STÉPHANE ANCEL, Universität Hamburg

Article

*Discourse against Catholic Doctrine in Tigray (Ethiopia): A Nineteenth Century Text*

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by Alessandro Bausi
in cooperation with
Bairu Tafla, Ulrich Braukämper, Ludwig Gerhardt,
Hilke Meyer-Bahlburg and Siegbert Uhlig
Discourse against Catholic Doctrine in Tigray (Ethiopia): A Nineteenth Century Text

STÉPHANE ANCEL, Universität Hamburg

The article deals with a peculiar document that was found during a field research conducted by the team of the Ethio-SPARE project\(^1\) during the spring of 2010 in church libraries of Gulo Mäkäda wäräda, north-east Tigray (historical Agame). During the field mission, a number of interesting, previously unknown documents related to the history of the region came to light. Among them, there is a Go'az text written during the 19th century and dedicated to the refutation of the Catholic doctrine. Because of its apparent historical significance, the text and its translation are presented here.

After the unsuccessful attempts of the 16th–17th centuries, Catholic missionaries arrived in Ethiopia and attempted to establish missions again at the end of the 1830’s. Despite their initial intention to settle in central regions of Ethiopia (such as Gondär, Bägemder or Goğgam), the political circumstances brought them towards the eastern part of Tigray.\(^3\) In 1838, Fr. Giuseppe Sapeto was in ‘Adwa. In 1843, däggazma Wābe Ḥaylā Maryam, the ruler of Tigray (1835–1867) permitted Dr. Schimper to settle in Ḥnįiččo where he was able to attract some proselytes. In 1844, Mgr de Jacobis established a mission in Go’al, in the vicinity of the town of Ḥddigrat, the political centre of the ‘Agame rulers. In 1845, he also established a mission in ‘Alitena, at the northern frontier of the realm of the šum ‘aganā, in the ‘Irrob region\(^5\). It soon turned out that the further development of missions

\(^1\) From 24 April to 24 May 2010. See for more details the report of the mission: http://www1.uni-hamburg.de/ethiostudies/ETHIOSPARE/missions.html.

\(^2\) “‘Agame” or “‘Agamā” was the name given to the north-eastern corner of Tigray comprising the wärāda of Gulo Mäkäda, Ganta Afāśum, Subha Şaše, Dallol and Kābbātā Bālāza until 1974; cf. Tsegay Berhe G. Libanos 2003: 137–138. The ‘Agame region is known as an important historical area with many remains from the Sabaean and Aksumite times. Leclant – Miqael 1959: 108–31; Godet 1977: 19–113.

\(^3\) Cf. among other works: Crummey 1972: 59–91; O’Mahoney 1982: 17–53. See also Coulbeaux 1929.

\(^4\) Also known as G’ala or Gouala.

\(^5\) “‘Irrob” is a self designation of three Saho subgroups. They live on the eastern plateau, south of the ‘Indālī River which marks the current border between Eritrea and the north-eastern corner of Tigray. Cf. Voigt 2007: 187a–188b.
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in Ṭənțičo was not possible; however, those in Ṭəgame, Gol’a and Ṭəlītena, became enduring Catholic settlements.

As commonly known, the Catholic missionaries faced strong opposition from both the political leaders of different scales, and from the hierarchs of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The nature of the Orthodox opposition to the Catholics is basically known to us chiefly from the missionary sources. The Catholic missionaries left us detailed narratives about the persecutions carried out against them, focusing on the role played by the metropolitans of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and other important figures of the Ethiopian politics. In their reports, they provided less detail about the opposition they faced from the side of the local Orthodox clergy or common faithful. This can be explained by their intention to present some spectacular facts rather than the daily life in Europe, and common problems of the Catholic missions in Ethiopia.

In general, we are familiar with the Orthodox position towards the presence of Catholics in Ethiopia, but we do not know much about the argumentation used by the Orthodox in their debates with the Catholic missionaries during the 19th century. Some Gel’az texts refuting the Catholic doctrine were written during the 16th century. In comparison, we do not have any Ethiopian anti-Catholic writings from the 19th century. The weak development of Catholic missions and their confinement to Ṭəgray may explain this fact. As far as the famous 19th century religious controversies are concerned, Ethiopian sources mostly focus on the struggle between Qəbat, Ṣägga Ṭaqq and Ṭəwəbdo movements, rather than on the local Ethiopian opposition towards the Catholic doctrine.

The short treatise refuting the Catholic faith presented below was found in the manuscript collection of the church (dābr) Dâbrà Gântâ Ṣâbây, located in the town of Ṣâbây, near the frontier of Ḳərob wârâda and Ṭəritə. Ṣâbây10 is located at mid distance between Ḳəddigrat and Ṭəlītena, on the road linking the two towns, which both accommodated

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6 The fiefdom of Ṭənțičo was given to the Protestants in 1848. Cf. O’Mahoney 1982: 80–81.
7 In addition to the quoted bibliography, see Annales de la congrégation de la mission ou Recueil de lettres édifiantes écrites par les prêtres de cette congrégation employés dans les missions étrangères, vols. 1–34 (1840–1869).
8 For example the Mäzgäbä haymanot (‘the Treasury of the Faith’) and the Mäḥbətä Ṭobbunna (‘Mirror of the Intelligence’). Cf. Cerulli 1960.
9 The exact location is Gulo Mäkäda wârâda, ṣabïya Ṣâbây, Ḹušät Sâsähayto.
10 The region of Ṣâbây, where numerous aksumite and sabaean remains could be identified, was already glanced at by the French archeologists Jean Leclant and André Miquel during the 1950’s. Leclant – Miquel 1959: 109–111.
significant Catholic missions. The treatise is included in the Four Gospels book (‘arba’tu wāngel) of the church.11 Bound in the traditionally typical way (two wooden boards, leather covering), the manuscript (164 fols. in 19 quires) can be dated back to the second half of the 18th century. In fact, a certain Ḥiyasu is mentioned in the supplication formulas, and one wonders if the name may refer to kings Ḥiyasu II (r. 1730–1755) or Ḥiyasu III (r. 1784–1788).12

The short, untitled text was written on the fly-leaves of the manuscript (fols. 1v–2v), in two columns per folio, with the total of 6 text columns.13 The handwriting is careful and can be dated back to the second half the 19th century. The author of this text is a certain Gəbrà ūywət. In his treatise, he confronts precepts, usually ascribed in Ethiopia to the Catholic doctrine, with arguments he sources from the Holy Scriptures and a few Gəỹəz works. The Filioque, the nature of Christ and the hypostasis union are the main topics of the text. Without surprise, the author is strongly influenced by the two main Ethiopian theological works dealing with Catholic doctrine, known at that time: the Mäzgäbä haymanot and the Mäșḥetä ləbunna. Even more surprising is that the author ascribes the following formula concerning the Unction of Christ to the Catholics: “the Father is the anointer, the Son is the anointed one, the Holy Spirit is the ointment”.14 However, we know that this is a statement shared by both Qəb’at and Səgga bəği movements15. In other words, as a follower of Təwəbedo, the author of the treatise simply associates the Catholic teaching with the doctrines of the competitive movements at that time. Moreover, the author tries to shock the Ethiopian believer with further “anti-Catholic” arguments, by elaborating on the issues of the supremacy of Rome, the place of menstruated women, the role of martyrs and saints in salvation, and the time of the infant baptism.

So far, it has been impossible to identify the author of the treatise, or find out where exactly the text was composed. No other copies of the text have come to light. However, taking into consideration the literary form (dis- course) of the work and the place where it was found (the area of the active Catholic preaching), we can assume that the text is a summary of the anti-

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11 The shelfmark of this manuscript is SM-003 in the Ethio-Spare database.
12 See supplication formula at the end of the Gospel of Matthew on fol. 59vb, line 16, and at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke on fol. 88r, line 5.
13 Fol. 1v: column a and b, 20 cm height, 9 cm width, 24 lines; fol. 2r: column a, 22.5 cm height, 10 cm width, 28 lines; column b, 23 cm height, 11.5 cm width, 28 lines; fol. 2v: column a, 21.5 cm height, 11 cm width, 28 lines; column b, 22 cm height, 10 cm width, 28 lines.
14 Fol. 2r, lines 12–13.
Catholic argumentation, possibly used by the Orthodox priests, and a witness of the local attitude towards the Catholic missionary activities. The treatise does not provide any hints to the political issues of the Catholic settlement in Ethiopia. However, it does highlight some elements of the discourse against Catholic faith in the context of the emergence of a strong religious Tawahdo identity.
Fig. 2: Manuscript SM-003, fol. 2r
Discourse against Catholic Doctrine in Təgray (Ethiopia): A Nineteenth Century Text

Fig. 3: Manuscript SM-003, fol. 2v
Discourse against Catholic Doctrine in Tǝgray (Ethiopia): A Nineteenth Century Text
We begin with the help of God writing the faith of ancient fathers, the twelve Apostles and the 318 Orthodox (fathers). And they say: “the Father generates, the Son (is) generated, the Holy Spirit (is) the Sprout”.\footnote{See in the Mäḥbetä ḥbuna: ḥḥ Propel. \textit{The Father generates the Son and lets proceed the Holy Spirit, He is not born and does not proceed from anyone else. The Son is (indeed) the Son, born from the Father. And the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father”. Cf. CERULLI 1960: 145 (text), 170 (tr.). See also in the Mäḥbafä maṣṭir: YAQOB BÊYENE 1993: 243 (text).} The Melkites\footnote{Old name given by Ethiopian to the followers of Chalcedon council. Cf. LOBO 1728: 304.} say: “The Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and from the Son”.\footnote{Catholic doctrine \textit{“Filioque”}. King Gälawdewos (1540–1559) has already contested it in his letter to Catholics. Cf. ULLENDORFF 1987: 166 (text), 170 (tr.). The proceeding of the Holy Spirit from the Father is also explained in the Mäẓgäbä ḥaymanot and in the Mäḥbetä ḥbunna. Cf. CERULLI 1960: 7–8 (text), 73–74 (tr.), 140 (text), 165 (tr.).} And we return to them the word: if the Son let proceed the Holy Spirit, (then) He took the work of His Father, and obtained two works: letting proceed the Holy Spirit, and being generated from the Father. And (therefore) the Holy Spirit is inferior to the Son, because He was generated from the Son.\footnote{This statement that the Holy Spirit is inferior to the Son seems to be an idea ascribed to the Catholics still recently by Ethiopians, even if it is not true. Cf. TESFAGZHI UQBIT 1973: 50. The Ethiopian Orthodox position (the Holy Spirit is not inferior to the Father and the Son) is explained in the Mäḥṣafä borban, book VI, in quoting Gregorios of Nazianze (against Macedonius). Cf. CONTI ROSSINI – RICCI 1965: 137 (text), 77 (tr.).} The Gospel says: “I send to you the Paraclete which came from the Father”\footnote{John 20: 21–23.}. And He did not say, “which came from Me”. And again He said: “I will ask the Father to send you the Paraclete”\footnote{John 14: 16–17.}. If it had been generated from Him, He would not say, “I will ask the Father”. And He said: “He (the Father) will take (it) from Me”\footnote{John 14: 26–27.}. Verily, He (the Father) takes the word from the Son, (namely) the Holy Spirit, and tells to the Apostles. [Fol. 1vb] And again they say: “the divinity does the work of divinity and humanity does the work of humanity”.\footnote{Doctrine ascribed to the Diophysites professed during the council of Chalcedon as described in the Mäẓgäbä ḥaymanot. Cf. CERULLI 1960: 15 (text), 81 (tr.).} And we say to them: if the divinity does the work of divinity and humanity (does) the work of humanity, the union has been abandoned and they became stranger (to each other). And we, we say: the divinity does the work of humanity and humanity does the work of divinity.\footnote{As the actual opinion of the Ethiopian theologian TESFAGZHI UQBIT 1973: 52.} Because humanity,
through divinity, cures the sick and resuscitates the dead, and the divinity, through the humanity, accepted the pain and the death. As the Book says: “The One who is immortal, died.” Again they say: “in one person, two natures.” And we return to them the word and we say to them: if you count the natures (of Christ), they are three: the human nature, the nature of the soul and the nature of divinity.27 And we, we say: “being honoured, one nature”, because the divine nature honoured the flesh.28 As Cyril the archbishop said this [Fol. 2ra]: “the one of the Word became the Flesh and this “the one of the Flesh became the Word”.29 The Gospel said: “I (the Son) and the Father, we are one”30 and “as the Father is living, Me too, I am living”. And Paul [said] “But the one who united himself with the Lord is one in spirit”.31 And again they say: “He (the Son) did not accept the soul without the flesh”. And we respond to their words: If He accepted the flesh, He accepted the soul, since the soul is named flesh and the flesh is named soul, since in the Old Testament (the people of) Israel descended (to) the land of Egypt being 75 souls.32 David said also: “Let each soul glorify God and let each flesh bless His holy name.”33 And the Gospel said: “For the soul of this child they search, to kill Him.”34 And the liturgy said: the souls of the generated one blossomed, born and grew from the flesh, the flesh is Him, and the one which was born from the Spirit, the Spirit is Him, as it is said in the Gospel.35 Again they say: “A man did not become a God”. And we, we say: God became a man and man [Fol. 2rb] became God by the union; because the incarnated man – God who died36 and was buried37 and rose on the third day and ascended to heaven in glory and sat on the right of His Father and He will come again in glory to judge the

26 Doctrine ascribed to the Diophysites professed during the council of Chalcedon as described in the Mäzgäbä haymanot. Cf. CERULLI 1960, 11 (text), 77 (tr.).
27 See the Mäshetä ለብህና, book VI. Cf. CONTI ROSSINI – RICCI 1965: 139 (text), 78 (tr.); see also Mäzgäbä haymanot and Mäşhetä ለብህና. Cf. CERULLI 1960: 7 (text), 72–73 (tr.), 140 (text), 164–165 (tr.), 143 (text), 168 (tr.).
28 See Mäzgäbä haymanot; cf. CERULLI 1960: 18 (text), 85 (tr.).
30 John 10: 30.
31 1 Corinthians 6: 17.
33 Psalms 145: 21.
34 Ref. to Matthew 2: 13.
36 Ref. to the words of Peter in 1 Peter 3: 18.
living and the dead. Again they say: “What we eat (is) His flesh with His soul”. And we, we say: the soul which was separated, the divinity which was united, is the living nature, because the soul is not eaten with the flesh. You do not eat the soul, as the Book says. Again they say: “the Father is the anointer, the Son is the anointed, the Holy Spirit is the ointment”. And we, we say: His divinity anointed his humanity (being) Himself the anointer, the anointed one and the ointment, since the three of them are ointment. Again they say: “He is insufficient in His humanity”. And we, we say: the Flesh is equal with the Father in his divinity, since the humanity of Christ is not less than His divinity and He made His humanity like His divinity, as the commentary on (the Book of) Job said: “The flesh stood equally on the right side of the Father”. Again they say: “Jesus Christ does not know in His flesh”. We, we say: He knows (by His flesh) because He said: “Lazarus died, let us go, let us wake him up” and He says to Martha also: “Your brother will resuscitate”. And to Nathanael He says: “Before Philippe [Fol. 2va] called you, I saw you (while you were under) the fig tree”. If He said in the Gospel “there is no one who knows this hour, either Angels or the Son, only the Father”, it means that the Son does not know since their will is one. And again they say: “the Church of Rome is the greater among the Church(es)”. And we say: one is the Church, the assembly of the Apostles not thanks to a temporary gold, but to glory, since their glory is the flesh and the blood of Christ. And again they say: “a woman who menstruates may enter the church”. We, we say she may not enter because (it is) the blood of a curse as our Lord said to Eve: In the same way that you made that tree bleed, you bleed. And because of this before seven days of

37 Anapora of Saint John Chrysostom, verse 67. Cf. ULLENDORFF 1987: 166 (text), 170 (tr.).
38 Thesis developed by the Qob’at movement and the Sägga lägg movement. Cf. GETATCHEW HAILE 1990: 34 (text), 31 (tr.); GUIDI 1900: 11–12; TèDROS ABRAHA 2010: 454.
40 Without the unction, the human nature could not be at the same place as the divine nature, meaning that in His humanity, Christ is less than the Father. This is a reference to the doctrine of Catholics argued by Paez in 1604. Cf. TESFAGZHI UQBIT 1973: 60. This doctrine is ascribed to the Diophysites professed during the council of Chalcedon as described in the mäziqâbä haymanot. Cf. CERULLI 1960: 15 (text), 81 (tr.). But this is also a reference to the doctrine of qeb’at movement. Cf. GETATCHEW HAILE 1990: 29 (text), 26 (tr.).
41 John 11: 11–23.
42 John 1: 48.
43 Matthew 24: 36.
44 As described in the Mäziqâbä haymanot. Cf. CERULLI 1960: 24 (text), 91 (tr.).
45 In the Mäziqâbä haymanot: “We believe in one holy Church, above all assemblies, the Apostolic one”. Cf. CERULLI 1960: 25 (text), 92 (tr.).
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purification, she may not enter a church.46 And they baptize the child on the second day or the third day; and we do not baptize him before the fortieth day and if it is a daughter, at the eightieth day, and if they become sick on the seventh day, since Lord introduced Adam in the Paradise on the fortieth day after he was created and Eve, in the Paradise, on the eightieth day after she was created, and therefore this order is appropriate for us forever. And again they say: “the saints and the martyr [Fol. 2vb] do not save the sinful soul”. We, we say: they (do) save the soul because our Lord said in the Gospel “if he gave in the name of my disciple only half of the bread or a chalice of cold water his reward will not perish”.47 And if they say, “We belong to the seat of Peter”, we say to them his seat is verily his seat, but Peter did not preach saying that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and from the Son, and about the two natures (that) the divinity does the work of the divinity and the humanity does the work of the humanity. This (is) the preaching of Leon,48 transgressor of the faith, during the reign of Marcian,49 King of lawlessness, and his wife Pulcheria,50 in the fourth council, Chalcedon. And so we say about them: they make four the Holy Trinity, (namely) the children of Leon, teacher of error. And I wrote this discourse on the faith because of spiritual zeal, I, ‘abba Gâbrà Ūywàt, sinner and guilty in what I was accused of. Indeed, increasing of words makes the heart forgetful. Do not forget (to recite) for me (each one you) one Pater Noster.

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46 As prescribed in the §4 pseudo-canon of Nicea, canon no.29. Cf. DA LEONESSA 1942: 46 (text), 74 (tr.).
47 Ref. to Matthew 10: 42.
48 Pope Leon (440–461), bishop of Rome who influenced the confession adopted by the council of Chalcedon.
49 Marcian, Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire (450–457).
50 Daughter of Emperor Arcadius (395–408) and sister of Emperor Theodosius II (408–450), Pulcheria is considered as saint by both Greek Orthodox and Catholic Churches.

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The article deals with a peculiar document that was found during a field research conducted by the team of the Ethio-SPARE project during the spring 2010 in church libraries of Gulo Mâkâda warâda, north-east Têgray (historical ‘Agame). This document is a Gôǝsǝ text written during the 19th century and dedicated to the refutation of the Catholic doctrine. Because of its apparent historical significance, the text and its translation are presented here. Taking into consideration the literary form (discourse) of the work and the place where it was found (the area of the active Catholic preaching) we can assume that the text is a summary of the anti-Catholic argumentation, possibly used by the Orthodox priests, and a witness of the local attitude to the Catholic missionary activities. The treatise does not provide any hints to the political issues of the Catholic settlement in Ethiopia. However, it does highlight some elements of the discourse against Catholic faith in the context of the emergence of a strong religious Tàwaḫo identity.