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Ethiopian Dynastic Marriage and the Bétā Esra’él

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Dynastic marriage for at least the half millennium, for which relatively good documentation is available, played a major, and well-attested, role in Ethiopian political life. Imperial rulers effected a number of important dynastic and other unions which transcended divisions of religion, ethnicity and class.¹

The early sixteenth century Portuguese traveller Francisco Alvares, generally a reliable informant, writing of the Šāwa-based Christian monarchs prior to the reign of Emperor Na’ūd (1494–1506), claimed that they “always had five or six wives”. These were chosen, he says, from among “the daughters of the neighbouring Moorish [i.e. Muslim] kings”.²

One of the most important inter-religious and inter-ethnic marriages of this period took place during the reign of Emperor Bā’ād Maryām (1468–1478), who effected a dynastic union with Ité Jan Zela, the daughter of Gārad Mehmād, a Muslim ruler of Hadeya.³ Converted to Christianity she later became better known as Empress Eléni, the author of two Ge’ez works on theology, the Regent for her grandson Emperor Lebnā Dengel, and a stateswoman, who, fearing the advance of the Ottomon Turks, took the imaginative and historic step of opening up relations with the Portuguese.⁴

The Ethiopian state’s involvement in inter-religious and inter-ethnic unions found no less important expression some two and a half centuries later when another great woman Regent, Empress Mentewwāb, of Gondār, arranged for her

son, Emperor Iyasu II (1730–1755), to marry Wobit, the daughter of Amizo, an Oromo (or Galla) leader from Yääju.\footnote{I. GUIDI, \textit{Annales Regum Iyäsu II et Iyo’as. Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium}, Vol. 66 (Louvain, 1912), p. 180.} The Scottish traveller James Bruce, who visited the country only a generation or so later, claims that their half-Oromo son Emperor Iyo’as (1755–1769) brought many of his mother’s Oromo kinsmen to his court, with the result that “in an instant nothing was heard in the palace but Galla”, i.e. Afan Oromo, and Emperor Iyo’as himself “affected to speak nothing else”.*

It would seem not unreasonable to suppose that beside such important, and well documented, dynastic unions connected with the ruling house there were many other inter-religious and inter-ethnic marriages among the lesser nobility and peasantry which were also politically significant, but passed unrecorded.

The purpose of the present paper is to examine how far the Bétä Esra’él, or Fäläša, fitted into the prevailing Ethiopian pattern of inter-religious royal marriage.

**Emperor Säršä Dengel and Emábét Ḥarāgo of Sämén**

Contacts between the Ethiopian State, which was based on Säwa in the centre of the empire, and the Bétä Esra’él, who lived for the most part in the far north-west of it, were for geographical reasons fairly restricted until the late sixteenth century. It was then, during the reign of Emperor Minas (1559–1563) that the move of the imperial capital from Säwa to the Lake Tana area, brought the imperial rulers into more direct contact with some of the more important areas of Fäläša settlement in and around the high and rugged Sämén mountains. The Bétä Esra’él country, despite its proximity, was, however, far from easy of access, or conquest.

The first Ethiopian ruler to establish himself firmly in the north-west of the country was Minas’ brother, the great Emperor Säršä Dengel, also known as Mālīk Sāġād (1563–1597), who, it is interesting to recall, had a Fäläša, or probably more correctly ex-Fäläša wife from Sämén. The scholarly Jesuit PERO PAES, who was in Ethiopia at the time, expressly states in his History that she

\footnote{J. BRUCE, \textit{Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile} (Edinburgh, 1790), II, 662.}
was a “newly converted Christian” of a Judaic background.7 Believed to have been a sister of Gedéwon, the notable Bétá Ésra’él ruler of Sámén, she is referred to in the royal chronicles of the time by the title Emábét or Tégázián8 (honoriﬁc titles perhaps the equivalent to Princess), and is variously called Harágó or Hárágwé, perhaps an abbreviation of Hárágá Wayn, i.e. Creeper, or Vine [of God].9 The union of Sárṣá Dengel and Harágó, which we must now consider, was on the face of things scarcely less important than the abovementioned marriages of Bá’édá Maryam and Jan Zéla or of Iyasu and Wóbit.

Whether the Sárṣá Dengel–Hárágó union was a dynastic union in the normal sense of the word may be a matter of debate. The Jesuits, with their implicit and explicit preoccupation with monogamy, regarded Hárágó merely as the Emperor’s “concubine”. Several later scholars have therefore tended to dismiss her as a person of little consequence. Her assumed position as sister to the Sámén Bétá Ésra’él leader Gedéwon would, on the other hand, suggest that she was a person of some signiﬁcance, at least locally, in her own right, as was the case of the consorts, ofﬁcial or unofficial, of more than one other Ethiopian

7 BECCARI, Rerum Aethiopicarum Scriptores Occidentali Inediti (Roma, 1903c17), II, 207-8.
8 On these titles see A. D’ABBADIE, Dictionnaire de la langue amariîña (Paris, 1881), cols. 470, 870.
ruler. Harago’s role as mother to several of the Emperor’s sons would moreover have given her prominence, and would by itself have justified her being accorded the above-mentioned titles of Emabêt and Tegazañi, if not that of Etegê, or Queen.

Emabêt Harago, like the Hadeya, Jan Zela, and the Oromo, Wobit, was not the first or principal wife of Sàrsà Dengel. His official consort was Maryam Sena, a woman of Orthodox Christian descent. Harago, it should be reiterated, was nevertheless a woman of by no means negligible status: in part because of her believed descent from the ruling Fàlāsha dynasty, and in part because of her apparently long-standing relationship with the Emperor, which caused her to bear him at least four sons. (Whether there were, as is probable, also one or more daughters, is not recorded).

The tie between Sàrsà Dengel and Gedéwon’s alleged sister Harago, like several dynastic arrangements in Ethiopian history, did not produce peace between the parties concerned, in this case the Ethiopian Christian empire and the Bétà Esra’él leadership. The Emperor in fact fought a major, and later well-documented, war against Harago’s Fàlāsha kinsmen. His ties with Harago may, however, have led him to afford Gedéwon some personal protection, as Steven Kaplan has suggested. Suspicion of this arises from a curious passage in the royal chronicle, which records that the Bétà Esra’él leader, at the close of a disastrous battle, escaped with fifteen armed men, and passed, supposedly unobserved, through the armies of two of the Emperor’s principal commanders. The chronicler protests, at perhaps more than reasonable length, that if anyone asserted that Gedéwon and his party had been recognized, and knowingly allowed to escape, such allegation was totally false.

Be that as it may, Harago was the mother, as we have seen, of four sons by Sàrsà Dengel, and this was a later matter of considerable political importance in that Maryam Sena reportedly had given birth only to daughters. This was of

11 J. Halévy, La guerre de Sarsa Dengel contre les Falachas (Paris, 1907).
great moment towards the end of the reign when the question of the royal succession came to be considered.

The fact that Ḥarāgo was not Sārṣā Dengel’s official consort – but only, as the Jesuits assert, a “concubine” – was, it should be emphasised, entirely irrelevant to the succession issue. This was later clearly, and correctly, stated by JAMES BRUCE, who, rebutting any suggestion that “illegitimate sons” had “no right to succeed to the crown”, observes that any such idea was “absolutely contrary to truth”, for in matters of royal succession “no sort of difference” was ever made in Ethiopia between legitimate and illegitimate sons. Ḥarāgo’s sons were thus fully entitled be considered for the throne, which, as we shall see, one of them duly attained.

We may conclude that Ḥarāgo, though mentioned only in passing in our records, and, like so many of her community an apparent convert to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, deserves a significant place in Bétá Eṣra’él biography and history. Thanks to her, Ethiopia was soon to have an Emperor of half-Fālaša descent.

Zā-Maryam

Towards the end of his life Sārṣā Dengel, having, as we have seen, no male heir by Maryam Sena, is said to have contemplated giving the royal inheritance to his nephew Zā-Dengel. The latter was the son of the Emperor’s brother Abétaḥun Ḍesanā Krestos. Shortly before his death, however, Sārṣā Dengel, if we can believe PERO PAES, was brought his son by Ḥarāgo, a child called Zā-Krestos, whom he had never previously seen. Moved by his sudden love for the infant the ageing monarch reportedly started to show less honour to his nephew Zā-Dengel, whom he made to stand, and, no longer sit, as formerly, in his presence. He also began to criticise his nephew behind his back, saying that he lacked the strong personality which Ethiopia then required of its ruler.

14 J. BRUCE, op. cit., II, 236.
15 Precious little is in fact known of the life of Ḥarāgo. Quirin has suggested that she might have been captured by Sārṣā Dengel in the course of an expedition to Sāmēn, but this, like so much about her, cannot be more than speculation.
16 J. BRUCE, op. cit., II, 236.
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The chief courtiers of the realm, according to PAES, quickly understood their master’s new way of thinking. To gain his pleasure it had long been their custom to agree with whatever he said. They therefore now began to praise the young half-Fālaša Zä-Maryam, and showed the Emperor that they wished to have his son as heir to the kingdom. Zä-Dengel was in this way soon almost entirely excluded from court activities.

This state of affairs lasted, however, for only about six months, at the end of which Zä-Maryam suddenly died. Särsä Dengel, PAES tells us, was much shocked by his son’s death, and regarded it as a Divine punishment for what he had done to poor Zä-Dengel, whom he thereupon once again befriended.17

Emperor Ya’qob

After Zä-Maryam’s death, Särsä Dengel, according to PAES who claims to have been informed by the monarch’s son-in-law Ras Atenatëwos, informed the great lords that he had once more resolved to give the empire to his nephew Zä-Dengel.

The courtiers, however, preferred Harägo’s younger son Ya’qob, who was then but seven years old. They favoured the latter, PAES argues, because they wanted a young emperor, whom they would be able to manipulate. (This consideration often played an important role in Ethiopian politics). The nobles accordingly told Särsä Dengel that Zä-Dengel was too rigid in his views, and criticised him in various other unspecified ways. The Emperor, nearing his end, and doubtless wearied by continued discussion of the succession issue, finally declared that they should settle the matter as they thought best.

After Särsä Dengel’s death in 1597, the lords and members of the royal family duly assembled, and agreed among themselves to make Ya’qob emperor. To forestall any opposition from Zä-Dengel, thus once again ousted from the succession, they seized him before he heard of his uncle’s demise. They took him as a prisoner to the island of Deq on Lake Tana, whence he was later transferred to a place of detention on one of the mountains of Gojjam, which was impossible of access without a rope.18

18 ibid, III, 208.
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It was in the above manner, according to PAES, that the half-Fâlaša prince Ya’qob was brought to the throne, and his rival Zâ-Dengel banished to remote areas from which he could not threaten this political arrangement.

A different story of these events was provided almost two centuries later by BRUCE, who, very characteristically, fails to cite any source for his statements, which, as far as we can tell, are not based on any known written source. The Scotsman ignores Sârṣà Dengel’s reported earlier choice of Ḥârâgo’s first son Zâ-Maryam as his heir, and begins the succession story with her second son Ya’qob. He claims, contrary to PAES, that it was Ya’qob whom the old Emperor originally favoured, and that the latter accordingly began treating him as the “heir-apparent”, which “everybody” in Ethiopia thought was “but natural and pardonable from the affection of a father”.

BRUCE goes on to claim that Sârṣà Dengel realising that his death was approaching, then changed his mind over the succession, for his “interest and love of his country seemed to overcome even ties of blood”: He accordingly began to favour his nephew Zâ-Dengel. The Emperor, according to the Scotsman, therefore called his state council around his bed, and, in his last words, supposedly declared:

“As I am sensible that I am at the point of death, next to the care of my soul, I am anxious for the welfare of my kingdom. My first idea was to appoint Jacob my son to be successor; and I had done so unless for his youth, and it is probable neither you nor I could have cause to repent it. Considering, however, the state of my kingdom, I prefer its interest to the private affection I bear my son; and do, therefore, hereby appoint Za Denghel my nephew to succeed me, and be your king; and recommend him to you as fit for war, ripe in years, exemplary in the practice of every virtue, and as deserving of the crown by his good qualities, as he is by his near relation to the royal family”.

BRUCE concludes his account by claiming that, as soon as Sârṣà Dengel was dead, the royal family reversed the succession. “The very reasons the dying king had given them, why Za Denghel was fitted to reign, were those”, he claims,

19 BRUCE produced his Travels, it should be recalled, almost twenty years after his visit to Ethiopia, and perhaps for that reason his writings, as is well known, contain many inaccuracies great and small.
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“for which they were determined to reject him: as they, after so long a reign ... were perfectly weary of being kept in their duty, and desired nothing more than an infant king and a long minority: this they found in Jacob”.

Bruce’s version, which, we would insist, was not based on any identified source, has tended to be generally accepted, and is for example uncritically reproduced by the early twentieth century British historian of Ethiopia, Sir Wallis Budge.

The Scotsman’s account has, however, implicitly been rejected by two modern Ethiopian scholars, Girma Beshah and Merid Wolde Aregay, both fully conversant with Portuguese sources. Following Paes, they declare that the dying Emperor Särṣā Dengel was “persuaded” by the courtiers to leave the throne to his seven year old son Ya’qob. This, they show, was therefore not a unilateral decision made by the nobles after his death, as Bruce had suggested.

Whatever the actual details of the succession struggle the main point was that, with the enthronement of Ya’qob, kingship, as so often in Ethiopian history, was once more vested in an infant, whom the nobles, because of his tender age, hoped to be able to control, and manipulate, for many years to come.

Ya’qob, whose capital was at Qoga, east of Lake Ṭana, reigned, according to the royal chronicle, for seven years. Not long after his accession, Ras Atenatéwos, the husband of one of Särṣā Dengel’s daughters by Maryam Sena, and governor of Bâgémder province, came to the capital, and established himself as the young Emperor’s “tutor”, or in effect his master.

In the sixth year of his reign Ya’qob, however, succeeded in freeing himself from this tutorage. He fought an armed battle with Atenatéwos, defeated him, and later replaced him as his political mentor by another lord, a Guragé chief called Ras Zâ-Šellasé. Ya’qob’s relations with the latter, however, soon deteriorated. The young Emperor then lost the support of the army, which rebelled. The soldiers, condemning him as a foolish child, interested only in his games, joined Zâ-Šellasé in deposing him.

Ya’qob at around this time was accused of various other crimes. These included adultery, betraying the Christian religion, breaking a cross on the church of Bétä Iyãsus, and consulting cow’s fat, like the Gallas (or Oromos), for

20 Bruce, op. cit., II, 236-7.
22 Girma Beshah and Merid Wolde Aregay, op. cit., p. 70.
purposes of prophecy. In view of his mother’s Falasha background the three latter charges, unsubstantiated and probably false as they were, are not without interest.  

After his overthrow the young Emperor was taken to Enarya province in the south-west of the empire where he was kept as a prisoner. He was replaced as Emperor by Sarsa Dengel’s nephew Za-Dengel, who was at last given the throne which his uncle had, as we have seen, apparently earlier wished to grant him. 

The reign of Za-Dengel was, however, but a short one. In the course of a rebellion not long after his accession he died, or was killed, in October 1606, reportedly on account of a horse accident, for, the chronicle says, “he did not know the art of riding, but only poetry and hymns”.  

The death of Za-Dengel, like that of so many other Ethiopian rulers, was followed by much political confusion, in the course of which the Gurage chief Za-Sellasé is said by the chronicle to have “held the realm in his hands”. Realising the need for the speedy appointment of a new Emperor, however, he decided on restoring Ya’qob to the throne. 

The young half-Falasha ex-Emperor, by then about fifteen years’ old, was accordingly recalled from Enarya, and again placed on the throne. To consolidate his power he effected a dynastic marriage with the daughter of the ruler of Hadeya, long an important source of gold, but, according to Almeida, had no time to carry out the wedding ceremony. 

Ya’qob’s second reign was even shorter than the first, for his power was soon afterwards challenged by Abeto Susneyos, the notable future Emperor of that name (1607-1632), who defeated and killed him in battle, in February or March 1607. 

The two reigns of Emperor Ya’qob, though short, were not unimportant. On the one hand he continued the imperial policy, dating back to Empress Eleni’s time, of seeking a dynastic alliance with the gold-producing country Hadeya. On the other, he conceived a diplomatic opening to the Jesuits and to the Portuguese, which in fact was later developed by his successors Za-Dengel and

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Susneyos. Ya’qob seems also to have won some popular recognition in that an impostor claiming to be him was soon to appear on the scene. The real Ya’qob’s historical reputation has on the other hand suffered from the fact that no chronicle of his reign was ever written.

Keflā Maryam and Mātkō

Emābēt Harāgo, Ya’qob’s ex-Bētā Esra’ēl mother, had at least two other politically important sons: Keflā Maryam and Mātkō. They were apparently both her children by Emperor Sārsā Dengel.27

Keflā Maryam, the more important of the two, is mentioned by both Pero PAES and Emperor Susneyos’ chronicle. The latter states, without giving any details, that Keflā Maryam was one of three “rebels” whom Gedēwōn, the Bētā Esra’ēl ruler of Sāmēn, nominated as a “king”, but was shortly afterwards captured by Susneyos’s men, after which he was convicted and “killed by the sword”.

Gedēwōn’s support for Keflā Maryam, supposedly his nephew, is revealing. It shows that the imperial and Bētā Esra’ēl ruling dynasties were in one way or other more closely connected with each other that might at first sight be supposed. Keflā Maryam, though reputedly Sārsā Dengel’s son, also had, it would seem, some political relationship with the Fālaḵa, from whom his mother, the late Emperor’s “concubine” had sprung.

Keflā Maryam’s rebellion probably occurred in the first year of Susneyos’s reign, or a little earlier, during the time of Ya’qob, for the chronicle states that he and Māktō were accused, apparently in 1608, of certain unspecified “idle and vile acts”, for which they were sentenced to death. The chronicler, who naturally presents the story from Susneyos’s standpoint, states that one of the brothers (whom PAES identifies as Keflā Maryam) “claimed to be the son of Mālāk Sāgād”, i.e. Sārsā Dengel, and therefore entitled to the throne, while the other brother (Mātkō, according to PAES) declared that should his brother become king he for his part wanted to be wazir, or in effect Prime Minister.

The plot originated, the chronicler would have us believe, in the two brothers’ personal ambition (a common charge in Ethiopian political history),

27 F.M. Esteves Pereira, op. cit., II, 79.
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and resulted in a considerable amount of fighting. The rebels reportedly “destroyed many districts” of “lower Sämén”, i.e. territory near that inhabited by the two brothers’ Fälašà kinsmen, who, we may assume, were probably involved in the struggle.

Keflá Maryam and Mätko were duly captured, and, according to the chronicle, “fell into the hands of the righteous king”, i.e. Susneyos, who then interrogated them. In response to his questions they declared that they had been “led astray”, by whom it is not specified, into doing “evil” things. The Emperor, having obtained this confession of guilt, handed them over to his judges, who, not surprisingly, found them guilty, and sentenced them to death. Susneyos then commanded that they should be killed by the sword, and, the chronicle sardonically states, they were thus both killed.28 This account was probably substantially correct, for it is fully corroborated by PAES.29

Ras Yämanà Krestos

Despite the cruel fate meted out by Susneyos to Haṛägo’s three sons, Ya’qob, Kefta Maryam, and Mätko, all three apparently Säršä Dengel’s children, the idea of a dynastic union with the Béṭä Esra’él rulers of Sämén was not dead. It was revived, remarkably enough, by none other than Susneyos’ brother, Yämanà Krestos, an ambitious prince who was strongly opposed to his imperial sibling’s attempt to convert Orthodox Christian Ethiopia to Roman Catholicism.30

Yämanà Krestos rebelled against his brother Emperor Susneyos, in or around 1617. To strengthen his position he is reported to have planned a dynastic alliance with the Béṭä Esra’él leader Gedéwon. This plan, for which he was later accused and condemned by Susneyos, is mentioned both in the chronicle and in PERO PAES’ History. The alliance was to be effected by Yämanà Krestos giving his daughter, i.e. Emperor Susneyos’ niece, to Gedéwon’s son Walay.31 The fact that Yämanà Krestos’ daughter was to become the young Fälašà leader’s wife, and thus the subordinate partner in the proposed dynastic marriage, would

28 ibid., II, 217.
29 ibid., II, 79; C. Beccari, op. cit., III, 327-8.
31 ibid, II, 136; C. Beccari, op. cit., III, 362.
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seem an indication of the importance Yāmanā Krestos attached to a Bétä Esra’ël alliance.

The rebellion against Susneyos was, however, soon crushed, and Yāmanā Krestos was obliged to surrender. He was charged with seven crimes, two of which are of direct relevance to our story:

5. Failing, during Susneyos’ campaign against Gedéwon, properly to guard a certain passage-way, and thereby allowing the Fālaša leader to escape.
6. Hating persons whom Susneyos loved, and loving those whom he hated; befriending the brothers and sisters of persons whom Susneyos had executed on account of their iniquity; giving his sisters and nieces in marriage to such persons; and “deciding to become related with the Fālaša leader Gedéwon by giving his daughter to the latter’s son Walay”.

Yāmanā Krestos was duly tried, and found guilty of treason, but, doubtless because he was the Emperor’s brother, was, unlike Sārṣā Dengel’s unfortunate sons, subsequently pardoned. He was nevertheless exiled to Gojjam, and, according to both PAES and the chronicle, expressly forbidden to carry out the proposed dynastic alliance with Gedéwon.

Susneyos’ triumph, we may conclude, put an end to any further royal dynastic alliances with the Bétä Esra’ël. This was scarcely surprising. The Emperor, unlike his brother Yāmanā Krestos, had no need of the Fālaša, for he hoped, as a result of his conversion to Roman Catholicism, to obtain much more valuable military help, including fire-arms, from the Portuguese. Encouraged by PERO PAES’ Jesuit successor, the rigid and fanatical Alfonso Mendes, he was moreover actively engaged in a struggle to suppress such “Judaic practices” as the Ethiopian Orthodox Saturday Sabbath, and was therefore ideologically unfavourable to any dealings with the Bétä Esra’ël, whose religion was even more “Judaic” than Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity.

By the time of the establishment of Gondār as the imperial capital in 1636 the Bétä Esra’ël royal house was a thing of the past. The Gondarine emperors

32 P. PAES, História da pápiã (Porto, 1945), III, 312.
continued to conduct dynastic unions with various ruling houses, including those of far-off Tegray, \textsuperscript{35} Ḥamasén, \textsuperscript{36} and Yejju \textsuperscript{37} but no longer with the Fālaṣa. A Bétā Esra’ēl-Christian union, like that of Sāsā Dengel and Harāgo, was not repeated as Yāmanā Krestos had wished. If marriages between members of the two communities occurred it was only at a much lower social level, which deserves a separate study.

Conclusion

Significant contacts between the Ethiopian State and the Bétā Esra’ēl began in the late sixteenth century with the move of the imperial capital to the Lake Tāna area, which was relatively near to Fālaṣa settlements in or around the Sāmēn mountains.

At about this time Harāgo, an apparently high-born Fālaṣa woman, supposedly the sister of Gedēwon, the Bétā Esra’ēl ruler of Sāmēn, and reportedly a recent convert to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, became the consort, or as the Jesuits preferred to say a “concubine” of the redoubtable Emperor Sāsā Dengel. She bore him four sons. One, Zā-Maryam, was chosen as heir to the throne, but died before he could succeed. The second, Ya’qob, actually ascended the imperial throne, but was too young to make any significant achievement. Two others, Kefā Maryam, and Mātako, threw in their lot with their kinsman Gedēwon, and thus played a notable role in imperial and/or Fālaṣa local politics.

There is no evidence whatsoever to suggest that Ethiopian Christians regarded Harāgo, or her children, as in any way different from the rest of the royal family, or that they were in any way discriminated against on account of their non-Christian, or Bétā Esra’ēl, origin.

The idea of a dynastic alliance with the Bétā Esra’ēl was subsequently revived by Emperor Susneynos’s rebel brother Ras Yāmanā Krestos. He proposed giving his daughter, the Emperor’s niece, to the Sāmēn ruler Gedēwon’s son and heir Walay. Ras Yāmanā Krestos’ rebellion was, however, crushed, after which

\textsuperscript{36} I. GUIDI, \textit{Annales Iohannes I, ’Iyāsu I et Bakāffā} (CSCO, 1923), pp. 179, 222.
\textsuperscript{37} The Wobit connection referred to above.
Susneyos exiled his brother to Gojjam, and forbade the proposed Bétä Esra’él dynastic alliance. As a Roman Catholic, seeking military support from the Portuguese, and an adherent of the Jesuits, who wished to cleanse Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity of “Judaic” elements, he would moreover have been predisposed against playing the Fālaṣa card.

The subsequent decline of Bétä Esra’él power, the disappearance of the Fālaṣa ruling dynasty, and the growing importance of fire-arms, which the Fālaṣa lacked, created a new strategic and political climate in which dynastic alliances between the Ethiopian monarchy and the Bétä Esra’él no longer had any place.