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The Kebra Nagast and the Syriac Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius: A Miaphysite Eschatological Tradition

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Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.

Psalm 68:31

Introduction

The most important turning point of the research on the Ethiopian national epic, namely the *Kebra Nagast*, was the discovery regarding the connection between this central work and the Syriac *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, written at the end of the seventh century.[1] The *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* was an early Christian response to Islam and to the Arab conquest, which reflects the significant impact of the Arab invasion. The Apocalypse, which partly relies on Psalm 68:31, affirms that the Byzantine King, rather than the Ethiopian King, will assume the role of the eschatological savior of the Christendom. The *Pseudo-Methodius* was promptly translated into Greek, and from Greek into Latin, soon after its circulation in the Syriac Christian world at the end of the seventh century.[2] In this paper, I will analyze and describe the relation between the Ethiopian national epic and this Syriac Apocalypse, following Shahid's approach which dates the *Kebra Nagast* as a sixth century work, originally composed in Coptic. In addition, I will discuss the influence and status of the image of the "Ethiopian Negus" (the Ethiopic word for "King") for the Syriac Christianity of the seventh century, and his significance in the Miaphysite context, by analyzing the cumbersome intentions of the *Pseudo-Methodius'* author.

[1] Piovanelli, "The Apocryphal Legitimation of a 'Solomonic' Dynasty in the Kebra Nagast – A Reaprissal," *Aethiopica - International Journal of Ethiopian and Eritrean Studies*. 16(1), 2013,p. 13.
[2] Michael P. Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), p. 108.

The Development of Ethiopian Christianity During the Sixth **Century**

The development and expansion of Ethiopian Christianity was considerably heightened during the fifth century, almost a century after King Ezana's "legendary" conversion.[3] At that moment, the brand new Axumite Christian Church still had certain shortcomings. E.Cerrulli argues that Ezana's conversion to Christianity was extremely fragile, and his acceptance of the new religion was constantly challenged by the conservative faction within the Kingdom.[4] In addition, Taddesse Tamrat, one of the most prominent Ethiopian historians, argues that Greek was apparently the major language of the Church, due to the lack of books in Ethiopic language. Therefore, most of the clergy may have been of foreign origin.[5] However, the strengthening and establishment of the Axumite Church coincides with the advent of groups of Syrian missionaries, – the *Sadqan* and the *Nine Saints* – owing to the persecutions that followed the Council of Chalcedon,[6] who established several monasteries around Axum and the northern province of Tigray.[7] It is extremely likely that after the arrival of the Nine Saints, Ethiopia was won for the anti-Chalchedonian movement.[8] Their advent strengthened the close linkage of Ethiopia with the main anti-Chalcedonian streams in the 5th century, which witnessed the rise of the Miaphysite movement. As part of this movement, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church remained independent from the influence of the Roman Empire and Hellenistic thought. Notwithstanding this fact, the Hellenistic influence notoriously came through the Holy See of St. Mark, namely the Coptic Church.

Ephraim Isaac, the renowned Ethiopian scholar, highlights the work performed by these holy men, which includes the translation of the bible from the Greek into Ge'ez, including, for example, the books of Enoch and Jubilees. The Nine Saints also translated homilies of the church

[3] According to traditional historical sources, the introduction of Christianity as the official religion of the state was caused by the result of evangelical activity from outside the country in conjunction with the desire of the Axumite King, Ezana, around 350 C.E. Some years later, the Kingdom of Axum adopted Christianity as its official creed. See Ephraim Isaac, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Tawahido Church* (New Jersey, The Red Sea Press, 2013), pp. 18-21; Sergew Hable Selassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270* (Addis Ababa: Haile Selassie I University Press, 1972), pp. 89-121; Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia: 1270-1527* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 21-25.
[4] Enrico Cerulli, *Storia della Letteratura Etiopica* (Milano: Nuova Accademia Editrice, 1961), pp. 20-21.
[5] Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia*, p. 23.
[6] Cerulli, *Storia Della Letteratura Etiopica*, pp. 23-24.
[7] Isaac, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Tawahido Church*, p. 21.
[8] Aloys Grillmeier and Theresia Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition: Volume II* (London: Mowbray, 1996), p. 303.

fathers and dogmatic treatises from Syriac into Ge'ez. As regards the monastic movement, E. Isaac argues that 'Headed by Abba Za-Mikael Aregawi Manfasawi, a disciple of the Coptic abbot Pachomius, the monks founded monasteries throughout Ethiopia. […] these monks and other saints flocked into Ethiopia in the fifth and sixth century, contributing to the monastic tradition, which is still strong in the Ethiopian Church'[9] The faithful and devout work of these holy men, brought the Church into the interior of the country, facilitating the teaching of the Christian religion among the local people, serving as permanent centers of Christian learning. In this regard, Cosmas Indicopleustes, the sixth century Egyptian monk, explicitly attests that with the onset of the century, "there is no limit to the number of churches with bishops and very large communities of Christian people, as well as many martyrs, and monks also living as hermits [that can be seen in] Ethiopia and Axum, and in all the country about it."[10]

Following the successful mission of the Nine Saints, Aloys Grillmeier suggests that "the Axumites were already so strong as Christians that they could appear as the powerful protector of Christianity in the southern lands of the opposite side of the Red Sea and were able to assert themselves for some time."[11] In this context, it is crucial to proceed with the analysis of the "apocalyptic" role given to the Ethiopian Negus within the *Kebra Nagast,* the Ethiopian national epic and the most important literary expression of the Ethiopian Christianity.

Dating the *Kebra Nagast*

The *Kebra Nagast* or *The Glory of the Kings* is an essential and indispensable book for understanding the Ethiopian Christian tradition. According to the testimony of Sir Ernest Wallis Budge, King John of Ethiopia wrote to Lord Granville in 1872: "There is a book called "Kivera Negust" which contains the Law of the whole of Ethiopia, and the names of the Shums [i.e. Chiefs], and Churches, and Provinces are in this book. I pray you find out who got this book and send it to me, for in my country my people will not obey my orders without it."[12] In addition, the Spanish Jesuit missionary, Pedro Paez, described this book as a "very old book that is kept in the

[9] Ephraim Isaac, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Tawahido Church*, p. 21.
[10] Cosmas Indicopleustes, *The Christian Topography of Cosmas, an Egyptian Monk* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 120.
[11] Grillmeier and Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, pp. 303-304.
[12] Ernest Wallis Budge, *The Queen of Sheba and Her Only Son Menyelek: Kebra Nagast* (Ontario: Ethiopian Series Cambridge Publications, 2000), p. vii.

Church at Axum…" in order to reveal the myth of origin of the Ethiopian Solomonic Dynasty.[13] Such was – and still is – the fame and the importance of this book, not only for the kings, but also for the Ethiopian people.

This work consists of a great compilation of several legends and traditions, some of them historical and some of an exclusively folkloristic character, influenced by the Old Testament and Rabbinic writings but also by Egyptian, Arabian, Syrian and Ethiopian sources.[14] The literary reflection of the Jewish penetration to be found in the *Kebra Nagast* can be explicitly compared with the Qur'an, as John Pawlikowski proposes, by pointing out "the Semitic potpourri that characterizes the Qur'an, with its numerous Hebraic, Aramaic-Syriac and Ethiopic loan words, often in hybrid disguises, suggests that a complex process of religious syncretism was at work."[15] We can summarize the fundamental pillars upon which the *Kebra Nagast* was written in the following manner: 1. the kings of Ethiopia were descended from King Salomon of Israel and therefore from the House of David. 2. The Ark of the Covenant was taken by the son of the Queen of Sheba and King Salomon, i.e. Menelik I, and brought from Jerusalem to Axum. 3. The God of Israel transferred his house from Jerusalem to Axum, then the ecclesiastical and political capital of Ethiopia.[16] Therefore, it can thus be stated that the *Kebra Nagast* is not only a literary work, but is the core of Ethiopian national and religious feelings and expressions and probably the most genuine expression of Ethiopian Christianity.[17]

Apparently, there is a broad consensus among the scholars on who was in charge of the compilation and translation of the *Kebra Nagast*, as well as on the date of the *Kebra Nagast*'s composition.[18] The author of the work is supposed to be Yeshak from Axum, a passionate and patriotic ecclesiastic who compiled this work between 1314 and 1322, during the first years of Amda Seyon reign, namely *Pillar of Sion*,[19] who came into power after the non-solomonic

[13] Isabel Boavida, Hervé Pennec & Manuel Joao Ramos, *Pedro Paez's History of Ethiopia: Vol. I & II* (London: Ashgate, 2011), p. 83.
[14] Budge, *Kebra Nagast* p. viii.
[15] John T. Pawlikowski, "The Judaic Spirit of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church: A Case Study in Religion Acculturation," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 4(3), 1971, p. 185.
[16] Budge, *Kebra Nagast*, p. vi.
[17] Edward Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians: An Introduction to Country and People* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 144.
[18] Cerulli, *Storia Della Letteratura Etiopica*, pp. 45, 46; Isaac, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Tawahido Church*, pp. 244, 245.
[19] George W. B. Huntingford, *The Glorious Victories of Amda Sion: King of Ethiopia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 5.

Zagwe rule. Yeshak of Axum supported the kingdom of the Endarta region – South eastern Tigray –. The governor of this region, Yakiba Egzí, attempted to rebel against Emperor Amda Seyon. This ruler is regarded by E. Ullendorff, as 'one of the most outstanding Ethiopian kings of any age and a singular figure dominating the horn of Africa in the fourteenth century.'[20] Piovanelli admits that the powerful governor of the Endarta region was probably an extremely ambitious ruler,[21] but such cynical considerations regarding the volatile political situation should not prevent us from recognizing the basic fact expressed by D. Hubard: 'The *Kebra Nagast* was written to justify the claims of the so-called Solomonic dynasty founded by Yekunno Amlak over against those of the Zagwe family who had held sway for well over a century.'[22] This fact is supposedly supported by the *Kebra Nagast* itself, according to the following statement: 'Those who reign, not being Israelites, are transgressors of the Law.'[23] In any case, there is no doubt that the *Kebra Nagast* played a central role in the establishment of a new religious, social and political order for Ethiopia during this turbulent period of history.[24]

However, contrary to what most scholars argue, Irfan Shahid highlights the value of the last chapter of the *Kebra Nagast*, "when the work starts to deal with contemporary or recent events in the sixth century, that mythopoesis recedes into the background and historiography of some sort takes over."[25] The Nazarene Scholar has strongly argued that the *Kebra Nagast* was most probably edited during the sixth century, and not during the fourteenth century, as claimed earlier. In this regard, the last chapter of the Ethiopian national epic reads as follows:

> And the King of Rome, and the King of Ethiopia, and the Archbishop of Alexandria – now the men of Rome were orthodox – were informed that they were to destroy them [the Jews who had instituted persecutions in Najran and Armenia, respectively territories of Ethiopia and Rome]. And they were to rise up

[20] Edward Ullendorff, "The Glorious Victories of Amda Seyon, King of Ethiopia," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 29(3), 1966, p. 600.
[21] Piovanelli, "The Apocryphal Legitimation of a 'Solomonic' Dynasty in the *Kebra Nagast*," p. 9.
[22] David A. Hubbard, *The Literary Sources of the Kebra Nagast: Another Look*, Ph.D Thesis, (St Andrews: St. Andrews University, 1956), Available online at *http://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/handle/10023/544*, p.360.
[23] Budge, *Kebra Nagast*, p. 199.
[24] Piovanelli, "The Apocryphal Legitimation of a 'Solomonic' Dynasty in the *Kebra Nagast*," pp. 20-21.
[25] Irfan Shahid, "The Kebra Nagast in the Light of Recent Research," *Le Museón*, 89, 1976, p. 137.

> to fight, to make war upon the enemies of God, the Jews, and to destroy them, the King of Rome 'Enya, and the King of Ethiopia Pinhas; and they were to lay waste their lands, and to build churches there, and they were to cut to pieces Jews at the end of this Cycle in twelve cycles of the moon. Then the kingdom of the Jews shall be made an end of and the Kingdom of Christ shall be constituted until the advent of the False Messiah. And those two kings, Justinus the King of Rome and Kaleb the King of Ethiopia, met together in Jerusalem […] and they were to divide between them the earth from the half of Jerusalem […] They were to be mingled with David and Solomon their fathers. The one whom in faith they chose by lot to be named from the Kings of Rome was to be called the "King of Ethiopia", and the King of Rome likewise was to bear the name of "King of Ethiopia…"[26]

The historical reason behind this eschatological description must be Kaleb's successful intervention in Narjan, in order to suppress anti-Christian revolts, as a result of a coalition with the patriarch of Alexandria and the Emperor Justin in order to make war against King Yusuf's army. We cannot ignore the fact that the sixth century was an exceptional period in the history of eastern Christianity. One of the most striking events during this period was the religious war that confronted the Christian Negus of Aksum, namely Kaleb, with the Jewish Himyar King, Yusuf. This confrontation between Judaism and Christianity as two state religions was unprecedented in the history of the Near East. It is important to mention that, as noted by Shahid: "The struggle for Arabia between Christianity and Judaism before the rise of Islam came to a climax in the sixth century, the first quarter of which witnessed two persecutions of Christians in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula."[27] Both persecutions called for an Ethiopian intervention, but the latter was the more significant of the two, due to its unique consequences: the military intervention led by the Ethiopian Negus culminated in the decline and fall of the Jewish Kingdom of Himyar and the subsequent spread of Christianity in the Arabian Peninsula. In addition, as claimed by Steven Kaplan, the Negus Kaleb was an active warrior defending his co-religionists both at home and abroad. In fact, the Axumite Emperor gained fame due to his major role in restoring the

[26] Budge, *Kebra Nagast*, pp. 225-226.
[27] Irfan Shahid, *The Martyrs of Najran: New Documents* (Wetteren: Imprimerie Cultura, 1971), p. 7.

Ethiopian Kingdom to its ancient limits as they were established by Menelik.[28] Particular emphasis must be given to the role played by Kaleb, who is, in fact, one of only two Ethiopian kings with a central part within the *Kebra Nagast.* [29] The role given to the king of Rome [or Byzantium], will be discussed in more detail below.

Moreover, the *Kebra Nagast* also includes a colophon at the end which attests that it had been translated from an Arabic version which was originally translated from Coptic. The editor of this work indicates in the Colophon the following:

> "In the Arabic text it is said: "We have turned [this book] into Arabic from a Coptic manuscript [belonging to] the throne of Mark the Evangelist, the teacher, the Father of us all. We have translated it in the four hundred and ninth year of mercy in the country of Ethiopia, in the days of Gabra Maskal the king, who is called Lalibala, in the days of Abbâ George, the good bishop."[30]

This passage must be seen and analyzed in a wider historical context, because it is deeply linked with a non-Solomonic dynasty that replaced the traditional Solomonic one. When the Axumite Empire started to decline by the twelfth century, mainly due to the constant threats and invasions of the Muslims, Ethiopia's cultural and religious development began to change notoriously.[31] This turbulent period was characterized by a strong Muslim proselytism around southern Ethiopia, whilst in the north this era was marked by the revival of a new Christian dynasty: the Zagwe.[32] The circumstances of the advent to power of the Zagwe Dynasty are far from clear. In this regard, Sergew Hable Selassie states that the chroniclers, who recorded this foggy period in Ethiopian mediaeval history, usually summed up the Zagwe rule as follows: "The Kingdom was given to the people who did not belong to the Tribe of Israel."[33] The Zagwe Dynasty, defined as usurpers according to orthodox tradition – taking into account that they were not of the race of

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[28] Steven Kaplan, *The Monastic Holy Man and the Christianization of Early Solomonic Ethiopia* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1984), p. 17.
[29] The first king with a significant position within the KN is Menelik, the first king of Ethiopia and the son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. See Ralph Lee, "The Conversion of King Caleb and the Religious and Political Dynamics of Sixth Century Ethiopia and Southern Arabia," in P. Sarris, M. Del Santo and P. Booth (eds.), *An Age of Saints?: Power, Conflict, and Dissent in Early Medieval Christianity*, (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 81-82.
[30] Budge, *Kebra Nagast,* p. 228.
[31] Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians,* p. 58.
[32] Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia,* p.53.
[33] Hable Selassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History*, p. 241.

King Solomon[34] – proved to be defenders of the Christian faith, building churches and monasteries, and encouraging missionary activities among tribes not yet converted to Christianity.[35]

The information given by the colophon, regarding the various stages through which the *Kebra Nagast* passed – namely, Coptic, Arabic and Ge'ez – allows us to consider, following Shahid's approach, that the date of composition of the work can be dated to the sixth or seventh century. According to Shahid, "the three stages which the *Kebra Nagast* passed […] are perfectly consonant with the history of these three languages in the Valley of the Nile, as media of literary and cultural expression…"[36] In this regard, the chances that the *Kebra Nagast* was originally written in Coptic are high, due to the importance of Coptic language in the Valley of the Nile during the Axumite period. Additionally, Coptic was the more developed language of expression for the composition of this kind of sophisticated work.[37] The question that arises, in this respect, is why the Ethiopian national epic was composed by a Copt, or in Coptic. The answer is simple: Miaphysitism. With the objective of better understanding of this argument, it is necessary to begin analyzing the relation between the last chapter of the *Kebra Nagast* and the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius.* The correspondence between these two works will reveal, on the one hand, a significant material for the research on the *Kebra Nagast* and, on the other hand, a broader understanding of the Syriac Miaphysite movement during the seventh century.

Pseudo-Methodius

The last chapter of the *Kebra Nagast* can be read and interpreted as an apocalyptic scene, which have a significant parallel in west Syrian apocalyptic of the seventh century. The most significant turning point of the research on the Ethiopian national epic was, as suggested by Piovanelli, the discovery regarding the link between the *Kebra Nagast* and the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius,* written at the end of the seventh century.[38] It was quickly translated into Greek, and from Greek into Latin, soon after its circulation in the Syriac Christian world.[39] The author remains unknown, but it was erroneously attributed to the fourth century martyr and Bishop

[34] Ibid.
[35] Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians,* p. 64.
[36] Shahid, "The Kebra Nagast in the Light of Recent Research," p. 142.
[37] *Ibid,* p. 145.
[38] Piovanelli, "The Apocryphal Legitimation of a 'Solomonic' Dynasty in the *Kebra Nagast,*" p. 13.
[39] Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims,* p. 108.

Methodius. The apocalyptic text describes Methodius' vision in which he divides the history of the world into seven different stages. The objective of such significant writing, which was strongly inspired by the Book of Daniel, was to place the Muslim offensive against the Byzantine successors of the Roman Empire. The framework used for the description of this doomsday scenario, was Daniel's eschatological map of the four world empires.[40] During the seventh century, Michael Penn suggests, "there was a widespread belief that the fourth and last of Daniel's kingdoms was that of the Greco-Romans, an amalgamation of the heirs of Alexander the Great, Constantine, and Jovian."[41] Allegedly, this idealized Christian emperor would bring unity and salvation to all Christianity.

Furthermore, it can be suggested that the *Pseudo-Methodius* it is a Miaphysite work, rather than a Chalcedonian one. The apocalypse's preamble adopts Mount Sinkar as the location where Methodius received the apocalyptic revelation.[42] Most commentators and researchers had argued that the author most probably wrote from a region not far away from Sinjar, a place which is relatively close to Nisibis. This area, traditionally part of the Sasanian Empire, did not have a considerable Chalcedonian presence, and was considered to be a Miaphysite stronghold, at least during the seventh century.[43] In addition, the *Pseudo-Methodius* also confers to Ethiopia a prominent place in the great events of the last days, which is based on *Psalm 68:31.* M. Penn notes that "unlike the Hebrew or Greek versions, the Syriac Psalm 68:31 speaks of Kush (Ethiopia) handing power over to God. Although of little interest to Chalcedonian readers, this verse was of import to a Syriac Myaphysite audience because Ethiopia also supported Miaphysitism."[44] According to the *Pseudo-Methodius,* the Christians who had assumed that the allusion in the Psalms concerns to the role of the King of Ethiopia were mistaken.[45] The interpretation to be found in *Pseudo-Methodius* suggests, regarding *Psalms 68:31,* that: "For a son of Kushyat, the daughter of Pil, the king of the Kushites, is the one who "will hand power over to God." And as soon as the holy cross is raised to heaven, the king of the Greeks will hand

[40] Piovanelli, "The Apocryphal Legitimation of a 'Solomonic' Dynasty in the *Kebra Nagast*," p. 13.
[41] Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims,* p. 113.
[42] *Ibid.*
[43] *Ibid.*
[44] *Ibid.*
[45] Glen W. Bowersock, "Helena's Bridle, Ethiopian Christianity, and Syriac Apocalyptic," in J. Baun, A. Cameron, M Edwards and M. Vincent (eds.), *Studia Patristica: Papers presented at the Fifteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies* (Louvain: Peeters Publishers, 2010), p. 216.

his soul over to his creator."[46] This extremely relevant excerpt, in contrast to the traditional exegesis of Psalm 68:31, states that the king of the Greeks is descended from the Ethiopia Princess – Kushyat – which happens to be the mother of Alexander the Great. In this way, the last king of the Greeks is considered to be both from the lineage of Alexander, and a descendant of the Ethiopian king. The thinking behind this interpretation it is likely to be related to the Arab Conquests of the seventh century, which "had made unrealistic the Miaphysite view of the Negus as the protector and deliverer of Christendom, a role now more appropriate to the Byzantine Basileus."[47] In this respect, it is relevant to emphasize the author's reference to his colleagues of the clergy. The translation provided by P.J Alexander, from the Syriac text, highlights the fact that "…many brethren of the clergy supposed that the blessed David spoke this word [Psalm 68:31] concerning the kingdom of the Cushites. And those who thought so erred."[48] This thesis within the *Pseudo Methodius* seems to be a polemic against the author's colleagues, who thought and believed that the Negus of Ethiopia will fulfill the Davidic prophecy from Psalm 68:31. The close connection between Syriac Christianity and the Ethiopian Church, as noted above, has played a major role in the Christianization process of Ethiopia. P.J Alexander argues that the military intervention of Ethiopia in Southern Arabia during the sixth century was mitigated by the Persian conquest of Yemen in 570, putting an end to Ethiopia's relevance as a military power.[49] However, the author's "brethren of the clergy" were apparently interested in finding a "biblical guarantee for the permanence of the Ethiopian kingdom"[50] which was based on the fact that Ethiopia was, at that time, the only kingdom where Miaphysitism was the official religion and creed. The exaltation and glorification of the only Miaphysite king, namely the Ethiopian Negus, strengthen the hypothesis that assures that both the author of the *Pseudo-Methodius*, as well as his "brethren of the clergy", were Miaphysite, and that the role given to the Ethiopian Negus in the context of Psalm 68:31 was still a source of discord among within Syriac Christianity.

[46] Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims*, p. 127.
[47] Shahid, "The Kebra Nagast in the Light of Recent Research," p. 175.
[48] Despite its significance, this feature was omitted from Penn's translation of the Apocalypse. For a translation from the Syriac text, see Paul J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), p. 168.
[49] Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, p. 29.
[50] *Ibid.*

Additionally, Shahid indicates that the author of the Apocalypse was not trying to answer to the Miaphysite perspective regarding the Ethiopian profile of the *Pseudo-Methodius*, but he "was counterblasting a political theory concerning the Ethiopian monarchy that had been formulated and had received literary expression such as the one to be found in the *Kebra Nagast*."[51] The political theory regarded by Shahid, includes four features: Firstly, Psalm 68:31 is naturally central for the editor of the *Kebra Nagast*, since it is the main claim of the Ethiopian kingdom to the defense and protection of Christianity; secondly, the Ethiopian Negus has a more important role than that of the Byzantine King; in the third place, the Ethiopian King is Solomon's direct successor, while the Byzantine King is Solomon's youngest son;[52] and lastly, Ethiopia will persist till the end of the days, while Byzantium will fall.[53] This literary dialogue between the two works around the roles of the Ethiopian and Byzantine Kingdoms and rulers seems to indicate that the *Pseudo-Methodius* was a response to another work that had proposed an opposite approach. By embracing Shahid's proposal of a sixth century *Kebra Nagast*, it would seem reasonable to affirm that the author of the *Pseudo-Methodius* was aware of the existence of an early version of the *Kebra Nagast*. This issue brings to the fore the literary relation between these two works, which will now be analyzed.

Literary Relation

The literary relation between the two works was first noticed by Shahid, who proposed that the author of the *Pseudo Methodius* relied on the Coptic manuscript of the *Kebra Nagast* – which is quoted in its colophon – in order to compose the Syrian Apocalypse.[54] Conversely, Francisco Javier Martinez had suggested that "the whole colophon in the *Kebra Nagast*, with the data about the successive translations from Coptic to Arabic and from Arabic to Ethiopic is most probably a literary device to lend authority to the final edition of the work in the fourteenth century."[55]

[51] Shahid, "The Kebra Nagast in the Light of Recent Research," p. 175.
[52] Budge, *Kebra Nagast*, p. 123.
[53] Shahid, "The Kebra Nagast in the Light of Recent Research," p. 175.
[54] *Ibid*, p. 174.
[55] Francisco J. Martinez, "The King of Rum and the King of Ethiopia in Medieval Apocalyptic Texts from Egypt," in W. Godlewski (ed.), *Coptic Studies: Acts of the Third International Congress of Coptic Studies*, (Warsaw, 1990), p. 257.

Martinez also noted that the Ethiopian compiler of the *Kebra Nagast* seemed to react to the doomsday scenario elaborated by the author of the *Pseudo Methodius.*[56]

There is, however, one important feature within the last chapter of the *Kebra Nagast* which seems to be essential for the validity of Shahid's approach. The last chapter of the Ethiopian national epic, and Chapter 19 mentions a character known as Domitius of Rome, who states that he himself "have found in the Church of [Saint] Sophia among the books and the royal treasures a manuscript [which stated] that the whole kingdom of the world [belonged] to the Emperor of Rom and the Emperor of Ethiopia."[57] Piovanelli does not hesitate to affirm that the name Domitius is essentially the result of a deformation of Methodius. Furthermore, Martinez proposes a "hypothetical solution" for this mysterious character, taking as an example the *Book of the Bee* of Salomon Bishop of Basra where Methodius is regarded as the "Bishop of Rome."[58] If this fundamental assumption is correct, this enigmatic character may be explained. But this fact, albeit essential, may indicate two opposing approaches. On the one hand, we may argue that the final composition of the *Kebra Nagast* cannot be dated before the influence of *Pseudo-Methodius* reached Ethiopia. On the other hand, and following Shahid's approach, we can conclude that the author of the *Pseudo-Methodius* had before him the Coptic version of the *Kebra Nagast* in order to elaborate his Apocalypse.[59] In opposition to this conclusion, Martinez criticizes Shahid's hypothesis, by minimizing the importance of the rediscovery of the *Pseudo-Methodius,* by P.J Alexander. The Egyptian apocalyptic, intensely analyzed by Martinez, led him to conclude that a dependence between the *Kebra Nagast* and the *Pseudo-Methodius,* is highly unlikely.[60] Martinez shows that the ideas endorsed in the *Pseudo-Methodius* were already common in Abbasid and Fatimid Egypt, where the Copts had designated the Negus of Ethiopia as the "eschatological champion of their orthodox – Miaphysite – faith."[61]

Conclusion

In this paper, I have analyzed and discussed the *Kebra Nagast* as a work that can be read as the mirror story of the seventh century Syriac *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius.* By adopting

[56] Martinez, "The King of Rum and the King of Ethiopia," pp. 257-258.
[57] Budge, *Kebra Nagast,* p. 16.
[58] Budge, *The Book of the Bee* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), p. 140.
[59] Shahid, "The Kebra Nagast in the Light of Recent Research," p. 175.
[60] Francisco Javier Martinez, "The King of Rum and the King of Ethiopia," p. 257.
[61] Piovanelli, "The Apocryphal Legitimation of a 'Solomonic' Dynasty in the *Kebra Nagast,*" p. 15.

Shahid's approach, who has notably argued that the *Kebra Nagast* was most probably composed during the sixth century, we are able to bestow a major role to *Kebra Nagast'* effect on the author of the Syriac Apocalypse. The significance of Psalm 68:31 and the function of the Ethiopian Negus as an eschatological figure within the *Pseudo-Methodius* have revealed some central aspects concerning some Miaphysite conceptions. By highlighting some of the features which are included in the *Kebra Nagast,* I have provided some relevant suggestions for the study of Syriac Christianity after the emergence of Islam. The quest for an eschatological champion of the Miaphysite faith, a quest that became extremely important after the Arab invasions during the seventh century, brought back to Ethiopia, and to the figure of the Ethiopian King, the "Glory" that was so highlighted and celebrated by the author of the Ethiopian national epic, the renowned "Glory of the Kings."

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