

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Exploring Christological Controversies in the Gondarine Period: The Significance of Amba Ćara Council and the Role of Tāwahədo and Qəbat Monastic Clergies, 1622-1854

*Bitwoded Admasu*¹; *Teferi Mekonnen (Ph.D.)*² & *Sisay Sahile (Ph.D.)*³

Abstract

This paper attempted to explore the nature of religious controversy among Tāwahədo, Şäggöčč, and Qəbatočč. It also tried to figure out its far reaching consequences on the state politics in the mid nineteenth century. Although religious controversy within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was appeared following the advent of Catholic missionaries in the early sixteenth century, the issue was not agenda during the first fourteen years of the episcopacy of Abunä Sälama III who was said to have deeply affected by theological disputes. The researcher used qualitative research methodology and consulted both primary and secondary sources. The findings of the research revealed that the empowerment of the metropolitan's authority over the Ethiopian Orthodox Tāwahədo Church by Emperor Tewodros II at the council of Amba Ćara led to the foundation stone for the termination of the factions which has great implication for the unity of the state. This council became a vital launching spring board for the Boru Meda synod that was held in 1878. Since the defeat of the various war lords silenced the religious factions that considerably enriched Sälamas space for action. Therefore, the pattern of relations which was established between Abunä Sälama III and Tewodros II at the council of Amba Ćara proved a guideline principle for succeeding rulers of Ethiopia.

Keywords: Ethiopian Orthodox Church; Tāwahədo, Şäggöčč; Qəbatočč; Karočč; Amba Ćara

Introduction

Religion and politics have been interwoven together for long times in most parts of the global community. In Ethiopian history, as in many countries of the world, religion and politics have been strongly intertwined together. This is due to the country's historical origins of adopting Orthodox Christianity as its state religion since the fourth century. This bilateral statehood establishment created a strong connection between Orthodox religious institutions and the governing structures, which influenced social, cultural,

1 Associate Professor of Global Studies, University of Gondar

E-mail: bitwodedadmasu@gmail.com,

2 Associate Professor of History, Director of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University (e-mail: teferim8@gmail.com

3 Assistant Professor of Sociology, University of Gondar (e-mail: sisaysahle@gmail.com



This journal is licensed under a creative common Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0. It is accredited to the University of Gondar, College of Social Sciences and Humanities.

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/erjssh.v10i2.7>

and political dynamics throughout the centuries (Tadesse, 1972:22-23). However, this strong combination between Orthodox religions and politics in the state administration was highly frustrated when the Jesuit Catholic missionaries tried to convert Orthodox Christian people. Jesuit missionaries worked hard for the conversion of the orthodox people to Catholicism from 1555 to 1633 by using the royal court as a politico-religious strategy instrument. The conversion was run from top to down. This was done nearly for fifty years without explicit changes observed by the combination of two remarkable men of the missionary Pedro Paez and Emperor Susānyos (r.1607-1632) which led to a profound political crisis (Crummey, 1972:7). From at least the early 1610s until his death, Paez believed to have become a close adviser to Emperor Susānyos, and he took part in different important political decisions (Bec RASO XI, 236, 376). As a result, Emperor Susānyos drove a more complete form of absolutism, as a result of which Latinization sought to eradicate the country's distinctive orthodox Christian customs (Crummey, 1972:7). This resulted in a revolution on politics and religion simultaneously. Hence, over ten years of continuous bloody civil war took place which led to Susānyos's capitulation in 1632, and to the collapse of Catholic enterprise. As a consequence, the Jesuit missionaries were expelled from Ethiopia and their attempt to convert the orthodox people of Ethiopia to Catholicism had also failed (Merid, and Girma, 1964:103). However, they left a legacy of theological controversy behind within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. It may be argued that initially the theological debate was mostly restricted in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and it was solely the responsibility of the clergy to handle it. But, later on, the doctrinal dispute went from the Church to the royal court as a result of the latter's involvement. Because of this, the royal monarchs were more concerned with religious issues than political concerns. A sustained challenge of the significant periods in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's history was the middle of the nineteenth century, when a series of Christological controversies erupted that had tremendous impacts on the balance of power between the Ethiopian monarchy and the Orthodox Church. These controversies centered on questions on the nature of Christ and they led to the bitter disputes between different factions within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

Methodology

The research employs a qualitative study which is based on a careful examination of both primary and secondary sources. Pertinent published and unpublished works have been consulted, cross-checked and reinterpreted. In addition, several evidences from the Abbots of relevant monastic communities have been interviewed and the oral information they provided has been critically examined.

Religious Synods Prior to the Council of Amba Āara: Uncovering Christological Controversies and the vital Role of *Tāwahādo* and *Qābat* Monastic Clergies

The Christological debate most feasibly arose as a result of the Orthodox Church encounter against Catholic dogma in the early 1620s was intensified in nineteenth century too. In the first case, the Jesuits were a starting factor for the controversy. After the Jesuits were expelled, the controversy resurfaced again, and the ecclesiastical community became entangled in internal disputes and conflicts (Berry B. La Verle, 1976:11). When Susānyos was engaged in a campaign to defend Goḡḡam and Ennarya from the Oromo raids, two groups of monks came to him to ask for arbitration in a *Tāwahādo* and *Qābat* dispute (Guidi, 1900: 11). At the meantime, the official verdict was postponed until the completion of the military campaign. In 1622 Emperor Susānyos held the council to resolve the conflict and a synod took place in Fogāra (Pereira, 1892:217-218). During this time, the *Tāwahādo* doctrine representatives were *Abba Zādāngəl* and *Abba Kəflä Krəstos* whereas the *Qābat* theologian were represented by *Abba Fätäləsəllassie*, *Abba Askalä* from Atəkāna, *Abba Ləbso* from Gongi, *Abba Bätəro*, and *Abba Ēstifanos*(Pereira,1892.:232).

The chronicle explained their position as follows: ወቦ፡ እለ፡ ይቤሉ፡ ተዋህዶተ፡ መለኮቱ፡ ለእግዚእን፡ ወመድኅኒን፡ እየሱስ፡ ክርስቶስ፡ ኮኖ፡ ሕዋንተ፡ ቅብዓት፡ ለሥጋሁ፡ ወካልኦን፡ ይቤሉ፡ ከብ፡ ቀባዒ፡ ወልድ፡ ተቀባዒ፡ መንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ቅብሶ(Pereira,1892:232-233). ‘There were some who said that the Union of the divinity of the Son Himself became Unction for the flesh of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ while others affirmed that the Father Anointer the Son Anointed and the Holy Spirit Unction.’ Susānyos officially endorsed *Qābat* and he ordered physical punishment against *abba Kəfle Krəstos* who refused to obey for *Qābat* doctrine (EMML 6285, fol. 92r. (tr. Getatchew, 1990: vii n. 3). *Azzaž Zādāngəl*, the other main representative of *Tāwahādo*, was barred from teaching his doctrine (Pereira, pp, 237-238). During the reign of Emperor Fasilādās who said to have pursued a steady policy of toleration and conciliation, two councils were held at Aringo ‘በአሪንጎ፡ ወገብረ፡ ጉባዔ፡ በእንተ፡ ነገረ፡ ቅብዓት’, ‘In Aringo an assembly was held on the issue of Unction’ (Perruchon, 1897:24). The first was said to have held on 23 June 1655. According to a “short chronicle”, it was convened at *Rača* (Ibid, 1897:24) and the Emperor subscribed to *Qābat* a verdict apparently supported by the Metropolitan Mika’el IV who anathematized anyone who is deviating from the doctrine (Getatchew, 1990:34-35). The second assembly was held in the year 1667 (BassÉt I, 347; Beg Cron 50-51). The controversy between Addam Zä’ānfraz, who was representing the *Tāwahādo* faction, and Zä’lyāsus, who was advocating for the *Qābat* adherents was marked by intense disagreement (Guidi, 1893:599-600). The victory of the *Tāwahādo* faction over the *Qābat* can be attributed to political factors, including the rebellion of Lasta, an area which was sympathetic to *Tāwahādo* but who were willing to protect persecuted Catholics. Perhaps,

Emperor Fasilädäs might have been politically vulnerable and he pursued a compromise that negatively impacted the followers of *Qəbat* (Beg Cron, 52). In the same way, the Chronicle of Emperor Yohannəs I registered several meetings which debated the issue of the anointing (Guidi lohan, 1893:23). A synod was also said to have held in Gondär in 1681. In this council of 1681 the *Qəbat* were represented by *abba* Akalä Krəstos, and the *Təwahədo* were represented by *abba* Niqolawos. At the end of the debate, the *Qəbat* lost, and Akalä Krəstos was excommunicated (EAe, 2010, Vol. IV, 267b-270a). Likewise, Emperor Iyasu I held a council in 1687 and it seemed that the *Qəbats* were again condemned (Tedros Abraha, EAeIV, 2010: 267b-270a). In an attempt to reconcile the parties, the Emperor convened another gathering in Yəbaba in 1688. The *Təwahədo* were represented by *abba* Betä Krəstos and *abba* Wäldä Krəstos and they won the dispute. On the other hand, the *Qəbat* were represented by *abba* Täbdan and *abba* Qozmos but they refused to submit, and they were condemned (Beg Cron 57-58). Thereafter, the *Qəbat* followers were forced to be exiled. Similarly, in April 1697, Emperor Iyasu I presided over another council, and the *Qəbat* *abba* Wäldä Tənsa'e and his brother *abba* Tämärtä were also condemned. However, in 1699, a conflict arose between *abba* Betä Krəstos and the *Qəbat* *abba* Arkä Dəngəl, resulting in the latter's excommunication (BegCron 74-75). It seemed that one of the challenges the reign of Iyasu I faced was the incidence of violence against *Qəbat* followers. As a result of this, it is believed that probably the embittered *Qəbatoč* adherents may have involved in his assassination (Tedros Abraha, 'Qəbat' EAeIV, 2010:267b-270a). In the same recurring fashion, the maltreatment of the *Qəbat* by Emperor Täklä Haymanot, at the commencement of his reign, may have played a role in his assassination (BegCron 87). This is because, following the council held in March 1707, the *Qəbat* leaders were condemned and they were imprisoned against their expectations (Ibid). On the other hand, the reign of Emperor Tewäflos brought a change which inclined in the *Qəbat's* favour. This is because of the evident that after his accession to the throne he made binding the formula በቅብዓት፡ ወልድ፡ ባሕርይ 'Bäqəbat wäldä *baħrəy*' a politico-religious decision which was aimed at winning over the allegiance of Goğğam (BegCron 90-91). This favoring situation to *Qəbat* remained in the following years, especially during the reign of Dawit III, who was overtly against the monks of Däbrä Libanos and who had officially proclaimed the *Qəbat* formula in late March 1720 (Beg Cron, 101). On the contrary, the Däbrä Libanos monastic communities were supported by Metropolitan Krəstodolu III, but at the time the monastic community suffered a great losses as a result of a monarchal led an Oromo contingent attack that claimed the lives of numerous educated monks, including *abba* Niqolawos (BegCron 102; Guidi, 1900: 20). The Council at *Kayla Meda* in Gondär, which occurred from October 1 to 5, 1763, marked a crucial turning point in the Christological controversies (Guidi, 1900, 10-25). During this period, the *Qəbat* theologians in Goğğam and the *Təwahədo* of Azäzo joined forces to counter a splinter faction (Guilyoas, 1900:198). The transition of the debate towards the question of the "births" of the Son resulted in the diminishing

significance of the *Qəbat* faction which caused it to cease being the central focus of the discussions.

The Arrival of *Abunä Sälama III* in Ethiopia in 1841 and the Dynamics of the Doctrinal Controversy

Like his predecessors, the arrival of *Abunä Sälama III* in Ethiopia in 1841 was characterized by the declining position of the authority of Egyptian bishops because of the internal Christological controversy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. When the *Abunä* arrived in Ethiopia in the last month of 1841 he was escorted to *ras Wəbe's* camp and soon won over by the party of the two births of Christ 'ወልድ፡ ቅብዕ', '*Wäld Qəb'*(Abir, 1968:111). The long and troubled career of *Abunä Sälama* continued up to 1867(Guidi,1899-1900:6-7; Crummey, 2004:5-17). The consistent decline in importance of the authority of Egyptian bishops was also parallel with the same decline in the power of the central monarchy during the Era of Princes. As the name suggests, the Era of Princes was a time when the various regions considered themselves as the kingdoms more or less independent. Throughout this period which lasted roughly from 1769 to 1855, powers were shared by the various regional lords. Instead of aspiring for central prominence by defeating their rivals in a national synod, they preferred to align themselves with the regional powers. Accordingly, the Unctionists or the *Qəbat* theologians were attributed with *Däbräwärq* monastery in eastern *Goḡḡam*. On the other hand, those who believed in the Son by Grace or *Şägga Ləḡḡ* was attributed with *Şäwa*, while the *Täwahədo* or Unionists were strong in *Gondar* (Crummey, 2000:144-161; Abir, 1970:27).

The doctrine of the three births believed to have reached *Şäwa* in the reign of *Sahile Selassie's* grandfather *Asfa Wossen* in the second half of the eighteenth century (Crummey, 1972:4) Because of the sustained and unsettled challenges of the doctrinal controversy, the careers of *Abunä Qerlos* and *Abunä Sälama* were the same as their seventeenth-century predecessors and the prevailing trend of aligning with factional monastic leaders suggested that the most ambitious regional lords could secure the support of bishops. This desire for episcopal support from regional lords was inspired by the perceived advantages of legitimacy, increased power, and by the ability to intimidate rivals (Abir, 1968:110). As a result, for the bishops to operate under these circumstances often meant they had to try to please everyone that often ended up by disappointing everyone at a huge personal risk instead.

The following observation by Dimotheos, a late nineteenth century traveler to Ethiopia who was acquainted with the political and religious life of the country, aptly summarizes the situation as follows:

‘Le Pre’lat copte n’a pas plus tôt touché le pays du Thégrî, que ses ruses habitants s’empresent de répandre dans les pays lointains du leur, que le novels Abouna appartient a’ leur parti, c’est-a’-dire, qu’il professe comme eux le Fils de Dieu Onction, et aussitot tous les pays s’agitent et se mettent en trouble. (Dimotheos 1871, p.63 Translated with www.DeepL.com/Translator (Free version) (revised).

The Coptic prelate has not touched the country of Tigre, that its cunning inhabitants hasten to spread in the distant territories of theirs, that the new Abunä belonged to their party, that is to say, that he professed like them the Son of God Anointed, [the Son Unction] and at once the whole country would be agitated, putting the unfortunate prelate in trouble (www.DeepL.com/Translator (Free version) (revised)

According to Dimotheos *Abunä Sälama III*’s first province he had to traverse on his way to Gondar was Tigray, the *Tāwahādo (Karra)* stronghold. It seemed that the adherents of *Tāwahādo* had him confess their teaching before letting him proceed to Gondar. For instance, *Abunä Sälama* had to traverse Tigray on his way to Gondar to assume the bishopric position in 1842(Guidi, 1889-1900:6-7; Crummey and Getatchew, 2004:5-17). In fact, it was by *Däğğazmač* Wube, the governor of Tigray and Semen at the time, that the coming of *Sälama* was facilitated. While he was in Wube’s court, *Sälama* had, therefore, to confess on one of the factions of the *Karra* doctrine (Crummey, 1972:85). Unfortunately, *Sälama III* had to make the unavoidable trip to Gondar. However, while he was on his way, the news of *Sälama*’s confession of *Karra*, while he was hosted by Wube, had already known to Gondar before him (Ibid, 1972:85). With little wonder, therefore, the adherents of *Şägga läğğočč* and *Qəbatočč* awaited *Sälama*’s arrival in Gondar with a rather unpleasant surprise because after *Abunä Sälama III* entered Gondar, he believed to have confessed the Son is Unction ‘**ወልድ፡ቅብዕ**’, ‘*Wäld Qəb*’. As consequence the clergy of Gondar expelled him back to Tigray.

**ያን፡ ጊዜ፡ በአቡነ፡ ሰላማ፡ ካህናት፡ ሁሉ፡ ተነሱባቸዉ፡
በሃይማኖት፡ ሶስት፡ ልደት፡ የጸጋ፡ ልጅ፡ በተዋህዶ፡
ከበረ፡ የሚሉ፡ አቡነ፡ ሰላማም፡ የአብ፡ ልጅ፡ የማሪያም፡
ልጅ፡ በተዋህዶ፡ ከበረ፡ በሉ፡ ባሉ፡ ጊዜ፡ የአዘዞና፡ የሸዋ፡
መነኮሳት፡ ከሽዎች፡ ሁሉ፡ መንኮሳት፡ ጋር፡ አንድነት፡
ሆነዉ፡ ተቃወሙ (Littmann E., 1902:4)**

At that time, the clerics opposed Abunä Sälama on the

basis of religion. They believed that 'the Son by Grace honored by Tāwahādo [union] was the correct stance. However, when Abunä Sälama proposed them to say 'the Son of the Father and the Son of Mary honored by Union, 'the monks of Azāzo and Šāwa, along with many other monks, opposed

It is fascinating to note that *Abunä* Markos, who was also involved in a doctrinal conflict during the early seventeenth century, had similar challenge to *Abunä* Sälama's narrative. This parallelism is crucial because it brings attention to the difficult situation of Egyptian bishops within the Ethiopian Church experienced due to their constant involvement in issues of doctrinal controversy during this time. This period was characterized by political and religious instability, which was marked by power struggles among the different factions of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and among the regional princes. The Christological doctrine of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church had had a significant impact on both the religious and political life of Ethiopia throughout its history.

The Persistent Theological Controversies, the End of the Era of Princes and the Countenance of the Metropolitan *Abunä* Sälama III

The persistent theological controversies, the End of the Era of Princes and the countenance of the Metropolitan *Abunä* Sälama were characterized by dramatic historical events. First of all, *Abunä* Sälama III was the 107th metropolitan of the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tāwahādo* Church from 1841 to 1868 (Guidi, 1899:14). According to Crummey, his birth date was not exactly known, however, given his consecration by Buṭrus VII, Patriarch of Alexandria, at the exceptionally young age of twenty-one, he must have been born ca. 1820 (Crummey, 1972:86). The first fourteen years of *Abunä* Sälama episcopacy occurred during the Era of Princes, a period of conflict, in which doctrinally inspired sectarianism in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church played an important role (Crummey, 'Sälama', *EAE*, IV, 2010:489b-490b). *Abunä* Sälama became deeply confused in the theological controversies among the advocates of '*Wäld qāb*' *Tāwahādo* (*Karra*), *Qabat*, and Son through Grace (*Yäšägga lağ*). However, with the rise of *Däggazmač* Kassa Hailu the future Emperor Tewodros II, the controversy resolved, and the general situation of the country improved. *Abunä* Sälama's arrival in Ethiopia was the result of a diplomatic mission sent by *Däggazmač* Wube Haylä Maryam, the dominant political figure in northern Ethiopia, who, immediately thereafter, went to war against *Ras* Ali Alula, using *Abunä* Sälama to legitimize his power (Crummey, 1972:87). After Wäbe was defeated at the Battle of Däbrä Tabor in February 1842, *Ras* Ali began to support *Abunä* Sälama III. After settling in Gondär, he quickly ran into a theological disagreement with *Yäšägga lağgočč* adherents who were led by *äččäge*

Maḥāšāntu, who had the backing of *nəguś Śāhale Səllase* from Šāwa (Crummey, 1972:87). Together with the Azāzo Täklä Haymanot and the Däbrä Libanos of Šāwa, they challenged Sälama's teachings through their network and through their mutual adherence to monastic regulations. Despite attempts to disprove this school's beliefs, and to reinstate strict Alexandrian doctrine, these initiatives failed. Finally, in June 1846, the Däbrä Tabor authorities with the support of Šāwa clerics drove the *Abunä* from Gondär (Ibid). He spent the next eight years in Tägray in an uneasy relationship with *Däggazmač Wube*, who resisted *Abunä Sälama's* attempts to undermine *Wəbe's* protection for Roman Catholic Lazarist missionaries, whom Wube valued as means of connection to France (Crummey, 1972). After *Śāhale Śəllase* passed away in 1849, *Abunä Sälama, Ras Ali*, and the new king of Šāwa *Haile Mäläkot* came to an understanding and agreement. However, Sälama did not return to Gondär until June 1854, when he was brought back by *Däggazmač Kassa*, who restored his authority, and who organized a religious council at *Amba Čara*, near Gondär. This council condemned the *Şägga* doctrine, and it reconfirmed the Alexandrian teaching of *Karra*. Following this, *Däggazmač Kassa* acknowledged the metropolitan's precedence over the *əččäge*, and he granted the latter control of the office of *liqä kahənat*, along with extensive authority over the clergy. He also adopted the title of *nəguś* for himself and he remarried his wife in a legally valid Church ceremony. This was done as part of a strategy to revive what was believed to be the Solomonic model of royalty, which required intimate ties between the Church and the state and the unity of the Church as a necessary component. The procedure was completed when *Abunä Sälama* crowned *Däggazmač Kassa* as *nəguśä nəgəšt* *Tewodros II* on February 11, 1855 (Crummey, 1972). A strong partnership between Church and state proved elusive in the short term. The very same person *Abunä Sälama III* whom Wube had brought from Alexandria, crowned *Kassa* as *Tewodros II King of Kings of Ethiopia* on 11, February 1855 (Bahru, 1991:30). Henceforth, the pattern of relations which was established between *Abunä Sälama* and *Tewodros* at the beginning of *Tewodros's* reign proved normative for succeeding rulers of Ethiopia. However, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church continued to host strong disputes and confrontations about Christology up to the middle of the nineteenth century. Even though the controversy was rooted since the arrival of the Jesuits, it was heightened in the middle of the nineteenth century. These tensions eventually spilled over state politics. Views on the character of Christ varied among Church factions, and these variations were strongly related to political allegiances they caused power battles within the Ethiopian monarchy. This exacerbated political unpredictability and volatility, which had detrimental effects on the nation's social and economic advancement.

Exploring the Complexities of the Christological Controversies: The Core of the Disputants in the Era of Princes

The analysis of the Christological controversies in Ethiopia from the early seventeenth century to 1854 revealed a complex interplay between religion and politics, with far reaching impacts on power dynamics on the country. The controversies centered on questions of the nature of Christ, and they led to brutal disputes among different factions within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. These debates spilled over into the political realm, contributing to political instability and social fragmentation. The controversies were closely linked to political allegiances and power struggles within the Ethiopian monarchy. As clearly indicated by Qes Azänä at Däbräwärq Maryam monastery, each of the religious factionists' aspired to safeguard their theological and political interests by putting the Emperors in a political dilemma.

አንደኛው የመነኮስ ስብስብ ይመጣና ወልድ ቅብዕ ብለህ ካመንህ ሽህ ዓመት ትነግሳለህ ካባ ይሸለማል። ሌላኛው የመነኮስ ስብስብ ደግሞ መንፈስ ቅዱስ ቅብዕ ብለህ ካመንህ ሽህ ዓመት ትነግሳለህ ይላል። ፀጋዉም በተመሳሳይ በፀጋ መንፈስ ቅዱስ ብለህ ካመንህ ሽህ ዓመት ትነግሳለህ ካባ ይሸለማል። በዚህ ሁኔታ ነገሥታት ወደ አንዱ ሲያጋድሉና አቋም ሲይዙ ሁከትና አመፅ ይከተላል። ሁከቱን ለማሰገድ ነገሥታት ጉባዔ ያዘጋጁሉ። (Qes Alämnäw Azänä, 2023)

‘One of the monastic groups came and said if you believe in the ‘Son Unction’ you [the monarch] would rule a thousand years and prized him Kabba[majestic gear]; the other monastic groups claimed if you say ‘the Holy Spirit Unction’ you would reign a thousand year. Similarly, the Şägga also exclaimed if you say the ‘Son Glorified through Grace’ you would reign a thousand year and prized them with majestic gear. In this situation, when the monarchs tried to take sides with any one of the factions, it would result in social and political instability. To avoid the violence the monarchs summoned a council.’

As a consequence, these factions within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church such as *Qəbat*, *Təwahədo*, and *Şägga* factions were engaged into far-reaching disputes which affected both the religious and political life of the country. It challenged not only the unity and authority of the Church itself but it also gravely affected the unity of the state. In fact, it was an Era of Christological controversy which was a time marked by religious disputes and conflicts. It lasted for more than eighty-six years and it was characterized by civil

wars among provincial lords of the north-central region of Bägemdär, Tigre and Goğğam. These lords aspired to collect taxes, distribute land grants, bestow military and civil titles, negotiate trade and foreign affairs, and became the supreme judges of verdicts. However, none of the competing princes proclaimed themselves as Emperors to fulfill a claim of Solomon descent despite their military prowess (Prouty Rosenfeld Chris, 1979:63). On the other hand, they also tend to use the faction party as a source of power and as an instrument of legitimacy. The Qəbat, which literally means ‘an ointment’, from Gə‘əz *qəb’at* is, in Ethiopia, a designation for Christological doctrine which has been existed from the early seventeenth century, is also known as መንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ቅብዕ. (*Mänfäs qəddus qəb’*, ‘the Holy Spirit is the ointment’, an abridgement of the formula “The Father is the anointer, the Son the anointed and the Holy Spirit the ointment” (Getatchew, 1990: 34). በቅብት፡ ወልድ፡ ባሕርይ. (*Bäqəbat wäldä baḥrəy*, ‘Son of nature by Unction’), whereas the *Tāwahədo* (*Karra*) maintained and argue that “the Son is the anointer, the anointed, and the Ointment”. According to Getatchew, *Qəbats* who called themselves as ሃይማኖት፡ መሰረተኛ (*Haymanot mäsihawit*, ‘Messianic [i.e. Christian] faith’, were not a mere Christological creed, because they were part of Ethiopian political life for nearly three centuries (Getatchew, 1990:34). They are said to have had a regional base in eastern Goğğam, mainly in Däbrä Wärq monastery, but it also spread as far as Hamasen (AbbSejour vol. 1, 218). Surprisingly, both the *Tāwahədo* and the *Qəbat* followers condemn the Jews, Arius, Macedonius, Nestorius, Leo, the Council of Chalcedon, and those who maintained the believe that Son by Grace (Getatchew, 1990:3-4). The *Qəbatočč* who are the adherents of the Unction doctrine were often associated with the house of *Abunä Ewoštaṭewos* (Guidi Iohan, 47-63; Raineri, 1983:477-499; Conti Rossini, 1925:472). However, the main issue of *Ewoštaṭewos* was the observant of Sabbath. In fact, it seemed that the hostility between *Qəbat* and the Däbrä Libanos based *Tāwahədo* was part of the continuation of the old rivalry and quest for supremacy between the two monastic families. The core of the dispute among the opposing Christology’s was the role of the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation of the Son (Tedros Abraha, ‘*Qəbat*’ EAeIV, 2010,267b-270a). The *Qəbat* attested their motto በቅብት፡ ክብር (*Bäqəbat Käbbärä*, which means ‘He was honored by the Unction’), which is against በተዋሕዶ፡ ክብር (*Bätāwahədo Käbbärä*, which is also means ‘He was Glorified by the Union’). Like *Tāwahədo*, *Qəbat* believed in *Hulätt lədät*, which means the “two births” of Christ (EAe, IV, 2010, 267b-270a). Both doctrines defended their Christological tenets invoking Biblical witnesses from the Old and New Testaments. Given the same text, it may result in contrasting interpretations. The contrasting interpretations and perspectives on anointing contribute to the complexity and divergence among the factionists’. As a consequence, the period from the early seventeenth century to the late nineteenth century was an era of protracted Christological controversy in the long history of the Ethiopian Church. The main subject of the debate was the meaning and relevance of the role of the Unction on Christ’s humanity and divinity and the relation between these two aspects and the role it plays in salvation.

The Role of Amba Čara Council in Expanding the Interplay between Church and State: Investigating the Influence of Regional Warlords

Amba Čara is a plateau landscape which is situated some 30 km south-east from Gondar. During his rise to power *Däğğazmač* Kassa Haylu (later Emperor Tewodros II) used this place as a base for his campaigns in and around Gondar, such as Dämbəya, Səmen and Wägära (E Ae. vol.I, 291). The Amba Čara Council holds a significant place in the history of Ethiopia, serving as a pivotal role for religious and political transformations during the closing years of the Era of Christological controversy. To the ever-increasing military capability and independence of the provincial warlords, the Monarchs became puppets of powerful nobles (Hiroki Ishikawa, 2002:215). However, the warlords' swelled military powers were curtailed by *Däğğazmač* Kassa the future Emperor Tewodros II who eventually facilitated the council of Amba Čara to be convened. Amba Čara council witnessed the convergence of religion and politics, which led to far-reaching effects on the country's landscape (Crummey and Getatchew, 2004:15). It is important to note that *Däğğazmač* Kassa played a pivotal role in shaping the unity of the country in the Amba Čara Council in 1854. Considering his deep and abiding religious curiosity, the council brought different factions together within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, including the *Qəbat* and *Şägga* factions, to address pressing religious and political matters (Crummey, 1972:143). During this council, *Däğğazmač* Kassa exerted his influence and authority to ensure the recognition of *Abunä* Sälama III as the leader of the Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahədo Church. He granted *Abunä* Salama III a higher status than the eččäge and entrusted him with the responsibility of overseeing the office of '*liqä Kahənat*', which entailed the general supervision of the clergy (Crummey, 1978:427-442).

On the other hand, the process of forcing factions to recognize *Abunä* Selama III as the leader encountered resistance and dissent among religious factions who possessed conflicting views or rivalries. However, Emperor Tewodros II's military power and political determination enabled him to assert his influence and to shape the outcome of the council in favor of unity. According to Littmann's account it is reported that a dispute arose between eččäge Wäldä Maryam, the clergy of Gondar, and Metropolitan *Abunä* Sälama regarding the ownership of the high priest office known as '*liqä Kahənat*' (Littmann Enno, 1902:2). The disagreement escalated to the point where *Däğğazmač* Kassa called for a conference to address the issue. During the conference, *Däğğazmač* Kassa rendered a judgment that favored *Abunä* Sälama and he dismissed the claim of eččäge Wäldä Maryam and the clergy of Gondar. The decision was determined based on the *Fətha Nägəst*, which upheld Metropolitan Sälama's authority over the high priest office. In that case, the proclamation cited evidence from the *Fətha Nägəst*, solidifying Metropolitan Sälama's rightful ownership of the high priest office (Littmann Enno, 1902:3). Following the verdict, *Däğğazmač* Kassa made a proclamation affirming the victory of Metropolitan

Sälama and the defeat of *eččäge* Wäldä Maryam by forcing the *Qəbat* and *Şägga* factions to accept the leadership of *Abunä* Selama III, Emperor Tewodros II aimed to establish a unified religious authority that could potentially strengthen his own political legitimacy and his centralized power within the country (Donald Crummey and Getatchew, 2004). The *Qəbat* and *Şägga* factions represented differing perspectives and power which base within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Their recognition of *Abunä* Selama III as the leader under Emperor Tewodros II's influence signaled a degree of consensus and unity among these factions, thereby consolidating the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's hierarchy and providing a sense of cohesion. Emperor Tewodros II's actions during the Amba Čara Council were instrumental in paving the way for the unity of Ethiopia. By compelling the *Qəbat* and *Şägga* factions to recognize *Abuna* Selama III as the leader of the Ethiopian Orthodox *Təwahedo* Church, he sought to consolidate religious authority, foster national unity, and strengthen his own political legitimacy. The council's outcome reflected the complex interplay between religion and politics during this period and it had significant implications for Ethiopia's future trajectory. The Amba Čara Council stands as a testament to the intricate interplay between religion and politics in Ethiopia during the nineteenth century. It served as a reminder of how religious institutions and political power can intersect and influence one another, shaping the course of a nation's history. The unity which was achieved through Amba Čara synod laid the foundation for subsequent religious and political developments. For instance, the Amba Čara council served as a momentous milestone and as a launching pad for the eventual synod of Borumeda. It provided a unique opportunity for the factions who were involved in controversy to come together and to engage in negotiations which was intended at resolving long-standing doctrinal controversies that had persisted for over two centuries. By fostering dialogue, negotiation, and compromise, the Amba Čara council contributed to the gradual resolution of long-standing doctrinal controversies within the Ethiopian Orthodox *Təwahedo* Church. It laid the groundwork for the future synod initiatives which were aimed at promoting unity. It ultimately strengthened the interplay between the Church and the state cohesion and it ensured its ability to navigate doctrinal challenges in the future. In general, the Amba Čara council holds a significant place in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's history as a pivotal moment of transformation.

Conclusion

The period from the early seventeenth to the late nineteenth centuries was an era of protracted Christological controversy in the long history of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The main subject of the doctrinal dispute was the meaning and relevance of the Unction on Christ. The controversies which were closely associated with the political allegiances and with power struggles within the Ethiopian monarchy that eventually led to political instability and social unrest. The controversies also had broader implications

for the relationship between religion and politics in Ethiopia, and they raised important questions about the balance of power between the Ethiopian monarchy and the Church. The persistent theological controversies at the end of the Era of Princes and the countenance of the Metropolitan *Abunä Sälama* were a difficult time characterized by risks and uncertainties. Assuming the prolonged and unsettled challenges of the doctrinal controversy, it had kept the relations of the monks and monarchs widen. That hastened to the absence of strong centralized monarchal authority which eventually led to the Era of more Christological controversy. The doctrinal controversy which was resulted from the factions of the 'Union' and 'Unction' theologians that weakened the unity of the state. That also led to a long lasting historical, political and socio-economic impacts on the state. As a result to solve such an extended controversial challenge, the council of Amba Čara was a great launchig pad for the future synod to be successful. For instance, in the later part of 1868 or early 1869, *Däğğazmač* Kassa Mərçča, later known as Emperor Yohannəs IV, issued a proclamation forbidding religious factions and their followers from residing within his domain. Fascinatingly, the council of Boru Meda which was held in May 1878 marked the final official phase of the Christological debate; since the theologians of *Qəbat* and *Şägga* factions were minimally represented and they were given less emphasis for discussions. In that case, it is possible to say that the council of Amba Čara initiated by Emperor Tewodros II proved a guideline principle for succeeding rulers of Ethiopia. The restoration and empowerment of the Metropolitan's authority over the Ethiopian Orthodox factionalists at the council led to the foundation stone that concluded religious factions which had great implication for the unity of the state.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the Ethiopian National Archives and Library Agency, Addis Ababa. Addis Ababa University, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Manuscript section for providing me with an access to valuable primary sources.

Declaration of interest statements

The author declared that this manuscript has no conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this paper. Besides, no funding was received for this research.

References

- Abir Mordechai. (1769-1855) *Ethiopia the Era of the Princes: The Challenge of Islam and the Re-unification of the Christian Empire*, cited by Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., Publishers.
- Alston William. (1998). *History of Philosophy of Religion in Edward Craig*, (ed) Routledge Encyclopedia of philosophy: Questions to Sociobiology, London.
- Ashby, M. (2006). *African Religion: Memphite Theology, Mysteries of Mind mystical Psychology and mental health for Enlightenment and Immortality*, Kindle edition.
- Ayele Abunä Täklä Hayəmanot.(1999). *Miscellanea Aethiopica*. Capuchin Franciscan Institute of Philosophy and Theology Publisher. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Bahru Zewde. (2002). *A History of Modern Ethiopia,1855-1991*. Ohio University Press; Second edition.
- Bruce, James. (1790). *Travels to discover the source of the Nile, in the years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772, and 1773*, II-V London, Edinburgh: J. Ruthven, Conti Rosinni. (1907) *Historia Regis Särşä Dəngəl*
- Caraman Philip. (1985) *The Lost Empire. The Story of the Jesuits in Ethiopia, 1555-1634*, Sidgwick and Jackson Publisher .
- Crummey Donald. (1972). *Priests and Politicians Protestant and Catholic Missionaries in Orthodox Ethiopia*. Oxford. At the Clarendon Press.
- Crummey Donald and Getatchew Haile. (1978). "Doctrines and Authority: Abunä Sälama, 1841-1854" Vol.37 No., pp.5-40 Published by Institute of Ethiopian Studies.
- Crummey Donald. "Orthodoxy and Imperial Reconstruction in Ethiopia 1854-1878", Journal of Theological Studies, New Series, XXIX part Two, pp.427-442.
- Crummey, Donald. (2010). 'Salama', in Siegbert Uhlig and Alessandro Bausi, eds, *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica, IV* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 489b-490b).
- Getatchew Haile.(1982). *Inside the Royal Confinement*, North East African Studies,4,1,St. John's University,19-25 .

- Getatchew Haile.(2004) '*Material for the study of the theology of Qebat*', in G. Goldenberg (ed.). *Ethiopian Studies*' Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Tel-Aviv 14-17 April 1980, 15 Rotterdam -New York, pp. 205-250.
- Getatchew Haile (ed.), (1999). *The Faith of the Uctionists (Haymanot mäsihawit)*. Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium scriptores aethiopici, vol. 91, Peeters, Louvain.
- Girma Beshah and Merid Wolde Aregay .(1964). *The Question of the Union of the Churches in Luso-Ethiopian Relations (1500-1632)*. Lisbon.
- Greenfield Richard. (1965).*Ethiopia: A New Political History*. Pall Mall Publishing Press. London.
- Hiroki Ishikawa. (2002) '*Changes in the Military System during the Gondar Period (1632-1769): Their Influence on the Decline of the Solomonic Dynasty*'Annales d'Ethiopie, vol.XVIII:215-229.
- Kidāna Wald Kəfle (1955). መጽሐፈ ሰዋስው፡ ወግስ፡ ወመዝገብ፡ ቃላት፡ ሐዲስ፡ ንባብ፡ በግእዝ፡ ፍቕድ፡ ባሕርኛ፡፡ (*Maṣḥafa sawāsaw wagəs wamazgaba qālāt ḥaddis. Nəbābu bagə'az fəččaw bāmārannā, 'A book of grammar and verb, and a new dictionary. Reading in Gə'az and translation in Amharic'*) ('Addis 'Ababā: 'Artistik mättamiyā bet).
- Kindeneh Endeg Mihretie. (2004). *The Role of the Qəbatoč in the Christological Controversy within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (1620-1764)*; Addis Ababa University.
- LaVerle Berry, (1976) "*The Solomonic Monarchy at Gondar, 1630-1755: An Institutional Analysis of Kingship in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia*" (PhD Diss, Boston University).
- Littmann Enno.(1902).*The Chronicle of King Theodore of Abyssinia*, New York Charles Scribner's sons, Leipzig Otto Harrassowitz.
- Pankhurst, Richard. (1992). *The Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the State in the Nineteenth Century*. The Journal of African History, 33(2), 261-286.
- Pereira Esteves. (1887). *Historia de Minas, Ademas Sagad, rei de Ethiopia*.

Poncet, Charles Jacques. (1709). *A Voyage to Æthiopia, Made in the Years 1698, 1699, and 1700: Describing Particularly that Famous Empire; as Also the Kingdoms of Dongola, Sennar, Part of Egypt, &c. With the Natural History of those Parts*, London.

ProutyChrisRosenfeld.(1979).*EightEthiopianWomenoftheZemeneMäsafant,1769-1855;* Northeast African Studies, Michigan State University Press.Vol.1,No.2.

Solomon Gebreyes. (2016).*The Chronicle of Emperor Gälawdewos*.

Taddesse Tamrat. (1972). *Church and State in Ethiopia*. Clarendon Press.

Tedros Abraha.(2010).‘Qəbat’ in Siegbert Uhlig and Alessandro Bausi, eds, *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, IV (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 267b-270a.

Ullendorff, Edward. (1968). *The Ethiopians: An Introduction to Country and People*.Oxford University Press.