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Edenic Children and Unripened Fruit: Anthropological and Botanical Immaturity in the Ethiopic *Mystery of the Judgment of Sinners*

Introduction

In the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, scribes around Lake Tana in northwestern Ethiopia translated and disseminated an Arabic apocryphal dialogue between Jesus and Peter.¹ Recording exhortations and revelations meant to be passed on to Clement of Rome and other apostolic figures, the *Mystery of the Judgment of Sinners* (*Myst. Sinners*) contains a little-explored retelling of *Genesis* 2–3.² In its rendition of the Adam and Eve’s time in the Garden of Eden, Jesus explains to Peter how commandment not to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was a test of their patience. In particular, Adam and Eve are marked as “children” (ⲕⲉⲛⲉ) and the fruit in terms of its “ripeness” or lack thereof (ⲛⲟⲩⲁ). Here, I want to contextualize this claim of a dual immaturity between both the humans and plants in the Garden of Eden in terms of early Christian theological claims about the youth and imperfection of Adam and Eve. In Jesus’s apocryphal retelling as portrayed in *Myst. Sinners*, the fall occurs because both the first humans and the tree are too young to act as mature beings, leading to Adam and Eve attempt to become like God too quickly by eating a fruit that was not yet ready for them to eat.

This short article will be broken down into four sections. The first will briefly introduce *Myst. Sinners* and provide context for the Edenic pericope upon which I focus. The second will explore how early Christian theologians set the stage for treating Adam and Eve as children in

¹ On *Myst. Sinners*’s likely Arabic origin and *Vorlage*, see Gianfrancesco Lusini, “Tradizione origeniana in Etiopia,” in L. Perrone (ed.), *Origeniana Octava: Origen and the Alexandrian Tradition. Origene e la tradizione alessandrina. Papers of the 8th International Origen Congress. Pisa, 27–31 August 2001*, vol. 2, «Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium» 164 (Leuven, 2003), p. 1181; Sylvain Grebaut, “Littérature éthiopienne pseudo-clementine,” *Revue de l’Orient Chrétien* 12 (1907): p. 285. On potential connections to the Qur’an, especially in its description of hell, see Thomas O’Shaughnessy, *Muhammad’s Thoughts on Death: A Thematic Study of the Qur’anic Data* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), p. 25.

² For a recent summary and bibliography of *Myst. Sinners*, see Chance Bonar, “Mystery of the Judgment of Sinners,” *e-Clavis: Christian Apocrypha*, <https://www.nasscal.com/e-clavis-christian-apocrypha/mystery-of-the-judgment-of-sinners/> (accessed 29 May 2023).

the Garden of Eden, treating them as anthropologically similar to other newly-born humans in their lack of wisdom and reprimandable decision-making. The third will very briefly introduce a contemporary text that corroborates *Myst. Sinners*'s treatment of the forbidden fruit as too ripe. Finally, I will turn to *Myst. Sinners* itself to analyze how it treats anthropological and botanical infancy as the cause of Adam and Eve's exile from Eden.

Overview of Myst. Sinners

Myst. Sinners survives in two late medieval and early modern Ge'ez manuscripts from the Lake Tana region of Ethiopia: one is held in Paris (BnF Éthiopien d'Abbadie 51, fols. 146^v–157^v; 15th/16th ct.), and one remains local (Tānāsee, Kebran Gabriel Monastery 35, fols. 59^r–70^v; 18th ct.).³ *Myst. Sinners* is copied alongside many other prominent early Christian texts, including the second-century *Epistle of the Apostles* and *Apocalypse of Peter*, as well as the seventh-century *Teaching of Jacob the Newly Baptized*.⁴ Translated from Arabic into Ge'ez, *Myst. Sinners* is paired in both of its extant manuscripts with the Ethiopic version of the *Apocalypse of Peter* and seems to be part of a trilogy along with it and the *Second Coming of Christ and the Resurrection of the Dead*.⁵

The content is generally broken into five sections: (1) Peter's exhortation to the other apostles about God's attributes; (2) a teaching that Peter offers to Clement about angels and salvation; (3) revelations given by Jesus to Peter about unity with God and humanity's disobedience since Adam; (4) Jesus's retelling of *Genesis* 2–3 and the necessity of his incarnation in order to defeat the devil who was incarnate in the serpent, and; (5) a concluding section on the Passover and kingship that focuses on Melchizedek.⁶ This article focuses on the fourth section, with some discussion of the third section's treatment of how both Adam and humanity more generally experienced only temporary punishment. It is worth noting that some scholars have seen hints of late medieval Ethiopic Origenist anthropological and soteriological concepts tucked away in *Myst. Sinners*—particularly its treatment of all humanity as eventually redeemable and punishment for sin as temporarily afflicting until

³ The Ethiopic text itself from BNF Abaddie 51 can be found in Sylvain Grebaut, "Litterature ethiopienne pseudo-clementine," *Revue de l'Orient Chretien* 12 (1907), pp. 380-387 and 13 (1908), pp. 166-174, 314-318. Digital images are available of the manuscripts housed at Kebran Gabriel Monastery, but no edition currently exists (<https://betamasaheft.eu/manuscripts/Tanasee35/viewer>).

⁴ Francis Watson, *An Apostolic Gospel: the 'Epistula Apostolorum' in Literary Context*, Society for New Testament Studies «Monograph Series» 179 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 30-31.

⁵ Roger W. Cowley, "The Ethiopic Work Which is Believed to Contain the Material of the Ancient Greek Apocalypse of Peter," *Journal of Theological Studies* 36.1 (1985), pp. 151-153; Richard B. Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, NT Supp 93 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), p. 147 n50; Eric J. Beck, "Perceiving the Mystery of the Merciful Son of God: An Analysis of the Purpose of the Apocalypse of Peter," PhD diss. (University of Edinburgh, 2018), p. 238.

⁶ A more substantial overview can be found in Grebaut, "Litterature ethiopienne," (1907), pp. 147-151.

apokatastasis occurs.⁷ While some hypotheses have been offered that propose Arabic Origenist thought as the source of such concepts for *Myst. Sinners*, it is still unclear.

My English translation of the fourth section is given here to support the reader.⁸

(fol. 154 va) Understand (it), scrutinize (it), ponder (it) in your heart. The leaders will exhibit it, but (you), you will understand (it) by meditating on (it) in your bed. Then you will know the greatness of the mercy of the Lord towards Adam, his creature. You will know how (Adam) once wanted to become God and (how) he himself wanted to become God, when he was seduced by the serpent, (him) and his wife. Indeed, the serpent said to the woman: ‘Woman, why has the Lord forbidden you to eat of the fruit of the tree?’ The woman replied, ‘It's so that we don't die.’ The serpent said to the woman: ‘Certainly it was not (so that) you should not die, but it was so that you should not become God, that he forbade you the tree.’

It was in the hope of becoming God that (Adam) transgressed the commandment of the Lord. The first parents were like children walking in **(fol. 154 vb)** the garden. Their Father had planted a beautiful (and) splendid (tree) in the garden, which was good for soul and body. If (the first parents) had been patient, (the fruits) would have ripened. As for them, they were the children of the Master of the garden. Their Father sent them to guard the garden and commanded them to cultivate it. They ate (fruits) of every color, which came from the garden. Their flavor was that of figs and excellent. When they saw (the forbidden tree), that they might not be mistaken because of it, (the Lord) immediately brought them and showed them (the tree) with fruits of excellent flavor, which he had planted in the garden. He said: ‘Do not approach this tree, lest it bring death upon you.’

Again, he instructed them and said to them: ‘Take care not to touch it, lest **(fol. 155 ra)** I strike you in my anger.’ Again he spoke to them, instructing them and telling them not to touch it or go near it: ‘When you lift up your hands on this tree, before I myself have given (of its fruit) to your teeth to eat, since it is green fruit, your belly will be tortured and (this green fruit) will corrupt your eyes, break your bones, break your limbs, make your body ashes and your vigor a corruption, which will harm you from the hairs of your head to the nails of your toes. Until (the fruits) have developed and ripened, I myself will come to you. I will pick them; I will clean (the tree); I will remove it away from up to every being, so that your tongue does not become ulcerated up to your throat and that the brokenness does not occur **(fol. 155 rb)** for your teeth. (Be) in (all) the

⁷ Paolo Marrassini, “Gli apocrifi etiopici: alcune osservazioni,” in N. del Gatto (ed.), *Corso di perfezionamento in Storia del Cristianesimo Antico diretto da Luigi Cirillo e Giancarlo Rinaldi. Atti. Napoli marzo-giugno 1996*. «Serie Didattica» 2 (Naples, 1999), pp. 238-266, esp. 249-251; Gianfrancesco Lusini, “Tradizione origeniana in Etiopia,” pp. 1177-1184.

⁸ English translation my own, building upon Grebaut's French translation and following his emendations added to clarify the subjects and objects of many sentences.

strength of your vigilance. Be careful not to covet (the forbidden fruit) and taste it, for it is green fruit.’

This is what he taught them. He allowed them to feed on the other fruits that were in the garden. Now it came to pass, when they were hungry, they ate of the tree. But (it was) in the hope of becoming God that they transgressed their Father's command. When they ate the fruit of the tree, when it was green fruit, they had not waited for it to develop and ripen. The unripe fruit corrupts (them). The children's teeth were blunted. They brought upon themselves (punishment) in the hope of becoming God. Indeed, the Enemy had driven them mad. Their Father knew that the unripe fruit had corrupted (them), and how they had eaten (the fruit) harmful to them, before the time of maturity, harvest, and goodness (of the fruit, when) it would have given them (**fol. 155 va**) pleasure. He drove them to a land of thorns and briars, that they might cultivate in the heat, in the sweat, (during their) existence.

The Father of these children knew that the Enemy had led them astray. He himself knew the temptation of the Adversary, how he had deceived the children by stealth, hiding himself in the body of a serpent (and) whispering in their ears. The Father of the children, who knew no evil, acts the same towards the Adversary, for he ravished him who had ravished the children. He participated in the flesh and blood of these children. Moreover, he participated in their own death, in order to give them his own life. Through mysterious wisdom, their own flesh, which he took, he united (**fol. 155 vb**) to his own divinity. Moreover, as for his own beauty, he unites it with our own corruption and with death. The weight of our own corruption was absorbed by the beauty of the divinity, by the glorious divinity. Our own death was absorbed by his own sublime life. Indeed, he became similar to humans, except for sin alone.

He bore our burden, our sufferings, and our weakness, in order to ravish the Enemy who had ravished the children whom the green fruit had corrupted. As (the Adversary) hid himself in the body of a serpent, so our Savior hid himself in the body of Adam. It was not immediately that he kidnapped (the Adversary) and put on our flesh, but it was after having delayed, until the one who had kidnapped the children had forgotten, so that he did not know him. When (the Adversary) approached him, (the Savior) killed him with the staff of his cross. When (the Adversary) had ravished (the children), the unripe fruit (corrupted them). He when he had taken away the Bold One, (**fol. 156 ra**) corrupted (him) entirely and bound him in frightful Sheol in outer darkness, in weeping and gnashing of teeth. Being risen, (our Savior) raised up his children, made them gods like himself, bestowed upon them his own life, and made them equal to himself, for he gave them his flesh and blood, so that they become equal to him.

Adam and Eve as Children

The depiction of Adam and Eve as children in *Myst. Sinners* is not unique, but appears in some corners of early Christian anthropological exploration. Most prominently, Irenaeus of Lyons was the first and most systematic writer to describe Adam and Eve as infants in his *Against Heresies* and *Demonstration of Apostolic Teaching*. As Matthew Steenberg has examined in depth, Irenaeus's treatment of Adam and Eve as children (*infans*; *νήπιος*) has often been overlooked because scholars treated it as metaphorical or symbolic childlike ignorance or innocence.⁹ In response, he analyzed the five primary passages in which Irenaeus described the children in Eden, since Irenaeus suggested that creation itself must experience an infantile (*infantilia*) stage and temporal development (in contrast to the fully developed and uncreated God).¹⁰ Eve, likewise, is described as not yet having reached puberty while in Eden, and so needed to develop and mature before being capable of fulfilling God's command to multiply and fill the earth.¹¹ For Irenaeus, all of God's creation—humanity included—is not born into fully-developed bodies but requires time to mature, leading to Irenaeus's treatment of the fall as a moment of childlike rebellion. As Steenberg puts it, “the doctrine of an infant creation establishes a dynamism to the human person in its relationship to God that forms the very heart of a developmental anthropology of salvation.”¹²

A few other early Christian theologians follow suit in their depiction of Eden and creation through a developmental model. Theophilus of Antioch, for example, defends God's justification for forbidding Adam and Eve from eating from the tree of knowledge against those who claim that the *tree itself* or *knowledge itself* was bad or dangerous. Instead, Theophilus argues that humanity's disobedience was bad because:

Adam, in his actual age, was an infant. On account of this, he was not yet able to receive knowledge worthily. For also now, when a child is born, it is not already able to eat bread, but is nourished first by milk and then, when advancing in age, it continues to solid food. So too would it have been for Adam.¹³

τῆ δὲ οὐσῃ ἡλικίᾳ ὅδε Ἀδὰμ ἔτη νήπιος ἦν· διὸ οὐπω ἠδύνατο τὴν γνώσιν κατ' ἀξίαν χωρεῖν. καὶ γὰρ νῦν ἐπὶ γέννησιν παιδίον, οὐκ ἤδη δύναται ἄρτον ἐσθίειν, ἀλλὰ πρῶτον γάλακτι ἀνατρέφεται, ἔπειτα κατὰ πρόσβασιν τῆς ἡλικίας καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν στερεὰν τροφήν ἔρχεται. οὕτως ἂν γεγόνει καὶ τῷ Ἀδὰμ.

⁹ Matthew C. Steenberg, “Children in Paradise: Adam and Eve as ‘Infants’ in Irenaeus of Lyons,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12.1 (2004), pp. 1-22.

¹⁰ Irenaeus, *AH* 4.38.1 (SC 1000: 942–948); see Steenberg, “Children in Paradise”, pp. 4-6.

¹¹ Irenaeus, *AH* 3.22.4 (SC 211:440); cf. *AH* 3.23.5; *Demonstration* 12, 14.

¹² Steenberg, “Children in Paradise”, p. 22.

¹³ Theophilus, *Ad Autolyicum* 2.25. Greek text from Robert M. Grant, *Theophilus of Antioch: Ad Autolyicum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 66.

For Theophilus, God’s relationship to Adam and Eve is the prototype of the parent-child relationship, which justifies his punishment of the world’s first children both for their disobedience and the attempt, as he puts it, for “infant children to think beyond their years” (τὰ παιδιά τὰ νήπια ὑπὲρ ἡλικίαν φρονεῖν) and bypass the “order” (πρὸς τάξιν) by which physical bodies and wisdom develops.¹⁴ The problem is not only, as Irenaeus argued, that Adam and Eve’s immaturity led to their poor decision-making, but that their attempt to acquire the knowledge of good and evil is itself a challenge to the limitations of creation’s natural developmental progression. Clement of Alexandria, similarly, conceptualized the creation of Adam as requiring further maturation. In his *Stromata*, Clement suggests that Adam “was perfect in regard to his formation” (τέλειον μὲν ὡς πρὸς τὴν πλάσιν) —specifically “the distinctive characteristics of the idea and form of the human” (τῶν χαρακτηριζόντων τὴν ἀνθρώπου ἰδέαν τε καὶ μορφήν).¹⁵ Against opponents that he labelled as heretics, who questioned whether a perfect God could make an imperfect Adam, Clement suggested that Adam “was not perfect in his creation, but adapted to the reception of virtue” (τέλειος κατὰ τὴν κατασκευὴν οὐκ ἔγένετο, πρὸς δὲ τὸ ἀναδέξασθαι τὴν ἀρετὴν ἐπιτήδειος).¹⁶ The form of Adam’s body, according to Clement, was created perfectly by God, but others of Adam’s qualities required time for adaptation and reception. While Clement does not say explicitly that Adam and Eve were children in Eden, he contributes to a late-second-century trend toward viewing the first humans as developmentally infantile and lacking some qualities that made the fall possible.

While we are unable to trace any clear lineage between the early Christian writers who first proposed Edenic children and *Myst. Sinners*, the Ethiopic text participates in a broader Christian anthropological landscape in which the first humans experience the embodied progression of time like all other humans.

The Forbidden Fruit as Unripened

Along with presenting Adam and Eve as children, *Myst. Sinners* treats the Garden itself in a corresponding way: the tree of knowledge of good and evil produces fruit that is not yet ripe. This image is not as common as the trope of Edenic children in Christian literary history. One of the few examples of this idea can be found in a contemporaneous text to *Myst. Sinners*: the 14th-century poetry of Yovhannēs T'lkuranc'i. From a text known as a “Commentary on Genesis” or “Rhymed History of Yovhannēs concerning the Creation of the World,” T'lkuranc'i presents the tree of knowledge as equivalent to a tree of death and immortality, and

¹⁴ Theophilus, *Ad Autolyicum* 2.25 (Grant, *Theophilus*, p. 66).

¹⁵ Clement, *Strom.* 4.23.150.3. Greek text from Anniewies van den Hoek and Claude Mondésert, eds., *Clément d'Alexandrie: Les Stromates: Stromae IV*, «Sources Chrétiennes» 463 (Paris: Cerf, 2001), p. 308.

¹⁶ Clement, *Strom.* 6.12; Greek text from Patrick Descourtieux, ed., *Clément d'Alexandrie: Les Stromates: Stromate VI*, «Sources Chrétiennes» 446 (Paris: Cerf, 1999), p. 254.

claims that “it was planted because of man (i.e., Adam) as a test of his love of God”.¹⁷ Much like Irenaeus’s earlier claim, the tree itself does not cause death *per se* but reveals whether or not the first humans are developmentally prepared to obey God as their father. T’lkuranc’i goes on to describe that because “the fruit of knowledge is unripe, it is a cause of death for you”.¹⁸ Knowledge itself is not presented as a danger to the Edenic inhabitants, but rather that the fruit was not at a graspable and edible developmental stage; a rush to consume knowledge is offered as the cause of the fall.

While this is just one rare example of Eden’s fruit as unripened, *Myst. Sinners* uses this image alongside the Edenic children to portray the Garden as a place of immaturity and unpreparedness.

Dual Immaturity in Myst. Sinners

Now to turn to *Myst. Sinners* itself. Even before Jesus retells *Gen* 2–3 in the fourth section of the text, his dialogue with Peter in the third section clarifies the relationship between immaturity and disobedience. Jesus describes the repentance that believers feel as causing affliction akin to disciplining a child: “Such is a child (ሕፃን) who sins against his father and against his mother (ለአቡሁ : ወለእሙ). As for this child, one does not strike him lightly in order to correct him (and not to kill him), but so that he does not sin again”.¹⁹ Humanity *en masse* are compared to children who require some light chastisement in order to return to a proper relationship with their parents, such that Jesus claims that God acts the same toward all descendants of Adam. Jesus presents the “children of humanity” (ደቂቀ : አገለ) as experiencing something similar to what Adam experienced: castigation not for castigation’s sake, but in order to urge humans to develop ethically.²⁰

Jesus’s explanation to Peter about how God’s disciplining of humans functions like a father treating his children leads directly into *Myst. Sinners*’s retelling of the Edenic narrative and its depiction of paralleled immaturities. In this retelling of *Genesis*, the serpent and Eve’s conversation revolves around how God’s commandment not to eat from the tree does not have to do with avoiding the death of the first humans, but rather about God’s fear of

¹⁷ T’lkuranc’i, *On the Creation of the World* 61 (Michael E. Stone, “Selections from *On the Creation of the World* by Yovhannēs T’lkuranc’i: Translation and Commentary”, in Gary Anderson, Michael Stone, and Johannes Tromp (eds.), *Literature on Adam and Eve: Collected Essays*, «Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha», (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 186. I am grateful to Annette Yoshiko Reed for this reference.

¹⁸ T’lkuranc’i, *Commentary on Genesis* 84 (Stone, “Selections from *On the Creation of the World*,” p. 194).

¹⁹ *Myst. Sinners* 153va §3 (Grebaut, “Litterature ethiopienne,” p. 13:169). Since no standard versification exists for *Myst. Sinners*, I will reference it by the manuscript page of BnF d’Abbadie 51 and the page enumeration offered in Grebaut, “Litterature ethiopienne,” *Revue de l’Orient Chretien* 12 (1907), pp. 380-387, and 13 (1908), pp. 166-174, 314-318. English translation my own, building upon Grebaut’s French translation.

²⁰ *Myst. Sinners* 154ra §1 (Grebaut, “Litterature ethiopienne,” p. 13:170).

humanity attempting to “become God” (ኢትኩት : አምላክ፡ ትእዛዘ : እግዚአብሔር).²¹ Twice after the serpent’s attempt to trick Eve into eating from the tree and risk becoming like God, the first humans are described “as children walking in the garden” (ከበመ : ሕፃናት : እለ : አንሰሰዉ : ውስተ : ገነት), but also genealogically as “children of the master of the garden” (ደቂቁ : ለባዕለ : ገነት).²² Throughout the rest of the narrative, Adam and Eve’s names are rarely used; rather, they are described as God’s children who are placed in the garden for its protection and cultivation, and who are expected to be patient as the garden co-matures alongside them.

As God’s first human children inhabit the garden, God’s description of the fruit from the tree of knowledge clarifies the danger of unripe or immature tasting:

When you lift up your hands on this tree, before I myself have given from the tree for your teeth to eat, since it is unripe fruit (ቆዕ), your belly will be tortured and (this fruit) will corrupt your eyes, break your bones, break your limbs, make your body ashes and your vigor a corruption, which will harm you from the hairs of your head to the nails of your toes. Until (the fruit) have developed and ripened (ወበሰለት), I myself will come to you. I will pick them; I will clean (them); I will remove it away from every being, so that your tongue does not become ulcerated up to your throat and that brokenness does not occur for your teeth. Be in the strength of your vigilance. Be careful not to covet (the fruit) and taste it, for it is unripe fruit (ቆዕ).²³

Both the noun for an unripened or green fruit (ቆዕ) and the verb for ripening (በሰለ) are central to God’s commandment given to the Edenic children in this passage. Unripened fruit from the tree of knowledge is depicted as not useful or worthwhile for Adam and Eve to pursue in its current state. Thus, the serpent’s deception occurs through tricking them into believing that the tree’s fruit were ready for consumption before God came to the garden to pick the fully-matured fruit and give them to Adam and Eve after *they themselves* had also matured. The retelling perhaps relies on how Eve is description as seeing the tree as “good for eating” (ከመ : ሠናይ : ዕዕ : ለበሰለ) in *Gen* 3:6, since *Myst. Sinners* describes both the tree as “good and splendid” (ሠናይ : ወላሕዩ) and its fruit as “like figs and good” (ዘበለሰ : ወሠናይ).²⁴ The goodness of the tree and its fruit, however, make God’s children susceptible to believing that their unripened state will benefit them and give them knowledge comparable to God’s. As the narrative progresses, Jesus reveals to Peter that the fruit corrupted Adam and Eve because they consumed it before “the time of ripeness, harvest, and goodness” (ጊዜሁ : ለበሰለ : ወቀሢም : ወሠዩ), which suggests that the *appearance* of the tree and fruit’s goodness earlier in the tale does not correspond to actual ripeness.²⁵ While *Myst. Sinners* does not explicitly connect the two motifs, it portrays both

²¹ *Myst. Sinners* 154va §12–17 (Grebaut, “Litterature ethiopienne,” p. 13:171).

²² *Myst. Sinners* 154va §17–154vb §18; 154vb §22–23 (Grebaut, “Litterature ethiopienne,” p. 13:171).

²³ *Myst. Sinners* 155ra §5–155rb §25 (Grebaut, “Litterature ethiopienne,” p. 13:172); cf. *Kebrā Nagast* 61.

²⁴ *Myst. Sinners* 154vb §19, 24 (Grebaut, “Litterature ethiopienne,” p. 13:171).

²⁵ *Myst. Sinners* 155rb §7 (Grebaut, “Litterature ethiopienne,” p. 13:173).

the first humans and the fruit of the tree of knowledge as immature and unprepared for their next developmental stage.

In the case of Adam and Eve, the corruption they experience at the hands of the unripened fruit allows for Christological and soteriological speculation by Jesus in *Myst. Sinners*. Jesus's incarnation as a second Adam is justified as undoing the corruption done to God's first humans by the serpent's botanical trickery: "He bore our burden, our sufferings, and our weakness, in order to ravish the Enemy who had ravished the children whom the unripe fruit corrupted" (ለደቂቅ : አለ : አማሰን : ቆዕ).²⁶ The undoing of immature corruption and, for *Myst. Sinners*, the eventual deification of humanity occurs through Jesus inhabiting the "flesh of Adam" (ሥጋ : አዳም) and corrupting the devil in return by casting him into Sheol.²⁷

This Edenic scene in *Myst. Sinners* gives us a glimpse into how *Genesis* could be retold and reframed so as to highlight childhood as a time of innocence, ignorance, and disobedience. Unlike the idealized childhood of some saints in Ethiopian hagiography—which often portrays them as wise beyond their years and wrestling with monastic concepts as a prepubescent stage²⁸—*Myst. Sinners* takes a less optimistic approach to the portrayal of Adam and Eve in order to highlight the need for an undoing of the fruit's corruption through Jesus's incarnation. Disobedience and punishment (albeit temporary) are central both to *Myst. Sinners*'s retelling of *Genesis* as the failure of children to obey their father and to early Christian treatment of children.²⁹ While the adolescent innocence of the first humans works against them in *Myst. Sinners*, biblical and apocryphal Christian literature often associates childhood with heaven or entering God's kingdom.³⁰ The ideal world is envisioned as one in which God is the father over human children who live in God's presence, but who also learn obedience that Adam and Eve fail to express in *Myst. Sinners*.

²⁶ *Myst. Sinners* 155vb §7–8 (Grebaut, "Litterature ethiopienne," p. 13:174).

²⁷ *Myst. Sinners* 155vb §11 (Grebaut, "Litterature ethiopienne," p. 13:174).

²⁸ Paolo Marrassini, "L'infanzia del santo nel cristianesimo orientale: il caso dell'Etiopia," in *Bambini Santi. Rappresentazioni dell'infanzia e modelli agiografici*, ed. Anna Benvenuti Papi and Elena Giannarelli (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1991), pp. 141-181; Steven Kaplan, "Seen But Not Heard: Children and Childhood in Medieval Ethiopian Hagiographies," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 30.3 (1997), pp. 539-553; Robert Phenix, "The Contribution of Social Science Research to the Study of Children and Childhood in Pre-Modern Ethiopia," in *Children in Late Ancient Christianity*, ed. Cornelia B. Horn and Robert Phenix (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), pp. 375-405, esp. 395-396.

²⁹ Cornelia B. Horn and John W. Martens, "Let the Little Children Come to Me": *Childhood and Children in Early Christianity* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), esp. 213-251.

³⁰ Eunyung Lim, *Entering God's Kingdom (Not) Like A Little Child: Imagine of the Child in the Gospel of Matthew, 1 Corinthians, and the Gospel of Thomas*, «Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft» 243 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), esp. pp. 6-7.

Abstract: In the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, scribes around Lake Tana in northwestern Ethiopia translated and disseminated an Arabic apocryphal dialogue between Jesus and Peter. Recording exhortations and revelations meant to be passed on to Clement of Rome and other apostolic figures, the *Mystery of the Judgment of Sinners* (*Myst. Sinners*) contains a little-explored retelling of *Genesis* 2–3. In its rendition of the Adam and Eve’s time in the Garden of Eden, Jesus explains to Peter how commandment not to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was a test of their patience. In particular, Adam and Eve are marked as “children” and the fruit in terms of its “ripeness” or lack thereof. Here, I want to contextualize this claim of a dual immaturity between both the humans and plants in the Garden of Eden in terms of early Christian theological claims about the youth and imperfection of Adam and Eve.

Keywords: Apocrypha; Ethiopian Christianity; Ethiopic; *Genesis* 2–3; Adam; Eve.

Resumen: A finales del siglo XIII o principios del XIV, los escribas de los alrededores del lago Tana, en el noroeste de Etiopía, tradujeron y difundieron un diálogo árabe apócrifo entre Jesús y Pedro. *El Misterio del juicio de los pecadores* (*Myst. Sinners*), que registra exhortaciones y revelaciones destinadas a ser transmitidas a Clemente de Roma y otras figuras apostólicas, contiene una narración poco explorada de Génesis 2–3. En su interpretación del tiempo de Adán y Eva en el Jardín del Edén, Jesús le explica a Pedro cómo el mandamiento de no tomar el árbol del conocimiento del bien y del mal fue una prueba de su paciencia. En particular, Adán y Eva son marcados como “hijos” y el fruto en términos de su “madurez” o falta de ella. Aquí, quiero contextualizar esta afirmación de una doble inmadurez entre los humanos y las plantas en el Jardín del Edén en términos de las afirmaciones teológicas de los primeros cristianos sobre la juventud y la imperfección de Adán y Eva.

Palabras clave: Apócrifos; Cristianismo etiópico; Etiópico; Génesis 2–3; Adán; Eva.