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**The Trinitarian Incipit in the Context of Ethiopia's Heretical
Discursive Formation in the Period from the 15th to 17th Century**

In the name of the Triple Saint.
Those who are one in their unity
Emerged before the world did.
Divine ones and being God,
Their divinity is perfect in all respects
And hidden from madmen's suspicions.
They placed their thrones over the cooled waters of the heavens.
There are thunderbolts roaring underneath them.
Angels and people have worshipped them for centuries
and will do so through the future centuries.

Abstract

The poetic *incipit* of a sixteenth-century Ethiopian manuscript – the life of a monastery's prior, which is considered heretical, is like any expression steeped in a discursive formation which determines its existence. The following areas should be covered to describe it: the great Trinitarian dispute within Christianity, the tradition of Ethiopian literature, the reformist and theological dispute in Ethiopia in the period the expression under consideration was being created, the heretical literature of the Stephanites and the beliefs that are ascribed to them, the collection of Stephanites' *gadls* and their excerpts on Trinitarianism, the manuscript of Habta Sellasje's life, the *incipit* of which constitutes this expression along with its stylistic qualities. Moreover, it seems to be justified to examine the particular characteristics of the expression by enhancing the fact that it is dependent upon the religious language, the variety to which it belongs.

The present paper attempts to adapt Michel Foucault's¹ methodological proposal (rather than a theory, as he underlines it himself) to the description of the expression which is, in a sense, foreign to the European cultural tradition. The subject matter of the description that I have chosen is a poetic incipit – a Trinitarian invocation which constitutes the beginning of a sixteenth-century “life”, the so-called gadl, by a heretical abbot from Ethiopia. I translated it from the copy of a manuscript written in the southern Semitic Ge'ez language, which is presently the language of liturgy in the Orthodox Ethiopian Church. The description of the selected expression requires, according to Foucault's hints, one to delineate and cover various subject-related areas, the existence of which is presupposed by the expression. The expression is simultaneously their function as well as a confrontation with the linguistic and logical system that it is governed by.

I consider the incipit, which is the subject matter of my “methodological experiment”, to be a holistic expression. The expression is not another elementary language unit on a given plane, so a set (we assume that it is homogeneous): sound, morpheme, word, and phrase cannot be completed by it. But it is “a field of the fulfillment of the propositional function” and of linguistic conditions which enable it to materialise in the form of a permanent message. It is neither a unit of language nor speech if it lives a non-self-reliant, secondary life which is dependent on the existence of a discursive formation. Its value is neither truth nor even a Habermasian claim for the truth but an ability to emerge and enter into diverse relations with sets of expression which co-exist in a given discursive formation. The description of the propositional function which is equivalent to the description of the expression is:

- venturing into various areas determining its existence, and
- grasping the way, in which it is possible to single it out.

Thereby, it is the demonstration of a discursive formation, in which the given expression functions and is governed. This formation is not a blend of “the world and language” but, undoubtedly, an extralinguistically conditioned system of expression which makes it possible to reveal itself to particular objects, their qualities and relations which are necessary or accidental among them.

It is not the sole system which allows the given expression to come into being. The expression also depends on such means of specification as: logic formation, cognitive formation and linguistic formation.

As a function of various systems, the expression does not have a one-layer and coherent description model. It is not like building a wall stone by stone, as Foucault puts it. The value of the dispersion that becomes a part of it imposes on its description, with the inability of the total exhaustiveness of its sense, the permission or even necessity of pluralising exploratory methods. The whole analysis, in turn, should answer the

¹ M. Foucault, *Archeologia wiedzy*, Warszawa: PIW, 1977, p. 174 [...] *I do not develop here a theory in the proper and full meaning of this word. Hence, I do not draw an abstract model which can be applied to an infinite number of empirical descriptions from a certain number of axioms.*

question: What factors contribute to specifying the expression that we are dealing with in the incipit under consideration?

To be able to at least partially handle the task, I assume that the very brief incipit comprises the following discursive areas:

1. the great Trinitarian dispute within Christianity;
2. the tradition of Ethiopian literature;
3. the reformist and theological dispute in Ethiopia in the period the expression under consideration emerged;
4. the heretic literature of Stephanites and beliefs attributed to them;
5. the collection of the incipits of the Stephanites' *gadls*;
6. the collection of the Stephanites' fragments of *gadls* concerning the subject matter of Trinitarianism;
7. the manuscript of Habta Sellasie's life whose incipit along with its stylistic qualities constitute this expression;
8. the religious language, the variation of which it belongs to.

1. Trinitarian Dispute within Christianity

Christian Orthodoxy, which originates from Scripture² and Tradition, boils down, broadly speaking, to the following propositions: God is one in three Persons. The three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have an eternal, indivisible and coexistent nature. There occur real relationships (*relationes subsistentes*) among them as well as total co-permeability (*circumincessio*) and co-existence which make up one divine reality. Below are the characteristics of the Persons of the Holy Trinity:

the Father – the parent, and principle – the source of the Son and the Holy Spirit;

the Son – preeternally born of the Father and along with Him: the principle and source of the Holy Spirit, born of the Holy Spirit in history;

the Holy Spirit – proceeding from the Father and Son and a bond between them.

In subsequent heresies these Trinitarian principles were undermined and repeatedly specified at subsequent councils starting with the anti-Arian First Council of Nicaea (325), and later the Seventeenth Ecumenical Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438–1445) collecting the knowledge about the Holy Spirit and adding the *Filioque*³ clause to the Symbol:

The Saint Roman Church, which was founded by our Lord's and Saviour's word, strongly believes, advocates and preaches [its faith] in one true Almighty God, who is constant and eternal, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one in substance and

² Apostles baptised in the name of the Holy Trinity, *Acts of the Apostles*. 19: 2–6.

³ The term denotes “and from the Son” and refers to the double origin of the Holy Spirit: from the Father and the Son. The Roman Church recognized this formula as late as the 11th century. It is the basic cause of the division of the Church into the Eastern one, which subscribes to the principle “*Per Filio*” (meaning “through the Son”) and the Western one.

*triple in Persons [...]. None of them surpasses the other in terms of eternity nor is above in terms of dignity nor in terms of power. Because it is the eternal reality without a beginning that the Son proceedeth from the Father and also that the Holy Spirit proceedeth from the Father and the Son.*⁴

Generally and broadly speaking, heretic anti-Trinitarian movements:

- undermined the unity of Persons in the Holy Trinity, which led to Tritheism, i.e. the acknowledgment of three distinct Gods;⁵
- accepted the uniqueness of the Supreme God who emanates the Word – Son (Neo-Platonic gnosis);
- assumed a mere conceptual division of the Three Persons; God becomes triple as the Maker, Saviour and Sanctifier only in acting (Sabellians);
- emphasised Christ's human nature existing next to the divine as well as the Holy Spirit's origin solely from the Father himself except for the Son (Nestorianism);
- negated the dualism of Christ's nature (human and divine) and emphasised only his divinity (Monophysitism);
- negated the consubstantiation of all the Trinity's Persons, the Creator of the world, and particularly: the Son-Logos with God the Father, which (in Arianism) resulted in making Jesus subordinate, attributing to him the role of the Creator, and filling the unfathomable chasm that separated God from his work. Christ as man came to represent the paragon of the Son's obedience to God until his martyr death on the Cross, thus demonstrating the way a Christian himself may attain the state of divinity and becoming God himself.

The last of the great heresies mentioned above, which was officially fought off in the 7th century, spread all over the ecumenical community. In the 16th century it revived in Socinianism and some of its elements can be encountered in various modern deistic beliefs. Definitely condemned at the Council of Constantinople (381), Arius' stance was the heart of an enormous dispute in which the great and highly respected hierarchs of the "Church of the first centuries"⁶ and the highest political dignitaries

⁴ I quote from the document of the 17th Ecumenical Council of Florence: Decree to Jacobites (1442), after *Breviarium Fidei: Kodeks doktrynalnych wypowiedzi Kościoła*, (= *Breviarium Fidei: The code of the Church's doctrinal statements*), ed. by J.M. Szymusiak SJ, S. Głowa SJ., Poznań: Księgarnia św. Wojciecha, 1964, pp. 216–217, The Decree follows as: *All that the Father is or has does not have from anyone but from Himself; [He] is the beginning without a beginning. Everything that the Son possesses he has from the Father and is the principle proceeding from the principle. Everything that the Holy Spirit is or the Holy Spirit possesses it has from the Father and the Son at the same time. But the Father and the Son are not the two principles of the Holy Spirit but one principle: like the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are not the three principles of the creation but one principle.*

⁵ Incidentally, this is just what the Arians, who negated the divinity of Word-Logos, accused the Catholics of.

⁶ *Inter alia*, the bishops such as: Alexander of Alexandria, Eusebius of Nicomedia, St. Athanasius, Pope Silvester I who convened the Council of Nicaea, St. Anthony, St. Ambrose of Milan, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus. See A. Bóber, *Świata Ekumeny: Antologia patrystyczna*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Apostolstwa Modlitwy, 1965;

were involved, including the emperors themselves such as Constantine, at whose court Arius, who was excommunicated, died in 336. The clearest presentation of Arian beliefs is enclosed in Bishop Wulfila's testament. He died in 383. Here is an almost *in extenso* quote⁷ by "the Arian apostle of the Goths" as he was called:

I, Wulfila, Bishop and Confessor, have always believed thus and in this sole and true faith I make my journey to my Lord. I believe that there is only one God the Father, alone unbegotten and invisible, and [I believe] in His only-begotten Son, our Lord and God, creator and maker of all things, not having any like unto Him. Therefore, there is one God of all, who is also God of our God. And [I believe] in one Holy Spirit, an enlightening and sanctifying power. (...) And I believe the Son to be subject and obedient in all things to God the Father, whom he is akin to according to Scripture, whom by Christ and the Holy Spirit.../.../(The text damaged here).

2. The Tradition of Ethiopian Literature (4th–17th Centuries)

It is quite difficult to briefly characterise the abundant literature written in the southern-Semitic language Ge'ez, which only a handful of European specialists is familiar with.⁸ Ethiopia, or rather, the Ethiopian state of Axum, whose tradition it corresponds to, having accepted Christianity in the 4th century, saturated almost all its literature with theological issues. As early as in the Axumite period (5th–7th century) the Bible was translated from its Greek prototype (or a Syrian one, the matter is disputable) as well as many works of the the Church Fathers, *inter alia*, Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory Thaumaturgus, Epiphanius of Salamis, Theodotus of Ancyra.⁹

These were mostly works of Christological subject matters, which always stirred up heated disputes, let alone religious wars, thus splitting the Church elites into separate sects seeking support in the sphere of secular power. Besides, the division into secular and ecclesiastic power (at least up to the 17th century) was of no importance since the imperial court was replete with Church hierarchs in each period and one of the most eminent Ethiopian emperors Zera Jacob (1434–1468) was not only a great reformer of the state's administration, but also a reformer of the Church and its rituals. He him-

M. Banaszak, *Historia Kościoła Katolickiego, T. 1: Starożytność*, Warszawa: Akademia Teologii Katolickiej, 1986; Daniel-Rops, *Kościół pierwszych wieków*, Warszawa: PAX, 1968; Daniel-Rops, *Kościół wczesnego średniowiecza*, Warszawa: PAX, 1969; *Katolicyzm wczesnośredniowieczny*, ed. by J. Keller, Warszawa: PWN, 1973; S. Pieszczoł, *Patrologia: Wprowadzenie w studium Ojców Kościoła*, Poznań: Księgarnia św. Wojciecha, 1964; K. Armstrong, *Historia Boga: 4000 lat dziejów Boga w judaizmie, chrześcijaństwie i islamie*, Warszawa: Prima, 1995.

⁷ Cited after *Breviarium Fidei*, *op. cit.*, p. 196–197.

⁸ I recommend those who are interested in this issue to read a condensed paper by Aleksander Ferenc, 'Writing and literature in classical Ethiopic (Giiz)', in: *Literatures in African languages: theoretical issues and sample surveys*, ed. by B. Andrzejewski, S. Piłaszewicz, W. Tyloch, Cambridge-Warszawa: PWN, 1985, pp. 255–300.

⁹ Cerulli, *LettEt*, 1961; Ricci, *LettEt*, 1969; Bober, *op. cit.*, p. 475.

self wrote a plentitude of liturgical and theological books and established a calendar of Church festivals. Moreover, he cultivated the unity and the law-abiding character of the doctrine by holding and supervising numerous such disputes. Next to translations and translation inspirations (apart from Greek and Syriac ones, also the works of the Coptic Church written in Arabic) Ethiopian literature was largely influenced by the vibrant trends of religious (particularly Marian) poetry and historical songs, apocrypha books and *sensu largo* hagiography. It is the saints, outstanding historical figures, or abbots of formidable monasteries who had their *gadls* (biographies, *acta*, *gesta*). A *gadl* itself is, from the European point of view, a syncretic form, and a stratified text complying with the formal convention of the genre. Yet, it includes, apart from the individual history of a hero, the interpretation of his beliefs and a dispute both with his opponents, who present different beliefs “in terms of faith”, and infidels, especially Muslims. Also, it contains descriptions of historical events as well as the economic situation of the country and the congregation. Last but not least, a *gadl* includes diverse poetic genres, such as: eulogies and hymns, invocations (to God or saints), blessings and curses, colophons, and even *qenie* – a truly artistic form of verse typical of Ethiopian literature and based on the rhetoric figure of “wax and gold”.¹⁰

3. Theological and Reformist Dispute in Ethiopia in the Period the Incipit Was Created

In all probability, the expression under consideration came into being around the middle of the 16th century, which is evidenced by paleographic analysis I carried out. The analysis becomes even more likely due to calculations of the death date of the hero in the manuscript and an assumption that the very manuscript could have been written right after the hero's death. However, its temporal span goes back to the distant period prior to the rise of the Stephanites' movement, which somehow conditions its emergence to the first quarter of the 15th century. It was a period of sharp rivalry various religious sects mostly linked with enormous monastic centers. It is particularly some liturgical and dogmatic tracks of several monastic congregations that come to the fore: Eustachius' scholars, Philip's scholars, the founder of the monastery of Debre Bizen, Tekle Haimanot's scholars from Debre Libanos and a group of monasteries on the islands of Tana Lake. The variation of customs and discipline supported the distinctiveness of Christological and Marian viewpoints. The diplomatic adroitness along with the lordly tenacity of Emperor Zera Jacob,¹¹ who strived to unify the partitioned state and church established a plane of compromise and reconciliation among factions favoured by

¹⁰ This poetic form is based on ambiguity; if it is superficial, the light wax of sense is “(s)melted”, and what is left is the gold of a hidden thought.

¹¹ A. Bartnicki & J. Mantel-Niećko, ‘The role and significance of the religious conflicts and people's movements in the political life of Ethiopia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’, *RSE*, 24 (1969–70), pp. 3–39; *idem*, *Historia Etiopii*. Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1971.

the emperor. At the same time, however, he was not able to preempt denunciations and intrigues, which often ended up with confiscation of property, infamy and maculation, let alone stoning to death. The emperor himself got involved (in his work *The Book of Nativity*) in fighting off two newly-established sects: Michaelites and Stephanites. The second quarter of the 16th century was a tragic period for Ethiopia. The country was largely plundered by Muslim troops despite the fact that they were eventually defeated. The 16th and 17th century is also the awakening of passionate nationwide theological disputes begun anew thanks to the presence of Latin missionaries.

4. The Heretic Literature of the Stephanites and Beliefs Attributed to Them

In a far-flung, inaccessible and rocky area in the gorge of the rapid Ginda-Gunde stream a monastery named the same is located. Inside the monastery there is a treasure-library, which enchanted an Ethiopist called Mordini who quoted a slightly exaggerated opinion of the first European, de Jacobis, who visited the place. He claimed that the library contained everything that had been written in Ge'ez up to then.¹²

Luckily, by sheer coincidence, thanks to the bond of friendship between two world famous scholars, Professor Stefan Strelcyn and Professor Roger Schneider, several micro-films of the manuscripts were placed in the Department of Semitics of the Institute of Oriental Studies at the Warsaw University. It was the lives of several heretic leaders of monastic life, abbots of this monastery.¹³ Sporadic mentions about the existence of this sect made up a part of some other belligerent, conflicting Ethiopian texts. Accusations against the Stephanites made by Ethiopian hierarchs were actually mouthed by Orthodox Ethiopian monks and kept on repeating. Consequently, the Stephanites were called to appear before the Patriarch John XIII: *Here are the monks who are neither Jews nor pagans. They do not believe in the Trinity. They worship neither Mary nor the Cross. They have no altar. They do not consecrate the Eucharist. And when they say their prayers*

¹² A. Mordini, 'Il convento di Gunde-Gundiè', *RSE*, 12 (1953), pp. 29–70; G. Cecioni, 'La regione di Gunde Gundie e il suo antico monastero', *Rivista Geografica Italiana*, 3–4 (1941).

¹³ So far only three Stephanite texts have been published: *Gadla abuna Abakerazun seu acta sancti Abakerazun*, ed. (& trad.) C. Conti Rossini, (CSCO 57 & 58, SAe 2:24 [= 25–26]), Louvain 1962, (= 1910), [henceforth: *Gadla Abakerazun*]; 'Les actes d'Ezra de Gunda-Gunde', ed. & tr. A. Caquot, *AE*, 4 (1961), pp. 69–124, [henceforth: *Gadla Ezra*]; 'Les Actes d'Isaïe de Gunda-Gunde', [éd. & trad. par] Aleksander Ferenc, *AE*, 10 (1976), pp. 243–294; [henceforth: *Gadla Isaias*] Moreover, in the Department of African Languages and Cultures of the Institute of Oriental Studies at the Warsaw University there are translations of a further three texts provided with critical comments. The first of them is my MA thesis supervised by Professor Stefan Strelcyn. Since it is my intellectual property, I allow myself considerable changes in the retranslation. Other MA theses containing translations of Stephanite *gadls* are: K. Motkowska, *Gadla Habta Sellase, czyli Żywoć Habta Sellase, czwartego przeora Stefanitów*. Praca magisterska napisana pod kierunkiem prof. Stefana Strelcyna, 1967, unpublished, [henceforth: *Gadla Habta Sellasie*]; M. Miszczak, *Żywoć Habta Sellase II †1709 z Gunda Gunde*, Praca magisterska napisana pod kierunkiem prof. Stefana Strelcyna, 1968, unpublished, [henceforth: *Gadla Habta Sellasie II*]; K.P. Błażewicz, *Żywoć Gebre Kristos z Gwind Gwinde*, Wstęp, komentarz i przekład, Praca magisterska napisana pod opieką dr Aleksandra Ferenc, 1996, unpublished. [henceforth: *Gadla Gabra Krestos*].

they do not say 'The Lord's Prayer' and 'The Creed'. The King of Ethiopia is fighting them off and the metropolitan excommunicated them. Their rule is not our rule. (*Gadla Ezra*, 100–101). This situation is reflected in the Stephanites' texts which include the accounts of disputes held at that time, when accusations were intelligently rebutted mostly on the basis of biblical passages. Nonetheless, it is even contemporary interpreters, that is, Ethiopists who are enormous scholarly authorities, who keep repeating the fifteen-century emperor of Ethiopia, Zara Jacob, the anti-Stephanites accusations by attributing to them either Arianism,¹⁴ or Gnosticism, or just anti-Marian beliefs,¹⁵ and failure to worship the Cross. The absurdity of these statements has been proved in the light of the original Stephanite texts. However, the reasons for the obstinacy of attributing heretical beliefs to the Stephanites ought to be investigated. The period of the rise of this movement was conducive to such an attitude. It was a time when the Church was being reformed from above, the Orthodox doctrine was pinpointed and unified liturgical regulations were imposed. Furthermore, the actual atmosphere of the Church hierarchs was a factor, too. It was a time of intrigues, suspicions, and a ruthless fight for political influence. Lastly, favourable to such a situation was an uncontrollable appetite for material goods which could also be gained via confiscating the properties of those accused of heresy.

5. The Collection of the Incipits of Stephanites' *gadls*

All the Stephanitan manuscripts I am familiar with start with an invocation to the Holy Trinity, which in the light of the lofty character of *gadls*, has to indicate a fully honest and truly committed confession which, let me add, has all the characteristics of the orthodoxy and is full of erudition and solicitude. Instead of discussing the particular incipits, I will quote them in full extent, except for the one being the subject matter of this paper.

1. *Gadla Abakerazun*: "In the name of the Holy Trinity existing without a beginning and mighty for long centuries, endlessly; which is triple in the form, one in divinity, indivisible and so replete with everything that it cannot be exhausted."
2. *Gadla Ezra*: "In the name of the Holy Trinity (whose persons) are a life while they are alive; they shall not die. The rulers whose authority shall not be lessened. They placed their thrones over the chariots of Cherubim and they fly on the wings of winds. With one thought they created the world."
3. *Gadla Isaias*: "In the name of God the Father who gives birth but is unbegotten. In the name of God the Son who was born, but does not give birth. In the name of God the Holy Spirit who neither gives birth nor was born. The triple One who does not borrow. The rich One who is not in need. The one who created the world from

¹⁴ K. Wendt, 'Die theologische Auseinandersetzungen in der Äthiopischen Kirche zur Zeit der Reformen des XV. Jahrhunderts', in: *Atti del Covegno Internazionale di Studi Etiopici (Roma 2–4 aprile 1959)*, (Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei: Problemi attuali di scienza e di cultura, quaderno 48), Roma 1960, pp. 137–146;

¹⁵ Jean Dorese, *L'Empire du Prêtre-Jean, t. II: L'Éthiopie médiévale*, [Paris]: Plon, 1957.

non-existence, without delay. The One who puts faith in the hearts of the believers. The One who repays everyone in accordance with their deeds. May it be glory to Him, through the centuries and centuries of centuries.”

4. *Gadla Gabra Krestos*: “In the name of God the Father, whose beginning of the existence is unknown. (In the name of God the Son) who was born of Him and of Mary through his incarnation. And in the name of God the Holy Spirit who is equal to him in his nature.”
5. *Gadla Habta Sellasie II*: “In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit – one God –who are counted each as a Person, thus constituting the unity of divine being. They are free of any calculation and any division; united without division and divided without unification, as they are united in ruling and reigning, and parted through their being unbegotten, their birth and origin. Thanks to this faith they are incessantly extolled by hosts of the great and praised by various troops. It is so because they are the beginning of things and the basis of all actions.”

6. The Collection of Stephanite *gadls* Concerning the Subject Matter of Trinitarianism

Apart from the Trinitarian greeting “In the name of the Father and...”, the pages of the manuscripts often include the typical teaching on the Holy Trinity. For the first time it was compiled in *Ezra’a Life* (*Gadla Ezra*, 94v): The Father who gave birth. The Son who was begotten. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of the Father and the Son who passed from the Father. And there are neither divergences nor changes in his nature.¹⁶ Three faces, three hypostases – one nature. Three names – one divinity, one kingdom, one power, one might, one thought.

In *Habta Sellasie II’s Life* (*Gadla Habta Sellasie II*, p. 55) there is a “protocol” of the whole theological dispute, the subject matter of which are Christological issues as well as dogmas of the Holy Trinity. The whole dispute is worth being a subject-matter of a critical and theological study. Since I am not able to adequately present it, I will tabulate a list of Scripture quotes¹⁷ used in it as its arguments, as well as names of the quoted Church Fathers. Let me add that examples of patristic expression have often survived only in fragmentary forms and the Ethiopian quotes may prove invaluable treasures for the history of Christianity.

List of Scriptural passages: Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; John 8:42; John 16:27–28; John 16:30; John 17:8; Matthew 16:16; Luke 1:31–32; Luke 1,35; Luke 3,38; John 1,3; I John 4:14–15; I John 5:9–10; Acts of the Apostles 9:20; Hebrews 1:2; II Timothy 2:3–5;

¹⁶ A. Caquot translates *hlaaweyaat* – ‘hypostases’ and *hlaawe* as ‘nature’, *op cit.* (in n. 13), p. 108.

¹⁷ It is a procedure applied for determining a heretic doctrine. See J. Devernay, *Religia Katarów*, Kraków: Platan, 2000.

List of allusions and references to Scripture: Matthew 16,17; John 6:69; Revelations 1:14–15; Romans 1:2–4; 1 Corinthians 11,3; II Timothy 2:1–2.

The Church Fathers:

Irenaeus [of Tyre?]; Dionysius of Alexandria; Basil the Great, George of Laodicea; Hippolytus; Ephrem the Syrian; Epiphanius of Salamis; John Chrysostom; Cyril of Alexandria (?).

The dispute also includes the quoted statements of the Stephanites' opponents (*Gadla Habta Sellasie II*: pp. 58, 59, 61). Also, their value cannot be underestimated. They are the accounts of Arius' beliefs and, apart from the first statement, quote famous anathematisms ending the Nicene Creed:

- “And in those times there were many people and monks in all countries who believed and said that the Son was born by the Father only by nature rather than body, thus separating as a result of their ignorance the body from the essence and nature; [and] that he was called the essence of the body, and the body is referred to as the essence and nature.”
- “[...] there are some who say: It was the time and days prior to the birth of the Son; when He did not exist and then he emerged from nothingness. Or there are others who say that he originates from a different body and other essence or those who say that He underwent some exchange or alteration... the Saint Apostolic Church cursed and excommunicated them. Likewise, it excluded those who thought up the inferiority of the Holy Spirit.”
- “There are those who say: it was the time and days prior to the Son's birth when he did not exist and then emerged from nothingness. Or there are others who say: from a different body or those who say: from a different essence or that he changed – therefore the Saint Church, the apostolic community, put an anathema on them.”

Priceless to the history of Christian thought seems to be the juxtaposition of the three Symbols enclosed in the manuscript of the *Gadla Habta Sellasie II*:

- A “We present the secrets of the right faith of our fathers, the Apostles, which the Holy Spirit in the mirror of his wisdom imparted to. And they taught by saying: We believe in one God the Father, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ who was born before the creation of the world. The one Son, equal to the Maker of all hosts in terms of dignity and power, who liked it to become man. And afterwards he took the body from our Lady, the Saint Virgin, without a man's semen and he was raised with people, sinless and free of vices, and there were no lies on his lips. Then he suffered and died bodily and rose again on the third day. He ascended into Heaven to his Father who had sent him. He was seated at the right hand of his might and sent us the comforter — the Holy Spirit who emerged from the Father and saved the world and who exists with the Father and Son.”

- B** “And our law-abiding fathers, who donned the Lord’s power, assembled and announced: We believe in one God the Father, the ruler of everything, the Maker of heaven and earth, and all that is visible and invisible. And we believe in one God, Jesus Christ, the Son of the one Father who existed with him before the creation of the world. Light from Light. True God from true God. Begotten, not made. One in Being with the Father. Through him all things were made and nothing was made without Him. And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeded from the Father. We worship and glorify Him with the Father and the Son who speaks through the Prophets.
- C** “In the name of God the Father – who gave birth rather than was born. In the name of God the Son – who was born rather than gave birth. In the name of the Holy Spirit – who proceeds rather than gives birth and was born. Triple in persons and one in divinity. The Trinity in unity and unity in the Trinity. Division in union and union in division. Equal in terms of dignity and glory. Honourable in terms of power and reigning. The Makers of all creation. What is down and up is worshipped by both angels and people. What deserves glory and might through the centuries and centuries of centuries. Amen.”

None of the quotations for the *Acts of Apostles* is exact. However, the second (B) converges to a large degree with the most famous profession of faith of Christian antiquity – the Nicene Symbol (325). It contains the well-known passage from the *Gospel of John* concerning Logos – the Word. The Nicene Symbol was reformulated in the Constantinople Symbol (381), which was accepted right after the Council in the whole Church. Still, it was approved of as a Credo in the whole Christian Church as late as in 1014, when the Holy Roman Emperor Henry II was authorised by Benedict VIII to use it in this way at the coronation ceremony in Rome. The plural of the verb ‘believe’ is retained in Greek. Yet, the Greek as opposed to the Latin text, does not include the controversial ‘Filioque’ clause, which is present in the Stephanites’ text and was permanently introduced to the European canon as late as the Third Council in Toledo (569).

Symbol A, in turn, is very analogous to Epiphanius’ Creed, bishop of Salamis on Cyprus, who put emphasis on the fullness of Christ’s “humanity” while fighting off widespread Apollinarism. (Christ was God-man but he had sinless Logos in the place of the soul). Epiphanius posited that Christ himself was willing to be man and that he did not accept humanity from male semen.

The two afore-mentioned Symbols blatantly fail to include the final clause about faith in “one, universal and apostolic Church”, in baptism, resurrection and the eternal life. I find this rejection enigmatic for at least one reason: faith in the eternal life is strongly stressed in the manuscripts under consideration. The last Creed, C, clearly corresponds to the “Quicumque” symbol, known as Athanasian (450–500). The similarity is convincing after making a simple juxtaposition.

7. The Manuscript of Habte Sellasie I's Life, the Incipit of Which Constitutes the Expression under Consideration along with its Stylistic Qualities

It is an artful composition that characterises the whole *gadl* I have translated.¹⁸ It starts with a colourful¹⁹ illumination depicting 'the portrait' of Habta Sellasie with the caption: "The picture of *abuna* Habta Sellasie – Favourite over Favourites" and the very invocation to the Trinity and it ends with lamentations after his death and two poetic fragments, the former of which is a hymn in Mary's honour and the latter is the elaboration of the colophon including blessings, *inter alia*, for the translator and listeners. His life passed by fulfilling the duties of an abbot who managed a big congregation of monasteries and visited them in the hard times of the Muslim invasion. The *gadl*, which describes his history, hints right after the *incipit* under consideration at the actual subject matter which is the summary of his life. The degree of its metaphorisation is an introduction to a finesse-like and graceful esoteric style which the whole text is written in. "*I condescend with the help of the Holy Spirit to tell and widely disseminate the beauty of goodness and the gentle mission of the life of blessed and saint abuna ('our father') Habta Sellasie. He stood on the bronze of the Gospel to shepherd his sheep with a little green nut stick. He accepted his duties from the chancel of Garizan Azal, which did not collapse for it stood on the solid ties of rules. And he started to sail at the sea of wisdom. He was circling like the sun at the gate of the four elements, having sheathed the sword of the Trinity, to which he put those who rebelled against the law. And then he died...*" In all probability, he died in 1555 and the paleographic analysis indicates that the manuscript itself could have been written right after his death.

The concept of style is a relational one; it presupposes the existence of other texts. So once compared to them the very text demonstrates some qualities of an exceptional, lofty or low, degree of tension. The set of texts that will constitute the points of reference to me are the remaining texts of the Stephanites. The author's language of the *incipit* appears to be very emotive prose. This impression is evoked mostly by:

- an overload of epithets, such as: (about the monastery's enemy:) "*the foes of justice, degenerate little grafts, guzzling like wild pigs*", (about the abbot, Habta Sellasie's predecessor:) "*on his beautiful old age, anointed with the oil of humility*", (about Habta Sellasie:) "*his face shines like that of a bright angel*";
- structuring elaborate, artful metaphors, such as: "*(The monks) took care of him and raised him by feeding with milk from the Heavenly Bride's breasts, that is to say, with the Old and New (Testament)*", "*having seen this, he placed it on the board of his heart*", "*he became the well of wisdom and the source of knowledge*", "*his soul bloomed*";

¹⁸ "Żywot Habta Sellasie (z hagiograficznej literatury etiopskiej)", [transl. into Polish] Kamilla Termińska-Korzon, *Euhemer: Przegląd Religioznawczy*, 83, (= 1, 1972), pp. 57–61.

¹⁹ Unfortunately, I had only a black-and-white microfilm of the text.

- the use of parable expressions: “*suffering kindled his body and crushed his bones*”,
- descriptions of visions, i.e. “*There I witnessed hidden mysteries, while the angels were walking past me on my right and on the left of my God, and the prayers of all saints ascended to Him. There I was really with them and enjoyed the voices of their hosts. I heard the following words among the voices of praise: There will be no one who could humiliate the winner. And also, I shall give a secret gift to the one who wins. I shall give him the book of light which no one will learn but the one who will receive it.*”
- constructing allegoric images: for example, a description of four rivers flowing from Paradise like the first four Stephanite abbots, which is too long to quote,
- quoting (creating?) poetic prayers, e.g. “*Through the intercession of the Lady of us all, /Mary, our mother/ and mother of our God,/ who is the praise of our tribe/ and salvation from our captivity,/ who gave birth to the sanctuary of our rescue/ and in whom the pain of our vice dwells,/ because She is our hope./ May Her prayer and blessing stay with us./ Through the centuries and centuries of centuries. Amen.*”
- quoting, interpreting and alluding to the Bible and to the writings of the Church Fathers, i.e. “*When they saw that their dwellings were robbed and nothing was left, they became really sad and had neither anything to sell nor to buy. And the fathers told them: do not sadden but bear in mind what was said: even if our earthly homes, dwellings, should be destroyed, the dwellings in heaven shall not be destroyed.*” (2 Corinthians 5:1); “*Not only did it happen to us, but also to the prophets when their temple was taken over. They lived then and lamented: Jeremiah among the willow trees of Babylon, Baruch in Egypt and Abimelekh sleeping under Agrippa’s fig tree*”.²⁰ “*We have also God’s words: Give us today our daily bread.*” (Matthew 6:11; Luke 11:3), and also: “*Look at the birds in the sky. They do not sow, do not reap, yet their heavenly Father feeds them.*” (Matthew 6:26). “*And the prophet says: he has given food to those who fear him.*” (Psalms 111:5).²¹

All the stylistic means are present in the very manuscript with an incredible density, thus making up a sublime, elaborate and ornate narrative which requires the recognition of many linguistic layers.

²⁰ See *The Greek Apocalypse by Baruch*: in: *Die Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments*, hrsg. v. E. Kautzsch, t. II, Tübingen: Mohr, 1900, p. 448; and the Ethiopic *The Rest of the words of Baruch* (= *the Ethiopic Book of Baruch* or: *4 Baruch*) which is a translation of the Greek *Paralipomena Ieremiou*; the Eth. text in A. Dillmann, *Chrestomathia Aethiopica*, Leipzig 1866, pp. 1–15; repr. in: *Anthologia Aethiopica*, hrsg. E. Hamerschmidt, Hildesheim 1988;

²¹ I have put in parentheses the exact references of passages and allusions that I deciphered.

8. Religious Language

The incipit is written in a religious language. Philosophers, theologians, linguists²² see the necessity of defining the language of religion itself which aims at searching transcendence and finding it by imposing a different dimension on the empirically experienced subject and object reality. It is emphasised that the intersubjective comprehensibility of a religious text requires a specific value called commitment,²³ which is supported by faith in an authority and by a community spirit. There is a basic contradiction between a specific, referential language of daily communication and an infinite number of references of a religious language which expresses them by undermining trust in oneself, paying attention to one's own inadequacy, and necessary obscurity when one talks about the inexpressible. An important indication of this language is the amalgam of symbols, metaphors, parables, allegories and paradoxes, which demonstrate vast layers of interpretation beyond themselves, thus making it possible to come up with various interpretations, transformations, exegeses, commentaries, allusions and mentions. The study of the Trinity is a particularly good example for it is paradoxical and gives rise to paradoxes. One can observe tension between faith open to mystery and the human inclination to rationalization; between Augustian formula 'credo ut intellegam' and its mirror yet well-known paraphrase 'intelligo ut credam'.

In conclusion, I would like to share my reflection about the relations between *translandum* and *translans*. The specialists, who deal with this subject matter, underline the fact that the so-called faithful (ideal) type of translation does not exist. Likewise, they point out that full synonymy is impossible. And since it is impossible to translate the sense of a text written in an ethnic language into another one, an absolute equivalent interlingual translation is also impossible. Basically, this statement does not clash with practice. It merely exposes the fact that any translation is simultaneously an interpretation and, as such, enriches and impoverishes a translated text. Also, it covers and uncovers its various qualities, it cleanses it, in that it makes it (always relatively) transparent, and 'blurs' it by paying attention to the idiographism of a translated text and specific visions of the world.

The problem that cropped up to me, as a translator, in the incipit can be seen at first sight. The expression: "The Triple Saint" – *səllus qəddus* is translated even by the renowned Ethiopists as "The Saint Trinity" (*Gadla Ezra*, incipit). On the other hand, however, having considered the marvellous linguistic adroitness of the scribe, his liking for stylistic and rhetoric figures, I put trust in his intentions which are unknown to me. He wrote the *gadl* of his abbot by the name of what is translated as "The Trinity's Gift". Thereby, he employed the word 'Trinity' dozens of times. He could not have unwittingly chosen the expression that he actually used. The fact that seems awkward to some woman

²² Exhaustive bibliography in my paper: K. Ter mi ń s k a, 'Język religii i składnia semantyczna', *Prace Językoznawcze* (Katowice), 19, 1991. pp. 181–189.

²³ R. Tr i g, *Rozum a zaangażowanie*, Warszawa: PAX, 1989.

from a remote country living four hundred and fifty years later and having a slight and superficial knowledge of his language may not matter at all. Or was it perhaps the writer's goal from the start to introduce some uncertainty, an understatement in exactly this controversial area? As in many other cases, this reflection can be recapitulated with Wittgenstein's aphorism: "Is replacing a blurred image with a sharp one always beneficial? Is it not often so that it is just a blurred image that we need?"²⁴

It seems that in translation the most fascinating to a linguist are those inevitable and forced falsifications and "roughnesses" which may most profoundly characterise the phenomenon known as textuality.

Perhaps it will not be too conceited to assume that performing this kind of description – an expression formalized as incipit, which is significant within a special religious community whose actions are steered by this sort of texts by overcoming temporal and spatial distance, leads to the enriching fusion of all or at least those horizons I was able to reach.

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²⁴ L. Wittgenstein, *Dociekania filozoficzne*, Warszawa: PWN, 2000, § 71.

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