

THE MELANCHOLY TRANSLATOR:
SIRAK WÄLDÄ ŚĒLLASSE HĒRUUY'S AMHARIC
TRANSLATION OF SAMUEL JOHNSON'S *RASSELAS*

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Every man is placed in his present condition by causes which acted without his foresight, and with which he did not always willingly cooperate. — *Rasselas*

In 1733, a young Englishman with uncertain prospects translated a long book that discussed the tribulations of the seventeenth-century emperor of Abyssinia.¹ This book took peculiar hold of his imagination and, twenty-five years later, Samuel Johnson wrote a fiction titled *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*.² His tale describes the quest of a melancholy Amhara prince who travels from an idyllic mountain valley in Abyssinia into the bustle of the outside world only to conclude that the determined search for happiness is futile. The book was almost instantaneously a success, with dozens of editions and translations into more than twenty-five languages. It was not until two hundred years later, however, that the book was translated into the prince's own language.³

Although the character Rasselas had not yet returned to Abyssinia by the end of *Rasselas*, the book itself did return home, finding its way into the heart of the nation's most famous literary family. One of the nobles who served the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie translated *Rasselas* into Amharic, the dominant language of Ethiopia.⁴ The translator's name was *Blatta Sirak Wäldä Śēllasse Hēruuy*,⁵ a young Amhara of a melancholy bent.

Sirak⁶ published የራሱ ህላሴ፡ መስፍን፡ ኢትዮጵያ፡ ታሪክ (*Yä-Rasēlas Mäsfənä Ityōpya Tarik*, "The Rasselas, Prince of Ethiopia, History") in December 1946.⁷ Some call it the first literary translation into Amharic.⁸ Within three years the emperor was giving it as a prize to top students.⁹ The book became a required text

in Ethiopian secondary schools until 1974,¹⁰ and it was used in 1962 for the British O-level exams in Amharic.¹¹ Those who attended school in Addis Abäba during this period remember *Yä-Rasśelas Tarik* vividly as an example of flawless Amharic prose and the inspiration of many passionate debates on its ultimate meaning. The book was so popular that more than one Ethiopian named a son after *Rasselas*.¹² Although schools abandoned the book as anti-revolutionary when Marxists deposed the emperor in 1974, some children discovered *Yä-Rasśelas Tarik* on their parents' bookshelves or, in later decades, read it at university.¹³

Despite its importance, few scholars have published about this translator or this translation.¹⁴ As a result, the uncanny resemblance between the Ethiopian translator and the Ethiopian titular character of *Rasselas* has gone unremarked. For both were Amhara (Abyssinia's ruling ethnic group), sons of prominent nobles, committed to journeys of the imagination into distant lands; men so brilliant, so curious, so creative that they pursued their education with a diligence that came at a tremendous cost—men too clever to be happy. Both left their countries to search for better ways of living. Both returned less enchanted with the outside world and hoping to aid their country's progress. Both saw through hypocrisy, deplored the misuse of power, and had a tendency toward brooding and unsociability. Their powerful minds and troubling experiences seemed to drag them toward despondency. A seventeenth-century poem that Johnson admired warned that a person should be careful what he chooses to translate, for he would inevitably find himself taken over by the text: "choose an author as you choose a friend," for as you translate, you will find that "your thoughts, your words, your styles, your souls agree / No longer his interpreter, but he."¹⁵ In the case of *Rasselas*, it seems more that like was drawn to like and Sirak, only the second Ethiopian to receive a Western education, laid claim to this foreign product that depicted something then unavailable in Ethiopian literature, a man of the court disillusioned with the outside world and alienated from his own. Filling a gap in scholarship, we provide the first thorough biography of the translator Sirak, as well as a short history of the process of translation, a brief analysis of the Amharic translation of *Rasselas*, and a review of some of the critical reception. Exploring the peculiar bond between the character *Rasselas* and his Amharic interpreter Sirak also allows us to consider the melancholy of the exiled translator and the postcolonial subject.

Belcher learned of this surprising return of *Rasselas* to Ethiopia while conducting research about Samuel Johnson. Through the generosity of a stranger, Daniel Bekele, she met the translator's family in April 2007, including Bekure Herouy, Sirak's grandson, in Addis Abäba. Working as an international lawyer, Bekure had published an English newspaper article in the 1980s about his

grandfather based on the extensive family archive he kept regarding the translation, along with Sirak's daughter Askale Sirak.¹⁶ Belcher had already written a draft of the article based on material that was not in the family archive, so we decided to join strengths and publish this article together.¹⁷



Figure 1: Sirak's photo in his Ethiopian Passport, issued by the Imperial Government of Ethiopia on 10 April 1937.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE TRANSLATOR AND HIS FAMILY

The Ethiopian translator of *Rasselas* was not just anyone, but the son of a prominent figure in Ethiopian history, *Blatten Geta Həruy Wäldä Šəllasse*.¹⁸ Həruy not only served as Haile Selassie's foreign minister but also was one of the country's most important literary figures, widely considered "the father of Amharic literature"¹⁹ and the author who "set the norm for Standard Written Amharic to this very day."²⁰ He published almost two dozen books, including poetry, biography, travelogue, advice, and a novel; launched several literary journals; and was the first to start printing books in Gəʿəz (classical Ethiopic) and Amharic as the director of the imperial press.²¹ Born on 7 May 1878,²² the translator's father Həruy "stands out as the great success story . . . of the early twentieth-century intellectuals" of Ethiopia.²³

The translator's father Həruy started his career as a scribe and served Haile Selassie while the future emperor was still just the Governor of Harär. The translator's father rose rapidly due to his brilliance and loyalty, serving in many ministerial posts including that of foreign minister, and died in 1938 while serving Emperor Haile Selassie in exile. Some described him as quiet and unassuming, but others labeled him the "Rasputin" of Ethiopia because of his influence over the emperor and his enemies.²⁴ Perhaps as a result, it was rumored among contemporaries that the translator's father had been "born the son of a slave and was a slave himself in childhood."²⁵ According to Həruy, however, he was of a noble but unlettered family and his father Wäldä Šəllasse "was very distressed about his being an uninstructed nobleman."²⁶ The family confirms this report about the translator's grandfather with an anecdote.²⁷

Həruy's father Wäldä Šəllasse was a lay priest without church training, much harassed for his lack of learning. One day he held a banquet to which he invited the high priests of his church. In order to humiliate him, they delayed their coming until after he was forced to start and only then did they arrive to insult him as a country bumpkin who began without his honored guests. He spent the night in despair over their ill-treatment and his own ignorance. Early that morning, without consulting even his wife, he left the village and all his property behind, to take his young son Həruy to be trained at a famous center of traditional church education, Šəllase Šəre Mädhane ʿAläm.²⁸ He thus gave his son Həruy what he had been denied, in addition to what he had received: his deep connection to the humble rural lives that provided so many of the characters in Həruy's fiction.

Unfortunately, Wäldä Šəllasse died when Həruy was thirteen and Həruy was forced to go into service for a local lord and as a scribe.²⁹ Not long after, he became a clerk for a noble connected with the court, where he encountered the priests of ʿĪntoṭto Raguʿel, a recently established institution of church education near Addis Abäba.³⁰ Always eager to learn, Sirak's father returned to

his education and advanced through some of the most difficult stages of the church system, including the study of poetry, scripture, and music.³¹ He soon came to the attention of the imperial scribe and by the age of twenty-five, in 1903, he had embarked on a career and started a family. From 1930 to 1937, he served Haile Selassie as Foreign Minister. Despite his full career as a civil servant, Hərüy managed to maintain his scholarly and literary pursuits throughout his life. While in exile in the 1930s in London, Hərüy taught Amharic and Gəʿəz at the School of Oriental and African Studies;³² becoming close friends with the professor of Ethiopic languages there, Eugen Mittwoch.³³

Although Hərüy had not been Western-educated, he saw such education as vital and sent both of his sons to British secondary schools and universities.³⁴ His son Fäqadä Śəllase (known as George among Europeans) attended Cambridge, and Sirak, the translator of *Rasselas*, attended Oxford (Samuel Johnson's alma mater).³⁵ Hərüy was very proud of his sons and told an interviewer in 1935 that they were "steering Abyssinia along the road of progress, and Europeanising Ethiopian life, as the Emperor wishes. . . . They further the Emperor's work unconditionally and pluck out and destroy the reactionaries."³⁶ This paternal pride may have given Sirak an unusual confidence and independence of thought, even while his privileged upbringing at an ancient court embarked on "Europeanising" introduced contradictions that may have served as a significant source of his melancholy.

Sirak Wäldä Śəllase Hərüy was born on 13 January 1911, in Addis Abäba.³⁷ Sirak was not his birth name, but a name he received when he was eleven. His birth name was Wäldä Śəllase, as his father had named him after his own persecuted father, who had paid such a high price for ignorance.³⁸ Sirak's mother was Ḥamärä Əšäte; he was their second son.³⁹

Hərüy sent Sirak at the age of five to study in the Tāwaḥədo Ethiopian Orthodox Church school at Däbrä Libanos, the most respected monastery of the time, with *Aläqa* Dästa Əšäte, its most famous teacher.⁴⁰ There Sirak quickly completed the first stage of traditional church education (Nəbab Bet), learning to read and write in Gəʿəz by the age of eight.⁴¹ He memorized not only Proverbs, as did all the students, but the Ethiopian catechism and the four Gospels.⁴² Dästa Əšäte told his friends that Sirak's mind was like a stamp seal, once something was carved into it, it never faded away. By the age of ten,⁴³ Sirak had moved on to the Qəne Bet stage, which is devoted to learning and composing poetry within strict forms. Qəne is the most complicated form of Ethiopian poetry, dense with layered meaning and, in the couplet form, often aphoristic. So difficult is this stage of learning, requiring such absorption, that students traditionally cover their heads with a sheep or goatskin while studying or reciting, so that they will not be distracted by the world around them. Sirak did not follow this practice, but rather studied or recited with his head

uncovered and looking at his surroundings. When a friend asked him why, he offered what is considered his first work of wisdom: “The mind and a calf, once released, are bound to wander.” As with any Qəne poem, this one is open to interpretation, but one meaning is: learn in freedom, since penned things tend to wander the first chance they get. Or, the mind is designed to wander, let it do so.

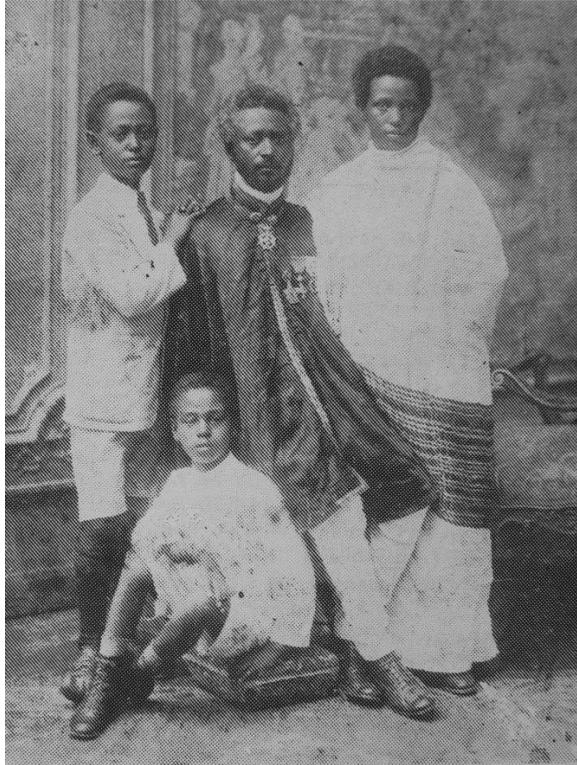


Figure 2: Sirak sitting at the feet of his father, mother, and older brother, c. 1920. From the photocopied program for Sirak’s memorial service in the Həruy family archive, Addis Abāba, Ethiopia.

Certainly Sirak was much invested in the natural world.⁴⁴ When Sirak came with other students to be examined one day, the teacher demanded how Sirak had the audacity to think that he was ready, since he had spent so much time wandering in the local woods. “Venerable teacher,” Sirak responded, “I have studied both the woods and Qəne and found that the woods have their own Qəne; you can find Qəne everywhere.” His teacher fell silent in agreement and Sirak’s classmates began to call him “Qəne Everywhere.” When the final oral examination and day of graduation came, Sirak had only one problem: he had completed his studies at such a young age that he was too short for anyone to

see him at the public examination. They had to stand him on a drum as a pedestal so that the multitude of learned people could watch him recite.

According to British reports, while completing his traditional Ethiopian education, Sirak studied at the Mənelək II Secondary School in Addis Abäba.⁴⁵ Sirak then left his country at the tender age of eleven to join his elder brother Fäqadä Śəllasse at the famous British colonial secondary school in Alexandria called Victoria College,⁴⁶ which Omar Shariff, King Hussein, and Edward Said also attended. That is, like *Rasselas*, he descended from the highlands of Abyssinia into Egypt to study and “begin his experiments upon life.” That year, in 1922, he traveled by ship on the Red Sea with his father, who was on his way to Jerusalem.⁴⁷ Since Sirak was only the second Ethiopian to attend the school,⁴⁸ his fellow passengers were intrigued by his reputation for brilliance. An admiring woman asked him to recite his Qəne as well as St. Paul’s Gospel (the Epistle to the Romans) in the Gəṣəz and then provide a translation into Amharic.⁴⁹ Surrounded by passengers, Sirak calmly sat down and did just that. Among those impressed by his precociousness was *Abunä Sawiros (Malakä Gännät Tädla)*, one of Ethiopia’s most important monks, the priest of the royal family, and founder of the modern Təwaḥədo Ethiopian Orthodox Church.⁵⁰ After hearing the young man recite, Sawiros announced that he should no longer be known as Wäldä Śəllasse but as Sirak, which means “wise philosopher.” The name stuck.⁵¹

The newly named Sirak went on to similar success at Victoria College. In 1928–29 he was the head boy, charged with making speeches and organizing the other student leaders.⁵² His “brilliant performance” at Victoria College gained him local recognition and then entrance to Oxford at the age of eighteen.⁵³ Such was the natural progression of things for a brilliant young man during the boom years of the 1920s, and yet one cannot help thinking of *Rasselas* in Egypt, searching futilely for better ways of living. What was Sirak’s mood upon leaving the African continent, where he had learned not only to speak English like a native but to be English, and journeying into the very heart of that empire? Did he hope that this new life would bring some previously unfound happiness? We have only his passport picture to aid us in imagining his thoughts. As his Stanford-educated grandson wrote about Sirak, “once he embarked on the road in search of wisdom and education, there was no return.”⁵⁴

Sirak was in residence at Brasenose College for three full academic years, from 1929 through 1932.⁵⁵ By 1930, Sirak had passed the Preliminary Examination in Modern History and taken part in the Freshmen Cricket Trials.⁵⁶ He was said to be a distinguished cricketer there,⁵⁷ and was a rowing coxswain, no doubt owing to his small size (he was 5’ 3”).⁵⁸ In 1931, he may have heard

David Nichol Smith, the prestigious scholar of the poetry of Samuel Johnson, gave a series of lectures on "Johnson and His Age."⁵⁹

Unfortunately, Sirak's successes were not to see their natural fulfillment.⁶⁰ He had to abandon "his promising career at Oxford" on 12 August 1932, one year before completion, because of financial difficulties.⁶¹ Haile Selassie had committed to paying for the education of Ethiopian students in England, as part of his program for training a new generation of Ethiopian leaders in progressive values, but the payments were slow or absent.⁶² Through no fault of his own, Sirak left in considerable debt to the college, and returned to Abyssinia at the age of twenty-one.⁶³

It would seem that Sirak thought well of his decade in the British educational system. He recommended his nephew to Victoria College, frequently wore his Oxford muffler, and was known as a "proud Brasenose man."⁶⁴ The house he shared with his father and brother in Addis Abäba was fitted with English furniture they had brought back from England.⁶⁵ And yet, Sirak had not become an Anglophile. Unlike his brother, Sirak had little interest in spending time with Europeans or being seen as European. As one of the British in Addis Abäba unsympathetically put it, Sirak came back to Ethiopia "Oxford-educated, capable, sour. Sirak has seen the world, come back to wear the shamma."⁶⁶ This is an adept turn of phrase, as the šamma is a cotton cloak worn by country Ethiopians and Sirak's wearing it is not only a sign of his allegiance to traditional Ethiopian values, but also his indifference to the British. However much Sirak valued his experiences abroad, like Rasselas he returned unconvinced that outsiders had the answers.

His abridged degree did not prevent Sirak from aiding his country. He returned to Ethiopia to follow his father's example, starting as secretary general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1934.⁶⁷ An observer at this time wrote that Sirak was someone who gave the emperor "consistently valuable advice, assistance," and who was thus trusted over many others.⁶⁸ An article in the *Washington Post* noted Sirak's prominent role in Addis Abäba as the emperor's interpreter with American diplomats.⁶⁹

Meanwhile, within months of returning from England, in 1933, at the age of twenty-two, Sirak married Wäynəšät Bäyyänä, a woman of good family from Moča, in far-west Ethiopia, the daughter of a man from Märḥabete, a region north of Addis Abäba.⁷⁰ In 1935, she served as one of the founding members of the first formal women's group, called the Ethiopian Women's Work Association.⁷¹ It was a charitable association providing medical assistance, among other services. She was a kind and cheerful woman, always smiling in photographs and looking admiringly at her husband. They were married for fifty years.

In October 1935, however, the Italian army invaded Ethiopia and embarked on an occupation of such brutality that an entire generation was lost. As foreign minister, his father Ḥərüy accompanied Haile Selassie into exile to London in May 1936.⁷² Sirak went as well, and because of the suddenness of their exit, both had to leave their families behind.⁷³ Although his brother also left, he shortly returned to Ethiopia to join the resistance.⁷⁴ For years Sirak and his father had no contact with their families nor any idea of their whereabouts.⁷⁵ In London, thanks to his English language skills, Sirak served as private secretary to the emperor.⁷⁶ While Sirak participated in many historic occasions, and met many famous persons, for him it was a winter of despair. The Ethiopian leadership was in disarray and disheartened, facing serious financial difficulties and feeling impotent to help those they loved at home. The British refused to get involved in defending Ethiopia against the Italians, and shunned the emperor in London.⁷⁷ No one in the Ethiopian delegation could agree on what to do and the infighting was constant. A dreadful future was upon them. After millennia of independent rule in Abyssinia, one of the few countries in the world not to have been colonized by European powers (although it was occupied by the Italians), it seemed the nation would be lost to rulers who thought nothing of using poison gas, bombs, and tanks on a populace with no more than rifles. It was the nadir of Ethiopia's three-thousand-year history. For Sirak, trained by England to think of England as the world's hero, England's inaction must have been a blow. "His memories from his days in exile . . . are not . . . pleasant memories."⁷⁸

Then disaster struck. In February 1937 the Italians caught his brother and tortured him to death for his leadership of the ongoing resistance in western Ethiopia.⁷⁹ Not long after, on 19 September 1938, Sirak's father died in Bath, sick at heart over the loss of country and family.⁸⁰ These successive shocks changed Sirak. The boy who had calmly recited his knowledge in front of an emperor on a ship bound for the British empire's best schools, and who had then gone on to a diplomatic role in international politics, was not the same afterward. According to recently released confidential files from the British Foreign Office, Sirak became so despondent after the death of his father and brother that he attempted suicide.⁸¹ No other documents record this attempt and the report is made several years later, but it is by a British observer who knew Sirak in Addis Abäba in 1936, in London in 1937, and then again in Addis Abäba in 1942–44.⁸² There may be, thus, some truth to it. Certainly, it was a terrible time for any Ethiopian. Going into exile was "the beginning of his discontent," as Sirak watched "his country losing its soul and independence" while its enemies only "laughed when the tears of the poor flowed like a river."⁸³

Finally, when the Italians entered World War II on the side of the Axis powers in June 1940, the British decided to act on behalf of Abyssinia. With nothing left to lose, Sirak quickly became involved in this effort. After four years in exile in England, Sirak traveled to Sudan in 1940, serving as Haile Selassie's advisor.⁸⁴ There a serious diplomatic incident clarified that Sirak's British education had not severed his allegiance to the emperor or the elite from which he came. Sirak told the Ethiopian emperor that some local British officials were planning to send a British emissary to southern Ethiopia with the promise that, if the marginalized Oromo people rose up against the Italians, the British would protect them in future from "Amhara overlordship."⁸⁵

In Sudan, Sirak encountered the South African-born British journalist George Steer, whom he probably first knew at Oxford and then again in Abyssinia in 1935 and 1936, when Steer was a close friend of the emperor's.⁸⁶ The emperor appointed Sirak to work with Steer in the British Information Office of the British Embassy in Khartoum translating war propaganda.⁸⁷ Many considered Sirak "the ideal person" for this job, since he had "almost equal competence" in Amharic and English.⁸⁸

Sirak's main job was translating anti-Italian articles that Steer and the British press officer Perry Fellowes wrote in English for *Banderaččən*, Haile Selassie's field newspaper. From July 1940 until March 1941, twenty-eight issues of the Amharic newspaper were airdropped every Wednesday over the parts of western Ethiopia that the Italians occupied.⁸⁹ These small literary masterpieces urged Ethiopians and Eritreans to desert the Italian army, which "exterminates your youth in his interminable wars" and has "filled your country with beautiful roads—to march you to your destruction." Sirak also translated shorter pamphlets, which were dropped in the tens of thousands over the countryside. Finally, Sirak translated and then recorded speeches for the loudspeaker unit, the first time such a unit had been used anywhere. At night, on the battlefields in Ethiopia, the unit broadcast Sirak's speeches urging the Amhara to desert. According to Steer, "the little, asthmatic voice of Sirak came over on the gramophone clear as a bell." These combined efforts were convincing; desertions reduced many Italian units to thirty percent of their strength, aiding the eventual defeat of the Italians' colonial effort in East Africa.⁹⁰

Many of the British in Ethiopia during the war mentioned Sirak in their later accounts, commenting on his small stature, his ill health (he had asthma), and his unusual translation skills. For instance, the Orientalist Edward Ullendorff commented that Sirak had "a noble head and a neat turn of phrase" as part of his "wayward genius."⁹¹ The most detailed portrait of Sirak, especially as a literary person, appears in Steer's gorgeously written book on his experiences during the war. Here the translator's personality finally comes into sharper view.

Steer described Sirak's character in evocative terms as "dreamy and determined and silent." Steer added that Sirak "suffered from an inner melancholy, and was clearly calm about it. He was an old friend of mine, and though he did not like me or any of his friends very much he understood us and knew what we wanted."⁹² In this reserved poet dwelt a gifted translator, according to Steer. In contrast to the previous Ethiopian editor, under whom *Banderaččän* "flowered into learned incomprehensibility" and "long-windedness," Sirak wrote quickly and beautifully:

He had learned from his father, Blattengeta Herrouy, the Emperor's former Foreign Minister, to write a lucid and concise Amharic that laid on paper like a well-planned garden, with level lawns, clipped hedges, vistas between the trees, and the colour of flowers not excessively splashed in. . . . he was scrupulous in his attempts not simply to translate but to transmogrify our ideas into their Amharic equivalent. . . . He worked at a noiseless speed.⁹³

This was high praise from a man famous for his own prose. Yet the time spent working in Khartoum on this propaganda effort was difficult for the introverted Sirak, since they all worked, some stripped to the waist due to the heat, at dusty typewriters in a room with one fan "and a lot of people trampling one on top of the other's stream of thought" (Steer, *Sealed and Delivered*, p. 99). Steer vividly describes Sirak's gloomy mood during this period:

Another person lived in him, completely dissociated from his work; it was thinking all the time about his wife whom he had left in Ethiopia in 1936, and at times it lay on its unmade brass bed in a sordid little Khartoum hotel sweating and smoking cigarettes and saying that its demon was upon it, that perhaps it would overcome the demon in this wrestling match, but that if it did not, the melancholy would master it forever. (Steer, *Sealed and Delivered*, p. 96)

This would seem to hint that Sirak fought the demon of depression daily and worked to remain among the living. According to the British, at this time "He still suffers occasionally from mental lapses" (p. 99).

After the war ended in Abyssinia in 1941, Sirak finally returned home, bearing with him the casket of his father, and rejoined his wife, whom he had not seen in five years. He was quickly appointed secretary general in the Ministry of the Interior and was given the honorary title of *Blatta*. He did not stay in this post long, however, and sometime between this post and into his next one,

before May 1943, he translated *Rasselas*. World War II was not over until 1945, so, although the Italians had been pushed out of Ethiopia, the British continued to be active in Ethiopia, including continuing to publish various materials. Between January 1944 and June 1945, Sirak returned to his occupation as a translator, once again working with a British press officer, but this time it was a man named Hender Delves Molesworth.⁹⁴ Sirak translated articles about the Allied war effort from English into Amharic for *Wädä Dil Godäna* (The Road toward Victory), a monthly British magazine printed in Asmara, Eritrea, but distributed in Addis Abäba.⁹⁵

Sirak did not enjoy his difficult work there, feeling that his contributions were undervalued. He wrote a draft letter (perhaps never sent) to Molesworth on 5 June 1945 voicing the translator's common complaint. Those "who have no difficulty in rendering 'good night' into 'bonsoir,'" he wrote, "see nothing out of the ordinary" in the difficult task of translating an Indo-European language into a Afro-Asiatic one. "But I can assure you that there is more in it than the mere act of . . . typing . . . and appending [a] signature." He concludes that he will do one last issue, "after which, 'good bye to all that,'"⁹⁶ a reference to Robert Graves's memoir about World War I. Two weeks later, Sirak sent his letter of resignation to Molesworth, giving as his reason "our conversation of this morning when you confirmed that none of the United Nations governments were interested in providing their own material for translation and publication in *Wede Dil Godana*."⁹⁷ Molesworth accepted Sirak's resignation with "very deep regret," communicating "the pleasure that our association has been to me."⁹⁸ In a draft letter, also perhaps never sent, Sirak protested the wording of this acceptance, perhaps concerned about Molesworth's wording of "you no longer feel able to continue."⁹⁹ As Germany had surrendered the previous month, Sirak may have been merely anticipating the end of the propaganda newspaper. Indeed, Molesworth left his post within several months. *Wädä Dil Godäna* did continue through 1946, but after a year publishing under the new name *Gize yä-wällädäw* (What Time Created), in 1947 it ceased publication.¹⁰⁰

In May 1948, Sirak was transferred back to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to serve as a deputy minister.¹⁰¹ In this capacity, he attended the fourth session of the United Nations General Assembly in 1949, which was devoted partly to the matter of whether the former Italian colony of Eritrea would be returned to Ethiopia. According to one observer, members of the Ethiopian delegation, including Sirak and the famously progressive *Ras* Ḥimməru Ḥaylä Šəllase, wore red boutonnieres to symbolize their dislike of Europe's handling of the issue of Eritrea and their alignment with the Soviet Union and communism.¹⁰² Sirak found this work at the ministry not much more interesting, apparently. There he met the same personalities he had worked with previously and apparently found them no easier. Given the absence of his father and brother, with whom

he had always worked, "he must have felt lonely and out of place."¹⁰³ The antipathy appears to have been mutual, as Sirak was shipped off to serve as consular in the Ethiopian embassy in India, when ጄmməru was the ambassador there (1954–60).¹⁰⁴ When he returned, Sirak was so frustrated with the office and so disliked the intolerance of his colleagues and the prime minister that he soon tendered his resignation.¹⁰⁵ He made his choice of life and permanently retired in his early fifties.

He then became a lifelong recluse, living on income from his land and rents and never leaving home, spending his last decades in a kind of fortress, as *Rasselas* had spent his first decades. Sirak spent his years gardening, cultivating his roses, and walking around his compound in solitude and meditation. He never wrote or translated again. Sirak's first public appearance in many years was at his fiftieth wedding anniversary, in 1983, a loving celebration in his home of his long and close marriage. Six months later he died at the age of seventy-two, leaving behind his wife, two sons, two daughters, and one grandson.¹⁰⁶

It may be that his ill health prevented Sirak from writing more;¹⁰⁷ but for Ethiopians he became a famous case of those who do not live up to their early promise. The literary critic Asfaw Damte wrote that Sirak was someone whose talent had been "nipped in the bud." Sirak's "mastery of the Amharic language" cannot have meant that his destiny was to be only a translator, Asfaw added, for "we do not believe that the ability to create a work of literature and the ability to competently translate one are mutually exclusive." Rather, "many a literary career has been launched by a first book of literary translation," including those of Dostoevsky and the Ethiopian poet laureate's Tsegaye Gebre Medhin.¹⁰⁸ Evidence that Sirak himself did not intend to be a one-hit wonder is that, when he sent the book to his college in 1947, in the enclosed letter he referred to the translation as "Opus No. 1."¹⁰⁹ Certainly, the discouraging and frustrating experiences he underwent trying to get his translation published, discussed in the next section, must have played a role.

Sirak's family thinks that Sirak disappeared himself as protection against the system in which he found himself a part, a system that required a person to become an "odd man out"¹¹⁰ or have his soul devoured. His experience abroad and at home "brought an end to the dream of a young man whose whole life seems to have been symbolized by frustration and intolerance."¹¹¹ He had to make a decision that "being odd in a system which was rapacious . . . [made] oddity . . . worthwhile."¹¹² Or perhaps, as someone who could become "completely dissociated from his work" by personal "demons," he was mastered by melancholy forever, as he himself had predicted, according to Steer.

In contrast to the quiet portrait that the British drew of Sirak, some Ethiopians saw him as a clever trickster, a man who expressed his anguish in the form of jest. Some say the following two tales are about him; others say it is about the Ethiopian folkloric character *Aläqa Gäbrä Hanna*.¹¹³ Whether they represent actions that Sirak actually took or not, some told these tales as if they were about him because they appeared to illustrate something about his disposition and psychological makeup. According to the first tale, Sirak was invited to a lavish banquet hosted by a noble family. Perhaps remembering his grandfather's experience with banquets and the mighty, Sirak first arrived in typical country clothing, wearing a *šamma*. The gatekeeper turned him back, assuming that he was not an invited guest and merely a beggar angling to get a free meal. Sirak went home, dressed in a tie and European dinner jacket, and returned to the banquet, where the gatekeeper greeted him with great formality, not even recognizing it was the same man. When it came time for the meal, Sirak sat down to the banquet with the others. But when the others began to eat, Sirak scooped up his meal and began to spread it calmly on his clothes. When the guests expressed alarm and consternation, he announced, "It is clear that you have invited my clothes not me, therefore they should eat."

In the second tale, Sirak drove a donkey onto the palace grounds, deliberately timing his entrance with the meeting between Haile Selassie and his twelve cabinet ministers. This was very perplexing behavior for a well-to-do and educated man, so the emperor asked what he was doing. Sirak responded with some surprise, asking "Can Your Highness object to me playing with one donkey if you play with twelve of them?" Both tales seem to reflect Sirak's dislike for the politics of the wealthy and powerful.

As these stories reveal, Sirak became something of a legendary figure in Ethiopia, famous for his early promise, his extraordinary translation, his contempt for politics and subsequent withdrawal from the world, and his failure to leave a larger legacy. Six months after his death, a long exchange among various critics took place in the local English language newspaper, debating why Sirak had not published more and lamenting the lack of information about his life and work.¹¹⁴ In the end, we know remarkably little about the man himself, or who his time would allow him to be.¹¹⁵

THE HISTORY OF THE TRANSLATION

We are fortunate to have substantial archival materials related to the translation, which contradict several assertions made previously about it. Edward Ullendorff suggested that Sirak's translation of *Rasselas* came into being at the request of the British press attaché Hender Delves Molesworth, who served in Ethiopia from 1942 to 1945.¹¹⁶ Ullendorff also claimed that the delays in publication were due to Sirak's "sedate pace" in translating *Rasselas*.¹¹⁷ Another

critic, Reidulf Molvaer, said that Molesworth asked Sirak to translate *Rasselas* in installments for *Wädä Dil Godäna*, and thus that the translation first appeared in full as a serial in 1944.¹¹⁸ We argue that they are mistaken, however, regarding the inspiration and publication of *Yä-Rasśelas Tarik*. The Herouy family archive documents a different series of events, with Sirak starting and quickly completing the translation at his own initiative, actively seeking a publisher rather than being solicited by one, and publishing only a quarter of the translation in *Wädä Dil Godäna*.

Regarding the translation's inspiration, we may never know why Sirak decided to translate *Rasselas*, but it would not have been surprising if Molesworth had made this request. Molesworth was a museum curator on leave from the Victoria and Albert Museum and a literary man known for his "freshness of approach" in Ethiopia, where "his readiness to identify himself with local interests gained him an unusual degree of confidence."¹¹⁹ According to Ullendorff, Molesworth "did not have even the remotest feeling of colour discrimination" (*Two Zions*, p. 174). But Molesworth could not have been the impetus for the translation as Sirak had completed it before he went to work for Molesworth in 1944 at *Wädä Dil Godäna*. Drafts of letters that Sirak wrote in May through August of 1943 to various Ethiopian government ministers (lobbying for the publication of *Yä-Rasśelas Tarik* as a book) demonstrate that Sirak had already completed the entire translation by May 1943, when he was thirty-two.¹²⁰

Although Molesworth was in Ethiopia by 1942, and might have met Sirak somewhere and asked him, a stranger, to do a *Rasselas* translation for *Wädä Dil Godäna*, which Sirak might have completed not a year later, it seems improbable. For one, Sirak does not mention Molesworth or *Wädä Dil Godäna* in the 1943 letters. More important, the 1943 letters demonstrate that Sirak devoted an enormous effort to finding a book publisher, as if he was worried that his translation would not see the light of day. Sirak's bitter exchanges with the ministers, which we will turn to in a moment, seem unlikely if he already knew that the book would appear in serial form. Rather, it seems that serial publication occurred because book publication did not. Sirak started to publish his translation in *Wädä Dil Godäna* six months later, in 1944, after the Ethiopian ministers had disappointed his hopes of seeing the translation published. Finally, *Yä-Rasśelas Tarik* started appearing in serial form within a month of Sirak arriving at the magazine in January 1944, again suggesting that Sirak could not have composed, proofed, and printed the translation in just a month at his new employer's behest.

If Sirak did not translate *Rasselas* for the British or their newspapers, why did Sirak choose to translate this book? Perhaps he merely saw it as useful for students, as most translations of *Rasselas* were used as types of textbooks in

schools.¹²¹ Or perhaps a deeper motivation was at work. Did he conceive of it during an assignment at Oxford, during a rainy afternoon spent in the dim recesses of the barrel-vaulted Brasenose library while reading of the unhappy mountain princes in his now distant home? Was it the book's central theme of the impossibility of human happiness in an imperfect world, which the much-haunted Sirak had good reason to believe was true? Was it, as the Ethiopian scholar Asfaw speculated, that Sirak thought that "the theme of the futility of life and human ambition" would appeal to Ethiopians, who had "been made to believe in another [heavenly] world," one that would reveal this material one to be only of "milk-and-honey" (sweet but insubstantial)?

Or was it the Abyssinia of *Rasselas*, returned to Sirak strange and yet somehow familiar, that drew him? Asfaw wondered if Sirak had stumbled across *A Voyage to Abyssinia* and *Rasselas* together "in some library or bookshop," and seeing the visible "Ethiopian connection" between the nonfictional travelogue and the fictional novel triggered the idea.¹²² Perhaps it struck him, as it did Asfaw, that a man like Johnson "so thoroughly English" would show in his own translation an "instinctive sympathy with the natives of an invaded country" and would then write "a book with an Abyssinian setting and characters."¹²³ Johnson's condemnation of the seventeenth-century Jesuits' incursion of Abyssinia in the preface to *A Voyage to Abyssinia* might have been particularly moving to a man devastated by the Italian invasion of the same land in the 1930s. Writing in 1984, Asfaw did not see an Orientalist or imperial impulse in the composition of *Rasselas* and it seems that Sirak did not either. Ethiopians tend to claim *Rasselas* as an Ethiopian text and, as Belcher has argued elsewhere, they have good reason to do so: it is a text animated by Ethiopian self-representations.¹²⁴ Unfortunately, unless new documents are found, perhaps at Oxford, we will never know what Sirak's exact inspiration was.

This important book, which influenced a generation of Ethiopian students, was almost not published at all, as the letters Sirak drafted in 1943 reveal. Indeed, Bekure has argued that government censorship played a role in the four-year delay between the translation's drafting sometime before May 1943 and its publication in full as a book in 1947. This section of our article reprises Bekure's previously unpublished argument and the related information from an unpublished draft of the *Herald* article, material dropped for reasons of space and sensitivity.¹²⁵

Three ministers seem to have blocked Sirak's efforts to publish. In those days, the Ethiopian official with the title of *Ṣähfe Tə'əzaz* (Minister of the Pen) was in charge of the government printing press and had to vet all proposed publications. On 12 May 1943 Sirak wrote to this official in Amharic, informing him that Sirak had translated a book about Ethiopia that had been previously "translated into all the major languages of the world" due to its worthiness as

a story of “meditation and sorrow, full of philosophy” (our translation).¹²⁶ Sirak asked the royal printing press to publish his translation as a book, noting that he was so confident that it would inspire no censorship questions that he was willing to submit the original to the censor. He added that he wanted to include ten pages in Amharic that were not from the original work, but that would serve as a prologue and an epilogue. These were pages from his father’s most famous work, *Wādaḡe Lābbe* (My Friend, My Heart).¹²⁷ He then asked very specific questions regarding the time printing would take, the maximum number of copies they published, and the estimated costs, all suggesting that he anticipated a positive reply.

The minister did not reply in writing, but told Sirak in person to give the translation to the printing press. If the press judged it profitable, they would publish it. However, he added, Sirak had to be willing to pay all the press’s expenses should the book not prove profitable. This was a surprising request; publishers do not ordinarily ask their authors to take on the risks of publication. The cost of publishing a book was extremely expensive (the final cost was equivalent to more than a decade of a civil servant’s salary, as discussed below). As it turned out, the publisher did *not* ask this of Sirak. When Sirak immediately gave the original to the press, they quickly told the minister, sometime between 13 and 17 May, that the book would be profitable and they were happy to publish it.

Upon being informed that the press had told the minister this, Sirak wrote to him again on 18 May, expressing his opposition to being held liable and his surprise that the minister should counter the press’s willingness to publish the book with such a draconian addendum.¹²⁸ He refused to agree to the risk-sharing proposal, but again offered to send the translation to the censor. No response was forthcoming. Sirak then went to the minister’s office to seek an answer, but was turned away by the secretary and told that the minister would send a formal reply by post when it was convenient for him.

After waiting several weeks without receiving a reply, on 10 June 1943 Sirak wrote to another official, the man who had replaced him as private secretary to the emperor, to complain of the systematic blocks to publication he had experienced despite his urgent desire to publish the translation.¹²⁹ When that secretary asked the Minister of the Pen what had happened, the minister blamed Sirak, saying he had been uncordial. Sirak again protested by post, on 16 June, noting that the minister mistakenly stated that the translation was not yet complete: “I offered the original manuscript of my translation for the censors to see, yet they neither officially acknowledged receipt nor did they officially pass a verdict on it” (our translation). He demanded that a decision be made about who would pay for the publication, arguing that if he paid, he should keep the copyright and absorb the profit or loss, and if the press paid,

it should have the copyright and absorb the profit or loss. These were, he fairly stated, the only logical alternatives. He concluded that for the Minister of the Pen to insist otherwise could only be the result of "a personal grudge against me, driven by jealousy and hostility, amounting to nothing less than outright animosity" (our translation). He added that he was disappointed to see that "corrupt and selfish government officials still exist in this 'new era,' men who still think and live in antiquated ways, hindering the new wave of progress which we hoped was to come" (our translation).

This strongly worded letter did not solve the issue, so Sirak wrote to yet another minister, the Minister of Education and Fine Arts, on 22 June asking him to promote the publication of *Yä-Rassélas Tarik* as part of his education mission.¹³⁰ Since the head of the printing press had told the Minister of the Pen orally and in writing that the translation would be profitable, Sirak argued, there could be no objection to publication. He added that asking an author to share the risk of publication was a violation of the press's general practices, a mere invention of the minister, part of "hitherto unknown policies."¹³¹ That the Minister of the Pen never provided this requirement in writing suggests that Sirak's suspicions were just. Sirak warned the minister that the problem Sirak was experiencing affected other authors as well, attaching copies of his correspondence with the other ministers. "How do you expect to . . . utilize the potential of the younger generation of the 'new era' to write or translate original works of literature," he demanded, if you do not support "their respective endeavors in the widest and fullest sense?" (our translation).

This letter also received no written response. His irritation and indignation only grew over the following months, and on 30 August 1943, he wrote again to the Minister of Education, lamenting the indifference and hypocrisy that prevailed, and lambasting "the false solidarity uttered orally and the false reasons [of risk sharing] forwarded by the authorities concerned." His conclusion was that the ministers had worked to "systematically suppress and subdue the process of publication" (our translation).

It is difficult to know why the authorities failed to act. Was it just inattention and lack of interest? Did the three conspire to prevent the publication of the translation because of personal grudges? A politically sensitive letter in the archive, in which Sirak writes to friends condemning the government's detention of a friend, may be relevant to the minister's inaction.¹³² Or was there something about the translation itself that drew their concern, something meriting censorship? While it might seem unlikely that a translation of a world-famous, canonical, eighteenth-century English book could raise the ire of censors, it was about an Ethiopian prince who questions worldly power.¹³³ Since Ethiopian authors and artists have a long tradition of indirect criticism of power, and Sirak was a harsh critic of the ministers, they might have suspected

that the book was subversive, perhaps in ways that were not obvious at first. Many Ethiopian authors have used translations of foreign texts to effect just such criticisms.¹³⁴ But Bekure wonders if they ever even read the translation, as there is no press receipt in the archive, in which case their refusal to publish was personal antagonism. The very bitterness of Sirak's letters suggests that he believed this was the real reason.

Whatever the reasons behind the Ethiopian authorities' failure to publish the *Yä-Rasselas Tarik*, we cannot rule out formal or informal censorship—that is, a deliberate effort by the government to prevent its people from reading a text, whether due to the nature of the text or its author. Certainly, Sirak did everything in his power to get the book published while the ministers in charge of censorship, publication, and education did nothing. Ironically, had Sirak made the translation before the war, it would undoubtedly have been published immediately, as Sirak's father had started his own press to print a plethora of books on an array of literary and historical topics.¹³⁵

So Sirak gave up on publishing the book through the Ethiopian government and pursued two other avenues of publication. Sometime in late 1944, Sirak commissioned church scribes to copy his translation onto fine-quality vellum by hand, in traditional Ethiopian style.¹³⁶ Completed in March 1945, this bound parchment manuscript, with hand-inked letters in two columns, has nine illustrations of *Rasselas's* activities at the top of some pages, as in an illuminated manuscript (see figs. 3–8).¹³⁷

Sirak also approached the British Legation for assistance. While they did eventually realize the publication of his book, they took three long years. At first, it seemed the translation would appear as a serial. Not six months after his last letter to the Ethiopian ministers, Sirak published the first chapter of his translation *Wädä Dil Godäna* (in the second issue, in early 1944). However, Sirak published only the first fourteen of *Yä-Rasselas Tarik's* forty-nine chapters in *Wädä Dil Godäna*.¹³⁸ The partial publication may be because Sirak got a more satisfactory agreement with the British to publish the translation as a book. That is, Sirak wrote to Molesworth on 22 January 1945, a year after starting to work for him, asking about the possibility of publishing *Rasselas* as a book.¹³⁹ Molesworth responded and things moved quickly. In March Sirak received a printing bid,¹⁴⁰ and in May Molesworth sent Sirak a legal contract, as instructed by Ullendorff, setting out the terms for publishing the book.¹⁴¹ Sirak signed the contract in early May 1945.¹⁴² A month later, Sirak resigned from working on *Wädä Dil Godäna*, a move hinted at in his response to the contract.¹⁴³



Figure 3: Rasselas among the animals. Beginning of Chapter 1; page 1 of Yä-Rasśelas Mäsäfəñ Ityoṗya Tarik in the bound manuscript edition dating to 1945.

The contract specified that the British Ministry of Information would print 1,000 copies of the translation, with the understanding that Sirak would buy 900 copies at cost or allow the office to sell them and keep the earnings, and that Sirak retained the rights in all future editions. They agreed to subsidize the printing with an independent printing press in Asmara, Tipografia Pietro Silla (Peter Silla Printing Press), which was then under British rule. Run by one of the Italians who had set up presses in Eritrea before the war, it was gaining a reputation for publishing literary work.¹⁴⁴

The British requested that Sirak send the entire manuscript to Eritrea but that the press would be able to send proofs only in small batches for Sirak to check, “owing to shortage of printing facilities.”¹⁴⁵ Sirak did not want to send

the entire manuscript; quite possibly this was the valuable traditional edition he had made, which could not be photocopied in 1945, but would have had to have been copied laboriously by hand. Rightly suspicious about delays, Sirak insisted that “if they want the complete translation I want to be by the side of the printer with it. And I can only do that if I am assured that the printers will start the work on a fixed date and work at it without interruption—official or non-official.”¹⁴⁶ This insistence may have been a tactic, however, to allow time for revisions, as Sirak did add that “the translation . . . wants reviewing as the need for it arises; which should take no time.” He also insisted that he not be charged for the costs of ferrying these proofs back and forth by air.

Presumably, the British agreed to receive the translation in installments, as within two weeks, in mid-May, Sirak gave them “half” the translation in “script.”¹⁴⁷ He must have sent the rest of the translation shortly thereafter because they had had the whole in their hands long enough by 15 July that Sirak wrote to express concern about the pace. He warned that he would consider their publication agreement “lapsed” if the final proofs were not available by 15 September 1945.¹⁴⁸ His threat was ineffective, perhaps in part because Molesworth left Ethiopia after July 1945 and returned to England to take a post at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

The publication process dragged on far longer than Sirak could have initially imagined, two more years. Before they started, Sirak thought the whole process would take “fifteen days.”¹⁴⁹ Sirak wrote again to try to speed things up in October 1945,¹⁵⁰ but another nine months ensued before the British Legation sent Sirak a written promise in July 1946 that if the printer did not print the book within three months of receiving proofs, they would compensate Sirak.¹⁵¹ No evidence suggests that such compensation was paid when this deadline came and went. In October, when Sirak reminded them of their agreement, the British promised to have the corrected proofs sent by December 1946.¹⁵² In mid-November, they explained that the long delay was because the Eritrean printer had not received a new metal Amharic font from Italy and they again promised to have proofs in December.¹⁵³ The British office in Asmara did indeed receive the “corrected printing” on 20 December and forwarded them to Sirak, along with his original, stating that any corrections would have to be added to an errata sheet later.¹⁵⁴ Sirak agreed to forgo approving a specimen of the binding at the end of December.¹⁵⁵ Two months later, on 26 February 1947, Tipografia Pietro Silla published 1,000 copies of the book.¹⁵⁶ In the opposite of poetic justice, the British military convoy that was to carry the books from Asmara to Addis Abäba was too full to take on these peaceful burdens.¹⁵⁷ It was not until a month later, on 5 April 1947, that the press attaché finally received the 900 copies in Addis Abäba.¹⁵⁸ Even then, Sirak had to write twice in order to get the copies, with the British promising on

16 April to deliver them in “the next day or two.”¹⁵⁹ They must have done so, as a receipt documents Sirak’s donation of a copy of the translation to the Ethiopian National Library on 20 April.¹⁶⁰

This was not the end of the matter, since Sirak now had to pay the British for the privilege of translating their classic into the language of its principal character. The printing press billed the British directly, who paid the press 3,264.80 East African Shillings (E.A.Shs.).¹⁶¹ Even before they had delivered the books to him, in March 1947, the British asked Sirak to pay up, requesting not just “a draft for the sum of E.A.Shs. 2,938.40 payable in Asmara as soon as is convenient for you,” but also noting that there would be additional a sum for insurance and transport.¹⁶² When payment was not immediately forthcoming, the British press attaché managed to suggest to Sirak’s wife that the reason the books had not been transported across town to Sirak was because payment had not yet been received.¹⁶³ Sirak did then receive the books, but does not seem to have been in any hurry to reward an almost three-year delay in publication with prompt payment. In July, the British sent Sirak a formal bill for E.A.Shs. 3,036.50 shillings, including a transport charge.¹⁶⁴ Sirak’s family was wealthy and he intended to sell the book at a profit, but for the sake of comparison, Sirak’s monthly salary from the British was E.A.Shs. 16 and 50 cents, so it would have taken him more than fourteen years to pay this bill using his civil servant salary.¹⁶⁵ It is not clear when Sirak paid, but a note on the formal bill suggests that he paid in three installments: first E.A.Shs.1,518.25, then 400, then 1,018.25.

After four years of struggle to overcome numerous obstacles, Sirak finally accomplished his dream of seeing *Rasselas* published in Amharic. He sent a copy to the librarian at his alma mater, Brasenose College Oxford, noting humorously that “You will, of course, be foxed by the problem [of] whether a translation justifies you in including my name amongst the Olympians of B.N.C. authors. Personally, I am not worried: I leave the case in the good hands of the pater and Ellesmere societies [of Brasenose], whose members will, I feel sure, prepare themselves for this pleading of the causes of sanctification by due regimen of B.N.C. ale.”¹⁶⁶

The book was popular enough to warrant a second edition of 5,000 copies from an independent press in Addis Abäba in 1964.¹⁶⁷ Again, Sirak published them at his own cost, under a “mortgage” agreement with the Addis Abäba Bank.¹⁶⁸ The cost of half the print run, in hardcover, was Ethiopian birr (ETB) 4,500 (about USD1,800 at the time).¹⁶⁹ In exchange for lending Sirak ETB4,000, the bank laid “claim to first mortgage of the books, the equivalent of 400 books,” and the press would keep the rest until they had been paid in full. The archive does not record any trouble associated with this edition. A third edition was begun in 1974, but was never realized,¹⁷⁰ perhaps because the noble

family's circumstances changed with the deposition of the emperor. Currently, there is no plan to reprint the translation.



Figure 4: *Rasselas* with the camels. Beginning of Chapter 8; p. 19 of *Yä-Rasselas Mäsäfän Ityopya Tarik* in the bound manuscript edition dating to 1945.



Figure 5: *Rasselas* with Imlac. Page 40 of *Yä-Rasselas Mäsäfän Ityopya Tarik* in the bound manuscript edition dating to 1945.



Figure 6: The kidnapping of Pekuah. Beginning of Chapter 33; page 72 of Yä-Rasselas Mäsäfön Ityopya Tarik in the bound manuscript edition dating to 1945.



Figure 7: Rasselas with his sister and advisors. Chapter 36; page 78 of Yä-Rasselas Mäsäfön Ityopya Tarik in the bound manuscript edition dating to 1945.



Figure 8: *Rasselas* with the astronomer. Page 97 of *Yä-Rassélas Mäsäfən Ityöp̄ya Tarik* in the bound manuscript edition dating to 1945.

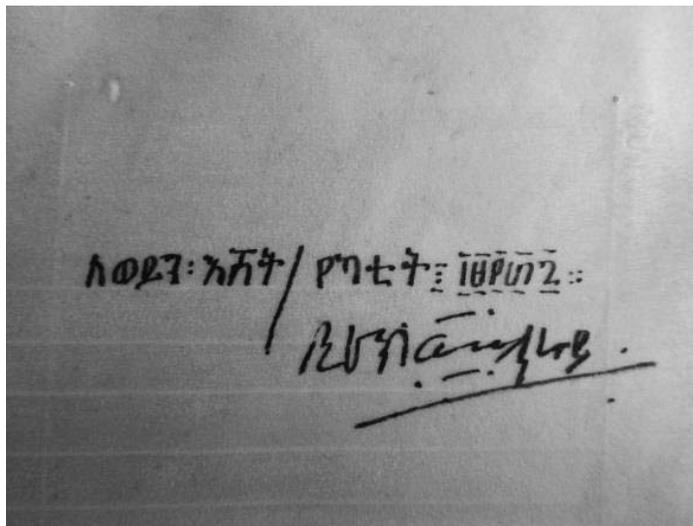


Figure 9: The translator’s dedication to his wife and his signature in Amharic; folio 1 of *Yä-Rassélas Mäsäfən Ityöp̄ya Tarik* in the bound manuscript edition dating to 1945. Herouy family archive.

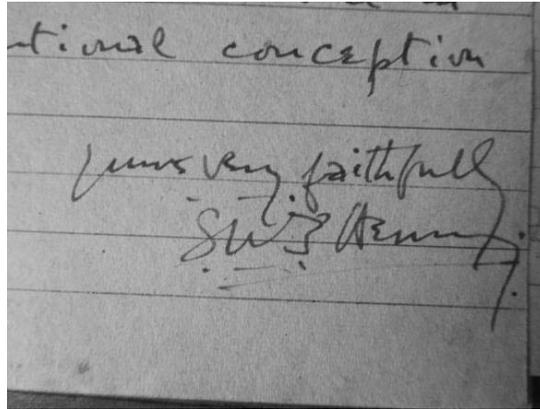


Figure 10: The translator’s signature in English in a draft letter. Herouy family archive.

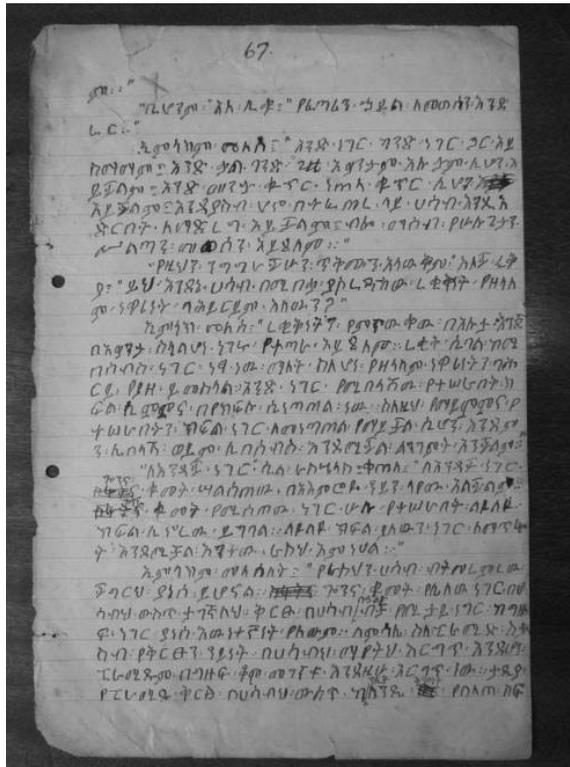


Figure 11: Page 67 of Sirak’s draft. The fifth paragraph is the translation of the famous passage from chap. 10 that starts “‘The business of a poet,’ said Imlac, ‘is to examine not the individual but the species.’” Herouy family archive, Belcher file 167.

THE NATURE OF THE TRANSLATION

Sirak's translation awaits a fuller interpretation than can be offered in this article. Suffice it to note that the translation is faithful, although, like translations of *Rasselas* into other languages, "locally inscribed by introductory matter and interpolations."¹⁷¹ In Europe, the eighteenth-century Spanish translator of *Rasselas* bound her translation with her original proto-feminist text as a way of highlighting what she found valuable in *Rasselas*: Johnson's foregrounding of learned women. What Sirak chose to include is similarly enlightening.

The brief preface that Sirak provided in Amharic summarizes the author's credentials, its source, and the text succinctly, foregrounding the alma mater that Sirak shared with Johnson. It reads as follows:

Dr. Samuel Johnson was born two hundred and thirty years ago. In his nineteenth year, he entered that great university called Oxford to pursue his education. Through his literary works and his English dictionary, he is one of the scholars who has expanded and improved the English language. After Johnson translated from French into English the Jesuit Lobo's book about Ethiopia, then he wrote *Rasselas*, which is a book of sadness and sorrow and philosophy. (our translation)

Sirak then includes, at the beginning and end of his translation, a prologue and epilogue that are not in Johnson's book but from the novel *Wädaḡe Ləbbe* by his prolific father, published in 1922, which was already in its fourth printing by 1956–57. Inspired by John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*,¹⁷² Ḥəruy's book is an imagined tour of various forms of knowledge. Toward the west is the Old Testament, full of darkness; toward the east is the New Testament, full of light; toward the north is the patristic literature, full of gloom; toward the south are the hagiographies, full of joy.

Sirak selected his prologue from the beginning of *Wädaḡe Ləbbe*'s chapter 28, perhaps as an illustration of the idea of a happy valley. For these passages are a poetic paraphrase of verses in Revelations 21, about the happiness and joy of heaven, where there is no longer hunger or thirst, illness or weeping, greed or envy, darkness or death. Rather, "Those who reach that city will dress in white garments and crowns of pure gold and will walk in the city. Those who arrive in that city, they do not wish to return to their previous place." Some evidence that he intended to evoke the happy valley is that Sirak begins his translation of *Rasselas* by titling the first chapter "About the Happiness of Kings," instead of Johnson's "Description of a Palace in a Valley."

Wädaḡe Ləbbe works remarkably well as a bookend for *Rasselas*. Sirak's epilogue is from the end of *Wädaḡe Ləbbe*, in which they return to their country

and are met by the grandchildren of their relations Mr. Thought, Mr. Movement, and Mr. Livelihood. These relations welcome them with such long greetings that the returnees cannot eat or sleep and the main character declares that it would have been better to have remained in that other country. Finally, a friend tells the main character not to worry, but rather to accept all with grace, and the main character gives thanks to God, whether good or evil, and resolves that it is better to stay in his own country, which is called Wealth. Sirak ending his translation of *Rasselas* with a debate about whether it is best to remain in one's own country is apt.

Sirak may have followed his father in amending his translation of *Rasselas* to align with *Pilgrim's Progress*, as both books are about the search for the good life. When, for instance, Johnson writes in the ninth paragraph of the book that the emperor's palace "was built as if Suspicion herself had dictated the plan," Sirak translates suspicion as "*Ato Teretari*" (Mr. Doubt), formalizing the personification with a title and switching the gender. Sirak does not do this throughout; for instance, in chapter 14 the word "suspicion" is not rendered "Mr. Doubt." However, the presence of such emendations suggests that Sirak's placement of his father's text next to Johnson's reflected a deeper interest in the text's intertextuality.

Sirak may have also worked to make the book include more dialogue. Edward Ullendorff parsed the translation of one sentence in chapter 3 of *Rasselas*, in which Johnson writes that "his old instructor . . . [regarding] his disease of mind, was in hope of curing it by counsel," noting that Sirak translated it as direct speech: "he sought saying: 'I shall cure it by counsel.'" Ullendorff commented that "This ['sought saying'] construction can be employed [in Amharic] as the equivalent of English reported speech as well as of several types of subordinate clauses."¹⁷³

Sirak's translation of the famous passage in chapter 11 regarding Europeans is worth attention, for a modern translator might be tempted to lessen its imperialist tone. In a much-discussed passage, Johnson wrote that "'The Europeans,' answered Imlac, 'are less unhappy than we but they are not happy. Human life is everywhere a state in which much is to be endured and little to be enjoyed.'" Sirak altered this only slightly, if we translate the Amharic back into English: "Imlac replied: Europeans are more happy than we are, but they have not found absolute happiness. Living things' fate everywhere is that, to rest a little bit, they must endure much."¹⁷⁴ Interestingly, Sirak wrote his Amharic translation of this line on a notecard, a notecard now in the Herouy family archive and with a pin mark through it, suggesting that Sirak had it posted in his office where he could see it.¹⁷⁵ In the prologue, epilogue, and translation choices, we can see hints that Sirak believed that returning home to Ethiopia was essential, but that it remained a "happy valley" of discontent.

CRITICS' RESPONSES TO THE TRANSLATION

The translation has received paltry attention from scholars writing in English, perhaps because it was most read in the decade up to 1974. In the first article in English on Amharic literature, written two years before the second edition was published, Stephen Wright wrote that Sirak's translation "ingeniously suggests the eighteenth-century English" of the original.¹⁷⁶ The same year that the second edition came out, Ullendorff praised it as an "excellent" translation, using it as an example of Amharic prose in his textbook of literary passages for learning Amharic.¹⁷⁷

Many Ethiopians have commented on the elevated Amharic of the translation, with poets praising it as elegant but many a student disparaging it as unreadable. Professor Taye Assefa, perhaps the leading scholar of Amharic literature, is not an admirer. In conversation, he told Belcher that he thought the translation was too faithful to the original English and that it reads unnaturally. Many others, however, disagreed. Asfaw stated that its "merit" lay in the "beauty of its language and its effective demonstration, especially at the time, that important works of world literature could be translated into Amharic. Not only is the Amharic of the translated text appropriate both in tone and structure, its biblical style dialogues also sound familiar to the Ethiopian ear."¹⁷⁸ He thought that Sirak had beautifully converted the text into an Ethiopian style from the old saints' stories and Gəḥəz literature of the monasteries. Another critic selected for praise Sirak's translation of the passage about the "business of a scholar," who is "neither known or valued but by men like himself," calling it "faultless" and a demonstration "of the beauty and versatility of the Amharic language."¹⁷⁹

Another important scholar, Professor Fekade Azeze of the Addis Abäba University Department of Literature and Languages, wrote a chapter of his dissertation about the novel and told Belcher about his experiences reading *Rasselas* in the eleventh grade in the 1960s. Since there were no Amharic literature courses at that time, reading *Rasselas* was meant as a linguistic not a literary exercise. But the translation was too philosophically irresistible to tolerate this use:

What fascinated us as students was the meaning. It was controversial, you couldn't pin it down, you couldn't agree, so everyone enjoyed discussing it. The instructor acted the book out and we philosophized about it. He was a short, lean person and one student argued with him so much about the meaning that there was a real squabble and the student stormed out. At that time, it was very unusual; it was not the tradition to debate with your instructor. Every line of the translation was

beautiful and debatable. I remember the language not the plot. Even now, you don't read that kind of Amharic, so poetic, so well-rendered.

In a public lecture that Fekade gave on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the high school where he read *Rasselas*, he made similar comments, saying that his instructor took *Rasselas* apart like a car engine and then reconstructed it, a kind of close reading that people no longer do, he claimed.¹⁸⁰ However, Fekade is quick to point out that it was not the first novel of ideas in Amharic. That honor goes to Gərmaččāw Täklä Ḥawaryat's book *Ar'aya* (Good Example) (1948–49), which debated what mode of development Ethiopia should follow and remains a popular novel.¹⁸¹

When Belcher sent out an e-mail to an Ethiopian listserv in 2007 asking for comments by readers about their experience of reading the book, at least a dozen people wrote in. These responses deserve their own article, suggesting so much about how studies of the canon would benefit from doing more reader-response research with non-European readers. One wrote that neither the teachers nor the students fully understood it—very high praise, since opacity is valued in Amharic and Gə'əz writing. It was only upon a second or third reading that one could get “the whole message of the book: that, no matter on what level of richness or poorness a person is, there is always something that he misses or aspires to know. There is always something that a man is missing in life.” Another Ethiopian, who has long lived in exile in the United States, wrote to say that he was grateful to the text for preserving aspects of Ethiopian culture now being lost: “Samuel Johnson was driven to write this book in English, after reading what Lobo (a Jesuit) wrote in French about Ethiopia. . . . It . . . helps me retain my fondest childhood memories about my beautiful homeland. To me it is an accurate description of how Ethiopia once was, before our culture and language began to be adulterated with Western influence.”

This is remarkable evidence of how much the book, emerging out of Johnson's own experiences of translating a tome about Ethiopia, has been reclaimed by Ethiopians for Ethiopia. In the twenty-first century, Amharic literature is vibrant, with many novels published every year, but for Ethiopians of a certain generation, *Yä-Rasselas Tarik* was the first time they had seen their own land, and their own experiences as their nation's elite, given voice in their own tongue.

CONCLUSION

Many know that Johnson wrote a famous book of fiction titled *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*, about an African prince who travels from Ethiopia to Egypt in search of wisdom. Few know that an Ethiopian translated this book into an Ethiopian language after World War II and that it was

widely taught in Ethiopian schools in the 1960s and after. In the groundbreaking *Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of "The Pilgrim's Progress,"* Isabel Hofmeyr calls for contextualizing of the western canon.¹⁸² This essay has been just such an attempt to better contextualize Samuel Johnson's work.

At the same time, the essay has also been the story of the fate of a post-colonial subject, a man stranded between two worlds—one the British empire of his education, the other the Ethiopian empire of his family and career. In postcolonial literature, a Western education is almost always a site of trauma that leads to melancholy and death. Like Gulliver at the end of his travels, Sirak too returned home strange, unnatural—marked by the very perfection of his immaculate, elegant, and bitter letters in English and Amharic, sent without real hope to the British and Ethiopians in charge of his destiny. Perhaps the isolation of his later life had nothing to do with empire or his experiences outside Ethiopia. Perhaps it was the terrible losses of the war, the failure of civil servants to bow to his noble lineage, or the ravages of clinical depression.

But since Sirak did have some uncanny relation to his literary subject, it is irresistible to speculate that Sirak's life upon his return to Abyssinia is the true coda of Johnson's novel, which ends so abruptly, far from Abyssinia. While it may seem odd to conflate the case of the real translator with the literary character *Rasselas*, it is not so peculiar in Johnson studies to treat the Prince of Abyssinia as a real person. The nineteenth-century scholar Hermann Kindt wondered if a historical figure could be the descendent of the character.¹⁸³ In a similar impulse to treat *Rasselas* as real, the Oxford librarian wrote to Sirak to say that they were "delighted to have the story of the Prince of Abyssinia translated into his own language."¹⁸⁴ It is not so far from this to be struck that both *Rasselas* and Sirak "began to withdraw . . . and to delight in solitary walks and silent meditation," that both railed against government, and both wanted the powerful to be held "accountable for injustice." Sirak's experiences upon returning to Abyssinia—his struggle to work with the powers that be, his impatience with fools, his failure to live up to his early promise—this too might have been the fate of the young philosopher *Rasselas* who learned that happiness is nowhere guaranteed.



Figure 12: The translator's grandson, Bekure Herouy, and the translator's daughter, Askale Sirak, in front of the translator's home. Photograph taken by Belcher in July 2011.

NOTES

1. Jerónimo Lobo and Joachim Le Grand, *A Voyage to Abyssinia (Translated from the French)*, trans. Samuel Johnson, ed. Joel Gold, vol. 15 of *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1985), p. 213. Early modern Abyssinia roughly corresponds to the highlands of the modern state Ethiopia.
2. For more on how this text animated Johnson's fiction through a kind of discursive possession, see Wendy Laura Belcher, *Abyssinia's Samuel Johnson: Ethiopian Thought in the Making of an English Author* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012).
3. "We . . . are delighted to have the story of the Prince of Abyssinia translated into his own language": Richard Shackleton (Brasenose College librarian) to Sirak, 2 July 1965, in Papers Related to Sirak's Translation of *Rasselas* into Amharic, Hørüy family archive, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Belcher Digital Image of the Hørüy Family Archive no. 188. Subsequent references to this collection, "Papers Related to Sirak's Translation of *Rasselas* into Amharic, Hørüy family archive, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia," are abbreviated "HFM," and "Belcher Digital Image of the Hørüy Family Archive" is abbreviated "BDI."
4. In most cases we have chosen to transliterate terms from Amharic or Gə' əz following Siegbert Uhlig, ed., *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica: Vol. 1, A–C* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003). In some cases, however, where another spelling is familiar in English, we follow that form, as with Haile Selassie, which appears as Ḥaylä Šəllasse in the *Encyclopedia Aethiopica*.
5. We have represented all Ethiopian titles with italics so that confusion with proper names does not arise. Sirak's title *Blatta* suggested a government official is learned; Sirak's father's title *Blatten Geta* was used for ministers. Sirak's name in the fidäl characters of Amharic is ሲራክ ወልደ ሥላሴ ኅሩይ. In English his name is also found spelled Sirak Wolde Selassie Hirue. On the form he completed on his entrance to Oxford, he listed his name as "Sirak Walde-Silasé Heroui," and himself as the second son of *Blatten-Guéta* Heroui, Minister for Foreign Affairs (Simon Bailey, Keeper of the Archives, University of Oxford, Bodleian Library, to Wendy Laura Belcher, 7 May 2008).
6. The Amhara do not have family names or surnames but patrilineal names. A man's name will have three parts—his own name, then his father's name, then his grandfather's name—and only the first word is considered his own name, so it is not correct to shorten his name to the second or third part. Therefore, following Ethiopian practice, we have used Sirak as his name throughout.
7. Samuel Johnson, *Yä-Rasselas Mäsäfəñ Ityop̄ ya Tarik (The History of Rasselas Prince of Ethiopia)*, trans. Sirak Wäldä-Šəllasse Hørüy, 1st ed. (Asmara, Eritrea: Tipografia Pietro Silla, 1946). The first edition lists the date of publication as December 1939 in the Ethiopian calendar, which could be late December 1946 or early January 1947 in the European calendar. Documents discussed later in the Hørüy family archive, however, demonstrate that the process of binding the book dragged on into February 1947, the books did not arrive in Addis Ababa until 5 April 1947,

and Sirak did not receive them until after 16 April 1947. We have listed the date of publication as it appears in the book. Fleeman correctly lists two Amharic editions of the translation, 1946–47 and 1964–65: J. David Fleeman, *A Bibliography of the Works of Samuel Johnson: Treating His Published Works*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000).

8. Asfaw Damte, "Ye-Rasselas Mesfine Ethiopia Tarik," *Herald Tribune (Addis Ababa)*, 7 Feb. 1984.
9. As evidenced by the handwritten inscription in the copy of the first edition in the Institute of Ethiopian Studies library at Addis Ababa University: donated by "Adanu Amanu. Because he came in first in Grade 9 of Holy Trinity Church School he was awarded this book on July 15, 1949 AD by His Majesty Haile Selassie the First, King of Kings of Ethiopia."
10. It is not clear what year *Rasselas* became a regular part of the curriculum. It was probably not as early as the 1940s, and may have been as late as 1964, when the translation was reprinted, since the large print run of 5,000 copies suggests an educational market. Regardless of the exact year, it became compulsory reading in Amharic literature for secondary school students in their final year, a regular part of the curriculum at schools like Mənelək II, Täfäri Mäkwännən, Mādhanə ʿAläm, Kotebe, and General Wingate.
11. Students taking the O-level exams in Amharic had to translate into English a passage from Sirak's Amharic translation: University of London, General Certificate of Education Examination: Ordinary Level: Amharic, summer 1962, in HFM, BDI no. 170–71.
12. For instance, a popular Ethiopian-American rapper is named Rasselas. Rasselas Alemayehu Asfaw, born in 1982 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, writes, "My father named me Rasselas because he read that book when he was in high school (in Amharic) and he liked the character. As for the meaning of the name, as you probably know, Ras is the title given to the Princes, and Selassie means 'The Power of The Trinity.' When Samuel Johnson wrote it, he made it into one name all together." Rasselas Asfaw to Wendy Laura Belcher, 5 May 2008. A search of WhitePages.com in July 2013 reveals that at least two other Ethiopian-Americans have this as a name, as does a nightclub in San Francisco.
13. Selamawit Mecca to Wendy Laura Belcher, 27 July 2013; Taye Assefa to Wendy Laura Belcher, 26 July 2013. Regarding the curriculum changes of the 1970s, see Edmond J. Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to People's Republic* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1991), p. 222.
14. Little has been published about translators or translations of *Rasselas* into other languages beyond brief biographical entries or mentions in passing of the esteem in which *Rasselas* was held abroad; for instance, Amaresh Datta, *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature*, 2 vols. (Sahitya Akademi Publications, 1988), 1:722; Priya Joshi, *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture, and the English Novel in India* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2002), pp. 73–74. Nothing has been published in English about Magdi Wahba's translation of *Rasselas* into Arabic in 1959, although a drawing from the translation is reproduced in Greg Clingham, *The Cambridge Companion to Samuel Johnson* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), p. 116.

15. Wentworth Dillon, Earl of Roscomon, *An Essay on Translated Verse* (London, 1684).
16. Sirak's daughter Askale Sirak and Bekure Herouy are the executors of his papers and have preserved many of the primary and secondary sources related to the publication of the manuscript, including Sirak's draft letters (which cannot be assumed to reflect exactly the versions that were sent), discussions of Sirak in the press, pages from the original draft, and the traditional manuscript version. A handlist of the seventy-five items in their two archives is available by sending an e-mail request to wbelcher@princeton.edu.
17. Askale Sirak and Bekure Herouy, interview with Wendy Laura Belcher, 7 May 2007. Belcher conducted subsequent interviews with them in May 2011.
18. His name is most often transliterated as Heruy Welde Sellase.
19. Reidulf Knut Molvaer, *Black Lions: The Creative Lives of Modern Ethiopia's Literary Giants and Pioneers* (Lawrenceville, N.J.: Red Sea Press, 1997), p. 1.
20. Jack Fellman, "Some Notes on Ethiopian Language and Literature," *Orientalia Suecana* 48 (1999): 35–42.
21. Albert S. Gérard, *Four African Literatures: Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, Amharic* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1971), p. 288.
22. Regarding the date of birth of the translator's father, Gérard gives the wrong date, saying he was born in 1898; *Four African Literatures*, p. 287. Bahru Zewde provides the right date and a discussion of the various dates in *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia: The Reformist Intellectuals of the Early Twentieth Century* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 2002), p. 70. Both provide fairly long biographies of Heruy.
23. Zewde, *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia*, p. 70.
24. That he was called the "Rasputin of Africa" is reported in Ladislav Farago, *Abyssinia on the Eve* (London: Putnam, 1935), chapter 14.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
26. Letter to Eugen Mittwoch, facsimile reproduced and translated in Edward Ullendorff, *Studia Aethiopica et Semitica* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1987), p. 95. See also Heruy Wäldä-Šállasse, "Wäldä-Šállasse Heruy," in *Yä Haywät Tarik: Biographie* (Addis Ababa: Ras Täfäri Mäkwännän Press, 1922–23).
27. Askale Sirak and Bekure Herouy, interview with Belcher, 2007. Parts of the following anecdote also appeared in Bekure Herouy, "The Question of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia," *Herald Tribune (Addis Ababa)*, 7 March 1984.
28. Spelled "Selassie Sere Medhane Alem" in Bekure's article. Regarding this center, see a sentence in Bairu Tafla, "The Historical Notes of Liqä-Ṭ äbbäbt Abbäbä Yeräfu," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 50, no. 2 (1987): 267–300.
29. Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855–1991* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1991), p. 71.
30. *Ibid.* For more information about the church, see Wudu Tafete Kassu, "Ṭṇṭ oṭ ṭ o Ragu' el," in the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005), 2:322–23.
31. Bahru Zewde, *History of Modern Ethiopia*, p. 71.

32. Bahru Zewde, "Ḥeruy Wäldä-Śällasse," in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica: He–N*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007), 3:20–21.
33. Bahru Zewde, *History of Modern Ethiopia*, p. 73.
34. Ullendorff, *Studia Aethiopica et Semitica*, p. 101.
35. Zewde, *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia*, p. 87.
36. Farago, *Abyssinia on the Eve*, pp. 123–24.
37. His passport, no. 20/37, lists his year of birth as 1909 (Imperial Government of Ethiopia, Sirak Herouy's Ethiopian Passport, 10 April 1937, in HFM, BDI no. 1–13). The family gives his date of birth as 13 January 1903 EC, which is 13 January 1911: see Bekure Herouy, "The Question of Rasselas." Two records in London give his year of birth as 1911. The Oxford librarian states that Sirak gave his date of birth at Oxford as 30 January 1911 (Bailey to Belcher, 2008). The incoming passenger lists gives his age in October 1936 as twenty-five, which would mean 1911 as a birth year: UK National Archives, *UK Incoming/Inwards Passenger Lists 1878–1960*, ed. Board of Trade: Commercial and Statistical Department and successors (Kew and Provo: National Archives of the UK (TNA); Ancestry.com, 2008). Since it is confusing to convert Ethiopian dates to European dates, with the Ethiopian New Year starting on 11 September, the passport is probably in error.
38. Because Ethiopian names start with the personal name, followed by the father's name, followed by the paternal grandfather's name, it seemed Sirak's name should have been Sirak Ḥeruy Wäldä-Śällasse (Asfaw Damte, "Ye-Rasselas Tarik"). But Wäldä-Śällasse was his given name (Bekure Herouy, "The Question of Rasselas"). Thus, for instance, it is incorrect to say that he "used his father's name as well as his grandfather's name" (Molvaer, *Black Lions*, p. 175).
39. Bekure Herouy to Wendy Laura Belcher, 13 May 2008. Her name is also spelled Hamare Eshete.
40. The information in this paragraph first appeared in Bekure Herouy, "The Question of Rasselas." Also spelled Desta Eshete.
41. Regarding his education, see also Ḥeruy Wäldä-Śällasse, "Sirak Entry" (Zewde, *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia*, p. 87).
42. The catechism *Amməstu A 'əmadä Mə' šṭ ir* (The Five Pillars of Mystery) is an original Ethiopian doctrinal work that is among the most frequently recited by students: see Verena Böll, "Amməstu A 'əmadä Mə' šṭ ir," in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003), 1:248.
43. See also Ḥeruy Wäldä-Śällasse, "Sirak Entry."
44. The information in this paragraph first appeared in Bekure Herouy, "The Question of Rasselas."
45. Peter Woodward et al., *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print: Part III: From 1940 through 1945: Series G: Africa: Volume 2: Africa, January 1942–March 1943* (Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America, 1998), p. 182. Dagmawi Mənelək II, the first school in Ethiopia to use Western-based education, was founded by the emperor of that name in 1908. It is possible that the British are mistaken: Däbrä Libanos is far from Addis Abäba and so Sirak could not have pursued both at the same time from age ten to eleven.

46. Ullendorff, *Studia Aethiopica et Semitica*, p. 101; Molvaer, *Black Lions*, p. 176; Bekure Herouy, "The Question of Rasselas."
47. The various sources do not quite agree on the ages and dates when the brothers attended Victoria College. According to one account, the two brothers arrived together at Victoria College in 1918: see Sahar Hamouda and Colin Clement, *Victoria College: A History Revealed* (Cairo: American Univ. in Cairo Press, 2002), p. 73. But H̄eruy wrote that his son Fāqadā Šəllasse went to the college at the age of ten (at least three years before Sirak), and then Sirak at the age of eleven, in 1914 EC, which was 1921–22 (which was indeed when Sirak was eleven): H̄eruy Wäldä-Šəllasse, "Sirak Entry." Heruy's book was published in 1922–23 and he states that Sirak's Victoria College professors had already written praising Sirak, so we know that Sirak did not arrive later than 1922–23. Further, the trip may have taken place as early as 1920, since H̄eruy went on journeys to Jerusalem only in 1920 and 1923, and with *Ras Täfäri Mäk'ännən* in 1924: see Bahru Zewde, "Heruy's 'Ya-Heywat Tarik' and Mahtama-Sellase's 'Che Balaw': Two Perceptions of a Biographical Dictionary," *History in Africa* 23 (1996): 387–99.
48. Hamouda and Clement, *Victoria College*, p. 73.
49. This anecdote first appeared in Bekure Herouy, "The Question of Rasselas."
50. Angela Muller, "Sawiros," in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 4:564–66.
51. Sirak's father's name "H̄eruy (precious)" was also given to him by a priest (his birth name was Gäbrä Mäsqäl): see Bahru Zewde, "Heruy's 'Ya-Heywat Tarik,'" pp. 387–99.
52. Hamouda and Clement, *Victoria College*, p. 245.
53. Zewde, *Pioneers of Change*, p. 87; Bailey to Belcher, 2008. Molvaer is incorrect when he says that Sirak only went to England after the Italians invaded (*Black Lions*, p. 176).
54. Bekure Herouy, typed draft of "The Question of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia," March 1984, in Papers Related to Sirak's Translation of *Rasselas* into Amharic, H̄eruy family archive, Addis Ababa, BDI no. 4–12.
55. Sirak was at Oxford for nine terms from Michaelmas term 1929 to Trinity term 1932 (Bailey to Belcher, 2008).
56. *Ibid.*; Elizabeth Boardman (College Archivist, Brasenose College Archives) to Wendy Laura Belcher, 21 May 2008.
57. According to a report finalized in Addis Ababa by Cecil Gervase Hope-Gill (1894–1984), First Secretary of the British legation in Addis Ababa from 1942 to 1944, for the British Minister to Abyssinia, Robert G. Howe, and sent to the British foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, in December 1942; Woodward et al., *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, p. 182. A classmate called him "a good slow bowler" (George Lowther Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia* [New York: Little, Brown, 1937], p. 74), and as having "nearly got his cricket blue at B.N.C." See George Lowther Steer, *Sealed and Delivered: A Book on the Abyssinian Campaign* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1942), p. 96.
58. According to his passport, he was 1.62 meters, or 5' 3" (Sirak Herouy's Ethiopian Passport, 1937).

59. These lectures were noted in the weekly official organ of the university, *Oxford University Gazette*, in 1931; Bailey to Belcher, 2008.
60. He is not recorded as having passed any further university examinations and did not take a degree.
61. Zewde, *Pioneers of Change*, p. 87, citing an official British report.
62. On the financial difficulties of students of this generation in England and Sirak's letters regarding his own difficulties, see Zewde, chap. 4.
63. Correspondence in his bursary file shows that he left owing over £180, which was not paid off until 1939 (Boardman to Belcher, 2008).
64. Regarding his nephew, Hamouda and Clement, see *Victoria College*, pp. 75–76. Regarding his muffler, see George Lowther Steer, "Exit the Emperor," in *We Were There: By Twelve Foreign Correspondents*, ed. Wilfrid Hope Hindle (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1939), pp. 209–32, and Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia*, p. 367. Regarding being a "proud Brasenose man," see Edward. Ullendorff, *The Two Zions: Reminiscences of Jerusalem and Ethiopia* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), p. 174.
65. Farago, *Abyssinia on the Eve*, p. 125.
66. Robinson MacLean, *John Hoy of Ethiopia* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1936), p. 142. Meanwhile, his brother seems to have been broken by his experiences abroad: "weak, drinking too much ... no help to the emperor" (142).
67. Zewde, *Pioneers of Change*, p. 178.
68. MacLean, *John Hoy of Ethiopia*, p. 142.
69. United Press, "Haile Selassie Pleased by U.S. Hope for Peace," *Washington Post*, 6 Aug. 1935.
70. Bekure Herouy to Belcher, 2008. Her name is sometimes transliterated Weynishet Beyene.
71. Richard Pankhurst, *An Introduction to the Medical History of Ethiopia* (Trenton, N.J.: Red Sea Press, 1990), p. 217.
72. Molvaer, *Black Lions*, p. 16.
73. Steer, *Sealed and Delivered*, p. 96. Passenger lists record Sirak Herouy arriving in London from Port Sudan by a ship named Strathaird on 2 October 1936 as a government employee who was part of the Ethiopian Legation, without a spouse, and at the age of twenty-five (UK National Archives, *Passenger Lists 1878–1960*). He appears to have been the only Ethiopian on the ship.
74. Woodward et al., *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, p. 256; Anthony Mockler, *Haile Selassie's War: The Italian-Ethiopian Campaign, 1935–1941* (New York: Random House, 1984), p. 165.
75. Sirak's mother and his three sisters "were said to be prisoners of the Italians and their precise whereabouts were unknown" ("Abyssinian's Will: Haile Selassie's Secretary English Court Order," *The Scotsman*, 6 April 1939).
76. Two English newspaper articles refer to him as such: see "Abyssinian's Will" and "Court & Personal," *Manchester Guardian*, 10 June 1938.
77. John H. Spencer, *Ethiopia at Bay: A Personal Account of the Haile Selassie Years* (Los Angeles: Tsehai Publishers, 2006), p. 72. The emperor did receive an Honorary Membership at the Cambridge Union Society on 19 May 1936, regarding which,

- see the photograph of the occasion, with Sirak, his father, and the emperor; Michael Straight, *After Long Silence* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983), pp. 185, 341.
78. Bekure Herouy, typed draft of article, 1984.
 79. Fäqadä Šällasse was one of the founding members of the Black Lions, an Ethiopian resistance movement during the 1930s (Zewde, *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia*, p. 203). See also "Mr. Thompson's Report on a Conversation with George Herouy," 21 Aug. 1936, British Foreign Office, 371/20207, in Ethiopia File 4044 (pp. 6349–7330). Later his nephew attended Victoria College on a scholarship created by his Coptic classmates in his memory (Hamouda and Clement, *Victoria College*, p. 74).
 80. Zewde, *Pioneers of Change*, p. 87.
 81. "His health broke down under the strain of his sorrows (his father's death in exile, his brother's murder by the Italians in February 1937 and separation from his wife, who was unable to escape from Ethiopia) and he attempted suicide" (Woodward et al., *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, p. 180).
 82. The report was filed by Hope-Gill, who had served as the consul in Addis Ababa in 1936, with the British legation in Addis Ababa from 1942 to 1944, and then went to London, presumably with Haile Selassie and his ministers, to attend the Imperial Defense College in London in 1937 (*British Documents on Foreign Affairs*). So he would have had repeated contact with Sirak. His papers are held at St. Antony's College Middle East Center Archive at the University of Oxford: <http://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/mec/MEChandlists/Hope-Gill-Collection.pdf>
 83. Bekure Herouy, "The Question of Rasselas."
 84. Haile Selassie went in June 1940, and Sirak's passport has a visa for Egypt dated May 24, 1940, but his visa for Anglo-Egyptian Sudan is dated 15 Nov. 1940 (Sirak Herouy's Ethiopian Passport, 1937).
 85. Richard Greenfield, *Ethiopia: A New Political History* (New York: F. A. Praeger, 1965), p. 256.
 86. Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia*, p. 74. For an excellent biography of Steer, who died not long after in 1944, see Nicholas Rankin, *Telegram from Guernica: The Extraordinary Life of George Steer, War Correspondent* (London: Faber, 2003). Steer was close enough to Haile Selassie for him to be the godfather of his son and attend the ceremony in London on 8 June 1940 (Mockler, *Haile Selassie's War: The Italian-Ethiopian Campaign, 1935–1941*).
 87. Haile Selassie, *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress, 1892–1937: Haile Selassie I*, ed. Harold G. Marcus, Ezekiel Gebissa, and Tibebe Eshete, trans. Ezekiel Gebissa (East Lansing: Michigan State Univ. Press, 1994), p. 127; Boardman to Belcher, 2008.
 88. Ullendorff, *Two Zions*, p. 174.
 89. Tekeste Negash, *Eritrea and Ethiopia: The Federal Experience* (Uppsala, Sweden: Nordic Africa Institute, 1997), p. 18.
 90. Steer, *Sealed and Delivered*, pp. 165, 73, 72, 176, 171, 170, 175, 97–98, 164.
 91. Ullendorff, *Two Zions*, 174.
 92. Steer, *Sealed and Delivered*, p. 96.

93. Steer, *Sealed and Delivered*, p. 96. Later Steer notes that Sirak always “finished his work in a trice” (p. 99).
94. Some contemporary observers mistakenly reported his name to be Dulphes Molesworth (Molvaer, *Black Lions*, p. 177). He served before and after the war at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Only two years older than Sirak, perhaps Molesworth knew Sirak during his time at Oxford, although they did not attend the same college; see “Mr H. D. Molesworth,” *The Times* (1978): 20.
95. Sirak says that he had spent the last eighteen months translating materials for *Wädä Dil Godäna* (probably ወደ ድል ጎዳና not ወደ ድል ጓደኛ); Sirak Wäldä-Śəllasse Hərüy, draft of letter to British press attaché H. D. Molesworth regarding work on *Wädä Dil Godäna*, 5 June 1945, in HFM, BDI no. 150. In their correspondence, the British did not call the magazine by its Amharic title but by *Highbrow*; see for instance, Edward Ullendorff to Molesworth from British Ministry of Information Publications, Asmara, Eritrea, regarding *Rasselas* in *Highbrow*, 3 Dec. 1944, in HFM, BDI no. 082.
96. Sirak Wäldä-Śəllasse Hərüy, letter regarding work on *Wädä Dil Godäna*, 1945. And again, “I don't know who the halfwits are who have been telling you that the pages of *Wadadil Godena* have thinned . . . I still believe in quality rather than quantity” (Sirak Wäldä-Śəllasse Hərüy, draft of letter to Molesworth regarding quality of *Wädä Dil Godäna*, 30 Oct. 1944, in HFM, BDI no. 141).
97. Sirak Wäldä-Śəllasse Hərüy, draft of letter to Molesworth regarding resignation, 15 June 1945, in HFM, BDI no. 145.
98. Hender Delves Molesworth, Letter from British Legation Office of the Press Attache to Sirak Regarding Resignation, 15 June 1945, in HFM, BDI no. 148–149.
99. Sirak protested, “I point this out to you should you care to correct it in the interest of the conventional conception of Truth and Reality” (Sirak Wäldä-Śəllasse Hərüy, draft of letter to Molesworth regarding Molesworth's Reply to Sirak's Resignation Letter, 19 June 1945, in HFM, BDI no. 145).
100. Agaedech Jemaneh, lecturer in AAU School of Journalism and Communications, to Wendy Laura Belcher, 31 July 2013.
101. Bekure Herouy, handwritten drafts of “The Question of *Rasselas*, Prince of Abyssinia,” March 1984, in Papers Related to Sirak's Translation of *Rasselas* into Amharic, Hərüy family archive, Addis Ababa, BDI no. 13–70.
102. Spencer, *Ethiopia at Bay*, p. 219, also p. 314.
103. Bekure Herouy, typed draft of article, 1984.
104. Richard Pankhurst, “ፎሙሩ ሁላላ ስላላ,” in Uhlig, ed., *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, 2:276–78. ፎሙሩ was Sirak's brother's father-in-law; Mockler, *Haile Selassie's War: The Italian-Ethiopian Campaign, 1935–1941*, p. 165.
105. Molvaer, *Black Lions*, pp. 176–77.
106. According to his funeral program, Sirak died in 1975 EC, which is 1982–83 in the Gregorian calendar, six months after his fiftieth wedding anniversary. A newspaper article about him dated 12 March 1984 says that Sirak died six months before, so around October 1983; see Girma-Selassie Asfaw, “A Note on ‘A Word on the Question of *Rasselas*,’” *Herald Tribune (Addis Ababa)*, 21 March 1984.

107. Ullendorff, *Two Zions*, p. 174, says he did not have the “strength” to do other translations after translating *Rasselas*.
108. Asfaw Damte, “Ye-Rasselas Tarik.”
109. “P.S. I am holding a pint to celebrate this Opus No. 1” (Sirak Wäldä-Śällasse Hjøruy, draft of letter to the Brasenose College Librarian, 14 May 1947, in HFM, BDI no. 167).
110. Asfaw Damte, “Ye-Rasselas Tarik.”
111. Bekure Herouy, “The Question of Rasselas.”
112. Ibid.
113. Both of the following tales are told in different form in Molvaer, *Black Lions*, pp. 175–76. We have told them as they are told in Sirak’s family.
114. Asfaw Damte, “The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia,” *Herald Tribune (Addis Ababa)*, 1 Feb. 1984; Asfaw Damte, “Ye-Rasselas Tarik”; Asfaw Damte, “A Word on the ‘Question of Rasselas,’” *Herald Tribune (Addis Ababa)*, 14 March 1984; Bekure Herouy, “The Question of Rasselas”; Girma-Selassie Asfaw, “Note”; Astatke Legesse, “Put Up or Shut Up!,” *Herald Tribune (Addis Ababa)*, 4 April 1984; Asfaw Damte, “Last Word on . . .” *Herald Tribune (Addis Ababa)*, 28 March 1984.
115. Bekure Herouy, typed draft of Article, 1984.
116. Molesworth “had the excellent idea that our first joint publishing venture should be a translation into Amharic of Dr. Johnson’s *Rasselas*. For this not uncomplicated task he had recruited the ideal person, . . . but he worked at his own sedate pace . . . [although he] did produce something excellent in the end—but nearly two years after the end of the war” (Ullendorff, *Two Zions*, pp. 173–75).
117. “At his rate of progress there would probably be no Ministry of Information in existence to publish the finished product in which it had invested a fair amount of money” (Ullendorff, p. 174).
118. “It was Molesworth who asked Sirak to translate Dr. Samuel Johnson’s *Rasselas* for this paper, and the Amharic version of the book thus started to appear as a serial. . . . The book continued to be translated for this paper also after the defeat of Germany and Italy . . . When the whole book had been serialized in this paper, Sirak collected all the pieces and issued them in book form” (Molvaer, *Black Lions*, p. 177; Ullendorff, *Two Zions*, p. 174).
119. “Mr H. D. Molesworth,” p. 20.
120. Sirak is rumored to have translated *Rasselas* in fifteen days to a month (Bekure Herouy, handwritten drafts of article, 1984).
121. Sisir Kumar Das and Sahitya Akademi, *A History of Indian Literature: 1800–1910, Western Impact: Indian Response* (New Delhi: South Asia Books, 1991), 8:109; Adam Rounce, “Editions,” in *Samuel Johnson in Context*, ed. Jack Lynch (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), pp. 31–37.
122. Asfaw Damte, “Ye-Rasselas Tarik.”
123. Asfaw Damte, “History of Rasselas.”
124. Belcher, *Abyssinia’s Samuel Johnson*, preface.
125. Bekure Herouy, handwritten drafts of article, 1984.
126. Sirak Wäldä-Śällasse Hjøruy, drafts of letters to the Minister of the Pen Wälda Giyorgis Wälda Yohannäs (in Amharic), 12 & 18 May 1943 in HFM, BDI no. 180,

- 186–87. Wälda Giyorgis Wälda Yohannəs was the Minister of the Pen from 1941 to 1955 and had been in exile with Sirak. Sirak’s friend Steer said that this minister had a reputation for being “ruthless” (Steer, *Caesar in Abyssinia*, p. 74). For translations from and discussions of these letters, see Bekure Herouy, handwritten drafts of article, 1984.
127. Həruy Wäldä Šəllasse, *Wädağ e ləbbe (My Friend, my Heart: The Character and Behavior of Man Unveiled in Parables)* (Addis Ababa: Imprimerie Éthiopienne, 1922–23).
128. Sirak Wäldä-Šəllasse Həruy, letters to Wälda Giyorgis, 1943.
129. Sirak Wäldä-Šəllasse Həruy, drafts of letters to Special Secretary of the Emperor Täfärra Wärq Kidanä Wäld (in Amharic), 10 & 16 June 1943, in HFM, BDI no. 181, 183–85. Täfärra Wärq Kidanä Wäld, who later became the Minister of the Pen (in 1955), had worked with Sirak in Khartoum, when the former served as a special liaison for the emperor with the British. See Fentahun Tiruneh, “Täfärra Wärq Kidanä Wäld,” in Uhlig, ed., *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, 4:816–17.
130. Sirak Wäldä-Šəllasse Həruy, drafts of letters to the Minister of Education and Fine Arts Mäk^wännən Dästa (in Amharic), 22 June & 30 August 1943, in HFM, BDI no. 176–77, 182. The Harvard-educated *Däğ ġ azmač* Mäk^wännən Dästa served as the Minister of Education from 1941 to 1944. See Thomas Zitelmann, “Mäk^wännən Dästa,” in Uhlig, ed., *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, 3:682–83.
131. Sirak Wäldä-Šəllasse Həruy, letters to Mäk^wännən Dästa, 1943.
132. Sirak Wäldä-Šəllasse Həruy, draft of letter to friends regarding a friend’s detention (in Amharic) 1943, in HFM, BDI no. 178–79. Sirak claims that his friend never said that Ethiopia was not free and that it was false grounds to accuse him of “terrorizing the spirit of the people” and “not being democratic.”
133. It is not clear whether these ministers had read the translation. Sirak’s letters do not suggest he sent them a copy of the manuscript, much harder to do in the 1940s than today.
134. Wendy Laura Belcher, “Still Burning the Candle: Playwright Ayalneh Mulatu,” *Ethiopian Review* 8, no. 1 (1998): 38–45.
135. Meseret Chekol Reta, *The Quest for Press Freedom: One Hundred Years of History of the Media in Ethiopia* (Lanham, Md.: Univ. Press of America, 2013), pp. 15, 28, 40–42. This also proves that Sirak’s translation was not done before the war, as it would have been quickly published then.
136. The dedication on fol. 2^r states “For Wäynəšät / Yäkatit 1937 [March 1945]”; Samuel Johnson, *Yä-Rasselas Mäsäfən Ityoğ ya Tarik (The History of Rasselas Prince of Ethiopia)*, trans. Sirak Wäldä-Šəllasse Həruy, traditional manuscript edition (Addis Ababa, 1945). Since such manuscripts take between three and six months to complete, it is safe to assume that Sirak commissioned it in late 1944. The name of the scribe is now unknown by the family.
137. A detail from this bound parchment manuscript was used for the cover of Belcher’s book *Abyssinia’s Samuel Johnson* (fig. 7).
138. *Yä-Rasselas Tarik* appeared in *Wädä Dil Godäna* as follows: in 1944 the chapters 1–4.5 appeared in issue no. 2; chapters 4.5–5 in no. 3; chapter 6 in no. 4; chapter 7 in no. 5; chap 7–8.5 in no. 6; chap 8.5–9 in no. 7; chapter 10 in no. 8; in 1945 chapter

- 11 appeared in issue no. 9, and chapter 12 in no. 10. No further chapters appear in issues 13 (1945) through 24 (1946).
139. On 27 January 1945, Molesworth wrote a letter to Sirak, stating it was in response to Sirak's letter of 22 January, concluding with the sentence "They want to know how much *Rasselas* is available to consider possibility of publishing" (Hender Delves Molesworth, British Legation Office of the Press Attaché, to Sirak regarding possibility of publishing *Rasselas*, 27 Jan. 1945, in HFM, BDI no. 073–074).
 140. Pietro Sila, Bid from Tipografia Pietro Sila Press for printing *Rasselas*, 1 March 1945, in HFM, BDI no. 088. See also Edward Ullendorff, letter to Molesworth from British Ministry of Information Publications, Asmara, Eritrea, regarding bid to print *Rasselas*, 1 March 1945, in HFM, BDI no. 085–087.
 141. Hender Delves Molesworth, letter from British Legation Office of the Press Attaché to Sirak, with contract for publishing *Rasselas*, 3 May 1945, in HFM, BDI no. 083.
 142. Interestingly, the copyright page of the 1947 edition states that the copyright is owned by Wäynäšät, Sirak's wife.
 143. "Pressure of work permitting, I may be able to deal with *Wedē dil Godāna* matters during the course of my [work on publishing the translation]" (Sirak Wäldä-Šällasse Hərūy, draft of letter to Molesworth regarding contract, May 1945, in HFM, BDI no. 160).
 144. For instance, this press published the first novel written in the Tigrinya language: *The Story of the Conscript*, by Ghebreyesus Hailu, in 1927; Ghirmai Negash, "Native Intellectuals in the Contact Zone: African Responses to Italian Colonialism in Tigrinya Literature," *Biography* 32, no. 1 (2009): 74–88.
 145. Molesworth, letter to Sirak with contract, 1945.
 146. Sirak Wäldä-Šällasse Hərūy, letter to Molesworth regarding contract, 1945.
 147. R. A. Chikhain, Receipt for Sirak from British Legation Office of the Press Attaché regarding script *Rasselas*, 18 May 1945, in HFM, BDI no. 084.
 148. "If the manuscript of my translation of *Rasselas* which is already in your hands has not been printed and corrected by me by the fifteenth of September 1945, I shall consider our agreement as having lapsed" (Sirak Wäldä-Šällasse Hərūy, draft of letter to Molesworth regarding translations for final *Wädä Dil Godāna*, 15 July 1945, in HFM, BDI no. 139). See also Molesworth to Sirak regarding forwarding comment, 14 [sic] July 1946, in HFM, BDI no. 142.
 149. Sirak Wäldä-Šällasse Hərūy to Molesworth regarding contract, 1945.
 150. According to J. F. Gelhin, letter from British Legation to Sirak regarding delayed printing of *Rasselas*, 1 Nov. 1946, in HFM, BDI no. 077.
 151. Clifford Norman, letter from British Legation Oriental Secretary to Sirak regarding delayed printing of *Rasselas*, 29 July 1946, in HFM, BDI no. 078.
 152. J. F. Gelhin, letter from British Legation to Sirak regarding delayed proofs of *Rasselas*, 26 Oct. 1946, in HFM, BDI no. 159; Gelhin, letter regarding delayed printing, 1946.
 153. "At the time the contract was signed Silla was expecting some more Amharic type face from Italy; but while he had expected their arrival in August, they have still

- not yet arrived" (J. F. Gelhin to Sirak regarding problem with fonts, 16 Nov. 1946, in HFM, BDI no. 076).
154. J. F. Gelhin to Sirak regarding printing of *Rasselas*, 20 Dec. 1946, in HFM, BDI no. 075.
 155. Sirak Wäldä-Šəllasse Həruy, draft of letter to British Legation J. F. Gelhin regarding proofs, 26 Dec. 1946, in HFM, BDI no. 163; J. F. Gelhin to Sirak regarding binding of *Rasselas*, 31 Dec. 1946, in HFM, BDI no. 152.
 156. The copyright page of the first edition states in Amharic that "Of this translation only 1,000 books were printed." See also J. F. Gelhin to Sirak regarding the estimated bill for printing *Rasselas*, 18 March 1947, in HFM, BDI no. 155–56.
 157. J. F. Gelhin to Sirak regarding delayed shipping of bound *Rasselas*, 24 Feb. 1947, in HFM, BDI no. 153. It was delayed until the 26 March 1947 convoy (Gelhin, letter regarding the estimated bill, 1947).
 158. J. F. Gelhin to Sirak regarding receiving bound *Rasselas*, 5 April 1947, in HFM, BDI no. 154.
 159. Sirak Wäldä-Šəllasse Həruy, draft of letter to Gelhin regarding delivery of copies of *Rasselas*, 14 April 1947, in HFM, BDI no. 168.
 160. Ethiopian National Library, receipt of a copy of *Rasselas*, 20 April 1947, in HFM, BDI no. 173.
 161. The estimate for the cost of "composition, correction, and printing" was 2,754 East African Shillings (E.A.Shs.), the binding was another 500; so the cost was E.A.Shs. 3264.80. This was actually less than the estimate, which was 3,391. Minus the cost of the 100 copies the British had agreed to purchase, at E.A.Shs. 326, the total cost was E.A.Shs. 2,938 (Gelhin, letter regarding the estimated bill, 1947).
 162. Less the cost of the 100 copies the British had agreed to purchase, at E.A.Shs. 326, the total cost was E.A.Shs. 2,938 before the additional costs; *ibid.*
 163. Sirak Wäldä-Šəllasse Həruy, draft of letter to Gelhin regarding bill, 9 April 1947, in HFM, BDI no. 164–65.
 164. Gelhin to Sirak regarding the final bill for printing *Rasselas*, 6 July 1947, in HFM, BDI no. 157; British Information Services, bill from British Ministry of Information for printing *Rasselas*, 27 June 1947, in HFM, BDI no. 158.
 165. The East African Shilling was a currency the British invented and used in East Africa until 1969. Twenty EAS were equivalent to one pound sterling; one pound sterling was worth \$4.03 in 1947. Thus the cost was around £146.9 or \$592 (British Ministry of Information, receipt from British Legation Office of the Press Attaché for Sirak's salary, 6 May 1945, in HFM, BDI no. 144).
 166. Sirak Wäldä-Šəllasse Həruy, draft of letter to the Brasenose College Librarian, 1947. Final letter cited in Zewde, *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia*, p. 87.
 167. Samuel Johnson, *Yä-Rasselas Mäsäfəñ Ityoṗ ya Tarik (The History of Rasselas Prince of Ethiopia)*, trans. Sirak Wäldä-Šəllasse Həruy, 2nd ed. (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, 1965). The title page of the second edition of the book is the same as the first but adds the following information. It includes a more formal date in Amharic: "In the thirty-fourth year of the reign of His Majesty Haile Selassie the First, King of Kings of Ethiopia." It also states that the first edition was 1,000 copies printed by Silla Printing Press in Asmara in 1939 [EC], and the second edition

- was 5,000 copies printed by Artistic Printing Press in Addis Ababa in 1957 [1964–65 in the European calendar]. In one copy, after the information about the second printing, appears something unusual: the number “2548” in European rather than Amharic numerals. The font suggests that it may be typewritten. Perhaps, like a piece of artwork, each of the copies was numbered and this donated copy was number 2,548 of 5,000.
168. Sirak Wäldä-Šəllasse Həruy, draft of letter to Artistic Printing Press accepting bid 196x, in HFM, BDI no. 161. In 1945, 1 birr was worth two E.A.Shs.
169. Laurent Pele, “Currency Converter in the Past with Official Exchange Rates from 1953 until the Present,” Fxtop Co., <http://fxtop.com/en/currency-converter-past.php>
170. Bekure Herouy, handwritten drafts of article, 1984.
171. John Stone, “Translations,” in *Samuel Johnson in Context*, ed. Jack Lynch, pp. 38–44.
172. *Pilgrim’s Progress* was translated into Amharic and printed in 1892 (Gérard, *Four African Literatures*, p. 277).
173. For the discussion of Sirak’s translation, see Ullendorff, *Studia Aethiopica et Semitica*, p. 202.
174. Yä-fəṭ ur əddəl yätəññawm ʧəqit lä-marāf bəzu lä-äššäkkäm näw ([of]-created the lot/fate everywhere little [for] resting much [for] carrying is.”
175. Sirak Wäldä-Šəllasse Həruy, handwritten notecard: quotation from *Rasselas*, last sentence of chapter 11, n.d., in HFM, BDI no. 079.
176. Stephen G. Wright, “Amharic Literature,” *Something* 1, no. 1 (1963): 11–23; as cited in Asfaw Damte, “Ye-Rasselas Tarik.”
177. He provided an extract, pp. 1, 4–6 of the translation: Edward Ullendorff, *An Amharic Chrestomathy. Introduction. Grammatical Tables, Texts, Amharic–English Glossary* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), p. 13.
178. Asfaw Damte, “Ye-Rasselas Tarik.”
179. Girma-Selassie Asfaw, “Note.”
180. መምህር ብርሀኑ ገሩይ ራህላስ የተባለውን መጽሐፍ እንደመኪና ሞተር አውርደው ፈታትተው በታትነው ተንትነው ሲገጥሙት እስከዛሬ ትዝ ይለኛል። (ከአምሐ አስፋው ጋር ስለነበራቸውም የቃላት ግብግብ አስታውሳለሁ) የመፅሀፉ ይዘት በወቅቱ ምን ያህል እንደገባኝ አላውቅም። በደስታ በተመስጦ የምክታተለው ትምህርት ግን ነበር። ዛሬ ስንት የቋንቋ መምህራን እርሳቸው እንደቀልድ ተዘናኝተው ያንዱ እክፍል ያደርጉት የነበረውን ሲያስተምሩ ማድረግ እንደሚችሉ ለመገመትና ለመናገር አልደፍርም; Fekade Azeze, “Talk Given on the Occasion of Teferi Makonen’s 75th Anniversary, March 30, 1992 EC” (Addis Ababa: Täfäri Mäköännən College, 2000).
181. A chapter of his dissertation is devoted to this novel; see Fekade Azeze, “The Intellectual in the Ethiopian Novel, 1930–1974” (PhD diss., University of Sheffield, 1988). See also Daniel Kendie, “Gərmaččaw Täklä Həwaryat’s,” in Uhlig, ed., *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, 2:787–68, sometimes spelled Germacaw Takla Hawarayāt.
182. Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of The Pilgrim’s Progress* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2004).
183. Hermann Kindt, “An Heir to the Throne of Abyssinia,” *Notes and Queries* n.s. 3, no. 12 (1867): 411. See discussion in Belcher, *Abyssinia’s Samuel Johnson*, p. 213.
184. Shackleton, Letter to Sirak, 1965.

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