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Vignette:

Gold coin of King Aphilas, early third century CE, as drawn by A. Luegmeyer after the coin in Rennau collection. Weight 2.48 grams, diameter 17 mm.

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The journal focuses on philology, linguistics, archaeology, history, cultural anthropology, religion, philosophy, literature, and manuscript studies with a regional emphasis on Eritrea, Ethiopia, the Horn of Africa, and related areas. The editors welcome contributions on relevant academic topics as well as on recent research in the respective field. Each issue of AETHIOPICA contains reviews of books which form a substantial section of the journal.

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Editorial

The present issue of AETHIOPICA is the twenty-fifth since the journal's founding in 1998. It is also the thirteenth issue I have worked on as editor-in-chief, one more than that of founder Siegbert Uhlig. The present time, however, does not lend itself to celebrations of any sort. The global political crisis and the situation in the Horn of Africa are having a deep impact on the scholarly community, which appears divided and radicalized on opposite or increasingly diverging positions as never before. The growing influence of diaspora communities is at times marked by waves of resurgent nationalism. The challenge posed by main-stream policy in countries of established scholarly traditions gives less and less space to small fields—as is the case of Ethiopian and Eritrean studies. The consequent lack of resources triggers the fragmentation of the scholarly scene. New balances based on mutual legitimation and acknowledgement of a common scholarly method are not obvious. The consequence of this complex situation, which reflects global changes, is that scholarly and academic freedom can be put at risk. Of all priorities envisaged in the mission of AETHIOPICA, preservation of academic freedom along with scholarly quality has been, is, and will remain the top priority of the journal.

I regret that in the past, and still now, the lack of available qualified authors has prevented AETHIOPICA from duly commemorating distinct colleagues and researchers recently passed away who were more than deserving of an obituary. I would like to remember at least some of them here, by name, as a very modest tribute to their work and memory: Johannes Launhardt (1929–2019), Mesfin Wolde Mariam (1930–2020), Steffen Wenig (1934–2022), Girma Fisseha (1941–2020).

To end on a positive note, three colleagues active in Ethiopian and Eritrean studies have received important awards this year, and we would like to mention them here: Samantha Kelly (Professor of Medieval History at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, also on our International Editorial Board), has won the Choice Outstanding Academic Title 2020, and the African Studies Review Prize for the Best Africa-focused Anthology or Edited Collection 2021, for her *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Leiden–Boston, MA: Brill, 2020); Verena Krebs (Junior-Professorin für Mittelalterliche Kulturräume at Ruhr-Universität Bochum) has received the Dan David Prize for her *Medieval Ethiopian Kingship, Craft, and Diplomacy with Latin Europe* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021); and Massimo Zaccaria (Professore Associato in Storia e Istituzioni dell'Africa at Università degli Studi di Pavia) has received the Giorgio Maria Sangiorgi award of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei 'per la Storia ed Etnologia dell'Africa'. To all of them—the warmest congratulations from AETHIOPICA!

The Confession of King Gälawdewos (r.1540–1559): A Sixteenth-Century Ethiopia Monophysite Document against Jesuit Proselytism

SOLOMON GEBREYES, Universität Hamburg

Background to the *Confession*: The Coming of Jesuit Missionaries and Religious Controversies

At the time of the Ethiopian king Ləbnä Dəngəl (r.1508–1540), the relationship between the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia and the Portuguese kingdom in the sixteenth century consisted mainly of diplomatic exchanges of embassies. This relationship lasted for about two decades until the Muslim leader of ‘Adal Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Ġāzī,¹ declared war on the Ethiopian king in 1527. This war caused huge casualties and basically destroyed the Christian state. Large numbers of Christians were forcefully converted and churches and monasteries burnt down. The Ethiopian king sent a letter to the Portuguese king Dom Manoel to ask him for military support against *Imām* Aḥmad. Portuguese soldiers, however, arrived only after Ləbnä Dəngəl’s death in 1540 in the monastery of Däbrä Dammo where he had sought refuge. It was under his son and successor Gälawdewos that four hundred Portuguese soldiers arrived, eventually playing an important role in defeating the Muslim army. From then on, the relationship between the Christian kingdoms of Ethiopia and Portugal would become more complex, acquiring a new religious dimension as well as a military one.²

In the immediate aftermath of the long confrontation between Muslims and Christians in Ethiopia, a religious debate began between Catholic Portuguese dignitaries and their Jesuit missionaries, on the one hand, and Ləbnä Dəngəl’s successor, King Gälawdewos (r.1540–1559) (whose regnal name was Aṣnaf Säḡäd), on the other. It appears to have been the pseudo-patriarch João Bermudez,³ who had served for over a decade at the court of the Ethiopian Christian king, who first officially attempted the formal conversion of Gälawdewos as a reciprocation for the military assistance the Portuguese gave during the wars

¹ ‘Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Ġāzī’, *E Ae*, I (2003), 155a–158a (F.-C. Muth).

² Martínez d’Alòs-Moner 2002, 1.

³ ‘Bermudez, João’, *E Ae*, I (2003), 540a–541a (A. Martínez).

against Muslims. Yet, several sources indicated that Bermudez did not raise key doctrinal questions concerning supposedly ‘Judaic’ practices within the Church of Ethiopia. The issue of the ‘Judaism’ of Ethiopian Christianity will become a bone of contention only later, during the first Jesuit mission. Bermudez only requested the king’s formal conversion to Catholicism and obedience to the Pope.⁴ This strategy was to lead to increased hostility between Bermudez and Gälawdewos and by 1553 the Ethiopian king eventually forced the Portuguese ambassador to leave his court.

The departure of Bermudez did not terminate Portuguese interests in having the Ethiopian king enter the Catholic fold. A letter Gälawdewos sent to Portugal was interpreted as showing signs of the Ethiopian king’s desire for conversion to Catholicism. This letter was widely publicized at the Portuguese court and beyond and in subsequent years two Jesuit missions were sent to Ethiopia for this purpose.⁵ The first group of missionaries was headed by the Jesuit father Gonçalo Rodríguez, and Diogo Dias, an ambassador of the Portuguese king. The mission’s purpose was to check the spirit and disposition of Gälawdewos and announce to him the arrival of a Catholic bishop together with his companions.⁶ In 1555 the group reached the court of Gälawdewos bearing gifts from the Portuguese king.⁷

In a letter, the group of missionaries urged Gälawdewos to offer his obedience to the Roman Church and to the Roman pontiff. Reportedly, the letter of the Portuguese king stated that ‘in a year’s time he would send him a man from his household with a certain number of religious men of holy life and proven doctrine’.⁸ As was to be expected, the missive was not well received by the king,

⁴ Whiteway 1967, 180–181.

⁵ The king sent the letter to the Roman Pope in January 1541. See Raineri 2003, 57–58.

⁶ The patriarch was João Nunes Barreto who was nominated after long consultation between the Portuguese king Dom João III and the Roman Pope Paul IV. His companions were Father Belchior Carneiro and Father André de Oviedo. See Boavida et al. 2011, II, 19; Pennec 2003, 83.

⁷ Portuguese and Ethiopian sources of the period reveal different views on the reception of the king. Gälawdewos royal chronicle states they were warmly received in the court by the king himself, according to their favourites all had been done correctly and Oviedo appreciated the good personality of King Gälawdewos; Conzelman 1895, 55 (ed.), 154 (tr.); Solomon Gebreyes 2019, 60 (ed.), 35 (tr.). Rodríguez, however, reported they had not been treated properly by the king himself, some doubt maybe attached to this account, as Rodríguez had been disappointed by the king’s refusal to convert to Catholicism. See Boavida et al. 2011, II, 20.

⁸ Boavida et al. 2011, II, 20. The letter of Rodríguez written after he returned to Portugal provides important information on their journey to Ethiopia, the reception of the king, his submission of the Portuguese king’s letter to King Gälawdewos, his composition of the

who soon left the court to wage a military campaign. Rodríguez, who stayed at the court, would have then started composing an apologetic treatise addressed to Gälawdewos, and in which the ‘errors’ of the Ethiopian Church were discussed. After his return from the military expedition, Gälawdewos became personally involved in the religious debate between his priests and the Jesuits. Discussion versed on such ‘errors’ in the views of the Catholics, such as the observance of Sabbath, the practice of circumcision, and the avoidance of eating pork meat.

The Jesuits, and in particular Rodríguez, insisted on two particular issues. The first was Gälawdewos’s obedience to the Roman pontiff that he allegedly had promised in his letter to the Portuguese king. The second issue concerned the Jesuit scholars the king of Portugal wished to send to Ethiopia. Gälawdewos replied he had never promised obedience to the Roman pontiff, and the part in the letter interpreted in that sense had been a simple mistake in translation.⁹ Regarding the second point he added he had scholars in his kingdom, and therefore no need of any from Portugal. He concluded by saying that he wished to obey the patriarch of Alexandria solely.¹⁰

This religious debate is contained in a document later known as the *Confession of King Gälawdewos* (CAe 1252).¹¹ In this document, the Ethiopian king declared his faith, and defended the doctrine and customs of Ethiopian Christianity against the accusations of ‘heresy’ made by Jesuit missionaries. The document is one of the most important expositions of the Monophysite doctrine of the Ethiopian Church. From that moment on it has attracted the attention of many scholars and has been studied from theological and philological perspectives. In this paper, the rationales behind Gälawdewos’s argument will be discussed and evaluated by means of an analysis of the indigenous sources and the historical context.

treatise against the errors of the Ethiopian Christianity, the king’s reaction and finally the journey back to Portugal. The letter’s entire content is found in the book of Boavida et al. 2011, II, 20–23.

⁹ The king had written the letter during the turbulent period of the first confrontations with the Muslims. The error of translation was imputed to Gälawdewos’s own scribe, an Arab monk. On this issue, see Boavida et al. 2011, II, 21.

¹⁰ After Gälawdewos’s refusal to convert to the Catholic faith, Rodríguez and his group left Ethiopia after a three-month sojourn. They went to India, where Bishop Oviedo and other Jesuit fathers awaited them. For Rodríguez’s letter, see Boavida et al. 2011, II, 20.

¹¹ CAe stands for the univocal Clavis Aethiopica identifier. The Clavis Aethiopica is a repository of Ethiopic works currently being developed by the Beta maṣāḥəft project (see <https://betamasaheft.eu/works/list>).

The Confession of King Gälawdewos

The *Confession of King Gälawdewos* was written in 1555 by King Gälawdewos in response to the points raised in an oral discussion and in a treatise by Rodríguez.¹² The *Confession* was written during the first controversy with the Jesuit missionaries, as discussed above.

¹² The date of composition of the *Confession* has been a subject of contention among various scholars. Ludolf 1661 and others have maintained the view that its composition was in 1555 based on the colophon of the *Confession* which states that ተጽሕፈ : በጊዮጃወጅ ዐመት : እምልደተ : እግዚአን : ኢየሱስ : ክርስቶስ : አመ : ጳግሮሰኔ : በግሪ : ዳሞት ('It was written in the year 1555 from the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the 23 Säne (June) in the country of Damot'), thus written basically according to the Roman calendar. This view is considered plausible and acceptable in this paper. In fact, William E. Conzelman, the first editor of the royal chronicle of King Gälawdewos, did not agree with this date and proposed it had been written after the second arrival of the Jesuit missionaries in 1557 (Conzelman 1895, xxix–xxx). He supported his idea based on Chapter 74 of the *Chronicle of King Gälawdewos* (Conzelman 1895, 81–82 (ed.), 169 (tr.); Solomon Gebreyes 2019, 84 (ed.), 50 (tr.)) that provides information on the composition of the treatise against the Jesuit missionaries who arrived in 1557. However, he did not consider the date in the colophon of the *Confession*. Furthermore, he backs up his claim that there was no strong debate between the Jesuits and the king during the first Jesuit mission. He concluded that the king composed it in response to Oviedo. But this argument is strongly refuted here on the basis of the following premises. One, his failure in not considering the date of the composition in the colophon for which there can be no excuse and upon which he made no comment at all. Indeed, the date does not contradict the fact that the event happened in 1555 and actually fits with the historical facts of 1555. As contemporary Portuguese sources confirmed, the king was in Damot at that time fighting the Gämbo people. The point, mentioned in Rodríguez's letter (Boavida et al. 2011, II, 20) stating that after he arrived at court, the king left to visit his mother and brothers in Damot, also verifies evidence contained in the colophon. Perhaps Conzelman confused the date in the colophon, it being written in the Roman calendar. Ethiopian kings had a tradition of using several calendars in their letters. It is not the first time an Ethiopian king used the Roman calendar in correspondence with European kings. Susənyos (r.1607–1632) also used the Roman calendar in correspondence with European counterparts (Raineri 2003, 126). On the other hand, the chronicle he edited had shortcomings regarding its objectivity of the representation of the Jesuits and the Portuguese soldiers that would be often repeated elsewhere in the text. For example, the chronicle dates the first arrival of the missionaries in the court as 1552 (Conzelman 1895, 55 (ed.), 154 (tr.); Solomon Gebreyes 2019, 60 (ed.), 35 (tr.)) but they actually arrived in 1555. Aside from which, serious religious debate during the first Jesuit mission largely about the supposed Jewish origin of certain customs was discussed in detail in the *Confession*. During the second mission debate focused instead on the nature of Christ, a subject on which a book called መዝገበ : ሃይማኖት (*Mäzgbä haymanot*, 'The treasure of faith') was composed. The *Confession* also deals with the nature of Christ, as well as the councils of the churches. Conzelman's mistake stems from failure to cross-

The composition itself seems to have been a long process. It was carefully prepared by scholars assembled at Gälawdewos's court who seem to have consulted all the authoritative texts available to them. It may be argued that the scholars of renown who called to the court included names such as *Jëččäge* 'Ēnbaqom,¹³ *Abba Zəkere*, and *Abba Pāwli*.¹⁴

The content of the text reveals the Bible and the main canonical books of the church, like the *Didascalia* ('Apostolic constitutions'; CAe 130), *Fəṭha nāgāst* ('The law of the kings'; CAe 1395), *Māšḥafä məšṭir* ('The book of mystery'; CAe 1951), *Senodos* (CAe 2317), *Haymanotä abäw* ('The faith of the fathers'; CAe 1586), and a section of daily prayers, *Šälotä haymanot* ('Prayer of faith'; CAe 3308), have been consulted.¹⁵ In addition to these sources, the text also considered the historical and cultural context of medieval Ethiopia as useful in countering the Jesuit missionaries' accusations. It builds upon the decisions of the universal church councils and on the Nicene Creed (*Symbolum Nicænum Costantinopolitanum*) of the Monophysite Church.¹⁶ It clearly addresses the issues of the *Confession*, **ዘንተ ፡ ኩሎ ፡ ዘጽህቁ ፡ ለጽሑፍ ፡ ከመ ፡ ታላላቅ ፡ ጽድቅ ፡ ሃይማኖት ፡** ('All this is what I have wanted to write, so that you should know the truth about my religion').¹⁷

The document has two main parts and an introductory note. The first parts deal with the doctrinal basis of the Orthodox Christian faith, namely Trinity and Christology—Incarnation, Passion, death of Jesus, baptism by remission of sins, resurrection of the flesh, and eternal life. The second part deals with those three

check the various sources. Furthermore, the entire justification in the final letter of Gälawdewos he sent to the governor of Goa, written at the same place and time mentioned in the colophon, confirms the *Confession* was written in 1555 (Merid Wolde Aregay 1964, 372–373).

¹³ Ricci 1954. See also 'Ēnbaqom', *EAE*, II (2005), 280a–282a (E. van Donzel).

¹⁴ *Abba Pāwli* and *Abba Zəkere* were court advisors and were well educated. Their names have been mentioned in several religious and historical texts. See also Pereira 1888, 26 (ed.), 45 (tr.); Basset 1881a, 334; Basset 1881b, 107. See also more in detail 'Pawli', *EAE*, IV (2010), 124b–125b (A. Wion).

¹⁵ *Fəṭha nāgāst* is the law of the kings that has been in use in Christian Ethiopia since the sixteenth century at least. See 'Fəṭha nāgāst', *EAE*, II (2005), 534a–535b (Paulos Tzadua and [Red.]). *Senodos* is the most important canonico-liturgical collection of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church; it includes a large body of writings dealing with various aspects of ecclesiastical practice. See 'Senodos', *EAE*, IV (2010), 623a–625a (A. Bausi). *Haymanotä abäw* ('The faith of the fathers') is the title of the Gə'əz version of a large Arabic compilation of the writings of the early Church Fathers. See 'Haymanotä abäw', *EAE*, II (2005), 1073b–1075b (A. Wion and E. Fritsch).

¹⁶ Lozza 1958, 30.

¹⁷ Ullendorff 1987, 169 (ed.), 176 (tr.).

Old Testament rites practised in the Ethiopian Church such as the observance of Sabbath, circumcision, and dietary restrictions. Regarding these accusations, the *Confession* provided very brief, but well organized and convincing rationales on how and why they were maintained in the Church.

The introductory part defines the faith of the king. It states that በሰሙ ፡ አብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ፩አምላክ ። ዝንቲ ፡ ውእቲ ፡ ሃይማኖትየ ፡ ወሃይማኖተ ፡ አበውየ ፡ ነገሥት ፡ እሥራኤላውያን ፡ ወሃይማኖተ ፡ መርዒትየ ፡ እለ ፡ ሀለዉ ፡ በዐጸደ ፡ መንግሥትየ ። ('In the name of the Father and the Son the Holy Spirit—One God. This is my faith and the faith of my fathers, the Israelite kings, and the faith of my flock who are within the boundaries of my kingdom').¹⁸ The king was motivated mainly by the wish to defend the faith of his fathers and his people from the Jesuits. He pretended to make an official declaration with which to discard ambiguity against his Orthodox faith and this is why he explained it in an explicit and definitive way. This too is stated in the text.

ንሕነሰ ፡ ነሐውር ፡ በፍኖተ ፡ ንጉሥ ፡ ጽዮሕ ፡ አማናዊ ፡ ወኢናጸንን ፡ ኢለ
የማን ፡ ወኢለፀጋም ፡ እምትምህርተ ፡ አበዊነ ፡ ፲ወጀሐዋርያት ፡ ወጳውሎ
ስ ፡ ፈልፈለ ፡ ጥበብ ፡ ወፎወጀአርድእት ፡ ወ፫፫፫፫ወ፫፫ ፡ ርቲዓነ ፡ ሃይማኖት ፡
ዘተጋብኡ ፡ በኒቅያ ፡ ወ፫ወ፫፫ ፡ በቀስጥንጥንያ ፡ ወጀ፫በኤፌሶን ። ከመዝ ፡
እሰብክ ፡ ወከመዝ ፡ እሜህር ፡ አነ ፡ ገላውዴዎስ ፡ ንጉሥ ፡ ዘኢትዮጵያ ፡ ወ
ሰሙ ፡ መንግስትየ ፡ አጽናፍ ፡ ሰገድ ፡ ወልደ ፡ ወናግ ፡ ሰገድ ፡ ወልደ ፡ ናኦ
ድ ። ('And we go along the path of the king, plain, true, and we do not
deviate, either right or left, from the doctrine of our fathers, the Twelve
Apostles, and of Paul, the fountain of wisdom, and of the 72 disciples,
and of 318 Orthodox [men] who assembled at Nicaea, and of the 150 at
Constantinople, and of the 200 at Ephesus. Thus I preach and thus I
teach, I Claudius, King of Ethiopia; and my regnal name Aṣnaf Sägäd,
son of Wänäg Sägäd, son of Na'od.')¹⁹

Here, Ethiopia attributes high authority to the first high council; Gälawdewos has omitted the Council of Chalcedon,²⁰ which is not accepted by the Monophysite churches.

The *Confession* devotes more space to its second part—the Judaic customs whose legitimacy had been contested by the Jesuit missionaries in several of

¹⁸ Ibid., 166 (ed.), 170 (tr.).

¹⁹ Ibid., 167 (ed.), 171 (tr.).

²⁰ It was the fourth ecumenical council convened by Pope Leo I with the backing of the Byzantine emperor for reviewing the conclusions of the Council of Ephesus in 431, which adopted Dioscorus's Alexandrine proposal. See 'Chalcedon, Council of', *EAE*, I (2003), 709b–711b (W. Witakowski).

their teachings and writings. Their challenge presupposed that all Judaic elements should be abandoned after the birth of Jesus. The churches' councils had endorsed that view too, so why should they still be practised by the Ethiopian Church?

The Jesuits' accusations against the Church of Ethiopia became more intense, particularly after Francisco Alvarez's visit to the court of Ləbnä Dəngəl in 1520. Indeed, in his long narrative on Ethiopia,²¹ Alvarez did not comment on these practices in the manner in which the Jesuit missionaries that followed him. Already in Portugal, the Jesuits had confronted the Ethiopian ambassador Šägga Zä'ab, who accompanied Alvarez on his return to Portugal on these issues. They had questioned and litigated with him at the court of the Portuguese king, and Šägga Zä'ab attempted to explain why the Church maintained these customs.²² Amidst the civil war between Christians and Muslims in 1539, a letter from Cardinal Afonso reached King Ləbnä Dəngəl on the same issue, proposing the Christian faith in Ethiopia purify itself from the Jewish customs of circumcision, Sabbath observance, and dietary restrictions.²³ At the time of Afonso's letter's arrival, the Ethiopian kingdom was in turmoil, and neither opposition nor acceptance of the Jesuit's propositions were given. However, when the Jesuits arrived at King Gälawdewos's court sixteen years later, the son and successor of Ləbnä Dəngəl confronted them about the Sabbath, circumcision, and dietary restrictions written in his *Confession*. He justified and defended the observance of Sabbath, circumcision, and restrictions on eating pork meat were not practised as 'Judaic', that is, as prescriptions of the Old Testament. The customs' justification was clearly exposed in the *Confession*. To better understand this text, the reason behind the accusation of these three elements is to be presented, and then Gälawdewos's argument as it appears in the *Confession*. An evaluation of the rationales given in the *Confession* from both a theological and a historical perspective on the basis of the existing sources will then be provided.

²¹ Beckingham and Huntingford 1961, 48, 246.

²² Martínez d'Alòs-Moner 2005, 34.

²³ Leonardo Cohen provided detailed information about the letter of Cardinal Afonso to King Ləbnä Dəngəl, written in 1539 which commented on the practice of such customs. In his letter, Afonso postulated in detail why Ethiopia had maintained the customs of the observance of Sabbath, circumcision, and dietary restriction. In this regard, Cohen argued that the *Confession*'s argument is based essentially on Afonso's letter, which proposed three rationales explaining the Ethiopian Church's Judaic practices. Indeed, these three rationales are similar to King Gälawdewos's view given in the *Confession*. The *Confession* was evidently written from an abundance of theological literary sources, providing clear and coherent reasons why the Church had maintained such customs for centuries, directly incorporated in the *Confession*. See Cohen 2002, 155–156.

The first and perhaps the most important element of the customs of which the Jesuits questioned the legitimacy was the observance of the Sabbath (Saturday).²⁴ The Jesuits accused the Ethiopian Church of disobeying the Council of Nicaea’s decision that that the observance of Sunday is more meaningful than that of Saturday.²⁵ Gälawdewos explained that Ethiopian Christians did not observe the Sabbath in the manner of the Jews, but actually in accordance with the order of the Apostles as written in the *Didascalia*. The relevant passage in the Gə‘əz version of the *Confession* reads as follows:

ወበእንተ ፡ ምክንያተ ፡ አክብሮትነ ፡ ዕለተ ፡ ቀዳሚት ፡ ሰንበት ፡ አክ ፡ ዘናከ ብራ ፡ ከመ ፡ አይሁድ ፡ እለ ፡ ሰቀልዎ ፡ ለክርስቶስ ፡ እንዘ ፡ ይብሉ ፡ ደሙ ፡ ላዕሌነ ፡ ወላዕለ ፡ ውሉድነ ። እስመ ፡ እሙንቱሰ ፡ አይሁድ ፡ ኢይ ቀድሐ ፡ ማየ ፡ ወኢያነድዱ ፡ እሳተ ፡ ወኢያበስሉ ፡ ጸብሐ ፡ ወኢይሐብ ዙ ፡ ኅብስተ ፡ ወኢይትፈለሱ ፡ እምቤት ፡ ውስተ ፡ ቤት ። ወባሕቱ ፡ ንሕነ ሰ ፡ ናከብራ ፡ እንዘ ፡ ናዓርግ ፡ ባቲ ፡ ቀርባን ፡ ወንገብር ፡ ባቲ ፡ ምሳሐ ፡ በ ከመ ፡ አዘዙነ ፡ አበዊነ ፡ ሐዋርያት ፡ በዲድስቅልያ ። አክ ፡ ዘናከብራ ፡ ከ መ ፡ ሰንበተ ፡ እሐድ ፡ እንተ ፡ ይእቲ ፡ ዕለተ ፡ ሐደስ ፡ ዘይቤ ፡ ዳዊት ፡ በእ ንቲአሃ ፡ ዛቲ ፡ ዕለት ፡ እንተ ፡ ገብረ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ ንትፈሣሕ ፡ ወንትኅ ሠይ ፡ ባቲ ። እስመ ፡ ባቲ ፡ ተንሥእ ፡ እግዚእነ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ወባ ቲ ፡ ወረደ ፡ መንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ላዕለ ፡ ሐዋርያት ፡ በጽርሐ ፡ ጽዮን ። ወባ ቲ ፡ ተሰብእ ፡ ውስተ ፡ ከርሠ ፡ ቅድስት ፡ ማርያም ፡ ድንግል ፡ በኩሉ ፡ ጊ ዜ ። ወባቲ ፡ ይመጽእ ፡ ዳግመ ፡ ለዕሤተ ፡ ጳድቃን ፡ ወለፍዳ ፡ ኃጥአን ።

(‘And as to the pretext of our observing (lit. “honouring”) the day of the earlier Sabbath, it is not that we observe it like the Jews who crucified Christ saying: his blood is upon us and upon our children. For those Jews do not draw water and do not light fire and do not cook meals and do not prepare bread and do not move from house to house. We, however, honour it by offering up on it the sacrifice (Eucharist) and perform on it the supper (agape) as our fathers, the Apostles, have commanded us in the *Didascalia*.²⁶ It is not that we observe it like Sunday [lit. “the Sabbath of the first day”] which is the new day of which David said, “This is the day which God has made for us to rejoice and be glad on” (Ps. 118:24). For on it Our Lord Jesus Christ was resurrected, and on it the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles in

²⁴ The Jesuit accused the Church of this practice claiming the observance of the Sabbath (Saturday) to be an Old Testament tradition as referred to in the Old Testament, Exod. 31:13–17.
²⁵ Boavida et al. 2011, I, 360.
²⁶ Harden 1920, 178–179. Similar context is also noted in the homily of Sänbät (see Lusini 1993, 156, 158 (ed.), 157, 159 (tr.)).

the upper chamber of Zion. And on it he became man in the womb of Saint Mary, virgin at all time. And on it he will come again for the reward of the righteous and the requital of the sinners.’)²⁷

Two striking points emerge here. Firstly, the *Confession* clearly identifies the features of the Jewish observance of Sabbath and then elaborates on the Ethiopian observance. The purpose of the *Confession* was to counter the Jesuits’ accusation that observance of Sabbath in the Monophysite Ethiopian Church was heretical. However, many scholars claimed the *Confession* to be merely an apologetic document mediating the Jesuit accusation and not reflecting an existing reality.²⁸ I argue here, that Gälawdewos’s justification of the observance of the Sabbath is supported by many religious texts, established centuries earlier under authorship of the Church. The observance of the Sabbath was already a bone of contention in the history of the Ethiopian Church, mainly between the house of Ewostatewos and the house of Täklä Haymanot,²⁹ which continued until the fifteenth century, when King Zär’a Ya’qob resolved to convene a council in Däbrä Məṭmaq of Šäwa in 1450 and declared the observance of the Sabbath in the Ethiopian Church as an official holiday and the *Didascalia* its source of legitimacy.³⁰ This book, which is also mentioned as the basis for the argument cited in the *Confession*, was translated from Arabic to Gə’əz, becoming the main

²⁷ Ullendorff 1987, 167 (ed.), 171–172 (tr.).

²⁸ Lozza 1946; Hammerschmidt 1963, 53; Ullendorff 1968, 110; Cohen 2002, 153; Ullendorff 2012, 146. In his extensive scholarly work, Edward Ullendorff, favouring the Jesuits stand against these practices, says the *Confession* was written as ammunition for the Jesuits’ accusations against the Church, but in reality all these practices are Jewish in origin. As part of his attempt to demonstrate the connection between the Church and Judaism, he details many of the Jewish customs, including the three to which the Jesuits claimed the Ethiopians adhered: the Sabbath, circumcision, and dietary restrictions (see Ullendorff 2012, 133–155). In a number of indirect hypotheses upon which he relied, he described how Jewish influences could be assimilated, both linguistically and historically, into the Church of Ethiopia. Rodinson 2012a, who reviewed Ullendorff’s article in detail and has written an article with a contrary viewpoint (see Rodinson 2012b), holds that Ullendorff’s claims are not supported by concrete evidence of any Jewish presence or practice of Judaism in the country. Using the work of other scholars who feel the practices accused by the Jesuits were not necessarily due to the influence of Judaism, Maxime Rodinson further argues these practices to have also been common in early Christianity, practised not only by Ethiopians, but Eastern Orthodox and Coptic Christians also. The debates in Ethiopian studies have existed since the sixteenth century, but are not yet resolved. The aim of this paper is, in fact, not to assess these debates, but to demonstrate how the treatise was written within the context of its sources.

²⁹ Tadesse Tamrat 1972, 230.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

source of legitimacy for the observance of the Sabbath in the Ethiopian Church. It stated,

O Lord Almighty, who didst create the world by Jesus Christ our Saviour, and didst appoint the Sabbath, and rest thereon from all Thy work, and hast commanded us to rest (on it) from all the work of our hands, and to be ready to serve and do Thy commandments; and hast given us feast days (for) the joy of our souls; and that we should remember the skill of Thy wisdom, that God the word was pleased to be born of a woman for our sakes, and appeared manifestly in this world.³¹

Another important book of the church, *Fəṯha nāgäšt*, which has canonical status for regulating religious and secular matters, was most likely translated from Arabic to Gə'əz in the sixteenth century. It also supports the views presented in the *Confession* under the title 'Sunday, Saturday, and feast days of the Lord, and why they are celebrated'. It states that Christians must not stop working on Saturday, as the Jews do, but as Christian, they shall work on this day.³² However, when it states that Christians shall work on this day, it does not mean Christians are to plough and harvest or be involved in other labour activities. Instead they are to support those needy, bury the dead, feed the hungry, visit the sick, pray, and serve God in all manner.³³ However, if among the Christians some are found to behave as Jews, they are to be driven away from the face of Christ.³⁴ In addition, the *Fəṯha nāgäšt* adds that Christians should not keep Saturday in similar manner to the day of Sunday, as the *Confession* makes clear. It provides detailed information on what the Christians ought to do only on Sunday.

Similarly, a famous medieval church scholar, Giyorgis of Säglä,³⁵ believed to have been at the court of King Dawit (r.1380–1413), produced his famous book, *Māšhafä məštir* following a debate with a contemporary European monk. Alongside some serious theological controversies, the Sabbath is also treated in this book. The text dedicates a chapter to the Sabbath and why the Sabbath is observed, refuting the Jesuits' accusation that the observance of the Sabbath had been abandoned by all those who adhered to the Christian faith.³⁶

³¹ Harden 1920, 178.

³² Paulos Tzadua and Strauss 1968, 114.

³³ Ibid.; Hiruy Ermiyas 2012/2013, 8.

³⁴ Paulos Tzadua and Strauss 1968, 114.

³⁵ For further details see 'Giyorgis of Säglä', *EAE*, II (2005), 812a–b (G. Colin).

³⁶ Yaqob Beyene 1993, 101–175 (ed.), 61–100 (tr.).

Aside from the above religious texts, King Zär'a Ya'qob composed a book called *Mäṣḥafä bərhan*, 'The book of light' (CAe 1921), describing the Eucharistic consecration. It also lists thirty-one activities, forbidden on both Saturday and Sunday. Furthermore, the book also gives indications on what ought to be observed in the first and second Sabbath.³⁷

The *Confession*, as with the *Fəṭḥa nägästä* stipulates that though Christians are expected to keep both Sabbath and Sunday, they should not regard Saturday and Sunday as equally holy days. *Fəṭḥa nägästä* presents a list of activities Christians are forbidden to do on Sunday: for instance, there shall be no prostration, the judicial decision of the authorities shall not be imposed on the faithful, no suit or judgement shall take place, no one shall claim his property from another, no member of the faithful shall demand payment of a loan or sue another.³⁸ Additionally, the text confirms that on both days Christians should be devoted to praying and serving God. Similarly, the book of *Senodos* lists the activities prohibited to Christians on Sunday.³⁹

Thus, the *Confession* does not contradict the canonical books, and it seems safe to assume the preparation of the *Confession* in the period under discussion as legitimation of the observance of Sabbath was very carefully drawn and in line with the canonical books of the Monophysite doctrine as foundation of the Ethiopian Church.

The other important point of the *Confession* was the justification of the practice of circumcision. The Jesuits' were concerned about why Ethiopian Christians circumcised their children eight days after birth.⁴⁰ The Portuguese and other European Christians had abandoned circumcision on the basis of the teaching of Paul stating, 'Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts.'⁴¹ In response to Jesuits' contestation of the legitimacy of the practice of circumcision by Christians, the Ethiopian king gave the following explanation in the *Confession*. He accepted the validity of Paul's teachings while also justifying the practice of circumcision among Ethiopian Christians:

³⁷ Ephraim Isaac 1973, 89.

³⁸ Paulos Tzadua and Strauss 1968, 114.

³⁹ Bausi 1995, 81–82 (ed.), 39 (tr.).

⁴⁰ They accused the Church claiming that circumcision is the Jewish practice as it is cited in Gen. 17:10–11.

⁴¹ 1 Cor. 7:18–19.

ወበእንተ ፡ ሥርዓተ ፡ ግዝረትኒ ፡ አኮ ፡ ዘንትገዘር ፡ ከመ ፡ አይሁድ ፡ እስ
 መ ፡ ንሕነ ፡ ናአምር ፡ ቃለ ፡ ምህሮሁ ፡ ለጳውሎስ ፡ ፈልፈለ ፡ ጥበብ ፡ ዘይ
 ቤ ፡ ተገዛሮሂ ፡ ኢይበቀኦ ፡ ወኢተገዛሮሂ ፡ ኢያሠልጥ ፡ ዘእንበለ ፡ ዳእ
 ሙ ፡ ሐደስ ፡ ፍጥረት ፡ ዝውእቱ ፡ አሚን ፡ በእግዚእነ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ክርስቶ
 ስ ። ወካዕበ ፡ ይቤ ፡ ለሰብአ ፡ ቆሮንቶስ ፡ ዘሂ ፡ ነሥአ ፡ ግዝረተ ፡ ኢይንግ
 እ ፡ ቀጥልፊተ ። ኩሉ ፡ መጽሐፈ ፡ ትምህርቱ ፡ ለጳውሎስ ፡ ሀለወ ፡ ንቤነ ፡
 ወይሚህረነ ፡ በእንተ ፡ ግዝረት ፡ ወበእንተ ፡ ቀጥልፊት ። ወባሕቱ ፡ ግዝረት
 ሰ ፡ ዘኮነ ፡ በኅቤነ ፡ በልማደ ፡ ሀገር ፡ ከመ ፡ ብጥኅተ ፡ ገጽ ፡ ዘኢትዮጵያ ፡
 ወኖባ ። ወከመ ፡ ስቀረተ ፡ እዝን ፡ ዘሰብአ ፡ ህንድ ። ዘንተሰ ፡ ዘንገብር ፡
 አኮ ፡ በዐቂባ ፡ ሕገገ ፡ ኦሪት ፡ ዳእሙ ፡ በልማደ ፡ ሰብእ ። ('And as to the
 institution of circumcision, it is not that we are circumcised like the
 Jews, for we know the word of the teaching of Paul, fount of wisdom,
 which says (Gal. 5:6), circumcision is of no avail, and lack of circum-
 cision does not empower either—but rather the new creation which is
 faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ. And furthermore he says to Corinthians,
 he who has taken circumcision let him not take (off) the foreskin. We
 possess all the books of Paul's teachings and they instruct us as regards
 circumcision and as regards the prepuce. But the circumcision which
 we have is according to the custom of the country—like the scarifica-
 tion of the face (practised) in Ethiopia and Nubia; and like the perfora-
 tion of the ears among Indians. What we do is not for the observance
 of the Pentateuch but rather in accordance with the custom of the peo-
 ple.')⁴²

From the above, we see the *Confession* defines circumcision as a 'culture' rather than a 'religious rite' in order to give the Jesuits a way to disconnect circumcision from Jewish or biblical tradition. In addition, this option provided the opportunity for defining the practice as supplementary to religion and, therefore, permissible as local practice.⁴³

Both the existing religious literature and historical works support Gälawdewos's views that circumcision had been a custom of the Ethiopia people for time immemorial. The *Fäthä nägästä*, in this regard, legitimizes this rationale given in the *Confession*, decreeing that under the new law circumcision is merely a custom without the sanction of a legal precept.⁴⁴ The practice of circumcision was not confined to the Christian community. It was part of common culture in the sixteenth century and earlier among non-Christian communities such as the

⁴² Ullendorff 1987, 168 (ed.), 173–174 (tr.).

⁴³ Cohen 2009, 181–182.

⁴⁴ Paulos Tzadua and Strauss 1968, 308.

Oromo and other nationalities as well as Muslims.⁴⁵ Even local adherents to the Church in post medieval times widely believed circumcision to be a custom rather than a practice of the faith. The most important Jesuit father of the seventeenth century, Páez, emphasized this, stating that when he asked people why they were practising circumcision they said they had adopted it from the ancestors.⁴⁶

Similarly, one of the most significant personalities that has contributed to knowledge of pre-modern Ethiopia, Alvarez, who spent six years visiting the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia related how the issue of circumcision was a practice without any ceremony.

Circumcision is done by anybody without any ceremony, only they say that so they find it written in the books, that God commanded circumcision. And let not the reader of this be amazed—they also circumcise the females as well as the males, which was not in the Old Law.⁴⁷

Finally, the part of the *Confession* regarding the Jesuits’ accusation of the king and his people being forbidden to eat pork. The Jesuits assumed the Ethiopian Church maintained Old Testament rules providing a description of edible and inedible animals. The Old Testament for instance classifies a pig as inedible by stating that ‘the pig, though it has a divided hoof, does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you. You must not eat their meat or touch their carcasses, they are unclean for you.’⁴⁸ Jesus said, ‘What goes into someone’s mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.’⁴⁹ Thus, the king responded admirably in the *Confession*,

**ወበእንተ ፡ በሊዐ ፡ ሐራውያኒ ፡ አኮ ፡ ዘንትከላእ ፡ በዐቂበ ፡ ሕገገ ፡ ኦሪት ፡
ከመ ፡ አይሁድ ፡ ለዘኒ ፡ በልዐ ፡ ኢናስቆርሮ ፡ ወኢናረከሶ ፡ ወለዘኒ ፡ ኢበ
ልዐ ፡ ከመ ፡ ይብላዕ ፡ ኢናጌብሮ ። በከመ ፡ ፀሐፊ ፡ አቡነ ፡ ጳውሎስ ፡ ለብ
ሔረ ፡ ሮሜ ፡ እንዘ ፡ ይብል ፡ ዘኒ ፡ በልዐ ፡ ኢይመንኖ ፡ ለዘኢይበልዕ ፡ ወለ
ከሎሙ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ ተወክሮሙ ። መንግሥተ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ ኢ
ኮነት ፡ በመብልዕ ፡ ወበመስቲ ፡ ከሉ ፡ ንጹሕ ፡ ለንጹሕን ፡ ወእኩይሰ ፡ ለሰ
ብእ ፡ በሊዕ ፡ ምስለ ፡ ዕቅፍት ። ወማቴዎስ ፡ ወንጌላዊ ፡ ይቤ ፡ አልቦ ፡ ዘይ
ክል ፡ አርከሶቶ ፡ ለሰብእ ፡ ዘእንበለ ፡ ዘይወፅእ ፡ እምአፋሁ ። ወዘሰ ፡ ውስ
ተ ፡ ከርሥ ፡ ይበውእ ፡ ወይትገመር ፡ ጽመ ፡ ወይትገደፍ ፡ ወይትከዐው ፡
ወያነጽሕ ፡ ከሉ ፡ መባልዕት ። ወበብሂለ ፡ ዝንቲ ፡ ቃሉ ፡ ነሰተ ፡ ከሎ ፡**

⁴⁵ Martínez d’Alòs-Moner 2005, 33.

⁴⁶ Boavida et al. 2011, I, 359.

⁴⁷ Beckingham and Huntingford 1961, 48.

⁴⁸ Lev. 11:7–8.

⁴⁹ Matt. 15:11.

ሕንጻ ፡ ስከተቶሙ ፡ ለአይሁድ ፡ እለ ፡ ተምህሩ ፡ እመጽሐፈ ፡ ኦሪት ።
(‘And concerning the eating of pork, it is not that it is forbidden to us by virtue of observing the laws of the Pentateuch like the Jews. Whoever eats of it, we do not detest him, nor do we consider him unclean; and whoever does not eat of it, we do not compel him to eat of it. As our father Paul wrote to the Romans, saying, “Let not him who eats (of it) reject him who does not eat (of it); God accepts all of them” (Rom. 14:3). The Kingdom of God is not in eating and in drinking; everything is pure for the pure, but it is pernicious for man to eat with offensiveness (Rom. 14:17 and 20). And Matthew the Evangelist says, nothing can defile man—except that which issues from his mouth. But whatever enters the belly finishes up in the latrine and is thrown out and poured away; all food purifies. And by the saying of these words he (Matthew) has demolished the entire edifice of the error of the Jews which they had learned from the book of Pentateuch.’)⁵⁰

Here, Gälawdewos wanted to show the difference between Jewish and Ethiopian restrictions on the eating of pork. Accordingly, the abstinence of Jews was sanctioned by the law of the Old Testament, whereas the Ethiopians had complete freedom according to the teachings of the Apostles and of Paul.

Further, he concluded that pork is not prohibited in his kingdom, but it is an individual choice. It is stated,

ባሕቱ ፡ በከመ ፡ አደሞ ፡ ልቡ ፡ ለሰብእ ፡ ይትኄረም ፡ እምበሊዐ ፡ ሥጋ ፡ እንሰሳ ።
ቦዘያፈቅር ፡ ሥጋ ፡ ዓሣ ፡ ወቦ ፡ ዘያፈቅር ፡ በሊዐ ፡ ሥጋ ፡ ዶርሆ ።
ወቦ ፡ ዘይትኄረም ፡ እምበሊዐ ፡ ሥጋ ፡ በግዕ ፡ ወኩሉ ፡ ዘከመ ፡ አደሞ ፡ ልቡ ፡ ይተሉ ።
ከመዝ ፡ ውእቱ ፡ ሥምረቱ ፡ ወፈቃዱ ፡ ለሰብእ ። በእንተ ፡ መብልዐ ፡ ሥጋ ፡ እንሰሳሰ ፡ አልቦ ፡ ሕገ ፡ ወአልቦ ፡ ቀኖኖ ፡ ውስተ ፡ መጽሐፍ ፡ ሐደስ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ንጹሕ ፡ ለንጹሐን ። ወጳውሎስኒ ፡ ዘሰ ፡ የአምን ፡ ኩሎ ፡ ለይብላዕ ።
(‘However, just as it pleases some to abstain from eating the flesh of animals, there are (others) who love the flesh of fish and those who love to eat the flesh of chicken; or those who abstain from eating of the flesh of sheep—and everyone follows that which pleases him: thus are the inclination and desire of man. As regards the eating of the flesh of animals, there is no law and no canon in the book of the New (Testament); to the pure everything is pure; and Paul says, whoever believes may eat everything.’)⁵¹

⁵⁰ Ullendorff 1987, 168–169 (ed.), 174–175 (tr.).

⁵¹ Ullendorff 1987, 169 (ed.), 175 (tr.).

Abstinence from eating certain animals should not necessarily be associated with Jewish culture; it has been a common phenomenon worldwide across religions even before Moses. It encompasses many factors according to the peoples' customs, environment, thinking, and ethnological needs. Abstinence from eating pork, in particular, was very frequent among ancient peoples such as the Egyptians and the Arabs. Thus, food preferences in Ethiopia would be derived according to Ethiopian people's custom, in some cases associated with traditional beliefs. So, the king explains, the restriction on eating pork had nothing to do with Judaic culture. In this regard, the Jesuits had not considered the complexity of the culture and history of Ethiopian society, which they viewed with a parochial gaze, in terms of rigid, dogmatic principles.

Thus, the eating of pork is a taboo in Ethiopian society and an interesting and well-known poem in Amharic clearly reflects the degree of restriction: ሥጋ ፡ ያሳማ ፡ እንኳን ፡ ለበላው ፡ ለሰማው ፡ ገማ ። ('Pork-meat defiles whoever hears of it'), explaining the extent to which pork is a taboo for the Ethiopian. In his letter to the Portuguese king, Rodríguez pointed out that Gälawdewos and a few of his priests did not dislike the Jesuits' teachings, but disapproved the permission the Catholic Church gave to eat pork.⁵² Similarly, other sources indicate the king's mother, Queen Säblä Wängel, to have been much in favour of the Portuguese. Nonetheless, she strongly supported her son Gälawdewos against the Jesuits' teachings particularly regarding the eating of pork. This clearly indicates cultural relativism rather than religious dogmatism.

Finally, it is contended that all the rationales Gälawdewos proposed in the *Confession* were not created in the sixteenth century. As shown above, these rationales already existed in various canonical books of the Ethiopian Church. In addition, the historical and the cultural context enables a defining of these rationales.

The *Confession* in the Eyes of Portuguese Civil and Ecclesiastics Authorities: Acceptance versus Counter-Defence

In the year of the *Confession*'s composition, King Gälawdewos dispatched it enclosing a letter to the then Portuguese governor of Goa, Dom Pedro Mascarenhas.⁵³ Recently, Cohen identified the presence of the Portuguese version of this *Confession* in his lengthy work on the *Confession*, in the Portuguese national archive Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo.⁵⁴ The Gə'əz version of the

⁵² Boavida et al. 2011, II, 22–23.

⁵³ Merid Wolde Aregay 1998, 39.

⁵⁴ Cohen analysed and discussed this Portuguese version of the *Confession* in his work Cohen 2002.

Confession was certainly translated into Portuguese by those Portuguese attending Gälawdewos's court at the time.⁵⁵

In the letter, the king talked of his being offended by Rodríguez declaring him a heretic and unbeliever. He underlined that the followers of the Alexandrian faith should not be regarded as non-Christians. He wrote, 'Therefore if anyone wishes to tell you now, point by point what our faith is and that it is different from the faith of the Christian do not believe him'. Finally, he concluded strongly and firmly, 'I believe, I believe, I believe until I die and as long as I live and throughout the time of times, Amen.'⁵⁶

Two years later, in 1557, after the *Confession* arrived in Goa, the governor there replied to Gälawdewos concerning the *Confession*. This letter was probably delivered by the second group of Jesuit missionaries who arrived at the court of the king that same year, led by Oviedo.

The letter is vital in understanding the immediate reaction of the Portuguese. They were satisfied by the justification of the king in the *Confession*. As evidenced here in the letter:

With the letter that I saw from your highness addressed to the Viceroy Dom Pedro, who is in glory, that I communicated to the *Capitanes* and *Hidalgos* in this council, we all received a great satisfaction seeing in it such a declaration of purity with which the faith is kept in your kingdom and states. With the safety that they should not observe the Sabbath as Jews nor follow the ceremonies they have.⁵⁷

Winning their religion's acceptance by the Portuguese authorities who had provided them with military support against *Imām Aḥmad* was a huge success for the king and his nobility.

The Portuguese, however, believed the Roman Church to be the only true church. Indeed, Gälawdewos would have deliberately ignored the Council of Chalcedon in the *Confession* and there was no ground for the Pope to refute the remaining parts. But formal obedience to the Roman pontiff was discussed again in this letter:

⁵⁵ Sources reveal Portuguese men attended the king's court who understood the Gə'əz language in the sixteenth century and served as translators between King Gälawdewos and the Jesuits throughout his reign. See Gonçalo Rodríguez's letter in Boavida et al. 2011, II, 19–23, and the letter of 1550 from the king of Abyssinia to the king of Portugal, in Whiteway 1967, 115–118.

⁵⁶ Merid Wolde Aregay 1964, 372–373.

⁵⁷ This Portuguese version was translated into English by Cohen who found the original letter in Portuguese (Paez 1905), Cohen 2002, 165–166.

In relation to what your highness shows in his letter of faith, about the Holy Trinity and a union in our lord Christ, it seems that we share the same feeling, according to the words in your letter. But as your highness does not speak about the faith that a universal faith should have, because it is true that not everything can be said in a single letter, I shall say in this one what we feel on the faith of this article. We firmly believe that there should only be one universal church headed by our Lord in the heavens, Christ and saint Peter and all of his successors here on earth. We claim that this is the holy mother Roman church, whose head and universal minister was the great apostle saint Peter, whom Our Lord Jesus Christ left in charge of all his sheep.⁵⁸

Thus, following this letter of the governor of Goa, the second missionary group arrived at the court of Gälawdewos led by Oviedo in 1557. Unlike the first Jesuit mission, this one focused on the formal obedience of the Ethiopian king to the Roman Church and on the doctrine of the nature of Jesus, no longer dealing with Jewish custom. The issue of ‘Jewish’ custom had already been thoroughly responded in the *Confession*. The Jesuit missionaries understood there to be no point in criticizing the Ethiopian Church for these customs any longer.⁵⁹ Indeed, Gälawdewos confirmed, both in the *Confession* and in the attached letter, that nothing could move him from the belief of his ancestors. Moreover, Oviedo stressed the view in the above governor’s letter providing details from the New Testament teaching:

There is no reason for there to be diversity in it among the Christians, but everyone should think the same in matters of the faith, and nobody should hold anything contrary to the Christ’s Gospel. And if they feel that we are wrong in anything and tell us what is right according to the gospel truth and the Universal Councils of the Church, we are prepared to follow the truth; and if they see that we are not wrong, they must follow the truth of the faith in one conformity, according to what Saint Paul says in the 1st Corinthians;⁶⁰ and not imitate the customs of their forefathers, if they are contrary to the truth because it is Christ Our Lord, who is Truth itself, who will judge us and give us punishment or glory, and not our forefathers. The same holds if, once the truth is known, one does not accept it because of the customs of one’s forefathers, if they are contrary to the truth; when Christ Our Lord preached

⁵⁸ Merid Wolde Aregay 1964, 372–373.

⁵⁹ Letter of Oviedo to King Gälawdewos, 1557, see Boavida et al. 2011, II, 31–32.

⁶⁰ 1 Cor. 1:10 that you all speak the same thing, and there be no schism among you.

the doctrine of His truth, had the heathens and the pagans who were converted not accepted it with the excuse that the customs of their fathers were different, they would never have received Christ, which would have been their perdition. And one must not leave the truth once it is known, out of shame and fear of the world.⁶¹

This idea could have been written to meet, or perhaps counter the idea in the introductory part of the *Confession* in which the king stated, ‘This is the faith and the faith of my fathers, the Israelites kings and the faith of my flock who are within the boundaries of my kingdom’.⁶² However, Oviedo did not mention the *Confession* in the long debate.

As Oviedo requested the king in the letter, the discussion on serious religious doctrine between Monophysite and Catholics in the king’s court was arranged. According to various sources, the debate includes the nature of Jesus, the Council of Chalcedon, and other doctrinal topics. Sources from each side claim victory for their own. One of the Jesuit fathers who accompanied Oviedo, for instance, asserted that the Jesuits raised strong arguments and the Ethiopian king’s scholars had insufficient learning to defend their own views, but the king himself was praised for being thoughtful and well educated.⁶³ King Gälawdewos’s chronicle, however, naturally spoke highly of the protagonist’s actions and victory, declaring the king’s success in winning them over.⁶⁴

In conclusion, the king grew even more firm in his beliefs confirming again what had already been declared in the *Confession*. Oviedo became desperate about the situation.⁶⁵ At the same time the king also initiated the preparation of another religious book to provide more details for points already indicated in the *Confession*, and more on the nature of Jesus. This document is said to be the *Mäzgäbä haymanot*.⁶⁶ Oviedo and his group were expelled to Dəbarwa. Oviedo died on his way to Goa. This marked the end of the first, unsuccessful Jesuit missions to Ethiopia.

⁶¹ Luke 9:26. This letter of Oviedo is included in the work of Páez, see Boavida et al. 2011, II, 32.

⁶² Ullendorff 1987, 166 (ed.), 170 (tr.).

⁶³ Letter of Father Manoel Fernandez, see Boavida et al. 2011, II, 34.

⁶⁴ Solomon Gebreyes 2019, 68 (ed.), 40–41 (tr.); Boavida et al. 2011, II, 35. Here Páez has consulted one of the versions of this chronicle in 1622 when he wrote his book almost more than 250 years before the first printed edition of the chronicle.

⁶⁵ Boavida et al. 2011, II, 35.

⁶⁶ Johnson 1960. See also ‘Mäzgäbä haymanot’, *EAE*, III (2007), 892b–893b (Getatchew Haile).

Conclusion

The *Confession of King Gälawdewos* is an important example of a religious encounter creating misunderstandings between an African indigenous Christian reading of Christian dogmas and its European interpretation. The Jesuits thought it would be a simple matter to impose their religion on Ethiopian society. The Ethiopian king, Gälawdewos, chose a peaceful approach to the religious dispute by composing an exposition of his faith as that of the Monophysite doctrine. The tradition of composing a text countering competing dogmas has long been a tradition in the Ethiopian Church both to resolve differences between religious factions within it and to respond to another religion's arguments. The *Confession of King Gälawdewos* emanated from such a well-established culture of literary production that had been developed throughout the evolution of Ethiopian Christianity. Thus, the production of the *Confession* must be seen in terms of a long established pattern of religious discourse and dogmatic elaborations.

The *Confession* reveals the dogmatic differences of two competing religious interpretations. It also highlights the link between cultures and beliefs as seen in the different interpretations of circumcision, observing of the Sabbath, and food taboos. The *Confession* clearly reveals the relevance of such customs for the Ethiopians, from both religious and cultural backgrounds, that had developed over time within its society. For both Christian societies and non-Christian societies in Ethiopia, circumcision was an essential rite of passage. Not to be circumcised was regarded as a serious imperfection of the body; the uncircumcised person was seen as dirty, ugly, closer to animal nature, and unfit to live a normal social life. Such values could not be renounced overnight. Therefore, I argue, the Jesuits followed a narrow approach, linked to their perception of Judaism and Jewish rites, as understood in the Iberian Peninsula of the same period.

Had, however, the king failed to defend the Ethiopian faith and simply accepted the Jesuit purification of local customs, the result would have almost certainly been a disastrous civil war as was the case half a century later during the seventeenth century in the Christian empire.

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Summary

The Jesuit mission in Ethiopia represented one of the most serious challenges of Ethiopian Christianity during the early modern times. The mission had two phases. In the first phase, from 1555 to 1603, the missionaries undertook to convert King Gälawdewos and his court in return for military support from Portugal but had to face opposition from his successor, Minas (r.1559–1563). The second period ran from 1603 to 1632 and marked the major success of the mission. The missionaries managed to convert King Susənyos (r.1607–1632) as well as important nobles and dignitaries. In the first phase of the mission, even though the Christian kingdom had been heavily weakened by the wars with *Imām Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Ġazī*, called ‘Grañ’ by Christians, the political and religious leaders resolutely opposed Jesuit proselytism. Their opposition took the form of theological debates, wherein local religious leaders, including the ruler, confronted the foreigners and their alien dogmas. In this paper, I will analyse a contemporary Ethiopian religious text popularly known as the *Confession of King Gälawdewos*. The piece was composed in 1555 under the order of Gälawdewos to face the Jesuit challenge. The paper will show that this important literary work was instrumental in defending the indigenous Orthodox religion and local customs.