



Three Ways of Life in One Woman Body of a Married Mother, a Martyr, and an Abbess of a Monastery: St. Fəqərtä Krəstos

Zewdie Gebreegziabher*, Abba Petros Solomon

Department of Philology, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Email address:

Zewdiegz@yahoo.com (Zewdie Gebreegziabher)

*Corresponding author

To cite this article:

Zewdie Gebreegziabher, Abba Petros Solomon. Three Ways of Life in One Woman Body of a Married Mother, a Martyr, and an Abbess of a Monastery: St. Fəqərtä Krəstos. *International Journal of Literature and Arts*. Vol. 10, No. 6, 2022, pp. 344-351.

doi: 10.11648/j.ijla.20221006.12

Received: October 27, 2022; **Accepted:** November 21, 2022; **Published:** November 29, 2022

Abstract: This paper is a reflexion on the three Ways of Life of St. Fəqərtä Krəstos as reflected in the Ethiopic hagiography, “Gädlä’ St. Fəqərtä Krəstos” which contains her life, work, struggle, covenant and mälk’ə. It is well known that Ethiopia had many great women martyrs and monastics that are recognized as saints by the Ethiopian Orthodox Täwhədo Church (EOTC). Among these women saints, St. Fəqərtä Krəstos had played a vital role in the religious and social life of the 17th c. period of Ethiopia and she is venerated as a great martyr, a monastic and a prominent saint. When we see the lives of Christian women saints in general, most of them were virgins, and some of them entered in to the monastic life after the repose of their spouse. So the hagiography of women saints generally reveals a virgin woman becoming a nun and living her entire life as a monastic or becoming a martyr; and sometimes both. There are also many married martyrs who have received the crown of martyrdom while witnessing for their Faith. Thus most of their lives generally exhibit either of the two ways of life, i.e., monasticism and/or martyrdom or married life and martyrdom. However, in the case of St. Fəqərtä Krəstos, amazingly she had lived all the three ways of life, which is quite unusual and rare. She was a married woman who had got married in obedience of her parents’ will and receiving the crown of martyrdom thereafter for her Faith. However what makes her life quite different from other martyrs is that she was raised by the Lord from death and had continued her third way of life as a monastic. As a result, she had lived three ways of life in one body.

Keywords: Hagiography of Women Saints, Women Body, Women Ways of Life, St. Fəqərtä Krəstos, Abbess of a Monastery

1. Introduction

It is understandable that the Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahido Church is one of ancient Church which has a rich tradition of antique manuscripts. In Ethiopia, manuscripts that are written in the ancient Gə’əz language of the country are found in a broad variety of genre and purpose. [1] The vast collections of Gə’əz manuscripts are preserved in the monasteries, churches, and; national and foreign libraries. In such records of the Gə’əz manuscripts, *the hagiography of Saints* is one of the vitally significant literary genre in the history of Ethiopian literature. Hagiographies in *Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahido Church context called Gädl*, are the writings that

narrate the lives, works, struggles and miracles of men and women saints. It obtains the highest place and has invaluable evidences of pivotal events relating to the saints’ period of religious life and the history of the country. [8] Amongst the hagiographies of Saints, ‘Gädlä St. Fəqərtä Krəstos’ is one of a manuscript (mäshafä, branna) that contains the life, deeds, covenant, mälk’ə and Miracles of St. Fəqərtä Krəstos¹, a great martyr, nun and prominent saint of the Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahido Church.

¹ Fəqərtä Krəstos means a loved one of Christ. Also known as Əmmä’muz (Əmmämə’uz,- literally which means Mother of the Odouring One). It comes from her childhood name ‘Mə’ouzzit’ or Mu’zit. The name Fəqərtä Krəstos is her nunhood name which she received while she was clothed the monastic habit.

Gädlä' St. Fəqərtä Krəstos is an important Gə'əz manuscript which written in 17th c. The word "Gädl²" is a Gə'əz term and it comes from the Gə'əz root word (verb - gə'ss) 'Təgadälä'; which literally means 'contending or to compete or to fight' (spiritually). It is similar to the word 'Təgadäl Gädlä sānayä bā'haymanot' which means Fight the good fight of faith; (1 Tim. 6: 12) and also 'sānayä Gädlä Təgadälku' means I have fought a good fight" (2 Tim. 4: 7-8) [6]. Therefore, "Gädl" means the good 'fight', 'combat', 'struggle', 'warfare' or 'battle' of saints for their faith until they triumphed and received their incorruptible crown of righteousness from God. [12] It also indicates to a Codex (mäshafä, branna or a book) contains the life, work, struggle, tribulation, covenant, mälk'ə and grace of a Saint. Then the word 'Gädlä' is a title taken together with name of the main existing acts of Saints and Martyrs venerated by the Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahido Church, like 'Gädlä Hawaryat', Gädlä' qə'ddusan'. In the same manner we say Gädlä' St. Fəqərtä Krəstos.

This text is taken from the dissertation which carried out by the corresponding author of this article to produce the Critical Edition with Annotated Translation of Gädlä' St. Fəqərtä Krəstos. The main goal of this study is to reconstruct the archetype text of Gädlä' St. Fəqərtä Krəstos based on Neo -Lachmmanian Method. During the preparation of the dissertation, the corresponding author of this article had reviewed previous researches, catalogues, microfilms, books, journals and articles which had been done in this study area to find out the research gap and to improve my understanding on the topic. In the process the researcher found out that *no previous critical editions and translation works neither* by foreign nor local scholars has been done until now on this subject As far as the researcher knows, there is no philological research done so far in any of the philological methods.

In this research it is expected to produce constructive philological and other results in different aspects. It is significant in providing some fundamental, vital and genuine information. This Critical edition will be the first work on Gädlä' St. Fəqərtä Krəstos. The study has critical importance in demonstrating the contribution of the Saint and the text *to fill the recognized gap* of the period in the philological study of Ethiopia in general and the study area in particular. It serves to know better the history, Theology, culture of the period. It helps the readers to understand the contents and physical characteristics of Gädlä' St. Fəqərtä Krəstos. The edited and translated text is important to other scholars especially for English speakers. The contribution of St. Fəqərtä Krəstos could be well recognized and her monasteries can present a new tourist attraction site. Fəqərtä Krəstos as the 17thc Ethiopian Saint, *her hagiography* is very important text to provide important information and it describes *how the opposition to Jesuits has taken place* and

the reaction of the Ethiopian monastic communities, priests and laymen to Jesuits at the time in a unique form. In this regard, this study has valuable contribution in the reconstruction of the Ethiopian past.

Because St. Fəqərtä Krəstos was one of the prominent Ethiopian woman religious figures of the 17thc. [15] She is mainly known for her fervent struggle with the Catholic Jesuit missionaries during their attack on Orthodox Christianity in the reign of Aše Susənyos (1605-1632). [9, 7, 10, 2, 14, 17, 15] She is also known as the founder of the two great communal monasteries that are still active in North Wällo province.³ St. Fəqərtä Krəstos was the Abbess of her second monastery until her last breath. In the EOTC, St. Fəqərtä Krəstos is regarded as the defender of the Faith of Orthodox Christianity, and is generally venerated as a *great martyr, a monastic and a prominent saint*. St. Fəqərtä Krəstos had played a vital role in the religious and social life of the 17thc. period of Ethiopia. Like the several great men and women saints of the EOTC, she has a Gädl written entitled "Gädlä' Fəqərtä Krəstos". The Gädl which was written by a local scribe, contains the narration of the life, the struggles and deeds of St Fəqərtä Krəstos.

The manuscript 'Gädlä Fəqərtä Krəstos' speaks about her life history, emphasizing on her struggles and spiritual character. It also narrates different issues in relation to her life and gives valuable information relating to the events of the period. It is understandable that several Ethiopian hagiographies, especially those written long time ago, have been given special attention by different scholars and many researches had already been done on them. However, the manuscripts of Gädlä Fəqərtä Krəstos as 17th c. hagiography, has not yet received due attention and has not yet been scientifically studied, microfilmed, cataloged, foliated, critically edited and translated in to English by foreign and local scholars until now. [12, 2] One of her monasteries⁴ has translated the Gädl into Amharic. The researcher has also observed the works of some scholars that had discussed about St. Fəqərtä Krəstos in their articles⁵ [15, 3] and books in the form of introductory and bibliographical lists of saints with short descriptions. [2, 14, 7, 10, 17, 16, 13] However, all these works only give brief information and preliminary biography on St. Fəqərtä Krəstos. As a result, we can see that no scholar had made an edition work on her Gädl.

The main source data of this study are the six collected Gädls of St. Fəqərtä Krəstos made of vellum. As aforementioned, the accessible copies of Gädlä Fəqərtä Krəstos were not microfilmed, cataloged, foliated and

² It has also a similar meaning to the Greek word 'hagiography' and with the Latin word 'Vita'. The Greek word 'hagiography' comes from the two Greek words 'hagios' (ἅγιος) means "holy or Saint" and 'graphia' (Γραφία) means "to write".

3 Rmna D'abrä Səna Kidanä Məhrät St. Fəqərtä Krəstos Communal Monastery and Gädamä Səhat Əmmä mu'ez Kidanä Məhrät St. Fəqərtä Krəstos Communal Monastery which are found at North Wallo,

4 Gädamä Səhat Əmmä mu'ez Kidanä Məhrät St. Fəqərtä Krəstos Communal Monastery.

5 Nosnitsin Denis wrote an article in EAe vol. II under the title Fəqərtä Krəstos by using the Amharic translation which was published by Gädamä Səhat Əmmä mu'ez Kidanä Məhrät St. Fəqərtä Krəstos Communal Monastery in 1995 E. C. [15], And BöLL Verena, also mentions St. Fəqərtä Krəstos among Holy women in Ethiopia in her article p 38. [3].

abbreviated before. So in the process of the study, the corresponding author of this article has given a systematic code (*capital letters and numbers as a sign to represent each of the manuscript*), and also photographed, measured, and foliated all the six manuscripts. All the available manuscripts were written in different periods of time by different scribes. As a result, each of the manuscripts has different size, folio, quire, hand writing, and also some variant contents.

In the EOTC Tradition, besides the narration of the life and spiritual struggles of the saint, most of the *Gādls* also contain *tā'ammərat* (miracles) of the saint, *qal kədan* (covenant) given from God⁶ and *mālk'ə* (image or effigy) composed to honor the saint. [18,15] Likewise, *Gādlä'* Fəqərtā Krəstos has all these vital components that are typical features of Ethiopian *Gādl*. It consists of four parts; the main life of the saint, the Miracles (*Ta'ammərat*) performed by the saint, the Covenant (*Kidan*) received from the Lord before her death, and the *Mālk'ə* (*Effigi*) which is prepared to honor her.

*Content Descriptions on the Manuscript EM₁*⁷

- 1) Prologue (f5r^a-f5v^b)
- 2) St. Fəqərtā Krəstos' s ancestry and annunciation of her birth (f5r^a-f6v^a)
- 3) Conception, birth, and baptism of St. Fəqərtā Krəstos (f6v^b-f7r^b)
- 4) Education, beginning of spiritual life and prophecies about St. Fəqərtā Krəstos (f7v^a-f8r^a)
- 5) St. Fəqərtā Krəstos life of holy marriage with St. Zär'a Krestos (f8r^b-f8v^a)
- 6) Annunciation that St. Fəqərtā Krəstos will give birth to a child (f8v^b-f9r^a)
- 7) St. Fəqərtā Krəstos' conception and giving birth to a child (f9r^a)
- 8) Her child taken up to heaven by the Angel of God (f9r^b)
- 9) Wave of controversies that arose during King Susənyos (f9v^b-f10v^a)
- 10) Her struggles to defend the faith of Orthodoxy (f11v^b-f13v^a)
- 11) The martyrdom of her husband St. Zär'a Krestos (f13r^b-f13v^a)
- 12) St. Fəqərtā Krəstos's martyrdom with a multitude of Christians (f13v^a-f13v^b)
- 13) St. Fəqərtā Krəstos rising from the dead (f13v^b)
- 14) Receiving the monastic habit to struggle in a monastic life (f14v^a-f14v^b)
- 15) St. Fəqərtā Krəstos struggle and the return of the King to his former faith (f15r^a-f15v^b)
- 16) Founding of the first monastery (f17v^b)
- 17) Pilgrimage of St. Fəqərtā Krəstos inside and outside of the country with her companions (f16v^b-f17r^a)

18) Her return to Ethiopia (f22v^a-f23v^b)

19) Founding of the second monastery (f24r^b-f24v^a)

20) Her covenant and death (f24v^b-f25v^a)

Miracles (Ta'ammərat)

- 1) Miracle one: St. Fəqərtā Krəstos healed many sick and a temptations by one healed women (f31v^b-f31v^a)
- 2) Miracle two: St. Fəqərtā Krəstos saved a woman who had many iniquities with her prayer (f31v^a-f31v^b)
- 3) Miracle three: Raised the nuns of her monastery who had died by a snake poisoned food and drink (f31v^b-f32v^a)
- 4) Miracle four: She multiplied the little thing they had by her prayers during a drought (f32r^a-f32r^b)
- 5) Miracle five: The water became blood and pus because of a widow breaking the Sabbath (f32r^b-f32v^a)
- 6) Miracle six: She banished and commanded evil spirits by calling on the name of the Holy Trinity (f32v^a-f32v^b)
- 7) Miracle seven: She opened the eyes of a blind man with her tears (f32v^b-f32v^a)

Additional Miracle (Ta'ammər)

A man who stole the key of a church miraculously returned it back to the monastery (f3v^b-f35r^b)

Covenant (Kidan)

In Ethiopian hagiographic tradition, 'covenant' is a part of the hagiography of saints. It narrates how God has given a covenant for the remembrance of the saint, usually endowed at the end of his/her earthly life or following the accomplishment of a major spiritual virtue by the saint. In a similar manner, the Lord has given a covenant to St. Fəqərtā Krəstos for all her sufferings and spiritual struggles in her married life, martyrdom, and ascetic life; all for the sake of the love of God. The Lord has promised her that He will keep her church till the Day of Judgment and that any sinner who partakes of the Holy Communion in her church will get a remission of his sins. He has also given her a covenant that anyone who calls her name in prayer and does a commemoration for her, and anyone who writes, translates and reads or hears her hagiography, who also comes to her monastery on a pilgrimage and salutes the church built by her own hands will be blessed by Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Mālk'ə (Effigi)

In Ethiopian hagiographic tradition, *Mālk'ə* is one part of the hagiography of saints which is written in the form of poem and salutation towards the physical body parts of the saint, praising and venerating in prayer. *Mālk'ə* a St. Fəqərtā Krəstos has two *Mālk'əs*: the main *Mālk'ə* and *Tərəfä Mālk'ə*. The main *Mālk'ə* has 30 main salutations and each of it has five lines in stanza.⁸ However, the manuscript of DL₁⁹ does not have main or *Tərəfä Mālk'ə*. And also the manuscript of EM₂¹⁰ has only the main *Mālk'ə* but it does not have *Tərəfä Mālk'ə*. The number of

6 In a hagiography, one of the distinctive parts is the 'covenant' or *Kidan* between the Saint and Christ. In the *kidan*, the Lord promises to forgive the sins of those who pray or give charity in the name of the saint. So *Kidan* usually appears to be given shortly before the Saints' death. [15].

7 One of the manuscripts of her *Gādl*, which is obtained from *Gādāmā Səhat Əmmā mu'ez Kidanā Məhrät St. Fəqərtā Krəstos Communal Monastery* which is symbolizes '*EM*' means *Əmmā mu'ez*.

8 A group of lines arranged together in a part of poem.

⁹The manuscript obtained from *Dābrā Ləbanos Abunä Tāklāhaimanot Communal Monastery*.

¹⁰ The manuscript obtained from *Dābrā Ləbanos Abunä Tāklāhaimanot Communal Monastery*.

additional Mälk'Ə (Tərəfä Mälk'Ə) of each manuscript is different. Some of them have four or seven lines of salutation and most of them have three lines of salutation. This doesn't keep to the custom of writing Mälk'Ə of the saints. Each Mälk'Ə of the saint is used during the feast of the saint in

conjunction with the hymn of St. Yared. If the line of salutation in a Mälk'Ə is incomplete, it might break the sound (Zema) of the hymn. To give a better clarity on the number of salutation of each Mälk'Ə, here is an illustration with table:

Table 1. 'Number of salutations of the Mälk'Ə'.

Types of The Mälk'Ə	Ms. EM ₁	Ms. EM ₂	Ms. EM ₃	Ms. EM ₄	Ms. RM ₁	Ms. DL ₁
The Main Mälk'Ə	30 salutations	30 salutations	30 salutations	30 salutations	30 salutations	No Main Mälk'Ə
Tərəfä Mälk'Ə	15 salutations	13 salutations	No Tərəfä Mälk'Ə	14 salutations	15 salutations	No Tərəfä Mälk'Ə

*Number of salutations of 'the main Mälk'Ə' and 'Tərəfä Mälk'Ə' found in each manuscript.

2. The Three Ways of Life Reflected in the Life of St. Fəqərtä Krəstos

As aforementioned, the hagiography of St. Fəqərtä Krəstos is an Ethiopian woman saint's hagiography, which gives a detailed description of her three ways of life from birth to the last of her breath. The hagiography reflects how her three ways of life had manifested in one woman's body; as a married mother, a martyr, and an abbess of a monastery. Therefore, the detailed descriptions of her life with her contribution as narrated in her hagiography are summarized as follows:

Her Birth and Childhood: The great Ethiopian martyr and righteous St. Fəqərtä Krəstos or Əmmä'mu'Əz was born on Tahsas 29 in South Gondar province of Dära, Fogera Anbäsime Dəstrict (Woreda) at a place called Kätättä Maryam near Abunä Hara Monastery, today known as *the village of Əmmä'mu'Əz*. Her father's name was Laba and her mother's name was Wängəlawət. Her parents were kind and pious who feared God, like Abraham and Sarah; and Joachim (Əyo'aqəm) and Hanna. Because of their childlessness for a prolonged period of time, they had grieved a lot and were continuously beseeching unto God so that He gives them a child. After praying unto God for His mercy for long, one day they heard an annunciation from the Angel of God. The Angel of God appeared to them and told them about the birth of St. Fəqərtä Krəstos, and said to them, rejoice and be glad, as your cry has reached unto God, and from you will come out a daughter who is virtuous in all of her deeds and upright in her Faith as Oreni and Barbara and Ilareya as Eupraxia and Senaser. And her fame will go out forever, and she will fight for the upright Faith and men will be saved by her prayer. She is blessed fruit of the womb [and] the beloved of God. Saying this, the Angel of annunciation departed and disappeared. Then her mother conceived and gave birth to a chosen beautiful daughter. The new born child, the later St. Fəqərtä Krəstos, stood up on her feet and praised God at the day of her birth saying; praise be to the Father and praise be to the Son and praise be to the Holy Spirit, You brought me out of darkness unto light by your saving mercy. And then she prostrated three times and offered three thanksgivings, and those who saw and heard this miracle were astonished.

Her parents gave her the name Mu'zit, and then when she

was baptized according to the canon of the Church, the priests gave her a baptismal name of Maryam Šädala. When she was baptized at her eightieth day, the Holy Spirit descended upon her and hovered over her head, and she said, Blessed be the Lord my God who let me reach this hour so that I receive the rite of Baptism of Christ. After that she partook of the Holy Mystery (The Eucharist) saying; Amen and amen and may it be for the salvation of my soul and body, O Christ my Lord, by this flesh and blood of yours, I beg you forever Amen. So she praised God miraculously in her Childhood; at the day of her birth, her baptism and when she partook of the Holy Eucharist.

The beginning of her spiritual life: Then she grew by wisdom and holy reprimand and the fear of God, and over her came the grace of God from her infancy. She got strengthened by the Holy Spirit and used to often go to church and greet the icon of the Lady Holy Virgin Mary and commend her body and soul to the Virgin Mary. St. Maryam Šädala, who was renamed Fəqərtä Krəstos during her monastic tonsure, asked her father and mother to take her to a teacher so that she could learn the teaching of the Church and the prayer of the saints. At that time a righteous monk came to her with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and prophesied about her future life, saying: And this righteous monk said, this saint is the beloved of God the Living and she is firm as men [and] will excel from us in astounding spiritual struggle, the tongue of man is not able to speak, [and] no one is like her from among women. And I saw this daughter Angels overshadowing her with their wings and taking her up and showing her the place of bliss and saying to her, Greetings, o you the Saint of God. And they said to me, o man, do not be sluggish [but] go and teach her the letters [reading] and the Psalter. At that time, I came and arrived unto you, and because of this I greeted her. Then the monk started teaching her how to read and she learnt reading in one day, as the Holy Spirit has enlightened her mind. And by the will and the grace of God, she very well learnt the teachings of the Church.

2.1. St. Fəqərtä Krəstos - A Married Mother

The fervent desire of St. Fəqərtä Krəstos was to take a monastic vow in one of the monasteries of the EOTC and live a life of celibacy with God. Her father and mother instead insisted on her getting married to a man whose name was Zära Krəstos, an officer of the Emperor, and she finally married him in obedience to her parents. However, just after they got married, she and Zära Krəstos discussed with each

other about their future life and decided to preserve their virginity. The scribe of the hagiography of St. Fəqərtā Krəstos described her married life by comparing it with the holy couples St. Demetros and St. John Kamma, who have lived a life of holy marriage with their spouses in virginity. So St. Fəqərtā Krəstos and St. Zāra Krəstos her husband lived in marriage by preserving their virginity for many years until the Angel of God appeared to them. After they had lived in virginity for many years, one day, the Angel of God appeared to them and told them about the birth of a child from them. Following the command of the Angel of God, she gave birth to a child who had the sign of the cross on his forehead. However, when the child was seven years old, he was taken up to heaven by the Angel of God. Generally, the holy couples lived an exemplary life.

2.2. St. Fəqərtā Krəstos - A Great Martyr

St. Fəqərtā Krəstos is a great martyr who had suffered a lot and endured the beatings and all the unspeakable afflictions by Emperor Susənyos during his reign in the 17th c. At that time the Catholic Jesuits were trying their best to proselytize the Orthodox Ethiopians to Roman Catholicism by spreading their faith from the palace to the populace. [5, 4] So there was a great doctrinal controversy and general havoc accompanied with much bloodshed during the reign of Aše Susənyos, as the Emperor has renounced the Orthodox Təwahədo faith and accepted the faith of the Catholic Church. [18] He has also declared for the replacement of the Orthodox Faith and Tradition by that of Roman Catholicism and the later as the official religion of the state, with the hope of receiving the Portuguese military assistance. However, the reaction of the Ethiopians was so vehement and determined that a great controversy arose in his kingdom. The people were deeply angered and stood against the king and the Jesuits till the point of death for the sake of their Orthodox Faith. Thus many Orthodox Christians, clergies, nuns, monks and the bishop refused the decree of the king and opposed his actions openly. That time is one of the recorded periods of persecution of the EOTC and among the most difficult times in her history. As a result of the imperial persecution, many Orthodox Christians were tortured, martyred, persecuted, and displaced. Many fled from the capital city of the Emperor. [17, 15] They struggled persistently until he eventually changed his attitude of Catholicism and returned back to the Orthodox faith. Among the prominent defenders of the Orthodox faith during that time was St. Fəqərtā Krəstos, one of the great women saints and defenders of the Faith. St. Fəqərtā Krəstos with her followers rejected the newly promoted faith of the king and his actions. She, along with her husband Zār'a Krəstos and her sisters in Christ and her followers, opposed the Emperor in public about his conversion and all that he was doing against the Orthodox Church. She resisted the Emperor face to face and also encouraged others to keep their faith. So her Gädl explains about the king's actions and reactions and the struggles of the Orthodox Christians in defending their faith.

As the Gädl states, the Angel of God appeared to St.

Fəqərtā Krəstos and Zār'a Krəstos and told them that it was time for them to shed their blood for the sake of their love for Christ. The two fasted and prayed for forty days and nights. When they had finished, an Angel of God appeared to them and told them to go quickly to the city and receive the glory of martyrdom. The soldiers first captured her husband, the officer Zār'a Krəstos, and threw him unto prison. Next they captured St. Fəqərtā Krəstos with her many servants and her followers and brought them to the King's square. She determinedly told him that she would never renounce her faith. He then ordered the soldiers to bring her husband from the prison, and asked them again saying: Believe in my faith and I will give you glory and authority. They replied him unanimously in one word, saying: We believe in the upright Orthodox Faith. Then the soldiers tied up the mothers and sisters who had come with St. Fəqərtā Krəstos and beat them till their bones were visible. They afflicted St. Fəqərtā Krəstos and stripped her off naked. But God commanded the rock to cover her nakedness. The King ordered the soldiers to severely beat her and her husband, but they could not find her body. The soldiers told the king everything that had happened and that they could not see her body except the ropes, which made him very upset. Her body appeared after a while, and the king again commanded to flog her with a whip and dragged her on the ground until her body was severely hurt and torn to pieces. Then they threw her back to prison. The next day, the king again threatened to kill them unless they believe in his faith. However, St. Fəqərtā Krəstos replied him saying, Do not threaten us, you can do whatever you like; for us, death is life with our Lord but we will never deny our faith. When he heard this, the king became very furious, and commanded to beat them with rods of iron until they broke their bones. Then they laid them on a metal bed and set them on fire. Again they threw them back into prison.

During the night, God's Angel, St. Michael, came and healed them. The next day, the King ordered the soldiers to bring them again. But St. Fəqərtā Krəstos came walking on her feet, and she looked as if she was coming out of a bathroom, and she was radiant and anointed with the ointment of the Holy Spirit. He still tried to persuade them, but to no avail. Then they sent hungry lions unto them, but the lions bowed down and licked the dust off their feet. When the soldiers of the king saw this miracle, they believed in their upright faith and the king ordered to cut their heads with the sword. Finally her husband Zār'a Krəstos finished his struggle in holy martyrdom. St. Fəqərtā Krəstos fought amazingly with the Emperor to defend the Orthodox faith and she remained steadfast by struggling fervently with him, which astounded and surprised him to not a smaller degree. As she testified her faith before the King, he became angry and ordered to behead her. Finally, she was beheaded with her followers and became martyrs together without fearing death for the love of Christ. So we find in her hagiography her martyrdom with her many followers. At one time alone, eight thousand ten (8,010) Christians were martyred by the King's order. St. Fəqərtā Krəstos prayed for herself and her sisters before they were martyred:

As the Gädl states, this Fəqərtä Krəstos witnessed before the king. [and at that time] he became angered and commanded to cut her off head by the sword. The soldiers came to cut off the head of St. Fəqərtä Krəstos. She turned her face towards the east [and] prostrated one hundred prostrations, stood up and prayed a long prayer from the Psalter of David and said, o my Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God the Living the Son of Mary Incarnate, whose praises are many, [please] make my blood a sacrifice of righteousness truly for the right faith, [please] lead me, o Lord, to Your upright path and do not abandon the soul of mine and the soul of my saintly sisters, [and] on this traitor and his wicked army, bring down Your wrath. At that moment came down stone of ice [and] killed many among his soldiers [and] became a [great] havoc in the city, and it decided to cut off her honoured head. Then they smote her by a sword and cut off her head and it became gloomy and thick darkness, the earth trembled, on that day eight thousand and ten (8010) were martyred.

St. Fəqərtä Krəstos Rose from the Dead: After she was beheaded and martyred, she was raised from the dead as if someone had just woken up from a deep sleep by the power of God Almighty. Then she appeared in front of the Emperor to reprimand him and said: “*O abəḍ rəkus wā alawə haymanot afrəngawi - O you indolent, impure and cruel, the follower of Religion of Afrəngawi*¹¹ (foreigners)”. When she said this, the Emperor became angry at his soldiers and it seemed to him that his order had not been properly carried out. Then St. Fəqərtä Krəstos was in imprisoned again. But miraculously and without delay she was released by an Angel of God. St. Fəqərtä Krəstos, after being released from the prison, renounced everything in this world and traveled into the monasteries of Ethiopia and also around the world, visiting churches, monasteries and holy places.

St. Fəqərtä Krəstos - a Nun: St. Fəqərtä Krəstos, after her martyrdom and resurrection from the dead, renounced this world and dressed the monastic habit and the schema¹² and started the life of monasticism. She then traveled from desert to desert and country to country, witnessing the faith, and enduring all the hardships that are associated with the life of asceticism such as the majesty of the night, the sounds of the beasts and the malice of the devil. St. Fəqərtä Krəstos started her monastic life by giving all her possessions to the poor. Then she renounced everything and was followed by her disciples, with the *Tabot of Kidanä Məhrät* together with Aba Kidanä Maryam, Akalä Krəstos and many nuns and monks amongst them. An Angel of God appeared to her and told all about her future life as a nun and then she went unto the bishop as she had heard from the Angel. The Angel has also announced to the bishop, Abunä Marqos, in his dream

about her coming, and told him that she is coming to receive the great schema from his hand. Then the following day St. Fəqərtä Krəstos came to the bishop Abunä Marqos. And at that time, he came and sat on his bishopric seat [and] ordered to bring her, and she entered with her eunuchs. She said and told him as she has struggled for the Faith and why she came to him. Then he dressed her with the monastic habit, cap and the schema, and he gave her the monastic name Fəqərtä Krəstos.

Her Journey to Different Monasteries and Holy Places: After St. Fəqərtä Krəstos was clothed with the holy monastic habit and the great schema, she travelled to different places inside and outside of Ethiopia, witnessing the Faith and facing the many spiritual struggles that are concomitant to the life of monasticism. She was beseeching God to show her specific monastic place by wandering and travelling throughout several provinces of Ethiopia. She went to Waldəbba and stayed there for about four years in prayer, as she was told to do so by the Angel of God. There she met her sister in Christ, St. Emma Wättät. Later she was to meet other nuns too and she wandered in the monasteries and deserts. Then St. Fəqərtä Krəstos made a pilgrimage to the Holy Places in Jerusalem [13] with her disciples of two hundred nuns and monks. Besides, she also visited Armenia and Egypt, and did many amazing miracles on her journeys. She then lived in Jerusalem for seven years, doing a pilgrimage to the holy places of the Lord and the saints. There she greeted Bethlehem, Goləgota, and many other holy places. Finally, by God's will, she returned from Jerusalem to Ethiopia during the reign of Emperor Fasil, led by the Angel of God St. Michael with a pillar of light. Then she arrived at the place where the Angel of God has told her to be her place. She has established two monasteries in North Wällo province; in the district of Mäqet (Gärägära, Fəlaqit) and Raya.

2.3. St. Fəqərtä Krəstos - An Abbess of a Monastery

During her struggle for the Faith, she was already serving as the leader of many women. There were also about two hundred nuns and monks who were accompanying her in her journeys from place to place. In addition to that she was the organizer and leader of the nuns of her monastery. She has served as the abbess of the monastery she has founded. And the Angel leading her, she arrived at the country of Machemateseni,¹³ near the monastery of Səhat, [and] stayed there with her community of holy virgins praying [unto] God for a long time. And then the two monks that have come with her to show her the way, while they were searching of her place, they found her. And this cross of light, hiddingly, dipped inside her burial place without anyone seeing it except her. They told her this thing. She stood and went and resided in this place of hers, she found what she has sought, and nuns were gathered unto her, many virgins, and made a community and became an abbess over the holy women. From all these, it clearly appears that the leadership quality and the wisdom of the saint was remarkable. Above and

11 She reprimands him, because of renouncing his Orthodox faith and accepting the faith of the foreign Catholic missionaries.

12 The Schema is a monastic order that is bestowed on monks that have attained a higher spiritual level of ascetic struggle and glory. It is bestowed on monks as well as nuns, as it is not associated with the priesthood. However in Ethiopian monasteries, nowadays, it is not as such customary to see the Schema bestowed on nuns. The reason behind this needs further research.

13 Today the name of this is unknown and may be changed with another name.

beyond, her life is exemplary for martyrdom, monastic life, as well as for any Christian men and women who aspire to live a life of holiness. St. Fəqərtā Krəstos showed the way of Christianity in practice for men and especially *for women*, who want to follow in her footsteps, renouncing worldly life, and shedding their blood for the love of Christ.

3. Her Contributions

The contributions of St. Fəqərtā Krəstos are manifold and multifaceted as she had lived in all the three ways of life: a married mother, a martyr, and an abbess. As her hagiography states, she had done a great contribution in returning Emperor Susenyos back to his Orthodox faith through her steadfastness and the miracles that had happened with the remains of her stripped off flesh. Although king Susenyos denied his faith under the deception of the Jesuit missionaries and has enforced much suffering on Christians, he did not succeed in fulfilling his decree and the Jesuits' ambition. The Orthodox Christians remained steadfast in their faith and preferred to die than convert their faith. Eventually, after much persecution of Christians and a great damage on the country for a number of years, the King returned to his former faith. Among the factors that contributed to the return of the King back to Orthodoxy are the miracles and prayers of our mother St. Fəqərtā Krəstos. As Emperor Susenyos saw the miracles done by the holy remains of St. Fəqərtā Krəstos and her fellow martyrs, he confessed and returned to his earlier faith. This is described in her Gädl as follows:... And after he told them these things, the king with his army believed in the prayer and the supplication of our queen Fəqərtā Krəstos. Then the monk who was raised from the dead, whose name was Aba Gebriel, went hiddenly holding the remains of our mother to several places in order to heal many patients and he raised seven dead [persons] and the patients that are healed by the remains of our mother Fəqərtā Krəstos are without number. The miracles that had happened with the skin of the flesh of our mother, like that of the Apostle Thomas who was stripped off his skin by the hand of the unbelievers, were astounding and startling.

Her other contributions are the founding of monasteries and the building of churches. St. Fəqərtā Krəstos is a founder of two monasteries and has served as the abbess of the second monastery until her last breath.¹⁴ During her wandering in

Ethiopian monasteries, St. Fəqərtā Krəstos reached at Raya Zobel, Qobo wārāda where there was an ancient monastery founded by Aba Guba, one of the Nine saints, but was devastated in the 16th c. Then St. Fəqərtā Krəstos reestablished this monastery in the 17th c. by building the church of Kidanā Məhrāt at the former location of the church. Currently the monastery is called Ramā Däbrā Səna Kidanā Məhrāt St. Fəqərtā Krəstos communal Monastery. Her Gädl states this fact as follows:... And after these things, they stood and went their way in peace and they reached the land of Zobel and there she built cells, separated places for men [monks] and women [nuns] and made a community of saints in their respective places like Saint Eugenia and as the blessed Arsema. And during that time became the building of churches by her miraculous hand and she hewed white stone by the name of our Lady Mary Mother of God, and got priests and deacons ordained and all the servants for her community. Arranging things as necessary, Emmā'muz hid with eight of her servants and the two of her sisters she appointed them as abbesses over the society of the holy virgins.

After she reestablished the monastery, she started her journey to Jerusalem and other holy places. And during the time of her wandering and travel, she had built many churches for the new believers that have come to the fold of the Church through the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. The spiritual endeavors and contributions of St. Fəqərtā Krəstos are not confined to the founding of monasteries, the building of churches, and ascetic and similar struggles. It is remembered that she had strived a lot as the defender of the Orthodox Faith. Besides, as she was a well educated woman, she had also served in copying the manuscripts of several church books like Gospel (*Wängəl*), Synaxarium (*Sənksar*), Hayemanot Abew (*Haymanotä abäw*), the book of prayer for the dead (*Gənzät*), Psalter of David (*Mäzmurä Dawit*) and Arganon (*Arəganon*) by her own hands and gave them to different churches for use. Then St. Fəqərtā Krəstos started writing books, and wrote in her hands Gospel (*Wängəl*) and Synaxarium (*Sənksar*), Hayemanot Abew (*Haymanotä abäw*), the book of prayer for the dead (*Gənzät*), the Psalter of David (*Mäzmurä Dawit*) and Arganon (*Arəganon*). She left them there. And she built [churches] in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the name of St. Michael and St. Gebriel, in the name of the Righteous and the Martyrs, and many churches were built. Finally, by the will of God, on her way back to Ethiopia from Jerusalem, she was led by St. Michael with a pillar of light. When she reached around Mäqet, she saw a pillar of light surrounded by a rainbow. And there the Lord commanded her to build a church and she built the church of Kidanā Məhrāt. There she founded her second monastery, in North Wällo where her precious holy relics have rested. In this monastery, she had served as the Abbes of the monastery until the day of her repose.

Her Rest And Feast Days: St. Fəqərtā Krəstos passed away on Yekatit 29 at the monastery she had founded and fought many spiritual battles. The Lord and Savior Jesus Christ came with the Blessed Virgin Mary, the holy Angels, the righteous martyrs, and took her holy soul to paradise. The

14 This monastery is different from the first monastery; because the Church was built by the Saint's own hand from unusual building material (from semiza or Sensel and ayit hareg – Sənsäl or Sməza and ayət harəg) and the roof was made of thatched grass (Sar). Therefore, this Monastery has an amazing history, because after she had finished building the Church in one day, (on Friday), Our Lord Jesus Christ descended from heaven in great glory with His Mother Holy Virgin Mary and His countless Angels to bless her and the Church she has just finished building during the Divine Liturgy. When Our Lord was came down and appeared to her, St. Fəqərtā Krəstos was kneeling down before Him. He blessed the Church built by her hand from Sənāl or Smə'za and at that time the new church also kneeled down in four directions. Amazingly, it is still possible to see that the church has bowed in four directions. Then our Lord promised to her that the church will remain intact till His Second Coming and that it will be a memorial to her till the end of the world that it will be witness for generations, and gave a covenant for all her spiritual struggles. Hence this church, which was built in 17th century, is still intact and it's bowing posture visible.

feasts of the saint that are commemorated in her monastery are three: one is on Tahesas 16, the blessing of her Church by the Lord Jesus Christ and her receiving a Covenant. The second is on Yekatit 15, the day on which she received the crown of martyrdom. And the third one is on Yekatit 29, the day of her rest from this world.

4. Conclusion

St. Fəqərtä Krəstos is a marvelous Ethiopian woman Saint of the 17th c. Several saints of God have usually their own special gifts that make them to be remembered in a particular way. Likewise, St. Fəqərtä Krəstos had lived an astonishingly unique life by living three ways of life, viz., in marriage, martyrdom and monasticism. She had lived a holy life in matrimony and has been the mother of a son. Finally, she had witnessed to the Faith and endured afflictions and ultimately became crowned with martyrdom. She was raised from the dead by the Lord and lived the rest of her life as a monastic nun through spiritual struggles in asceticism. She has made many and valuable contributions in returning King Susənyos back to his Orthodox faith through the miracles done through her and by her prayers. She has also contributed in the establishment and reestablishment of monasteries and in the building of churches. Her leadership quality during her martyrdom and monastic life is also of great significance and a source of inspiration for Christians in general and women monastics in particular.

Acknowledgements

My special gratitude and deepest appreciation goes to my husband Eng. Hailealem Worku who is always patient and supportive, taking care of me and encouraging me in all aspects of this study from the very beginning till its completion including assisting me in the editing process. And I want to extend my earnest gratitude to my brother Dn. Yaregal Abegaz and my instructor Aba Daneil Asefa (PhD) who had given their time in the editing process of the study. Finally my heartfelt appreciation also goes to my adviser Abba Petros Solomon (PhD) for his continuous advice of my study.

References

- [1] Adamu Amare and Belaynesh Mikael, 1970, The Church of Ethiopia, A Panorama of History and Spiritual life, *The Role of the Church in Literature and Art*, Addis Ababa, a publication of the EOTC, p. 74.
- [2] Amsalu Tefera, 2011 E. C., Nəq'a Mətsahift, Addis Ababa, jajaw Printing press. p. 211. (In Amharic language).
- [3] BöLL Verena, 2003, Hamburg; Saints, Biographies and History in Africa, Holy women in Ethiopia, Frankfurt, page 31-45.
- [4] Cohen, Leonardo. 2009, The missionary strategies of the Jesuits in Ethiopia (1555-1632). Vol. 70. Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, p. 53 and 7-16.
- [5] (2007), The Jesuits in Ethiopia: Missionary Methods and Local Responses to Catholicism (1555-1632), *Aethiopica* 10, International Journal of Ethiopian and Eritrean Studies, University of Hamburg, P. 301-302.
- [6] EOTC, 1988, Amharic commentary of St. Paul Epistles, 'ye'qidus Paulos Metsehaf Nibabu ka'ne' Treguamew", A. A.).
- [7] EOTC. 2000 E. C., The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church History from the Birth of Christ to 2000 E. C.; A. A. Tinsae zegubae matemiya bet. (Amharic).
- [8] Esposito Joseph J., 1994, "Hagiology" The New Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 5, Chicago, 615.
- [9] Harden J. M. 1926 'An introduction to Ethiopic Christian Literature' New York, NY: McMillan, p. 27.
- [10] Kefyalew Merahi (kesis): 1998, "The spiritual and Social Life of Christian Women", Addis Ababa, Commercial Printing Enterprise, p. 39.
- [11] Kidane Wold Kifle (Aleqa) 1948, Mətsəhafə Sewasəw wə ges wə Məzgəbə qalat Artistic printing press, p. 301.
- [12] kinefe – Rigb Zeleke, 1975, "Bibliography of the Ethiopian Hagiographical Tradition", JES, vol. XIII, No. 2, No. 40&41., AAU, p. 57-102.
- [13] Lorenzi James De, 2015, Guardians of the Tradition: Historians and Historical Writing in Ethiopia, University of Rochester press, page 98.
- [14] Mərqorəwos Arəga (Like Birhanat), 1998 E. C.: The history of Ethiopian Saints 5th book, P. 92-95.
- [15] Nosnitsin Denis, 2005, Fəqərtä Krəstos, *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 2, Harrassowitz Verlag. Wiesbaden, p. 521.
- [16] Sirgew Hable Selassie (Dr.), 1969, The bibliography of ancient and medieval Ethiopian history" page. 56-58.
- [17] 1982 E. C. Amharic Church dictionary: Ethiopian microfilmed agency, AAU. vol. 11, p. 134-35. (Amharic).
- [18] Taddesse Tamrat, 1968, Church and State in Ethiopia 1270 - 1527, A Thesis of Ph.D. in the University of London, p. 12.
- [19] 1970, The Church of Ethiopia, A Panorama of History and Spiritual life, Persecution and Religious Controversies, Addis Ababa, a publication of the EOTC, p. 29.