

# Northern Ethiopian Historiography during the Second Half of the Solomonic Period (1540–1769)

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The Christian kingdom of northern Ethiopia lost almost half its territory to the Oromo during the second half of the 16th century. *The History of the Galla (Zenabu lä-Galla)* written by Baḥrəy in 1593 is the most important work on this Oromo invasion. The chronicle of Šāršä Dəngəl (r. 1563–1597) was contemporaneous with *The History of the Galla* and is one of the royal chronicles that represent the nucleus of the historiography related to this region. The present paper considers the characteristics of historiography in northern Ethiopia during the second half of the Solomonic Period (1540–1769) by examining why Baḥrəy had to defend his writing of *The History of the Galla* and why the authors of the royal chronicles devoted so many pages to the monarchs' military victories.

The following hypotheses are proposed:

1. Baḥrəy wrote *The History of the Galla* to assert that the Oromo frequently defeated the Christian armies because the social institutions and customs of the Oromo were better suited for warfare. On the other hand, intellectuals thought that historical accounts should be written to praise deeds of "good Christians." Therefore, Baḥrəy justified his writing about the history of the Oromo, who were non-Christians, by citing the works of the famous Coptic historian al-Makīn, who had devoted many pages to Muslim history.
2. The author of *The Chronicle of Šāršä Dəngəl* criticized al-Makīn's work and did not describe in detail the damage caused by the Oromo because his purpose was to reveal the miracles of God, which he found in the monarchs' deeds, especially their military successes. The authors of the royal chronicles during the 17th and 18th centuries continued this policy.

The impact of the Oromo incursion was addressed in *The History of the Galla*. However, the impact of these events on historiography was transient. The defense of Christianity continued to be a characteristic of the historiography of northern Ethiopia throughout the second half of the Solomonic Period.

**Key words:** Ethiopia, Amhara, Oromo, Solomonic dynasty, historiography, Christianity

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## INTRODUCTION

Many scholars believe that ethnic migrations were frequent occurrences in the interior of Sub-Saharan Africa and that these migrations influenced the formation of societies in this area. In many cases, the source materials for the ethnic migrations are oral histories that include many legends. The Oromo incursion into the Christian kingdom of northern Ethiopia is a rare case because it can be studied by recourse to several written sources.

The most important source on the Oromo incursion is *The History of the Galla (Zenabu lä-Galla)*,<sup>(1)</sup>



Chernetsov affirmed that *The History of the Galla* stands apart among other contemporary works of Ethiopic literature by virtue of its subject and because it overstepped the traditional limits of the two main literary genres of the time—historiography and hagiography (Chernetsov 1974: 803). It is important to note that Baḥrəy hesitated to write this work, which has been highly esteemed by scholars as an important historical source. Although this attitude of the author offers a key for understanding the historiography of northern Ethiopia, little attention has been given to this point.

*The Chronicle of Śārṣä Dəngəl*, which was written at the same time as *The History of the Galla*, is one of the royal chronicles that form the core of northern Ethiopian historiography and serve as the principal sources for studies of the history of this region. However, the author of *The Chronicle of Śārṣä Dəngəl* did not describe in detail the human damage and territorial loss suffered by the kingdom at the hands of the Oromo; instead, the author discussed the monarchs' military victories, even though he wrote this chronicle at the very time that the Oromo's incursions into the kingdom were at their worst. This approach is suggestive of a characteristic of northern Ethiopian historiography. Although several studies on the royal chronicles (Pankhurst 1967: xii–xv; Chernetsov 1974; 1988; 1988–1989; 1994) have been written, scholars have not addressed why the authors of these chronicles emphasized the monarchy's military successes.

The purpose of this paper was to consider an important aspect of northern Ethiopian historiography by examining why Baḥrəy hesitated to write *The History of the Galla* and why the authors of the royal chronicles devoted this series to the monarchy's military successes during the second half of the Solomonic period (1540–1769).

## 1. PURPOSE OF WRITING *THE HISTORY OF THE GALLA*

### 1.1. *The Oromo Incursion during the 16th Century*

According to Baḥrəy, the Oromo started to attack Bali, which was situated in the south of the Christian kingdom, during the reign of Emperor Ləbnä Dəngəl (r. 1508–1540) (Guidi 1961–1962 I: 223). The Oromo subsequently conquered numerous territories in this kingdom, and information on the *luba* provides important insight into the process of conquest. Baḥrəy explained the *luba* in Chapter 4 as follows:

They (the Oromo) have neither king nor master like other peoples. But they obey the *luba* during 8 years. At the end of 8 years, another *luba* is named, and the former one retires. They do this on each occasion. The word *luba* means “those who are circumcised at the same time. (*Ibid.*, 225)<sup>(2)</sup>

Thus, the Oromo followed a system referred to as *gada*, in which age-grade classes succeeded one another every eight years by assuming military, political, and ritual responsibilities (Beckingham & Huntingford 1954: lxxi, 205–208). Baḥrəy referred to the age-set in power as the *luba*<sup>(3)</sup> and described the history of the nine *lubas* in Chapters 5–18 of his book (Guidi 1961–1962 I: 225–229). Beckingham and Huntingford estimated the periods during which the nine *lubas* ruled by comparing references to these *lubas* with the several events with known dates (Beckingham & Huntingford 1954: 208–210). This paper uses these estimates of the periods during which the nine *lubas* ruled.

According to Baḥrəy, the Oromo started their war on Bali during the period of the Melbaḥ *luba* (1522–1530) and began to attack Fäṭāgar during the period of the Bifole *luba* (1546–1554). The Oromo devastated the Amhara and started their war on Begämədr during the period of the Hərmufa *luba* (1562–1570). They devastated Shoa and started raiding Gojjam during the period of the Robale *luba* (1570–1578). The Oromo started to advance to Dämbya, which was situated to the north of Lake Tana, during the period of the Birmäge *luba* (1578–1586). Damot<sup>(4)</sup> and Shoa were dominated by the Oromo until the period of the Mul'äta *luba* (1586–1594); during this era, many people were killed, and their cattle were plundered. Many inhabitants of the southern regions fled into areas con-

List 1. Monarchs of the Christian Kingdom

|                  |              |
|------------------|--------------|
| Yəkuno Ämlak     | r. 1270–1285 |
| ⋮                |              |
| ‘Amdä Şəyon      | r. 1314–1344 |
| ⋮                |              |
| Zär’ä Ya’qob     | r. 1434–1468 |
| ⋮                |              |
| Ləbnä Dəngəl     | r. 1508–1540 |
| Gälawdewos       | r. 1540–1559 |
| Minas            | r. 1559–1563 |
| Şärşä Dəngəl     | r. 1563–1597 |
| Ya’qob           | r. 1597–1603 |
| Zädəngəl         | r. 1603–1604 |
| Ya’qob           | r. 1604–1607 |
| Susnəyos         | r. 1607–1632 |
| Fasilädäs        | r. 1632–1667 |
| Yohännəs I       | r. 1667–1682 |
| Iyasu I          | r. 1682–1706 |
| Täklä Haymanot I | r. 1706–1708 |
| Tewoflos         | r. 1708–1711 |
| Yostos           | r. 1711–1716 |
| Dawit III        | r. 1716–1721 |
| Bäkaffa          | r. 1721–1730 |
| Iyasu II         | r. 1730–1755 |
| Iyo’äs           | r. 1755–1769 |

List 2. The *luba* from 1522 to 1594

|         |           |
|---------|-----------|
| Melbaḥ  | 1522–1530 |
| Mudäna  | 1530–1538 |
| Kilole  | 1538–1546 |
| Bifole  | 1546–1554 |
| Məsle   | 1554–1562 |
| Ḥärmufa | 1562–1570 |
| Robale  | 1570–1578 |
| Birmäge | 1578–1586 |
| Mul’äta | 1586–1594 |

Source: Beckingham & Huntingford 1954: 208–210.

trolled by the Christians. Baḥrəy was one of these refugees; he had lost the fortune he had amassed in his homeland as a result of the Oromo’s attacks (Guidi 1961–1962 I: 224).

The Jesuits, who stayed in northern Ethiopia during the first half of the 17th century, noted the reduction in the size of the kingdom as a result of the Oromo’s incursions during the second half of the 16th century. M. de Almeida, a Portuguese Jesuit, stated that “30 kingdoms” and “17 provinces, or regions smaller than a country”<sup>(5)</sup> were ruled by the Emperors before the Oromo invasion, but only “17 kingdoms” and “9 provinces” were ruled by Susnəyos (r. 1607–1632). He also noted that the kingdom had been reduced by half because of the Oromo incursions (Beccari 1969 V: 9, 11).

## 2. *The Defense of Baḥrəy*

Why did Baḥrəy write *The History of the Galla*? We will begin by considering the first passage of this work: “I have begun to write the history of the Galla in order to make known the number of their groups, their eagerness to kill people, and the brutality of their manners” (Guidi 1961–1962 I: 223).

Baḥrəy explained in detail the genealogy and the organization of groups within Oromo society in Chapters 1, 3, and 4 of *The History of the Galla* (*Ibid.*, 223–225); these explanations included “the number of their groups.” From Chapter 4 to Chapter 18, Baḥrəy described the wars that had occurred between the Christians and the Oromo until 1593, which was when he wrote *The History of*



*the Galla*. He stated that the Oromo killed many Christians, and he described the Oromo custom of deserting children in Chapter 10. These explanations were intended to elucidate “their eagerness to kill people and the brutality of their manners.”

In Chapter 19, Baḥrəy added an important purpose for writing *The History of the Galla*:

The wise men often discuss and say, “Why did the Galla defeat us although we are numerous and well supplied with arms?” Some have said that God has allowed it because of our sins. Others have said that it is because we are divided into ten groups, nine of which do not take part in war and are not ashamed of displaying their fear. Only the tenth group goes to war and fights to the best of its ability. Although we are numerous, those who can fight in war are few in number, and there are many who do not go to war (*Ibid.*, 229).

After explaining the 10 groups, Baḥrəy continued as follows: “In contrast, these nine groups that we have mentioned do not exist among the Galla. All men, from small to great, are masters of warfare. For this reason, they ruin and kill us.” (*Ibid.*, 230).

Baḥrəy criticized those who proposed that God allowed the Oromo to defeat the Amhara.<sup>(6)</sup> In Chapter 19 of *The History of the Galla*, he also noted that Amhara society contained few warriors, but that all men were masters of warfare in Oromo society. In Chapters 15 and 20, he explained an Oromo custom in which young men who had killed a man or a savage animal shaved their heads, leaving a patch of hair (*Ibid.*, 227–228, 230–231). According to Chapter 15, “Those who have killed men or large animals shave their heads leaving a patch of hair on the top. Those who have not killed are tormented with lice. That is why they are eager to kill us” (*Ibid.*, 227–228). By referring to this custom, he intended to show that the Oromo were more warlike than were the Amhara, who feared going to war.

Thus, Baḥrəy wrote *The History of the Galla* to disseminate information about the Oromo and to argue that the Amhara were inferior in strength to the Oromo due to differences in social institutions and customs.

It seems plausible that an intellectual in a Christian kingdom in northern Ethiopia would produce a work warning against the Oromo, who had caused damage to the Christians in northern Ethiopia. At the beginning of *The History of the Galla*, however, Baḥrəy asserted:

I have begun to write the history of the Galla in order to make known the number of their groups, their eagerness to kill people, and the brutality of their customs. If anyone says of me, “Why has he written a history of bad people as a history of good people?” I would answer by saying, “Search in the books. You should find that the history of Muhammad and the histories of the Muslim kings, who are our enemies in religion, have been written. Giyorgis Wäldä Ämid has written the history of the foolish kings of Ägäm<sup>(7)</sup> or Äfridon<sup>(8)</sup> and other Persian kings and those whom we call Sofi<sup>(9)</sup>” (*Ibid.*, 223).

Although we have no definite information on the identities of the authors of “the history of Muhammad and the histories of the Muslim kings,” the “history of Giyorgis Wäldä Ämid” is known to refer to *The Blessed Collection* (*Al-Majmū‘ al-mubārak*), written in Arabic by Coptic historian Jirjis, or Makīn b. Al-Amid (AH 602–672/AD 1205–1273). This work covered the period between creation and the accession of Sultan Baybars II of the Mamluk dynasty of Egypt (AH 658/AD 1260) (Plessner 1987: 173)<sup>(10)</sup> and was translated into *Gə‘əz* during the first half of the Solomonic Period (1270–1540), although scholars remain divided about the exact date of its appearance. For example, E. Cerulli dated it to “the beginning of the fourteenth century,” M. Kropp to “during the reign of Zär‘ä Ya‘qob (1434–1468),” and I. Guidi to “around 1500” (Guidi 1932: 70; Cerulli 1968: 54; Kropp 1989: 211).

Works written by Copts in Egypt, such as *The Legislation of the Kings* (*Fəṭḥä nägästä*),<sup>(11)</sup> influenced the northern Ethiopian Christians (Ullendorff 1973: 140–141), and Northern Ethiopian historians

have emphasized the work of Makīn. According to M. Kropp, its chronology played an important role in northern Ethiopian historiography (Kropp 1989: 211).<sup>(12)</sup>

According to the catalogue of Gəʿəz and Amharic manuscripts in the British Museum compiled by W. Wright, Or. 814 is a Gəʿəz version of the work by Makīn and consists of 188 folios. The author described the history from Adam to Tiberius, the Roman Emperor (r. 1437) from the first folio to fol. 80r, and he described the history of the Christian world up to the reign of Heraclius, the Byzantine Emperor (r. 610–641), from fol. 82r to fol. 124r. After discussing the history of the Patriarchs of Alexandria and the ecumenical councils, the author started his description of the history of the Islamic world in fol. 154r. and ended this narrative in fol. 188r with his account of Baybars II (Wright 1877: 293–294).<sup>(13)</sup> We have scant information on the work of Giyorgis Wäldä Ämid, which Baḥrəy consulted. Judging from the passage on “the history of the foolish kings of Äġäm or Äfridon and other Persian kings and those whom we call Sofi,”<sup>(14)</sup> it is clear that this work included histories of Persian kings.

Although Baḥrəy was presumably criticized for writing *The History of the Galla*, with questions such as “Why has he written a history of bad people as a history of good people?”, it is obvious that the readers of *The History of the Galla* were clergymen and followers of the Ethiopian Church, and that “good people” referred to the saints of the Ethiopian Church. Baḥrəy feared such criticism, although *The History of the Galla* was not intended to praise the Oromo. It was merely unlike the hagiographies written to praise saints. That he refuted criticism by noting that Giyorgis Wäldä Ämid and other historians wrote the history of Muslims, who were “enemies of the Christians,” reveals that Baḥrəy thought that it was the Oromo who deserved criticism for causing damage to the Christians in northern Ethiopia. Thus, the first passages of *The History of the Galla* show that the Christian intellectuals in northern Ethiopia acknowledged that historical works should address good Christians, but that criticism for describing Oromo history at the end of the 16th century, when the kingdom was on the verge of ruin by this group, was not warranted. These passages also show that Baḥrəy defended his writing of *The History of the Galla* by invoking historical works written by Coptic historians in Egypt.

## 2. THE PURPOSE OF WRITING THE ROYAL CHRONICLES

### 2.1. *The Purpose of Writing the Chronicle of Śārśä Dəngəl*

At the end of Chapter 7, the author of *The Chronicle of Śārśä Dəngəl*, which was contemporaneous with *The History of the Galla*, referred to a work called *The History of the Times (Tarikā āzmānat)*, edited by Giyorgis Wäldä Hämīd. The author criticized this work and included it in his purpose for writing the chronicle (Conti Rossini 1961–1962 I: 80–81).

This purpose was to make readers and listeners praise God and to record “the miracles that God showed in the hands of this Christian king.” Because it was impossible for one author to record all the miracles attributable to God, he did not include the entire history from Adam to “the medieval kingdoms of the Muslims,” as did Giyorgis Wäldä Hämīd. Because he felt that he could not fully describe all miracles due to their great number, he said “Let’s keep silence; otherwise, I cannot complete writing of the greatness of God who has done good things.”

Chernetsov noted that the authors of the chronicles of medieval Ethiopia<sup>(15)</sup> focused “not so much on human action as on divine acts revealed to the world indirectly ‘as deeds of the Christian king’” (Chernetsov 1988: 193). The author of *The Chronicle of Śārśä Dəngəl* intended to encourage readers to praise God, and he attached importance to the miracles caused by God and manifested in the deeds of Śārśä Dəngəl, a Christian monarch.

The author of *The Chronicle of Śārśä Dəngəl* criticized the work of Giyorgis Wäldä Hämīd because the latter described world history from the creation to “the medieval kingdoms of the Muslims.” According to the author of *The Chronicle of Śārśä Dəngəl*, the Muslims oppressed “the Christians’ true faith that will bring eternal salvation” and were going to the hell as enemies of Christianity.



According to this author, historians were not allowed to write detailed histories of the Muslims, such as that produced by Giyorgis Wäldä Hämüd, because such works would obscure the miracles of God enacted by Šäršä Dəngəl.

In what kinds of deeds did the author of *The Chronicle of Šäršä Dəngəl* find the miracles of God? To answer this question, we must turn to Chapter 7 of *The Chronicle of Šäršä Dəngəl*, which begins with the following passage: “This chapter reveals the miracles of God that we will write in order” (Conti Rossini 1961–1962 I: 57–81). This chapter included the author’s description of the royal army’s victory over Yəshäq,<sup>(16)</sup> who had entered into an alliance with the Ottomans and rebelled against Šäršä Dəngəl, as well as the death of Yəshäq and the punishments inflicted on his remains. This account shows that the author found “numerous miracles of God” in the monarch’s military successes. As Baḥrəy discussed in Chapters 11–18 of *The History of the Galla*, the Oromo inflicted human damage and caused territorial loss to the kingdom during the reign of Šäršä Dəngəl (Guidi 1961–1962: 226–229). Nevertheless, the author of *The Chronicle of Šäršä Dəngəl* did not describe these events, but devoted numerous pages to the monarch’s military successes over the rebels: the Oromo, the Ägäw, and the Betä Əsra’el.

Chernetsov proposed that the author of *The Chronicle of Šäršä Dəngəl* was Baḥrəy, who wrote *The History of the Galla* (Chernetzov 1988–1989). He pointed out that the literary devices of using a dispute with an imaginary opponent and paired epithets directed at Šäršä Dəngəl appeared in both works, similar attitudes toward the prophetic gift of priests were included in both works, and the works were contemporaneous with each other. This argument is not persuasive because Baḥrəy wrote about the history of the Oromo, invoking the work of Makin, whereas the author of *the Chronicle of Šäršä Dəngəl* adhered to the custom of Christian historians in northern Ethiopia by criticizing the work of Makin.<sup>(17)</sup>

## 2.2. *The Purpose of Writing the Royal Chronicles during the 17th and 18th Centuries*

We do not have the chronicles of Ya’qob and Zädəngəl, who came to the throne after the death of Šäršä Dəngəl. *The Chronicle of Susnəyos* followed *The Chronicle of Šäršä Dəngəl*. The chronicles of five monarchs of the Gondar Period (1632–1769) survive: Yoḥännəs I (r. 1667–1682), Iyasu I (1682–1706), Bäkäffa (r. 1721–1730), Iyasu II (r. 1730–1755), and Iyo’as I (r. 1755–1769).

*The Chronicle of Bäkäffa* provides important information about the purpose behind these royal chronicles. The chronicle of Bäkäffa, titled *The History of the King of Kings Bäkäffa* (*Tarikä nəgušä nəgəst Bäkäffa*), was divided into three parts. The first part covered the beginning to the article on AM<sup>(18)</sup> 7 Mäskäräm 7217 (AD 5 September 1724) (Guidi 1960–1961 III: 270–290). The second part begins with “The History of King of Kings Maših Sägäd<sup>(19)</sup> (*Zenabu lä-nəgušä nəgəst Maših Sägäd*)” and ends with the article on AM 6 Nəḥäse 7218 (AD 10 August 1726) (*Ibid.*, 290–314). The third part begins with “Chapter 1. [My] son Kənfä Mikael has started to write in this point” and ends with an article on AM 11 Ṭərr 7220 (AD 18 January 1728) (*Ibid.*, 314–321).

The author of the first part of *The Chronicle of Bäkäffa* was Sinoda, according to a passage in Chapter 14 (*Ibid.*, 285). The important point here is that this individual was referred to as “The author of the histories of Gibe, Ġawi, and Lasta” in the article dated AM 6 Nəḥäse 7218 (*Ibid.*, 313–314).

At the end of Chapter 8, Sinoda revealed that he wrote the history of the military expedition to the Gibe region led by Iyasu I and that he was writing the history from the time of the military expedition against the Ġawi of Damot led by Bäkäffa to the time at which he was nominated to serve as Bäkäffa’s scribe (*Ibid.*, 283). It is clear that *The History of Gibe* was referring to Sinoda’s narrative on the military expedition to the Gibe basin led by Iyasu I. *The History of the Ġawi* referred to the first part of *The Chronicle of Bäkäffa*, which included the explanation of the military expedition against the Ġawi (*Ibid.*, 275–283). In the same way, *The History of Lasta* referred to the second part of *The Chronicle of Bäkäffa*, which included the explanation of the military expedition against Lasta led by Bäkäffa (*Ibid.*, 296–304). Thus, the first and second parts of the *The Chronicle of Bäkäffa* were named based on major military expeditions.

The passages in the first part of *The Chronicle of Bäkäffa* are important in understanding why the

authors of the royal chronicles emphasized descriptions of military activities. The author noted, "I will inform the people of the miracles that God realized on the ground"<sup>(20)</sup> and enumerated events that he interpreted as God's miracles (*Ibid.*, 271). According to this list, the victory of Bäkaffa in the military expedition against the Ġawi was one of these miracles.

In many cases, little information is available on those who read or heard the royal chronicles. Fortunately, valuable information can be found in *The Chronicle of Bäkaffa*. On AM 7 Taḥṣāś 7218 (AD 14 December 1725), Bäkaffa ordered Sinoda to read the history he was writing to a group of nobles so that those who did not know of these events could learn of them (*Ibid.*, 306). This passage clarifies that Sinoda, who was the author of the first and second parts of *The Chronicle of Bäkaffa*, intended to inform the monarch and nobles of the glory of God. For this reason, he devoted numerous pages to descriptions of the monarch's military activities in which the miracles of God were presumably manifested.

Iyasu II and Iyo'as I succeeded to the throne after the death of Bäkaffa. Chernetsov pointed out that these monarchs' chronicles primarily described events in the royal court (Chernetsov 1994: 90), but argued that we should not overlook that they also included redundant references to their military activities, even though these monarchs did not achieve distinguished victories. For example, the rebel army led by Tānsē Mammo surrounded Gondar at the end of 1632. The description of this rebellion, which was covered in detail, forms 16% of *The Chronicle of Iyasu II* (Guidi 1954–1962 I: 51–75). After the explanation of this rebellion, the author noted that he wrote this chronicle because God created "numerous good deeds and admirable battles" (*Ibid.*, 76). It is obvious that the suppression of the rebellion of Tānsē Mammo was seen as an "admirable battle" created by God. The author of *The Chronicle of Iyasu II* devoted numerous pages to descriptions of the military activities of the monarch, such as the military expeditions against the Bälāw<sup>(21)</sup> and Mikā'el of Tigre (*Ibid.*, 109–111, 113–115, 127–136, 147–148, 156–157), confirming that the author of *The Chronicle of Iyasu II*, like Sinoda, described the numerous military activities of the monarch because he saw the grace of God in the monarch's military successes.

The authors of the three royal chronicles of the 17th century, *The Chronicle of Susnəyos*, *The Chronicle of Yoḥännəs I*, and *The Chronicle of Iyasu I*, also devoted numerous pages to the monarchs' military activities.<sup>(22)</sup> The Jesuits were worried that the content of *The Chronicles of Susnəyos* consisted primarily of military activities, as they had succeeded in converting Susnəyos to Roman Catholicism and thought that the author should provide a detailed description of the monarch's conversion and other matters related to Roman Catholicism. P. Paez, a Spanish Jesuit, explained that little information on Roman Catholicism during the first half of *The Chronicle of Susnəyos* was provided because Täklä Šəllase,<sup>(23)</sup> the author of this chronicle, harbored antipathy toward Roman Catholicism (Pais 1945–1946 III: 145; Beccari 1969 III: 373–374). After his conversion to Roman Catholicism, Täklä Šəllase became so ardent a believer that he died a martyr. The content of the chronicle, however, did not change after his conversion. M. de Almeida, a Portuguese Jesuit, discussed this matter as follows (Beccari 1969 VI: 115):

This book is divided into two parts . . . I quote the history of Emperor Seltan Çagued,<sup>(24)</sup> or his chronicle for the second part. It is the work which Azage Tino,<sup>(25)</sup> the author of his chronicle and famous martyr, wrote until 1619. . . I quote this chronicle here as a base or a sketch for the explanation which we will narrate, because the author describes only battles and does not mention efforts made for the matters of the faith. This is a custom of this place.

Almeida explained that the author of *The Chronicle of Susnəyos* described "only battles," which he thought was the custom in northern Ethiopia. Unfortunately, he overlooked the fact that the author of the chronicle intended to praise God by describing "only battles."



## CONCLUSIONS

My main conclusions are as follows:

1. Baḥrəy wrote *The History of the Galla* to disseminate information about the Oromo, to insist that Amhara society was inferior in strength to that of the Oromo because of differences in social institutions and customs, and to criticize those who interpreted the threat posed by the Oromo as divine punishment. At the end of the 16th century, intellectuals believed that historians had to write “the history of good Christians” and that it was unsuitable to record the history of the Oromo, who were not only not Christians, but who also actually caused damage to Christians. Baḥrəy needed to defend *The History of the Galla* by invoking the work of Makīn, a Coptic historian, who wrote about the history of Muslims.
2. The author of *The Chronicle of Śāršä Dəngəl* intended to encourage people to praise God by informing them of miracles, especially the military successes, which were attributable to God and manifested in the deeds of the monarch. He criticized Makīn, who devoted numerous pages to the history of the Muslims, because this was an unsuitable way for him to praise God. The authors of the royal chronicles of the 17th and 18th centuries followed the author of *The Chronicle of Śāršä Dəngəl*.

At the end of the 16th century, the purpose for writing historical works was to praise God by describing the deeds of the Christian monarchs, as exemplified by *The Chronicle of Śāršä Dəngəl*. The threat of the Oromo and the influence of the work of Makīn encouraged Baḥrəy to write *The History of the Galla*, in which the author attempted to explain events in terms other than the divine. However, such an attempt was transient. Defending Christianity continued to be a primary characteristic of the historiography of northern Ethiopia during the 17th and 18th centuries.<sup>(26)</sup>

## NOTES

- (1) The Christians in northern Ethiopia called the Oromo the “Galla.” In this paper, I will refer to them as the “Oromo,” except in quotations, because “Galla” is a derogatory term.
- (2) Citations of *The History of the Galla* in this paper are my own translations, based on the Gə‘əz text edited by I. Guidi (Guidi 1961–1962).
- (3) See the explanation provided by Asmarom Legesse (Asmarom 1973: 90) for more information about the relationship between the *luba* and *gada* systems.
- (4) Damot was situated in the south of the Blue Nile until the 16th century. The inhabitants of this region fled to Gojjam as a result of the Oromo attack. Since the 17th century, an area of Gojjam has been known as Damot. See the explanation provided by Huntingford (Huntingford 1989: 138, 143) for information on the change in the name of this location.
- (5) The Jesuits called the larger region of Ethiopia *reino* (kingdom) and the smaller one, *provincial* (province) in Portuguese.
- (6) Baḥrəy criticized the people who explained the devastation of the kingdom by the Oromo as divine punishment and said, “Who should ask help from God?” when soldiers were victorious (Guidi 1960–1961 I: 230). However, he did not deny the presence of divine acts in the events on the ground. For example, Chapter 9 of *The History of the Galla* discussed a slaughter of the Muslims by the Oromo during the reign of Gälawdewos (r. 1540–1559) as the revenge of God for the slaughter of the Christians by the Muslims. Chapter 13 also discussed that Däḥärägot, governor of a province, was killed by the Oromo during the reign of Śāršä Dəngəl by the will of God because the sins of the Christians were not expiated (*Ibid.*, 225–227).
- (7) A word of Arabic origin, Ägäm means Persian language or Persia itself in Gə‘əz and Amharic (Kane 1990 II: 1317).
- (8) A legendary hero of Persia discussed in the *Šāb-nāma* and other legends (Ahmad Tafazzoli 1999).
- (9) Shah of Safavid (Beckingham & Huntingford 1954: 111).
- (10) With the exception of the contemporary information at the end of the book, scholars have not commented on the work of Makīn because most parts of his work are copies of previous Arabic works. However, this

is one of the earliest Arabic histories brought to Europe, and it played an important role in the study of Islam in Europe (Cahen & Coquin 1991: 143).

- (11) Translation in Gə'əz of *The Collection of Šafi' (Al-Majmū' al-Šafawī)* written by Al-Šafi' b. al-'Assāl in Arabic for the Copts. This work is a collection of canon laws as well as civil and penal legislation, and it influenced the customs and civil and penal laws in northern Ethiopia (Guidi 1932: 78–79; Cerulli 1968: 176–177).
- (12) For example, MS Bruce 88 of the Bodleian Library included the royal chronicles from 'Amdä Šəyon (r. 1314–1344) to Šäršä Dəngəl. This manuscript explained the dates of principal events in the Old Testament on the basis of Makīn's chronology (MS Bruce 88, fols. 3v–4v).
- (13) After the death of Makīn, Mufaḍḍal b. Abi 'l-Faḍā'il finished the unwritten work of this author (Brockelmann 1943–1949 I: 425–426). Or. 814 seems to be the translation into Gə'əz of this revised edition.
- (14) If the book consulted by Baḥrəy was the work of Makīn, it seems to be the revised edition that was based on the edition by Mufaḍḍal b. Abi 'l-Faḍā'il and that added the history of the Islamic world from the 14th to the 16th centuries. However, it may be another book that included the Persian kings.
- (15) Chernetsov referred to the chronicles of Šäršä Dəngəl and Susnəyos as historiography of "Medieval Ethiopia." His definition of Medieval Ethiopia is not clear, although it included these monarchs' reigns.
- (16) Yəšḥāq was the governor of Baḥrmədr, and he fought against the Ottoman troops who attempted to conquer the Ethiopian plateau during the reign of Minas (r. 1559–1563). After the death of Minas, he entered into an alliance with Ottomans and rebelled against Šäršä Dəngəl. In 1579, he was killed by the royal army.
- (17) Baḥrəy was appointed to the important office of "King's Priest (*qes ḥäše*)" at the end of the reign of Šäršä Dəngəl (Conti Rossini 1893: 805). As Chernetsov proposed, Baḥrəy may have been the author of this monarch's chronicle. In that case, he followed the custom of writing histories in the official chronicle and expressed his own opinions in *The History of the Galla*. This hypothesis requires further consideration.
- (18) AM (i.e., *Anno Mundi*). In the past, several eras were widely used in northern Ethiopia to number years.
- (19) Mäsiḥ Sägäd was the throne name of Bäkaffa.
- (20) Amharic was the principal spoken language, and Gə'əz was the written language in the Christian kingdom of northern Ethiopia. Amharic-speaking people needed to study Gə'əz to understand the books written in Gə'əz (Pais 1945–1946 I: 189190; Beccari 1969 II: 221–222). Therefore, most people listened to rather than read the royal chronicles.
- (21) Bäläw is the name of an ethnic group living in the borderland between the Ethiopian kingdom and the Sennar kingdom of Sudan. Iyasu II conducted military expeditions against this group and suffered a crushing defeat in 1744 (Bruce 1790 II: 635–641; Guidi 1954–1962 I: 114–115).
- (22) See the explanation provided by Huntingford (Huntingford 1989: 151–234) regarding the military expeditions conducted by these monarchs.
- (23) According to Chapters 23 and 53 of *The Chronicle of Susnəyos*, Məhreka Dəngəl started to write this chronicle, and Täklä Šəllase was the author of latter part (Esteves Pereira 1892–1900 I: 70, 208).
- (24) Šəltan Sägäd was the throne name of Susnəyos.
- (25) "Tino" is an epithet referring to Täklä Šəllase, meaning "small," in the Oromo language (Foot 1970: 53; Tilahun 1989: 556; Borello 1995: 395).
- (26) Until the introduction of European-style schools, the Ethiopian Church played a principal role in education in northern Ethiopia. To understand the influence of Christianity on northern Ethiopian historiography, it is important to examine the relationship between historians and their education. See the explanation provided by O'Hanlon and Imbakom Kalewold (O'Hanlon 1946: 13–21; Imbakom Kalewold 1970) regarding church education in northern Ethiopia.

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