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Article

Early 20th Century Theological Controversies in Ethiopia: A Letter of the Coptic Metropolitan Petros of 1904

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Bibliographical abbreviations used in this volume


CSCO  =  Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1903ff.

EFAH  =  Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Orient-Abteilung, Epigraphische Forschungen auf der Arabischen Halbinsel, herausgegeben im Auftrag des Instituts von NORBERT NEBES.

EMML  =  Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, Addis Ababa.


JSS  =  Journal of Semitic Studies, Manchester 1956ff.


OrChr  =  Oriens Christianus, Leipzig – Roma – Wiesbaden 1901ff.

OrChrP  =  Orientalia Christiana Periodica, Roma 1935ff.


PO  =  Patrologia Orientalis, 193ff.


SÀe  =  Scriptores Aethiopici.


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Early 20th Century Theological Controversies in Ethiopia:  
A Letter of the Coptic Metropolitan Petros of 1904

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In November–December 2012, the team of the Ethio-SPaRe project visited  
several churches and monasteries in the Tämben region (Däg’a Tämben  
warzáda, Central Tigray zone) and digitized a substantial portion of their  
manuscript collections. A very interesting document was found in one of the  
books housed in the Qäddast Maryam monastery in Qäqäma – a letter written  
by the Coptic Metropolitan Petros (1881–1917) in 1904. The present article  
aims at editing and commenting this important historical document. Even if  
the tenure of Petros is known to historians in broad outline, clear information  
concerning his activity is certainly lacking. What is more, the period of his stay  
in Tigray between 1903 and 1914 is basically not documented. To the best of  
our knowledge, until now, no writings of the Metropolitan concerning the  
Ethiopian Orthodox Church have emerged and become known to the scholars.  
Thus far only one document signed by the Metropolitan has been published  
(though not commented), that is, his letter to Alfred Ilg dated to 1896.¹  
The present letter deals with the Trinitarian and Christological doctrines  
and is addressed to the clergy of Tigray. Because of its historical significance,  
we decided to translate this document, provide some comments on it  
and eventually publish it. For one thing, this publication gives the chance to  
lay down the facts of the tenure of Petros in Ethiopia. For another, it sheds  
light on information about a little known theological controversy, which  
appeared in Tigray at the beginning of the 20th century. Also, the analysis  
of the new historical material leads to proposing a more balanced and accurate  
view on the role of the Coptic bishop within the organization of the  
Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

The tenure of Petros between 1881 and 1904

Petros was Coptic Metropolitan of the Ethiopian Orthodox T’wahado  
Church from 1881 to 1917. He appears as Petros VII in the traditional lists of

¹ BAIRU TAFLA 2000: 213 (text), 472f. (tr.).
the Coptic Metropolitan of Ethiopia, but as Petros IV in the historically reconstructed lists. The previous Coptic Metropolitan of Ethiopia, 'Atntawos, died in 1876. Because of hostilities between Ethiopia and Egypt, King Yohannas IV (r. 1872–89) delayed the replacement of the metropolitan for four years. He finally decided to request not for one but for four bishops. The request for several bishops was not unprecedented in the history of Ethiopia, since its rulers usually tried to avoid the absence of the bishop after the death of the incumbent bishop. The aim was keeping and, at times, even improving the ecclesiastic control over clergy. However, such petition was accepted by the Alexandrian Patriarchate only once, during the reign of Zar'a Ya'qob (r. 1434–68) when two Metropolitans, Gabra'el and Mik'a'el, were consecrated. At the time of King Yohannas IV, the problematic religious situation dramatically conditioned his request. Even if Yohannas did not apparently need the bishop to convoke the council at Boru Meda in 1878 or to impose the Tawada doctrine as the only one authorized in the kingdom, he definitively needed several bishops to control the local clergy and to supervise the conversion of the population. Thus, in January 1881, he sent 12,000 Maria Theresa thalers to the Coptic Patriarch in Cairo, Cyril V (1874–1927). Then, in June, an Ethiopian delegation was sent to Cairo with gifts for the Patriarch and the Egyptian ruler. As a result, on 8 July 1881, the Coptic Holy Synod accepted the Ethiopian request and Patriarch Cyril consecrated four Coptic Bishops for Ethiopia: Matewos (1881–1926), Luqas (1881–99/1900), Marqos (1881–83) and Petros. The four prelates reached Maqal, the capital city of Tagray, on 29 October 1881. The population of Wollo was to be converted to Christianity while the populations of Gojjam and Sawa were to deny the Qobat and Saggà logos doctrines, respectively. The problem of the conversion of people definitively won over the Coptic authorities; cf. Zewde Gabre-Sellassie 1930: 303.

4 Id. 1977: 150 (text), 151 (tr.); Zewde Gabre-Sellassie 1975: 108.
5 Ibid.; Simon 1885: 345.
7 The population of Wollo was to be converted to Christianity while the populations of Gojjam and Sawa were to deny the Qobat and Saggà logos doctrines, respectively. The problem of the conversion of people definitively won over the Coptic authorities; cf. Zewde Gabre-Sellassie 1930: 303.
8 Simon 1885: 249–251.
9 Zewde Gabre-Sellassie 1975: 108.
12 Simon 1885: 344.
tion of rank among the four prelates was posed at their arrival, the Italian Peri-
ni reports that the Coptic Bishops refused to establish any hierarchy among
them. Nevertheless, the chronicler of the reign of Yohannas, a posteriori,
clearly sets apart Petros, designated as Ḥ Ḥ Ḥ liqā papasat, from Matewos,
Luqas and Marqos, designated as Ḥ Ḥ Ḥ papas. Also Asmā Giyorgis in his
historical work singles out Petros from the other Coptic Bishops. Accord-
ing to him, however, Petros was appointed as Ḥ Ḥ Ḥ asat, from Matewos,
Luqas and Marqos, designated as Ḥ Ḥ Ḥ as. Two possibilities are offered to us: the
differentiation in terms of rank between the Coptic prelates was established
after their arrival in Ethiopia and, consequently, concerned only the Ethiop-
pian context, or Petros was consecrated as Bishop of higher rank already by
the Patriarch.

Before we try to investigate which of these two options is more likely
and realistic, let us discuss the nomenclature and the usage of high rank
ecclesiastic titles by the Alexandrian Patriarchate and by the Ethiopian Or-
thodox Church. From the Patriarchate point of view, the Coptic Bishop of
Ethiopia was traditionally the mu ṭ rān, an Arabic word meaning “metropol-
itan”, which was always translated into G Ḥ Ḥ Ḥ Ḥ as. The Patriarch of
Alexandria in G Ḥ Ḥ Ḥ Ḥ Ḥ sources was called liqā papasat that is “the head of the
metropolitans” – term which basically refers to his authority over them,
while in Arabic he was called ’aba, “pope”, or baṭriyark, “patriarch”. Ordinary bishops were called ’epίsqopos, in Arabic “usquf”. In theory, the
Metropolitan (mu ṭ rān/papas) had the right to consecrate bishops (’epίsqopos)
who were subject to his jurisdiction. However, during the 13th
and 14th centuries, the Patriarch of Alexandria gradually became the only

14 Bairu Tafla 1977: 152 (text), 153 (tr.).
15 ID. 1987: 738 (text), 739 (tr.).
16 Graf 1954: 107. The Greek-Coptic word mētropōtēs is rendered in Christian Arabic as maṭrūbūlīt or muṭrān. The term muṭrān was always used in the letter sent by the Coptic authorities for designating the Coptic bishop of Ethiopia; see Murad 1942: 132. The term muṭrān corresponds also to another word in G Ḥ Ḥ Ḥ Ḥ Ḥ sources, ṭρεπάλη mātropolis. However, it was not used and papas was preferred by the Ethiopians. The translation of the canon concerning the election of the Patriarch of Alexandria present in the Senodos and in the Fatḥa Nāgāṣt is in this case very clear: “The election of a Patriarch shall take place only in the presence of the bishops and the mātropolis, who is the papas”. See in the Fatḥa Nāgāṣt in Guidi 1936: 30f.; Id. 1899: 24; Paulos Tzadua 1968: 19; see in the Senodos in Bausi 1995: 91.
17 Graf 1954: 25; see also Murad 1942: 110, 130, 135.
hierarch who was eligible to appoint bishops.\textsuperscript{20} As a result, the Coptic Metropolitan lost their power as archbishops in Egypt. From that time onwards, even the Metropolitan of Ethiopia could not consecrate bishops, just like his counterparts officiating in Egypt. The change of the ecclesiastical situation in Egypt explains the disparity in the Senodos and in the Fatba Nāgāṣt, the two main Gəsz canonical sources, about the authority of the Coptic bishop of Ethiopia.\textsuperscript{21}

As mentioned before, in the chronicle of Yohannas IV Petros is referred to as liqā papasat, the title which implies at least some jurisdictive power over the bishops, as well as the right to consecrate them. The chronicler uses almost the same term in reference to the Patriarch of Alexandria with the exception that he adds the information ṭha' Askanderya, “of Alexandria”) after the title of the Patriarch.\textsuperscript{22} However, from the Coptic perspective, the Bishop of Ethiopia could not have a higher rank than the Metropolitan (papas/muṭrān), since the Patriarch of Alexandria monopolized all the archbishopic powers. Furthermore, it is highly improbable that the Patriarch of Alexandria would accept the same title as the “main” Metropolitan of Ethiopia. All in all, it transpires that while Petros was considered the Metropolitan (mēttropolītēs in Coptic/muṭrān in Arabic) by the Coptic Patriarchate, he was addressed as liqā papasat in Ethiopia.

The disparity between the Coptic and the Ethiopian way of understanding the Petros’ position is reflected in his official seal. The seal appears in the edition of the chronicle of King Monilṣk II\textsuperscript{23}, in the above mentioned

\textsuperscript{20} In the 14\textsuperscript{th} century, the Coptic theologian Yūhannā ibn ‘abī Zakaryā stated this fact in the 51\textsuperscript{st} chapter of his nomocanon; cf. PÉRIER 1922: 746; see also KHS-BURMESTER 1967: 154.

\textsuperscript{21} In the Senodos, the Bishop of Ethiopia is authorized to consecrate bishops subject to his jurisdiction; cf. MAURO DA LEONESSA 1942: 50 (text), 78 (tr.). However, in the Fatba Nāgāṣt, the Bishop of Ethiopia did not have the right any more to appoint bishops; cf. GUIDI 1936: 23f.; ID. 1899: 29; PAULOS TZADUA 1968: 18. The canon concerning the authority of the Bishop of Ethiopia comes from a canonical work ascribed to Marţā of Maipherqat written in Syriac probably in the 6\textsuperscript{th} century; cf. VOÓBUS 1982: 62f. (text), 55f. (tr.). Later, this canonical work was translated by the Coptic Church under the title “84 Arabic canons of Nicea”; cf. MEINARDUS 1962: 231–242. These canons were then translated into Gəsz and included in the Ethiopic Senodos before the 15\textsuperscript{th} century; cf. BAUS 2010: 623b. Yet a new translation appeared in the work of an Egyptian theologian al-Ṣāḥib ‘abū ‘l-Fadā’il ibn al-‘Assāl in the 13\textsuperscript{th} century. This specific book, in turn, was rendered into Gəsz in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century and appeared under the title Fatba Nāgāṣt; cf. PAULOS TZADUA 2005: 534a.

\textsuperscript{22} BAIRU TAFILA 1977: 86, 150 (text), 87, 151 (tr.).

\textsuperscript{23} ZEWDE GUEBRE-SELLASSIE 1930: 308 figure 46.
letter written to Alfred Ilg\textsuperscript{24} as well as in the letter to the Tägrayan clergy, which we will come to later on. The official rank of Petros is inscribed in the seal in three languages: Arabic (Butros muṭrān), Ge’ez (Petros liqā papasat) and Coptic Bohairic (Pitros méetropolītēs [sic]). Thus, the inscription confirms that according to the Coptic Church, Petros was considered, just like his predecessor, the Metropolitan in Ethiopia. However, in the Ethiopian context, Petros had a higher ranking than the papas. Let us mention that even in his letter to Alfred Ilg, Petros designates himself as liqā papasat (አርቲክስ እwaters: እwaters እwaters).\textsuperscript{25} One could wonder if, in 1896, it implied the Bishop of Tägray’s claim against the hegemonic aspirations of Matewos, the Bishop of Sāwa. Basically, only few Ethiopian sources used the title liqā papasat. In manuscripts found by the Ethio-SPaRe team in Tägray and clearly identified as being written during the reign of Yōḥannās IV, the scribes employed the term papas in reference to Petros.\textsuperscript{26} Only once liqā papasat is used for this purpose.\textsuperscript{27}

The chronicler of Yōḥannās IV points out that from the beginning of the negotiation with the Coptic Patriarchate, the King aimed at separating the Coptic Bishops and sending them to different regions.\textsuperscript{28} Simon does not believe in this plan but he mentions such a possibility.\textsuperscript{29} In fact, the four Bishops stayed with Yōḥannās for the first two years. Sending them off to the regions was postponed because of the fierce rivalry between Tāklā Haymanot, nāgūs of Goggam, and Manilak, nāgūs of Sāwa.\textsuperscript{30} In 1883, Yōḥannās made an effort to bring peace between them and summoned a reconciliation conference at Boru Meda where he met with the two Princes. At that time, the areas of jurisdiction of the four Bishops was also discussed. The rulers decided that Matewos would stay at the court of Manilak, Luqas would follow Tāklā Haymanot and Marqos would assist the son of Yōḥannās, ras Ar’aya Šällase (1869/70–88), in Däbrà Tabor. Finally, only Petros was to stay with King of Kings Yōḥannās IV.\textsuperscript{31} Becoming the Metropolitan of the King of Kings also meant

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Bairu Tafla 2000: 213 (text), 472f. (tr.).
\item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{26} See manuscripts digitized by the Ethio-SPaRe team: MAC-004, KY-064, UM-022, QSM-009, AGM-005, AMQ-002.
\item \textsuperscript{27} See the manuscript MR-019 digitized by the Ethio-SPaRe team.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Bairu Tafla 1977: 152 (text), 153 (tr.).
\item \textsuperscript{29} Simon 1885: 344.
\item \textsuperscript{30} During the battle of Embabo between the troops of Tāklā Haymanot and Manilak in June 1882, the four Bishops were still with Yōḥannās; cf. Bairu Tafla 1977: 738 (text), 739 (tr.).
\item \textsuperscript{31} Zewde Gebre-Sellassie 1930: 190, 303; Marqos died just after his arrival in Däbrà Tabor.
\end{itemize}
that Petros could have been designated as liqä papasat. However, it seems to be a matter of usage rather than a fact. The Metropolitan, who sat on the right of the King of Kings, took the title which enabled him to stand out from the others, but without real authority over them. And indeed, Petros did not seize more power than the other Coptic prelates. Each papas was installed in the region under the rule of the Prince to whom he was entrusted, without disturbance from the others. The Bishopric was totally divided and, consequently, Matewos and Luqas were totally independent. The French traveller Jules Borelli does not mention any hierarchy among them and was extremely pleased when Petros allowed him to enter Tagray after Matewos let him enter Säwa.

Petros accompanied Yohannas to the battle of Mätämma and was present when the King of Kings died from his injuries on 9 March 1889. On his deathbed, Yohannas bequeathed his throne to ras Mangäsa and Petros supported him against Yohannas’ other nephews. On 3 November 1889, Manilak of Säwa was crowned King of Kings by Bishop Matewos. Petros protested against this act arguing that having been the Bishop of the previous King of Kings, he was the one who was supposed to crown the new ruler. Despite his objection a letter from the Patriarch of Alexandria confirmed the coronation and, at the same time, the new “status” of Matewos. Thus, the transfer of the secular power from Tagray to Säwa had the same repercussions for the Bishopric: Petros, the Bishop of Tagray, lost his primus inter pares status in Ethiopia. But again, it did not mean that Matewos had an authority over Luqas and Petros. Just after the battle of Mätämma, Luqas and Petros stayed in Däbrä Tabor, but later Manilak sent Luqas to Lalibälä and Petros to Yäggä, probably to isolate them from the centre of any secular power jeopardizing Manilak’s rule. Luqas was given back to Täklä Haymanot after the Prince submitted himself to the new sovereign of Ethiopia. Petros, in turn, was kept in Addis Abäba until the problematic political situation in Tagray was settled: Manilak definitively could not permit him to join ras Mangäsa, who threatened his authority over the country.

Matewos and Petros together exercised their power at the ecclesiastical court in Addis Abäba. In 1891 Manilak decided to divide Ethiopia into three dioceses, intending to clarify the jurisdiction of the three Bishops. Two Bishops ruling at the same place with exactly the same power was definitively not

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32 The role of the Bishop consisted mainly in the consecration of churches and in the ordination of priests and deacons; cf. ibid. 210; ANNARATONE 1914: 262ff. They could also place excommunication; cf. BAI'U TAFLA 1987: 738ff.
33 BORELLI 1890: 118.
34 ZEWDE GUEBRE-SELLASSIE 1930: 303ff.
35 Ibid. 284.
36 Ibid. 299–302.
a favourable situation and could probably provoked conflicts. Luqas, who
died in Goğgam between 1899 and 1900, was granted authority over Täklâ
Haymanot’s territories (Goğgam, Agâw Mâdâr, Kâffa). Petros received jurisdic-
tion over Tagray, Eritrea, Lasta and Wag, while Matewos received au-
thority over the rest of Ethiopia. The diocese of Petros was really smaller
than his previous one as he lost a large part of the central highlands (Gondår
region, Bâgemdâr). But the division into dioceses proves again that the three
Coptic Bishops had the same type of ecclesiastical authority and Petros
could hope to enjoy the same independence as before. Finally, in 1899, ras
Mângâsa submitted himself to Mânilk and from that moment on the situa-
tion in Tagray settled step by step. In 1903, Petros was permitted to come
back to Tagray.38

The letter of Petros found in the manuscript collection of the Qâqâma
monastery

Extremely limited historical information is available on Petros’ stay in
Tagray between 1903 and 1914. Only the Italian traveller Ferdinando Mar-
tini provides us with some information on the occasion of his visit to Petros
on 27 April 1906.39 More information on the Coptic bishop appears later
when he crowned ras Mîka’el Ali (1847/50–1918) as nagus in Dâse in 1914
and when he decided to support him against Sâwa aristocracy after the coup
d’état of 1916.40

The letter that we deal with has been found in a manuscript kept in the
Qaddast Maryam monastery in a village called Qâqâma, located in Dâg’a
Tâmben wârâda between towns Hagârâ Sâlam and ‘Abiy ‘Addî.41 The mon-
astery was founded by King Yohânnas IV, whose associate and close compan-
ion, Gâbrâ Giyorgis, became the first abbot of the community. The monastic
library includes a fine Octateuch manuscript on the last folios of which we
find the letter of Petros presented here.42 According to the colophon (on fol.
150r), the manuscript43 was written in 1664, in the 32nd year of the reign

37 Ibid. 304ff.
38 Ibid. 305.
40 Cf. Pollera 1926: 221; Berhanou Abebe 2001: 317f.; Smidt 2001: 67f.; Gebre-
41 Nosnitsin 2013: 388–396.
42 Ibid. 392–395.
43 152 fols., dimensions: mm 394 x 295 x 75. The shelfmark given by the Ethio-SPaRe
project to the manuscript is QDGM-003. The manuscript was identified as coming
from Mâqdâlâ library; see Ancel – Nosnitsin 2014: 90–95, here 94.
Fig. 1: Letter of Petros, manuscript, Qdassat Maryam monastery, Qäqäma, Tagray, fol. 151v
Fig. 2: Letter of Petros, manuscript, Qëddast Maryam monastery, Qaqëma, Tagray, fol. 152r
of King Fasilädäs (1632–67, here called ‘Alämä Sägäd). The letter was written on 25 April 1904 (17 Miyazya 1896 ‘A.M.), but we do not know what the circumstances were when the document was penned. We can only assume that Petros personally visited the monastery since the letter contains his seal. The letter of Petros is written on the flyleaves of the manuscript, on two ruled and pricked folios, 151v and 152r [Figs. 1 and 2]. The seal of Petros appears twice, in the upper margin of fol. 151v and in the lower margin of fol. 152r. Even if faded, the Arabic inscription is still partly visible on fol. 151v [Fig. 3] while the Ga‘az inscription is to some extent legible on fol. 152r [Fig. 4]. As mentioned before, it is the same seal as the one published in the edition of the chronicle of Manilak and in the letter of Petros to Alfred Igl from 1896.

Characteristic features and exact periodization of the script(s) of the 19th and 20th centuries have still not been sufficiently studied. Therefore, we will restrict ourselves to drawing attention to some features of the hand that penned the letter. The handwriting is of rather mediocre quality mainly because of the irregularity in the shape of the letters. They are produced in a manner common to the Ethiopic scripts with the pen nib at 0° angle to the writing line, resulting in bold upright vertical strokes and thin horizontal strokes. The curved stroke of such letters as , ,  appears thinner where it is most twisted and broader in its more straight areas. To make the writing of some letters easier, the scribe started penning the first stroke from a thin line, as in the letters  and  (in , fol. 151v, l. 6). Finishing the

44 Fol. 151v: 29 lines; fol. 152r: 35 lines.
47 So called “Haarstriche”, see ibid. 781; “hair-like strokes”, see ID. 1990: 107.
stroke with this simple flick of the pen is less frequent, for instance in the letter ough (in ঋ (foll. 152r, l. 3). The shape of the letters has an angular form. The letters are tall, slender and spaced well apart. In a number of words, for instance ও (foll. 151v, l. 3), ঐ (foll. 151v, l. 9), ছ (foll. 152r, l. 2) and ন (foll. 152r, l. 9) the loop of the letters of the 5th order, that is, ও, ঐ, ছ and ন is reduced to a short thick dash. Similarly, the loop of the letters of the 7th order looks like two short thick dashes since the scribe failed to connect them with two parallel lines. The examples that illustrate this case mostly concern the letter ও as in ওদ (foll. 151v, l. 3), নদ (foll. 151v, l. 8, l. 9), ছদ (foll. 151v, l. 23) and ছ (foll. 152r, l. 2). Also, the vowel marker of the letter ও in ওদ (foll. 152r, l. 7) is reduced to simple dashes.

The Amharic writing does not differ that much from the contemporary practice. There are only two peculiarities which may be worth a remark. First, the letter ও (in ওদ, foll. 151v, l. 9) is penned with an additional dash extending to the left from the bottom of the left leg. This feature is attested in Amharic texts dated to the 18th century. Secondly, the palatalization marker consists of two dashes that extend diagonally from the top of the letter, one to the left and one to the right (for example ও and ও in ওদ ; ওদ, foll. 151v, l. 2). In contrast, the present day convention is to pen the dashes horizontally.

It is reasonable to assume that the letter found in the Octateuch is a copy of the original letter of Petros that was made to record this important document. The original letter, most likely written on paper, was sent to the addressee. The present document is written continuously without any visual organization of basic textual units, such as the part containing an address to the reader and greetings, the main body of the letter and the concluding part. It is difficult to say whether this unstructured stream of words mirrors the visual organization of the original letter. However, among the edited letters, private and official, penned around the same time as the letter of Petros, we most often encounter letters with at least rudimental division into three parts.

A few erasures and corrections made in the text show that the scribe proofread the text, possibly under some kind of supervision. This, in turn, indicates that he was aware of the significance of the document and serious consequences which any unintended changes may have brought about. The corrections usually involve adding omitted words and letters, and, in one case, crossing out a part of the word and substituting it with another. Punctuation is applied in a consistent and logical manner. There are three differ-

48 GETATCHEW HAILE 1983: 158.
ent punctuation signs used in the text: two dots (֓) for separating words, four dots (֔) for separating sentences and two dots with a dash above and below (֖) for separating two related ideas within a sentence. Apart from a few exceptions, all numbers are written in Ethiopic numerals, for instance, ֛ъкدوا .Dock  one Divinity”.

Since Amharic was used as the language of communication in the Ethiopian Church, the letter sent by the Metropolitan to the Tagroñña-speaking educated community was in that language. Aside from Amharic, the letter also contains a few Gaɔaz sentences. Both languages may be viewed as forming two layers: the author leads the main argumentation in Amharic, the profane language, and supports his stance with quotations in Gaɔaz, the language of the Scriptures and authoritative religious texts. Let us discuss both layers beginning from Gaɔaz. The Gaɔaz layer of the letter consists of quotations from the New Testament, from Haymanota ‘abaw (“The Faith of the Fathers”) – theological miscellanea from which the author cites the Church Fathers – from the Anaphora of St. Mary and from some other unidentified writings. Also, Gaɔaz is the source of numerous words employed as technical terms in the theological discussion. Finally, a few formulaic expressions, by which we mean fixed phrases applied in specific acts of communication, are written in Gaɔaz. These are the introduction of the sender of the letter (ں֔֕: ֔, fol. 151v, ll. 1–2) and the excommunication (ں֔֕: ֔, fol. 152r, ll. 30–34). Most of the quotations are introduced by various Amharic expressions indicating direct speech, such as the simplest and most common ֔: “as he said”, ں֔: “he said” as well as ں: ں: “he answered him saying,”, ں: ں: “he testified to him saying:”, which specify the type of the speech act. With the exception of 1 Pet 3:18, all the remaining citations are identical or almost the same as in their source books.50

The Amharic layer appears very dominant in the letter. It starts with a formulaic expression used at the beginning of any letters (ں֔, “may it reach”, fol. 151v, l. 2) and the everyday greeting. Then, the author explains the cause of the letter and mentions the authority of the fathers that stands behind him. After that, the argumentation follows which is concluded with listing and anathematizing those who would deny the Tawahado doctrine. In two instances, the author explicitly applies the way of leading a

polemics known from the *andomta*-commentary.\(^{51}\) They are indicated with such expressions as *֔אֲרַאַמ* רִמְיֶא → "if they say ‘why’," (fol. 151v, l. 25) and *֔אֲרַאַמ* רָיָא → "as for this, if they say ‘how’,” (fol. 151v, l. 28). The type of Amharic, in which the letter is penned, indicates Modern Amharic, namely the language that is known from written sources from the second half of the 19th century and is to a great extent in use today, especially in religious circles.\(^{52}\) Nevertheless, one syntactic peculiarity, which nowadays is obsolete but was still present in the language at the beginning of the 20th century, is worth mentioning. That is, on one occasion, the writer of the letter uses content clauses composed of the complement *֔אֲרַאַמ* רִמְיֶא- and the simple imperfect form of the verb, *֔אֲרַאַמ* רָיֶא → *֔אֲרַאַמ* רָיֶא → הָיָא (fol. 151v, l. 29). This construction is currently substituted by the complement *֔אֲרַאַמ* רִמְיֶא- followed by the relative imperfect.\(^{53}\) The quality of Amharic is indicative of the native speaker knowledge of the language. The abundance of citations and their exactness, the smooth and skilful flow of argumentation, the knowledge of the *andomta*-commentary jargon and the ease with which the theological matters are discussed suggest that the author of the letter was very well-versed in the teachings and the doctrinal position of the *Tawabado* Faith.

Given that the sender of the letter, Petros, came from Egypt, where he also obtained his theological education, we may rightly ask if he initially wrote the letter in Arabic and had it translated into Amharic and Gə᾿az. This possibility should be excluded based on the linguistic features and the content. Aside from one Arabic word, *֔אֲרַאַמ* רָיֶא (fol. 152r, l. 8), being in fact a loan word in Gə᾿az, the language of the letter does not show any signs of an Arabic *Vorlage* neither on the syntactic, morphological nor lexical levels. The word *֔אֲרַאַמ* רָיֶא used in reference to the Pauline epistle, instead of Gə᾿az אַמַּתָּאִית suggests that, indeed, the Metropolitan had a major role in making up the letter. As for the content, it reveals the way and the sources of argumentation peculiar to the Ethiopian theological tradition. To make this claim even more convincing, let us mention that the Anaphora of St. Mary was still unknown to the Coptic Church at the time of Petros.\(^{54}\)


\(^{52}\) APPLEYARD 2003: 111f.

\(^{53}\) GOLDENBERG 1965: 10.

\(^{54}\) At that time, the Coptic Church used only the Anaphoras of St. Cyril, St. Gregory and St. Basil.
Theological context of the letter

In his letter, Petros aims at exposing the Trinitarian and Christological doctrines accepted by Alexandria, and thus by the Ethiopian Church and State, to the clergy of the “land of Ag’azi” (አንድር እና እንግሳ). Although the expression “land of Ag’azi” was usually employed in reference to Ethiopia, in this case it may refer specifically to the central regions of Tǝgray. The expression is rather obsolete and does not exist in Modern Amharic. However, it is still used by the elders in some parts of the present-day Tǝgray when they talk about the region they live in. Petros’ letter, being didactical in character, presents and also explains difficult but crucial theological issues. In what follows, we will summarise the contents of the letter and, subsequently, we will try to analyse the key points that it raises.

The letter was sent as a reaction to the presence of “wicked people” (አንድር እና እንግሳ) among the clergy who were challenging the Tǝawahdo doctrine (አንድር እና እንግሳ). At first, he says that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are of one and the same intellect (ፋንንት), word (ወንድ) and breath (ወንድ). Petros explains that they represent one divinity, called Lord (ኢትዮጵያ ዳግራ_sequences), Divinity (ምስክርት) or God ( hookers), in three persons, which respectively generates (አንድር እና እንግሳ), is generated (አንድር እና እንግሳ) and is the sprout (አንድር እና እንግሳ). Thus, he contests the existence of any hierarchy among the Persons of the Trinity. Then, he gives an answer to the technical problem posed by the statement which says, at the same time, “one Divinity in three Persons” (አንድር እና እንግሳ እና እንግሳ እና እንግሳ እና እንግሳ ዳግራ_sequences, fol. 152r, l. 3) and “one Person is equal to one Divinity” (አንድር እና እንግሳ እና እንግሳ እና እንግሳ ዳግራ_sequences, fol. 152r, ll. 3f.). In this way, he insists on the impossibility to separate notions of “person” (አንድር እና እንግሳ) and “divinity” (አንድር እና እንግሳ). After this, he comments on the statements concerning Christology by saying that “[Christ] is one Person, one Nature; united in the Mode of Existence, united in Nature, [being] the Son of the Father, the Son of Mary, He was honored by the [hypostatic] union” (አንድር እና እንግሳ እና እንግሳ ዳግራ_sequences, fol. 152r, l. 9f.) and highlights that for him Christ knew (only) two births (አንድር እና እንግሳ). Then, he exposes the problem of the death of Christ on the cross. He contends that only the flesh and not the divinity died on the cross and explains that, on the contrary, “Divinity died in the flesh” (አንድር እና እንግሳ ዳግራ_sequences, fol. 152r, ll. 20f.). He finishes his letter by pointing out several theological ideas which he condemns.

55 Information given by Wolbert Smidt (Mekelle University); see also SMIDT 2010a: 890b.
Peṭros does not explicitly say who the people that are challenging the Orthodox faith are and where they are. Nevertheless, the religious context of Tigray at that time and the theological themes that he deals with allow us to identify the characteristics of these opponents and their location. The council of Boru Meda in 1878 had imposed Tawḥedo/Wald ḡ in Christological doctrine as the only one accepted in the Christian kingdom. Qoḥat and Ṣaggā ḡ doctrines were condemned. But it did not put an end to theological controversies in Ethiopia. At the end of the 19th century, a controversy concerning the Trinity and the concept of divinity (חאbratesחא, מלאךot) emerged. In Waldabba hermitage, monks divided themselves into two rival factions. The first one, called the “house of abunā Minas”, after the name of a known spiritual father of that place, professed that Trinity represents “one Divinity in Three Persons”. This doctrine was summarized as the “one Divinity” (חאbratesחא, and מלאךot) doctrine. The second one, called the “house of abunā Ta’œmā Krætost”, after the name of another recognized spiritual father, professed, on the contrary, that Trinity represents “Three Divinities in Three Persons”. It was known as the “three Divinities” (חאbratesחא, sost מלאךות) doctrine. Apparently, the religious dispute had its source in the problematic interpretation of the statement written in the Mälk’a şollase (“Image of the Trinity”): חאbratesחא לאמותיו: מאך: מאך: מאך: שדית, “Each of Your faces has Divinity.” Starting from Waldabba, the controversy spread to other parts of Tigray and appeared among the clergy of different monasteries like Däbrä Abbay and Däbrä Bizân, and finally among the clergy of Aksum. The theological dispute gained vital importance and in April 1907 King Mnâlik II (r. 1889–1913) was urged to write a letter to Waldabba calling for reconciliation of the two movements. Evidently, it did not solve the problem and so the monarch sent another letter in June 1910. In both letters, Mnâlik threatened those who disobeyed with anathema from

57 TEDROS ABRAHA 2010: 992a–993a.
60 TEDROS ABRAHA 2010: 992b; BERHANĀ MÂSQÂL TESFAMYÂM 1996: 242f.
61 TEDROS ABRAHA 2010: 992b.
62 The letter was sent in Waldabba on 1 June 1910 (24 ḡombot 1902 ‘A.M.). The photos of the letter and its transcription are published by Bârîhun Kâbbâdâ in his book about Waldabba; cf. BÂRÎHUN KABBÂDÂ 1983: 141–149.

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Bishop Matewos. As mentioned, Waldabba was under the jurisdiction of Matewos while Aksum and Central Tagray were under the jurisdiction of Petros. In November 1914, a council in which Petros participated, was even set up at Däse to overcome the problem involving clergy of Aksum and of Däbrä Abby monastery. In fact, at that time Däse became the See of the new diocese of Petros as the Bishop of Tagray and Wällo under the patronage of the newly crowned nāgus Mika’el. Even if, apparently, the dispute calmed down in Aksum and Däbrä Abby, it continued over the 20th century in Waldabba where it still lingers on today.

Obviously, the letter of Petros written in 1904 refers to this Trinitarian controversy. It seems that it was sent to the clergy of Aksum or to the monks of Däbrä Abbay. In his letter, Petros aims at proving that Trinity represents “one Divinity in Three Persons”. At first, he treats the old and well known heterodox doctrines like those of Arius, Macedonius, Apollinaris or Sabellius (fol. 151v, ll. 22–25). But then, when he exposes then the “arithmetic” problem posed by the statement telling, at the same time, that “they are Three Persons in one Divinity” and “one Divinity is equal to one Person” (fol. 152r, ll. 3f.), he refers to unnamed “heretics”. Thus, in this passage, Petros targets the followers of the “three Divinities” doctrine without calling them as such, but he exposes their theological argument.

The letter also mentions other controversies. Petros reminds the main theological statements officially accepted by the Ethiopian Church. In relation to the Trinity, he makes a clear reference to the statement saying that: “The Father generates, the Son is generated, and the Holy Spirit is the sprout” (fol. 151v, ll. 16–21). This reference permits him to contest the Catholic doctrine of the Filioque. As such, he invokes the dispute which occurred with Catholics during the 16th century.

If his purpose was both to remind the statements accepted by the Church and to confront those who, in the past, had contested them, he was also concerned with other Ethiopian theological movements. Just after explaining the necessity of not separating the notions of divinity and person for Trinity, Petros invokes the statements accepted by the Tawahodo doctrine concerning the Christological teaching in telling that: “We believe that He is one Person, one Nature; united in the Mode of Existence (käwin), united in

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64 TEDROS ABRĀHA 2010: 993a.
Nature (bahrây), [being] the Son of the Father, the Son of Mary. He was honored by the [hypostatic] union, [so there are] two births” (fol. 152r, ll. 9f.). At first, this sentence exposes the statements accepted by Ţāwahādo doctrine during the controversy on “unction” and “union”, also summarized as “ブッブドゥ・マён・ラーブ” “[Christ] is the Son [of God] in nature by the [hypostatic] union. It opposes followers of both Qab’at and Şāgga lağ movements.  

Secondly, it is a summary of the Ţāwahādo doctrine on the number of Christ’s “births”, as it was expressed at the council of Boru Meda in 1878. Even if Petros admits that during the hypostatic union “the Son was honored”, he professes the “two births” (“bulātt lūdāt”) of Christ, which are the eternal birth from the Father and the temporal birth from the blessed Mary. This doctrine opposed the “three birth” (“sost lūdāt”) followers (mainly from the Şāgga lağ movement), who believed in a third “birth” which happened when the unction by the Holy Spirit took place (at His incarnation or His baptism). In fact, Petros continues his discourse by focusing on the absence of a third “birth” during the life of Jesus Christ.

The last part of the letter deals with the problem concerning the death of Christ and the statement claiming that “Divinity died in the flesh” (fol. 152r, ll. 20f.). Here again, it is a clear allusion to the debate with the Catholics.  

Finally, he concludes his letter by reminding the main doctrines that he refutes and he threatens those who profess them (fol. 152r, ll. 27–34). He refers to Catholics (those who profess Diophysite doctrine and Filioque), but also to Protestants (those who deny the transubstantiation), to the Şāgga lağ movement (those who say “Son of Grace through the unction”), and to the Qab’at followers (those who say “Son of nature through the unction”).

Written in 1904, the letter shows an early state of the involvement of high ecclesiastical and political authorities in the Trinitarian controversy, which occurred in Tagray at the beginning of the 20th century. The nicknames of each group (“one Divinity” and “three Divinities”) do not appear. They will be clearly identified only in the letters of Manilak in 1907 and 1910. Also, Waldaṣṣba is not mentioned in the letter. The sending of this letter in 1904 was nevertheless motivated by the spread of the dispute about
the number of divinities for the Trinity in the central regions of Tägray. It seems that Petros did not really know all the characteristics of the controversy or its origin, perhaps because the Waldabba region did not belong to his diocese. However, the controversy was brought into the heart of Tägray. In this letter, Petros targeted all potential opponents to the official doctrine of the Ethiopian Church present in Ethiopia at that time, such as Catholics, Protestants, Sağga Iq and Qob’at. Petros as bishop of that region, was apparently the first one who officially reacted to solve the problem. And one had to wait for the letters sent by Manlök II to Waldabba in 1907 and 1910 to see that the high authorities of the Church finally identified the origin and the two groups of the “mälıkot controversy”. Thus, it may be concluded that the letter presented here is probably the oldest known historical document issued from high ecclesiastical authorities which refers to the “mälıkot controversy”.

Text

Early 20th Century Theological Controversies in Ethiopia

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Still readable: ֔.

Still readable: ֔.
The letter sent by Petros, Metropolitan of the kingdom of Ethiopia, the servant and the apostle of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the son of Saint Mark the Evangelist. May it reach the blessed and saintly children and friends who live in the land of Agazi. How are you? I am well, thanks be to God. It greatly saddened me to hear that among the priests wicked people have risen who are changing the doctrine of (lit. “the doctrine which says”) “the only Son”. The faith of Alexandria and Ethiopia is one. When our Lord Jesus Christ asked the apostles in Caesarea [Philippi], “Who do all people say that I am?” they answered, “One says that you are Elijah, one that Jeremiah, some that one of the prophets (lit. “like one prophet”). When he said to them, “And you, who do you say that I am?” Saint Peter answered him, “You are the Christ, the Son of God”. And upon hearing this, the Lord said to him, “Blessed are you, Peter son of Jonah”. And the Father testified to Him in these words, “This is my Son.” And I have taken this and I am writing to you the faith of our Fathers, the Apostles and the Three Hundred. The Father, being in and of himself intellect, is [also] the intellect of the Son and the Holy Spirit. They do not have another intellect. Through Him they are called possessors of intellect. In His separate perfect Person He is called Lord, Divinity, God. And the Son, being in
and of himself the word, is [also] the word for the Father and the Holy Spirit. They do not have another word. Through Him they are called possessors of speech. In His separate perfect Person He is called Lord, Divinity, God. And the Holy Spirit, being in and of itself the breath, is [also] the breath for the Father and the Son. They do not have another breath. Through it they are called possessors of life. In its separate perfect Person it is called Lord, Divinity, God. Because of this we call [all] Three equally Lord, [all] Three equally Divinity, [all] Three equally God. Lord in Nature and Divinity is one. Lord in Person(s) is three. 85 Lord generates, Lord is generated, Lord [is] the sprout, one Lord. 86 As the Gospel says, “And the Word was Lord”. 87 The Divinity is one in Nature (and) is three in Person. The Divinity generates, the Divinity is generated, the Divinity [is] the sprout, one Divinity. And as Basil of Antioch says, “And the Divinity is the Persons who are the holy Faces”. 88 God in the Divinity and Nature is one, in Person(s) is three. God generates, God is generated, God [is] the sprout, one God. As Athanasius says, “God is the Father, God is the Son, God is the Holy Spirit”. 89 Again, we do not say with Arius, “The Father is the creator, the

is the sun, the Son is the sun, and the Holy Spirit is the sun”; cf. ֵֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֶֆ
Son is the creation\textsuperscript{90} and with Macedonius, “The Holy Spirit is inferior”\textsuperscript{91} and we do not with Apollinarius assign [different] hierarchy of dominion and [different] hierarchy of subtlety\textsuperscript{92} and we do not say what any other heretics [say]. We say, “These Persons are one Lord, one Divinity, one God”. We do not say with Sabellius and with Islam, “One Person, one Face”\textsuperscript{93}.

If one asks “why”, [the answer could be:] because person existing within person, it is as if with one counsel, with one authority, like one man they produced a joint work. And the joint work is the mystery about which Cyriacus [of Behnesa] said [beginning from], “The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit think” up to “they judge”\textsuperscript{94}. Again, if one asks how this is that there is no difference between generating from being generated, being generated from generating, causing to proceed from proceeding, proceeding from causing to proceed, it is like the birth of the Son, the origin of the Holy Spirit, the word and the breath issue from the intellect [and] a spring issues from [the same] spring, but it is [all] indissoluble. [Fol. 152r] It is because of this that, as Ignatius the Bishop of Antioch said, “His birth does...\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{90} As exposed in the Māshaftā borhan, book VI; cf. CONTI ROSSINI – RICCI 1965: 134 (text), 75 (tr.); see also in the Māzgābā haymanot; cf. CERULLI 1962: 6f. (text), 72f. (tr.). In the preparatory service for the liturgy, chapter 4, verse 43 the statement that “we believe also that Christ is not in the least degree inferior because of His incarnation”\textsuperscript{91} is declared; see also the Anaphora of Cyril, verse 97; cf. Ṣhr. 1962: 53, 229.

\textsuperscript{91} As exposed in the Māshaftā borhan, book VI; cf. CONTI ROSSINI – RICCI 1965: 134 (text), 75f. (tr.); see also in the Māzgābā haymanot; cf. CERULLI 1962: 7f. (text), 73f. (tr.). The statement, refuting it, is declared in the Anaphora of John Chrysostom, verse 72: “May this Holy Spirit, who is neither searchable nor inferior...”\textsuperscript{92}; see also in the Anaphora of Jacob of Serug, verse 38; cf. Ṣhr. 1962: 214, 235. The statement telling 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; ANCEL 2012: 98, 100.

\textsuperscript{92} The doctrine ascribed to Apollinarius has not been identified. Cyril of Alexandria mentions Apollinarius in his letter to Awfamius, Haymanotā 'abāsē, chapter 73, section 15, paragraph 27; cf. Ṣhr. 1967: 274. However, only the Amharic “translation” of this passage (col. b, page 274) specifies the Apollinarius’ idea: “\textit{\textit{ὠστε: ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ άνθρωπος ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς πάντων}}” (“I did not say with Apollinarius: ‘[Christ] did not assume a soul’ and I did not give any ranks”).

\textsuperscript{93} As exposed in the Māshaftā borhan, book VI; cf. CONTI ROSSINI – RICCI 1965: 133 (text), 75 (tr.); see also Māshaftā maṣṣir, chapter 1; cf. YAQOB BEYENE 1990: 2 (text), 2 (tr.).

\textsuperscript{94} Petros refers to the Anaphora of St. Mary (which is ascribed to Cyriacus of Behnesa), verse 58–66, where 27 joint activities of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are enumerated. He mentions the first joint work (verse 58: “The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit think”) and the penultimate (verse 66: “The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit judge”); cf. Ṣhr. 1962: 114.
not stop with his first [birth], just like a spring is from a spring”. Also as Saint Cyrill [of Alexandria] said, “Like a spring which bubbles forth forever.” And they are one in more than this [what is listed above]. The heretics, however, taking, “They are three in Persons and one in Divinity”, they say, “Divinity cannot be called person, [and] person cannot be called divinity, but it is that Divinity encompasses Three Person[s]”. By saying this they take person separately and divinity separately. We, however, do not separate divinity from person and person from divinity. Out of Three Persons one Person, the Divine Son, became man, man became God, “The word became flesh” as John the Evangelist says. Also, Gregory of Nazianzus said, “He is God who became man and man who became God”. Also, Paul in the second part of his epistle to the Colossians said, “See to it that no one deceives you with philosophy and what is vain deceit and errors of this world and not on the law of Christ in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form.” We believe that He is one Person, one Nature; united in the Mode of Existence (käwin), united in Nature (babrxy), [being] the Son of the Father, the Son of Mary, He was honored by the [hypostatic] union, [so there are] two births. As Paul says, “When

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95 Unidentified quotation.
96 Unidentified quotation.
97 He refers to the contradiction which says at first that “one Divinity, three Persons” and secondly “Divinity and Person are equal”. His response is clearly an answer to the problem posed by monks in Waldabba and then in Däbrä Abbay when they proposed that Trinity is composed with three Divinities rather than only one.
98 Jn 1:14.
100 Ref. to Col 2:8f.
101 At first, this sentence is a summary of statements accepted by Täwabdäo doctrine during the controversy on “unction” and “union”, also summarized as Nïpëhëhër : 1990: xi. Petros uses both käwin and babrxy to express the notion of “nature”; cf. Getatchew Haile 1990: ix. But also, it is a summary of Täwabdäo doctrine as it was expressed at the council of Boru Meda in 1878 on the controversy concerning the number of “birth” of Christ. Even if he admitted that during the hypostatic union “the Son was honored”, Petros professed the “two birth” (bulätt ladät) of Christ which are the eternal birth from the Father and the temporal birth from the blessed Mary. It opposed to the “three birth” (sost ladät) followers (mainly issued from Sägga løg movement) who believed in a third “birth” which happened when the unction by the Holy Spirit took place (at His incarnation or His baptism); cf. Getatchew Haile 1990: ixf.; Yaqob Beye 1981: 15, footnote 48, 281f.; Tesfazghi Uqbit 1973: 84.
the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman”.102 Also, Basil of Caesarea [and] Severus of Antioch said,103 “And it is fitting for us to believe in two births of the Son of God”.104 And after being born, He was baptised in His 30th year; having been baptised, He taught for 3 years and 3 months. For the salvation of the world the Divine Son was crucified in the flesh [and] He died.105 As St Peter said, “For Christ was crucified in the flesh for us and for our sins. He was hung on a tree in the flesh”.106 Also, St Paul said, “For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, all the more so, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life”.107 When we say Divinity died in flesh, then heretics, in taking the reading which says, “If you say Divinity died, you will become the killer of the Holy Trinity” [they] are saying that the flesh died but and not the Divinity.108 Saying like that they must be ignoring the subject matter [of this passage]. The scholar, however, said like that to people who say, “[the nature of the relationship between the two natures is that of] dwelling, [Christ has] two natures, He did not assume the soul”. If one says, “How is it that Divinity died in the flesh?” it means separating the flesh and the soul. Emmanuel died like we die, which is a separation of soul and flesh.109 Again, as Severus of Antioch says, “For according to their reading if He did not die our death [so] how could we glorify his death for our salvation?”110 Also, flesh in the Divinity is everlasting, it is immortal, since the Divinity is everlasting. What is called the Divinity is the Son who became incarnated as man in His separate Person. It is this [faith] through which either we receive suffering or through which we enter the Kingdom

103 In singular in the text.
104 Homily of Basil of Caesarea as exposed in Haymanotà abâw, chapter 34, section 5, paragraph 6; cf. ӎӬӬӬӬ 1967: 117. Petros refers also to words ascribed to Severus of Antioch as exposed in Haymanotà abâw, chapter 84, section 1, paragraph 8; cf. ibid. 357.
105 Here Petros aims at showing that there was no “birth” of Christ after the eternal birth from the Father and the temporal birth from the blessed Mary.
106 Reference to 1 Pet 3:18.
107 Rom 5:10.
108 Petros refers to Catholics as this doctrine was ascribed to them by the Ethiopian theologian at that time. See the report of the dispute between Ethiopian scholars and Catholic missionaries proposed by the Ethiopian theologian; cf. ADMASU GÂMBÂRE 1954: 180; TESFAZGHI UQBIT 1973: 65. But this dispute was also reported by Pedro Páez; cf. BOAVIDA – PENNEC – RAMOS 2011: 338.
110 As exposed in Haymanotà abâw, chapter 85, section 3, paragraph 28; cf. ibid. 368.
of Heaven. Oh my children, in her [the faith] guard yourselves from all evil. He who has heard what is written here and firmly stays in this faith, may He make you blessed, saintly, and absolved. However, he who would go astray from this faith: those who say two natures [and] two persons;\textsuperscript{111} those who say He did not take on [His] soul from Mary;\textsuperscript{112} he who says that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Son;\textsuperscript{113} he who says [Christ is the] Son of grace through unction of the Holy Spirit [the three births];\textsuperscript{114} he who says [Christ is the] Son of nature through unction of the Holy Spirit;\textsuperscript{115} he who says that the bread having changed does not become divine flesh and the wine having changed does not become divine blood but is [just] a reminder;\textsuperscript{116} by the authority of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, may he be split by a two-bladed sword, may he be excluded by the mouth of the 12 Apostles, and at the Second Coming may he be kept far from His throne, by the authority of the 318 Orthodox of Nicaea and by the mouth of the 200 Ephesian [fathers] and by the mouth of all the bishops and by my own mouth of me Peetros, may he be cursed. This writing was written in 1896 Year of Mercy in the year of John on the 17\textsuperscript{th} of the month of Miyazya (25 April 1904 A.D.) in Däbrä Gänntät Qäqäma.

\textsuperscript{111} Christological doctrine usually ascribed to diophysites by Ethiopian theologians. Here Peetros refers to the Catholic doctrine even if it should be described as “one Person, two natures” (as described in the Mäzgäbä haymanot; cf. Cerulli 1960: 11 [text], 77 [tr.]). In fact, according to Ethiopian theologians, to separate the two natures of Christ means also to divide the person in two, because they did not believe that there may be in Christ a nature without its own subsistence and personality. So, according to them, to accept two natures of Christ would mean recognizing two natures with two wills in contradiction with each other; cf. Ayele Teklehaymanot n.d.: 253; Bandres 2003: 27; see also the letter of Diyonasyos to Sányos in Haymanotà abäwè, chapter 99; cf. \textit{yr.ṣytə ‡ ኪሬ} 1967: 438–444.

\textsuperscript{112} It is a reference to the dispute with Catholic concerning the origin of the soul of Christ; cf. Cohen 2009: 136–140. It is also possible that Peetros targets all those who deny the Theotökos doctrine, namely that of Mary as \textit{mätyr} : ኪሬ (“begetter of God”), meaning Protestants.

\textsuperscript{113} It is a reference to the dispute with the Catholics concerning the Filioque doctrine; cf. Cohen 2009: 133–136. King Gälädewos (1540–1559) have already contested it in his letter to the Catholics; cf. Ullendorff 1987: 166 (text), 170 (tr.). The proceeding of the Holy Spirit from the Father is also explained in the Mäzgäbä haymanot and in the Mäṣbētä lbbäna; cf. Cerulli 1960: 7f. (text), 73f. (tr.); 140 (text), 165 (tr.).

\textsuperscript{114} Peetros refers to followers of the Säggä lôg movement; cf. Getatchew Haile 1990: 27 (text), 25 (tr.).

\textsuperscript{115} Peetros refers to the followers of the Qob’at movement; cf. ibid. 29–34 (text), 26–31 (tr.).

\textsuperscript{116} Peetros may refer to those who refute the transubstantiation, meaning the Protestants.
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Summary

In November–December 2012, the team of the Ethio-SpaRe project found a letter written by the Coptic Metropolitan Petros (1881–1917) in 1904. The letter was copied into one of the books housed in the Qäddät Maryam monastery in Qäqämä. It deals with the Trinitarian and Christological doctrines and is addressed to the clergy of Tagray. Because of its historical significance, the present article aims at editing and commenting this document.