

Gadle Lalibela/Life Of Lalibela – Rough Translation Of Vie de Lalibala, roi d'Ethiopie: texte éthiopien (French)

Introduction

Listen now, my dear friends, you who seek the blessings of the grace of the righteous and who burn with love for Lalibela, so that you may delight in the tale of his pleasant struggle, which penetrates like water into the depths or like marrow into the bones. For it is a rain of praises that is not dried up by the great heat of summer. Therefore, open the ears of your hearts. I begin, as much as the imperfections of my tongue and the small extent of my knowledge allow, to recount some of his many miracles. I cannot enumerate all the deeds of this blessed man, but only a small number of them, so that your heart may rejoice in learning about them. For the story of the righteous brings much more joy than a well-laden table satisfies, or than wine and mead quench thirst; it has more sweetness than oil and fat, as the prophet says: "His words are smoother than butter" [Psalm 55:21]. As for you, it is fitting that you clothe yourselves in his faith as with a garment, that you wrap yourselves in it as with a veil, and that you honor this man as you honor the angels, the prophets, the apostles, the righteous, the martyrs, the virgins, and the monks, because he is their equal in every way. May his prayer and intercession, his help, and the hope of his blessing be with the servant of God, our queen Walatta Iyasus, with Walatta Hiruta Selassie, and with all of you here present, who have come from near or far to take refuge in the shadow of his wings; may he remain with you until the end of time. Amen.

The Birth of Lalibela

In Ethiopia, there was a city called Roha, which is the birthplace of the blessed Lalibela. In this city lived a man from one of the most prominent, noble, and wealthy families, rich in gold, silver, clothing, precious fabrics, servants, and maidservants. This man was named Jan Seyum. He married and had a son, who was this illustrious saint, mysteriously named Lalibela. I will now explain the meaning of this name and why it was given to him.

When his mother gave birth to him, a great of bees surrounded him, just as they gather around honey. His mother saw these bees swarming around her child, like an army around a king. At that moment, the spirit of prophecy descended upon her, and she said, "The bees recognize that this child is great." This is why she gave him the name Lalibala, which means "The bee has recognized his grace."

Indeed, it is certain that the bees recognized his grace, as they surrounded him like they do with honey (for bees love honey), which is why they flew around him. The blessed Lalibala was destined to produce pure honey through good works, gathering flowers of various colors, shapes, scents, and fragrances; by striving more than other saints, fasting more than other fasters, remaining purer than other pure men, resisting passions more than other steadfast men, worshiping God more than other worshippers, humbling himself more than other humble men, showing more gentleness and mercy than other gentle and merciful men, being more charitable than those who give alms, loving his neighbor more than other philanthropists, attending church more frequently in the morning than other devout attendees*, and fostering peace around him more than other peaceful men. In all that constitutes good works, there was not a single thing that the blessed Lalibala did not gather to acquire wisdom.

He who searches hearts and minds had sent the bees to surround him on the day of his birth, just as they surround honey. There is also another similarity that completes the omen given by these bees concerning the blessed and holy Lalibala, for a great mystery was revealed on the

day of his birth. Although he was just a child at the time [fol. 37], it was foretold what would happen to him in his old age. The bees symbolize the king's army, and their stingers, with which they sting men, represent the weapons of the king's soldiers, used to wage war against the infidels who oppose the king. For the blessed Lalibala was destined to be a king, and that is why the bees surrounded him, like the army and escort of a king, though he himself did not yet understand this omen of his future command. His royalty was revealed before he was proclaimed king; his supremacy was apparent even before he was named king or prince. However, these were not physical bees but angels who had taken their form to announce his reign and the pure honey of good works that would flow from him. The blessed Lalibala was destined to wear royal garments and fulfill this prophecy on earth by performing deeds of justice.

Portrait of Lalibala

Lalibala grew up, nourished by the Holy Spirit, who strengthened him in power, wisdom, and resolve, with an admirable bearing of majesty. He was perfectly handsome, without deformity from head to toe; his cheeks were red like the skin of a pomegranate, his eyes resembled the morning star, his fingers like a pair of doves (!), his nose straight, the tone of his voice pleasant, his mouth eloquent, and his tongue articulate. Thus, Lalibala grew, accompanied by the grace of God, the help of Jesus Christ, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. All who saw him admired his majesty and bearing and foretold his future kingship. The bees had also foretold this on the day of his birth. Just as our Savior, when He was born of a holy virgin in whose womb He had been conceived without the involvement of any man, sent a star to the Magi to announce His birth and reveal His kingship—since He was born the King of Heaven and Earth in the land of Judah—likewise, instead of a star (on the recto of fol. 38 there is a colored drawing with the inscription: *How Saint Lalibala was born in the city of Roha*) [fol. 38 r°], He sent bees on the day of the blessed Lalibala's birth to announce his kingship while he was still a little child because he was destined to become king when he grew up. Jesus Christ was to inherit the kingdom of heaven and earth, and that is why His birth was revealed by a star. The birth of His servant Lalibala was revealed by bees because His Lord wished to make him His equal. Therefore, he was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb, like Jeremiah and John. Thus, the blessed Lalibala was born filled with the spirit of knowledge and wisdom, the spirit of understanding and judgment, the spirit of holiness and purity, for he was born by the will of the Father, by the good pleasure of the Son, and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

(The verso of fol. 39 contains a colored drawing depicting Lalibala giving alms to the children of the poor.)

Lalibala is Persecuted by His Brother, the King, Who Seeks to Kill Him

At that time, the throne was occupied by his brother named Harbâye. Upon learning of the prophecy concerning Lalibala, his brother feared that Lalibala would seize his kingdom without God's will, which greatly tormented him and his friends (his courtiers). However, one cannot seize a throne except by God's will, and if that will is manifested, it will surely be fulfilled. Out of jealousy, his brother, the king, began to reproach him, and all those in the royal household—his courtiers—hated him for the same reason, just as Joseph's brothers hated him because he had shared his dream, saying: "I saw in the night that we were in a field harvesting, and your sheaves came and bowed down before mine." When his brothers heard this dream, they said to him: "Do you intend to reign over us and be our king?" Because of this, they sold him into Egypt. But what

was foretold came to pass when the time was right, and his brothers bowed before him, along with their wives and children, in the land of Egypt, where Joseph reigned.

Those who hated the blessed Lalibala did not know what had been written for them long ago; for the prophet says: "They do not know, they do not understand; they walk in darkness." If they had known, they would not have blasphemed against him, they would not have insulted him, but they would have said: "Let us serve the one whom God has given us as master and submit to the one He has designated as our lord." But they sought to rid themselves of him, thinking [fol. 42] they could kill him with poison.

One day, the blessed Lalibala drank a potion that greatly weakened him because it was a debilitating drink, but it only served to cleanse his body of impurities. Lalibala had a half-sister (from the paternal side) who was very wicked, the daughter of Elezabel and a new Herodias, resembling Cain, the murderer of his brother. She sent him a deadly poison that she had prepared and mixed with beer, intending to kill him quickly so that he would not become king. She sent him a cup full of this poison, and Lalibala, who was thirsty and eager to drink, thinking it was just beer and unaware that poison had been added, instructed a deacon from his household, who was with him, to drink from the cup. He said to him, "Drink first; it will please me." This was his usual practice—he would have the deacon drink first and then drink himself. But as soon as the deacon drank a few drops of the liquid, he experienced violent convulsions throughout his body, from head to toe, began vomiting, collapsed, and died instantly, for it was a potent poison. A dog that was nearby and licked the deacon's vomit also died immediately.

When the blessed Lalibala saw this terrible outcome, he was astonished and thought, "Why did this deacon, who drank from the cup my sister sent me, and this dog, who licked his vomit, die so quickly?" Seeing that both had died immediately after drinking from the poisoned cup, the blessed Lalibala was plunged into deep sorrow over their deaths. He beat his chest, shook his head, and cried out in tears: "Woe is me! Wasn't this drink prepared for me? And isn't it because of me that this deacon and this dog have died? Yes, my guilt is great, for they perished in my place." After uttering these words [fol. 43], he wept profusely; the love of God and of his neighbor filled his heart, and he remembered which is written in the Holy Scriptures, and especially what Saint Paul says: "I will show you the most excellent way; nothing will benefit you if you do not love one another. Even if I knew the language of angels and of all nations, if my body were to be burned, I would be powerless to redeem it; and even if I had the gift of prophecy and knew all things hidden or revealed, if I do not have charity, I am nothing. It will benefit me nothing. Since I have no charity, I am nothing and worth nothing, for charity is the entire law." Lalibala, who understood this and knew that Our Lord Jesus Christ wanted us to love one another, took the cup that had caused the death of the deacon and the dog and drank its contents, crying out: "Let me die like them, since it is because of me that they died."

See, my friends, the goodness and purity of heart in Lalibala, who gave himself over to death because he had caused the death of other creatures and did not spare himself. The ardent love of the Holy Spirit burned within him and had not cooled in his heart; he had not been touched by the waters of perdition. Consider this, my dear friends. If it were so for everyone, I would give thanks to God. Because he had not first drunk from this poisoned cup, which had caused the deacon's death after drinking not a large, but a small amount, Lalibala, seeing that he had died, exclaimed: "Let me die like him, for it was a cup prepared for me that caused the death of another; my sin was great enough to cause my brother's death." And saying these words, he resolutely took this fatal cup and drank it with perfect self-denial.

My dear friends, who among you, upon seeing a robber, would not flee? Who, seeing a sharp javelin in the hands of a strong enemy, would not try to avoid it? Who, with a sharp sword hanging over their neck, would not feel fear? Who, seeing a raging fire, would throw themselves into it without fear of the flames? Who, upon seeing a deep abyss, would willingly plunge into it, rolling all the way to the bottom? No one would do what Lalibala did out of love for his neighbor, for he was a vessel of love for God and his fellow man. If others had been in his place, if such an event had happened to them, they would not have even wanted to touch that cup with the tip of their fingers after seeing that it had caused the death of those who had drunk from it before. Moreover, they would have seized the woman who gave it to them, insulted her, mistreated her, and put her to death. It seems to me that they would have devoured her flesh and drunk her blood, and even then, their hearts would not have been satisfied, for the deed she committed was indeed wicked.

But Lalibala did not fear drinking from the poisoned cup; he remembered the gall and vinegar mixed with myrrh that Our Savior drank on the cross to redeem many sinners, as He Himself said: "I give my life for my sheep." Nothing is greater than this love (for others), which leads one to sacrifice oneself for one's friends.

In truth, Lalibala resembled the Savior of the world since he voluntarily drank from the poisoned cup out of love for others; for he had learned that charity is the entire law. He who loves his neighbor fulfills the entire law. He had also learned this saying from the Gospel: "Love the Lord with all your heart, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself, for these precepts are the foundation of the law and the prophets." Lalibala followed them to the point of offering himself up to death, as he drank the potion that had killed a man and an animal. However, when he drank it, it did not bring him death [fol. 46 r°], but instead revealed to him the mysteries of heaven and earth. This is another resemblance to Jesus Christ, for the cup of death that Christ drank brought life to those who were dead, light to those in darkness, wealth to the poor, and purity to those who were defiled by idol worship.

Lalibala Is Taken Up to Heaven

[fol. 47] When the blessed Lalibala drank this potion, he became weak, but not because he was overcome by the poison's power. His weakness was caused by a large worm that had been troubling him in the past; when the poison met this worm, it was tormented, could no longer stay within him, and left the body of the blessed Lalibala. The worm had fifty coils (or segments). When the worm came out, Lalibala felt relief in his body and limbs.

If I told you that he became weak, do not think it was due to the poison he drank, for poison has no effect on God's servants, as Our Lord Himself says: "If they drink any deadly poison, it will not harm them." Lalibala's weakness was caused by the worm's struggle to leave his body when it was affected by the poison. After the worm was expelled, the blessed Lalibala felt better and was cured of his illness. Then God saw the goodness of this blessed man, his love for people, his desire to emulate God, and his burning wish to fulfill His will and obey His commandments. Seeing how Lalibala had drunk the cup filled with deadly poison out of love for his neighbor, God sent one of His radiant angels from His army to visit him and take his soul to heaven to reveal the mysteries above.

This radiant angel descended joyfully, shining like fire, for this is how the angels of light move when the righteous God sends them to His chosen ones and to those who do His will—to visit them, provide them with what they need, free them from prison, reveal secrets to them, or help

them in all their afflictions [fol. 48]. When these angels are sent to the saints, they are radiant with joy. This angel came to Lalibala just after he had drunk the poisoned potion and took his soul up to heaven with great joy. As he ascended to heaven, the angel taught him to sing the following hymn: "Send forth your light and your truth; let them guide me, let them bring me to your holy mountain and to your tabernacles. Then I will go to the altar of God, to God, my exceeding joy." "If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea even there your hand will lead me, and your right hand will hold me fast."

While singing this hymn, Lalibala was lifted up, carried on the wings of the angel of light, until he reached the region of the first heaven. Upon arriving at the firmament, he heard a terrifying and dreadful noise and saw formidable faces that emitted sparks of fire and roared in anger, as if they wished to tear him apart. Lalibala was terrified by the noise of their anger, the fury of their roars, and their frightening appearance, which could dissolve one's limbs like fire melts wax. At the sight of these terrifying beings, Lalibala was struck with great fear. The angel guiding him remained silent and did not attempt to calm these angry faces that appeared to Lalibala in such a dreadful form. When Lalibala saw their wrath, he fully understood the fear they instilled in him.

[fol. 53] Then the angel flew into the second heaven, carrying the blessed Lalibala, and said to him: "Rejoice, man of God, for you are in the space reserved for the vigilant angels. Behold this luminous region, for you have been deemed worthy of the great favor of witnessing it." As the angel spoke these words, Lalibala heard a great noise, like the sound of mighty waters, yet it was pleasant to hear. However, this terrifying noise was even more awe-inspiring than the one he had heard in the first heaven. He then said to the angel accompanying him, "How much more solemn and majestic is this sound than the one I just heard!"

[fol. 56] As Lalibala spoke, the angel took him from the second heaven and transported him to the region of the third heaven, which was surrounded by light and glory. The angels of the third heaven are greater than those of the second, and upon seeing them, the blessed Lalibala felt a new joy.

Description of the Ten Monolithic Churches of Heaven

[fol. 68] After saying these words, God showed him the great buildings made from a single stone. The number of these churches was ten, each with its unique construction, color, and appearance. Some had narrow entrances with vast interiors, while others had wide doors with small interiors. Their walls were very long and tall, and among these churches, some were higher than others and had distinct colors. Some were reddish, others the color of stone, others the color of zagas, and still others the color of kebo dust. Some were enormous in size, with some being larger than others by a considerable extent.

Lalibala Receives the Command to Build Similar Churches; His Return to Earth

[fol. 75] God also said to the blessed Lalibala: "Do not worry about your kingship, for I will make you a king not for the fleeting glory of this world, but so that you may build churches like the ones you have seen. That is why I will anoint you as a king and set you as anointed over my people until you have completed my sanctuaries. You are worthy to bring them forth from the depths of the earth by my power but not by the wisdom of men, for mine is very different from that of men."

Then God commanded the angel of light to return Lalibala to the earth and to place his soul back into his body. All of this had taken place over the span of three days, during which he had seen the mysteries of the seven heavens, the glory of the angels who inhabit each one, which is increased by the splendor of the heavens, and the light of some which is further enhanced by the light of others. He also witnessed the majesty of God seated above the cherubim, the mighty God who spoke to him from above them. On the third day, he was led back to his body by the luminous angel, who carried out God's command to return him to the body from which he had been taken. He was like the Lord, who rose on the third day from the dead, and not like Jonah, who spent three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, lamenting and weeping bitterly. For Lalibala was surrounded by great joy in the heavenly court of the vigilant angels and in the houses of light, just like Jeremiah, the prophet, who saw in heaven the mysteries of the prophecy concerning the coming of Our Lord and His incarnation.

The blessed Lalibala returned to earth on the third day after having contemplated the mysteries of heaven and received the anointing of kingship, after having made a covenant with God and accepted the mission to build churches similar to those he had seen.

The people who had stayed by his body were preparing the shroud and the linens to wrap and bury him. [The recto of fol. 76 is occupied by a colored drawing representing God making a covenant with Lalibala, with an angel behind him raising his right hand above his head. Above the drawing is the inscription: *Lalibala receiving the word of his Creator*. The verso is dedicated to two drawings with this inscription: *Death of Saint Lalibala*] [fol. 77]. However, they did not dare to do so because his body was not cold like other corpses on the third day, as it was warmed by the flame of the Holy Spirit that resided in it.

Suddenly, Lalibala rose from his bed, like a man awakening from a deep sleep. His face was shining like the sun, due to the vision he had of God's glory. After rising, he thanked and blessed God with these words: "I give you thanks, O Lord, for welcoming me and for not letting me fall prey to my enemy; Lord, my God, I cried out to you, and you had pity on me; O Lord, you brought me up from the grave and saved me from those who had descended into the pit. You protected my head on the day of death. What shall I render to you, O Lord, for all that you have done for me?"

Those who had made all the preparations to bury him were astonished and amazed. They exclaimed, "Today we have witnessed a miracle. A man who had been dead for three days has been resurrected, a miracle similar to the one we have heard about our Savior, for it is said in the Gospel that He raised Lazarus, who had been dead for four days and whose body had already begun to decay. And today, He has resurrected before us the blessed Lalibala, on the third day after his death." Then they began to question the blessed Lalibala. They asked him, "Where have you been during these three days? How did you feel? What happened to you? the cause of your death, the cause of your resurrection?" They showed him the shroud and the linens that were meant to wrap him, saying, "See these linens and bandages we prepared to bury you; we were waiting for your body to cool down, and if that had happened, we would have buried you." Lalibala replied, "Blessed be God who saved me from your plans; His purpose and intent were not the same as yours, as the prophet has said: 'My plans are not like your plans, and my thoughts are not like your thoughts, but they are very different from each other.'"

This is what Lalibala told them without revealing anything about the vision he had seen. Such was the fruit [fol. 78] of the love for others that had been multiplied in Saint Lalibala by the cup he drank out of love for his neighbor after seeing one of his companions die from the poison that

had been prepared for him. This love attracted the grace of the Holy Spirit to him and allowed him to see the mysteries of heaven and the glory of God hovering above the cherubim in a dazzling splendor. For love deserves a great reward because it is through love that all good works are accomplished, as Saint Paul says: "He who loves his neighbor fulfills the whole law." He also says: "Love your fellow man, for charity covers all sins." Thus was fulfilled the word of the Apostle written about Lalibala: "He bore fruit and produced twice as much."

As for us, may God and Our Lord Jesus Christ inspire us with the desire to love our neighbor, through the pure intercession and help of Lalibala, through the hardships of his struggle, through the sweat of fatigue that covered the body of this blessed and venerable Lalibala, who was called Gabra Masqal (Servant of the Cross). May they protect our queen Walatta Iyasus from the temptations of the body and spirit until the end of time. Amen.

Lalibala, Harassed by His Brother, Withdraws to the Desert

The blessed Lalibala continued to endure insults and scorn from his family members and those whom Satan had stirred up against him. They mocked him; one would say, "He will be king," and another would add, "If he reigns, he will sell us myrrh, the incense of the church." When Lalibala heard these insults, he thought to himself: "Come, I am a stumbling block to my neighbor, to my brothers; I will not stay with them any longer. It is better for me to go into the desert and live with the wild beasts; it is preferable to be with these animals than with people who have sharp tongues, for no one can tame the tongue of man. Every creature submits to man—the animal that walks and the bird that flies—but the tongue of man is untamable; it is wicked and full of deadly venom, as Saint Paul says: 'The temptation will come to you only from man.' Enoch left mankind and withdrew [fol. 79] into the desert, preferring the company of beasts, and the beasts did not lead him into sin. It was then that he was taken up to heaven and saw its mysteries. Elijah also withdrew to the desert and was fed by ravens who brought him bread morning and evening. Men did not cause him to sin because he fled from Jezebel, but he did not have to flee from the wild animals, who came to bow before him. Finally, John lived in the desert from his youth, eating tender leaves of trees and drinking the dew. The beasts did not push him into sin; the lions and wild oxen were his brothers."

After reflecting on this, Lalibala went into the desert, where he lived off the animals he hunted and the partridges he caught in nets. The blessed Lalibala had no other thought but to continually praise God's glory through songs. He beat his chest day and night, groaning and shedding bitter tears in his great affliction; he mortified himself through hunger, thirst, cold, lack of clothing, labor, and fatigue, and subjected himself to all the hardships of those who live in the desert. Men called him a beast, but God saw him as a soldier in His army, for He sees the heart and examines the mind, and He does not judge as men do, because He sees the inner being while men see only the face. Lalibala was despised by men and insignificant in the eyes of the world, but he was great and glorious before God.

He thus remained in the desert, like the Israelites, whose needs were provided for by the Spirit of God when they entered the promised land that the Lord had sworn to give to their fathers. The blessed Lalibala also lived in the desert, sustained by the strength of the Holy Spirit, and he procured his food by hunting, as I have told you.

May the blessing of his prayer accompany the servant of God, our queen Walatta Iyasus, her sons Hayla Iyasus, Hayla Mika'el, Walda Maryam, and her daughters Walatta Maryam and Hiruta Selasê. May the blessing of his grace be upon all of us gathered in this holy church until

the end of time. Amen. While the blessed Lalibala was in the desert, the angel of the Lord, who had taken him up to heaven and had been charged with watching over him until the end of his days, appeared to him and said, "Greetings, Lalibala, man of the Lord." The blessed Lalibala replied, "Who are you, you who greet me?" The angel answered, "I am the angel of God; I am the one who took you up to heaven, who showed you the mysteries of light, and who was assigned to watch over you." Then the blessed Lalibala said to him, "May your blessing be upon me, O Lord." The angel continued, "Listen carefully to what I am about to say." Lalibala responded, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." The angel then said to the blessed Lalibala, "Tomorrow morning, at this time, a young girl will come to you," and he described the signs by which he would recognize her, as well as her clothing. Then he added, "This young girl will become your wife; she has been chosen by God, just like you, and she will be as dear to you as you are to yourself. She is not inferior to you in the beauty of her actions; she is a servant of God, and she will teach you many good works. You will discuss this plan with her and speak to her as I am speaking to you, on behalf of God, for it is He who commanded me to tell you this." Lalibala then asked the angel, "Must I take a wife now that I have seen the radiant light you showed me in the seven heavens, the majesty that exists in the firmament, and that you specifically instructed me not to forget?" But the angel replied, "Will it be a sin for you to take a wife, man of God, since your reward and grace will not be diminished because of her? For it is not for the love of a woman that you will marry, but for the love of posterity." Lalibala still resisted the angel of the Lord and said, "It is not fitting for me to marry." But the angel insisted: "Can you, he said, oppose the orders of God, and can you alone give life to the children that are within you?" After much discussion on this matter, the blessed Lalibala replied, "Let [fol. 81] God's will be done, not mine." Then the angel disappeared.

The next day, Lalibala saw a young girl gathering grass in the desert, and her appearance matched the description the angel of the Lord had given him. He spoke to her as the angel had instructed. She was a holy person, and she was charmed by what Lalibala said, for he was acting on God's command. Lalibala settled in the part of the desert where this young girl had met him. She would bring him bread and roots that she cooked at her father's home, and this continued for a long time. Then one day, the blessed Lalibala said to her when she came to visit him (she often visited him after their first meeting and always brought him part of the provisions she had prepared), "Speak to your father about what I have told you," and he repeated to her the words of the angel. She returned home and told everything to her father. Now, her father lived in the fear of God and knew in advance what was to happen. Before she had even finished her story, he said, "Go and bring this man." She immediately left, found Lalibala in the desert where she had left him, and brought him to her father. When they were in each other's presence, they greeted each other with the greeting of the Holy Spirit, and the girl's father said to Lalibala, "Why have you seduced my daughter, my son?" Lalibala replied, "It was not willingly that I seduced her. What has been decreed by God's will cannot fail to happen, but what is determined by men is fragile and uncertain."

Upon hearing Lalibala speak in this way, the girl's father understood that the angel of the Lord had appeared to him, and he called his wife to seek her opinion before giving their daughter to Lalibala. His wife consented willingly, for Lalibala had a pleasant appearance and demeanor, as the grace of God surrounded him. Just as the sun, fixed in the vault of the firmament, fills the atmosphere with the full force of its beauty and the brilliance of its light, so too did the grace of God surround Lalibala [fol. 82]. The girl's parents then gave her to him to be his wife according to the law of God. The saint and blessed Lalibala took the young girl and recognized her as his wife before God; they were blessed together and received from Jesus Christ the seal of grace, just as

Isaac and Rebecca were blessed, who gave birth to the father of the twelve olive branches, who wrestled with the man (angel) of fire (?) and was for that reason called Israel. The blessed Lalibala continued to live in even greater fear of God, to do His will, and to submit to the teachings of the Gospel of Christ after he met this young girl, for she had a great love for God. She also obeyed her husband as Sarah obeyed Abraham. She called him "my lord," and acted according to his orders and advice. He followed her counsel without deviating in the least, for her words were sweeter to him than honey and sugar, and his words were as pleasant to her as grapes.

They lived together in perfect love of God, for it was God who had united them, and for this reason, they were one body, as it is said in Genesis: "A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." Our Lord also says in His Gospel: "The man and the woman are no longer two, but one flesh; man must not separate what God has joined together." Such was the marriage of Lalibala and Masqal Kebra, united by a spiritual bond, not by the charms of demons (?) like worldly people, but according to the law that God established, as Isaac and Rebecca had been; for as Saint Paul says: "Marriage is honorable among all; their union is without defilement and their bed without impurity." Thus they lived together, observing the love of God and humility, in the home of the young girl's father.

But when the devil, who is the enemy of good, saw them in this happy state, he became jealous. He could not contain himself, his spirit was disturbed, and he devised a scheme to destroy their happiness. He then entered the hearts of men [fol. 83] whom he found suitable, clean, prepared, and fit to be his dwelling; he spread over them the veil of his malice with which he tormented their spirits. After taking possession of their souls, he incited them to act against Lalibala, and so they did.

These men went to the king to accuse Lalibala of a false crime; just as Judas had been driven by the devil to betray our Savior to the chief priests, who were like dogs and fattened oxen (?), so too were these men led by Satan, the teacher of evil; they conspired to tell the king that Lalibala had taken a young girl who had pledged her faith to another and had made her his wife. They added: "O king, do not turn a blind eye to this crime, for it is a disgrace to your kingdom and your house. ignore this matter, for he seeks by all means to ascend to the throne; if you leave him unchecked, his power will grow, and he will become the strongest." When the king, who was the brother of the blessed Lalibala, heard this, he ordered that Lalibala be brought to his palace, for he had long harbored irritation against him, suspecting that Lalibala wanted to dethrone him. The men sent to fetch the blessed Lalibala came to him and told him that the king was summoning him. Lalibala questioned them: "Why," he asked, "does the king summon me, an oppressed man who has distanced himself from him and his court without doing any harm? And now, it is not to do me good that he sends for me; it is probably because he has found some reason to persecute me further. His heart is angry with me, and he wants to make me suffer, just as Saul once became angry with David and sought to kill him out of jealousy for power. Who has informed the king that I am here? Have I not fled from desert to desert, hiding in caves, to escape my brother, as David fled from Saul? But Saul and David were not brothers; they were from different families, as Saul was the son of Kish from the tribe of Benjamin, and David was from the tribe of Judah. As for me, I am pursued by my brother; his kingship, instead of being a source of joy for me, is a cause of great torment. Instead of loving me, he hates me. And now, my brothers, tell me, if you know, why he is summoning me."

The king's envoys replied, "Come, our brother, when you are near the king, you will know why he has called you" [fol. 84]. Then they took him to the king and brought him before him. The king

said to him, "Why do you do things under my reign that should not be done? Why have you taken as a wife a young girl who was promised to another?" Lalibala replied, "Allow me to speak." The king said, "I permit you, speak." Then the blessed Lalibala said, "This is not true, O Lord; I have not taken what God has not permitted me to take, and I have not used violence against anyone." Then the two men who had accused him before the king came forward and testified that he had taken a young girl who was betrothed to another man.

When the king, his brother, heard this testimony, he ordered that Lalibala be whipped with a corded whip. The king's men prepared to strike the blessed Lalibala, who cried out, ready to endure the punishment: "I have placed my trust in you, O Lord, and I will never be put to shame. Deliver me in your righteousness and rescue me; turn your ear to me and save me quickly. Be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me, for you are my strength and my refuge. For the sake of your name, guide me and sustain me; free me from the traps that have been set and hidden to catch me, for you are my refuge. Into your hands, Lord, I commit my spirit. Redeem me, Lord, God of truth, and hide me under the shadow of your wings."

As he spoke these words, the king's men began to beat him. Meanwhile, the king, after giving this order, had entered the church to receive communion just as they started to strike Lalibala. They did not stop until the king came out of the church after the sacrifice, taking turns beating Lalibala. But God, who does not forget those who trust in Him, sent an angel to cover Lalibala with his wings so that the blows would not harm him. This angel of justice descended and protected the blessed Lalibala with his radiant wings; this angel was his guardian angel, assigned by God to watch over him throughout his life. When the king left the church, he heard the sound of the blows being struck upon Lalibala and asked those with him, "What is this noise I hear?" They replied, "Is it not you who ordered, upon entering the church, that Lalibala be beaten? It is he who is still being struck at this moment" [fol. 85].

The king was then frightened, fearing that his brother was dead, and he immediately ordered the punishment to stop. But the blessed Lalibala had not been harmed and had suffered no injury, which astonished all those present. The king was also filled with amazement, completely astonished to see that his brother had not suffered in any way from the blows that had been inflicted upon him.

Lalibala then went to find his wife and recounted everything that had happened, how his brother had treated him, and how God had protected him from the blows by sending an angel of light who covered him with his wings. They thanked God and offered this prayer of thanksgiving: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who has had mercy on us and saved His people; blessed be the name of His holy majesty, for He does not reject those who trust in Him; He is the help of those who turn their thoughts to Him, as Our Lord Jesus Christ said through the mouth of His prophet: 'He has placed his trust in me, and I will I will protect him and save him because he knows my name;

He calls upon me, and I answer him. I am with him in the day of his affliction; I will save him and glorify him. I will satisfy him with long life and show him my salvation, and the praise of God will fill the whole earth. So be it, so be it.

After making this prayer, they consoled each other, like two friends or rather like two companions, that is to say, he received consolation from his wife, and she received consolation from him, for her husband had been spared the blows, and these blows had been inflicted because of her, just as Christ suffered scourging for His Church. As (Saint) Paul says, "He who loves his wife loves himself." Lalibala, who had learned this maxim, burned with love for his wife,

and she had much love for him, just as the Church loves Christ. May their prayer, their intercession, their blessing, their help, the offering of their sacrifice, the sweet fragrance of their incense burning in the censer of the twenty-four priests of heaven, the drops of their sweat while they were in adoration, the fatigue they felt when they stood, their zeal in the vigil, the tears they shed for the love of God, their eagerness to go to church in the morning or to console the captives, their admirable gentleness that resembles that of the lamb, the merit of their alms, whether secret or public; [fol. 86] may all the extreme zeal with which Lalibala and Masqal Kebrâ submitted their bodies to the yoke (of the Gospel) accompany our queen Walattâ Yasus and her daughter Hiruta Sällasé, as well as all those who trust in the power of the prayer of these two luminous pearls, shining with resplendent light in the darkness; may they guide us, wherever we go and wherever we come from, may they be before us, behind us, to our right and to our left, until the end of time. Amen.

LALIBALA AND HIS WIFE RETIRE TO THE DESERT. GOD PROVIDES FOR THEIR NEEDS.

Lalibala then reflected on all the suffering he had endured from his relatives and all those who made up the king's court, and he said to his wife: "Let us go to the desert to recover from all the torment caused by these people who hate us, for it is better to live with beasts than with men who are wicked." Then he took his wife, who found this idea pleasing, and went with her to the desert, where they lived in perfect love under the protection of God, who provided them with everything they needed. One day, after they had ventured farther and had sat in a cave without anything to make their evening meal, he said to his wife: "Get up, and let us pray to God that He may give us our food." His wife replied: "Yes, my lord," and stretching out their arms and lifting their eyes to heaven, they prayed as follows: [fol. 87]. When they had finished their prayer, Masqal Kebrâ went to the middle of the cave and found a large partridge. She immediately informed her husband and showed him what she had discovered. Seeing this, Lalibala thanked God with these words: "Blessed are you, O Lord, who dwell in the highest heavens and who see the little ones." From that day on, they both stayed in that cave, where they were fed by what the Holy Spirit had provided [fol. 88], and these two little prophets, Lalibala and Masqal Kebrâ, fled to the mountains like birds. Then, men from the king came to search for them in all the regions, in all the deserts, and in all places, to imprison them and kill them out of jealousy, for Satan was driving them against the servants of God. Lalibala and Masqal Kebrâ were servants of the Holy Trinity.

These trees of paradise, Lalibala and Masqal Kebrâ, bore fruits of perseverance and produced all kinds of good works, guided by the love of God. The king's men who had been sent to search for them did not find them and could not reach them. An angel of the Lord appeared to Lalibala and Masqal Kebrâ in the desert and said to them: "The king's servants are looking for you, leave this place, come and follow me where I will lead you." This angel was Gabriel, the same one who had taken Lalibala up to heaven, who had protected him when they tried to strike him, and who had been appointed by God to guard him throughout his life.

THE ANGEL GABRIEL ANNOUNCES TO MASQAL KEBRÂ THE UPCOMING DEPARTURE OF LALIBALA TO JERUSALEM.

Lalibala and Masqal Kebrâ followed Gabriel, who guided them to save them by hiding them from the searches of the king's emissaries. He did not leave them in the first village, nor in the second, but led them to the land of Mesrâq, which is at the beginning of the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia. There, the angel Gabriel brought them, and then He said to them: "Stay here until you separate from one another, for it is God's will that the blessed Lalibala now go to visit the

city of Jerusalem. As for you, Masqal Kebrâ, you will remain here until your brother returns, after visiting the places where the mysteries of Our Lord were fulfilled." Upon hearing these words, Masqal Kebrâ began to feel distressed over the impending separation from her husband. When the angel Gabriel saw her in this state, he said to her: "Why does sorrow grip your heart? God will not leave you alone here; He has given orders concerning you to Mika'el, who is a superior angel seated at the right hand of the Almighty, His trusted angel whom He has placed over the powers. He has entrusted you to his care, just as I have been assigned to care for your husband." After saying these words, Gabriel disappeared from their sight.

Lalibala was then taken on Gabriel's wings and placed in front of Masqal Kebrâ. She immediately stood up, filled with joy, and threw herself around her husband's neck, embracing him with love. Then, she fell at Gabriel's feet, exclaiming: "Hail to the angel of justice, hail to the angel of light; I know, for I learned long ago, that you are a joyous messenger, a messenger of good news." This is how she greeted him, for she had regained her happiness upon seeing these two archangels and her husband.

Thus, angels and men met; there was but one flock and one race: two were mortals, Lalibala and Masqal Kebrâ, and two were beings of fire, Mika'el and Gabriel. Then all four of them conversed about the greatness of God, and Lalibala told Masqal Kebrâ that he had seen in Jerusalem all the mysteries through which our salvation was accomplished, and that he had seen, at night, in a vision, all the scourging of Our Lord. Masqal Kebrâ, in turn, recounted what had happened to her while he was away; she had experienced the same vision as her husband, and none of the mysteries remained hidden from her, for they both had the same vision on the same night. While Lalibala was in Jerusalem, Masqal Kebrâ saw, in Ethiopia where she was, the same mysteries that her husband had witnessed.

After sharing with each other all that concerned them, they began to glorify God, along with the two archangels, with these admirable words: "Bless the Lord, all works of God, [fol. 111], for He is glorious and exalted forever; bless the Lord, sons of men, for He is glorious and exalted forever; bless Him, angels of God, for He is worthy of praise and exalted forever." This is how they all gave thanks to God together; the angels joined their praises with those of the men, for two kinds of beings, superior and inferior, were united in that place.

RETURN OF LALIBALA TO ETHIOPIA.

[fol. 109 verso] After saying these words [fol. 110], the blessed Lalibala set out to return to Ethiopia, where he was to build those churches, which, according to the instructions he had received, were to be constructed without wood, mortar, ceiling, or roof. Then Gabriel took him on his luminous wings, flew through the air, and brought him to the region where Masqal Kebrâ was, at the entrance to the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia. Masqal Kebrâ was then in the company of Mika'el, who was consoling her by announcing the imminent arrival of her husband and telling her how he would arrive. When the time of his arrival was near, Mika'el said to Masqal Kebrâ: "Prepare yourself to see your husband again." As he spoke these words, Gabriel arrived, carrying Lalibala on his wings. Mika'el also appeared that same day to the women who had been entrusted with the care of Masqal Kebrâ while they were waiting for Lalibala to return as he had promised them. When they saw him, they were filled with joy and greeted him warmly, saying: "Did you have a good journey, handsome young man, servant of God?" Mika'el replied to them: "May God grant you peace, women beloved by God; where is the one I entrusted to your care?" At these words, they went to call Masqal Kebrâ, who was in another place with her husband. But

these women did not know her husband, for they had only seen Mika'el before, who had instructed them to watch over Masqal Kebrâ while Lalibala was in Jerusalem.

THE ARRIVAL OF LALIBALA.

Then the four of them set out, Lalibala, Masqal Kebrâ, Mika'el, and Gabriel, with the latter two serving as guides. When they were somewhat distant from [fol. 112] the city, Mika'el and Gabriel took Lalibala and Masqal Kebrâ on their luminous wings and brought them close to the place where the king, Lalibala's brother, named Harbay, as I have already told you, was staying. While Lalibala and Masqal Kebrâ stood there, Our Lord Jesus Christ appeared to the king during the night, striking him with terror in his sleep because he had previously mistreated his brother Lalibala. He rebuked him harshly on this matter, much like He rebuked Laban for pursuing Jacob to harm him. Similarly, Our Lord reproached this king and announced to him that his reign was over and that his kingdom would be given to Lalibala—not for the glory of this world, but to build churches without stone or mortar. Then he ordered this king to go find his brother and informed him of the city where he was. "Go," he said, "to meet him with great pomp and joy, singing hymns, for I have anointed him with holy oil, the oil of spiritual kingship, as befits kings who are chosen from their mother's womb. They are anointed with the oil of kingship, which helps them understand justice and defeat infidels. Now, go and seek out your brother with great honors and joy, as I have instructed you, and do not let your heart grieve over the loss of your kingdom. I did not give it to Lalibela for the glory of this perishable world, but so that he could build churches. As for you, seek the kingdom of heaven, which is indestructible, while the kingdom of earth is ephemeral. When you rise, go find your brother on the day of his arrival. Seat him on your throne, invoking heaven's blessing upon him. Cut his hair with your own hand on the day you place him on the throne, as is customary for the consecration of kingship."

After uttering these words during his nocturnal appearance, Our Lord Jesus Christ disappeared. The king awoke in terror, his bones trembling from the fear caused by this apparition, and he was terrified by the voice that had rebuked him. Rising, he prostrated himself, crying out, "Lord, when you appeared to me last night in a vision and reproached me for the mistreatment I inflicted upon my brother, your majesty terrified me, and your angry voice crushed me. How will I stand before you on the dreadful day of the great judgment, where only the righteous will be saved? Where will I find myself on that day, a sinner? Where will I hide?"

Then the king summoned the people of his court. His servants and soldiers who made up his guard gathered immediately and came to him. He told them that God had appeared to him, rebuked him for mistreating his brother, and that his kingdom had been given to Lalibela. Then he added, "Now, let us go find Lalibela, for God has commanded me to go to him, place him on my throne, and cut his hair with my own hand, as is customary for the enthronement ceremony."

His courtiers then said to him, "What does all this mean? Our hearts are broken with sorrow to hear you speak of abandoning your throne while you are still alive." He replied, "It is a great joy for me to leave the kingship, and if I had known earlier that I would experience such fear, I would not have remained on my throne, for the dreadful majesty of the one who appeared to me last night terrified me. Upon waking, I could not stand or speak; my tongue was paralyzed. That is why my heart has detached from the kingship, for I thought of the hour of the final judgment, a time when there will be no regard for kings, princes, the rich, or the poor, but only for each person's deeds. The one who appeared to me said, 'The kingdom of earth is perishable; seek the kingdom of heaven.'"

After saying these words, the king set out at a brisk pace, followed by his courtiers and muleteers. As his courtiers urged him to mount a horse, he refused and said, "I will not mount a horse until I have met my brother and he has forgiven me for the wrongs I have done to him." He continued to walk on foot to meet his brother. Meanwhile, Gabriel said to Lalibela, "Prepare yourself to meet your brother, for he is coming toward you on foot and has sworn not to mount his mule until he has seen you." Lalibela then set out for the place where his brother, the king, was expected to pass, and soon they saw each other. As soon as the king saw Lalibela, he prostrated himself, and Lalibela did the same. They then rose and embraced sincerely, stepping aside to be alone, after the king had ordered his escort to keep a distance. The king asked Lalibela to forgive him for having persecuted him in the past, and after reconciling, they shared everything they had to say to each other.

The king revealed to Lalibela the vision he had experienced during the night and the command he had received to place him on the throne. Lalibela, in turn, told him how he had received the anointing of kings and what royal name had been assigned to him. After sharing all this with his brother, Lalibela added, "It is not for the glory of this world that God has announced that I will rule on your throne, but because of the churches I must build, I, your unworthy servant." "I know that too, my brother," replied the king, "may the Lord of Hosts and King of Israel strengthen your throne with justice, as he established that of David, his servant, and his son Solomon." Then the king resumed his journey, accompanied by his brother, who rode on the same royal mule. They thus arrived at the king's residence and entered the palace. The king immediately ordered his troops to gather and made preparations for the coronation ceremony. He then took scissors, cut Lalibela's hair himself, and seated him on the throne. A herald made a tour of the palace, proclaiming, "Lalibela reigns by the will of God." The king then ordered all his subjects to recognize Lalibela as their sovereign, to render him all the honors due to a king, and to submit to his judgments. At the same time, he gave his brother the royal name "Gabra Masqal," which had been assigned to him by God before his ascension.

When Lalibela was seated on the throne, he undertook a more rigorous fast than that of the monks, for kingship to him was akin to monastic life. Humility grew in his heart after he was made king; he did not eat the royal table's dishes but had a servant named Kreslos Harayo (meaning "Christ has chosen him") who bought him the essentials. His diet consisted of dry bread dipped in a broth of herbs, cut into three pieces, with nothing added. For drinking, he was given a small cup, insufficient to quench his thirst. This was how Lalibela spent all the days of his life, from his ascension until his death.

At times, when he was about to dine, three brothers would approach the room where he took his meals and say, "Lord, give us something to eat, for we have nothing to dine on today." When one of them uttered these words, Lalibela would take one of the pieces of bread soaked in broth and give it to him. The second would then speak and receive the second piece, and when the third asked, Lalibela would command his servant to give him the third piece. Thus, Gabra Masqal's meal was concluded, as he had only those three pieces. When his servant noticed that Gabra Masqal's portion was depleted, he would take the crust of the bread, break it, dip it in the herb broth, and present it to Lalibela, but he would refuse, saying, "If God has received from me, through the hands of His servants, the three pieces of bread I usually eat, why should I eat anything else? If I were to take what you offer, it would be as if I had given nothing, since I would be eating something in place of what I had given."

This is how he responded to his servant, and he would fast through the night. However, his soul was nourished by the food of the Holy Spirit, which is the word of God, for he fulfilled the

Apostle's commandment: "Love your neighbor more than yourself." And indeed, Gabra Masqal adhered to this, enduring hunger to feed others and thirst to quench theirs. But did not Our Lord say in the Gospel, "Blessed are those who hunger, for they shall be satisfied"? To fulfill this commandment, Gabra Masqal gave away the three pieces of bread that served as his sustenance. It was not out of stinginess that he gave away his food, even though he was king, but to attract the grace of God. He would then instruct his servant to distribute additional food and drink to these three brothers. When he saw poor people without clothing, he would have garments given to them.

When his servant went out after distributing to these three brothers, he saw them ascend to heaven, for they were three angels who came to visit Gabra Masqal to test his charity. Angels visit in this manner, disguised as the poor, all those who love pilgrims; Our Lord also visits them and stays in their homes, just as He rested in the house of Abraham. He bestows upon them the blessings He poured out on that patriarch and his descendants. Thus, He blessed Gabra Masqal, and it was a wonder to see this king endure such rigorous fasting and intense thirst, for during his entire reign, he ate only three pieces of bread per day and drank from only one cup.

May his prayer, intercession, assistance, and grace protect our queen Walatta Iyasus, as well as her sons Hayla Iyasus, Hayla Mika'el, Walada Maryam, and her daughters Walatta Maryam and Hiruta Selassé.

Miracles in Favor of Lalibela

One day, when the tribute due to Gabra Masqal as king was to be paid, those responsible for collecting and delivering the tax gathered several jars of honey and arrived at the bank of a river they needed to cross. The current was very strong, preventing them from crossing, as it was during the rainy season. They stayed on the bank, waiting for the floodwaters to subside. After waiting for some time, they decided to enter the river because they were eager to fulfill the orders of the city's elders, who had instructed them to deliver the tribute without delay. When they entered the water and reached the middle of the river, they were swept away by the current, and their honey jars fell. The jars were pushed among the rocks and carried to the bottom of the river. These men barely managed to get out of the water, returned to their village, and told the leaders everything that had happened and how they had lost the honey jars when they were swept away by the current.

The leaders immediately went to Lalibela to inform him of the matter. The king showed no anger or the slightest annoyance at the news, for he was gentle as a dove and wise as a serpent, just as Our Lord recommends in His Gospel: "Be wise as serpents and gentle as doves." Wisdom, as he said, is evident through good deeds Saint Paul said: "Be wise toward yourselves, toward your souls, and toward your neighbor." Gabra Masqal was gentle, as the Apostle to the Gentiles also said: "If anyone thinks he is wise, he is a fool; let him become wise, for God makes the wisdom of this world foolish."

When the village leaders informed Lalibela about the loss of the honey pots, he remained calm and composed, even joking and smiling as he said, "If we couldn't take the honey from the water, it's because the water was quicker than us and seized it despite our efforts." Hearing these words spoken with a smile, all the courtiers around him laughed, seeing that the king was not the least bit troubled. The honey pots remained hidden in the water for several days, but after the floodwaters receded, the water became clearer and less abundant, revealing the sand where the honey pots were found intact. Not one of them had been broken by the rocks, and the

seals on the lids had not even been touched or removed. Those who discovered them called others to help carry them back to the king and said, "Behold, O king, our lord, these are the honey pots that were engulfed by the river; they are unbroken, and the honey remains inside, for the mantle of your prayer protected them. Even though they stayed in the water for so long, the seals on the lids were not disturbed." The king then said, "Let's see," and upon seeing this miraculous and astonishing thing for those who would hear of it, he exclaimed, "Glory to you, O Lord, for nothing is impossible for you; what is difficult for others is easy for you; nothing is beyond your power." Then, turning to his courtiers, he said, "See, people of God, we wanted to eat this honey before its time, and God used this river to prevent us; He preserved it in the water, and now that its time has come, He returns it to us, having brought it out. Thank Him for granting you such a sign of His favor, for this miracle was performed for you, and the water did not spoil your food." They all then said, "Glory to God, the Lord of Lords, the King of Kings, who has sent you among us to bear the burden of our sins; protected by the shield of your prayer, we hope for salvation in heaven and on earth, for you observe poverty and fasting like the monks." Hearing his courtiers speak this way, Gabra Masqal silenced them, for he particularly detested the vain glorifications of this world; he would have preferred to give his body to the flames rather than listen to such praises, which destroy the souls of those who accept them in their hearts. When his courtiers flattered him, he rejected their flattery and refused to listen, for he kept in mind the words that Christ said to the Church in His holy Gospel: "Woe to you who listen to the praises addressed to you and the flattering words spoken about you, for this is how they treated those who came before you." See, then, my dear friends, the surprising things God has done for Gabra Masqal, for He commanded the water to obey him as a servant obeys her mistress. Indeed, the water obeyed Gabra Masqal, respecting the seals placed on the lids of those honey pots, not breaking a single one. It carefully preserved them under God's command, to protect the goods of His anointed and chosen one, Gabra Masqal. The torrent breaks stones when it rolls them over each other and uproots trees, for the torrent is strong, but the one who makes a path through the waters is the true strong one; it was He who watched over these honey pots to ensure they were not pierced and that the seals on their lids were not damaged. Just as He preserved Jonah during his time in the belly of the whale, so too did He protect these vessels full of honey through the power of Lalibela's prayer; may his request, intercession, blessing, and protection always accompany our queen, Walatta Iyasus.

Humility of Lalibela

On another occasion, Gabra Masqal performed a remarkable act of humility. Although a king, he resembled the poor and shared in their disdain for the world. It was not due to a lack of wealth that he acted this way, but to conquer the kingdom of heaven, he made himself poor, even while being king. One day, he had a lavish table prepared, like that of a king, to offer a meal to the members of his court. He provided them with exquisite dishes of all kinds and beer as a drink so that they could celebrate. As for himself, he slipped out from behind a curtain, dressed in rags like a poor man, and made his way to the room reserved for the poor through a passage where no one could see him. He entered and sat among them to receive the bread of the poor, which his courtiers, by his order, were distributing to the needy. He used every means to mortify both his soul and body. While he was among them, one of the servants tasked with distributing bread to the poor passed by him, gave him a piece, and walked away after recognizing him. A moment later, a musician spotted him among the poor, and upon realizing it was the king, he began to sing, accompanying himself on his instrument: "While others feast on beef and drink beer, the king is sitting with the poor like a beggar." Upon hearing these words, Gabra Masqal immediately rose and retreated behind his curtain, deeply upset that he had been recognized by the

musician. He was determined to perform his good deeds discreetly and in secret, as Our Lord advises in the Gospel: "Let the good you do be hidden; let men [fol. 120] not know that you are fasting; but your Father who is in heaven will see you." Gabra Masqal, nourished by the bread given to him by his servants, was close to his divine protector. He had accomplished an admirable and difficult task by joining the poor to gain the kingdom of heaven, in accordance with the words of the Pontiff of the world, Jesus Christ: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The prayers and petitions of Lalibela ascended to the sanctuary of the Most High, spreading a sweet aroma like a sacrifice of incense, for they emerged from the mouth of the righteous and entered the temple of the supreme high priest without being hindered, as if carried on the wings of the humble, because he had united with the poor.

As for us, if we do not have exquisite dishes and fine herbs that our bodies crave, we cannot go without them for even a single night. If we find them, we do not part with them, and if we do not find them, we strive to obtain them, for we do not possess the spiritual zeal that enables fasting. Meanwhile, Gabra Masqal, though seated on a throne, abstained from eating and drinking for bodily pleasure, seeking instead to procure the complete delights of the eternal heavenly feasts. May Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ admit us to this wedding feast through the grace of the prayer of Gabra Masqal, His anointed, who committed himself to fasting while he was king, and may He protect our queen Walatta Iyasus forever. Amen.

A Rebel Chief Defies Lalibela

On another occasion, the chief of a town in his kingdom rebelled against him. Gabra Masqal sent his son to wage war against this vassal who had declared himself an enemy. When his son arrived near the rebellious chief's town, he camped at a location at the foot of a nearby mountain and sent an officer with an escort to propose peace in these terms: "My father has sent me to offer you peace and to ask why you have rebelled against him. Do you think that God will not guide us? If God is leading us, you cannot escape if you resist." However, the rebel received the king's envoy with insults, as Sennacherib did in the past, and said, "I have no intention of making peace with your father or with you; I do not fear you [fol. 121] and I will not respond to your proposal. As for escaping from your hands, do not invoke anyone, and know well that you cannot harm me. If you want us to fight, prepare yourself, and I will do the same and come to face you."

When this response was reported to Lalibela's son, he sent word back to the rebel: "So be it; it is not I who will make war on you, but the God of my father who will deliver you into my hands." The following day, they prepared for battle and set up camp opposite each other. The rebel's son said to Gabra Masqal's son, "Leave your army, and I will leave mine, and we will fight each other alone." Gabra Masqal's son replied, "Did I not tell you yesterday that I am not fighting you with my own strength? God will deal with this challenge as He dealt with Goliath; as for me, I will face you with the strength of my God, like David the believer." With these words, he signaled to the rebel's son to advance, but the rebel's son mocked him and said, "You advance first." As Gabra Masqal's son moved towards him, the rebel's son struck at him, but did no harm, as the javelin veered off course due to the prayer of King Gabra Masqal. Although the king remained in the city of Roha, he saw everything happening between his son and the rebel's son, not with physical eyes, but with the eyes of the spirit. Although his son was far from him, in the land of the rebel chief, about eight days' journey away, when the rebel's son struck at his son, he saw it in spirit and prayed: "Guard him, O Lord, as the apple of your eye and protect him under the shadow of your wings." It was after this prayer that the rebel's javelin passed over his son's head. Gabra Masqal's son then struck the rebel's son in turn, hitting him; the javelin pierced through his

neck, exiting through his throat by the span of a hand, pinning him to the ground. Thus the arrogant one died, while Gabra Masqal's son remained unharmed, thanks to his father's prayer. Gabra Masqal saw the rebel fall by his son's hand and commanded his courtiers to shout for joy, for God had won the victory through His servants and Satan had been defeated along with his followers. After the death of the rebellious king's son, his soldiers fled. The soldiers of the son of Gabra Masqal pursued them and exterminated them. They captured the father of the young prince who was killed and brought him in chains to their commander. The commander, after restoring order, returned to his father and handed over the rebellious leader who had been brought to him in chains [fol. 122].

But when Gabra Masqal, who was full of mercy like God, saw him before him, he said: "Why did you revolt against me? Now, I forgive you for what you have done, but do not repeat this evil deed; return to your family and your kingdom."

However, this man was haughty and proud. Instead of thanking the king as he left, he began to mock him and his court. "What fools these people are!" he said. "I revolted against them, God delivered me into their hands, and they release me without causing me any harm. If they weren't mad, they would have put me to death." Then, he jumped on his horse and set off. On his way, there was a thorny tree; this proud man hit his head against the tree, which pierced his forehead, and he died instantly. The king was informed of how he had died, and upon hearing this, he said: "Pride had not left his soul, that is why he died, and because he hated us. See, O my dear friends, etc."

Now, I want to tell you about a miracle performed one day by Gabra Masqal. There was a rich woman who, not content with indulging in the flesh of animals at every meal, also wanted to devour her fellow beings through slander, and she accused Lalibela of wrongdoing, blaspheming against him. Then, she began to eat, but a piece of meat got stuck in her throat, unable to go down or come back up. Stuck in the middle of her throat, it was choking her; her eyes almost popped out of their sockets due to the pain she felt. Then she prayed within herself: "I have sinned against you, Lord Gabra Masqal, anointed of the Lord. I will no longer complain against you. I will no longer speak ill of you but will speak well." No sooner had she finished this mental prayer than the piece of meat that was obstructing her throat came out with a bit of blood and fell at her feet.

Another time, there was a man who began to blaspheme against Lalibela and hurl insults at him. His wife said to him: "Do not rage against the servant of God, who is also His anointed [fol. 123]." But he became angry with his wife, then went to bed and fell asleep. When he woke up, he had lost his sight. He told his wife, who replied: "Did I not tell you not to blaspheme against the servant of God? God has punished you for speaking ill of His servant, in the blindness of your heart, and He has made you blind so that you would be so inwardly and outwardly. Do not grieve over the loss of your eyes; rather, grieve for your soul because you will be condemned to the fires of Gehenna if you do not repent. For Our Lord says in the Gospel: 'Whoever blasphemes against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not have forgiveness in this world or in the next.' Those who blaspheme against the Son of Man are those who insult people who have not been baptized; and those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit are those who speak ill of men who have received the Holy Spirit through baptism. Do not think that in this case, you are attacking men; you are attacking the Holy Spirit." Thus, this woman reprimanded her husband, for she was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

And now, O my dear friends, may blasphemy never come out of your mouth against one of your Christian brothers, for he was begotten by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, when we blaspheme against a Christian, it is as if we are attacking the Holy Spirit. May God protect us from such a habit, for Saint Paul teaches us that we should curse no one, not even Satan; it is not so that we have regard for Satan that he teaches us this, but so that we refrain from cursing our brothers and are not led into doing so.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE MONOLITHIC CHURCHES; THEIR DESCRIPTION

Listen then, O my dear friends, for I am going to tell you how these churches were extracted from the earth by the illustrious and memorable Lalibela and how they were built, without framework or mortar, without roof or architraves. Have you ever heard of such a thing, seen such a wonder? It was an admirable treasure discovered by Lalibela, in whose heart and mind it had been hidden by Him who made all that is on earth, the Creator of all things [fol. 124], who brought the entire world into being by the call of His voice. When the time to build these churches came and when Lalibela had grown in body and spirit, God wanted to reveal this secret treasure that He had buried from the beginning of time in the bowels of the earth, when He had laid its foundations, to show a wonder to the people He had destined to produce these monuments, through admirable work and a secret mystery. Just as He had once brought forth from the earth all the seeds of plants according to their kind their shape, the trees according to their appearance and form, as well as the numerous animals of all kinds and conformations. Similarly, He wanted to bring forth from the earth these churches of different colors and forms, so that no two would resemble each other in appearance or construction.

When the time came to reveal these ten monolithic churches, God said to Lalibela: "The time has come to build the churches I showed you before; arm yourself with courage and strength to accomplish this work, for many souls will be saved in these churches. Hurry to build them. I have commanded my angels to assist you." Then Lalibela had a large number of iron tools forged, some for working the stone, others for carving it, as well as several others suitable for constructing a temple in the rock. From that moment on, Lalibela no longer thought about his own needs, nor those of his wife (?); he thought every day about successfully completing the construction of these churches, modeled after those he had seen in heaven, strengthened in every way by the Holy Spirit. After having the necessary tools made for this work, he ordered all the people to gather and spoke thus: "All of you who are gathered here, tell me what wage you want to receive for helping to build these churches that God has commanded me to erect; let each one state the wage they desire, whether they will be shaping the stone or clearing the earth. Speak up, and whatever you ask of me, I will give it to you, so that you cannot say that I made you work against your will; for I do not want your labor to go unrewarded, nor do I want you to murmur." Then each person stated the price they desired, and the king paid it, as he had promised [fol. 125], without interruption, from the day the construction of the churches began until the day it was completed. He gave everyone their wages: to the one who cut the stone, to the one who shaped it, and to the one who removed the debris from the carving. Among the people, there were many who were very skilled and to whom God had given a certain knowledge, like Bezalel and Oholiab. Gabra Masqal prepared to replicate the churches that God had shown him and to begin their construction; the angels went with him to measure the site according to the dimensions that the churches should have, whether large or small, as the case may be. He bought the land on which these churches were erected at a price of gold from those who owned it, and this was an act of great kindness on his part, for if he had wanted to seize it, who could have stopped him, being the king? He first built a church similar to the one God had

shown him, with admirable craftsmanship and art, which man cannot achieve without divine wisdom; he adorned it both inside and out and added beautiful windows with bars. These bars were not made of wood, and their columns were of belzunât (?). In front of this church, he built two others, each with an exit door, separated inside by a partition with a door. Behind it, he raised a large church, which he adorned greatly, not with gold or silver, but with carvings made in the stone; the pillars of this church numbered seventy-two, like the disciples of the Savior. To the right of the first church, he had another one carved out, as well as one on its left. He named the first Bêta Mâryâm (House of Mary); he gave one of the two churches in front of it the name Dabra Sina (Mountain of Sinai) and the other Golgotha; he called the one on the right Bêta Masqal (House of the Cross) and the one on the left Bêta Danagel (House of the Virgins). Thus, he grouped five beautiful churches carved from the same rock.

Near these five churches, he erected two others which are very beautiful and whose construction is different; they are separated from each other by a common wall; he named one Bêta Gabriel (House of Gabriel) and the other Bêta Abba Matâ'e (House of Abba Matâ'e); in this way, he joined these two churches, surrounding them with the same wall and separating them internally by a wall [the front of folio 126 contains a colored drawing representing a church with the inscription: Construction of Lalibela; fol. 126v]. He built two other very beautiful churches of a different construction; he called one of them Bêta Marqorewos (House of Mercurius) and the other Bêta Amanuel (House of Emmanuel) and grouped these two churches together; then he built another isolated one, constructed differently, in the shape of a cross, as the angels had indicated and shown him while he was taking measurements on the ground; he named it Bêta Giyorgis (House of George). Thus, he completed the construction of ten churches, each with different architecture and appearance. Gabra Masqal did nothing other than what God had shown him and exactly reproduced what he had seen in the seventh heaven, without increasing the length, width, or height, following God's command not to add to the length or height.

When he began to build these churches, the angels came to assist him in every task; there was then a group of angels and a group of men, for the angels joined the workers, the quarrymen, the stonecutters, and the earth diggers. The angels worked with them during the day and alone during the night. When the workers would complete one cubit during the day [fol. 127], by the next morning, there would be three additional cubits because the angels worked all night. Seeing this, the workers exclaimed: "What is this miracle? We completed one cubit yesterday, and today there are four." They did not realize that the angels were doing this work because they could not see them; but Lalibela knew this, for the angels, who were aware of his virtue, did not hide from him. The angels of fire were his companions, and that is why they did not conceal themselves; this is how these ten churches made from a single stone were built.

Judge for yourselves, O my friends, what kind of man this was who built these churches, unlike any others ever constructed in other lands. What language could describe them? I am incapable of explaining the structure of their surrounding walls to you; do not expect me to describe their interiors. Whoever sees them cannot be satisfied with just one view, and in his astonishment, the heart cannot tire of admiring them. It is a true miracle accomplished by Lalibela, whose miracles no mortal can count. If anyone can count the stars in the sky, let them count the miracles of Lalibela. [The reverse of folio 127 contains a drawing representing an angel working on the construction of a church, with the inscription: Construction of Bêta Mâryâm; fol. 128]. If anyone wants to appreciate the work of these churches, built by Lalibela, let them come to see them (even now), for the tower constructed by Lalibela has not been altered by time; it is like the tent of Moses and not like the temple of Solomon that the impious destroyed; the tower, that is,

the temples of Gabra Masqal (still exist); they will not be destroyed or even shaken until the heavenly Jerusalem, destined for the elect who are to reside there, appears on earth.

Peter, Paul, and Jesus, their master, built, by the order of God, a temple for the Virgin with three stones as soft as wax, and Lalibela erected ten churches with a single stone, aided by the grace and armies of God. Peter and Paul built the salvation of many souls on faith alone, and Lalibela constructed several churches with a single stone. Peter and Paul founded churches on a single rock, but they were made with mortar; they had a roof, a ceiling, architraves, and wooden columns, whereas Lalibela founded several monolithic churches without mortar to bind the stones, without a separate roof to cover them, nor thatch to cover them. We cannot describe all the details of their construction, for there are many different types. My tongue falters and is powerless to recount all the virtues of Lalibela, this illustrious man, who was more remarkable than all mortals for his wisdom and great justice, and who was like Solomon the Wise among all the people and all the sages of Egypt. Solomon, aided by Hiram, king of Tyre, built a temple in Jerusalem with stones each measuring 7 to 8 cubits, from cedarwood, larchwood, and cypresswood; in this way, he made two monuments in twenty years: a temple for the Lord and his own palace. Lalibela built ten churches from a single stone, with the help of the Son of God. These two wise men each erected temples: the first's was made of stone, wood, and mortar; the second's are all carved from a single stone, without any accessories, without wood for the windows, or mortar for the joints of the stones, for he made them entirely from a single stone [fol. 129]. Their walls are of a single stone, their interior is of a single stone, and the challenges of the interior work were greater than those of the walls. Therefore, any Ethiopian who, after hearing about these remarkable churches, does not go to the holy city of Roha (to visit them), is like a man who has no desire to see the face of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

LALIBALA DOES NOT WANT HIS SON TO SUCCEED HIM; DEATH OF LALIBALA.

When the blessed and holy Lalibela had completed the construction of these churches, modeled after those God had shown him, he no longer wished to retain the burden of kingship, nor to pass it on to his son. Instead, he said: "May God take back this royal duty and return it (to the house) of Israel, for it is to them that He said: 'I have created all nations for you,' and He also swore with these words: 'Do not despise the people of Jacob; do not disdain the people of Israel, because I have chosen them among all peoples.' And the prophet said: 'God swore to David by His righteousness, and He will not repent of it'; He said to him: 'I will place your descendants on your throne.' Now, therefore, let God return this kingdom to the house of Israel; let it henceforth belong to the house of Israel; let them occupy the throne; let the mighty God no longer keep the kingship for me and my family. I have completed the mission for which He gave it to me Himself through His angels."

Thus spoke King Gabra Masqal, who did not love the honors of this world, after he had finished his work. He distributed all his possessions as alms, to the point where he no longer had shoes to put on his feet. He gave ornaments to the churches he had built in all places; as for those ten temples he had carved from a single stone, he endowed them, as was fitting for such buildings, with crosses and curtains. Some had only paintings. He did especially marvelous things in the sanctuary of Golgotha; (the representation) of the glorious body of the lamb that is not devoured by worms (?) and several other paintings, which he thought about day and night (?). He had no other thoughts, no concern for his food [fol. 130] or his clothing, and he neither cared for his wife nor his children, but only for these churches. And when they were completely finished, each morning he would make this prayer: "In these sanctuaries that you have raised by my hand, give me the tithe, O Lord." And God said to him: "Let it be according to your desire; since you

come in the morning to my church with a pure heart (?), O my chosen one, so it shall be as you have asked. You have completed your mission and kept your faith; now the brilliant crown of the righteous awaits you, and the gate of the kingdom of heaven is open for you to enter with joy."

Some time after Our Savior addressed these words to him, the blessed Lalibela suffered a brief illness and died on the 22nd of the month of Haziran. His soul was received by the angels of light. Gabriel carried it on his wings while the other angels walked before and behind him, singing. They carried his soul to heaven. Gabra Masqal returned to his eternal dwelling and sat beside Peter and Paul, as the Savior had promised him.

Here, my dear friends, is a small glimpse of the virtues of Gabra Masqal, which I have composed for you to bring you joy. May the powerful prayer of this king be for all of us gathered here a glorious helmet for our heads, a radiant halo (?) for our faces, an effective salve for our eyes, rings of grace for our ears, a sweet fragrance for our nostrils, a seal of righteousness for our lips, a joyful mantle for our shoulders, a triumphant robe for our chests, bracelets of mercy for our arms, rings of love for our fingers, protective shoes for our feet, a refreshing drink for our thirst, and manna for our hunger. May Lalibela lead us into the house of delights where he himself has entered, protecting us under the shadow of his wings, and may he make us sit at the table where he is seated, until the end of time. Amen.

May God have mercy and grant the kingdom of heaven to the one who wrote and had this story written, to those who read it, translate it, or hear it read; through the prayer of Mary, mother of God, through the intercession of Michael, Gabriel, the prophets, the apostles, the righteous, and the martyrs.

At the request of Lalibela and Masqal Rebrâ, may He grant His help to our queen Walatta Iyasus, to her sons Hayla Iyasus, Hayla Mika'el, Walda Mâyâm, and to her daughters Walatta Maryam and Hiruta Selasê, until the end of time. Amen.

