

A Historical and Theological Overview on the Hagiography: A Focus on the Life of Women Saints

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Abstract: This paper attempts to demonstrate a historical and theological overview of hagiography by focusing on the life of women saints. The hagiographies of saints were written by different scribes in different periods of time in the progress of hagiography. In Christianity, the life of sanctity and canonization are not related to gender but the virtuousness of one's life. Any one, male or female, who had devoted life unto God and lived a saintly life is honored by the Church and venerated as a saint. As a result the Church does not have men saints only but also has many great women saints. This act of veneration is demonstrated by the writing of their hagiographies, consecrating churches and monasteries in their names and celebrating the feast days of men and women saints. So the recognition of sainthood in the church is a matter of the sanctity of one's life. But we cannot confuse sanctity of life with the role of men and women in the Church. Any male or female who has lived an exemplary life and reached a higher spiritual level could be recognized as a saint. The main objective of this article is to investigate the origin and development of hagiography in the Christian world with a historical and theological overview on the life of women saints. It is a part of the preliminary dissertation work of Corresponding author's at Addis Ababa University on a prominent Ethiopian women saint with the title of "Gädlä Fəqərtä Krəstos: Critical Edition with Annotated Translation."

Keywords: Women Saints, Women Hagiography, Ethiopic Hagiography, Origin and Development

1. Introduction

Hagiographies are one of from a literary genre and it is the writings that narrate the lives, works, struggles and miracles of men and women saints. The term hagiography describes literary products related to the veneration of the saints. It refers to writings about the lives of saints and, Hagiology is the study of saint's lives through the examination of holy writings. The Greek word 'hagiography' comes from the two Greek words 'hagios' (ἅγιος) means "holy or Saint" and 'graphia' (Γραφία) means "to write". It has a similar meaning to with the Latin word 'Vita' (life; plural form, vitae). It shows the acts or life of saints. And also with the Gə'əz word 'Gädl' which means the good 'fight', 'combat', 'struggle', 'warfare' or 'battle' of saints for their faith. In the history of hagiography, the word 'vitae' or Act (Gädl) indicates that 'life' like vitae of 'Saint Antony.' [37, 23].

The main purpose of the research is to produce Critically

Edited text with Annotated Translation based on Neo – Lachmmanian Method. The study addresses basic research questions, and among the questions; What is the significance of this Gädl for social, historical, cultural, philological, and theological studies?, Which philological reflections can we make on Gädlä St. Fəqərtä Krəstos?... etc. Although the main work of the study is to produce a Critical Edition on Gädlä St. Fəqərtä Krəstos, as the hagiography of a women saint, the related issue of an overview of the hagiography of women saints is also overviewed by the researcher. The hagiography St. Fəqərtä Krəstos is an important Gə'əz manuscript written in the 17th c. The account of events that are found in the hagiography have a great significance when placed in their historical, social, cultural, philological, and theological context of the 17th c. Ethiopia. [26, 9] In addition to this, the text is important to gender study and has a great value to study St. Fəqərtä Krəstos' period in particular and the hagiography of women saints in general.

During the preparation of the study, the researcher has

reviewed the accessible previous researches, catalogues, microfilms, books, journals and articles that had been done in the study area in order to find out the research gap. 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 researcher found out that no previous philological work has been thoroughly done on this subject in all philological methods at all levels of study, not microfilmed, cataloged, foliated, critically edited and translated [26, 2] by foreign and local scholars until now. There is no any research done on this subject at all levels of academic dissertation. Therefore, the study fills the gap on the selected study area. However, the researcher had observed that the works of some scholars had discussed in their articles and books about St. Fəqərtä Krəstos in the form of introductory and bibliographical lists of saints with a short description.

The hagiography of saints records the narration of the practical life of men and women saints and thus could serve as the model for Christians. The narration in the Gādl about the saint's life attracts and leads the listener and the reader to the life of sanctity. [29] So the hagiography of St. Fəqərtä Krəstos helps and shows how to live as a Christian. Her kindness and zealousness to bring others in to goodness is also expressed in many ways. The contribution of St. Fəqərtä Krəstos to the Church and the country is exemplary for men and women. She has defended her faith, evangelized the Gospel to the unbelievers, built churches and founded two monasteries. She was a good monastic leader and she was influential in all aspects of her life. Therefore, St. Fəqərtä Krəstos has become a source of encouragement for women who had served in the Church and the country from then to the present.

In the Tradition of Christian hagiography, the aim of the scribes is to write the life of the saint to seek blessings and to honor the saint by recording their life and works. Generally Christians read and use the lives of saints for their religious values but besides the texts has different values. Therefore her hagiography has a great value to the Church and the country in all aspects. Among the different values of Gādlä Fəqərtä Krəstos some of them are; *historical value, ethical and social value, gender value and religious value.*

As a religious text, the Gādl has several important religious values and it has detailed information on the doctrinal issues, about the services of the Church, and practical Christianity. Among them: on the mystery of the Holy Trinity, Soteriology, Christology, Pneumatology, Mariology, and Liturgy; and on the Mysteries of the Church such as; Baptism, Holy Communion, Holy Matrimony, Priesthood, and Confession. It has also accounts dealing about defending of the faith, evangelization or missionary activities, monastic life and the like.

And as a women hagiography, Gādlä St. Fəqərtä Krəstos is a pivotal text for gender study. It helps to understand the contribution of women saints of that period and gives important evidence that women could attain a very high

spiritual level by the grace of God as any one of the men saints and it makes clear about the gender issue in the Church. The Church honors women without any bias starting with honoring the Mother of God Holy Virgin Mary beyond and above all creation. The Church honors all men and women saints equally and canonizes them as saints, consecrates churches and monasteries in their names, writes their hagiographies, commemorates them and makes celebration during the feast day the saint, allows the believers to be called by their names, etc. As a result the Church books including hagiographies show how the Church gives honor to women saints and all Christian women. However, we don't deny the fact that there are men without knowing the true teaching of the Church but just based on their own personal attitude look down on women and give them an inferior position. But the teaching of the Church from the very beginning gives due respect to all Christians, i.e., men and women irrespective of gender. So her hagiography shows practically the fact that the Orthodox Church never undermines women. As a hagiography of a local woman saint, it provides information about the role of women and how women had strong spirit in monastic life and struggling in defending their faith and country.

As aforementioned, Gādlä St. Fəqərtä Krəstos contains important doctrinal and liturgical issues of the Church that are of great relevance for today. Some of them could serve as solutions to answer the questions of some who raise controversies in relation to priesthood with respect to gender issue. In this regard, Gādlä Fəqərtä Krəstos gives basic information on the service of priesthood; as to whom it is given and who performs this service. St. Fəqərtä Krəstos is a saint who has attained to a high spiritual level by the grace of God. Her journey from place to place was not as usual as any other person but she passed the wilderness with the womb of a bright cloud, she frequently spoke with the Angel of God, and God sent His Angel to her when she wanted help. Not only this, but she was also speaking frequently with the Mother of God, the Holy Virgin Mary and other saints. Our Lord Jesus Christ has also appeared to her several times and also has blessed her work and gave her a covenant.

She had also done many miracles, casted out devils, healed the sick, cleansed lepers and those possessed of the devil were saved when they believed in her prayer and they were healed from their sicknesses. All these things are not related to the role of men and women in the Church but are a matter of one's relationship with God and his/her sanctity of life. The attainment of such spiritual virtues and graces has nothing to do to one's gender. However, unfortunately, some confuse this with that of the priesthood. The priesthood is confined to male only and even among male, it is only very few that are called to this service. This is because the priesthood is not a gift of salvation but a gift of serving others and conferring the grace of salvation of God through the Church. Thus the service of priesthood is not for everyone.

Her hagiography states how the grace of God revealed through her, it says: And they lived there she doing miracles

and wonders with her hand St. Fəqərtā Krəstos, casting out devils and healing the sick and lepers were cleansed and those possessed of the devil were saved when they believed in her prayer, they were healed from their sicknesses. Thus, even though she had attained to a very high level of spiritual grace and was given the power to do miracles in His Holy Name, she couldn't bypass the Tradition of the Church but strictly abided by the Tradition of the Church. Even if she was in a difficult situation during her journey in that there was no even one priest to baptize the new converts, her reaction was to ask God in prayer to send her a priest. So when she prayed unto God, He resurrected and sent her one among the reposed bishops. Therefore, she had never performed the works of priesthood, and all the activities pertaining to the Mysteries of the Church during her life are performed by priests.

2. The Origin and Development of Christian Hagiography

Christian hagiography recorded the life of martyrs, ascetics and holy fathers and mothers having an exemplary life for believers to follow and imitate them. In the Holy Bible, we find the life of several saints written in a way that served as a basic foundation for the pattern and structure of later hagiographies.¹ This is particularly the case in the historical books of the Bible: the Old Testament in general and the Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, their lives (hagiographies) have been part of the Old Testament Scripture. So we find the life of several Old Testament Biblical saints recorded in the pattern of the three forms of the life of saints: Martyrs, Ascetics and Holy fathers and mothers.²

For example, in the Book of Genesis, we get a lot of information about the life of several great fathers and mothers such as Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel, and Joseph. Similarly, the book of Exodus contains much material about the life of Moses, and the Book of Kings (First and Second) furnish a lot of information about the life of the other great Old Testament prophets Elijah and Elisha.³ There are also great women that are mentioned in the Old Testament such as Rehab, and great female Prophetesses like Debora, Huldah, and other women

saints that have books written entitled in their names: Ester, Ruth, and Judith. In addition to this, in the book of Maccabees we find the Martyrs, the sons of Maccabeus who refused to eat what was scarified to idols and were martyred in the Old Testament time during the reign of Tərutšaidan. These are similar to the acts of the New Testament Christian martyrs. [27] Their life story is found in the book of Maccabees in the Holy Bible, the Synaxarium, and the writings of the early Church fathers.⁴

In the Holy Bible of the book of Maccabees, we find the narration on their martyrdom as follows:

But the sons of Maccabees, who believed in God, refused to eat the sacrifices offered to idols and they gave their body to death. Knowing that this world will become old and passing away and a its desire/happiness/ will not live forever they gave their bodies to be burned with fire to be saved from the fires in the heaven. For they knew that, the wrath of God is greater than the wrath of the king and it is worse to challenge God than to challenge man. "It is better to be happy one day in Paradise than to be long on earth. It is better Your one hour of forgiveness than long life on earth. What is our age? Is it not as shadow that passes away and like the wax at the edge of a furnace fire? But you, O Lord, live forever, Your time will never end, Your name is called from generation to generation."... Then after they proclaimed this and refused to eat the sacrificed of the idols, gave their bodies to martyrdom for the sake of God. Macc. Ch. 13:1-14.

Therefore, the Old Testament Books show the lives of these fathers and mothers; their call to spiritual life, their struggles and temptations amidst the world of sin and corruption, the blessings they have received from God, their longing for the other world, and their eventual transition from this world. Many of these Old Testament figures such as Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Samuel, and John the Baptist were born to parents that had long suffered from barrenness or childlessness. Some of them like Samson were born by the annunciation of an Angel to their parents. [34]

1 The life of Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel, and Joseph are the model of the later great Fathers and Mothers; the life of Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel and the five sons of Maccabees are the model of later martyrs. And the two prophets Elijah, Elisha and also Melchizedek had lived in the form of ascetical life during the Old Testament time and this had served as a model and pattern of later New Testament ascetics. At the end of Old Testament and the beginning of New Testament, John the Baptist is also the model of later ascetics.

2 The Ethiopic Maccabees book known as the "Ethiopic book of Maccabees" is an original Gə'əz work centered on the legendary martyrdom of three Jews under king Šərušaydan (from the name of the cities of Tyre and Sidon). [4] And the lives of The Three Children, recorded in the Book of Daniel. (Dan. 3).

3 The two prophets lived an ascetical life during Old Testament time that became a model and pattern of later New Testament ascetics. And all the lives of Old Testament Prophets are available in Ethiopic Synaxarium in their feast days. [4]

4 Albrecht Quotes the following: "How, then, should we understand the Maccabees? Namely today is their holiday. True, they are not honored by many since their struggle did not take place after Christ, but they merit being honored by everyone because their steadfastness was for the sake of defending the ways of their fathers. Indeed, what would those who suffered their martyrdom before Christ's Passion have done had they been persecuted after Christ and had followed the example of His death for us? Would not those who had been so virtuous without the help of such an example proved even more noble facing danger after Christ's example?"[6] with reference: Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oratio 15," in Migne, PG 35, col. 912A-933A. French in Raphaele Ziade, Les martyres Maccabees: De l'histoire juive au culte chretien. Leshomelies de Gregoire de Nazianze et de Jean Chrysostome, vol. 80, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 299-311, We find also in Synaxarium the following: In the kingdom of the Midianites and Moabites there was a king whose name was Tərutšaidan who devoted to evil and he had many gods whom he worshipped and served. Fifty of whom were in the form of men and twenty in the form of women; and he used to sacrifice to them morning and evening and compel other men to sacrifice to them. At that time there was a man of the tribe of Benjamin whose name was 'Maccabeus' and he had three good and strong sons. Their names were 'Abya' and 'Sila' and 'Pantos' and all are highly praised for their character, and feared for their endurance. [8]

We also get the hagiography of some Old Testament saints written by Church Fathers. For example, the life of Moses was written by St. Gregory of Nyssa [13] while St. John Chrysostom has written about the Maccabees.⁵ Amazingly, in Ethiopia there are Gädlä for some of these Old Testament figures. These include “Gädlä Adam and Eve, and the life of Enoch and Elijah, among the hagiographies of saints in Gəʿəz language.⁶ As is known, Adam and Eve are the first created human beings and the father and mother of mankind. Their story is found in Genesis, the first book of the Holy Bible. However, Gädlä Adam and Eve is obviously more of a Christianized hagiography. [44] In addition to this the translation of the book of Enoch are also found in Geez language.

Besides, the Book of Job is another model of Christian hagiography. This book starts by describing the identity and the life of Job,⁷ and then continues to the temptations stirred by the devil, then the struggles and the sufferings undergone by Job, and the Divine visitations and his eventual triumph and glory. In the New Testament, too, the Acts of the Apostles narrates the apostolic mission of St. Paul and the different adversities he had faced while carrying out his mission on the one hand and the perseverance and struggle of the Apostle and the Divine assistance sent to his aide on the other hand. Later hagiographies are more or less mirror reflections and continuations of such prototype hagiographies found in the Bible.⁸

Therefore, there is a resemblance between the stories of Biblical saints with that of the hagiography of Christian saints. The structure of the hagiographies of Christian saints is by and large similar to the story of the fathers recorded in the Holy Bible. The conception of some of them, for example, like St. Fəqərtä Krəstos and other saints was by the

annunciation of the Angel of God.⁹ As St. Paul mentions the names and the struggles of some prominent Old Testament saints in his Epistles to the Hebrews in a hagiographical expression,¹⁰ some of the Old Testament saints had struggled with cruel kings, some of them were martyred,¹¹ others were persecuted, stoned,¹² etc. In the New Testament, the lives of the Christian saints are generally presented in relation to their birth and childhood,[34] the beginning of their spiritual life, their virtues and struggles, the miracles of healing and others that are brought by God through them, their blessings and finally their repose. [23] Hence, the account of the life of Biblical saints had influenced later Christian hagiography of saints in many ways. Thus we can confidently assert that the origin and source of Christian hagiography is the Holy Bible itself.

The lives of the Old Testament Biblical saints had served as models for Christian hagiographies and these developed in time to depict the life of Christian martyrs in the first centuries. Then it developed very well and became widespread in the fourth century as a great number of the lives of martyrs and ascetic monks were being written and collected in different parts of the Christian world. These hagiographies of the saints of the Church were eventually becoming an integral part of the reading materials of Christians.

Next to the Holy Bible, the hagiography of St. Polycarp [10] and St. Antony [3] were the models for Christian hagiographies. In this regard, Andrew Louth says the following:

The nature of a saint's life, from its beginnings, was more deeply affected by the emerging Christian cult of the saint, of which the Life soon came to form a part. The cult of the saint was originally the cult of the martyr, a cult that can be traced back at least to the second century, as the Martyrdom of St. Polycarp shows. [30]

5 John Chrysostom delivers homilies on a feast of the Maccabean Martyrs (pre-Christian Jewish martyrs of Antioch, S00303) held in Antioch (Syria) in 386 or shortly after; he refers to the relics of the saints, and recounts aspects of their story. Written in Greek at Antioch. “What then?” one may say, “were they wronged, who lived before His coming?” By no means for men might then be saved, even though they had not confessed Christ. For this was not required of them, but not to worship idols, and to know the true God. “For the Lord thy God,” it is said, “is one Lord.” Therefore the Maccabees were admired, because for the observance of the law they suffered what they did suffer; and the three children, and many others too amongst the Jews, having shown forth a very virtuous life, and having maintained the standard of this their knowledge, had nothing more required of them. For then it was sufficient for salvation, as I have said already, to know God only; but now it is so no more, but there is need also of the knowledge of Christ. Therefore He said, “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin, but now they have no cloak for their sin.” [17] and Summary and translation: [35].

6 Not only their hagiography, also consecrated Church in the name of Prophet Elijah in Addis Ababa, Entoto and East Gojam Däbrä Elias of EOTC Church.

7 It starts by telling his name, his country, his kindness, fear of God and his staying far away from evil by saying: “There was a man in the land of Uts, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.” The book of Job. 1: 1.

8 Moreover the great fathers and martyrs, we find the prototypes of monasticism in the Holy Bible. “The Ethiopian church tradition sees the forerunners and prototypes of Monasticism in personages of O. T. and N. T.: Enoch, Melchizedek, Elijah on Mount Carmel and Ezra, John the Baptist, and, finally, Christ, “the first hermit”, [38, 24].

9 Among them, Samson, in the Old Testament (Judg 13:3-20) and St. John the Baptist in New Testament (Luke 1:5-20) were born after their parents suffered long years with infertility and their birth was with the annunciation of the Angel of God. The narrations of their life and the life of their parents have similar expression with the hagiography of other saints in the New Testament.

10 Heb. 11: 37 St. Paul “They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented.”

11 Prophet Elijah (1Kgs. 17-20, 1Kgs. 1-2) struggled with Ahab, king of Israel and then Naboth (1Kgs. 20:13) suffered and martyred in Old Testament times. The sons of Maccabeus, Maccabees (Macc. Ch. 13:1-14) and tradition says that Prophet Isaiah was martyrs of the Old Testament which martyred with fire and slain with the sword respectively.

12 Like Zechariah the priest, when the Israelites abandoned [house of] the Lord God of their forefathers, and worshiped, to the trees and idols, then Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest advises them to return to God. However they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the square of the house of the Lord. 2 Chr. 24:18-26. Nabute was stoned and martyred in Old Testament times (1Kgs. 20:13), and also tradition says that Prophet Ermas was stoned and martyred in Old Testament times. in Old Testament and St. Stephen in New Testament (Acts 7:58) were stoned and died in death of martyrdom.

3. Women Saints and Their Lives in the History of Christian Hagiographies

The lives of women saints are exemplary for later men and women and reflect the true character of a godly life. Women saints are the virgins who dedicated their life to Christ, holy in body and spirit, and who had defended their faith and virginity. [20] Many women virgin saints had dedicated their life entirely unto God and other women have also served God in a married life by leading their life according to the word of God and living a holy life. Regarding the lives of women saints, we find several Biblical women saints, martyrs and monastics whose sanctity of life has become a source of inspiration for Christians in general and for women in particular.

The hagiography of women saints were written down in different periods of time. As aforementioned in the development of Christian hagiography, the lives of great women mothers are recorded in the Bible. Thus the pattern and roots of the hagiographies of women saints are from the Holy Bible. In the historical part of the Old Testament there are books entitled in the name of women in the pattern of hagiography. For example, the book of Ruth, the book of Judith, and the book of Esther are the main ones. These books are narrated in a manner similar to that of a Christian hagiography, describing the life and deeds of the character. In addition to this, we also find many great Biblical women like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Anna the mother of Samuel, the Shunammite woman, the Widow of Zarephath and among women prophetesses Debora and Huldah were prominent Old Testament figures. These Old Testament women were the models for Christian saints.

New Testament Biblical saints like Holy Virgin Mary the Mother of God, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, Elisabeth the wife of Zacharias, Mary Magdalene, and the women saints mentioned by St. Paul in Rome 16 are among the New Testament Biblical women saints. Therefore, we find several Biblical women saints, early Christian women martyrs, and monastic women saints whose sanctity of life become a model for later men and women Christians, in particular later women saints.¹³

In the New Testament, the first Christian saints were martyrs. Following the accounts of women saints written in the Holy Bible, we find the life of many martyrs. These women martyrs had endured the unspeakable tortures and pain with perseverance and joy for the sake of their faith in and love for Jesus Christ. Numerous women martyr saints had flourished during the period of Christian persecution and the era of martyrdom. In addition to the detailed description of their life, the hagiography of martyrs also recorded the incredible miracles that the saints had done through the grace of God during their suffering times and the rest of their lives.

Next to the life of martyrdom, the flourishing field of

sainthood was the life of monasticism. The Church has numerous women saints who had renounced the world and everything they had for the sake of their love of God. Many of the lives of monastic mothers were collected and written down by later time searchers and collectors of the lives of saints. In this regard, the service done to us by the bishop Palladius, St. John Cassian, and the seven monks from Jerusalem is marvelous and pivotal asset in the life of saints. These fathers had travelled throughout the desert of Egypt in search of meeting the desert fathers and mothers and to learn as much information as they could about their lives and sayings. They had collected valuable information directly from those who were alive at the time by looking and listening to them and from their disciples and from those who knew about them on those who had departed. In this genre, we have the Lusaic History of Palladius [7], the Conferences of St. John Cassian [16], and the Sayings of the Desert Fathers. [43] St. Eugenia, St Euphrosyne, St Marina, St. Melania the Elder [7], St. Melania the younger [7], St. Synkletike [42], and St. Mary of Egypt [14] are among the prominent women monastic mothers about whom we have accounts of their life and sayings.

4. The Ethiopic Hagiography

The Ethiopic hagiographies, as part of the Christian hagiography at large, had recorded the life of Christian men and women saints that had strived on the path of God. As a Christian hagiography, the sources of Ethiopian hagiography are the Holy Bible and the later translated non Ethiopian hagiographies of saints. In Ethiopia, manuscripts are found in a broad variety of genre and purpose written in the ancient Gə'əz language of the country. [1] The vast collections of Ethiopian Gə'əz manuscripts are preserved in the monasteries, churches and national and foreign libraries. Among such records of the Gə'əz manuscripts, *the hagiographies of Saints* are a significant genre in the history of Ethiopian literature and take the highest place. [36] Ethiopic hagiographies are the translation of early Church period saints and martyrs and the indigenous hagiographies of the local saints and martyrs written by the Ethiopian Orthodox Tāwahədo Church (EOTC) scholars.¹⁴

According to the EOTC Tradition, manuscript works flourished during the Aksumite period in the form of translation from Greek in to Gə'əz with the coming of a group of monks called the Nine saints.¹⁵ However, the restoration of the Solomonic line in 1270 was the turning point of the "Golden Age of Gə'əz literature." In this period, Gə'əz literature was flourishing, both original writings as well as translations from Syriac, Coptic, and in later times Arabic, in to Gə'əz. [1, 31] And at the end of the 14th century and the beginning of 15th century, a new written artifact of Gə'əz manuscripts that were dedicated to *the lives of martyrs*

13 For example St. Macrina's model was St Tekla and Gregory of Nyssa himself introduces the theme of Macrina as a second Thecla near the beginning of the Life. [25]

14 Some of the translations were made in the Aksumite period and many more in later periods, obtained wide circulation in Ethiopia. [36, 9, 40, 22, 21]

15 The tradition of copying scriptural, service books and other important dogmatic books are started during 5th and 6th c after the coming of Nine Saints.

and saints, both original and translation, appeared. [31, 9, 1] including Gädlä Sāma'etāt (Acts of the Martyrs) and Gädlä Hāwāryāt (Acts of the Apostles). Therefore, after the Aksumite period, the medieval period of Ethiopia was rich in the production of literature, particularly in hagiography. [1, 40]

Thus, Ethiopic hagiography is the translation of the hagiography of the early Church period saints and martyrs and the indigenous production of the life and struggle of the local saints and martyrs written by the Ethiopian Orthodox Tāwahido Church scholars. These texts remain essentially vital to understand the history of Christianity in particular and the real character of the society in general. As a literary type, the hagiography of saints recorded the life of the saints and also contains rich historical information of the past. For this reason the texts play a significant role in the construction of the medieval history of the Church and the country. [26] This is because the hagiographies of saints in Ethiopia are the main literary genre that gives different evidences the past relating to the saint's period in a unique manner. They provide information on the major events that had taken place relating to the life and the various spiritual struggles of the saint.

Apart from narrating the lives, struggles and miracles of men and women saints, hagiographies also describe the bishops, the political situations, the kings, the name of places of the time, and many other related events of the period covered by the hagiography of the saint. [33] As a result, hagiographies are valuable genre for contemporary religious life and for the history of the country. [15] It is used as a *source material* for social, political, geographical, archeological, theological, linguistic, and different fields of studies. [21]

5. Women Saints and Their Lives in Ethiopic Hagiography

It is understandable that Ethiopia had many great female nuns and martyrs recognized as saints by the EOTC. Some of these women were the organizers and leaders of monastic community of nuns with a spiritual endeavor. They have done great works in the founding of monasteries and the building of churches. [20] Above and beyond, their lives are exemplary for martyrdom, monastic life, and for any Christian women who aspire to live a life of holiness. Women saints have practically showed the way of Christianity for men and especially *for women* who want to follow their footsteps.

Some of these women saints had hagiographies written in the Gə'əz language. Among the prominent figures of Ethiopian women saints whose hagiographies are known are: St. Fəqərtā Krəstos, St. Krəstos Sāmra, St. Mäsqäl Kəbra, St. Wälättä Maryam, St. Tsäbälä Maryam, St. Zəna Maryam, St. Wälättä Pertos, St. Ehətä Krəstos, St. Ehəte Petros,¹⁶ St

Haymättä Səlasə, St. Mära'te Sə'luse, St. Mariam Kibra (Mother of Ase Na'od), St. Amättä Dəngel, St. Krəstos Kibra, St. Wälättä Sāma'ət, St. Wälättä Tsəθion, St. Zəna Dəngil and St. Tsəige Səlasə. Among these Gə'əz manuscripts of Ethiopian women saints, the dissertation work of the main author of this article is on "Gädlä St. Fəqərtā Krəstos," a hagiography written in the 17th c. that narrates the life, struggles, and deeds of St. Fəqərtā Krəstos.

In addition to the Gə'əz hagiographies of these Ethiopian women saints, we also find the hagiographies of Biblical and other non Ethiopian ascetic and martyr women saints whose hagiographies have been translated into Gə'əz separately as well as in the collections of the book of saint, such as in the Synaxarium, Gädlä Sāma'etāt, Gädlä Kədusan, and Gädlä Kədusat Anəst.¹⁷ Among them are St. Mariam Magdalin, St. Mariam Entä'efret, St. Mary of Egypt, St. Iyäluta (sometimes her Gädl is together with that of her son St. Qirqos), St. Hana (Mother of Holy Virgin Mary), St. Arsəma (Hripsime) and St. Entoləya, St. Krəstəna, St. Johana, St. Helena, St. Eugenia, St. Yostina, St. Thecla, St. Pelagia, St. Irene, St. Irene/Oreni, St. Mäkbīyu, St. Tawkəlyā, St. Aphoməya, St. Barbara and St. Juliana, St. Emərayis, St. Pätirqa (her Gädl is with her husband St. Təwoflos), and St. Iray/Ira (her Gädl is with her brother St. Abadər).

The EOTC venerates women saints in her Tradition by writing and reading their hagiographies and by dedicating spiritual feasts to receive their blessings and intercession. Among the translation of the hagiography of women saints is the hagiography of St. Arsema (Hripsime).¹⁸ All recognized saints are venerated in the EOTC in relation to their feast days with different rites and ceremonies. In the Tradition of the EOTC, the feast day of saints is celebrated with ceremonies that include the hymns of St. Yared song by scholars of the Church¹⁹ starting from the eve and continuing through the whole night, and concluded by the celebration of the Divine Liturgy and the procession of the Ark (Tabot). In addition, reading the hagiography of the saint and the delivery of a sermon by narrating the life story of the saint

Shānkure, and other. About the hagiography of the above women saints, mentions are made by Ethiopian authors like: Sirgew Hable Selassie. [20, 26, 19, 32, 11, 2] and Gädlä Semaetāt, and Gädlä Kidusat Anest. Gädlä St. Fəqərtā Krəstos also mentions twenty two Biblical Women as well as Martyr and Monastics Saints like: Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, Rachel, Dina, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Jochebed, Deborah, Hannah, Beathsheba, Judith, Esther, Elisheba (t), Maryam Enta efre'at, Salome, Maryam, Martha, Samaritan woman, a woman of Canaan, Phebe and St. Barbara, St. Hilaria and St. Eupraxia, St. Senaser, St. Eugenia, St. Arsema, St. Soliyana, St. Akrosiyas, St. Petriqa, Pistis, Elpis, Agapis, St. Irene/Oreni and St. Emma'watat are stated in the main hagiography part and Mälk'ə of St. Fəqərtā Krəstos in a mystical explanation with her life.

17 Some of them like, St. Sophia with her three Children written in Ethiopian Synaxarium Tir 30 (February 07) [8] St. St. Mäkbīyu with her *seven Children* [12] and St. Iyäluta (with her only son St. Qirqos were martyred with their children).

18 The hagiography of St. Hripsime is a translated hagiography and the saint has achieved considerable fame and veneration in Ethiopia. "This phenomenon should be viewed in a wider context of the relations between Armenia and Ethiopia and their respective national churches." [28]

19 For example, the memorial day for the three children and St. Sophia is celebrated with the praise of morning (Sebhate Negih) every year on Nehase 7 in the Church according to the Liturgical Order of the Deg^{wa}. On this day, the name of those Saints is remembered with great honour in Degwa and Mewasiet. [12]

16 St. Ehətä Krəstos and St. Ehəte Petros were the close friends of St. Walatä Petros. [25] In addition to the above list of women saints, we find also other prominent Ethiopian women Saints such as St. Emma Wättät, St. Emma

and the miracles that God had done through the hands of His saint are integral parts of the Feast. Finally, the Ark consecrated in the name of the saint is honored in a great procession and the festivity is joyously celebrated with different elevating spiritual rites and processions.

6. Theological Overview of Orthodox Christianity on Women

Christianity from the very beginning has practically demonstrated the honor due to women. Above and beyond all, Jesus Christ was born of a woman. He chose a woman to be His mother. There can be no other way to show the woman ennobling nature of Christianity paralleling this fact. The Church demonstrates this in Her teachings as well as practices. For example, when one enters into an Orthodox church, he first comes face to face with the Icon of the Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God in front on the Altar and on the wall of the Church. The icons of numerous women martyrs, holy desert mothers, abbesses and nuns that lived in monasteries are also depicted all over the church walls. The Orthodox Church celebrates all these women saints according to Her Liturgical calendar. Therefore, there are many feasts throughout the year which remind us the role and honor of women in the Church.

In addition, holy women and their deeds are commemorated during the Great Holy Week such as Mary who anointed our Lord's Body with pricey perfume and the myrrh-bearers who had come to His Tomb intending to balsam His Body. The EOTC also remembers them in one of the days of the week following the Resurrection of The Lord. However, among all the holy women and men, Mary, the Mother of God, has a unique place as she is above all creation in purity and honour. This is because she is the prototype of the spiritual perfection of human beings, the new Eve. She is the intercessor of human beings for anyone who wants to benefit from her motherhood and protection.

7. Conclusion

Christian hagiography is a literary genre that narrates about the life and struggle of the saint and other events of historical significance regarding to the time. Though the major purpose of the writing of Christian hagiographies is to reveal the graciousness of God and the spiritual struggle of the saints, they contain invaluable information that have historical, theological, significance. Christian hagiographies are the continuation and development of Biblical characters and narrations. Christian hagiography describes the life and struggles of martyrs, monastics and Church fathers and mothers. The sanctity of life and the attainment of Divine grace is dependent on one's virtue, not gender. Thus as we have the hagiography of men saints, we do have also the hagiography of several women saints. Such writings furnish us much resources and information and could serve as inputs for different studies.

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