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### Article

*“The Eighteen Million Täwaḥədo Victims of Martyr-Saint Adyam Sägäd Iyasu”: Towards a Better Understanding of Lasta–Təgray Defiance of the Royal Centre of Gondärine Ethiopia (1630s–1760s)*

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# “The Eighteen Million *Täwähädo* Victims of Martyr-Saint Adyam Sägäd Iyasu”: Towards a Better Understanding of Lasta–Təgray Defiance of the Royal Centre of Gondärine Ethiopia (1630s–1760s)

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## I. Introduction and Thesis Statement

The stories of two hagiographies, called *Gädlä Ḥstənfasä Kərstos* and *Gädlä Adyam Sägäd Iyasu* stand out as curious anomalies in comparison to most of what we know about late 17<sup>th</sup> century Ethiopia. *Gädlä Ḥstənfasä Kərstos*, has just come to light and is introduced to scholarship in this article.<sup>1</sup> *Gädlä Adyam Sägäd Iyasu* is known to us since a variant of it is published by Carlo Conti Rossini.<sup>2</sup> The extant copies of *Gädlä Ḥstənfasä Kərstos* no doubt await detailed study and critical edition. For now, what needs to be highlighted as outlandish in its story, for the purpose of this study, is the sting-

<sup>1</sup> The *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* has no entry for Ḥstənfasä Kərstos. So far, I am aware of three variants of the *gädl*. 1.) One is a 93 folios long Gəʿəz manuscript in parchment, written in two columns, each column has 20 lines and is in a monastic library. Honoring the request of the community, the name of the monastery cannot be disclosed here. However, I would like to thank the monastic community for allowing me to photograph the manuscript in its entirety during a visit in February 2009. 2.) An abridged version of the Gəʿəz text on the verso of an Amharic translation is published by Qäšäba Maryam monastery in 2000 E.C., under the rather long title **ዘጠኝ ዓመት አባይ በረሃ ውስጥ በራሳቸው ተዘቅዝቀው በመቆም ለኢትዮጵያ የጸሎት የአባታችን የአቡነ እስትንፋስ ክርስቶስ ገድል በግዕዝና በአማርኛ**. Qäšäba Maryam is a small monastery found not too far from the famous Däbrä Libanos Monastery in Šäwa. Every year on Gənbət 9 (May 17), people come to this monastery from near and far to attend the commemorative feast of Ḥstənfasä Kərstos’ death. There are two variants of this published version that I am so far aware of. The first one, which I came across in Šəməbərma monastery, in East Goḡḡam, has 115 pages and will be identified here as A. 3.) The other, identified here as B, has 110 pages and has been available in most church bookstores in Addis Abäba. According to his vita, Ḥstənfasä Kərstos was born in Šäwänä Abbay, a place in the district of Dawənt, present day northern Wällo, in the later years of Fasilädäs’ reign (r. 1632–1667). After attending his early education in the famous Ḥayq Ḥstifanos monastery, he received his monastic habit from the abbot of a lesser known monastery called Däbrä Dəba. At the age of 33 he became the *abbot* of Däbrä Asägaḡ. Both Däbrä Dəba and Däbrä Asägaḡ are affiliated to Ḥayq Ḥstifanos. According to the chronology of his vita, most of the spiritual activities that earned Ḥstənfasä Kərstos sainthood took place during the reign of Yoḥannəs I (r. 1667–1681) with the climax set in the reign of Iyasu I (r. 1681–1706); see, **ዘጠኝ ዓመት አባይ በረሃ ውስጥ**, pp. 4, 39, 54–77 (the pagination is according to B).

<sup>2</sup> CONTI ROSSINI 1942: 65–127.

ing critic on Iyasu I. According to this most strange hagiography, Iyasu I was guilty of terrorizing 18 million people into submission to, what was to the author, the *sost lädät* (lit. three births) also called *Şägga Ləğ* (lit. Son by Grace) heresy.<sup>3</sup> Iyasu I harassed and persecuted such multitude for adhering instead to Wäldä Ab Wäldä Maryam, *bätäwəhədo kəbärä, hulät lädät*. This is the Alexandrian Orthodox doctrine of the Ethiopian Church on the mystery of the incarnation, called *Täwəhədo* (lit. union, oneness) in Gəʿəz. The ratification of this formula, polemically referred to as *Karra* (lit. Knife), at a synod held in Boru Meda in 1878, settled the Christological controversy that beset the Ethiopian Church for the preceding two and half centuries.<sup>4</sup> The synod of Boru Meda also banned the teachings of the other two groups involved in the controversy, called *Qəbat* (lit. Unction/Ointment) and *Şägga Ləğ* as heresies.<sup>5</sup> In effect, *Gädlä Əstənfəsä Kərstos* accuses therefore Iyasu I of being a *sost lädät* or *Şägga Ləğ* heretic.

<sup>3</sup> *Gädlä Əstənfəsä Kərstos*, ff. 45ra–50ra; see also, **ዘጠኝ ፡ ዓመት ፡ አባይ ፡ በረሃ ፡ ውስጥ**, pp. 53–63. In both A and B of the published versions, the number of the multitude is explicitly stated as 18 million. In a clear break with both the hagiographic and chronicle traditions, where large crowds are simply described either as, “as innumerable as the sands of the sea” or “as innumerable as the stars of the sky”, the Gəʿəz manuscript f. 50ra, of the vita of Əstənfəsä Kərstos, puts the figure as **ወእምልዓ ፡ ኢትዮጵያ ፡ ፲ወ፰ ፡ ምእልፊተ ፡ አዕላፍ** which might even be significantly higher than 18 million. It is also important to make clear here that B’s story differs from that of A and the Gəʿəz manuscript in one important detail: in B, the name of the king responsible for the persecution is Susnəyos (r. 1607–1632). However in all three versions, the persecution came after the reign of Yoħannəs I who was said to be righteous. In going back to Susnəyos’ reign, B clearly reverses the chronology of the story. There is also a mention of an Egyptian bishop called *Abunä Marqos*, who was allegedly on the side of the martyrs. While there was no bishop under that name during Susnəyos’ reign, *Abunä Marqos* was indeed the Egyptian bishop of the Ethiopian Church during the later years of Iyasu I’s reign and for some time after (BASSET 1882: 44). For these and other reasons we take the story of the Gəʿəz manuscript and A, that identify Iyasu I as the antagonist of the story, as more appropriate.

<sup>4</sup> The literal rendering of *Wäldä Ab Wäldä Maryam, bätäwəhədo kəbärä, hulät lädät* in English is “(Christ) Son of the Father, Son of Mary, (He was) ennobled/glorified by (His) Union (with divinity), (had) two births”. This is the *Karra* teaching carefully formulated to reflect the difference, the adherents of *Karra* had, with their *Şägga Ləğ* and *Qəbat* rivals; see GÄBRÄ SƏLLASSE 1959 E.C.: 86–92; ADƏMASU JÄMBÄRE 1954 E.C.: 279; GORGORIWOS 1991 E.C.: 86–92; GETATCHEW HAILE 1986: 205–209.

<sup>5</sup> *Karra, Qəbat* and *Şägga Ləğ* are polemical labels mutually given by the three factions involved in the unction controversy. The names signify alleged Trinitarian and Christological heresies the three groups identified in each other’s teaching; for etymology of the three terms see GETATCHEW HAILE 1990: ix–x, n. 6–9. It is ironic that we have better information about synods held in earlier centuries than about Boru Meda. Most accounts present the Boru Meda synod as if it were conducted only between the adherents of *Şägga Ləğ* and *Karra*, though *Qəbat* was also condemned as heresy; see for example, GORGORIWOS 1991 E.C.: 69–72 and GÄBRÄ SƏLLASSE 1959 E.C.: 86–92.

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In sharp contrast, *Gädlä Adyam Sägäd Iyasu* is dedicated to the veneration of Iyasu I as a martyr-saint. To our knowledge, this hagiography is the only one of its kind dedicated to a ‘Solomonic’ king.<sup>6</sup> In other words, Iyasu I is the only one among the monarchs of the Solomonic dynasty to have a hagiography composed to his name. Enumerating the spiritual exploits that earned Iyasu I his sainthood and martyrdom, the author of *Gädlä Adyam Sägäd Iyasu* lists ten wrongdoings Iyasu I was charged with at the hands of his assassins. The third in the list states that his tormentors charged Iyasu I of heresy for adhering to *Şägga Ləğ*.<sup>7</sup> *Gädlä Īstənfəsä Kərstos* and *Gädlä Adyam Sägäd Iyasu* clearly belong to the partisans of *Karra* and *Şägga Ləğ*, respectively. Needless to say, the two groups were arch-rivals. Yet, the two hagiographies corroborate each other in portraying Iyasu I as a *Şägga Ləğ* partisan, *Gädlä Īstənfəsä Kərstos* denounces him and institutes a curse against him while *Gädlä Adyam Sägäd Iyasu* praises him and bestows the honour of, not just martyrdom, but also sainthood upon him.

Needless to say, historical accuracy is not the strength of hagiographies. As a rule, one should therefore guard against any rush to reconstruct historical truth based on them.<sup>8</sup> All the same, it is extremely puzzling that, of all rulers, the authors of the two *gädl*s should pick Iyasu I as the villain and hero of their respective stories. What makes Iyasu I the last candidate one can think of for both roles is the fact that his *Täwahädo* record is impeccable. In fact, few facts are as secure and firmly established in Ethiopian historiography as Iyasu I’s stalwart championship of *Täwahädo*. Based on more reliable contemporary sources, historians have affirmed that it was during his reign that *Täwahädo* became the unrivaled official doctrine of the royal court. Before that, the balance of power was shifting and turning between *Täwahädo* and *Qəbat*.<sup>9</sup>

So why would *Gädlä Īstənfəsä Kərstos* single out Iyasu I, the one ruler who deserves all the credit for establishing *Täwahädo* as the uncontested orthodoxy of the Ethiopian Church, for the most vicious attack denouncing him as the enemy of the adherents of *Täwahädo*? Or, better put for the conversant in Early Church history, why would *Gädlä Īstənfəsä Kərstos* make a Diocletian out of precisely the Constantine of the Ethiopian Church? Similarly, why would *Gädlä Adyam Sägäd Iyasu* commemorate Iyasu I as the most stalwart defender of *Şägga Ləğ*? To resolve these enigmas, this study argues

<sup>6</sup> Three Zagwe kings, Lalibäla, Näʾakkwəto Ləʾab and Yəmrəḥännä Kərstos have *Gädl*s; see TADDESSE TAMRAT 1970: 13, n. 4.

<sup>7</sup> This detail is available only in the Dima Giyorgis version of the *gädl*; see *Gädlä Iyasu*, UNESCO, IES, Microfilm, Series 10, no. 62, Dima Qəddus Giyorgis Church, Goğgam.

<sup>8</sup> TADDESSE TAMRAT 1970: 12–18.

<sup>9</sup> BERRY 1976: 19ff., 221; ID. 2005: 495a–b; CRUMMEY 2000: 84, and MERID WOLDE AREGAY 1971: 574f.

that the dominant *Täwähädo* teaching of Iyasu I's days was *Şägga Ləğ*. This means, contrary to the claim of the Ethiopian Church today, which scholarship also uncritically endorses, *Täwähädo* has never been synonymous with *Karra*. It was a contested title and prior to 1878 the adherents of *Karra* were the group with the least claim on it.<sup>10</sup> Viewed in this light, the hagiographies cease to be bizarre anomalies. In other words, to put inexcusable numerical exaggerations aside, *Gädlä İstənfəsä Kərstos* had a reason to punish Iyasu I, for Iyasu I was indeed hostile to the partisans of *Karra*. The author of *Gädlä Adyam Säğäd İyasu* is also right in being highly indebted to Iyasu I, for the *Täwähädo* teaching Iyasu gave official recognition to was indeed *Şägga Ləğ*. And with slight revision, its claim that Iyasu I lost his life defending *Şägga Ləğ* can be corroborated. As this study will demonstrate, the partisans of *Karra* were indeed the group responsible for the assassination of Iyasu I.

However, neither rendering the accounts of the two hagiographies intelligible nor exhaustive interrogation of the meaning of the term *Täwähädo* are the primary objectives of this study. These are issues pursued here as a necessary first step towards reconstructing the history of armed resistance, the adherents of *Karra* put up against the royal centre during Gondärine Ethiopia. The rebellion was not a flash in the pan in what was otherwise, as some historians suggest, a relatively peaceful period.<sup>11</sup> It was a history of defiance and armed uprising that lasted for the entire duration of the Gondärine period, from the 1630s all the way to the 1760s, interspaced though it was, with relatively calm periods. The resistance movement was also impressive in its geographical breadth. As this study will show, it encompassed several districts of what are today northern Wällo and southern Təgray.

It is astonishing that a resistance movement of such scale and magnitude should elude half a century of modern Ethiopian historiography. It is not for dearth of sources that historians remained unaware of it. Rather failing to see

<sup>10</sup>This is not an original claim of this study; see for example KIDANÄ WÄLD KƏFLE 1948 E.C.: 743. Getatchew Haile dismisses Kidanä Wäld as dishonest along with his teacher Kəflä Giyorgis; see GETATCHEW HAILE 1986: 207–208, with corresponding notes and 242, n. 13; see also AYYÄLÄ TÄKLÄ HAYMANOT 1955 E.C.: 133–176. Ayyälä's work is however marred by serious errors such as his consistent assertion that *Karra* and *Qəbat* were one and the same. What is ironic is that even those scholars who are adamantly against the notion of *Şägga Ləğ* being the *Täwähädo* teaching of the *Betä* Täklä Haymanot community nonetheless repeatedly come across strong evidences suggesting it. However the unspoken convention is to suppress these clues to the footnote, as quickly as they are encountered, and proceed with the assumption that *Täwähädo* was a term that exclusively belongs to the *Karra* group; see for example CRUMMEY – GETATCHEW HAILE 2004: 15f. n. 31 and GETATCHEW HAILE 1990: ix n. 5.

<sup>11</sup>CRUMMEY 2000: 93.

the phenomenon in its totality, that is, as a sectarian resistance movement which lasted nearly a century and half, historians tried to explain its various episodes and manifestations as isolated incidents.<sup>12</sup> This is due to the wrong but firmly entrenched assumption that *Karra* was the *Täwähädo* teaching endorsed as official orthodoxy for most of the duration of the Gondärine period. No historian could thus entertain the possibility of a long lasting sectarian resistance movement in the name of *Karra*, as this doctrine was seen to be the pillar of the center’s legitimacy.<sup>13</sup> That is why putting such erroneous assumption to rest is a necessary first step towards reconstructing the rebellion of the adherents of *Karra*. In other words, as this study will show, throughout the Gondärine period, far from being the party which had the favour of the royal court, the adherents of *Karra* were engaged in one of the most protracted rebellions in Ethiopian history against the royal centre.

In all of the relevant primary sources, the spokesmen of the rival factions, who made up the opposing sides in all the decisive royal synods convened to resolve the controversy on unction are identified as spokesmen of the *Betä* Ewostatean and *Betä* Täklä Haymanot communities. It is also clear from the same sources that the teachings maintained by the two parties were *Qəbat* and *Täwähädo*. Based on this, scholars assume that until the appearance of a third party some time in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the rival faction that conducted the unction debate were only two: The Ewostateans who advocated *Qəbat* and the community of *Betä* Täklä Haymanot who defended *Täwähädo*. According to the received view the *Täwähädo* teaching championed by the *Betä* Täklä Haymanot community, was *Karra* and at the conclusion of the Boru Meda synod in 1878, became the official doctrine of the Ethiopian Church ever since. The dominant view further asserts that *Şägga Ləğ* was a late 17<sup>th</sup> century or early 18<sup>th</sup> century third addition. It owed its origin to the internal split of the *Betä* Täklä Haymanot community.<sup>14</sup>

Contrary to what the conventional view summarized above asserts, this study will unequivocally demonstrate that there were three rival parties

<sup>12</sup> For example Richard PANKHURST (1984: 213–230) has a study dedicated to the case of the rebellion of Lasta against the Solomonic dynasty. DIMITRI (2004: 665–680) is also devoted to the unruly nature of Lasta’s relation with the monarchial centre of Gondärine Ethiopia. However both authors fail to show that the rebellion included most of southern Təgray besides Lasta. Also, they do not show the sectarian nature of the conflict instead mainly focusing on its political dimension.

<sup>13</sup> For the assumption that the *Täwähädo* teaching in the name of *Karra* was maintained by the *Betä* Täklä Haymanot community throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century, see MERID WOLDE AREGAY 1971: 551, 555, 574; CRUMMEY 2000: 85, 92, 100; ID. 2006: 478ff. and ID. – GETATCHEW HAILE 2004: 9.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, see also MERID WOLDE AREGAY 1971: 595; CRUMMEY 2000: 84f., 103f.; GETATCHEW HAILE 1986: 241, n. 10, 242 n. 13.

throughout the duration of the controversy. Furthermore, *Karra* had little or nothing to do with the *Betä Tāklä Haymanot* party. Throughout the Gondärine period, *Karra* was the teaching of a third group who defied the centre using southern Təgray and Lasta as their safe-heavens and was far from being the *Täwähədo* teaching. The *Täwähədo* teaching defended by the *Betä Tāklä Haymanot* party was rather *Şäggä Ləğ*, that is, the origin of which is wrongly pushed to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

To reconstruct the details of *Karra* resistance against the monarchical centre in the period from the 1630s to the 1760s means to challenge most of the givens of the history of Gondärine Ethiopia. As it is well known, Orthodox Christianity was the dominant religion of the highland kingdom of Ethiopia for most of its history. One of the assertions the Ethiopian Church has been boldly making throughout the last century, along with the above indisputable fact, is that its Christological foundation in its post-1878 *Karra* form is also set in stone. This is what mainstream Ethiopian historiography also endorses with little scrutiny. Nothing, as this study will show, could however be further from the truth. The Ethiopian Church defines *Karra* as the pillar of its Christology and cannot be a partaker of the glories of Gondärine Ethiopia. It can only be identified with the agonies and tragedies of the period, both as a victim and perpetrator. Hence, for example, Yoḥannəs I, whom tradition holds as righteous, earned such title in recognition of the brutal punishment he meted out to the adherents of *Karra*. Such a story line also recasts Iyasu I as unsuspecting victim of *Karra* revenge. That Iyasu I lost his life due to gruesome assassination is well-known. It is also well-known that his assassination had a lot to do with the sectarian strife of the time. What is not even remotely possible for any historian thus far is that the masterminds of the plot behind his assassination could be *Karra* zealots.

The remaining sections of this study will address the issues outlined above. The first section will provide a brief assessment of the teaching of the three rival groups. The aim is to demonstrate that the *Täwähədo* teaching championed by the *Betä Tāklä Haymanot* party throughout the Gondärine period was *Şäggä Ləğ* not *Karra*. The second part will relate the history of sectarian resistance movement to the adherents of *Karra* put up against the royal centre of Gondärine Ethiopia.

## II. *Şäggä Ləğ* Being the *Täwähədo* Teaching of the *Betä Tāklä Haymanot* Community

As is well known, for two and a half centuries starting in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century to the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ethiopian Church went through grueling doctrinal controversy. The essence of the controversy that

divided its clergy into three factions called *Qəbat*, *Şägga Ləğ* and *Karra*, was the anointment of Christ. As will be explained shortly, the issue was a leftover from the Christological debate the local clergy conducted with Jesuit missionaries during the first three decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The main objective of this section is to show that the *Täwähädo* teaching (championed by the representatives of the *Betä* Täklä Haymanot party against the *Qəbat* formula of the rival *Betä* Ewostatewos community) was *Şägga Ləğ*. The evidence for this is unequivocal and quite conclusive. However, such documentary proof is hardly self-evident for an unfamiliar reader with this topic. That is why it needs to be preceded by a brief account of the origin of the controversy and the basic differences that set the teachings of the three factions apart, as presented below.

From its foundation in the 4<sup>th</sup> century to 1959, the Ethiopian Church was a diocese of the Alexandrian See. This had serious episcopal and doctrinal implications. Episcopally, it meant that throughout the mentioned period, the Ethiopian Church had to secure its bishops from the Coptic Church of Egypt.<sup>15</sup> What is even more important for this study is however the fact that the Alexandrian subordination also permanently determined the doctrinal orientation of the Ethiopian Church.<sup>16</sup> The Chalcedonian Creed, ratified in 451, is what brought about the lasting separation of the Alexandrian See from the Roman Catholic Church. The Creed affirms that in Christ there were/are two natures and one person. The basic notion behind this formula is the assertion that the human and divine natures of Christ operated and co-existed in distinction (though not in complete separation) to each other after the incarnation. This formula reserves all the miracles, Christ did during his earthly sojourn, to His divine nature, while restricting His passion and inferior attributes to His human nature alone.<sup>17</sup>

Along with Churches that came to be known as Non-Chalcedonian Oriental Orthodox Churches, the Alexandrian See rejects the Chalcedonian creed in favour of the formula that in Christ there was/is only one (unified divine-human) nature and one person. Antithesis of Chalcedon, the essence of this formula, called *Täwähädo* in Gə‘əz, is the contention that the union, the divine and human natures of Christ affected during the incarnation was an absolute one. It is therefore improper to speak of the two natures of Christ, that is the divine and human natures, operating in distinction to each other after their union. According to the adherents of the one-nature Chris-

<sup>15</sup> WUDU TAFETE KASSU 2006: 1–26; MUNRO-HAY 1997.

<sup>16</sup> GUIDI 1922–23: 5–9; see also BOAVIDA – PENNEC – RAMOS 2011: I, pp. 309–358.

<sup>17</sup> For a good discussion of this from the perspective of the Jesuits, see *ibid.*, pp. 321–346; for the Ethiopian side of the story see CERULLI 1958: 235f.; ID. 1960: 139–158.



tology of Alexandria, with the exception of sin, the divine nature of Christ partook in every human act Christ did during His earthly sojourn. Likewise, due to its absolute union with divinity, the human nature participated in all the wonders and miracles Christ did.<sup>18</sup>

Ironically, Soteriology and preserving the reality of the incarnation is at the heart of both Christologies. This is clear from the Monophysite versus Dyophysite charge the adherents of the rival creeds often label each other with. Chalcedonians accuse the adherents of one-nature Christology as Monophysites. The essence of the charge is that the union, the divine and human natures of Christ affected at the moment of the incarnation was absolute, and Alexandrians rendered the reality of the human nature of Christ hallow. According to Chalcedonians, limited and inferior human nature is not capable of effecting absolute union with transcendent and perfect divinity, without human nature's qualities getting lost and dissolved in the process. If that were the case, Christ was human only in appearance, not in reality. In the end, that will render the whole notion of the incarnation invalid. Chalcedonians also warn that their rival's unqualified insistence on the view that the union of the divine and human natures of Christ was absolute, did not allow for any distinct mode of operation and afterwards also had the danger of Patripassianism.<sup>19</sup> On their part, the adherents to one-nature, *Täwähädo*, Christology of Alexandria label their opponents as Dyophysites. What the charge signifies is that Chalcedonians' insistence on the view that the two natures need to be kept apart, rendered the whole notion of the incarnation and ultimately Soteriology hallow. According to the adherents of one-nature Alexandrian Christology, unless the divine nature participated in all the things Christ did from birth to death, it is impossible to say that mankind was redeemed of original sin through the death of the Son of God.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*; the chief advocate of the one-nature Christological formula, who is commemorated as martyr-saint by the followers of Alexandrian Christology including the Ethiopian Church, is Dioscorus. However, for the Catholic Church Dioscorus is a heretic, see BOAVIDA – PENNEC – RAMOS 2011: II, p. 301, where according to P. Paez, one of his prominent converts in the court of Susnəyos, said, “what great torment Dioscorus must be suffering in hell for all the people that he led to perdition through his doctrine”.

<sup>19</sup> *Patripassianism*, (Latin, father-suffering), is the heresy of saying Christ died in his divinity. Since the divinity of the three persons of the Holy Trinity is one, such idea would also imply that the Father and the Holy Spirit suffered and died along with Christ, see BOAVIDA – PENNEC – RAMOS 2011: I, p. 338, for the fact that the Jesuit missionaries made such accusation against their Ethiopian counterparts.

<sup>20</sup> In order to drive this point home, during their debate with the Jesuits the Ethiopian clergy went to the extent of saying things which might easily be interpreted as saying Christ died in his divinity; see for example CERULLI 1960: 15.

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In their endeavour to convert members of the Ethiopian Church to Roman Catholicism, the Jesuit missionaries of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century concentrated their effort in convincing the local clergy to reject one-nature Christology in favour of Chalcedon. To that end, the Jesuits barraged the local clergy with scriptural proof texts that highlight the passion and inferior human attributes of Christ, such as birth, growing in stages, worshipping, expression of fear, crying for help and ultimately, death. The objective was to impress it upon their counterparts that these acts need to be reserved to the human nature alone, hence the need to understand the union (the two natures of Christ affected at the moment of the incarnation) as a limited one. In other words, according to the Jesuit missionaries, as the inferior attributes of the human nature and the passion of Christ listed above attest, the two natures of Christ co-existed and operated in distinction (though not in complete separation) to each other after the union. The Jesuits warned, that to involve divinity in the above acts, would be to fall into a grave abyss of Trinitarian heresies such as, introducing ignorance to omniscience, limitation to omnipresence and/or transcendence, and ultimately death to eternal God.<sup>21</sup>

Scholars correctly trace the origin of the unction controversy to the Jesuit episode.<sup>22</sup> However, only Guidi tried to give theological explanation as to how the Christological controversy with the Jesuits might have evolved into the subsequent unction debate within the Ethiopian Church. Guidi speculates that the Jesuits might be the ones who cited the mystery of unction to their advantage during the Christological debate with the Ethiopian clergy.<sup>23</sup> To appreciate the plausibility of his speculation, it is important to understand how the Jesuits interpreted unction within the context of Chalcedon. According to them, the meaning of the unction that Christ received from the Holy Spirit that Scripture alludes to is the grace of the Holy Spirit. Such grace of the

<sup>21</sup> See BOAVIDA – PENNEC – RAMOS 2011: I, pp. 309–358. One of the most eloquent and strong rejoinders the local clergy used to make against such challenge and in support of their one-nature Christology was the circumstances of Christ’s conception and birth. Unless divinity effected perfect union with the flesh, Christ took from Mary, the Ethiopian clergy argued, it would not have been possible for the Virgin Mary to be found pregnant while being a Virgin. What was born of Her was however at the same time Jesus the man, since otherwise She could not have held divinity in Her womb for nine months and five days, since the whole world was incapable of holding divinity, let alone of a woman’s womb. At the same time, the fact that what was born of Her was the divinity of Christ can be attested from the fact that the Virgin Mary remained virgin after giving birth; see CERULLI 1960: 153ff.

<sup>22</sup> MERID WOLDE AREGAY 1971: 550, n. 2; ID. 1998: 51; CRUMMEY 1972: 14–24; ID. 2000: 81; ID. 2006: 477; GETATCHEW HAILE 1990: xf. and AYYÄLÄ TÄKLÄ HAYMANOT 1955 E.C.: 131, 134.

<sup>23</sup> GUIDI 1922–23: 10.

Holy Spirit was in turn “ከመ፡ጸጋ፡ መንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ... ዘያጸንዖሙ፡ ለሰማዕታት፡ በውስተ፡ ዓውደ፡ ስምዕ፡ ወዘያጌይሎሙ፡ ለጸድቃን፡ ግዜ፡ ተጋድሎቶሙ፡ በውስተ፡ ገዳም፡ ምስለ፡ ሰይጣናት፡ ወዘይረድአሙ፡ ለሰባክያን፡ በውስተ፡ ስብከቶሙ፡”<sup>24</sup> According to the Jesuits, the subject of this grace in Christ could only be His human nature. The divine nature of Christ, which is God the Son, cannot in anyway be thought of as the subject or receiver of such grace of the Holy Spirit. To argue so, according to the Jesuits and by extension the Catholic Church, would be to imply that God the Son was inferior and subsequent to the Holy Spirit to seek and be the subject of such grace. This, according to the Jesuits, was a grave violation of the Nicene-Constantinople Creed, which upholds that the Divine Triad are co-equal and consubstantial in their divinity as well as the *Filioque* which asserts that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.<sup>25</sup> The mystery of unction was therefore yet another irrefutable proof to the distinct (though not completely separate) co-existence of the two natures in Christ. According to the Jesuits, their Ethiopian counterparts could not therefore integrate the mystery of unction into their “*Monophysite*” doctrine without falling into the grave Trinitarian heresies described above.<sup>26</sup>

In the wake of the expulsion of the Jesuits, the Ethiopian clergy were therefore left with two outstanding Christological issues: convincing explanation as to how limited and finite humanity shed off its inferior attributes to be worthy of absolute union with divinity and fitting “*Monophysite*” account to the mystery of unction. The views of the three rival factions need to be viewed as alternative solutions to this challenge, as the following observation by *mälakä bərhan* Admasu Jämbäre, one of the foremost scholars of the Ethiopian Church in the 20<sup>th</sup> century suggests, “የኢትዮጵያ፡ ሊቃውንትስ፡ ሳይጣሉ፡ የተጣሉ፡ ሳይያዩ፡ የተለያዩ፡ መስለው፡ የሚታዩ፡ ኸሉም፡ በየበኩላቸው፡ የኸሉት፡ ባሕርይን፡ ባሕሉ፡ ለመሸሸ፡ ነዉ፡ እንጂ፡ ማንላቸውም፡ ወገን፡ ቢኾን፡ የካቶሊክን፡ ባህሉ፡ ደግፎ፡ ኸሉት፡ ባህርይ፡ የሚሉ፡ አይገኝም፡”<sup>27</sup> Viewed in this light, *Qəbat* ap-

<sup>24</sup> PEREIRA 1892: 238 “is like the grace of the Holy Spirit, which makes the martyrs firm at the scene of martyrdom and the upright strong at the time of their struggle with the devils in the wilderness and which helps the preachers in their sermon”. For the fact that Susnəyos solicited the assistance of the Jesuits in formulating such a ruling at the conclusion of Fogära synod in 1620, see MERID WOLDE AREGAY 1971: 552, n. 2.

<sup>25</sup> See BOAVIDA – PENNEC – RAMOS 2011: I, pp. 313–320, for the fact that the *Filioque* (Latin, and [from] the Son), was an important issue in the debate between the Jesuits and the Ethiopian Clergy. The latter, never a signatory of the *filioque*, steadfastly uphold the view that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone.

<sup>26</sup> See AYYÄLÄ TÄKLÄ HAYMANOT 1955 E.C.: 131–152; TEWELDE BEIENE 1982: 196–258.

<sup>27</sup> “It is in their effort to make sure that they always steered clear from the teaching of two natures, (and one person in Christ) in their respective ways that the Ethiopian (Church)

pears to be a radical “*Monophysite*” response that addresses the challenge by quite literary turning the Jesuit logic on its head. The strategy also appears to be one of ‘killing two birds with one stone’. According to *Qəbat* (the adherents of *Qəbat*) far from irrefutable proof to the distinct co-existence of the two natures of Christ after the incarnation, the Unction of the Holy Spirit that Christ received was what affected the absolute union or oneness of His divine and human natures during the incarnation. This is what their formula, *bäQəbat wäld bahrəy*, which means by unction the (human nature of Christ became) natural son (of the Father), signifies. According to this view, in his preincarnate state, as one of the three persons of the most Holy Trinity, Word or God the Son, was natural son of God the Father. In line with this and their one-nature Christology, the adherents of *Qəbat* argue that their teaching of the divine and human natures of Christ affected absolute union or became indistinguishably one at the moment of the incarnation, meaning that Word in his preincarnate state, the human nature also partook and became natural Son/*yäbahrəy läğ* of God the Father. This is therefore an adamant “*Monophysite*” reaction, strictly within the framework of one-nature Alexandrian Christology. As such it gives no ground whatsoever to the Chalcedonian Creed.<sup>28</sup> Indeed the upholders of this view seem to be oblivious of the *Monophysite* charge, which their *bäQəbat yä-bahrəy läğ* formula explained above only strengthens. That means, if the unction made the flesh or human nature of Christ natural Son of the Father, there would be nothing left of the human nature, since God the Son in his preincarnate state would not have a complete human nature, among other things with corporal body.<sup>29</sup> The adherents of this view also uphold the notion

scholars appear to be quarrelling each other. Otherwise not one among the parties confesses (the teaching of) two natures (in Christ) in support of the Catholic Church” (ADMASU JÄMBÄRE 1954 E.C.: 280). The dominant view in the secondary literature thus far is however that *Qəbat* and *Şägga Läğ* owed their origin to an attempt to appease the Jesuits by partial or full embrace of the Chalcedonian Creed; see CRUMMEY 1972: 14–27; GETATCHEW HAILE 1990: xf.; MERID WOLDE AREGAY 1998: 51. The current EOTC also depicts *Qəbat* and *Şägga Läğ* as local agents of Chalcedonians, see for example ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX TÄWAHÄDO CHURCH (EOTC) 1995–1996 E.C.

<sup>28</sup> This is for example what the *Qəbat* teaching defended at the famous Aringo synod held in 1654 reflects; see GETATCHEW HAILE 1990; see also, *Wäldä Ab*, MS, Däbrä Wärq Monastery, East Goğğam, foll. 36v–51v. *Wäldä Ab* is the *Qəbat* theological compendium. Most *Qəbat* monasteries today have *Wäldä Ab* in their collection. An extended version of *Haymanot Məsihawit* is also part of *Mäşhäfä Məştir*, MS, Däbrä Wärq Monastery, East Goğğam, foll. 36v–56va. *Mäşhäfä Məştir* is another important *Qəbat* composition which purports to narrate the early phase of the controversy up to the 1780s; see also KINDENEH ENDEG 2004: 77–34 for extended analyses of the *Qəbat* teaching.

<sup>29</sup> See for example *Mäşhäfä Məştir*, foll. 61r–62v, 64v, 67r, 72r–73v, 91r–92v where the *Qəbat* author complains that the rival school accused the adherents of *Qəbat* of deny-

that each person of the Holy Trinity played a role in the mystery of the incarnation; God the Father as anointer, God the Son as anointed, that is as the subject of the anointment and the Holy Spirit as unction or ungent.<sup>30</sup>

The view polemically referred to as *Karra* was another radical Alexandrian reaction to the Jesuit challenge explained above. The adherents of *Karra*, who refer to themselves as *Täwähədowoč/Unionists*, argue that what enabled the flesh or humanity of Christ to overcome its limitations and imperfections so that it became worthy of absolute union with divinity was its union with the latter. This is what their formula *bä-Täwähədo kəbärä*, which means (the human nature of Christ) was enobled/glorified by (means of its) union (with the divinity of the Son), signifies. The adherents of *Karra* are also known for totally rejecting any notion of unction as a distinct act that took place at any point during the incarnation or afterwards. They argue that all scriptural references to the anointment of Christ are allusion to the union of the human nature of Christ with divinity, by which it (the human nature), was ennobled and glorified. According to *Karoč*, unction therefore simply means union and the anointer was the divinity of Christ (that is God the Son) and the subject of the unction was His humanity. According to this view, the divine nature of Christ ennobled and glorified the flesh or humanity with which it was united. This is what their formula *lälihu qəbay täqəbay qəb*, which means (Christ) Himself the Anointer, the (One) Anointed and the Unguent, signifies. This formula also reflects their contention that Christ did not need the involvement of the other two persons of the Holy Trinity in the process of ennobling and glorifying the flesh He took from Mary. Another slogan which reflects the above contention of the adherents of *Karra* is *Wäld qəb*, which means the Son Unction. *Wäld qəb*, as the slogan of *Karoč*, deserves special attention here. It is what marked out the partisans of *Karra* from their *Qəbat* and *Şägga Ləğ* rivals who propagate *Mänfäs Qəddus Qəb/the Holy Spirit Unction* in common.<sup>31</sup>

ing the humanity of Christ, by constantly confronting them with questions, such as if the flesh of Christ became natural son/*yəbahrəy ləğ* does it mean that He became abstract, since divinity was abstract, does it mean that Christ's passion and death were fake since the divine nature of God is immune to suffering and death, etc.

<sup>30</sup> For the way *Qəbatoč* elaborate this in reference to their understanding of the meaning of the Trinitarian formula that the most Holy Trinity are one in divinity and three in person, see KINDENEH ENDEG 2004: 111–120.

<sup>31</sup> See GETATCHEW HAILE 1986: 205–209 for a good discussion of the *Karra* teaching. There are also several manuscripts where the *Karra* teaching is expounded. MS nos. 253, 255–258, 458 and 755 of the National Library in Addis Abäba, are for example *Karra Ämməstu A'madä Məştir* (lit. 'the Five Pillars of Mystery'). This is a literary genre that started after the unction controversy, in which the three factions expound

The adherents of the third view, polemically referred to as *Şägga Ləğoč*, share the formula, *bäTäwähädo kəbärä* with *Karoč*. This means, like *Karoč*, the adherents of *Şägga Ləğ* address the central Jesuit challenge by arguing that its union with divinity was what ennobled and glorified the human nature or flesh of Christ, thereby making it (the human nature) worthy of union with the divine nature.<sup>32</sup> However, unlike *Karoč*, the adherents of *Şägga Ləğ* do not proceed from there to total rejection of unction. Noting that the occasion had several scriptural proof texts, they recognize unction/anointment as a separate act Christ underwent during the incarnation. On the other hand, unlike *Qəbatoč*, they do not attach a central role to the incident, that is, they do not adhere to the notion that the anointment that He underwent through was central to the process by which the human and divine natures of Christ affected union at the moment of the incarnation.

As mentioned above, to the adherents of *Şägga Ləğ*, its union with divinity was what ennobled and glorified the flesh Christ took from Mary, thereby making it worthy of union with it, that is, with divinity. Hence against their *Qəbat* rivals, *Şägga Ləğoč* argues that having no significance whatsoever for himself, Christ underwent unction for our sake. They observe that everything Christ did and underwent during his earthly sojourn was for the sake of humankind. Likewise, He also received the unction of the Holy Spirit, not for His own sake, but rather for the sake of humankind. According to *Şägga Ləğoč*, the anointment of Christ was therefore part of *Soteriology*, the economy of salvation.<sup>33</sup>

The Christological and Trinitarian issues at stake in the unction controversy are too complex to be exhaustively treated by the above brief summary. However, for our purpose here of the thick and impenetrable Trinitarian and Christological haze, that makes the controversy appear rather forbidden, what we need to zoom into is the issue of accepting or completely rejecting unction. Accordingly, of the three views, *Qəbat* and *Şägga Ləğ* accept the notion that Christ received the Unction of the Holy Spirit. *Karoč* on the other hand reject any notion of unction. It is also important to highlight here that, against *Karoč*'s “*lälibu qəbay täqəbay, qəb*”, that is “Himself (Christ) Anointer, Anointed and Unction/Ointment”, which signifies their rejection of any notion of unction as a separate act from the union (of the two natures of Christ

their respective teachings on the five fundamental issues of Christian doctrine; the doctrine of the Trinity, Incarnation, Eucharist, Baptism and Reincarnation; see also GÄBRÄ ƏGZI'ABHER ABRƏHA 2005 E.C., which is a book length defense of *Karra* published by *Betä Tama*, the *Karra* section of *Waldəba Abränənt*; see also GORGORIWOS 1991 E.C.: 86–92, 69–72.

<sup>32</sup> See GUIDI 1893: 599–605.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

during the incarnation), *Qəbat* and *Şägga Ləğ* propagate the common formula, “*Ab Qəbay, Wäld Täqəbay, Mänfäs Qəddus Qəb*”, i.e., “the Father Anointer, the Son Anointed and the Holy Spirit Unction/ unguent”. *Wäld qəb*/the Son Unction versus *Mänfäsə Qəddus Qəb*/Holy Spirit Unction were also the widely known formula by which the above difference between *Karoč* on the one hand and *Qəbatoč* and *Şägga Ləğoč* on the other were popularized. It is also important to stress here that notwithstanding their common Holy Spirit Unction position vis-à-vis the Son Unction formula of *Karoč*, there was no love lost between *Qəbat* and *Şägga Ləğ*. Their difference revolves around the meaning and relevance of the unction of the Holy Spirit which both received acceptance from Christ.<sup>34</sup>

When we turn to the primary sources with the above distinction in the teaching of the rival factions in mind, it becomes visible that in almost all the royal synods held during the 17<sup>th</sup> century to resolve the unction controversy, the fact that Christ received the unction of the Holy Spirit was never an issue. What was an issue was the meaning and relevance of such unction. This suggests that the rival sides were the partisans of *Qəbat* and *Şägga Ləğ*. In this regard, of particular interest for us here are the synods held during the reign of Iyasu I. These synods were concluded by declaring the *Təwəhədo* teaching of the *Betä Təklä Haymanot* side as official orthodoxy. The formula of the rival Ewostəatean side that was renounced as heresy was *bäQəbat yəbahəry ləğ*.<sup>35</sup> What needs further emphasis here is the content of the winning *Təwəhədo* teaching. As can be seen from the excerpts quoted below, the *Təwəhədo* teaching which was endorsed as official doctrine at the conclusion of both synods did not reject unction altogether as *Karoč*, and since the 1878 Boru Meda synod, the Ethiopian Church do. Rather the dominant *Təwəhədo* teaching of Iyasu I’s reign interpreted unction as an act Christ underwent through for the sake of humankind. As explained above, that was *Şägga Ləğ* in its purest form. The central part of the ruling of the decisive Gondär synod held in 1686 on unction reads as follows, “ወቃልሂ ፡ [...] እንበለ ፡ ኃጢአት ፡ ባሕቲታ ፡ ተቀብዓ ፡ መንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ [...] ወበተቀብሮቲሂ ፡ መንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ኮነ ፡ ወልደ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡”<sup>36</sup> The synod of Yibaba held in 1699 was the other decisive synod held during the reign of Iyasu I. The central statement of the decision of the synod on the issue of unction reads as follows “ወበእንተ ፡

<sup>34</sup> See above.

<sup>35</sup> GUIDI 1903: 94f., 203f., 240f.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95, “with the exception of Sin, Word inherited everything that belongs to Man [...] with this Unction of the Holy Spirit He became the Son of God”.

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ተቀብቶቹ ፡ ይቤ ፡ በዘተሰብአ ፡ ተቀብዖ ፡ ወቀብዖ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ መንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ወኃይለ ።”<sup>37</sup>

The ruling of the 1686 and 1699 synods also clearly show that the teaching of the Ewostətean community rejected as heresy was *bäQəbat yäbahry ləḡ*, the *Qəbat* teaching. This means that let alone being the official *Täwahədo* teaching, *Karra* was not even represented in the synods. As the next section will show, the situation was the same from the early days of Fasil all the way to the 1760s. The case of Iyasu I’s reign is chosen here for the simple reason that our firsthand information is richer and more complete for that period.

Another serious flaw in the secondary literature that needs to be put to rest before moving to the next section is the notion that *Şägga Ləḡ* had a pro-Chalcedonian implication. Virtually all scholars subscribe to this view, which seems to hold part of the explanation for the reluctance of historians to allow for the possibility that *Şägga Ləḡ* might be the *Täwahədo* teaching of the *Betä Täklä Haymanot* community for most of the Gondärine period.<sup>38</sup> The historian who seems to be absolutely certain on this is Crummey who said that *Şägga Ləḡ* “may well have moved beyond Chalcedon.”<sup>39</sup>

It is however interesting to explain here that such strong conviction rests on the simple notion that *Şägga Ləḡ* interprets unction as something that Christ received “*bä-təsbəʾtu*”, which means, “in his humanity”. According to the predominant view, this in turn opens the way for the main assertion of the Chalcedonian Creed that the human and divine natures of Christ co-existed and operated in distinction to one another after the incarnation.<sup>40</sup> Had it been the case that *Şägga Ləḡ* affirm that Christ received the unction of the Holy Spirit *bätəsbəʾtu* in his humanity, the above Chalcedonain implication would have indeed been unavoidable. However, the adherents of *Şägga Ləḡ* did not uphold the view that Christ received unction *bä-təsbəʾtu*. Their position was rather, “*enzä təsäbeʾa təqabeʾa*”, that is, Christ received unction when he became man.<sup>41</sup> This implies that the subject of unction for the adherents of *Şägga Ləḡ* was the incarnated Word because He became man. In fact none of the contending parties made it emphatically clear that the unction Christ received “ኢጋደረ ፡ በሥጋ ፡ [...] አላ ፡ በዘተሰብአ ፡

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204, “And about His anointment it says, He was anointed because He became Man. God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and power”.

<sup>38</sup> See for example MERID WOLDE AREGAY 1971: 595; ID. 1998: 51; CRUMMEY 1972: 21, nn. 3 and 24; GETATCHEW HAILE 1990: xif.; ID. 1986: 206, 208 and CRUMMEY – GETATCHEW HAILE 2004: 9 and AYYÄLÄ TÄKLÄ HAYMANOT 1955 E.C.: 133–176.

<sup>39</sup> CRUMMEY 1972: 24.

<sup>40</sup> See fn. 38 above.

<sup>41</sup> GUIDI 1903: 95, 204, 241.



ተቀብላ ፣” as *Şägga Ləğoč* did. For them, the subject of unction was God the Son, *ənzä täsäbäʿa*, because He became man, not *bä-təsbəʿtu*, that is Christ in his humanity, as the Jesuits contend. And, the gulf that separates *bä-təsbəʿtu* and *ənzä täsäbäʿa* is as wide as the gulf that separates one-nature Alexandrian Christology from Chalcedon.<sup>42</sup>

### III. Defiance and Rebellion of Lasta and southern Təgray against the Royal Centre of Gondärine Ethiopia (1630s to 1760s)

Lasta has a long history of defiance and rebellion against the Solomonic dynasty. The cause is usually ascribed to the ambition of the *wag šum* members of the local ruling house, who trace their descent to the Zag<sup>w</sup>e if not to reclaim royal power, at least to attain greater regional autonomy.<sup>43</sup> However, many features of the rebellion run counter to such assertion, suggesting instead that the major driving force of the rebellion was sectarianism. The first point that needs to be highlighted in this connection is the fact that the so called Lasta rebellion had in fact a wider geographical breadth. Besides Lasta, it involved several districts of what is today southern Təgray. Adherence to *Karra* was what these areas had in common. This allowed them to form a common front against the royal centre of Gondärine Ethiopia. Secondly, for all the attempt to stretch the origin of Lasta’s rebellion to the very moment when the Zag<sup>w</sup>e lost power to the Solomonic dynasty,<sup>44</sup> our sources trace the origin of the most known case only to the reign of Susneyos, when Lasta served as the centre of the nationwide anti-Catholic uprising.<sup>45</sup> The rebellion of Lasta and southern Təgray raged unabated for the next century, outliving the restoration of Alexandrian Orthodoxy in 1632. Then it drew to a close at the least expected time in the 1760s.<sup>46</sup> If the goal had been to attain regional autonomy, then the 1760s,

<sup>42</sup> This difference is very clear for example when we compare the pro-Chalcedonain definition of unction made at the conclusion of the Fogära synod by the influence of the Jesuits with the rulings of the synods held during Iyasu I’s reign; s. PEREIRA 1892: 237f.; GUIDI 1903: 95, 204, 241. In the case of the former, Christ received unction in his humanity, hence it was the human nature of Christ after the incarnation, in the case of the latter it was God the Son who underwent unction, hence divinity because He became man; see also KIDANÄ WÄLD KƏFLE 1948 E.C.: 780, where he explicitly says, “ተቀብሎ ፣ ግለት ፣ ግን ፣ አንቀጽ ፣ ሊቃል ፣ ስለሆነ ።”.

<sup>43</sup> See for example PANKHURST 1984: 214; BERRY 1994: 219–224; DIMITRI 2004: 665–680.

<sup>44</sup> See for example PANKHURST 1984: 213–229; out of the 17 pages, he dedicates only one page to the long period from the 14<sup>th</sup> century to Susnəyos’ reign, compared to 16 pages for the century and half after.

<sup>45</sup> See for example ms EMMML no. 7506, foll. 199v–200v, cited by GETATCHEW HAILE 1988: 7–21.

<sup>46</sup> PANKHURST 1984: 226f.

the eve of the *Zämänä mäsaḥənt*/Era of Princes, was the most opportune time to realize it. It is also remarkable that the *wag šums* were just one among several sources of leadership for the rebellion. Had the goal been attaining autonomy for Lasta, then one would expect them to be the constant source of leadership. Another strong clue to the sectarian nature of the rebellion is that the surrender of the military leaders never brought about the submission of the rebellious districts. Rather, as we shall see, the rebels would propose their own terms for peace, which is the centre’s acceptance of *Karra* as official doctrine at the expense of *Qəbat* and *Şägga Ləḡ*. As will be shown, the incorporation of Lasta and South Təgray to the monarchical centre in the 1760s came when this condition was met.

Our sources for the reign of Fasil are incomplete and fragmentary. However even from the limited evidence therein, it is clear that the doctrinal rivalry assumed its lasting nature through the expulsion of the Jesuits, both in terms of the identity of the parties involved in it and the balance of power in their rivalry. Accordingly, on the one hand there were Ewoṣtateans and the *Betä Täklä Haymanot* communities fighting it out for the control of the centre, championing the teachings of *Qəbat* and *Şägga Ləḡ* respectively. The adherents of *Karra* on the other hand defied the centre using Lasta and southern Təgray as their safe-heavens. *Qəbat* and *Şägga Ləḡ* were the views debated by the representatives of the Ewoṣtatean and *Betä Täklä Haymanot* parties respectively at the two major synods held in 1654 and 1663 at Aringo, a royal camp in South Gondär.<sup>47</sup>

*Məşḥəfä Məstir*, the *Qəbat* ms that narrate the early history of the controversy until the last decade of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, is further helpful in enlightening us about the whereabouts of the *Karra* partisans during the early stage of Fasil’s reign. It says that in the run up to the first synod of Aringo held in 1654, in addition to those who propagate the *Şägga Ləḡ* view, there were those who propagated “*lälibu Qəbay, təqəbay, Qəb*”, clearly the *Karra* teaching, as explained in the previous section. However, after suffering repeated setbacks and rebuff, including excommunication by the bishop at the time, as advocates of heresy, they took flight to the north. It says “ሐኅ ፡ ወተሰዱ ፡ ከሎሎ ፡ መንገሥ ፡ ሰሜን ፡ ዘይሰመይ ፡ ምድረ ፡ ዋግ ። ወበሀየ ፡ መሀሩ ፡ መጽሐፈ ፡ ስሕተ

<sup>47</sup>This is partly evident from the fact that the *Qəbat* and *Şägga Ləḡ* versions of the history of the controversy identify each other as the rival sides while the same claim by the major *Karra* source is uncorroborated; for *Qəbat* see *Məşḥəfä Məstir*, foll. 36v–56va and *Wäldä Ab*, foll. 36v–51v; for the *Şägga Ləḡ* version see GUIDI 1893: 599ff.; for *Karra* see *Nägärä Haymanot*, MS, Məndaba Monastery, North Gondär, foll. 10r–13r.

ት ፡ ለለሀገሩ ፡ ወለለደብሩ ፡ እምአመ ፡ ቦኡ ፡ ምድረ ፡ ዋግ ፡ ... ወክህደ ፡ ከሉ ፡ ሰብ  
አ ፡ ላስታ ፡ እምፈለገ ፡ ተከዚ ፡ እስከ ፡ ወሰነ ፡ ዘመዶ ።”<sup>48</sup>

Indeed while *Qəbat* and *Şägga Ləḡ* partisans vied for control of the centre, the adherents of *Karra* were in constant rebellion mobilizing Lasta and South Təgray. During the first five years of Fasil’s rule, their leader was a certain Mälkä’a Kərstos. A man with a royal pedigree, Mälkä’a Kərstos, was also the main leader of the anti-Catholic uprising during the last decade of Susenyos’ reign. Under Mälkä’a Kərstos’ leadership, the Təgray–Lasta faction managed to briefly control the palace in Gondär, though shortly afterwards, Fasil managed to retake the palace by defeating and killing Mälkä’a Kərstos.<sup>49</sup> As would be the case throughout the succeeding decades, the death of the leader did not ensure the end of the rebellion. Indeed, Fasil continued to carry out very costly campaigns against Lasta throughout the remaining years of his reign. Lasting victory however eluded him to the end.<sup>50</sup>

The rebellion of southern Təgray and Lasta continued throughout the reign of Yoḥannəs (1667–1681), Fasil’s son and successor. The gruesome details of the repeated campaigns the royal centre carried out to put down the rebellion is extensively covered in the chronicle of the period.<sup>51</sup> Even more important for our purpose here is that the royal chronicle makes the sectarian nature of the rebellion unequivocally clear. As will be shown shortly, the people of Lasta and southern Təgray were repeatedly denounced as heretics for denying the mystery of Unction. The Chronicler also makes it clear that on their part, the rebels of Lasta and South Təgray proposed the royal centre’s acceptance of *Karra* as the ultimate condition for peace.<sup>52</sup>

However, for the first few years of his reign, Yoḥannəs was too busy unifying the pro-Holy Spirit Unction base to pay enough attention to the Təgray–Lasta problem. That meant unifying the Ewoṣṣateans and the *Betä Täklä Haymanot* communities that accepted the doctrine that Christ received the unction of the Holy Spirit.<sup>53</sup> That to a certain degree Yoḥannəs succeeded in doing so is partially evident from the composition of his ecclesiastic retainers. His court was always frequented by the big names of the

<sup>48</sup> *Mäshäfä Məstir*, fol. 34vb, “They all left and took flight northwards to the country of Wag. As soon as they set foot to Wag, they started to teach and disseminate there heretical books ... And all the people of Lasta, from the confluence of River Tākäze to the end of Zämädo, became heretics”.

<sup>49</sup> PERRUCHON 1897: 362f.; BASSET 1882: 29f.

<sup>50</sup> PERRUCHON 1897: 364, 369; BASSET 1882: 30, 32f.

<sup>51</sup> GUIDI 1903: 19–46.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40ff.

<sup>53</sup> See pp. 54ff. above.

“The Eighteen Million *Təwəhədo* Victims of Martyr-Saint Adyam Säğäd Iyasu”

Ewoṣṭatean and the *Betä* Täklä Haymanot communities.<sup>54</sup> This was partly also a result of the fact that the two central parties, i.e., Ewoṣṭateans and the *Betä* Täklä Haymanot communities, came out of his father’s reign more or less balanced. Yoḥannəs therefore made it the corner stone of his policy not to disturb this *status quo*.<sup>55</sup> This reflected by the decision of the two synods held in the 1670s, in places called Ləzəbšəha and Q<sup>w</sup>ara Anbäsa. Both were held to condemn the people of Lasta as heretics for refusing to adhere to the teaching that Christ received of the unction of the Holy Spirit. After securing the condemnation of Lastans on that account, both synods refrain from explaining the significance of the unction of the Holy Spirit that Christ received, lest the Ewoṣṭateans and the representatives of the *Betä* Täklä Haymanot community quarrel. This was in line with Yoḥannəs’ effort to secure the bipartisan support of the Ewoṣṭatean and *Betä* Täklä Haymanot communities in his effort to put down the Təgray–Lasta rebellion.<sup>56</sup>

Yoḥannəs launched the first of what would become repeated campaigns against Lasta in 1678. A synod held in a place called Zängäraç sanctioned the ensuing battles as crusade against heretics. Citing canon law, the synod exhorted the faithful to fight “heretics by the sword”.<sup>57</sup> That seems to have given the army, which was personally headed by Yoḥannəs, a free hand to treat the rebels with utmost brutality. The chronicler tells us that the army defiled churches on its way to the rebel country and set entire villages ablaze. The slain, who fell in battle were emasculated, while women and children were carried off as captives along with cattle. All this however did not secure the submission of the rebels. Other than rampage, the royal army returned with no clear achievement.<sup>58</sup>

In the meantime, war broke out in southern Təgray. The chronicle gives us a long list of the districts involved in the armed uprising. The rebels were lead by two local lords called Zämaryam and Fares. We are told that the latter was fresh out of royal prison. On his part, the emperor fought through his surro-

<sup>54</sup> GUIDI 1903: 3–55; among the big names of the *Betä* Täklä Haymanot community who made up the ecclesiastic retainers of Yoḥannəs’ court were the *Īččäges*, Həryaqos and Şägga Kərstos, and abbots of prominent *Betä* Täklä Haymanot monasteries specially Īdä Kərstos of Mäguna. The main representatives of the Ewoṣṭatean side who frequented the royal court were *Īwur* Zä’Iyasu (Zä’Iyasu the Blind) of Däbsan and Təbdan of Gonj.

<sup>55</sup> See GETATCHEW HAILE 1990: xf., for the fact that the first synod of Aringo held in 1654 was concluded by the victory of *Qəbat*. In contrast, the author of *Məşhəfä Məstir* gives the impression that the second synod of Aringo held in 1663/64 ended in stalemate, *Məşhəfä Məstir*, foll. 74v–75r.

<sup>56</sup> GUIDI 1903: 23f., 40ff.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19–23.

gate, Dəlbä Iyäsus, to whom he had given the governorship of the rebellious districts.<sup>59</sup> Unlike Lasta, here the initiative seems to have been taken by the rebels. The flash point of the war in southern Təgray was Säläwa, the well defended fortress from where Fares launched his attacks. Säläwa has the reputation of being so impregnable that it did not even give way to the infamous invasion of Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Ġāzī (Aḥmad Grañ) in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century. A native of Säläwa, at the beginning, Fares also had the additional advantage of fighting in his home turf. Fares and Zämaryam were therefore able to occupy several districts before Dəlbä Iyäsus had time to organize a meaningful counter-attack.<sup>60</sup>

It is also interesting to mention here that in what appeared to be a response, the rebels of South Təgray also conducted themselves with extreme cruelty. We are told that they burnt several churches and villages, emasculated the slain and carried off women and children in captivity along with cattle.<sup>61</sup> What is more interesting to highlight is that after controlling several districts, Fares and Zämaryam sent a message to Maḥdäro, the *wag šum* of Lasta, inviting him to incorporate the districts to his domain. In a latter page, the Chronicler tells us that the reason Fares was so enamored with Maḥdäro was because he accepted “the accursed religion of the people of Lasta”.<sup>62</sup>

After a period of the receiving end for more or less two years, the royal side finally managed to reclaim some of the districts of southern Təgray in 1680. The turning point came with the surrender of Zämaryam. The chronicler of Yoḥannəs tells us that Zämaryam went to Gondär and turned himself in Yoḥannəs. Duly pardoned and rehabilitated, Zämaryam was hastily redeployed to southern Təgray to fight Fares, his former comrade-in-arms. This was induced by Fares, who by then was exposed to a three pronged attack by Zämaryam, Dəlbä Iyäsus and a certain Bənyam<sup>63</sup>, to take flight to Lasta to avoid capture. In Lasta, *wag šum* Maḥdäro, the ruler of the province independent of the royal centre, offered Fares governorship of three districts. However, Fares refused to abandon his fight for his sectarian cause of the three districts in Lasta. Trading off the offer for governorship with reinforcement, he therefore hurried back to Təgray. Indeed with the help of the army he secured from Maḥdäro, Fares managed to retake his Säläwa fortress. However that proved to be a very short lived recovery. In 1680, barely a year be-

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25ff.; see also BERRY 2005: 495a–b.

<sup>60</sup> GUIDI 1903: 25ff.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 33.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29–34; Bənyam was the brother of Zämaryam who was also appointed the governorship of a portion of the rebellious districts in southern Təgray.

fore the death of Yoḥannəs, Fares suffered another crushing defeat which forced him to surrender.<sup>64</sup>

The chronicler of Yoḥannəs was elated to report the success of the royal army to occupy Säläwa. However it was a bit too early to celebrate success. As it turned out, neither the surrender of Fares nor the occupation of Säläwa decisively broke the will of the rebels. This became clear through the chronicle when, undisturbed by the surrender of their army heads and instead following the leadership of monks, the moving spirit behind the rebellion, the rebels approached Yoḥannəs with their own terms for peace. In a letter they sent to Yoḥannəs, they made it clear that they would lay down their arms and become loyal subjects of his only in return for his willingness to expel those who adhere to the teaching that Christ received the unction of the Holy Spirit. In a synod held in Q<sup>w</sup>ara Anbäsa, the spokesmen of the Ewoṣṣatean and *Betä Täklä Haymanot* communities denounced the letter as heresy. It was also decided that those who made the proposal be punished for their audacity to insult the emperor and the orthodox faith. The ensuing campaign against Lasta proved as bloody as all previous engagements. However, as usual, it did little to secure the submission of the rebels.<sup>65</sup>

Berry writes that “throughout the 1690s, Fares was the power behind Iyasu’s throne”. Berry further observes that “few noblemen ever attained the power and stature that Fares achieved in the 1680s and 1690s”.<sup>66</sup> At the peak of his career in the 1690s, Fares was *ras bitwäddäd*, a title that allowed him to monopolize the top military and administrative positions of Iyasu I’s court.<sup>67</sup> Though hard to believe, this was the same Fares who, as the leader of the Təḡray–Lasta rebellion, troubled Yoḥannəs, Iyasu’s father and predecessor like no other. Yet, it needs to be quickly added here that Fares’ case hardly represents a major departure in Iyasu’s approach towards the Təḡray–Lasta problem from that of his father. Fares’ rise to prominence in

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29–35.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 39–46; that both Ewoṣṣateans and *Betä Täklä Haymanot* were represented in the synod is evident from the presence of Täbdan of Gonj, one of the prominent spokesmen of *Qəbatoč*, who also addressed the synod; see specially p. 42. The chronicle phrased it “He was ennobled by the unction of the Holy Spirit”. This is indeed how the adherents of *Karra* who reject any notion of Christ receiving the unction of the Holy Spirit interpret the common *Qəbat–Şägga Ləḡ* position, thereby also refusing to recognize the difference in the interpretation of the meaning and significance of such unction between the two groups. Because, as far as the adherents of *Karra* were concerned, their *Qəbat* and *Şägga Ləḡ* pro-Holy Spirit Unction rivals, though constituting two groups, were one and the same.

<sup>66</sup> BERRY 2005: 495a–b.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

his court was rather a result of Iyasu I being a true son of his father. As we have seen above, it was Yoḥannəs who introduced the policy of not just clemency but also appointment to former leaders of the Təgray–Lasta rebellion who were willing to surrender, including Fares himself. By trying to resolve the sectarian problem by co-opting the rebel leaders, Iyasu was therefore only lifting a page from his father’s administrative manual. However, as will be shown below, in Iyasu’s case, his attempt to buy the loyalty of Fares by title and appointment, turned out to be his worst mistake.

As we have seen above, following the surrender of Fares, the rebels of Lasta proposed to lay down their arms in return for Yoḥannəs’ recognition of *Karra* as official doctrine. However, not only did Yoḥannəs turn down the offer, but he ordered another wave of attack against Lasta for making such an insulting offer.<sup>68</sup> This implies that Fares was a turncoat who betrayed the rebel cause simply for the sake of office, while the centre did not concede any ground in terms of making concession to *Karra*. Careful scrutiny of Fares’ subsequent career reveals a person of deep devotion to his sectarian cause. His joining of Iyasu’s court therefore seems simply a change of strategy, meant to achieve his sectarian goal from within the system. When that did not come to pass, Fares did not cave in and surrender to fate. Rather, as a man of strong will, he did the unimaginable. In a move which had little or no precedent, Fares arranged the downfall and subsequent assassination of Iyasu I.

Iyasu’s first test of Lasta’s resistance came in 1689 when, after initial sign of submission, the Lastans rejected his request for annual tribute. Though infuriated, Iyasu did not rush to the use of force. Instead, in a remarkable display of statesmanship, he sent the lords of Lasta a letter of reprimand, where he also warned them not to further test his patience. The overall tenor of his message however betrays more than just statesmanship in his patience. It seems that Iyasu dreaded nothing more than the prospect of engaging Lasta in arms, which is understandable, given his awareness of the terrible failure of his predecessors on that score.<sup>69</sup> However, both plea and threat falling on deaf ears, he was left with no option but to declare war. Nonetheless, to his immeasurable dismay, his call for mobilization yielded only the fifth of the expected strength of his army. The reason, according to the chronicler of Iyasu, was because everyone was afraid of engaging Lasta.<sup>70</sup>

Instead of a major campaign headed by him, Iyasu therefore ended up sending Fares with a small entourage to further plead with the Lastans to

<sup>68</sup> GUIDI 1903: 40ff.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 139ff.

<sup>70</sup> PANKHURST 1984: 222.

comply with his request in peace which appeared to be the most unwise and desperate move. What made it look so was, among other things, the poor choice of envoy as the Lastans could not be expected to forget that, as far as they were concerned, Fares was the traitor, who owed his illustrious title and position to the royal court for betraying them. One would thus expect the Lastans to answer Iyasu’s overture for peace through Fares, with nothing but the worst rebuff due to a turncoat. What happened was however the exact opposite. The chronicler tells us that the delegates of Lasta met Fares half way saying, “ሃይማኖትክሙ ፣ ሃይማኖትኅ ፣ ወንገሥክሙ ፣ ንገሥትኅ ።”<sup>71</sup> They even entrusted Fares with the additional task of intervening on their behalf in a matter which involved a dispute they had with a neighboring Oromo clan.<sup>72</sup>

We do not know what must have transpired between them and Fares, for the Lastans to restore their former confidence on him. However, it is worth mentioning here that the previous year, Iyasu allowed two monks, a certain Wäldä Tənsa’e and his friend Təmərte to debate their doctrine on unction with his ecclesiastic retainers. As the spokesmen of the Ewosṭatean and *Betä Täklä Haymanot* communities would angrily refer back to the incident several decades later in 1763, Wäldä Tənsa’e and Təmərte were granted the audience in their capacity as representatives of *Karra*.<sup>73</sup> The occasion was therefore a seminal event for *Karra* to be defended in a royal synod for the first time. That was very likely facilitated through the good office of Fares. It is also reasonable to attribute Fares’ rare success in the subsequent mission to Lasta to the latter’s recognition of his role in advancing their sectarian cause at the royal centre.<sup>74</sup>

For all that, the first showing of the representatives of *Karra* in the royal court was not a success. The chronicler tells us that Wäldä Tənsa’e and Təmərte were forced to desist and their teaching was denounced as heresy. However, with their right hand man still running the show at the royal court, the Lasta–Təgray partisans of *Karra* had reason to remain hopeful for a better outcome in the future. Nonetheless, given his steadfast loyalty to the *Betä Täklä Haymanot* community and its *Šägga Ləḡ* teaching and their chance to debate their doctrine in a royal synod, seemed to be the furthest Iyasu could go in adopting an accommodative stance towards *Karra*. How-

<sup>71</sup> GUIDI 1903: 207, “your religion is our religion, your king is our king”.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 207f.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 189f., 194; GUIDI 1893: 602; ID. 1912: 199.

<sup>74</sup> ID. 1903: 95f.; the fact that Iyasu I’s famous review of the tax system from Ḃndārta in Təgray all the way to the heartland of the kingdom in Wägära also came immediately afterwards, is another strong indication that the events were indeed interrelated and part of a well-thought out strategy to appease the partisans of *Karra*.



ever for Fares, a no less diehard *Karra* loyalist, it seems that nothing short of total victory would do.<sup>75</sup>

The details of the initial disagreement between Iyasu and Fares are not clear to us. What is clear is that some time in 1704 Fares was sent to Təgray to assume his governorship of the province, (which he was given earlier on top of his role in the royal administration as *ras bitwäddäd*), in person. On the surface, there is nothing extraordinary in such arrangement. However, in Fares' case it clearly amounted to banishment. Among other things, it meant he was stripped of his *ras bitwäddäd* title and all the power and influence that went with it. His long career also unequivocally demonstrates that his devotion and loyalty to *Karra* was more important to Fares than his title and appointments. His next move was to form an anti-Iyasu coalition. It took no time for the coalition, which enlisted the support of influential provincial governors, such as *däggäč* Wäldä Gyorgis of Səmen and court officials such as *blattengeta* Kidane and *bäğəron*d Abatä to achieve its goals. Overthrowing Iyasu, the Fares led coalition put his eldest son, Täklä Haymanot, on the throne. The plotters followed their plan through to the subsequent gruesome assassination of Iyasu I.<sup>76</sup>

With his candidate in office, it seemed all but certain that at long last Fares had arrived at the destination of his long and arduous sectarian journey, which took him from a life of rebellion in Säläwa to the position of *ras bitwäddäd* in Iyasu's court. However, Täklä Haymanot turned out to be weak and indecisive. This was in full display in a synod held in 1707 when the representatives of *Karra* were left to fend for themselves against a joint Ewosṭatean and *Betä* Täklä Haymanot offense. Given the fact that he owed his office to Fares, their right hand man, Wäldä Tənsa'e and Təmərte, the *Karra* spokesmen, were counting on Täklä Haymanot to throw the full weight and influence of the royal court behind them, in a manner that would decide the outcome of the synod in their favour. Such support failed to materialize, Wäldä Tənsa'e and Təmərte suffered another humiliation as proponents of heresy.<sup>77</sup> That hinted to the fact that Fares did not have the right man for his purpose in Täklä

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189; the teaching is usually confused with the *Qəbat* teaching of Ewosṭateans. However that is not the case as is evident from one of the reproaches Wäldä Tənsa'e suffered. According to the chronicler, he was chided for introducing a teaching he would not have learned from Ewosṭatewos. It is further clear from the reference Ewosṭateans and *Betä* Täklä Haymanot communities made to it in their joint rejection of the same teaching in 1763; see GUIDI 1912: 199.

<sup>76</sup> BASSET 1882: 56f.; BERRY 1976: 26–30; MERID WOLDE AREGAY 1971: 598 and CRUMMEY 2000: 85f.

<sup>77</sup> BASSET 1882: 60f.; GETATCHEW HAILE 1986: 229–232; Getatchew wrongly identifies Wäldä Tənsa'e and Təmərte, as *Qəbat* spokesmen.

Haymanot. He therefore withdrew the all too important support from Täklä Haymanot. His lifeline cut, Täklä Haymanot in turn became easy target to the wrath of *Qəbatoč*, who held no less grudge against him for frustrating the hope with his reign, that a better day would dawn for them. It was the Agäw, sympathetic to *Qəbat*, called Gäbärmoč who killed Täklä Haymanot while he was on a hunting trip to their country in Goḡḡam. The partisans of *Qəbat* also succeeded in outmaneuvering Fares in the ensuing power struggle to enthrone a prince sympathetic to their faction. Accordingly, they enthroned Tewoflos, whose first policy measure was to issue a decree making *Qəbat* official doctrine of the royal court.<sup>78</sup> Tewoflos also put Fares in fetters and threw him into Məşrah, a royal prison in Lake Ṭana. Fares, who died in 1716 without seeing the success of his lifelong mission on behalf of *Karra*, had the small consolation that his body was to be laid to rest in his native land Säläwa.<sup>79</sup>

It took the rise of another Säläwan *ras* Mika<sup>3</sup>el Səhul, for the adherents of *Karra* to revive their ambition for the centre in the 1740s. In the intervening decades from the 1710s to the early 1740s, Təgray and Lasta fell back to their former position of rebellion and defiance of the centre.<sup>80</sup> In many ways, *ras* Mika<sup>3</sup>el's career followed the path of Fares'. In fact the resemblance in their careers is so sticking and substantial that it cannot be dismissed as a matter of accident. Rather it seems that *ras* Mika<sup>3</sup>el was a conscious heir of Fares. To start with, both were natives of Säläwa, no trivial detail, since such local background must be what informed their devotion to *Karra*.<sup>81</sup> Like Fares, *ras* Mika<sup>3</sup>el started out as a powerful regional lord and burst into the national scene to distinguish himself in the late 1760s as the most powerful man of the kingdom, *ras bitwäddäd*. Like Fares, Mika<sup>3</sup>el owed his *ras bitwäddäd*ship to his personal merit as an accomplished military leader. Like Fares, Mika<sup>3</sup>el was also the one who turned the office into the effective role of king-making. When that meant assassination, like Fares, Mika<sup>3</sup>el did not shrug away. Accordingly, on May 10, 1769, he put Yoḡannəs, the son of Iyasu I, on the throne. A few days after, he got rid of Iyo<sup>3</sup>as by strangling him. A few months after, Yoḡannəs suffered the fate of Iyo<sup>3</sup>as, when Mika<sup>3</sup>el found him not to his liking. Mika<sup>3</sup>el put yet another prince, Täklä Haymanot on the throne, thereby inaugurating the official onset of the *Zämänä mäsafənt*.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>78</sup> BASSET 1882: 62ff.; BERRY 1976: 33f.

<sup>79</sup> BASSET 1882: 64; BERRY 2005: 495a–b.

<sup>80</sup> PANKHURST 1984: 224ff.; throughout this period the centre was pro-*Qəbat*, see GUIDI 1912: 16f., 201f.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213; BERRY 2005: 495a–b.

<sup>82</sup> CRUMMEY 2000: 110ff.; GUIDI 1912: 212–251.

Most important for this study is however the fact that like Fares, Mika'el used his office to advance the cause of *Karra*. The details are interesting to relate here. Sometime in 1763/4, a monk, called *abba* Ǝṣāte, delivered an alleged patriarchal letter to the court of Iyo'as. When read, it turned out that the letter endorses *Karra* as official doctrine of the mother, Alexandrian Church, hence implying that the Ethiopian Church should follow suit. However, the representatives of the *Betä* Ewoṣatewos and *Betä* Täklä Haymanot communities, who advocated the *Qəbat* and *Ṣägga Ləḡ* teachings respectively, were not to be easily persuaded. As they had repeatedly done in similar occasions before, they came together and secured the rejection of the letter as forgery. As such, the whole thing appeared to be inconsequential, had it not been for the fact that the messengers, who delivered the alleged patriarchal letter to the royal court, were not alone. The chronicler tells us that they had come with their supporters mainly from Lasta and Təgray. They also had sympathizers within the royal court. As such, it was with difficulty that a potential showdown between *Karra* sympathizers on the one hand and the joint Ewoṣatean-*Betä* Täklä Haymanot partisans on the other, was averted, with the removal of the former from Gondär. The official chronicle and the *Ṣägga Ləḡ* source end their account there, as though that was the end of the story.<sup>83</sup> However, we learn from another source that after a short while, the partisans of *Karra*, who were sentenced to exile returned to Gondär, accompanied by *ras* Mika'el. This time around, they were given royal welcome. For the next two years, when *ras* Mika'el was the one running the show at the monarchical centre, *Karra* enjoyed the status of being official doctrine of the royal court.<sup>84</sup>

What is also remarkable here is that Lasta, as much as Təgray, was the source of *ras* Mika'el's strength. For example, *ras* Mika'el's army had substantial number of recruits from Lasta. Under *ras* Mika'el's leadership, the Lastans also fought the wars of the royal centre. Lastans also contributed to the success of *ras* Mika'el by facilitating the passage of his army through their territory.<sup>85</sup> The details therefore prove the central thesis of this study that the incorporation of South Təgray and Lasta came with the success of *Karra* to become official doctrine of the centre for the first time in the history of Gondärine Ethiopia in the late 1760s and early 1770s. However, Mika'el Səḥul's dominance of central politics was a short lived one and another Təgrayan lord did not replace him in the *ras bitwäddäd* position. The end of his career also inaugurated the onset of the *Zämänä mäsaḥənt*/Era of Princes, when the various provinces that hitherto made up the Christian

<sup>83</sup> GUIDI 1912: 198–202; ID. 1893: 604f.

<sup>84</sup> ID. 1912: 200f., n. 1.

<sup>85</sup> PANKHURST 1984: 226f.

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Kingdom became more or less autonomous. That also made the sectarian rivalry for control of the centre irrelevant. Instead, throughout the period of the *Zämänä mäsaḥant* from the 1770s to 1855, the three factions aligned with the regional power players.

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### Summary

Two *gädls*, briefly examined in this study, portray Iyasu I as a *Šägga Ləğ* partisan. *Šägga Ləğ* is one of two views dismissed as heresy at the 1878 Boru Meda synod. This synod settled the Christological controversy that beset the Ethiopian Church for two and a half centuries, by declaring *Karra*, the polemical name for *Tāwəḥədo*, as official orthodoxy. What is strange about the accounts of the two *gädls* is that they seem to contradict one of the *doxas* of Ethiopian historiography, which is that Iyasu I was a diehard *Tāwəḥədo*. This study resolves this enigma by showing that during the Gondarine period the *Tāwəḥədo* teaching, which enjoyed the recognition of the royal centre as orthodoxy, was *Šägga Ləğ*. Such revision of the historiography of the doctrinal controversy in turn paves the way for a better understanding of the rebellion of Lasta and southern Təgray, against the monarchical centre of Gondarine Ethiopia. So far, the history of this rebellion is poorly understood due to the wrong assumption that the *Karra* teaching championed by the Lasta–Təgray group at the time was the same *Tāwəḥədo* of the monarchical centre. No historian could thus entertain the possibility of a long lasting rebellion in the name of *Karra*. This study shows that throughout much of the Gondarine period, *Karra* was rather the doctrine of a third party that defied the centre using Lasta and southern Təgray as safe-heavens.