

African musical genres have been appropriated by the West, there is no extended discussion of the reverse phenomenon (i.e., Africa's appropriation of the West), although the chapter on harmony contains a brief subsection titled "Western Harmony." Furthermore, the author's treatment of African diasporan music amounts to a scant half page. These are, however, minor concerns. All in all, this is a much-needed work that will spur in-depth discussions about the core features of African music. The book is geared toward advanced undergraduate and graduate students, preferably with a strong background in musicology, ethnomusicology, or music theory. Nonspecialists, however, will still find much to ponder here. Most important, an African readership will find this to be a very welcoming and useful text.

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MEMOIRS AND BIOGRAPHY

Galawdewos. *The Life and Struggles of Our Mother Walatta Petros: A Seventeenth-Century African Biography of an Ethiopian Woman.* Translated and edited by Wendy Laura Belcher and Michael Kleiner. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015. v + 500 pp. Maps. Photographs. Index. \$39.95. Cloth. ISBN: 978-0-691-16421-2.

When in the sixteenth century an invading Muslim army threatened the Christian highlands of Ethiopia, Emperor Lebna Dengel sought the assistance of the Portuguese. Having long desired contact with the land of Prester John, the Portuguese sent several hundred musketeers, who helped defeat the invading army. This action, however, brought on another sort of invasion—Jesuits intent on converting already Christian (Orthodox) Ethiopians to Roman Catholicism. During the next one hundred years priests served royal families as advisors, educators, and diplomats to the West, and managed to convert two successive kings. These conversions generated ongoing rebellion that tore at the fabric of Ethiopian society. Some of the strongest resistance from those who remained faithful to the Ethiopian church came from women. Among such women was Walata Petros (1592–1642). Married to one of the king's counselors and military commanders, who had converted, she not only refused to convert but conspired to leave her husband and become a nun. *The Life and Struggles of Our Mother Walata Petros* is her story as recorded by a monk named Galawdewos in 1672–73. The introduction, by Wendy Belcher, wonderfully contextualizes the manuscript and its author, providing an overview of the history, religion, and role of women in this period, and the text that follows is an

eminently readable translation by Michael Kleiner. Together they have made a significant contribution to the study of African literature and the early history of African resistance to European expansion into the continent. With the translation and annotation of this manuscript they have not only shattered, once again, the false notion of Africa as a continent that had no written literature before European contact, but most notably, they have done so with a manuscript in which “a woman was the subject of the text, a woman was the prompter of the text, and a woman authorized the writing of a text” (19).

The Life and Struggles of Our Mother Walata Petros was translated from the Ge’ez (or Ethiopic), the ecclesiastical language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. It derives from a genre of Ethiopian literature known as *gadla*—Ge’ez for the “spiritual struggle” or “acts of” a saint—which record the biography and miracles of religious figures. Only a very few of the many hundreds of texts found in Ethiopia, as well as in museums and individual collections outside the country, have been translated. To distinguish the present work from these more fanciful hagiographies, Belcher defines *Life and Struggles* as a hagiobiography. This is a useful distinction; Galawdewos, the monk who compiled the manuscript, did so only thirty years after Walata Petros’s death and therefore he was able to collect eyewitness and oral accounts, many from women. However, if other *gadla* were just as carefully contextualized and translated, we might well be able to add these to the category of hagiobiography. What is clear is that the hagiography genre contains significant pieces of narrative history and has served as a rich repository for preserving indigenous thought. One hopes that Belcher and Kleiner’s pioneering effort will lead to the annotated translation of many more such works.

Kleiner’s outstanding translation and helpful transcriptions of Ge’ez vocabulary make the text easily accessible. Nevertheless, *Life and Struggles* is close to the original document. It consists of four parts: the life of Walata Petros, her twenty-seven miracles, a praise poem, and a hymn that acclaim her virtues. Each is prodigiously annotated for the specialist on Ethiopia, but there is also much here for the nonspecialist, including more than sixty of the manuscript’s illuminations, each beautifully reproduced in color. Also useful for a reader are the chronology and an expansive glossary of people, places, and terms. These features not only present a full accounting of the life of Walata Petros, but also serve as a solid introduction to Ethiopian Christianity, from its theology and ascetic monastic life to the ways in which its practices and beliefs differ from those of Western Christianity.

What we learn about Walata Petros is rich and detailed, as are the insights gained into this period of Ethiopian history. When this noble lady left her husband and took up the life of a nun, she became what Belcher characterizes as a “radical itinerant preacher,” going on to found religious communities and in due course becoming one of the few female saints in the Ethiopian church. She not only supported the rejection of Roman Catholicism—the foreigner’s faith—but she also implored the clergy not to

bless the king during the daily Divine Liturgy. When the edict requiring all Ethiopians to convert to Roman Catholicism was revoked, Walata Petros was seen as a heroine in her own time. Belcher also makes a convincing argument about the important roles played by noblewomen at this moment in Ethiopian history, and the significance of female agency in general.

A unique aspect of this account—and one that distinguishes it from other *gadla*—concerns Walata Petros's relationship with another nun named Eheta Krestos. Belcher concludes that for over twenty-five years, as Walata Petros was engaged in establishing a number of religious communities to accommodate her growing group of followers, she and Eheta Krestos “became lifelong companions, a holy and celibate couple . . . involved in a lifelong partnership of deep romantic friendship” (39). Belcher introduces this relationship between the two nuns as “the earliest anecdote we know of in which African women express desire for other women” (xxxii). The case she makes is measured, but it could have benefited, nevertheless, from even a brief mention of the large body of research and writing on the subject of spiritual friendship in the medieval and early Renaissance. Such relationships were not as unique as this volume suggests.

This one omission, however, does not in any way detract from the value of this volume, or the significance of Belcher and Kleiner's contribution in making widely available this important hagiobiography of an exceptional female leader, written “in an African language by Africans about Africans” (1).

A final thought: a high compliment is due to Princeton University Press for publishing such a magnificent volume, on quality paper with maps, excellent four-color reproductions, and real footnotes, and for offering it at a most reasonable price.

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Herman J. Cohen. *The Mind of the African Strongman: Conversations with Dictators, Statesmen, and Father Figures*. Washington, D.C.: New Academia Publishing, 2015. xiii + 205 pp. Index. \$24.00. Paper. ISBN: 9780986435300.

The “Big Men” of African politics are a fascinating subject. After all, few leaders are so powerful and uncontested in their political decision-making, and few have failed so miserably. More than a half-century after the majority of African nations gained their independence, there is still too little sustainable economic development on the continent. Political conflicts continue to be explosive, corruption and clientelism are rife, and the rule of the law is overwhelmingly deficient. These outcomes stand in stark contrast to the