

The Translation of the Poem *Hail to Walatta Petros* (*Sälamta Wälättä Petros*)

A sälam or sälamta is a short Ethiopian poem or hymn in the language of Gəʿəz that focuses on the good deeds or spiritual essence of an Ethiopian leader and/or Christian saint. It begins each stanza with the words sälam lä- (peace upon, or hail to). Sälamat (plural) generally have between six and twelve stanzas, with only three lines per stanza, with a long first line and two shorter lines of three to four words each following it, and a final four-line stanza.

In the book itself, The Life and Struggles of Our Mother Walatta Petros, we aid the scholar or student who does not read Gəʿəz, but is interested in understanding the skill and elegance of the original poem as well as possible, by providing the poem in fidäl, in transliteration, and in word-for-word English translation, along with, on facing pages, a poetic English translation by Kristin Fogdall. We have provided Fogdall's translation below on its own, in an easy-to-read version properly spaced, for use in the classroom. For all scholarship, please consult the book itself.

[1] Hail to you, Walatta Petros, a garden! Wrapped in heavenly scent,
you are shade for the doves,¹ from the heat of misery
that fills our world.

[2] Hail to you, Walatta Petros, a mirror! You reveal the Trinity
in its holiness to everyone, high and low:
now the faithful sit safe on dry ground.²

[3] Hail to you, Walatta Petros, a light! Your preaching split the darkness
and the foolish friends of this world
ran eagerly toward repentance.

[4] Peace upon you! What no eye has seen nor ear ever heard,³
that mystery you chose as your wedding finery,
refusing a life of luxury.⁴

[5] Hail to you, Walatta Petros, our mother! Strength of will carried you
through the narrow gate⁵—like thousands of martyrs before
and the righteous monks of Waseef.

[6] Peace upon you and your forebear Shenoute, arrayed in the armor of chastity!
Come, comfort our distress and woe;
guard us while the whirlwind rages.⁶

[7] Hail to you Walatta Petros, who brings harmony! May the power of your help
outweigh the schemes of Satan and of men;
may it veil us like a cloud.⁷

[8] Peace upon you! We make a walled fortress from your aid;
we fear not the assault of godless enemies
when they rise against us.

[9] Peace upon you! For your children, the brothers and all the sisters—
plead without ceasing in the presence of the Lord,
that they may avoid temptation.

[10] Peace upon you! You escaped the snares of beastly iniquity
by carrying the guarantee of victory—the cross—
as did the disciples of Saint Macarius.

[11] Hail to you, Walatta Petros! From the Four Creatures of Heaven⁸
to where the Holy Trinity is worshipped,
raise the incense of our song—
with a censer wrought of light!

Content Notes

- 1 When Christ grants WP her kidan, he says, “many people will gather around you, from east and west. They will be pure doves, and they will benefit [from you] for the salvation of their souls.” The doves are a metaphor here for WP’s disciples.
 - 2 The author appears to allude to the episode when water suddenly rushed down the dry riverbed where WP and her followers had camped. Alternately, it is a reference to God creating dry ground for his people to cross dangerous seas or rivers, for example, Exodus 14:22 and Joshua 4:23.
 - 3 Regarding God promising as a heavenly reward what no eye has seen nor ear heard, see 1 Corinthians 2:9.
 - 4 This is an allusion to WP leaving a wealthy man and her life as a pampered wife to become the bride of Christ as an ascetic nun.
 - 5 See Matthew 7:13–14; Luke 13:24.
 - 6 See Proverbs 1:27–28.
 - 7 For references to God as a protective cloud, see, for example, Mark 9:7 and Matthew 17:5.
 - 8 This refers to the four living creatures of Revelation 4:6–8: the lion, the calf, a humanlike creature, and the eagle, each of which has six wings and praises God saying “Holy, holy, holy.”
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