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**Archbishop Methodios**  
of Thyateira and Great Britain

*General Editor*

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## ETHIOPIAN LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY

By

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It was in June 1962 as I was then writing the manuscript of my book, *The Philosophy of Man*, a vast inquiry on the notion of man throughout history, from the Upanishands of ancient India to logical positivism in our days, that I came across in the archives of the Addis Ababa National Library a rather big manuscript covered with wooden boards whose title startled me: *The Book of the Philosophers!* It was a fine manuscript written in black ink, although a few words were written in red ink, of one hundred and eight pages. It was written, not in modern Amharic, but in the ancient Semitic language called Geez which survives mostly in the liturgy of the Ethiopian Church. All I knew through a rapid leafing of the manuscript was that Ethiopia was in possession of a philosophical written text, which went back to the time when Geez was the spoken language of the country. I could identify it because there stood out in red ink, the expression: "It has been said", or "A wise man said." It was therefore a book of *Sententiae*, or "Sayings" attributed to names I could easily identify: Plato, Socrates, Hippocrates, Aristotle, Solomon...

At that time I did not suspect how accurate, profound and comprehensive was my first intuition, but now, after years of research on the written philosophy and the sapiential literature of Ethiopia and even of the whole continent of Africa, I know that man occupies the centre of all concerns and views: of the archetypal images, the sapiential type, the thought patterns, the world view, the social models, the ethical problems.

I first made this observation as I was trying to delineate the profile of images used in the sapiential and philosophical works of Ethiopia. For the image lays deeper than the clear idea. Depth psychology has accustomed us to penetrate into the symbols wrapped up by the unconscious. Now these symbols do not emerge as a jungle in which no pattern is discernible. It may not always be manifest at first sight, or it may be blocked by self-defence reactions, but there is always a deep-seated form. As my research on traditional or evolutionary Ethiopian philosophy was

progressing, I saw a kind of architecture of images building itself before my very eyes, a real pyramid whose basis is nature and whose apex is man himself. But the human person is not only the most important element in this construction; man penetrates the pyramid itself like a line joining the summit to the centre of the base, since a distinction is made between material beings made by man and those that are not, and since certain elements of the material world, like time for instance, are considered under a human viewpoint.

We are here at the heart of Ethiopia—but would it not also be the heart of the whole of Africa? Symbols are rarely things in physical nature, as they exist in themselves, independently of any human usage or modification. The human seal has left its imprint through the entire structure of the basic images, an imprint which becomes more and more manifest as one goes down the scale of life and penetrates into matter moulded by man or at least reflecting his being. Man himself is the pre-eminent symbol: his body with its various organs and in particular his heart, internal centre of intellectual, emotional and moral operations; the illnesses that beset him; man as individual and as social unit accomplishing various functions in society; lastly, man in the night infinite complexity of his functions.

Whereas the Western world, has a tendency to consider things as they are in their impersonal objectivity, the Ethiopian Semitic world is clearly anthropocentric. The Westerner takes as its starting point the world of external reality, which is distinct and measurable. The Semitic Ethiopian does not break away from the world in which he lives. He does not disengage himself from it, he does not stand out; he is part of it. His starting point is within himself, in his own personal experience. He does not try to express what is in his mind; he rather attempts to evoke it.

The Westerner reconstructs and recreates the outside world within the framework of his own thought. The Ethiopian starts from what is already in his mind

and endeavours to transmit it by suggestion. The Westerner abstracts and arrives at the universal idea; the Semite sticks to the particular and tries to absorb it. The Westerner would like to conceive truth and to demonstrate it; the Semitic Ethiopian seeks to offer himself to it and to have it desired by others. The Western world is a world of things, the Ethiopian world is a world of persons.

The Western world is the world of senses and of matter; its instrument is reason. It is interested in things which have nothing in common with the interior world. It is the offshoot of ancient Greek thought and in particular of the civilization which has developed since the Renaissance. However, it carries within itself its own contradiction: existentialist philosophy is a contemporary witness of an attempt in the Western world to find the concrete anew, to go the way which, leaving aside the idealist Greek and German manner of edifying a whole system on the basis of abstraction, prefers to apply thought to the art of living.

The Semitic Ethiopian universe is that of human beings and of human life. This does not mean that the Semitic world is completely divorced from the scientific way of thinking. Later on I would "discover" the philosopher Zera Yacob (Zär a Ya,eqob, "The Seed of Jacob") who is a splendid witness for Ethiopia of a rationalistic attitude; the development by Semites of astronomy and mathematics is as revealing a phenomenon outside of Ethiopia. But in both cases the approach to problems is different from the Western one. In the particular case of Zera Yacob, nothing could be more revealing than his epistemological and dialectical inquiry, since the symbols which support it are deeply "humanized" and compose a profile where things, the objects of conscious thought are linked on the level of the subconscious to the human experience of the author and the vast cultural background where the human element is both basis and summit.

Looking at the development of Ethiopian philosophy as a whole, one may introduce a distinction, a double dimension which I call vertical and horizontal. The first cuts through centuries and, just as a cut through geological strata, gives us the dynamic movement, the historical development of Ethiopian philosophy. The second refers to the convergence at the same time, and beyond a mere verbal analysis, of the structures elaborated in each of the philosophical works of Ethiopia.

I would like, first, to present the historical unfolding of Ethiopian literature and within its parameters the place and situation of texts expressing its thought.

## THE VERTICAL DIMENSION - ETHIOPIAN LITERARY WORKS

### 1. *The Physiologue*

Geez literature, like Coptic, Armenian, Georgian and, in its near totality, Syriac literature, begins with

the introduction of Christianity and hence is not really a literature of national origin. The first Ethiopic texts were made from the Greek of the Holy Scriptures, and this Greek origin had an influence on the syntax of the written language, if not on the spoken language itself.

The oldest documents of Geez language still extant are epigraphic and not strictly literary. Besides short inscriptions like that of Matara (*Mätära*) in Eritrea (*'eretra*), the great royal inscriptions of Aksum, the capital of the ancient kingdom, are a clear indication of the Greek cultural influence, the only foreign one which at that time penetrated into the country. Even today in the small garden laid out at the entrance of the town of Aksum, the visitor may see a long inscription in three types of script: South Arabian, Ethiopic and Greek. It dates from the first years of Hezana: roughly in the third decade of the fourth century.

During that period Geez was supplanting Greek as the official language. The first king of whom we know had a Greek education; his successors in the third century used Greek as the official language of their public documents. The primitive language of the Ethiopian Church was, it may be presumed, Greek, since its nucleus was formed by Roman merchants resident in the country. But as the indigenous culture steadily developed and ousted the imported culture of Greece, the liturgy and the Holy Scriptures were translated into Geez. This translation took place in the Vth century, when, presumably, the number of native converts was becoming considerable.

The translation of the Bible includes, besides the canonical and deuterocanonical books, some apocryphal and pseudepigraphical books which are considered as genuine in Ethiopia, and generally received as canonical, namely the two books attributed to Esdras, the "Paralipomena of Baruch", "The Ascension of Isaiah" "The Book of Enoch," "The Book of Jubilees" and the "Pastor of Hermas." These writings are either partially lost in the language in which they were originally written, or they are paired in the Ethiopic version with readings more or less different from the known ones. Such an abundance of translation of apocryphal or apocalyptic texts show the popularity of this type of writing in the Ethiopia of those days, and corresponds to the psychology of the people.

It is here that *The Physiology (Fisalgwos)*, the oldest "philosophical" text I have found and analysed, should be placed although I have devoted to it the collection *Ethiopian Philosophy* corresponding to the order of discovery of manuscripts and not to the historical order of literary composition.

*The Physiologue* has two significant characteristics: its symbolism and its set of moral values.

It is a description of animals, plants and stones. But all of these stand as symbols. It is well known that Ethiopian culture is highly symbolic. Here we have one complete Ethiopian work which is entirely

symbolic, so that we are in a privileged position to determine and define in a precise way and with a great abundance of material one of the main characteristics of Ethiopian culture.

Here for example there is "hoopoe" which is equivalently called in Ethiopic: *hepw opas*. This lapwing freeing his parents from the ills of old age is a symbol of man who should love his parents.

The young ones of the lapwing, when their father grows old, pluck off his moulting feathers, peck his eyes, keep him in a hot place, welcome him under their wings, feed him, and guard him, as if they were saying to their father: "As a reward for having kept us and for having deprived yourself of food when you were feeding us, we shall do likewise to you." And they do so until these aged birds are imparted renewed vitality; they are rejuvenated and are young once more.

How would not intelligent beings love their parents?

Each animal, plant or mineral is symbolical of moral values. In all the "philosophical" Ethiopian works which follow *The Physiologue*, the prevalence of the interest for moral concerns is strongly underlined. Here, however, we are dealing with a text which gives us the complete set of values which characterizes Ethiopia.

One would expect that in a work which has been so deeply stamped by ancient Christianity, the most frequent type of the typology of *The Physiology* would be Christ. But it is not so. The central type of *The Physiologue* is man, although man is always considered in his religious relation either to Christ or to the Church or to the Bible. In spite of its Christian or monastic influence *The Physiologue* is not theocentric but anthropocentric. This anthropology, however, is basically theological. The centre of interest and of study is man and not God, but man in one of his most fundamental relations to God. *The Physiologue* therefore expresses a theological anthropology.

What does *The Physiologue* tell us about "man" within the context of the theological anthropology?

It is basically a *metanoia*, a *conversio*: man turns away from one state in order to move forward towards another: it is a change of belief and of life, manifested by the abandonment of unbelief, of carnal desires, of the world, of evil conduct in order to embrace life in Christ and in His Church: in a word, the heart changes.

*The Physiologue* is not an entirely original work. It is a translation and an adaptation from a Greek original. The Greek *Physiologue* seems to have been composed either at the end of the II century A.D. or during the first decades of the third. The near unanimity of scholars favours Egypt as the place of its redaction, and within Egypt, Alexandria. The

name of the author is unknown, although the work was later on attributed to various names: Saint Epiphanius Archbishop of Constance in Cyprus, Aristotle, Saint Peter bishop of Alexandria, Saint Athanasius of Alexandria, Saint Ambrose, Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Basil, Solomon.

The Ethiopian translation-adaptation was made most probably at the beginning or in the middle of the Vth century. It seems to have been completed in Egypt, perhaps by an Ethiopian living in a monastery of Skete where he had access to its rich library. The name of the author of the Ethiopic version is unknown.

*The Physiologue* was so popular in Eastern Christendom and in the East that it can be described as the principal work of Christian symbolism inspired from nature. Christianity took many symbols from *The Physiologue*, the most important of which were the phoenix as the symbol of Christ's resurrection and the pelican as the symbol of His self-offering on the cross. In the middle ages no book except the Holy Scriptures had such a wealth of translations: it is the origin of the *Bestiaries*, and has directly inspired Christian art, from the Cathedrals to illuminated manuscripts. Indeed in *The Physiologue* the naturalistic and symbolic elements are fused with true artistry and each chapter is something of a creative masterpiece.

As to the Ethiopic version it is the closest to the Greek original, and the Greek text itself on which the Ethiopic is based was at its greatest and purest development, before it suffered vicissitudes during the Byzantine era.

One may query why *The Physiologue*, which is not a philosophical work but a naturalistic-theological book of Christian symbolism, has been placed at the beginning of a synthesis on "Ethiopian Philosophy". But seen from the vantage point of later developments in Ethiopian philosophy, *The Physiologue* affords a first glimpse into its rudimentary beginnings. It is like observing a great river in its initial streamlets. Nearly all the main characteristics that will flourish in *The Book of the Philosophers*, *The Life and Maxims of Skendes*, *The Treatise of Zera Yacob* and *The Treatise of Walda Heywat* are present in *The Physiologue*, although in an inchoate way: its thought patterns, its archetypal images and symbolism, its world view with the place within it of animals, plants and minerals, its anthropology, its social approach and its set of ethical values. Without the later developments of Ethiopian philosophy, *The Physiologue* is deprived of its significance; without *The Physiologue*, Ethiopian philosophy is deprived of its roots.

## 2. *The Book of the Philosophers*

The second great literary period is due to a large extent to the clergy: re-establishment of the Solo-

monian dynasty, frequent relations with the Patriarchate of Alexandria. This explains why the literature of the time was written in the sacred and liturgical language, Geez, at that time a dead language, and not in the live and spoken language, Amharic, and why translations were made, not from Coptic, but from Arabic, just as they were made from Greek during the first period. These translations of the first two periods often have a significant importance, since they were made from texts which are lost or which are better than those still extant or known to us.

In this second period which is much longer and richer than the first, three subdivisions may be made. The first, which we may call the period of Hamda Seyon (*'Amdä Seyon*, reigned 1314–44), lasts until the beginning of the XVth century. The second subdivision may be called after the most famous king of the XVth century, Zera Yacob (reigned from 1434 to 1468; not the philosopher) and goes up to the first quarter of the XVIth century, and even a little later. There follows the third period, which for some writings continues up to the XIXth century and even later up to our own days. However, it is not possible to determine with complete precision when each of these literary periods begins and ends, since in each of them there are works which are closely connected with those of the preceding period, a phenomenon that occurs in any literature.

No "philosophical" text belong to this first subdivision. However, the second subdivision is particularly rich in the history of Ethiopic literature from a philosophical viewpoint. It was then that Abba Mikael (*'Abba Mikael*) translated and adapted into Geez *The Book of the Philosophers* which was completed between 1510 and 1522. It was then also that *The Life and Maxims of Skendes* was translated and adapted into Geez, although the identity of the author is unknown.

The author of the Ethiopic text of *The Book of the Philosophers*, Abba Mikael (Father Michael), is a writer of Egyptian origin whose contribution to Ethiopic literature is considerable. He is the author, not only of *The Book of the Philosophers* completed between 1510 and 1522, but of *The Acts of George of Lydda*, composed before 1481–8 and completed by a scribe in 1510, and of *The Commentary of St. John Chrysostom on St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews*, composed in collaboration with Enbaqom (Habba-kuk) and completed in 1522–3 (for 1524–5).

The Ethiopic text was translated "by the mouth of Mikael." the author orally rendered an Arabic text into current language and an Ethiopian wrote it in Ethiopic on parchment. The Arabic text in turn is generally considered as having been written by Human in ibn Ishâq, who was born at Hira, Mesopotamia in c.A.D. 809 as the son of a Nestorian Christian and who died in 873 or more probably in 877. The Arabic text in its turn is based on a Greek original which is lost. This Greek original, however,

belonged to the later literature of apophthegms in the form of which it flourished during the Byzantine period. If one were to use as guide only the Greek names used in this Collection of Sayings and if it could be proved that those names were found in the Greek original, one could draw some conclusion as to the date of its composition: since the most recent Greek names, Heraclius about (575–641) belongs to the middle of the VIIth century A.D., one could therefore have a *terminus a quo*, the *terminus ad quem* being the IXth century when it was translated into Arabic. Greek influence is everywhere evident in *The Book of the Philosophers*: Pre-Socratic, Socratic, Aristotelian, but especially Platonic and Neo-Platonic.

One may query to what extent a work translated from an Arabic text which goes back to a Greek original can be labelled "Ethiopian". The answer is that this work of translation (the same could not be said of the original works of Zera Yacob and of Walda Heywat) is Ethiopic, not by the originality of its invention, but by the originality of its style and presentation. The Ethiopians never translate literally: they adapt, modify, add, subtract. A translation therefore bears a typically Ethiopian stamp: although the nucleus of what is translated is foreign to Ethiopia the way it is assimilated and transformed into an indigenous reality is typically Ethiopian.

One example taken from *The Book of the Philosophers* will suffice to bring home this point. The well-known conversation between Diogenes and Alexander of Corinth, which is recorded by Diogenes Laertius, is found in our Ethiopic work. But it is transformed beyond recognition. The famous answer of Diogenes to the king, "Move away from my shadow", is ascribed to Socrates in Ethiopic, as it already was in Arabic. The whole passage has been given such a specific Christian form and development that one seems to be listening to an Oriental monk speaking through the mouth of Socrates. Alexander the Great is called simply "The King" as he is in the Arabic. As in most other passages in our manuscript, he is placed in an inferior position in relation to the wise man. The whole dialogue hinges around one point, life. For Socrates the real life is the spiritual one. But the King misses the point, and thinks Socrates is speaking of the temporal life. A subtle irony prevails in the Ethiopic account of the encounter. The inserted story of the service to the idols found in the Arabic text has disappeared completely from the Ethiopic, whereas the Ethiopic has misunderstood the Arabic expression "spittle of the worms" which is meant to be a contemptuous expression for "silk". The Ethiopic can do no better than to render it as the Biblical "work that does not sleep". The covering of Diogenes from the sun by Alexander the Great in the Greek text has become in Arabic the covering of Socrates from the sun by the war materials of the King and in Ethiopic the prevention by the King from Socrates' own wish, which is the heat of the sun.

Is therefore the account of the meeting between Alexander the Great and Diogenes, as found in *The Book of the Philosophers*, Ethiopian or Greek or Arabic? Is it Ethiopian by style, by treatment of the subject, and not by invention.

*The Book of the Philosophers* is a Collection of Sayings. It presents the quintessence of what various "philosophers" have said on a certain number of topics, the greater number of which are ethical. Most of the paragraphs begin with: "A wise man said." The saying that follows is usually a striking sentence that catches the imagination, a maxim, a proverb. But it often develops into more elaborate forms, becoming parable, allegory, discourse, argument.

As to the names of the "philosophers", not only has there been historically a mishandling of these names from one collection of sayings to another so that there is a continuous substitution of certain persons for others, but also great names are often used as pretext for the most common practical lore. Sayings are attributed usually to Greek philosophers, but occasionally to Roman personages, to Old Testament figures and to Christians.

This Collection of Saying, so characteristic of the Ethiopian wisdom literary form, is very popular in Ethiopia, as witnessed by the great number of its manuscripts and also by the additions, corrections, and glosses in the same manuscript, as in the one I found in the National Library of Addis Ababa and which was the starting point for my research on *Ethiopian Philosophy*.

### 3. *The Life and Maxims of Skendes* Introduction

Modern psychology claims that the Oedipus story is common to all men of all countries of all times. It is the story of a man who unconsciously marries his mother. When his mother becomes aware of the identity of her husband, she hangs herself. Oedipus tears out his eyes and disappears mysteriously. The legend, which has been the source of inspiration for many dramatists, is for Freud the symbolic expression of a psychological drama common to all men.

Now, only a few nations in the world have a written version of this story. The Ethiopic manuscript than I have found in East Berlin is evidence that Ethiopia must now be counted among these few nations.

The title of the Ethiopian version of this story is: "*The Life and Maxims of Skendes*." (For those who are acquainted with Ethiopian literature, the name of *Skendes* which originally simply meant "Second" must not be confused with *Eskender*, which means "Alexander.") The Ethiopian narrative goes up to the first quarter of the VIth century. It is a translation-adaptation of an Arabic account which would have

been conceived shortly before the Xth century. In its turn the Arabic story seems to be based on a Greek original of the 2nd century A.D. A careful examination of the Ethiopic and the Arabic texts shows that the Ethiopian translator is clearly distinguishable as a deeply thinking person with a very sensitive power of perception. The *Skendes* story as it is conveyed in Ethiopic, is the most perfect, the most morally chastened off all the preserved accounts of this type.

The Ethiopian text is divided into three sections. The first section contains the life of *Skendes*; the second section, a series of fifty-five questions and the third section, a series of one hundred and eight questions.

The first section, "The Story of *Skendes*", presents a fascinating interest: here is a summary of it, which follows the original text as closely as possible and is now and then illustrated with a few quotations.

#### *The Story of Skendes*

In the days of Emperor *Endryanos* ('*endryanwoe*,) a certain *Skendes* is sent by his parents to Athens and to *Berytus* (modern *Beyrouth*) "in order to be imbued with the philosophy of the wise". At that time *Skendes* was twelve years old. After his departure, his father passed away.

He engaged in learning for twenty-four years. Once, while he was reading a book "by a wise master concerning women", he was deeply shocked by the statement he made concerning them: "All women are prostitutes." His heart was filled with anger on account of this maxim. He cursed his former master because he had said: "All women", and reflected: "Would not then my mother be a prostitute since all women are included, and no one is excluded from the whole group"?

Still under the effect of the traumatic shock, he pursued his reading until he found the passage where it was written that the veracity of a statement is in need of a testing, that is of an experimentation before it is certain that the statement is true.

*Skendes* praised God, happy that he had found the sure way of knowing what was written about women: namely the experimental method. He reflected: "Truly, I will subject my mother to a test, if I live and return to my country. She will indeed have forgotten me and will not recognize me. It is twenty-four years since I left her. She will not recognize me if I do not declare to her, 'I am your son'. I went away from her when I was twelve years old. I was then a little boy and had no beard. But now I am a fully grown man and have a beard. What can prevent me from subjecting my mother to a test that I may know the value of the statement about women? I will as well find out that experience is the completion of the truth of any statement. I will do this if I live

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and return to my country. If the truth or the statement materializes, I will have to say, 'No one can have the upper hand over the wise as far as wisdom is concerned;' if, however, I prove the statement to be false, I will reject the whole science of the idolatrous philosophers. I will say that the traces of man cannot be found."

Skendes, who is now thirty-six years old, returns to his country. He proceeds to the place where his servants used to bring their beasts of burden and where the people drew water. He sits at the well.

Then it happened that one of his maid-servants also came to draw water. He recognized her, but she did not recognize him. As she came near him, he enquired from her: "Is your master in this city today?" The maid burst into tears and said: "My master is dead". Thus did he learn that his father was dead. Skendes then asked the maid: "Is your master's son in the city today?" The maid answered: "Twenty-four years have now passed since my master's son was sent to study the wisdom and the way of reasoning to the wise philosophers and the interpretation of books? Thus was he sure that she did not recognize him. Skendes said to the maid: "If this is the case, take these hundred dinars of gold and render the heart of your mistress agreeable to me, so that she may spend one night with me. As for you, I give you these fifty dinars; thus will you speak to your mistress, 'A handsome young man begs you to sleep with him only for one night. The next day he will go to his country, for he is a stranger. He will let no one know of this secret'".

The scene that immediately follows the maid-servant's meeting with Skendes is remarkable by its likelihood and the truth of its thoughts and actions. The maid, upon entering the house of her mistress, offers the hundred dinars to her as she whispers to her ear the proposal that accompanied the money. When her mistress heard this, her anger knew no bounds. She flung at the maid's head the chair upon which she was resting. But the maid insists; her words are soft and depict the handsomness of the stranger—her mistress' own son. Finally resistance and hesitations are overcome; her mistress yields with ardour: "If this is so, come, I want to take care of your head and place on it salt and many medicinal herbs; take off this dress, put on a clean one, go back to the man and tell him, 'She has agreed and her heart is willing. But he should not come and enter my house before the sun sets and darkness grows around everything. Then bring him in to me very late in the evening at the first hour of the night lest anyone find out he has come to me.

When night drew nearer, Skendes came to his mother's garden. Then the maid took him by the hand and led him to her mistress. When the wise man entered her room, his mother rose up in front of him, but she did not recognize her son. "The mother was cheerful and rejoiced exceedingly with pleasure

and lust and whatever pleases the senses. As for her son, he was kissing his mother with a spiritual kiss and there was no evil in his heart". After dinner, they went to sleep together, but, according to the Ethiopic text, Skendes simply placed his head against his mother's breasts and slept until the next day. When in was daylight, Skendes rose from his sleep and wanted to leave the room, while his mother was pleading with him: "Did I fail to please you"? Skendes answered with the shattering self-identification: "I am your son Skendes!"

When his mother heard this, she was stupefied with shame. She went out, threw a rope to a tree, put her neck to it and hanged herself. The philosopher, however, did not know what his mother was doing. But when he put on his clothes and went out to pour out water, he saw his mother strangled to death.

Broken with sorrow, O "tongue", he said, "you killed your mother". "I will punish you with silence; you shall never speak as long as you are alive on earth". There was a loud shouting and much weeping in the house of the wise man: the servants brought down the corpse and buried his mother. After the burial, the sage did not say one single word to them. The people of the city questioned him and rejoiced with him because he had come back to his fatherland. But he would only make a nod to them with his head.

The emperor heard that Skendes had vowed never to speak again. So he summoned him to his court. When Skendes arrived, the emperor stood up from his throne and ordered him to sit in his place. He told him: "Your silence, Skendes, was appropriate before you came to us. For indeed there was no one equal to you who could understand your language. But now make us worthy to hear your words, and for the sake of virtue do raise your voice." But Skendes remained adamant in his silence.

Then the emperor had recourse to physical violence to break the sage's resolution: Skendes was dragged around the whole pavement of the citadel trapped in a net; he was threatened with wild animals; he even bared his neck so that the sword-bearer may cut it with his sword. But he absolutely refused to speak.

The sword-bearer untied the chains of the wise man, clothed him with a magnificent vestment and brought him before the emperor. "The emperor was in admiration at Skendes' fortitude and perseverance in his refusal. He even rejoiced overwhelmingly at his constancy in keeping silence. For the wise Skendes surpassed all the wise by his wisdom." He ordered that a pen and a tablet be brought to the sage and, while respecting his vow of silence he begged him to answer his questions in writing, so that he "may rejoice in his knowledge." Skendes acquiesced. One of the first things he wrote was a parable: the milkmaid story. This story can be traced back to India. It was translated from Sanskrit into Persian, from Persian into Arabic, and from Arabic into Ethiopic.

The gist of the story lies in the problem of guilt; to whom should the suicide of Skendes' mother be imputed? To his father, to his master in philosophy to the maid, to himself, to his mother?

Man's quest for identity has therefore ended in tragedy: a kind of crime for which it is impossible to assign a real culprit. There is an atonement without an intentional fault, a fault without a real culprit, a crime of destiny: an idea that brings us back to ancient Greece and to the most sombre tragedies of its theatre.

Such is the interpretation of events on the conscious level, that is in the eyes of Skendes. But depth psychology would analyze the events in a different way. In his emotional development Skendes had remained stuck in an infantile attachment to his mother. He has never been weaned as it were from his mother. Intellectually and socially he is a man of thirty-six years of age; affectively he has remained a child. To consider all women as prostitutes is symptomatic of a severe form of fixation to mother. On this level the wish is not, symbolically speaking, to return to mother's protective arms, nor to her nourishing breast, but to her all-receiving and all-destroying-womb. If the nature of sanity is to grow out of the womb into the world, the nature of severe mental disease is to be attracted by the womb, to be sucked back into it—and that is to be taken away from life.

#### *The Maxims*

When the emperor understood the explanation which Skendes had proposed to him concerning the milkmaid story, not only did he marvel at the philosopher's wisdom, but he invited him to answer in writing to a series of questions that he wanted to ask him. There then follow in the Ethiopic text two series of questions and answers. The first, comprising only fifty-five questions, reflects the intellectual and spiritual climate during the first centuries of the Christian era and in particular the works of one of the gnostics. As a result there is a certain mingling of pantheism and of theism whose expression is sometimes intensely poetical.

They questioned the wise philosopher and said to him: what is the day? He answered:

"The day is a messenger that toils, hastening down for twelve hours; each day it begins and then in the evening it hides its figure; it is an eternal substance; it is a created mirror whose root is planted in the air; it rises and sets; it is a place full of effort; it fails for twelve hours; it is the beginning of the day; it remembers the like of all; it is created to render all things visible. At night, however, it forgets the numerous things of the day. It is itself a messenger in the air, a runner and also an eternal memory.

On the contrary the second series, of the hundred and eight questions, resumes the traditional themes of Christian Ethiopia. It is essentially ethical and sapiential, strongly underlining the moral principles outside of man: God and the devil. Man and the cosmos are considered in an ethical perspective. The influences are Biblical, Christian and monastic.

#### *4. The Treatise of Zera Yacob*

The third literary period is a period of great events which have an impact on literature and on philosophy. In its beginning, shortly after the first twenty years of the XVI century, the movement of the Oromo towards the north introduced a new ethical element to the ancient Abyssinian race. The invasion of the Moslems under the command of Ahmet Gran, brought devastation to the country, the destruction of many churches and monasteries, and the burning of many precious books and manuscripts. But it was also the occasion for events of great importance in Ethiopian literature: the close relations with Europe in general and with Portugal and the Pope in particular, the mission of the Jesuits, religious quarrels, the short victory of the Catholic and the official re-establishment of the traditional faith. These events stirred religious controversies and gave birth to a religious revival. They led to a revision of the already existing sacred books and to the writing of new ones. *The Treatise of Zera Yacob* and to a lesser degree *The Treatise of Walda Herywat* reveal the tensions that characterize this age and the attempts to transcend its limited boundaries.

In 1667 (Gregorian Calendar) an Ethiopian philosopher by the name of Zera Yacob wrote a *Treatise* in which he recorded both his life and his thought. To the person with some acquaintance of Ethiopian history, the name Zera Yacob brings to mind the 15th century emperor of that name (reigned 1434-68) who gave his name to the preceding literary period: consolidator of the First Shoan Kingdom, a religious zealot, a literary figure of considerable reput and an efficient administrator. Zera Yacob the Philosopher lived about a century and a half later. By temperament and family background, he was an exact opposite of his namesake.

The philosopher is original in many ways. He begins his *Treatise* with the story of his life. It is the only known autobiography in Ethiopic literature. He was born in the environs of Aksum from a poor farmer. He attended the traditional schools of Ethiopia, studying in particular the Psalms of David, sacred music, the *qene* ("poetry" or "hymns") and Ethiopian "belles-lettres". This is a point of special importance. The language of Zera Yacob is *pure qene* Geez: it reveals no foreign influence. Indeed it is the jewel, the masterpiece of Ethiopian literature. But the import of the *qene* school or Zera Yacob went further than mastery of the Ethiopian language.

In such a school questions and discussion are encouraged. Students are trained to reflect and criticize, and hence they have been dissenters more often than not. Indeed it can be said that Ethiopian philosophy in the sense of a philosophy based on primacy of thought originated in the *gene* school.

In 1626 king Susenyos made his solemn profession of Catholic faith. Shortly afterwards, Zera Yacob was denounced before the king by a priest from Aksum. Zera Yacob was compelled to flee for his life, taking with him three measures of gold and the most precious of his possessions—the second great influence in his life together with *gene* language and culture: the Book of Psalms, the *Dawid*. On his way to Shoa, whose present capital is Addis Ababa, in the south, he found a beautiful, uninhabited location: a cave at the foot of a valey, south of the Takkaze River, where he lived for two years, till the death of Susenyos. There, in the peace and solitude of the cave, far from conflicts among men, he elaborated his philosophy.

It is an absolutely original work, the fruit of his own personal reflection, and not a translation or an adaptation from foreign sources, as most of Ethiopic literature is. The philosophy that later on will be developed in his *Treatise* is clearly rationalistic.

Rationalism is here considered as the view which recognizes true only that content of faith which can be made to appeal to reason. In Ethiopia, traditional, philosophy in its written form is intimately linked with Christianity in general and monasticism in particular. It is precisely in this sense of the absolute and exclusive sufficiency of human reason which denies all dogmatic assertion that reason would be unable to establish by its own means and to comprehend adequately that Zera Yacob is said to be rationalist.

The Geez title of the *Treatise* of Zera Yacob is *Hatata* (*hatāta*.) This word comes from a root which originally meant: "to question bit by bit, piece-meal; to search into or through, to investigate accurately; to examine; to inspect." The light of reason is for Zera Yacob the discriminating criterion between what is of God and what is of man, between the essential tenets of natural religion and the manmade additions to prove men's "inventions". Through the application of his method, the light-reason whose immediacy enlightens his investigation, Zera Yacob has found a basic principle: *The Goodness of the Created Nature*. On this foundation he moves towards theology, ethics, psychology, his theology being mostly a creational one, his ethics accepting only that which is based on the goodness of the created thing, like that of married life and of food, thus rejecting the time-honoured monastic life and fasting of traditional Ethiopia, and his psychology emphasizing man's freedom and his superiority over the rest of creation.

A contemporary of René Descartes, Zera Yacob resembles him in many ways. Not that Zera Yacob makes use of universal methodic doubt. But in both

philosophers one finds a method, the occasion for a critical inquiry, the necessity for such an inquiry, a criterion which leads to the establishment of a basic principle that is applied in both authors to theodicy, ethics and psychology (and in Descartes to cosmology). In both also the method of inquiry is revolutionary, although its roots are deeply theological. The historical circumstances from which the rationalism of both thinkers originates are equally similar: the collapse of scholasticism, of the harmony between faith-reason in Europe, and in Ethiopia, the confrontation with Western culture and violent religious discord. The environment for the initial project of the *Discourse on Method* (1637) and the *Hatata* (1667) is solitude: that of Descartes in Weubourg during winter and that of Zera Yacob on the banks of the Takkaze River for two years.

Undoubtedly, Zera Yacob is not a mathematical genius; his philosophy does not appear as a deduction, a linear continuity from a first principle or a first idea, but rather as the unfolding of sun rays which emanate from a single centre, thus safeguarding the complexity and richness of reality. "A genuine contribution to the history of human thought:" such is the judgement of Enno Littmann on the work of Zera Yacob.

After the death of Susenyos, he left his cave in order to live among his fellowmen: he settled down at Enferaz in the house of a rich merchant called Habtu who became his literary patron. It is for him that he copied the Psalms in a beautiful writing that everybody admired: he taught Habtu's two sons and married one of his maid-servants. At the request of one of his sons, Zera wrote Yacob his *Treatise* when he was sixty-eight years old. He was to live at Enferaz for twenty-five more years. The account he has left of his happy family life, of his prosperity, of the birth of his children and grandchildren smacks patriarchal simplicity. He died in 1692 at the age of ninety-three.

### 5. *The Treatise of Walda Heywat*

#### *Presentation*

After Zera Yacob's death, his disciple Walda Heywat, one of Habtu's sons, also wrote a *Treatise* in which he relates the last years and death of his master and presents the latter's thought in a more pedagogical and parenetic way.

One can easily imagine a scene which must have often taken place in the rich merchant's house in Enferaz: Habtu's two sons are seated at the feet of their master Zera Yacob, but the face of the younger son is aglow with the light of understanding and admiration. Walda Haywat is aware that his master is not simply one more teacher in Ethiopia, but an original and profound thinker. This is what *Zera Yacob* will write about him in his *Treatise*: Walda Heywat "was closely associated with me in science

and in my great affection: he knew all my secrets; there was nothing I kept hidden from him. After his constant entreaties, I wrote this small book just for the sake of his love”.

However, the second *Treatise*, that of Walda Heywat, is not a simple repetition of the first. Although Walda Heywat's ideas are essentially those of his master, his presentation of them is remarkable for its pedagogical qualities. He is an admirable storyteller. Each of his stories in an illustration in practical life of the principle he wants to inculcate. Each one shows the influence of Ethiopian popular literature on Walda Heywat, although his short stories are much more dramatic and picturesque than their original models in the sapiential written literature of the country.

The pedagogical value of Walda Heywat goes much beyond the literary qualities of his presentation. He seems to have selected among his master's ideas those which have the closest link with the sense of human life. He expresses his ideas with vigour, usually addressing his readers as if they were his disciples. Walda Heywat is above all an educator, utilizing pedagogical techniques: he is in constant communication with his “students”, asking them questions, foresees their objections, answers them, inserts questions, within his answers, maintains his audience in a living rapport with him thanks to the use of imperatives. The harmony between practical sense and educational concern in Walda Heywat is such that present-day Ethiopia has placed in the limelight many aspects of his thought: the value of work, a social philosophy with its different practical applications, an energetic affirmation of the equality of all humans whatever be their beliefs, and the insistence on the beauty of marriage and of family life over and against their slanderers.

#### 6. Authorship of the two *Treatises*

The authorship of these very original *Treatises* was challenged in 1920 by Carlo Conti Rossini, who claimed to have identified the real author in Padre Giusto d'Urbino, an Italian scholar who worked in Ethiopia in the XIX century and who, together with his scribe, copied the two manuscripts of the Hatata which are extant in the Bibliothèque nationale des Paris. His arguments are mainly extrinsic, as the recent age of the manuscripts, the name Zera Yacob that would hide the baptismal name of Giusto d'Urbino: Jacopo, Giusto's knowledge and love of the Ethiopian language and literature, and the information on Islam which would have been taken from the Ethiopic translation of *Les soirées de Carthage* made by Giusto himself. In 1934, arguments, mostly linguistic, were brought forward by Eugen Mittwoch to apply to the second as well as to the first *Treatise*. From that moment on, nearly all interest was lost for the Hatatas, which were no more considered as

“the jewel of Ethiopian literature”, but as a mystification.

Two Ethiopian scholars, Dr. Amsalou Aklilu and Ato Alemayyehu Mogrs, have taken over the whole question of authenticity. The former underlines on the one hand the value of testimonies in favour of authenticity given by Antoine d'Abbadie and Giusto d'Urbino himself, and on the other hand the lack of value of Abba Takla Haymanot's testimony which was the starting point of Conti Rossini's investigation; he also discusses the “non-religious” character of the *Treatises* (concerning the recent age of the manuscripts), and the order of words in Zera Yacob's sentences. The latter investigates the Biblical quotations and the *gene* Geez that are used, as well as the *gene* culture which explains the singularity of the Hatatas and the knowledge of Islam they exhibit.

I have examined both the internal and the external types of evidence. A statistical research (of both the quantitative and the qualitative-quantitative kinds) yields the duality of authors which is denied by the opponents of the Ethiopian authorship. The Biblical quotations of Giusto d'Urbino have nothing in common with those of either *Treatises*.

Five unknown letters by Giusto d'Urbino have been found in Rome. A letter by Giuseppe Sapeto vindicating the memory of Giusto d'Urbino against the insinuations of Tekla Haymanot together with documents concerning the whole controversy, have also been collected and published. In Matraia the baptismal record shows that the baptismal name was Giovanni Jacopo. A complete dossier of original letters and a memoir of Giusto d'Urbino were discovered in Luce. Investigation has also been made into all the Geez works of Giusto d'Urbino: MS.167 of the Società geografica italiana, MS.134 of the Biblioteca nazionale Vittoria Emanuele, MSS. d'Abbadie 216 and 217 of the Bibliothèque nationale de Paris and MS. Ethiopian 165 of the Vatican Library.

The Study of all these sources reveal:

1. that Giusto d'Urbino does not share the ideas that are expressed in the Hatatas at the time he is supposed to have written them;
2. that his knowledge of Geez in general and of the *gene* in particular is appalling and hence cannot be the perfect Ethiopic language of the Hatagas;
3. that Giusto's source who has copied one of the two manuscripts of the Hatatas (MS. 215) did not know Geez well enough to be its author under the editorship of Giusto.

If these conclusions are valid, the Ethiopian authorship of the Hatatas is re-established, and the conclusion follows that *Modern Philosophy*, in the sense of a personal rationalistic critical investigation, began in Ethiopia with Zera Yacob at the same time as in England and in France.

### 7. Their Significance for Modern Ethiopia and for Africa

These few pages which we have devoted to Zera Yacob and his disciple hardly do justice to the personality and the transcendent thought of the 17th century philosopher. Although he had been marked by the seal of the economic, political, social, geographical, historical and cultural factors of his time, he has not simply submitted to them: "men change circumstances".

It is the sign of the genius that he cannot be completely explained by determinism or reduced to it. In the combination of conditioning by environment and human causality by which a personality is expressed, genius incarnates the liberality of the spirit. Zera Yacob transcends the century which has given him life, language, education, solitude and company. That is why his message is so significant for our times.

The aspects of his philosophy which are meaningful to us depend to a great extent on our own thoughts, choices even on our deepest emotions. At that level our judgement is necessarily personal.

Our world in this last quarter of the twentieth century is as divided as the Ethiopia of Zera Yacob. The options before us are always the same, but they bear on more basic issues. Will man tear away from his roots or will he grow and expand in the direction of his roots? Will the rupture be so penetrating that nothing will remain which is not torn? Are the shocks of the future so shattering that man loses his identity? Or does hope cast some light over the conflicts and tensions of the modern world, in comparison to which the 17th century divisions appear as battle game for tin soldiers?

Zera Yacob's answer is one of lucid hope. He was not crushed by the events of his epoch, nor by its intolerance and narrow-mindedness. For he was animated by a *critical* sense. Only he who accepts everything without discernment ends in the unbearable loss of all. Zera Yacob was saved from the absurd limits of his time by his *hatata*, by his power of inquiry, of criticism, of discernment and of evaluation, just as today man saved from social and ideological pressures if he is ready, in the liberty and light of his reason, to search for clarification of problems and to scrutinize credentials.

In the face of growing discord, Zera Yacob sought with serenity, a liberal and courageous spirit, that which drives men beyond the divisions they have made for themselves. It was the paradox of his life that his love which knew no frontiers serapated him from all in the seclusion of his cave. But his cave may become for us the starting point to identify and realize the unity which the limits of his day had constrained to such narrowness.

In the last analysis it is perhaps by his trust in *man*, in the power of his reason and the resource-

fulness of his nature that Zera Yacob is the most significant for the modern man. In the present historical context of a world torn by ideological conflicts and emptied by the rejection of so many values and even by the meaningfulness of life, it is comforting to hear a voice—a voice that has been stifled for so long—which speaks with such simplicity the language of trust of hope and health. A world crumbles in resounding crash. May it hear a voice which comes from Ethiopia and which could uplift it towards tomorrow!

#### *From Wisdom to Rationalism*

The texts that are here presented span more than twelve centuries of literary production. They show a double evolution: from translation (*The Physiologus*, *The Book of the Philosophers*, *The Life and Maxims of Skendes*) to originality (*The Treatise of Zera Yacob*, *The Treatise of Walda Heywat*;) from wisdom to rationalism. Even the works of translation themselves manifest an evolution: from the frequent misunderstandings of *The Physiologue* to the deep intuitions of *The Book of the Philosophers* and the sensitive, reflective perceptions of *The Life and Maxims of Skendes*. The link with Christianity evolves from the entirely Christian symbolism of *The Physiologus* to the anthropocentrism, considered however in its theological orientation, of *The Book of the Philosophers*, to the theistic pantheism of the first series of maxims in *Skendes*, and to the anti-Christian although deeply mystical radicalism of Zera Yacob and his disciple.

But it is the very notion of "philosophy" that shows the greatest evolution. Philosophy may be taken in a broad and in a narrow and more precise way. Philosophy in a wide sense is a "wisdom". Wisdom is not synonymous with knowledge; it does involve knowledge, but it also includes the ability, the inclination and the steady purpose of putting knowledge to good use. Thus wisdom involves several things: an end or purpose to be attained; an appreciative notion of this purpose; an ability, an inclination, and a steadfast effort to achieve the known purpose in the best possible manners. Such is wisdom considered subjectively, in the person who possesses it. Taking the term "wisdom" in an objective sense and regarding it in a most general way, we may say that wisdom is the sum-total of the things worth knowing and working for.

*The Book of the Philosophers and The Life and Maxims of Skendes* are philosophy in a broad sense. *The Physiologus* is a naturalistic-theological book of Christian symbolism. But even within the same sapiential type, distinctions should be made. *The Book of the Philosophers* presents the simplest and most common form of wisdom literature: the "saying" *The Life of Skendes* is a philosophical novel. The second and third sections, within the question-and

answer frame, cover the whole spectrum of the sapiential forms: the maxims, numbers, the exhortation and the portrait.

*The Treatise of Zera Yacob* and that of Walda Heywat are philosophy in a strict sense. It is the result of the reflection of one man and his disciple. They have a clearly defined method, characterized by criticism, inquiry the very name of the treatise in Ethiopic is *hatata*, "inquiry"), a criterion, the light of reason and a basis upon which the whole edifice of the inquiry is founded. But even here, within the same rationalistic approach to reality, a clear distinction remains between the master and his disciple. Zera Yacob is the only one of the two philosophers who presents in a complete, systematic, original manner the methodology of his philosophy. Although Walda Heywat shares the ideas of his master, the starting point and the dialectical movement from this origin are not to be found in his *Treatise*: from that viewpoint he is in the line of traditional Ethiopian thought.

### THE HORIZONTAL DIMENSION OF ETHIOPIAN PHILOSOPHY.

#### 1. Method

I perfectly agree with Professor Paulin J. Hountondji who, at the Seminar on African Philosophy, stated that African Philosophy exists and develops according to the same modalities as all the philosophies of the world: in the form of a literature. African Philosophy is *no more nor less than* African philosophical literature.

The first step therefore, for a historian of Ethiopian Philosophy, consists in finding these written sources. I have described them in the first part of this work which I have defined as "The Vertical Dimension of Ethiopian Philosophy". Here I shall only add two observations. The first is that, in my opinion, this methodological starting point is the same for *all* cases, that is, for both oral and written Ethiopian "philosophy".

My second observation resumes an observation already made in connection with the oldest text I have found, *The Physiologue*.

It is through key words that one obtains the deepest penetration into the thought and structure of an author's philosophy. I have established the list of key words of each work in both a quantitative and a qualitative way: quantitative by the exact calculation of the number of words in an Ethiopian work and the number of occurrences of the most frequent words and groups of words; qualitative by the signification of a word, by its role in the semantic "ecology" of its environment. Now key words do not appear haphazardly in these well-structured works. They are not isolated and atomically dispersed. They are grouped around a main idea and are organized

into an organic unity which may be a theme, a cycle or a leitmotiv. I shall end this synthetic study with the eight key words which form the linguistic nucleus of the philosophical vocabulary of Ethiopia.

#### 2. Wisdom

Wisdom is polysemic. It is altogether orientation and dynamism; literary form; key word, theme, leitmotiv, synthetic structure.

##### a) *Wisdom as Movement*

In Ethiopia as elsewhere in Africa there is a very rich traditional thought. It is a popular philosophy, a wisdom, the product, not of the speculation of one man who makes up a whole system, but of the experience of a whole people. This experience is transmitted from father to son, from one generation to another, from one village to another, from one century to another. It is a river which collects the water flowing from all sides and from above, but this river always advances in the same direction: the living stream of tradition. Such a literature exists everywhere in Africa, but whereas in other African countries it is purely oral, in Ethiopia it is also written. Partly translation of Greek or Arabic originals, it is also adaptation, and bears a typically Ethiopian stamp.

*The Treatise of Zera Yacob* is neither a translation nor an adaptation. A critical rationalist, in no way does he enter into the movement of tradition. He is even clearly opposed to it. Now it is very symptomatic that his disciple Walda Heywat, although a faithful echo of his master's thought, combines in his *Treatise* the antitraditional rationalism of Zera Yacob with the themes and anecdotes of Ethiopian traditional wisdom. Everything takes place as if the movement of Ethiopian philosophy was fundamentally sapiential and that even if for a time one keeps at a distance from it, the orientation and internal dynamism of wisdom are such that the latter ends up by joining with its counterpart.

##### b) *Wisdom as Form.*

The literary form expresses two types of wisdom: popular and didactic.

Popular wisdom, which is more or less identical amongst all peoples, comprises a great number of truths in immediate contact with experience: they embrace the whole scope of human life. Popular wisdom is usually expressed in proverbs which, in view of an easy memorization, are moulded in rhythmic forms. Parallelism abounds, whether it is symbolic or antithetic or both at the same time: but numerical proverbs, questions and answers are also different forms of the same basic structure of Ethiopian Semitic rhythm. "Common sense" truths, and even platitudes are placed side by side with penetra-

ting observations of individual and social life, usually expressed by a concrete and vivid metaphor.

Amongst these rhythmic proverbs some are in contradiction to each other. For popular wisdom must meet all circumstances in life and register in its formulation the infinite variety of situations. Consequently popular wisdom is not a science, it does not aim at the universal, but it gathers a wealth of useful experiences without the ambition of codifying them; it is an art of living rather than an inchoative system.

Didactic wisdom does not formulate truths which are different from popular wisdom; it expresses itself under a less direct and spontaneous, but more developed form. It utilizes the parable, the maxim, longer units of thought and of argumentation. It supposes the work of a particular author who oftentimes does not express wisdom in general, but his own personal thought.

Written Ethiopian wisdom includes both types: popular and didactic. Hence one finds within it a real kaleidoscope of literary genres: the maxims, the numerical proverb, the exhortation: advice cognition the hyperbole or emphasis. Dialogue with its questions and answers and its diddles, the narrative with tales and stories, its "personal experience" and portraits often combine with the pure didactic form. Even if analysis may make a distinction between these clearly differentiated types of sapiential expression, the language of the sage makes light to these too rigid frames and usually is expressed in a vibrant cluster of greatest spontaneity.

#### c) *Wisdom as Theme.*

One of the most revealing approaches to the thought and structure of an author is the key word. Key words are usually words, substantives or adjectives which recur frequently in a given work. But frequency is not the only criterion I wanted to take into consideration. Otherwise, if we pay attention only to the quantitative aspect of language, we have no more than the vocabulary of a work, a kind of *Concordantia*. Undoubtedly, such a linguistic approach is useful and even necessary: but it is only a preliminary approach. The qualitative dimension must also be taken into account. Here we penetrate into the significance of a word. Now key-words cluster around an idea and compose a unity, each key-word fulfilling its role and function within the organic structure. This unit I call theme since, as in music, it constitutes the basis of variations and of the development of the composition.

In my monographic studies I have demonstrated, supported by statistics and diagrams, that the principal theme of *The Book of the Philosophers* and *The Life and Maxims of Skendes*, at least its biographic and its first series of maxims, is wisdom. In the second series of maxims, wisdom is a secondary theme, ethics occupying the first place. The structure of

*The Physiologue* hinges round three themes: naturalistic, typological and theological, whereas the *Treatises of Zera Yacob* and of *Walda Heywat*, besides their autobiographical sections, have as axis the themes of inquiry and of creation.

#### d) *Wisdom as Structure*

Moral values considered in their diverse ramifications are very numerous in Ethiopian literary work. In *The Book of the Philosophers* we can count about forty: ability, altruism, calmness, competence, courage, discernment, faith, firmness, foresight, forgiveness, frugality, generosity, good reputation, gratitude, honesty, hope, ingenuity, joy, justice, knowledge, mercy, moderation, obedience, optimism, patience, perfection, politeness, poverty, power, prosperity, prudence, religion, respect, serenity, silence and speech, strength, trust, truthfulness, working habits.

However, in a certain sense, wisdom comprehends everything, absolutely everything, since it is the network of relations which unite the moral agent to himself, to his creator, to the different situations in life, to his fellow men and to the world in general. It is a habit in man, but a habit which embraces all, a way of living, of being. Hence its comprehension is vast and complex. On the other hand its extension is very narrow since it applies only to man, and within man himself, to the centre of all his responsible decisions.

The *Gestalt* of wisdom is both highly diversified and unified from within. It is diversified, because it includes intellectual, moral and theological virtues, man in his nature and in society, the basis of the moral world and its practical applications to the qualities, considered as "cardinal", of the good usage of speech and of material goods.

It is unified from within, because the structure of wisdom is the structure of man, as he advances towards his finality drawn by the ultimate and divine pole of all his actions and as he searches in his heart for the authentic interior answer to a transcendent call that is immament to him. Wisdom is therefore an important cultural element. It is the humanism of traditional Ethiopia. Through wisdom Ethiopia merges with the great stream of thought whose source is Egypt, Mesopotamia and Greece, since wisdom aims at solving in its own manner, which is axiological, the central problem of philosophy: unity and multiplicity.

The answer to this problem was more speculative in ancient Greece as it was passing from the monism of the first Pre-Socratics towards the constant flux of Heraclitus and attempted a synthetic solution in Plato and Aristotle. In Ethiopia, the problem, of unity and multiplicity was not set in an abstract and systematic way. The problematics of Ethiopia is existential. It unfolds in a context of life rather than

of science. It is a concrete experience. Through moral action one enters into personal relations with God, men and the world. These relations assume different forms and comprise many degrees. At the same time, a superstructure of significations is evoked, because wisdom coordinated in the center is unity of a multiplicity of virtues and a wide spectrum of entities, from the Lord above to the world below. In the unity of its heart resounds the multiplicity of human situations.

If we try to record on a diagram these different meanings and relations, we see a fan-like development and unfolding from a single centre.

### 3. Thought

One must make a distinction between longer units of thought, as for instance a chapter expounding the philosophy of Zera Yacob or of his disciple, the account of his life or the biography of Skendes, the symbolism of *The Physiologue*, and shorter units, as for instance the two series of maxims which follow the biography of Skendes.

#### a) The ABA' Pattern

All the longer units of thought are characterized by a type of development which is proper to Semitic thought. It comprises three movements or three stages: a statement is cut into two by a block which at first seems to be erratic but which in reality is its keystone. A theme (B) which looks like a digression is inserted into another theme; this latter one is first presented in its broad lines (A): at the end it is resumed with precision thanks to the data of B. In other words: thought (A) is expressed, then another (B) is placed side by side or is opposed to it, then the first thought (A) is enlightened by the intuitions drawn from (B).

It is usually a case of development through analogy (Thesis I–Thesis II– Synthesis of I and II), although the dialectical process in the strict sense (Thesis –Antithesis–Synthesis) occurs now and then. The study of the ABA' thought pattern sets into light

the *unity* of certain longer developments, in particular in *The Book of the Philosophers and The Treatise of Walda Heywat*. Where a rapid glance would have only perceived an isolated digression, a more attentive examination reveals the coherence of architectural lines. The text may give the impression of losing its trail, of abandoning the direction of the initial thought. In reality it is taking some attitude in order to enlighten by a vertical dimension and a broader view the panorama it was describing. The most intimate link of internal logic binds these apparently isolated blocks to all that surrounds them.

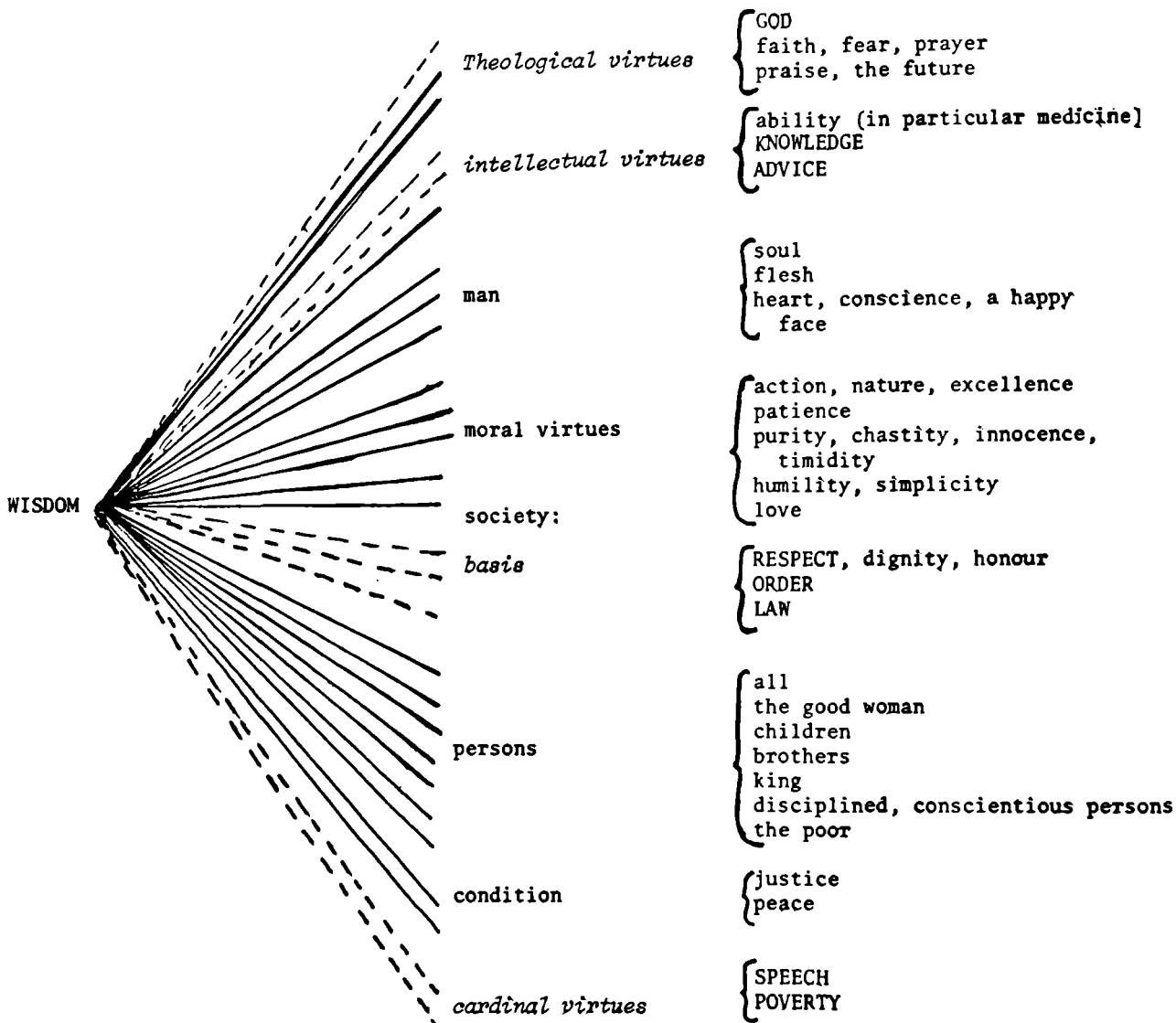
Unity of thought is one of the most significant consequences of sensibilization to this type of logic. Contradictions could appear in a microscopic type of analysis, whereas a high and richer unity emerges from a broader synthesis. This kind of logic is uninterrupted. Only an acute and penetrating mind may, at the moment it is pursuing thesis. A foresees beyond the apparent digression of B the possibility of integrating into A such diverging themes.

The ABA' pattern also reveals a refined sense of rhythm. A binary movement is integrated into a ternary movement which embraces the whole tempo in a single rhythm.

It is interesting to note that this triadic type of development is found not only in the more traditional works, but also and especially in the anti-traditional rationalists Zera Yacob and Walda Heywat—one of the strongest arguments, in terms of intrinsic evidence, of the Ethiopian authenticity of these two treatises. As a matter of fact all the chapters of these *Hatatas*, except of course the autobiographical sections, are structured on the ABA' Model.

One of the most striking examples of this quasi-dialectics is found in Chapter XVIII of *The Treatise of Walda Heywat* on the importance of manual work. The author's thought is developed according to three triads which are arranged between themselves according to three horizontal series. There is a correspondence between the three series of thesis A, as there is also between the three series of antithesis B and of the synthesis A'. Here are the main lines of this development:

	I	II	III
	(Imperative)	(Interrogative)	(Imperative)
A	Love, competence, <i>pride (true)</i> God's precept, necessity	Necessity	Exhortation to work
B	Do not say: Suitable no poor, workers	Do not say: "I have all I need without work"	Do not spy: "I have enough"
A'	Fruit of <i>pride (false)</i>	Fruit of laziness	Fruit of laziness Be like your creator



Dotted lines: most frequent relations

Italics: most frequent notions

Capitals: key words

Synthetic structure of wisdom

The main idea which is developed in the A proposition of the first series is expressed as an advice in the imperative: Love to work: be competent in your work: find your (true) pride in it. This exhortation is based on God's precept. In the second series, only the necessity of work is developed in the interrogative form, whilst in the third triad there is a return to the exhortation to work in the imperative.

The parallel in the second moment (B) is still more striking from one triad to another, since each time it is introduced by the formula: "Do not say". There follows each time an objection to work expressed in direct discourse. The first objection refers directly to the sociological situation in Ethiopia where manual work was traditionally the lot of the poor, the blacksmiths, the builders, the sons of artisans, but below the dignity of important and noble persons. The second and the third triad repeat more or less the same objection; why work? I have all I need.

In the third moment A' the same expression is repeated three times in nearly identical terms: such an objection is the fruit of pride, the fruit of laziness, the fruit of hopeless laziness. The antithesis in the first series between the true pride to be found in work (A) and the false pride of those who spurn manual work (A') could only be brought into the lifelight by the triadic dialectics. And yet in the first and the second series the synthesis is not really made in the third step. It is twice introduced, and twice abandoned immediately as in the hesitating thematic approaches of Beethoven in the first movement of his Ninth Symphony. Thereby Walda Heywat carries the whole weight of the third moment of his first two series unto the end of the last which climaxes the whole composition with the analogy between human work and divine creation.

Love to work with your hands as much as your life allows, and be expert in this work that you may gain a profit from it; do not be ashamed to work with your hands, because it is God's precept; without work of their hands all human creatures perish and their whole life is destroyed. Do not say: "Hard work is suitable to the poor and the workers, the blacksmiths and the builders, to the sons of artisans, not to the sons of important and noble persons; "such a thought is born from a proud heart. Are not the needs of our life equally exacting for each single person? as the needs of our life are not satisfied except through hand-work, likewise work is imposed on each one so that he will fulfil his needs; do not say: "I have all I need to be able to eat and drink without work;" this springs from vicious laziness and destroys the order of the creator who said: You shall eat from the fruit of your work. He who lives on the work of another man while he has himself the ability to work is a thief and a plunderer. Acquaint yourself with manual labour in your

childhood; carefully avoid laziness, for an idle person is not worthy of God's grace. Do your work so that at the right time you may provide for your own needs, and those of your family and of the poor you help. Let not your heart be beaten down if the fruit of your work is wasted or lost, but persevere in your work and pray to God that he bless this fruit and multiply it. Do not exhaust yourself as animals with no power of thinking, but lay out your work wisely so that you will increase usefulness and profit, and lessen fatigue. If God makes your work prosper and you gather its fruit, thank him with all your heart and rejoice with all your family: eat, drink, celebrate a feast of you and enjoyment; and persevere in your work to that you may add fruit to the fruit already found in your work, and profit to the profit already gained. Never say: "I have enough;" do not say either: "This small amount is enough for my life: why should I labour uselessly?" This utterance stems from a hopeless laziness. Acquire as much as you can without dishonesty; enjoy all the goods you have acquired by the sweat of your brow, and be like the creator: as our creator created from nothing by his power and wisdom all the goods of this world that we see, so you also produce by your own effort and wisdom from your work some good fruit for your life and that of your fellow man.

#### b) Question-and-Answer

The question-and-answer pattern is the tool upon which the whole general design of the great works of Ethiopian thought is woven. In *The Book of the Philosophers* dialogue of this type is very frequent: dialogue between Socrates and the King, dialogue between a wise man and a monk from Palestine. Disciples question their master, or secular people a monk, or an unidentified person a monk. There are even cases when the question-and-answer type is underlined by parallelism and its reduction to the essential structural lines of dialogue:

The wise Solomon was asked: "Where is the dwelling place of observation?"

He said: "In the brain".

- "Where is the dwelling place of desire?"

He said: "In the soul."

- "Where is the dwelling place of life?"

He said: "In the face".

- "Where is the dwelling place of the spirit?"

He said: "In the nose".

- "Where is the dwelling place of wisdom?"

He said: "In the tongue".

- "Where is the dwelling place of sorrow?"

He said: "In the chest".

- "Where is the dwelling place of the strength of the spirit?"

He said: "In the lungs."  
 -"Where is the dwelling place of truth?"  
 He said: "In the eyes."  
 -"Where is the dwelling place of sanity?"  
 He said: "In the ears."  
 -"Where is the dwelling place of counselling?"  
 He said: "In the conscience."  
 -"Where is the dwelling place of joy?"  
 He said: "In the heart."  
 -"Where is the dwelling place of the soul's enemy?"  
 He said: "In the flesh."  
 -"Where is the dwelling place of usefulness?"  
 He said: "In the hands".  
 -"Where is the measure of a good reputation?"  
 He said: "In the face."

The entire structure of the two series of maxims which follow the file of Skendes is based on parallelism, since they are essentially a sequence of questions and answers. This unchanging pattern is repeated fifty-five times in the first series and one hundred-and-eight times in the second. It may be formulated thus: "They questioned Skendes and told him: He answered;"

The question-and-answer is frequent in the two Hatatas. But it is conditioned by the life and temperament of the respective authors. Zera Yacob discusses with himself in the solitude of his cave at the foot of the Takkaze Valley; he asks questions to his own self, to which he duly responds. Walda Heywat whose thought is not, like that of his master, the fruit of his personal reflection, nor of his solitude, stands in constant rapport with the "other", whose question he records and to which he replies like an excellent pedagogue.

It is remarkable in both authors that the question-and-answer is implicated in the ABA' pattern described above. As illustrations, I delineate the logical profile of Chapter XII of Walda Heywat on the necessity of prayer.

- A Necessity of constant prayer.  
 B *Objection*: no such necessity since God knows our needs.  
 A' *Answer*: the purpose of prayer is not to recall our needs to God (B), but to render us worthy of Him (A).  
 (A) Excellence of prayers.  
 (B) Miserable state of man without prayer.  
 (A') Our spirit cannot live (B) unless it comes closer to its creator (A).

There are few questions in *The Physiologue* and, except for one, they have no answer. They are purely rhetorical: they are asked by the Physiologue himself and are addressed to his readers, whose answer is never given, as in Walda Heywat, but is considered

as the assent to the content of the question. That is why the question can be the last sentence of a chapter: no reply is expected.

Since the bird has the power to kill itself and to side again, how then is it possible for the Jews to murmur against our Redeemer for having said: "It is in my power to lay down my soul and to take it up again!"

### c) *The Biographical Form*

#### *The Objective Level and the Subjective Level*

There are two biographies in the texts I have studied: the life of Skendes, a kind of philosophical novel and the autobiography of Zera Yacob which is presented as a historical narrative. Now, there are a great number of similarities between the two biographies. The division of the two *Vitae* into fifteen chapters is already a sign of a certain identity in composition. The equal length of chapters is another, the average number of sentences per chapter being of twenty-five sentences for Skendes and of twenty-six sentences for Zera Yacob—whereas, in contrast, for *The Physiologue* it is only of twelve sentences. But the biographical structure of the two works is mostly characterized by the oscillation from the objective level to the subjective level. As this oscillation is particularly sharp in Zera Yacob, I start with it although it appeared later than Skendes.

There are, therefore, two levels: an *objective* level corresponding to events according to their chronological order and a *subjective* level of inquiry, of prayer and meditation. In Zera Yacob these two levels are integrated into the triadic ABA' pattern:

- A The life of Zera up to the death of Susenyos  
 B His solitude in the cave. His Hatata.  
 A' The death of Susenyos; events from his entrance into Enferaz to his son's marriage.

The first level is that of life: it is conditioned by the coordinates of space and time. This first level is represented in *The Treatise of Zera Yacob* considered as a whole by A and B. But the sequence of events is interrupted by a long development on his solitude and the thought he elaborated in his cave.

This B section corresponds to the level of the hatata, of the inquiry. It is no more autobiographical in the narrow sense of the word. It passes from the external to the internal world, from a series of events to an inner dialectic, of questions he sets to himself and of answers he gives himself; to prayer and meditation, from the society of men to a solitary dialogue with the creator and with himself. This does not mean that the two sections A and B are two juxtaposed facts of equal importance in the structure of his

thought. As always in the ABA' pattern, B is the most important. It is also the longest and the most developed.

Consequently the A' section which follows is not simply the resumption of A. It is enlightened by B. The philosophy elaborated during the years of solitude casts its light upon the last years of his life: upon the type of education communicated to those who have been entrusted to him, upon the writing of his life and of his thought (A and B) at the request of one of his students and especially upon his total attitude towards the world, men and himself, to which his marriage and the serenity of mind which has marked his last years are witnesses.

Hence the biography gives us the key to the philosophy of Zera Yacob. It is the fruit of his own reflection on the events which have moulded his life. Each moment of introspection not only follows an event in time but originates from it, or more exactly is a penetrating intuition into the heart of the history which has conditioned his life.

In *The Life of Skendes* the oscillation from the objective to the subjective level is not embodied in the ABA' pattern; the coordinates of time and space do not determine the historical background of the biography but are peripheral to it. The oscillation from one level to another is pursued in a linear way: the simple dramatic progression of events.

The first chapter introduces us to the objective level of Skendes' education; the second chapter brings us to the subjective level by revealing to us Skendes' reflections as he reads the statement on women. In the third chapter we are brought back to the objective level of the conversation between Skendes and his maid, whilst the fourth chapter takes place on the subjective level of thought after Skendes has requested the maid's assistance.

After this moment of introspection, everything takes place for a time on the objective level: the maid's dialogue with Skendes' mother and her final acceptance (Chapter V); the immediate preparation for the bedroom scene (Chapter VI.) But as we come closer to the summit of the biographical sections the revelation of Skendes' identity to his mother, the pendulum movement hastens. It becomes feverish, gasping. The seventh chapter begins on the objective level of events with the encounter between Skendes and his mother, oscillates for a time towards Skendes' marvelling at the veracity of the statement on women. Then we witness a return to the reality of facts with the dinner scene, once more the speculation level with Skendes' Biblical meditation, and again the level of facts from the bed scene up to the revelation of the son's identity. The same tempo is continued into the eighth chapter which is a great oscillation from the mother's suicide to the son's vow of silence.

Afterwards the panting rhythm slows down, tempered by Skendes' withdrawal into himself. The oscillation is now between the successive efforts of

the emperor to have the philosopher speak and Skendes' firmness in his silence. Once the sage has accepted to write, the movement is limited to the questions asked by the emperor and Skendes' discourse on the limits of despotic power, the milkmaid story and its explanation—a preparation for the two series of questions and answers which in their own way prolong the rhythmic variation.

There is therefore an oscillation between the objective and subjective levels in Skendes as in Zera Yacob, but their rhythm and significance are very different. Whereas this oscillation appears in Zera Yacob only in the autobiographical sections (A and A'), but with constant regularity—in Skendes it prevails throughout the whole biography, but with variable tempos of acceleration and retardation. Moreover the significance of this transition from the order of facts to the order of thought is very great in Zera Yacob, since it reveals a complete philosophy—the epiphany in his heart of the meaningfulness of the event. But in Skendes, the strictly philosophical sections are annexed to the *Life*. The subjective level only reveals, within the biographical frame, Skendes' reflection on a philosopher's judgement about women.

#### d) *Typology*

*The Physiologue* is from beginning to end a typology, that is an emblem and a type. The emblem is invariably an animal (40 chapters,) (6 chapters) or a tree (2 chapters) symbolizing the type: man, Christ or the devil. Each chapter is therefore articulated around a naturalistic section describing the emblem whose moral and Christian application is developed in the hermeneutic section.

If therefore we disengage typology from *The Physiologue*, we reconstruct its doctrinal structure and its content on man, Christ and the devil. By the same token we give the emblem its true signification. For the emblem is composed and organized in view of the type and not the other way round. If we represent by letters the emblem and the type, the emblem should be symbolized by B (and not by A) and the type by A (and not by B) because even if B appears first in the naturalistic section with which each chapter begins and even if A follows B, logically it is the opposite procedure: B has been composed with A in view, B is modelled and fashioned by A.

This is true not only of the principal entities of the emblem: animal, plant or animal, and of the type: Christ, man and devil. But it also applies to all and each of the elements of the typological correspondence. If we want to know the true signification of the multiple elements of the emblem, we must start with the type and making our way from the typological motifs to the emblem, we must discern from among the multiplicity of its naturalistic traits those which are destined to correspondence in the emblem.

This principle also applies to the very structure of the naturalistic and hermeneutic sections of each chapter. In the first part there is often confusion, lack of organic development and unity. All the elements are there, but pell-mell. The second section is ordinarily well developed, each element following a lo-

gical sequence and taking its place within a well organized unity.

If we represent by small letters and exponents each of the corresponding motifs in the typological ensemble the following symbolic pattern may express its logical sequence and its development:

	<i>Emblem</i>	<i>Type</i>
	B	A
(b <sup>3</sup> )	b <sup>1</sup>	a <sup>1</sup>
(b <sup>2</sup> )	b <sup>2</sup>	a <sup>2</sup>
(b <sup>1</sup> )	b <sup>3</sup>	a <sup>3</sup>

Thus in Chapter XVI on the panther:

B	A
<i>The Panther</i>	<i>Christ</i>
b <sup>1</sup> but which appears in third place in the naturalistic section the sweet breath of the panther	a <sup>1</sup> the perfume of Christ
b <sup>2</sup> the panther awakens from its slumber after three days	a <sup>2</sup> Christ rises again from His slumber after three days
b <sup>3</sup> but which appears in first place: multicoloured skin	a <sup>3</sup> multicoloured vestment woven with virginity, strength purity, goodness, grace peace and perseverance

#### e) *The Maxims*

The maxims annexed to *The Life of Skendes* offer a vast array of thought patterns. Some maxims are constructed on an image or a rhythm; others on the ABA' triad, monism, the sapiential form; others still are a descriptive definition, a clarification of terms, a genetic or teleological explanation, a conditional or disjunctive type of reasoning or an aporia (avowal of ignorance); the Conclusion of the second section is even a vestige of the biographical form of the first section.

How can one explain such a considerable number and such variety of thought patterns in the *Maxims*? The maxims in *The Book of the Philosophers* did not offer such a display. In this traditional collection of sayings, these were usually too short to permit a diversity of logical development. Hundreds of these maxims are only one-sentence long, whereas the average number of sentences per maxim in the first series of *Skendes* is ten, and in the second, four. However, the length of the *Maxime* is not as great as in a biographical chapter (twenty-five sentences). The *Maxims in Skendes* are sufficiently developed to offer abundance and variety in their logical approach; on the other hand they are not limited to the unique thought pattern either of the very short traditional maxims or of the more elaborate biographical chapter.

#### 4. Rhythm

*The Book of the Philosophers* and *The Maxims of Skendes* are at the crossroads between two expressions of the same basic rhythm, Semitic and Greek. Both of them have been translated and adapted from Arabic, and the Arabic version itself goes back to a Greek original, although there has been some controversy about the language of the original *Secundus*.

If by rhythm is meant the recurrence of basic patterns in composition, then parallelism is the heart of Ethiopian rhythm. Correspondence between one word, one image, one phrase, one thought and another occurs over and over again.

In *The Book of the Philosophers*, there are three types of parallelism:

1) synonymic, where the second line (stich or semistich) reinforces the first, the same word (identical or similar in meaning) or the same thought pattern is reiterated;

2) antithetic, where the second line denies the first or is in contrast to it;

3) synonymic-antithetic, where the two preceding types are combined.

Although the three types of parallelism are represented in *The Book of the Philosophers*, antithesis in all its various forms has so deeply sealed its imprint upon this work that it is, together with the ABA'

thought pattern, one of its essential characteristics. The roots of such a contrast are to be found in a special way of thinking and in a particular sensibility. The author's thought being concentrated around two poles, the expression almost necessarily assumes the antithetical form, the only one which permits him to embrace and translate his world view.

It seems necessary to such a mind, when it tackles a problem of human conduct, to oppose two worlds, two ideas, two types of men, two realities. It is as if one word or one phrase automatically called for its contrary. A first antithesis is often surrounded by a series of others which are secondary to it: they clash with the first, react one upon another, thus contributing to the advancement of thought.

It seems that the view of man and of his universe has been determined by two great antitheses: good and evil, wisdom and folly. Within this fundamental division, all qualities and defects, virtues and vices find their assigned place. The dichotomy penetrates into the heart of man, for man is flesh and spirit or soul, with its desires which raise him above himself or bring him back upon himself.

However, this dualism of *The Book of the Philosophers* is situated on the moral plane: it concerns only man and his behaviour and not a cosmological conflict. An axiological antithesis has been raised to the level of a universal truth.

The consequences which may be derived from this essential feature of Ethiopian thought are considerable:

- 1) It is necessary to draw out the two antithetic poles if one wants to find the axis of development.
- 2) The two of the antitheses are of unequal importance. One is at the service of the other, the aim of the first being to set into light the greater value of the second.
- 3) Very often terms have meaning only through their opposition to their contraries.
- 4) Through the clash of antitheses, *The Book of the Philosophers* obtains a semantic enrichment of concepts.
- 5) Thanks to antithetic opposition one finds the solution to contradictions between maxims.
- 6) The conflict of antitheses produces a paradox.

The latter is not a vain pyrotechnics of words or of concepts. Life as understood by the sage possesses its own paradoxical structures; the apparent contradiction between words reflects the antinomies which the author notes with care and even with some gleefulness to a superior mind the attempt at a solution, or preferring silence to insufficient answers.

Such paradoxes imply a global view of reality. Egypt has therefore introduced us to this depth level of Ethiopian thought. It presents an all-round view of reality. Whilst it underlines one element with obvious insistence, it does not lose sight of its complementary aspect. It is predominantly A, B or C, but not exclusively. It is predominantly dualistic, but not exclusively. It is predominantly religious, but not exclusively. It is predominantly moral, but not exclusively. This attempt to encompass all aspects of reality is partly explained by the various and at times conflicting sources from which the conclusion of *The Book of the Philosophers* is drawn. Thus on page 97, line 1 of our manuscript it is said: "the soul is everlasting," but on line 9 it is stated that the soul "passes away when the flesh passes away." Such contradictions are not made, as occasionally in the *Ochelet*, for the sake of contradiction itself. Nor is such a global presentation of a question only the result of a lack of critical sense—although epistemological inquiries in *The Book of the Philosophers*, in opposition to the two rationalistic treatises, are nearly completely absent. It is rather a spontaneous attitude which, fully aware of the complexity of reality and of man himself, makes a choice (of dualism for instance) and, at the very moment when it concentrates upon a point remains upon a different explanation (substantial unity for instance) which it retains but keeps in a peripheral situation.

### 5. The Image

I do not want to come back on what I have said about the image in my Foreword: the depth of archetypal images and the human dimension of Ethiopian culture. Here I would simply like to confirm by a diagram and by figures the exactitude of the profile of images which I have delineated in the Foreword.

#### UNITS OF IMAGE

Categories of images	Occurrence	Percentage
D Man	875	54.3%
C Plant and animals	196	12.2%
B Artificial objects	326	20.2%
A Physical material things	214	13.3%
Total	1611	100%

Images are very numerous in the whole of Ethiopian philosophical works. They appear under all forms: mostly metaphors and comparisons, but also typological emblems (*The Physiologue*,) combinations of metaphor and comparison, parables, allegories, synecdoches and metonymies.

The role of the image varies from one work to another. *The Physiologue* is essentially a typology, namely an emblem and a type. But if we penetrate into the interior of each chapter and if we try to see if it possesses some comparisons or metaphors different from the main emblem of the chapter—or if the emblem is not resumed within the chapter and integrated within a few figures of style, we realize that we are in the midst of an exuberant forest of images. The number and variety of metaphors in particular, but also of comparisons and of combinations of both is such that we must conclude: the image is the web and, except for a few sapiential and rhythmic types, nearly the entire literary tissue of *The Physiologue*. In principle these metaphors and comparisons appear in the hermeneutic section of each chapter, while in the naturalistic section vivid and kinetic descriptions abound.

The imagination that *The Book of the Philosophers* reveals is not that of the poet, but that of the master of wisdom. The image is at the service of thought. Its end and content is didactic. It is not an addition coming from without; it is integrated into the web of the maxims. It manifests great sagacity and simplicity of intellectual life; an alert temperament whose sensibility is subtle and always in movement; a style that seeks less to develop the image for its own beauty than to persuade and to draw symbols from the simplest aspects of life and in particular from man himself.

In *Skendes*, and especially in the two series of maxims which prolong his biography, the quantity and quality of images transcend all the other works. Far from being subordinated to thought as in *The Book of The Philosophers*, the image in the book of *Skendes* is treated for itself, for its own intrinsic poetic value. It often acquires the dimension of an intellectual thought pattern. It is a symbol.

The rationalist Zera Yacob shows economy of images (66 occurrences.) Nearly all his images are limited to "heart" (22 occurrences) "light" (5) and "path" (4). Moreover they are taken mostly from the Bible in general and from the Psalms in particular.

On the other hand his disciple Walda Heywat combines his master's rationalism with the traditional imagery of *The Book of the Philosophers*. He uses frequently and with finesse the comparison, the analogy of proportion, the metaphor, the metonymy and the portrait. All these forms are characteristic of sapiential, didactic and pedagogical style and thought.

It is difficult to establish a precise statistical evaluation

of the occurrence of images. When the same symbol, the "heart" for instance, comes back two or three times in the same context and with the same meaning, should one record the number of times the same word is repeated or retain as *unit of image* the ensemble where the same basic image occurs? I have preferred to use as criterion the *unit of image*.

There are 1611 such units: a very high figure when one compares it to the total number of sentences: 5407, namely 30%. Let us now place these units in a logical frame, and distribute them according to the great categories of nature: man, animals, plants, inorganic things. One will immediately realize that a division must be made between artificial objects, the fruit of man's work, and things, like river, mountain, as they are found in nature independently of man's work.

To a simple vertical line which goes progressively from A to D, namely in the ontological scale of entities from physical material things independent of man to man himself, is now superimposed a pyramidal structure whose base is nature and summit, man himself. This is what I call, in the absence of a better term which I would have liked to borrow from the Ethiopian vocabulary, the "personalist" or "anthropocentric" profile of images. This mathematically verifiable "discovery" casts such a light on Ethiopia's philosophy and culture—for the archetypal image lies in the deepest recesses of the human being—that I have presented it at the very beginning of this book, before establishing its statistico-lexicographic foundation.

All that remains for me to do now is to illustrate by a few quotations the conclusions I have just advanced. Nearly all the images (54.34) are therefore of the following type: "The sun and the moon are these that have explored this world, and they know that great men do not remain." The sun and the moon are physical entities; they exist in the objective order of nature—for the Ethiopian there is no doubt about this. Yet to material things typically human qualities are attributed: to express, to know. In other words, man, the subject, is better known than nature, the object. It is in function of man, of his body, of his organs and tissues, of his heart, of his individuality, of his place in society, of the amplitude of his action, that more than half the metaphors, comparisons and other types of images are inspired and constructed.

The next group of images is intimately linked to the first, since it is composed of artificial objects made or determined by man:

Clouds go like ships.  
Winds are like crowns surrounded  
with fruits, the delight of the earth.  
The ocean is the wall of the world.  
The heavens will be furled like paper.

Once more, here are things which exist as such in the universe: clouds, winds, oceans, skies. To what

are they compared? To the fruit of human work: ships, crowns, wall, paper. Man is still present.

As to animals and plants, physical material things, they are undoubtedly known. But they rarely serve as points of reference. Outside of man and of what is made by him the Ethiopian, as he is known to us by thirteen centuries of literary production, seems to lose his interest.

## 6. *The World*

The two most eloquent works on the world are *The Book of the Philosophers* and *The Maxims of Skendes*.

In *The Book of the Philosophers* there is no explicit definition of matter. However, its characteristics are given, firstly by its opposition to the spirit: then by its elementary composition; water, air, earth, fire; thirdly by its temperature and degree of humidity, and finally by its two properties: space and time.

Only one maxim is devoted to space and yet it is most significant since it expresses the cosmology which serves as background to the whole book. Space is a kind of receptacle for the cosmos. Below the foundations of the flat earth and of the sky, whose lateral walls are grounded on the solid earth, there is nothing to be contained and hence there is no space. Space is limited like the visible universe itself.

On the other hand *The Book of the Philosophers* has much to say about time: not cosmic time which regulates the cycles of nature, but historical time unfolding as event. For it is the human, the moral which is a concern to the author, and not the material as such.

1) Historical time is considered as a successive continuum. It is not cyclical, but linear. It is symbolized by a spear which is thrust forward, from the past movement which is no more, through a present which is arrested in none of its movements, towards a future which is not as yet. Such a notion of the irreversibility of time, coming from a Judaeo-Christian tradition, endows present life with a dramatic significance. Time is ambivalent. It is a thing of great value: it is a flowing reality that never comes back upon itself.

However, the symbol of the line does not express the total reality that is envisaged. The symbol of time suggested by the whole *Weltanschauung* of *The Book of the Philosophers* is the tree—the tree that grows, and from one seed become a multitude of fruits. The roots of time and the roots of eternity are at work on the same tree of man. The event is pregnant with Advent. This coexistence of time and eternity expresses in *The Book of the Philosophers* the paradox of a truly inventive and free creation and of a transcendental Being that is self-sufficient.

2) The temporal dimension of creation, with its specification of past, present and future, as well as the immanence of its reality are very frequently mentioned.

3) It is within this temporal context that life obtains its significance. Hence the comparison of life with a road. There is a localization symbol and a spatial direction for this straight road: it is the vertical line which goes from this earth upward.

4) Anticipating his final and irrevocable limit of presence in this world, man assesses himself in the light of the finite possibilities which precede his end, shoulders his responsibilities and thus gives an authentic sense to the entire duration of his existence. Such a death becomes a life. It is a wisdom in its temporal depth.

5) When we come to the explanation of subsistence beyond temporal death, we are faced with two explanations which are placed side by side without any attempt at reconciliation: the Platonic notion of immortality which presupposes dualism and the Semitic, Biblical notion of resurrection which presupposes a unitary view on man. The former is the prevalent explanation.

Creation explains the double finality of the world: the first is intrinsic to it and is expressed by the laws of nature, the second transcends its material limits and is concentrated in man. The cosmic world reaches its signification only in man. *The Book of the Philosophers* is not interested in the earth for its own sake, but only as the sensible, material terrain where man's feet stand. This human world is sometimes considered as good, good for the flesh and good for the soul.

But most maxims are opposed to this fundamental optimism. The world, according to this type of monastic view, represents the section of mankind absorbed with concern for the present life; its interests are opposed to those of the life to come. One should withdraw from such vanity and evil.

*The Book of Skendes* is contemporary to *The Book of the Philosophers*. And yet its world view, as it is expressed in the first series of maxims, propounds something that is rare in Ethiopia: pantheism, or more exactly theistic pantheism—as will later be found in Victor Hugo and Teilhard de Chardin. Pantheism has its source in the ideas which seem to have inspired the book of Secundus: they correspond to the semi-philosophical and semi-religious ideas that were widespread during the first centuries of the Roman Empire. At that time when Christianity had not triumphed as yet, the movement which would end with the complete abandonment of paganism was strongly stirring the minds of men. They were striving at the comprehension of the mysteries of nature, of man and of God.

It is especially during the first centuries of the Christian era that theistic pantheism took the specific form we find in Secundus. Each religion was developing in the East sects which had their own gnosis, their mystical interpretation of cult, of creation, of nature and of the supernatural. At first, Jewish cabalists, Christian gnostics, then the Neo-Pla-

tonists of Alexandria, as well as many schools before and after them took part in this movement.

The Greek text as well as the Arabic contain a mingling of pantheism and of theism; in the Arabic, and still more in the Ethiopic, theism is clearly Judaic.

### 7. Man

In *The Book of the Philosophers* there are three different words to express man either in his unity or in one of his parts: "nafs," "sega," "flesh" and "man-fas", "spirit." The Book contains no formal discussion on the unity of the soul or the diversity of its functions. But it is impressed by the image of man as a battlefield for conflicting principles. Is the insistence on tensions in man due to historical factors, as the influence of Alexandrian Neo-Platonism; Or were the compilers of this book already attuned to these immanent struggles and starting from their personal convictions have they sought for an explanation which they have found in the Neo-Platonism of the time? The Neo-Platonic influence is so strong and so deep in this work that even when it uses the language of Semitic anthropology (flesh and spirit), in fact it thinks in terms of Greek dualism (body and soul). The hands are of Esau, but the voice is of Jacob. The hands are Semitic, but the voice is Greek. The anthropology manifested by *The Book of the Philosophers* seems at first sight to express a unitary view of man. But a careful study reveals that it is bound to Neo-Platonism, with its insistence on conflicts in man, nay in the soul itself.

None of the three terms: soul, flesh, spirit expresses man in the totality of his complexity. There is no trace of monism. Man is structured, as is the rest of created universe.

However, the way the different parts of man are united is a mystery which disconcerts the human mind. Man is both unity and division, harmony and conflict, order and disorder.

When we compare the Hatatas to *The Book of the Philosophers*, a double difference appears immediately. The first is that anthropology is not identically treated by the authors of the Hatatas. It is the privileged domain of Walda Heywat. However, the longer explanations of the disciple are but the development of the master's intuitions on the subject.

The second difference lies in the exclusive dualism of the Hatatas. *The Book of the Philosophers* takes into account both the unity and the division in man, although division is underlined. No similar hesitation in the Hatatas, no effort to embrace all the aspects of complexity in man. They are explicitly dualistic. However, the psychological vocabulary is exactly the same "man", "soul", "spirit" and "flesh". The most frequently used terms are, in order of decreasing proportion: "man". "soul" ("spirit"), "flesh."

One of the most remarkable characteristics of the-

se two *Treatises* is their intimate and profound relation to creationism. There is not one statement about anthropology where creationism does not appear directly or indirectly, implicitly or explicitly. I have already noted in the first part of this work that the goodness of the created thing was the basis of Zera Yacob's method. The *rest of the Treatise*, in its logical development, essentially appears as the application of this basic methodological approach to the intimately interrelated domains of theodicy, ethics and psychology. However, psychology is more than the third and last application of Zera Yacob's methodological basis to the particular field of philosophy. Creationism has so profoundly penetrated psychology that it is from this internal centre of its structure that each of these parts must be considered: the difference between man and the animal, the soul and its relation to the body, the immortality of the soul.

The difference between man and the animal is the explicit object of Walda Heywat's study in two of his chapters, VIII and XII. In Chapter VIII, he insists on man's admiration for his creator and on the praise owed to Him for having raised the human being above all other creatures through his reason and his science. In Chapter VII he contrasts the animals who do not know from whom they receive what they need, and men who do know. Statements made here and there in the second Hatata, if collected, amount to a rather complete treatise on the subject. Animals do not have the power of thinking. Man is superior to them by his intelligence which draws him closer to the creator. But he has no greater worth than an animal if he is bought like a slave. He is even inferior to an animal if he abandons his parents in order to become a monk or if he considers the conjugal act as contrary to nature.

The soul is spiritual and rational. However much Walda Heywat insists that by "Man" we should understand "Soul": he does not doubt the existence of the sega. We must here avoid an inextricable confusion. The Ethiopic word *sega* has two different meanings. The first is "flesh" corresponding to the Greek *sarx* and the Latin *caro*. One single term therefore covers two very different approaches in psychology: dualism and unity. But *even sega* refers to man's weakness and fragility, it does so within the framework of dualism and not unity. This creates no problem when *sega* signifies the "body" since the "body" is a word of dualism. But a linguistic problem may arise when *sega* stands for the "flesh." The "flesh" then means this part in man which is distinct from the spiritual and rational part called "soul" and considered as superior to it; the "flesh" is weak, fragile, passible, mortal. In other words, for the Hatata, the "body" is the "flesh." Both express dualism, both express the ambivalence of the unique word in Geez: *sega*.

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towards concupiscence. It is the obstacle to the mastery of human actions; it may lead to adultery those who would want to remain celibates: the advocates of monastic fasting like to avoid this trap. It is mortal and as such its value is inferior to that of immortal soul. However, the flesh is not only described in somber colours. It has some value since it is not without purpose that God has "planted" concupiscence in the flesh. It expresses a natural and wholesome desire of marriage, in which husband and wife are one.

Zera Jacob presents three arguments in favour of immortality. The first is metaphysical; it is based on the desire for happiness which is inherent to the human soul and yet is not sated with finite joys of present life. The second is psychological; it is founded on the spiritual power of the soul. Our soul is capable of having the mental concept of God and consequently it is capable of being immortal. He who has given the power will also give the reality. The third is moral; it rests on the existence of injustice in this world. The light of reason requires that an almighty God re-establish perfect retribution after death.

Walda Heywat has devoted the greater part of two chapters to immortality: Chapters IV and XXXIV. In the first he opposes to the soul of animals, whose mortality or immortality we are not sure of, that of man whose immortality is beyond doubt. In the second he exhorts his reader not to fear the things which frighten the wicked at the hour of their death, and he raises to the contemplation of the light of God and to the ardent love of the soul for its creator.

One point is luminously clear in the two *Hatatas*: they only mention immortality of the soul, never resurrection of the flesh. The former conveys a dualistic conception of man, the second, a unitary conception.

Man as object of philosophical anthropology is unknown to *The Physiologie*. It speaks abundantly of the person; but the human being is considered in theological terms and nearly always signifies: "the Christian." What therefore does *The Physiologie* tell us about man within the context of theological anthropology? It is essentially a *metanoia*, a *conversion* in the sense that man must turn away from one state in order to turn towards another: the first state is that of infidelity, of carnal desires, of the world, of evil conduct; the second, that of Christ and of His Church.

As to *Skendes*, saddling over pantheism and theism, Greek paganism and Egypto-Ethiopian Christianity, it presents man as both responsible and pre-determined. Although the result of three elements: the earth which gives him his body, the air which gives him his vital force and fire which gives him his intelligence, man has nevertheless a destiny that transcends the boundaries of life; he also has duties, merits and demerits; he must strive and struggle.

He therefore is in possession of a certain liberty which is at work in a manner parallel to the fatal action of destiny and the active intervention of providence. Destiny and providence, divine and natural laws coexist.

It is precisely the conflict between destiny and providence, divine and natural laws which supplies the dramatic and even radical situation for the story of *Skendes*. On the one hand his mother, as all women according to the author, is burdened with instincts which necessarily lead her to the incestuous act; on the others hand, she is a free, responsible creature. No one is responsible, and yet there must be an atonement. The Moira of ancient Greece survives unto the practices and beliefs of magi, cabalists and talmudists up to Christian Ethiopia.

### 8. Society

Two works are particularly significant on man as a social being: *The Book of the Philosophers* and the *Hatatas*; two others say practically nothing on the subject: *Skendes* and *The Physiologie*.

We can draw a graphic representation of the social *Weltanschauung* of *The Book of the Philosophers*. It would comprise three concentric circles. In the centre is the family—not the family as social unit (the latter is with the state one of the objects on which this view of the social world is applied), but as paradigm of social relations. These relations are anchored in the respect, the esteem and the recognition of the dignity of the other.

Beyond the family, lay order and law. Order includes all that is directly related to the finality of man, the ensemble of norms: its model is the just adaptation of each part of the cosmic universe to the other. The law resides in the perfection of the action itself. But the ultimate model is God who, as infinite and present to the world of well ordered social relations, is both above and outside the two preceding circles and yet penetrates them to their very centre.

Such a well structured *Weltanschauung* is strongly marked by stability. Its roots are firm and steadfast, but not altogether. For a breach opens into this well ordered structure and from the centre of family-like relations makes its way unto and reaches the order and law of the creator. This breach is human folly, disorder, sin, as its destructive action widens through the strata of the universe.

Within this *Weltanschauung* are to be found three of the particular items of social relations: our fellow-man, conjugal society and the state.

When we penetrate into the details of each of these three spheres, we observe that they are not as rigid as they appear at first and from a distance.

Respect, dignity and veracity must be considered in the light of family relations, where a friend, a servant and even a neighbour are recognized as brothers, travellers as companions and one's wide as

one's body and soul. There is place for discretion, intimacy and even reservedness.

Likewise life, trust, joy, happiness breath within the norms which constitute the model of order. The harmony of order is not as mechanical as the uniformity of the skies. It is a harmony of peace, of security, of goodness, of forgiveness for all the efforts which aim at breaking an order that is human and free, and not inflexible and determined. The Kingdom itself cannot exist without friends.

Even the law to which all men must conform, its authenticity, its justice towards the individual and towards all, is related from above to divine friendship and from below to the hope, the prayer, the generosity and the mercy of the king.

What place is attributed to love in these interpersonal relations? Love is the greatest and strongest factor in drawing men together. What type of love does *The Book of the Philosophers* propose? Is it the self-centred, passionate *eros* or *agape* which seeks to satisfy the other;

Perhaps the closest analogy with the Ethiopian *fefer*, "love" is the Hebrew notion of *nheed* whose first meaning is that of bond or contract, and whose significance has been utilized to designate the human relations which are the result of such a bond. Where the Hebrew at first blush thinks of a "bond", the Ethiopian thinks of the respect due a person of consideration, who is precious, dear, "heavy".

The semantic landscape which surrounds love as *fefer* offers a "form", a *Gestalt* which extends all around it in various types of connections and identifications. Some are juridical like law, peace, unity; others are moral like conscience, conduct, loyalty, obedience, duties; others are dynamic like profit, power, richness, direction; other are sapiential like wisdom and advice, or divine in their origin and the perfection of their blessing; but all convey the idea of weight like the splendid definition of love by a IV-century African thinker: "*Amor meus pondus meum*. My love is my weight".

*The Book of the Philosophers*, as we have seen, exhibits a strong and solidly structured social *Weltanschauung* based on respect, order and law. Such an architecture is not absent from the *Hatatas*. They devote a relatively important place to respect, order and law. But when we pass from traditional to modern philosophy, the centre of social ethics is displaced from a stable, firm and secure articulation to a more metaphysical basis: creation.

Whereas there are three hundred and ninety-nine sayings on social ethics disseminated throughout *The Book of the Philosophers*, the first *Treatise* contains only a few references to it; the second *Treatise* has concentrated in one chapter (XIII) the marrow of *Walda Heywat's* social philosophy.

The creational dimension of *Walda Heywat's* social ethics has three immediate consequences as far as social theory is concerned namely: unity (or

equality) co-operation and love. Since all men, independently of their family ties or their religious belonging, are creatures of the same creator, they are sons of the same father and brothers of the same family. Consequently they are absolutely equal between themselves: they should love one another, and cooperate between themselves:

The virtues and vices which are brought to light by such a *social Weltanschauung* are only touched upon in this short chapter. But the choice of these is very revealing. One notices that in *Walda Heywat*, as in traditional Ethiopian wisdom, defects are more abundantly treated than the qualities to which they are opposed. Only one virtue is presented as a key word; but in the context of love and unity it is practically the most important since, in practice, there will be confrontation with those who do not share this social approach and consequently make use of violence. This primordial virtue is patience.

As to vices, according to *Walda Heywat*, they are opposed to the most basic duties and rights; to the duty of love like physical blows against one's neighbour; to the duty of truthfulness, in language as lie, calumny, evil speech, and in married life as adultery; to the duty of justice as murder and to the right of ownership as theft.

*Walda Heywat* is thus brought about to propose social conformism and to devote a whole chapter to it (IV). When at home, one should follow the customs of one's country. But when abroad, one should conform to local customs. Once more a parallel with *Descartes* is suggested. In the third part of his *Discours sur la methode*, as he is about to enter the rigid but disquieting discipline of the methodic doubt, *Descartes* establishes three rules of a provisional ethics which is destined to leave him in a tranquil state of mind in spite of his theoretical doubt. The first of these rules concerns social conformism which requires from the individual that he conform to the laws and the religion of his country.

However, the social conformism of *Descartes* is first proposed as a provisional measure of Stoic ethics. Once he has established the existence and nature of God, of the soul and of the world, he re-discovers this moral law, but this time in order to give it a solid conclusion, scientifically and up to a point mathematically deduced from preceding certitudes. In *Walda Heywat* there is no double value to social conformism: from the beginning it is presented as a permanent rule.

No subject is more developed in both *Treatises* than that of marriage and of family. Marriage does not have the significance of a methodological principle like the "inquiry" (*hatata*;) neither is it like creation the basis of the entire construction, nor its summit like the infinite being. Marriage is rather the centre of all centres. For among the three interrelated domains which emerge over the horizon of creationism: theodicy, ethics, and psychology, ethics occupies the

central part; and at the centre of social ethics, marriage.

What are the values Zera Yacob and Walda Heywat recognize to marriage life and to family? They agree on the sanity of monastic life, the excellence of matrimonial and familial life in general and of the conjugal act in particular, monogamy and the permanence of marriage. Both recognise as evil: divorce, fornication, abortion and polygamy. Only Zera Yacob maintains the equality of man and woman; for Walda Heywat woman is inferior by nature.

Contrary to *The Book of the Philosophers*, the two Hatatas have little to say about the state. For Zera Yacob, kings like richness, hypocrisy, treason and perfidy. As to Walda Heywat he is so impressed by the political evils of his time that he has hardly touched upon the moral values that "those who govern" should possess. If it is comforting to hear him speak with vigour against slavery, one can only regret his attitude towards friendship: one must be suspicious of all men, even of friends.

### 9. Morality

As for the preceding section on society, I shall mostly refer to two works, one which represents the traditional wisdom of Ethiopia, *The Book of the Philosophers*, and the other, its modern rationalistic counterpart, *The Treatise of Zera Yacob* and that of *Walda Heywat*.

#### a) *The Central Position of Ethics*

Morality is the central element of *The Book of the Philosophers*. Cosmology, psychology and sociology hardly exist in their own right. They are completely conditioned by the author's concentration on moral questions. For example, little attention is paid to cosmic time; time is defined in terms of morality. The human heart is not simply a physiological organ; it is an image, a symbol, and above all the centre of moral habits. As a matter of fact, all the chapters I have studied in this work: thought, rhythm, image, world, man and society are fundamentally nothing but aspects of a great reality towards which they converge one way or the other: moral action. Even theological questions, which transcend the finitude of human action, are considered in the perspective of morality.

When we move to the rationalistic treatises of Zera Yacob and of his disciple, the situation changes. Their structure is not modelled according to interior circles which would penetrate into the depths of morality as it is the case for the XVI-century Collection of Maxims. The two *Treatises* have neither their architecture as resting on an ontological basis: the goodness of the created thing. We would penetrate under this basis and consider how its pillars plunge into Ethiopian theology and in particular into the

psalmic view of the world. Over this basis and founded upon it a vast shell-like dome opens somewhat in the manner of an ultramodern building. Each point of this dome finally rests on the unique basis. For ethics, no more and no less than theodicy, psychology and cosmology, is firmly established on the same creational ground. However, in its own way, ethics is central to these *Treatises*, not in the sense that it conditions all the rest as *The Book of the Philosophers*, but in the more restricted sense that it occupies the greatest part of the vault. Nearly all the principles of ethics have been included: from the more abstract principles of ethics to their more concrete application to life, and there again from the relations of man to his Lord, to himself, to his neighbour to the relations between husband, wife and children and to those within the State. It is here that Zera Yacob approaches ethical problems in a very different way from Walda Heywat. But both agree on the prevalence of concern for moral questions.

If we take as sources of our analysis the other works of Ethiopian literature: *The Physiologue* and *The Life and Maxims of Skendes*, particularly the second series of *Maxims*, the conclusion emerges in a peremptory way: the moral prevalence characterizes all expressions of Ethiopian thought.

#### b) *The Norms of Morality*

What makes the right act good and the wrong act bad? What is the cause of goodness in some acts, of badness in others? The answer is: the relationship of the act to some yardstick of morality called a norm of morality.

A norm of morality may be (a) subjective, that is, existing in the human agent and giving him moral guidance in the placing of his human acts; (b) objective, that is existing outside the human agent in the order of objective reality. Some moralists make a distinction, within the objective norm of morality, between the proximate and the ultimate norm, the ultimate being the last assignable reason why the proximate norm is precisely what it is.

Here we encounter one of the most far-reaching controversial issues in ethics, namely, is morality purely subjective? Does it depend entirely on the viewpoint of man, individual or social, so that rules of morality are nothing more than a series of convenient arrangements or the expression of social habits founded on emotion, which change with time and place? Or is morality objective, rooted in reason, and founded on principles as valid as those which underlie physics or astronomy?

Schools of the thought have often derived their name from the answers to this basic problem: utilitarianism, intuitionism, autonomous reason, moral positivism,

What is the norm according to the *The Book of the Philosophers*? One gap is immediately apparent:

there is no place for the proximate standard of morality. One soars immediately to the ultimate: God. There is no concern for the immanent axiological dimension of the human act, be it *a lex naturalis* a categorical imperative of a free, autonomous reason or self-realization.

There is God above and man's conscience below, the objective and ultimate, the subjective and proximate, the eternal and the impermanent. It may be that the negative approach to the world and the flesh characteristic of so much Ethiopian monastic and ascetic literature, prevented the authors of *The Book of the Philosophers* from considering the immanent values of human nature, rooted in time, in the world, in matter.

The whole ethical ensemble may be represented as a globe. It revolves around two poles, one being God, the ultimate objective norm; the other, conscience, the subjective criterion. The axis that holds them together is human life, for on one hand conscience guides man throughout his existence, and on the other hand, the Infinite Transcendental Being penetrates each moment of the temporal duration up to the liberating rupture of its limits through death. Around this axis revolves the whole ethical body of goodness kept together by the attraction of its teleological pole. Outside of it, dragged down by the fall of gravity, falls evil like a parabolic path that leads nowhere.

Morality therefore appears as a dialogue, in a simple, stark, naked transcendentalism—not the idealistic transcendentalism of Kant, but an ethical, ascetic transcendentalism which concentrates on the axiological sphere and the dialectics which crosses it through and through. *The Book of the Philosophers* attributes a much greater importance to the subjective norm of conscience than to the objective ultimate one, *egziabher*, "The Lord of the World." It is a work of wisdom, of ethical education, of orthopraxy. Now there is no education possible of the objective norm; it is enough to indicate its existence and to identify its nature. The whole burden and message of *The Book* concentrate on conscience, its role as a guide in the moral world, its nature, its depth, its relation to the objective norm, the display of its connections with other aspects in man, the difficulties encountered in its proper operation, its value, the type of person it characterizes.

In order to express such a diversified range of meanings, *The Book of the Philosophers* makes use mainly of two words. The most frequently used is *lebbuna*. It is derived from *lebb*, "heart". *Lebb* stands as symbol of all that is internal and central in man, not only of an affective and intellectual type, but also of a moral one. The "heart" is sensitive to the least movement; it wants and listens, ready to respond to the voice of *egziabher*. *Lebbuna* does not evoke, as the English term "conscience", a rational connotation, but

an internal organ that throbs at the call of duty.

The second term *hellina* is less frequent and less concrete than *lebbuna*. It refers to "cogitation, meditation, a mental conception." Hence when the mind is responsible for its own activity, *animus sui compus*, we have the moral significance of the English word "conscience."

Where *The Book of the Philosophers* keeps complete silence, namely on the proximate standard of morality, the *Treatises* are clear, precise, abundant: where *The Book of the Philosophers* is rich and colourful, namely on the subjective standard, the *Treatises* show economy of vocabulary and shades of meaning. For the first time in the literary history of Ethiopia the proximate norm is given full relief in the natural law, the *lex naturalis*. The Geez language in which the *Treatises* were written offered their authors a semantic richness which the Latin *lex* does not afford. For there are two words for "law" in Geez.

The first and most commonly used is *heg*. It comes from a root which means: "a day's work, a boundary-mark, a limit, a determined time, a law". It refers first of all to a positive law, and in particular to the divine *nomos*, but it is also and very frequently applied to the laws and institutions of a country or society, and finally also to the "law of nature". In this sense, the law is usually considered as it emanates from the creator and is willed by Him. Mating is willed by *the law of creation*; marriage springs from *the law of the creator the law of creation* "orders" one man to marry one woman; those who have fulfilled the *law of their nature* will be rewarded; we should know *the laws of our creator* and keep them: God respects the limits of each creature's service determined by the law of its nature; it is we ourselves who violate the *laws that the creator set up for us and for all the creation*. God has imposed *laws on all creatures*; the lazy person violates *God's law*; marriage comes from a *law of nature*; men, despising the wisdom of the creator, refused to work according to *His law*; they did not understand God's work nor follow *the natural law that reason taught them*.

But there is another word for "law" in Geez: *serat*: Its root seems to have meant: "to stretch forward", and hence "to dispose on a line, to set in order". *Serat* is first of all a "disposition, a setting in order, a class." It is also an "arrangement", and "a rule of life according to order, an instruction". Hence its meaning of "precept, commission, edict, decree" and of "law, stature" which applies to the laws which are inscribed in the very nature of things.

In many of these texts, it refers, as *heg* itself, to the creator, but with an emphasis on the imprint it has left on all creatures, on the order God has established in the world which He sustains and which man cannot destroy, because the order of God is stronger than the order of man. Man should follow the law which his creator imposed upon him and never exceed it

10. Key Words and Themes  
of Ethiopian Philosophy

In the section on "Wisdom as Theme" I have already defined the terms "key words" and "themes". Here I would like to consider synthetically *all* the works of Ethiopian literature which I have analyzed: traditional and anti-traditional, inspired by Christianity and opposed to any positive religion, anonymous or not, critical or not, original or not.

One could expect that there would be no key words, common to so diversified a span. But there are a few: eight exactly. They may be considered as the linguistic nucleus of Ethiopia's philosophical vocabulary. Some are sapiential like *wisdom* and *knowledge*; others are theological like *Lord*, anthropological like *flesh*, *soul-spirit* and *heart*; still others are ethical like *law* and *love*.

We have already considered each of these key words, from "Wisdom as Theme" to the double signification of "law." However, we have left for the end the key word which gathers all the meanings, connections and resonances of Ethiopian literature: the "heart."

The "Heart"

The ancient unused root *labbaba* has given rise, in Ethiopian sapiential and rationalistic literature, to the richest and most diversified key word of philosophy, since the *heart* has a multiplicity of connotations: opposition to flesh and identification with it, conflicting tendencies, internal centre, centre of intellectual operations, centre of emotions, centre of moral habits.

In *The Physiologue*, the heart is indeed an internal centre, but its relations are of a theological nature, with Christ through faith and prayer and with the demon through passion and sin. Whereas in all other philosophical works, the *heart* is one of the most frequently used key words, in *The Physiologue* the frequency of its occurrence is weak (fifteen times).

In *The Book of the Philosophers*, the *heart*, *lebb*, is a frequent symbol, rich in significance and of a vast comprehension. It is opposed to the flesh, never to the soul. However, man is led by the flesh to the knowledge of man's *heart*. The flesh is the revelation of the *heart*. The heart harbours inclinations which are not only different but *conflicting*. It is the stage for a dramatic struggle between the forces of evil and the forces of good, between the world and aut-

hentic wisdom. It is the most internal centre of man. It is harmony with oneself, the last refuge where one cannot escape one's true identity. Whereas in Greco-Roman culture, the *heart* as symbol usually refers to the emotional nature of man in opposition to his intellectual nature, in Semitic culture it comprises not only the emotional, but also the intellectual and the moral. From among the three categories the *heart* is the centre of: the intellectual, the emotional and the moral, the emotional is the least represented in *The Book of the Philosophers*. The moral connections anchored in the heart of man are the most numerous and the most important.

The *heart* is the most frequently used symbol in *Skendes*, as it also was in *The Book of the Philosophers*, but not with the same richness of connotations. In the biographical section of *Skendes*, the *heart* ordinarily designates the emotional in opposition to the intellectual nature. *Skendes' heart* is full of anger when he reads the philosopher's statement about women; he desires to gain to himself the emperor's *heart*. His mother's *heart* is favourable to the traveller's proposition; sadness is absent from it; it is comforted by his charm and smile; it clings to the unknown traveller because of his beauty; all its desires are sated.

Whilst the biographical section underlines the *Maxims* and particularly the second series of maxims insist on the ethical. From this viewpoint, Sections II and III, are deeply rooted in the symbolism which characterizes all the Ethiopian philosophical contributions. Compared to *The Book of the Philosophers*, the first series of maxims appears as pessimistic, since it presents only the forces of evil which bend man's *heart*. In comparison, *The Book of the Philosophers* evoked only the forces of good in the symbolism of the *heart* as centre of moral habits. However, the second series of maxims is more global. It underlines the purity of the heart, its good intentions. But it also knows, as the first series, his mundane desires, his sense of guilt, in a word, the evil that dwells in him.

The *heart* is also the most employed symbol in the *Hatatas*. But it does not have the same richness of connotations as for instance in *The Book of the Philosophers*. Its opposition to the flesh, its conflicting tendencies are not mentioned; only once, in Zera Yacob, is the *heart* referred to as internal centre. The *heart*, however, is well known as internal centre, especially by the more intellectualist Zera Yacob: it is also known somewhat and by both as centre of emotions; much as centre of moral habits by the two authors, but especially by the more parenetic Walda Heywat.