

# Mythologies of evil and the glory of Ethiopia in the *Kəbrä nägäšt*

Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha

2025, Vol. 34(3) 189–205

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DOI: 10.1177/09518207251315673

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## Abstract

This article traces a number of overlapping themes related to the origins of evil that are present in certain Jewish and Christian pseudepigraphic texts, the Quran, and the Gə‘əz (or Ethiopic) *Kəbrä nägäšt*. The *Kəbrä nägäšt* features a mythology of evil that conflates different narratives about how evil was introduced into the world. In particular, the Ethiopic work brings together narratives about the fall of the angels in the *Book of the Watchers* in *1 Enoch* with stories about the fall of Satan as related in pseudepigraphic texts like the *Life of Adam and Eve* and the *Apocalypse of Moses*. An expansion of the biblical account of Adam and Eve in Genesis can also be found in the Quran, which expounds on the motivations that led Satan to rebel against Allah. One finds echoes of these various themes in the mythology of evil in the *Kəbrä nägäšt*, which I argue not only evinces a number of entanglements between different scriptural and parabiblical traditions, but is also thematically linked to the glorification of Ethiopia over Israel as the new location of the glory of Zion.

## Keywords

*1 Enoch*, *Apocalypse of Moses*, Ethiopic, *Kəbrä nägäšt*, *Life of Adam and Eve*, Quran

## Introduction

Identifying the historical context(s) within which the text was composed remains one of the more confounding questions in the study of the Gə‘əz (or Ethiopic) saga commonly known as the *Kəbrä nägäšt* (ክብረ ነገሥት).<sup>1</sup> Some strong evidence supports the view

1. At the core of the K.n. is the legend of the Queen of Sheba (or the Queen of the South), king Solomon, and their son Menelik I, who establishes the Israelite-Ethiopian dynasty. The text also addresses various theological issues, such as the doctrine of election, salvation, and the End Times. For overviews of the content of the K.n. see Gizachew Tiruneh, “The Kebra Nagast: Can Its Secrets Be Revealed?” *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 8

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that the text was composed soon after the commencement of the Christian Solomonic dynasty in medieval Ethiopia.<sup>2</sup> The scholarly agreement is largely unanimous that the principal rhetorical objective of the text is the legitimization of the Solomonic dynasty. The *Kəbrä nägäšt* (hereafter K.n.) traces the genealogy of the Solomonic dynasty back to the eponymous ancient Israelite king and his union with the Queen of Sheba, who is referred to in the text as Mākodā (ጠክዳ). Colophons that have survived in some important manuscript witnesses further corroborate the dating of the K.n. within medieval Ethiopia, although the same colophons suggest that the Gəʿəz text was itself a translation from Arabic and Coptic versions that were written much earlier.<sup>3</sup>

The reference to earlier Coptic and Arabic versions of the K.n. constitute one among several reasons why some scholars have advocated for dating the composition of the text to the late antique period.<sup>4</sup> Apart from both textual and oral traditions about the ancient origins of the K.n., internal evidence seems to indicate a concern for the late Aksumite period over against later periods in Ethiopian history. For example, the apocalyptic prophesy that appears at the conclusion of the work casts the sixth-century Aksumite king Kāleb as the protagonist of the final apocalyptic battle. By contrast, the K.n. makes no explicit mentions of post-Aksumite Christian kings. The text also centers the sixth-century Jewish kingdoms of South Arabia as the primary antagonists of

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(2014): 51–72; P. Marrassini, “Kəbrä Nägäšt,” in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007), 364–68; William Leo Hansberry, *Pillars in Ethiopian History: The William Leo Hansberry African History Notebook*, Vol. 1, ed. Joseph E. Harris (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1974), 33–59; E. Cerulli, *La letteratura etiopica* (Florence: Sansoni Accademia, 1968), 36–37; David A. Hubbard, “The Literary Sources of the Kebra Nagast” (PhD diss., St. Andrews, University of St Andrews, 1956), 65–69. For a discussion of the manuscripts and critical editions of the text, see Ralph Lee, “Symbolic Interpretations in Ethiopic and Ephremic Literature” (PhD diss., London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2011), 61–63.

2. For arguments in favor of dating parts or the whole of the K.n. to the medieval period, see Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Stuart Munro-Hay, “A Sixth Century Kebra Nagast?” *Annales d’Éthiopie* 17 (2001): 43–58; Edward Ullendorff, *Ethiopia and the Bible* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968); Cerulli, *La letteratura etiopica*; D.N. Levine, *Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); Enno Littmann, *The Legend of the Queen of Sheba in the Tradition of Axum* (Leiden: Brill, 1904).
3. H. Zotenberg, *Catalogue Des Manuscrits Éthiopiens (Gheez et Amharique) de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris: N. L. Paris, 1877), 222.
4. For arguments dating parts or the whole of the K.n. to the late antique period, see Tiruneh, “The Kebra Nagast: Can Its Secrets Be Revealed?”; G. W. Bowersock, “Helena’s Bridle, Ethiopian Christianity, and Syriac Apoclyptic,” *StPatr* 45 (2010): 211–20; Bernard Leeman, *The Queen of Sheba and Biblical Scholarship* (Queensland: Queensland Academic Press, 2005); David Johnson, “Dating the Kebra Nagast,” in *Peace and War in Byzantium*, ed. Timothy S. Miller and John Nesbitt (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 197–208; ‘Irfān Šahīd, “The Kebra Nagast in the Light of Recent Research,” *Le Muséon: Revue d’Études Orientales* 89 (1976): 133–78; E. A. W. Budge, ed., *The Queen of Sheba and Her Only Son Menyelek (I), or The Kebra Nagast: The Book of the Glory of the Kings of Ethiopia* (London: Forgotten Books, 1932).

Christian Ethiopia, conspicuously failing to mention Islam or the Muslim rivals of medieval Christian dynasties in Ethiopia.

The emphasis on late-antique Aksum and the puzzling omissions of successive events/figures, when viewed in concert with the strong evidence for the composition of the text in medieval Ethiopia, complicate efforts to identify K.n. as exclusively a product of *either* late antiquity *or* the medieval period. While identifying a singular date for the composition of the text therefore seems untenable, taking *both* the late antique *and* medieval periods as relevant backgrounds for analyzing the text represents a more critical and fruitful approach to the study of the K.n.

For example, incorporating the late Aksumite context of the sixth and seventh centuries into an analysis of the K.n. helps to spotlight some interesting themes within the text that might otherwise be overlooked. Late antiquity was a period of profound fluidity and porousness between different polities, cultures, languages, and religions across the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern worlds. Scholarship on late antiquity has begun to move away from outdated models of distinct cultures and religions with rigid and fixed boundaries to an understanding of late antique communities as being constituted both internally and externally by dynamism, exchange, interinfluence, and overlapping boundaries. In particular, such new frameworks have been applied in the study of the relationship between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in late antiquity.<sup>5</sup> The dynamic transmission of pseudepigraphic literature and traditions between Jews, Christians, and Muslims represents an important aspect of the study of the late-antique entanglements between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Over the course of late antiquity and the medieval period, the Axumites actively took part in the political, cultural, and literary networks active across the ancient Mediterranean and Red Sea regions. Several features of the K.n. reflect the porousness between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions during these periods, particularly features of the text that draw on pseudepigraphic sources.<sup>6</sup> The variegated, composite nature of the text is tellingly reflected in the apocalyptic sections of the K.n., which rely on several pseudepigraphic narratives as relayed through Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scriptural traditions. In what follows, I first survey various etiologies of evil as they appear in *the Book of the Watchers in 1 Enoch*, *the Life of Adam and Eve*, *the Apocalypse of Moses*, and the Quran. I then analyze how these different accounts are interwoven together within the

5. For examples see Reyhan Durmaz, *Stories between Christianity and Islam: Saints, Memory, and Cultural Exchange in Late Antiquity and Beyond* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022); Meir M. Bar-Asher, *Jews and the Qur'an*, trans. Ethan Rundell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022); Peter Schadler, *John of Damascus and Islam: Christian Heresiology and the Intellectual Background to Earliest Christian-Muslim Relations* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); John C. Reeves and Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Enoch from Antiquity to the Middle Ages: Sources From Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Volume I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Guy G. Stroumsa, *The Making of the Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

6. For more detailed overviews of the sources of the K.n. see Hubbard, "The Literary Sources of the Kebrā Nagast."

apocalyptic chapters of the K.n. I also situate the K.n.'s mythology of evil within the broader rhetorical program of the text and make the case for reading the mythology of evil in the K.n. partly as thematically linked to the claim that Ethiopia has replaced Israel as the resting place of the glory of Zion.

## The mythology of evil in the *Book of the Watchers*

The *Book of the Watchers* (*1 Enoch* 1–36), one of the five texts that together comprise *1 Enoch*, represents one school of ancient Jewish interpretations of the Hebrew Bible that understand the rebellion of angels as the source of evil on earth.<sup>7</sup> Although *1 Enoch* in its entirety survives only in Ethiopic textual witnesses, there are also surviving fragments or portions of earlier Greek and Aramaic versions of the text.<sup>8</sup> The angelic rebellion recounted in *1 Enoch* 6–11 begins in much the same way as the passage in Genesis on which it ostensibly relies:<sup>9</sup> “When the sons of men had multiplied, in those days, beautiful and comely daughters were born to them. And the watchers, the sons of heaven, saw them and desired them” (*1 Enoch* 6:1–2).<sup>10</sup> The introduction of evil into the world as presented in *1 Enoch* 6–11 primarily involves the sinful combination of two spheres that

7. For a discussion of the centrality of origin myths of evil to apocalyptic forms of knowing in ancient Jewish literature see Paolo Sacchi, *Jewish Apocalyptic and Its History*, trans. William J. Short (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997). Sacchi identifies the *Book of the Watchers* as the oldest apocalypse and further catalogues the origin and nature of evil as one of the three ideas central to the text in particular and to the apocalyptic in general (p. 102). For a broad overview discussion of the origin of evil in Second Temple literature, see John J. Collins, “The Origin of Evil in Apocalyptic Literature and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Seers, Sibyls and Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism*, ed. John J. Collins (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 287–300.
8. For more on the textual history of the Aramaic, Greek, and Ethiopic versions of *1 Enoch*, see George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 9–21.
9. For a discussion of the relationship between *1 Enoch* 6–11 and Genesis 6, see Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1*, 166. Nickelsburg argues that *1 Enoch* is best understood as an interpretation of Genesis 6, and he notes that very few scholars (for example, J.T. Milik and Margaret Barker) hold the opposing viewpoint. Nevertheless, given the terse and cryptic nature of Gen 6.1–4, Nickelsburg does allow for the possibility that the pericope might be a fragment of an earlier tradition (p. 167). For more recent studies on the receptions of Genesis in the Second Temple Period see Angela Kim Harkins, Kelley Coblenz Bautch, and John C. Endres, SJ, *The Fallen Angels Traditions: Second Temple Developments and Reception History* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2023); James C. VanderKam, *From Revelation to Canon: Studies in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2021); Miryam T. Brand, *Evil Within and Without: The Source of Sin and Its Nature as Portrayed in Second Temple Literature* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013).
10. Cf. Gen 6.1–2: “When people began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that they were fair; and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose.” Unless otherwise indicated, translations of *1 Enoch* are taken from George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, eds., *1 Enoch: A New Translation Based on the Hermeneia Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004).

were never meant to mix: the spiritual and the fleshly.<sup>11</sup> This sinful union between angels and humans comes to pass when the watchers have illicit sexual relations with women.<sup>12</sup>

The unholy union between the watchers and the women produces illegitimate “bastards” (אֲבָרִים; κίβδηλους), who are described as giants who not only consume “the labor of all the sons of men,” but also devour one another (*1 Enoch* 10.9). The giants then proceed to infest the world with evil spirits:

But now the giants who were begotten by the spirit and flesh—they will call them evil spirits on the earth, for their dwelling will be on the earth. The spirits that have gone forth from the body of their flesh are evil spirits, for from humans they came into being, and from the holy watchers was the origin of their creation. Evil spirits they will be on the earth, and evil spirits they will be called. (*1 Enoch* 15.8–9)

The violence and havoc that the giants wreak on earth is compounded by another wicked form of union between the watchers and humans. In addition to having sexual relations with women, the watchers also corrupt human beings by making illicit knowledge known to them.<sup>13</sup> The mysteries that the watchers reveal to humans were part of the spiritual sphere and were never meant to be introduced on earth.<sup>14</sup> The epistemic combination of heavenly and earthly knowledge constitutes the second great transgression of the watchers. The watchers thus produce both physical and intellectual bastards on earth that together result in the origin and proliferation of evil.<sup>15</sup> While their physical children

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11. In *1 Enoch* 15.4, God rebukes the watchers saying, “You were holy ones and *spirits*, living forever. With the *blood* of women you have defiled yourselves....”
  12. *1 Enoch* 6.2 reads, “And the watchers, the sons of heaven, saw [the daughters of men] and desired them.”
  13. “Shemihazah taught spells and the cutting of roots. Hermani taught sorcery for the losing of spells and magic and skill. Baraqel taught the signs of the lightning flashes. Kokabel taught the signs of the stars. Ziqel taught the signs of the shooting stars. Arteqoph taught the signs of the earth. Shamsiel taught the sign of the sun. Shariel taught the signs of the moon. And they all began to reveal mysteries to their wives and to their children” (*1 Enoch* 8.1-3). Asael is portrayed as the most prolific teacher as he manages to teach people how to make instruments of war, how to fashion various jewelry out of gold and silver, and how to adorn women with makeup (*1 Enoch* 8.3).
  14. In *1 Enoch* 16.3-4, God accuses the watchers saying, “You were in heaven, and no mystery was revealed to you; but a stolen mystery you learned; and this you made known to the women in your hardness of heart; and through this mystery the women and men are multiplying evils on the earth.” The revelation of mysteries is absent from the Ethiopic and the Akhmim manuscript of the Greek version and is found only in Syncellus (Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch* 1, 189).
  15. A curious exception to this conclusion is found in the *Epistle of Enoch*. In this final section of the *Book of Enoch*, Enoch orates his various exhortations partly directed at sinners. He says, “I swear to you, sinners, that it was not ordained for a man to be a slave, nor was a decree given for a woman to be a handmaid; but it happened because of oppression. Thus lawlessness was not sent upon the earth; but men created it by themselves, and those who do it will come to a great curse” (*1 Enoch* 98.4). Here the assertion is made that evil was not introduced into the world by the watchers. Instead, evil is a product of human beings who created it themselves.

wreak havoc on the earth, their intellectual children, namely, the illicit mysteries revealed to humans, end up corrupting the human race and leading to the punitive Flood that God sends.

### **The Life of Adam and Eve and the Apocalypse of Moses**

The Latin *Life of Adam and Eve* and the Greek *Apocalypse of Moses* (also called the *Greek Life of Adam and Eve*) represent another school of Jewish pseudepigraphic writings that center the question of the origins of evil on earth.<sup>16</sup> In his numerous and wide-ranging works on the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha, Andrei Orlov provides an analysis of how typologies of biblical figures like Adam, Enoch, Melchizedek, Moses, and Jacob constitute important motifs in the development of early Jewish apocalypticism.<sup>17</sup> He has stressed competing mythologies of evil centered around the Eden story and the Enochic myth of the watchers. Relying on the narrative of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, as opposed to the account of the union between women and “the sons of God” in Genesis 6, texts like the *Life of Adam and Eve* (hereafter *L.A.E.*) and the *Apocalypse of Moses* (hereafter *Apoc. Mos.*) trace the origins of evil not to the fall of the watchers but rather to the fall of Satan.<sup>18</sup>

The two versions of the text present a more developed account of the fall of Adam and Eve than the biblical episode by expounding on the true identity of the enigmatic serpent in Genesis 3. The *Apoc. Mos.* identifies Satan (or the Devil) as the agent who speaks through the serpent in order to persuade Eve to take a fruit from the forbidden tree and eat it (*Apoc. Mos.* 16.1).<sup>19</sup> The temptation is much the same as the one highlighted

16. See M. D. Johnson, “Introduction,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, Vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 249–57. Now extant in Greek, Latin, Armenian and Slavonic translations, the original was probably written in Hebrew. Johnson understands the *Life of Adam and Eve* as one among a set of texts that survive in Armenian, Slavonic, Syriac, Arabic and Ethiopic and center the biblical figure Adam including the *Combat of Adam and Eve*, the *Testament of Adam*, and the *Apocalypse of Adam* discovered at Nag Hammadi (p. 250).

17. See Andrei A. Orlov, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005); Andrei A. Orlov, *From Apocalypticism to Merkabah Mysticism: Studies in the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Andrei A. Orlov, *Dark Mirrors: Azazel and Satanael in Early Jewish Demonology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2011). For a discussion of the tension between various mythologies of evil in early Jewish apocalypticism as well as their receptions in rabbinic Merkabah, Hekhalot and pseudepigraphic traditions, see Orlov’s essays on the Enoch and Adam traditions in his *From Apocalypticism to Merkabah Mysticism*, 109–310.

18. Johnson notes that the Greek and Latin editions of the *Life of Adam and Eve* line up well with certain theologies of Judaism, early Christianity and the Dead Sea Scrolls. God is portrayed as being exalted and transcendent with a hierarchy of angels under him. Satan, the source of evil, is a pre-existent fallen angel, although of the two works, only the *L.A.E.* details the account of his initial fall from heaven. Additionally, the restoration of Adam to his pre-fallen state becomes an important motif in the *L.A.E.* and the *Apoc. Mos.* (Johnson, “Introduction,” 253).

19. The text also seems to indicate that after sending the serpent, Satan later enters the Garden on his own: “And I opened (the gate) for him, and he entered into Paradise, passing through in

in Genesis: the devil tells Eve, “Fear not; for at the very time you eat, your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil” (*Apoc. Mos.* 18.3). Eve falls for the deception and eats of the fruit, but not before swearing an oath that she would entice her husband to do the same (*Apoc. Mos.* 19.2). In response to their transgression, God expels Adam and Eve from Paradise and places imprecations on both of them and the serpent in much the same fashion as the narrative in Genesis.<sup>20</sup>

The *L.A.E.*, moreover, expands the narrative of Adam and Eve further by presenting an explanation for why Satan felt the need to deceive Adam and Eve in the first place. The text opens with Adam and Eve just after their expulsion from Paradise. In an attempt to show their penitence, the two agree to stand neck-deep in the waters of the Tigris River, Adam for forty days and Eve for thirty-seven days (*L.A.E.* 9.1–4). Eighteen days in, however, Satan comes dissembled as an angel of light. He approaches Eve and tells her that God has heard her supplications and grants her and her husband amnesty. Eve is once again fooled by Satan and comes out of the water before the appointed time, causing her to lament and to ask the Devil why he continues to torment her and her husband.<sup>21</sup>

Satan’s response to Eve’s question unveils another layer of the narrative that traces the origins of evil by recounting Satan’s fall, which is instigated by God’s creation of Adam. After God creates Adam, the archangel Michael brings all the angels before Adam and commands them to worship him. Satan refuses to do so, claiming that he was prior to Adam in creation and thus superior to Adam.<sup>22</sup> Michael responds by telling Satan that if he does not worship Adam, God would be wrathful toward him. Satan responds, “If [God] be wrathful with me, I will set my throne above the stars of heaven and will be like the Most High” (*L.A.E.* 15.3).<sup>23</sup> Upon hearing Satan’s subversive proclamation, God expels Satan and his angels from heaven and strips them of their glory. Satan then concludes relating his story by addressing Adam:

All my enmity and envy and sorrow concern you, since because of you I am expelled and deprived of my glory which I had in the heavens in the midst of angels, and because of you I was cast out to earth. (*L.A.E.* 12.1)

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front of me” (*Apoc. Mos.* 19.1). Satan is best understood to be the one who enters Paradise at this point since the serpent was already inside.

20. For an updated translation and thoroughly comprehensive introduction and commentary to the text, see John R. Levison, *The Greek Life of Adam and Eve* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022). Levison compares the account of the origins of evil in the Greek text with parallel narratives in biblical versions like the MT and LXX. He also provides comparisons with relevant parallels in the Latin, Armenian, Georgian, and Slavonic versions of the text. In place of the doctrine of the fall that is often misidentified as the core idea within the text, he argues for the salience of a four-part thematic program concerned with patrimony, pain, paraenesis and pardoning (p. 3). For another recent commentary on the text, see Jan Dochhorn, *Die Apokalypse Des Mose: Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).
21. Eve questions Satan as follows: “Why do you assault us for nothing? What have you to do with us? What have we done to you, that you should pursue us with deceit? Why does your malice fall on us? Have we stolen you glory and made you to be without honor?” (*L.A.E.* 11.2–3).
22. *Vita* 14.3.
23. Cf. Isaiah 14.

In summary, the *Apoc. Mos.* and the *L.A.E.* present a two-tiered etiology of evil. First, Satan's deceiving of Adam and Eve accounts for the presence of evil in the world, as the resulting transgression led to the separation of Adam and Eve from God. Second, the texts provide an explanation for the evil of Satan himself, which results from his pride and jealousy over the favor that God shows Adam. The two texts also portray Adam as a being who, although temporarily humbled, will be exalted in glory in the future. This dichotomy between humility and pride, as well as the animosity between the Devil and Adam as the cause of Satan's fall, are two motifs picked up in the Quran.

## Adam and Iblis in the Quran

Similar to the *L.A.E.* and the *Apoc. Mos.*, the Quran presents a two-tiered etiology of evil that explains both the fall of the first humans and the fall of the evil figure who causes their downfall (Satan, or Iblis). The Quranic use of Jewish and Christian literature is a vast and complicated subject, the intricacies of which will not be dealt with in this paper.<sup>24</sup> Instead, I briefly outline here some key motifs in the accounts of Adam and Iblis in the Quran and compare and contrast them with similar motifs found in the *L.A.E.* and the *Apoc. Mos.*, as well as with the mythology of evil found the K.n. as discussed in the section below.

The first part of the Quran's mythology of evil, namely the account of the fall of Adam and his wife, appears in Surah 2 (Al-Baqara), which in part builds on the narrative of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. As in the biblical text, the Quran relates the exiling of Adam and his wife from Paradise for falling prey to the deception of Satan (الشَّيْطَانُ) and eating from the forbidden tree.<sup>25</sup> The second part of the etiology of evil in the Quran, which explains the reasons behind the fall of Satan, is also related in Surah 2 with the discussion of Iblis. Further accounts of Iblis and his enmity toward God and Adam subsequently appear in Surah 7 (Al-A'raf), Surah 15 (Al-Hijr), and Surah 17 (Al-Isra).

According to Surah 2.30–36, Allah decides to place a "successor" (خَلِيفَةً) on the earth. His decision is met with the demurring of angels. In spite of the angelic objections, Allah proceeds to create Adam and subsequently commands the angels to bow down to him. The command echoes the same order given to the angels by the archangel Michael in the *L.A.E.* Just as Satan in the *L.A.E.* refuses to bow to Adam, Iblis in the Quran similarly

24. For discussions of the receptions of Enochic literature and other Jewish pseudepigraphic works in early Islam, see John C. Reeves, "Resurgent Myth: On the Vitality of the Watchers Traditions in the Near East in Late Antiquity," in *The Fallen Angels Traditions*, 94–115; Patricia Crone, "The Book of the Watchers in the Quran," in *Exchange and Transmission across Cultural Boundaries: Philosophy, Mysticism, and Science in the Mediterranean World*, ed. H. Ben-Shammai, S. Shaked, and S. Stroumsa (Jerusalem: Keterpress Enterprises, 2013), 16–51; John C. Reeves, "Some Explorations of the Intertwining of Bible and Qur'an," in *Bible and Qur'an: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, ed. John C. Reeves (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 43–60; John C. Reeves, "Exploring the Afterlife of Jewish Pseudepigrapha in Medieval Near Eastern Religious Traditions: Some Initial Soundings," *JSJ* 30 (1999): 148–77.

25. The text reads, "We cautioned, 'O Adam! Live with your wife in Paradise and eat as freely as you please, but do not approach this tree, or else you will be wrongdoers.' But Satan deceived them—leading to their fall from the blissful state they were in, and We said, 'Descend from the heavens to the earth as enemies to each other. You will find in the earth a residence and provision for your appointed stay'" (Surah 2.35–36).

disobeys the divine command: “When we told the angels, ‘Bow down before Adam,’ they all bowed. But not Iblis, who refused and was arrogant: he was disobedient” (Surah 2.34).<sup>26</sup>

The Quran gives a slightly different explanation for why Iblis refuses to bow down to Adam. Whereas in the *L.A.E* Satan refuses to bow before Adam because he had been created before Adam, in the Quran Iblis refuses to bow to Adam because he was made from fire while Adam was created out of clay (Surah 7.11).<sup>27</sup> The resulting enmity between Adam and Iblis is presented in the Quran as part of Adam’s punishment for falling into Satan’s temptation: “But when Satan made them slip, and removed them from the state they were in, We said, ‘Get out, all of you! You are each other’s enemy’” (Surah 2.36). The same condemnation is reiterated in Surah 20.113: “Get out of My garden as each other’s enemy.” In this way the presence of evil in the world is explained as the result of the enmity between Adam and Iblis, sometimes referred to as Satan. This enmity in turn is a result of the disobedience of Iblis on account of his prideful refusal to accept God’s glorification of Adam over those created before humans.

Because of the jealousy he harbors toward Adam, Iblis pledges to drive a wedge between Allah and human beings. Here another important motif appears within the Quranic mythology of evil. Iblis not only instigates the rise of evil in the world by deceiving Adam and Eve, but he also makes it his vendetta to deceive their descendants:

And then Iblis said, “Because You have put me in the wrong, I will lie in wait for them all on Your straight path: I will come at them—from their front and their back, from their right and their left—and You will find that most of them are ungrateful.” (Surah 7.13–18)

The sinfulness of those led astray are presented as rewards for Iblis and his deceptive ways. His ploy against Adam and his descendants bears fruit in the number of those he can lead to Hell.

## The mythology of evil in the *Kābrā nāgāst*

The K.n. presents an intriguing conflation between the mythologies of evil found in the Adamic narratives discussed above and the account of the fall of the angels in the *Book of the Watchers*. The third section of the K.n., comprising Chapters 95–112, largely contains hermeneutic expansions of passages from the Hebrew Bible that were taken from patristic sources. The theme of elevating the historical and theological significance of Ethiopia dominates this section. Hubbard views the presence of this theme in section three as an indication of its late date, concluding that it must have been written in the latter stages of recension in the thirteenth century.<sup>28</sup> This latter section attempts to outline a

26. This motif also appears in *b. Sanhedrin* 38b.

27. Surah 15.26–31 reiterates the story in more detail: “We created man from sounding clay moulded from black mud. As for the jinn, We created them earlier from smokeless fire. Remember, O Prophet, when your Lord said to the angels, ‘I am going to create a human being from sounding clay moulded from black mud. So when I have fashioned him and had a spirit of My Own creation breathed into him, fall down in prostration to him.’ So the angels prostrated all together—but not Iblis, who refused to prostrate with the others.”

28. Hubbard, “The Literary Sources of the *Kebra Nagast*,” 61–69.

very particular salvation history that pulls from a wide range of sources. Beginning with Moses and the Israelites, it highlights passages from the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, all the way up to the Second Coming of Christ.

It is in this context in Chapter 100 of the K.n. that one finds a reworked version of the story of the fall of the watchers, which in the Ethiopic retelling is conflated with motifs drawn from the narratives about Adam in texts like the *L.A.E.*, the *Apoc. Mos.*, and the Quran. The story opens with a conversation between “the angels who rebelled” (እለ ተዐደዉ መላእክት) and God, who is angry with them on account of their jealousy and resentment toward Adam. The angels disparage Adam by invoking his transgression against God’s commandment not to eat from the tree in the Garden. They contrast Adam’s disobedience with the exceptional favor God has shown him in establishing him over other creatures and in calling him “my beloved firstborn son” (ወልድዮ በኩርዮ ወፍቀርዮ). The resentment of the angels toward Adam recounted in the K.n. mirrors the demurring of the angels in the Quran, who similarly object to God’s exalting of Adam over them despite the fact that they were created before him. Although God does not order the angels to bow before Adam in the K.n., a hierarchical relationship between the two is implied when the angels claim that God gave them over to Adam so that they would minister to him.<sup>29</sup> God responds to the complaint of the angels as follows:

The Merciful One, the lover of mercy, answered them on account of Adam and said to them, “I created you from fire and air with a singular *intention* (ጎሊና): to praise [me]. But I created him out of dirt, water, air, and fire with twice as many [intentions] as you. He thus became one of flesh and blood having ten intentions, five good and five evil. (K.n. 100)<sup>30</sup>

God’s response to the angels in K.n. once again echoes the explanations of the differences between Adam and the angels that appear in earlier texts like the Quran and 2 *Enoch*.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, in addition to pointing out Adam’s chimeric nature relative to angels, God further defends Adam against their complaints with the following statement:

29. The text reads, “... God loved [Adam] and even gave us over to him so that we might minister to him” (አፍቀሮ ፣ እግዚአብሔር ፣ ወወሀበ ፣ ኪያነሂ ፣ ከመ ፣ ንትለአኮ) (Carl Bezold, ed., *Kebra Nagast, die Herrlichkeit der Könige: nach den Handschriften in Berlin, London, Oxford und Paris* [Munich: K.B. Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1905], 142). All translations of the Gə‘əz text are mine. Although page numbers in Bezold’s edition of the text are given in Gə‘əz numerals, I have listed them in Arabic numerals in the citations provided here.

30. አውሥአሙ ፣ መሓሪ ፣ ወመፍቀሬ ፣ ምሕረት ፣ ህዩንተ ፣ አዳም ፣ ወይቤሎሙ ፣ አንትሙስ ፣ 1 ፣ ጎሊና ፣ ረጠርኩክሙ ፣ ለስብሐት ፣ እምእሳት ፣ ወነፋስ ፣ ወሎቱስ ፣ ፈጠርክዎ ፣ ምክዕቢተ ፣ ዚአክሙ ፣ እመሬት ፣ ወእማይ ፣ እምነፋስ ፣ ወእሳት ፣ ወኮነ ፣ ዘሥጋ ፣ ወደም ፣ ወቦቱ ፣ (I)ጎሊናተ ፣ (፭)ዘሠናያት ፣ ወ(፭)ዘእኩይ (Bezold, *Kebra Nagast*, 143).

31. See note 27 above. Cf. 2 *Enoch* 30.8 where God says, “And on the sixth day I commanded my wisdom to create man out of the seven components: his flesh from earth; his blood from dew and from the sun; his eyes from the bottomless sea; his bones from stone; his reason from the mobility of angels and from clouds; his veins and hair from the grass of the earth; his spirit from my spirit and from wind.”

As for you, you have no other intention apart from worshipping me, except for *that proud one who spawned evil* (ውእቱ ዕቡይ ዘአሥረጻ ለእኩይ) and became wicked and was then removed from your assembly. Why do you too exalt yourselves over Adam? For if you were like him, and if I had created you from fire and dirt, you would have become flesh and blood and *surpassed him in the transgression of my commandments and the denial of my word* (ውእም አፈድፈድክሙ እምኔሁ ዐሊው ትእዛዝየ ወክሒደ ቃልየ). (K.n. 100)<sup>32</sup>

This passage illustrates several aspects that characterize the syncretistic nature of the mythology of evil that appears in the K.n. One of the key motifs that surfaces here is the veiled allusion to Satan as the originator of evil. Although the text does not discuss Satan’s fall in detail, it does imply that his fall and the evil it spawned occurred prior to the fall of the angels. Another interesting motif is God’s claim that if the angels had been created in the same form as Adam, they would have done worse than he did with respect to keeping God’s commandments. The angels respond to God as follows:

They said to him, “Praise to you, oh Lord. Far be it from us! We will not violate your commandments nor will we disobey your word because we are spirits [destined for] life while he is earthly and [destined for] folly. Now test and examine us closely [to see] if we are capable so that you may know whether we are able to keep your word. (K.n. 100)<sup>33</sup>

The angels’ challenge to God represents another case of the blending of various apocalyptic traditions that reoccurs in the K.n. In this case, the jealousy and resentment that characterizes Satan (or Iblis) in earlier narratives about Adam are transferred onto the angels who rebel. The story proceeds by relating what happens to the angels after they challenge God to make them like Adam:

Then by his word they were instantly given the flesh, blood, and heart of *human beings* (እጋለ እምሕያው). They descended from the heights of heaven and went down to earth and into the folly of the dancing of the children of Cain ... Now their daughters [i.e. of the children of Cain] were there and the [fallen angels] pleased themselves shamelessly because the women perfumed themselves, became enticing to them and stirred up their minds. They did not restrain themselves for one moment but instead took them for themselves, each one choosing women from among them, and they committed sin with them. For God does not rest inside the hearts of *the proud* (ዕቡያን) and the detestable, but resides in the heart of *the humble* (ትሑታን) and the upright. (K.n. 100)<sup>34</sup>

32. ወአንትሙስ ፣ አልብክሙ ፣ ባዕደ ፣ ኅሊና ፣ ዘእንበለ ፣ ስብሐትየ ፣ ዘእንበለ ፣ ውእቱ ፣ ዕቡይ ፣ ዘአሥረጻ ፣ ለእኩይ ፣ ወከነ ፣ እኩየ ፣ ወተስዕረ ፣ እማኅበርክሙ ፣ ወአንትሙኒ ፣ ለምንት ፣ ትትዔበይ ፣ ለዕለ ፣ አዳም ፣ ወሰበ ፣ ኮንክሙ ፣ ከማሁ ፣ ወፈጠርኩክሙ ፣ እማይ ፣ ወመሬት ፣ እምኮንክሙ ፣ ሥጋ ፣ ወደም ፣ ወእም አፈድፈድክሙ ፣ እምኔሁ ፣ ዐሊው ፣ ትእዛዝየ ፣ ወክሒደ ፣ ቃልየ (Bezold, *Kebrā Nagast*, 143).

33. ወይቤልም ፣ ስብሐት ፣ ለከ ፣ እማኪኦ ፣ ሐስ ፣ ለነ ፣ ኢንትዐደው ፣ ትእዛዝከ ፣ ወኢነዐሉ ፣ ቃለከ ፣ እስሙ ፣ ንኢነ ፣ መንፈሳዊያን ፣ ለሕይወት ፣ ወውእቱሰ ፣ መሬታዊ ፣ ለእበድ ፣ ወይእኬኒ ፣ እሙ ፣ ንክል ፣ ጥዩቀ ፣ ፍትነን ፣ ወአሙክረነ ፣ ከሙ ፣ ታእምር ፣ ለእሙ ፣ ንክል ፣ ዐቂበ ፣ ቃልከ (Bezold, *Kebrā Nagast*, 143).

34. ወሰቤሃ ፣ ተውህበሙ ፣ ምስለ ፣ ቃሉ ፣ ሥጋ ፣ ወደም ፣ ወልበ ፣ እጋለ ፣ እምሕያው ፣ ወተሠርሙ ፣ እምልዕልተ ፣ ሰማይ ፣ ወወረዱ ፣ ምድረ ፣ ኅበ ፣ እበደ ፣ ዘፍኖሙ ፣ ለደቀቀ ፣ ቀየን ፣ ምስለ ፣ ኩሉ ፣ ኪኖሙ ፣ ዘተኬነው ፣ በእበደ ፣ ዝሙቶሙ ፣ ወማሕሌቶሙ ፣ በከበሮ ፣ ወበመሰንቆ ፣ ወበዕንዚራ ፣ ወበረዓም ፣ ብተኅ ፣ ምስለ ፣ ይባቤ ፣ ወማሕሌት ፣ ወአዋልዲሆሙኒ ፣ ህየ ፣ ሀለዋ ፣ ወይትዋነየ ፣

The angels’ taking on flesh and blood here constitutes a novel addition to the Enochic myth of the fall of the watchers. Whereas the lust for women on Earth is what impels the watchers to leave heaven in *1 Enoch*, in the K.n., it is the pride of the angels as manifested in their claim that they could withstand that temptations of Satan even if they were to become human. Although the motivation of the angels in Chapter 100 of the K.n. is notably different from that of the angels in the *Book of the Watchers*, there are also some clear parallels between the two texts. Most notably, both texts depict the sexual relations between the fallen angels and women as the source of giants and evil spirits on earth.

Moreover, in both texts, the fall of the angels serves as a prelude to the story of Noah and the Flood that God sends in order to eradicate the evil caused by the unholy union between women and the fallen angels. While the story of the fall of the watchers has often been viewed as a myth about the origins of evil on earth, in a recent article, Matthew Goff has made the case for nuancing this common but reductive reading of the *Book of the Watchers*.<sup>35</sup> He highlights the point that the watchers are corrupted through the temptations of women (*1 Enoch* 8.1), which complicates the view that the former introduce evil on earth since the portrayal of the women as temptresses implies the presence of evil on earth prior to the arrival of the watchers. As opposed to viewing the *Book of the Watchers* simply as an account of the origins of evil, Goff proposes a more nuanced interpretation of the text as an etiology of the evil that causes the Flood and the continuity of evil in the form of demons from their origins in the primordial age into subsequent periods.<sup>36</sup> Such a reading of the watchers myth as a rhetorical device for setting up the story of the Flood certainly applies to the version that appears in Chapter 100 of the K.n., since the chapter closes with contemplation on the theological significance of Noah’s Ark.<sup>37</sup>

Here I propose another possible rhetorical function of the story of the fall of the angels in the K.n., namely the thematic connection it allows between descriptions of Adam relative to the angels and descriptions of Ethiopia relative to Israel that appear throughout the text. The story of the fall of the angels in K.n. 100 closes with a pedagogical pronouncement about God’s aversion for those who are *proud* (ዕብደ) in contrast to his love for and proximity to those who are *humble* (ትሑት). Adam’s depiction as a humble figure who is loved by God is further elaborated upon in the story “Concerning the Two Servants”

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ዘእንበለ ፣ ኅፍረት ፣ እስመ ፣ ተምዕዘ ፣ ሎሙ ፣ ወአደማሆሙ ፣ ወሆካ ፣ ኅሊናሆሙ ፣ ወኢተዐገሱ ፣ አሐተ ፣ ሰዐተ ፣ አላ ፣ ነሥኡ ፣ ሎሙ ፣ ለርእሶሙ ፣ እምኔሆን ፣ ዘዘ ፣ ኅረዩ ፣ አንስትያ ፣ ወአበሱ ፣ ምስሌሆን ፣ እስመ ፣ እግዚአብሔር ፣ ኢያዐርፍ ፣ ውስተ ፣ ልበ ፣ ዕቡያን ፣ ወሐማይያን ፣ አላ ፣ ያዐርፍ ፣ ውስተ ፣ ልበ ፣ ትሑታን ፣ ወየዋሃን (Bezold, *Kebra Nagast*, 144).

- 35. See Matthew J. Goff, “Enochic Literature and the Persistence of Evil: Giants and Demons, Satan and Azazel,” in *Das Böse, Der Teufel Und Dämonen*, ed. Jan Dochhorn, Susanne Rudnig-Zelt, and Benjamin G. Wold (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 31–45.
- 36. Goff, “Enochic Literature,” 35–42.
- 37. Throughout the K.n. as a whole, Noah and the Ark play a significant role as theological symbols, along with Adam’s Pearl, the Ark of the Covenant, Paradise, Mary, and the Cross of Christ. For a thorough discussion of the symbolic uses of these motifs in the K.n., see Lee, “Symbolic Interpretations.”

(በእንተ ክልኤቱ አግብርት), which appears in Chapter 99 of the K.n. immediately preceding the story of the fall of the angels.<sup>38</sup>

In this parable, one servant who is proud and arrogant abuses the second one, described as oppressed and humble. The king punishes and humbles the proud servant and ameliorates the wounds of the humble servant before exalting him. At the conclusion of the narrative, the identities of the three figures are revealed: the king is Christ, the arrogant servant who was humbled is Satan, and the humble servant who is exalted is Adam. The story then concludes as follows:

He [i.e. Christ] placed the flesh of Adam on the throne of dominion. He magnified, exalted, and honored him. He was praised by all those whom [God] had created: angels, archangels, thousands, tens of thousands, and vast numbers of spiritual beings. *For he cast down the proud and lifted up the lowly* (እስመ አውደቆ ለዕቡይ ወአንሥኦ ለትሑት); *he disgraced the arrogant and glorified the humble* (አጎሰሮ ለዕቡይ ወአክበሮ ለትሑት). (K.n. 99)<sup>39</sup>

Adam’s exaltation in Chapters 99–100 mirrors the exaltation of Ethiopia as the new location of the glory of Zion, the central theme that is woven throughout the entirety of the K.n. Just as Adam is figured as a humble figure who is then exalted by God, the K.n. similarly depicts Ethiopia as being exalted and glorified from an initially low and humble position. For example, Ethiopia’s glorification is dramatically pronounced by Solomon in Chapter 60 of the text, which follows the stories surrounding Menelik’s exit from Jerusalem after absconding with Zion, or the Ark of the Covenant (Chapters 38–59). Upon hearing that the son he has fathered with the Queen of the South has fled Israel with the Ark, Solomon pursues Menelik all the way to Egypt. But when Menelik manages to escape capture and flee to Ethiopia, Solomon weeps bitterly and cries out:

Arise David, my father, and mourn with me on account of our Lady [Zion], because God has forsaken us and has taken our Lady away from your children...Woe to us! Woe to us! For righteousness has passed from us and we have been admonished...Woe to us! Woe to us! For the glory of the noble daughter of Zion has been taken away *and the glory of the daughter of lowly Ethiopia has been magnified* (ወዐብዩ ክብረ ለወለተ ኢትዮጵያ ጎስርት). (K.n. 60)<sup>40</sup>

### Conclusion

In summary, like all the other texts examined here, the K.n. does not provide a systematic mythology of evil. Instead, it attempts to answer issues that were most immediate to the historical context in which it was written. As such one can only hope to draw

38. K.n. 99. See Bezold, *Kebra Nagast*, 141–42.  
39. ወሊሥጋ ፣ አዳም ፣ አንበሮ ፣ ዲበ ፣ መንበረ ፣ መለኮት ፣ ሰዕብዮ ፣ ወአልዐሎ ፣ ወአክበሮ ፣ ወተሰብሐ ፣ እምነ ፣ ኩሎሙ ፣ እለ ፣ ፈጠረ ፣ መላእክት ፣ ወሊቃነ ፣ መላእክት ፣ እልፍ ፣ አእላፍት ፣ ወትእልፊተ ፣ አእላፍት ፣ መንፈሳዊያን ፣ እስመ ፣ አውደቆ ፣ ለዕቡይ ፣ ወአንሥኦ ፣ ለትሑት ፣ አጎሰሮ ፣ ለዕቡይ ፣ ወአክበሮ ፣ ለትሑት (Bezold, *Kebra Nagast*, 141).  
40. ተንሥእ ፣ ዳዊት ፣ አቡዮ ፣ ውብኪ ፣ ምስሌዮ ፣ በእንተ ፣ እግዝእትነ ፣ እስመ ፣ ተሀዩዩነ ፣ እግዚአብሔር ፣ ወንሥኦ ፣ ለእግዝእትነ ፣ እምደቂቅከ... አሌለነ ፣ አሌለነ ፣ እስመ ፣ ጎላፈት ፣ ርትዕ ፣ እምኔነ ፣ ወተገሠጽነ... አሌለነ ፣ አሌለነ ፣ እስመ ፣ ተንሥተ ፣ ክብራ ፣ ለወለተ ፣ ጽዮን ፣ ክብርት ፣ ወዐብዮ ፣ ክብራ ፣ ለወለተ ፣ ኢትዮጵያ ፣ ጎስርት (Bezold, *Kebra Nagast*, 67–68).

provisional conclusions. I have here made the case for reading the thematic connections between Adam and Ethiopia and their exaltations from humble or lowly positions as part of the rhetorical strategy behind the K.n. It is possible that Adam's depiction as the humble servant who is exalted by God is given center stage in the K.n.'s mythology of evil because a similar dynamic characterizes Ethiopia's exaltation over against Israel. This rhetorical framework may thus help explain the redactional strategies employed in the K.n. in order to synthesize varying Enochic and Adamic mythologies of evil, which in turn serves to explain the peculiar rendition of the watchers myth that surfaces in the medieval Ethiopic saga.

### Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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