

The Place of the Hagiography of King Iyasu I in the Ethiopic Literary Tradition

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to define the generic features of the hagiography of King Iyasu I, one of Gondärine's acclaimed Kings, ase Iyasu I (r. 1681-1706). It was written two years after the death of the king by azaê Sinoda in Gə'əz. The literary genre of the hagiography of King Iyasu I is still a subject of scholarly debates. The contents and patterns of the hagiography are examined in comparison to the customary patterns of the previous hagiographical genre via entailing textual methods of analysis. Data were analyzed using content and thematic analysis. The article found that despite such linked and distinctive textual features, the hagiography of king Iyasu I appears to be one of the rare hagiographic texts in the history of the Ethiopic hagiography tradition. Apart from contributing our textual knowledge of hagiography, this paper confirms king Iyasu I is the only one among the monarchs of the Solomonic dynasty to have a hagiography composed to his name. It implies that Ethiopic hagiography had developed beyond the essentially edificatory goals of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church into a broader scope of contents and aims, particularly in the Gondärine period. This article is expected to be significant in examining the nature of Ethiopian hagiographic texts and their trends in keeping the narrative accounts about kings and their roles in historical periods.

Key Words: Ethiopian Literature; Ethiopic (Gə'əz) language; Hagiography; Royal Chronicle.

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INTRODUCTION

As part of the Christian Orient, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) has a rich tradition of the recount and celebrate the lives, deaths and posthumous miracles of Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian Saints, Martyrs and Saintly Kings through literary genres known as *gädl*. The English counterpart of such writings is Hagiography. The term *ገድል* (*Gädl*) is a Gəʼəz word which can literary be translated as ‘struggle’, referring to spiritual deeds.¹ It may also have a meaning similar to the ‘acts’ of saints or martyrs, as the Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament. Because of the general resemblance in the purpose of writing, the *Gädl* of Ethiopian saint may be analogically treated as the Latin ‘Vita’ or the Greek ‘Bios’ or ‘Politeia’. In view of this, therefore, hereafter in this study the term ‘*Gädl*’ is used to refer to what is conventionally known as hagiography. In all cases, documenting the lives of saints or martyrs is the central theme. It has great value in helping us to reconstruct the political and religious history of the period. According to Kaplan, there are two types of Ethiopic hagiographic literature: the translated hagiographic texts dealing with the lives of the saints of the early Christian Church and those Ethiopic hagiographies composed for the local Saints. The first, devoted to non-Ethiopian Saints, translated from Greek during the Aksumite Period and many more from Arabic during the later historical periods such as the monastic rules of Saint Pachomius, *Gädlä Säma’ətatand* others. It is presumed that these works started with the introduction of Christianity in the 4th century and before the beginning of the composition of the medieval Ethiopian royal chronicles. As to the hagiographies in the second category, they are concerned with the lives of local saints, the life of some Ethiopian Kings and many monastic leaders who lived between the 13th and 16th century. Nosnitsin(2005) pointed out the main reason for flourishing of local hagiographic works: ‘It was closely linked to the development of the Ethiopian monasticism on the one hand and the increased the role of local veneration of Ethiopian holy men and women on the other.’ In line with this, different sources revealed that the number of local hagiographies which were produced over centuries is estimated to be over 200.

The hagiographies were not only a literary genre to record the common history of the saints and holy men/women; rather they served as a historiographical document dealing with the history of Ethiopian Kings. Evidently, hagiography has been the only written royal historiography composed for some Kings of the Zag^we dynasty; they are regarded as holy Kings by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. It conventionally described the Zag^we rulers as a ‘usurping’ dynasty, though four of the Zag^we Kings, *Yəmrəhnnä-Krəstos*, *Lalibāla*, *Nä’akkwəto Lā’ab* and *Yəṭbaräk* have hagiographies composed to their name. Likewise, with a few such exceptions King *Iyasu I* is the only one among the Solomonic monarchs of Ethiopia to have a hagiography composed in his name. He was murdered by his people and this was taken as martyrdom by the author of the *Gädl*. The main objective of these hagiographies is to celebrate the monarchs for their particular zeal in defending Christianity. They must have shown the possibility of leading a pious life while at the helm of a kingdom.

In line with the above, the literary genre of hagiography of King *Iyasu I* is still a subject of scholarly debates. In other words, scholars have doubted whether or not the text belongs to the hagiography genre. However, the incipit specifies that the text is called *ገድል* ‘*Gädl*’ reads: *ገድል፡ ዘንጉሥነ፡ ስም፡ ኢየሱስ፡ መናኔ፡ መንግሥት፡ ወሰማዕት፡ ደመ፡ ከቡር፡ ዘፈጸመ፡ ስምዖን፡ አመ፡ በጅ፡ ለወርኅ፡ ጥቅምት፡*

¹ Gəʼəz (Etiopic/ Classical Ethiopic) (*ግዕዝ*) is the classical language of Ethiopia. Names used in European literature are “Classical Ethiopic”, “old Ethiopic” or simply “Ethiopic”. The position that Geez holds in Ethiopia has often been compared to that of Latin in Europe.

በሰላም፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ አሜን፡ ወአሜን፡² (‘Spiritual combat of our King honoured by name, Iyasu, despiser of the Kingdom, and honoured blood martyr, who accomplished his martyrdom on the 5th of the month of Təqəmt , in the peace of the God. Amen and amen’). It also registered the text in the UNESCO catalogue as ‘Gädl’, without further specification.³ On the other hand, Noslitsin (2005) claimed the hagiography of King Iyasu I differs from that of the other Ethiopic hagiographical genres by stating, ‘though the work is called *gädl* in the incipit, the hagiographer followed very much a historiographer in style’.⁴ Similarly, other senior Ethiopicist philologists Conti Rossini⁵ and Chernetsov⁶, have also favoured similar views arguing that the text is not belonging to the hagiography genre.

Research on the generic features of the hagiography of King Iyasu I is very scanty. There are, of course, two philological works on the hagiography of King Iyasu I have been conducted by Conti Rossini and Sevir Chernetsov. These works mainly focus on the edition and translation of the hagiography of King Iyasu I. Conti Rossini was edited and translated the hagiography into Italian in 1942. Meanwhile, Sevir Chernetsov translated the text into Russian in 1990. They do not investigate the unusual features of the hagiography of King Iyasu I. It is in this context that to the researcher intends to examine unusual literary features of the hagiography in comparison to the literary elements of the Ethiopic hagiography genre.

Considering these observations, this paper attempts to answer the questions of whether the hagiography of King Iyasu I belongs to the Ethiopic hagiography genre or not, and does the *Gädl* of King Iyasu I consist of characteristics that may confirm the notion according to which the text can be called historiographic?

This paper discusses these questions based on an analysis of primary sources. Thus, the researcher analyzed the text based on the manuscript of Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Éth. 338, Grèbaut 1941, 1 (no.34), ff. 1v 56r.⁷ To determine this, the historical, textual and structural features of the hagiography of King Iyasu I will be examined.

KING IYASU I AND HIS HAGIOGRAPHY

King Iyasu I ruled for 24 years, from 1682 to 1706. His regnal name, *Adyam Sägäd*⁸, is always used together with his name whenever reference is made to him or his reign.⁹ He was also known as ‘Iyasu the Great’. He owned this name based on his courage in war and his skills for administration.¹⁰ He continued the policy of his father King *Yohannəs I* (1667-82), and his grandfather King *Fasilädäs* (1632–1667); he attempted to create peace and stability in the country. Unfortunately, internal theological disputes caused by monks and others continued and

² Conti Rossini 1942, 67; ff. 1ra.

³ Catalogue UNESCO 1970, Series 10, no.62, Dima Qəddus Giyorgis Church, Goğgam.

⁴ ‘Hagiography’, EAe, II (2005), 972 (Denis Noslitsin)

⁵ Conti Rossini 1942.

⁶ Chernetsov 1990, 233.

⁷ the following manuscripts were also consulted: Ms. translated by Conti Rossini in 1942, pp. 65-128. The Ms. Addis Ababa, Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES), IES. 693.

⁸ This throne name is also known by *ase* Iyasu II (r. 1730-55).

⁹ The throne names of Gonderiän King s literally rendered as *Aläm Sägäd* (‘the world submitted’), *A’əlaf Sägäd* (‘thousands submitted’), *Adyam Sägäd* (‘the confines of the earth submitted’), *Ləul Sägäd* (‘the exalted submitted’), *Asrar Sägäd* (‘the enemies submitted’), *Sähay Sägäd* (‘the sun bowed’), *Adbar Sägäd* (‘the mountains bowed’), *Mesihe Sägäd* (‘the anointed submitted’). Berry, 1976, 155.

¹⁰ *Täklä Sadəq Mäkuriya* 1960, 281.

it had a danger for the authority of the King.¹¹ He maintained the royal presence over a large territory. King Iyasu I was the last Gondarine monarch to reach as far as Ānnarya in the region of Gibe, in 1704.¹² He built up his power by visiting such symbolical places as the old and then remote monastery of Dābrā Libanos in Šawa¹³ in 1699 and above all, Aksum Səyon. During his reign, Ethiopian Orthodox Church was the great beneficiary from his law of the land because the Gult lands, laws and privileges were restored to Aksum Səyon in 1687. He also built the model church of Dābrā Bərhan Šəllase in Gondär, which was consecrated in 1694. Nowadays, this church is known for its fine murals, which cover the entire wall. He also gave preferences to the religious doctrine of the Täwahədo (Unionists)¹⁴ and supported the ‘house of abunä Täklä Haymanot’¹⁵, mainly relying on the legendary pact (Kidān) between King Yəkunno Amlak and the Saint which was believed to have the Solomonic dynasty preserved for centuries.¹⁶ Besides, he tried to reform the society in an economically and culturally sense. He undertook the reform of customs’ posts, aiming at stopping the uncontrolled taxation of goods on the trade-routes from Āndārta in Təgray to Gondar.¹⁷ He fell ill and went to different churches and monasteries around Lake Ṭana for cure in 1705. Thereafter, he appointed his son Täklä Haymanot. However, on 8 March 1706, the supporters of Qəbat doctrine court nobles in Gondär, most prominently ras Fares and däggəzmač Wäldä Giyorgis of Səmen, enthroned Täklä Haymanot¹⁸ against the will of King Iyasu I. He was shortly after his dethronement murdered by order of his son, his concubines Mäläkotawit, and her brothers on 策əqla Mänzo, an island in the Lake Tana.¹⁹ Then, he was buried in the royal cemetery on the island named Məsraha. He was regarded as a ሰማዕት (‘Martyr’) because of the tragic death, he suffered at the hands of his maternal uncles, Dərmən and Pawlos and thus his hagiography, called Gädlä Adyam Sägäd was written soon after his death. He was also commemorated in the Sənkəssar on 05 Təqəmt, the day of his death.²⁰

It is believed that *Gädlä Adyam Sägäd Iyasu* was probably written by *azzaž Sinoda*²¹. It was composed some years after the death of the King during the reign of Tewoflos (1708-11). It is

¹¹ Boll 2009, 65.

¹² Berry 1976, 149.

¹³ It is a famous monastic institution founded by St. Täklä Haymanot. It was originally called Dābrā Asäbot, its name being changed in the reign of Zärýa YaYəqob (r. 1334-1468).

¹⁴ The word ተዋሕዶ, Täwahədo means ‘fusion’ or ‘unity’. See Leslau 1991, 609. Here ተዋሕዶ, Täwahədo refers to the fusing of humanity and divinity in the person of Christ and is a reflection of the non- Chalcedonian miaphysite Christology of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

¹⁵ The monastic congregation of Dabra Libanos of Šawa

¹⁶ ‘Iyasu I’, *EAE*, III(2007), 249-251 (Claire Bosc-Tiesse).

¹⁷ Boll 2009, 65.

¹⁸ *king* Täklä Haymanot (r. 1706-08), succeeded his father aše Iyasu I. He had his father murdered and consequently he was styled አርጉም (‘The Cursed’). Budge 1928, 425-34.

¹⁹ King Iyasu I preference to the religious doctrine of the ‘unionists’, whereas his son of Täklä Haymanot supported by Goğgam Qəbat ‘Unctionists’, most probably one cause of his death was doctrinal differences.

²⁰ This episode is found in the *Sənkəssar* manuscript BritLib Orient. 660, በዛቲ፡ ዕለት፡ አዕረፈ፡ ኢየሱስ፡ ንጉሥ፡ ወሰማዕት፡ ተመሳሊሁ፡ ለአቤል፡ ዘተከዕው፡ ደሙ፡ በዓመ፡ ለዘንቱ፡ ኢየሱስ፡ ሰማዕት፡ ወለድዎ፡ በጾም፡ ወበጸሎት፡ ንጉሥ፡ ዮሐንስ፡ ጻድቅ፡ ዘብሔረ፡ ኢትዮጵያ፡ ወንግሥት፡ ሰብለ፡ ወንጌል፡ ፈራሂተ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡፡ (‘On this day died aše Iyasu I, King and martyr, who was the likeness of Abel, whose blood was poured out through violence. aše Yohannəs, the righteous King of the country of Ethiopia, and his God-fearing Queen Säblä Wängle, got this [man] Iyasu by fasting and by prayer). It ends with the words በረከተ፡ ጻሎቱ፡ ለዘንቱ፡ ኢየሱስ፡ ሰማዕት፡ የሁሉ፡ ምስለ፡ ወልድ፡ ንጉሥን፡ ኢየሱስ፡ ወምስሌኒሁ፡ ሰማዕያን፡ ለዓለም ፡ዓለም፡ አሜን፡፡ (May the blessing of the prayer of this aše Iyasu I be with his son our King Iyasu I, and with us who hear [his history] for ever and ever!).

²¹ He was an 18th-century royal historiographer. He penned the last six chapters for the events until 5 June 1704 and a short ‘Second Account’ (*Zena kaləy*) about Iyasu I’s entering Gondar. He lived as a cleric at Dabra Bərhan Səllase

dedicated to the veneration of King Iyasu I as a martyr-King.²² In this regard, Conti Rossini, states that when *King* Tewoflos decided to honour the memory of King Iyasu I and canonize him on the second anniversary of his death, Sinoda was reappointed to write the hagiography of King Iyasu.²³ It is known to us since a variant of it was published by Carlo Conti Rossini²⁴. Conti Rossini in his edition of this hagiography employed only one manuscript that is preserved in Gondär Däbrä Bərhan Šəllase church. Besides, Russian's translations were prepared for the hagiography of king Iyasu I by Chernetsov based on Conti Rossini's editions.

THE INTERTEXTUAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ETHIOPIC HAGIOGRAPHY AND ROYAL CHRONICLE

Before discussing the generic feature of HI, the basic textual relationships between the Ethiopian genre of hagiography and the royal chronicle must be examined. It requires us to evaluate its content and organization. In essence, the two genres are oriented towards different goals; the Ethiopic hagiography focuses on saints/martyrs' pious life and Christian way of life. In other words, it is a contending, challenge fighting and struggle of saints/martyrs through their life on earth. In the case of the Ethiopian royal chronicle genre, however, mainly focuses on the King's biography, his worldly achievements and glorifying his royal pedigree. It is usually compiled by scribes (*Sähafe Tə'əzazat*) at court who were usually contemporaries of the events they chronicled. Apparently, the major differences between the hagiography and the royal historiography genres lie above all in the disposition of prime motives.

Although the audience and purpose of writing are widely different, both the hagiography and the royal chronicle genres share many thematic features. As for the similarities between the two genres, both are very often written by ecclesiastic or recognized clerics who were at full command of Gə'əz language and heavily influenced by church education. Both often employed the same sources which, among others, comprised of the Bible and the works of sacred scriptures. Several chronicles used the hagiography as their sources, and some hagiographers venerating saint who were historical persons have chronicles as their sources. The Hagiographic genre also coexists with that of the chronicle. For example, royal chroniclers frequently adopted the subject of the saint's humility, an integral part of a hagiography's text to present the King's humbleness. Many chronicles include also hagiographical topics, such as the vita and miracles of saints. A number of hagiographical texts, on the other hand, contain secular public affairs concerning with political phenomenon which took place in the Kings' empires are addressed in the hagiographic genre.

cathedral during the reign of *aše* Täklä Haymanot. He resumed his pen as historiographer only in the reign of *aše* Bakaffa, in 1721, and was granted the official title of *sähafe tə'əzaz* as late as 1723. He also wrote the first 27 chapters of the Chronicle of Bäkaffa. 'Sinoda', *EAE*, IV (2010), 668a–669a (Sevir Chernetsov and Denis Nosnitsin); See also 'Historiography', *EAE*, III (2007), 42 (Sevir Chernetsov).

²² Bosc-Tiessé 2007, 250.

²³ Conti Rossini 1942, 65. There is also an interesting passage in the chronicle of Bäkaffa about Sinoda who composed a song for *aše* Iyasu I which was possibly part of this hagiography. It reads ወዓዲ፡ ደረሰ፡ መዝሙረ፡ ሐዲ፡ ኢያሱ፡ ሰማዕት፡ ሐዲስ፡ ባሕቱ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ ያዕርፍ፡ ነፍሱ፡ ውስተ፡ ሕፃነ፡ አብርሃም፡ ይስሐቅ፡ ወያዕቆብ፡ (Besides, he composed the psalm of *hase* Iyasu the new martyr. However God rests his soul in the burst of Abraham, Yəshaq and Ya'yəqob). Guidi 1903, 283.

²⁴ Conti Rossini 1942: 65-127.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study has employed textual method of analysis to gain understanding of the textual features of the hagiography of King Iyasu I as a component of the Ethiopic hagiographic tradition. The textual features of the hagiography have been gathered through the involvement of close reading and interpreting the selected text. In the course of this study both primary and secondary sources have been consulted. The primary manuscript used is the Ms Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Éth. 338. Griaule (1941: 2) has described the manuscript. It is written on a parchment of 56 folios with two columns of 17 lines and measures 168mm.x 137mm. It was written in the 20th century.²⁵ The main reason for the use of this version is the comprehensiveness of the text. The secondary sources comprise diverse scholarly work and scientific articles of the contemporary periods. With the involvement of this approaches of textual analysis that this paper has been done to examine textual features of the hagiography of King Iyasu I.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

AN EVALUATION OF THE HAGIOGRAPHY OF KING IYASU I

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF HAGIOGRAPHY OF KING IYASU I

In terms of content, the hagiography of King Iyasu I differs greatly from its predecessors. It is a valuable source material for reconstructing the historical reality of his reign. Its content strongly focuses on the King's historical background and military success. It also contains many more historical details which are not found in his official chronicle and other contemporaneous textual sources. Among the major historical incidents that are recounted in the HI, the foundation of the church of Däbrä Bərhan Šəllase, Täklä Haymanot and St. Gälawdewos. It also contains events such as the King's great campaign to Gibe state and the mourning of his death. This hagiographic text is also informative in the aspects of the last years of the King's reign particularly in the post 1704 which were not accounted in his official chronicle. As the temporal scope of narrative account of his official chronicle is limited only up to 1704 two years before the assassination of the King held. Therefore, the hagiography of King Iyasu I detailed historical facts that help us to understand significantly the history of the period in general and the history of King Iyasu I in particular. Perhaps due to the fact that the text encompasses a number of secular affairs concerned with political phenomena, one of the main reasons for the aforementioned scholars to categorise the text into a historiographical literary genre of Ethiopia.

THE TEXTUAL FEATURES OF THE HAGIOGRAPHY OF KING IYASU I

Apart from the historiographical details, the hagiography of King Iyasu I also includes all the conventional hagiographical patterns in the main narrative. Some hagiographical details are included evidently to reveal the King's virtues and holy life. The author of the hagiography of King Iyasu I tresses the ideas of the holy man and martyrdom, which is a common theme found

²⁵ Sylvain Grebaut, *Catalogue des manuscrits éthiopiens de la collection Griaule, Première Partie: Tome second: Sections VII–IX. VII. Hagiographie. VIII. Homélie-panégyriques. IX. Malke'e et salam. Planches I–VIII*, Paris 1941 (*Miscellanea Africana Le-baudy* 3) [II]

in many Ethiopian hagiographic literatures.²⁶ He described the King as a righteous who possessed many character traits that are highly valued in Christianity. The King’s holiness is recognised through his ascetic practice of fasting and praying during his stay in the island of ጨቅላ፡ መንዝ፡²⁷ (‘Cäqla Mänzo’). There, a Holy Trinity appears to him in a vision, foretelling his martyr’s death. Throughout the hagiography, Holy Trinity is presented as assisting King Iyasu I. This can be understood from the quoted text below:

ወበፍጻሜ፡ ቀኖናሁ፡ አስተርአይዎ፡ ሎቱ፡ ሥሉስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ አጋእዝተሁ፡ በአምሳለ፡ እደው፡ ሠለስቱ፡ በውስተ፡ ራእዩ፡ ወይቤልዎ፡ ሥምረትነ፡ ዘአንተ፡ ሠመርከ፡ በልቡናከ፡ ወባሕቱ፡ ሀለወከ፡ ትኩን፡ ሰማዕተ፡ ደም፡ ክቡር፡ ወውእቱ፡ ፍዳነ፡ ዘንትፈደዮ፡ ንንክ፡ እምነክ፡ በአንተ፡ ሕፀ፡ ትሩፋት፡²⁸ (‘At the end of his penance, the Holy Trinity appeared to him, his Lords, looking like three men, in his vision, and they said to him: "Our pleasure is what you liked in your mind; moreover, you will become a martyr with honored bloodshed. This is the pain that we will take from you for the smallness of virtuous things [yours]’).

His holiness shows again through rejecting his Kingship and decided to lead a life of seclusion, ሐረ፡ መንገለ፡ ምናኔ፡ ኅይዲ፡ መንግሥቶ፡²⁹ (... [The King] left for renunciation, rejecting his Kingdom). In doing so, he fled to the island of ጨቅላ፡ መንዝ (‘Cäqla Mänzo’) to purify himself in isolation.³⁰ In this connection, Kaplan stated that the topic of isolation of worldly pleasures is a recurrent character of holy person and alludes to the ideal image of martyrdom.³¹ It also characterised him in the hagiography’s text as a humanitarian, which is an important aspect of the ascetic lifestyle. He often gave alms to the poor and the needy in hopes to be rewarded through purification of his sin.³² Let’s take the following example to illustrate this:

ወቦ፡ ጊዜ፡ አመ፡ ይትፈራሳሕ፡ ምስለ፡ ነዳዳን፡ ወምስኪናን፡ ወዕቡሳን፡ ወሐንካሳን፡ ወዕውራን፡ እንዘ፡ ያበልዎሙ፡ እማእደ፡ መንግስቱ፡ ወያስትዮሙ፡ እምስቱ፡ መንግስቱ፡ በእንተ፡ መንገሥተ፡ ሰማይት፡ ወንበሂ፡ ኮኑ፡ እሉ፡ ንቡራን፡ በመራሕብተ፡ ትዕይንቱ፡ እንዘ፡ ይስእሉ፡ ይዘሩ፡ ሎሙ፡ ምጽዋተ፡ ወትረ፡ በእንተ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ (‘Sometimes he rejoiced with the poor and the unhappy and the sick and the lame and the blind, while he gave them food from the royal table, and gave them drink of the royal drink for love of the Kingdom of heaven: Wherever they were, standing on the squares of his camp, when they asked him, he always spread alms, for the love of the Lord’.)

Hagiography of King Iyasu I also describes the King as a patron, who saved his people from the pagan attacks, exemplified by the following sentence: ውእቱሂ፡ አሰፈዎሙ፡ አሜሃ፡ ከመ፡ ያውፅአሙ፡ እምባብርናት፡ ወይመይጦሙ፡ ውስተ፡ ብሔርሙ፡ ዘትካት፡ ከመ፡ የሐድሱ፡ ክርስትናሆሙ፡ ቀዳሚ፡³³ (He gave them

²⁶ The notion of martyrdom, developed by the early Church regarding those who gave their own life for the Christian faith, seems to have been first established by the late 2nd century, when a difference was also set between “red: and “White” martyrdom, namely, between martyrs who proved their faith by shedding their blood and confessors who suffered exile and imprisonment, but not death, for their beliefs. The term is derived from the verb ሰማ (‘hear, hear of, heed, give heed, obey, be obedient, listen, hearken, perceive, understand, bear witness and testify.’). In the traditional meaning, Martyrdom is also a term for a story of a martyr or a group of martyrs. ‘Martyrdom’, *EAE*, III (2007), 802b-805a (Denis Nonsnitsin – Gianfranco Fiaccadori); Leslau 1991, 501.

²⁷ Conti Rossini 1942, 88.

²⁸ Conti Rossini 1942, 87.

²⁹ Conti Rossini 1942, 87.

³⁰ Isolation or solitude was the practice amongst Ethiopian saints and martyrs of secluding oneself away from others to better focus on one’s interconnectedness with God. Within Christian history, Jesus modeled the isolation practice when he entered into the desert for forty days (Mt. 4:2).

³¹ Kaplan 1984, 20-22.

³² Abstinence, voluntary poverty and charity all occupied a central place in the culture of Ethiopian Christianity. Lay people, clergy and rulers were all expected to give generously to the needy. In return they acquired merit and their sins were forgiven. ‘Alms’, *EAE*, I (2003), 2099a – 210a (Steven Kaplan).

³³ Conti Rossini 1942, 84.

hope to take them out of the slavery and return them to their homeland so that they would restore their former Christianity). We find these motives in the stories about other Ethiopian saints who are recognized as such by the EOC and enjoy posthumous liturgical veneration. He also took an active part in church liturgy and could enter the holy of holies in the church along with the priests and deacons. He could carry the *tabot* into the sanctuary. However, he was not a formally ordained priest.

The King's holiness is not only recognised through his ascetic life³⁴, but also recognised through his violent death. The author of the hagiography of King Iyasu I also regarded him as a righteous martyr; he shared the same manner of dying as other martyr-Saints in the medieval Ethiopia. In addition to this, King Iyasu I is one of the few two Solomonic Kings to have been venerated as a martyr-King, next to King Gälawedewos.³⁵ In contrast to King Gälawedewos, King Iyasu I was not killed by Muslim invaders, but by his own people. The orders of his son, Täklä Haymanot who lured and murdered him. There are several passages in the hagiography of King Iyasu I depicting King Iyasu I as a martyr-King, including the following sentence:

ወእምዘ: አመ :፩ለወርሕ: ጥቅምት: በእለተ: ረቡዕ: ቀተልዎ: ግብተ: በዝብጠተ: ዐረር: ዘነፍጥ: ወበርግዘተ: ኰናት: ስሑል: ከመ: ገላውዴዎስ: ሰማዕት: ወበውዕየተ: እሳት: ነዳዲ: ከመ: ቂርቆስ: ሕፃን: እንዘ: አልቦ: ዘአበሰ: ላዕሊሆሙ: ወዘጌገዩ: ወበዘከመዘ: ግብር: ኮነ: በእዴሆሙ: ሰማዕተ: ሥቃየ: ከመ: እሉ: ፪ቱ: ሰማዕታተ: ግፍዓ: ዐቢ*ይ: ወከመ: ኰሎሙ: ሰማዕታት።³⁶ ('And then, on the 5th of the month of Təqəmt, on Wednesday, they killed him suddenly with a rifle bullet and with sharp spears, like Gälawedewos (Claudio) a martyr, and with lighting a fire, burning, like Qirqos a child, while in nothing he had sinned against them and had wrong. In this way he for their hands became martyred with tortures, like those two martyrs, victims of serious wrongs, and like all martyrs').

In Ethiopian Christian martyrdom tradition, most of those called martyrs are honored by setting the day of their martyrdom. In a similar manner, the commemoration date for *King* Iyasu I was set on the alleged day of his martyrdom. The incipit folio of his hagiography contains a note commemorating the King's day: ገድል: ዘንጉሥነ: ክቡረ: ስም: ኢያሱ: መናኔ: መንግሥት: ወሰማዕተ: ደም: ክቡር: ዘፈጸመ: ስምዖ: አመ: ፭ለወርሕ: ጥቅምት: በሰላመ: እግዚአብሔር: አሜን: ወአሜን።³⁷ ('Spiritual combat of our King, honored by name, Iyasu, despiser of the Kingdom, and honored blood martyr, who completed his martyrdom on the 5th of the month of *Təqəmt*, in the peace of the Lord. Amen and amen').

The extract above serves to highlight that the commemoration date for *King* Iyasu has been established on the supposed day of his martyrdom, *Təqəmt* 5 as the date of martyrdom of the King. Nonetheless, the commemoration is omitted in the contemporary church standard edition.³⁸ In Däbrä Bərhan Šəllase church, the martyrdom feast of the King is still celebrated and read the

³⁴ Both CI and *Sənkəssar* 's entry of *ase* Iyasu I described *ase* Iyasu I as moderate, devoted to God, being generous to the poor and overseas pilgrims. This is clear in innumerable passages of his chronicle: his prayers and fasting, offerings to the royal chapel as well as churches and monasteries that are visited by him and his good relationships with the clergy. This is a trait we also found in several other Ethiopian Kings' royal chronicle.

³⁵ Berry 1976, 33.

³⁶ Conti Rossini 1942, 89.

³⁷ Conti Rossini 1942, 67.

³⁸ Sainthood or Martyrdom recognition by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church took place after the life of the saint was written. Sainthood is not a matter of canonization in the Ethiopian Church; it is rather a recognition given by the faithful. See 'Saint, Christian', *EAE*, IV (2010), 476b- 480a (Denis Nonsnitsin).

respective notice in the *Sənkəssar* every year on 5 *Ṭəqəmt* even if there is no *tabot*³⁹ consecrated in his name.

STRUCTURAL FEATURE OF HAGIOGRAPHY OF KING IYASU I

By and large, the hagiography of King Iyasu I also shares similar narrative structures with those of Ethiopic hagiographic genres and adheres to Ethiopic hagiographical narrative structure. In this regard, the Ethiopic hagiographies are generally distinguished by their stereotypical form and constructed around certain main literary features in a particular way, which remain often common and identical almost in all such texts, with the exception of slight changes in proper names or circumstances. In such a connection, Kaplan⁴⁰ divided the Ethiopian hagiographical literary features into four usual schemes: the first includes the saint's story of life (*Gädl*), containing his evangelical work and his monastic pursuit in an isolated hermitage; the next section deals with the *Kidan*, namely the pact, which the saint receives from God, in exchange for his struggles; the third part highlights the miracles attributed to the saint, both in his lifetime and after his death; and the fourth and last part is composed of his the saint's *Mäilkəy*, that are poetic composition in praising different parts of the body of the saints. A unique case for hagiography of King Iyasu I, four Ethiopic hagiographical literary features appeared in the text.

Like all other hagiographic literatures, the narrative of the hagiography of King Iyasu I encompasses the *Gädl* (vita)⁴¹ that treats the full range of the King's lives. Moreover, it does not stop at his death, but continues to talk about the reception of his soul in heaven and the life of his soul after death, as the following sentences illustrate:

ናሁ፡ ንጽሕፍ፡ ጎዳጠ፡ እምብዙ፡ ትሩፋቲሁ፡ ወተጋድሎቱ፡ ዕጹብ፡ እምቢዜ፡ መንኖቱ፡ መንግሥት፡ እስከ፡ ከዊኖቱ፡ ሰማዕተ፡ ደም፡ ክቡር፡ ወዓዲ፡ ዘእምቅድመዝ፡ ብዝኃ፡ ኂሩታቲሁ፡ ወሠናዮቲሁ፡ ዘገብረ፡ ለክሉ፡ ዓለም፡ ወዕብዮ፡ ሀብት፡ ዘተውህቦ፡ እምነብ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ አምላኩ፡ በመዋዕለ፡ ምግቡ፡ ወሲላዊ፡ ለንጉሥ፡ ዐቢይ፡ ወክቡር፡ እምነገሥት፡ ምድር፡ መሲሕነ፡ ኢየሱስ፡ መናኔ፡ መንግሥት፡ ወሰማዕተ፡ ደም፡ ክቡር፡ በእንተ፡ ኢየሱስ፡ ክርስቶስ፡ ወርቀዕ፡ ሃይማኖት፡ ከመ፡ ቁስጠንጢኖስ፡ ጸድቅ፡ ወእለ፡ ከማሁ፡ ጽሑፋነ፡ ዜና፡ ነገሥት፡ ጸሎቱ፡ ወበረከቱ፡ የሀሉ፡ ምስለ፡ ክሉ፡ ሰማዕያን፡ ለዓለመ፡ ዓለም፡ አሜን።⁴² ('We will write a few things of among his many perfections and his spiritual struggle, wonderful from the time of his renunciation of his Kingdom until his becoming a martyr of honoured blood, he does not have many of his virtues before that and his good deeds, which he did to the entire world, and of the greatness of the gifts that were given upon him by the Lord, his God, in the days of the messianic administration of the greatest and most honoured King among the Kings of the earth, our messiah. Iyasu, despiser of the world and honoured blood martyr for the sake of Jesus Christ, Orthodox as Constantine, and the righteous as other

³⁹ According to the canon of the EOC, the presence of a *tabot* is obligatory in every Church. *Tabot*, is a Gə'əz word referring to a replica of the Tablets of Law, onto which the Biblical Ten Commandments were inscribed, used in the practices of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. *Tabot* can also refer to a replica of the Ark of the Covenant. The word *Ṣəllat* (ጽላት፣ singular *Ṣəlle* ጽሌ፣) refers only to a replica of the Tablets but is less commonly used. The Gə'əz word *tabot* is derived from the Jewish Aramaic word (*tebuôa / tebeôa*). For greater detail, see: Amsalu Tefera 2015, 9- 38; 'Tabot', *EAE*, IV (2010), 802- 807 (Emmanuel Fritsch).

⁴⁰ Kaplan 2012, 391.

⁴¹ Hagiography is a term describing literary products related to the veneration of the saints. In Ethiopian context, it encompasses a number of genres or different types of texts: Vita, or Acts (*Gädl*), Miracles (*Täyammər*), Homilies (*Dərsan*), hymns and hymnological compositions of different kinds, accounts about the translation of relics and a number of smaller texts like monastic genealogies, prayers and inscriptions. Hagiography is sometimes misleadingly referred to as 'Gädl'. In Ethiopian manuscript tradition, hagiography and *Gädl* are fundamentally distinguishable in nature and form, the two terms must not be considered interchangeable. *Gädl* is a distinctive category and by-product of the hagiography genre. 'Hagiography', *EAE*, II (2005), 969a-972a (Denis Nossnitsin), esp. 969a.

⁴² Conti Rossini 1442, 68.

Kings similar to him, their story was written. May his prayer and his blessing are with us all, listeners, forever. Amen’).

In the Ethiopian hagiography tradition, the *Kidan* (pact) passage is one of the important proofs to justify and consider the text as the hagiography genre of literature. This text seems to contain a *Kidan*, a vow or formal pact made between the King and Holy Trinity, given to the King just before his death. In his *Kidan* the Trinity was revealed to him in a vision and he was promised martyrdom. The salvation of the souls is promised to those who pray in his name, make intercessions, commemorate him, and give alms in his name. The pact in the hagiography of King Iyasu I read as follows:

ወበፍጻሜ፡ ቀኖናሁ፡ አስተርአይዎ፡ ሎቱ፡ ሥሉስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ አጋእዝቲሁ፡ በአምሳለ፡ እደው፡ ሠለስቱ፡ በውስተ፡ ራእዩ፡ ወይቤልዎ፤ ሥምረትነ፡ ዘአንተ፡ ሠመርከ፡ በልቡናከ፡ ወባሕቱ፡ ሀለወከ፡ ትኩን፡ ሰማዕተ፡ ደም፡ ክቡር ። ወውእቱ፡ ፍዳነ፡ ዘንትፈጆዮ፡ ንሕነ፡ እምኔከ፡ በአንተ፡ ሕፀፀ፡ ትፋፋት። ወሰሚዖ፡ ዘንተ፡ እምኔሆሙ፡ ወድቀ፡ ውስተ፡ ብዙኅ፡ ኅሠሣ፡ በኅሊናሁ፡ በአንተ፡ ክዕወተ፡ ደሙ፡ ዘይከውን፡ ድኅረ፡ እንዘ፡ ይብል፤ ዘከመ፡ እፎ፡ ወእቱ፡ ምክንያተ፡ ዝንቱ፡ ግብር።⁴³ (‘At the end of his penance, the Holy Trinity appeared to him, his Lords, looking like three men, in his vision, and they said to him: ‘Our pleasure is what you liked in your mind; moreover, you will become a martyr with honored bloodshed. This is the pain that we will take from you for the smallness of virtuous things [yours]’. When he heard this from them, he fell into many reflections, in his mind, about the shedding of his blood that would take place later, as he said, ‘How can this fact happen?’).

As in the case all Ethiopic hagiographical literatures, the hagiography of King Iyasu I consists of miracles and vision. The King's contributions were not limited only to the building of churches; he also freed Christians from the hands of pagan, converted pagans, healed the sick and stopped the tidal wave of the sea. From the following excerpt, it is possible to vindicate that the King is a man of God and it also shows his power over the natural world as well as he owned the power of intercession.

ወአልቦ፡ አመ፡ ፈወሰ፡ ዱያነ፡ በመሬተ፡ ዝኅሩ፡ ወበሕጽበተ፡ ልብሱ፡ ዘዕሉል፡ በደም፡ ወበመክፈልተ፡ ዝክሩ፡ ወአልቦ፡ ኢናዘዘ፡ ሕዙናነ፡ ወትኩዛነ፡ በጸውዖ፡ ስሙ፡ ቅድስት፡ ወበተማሕፅኖ፡ ዐፅመ፡ ክቡር፡ ወካዕቦ፡ አልቦ፡ እምክሉ፡ ዓለም፡ ዘኢይገብር፡ ተዝካረ፡ ስሙ፡ ወዘኢያስተብቀኅዕ፡ በስሙ፡ ኅበ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ ወዘኢይትመሐፀን፡ ቦቱ፡ በተአምኖ፡ ጽኑዕ፡ ውእቱሂ፡ ኢያስተኅፍር፡ ወኢያስተሀይድ፡ አለ፡ ይገብር፡ ከሉ፡ በኅይለ፡ ፈጣሪሁ፡ ወይፌጽም፡ ማኅሠሠ፡ ለከሉ፡ ዘተማሕፀነ፡ ኅቢሁ።⁴⁴ (‘He was able to heal the sick with the dust of his coffin and with the washing of his blood-soaked dress and with participation in his memory. He was able to console the afflicted and the sad with the invocation of his memory. With the invocation of his holy name and trust in his honored relics, he was able to console the afflicted and sad. Moreover, there was not one throughout the world who did not celebrate the commemoration of him in his name, and who did not remember in his name to the Lord and who did not recommend himself to him by placing his trust firmly in him. He does not disappoint or deceive, but does everything, through the strength of his Creator and brings to completion what one seeks in favor of is sought for the benefit of all who are recommended to him’).

Furthermore, the *Mälkäy*⁴⁵ is a poetic composition to praise different parts of the saint’s or martyr’s body and apparently considered a piece of evidence to determine certain text whether it is belongs to the Ethiopic hagiography genre or not.⁴⁶ The hagiography of King Iyasu I of King Iyasu I also contains the *Mälkäy* to praise King Iyasu I and different parts of his body. It comprises 29 stanzas of five rhythmic verses; the first verse starts with the words ሰላም፡ ለ ... (‘Hail to’ ...). Each stanza addresses to one part of the body. Unlike, other Ethiopic hagiographic

⁴³ Conti Rossini 1942, 87.
⁴⁴ Conti Rossini 1942, 95.
⁴⁵ The word *Mälkä* መልክዕ is derived from the verb *läkäya* ለከዕ meaning ‘inscribe, imprint, mark, set down in writing and compose’. Leslau 1991, 313.
⁴⁶ Tadesse Tamrat 1970, 12-18.

traditions, his *Mäilkäy* not only praised the saint's holy life but also praised the King's heroic deeds. Let's take the following stanza from the King's *Mäilkäy* to demonstrate this.

ሰላም፡ ለመዛርኢኩ፡ እለ፡ ምስለ፡ ኩርናዕ።
ለብሱ፡ ጎይለ፡ አርያማዊ፡ አንበሳ።
ሰማዕተ፡ ደመ፡ ግፍዕ፡ ኢያሱ፡ እምነብ፡ እኩያን፡ ሰብእ፡ ጎሠሣ።
እፎ፡ በጽሐኩ፡ ተኩንዖ፡ እንዘ፡ አልብኩ፡ አበሳ።
ወእንዘ፡ ላዕሌኩ፡ ጎይለ፡ ጄወስሳ።⁴⁷
(‘Hail to your arms that with your shoulder.
They covered the strength of the sublime lion.
Martyr with bloodshed for injustice, Iyasu was sought after by evil men.
How could a condemnation blame while you were without sin.
And while the strength of one hundred and sixty was on you’).

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have examined the historical, textual and structural features of the hagiography of King Iyasu I. The textual and structural features of show that the hagiography includes all the conventional hagiographical patterns in the main narrative. The historical content of the hagiography also encompasses a number of secular affairs concerned with the political phenomena. The sustained use of historical contents, for example, is characteristic of these works yet differs from conventional ways of incorporating historical features into Ethiopic hagiographical writing. Thus, considerable historical contents in the text show that the author of the hagiography no longer limited his intentions to follow the conventional pattern of Ethiopic hagiography. Instead, he inserted the historical reality of his reign. From the foregoing discussion, it can be concluded that the Ethiopic hagiography had evolved far beyond the edificatory goals of early medieval hagiographies, embodying a border range of contents, styles and aims, particularly in the Gondärian period.

By and large, the Ethiopic hagiography persist an untapped informative source in terms of their social, cultural, literally, political and historical contents awaiting study and research that will reveal the Ethiopian past.

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⁴⁷ Conti Rossini 1942, 97- 98.

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