The Refutation of Magic in the Dərsanat of Zärʾa Yaʿqob

by

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Author’s Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

The 15th century Ethiopian Emperor Zär’a Yaʿqob (r. 1434-1468) is perhaps the most influential figure in the almost 1700 year history of the Ethiopian Church. One would be hard-pressed to name an individual who can match the amount of reforms, innovations, and persecutions brought about by him, the corpus of writings attributed to him, and the many acts and miracles associated with his life. Indeed, almost every aspect of modern practice in the Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahdo Church has in some way been touched by the Emperor’s influence, from the ecclesiastical calendar to canon law to ritual practice. Zär’a Yaʿqob is often known for his involvement in the theological controversies that were prominent during his reign, the instigators of which often elicited his ire, but no group of individuals were more feared or hated by the Emperor than magicians.

Many of the works attributed to Zär’a Yaʿqob, including the Ṭomarä Təsbʿıt (Epistle of Humanity), the Māṣḥafā Bərhan (Book of Light), and the Māṣḥafā Milād (Book of the Nativity), contain rebukes of magicians of different sorts, from diviners to sorcerers or charmers to demoniac soothsayers. In order to argue convincingly against these practices, Zär’a Yaʿqob based his authority on texts from the Old and New Testaments and pseudo-Apostolic texts, adapting the motifs and arguments to suit his purposes, ultimately depicting practitioners of magic as wicked individuals, condemned by the Apostles, idolatrous, and destined for destruction. This use of sources and of portrayal formed a key part of the Emperor’s efforts to root out magic in his Empire and an analysis of these efforts offers useful insights into medieval Ethiopian spirituality and religion, homiletics, theology, ecclesiastical politics, and even state politics.
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I cannot express how indebted I am to the mentorship and friendship of my supervisor, Dr. David Porreca. A great deal of how I came to be where I am today is due to his guidance, assistance, instruction, generosity, and sheer kindness. I am truly grateful for everything he has done for me. I am also grateful to Dr. Pierluigi Piovanelli (University of Ottawa) for agreeing to serve as an external committee member and for the support he has provided. I also express my appreciation for the support and assistance provided by Dr. Andrew Faulkner.

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Lastly, I am thankful to those people, many of whom I do not know their names, who, although they did not know me, were overwhelmingly hospitable and informative while I was conducting research in ’Aksum, Lalibāla, ’Addis ’Abāba, and Gəšän Maryam. The Habesha people are a shining example of true ξενία and I will always have fond memories of the times I have spent with them, both within Ethiopia and in the diaspora.
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System of Transliteration

This thesis adheres to the following system of transliteration, as recommended by the editors of the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*. Quotations containing transliterations that follow alternate systems have been normalized to this system for consistency, but the titles of cited secondary books and articles have been retained. Ethiopic text in footnotes has not been transliterated.

The only non-Gəʿəz consonant to occur in this thesis is እ, which has been transliterated with Ş/š, as recommended by the editors of the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*.

Note that it is very common in Ethiopian manuscripts to see confusion between certain consonants that became homophonous over time due to the influence of vernacular languages. This confusion is generally observed with the letters እ/👚, ይ/ስ, እ/_BR, and, less commonly, እ/ꠖ and እ/_years. For example, one can find ስሚ፲ fører: (sray) misspelled as እሚ፲ fører: (sray), with both spellings sometimes occurring in the same manuscript. Note also that, for the phonemes እ, ከ, አ, and ኢ, the phonetic value of /ä/ is rather /a/, thus እኔ፲ /əF: is rendered as mäṣḥaf, not mäṣḥaf.
List of Abbreviations

**CSCO**

Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium.

**Didasqolya**


**EAE**


**Homily on the Rite of Baptism and Religious Instruction**

**Textus (Tx.)**


**Versio (Vs.)**


**Mashaḥaf Berhan I**

**Textus (Tx.)**


**Versio (Vs.)**


**Ephraim**


**Mashaḥaf Berhan II**

**Textus (Tx.)**


**Versio (Vs.)**


**Mashaḥaf Kidan**


**Mashaḥaf Milad I**

**Textus (Tx.)**

ABBREVIATIONS


*Māṣḥafā Milad II*


Royal Chronicle


*Sīnodos*


Ṭomarā Təsb’ät


Introduction

The rich religious tradition of Ethiopia, with its long history, unique development, and abundance of texts, presents a range of practices ranging from Christian rites to Semitic pagan rituals, with a sizeable class of “magico-religious” prayers and rituals bridging the gap between the opposing traditions. Few figures loom larger in Ethiopian religious history than the zealous Christian Emperor Zär’a Yaʿqob (1399-1468). Remembered for the large corpus of lectionaries, treatises, and prayers attributed to him, his many significant, lasting religious reforms, and his severely repressive policies and persecutions, his role in working to suppress magical practices within Ethiopia is often highlighted in accounts of his reign, both contemporary and modern. Praised in the Māṣḥaf Sŏnkəsar (Book of the Synaxarion) as “orthodox and apostolic,”¹ the royal chronicle relates how “great terror and great fear” were spread throughout the entire country because of “the severity of his justice and his authoritarian rule,” directed largely against those who “confessed that they had worshipped Dāsk and the Devil” (i.e., those who were accused of practicing magic).² The corpus of writings attributed to Zär’a Yaʿqob affords an excellent opportunity to analyze several aspects of Ethiopian religion and society, including theology, homiletics, ecclesiastical structures, political and religious authority, popular devotion, and religious development. Given the Emperor’s great hatred and fear of practitioners of magic, his efforts to refute the practice of magic through his ḍorsanat using various rhetorical techniques, especially his use of the

² Royal Chronicle, Tx. p. 4 = Haber p. 152.

This is described in the first recension of the royal chronicle. The more favourable second recension (copied together with the first) relates how “a great peace and great tranquility” were spread throughout the entire country “because the king taught justice and faith,” on account of which “he may be counted among the prophets and apostles.” (Royal Chronicle, Tx. p. 80 = Haber p. 163). On the reediting of the royal chronicles, see Manfred Kropp, “La réédition des chroniques éthiopiennes: perspectives et premiers résultats,” Abbay 12 (1983-84): pp. 49-73.
authority of the Christian Scriptures and pseudo-Apostolic texts, are particularly deserving of research.

Manuscript cataloguer Getatchew Haile has published extensively on Ṣār’a Yaʿqōb, publishing editions and translations of some of the Emperor’s works (The Epistle of Humanity of Emperor Ṣār’a Yaʿqōb (Ṭomarā ṭṣbʾt), The Homily of Ṣār’a Yaʿqōb’s Māḥaṭa Bārḥan on the Rite of Baptism and Religious Instruction, a collection of Marian texts (The Mariology of Emperor Ṣār’a Yaʿqōb of Ethiopia)) and contemporary sources (including many Stephanite sources) with helpful introductions. He has also published some articles on the theological controversies during the Emperor’s reign (“The Cause of the Ḥisṭanosites: A Fundamentalist Sect in the Church of Ethiopia,” “The Forty-Nine Hour Sabbath of the Ethiopian Church”), but has not published any material directly related to the practice of magic in Ethiopia, with the exception of his edition (and Preliminary Investigation) of the Ṭomarā ṭṣbʾt. Pierluigi Piovanelli has also written about the theological controversies (“Les controverses théologiques sous le roi Zar’a Yāqob (1434-1468) et la mise en place du monophysisme éthiopien,” “Connaissance de dieu et sagesse humaine en éthiopie: Le traité Explication de la Divinité attribué aux hérétiques «mikaélites»”). Marie-Laure Derat, in addition to some articles on the Emperor’s reign (“‘Do Not Search for Another King, One Whom God Has Not Given You’: Questions on the Elevation of Zār’a Ya’eqob”), has published a valuable article on Zār’a Yaʿqob’s royal homilies (“Les homélies du roi Zar’a Ya’eqob: La communication d’un souverain éthiopien du XVe Siècle”), although this is primarily focused on the composition and copying of his homilies rather than the rhetoric he uses in the homilies. The contributions of Steven Kaplan on Ethiopian religion (The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia: From Earliest Times to the Twentieth Century, “Magic and Religion in Christian Ethiopia: Some Preliminary Remarks”) are also deserving of mention. Taddesse Tamrat’s foundational Church and State In Ethiopia, 1270-1527
is, of course, an important relevant historiographical work, as is his study of the Stephanite heresy (“Some Notes on the Fifteenth Century Stephanite «Heresy» in the Ethiopian Church”), however his works were published before the publication of several important historical sources. Lastly, but of no less significance, the critical editions of Carlo Conti Rossini and Lanfranco Ricci (Il Libro della Luce del negus Zar’a Yā’eqob (Maṣḥafa Berḥān), Kurt Wendt (Das Maṣḥafa Milād (Liber Nativitatis) und Maṣḥafa Sellāsē (Liber Trinitatis) des Kāisers Zar’a Yā’eqob), and Jules Perruchon (Les chroniques de Zar’a Yā’eqob et de Ba’eda Māryām, rois d’Ethiopie de 1434 à 1478) are crucial works for any research pertaining to Zār’a Yaʿqob. However, neither the rhetoric of Zār’a Yaʿqob’s compositions nor the practice of magic during his reign have received significant attention in scholarship.

1. The Reign of Emperor Zār’a Yaʿqob (1434-1468)

Zār’a Yaʿqob was elevated to Negušā Nāgāšt (“King of Kings” — Amh. “ʿAṣa,” “Emperor”) in 1434, taking the regnal name Qʷāṣṭāṅtinos (Constantine).³ The youngest son of Emperor Dawit I,⁴ his reign was not only longer than that of his father, but also longer than the combined reigns of his brothers and nephews, whose reigns fell between his father’s and his own.⁵ There is much confusion in the sources regarding those successions that followed the reign of Dawit I, which ended in 1412.⁶ Even Zār’a Yaʿqob’s own succession faced challenges, as de-

³ Steven Kaplan and Marie-Laure Derat, “Zār’a Yaʿqob,” in EAe, s.v.
His birth name, Zār’a Yaʿqob translates to “Seed of Jacob.” Although the only Zār’a Yaʿqob to have acceded to the throne, his grandson ʿĪskandar (r. 1478-1494) also took the regnal name Qʷāṣṭāṅtinos and could thus be called Qʷāṣṭāṅtinos II, making Zār’a Yaʿqob Qʷāṣṭāṅtinos I, but the scholarly convention is to refer to both emperors by their birth names.

⁴ Dawit I (r. 1379/80-1412) is sometimes called Dawit II by historians, but should not be confused with Lābnā Dāngal (r. 1508-1540), who took the regnal name Dawit and should thus be counted as Dawit II.


scribed in the second *dorsan* of his *Tamarä Tšbšt* and alluded to in other texts. The Emperor describes an attempted rebellion initiated by the *Boḥöt Wäddäl* (a prominent court position), ’Isayɔyyas, and supported by ’Isayɔyyas’s wife, Šiłḥ Māngāša, who may be identified as a daughter of Zār’a Ya’aqob, and Gälawdewos “the Jew,” who was probably another one of Zār’a Ya’aqob’s children, perhaps even his eldest son and successor, Bā’ødā Maryam. Zār’a Ya’aqob successfully quelled the rebellion and, in the third year of his reign, left for Aksum, being formally crowned there in 1439, presumably by the newly appointed metropolitans of Ethiopia, Mika’el and Gäbrə’el.

Prior to his ascension to the throne at the age of 35, Zār’a Ya’aqob lived in the royal prison at ’Amba Gəšän, a location later associated with the famous church of Gəšän Maryam and a piece of the True Cross, which had been established to prevent intrigue among members of the royal family. He is also supposed to have spent part of his youth living as a monastic in a monastery in Təgray, often identified as the monastery of Däbrä ʿAbbay. It is claimed that Zār’a Ya’aqob received an extensive theological education during his stays at Däbrä ʿAbbay and ’Amba Gəšän, in some accounts from none other than the preeminent Ethiopian theologian Giy-

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This education is often presumed to be part of what led him to enact his numerous religious reforms and compose the many theological treatises which have been attributed to him.

The most significant religious controversy during the reign of Zăr’a Yaʿqob was that of the ʾEwosṭateans. ʾEwosṭatewos, who lived during the reign of ‘Amdā Ṣəyyon (r. 1314-1344), was a monk who strongly supported the observance of the Qīdamit ʿsāḥāt, the First (i.e., Hebrew) Sabbath. Although the practice was likely found in Ethiopia centuries before the monk rose to prominence, as evidenced by an 11th-century letter from Metropolitan Sawiros to Patriarch Cyril II of Alexandria, the monk had managed to gain a large following of monastic communities in support of the practice. Before leaving for Egypt to make his case before Patriarch Benjamin, ʾEwosṭatewos told his followers never to associate themselves with those who did not follow their teachings, leading to a schism within the Ethiopian church. By the time of Zăr’a Yaʿqob’s ascension to the throne, the century-old Dāqiqū (“House of”) ʾEwosṭatewos counted 95 monasteries and 26 convents under its influence, each of which represented several dozen resident monastics. Dawit I had largely sought to avoid involving himself directly in the matter, instead authorizing Metropolitan Bārtālowos to take action against the group, although he did eventually concede and issue a decree of toleration. Zăr’a Yaʿqob, however, being determined to settle the matter once and for all, presided over a council at Dābrā Māṭma in 1450, himself having “defi-

15 Taddesse, Church and State, pp. 210-212.
16 Taddesse, Church and State, p. 211.
17 Taddesse, Church and State, pp. 213-214.
nite pro-Sabbath convictions,” even though he did not actually observe it.\footnote{Taddesse, \textit{Church and State}, p. 226; Kaplan and Derat, “Zär’a Ya’qob,” in \textit{EAe}, s.v.} In spite of opposition from the Alexandrian Patriarch, the council decided in favour of observing the \textit{Qūdamit Sānhāt}, and the \textit{Ḍaqiqā Ṣewṣṭētewos} was fully reconciled to the Ethiopian Church.\footnote{Taddesse, \textit{Church and State}, p. 225; Pierluigi Piovanelli, “Les controverses théologiques sous le roi Zar’a Ya’qob (1434-1468) et la mise en place du monophysisme éthiopien,” in \textit{La controverse religieuse et ses formes}, ed. by Alain Le Boulluec (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 217.} This was only one of a number of steps taken by the Zär’a Ya’qob to distance the Ethiopian Church from the Egyptian hierarchy and assert himself as the leader of Ethiopia, both politically and religiously.

Another noteworthy religious controversy in history of Ethiopian Christianity is the Stephanite heresy, which arose during the reign of Zär’a Ya’qob. The name is taken from the leader of the heresy, the monk ʾĒṣṭifanos. Although he had several monastic communities under his supervision, ʾĒṣṭifanos was greatly disliked by many of the other monastic leaders in the Ṭəgray region.\footnote{Taddesse Tamrat, “Some Notes on the Fifteenth Century Stephanite «Heresy» in the Ethiopian Church,” \textit{Rassegna di Studi Etiopici} 22 (1966), pp. 108-109.} In the wake of ʾĒṣṭifanos making public comments against the authority of the emperor in religious matters, Zär’a Ya’qob summoned him to court, where he was flogged for his positions.\footnote{Taddesse, “Some Notes,” p. 110.} Some time later, the Emperor arranged for a meeting to take place in Ṭ’Aksum at which the clergy of Ṭəgray would be assembled for a discussion on doctrine, to which ʾĒṣṭifanos was brought by force.\footnote{Taddesse, “Some Notes,” p. 110.} The discussion at the meeting centred around the cult of the Virgin Mary and veneration of the Cross, and ʾĒṣṭifanos publicly declared his opposition to both practices, in addition to rejecting the doctrine of millenarianism.\footnote{Steven Kaplan, “Stephanites,” in \textit{EAe}, s.v.; Pierluigi Piovanelli, “Les controverses,” p. 209; Getatchew Haile, “The Cause of the ʾĒṣṭifanosites: A Fundamentalist Sect in the Church of Ethiopia,” \textit{Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturbunde} 29 (1983), pp. 108-109.} Because of his adamant position, ʾĒṣṭi-
fanos and several of his followers who were present with him were exiled, with Ḥistīfanos himself
dying during his exile.24 The remaining Stephanites assembled in the ‘Agamā province, the loca-
tion of what became their primary monastery, Gundā Gunde, where they were supported by the
local population and the governor of the province.25 Although they had been excommunicated,
the Stephanites did not seek to separate themselves from the Ethiopian Church, instead particip-
ating with their persecutors in disguise.26 As Getatchew Haile notes, the Stephanites were a
great problem for Zār’ā Yaʿqob, about whom he says, “He dreaded the challenge to his authori-
ty and the eventual schism in the Church, which he had united with an iron fist.”27 The Stephan-
ites faced widespread and harsh persecution, having been publicly branded as heretics, an opin-
ion which persisted even after one of the most prominent Stephanite leaders prostrated himself
before an icon of Mary in the hopes that the excommunication would be lifted.28 The heresy per-
sisted after Zār’ā Yaʿqob’s death, especially around Gundā Gunde, although the Stephanites
were gradually reincorporated into the Ethiopian Church.29 Taddesse Tamrat questioned the va-
lidity of the accusation of heresy that was brought against the Stephanites, stating, “if Ḥistīfanos
was paraded as a leader of a ‘heresy,’ it was largely due to the historical accident that he lived in
the reign of Zār’ā Yaʿqob, an Ethiopian priest-king of the first order.”30 As Getatchew demon-
strates, the doctrinal disagreements between the Stephanites and the Emperor were muddled

and, until the widespread persecution of Stephanites, the status of the Stephanites varied at different times and in different locations.\textsuperscript{31}

The heresy of the priest Zämika’el also received attention from Zăr’a Ya’aqob. Unlike ’Ewosțatewos and ’Ĭstifanos, Zämika’el was not the leader of a united group of followers but instead served as a figurehead for Zăr’a Ya’aqob’s refutation of the doctrines ascribed to him and others.\textsuperscript{32} The doctrine most associated with Zämika’el concerns the personhood of the Trinity. While Zăr’a Ya’aqob believed the Trinity to be analogous to three aligned suns, Zämika’el believed the Trinity to be analogous to one sun which is round, bright, and hot.\textsuperscript{33} This doctrine, seen as being anti-Trinitarian, led to its proponents being labelled as Jews.\textsuperscript{34} Zämika’el is also supposed to have taught, also in opposition to the beliefs of Zăr’a Ya’aqob, that the image of God is unlike that of men, that the doctrine of millenarianism is incorrect,\textsuperscript{35} that the Virgin Mary was undeserving of veneration, and that several books in the Ethiopian canon ought to be rejected.\textsuperscript{36} The doctrines of Zämika’el were refuted in Zăr’a Ya’aqob’s Māṣḥafā Berhan and Māṣḥafā Milūd (and Māṣḥafā Šollase — see below).\textsuperscript{37} The other theologians prominently associated with the same

\textsuperscript{31} Getatchew, “The Cause of the Īstifanosites,” pp. 95-104.

\textsuperscript{32} Getatchew Haile, “Zämika’elites,” in E4e, s. v.

\textsuperscript{33} Getatchew, “Zämika’elites,” in E4e, s. v.


\textsuperscript{35} The anti-millenarian doctrine attributed to Zämika’el is usually described as “There is no (banquet on) Mount Sion” (Getatchew Haile, Epistle of Humanity, p. 4, n. 10). The Stephanites were also accused of this belief.


\textsuperscript{37} Getatchew, “Zämika’elites,” in E4e, s. v.; Ephraim, Text-Critical Introduction, pp. 54-59.
or similar doctrines are named ‘Asqa and Gämalyal.\textsuperscript{38} As Pierluigi Piovanelli argues, the doctrines defended by Zär’a Yaʿaqob represent long-held traditions likely observed since the spread of Christianity during the Aksumite period, while the Emperor’s opponents are often advocating for doctrines that were considered orthodox by the Coptic and other churches.\textsuperscript{39}

In the year 1454, the Emperor, who, like most of his predecessors, had a nomadic capital, established a fixed capital at Dābrā Bərhan (The Mountain of Light) following a miraculous vision. Thirty-eight days after a group of Stephanites was stoned, the royal chronicle reports that a cross of light appeared in the sky,\textsuperscript{40} echoing that which appeared to Constantine the Great at the Milvian Bridge. Zär’a Yaʿaqob spent twelve of the last fourteen years of his life in Dābrā Bərhan, dying in 1468.\textsuperscript{41} He was succeeded by his eldest son, Bāʾdā Maryam.

\section*{2. Works Attributed to Zär’a Yaʿaqob}

The royal chronicle notes that Zär’a Yaʿaqob “recorded his instructions [concerning religious practice] in his holy books, which are titled: \textit{Ṭomara Təsh əbt}, and \textit{Məshaftə Bərhan}, and \textit{Məshaftə Milād}, and \textit{Ḵəḥdəta Səyənə}, and \textit{Məshaftə Bahreyn}, and \textit{Təʾaqbo Moştir}, and \textit{ʾƎgzi əbaḥer Nəgsā}.”\textsuperscript{42} These seven texts, universally attributed to the Emperor, are the most important works for understanding his religious policies and have left a lasting impression upon the theology of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item Each \textit{dorsan} of the \textit{Ṭomara Təsh əbt} begins with a story recounting how a certain Gämalyal told a deacon that he ought to have a book of magic copied onto his blank parchment instead of the \textit{Təʾammərə Maryam} (\textit{Collection of Miracles} of Mary). This story follows shortly after a rebuke of Zamika’el.
\item \textit{Royal Chronicle}, Tx. pp. 69-71 = Haber pp. 162-163.
\item \textit{Royal Chronicle}, Tx. pp. 78-79 = Haber pp. 162-163.
\item \textit{Royal Chronicle}, Tx. pp. 76-78 = Haber p. 163.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
The *Ṭomarā Təsəb ʾet (Epistle on the Incarnation)*\(^{43}\) is a homiliary of three *dərsanat*, each dedicated to several of the apostles and to be read on their respective feast days. The purpose of the homiliary was, according to the text itself, to instruct the people in “the worship of God with a heart pure from the filth of the idol of this world, who is the ṭānq “alī.”\(^{44}\) According to a colophon in the only extant copy of the text, MS EMML 1480, the Emperor, “being zealous for the proper faith,” composed the homilies in order to “abolish from the land of his kingdom all kinds of perversions.”\(^{45}\) The text, which is entirely focused on the refutation of magicians, claims that its composition began within two months of the Emperor’s ascension and, given that it is referenced in the *Māṣḥafā Borhan* and the *Māṣḥafā Milād* but does not reference these texts, and that it refers to fewer types of magical practices than the other texts, and that it is listed first in the royal chronicle, it is likely, as Getatchew Haile claims, that it was indeed composed before the Emperor’s other works.\(^{46}\) As Marie-Laure Derat notes, due to some of the events described in the text, it could not have been completed before 1445.\(^{47}\) Throughout the three *dərsanat*, all of which have a similar style, a common refrain, “Glory be to God Who created us to worship Him,” is found.\(^{48}\) The text, which was almost entirely lost, was identified by Getatchew Haile from the only known extant manuscript, photographed in an Eritrean monastery in 1980, a manuscript which he considers to be contemporary with the Emperor’s reign and possibly copied at his own court,\(^{49}\) and

\(^{43}\) Commonly referred to as the *Epistle of Humanity*, following the title of Getatchew Haile’s critical edition.

\(^{44}\) *Ṭomarā Təsəb ʾet*, Tx. p. 113= Vs. pp. 89-90.


\(^{49}\) Getatchew, “Preliminary Investigation,” pp. 210-211.
published a critical edition and translation of the text in 1991. Consequently, a large portion of the scholarship surrounding Zăr’a Yaʿqob and Ethiopian magic, having been written before then, is unaware of its contents.

The Māṣḥafā Borhan (Book of Light) is a homiliary in six books comprised of fifteen dorsanat that are designated to be read on Saturdays, Sundays, and the days of Passion Week. The text contains dorsanat devoted to the observance of the Qādamit Sānbāt, the refutation of heresy and magic, church attendance and teaching, and the conduct of clergy. Ephraim Isaac argued in his Text-Critical Introduction that the Māṣḥafā Borhan predated Zăr’a Yaʿqob, having been composed by a “Jewish Christian,” “Sabbath-venerating community,” and was edited to suit the Emperor’s purpose. Other scholars do not seem to take up this argument and generally consider the work to have actually been composed by or at the behest of Emperor Zăr’a Yaʿqob and either make no discussion of the origins of the text or seemingly contradict Ephraim’s assertions. Getatchew Haile published in 2013 a critical edition and translation of a dorsan, which he titled The Homily of Zăr’a Yaʿqob’s Māṣḥafā Borhan on the Rite of Baptism and Religious Instruction, that, while left out of Conti Rossini’s critical edition of the Māṣḥafā Borhan, is found in manuscripts together with the first two books of the Māṣḥafā Borhan (although, strangely, not the last four). He argues it is a part of the Māṣḥafā Borhan, or at least a dorsan that can without doubt be attributed to Zăr’a Yaʿqob. Like the rest of the Māṣḥafā Borhan, the dorsan focuses on the conduct of clergy, church attendance, and the practice of magic.

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50 Ephraim, Text-Critical Introduction, p. 5; Getatchew Haile, “Borhan: Māṣḥafā bōrhan,” in EAc, s.v.
54 Getatchew, The Homily of Ṭḥra Yaʿqob’s Māṣḥafā Borhan, p. xii.
The Māṣḥafā Milād (Book of the Nativity) is a homiliary for the monthly feast commemorating the Nativity of Christ, celebrated on the 29th day of the month (although some months also have a dōrsan for the 28th, since in leap years the annual feast falls on 28 Taḥṣaš instead of 29 Taḥṣaš). The text serves as a treatise on the theology of the incarnation of Christ and a polemic against “Jews” (perhaps the Zāmika’elites) and Stephanites. The dōrsan for each month, with the exception of Māskārām, ends with a treatise on Trinitarian theology, collectively referred to as the Māṣḥafā Śəllase (Book of the Trinity) or Ḥoḥṭā Śāhây (Gate of the Sun), which also contains polemical elements.

The Kōḥdāta Sāyṭān (Abjuration of Satan) is a short creedal prayer recited everyday by Ethiopian Orthodox Christians as part of the daily prayers and is always the first prayer of every service. The full text of the prayer is:

In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God.

Believing and taking refuge in the Holy Trinity, I abjure you, Satan, before this my Mother, the Holy Church, which is my witness, Mary Sion, unto ages of ages.

According to the royal chronicle, Zār’a Yaʾqob ordered priests to “ceaselessly sprinkle with holy water, from dusk to dawn, the palace of the King, [reciting] the Gospels, the Psalms of David, the Kōḥdota Sāyṭān [sic], and the hymn ‘Agzi’abher Nāgsā’ for protection from magicians who

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55 Getatchew, “Milad: Māṣḥafā milad,” in E4e, s.v.
56 Getatchew, “Milad: Māṣḥafā milad,” in E4e, s.v.
57 Tedros Abraha, “Śəllase: Māṣḥafā śəllase,” in E4e, s.v.; Getatchew, “Milad: Māṣḥafā milad,” in E4e, s.v.
wished to harm him. \(^{60}\) The text of the prayer is found at the beginning of each book of the \(Māṣḥafā Borhan\) and of each \(dorsan\) in the \(Māṣḥafā Milād.\) \(^{61}\) While Getatchew Haile “suspect[ed] that … the [prayer] was composed at [Zār’a Yaʿqob’s] court as a prayer against evil spirits,” Emmanuel Fritsch confidently identified the prayer as the \(Ḳəḥdāta Sāyṭān\) of Zār’a Yaʿqob, the identification of which scholars had previously been uncertain. \(^{63}\)

Several lesser works are also attributed to Zār’a Yaʿqob. The \(Māṣḥafā Bahray\) (Book of the Pearl) is a rite of unction for the sick, \(^{64}\) the \(Tā’aqbo Moṣṭir\) (Care of the Mystery) is a treatise for priests concerning the careful handling of the Eucharistic elements, \(^{65}\) and \(ʿAgziʿabher Nāgsā\) (God Reigns) is a hymnal containing hymns that, as one might expect, concern role of the Virgin Mary, the glory of the Sabbath, and Trinitarian doctrine. \(^{66}\) Other texts besides those listed in the royal chronicle are commonly attributed to Zār’a Yaʿqob, including the \(Raʾyā Tāʿammor\) (Revelation of the Miracle[s] [of Mary]), a collection of four readings to be read before reading the \(Tāʿammorā\)

\(^{60}\) Royal Chronicle, Tx. p. 40 = Haber p. 159.


\(^{63}\) Fritsch, “Kehedata Sayṭān identified,” p. 368.

\(^{64}\) Getatchew Haile, “Bahray: Māṣḥafā Bahray,” \(E\&\), s.v.

\(^{65}\) Anaïs Wion, “Tāʿaqbo Moṣṭir,” in \(E\&\), s.v.


There is another collection of hymns bearing the same name attributed to Abba Gıyorgis of Gaśaʾča and a third collection based on a hymnal composed by a certain Ṭārke. The title is based on the opening lines of Ps. 92 (LXX).

Perruchon notes that the text “renferme des salams ou pièces de vers en l’honneur des saints.” Presumably he is referring to the class of hymns called “\(סיולת יִּהוּדָה\),” which are composed in honour of saints, praising their sanctity through descriptions of their likeness (the literal meaning of the term), and which consist of verses that begin with the words “\(הלל \(ב\) הים \(ב\) יבכ\)” (hence “des salams”).
Chapter 1: Introduction

Maryam ([Collection of] Miracle[s] of Mary), the Sōbhatā Ḥaqr (Praise of the Beloved), a collection of hymns that “is considered to form a unity with the office of the Sā’atat (Horologion),” the Māṣḥafā Ṭēfūt (Amh. Book of ‘Ṭeff Grains), a book recounting how the Emperor brought a piece of the True Cross to ’Amba Gəśān, the Dorsanā Mālaʾkt (Readings on the Angels), and a handful of individual darsanat and other works.

It is known that Zār’a Yaʾqob patronized a royal scriptorium for copying his darsanat and other royal texts, but it is unclear to what extent the scriptorium and court clerics were involved in the composition of the texts attributed to him. As Marie-Laure Derat notes, it is possible that the Emperor “recevait l’assistance de membres du haut clergé, susceptibles de lui fournir le matériel théologique nécessaire à la construction de ses textes.” The last homily of the Ṭomerā Ṭōsbēt, written from the perspective of the copyist, describes its composition thus:

He [Zār’a Yaʾqob] threaded pearls on the string of the pure faith. He extracted perfume and poured (it) into the bottle of the mind of man. He took great pains, cared exceeding-

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Zār’a Yaʾqob and his father, Dawit I, are especially associated with the Ṭāʾammorā Maryam, as the text was first translated from Arabic into Gəʿez during the latter’s reign, while the importance of the cult to Mary was greatly expanded during the former’s. The text is noteworthy for having been originally composed in Latin and Old French. The Raʾyā Tāʾammor was edited and published in Getatchew, Mariology, pp. 63-145. On the Ṭāʾammorā Maryam, see Ewa Balicka-Witakowska and Alessandro Bausi, “Ṭāʾammorā Maryam,” in Ede, s.v.

68 Habtemichael Kidane, “Sobhata Foqr,” in Ede, s.v.

Habtemichael notes in the Ede, “Tradition ascribes the composition of the S.f., or at least of its Marian parts, to the 15th-cent. Emperor Zār’a Yaʾqob.”

69 Haile Gabriel Dagne, “Amba Gəśān,” in Ede, s.v.


70 Kaplan and Derat, “Zār’a Yaʾqob,” in Ede, s.v.


Getatchew Haile also suggests this (Getatchew, Mariology, p. 67).
ly and was solicitous that God alone be worshipped and all (other) worships and the idol of this world cease. I am a witness before the dread God that I heard him as he said, “How much I desire that Ethiopia stand firm in the worship of God…”

This can be seen in other works attributed to the Emperor. In the letter of metropolitans Mikaʾel and Gābraʾel concerning the observance of the Qädamit Sänbät, he is called “the horn of our salvation, the learned Zärʾa Yaʿqōb, treasure house of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments,” again reinforcing the claim that Zärʾa Yaʿqōb composed the works himself. It is clear that Zärʾa Yaʿqōb’s works played a critical role in his imperial policy, which has been best described by Taddesse Tamrat in the conclusion to his monumental Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270-1527:

King Zärʾa Yaʿqōb stands out as the only monarch who made a serious attempt to grapple with the overriding problem of creating a nation out of the manifold communities which constituted his extensive empire. In doing this, however, he sought to superimpose a religious nationalism on his subjects, and his efforts ended in a substantial failure.

While his attempts at unity may not have been lasting, his extensive theological contributions can be seen in almost every aspect of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, even in the modern day, and this fact alone attests to the significance of his works.

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73 Ṭomarā Ṭəḥšt, Tx. p. 113 = Vs. p. 90.
74 Getatchew, The Epistle of Humanity, p. ix.
76 Taddesse, Church and State, p. 302.
3. Magic in the Time of Zär’a Yaʿqob

Part of the difficulty in analyzing the writings of Zär’a Yaʿqob and his contemporaries with regards to the practice of magic is the terminology. As noted by Taddesse Tamrat, “the precise meaning of [the] terms frequently used by Zär’a Yaʿqob in his writings and in the hagiographies of his period [to refer to magicians] is still uncertain.”77 Indeed, the Emperor does use a variety of terms to refer to practitioners of magic, including ṭänqʿali, māšarray, mari, and rāʿyi, among others,78 and also refers to various demon cults.

Before assessing Zär’a Yaʿqob’s refutation of the practice of magic, it is important first to establish what practices he is referring to. The most frequent term employed by the Emperor to refer to magicians is ṭänqʿalayyan, a term whose roots are elusive.79 Lexicographer August Dillmann defines ṭänqʿali in his Lexicon as, “hariolus, fatiloquus, divinator,”80 while Wolf Leslau, in both of his dictionaries, simply defines the term as, “soothsayer, diviner.”81 In the Ṭomarā Ṭosbʿt, it does not seem that the term occurs in any quotations and very rarely occurs in a form other than the agentive noun ṭänqʿali (such as the verb ṭänqʿālā). The Emperor does not indicate that ṭänqʿalayyan performed spells or wicked deeds and only associates them with divination. References also occur, both in Zär’a Yaʿqob’s own writing and in his quotations, to astrologers, using the substantive active participle rāʿayi (lit. “observing”). References also occur to those who participate in the ḥasabāʿ ḫdāt, the computation of the horoscope (lit. “the computation of [the time of] birth”).82

77 Taddesse, Church and State, p. 235, n. 1.
78 See the glossary for a list of key terms with explanations.
80 August Dillmann, Lexicon linguæ aethiopicae (Leipzig: T. O. Weigel, 1865), col. 1234.
82 E.g. Ṭomarā Ṭosbʿt, Tx. p. 29 = Vs. p. 23.
and in the ḫəryätä ḥlätät wäsäʿätät, “the choosing of days and hours.” Thus, divinatory magic, practiced by ṭänqʿaloyan and rāʿayt, is a very common theme in the anti-magic polemic of Zār’a Yaʿqob.

When referring either to the practice or the practitioners of spell or charm magic (sorcery), the term śəray is very often used. While the term can have a positive connotation, referring to medicine and healing, as noted by Dillmann, and is used in this way in various prayers, the term frequently has a negative connotation, much like the Greek φάρμακος, which it often translates, instead referring to illicit magical deeds, as is the case in the writings of Zār’a Yaʿqob and his contemporaries. As the Emperor describes in the second dərsan of the Ṭomarä Ṭəšb bət, one may, by means of śəray, kill a person, abort a fetus, or make someone ill. In the Homily on the Rite of Baptism and Religious Instruction, Zār’a Yaʿqob reports that magicians using śəray were rumoured to be able to move mountains and trees and make a rope stand upright. Those who use śəray, that is, màšarrayyan or sūb’a śəray, are heavily criticized in the Emperor’s works. Later works, such as the Maftohe Śəray ([Prayers to] Loosen Śəray), are wholly devoted to the subject of śəray and discuss similar matters as those which the Emperor brings up in his own works. The terms mari, marit, and mart also occur for sorcerers, although they can also refer to divination, being a more general term for magician, as noted by Leslau. A variety of specific magical acts ranging from augury to illusions are mentioned throughout the works of Zār’a Yaʿqob but they are too numerous to analyze here.

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83 E.g. Ṭomarā Ṭəšb bət, Tx. p. 6 = Vs. p. 6.
84 Dillmann, Lexicon, col. 245.
85 Ṭomarā Ṭəšb bət, Tx. p. 48 = Vs. p. 39.
86 Homily on the Rite of Baptism and Religious Instruction, Tx. 98 = Vs. 68.
87 Leslau, Concise Dictionary, pp. 32-33.
In the writings of Zăr’a Ya’qob and his contemporaries, one can find references to prominent demons or their cults, but there are few extant works that discuss these in detail. By far the most common of these demons/demonic cults is (the) Däsk. As Bogdan Burtea notes, the Emperor often seems to refer to the Däsk as being a sort of cult, while in literature generally composed after the reign of Zăr’a Ya’qob, Däsk is understood as being the name of a demon. As Jacques Mercier notes, “One recognizes here the Christian scheme, dating from the time of Tatian, by which pagan gods are seen as demons seeking adoration.” Most scholars explain the term as referring to a spot or stain, and the demon Däsk, associated with the “noonday demon” (ganenä qältar) in at least one instance, was reported to cause a certain disease. According to the royal chronicle, Zăr’a Ya’qob required his subjects to bear a tattoo on their left hand that said, “I reject Däsk the accursed; I am a servant of Mary, mother of the creator of the entire universe.” In the Emperor’s own writings, individuals consult with a Däsk like a soothsayer. One of the most significant sources on the cult of Däsk is the gädl of Abba Samuel of Däbrä Wägäg, a prominent monastic leader who lived during the reign of Zăr’a Ya’qob’s father, Dawit I, which claims that Samuel travelled around the countryside expelling Däsk (and Gʷədale) and converting people to Orthodoxy. It seems likely that, as Stanislas Kur explains in the introduction to his edition of the gädl, the cult of Däsk involves the demon possessing an individual and speaking through him, and

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88 Bogdan Burtea, “Däsk,” in EAc, s.v.
90 Cf. Ps. 90:5-6 LXX, which refers to God’s deliverance “ἠρπάξας ὅ : ὁ ἡγοῦντα : ΦΙΣ :” (“ἀπὸ συμπτώματος καὶ δαιμονίου μεσημβρινοῦ”) — “from misfortune and the noonday demon.”
92 Royal Chronicle, Tx. p. 6 = Haber p. 152.
it is this possessed individual who is consulted as a soothsayer. Jacques Mercier describes a ritual by which pagan deities named Gudale and Mäqawəzäy “ride” a priest who was “anointed with [a sacrificial] cow’s blood and adorned with its peritoneum” and had stepped into a fire. The deity “riding” him would then “speak through his mouth, prophesying for the congregation, who would ask questions about the future or about the origin and outcome of an illness.”94 Presumably all of these cults, Dāsk, Dino, Gʷədale (Gudale), Ṭāʃānt (Fāšānt), and Mäqawəze (-zäy/-za), functioned in a similar way.95 So-called “possession cults,” led by “shaman-like ritual experts,” are a prominent feature of Northeast African spirituality, with the best known such cult in recent times being that of the zar.97 Interestingly, Jon Abbink notes that sometimes the practice of possession cults extends to someone who is a tänq “ay (Amh. = tänq “alı), implying that the classes of magic are not mutually exclusive.98

Although it seems that there are logical categories of magicians, namely, diviners, sorcerers, and demoniacs, and Zär’a Ya‘qob does occasionally make arguments directed to a specific category, they are very often referred to together, even in one mention. For example, from the first book of the Ālaf ḏorhan, “teach them not to attend to məryan and marit, nor to Dāsk and Ṭāʃānt and Gʷədale, nor to Mäqawəza and Dino, nor to tänq “alsyan, nor to those who make the calculation of the stars, nor to mäsərryan, nor to any idolatry which God hates.”99 Similarly, from the Homily

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97 Jon G. Abbink, “Possession Cults,” in *EAe*, s.v.
98 Abbink, “Possession Cults,” in *EAe*, s.v.
on the Rite of Baptism and Religious Instruction, “The idlers [whom the Prophet Sirach refers to (cf. Sir. 22:2)] are the māsārrayan, ṭāng “alayan, Dāsk, maryan, and all idolaters and those who propagate their wonders.”

Presumably, such lists of magicians are meant to serve as a sort of catch-all for magical practices, leaving no practice to be assumed licit. In the same homily, the Emperor, however, does make the distinction that, among “the mā’ansāban, the mart, Dāsk and Dīno, … some are māsārrayan and some are ṭāng “alayan.”

All of these practices were deemed harmful, both physically and emotionally, and evil (i.e., spiritually harmful) by the Emperor and thus needed to be rooted out altogether.

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100 Homily on the Rite of Baptism and Religious Instruction, Tx. p. 94 = Vs. p. 65.

101 Homily on the Rite of Baptism and Religious Instruction, Tx. p. 83 = Vs. p. 57.
The Rhetorical Strategy of Zär’ā Yaʿqob in His ḫransat

One of the frequent goals of Zär’ā Yaʿqob’s numerous ḫransat is to refute the practice of magic and divination, including the consultation of magicians and diviners, within his nominally Christian empire. The Emperor, rather than simply giving orders on his own authority, cleverly employs rhetorical techniques in order to present strong, convincing arguments in an attempt to persuade simply those who engage in these practices to abandon them. As Ephraim Isaac describes, “the tone of the command[s] [are] not royal but homiletic; the king is really not giving [commands] expecting to be obeyed, but is speaking like a religious spokesman.” The two most prevalent techniques used by the Emperor are the use of negative portrayal and a reliance on the authority of the Christian Scriptures and their composers. These complimentary techniques reflect Zär’ā Yaʿqob efforts to refute better those practices which he did not approve of and more effectively root out the practice of magic.

1. Rhetorical Use of Portrayal

The use of negative portrayal is most evident in the three ḫransat of the Ṭomarā ḫsb. Throughout the lectionary, the Emperor employs a number of recurring themes in order to portray practitioners of magic as wicked and harmful individuals who are deviants from orthodox Christianity. The most striking example of this is his oft-levelled appellation of “Jew and idolater [ʾAyhud wā-māṭaʿawi],” which occurs more than seventy times in the lectionary. The Emperor de-

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1 Ephraim, Text-Critical Introduction, p. 22.

Ephraim’s point is to contrast the tone of the Māḥafāḥ Boḥān with other works of Zär’ā Yaʿqob, using the tone of the Ṭāʾāqbo ḫṣir as a contrasting example, in order to show how it might not have been composed by the Emperor. However, it is clear that this tone is shared by the Ṭomarā ḫṣir, which was published after Ephraim’s Text-Critical Introduction.

2 This section is based largely on my paper titled “Portrayal of the Magician in the Polemics of Emperor Zär’ā Yaʿqob of Ethiopia,” presented during the session “Pros(e) and Cons: Anti-Magic Polemic II” at the 51st International Congress on Medieval Studies (Kalamazoo, MI: May 11-14, 2016).
rives this appellation from the *Sinodos*, Canon 15 of the canons ‘Amdōḥrāʾ ʿArgā (“After the Ascension [of the Lord]”): 

Let anyone who trusts in astrology and believes in the words of *maryan*, of *sābʾa ʿsray*, and of *rāʾaytā ʾkōkāb* and in the computation of the horoscope, and he (who) consults them about what is not proper for him and accepts their words, disregards the commandments of God, his dispensations and judgements, and equates the Christians with those who do not know God, be removed from his office; let him fall from the ordination of priesthood because he has acted like the Jews and the idolaters.³

This quotation is also used by the Emperor in the *Māṣḥafā Barhan*, Book IV, but without any repeated usage of the phrase:

Woe to you then, O children of the Devil, … who want to suppress the majesty of the God of Heaven, who claim to know the mysteries of God, … and as the man who draws auspices from the stars of heaven does not have to supplicate his Creator, who practice the computation [of the horoscope], … His Apostles have called you idolatrous Jews in their *Sinodos*. By the Holy Spirit, behold, you are ruined, who cut stones for his altars, who sacrificed animals and birds to Satan, … who know the incantations of Satan, who kill the souls of the sheep of Christ.⁴

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³ *Sinodos*, Tx. pp. 22-23 = Vs. pp. 11-12.
⁴ *Māṣḥafā Barhan II*, Tx. p. 72 = Vs. p. 43.

Zār’a Ya’aqob, noting that he derived this appellation from the *Sinodos*, quotes the canon in the first dursan (*Tomarā Ṭṣḥbḥt*, Tx. p. 15 = Vs. p. 12). For an introduction to the *Sinodos*, see Chapter 5.1: *An Introduction to Pseudo-Apostolic Texts in Ethiopian Tradition*

The reading in the *Tomarā Ṭṣḥbḥt* is “አይሁድ፡መጠأهلይን፡,” which is found in some MSS of the *Sinodos*, though other MSS of the *Sinodos* omit the clitic “ወ-” (“and”), rendering the phrase as “idolatrous Jews.” Yet other MSS read “ወአረማውያን፡” (“and heathens”) in place of “ወመጠأهلይን፡.” (Bausi, p. 23). Note that the second reading (“አይሁድ፡መጠأهلይን፡”) is found in the *Māṣḥafā Barhan* (see n. 4 below), although it is not a direct quotation in that instance.

See n. 3 above.
Chapter 2: Rhetorical strategy

The accusation of being Jews in the Ṭomārā Tāshbāt is expounded upon later in the first dorsan, where he says, again referencing the Sinodos, “The Apostles have written in their Sinodos many excommunications about other sins, … but they have not said (in those cases) ‘because one has acted like the Jews and the idolaters,’ as they have said about the ṭānq ‘ali.”5 The intended meaning of the appellation is also made clear in the first dorsan, where the Emperor says, “The sin of ṭānq ‘alayn is greater than any sin, and their perversity is greater than any perversity, because the Apostles have counted them in their Sinodos with the Jews and the idolaters,”6 taking that the appellation to mean that their sin is the most grievous. Interestingly, the “Jews” whom the Emperor seeks to refute in the Māḥāfū Milad are, in the reading for 29 Yākkatīt, accused of consulting with “the Ṭāfīnt, and the Gʷdāle, and the Dīnī, and the Dūskī, and the Māqawzē, and all kinds of māsār- rayn.”7 He later asks “Why, O Jew, do you associate with the Ṭāfīnt and all kinds of sāb A fāl, māryan and mārat… ?”8 This is different from the accusation in the Ṭomarā Tāshbāt that these magicians themselves are Jews, although it is still pejorative in that it is an association with the Jews. The Emperor elsewhere in the first dorsan of the Ṭomarā Tāshbāt makes an interesting argument regarding the faith and practice of magicians, saying that they call themselves Christians “in order that one may not call them Jews or Muslims,” but become magicians “in order that they may not live according to the law of the Christians.”9 He then stresses that, having become magicians, they are those “whom the Apostles have called Jews and idolaters, which means (those who prac-

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5 Ṭomarā Tāshbāt, Tx. p. 29 = Vs. p. 23.
6 Ṭomarā Tāshbāt, Tx. p. 29 = Vs. p. 23.
CHAPTER 2: RHETORICAL STRATEGY

tice) idol-worshiping.” The Emperor insists that they are not Christians, but does not explicitly identify them as Jews, simply noting that they have been “called Jews.” As Steven Kaplan notes, “perhaps the most common usage of the term Ḥayẖud [Jew] in medieval Ethiopia was as a description of Christian groups viewed by an author as heretical,” a usage that “was especially popular in the time of Zār’a Yaʿqob.” He goes on to say, regarding the dual allegation of being Jews and idolaters, that “there seems to be little alternative but to view [this] alleged ‘Jewishness’ as political in character.” While Amaleletch Teferi disagrees with Kaplan’s general view that “the Ḥayẖud of earlier sources are not identical to the Fālaša of later texts,” arguing instead that some communities referred to as Ḥayẖud were actually Jewish, it is very clear that Zār’a Yaʿqob is using the term solely as a pejorative and not referring to actual practitioners of Judaism. Even the Ethiopian daily prayers, the first of which is Zār’a Yaʿqob’s Ḥaḥdāta Sāyṭan, say this of the Jews — “The Jews rejected it [the Cross], but we believe, and those who believe in the power of the Cross are saved” — demonstrating a pre-existing and oft-repeated pejorative example of “Jews” (referring in this example to actual Jews), who are seen as deviating from orthodox Christianity.

12 Kaplan, The Beta Israel, p. 61.
14 “Fālaša” is a term often used to refer to Ethiopian Jews, the Betă ʾ-zArs’el (“House of Israel”). The use of the term, and the connotations surrounding it, are complex and controversial, both historically and presently.
16 Ṭomarā Ṭosḥ ṣṭ, Ṭomarā Ṭosḥ ṣṭ: Ḥaḥdāta Sāyṭan (አክሱም ስተማያ በቤት, ሳወ ት/ዓ), p. 316.
17 Recall that the Stephanites refused to prostrate themselves before the Cross and that the allegedly non-Trinitarian Zāmika’elites were called “Jews.”
Zār’a Yaʿqōb’s second accusation, that magicians are idolaters is also a recurring theme in the Ṭomarā Ṭasbšt.

Throughout the Ṭomarā Ṭasbšt, Zār’a Yaʿqōb argues that magic is a form of idolatry. This is, of course, most evident in his “Jews and idolaters” appellation, but it is also discussed at length in several places. For example, in the first dorsan of the Ṭomarā Ṭasbšt, the Emperor argues:

Behold, ṭāq “alīyan are not different from those who worship the sun . . . . What the Apostles have called “worshipping of a celestial power” is observing the sun, the moon, and the stars for a sign of wickedness by the teaching of the ṭāq “alīyan, who are called Jews and idolaters.18

The Emperor here equates divination by celestial bodies to worship, and therefore idolatry, in order to present an argument based on quotations from the Old Testament and from Apostolic texts. In the second dorsan, the Zār’a Yaʿqōb proclaims to the magician, “there is no one who is more abominable than you, because you are called the idol of this world, as Paul has said.”19 The Emperor, in addition to suggesting that magicians are idolaters, goes so far as to suggest, based on his reading of Galatians 4:8-10, that magicians are themselves idols. There is a significant implication behind this accusation. Calling magicians idolaters deters people from becoming magicians themselves, but calling them idols deters people from even associating with them and thereby becoming idolaters. He repeats the reference to Galatians later in the dorsan, prefacing it with the statement, “A ṭāq “alī is surely an idol, and those who consult him are idol-worshippers.”20 It perhaps might be possible to connect this idea to the practices of the Dāsk and other cults, since

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18 Ṭomarā Ṭasbšt, Tx. p. 22-23 = Vs. p. 18.
19 Ṭomarā Ṭasbšt, Tx. p. 60 = Vs. p. 48.
20 Ṭomarā Ṭasbšt, Tx. p. 65 = Vs. p. 52.
they involve consulting a diviner, the individual possessed by the demon, but also have an aspect of worship, the demon being the focus of the cult. The allegation of idolatry is also seen in the Homily on the Rite of Baptism and Religious Instruction, where the Emperor says, “Then, come, turn to repentance, O idolaters, who consult ṭāṃq “ābyan and are guided by astrology.” Since magicians are always presented as performing services for others who consult them, it would be theoretically possible for the Emperor to repress the practice of magic by driving away their clientele. Regarding magicians as idolaters, the Emperor also states in the first dersan of the Ṭomarā Tāsb ʿt:

You, too, a Christian and a priest, when you abandoned the commandments of Christ and preferred the choosing of days and hours, and astrology, you became an idolater. The meaning of idolater is idol-worshipper. Here, Zār’a Yaʿqob very clearly suggests that the magician had previously been not only a Christian but a priest. The loss of priesthood (and even baptism) is also a recurring theme used by Zār’a Yaʿqob.

Throughout his dersanat, Zār’a Yaʿqob asserts the claim that magicians have nullified their baptisms and priesthoods. In the third dersan of the Ṭomarā Tāsb ʿt, he says,

How is it, therefore, that your priesthood should not be nullified, O ṭāṃq “ali, whom (the Apostles) have called a Jew and an idolater? Not only (is this true of) the ordination of your priesthood, but even your Christian baptism has also been nullified.

As in the first dersan, the Emperor is suggesting that magicians are clerics. Richard Kieckhefer’s notion of a “clerical underworld,” a collective term for clerics who practiced necromancy (here

21 Homily on the Rite of Baptism and Religious Instruction, Tx. p. 67 = Vs. p. 46.
22 Ṭomarā Tāsb ʿt, Tx. p. 14 = Vs. p. 18.
23 Ṭomarā Tāsb ʿt, Tx. p. 107 = Vs. p. 85.
defined as “explicitly demonic magic”), can be clearly seen in Zär’a Ya’qob’s rebukes of ṭān-q’alayan, whom he supposes to have been priests. As Kieckhefer notes, literate clerics, “if they had access to the infamous books of necromancy, and if they were curious enough to try them out,” would have had everything they needed for “membership in this clerical underworld.” In the first dorsan, the Emperor, describing one’s ascent from layperson to psalmist [māzāmor], then to lector [ʾAnagʾmosṭis], then subdeacon [nasqā diyaqon], then deacon [diyaqon], then priest [qāsis], then bishop [ʾēppis qoppos], then metropolitan [pappas], then patriarch [liqā pappasal], says of this man, “you, after you had reached this honourable rank, you ruined the entire rank of your priesthood, you became stripped of your Christian baptism, and you made yourself a Jew and an idolater.”

It is safe to say that the accusation of the patriarch practicing magic is purely for rhetorical effect, after all, Zär’a Ya’qob’s dorsan is directed at all practitioners of magic and his knowledge of the patriarch’s activities was presumably limited. The point remains the same, that clerics were practicing magic and, as Kieckhefer notes, even in the absence of “hard evidence” against clerics, “there is nothing unlikely about people in these positions dabbling in magic of various kinds, including necromancy.”

Däbtäročč, lay clerics who are trained as cantors, are very often associated in Ethiopian tradition with natural medicine and magic, being attributed great powers largely on

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The distinctions between episcopal ranks in Ethiopia, both historically and presently, are very complex, in no small part due to a multiplicity of terms (አንዳስ፡ቀጲስ፡, ነቀ፡ጳጳሳት፡, ነቀ፡ጳጳስ፡, ነጳጳስ፡, ነውስ፡, ነጳጳስ፡). As a result, it is often difficult to establish direct correspondences with the episcopal ranks found in most other traditions.

The joint metropolitans of Ethiopia appointed at the start of Zär’a Ya’qob’s reign, Mika’el and Gābra’el, each held the rank of ወስስ; thus ኈllu: ወስስ፡ can only refer to the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria (then Pope John XI).

account of their literacy and advanced learning.\footnote{Steven Kaplan, “Däbtära,” in \textit{EAe}, s.v.; Mercier, \textit{Art That Heals}, p. 44.} As Mercier says, describing the common perception of \textit{däbtäroćč}, “These clerics have two faces, one of them is bright and diurnal, lit by the light of the knowledge of God, the other obscure, casting evil spells in the dark of night.”\footnote{Mercier, \textit{Art That Heals}, p. 44.}

Magicians are also portrayed as wicked individuals who cast harmful spells, conjure demons, and lie to others, causing strife. In the \textit{Ṭomarā Təsbət}, Zār’a Ya‘qob says, “As for the \textit{māsārręyy}, sometimes he kills with his spell [\textit{səray}]; sometimes he makes a fetus abort from the womb of its mother; and sometimes he makes people sick by his spell [\textit{səray}]. The kinds of deeds of a \textit{māsārręyy} are many.”\footnote{\textit{Ṭomarā Təsbət}, Tx. p. 48 = Vs. p. 39.} The Emperor also refers to “the exorcist who enchants with his voice by invoking the names of demons,” and “the preventer, … who prevents in the name of demons so that they may do for him what he wants.”\footnote{\textit{Ṭomarā Təsbət}, Tx. pp. 50-51 = Vs. pp. 40-41.} The Emperor proclaims to the magician, “behold, you kill the body and the soul of those who follow your teaching because your teacher is Satan, killer of man’s soul.”\footnote{\textit{Ṭomarā Təsbət}, Tx. p. 10 = Vs. p. 9.} He goes on to say, “You teach lies to those who listen to you, as your father Satan has taught you his lies.”\footnote{\textit{Ṭomarā Təsbət}, Tx. pp. 7, 89 = Vs. pp. 6, 71.} This ties in with his argument that magicians “make a husband quarrel with his wife whom he loves and whom she loves,” thereby becoming “a teacher of animosity by causing a man to quarrel with another by saying, ‘[This] is bad for you,’ and ‘[This] is good for you.’”\footnote{\textit{Ṭomarā Təsbət}, Tx. pp. 7, 89 = Vs. pp. 6, 71.} This same argument is seen in Zār’a Ya‘qob’s account of the attempted rebellion of ‘Isayyayas. The Emperor proclaims,
O Christian people! Behold, you have heard how consulting šnq*təlyən, maryən, Dıno, and Dǔsk did not save 'Isəyəyyas and his associates; on the contrary, the punishment of the wrath of God came down on them until it destroyed them for departing from his worship.35

These claims made by Zər’a ūqəqəb, as well as the others mentioned above, that magicians are idolatrous, false Christians and they cause harm to those around them and consort with demons, portray anyone who practices magic or consults with someone who does in a very negative light, furthering the Emperor’s goal of rooting out the practice among his nominally Christian subjects.

2. Rhetorical Use of the Scriptural Authority

The second key strategy employed by the Emperor in his anti-magic polemic is his reliance on the authority of the Christian Scriptures and Apostolic writings. The Ţomarə Tətbət describes its composition in this way:

[ţər’ə ya’təqəb wrote it,] gathering (passages from) the canonical Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments (and) harmonizing their words, as has been said in the Šinodos, “One theme from one word and from one utterance.”36

The Emperor, both here and in his other works, rests a considerable portion of his argument on the authority of these texts. As Getatchew Haile describes, discussing the Ţomarə Tətbət,

[ţər’ə ya’təqəb] had to make sure that the practices which he disapproved were also condemned in the book[s] of the Christians [i.e., the Šinodos, the Didspqlyə, etc.]. Since the

35 Ţomarə Tətbət, Tx. p. 77 = Vs. pp. 61-62.
36 Ţomarə Tətbət, Tx. p. 113 = Vs. p. 90.

This is taken from title 81 of the first recension of the Akbəlisat, which reads, “it is a testimony from one theme from one word from one utterance, God, the artificer and its creator, in its word and its spirit” (Šinodos, Tx. p. 229 = Vs. p. 89). Zər’a ūqəqəb also cites this passage in his defence of the canonicity of the Šinodos in the Homily on the Rite of Baptism and Religious Instruction, saying that the book unites all eighty-one Scriptures (Tx. p. 109 = Vs. p. 76).
book[s] [were] not written for the Ethiopian context, he had to interpret his quotations in such a way that they also applied to Ethiopia.\footnote{Getatchew, “Preliminary Investigation,” p. 214.}

By using these quotations in this way, the Emperor is able to show that his repressive policies are not innovations, but instead are avenging the instructions of the prophets, the Apostles, and even Christ Himself. He often uses phrases like, “It is not I who have … but the Apostles” to emphasize this point.\footnote{E.g. Ṭomară Ṭəsb b’t, Tx. p. 15 = Vs. p. 12.} Zăr’a Ya’qob uses his sources in a number of ways, sometimes quoting lengthy passages from the Old Testament and from the Sinodos, other times using the same short quotation repeatedly, such as Isaiah 40:13, “No one knows the counsel of God,”\footnote{Ṭomară Ṭəsb b’t, Tx. pp. = Vs. pp.} and Galatians 4:9-10, “How is it that, turning to this weak and beggarly idol of this world [ṭaʾotä zəʾaläm], you want to serve them in vain and observe days, months, seasons, and years?\footnote{Ṭomară Ṭəsb b’t, Tx. pp. = Vs. pp.} The Emperor adapts passages as necessary for his argument, making passages that do not seem immediately relevant useful to his argument and interpreting passages such that they seem to very strongly agree with his arguments. This use of Scripture will be explored in subsequent chapters.

While Zăr’a Ya’qob’s quotations and references refuting magicians always come from the canonical Scriptures (according to the Ethiopian canon), there is one reference that is an exception to this. In the first book of the Mäṣḥafä Borhan, the Emperor makes use of a reference to the
gädl of St. Qirqos the child-martyr. The Emperor relates how the infant, having been forced to eat food and drink that had been sacrificed to an idol, responded to his persecutor:

“Indeed, if I would have done this voluntarily, I would have been condemned before God; but since I [did it] involuntarily, you have prepared Hell [Gähannäm] for yourself. As for me, you have indeed prepared a crown [of martyrdom].”

Zär’a Yaʾaqob, also drawing on the Psalms and the Gospel of John, uses his recounting of the martyrdom to argue not only that “for a Christian, if the mäsärreyan would kill him, he becomes a martyr,” and that, for the mäsärreyan, “their blood is upon their heads,” but he even claims that “those who kill a mäsärreyan have no sin,” and the killing is “as though he were bringing a sacrifice to God.” While the Emperor says this elsewhere, it is often, as in this case, his own interpretation of the quotation. This is the sole instance in refuting magic where Zär’a Yaʾaqob uses a text from outside the canonical Scriptures, although elsewhere in his dərsanat he references the works of John Chrysostom, Gregory the Theologian, Cyril of Alexandria, the Gädlä Ḥawaryt (Gädl of

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41 “Qirqos” is the standard form in Ethiopic. The name can be found in scholarship variously rendered as Quiricus, Cyricus, Cyriacus (erroneously), and Cyr. The child-martyr is usually depicted with his mother, St. Julitta, who is said to have been martyred with him during the Roman persecutions. The cult of St. Qirqos (and Julitta) is very prominent in Ethiopia. See Vitagrazia Pizani, “Passio of St Cyricus (Gädlä Qirqos) in North Ethiopia Elements of Devotion and of Manuscripts Tradition,” in Veneration of Saints in Christian Ethiopia ed. by Denis Nosnitsin (2015).

Vitagrazia Pizani is currently preparing the first critical edition of the Ethiopic gädl (see above). An unedited comparison of the Syriac, Arabic, and Latin texts was prepared by August Dillmann (August Dillmann, “Über die apokryphen Märtyrergeschichten des Cyriacus mit Julitta und des Georgius,” SPAW 23, 1887, pp. 339-56.). Coptic fragments of the text were edited by Elinor Husselman (“The Martyrdom of Cyriacus and Julitta in Coptics,” Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt vol. 4 (1965), pp. 79-86.). The text, extant in a number of recensions, is known to have been translated into several other languages as well, including Armenian and Sogdian (Nicholas Sims-Williams, “Acts of Cyriacus and Julitta,” in Encyclopaedia Iranica 4.5 (1993), p. 512.).


the Apostles), and other sources, showing that, even though he is clearly capable of doing so, it is not useful to his arguments.

44 E.g., Homily on the Rite of Baptism and Religious Instruction, Tx. p. 63 = Vs. p. 44; Māṭṭafṭā Borhan I, Tx. p. 10 = Vs. p. 5; Māṭṭafṭā Milad II, Tx. pp. 85, 96 = Vs. pp. 75, 84-85; Ţomarā Ṭənb, Tx. p. 34 = Vs. p. 27.

Zär’a Yaʿqob’s Use of Old Testament Sources

The most important sources for Zär’a Yaʿqob in refuting the practice of magic are without doubt the Old Testament and the Sinodos.\(^1\) The Emperor cultivated a reputation for being well-versed in Christian literature, as demonstrated throughout his works, but few sources can match the authority and breadth of the Old Testament. That Zär’a Yaʿqob cites the Old Testament more than the New Testament when refuting magic is of little surprise, as the Old Testament provides a larger collection of stories, especially concerning the practices of foreign cultures, which are often associated with the practice of magic, and those who transgress the commandments of God, including those who perform magic or consult with magicians. The Old Testament also provides a firm basis for argumentation that would be recognized by the Emperor’s opponents, such as non-Trinitarians and “Jews,” who might not be convinced by arguments from the New Testament. Throughout his dərsanat, Zär’a Yaʿqob retells a number of Old Testament stories and cites several excerpts, selected and interpreted to be as compelling as possible, in order to present convincing arguments against the practice of magic, often bolstering these with passages from the New Testament and pseudo-Apostolic texts.

Quotations from the book of Deuteronomy form a large part of the second dərsan of the Ţomarä Ṭosḥbt. Five long, direct quotations from the book of Deuteronomy are given, each introduced with the phrase, “Furthermore, the holy Octateuch says,” with the exception of the first quotation, which is introduced with, “The holy Octateuch in Deuteronomy says.”\(^2\) The wording of the short introductory phrase is telling. While the Emperor could simply say, “As it says in Deuteronomy,” as he does with other books, he always uses the adjective qaddəst, “holy,  

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1 For an introduction to the Sinodos, see Chapter 5.1: An Introduction to Pseudo-Apostolic Texts in Ethiopian Tradition.

2 Ţomarä Ṭosḥbt, Tx. pp. 53-60 = Vs. pp. 43-48.
sanctified,” and prefers the term Ḥorît, which refers to the Octateuch as a whole, although it also may be used to refer specifically to the Mosaic Law.3 This is evidently meant to give his quotations more weight. By continually referring to it as the “qadday Ḥorît,” Zăr’a Ya’qob reinforces the context of his quotations and their association with the earliest Judaeo-Christian laws and prophetic revelations. One only needs to recall the reverence given to the Torah in Jewish communities to imagine the effect that the Emperor’s use of the term might have had on his subjects, the Ethiopian Christian tradition being generally seen as among the most Judaic (or Judaizing) of traditions, having a strong connection to Judaism and the Old Testament.4

Zăr’a Ya’qob also makes a comparison in the second darsan of the Ṭomarā Təšbət between ṭänq “alayan and the Babylonian court magicians in the book of Daniel. The Emperor, paraphrasing the events surrounding the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, describes how, “The king commanded that the səb’ā šray, səb’ā sāgāl, the wise men, those who have understanding, and ma’omran be called to tell the king his dream.”5 Describing their demise, he says to the ṭänq “alayan of his empire, “You, too, O ṭänq “ali who lives in this time, deserve death like them.”6 Here there is a clear distinction made between the magicians whom the Emperor is seeking to refute, the ṭänq “alayan, and the magicians referred to in the Old Testament, who are səb’ā šray, səb’ā sāgāl, and ma’omran. Later, the Emperor does refer to the Babylonian magicians as ṭänq “alayan, but it is still clear that they are not the same as the current ṭänq “alayan. In both instances, Zăr’a Ya’qob, first describing the magicians of Nebuchadnezzar, then describing the magicians of Belshazzar, uses

3 Getatchew prefers to translate Ḥorît as “the Torah.”


5 Ṭomarā Təšbət, Tx. p. 61 = Vs. p. 49.

6 Ṭomarā Təšbət, Tx. p. 61 = Vs. p. 49.
the phrase, “who were like you,”\(^7\) maintaining some level of distinction between the ūt̊uŋ “uṣlayn of his time and the Babylonian magicians. The Emperor deals with this matter throughout his dor-sanat, as there are no references to ūt̊uŋ “uṣayl or Dāšk or other such practices in the Scriptures. It is also fitting that the Babylonian magicians are, from the perspective of the Old Testament, alien priests, since Zār’a Ya’qob implies that ūt̊uŋ “uṣayl is practiced by foreigners.\(^8\) Similar to the story of Nebuchadnezzar, Zār’a Ya’qob also recounts in the third dorsan the story of King Balak of Moab from the book of Numbers, “who wanted the destruction of the people of God by the māstäqasm of Balaam the māṣēgol,” but is instead put to shame, as God “nullifie[d] the māstäqasm” and “turn[ed] to blessing the curse of those who curse.”\(^9\)

In the third dorsan of the Ṭomārā Ṭosḥʿat, Zār’a Ya’qob, as he did with the story of Nebuchadnezzar, gives a lengthy summary of the destruction of Holofernes, who was a commander of Nebuchadnezzar, as described in the apocryphal book of Judith. Unlike in Deuteronomy, the Emperor is unable to find rebukes against magicians in the account, instead using it simply as an example of the wrath of God. Zār’a Ya’qob proclaims, “See, O community of the Church, how God shows His power when He destroys those who deny Him, and how He saves those who worship Him.”\(^10\) The Emperor here barely constructs any significant argument, seemingly drawing on whatever stories he can to make his point.

Zār’a Ya’qob does not only simply rely upon the authority of his sources in his arguments, but he also constructs more complex rhetorical arguments using his sources. For example,

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\(^7\) Ṭomārā Ṭosḥʿat, Tx. pp. 62-64 = Vs. pp. 50-51.


\(^9\) Ṭomārā Ṭosḥʿat, Tx. p. 103 = Vs. p. 82.

\(^10\) Ṭomārā Ṭosḥʿat, Tx. p. 100 = Vs. p. 80
in the beginning the first dersan of the Ṭomarā Ṭosḥʾt, the Emperor constructs an argument from the book of Ezekiel. He first provides a lengthy quotation regarding the prophet’s rebuke of the people of Jerusalem for their “abandoning of the worship of God,” comparing them to a Christian priest who has “made [himself] a Jew and an idolater by [his] choosing of one day from (other) days and one hour from (other) hours.”\(^\text{11}\) He further compares magicians to those whom the prophet describes as going into the temple and, “with their backs to the house of God, … [worship] the sun” (cf. Ez. 8:15-16).\(^\text{12}\) The Emperor then asserts that “ṭāŋqʿalṭyan are not different from those who worship the sun,” harmonizing the admonishments from Ezekiel with those from the Didasqolya:

And as Ezekiel has called the children of the Temple “worshippers of the sun,” so have the Apostles, too, called ṭāŋqʿalṭyan “worshippers of a celestial power,” as they have said in their Didasqolya,\(^\text{13}\) “And as for those who practice astrology, worship a celestial power, and observe day(s) and hours, would [God] accept the prayers of these? … They are, indeed, desolate of the Holy Spirit, Who dwells in the hearts of the faithful.” Behold, ṭāŋqʿalṭyan are no different from those who worship the sun, as the Apostles have said … . What the Apostles call “worshipping of a celestial power” is observing the sun, the moon, and the stars for a sign of wickedness by the teaching of the ṭāŋqʿalṭyan, who are called Jews and idolaters.\(^\text{14}\)

The Emperor cleverly uses the Didasqolya to equate astrology with the worship of celestial entities, which then allows him to equate astrologers with the worshippers of the sun mentioned by

\(^{11}\) Ṭomarā Ṭosḥʾt, Tx. pp. 13-14 = Vs. pp. 11-12.

\(^{12}\) Ṭomarā Ṭosḥʾt, Tx. p. 22 = Vs. p. 18.

\(^{13}\) For an introduction to the Didasqolya, see Chapter 5.1: An Introduction to Pseudo-Apostolic Texts in Ethiopian Tradition.

\(^{14}\) Ṭomarā Ṭosḥʾt, Tx. pp. 22-23 = Vs. p. 18.
Ezekiel, thereby enabling him to strengthen an argument from a pseudo-Apostolic text with one from the Old Testament. Immediately after establishing this connection with the sun-worshippers of Ezekiel, Zār’a Ya’qob quotes several passages from the prophet describing God’s wrath towards His enemies (i.e., the sun-worshippers). For example, he quotes Ezekiel as saying, “And God said to me, ‘I will take my revenge on them in my wrath. I will not be compassionate toward them, and my eye will not spare them’” (Ez. 7:1-9), and relates this back to the magicians, saying,

See, therefore, how the worshippers of a celestial power, who are tâŋq ‘aləyan, who are called Jews and idolaters, have no salvation. Who will be compassionate toward those whom God has not spared? Stay away, therefore, from tâŋq ‘aləyan, O flock of God, lest they destroy you with themselves.\(^{15}\)

Thus, one can see how the Emperor constructs a complex argument by equating a practice seen in Ethiopia, tâŋq ‘äla, with one described in the Didqşqphya, thereby connecting it to condemnations given by the prophet Ezekiel. Zār’a Ya’qob would not have been able to connect directly the practice of tâŋq ‘äle with the prophet’s condemnations, as they are solely directed towards sun-worshippers, but he uses a sort of syllogism to apply Ezekiel’s condemnations to tâŋq ‘aləyan.

Although they are each cited only once in the first dorsan, and indeed only once in the entire Ṭomărā Tsəb ʿət, Zār’a Ya’qob’s use of the books of Enoch\(^ {16}\) and Jubilees, which are only considered canonical in Ethiopia, are worth mentioning. The Emperor quotes from the book of Enoch the list of the watchers, or fallen angels, who taught magical arts to mankind. He cites the book, saying, “as Enoch, the seventh from Adam, has said, ‘Bāraqīyāl taught astrologers [rā’ayyanā kokāb], Kokābə’el omens [toʿmortat], Təmə’el taught astrology [raʿy], and ṬAsdərə’el

\(^{15}\) Ṭomărā Tsəb ʿət, Tx. p. 23 = Vs. p. 19.

\(^{16}\) I.e., 1 Enoch, the Enochic book that is only extant in its entirety in Gəsz.
taught the course of the moon for the destruction of men’’ (Hen 8:3-4).17 As noted by Leslie Baynes, the book of Enoch is frequently used by Zāʾr’ā Yaʿqob in his other works, with the Māṣḥafā Milad, for example, both beginning and ending with the same reference to the book of Enoch and being “permeated with quotations from 1 Enoch.”18 However, this is the sole instance that the book is used to refute the practice of magic. It is an obvious choice, as it ties into the Emperor’s portrayal of magicians as the “partners of demons”19 and the “son[s] of the Devil.”20 Zāʾr’ā Yaʿqob defends the canonicity of the book of Enoch in the Homily on the Rite of Baptism and Religious Instruction, at first giving arguments based on New Testament references to the book of Enoch and the patriarch himself, but also, countering the “man who says, ‘I will not accept the book of Enoch even if you give me [the evidence which] the Apostles gave from the book of the epistle of Jude,” presents an argument based on the Didasqalya as well as, more interestingly, Moses’ astronomical knowledge.21 The Emperor poses the question, “how could [Moses have] know[n] the rotation of the sun, moon, and stars, the fullness of the light of the moon and its waning, and the appearance of (new) years without [the book of] Enoch?”22 While the astronomical book is a well known component of the larger book of Enoch, it is interesting that Zāʾr’ā Yaʿqob should draw attention to Moses’ knowledge of astronomy, which he claims came from the book of Enoch, when he points out in the Ṭomarā Tshbšt that, according to Enoch, it is the demons who taught astrology and “the course of the moon for the destruction of men.”

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17 Ṭomarā Tshbšt, Tx. p. 15 = Vs. p. 12.
19 Ṭomarā Tshbšt, Tx. p. 12 = Vs. p. 10.
22 Homily on the Rite of Baptism and Religious Instruction, Tx. p. 109 = Vs. p. 76.
Zār’a Yaʿqob did not consider it a problem, as the book in its entirety was considered canonical, or perhaps one might argue that the astronomy taught by Enoch is sanctioned by virtue of his holiness and distinct from the astrology taught by demons. Nonetheless, given the Emperor’s attitude towards those who “worship a celestial power” in their observing of the stars and the moon, it does still seem somewhat odd that he should draw attention to this.

Zār’a Yaʿqob’s quotation from the book of Jubilees introduces a series of Old Testament references at the end of the first dorsan of the Ṭomarā Ṭosbʾt. After quoting a passage describing Abraham’s epiphany, the Emperor admonishes his subjects, “who follow the footsteps of the faith of Abraham,” that “Abraham prayed lest he and his seed go astray forever by observing the stars, the sun, and the moon” (cf. Jub. 12:16-20), a reference, of course, to magicians.23 He then references Josiah in 1 Kings, who, he claims, “destroyed the maʾmran, fiqadzyan [lit. “ones who want/desire”], and the idols [tārfan] of all their gods,” as well as the destruction of idols by Jacob, Moses, Asa, Elijah, and Hezekiah.24 As shown by Jacques van Ruiten, Zār’a Yaʿqob is fond of recounting stories told of Abraham in the book of Jubilees,25 and here the Emperor also demonstrates his command of the Old Testament by including numerous other examples, although lacking in the same level of detail.

The Old Testament is a key source for Zār’a Yaʿqob in his refutation of magic. Being filled with stories of God’s wrath towards those who oppose His chosen people and instances where those who practice magic or idolatry are rebuked, the Old Testament offers a wealth of

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Note that van Ruiten’s study was limited to the Māṣḥāfā Milād.
material to draw upon his dersanat. Rebukes from prophets such as Ezekiel and stories of the destruction of wicked men such as Nebuchadnezzar are easily used by the Emperor to demonstrate why one should avoid practicing magic. The status of the Old Testament as a collection of sources accepted by most Christians, even if they are not considered orthodox, and also Jews enables Zär’a Yaʿqob to present arguments that would likely seem more convincing to his opponents. Combined with strategic presentation and juxtaposition with corroborating New Testament and pseudo-Apostolic texts, Zär’a Yaʿqob’s use of Old Testament sources is a perfect example of his rhetorical use of Scriptural sources in the refutation of magic.
Zār’a Yaʿqob’s Use of New Testament Sources

For Zār’a Yaʿqob, the New Testament is of less usefulness than the Old Testament and pseudo-Apostolic sources. While the fact that he can directly cite Christ in the Gospels would seemingly allow him to present more authoritative arguments than when he quotes the prophets or the Apostles, there is the issue of the relative paucity of passages both in the Gospels and in the rest of the New Testament that discuss magic or even idolatry (of the pagan sort, not metaphorical idolatry) in any way. Nonetheless, the Emperor still manages to interpret some passages in such a way that he can use them to refute the practice of magic.

Quite fittingly, Zār’a Yaʿqob quotes the Gospels of Matthew and Luke in the first dorsan of the Ṭomarā Ṭṣḥ b’t, which is dedicated to them, and the Gospel of Mark in the second, which is dedicated to him. The third dorsan is not dedicated to any of the Evangelists, although it is dedicated to Peter and Paul, but nevertheless has very few references to the New Testament, with the exception of the frequently quoted passage from Galatians 4, instead favouring pseudo-Apostolic texts. In the first dorsan, the Emperor compares the statement of Christ, which “the Evangelist Luke has reported,” that, “The Son of Man is coming at an unexpected time” (Lk. 12:40) with his oft-cited words of the prophet Isaiah, who says, “No one knows the counsel of God” (Is. 40:13). These statements lead Zār’a Yaʿqob to conclude that ṭānq “al yan “lead others astray [in] saying, ‘I know your life and your death and the length of your years,’” calling this the greatest of all their lies. He even mocks them, saying, “You do not know even what you will eat and what you will drink.” This fits in with Zār’a Yaʿqob’s portrayal of

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1 Ṭomarā Ṭṣḥ b’t, Tx. pp. 10-11 = Vs. p. 9.
2 Ṭomarā Ṭṣḥ b’t, Tx. p. 11 = Vs. p. 9.
3 Ṭomarā Ṭṣḥ b’t, Tx. p. 11 = Vs. p. 9.
magicians as people who lie to their clients and display arrogance in their supposed knowledge of the future.

Zār'a Yaʿqob, in the first dorsan of the Ṭomarā Ṭsḥbʾt, also juxtaposes words of Christ in the Gospel of Matthew with the book of Ezekiel. The Emperor begins,

Our Lord has said in the Gospel of Matthew, “Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. … Does one gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles? … Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire and burned up.” [Mt. 7:16-19]

This passage is then juxtaposed with the prophecy of Ezekiel that sun-worshippers will be cut down by angels wielding axes:

Just as He ordered Ezekiel to tell those axe-men, “Cut down those who worship the sun” [cf. Ez. 9:6], so Our Lord has said in the Gospel, “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire and burned up.”

This is again part of the main rhetorical strategy of Zār’a Yaʿqob, to harmonize various passages from the Scriptures in order to construct more effective arguments.

As mentioned previously, a key passage of Scripture for Zār’a Yaʿqob, the one which he cites the most from the New Testament, is Galatians 4:8/9-10:

Formerly, you served, in your ignorance, those who are not gods [ʾamalbkt]. But now, you have known God [ʾʿgziʿabsher], or rather, He has known you. How is it that, turning to

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4 Ṭomarā Ṭsḥbʾt, Tx. pp. 27-28 = Vs. p. 22.
5 Ṭomarā Ṭsḥbʾt, Tx. p. 28 = Vs. p. 22.
this weak and beggarly idol of this world [ṭaʾotā ẓ̱alām], you want to serve them in vain and observe days, months, seasons, and years?\(^6\) The Emperor quotes the passage verbatim thirteen times in the Ṭomarā Ṭosḥʾṭ, often including its attribution to the Apostle Paul and always interpreting the phrase “observe days, months, seasons, and years” as a reference to divination and understanding the phrase “idol of this world” to refer to one who practices divination. The passage thus plays an important role in his portrayal of magicians as idolaters, even going so far as to call them idols themselves.

Although Zārʾa Yāʾqob shows a clear preference for pseudo-Apostolic texts, especially the Sinodos, which he considers to be a part of the same Scriptural canon as the New Testament, he still makes use of the Gospels and also, with great frequency, the Epistle to the Galatians. Quoting the words of Christ in the Gospels allows him to appeal directly to the highest authority in his refutation of magic, further bolstering his arguments based on Old Testament and pseudo-Apostolic sources.


Only these three instances include verse 8 and the beginning of verse 9, the other ten instances begin with “How is it that…”
CHAPTER 5: PSEUDO-APOSTOLIC SOURCES

Zär’a Yaʿaqob’s Use of Pseudo-Apostolic Sources

The Scriptural canon of the Ethiopian Church is widely known for being the largest canon of any Christian tradition, traditionally enumerated in eighty-one books (a number acknowledged even by Zär’a Yaʿaqob). In addition to the seventy-six books common among most Eastern Christian traditions (with the exception of 4 Maccabees), the canon also includes several pseudo-Apostolic texts. As Alessandro Bausi describes, three pseudo-Apostolic texts in particular “enjoyed the highest success” in the works of Zär’a Yaʿaqob, namely, the Sinodos, the Didaskalya, and the Mäṣḥafä Kidan (Book of the Covenant), used by the Emperor as “the paradigm of the true Christian law.” The role of these texts in the theology and policies of the Emperor and his reliance upon them cannot be overstated. It is worth first introducing these texts and Zär’a Yaʿaqob’s general perspective of them before discussing their use in his anti-magic polemic.

An Introduction to Pseudo-Apostolic Texts in Ethiopian Tradition

The Sinodos, which is certainly the most cited of the three pseudo-Apostolic sources, if not the most cited of any of the eighty-one Scriptures, in the works of Zär’a Yaʿaqob, was thoroughly

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1 The Ethiopian canon notably replaces 1-4 Maccabees with 1-3 Müqabyan, particularly Ethiopian recensions that differ greatly from the LXX.

2 Also known as the Senodos or (in English) the Synodicon. Borrowed from the Greek σύνοδος.

3 From the Greek διδασκαλία.

4 Or simply the Kidan. Also known as the Kidan zäʾÆgziʿmä Ṣıyäsus kirštos (Covenant of Our Lord Jesus Christ, often translated as Testament of the Lord or Testamentum Domini).

5 Alessandro Bausi, “Senodos,” in EΔe, s.v.

Other pseudo-Apostolic texts are extant in Gəʿez, however, most are not considered canonical according to the Ethiopian Church (and as argued by Zär’a Yaʿaqob).
promoted by the Emperor, who notably sent a copy to the Ethiopian community in Jerusalem. The book is a sizeable compilation of numerous pseudo-Apostolic canons, canons (both genuine and pseudepigraphal) from both ecumenical and local church councils, and patristic texts. The main text of the Sinodos is comprised of four different recensions of the Apostolic Canons, two in 80 (Goṣṣəw and Bätəlsat), and two in 81 canons (both called ʿAbṭəlisat), the 71 canon Təʾəzəzat, the canons ʿAndoḥrə ʿArğā (“After the Ascension [of the Lord]”), two different recensions of the canons of Simon the Canaanite, and the letter of Peter to Clement (the Sinodos zāQālemət). The work “largely consists of translations [into Goʿəz] from Arabic, in turn relying on Coptic and/or Greek texts.” As noted by Bausi, “[many] sections of the Sinodos certainly depend upon a Greek Vorlage and date to a much older (probably Aksumite) period.” The text comprises recensions of canons of Melkite and of Coptic origin. Ignazio Guidi supposed that the Melkite elements were added by the Copts before its transmission to Ethiopia, although Bausi hypothesized that the Melkite canons may have come to Ethiopia alone and the Coptic canons were later superimposed on them. Much of the importance and usefulness of the Sinodos is due to the fact that the component canons deal with “every aspect of the life of the Church” and were seen as having

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7 Bausi, “Senodos,” in EAr, s.v.


Note that some of these may be further subdivided and are referred to by Zār’a Yaʾaqqob according to their incipits. The letter of Peter to Clement (the Sinodos zāQālemət) should not be confused with the seven book compilation of canons referred to as the Qālemət.

9 Bausi, “Senodos,” in EAr, s.v.

10 Bausi, “Senodos,” in EAr, s.v.


Apostolic authority.\textsuperscript{13} The effect of this on Zār’a Yaʾqob’s rhetoric will be explored in the coming arguments.

The Ethiopic Did\textit{sqa}\textit{lya} comprises the first six books of the \textit{Apostolic Constitutions}, a Syrian reworking, now lost in its Greek original, of the Greek \textit{Didascalia} plus the seventh book of the \textit{Apostolic Constitutions}, which is based on the \textit{Didache} (with some additions).\textsuperscript{14} The Did\textit{sqa}\textit{lya} does not, however, contain the final eighth book of the \textit{Apostolic Constitutions}.\textsuperscript{15} Translated into G\textit{əʿəz} from Arabic, it is attributed to Clement of Rome and forms part of the large corpus of pseudo-Clementine literature.\textsuperscript{16} Although it is cited far less than the \textit{Sinodos}, the Did\textit{sqa}\textit{lya} still plays a role in Zār’a Yaʾqob’s anti-magic polemic.

The M\textit{āṣḥaf}ā\textit{ Kidan}, likely translated into G\textit{əʿəz} from Greek during the Aksumite period, deals with the performance of several rites, including the Anaphora of the Lord, one of the principal anaphoras used in the liturgy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and also discusses numerous ecclesiastical matters, claiming to contain teachings given to the Apostles by Christ before his ascension.\textsuperscript{17} While it is frequently quoted by Zār’a Yaʾqob in his \textit{dəɾsanat}, forming an important trio of pseudo-Apostolic books along with the Did\textit{sqa}\textit{lya} and the \textit{Sinodos}, it is not at all used in his refutations of magic.

In the \textit{Homily on the Rite of Baptism and Religious Instruction}, Zār’a Yaʾqob provides a lengthy defence of the three texts together. The Emperor, countering the one who denies that the books belong to the eighty-one canonical Scriptures, says, “the \textit{Kidan}, the Did\textit{sqa}\textit{lya}, and the \textit{Sinodos} are...\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{13} Bausi, “Heritage and Originality” p. 16; Bausi, “Senodos,” in \textit{EAe}, s.v.

\textsuperscript{14} Alessandro Bausi, “Did\textit{sqa}\textit{lya},” in \textit{EAe}, s.v.

\textsuperscript{15} Bausi, “Did\textit{sqa}\textit{lya},” in \textit{EAe}, s.v.

\textsuperscript{16} Bausi, “Did\textit{sqa}\textit{lya},” in \textit{EAe}, s.v.

\textsuperscript{17} Alessandro Bausi, “Testamentum Domini,” in \textit{EAe}, s.v.
one book” — “the Apostles wrote [the Kidan], with the Saviour dictating (it) to them,” while the Didssqlyya and the Sinodos are “the casts in the image of this Kidan” which the book describes as being sent out from Jerusalem after its composition.\(^{18}\) He goes on to declare that “everything that is not in the Mäṣḥafä Kidan and the Mäṣḥafä Didssqlyya is in the Sinodos; everything that is not in the Sinodos is in the Mäṣḥafä Kidan and the Didssqlyya.”\(^{19}\) Zâr’a Yaʿqob provides detailed arguments surrounding the rite of baptism and the construction of churches, suggesting that these cannot be performed without the directions given in the three books and thus they must be accepted as canonical. The Emperor concludes his defence (and the homily), which also incorporates a defence of the book of Enoch, with the words, “as for us, we preach the Octateuch [ʾOrit], the Prophets, the Gospel, the Kidan, the Sinodos, and the Didssqlyya.”\(^{20}\) This is a clear testament to the importance placed by Zâr’a Yaʿqob on the three books.

The Importance of Pseudo-Apostolic Texts in Zâr’a Yaʿqob’s Polemic

Each of the three dørsanat in the Ṭomarä Ṭosḥʾt is appointed to be read on feast days pertaining to certain Apostles. The first is appointed for the feast days of Bartholomew, Matthew, Luke, Philip, and Andrew;\(^{21}\) the second for those of John, James, son of Alphaeus, Matthias, James, son of Zebedee, and Mark;\(^{22}\) the third for those of Peter and Paul, Thomas, Thaddeus, Nathaniel, and James, the brother of Christ.\(^{23}\) Throughout the beginning portion of each dørsan, the named Apostles are quoted from the Sinodos. The only exceptions to this are Luke in the first

\(^{18}\) Ṭomarä Ṭosḥʾt, Tx. pp. 103, 110 = Vs. pp. 71, 76.

\(^{19}\) Ṭomarä Ṭosḥʾt, Tx. p. 104 = Vs. p. 72.

\(^{20}\) Ṭomarä Ṭosḥʾt, Tx. p. 110 = Vs. p. 77.

\(^{21}\) Ṭomarä Ṭosḥʾt, Tx. p. 1 = Vs. p. 1.

\(^{22}\) Ṭomarä Ṭosḥʾt, Tx. p. 36 = Vs. p. 29.

\(^{23}\) Ṭomarä Ṭosḥʾt, Tx. p. 80 = Vs. p. 64.
dorsan, who instead receives a quotation from his Gospel, and Paul in the third dorsan, because the related feast day jointly commemorates Paul and Peter, the apostle who is actually quoted from the Sinodos in the third dorsan. All other quotations from the Sinodos in each dorsan are not attributed to any specific apostle, only broadly to all of the Apostles (with the exception of those quotations which themselves provide attribution).

The Apostolic attribution of the Sinodos is of great importance for Zăr’a Yaʿqob with regards to his argumentation, given that the names of the Apostles presumably hold great authority for any Christian. The introduction and explanation of every quotation from the Sinodos reiterates its perceived Apostolic origin. For example, in the second dorsan, Zăr’a Yaʿqob argues,

Behold, the Apostles have said in their Sinodos, “Do not create division, but reconcile in peace those who quarrel.” But you, ṭanq “alı, behold, you create division and teach them quarrelling in place of peace, violating the law which the Apostles have laid down.²⁴

In the cases of attributions to named Apostles in the second and third dorsanat, each introduction also has an embellishing line about the life of the saint following Christ’s resurrection. For example, from the third dorsan,

Peter, the chief of the Apostles, preached in the land of Rome and other cities, as has been said in the Sinodos, “Simon Cephas, who is Peter,” preached in the land of Rome, “Antioch, Spain, and the cities surrounding them and in all of Rome.” And in his epistle, it is stated (that) Peter preached in the lands of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. In the course of his teaching, Peter has said in the Sinodos, “Do not kill, and do

²⁴ Țomară Tășb ăt, Tx. p. 43 = Vs. p. 35.
not commit adultery; do not corrupt a little child; do not steal. Do not be a maʾmer; do not be a rāʾayāʾa kokāb; do not be a māšārīy. …”

The added description of Peter’s preaching evidently does not have a direct use in the Emperor’s argument against the practice of magic, almost seeming to be a digression. However, it demonstrates that Peter acted as an Apostle and lived in a devout manner, thereby enhancing his perceived authority on matters pertaining to a virtuous Christian life.

Perhaps the most extensive example of Zār’a Yaʿqob harmonizing texts in his refutation of magic occurs in the second dorsan of the Ṭomarā Ṭəsb ʾət and concludes with a quotation from the Sinodos. The Emperor begins with a long quotation from Deuteronomy which prescribes death by stoning for those who “have bowed down to the sun or the moon” (Dt. 17:2-7), interpreted by the Emperor, of course, as referring to the practice of magic. This is first harmonized with the words of Christ in the Gospels, “It is better that they fasten and hang a millstone round the neck of the one who leads one of these little ones who believe in me astray and drown him in the depth of the sea” (Mt. 18:6/Mk. 9:42/Lk. 17:2) the connection with magicians being that magicians “lead God-worshippers astray with heavenly signs.” Thus, the Emperor argues, “The words of the Octateuch [‘Orit] and the Gospel … are in agreement” (since both prescribe death). The Emperor finally quotes the Sinodos, saying, “As the Apostles also have said in their Sinodos, ‘Fight against the apostates and heretics with a sword of iron.’”

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25 Ṭomarā Ṭəsb ʾət, Tx. p. 85 = Vs. p. 68.
26 Ṭomarā Ṭəsb ʾət, Tx. pp. 53-55 = Vs. p. 43-45.
27 Ṭomarā Ṭəsb ʾət, Tx. p. 55 = Vs. p. 44.
28 Ṭomarā Ṭəsb ʾət, Tx. pp. 54-55 = Vs. p. 44.
29 Ṭomarā Ṭəsb ʾət, Tx. p. 55 = Vs. p. 45.

The quotation from Sinodos is taken from the Letter of Peter to Clement (Sinodos z̲αQ̲ile̲m̲m̲t̲o̲s), tenth canon (Sinodos, Tx. pp. 286-287 = Vs. p. 110) (cf. Ex. 32:27).
Yaʿqob then ultimately concludes, “See, O ṭänqʿali, that there is no sparing of your extirpation, neither with the people of the Torah [ʿOrīṭ] nor with the people of the Gospel,” thereby tying all three texts together to form one strengthened argument, namely, that magicians are universally condemned to be executed, a policy Zārʿa Yaʿqob himself implemented in his empire, as the royal chronicle recounts, which notes that “he did not even spare his sons, [seven of whom are here named], nor many other among his offspring.”

Zārʿa Yaʿqob quotes the Didasqalya eight times in the Ṣomārā Ṭṣḥbṭ, of which six quotations are taken from the same passage. First used in the first dōrransan to equate the sun-worshippers in Ezekiel to magicians, the passage indicates that the prayers of “those who practice astrology, worship a celestial power, and observe days and hours” are neither pleasing nor accepted by God and such persons are “desolate of the Holy Spirit.” The exceptional passages are the well-known apocryphal story of Simon Magus, who had been flying on a demon, falling to the ground after it is commanded by Peter, and an apocryphal story of Manasseh, inserted as part of an account of the patriarch’s deviance and eventual repentance. Thus, the Didasqalya plays only a minor role in Zārʿa Yaʿqob’s refutation of magic, although it proves most useful in enabling the Emperor to equate the worship of celestial bodies with astrology and magic, thereby serving an instrumental role in several of his arguments.

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30 Ṣomārā Ṭṣḥbṭ, Tx. p. 55 = Vs. p. 45.
31 Royal Chronicle, Tx. p. 5 = Haber p. 152.
33 Ṣomārā Ṭṣḥbṭ, Tx. p. 50 = Vs. p. 41.
34 Ṣomārā Ṭṣḥbṭ, Tx. p. 94-95 = Vs. pp. 75-76.
Conclusion

Zăr’a Yaʿqob is said to have spent much of his reign living in fear of magic and zealously persecuting those accused of practicing it, whether divination or sorcery. Marie-Laure Derat makes the important point that, “Le plus souvent, [des opposants au roi] sont dénoncés [dans ses homélies] soit comme des hérétiques, soit comme des adeptes de pratiques magiques et de sorcellerie.”¹ Getatchew Haile likewise points out that one of the things Zăr’a Yaʿqob accomplished with the ʿTomarā Ṭəṣbʾət was “the destruction of his personal enemies.”² Indeed, the Emperor’s condemnations of the rebellious Ḳisayyyas and Šīḥ Māŋgāša were surely of great benefit to him in solidifying his reign and making it clear that the populace of Ethiopia ought not to “search for another (king) that God has not given [them].”³ But one should consider the royal chronicle’s claim that Zăr’a Yaʿqob ordered priests to “ceaselessly sprinkle with holy water, from dusk to dawn, the palace of the King, [reciting] the Gospels, the Psalms of David, the Ḳəḥdota Ṣəyṭan [sic], and the hymn Ṣəgba Ḳəḥer Nəṅga” for protection from magicians,⁴ the Emperor’s edict ordering the people to bear three tattoos on their body affirming their orthodoxy and abjuring Ḹāsk and the Devil,⁵ and the very fact that prayers such as the Ḳəḥdəta Ṣəyṭan and Māshafā Bahry, regardless of whether the Emperor truly wrote them himself, were seen as necessary in the first place. Steven Kaplan notes, “Whatever Zăr’a Yaʿqob’s problems may have had [to do] with the practice of magic[,] it was not because he did not [believe] in the efficacy of [magical] rituals,”

² Getatchew Haile, “Preliminary Investigation,” p. 228.
³ ʿTomarā Ṭəṣbʾət, Tx. p. 79 = Vs. p. 63.
⁴ Royal Chronicle, Tx. p. 40 = Haber p. 159.
⁵ Royal Chronicle, Tx. p. 6 = Haber p. 152.
indeed, “it would appear that throughout his reign he lived in fear that his enemies would use such ‘magical’ forces against him.” He points out that the Emperor, who always wore an icon of the Virgin Mary and denounced the use of heathen amulets, “objected not to protective power of a charm, amulet or image, but to the source of its power.” While Zär’a Ya’qob may have benefitted in various ways from his persecution of magicians, it is still quite clear that the Emperor was truly afraid of magic and his efforts to root it out from his empire were not simply a veil for some political maneuvers.

The reign of Zär’a Ya’qob ended a period of instability and downturn within Ethiopia. For the Emperor, a key component of bringing about stability and national unity (to use the term very loosely) was promoting a religious unity among his subjects. His ecclesiastical reforms, persecutions of heretics and magicians, and homiletic contributions all worked towards this end. His rhetorical techniques, including the use of portrayal and strategic use of Scriptural texts, were critical to the effectiveness of his darsanat, and thus of some significance for understanding the events of his reign. By presenting magicians not just as wicked individuals destined for destruction and deserving of reproach, but as individuals deemed so by the prophets, Apostles, and even Christ himself, Zär’a Ya’qob sought to achieve the eradication of those magicians whom he feared and bring about the peace and prosperity he so desired for his empire.

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<tr>
<th>Glossary</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'amlak (pl. 'amalak't)</td>
<td>A god or deity; compare with 'Agzi'abher.</td>
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<tr>
<td>'Agzi'abher (or 'Agzi'a Boher)</td>
<td>The Christian God, lit. “The Lord of Earth;” note that this creates a clear distinction with the more general 'amlak that is not found, for example, in Greek (Θεός) or Latin (deus).¹</td>
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<tr>
<td>däbtära (pl. -ročč)</td>
<td>(Amh.) a well-educated lay cleric trained as a cantor; often associated with the practice of magic and traditional medicine.</td>
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<tr>
<td>dərsan (pl. -nat)</td>
<td>an exegetical homily or reading, generally on a theological topic and drawing on Scripture; can also refer to a compilation of these (i.e., a homiliary or lectionary).</td>
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<tr>
<td>fal (pl. -lat)</td>
<td>an omen; sib'a fal(at) are diviners or augurs; according to the Tomarä Tesh'b, “a fal is the idle rumour (of one) who foretells, saying, ‘At such time war will break out, famine will take place, the fruit of the earth will be destroyed’” (Tx. p. 52 = Vs. p. 42).</td>
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<tr>
<td>gädl (pl. -lat)</td>
<td>the hagiographical acts of a saint; often contrasted in scholarship with a saint’s mälk’a, a hymn that praises the piety of a saint through their physical description (“mälk’a” means “likeness”).</td>
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<tr>
<td>ganen (pl. 'aganent)</td>
<td>a demon (i.e., the Christian δαίμων); in later literature, Däsk, Dino, G'wdale, etc. are explicitly labelled as 'aganent; cf. Arabic ġinn.²</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mä'anshe(an)</td>
<td>a diviner, perhaps one who casts lots; the term, found in the Sinodos (Tx. p. 68 = Vs. p. 33), is likely derived from the Arabic nāsib (“fate, luck”); cf. Tigre nāsib (“luck”) and the obscure Ga'az verb nāsāhā (“to measure/count (one’s portion)”).</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ma'bnor (pl. -ran)</td>
<td>an augur or medium.</td>
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<tr>
<td>mari (pl. maryan/ maryat)</td>
<td>a heathen priest or magician (m.).</td>
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</table>

¹ The origin of this title is the monumental inscriptions of King 'Ezana of 'Aksum, the first Ethiopian ruler to convert to Christianity, who, seeking to replace the many-named pagan deities of his previous inscriptions, referred to God as ḥ’7H’h : ŋæL : (“Lord of Earth”), ḥ’7H’h : n’øjä : (“Lord of Heaven”), and ḥ’7H’h : h’r : (“Lord of All”) (See Merid Wolde Aregay, “Agzi’abher,” in EAe, s.v.).

² Although ḥ’7 h : ġ’inn are demons, not ġ’inn. This is sometimes seen in Ga’saz, that is to say, n’øjä :; usually reserved for the Devil, is sometimes used in the plural (n’øjäř₄) to mean h’rንं :; the suggestion by Ephraim Isaac (Text-Critical Introduction, p. 85, n. 3) of a connection between as and ġ’inn (which he misspells ḡ’inn) is baseless; the name is rather derived from Syriac.
GLOSSARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>marit (pl. maritat)</td>
<td>סֵלֶת; סֵלֶתָה: a heathen priest or magician (f.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mart</td>
<td>see mari and marit above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>māsarray (pl. -yan)</td>
<td>סַלֶלֶת; סַלֶלֶתָה: a magician or sorcerer who practices šray; synonymous with sāḥ à šray (“men of šray”); often used to translate פָרָמָהוֹס and γόης.</td>
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<tr>
<td>māṣḥaf</td>
<td>סָלֶלֶת; סָלֶלֶתָה: a book; often in status constructus as Māṣḥaf ... (“Book of ...”); can also refer to other written things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>māstāqsom</td>
<td>סַלֶלֶת; סַלֶלֶתָה: a type of divination or augury; in the Tōmarā Ṭəsb bt, Balaam, who is called a māṣägə (see sāgəl below), is implied to have practiced māstāqsom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>māṭaʿawi (pl. -wəyan)</td>
<td>סָלֶלֶת; סָלֶלֶתָה: a person who worships a ṭəb, an idolater; synonymous with māmläke ṭət (“one who worships idol[s],” “idol-worshipper”).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qädam(it) Sänbät</td>
<td>פתָרִי: פתָר: “The First/Original/Ancient Sabbath;” refers to the custom of observing Saturday (in addition to Sunday) as the Sabbath.</td>
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<tr>
<td>rāʾayi (pl. rāʾayt)</td>
<td>הָנָה; הָנָה: act. ppl. of “to observe,” refers to an astrologer; often “rāʾayä ḳəṭab” (“one who observes the stars”).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sāgəl (pl. -lat)</td>
<td>ḳƏṅə: ḳƏṅə: a form of divination or augury; sāḥ à sāgəl are diviners; the Magi from the Gospel Nativity account are called sāḥ à sāgəl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>šray</td>
<td>פֶּלֶת: magic, specifically spell or charm magic (as opposed to divination); often used to translate פָרָמָהוֹס; Simon Magus, the quintessential magician in Christian tradition, is said to have practiced šray (Acts 8:9); can also have a positive connotation (often one of healing); see māsarray above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ṭəb (pl. -tət)</td>
<td>מְרַה; מְרַה: an idol; see māṭaʿawi above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ṭənj “ali (pl. -leyan)</td>
<td>מַהְרַה: מַהְרַה: a kind of soothsayer or diviner; never mentioned in Scriptural quotations, only in rhetorical arguments and addresses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tomar</td>
<td>מַמֲר: a small tract or epistle; cf. Greek τομαρίον; note that, as in Greek, which uses επιστολή, “tomar” is not used to refer to the Scriptural epistles, but rather “mälʾkt.”</td>
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</tbody>
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