



The Birth of an African Literary Form: the Ethiopian Hagiographical Novel in Comparative Perspective

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Defining hagiography

Etymology:

Greek *(h)agios* (ἅγιος, “holy”, “saint”) + *graphēin* (γράφειν, “write”)

Origins:

For Christian hagiography: Roman and later Byzantine empire

In the Byzantine North Africa: Coptic Egypt

Main examples:

The Life of St. Anthony the Great

The Life of St. Pachomius the Great

Main forms (Latin term and English translation):

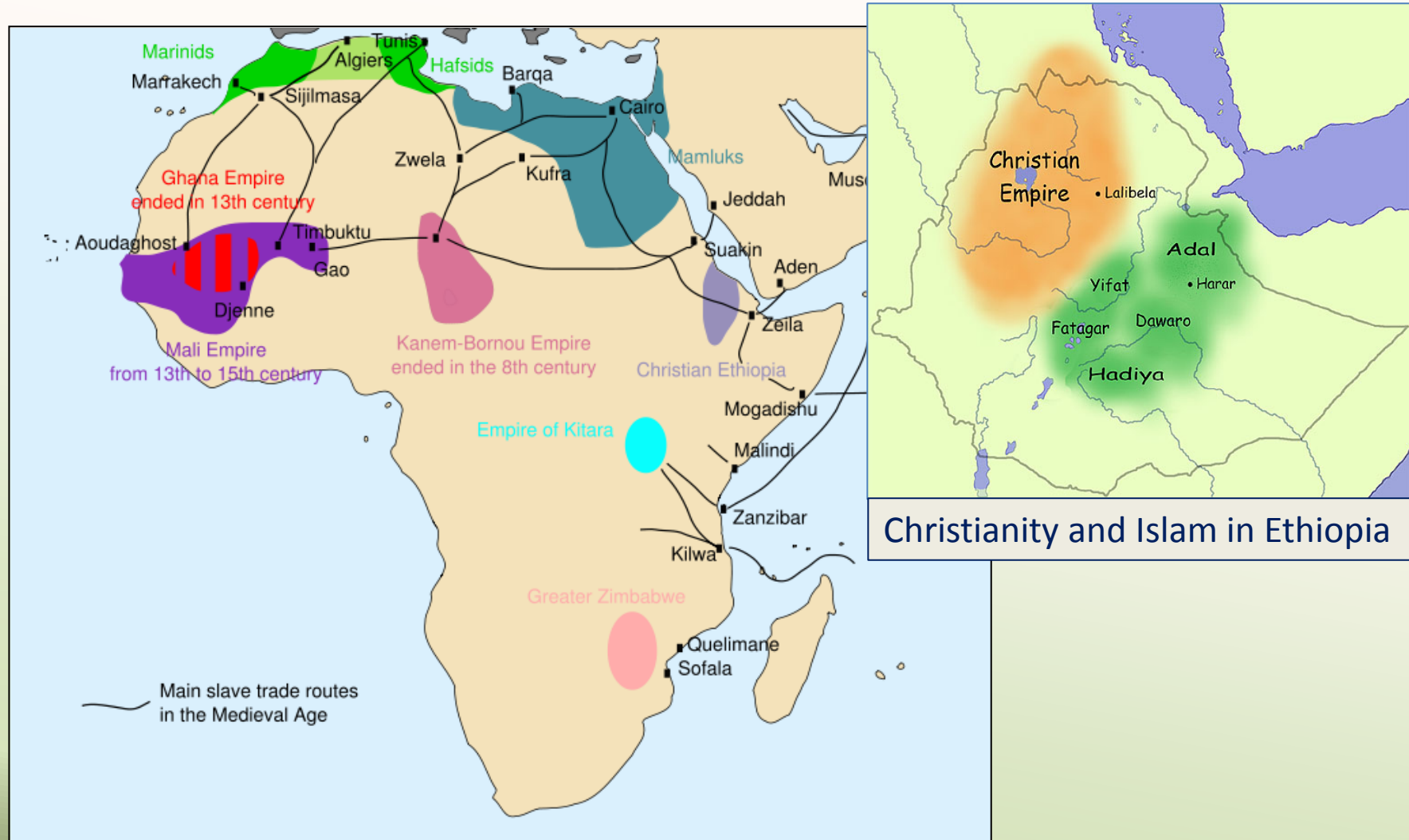
Passio (Passion)

Vita (Life)

Miracula (Miracles)

Encomium (Panegyric)

Medieval African Civilizations



Ethiopian hagiography

Main text forms:

Life (Eth.: *Gädl*)

Miracles (Eth.: *Tä'ammər*)

Panegyric (Eth.: *Dərsan*)

New text forms:

mälkə' (praise of body parts)

sälam (salutations)

Structure of a hagiographical dossier:

Gädl

Tä'ammər

A poetic composition (*mälkə'*, *sälam*, *qəne*)

St. Täklä Haymanot

ተክለ፡ ሃይማኖት, b. ca. 1215, d. ca. 1313

Evangelizer of southern Ethiopia

Vitae compiled in 1313, 1400-50, **1515**, and the 18th century



Azäzo Täklä Haymanot, mural



Däbrä Libanos, modern church building

Gädlä Täklä Haymanot

ገድለ፡ ተክለ፡ ሃይማኖት, 1515 redaction



Gädlä Täklä Haymanot, Qärsäbär: one of the over 70 known manuscripts

Structure of a *Gädl*

Introduction / Prologue

Main body

- 1) parents
- 2) birth and childhood
- 3) ordination as priest
- 4) choice of monastic habit
- 5) departure from the monastery
- 6) asceticism, wonderings, miracles
- 7) pilgrimage to Jerusalem
- 8) foundation of a monastic community
- 9) miraculous trip to Heaven
- 10) “covenant” (i.e. the promise of Jesus Christ to take care of those faithful to the saint)
- 11) testament
- 12) death and ascension of the soul

Conclusion

Prologues in comparison

Gädlä Täklä Haymanot, 16 th cent. <i>Ethiopic</i>	Life of Arsenij of Konev, 16 th cent. <i>Russian</i>	Life of Anthony the Roman, 16 th cent. <i>Russian</i>	Life of Eufrosinia, 16 th cent. <i>Russian</i>	Life of Prince Vladimir, 16 th cent. <i>Russian</i>	Life of Princess Olga, 16 th cent. <i>Russian</i>
[All belivers of the Saint will join him the “ banquet of Zion ”] (4-V)	(translation is mine – DN)	(translation is mine – DN)	(translation is mine – DN)	(translation is mine – DN)	(translation is mine – DN)
<p>Come, gather to listen to his beautiful story, gather quickly, like the thirsty one rushes to a source of water, so that the ear of your heart may drink, so that you may listen (the story about) the contendings of your father...</p> <p>And you who came together in this holy Christian church, priests and deacons, believing males and females, elders and children, the nobles and the folk, listen to the spiritual account of the passions of his divine contendings....</p>	<p>Come, fathers and brothers, come the flock of those who are named Christians, come the Orthodox and descend your hearing to the words of my mouth, and listen without laziness what is being told, in order to rejoice this feast of spirit, which abounds not in the food of flesh but is composed of divine truth, which does not fill the body but enlightens the mind, and moreover illuminates the soul and the body with the words of the divine truth.</p>	<p>Come the lights of the church, shepherds and teachers of the entire Christian people; come the blessed fathers, get closer o the entire community holy in Christ; come the clergy. Come men and women, old and young, lads and maidens, those married and those simple and those wise, celebrate with me the glory of the blessed father...</p>	<p>Come and assemble all those who live the life of the angels in desert and caves, the old who [for a while] forget their weakness and the young who run like deers. For I want to offer you a feast so that, eating, your souls would rejoice. For herewith is a feast of undecaying dishes. Those that decay are sweet to the throat and filling to the stomach, but these here bring joy to the soul and strengthen the mind for working the good deeds.</p>	<p>Come o fathers and announce to us and teach us and mediate for us in front of Jesus Christ! Come o brothers and work with us and give us good advice for wisdom, and complete the incolpleted, decorating the crown of words for the good of the listeners! Come o children and listen with heed and learn the awe of the Lord. Come all our fellow countrymen...</p>	<p>Come all the Orthodox of the Russian land, all estates of the realm and all ages, let us rejoice in our Lord, kneel and prostrate in front of Him, singing him a joyful song, praising and blessing His holy name and the great mercy that He offered to us, having enthroned himself within us and having strengthend us in our unshakeable faith in Him, the one in the Trinity the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, our true God who created us ...</p>

Poetic intermezzos

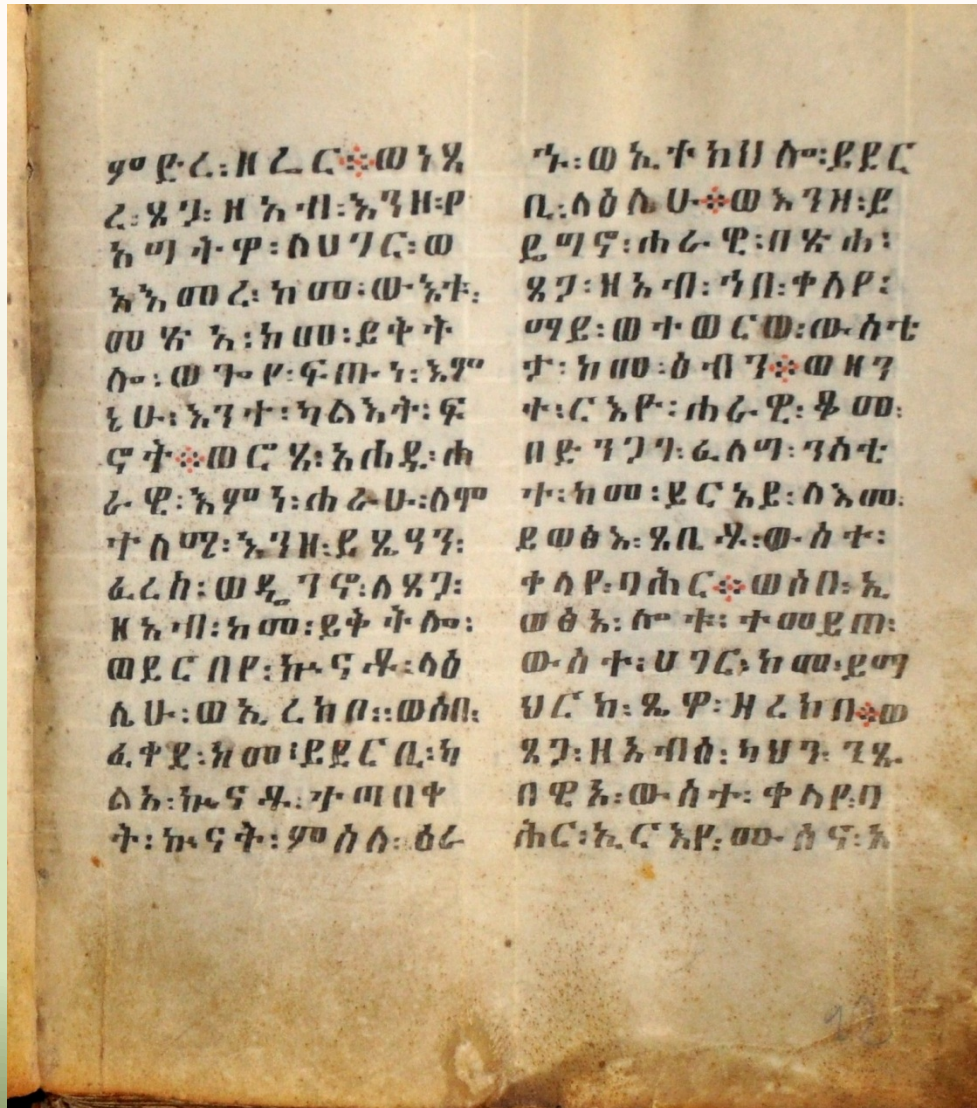
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በላዕሌነ፡ ለትርብብ ::

“The grace of the two doves
And the grace of their wise son
May it extend over us!”

ወጠፍአ፡ አምልኮ፡ ጣዖት፡
ወተስእሎ፡ ማሪት፡
እምኩሉ፡ ብሔረ፡ ዳሞት፡
በሰብከቱ፡ አቡነ፡ ተክለ፡ ሃይማኖት፡፡

“And the worship of the idols,
And the practices of the sorcerers,
Disappeared in the entire country of
Damot,
Through the preaching of our father
Täklä Haymanot”

Escape scene



ATH-002 (fol. 12r):

“And Säggä Zä-Ab saw that they are encircling the village, and realized that (the pagan King) had come to kill him. And he ran away from there along a different path; and a (pagan) soldier rushed while riding a horse, and pursued Säggä Zä-Ab in order to kill him, and throw a javelin upon him, but did not hit him. And as he wanted to throw another javelin, it stuck to his palm, and he was not able to throw it. And Säggä Zä-Ab reached the brink of the water, and hurled down into it like a stone... As the soldier stood for a while at the edge of the water, to see if he would come out...”

Gädlä Täklä Haymanot: digressions

Introduction

Main body 1) parents

2) birth and childhood **preceded by a long historical digression**

3) ordination as priest Sheba and Solomon

4) choice of monastic habit Birth of Menelik I

5) departure from the monastery Menelik brings the Ark of the Covenant

6) asceticism, wonderings, miracles Azariah son of Sadok accompanied Menelik

7) pilgrimage to Jerusalem Frumentius brings Christianity to Ethiopia

8) foundation of a monastic community Genealogy of Täklä Haymanot

9) miraculous trip to heaven Genealogy of Ethiopian kings

10) “covenant”

11) testament

12) death and ascension of the soul

Conclusion

Sub-plot on Motälämi. *Anagnorisis*

I: before the birth of the Saint

The rapture of the Saint's mother Egzi' Haräya by the pagan king Motälämi

The miraculous intervention of the Archangel Michael

The Saint's father, Sägga Zä'-Ab, **recognizes** Egzi' Haräya

II: 25 years later

Täklä Haymanot is captured by the pagan king Motälämi

Täklä Haymanot prevails over the sorcerers

Motälämi “**recognizes**” Täklä Haymanot

Motälämi is convinced and converts to Christianity

Other “recognition” stories:

Life of Thais; Life of Apollinaria; Life of Abraham and his niece Maria; Life of Abraham of Scetes; Life of Eustachius Placidus; Life of John Calyvites; Recognitions of Clemens; Life of St. Alexis Man of God

Sub-plot on Motälämi. *Enduring life*

II. 1: prior to the encounter with Motälämi

Struggle with the sorcerers for **43** days

Each time the Saint dies but St. Michael resurrects him.

II. 2: during the Motälämi episode

Motälämi has Täklä Haymanot thrown from the cliff, but
the Saint is saved by the Archangel Michael

Motälämi repeats the execution, killing also 24 soldiers
who had captured the Saint; St. Michael saves all
Motälämi executes all people who had gathered and tries
to kill Täklä Haymanot with his own hands.

Other stories with indestructible life:

Passions of Apoli, Anub (Nob), Basilides the General, John
and Simon, Claudius Stratelates, Irene, Isidorus of
Antioch, Julius of Aqfahs, Paphnutius of Dandarah

Captivity theme

Coptic:

Passion of Claudius

Passion of Basilides

Amharic:

Afäwärq Gäbrä Iyäsus (b. 1868, d. 1947)

ልብ ወለድ ታሪክ *Ləbb Wälläd Tarik*, Rome 1908

Hagiographical novel

Main innovations:

- vivid style

- historiographical digressions

- sophisticated narrative structure

- plotting techniques

- adventurous stories

Fiction elements prevail over hagiography and history



Thank you for your attention.

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