Over the next two decades of his life, Conti Rossini did not return to this work, perhaps because Latin became less viable as a scholarly language over those years. The Täwahədo Church also published a nonacademic but solid translation into Amharic in 2004 (Gälawdewos 2004). These three books are the extent of the print versions.

Unfortunately, the Conti Rossini print edition and the Italian translation are problematic, largely because they are based on a single manuscript that was quite flawed. When Conti Rossini embarked on his print edition, three manuscripts of the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros* were available in Europe—in the national libraries of Paris and London, and the state libraries of Dresden, Germany. Conti Rossini did check a few folios of MS Abb. 88 against the manuscript at the British Library (our MS E) (Conti Rossini and Jaeger 1912, viii), concluding that MS Abb. 88 was a reliable and representative text. However, both were of comparatively low textual quality. Furthermore, inevitably, errors crept into the Conti Rossini print edition (which we always abbreviate as CR in the notes and sometimes elsewhere) that were not in MS Abb. 88.

While Ricci was aware of the limitations of the print edition, he understandably considered it important to provide a translation of this vital text. His translation is valuable—for instance, in identifying the hundreds of biblical sources for the text's many quotes and allusions, which we have included in the notes of our translation—but was seriously undercut by the flawed print edition. Moreover, the volume was published in the academic series CSCO and was translated into academic Italian, both of which factors greatly limited the translation's audience. Finally, Ricci made the disastrous decision to transform all of the text's rich and lively dialogue into deadened indirect speech (e.g., "she said 'I beg you now, my lady, . . . have mercy on me!'" became "she begged her to have mercy on her").

5

had passed away and found rest, in the Year of Mercy 7165 [i.e., 1672–73 CE],¹ in the eleventh *epact*² [and] the nineteenth *matqi*,³ in the fifth year of the reign of our King Yohannes,⁴ lover of God, in a year of Matthew the Evangelist.⁵ This book is to be read out aloud on every seventeenth of the month of Hidaar [24 November, the anniversary of Walatta Petros's death].⁶ May the blessing of her prayers⁷ and the grace of her assistance be with _____⁸ for eternity, amen.⁹

¹ According to the Tāwāhədo Church, time started when God created the world 5,500 years before the birth of Christ. Thus, the year 7165 minus 5,500 is the year 1665. However, the Ethiopian calendar is seven years behind the Western or Gregorian calendar, and the new year begins on 11 September. Therefore, the reference is to sometime between 11 September 1672 and 10 September 1673 CE.

² Lit., *abāqte*, from the Greek *épaktai hēmérai* (added days). An epact is the number of days into the lunar cycle on the first of the year. The year this text was written had an epact of eleven, meaning that there was an ecclesiastical new moon that fell on the eleventh of the month during this year. An epact is part of a complicated formula for calculating the dates on which certain Christian holidays should fall each year. For instance, Christ is said to have risen from the dead on Sunday, the seventeenth day of the Paschal moon, and so Christians use the Greek Metonic Lunar Cycle to identify a Sunday before that day every year. There are 235 lunar months for every nineteen solar years; thus, after a period of nineteen solar years, the new moons occur again on the same days of the solar year.

³ Lit., *mātqə*, the number of days left in the lunar month on the first of the year. That is, the *abāqte* and the *mātqə* always add up to thirty. They match the date.

⁴ *Yohannəs* (John) I (r. 1667–82); thus, the fifth year of his reign was 1672–73.

⁵ Ricci silently corrected this to *l'evangelista Luca*, as the evangelist's name for this year is Luke not Matthew. Another Ethiopian way of representing a particular year is using a four-year cycle, with each year named after one of the authors of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and, for the leap year, John.

⁶ *Hədar* (the month from 11 November to 10 December). That is, on the anniversary of her death, the priests would read the entire *Gädlä Wälättä Petros* out loud, spending the whole day to do it. Reading an entire saint's life out loud was believed to confer special blessings on the community.

⁷ "Prayer," "blessing," and "heavens" often appear in the singular or plural in Gə'əz, where English would have them vice versa. So we have converted them throughout to the number typical in English.

⁸ Gə'əz manuscripts typically invoke blessings by name for the owner or commissioner of the particular manuscript. That person then receives special blessings from being in the saint's text and having his or her name recited when the text is read aloud. In Abb. 88, the original name had been erased here and a secondary list of owners inserted again, almost identical to that on the first page: Minas, Finḥa (which Conti Rossini sensibly emended to Finḥas), Na'od, Muzu, Şəge, Arāgawi, Bākaffa, Şota Maryam, Wəbit, Säblä Maryam, Melkol. Other manuscripts inserted other names or phrases, as follows: A: *fəqura* _____ (her beloved [name illegible]); B: *fəqura Agnaṭəyos* (her beloved Ignatius [the abbot of Daga Monastery who commissioned the copying of the manuscript]); C: *ḥaṭə't wälättä Wälättä Isra'el* (her sinful daughter Walatta Israel); D: *nəgušanä Dawit* (our king David [r. 1716–21]); E: *gäbra Tāwäldä Mādḥən* (her servant Tewolde Medhin); FJ: *[məslə]nä* ([with] us); G: [name illegible]; H: *gäbra Ya'qob* (her servant Jacob); I: *fəqura Asa'anä Maryam wä-məslä k'əllanä sāma'əyan* (her beloved Asaina Maryam and with all of us who hear this); K: *gäbra Zär'a Ya'qob* (her servant Zera Yaqob).

⁹ The CR print edition was checked against manuscripts ABCDEFJK only through this point in the manuscript. After, only three manuscripts, BDJ, were checked against CR. See "Introduction to the Translation of the Text" in this volume.

Chapter 3: Our Mother's Conception and Birth

Let us begin¹ with the help of God to write the story of the conception and birth of our holy mother of exalted memory, Walatta Petros, of a distinguished family and noble lineage, from the house of Dawaro and Fatagar.² Her father's name was Bahir Saggad,³ her mother's Kristos Ebayaa.⁴ Both of them were righteous and God-fearing people, as well as very rich in the possessions of this world. People would praise them for all their good deeds, their fasting, prayers, and mercy toward the poor. Her brothers were great lords whose names were Pawlos,⁵ Za-Manfas Qidduus,⁶ Lisaana Kristos,⁷ Za-Dinghil,⁸ and Yohannes.

As for her father Bahir Saggad, every year during the fast of Nahaasé,⁹ he would go to the island of Réma¹⁰ and [there] fast with a clean heart and a pure mind, out of his love for our Lady Mary. [For additional mortification,] he would stand in the lake during the night, dressed in a garment of iron, praying and supplicating for the salvation of his soul.¹¹ When the fasting period¹² was over and the feast [of the Assumption] arrived, he would prepare a banquet and [thereby] make the poor and the wretched happy. One day, when he lacked what he needed for the banquet, he

¹ BJ, CR: *nəwāṭṭən* (let us begin); D: *nəwəṭṭən* (we begin).

² *Däwaro* and *Fätägar* were two historical Christian provinces located in today's south-central Ethiopia, south and southeast of today's Addis Ababa, but WP's family would have been driven out by Oromo pastoralists migrating north in the second half of the sixteenth century.

³ *Bahər Säggäd* (The [regions by the] sea submit[s] [to him]). Unusually, WP's father is not identified by his Christian name, as most others in the text are, but by his secular name. Secular names were more often used in everyday interactions; although everyone had a Christian name as well. Several possible explanations have been forwarded: as a prominent nobleman, Bahər Säggäd was well known and therefore the author Gälawdewos uses the name by which he was famous; military men were rarely known by their Christian names; and WP's father died when she was so young that her community did not know his Christian name (which was not often used in public).

⁴ *Krastos 'Əbäya* (In Christ lies her greatness).

⁵ *Pawlos* (Paul).

⁶ *Zä-Mänfäs Qəddus* (He of the Holy Spirit).

⁷ *Ləsanä Krastos* (Tongue of Christ).

⁸ *Zä-Dəngəl* (He of the Virgin [Mary]).

⁹ The fast in honor of Our Lady Mary's Assumption takes place during the first fifteen days of the month of Nəhase (7–21 August). Afterward, there is the feast in honor of her ascent into heaven (or Assumption) on 16 Nəhase. Thus, Bahər Säggäd either stayed on Rema Island for fifteen days or he went every day to Rema for fifteen days.

¹⁰ *Rema* Island, home of one of Ethiopia's most important monasteries, is about six miles north of Q'äraşa, and is a frequent setting of this text.

¹¹ BDJ: *ənzä . . . yəşelli wä-yastäbäqq'ə' bā'əntä mādhanitā nəfsu* (praying and supplicating for the salvation of his soul); CR: *ənzä . . . yəşelli bā'əntä mādhanitā nəfs* (praying for the salvation of the soul). "Generally speaking, the People of Ethiopia are much inclin'd to Penance, wherein these Religious Men signaliz'd themselves, going into Water in cold Weather, and continuing in it several Hours" (Tellez 1710, 98).

¹² BDJ: *şom* (the fasting period); CR omits.

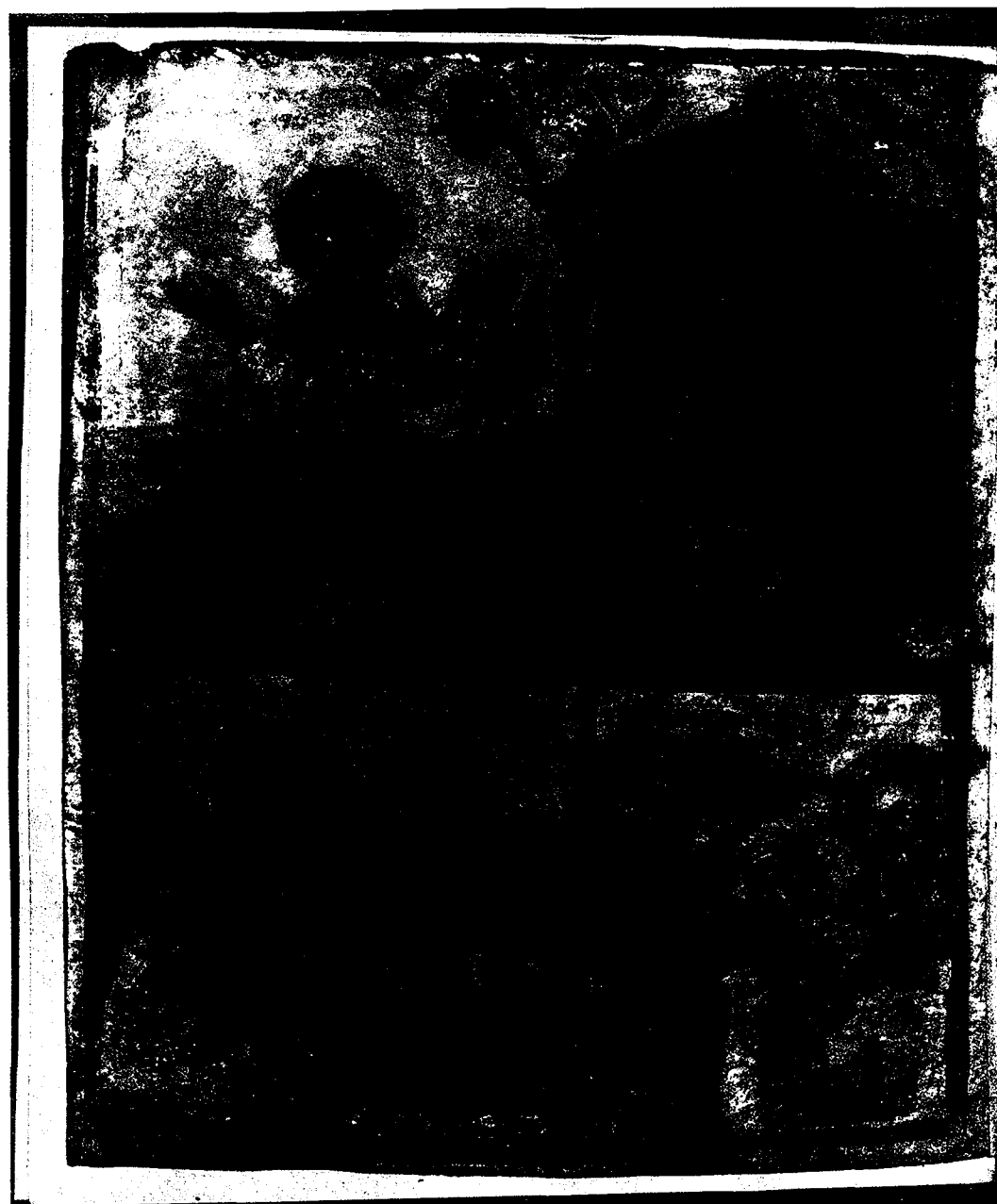


Plate 1. How our mother's father prayed while standing in Lake Tana (top panel), "how he found [gold] inside the fish's belly" (bottom left), and how he learned from a monk that he had seen a vision that his wife would give birth to an extraordinary daughter (bottom right). Passages between quotation marks are our translations of still readable Gə'əz captions or caption parts, with square brackets indicating conjectures of ours. (MS A, f. 144v © Saxony State Library–Dresden State and University Library SLUB Mscr.Dresd.Eb.415.e,2).

became extremely sad, and while he prayed in the lake, as was his custom, he found a fish. When he tore open its belly, in it was gold weighing an ounce.¹ He much marveled [at this], rejoicing and praising our Lady Mary. With this gold, he achieved his desire² [to hold the banquet].

It was further told about him that while in church during the liturgy, he would see the mystery of Communion, with the host changing from bread to white lamb, and also would see it return to its previous state.

While he was living this kind of life, a righteous monk said to him, "I have seen³ a great vision, with a bright sun dwelling in the womb of your wife Kristos Ebayaa."⁴

Bahir Saggad replied, "*Abba*,⁵ please interpret the meaning of your vision to me."

So, the monk interpreted [the vision] to him and said, "A beautiful daughter who will shine like the sun to the ends of the world will be born to you. She will be a guide for the blind of heart, and the kings of the earth and the bishops will bow to her. From the four corners of the world, many people will assemble around her and become one community—people pleasing God. Through her⁶ your names [Bahir Saggad and Kristos Ebayaa] will be called out until the consummation of the world."

Bahir Saggad then also saw a vision like the monk. He told his wife what the righteous monk had imparted to him, and that he himself had seen [the same vision]. He said to her, "Come, let us hold a vigil and pray with great penitence for seven days so that God may reveal to us and make us certain that this thing is true."⁷

She replied, "Very well." Therefore, that is what they did. After completing a week, he said to her, "Let us do another week since nothing has been revealed to me."⁸ Again she said to him, "Very well," and that is what they did. After they had completed the two weeks, they too saw what the righteous monk had seen. However, they kept this thing [secret] in their hearts until its time had come.

¹ Similar stories about finding gold in the belly of a fish appear in many cultures, perhaps earliest in Greek, Sanskrit, and Hebrew tales. However, the story probably owes most to a similar tale in the *Sankassar*, which relates for 12 Hədar (21 November) the story of Dorotheus, a poor man who wanted to make a feast for Saint Michael and similarly found gold in the belly of a fish (Budge 1928, 1:232).

² BDJ: *wä-fäṣṣämä botu fäqado* (lit., and through it he accomplished his desire); CR: *wä-fäṣṣämä zäntä fäqado* (and he accomplished this desire of his).

³ BDJ: *rə'iku* (I have seen); CR: *ra'ayku* [sic], from Abb. 88 *rə'yä* (he has seen).

⁴ This is reminiscent of the renowned fourteenth-century Ethiopian text the *Kəbrä Nägäšt*, in which the Queen of Sheba, Makədda, sees a vision that "there was a star in my womb . . . and I saved . . . all the men of my country thereby" (Budge 1922, 154).

⁵ *Abba*, meaning "father," is a form of address for monks, priests, and other clerical dignitaries. Among themselves, they usually call each other "brother." Likewise, "mother" is a form of address for nuns, but among themselves they usually call each other "sister."

⁶ BDJ: *bati* (through her); CR: *bahtu* (however; moreover).

⁷ In the Bible, the walls of Jericho fell after seven days dedicated to prayer and marching around the city with the Ark of the Covenant. See also Leviticus 8:33 and Exodus 29:35.

⁸ BDJ: *əsmä i-täkäštä litä mənt-ni* (since nothing has been revealed to me); CR omits *litä* (to me).

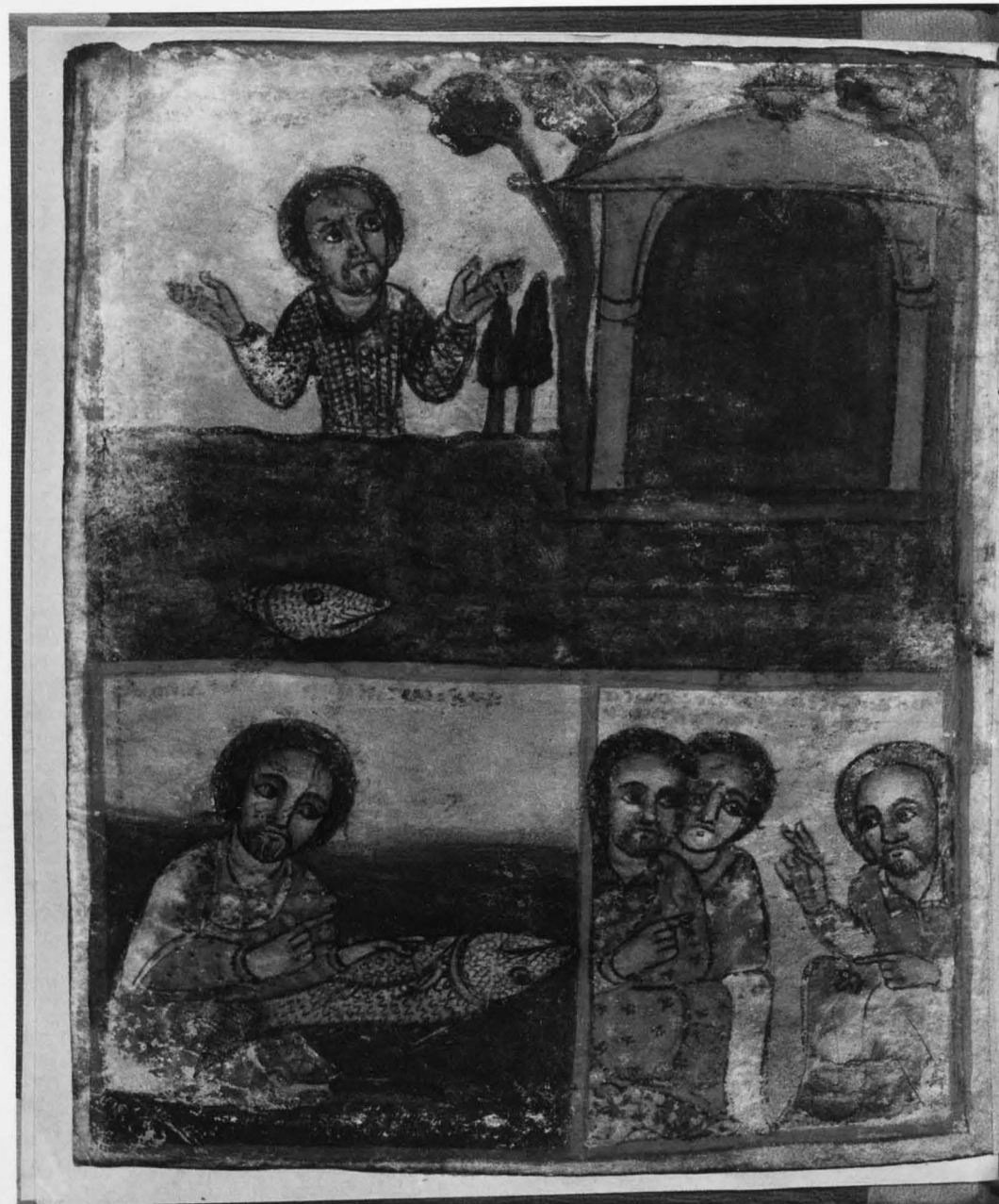


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Plate 2. How Walatta Petros's father and mother prayed after having learned about the vision (top), and how "her father saw a sun [in] his wife's belly" (bottom) (MS A, f. 145r © SLUB Mscr.Dresd.Eb.415.e,2).

After a few days, Kristos Ebayaa conceived by the will of God. When the time arrived for her to give birth, pain gripped her. Hearing this, Bahir Saggad withdrew to a chapel and prayed that she would give birth without pain and suffering. Continuously he sent messengers [to the house], one after another. At the proper time, Kristos Ebayaa gave birth, and a servant¹ who had been sent came carrying the good news and announced to Bahir Saggad that she had given birth.

He asked, "What is the newborn child, boy or girl?"

The servant responded, "It's a girl."

At that moment, Bahir Saggad was amazed and praised God because it was fulfilled for him what the righteous monk had told him and what he himself had seen. Therefore, he went happily and exultantly into the house of childbed, even though he was a great lord and it was not appropriate for him to enter into such a house.²

They said to him, "How can you enter the house of childbed before the time for entering has arrived?"

Bahir Saggad responded, "Let me enter, I who already knows! You don't yet know what secret is associated with that girl child." Thus he entered, sat down, and said to the midwife,³ "Please show me the child! Give her to me to hold her and kiss her."

The midwife said to him, "How can you hold and kiss a newborn who is all covered in blood?"

He responded, "Give her to me! Truly, there is no unclean blood or filth on this daughter of mine."

Therefore, the midwife wrapped her in a garment of fine linen and gave her to him. He received her and carried her in his arms for a while, looking her in the face and kissing her head. He marveled at the beauty of her appearance and said to her, "You are blessed, child that God has chosen and sanctified⁴ to be his servant while still in your mother's womb!"⁵ Having said this, Bahir Saggad left the room and went away.⁶

On account of [all] this, we consider blessed⁷ Walatta Petros's father and mother who brought forth for us this blessed and holy mother through whom we have found salvation. She became our guide toward righteousness and hope, she revealed to us the way of renunciation and of monastic life and taught us the law of

¹ *Gäbr*, which we have translated as "servant" throughout; debates continue in Ethiopian studies, however, over the translation of this term, which some, with good evidence, translate as "slave."

² BDJ: *wastä betä haris* (lit., into the house of childbed); CR: *wastä haris* (lit., into the childbed). A man was not supposed to enter the room of childbirth. If he did so, he became impure and could not enter a church or other holy place for forty days. See Kaplan (2003b).

³ BDJ: *wä-yäbela lä-mäwäldit* (and said to the midwife); CR: *wä-yäbela lä-wäladit* (and said to the mother).

⁴ BDK: *həšan zä-ḥaräyäki əgzi'abher wä-qäddäsäki* (child that God has chosen and sanctified); CR omits *wä-qäddäsäki* (and sanctified [you]).

⁵ Compare with Jeremiah 1:4.

⁶ This account of practices around childbirth is one of the earliest in Gə'əz literature.

⁷ BJ: *nastäbäššə* (we consider blessed); CR, D: *nastäbšə* (let us consider blessed).



Plate 2. How Walatta Petros's father and mother prayed after having learned about the vision (top), and how "her father saw a sun [in] his wife's belly" (bottom) (MS A, f. 145r © SLUB Mscr.Dresd.Eb.415.e.2).

After a few days, Kristos Ebayaa conceived by the will of God. When the time arrived for her to give birth, pain gripped her. Hearing this, Bahir Saggad withdrew to a chapel and prayed that she would give birth without pain and suffering. Continuously he sent messengers [to the house], one after another. At the proper time, Kristos Ebayaa gave birth, and a servant¹ who had been sent came carrying the good news and announced to Bahir Saggad that she had given birth.

He asked, "What is the newborn child, boy or girl?"

The servant responded, "It's a girl."

At that moment, Bahir Saggad was amazed and praised God because it was fulfilled for him what the righteous monk had told him and what he himself had seen. Therefore, he went happily and exultantly into the house of childbed, even though he was a great lord and it was not appropriate for him to enter into such a house.²

They said to him, "How can you enter the house of childbed before the time for entering has arrived?"

Bahir Saggad responded, "Let me enter, I who already knows! You don't yet know what secret is associated with that girl child." Thus he entered, sat down, and said to the midwife,³ "Please show me the child! Give her to me to hold her and kiss her."

The midwife said to him, "How can you hold and kiss a newborn who is all covered in blood?"

He responded, "Give her to me! Truly, there is no unclean blood or filth on this daughter of mine."

Therefore, the midwife wrapped her in a garment of fine linen and gave her to him. He received her and carried her in his arms for a while, looking her in the face and kissing her head. He marveled at the beauty of her appearance and said to her, "You are blessed, child that God has chosen and sanctified⁴ to be his servant while still in your mother's womb!"⁵ Having said this, Bahir Saggad left the room and went away.⁶

On account of [all] this, we consider blessed⁷ Walatta Petros's father and mother who brought forth for us this blessed and holy mother through whom we have found salvation. She became our guide toward righteousness and hope, she revealed to us the way of renunciation and of monastic life and taught us the law of

¹ *Gäbr*, which we have translated as "servant" throughout; debates continue in Ethiopian studies, however, over the translation of this term, which some, with good evidence, translate as "slave."

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³ BDJ: *wä-yābela lā-māwāldit* (and said to the midwife); CR: *wä-yābela lā-wāladit* (and said to the mother).

⁴ BDK: *ḥaṣān zā-ḥarāyāki ḥgzi'abher wā-qāddāsāki* (child that God has chosen and sanctified); CR omits *wā-qāddāsāki* (and sanctified [you]).

⁵ Compare with Jeremiah 1:4.

⁶ This account of practices around childbirth is one of the earliest in Gə'əz literature.

⁷ BJ: *nastābāṣṣə* (we consider blessed); CR, D: *nastābṣə* (let us consider blessed).

love and humility. If they had not brought her forth for us, our lives would have been destined for perdition. As the prophet Isaiah says, “If the Lord of Hosts had not left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom and would have resembled Gomorrah.”¹ Behold, in her the sign of her parents’ righteousness was visible, since the good tree produces good fruit, but the bad tree produces bad fruit. As our Lord says in the Gospel, “No good tree produces bad fruit,² and no bad tree produces good fruit. Every tree is known by its fruit.”³ Paul further says, “If the first fruit is holy, the [entire] dough⁴ also will be holy, and if the root is holy, the branches also will be holy.”⁵

Chapter 4: Our Mother’s Baptism and Childhood

8 When the infant was eighty days old,⁶ they baptized her in Christian baptism according to the order of the book⁷ and named her Walatta Petros. And truly, she was a daughter of Peter,⁸ since the work of the father is found in the one who is born from him.⁹ As our Lord said to Peter, “Upon you I will build my church,”¹⁰ and upon her, too, the Lord built a community and made them a house [of God]. As Paul says, “You [all] are the house of the Lord.”¹¹ Just as the Lord gave Peter the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, so he likewise gave to Walatta Petros that those who follow her will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. And as the Lord three times said to Peter, “Tend my sheep,”¹² so to her likewise he conferred the tending of his sheep in the pasture of meritorious spiritual struggle.

She truly was worthy of this name [of Walatta Petros] since the son of a king becomes a king and the son of a priest becomes a priest; and just as Peter became the head of the apostles, she likewise became the head of all [religious] teachers.

¹ Isaiah 1:9, Romans 9:29. God destroyed these cities in Canaan with fire and brimstone because its people were wicked sinners, according to Genesis 13:13.

² BDJ: *albo ʾəṣ šānnay zā-yafārri fāre akuyā* (no good tree produces bad fruit); CR omits.

³ Matthew 7:18; Luke 6:44.

⁴ BDJ: *wā-bəḥuʾ-ni* (the dough also). CR: *wā-bəṣəʾtā* (and beatified), from Abb. 88 *wā-bəṣuʾanā* (and the beatified people).

⁵ Romans 11:16.

⁶ Girls were baptized on the eightieth day, boys on the fortieth (Kaplan 2003b).

⁷ The book could be the Bible or perhaps another book that articulates the rituals of baptism.

⁸ Saint Peter was one of Christ’s Twelve Apostles in the New Testament, the one upon whom Christ said he would found his church. Throughout the *WP gādī*, the author compares WP to her namesake, especially in their founding of communities. Often the author does so without naming Saint Peter, but by telling stories about WP that the well-versed biblical reader will recognize as parallel to Peter’s life.

⁹ Conti Rossini notes that two lines here are missing in Abb. 88. BDJ, however, have no gap here, nor any sign of erasure and correction.

¹⁰ BDJ: *betā krəstiyanayā* (my church); CR: *betā krəstiyan* (the church). Matthew 16:18.

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 3:9.

¹² John 21:15–17.

Just as Peter could kill and resurrect through his authority, she likewise could kill and resurrect.¹ She became a god by grace, as scripture says,² “You are gods, all of you are children of the Most High.”³ O glory, glory of such dimensions! O sublimity, sublimity of such greatness! While she was a human being like us, to her it was given to be a god.⁴

But let us return to our story. The young girl was pleasant to look at and had a beautiful figure. The look in her eyes was like a shining star; her teeth were white like milk. As Solomon says in the Song of Songs, “You are wholly beautiful; there is no flaw in you. There is nothing [ugly] upon you.”⁵ But the outer beauty of her appearance was surpassed by the inner beauty of her mind. Listen, my loved ones: What should make us boastful of the beauty of our appearance, which changes and decays? Is a human being justified [before God] by his beautiful appearance, or damned by his ugly aspect?

About this the Orit says,⁶ Rachel had a beautiful appearance and beautiful eyes, and Jacob loved her very much.⁷ For seven years he served her father for the sake of her. Yet her father did not give her to him, but stealthily gave him⁸ Leah; and Leah, instead, had bleary eyes and Jacob did not love her. As soon as he saw her, he was very⁹ distressed. However, Laban, [the girls’ father,] said to him, “Do not be in pain. This doesn’t happen in our country; people do not first give the younger one while an older [unmarried] one is there. Complete another seven years [of service], and I will give her to you, too.” So, Jacob again served Laban for seven years, and Laban then gave Rachel to him, too.¹⁰

God, by contrast,¹¹ favored Leah—who was despised because she was ugly in appearance and had bleary eyes—by opening her womb, and so she gave birth to Judah from whose seed Christ was born. As Jacob said, “Kingship will not vanish

¹ Acts 5:1–10; Acts 9:40.

² BDJ: *bā-kāmā yābe māṣḥaf* (as scripture says); CR: *bā-kāmā yābe bā-māṣḥaf* (as it says in scripture).

³ Psalm 81[82]:6; John 10:34.

⁴ CR adds *bā-ṣagga* (by grace). In calling WP a “god” (*amlak*), the author is relying on biblical precedent. As he notes, in the Old Testament, in Psalm 81[82]:6, the Lord says, “You are gods,” and in the New Testament, in John 10:34, Jesus says, “I have said you are gods.” Also, in Isaiah 41:23, the Lord says, “That we may know that you are gods”; in Exodus 7:1 and Exodus 4:16, the Lord tells Moses that “I have made you like God to Pharaoh.” In the New Testament, in 2 Peter 1:4, Paul says that we “become sharers of the divine nature.” Also, the oft-called Father of Orthodoxy, Saint Athanasius, says in *De Incarnatione*, “For the Son of God became man so that we might become God.”

⁵ Song of Songs 4:7.

⁶ See Genesis 29:15–35 for the entire episode that follows.

⁷ BDJ: *ṭəqqā* (very much); CR omits.

⁸ BDJ: *wāhabo* (gave him); CR omits.

⁹ BDJ: *ṭəqqā* (very); CR omits.

¹⁰ CR omits the entire sentence (*wā-tāqānyā lotu kaʾabā 7 ʾamātā wā-wāhabo kiyaha-ni*; lit., thereupon he again served him for seven years, and he then gave her to him, too).

¹¹ BDF: *əgziʾabher-əssā* (God, by contrast); CR: *əgziʾabher-ni* (God, moreover).

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from Judah, nor princely power from his member.”¹ As for Rachel, who had beautiful eyes and whom Jacob loved, God did not love her and did not give her a child, so ultimately she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, “Give me a child, or else I will die!”² With great difficulty Rachel then gave birth to Joseph and to Benjamin, but from their seed Christ was not born.³ God for his part does not look at outer beauty, but at inner beauty.⁴

Furthermore, the Orit says: Esau was beautiful in his appearance and Isaac loved him, while Jacob was ugly in his appearance and God loved him.⁵ He says, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”⁶ Also, Christ was not born from the seed of Esau, but from that of Jacob. David, too, says, “He took me from my father’s sheep and anointed me with holy oil. My brothers were handsome and older but God was not pleased with them.”⁷ Because of this, we should not boast about the beauty of our looks, nor need we be ashamed of the ugliness of [our] appearance, since that which is perishable should clothe itself with that which is imperishable.⁸

Listen further and we will tell you [more of] the story of Bahir Saggad, the father of our holy mother Walatta Petros. He loved her more than all his grown male children, with his whole heart and his entire mind, and he was proud of her. While she was still a child and of a tender age so that she did not yet know her father’s and mother’s name, he used to put her on a chair and on a bed.⁹ He would take his sword and pace in front of her, lifting up his feet and marching for her, just like soldiers march in front of the king. He would sing her name and say to her, “I will die for you, I, your father, blessed child whom God has chosen, blessed and made holy.” He would do this every day, not [only] after having had his fill and being

¹ Genesis 49:10.

² Genesis 30:1.

³ See Genesis 30:22–24 and 35:16–18; Matthew 1:17.

⁴ 1 Samuel 16:7.

⁵ While Genesis 25:28 indeed says that Isaac preferred Esau, the Bible attributes this not to Esau’s good looks but to the animals he hunted and cooked for his father. Moreover, the verse does not contrast the preferences of Isaac and God, but of Isaac and his wife Rebecca: it is of her that it says that she preferred Jacob, who stayed by her side. However, the Gəʿəz Bible, like the Vulgate, does mention that Jacob was a “plain” man and that he had to put on an animal skin to fool his father into thinking he had Esau’s more masculine frame (Mersha 2011, 532). The two men undoubtedly looked quite different, with Esau living his life outdoors hunting and Jacob his life indoors with his mother. The author thus interprets the passage here, suggesting that God was not fooled by Esau’s beautiful masculinity.

⁶ Malachi 1:2–3 and Romans 9:13.

⁷ Psalm 151:4–5 (this psalm does not appear in the Protestant Bible). But see also 1 Samuel 16:6–13, where it is said that David too was handsome.

⁸ BDJ: *halläwo lä-zäntu zä-yəmassən yəlbäs zä-i-yəmassən* (that which is perishable should clothe itself with that which is imperishable); CR omits *yəlbäs zä-i-yəmassən* (clothe itself with that which is imperishable).

⁹ In that era, it was considered inappropriate for a child to sit on rare and therefore precious pieces of furniture. Also, the word “bed” in Gəʿəz (*ʾarat*) and Amharic (*alga*) is used metaphorically to mean “throne,” so this passage may connote elevating on a pedestal. Also, as royal audiences demonstrate, those who sit are higher in rank than those who stand.

drunk but while he was hungry and thirsty.¹ Truly, he was drunk with love for her and knew the secret of what would happen through her.

[Nevertheless,] he soon died and his joy did not have fulfillment. He desired but did not see, he looked but did not find. As our Lord says in the Gospel,² “Truly, many prophets and righteous ones wanted to see what you see but did not see it.”³

Chapter 5: Our Mother’s Marriage and Children

Therefore, her mother and brothers then raised our holy mother Walatta Petros, in wisdom and the fear of God, and taught her the books of the Church. When she grew up and reached the legal age for marriage,⁴ they gave her to one of the great lords of the land whose name was Malkiya Kristos⁵—he was the chief adviser of King Susinyos, who sat on the throne having adopted the faith of the Europeans⁶—so that she would become his wife, according to the ritual of matrimony for the daughters of great lords, in order to procreate.⁷ For scripture says, “Be many and multiply and fill the earth.”⁸ When Malkiya Kristos brought her into his house, he loved her very much; he knew her, and she conceived.

She then, like Martha, prayed to God, using these words, “If this unborn child which is inside my womb shall be born and please you,⁹ may it live; but if not, may

¹ That is, it is normal for people to play when they are satiated and have extra energy; it is rare for someone to do so even when they are enervated by lack of sustenance.

² D: *bä-kāmā yəbe əgziʾənā bä-wāngel* (as our Lord says in the Gospel); CR: *bä-kāmā yəbe māṣṣaf* (as scripture says); BJ: *bä-kāmā yəbe* (as he [or: it] says).

³ Luke 10:24.

⁴ Girls were often legally married at the age of seven, but the marriage would not be consummated until she went to live as a wife with her husband. In the past, girls reached puberty at later ages, so WP may have been around sixteen when she joined her husband. Currently, the average age at menarche in Ethiopia is 15.8 years (Zegeye, Megabiaw, and Mulu 2009).

⁵ *Mälkəʾa Krəstos* (Image of Christ).

⁶ *Haymanotä Afrəng* (faith of the Europeans). Susənyos ruled Ethiopia from 1606 to 1632 and, under the influence of Portuguese Jesuit missionaries, converted from Orthodoxy to Catholicism in 1622. This triggered major internal upheavals—one of the main subjects of this hagiobiography—until 1632, when he rescinded his conversion.

⁷ At least two *Sənkəssar* entries on WP (Ethio-SPaRe MKL-019 and MR-003; see table 2) state that she was married to another man before *Mälkəʾa Krəstos*, an unnamed man who was killed by King Yaʿqob (r. 1597–1603, 1604–6), the king who preceeded Susənyos (a matter discussed in “The Biography of Walatta Petros” in this volume). As the *Sənkəssar* entry was likely written within a year of her death, to be read upon her annual commemoration, and the author Gälawdewos wrote the *WP gädl* several decades later, it would seem Gälawdewos deliberately omits this information. Since WP would have been only nine in 1606, this earlier marriage would not have been consummated and therefore did not result in children; thus, Gälawdewos might not have considered it important enough to mention.

⁸ Genesis 1:28.

⁹ BDJ: *yətwälläd wä-yašämmäräkä* (shall be born and please you); CR: *zä-yətwälläd əm-yašämmäräkä* (which shall be born, if then it pleases you).

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it quickly die.”¹ When her pregnancy reached term she gave birth. She had the boy child baptized, but then he immediately died, God having listened to her prayer. Saying the same prayer, she gave birth to three children,² and all of them died by the will of God. Nonetheless, Malkiya Kristos, the husband³ of our holy mother Walatta Petros, was very generous and [still] loved her very much.⁴ Yet she⁵ did not want to stay with him because she [now] bore in mind the transience of the world.

As the Apostle Peter says, “All flesh is like grass, and all the glory of man is like the flower of the grass.”⁶ And John further says, “Do not love the world and that which is in the world because everything in the world is the desire of the eye and the desire of the flesh. Life’s distress does not come from the Father but from the world. In addition, the world will perish, and its desires will perish.”⁷ Moreover Paul says, “It is right, O our brothers, that it be like this, because all the things of this world are soon to perish: Those people who have married shall be as if they did not marry, those who live comfortably as if they did not live comfortably, those who cry as if they did not cry, those who rejoice as if they did not rejoice, those who purchase as if they did not purchase, those who have possessions as if they did not have them, those who eat as if they did not eat, and those who drink as if they did not drink, since all the pleasures of this world will pass and perish.”⁸ Furthermore, our Lord says⁹ in the Gospel, “What would it benefit man if he gained the entire world but lost his soul? What can man give as ransom for his soul?”¹⁰

¹ This would appear to be WP’s first prayer for someone’s death. This Martha is not that of the New Testament, who has nothing to do with children, but probably a Martha of the *Sankassar* or *Tä’amärä Maryam*. There are two childless Marthas in the *Sankassar* who pray for children: one is the mother of Saint Vincent, celebrated on 5 Tahśaś (14 December), the other is the grandmother of Abba Simon of the monastery of Antioch, celebrated on 29 Gənbət (6 June). However, this specific prayer is not mentioned in the *Sankassar*. A *Tä’amärä Maryam* at Mekane Yesus Seminary, Addis Ababa, includes a miracle about how the Virgin Mary gave a child to a certain woman named Martha from a royal family in the East and how the Virgin Mary raised that child from the dead when the wife of the emperor Diocletian threw the child to the floor out of jealousy (EMIP 601, Mekane Yesus Seminary 1, 190rv).

² Lit., 3 *wəluḏä*, which could also mean three sons.

³ BDJ: *bə’asiha-ssä Mälkä’a Krəstos* (lit., her husband nonetheless, Mälkä’a Krəstos); CR omits -ssä (nonetheless).

⁴ BDJ: *ba’əl wə’ətu təqqä wä-yafäqqəra fädfadä* (was very generous [lit., rich] and loved her very much); CR: *yafäqqəra fädfadä wä-ba’əl wə’ətu təqqä* (loved her very much, and was very rich).

⁵ BDJ: *wä-yə’əti-ssä* (yet she); CR: *wä-yə’əti* (she).

⁶ Lit., *fəre ša’r* (fruit of the grass). 1 Peter 1:24. See also Isaiah 40:6–8.

⁷ 1 John 2:15–17.

⁸ 1 Corinthians 7:29–31.

⁹ BDJ: *yəbe* (says); CR omits.

¹⁰ BDJ: *məntä əm-wähabä säb’ bezaha lä-näfsu* (What can man give as ransom for his soul); CR: *məntä əmmä i-wähabä säb’ bezaha lä-näfsu* (What if man did not give the ransom for his soul). Matthew 16:26.

This is why our holy mother Walatta Petros spent all her days in fasting and prayer, while in the evenings she entered into the church and kept vigil all night without interruption, [in turns] standing upright and prostrating herself as well as praying in all manners. Thus she would go into ecstasy¹ and disappear from [the view of] the women who had followed her.² At dawn, she would reappear to them and return home.

Every Sunday Walatta Petros would sponsor a meal for the clergy of the church. With her was a woman who cooked the *wot* stews³ and the other various dishes.⁴ That woman used to grumble; she did not like to cook for the clergy. When our holy mother Walatta Petros understood what that woman harbored in her mind, she one evening took the woman with her to the church and let her see the vigil and exertions of the clergy.⁵

As a result, the woman repented and said, “I have sinned! Forgive me for causing you distress. Before this, I didn’t know what the priests did, but now I have seen it and marveled [at them]. From now on I will certainly do all you desire and will not disobey your orders.”

Those who know [Walatta Petros’s story] further relate: When our holy mother Walatta Petros celebrated a holiday with a banquet, she provided everything the body needs, all kinds of food and drink,⁶ as well as meats. She then assembled the poor and wretched, all the people of the town⁷ as well as the priests of the church, and seated them at the table, each one at the seat that was due to them. Then they would eat and drink until they had had enough and were happy. She on the other hand would not taste anything from all this, but would eat cooked bitter *ranch* leaves⁸

¹ Lit., *tətmäśśät* (she would be seized). Alternatively, the author might mean that WP was seized by an external heavenly force.

² Many Täwahädo Church monasteries have tales of particularly holy monks and nuns who become invisible.

³ *Wät* is the generic name for the variety of stews that are served with a staple at most meals. On fasting days, it will be a vegetable stew, often with greens. On nonfasting days, if the family is not poor, it may be a meat stew such as *doro wät* (chicken stew), often spiced with red peppers.

⁴ BDJ: *zä-tətgəbbär . . . gəbrä mābalä’t zä-zä-zi’ahu* (who cooked . . . the other various dishes); CR: *zä-tətgəbbär . . . gəbrä mäl’əkt zä-zä-zi’ahu* (who performed . . . various other services).

⁵ A working servant would not see the clergy performing their ritual duties, partly because she would not have much time to go to church and partly because much of this is done in the church during the night, when no congregation is there.

⁶ BDJ: *k’allo māfqədatä šəga mābalä’tä wä-səteyatä zä-zä-zi’ahu* (everything the body [lit., flesh] needs, all kinds of food and drink); CR: *k’allo mābalä’tä māfqədatä šəga wä-səteyatä zä-zä-zi’ahu* (all foods, what the body [lit., flesh] needs, and all kinds of drinks).

⁷ *Hagär*, a capacious term that can mean village, town, district, or region, and that we have most often translated as “town.” In the seventeenth century, towns were modest settlements of around a couple hundred people or less. See Pankhurst (1982).

⁸ *Ränč* or *renč*, an Amharic loanword, is an indigenous plant of Ethiopia with edible

and drink [only] water,¹ while it appeared to the others that she ate and drank like them. Nobody from among the people [at the banquet] knew [this] about her except for the maidservant who served her. For a long time she maintained this way of life, and desired not at all the pleasures of this ephemeral world.

She lived a regular married life with her husband Malkiya Kristos, but waited and looked for the day on which it would please God for her to leave, escaping and fleeing from her husband, abandoning the world and becoming a nun. She prayed continuously [for this] and implored God, saying, "Show me your way, Lord, and teach me your path. Lead me with your righteousness, and, O Lord, teach me, your servant,² your path,³ the right path."⁴ Our holy mother Walatta Petros kept praying like this.⁵

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Chapter 6: Our Mother Tries to Take Up the Holy Life

When the time came that it pleased God for her to leave this world[ly life], her husband Malkiya Kristos went on a military campaign with the king.⁶ As for her, she stayed in the region of Simaada,⁷ on the third story of the [couple's] castle⁸ [where] no one could see her. At that time, by the will of God, two monks came to our holy mother Walatta Petros, *Abba Yamaana Kristos*⁹ of Réma Monastery and *Abba Tazkaara Dinghil*¹⁰ of [Lake] Tana. They had been sent by *Abba Fatla Sillasé*¹¹ to bring her stealthily¹² out [of her husband's home] and take her with them to Zäge.¹³ When she saw them, she was very happy. In charity, she then gave all her

leaves: *Caylusea abyssinica*. Monks and nuns especially devoted to asceticism would eat only leaves; the Ethiopian saint Täklä Haymanot ate bitter leaves during Lent.

¹ Alcoholic drinks would have been served at a banquet.

² CR adds *Wälättä Petros*.

³ BDJ: *fənotākä* (your path); CR omits.

⁴ Partly based on Psalm 26[27]:11.

⁵ BDJ: *näbärät ənzä təşelli kāmā-zə* (kept praying like this); CR: *näbärät ənzä təbəl kāmā-zə* (kept speaking like this).

⁶ According to Susənyos's royal chronicle, Mälkə'a Krəstos often went on military campaign with Susənyos (Täklä Šəllase [Tinno] 1900, chapter 53).

⁷ *Səmada* is a region about seventy miles southeast of Lake Tana.

⁸ Lit., *maḥfād* (tower or fortress).

⁹ *Yəmanä Krəstos* (Right Hand of Christ) is a monk from Rema who also appears in one of the miracles.

¹⁰ *Täzkarä Dəngəl* (Commemoration of the Virgin).

¹¹ *Fätlä Šəllase* (Cord of the Trinity) is a famous historical figure and high-ranking monk associated with the royal court. In Susənyos's royal chronicle, Fätlä Šəllase participates near southeastern Lake Tana in a famous debate before Emperor Susənyos about the nature of Christ. In this hagiobiography, Fätlä Šəllase is a special defender of WP, protecting her from her husband and church leaders.

¹² BDJ: *šəmmittä* (stealthily); CR omits.

¹³ *Zäge* is a small peninsula protruding into Lake Tana at its narrow southernmost end, not far from today's regional metropolis Bahər Dar.

possessions to the poor and the wretched. In addition, she took all her jewelry, eighty ounces weight of gold, in order to distribute it to the needy and to churches on their way. They then came to an agreement¹ about the time when they would leave. When it became evening and after people had fallen asleep, she summoned her three maidservants, Maryamawet,² Eskindirawet,³ and Iyopraxia⁴ so that they would follow her.

Then our holy mother Walatta Petros left [the castle], and the monks received her, took her with them, and made her mount a mule. They spent the entire night walking and thus in [only] one day reached [the church of] the Abode of Our Lady Mary⁵ at Racha;⁶ there they rested. Then she began to distribute the gold all along the way. What is truly astonishing and wondrous, though, is that within [just] one day she marched such a long way, even though she was weak and her body tender. If it had not been for the power of God that strengthened her, who would have been able to march like that? Not even a strong young man could have marched like that, let alone a woman like her. For she lacked strength and her feet were delicate because she had never trod the earth before in her entire life.⁷ If she got up from her resting couch,⁸ she would stand upon a carpet that had been spread out, and if [so much as] fallen dry breadcrumbs found her there, they hurt her feet so that they would bleed. However, the power of God strengthened her and she did not feel any weakness because she was inebriated with love for Him. [She was drawn to her destination] like someone invited to a wedding or like a mighty warrior⁹ to a prize.¹⁰ And indeed our holy mother Walatta Petros marched to a heavenly wedding and to the groom Jesus Christ; indeed, she marched toward a prize, fighting against the devil¹¹ and taking from him many souls that he had made his prey.

13

¹ BDJ: *täsāna'awu wā-tā'adāmu* (lit., they came to and reached an agreement); CR: *täsāna'awu wā-tāmakāru* (they came to an agreement and deliberated).

² *Maryamawit* (She of [Saint] Mary).

³ *Əskəndərawit* (She of Alexander). Alexander the Great was considered a saint in Eastern Christianity.

⁴ *Iyopəraqsəya* (Eupraxia [good conduct]). This is an elegant Greek name rather than a typical Ḥabāša name, and thus, counterintuitively, the sign of a servant or slave. Just as in ancient Greece, in Ethiopia a recently enslaved person from elsewhere was renamed with a type of name that distinguished him or her from a citizen. In Ethiopia, foreign slaves were often given classical names, just as in the United States, where slaves were often given classical names like "Caesar," "Cato," or "Jupiter."

⁵ Lit., *Maḥdärä Əgzə'tənā Maryam* (Abode of Our Lady Mary).

⁶ *Räčā* is a town about fifteen miles southeast of Lake Tana, on the way from Səmada to Zäge. The distance they traveled in one night is about fifty miles. Since mules generally travel between fifteen and twenty miles a day, this is quite far.

⁷ BDJ: *bä-k'əllu māwa'əliha* (lit., in all her days); CR omits *k'əllu* (all).

⁸ Lit., *'arat* (bed or throne).

⁹ CR adds *zä-γəräwwəş* (who runs).

¹⁰ Lit., *məhərka* (loot).

¹¹ *Diyabolos*. This is rare; the *WP gädl* usually has *säyṭan* (Satan).

Again they set off from Racha and came to Chegwaré Zigba [town],¹ and then, moving on from there, to Wonchet [town].² [There] they hid in the house of an old nun named³ Amata Petros;⁴ she remained there for a few days. Then our holy mother Walatta Petros set off from Wonchet, went to Robet⁵ [town], and [eventually] reached Emabra⁶ [town] opposite Zagé [on Lake Tana]. There, at the lake-shore, was a man named Kifla Maryam⁷ who owned a *tankwa* papyrus boat⁸ and was a good person. Thus, Walatta Petros became his guest: he received her, took her into his house, and gave her shelter.⁹ The next day he came with the *tankwa* and took her to the monastic settlement of Zagé. When she arrived there, she was happy and gave thanks to the Lord. She greeted the saints¹⁰ who lived in that monastic settlement, monks and nuns, and implored them to kindly remember her in their prayers.

Then she remained there, saying, "This is my resting-place¹¹ forever. Here I will live because¹² I have chosen it." She therefore shaved her head's hair and put on a nun's cap.¹³

¹ Čägg^warre Zägba (Caterpillar Cedar) is a town in the Dära region along southeastern Lake Tana, presumably south of Wänčät.

² Wänčät is about fifteen miles up from Baḥar Dar on southeastern Lake Tana, about five miles southeast of Q^wäraša. The distance from Rāča up to Wänčät is about thirty miles.

³ BDJ: *antä tassämmäy* (lit., who was called [3rd-ps. fem. sg.]); CR: *antä tassämmäyi* (you [2nd-ps. fem. sg.] who are called).

⁴ *Amätä Petros* (Maid servant of [Saint] Peter).

⁵ *Robit* is a town on the southeastern side of Lake Tana, about ten miles south of Q^wäraša. The distance from Wänčät down to Robit is about nine miles.

⁶ *Emäbra* is probably directly east of Robit about two miles, on the shore of Lake Tana, directly opposite Zäge.

⁷ *Kaflä Maryam* (Dedicated to [Saint] Mary).

⁸ *Tank^wa*, a long, narrow, shallow boat (canoe) made of bundles of locally grown papyrus, still common on Lake Tana (plate 3). Owners propelled them mostly by pole not paddle, so they tended to stay close to shore where it was shallow. It averaged about one mile an hour.

⁹ BDJ: *wä-aḥdära* (and gave her shelter); CR: *wä-ḥadārät* (and she found shelter).

¹⁰ In the early Christian church, all Christians were referred to as saints, a usage continued here.

¹¹ BDJ: *mə'rafəyā* (my resting place); CR omits *-yā* (my).

¹² BDJ: *zəyyä aḥaddər əsmā* (here I will live because); CR: *zəyyä əsmā* (here indeed [*əsmā* = because or indeed]).

¹³ *Qob'*. When an individual decides to become a nun or monk, he or she marks this by shaving the head (being tonsured) and putting on the *qob'* as a signal of intention. The abbot who gives the *qob'* to the individual has a special role in his or her spiritual life, although given the upheaval in the church at the time, and the lack of Orthodox priests, WP might have done it alone. There is then usually a three-year novitiate, although this varies (Chaillot 2002, 154). Two stages characterize the process of becoming a monk or nun. In the *rād'* (or first) level, they receive the *qob'* and are trying out the life. They are free to travel, for instance. In the *ardə't* (or second) level, they receive the mantle, sash, and belt, and are full members.

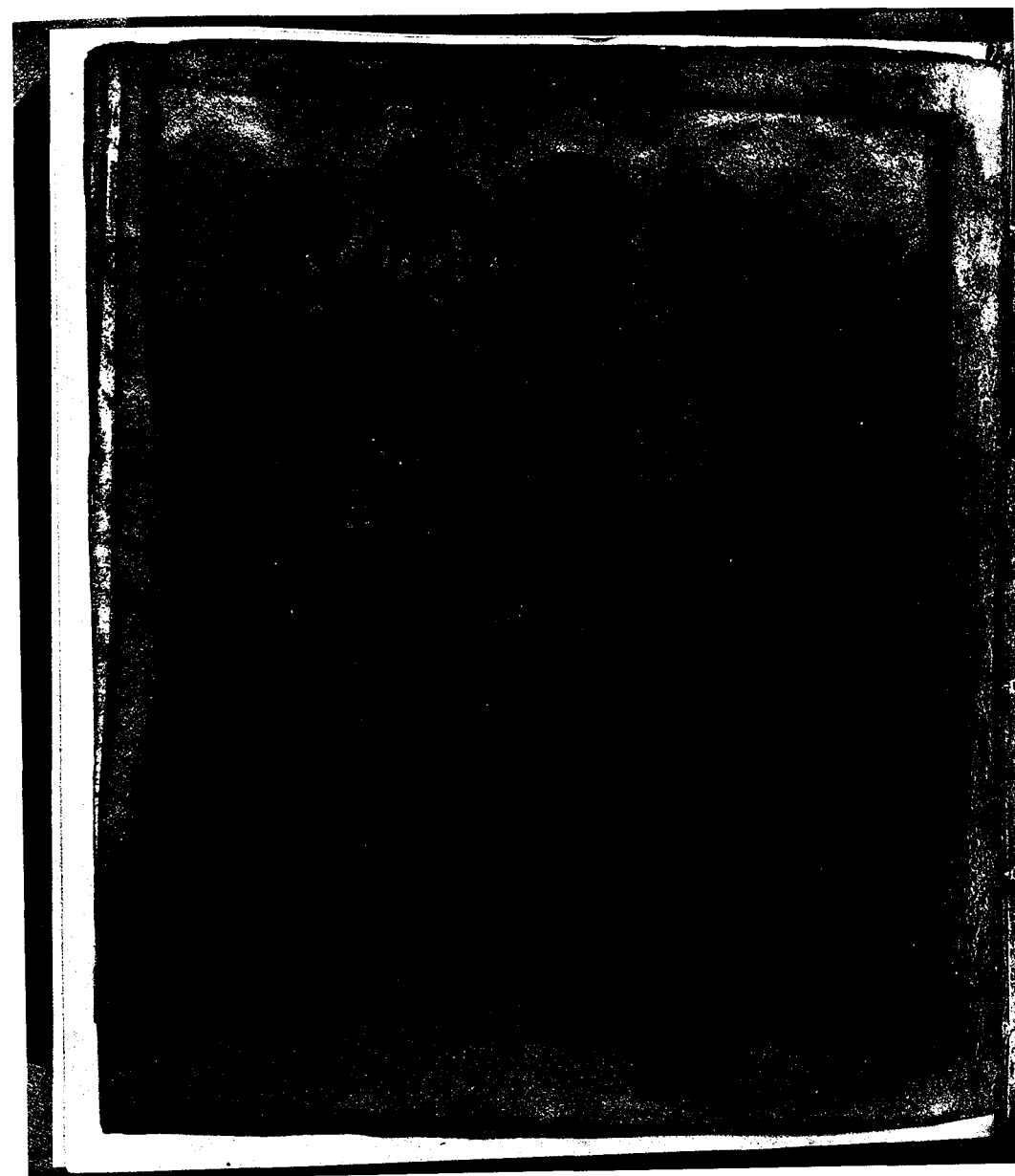


Plate 3. How two monks and a boatman took our mother and her servants on Lake Tana to the Zagé monastery (MS A, f. 145v © SLUB Mscr.Dresd.Eb.415.e,2).

Again they set off from Racha and came to Chegwaré Zigba [town],¹ and then, moving on from there, to Wonchet [town].² [There] they hid in the house of an old nun named³ Amata Petros;⁴ she remained there for a few days. Then our holy mother Walatta Petros set off from Wonchet, went to Robet⁵ [town], and [eventually] reached Emabra⁶ [town] opposite Zagé [on Lake Tana]. There, at the lake-shore, was a man named Kifla Maryam⁷ who owned a *tankwa* papyrus boat⁸ and was a good person. Thus, Walatta Petros became his guest: he received her, took her into his house, and gave her shelter.⁹ The next day he came with the *tankwa* and took her to the monastic settlement of Zagé. When she arrived there, she was happy and gave thanks to the Lord. She greeted the saints¹⁰ who lived in that monastic settlement, monks and nuns, and implored them to kindly remember her in their prayers.

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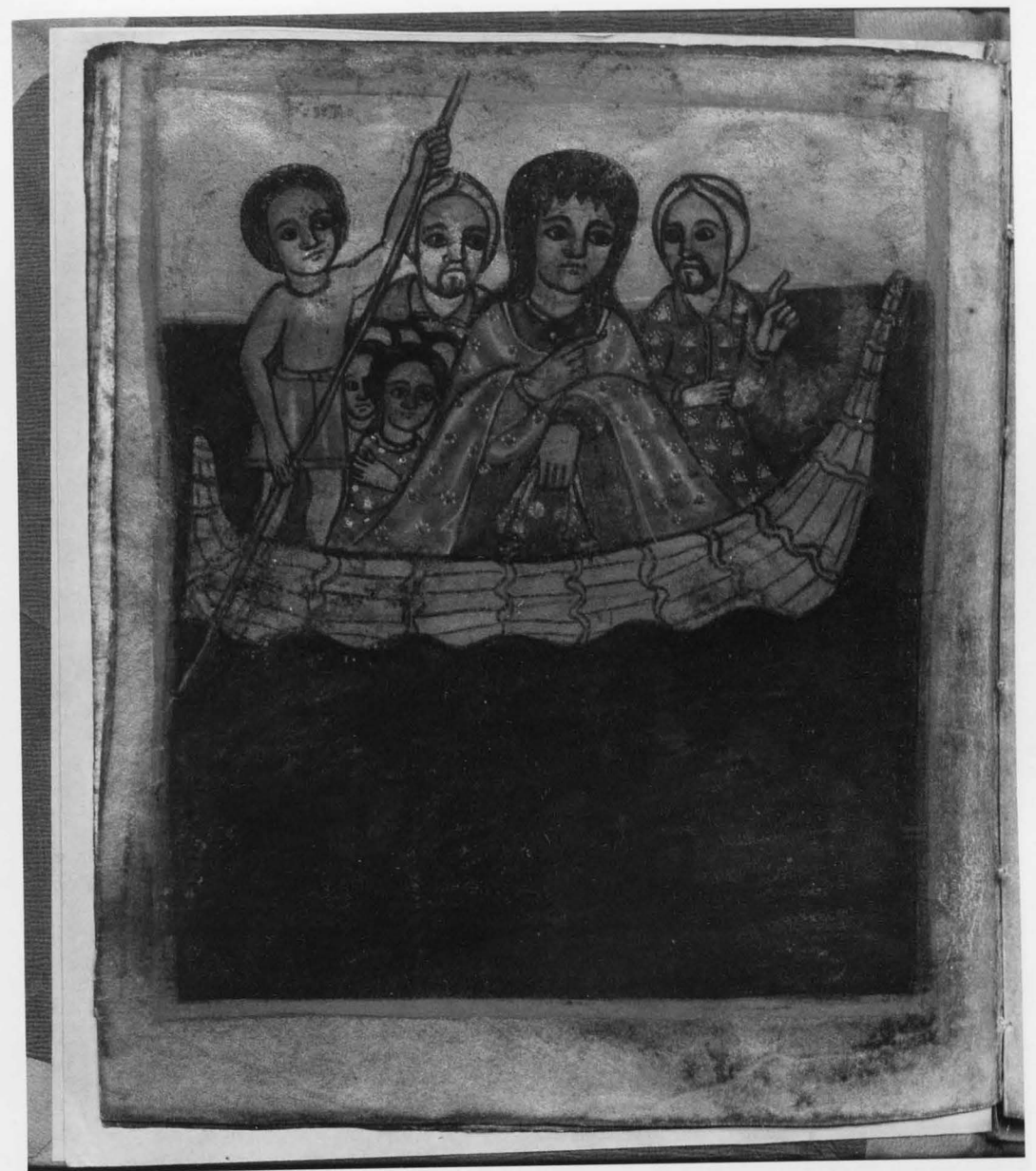


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Plate 4. How our mother was received and blessed by a monk (top) and “how her [head’s] hair was shaved so as to prepare her to become a nun” (bottom) (MS A, f. 146r © SLUB Mscr.Dresd.Eb.415.e,2).

Chapter 7: Our Mother’s Husband Hunts Her Down

When her husband, Malkiya Kristos, while he was at the camp with the king, learned that our holy mother Walatta Petros had fled and disappeared, he told the king and asked leave so that he could go¹ tracking her and searching for her. The king gave him permission and dispatched him. Malkiya Kristos set out immediately, in great anger and roaring like a lion.²

He called up his regiment,³ named Siltaan Marid,⁴ which he had set up in the region of Wuddo,⁵ along with their leader, an *azmach*.⁶ He took them with him and crisscrossed the entire region, asking around about where Walatta Petros had gone; and people told him that she had entered Zagé [Monastery].⁷ Straightaway, he surrounded the town of Robeet and ordered his regiment Siltaan Marid to destroy it, plunder the inhabitants’ possessions, eat up their provisions without restraint, and have no mercy. When they found that man [Kifla Maryam], the owner of the tankwa, they took him prisoner, plundered his goods, and seized his livestock. They acted according to Malkiya Kristos’s orders.

The people of the town, men and women, broke out in cries of wailing, and there was great upheaval.

Malkiya Kristos furthermore told the soldiers’ leader, “Build a lookout in a tree-top at the lakeshore, climb up it, observe the tankwas⁸ that come and go, in each direction, and if you discover Walatta Petros, arrest her.” That man did as⁹ his lord had ordered him, climbing up to the lookout and keeping watch day and night. Whenever he saw a tankwa coming, he went down to look at it, and if she was not in it,¹⁰ he let it go.

14

¹ Lit., BDJ: *wā-tāsānā’alā amannehu kāmā yəḥur* (and asked leave from him so he could go); CR: *wā-tāsānā’alā am-kāmā yəḥur* (and asked leave as soon as to go [sic]).

² It is still common for families to try to prevent women from leaving to become nuns (Wright 2001, 57).

³ BDJ: *ḥarrah* (his regiment); CR: *ḥarra* (the regiment).

⁴ *Šaltan Mār’ad* (It makes the [Muslim] sultan shiver). The exploits of this famous regiment are documented in Susənyos’s royal chronicle.

⁵ *Wəddo* is a region directly east of Lake Ṭana.

⁶ BDJ: *azmač*; CR: *azmači*. An *azmač* is a military campaign leader.

⁷ BDJ: *wā-nägärəwwo kāmā bo’at Zāge* (and people told him that she had entered Zāge); CR: *wā-nägärəwwo ḥabā bā’atā Zāge* (and people told him: to a monastic cell at Zāge).

⁸ BDJ: *nāššər tank’ā* (observe the tankwas); CR: *nāššər tank’aha* (observe her tankwa).

⁹ BDJ: *bā-kāmā* (as); CR: *wā-kāmā* (and like).

¹⁰ Our translation here assumes a feminine subject, *ḥaṭ’at* (lit., she was missing), whereas BDJ and CR all have masc. *ḥaṭ’a* (he was missing).



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On his part, Malkiya Kristos had gone to Woynayat [town]¹ to Woyzaro² Walatta Giyorgis,³ daughter of the [late] King Sartsa Dinghil,⁴ and to Abba Fatla Sillasé.

They rebuked him, saying to him, "Why did you lay waste to the town [of Robeet] without reason and bring ruin to people who did nothing wrong or unjust? Beware of God's wrath coming down⁵ upon you!"

Immediately, he fell at their feet and replied, "I entrust myself to you, pass judgment on me and bring about peace between me and my wife. If I have done anything wrong [against her] in the past, she shall have her compensation.⁶ From now on, though, I will not commit any wrongdoing again. [Even] if she tells me, 'Quit being a soldier of the king!,' I will quit it for her sake, as she has chosen." While he spoke these things, he cried and spilled tears.

After they had heard his words, they said to him, "These words of yours are not sincere. Rather, they will change tomorrow." So, he swore before them a strict oath.

Following this, Abba⁷ Fatla Sillasé went to our holy mother Walatta Petros and told her about the devastation of the town [of Robeet] that had come about because of her, and about all that Malkiya Kristos had spoken, and that he had sworn a strict oath.

After our holy mother Walatta Petros had heard [this], she said, "No! No!⁸ I will not leave this monastic settlement,⁹ and neither will I reconcile with him."

Abba Fatla Sillasé rebuked her, telling her, "If it is you who leave him, and if he marries another woman, his transgression is your fault.¹⁰ As for me, I advise you that reconciling with him is better for you. If he has acted wrongfully against you

¹ Wäynayät, somewhere near Lake Tana.

² Wäyzäro is a title for women of royal blood, often translated as "Princess" or "Lady." Following the typical commonalization of aristocratic titles of address, wäyzäro means "Mrs." in contemporary Ethiopia.

³ Wälättä Giyorgis (Daughter of [Saint] George). She was the daughter of King Šärsä Dəngəl (r. 1563–97) and Queen Amätä Krəstos. She was also the wife of a powerful man, Ras Atənatewos, and the mother of Wälättä Pəwlos, who later became a nun with WP.

⁴ Šärsä Dəngəl (Scion of the Virgin [Mary]).

⁵ BDJ: 'uq . . . kāmā i-yətmā'a' əgzi'abher (lit., watch out . . . that God does not become enraged); CR without the negation: 'uq . . . kāmā yətmā'a' əgzi'abher (watch out . . . that God does become enraged [sic]).

⁶ In traditional customary law, compensation can be paid for an injury or an offense. It is unclear what offense Mälkä'a Krəstos is offering to pay for, whether those named in the text, such as his killing the bishop, or perhaps something not named in the text, such as an affair. Although he and WP did not have any living children, it seems unlikely that he took up with or married another woman for this reason. Historical records show that he did have three sons, two of whom were governors in the 1620s, which suggests that they were born long before his marriage to WP and were of an age with her. He is not recorded as having married anyone else.

⁷ BDJ: abba; CR omits.

⁸ BDJ: ənbəyā ənbəyā (no, no); CR with single, and less emphatic, ənbəyā.

⁹ Lit., gädām (wilderness or monastic settlement). Three types of holy institutions exist in the Təwəhədo Church: gädām, dəbr, and maḥbār. See "The Text's Religious Context" in this volume.

¹⁰ Married women did not usually become nuns until late in life for this reason.

in the past, take your compensation. [Concerning the future], I have made him swear that he will not wrong you again. Furthermore, since¹ the people of the town [of Robeet] wept because of the devastation they suffered, God is displeased with you. He does not love your repudiation of the world and will not accept your prayers."

Our holy mother Walatta Petros responded² with these words, "I know Malkiya Kristos's character, that it is not founded on righteousness. However, I will obey your word, my father and teacher. It shall be as you said so that the people of the town [of Robeet] will not complain about me. You have to swear to me, though, that you will not make me see the face of his mother."³

He replied, "Very well," and they agreed on this. Abba Fatla Sillasé then left first, in order to send her a mule, while our holy mother Walatta Petros remained there for the night.

Do you see, my loved ones, the noble virtue of our holy mother Walatta Petros, in that she returned herself to Malkiya Kristos, saying, "I prefer that I should perish rather than all the people perish on account of me"? This is reminiscent of what our Lord said to the guards⁴ who came to arrest him. As the Gospel says, "The Lord Jesus said to them, 'Who are you looking for?' and they replied, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' He responded, 'I am he. If you want me, let these [disciples] go.'"⁵ Our holy mother Walatta Petros did likewise and said, "God's will⁶ be done! He can save me; to him nothing is impossible. He who saved Sarah from the hands of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and from the hands of Abimelech, king of Gerara, he will also save me.⁷ He who saved Susanna from the hands of the old men, he will also save me.⁸ He who

¹ Lit., lā'əmmā (if).

² CR adds lā-abba Fätlä Šəllase (to Abba Fätlä Šəllase).

³ BDJ: lā-əmmāyā (of my mother); CR: lā-əmmu (of his mother). Although most WP manuscripts state that she did not wish to see the face of her own mother, other aspects of the text suggest that in fact it is his mother's face that she does not wish to see. For instance, her friends revile Mälkä'a Krəstos's mother later on the same page of the text. His mother was Wäyzäro Mäsqäl 'Əbəyā (In the cross lies her greatness), according to Susənyos's royal chronicle. She begged the king to spare her son from execution (Täklä Šəllase [Tinno] 1900, 235). She was the second wife of the grandson of King Ləbnä Dəngəl (r. 1508–40), Šärsä Krəstos, who was King Susənyos's father by his first wife. However, the text might be referring to a woman who appears later in this text helping WP: Mälkä'a Krəstos's stepmother Amätä Krəstos (Täklä Šəllase [Tinno] 1900, 78, 133n).

⁴ BDJ: šägərat (guards); CR: šərawit (soldiers).

⁵ John 18:5.

⁶ BDJ: fäqadä əgzi'abher (God's will); CR: fäqadəkä (your will).

⁷ According to Genesis 20 and 26, Abimelech was the king of the Philistines, of the region Gerar, who tries to take Abraham's wife Sarah when Abraham claims she is his sister.

⁸ Daniel 13:1–64. While the Protestant (Masoretic-based) book of Daniel stops at chapter 12, the Orthodox (Septuagint-based) version has two extra chapters. Two older men see Susanna in her bath and attempt to blackmail her into having sex with them by threatening her with the false accusation that she had a young lover. She refuses to sleep with them and is about to be executed for adultery, when Daniel demands that the old men be questioned about their account. She is saved and they are executed.

saved [my countrywoman] Egzi Harayaa¹ from the hands of [King] Motalami,² he will also save me.”

In addition, she said, “I do not fear evil³ because you, [Lord,] are with me.’ ‘God will shine a light for me and will save me: what then can make me afraid? God is my life’s refuge: what then can terrify me?’⁴ ‘I put my trust in God; I have nothing to fear. What can men do to me?’”⁵ Raising this and similar prayers, she spent the entire night.

Chapter 8: Our Mother Returns to Her Husband

The next night they put a tankwa in water and had our mother Walatta Petros and her maidservants get in it. The boatmen were *Abba Yamaana Kristos* and *Abba Tazkaara Dinghil*; they poled it, one at the prow and the other at the stern.

While they were on the open water, the soldiers who were watching for them from on high in the lookout heard their voices and recognized them from their words, since the [clerical] boatmen abused Malkiya Kristos and reviled his mother. Our holy mother Walatta Petros, however, reprimanded them, saying, “Why do you talk so much and heap scorn on a noblewoman? Do your mouths have no locks?”

After the soldiers had climbed down from the lookout and hid themselves from Walatta Petros’s party, some of them ran to their lord to tell him the good news.⁶ The voyagers, for their part, reached the lakeshore at Emabra and docked their tankwa. Since it was night and morning had not yet come, they did not see the soldiers who had hid themselves from them⁷ and lay in wait for them. Walatta Petros and her companions remained on the lakeshore until morning came and until Walatta Petros would be sent⁸ a mule.

¹ *Īgzi’ Īharāya* (The Lord has chosen her). She was the mother of Ethiopia’s most famous saint, Tāklā Haymanot. According to his hagiobiography, in her youth she was abducted by the wicked heathen king Motālāmi, who planned to assault her chastity. Before he could do so, however, she was miraculously saved by the Lord.

² *Motālāmi* (thus BDJ; CR: *Mātālomi*) may be partially derived from the word *motii* (or a variant thereof), the word for “king” in many Cushitic Ethiopian languages. Also, *lam* is the word for “cow” in Amharic, so perhaps the name indicates that he was the king of a pastoralist community.

³ Psalm 22[23]:4. In the Gəʿəz text, the grammatically masculine *əkuy* (evil) can refer to evil in the abstract or to an evil male person. Through this ambiguity, the text denounces Mälkə’a Krəstos.

⁴ Psalm 26[27]:1.

⁵ Psalm 55[56]:4.

⁶ BDJ: *kāmā yabsərəwwo* (to tell him the good news); CR: *kāmā yəbsərəwwo* [sic], editing the *kāmā yəbsərəwwo* (to break him) of Abb. 88.

⁷ BDJ: *ällä yəṯhabbə’əwwomu* (who had hid themselves from them); CR: *wä-täḥabb’əwwomu* (they had hid themselves from them).

⁸ BDJ: *wä-əskä yəfennəwu lati* (lit., and until they would send her); CR: *wä-əskä yəfennu lati* (and until he [Abba Fätlä Šəllase] would send her).

As soon as morning had come, the commander of the soldiers emerged from where he had hidden and wanted to arrest the monks. When they resisted him, he got rough with them and abused them, saying, “You are rascally monks who do violence to a married woman!” Today, though, God has abandoned you and given you into my hands.” He then held his sword sideways, inside its sheath, and struck them in order to frighten them. The commander hit *Abba Tazkaara Dinghil*’s legs and wounded him; the scar from the wound remained on his legs until he died.

Immediately, our holy mother Walatta Petros rose up in great anger, slapped the commander on his cheeks, and said to him, “You insolent servant,² how dare you disrespect me!”

Those [other] soldiers reached Malkiya Kristos and informed him [about finding Walatta Petros]. When he heard [this news] he rose up with joy, mounted his horse, and hurried to her. He forgot his oath and wanted to seize her and take her away, without *Abba Fatla Sillasé* and *Woyzaro Walatta Giyorgis* knowing.

He knocked her nun’s cap off her head, prodded her³ from behind with his feet, and said to her, “Get going!”

Upon that, our holy mother Walatta Petros immediately let herself fall on the ground and acted as if dead. She kept silent and obstinately⁴ stopped moving. It was not possible to put her on a mule. Malkiya Kristos then ordered his soldiers to transport her by grasping her wrists and ankles⁵ through her clothes. However, they [almost] were unable to move her.⁶ With great difficulty they carried her a short distance. Everywhere on their way there were thorns, and walking was difficult for them. Therefore, they set her on the ground. As for Malkiya Kristos, he became enraged, gnashing his teeth, frightening the soldiers, and scowling at them.

At that time, the soldiers began to implore Walatta Petros with gentle words, saying, “Our merciful and compassionate lady,⁷ have mercy on us and be kind to us, as is your custom! For if you resist us and we are unable to carry you therefore, our lord will get angry with us and will kill us. Comply with us and show us compas-

¹ *ʾammāšā*, the Gəʿəz verb employed here, means “to do injustice or violence to someone” and has been translated accordingly. It can also be employed for rape, however. Overtones of this are present here as becomes clear when the overbearing soldier makes a point of denouncing the monks’ alleged injustice against a “married woman” (*bəʾəsītā bəʾəsi*, lit., “a[nother] man’s woman”), effectively accusing them of having committed acts of sexual violence against WP, a charge all the more outrageous given their monastic commitment to chastity.

² Or “You disobedient servant,” if, assuming a common variation of Ethiopic orthography, one chooses to read *ʾəbuy gäbr* instead of the *ʾəbuy gäbr* of BDJ and CR.

³ Lit., *lākāfa nəstītā* (lightly touched her).

⁴ Lit., *bā-əkäy* (with malice).

⁵ BDJ: *əḥizomu bā-arbaʾtu šənāfihu* (lit., they grasping by the four extremities); CR: *əḥizomu arbaʾtā šənāfihu* (they grasping the four extremities).

⁶ According to the Jesuits, the women of the court often weighed quite a bit. WP had only just started her journey as a nun, and the text makes clear that she had all the softness of a wealthy woman.

⁷ The soldiers address WP in terms normally used only when addressing Saint Mary.

sion.” When she heard their words, she had mercy on them and stood up so they could put her on a mule.

While they said these things, there arrived envoys who had been sent by *Abba* Fatla Sillasé and *Woyzaro* Walatta Giyorgis. These envoys said to Malkiya Kristos, “How could you lie to us, deceive us,¹ and secretly, unknown to us, go and seize her on the road like a thief and bandit? You made a childish judgment! This decision of yours is not going to be a good one. Now we are telling you to come here, [to our home at Woynayat,] and she shall come too, so that we can effect a reconciliation between you. If, however, you refuse to come, being contemptuous of us and not heeding our word, we will consider ourselves wronged by you, and together with us God will have been wronged.”

When Malkiya Kristos heard this message,² he became afraid, changed his mind,³ and set off toward them. As for our holy mother Walatta Petros, they made her mount a mule and conveyed her to them at Woynayat, too. There *Abba* Fatla Sillasé and *Woyzaro* Walatta Giyorgis adjudicated between them, reconciled them, and dispatched them in peace. Thus our holy mother Walatta Petros and Malkiya Kristos returned to their region of Simaada.

Chapter 9: Our Mother Leaves Her Husband Again

After this, our holy mother Walatta Petros lived looking for a reason to separate from Malkiya Kristos. In those days, the faith of the Europeans had begun [in Ethiopia] and *Abuna* Simeon,⁴ the patriarch [of the Orthodox Church],⁵ had been killed, along with Yolyos,⁶ so that they became martyrs.⁷ That man, the patriarch’s killer,

¹ BDJ: *əfo . . . heṭkänä* (how could . . . you deceive us); CR: *əfo . . . meṭkä* (how could . . . you change).

² BDJ: *wä-sämi’o zäntä mäl’əktä* (lit., when he heard this message); CR: *wä-sämi’o zäntä Mälkä’a Krastos* (when Mälkä’a Krastos heard this).

³ Lit., *tämäytä* (to turn around, turn back), can be interpreted spatially or metaphorically.

⁴ *Säm’on* (Simon) was the Egyptian patriarch of the Täwahədo Church under Susənyos, and he refused to convert to Roman Catholicism. He supported the anti-Catholic rebel Yolyos, and after Yolyos was defeated in battle on 11 May 1617, Säm’on was dragged onto the battlefield, tortured, killed, and left for dead for two days. In a further affront to the faithful, his severed head was delivered to the king.

⁵ *Päppas* (patriarch or metropolitan), the highest-ranking figure in and head leader of the Täwahədo Church (also called the Coptic metropolitan), who always came from Egypt, being assigned by the head church in Alexandria.

⁶ *Yolyos* (Julius). Yolyos started off as a lowly lieutenant to Susənyos before the latter was made king. After, Susənyos married him to his daughter Mäləkotawit and made him the governor of Goḡgam. In 1609, however, Yolyos participated in a plot against Susənyos stopped by *Ras* Šə’älä Krastos. He then died fighting in the anti-Catholic rebellion of 11 May 1617.

⁷ BDJ: *wä-konu sāma’tä* (so that they became martyrs); CR: *wä-konä sāma’tä* (so that he became a martyr).

then took the patriarch’s vestment and gave it to Malkiya Kristos.¹ When our holy mother Walatta Petros learned [about this], her mind shuddered and she was filled with revulsion for Malkiya Kristos. She refused to come close to him and stopped sleeping with him.

She said to him, “How can I live with you when you are not a Christian? You have had the patriarch killed! And look: You have the patriarch’s vestment in your possession!”

After this, she ceased² eating and drinking, and abandoned beautifying herself in the manner of women. She did not style her hair or put on oils and perfumes, nor perfume herself by burning various fragrant substances, nor paint her fingernails, nor color her eyelids with kohl,³ nor adorn herself with beautiful clothes.⁴ She gave up all these things, as well as other similar ones. She lived like a nun, making herself wretched in every way.

When Malkiya Kristos saw our holy mother Walatta Petros’s behavior and the determination of her heart, and when furthermore it pleased God, he said to her on his own account, without anybody forcing him, “For how long will you live with me like this? Go where you please: I will not hinder you.”

She replied, “Swear to me that you will not go back on your word.”

So he swore to her. He also asked her likewise.⁵ So she swore to him.⁶

The next day she said to him, “Dispatch me according to your word.”

He replied, “Very well,” and ordered his soldiers to saddle a mule, make her mount it, and accompany her.

¹ BDJ: *näs’a ləbsä pappas wä-wāhabo lä-Mälkä’a Krastos* (took the patriarch’s vestment and gave it to Mälkä’a Krastos); CR: *wä-wāhabo ləbsä pappas lä-Mälkä’a Krastos* (gave the patriarch’s vestment to Mälkä’a Krastos). The text makes clear that Mälkä’a Krastos did not kill the patriarch. However, he did take part in the battle against Yolyos, and the killer knew Mälkä’a Krastos well enough that he gave him the patriarch’s garments of office.

² Lit., *ḥarrämät* (she anathematized).

³ BDJ: *wä-tä’atno mā’aza zä-zä-zi’ahu wä-gäbirä ṭəm’atatä ḥəbr zä-aşfar wä-täk’əḥlo a’yənt* (nor perfume herself by burning various fragrant substances, nor paint her fingernails, nor color her eyelids with kohl); CR instead only *wä-təwzəft* (and jewelry), but Conti Rossini notes that two lines were erased here in Abb. 88.

⁴ CR adds: *wä-ḥartämät* (and she became emaciated).

⁵ BDJ, Abb. 88: *wə’ətu-ni yəbela kāmāhu* (lit., he also said to her likewise); CR altered to: *wə’ətu-ni [wä]-yəbela [māḥali litä] kāmāhu* (he also [then] said to her, “[Swear to me] likewise”).

⁶ It is unclear why Mälkä’a Krastos needs WP to swear likewise since she has made no promises and he is the one who has reneged on a solemn promise. Perhaps he means that she should not change her mind and return to him since he wants to marry another. Perhaps it is intertextual. This exchange of vows is reminiscent of those exchanged between King Solomon and Makədda, the Queen of Sheba, in the fourteenth-century *Kəbrä Nəgəšt* (The Glory of the Kings), when Solomon uses vows to trick and seduce her. Makədda asks him to promise to take nothing of hers “by force” (namely, her virginity) and Solomon makes her promise that she will take nothing of his “by force.” When she takes up a glass of water in his house, he claims she broke her vow and has his way with her.

He also sent word to her family, "Take back your daughter. After¹ I reconciled with her, she never made me happy but only gave me displeasure. In addition, she is no longer one body with me as is the decree for husband and wife. From now on, she may do as she wants² and pleases."

At that time all the people of his household, men and women, wailed and cried and said to their lord, "Don't let her go!"

He replied, "But I have sworn an oath and therefore it is impossible for me to hold her back." It was not he who let her go, [however,] but rather the will of God that prevented him [from reneging].

Then our holy mother Walatta Petros mounted a mule and went on her way, with crying and wailing men and women seeing her off because she was leaving them. In sadness they returned to their homes. Those others who had been dispatched together with her took her to her brother Za-Dinghil,³ told him about their mission, and then returned home. Za-Dinghil received her well and accommodated her in his residence.

As for Walatta Petros, she was very happy and glad. She praised God, saying, "I would rather be a castaway in the house of God⁴ than live [pleasantly] in the house of sinners."⁵

When our holy mother Walatta Petros had left her home, she had not taken anything with her, neither gold nor silver to sustain her on the way,⁶ nor a staff, nor shoes, even though she was the wife of a lord and the daughter of noble parents. As our Lord said to the disciples, "Acquire for yourselves neither gold nor silver."⁷ Rather, she had left [her husband's home] with nothing, saying, "Naked did I emerge from my mother's womb, and naked will I return to the womb of the grave."⁸

As David says, "The law from your mouth is better for me than countless amounts of gold and silver."⁹ "This is why I have loved your commandment more than gold and topaz."¹⁰ What, then, is God's commandment? Is it not to renounce possessions and to carry the cross? Our Lord further says, "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom

of Heaven."¹¹ In addition, the *Sayings of the Fathers*² relate, "Dear ones, what is gold? Is it not an evil shackle and a chain? Iron only destroys the body, while gold is an affliction for the body and a torment for the soul." And again Paul says, "The love of money is the root of all evil" because through it many went astray and deserted their faith.³ This is why our holy mother Walatta Petros also abhorred worldly wealth and regarded it as nothing.

Chapter 10: Our Mother Leaves Her Brother's House to Become a Nun

A short time thereafter, when our holy mother Walatta Petros had made up her mind to go away and become a nun, she said to her brother Za-Dinghil, "Allow me to go visit my [spiritual] teacher [*Abba* Fatla Sillasé] because he is sick and suffers. It has been a long time since I have seen him. If he dies without me seeing him, he will curse me. Truly, the spiritual father is greater than the corporeal father."

Za-Dinghil replied, "Go ahead," not realizing that she had spoken to him deceptively and with cunning words;⁴ she appeared sincere to him.⁵ Thus he ordered his retainers to saddle a mule for her, help her to mount it, guard her⁶ [on the way], and conduct her to her teacher. They acted on her behalf as her brother had ordered them. Thus she went, while with her were her maidservants who [always] followed her.

When she was close to reaching the town [of Robeet], she told the retainers, "Help me dismount. I will camp here today. I don't want to increase the burden on my teacher since we are many and he cannot host [all of] us. So, you, return on your way. You can collect me again another day because I will remain with my teacher quite a while." With these words, she sent them away, and they went.

She had already premeditated this decision with her teacher. He had devised this ruse craftily⁷ so that they would not feel betrayed by or hostile toward him. [Thus] our holy mother Walatta Petros stayed behind, together with her maidservants.

¹ DJ: *am-dāhrā* (after); B, CR: *am-kāmā* (as soon as).

² BDJ: *tagbār zā-fāqādāt* (lit., she may do what she wants); CR: *tānbār zā-fāqādāt* (she may live what [sic] she wants).

³ *Zā-Dāngāl* (He of the Virgin [Mary]) is WP's fourth brother, an important lord of the court.

⁴ BDJ: *wastā betā agzi'abher* (in the house of God); CR: *wastā agzi'abher* (in God).

⁵ Psalms 83[84]:10.

⁶ BDJ: *i-wārqā wā-i-bārurā sənqā lā-fānot* (lit., neither gold nor silver as provisions for the way); CR: *i-wārqā wā-i-bārurā wā-i-sənqā lā-fānot* (neither gold nor silver nor provisions for the way).

⁷ Matthew 10:9.

⁸ Job 1:21. The original Hebrew does not have the second "womb," just "return to the grave."

⁹ Psalm 118[119]:72.

¹⁰ Psalm 118[119]:127.

¹ Matthew 19:24; Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25.

² *Nägārā Abāw* may be a loose title for *Apophthegmata Patrum Aegyptiorum* (Sayings of the Desert [lit., Egyptian] Fathers) or it may not be a title at all, but simply mean here "a saying of the Fathers is as follows." We have not been able to locate the saying in other sources.

³ 1 Timothy 6:10.

⁴ BDJ: *bā-tāṭbabā nāgār* (lit., with a ruseful discourse); CR: *bā-ṭabābā nāgār* (with a prudent discourse).

⁵ It is still the case that women steal away from their families to become nuns (Wright 2001, 16–17, 56). Many never communicate with their families again, because they are supposed "to leave one's blood relatives, riches, and worldly pleasure," according to the *Fatḥa Nāgāšt* (Ibn al-ʿAssāl 1968, 67).

⁶ J: *yāṣāwwānāwwa* (guard her); BD: *yāṣāwwānāwwa* (seek refuge with her); CR: *yāṣurāwwa* (carry her).

⁷ BDJ: *tāṭābbābā* (lit., he had acted craftily); CR: *tāṭābbābāt* (she had acted craftily). Since WP engaged in lying in order to escape living under the authority of the men in her family,



Plate 5. How our mother left her brother's house with a maidservant (top) and "how the owner of the house said to her: 'You can spend the night [here]'" (bottom) (MS A, f. 146v © SLUB Mscr.Dresd. Eb.415.e,2).

She proceeded to the house of one of the people of a [nearby] town and spent the night there.¹ However, when it was deep night and all the maidservants were asleep, she woke up a young servant girl² to guide her³ [to her teacher's house]. Together with that girl, she then stealthily left, walking on foot, while her blood flowed like water because the sharp edges of the stones cut into her feet. They were truly soft, like the feet of an infant just come from its mother's womb. The people who saw⁴ that blood [the next morning] wondered among themselves:

"What is this blood? Is it the blood of a goat or a sheep that a leopard has torn apart, or that a thief has slaughtered?"

On her part, our holy mother Walatta Petros, proceeding slowly together with the girl, reached the town of Robeet [the next day,] and [entered] into the Presentation of Our Lady Mary Church,⁵ its sanctuary. She sat down in the church courtyard of the people of that place.

They, however, said to her, "Get up! We don't have a lodging place here. Rather, go into the town where you will find lodging."⁶

She replied, "I will not go to the town but will stay in your courtyard." Then, when evening came, they allowed her into a hut that a nun had abandoned. For that week, our holy mother Walatta Petros went and lived there, together with that girl. She came to like that hut very much and wanted to stay there until God's judgment.⁷

Chapter 11: Our Mother Finds a New Servant

That girl gave her much trouble, however, more than that of one hundred people.⁸ So Walatta Petros became very distressed and said [to herself], "If I found someone who, for my benefit, would take her [with them], I would send her back. I would

the text allays any concerns about her behavior by explaining that it was not she but her teacher who devised this falsehood.

¹ A home was traditionally several buildings inside a fenced compound, with buildings for people, animals, and storage. Wealthy people often had separate buildings for cooking and receiving guests. Poor people would have only one. Most buildings would be round and windowless with adobe walls, thatched roofs, and only one door. The floor and walls were smooth, with built-in clay benches.

² Lit., *ḥaṣan* (infant).

³ Lit., *kāmā tatlāwa* (so that she [WP] could follow her [the girl]).

⁴ BDJ: *wā-ällä rā'yu sāb'* (the people who saw); CR: *wā-sobā rā'yu sāb'* (when people saw).

⁵ Lit., *betā krastīyanā ʿġzā tənā Maryam Zā-Bā'ata* (lit., the church of Our Lady Mary, of Her Entry). This church is named after the ritual in which a girl Mary was presented by her parents to serve in the temple, according to the Apocrypha.

⁶ The townspeople's unfriendliness may have something to do with her husband's actions in destroying the town previously.

⁷ Lit., *askā tātḥāṭāḥ bā-ʿgzi'abher* (until she would be judged [or released] by God).

⁸ BDJ: *'abiyā hukātā zā-yabāzzāḥ ʾm-hukātā 100 sāb'* (lit., much trouble, more than the trouble of one hundred people); CR omits *100*, resulting in the translation, "much trouble, more than [ordinary] people [would]."



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"Mercy and justice have met, righteousness and peace have kissed."¹ "It is good and pleasant indeed when sisters are together."²

As for our holy mother Walatta Petros, nobody resembled or equaled her in all kinds of work.³ If she occupied herself with the preparation of the *wot* stew, it turned out tasty and delicious smelling, and so abundant that it exceeded the measure. Or if she went out into the countryside in order to collect [fire]wood, a large load immediately⁴ came together for her. In all she did, God gave her success. Furthermore, she used to go to a faraway river carrying a jar.⁵ There she would draw water and carry [it back].⁶ [To do so,] she had to climb up a steep ascent on all fours.⁷ On that path, there was a large stone where she used to sit down and rest a bit, catching her breath, because her body was exhausted. People call this stone "Walatta Petros's Resting Place," and even today everybody who goes up or down [this ascent] kisses and salutes it. It will remain⁸ a monument to the memory of her name⁹ until the consummation of the world. From there, she would then rise up [again], carrying that jar and returning to their home. Everybody who saw her marveled. [Walking] the length of the path to that river took from dawn to the third hour¹⁰ [i.e., 9:00 AM].

The sisters who were with her did likewise because she was their example and she taught them the works of humility. As our Lord says, "He who among you wants to be a leader should be a servant to the others."¹¹ Similarly, [the Apostle] Peter says, "Be examples for his flock, so that when the Lord of the shepherds appears, you may obtain the crown of glory that does not wither."¹²

25 In the monastery there also were idle and lazy nuns who did no work at all and lived in sloth. They let their fingernails grow and did *hatsanaa* beautifying.¹³ Yet

¹ Psalm 84[85]:10.

² Psalm 132[133]:1. The author has changed the biblical "brothers" to "sisters."

³ BDJ: *bä-šota k"əllu tāgbar* (in all kinds of work); CR: *bä-šota k"əllu tāgbar zä-zä-zi'ahu* (in all the various kinds of work).

⁴ BDJ: *fəṭunä wä-bä-gizeha* (lit., quickly and immediately); CR *fəṭunä* (quickly).

⁵ BDJ, Abb. 88: *kora* (a jar). CR mistakenly altered this to *korä*, the accusative of *kor* (saddle).

⁶ BDJ: *wä-təqäddəḥ mayä wä-təšäwwər* (lit., she would draw water and carry); CR omits.

⁷ Walking long distances, drawing water, and then carrying it home on one's back was the daily and extremely laborious task of most women in Ethiopia. As a woman from a noble family, WP would not have been used to such tasks.

⁸ Lit., *wä-konä* (it has become).

⁹ BDJ: *lä-täzkarä səma* (to the memory of her name); CR: *lä-täzkarä zi'aha* (to her memory).

¹⁰ Ethiopians count the hours as they do in the Bible, from sunrise, with the first hour of the day ending at 7:00 AM. Thus, the third hour of the day is 9:00 AM.

¹¹ BDJ: *yəkunkəmu gäbrä* (lit., should be a servant to you [masc. pl.]); CR: *yəkun gäbrä* (should be a servant). Mark 10:44; Matthew 20:27.

¹² 1 Peter 5:2, 4.

¹³ The term *ḥašāna* (BDJ, CR) is very uncommon and does not appear in any of the standard dictionaries. The Italian translator Ricci squarely admitted that he was at a loss (Gälawdewos 1970, 23n6), and other Gə'əz scholars we consulted did not know the word

when they saw the humility and toil of our holy mother Walatta Petros, they began to scold and rebuke themselves, saying, "Woe and doubly woe are we who have spent our days in laziness and indolence, even though we are poor people's daughters and the wives of Walatta Petros's servants and retainers.¹ Normally we would be grinding [grain] and fetching water. We have not been mindful² of the day of our death and have ignored that there will be a retribution for the lazy. Yet, Walatta Petros—a lady, a daughter of nobles, and the wife of a lord—has made herself poor and entered through the narrow gate that leads to eternal life. By contrast, we are in the broad gate that leads to perdition."³ Having considered this, they repented of their past behavior, emulated our holy mother Walatta Petros, and began to work like her.

Of how many virtuous deeds of our holy mother Walatta Petros could we tell? They are oh so many! Moreover, the prayers, prostrations, and virtuous deeds that she performed secretly remain unknown: the works of the righteous are concealed.

Chapter 14: King Susinyos Establishes the Filthy Faith of the Europeans

After this,⁴ King Susinyos began to make changes and established the filthy faith of the Europeans [i.e., Roman Catholicism], which says: Christ has two natures, [even] after He, [in his divine and human natures,] became one⁵ and he became the perfect human being. [Thereby,] Susinyos repudiated the holy faith of Alexandria,⁶

either. The root *ḥ-š-n* denotes the semantic field of caretaking, derived from a basic meaning of womb/lap. In Tigrinya, *ḥašənot* means what the bride does to prepare to welcome the bridegroom, which includes putting oil in one's hair, brightening one's face, putting on woody perfumes, and making one's palms black. Thus, it seems that the nuns were doing some kind of grooming or beautifying, perhaps even manicures or hennaing the hands, which would not be appropriate for women withdrawn from the world.

¹ BDJ: *anəstiya agbərtaḥa wä-wä'aləyaniha* (lit., the wives of her servants and retainers); CR: *wä-i-nəkäwwən əm-a'matiha wä-wä'aləyaniha* (and we would not be among her maid-servants and retainers). Previously married women could remain married (but celibate) even after they became nuns.

² BDJ: *i-täzäkkärnä* (we have not been mindful); CR: *əsmä i-täzäkkärnä* (truly, we have not been mindful).

³ Matthew 7:13.

⁴ BDJ, Abb. 88 here all add a *sobä* (when), which does not make sense syntactically. Therefore, our translation here follows CR, who ignored this *sobä* in his print edition.

⁵ B, CR: *täwähadä* (became one); DJ: *täwähadä* (became one). The English translation is identical; however, the verb in DJ here is of a different stem, which more strongly suggests a reciprocal union of the two natures *with each other*.

⁶ The Egyptian metropolis of Alexandria is invoked because it was the seat of the patriarch of the Coptic Church, whom the Täwähädo Church recognized at the time as their supreme spiritual authority.

which says as follows: Christ became the perfect human being; he is not split or divided in anything he does;¹ [he is] one Son. [In him] there is [only] one aspect, one essence, and one divine nature,² namely, that of God the logos.³

When our holy mother Walatta Petros heard this, she could not bear it but withdrew⁴ and fled from place to place, exiling herself until she reached Tsiyaat⁵ together with her female companions, whom we mentioned before.

As the Gospel says, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness because they will have the Kingdom of Heaven.”⁶ It further says, “Turn away from the lying prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing while inside they are ravenous wolves.”⁷ By their fruits you shall know them.”⁸ In addition, Paul says, “Our brothers, I implore you to beware of those⁹ who create turmoil and bring quarrels against the doctrine you have learned.”¹⁰ Truly, they serve their belly and not God, and with artful language and pleasant manners lead astray many simple people.”¹¹ Do not waver and “do not place yourselves under the yoke of the unbelievers.”¹² Therefore, leave their midst and separate from them. God says, “Do not come close to the impure. I will receive you and be your father, and you will be my sons and daughters.”¹³ [Thus] says God who has power over everything. Fur-

¹ BDJ: *bä-kʷəllu gəbru* (lit., in all his deeds/conduct/activity); CR: *bä-kʷəllu* (in anything [lit., in everything]).

² *1-raʿy wä-1-həllawə wä-1-mäläkot*. Lit., *raʿy* (vision), but in this context we take it to mean what is seen, hence “aspect.”

³ These same words are found in the sixth line of the hymn of praise for Monday in the *Wəddase Maryam* (Praise for Mary), which Budge translates as “He was a perfect man, without division and without separation, in all His work the Only-begotten, but with one form, one being, and one divinity (or Godhead)—God the Word” (1933a, 282). See “The Text’s Religious Context” in this volume.

⁴ The Gəʿəz equivalents of English “to bear” and “to withdraw” are closely similar: *ተግግሠ* *täʿaggäsä* and *ተገሰሠ* *tägəhsä*. By using them in proximity to each other, the author displays literary skill.

⁵ BDJ: *hagärä Şəyat* (lit., the town or district of Şəyat); CR: *hagärä Şəyan*. This town or district is around one hundred miles due east of Lake Tana. The error in CR, spelling the name with a final “n,” and thus Ricci’s translation “Şyān,” lead some scholars to say that WP went to the home of Zion (the Ark of the Covenant), which is Aksum, but nothing in the text says she went there.

⁶ Matthew 5:10.

⁷ DJ: *täkʷəlat mäsäṭṭ* (ravenous wolves); B, CR: *täkʷəlat wä-mäsäṭṭ* (wolves and predators).

⁸ Matthew 7:15–16.

⁹ BDJ: *täʿaqəbəwwomu* (beware of those); CR: *täʿaqəbəwwomu* (you will guard those [sic]).

¹⁰ Based on the original Greek, our translation assumes a Gəʿəz original of *zä-tāmāharkamu* (that you [masc. pl.] have learned). By contrast, BDJ have: *tagbäru* (lit., so that you [masc. pl.] do/perform); CR: *tənbäru* (so that you [masc. pl.] endure).

¹¹ Romans 16:17–18.

¹² 2 Corinthians 6:14.

¹³ 2 Corinthians 6:17–18.

thermore, the *Rules for the Monks*¹ says, “Do not pray² together with *arseesaan*,³ that is to say, heretics.”⁴

This is why our holy mother Walatta Petros kept away [from them] and fled, going to the faraway region [of Tsiyaat] so as not to hear the blasphemy of the Europeans and not to have company with anyone who had joined that creed.

There she lived, dedicating herself devotedly to the service of God with fasts and prayers. She also rendered service with the same works as before, by grinding [cereals], drawing water, and gathering wood in the countryside, while her feet were being injured by the pricking of thorns, by sharp splinters of wood, and by small stones,⁵ until they bled abundantly. Those who saw that blood on the way said to one another, “This blood⁶ is from Walatta Petros.”

She and her companions also used to go to the harvested fields in order to glean [leftover] grain; they would collect it for their sustenance. When she started to glean, after a little while her basket would suddenly fill up for her.⁷ Even though she would pour [its contents] into a leather sack or another basket, they would not harmfully diminish because God’s blessing was in her hands. Those [other] sisters would glean [only] a small quantity, however.

[One time,] when the owner of the field came and saw her gleanings as opposed to theirs, he reviled her and said about her, “She has stolen from my sheaves, that was how she so quickly filled it!” Then, injuriously,⁸ he scattered all that she had gathered on the ground. She was not sad, however, and did not grumble at all when he reviled her and harmed her by pouring it out,⁹ but was patient and accepted with praise [for God] all that happened to her.

¹ *Ḥənşa mənākosat* is a section of the *Haymanotä Abäw*, the most important expression of the Təwəhədo Church creed during this period.

² BDJ: *i-təşälləyu* (do not pray [neg. imper. pl.]); CR: *i-təşəlləyu* (you [pl.] will not pray).

³ From Greek *haireisis* (heresy), which in Gəʿəz came to be understood to refer not to a false doctrine but to its adherents.

⁴ A modern Ethiopian print edition of the *Haymanotä Abäw* gives this sentence as follows: *i-təşälli məslä arisan zä-wəʾatomu ʿalawəyan* (Do not pray [neg. imper. sg.] together with *arseesaan*, that is to say, heretics) (Anonymous 1994, chap. 20, sec. 3; p. 56, l. 17). In the *WP gädl*, by contrast, the text is: *i-təşälləyu məslä arisan zä-wəʾatomu mānafəqan* (Do not pray [neg. imper. pl.] with *arseesaan*, that is to say, heretics). In addition to the singular versus plural contrast in the imperative, both versions also differ with regard to the term they use for heretics, namely, *ʿalawəyan* versus *mānafəqan*. The first one has a strong connotation of rebellion, whereas the second one carries overtones of a lack of conviction.

⁵ BDJ: *wä-bä-aʿban dəqqaq* (and by small stones); CR: *wä-baʿədan dəqiq* (and other small objects).

⁶ BDJ: *däm* (blood); CR omits.

⁷ *Yəməlləʾ lati*, which can be transitive or intransitive, and thus can also be translated as “he [i.e., God] filled [it] for her.”

⁸ Lit., *bati* (on her), a syntactic structure modeled on Amharic, the negative equivalent to more frequent *lati* (to her benefit), on which we had a note when this pattern first appeared. See also our explanation in “Translation Principles and Procedures.”

⁹ BDJ: *yəkəʿu bati* (lit., poured out to her detriment); CR: *yəkəʿu lati* (poured out for her benefit [sic]).

Chapter 15: Our Mother Preaches and Incurs the King's Wrath

27 While our holy mother Walatta Petros lived like this in that region¹ [of Tsiyaat], she became animated by religious zeal and could not contain it. She exhorted the people of the town not to accept the filthy faith of Leo² and not to mention the name of the apostate king during the Liturgy since he was outside the true faith and accursed. As Paul says, "If an angel from above taught you something different from that which we have taught you, let him be accursed."³

When King Susinyos heard about this talk, he became extremely angry and exceedingly furious. He roared like a lion and threatened Walatta Petros's brothers and [other] relatives. He proclaimed against them, "I call the sky and the earth as witnesses against you! I swear by my mighty kingdom⁴ that I will punish you, that you will die a terrible death, and that I will purge your memory from the earth if you don't quickly bring in Walatta Petros. Behold, [with her words] she has stripped me of my kingship, rebelled against me, betrayed me, and insulted me as well as my faith. She has subverted the hearts of that town's people so that they don't accept my faith and don't mention my name in the Liturgy. Before, there was no enmity between you and me. From now on, though, I have a feud with you!"

When Walatta Petros's relatives heard the threats that the king spoke against them, they became very afraid and were shaken because that king was fierce. He did not show clemency to anyone; as he said he would do, he would do.

So, they sent her these words, "Behold, all of us will perish on account of you! None of us will be spared,⁵ neither young nor old, because the king is angry indeed and has proclaimed against us and promised us death. He has said to us, 'Walatta Petros has stripped me of my kingship and rebelled against me. If you don't bring her in quickly, you will die a terrible death.' Now we say to you: Come quickly, don't tarry, and don't determine our death, because you are flesh from our flesh and bone from our bone: your mother and your brothers."⁶

When she heard this message, our holy mother Walatta Petros became very sad and took counsel with her companions. All of them together, unanimously,⁷ said, "We prefer to go and die for our faith than that our relatives die on our account. Do

¹ BDJ: *bä-wə'ətu hagär* (in that region); CR: *bä-wəstä hagär* (in the region).

² *Layon*. Pope Leo I was a fifth-century head of the Roman Catholic Church. He wrote a theological treatise important to the Council of Chalcedon, which approved the doctrine of the dual nature of Christ. The Täwähädo Church rejected this council and saw Leo as emblematic of the heresy.

³ Galatians 1:8.

⁴ *Mängəšt* can mean "kingdom," "rule," or "kingship."

⁵ BDJ: *i-yətarraf'a aḥadu'a əmännə'a* (lit., not one of us will be spared); CR: *i-nətarraf'a aḥadä'a* [sic] *əmännə'a* (we will not be spared, not one of us).

⁶ BDJ: *əmməki wä-aḥawki* (your mother and your brothers); CR: *əmməki wä-aḥawki nəḥnä* (we are your mother and your brothers).

⁷ Lit.: *bä-1 qal* (with one voice).

we not hope and wait for this [anyway]?¹ Our faith² is with us in our hearts; no one can rob us [of it]. As the Gospel says,³ 'As for Mary, she has chosen the good part, which will not be taken away from her.'⁴

Having said these things, they set out from there and returned [to her familial home]. [There] our holy mother Walatta Petros met with her mother and her brothers. They implored her, "Do not violate the word of the king, so that he will not kill you and us because of your rebelling."

What is more, her mother lifted her breasts and said to her, "Am I not your mother who nurtured you with these breasts of mine? Do you have no regard for me?"⁵

However, our holy mother Walatta Petros did not listen to their words and did not bend her mind to their advice. As the apostles say, "Is it right that we should listen to you and not to God? We prefer to please God than to please men."⁶

Chapter 16: Our Mother Appears Before King Susinyos

At that time, the king was in his castle. He ordered that her relatives bring her to him, so they took her in. She went hoping to die for the true faith. With her went her mother and her brothers: they followed her in tears, as if they were seeing her off to death, like a corpse that is taken away to be buried.

Our holy mother Walatta Petros did not lift her face and did not look at them, however, but rather said to them, "Why do you cry and break my heart? Why do you place an obstacle in my way? Do not cry for me but rather cry over yourselves. Truly, from now on nothing bothers me. Truly, I carry the suffering of Christ in my flesh.

"Who can make me abandon my love for Christ? Suffering? Tribulation? Exile, hunger, nakedness, the sword, anguish?"⁷ As scripture says, 'Because of you, [Lord,] they will kill us every day.'⁸ We have become like sheep that will be slaughtered."

¹ BDJ: *akko-nu zāntä nəseffo wä-nəšännəḥ* (do we not hope and wait for this?); CR with an emphatic construction: *akko-nu zāntä zä-nəseffo wä-nəšännəḥ* (is it not this that we hope and wait for?).

² CR adds *nəḥnä* (we).

³ BDJ: *bä-kämä yəbe* (lit., as it [or: He] says); CR: *bä-kämä yəbe əgzi'anä* (as our Lord says).

⁴ Luke 10:42. This is not the Virgin Mary, the mother of Christ, but Mary of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus and Martha. She chose to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to his words rather than assist her sister Martha in the domestic chores necessary to care for the guests. Jesus praised her choice.

⁵ A mother lifting her breasts or pointing to them to remind a child of her sacrifices was a common gesture in Ethiopia.

⁶ Acts 4:19–20; 1 Thessalonians 2:4.

⁷ Romans 8:35. While one would expect "what" as the initial interrogative, the Greek original also has "who" (*tis*). In addition, for rhetorical effect, the Ethiopian author has changed the pronoun from "us" to "me" and the verb from "separate" to "abandon."

⁸ BDJ: *'əlätä* (day); CR: *amirä* (day).

⁹ Psalm 43[44]:22; Romans 8:36.

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'I am confident, however, that nothing can make me abandon the love for God through Jesus Christ: neither death, nor life; neither angels,¹ nor nobles;² neither what is, nor what will come; neither someone powerful, nor anything above nor the abyss;³ not even being born again in hell.⁴ There is nothing that can make me abandon the love of Christ. As for me, I will always be faithful and will never renege. Nobody whosoever can persuade my heart that I should renounce my faith, whether they frighten me with banishment to remote places, put me into the fire, throw me to the lions, drown me in the great lake, cut up my body and my limbs, or punish me with each and every sort of torture.⁵ Still, I will never renounce my faith. Rather I am strong of heart through the word of our Lord Jesus Christ,⁶ who says, 'Do not fear those who kill your flesh. Your soul nobody can kill. Rather, fear him who has permission, after having killed,⁷ to put soul and body together into the fire of hell.'⁸

Continuing [on her way], our holy mother Walatta Petros then arrived at the king's castle. The king ordered all the great lords, nobles, learned men, and judges to assemble, and they did as the king had commanded. They all assembled, richly adorned, in great magnificence, and sat down in a circle, according to their ranks and orders.⁹ Then the king commanded that they bring in our holy mother Walatta Petros. She came and stood in front of them with a determined heart and a strong faith. She did not tremble¹⁰ due to their magnificence, the great number of their assembly, or their empty talk. As David said, "Why are the gentiles in uproar, and why do the people make empty talk? The kings of the earth have risen up, and the rulers have conspired with them against God and against his Anointed One."¹¹

¹ *Mäla'akt* can also mean "captains" or "lords."

² *Qäddämt* can also mean "forefathers" or "ancestors."

³ Romans 8:38–39. As in the earlier quote from Romans 8:35, the verb is changed from "separate" to "abandon."

⁴ BDJ: *wä-i-dagäm lädät zä-mäthät* (lit., and not the second birth of below); Abb. 88: *wä-i-gädäm sädät zä-mäthät* (and not the wilderness exile of below), which CR altered to *wä-i-gädäm [wä-i-sädät zä-mäthät* (and not the wilderness, and not exile of below).

⁵ WP or the author may be thinking of the suffering of various martyrs in the *Sənkəssar*, but perhaps just the future events of WP's own life, since she was banished to a remote place, her guard attempted to burn her to death, her community was attacked by a lion, she almost drowned in Lake Tana, and her feet were cut by sharp stones.

⁶ BDJ: *bä-qalä əgzi'anä Iyäsus Krəstos* (through the word of our Lord Jesus Christ); CR: *bä-qalä əgzi'abher əgzi'anä Iyäsus Krəstos* (through the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ).

⁷ BDJ: *əm-dəhrä qätälä* (lit., after he killed); CR: *əm-dəhrä yəqättäl* (after he kills).

⁸ Matthew 10:28.

⁹ BDJ: *wä-näbäru 'awdä bā-bā-mānabərtihomu wä-bā-bā-sər'atomu* (and sat down in a circle, according to their ranks and orders); CR: *wä-näbäru 'awdä mānabərtihomu wä-bā-bā-sər'atomu* (and sat down in a circle of their chairs, according to their orders).

¹⁰ BDJ: *wä-i-gäggäšät* (she did not tremble); CR: *wä-i-dängäšät* (she was not terrified).

¹¹ Psalm 2:1–2. The author thus compares WP to Christ, the Anointed One.

Walatta Petros, by contrast, stood alone,¹ according to the procedure for a rebel against the king.² Then those charged with speaking for the king³—[while he stayed in another room]—said to her, "You have rebelled against the king, you have rebelled against God. You have resisted his order, you have transgressed against his word, and you have blasphemed against his faith.⁴ You have subverted the hearts of the people of the land so that they don't accept his faith and don't mention his name in the Liturgy!"

However, our holy mother Walatta Petros did not respond or reply at all. Rather she listened with her head bowed and a critical smile, but humbly said, "I have not reviled the king. Rather, I will never renounce my faith."

On his part, the king regularly sent servants to inquire, "What does she say?"⁵

They told him, "She does not respond at all. Rather she keeps silent and expresses amusement."

Upon that, the king became enraged and said, "She despises me,⁶ laughs at me, and mocks me," and ordered that she be killed or [at least] her breasts cut off.

At that point [Walatta Petros's husband] Malkiya Kristos stood up before the king and said to him soothingly, "My lord, do not lose your temper. It is not due to contempt for you that she is laughing. Rather, an [evil] spirit that has been residing in her since her childhood makes her laugh."

With these words, Malkiya Kristos calmed the king's rage. Truly, Malkiya Kristos [still] loved Walatta Petros very much. As for our holy mother Walatta Petros, she did not fear death and was not terrified by the king's majesty.⁷ As Peter says, "Do not fear that which strikes you with awe, and do not be terrified by it. Rather

¹ BDJ: *wä-yə'əti-ssä təqäwwəm bahtita* (lit., she by contrast stood alone); Abb. 88: *wä-yəhtətəwwa* (let them interrogate her), which CR altered to *wä-yəhattətəwwa* (they interrogated her).

² Other women underwent this type of court trial during this period. The Jesuit Pedro Páez excerpted and translated a section from Susənyos's royal chronicle about the court trial of Wälättä Giyorgis, the daughter of the former king Šārša Dəngəl (r. 1563–97), because she refused to convert to Catholicism (2011, 2:252).

³ BDJ: *'aqabəyanä nābib zä-nəguś* (lit., the guardians of speech for the king); CR: *'aqabəyanä nəguś* (the officials of the king).

⁴ At this point the multiple masc. possessive pronouns in the sentence are ambiguous. Whose order has WP allegedly resisted and against whose word has she allegedly transgressed: God's or the king's? Only subsequently does it become clear that the officials' reference is to the king. This ambiguity may be their way of ascribing almost divine authority to the king.

⁵ BDJ: *məntä təbəl wä-məntä tawäššə'* (lit., what does she say and respond); CR: *məntä tawäššə'* (what does she respond). According to Ethiopian court protocol, the king would not have been present at the inquiry.

⁶ BDJ, CR: *sobä tastäḥəqqərāni* (lit., when she despises me). But *sobä* (when) does not make sense here, so we do not consider it in our translation.

⁷ Lit., *gərmahu* (his or its [namely, death's] majesty). *Gə'əz* does not have a neuter in the third-person singular, therefore the masculine possessive suffix *-hu* could potentially also refer to nongendered death.

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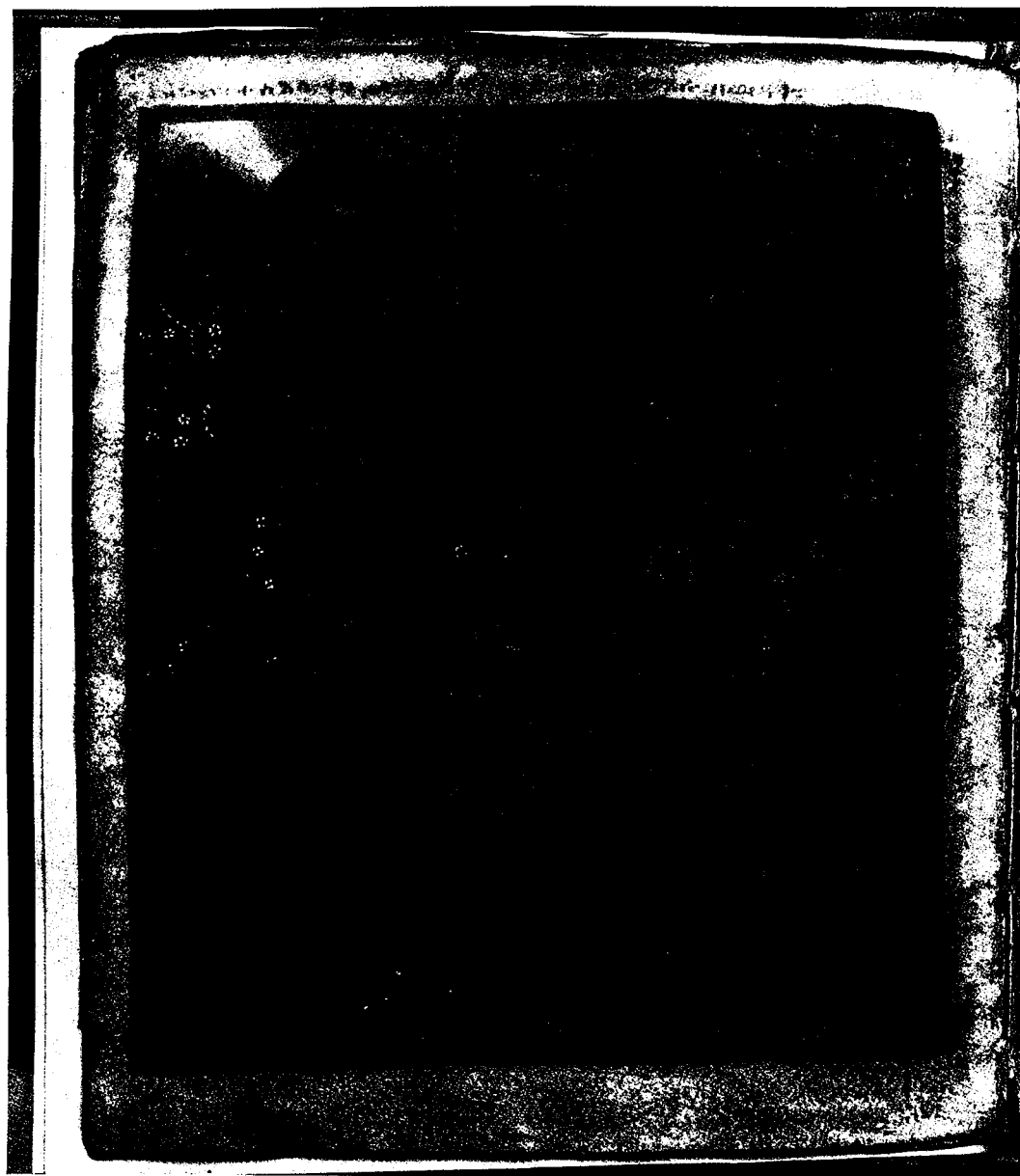


Plate 7. “How King Susinyos questioned her about her faith and looked at her in anger” and how “the great lords” watched her being questioned. It seems that her husband stands next to her, advising the king not to kill her (MS A, f. 147v © SLUB Mscr.Dresd.Eb.415.e,2).

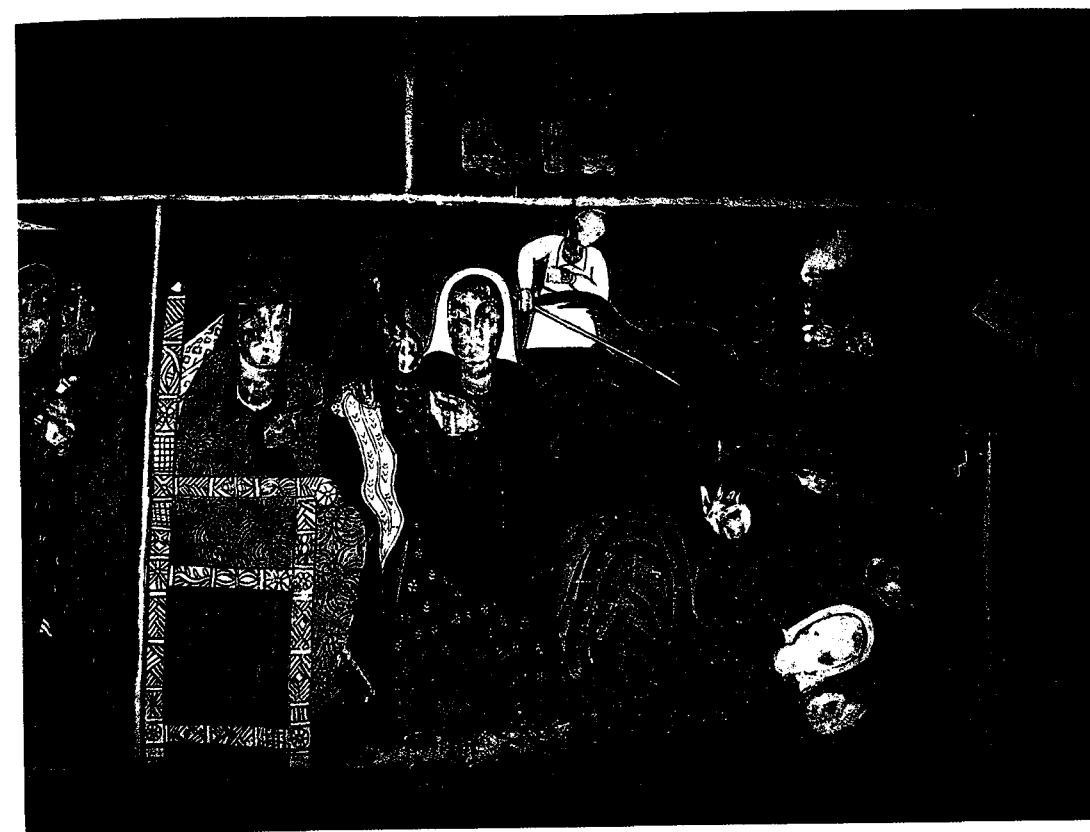


Plate 8. Mural prepped for restoration at Réma Monastery Church of our mother confronting King Susinyos. Photo by Wendy Laura Belcher, January 2011.

sanctify God with all your heart.”¹ So, Walatta Petros prayed,² “You who have strengthened the prophets, strengthen me! You who have strengthened the apostles, strengthen me! You who have strengthened the martyrs, strengthen me so that I die for the sake of your name and receive the crown of martyrdom.”

The king’s counselors then advised him, “Hear us, O King! It is better for you to abandon [the idea of] killing a woman than to have her entire lineage, [the house of] Dawaro and Fatagar, as your enemies.”³

The king replied, “If she leaves me alone⁴ and keeps quiet, leave her alone.”

¹ 1 Peter 3:14–15.

² Lit., *təbəl* ([she] says).

³ DJ: *ašrarākä* (as your enemies); CR: *ašrarä* (as enemies); B illegible.

⁴ Abb. 88 adds *zä-konä* (that which happened), which makes no sense in the context (thus already CR 30n2; nonetheless, he did not edit here). Obviously, it is a copying error due to *zä-konä* of the next sentence in Abb. 88/CR.



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All of this happened, however,¹ because it did not please God for her to walk down this path [of martyrdom].² Rather, he had prepared another path for her, namely, the path of Anthony and Macarius,³ just as the monk before her conception had said that she would guard his flocks. Truly, our Lord says, “My Father has many dwelling places.”⁴

They let her go then, but told her, “Don’t go to a faraway region, and don’t teach again. Rather, stay with your family.” So, her family took her and made her live with them.

Chapter 17: Our Mother Escapes Ras Silla Kristos

Then many theological teachers who were of the true faith came there. They found comfort in Walatta Petros’s presence, and encouragement through each other.

Soon thereafter, she fled [again] and entered the monastic settlement of Zagé. With her were Walatta Pawlos, Eheta Kristos, and many others, as well as her maidservants Iyopraxia, Maryamawet, and Eskindirawet. *Abba* Tsigé Haymanot was also there with them. He used to comfort and encourage them.⁵ They lived together in peace.

31 Then a wily man came there deceitfully, under the guise of a friend wanting to visit them, just like that man who had visited *Abba* Babnooda.⁶ They did not understand that he had come in bad faith, however, and offered him good food,⁷ which he

¹ BDJ: *zā-ni konä* (lit., this however happened); CR: *zā-ni zā-konä* (this thing however which happened).

² The text frequently addresses the fact that WP was not a martyr. Such was not strictly required of a saint, but she sometimes struggled with this fate, as did Saint Paul himself in Phillipians 1:21–25, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. . . . But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress.”

³ Name forms in DJ: *Ἐντωνῶς, Μάκαρας*; in CR: *Ἐντωνῶς, Μάκαρας*; in B: *Ἐντος [sic], Μάκαρας*. These are two of the Desert Fathers, ascetics who lived in fourth-century Egypt and founded Christian monasticism. Saint Anthony is frequently invoked in Gəʿəz hagiobiographies, usually with his disciple, Saint Macarius.

⁴ John 14:2.

⁵ Gəʿəz distinguishes between masculine and feminine third-person plural object pronouns (English “them”). The Gəʿəz text here, as well as at the end of the preceding sentence, has the masculine form, which is also used for mixed-gender groups. The use of this form suggests that the monastic settlement of the Zāge Peninsula comprised both men and women.

⁶ BDJ: *bā-kāmā hawwāšo lā-abba Bābnuda* (lit., just as he had visited *Abba* Bābnuda); Abb. 88: *lā-abba Säge* (namely, *Abba* Säge), which CR altered to *lā-abba Säge [Haymanot]* (namely, *Abba* Säge [Haymanot]). According to certain versions of the *Sənkəssar*, *Abba* Bābnuda was a third-century Egyptian monk condemned by God to be devoured by a lion for sharing his “heavenly food” with a deceitful monk.

⁷ CR adds *wā-təhnä* (and *təhn*). *Təhn* is an uncooked food made of mixing water with ground, roasted barley, good for travelers and soldiers.

ate. Then, he took a little of that food and wrapped it up in his clothes to take home and show to others. Now he left immediately.

When he came home, he took that food out of his clothes to show to his wife. However, while he held it in his hand, an angel of God snatched the food away from him. He was shocked and bewildered and therefore told his wife what he had done. She became irritated with him and said to him, “Why did you act like that and seek out [divine] punishment for yourself?”

Also, *Ras Silla Kristos*¹ sent one of his soldiers as a spy to investigate our holy mother Walatta Petros’s situation [at Zagé]. The soldier arrived and met with them. They gave him food to eat also, which he ate.² Now, imagine, that soldier was a son of Eheta Kristos’s husband!³

Then the soldier left⁴ and reported back to Silla Kristos what he had seen and that he had eaten fine, delicious, and good-smelling food. He added, “My lord, you worry needlessly. Walatta Petros’s situation is better than even yours!”⁵

When Silla Kristos heard this, he gnashed his teeth and longed to mount a surprise attack against them. At that time, he was at Dabra Entonyos.⁶

When our holy mother Walatta Petros heard about this, she hurriedly left [Zagé] and headed toward Abbabeet⁷ in a tankwa. In that part of the lake, there were three large hippopotamuses.⁸ One of them broke away [from the group] and, snorting, approached with the intention of overturning [their tankwa] and drowning them.

The boatmen as well as the sisters who were with Walatta Petros were afraid and exclaimed, “Let us throw ourselves overboard, of our own volition, so that this hippo will not drown us!”⁹

Our holy mother Walatta Petros, however, scolded them, “Do not be afraid, O you of little faith! What makes you fear? Do you think that you will never die?”

¹ *Ṣāʿalā Krastos* (Image of Christ) was the Roman Catholic counselor of King Susənyos who persecuted WP for her beliefs and later was executed by Fasilädās.

² BDJ: *wā-bālʿa* (lit., and he ate); CR omits.

³ That is, a son by a woman other than Eheta Kristos.

⁴ BDJ: *wā-ḥorä* (lit., then he left); CR omits.

⁵ BDJ: *əm-halləwotä ziʿakä-ssä* (lit., than your situation even); CR: *əm-halləwotä ziʿakä* (than your situation). This fact is noteworthy to the spy, and *Ṣāʿalā Krastos* subsequently becomes angry, because they expect monasteries to be poor and have little and bad food. The monks may have eaten simply, but have prepared good food for visitors. Before, the angel had snatched the food from the soldier to protect WP against such accusations.

⁶ *Däbrä Ḥentonyos* must be a place near Zāge on southern Lake Tana. Since it can also mean “the monastery at Ḥentonyos,” it most likely is Ḥentonyos, an island with a famous monastery (and once a convent) about three miles from Zāge.

⁷ *Abbabit* is a town on the southwestern side of Lake Tana above the Zāge Peninsula.

⁸ Hippopotamuses are common in Ethiopian lakes and rivers. Christians considered them unclean, according to Old Testament law, thus adding an extra element of terror to the incident.

⁹ BDJ: *kāmā i-yastəmānā* (lit., so that it does not drown us); Abb. 88: *kāmā i-yastəmāni* (so that it does not drown me), which CR correctly edited to *kāmā i-yastəmānā*.

does not prevent it from entering because it comes through the roof of the house. Not even lions or snakes scare us like this beast does! Let us leave and go to another place. If you refuse, we will scatter on our own and leave you behind alone!”

When they spoke to her like this, [together with them] she left that place and went to the region of Tsellemṭ.¹ There, too, she lived teaching the inhabitants the true faith and exhorting them not to adopt the filthy faith of the Europeans.

Chapter 27: Our Mother Again Incurs the King’s Wrath

Then, when King Susinyos heard that our holy mother Walatta Petros was in the district of Tsellemṭ and that she was teaching the [Orthodox] faith, he became angry and enraged, roaring like a lion.

He said, “Even though I left her alone, she doesn’t leave me alone! Even though I was lenient toward her, she’s not lenient toward me. From now on, however, I will decide on my own what to do [with her].”

So, he summoned one of his military men, whose name was *Amba-Ras*² Filaatawos³ and who was in charge of that district of Tsellemṭ. He said to him, “Go and bring Walatta Petros to me quickly!”⁴

45 Filaatawos went as the king had commanded him,⁵ arrived at where she stayed, and said to her, “The king has ordered me to you. He says to you, ‘Come immediately, and don’t say, “Tomorrow!”’”

Our holy mother Walatta Petros replied, “Behold, I am in your hands. Do with me as the king has ordered. I am ready for it and prepared to die. I’m not afraid of anything.”

Immediately then, our holy mother Walatta Petros set off from there and went with him. With her were [the sisters] Eheta Kristos and Kristos Sinnaa,⁶ [as well as her maidservants] Maryamaweeṭ and Eskindiraweeṭ.

¹ *Šallāmt* is a historical province around 150 miles north of Lake Ṭana in what was Bāgemdār and is now Ṭəgray. It is east of Waldəbba, stretching from the Səmen Mountains north to the Tākkāze River. It was largely populated by Betä ʿIsra’el, who were Jewish, and in 1623–24, Susānyos suppressed a rebellion there.

² *Amba-Ras* is a mid-rank military title originally meaning “Commander of an *amba*,” that is, of one of the Ethiopian flat-topped table mountains that were often used as natural fortresses. In the mountainous region of *Šallāmt*, this person was in charge of the local population.

³ BDJ, CR: *Filatawos* (commonly: Filatewos), from the Greek *Philotheos* (He who loves God).

⁴ BDJ: *Wälättä Petros-ha* [acc.]; CR: *lä-Wälättä Petros-ha* [sic: dative and acc.].

⁵ BDJ: *bä-kāmā yabelo* (lit., as he had said to him); CR: *bä-kāmā yəbe* (as he had said).

⁶ BDJ: *Krastos Šanna* (In Christ lies her beauty); CR: *Maryam Šanna* (In [Saint] Mary lies her beauty).

Chapter 28: The Europeans Try to Convert Our Mother

Walatta Petros arrived at and entered the king’s castle in the month of Ginbowṭ.¹ They lodged her in² the house of *Dejjazmatch*³ Billa Kristos.⁴ Then they began to [try to] persuade her with many clever tricks to abandon the true faith of Dioscoros⁵ and adopt the filthy faith of Leo.

Three renowned European false teachers⁶ came to her⁷ and debated with her about their filthy faith, which says, “Christ [still] has two natures after the ineffable union [of his humanity and divinity].”

She argued with them, defeated them, and embarrassed them. Each morning, other Europeans came to her, reading to her and explaining their filthy book to her.⁸ Our holy mother Walatta Petros, however, did not listen to their talk and did not accept⁹ their faith. Rather, she laughed and made fun of them.

As the Gospel says, “Therefore, you all should not call yourselves teachers on this earth because your teacher is one, Christ.”¹⁰ Also, the Apostle John in his letter says, “Our brothers, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirit, whether it is from God, because many false prophets have come into the world” who do not believe in

¹ *Gənbot* is the ninth month of the year in the Ethiopian calendar, extending from 9 May to 7 June. Holy Week and Easter often fall during this month.

² BDJ: *anbärəwwa ḥabā* (they lodged her in); CR: *agbā’əwwa ḥabā* (they entered her into).

³ *Däggazmač* (lit., He who leads the center column into battle) is one of the highest, sometimes the highest, traditional military rank, generally below a *ras*. The leader with this title had the duties of being a regional governor, a regional judge, or a regional military commander, depending on the period.

⁴ *Bə’lā Krastos* (Wealth of Christ) was the king’s cousin and confidant, a great lord who helped to bring Susānyos to power and who was a friend of the Jesuits. He had become Roman Catholic and even wrote scholarship attempting to show that the Tāwəḥədo Church had not always been anti-Chalcedonian.

⁵ *Diyosqoros* was a pope of the Alexandrian Church in the fifth century and remained so even after he had been deposed as a heretic in 451 by the Council of Chalcedon for refusing to agree with its doctrine. He is thus a hero in the Tāwəḥədo Church, which rejects the Council of Chalcedon. One of the fourteen Tāwəḥədo Church liturgies is the Anaphora of Saint Dioscorus.

⁶ In May 1625, when this likely happened, about sixteen Jesuit priests lived in Ethiopia, including Jerónimo Lobo, Manoel de Almeida, and Manoel Barradas, all of whom later wrote about their experiences in Ethiopia. The three who initially visited WP would not have included Páez, who had died, nor Mendes, who was brought in to talk to WP later, as a last resort. Regarding the Jesuits’ attempts to convert Ḥabāša women, see Belcher (2013).

⁷ BDJ: *ḥabeḥa* (to her); CR omits.

⁸ It is unclear to which book the author alludes. Susānyos encouraged the Jesuits to translate many works into Gə’əz (Cohen 2005). It may be the Catholic catechism, which was translated into Amharic around 1619 (Páez 2011, 39).

⁹ BDJ: *i-təṭwekkäf* (did not accept); CR: *təwekkäf* [nonexistent form].

¹⁰ Matthew 23:8. The original biblical text does not have the word “Christ.” In Matthew, it is Christ himself who speaks this verse, and the teacher he alludes to is God.

Jesus Christ, that he has come in the flesh.¹ “By this you will know the Spirit of God: each spirit which believes² in Jesus Christ, that he came in the flesh of a man, is from God,³ but each spirit which does not believe in Jesus Christ, that he came in the flesh, is not from God. Rather it is from the false messiah of whom you have heard that he would come.”⁴ John further says, “Anyone who wavers and does not remain in the teaching of Christ is not with God. But he who remains in the teaching of Christ is in the Father and the Son.⁵ He who comes to you and does not bring⁶ this teaching, do not let him enter your houses and do not even greet him because he who greets him has fellowship with him in his evil deeds.”⁷ This is why our holy mother Walatta Petros treated these European false teachers with contempt and repudiated them.

The king then inquired about her, “What does she say?”

The Europeans replied to him,⁸ “She does not listen and does not accept what we say. Instead, she insults us. Can water penetrate a heart of stone?”

Because of this, the king became enraged and wanted to kill her.

His counselors prevented him, however, saying, “Do not do something like that! If you kill her here,⁹ everyone¹⁰ will follow her and join her in death. And once the people have perished, over whom will you rule? Instead, order that she remain a captive.”

So the king ordered that she be taken to the region of Zhebey and handed over to the Black man so that she would live [there] as a captive.

Following this [decision], Malkiya Kristos entered into the king’s chamber, stood before him, and implored him, “My lord king, I beseech you, if I find grace before you, hand Walatta Petros over to me until the months of the rainy season are over.¹¹ During that time, I will admonish and advise her. In addition, the spiritual

¹ 1 John 4:1.

² BDJ: *əntä tā’ammən* (which believes); Abb. 88 *əntä i-tä’ammən* (which does not believe), which CR sensibly edited to *əntä tā’ammən*.

³ BDJ: *əmənnä əgzi’abher yə’əti* (is from God); Abb. 88 omits *əmənnä* (from), but CR aptly inserted *əm-* (from [enclitic variant of *əmənnä*]).

⁴ 1 John 4:2–3.

⁵ BDJ: *wä-i-yənäbbər bā-təmhərtu lä-Krəstos i-hallo məslä əgzi’abher. Wä-zä-ssä yənäbbər bā-təmhərtu lä-Krəstos bā-ab wä-bä-wäld hallo* (and does not remain in the teaching of Christ is not with God. But he who remains in the teaching of Christ is in the Father and the Son); CR: *wä-i-yənäbbər bā-təmhərtu lä-Krəstos bā-ab wä-bä-wäld i-hallo* (and he who does not remain in the teaching of Christ is not in the Father and in the Son).

⁶ BDJ: *i-yamäššə’* (does not bring); CR: *yamäššə’* (brings).

⁷ 2 John 1:9–11.

⁸ BDJ: *awśə’əwwo wä-yəbeləwwo* (lit., replied to him and said to him); CR omits *wä-yəbeləwwo* (and said to him).

⁹ BDJ: *bä-zəyyä* (here); CR omits.

¹⁰ BDJ: *k’əllu ‘alām* (lit., the entire world); CR: *zə-k’əllu ‘alām* (this entire world).

¹¹ BDJ: *əskä yāḥallaf wārḥa kərāmt* (lit., until the month [sic] of the rainy season is over); CR omits *wārḥa* (the month of). Most people stayed in one place during the rainy season (*kərāmt*), since traveling during this period was difficult and even posed serious health risks due to the cold, wet, swollen rivers and lack of adequate shelter along the road. Furthermore,

leader¹ of the Europeans, Afonsu,² shall read his book to her³ and have her listen [to it] every day. If then she still refuses to convert, we will send her away.”

The king replied, “Yes, I agree to your proposal.”

Our holy mother Walatta Petros was then handed over to Malkiya Kristos. He took her to Azezo,⁴ lodged her in his house, and provided her with food. With her were Eheta Kristos and Walatta Kristos.⁵ Throughout their entire lives, Walatta Petros and Eheta Kristos were like our Lady Mary and Salome.⁶

Afonsu went to Walatta Petros each Saturday morning, without breaking for lunch,⁷ in a clever move to make her fast likewise,⁸ and read his book to her. How-

the people of the court traditionally spent the rainy season in their ancestral homes rather than at court. WP had arrived at the court in May; *kərāmt* ends in mid- to late September.

¹ *Māmhər*, which can mean “teacher” or “master,” but is also regularly used to designate an abbot, and sometimes in the sense of “theologian”; for instance, when the Jesuit theologians (*māmhəran*) at Susənyos’s court argue with WP. The words “abbot,” “teacher,” “theologian,” and “spiritual leader” in the text are always a translation of this same word.

² The Portuguese Jesuit Afonso Mendes (1579–1656) was appointed Catholic patriarch of Ethiopia in 1622 by the pope and served in Ethiopia as a missionary from 1625 to 1634. He was important in increasing the king’s pro-Catholic policies and officially establishing Roman Catholicism as the state religion. Because Mendes was stricter than Páez, many scholars attribute the failure of Roman Catholicism in Ethiopia to him. Mendes worked one-on-one to convert the women of the royal court, as the Jesuit accounts attest.

³ This may have been Mendes’s *Bran-Haymanot Id Est Lux Fidei In Epithalamium Aethiopiassae, Sive In Nuptias Uerbiat Ecclesiae* (1692), which Mendes composed in Latin and later translated into Gə’əz with Wäldä Krəstos, a relative of Ras Šə’älä Krəstos, who admired it and recommended that it be called *Light of Faith* rather than *Doctrine of Faith* (Cohen 2009a, 11).

⁴ *Azäzo* is an important town, north of Lake Tana but about eight miles southwest of Gondär, that served as the de facto capital during the Susənyos period. Susənyos and his court, and therefore the Jesuits, lived there from 1607 until 1632, building castles, palaces, and churches, and otherwise supporting the arts. It was from this town’s church that the Jesuits announced Catholicism the official state religion and where Susənyos was buried. It was an important religious center, as thousands of monks came to debate the religious issues inspired by the presence of the Jesuits. It is not surprising, then, that WP’s husband Mälkə’a Krəstos had a home in this town and brought her there to be converted by Mendes. Gondär only became the capital after Fasilädäs came to power.

⁵ *Wälättä Krəstos* (Daughter of Christ) is a nun who was with WP at Mälkə’a Krəstos’s house in Azäzo, but fled when WP was banished to Žäbäy. She is probably not the same woman as Wäyzäro Wälättä Krəstos, a noblewoman who appears later in the text and always with her title Wäyzäro.

⁶ *Sälome* is not the salacious Salome but Mary Salome, who was Mary’s sister and Jesus’s aunt. According to the *Sənkəssar*, she was midwife at the birth of Christ, fled with the Holy Family into Egypt, and was a second mother to Christ throughout his life. Although the *Sənkəssar* does not specify the closeness of Mary and Salome, the author extrapolates this from Salome’s closeness to the Holy Family.

⁷ CR: *ənzä i-yemässəḥ* (lit., without him having lunch); BDJ: *ənzä i-temässəḥ* (without her having lunch). In view of the continuation of the text, this appears to be one of the rare occasions where the Abb. 88/CR variant is superior to BDJ.

⁸ Orthodox Christians are required to break the fast after the Sabbath services on Saturdays.

ever, he would return embarrassed because she treated him with contempt, repudiated him, and did not listen to his teaching.¹

Each time, the king asked, "Has Walatta Petros converted and embraced our faith?"

47

But they responded, "No."

Chapter 29: King Susinyos Banishes Our Mother to Zhebey

Then, when the months of the rainy season had passed and the month of Hidaar had begun, and the time was near that our Lord had predicted to her, "You will go down to Zhebey,"² the king summoned one of his military men and said to him, "Go and take Walatta Petros, her alone, to the region of Zhebey. Do not let anyone follow her, neither men nor women."

Having received the king's order, the soldier went, arrived at where our holy mother Walatta Petros was [at Azezo] and told her, "The king has ordered me to take you to the region of Zhebey."

Our holy mother Walatta Petros replied to him, "Here I am, in your hands. Do as the king has ordered."

At this time, Walatta Kristos became afraid and fled, carrying a water container³ and wearing the clothes of a maidservant, like one who is going to draw water. Eheta Kristos, on the other hand, remained behind⁴ at that place, [Azezo]. So, our holy mother Walatta Petros went away alone, just as our Lord Jesus Christ had gone to Calvary alone, carrying his cross; she was like him. As Paul says, "Let us follow Christ's example in order to proceed from glory to glory."⁵

Now, that soldier was very rough⁶ and of bad character, without mercy and fear of God. He took Walatta Petros, made her mount a recalcitrant mule, and did not hold the reins for her but rather drove the mule from behind, poking at its anus⁷ with a stick so that it would become angry and throw her down,⁸ and she would die. He did not feel any compassion for her at all because Satan had rendered him hard-hearted. Acting thus, he took her down a rough and rugged road and beat that mule so hard that it fell and tumbled down a precipice. Immediately, though, an

¹ BDJ: *tāmharto* (his teaching); CR: *tāmhartā* (the teaching).

² Since *Žābāy* was a hot, lowland region, "going down" evokes associations of a descent into hell, climatically as well as culturally.

³ BDJ: *qāšutā* (a water container); CR: *qāšuta* (her water container).

⁴ BDJ: *tārfāt* ([she] remained behind); Abb. 88 omits, CR then filled the obvious gap by inserting *nābārāt* ([she] stayed).

⁵ 2 Corinthians 3:18. The author has reversed the order of the original biblical quote.

⁶ Lit., *gāzufā kəsad* (thick-necked).

⁷ BDJ: *māk"sahu* (its anus); Abb. 88/CR: *sāk"ānahu* (its heels). Perhaps this later manuscript was consciously sanitized.

⁸ BDJ: *kāmā . . . yawdāqa* (so that it would . . . throw her down [subj.]); Abb. 88: *kāmā . . . yawāddāqa* [sic: ind.], which CR sensibly altered to the required subjunctive.



Plate 15. "How he [i.e., Susinyos's soldier] put her on a mule and it threw her into an abyss" (top) and "how an angel saved her" (bottom) (MS A, f. 150v © SLUB Mscr.Dresd.Eb.415.e,2).

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Plate 15. "How he [i.e., Susinyos's soldier] put her on a mule and it threw her into an abyss" (top) and "how an angel saved her" (bottom) (MS A, f. 150v © SLUB Mscr.Dresd.Eb.415.e,2).

angel caught our holy mother Walatta Petros, laying her down on good land in soft grass so that she stood up alive and unharmed.

48

As the book says, “Having taken three names, I lean on a staff. Even if I fall, I stand up again.”¹ Likewise, David says, “Many are the sufferings of the righteous. However, God delivers them from everything. God protects all their bones, not one of them will be shattered inside them.”² He furthermore says, “Truly, for your sake God has ordered his angels to guard you in all your ways. They will lift you up with their hands³ so that your feet will not trip over a stone.”⁴ In addition, Paul says, “We have a treasure in an earthen vessel, [which shows] that the great power is from God, not from us. While we suffer from everything, we are not distressed; while we are despised, we do not feel disgraced; while we are persecuted, we do not feel cast out; while we are tormented, we do not perish. We always carry the death of Christ in our flesh, so that the life of Christ may be known through this mortal body of ours.”⁵ The same also happened to our holy mother Walatta Petros.

Chapter 30: Our Mother in Exile Earns the Fear of Her Guard

After this, the soldier made Walatta Petros mount the mule again and brought her to the region of Zhebey. He handed her over⁶ to the Black man, whom he told all the king’s orders.⁷ The soldier said to him, “Guard her until the time when the king orders either [her] death or [her] life.”

So, she was alone. When her mother Kristos Ebayaa heard that Walatta Petros had gone away alone,⁸ she became very distressed. Then she sent her maidservant Ilarya⁹ to her so that she would stay with Walatta Petros and serve her.

¹ This is a lyric from a hymn by Saint Yared in the *Ṣomä Daggʿa*, an original literary work and the liturgical text for the Lenten services of the Täwahädo Church. This quote has the double meaning (*säm-anna wärq*, lit., wax and gold, but a metaphor for surface and deeper meaning) characteristic of much of Ethiopian poetry, or *qane*. The three names are Christ, the Father, and the Holy Spirit, who are one in the Trinity, thus providing the support of faith that allows the priest to stand strong, who leans on a staff during the long hours of the service. Ricci says this line is from Micah 7:8, and perhaps the hymn lyric was inspired by it, but the biblical verse does not mention three names or a staff, but only standing up again.

² Psalm 33[34]:19–20.

³ BD: *bä-ädäwihomu* (with their hands); J, CR: *bä-ädäw* (with hands).

⁴ B: *əgräkä* [nom.] (lit., your foot); DJ, CR: *əgräkä* [acc.] (your foot). Psalm 90[91]:11–12.

⁵ 2 Corinthians 4:7–10.

⁶ BDJ: *wāhabä kiyaha* (he handed her over); CR: *wāhaba kiyaha* [sic] (he handed her over, her).

⁷ Although the highland peoples despised the peoples they called Šanqalla, frequently raiding them and trading them as slaves, this man seems to have an official status in Susanyos’s kingdom. He takes the king’s orders and may be a kind of partner in a clientele state.

⁸ BDJ: *baḥtita* (alone); CR omits.

⁹ *Ilarya* (Hillary) is an elegant Greek name and thus typical for a servant or slave. WP’s

The Black man then took charge of Walatta Petros, did as the king had ordered him, and cast our holy mother Walatta Petros into prison.¹ She spent three days without eating or drinking because the Black man was an impure heathen who had nothing in common with her, be it in way of life or in faith.² She did not understand his words when he spoke with her, whether they were kind or cruel.

How terrible was this day and how difficult this hour³ in which our holy mother Walatta Petros suffered tribulation and banishment! It was much worse and much more difficult than any tribulation and banishment that met the [other Orthodox] Christians in those years. Where is she among women who is equal to Walatta Petros? Who could have patiently born all this like her? Not only a weak woman, but even men who possess strength—they would not have been able to endure like Walatta Petros. However, the power of God that was upon her enabled her to endure and gave her strength. As the Apostle Peter says, “After you have suffered for a little while, God will perfect you, strengthen you,⁴ and make you understand.”⁵ If, by contrast, Walatta Petros had been made to stay in a region of Christians whose language she would have understood, whose way of life she would have known, and with whom she could have participated in eating and drinking, her endurance would not have been extraordinary and difficult, but easy.

49

When the Black man saw her [abstaining], he said to her in his language, “What’s the matter with you? What is this you’re doing, that you don’t eat and drink? How will you stay alive?”

Unfortunately, there was no one who could translate between them. Suddenly, however, God opened Walatta Petros’s ears and she understood his language. As scripture says, “The Lord granted Joseph a sign as he went to the land of Egypt, and he understood a language that he had not known [before].”⁶ The same happened to her.

Therefore, our holy mother Walatta Petros replied to the Black man, “How can I, a Christian woman, eat food that you have prepared? How can I drink water from a cup that you drink from, you, an impure heathen who does not share my faith? You don’t have any sacred prohibitions: you eat mice and serpents and all the im-

mother’s servant woman was likely a slave from what is modern southern or western Ethiopia. This woman served WP for many years and is called “saintly” in the text. Indeed, later, she successfully stops the sun.

¹ BDJ: *wəstā betä moqəḥ* (into prison); CR: *wəstā moqəḥ* (into chains).

² Ethiopian highland culture—Jewish, Christian, and Muslim alike—is characterized by strict restrictions on commensality, especially with regard to meat. Normally, adherents will only eat meat from an animal slaughtered by someone of their own faith. Furthermore, those of different classes or stations do not eat together.

³ BDJ: *mi-mätān gərəmt zati ʾälät wä-ʾəṣəbt zati säʾat* (how terrible was this day and how difficult this hour); CR: *mi-mätān gərəmt wä-ʾəṣəbt zati säʾat* (how terrible and difficult was this hour).

⁴ BDJ: *wä-yaṣānnəʾakəmu* (he will strengthen you [pl.]); CR omits.

⁵ 1 Peter 5:10.

⁶ Psalm 80[81]:5.

pure animals that the Law has forbidden people to touch and eat. So bring me¹ raw food, an unused pot for cooking, and an unused gourd for drawing water!”

He, too, understood her language [now]. So, he did accordingly and brought Walatta Petros what she had requested. Ilarya then cooked that food and served it to her but Walatta Petros tasted [only] a little of it and then left the rest. Ilarya cried bitterly because our holy mother Walatta Petros had refrained from eating.² The two of them lived³ for a month in this way, all by themselves.

Then Satan entered into the heart of the Black man so that he laid his eyes on Walatta Petros: he began to make advances toward her, as men do with women. When she rejected him, he used a cord to tie her back to the house post and secured her in that position. He then gathered wood and brought fire to light the wood near her feet and torment her⁴ with the smoke. That fire went out, however: it did not burn and did not smoke. Therefore, when he failed, he let her go, untying the ropes from around her.

He did not stop making advances toward Walatta Petros, however, and one day he went to see her at the prompting of Satan, thinking that he would be able to fulfill his desire [to have her]. But when he entered the hut where our holy and chosen mother Walatta Petros lived, he saw her standing in prayer, with her face resplendent like the sun. With her, by her side, stood an angel of God, holding a drawn sword in his hand near her ear.

50 Instantly, the Black man was shocked⁵ and scared. He retreated, falling on his back. From that day onward, he was chastened and did not make advances toward Walatta Petros again. Rather, he treated her with respect and was afraid of her. Satan, too, was humiliated and defeated. How could that Black man aspire to what he aspired to? An act that was not [even] granted to [Walatta Petros's husband] Malkiya Kristos⁶—did he imagine that it would be granted to him, a foul servant?⁷ However, that idea was not his own but Satan's, because in his insolence he wanted to become Lord.⁸

¹ BDJ: *wā-baḥtu amṣa' litā* (lit., but bring to me); CR omits *litā* (to me).

² It is unclear why she did not eat more; perhaps it was for the usual ascetic reasons.

³ BDJ: *nābāra kal'ehon* (the two of them lived [fem. pl.]); Abb. 88: *nābāru kal'ehon* (the two of them [fem. pl.] lived [masc. pl.]); CR pointed out the gender error in the verb form (49n1), but did not correct it.

⁴ DJ: *kāmā . . . yamāndāba* (to . . . torment her [subj.]); B, CR: *kāmā . . . yamānāddāba* [sic: ind.].

⁵ BDJ: *dāngāṣā* (was shocked); CR omits.

⁶ BDJ: *əfo ḥallāyā ḥabā ḥallāyā. Zā-i-konā gābr lā-Mālkā'a Krastos* (lit., how could he think of what he thought of? An act that was not granted to Mālkā'a Krastos); CR omits the second *ḥallāyā*, leading to a different syntactic division: *əfo ḥallāyā ḥabā zā-i-konā gābr lā-Mālkā'a Krastos* (how could he aspire to an act that was not granted to Mālkā'a Krastos). That is, she had not slept with her husband since she had renounced the world for good after learning about his involvement in the death of *Abunā Sām'on*.

⁷ The disgust here is triple: that he was not a Christian, that he was from a despised ethnic group, and that he was of a much lower class. As noted before, the word *gābr*, here translated as “servant,” can sometimes mean “slave.”

⁸ The sentence's “his” refers to Satan's not the Black man's insolence (because the term



Plate 16. How the heathen Black man tied our holy mother to a post and lit a fire at her feet, and “how an angel chastised him” when he tried to rape her (MS A, f. 151r © SLUB Mscr.Dresd.Eb.415.e,2).

pure animals that the Law has forbidden people to touch and eat. So bring me¹ raw food, an unused pot for cooking, and an unused gourd for drawing water!”

He, too, understood her language [now]. So, he did accordingly and brought Walatta Petros what she had requested. Ilarya then cooked that food and served it to her but Walatta Petros tasted [only] a little of it and then left the rest. Ilarya cried bitterly because our holy mother Walatta Petros had refrained from eating.² The two of them lived³ for a month in this way, all by themselves.

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⁷ The disgust here is triple: that he was not a Christian, that he was from a despised ethnic group, and that he was of a much lower class. As noted before, the word *gäbr*, here translated as “servant,” can sometimes mean “slave.”

⁸ The sentence's “his” refers to Satan's not the Black man's insolence (because the term



Plate 16. How the heathen Black man tied our holy mother to a post and lit a fire at her feet, and “how an angel chastised him” when he tried to rape her (MS A, f. 151r © SLUB Mscr.Dresd.Eb.415.e.2).

him, Christ leaned upon my bed and said to me three times: 'He who has toiled and endured hardship in this world will be refreshed and live forever [in the next]. Truly, he will not see perdition!' In addition, our Lord breathed on my face and blessed me.¹ So, I said to him: 'What is the meaning of this breathing [on] and blessing [of me]?' He replied to me: 'I have conferred upon you the rank of archdeaconess.'²

"This is what I have heard from her," said Silla Kristos.

Chapter 91: Our Mother Appoints Eheta Kristos Her Successor

Then, on Saturday, when our holy mother Walatta Petros's illness became [still more] grave,³ everyone gathered in the church, and made prayers and supplications.⁴ Great sadness reigned on that day. Also, at the ninth hour of that day [i.e., 3:00 PM], *Abba Za-Maryam*, *Abba Kifla Samaat*, *Abba Za-Mikaél*, and *Abba Silla Kristos* assembled around Walatta Petros, and said to her, "When Moses passed away, he left Joshua in his place, who then watched over Israel.⁵ Also, Elijah left behind Elisha [as his successor],⁶ and so did all [great spiritual leaders] in their respective times. Therefore, you too should now tell us,⁷ who will be mother in your stead and watch over your community?"

Our holy mother Walatta Petros replied to them, "In fact, I have ruled over them for many years. Didn't I time and again tell them: 'Serve!'⁸ From now on, however, they shall be free, live as they see fit, and watch over themselves. Who is the brother

¹ See John 20:22; also see Genesis 2:7; Ezekiel 37:5.

² BDJ, Abb. 88: *šemkuki liqā diyaqonawit*, which is grammatically problematic: while *liqā* is masculine and in the accusative, adjectival *diyaqonawit* is feminine and in the nominative. Therefore, CR altered to *šemkuki liqā diyaqonat* (I have named you head of the [male] deacons) and Ricci followed him and translated it as *ti ho conferito il grado di capo dei diaconi* (I have appointed you to the rank of the head of the deacons). Meanwhile, the caption of the relevant image in D has *liqtā diyaqonawitā* (head [fem.] deaconess [fem.]), which is grammatically correct, and which we have assumed in our translation. For a full discussion of WP's title, see "Tāwahədo Church Monasticism" under "The Text's Religious Context."

³ BDJ: *sobā šān'a həmam la'lā əmmənā qəddəst* [B adds: *wā-burəkt*] *Wälättä Petros* (lit., when the illness became strong against our holy mother WP); CR: *sobā šān'a həmam la'leha lā-əmmənā qəddəst Wälättä Petros* [different construction, but identical translation].

⁴ BDJ: *šəlotā wā-məhəlla* (prayers and supplications); CR: *šəlotā məhəlla* (prayers of supplication).

⁵ Deuteronomy 34:9.

⁶ 1 Kings 19:19–21 and 2 Kings 2.

⁷ J, CR (through emendation of Abb. 88): *nəgəranā* [substandard orthography for *nəgərinā*] (tell us); BD, Abb. 88: *nəgəranī* [substandard orthography for *nəgərinī*] (tell me).

⁸ In the Gə'əz, the two verbs that we render here as "I have ruled over them" and "Serve!", namely, *qānāykəwwomu* and *tāqānāyu*, are both derived from the same root *q-n-y*; *qānāykəwwomu* is in an active, *tāqānāyu* (which could also be translated as "Submit!" or "Worship!") in a passive stem. The speaker Walatta Petros or the author Gälawdewos, through the use of two root-identical verbs, display stylistic skill.

or sister whom I have not personally admonished¹ and taught? Therefore, all of them are well taught and² competent to take care of themselves.

"I say to you, however, that I entrust Eheta Kristos to all of you.³ Behold, I am going and leaving her, while she⁴ remains behind alone. She will be disconsolate;⁵ she has no other hope than me!"⁶ Walatta Petros said this to them three times.⁷ After she had said these things, she dismissed them. In this veiled manner, she had thus indicated to them that they should appoint Eheta Kristos [as abbess].⁸

Chapter 92: Our Mother Departs to Eternal Life

After this,⁹ the suffering of our holy mother Walatta Petros became intense, and she was no longer able to speak. So, the door [to her house] was closed and nobody was allowed to enter. Everybody¹⁰ gathered in the church in the evening, staying into the night¹¹ to chant supplications and say prayers.

Then, when it was midnight on the turn to Sunday, the seventeenth of the month of Hidaar,¹² Walatta Petros's soul left her body and she passed away in peace when she was fifty years old, [of which she had spent] twenty-four before her repudiation [of the world] and twenty-six after it.¹³ On that day,¹⁴ a column of light was planted that appeared to all the world.¹⁵

¹ BDJ: *zā-i-mä'adkəwwomu* (whom I have not . . . admonished); CR: *zā-i-ammärkəwwomu* (whom I have not . . . instructed).

² CR adds *k'əllomu* (all of them).

³ DJ: *amaḥəššənəkəmu lā-k'əlləkəmu* (I entrust . . . to all of you); B: *amaḥəššənəkəmu* [sic: ungrammatical] *lā-k'əlləkəmu*; CR: *amaḥəššənəkəmu lā-k'əlləkəmu* (I hereby entrust . . . to all of you).

⁴ BDJ: *wā-yə'əti* (while she); CR: *wā-yə'əti-ni* (but she).

⁵ BDJ: *ənəbəztā* [acc.] (disconsolate); CR: *həzəntā* [acc.] (sad).

⁶ See 1 Corinthians 15:19.

⁷ BDJ: *wā-təbelomu kāmā-zə 3 gize* (lit., she said like this to them three times); CR: *wā-təbelomu ana-ssā qānāykəwwomu kāmā-zə 3 gize* (she said to them, "I have ruled over them," like this, three times).

⁸ CR adds *əm-dəḥreha* (after her).

⁹ BDJ: *wā-əm-dəḥrehu* (after this); CR omits, but has similar *əm-dəḥreha* (after her) at the end of the preceding paragraph.

¹⁰ BDJ: *k'əllu sabb* (everybody); CR omits.

¹¹ Lit., *bā-gize sārək wā-bā-gize nəwam* (in the evening and at the time of sleep).

¹² CR proceeds differently from here, rearranging and adding text, which additions now appear below in the "Alternate Ending of the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros*."

¹³ ABCDEFGHIJK, CR are in complete agreement about the date and day of her death, her age at death, and her years before and after becoming a nun, although none state an exact year of birth or death. She was twenty-four when she became a nun and then she lived for twenty-six years as a nun. She died on a Sunday on 24 November at the age of fifty, three months after she first fell ill.

¹⁴ BDJ: *wā-bā-yə'əti 'əlāt* (on that day); CR omits (see below, "Alternate Ending of the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros*").

¹⁵ BDJ: *tätäklä . . . wā-astār'ayä wastä k'əllu 'alām* (lit., was planted . . . and appeared in

All the people from all the [Lake Tana] islands and from all the [neighboring] regions now assembled,¹ because Walatta Petros had been a mother to them in many ways. To him who had looked for instruction, she had given food and clothing² and assigned him to a teacher. The assembled wept over her³ and wailed over her,⁴ intensely and loudly, just as the children of Jacob had wept and wailed over him.⁵ O such weeping and wailing!⁶ O such cries of woe and shouts [of pain]!⁷ [On that day,] nobody looked at his neighbor,⁸ everybody was so grief-stricken that none could console.⁹ On that day, the monks could not be distinguished from the laypeople because their monks' caps had been cast from their heads [by rolling about in grief].

After this, during the singing of psalms and hymns, Walatta Petros was shrouded in an atsf vestment, according to the rules of monastic life, and buried¹⁰ near the church entrance; she was put in the ground without a coffin.¹¹

May her intercession be with _____, with the sinful scribe, and with all of her sons and daughters who have longed for and been anxious for this *Life and Struggles* to be written down. For eternity, amen.¹²

all the world); CR: *tätäklä . . . wä-astär'ayä wästä 'aläm* (lit., was planted . . . and appeared in the world).

¹ BDJ: *wä-tägabə'u* (now assembled); CR: *tägabə'u* (assembled).

² BDJ: *sisayä wä-ləbsä* (food and clothing); CR: *sisayo wä-ləbso* (his food and his clothing).

³ BDJ: *bäkäyəwwa* (wept over her); CR: *bäkäyu* (wept).

⁴ BDJ: *wä-laḥawəwwa* (and wailed over her); CR: *wä-laḥawu* (and wailed).

⁵ Genesis 50:7–11.

⁶ BDJ: *o-zä-ameha bəkay wä-laḥ* (lit., o the weeping of wailing of that time); CR omits.

⁷ CR adds *zä-i-konä gəmura* ([the likes of] which had never been).

⁸ BDJ: *i-yəneṣṣəro 1 lä-kalə'u* (nobody looked at his neighbor); CR: *i-yəneṣṣəro 1 lä-1* (nobody looked at anyone).

⁹ BDJ: *wä-albo zä-yənazzəz* (lit., and there was none who could console); CR: *wä-albo zä-yətnazzäz* (and there was none who could find consolation).

¹⁰ BDJ: *wä-qäbärəwwa* (lit., and they buried her); CR: *wä-wäsädəwwa wä-qäbärəwwa* (and they took her and buried her).

¹¹ People were buried in a coffin unless they were poor. That WP sought to be buried without one shows her humility, even in death. Although all Christians were buried near a church, or inside the church fence, only persons of great stature were buried near the church entrance, as WP was.

¹² At the end of each manuscript of the *WP gädl* (after the words "without a coffin") and before the *tä'amər* (miracles), scribes added a paragraph calling for blessings on particular people (for example, the scribe and commissioner) and included information about the creation of the particular manuscript. Since these paragraphs are so different, the paragraph we have translated here is just an example of how these invocations read, taken from BJ. Meanwhile, the Abb. 88 scribe went further and actually altered and added to the report on her death, including a different paragraph documented in CR (p. 110, lines 11–18), and reproduced below (up to "without a coffin"). Thus, all eleven manuscripts we checked were in agreement among themselves at the end, but differed considerably from CR.



Plate 22. How the community grieved when our mother died (MS F, photo 64, no caption).

All the people from all the [Lake Tana] islands and from all the [neighboring] regions now assembled,¹ because Walatta Petros had been a mother to them in many ways. To him who had looked for instruction, she had given food and clothing² and assigned him to a teacher. The assembled wept over her³ and wailed over her,⁴ intensely and loudly, just as the children of Jacob had wept and wailed over him.⁵ O such weeping and wailing!⁶ O such cries of woe and shouts [of pain]!⁷ [On that day,] nobody looked at his neighbor,⁸ everybody was so grief-stricken that none could console.⁹ On that day, the monks could not be distinguished from the laypeople because their monks' caps had been cast from their heads [by rolling about in grief].

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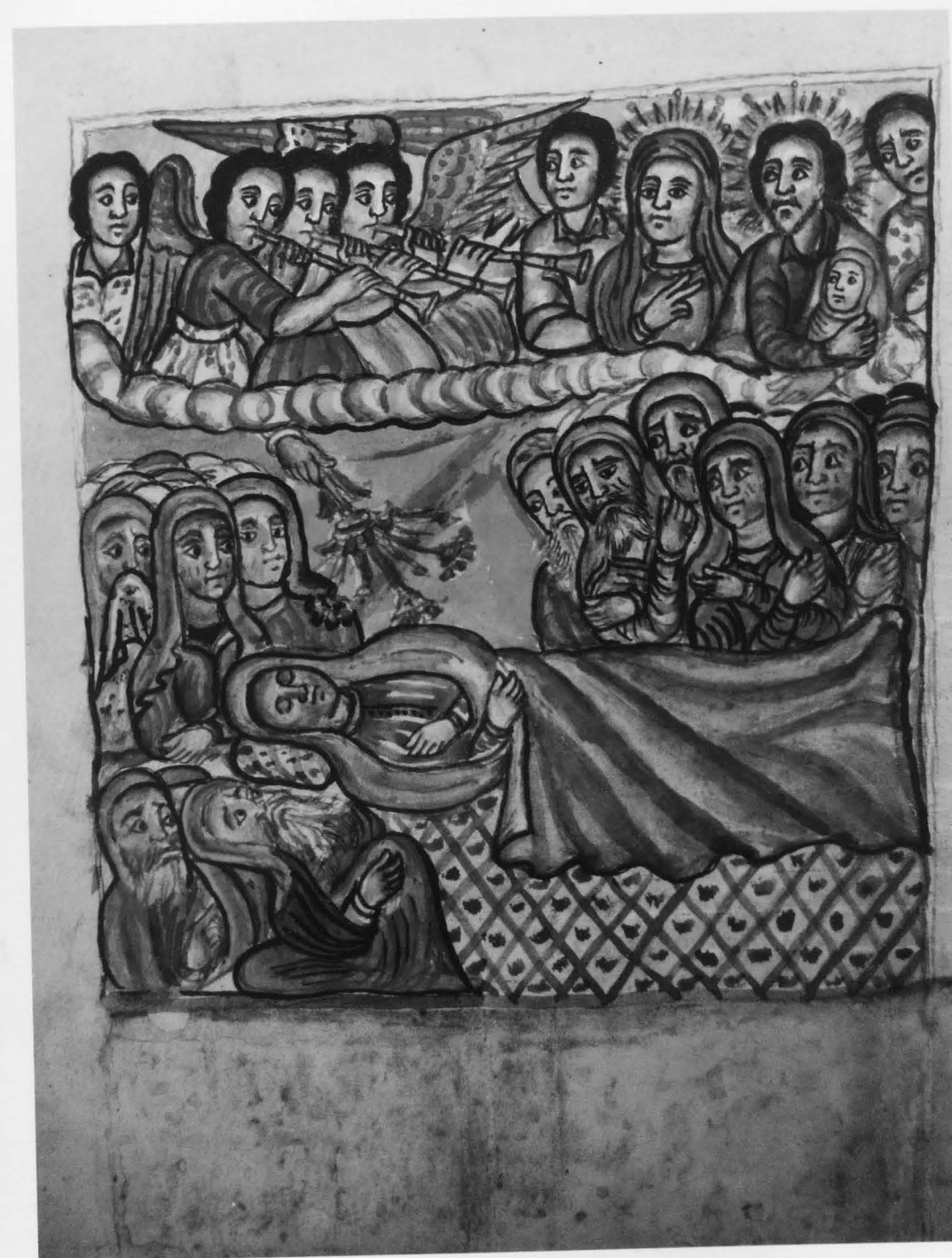


Plate 22. How the community grieved when our mother died (MS F, photo 64, no caption).



Plate 23. "How our mother Walatta Petros passed away [second part of caption illegible]," was shrouded by the grieving community (top), and "how they put her into the grave on the island of Réma" (bottom) (MS A, f. 153v © SLUB Mscr.Dresd.Eb.415.e,2).

Alternate Ending of the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros*

Above, Abb. 88/CR inserts sentences into and alters as follows the fourth paragraph back that starts "Then when it was midnight on the turn to Sunday, the seventeenth of the month of Hidaar":

Then when it was midnight on the turn to Sunday, the seventeenth of the month of Hidaar, our Lord Jesus Christ again came [to Walatta Petros], together with his mother, our Lady Mary. Also, all the angels came, and all the prophets, and Peter and Paul and all the apostles. Furthermore, [Saint] Stephen,¹ [Saint] George,² [Saint] Fasiladas, and all the martyrs came;³ and the 144,000 Children [of Bethlehem] whom Herod had killed; and all the righteous ones led by their father [Saint] Anthony. After all of them had come, Walatta Petros's soul left her body and she passed away in peace. Then a column of light was planted and appeared in the world, and she was taken away to eternal life.

As for me, her sinful servant [name erased]: Do not separate my soul from her soul!⁴ I implore you, [Christ], through your holy mother Mary. [Thus,] in eternity, amen.

My beatified mother Walatta Petros, I hereby entrust myself to your kidaan [with God] and to your holy prayers for your servant's soul. I implore you, [Walatta Petros,] through our Lady Mary: Do not separate my soul from yours. [Thus,] in eternity, amen, and amen. May it be thus, may it be thus.

Above, Abb. 88/CR further inserts an invocation after the last paragraph of the biography, which ends "she was put in the ground without a coffin":

She was put in the ground without a coffin. May the blessing of her assistance, the power of her holy prayer, and the mediation of her intercession for her servant [name erased] save him⁵ from bitter [eternal] death and from the punishment of damnation. [Thus,] in eternity, amen.

¹ *Ἰστέφανος* was a first-century deacon and the first martyr of the early Christian church. See Acts 6 and 7.

² *Giyorgis* is one of the most revered foreign saints in Ethiopia, celebrated on the twenty-third of every month. It is reputed that this third-century saint George of Lydda saved a young woman from a dragon, and he is usually depicted in this act.

³ These might be the martyrs specifically associated with Saint Fasilädäs or all the Christian martyrs generally.

⁴ We translate this paragraph and the next two quite differently from Ricci. Here, for instance, Ricci makes WP the sentence's agent and endows her with the power to establish the abode of the author's soul after his death: *per me, peccatore servo di lei, ella non disgiunga la mia anima dall'anima di lei: l'ho affidata a Te in nome della tua madre santa Maria* (As for me, her sinful servant, may she not separate my soul from her soul. I have entrusted it to you in the name of your holy mother Mary). The negative imperative *i-talelaya* (do not separate it [namely, my soul]) allows an interpretation as a masculine or a feminine singular, even though its reading as a masculine singular—the choice we made—is more grammatically standard.

⁵ Abb. 88: *yäbezäwäwo* [sic: adding a 3rd-ps. masc. sg. object suffix to a passive voice verb, with incorrect morphophonology to boot] (may it be saved him [sic]); CR altered to



Plate 23. "How our mother Walatta Petros passed away [second part of caption illegible]," was shrouded by the grieving community (top), and "how they put her into the grave on the island of Réma" (bottom) (MS A, f. 153v © SLUB Mscr.Dresd.Eb.415.e.2).

Alternate Ending of the *Gädlä Wälättä Petros*

Above, Abb. 88/CR inserts sentences into and alters as follows the fourth paragraph back that starts "Then when it was midnight on the turn to Sunday, the seventeenth of the month of Hidaar":

Then when it was midnight on the turn to Sunday, the seventeenth of the month of Hidaar, our Lord Jesus Christ again came [to Walatta Petros], together with his mother, our Lady Mary. Also, all the angels came, and all the prophets, and Peter and Paul and all the apostles. Furthermore, [Saint] Stephen,¹ [Saint] George,² [Saint] Fasiladas, and all the martyrs came;³ and the 144,000 Children [of Bethlehem] whom Herod had killed; and all the righteous ones led by their father [Saint] Anthony. After all of them had come, Walatta Petros's soul left her body and she passed away in peace. Then a column of light was planted and appeared in the world, and she was taken away to eternal life.

As for me, her sinful servant [name erased]: Do not separate my soul from her soul!⁴ I implore you, [Christ], through your holy mother Mary. [Thus,] in eternity, amen.

My beatified mother Walatta Petros, I hereby entrust myself to your kidaan [with God] and to your holy prayers for your servant's soul. I implore you, [Walatta Petros,] through our Lady Mary: Do not separate my soul from yours. [Thus,] in eternity, amen, and amen. May it be thus, may it be thus.

Above, Abb. 88/CR further inserts an invocation after the last paragraph of the biography, which ends "she was put in the ground without a coffin":

She was put in the ground without a coffin. May the blessing of her assistance, the power of her holy prayer, and the mediation of her intercession for her servant [name erased] save him⁵ from bitter [eternal] death and from the punishment of damnation. [Thus,] in eternity, amen.

¹ *Ἰστίφανος* was a first-century deacon and the first martyr of the early Christian church. See Acts 6 and 7.

² *Giyorgis* is one of the most revered foreign saints in Ethiopia, celebrated on the twenty-third of every month. It is reputed that this third-century saint George of Lydda saved a young woman from a dragon, and he is usually depicted in this act.

³ These might be the martyrs specifically associated with Saint Fasilädäs or all the Christian martyrs generally.

⁴ We translate this paragraph and the next two quite differently from Ricci. Here, for instance, Ricci makes WP the sentence's agent and endows her with the power to establish the abode of the author's soul after his death: *per me, peccatore servo di lei, ella non disgiunga la mia anima dall'anima di lei: l'ho affidata a Te in nome della tua madre santa Maria* (As for me, her sinful servant, may she not separate my soul from her soul. I have entrusted it to you in the name of your holy mother Mary). The negative imperative *i-tälelaya* (do not separate it [namely, my soul]) allows an interpretation as a masculine or a feminine singular, even though its reading as a masculine singular—the choice we made—is more grammatically standard.

⁵ Abb. 88: *yäbezäwäwo* [sic: adding a 3rd-ps. masc. sg. object suffix to a passive voice verb, with incorrect morphophonology to boot] (may it be saved him [sic]); CR altered to

May the Lord have mercy on all of Walatta Petros's [spiritual] sons and daughters, together with [mercy on] all of us. May God jointly admit [all of] us into the Kingdom of Heaven: he who wrote this manuscript, he who commissioned it, he who reads it, he who interprets it, and he who listens to its word. [Thus,] in eternity, amen.

I have commissioned the copying of this book of your *Life and Struggles*, [Walatta Petros,] so that you may admit me to¹ your community [and] each month come to me on the day of your tazkaar with your assistance.²

yäbezäwänä, putting a first-person plural object suffix instead, but still combining a passive voice verb with an object suffix (may it be saved us [sic]). Our translation assumes an original *yäbezäwo* (may [it] . . . save him).

¹ CR: *äm-* (from), which does not make sense contextually.

² The commissioner, rather than the author Gälawdewos, speaks here, asking to participate in WP's kidan and be honored by her assistance when he holds her täzkar.

The Translation of the *Miracles of Walatta Petros* (*Tä'amärä Wälättä Petros*)

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one eternal God!¹ We will now continue by writing down the miracles that our holy mother Walatta Petros performed; may her intercession² be with _____³ for eternity, amen.

Listen and let us tell you about the powerful miracles⁴ that happened after our holy mother Walatta Petros had passed away. We have heard them and seen them! Many took place⁵ on the days of her tazkaar, from the thirtieth-day [tazkaar] until [that of] the end of the year, when⁶ God's blessings descended on all the tazkaar works.⁷

On those occasions, many people would gather, in countless numbers,⁸ from the islands and the monasteries,⁹ from the churches and the monastic settlements,¹⁰ from all the provinces. Among them were abbots, priests, deacons, and monks, with incense burners and crosses; there were the poor and the wretched, and the blind and the lame, because Walatta Petros's fame had spread¹¹ to the ends of the world.

¹ What follows are the *tä'amär* (miracles) that appear in ABCDEFGIJK. The *tä'amär* of BDJ are written in the same hand as the *gädl*. MS H has an entirely different set of eight miracles. MS I is unique in that it not only has the standard set of miracles but first expands this with five further miracles (written in the same hand as the standard set), then goes on to add the MS H miracles (written now in a different hand), and finally provides three further miracles in this second hand. All these extra miracles are summarized in the next section, and are not translated in this section.

² BDJ: *tənbələnnaha* (her intercession); CR: *šälotä wä-bäräkätä räd'eta* (her prayer and the blessing of her assistance).

³ B: *fəqura Agnatəyos* (her beloved Ignatius); D: *fəqura* [masc.] *Ḥirutä Šəllase* (her beloved [masc.] *Ḥirutä Šəllase* [the Benevolence of the Trinity]); J: *fəqarta* [fem.] *Akrosəya* (her beloved [fem.] Akrosia); Abb. 88: [*məslä*] *gäbra* [name erased] ([with] her servant [name erased]), which CR altered to [*məsle*] *nä* ([with] us).

⁴ Lit, *ḥaylā tä'amər* (the power of the miracles).

⁵ Lit., *zä-yətgäbbär* (which took place [sg.]).

⁶ B: *amä* (when); DJ, CR: *kämä* (so that).

⁷ Lit., *la'lä k'əllu zä-konä gəbrä täzkar zä-yətgäbbär* (on every täzkar work that was done [and] that was performed).

⁸ BDJ: *əllä albomu ḥ'əlq'* (lit., who had no number); CR omits here, but has this phrase at the end of the sentence, after "provinces."

⁹ BDJ: *əm-däsəyat wä-əm-adbarat* (from the islands and the monasteries); CR: *əm-məšraq wä-əm-mə'rab əm-adbar* (from east and west, from the monasteries).

¹⁰ Lit., *əm-məkanat wä-əm-gādamat* (from parish churches and monastic settlements).

¹¹ BDJ: *əsmä səmu' wə'ətu* [D omits *wə'ətu*] *zenaha* (lit., because her story had been heard); CR: *əsmä təsäm'a zenaha* [different construction, but identical meaning].