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Ralph Lee with Mehari Worku and Wendy Laura Belcher
Translation of the *Hatata Zara Yaqob*

Part I: My Life (1600–1632)

Introduction¹

In the Name of God, who alone is righteous, I, *Walda Heywat*,² shall write down³ the life story,⁴ wisdom, and philosophical inquiry of *Zara Yaqob*,⁵ which he himself composed.

Zara Yaqob said the following:

Litt Ed 3
Abb215 1r
Sum 3
Abb234 2r

Chapter 1: My Birth

Come and hear me!⁶ Let me tell all you who stand in awe of God about what he has done for me!⁷ Now, I begin!⁸

1 The extant manuscripts of HZY (Abb 215 and Abb 234) do not have chapter titles, only chapter numbers. Thus, the wording and placement of all chapter titles in our translation are our inventions, to aid the reader. We have floated the page or folio number of the relevant HZY manuscripts, editions, and translations in the margins: ‘Abb215’ indicates the matching folio in d’Abbadie manuscript no. 215; ‘Lit Ed’ indicates the matching page in the Littman Ge’ez critical edition; ‘Sum’ indicates the matching page in the Sumner translation; and ‘Chap’ indicates the original chapter numbers in the Ge’ez manuscripts. If a footnote begins with Ge’ez script, those words are from Abb 215, our base source.

2 This name ‘Walda Heywat’ does not appear here, but the postscript identifies the writer as such, so we have inserted his name here for clarity.

3 አጽሐፍ (I shall write). See Manuscripts of the Texts on what this means in this context.

4 ጎድል (striving, combat, struggle) but often translated as ‘life’ or ‘life story’ because the word appears in the titles of Ethiopian hagiographies (e.g., *Gādlā Pətros*).

5 ወሐተታሁ (and his inquiry). ሐተታ is one of the most important words in this text and has the meaning of ‘inquiry’ or ‘investigation’, so we translate it here as ‘philosophical inquiry’.

6 Abb 234 omits the introductory sentences and starts with ‘Come and hear me!’

7 ለኔሴ (for me or for my soul or for my inner self). We have translated it contextually throughout. Psalm 66:16 (65:16 LXX).

8 Abb 234 omits: Now, I begin!

In the name of God, the creator¹ of all things, the first and the last, the almighty,² the fountain of all life and all wisdom, I will³ write about just a few of the many things that have happened to me during the long years of my life.

May my soul be glorified by God, may the humble listen and delight, for [as it says in Psalms,] ‘I have sought God, and he answered me’. ‘You should all come close to him now, and he will enlighten you, and you will not be ashamed’. ‘Glorify God with me, and together we will exalt his name’.⁴

Originally, my lineage is from the priests of Aksum.⁵ But I was born from a poor farmer in the region of Aksum,⁶ on 28 August⁷ in the third year of the reign of Yaqob I,⁸ 1,600⁹ years after the birth of Christ. By Christian baptism, I was named Zara Yaqob, but people call me Warqe.

Abb215 1v
Sum 4

1 ፈጣሪ (creator), from the root ፈጠረ (create, fashion, produce). This term also appears in the Ge'ez Bible, to refer to God.

2 አጋዢ ጥሉ (the holder of everything, but also: all-embracing, omnipotent, almighty). In Ge'ez, the term አጋዢ ጥሉ has often come to reference how God holds up everything rather than how God has power over everything.

3 Abb 234 adds: begin to.

4 Psalm 34:5, 4, 3 (33:5, 4, 3 LXX). The author often slightly alters his quotations from Psalms for a rhetorical purpose. Here, he has flipped the order of three verses to build a story of seeking God, learning from God, and then exalting God.

5 Aksum is an ancient city in the northern Ethiopian highland region of Tigré, the capital of the Aksumite Empire into the 700s CE. Aksum remains the most holy city of Ethiopian Christianity, as it is where the Ark of the Covenant is said to be kept.

6 Priests are of a higher class than those who are just farmers, especially priests for the prestigious and wealthy city of Aksum. Getatchew Haile argues that the author has ‘violated local tradition’ by not naming his birth village, likely due to fear of his family being persecuted for his views (Getatchew Haile 2017, 68.)

7 ፳፱ዓለነሐሴ, (the 25th [day in the month of] Nahase in the Ethiopian calendar). The Ethiopian calendar marks hours, days, months, and years differently; 25 Nahase corresponds to Monday, 28 August, in the Western/Gregorian calendar for that year.

8 ያዕቆብ (Yaqob [Jacob]); that is the Ethiopian King Yaqob I (1597–1603 CE, 1605–1607 CE).

9 በ፲፭ዓመታዊዓመዱ (In 1592) in the Ethiopian calendar, which corresponds to 1600 in the Western/Gregorian calendar, which is indeed the third year of Yaqob I's reign.

Chapter 2: My Schooling

When I was old enough, my father sent me to school to study,¹ and after I had learned to recite the Psalms of David,² my teacher told my father, ‘This child, your son, is brilliantly intelligent,³ and is diligent in studying, and if you send him for further schooling, he will become a great scholar and teacher’.

Abb234 2v

When my father heard this, he sent me to study the sacred music of *Zema*.⁴ Unfortunately, my voice was no good, and my throat was coarse, so I became a laughingstock to my friends, my fellow students. I stayed there[, at the school for Zema, only] three months, and then left with a grieving heart.

Then, I went to another teacher, one who taught *Qene*⁵ poetry and Ge’ez grammar.⁶ God granted me the wisdom to learn more quickly than my friends, my fellow students, and this gave me joy instead of my previous grief, so I stayed there for four years[, spending one year on grammar and three years on *Qene*].

During that time, death stared me in the face, but God saved me.⁷ While I was playing with my friends, the fellow students, I fell over a cliff. I don’t know exactly how I was saved, only that God saved me by a miracle. After I was rescued, I measured the [height of the] cliff with a long rope, and it was

Abb215 2r

Litt Ed 4

1 Abb 234 omits: sent me to school to study. The EOTC traditional educational system is one of the longest running educational systems in the world. See the Introduction regarding its complexity, content, and stages.

2 መዝሙረ ዳዊት (Psalms of David), a shorthand title for the Psalms and accompanying prayers in the Ge’ez Psalter. In the EOTC, a child might learn to read Ge’ez letters around the age of four and then, starting around the age of seven, spend the next three years complete the tasks of learning memorizing Psalms.

3 ብሩህ ልቡና (brilliantly intelligent). Such Ge’ez words as ልቡና (intelligence) and ለባዊ (rational, intelligent, one who reasons) are used throughout the Hatata, all based on the root ልብ (heart). In Ge’ez and other Semitic languages, the seat of both thought and emotion is the heart. On this topic, see (Kiros 2005b).

4 The EOTC traditional education system has five areas of study; the second is *zema bet* (the house of music), in which you learn chanting and memorize hymns. See our Introduction to the Hatata Inquiries.

5 The third EOTC educational stage is *qene bet* (the house of poetry), perhaps the most difficult stage, in which one studies grammar, style, and history; analyses the canon of poetry going back centuries; and composes original poetry. The text of the HZY bears witness to the author’s intensive study of poetry, as it plays with words and meaning.

6 ሰዋሰው (ladder, but also grammar), which is the name for Ethiopian grammar treatises and which more broadly became the term for ‘grammar’.

7 በእማንቱ መዋዕል እግዚአብሔር አውጽኦኔ እምኔይነ ሞት (in those days God brought me out from the eye of death).

Abb234 3r more than ten meters.¹ I got up alive and went to my teacher's house, glorifying God who had saved me.

After that, I left and went to study scripture interpretation.² I continued with this stage of learning for ten years. I studied [sacred] books, [both] how the foreigners,³ [the European Catholics,] interpreted them and how our [Ethiopian] country's teachers interpreted them. Often, both of their interpretations were not in harmony with my reason, so I just kept silent and hid⁴ all the thoughts in my heart. Then I returned to my region, of Aksum, and taught for four years.

Chapter 3: My Days of Persecution

Abb234 3v Those days were evil ones, because in the nineteenth year of the reign of
Abb215 2v *Susenyos*,⁵ Bishop *Efons*[, that is, Afonso Mendez,]⁶ came from the land of the foreigners[, the Europeans]. Two years later, a terrible persecution arose across the whole land of Ethiopia, because the king embraced the faith of the foreigners[, the European Catholics], and so the king began to persecute everyone who did not accept it.

1 ጳጳሳዊ በእጩ ወጪከር (25 cubits and 1 hand span). The cliff was 10 to 15 meters (34 to 50 feet) deep.

2 The third EOTC educational stage is *matsehaf bet* (the school of exegesis), in which you learn to interpret scripture and texts.

3 ፍራንጅ (fəranǧ, also spelled fārāṅg, probably derived from 'Frank'), which in Ge'ez texts usually refers to foreigners of European origin but in this text usually appears to mean Catholics. For instance, later in the text, the ፍራንጅ are connected to 'the Throne of Peter', that is, the See of Rome and the Bishop of Rome. We translate it as 'foreigners' and add '[European Catholics]' to clarify the specific group.

4 ኅባእኩ (I hid). This seems to be an allusion to Luke 2:19: 'But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart'.

5 ሱሰነዮስ (Susənyos) was king of Ethiopia from 1606 to 7 September 1632. Persuaded by European Jesuit missionaries, he converted from Ethiopian orthodoxy to Roman Catholicism in 1621. His edict that all Christians had to become Roman Catholics triggered a religious civil war. It ended in 1632 when Susənyos rescinded that edict and soon afterward died.

6 አፎንስ. As is consistent with other Ge'ez texts of the period, this text gives only *Efons* the name to the European Catholic Jesuit Afonso Mendes. Mendes was appointed, by the Bishop of Rome, as the third Catholic Patriarch of the EOTC, in 1622 CE. The author refers to him throughout with the lesser title: አቡነ (our father), the title of a bishop. Mendes is remembered for his harsh Latinising reforms of the clergy, the church, and the calendar.

While I was in my hometown and teaching the sacred texts, many of my friends began to hate me. This was because in those days [the principle of] loving one's neighbour¹ had vanished, and jealousy took hold of my friends, since I was better at learning and loving my neighbour than they were. Chap 2
Sum 5

However, I was on friendly² terms with everyone, with the foreigners[, the European Catholics,] and with the Copts[,³ the Egyptian Orthodox Christians]. So, while teaching and expounding the books [for my students], I said, 'the foreigners[, the European Catholics,] say these things, and the Copts[, the Egyptian Orthodox Christians,] say these other things'. I did not say, 'this interpretation is good' or 'that interpretation is bad'. Rather, I said, 'all of these interpretations are good if we ourselves are good'.

They all hated me for this, since to the Copts[, the Egyptian Orthodox Christians,] I seemed like a foreigner[, a European Catholic,] and to the foreigners, I seemed like a Copt. Frequently, they made false charges against me to the king. But God kept me safe.⁴ Abb234 4r

Then, *Walda Yohannes*,⁵ one of my enemies, a priest from Aksum, became a friend of the king—because kings' friendship can be gained through deceitful words. This deceiver went to the king [Susenyos], and said of me, 'Look, this man misleads the people,⁶ telling them that we should rise up because of our faith, kill the king, and expel the foreigners[, the European Catholics]'. He made many other similar false accusations against me.⁷ Abb215 3r
Litt Ed 5

¹ Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 25:39, Mark 12:31

² Abb 215: I was on friendly terms; Abb 234: because I was on friendly terms.

³ The patriarch of the EOTC was always Egyptian, appointed in Alexandria for life. Therefore, a large community of Egyptian Coptic Christians lived in Ethiopia, near the mother church in Aksum. Interacting with Coptic Christians would have been typical of someone who lived in Aksum.

⁴ Abb 215: and God kept me safe; Abb 234: but God kept me safe.

⁵ ወልደ ዮሐንስ (Son of [Saint] John).

⁶ Luke 23:2; this phrase is similar to the charge made against Christ.

⁷ Abb 215: 'and kill the king' is added in the margin by a secondary hand; in Abb 234 the phrase is in the body.

Chapter 4: My Fleeing into the Wilderness

As soon as I found this out,¹ I became afraid. I had three ounces of gold,² so I took that with me, [along with] a book and a psalter³ for my personal prayers, and I fled during the night. I did not tell anyone, nor did anyone ask me, where I was going, and I arrived at an isolated place⁴ by the *Takkaze* River.⁵

By the next day, I was starving, so I fearfully went out to beg for some bread from the wealthy in a nearby town. They gave me some, and I ate. Then I fled [to my next hiding place]. I did the same thing [begging and walking,] for many days.

Abb234 4v While heading towards the region of Shewa,⁶ I found another isolated place.⁷ At the bottom of a high cliff, there was a beautiful cave, and I thought, ‘I can stay here without anyone knowing’. I lived there for two years, until Susenyos died.

Abb215 3v Sometimes I went out, heading to the market⁸ or to one of the Amhara towns.⁹ The Amhara people thought that I was a hermit monk begging for alms, and they gave me food.

1 Abb 215: as soon as I found this out; Abb 234: as soon as I heard this.

2 ቼለውቅያተ ወርቅ (three *awqayyat* of gold) One ወቅት (*waqet*) is approximately equivalent to 1 ounce, or 28 grams.

3 Abb 234: a book of the Psalms of David. *Psalms of David* is the title of an Ethiopian book that actually includes more than Psalms. This daily prayer book, the Psalter, also includes other biblical songs, the *Song of Songs* and Ethiopian hymns and prayers to Mary.

4 ገዳም (wilderness or monastery), here and several sentences later, and by implication a place where someone goes to be a hermit monk, isolated from all others, hence its second meaning.

5 ተክሲ (*Täkkāzī*) is a river marks the southern boundary of the northernmost Ethiopian region of Tigré. This is an alternate spelling of the term, common in older manuscripts.

6 ሸዋ (*Šäwa*), the southernmost Ethiopian region. The modern city of Addis Ababa is at its centre, about 570 kilometres (350 miles) south of Aksum. Abb 234: ሰዋ (*Sewa*).

7 Previous translations did not make clear that the place where he stayed was not on the Takkaze River.

8 In highland Ethiopia, markets are not found in towns (which are only for homes) but are held on two or three days a week between different towns on main roads. Only a place outside of town has enough space for all the people, animals, crops, crafts, and so on.

9 The Amhara are a people of highland Ethiopia, who live in Shewa, but also in the historical region directly west of the historical region of Shewa and south of the historical region of Tigré, which is the author's home region. The centre of the Amhara people is Lake Tana, with Begemder to the north of it and Gojjam to the south.

People didn't know where I lived or returned to, and when I was alone¹ in my cave, I felt like I was living in the Kingdom of Heaven, because I hated to be with human beings,² knowing their limitless evil.

I improved my cave with a fence of stones and thorny branches to prevent wild animals from eating me during the night. Also, I made a way to escape in case anyone came searching for me.

I lived there in peace, and I prayed the Psalms of David with all my heart, and I trusted in God who hears me.³

Part II: My Inquiries

Chapter 5: My Inquiry regarding Wickedness

[Every day,] I had nothing to do after making my prayers, so I meditated all day on humanity's quarrels and wickedness, and also on the wisdom of the Lord their creator, who keeps silent⁴ when they act wickedly in his name, persecute their neighbours, and kill their own brothers and sisters, due to the power of the foreigners[, the European Catholics,] in those days.

Chap 3

Abb234 5r

Abb215 4r

It was not just the foreigners[, the European Catholics, who acted wickedly], but as for the nation's people[, the Ethiopian Orthodox,]⁵ they were even more evil than the foreigners. Those [of my country] who accepted the foreign [Catholic] faith said, 'the Copts[, the Egyptian Orthodox Church,] have denied the true faith⁶ of the Throne of Peter,⁷ and they are the Lord's enemies'. So, the [Ethiopian] Catholics persecuted the Coptic [leaders, and

Sum 6

¹ Abb 234: when I was a hermit (or solitary).

² ሰብአ (human). The author uses this word frequently and we have translated it variously according to context, including 'human', 'human being', 'all human beings', 'humanity', 'people', 'all people'.

³ Abb 234: and I trusted that God hears me.

⁴ That is, he is pondering why God would keep silent when people rebel in his name. What wisdom would make God silent?

⁵ Abb 234: for our nation's own people. However, the more impersonal wording in Abb 215 (as opposed to the more personal wording in Abb 234) could be put down to scribal error of miscopying the pronominal suffix -ነ (our) with the particle -ኒ (also).

⁶ ሃይማኖት ርኅብ (Orthodox faith).

⁷ Abb 234 omits: of the Throne of Peter. This refers to the seat of the Bishop of Rome, also known as the Pope, the head of the Roman Catholic Church.

their Ethiopian followers,] and the Copts did the same on account of their own faith.¹

I turned over in my mind, ‘If God is the guardian of humanity, how has their human nature been ruined in this way?’

I wondered, [as it says in Psalms,] ‘How can God know [about human depravity]? Is there knowledge in the Most High?’²

Litt Ed 6 And if there is such knowledge, why does God keep silent on human depravity, when they defile his name or act wickedly in his holy name?

I turned this over in my mind many times, but I did not understand it at all.

I prayed [with Psalms]:³

Abb234 5v ‘O my lord and creator—who created me intelligent—make me understand’⁴

‘Tell me your hidden wisdom!’⁵

‘Give light to my eyes, so that I don’t sleep the sleep of death’.⁶

Abb215 4v ‘Your hands made me and formed me, make me understand and I will learn your commandments’.⁷

‘Because, as for me, my feet almost stumbled, and my steps almost slipped’.⁸

[When I tried to understand wickedness,] ‘this was wearisome for me’.⁹
As I prayed, this and similar [thoughts] continued [to turn over in my mind].

1 Abb 234 omits: on account of their own faith.

2 Psalm 73:11 (72:11 LXX). We have added the subject of God’s knowledge, ‘human depravity’, based on an earlier verse in this Psalm. The author often alludes to the meaning of a whole Psalm by giving just one line from it, assuming that his Ethiopian audience, who knew all the Psalms by heart, will understand the overall themes, subject, and context to which the quotation alludes.

3 The author is creating his own Psalm, on a particular theme, by yoking disparate passages in various Psalms together.

4 Psalms 119:34 (118:34 LXX). *ἡ ἐλπίς σου ἡ ἐποίησέν με* (you who created me intelligent, make me understand).

5 Psalm 51:6 (50:8 LXX).

6 Psalm 13:3 (12:4 LXX).

7 Psalm 119:73 (118:73 LXX). In the Psalms and other biblical passages, ‘commandments’ include the Ten Commandments but are not limited to them.

8 Psalm 73:2 (72:2 LXX).

9 Psalm 73:16 (72:16 LXX)

Chapter 6: My Inquiry regarding the Existence of a Creator

One day, though, I pondered, ‘Whom do I myself pray to? Is there a Lord who hears me?’

I was deeply troubled, and I said to myself, just as David said [in Psalms], ‘Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure!’¹

Later, I pondered [something else] that David had said, ‘Does he who planted the ear not hear?’²

I thought, ‘In reality, who is it who gave me ears to hear, and who created me as intelligent? How did I myself come into this world? Where did I come from?’³

For, I didn’t exist prior to the world,⁴ I don’t know [the time] when my life and my intellect began. But who created me? Did I create myself with my own hands? But I didn’t exist when⁵ I was created [so how could I create myself?].

Abb234 6r

If I say that my father and my mother created me, then my parents’ creator and their parents’ creator must still be searched for, until arriving at the first ones who were not conceived like us, but who came into this world in another way, without parents.

Abb215 5r

For, if they were conceived, I don’t know where their genealogy begins unless I say, ‘There is one being who created them out of nothing,’⁶ one who was not created, but rather already existed and will exist forever,⁷ Lord of all, the Almighty, who has no beginning or end, immutable, whose years are innumerable’.

1 Psalm 73:13 (72:13 LXX). That is, if there is no creator, one need not behave correctly to satisfy him.

2 Psalm 94:9 (93:9 LXX).

3 Abb 234 omits: and from where did I come?

4 He seems to have in mind the opening from the divine liturgy of the Anaphora of Dioscorus: እምቅድመ ዓለም ወእስከ ለዓለም ሀሎ እግዚአብሔር በመንግሥቱ እግዚአብሔር በትሥልስቱ እግዚአብሔር በመለኮቱ (From before the world [began,] and for eternity God exists in His kingdom; God exists in His trinity; God exists in His divinity).

5 Abb 234: when.

6 እምነበ አልቦ (from that which is not), a phrase expressed in Latin as *ex nihilo* (from nothing).

7 ዘህሎ ወይሄሎ (the one who is and will be), from Exodus 3:14, which is included in the hymn *Waddase Maryam*, the part recited every Monday in the liturgy. This whole sentence has set expressions from the EOTC liturgy and many of them rhyme, as with the example given here.

I said, ‘Therefore, there is a creator’, because if¹ there were no creator, then the creation would not have existed. Because we exist and are not creators but rather are created, we have to say that there is a creator who fashioned us.

Further, this creator who fashioned *us* with the faculties of reason and speech² cannot himself be without these faculties of reason and speech, because from the abundance of his reason he created us with the faculty of reason. ‘He understands all things, because he created all things, and he sustains all things’.³

I thought, ‘My creator will listen to me when I pray to him’, and I was very happy with this thought.

So I prayed with great expectation, loving my creator⁴ with all my heart, I prayed [aloud with the Psalms], ‘You, O Lord, know all the thoughts of my heart from far away. For look, you yourself knew all things, in the first and the last, and you knew all my ways in advance’.⁵

So, I thought, because of this [truth], it said [in the Psalms],⁶ ‘You know from far away’; [that is,] because the Lord knew my thoughts before I was created.

I prayed aloud, ‘O my creator, give me understanding!’

Chapter 7: My Inquiry regarding the Truth of Different Religions

And later, I thought, ‘Is all that is written in the sacred books⁷ true?’ I thought a lot, but [in spite of this thinking,] I didn’t understand anything.

1 Abb 234 omits: if. This appears to be a scribal error of omission.
2 ለባውያን ወንባብያን, (as ones with intelligence and beings with speech). That is, they can understand the world and they have the linguistic capacity to articulate that understanding. The same two words appear in the next two phrases as well.
3 These phrases are repeated many times during the EOTC liturgy of hours and the divine liturgy (for instance, during the concluding part of the Anaphora of Dioscorus).
4 Abb 234: our creator.
5 Psalm 139: 2, 5, 3 (138: 2, 5, 3 LXX).
6 ይቤ. (it or he said). The opening phrase of this sentence is the standard formula for opening commentary on a biblical text in the Ethiopian tradition.
7 መጻሕፍት ቅዱሳት (holy books), but in the Ethiopian tradition, few churches or monasteries would have manuscripts with every book of the Bible (an extended canon of 81 books), and many other texts are regarded as sacred, so these words are not referencing a defined set of biblical books.

So, I said [to myself], ‘I will go, and I will ask learned people and those who question deeply, and they will tell me the truth’.¹

And after this, I thought, ‘What answer will people give me except that which is already present in their hearts?’

In fact, everyone says, ‘My religion² is correct, and those who believe in another religion believe in something false, and they are enemies of God’.

Abb234 7r

Now, the foreigners[, the European Catholics,] say to us, ‘Our creed is good, and your creed is evil’.

But we [Ethiopians] answer them, ‘It is not evil; rather your creed is evil and our creed is good’.

Now, suppose we asked Muslims and Jews [about their belief]? They would say the same thing to us.

Abb215 6r

Also, if they argued the case in this debate, who would be the judge?

No human being³ [could judge] because all human beings have become judgemental, and they condemn each other.

First, I asked a foreign[, European Catholic] scholar about many things concerning our [Ethiopian] creed⁴ and he decided everything [was right or wrong] according to his own creed.

Afterwards, I asked a great Ethiopian teacher, and he [likewise] decided everything according to his creed.

If we asked Muslims and Jews about the same things, they would also decide according to their own religion.

Where will I find someone who will decide [on the religions and creeds] truthfully? Because [just as] my religion seems true to me, so does another’s religion seem true to them. But, there is only one truth.

¹ Abb 234 omits: and they will tell me the truth.

² ሃይማኖት (belief, creed, faith, or religion).

³ አጓለ እመክያው (children of the mother of the living [Eve]). In Ethiopia, this is a typical formulation for expressing the idea of humanity, emphasizing that we all come from one mother. For instance, in the English Bible, Christ is called ‘the Son of Man’ while in the Ethiopic Bible he is called ወልደ አጓለ እመክያው (the Son of the Children of the Mother of the Living) (John 3:13–14).

⁴ Abb 234 omits: about many things concerning our creed.

Abb234 7v As I turned these things over in my mind, I thought, ‘O wisest¹ and most righteous Creator, who created me with the faculty of reason, give me understanding’.²

For wisdom and truth are not found among human beings, but as David said [in Psalms], “indeed, everyone is a liar”.³

Abb215 6v I thought and said [to myself], ‘Why do human beings lie about these vital matters [of religion], such that they destroy⁴ themselves?’

It seemed to me that they lie because they know nothing at all, although they think they are knowledgeable. Therefore, because they think they are knowledgeable, they don’t search to find out the truth.

David said [in Psalms], ‘their hearts are curdled like milk’;⁵ Indeed their hearts are ‘curdled’ by what they have heard from their ancestors. Furthermore, they never investigated whether what they heard is true or false.

Litt Ed 8

As for me, I say [with Psalms],

‘It was good for me, O Lord, that you inflicted suffering on me so that I may learn your judgement.’⁶

Sum 8

‘Rebuke me with truth and reproach me with mercy. Don’t let my head be anointed⁷ with the oil of sinners’⁸ and false teachers.⁹

[I add,] ‘Give me understanding for you have created me as a rational being’.¹⁰

I thought and said [to myself], ‘If I am a rational being, what do I understand?’

Abb234 8r

I thought, ‘I understand that there is a creator who is greater than all the creation’. For, out of the richness of his greatness he created great things. Also, he is a rational being, understanding all things, for out of the richness of his

¹ ጠቢብ ጠቢባ? (wisest of the wise), the normal way to express a superlative in Ge’ez, but perhaps also an allusion to the Ge’ez hymn of the same name, ጠቢብ ጠቢባ?, a short narration of the history of salvation.

² A frequent request of the Psalmist in Psalm 119, for instance verses 34, 73, 125, 144, 169 (118: 34, 73, 125, 144, 169 LXX).

³ Psalm 116:11 (115:2 LXX).

⁴ Abb 234: to ruin themselves.

⁵ Psalm 119:70 (118:70 LXX).

⁶ Psalm 119:71 (118:71 LXX).

⁷ ኢይትቀባፊ ርእሰየ (Don’t let my head be anointed).

⁸ Psalm 141:5 (140:5 LXX).

⁹ Abb 234: liars.

¹⁰ ለባዊ, (rational, intelligent, one who reasons), an adjective which also serves as a noun, which we have translated differently according to context; sometimes as ‘rational’, ‘faculty of reason’, ‘rational being(s)’, ‘understanding being(s)’, ‘intelligent’ (as describing Hirut), or ‘wise’ (again as describing a person as ‘wise and inquisitive’).

understanding he created us as rational beings. So, we should worship him, because he is the Lord of all, and when we pray to him, he hears us,¹ because he is the almighty.

And I thought and I said [to myself], ‘When God created me as a rational being, it was not purposeless that he created me so’. Rather, [he did it] so that I would seek him, and understand him and his wisdom, creating me in the way he did.² I will glorify him for as long as I live.

Abb215 7r

Chapter 8: My Inquiry regarding Falsehood

I thought, and I said [to myself], ‘Why don’t all human beings understand the truth instead of [believing] lies?’

It seemed to me that it is because the nature of human beings is weak and lazy. Human beings do delight in the truth, and they love her³ greatly, and they desire to know⁴ creation’s mysteries, but doing so is difficult. The truth won’t be found without great toil and patience.⁵

As Solomon said [in the Bible], ‘I gave my heart to seek out and examine, with wisdom, everything that happens under the sun, because God gave human beings a vile burden for them to be exhausted by’.⁶

Because of the vileness of this burden, human beings don’t want to ask questions,⁷ and they rush to believe what they have heard from their ancestors, without questioning.

Abb234 8v

Also, God created human beings to be the owners of their own actions, to be what they want to be, whether good or evil.

If human beings choose to be evil and liars, they can be, until they receive the judgement that their evil deserves.⁸

Abb215 7v

1 Abb 234: when I pray to him he hears *me*.

2 Abb 234: Rather, so that I would seek him, and his wisdom with which he created me.

3 the soul, the mind, human nature, wisdom, truth, and many other abstract qualities are feminine. This text here treats ‘truth’ as feminine.

4 Abb 234: and they greatly love to know.

5 Abb 234: But this is difficult, and will not be found without toil and great patience.

6 Ecclesiastes 1:13.

7 ኢየሱያስ ይጥቅም (they don’t want to inquire).

8 Abb 234: they can be.

Also, human beings choose fleshly pleasure, because they are fleshly beings.¹ They seek to satisfy the desires of their flesh in every way that they can be found, whether good or evil.

It is not God who created human beings as evil, rather it is God who gave them the choice to become whatever they want. Because God gave them this choice, any human being will be worthy of a reward if they are good or judgement if they are evil.

Litt Ed 9 If a liar who seeks wealth or prestige among human beings wants to obtain these through lying, he will speak lies, representing them as true. To human beings who don't want to question, his lies will seem to be true, and they will believe in them with unshakable faith.

Abb234 9r Look, how many lies our people believe with unshakable faith! They believe² in astrology³ and other prediction practices, in [the power of] repeating secret names, in omens, in demon summoning, and all charms, and in everything fortune tellers pronounce. They don't believe in all these because they investigated them and found them to be true, rather they believe in them because they heard about them from their ancestors.⁴ Why did these people lie, except to gain wealth and prestige?

Likewise, those who want to rule the people⁵ say, 'God has sent us to announce the truth to you'.

Sum 9 As a result, the people believe. Those who came later didn't question the belief of their fathers, rather they accepted it⁶ without question. They even strengthened it,⁷ by adding stories of signs and miracles to prove the truth of their belief.⁸ And they declared, 'God did these signs and miracles!' Thus, they made God an attesting witness of lies and a collaborator with liars.⁹

1 Romans 8:5, but also expressed in the Anaphora of Dioscorus: ንሕሳስ ሥጋውያን ንሐሊ. ሕገ ሥጋ ወንዝብር ግብረ ሥጋ ወንሐውር በፍፍተ ሥጋ (We, however, are fleshly. We think according to the law of the flesh; we do the work of the flesh; and we proceed in the path of the flesh).

2 Abb 234 adds: why do they believe?

3 For an example of Ethiopian astrology, see the fifteenth-century Ge'ez text ዐውደ ነገሥት ወሐሳብ ከዋክብት (The Divine Cycle of Kings and the Computation of the Stars).

4 Abb 234: but because they heard it from their ancestors.

5 Abb 234: those who wanted to rule human beings.

6 Abb 234: They did not inquire, rather they accepted the faith of their fathers.

7 Abb 234 makes the pronoun 'it' explicit with ለሐሰት (the lies), making the object of the verb clear.

8 Abb 234: In order to strengthen their religion.

9 Abb 234 omits: and a collaborator with liars.

But to the one who searches, truth will quickly¹ be revealed. For, because the one who inquires with the pure reason which the Creator has put into the human heart, to perceive the creation's established order and laws,² will find the truth.

Chapter 9: My Inquiry regarding Jewish, Islamic, and Christian Laws about Sexuality and Bodies

[Regarding the Jews,] Moses said, 'I was sent from God to announce to you all His will and His law'.³

Abb234 9v

But those who came after him, they added stories of miracles which they allege were done in the land of Egypt and on Mount Sinai.⁴ They made their additions appear like the truth of what Moses had [originally] said.

Abb215 8v

But, to the one who investigates [these stories], they don't seem like the truth. For, in the books of Moses, [that is, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy,] detestable wisdom is found,⁵ that is not in harmony with the Creator's wisdom, nor creation's established order and laws.⁶

For, under the authority of the Creator's will and the creation's established order, men and women should⁷ have the bodily communion of intercourse,⁸ joining together in their flesh. [In this way,] they [conceive and] give birth to children so that humanity will not disappear. This union, which God has estab-

1 Abb 234 omits: quickly.

2 Abb 234: And into the ordering of creation, which is clear to our intelligence.

3 Moses does not say this sentence in the main Biblical books about him, Exodus and Deuteronomy; rather, the author here creatively summarizes various things Moses said about his relationship with God and his people. See Exodus 3:13.

4 In EOTC theology, a distinction is often made between Christian folklore (like hagiographies or miracle collections) and canonical texts, with theologians cautioning against taking miracle stories at face value. HZY is taking that general caution further and using it to question the Bible itself and some of its miracles associated with Moses. On this caution, see the book *ወዳጅ ልብ* by Heruy Walda Selassie.

5 Abb 234: For this is found in the books of Moses.

6 Abb 234 omits: and laws.

7 Abb 234: So, the creation's established order commands men and women.

8 ሩኅቢ, which is derived from ረከቢ (to find something or someone). Therefore, it is not a reference to sex alone but to the connection and intimacy that sex provides.

lished as part of human nature, the law of his creation for humanity,¹ cannot be impure, because God will not defile the work of his own hands.²

[But,] as for Moses, he said, ‘all intercourse is impure’.³

It is only our intelligence that makes us sure⁴ that anyone who says this is a liar and regards the creator himself as a liar.

Meanwhile, Christians claim that their law is from God, and miracles have been found that assert this.

Abb234 10r

But, only our intelligence tells us and assures us that marriage is part of the creator’s established order.⁵ The ascetic monastic life rejects the creator’s wisdom, because it prevents conceiving children [and giving birth to them,] and thus destroys the human race.

Abb215 9r

Litt Ed 10

Also, when⁶ the Christians’ law says, ‘the ascetic monastic life is better than marriage’,⁷ it’s telling a lie and it’s not from God.⁸ For, how can the Christian law that violates the Creator’s law be better than his wisdom? Can human deliberation improve on the work of God?⁹

In the same way,¹⁰ Mohammed said, ‘I received¹¹ from God what I command you to do’.

There were plenty of miracle writers who affirm [the claim] that Mohammed was sent by God and so they believed in him.

As for you and me, we know that Mohammed’s teaching [about multiple wives] cannot be from God.¹²

For, human beings, born male and female, are equal in number, and if we count men and women who live in one country, there is one woman for

1 Abb 234: This union is the law of the creator.

2 Abb 234: his precepts.

3 Moses does not say this sentence in the main Biblical books about him, Exodus and Deuteronomy; rather he is creatively summarizing the ritual purity laws that appear in the Hebrew Bible, many in Leviticus (e.g., even married people who have intercourse cannot approach the temple or tabernacle for twenty-four hours, which law both Ethiopian Orthodox Christians and Muslims also follow).

4 Abb 234: makes certain.

5 Abb 234: It is that marriage is part of the creator’s law.

6 Abb 234 omits: when.

7 It is unclear where this quotation comes from; writing on monasticism and asceticism has regularly affirmed celibacy as spiritually preferable to marriage.

8 Abb 234: and this is a lie.

9 Abb 234 omits: Can human deliberation improve on the work of God?.

10 Abb 234: also.

11 Abb 215: ‘I received’ added in the upper margin by a secondary hand.

12 Abb 234 omits: Mohammed’s teaching cannot be from God.

every man. There aren't eight or ten women for each man, because creation's established order prescribes that one man and one woman will marry. So, if one man marries ten women, nine men will have no wife. This violates the creator's established order and the creation's laws,¹ and it annuls the benefits of marriage.² Mohammed, who taught in God's name that it is proper for one man to marry many women, is a liar and was not sent from God.

Sum 10

Abb215 9v

Abb234 10v

I investigated a few such things concerning the established order of marriage.

Similarly, even if I were to investigate the rest of the Mosaic Law,³ Christian law, and Islamic law, I would find many things that are not in harmony with our creator's 'truth and justice',⁴ which our intelligence reveals to us.

Because the creator put the light of intelligence in the human heart, that human beings may perceive good and evil; recognise what is and is not proper; and distinguish the truth from a lie, and how 'By your Light, O Lord, we see light'!⁵

If we were to see by this light of our intelligence what is our duty, it cannot deceive us, because our Creator⁶ gave us this light that we may be saved by it, and not destroyed.⁷ And all⁸ that the light of our intelligence reveals to us is from the fountain of truth.⁹

By contrast, what human beings say to us arises from the fountain of lies. Our intelligence affirms¹⁰ to us that everything the Creator has established is right.

¹ Abb 234: and opposes his wisdom.

² While many critiques of Islam exist in EOTC theology, the focus on polygamy here would seem to be unique to this author. Perhaps this was because polygamy was not so rare among Ethiopian Christians, especially among the nobility.

³ *አገ ኦሪት*, which is a little ambiguous, as the term *orit* may refer to 'the Law', 'the Ten Commandments', or 'the Octateuch' (that is, the first eight books of the Bible, Genesis to Ruth, which are commonly bound together in manuscripts). In this context, it clearly refers to Old Testament Law, but something wider than just the Ten Commandments.

⁴ Psalm 111:7 (110:7 LXX).

⁵ Psalm 36:9 (35:9 LXX)

⁶ Abb 234: the creator.

⁷ An allusion to John 1:9 and John 3:16.

⁸ Abb 234 omits: and all.

⁹ Alternately, *ወክሉ ዘያርእየነ ብርሃነ ልቡናነ እምነቅዓ ጽድቅ ውሉቱ* might be translated 'our intelligence's light arises from the fountain of truth'.

¹⁰ Abb 234: tells us.

Abb234 11r With virtuous¹ wisdom, the creator ordained that each month blood
 Abb215 10r should flow from a woman's womb; and that this flow of blood is essential
 to a woman's life and the bearing of children.² A woman who does not have
 Litt Ed 11 this flow is barren and cannot bear children, because her womanhood is
 damaged.³

But Moses⁴ and Christians have declared that this [particular] wisdom
 of the Creator is [something] impure. Moses even declares that anything
 touched by a [bleeding] woman is impure.⁵ This 'law of Moses' makes mar-
 riage and a woman's entire life difficult because it annuls [the principle of]
 mutual help, impedes child rearing,⁶ and destroys love. Therefore, this 'law
 of Moses' cannot be⁷ from the Creator of women.

[On another issue], our intelligence tells us, 'We should bury⁸ our dead
 relatives'.⁹

Their corpses are not unclean, except in accordance with 'Moses'
 wisdom'. [That's] not [the case] according to our Creator's wisdom, who
 made us from earth so that we might return to earth.¹⁰

On the contrary, God will not defile the order which he himself estab-
 lished with great wisdom as befits all creation. Human beings, however,
 want to defile this established order so that they might honour the falsehood
 [of human laws].¹¹

Abb234 11v In addition, the Gospel says, 'He who does not leave his father and
 Abb215 10v mother, his wife and children will not be worthy of God'.¹²

1 Abb 234: with great.

2 Abb 234: and for childbearing.

3 እስመ ማሰነ ፍጥረታ (because her nature is spoiled).

4 The author is precisely focused on what Moses did, not on Jews as a race or Jewish law more generally.

5 Leviticus 15:19–30.

6 Abb 234: Because <and> it annuls the law of mutual help < and . . . of children> and the raising of children.

7 Abb 234: cannot come.

8 Abb 234: our intelligence tells us to bury.

9 አጋዊነ (our brothers), but this word can also mean 'kindred' or 'relatives'.

10 An allusion to Genesis 3:19, but flipping what is a curse, 'By the sweat of your face you will eat your bread . . . , for you are earth and to earth you will depart', into something positive, treating death and burial as part of the natural order.

11 ቃለ ሐሰት (the word of falsehood).

12 Abb 234: The Gospel says that he who leaves his father and his mother, his wife and his children is worthy of God. Paraphrase of Matthew 10:37, Luke 14:26, which is direct speech from Jesus.

This abandonment [of family] undermines the nature of all humanity,¹ and God does not delight in destroying his creation.

Further, our intelligence shows² us that abandoning fathers and mothers in their old age, so that they die through neglect, is a terrible transgression. And ‘God is not a God who loves violence’.³

Also, those who abandon children are more wicked than the wild beasts of the wilderness, for animals don’t abandon their offspring.

Also, he who abandons his wife sets her up to commit adultery. He destroys the Creator’s established order and the creation’s laws.⁴

Sum 11

Consequently, what the Gospel says in this section of the text⁵ [about leaving your family] cannot be from God.

Also, Muslims say that it is proper to sell and trade human beings like animals. But only through our intelligence do we realise that this Muslim law cannot come from the Creator of human beings, the one who created us equal, as brothers and sisters, meaning that we call the Creator ‘our father’ [as members of his family]. But Mohammed regarded weak human beings as the property of strong human beings and equated rational creation⁶ with irrational beasts. Can it be that this violence comes from God?

Abb234 12r

Abb215 11r

Chapter 10: My Inquiry regarding Jewish, Islamic, and Christian Laws about Food

Likewise, God will not command pointless things.⁷

He will not say, as those among the Christians who keep fasting laws say, ‘Eat this but don’t eat that; eat today but don’t eat tomorrow; don’t eat meat today but eat it tomorrow’.

1 ያማሽን ኩሎ ፍጥረት ሰብአ (it ruins the entire nature of humanity).

2 Abb 234: tells us.

3 An allusion to Psalm 5:4 (5:5 LXX); Ethiopic versions of this psalm have እስመ ኢኮነክ እምላክ ዘዓመፃ ያፈቅር (You are not a God who loves violence), and the author has adapted the quotation into reported speech to fit the rhetorical context.

4 Abb 234: the creation’s established order.

5 በዝንቱ ብሔር (in this section/region), a formulaic expression used in the Ethiopian *andemta* schools for speaking about sections of text.

6 ለፍጥረት ለባዊት (the understanding or intelligent creation [fem.]). In the Ethiopian tradition, the creation is referred to in the feminine, which the author uses here to communicate its uniqueness, beauty, delicacy, and sacred nature.

7 Abb 234 omits: he [God] will not command pointless things.

Also, to the Muslims, God does not say, ‘eat during the night¹ but don’t eat during the day’, nor other similar things.

Litt Ed 12

For our intelligence teaches us that we are permitted to eat anything that does not harm our health or constitution,² and also to eat every day enough to sustain our lives. Eating one day and fasting another destroys [our] health. The fasting laws lie outside the established order of the creator, who created food for good health. He desired for us to eat food, and to give thanks to him. It isn’t right that we should abstain from this blessing of his.³

Abb234 12v

Abb215 11v

If there are those who tell me that the fasting law was established to kill the lust of the flesh, I say to them, ‘The craving of the flesh, in which a man is attracted to a woman and a woman is attracted to a man, is the creator’s wisdom’.

Contradicting this [wisdom, by restraining this attraction,] is not right, it’s ignoring the creator’s established order of lawful intercourse⁴ [through marriage].⁵ Indeed, our creator did not put this craving into all human and animal flesh for no reason. Rather, he planted this craving in human flesh as the foundation of life in this world,⁶ and he sets all creation on the path established for it.⁷

Also, so that this craving does not exceed its natural limits, we should [only] eat as much as we need⁸ because gluttony and drunkenness destroy our health and our work. But as a person does not sin who eats⁹ as much as they need on Sunday, or during Pentecost, similarly a person who eats

1 Abb 234: Don’t eat today but on another day eat. Don’t eat meat today but eat it on another day. Eat during the night.

2 Abb 234: for our intelligence with which the creator bestowed us tells us to eat everything that does not harm our constitution.

3 Abb 234: The fasting law and other abstinences, except the abstinence from that which corrupts human nature, cannot be from God. Because God does not command useless things and after he created food for human life, he wants us to eat them and worship him and not to reject his blessing.

4 Abb 234: the creator’s established order, which is lawful marriage and intercourse.

5 ወክብተሎቲስ ኢይደሉ እንበለ በሥርዓት አመር ዘሠርዓ ውሉቱ ፈጣሪ በሩካቤ ሕጋዊ (violating it is not right, only [its fulfilment] in the well-known established order of the creator, lawful sexual communion). This sentence is an example of how the author regularly expresses complex ideas in complex and elegant language.

6 Abb 234: But so that this craving would be for the life of this world.

7 Abb 234: And he sets human nature in the wisdom of the creator and in all of creation’s established order.

8 Abb 234: with measure.

9 Abb 234 adds: and drinks.

on Friday¹ or on the days before Easter does not sin,² because God created human beings with the desire to eat the same amount of food every day and every month.

The Jews, the Christians, and the Muslims did not comprehend God's work when they established the fasting laws. Rather, they lied saying,³ 'God established fasting for us and forbids us eating'.

Abb215 12r

Yet God our creator gave food for our nourishment, for us to eat from it and not to abstain from it.⁴

Abb234 13r

Sum 12

Chapter 11: My Inquiry regarding Religious Agreement

Also, there is another great matter for inquiry: because, all human beings are equal in God's presence, and they are all his understanding creation.

Chap 6

He did not create one group of human beings for life and another for death, one for mercy and another for judgement.⁵ Our intelligence teaches us that this [sort of] favouritism does not exist in God, who is 'righteous in all his deeds'.⁶

But Moses was sent to teach the Jews alone, and David himself said [in Psalms], 'God did not act like this towards other nations, and he did not tell them his judgement'.⁷

[The matter for inquiry is:] why did God tell his judgements to one nation and not to another? Nowadays, Christians say, 'God's teaching is not to be found except with us', but, the Jews, Muslims, Indians,⁸ and others say the same thing.

Litt Ed 13

¹ In EOTC tradition, Wednesday and Friday are fasting days for most of the year.

² Abb 234: how does he sin who likewise eats on Friday?.

³ Abb 234: The Jews, Christians and Muslims lie when they say.

⁴ Abb 234: Because the creator himself gave people their nourishment to eat and not to abstain from it.

⁵ Abb 234: omits: one for mercy and another for judgement.

⁶ Psalm 145:17 (144:17 LXX).

⁷ Psalm 147:20 (147:9 LXX). The primary meaning of the Ge'ez verb is 'telling', while the primary meaning of the verb used in the Septuagint and the Vulgate is 'showing'. Perhaps the wording of this verse focused on the act of speaking, brought it to mind in a section on Moses' teaching. Note that the Ge'ez ቆጥሎ translates the Greek τὰ κρίματα αὐτοῦ, understood here as thoughtful and wise deliberations; a legal decision by a judge; or a proper recognition of someone's rights.

⁸ Ethiopia has had trade connections with Southeast Asia since antiquity, and the author seems to have in mind Indian religions.

Abb215 12v Furthermore, the Christians don't agree among themselves. The foreigners[, the European Catholics,] tell us, 'you don't have God's teaching, rather we have it'. We too say the same thing [to them].

Abb234 13v But, if we would only listen to human beings, we would know that God's teaching has only reached a tiny few. Moreover, we don't know to which [few] of all these human beings it reached. Is it impossible for God to establish his word among human beings if he wants to?

Yet, the wisdom of God, with good counsel did not abandon human beings to agree with lies,¹ so that it would appear to them as truth. Because when all human beings agree with each other on something, that thing seems like the truth. [That's why God made it so that] all human beings cannot agree with lies, just as none of them can ever agree in their religious beliefs [which all have elements of falsehood introduced].²

If only we would think [about this]: why do all human beings agree in saying that there is a God, the Creator of all?³

Abb215 13r Because the intelligence of every human being knows that everything that we see is created, that no creature may be thought of as created without a Creator, and that if there is a Creator, he is truthful. Because of this, all human beings agree on this point.

Yet when we inquire into the religious beliefs that human beings have taught, we cannot agree with them [all] because lies are mingled together with truth in them.⁴

Human beings quarrel with each other. One person says that something is true, while another says that it is not, it is a lie. All of them lie by regarding the word of human beings as the word of God.

Abb234 14r I thought and said [to myself], '[However,] even if human religion is not from God, it is desirable because it gets good things done, for it terrifies the wicked into not doing evil things and it consoles the good for their patient endurance'.⁵

For me, religion of this kind is like a man's wife who conceived a child through adultery, without her husband knowing. The husband delights in

1 Abb 234: acted so that people would not agree with lies.

2 Abb 234: So now, they agree with lies, because none of the people agree on their religion.

3 The author appears to be unaware of the long tradition of atheism, unlikely in a European author.

4 Abb 234: because it is a lie.

5 Abb 234: people's religion is not from God, and it only becomes good because they produce good things, but it terrifies the wicked into not doing evil, and it comforts good people with their patience.

the child whom he supposes to be his son, and he loves the child's mother. Should he find out she conceived the child through adultery, he would be despondent and would reject and drive out his wife with the child.¹ Abb215 13v

Likewise, when I realised that my religion² was an adulteress and a liar, I became despondent because of her and of the children of her adultery [with lies]: they are hatred, persecution, physical abuse, imprisonment, and death, which have banished me into this cave.

Yet, for me, it's the truth to say that this Christian religion, established during the time of the Gospel, was not evil. For it instructs human beings to love one another and do every work of mercy. Sum 13
Litt Ed 14

But today, our country's³ people have banished the love that derives from the Gospel [in exchange] for hatred, dominance, and snakes' venom.⁴ They have torn their religion away from its foundations, and teach hollow things, do violent things,⁵ and are falsely called Christians.

Chapter 12: My Inquiry regarding False Doctrine and God's Established Order

I thought and said [to myself], 'Why does God allow deceivers to deceive his people?'⁶ Chap 7
Abb234 14v

God has given intelligence to each and every human being, so that they might recognise truth and lies. He has graciously given them the ability to discern, with which they may choose truth or lies, whichever they wish. Abb215 14r

If we want truth, let us seek it with our God⁷-given intelligence, to see with it what is best for us⁸ from among creation's desirable things. We don't find the truth in human doctrines because 'Every person is a liar'.⁹

1 This type of extended analogy is one of the major rhetorical features of *qene*.

2 Abb 234: religion.

3 Abb 234 omits: our country's.

4 Psalm 140:3 (139:3 LXX). Quoting this phrase from a Psalm about the harm of evil men is likely an allusion to the bitterness among religious groups of the 1600s.

5 Psalm 119:3 (118:3 LXX).

6 Abb 234 adds: in his name.

7 Abb 234: creator.

8 Abb 234: with it to see his wisdom.

9 Psalm 116:11 (115:2 LXX).

If we prefer lies over truth,¹ it won't be the Creator's established order that will be destroyed because of this, nor the enduring law that he established for all creation.² Rather, it is we ourselves who will perish through our errors.

God protects the world with the rules that he established, which human beings cannot subvert because God's order and rules are stronger than human order and rules.³

For instance, those who believe that monastic celibacy is better than marriage are drawn toward marriage by the strength of the order and rules of the creator.⁴

Also, those who believe that fasting makes the soul righteous, eat when hunger seizes them.

Abb234 15r

Abb215 14v

Also, those who believe that giving up their possessions makes them perfect are drawn toward seeking possessions because of their usefulness. After they give up their possessions, they seek them out again, just as many monks have done in our country.

All liars who want to destroy creation's established order are like this. Yet, they cannot do anything but reveal their feeble lies. The Creator 'laughs at them', and the Lord of creation⁵ 'mocks them',⁶ because 'God knows the working of justice, but the sinner is ensnared by the work of their hands'.⁷

Therefore, the monk who disparages the institution of marriage will be ensnared by adultery, other sins of the flesh which are not natural,⁸ or evil suffering.

Those who discard their possessions will become flatterers of kings and wealthy people in order to acquire possessions [again].

1 Abb 234: do not seek the truth.

2 Abb 234: of creation.

3 Abb 234 omits: God's order and rules are stronger than human order and rules. The human order includes the religious rules and regulations created by human beings, such as considering women impure during menstruation as well as fasting, monastic life, slavery, and so on.

4 Abb 234: by the power of creation.

5 Abb 234: and God.

6 Psalm 2:4 (2:4 LXX).

7 Psalm 9:16 (9:17 LXX). Note that here and elsewhere in our translation, when a singular masculine pronoun in the Ge'ez does not refer only to men, we sometimes have translated it with the singular 'they' or 'their'.

8 Abb 234 omits: flesh which is not according to his nature. The unnatural sin(s) would primarily be homosexual activity but might include sins like incest and bestiality.

Those who abandon their relatives, saying that it's for God's sake, will lack help when times are difficult for them and they are senile, and they will come to blame and curse God and human beings.

Those who violate the Creator's established order will likewise 'be ensnared by the work of their own hands'.¹

Litt Ed 15

Sum 14

In addition, God leaves error and evil among human beings because our souls live in this world, as if in a land of temptation through which God's chosen ones are put to the test.

Abb215 15r

Abb234 15v

As the wise Solomon said, 'For God put the righteous to the test and found them worthy of himself, and he tested them like gold is tested in a furnace, and he accepted them like a pleasing burnt offering'.²

Chapter 13: My Inquiry regarding Death

After our death, when we return to our creator, we will see how God established everything truthfully and with great wisdom and how all his ways are right and just.³

It is clear that our soul lives after the death of our flesh.⁴ For, in this world our desires are not completely satisfied: those who don't have, seek, and those who have, desire more. Further, for those who have [possessions], even if a person possessed everything that exists in the world, they are not satisfied, and they long for [more].

This natural disposition of ours shows⁵ that we were not created merely for life in this world alone, but also for the life that is to come.

Abb215 15v

There, souls who have fulfilled the will of their creator will be completely satisfied, and they will not desire anything else.⁶ Without this [life after death], human nature would be left wanting and would not get everything intended for it.

Abb234 16r

1 Psalm 9:16 (9:17 LXX).

2 Wisdom of Solomon 3:5–6. This Second Temple text is canonical in the Ethiopian and other traditions.

3 Abb 234: as all God's ways are merciful and right.

4 Abb 234: our death.

5 Abb 234: recognizes.

6 Abb 234 adds: because.

Also, our soul¹ is able to imagine God² and to see him in her mind. Still more, she is able to imagine eternal life! God did not give our soul the capacity to imagine this for no reason; on the contrary, just as he gave her that capacity, he also gave her the possibility of finding [what she imagined].

Also, all righteousness is not fulfilled in this world.³

For, evil human beings achieve satisfaction from the good things of this world, while the gentle starve. There are evil human beings who are happy, and there are good human beings who are sad; there are vicious human beings who live lives of pleasure, while there are virtuous human beings who mourn.⁴

Therefore, after our death, another life and the perfection of justice is needed, in which all human beings will be rewarded according to their actions.⁵ He will reward those who did the Creator's will as revealed to them by the light of their intelligence, and also those who followed their human constitution's nature.⁶

Abb215 16r

Their constitution's nature is [known and] certain, because our intelligence tells us plainly if we study the matter. But human beings don't like to investigate things, they prefer to believe in human words, rather than truthfully seeking their Creator's⁷ will.

1 Abb 234: my soul.

2 Abb 234: Lord.

3 The author writes that 'all righteousness is not fulfilled in this world', which phrasing likely arises from Matthew 3:15, in which Jesus says that *ወይደልወነ ከመ ንጌጽም ኩሉ ጽድቅ* (all righteousness should be fulfilled by us). The author is creatively adapting the famous biblical line, converting it into the negative for his rhetorical purpose.

4 Abb 234 omits: there are vicious human beings who live lives of pleasure, while there are virtuous human beings who mourn.

5 Psalm 62:12 (61:12 LXX); Psalm 28:4 (27:4 LXX).

6 Abb 234: by their intelligence and by the law of creation.

7 Abb 234: the creator.

Chapter 14: My Inquiry regarding Intelligence and the Truth of the Bible

Abb234 16v

Chap 8

Litt Ed 16

The Creator's will is known¹ through this aphorism² that our intelligence tells us, 'Worship God your Creator;³ love all human beings as yourself'.⁴

Moreover, our intelligence says, 'Don't do to human beings what you don't want them to do to you, but rather do to others what you want them to do to you'.⁵

Furthermore, the Ten Commandments of the Pentateuch⁶ are also the Creator's will. The only exception is [the third commandment, about] honouring the sabbath because our intelligence does not confirm or deny it.⁷

Sum 15

But things like: let's not murder, let's not steal, let's not lie, and let's not have sex with another man's wife—our intelligence teaches us⁸ that those things aren't right to do.

Similarly, the Gospel's Six Commandments⁹ are the Creator's¹⁰ will. For we want other human beings to perform these acts of mercy for us, and we should do for others what we are able to.

Abb215 16v

¹ Abb 234: is discovered.

² ሐጺር (short [saying]).

³ Abb 234 omits: your creator.

⁴ Allusion to Matthew 22:37–39, Mark 12:29–31, and Luke 10:27, but with the command in the first part of the verse, that we 'love' God, changed to 'worship' God.

⁵ Matthew 7:12.

⁶ ፲ ቃላት ስራት (the ten words of Orit). the Ten Commandments are often referred to as the 'Ten Words', a way of emphasizing that they are not merely laws but also words to live by.

⁷ አስመ በእንተ አክብሮት ሰንበት ያረምም ልብናን, (since our understanding is silent about the honouring of the sabbath). The author is uncertain whether the ritualistic observations of the Sabbath are a good idea because thinking about it has not yielded an answer, only silence.

⁸ Abb 234: tells us.

⁹ ፮ ቃላት ወንጌል, (the six words/commandments of the Gospel). This is an important Ethiopian theological concept. The Six 'Words' of Jesus Christ have primacy over the Ten Commandments as rules for daily living in Ethiopia; the latter are rarely mentioned without the former. Jesus Christ named six works of mercy in Matthew 25:35–36: feed the hungry, quench the thirsty, accept and help strangers, clothe the naked, visit the sick, and visit those in prison. Note that these are not the six of the Ten Commandments that Jesus Christ repeats in the Gospels (Matthew 19:18), about murder, adultery, theft, lying in court, and honouring your parents and loving your neighbour.

¹⁰ Abb 234: God.

Furthermore, it's the Creator's will for us to take care of our lives and way of living in this world. Due to the Creator's will, we came into this life and live it, so we should not relinquish it except due to his sacred will.¹

Abb234 17r

This same Creator of ours wants us to improve our lives with our knowledge² and work, because he gave us the intelligence and skills to do so. For instance, doing manual labour is the Creator's will,³ because without this we won't get life's necessities. Likewise, [due to the Creator's will,] a man marries a woman and raises children.

Abb215 17r

Moreover, there are many other actions⁴ that are in harmony with our intelligence, and beneficial for our life⁵ and all human lives. We should persevere with these⁶ actions because such is our Creator's will. We should understand⁷ that God did not create us as perfect,⁸ but rather as understanding beings with the potential for perfection.⁹ That way, we may be perfected while we live in this world,¹⁰ and after, be worthy of the reward that our Creator in his wisdom has prepared for us.

God could have created us as perfect and made us live in a blessed¹¹ state on earth.¹²

But he did not want to create us as such. Rather, he created us prepared for perfection.

Abb234 17v

He put us amidst this world's trials so that we could become perfect, and worthy of our Creator's reward after our death. So long as we live in this world, we should glorify our Creator, fulfil his will, and patiently endure until he takes us to himself.

1 Abb 234: by the creator's will.

2 Abb 234: knowledge.

3 ገቢረ ግብረ እጅ (working the work of the hand). The author seems to be challenging negative Ethiopian cultural attitudes toward craftsman, such as blacksmiths and potters, by linking them with more respected forms of manual labour, like that of farmers.

4 Abb 234: things.

5 Abb 234: our nature.

6 Abb 234: we should accomplish them [these things].

7 Abb 234: we should consider.

8 Abb 234 adds: but he put us in this world.

9 In Protestant theology, human beings can never be perfect as the fall is understood to result in total depravity; in EOTC theology (and Orthodox theology more generally), some can and do become perfect. That is the purpose of the human journey, to be perfected through suffering.

10 Abb 234: life.

11 ብፁዓን (blessed, happy [people]), the same word used for such in Psalm 1:1 and the Beatitudes, for instance, Matthew 5:3–12.

12 Abb 234: in this world.

Let us appeal to his goodness to ease the time of our testing and to forgive us our sins and [all] the stupid things we did due to ignorance.¹ Let him give us intelligence] so that we can know and keep the [beneficial] laws of our created nature. Litt Ed 17

Concerning prayer, we should always pray, because that's what's natural for a rational creature. The rational² soul understands that there is a God³ who knows everything, protects everything, and rules everything.⁴ Abb215 17v

The soul is drawn to God to pray, and she asks him for good things and to be saved from evil.

The soul takes refuge in the hands of the one who can do all things⁵ and for whom nothing is impossible.⁶ [I praise God:]

The Lord is great and high—

He sees those who are beneath him,⁷

and he sustains everything, and he understands everything, and he teaches everyone,

and he guides everyone.

Our Father, our Creator, our Protector, who is the reward for our souls, who is merciful, Abb234 18r

who is good, who knows all of our suffering,

and who delights in our patient endurance, who created us for life and not for destruction.⁸

As the Wisdom of Solomon says, ‘You, O Lord, have mercy on all, because you can do all things, and you overlook human beings’ sins while you await their Sum 16

¹ Abb 234: in our youth.

² Abb 234 omits: rational.

³ ወንፍስ ነባቢት ዘትሉቡ ከመቦ እግዚአብሔር (the speaking [or rational] soul that understands that God exists).

⁴ ወተሎ ይመልከ (he rules everything). A stock phrase from Revelation (1:8, 4:55, 15:3, 21:23), which has እግዚአብሔር ዘተሎ ይመልከ (God who is the ruler of all [i.e., Almighty]).

⁵ Abb 234 omits: and to be saved from evil. She takes refuge in the hands of the one who can do all things.

⁶ Allusion to the Liturgy of Hours, Luke 1:37.

⁷ Psalm 138:6 (137:6 LXX). The Ethiopic bible, in line with the LXX, has እስመ ልዑል እግዚአብሔር ወይሬኢ ዘቢታሕቱ (For the Lord is high and he sees those who are beneath him). The author adds ሃቢይ (great). The addition may be deliberate or arise from textual variations appearing in the Ge'ez Bible the author memorized.

⁸ The anaphoras composed in Ge'ez often wax lyrical about God as in this paragraph—they include poetry of ecstatic praise layered with multiple rhythmic phrases of repeated diction and syntax (see, for instance, The Anaphora of St. John the Son of Thunder, the Anaphora of St. Dioscorus, and the Anaphora of Mary).

repentance. You love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made'.¹

You are compassionate and merciful to all creation.

God created us as understanding beings so that we may meditate on his greatness, worship him, and pray to him for our body and soul's necessities. Our intelligence, which our creator put into human hearts, teaches us² all these things.

Abb215 18r

How can the teaching of our intelligence be meaningless and false?

Chapter 15: My Inquiry regarding the Efficacy of Prayer Against Sin and Enemies

Chap 9 I came to know in another way that God hears our prayers when we pray to him with our whole heart, with love, faith, and patient endurance.

For I was a sinner in my youth for many years, not thinking at all about the work of God,³ nor praying to him, and I was guilty of many⁴ things inappropriate for a creature of intelligence. Because of my sin I fell into a trap from which a human being cannot escape safely, and I came close to utter torment, and the terror of death overtook me.

Abb234 18v

At that time, I turned to God, and I started to pray to him to⁵ save me, because he knows all the ways of salvation.

I said to God, 'I will repent of my sins, seek your will, O Lord, and I will do your will! But, right now, forgive me my sin, and save me'.

Abb215 18v

I prayed with all my heart, for many days, and God heard me, and saved me completely. I worshipped him, and I turned to him with my whole heart.

Litt Ed 18

I recited Psalm 114, [which begins] 'I loved, because the Lord heard the voice of my petition'.⁶ It seemed to me that this psalm was written about me.

¹ Wisdom of Solomon 11:23–24.

² Abb 234: tells us.

³ An allusion to Psalm 25:7 (24:7 LXX). Abb. 234: I am a sinner. I lived beforehand for a long time not thinking about the work of God. In Ethiopia, the age of accountability is often considered to begin at the age of seven.

⁴ Abb 234: I did. . .

⁵ Abb 234: I started to ask God.

⁶ Psalm 116:1 (114:1 LXX). While the author rarely gives the number of a Psalm, he does so in a few places in this text (always numbered as in the Ethiopic and LXX). Giving the number as a shorthand for a Psalm is common in such Ethiopian liturgical texts as the Liturgy of Hours and the Book of the Divine Liturgy.

I also said [the Psalm], ‘I shall not die, but I shall live, and I will tell of the Lord’s work’.¹

For instance, there were those who constantly made false accusations against me to the king. They said to him, ‘This man is your enemy, and an enemy of the foreigners[, the European Catholics]’.

I knew that the king’s rage burned against me.

One day, king [Susenyos]’s messenger came and said to me, ‘The king says, ‘Come quickly to me’.²

Abb234 19r

I was terrified, but I couldn’t escape because the king’s men were watching for me. I prayed all night, with a mournful heart, and in the morning, I got up, and went to be in the king’s presence.

But God had softened the king’s heart, and he received me lovingly and didn’t say anything about the things that I was afraid [he would accuse me of.] Rather, he asked about many matters of doctrine and scripture.³

Abb215 19r

He said to me, ‘because you are a learned man, you should love the foreigners[, the European Catholics,] because they are very learned’.

I said to him, ‘Yes indeed!’ because I was afraid, but also because the foreigners[, the European Catholics,] were truly learned.

After this the king gave me five ounces of gold and sent me away in peace. After leaving the king, I was amazed, and I praised God who had made things turn out well for me.⁴

Sum 17

Then, when Walda Yohannes made false accusations against me, I fled, and I didn’t pray for God to save me, as I did earlier [with the king], because now I was able to escape [on my own].⁵ Human beings should do everything that they can without asking God to help them for no reason.⁶

Now I worship him. Through my escape and living in a cave, I found the occasion to make a perfect return to my creator, to think what I had never thought before, and to know the truth, which makes my soul rejoice with great joy.

Abb234 19v

Abb215 19v

1 Psalm 118:17 (117:17 LXX).

2 ነጻኣ ፍጡነኣ ኅቢየኣ, adding -ኣ at the end of words, as done here, signals the exact words of being quoted and is typical of a royal, official message in Ge’ez texts. This is a very archaic practice for marking direct discourse. The author is very learned in a variety of Ge’ez discursive practices.

3 Abb 234 omits: and scripture.

4 Possibly an allusion to Psalm 116:12 (115: 3 LXX), as it has the same phrase #ገብረ ሊተ (what he did for me).

5 He does not explain why he can now escape, but likely it is due to his improved relationship with the king.

6 Abb 234: We should do what we can without asking God to help us for no reason.

Truly, I say to God [with Psalms], ‘I deserved what you caused me to suffer so that I could know your statutes’.¹

For how much more have I understood while living alone in a cave than I understood when I lived with scholars?² What I have written here is just a few of the many things that I meditated on while I lived in the cave.

I glorify God who gave me wisdom and who made me understand creation’s mysteries.³ My soul is drawn to him and rejects everything but meditating on the work and wisdom of God.⁴

Litt Ed 19 I prayed all day⁵ with the Psalms of David, with my heart outstretched,⁶ because [such] prayer benefits me greatly and raises my thoughts to God.

Even if I find something in the Psalms of David which is not in harmony with my thought, I interpret it and harmonise it with my intellect and everything will become well with me.⁷ And when I pray like this, it increases my trust in God.

Abb215 20r

[Following the Psalms,] I always say,⁸

‘Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer, don’t disdain my petition’.⁹

‘Redeem me from the extortion of human beings’.¹⁰

‘But as for you, O Lord, don’t take your compassion from me;
may your mercy and your truth always find me’.¹¹

1 Psalm 119:71 (118:71 LXX).

2 Abb 234 omits: Truly, I say to God, ‘I deserved what you caused me to suffer so that I could know your statutes’. For how much more have I understood while living alone in a cave than I understood when I lived with scholars?.

3 Abb 234: so that I might understand all this.

4 Abb 234: but meditating on God and on his wisdom.

5 Abb 234 omits: all day.

6 Abb 234: with all my heart.

7 Such harmonizing is a strategy taught in the EOTC commentary tradition when dealing with challenging passages in Scripture.

8 The author is creating his own Psalm on a particular theme by yoking disparate passages in various Psalms together. With two exceptions, he has selected only those verses where the speaker is speaking directly to God (in the singular first person) and asking God for mercy, help, and guidance. Then, he has altered the pronouns from third or plural first person to the singular first person. Such play and adaptation is typical of someone who has studied in qene school. For another instance, see ገድለ ፈለጎስ (Gädlä Filäppos)

9 Psalm 55:2 (54:2 LXX).

10 Psalm 119:134 (118:134 LXX).

11 Psalm 40:11 (39:11 LXX).

'Let me not be put to shame, O Lord, for I have called on you'.¹ Abb234 20r
 'So, I will sing [Psalms] to your name forever, that you might give me
 what I long for all day long'.²
 'Look upon me and have mercy on me; give your strength to your servant
 and save the son of your serving girl. Make with me a sign for good'.³
 'For your name's sake, lead me and nourish me'.⁴
 'Don't drag my soul away with sinners'.⁵
 'Let your mercy be with me, as I trust in you'.⁶
 'Make me one who hears of your mercy in the morning'.⁷
 'Protect me, and make me happy in the land, don't deliver me into my
 enemy's hands'.⁸
 'Cause me to hear joy and gladness'.⁹
 'And don't put me to shame because of my expectation'.¹⁰
 'They will curse, but you will bless'.¹¹
 'And let them know that [all] this is your hand'.¹²

Sum 18

This [prayer] and ones like it, I was praying day and night with all my heart.

*Morning and evening, the prayer I was praying went like this:*¹³

Chap 10

'I worship you, O my creator and guardian, and Abb215 20v
 'I love you with my whole heart, and
 'I praise you because of the good things that you have done for me this night'. Abb234 20v

1 Psalm 31:18 (30:18 LXX).

2 Psalm 61:8 (60:8 LXX).

3 Psalm 86:16–17 (85:16–17 LXX).

4 Psalm 31:3 (30:4 LXX).

5 Psalm 28:3 (27:3 LXX). Abb 234 adds: Your mercy will follow me for all the days of my life; quoting Psalm 23:6 (22:6 LXX).

6 Psalm 33:22 (32:22 LXX). Again, the author has changed the pronouns to personalise the Psalm.

7 Psalm 143:8 (142:8 LXX).

8 Psalm 41:2 (40:3 LXX). Again, the author has changed the pronouns to personalise the Psalm.

9 Psalm 51:8 (50:10 LXX, but sometimes 50:8 in Ethiopic bibles).

10 Psalm 119:116 (118:116 LXX).

11 Psalm 109:28 (108:28 LXX). This particular Psalm is full of curses. Since the author emphasizes love instead throughout, he may be demonstrating his point about harmonizing the Psalms with his thinking by omitting the verses that call for condemnation and instead selecting ones opposing human curses with divine blessing.

12 Psalm 109:27 (108:27 LXX).

13 Abb 234: Morning and evening the prayers I was praying, and which I prayed all day with great hope went like this. In what follows, the author has personalized a rhyming prayer sung thrice at the end of the EOTC Liturgy of Hours held at night.

(If it is evening, I say [instead, ‘what you have done for me] this day’.)
 ‘Protect me this day also.
 (If it is evening, I say [instead, ‘protect me] this night’).¹
 ‘Give me understanding in this day
 ‘and in all the days of my life,
 ‘that I may know your will for me
 ‘and fulfil it all the days of my life.
 ‘Forgive me my sins.
 ‘Give me every day enough for life’s necessities.
 ‘Strengthen me always with trust in you, O my Lord,
 ‘because of your kindness, your power, and your greatness.
 ‘Save me from poverty, from human hands and tongues, and
 ‘from the body’s illness and the soul’s sorrow’.

After this, I would pray with Psalm 30, [which begins] ‘In you I have trusted’.²

Chapter 16: My Inquiry regarding Work and Happiness

I meditated, and said [to myself], ‘I should work and toil with all my skills to obtain all of life’s necessities, for it is not enough for me to pray only. Nevertheless,³ because I don’t have any practical skills,⁴ I shall proceed with God’s power’.

[I prayed:]

‘Without your blessing, O Lord, my work won’t benefit me at all.’⁵

‘As for you, [God,]⁶ bless my thoughts, and my work and my living,⁷ give me possessions and happiness on the path according to your knowledge and will.

Litt Ed 20

Abb215 21r

¹ በዛቴ መዓልት/ ዕቀበኔ ዓፄ. በዛቴ መዓልት/ወሠርከሰ ዕብል/ በዛቴ ሌሊት/ አለብወኔ በዛቴ ዕለት. The liturgy has ወበከመ ዐቀብከነ/ እምነግሕ እስከ ሰርክ/ ዕቀበነ እግዚአ/ እምሰርክ እስከ ነግሕ (As you have protected us from morning to evening, protect us from evening to morning).

² Psalm 31:1 (30:1 LXX).

³ Abb 234: I, for my part, should work as I can to obtain everything that is necessary for me. Because.

⁴ አየእምር ተግባረ (I do not know [manual] work). The author is a highly educated scholar, who spent years in school and left his home on the farm at an early age to live as a hermit, so he has no skills in physical labour.

⁵ Abb 234: I shall proceed with God’s power, because my ability without your blessing will not benefit me.

⁶ Abb 234 adds: my dear creator.

⁷ Abb 234 omits: and my living.

‘Turn the hearts of those who live with me to do well by me, because everything happens according to your blessed will,¹ and be gracious to me when I am old and senile’.

I know that our hearts are always in God’s hands, and that God is able to make us happy and cheerful, even if we are in the midst of hardship, poverty, or suffering. But, God is also able to make us miserable in the midst of prosperity and all the world’s pleasures.

Abb234 21r

Because of this, every day we see the poor and the suffering taking pleasure in life with joyful hearts, while the wealthy and the kings are despondent and miserable amid their wealth due to their many cravings.

Although we don’t desire sadness, it rises in our hearts without us knowing the reason for its rising. We should pray to God to let us ‘hear gladness and joy’² and make us happy on earth.

For God makes light rise on the righteous and happiness on the upright in heart.³

Abb215 21v

God knows and rules over all the ways of our hearts and is able to make us happy despite our anguish and sad despite our good works. Joy and sadness don’t come to us in the way that human beings think they do, rather [they come] because God makes us hear them.⁴

So, I said, ‘You, O my Lord and my Creator, let me hear gladness and joy, and make me happy as long as I live on earth. After my death, send me to you and satiate me’.

Abb234 21v

I was praying like this day and night.

Chapter 17: My Inquiry regarding Nature and the Feebleness of the Human

I was marvelling at the beauty of God’s creatures, each in its established order, the animals that eat plants and the animals that eat meat. They are drawn by their nature to preserve their life and to continue their kind.⁵

Sum 19

¹ Abb 234: to do good to me.

² Psalm 51:8 (50:10 LXX).

³ Psalm 97:11 (96:12 LXX).

⁴ The author, in the elegant EOTC commentary style, interprets and expands on Psalm 51:8 (50:10 LXX), which he just cited.

⁵ ἡ ἰσχύς αὐτοῦ (their seed).

Moreover, the forest's trees and plants, which were created with great wisdom—grow shoots, [then] bud, bloom, and produce fruit of their seed's kind without any mistakes.

It's almost like they have a soul.¹

Abb215 22r

Moreover, the mountains and valleys, the rivers and springs, all your works, glorify your name,² O Lord. 'Your name is made glorious in all the earth'.³ In heaven as well, how great are the works of your hands!⁴

This sun is the spring of light and the spring of the life of the world.⁵

The moon and the stars, which you yourself established, don't stray from their ordained paths. But who knows the stars' number, or distance, or size, which seem small to us because of their remoteness?⁶

Litt Ed 21

And who understands the clouds, which pour out water, making lush vegetation sprout? Everything is majestic and wonderful, and everything was created with wisdom.

Abb234 22r

I stayed like this for two years, marvelling [at creation] and glorifying the creator. I thought and said [to myself], 'the work of God is excellent, and his thoughts are deep, and his wisdom cannot be described'.

How can human beings, who are puny and needy, lie and say, 'I was sent from God to reveal his wisdom and righteousness to humanity'?⁷

They reveal nothing⁸ to us but their own empty and worthless ideas. Their human nature is so puny.

Yet, with the intelligence our creator graciously bestowed on us, we can know his greatness. [For instance,] I said,

Abb215 22v

"I am poor and needy"⁹ in your presence, O Lord!

'Give me understanding of what I should know about you,'¹⁰

1 Abb 234 omits: grow shoots, bud, bloom, and produce fruit of their seed's kind without any mistakes. It's almost like they have a soul.

2 Abb 234: everything glorifies your name.

3 Psalm 8:1, 9 (8: 1, 9 LXX).

4 Abb 234: How great is your name, O Lord!.

5 Abb 234: spring of life.

6 See the Introduction's Authorship of the *Hatata Inquiries* regarding these remarks on stars.

7 Abb 234: He comes to us and says to us, 'I came to you to reveal the wisdom of God to you'.

8 Abb 234: But they reveal nothing.

9 Psalm 40:17 (39:23 LXX).

10 Abb 234: what a rational creation like me should understand.

‘so that I may marvel at your greatness, and
‘glorify you all day with new praise!’¹

Part III: My Life (1632–1693)

Chapter 18: My Becoming a Scribe after the Return of the Orthodox Faith

In 1632 CE,² King *Susenyos* died, and his son *Fasiladas* ruled in his place.

Chap 11

At first, he loved the foreigners[, the European Catholics,] as his father did; however, he did not persecute the Copts, [the Egyptian Orthodox Church,] and there was peace in all of Ethiopia’s provinces.

At that time, I left my cave and went first to the Amhara districts, and then trekked to the Begemder district. To all the enemies of the foreigners[, the European Catholics,] I seemed like one of those monks who had fled in the days of *Susenyos*, so they liked me and gave me food and clothing.

Abb234 22v

While I was going along from one town to another, I didn’t want to return to Aksum, because I knew the wickedness of its priests.

I was reminded [of the Psalm] that ‘a person’s path is made sure by God’,³ and I said, “Show me, O Lord, the path that I should travel”,⁴ and to the region in which I should live’.

I thought I would trek to and live in the province of Gojjam but God guided me to a place I had not considered.

Abb215 23r
Sum 20

One day, I reached the Enfraz district [of the Amhara province], and came across a wealthy man, whose name was Habtu, which means ‘the wealth of God’ [in Amharic].⁵

¹ Regarding a ‘new song’, see Psalm 33:3 (32:3 LXX), 40:3 (39:3 LXX), 96:1 (95:1 LXX), 98:1 (97:1 LXX), 149:1 (149:1 LXX).

² መባረረዎቹወንድሜ ዓመት እምልደተ ክርስቶስ (In the year 1625 after the birth of Christ). The year is in the Ethiopian calendar; in the Western calendar, this is 1632.

³ Psalm 37:23 (36:23 LXX).

⁴ Psalm 143:8 (142:8 LXX).

⁵ The author gives the Amharic meaning of the name ‘Habtu’, indirectly reminding the reader that in Ge’ez, it means something equally important, ‘the gift of God’.

I stayed there for a day. The next day, I asked him for ink and parchment [to write on] so that I could send a letter to my relatives in Aksum.¹

Lord Habtu² asked me, ‘Are you a scribe?’

I replied, ‘Yes, I am a scribe’.

And he said, ‘Stay with me for a while, and write down the Psalms of David for me, and I will pay you a wage’.

I said to him, ‘Certainly!’

Abb234 23r

I praised God in my heart, who had revealed to me a way to eat the fruit of my labour.³ I was loathe to return to my previous profession as I didn’t want to teach lies.

Litt Ed 22

If I were to teach the truth, others would not listen to me without hating me,⁴ accusing me, and persecuting me.

I want to live in peace and love with all human beings. I prefer to earn a living from the fruit of my labour.⁵ I would rather be forgotten by human beings and live in hiding with my God-given wisdom, ‘than to live honoured in the house of sinners’.⁶

Abb215 23v

In a few days, I prepared the ink and parchment for a manuscript.⁷ I wrote down in one book the Psalms of David.

Lord Habtu and all who saw my writing were astonished at its beauty. Lord Habtu gave me my wages: one fine set of clothing.

Later, Habtu’s son, whose name was Walda Michael,⁸ said to me, ‘write down [a book] for me, just as you did for my father’. So I wrote one and he gave me a cow and two goats.

¹ Although sending written messages would have been rare in those days, it was not unknown. For instance, kings had a specific method of sending written messages to their officials by way of messengers carrying the letters in a cleft stick.

² Throughout this section, the wealthy nobleman Habtu is addressed as *አግዚእ ሀብቱ* (Lord Habtu). *አግዚእ* (Lord) is an honorific title for a master, patron, or noble and also was used to address God, especially the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ *ዘአርአየኒ ፍኛ በዘአሰሰይ ፍሬ ሞግዮ* (who has shown me the way I will eat the fruit of my labour), here and in several sentences. This is an allusion to Psalm 128:2 (127:2 LXX) *ፍሬ ሞግክ ተሰሰይ* (may you eat the fruit of your labour).

⁴ Abb 234 omits: hating me.

⁵ Abb 234: from the work of my hands.

⁶ Psalm 84:10 (83:10 LXX).

⁷ It can take many months to prepare the ink and parchment for a manuscript, so it is likely that he ‘prepared’ by purchasing them.

⁸ *ወልድ ማኲአል* (son of [Saint] Michael), an Ethiopian Christian name often given to a son born or baptized on St. Michael’s day, the twelfth day of every Ethiopian month.

After this, many people came to me, to create copies of the Psalter, and other books and letters, because this place had no scribe other than me. They gave me clothes, goats, salt, grain,¹ and other similar things. Abb234 23v

Lord Habtu also had two younger sons, one called Walda Gabriel,² known as Tesemma,³ and the other called [Walda] Heywat, known as Metekku.⁴

Their father Habtu said to me, ‘Teach them how to read the Psalter, and I will give you a wage: enough food to feed yourself.⁵ What extra you earn as a scribe will be yours’. Abb215 24r

I replied, ‘Certainly, my father! I’ll do everything that you’ve commanded me to do. Only, stand in the stead of my father and my mother and my relatives, because without you I have no family’.

Chapter 19: My Getting Married and Starting a Family

I knew that it wasn’t good for a man to live alone, without a wife, because this path draws one into sin. Human beings shouldn’t live in a way that isn’t true to their nature,⁶ to stop them from being entangled by false accusations about what they have done. As the ancestors said, ‘It is not good for a man to live alone’, for a man needs a wife.⁷ Chap 12

I said to Lord Habtu, ‘I’m not a monk, I just seemed like one because of the hard times’. Abb234 24r

There was a servant of Lord [Habtu] called Hirut.⁸ She wasn’t extraordinarily beautiful, but she was a good person, intelligent, and patient.

So I asked Lord Habtu, ‘Give me this servant to be my wife’.

1 Abb 234 omits: grain.

2 ወልደ ገብርኤል (son of [Saint] Gabriel), an Ethiopian Christian name often given to a son born or baptized on St. Gabriel’s day, the nineteenth day of every Ethiopian month.

3 ተሰማ (He Was Heard [in Amharic]), a very common Ethiopian boy’s name.

4 ምትኩ (His Replacement [in Amharic]), a common Ethiopian boy’s name, given to a son who came after the loss of a beloved family member and thus consoled the family. This man, Zara Yaqob’s student, is the author of the second Hatata.

5 Abb 234: what you can eat.

6 Abb 234: except by their established created order.

7 Abb 234 omits: As the ancestors said, ‘It is not good for a man to live alone’, for a man needs a wife. The setup to the quotation is probably from Matthew 5:21, which has በከመ ተብላለ ለቀደምት (as it was said to the ancient ones). But the point about living alone is from Genesis 2:18. By combining the Old Testament quotation with the New Testament one, the author rhetorically gives status to his own ‘new’ ideas.

8 ጊደት (Generosity, Goodness [in Ge’ez]), a common Ethiopian girl’s name.

Lord Habtu said to me, ‘Certainly! From today onwards she is not my servant, but your servant’.

Abb215 24v
Sum 21

I said, ‘not my servant, but my wife! Because husband and wife are equals in marriage.¹ We shouldn’t call them master and servant, because ‘they are one flesh’² and one life’!

Litt Ed 23

Lord Habtu replied, ‘You’re a man of God, do as you wish!’

We called the servant, and I asked her, ‘Would you like to be my wife?’

She replied, ‘Whatever my master wishes’.³

Lord Habtu said to her, ‘I would love it.’⁴

She said to me, ‘It would be great for me. Where will I find a man better than you?’

She and I then said to Lord Habtu, ‘Bless us, our father!’

He said, ‘God bless you and keep you, and may he give you health and love for the length of your days, and may he give you children along with the wealth of this world, and may he keep evil things away from you!’

Abb234 24v

And we said, ‘Amen! Amen!’

And so Hirut became my wife, and she really loved me, and she was so happy because she had been despised in Habtu’s house, and the people there had made her suffer constantly.⁵ Because she loved me, I set in my heart the desire to please her in every way I could. I believe no other marriage has been as strong in love and blessed by God as ours.

Abb215 25r

I [still] had two ounces of gold, left from the three I took with me when I fled from Aksum. In addition, working as a scribe, I had acquired cows, goats, and clothes. I built a small house in Lord Habtu’s neighbourhood, and I lived there with my wife in [a state of] love. She spun cotton thread day and night [for sale].⁶ I wrote [letters and manuscripts for pay] and taught Habtu’s sons and other children⁷ who lived there. Lord Habtu gave me a container⁸ of *teff* each month for teaching his sons.

1 Although the author’s idea of women’s equality is uncommon, it is not unique in Ge’ez texts. For instance, in the Ethiopian commentary on Genesis 2:22, the biblical passage about Eve being taken from Adam’s side, the scholars interpret as meaningful the place on his body from which she came. If she had come from his head, she would be superior; if from his feet, she would be inferior. Since she is from his side, she is equal and precious.

2 Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:6, Mark 10:8, etc.

3 As a servant and a girl, she was required to give obedient answers like this.

4 አንሰ እፈቅድ (As for me, I desire [it]).

5 Abb 234: had troubled her.

6 Spinning cotton was a common trade for women in Ethiopia.

7 ወለካልአን ሕፃናት, which could include girls. Girls from the elite were always taught to read.

8 ቀሥት, which is a container of uncertain size, often used for mead but also for grain.

I lived the good life like this in [a state of] love with my wife, although she did not bear me a child. Later, she did become pregnant and bore me a son on Monday, 18 October, 1638.¹ We rejoiced together in our son. I named him after my father: Betsega Habta Egziabher.²

Abb234 25r

Abb215 25v

Chapter 20: My Surviving Wicked Enemies, War, and Famine

Three years later, [the European Catholic] Bishop³ Efons[, that is, Afonso Mendez,] returned to his country.⁴ Then, all his enemies became powerful and his friends were driven out as well as him.

During those times[, in the 1640s], in all the regions, teachers were sought after who could teach and sustain the ancient teaching [of the Orthodox faith]. My relatives in Aksum sought me out[, asking me] to return to my previous teaching position and to teach the sacred books in Aksum as before. That's because people [mistakenly] assumed that I had fled out of fear of the persecution that arose because of Bishop⁵ Efons [and so now I could return].

They sent for me, saying, 'Return to us, for your enemies have vanished and your friends have been saved!'

1 አመ ፲፩ጥቅምት በዕለተ ሰኔይ እምልደተ ክርስቶስ ፲፪ወ፯፻ወሰኛወ (the second day of the week [i.e., Monday], 10th of ፕጃምት, 1631 years after the birth of Christ). A secondary hand has properly corrected the numeral of the date from the 10th to the 11th because the 11th of that month in 1631 was a Monday and the 10th was not. The base hand of Abb 215 originally wrote ፲፩ጥቅምት (10th of ፕጃምት), and a secondary hand overwrote the ለ with ፪ and added interlinearly a ለ, so that it reads ፲፪ለጥቅምት (11th of ፕጃምት). Abb 234 has the same date as the base hand of Abb 215. Littmann choose to follow the secondary hand of Abb 215 reading of the 11th.

2 በጌጋ ሀብተ እግዚአብሔር (By the grace of the riches of God). This is a richly allusive name in the Ethiopian tradition. First, his 'father' is 'Habtu' (the second part of his son's name). Second, his son is a gift 'by the grace of' that richness (Habtu) and God.

3 Strictly, he was appointed the Patriarch of the EOTC, but the author refers to him with a lesser title: አቡነ (literally, 'our father'). Abb 234 omits አቡነ.

4 Afonso Mendes did not leave Ethiopia in 1641 but in 1633, when the Ethiopian emperor banished him and other Jesuits. However, 1641 marked the year when all European Catholic missionaries in Ethiopia were gone. The author seems to have assumed that the patriarch would be one of the last to leave, not the first. This error is more likely made by an Ethiopian in the late 1600s than by a Catholic priest in the 1800s, who would be familiar with the details of his predecessors' mission.

5 Abb 234 omits: bishop.

Litt Ed 24 I replied, 'I have no enemies, and I have no friends, except this man of God
Abb234 25v my Lord Habtu, his children, and my wife. I will never leave them! All of you,
live in peace, but it wouldn't do for me to return to you!'

[Meanwhile,] that hypocrite, who had previously accused me before
King Susenyos, my enemy Walda Yohannes, he returned to the Egyptian
faith[, that is, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church] after Bishop Efons had gone.¹
Abb215 26r But, he had no faith except that which suited him for the moment. Very cun-
ningly he went and became friendly with King Fasiladas, because kings love
the crafty and hypocritical.

When Walda Yohannes heard that I was living peacefully in the Enfraz
Sum 22 region, he again began to make accusations against me. He said, 'He is a teacher
who secretly teaches foreign [Catholic] doctrine'. He said this to the Enfraz gov-
ernor.

I was greatly saddened by this malice.² Previously he had said of me, 'He
is an enemy of the foreigners[, the Catholics]', and now he said, 'He is their
friend'.

With a grieving heart, I said, 'May God destroy deceitful lips!'³

Then, I prayed with Psalm 34 for many days, [which begins,] 'Harm
them!'⁴ and with Psalm 108, [which begins,] 'Don't fail to hear me!'⁵

Abb234 26r And, God heard me! For this man [later] was appointed over many dio-
ceses in [the province of] Dembiya, and his people⁶ there hated him and
killed him. His dead body was found in his house, but his killer was never
found. Then, 'a stranger took his position'⁷ and his possessions.

1 The author's enemy has not merely returned to the EOTC but has also aligned himself with the powerful Egyptian bishop's community in Ethiopia.

2 Abb 234: his evil.

3 Psalm 12:3 (11:3 LXX).

4 Psalm 35:1 (34:1 LXX). Note that the author again uses the opening of a Psalm to refer to the whole Psalm. This Psalm, a cry out for justice, is always read in the Ethiopian liturgy on Good Friday.

5 Psalm 109:1 (108:1 LXX). አግዚአ ኢትዮጵያዊ ስለሌትኖ (O Lord, do not be deaf to my plea).

6 'His people' were likely family members, priests, or servants, as only insiders could kill him in his own house.

7 Psalm 109:8 (108:7 LXX). The author is noting that the Psalm with which he prayed has come true. In the Psalm, a wicked man accused a good man, and so he prayed to God that the days of this wicked man be shortened and for a stranger to take his position.

In 1642,¹ a great famine came to all of Ethiopia's regions. [That divine] punishment² was severe because of our people's sins and the lack of neighbourly love. That is, because those who welcomed the faith of King Susenyos and Bishop Efron at first persecuted those brothers and sisters who did not accept their faith. Later, those [same brothers and sisters] who were persecuted paid back their enemies sevenfold and killed many of them.

Chap 13

Abb215 26v

[As a result of] all of this, everyone knew, 'there is no fear of God before their eyes, and the way of peace they have not known'.³

Calling them 'Christians' is meaningless because Jesus Christ commands Christians to love one another before all else and above all else. This [type of] mutual love had disappeared entirely from among those who were called Christians. They sinned against their brothers and sisters and devoured one another like they were eating a meal.⁴

[King] Fasiladas began to rule with good advice and with wisdom, but he did not persevere in goodness. Rather he became an oppressive king and persisted in persecution and violence. He hated the foreigners[, the European Catholics,] who had done good things for him, and built fortresses and beautiful castles,⁵ and made his kingdom prosper through their wise work. He hated them, he persecuted them and drove them out, and he repaid evil for good. Fasiladas himself became an evildoer in every respect.⁶ He unjustly killed people and multiplied his acts of adultery. After committing adultery with

Litt Ed 25

Abb234 26v

Abb215 27r

1 ወበ፲፫፻፱ ዓ.ም. (1642, in the Ethiopian Calendar). After civil wars, there is often a famine due to farmers not planting. Records about famines for this period are thin, as King Fasilädäs (r. 1632–1667) had no surviving chronicle and the Jesuits were no longer reporting on events in Ethiopia.

2 መቅሠፍት (punishment, whipping, torment, wrath, *but also* divine punishment).

3 Romans 3:17–18. These two quotations come at the end of a long passage in which St. Paul argues that there is no one who is righteous. '.

4 Abb 234 omits: and devoured one another like they were eating a meal. An allusion to Psalm 53:4 (52:5 LXX), 'Those who eat my people like eating bread, did not call upon God'.

5 ሎቱ ... አብያተ ሠናያተ (for him . . . good houses). As the word for 'castle' includes the word for 'house'—ቤተ መንግሥት (*betā mǝngǝst*, house of the king)—we assume that the house 'for him', the king, is a castle.

6 Abb 234: he became a violent man. This negative evaluation of King Fasilädäs is unusual and striking. Generally, he is only lauded for bringing back the Ethiopian Orthodox faith; for instance, a famous poetic phrase associated with him is ፋሲለደስ ይገነዝብ የሮም ሃይማኖት ይርከስ የአስክንድርያ ሃይማኖት ይመለስ (May Fasilädäs rule, may the faith of Rome be considered unclean, and may the faith of Alexandria return). But the author is focused throughout this section on justice and fairness, so it was bad for the king to persecute those who had helped them.

women, he killed them.¹ He sent his soldiers, who were violent oppressors, and they plundered the provinces and the homes of the poor. For God gave an evil king to evil human beings.²

Because of the [Ethiopian] king's sins and the [Ethiopian] people's sins, another famine [then] fell upon them as a divine punishment. After the famine, a plague came, and many died. Others were terrified, yet fear did not lead them to their salvation³ because they persisted in their foolishness and their hatred.⁴

[As a result,] a good number said, 'God's punishment fell upon us because of you all, who banished Bishop Efons'.

Sum 23 While others said, '[No, it's] because of those who denied the previous Orthodox Faith and defiled the Church,'⁵ [it's] because of this that divine punishment fell upon us!'

Abb234 27r Thus, they were divided among themselves, and they fought. They failed to understand that they deserved divine punishment [for a different reason:]
Abb215 27v because they had abandoned neighbourly love and had broken that rule of righteousness—which God had established for all creation,⁶ because of human tenets. They had violated [God's] natural laws due to human laws⁷ derived from this or that religion.

[The Book of] Isaiah and the Gospel 'spoke rightly' about them, [saying,] 'These people honour me with their mouth, but in their hearts they are far away from me, in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrine human tenets'.⁸

John, [in his First Letter,] also said, 'whoever says, "I live in the light," and hates their neighbour, is a liar and remains in darkness to this day. But whoever loves their neighbour lives in the light and there is no cause for stumbling with them. Whoever hates their neighbour lives in darkness, and

1 Other known Ge'ez sources do not record such actions, but such contemporary views may have been erased over time by a grateful nation.

2 This is a common Ethiopian explanation for national suffering—that God caused it due to the people's wickedness—based on the story about the worldly king the Israelites want (1 Samuel 8).

3 ወላኮ ለድኅን (but it was not for salvation).

4 Abb 234 omits: they persisted in their foolishness and their hatred.

5 Abb 234 omits: and defiled the church.

6 Abb 234: God's command.

7 Abb 234: they had violated the word of God which says in our minds, 'do not kill, do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you', due to their precepts.

8 Isaiah 29:13 LXX, and Matthew 15:8–9, Mark 7:6–7. Also, the author changes the quotation and uses በአፋሆሙ (with their mouths), rather than በከፍፍሪሆሙ (with their lips).

they do not know where they are going, because darkness has blinded their eyes'.¹

This prophecy was fulfilled by our nation's population: they do not know where they are going, they fight with each other about their beliefs² because they do not [even] know what they believe, and they live in darkness. Abb234 27v

As for us, after our gold ran out during the famine, we sold our cows and clothes. As a result, praise God, we were not hungry like others. Rather, we ourselves ate and [also] fed the hungry and sick throughout the two years of famine and plague, and we did not suffer. Abb215 28r

The saying [in Psalms] was fulfilled in us, 'They shall not be put to shame in evil times, and they will be satisfied in times of famine'.³ We worshipped God who did countless good things for us.

Chapter 21: My Patron Dying and My Teaching His Sons

Chap 14

A year later, [in 1645,] Lord Habtu died, and we mourned deeply and lamented greatly for him. Litt Ed 26

Before he died, he called us all and said [to me], 'Look, I am about to die. May God protect you and bless you! Be the father to my children!'

He gave me two oxen and a mule, and to my wife he gave two cows, with their calves. Then, he said to us, 'Pray for my soul!'

He died in God's peace. May God give his blessed soul rest!⁴ We buried him with great honour. Abb234 28r

His first-born son, whose name was Walda Michael, loved me as his father and listened to my advice. He had a wife by the name of Walatta Petros, known as Fantaya.⁵ She was from among the nobles of the region, Abb215 28v

¹ 1 John 2:9–11. The author quotes from the Ge'ez Bible, but adds the phrase, ሐሳዊ ውሉቱ (he is a liar), which does not appear in the Greek or the Latin. The First Letter of John is the first text that a student reads in the EOTC educational system once they have learned their letters.

² Abb 234: belief.

³ Psalm 37:19 (36:19 LXX).

⁴ This resembles the common prayer for the dead in the EOTC and other Orthodox traditions, which prayer is አዕርፍ አግዚአ ነፍሰ ገብርክ (give rest, Lord, to the soul of your [male] servant).

⁵ ወለተ ጌጥሮስ ወተስጦዋት ፈንታየ (Wälättä Ṗetros [Daughter of (Saint) Peter (in Ge'ez)]), and she was named Fantayä [My Portion (in Amharic)]). Both are common names. Habtu's son, who is wealthy, has unsurprisingly married nobility.

and a doer of good works, full of neighbourly love and humble. She loved us as a mother loves her children.¹

Sum 24 The two other sons of Habtu, Tesemma and Metekku, grew up. They both had learned to read the Psalter. Metekku[, that is, Walda Heywat,] had also learned to write [and work] as a scribe and had mastered grammar and the scriptures.² So, he bonded with me in knowledge and great love. He knew all my secrets, [my beliefs,]³ and there was nothing that I hid from him.⁴

Because of his love, I wrote this short work following his repeated requests.

Chapter 22: My Son, His Wife, and Their Children

Chap 15 My son[, Betsega Habta Egziabher, who went by the name Habtu,] grew up to become a handsome young man.

When he was twenty years old, I knew that he was inadvertently doing wrong, not knowing that it was the [kind of] sin that indicates the desire for marriage.⁵

Abb234 28v I frequently reprimanded him, saying, ‘this act is not right because it violates the creator’s established order for us. Rather, you should marry a woman and live according to our nature’s order’.⁶

Abb215 29r He replied, ‘Sure, give me a wife!’

I searched and found a beautiful young woman, whose name was Medhanit.⁷ She was the daughter of the head of the cattle herders, who was from the village of Lamge.⁸ My son was well pleased with her. Her father

¹ Although she is, in effect, the author’s daughter-in-law, she is mother over them because she and her husband have inherited Habtu’s position and oversee all the servants.

² Abb 234 omits: and the scriptures. That is, the student’s educational progress mirrors that of his teacher, the author.

³ That is, he did not hide his unusual philosophical musings. However, this is also likely to be a biblical allusion to the relationship between a spiritual mentor and mentee. In 2 Timothy 3:10, Saint Paul tells Saint Timothy, ‘you know all about my teaching, my way of life’.

⁴ Abb 234 omits: and there was nothing that I hid from him.

⁵ Abb. 234: he was sinning in his flesh by spilling his seed because of the pleasure that he would get from it. Abb 234 is explicit that the act is masturbation. Abb 215 was explicit, but the phrase has been erased.

⁶ Abb 234: as is proper.

⁷ መድኃኒት (Salvation [in Ge’ez]; Healing Medicine [in Amharic]), a common Ethiopian girl’s name.

⁸ ላምጌ (cowbell). This is still a village today in the Qwarit District of Western Gojjam.

gave her fifteen cattle¹ as well as clothes, so she became my son's wife and we all lived together in [a state of] love.

After two years, she bore a son. I called him Yetbarak, meaning [in Amharic], 'May God be blessed'!² Then, she bore a second son, and I called him Destaye.³ Next, she bore a daughter, and I called her Eseteye.⁴ I praised God who had satisfied me from out of all his goodness.

Chapter 23: My Writing This Book

As for me, I lived with human beings, seeming like a Christian to them. But, in my heart, I did not believe—except in God the creator of everything and the protector of everything, as he had given me to know.

And I thought and said [to myself], 'Is it a sin before God for me to appear to be a believer when I am not, and in this way deceive human beings?'

Litt Ed 27

Abb234 29r

I said [to myself], '[No,] people are willing to deceive others and if I reveal the truth to them they won't listen to me, rather they will insult and persecute me. There is no benefit in revealing my thoughts to them; on the contrary, [it does] great harm'.

Abb215 29v

Because of this, I lived with people as if I was like them,⁵ and I dwelled with God in the way that he had given me to know.

But, so that those who come after me will understand me, I wanted to write this book, which I will keep concealed until my death.

If, after my death, a wise and inquisitive⁶ person were found, I would ask them to join their mind with mine [and continue the work]. [I would say to them,] 'Look, I began my inquiry, [about concepts] which have not been explored before. Complete what I have begun, so that our nation's people might gain wisdom with God's help and come to know the truth.'⁷ [Complete the work so] that they may not believe lies, trust in violence, or go from one

¹ Both families give marriage gifts to the other family in Ethiopian culture. But this gift by her father to the couple is unusually lavish and a sign of his care for her.

² Abb 234 omits: meaning, 'May God be blessed'. This is a common Ethiopian boy's name.

³ ደስታየ (My Delight [in Amharic]), a common Ethiopian boy's name.

⁴ ዕዳላየ (My Reward [in Ge'ez]), a common Ethiopian boy's name.

⁵ Abb 234 adds: except their evil deeds.

⁶ Abb 234 omits: and inquisitive.

⁷ Abb 234: In the same way all people, if they are able, should arrive gradually at knowledge of the truth.

Abb234 29v meaningless thing to another;¹ but rather might understand truth,² love their
Sum 25 brothers and sisters, and avoid fighting with one another because of their
meaningless beliefs,³ as they have done so far’.

Abb215 30r If a wise person is found who understands this book, and concepts even
more excellent than it contains, and that person is willing to teach and write⁴
[more, add to it], may God give them the desire of their heart. May God fulfil
his good will for them and satisfy them from with his limitless goodness just
as he satisfied me. May God make them rejoice and bless them on the earth,
just as he made me rejoice and blessed me through to this very day.

As for the one who slanders me because of [my writing in] this book, and
does not want to understand how to be better;⁵ may God reward that person
according to their actions! Amen.

Coda: The Completion of the Book

[Walda Heywat adds the following coda:]

Zara Yacob, who was [also called] Warqe, wrote this book in the sixty-eighth year of his life, when Fasiladas had died and Yohannes [I] reigned.⁶

Abb234 30r After he wrote this book,⁷ Zara Yacob lived in virtuous old age for twenty-five more years,⁸ loving God our creator, and glorifying him day and night.
Meanwhile, he became very honoured [by everyone around him]. He [lived to] see his great grandchildren; [because] as for his son [Betsega Habta Egziabher, who was also called] Habtu, he had five sons and four daughters with his wife, Medhanit.

Abb215 30v Zara Yacob, who is [also called] Warqe, lived until he was ninety-three years old, never falling ill. He died with great hope in God our creator. His wife died four years later, and she was buried with her husband. May God graciously receive their souls [to live] in peace forever and forever!

1 A paraphrase of Psalm 62:10 (61:9 LXX).

2 Abb 234: They might understand the Creator’s wisdom, and set their hope on his mercy and truth, and pray to him with a pure heart when they suffer.

3 Abb 234: they themselves would not fight with one another because of their beliefs.

4 Abb 234: like me.

5 Abb 234 omits: and does not want to understand how to be better.

6 The Ethiopian king Fasiladas died in October 1667; his fourth son, King Yohannes I, reigned from then until 1682. The author was born in August 1600.

7 Abb 234 omits: book.

8 That is, he died at the age of 93.

His great grandchildren became very honoured [as well] in our region, and they were blessed with their father's blessing. Indeed, their house was not big enough to contain all their cattle, so some of them went down to the lowlands,¹ to their mother's relatives, and lived there. Litt Ed 28

[As it says in Psalms,] 'Behold! The one who respectfully fears God is blessed like this!'²

May God bless us with the same blessings as those of my father, Habtu, and with the same blessings as those of my teacher, Zara Yacob.

Now I am [also] very old [and near death]. [As the Psalmist says,] 'I was a young man and I have grown old, yet I have never seen a righteous person rejected, nor their children lack food, but they live amidst blessings forever'.³ Abb234 30v

I, Walda Heywat, who is called Metekku, added this short piece to my teacher's book, so that you may know the beautiful end of his life.⁴

Regarding my wisdom, which God gave me to understand and that Zara Yaqob taught me for fifty-nine years,⁵ I also have written a book, one of knowledge and advice for all Ethiopia's children. Sum 26

May God give them understanding and wisdom⁶ and love, and may he bless them forever and ever. Amen!

The end of this book.⁷

¹ ቆላ (lowlands), in Amharic. That is, the area of Gojjam from which the son's wife came, Lamge.

² Psalm 128:4 (127:5 LXX).

³ Psalms 37:25–26 (36:25–26 LXX).

⁴ Abb 234 omits: to my teacher's book, so that you may know the beautiful end of his life.

⁵ Since children begin school between the age of four and seven, we may infer that Walda Heywat, at the time of the writing of this coda, is in his sixties.

⁶ Abb 234 omits: and wisdom.

⁷ Abb. 234: May God bless, with the [same] blessing [as that he gave to] Zara Yaqob, his servant Walda Giyorgis, who enabled this book to be written down so that God's blessing would always be with him, and also bless his scribe Walda Yosef, forever and ever. Amen! Let it be, let it be.