

The *Kəbrä Nəgäšt* (Glory of the Kings) Goes Global

Transnational Entanglements of Ethiopian Orthodox Political Theology in the Early Twentieth Century

Introduction: Solomonic Political Theology and its »Neo-Solomonid« Reconfigurations

Unlike in the Greco-Roman world, where Christianity spread from the lower classes to the ruling elite, in the Horn of Africa Christianity was introduced as a court religion. It is therefore not surprising that both the Aksumite Kingdom – one of the first polities to proclaim Christianity as its state religion, doing so as early as around 340 AD – and the Ethiopian Empire, its political successor, have heavily relied upon theology as a means both of self-fashioning and of self-legitimation¹.

The central theme of Ethiopian Orthodox political theology is undoubtedly the *translatio imperii* from Ancient Israel to Ethiopia, an idea manifesting itself in a vast number of texts, but reaching its most profound articulation in the highly influential mediaeval treatise *Kəbrä nəgäšt* (»Glory [or Nobility] of the Kings«)². The *Kəbrä nəgäšt* substantiated this claim in a twofold way. Firstly, by creating a genealogical link, tracing the Ethiopian monarchy back to Solomon, King of Israel, and the Queen of Sheba, referred to in the text as Makkəda and the »Queen of the South« (*Nəgəstä Azeb*)³. And secondly, by putting forward an elaborate narrative

1 See, for example, two studies that are widely regarded as classics of their kind Taddesse TAMRAT, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270–1527*, Oxford 1972; Eike HABERLAND, *Untersuchungen zum äthiopischen Königtum*, Wiesbaden 1965.

2 The Gəʿəz text has been critically edited and translated into German by Carl BEZOLD, *Kebrä Nagast. Die Herrlichkeit der Könige. Nach den Handschriften in Berlin, London, Oxford und Paris zum ersten Mal im äthiopischen Urtext herausgegeben und mit deutscher Übersetzung versehen*, Munich 1905. The much-reprinted English translation by Ernest Budge is to be used with caution, since it has a number of notorious flaws: Ernest Alfred Thompson Wallis BUDGE, *The Queen of Sheba and Her only Son Menyelek. Being the History of the Departure of God & His Ark of the Covenant from Jerusalem to Ethiopia, and the Establishment of the Religion of the Hebrews & the Solomonic Line of Kings in That Country: A Complete Translation of the Kebrä Nagast with Introduction*, London 1922.

3 This narrative develops the biblical story related in 1 Kings 10:1–13 and 2 Chronicles 9:1–12. For a detailed discussion of the figures of the Queen of Saba and Solomon in Ethiopian tradition, see Alessandro BAUSI, *La leggenda della Regina di Saba nella tradizione etiopica*, in: Fabio BATTIATO et al. (eds.), *La Regina di Saba. Un Mito fra Oriente e Occidente*, Naples 2016, pp. 91–162; Witold WITAKOWSKI/Ewa BALICKA-WITAKOWSKA, *Solomon in Ethiopian Tradition*, in: Joseph VERHEYDEN (ed.), *The*

about the transfer of the Ark of the Covenant from Jerusalem to Aksum, which in its turn was interpreted as a visible sign of the divine election of Ethiopians as God's new chosen people. The legendary Mənilək I, the supposed son of Solomon and the Queen of the South⁴, would have been the first in a line of Ethiopian rulers, which stretched to the reign of Emperor Həylä Śəllase (1930–1974).

The rise of the Solomonic political theology is generally associated with the reign of Yəkunno Amlak (1270–1285), who had interrupted the rule of the non-Israelite Zag^we dynasty and claimed to »restore« the legitimate Solomonic lineage⁵. The compilation of the *Kəbrä nägäšt* in its present form around 1314–1322 is generally believed to be part of this legitimisation process, even though some parts of the text may be of a much earlier origin⁶. Certainly, the ideas of Israelite descent and the claim to possess the Ark of the Covenant both predate the *Kəbrä nägäšt*, as can be seen from the famous Arabic text by the Coptic priest Abū I-Makārim Sa'dallāh

Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition. King, Sage and Architect, Leiden 2013, pp. 219–240.

- 4 According to well-established later Ethiopian tradition, the son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba was called Mənilək. However, in the *Kəbrä nägäšt* itself, he is called Bāynä Ləhkəm (from Arabic Ibn al-Ḥakīm, »son of the wise man«).
- 5 In a most prominent way, the story of the restoration of the Solomonic dynasty by Yəkunno Amlak is recounted in the treatise *Bə'älä nägäšt* (»Riches of the Kings«), composed in the seventeenth century. See Sevir CHERENTSOV, *Bə'älä nägäšt*, in: Siegbert UHLIG (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 1, Wiesbaden 2003, pp. 514f.; George Wynn Brereton HUNTINGFORD, »The Wealth of Kings« and the End of the Zagwe Dynasty, in: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 28/1 (1965), pp. 1–23. Remarkably, it is often transmitted within the same manuscripts as the *Kəbrä nägäšt*. Cf. Marie-Laure DERAT, *L'énigme d'une dynastie sainte et usurpatrice dans le royaume chrétien d'Éthiopie du XI^e au XIII^e siècle*, Turnhout 2018, pp. 157–160.
- 6 Some scholars argue that the core of the text can be traced back to the sixth century. See Muriel DEBIÉ, *Le Kebra Nagast éthiopien. Une réponse apocryphe aux événements de Najran?*, in: Joëlle BEAUCAMP et al. (eds.), *Le massacre de Najrān. Religion et politique en Arabie du sud au VI^e siècle*, II: Juifs et chrétiens en Arabie aux V^e et VI^e siècles: regards croisés sur les sources, Paris 2010, pp. 255–278; Glen BOWERSOCK, *Helen's Bridle, Ethiopian Christianity, and Syriac Apocalyptic*, in: Jane BAUN et al. (eds.), *Studia Patristica XLV: Ascetica. Liturgica, Orientalia, Critica et Philologica, First Two Centuries. Papers Presented at the Fifteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 2007*, Leuven 2010, pp. 211–220; George BEVAN, *Ethiopian Apocalyptic and the End of Roman Rule. The Reception of Chalcedon in Aksum and the Kebra Nagast*, in: Jitse Harm Fokke DIJKSTRA/Greg FISHER (eds.), *Inside and Out. Interactions between Rome and the Peoples of the Arabian and Egyptian Frontiers in Late Antiquity*, Leuven 2014, pp. 371–390. The *Kəbrä nägäšt's* relation to earlier traditions circulating throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and the context of its translation into Gə'əz are also still being debated. For an introduction to the discussion and further bibliography, see Paolo MARRASSINI, *Kəbrä nägäšt*, in: Siegbert UHLIG (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 3, Wiesbaden 2007, pp. 364–368; Pierluigi PIOVANELLI, *The Apocryphal Legitimation of a »Solomonic« Dynasty in the Kəbrä nägäšt – A Reappraisal*, in: *Aethiopica* 16 (2013), pp. 7–44.

b. Ğirġis (died after 1208), *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt and some Neighbouring Countries*, dating back to the early thirteenth century⁷. Consequently, the idea of the superiority of the Christian Kingship of Ethiopia was already bound to the monarch's claim to Zion – i. e., the Ark of the Covenant preserved in, and ultimately identified with, Aksum – at quite an early date⁸. The head of the Solomonic state was honoured first and foremost as *Nəgušä Şayon* («King of Zion»).

The idea of Solomonic descent was part of a wider set of associations which played a decisive role in Ethiopian political theology. First of all, the direct lineage from Israel and the notion of the purity of faith were closely interconnected. Since the *Kəbrä nəgäšt* argued that the Ethiopians had already converted to monotheism and adopted the Old Testament in the time of the Queen of Sheba, the Ethiopian theologians could claim to be safeguarding the purest version of Scripture. This idea harked back to the popular polemical *topos* of the Jews who had deliberately changed a certain number of key passages or excluded whole books of the Old Testament. In the *Məşḥafä məştir* («Book of the Mystery»), written in 1423–1424, the renowned Ethiopian Orthodox theologian Giyorgis of Sägla (ca. 1365–1425) made this claim in the following terms:

Concerning the books of the Old [Testament], they have been translated from Hebrew into Gə'əz in the days of the Queen of the South who visited Solomon. Therefore, the interpretation of the prophetic books found in the land of the Aġ'azi [i. e., Ethiopia] was faithful, because they had adopted the Jewish Law before the birth of Christ. If they had translated them after the birth of Christ, the crucifiers would have changed the true word into a testimony of falseness⁹.

While the whole Ethiopian nation was imagined as *versus Israel*, members of the Solomonic dynasty were seen as keepers and defenders of the true faith. To express

7 The author not only mentions that the Ethiopian rulers are »of the family of Moses and Aaron«, but states that the Ethiopians possess »the Ark of the Covenant, in which are the two tables of stone, inscribed by the finger of God with the commandments which he ordained for the children of Israel«, Basil Thomas Alfred EVETTS (ed.), *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt and Some Neighbouring Countries Attributed to Abu Salih, the Armenian*, Oxford 2 1969, pp. 287f. Note that this famous description was for a long time wrongly ascribed to Abū Şālih, a Christian Arab author from the thirteenth century. However, the work was compiled by Abū l-Makārim Sa'dallāh b. Ğirġis. Cf. Franz-Christoph MUTH, Abū Şālih, in: UHLIG (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 1, pp. 54f.

8 See Amsalu TEFERA, Traditions on Zion and Axum, in: Id., *The Ethiopian Homily on the Ark of the Covenant*, Leiden 2015, pp. 39–80.

9 The English translation follows PIOVANELLI, *The Apocryphal Legitimation*, p. 11, note 19; for a critical edition see Yaqob BEYENE, Giyorgis di Sagla. *Il libro del Mistero (Maşḥafa Məştir)*, vol. 1 [textus], Leuven 1990, pp. 124f. and *ibid.*, vol. 2 [versio], pp. 75f.

the unique relationship with biblical Israel, Ethiopian rulers have often depicted themselves as *ʿĀsraʿelawīyan* («Israelites»), *Däqqä ʿĀsraʿel* («Children of Israel»), or even *Betä ʿĀsraʿel* («House of Israel»)¹⁰.

This set of ideas was also instrumental for the »Neo-Solomonids«, Ethiopian rulers who ascended the throne from the 1850s onward, following a period of monarchical weakness and decentralisation known as *Zämänä mäsaḴant* («Era of the Judges [or Lords]») ¹¹. The »Neo-Solomonic« political theology that drew on the mediaeval tradition of the *Kəbrä nägäšt*, but also modified it, adapting it to the challenges of modernity, remained the decisive ideological force of imperial Ethiopia until its fall in 1974.

But what precisely was new about »Neo-Solomonic« political theology? Donald CrummeY has suggested that the »Neo-Solomonids« introduced three main innovations introduced into traditional political ideology: Firstly, they formulated a new principle of legitimate descent, not linked to direct succession through the male line only. Secondly, as active warlords, they abandoned the historic Solomonic practice of ritual seclusion. And thirdly, whereas mediaeval Solomonids had practiced structured polygamy, the »Neo-Solomonids« have revolutionised royal marriage customs by adopting the marital customs of the clergy: a strict monogamy sanctioned by the sacrament of marriage¹². Some further studies have demonstrated how Ethiopian Emperors of the late nineteenth century re-invented the coronation rite in order to strengthen their claim to Solomonic descent and use it as a means of legitimisation in the internal political struggle¹³. Without diminishing the high value of the findings made in this field over the last decades, one notable limitation of previous research must be pointed out. »Neo-Solomonic« political theology (or ideology, as some authors prefer to refer to it) has been

10 Steven KAPLAN, Solomonic Dynasty, in: Siegbert UHLIG (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 4, Wiesbaden 2010, pp. 688–690. In keeping with this royal ideology, several of the outstanding rulers of this period had names with strong biblical Israelite connotations including Amdä Şəyon (lit. »Pillar of Zion«) and Zärʿa Yaʿqob (lit. »Seed of Jacob«). Emperor Dawit II, counted second after Dawit (David), the father of Solomon.

11 The name of this period that was marked by conflicts among regional rulers and warlords over the control of the emperor refers to Judges 21: 25. It is conventionally dated between 1769 and 1855. The end of this period is associated with the reign of Tewodros II (1855–1868). For a short historical overview, see Sophia DEGE, *Zämänä mäsaḴant*, in: Alessandro BAUSI (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 5, Wiesbaden 2014, pp. 122–129.

12 Donald CRUMMEY, Imperial Legitimacy and the Creation of Neo-Solomonic Ideology in 19th-Century Ethiopia, in: *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 28/109 (1988), pp. 13–43, at p. 15.

13 The most prominent instance is that of Yoḥannəs IV (1871–1889), who organised his coronation in Ancient Aksum, see Izabela ORŁOWSKA, The Legitimising Project. The Coronation Rite and the Written Word, in: *Aethiopia* 16 (2013), pp. 74–101; ead., *Re-Imagining Empire. Ethiopian Political Culture under Yohannis IV, 1872–92*, PhD Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, London 2006.

analysed exclusively within the Ethiopian national context and its internal dynamics, thereby neglecting the increasing importance of international relations for Ethiopia and its high impact upon all spheres of life in the Horn of Africa in the age of New Imperialism.

While Western historiography often tends to exoticise Ethiopian Orthodoxy by highlighting its absolute uniqueness (usually explained by a reference to its supposedly continuous isolation from the rest of Christendom), this chapter seeks to question this assumption by employing a distinctly transnational perspective. Even though the Solomonic narrative of the *Kəbrä nəgäšt* ought indeed to be considered a distinctive and highly remarkable form of political theology, neither its emergence nor its development can be understood without considering Ethiopia's entanglements with the wider world. The same applies to »Neo-Solomonic« theology. In the following, I will argue that the transformations of Ethiopian political theology can only be comprehended in connection with the novel conditions in the field of international relations which the Ethiopian Empire had to face in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, not least with the threat of European colonialism. Consequently, »Neo-Solomonic« political theology can be seen as a product of complex transnational entanglements. In order to substantiate this assertion, I am going to demonstrate how the transformations of Ethiopian political theology performed by three »Neo-Solomonid« rulers of the early twentieth century – Mənilək II (1889–1913), Zäwditu (1917–1930), and Ḥaylä Šəllase – were influenced by their intellectual and/or political engagement with the wider world. By doing so, I shall analyse the influence of Ethio-German, Ethio-British, and Ethio-Japanese entanglements upon reconfigurations and new articulations of Solomonic theology.

Emperor Mənilək II: Ethio-German Entanglements, Theology of Colonisation, and the Quest for Historicity of the Solomonic Narrative

Even though by the end of the nineteenth century the Ethiopian Empire was virtually the only state on the entire African continent to retain its independence, it was surrounded by European colonial territories: Eritrea and Italian Somaliland (the southern and central parts of present-day Somalia) belonged to Italy; Sudan, British East Africa (present-day Kenya), and British Somaliland (the northern of present-day Somalia) belonged to Great Britain; French Somaliland (present-day Djibouti) belonged to France. In this context, relations with European powers were of immense importance for Ethiopian politics. The German Empire as a state that had no discernible colonial ambitions towards Ethiopia was perceived as a potential ally, which contributed to a dynamic development of contacts between both

countries¹⁴. Ethio-German diplomacy unveiled some reconfigurations of »Neo-Solomonic« political theology that otherwise would not have been observable. In the following, two such aspects should be discussed: the Ethiopian attitude towards European colonisation and the quest for new historical evidence for the Solomonic narrative.

Already in the early 1870s Ethiopian Emperor Yoḥannəs IV had succeeded in establishing contacts with German Emperor Wilhelm I (1871–1888). In the absence of alternative diplomatic channels through which political communication between Ethiopia and Germany could have taken place, in the initial stage correspondence turned out to be the principal instrument of exchange¹⁵. From the very beginning, the idea of a shared Christian identity became the main feature of the Ethio-German diplomatic discourse. Thus, Wilhelm I expressed the conviction that Ethiopia and Germany were fundamentally connected to each other by belonging to »the same precious Christian faith« (*»demselben theuern christlichen Glauben«*)¹⁶. In their turn, Ethiopian monarchs, in order to create a sense of a Christian communion often began their letters with a doxological Trinitarian formula and explicitly referred to their letter recipients as fellow-Christians. For example, Yoḥannəs IV spoke of Wilhelm I as a »firm Christian« (*tənnu krəstiyān*)¹⁷ and of the chancellor of the

14 About early relations between Germany and Ethiopia, see Ursula GEHRING-MÜNDEL, 100 Jahre deutsch-äthiopische diplomatische Beziehungen, in: Walter RAUNIG/Asfa-Wossen ASSERATE (eds.), *Orbis Aethiopicus. Ethiopian Art – A Unique Cultural Heritage and Modern Challenge*, Lublin 2007, pp. 67–101; Adelheid ZELLEKE, 100 Jahre Deutsch-Äthiopischer Freundschafts- und Handelsvertrag 1905–2005, Bonn 2004; Dag ZIMEN, *Rosen für den Negus. Die Aufnahme diplomatischer Beziehungen zwischen Deutschland und Äthiopien 1905*, Göttingen 2005; Wolbert G.C. SMIDT, *Five Centuries of Ethio-German Relations*, in: Language Department of the German Foreign Office (ed.), *Ethio-German Relations*, Addis Abeba 2004, pp. 6–14; id., *Photos as Historical Witnesses. The First Ethiopians in Germany and the First Germans in Ethiopia. The History of a Complex Relationship*, Münster 2015; Rudolf FECHTER, *History of German Ethiopian Diplomatic Relations*, in: *Zeitschrift für Kultur-Austausch. Sonderausgabe Äthiopien* (1973), pp. 149–156; Bairu TAFLA, *Ethiopia and Germany. Cultural, Political and Economic Relations 1871–1936*, Wiesbaden 1981, pp. 73–144.

15 So far, the correspondence has only been partially edited. See TAFLA, *Ethiopia and Germany*, pp. 188–303; Wolbert G.C. SMIDT, »Annäherung Deutschlands und Äthiopiens«. Unbekannte Briefe des Kaisers Menelik II. und seines Gesandten 1907–08, in: Stefan BRÜNE/Heinrich SCHOLLER (eds.), *Auf dem Weg zum modernen Äthiopien. Festschrift für Bairu Tafla*, Münster 2005, pp. 197–224. A number of not yet edited letters are to be found in the Political Archive of the German Foreign Office (*Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes*) in Berlin.

16 Political Archive of the Foreign Office [henceforth PA AA], Allg. A 3900, Letter of Wilhelm I to Yoḥannəs IV, 9 July 1880; cf. TAFLA, *Ethiopia and Germany*, pp. 195–199.

17 PA AA, Allg. A 23/197, Letter of Yoḥannəs IV to Wilhelm I, 8 Nəhase 1864 Ethiopian calendar [= 13 August 1872]; cf. TAFLA, *Ethiopia and Germany*, pp. 188f.

German Empire, Otto von Bismarck (in office 1871–1890) as a »kind man [and] perfect Christian« (*dägg säw faşum krəstiyān*)¹⁸.

The Ethiopian Emperor Mənilək II¹⁹, who succeeded Yoḥannəs IV in 1889, followed the same rhetorical pattern in his correspondence with German Emperor Wilhelm II (1888–1918), highlighting the common Christian identity of both nations. However, more importantly, he formulated a theological reflection on the European colonisation of Africa. One of the most notable passages addressed to the German Emperor on this subject reads as follows:

The Ethiopian Empire was for many centuries located between Moslems and heathens; today, the European powers have, by the will of God and by the effort of Europe, become neighbours of Ethiopia in all directions. The way is open for knowledge and commerce. [...] Even though the territories of Germany are far away from our country, it is likely that the subjects of both will meet²⁰.

This statement has important implications not least in terms of political theology. Firstly, Mənilək II portrays European colonisation in the Horn of Africa not primarily as a change of political order, but rather as a shift within the religious landscape of the region. Secondly, he accentuates the Christian and, from his point of view, »God-willed« (*bäəgzi-abḥer fāqad*) nature of the new political regimes in Ethiopia's vicinity, and welcomes them as a long-awaited disruption of the religious isolation of Christian Ethiopia. As far as the causes of this isolation are concerned, Mənilək II points to »the desert and the followers of Islam« (*bārähāna yäʾslām wägānnočč*) who, he claims, had prevented contact with the »Kings of the Christians« (*yäkrəstiyān nəgāstat*)²¹.

Such favourable attitude towards the ongoing process of European colonisation of Africa and its interpretation primarily in terms of Christian domination over the »heathens« was rooted in Mənilək's II political theology and was at the same time related to the recent developments in Ethiopia itself. The end of the nineteenth century was marked by an enormous territorial expansion, in which the Ethiopian

18 PA AA, Allg. A 3233, Letter of Yoḥannəs IV to Bismarck, 11 Yäkatit 1873 Ethiopian calendar [= 17 February 1881]; cf. TAFLA, Ethiopia and Germany, pp. 204f.

19 On Mənilək II, see Christopher CLAPHAM, Mənilək II, in: UHLIG (ed.), Encyclopaedia Aethiopica, vol. 3, pp. 922–927; Harold G. MARCUS, The Life and Times of Menelik II. Ethiopia 1844–1913, Lawrenceville, NJ, 1995; Chris PROUTY, Empress Taytu and Menelik II. Ethiopia 1883–1910, London 1986.

20 PA AA, A 14623, Letter of Mənilək II to Wilhelm II, 7 Ḥamle 1893 Ethiopian calendar [= 14 July 1901]; cf. TAFLA, Ethiopia and Germany, pp. 230–233.

21 PA AA, A 2829, Letter of Mənilək II to Wilhelm II, 6 Taḥśaś 1882 Ethiopian calendar [= 15 December 1889]; cf. TAFLA, Ethiopia and Germany, pp. 208–221.

Empire more than doubled its territory, a process that ran in parallel to European colonisation. Since the areas conquered in the course of Ethiopia's expansion, like the parts of Africa dominated by European colonial powers, were predominantly inhabited by non-Christian populations, both processes were interpreted as a triumph of the Christian faith. Thus, in his letters to the German monarch, Mənilək II situated the incorporation of new territories into the Ethiopian Empire on the one hand and European colonisation on the other in an unambiguous relationship, with Christianity as the main reason for the success of both these endeavours²². The theological foundation of such an understanding may lie in the *Kəbrä nägäšt* and related texts of Solomonic tradition that contain the important *topos* of the eschatological religious war, in which Christian forces united under the leadership of the Kings of Ethiopia and of »Rom« (a toponym initially related to Constantinople, which later received a larger set of associations connected to powerful Christian polities outside of Ethiopia) win the final battle against the »enemies of the Christian faith«²³.

The progress of Ethio-German encounters at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century culminated in the plan to establish official diplomatic relations in 1905. By that time, the Ethiopian Empire had already entered into diplomatic relations with France (since 1897), Great Britain (since 1897), Russia (since 1898), Italy (since 1889), and the United States of America (since 1904). In March 1905, Wilhelm II sent a special imperial legation under the leadership of the Orientalist and diplomat Friedrich Rosen (1856–1935)²⁴ to Ethiopia with the aim of signing an official »Friendship and Trade Treaty«²⁵. Two initially secret agreements made in the context of these negotiations reveal how Solomonic political theology had been reconfigured under the conditions of the early twentieth century.

22 PA AA, A 6118, Letter of Mənilək II to Wilhelm II, 14 Miyazya 1883 Ethiopian calendar [= 21 April 1891]; cf. TAFLA, Ethiopia and Germany, pp. 214–217.

23 On Ethiopian eschatology and in particular on the figure of the Ethiopian King therein, see André CAQUOT, La royauté sacrée en Éthiopie, in: *Annales d'Éthiopie* 2 (1957), pp. 205–218; HABERLAND, Untersuchungen, pp. 149–172; Robert BEYLOT, Le millénarisme, article de foi dans l'Église Éthiopienne, in: *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici* 25 (1971–1972), pp. 31–43; Merid Wolde AREGAY, Literary Origins of Ethiopian Millenarianism, in: Anatoly GROMYKO (ed.), *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Ethiopian Studies, Moscow, 26–29 August 1986*, vol. 5, Moscow 1988, pp. 166–169.

24 On Friedrich Rosen, see Werner DAUM, Gelehrter und Diplomat. Friedrich Rosen und die Begründung der diplomatischen Beziehungen zwischen Deutschland und Äthiopien, in: Walter RAUNIG/Steffen WENIG (eds.), *Afrikas Horn. Akten der Ersten Internationalen Littmann-Konferenz*, Wiesbaden 2005, pp. 265–281.

25 The itinerary of the trip as well as the diplomatic negotiations are documented in Felix ROSEN, *Eine deutsche Gesandtschaft in Abessinien*, Leipzig 1907; Hans VOLLBRECHT, *Im Reiche des Negus Negesti Menelik II*, Stuttgart 1906; Carl BOSCH, *Karawanen-Reisen. Erlebnisse eines deutschen Kaufmanns in Ägypten, Mesopotamien, Persien und Abessinien*, Berlin 1928, pp. 141–239.

The Germans arrived in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa on 12 February 1905, and were granted several audiences by the Ethiopian Emperor during the first weeks of their stay. However, initial negotiations produced no results. An extraordinary opportunity to change this course of things appeared on 27 February, when Mənilək II paid his first visit to the premises of the German legation. It was at this meeting that contentious issues that still stood in the way of signing the bilateral agreement between Ethiopia and Germany were resolved. The factor lay in Friedrich Rosen's accounts of his travels to the Near East and the latest successes of German archaeologists in the field of biblical archaeology. The Ethiopian Emperor displayed considerable interest in the German excavations in Babylon, »which have shed a good deal of new light on the events dealt with in the Bible«²⁶. Evidently, the news that certain biblical accounts could be validated with the help of modern science had deeply impressed Mənilək II. He therefore granted – quite to the surprise of the German diplomats – to Germany the right to undertake archaeological excavations in Aksum, the ancient Ethiopian capital. Felix Rosen, a member of the imperial legation and brother of its leader, Friedrich Rosen, commented on this decision: »The great understanding which the Negus showed here for a purely scientific question, already led us to assume that the wise ruler, by the standards of his country, would be a promoter of art and science«²⁷.

However, for Mənilək II the decision to undertake archaeological excavations in Aksum was by no means a »purely scientific question«. Rather, the Ethiopian Emperor aimed at establishing a continuity of modern Ethiopia with the ancient Aksumite Kingdom and its supposedly »biblical« roots, as they were depicted in the *Kəbrä nəgäšt*. Archaeological excavations were supposed to reveal Aksum's splendour at the time of the Queen of Sheba and provide historical evidence supporting the Solomonic narrative. In other words, the archaeologists were expected to prove the historicity of the Solomonic narrative and thus maintain its credibility under the conditions of modernity.

Wilhelm II, who was himself very much interested in archaeology, welcomed this news²⁸. However, the information about planned archaeological excavations

26 »[...] die so manches neue Licht auf die in der Bibel behandelten Ereignisse geworfen haben«, ROSEN, Eine deutsche Gesandtschaft, p. 266.

27 »Das große Verständnis, das der Negus hier einer rein wissenschaftlichen Frage entgegenbrachte, ließ uns schon vermuten, daß der kluge Fürst, nach den Verhältnissen seines Landes, ein Förderer von Kunst und Wissenschaft sein würde«, *ibid.*, pp. 266f. (my translation).

28 On Wilhelm II's enthusiasm for archaeology, see the articles in Thorsten BEIGEL/Sabine MANGOLD-WILL (eds.), *Wilhelm II. Archäologie und Politik um 1900*, Stuttgart 2017. Unfortunately, the excavations in Aksum are not considered in this volume, which nevertheless offers a good introduction to the political and scientific context of such undertakings and demonstrates the importance of archaeology in the reign of Wilhelm II.

in Aksum was supposed to be kept hidden from German academic circles for the time being. The German Emperor left the following handwritten marginal note on a telegram sent to him by the head of the German imperial legation to Ethiopia: »Bravo, Rosen! He did a splendid job! Shall receive high decoration! [...] Better not inform scholars yet, they gossip just like old wives«²⁹. Apparently, Wilhelm II feared a possible continuation of the only recently settled »Babel-Bible controversy«³⁰, not least because excavations in Aksum might raise the question of the authenticity of the Ark of the Covenant supposedly located there.

Using archaeology as a means of historical legitimisation was indeed a major innovation in Ethiopian Orthodox political theology on the part of Mənilək II. In the same year, 1905, without waiting for the arrival of the German specialists, he initiated excavations in Aksum and announced the discovery of the grave of his legendary predecessor, Mənilək I, son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Thereby, the most immediate »evidence« of the authenticity of the Solomonic narrative was provided and the relicts of the first Ethiopian King were solemnly transferred to the church of Aksum Şəyon, the place where the Ark of the Covenant was believed to be kept. Remarkably, the German archaeological expedition that arrived at Aksum in spring 1906 under the leadership of Enno Littmann (1875–1958) did not categorically dispel this mystification. Their survey of the archaeological site showed that the so-called »grave of Mənilək« was in fact of more ancient origin than most other structures to be found in Aksum³¹.

There was yet another secret agreement made in the context of negotiations over the »Friendship and Trade Treaty« that aimed at the validation of Ethiopian Orthodox political theology. Germany was supposed to intervene in favour of Ethiopia in the question of the ownership of the Dayr as-Sulţān (Arabic: دير السلطان; Gəʿəz: *Der Šəlţan*) monastery in Jerusalem³², which had become a bone of contention between

29 »Bravo Rosen! Hat seine Sache ganz vortrefflich gemacht! Soll hohe Dekoration erhalten! [...] Gelehrte lieber noch nicht informieren, die plaudern ebenso wie die alten Weiber«, PA AA, R 14914 and R 131418, Marginal note on the telegramme from Friedrich Rosen to the Foreign Office, 10 March 1905.

30 On this controversy, see Suzanne L. MARCHAND, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire. Religion, Race and Scholarship*, New York 2009, pp. 244–249; Klaus JOHANNING, *Der Bibel-Babel-Streit. Eine forschungsgeschichtliche Studie*, Frankfurt am Main 1988; Reinhard G. LEHMANN, *Friedrich Delitzsch und der Babel-Bibel-Streit*, Göttingen 1994.

31 Cf. ROSEN, *Eine deutsche Gesandtschaft*, p. 475; Enno LITTMANN/Daniel KRENCKER, *Vorbericht der deutschen Aksumexpedition*, Berlin 1906, p. 30.

32 The Ethiopian Orthodox community had been established in Jerusalem since the Middle Ages. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it had owned four chapels within the church of the Holy Sepulchre and a monastery on Mount Zion. However, since the sixteenth century, only the monastery of Dayr as-Sulţān, located on the roof of the chapel of Helena in the church of the Holy Sepulchre, remained in its possession. And by the eighteenth century at the latest, the Coptic Church disputed

the Ethiopian and Coptic Churches³³. Thus, Wilhelm II, who himself was Protestant, was to become the advocate of the Ethiopian Church in an inner-Orthodox conflict³⁴. This at the first glance unexpected role was assigned to the German Emperor because he maintained close connections with the Ottoman Empire and had a powerful diplomatic network in the region.

The monastic settlement in Jerusalem was of considerable importance for Mənilək II, not only as a spiritual and intellectual centre of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, but also as vivid proof of the Solomonic narrative. According to Ethiopian tradition, the name of the monastery – Dayr as-Sulṭān means »Monastery of the Sovereign« – indicated that the site of the monastery had been given to the Queen of Sheba by the ruler of Jerusalem, King Solomon³⁵.

Both these agreements deeply connected with Ethiopian Orthodox political theology paved the way for the signing of the German-Ethiopian »Friendship and Trade Treaty« and made the establishment of diplomatic relations between both countries possible³⁶. The entanglement of political theology and diplomatic relations found its symbolic expression in a special celebration in Aksum on Easter Sunday, 30 April 1905. On this day, the German legation reached the city on the way back to Europe and was welcomed with a service held in its honour in the front of the famous church of Aksum Ṣəyon. As representatives of an allied Christian Empire, the mem-

the Ethiopian property rights to the monastery and were only prepared to grant rights to its use. A new level of escalation was reached in 1890, when the Copts closed two chapels and the Ethiopian community was forced to celebrate its services in the open air, near these chapels. For the history of the Ethiopians in Jerusalem, see Enrico CERULLI, *Etiopi in Palestina. Storia della comunità etiopica di Gerusalemme*, vols. 1–2, Rome 1943–1947; Salvatore TEDESCHI, *Profilo storico di Dayr as-Sultan*, in: *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 2 (1964), pp. 92–160; Kirsten STOFFREGEN-PEDERSEN, *The History of the Ethiopian Community in the Holy Land from the Time of Emperor Tewodros II till 1974*, Jerusalem 1983.

33 On the history of the dispute over the monastery, see Tigab BEZIE, *Ethiopia's Claim on Deir es-Sultan Monastery in Jerusalem, 1850s–1994. Roots, Litigation, Current Status*, Saarbrücken 2011; Kirsten STOFFREGEN-PEDERSEN, *Deir es-Sultan. The Ethiopian Monastery in Jerusalem*, in: *Quaderni di studi Etiopici* 8–9 (1987–1988), pp. 33–47.

34 For this purpose, an Amharic document in French translation was given to Friedrich Rosen. It contained numerous earlier judicial decisions concerning the property rights on the monastery: PA AA, A 14563, Rosen to the Foreign Office, 16 August 1905. The documents were later published, Abba FILḌḌOS, *The Rights of the Abyssinian Orthodox Church in the Holy Places*, Jerusalem 1962.

35 Kirsten STOFFREGEN-PEDERSEN, *Dayr as-Sulṭān*, in: Siegbert UHLIG (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 2, Wiesbaden 2005, p. 117. According to Ethiopian tradition, it was the Empress Helena (ca. 250–330), mother of Constantine the Great (r. 306–337), who herself assigned the Ethiopians the specific location on which to build their chapel. Cf. Maurice de COPPET (ed.), *Chronique du règne de Ménélík II roi des rois d'Éthiopie*, vol. 2, Paris 1930, pp. 489f.

36 PA AA, *Vertragsarchiv. Deutsch-Äthiopischer Freundschafts- und Handelsvertrag*; cf. ZIMEN, Rosen, pp. 47–50.

bers of the German imperial legation were included in the liturgical practice of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church at a particularly sacred place³⁷. The special status that Mənilək II attributed to the visit of the German imperial legation was emphasised by *Aq^waq^wam*, the liturgical dance of the Ethiopian clergy³⁸.

Empress Zäwditu: Ethio-British Entanglements and the Quest for a Female Role Model

After Mənilək's II death in 1913, Ethiopia entered a period of deep political crisis. At first, Mənilək's grandson Iyasu (1913–1916) became the designated emperor³⁹. However, his reign proved to be short. In 1916, before he had even been officially crowned, Iyasu was charged with apostasy, alleging that he had converted to Islam and thus lost his right of succession within the Solomonic dynasty.

After some hesitation, the head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, *abunä* Matewos (1843–1926)⁴⁰, supported the *coup d'état* and released the nobility from its oath of loyalty to Iyasu, who was declared deposed from the throne and excommunicated from the church⁴¹. The assembly of nobles asked Zäwditu, Mənilək II's youngest daughter, to ascend the throne and become Empress of Ethiopia. At the same time, Täfäri Mak^wännən (the future Emperor Ḥaylä Šəllase) was elevated to the title of *Ras* and made heir to the throne⁴². Zäwditu was to become the first female sovereign in Ethiopian history ruling in her own right rather than as the

37 ROSEN, Eine deutsche Gesandtschaft, p. 467.

38 This dance – accompanied both by singing and by the traditional church musical instruments, the prayer stick (*mäqq^wamiya*), the sistrion (*šānašəl*) and the drum (*kābāro*) – served as expression of a special spiritual joy and was prohibited in Lent; see Kay KAUFMAN-SHELEMAY, *Aq^waq^wam*, in: UHLIG (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 1, p. 293; Donald Nathan LEVINE, *Wax and Gold. Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture*, Chicago 1986, p. 26.

39 On Iyasu and his period, see Ficquet ÉLOI/Wolbert SMIDT (eds.), *The Life and Times of Lij Iyasu of Ethiopia. New Insights*, Münster 2014; Bahru ZEWDE, *Iyasu*, in: UHLIG (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 3, pp. 253–256.

40 Initially, Matewos was a monk in the Coptic monastery of St Pachomius. In 1881, following a request of Emperor Yoḥannəs IV, he was ordained together with three other Coptic monks as bishop for Ethiopia. At first, he was bishop of the province of Šāwa, but when Mənilək II, with whom he maintained a close relationship, became emperor in 1889, he replaced then the head of the Ethiopian Church, *abunä* Peṭros IV (1881–1917) by permission of the Coptic Pope Kirellos V (1831–1927). On *abunä* Matewos, see Steven KAPLAN, *Matewos*, in: UHLIG (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 3, pp. 867f.

41 Cf. Ahmed Hassen OMER, *The Coup d'État of September 26, 1916. Different Perceptions*, in: *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 46 (2013), pp. 99–120.

42 *Ras* was the second highest rank and title (after *nəguś*, the emperor) in the hierarchy of the Ethiopian Empire; cf. Denis NOSNITSIN, *Ras*, in: UHLIG (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 4, pp. 330f.

crowned spouse of an emperor. As a consequence, Ethiopian Orthodox political theology faced a previously unknown challenge.

The new accentuations of Solomonic theology manifested themselves during the coronation that took place on 11 February 1917 (= 4 Yäkkatit 1909 in the Ethiopian calendar). The traditional symbolism of the ceremony reflected continuity and emphasised deep respect for the long history of the Empire. At the same time, given the lack of precedent for a female sovereign in Ethiopian history, the tradition required creative adaptation. A new royal title was created, with the empress to be called *Nəgəstā nəgəstat* («Queen of Kings»), by analogy with the traditional imperial title of male monarchs, *Nəguṣä nəgästä* («King of Kings»)⁴³.

The ceremony of Zäwditu's coronation was marked by a combination of traditional patterns and innovative elements. It was the first coronation to which a high number of foreign guests and diplomats were invited. There were two main purposes behind this strategy. First, the coronation aimed to demonstrate the power of Ethiopia as an independent African country and to secure its diplomatic recognition as an equal of the European countries. Second, the presence of foreign guests was to attest the international support of the new regime and prove its commitment to modernisation⁴⁴. Since the coronation took place when World War I was at its height, representatives of the British, Italian, French, and Russian legations were present, while the representatives of Germany and Ottoman Empire decided not to attend.

During the ceremony, before reciting the coronation prayer, *abunä* Matewos addressed the gathering. As a theological justification of the unusual fact that the monarch to be crowned was female, the archbishop mentioned the example of the Queen of Sheba, stressing that it was from her, and not from his father, Salomon, that Mənilək I had inherited the Ethiopian crown⁴⁵. This motive was, however, intertwined with a modern European practice. *Abunä* Matewos referred to the example of the British Queen Victoria (1837–1901) and her successful reign⁴⁶. The choice of Queen Victoria as a role model also had a clear political dimension, demonstrating to the foreign representatives at the ceremony that the new political

43 Gianfranco FIACCADORI, *Nəguṣ*, in: UHLIG (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 3, p. 1164. The Ethiopian title of empress as the coronated spouse of an emperor was *ጌtege*; cf. Hanna RUBINKOWSKA, *ጌtege*, in: UHLIG (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 2, p. 392.

44 Cf. Hanna RUBINKOWSKA, *A New Structure of Power: The Message revealed by the Coronation of Zäwditu (1917)*, in: *Annales d'Éthiopie* 28 (2013), pp. 19–44, at p. 38.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

46 See also the recollections of a British eyewitness to the coronation, Leland Buxton (1884–1967): «A long proclamation was read out, which, by way of apologising for the sex of the monarch, referred to the great success achieved by Queen Victoria», quoted in Arnold Weinholt HODSON, *Seven Years in Southern Abyssinia*, London 1927, p. 135.

elites saw themselves on the side of the Allies in the ongoing World War I, rather the Central Powers with which the disposed Iyasu had sympathised.

These two female figures, the Queen of Sheba and Queen Victoria, symbolised the political programme of the new Ethiopian Empress. Similarly, as Victoria's reign marked a long period of economic, cultural, and political growth, it was hoped that this would also be the case under Ethiopia's first empress. The reconfigurations of Ethiopian Orthodox political theology introduced by Zäwditu can be described as a »Sabean turn«. As underscored by the coronation, the Ethiopian royal dynasty was to be perceived not primarily as »Solomonic«, but rather as »Sabean«, since it was from the Queen of Sheba that Mənilək I had inherited the Ethiopian throne.

In her quest to normalise the idea of female leadership in Ethiopia, Zäwditu endeavoured to bring the Queen of Sheba out of the shadow of the figure of Solomon. An important step in this direction, was the institution of the »Order of the Queen of Sheba« in 1922⁴⁷. As such, the use of orders following the European pattern was a fairly recent practice introduced in the Ethiopian Empire only in the second half of the nineteenth century⁴⁸. Yoḥannəs IV had instituted the »Order of Solomon« as the highest imperial honour in the 1870s⁴⁹. It was against this background that Zäwditu articulated her message. The insignia of the »Order of the Queen of Sheba« symbolically referred to the idea of *translatio imperii* from Ancient Israel to Ethiopia, thereby highlighting the central role of the Queen of Sheba in this process. It depicted a golden Star of David; at its centre was placed the right-facing profile of the Queen of Sheba superimposed over a three-pointed star, the symbol of the Trinity. Since orders were bestowed upon the highest nobility of the Ethiopian Empire as well as upon members of royal families of foreign states, they were an effective means of propagating the new ideology among the elites.

47 The »Order of the Queen of Sheba« was presented in six classes: Collar (only for members of the royal family); Grand Cordon (limited to 25); Grand Officer (limited to 45); Commander (limited to 55); Officer (unlimited); Member or Chevalier (i. e., »Knight«; also unlimited); cf. Gregory R. COPLEY, *Ethiopia Reaches Her Hand unto God. Imperial Ethiopia's Unique Symbols, Structures and Role in the Modern World*, Alexandria, VA, 1998, p. 151; cf. also Guntram FUHRMANN, *Orden erzählen Geschichte. Von den Anfängen bis zur Zeit Friedrichs des Großen*, Norderstedt 2015, pp. 16f.; Borna BARAC, *Reference Catalogue – Orders, Medals and Decorations of the World Institutes until 1945*, vol. 2, Zagreb 2010, pp. 41f.; Mario VOLPE, *Signs of Honour – Compendium of Orders of Knighthood and Honours of Italy, Europe and the Rest of the World*, vol. 2, Rome 2009, p. 410.

48 On the history of orders in Ethiopia, see Asfa-Wossen ASSERATE, *Orders and Decorations*, in: UHLIG (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 4, pp. 44–46; Gregor GATSCHER-RIEDL, *Die Orden des äthiopischen Kaiserreichs und der salomonidischen Dynastie*, in *Zeitschrift der Österreichischen Gesellschaft für Ordenskunde* 91 (2013), pp. 1–22.

49 On the »Order of Solomon«, see COPEY, *Ethiopia*, p. 149; FUHRMANN, *Orden*, pp. 20f.; BARAC, *Reference Catalogue*, p. 21; VOLPE, *Signs*, pp. 408f.

At the same time, Zāwditu continued the quest for historical legitimatisation of the history of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba begun by Mənilək II. However, also in this endeavour, the Empress aimed to highlight the role of the Queen of Sheba. For this purpose, she commissioned an official of German-Ethiopian descent, Jakoub Adol Mar (1881–1952)⁵⁰, to collect »all legends, tales, songs and oral traditions about the history of the Queen of Sheba« and to write her biography with the greatest possible degree of historical truth⁵¹. Due to his family background and professional experience – he had spent 17 years in Germany, where he attended school and university, and later held several important administrative positions under Mənilək II – Jakoub Adol Mar was familiar with both worlds. Zāwditu held, therefore, the justified hope that he would confirm the Ethiopian traditional narrative with help of modern Western scholarship and sent him to Europe for this purpose. Although the diplomatic career of Jakoub Adol Mar, who was appointed Ethiopian consul in Belgium in 1922, cannot be described as successful⁵², he fulfilled his assignment and wrote a treatise of over 2,000 pages in the Amharic language. The book about the Queen of Sheba was handed to Empress Zāwditu in handwritten form together with ten copies. While the Amharic treatise subsequently disappeared, in 1940 Jakoub Adol Mar published a novelistic account in French, *Makéda, Reine vierge. Roman de la Reine de Saba*, which was based upon his original research conducted for Zāwditu⁵³. Even though the book had a distinctively

50 Jakoub Adol Mar was the last of the ten children of Johannes Mayer, a German Lutheran missionary, and an Ethiopian, Sara Nəguśe. His German name was Adolf Jakob Mayer; in the Ethiopian version, Mayer became »Mar« and Adol became »Adol«. In Ethiopia, he was known mainly as »Ya’aqob Mar«. On Mar, see Wolbert G.C. SMIDT, Mayer, Adolf Jakob, in: UHLIG (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 3, pp. 889f.

51 Prince JACOUB, Makéda, *Reine vierge. Roman de la Reine de Saba*, Paris 1940, p. 5.

52 Little is known of his direct consular activities in Belgium, but he was allowed to cooperate very closely with the German government following Hitler’s seizure of power. He spent the years 1933 and 1934 in Ethiopia, where he was commissioned by the German ambassador to draw up an unrealised plan for the settlement of 20,000 Germans in Ethiopia. Cf. Bruce G. STRANG, *Collision of Empires. Italy’s Invasion of Ethiopia and its International Impact*, Farnham 2013, p. 240. In 1937, he moved to France with his wife, the Belgian actress Hélène Smet (1888–1972), whom he had married in 1923. After the outbreak of World War II, as a German citizen, he was interned in France, but soon after the German occupation of France he was released. From then on, Jakoub Adol Mar worked for the German Propaganda Department in France under the *Dienststelle Ribbentrop*, where he ran his own radio programme, *Le quart d’heure colonial*. Later he was also responsible for the Arabic-language programme on the *Paris Mondial* station. After the war, Jakoub Adol Mar was held responsible for this activity and was sentenced to five years imprisonment. Cf. Ras Mar Jacob – honigsüß, in: *Der Spiegel. Das deutsche Nachrichten-Magazin* 1 (1947), p. 9.

53 JACOUB, Makéda. In 1997 the book was reissued: Jakoub Adol MAR, Makéda, ou, *La fabuleuse histoire de la reine de Saba*, Paris 1997; German translation: Id., *Makeda, Königin von Saba*, Munich 1998.

novel-like character, Jakoub Adol Mar was presented by the editors as a trustworthy scholar and »un érudit pour qui les mystères du monde oriental antique n'ont pas de secrets«⁵⁴. The book was nothing more than a glorification of the Queen of Sheba, based upon various assumptions regarding ethnography and archaeology of the Ancient Orient and padded out with elements of Ethiopian everyday life projected onto the past.

All in all, the »Sabean turn« initiated by Empress Zäwditu can be described as a remarkable attempt to shift emphases within the traditional understanding of the Solomonic narrative. Whereas the Queen of Sheba provided a model of justification of a female rule within the Ethiopian tradition, the figure of Queen Victoria was undoubtedly an important contemporary point of reference. In the instruments she employed to reconfigure Ethiopian Orthodox political theology, Zäwditu followed the example of her father, Mənilək II. Both of them made use of modern Western scholarship in their attempts to provide historical evidence for the Ethiopian founding myth.

Emperor Ḥaylä Šəllase: Ethio-Japanese Entanglements and the Quest for a Juridical Legitimation of the Solomonic Narrative

On 2 November 1930, *Ras Täfäri Mak'ännən*, who was to become the last Solomonic monarch, ascended to the throne and assumed the royal name Ḥaylä Šəllase (Haile Selassie). In the course of his long reign, which lasted until 1974, Ḥaylä Šəllase largely shaped »Neo-Solomonic« political theology. While his contribution to the Ethiopian Orthodox political thought certainly deserves a comprehensive study, in the following I would like to focus on one particular episode that arguably was formative for the further development of political theology in Ethiopia – the promulgation of the first modern constitution in Ethiopian history⁵⁵.

54 JACOUB, Makéda, p. 4.

55 Some scholars regard the ensemble of mediaeval writings – including the already often mentioned *Kəbrä nəgəst*, the *Šər'atä mängəst* (»Order of the Reign«), and the *Fəṭṭa nəgəst* (»The Law of the Kings«) as the first written constitution that provided the ideological and legislative foundations of the Ethiopian monarchy; see Bairu TAFLA/Heinrich SCHOLLER, *Ser'ata Mangest. An Early Ethiopian Constitution*, in: *Verfassung und Recht in Übersee* 9 (1976), pp. 487–499; James C.N. PAUL/Christopher CLAPHAM, *Ethiopian Constitutional Development*, 2 vols., Addis Ababa 1969–1971; Heinrich SCHOLLER, *Constitutional law: From Tradition to the 20th Century*, in: Id., *Ethiopian Constitutional and Legal Development*, vol. 1, Cologne 2005, pp. 79–86; cf. id., *Constitutions*, in: UHLIG (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 1, pp. 788–791.

Ḥaylä Šəllase promulgated the constitution (*Ḥəggä mängəst*) less than a year after his coronation, on 16 July 1931. It was drafted by a Russian-educated intellectual, Täklä Ḥawaryat Täklä Maryam (1884–1977)⁵⁶, and modified by the emperor and his advisers. It has to be stressed that the Ethiopian constitution to a certain extent followed and even copied the Japanese Meiji Constitution of 1889⁵⁷. Whereas the Meiji Constitution in its turn was largely modelled on the Prussian constitution of 1850 and that of the German Empire of 1871, it had certain unique features that were missing in other modern constitutions. The feature of the Japanese constitution that doubtlessly appealed to Ḥaylä Šəllase, who sought to provide a juridical foundation to Ethiopian Orthodox political theology, was the idea of the emperor's sacral nature and the religiously connotated notion of royal succession. Accordingly, the Ethiopian constitution declared in its first chapter that »the imperial dignity shall remain perpetually attached to the line of His Majesty Haile Selassie I, descendant of King Sahle Selassie, whose line descends without interruption from the dynasty of Menelik I, son of King Solomon of Jerusalem and the Queen of Ethiopia, known as the Queen of Sheba«⁵⁸.

Thus, the descent of the Ethiopian royal dynasty from King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (here called »the Queen of Ethiopia«) was not perceived as a matter of religious belief or historical inquiry, but was rather determined as a fundamental juridical principle. The formulation of this article has obvious parallels with that of the Meiji Constitution which referred to the »sacred imperial ancestors« as well as with the idea of »the throne of a lineal succession unbroken for ages eternal« expressed in its preamble⁵⁹. An important innovation introduced by Ḥaylä Šəllase concerned the principle of legitimate succession to the throne. It stipulated that imperial power had to be transmitted exclusively within his own line rather than – as had previously been the case – within the Solomonic dynasty as a whole.

56 See Maxim ZABOLOTSKIH, Täklä Ḥawaryat Täklä Maryam, in: UHLIG (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 4, pp. 829f.; Bahru ZEWDE, *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia. The Reformist Intellectuals of the Early Twentieth Century*, Oxford 2002.

57 Cf. Joseph Calvitt CLARKE III, *Alliance of the Colored Peoples. Ethiopia and Japan Before World War II*, Rochester, NY 2011, pp. 37f.; PAUL/CLAPHAM, *Ethiopian Constitutional Development*, vol. 1, p. 370; Aberra JEMBERE, *An Introduction to the Legal History of Ethiopia, 1434–1974*, London 2000, pp. 167–172.

58 The Constitution of Ethiopia. Established in the Reign of His Majesty Haile Selassie I, July 16, 1931, Chapter I, Article 3, published by: WorldStatesmen.org, URL: <https://www.worldstatesmen.org/Ethiopia_1931.txt> (09-28-2023).

59 The Constitution of the Empire of Japan (1889), published by: Hanover Historical Texts Project, URL: <<https://history.hanover.edu/texts/1889con.html>> (09-20-2023) [abbreviated form of Hirobumi Iro, *Commentaries on the Constitution of the Empire of Japan*, trans. by Miyoji Iro, Tokyo 22nd year of Meiji 1889].

Another central feature borrowed from the Meiji Constitution was the proclamation of the idea of the sacral kingship⁶⁰. Whereas the Japanese constitution stated in a concise manner, »the emperor is sacred and inviolable«⁶¹, the Ethiopian constitution elaborated this formulation, deriving the sacrality of the emperor from his membership of the Solomonic dynasty and the sanction of the church expressed through anointment. The relevant passage of the Ethiopian constitution reads as follows:

By virtue of his imperial blood, as well as by the anointing which he has received, the person of the emperor is sacred, his dignity is inviolable and his power indisputable. He is consequently entitled to all the honours due to him in accordance with tradition and the present Constitution. The law decrees that anyone so bold as to seek to injure His Majesty the emperor will be punished⁶².

In effect, the Meiji Constitution provided an excellent foundation for Ḥaylā Šəllase's constitutional design that allowed him to enshrine central features of Ethiopian Orthodox political theology in the main legal document. Despite its remoteness in geographical as well as cultural and religious terms, in the 1930s Japan became a significant role model for Ethiopian intellectuals by offering an alternative paradigm of modernisation that differed markedly from Western models⁶³. Even though, during the early period of Ḥaylā Šəllase's reign, Ethiopia cultivated a closer bilateral relationship with Japan⁶⁴, the most profound outcome of the Ethio-Japanese entanglements was certainly the promulgation of the Ethiopian constitution that adopted the Japanese idea of the sacral kingship and restated it in accordance with Ethiopian Orthodox political theology.

60 On the Japanese notion of the sacral kingship, see Yukata HIBINO, *Learning the Sacred Way of the Emperor. The National Ideals of the Japanese People*, New York 2010; Ben-Ami SHILLONY, *Enigma of the Emperors. Sacred Subservience in Japanese History*, Kent 2005; Emiko OHNUKI-TIERNEY, *The Emperor of Japan as Deity (Kami)*, in: *Ethnology* 30/3 (1991), pp. 199–215.

61 *The Constitution of the Empire of Japan*, Chapter I, Article 3.

62 *The Constitution of Ethiopia*, Chapter I, Article 5.

63 See Bahru ZEWDE, *The Concept of Japanization in the Intellectual History of Modern Ethiopia*, in: Id. (ed.), *Proceedings of Fifth Seminar of the Department of History*, Addis Ababa 1990, pp. 1–17; CLARKE III, *Alliance*, pp. 7–21; Sara MARZAGORA, »We Proceed following Japan«. *The Role of the Japanese Model in Early 20th Century Ethiopian Political Philosophy*, in: Arno SONDEREGGER (ed.), *African Thoughts on Colonial and Neo-colonial Worlds. Facets of an Intellectual History of Africa*, Berlin 2015, pp. 17–32.

64 See Hideko FAËRBER-ISHIHARA, *Japan, relations with*, in: UHLIG (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 3, pp. 267–269; CLARKE III, *Alliance*, pp. 31–61; Hideko FAËRBER-ISHIHARA, *Heruy, le Japon et les »japonisants«*, in: Alain ROUAUD (ed.), *Les orientalistes sont des aventuriers*, Paris 1999, pp. 143–149.

Conclusion

The *Kəbrä nəgäšt* can indeed be regarded as a remarkable example of transnational entanglements within the Christian oriental world. This text was in all probability composed in Arabic language within a Coptic Christian context, was largely shaped by imagery of the Hebrew Bible as well as theological ideas originating from the Syrian milieu, was translated in the fourteenth century into Gə'əz, and on the Ethiopian soil gave rise to a very particular Orthodox political theology. However, the history of its reception and re-interpretation in the modern times cannot be comprehended without also considering the numerous transnational entanglements involved.

The *Kəbrä nəgäšt* provided the Ethiopian Empire with a strong and lasting Israelite identity and laid the foundation of Ethiopian Orthodox political theology built upon the Solomonic narrative. However, the »Neo-Solomonids« had to find new ways to articulate this narrative in the face of two major challenges. On the one hand, after the enduring period of decay of the monarchy known in Ethiopia as *Zämänä mäsaḥant* (1769–1855), the position of the emperor needed reinforcement in order to be able to consolidate the state. On the other hand, the Ethiopian Empire had to assert its position as a powerful and sovereign state in view of the threat posed by European colonisation. The new expressions of the Solomonic narrative advanced in the early twentieth century functioned as a means to establish a political order that would be able to meet these challenges.

The paradox of the situation that the Ethiopian rulers found themselves in during the early twentieth century was that the Solomonic narrative that used to be regarded as indisputable and could therefore serve as the source of legitimation itself required a historical authentication. The Solomonic narrative was contested. Therefore, the Ethiopian rulers attempted to make use of European science, as in the cases of Mənilək II and Zäwditu, to provide (or rather to construct) historical evidence for the Ethiopian founding myth. Moreover, transnational entanglements made reconfigurations of Ethiopian Orthodox political theology and its embedding into new forms possible, as exemplified by the case of the »Sabeen turn«. The incorporation of the Solomonic narrative into the first Ethiopian Constitution, largely inspired by the Japanese constitutional design, was a logical consequence of the process that Pierluigi Piovanelli has described as the »Solomonic reconstruction of Ethiopian reality«⁶⁵. As demonstrated in this chapter, this Solomonic reconstruction was made possible not least by transnational entanglements of intellectual, diplomatic, and religious kinds.

65 PIOVANELLI, *The Apocryphal Legitimation*, p. 21.

Intensive exchange with the wider world not only contributed to the transformation of Ethiopian Orthodox political theology but also drew the attention of European scholars to the Solomonic narrative in general and to the *Kəbrä nəgäšt* in particular. The rumour that the Ethiopian Christians have a book under the title *Gloria regum*, containing a story of the Queen of Sheba that deviates from the biblical account and enjoying an extraordinary authority »like another gospel« (*alterum quasi Evangelium*), was circulating in Europe since the Early modern period⁶⁶. However, the text of the *Kəbrä nəgäšt* remained virtually unknown in the West until the early twentieth century, when Carl Bezold published a critical edition of the *Kəbrä nəgäšt's* Gə'əz text accompanied by a German translation⁶⁷. Thus, the formative text of Ethiopian Orthodox political theology, previously known to European readers mainly through contradictory paraphrases, was for the first time made available in its entirety.

Numerous enthusiastic reviews of Bezold's edition bear witness to considerable interest in the *Kəbrä nəgäšt*⁶⁸. An interest in the Solomonic narrative evolved amid fascination for the Queen of Sheba that could be observed among early twentieth-century scholars. Remarkably, debates around her figure were held across disciplinary and national borders and involved not only theologians and historians

66 Hiob LUDOLF, *Historia Aethiopiae, sive brevis & succincta descriptio Regni Habessinorum, Quod vulgo male Presbyteri Iohannis vocatur*, Frankfurt am Main 1681, Cap. IV.II.I.

67 BEZOLD, *Kebrä Nagast*. Previously, Franz Praetorius had edited a relatively small portion of the *Kəbrä nəgäšt* (chapters 19–32 out of total 117 chapters) and provided it with a Latin translation: Franz PRAETORIUS, *Fabula de Regina Sabaea apud Aethiopes*, Halle 1870.

68 [book review] Theodore NÖLDEKE, *Kebrä Nagast. Die Herrlichkeit der Könige. Nach den Handschriften in Berlin, London, Oxford und Paris zum ersten Mal im äthiopischen Urtext herausgegeben und mit deutscher Übersetzung versehen*, in: *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 19 (1905), pp. 397–411; [book review] Hugo GREßMANN, *Kebrä Nagast. Die Herrlichkeit der Könige. Nach den Handschriften in Berlin, London, Oxford und Paris zum ersten Mal im äthiopischen Urtext herausgegeben und mit deutscher Übersetzung versehen*, in: *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 60 (1906), pp. 666–674; [book review] Johannes FLEMMING, *Kebrä Nagast. Die Herrlichkeit der Könige. Nach den Handschriften in Berlin, London, Oxford und Paris zum ersten Mal im äthiopischen Urtext herausgegeben und mit deutscher Übersetzung versehen*, in: *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen* 11/171 (1909), pp. 903–912; [book review] James CRICHTON, *Kebrä Nagast. Die Herrlichkeit der Könige. Nach den Handschriften in Berlin, London, Oxford und Paris zum ersten Mal im äthiopischen Urtext herausgegeben und mit deutscher Übersetzung versehen*, in: *Review of Theology and Philosophy* 1 (1906), pp. 225–229.

but also Byzantinists⁶⁹, Germanists⁷⁰, and even Sinologists⁷¹. Thus, the *Kəbrä nəgäšt* and the Solomonic narrative themselves became part of an increasingly globalised intellectual discourse.

69 Just to give an example, in the years 1902–1904 a notable debate took place in the pages of *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* on the identification of the Queen of Sheba with Sibyl in Byzantine historiography. The disputants were Samuel Krauss (1866–1948), professor of Hebrew at the Jewish Teachers' Seminary in Budapest, and the prominent New Testament scholar Eberhard Nestle (1851–1913); see Samuel KRAUSS, Die Königin von Saba in den byzantinischen Chroniken, in: *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 11 (1902), pp. 120–131; Eberhard NESTLE, Zur Königin von Saba als Sibylle, in: *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 13 (1904), pp. 492f.

70 Thus, in 1905 Wilhelm Hertz (1835–1902) published a revised version of the study in which he carefully examined the transfer of the legend of the Queen of Sheba and Solomon into German literature and art of the Middle Ages and early modern times: Wilhelm HERTZ, Die Rätsel der Königin von Saba, in: Friedrich von der LEYEN (ed.), *Gesammelte Abhandlungen von Wilhelm Hertz*, Stuttgart 1905, pp. 413–455.

71 For instance, the sinologist Alfred Forke (1867–1944) tried to show the influence of the Queen of Sheba, who in his view had been a historical figure ruling over a political entity in the Horn of Africa, upon Chinese mythology. In the Chinese goddess Si Wang Mu (literally: »the Queen Mother of the West«) and the mythical mountain of the gods Kunlun, the professor at the Seminar for Oriental Languages in Berlin saw nothing but a poetic reflection of the Queen of Sheba and the Ethiopian highlands. See Alfred FORKE, Mu Wang und die Königin von Saba, in: *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen an der Königlichen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin* 7 (1904), pp. 117–172.