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## **Dissertation Abstracts**

*In Search of Zär'a Ya'qob: A Study of the Philosophy and Intellectual History of  
the Ḥatāta Zär'a Ya'qob and the Debate Concerning its Authorship*

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The work has also involved a study of the evolution of medieval Muslim Ethiopian urbanism. To this end, the settlements of the Sultanate of Ifat (1285–1415) and those of the Sultanate of Bar Sa‘ad ad-Dīn (1415–1577) have been analyzed, observing continuities in domestic and religious construction techniques but significant changes in urban planning. Thus, on the one hand, the Ifat settlements are compact urban centers with well-defined urbanism and protected by walls; on the other hand, those of Bar Sa‘ad ad-Dīn lacked such urban planning, with only three walled settlements, and the buildings were dispersed, reflecting a more nomadic and livestock-oriented society.

JONATHAN EGID, *In Search of Zār’a Ya‘qob: A Study of the Philosophy and Intellectual History of the Ḥatāta Zār’a Ya‘qob and the Debate Concerning its Authorship*, PhD Dissertation in Philosophy, King’s College London, defended on 14 June 2024.

This PhD Dissertation is a study in the provenance and the legacy of a work of philosophy composed in highland Ethiopia, and an exploration of its meaning for the history and historiography of philosophy. The work in question is the *Ḥatāta Zār’a Ya‘qob*, a philosophical autobiography that narrates the life and thought of the eponymous Zār’a Ya‘qob, from his birth in the environs of Aksum, his exile and refuge in a mountain cave, his later years, and in a colophon by his disciple Wäldä Ḥəywät, his death. The *Ḥatāta Zār’a Ya‘qob* and *Ḥatāta Wäldä* have served to demonstrate, in the words of Claude Sumner, that ‘modern philosophy, in the sense of a personal rationalistic critical investigation, began in Ethiopia with Zār’a Ya‘qob at the same time as in England and in France’. But they have also been objects of puzzlement and suspicion. Over the last one hundred years, many scholars have concluded that these texts are in fact nineteenth-century forgeries, composed by a Capuchin missionary two centuries after their supposed composition. This dissertation examines the text itself and its philosophical system, the ongoing controversy over its authorship, and considers what it might mean for the history and historiography of philosophy.

The central aims of this dissertation are fourfold. The first is to demonstrate the interest of the ideas presented in the *Ḥatāta* by providing an original interpretation of its philosophical system. The second is to show that the state of the authorship debate at the time of writing is fundamentally inconclusive, and that the arguments on both sides of the debate are roughly equally weighted.

Third, given this aporia, I aim to examine *why* the authorship question has seemed so important to so many scholars and *how* it has been employed to support a dizzying multiplicity of political projects, from Tsarist Russia to Mussolini’s fascist imperialism to Haile Selassie’s Ethiopian nationalism, the Marxist-Leninist military dictatorship of the *Därg* and the contemporary academic politics of

diversification and decolonisation. Finally, I aim to explore how the *Ḥatāta* and the debate over its authorship might shed light on the history and historiography of philosophy, by critiquing certain ‘Hegelian’ assumptions that underlie both the political and philosophical aspects of the debate, and proposing an original, ‘connected’ methodology for the history of seventeenth-century philosophy.

Chapter 1 presents an original interpretation of the philosophical system of the *Ḥatāta*, paying particular attention to the original Gə‘əz. I argue that the resolution of religious disagreement was the primary motivation of Zär’a Ya‘qob’s thought, in particular the problem of perspective-relative justifications for religious claims, a problem he solves with his notion of a harmony between *labbuna*, *śar‘atā fətrāt*, and *fäṭari*. I then outline his critique of society and institutional religion and provide an account of his ethics.

The second chapter provides an exhaustive overview of the reception history of the *Ḥatāta Zär’a Ya‘qob*, and the controversy over its authorship as it has developed over the last century and a half. I then subject these arguments to critical scrutiny, providing an account of the intellectual history of the authorship debate that focuses on the intellectual and cultural-political underpinnings of these arguments through ‘colonial’, ‘decolonial’, and ‘present’ moments. I argue that Conti Rossini’s argument for a non-Ethiopian authorship involves a claim for the impossibility of philosophy in Ethiopia, and I connect his philological writings to his political ones by means of the Hegelian connection between the capacity for philosophising and the capacity for political self-determination. Much of the rest of the chapter traces the reactions to, and sublimations of, this ‘Hegelian conception’ through the rest of the authorship controversy, both the reaction against it in the ‘African Philosophy’ debates of the sixties and seventies and its tacit endorsement in both Ethiopian nationalism and contemporary ‘diversification’ discourse in Anglo-American universities.

I take up this ‘Hegelian conception’ in the fourth chapter, arguing that it has had a pervasive and often pernicious influence on the writing of the history of philosophy, on account of the disciplinary or cultural identity of philosophy (as conceptually ‘pure’), its historical development (as teleological), and its geographical scope (Eurocentric). The purpose of this chapter is to offer an alternative. I begin by asking Justin Smith-Ruiu’s question ‘is philosophy more like dance or ballet?’, and argue that for the purposes of a global history of philosophy that does not reproduce the aforementioned Hegelian exclusions, we should treat philosophy as more like dance, that is, as potentially instantiable in a wide variety of social configurations. This raises the further question: if philosophy might occur in quite different societal forms, how are we to understand the relationship between thinkers from various traditions? I examine three possibilities. The first is the familiar notion of ‘comparative philosophy’, which I argue can be philosophically fruitful, but is unable to offer a way of integrating the comparanda into

a single coherent narrative required for a history of philosophy. The second, a ‘method of parallels’ based on parallels in the material conditions of quite different contexts of philosophical production offers stronger (material) grounds for such a history. The third, and my favoured option that of a ‘connected’ history of philosophy, which traces the material and linguistic connections between philosophical texts, thinkers, and contexts of production.

The fifth chapter puts this methodology into action, providing a connected microhistorical study of philosophy in early seventeenth century Aksum. I do so by building up a picture of the discursive context of discussions of philosophy, cultural difference, societal critique, and neutral adjudication of religious disputes from contemporary Gə‘əz theological, historical, and ethnographic works, translations of foreign philosophy, and oral disputations. The aim here is to finally intervene in the authorship debate by providing a ‘proof of possibility’ of a seventeenth-century Ethiopian authorship of the text, thereby debunking Conti Rossini’s argument that the work was unthinkable in early modern Ethiopia. It is also intended to demonstrate the potential of the ‘connected’ history of philosophy for the study of seventeenth century philosophy in a global context, and more generally the philosophical richness of seventeenth century Ethiopian thought.

The final chapter ties up some of the most important themes of the dissertation, beginning with an account of the method of parallels and connected history as a framework for a globally interconnected history of seventeenth-century philosophy. Second, I provide some reflections on the significance of authorship and authenticity in the study of the *Ḥatāta*, and ask whether, and why we should care who wrote the *Ḥatāta*. Finally, in the coda I provide an interpretation of the significance of the *Ḥatāta* to a modern audience.

SABRINA MAURUS, *Battles over State Making on a Frontier: Dilemmas of Schooling, Young People and Agro-Pastoralism in Hamar, Southwest Ethiopia*, PhD Dissertation in Sociocultural Anthropology, Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies (BIGSAS), University of Bayreuth, on 16 June 2020.\*

Compulsory schooling has been promoted worldwide through the United Nation’s Development Goals. Assuming that schooling minimizes poverty and supports development and social mobility, ‘western’-style schooling has become a ‘global good’ that is rarely examined critically. However, in Hamār *wārāda* (‘district’) in

\* This work was awarded the dissertation prize of the German Anthropological Association (2021, first prize), the prize for excellence in applied development research of the KfW Development Bank (2021, second prize), the young scholars’ prize of the Association for African Studies in Germany (2020/21), and the prize of the city of Bayreuth for outstanding dissertations (2020).