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From the Author

REMARKS

ON THE

MATS'HÁFA TOMÁR,

OR THE

BOOK OF THE LETTER:

AN ETHIOPIC MANUSCRIPT IN THE LIBRARY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF TÜBINGEN;

CONTAINING

AN ACCOUNT OF A LETTER WHICH IS SAID TO HAVE DESCENDED
FROM HEAVEN TO ST. ATHANASIUS.

BY

CHARLES T. BEKE, Esq., Ph. D., F.S.A., F.R.G.S.,

CORRESPONDING MEMBER OF THE GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY OF PARIS,
MEMBER OF THE SYRO-EGYPTIAN SOCIETY OF LONDON, AND
OF THE ORIENTAL SOCIETY OF GERMANY.

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[From the *British Magazine* for March, 1848.]

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REMARKS, &c.

THE first volume of the Journal of the Oriental Society of Germany* contains a very interesting description, given by Professor v. Ewald of Tübingen, of a large and valuable collection of Ethiopic manuscripts, procured in Abessinia by the Rev. Dr. Krapf,† and sent by him to Tübingen in 1844, where they were purchased for the University library of that town.

Among these manuscripts is one‡ bearing the title of *Mats'háfa Tomár*,§ that is to say, "The Book of the Letter." On account of the remarkable nature of this document, the learned commentator has translated it into German; and of his translation the following is an English version:—

"The Book of the Letter which descended from Heaven to Athanasius.

* "Zeitschrift der Deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft," vol. i. p. 7, *et seq.*

† Professor v. Ewald states (p. 7.) that Dr. Krapf obtained these manuscripts in Tigre, on his second brief visit to that province in 1843, after he had been refused admittance a second time into Shoa. This would, however, appear to be a mistake. For, in the year 1841, when I was in Shoa with Dr. Krapf, I was allowed by him to copy a list of 110 Ethiopic and Amharic manuscripts, of the first eighty-one of which he was then in possession, but the remaining twenty-nine had not yet been obtained by him. At No. 63 of this list—consequently among those possessed by Dr. Krapf in Shoa, in, or previously to the year 1841—is "*Mats'háfa Tomár*, a letter which Christ is said to have written:" that is to say, the manuscript in question.

In the Appendix to the third volume of Major Harris's "Highlands of Æthiopia" is given a "Catalogue of [110] extant MSS. in the Æthiopic and Amharic Tongues," which catalogue is identical with the list copied by me, except that, as Professor v. Ewald remarks (p. 6), it contains such a mass of orthographical errors, as to be intelligible to an adept alone. But no distinction is made in it between the works already acquired by Dr. Krapf, and those known to him only by name; nor is, indeed, any allusion made to the learned and worthy missionary in connexion with it.

After leaving Shoa, I was able to add to this list the names of a few other MSS.

‡ "Zeitschrift, &c.," p. 16.

§ "ጠዕር : vel ጠ-ጦር : طومار *Volumen, Epistola, Diploma, Tomus libri*."—Ludolf. "Lexic. Æthiop.," p. 552. *Tomár* is the word used in Abessinia at the present day in the ordinary heading of letters: e. g. "May this letter (*tomár*) come from A. B. to C. D.," &c.; which heading is written in Ethiopic, though, owing to the ignorance of the scribes, the body of the letter itself is generally written in Amharic. An example of this style of heading may be seen in the letter addressed by the King of Shoa to the government of Bombay, at Dr. Krapf's suggestion, a translation of which is inserted in the "Journals of the Rev. Messrs. Isenberg and Krapf," p. 250.

"On a Sunday, in the year 1056 of Alexander,* at Rome, this Letter came down from its former place: this Letter fell in the church of St. Peter and St. Paul, while 120 priests were therein with Athanasius, together with men, women, and children, 230 souls. While these were praying and imploring mercy, the brightness of the day was darkened over them, so that no man could see another's face. Thereupon the assistants of the high priest went out, and raising their eyes towards heaven, saw the Letter borne between heaven and earth. They went immediately to the high priest, and besought him to go out and see what there was above the sanctuary: but he commanded them to wait till they had partaken of the holy life-giving sacrifice.† Then they all went out with great wonder to behold this miracle. But the Letter still hovered over the sanctuary; and, as they were much afraid, the high priest ordered them not to go again out of the church. But the inhabitants of the city had heard a great disturbance in the church, and hastened thither; and they assembled there to the number of 10,700 souls, old men and youths, children, women, girls, virgins, and others, so that not one soul remained behind in the city, except such women as were not permitted to enter the church.‡ When these had all drawn near, they raised their voices to God that he would show them this miracle: the high priest and the other priests put on white garments to purify themselves from sin: the high priest then went out again in front of the sanctuary, and spread cloths on the ground, and the people prayed to God to show them this miracle. Then fell the Letter on the outspread cloths; and the high priest taking it up, entered into the sanctuary and spake thus to the congregation (the words were written on the face of the Letter):—'The holy ever-living God thus teaches us:—I sent to you a letter heretofore in the year 1042 of Alexander,§ and gave you my commandment; but ye did not receive it, and did not do according to it. Therefore, I send to you this Letter in the year 1056, in order that ye may repent and turn from your wickedness, that ye may not speak lies, nor repeat in church after the priests when they consecrate the sacrifice. Beware of lying, evil-speaking, and hatred. Moreover, observe my day, which I have sanctified, honoured and exalted above all others, namely, the blessed Sunday: also observe and honour the Wednesday and Friday; and keep the laws, that thereby ye may live. But the Sunday shall ye keep from the first hour of the day until the morning of the Monday. On it work not at all; neither buy nor sell, neither receive nor give; but be kind and do good to your poor and suffering brethren. Take

* A.D. 745.

† See Levit. chap. xii.

‡ The Lord's Supper.

§ A.D. 731.

care of the orphans and widows; do wrong to no man, and beware of sin: if not, I will send on you hail, locusts, death, judgement, and everything else of the same kind; I will root you out of the land, and will send wild beasts among you to devour you. I swear by my awful name and by my mighty arm, that I will not turn my face toward you, nor will I let you see any good. And did not the archangel pray to me and implore me on your behalf even to this day, that I would teach you, I would deal with you as wicked men do and wish to do. Therefore keep my commandments, and do no wrong to the orphans or to the distressed; drive them not away when they enter your doors and beseech you to gladden them with your superfluities. Resemble not the deaf adder.* I, God, gave to the children of Israel my Law and my Commandments on Mount Sinai; and so long as they kept the same, gave the tithe of their property, and performed what was seemly, I was their father and their mother, and they were my chosen people. But when they rejected my Law, I turned my face away from them, chose and raised you, clothed you with my baptism, and adorned you with the life-giving holy Trinity. But ye have despised my commandments and hearkened not to my voice. Therefore I now say unto you: If ye hear not my voice and keep not the Sunday, if ye despise the poor and the captives, I will send among you from every side heavy and great punishments; lions and wild beasts, which shall devour you with your lying and deceitful tongues. Know, that if ye keep not the holy Sunday, and do not what I have plainly commanded you; if ye show no mercy nor compassion to your neighbours and to the widows and orphans, and if ye honour not the priests, I will send down upon you the scourge of my wrath. And know, that whosoever leaves his wife and marries another, shall not see the kingdom [of heaven]. Know, that if ye keep not my commandment, and set it not before your eyes, and let it not enter into your hearts, I will send down upon you hunger and thirst and unspeakable terror. But if ye keep my holy Sunday, give alms, and do good to your neighbours, I will send down my blessing and my mercy upon you, and will preserve you from your enemies: if ye hear my commandment, I will save you from the fearful evil day, and your power shall continue. Verily, verily, I say unto you, whosoever gives alms to the poor, and does good to the priests on the holidays in the church, him will I, as it is promised in the holy Gospel, reward six thousand times in this life, and in the world to come I will write his name in the book of life. Whosoever takes usury, on him shall the tempest fall: whosoever takes vengeance

* Psalms, lviii. 4, 5.

on his brother among the children of baptism,* shall not partake of the holy sacrifice until he shall be reconciled to him: whosoever sues his brother before the emperor, is reprobate and accursed; his acts shall not be acknowledged, neither shall he be spoken to: so, also, every rich man who goes with evil intentions to the emperor, with whom, however, he shall find no remedy against sins. Hear therefore this my commandment, and keep my word: assemble together in the church on Sunday, with love and forgiveness one toward another; so that the Holy Ghost may overshadow you. And honour your priests, who offer the Lamb of God for your sins. If any one shall mock the priests, on him shall my rod fall, because they pray to me for you; and whosoever among you despises this my commandment, on him will I send heavy sickness and punishments, and he shall be entangled therein to his own damnation: sun and moon will I darken before you.'

"As soon as he had ended the words of this Letter, a voice was heard from heaven, saying—'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: keep ye the Sunday.' And immediately the church was filled with an exhalation, such as no mortal man had ever smelled before. And a second voice was heard, saying—'Blessed be He, the Lord Almighty. He is whosoever it pleases Him to be.' And the high priest heard the voice, and said:—'It is the voice of God, and He has sent His word over the whole face of the earth, to the east, and west, and south, and north. But I, sinner [that I am], do swear to you and say, by God who knows it with the holy Trinity, by the congregation of angels, cherubim and seraphim, and the blessed Peter and Paul, and by all good martyrs and holy teachers, that this Letter was not written by the hand of man, nor prepared by mortal deed; neither could any one have devised or written it; and that whosoever hears it and does not carry it with him into his city or into his country, to read before the people, shall be excommunicated. But whosoever believes in it, grace shall come upon him and upon his children and his possessions.'"

After this follow numerous similar adjurations and asseverations, which the learned translator has not considered it necessary to repeat. And further, he remarks that the threats and promises of all kinds which are reiterated, with little variation, throughout the Letter, have been abbreviated in his translation; but that the essential parts of the Letter, together with its style and character, have been correctly given.

In a subsequent communication from Professor v. Ewald, inserted in the same Journal,† reference is made to several similar letters in the Arabic language, which are extant in the libraries of the Vatican and the British Museum.

* *i. e.* Christians.

† "Zeitschrift, &c.," vol. i. p. 337.

Those in the Vatican are three, which are described by that accomplished scholar, Cardinal Mai, in his Catalogue of the manuscripts in that library.

The first* is an apocryphal letter or epistle from the Apostles Peter and Paul, to St. Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria, which is said to have descended to him from heaven on the 25th December, in the year 1057 of Alexander, or 746 of Christ, while he was celebrating divine service in the church dedicated to those saints; there being present 12,000 bishops, 700 priests, and 23,000 of the laity. It enjoins, with threats, *the observance of Sunday*, and the performance of penance. The manuscript itself was written A.D. 1426.

The second† is a letter of a similar character, (imperfect towards the end,) which is said to have fallen from heaven in the year 1352 of the Greeks, or 1042 of the Christian era. It contains various salutary precepts.

The last‡ is an ordinance *for the observance of Sunday*; and this, in like manner, is stated to have descended from heaven.

In the collection of oriental manuscripts in the British Museum, is a letter, in the Arabic language but in the Syriac character, professing to have descended from heaven. The following is a translation of the title of this letter, as given in the catalogue of those manuscripts:§—

“Further, &c., we write an account of a famous letter which was sent from heaven, and of the remarkable injunctions contained therein, respecting *the observance of the blessed Sunday*, and of the excellences of that day, which God Almighty adorned and distinguished above all other days on account of its great virtues; and He commanded and enjoined the faithful to observe that day, and to abstain on it from both buying and selling, and from the pursuit of gain, and from travelling; and He therefore directed and commanded the faithful to keep it from the ninth hour of the Sabbath [Saturday] until the dawn of the second day of the week [Monday]; and He commanded the faithful on this day to frequent the holy churches, and to pray, and to give alms liberally, and to have compassion on the poor, and the widows and orphans, and the needy. And this letter likewise enjoins the observance of the sixth and fourth days of the week [Friday and Wednesday]. God has regard for the salvation of the faithful through the excellence of these days, and the benefit of their blessings.”

The various precepts, both moral and religious, which these letters contain, as well as the strict injunctions for the veneration

* “Scriptorum Veterum nova Collectio, e Vaticanis codicibus edita,” tom. iv. (Romæ: 1831) p. 263.

† Ibid. p. 312.

‡ Ibid. p. 542.

§ “Catalogus Codicum manuscriptorum Orientalium Musei Britannici,” pars i. p. 110.



tion of the priests, were no doubt considered very useful, and even necessary, among the rude people for whose instruction these pretended revelations were intended. But all other precepts and injunctions, however strongly expressed, are evidently subordinate to the command, which, in the Ethiopic letter in particular, is so frequently reiterated, to honour and observe the Christian Sabbath—a command which is still more solemnly repeated by the alleged voice from heaven, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: *keep ye the Sunday.*”

Professor v. Ewald, in commenting on these letters, suggests* that they may possibly have been fabricated at *Rome* in the eighth century of our era, and thence introduced among the Christians of the Nestorian and Coptic churches. But I apprehend that such an hypothesis is not maintainable; and this for the following reasons:—

The Ethiopic letter, and one of the Arabic ones, enjoin the observance, not only of Sunday, but also of Wednesday and Friday. These days, called the stationary days, half-fasts, and fasts of the fourth and sixth days—by the Latins, *Feria quarta* and *sexta*, and by the Greeks, *Τετράς* and *Παρασκευή*—were observed as fasts by the whole Christian church previously to the time of Clemens Alexandrinus and Tertullian (A. D. 200); the reason given for their observance being, that on the former of those days the Jews conspired to betray our Lord, and on the latter day our Lord was crucified.† About the end of the third century, however, some of the western churches began to make *Saturday* a fast-day. At the Council of Eliberis or Elvira (circa A. D. 300) that day was ordered to be observed as a fast in the Spanish churches; and St. Augustin states that it was so kept in his time (circa A. D. 400) at *Rome*, and in some other of the Western and African churches.‡ At the present day the ordinary weekly days of abstinence observed by the Roman Catholics of Italy and Spain (though not by those of England) are Friday and Saturday—not Wednesday and Friday.

Had, then, the letters in question been written at *Rome*, at any time subsequent to the commencement of the fourth century, they would surely have enjoined the observance of the fast-days of the Church of Rome—namely, Friday and *Saturday*.

In the Eastern churches, on the contrary, the original fast-days of the primitive Christians continued to be, as they still are, recognised and observed. Consequently we are bound to regard these apocryphal letters as emanating from one of these latter churches. It may not be easy to determine the precise

* “*Zeitschrift, &c.*,” p. 338.

† Bingham, “*Origines Ecclesiasticæ*,” xxi. 3, 1.

‡ *Ibid.* xxi. 3, 6.



place of their origin; but when we consider the countries, churches, and languages, in which they are found to exist, the most reasonable conclusion is, that they were composed at Alexandria by the priests of the Coptic church.

With respect to the class of persons for whose behoof these pretended revelations from heaven were intended, the following remarks are offered for consideration.

In the first ages of Christianity, many of its professors, especially in the Eastern churches, were converts from the Israelitish religion,* who, notwithstanding their conversion, still continued to retain various forms and ceremonies of their previous faith. Among these converts and their descendants the Hebrew Sabbath appears to have been long and pertinaciously retained; and so generally, as to have rendered it necessary for the Council of Laodicea (between A. D. 314 and 372) to forbid the keeping of that day.

It can hardly be doubted that these fictitious letters from heaven were likewise directed to a people who observed the Hebrew Sabbath; only, seeing the much later date of these letters, it may be questioned whether their object was not the conversion of those who actually continued to profess the Israelitish faith, rather than the correction of what was considered to be an error among those who had already become Christians. However the case may be with respect to the Arabic letters, this certainly appears to be the more reasonable opinion as regards the Ethiopic one. And in adducing the following arguments in support of this opinion, I wish it to be understood that they are intended to apply to that letter alone.

Concurrently with the promulgation of the Gospel in the countries bordering on the Red Sea, and in all probability at a period long anterior to the coming of Christ, the Law of Moses was zealously preached in those countries, and many proselytes were made to the Hebrew faith. In Abessinia this was particularly the case. The deep root which that faith had taken there, and its great development throughout that country previously to the introduction of Christianity, are proved by the remarkable fact, that, in spite of all the efforts of the Christian priesthood, which has been constantly renovated from Egypt—aided too, no doubt, by such means as this alleged miraculous letter—the Mosaic Sabbath continues, even at the present day, to be observed by the larger portion of the Christian inhabitants just as strictly as Sunday itself is; † while, here and

* Some suggestions on the subject of these early Israelitish converts are offered in "Origines Biblicæ," vol. i. p. 260, *et seq.*

† This is especially the case in Gódjam, in the extreme south-west of Abessinia. I have been frequently reproved there by the scribes and priests for gathering herbs in my garden on the Sabbath, and have had to answer them (though to

there, over almost the entire country, are found the scattered remnants of a once numerous *Israelitish* people, who still retain the religion of their ancestors, though in an extremely debased form.

There is, however, no reason for imagining that these Israelites of Abessinia, who are known in that country by the name of *Faláshas*, are, as a people, the lineal descendants of any of the tribes of Israel. Their peculiar language, which they still retain, differs entirely from the Syro-Arabian class to which the Ethiopic and Amharic, as well as the Hebrew and Arabic, belong,* and is cognate with, and closely allied to, the existing dialects spoken by the A'gaus of Lasta and of A'gaumider;† a circumstance affording a strong argument in support of the opinion that all these people are descended from an aboriginal race, which has been forced to give way before the advances of a younger people from the opposite shores of the Red Sea—first in Tigre, and subsequently in the countries adjacent to Bab-el-Mandeb.‡

It is not till about the end of the tenth century of the Christian era that we possess any history of the Israelites of Abessinia as a separate people. And even then, the particulars respecting them, which are to be gathered from the annals of the country, as given by Bruce, must, in the earlier portions at least, be received with great caution.

I do not allude to the legend of the descent of the Imperial house of Ethiopia from Ménilek, the son of Solomon, King of Israel, by the Queen of Sheba;§ since that legend is made by the chroniclers to relate to the *Christian* rulers of the Christian

little purpose) with the text, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." (Mark, ii. 27.) It is not lawful there, either on Saturday or Sunday, to plough the ground, to reap or to *separate any growing thing from the earth*, to grind grain, or to draw water. In Tigre, the most north-easterly province of the empire—being that into which Christianity was first introduced, and which has always stood in more intimate connexion with Egypt and the Church of Alexandria—the Saturday is not so strictly kept. The people (of Tigre) do not plough on that day, nor do they reap grain or pulse; but they may reap flax, sesame, and other seeds. Some few, also, grind their grain. It is remarked by Mr. Isenberg also ("Abessinien und die evangelische Mission," vol. ii. p. 152) that the inhabitants of Tigre are more lax in the observance of the Levitical ordinances generally than those of the more southern portions of Abessinia.

* This class of languages is usually styled "Shemitic;" it should more properly be denominated "Hamitish." See "Origines Biblicæ," vol. i. p. 92, note; p. 226, *et seq.*

† See "A Statement of Facts relative to the Transactions between the Writer and the late British Political Mission to the Court of Shoa," (second edition,) p. 13, note; and "Transactions of the Philological Society," vol. ii. p. 89. There are various other tribes dispersed over different parts of the empire—the Kamáunts, Zaláns, Figéns, &c., of Western Abessinia, and the Abeláms and Tabibán ("Wisemen," plural of *Tabib*) of Shoa—all of whom may be regarded as the remains of the ancient inhabitants. Several of these tribes profess Christianity, but all have customs varying more or less from those of the mass of the population, and approaching more to Judaism.

‡ See "Archæologia," vol. xxxii. p. 49, note.

§ See Bruce, "Travels, &c.," (second edition,) vol. ii. p. 460, *et seq.*

Abessinians. Though even this legend, unfounded as it may be considered to be in its existing form, is not improbably based on a substratum of truth, as referring to the Israelitish origin—if not by blood, at least by proselytism—of the early emperors of the country. What I mean is, the history of the Israelites or Faláshas, as distinct from the Christians.

In the native annals it is recorded, that about the year 960 of our era, these Israelites gained the ascendancy over the Christians, when an usurper professing their faith ascended the throne, and founded a dynasty, which enjoyed the imperial dignity for about three centuries.* The princes of this intrusive dynasty subsequently adopted Christianity; and the last of them is said to have abdicated the throne in favour of a prince of the former royal house. Still the Israelitish portion of the population continued so numerous and powerful as to occasion much annoyance and trouble to the reigning emperors; and they were subjected, in consequence, to repeated defeats and much persecution.† In the end they became considerably weakened, reduced in number, and restricted principally to the mountainous and not easily accessible province of Sámien, where they continued to dwell, in tolerable order and subjection, under the rule of princes of their own blood and faith.‡ In the year 1594, however, they once more took up arms against the Emperor Sártsa Déngel, by whom they were defeated with great slaughter, and their king, Géshen, slain.§ Gideon, who succeeded his brother Géshen, having continued his opposition to the then reigning Emperor Súsneos (Socínios), a decree was issued by the latter, in the year 1617, for the extirpation of the Faláshas of Sámien and the districts adjacent.|| The massacre which ensued was very general, Gideon himself falling a victim.¶ The children of the slain were sold for slaves; while all the Faláshas in Démbea and the districts immediately in the Emperor's power, were commanded, under pain of death, to renounce their religion and be baptized. Many were baptized accordingly; and "they were all ordered to plough and harrow on the Sabbath-day."**

Since that period, the Faláshas, or Israelites of Abessinia, appear to have lost all territorial possessions,†† and to have sunk

* Bruce, vol. ii. p. 451, *et seq.*

† Ibid. vol. iii. pp. 55, *et seq.*, 95, 98, *et seq.*

‡ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 408.

§ Ibid. vol. iii. p. 250, *et seq.*

|| Ibid. vol. iii. p. 307, *et seq.*

¶ Ibid. But see vol. ii. p. 408, where the death of Gideon is placed in the year 1600.

** Ibid. vol. iii. p. 308.

†† Bruce says, however, (vol. ii. p. 409,) that even down to his time the Faláshas of Sámien were "suffered to enjoy their own government," and that "their king and queen were again called Gideon and Judith, when he was in Abessinia." I was

into insignificance. But distinct communities of them, dispersed over the country, are still to be met with, principally in the western and most remote portions of it.*

This summary of the history of the Faláshas may appear to have led us away from the more immediate subject of discussion; but it is not without intention. Forasmuch as, seeing the prevalence of the Hebrew religion in Abessinia, and the trouble which its professors occasioned to the dominant Christian inhabitants and their rulers, it is perfectly intelligible that the latter should have adopted every means, even if not always the fairest, for the purpose of subduing them, converting them, or in any way bringing them into control. Hence we may not unreasonably regard this apocryphal letter from heaven as having been prepared by the Christian priesthood of Abessinia—on a Coptic model, no doubt—with a view to the conversion of the Faláshas, by means less severe, though not more justifiable, than those employed by the temporal authorities. Indeed, the ingenious reference made in it to the giving of the Law to the Children of Israel on Mount Sinai, and its subsequent rejection by them, *whereupon the Abessinians became the chosen people of the Lord in their stead*, plainly shows that this pretended revelation was intended for the especial behoof of a grossly ignorant Israelitish people,† who still clung to the outward forms of their Law, however they might have lost its spirit, and who consequently were averse to adopt the weekly festival and fasts of the Christian church, not in lieu of, but merely in addition to, the Hebrew Sabbath. In further proof of the position thus advanced, it is to be observed that this letter does not, like the decree of the Council of Laodicea, abrogate the keeping of the Sabbath, but simply enjoins the observance of the Sunday; and its hearers would appear to have understood the injunction literally, and to have kept the latter day accordingly—without, however, giving up the observance of the former.

As regards the period when this letter was composed, or at all events promulgated in Abessinia, it may be remarked, that

informed that Dédjach (*i. e.* Duke) Ubie, the present *Christian* ruler of Sámien by descent, and of Tigre by conquest, is the lineal representative of the native princes of the former province.

* A visit made by me to a village of Faláshas, in A'gaumider, is described in the "Journal of the Royal Geographical Society," vol. xiv. p. 8, and in the "Jewish Chronicle," vol. iii. p. 83. Some of their customs, which are very remarkable, are identical with those of the ancient Samaritans, as cited by Dr. J. M. Jost, in the latter work, vol. iii. p. 73. They call themselves the children of Israel, and repudiate altogether the name of Jews.

† Dr. Samuel Gobat, the first Protestant missionary in Abessinia, and the present Bishop of Jerusalem, in speaking of the Faláshas, says: "I have done all I could to procure information concerning them; but have been able to ascertain one thing only; viz., that they are still more ignorant than the Christians."—"Journal of a Three Years' Residence in Abyssinia," (second edition,) p. 308.

it is of the essence of documents of this nature to pretend to a greater antiquity than they really possess; and as this letter professes to have been written in the year 1056 of the era of the Greeks—that is to say, 745 years after the birth of Christ—it is manifestly the composition of a later, and not improbably a much later, period. There is indeed one circumstance alluded to by Professor v. Ewald, which would, at first sight, lead to the conclusion that it is of a date several centuries subsequent to that which it bears. He states,* that mention is made in it of the celebrated Abessinian saint and legislator, Abúna† Tékla Háimanot; but he has unfortunately omitted to give a translation of the passage. The individual in question is generally understood to have flourished in the *thirteenth* century;‡ and, assuming this to be the case, the date of the composition of this document, in which he is named, must necessarily be brought down to the end of that century, at the earliest.

Abúna Tékla Háimanot performs a most important part in the political and ecclesiastical history of Abessinia, the existing constitution of both being considered to have been originated by his acts and counsels. The determination of the time when he really flourished is, therefore, a matter of importance. It may consequently be expedient to give here a brief outline of that portion of the received native history with which he is usually connected.

It has already been stated, that towards the end of the tenth century the throne of Ethiopia was seized by an Israelitish conqueror. By this usurper the whole of the Christian princes of the race of Solomon, four hundred in number, were slaughtered, with the exception of one infant, named Del Naad, who was conveyed by some faithful adherents into the province of Shoa.§ Here he and his descendants continued to reign till the year 1268; when Del Naad being represented by A'íkuna A'mlak, and the imperial throne occupied by Nákweto Laab, a Christian descendant of the usurping Israelitish house of Zágie, the following most remarkable event in the history of Abessinia occurred:—Tékla Háimanot, a native monk, who had been ordained Abúna or Bishop of Ethiopia by the Patriarch of Alexandria, obtained such an extraordinary influence over the reigning Emperor, Nákweto Laab, as to induce him to resign his crown in favour of the rightful heir, A'íkuna A'mlak. The treaty made between the two princes, through the mediation of Abúna Tékla Háimanot, consisted of the following four articles; namely—That

* "Zeitschrift, &c.," p. 21.

† i. e. "our Father."

‡ He is said to have died in the fourteenth year of the reign of the Emperor A'íkuna Amlak, A.D. 1282. See Bruce, vol. iii. p. 37.

§ Bruce, vol. ii. p. 452, *et seq.*

Nákweto Laab should abdicate in favour of Aíkuna Amlak; that a portion of the province of Lasta should be assigned to Nákweto Laab and his heirs in absolute sovereignty; that one third of the empire should be appropriated to the Abúna, for the use of the church (whence this event has become an epoch in Abessinian history under the name of the Era of Partition); and, lastly, that no native Abessinian should thenceforth be chosen Abúna, even though ordained at and sent from Alexandria, but that a *Coptic* priest should always enjoy the Episcopal See of Ethiopia.*

It is to be regretted, that a story so very circumstantially related should be open to the suspicion—and, indeed, more than the suspicion—of being a pure fiction. In the beginning of the year 1843, on my journey homewards from the province of Gódjam, in the south-west of Abessinia, I passed through Waag, the northern division of the ancient kingdom of Lasta. The inhabitants of this part of Abessinia, which is almost unknown to Europeans, are A'gaus, who (as has already been mentioned) are to be regarded as of the stock of the aborigines of the country; and among them I became acquainted with a tradition entirely at variance with that recorded in the Ethiopic chronicles, of which a summary has just been given. It is beside the present subject to enter into all the particulars of this A'gau tradition, some of which have already been recorded by me elsewhere.† It is sufficient to say that, according to this tradition, Abúna Tékla Háimanot had no share whatever in the partition of the empire; that a totally different origin and a much earlier date are attributed to that partition; that the princes of Southern Lasta (or Lasta Proper), who claim to be the lineal representatives of the Emperor Nákweto Laab, make no pretensions to be independent sovereigns, but are vassals of the empire, like the other hereditary provincial governors; and that, on the contrary, it is the *Waag-Shums*, or independent rulers of Waag, *who are not of the house of Zágie*, that enjoy, and have from time immemorial enjoyed, equal sovereign rights with the emperors of Abessinia‡—the power of both princes being, however, at the present day, merged in that of the hereditary Ras, or Vizier, of the family of Ras Gúksa, a Yédju Galla, whose grandson, Ras 'Ali, is now the virtual ruler of the empire of the alleged descendants of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.

Again, the particulars collected by the Portuguese Jesuits, who visited Abessinia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,

* Bruce, vol. ii. p. 458.

† See "Archæologia," vol. xxxii. p. 48, *note*; p. 55, *note*; and "Journal of the Royal Geographical Society," vol. xiv. p. 55.

‡ According to the native saying, "Waag-shum la wánbar; Negús la mánbar." *i. e.*, "The ruler of Waag to the *wánbar*, and the emperor to the *mánbar*:" the two words being synonymous, and signifying throne, or chair of state.



respecting this celebrated personage, Abúna Tékla Háimanot, are not less at variance with the Ethiopic chronicles than is the tradition of the A'gaus of Lasta. The historian Tellez, after giving* an account of the first promulgation of the Gospel in Abessinia, by Frumentius or Farmonátos, about A.D. 330, describes the introduction of Monachism into that country as having taken place towards the end of the fifth century, through the instrumentality of nine monks, who came from *Rūm*, and settled in Tigre. By "*Rūm*," as the learned Patriarch Affonso Mendes remarks,† is meant, not *Rome* or the Western Empire, but *Greece* or the Eastern Roman Empire, under the rule of the Byzantine emperors.‡

The chief of these nine Greek missionaries was Abba A'ragawi or Za Mikaél, who was a disciple of St. Pachomius in the Thebais; and it is not improbable that the statement that he and his companions came from *Rūm* or *Greece* is intended to mean, that they were members of the *Greek* or *Melchite* church of Constantinople, as opposed to that of the *Jacobites* or *Monophysites* of Alexandria. The companions of A'ragawi were Abba Pantaleón, Abba Gárima (also named Yis'hák), Abba Alef, Abba Zéhhma, Abba Atsfe, Abba Likános, Abba Imá'ta, and Abba Góbba (also named Oz),§ all of whom are saints of the Abessinian calendar.||

The mantle of St. Anthony—for the identical garment which he wore is said to have passed from him through St. Macarius and St. Pachomius to Abba A'ragawi—was transmitted by the latter to his successors in Abessinia, Abba Krístos-Bezana, Abba Máskal-Moa, and Abba Yohánnes, and lastly to Abba Tékla-Háimanot. Without adverting to the many wonderful stories which are related respecting this latter personage, who is the object of such extreme veneration among the ignorant Abessinians, as to be regarded by them as "the Creator," and as one of the persons of the Holy Trinity,¶ it is sufficient to state, that at the age of fifteen, he was admitted to deacon's orders by

* "Historia geral de Ethiopia a Alta," I. 28—30; and see Ludolf, "Hist. Æthiopic." III. 3, 2, *et seq.*

† Tellez, I. 31. Ludolf, "Comment. ad Hist. Æthiop." III. 18, 4.

‡ Down to the present day, *Greece* is styled **ሪሙ** : **ሪሙ** *Rūm*, both by the Abessinians and by the Arabs; while *Rome* itself is called by them **ሪሙያ** : **ሪሙያ** *Rómeya*, or *Romtya*.

§ The names of some of these missionaries, as here given, vary slightly from those recorded by Tellez and Ludolf. They have been corrected from the names written in the Ethiopic character in Mr. Isenberg's "Amharic Dictionary."

|| Abba A'ragawi, in particular, is renowned for his great sanctity and extraordinary miracles. He is said to have converted even the devil himself, whom he induced to wear the cowl for forty years.

¶ See "British Magazine" for December, 1847, vol. xxxii. p. 661, *note*.

Cyril, who was then the Abúna or Bishop of Ethiopia, in the time of Benjamin, the Jacobite Patriarch of Alexandria.* As that patriarch was the contemporary of Chosroes and Heraclius, we have the date of about A.D. 615 or 620 as the period when Tékla Háimanot was thus ordained. He will consequently have flourished towards the middle of the *seventh* century; and this is all we have to do with on the present occasion.

In the face of the great discrepancy which is thus found to exist between this account of Abúna Tékla Háimanot and that given of him in the Ethiopic chronicles, it might be difficult to decide which of the two should be preferred. The tradition of Lasta comes here to our aid, and by opposing the latter, throws its weight into the scale on the side of the former. And when we consider how completely and how immediately after the time of its founder, St. Anthony, Monachism pervaded the whole of Christendom, we obtain a strong additional argument in favour of the *earlier* date attributed by the Portuguese Jesuits to the monk Tékla Háimanot.†

Assuming, then, the fact to be, that this celebrated personage really flourished in the middle of the seventh century, we may account in the following manner for the anachronism of the Ethiopic chroniclers in describing him as the contemporary of the Emperor Aíkuna A'mlak, who lived as much as six centuries later. According to the view which I take of the history of that monarch,‡ he was a conqueror, of distinct origin from the earlier rulers of the country of the race of Ménilek, whose descendant, however, he pretended to be. It was, I conceive, in order to give him and his successors an apparently legitimate title to the throne, that the legend of the escape of Del Naad to Shoa was invented, together with all the concomitant circumstances recorded in the annals.§ And, seeing the extreme veneration in which Abúna Tékla Háimanot is held, the chroniclers of the new dynasty have associated him with the founder of that dynasty, as the most effectual means of silencing all scepticism as to the alleged fact of Aikuna Amlak's being the lineal representative of Ménilek, the son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.

Applying the same argument to the case of the pretended

* Tellez, I. 33. The Patriarch Affonso Mendes makes Tékla Háimanot to have been *born* about A.D. 615 or 620.

† A'ragawi and his companions were of the *Greek* church; Tékla Háimanot of that of Alexandria. If we suppose the latter to have introduced the doctrines of the *Jacobite* church into Abessinia, we shall at once perceive an intelligible reason for the regulation which he is said to have made, that in future the episcopal see of Ethiopia should invariably be filled by a *Coptic* priest from Alexandria, and not by a native Abessinian.

‡ "See *Archæologia*," *loc. cit.*

§ At the present day a legend of a similar character has been invented in Shoa, for the purpose of showing Sáhela Selássie, the reigning king of that country, to be a descendant of Ménilek. See "*Archæologia*," *loc. cit.*

miraculous Ethiopic letter which forms the principal subject of the present remarks, we may reasonably conclude that the name of this renowned saint was inserted in it in order to give it, in like manner, validity and currency in Abessinina. With regard to *dates*, the fabricators of this letter had no need to be very scrupulous. The ignorant people who could give credence to the alleged communication from Heaven, were not likely to have any misgivings as to the monstrous collocation, in the *eighth* century, of the Patriarch Athanasius and the Bishop Tékla Háimanot, the former of whom had then been dead nearly four hundred years,* and the latter most probably the greater part of a century.†

St. Mildred's Court, 24th January, 1848.

* He died A.D. 373.

† After all, it may perhaps be that these anachronisms arose from sheer ignorance. Several years ago, I detected a curious monkish blunder of a very similar character. The Register of the Priory of Aylingham, in Lincolnshire (in Bibl. Bodl.—Arch. Cant. F. 119, f. 147; referred to in Dugdale's "Monasticon Anglicanum," vol. ii. p. 804), contains an entry, written between the years 1281 and 1303, stating that a certain benefactor to that priory, which was founded between the years 1147 and 1167, was a follower of William the Conqueror, in 1066! Thus, within the short period of at most 156 (and possibly only 114) years, an error is committed of nearly another hundred years. Yet there is every reason for believing this error to have been unintentional on the part of the ignorant monks, with whom it originated. See "Collectanea Topographica et Genealogica," vol. iv. (1837) p. 337, *et seq.*

While correcting the foregoing pages for the press, I have seen the Catalogue of Ethiopic Manuscripts in the British Museum, ("Catal. Codicum MSS. Orient. Mus. Brit. pars. iii.") which has just been placed in the reading-room there. Of these manuscripts, Codex XLV. contains "The Life of St. Tékla Háimanot;" the Postscript to which affords a striking confirmation of the opinions expressed above on the subject of that celebrated personage. It is thus translated by Dr. A. Dillmann, the learned author of the Catalogue:—"Jubente Abbate Petro, qui in sede Patris nostri Técla Haimanoti collocutus, purpura justitiæ ejus amictus, sagitta amoris ejus ictus est, misimus hunc librum, ut in perpetuum maneret. Anno Judicii 6542, anno 1026 a nativitate Mariæ, a nativitate filii fabri 1042, a conversione Æthiopiæ 697, anno Martyrum Antiochiæ 754, fidei Nicænæ 714, cum epacte solis 3, lunæ 27, dies Johannis 6 est, Evangelistæ Matthæi anno, tempore functionis Patris nostri Petri, decimo officii ejus anno, scriptio hujus libri finita est, beneplacito Dei, cujus regno debetur gloria et honor," &c. On this Dr. Dillmann remarks:—"Hanc subscriptionem ab auctore primario derivandam esse, probabile est. Definitiones temporis, in illa allatæ, in annum Christi 1042 plurimæ coincidunt. Sed cum Chronica Æthiopica ubique Icon-Amlak regem per Tecla Haimanotum in thronum evectum esse tradant, quod circa annum Christi 1268 factum est, sequitur, auctorum Vitæ veram Tecla Haimanoti ætatem aut ignoravisse aut dissimulavisse." But, in reality, it is not to the writer of the life of this saint, but to the chroniclers themselves, that the blame attaches.—25th February, 1848.

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